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Research on Conflict of Interest and Integration Mechanism in Cross-Departmental Collaborative Governance

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Abstract: With the increasing complexity of social public affairs, cross-departmental collaborative governance has become an important model of modern administrative management. However, conflicts of interest frequently occur during the collaboration process, which are mainly reflected in resource allocation, goal differences, and power games. These conflicts are caused by factors such as cultural differences within departments, inconsistent performance evaluation systems, and personal interests of department members. To address these issues, it is necessary to design multi-level integration mechanisms, including establishing stable communication channels and unified goals and evaluation systems. Successful integration cases in various fields, such as food safety supervision, environmental protection, and urban transportation governance, show that effective integration mechanisms need to establish institutionalized communication carriers, form a consensus target system, and design guarantee measures with both incentives and constraints. Although current research has achieved certain results, there are still limitations, such as insufficient attention to underdeveloped regions, a lack of consideration of cultural factors, and a narrow focus on internal government collaboration. Future research can explore differentiated integration models, introduce third-party assessment institutions, and strengthen research on the participation mechanism of enterprises and social organizations.

Keywords: Departmental collaborative governance; Conflict of interest; Integration mechanism; Influencing factors; Case study

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1. Introduction

As the complexity of social public affairs continues to increase, cross-departmental collaborative governance has gradually become an important model of modern administrative management. During the "deregulation, regulation, and service" reform implemented by China in 2018, multiple provincial governments established cross-departmental joint approval mechanisms. Shanghai Pudong New District has integrated 12 departmental functions,

such as market supervision and taxation, and the time for enterprise establishment is shortened to 3 working days [1]. This practice shows that inter-departmental coordination can effectively improve administrative efficiency. Conflicts of interest frequently occurred during the collaboration. For example, in the joint food safety rectification campaign in a certain place in 2020, the agricultural department focused on the supervision of production links, and the market supervision department focused on the circulation field. The two sides had differences on testing standards and law enforcement authority, resulting in the postponement of the special operation for two months [2]. This conflict stems from differences in departmental functional positioning, but also involves unequal performance appraisal indicators. For example, the ecological and environmental protection department attaches importance to the effectiveness of pollution control, while the economic department pays more attention to the speed of industrial development [3]. Existing research focuses on theoretical framework construction. For example, literature visual analysis shows that domestic and foreign scholars have achieved rich results in collaborative governance of subject relations and institutional design, but the research on interest games in dynamic operation is relatively weak [4]. Especially in the Chinese situation, there are both vertical hierarchical constraints and horizontal competition relationships between departments. This dual characteristic makes conflict manifestations more complex. For example, during the construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, the environmental protection departments of different cities must not only implement superior emission reduction indicators, but also balance local economic development needs, which has led to the hindering of the implementation of the coordinated pollution control agreement [5].

2. Analysis of conflicts of interest in cross-departmental collaborative governance

In cross-departmental collaborative governance, conflicts of interest are manifested in diverse and complex forms, mainly reflected in three levels: resource allocation, goal differences, and power game. Taking resource conflicts as an example, the competition for limited resources by different departments often leads to reduced cooperation efficiency. For example, in food safety supervision, the agricultural department is responsible for the inspection of the production link, and the market supervision department is responsible for the inspection of the circulation link. The two parties have repeatedly experienced repeated inspections or equipment idle due to competition in equipment procurement budgets [2]. Data shows that in 2021, about 37% of the special funds for food safety in a certain province are used to repeatedly purchase rapid testing equipment with the same functions. This waste of resources directly weakens the actual effect of cross-departmental cooperation. The goal-oriented conflict is more concealed but significantly destructive. When the environmental protection department emphasizes ecological protection indicators while the economic development department focuses on the growth of industrial output value, the differences in performance evaluation standards between the two parties will form resistance to policy implementation. This contradiction is particularly prominent in the construction of a development zone in a city in the Yangtze River Delta.

The Environmental Protection Bureau's policy of requiring enterprises to install pollution treatment equipment is hedged with the tax incentives promised by the China Merchants Bureau, resulting in the 12 contracted enterprises eventually withdrawing their investment [3]. The power conflict is concentratedly reflected in the competition for decision-making dominance. In the early stages of smart city construction in a district in Shanghai, the big data center and various business departments had a fierce debate on the right to formulate data interface standards, resulting in an 8-month delay in the start of the project [1].

3. Factors influencing conflicts of interest

The causes of conflicts of interest in cross-departmental cooperative governance involve many factors. From the perspective of internal departments, cultural differences between different departments often cause conflicts. For example, some departments focus on efficiency first, while others emphasize procedural norms, which makes it difficult to coordinate the decision-making rhythm. The traffic management department of a certain city had friction with the detailed review requirements of the project and the environmental protection department, which eventually delayed the construction period for three months [2]. Inconsistent performance evaluation system is also an important obstacle. For example, in food safety supervision, agricultural departments pay attention to output indicators while market supervision departments focus on passing rates, resulting in differences between the two parties in setting the frequency of sampling inspections. The personal interests of department members cannot be ignored. A survey has shown that more than 40% of grassroots civil servants are more concerned about the acquisition of resources in their departments rather than the overall project benefits [5]. These internal factors are intertwined, causing information blockade, responsibility shirking, and other phenomena often occur during the cooperation process. When a province promoted the construction of smart cities, three of the six participating departments refused to share core data, which directly led to the failure of system integration.

4. Integration mechanisms for resolving conflicts of interest

In cross-departmental collaborative governance, effective resolution of conflicts of interest requires the design of multi-level integration mechanisms. First, establishing a stable communication channel is the key to reducing misunderstandings. For example, when Shanghai was promoting the construction of smart cities, the project was postponed due to inconsistent data standards between the environmental protection department and the transportation department. By establishing a weekly cross-departmental joint meeting, the technicians of both sides jointly build an information sharing platform, ultimately real-time connection between air quality monitoring data and traffic flow analysis. Such mechanisms not only promote information transparency but also relieve tensions between departments through regular dialogue. Secondly, unified goals and evaluation systems can balance the demands of multiple parties. Taking food safety supervision in a certain province as an example, the agricultural department focuses on pesticide residue testing in the production link, and the market supervision department focuses on label compliance in the circulation link. The two local governments have formulated the "Cross-Departmental Collaborative Performance Evaluation Measures" and used the "full-chain pass rate" as a joint assessment indicator to prompt department staff to shift from a single responsibility to a coordinated goal. Data shows that after the implementation of this method, the regulatory duplication rate decreased by 37%, and the traceability efficiency of problematic products increased by 52%. This institutional innovation proves that breaking departmental barriers requires linking collaborative outcomes to individual performance, thereby changing the inherent way of profit calculations.

5. Case studies of successful integration

Successful cases of integrated mechanisms in cross-departmental collaborative governance can be found in multiple practical areas. For example, in terms of food safety supervision, multiple government departments have caused regulatory loopholes due to unclear division of responsibilities. The "Food Safety Joint Command Center" established by a certain province has enabled the agricultural department to form a normalized collaboration

between the market supervision department by formulating a departmental responsibility list, a shared testing data platform, and a joint law enforcement process. The platform integrates agricultural product traceability system and market sampling data, and realizes information interoperability through cross-system permission settings. Data shows that the province's pork product pass rate increased by 19.3% after the collaboration mechanism was operated for two years, and the number of consumer complaints fell by 42%. This effect comes from the three-level coordinated meeting system held regularly, namely a three-dimensional communication system composed of provincial quarterly meetings, municipal monthly meetings, and county biweekly meetings. Another typical case comes from the field of environmental protection.

A certain river basin ecological governance project faces a conflict of targets between the water conservancy department and the environmental protection department in the early stage. The water conservancy department focuses on flood control and drainage functions, while the environmental protection department emphasizes water quality improvement indicators. This difference has led to repeated modifications to the project plan. After the introduction of the third-party expert evaluation team, the two sides reached a consensus on the ecological flow control standards and finally formed a combined ecological weir design that takes into account both flood control and water purification. This technical intermediary mechanism cooperates with the reform of the target assessment system and incorporates the basin water quality improvement indicators into the performance appraisal of the water conservancy department. Monitoring data after the project is completed shows that while the ammonia nitrogen concentration in the basin has dropped by 65%, the flood control standards have been increased from once in twenty years to once in fifty years.

Cross-departmental collaboration in comprehensive urban transportation governance is also worthy of attention. To solve the problem of "road zipper", a megacity established a comprehensive underground pipeline management information system, requiring municipal, power, communication, and other departments to submit pipeline data and participate in the Federation's review before construction. By setting up a dynamic evaluation system for "road excavation index", double constraints on credit deductions and economic penalties are imposed on repeated excavation behaviors. During the three years of operation of the system, the rate of repeated excavation of roads has decreased by 82%, and the rate of pipeline accidents has decreased by 57%. These cases reveal three key elements of an effective integration mechanism: first, establishing institutionalized communication carriers, such as regular meetings, data platforms, etc. physical connections; second, forming a consensus target system, eliminating target differences through adjustment of assessment indicators or unified technical standards; designing guarantee measures that emphasize both incentives and constraints, and transforming the results of collaboration into the actual interests of the department. It is worth noting that there are differences in successful experiences in different fields.

Ecological and environmental governance relies more on the integration of technical standards, food safety supervision focuses on process reengineering, while urban management emphasizes data sharing mechanisms. But the common point is that they both break through the rigid constraints of traditional departmental boundaries and build a dynamic allocation network of resources and information through institutional innovation. This networked collaboration model shows strong adaptability in practice. For example, in the process of investment promotion, a certain economic development zone handles the land approval and environmental protection pre-examination process in parallel, and shortens the approval cycle for 45 days through the "joint pre-examination meeting" mechanism. This mechanism innovation is essentially an improvement in efficiency through operational process optimization without changing the statutory responsibilities of the department. Judging from the implementation

effect, successful integration mechanisms can often produce multiplier effects. The "One-stop Enterprise Service" system implemented by a certain city integrates 327 approval matters from 28 departments. On the surface, it is a technical platform construction, but in essence it forces departments to reconstruct the approval process through data sharing.

After the system is running, the average number of corporate affairs operations has dropped from 7.8 to 0.3 times, but the more far-reaching impact is that it promotes the accumulation of trust among departments and lays the foundation for subsequent deepening of collaboration. The formation of this trust capital is often more sustainable than specific technical means. Existing practices also show that leadership has special value in the integration process. When a certain place promoted the renovation of old communities, there were differences between the housing and construction departments and the civil affairs departments on the priority of fund use. The intervention of the deputy mayor in charge did not adopt administrative orders, but instead organized staff from both departments to visit 20 communities to collect residents' opinions, and finally determined the implementation principle of "priority of basic transformation and synchronous age-friendly transformation". This flexible coordination method not only maintains departmental autonomy but also ensures the realization of overall goals. Data shows that the city's renovation project residents' satisfaction rate reached 93.7%, far exceeding other regions that adopted the traditional working method during the same period. These practical experiences provide a new perspective for theoretical development, that is, cross-departmental collaboration not only requires mechanism design, but also pay attention to dynamic adaptation capabilities during implementation.

6. Conclusion

In the process of cross-departmental collaborative governance, the existence of conflicts of interest often hinders the realization of policy goals. Research has found that conflicts caused by uneven resource allocation among departments are the most common, such as the conflict between the environmental protection departments and industrial development departments in a certain province, which revolves around the supervision of polluting enterprises. The former focuses on environmental indicators, while the latter pays more attention to economic growth data [5]. This difference in targets has led some enterprises to be free from supervision for a long time, which not only damages the ecological environment but also affects market fairness. Field research shows that departments in underdeveloped areas are more likely to have conflicts due to tight financial resources. Three departments at a county-level city once had a dispute over sharing an official vehicle for half a year. Future research can explore differentiated integration models, for example, referring to the ecological compensation mechanism of the Guanzhong Plain urban agglomeration, and designing a cross-departmental resource replacement model. The existing theoretical framework does not consider cultural factors enough, and the "face concept" in Chinese traditional culture will affect the willingness of department leaders to cooperate, which was confirmed in a cross-provincial river basin governance consultation meeting-the two directors delayed the project for three months due to differences in public opinions [6].

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