

Exploration of Problems and Countermeasures in the Field of Self-Conducted Procurement in Universities

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Abstract: To improve procurement efficiency, reduce procurement costs, and shorten procurement cycles, universities often entrust procurement projects with relatively small amounts to the procurement management department based on actual circumstances. But due to the high professional requirements of procurement, lengthy procurement processes, and the involvement of multiple departments, numerous problems often arise in practice. Based on an analysis of the current state of self-conducted procurement in universities, this paper combines practical situations to seek corresponding countermeasures, aiming to enhance the standardization and quality of self-conducted procurement in universities.

Keywords: Universities; Self-conducted Procurement; Tendering and Procurement.

1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of the deepening reform of the government procurement system and the “streamline administration, delegate power, and improve services” policy in universities, the scope and autonomy of self-conducted procurement in universities have been continuously expanding. Since self-conducted procurement combines efficiency and flexibility, and eliminates the coordination procedures with agencies, universities often adopt self-conducted procurement for projects with smaller budget amounts based on their specific circumstances. Currently, self-conducted procurement has become a key link for universities to support teaching and research, optimize resource allocation, and enhance educational efficiency.

But due to the large number, diverse types, and strong professionalism of self-conducted procurement projects, coupled with a relatively lagging management system construction, many problems have been exposed in practice. These include imperfect procurement systems, incomplete acceptance procedures, and insufficient attention from demand departments. So there is an urgent need to explore a set of systematic and effective optimization countermeasures to regulate the self-conducted procurement behavior of universities and provide a guarantee for the high-quality development of university procurement.

2. Current Situation and Existing Problems of Self-Conducted Procurement in Universities

2.1. Imperfect Procurement System Construction

Currently, self-conducted procurement in Chinese universities is still in its infancy, lacking unified guiding documents from higher authorities. When constructing systems, universities can only explore based on their own institutional circumstances, which may lead to situations where there are no rules or regulations to follow during specific implementation. For certain emergencies, such as the collapse of a carport, laboratory fires, or emergency repairs for pipeline leaks, most universities lack corresponding

emergency procurement systems to ensure procurement is completed efficiently within the framework of regulations. For special services such as cadre training, media publicity, and international education, which can only be procured through directed methods, and whose budget amounts fall below the government procurement threshold but above the university’s self-conducted procurement threshold, universities often also lack comprehensive systems and procedures. The inadequacy of procurement systems often leads to universities either violating regulations to ensure project operation when handling urgent or special projects, resulting in auditing loopholes, or adhering strictly to regulations, delaying project handling and leading to further harm.

2.2. Incomplete Acceptance Procedures

Acceptance is the final step in university self-conducted procurement. But in practice, most universities have a mindset of “emphasizing procurement while neglecting acceptance,” believing that the project ends once the contract is signed and the goods are delivered, and that acceptance is merely a formality[1]. This can lead suppliers to deliberately substitute inferior goods, provide substandard products, or use counterfeit branded products to pass acceptance. Even if there are delays in delivery or a need to re-tender, this can delay usage and ultimately result in a waste of state-owned assets, and may even affect teaching and research development plans. For compliance, there may also be situations where suppliers privately agree with project leaders to replace the subject matter. Even if the replaced subject matter meets the requirements of the tender documents, the process is not compliant. Over time, this creates significant procurement risks and may breed corruption.

2.3. Lack of Professionalism Among Procurement Personnel

Compared to traditional university administrative departments such as Academic Affairs and Student Affairs, tendering and procurement departments have a shorter history. In some universities, the tendering and procurement department is not established independently but operates as part of functions like finance, asset management, or logistics., the staff of the tendering and procurement department are

generally transferred from other administrative departments or colleges, lacking a professional background. When executing tendering and procurement procedures, they are prone to misinterpretations of policies and regulations, leading to project failures or procurement risks. Under the university's job rotation system, personnel changes are frequent. For the highly specialized and policy-sensitive field of tendering and procurement, the continuity of expertise and experience is insufficient, hindering the formation of a highly skilled professional team and creating obstacles for the sustained progress of university procurement work[2].

2.4. Insufficient Attention from Demand Units

University self-conducted procurement is generally managed and coordinated by the procurement management department, with secondary units (such as administrative departments and other colleges) proposing the demand and being responsible for execution. But because the amounts involved in self-conducted procurement projects are relatively small, and secondary units are primarily responsible for core work like teaching and research, overall attention to self-conducted procurement is low. Most projects are handled by young teachers with limited experience, and it is rare to assign dedicated personnel for procurement affairs, making it difficult to establish a systematic procurement model within secondary units. This context can lead to issues such as: insufficient demand research causing frequent bid failures or supplier complaints, delaying project schedules; and imprecise budget estimates leading to waste of financial funds or project re-tendering, adversely affecting university self-conducted procurement.

2.5. Procurement Integrity Issues

Tendering and procurement involves large sums of money and diverse categories, making it a key area for integrity supervision. But in practice, due to the complexity of projects and the limited number of staff in procurement management departments, oversight is often limited to procedural checks, making it difficult to delve deeply into each project, creating regulatory blind spots. At the same time, because the executing secondary units have an inadequate understanding of procurement policies, they may engage in "breaking down a project into smaller parts" to keep the budget below the procurement threshold, circumventing tendering requirements. Regarding information disclosure, most universities publish their self-conducted procurement announcements on their official websites. Compared with specialized tendering and bidding websites, this has limitations for reach and public accessibility. It may only reach a small group of suppliers, increasing the risk of bid-rigging or collusion.

3. Exploration of Countermeasures in the Field of Self-Conducted Procurement in Universities

3.1. Improving System Construction

"Without rules, nothing can achieve." The primary step in solving the problems of university self-conducted procurement is to establish a sound system. Starting from the top-level design, ensuring projects have "rules to follow" means that whether for routine projects or emergency tasks, faculty can find operational guidance within the institutional framework, avoiding confusion and disputes caused by

ambiguous rules. For specific implementation, first, the comprehensiveness of the system should ensure, covering both routine and special projects horizontally, and spanning the entire procurement process vertically, achieving closed-loop management. Second, supporting systems should establish at different levels. At the university level, institutions generally establish management measures for procurement and relevant systems for self-conducted procurement, defining the general direction. But due to space constraints, details are often lacking. To strengthen closed-loop management, the procurement department can add supplementary systems covering the scope of special projects, demand specification templates, bid evaluation guideline manuals, supplier management norms, etc., ensuring every step has a basis. At the same time, secondary units can also establish procurement sub-systems tailored to their own needs to facilitate supervision, evaluation, and execution of self-conducted procurement. Regarding system updates, a system review cycle should establish. Every two to three years, the procurement management department should lead the collection of feedback from user units and related departments, revising and improving the system based on changes in national policies, university development needs, and new issues exposed in practice, ensuring it remains "useful and effective."

3.2. Enhancing Acceptance Awareness and Improving Acceptance Procedures

As the "last mile" of procurement, safeguarding the acceptance process is crucial for ensuring procurement outcomes. To address the mindset of "emphasizing procurement while neglecting acceptance" in universities, awareness should strengthen through publicity, increasing the attention paid to acceptance work at all stages. It is essential to fully understand that acceptance is not an isolated step but, together with contract management, supplier management, payment management, and audit supervision, constitutes a key component for improving procurement efficiency. At the same time, it should be constrained through systems. The procurement management department should collaborate with relevant centralized units such as asset management, infrastructure, research, and academic affairs to issue specific regulations on acceptance. Acceptance standards should establish based on different procurement categories (goods, services, engineering), clearly defining the acceptance organization, responsibilities of all parties, basic procedures, and dispute resolution. To counter suppliers substituting inferior goods, contract signing and review capabilities should enhance, incorporating quantifiable and verifiable acceptance standards and methods as annexes to the contract, eliminating ambiguity from the outset.

During the acceptance implementation phase, a dedicated acceptance team should be formed, possibly consisting of project users, technical personnel, etc. If necessary, asset management department staff or external experts can be invited. At the same time, the acceptance of self-conducted procurement should be integrated into routine audits, strengthening audit sampling to ensure the professionalism and impartiality of the acceptance work. For supplier management, acceptance should serve as the final line of defense to constrain supplier behavior. Acceptance results can be linked to payment schedules and supplier evaluations. For critical projects, failure to pass acceptance could trigger penalty clauses, motivating suppliers to proactively improve

their delivery quality and service capabilities.

3.3. Implementing Procurement Responsibilities and Building a Professional Team

Compared to delegated procurement or government procurement, self-conducted procurement is entirely an internal procurement activity implemented by the university itself. Standardizing the behavior of procurement personnel and implementing procurement responsibilities is particularly important. From the perspective of the self-conducted procurement process, responsibilities should be allocated to every department involved in the project, including secondary units, centralized management departments, the procurement management department, financial budget departments, and legal affairs departments. Only by clearly defining responsibilities for each role in the process can the work responsibilities across the entire procurement process be effectively implemented.

Regarding professional team building, as university procurement work progresses, procurement in most universities has gradually become more regulated. Many institutions have started to establish procurement as an independent department., strengthening the professional development of the procurement team is urgent. From the university's perspective, the procurement team primarily refers to the procurement management department. But in practice, secondary units, as procurement demand initiators, evaluators, and end-users, also; their procurement capability is equally important. Specific approaches include: first, establishing a tiered and phased learning mechanism. For procurement management personnel, policy learning and practical experience can be enhanced through professional training, exchanges with peer universities, and on-campus seminars. For procurement personnel in secondary units, regular information-sharing sessions can be organized, using Q&A and discussion formats to deepen their understanding of procurement execution, avoiding issues like completing processes after procurement or exceeding budgets. Second, strengthen workflow management. Procurement management personnel should regularly review and optimize their own business processes, creating workflow diagrams. This improves their understanding of the business while facilitating future job rotations, allowing successors to understand the business more quickly and effectively preventing work omissions. Secondary units could implement an annual rotation system for procurement personnel. This helps prevent work disruptions caused by frequent personnel changes and allows personnel to accumulate experience for future procurements. universities should take the lead in establishing an on-campus expert database. University faculty are a vital source for government procurement expert pools. Universities should firmly leverage this faculty resource, encouraging qualified faculty to learn procurement policies and participate in on-campus evaluations. For fields not covered by the university, external experts can be invited for guidance, leading on-campus procurement evaluations towards greater professionalism while also contributing to societal development. Finally, procurement involves significant financial amounts and high risks. Universities should regularly organize integrity training led by supervisory departments such as the Discipline Inspection Commission and Audit Office, strengthening the professional ethics of staff, ensuring they avoid crossing the integrity red line during

procurement, and maintaining procurement openness and fairness.

3.4. Establishing a Full-Process Procurement Supervision and Regulation Mechanism

Given the wide variety of self-conducted procurement projects, supervision solely by the procurement management department often fails to penetrate projects deeply, resulting in inadequate oversight. To improve this situation, supervisory responsibilities can be allocated across key nodes of self-conducted procurement, such as project initiation and research, procurement implementation, contract signing, and acceptance payment. This involves multiple departments actively participating in supervision and review, strengthening internal control, and ultimately achieving full-process supervision of procurement[3]. First, during the ex-ante stage of project initiation and research, the procurement demand department should establish a dedicated supervision team to review the material list, budget planning, and procurement feasibility submitted by the procurement team. The project should then be submitted to departmental meetings or joint party-administrative meetings for resolution, ensuring the necessity of the procured materials, budget adequacy, and project operability. Second, supervision during procurement implementation is a crucial stage requiring cooperation among centralized management departments, the procurement management department, and the demand department. Centralized management departments need to supervise the purchase and subsequent use of materials. For instance, the Asset Management Office should verify the wear and tear of similar equipment and the new equipment's asset registration plan. The procurement management department must supervise procurement categories, procurement methods, etc., verifying whether the items are within the centralized procurement catalog and whether the procurement method complies with standards. They also need to supervise procurement procedures, supplier affiliations, etc. For the procurement demand department, an internal control system should establish. A supervision team should review the tendering documents for bias, supplier qualifications, evaluation results, and any private contact between procurement personnel and suppliers. Through collaborative supervision by multiple departments from different perspectives, the fairness and impartiality of the procurement process can be effectively ensured. Third, during the supervision of procurement outcomes, the acceptance team, in coordination with supervisory departments like the Discipline Inspection Commission and Audit Office, should conduct spot checks on procurement results. They should verify consistency between the material list in the tender documents and the actual delivered items, checking for substitutions with inferior goods. Any discovered violations should be strictly dealt with to eliminate corrupt practices.

3.5. Utilizing Information Technology to Build a Procurement System

With the development of the internet and the advancement of the "Internet +" strategy, informatization has become a necessary trend for the next stage of development in university procurement. Effectively utilizing information technology to build a procurement system can provide strong support for solving various problems in university self-conducted procurement. For systems and processes, established procurement workflows can be embedded in the

information system, preventing responsible faculty from making mistakes due to unclear processes. Regarding acceptance, online acceptance procedures can establish, allowing acceptance data to be recorded in the system for easy access and review at any time, preventing acceptance from becoming a mere formality. For supervision, informatization enables the complete traceability of the entire process, including the submitted procurement list, procurement amount, involved approvers, supplier information, and various timestamps. Supervisory departments can conduct penetration inspections through the platform at any time and can set corresponding system alert rules. To enhance the professional capabilities of procurement personnel, the information system can incorporate intelligent interactive programs and knowledge bases, helping procurement personnel at relevant nodes better understand policies and solve problems. For constraining suppliers, the information platform can utilize a supplier evaluation system. The existence of the information platform maximizes the transparency and openness of the procurement process. big data can be used to analyze and compare procurement projects, budget amounts, and suppliers across various demand departments, reducing potential integrity risks.

4. Conclusion

Against the backdrop of deepening government procurement system reform and the connotative development of universities, self-conducted procurement, as a key link for optimizing resource allocation and enhancing educational efficiency, requires a high degree of standardization and effectiveness. But in practice, self-conducted procurement in universities often faces problems such as inadequate procurement systems, generally weak acceptance processes, insufficient professionalism and high turnover of procurement teams, blind spots in the full-process supervision

mechanism, and insufficient information disclosure, which plant seeds for integrity risks. The primary necessity is to improve the system construction, forming a framework covering both routine and emergency situations to ensure there are rules to follow for all tasks. The critical link is to strengthen the management of performance acceptance, solidifying the final defense line of procurement quality by clarifying standards and implementing responsibilities. The fundamental support lies in strengthening the procurement team through professional training and stability measures to enhance overall execution capability. An important safeguard is to build a supervisory network combining internal and external forces with multi-department collaboration and actively utilize information technology to enhance transparency and regulatory effectiveness. In the future, universities should base themselves on their actual circumstances, combining institutional constraints, technological empowerment, and professional expertise to gradually build a new procurement management pattern characterized by clear rights and responsibilities, standardized processes, and controllable risks. This will provide solid support for the smooth conduct of teaching and research activities and contribute to the modernization of university governance systems and capabilities.

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