

# Research on Management Mechanisms of Cross-Departmental Collaboration in Solving Complex Public Problems

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## Abstract

The public problems faced by modern society are increasingly complex, often requiring collaboration among multiple departments for effective solutions. This study focuses on the management mechanism theory of cross-departmental collaboration in addressing complex public problems. By analyzing models of multi-stakeholder participation in public governance including government departments, non-governmental organizations, and enterprises, the research explores key factors promoting effective cross-departmental collaboration. The study proposes that information sharing mechanisms, interest coordination mechanisms, and responsibility-sharing mechanisms are core theoretical elements ensuring successful cross-departmental collaboration. The research also emphasizes the theoretical importance of leadership, compatibility of organizational cultures, and trust-building in the collaboration process. The study points out that the main theoretical challenges faced by cross-departmental collaboration include departmental conflicts of interest, communication barriers, and uneven resource allocation. To address these challenges, this study proposes theoretical strategies such as building flexible collaboration networks, establishing shared visions, and designing effective performance evaluation systems. These findings not only deepen the understanding of the nature of cross-departmental collaboration but also provide conceptual frameworks and theoretical guidance for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of public problem-solving.

## Keywords

Cross-Departmental Collaboration, Public Governance, Collaboration Mechanisms, Organizational Management, Public Problem Solving

## 1. Introduction

With the rapid development of society and the acceleration of globalization,

modern public management faces unprecedented challenges. Complex public problems often span multiple domains, involving numerous stakeholders, and cannot be effectively addressed by a single department or agency. Cross-departmental collaboration, as an emerging mode of public governance, plays an increasingly important role in solving complex public problems. However, the effective implementation of cross-departmental collaboration faces many challenges, including organizational boundaries, cultural differences, and conflicts of interest. Therefore, an in-depth study of the management mechanisms of cross-departmental collaboration has significant theoretical and practical importance for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of public problem-solving. In recent years, academic research on cross-departmental collaboration has deepened. Ansell and Gash (2008) proposed a conceptual framework for collaborative governance, emphasizing the importance of stakeholder participation. Thomson et al. (2020) focused on the multidimensional characteristics of the collaboration process, including governance, administration, autonomy, mutuality, and norms. These studies have laid the foundation for understanding the nature and mechanisms of cross-departmental collaboration. However, existing research still has some limitations. Most studies focus on the process and outcomes of collaboration, with relatively insufficient research on the management mechanisms supporting collaboration. While the challenges and obstacles faced by cross-departmental collaboration have been discussed, systematic research on coping strategies remains inadequate (Baruch et al., 2021). In China's unique political and administrative environment, the operational mechanisms of cross-departmental collaboration still need further exploration and validation. This study aims to fill these research gaps by analyzing in-depth the management mechanisms of cross-departmental collaboration, exploring their application in solving complex public problems, and proposing corresponding theoretical frameworks and practical recommendations. Through this series of analyses and discussions, this study aims to provide theoretical guidance and practical insights for improving the effectiveness of cross-departmental collaboration and better solving complex public problems.

## **2. Theoretical Foundations of Cross-Departmental Collaboration**

### **2.1. Network Governance Theory**

Network governance theory provides an important theoretical foundation for understanding cross-departmental collaboration. This theory posits that in complex social environments, the resolution of public problems requires interaction and collaboration between multiple actors, rather than the independent action of a single organization. Network governance emphasizes the importance of inter-organizational relationships and how these relationships affect resource allocation, information flow, and decision-making processes. From the perspective of network governance, cross-departmental collaboration is viewed as a dynamic, self-organizing network structure. This structure allows different departments and

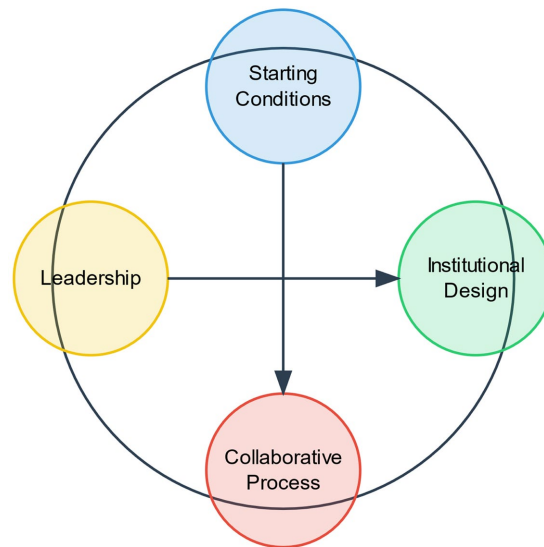
organizations to transcend traditional hierarchical boundaries, forming more flexible and adaptive cooperative relationships. Network governance theory emphasizes the core role of trust, reciprocity, and shared goals in maintaining collaborative networks (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2020). At the same time, the theory also points out the challenges faced by network governance, such as coordination difficulties, ambiguity of responsibilities, and power asymmetries (Deng & Tang, 2017). Network governance theory provides a systematic analytical framework for cross-departmental collaboration, helping to understand the complex dynamics and multiple interactions in the collaboration process. It emphasizes the importance of informal relationships and social capital in promoting collaboration, providing theoretical guidance for designing more effective cross-departmental collaboration mechanisms. The application of network governance theory has liberated cross-departmental collaboration from traditional hierarchical structures, forming a more open and flexible governance model that is better suited to addressing the current complex and changing public problems.

## 2.2. Collaborative Governance Theory

Collaborative governance theory further deepens the understanding of cross-departmental collaboration, paying particular attention to institutional arrangements and governance mechanisms in the collaboration process (Ansell & Gash, 2018). This theory emphasizes that effective cross-departmental collaboration requires establishing a clear set of rules, procedures, and structures to guide and regulate interactions between parties. Collaborative governance theory proposes a dynamic model of the collaboration process, including starting conditions, institutional design, leadership, collaborative process, and outcomes. As shown in **Figure 1**, this model emphasizes the cyclical nature of collaboration, where the results of collaboration in turn influence future collaboration conditions and processes. Collaborative governance theory particularly emphasizes the importance of information sharing, joint decision-making, and collective action in the collaboration process. The collaborative governance model provides a systematic framework for understanding and managing complex cross-departmental collaboration, helping to identify key factors affecting collaborative success. The theory argues that effective collaboration requires creating an appropriate institutional environment, including establishing common rules, promoting open dialogue, and fostering trust and commitment. At the same time, collaborative governance theory also emphasizes the key role of leadership in driving the collaboration process, including promoting stakeholder participation, managing conflicts, and building consensus. Through this systematic approach, collaborative governance theory provides practitioners with a comprehensive guiding framework, contributing to the design and implementation of more effective cross-departmental collaboration.

## 2.3. Public Value Management Theory

Public value management theory provides an important value orientation for



**Figure 1.** Collaborative Governance Model. Source: Adapted from Emerson, K., & Nabatchi, T. (2020). *Collaborative Governance Regimes*. Georgetown University Press.

cross-departmental collaboration. This theory emphasizes that the goal of public management is not only to improve efficiency and effectiveness but, more importantly, to create public value. In the context of cross-departmental collaboration, public value management theory advocates that collaboration between different departments and organizations should be oriented towards creating and realizing shared public value. Public value management theory proposes three key elements: public value proposition, authorizing environment, and operational capacity (Moore, 2019). The public value proposition refers to the specific public interests that collaboration aims to achieve; the authorizing environment involves obtaining stakeholder support in the political and legal framework; and operational capacity focuses on the resources and capabilities needed to realize public value. The dynamic balance among these three elements is crucial for successful cross-departmental collaboration. Public value management theory provides an important value framework for cross-departmental collaboration, emphasizing that collaboration should aim to create public value as its ultimate goal. This theoretical perspective helps coordinate the interests of different departments, establish a shared vision, and provide new standards for evaluating collaborative outcomes. Through the lens of public value, cross-departmental collaboration is not only an integration of resources and capabilities but also a process of creating shared value. This approach encourages participants to transcend departmental interests and jointly pursue broader social benefits. At the same time, public value management theory also provides new dimensions for evaluating the effectiveness of cross-departmental collaboration, focusing not only on efficiency and effectiveness but also considering the contribution of collaboration to public interests.

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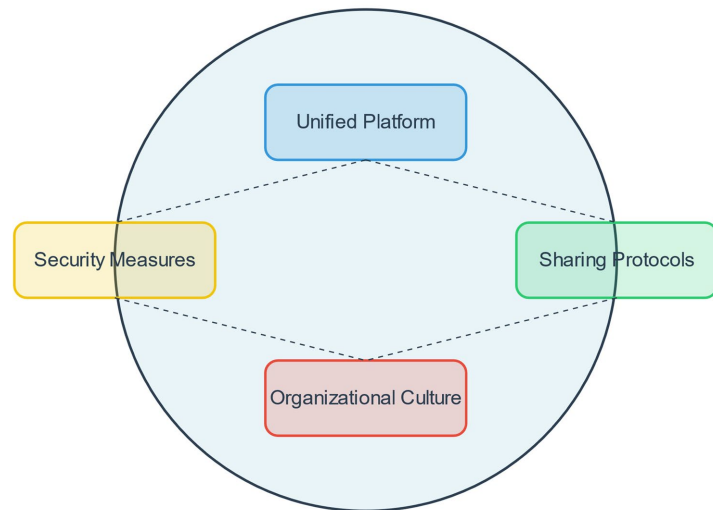
### 3. Core Management Mechanisms of Cross-Departmental Collaboration

#### 3.1. Information Sharing Mechanism

Information sharing is one of the key elements for successful cross-departmental collaboration. An effective information sharing mechanism can promote knowledge flow, reduce information asymmetry, and improve the quality and efficiency of decision-making. In cross-departmental collaboration, the main challenges of information sharing include technological barriers, organizational culture differences, and concerns about information security. To overcome these obstacles, establishing an effective information sharing mechanism needs to consider the following aspects: establishing a unified information sharing platform to ensure technical interoperability; formulating clear information sharing protocols specifying the scope, frequency, and methods of sharing; fostering an open and transparent organizational culture that encourages proactive information sharing; and establishing necessary information security measures to balance openness and protection (Yang & Maxwell, 2021). As shown in **Figure 2**, a complete information sharing mechanism includes four key elements: unified platform, sharing protocols, organizational culture, and security measures. Effective information sharing can not only improve collaboration efficiency but also promote innovation and problem-solving. By sharing information, different departments can obtain a more comprehensive perspective on problems, thereby generating more innovative solutions. At the same time, information sharing also helps build mutual trust, laying the foundation for long-term cooperation. However, achieving effective information sharing requires overcoming numerous obstacles, including technical compatibility issues, inter-organizational competitiveness, and concerns about information misuse. Therefore, establishing an information sharing mechanism that balances openness and security is crucial for successful cross-departmental collaboration.

#### 3.2. Interest Coordination Mechanism

Interest coordination is one of the core challenges in cross-departmental collaboration. Different departments and organizations often have their own goals, priorities, and interests, which may lead to conflicts and resistance in the collaboration process. An effective interest coordination mechanism aims to balance various interests, find common ground, and create mutually beneficial situations (Thomson et al., 2020). Establishing an interest coordination mechanism needs to consider the following aspects: clarifying the interests and demands of all parties, establishing transparent communication channels; identifying points of interest intersection, cultivating a shared vision; designing flexible interest distribution mechanisms to ensure fair returns for all parties; and establishing conflict resolution mechanisms to address disagreements in a timely manner. Effective interest coordination can not only reduce friction in the collaboration process but



**Figure 2.** Information sharing mechanism. Source: Adapted from Yang, T. M., & Maxwell, T. A. (2021). Information-sharing in Public Organizations: A Literature Review of Interpersonal, Intra-organizational and Inter-organizational Success Factors. *Government Information Quarterly*, 38(1), 101506.

also enhance the enthusiasm and commitment of participants. Through interest coordination, parties can better understand each other's positions and needs, thereby finding innovative solutions. However, interest coordination is an ongoing process that requires constant communication and adjustment. In this process, building mutual trust and respect is crucial, helping parties maintain open and flexible attitudes when facing differences. At the same time, the interest coordination mechanism should also consider the balance between long-term and short-term interests to ensure the sustainability of collaboration.

### 3.3. Responsibility Sharing Mechanism

Responsibility sharing is a key mechanism for ensuring the effective implementation of cross-departmental collaboration. In a complex collaborative environment, clearly defining the responsibilities of each party and establishing a reasonable responsibility sharing mechanism are crucial for the success of collaboration (Mutua & Kiruhi, 2021). An effective responsibility sharing mechanism should include the following aspects: clearly defining the duties and authorities of each party to avoid overlapping or missing responsibilities; establishing evaluation and supervision mechanisms for responsibility fulfillment to ensure that each party assumes their due responsibilities; designing flexible responsibility adjustment mechanisms to respond to environmental changes and new situations; and establishing responsibility accountability and reward-punishment systems to enhance the enthusiasm for fulfilling responsibilities. The responsibility sharing mechanism involves not only the allocation of tasks but also the distribution of risks and benefits. Reasonable responsibility sharing can improve collaboration efficiency, reduce internal conflicts, and help build mutual trust and long-

term cooperative relationships. In practice, the design of the responsibility sharing mechanism should consider the capabilities and resources of each party to ensure the fairness and feasibility of responsibility allocation. At the same time, it is necessary to establish clear accountability mechanisms to ensure that each party seriously fulfills their responsibilities. Effective responsibility sharing can not only improve the efficiency and effectiveness of collaboration but also promote organizational learning and capacity enhancement, laying the foundation for future collaboration.

## 4. Key Factors Affecting the Effectiveness of Cross-Departmental Collaboration

### 4.1. Leadership

Leadership plays a crucial role in cross-departmental collaboration, directly influencing the direction, quality, and effectiveness of collaboration. Effective leadership can promote communication between different departments, coordinate various interests, and drive the achievement of common goals. As shown in **Figure 3**, leadership in cross-departmental collaboration is manifested in multiple aspects: strategic vision, the ability to identify collaborative opportunities and formulate long-term plans; communication skills, the ability to build bridges between different departments and stakeholders; coordination ability, the ability to balance various interests and resolve conflicts; and decision-making ability, the ability to make correct judgments in complex situations. Leaders need to possess cross-boundary thinking, being able to understand and respect the cultures and working styles of different departments. At the same time, leaders also need to have a collaborative spirit, being able to set aside departmental interests for the overall interest. In cross-departmental collaboration, leadership is often distributed, with different stages and levels requiring different leadership roles. Therefore, cultivating multi-level leadership and establishing flexible leadership mechanisms are crucial for the success of collaboration. Effective leadership can not only promote the smooth progress of collaboration but also cultivate an organizational culture of collaboration, laying the foundation for long-term cross-departmental cooperation. The challenges faced by leaders in cross-departmental collaboration include: how to promote collaboration while maintaining the autonomy of each department; how to handle power and resource imbalances; how to find a balance between different organizational cultures and working styles. Addressing these challenges requires leaders to possess high adaptability and innovation, being able to flexibly apply different leadership strategies according to specific situations. Leaders also need to focus on building trust, demonstrating the value of collaboration through their actions, thereby influencing and driving the development of the entire collaborative network. In an increasingly complex public management environment, cultivating leaders with cross-departmental collaboration capabilities has become an urgent task (Crosby & Bryson, 2018).



**Figure 3.** Leadership in Cross-departmental Collaboration. Source: Adapted from Crosby, B. C., & Bryson, J. M. (2018). The Leadership of Cross-sector Collaborations. *Public Administration Review*, 78(4), 527-531.

## 4.2. Organizational Culture

Organizational culture plays a key role in cross-departmental collaboration, influencing the behaviors, values, and work habits of collaboration participants. Different departments and organizations often have their own unique cultures, and these cultural differences can become barriers to collaboration. Therefore, building an organizational culture suitable for cross-departmental collaboration is crucial. An organizational culture that supports collaboration should have the following characteristics: openness, willingness to accept new ideas and methods; trust, belief in the abilities and sincerity of partners; flexibility, ability to adapt to changes and uncertainties; innovative spirit, encouragement to try new solutions; and sharing awareness, valuing knowledge and resource sharing. Cultivating such a culture requires long-term efforts, including leadership demonstration, institutional design, and continuous training and communication. In cross-departmental collaboration, special attention needs to be paid to cultural integration. This is not about eliminating cultural differences, but about establishing a meta-culture that embraces and respects differences (Sørensen & Torfing, 2021). Through shared visions and values, participants from different cultural backgrounds can find common ground, forming collaborative cohesion. At the same time, the shaping of organizational culture also needs to consider the influence of the external environment, ensuring that cultural changes are in line with social development trends. An organizational culture that supports collaboration can not only promote current collaborative projects but also create favorable conditions for future cross-departmental cooperation. However, changing organizational culture is a slow and complex process that requires overcoming many challenges. These challenges include how to break existing mindsets and work habits; how to handle

resistance and conflicts in the cultural change process; how to promote cultural integration while maintaining organizational characteristics. Addressing these challenges requires a systematic approach, including formulating clear cultural change strategies, designing systems and processes that support collaboration, and establishing effective incentive mechanisms. It is also necessary to focus on the continuity and consistency of cultural change, ensuring that new cultural concepts can be implemented and reflected in daily work. In the context of cross-departmental collaboration, shaping organizational culture is not only the task of individual organizations but also the shared responsibility of the entire collaborative network.

### 4.3. Trust Building

Trust is the cornerstone of cross-departmental collaboration, directly affecting the depth and effectiveness of collaboration. In a cross-departmental environment, building and maintaining trust face special challenges due to differences in organizational backgrounds, goals, and interests. An effective trust-building mechanism should include the following aspects: transparency, maintaining openness in information and decision-making processes; consistency, aligning words with actions and fulfilling commitments; fairness, ensuring reasonable distribution of benefits and responsibilities; capability demonstration, winning respect through professional performance; and communication mechanisms, establishing regular and smooth channels for exchange. Trust building is a gradual process that requires accumulation through continuous interaction and positive experiences. In this process, the strategy of early wins is particularly important, quickly establishing initial trust by achieving some small, visible successes. At the same time, trust building needs to consider different levels of trust, including interpersonal trust, inter-organizational trust, and trust in the entire collaborative system. In cross-departmental collaboration, trust is not only a goal but also a means. High levels of trust can reduce transaction costs, improve decision-making efficiency, promote knowledge sharing, and thus significantly enhance the overall effectiveness of collaboration (Lee et al., 2022). However, trust is also fragile and requires continuous maintenance and repair. Therefore, establishing trust repair mechanisms and addressing misunderstandings and conflicts in a timely manner are crucial for maintaining long-term collaborative relationships. The challenges faced in trust building include: how to quickly establish initial trust in a limited time; how to maintain trust in situations of conflict of interest; how to handle trust crises and breaches of trust. Addressing these challenges requires multi-dimensional strategies, including establishing formal trust assurance mechanisms such as contracts and agreements; cultivating informal trust relationships such as personal networks and social interactions; and creating shared values and visions to form emotional and cognitive foundations of trust. It is also necessary to focus on the dynamic nature of trust, adjusting trust-building strategies and methods in a timely manner according to different stages of collaboration and environmental changes. In a complex cross-departmental collaborative environment, trust building

is not only the responsibility of managers but also the shared task of every participant.

## 5. Conclusion

This study has conducted an in-depth exploration of the management mechanisms of cross-departmental collaboration in solving complex public problems, providing theoretical frameworks and practical guidance for improving collaborative effectiveness. Through the analysis of network governance theory, collaborative governance theory, and public value management theory, this study has elucidated the theoretical foundations of cross-departmental collaboration. The research focused on three core management mechanisms: information sharing, interest coordination, and responsibility sharing, revealing their key roles in promoting effective collaboration. At the same time, the study also emphasized the important influence of key factors such as leadership, organizational culture, and trust building on collaborative success. These findings not only deepen the understanding of the nature of cross-departmental collaboration but also provide valuable guidance for practitioners. However, cross-departmental collaboration still faces many challenges, such as departmental conflicts of interest, communication barriers, and uneven resource allocation. Future research should further explore how to overcome these obstacles, especially how to design and implement more effective collaboration mechanisms in different political and cultural contexts. At the same time, with the development of technology and changes in the social environment, the forms and content of cross-departmental collaboration are constantly evolving. Therefore, continuously paying attention to emerging collaboration models and practices, and timely updating theoretical frameworks are crucial for promoting research and practice in cross-departmental collaboration. In summary, this study provides a comprehensive perspective for understanding and improving cross-departmental collaboration, pointing the direction for future research and practice.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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