

Psychological Motivations and Promoting Paths for Core Entities' Participation in Internal Governance of Universities

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Abstract: Governance, as a paradigm of public management science with postmodern complexity characteristics, is often regarded as an important mechanism for rebuilding power balance in diversified social changes, with its core lying in promoting collaborative governance among multiple stakeholders. University governance is a crucial part of educational governance, and its internal governance effectiveness is related to the quality and standards of university construction. This study adheres to a problem-oriented approach, starting from the entity issue of explaining "who governs," and views teachers, students, and administrative personnel as the core governance entities of universities from a stakeholder perspective. To address the behavioral issue of "how to participate," based on the Theory of Planned Behavior and combined with field research, this study explores the differential impacts of various factors on governance entities. Based on these, suggestions are proposed to improve university internal governance and promote diversified collaborative co-governance, advocating for university leaders to reduce the difficulty of participation in university internal governance, create a participatory atmosphere for university internal governance, and stimulate enthusiasm for participation in university internal governance.

1. Introduction

Governance falls within the scope of public administration and originates from the Greek term meaning "to steer", inherently implying control, regulation, and manipulation. In the context of the emergence of joint-stock companies, where ownership and control are vested in different entities, governance has acquired a modern significance in conceptual terms. Related theories have gradually been applied in various fields such as economics, politics, and society, exerting significant influences. Educational governance represents an important aspect of governance research, with the effectiveness of higher education governance being particularly crucial for the integrated promotion of education, science, and talent. Therefore, it holds significant research value. For universities that undertake functions such as talent cultivation, scientific research, and social services, the modernization of their governance is not only a requirement imposed by the modernization of the national governance system and capacity on university governance but also a fundamental guarantee for constructing world-class universities with Chinese characteristics rooted in China. As one of the two extremely important dimensions of university governance, the effectiveness of internal university governance is related to the intrinsic quality of world-class university construction and, to a certain extent, determines the quality and modernization level of university governance.

The core of governance lies in collaborative co-governance based on diverse participation. Therefore, the key to enhancing the effectiveness of internal university governance hinges on addressing the issues of "who participates" and "how to participate". "Who participates" emphasizes the question of entities, where identifying essential governance entities and constructing a scientific

governance structure are crucial prerequisites for improving the internal governance system of universities. "How to participate" points to the issue of behavior, where regulating the governance behavior of entities and establishing appropriate governance mechanisms are necessary guarantees for enhancing internal university governance capabilities. Ideal internal university governance not only calls for the joint participation of multiple actors but also ensures that all parties can fully express their own interests during the governance process, thereby fostering consensus through consultation and interaction to achieve collaborative wins. However, in practice, there are issues of over-participation or lack of participation by certain entities. The generalization of administrative power, the weakening of academic power, and the absence of democratic power such as that of students have led to conflicts among different types of governance entities within universities throughout their development. The variations in the intensity and effectiveness of participation among different governance entities have, to a certain extent, resulted in the distortion of multiple participation and the virtualization of collaborative governance. These practical issues have seriously infringed upon the legitimate rights and interests of university governance entities, hindering the establishment and development of a healthy governance ecosystem within universities. So, what leads to the differentiated behaviors of different entities in university internal governance? To answer this question, based on identifying the core governance entities of universities, this study will analyze the factors influencing the governance behaviors of each entity and propose feasible suggestions. This will contribute to promoting collaborative co-governance and enhancing the effectiveness of university internal governance.

2. Identification of core governance entities in universities from the perspective of stakeholder theory

Who should govern universities? Stakeholder theory provides a research perspective to answer this question. The concept of "stakeholder" originates from the field of business management and was first introduced in an internal memorandum of the Stanford Research Institute (SRI). In 1963, the institute clearly defined "stakeholders" as groups without whose support the organization could not survive^[1]. To date, economists have proposed nearly 30 definitions, and the application scope of the "stakeholder" concept has expanded from the field of economics to social sciences such as sociology, education, and politics. Among various definitions, the perspective proposed by Freeman, an American economist and a major founder of stakeholder theory, in 1984 is particularly representative. He stated, "Stakeholders are individuals and groups that can affect the achievement of an organization's objectives or are affected by the process of an organization achieving its objectives."^[2] In the field of business management, stakeholder theory strongly challenges the traditional core concept that "a company is owned by individuals and institutions holding common stock in the company." This theory posits that, with the development of the times, the position of material capital owners in companies will gradually weaken, and the role of company stakeholders will shift from influencing the company to participating in strategic decision-making, management, and even co-governance of the company.

University governance refers to the decision-making mechanism and process involving various stakeholders in major university affairs, implying that stakeholders of the university are the natural entities of university governance. From student autonomy to professor-led governance, and further to the specialization of administrative affairs and government intervention, stakeholders have gradually emerged alongside the historical evolution of universities. While playing a crucial role in university governance, they have also made universities typical stakeholder organizations. However, unlike corporations, universities are non-profit organizations without shareholders in the strict sense, and no one can obtain the residual profits of the university. Therefore, no individual or group can exercise independent control over the university, which necessitates joint control by stakeholders. This difference necessitates that discussions on issues related to university stakeholders should be combined with the actual characteristics of the university itself. Henry Rosovsky, taking into account the realities of American universities, proposed "four levels" of university stakeholders in his book "The University: An Owner's Manual": the first level consists of faculty, students, and

administrative staff; the second level includes alumni, donors, and trustees; the third level primarily refers to the government, banks that provide student loans, and academic review committees, who are only stakeholders under specific conditions; and the fourth level comprises the public, communities, media, etc^[3]. Some scholars, based on China's actual situation, have made adjustments to Henry Rosovsky's "four-level" analytical framework to better suit Chinese conditions. They classify university stakeholders into core stakeholders, including teachers, students, and administrative personnel; important stakeholders, including government departments and alumni; indirect stakeholders, including those with contractual relationships with the university; and marginal stakeholders, including the community, the public, and media opinion. This study, drawing on the views of Chinese and foreign scholars, considers teachers, students, and administrative personnel as the research subjects. It is believed that these three groups can most significantly influence the achievement of university goals and are most affected by the process of the university achieving its goals. They are the core stakeholders of the university and also the core governance entities.

3. Analysis of factors influencing core governance entities' participation in internal university governance

In reality, there are significant differences among teachers, students, and administrative personnel in terms of their participation content, forms, demands, and obstacles within university internal governance. How can a systematic tool be applied to analyze the impact of these differentiating factors on the participation behavior of different entities in governance? The Theory of Planned Behavior provides an analytical framework for answering this question. The Theory of Planned Behavior is one of the important theories in psychology for explaining and predicting individual-specific behaviors, with origins tracing back to the Theory of Multi-attribute Attitude and the Theory of Reasoned Action. The Theory of Planned Behavior, while affirming that behavior intention determines the occurrence of behavior, posits that behavior intention is jointly influenced by attitude toward the behavior, subject norm, and perceived behavior control. It also points out that perceived behavior control can directly or indirectly affect the occurrence of behavior^[4]. Among these, attitude toward the behavior refers to an individual's positive or negative feelings towards the behavior, or an assessment of the degree of liking or disliking for performing a specific behavior. Subject Norm refers to the social pressure an individual feels regarding whether to adopt a particular behavior, representing the extent of influence exerted by individuals or groups that have an impact on an individual's behavior decision-making when predicting the behavior of others. Perceived Behavior Control refers to an individual's perception of the ease or difficulty in performing a specific behavior, reflecting their awareness of factors that facilitate or hinder the execution of the behavior. Based on the analytical framework of the Theory of Planned Behavior, we have extracted the influencing factors of core actors' participation in university governance behavior through field research and compared these factors across different actors. We found that:

(1) Attitude toward the behavior is generally composed of affective attitudes and instrumental attitudes. In terms of affective attitudes, the three groups generally view their participation in university internal governance from the perspectives of emotional generation and identity affiliation enhancement. The difference lies in that administrative staff perceive this behavior as relatively enjoyable and unburdensome compared to the other two groups. In terms of instrumental attitudes, there are differences among the groups. Teachers believe that participation in governance, especially academic governance, helps to make decisions more scientific and reasonable, and they think that by participating in governance, they can express their own demands, clarify research indicators, and thus benefit their own development and safeguard the interests of their academic community. Administrative staff examine their participation in university internal governance from the perspectives of ensuring scientific decision-making, safeguarding departmental interests, promoting their own growth, and facilitating the smooth conduct of their work. Students mainly view the beneficial outcomes of participating in university internal governance from the perspectives of safeguarding their own rights and interests, enhancing communication to foster mutual trust, and

acquiring valuable experience. However, they also believe that participating in governance can consume time and energy, negatively impacting their academics and personal life.

(2) Subject norms are generally composed of demonstrative norms and injunctive norms. In terms of demonstrative norms, different groups are influenced by distinct significant groups in their participation in university internal governance, such as predecessors and peer teachers for the faculty group, colleagues and leaders for the administrative personnel group, and classmates for the student group. However, there are also some convergent characteristics. For example, all three groups consistently believe that university leaders play a crucial role in internal governance, which will influence their participation in governance to a certain extent. In terms of directive norms, apart from the significant groups involved in exemplary norms, administrative personnel believe that their work objects will prompt them to participate in governance by making suggestions or demands. Students think that parents will encourage them to focus on their academics and maintain a low profile, thus advising them to minimize their involvement in governance. Additionally, certain institutions (such as academic committees, faculty representative assemblies, student representative assemblies, etc.) and related systems also facilitate the participation of multiple groups in university governance.

(3) Perceived behavior control generally consists of internal and external control. In terms of internal control, all three groups consider experience and confidence as important internal factors that either promote or hinder their actions. The difference lies in that teachers and students determine the scope and extent of their participation in university internal governance based on whether the behavior will have negative impacts or the magnitude of those impacts. Administrative personnel, as organizers or leaders, believe that their participation in university internal governance is taken for granted, and the motivation to carry out work more smoothly is also an important factor promoting their participation in university internal governance. In terms of external control, several groups generally consider significant time costs and pressures, unreasonable participation systems and rules, and low governance efficiency as major obstructive factors. In addition, the interviewed teachers believe that the transparency of governance-related information is a crucial external control element and think that a frequently reforming campus atmosphere will encourage them to pay attention to and participate in university internal governance. The interviewed administrative personnel pointed out that they sometimes need to deal with more urgent administrative matters, which may hinder their participation in university internal governance. From the perspective of implicit factors, the interviewed students believe that the university's advocacy for different groups to participate in university internal governance may spark their interest in governance and motivate them to try to participate.

Moreover, the specific governance areas of concern for core stakeholders vary depending on the group category. The teacher group generally focuses on areas such as talent cultivation, scientific research, and their own development, specifically involving the formulation of enrollment plans, revisions to talent cultivation programs, teaching arrangements and management, policy formulation for scientific research projects, teacher evaluation, assessment for teacher promotion, as well as the formulation of relevant developmental policies and the appointment of key leaders within their organizations. Administrative personnel are more concerned with administrative promotion and institutional development. Meanwhile, differences in individual job types and levels lead to variations in the specific areas of concern for administrative personnel. For example, several interviewees focused on areas such as scholarship and grant policy formulation, and ideological and moral education, reflecting a distinct work orientation. Students, on the other hand, are more eager to participate in governance in areas that are closely related to them, such as scholarship and grant evaluations, academic assessments, logistical support, and employment, in order to strive for and safeguard their own interests in university internal governance.

4. Discussion

Based on the above analysis, this study believes that university leaders should take actions from at least three aspects to improve the university governance structure, enhance university governance

capacity, and strengthen university governance effectiveness.

(1) Remove obstacles, improve methods, and effectively reduce the difficulty of participation in internal university governance. Perceived behavior control represents the degree of control that the behavior entity perceives over the target behavior, and is an important factor influencing behavior and intention. The resistance perceived by the three core stakeholders in participating in internal university governance is concentrated at three levels: access, process, and feedback. At the access level, universities should relax requirements and lift restrictions on participation in governance rule-making; strive to create opportunities and conditions for stakeholders to participate in governance; and improve various pathways for participation in governance within the university to ensure that all entities can exercise their power substantively through formal channels such as the Faculty Congress, Staff Congress, and Student Congress, as well as voice their opinions through informal channels such as discussions, interactions, and consultations. At the process level, university leaders should change their mindset, improve their methods, uphold democratic values, and shift the policy communication approach from a top-down model to an equal communication among all parties; they should fully consider the actual situations of various groups and guide all stakeholders to express their opinions based on thorough consideration, thereby overcoming the practical obstacles of time pressure on their participation in governance. At the feedback level, university leaders should promptly respond to the opinions and demands expressed by various stakeholders through various channels and communicate with them to enhance their sense of efficacy in participating in governance, thereby increasing their willingness to do so.

(2) Lead by example, establish rules and regulations, and effectively foster an atmosphere of participation in university internal governance. Subject norms represent the social pressure that an individual perceives from significant others or groups around them regarding whether they should perform a target behavior, serving as a crucial factor influencing behavior and intention. Based on the significant influence of injunctive norms and prescriptive norms on individuals' willingness to participate in governance, universities should prioritize atmosphere building and institutional development as key areas of focus, effectively cultivating an active participatory atmosphere within university internal governance, in order to leverage and enhance the positive impact of group norms on stakeholders' willingness to participate in governance. In terms of atmosphere building, the leadership of universities should uphold democracy, act fairly, and be open to diverse voices from various stakeholder groups regarding the development of the university; they should adopt various measures to encourage stakeholders to participate in the internal governance of the university, such as publicly recognizing and praising those who engage in governance activities, thereby fostering a positive atmosphere of competition and exemplary influence. In terms of institutional development, universities should promptly improve their internal governance structures, establish a mechanism for deliberative democracy, and provide institutional guarantees for genuine participation of various stakeholder groups in the internal governance of the university.

(3) Strengthen identification, positive incentives, and strive to stimulate enthusiasm for participating in internal governance of universities. Behavior attitude is the most core concept of planned behavior theory, representing the comprehensive evaluation of target behavior by the behavior entity and being the key influencing factor of behavior and its willingness. Based on the significant impact of emotional attitudes and instrumental attitudes on entities' willingness to participate in governance, universities should strengthen the publicity of governance concepts, build a positive incentive mechanism, and strive to stimulate the high enthusiasm for participation in internal governance of universities, so as to promote behavior attitudes to have a positive impact on stakeholders' willingness to participate in governance. In terms of promoting governance concepts, universities should focus on creating a relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere for participation in governance. On one hand, they should abandon cumbersome procedures for participation and establish simple, straightforward, and to-the-point processes to emotionally overcome obstacles. On the other hand, they should actively promote governance concepts, replacing top-down communication with interactive processes based on equal consultation to foster a comfortable environment for participation in governance. In terms of constructing positive incentive

mechanisms, university leaders should formulate appropriate positive incentive policies based on actual situations, encompassing both material and, more importantly, spiritual incentives. By employing diverse and multi-layered incentive mechanisms, they can satisfy the advanced needs of stakeholder groups involved in governance in terms of social needs, respect, and self-actualization, thereby enhancing their attitudes toward the behavior and strengthening their willingness to participate in governance.

5. Conclusion

Based on the perspective of stakeholders and combining the research findings of relevant scholars with the objective realities of university organizations, this paper identifies teachers, students, and administrative personnel as the core entities of university internal governance. Then, based on the Theory of Planned Behavior, it conducts an in-depth analysis of the factors influencing the willingness and behavior of core stakeholders to participate in university internal governance. Accordingly, suggestions are proposed to improve university internal governance and promote diversified collaborative co-governance. The research findings are conducive to facilitating equal, efficient, and orderly participation of all parties in university governance to safeguard their respective interests and realize their respective values. It is also expected to provide feasible practical solutions for university administrators to gather consensus from multiple parties, harness diverse forces, and resolve various conflicts.

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