

---

**THE INFLUENCE OF UNION-MANAGEMENT RELATIONS CLIMATE  
ON PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY AND AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT IN  
CHINA**

Hu Caihong, Wang Lingyun

College of Economics and Management, Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics

**ABSTRACT**

The paper mainly discusses the influence of union-management relations climate on employee's psychological safety and affective commitment, and takes 358 employees as samples to verify. The results show that the union-management relations climate has a significant positive impact on employees' psychological safety and affective commitment. In other words, under the active collaboration union-management relations climate, employees will have positive psychological work performance, and the study also provides practical guidance for the construction of harmonious labor relations.

**Keywords:** Union-management relations climate, Psychological safety, Affective commitment

**INTRODUCTION**

In recent years, with the frequent occurrence of labor conflicts and disputes, some problems such as commitment and work anxiety have become increasingly prominent (Wu, et al., 2017). The fundamental reason lies in that most of the existing enterprise management modes are led by the employer, which aims to emphasize the improvement of the overall efficiency of the organization but neglects the personal interests of employees (Boxall and Macky 2009;Kroon, Van, et al. 2009). With the deepening of China's reform and opening up, and the comprehensive progress of China's trade union system reform, trade union are no longer the "extended function" organizations of party and government. The nature, status and role of Chinese trade union have been fundamentally changed (Xu, 2012). For example, trade union are playing an important role as a bridge and bond in safeguarding the rights and interests of employees, promoting the development of enterprises and establishing harmonious labor relations (Duan, et al., 2011; Wang, 2012). The labor relations of trade union and the enterprise also had the significant change, as the focal object of trade union and the enterprise to begin to receive attention in the academic and practical circles.

Union-management relations climate is an important working atmosphere in the daily workplace, and the degree of cooperation between the union and the enterprise will affect employee's working feelings. Such as Li (2017) pointed out that in the harmonious and open atmosphere of labor relations, the management and trade union will work together to create a good working environment for employees, they exchange information with each other, timely solve employee's problems, and employees under this atmosphere, they tend to form the positive psychological feeling, employee psychological safety awareness will naturally be enhanced, at the same time they will produce high affective commitment; on the contrary, under the hostile atmosphere and cold labor relations, management and trade union oppose each other, they don't care employee's problem, employees perceive they may cause great losses, it is easy to make staff to produce uneasy psychological mood, and also makes people distrust organization, thereby lowering the individual's affective commitment. Therefore, this paper focuses on the status quo of union-management relations in the Chinese context, and explores the influence of union-management relations climate on employees' psychological safety and affective commitment.

## **RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS**

### **Union-management relations climate and psychological security**

The relationship between trade union and management refers to the degree of harmony between trade union and management, which reflects the fairness of the interaction between management and trade union, and the performance of trade union and management in solving common problems (Iverson and Buttigieg 1997). Cooke (2011) pointed out that, in the context of increasing competition among non-union companies, the union enterprise in order to adapt to this kind of competition pressure, the union changed its previous confrontational strategy against management (such as strikes, etc.), to adopt a more harmonious labor relations strategy, which emphasizes the collective bargaining way to promote the improvement of the enterprise management mode and improving the production efficiency. Zhu, Warner, et al. (2011) pointed out that China's trade union rely more on the attitude and way of cooperation with enterprise management to protect workers' rights and interests. Wu, et al. (2016), China's trade union and enterprises can be divided into fierce confrontation, completely follow and mode of three kinds of unity and cooperation relations, the study found that compared with the fierce confrontation and completely follow mode, trade union and enterprises can unity cooperation mode based on the organizational perspective to group performance guidance for decision-making and tend to use the relatively peaceful ways such as collective bargaining to coordinate the contradictions and conflicts of interest of both sides of labor and capital, the organization with a higher level of synergy, the employee psychological and behavioral aspects of positive effects in full into the organization's output and the excess gain. Compared with a large number of foreign researches

on the union-management relationship, China's researches in this field are still in the preliminary stage, and the researches on the union- management relationship are scattered and unsystematic. However, existing studies have found that in the union-management relations climate under active cooperation, both parties are more inclined to solve problems through collective negotiation, and more willing to create a fair and harmonious working environment for employees.

Psychological safety refers to employees' freedom to express themselves in the workplace, but don't fear being criticized or retaliated by others (Kahn 1990;Dyne and Lepine 1998). It is a safety perception about employees' individual freedom and inviolate interests in the current environment. The study finds that the psychological security of employees comes from the atmosphere created by the organization. In this process, the positive organizational atmosphere is the most important factor for the psychological safety of employees(Edmondson and Lei 2014). In fact, trust and support from the organization can enhance employees' perception of the organizational security atmosphere. The union-management relationship under active cooperation, will enable employees to feel the efforts and support of the company and the union in timely replying to and solving employees' complaints, reasonable demands and problems reported, thus contributing to the formation of employees' psychological safety. The paper proposes the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: there is a significant positive correlation between union-management relations climate and psychological safety.

### **Union-management relations climate and affective commitment**

Affective commitment is a dimension of company commitment, which refers to the individual's emotion, identification and involvement in the organization, reflecting a positive attitude of employees towards the organization(Meyer and Allen 1991). Angle and Perry (1986) found that when they could unite with each other and cooperate with each other in times of crisis and difficulty, they could encourage employees to participate more in the daily management and decision-making of the organization, and then show more efforts and loyalty to the organization. Deery and Iverson (2005) studied 305 branches of international finance organization in Australia and found that if enterprises are willing to share information with trade union and promote the establishment of joint problem solving mechanism, the organizational atmosphere will become more harmonious and thus have a positive impact on employees' organizational commitment. Snape and † (2012) based on the theory of social exchange, pointed out that when an employee's employer is able to live in harmony with the union, he/she will show a higher level of commitment because he/she appreciates the efforts made by the employer to create a harmonious environment. Lin (2013)found that the relationship atmosphere between labor union and

management has a positive impact on job satisfaction, but it has a u-shaped relationship with affective commitment.

Hypothesis 2: there is a significant positive correlation between union-management relations climate and affective commitment.

## **METHODOLOGY**

We tested the above hypotheses using data collected from 502 employees of enterprises in Jiangsu, Anhui, Zhejiang and Shandong. The paper adopted the form of questionnaire survey and there were two ways of data collection: one was E-mail, and the electronic version of the questionnaire was sent to the respondents directly through the person in charge of the unit; The second was the way of visiting, through the researcher's social relations, we distributed and collected questionnaires in the firm personally. In order to improve the effectiveness of the questionnaire, process control measures was adopted in the survey process: with the support of enterprise leaders, the survey process was ensured to strictly abide by the principle of anonymity, so that the obtained data were closer to the real situation of the subject. At the same time, the interviewees were tutored in filling in the questionnaire. On the one hand, the interviewees were allowed to understand the structure and content of the questionnaire; on the other hand, the interviewees were allowed to attach importance to the survey from the perspective of attitude, so as to improve the quality of the questionnaire. The survey period started from September 2017 to the end of December 2017. A total of 502 copies were collected in this questionnaire. In order to ensure the validity of the questionnaire, invalid questionnaires with missing items and too many of the same options were eliminated. The remaining 358 copies of valid questionnaires had an effective rate of 71.3%. In terms of gender, men accounted for 52.94 percent and women for 47.06 percent. In terms of age, 20.22% were under 25 years old, 34.23% were between 26 and 30 years old, 35.85% were between 31 and 40 years old, and 9.7% were over 41 years old. Education degree, 69.54% above undergraduate degree; The tenure of an enterprise was 78.71% over 3 years. In terms of firm scale, 28% over 500. In terms of enterprise positions, 59.84% of ordinary employees and 40.16% of managers at the grassroots level or above are employees.

## **Measures**

On the basis of literature review, the paper scale adopted the mature scale published in authoritative journals at home and abroad, and the English-related scale followed the standard translation procedure. In order to ensure the reliability and validity of the questionnaire, a pre-survey was conducted, and the items whose reliability and validity did not meet the requirements were excluded by statistical methods. In addition to demographic variables, all other variables in

the paper were scored by likert-5 scale, where 1 means "strongly disagree" and 5 means "strongly agree".

(1) Union-management relations climate. Measurements were made using the "harmony" subscale in the labor relations atmosphere developed by Dastmalchian, Blyton, et al. (2011). Including "the union and the enterprise work together to create a good working environment", "in the union and business relations, both sides attach great importance to each other's opinions" and other 10 items.

(2) Psychological safety. A scale developed by Liang, Farh, et al. (2012) was used. Including five items such as "I have expressed my own feelings in my work" and "presenting real ideas in the current enterprise", the internal consistency reliability coefficient of the scale is 0.818.

(3) Affective commitment. Using the affective commitment scale of Meyer and Allen (1991). Including "I have deep feelings for the company", "I will treat the business as my own thing" and other six items. The internal consistency reliability coefficient of the scale is 0.849, and the internal consistency is good.

(5) Control variables. To avoid the effects of these variables, the paper controls demographic variables.

### **Common Method Variance**

In order to avoid the cognate variance problem in this paper, the common method variance was controlled and detected by the following methods. 1. In the questionnaire design, simplify and clarify questions as much as possible, and shuffle the order of questions; 2. Statistically, through the Harman single-factor test of the paper data, factor analysis was performed on all questions of, and the first principal component was obtained without rotation, and it was explained that 39 % of the total variance, which was not up to 50%. Therefore, the homology variance problem in this paper was not serious.

### **Correlation Analysis**

Table 1 shows the mean value, standard deviation and correlation coefficient of each variable. It can be seen from the table that there is a significant positive correlation between union-management relations climate and psychological safety ( $r=0.261, p<0.01$ ). There was a significant positive correlation between union-management relations climate and affective commitment ( $r=0.432, p<0.01$ ).

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Coefficients**

variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1.gender	1										
2.age	-0.105	1									
3.education	-0.118*	0.059	1								
4.firm style	-0.074	-0.019	-0.363**	1							
5.firm scale	-0.032	0.220**	0.194**	-0.077	1						
6.firm tenure	0.064	0.310**	-0.103	-0.060	0.157**	1					
7.union tenure	0.103	0.283**	-0.069	-0.113*	0.124*	0.846**	1				
8.position	0.071	-0.279*	0.006	-0.117*	0.082	-0.335**	-0.241**	1			
9.union-management	0.05	-0.208**	-0.223**	0.160**	-0.248**	0.004	0.005	0.051	1		
10.psychological safety	0.056	-0.037	-0.174**	0.263**	-0.037	-0.047	-0.021	-0.052	0.261**	1	
11.affective commitment	0.016	-0.043	-0.153**	0.185**	-0.140**	0.054	0.039	-0.134*	0.432**	0.475**	1
mean	1.488	3.34	2.781	1.846	3.843	6.918	6.287	3.363	3.669	3.257	3.767
sd	0.501	0.953	0.766	0.636	1.216	6.402	7.109	0.893	0.870	0.505	0.815

**Hypothesis Tests**

(1) Verification of the impact of union-management relations climate on psychological safety and affective commitment. As can be seen from table 2, union-management relations climate has significant positive effect on psychological safety ( $\beta = 0.137$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and hypothesis 1 is verified. Union-management relations climate has a positive impact on affective commitment ( $\beta = 0.389$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and hypothesis 2 is verified.

**Table 2: The Main Effects of Union-Management Relations Climate**

variables	psychological safety		affective commitment	
	model1	model2	model3	model4
gender	0.061	0.06	0.021	0.018
age	-0.014	0.006	-0.05	0.008
education	-0.066	-0.046	-0.087	-0.03
firm style	0.181***	0.161***	0.178*	0.12
firm scale	0.011	0.03	-0.061	-0.006
firm tenure	-0.013	-0.015	0.005	0.001
union tenure	0.008	0.008	0.001	0

position	-0.039	-0.048		-0.104	-0.13*
union-management		0.137***			0.389***
R2	0.091***	0.091***		0.071**	0.071**
Δ R2	0.139***	0.048***		0.221***	0.15***

## CONCLUSION

### Conclusion and discussion

The paper verifies that the union-management relations climate has positive influence on psychological safety and affective commitment. This study also provides some theoretical contributions and enlightenment, as follows: First of all, the paper confirms that the union-management relations climate has a positive impact on the employee's psychological safety and affective commitment, that is, the more harmonious the union-management relations climate is, the higher the employee's psychological safety and affective commitment is. The study shows that with the advancement of China's trade union transformation, trade union are no longer the "empty shell trade unions", "boss trade unions" or "affiliated organizations of enterprises" in people's impression, and they play an important role in safeguarding the rights and interests of employees and improving labor relations. Second, it can not only deepen understanding of China labor relations theory, and the resulting theory can guide the construction of China's trade union and enterprise labor relations practice, can help employees from the Angle of harmony and win-win, understand the relationship between the enterprise and the trade union. On the one hand, the urgent need for enterprises to improve the status of the trade unions in cognition, attach importance to the role of trade unions at the same time, to push forward enterprise reform itself, to adapt to the new changes and new development of trade union; on the other hand, the trade union also needs to express and protect the rights and interests of employees under the framework of legal system and rules. At the same time, it also needs to formulate the system and rules that employees jointly recognize and abide by to regulate and guide employees to correctly safeguard their rights and interests, which is of great practical significance to the construction of harmonious labor relations.

### Limitations and prospects

Due to the objective conditions are restricted, paper also has some limitations: The cross section data in this paper cannot exclude the effect of reverse causality, and the longitudinal research method can be used in future research.



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This work was supported in part by supported by the National Social Science Foundation of China (16BGL106); the Special Funds for Major Project Cultivation of Fundamental Scientific Research Funds for the Central Universities (NJ2018029).

## **REFERENCES**

- [1] Wu Jinhong, Hu Enhua, Wang Lingyun and Shan Hongmei, Research on the Influence of Trade Union-Corporate Relationship Model on Organizational Commitment from the Perspective of Heterogeneity, *Management Review*, 2017, 29, (10): 120-131.
- [2] Boxall, P. and K. Macky, Research and theory on high-performance work systems: progressing the high-involvement stream, *Human Resource Management Journal*, 2009, 19, (1): 3-23.
- [3] Kroon, B., d. V. Van, K and M. Van Veldhoven, Cross-level effects of high-performance work practices on burnout: Two counteracting mediating mechanisms compared, *Personnel Review*, 2009, 38, (5): 509-525.
- [4] Xu Jianli, Research on the Contradiction between Labor and Capital and the Adjustment of Trade Unions in Non-public Enterprises in Zhejiang—An Empirical Study Based on the Labor Union of Migrant Workers Renting Land, *Zhejiang Social Sciences*, 2012, (3): 136-141+161.
- [5] Duan Shimin, Zhang Chi, Wang Jinfeng and Shen Ya, Practice and Reflection on the Activities of Enterprise Trade Unions to Build Workers' Homes—Taking Central Enterprise Trade Unions as an Example, *Journal of China Institute of Labor Relations*, 2011, 25, (2): 21- 26.
- [6] Wang Yongli and Zheng Yuyu, Analysis of the Performance and Effect of Cross-border Functions of Trade Unions under the Dual Role Positioning, *Management World*, 2012, (10): 130-145.
- [7] Li Zhaomin and Zhao Yuming, The Influence of Five Dimensions of Labor-Management Relationship on Staff Psychological Safety and Job Embedding—An Empirical Study Based on Private Enterprises in Guangdong and Shandong Provinces, *Management Review*, 2017, 29, (4): 108-121.



- [8] Iverson, R. D. and D. M. Buttigieg, Antecedents of union commitment: The impact of union membership differences in vertical dyads and work group relationships, *Human Relations*, 1997, 50, (12): 1485-1510.
- [9] Cooke, F. L., Gender organizing in China: a study of female workers' representation needs and their perceptions of union efficacy, *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 2011, 22, (12): 2558-2574.
- [10] Zhu, Y., M. Warner and T. Feng, Employment relations "with Chinese characteristics": The role of trade unions in China [J], *International Labour Review*, 2011, 150, (1-2): 127-143.
- [11] Wu Jinhong, Hu Enhua, Wang Lingyun and Shan Hongmei, The Influence of Trade Union-Corporate Relationship Model on Employees' Double Organizational Commitment, *Systems Engineering*, 2016, (2): 25-32.
- [12] Kahn, W. A., Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work, *Academy of Management Journal*, 1990, 33, (4): 692-724.
- [13] Dyne, L. V. and J. A. Lepine, Helping and Voice Extra-Role Behaviors: Evidence of Construct and Predictive Validity, *Academy of Management Journal*, 1998, 41, (1): 108-119.
- [14] Edmondson, A. C. and Z. Lei, Psychological Safety: The History, Renaissance, and Future of an Interpersonal Construct, *Social Science Electronic Publishing*, 2014, 1, (1): 23-43.
- [15] Meyer, J. P. and N. J. Allen, A three-component conceptualization of organizational commitment, *Human Resource Management Review*, 1991, 1, (1): 61-89.
- [16] Angle, H. L. and J. L. Perry, Dual Commitment and Labor-Management Relationship Climates, *Academy of Management Journal*, 1986, 29, (1): 31-50.
- [17] Deery, S. J. and R. D. Iverson, Labor-Management Cooperation: Antecedents and Impact on Organizational Performance, *Industrial & Labor Relations Review*, 2005, 58, (4): 588-609
- [18] Snape, E. D. and T. R. †, Industrial Relations Climate and Union Commitment: An Evaluation of Workplace-Level Effects, *Industrial Relations A Journal of Economy & Society*, 2012, 51, (1): 11-28.

- [19] Lin Yaqing (2013). High-performance work system, the atmosphere of union-management relationship and the empirical study of the employment relationship atmosphere, Nanjing University.
- [20] Dastmalchian, A., P. Blyton and R. Adamson, Industrial relations climate: Testing a construct, *Journal of Occupational & Organizational Psychology*, 2011, 62, (1): 21-32.
- [21] Liang, J., C. I. C. Farh and J. L. Farh, Psychological Antecedents of Promotive and Prohibitive Voice: A Two-Wave Examination, *Academy of Management Journal*, 2012, 55, (1): 71-92.