



On the Construction of Chinese Government Procurement of Public Service Assessment System

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Abstract

To improve the way of governments to provide public services is a hot spot in academic and political studies in recent years. CCP Eighteenth Congress Report points out that, “we must change the means of providing public services through reasonable approaches, while using reasonable methods to improve the existing social management system.” Chinese society has entered a stage of rapid economic and cultural development, and only based on the fulfillment of the principles and policies implemented by the government since the eighteenth Congress can we truly promote the socio-economic and cultural development. By analyzing the problems in current government procurement of public services, this paper puts forward corresponding solutions so that these policies can help the government to create more public service value.

Key words: Government agencies; Public service; Assessment mechanism

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INTRODUCTION

Government’s procurement of public services has become a trend in the international community. Its theoretical origins can be traced back to the new public management movement since the 1980s. The introduction of market mechanisms into the provision of public services is its core essence. Later, social organizations also are involved in the market of providing public services, playing their respective comparative advantages as public organizations. Government procurement of public services is an important content of global public management reform. In China, compared with the great economic achievements made in reform and opening up in three decades, education, health, social security and other basic public service supply has been lagging behind. It is the long-term development imbalance that “economy grows while basic public services lag” and “the country is rich while people’s livelihood is not improved much” that highlights the importance and urgency of promoting public service. At the same time, along with the tide in the international community and the increasing demands in public service from Chinese people, the government continues to change their management philosophy. With foreign experience in accordance with national practice, the new way of government to provide public services, government procurement of public services, is proposed. It also raises concerns and considerations of the theory and practice communities. Issues to improve the government procurement of public services assessment system are current hot issues, as they relate to the non-circumvented practical problems in the practice of government procurement of services. It is involved in enhancing the image of the government, but also involves the vital interests of the public; therefore, it is the subject of wide attention of domestic scholars.

1. IMPORTANCE OF IMPROVING GOVERNMENT PROCUREMENT OF PUBLIC SERVICE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

With the change of social and economic structure of our country, the reasonable demands of the people for the comprehensive development of their own have further improved, and they also propose more hope for the development of the society. In such a case, only to the presence of more fairness in society can we fully realize the core essence of public social service. Through the establishment of equity, it will also become one of the major driving forces of social development and improve government procurement of public services system.

Meanwhile, the assessment of the government for the purchase of services is an important part in the government procurement of public services. In the present society, whether the public service is complete must be achieved through the assessment. Although in today's society, we have made certain achievements in public service evaluation, for the development of the whole society, there are still large defects. For example, legal provisions are not standardized, social assessment system is imperfect, and there are other practical issues that need to be urgently addressed in the evaluation process. Therefore, in modern society to improve the government's public service evaluation system is imperative.

2. UNFAVORABLE FACTORS IN THE EVALUATION PROCESS OF GOVERNMENT PROCUREMENT OF PUBLIC SERVICES

Through extensive research, we find that an important factor affecting government procurement of public services is that the public service evaluation system itself is imperfect. Therefore, the government now has an urgent requirement to improve the public service evaluation system. This is mainly reflected through the problems to be solved in the process of purchasing such as the quantification of intangible benefits, unavailable data, appropriate risk assessment, lack of skills and technology and political and bureaucratic interference and so on (Wang, 2012). Dai Yi has conducted studies on the government procurement of public services system for a long time. In his view, when the government assesses public services, it will also have many adverse effects. For example, it may expose the imperfections of the government's public service and there are questions and doubts about the public service programs in the implementation process. Therefore, there is the phenomenon of rejecting assessment of many government departments. Stern and Kubin have reached consensus for

quality assessment. They think assessment of quality is an important guarantee for enhancing the image of the government and improving the quality of service in government purchases (Dai, 2004). A number of studies have shown that factors affecting government procurement of public service assessment can be divided into two aspects: assessment policy as an institutional performance investigation and assessment implementation environmental coordination status.

On the one hand, assessment as an institutional arrangement, its ultimate effects of policies and institutional efficiency have a great relationship. Evaluation system which costs larger transaction fees has a lot of costs occurred in the implementation process, and these costs will ultimately be passed on to consumers, resulting in inefficient evaluation. On the other hand, assessment implementation environment, including the legal framework, assessment agencies, government actions, rent seeking, information and technology, has assessment effects on government procurement of public services from different angles. Through research we can see, from the current situation of social development, when the government purchases public service evaluation, they will be hampered by several unfavorable factors.

2.1 The Shortcomings of the Assessment Subject Itself

2.1.1 Simplification of Assessment Subject

Now in the process of social development, the assessment subjects of public services are mainly governmental official agencies, which directly show that the assessment subjects of public services have the shortcomings of simplification. In developed Western countries, the assessment subjects of public services are diverse, including not just the official governmental agencies, but also the participation of various civil society groups and the masses. Therefore, when the Chinese government assesses public services, it needs to encourage various civil groups to assess public service reasonably. This assessment process will make social organizations and people have more objective cognition on the implementation process and implementation effects.

2.1.2 The Assessment Scope Is Narrow and Not Typical

In many developed Western countries, government procurement of public services assessment has formed a very sound system. Meanwhile, for the purchase of public service assessment, Western countries have formed a very standardized system. In many Western countries, government procurement of public services system is not being implemented by a single official agency, but purchased by specialized agencies designated by the official, while various provisions about the procurement have been effectively rendered in the law. In China, although the government is committed to the reform of

the procurement of public service assessment system, it is still at an early stage of development, and there is no relatively perfect legal document to regulate it. We can see from government procurement of public services assessment in recent years that when the government purchases public service assessment, it puts great emphasis on the participation of the masses and relative service groups, but there are a great arbitrariness and irrationality. For example, groups involved in the assessment are designated by the government, and not generated by the public opinion. When the government screens the participating groups, it will often ignore civil societies and the representatives of the masses which have a conflict of interest with the government and even disguisedly reject them. Although this in a great extent safeguards the interests of the government, but to a certain extent, it has caused the defect that when the government purchases public services, various participants are not clear.

2.1.3 Assessment Subjects Are Subjective and Not Scientific

In the course of the current assessment system, there is often the shortcoming that the superior assesses the subordinates, which result in the existence of a direct link between the assessment subject and object. Such direct link in a way is likely to cause a lack of supervision in the assessment, lacking true scientific features and objectivity. In western countries, many developed countries encourage social communities to participate in assessing public service, while in our country, the participation level of social organizations is decided directly by the government. The government's attitude towards various social organizations will directly determine whether the organization can successfully participate in public service evaluation. Therefore, only a modest relaxation of the policy can we make more social groups participate in the existing evaluation system with a more equitable manner.

2.2 Factors of Assessment Policy Implementation Environment

2.2.1 The Relevant Legal System Is Not Complete

At this stage, legal texts are imperfect when the government purchases public service evaluation and this problem deserves the attention and research of the government. Relevant laws and regulations formulated by some local governments play a certain role in promotion of the system in practice and have some practical value. However, specific to the implementation and evaluation and assessment approach, they are often not operative and difficult to promote. Imperfect legal texts seriously affect the normal operation of the government procurement of public service assessment so that assessment enters into a dilemma without laws and is difficult to promote. On the one hand, it directly affects the legal environment of

government procurement of public services; on the other hand, it leaves the legal environment cannot achieve its norming to some extent. Laws and regulations as a regulating means to, whose role has been severely weakened, will inevitably result in the dilemma that there is no law to follow in the assessment of government procurement of public services and it is difficult to promote the assessment of government procurement of public services.

2.2.2 Lack of Professional and Standardized Assessment Agencies

Professional and standardized assessment agencies often refer to independent third-party evaluation institutions, and their assessment method is usually to hire government procurement of public services performance assessment team formed by a number of experts from agencies or research institutions. The team will evaluate multiple objects according to certain evaluation index and evaluation criteria, and then follow a certain method to integrate individual assessment into an overall assessment and finally use the assessment method that the object prefers. Only to maintain the independence of the third-party assessment subject to the greatest degree can we guarantee true fairness and justice in the assessment of public services. However, in our society at the present stage of development, there are still some shortcomings such as restrictions from the government to the assessment agency and the simplification of assessment subjects. Even though there are some social organizations involved in the assessment, they are only limited to the delegation and authorization from the government and the real manipulator is still the government. It would appear that the government is still not really decentralized. At the same time, assuming that the third party evaluation agency is not authorized by the government, then in the evaluation process in the future, it will be difficult to obtain real and effective performance information from the government.

2.2.3 Public Service Assessment Participants' Information Is Asymmetric

When assessing public services, it will involve more participating factors. The most significant relationship between the various factors involved is trust, which is a direct commission and entrusting relationship between the consumer and the evaluators. In this commission relationship, due to asymmetric information, assessors grasp a lot of information with respect to consumers and may conspire with service providers—social organizations by using this information advantage to form a moral hazard. The second relationship is the contact between the assessment subject and object. Due to the presence of asymmetric information, social organizations have more information such as the cost of services than assessors, but assessors must strive to induce social organizations providing public services under a public

interest standard. Government assessment itself as a monopoly of power will form a chain of pursuable interest and thus the assessment process is often accompanied by rent seeking activities.

Throughout the whole assessment process, collecting information is the most important part. As long as this part is fair and just, a more just government procurement of public services assessment system will be formed. The government, as the assessment subject, must play the role of regulator. Its disclosure of information must be transparent, focusing on the publication of information to, prevent information asymmetry to a certain extent.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE APPROACH TO IMPROVING GOVERNMENT PROCUREMENT OF PUBLIC SERVICE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

To achieve the construction of a scientific and objective assessment system of government procurement of public service, we must first identify the standards to construct an assessment system, including content standards and testing standards, and based on these established standards, on the basis of certain procedures personnel perform the assessment on the reality and make a reasonable structural adjustment depending on the assessment of the object. The establishing of a scientific, reasonable and stable evaluation system is conducive to the formation of objective and reliable assessment structure, so that the transfer payment and other assessment policies implemented based on the result maintain neutral and avoid interference with the human factors. This is also conducive for the region and related social organizations to form stable expectations.

3.1 Build a Fair and Reasonable Government Procurement of Public Service Assessment System

In many developed Western countries, in the process of a number of researches, government departments find that only to build a fair and reasonable evaluation system of government procurement of public services can we be able to promote the improvement of the quality of public social services; only to implement reasonable performance management strategy can we be able to achieve the real assessment and monitoring of government procurement of public services. Like any commodity, the complete supply process of public service includes all aspects from the input, output and the final consumption; therefore, a measure of the level of public services should be reflected in all aspects and in practice. Construction of a fair and reasonable evaluation system should include not only comprehensive index for the various public services, but also classify indicators for different types of services. At present, China has already enacted a number of assessment criteria in the field of

education, health care, social security and some other public services, but most of these indicators are quantitative indicators on inputs and outputs. They generally do not have a direct impact on the quality and effects of public services, but in the real service process, these contents will cause some degree of obstruction to the process of public services. Therefore, the development of scientific and reasonable evaluation index of public services should be based on the current circumstances of China. On the basis of improve the quantity and total amount indicators of our government procurement of public services, we should gradually increase personalized indicators on quality and in the following year publish the index system which can more fully reflect the assessment of the quantity and quality of public services. The index system contains numerous factors, which include not only social goals, but also individual public service goals; it includes both comprehensive indicators reflecting the commonality of public services assessed and classification indicators to assess certain categories of public services. Especially public services which have a very close relationship with the economic and social development and people's lives must guarantee the standardization across the country.

3.2 Improve the Implementation Process of Government Procurement of Public Service Evaluation System

The means to implement government public service assessment system in foreign countries mainly includes the following aspects: Based on pre-determined assessment criteria, combining with the assessment results of the supply status of public services, it will use fiscal transfer payments or other means to allow areas and groups which do not meet the implementation standard to reach the appropriate standard. Therefore, when the evaluation criteria are identified, government procurement of public services assessment system is mainly related to the assessment subject, assessment object, evaluation procedures and factors based on this the assessment is established and data and other issues. Along with China's government procurement of public services in nearly three decades of practice processes, evaluation system is also undergoing the process of gradual improvement. Assessment based on objective factors has the basic institutional provisions, but there are problems. For example, the institutional level is not high; the system is instable; the assessment process is not open or transparent enough; assessment subjects are decentralized and not authoritative enough; imperfect laws and regulations cannot guarantee a reasonable solution to the problems. We need to develop the following measures to improve and correct these problems.

Firstly, we should establish a fair and reasonable assessment system of public services and related assessment subjects in the country. For the institutional arrangements of assessment subjects, there is no uniform

practice in various countries and the more common practice is that the central government agencies become the subjects of evaluation policies. Typical central agency is the Office of the President, Prime Minister's Office, or the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of the Interior, local governments or the Ministry of Planning (including the Planning Commission). These agencies can reasonably assess public services. Meanwhile, the state also sets up legislative agencies corresponding with public services and relatively independent social organizations to achieve effective and rational assessment. Our government procurement of public services evaluation system gradually learns from the assessment models in other countries, but the difference is that in the process of implementing the purchase, the power is more concentrated in our country. For example, in the process of execution of power, it causes a conflict between the government and social organizations. There are unreasonable phenomena. For example, the third-party assessment agencies are still subject to the government. Therefore, the construction of completely independent, professional and authoritative assessment agencies with unified purpose in the current is very necessary.

Secondly, we should ensure the fairness and equity of government procurement of public service assessment procedures. In the construction of government procurement of public services assessment system, our country has to take the advantage of multiple assessment subjects to achieve standardized and transparent assessment procedures. This is imperative. We should learn from foreign experience. The achievement of scientific assessment should be based primarily on the financial allocation of funds, through an open and transparent process to improve the relevant support

measures, ensure profession and authoritativeness of the third-party assessment subjects, and ensure the justice of assessment results and disbursement of funds to facilitate dual achievement of policy objectives of fairness and efficiency. If the assessment procedures are not open and transparent, it may lead to rent seeking activities of potential recipients of funds transfer payment to the evaluation subjects and the final result is transfer payments rather than to the areas or groups which objectively need inflows or even the opposite. Therefore, we must achieve a fair and impartial government procurement of public services assessment procedures.

SUMMARY

Government procurement of public service assessment system, as an important means to promote the effective management of the government, is directly related to the process of China's market-oriented services. The current assessment of government procurement of public services is in gradually institutionalized and standardized process. To improve assessment mechanisms, regulate the institutional environment, provide good institutional support for the operation of the assessment have a very important significance to break the assessment dilemma of government procurement of public services.

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