A Governance Assurance Framework for a University Leadership in the Age of Polycrisis

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May 2025.

Keywords

Abstract

Higher education has undergone a significant transformation from its historic character as a community of scholars. As higher education institutions are being called upon to present a more business-like complex, a growing executive management style built on a foundation of governance and deeper accountability has taken root. The effect is the introduction and implementation of practices that conflict with the traditional values of the university, accompanied by concomitant resistance to managerialism and the bureaucratization of the academic project. The article examines six governance frameworks and identifies five key drivers of governance: leadership and direction, strategy and performance, accountability, ethical culture, and stakeholder relationships, as well as a sixth lever: monitoring, evaluation, and improvement.

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1.Introduction

The changing position in higher education globally was succinctly summarized by the Lambert Review (2003: 93), highlighting the fact that historically, universities were run as communities of scholars, where management and governance arrangements were generally participatory. Senates and councils were large and conservative.' However, the 21st century has seen the move towards a more executive management style at universities. Universities now have statutes and constitutions that clearly distinguish management from governance - the Vice Chancellor has the equivalent of a 'CEO mandate', whilst governance is the responsibility of a much smaller independent governing body, the new-style Council (Lambert Review 2003: 93). An analysis of the literature confirms this, leaving no room for doubt that there is a wave of transformation, reflecting the changing relationship between higher education and the state, built on a new growing foundation of governance (Coaldrake et al 2003).

Gjerding et al (2006) correctly identify the core factors influencing this transformation as changes to the funding regime, a reappraisal of research, a changing world market, shifting government objectives, expanding participation, a third mission emphasis, and regulation. Universities, they note, are now required to move away from the traditional university to a more business-like higher education complex, with a particular requirement of demonstrating traits of being market-driven and investing for the future, strategically managed rather than merely being administered, and showing clear lines of sound governance particularly vis-à-vis enterprise risk management and proactive awareness of risk and opportunity. Further summarizing the current social, economic, and political global climate in which universities today find themselves, Yanikkaya (2025) reflects on their need to respond much more effectively to this age of polycrisis.

> **"** Universities worldwide are grappling with different types of crises stemming from financial constraints and budget cuts, wars and armed conflicts, natural calamities, political pressures, legal impediments, unequal access to technological abilities, cybersecurity risks, unsafe campus

environments, refugees and displaced populations, climate
change and interconnected multiple crises or 'polycrises'.

All these crises fundamentally impact teaching and learning and demand a
university response. Focusing on the effectiveness of higher education's
responses to the need for leadership and governance transformation,
Goedegebuure and Hayden (2007: 6) unpack the global position summarized
by Allan, pointing out that whilst Australia emphasizes a failure by
universities to function in a sufficiently 'business-like' manner, in Canada,
the U.K., and the U.S.A., the shift to a more centralized model of university
governance is undergirded by a clear move to increase the accountability
requirements being imposed by the state on public higher education
institutions. Governance in the public university sector is also an emerging
area of emphasis in South Africa, with an approach like that in Canada, the
U.K., and the U.S.A. Describing the coactive relationship between
institutional autonomy and public accountability, the South African White
Paper 3, 1997 *Programme of Transformation for Higher Education* (RSA
General Notice 1997) records points out: The principle of institutional
autonomy refers to a high degree of self-regulation and administrative
independence concerning student admissions, curriculum, methods of
teaching and assessment, research, establishment of academic regulations and
the internal management of resources generated from public and private
sources. On the other hand, institutions are answerable for their actions and
decisions not only to their governing bodies and the institutional community
but also to the broader society. Firstly, it requires that institutions receiving
funds should be able to report on how and how well money has been spent.
Secondly, it requires that institutions should demonstrate the results they
achieve with the resources at their disposal. Thirdly, it requires that
institutions should demonstrate how they have met national policy goals and
priorities. Institutional autonomy is thus a condition of effective self-
government and is directly and inextricably linked to the demands of public
accountability. Notwithstanding the clear imperative and direction, the reality
of public higher education in South Africa is that, unfortunately, most
universities have not attained the level of organizational maturity required to
understand the critical value and importance of a sound governance regime.

The result is that governance principles continue to be applied as disparate activities rather than as an *institutional process*. To manage the shortcomings, the government responded by placing increasing regulatory onuses on universities, and regulators imposed an increasingly stringent audit regime, marking an explicit shift from universities focusing only on academic growth and scholarship to university leadership being held accountable for overall institutional survival.

At the turn of the century, the Lambert Report (2003: 102) highlighted the emerging status quo, pointing out:

> " Governments appear not have sufficient confidence in the way that universities run themselves to give them funding without strings attached. Some of this is justified – the sector has in the past suffered from poor management and a lack of strategic thinking. Yet if universities are to become more creative and play their full part in regional and national economies, then ways must be found to give them more room to develop a strategic vision and take entrepreneurial risks.

The highlighted coordinates from the Lambert Report (2003) remain relevant. In this milieu, good governance practices are central for higher education institutions, which find themselves increasingly focused not only on academic growth and scholarship but responsible for overall institutional survival (Deloitte 2013: 10). The effect is the introduction of practices that 'increasingly conflict with traditional values of university governance' (Waugh 2003: 85). Academic resistance to this changing environment is predicated on the belief that the changes introduced detract from the academic project of scholarship, stifle academic creativity and innovation, and destroy the most essential features that distinguish a university from a business.[1] The

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[1] The author suggests that if universities intend to manage this tension effectively, one of the most credible spaces for doing so will be through the Senate, provided that the importance of the Senate within the university structure is fundamentally reasserted. However, the effectiveness, role, and function of the university Senate is a topic in its

changing face of the university, if not properly managed, will expose the risk of excessive bureaucratization, increased administrative workloads for academic staff that divert them from their core business, formalization that stifles innovation and creativity, and the de-professionalization of academic staff who feel like they are being policed. This is interpreted as a lack of trust in their knowledge and capabilities. Power (1999) also reflects on the "audit explosion" confronting higher education institutions. His conundrum is whether these audits – like regulations – lead to improved quality and accountability. Contributing to the debate, Huisman (2019: 3) also questions: even if they do, at what cost and with what side effects do they come?

Acknowledging that universities must change, it is essential that when universities introduce a governance strategy, it be holistic, integrated, and inclusive, striking a balance between the sustainability of the university structure and system and integrating the overall scholarship culture. The outcome must assure regulators and stakeholders of the strategy's efficacy, including the areas of challenge, opportunity, and development, and the trajectory toward good governance.

Formalized governance frameworks have become crucial to effective governance management at universities. A governance framework will enable institutions to confirm their commitment to best practices, facilitating the measurement and monitoring of performance in the identified levers of good governance. A governance assurance framework must address four key factors: relevance to the university sector, responsiveness to the regulator's requirements, assurance to the university council and stakeholders, and demonstrable value for institutional sustainability. A well-designed governance framework serves as a lens for both institutional managers and leadership responsible for reporting, as well as for the Council, the Regulator, and all stakeholders, regarding the institution's governance maturity.

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own right and will not be covered in detail in this discussion except to stress that the Senate is an essential stakeholder in academic governance.

2.Literature Review

Globally, governance systems range from legislated rules to good governance based on principles and best practices. Some standards have been legislated to promote enforcement. Compliance with these standards has thus become peremptory. Adoption is no longer a matter of goodwill (IODSA 2009: 10). The literature presents many definitions of governance ranging from a limited focus on 'policy and strategy' (Kaplan 2004: 23) to 'direction and accountability', 'structure and decision-making', 'control and accountability' and stakeholder relationships (Goedegebuure and Hayden 2004: 2-3, 11). Goedegebuure and Hayden (2004: 2-3) provide an excellent synthesis of various definitions. Baird (adopting the definition of the Australian National Audit Office) defines governance as 'the process by which organizations are directed, controlled and held to account', whilst Toma defines it as the process which responds to the question: who makes what decisions? The OECD presents a more complete definition, introducing the element of 'engagement' and describing governance as a set of relationships between a company's management, its board, its shareholders, and other stakeholders. It 'provides the structure through which the objectives of the company are set, and the means of attaining those objectives and monitoring performance are determined (Goedegebuure and Hayden 2004:11). The Corporate Governance Framework (2014-2018) produced by the Queensland Government, Australia describes governance as 'the set of responsibilities and practices, policies and procedures, exercised by an agency's executive, to provide strategic direction, ensure objectives are achieved, manage risks and use resources responsibly and with accountability' (2014: 5). However, it is submitted that it still omits an essential element of good governance which is that of *relationships*. In response to the question raised by Kezar (2004: 35), an effective governance model must stand on two pillars: relationships, trust, and leadership, on the one hand and be undergirded by structures and formal processes on the other.

Birnbaum (2004:10) emphasizes that governance must be a combination of 'hard' and 'soft' elements, where 'hard' governance refers to "the structures, regulations, and systems of sanctions in an organization that defines authority

relationships, prescribes certain organizational processes and encourages compliance with enacted policies and procedures", whilst 'soft' governance is located in the concepts of 'how organizational cultures are created over time' through interactions with critical role-players. Birnbaum's definition offers a comprehensive view of governance, highlighting the integrated dualism. As he states, "…hard governance can channel and, to some extent, harness the power of soft governance so that the two are mutually reinforcing…" (Birnbaum 2004: 10).

In South Africa, the King III Code on Good Governance (King III)[2] set a national framework for good governance, which is also applicable to higher education.[3] Highlighting the requirement for universities to adhere to the King III principles and standards, the Government promulgated the National Annual Reporting Regulations for Higher Education Institutions (RSA Government Gazette No. 10209), which mandates annual reporting to the Regulator on identified governance matters. The Ministry's approach was pre-empted by national austerity and aimed to promote greater accountability for funds dispersed to universities, as well as to emphasize cooperative governance, a focus on ethical leadership, operations, and management, and responsible IT governance. The Regulations draw an analogy with company boards, strongly emphasizing the elements of accountability, sustainability, and the Council's role in driving the overall institutional strategy. Interestingly, and a concern to many in the university milieu, the Senate Report is the *only* deep academic reflection among the sixteen mandatory reports. Annual reporting by universities is not unique to South Africa, but the foci may differ (Shattock 2013: 219, 227; Deloitte 2013: 9).

A second identified challenge is that for optimal benefit from the spirit and purpose of the Annual Reporting Guidelines, management will need to (a) understand what is required and (b) be more proactive. Councils will also need to pay more explicit attention to their oversight role. Universities are at a critical juncture. Acknowledging that governance centers on strategic

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[2] The King III Code has been updated, and King IV is now in effect.

decision-making and how institutional operations should be managed, it empowers Councils and university leadership to more effectively utilize their powers to address the complex problems confronting higher education in the 21st century.

Yanikkaya (2025) identifies the most significant crisis facing higher education that needs to be addressed as the increasing distrust in higher education and the depreciation of intellectual and academic work. He (Yanikkaya 2025: n.p.) states:

> **❝** It began with the so-called 'managerial turn' in higher education. … [M]arket-driven visions and strategies risk transforming higher education institutions into merely vocational schools.
>
> Coupled with the backlash against equity, diversity, inclusion and justice initiatives, the world is becoming increasingly economically and politically conservative under the guise of globalisation's ideological face: neoliberalism.

Universities, which have traditionally been facilitators of social cohesion and the critical conscience of society, are losing this character. Against this backdrop, it becomes imperative for universities, with the Council and management working collectively, to respond more effectively to the emerging challenges and opportunities of globalization. Integrated governance structures and implementation become increasingly key to ensuring that leadership is sufficiently aware of the challenges, allowing for proactive crisis management and continuity of academic activities.

3. Discussion: proposing a Good Governance Framework for Higher Education Institutions

Six governance frameworks were selected for analysis and comparison to derive a good governance framework for higher education. They were:

— The UN Development Programme
— The Commission of European Communities (CEC)

— Committee of University Chairs (CUC)
— The King IV Code on Good Governance
— Langlands Committee Good Standards Report
— Queensland Government Department of Education Corporate Governance Frameowrk

The following Table summarizes the key factors of good governance described in each report.

Table 1: Summary of the principles of good governance

UNDP	CEC[4]	Committee of University Chairs (CUC)
Participation – free, active, and meaningful participation in decision-making processes	Participation	Engagement – governing bodies understand the global, national, and local stakeholders and require assurance of meaningful engagement
Non-discrimination and inclusiveness – development gains must be extended to the most excluded groups and individuals	Coherence	Sustainability – the governing body sets the mission, strategic direction, overall aims, and values of the institution.
Performance and responsiveness	Effectiveness	Effectiveness – the governing body ensures that governance structures and processes are robust, effective, and agile, continuously evaluating governance practices. Reputation – the governing body safeguards and

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[4] Commission of the European Communities (CEC: Governance means rules, processes, and behavior that affect how powers are exercised regarding participation, coherence, effectiveness, accountability, and openness.

		promotes institutional reputation and autonomy.
Accountability – linked to the rule of law	Accountability	Accountability
Rules-based transparency	Openness	Equality, inclusivity, and diversity – the governing body promotes a positive that supports ethical behavior.
King IV Code of Governance	**Langlands Committee Good Standards Report**	**Queensland Government Department of Education Governance Framework5**
Stakeholder Relationships – adopt an inclusive approach that balances the needs, interests, and expectations of material stakeholders	Focusing on the organization's purpose and outcomes for citizens and service users.	Engagement – stakeholders' perspectives shape the strategic direction
Leadership – lead ethically and effectively and behave as a responsible corporate citizen.	Promoting values throughout the organization and demonstrating good governance through one's behavior.	Leadership must be visible and responsive
Strategy and performance – purpose, risks and opportunities, strategy, business model, performance, and organizational	*Performing effectively in clearly defined functions and roles *Developing the capacity and	*Strategic Direction – priorities and objectives align with the strategic direction. *Effective alignment of objectives to deliver

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5 Based on

sustainability are part of a value-creation process	capability of the governing body to be effective *Managing risk	meaningful outcomes ("value creation"). *Risks must be balanced with opportunity. *Decisions are informed by data and evidence, to develop fit-for-purpose outcomes.
Accountability, fairness, and transparency, including IT and compliance governance. Reporting must ensure stakeholders can adequately assess performance.	Engaging stakeholders and making accountability real	Accountability – there must be transparent and accountable decision-making.
Ethical Culture - create and maintain an ethical culture	Making informed, transparent decisions	Trust and transparency – actions and decisions withstand scrutiny and build confidence.

The six governance reports studied all emphasize what Birnbaum describes as 'soft' governance (2004: 10). They are (i) leadership and direction, (ii) strategy and performance, (iii) accountability, (iv) fairness, transparency, and open/ethical organizational culture; and (v) stakeholder relationships, participation, and expectations. In looking at an assurance framework, the IODSA stresses that 'Corporate governance mainly involves the establishment of structures and processes, with appropriate checks and balances that enable directors to discharge their legal responsibilities' (2009: 10). Similarly, best practice dictates that proper assurance also requires an evaluation and monitoring of delivery and performance. In this exercise, the university, Council, and stakeholders will have a gauge on the "hard" and "soft" returns on investment and achievement of the identified strategy, goals, and performance objectives. In addition to the five drivers of good governance identified in the six reports, continual monitoring, evaluation, and

improvement are essential for advancing any project. A sixth driver of good governance is thus an overarching assessment of improvement. It is emphasized that the identified drivers should never be read in silos: a good governance assurance framework in the university setting integrates the identified principles in an interlocking system of operations.

Leadership and Direction

The Nolan Principals for Public Life (UK) is a framework of ethical conduct for those in public office. It includes honesty, integrity, objectivity, accountability, selflessness, openness, and leadership. In the current adverse economic climate, the demand for accountability - especially where state funding is involved - is no longer up for debate. This level of increased scrutiny has put higher education institutions in the spotlight, requiring that performance tangibly demonstrates:

(i) Responsiveness to the national imperatives, and requirements of the regulating authorities.

(ii) Demonstrable value for institutional sustainability.

(iii) Assurance to the university Council and stakeholders of strategic leadership and direction.

(iv) Relevance to the university sector and the academic project, including the preservation of the institution's academic character. Too much management and too little freedom, too much hierarchy, and too little community will destroy academic passion and, without a doubt, the student's experience.

Responsible university leadership must reimagine the institution, promoting the balance between public accountability, quality scholarship, and academic well-being. Acknowledging that the polycrisis will vary in severity for different institutions, depending on the proximity and scale of the challenges (Yanikkaya 2025), leadership and direction will consider building an institution that is both local, rooted in its regional communities, and global in scope, with its intellectual networks. The governance model respects the stakeholder narrative and places the attitudes, values, and expectations of internal and external stakeholders at the center. Leadership recognizes the

value of the technological revolution and the data-driven imperatives of resource modeling and sustainable solutions. Accountability is embedded throughout the institutional practices. The tradition of a vice chancellor in an end-of-career role is gone, and leadership – strategic and operational - is appointed because of peoples' strategic capacity and capabilities.

A critical function of university leadership is undoubtedly setting an aspirational organizational strategy that is clear, responsible, and focused on institutional relevance and sustainability. The King III Committee (1ODSA 2009: 12) described sustainability as one of the primary moral and economic imperatives of the twenty-first century. The consequential commitment to the triple bottom line (people/society, profit/business, and planet/environment) remains pertinent, presenting both risks and opportunities for business that are interconnected and complex yet must be understood by decision-makers (IODSA 2009: 12). The higher education institution today is at a critical juncture in a challenging economic climate and manifold interests competing for attention. The twenty-first-century university leader must be a distinctly different person from those of centuries past, possessing the critical ability to integrate and balance the academic project, key strategic trends, and the demands for institutional sustainability and accountability. As Bensimon (2007: 457) highlights, above all else, university leaders need to know how to use inquiry skills to bring about responsible change, where the core inquiry activities are "intentionally designed to advance an agenda of accountability" and a values-oriented approach. Describing responsible leadership, Deakin and Konzelman (2003: 587) stress that when studying governance failures, it is not the structures that collapse but the values and behaviors of those operating them that are the root cause of the consequential failures. Regulation is, in fact, only part of the governance solution; a vital component lies in the personal standards of honesty and ethics generally set by leadership and embedded in the organizational culture (Robins 2006: 46; Wessels 2015: 13).

Strategy and Performance

In the University, the Council approves the institution's strategic direction, allowing the executive leadership to take responsibility for its

implementation. The role and function of the Council are key to good governance, promoting ethical leadership and institutional sustainability. However, the study conducted by Henley Business School, UK (Kakabadse et al 2020) is informative in understanding why universities under the leadership of their Councils have not fulfilled their governance obligations. The study emphasizes that, on paper, the Council is the governing body; however, Councils are often constituted with members who lack the skills to act as highly performing bodies. Universities, they note, are large complex organizations with a level of complexity not found in many other enterprises. Further, at the operational level, there is a fundamental information gap between what Council receives and what goes on in the institution caused by various factors including (i) the fact that the Vice Chancellor sets – and therefore controls – the Council agenda; (ii) the understanding that Council does not involve itself in the institutional operations; (iii) the size of the Council which often renders it somewhat unwieldy; and (iv) the limited time for meetings which is often inadequate to interrogate matters robustly. These constraints, they point out, lead to a critical information chasm between the Council and the University that makes it increasingly challenging to talk about stewardship and accountable leadership in the Council (Kakabadse et al 2020).

That said, the Council remains the governing body responsible for approving the institutional strategy. Once the strategy is approved, a good communication plan is essential for its successful rollout. The strategy must be communicated, internalized, and embedded within the institution, and it must equally be brought to the attention of the external stakeholders. Communication, however, is one pillar that speaks to 'substance'; it is not the result. University leadership must create an environment to enable the delivery of the strategy according to the committed timelines (sometimes referred to as 'form'). An essential enabler in this regard is certainty that the resources required to achieve the committed performance objectives of the strategy are both adequate and available and that those that are available are managed for optimal utilization (stewardship).

Linked to the imperative of strategy, effective leadership must provide a coherent policy framework, ensuring that policies identify both immediate

operational and long-term objectives that are aligned with the institutional strategy. The challenge in higher education institutions is often a siloed approach to policy development, resulting in multiple documents. However, if policies are designed to cut across various sectoral interests seamlessly, it would lead to a more straightforward and logical policy framework that would concomitantly enhance effectiveness. Clear policies, procedures, roles, and responsibilities are essential for supporting transparency and openness, which in turn yield improved decision-making and promote fairness and clarity within the organization. Noteworthy, however, is the understanding that while clarity is important in promoting the requirement of certainty, institutions must be cautious of draconian policy regimes, especially in the university environment, where debates on the fettering of academic autonomy and innovation continue to rage.

Another crucial component of effective governance is the existence and implementation of a risk and opportunities management framework (King IV 2016: Principle 4). While alien to traditional university argot, issues are easier to deal with when organizations, including universities, apply an informed, forward-looking, and proactive lens to strategic imperatives - this is the function of risk and opportunity assessment and risk management. Institutional effectiveness is enhanced when risk management is integrated into the institution's culture and is embedded in its values, practices, and operational processes. It focuses on the relationship between the identified risk and its impact on achieving the outcomes. The additional risk management information will facilitate better-informed planning and decision-making within the university and its structures when integrated into strategic and operational planning.

Ultimately, a sound, aligned performance base - undergirded by planning and resourcing, continuous monitoring, and evaluation - will culminate in effectively delivering and achieving the approved strategic and operational goals.

Accountability

If good governance is about institutional culture, it must not be synonymous with compliance. Institutions must, at all costs, strive to avoid the bogey of "box-ticking," as highlighted by Robins (2006: 44):

> " If your focus is just compliance, you will end up with a board with the brain of a lawnmower and the brakes of a Rolls Royce. (Fox)

> Over-regulation can and will kill the entrepreneurial spirit, it will crush innovation as more and more resources are shifted towards compliance, and away from staying ahead of the pack. (Wisenthal)

These sentiments and the caution are particularly apposite in the university environment where innovation and creativity are fundamental to the institution's spirit. It is thus crucial that as institutions embed their governance regime, the institutional culture must become more performance-driven (qualitative advantage) rather than one of conformance (quantitative reactions). This does not mean that compliance has no place in the governance regime - organizations must always be 'answerable for decisions' and have 'appropriate mechanisms in place' to ensure that they adhere to all applicable standards (Queensland Governance CGF Report 2014: 5). However, the challenge is to identify and implement an even-handed balance between the 'prudential constraints' and the 'unfettered vigour of complete laisser-faire' (Robins 2006: 46).

Reflecting pertinently on academic governance, the ICDE/UNESCO Draft ODL Declaration (May 2014) stresses accountability and public assurance, stating:

> " Public investment in education needs to produce outcomes and results which communities can support. Methods of accountability and public assurance need to be developed, which should include an assurance that learning outcomes will have a personal, social, economic and environmental impact that is goal directed.

Accountability includes the element of responsibility and strong, capable, and competent leadership.

Openness, Fairness, Transparency, and an Ethical Culture

Merging the elements of leadership, effectiveness, and organizational culture, Deakin and Konzelman (2003: 587) note that when studying corporate governance failures, it is not the structures that collapse but the 'values and behaviors' of those operating them that are the root cause of the consequential failures. All six governance reports studied emphasize the relationship between good governance and ethical culture/organizational values, as well as the draft ICDE/UNESCO ODL Declaration (May 2014), which stresses that insofar as universities are concerned, learning outcomes must be structured amongst others, "embed the values of moral regeneration and community upliftment". (See also the King III Code; Dawson 2004: 132; and Goedegebuure and Hayden 2007: 3). Universities should take note of the conversation, even though much of the contemporary public discourse about governance of higher education is "pre-occupied with implementing more business-like governance structures" and focused on "efficiency in decision-making" (Goedegebuure and Hayden 2007: 5). The focus on re-introducing a values-driven leadership and pedagogy is gaining traction, as was evident as an outcome of the 26th ICDE World Conference, Sun City, 14-16 October 2015.

Cooperative Governance / Stakeholder Relationships

The key constructs under this fifth driver in the governance framework are identifying key institutional stakeholders, developing a stakeholder engagement strategy and plan, communicating effectively, managing performance, including individual staff performance and talent management, promoting staff wellness, ensuring safety, occupational health, and environmental management, and, critically, engaging with student voices. The identified key constructs are achieved through a series of planned activities. Undergirding the principle of cooperative governance is acknowledging that stakeholders must be reliably informed. Communication is once again critical, as it delivers information at the appropriate level to

various stakeholders and creates opportunities for feedback, thereby linking the various aspects of the governance paradigm into a coherent narrative.

Staff and students, regulatory authorities, industry, and for private higher education institutions, shareholders generally constitute the primary stakeholder community in universities. However, noting the practice in the U.S. and Europe (Payne 2006: 70), the role of organized labor in South Africa cannot be ignored. Organized labor plays a significant role in decision-making at universities, particularly public universities, and should be recognized as a primary stakeholder in the stakeholder matrix. As stated by the Government of Queensland CGF Report (2014-2018: 22), "… know your customer, deliver what matters, make decisions with empathy."

Consultation and buy-in are critical to the successful implementation of the strategy. Consultation ensures early input, combined formulation of ideas, and overall stakeholder involvement. When feedback is followed, and commitments are acted upon, it builds trust. Kezar (2004: 40, 42) similarly highlights leadership, relationships, and trust as being critical to a robust governance process, emphasizing that involvement and commitment enhance "ownership and a sense of meaning" so that "governance is no longer a task that people had to suffer through to meet institutional obligations …."

Reflecting specifically on the importance of consultation in the university context, Birnbaum emphasizes that whilst academic involvement in shared decision-making may slow down the decision-making processes, it ensures that there is always proper regard for institutional core values and provides the needed sense of order and stability (Birnbaum 2004: 7). There is also a difference between "effective consultation" and an "information session": however, there is a line that should not be breached as universities pursue the principle of consultation and that is to avoid stakeholder engagement becoming co-management.

The principles of transparency and participation/engagement also emphasize the need for greater openness, stronger interactions, and more systemic engagement with stakeholders at an early stage in policy development. This may contradict the more linear policy-making processes often adopted at universities. Collaboration and hearing stakeholder voices, however, are vital

to successful change, as stakeholder engagement promotes confidence and ensures critical buy-in to the university's strategic focus and direction, resulting in a more effective and coordinated approach to achieving its institutional objectives. The CEC (2001: 14) placed material emphasis on the importance of transparency and consultation, noting:

> **"** Creating a culture of consultation cannot be achieved by legal rules which would create excessive rigidity and risk slowing the adoption of particular policies. It should rather be underpinned by a code of conduct that sets minimum standards, focusing on what to consult on, when, whom and how to consult. Those standards will reduce the risk of the policy-makers just listening to one side of the argument or of particular groups getting privileged access ….

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Improvement

Governance is not static. Recognizing the evolving milieu in the current age of disruption and polycrisis, strategy, goals, and objectives must be regularly reviewed and adjusted to remain relevant and responsive. Continual monitoring enables institutions to proactively identify causal factors for the non-achievement of goals, as well as existing and emerging issues and trends that should receive attention.

A strategy review must be undergirded by both forward-looking risks and opportunities, as well as a thorough investigation of why some goals were unsuccessful. Often, in such cases, alternate solutions are implemented without an adequate assessment of why they should succeed where the previous activity failed. This may be an unfortunate result of a higher education culture that assumes the Council and management know what is best for the institution. Secondly, improvement planning often becomes a symbolic exercise to meet regulatory requirements rather than a reflective and inclusive learning experience for the organization.

4.Higher education institutions assuring good governance: a framework

The Qld Government Department of Education Governance Framework succinctly summarizes the standards of governance, stating:

> 66 Governance is how people and resources are organized to make decisions, create opportunities, manage risk, remain accountable, and drive performance to achieve our purpose.

A framework for managing good governance in higher education institutions is proposed, considering the five drivers of good governance, as well as the sixth lever of monitoring, evaluation, and improvement. Comparing the feedback from Sections A and B will provide institutional leadership with a representation of the levels of synchronicity between the University's broad thinking about the identified governance drivers, as captured in Section A, and the realities of implementing the good practices that contribute to the individual themes (Section B) at the institution.

SECTION A: GENERAL

MEASUREMENT/RATING SCALE		
1 – Not at all satisfied	2 – Very satisfied	3 – Somewhat satisfied
4 – Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	5 – Somewhat satisfied	6 – Very satisfied

Please consider the questions below and respond using the measurement scale provided above.

#	STATEMENT FOR CONSIDERATION
1.	How satisfied are you that there is a shared understanding amongst the employees of the institutional purpose and direction (strategic focus areas)

2.	How satisfied are you that the institution's leadership and governance structures align the institutional functions, structure, and culture with the organizational strategic focus areas?
3.	How satisfied are you with the alignment of planning and resource allocation in support of achieving the strategic focus areas?
4.	How satisfied are you with the institution's level of accountability, clarity, and transparency related to legislative compliance, information management, and corporate reporting?
5.	How satisfied are you with the effectiveness of communication and the implementation of the best management practices aimed at achieving an institution-wide understanding of performance and behavioral expectations?
6.	How satisfied are you with resource management and the monitoring, reviewing, and reporting processes for improving service delivery?
7.	How satisfied are you with the reviews, interventions, capacity-building efforts, and internal control mechanisms in place to improve organizational and individual performance?
8.	How satisfied are you with the Senate's role in leading the academic project?
9.	How satisfied are you that the institution has properly identified its key strategic stakeholders?
10.	How satisfied are you with the implementation of enterprise risk management to manage risk and embed risk assessment as an integral part of all activities?

For feedback to enable informed decision-making, respondents should have the option to provide qualitative feedback on their responses after each question.

SECTION B:

MEASUREMENT SCALE			
1 – Not at all important	2 – Low importance	3 – Slightly important	4 – Neutral
5 – Moderately important	6 – Very important	7 – Extremely important	

#	FOR CONSIDERATION

To improve and strengthen the governance regime at the institution, it is essential to ensure a thorough understanding of the key material factors that contribute to good governance. Against this background, what importance do you attach to each of the following features to responsibly perform your governance role:	
1.	**Ethical Leadership and Direction**
1.1	A clearly defined institutional mission
1.2	A clearly defined institutional vision statement
1.3	An institutional culture statement that is understood and shared by all role-players
1.4	A communicated set of institutional values
1.5	Regular formalized communication between institutional leadership and staff
1.6	Transparent decision-making processes and resource allocation
1.7	Promoting inclusivity and diversity amongst staff and students
1.8	Fair and transparent staff appointment processes
1.9	A published gift and conflicts register available to all key stakeholders
1.10	A clear understanding of the institution's primary stakeholder community
2.	**Strategy and Performance**
2.1	A strategic plan that is consulted with role-players
2.2	Regular review (update) of the strategic plan, taking cognizance of the internal micro- and macro-environments
2.3	A documented and applied organizational structure
2.4	An effective governance committee structure with clear roles and responsibilities
2.5	Independent performance reviews of all management and governance structures
2.6	Approved processes for staff appointments
2.7	Change management processes that are responsive to the internal and external environments
2.8	A performance management system for staff
2.9	Fair and transparent consequence management processes
2.10	RISK MANAGEMENT:
2.10.1	The existence of an enterprise risk and opportunities management framework
2.10.2	A shared understanding of the principles of institutional risk management

2.10.3	A strategic risk register aligned with the institutional Strategic Plan
2.10.4	An institutional risk appetite and risk tolerance statement
2.10.5	Academic risk and opportunities management that is regularly reviewed
2.10.6	ICT risk management
2.10.7	Finance, fraud, and corruption risk management
2.10.8	A business continuity plan and model
2.10.9	Business continuity management processes
2.10.10	The deliberate integration of risk management into all institutional practices and processes
3.	**Accountability**
3.1	Institutional policies and procedures that are available to all role-players
3.2	A Code of Conduct for institutional staff
3.3	Student support activities promoting success and retention
3.4	Compliance reporting on relevant higher education and other institutional legislation and applicable standards and regulations
3.5	A clear policy on the institutional position on sustainability and sustainable practices
3.6	Integrated annual report
3.7	Upholding ethical research practices and academic freedom
3.8	Regular institutional assessments and stakeholder feedback
3.9	Regular academic audits to promote academic quality and improvement
3.10	The inclusion of diverse voices in governance matters
3.11	Publishing data on institutional performance and impact
3.12	Use Key Performance metrics to measure performance
4.	**Stakeholder Relationships, Participation, and Expectations**
4.1	Stakeholder engagement plans per identified strategic stakeholder
4.2	The implementation of occupational health and safety and environmental management plans
4.3	Strong internal communication among key stakeholders
4.4	Ongoing engagement with alumni on all matters and matters of institutional governance and academic quality
4.5	Identifying industry needs through surveys and engagements

4.6	Established formal relationships with organized labor operating at the institution on matters of institutional governance and sustainability
4.7	A robust Senate that actively and effectively leads scholarship at the institution
4.8	An impact analysis on how the institution supports the surrounding communities that it serves and/or from where its students are drawn
4.9	Institutional functions and events to promote stakeholder engagement
4.10	Key stakeholders sit on relevant governance committees
5.	**Monitoring, Evaluation, and Improvement**
5.1	An institution-wide integrated quality management system
5.2	An adequately resourced quality assurance unit
5.3	Clearly stated and shared quality standards aligned with the national norms
5.4	The implementation of professional standards linked to relevant programs
5.5	Study and research support and assistance for staff
5.6	A recognition/incentive programme that rewards good performance
5.7	An effective internal audit unit
5.8	The practice of conducting internal and external audits and compliance reviews across the institution
5.9	Effective and efficient monitoring, reviewing, and reporting processes
5.10	A shared understanding of integrating improvement planning into the annual strategic planning discussion

For enhanced feedback, an additional column could be added, requiring respondents to indicate whether the specific governance standards are embedded in the institution's practices.

5.Conclusion

The debate on institutional governance and sustainability is rooted in the principle of 'quality' - a governance regime that supports informed and effective decision-making is essential for the sustainability of universities. Advancing the understanding of the symbiotic relationship between good

governance and quality demands of higher education leadership requires a deeper interrogation of the question of whether good governance is a facet of quality or whether quality is attained when good governance is embedded. A common problem in universities is the siloed approach to governance. Institutional governance is not an event but a process - disparate governance activities only create a perception of good practice but do not achieve the optimal state that enables sound decision-making regarding the management of governance in universities.

However, when the discussion centers on governance in higher education, an essential consideration is to acknowledge that the core issue is not only about making governance more effective; it must also prioritize the importance of preserving the university's academic character, what O'Day (2002) emphasizes as the critical distinction between professional and bureaucratic accountability. The governance regime should not compete with the university's core business and needs to be sufficiently nuanced to avoid stifling the very purpose of the institution it seeks to serve. The proposed governance assurance framework, therefore, is not just about regulation; it also focuses on developing an ethical organizational culture in the spirit of cooperative governance. Regulation is only part of the governance solution; a vital component lies in the personal standards of honesty and ethics generally followed by members of the organization, as well as the organizational culture (Robins 2006: 46; see also Wessels 2015: 13).

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7.Short biography

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