



How Organizational Climate Influences Innovation: A Qualitative Inquiry into the Commerce Sector

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between organizational climate and innovation in the commerce sector. Methodology: A qualitative research design was employed, using semi-structured interviews with 21 professionals in Tehran's commerce sector. Purposeful sampling ensured the inclusion of participants with direct experience in organizational innovation. Interviews continued until theoretical saturation was reached, capturing diverse perspectives. Thematic analysis was conducted using NVivo software, identifying key themes and subthemes that explain the influence of organizational climate on innovation. The study identified four main themes: leadership and management practices, work environment and resources, employee engagement and collaboration, and organizational support for innovation. Visionary leadership, effective communication, and resource allocation emerged as critical enablers of innovation. Employee engagement strategies, such as team dynamics and recognition mechanisms, also played a pivotal role. Barriers to innovation included insufficient resources and resistance to change. The findings align with previous studies, emphasizing the importance of a supportive and collaborative climate in fostering innovation. The study highlights the multifaceted role of organizational climate in shaping innovation within the commerce sector. Leadership styles, resource management, and employee engagement are critical drivers of innovation. Organizations should prioritize creating a positive climate by investing in leadership development, enhancing resource accessibility, and fostering a culture of collaboration and recognition. These strategies can enable organizations to remain competitive in rapidly changing markets.

Keywords: *Organizational climate, innovation, leadership practices, employee engagement, resource allocation, commerce sector, qualitative research.*

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1. Introduction

Organizational climate plays a crucial role in shaping employee behavior, performance, and innovation. As a key determinant of organizational effectiveness, it encompasses shared perceptions of policies, practices, and procedures within a workplace (Rangriz et al., 2020). Understanding how organizational climate influences innovation is particularly vital in the commerce sector, where creativity and adaptability are necessary to remain competitive. Organizational climate is foundational in influencing employee attitudes and behaviors. It serves as a critical context within which trust, motivation, and engagement flourish or falter (Adamska et al., 2022; Akter et al., 2023). Positive climates that foster inclusivity, transparency, and collaboration enable employees to engage in innovative behaviors (Franco & Landini, 2022). Conversely, climates marked by procedural injustice or ambiguity can stifle creativity and lead to organizational silence (Kettaf, 2024). Research has demonstrated that innovative organizational cultures, characterized by shared values supporting experimentation and knowledge sharing, significantly influence workforce agility and adaptability (AlMulhim, 2023; Zuraik & Kelly, 2019).

In commerce, where rapid market shifts and technological advancements dominate, cultivating an environment conducive to innovation is paramount. For instance, studies have linked resource availability, leadership styles, and team dynamics with increased organizational performance and innovation capacity (Rahimi et al., 2023; Sahib & Ali, 2021).

Innovation within organizations depends on several climate-related factors, including leadership, communication, and employee engagement. Transformational leadership styles, which prioritize employee empowerment and visionary thinking, are particularly effective in fostering an innovation-friendly climate (Hamid et al., 2022; Woznyj et al., 2019). Such leaders promote psychological safety, encouraging employees to voice ideas and experiment without fear of failure (Haji Aghanajad & Angazi Ghods, 2022).

Moreover, communication channels that emphasize transparency and active feedback loops are essential for fostering collaboration and innovation. Employees who perceive fairness and inclusivity in decision-making processes are more likely to exhibit innovative behaviors (Azimzadeh, 2023; Sein Myint et al., 2021). Research on university librarians, for example, has shown that climates

prioritizing knowledge sharing and creative autonomy lead to higher levels of job creativity (Nwangwu et al., 2021).

Despite its importance, innovation is often hindered by barriers within the organizational climate. These barriers include insufficient resource allocation, rigid hierarchies, and resistance to change (Dehnavi et al., 2021; Rehman et al., 2020). Financial constraints, limited access to technology, and inadequate training opportunities further exacerbate these challenges, particularly in resource-constrained sectors such as education and public administration (Parsakia et al., 2022; Quan et al., 2023; Rahimi et al., 2023).

On the other hand, enabling factors such as collaborative cultures, supportive leadership, and strategic resource allocation significantly enhance an organization's innovation potential (Esmaeili et al., 2021; Franco & Landini, 2022). For example, a study on private banks in Iran identified a direct correlation between an excellent organizational climate and innovation-driven outcomes (Moradisaleh et al., 2021).

Tehran's commerce sector, a dynamic hub of trade and innovation, provides a fertile ground for exploring the relationship between organizational climate and innovation. With businesses navigating complex regulatory landscapes and rapidly changing consumer demands, fostering an adaptive and innovative climate is more critical than ever (Haji Aghanajad & Angazi Ghods, 2022). Studies on higher education and banking institutions in Tehran have revealed that collaborative climates, characterized by teamwork and shared goals, significantly enhance organizational commitment and innovation (Haji Aghanajad & Angazi Ghods, 2022; Shad, 2021).

Building on these insights, this study aims to explore how various dimensions of organizational climate influence innovation in Tehran's commerce sector. Specifically, it investigates the role of leadership practices, communication strategies, resource allocation, and employee engagement in fostering or inhibiting innovation. By employing qualitative methods, the research captures nuanced perspectives and contextual factors that quantitative approaches might overlook.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This qualitative study explores the influence of organizational climate on innovation within the commerce sector. The research adopts an interpretive paradigm to

capture participants' subjective experiences and insights. The study focused on employees and managers working in commerce-related organizations in Tehran. Purposeful sampling was employed to select participants with firsthand knowledge and experience regarding organizational climate and its potential effects on innovation. Recruitment continued until theoretical saturation was reached, ensuring comprehensive coverage of themes without the emergence of new concepts.

2.2. Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, providing participants the flexibility to share detailed narratives while adhering to the study's objectives. An interview guide was designed to explore key areas, including organizational practices, employee engagement, leadership styles, and innovation processes. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was conducted either in person or via online video calls, depending on participants' preferences and availability. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using NVivo software to systematically code and organize the transcribed interviews.

A thematic analysis approach was applied, involving the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns (themes) within the data. The analysis began with open coding to capture initial ideas, followed by axial coding to link categories and identify relationships. Constant comparative analysis ensured the refinement of themes and subthemes, culminating in an overarching understanding of how organizational climate influences innovation. Rigorous attention was given to data saturation, ensuring credibility and trustworthiness throughout the analysis process.

3. Findings and Results

The study included 21 participants from Tehran's commerce sector, comprising 12 males (57.1%) and 9 females (42.9%). Participants ranged in age from 28 to 54 years, with a mean age of 39.4 years. In terms of educational background, 8 participants (38.1%) held bachelor's degrees, 10 (47.6%) had master's degrees, and 3 (14.3%) possessed doctoral degrees. The majority of participants (16 individuals, 76.2%) were employed in managerial or supervisory roles, while the remaining 5 (23.8%) were in non-managerial positions. Work experience varied widely, with 7 participants (33.3%) having less than 10 years of experience, 10 (47.6%) reporting 10–20 years of experience, and 4 (19.1%) having more than 20 years of experience.

Table 1

Categorical Subthemes and Concepts in Organizational Climate

Category	Subcategory	Concepts
Leadership and Management Practices	Visionary Leadership	Goal setting, Strategic direction, Vision clarity
	Effective Communication	Clarity in instructions, Transparency, Active listening
	Empowerment	Delegation, Trust-building, Encouraging autonomy
	Risk Management	Risk-taking tolerance, Mitigating challenges, Proactive strategies
Work Environment and Resources	Decision-Making Styles	Authoritative style, Collaborative approach, Consensus building
	Resource Allocation	Budgeting, Efficient allocation, Prioritizing innovation resources
	Technology Infrastructure	High-speed internet, Modern software tools, Tech upgrades
	Physical Work Environment	Ergonomic design, Office layout, Accessibility
Employee Engagement and Collaboration	Training and Development	Skill enhancement workshops, Career advancement, Innovation-oriented training
	Motivational Strategies	Employee morale programs, Recognition events, Flexible working
	Team Dynamics	Conflict resolution, Collaboration tools, Peer bonding
Organizational Support for Innovation	Feedback Mechanisms	Constructive criticism, Performance evaluations
	Recognition and Rewards	Incentive-based rewards, Acknowledging efforts
	Innovation Policies	Open innovation, Innovation hubs
	Supportive Culture	Team encouragement, Idea incubation, Workplace creativity
	Knowledge Sharing	Case studies, Idea exchange forums, Employee innovation cells
	Financial Incentives	Incentivized programs, Extra allowances, Top-level promotions

3.1. Leadership and Management Practices

Visionary Leadership was highlighted as a critical factor, with participants emphasizing the importance of goal setting, strategic direction, and vision clarity in fostering innovation. One participant mentioned, "Our leadership consistently communicates a clear vision, which motivates us to think creatively."

Effective Communication emerged as another essential subtheme, where clarity in instructions, transparency, and active listening were key concepts. An interviewee noted, "Transparent communication builds trust and encourages innovative ideas from everyone."

The Empowerment of employees through delegation, trust-building, and encouraging autonomy was frequently discussed. One manager stated, "We perform best when we are trusted to make decisions independently."

Risk Management, including risk-taking tolerance, mitigating challenges, and proactive strategies, was seen as vital. A participant remarked, "Innovation involves risks, and our management encourages us to take calculated ones."

Lastly, Decision-Making Styles, such as authoritative approaches, collaborative methods, and consensus building, influenced innovation significantly. According to one respondent, "Collaborative decision-making ensures everyone's ideas are heard and considered."

3.2. Work Environment and Resources

Resource Allocation was frequently mentioned, with participants highlighting budgeting, efficient allocation, and prioritizing innovation resources as key to sustaining innovative activities. One interviewee shared, "Our team's success depends on how resources are strategically allocated."

Technology Infrastructure played a pivotal role, with high-speed internet, modern software tools, and regular tech upgrades enabling innovative processes. A participant stated, "Access to the latest technology gives us a competitive edge in ideation and execution."

The Physical Work Environment was described as instrumental, with concepts like ergonomic design, office layout, and accessibility contributing to a conducive atmosphere for creativity. One respondent observed, "A well-designed workspace inspires us to think differently."

Additionally, Training and Development opportunities, such as skill enhancement workshops, career advancement programs, and innovation-oriented training, were valued. A

participant noted, "Regular training keeps us updated and sparks new ideas."

3.3. Employee Engagement and Collaboration

Motivational Strategies were pivotal, including employee morale programs, recognition events, and flexible working arrangements. One participant reflected, "Recognition events boost our morale and drive us to innovate."

Team Dynamics, with a focus on conflict resolution, collaboration tools, and peer bonding, facilitated a supportive environment. A participant shared, "Our teamwork thrives on effective communication and conflict resolution."

Feedback Mechanisms, such as constructive criticism and performance evaluations, were seen as critical. An employee mentioned, "Timely feedback helps us refine our innovative ideas."

Recognition and Rewards were also vital, with incentive-based rewards and acknowledging efforts motivating employees. As one participant stated, "Acknowledging our contributions inspires us to keep innovating."

3.4. Organizational Support for Innovation

Innovation Policies, such as open innovation and innovation hubs, were recognized as driving forces. A manager noted, "Our organization's policy of open innovation encourages collaboration beyond boundaries."

A Supportive Culture, fostering team encouragement, idea incubation, and workplace creativity, was deemed essential. One participant shared, "Our culture encourages brainstorming and thinking outside the box."

Knowledge Sharing, facilitated by case studies, idea exchange forums, and employee innovation cells, promoted continuous learning and creativity. A respondent observed, "We grow by sharing knowledge and learning from each other's experiences."

Lastly, Financial Incentives, such as incentivized programs, extra allowances, and top-level promotions, were highlighted as enablers of innovation. An interviewee stated, "Financial incentives motivate us to push boundaries and explore new ideas."

These findings illustrate the intricate interplay between leadership, resources, engagement, and organizational support in fostering innovation within the commerce sector.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal that organizational climate significantly influences innovation within the commerce sector in Tehran. The results identified four main themes: leadership and management practices, work environment and resources, employee engagement and collaboration, and organizational support for innovation. Each of these themes contains specific subthemes and concepts that explain how the organizational climate facilitates or impedes innovative practices.

Leadership and Management Practices were found to be central to fostering innovation. Participants emphasized the role of visionary leadership, effective communication, and empowerment in driving creativity and collaboration. These findings align with Franco and Landini (2022), who demonstrated that leadership styles that prioritize employee autonomy and trust contribute to workforce agility and innovation (Franco & Landini, 2022). Similarly, Hamid et al. (2022) highlighted transformational leadership as a critical enabler of innovative behaviors by creating an environment of psychological safety and open communication (Hamid et al., 2022). The role of decision-making styles and risk management further reinforces that leaders who embrace collaborative and strategic approaches are more successful in fostering innovation (Zuraik & Kelly, 2019).

Work Environment and Resources emerged as another critical theme. Participants cited adequate resource allocation, technological infrastructure, and training opportunities as pivotal to innovation. These findings are consistent with research by Rahimi et al. (2023), who noted that resource constraints and insufficient technological tools often act as barriers to innovation in educational institutions (Rahimi et al., 2023). Moreover, the importance of ergonomic and accessible workspaces, as identified in this study, echoes the conclusions of Sein Myint et al. (2021), who found that supportive physical environments enhance employee creativity and productivity (Sein Myint et al., 2021).

Employee Engagement and Collaboration was highlighted as a key driver of innovation. Subthemes such as motivational strategies, team dynamics, and recognition mechanisms underscore the importance of fostering a collaborative and engaging organizational culture. These results align with Akter et al. (2023), who identified trust and engagement as mediating factors between organizational climate and work quality in the hospitality sector (Akter et

al., 2023). Similarly, Haji Aghanezhad and Angazi Quds (2022) found that a collaborative climate enhances employees' organizational commitment and innovative capacities (Haji Aghanajad & Angazi Ghods, 2022). Recognition and feedback mechanisms, as reported in this study, support findings by Parsakia et al. (2022), who demonstrated that positive reinforcement encourages employees to contribute novel ideas (Parsakia et al., 2022).

Finally, Organizational Support for Innovation was a recurring theme, with participants emphasizing innovation policies, supportive culture, and knowledge sharing. The results corroborate the findings of Woznyj et al. (2019), who noted that climates that prioritize knowledge-sharing practices improve organizational performance and innovation outcomes (Woznyj et al., 2019). Additionally, Moradisaleh et al. (2021) identified that supportive policies and financial incentives play a vital role in fostering an innovation-friendly climate, echoing this study's findings (Moradisaleh et al., 2021).

The study's results align with a growing body of literature on organizational climate and innovation. For example, Rehman et al. (2020) highlighted the importance of affective commitment and knowledge sharing in mediating the relationship between climate and performance, which supports this study's findings on employee engagement and collaboration (Rehman et al., 2020). Similarly, Azimzadeh (2023) emphasized that psychological and cultural dimensions of organizational climate are critical for fostering citizenship behaviors that indirectly drive innovation (Azimzadeh, 2023).

This research also reinforces the conclusions of Franco and Landini (2022), who argued that innovation stems from a combination of leadership vision, resource allocation, and a supportive culture (Franco & Landini, 2022). Furthermore, studies by Akter et al. (2023) and Haji Aghanajad and Angazi Ghods (2022) provide additional support for the finding that trust and collaborative climates are essential for enhancing organizational commitment and creativity (Haji Aghanajad & Angazi Ghods, 2022).

The results of this study contribute to theoretical understanding by integrating the role of organizational climate in shaping innovation processes. Specifically, the findings underscore the interplay between leadership, resources, and employee dynamics as critical determinants of innovation. These insights bridge existing gaps in the literature by providing qualitative evidence on how these factors manifest in the commerce sector, a context less explored in previous studies.

This study has several limitations. First, it focuses solely on the commerce sector in Tehran, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other sectors or regions. Second, the reliance on qualitative methods, while providing rich contextual insights, may introduce subjective biases in data interpretation. Third, the sample size, though sufficient for achieving theoretical saturation, may not capture the full diversity of experiences within the commerce sector. Lastly, the study did not account for potential external factors, such as economic conditions or regulatory frameworks, that could influence the organizational climate.

Future research should address these limitations by expanding the scope of the study to include multiple sectors and regions to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, incorporating mixed-methods approaches that combine qualitative insights with quantitative data could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between organizational climate and innovation. Longitudinal studies would also be valuable to examine how changes in organizational climate over time influence innovation outcomes. Moreover, exploring external factors, such as market dynamics and regulatory environments, could offer deeper insights into the contextual influences on organizational climate.

Organizations should prioritize creating a positive organizational climate by investing in leadership development programs that emphasize visionary and transformational leadership styles. Ensuring transparency in communication and fostering trust through empowerment and collaboration should be central to organizational strategies. Providing adequate resources, including technological tools and training opportunities, is essential to enable employees to innovate effectively. Organizations should also implement structured feedback and recognition mechanisms to motivate employees and encourage creative contributions. Finally, establishing policies that support knowledge sharing and financial incentives can further cultivate an innovation-friendly culture.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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