



Optimizing library's organizational climate through improvement of the weak scales identified by ClimateQUAL™ surveys: A case study of Nanjing Agricultural University Library

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ABSTRACT

Nanjing Agricultural University Library (NAU Library) performed an organizational climate assessment in 2011 with a revised ClimateQUAL™ scales and implemented some measures to optimize the weak areas identified. The second and third rounds of assessment were carried out in 2014 and in 2017 to examine the effects of such optimization measures. The results showed the scores increased overall. Data from the three rounds of assessments revealed that team work was markedly improved. Interpersonal conflict and task conflict decreased in the work place. However, the pattern of all the scales kept almost the same. Justice, Deep Diversity, Continual Learning, Stimulate & Competition, Organizational Commitment and Psychological Empowerment in the Workplace are in the bottoms of the curves of the survey results of 2011 and 2017. Librarians thought they were qualified for the job but they did not have a large impact on or a great deal of control over what happens in the library. Innate problems that influence the library climate have not been solved yet. Such issues need to be addressed at a societal level before changes are seen at an organizational level.

Introduction

Chinese academic libraries place increasing emphasis on organizational culture and view it as one of the core issues in library management (Ke, 2013). However, Chinese academic libraries face many challenges with regard to a satisfactory organizational culture.

In China, an academic library is a designated unit within a university, providing information services to all faculties within the university. Within the hierarchical administrative structure of a university, the library operates in parallel to other institutes and colleges. The university assigns one of the vice presidents to coordinate the library's activities and collaborate with the other institutions of the university. The university also appoints a director and several assistant directors to take charge of the daily administrative work of the library. In general, a library has several departments that fulfill specific functions in order that different types of information resources can be organized and utilized by all faculties within the university.

The Nanjing Agricultural University (NAU) library is such a Chinese academic library. The library consists of nine departments: The Administrative Office, Information Application Department, Network

Operations Department, Customer Service Department, Development & Research Department, Reference Department, Department of Educational Technology, Department of Construction Resources, and the Department of Reader Services. The departments differ greatly in terms of their respective roles and duties. The management of each department is primarily concerned with motivating librarians to provide a reliable range of resources, promoting better campus information technology, and providing high quality education and technical services.

The Ministry of Education of China is the principal government agency that designates funding to the universities. Universities allocate operating and resource expenses to academic libraries. However, personnel expenses are not allocated to academic libraries. The department of human resources of the university is responsible for the payment of librarians' salaries (wages). Such salaries vary in accordance with the types of employment contract, which also determine the identity and status of the librarians.

In general, there are two types of contracts: the first is signed by a librarian and the university, whereby the librarian is a university member; the second contract-type is signed by a librarian and a labor

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dispatch company of which the librarian is a member. The university then leases the librarian from the company. With respect to the contrasting types of contracts, librarians receive different levels of remuneration, although they carry out the same work. For example, the first type of contract may offer a librarian a salary of 7000–8000 yuan per month. However, for the same job position, the second contract may award a librarian just 4000–5000 yuan per month. This can easily galvanize grudges held by librarians and destroy the atmosphere of an organization.

Employees are an organization's most important asset. Employees' feelings about how they perceive organizational work flow, regularization, and policy influence their behaviors, thereby altering the climate within the organization. Research and assessment on organizational climate began in the 1930s (Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939). Forehand and Von Haller (1964) investigated the environmental variation in studies of organizational behavior and regarded employees' long-term perception of the organization and its circumstance as the organizational climate. Schneider, Ehrhart, and Macey (2013) further studied optimization of the organizational climate with the aim of improving employees' perceptions of the work environment, which fosters a spirit of support and encouragement, and promotes innovative methods to solve any issues that arise on the job.

From the library's perspective, a positive organizational environment is also beneficial for stimulating librarians' motivation to cope with complex and changing environments. At the end of the 20th century, libraries in the United States took the lead in examining organizational climate and assessment (Kyrillidou & Baughman, 2009), and furthermore optimized and improved the organizational climate through data analysis (Lowry, 2011; Li & Bryan, 2010). ClimateQUAL™ was developed as a tool to assess a library's climate and diversity. It assesses perceptions held by library staff concerning (a) their library's commitment to the principles of diversity, (b) organizational policies and procedures, and (c) staff attitudes. It is an online survey with questions that are designed to evaluate the impact that perceptions have on service quality within a library setting (ClimateQUAL®, 2018).

As a result of encouragement from the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), 62 libraries in the United States, four British libraries, and two Canadian libraries took part in assessments (ClimateQUAL®, 2018). In addition, Iran referenced ClimateQUAL™ in order to implement an organizational climate assessment of academic libraries, including 520 employees from 96 central libraries within Iranian government universities (Yaminifirooz, Nooshinfard, & Siamian, 2015).

Some Chinese academics introduced ClimateQUAL™ assessment scales (Bao & Zhou, 2010; Zheng, 2011; Zhu & Bao, 2016), its mode of application (Zheng & Zhang, 2011), and an analysis of the assessment methods used (Xu, 2012). While academics hold different views about organizational climate assessment scales, it is generally believed that those scales vary across cultures and organizational functions. Some Chinese academics also discussed cultural differences (Zhou & Bao, 2015) and sought to localize ClimateQUAL™ scales (Jiang, 2013; Zheng & Hu, 2013). ClimateQUAL™ has already been used to improve the libraries' organizational climate in American (Hu, 2016). However, the effects of such applications of the Chinese library climate assessment has not been examined.

NAU library revised the ClimateQUAL™ scales and performed the first round of organizational climate assessment in 2011. NAU library tried to identify particular factors related to the work environment that impact upon librarians' job satisfaction. NAU then adopted some measures to improve the factors identified. The second round of organizational climate assessment was implemented in 2014 (Tang, Ni, & Chen, 2016; Tang, Ni, Chen, & Xi, 2016). Management strategies were undertaken to respond to the problems reflected in the assessment. The third round of assessment was implemented in 2017 to examine the effect of such optimization measures. The analysis is outlined in this article. In the second section, we present an overview of how we adjusted ClimateQUAL™ for the Chinese environment. Our results are

presented in the third section. In the fourth section, we make a comprehensive analysis on the change of scores in all scales and discuss the influence of Chinese culture on the organizational climate. Our conclusions are presented in the final section.

Adjustment of the ClimateQUAL™ for the Chinese environment

Although organizational climate assessments have been carried out at the libraries in the United States, these assessments had not yet been applied to Chinese libraries before 2010. Such an assessment can be facilitated by adapting the USA ClimateQUAL™ evaluation system to a Chinese environment. Moreover, the public information approach of ARL implies that one can obtain a thorough understanding of each dimension within the ClimateQUAL™ evaluation, though the evaluation questions for each dimension are not available to the public. As such, given the management features of Chinese academic libraries, NAU Library decided to utilize ClimateQUAL™ as a model, but to adapt the relevant evaluation dimensions and design specific questions of assessment.

We used the Delphi method (Landeta, 2005) to set the assessment scales and invited five well-known directors from academic libraries in the Nanjing region to serve as the indicator evaluation group.

We carried out a basic analysis of the ClimateQUAL™'s scales and sent our preliminary analysis to these five academic library directors, asking them to submit their comments by email. Having reviewed their comments, we selected some scales, which were then forwarded to the directors for validation. Each director put forward suggestions about which scales should be retained, which should be removed, and which should be expanded.

We compiled the suggestions from the five directors and formulated a report outlining similarities and differences with respect to the suggestions. We then forwarded the reports to the five directors, which provided a framework of reference that allowed the directors to adjust their opinion.

Finally, we invited the five directors to partake in face-to-face discussions about their disagreements in order to obtain a consensus regarding the scales.

The process of adaptation and revision is described in detail in Zhou's dissertation (Zhou, 2010). Table 1 illustrates the similarities and differences between the USA and Chinese version of the ClimateQUAL™ scales.

Climate for Psychological Safety refers to the degree to which an organization encourage employees to freely share opinions with management. The sample questions are "When someone in the library makes a mistake, it is often held against them" and "As an employee in this library one is able to bring up problems and tough issues". These are actually in contradiction with the traditional Chinese culture. In the circumstance of the Chinese traditional culture, an organization should

Table 1

Similarities and differences between the Chinese and the USA versions of the ClimateQUAL™ scales.

Action	Climate	Attitude
Retained	Organizational justice	Job satisfaction
	Leadership	Organizational commitment
	Deep diversity	Organizational citizenship behaviors
	Innovation	Psychological empowerment in the workplace
	Continual learning	Task engagement
Removed	Teamwork	Work unit conflict
	Customer service	
	Interpersonal treatment	Organizational withdrawal
Added	Psychological safety	
	Stimulation and competition	Staff stability
Adjusted	Demographic diversity	

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