A Six-Actor Managerial Framework for School Governance and Institutional Quality: Evidence from Field Research

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Abstract

This article develops a six-actor managerial framework to examine school governance and institutional quality, drawing on field data collected during doctoral research. The decision to keep six groups in the same analytical frame is deliberate. Principals, teachers, auxiliary and non-teaching staff, students, parents, and community actors often appear in separate institutional conversations, even though they interact with the same school from different positions. Here, governance is not reduced to leadership, regulation, or compliance. It is read through the lens of how participation, communication, transparency, accountability, collaboration, and trust are perceived by those groups. The empirical material comprises 901 valid responses collected through six actor-specific questionnaires. Overall, the responses are favorable but not flat. Communication is strong, especially for parents and community actors, while students and teachers point more clearly to tensions around influence, fairness, psychological safety, and centralized decisions. The framework is proposed as a practical reading tool for school leaders: it shows where arrangements work, where they remain mainly procedural, and where improvement should start.

Keywords: *school governance; six-actor model; institutional quality; field research; educational management; stakeholder participation*

1. Introduction

School governance is no longer only an administrative matter. For school managers, it has become a daily practical issue because schools must respond immediately to policy requirements, community expectations, internal quality assurance, and the ordinary pressures of institutional life [1], [2]. In this setting, governance is shaped not only by the management team or by formal bodies, but also by the circulation of information, the way decisions are explained, the seriousness of consultation, and the degree to which different actors understand their place in the school.

The problem can be stated plainly. A procedure may exist and still have little perceived force. A council may meet, a consultation may be announced, or a communication channel may be available, while some actors still feel that decisions have been made elsewhere. This is why the article keeps a distinction between formal governance arrangements and the lived experience of those arrangements.

The study uses a six-actor lens: principals, teachers, auxiliary and non-teaching staff, students, parents, and community actors. These groups do not have the same authority, and they do not encounter the school from the same position. That asymmetry is precisely why their perceptions are useful. Each group can reveal a different part of the institutional picture. The framework then connects these perceptions to institutional quality and identifies areas where leadership may need to explain, adjust, or redesign existing routines. The six-actor logic is summarized in Fig. 1.

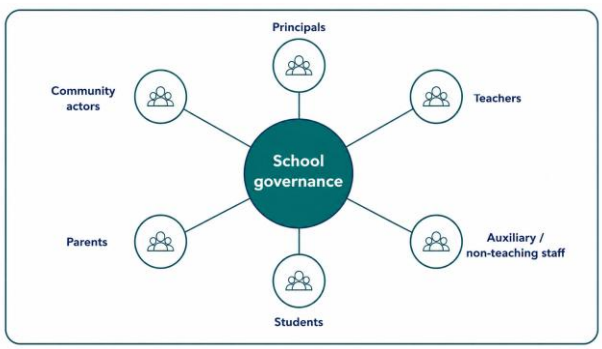

Fig. 1. Six-actor managerial framework for school governance and institutional quality

For this reason, the paper reads stakeholder perceptions as evidence that needs interpretation, not as isolated comments. Once the answers are collected in the same matrix and compared across groups, they become early warnings. They indicate where participation is felt as real, where communication already works, and where formal mechanisms have not yet produced a shared sense of influence, fairness, or trust.

2. Theoretical Background

One way to approach school governance is to focus on leadership, administrative coordination, and compliance with formal regulations [3]. This view is necessary, especially in systems where schools operate under detailed rules. It is not, however, sufficient. Schools are also social, professional, and community institutions. Decisions made inside them are interpreted, negotiated, applied, or resisted by several categories of actors [1], [4], [5].

A stakeholder-oriented reading widens the frame. Principals set direction and coordinate institutional priorities. Teachers carry policy and school decisions into classroom practice. Auxiliary and non-teaching staff maintain the daily operational conditions of schooling. Students experience the consequences of decisions directly, often before adults notice the effects. Parents bring expectations, feedback, and legitimacy from the family environment. Community actors connect the school to wider social and institutional networks. Looking at only one group would therefore leave part of the governance field outside the picture.

Institutional quality also means more than academic results or administrative compliance [2], [6]. It includes the quality of communication, the credibility of participation, collaboration, transparency, fairness, trust, and organizational culture. The distinction between formal and lived governance is useful here. Formal governance refers to written rules, structures, and procedures. Lived governance refers to what these arrangements become in practice: how they are understood, used, questioned, or trusted by those who meet them in everyday school life [7].

3. Research Design and Methodology

The empirical part of the research is based on a descriptive-interpretative quantitative design. Six questionnaires were used, each adapted to the institutional position of one actor group [8], [9]. The study did not aim to test a causal model. Its purpose was more modest and, for school management, more practical: to describe how key groups perceive governance-related dimensions and to identify differences that may guide managerial interpretation.

The instruments were developed around a common governance matrix. Even so, the wording was adjusted for each respondent category. A student, a teacher, a parent, and a community partner do not meet school governance from the same place. The main dimensions included participation and voice; leadership and decision-making; communication and transparency; institutional climate and trust; collaboration; inclusion; digitalization; and institutional support.

The questionnaires used five-point Likert-type scales. Since these data express ordered perceptions, the analysis relies on descriptive and comparative indicators, not on claims of objective measurement [10], [11], [12]. Negatively formulated items, including those referring to centralization, formal consultation, fear of contesting decisions, favoritism, or bureaucratic obstacles, were examined separately. When they entered synthetic scores, they were reverse-coded using the formula: adjusted score = 6 - raw score.

The final dataset includes 901 valid responses. It is not presented as nationally representative. Its value lies elsewhere: it allows the same school governance field to be read through several categories of experience, so that convergences and tensions become visible simultaneously.

Table 1. Respondent structure

Actor group	Number of responses
Students	282
Teachers	144
Parents	338
Principals	34
Auxiliary/non-teaching staff	71
Community actors	32
Total	901

4. Results

The respondent structure allows the governance field to be viewed from several institutional angles. Parents and students form the largest groups in the dataset. Principals and community actors are smaller groups, so their results must be read with more caution. Their presence is still important: governance is not experienced only by the most numerous actors. It is also experienced by actors who hold strategic or boundary positions in the school ecosystem.
The adjusted scores indicate a generally favorable view of school governance. Parents record the highest overall score (4.24). Teachers and principals have the same score (4.11), followed by auxiliary/non-teaching staff (4.09), community actors (4.07), and students (3.92). The students' score is still above the scale midpoint; however, it is the most reserved among the six groups and therefore warrants attention.

Table 2. Overall adjusted descriptive scores by actor group

Actor group	Overall adjusted score
Parents	4.24
Teachers	4.11
Principals	4.11
Auxiliary/non-teaching staff	4.09
Community actors	4.07
Students	3.92

4.1. Communication as a Strong Governance Dimension

Communication is one of the clearest strengths in the dataset. Parents describe communication channels as accessible and consider information about school rules generally clear. Community actors also evaluate communication with the partner institution positively, especially regarding available channels and the willingness to maintain collaboration.
At the classroom level, teachers and students both report favorable communication. Teachers mention encouraging questions and giving feedback, while students acknowledge classroom dialogue. This is a significant result, but it should not be overread. Communication shows that information and interaction are present; it does not, by itself, prove that stakeholders have influence over institutional decisions.

4.2. Formal Participation and Perceived Influence

The results also show a recurring distance between formal participation and perceived influence. Student councils, parent councils, administrative boards, and other representative mechanisms are visible in the institutional landscape. Their presence, however, does not always convince stakeholders that their contribution changes decisions.
Students provide the clearest signal. They value classroom dialogue and believe that students should be consulted when important school decisions are made. At the same time, weaker scores appear on items referring to actual influence, especially when decisions seem to be taken before consultation or when influence appears unequally distributed. Parents show a related pattern: communication with the school is strong, but consultation can still feel procedural rather than consequential.

4.3. Institutional Climate, Trust, and Psychological Safety

The institutional climate is assessed positively overall, but the picture is not without sensitive areas. Students usually report respectful relations with teachers. Auxiliary and non-teaching staff also report respect from students, parents, and teachers. Lower adjusted scores appear when the questions move from everyday politeness to impartiality, the possibility of contesting rules, and confidence that problems can be reported safely.
This distinction matters for governance analysis. Climate is not only about friendliness or polite interaction. It also includes psychological safety, the perception that rules are applied fairly, and the belief that disagreement can be expressed without negative consequences. These are the points where formal procedures must be connected to lived trust.

5. Discussion

The results support a multi-actor reading of school governance. Principals and teachers remain central, but they do not exhaust the whole institutional reality of the school. Students, parents, auxiliary/non-teaching staff, and community actors bring into view issues that a leadership-centered analysis could easily miss.

The first discussion point concerns formal and lived governance. The formal structures of participation are present and recognized, but their perceived force differs. Some stakeholders know representation exists, but still do not experience it as a genuine route to influence. For institutional quality, that difference is not marginal. A school does not improve simply by having structures on paper. It improves when those structures are understood, trusted, and connected to visible responses [1], [7].

The second point concerns communication. The data suggest that a school may communicate relatively well and still leave some stakeholders uncertain about influence. This is not a contradiction. Communication often carries information from the institution to the stakeholder. Participation requires one more step: the institution must show what happened after stakeholder input was received. For this reason, transparency needs feedback loops and evidence that consultation has consequences [1], [2].

The third point concerns teacher agency. Teachers report strong dialogic practices in classrooms, which suggests that participatory routines may be more visible in pedagogical interaction than in institutional decision-making [13], [14]. The fourth point concerns fairness and psychological safety. Lower scores on fear of contesting decisions, preferential treatment, and reluctance to report problems indicate that governance quality is tied to trust, not only to compliance [6].

6. Managerial Implications

The first implication is to move from formal participation to participation that leaves a trace. Councils, committees, and consultation moments should not only exist. Stakeholders should be able to see what happened to their proposals: whether they were discussed, accepted, revised, postponed, or rejected. Without this visible return, consultation can easily be read as a ritual rather than as a route to influence.

A second implication follows from the strong communication results. Because communication is already a relative strength, schools can use it as a base for deeper participation. Communication channels can become feedback channels, and information meetings can be linked to structured consultation. In practical terms, this may mean short reporting notes after consultations, accessible decision summaries, and recurring opportunities for actor-specific feedback.

Student voice requires particular attention. The data show that students experience classroom dialogue more positively than institutional influence. A practical response would be to strengthen student feedback forums, make student councils more visible, and consult students on decisions that directly affect their school experience [15].

Teacher participation also requires attention. Teachers should be treated not only as implementers of decisions, but as institutional contributors. Auxiliary and non-teaching staff should be included more clearly in consultation and resource-related discussions. Finally, school-community collaboration should be organized through stable communication channels, clear agreements, and realistic expectations, so that the partnership does not remain dependent on informal goodwill [1], [16].

7. Main Contribution of the Study

The main contribution of the article is the empirical grounding of a six-actor managerial framework for school governance and institutional quality. The model brings together principals, teachers, auxiliary/non-teaching staff, students, parents, and community actors within the same analytical frame.

The study contributes in three ways. Conceptually, it separates the existence of governance structures from the influence that stakeholders actually perceive. Empirically, it uses 901 responses collected from six actor groups. Managerially, it treats differences in perception as useful diagnostic signs, not as minor variations in opinion.

For school leaders, the framework offers a compact instrument of institutional reflection. It helps identify who perceives what, where formal procedures do not become meaningful participation, and which areas require intervention in communication, consultation, fairness, psychological safety, inclusion, or collaboration.

8. Conclusions

This article examined school governance and institutional quality through a six-actor managerial framework grounded in field research. The results are generally favorable, but they also show that governance is not experienced in the same way by all groups. Communication, classroom dialogue, and willingness to collaborate are stronger dimensions. The more vulnerable areas concern perceived influence, the distance between formal consultation and real participation, psychological safety, fairness, and transparency of resources.

The practical conclusion is straightforward: institutional quality does not depend only on adopting governance structures. It also depends on whether those structures are understood, experienced as meaningful, and linked to feedback and collaboration routines. Stakeholder perceptions can therefore work as an early diagnostic instrument. Differences between actor groups are not just statistical details; they can point to places where explanation, dialogue, or redesign is needed.

Although the empirical data are context-specific, the proposed framework may be relevant to European education systems concerned with stakeholder participation, institutional quality, and school-level governance.

The study has limitations. It relies on self-reported perceptions and should not be read as an objective measurement of governance quality. The sample is contextual and unevenly distributed, and smaller groups such as principals and community actors require cautious interpretation. Future research should combine questionnaires with interviews, focus groups, document analysis, and longitudinal validation in different school contexts.

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