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Article

# Cross Departmental Collaboration and Operational Risk Management in Power Engineering Project Execution: An Internal Case Study Analysis

Haoyi Zhang <sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Northumbria University London Campus, London, UK

\* Correspondence: Haoyi Zhang, Northumbria University London Campus, London, UK

**Abstract:** The execution of power engineering projects necessitates complex coordination across multiple internal departments and inherently involves significant operational risks, ranging from severe safety hazards to substantial financial and scheduling overruns. While cross-departmental collaboration is widely acknowledged as vital for overall project success, its specific interaction with operational risk management within the internal operations of large-scale power enterprises remains insufficiently explored in contemporary literature. This study investigates the underlying mechanisms, systemic challenges, and direct impacts of such collaboration on risk management through an in-depth case study of a major power engineering corporation. Employing a rigorous mixed-methods approach, the research combines qualitative analysis of internal project documents, detailed process maps, and semi-structured stakeholder interviews with a quantitative assessment of historical risk incident data and cross-functional collaboration metrics. The comprehensive findings indicate that effective inter-departmental synergy—characterized by transparent communication channels, strategically aligned objectives, and technologically integrated management systems—substantially enhances the proactive identification, accurate assessment, and timely mitigation of operational risks. Conversely, the presence of structural silos, conflicting departmental priorities, and inadequate knowledge-sharing protocols persistently undermine collaborative risk management efforts, leading to increased vulnerability. Ultimately, this research contributes significantly to project management and risk mitigation theory within the critical power sector. It offers actionable, evidence-based insights for industry practitioners aiming to improve internal governance structures and optimize collaborative workflows, thereby fundamentally enhancing project resilience, operational safety, and long-term enterprise sustainability.

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### 1. Introduction

The power engineering sector, marked by large-scale projects and stringent safety demands, requires high efficiency and reliability in project execution [1]. Effective internal coordination across functional departments like design, procurement, and construction is crucial for project success. While departmental expertise is essential, the level of synergy between units critically determines an organization's ability to manage operational risks throughout a project's lifecycle.

Cross-departmental collaboration is increasingly recognized as a key enabler of project management, supporting resource optimization, innovation, and problem-solving. In power projects, risks such as technical failures, safety incidents, and delays often arise

at departmental interfaces, requiring integrated oversight. Effective collaboration enables holistic risk identification and coordinated mitigation, whereas poor communication leads to fragmented responses and heightened vulnerabilities [2].

Despite its importance, empirical research on how inter-departmental collaboration specifically affects operational risk management in power engineering remains limited. Most studies treat collaboration and risk control separately, overlooking their dynamic interplay [3]. This gap is significant in an industry where technical and regulatory complexity amplifies the cost of collaboration failures.

This study addresses this gap through an internal case study of a major power engineering firm. It investigates how collaborative practices manifest internally, what challenges hinder them, and how collaboration quality influences risk identification, assessment, and mitigation [4]. By analyzing project documentation, workflows, and stakeholder insights, this research maps the link between departmental cooperation and risk control.

The study offers both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it integrates organizational behavior with risk management in a high-stakes context. Practically, it provides actionable insights for improving structures, communication, and metrics to foster collaboration and enhance project resilience and safety [5].

The paper is structured as follows: Chapter 2 reviews related literature, Chapter 3 outlines the framework and methodology, Chapter 4 presents findings, and Chapter 5 concludes with implications and future research directions [6].

## 2. Literature Review

This chapter reviews existing research on cross-departmental collaboration and operational risk management, highlighting the gap this study addresses. Although both areas have been extensively studied independently, their intersection within power engineering project execution remains insufficiently explored [7].

### 2.1. Cross-Departmental Collaboration

Cross-departmental collaboration is essential for achieving organizational goals in complex projects. Research in various sectors identifies key factors influencing collaborative performance, including leadership support, incentive alignment, and formal coordination mechanisms. Studies in financial organizations further elaborate on structured models for collaboration, emphasizing the design of integrated workflows and customer-centric processes to overcome departmental barriers. The advent of digital tools, particularly Artificial Intelligence (AI), offers new possibilities for enhancing collaboration. AI applications in areas like budget monitoring demonstrate potential for improving accuracy and facilitating real-time, cross-departmental oversight of project deviations. Fundamentally, effective collaboration relies on integrated information systems. Evidence from investment firms shows that data-driven integration across departmental systems is crucial for ensuring reporting accuracy and unified operational visibility. These insights underscore that collaboration is not merely a managerial concern but a systemic capability enabled by structures, processes, and technology.

### 2.2. Operational Risk Management in Engineering

Operational Risk Management (ORM) is a systematic discipline critical for project success. In critical infrastructure sectors, integrated enterprise systems like ERP BPMS are vital for mitigating operational risks by providing centralized control and process visibility. Within the energy sector specifically, Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) frameworks play a strategic role in supporting decision-making processes by providing a holistic view of risks across organizational activities [8]. The digital transformation of power enterprises, leveraging data centralization and digital twins, is increasingly recognized as a pathway to optimize management and enhance predictive risk capabilities. Furthermore, breaking down information silos through cross-functional analytics frameworks is essential for generating collaborative insights that inform proactive risk identification. The application of AI extends to financial risk management

within enterprises, offering strategies for optimization and more dynamic risk assessment. Ultimately, digitalization drives performance by strengthening integration, resilience, and risk management across the value chain, as seen in industrial supply chains. These studies highlight a trend towards technologically enabled, integrated, and proactive risk management.

### 2.3. *The Research Gap*

Despite extensive literature in both domains, a significant gap remains. Few studies explicitly examine how the quality and mechanisms of daily internal cross-departmental collaboration directly influence specific operational risk management (ORM) processes, such as identification, assessment, and mitigation, within the context of power engineering projects. While technology and integrated systems are often promoted as solutions, the role of relational coordination, informal networks, and collaborative problem-solving in operational risk control is less comprehensively understood [9]. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring the relationship between collaborative practices and risk management outcomes within the internal operations of a power engineering firm.

## 3. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This chapter delineates the conceptual underpinnings and the detailed methodological approach adopted to investigate the interplay between cross-departmental collaboration and operational risk management within the internal project operations of a power engineering enterprise. The study employs a single, in-depth case study design, leveraging a mixed-methods strategy to triangulate data from multiple sources [10]. The theoretical framework integrates concepts from organizational theory and risk management to guide the inquiry, while the methodology outlines a systematic process for data collection, analysis, and validation.

### 3.1. *Theoretical Framework*

The analytical lens for this research is constructed by synthesizing two principal theoretical streams: the Relational Coordination Theory (RCT) from organizational studies and the Integrated Risk Management (IRM) perspective from project management [11].

Relational Coordination Theory provides a robust framework for understanding the quality of coordination among diverse organizational actors. It posits that effective coordination is achieved through frequent, timely, accurate, and problem-solving communication, supported by shared knowledge, shared goals, and mutual respect among participants. In the context of this study, departments such as design, procurement, construction, and health, safety, and environment (HSE) are the key actors. RCT allows for the assessment of not just the formal structures of collaboration but also the relational dynamics that facilitate or hinder the flow of critical risk-related information and joint action [5]. This theory shifts the focus from static organizational charts to the processes of interaction that constitute collaborative practice.

The Integrated Risk Management perspective moves beyond viewing risk management as a series of isolated, department-specific tasks. It conceptualizes risk management as a holistic, systemic process that must be embedded within and across all project activities and organizational functions. From this view, risk identification, assessment, and mitigation are not the sole purview of a dedicated risk department but are collective responsibilities that require input and alignment from all involved units [12]. The effectiveness of IRM is thus contingent on the organization's ability to integrate risk considerations into collaborative decision-making loops at every departmental interface.

The synthesis of RCT and IRM forms the core of this study's theoretical framework [8]. It is proposed that the degree of relational coordination, as defined by RCT, between departments directly enables or constrains the integration of risk management processes, as envisioned by IRM. High-quality relational coordination acts as the social and communicative infrastructure that allows for seamless information sharing about

potential risks, joint interpretation of risk significance, and coordinated execution of mitigation measures. Conversely, weak relational coordination creates gaps in this infrastructure, leading to fragmented risk perception, unaligned responses, and ultimately, heightened operational vulnerability.

### 3.2. Methodology

This research employs an exploratory, single-case study design. The case is a large, state-owned power engineering enterprise in China, referred to as "PowerGrid EPC Corp." (a pseudonym for confidentiality). The corporation was selected due to its portfolio of complex, high-voltage transmission line and substation projects, which involve intense interaction among multiple internal departments, and its documented history of managing operational risks. This setting provides a rich, context-bound environment to explore the research questions in depth.

A mixed-methods approach was deployed for comprehensive data triangulation, involving both qualitative and quantitative components.

#### 3.2.1. Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

Document analysis was conducted on internal project documents from three recently completed major projects. These included project charters, organizational breakdown structures, meeting minutes from cross-departmental coordination meetings, risk registers, incident reports, and process workflow maps. The analysis aimed to reconstruct formal collaborative mechanisms and trace the documented handling of operational risks.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 24 personnel across four core departments (Engineering Design, Procurement & Logistics, Construction Management, and Health, Safety & Environment) as well as the Project Management Office. These interviews, lasting 45-75 minutes, focused on perceptions of inter-departmental collaboration, examples of collaborative success and failure in handling risks, and descriptions of communication channels. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and anonymized [13].

Non-participant observation was carried out during four cross-departmental project review meetings to witness real-time collaborative interactions and decision-making processes related to risk discussions [7].

The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Transcripts and notes were coded inductively to identify recurring themes related to collaboration enablers, barriers, and their perceived impact on risk management steps, including identification, assessment, and mitigation. The software NVivo 12 was utilized to manage and code the data.

#### 3.2.2. Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis

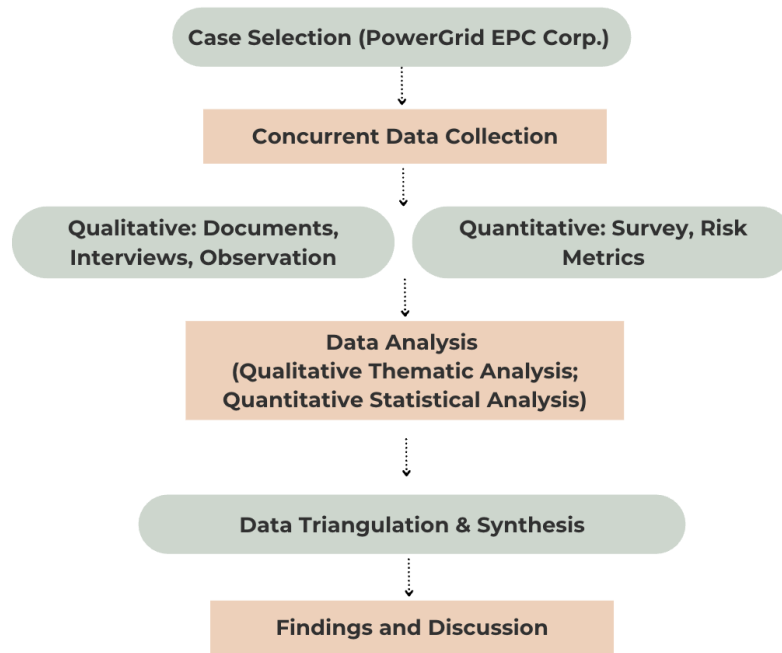
A short survey based on the Relational Coordination scale was administered to 89 project staff across the same departments to quantify perceptions of communication frequency, timeliness, accuracy, problem-solving focus, shared knowledge, shared goals, and mutual respect [13]. A 5-point Likert scale was used.

Historical project data from the case company's database over five years was analyzed. Key metrics included frequency and severity of safety incidents, schedule deviation rates, cost overrun percentages, and quality defect rates. These metrics served as proxy indicators for operational risk management outcomes [14].

Quantitative data from the survey were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, to profile the state of relational coordination. Correlation analysis was conducted between aggregate departmental relational coordination scores and project-level risk outcome metrics for the projects the respondents were involved in [13].

### 3.3. Method Flowchart

The sequential and integrative steps of the research methodology are illustrated in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Research Methodology Flowchart

This multi-faceted approach ensures a comprehensive and validated understanding of the complex relationship between collaboration and risk management within the case study setting [10, 14].

#### 4. Findings and Discussion

This chapter presents and discusses the empirical findings from the in-depth case study of PowerGrid EPC Corp [10]. The analysis integrates qualitative insights from documents, interviews, and observations with quantitative survey and project performance data to address the core research questions. The findings are structured around three key themes derived from the thematic analysis: the manifestations of collaborative practices, the identified challenges to collaboration, and the tangible impacts of collaboration quality on operational risk management processes. Four tables summarize critical quantitative and qualitative data to support the discussion.

##### 4.1. Manifestations of Cross-Departmental Collaborative Practices

The study identified both formal and informal mechanisms for cross-departmental collaboration, with varying degrees of effectiveness. Formally, the enterprise relied on structured weekly project coordination meetings and a digital project management information system (PMIS) designed for document sharing and workflow approval (As shown in Table 1).

**Table 1.** Formal Collaborative Mechanisms and Their Utilisation

Mechanism	Stated Purpose	Departmental Participation Frequency (Reported)	Primary Content Shared
Weekly Coordination Meeting	Synchronize progress, resolve issues	High (All core depts.)	Schedule updates, resource requests, emergent issues

Project Management Information System (PMIS)	Centralize documentation, track workflows	Medium to High	Design drawings, procurement orders, inspection reports, RFI logs
Stage-Gate Review Meetings	Milestone approval, risk assessment before next phase	Medium (Dept. heads & PMO)	Compliance checklists, risk registers, performance dashboards

Interview data revealed that while these formal structures existed, their effectiveness was mediated by informal practices. Key informants from the Construction and HSE departments emphasized the critical role of informal interpersonal networks and ad-hoc communication channels (e.g., instant messaging groups) for solving urgent, on-ground problems. "The official meeting happens every Tuesday," one construction manager noted, "but the real decisions about how to handle a sudden site safety hazard or a material mismatch happen over the phone in minutes [9]. Who you know and can call directly makes all the difference." This finding aligns with the emphasis on timely, problem-solving communication beyond formal protocols.

4.2. Primary Challenges to Effective Collaboration

Despite the established mechanisms, significant barriers hindered seamless collaboration, directly impacting risk management. Thematic analysis identified three interconnected challenges, as summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Key Challenges to Cross-Departmental Collaboration

Challenge Category	Specific Manifestations (Illustrative Quotes)	Departments Most Affected
Goal & Priority Incongruence	"Procurement is evaluated on cost savings, we (Construction) are evaluated on timeline. Their 'best price' vendor often delivers late, hurting my schedule." (Construction Manager)	Procurement vs. Construction; Design vs. HSE
Information & Knowledge Silos	"The design changes are in the system, but no one explained the why behind the new technical spec to our field supervisors. We executed, but didn't understand the new risk it introduced." (HSE Officer)	Design vs. All downstream departments
Deficient Communication Quality	"Meetings are monologues of status reports, not dialogues for problem-solving. Complex risk issues get simplified to 'green', 'yellow', 'red' on a slide with no deep discussion." (Project Engineer)	All departments

These challenges created a fragmented environment. For example, the goal misalignment between Procurement and Construction resulted in suboptimal material choices that, while cost-effective, had longer lead times or required special handling, introducing unassessed schedule and safety risks. The siloed information flow prevented

critical contextual knowledge about design intent or material properties from reaching the teams responsible for on-site risk mitigation [3].

4.3. Impact on Operational Risk Identification and Assessment

The quality of collaboration had a direct bearing on the first two stages of the risk management cycle. As shown in Table 3, projects with higher reported Relational Coordination (RC) scores from the survey demonstrated more proactive and comprehensive risk identification.

**Table 3.** Correlation between Relational Coordination Score and Risk Register Quality

Project Code	Avg. RC Score (Survey, 1-5)	Number of Risks Identified in Planning Phase	Percentage of Risks Identified Proactively (vs. Reactively)
P-A	4.1	87	78%
P-B	3.4	52	60%
P-C	2.8	41	45%

Qualitative data explained this correlation. In high-RC environments, interviewees described more open dialogue where field personnel felt comfortable raising potential concerns with design engineers early on. "In Project A," a design lead explained, "the construction foreman would message me about potential constructability issues on the drawings before we finalized them. That saved us from multiple future change orders and safety hazards." In low-RC projects (like P-C), risks were often identified only after they had materialized into incidents, as fear of blame or inter-departmental friction suppressed early reporting. Furthermore, risk assessment was hampered when departments used different criteria; the Procurement department's risk matrix heavily weighted cost impact, while HSE's weighted safety severity, leading to conflicting priorities for the same risk event.

4.4. Impact on Operational Risk Mitigation and Outcomes

The final stage of risk mitigation was where collaborative breakdowns had the most visible operational consequences. Effective mitigation required coordinated action, which was frequently undermined by the challenges outlined earlier. Table 4 compares risk outcome metrics across two projects with contrasting collaborative profiles.

**Table 4.** Comparative Risk Outcome Metrics for Two Sample Projects

Metric	Project X (High Collaboration Profile)	Project Y (Low Collaboration Profile)	Notes
Safety Incident Frequency (per 100,000 hrs)	0.8	2.3	Project Y had poor HSE-Construction communication on hazard controls.
Average Schedule Delay (against baseline)	+4.5%	+15.2%	Project Y experienced major delays due to uncoordinated response to a supplier failure.
Cost Overrun (against budget)	+3.1%	+11.7%	Overruns in Y were linked to rework and expedited

costs from poor design-  
constructability alignment.

Interview narratives from Project Y detailed a specific incident: a critical equipment delivery was delayed. The Procurement department, working in isolation, secured an alternative supplier without consulting Construction on the new equipment's installation interface requirements. This resulted in a mismatch upon arrival, requiring costly field modifications and causing a significant schedule delay. A Construction supervisor stated, "If they had just walked the new specs over to our engineers, we would have caught the problem in five minutes. Instead, it cost us three weeks." This exemplifies how a lapse in relational coordination (specifically, timely, accurate, problem-solving communication across a boundary) directly translated into a failure of integrated risk mitigation, escalating an initial procurement risk into major schedule and cost risks [12, 13].

#### 4.5. Discussion

The findings consistently demonstrate that cross-departmental collaboration is not merely a supporting factor but a critical enabler or constraint for each phase of operational risk management within power engineering project execution. Effective collaboration, characterized by the principles of relational coordination, creates a permeable organizational membrane that allows risk intelligence to flow freely, be interpreted collectively, and be acted upon cohesively.

The identified challenges, including goal incongruence, knowledge silos, and poor communication quality, act as systemic filters that distort or block this flow. They cause risks to be identified late, assessed with parochial bias, and mitigated with uncoordinated actions that often transfer or amplify the risk elsewhere in the project system. The quantitative data on risk register quality and project outcomes provide compelling evidence that these are not merely perceptual issues but have measurable impacts on safety, time, and cost.

This case study thus validates and concretizes the integrated theoretical framework proposed in Chapter 3. It shows that the social and communicative infrastructure of relational coordination is foundational to achieving the integration required for effective risk management. The power engineering context, with its high stakes and complex interdependencies, amplifies both the benefits of getting this integration right and the severe costs of getting it wrong [4]. The findings suggest that interventions aimed at improving operational risk management must extend beyond technical tools and procedural audits to fundamentally address the relational and collaborative dynamics between departments.

## 5. Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the intricate relationship between cross-departmental collaboration and operational risk management within the internal project execution environment of a power engineering enterprise. Through an in-depth, mixed-methods case study of PowerGrid EPC Corp., the research has illuminated how the quality of inter-departmental interactions fundamentally shapes the efficacy of risk management processes, directly impacting project safety, schedule, and cost outcomes.

The findings confirm that cross-departmental collaboration is a critical operational variable, not merely a background factor. Effective collaboration, manifested through timely and problem-solving communication, shared goals, and mutual respect, serves as the essential conduit for integrated risk management. It enables the proactive identification of latent risks at departmental interfaces, facilitates holistic and aligned risk assessment, and ensures coordinated execution of mitigation measures. Conversely, the study identified specific, entrenched barriers, namely goal incongruence driven by conflicting departmental performance metrics, persistent information and knowledge silos, and deficient communication quality in formal forums. These barriers systematically degrade the organization's collective risk sensing and response capability.

Empirically, the research demonstrated tangible consequences. Projects characterized by higher levels of relational coordination exhibited more comprehensive risk identification, a greater proportion of proactive versus reactive risk management, and significantly superior performance metrics, including lower safety incident rates, reduced schedule delays, and minimized cost overruns. The comparative analysis of specific incidents, such as the procurement-construction interface failure in Project Y, provided a granular view of how a breakdown in collaborative dialogue directly escalates a contained issue into a major project risk.

The primary theoretical contribution of this study lies in its empirical synthesis of relational coordination with the integrated risk management perspective within a high-stakes engineering context. It moves beyond abstract advocacy for better communication to detail the specific mechanisms through which relational dynamics enable or disable systemic risk control. It underscores that operational risk is not only a technical or procedural challenge but a deeply socio-organizational one.

From a practical standpoint, the implications for power engineering enterprise managers are clear. Improving operational risk management requires deliberate intervention at the collaborative level. Recommendations arising from this case include, first, aligning key performance indicators across departments to foster shared objectives regarding risk outcomes, not just departmental outputs. Second, investing in platforms and rituals that facilitate not just information exchange but sense making, such as integrated risk workshops with all stakeholders, rather than relying solely on sequential reporting. Third, formally recognizing and empowering boundary spanners, individuals who naturally bridge departmental divides, to strengthen the informal networks that proved crucial for timely problem resolution.

This study has limitations, primarily its focus on a single case, which, while providing depth, limits generalizability. Future research should test these findings across multiple power enterprises and different types of engineering projects. Longitudinal studies could track how interventions aimed at improving relational coordination subsequently affect risk metrics over time. Furthermore, exploring the role of digital collaboration tools in mediating or transforming these relational dynamics presents a promising avenue for inquiry.

In conclusion, for power engineering enterprises navigating an environment of escalating complexity and stringent safety demands, mastering the internal synergy of cross-departmental collaboration is no longer optional but a strategic imperative for operational resilience. This research affirms that the path to robust risk management is paved not only with advanced technical tools but with the quality of human interaction and organizational integration.

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