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### **Leadership and Management Trait of SMC Members in School Governance Kuldip Neupane**

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#### **Abstract**

*Among various school governing bodies, the School Management Committee (SMC) is the leading one that designs the vision and missions for the school. Nepalese education policy has given SMC the duty of school improvement. The theory of governance explains leadership and management quality in its process. So, SMC, from the viewpoint of governance theory, better performs when possesses leadership and management knowledge. This mixed method research explored these qualities in the SMC of Kanchanjunga Secondary School. The qualities are explored from the viewpoints of students and the SMC chair both, where the quantitative data were collected from the students and qualitative from the SMC chair. The research found that the SMC of the researched school possessed less leadership and management qualities. The SMC members need knowledge and training on the traits of leadership and management like decision making and dissemination, setting goals for the school, participatory approach in decision making and implementation, communicative approach, transparency, and accountability.*

**Keywords:** governance, school governance, management, leadership, trait

#### **Introduction**

I saw a showering congratulatory note on Kapil's Facebook page who was newly elected School Management Committee chair of Kanchanjunga Secondary School. Many notes expressed the best wishes for his tenure and the success and development of the school. Since Kapil was my contemporary I was happy to have a young mind leading SMC of the only public school in my locality. Since I am working as a principal in a school I expected to be a great help for Kapil to lead the school.

I met him after few days after he was elected, congratulated him, and promised to help him in case he needs. His victory mood had not dimmed yet to listen to me. He asserted that he would work hard to gain back the reputation of the school which was lost because of the weak performance of the former SMC chair. After the victory mood was over, almost after fifteen days, he invited me for a short meeting. I was happy to have his invitation as I had some offerings to him. At our meeting as I was about to start the conversation about my experience, he overtook me and began his story of complaining about the former chairperson and the former head teacher.

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Contrary to my expectation he requested me to establish a relationship with some donor agencies to provide bags and uniforms to the students.

School Management Committee is a direct body to govern the everyday activities of schools as GoN 2016 in SSDP (2016/17 – 2022/23) says, “The Education Act gives SMCs major responsibilities for governing and managing schools... While SMCs need to focus more on school level planning... SMCs and PTAs are responsible for internal management and day-to-day functioning of schools” (p. 16). This body keeps the power to do many activities to improve the quality of education. As stated in points no. 5 and 11 under the rights and duties section of SMC in Education Act 2028 B.S. (8<sup>th</sup> Amendment) it has a duty to improve students’ achievement by improving the educational environment of the school. Now, relating it to the story of Kapil some questions arise: being the chairperson of SMC is a matter of rights or duties?, how much the members of SMC are aware of their duty in improving school’s educational quality to improve students’ achievement? What plan do the SMC members make to make teachers more dutiful?, what motivational plans do they make to make students labor more in education? And how do they perceive their duties in improving the quality of education? The vital query of this research is how the members of SMC understand their role in managing and leading the school

### **Literature Review**

This section links the stated case with the prevailing literature on theories of governance. Governance theory depicts various dimensions among which management and leadership aspects have been analyzed here. Later the theories of governance are linked with school governance.

### **Management Theory of Governance**

According to UNDP (1997) in Everatt (2019) “governance is the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority in the management of country’s affairs at all levels” (p. 22) which Abdullah and Valentine (2009) in case of corporate governance say “it can be defined as a set of process and structures for controlling and directing an organization” (p. 88). Governance is managing the affairs of the public interests where the selected (in some cases elected like SMC) body manages the affairs for the maximum output and outcome and that is why Pillay (2019) asserts “poor countries are poor because they have bad governance and countries that grow or are rich are those that have improved their governance” (p. 59). In the case of school governance, it is a national affair for it produces human resources for the development of the country and local affairs as well since it directly addresses the need of the locals. For “governance is a process, punctuated by many local ‘moments’” (Everatt, 2019, p. 20), the school governance process covers many local moments to address educational needs. Management is a part of governance where “governance sets the norms, strategic vision, and direction, and formulate high-level goals and policies and management run the organization in line with the broad goals and direction set by the governing body” (Pillay 2019, p. 67) which “is based on finding consensus” (Feiertag, 2022, p. 37). “One of the forms of good governance is obtaining a fair opinion with an exception” (Saputra, 2021, p. 328). In this regard, SMC governs and manages both the conduction of school activities. SMC, in the case of governance, networks with the government authorities, school head teacher and teachers, and with other local communities in the process of everyday activities conduction and

control. “Although networks are clearly an integral part of governance, the conflation of governance and networks creates an overly narrow definition of governance that excludes those forms of steering, control and coordination that are not provided by stable, horizontal networks” (Ansell & Torfing, 2016, p. 3). This definition also clears the tasks of SMC as governance and management both as Fatiha (2021) says “good governance can also support ... an effective management behavior” (p. 94).

Management theory covers the wide area where coordination and communication play vital role. As Bang (2003) in Chhotray and Stoker (2009) emphasizes “it is important to view governance as a ‘communicative relationship’” (p. 37) “the governance concept points to the creation of a structure or an order which cannot be extremely imposed but is the result of a multiplicity of governing and each other influencing actors” (Kooiman & VanVliet, 1993 in Stoker, 2018, p. 15). “At its most basic level, governance covers ‘the management of the course of events in a social system’, whether such systems are conceived in organizational, sectoral or broader terms” (Burris et al.2005 in Edwards et al. 2011, p. 11).

### **Leadership Theory of Governance**

Chhotray and Stoker (2009) say “governance seeks to understand the way we construct collective decision-making” (p. 2) where “good governance has many attributes. It is participatory, transparent and accountable” (UNDP, 1997 in Everatt, 2019, p. 22) and “governance is ultimately concerned with creating the conditions for ordered rule and collective action” (Stoker, 2018, p. 15). The leadership attributes like decision making (collective), making it participatory, transparent and accountable for collective action lie in governance which “is about the rules of collective decision-making” (Geeraert, 2022, p. 23).

SMC is the governing body of school which makes (has to make) collective decision making sure the maximum involvement of the concerned population for “we cannot talk meaningfully about democratic governance and accountability if citizens cannot take an active part in policy making and be confident that their active citizenry will shape public policy” (Pillay, 2019, p. 16). Leading the concerned actors in the process of school governance for the meaningful decisions give possible outcomes since “the use of the term ‘governance’ helps to capture these additional aspects of government and governing, where a multitude of actors interact in both formal and informal ways” (Howlett et al., 2021, p. 204). In the process of collective decision making “the role of [the] non-governmental agencies in delivering public services and programs is an important part of the focus provided by the governance perspective” (Chhotray and Stoker, 2009, p. 20) and School Management Committee is a non-governmental agency to deliver the educational services.

Decision making is a difficult task School Management Committee does amid the plurality of actors in the process of school governance. SMC manages this since “governance is concerned with how societies, governments, and organizations are managed and led” (Edwards et al., 2012, p. 9) as “it is a political activity; it is about coordination and decision making in the context of a plurality of views and interests” (Chhotray & Stoker, 2009, p. 6). The decision making for SMC is a hard job since “in governance relationship no one organization can easily command, although no organization may dominate a particular process of exchange” (Stoker, 2018, p.

19). SMC demonstrates good leadership quality in this process for “internal governance work of monitoring and coaching is closely linked with the executive leadership and involves knowledge of the mission, management and financial structure of an organization” (Reid & Turbine, 2013, p. 167).

Transparency and accountability are the two leadership attributes focused on the definition of governance as “good governance theory include accountability, control, responsiveness, transparency, public participation, economy, efficiency, etc.” (Ekundayo, 2017, p. 154) and “the governance approach which has serious reform proposals in public administration, has very critical principles such as transparency, accountability, rule of law and participation” (Karatas, 2020, p. 2663). The development agencies like World Bank, UNDP, UNESCO, and WHO have not excluded transparency and accountability in their governance definitions.

### **School Governance**

The term ‘school governance’ ensures that the school system is not driven only by the government. More actors need to be involved in the formation of the school system. In order to make innovative work, teachers and school leaders must take innovative ideas to SMC and PTA, and they must transform them into actions. Students should understand innovation and improve their actions.

Educational goals are better achieved when the governing bodies and systems work properly. Ozar and O’Neill (2013) state “success of the [school] mission depends on the key components of governance, which provide direction or authority, and leadership, which assure effective operations” (p. 17). The main responsibility of governing body is to manage schools as Wahlquist in Singleton (2013) says that “the school boards have the primary responsibility of ‘maintaining’ the school” (p. 25). Maintaining and managing means the better achievement of students. School board (a key institution of school governance), according to Dervarics and O’Brien (2011), “commits to a vision of high expectations for students’ achievement, students’ ability to learn, focus on policy formulation for students’ achievement, take part in team development and training”. Governing bodies like “school boards are responsible for student achievement and well-being, safe and inclusive school climates, assuring effective stewardship of board’s resources and delivering effective and appropriate education programs for their students” (OPSBA, 2018, p. 21). “Governance is central to the achievement of full compliance with all the standards and, in turn, facilitates and sustains the successful school” (Ozar & O’Neill, 2013, p. 17). This literature says that school governance finally focuses on the better achievement of students. Better management of the school is the process to achieve it.

The governance concept in education emerged as the consequence of the decentralization process and public private partnership. School governance structures, according to Mncube (2009), “create an opportunity for all stakeholders (including community representatives) to develop a sense of ownership of the school and thus take responsibility for what is happening at the school” (p. 85). As public property education needs to be observed through the perspectives of its stakeholders like students, parents, and the community where “different role players in school governance must work together in good faith with mutual trust” (Mansfield-Barry and Stwagi, 2019, p. 81). It is the process of enhancing democracy too. The term governance holds the quality of balancing the government’s one-way decision making process

with the meaningful and participatory involvement of the general public. Governance includes non-governmental institutions in decision making.

### Data Presentation and Analysis

This section presents the data and their analysis. The quantitative and qualitative data are analyzed simultaneously. The data are analyzed under two headings: management traits and leadership traits of SMC.

#### Management Trait of SMC

To analyze the management attributes of SMC the students were given a questionnaire. First, the management traits were drawn from the literature, and then five questions were designed to understand the management quality of SMC through students.

The result is presented in table 1. Simultaneously, an interview with the SMC chair was conducted with the interview questions being based on the same traits which are analyzed together.

Table 1. *Students' Response on Management Traits of SMC*

Questions	Yes %	No %	I don't know %
Do you know your school's vision and mission?	4.13	21.49	74.38
Have any government authorities visited your school within a year?	–	78.51	21.49
Have any members of the School Management Committee visited your classroom within a year?	9.09	66.11	24.79
Does your principal pass you/your parents message of the decision made by the School management Committee?	15.70	73.55	10.74
Does your school take you out to the society for the study of society?	85.12	6.61	8.26

The question 'Do you know your school's vision and mission?' was designed to know about the mission activities SMC has been doing. 4.13% of the students said 'yes', 21.19% said 'no' and 74.38% said 'I don't know'. A large number of students, 74.38%, do not know and 21.19% said 'no' about the mission activities means the SMC has not been active to make the stakeholders feel that the management of the school is active. However; during the interview the chair articulated the activities they are doing to achieve the five goals he stated. He said, "we motivate teachers and students to achieve better SEE results, when teachers work hard better results will be achieved which will support in increasing the number of students, we will manage ICT training for the teachers, we are hiring a trained librarian who will motivate students to read books, and we are having meetings with municipality office to demand projectors for classrooms". As in the first question, contrary to the quantitative result, the SMC has been going through the mission but the weak part is it has not been able to impart the message to all the stakeholders.

The next question, 'Have any members of the School Management Committee visited your classroom within a year?' was designed to understand the directional trait of SMC to head teachers, teachers, and students. 9.09% answered 'yes', 66.11% answered 'no' and 24.79% answered 'I don't know'. The students' responses clarify

that the directional activities of SMC have not flowed to the students' level. In the case of the directional activities with head teacher and teachers the SMC chair said, "I meet the head teacher almost every day. We talk more about how to develop the school. But I have not made more communication with the teachers. It is not about giving direction to the head teacher, we work collaboratively. So I suggest only. We together make plans and work. But we have not worked collaboratively with the teachers". The interview response of the chair clarified that their directional activity is following a top-down approach. They direct more to the head teacher than the teachers and students.

Regarding maintaining relations with government authorities the SMC chair accepted that they have good relations with the municipal office however, they have not been able to maintain relations beyond that. This interview question was formulated to understand the communicative relationship of SMC with the government offices and officials in the process of governance. For the same, the students were asked 'Have any government authorities visited your school within a year?' No one said 'yes' in this question, 78.51% said 'no' and 21.49% said 'I don't know'. This quantity clearly reflects the situation that SMC has not maintained relationships with government officials to make students feel as though the work is being done as the chairperson claimed.

The next question sought to explore the communication skill of SMC where the question: 'does your principal pass you/your parents message of the decision made by the School Management Committee?' was asked. Out of 121 students, 15.70% wrote 'yes', 73.55% wrote 'no' and 10.74% wrote 'I don't know'. Communication is very important to disseminate the organization's vision, mission, and goals. The decisions made by the SMC affect all the stakeholders of the school. So, the general assumption is everyone should know 'what is going on and what will happen in school'. The students' responses say that the communication part is weak which the SMC chair accepted as he said "this is our weakness. We have not thought about it yet. Generally, the messages to the students go through the teachers by some means, directly or indirectly. However, we have not thought of a formal channel to communicate about the decisions made in the SMC to all the stakeholders".

The final question wanted to understand the social link they are establishing as a part of the management qualities. The students were asked 'does your school take you out to the society for the study of society?' In response to this question, 85.12% of the students said 'yes', 6.61% said 'no' and 8.26% said 'I don't know'. This means the social relation trait of management is strong in the school which the SMC chair also added, "There are many successful people in our society. We are planning to call them to school and discuss how they can be involved in school. Likewise, our cultural knowledge also is very important and for this also we are planning to invite people and discuss it".

### **Leadership Trait of SMC**

The leadership traits of Governance first were drawn from the reviewed literature. Then the questions to the students were designed based on the same qualities. The result is presented in table 2. An interview with the SMC chair was conducted simultaneously and both of the data are analyzed together.

Table 2. *Students' Response on Leadership Trait of SMC*

Questions	Yes %	No %	I don't know %
Does your school involve your parents while making any decisions?	5.78	83.47	10.74
Do you/your parents know about the decisions made in school?	33.06	39.67	27.27
Does your School Management Committee accept its weakness when your result is weak?	—	19.01	80.99
Do you think your head teacher and School Management Committee work focusing on the set goals?	65.29	14.88	19.83

Participatory approaches, transparency, accountability, and outcome focus are the leadership traits analyzed here. The first question was on the participatory approach. The theory of governance emphasizes the maximum participation of the plurality of actors in the decision making process so that maximum stakeholders take ownership of the decision made. The question for the students was 'Does your school involve your parents while making any decisions?' In response 5.78 % of them ticked 'yes', 83.47 % ticked 'no' and 27.27 % ticked 'I don't know'. A huge number of students said 'no' and 'I don't know' which means SMC is not following a participatory approach in the governance process of the school. The interview question for the SMC chair focused on the process of including stakeholders in the decision making process and he responded, "It depends on the nature of the issue. If the issue demands, we call all the stakeholders. But in many cases, we, SMC members, including the school principal discuss and decide. If we can decide some issue taking time, then only we call other stakeholders". The sense of the chairperson also reflected that they are following a less participatory approach in the process of governing the school.

The following question 'do you/your parents know about the decisions made in school?' would explore the transparency trait of leadership in the process of school governance. 36.06 % of the students answered 'yes' to this question. 39.67 % answered 'no' and 27.27 % answered 'I don't know'. The responses demonstrate that the SMC has a satisfactory level of transparency however, the sum of 'no' and 'I don't know' is more than 'yes' means they have to work a lot to be more transparent. In the interview, the SMC chair insisted that it is the stakeholders who should be proactive to know what is happening in school. He said, "when they (the stakeholders) ask we tell them. In some cases, we publish notices on school notice boards. But many people do not keep any concern". His voice was more toward the reciprocal relationship between the stakeholders and the decision makers. It is not only decision makers who have to try to be more transparent rather the stakeholders also hold the same responsibility to make the decision makers transparent. The more the stakeholders keep concerned and query the matters the more the decision makers become transparent.

The next leadership trait in this research is 'accountability'. The literature on governance talks more about accountability. They say the governing body should be accountable for the decision they make. To understand the accountability trait in leadership of the SMC chair was asked 'who do you blame in case of a wrong decision?'

He answered, “when we decide we should blame ourselves. It is because it is our decision. The good result and bad result both are ours. We should take ownership of it”. His answer reflected that he is ready to take accountability. On the other hand, the students answered the question ‘does your School Management Committee accept its weakness when your result is weak?’ No student answered ‘yes’ to this question. 19.01 % answered ‘no’ and 80.99 % answered ‘I don’t know’. Though there is no ‘yes’ response ‘no’ response also is the less and high number of responses is ‘I don’t know’. In this situation, the SMC feels accountable for any weakness of the organization but the stakeholders have not been able to sense it yet.

The final leadership trait of this research is ‘result orientation’. Scholars of governance literature have both views that ‘governance focuses more on the process than product’ and ‘governance for the result’. The SMC of Kanchanjunga Secondary School demonstrates more result oriented activities than process oriented as the SMC chair answered ‘outcome’ for the question ‘what do you think; SMC should focus more on process or outcome?’. He added, “we should be result oriented. If the result is good no one remembers about the labor done in the process. To get a better result process is also very important but result counts more than process”. Supporting his view 65.29 % of the students responded ‘yes’ to the question ‘Do you think your head teacher and School Management Committee work focusing on the set goals?’ 14.88 % answered ‘no’ and 19.88 % ‘I don’t know’. ‘I don’t know’ response against this question holds the possibility to be in ‘yes’ also. That is why the SMC is more result oriented than process.

### Findings

The findings of this research were drawn under the traits of Management and Leadership that are discussed in the data presentation section. The overall finding is that SMC is having fewer qualities of management and leadership aspects of school governance.

The overall management traits are found less in SMC. They have informally set the vision and mission however; they lack the formal process since “the primary parameter (of management) includes the effective application of the implementation and formulation strategies which improve the performance of the government sector” (Kang, 2006 in AIDhaheeri, 2020, p. 1976). The informally set goals are not acknowledged by the stakeholders of the school. When the stakeholders do not know the goals they don’t take ownership of it. This makes it difficult to achieve the targeted goals. The management theory says the set goals for the organization should be disseminated to every stakeholder of the very organization because “if the organization does not display a clear goal, vision or mission, public/employee support and a comprehensive understanding, the implementation and the formulation strategies would be ineffective” (Poister et.al, 2010 in AIDhaheeri, 2020, p. 1976) which is found lacking in the SMC of the school.

The result reflected that the directional activity follows a top-down approach. The SMC members were not found to be present everywhere for the direction of minor to major activities. The management theory says that instructional management seeks the presence of high level management at every level for Glickman et al. (2000) in Mangali et al. (2019) insist “institutional management is considered an important



activity in the management and administration of educational institutions because it ensures the quality of educational organizations and draws together disconnected elements of instructions into whole-school actors” (p. 40) which makes the things clear to everyone. This event motivates the entire stakeholders to help maximum from their desks to achieve the goals.

Communication is one of the vital attributes of management since Enos (2007) in Oyeniran et al. (2020) says “communication is one of the most important dynamics in organizational performance” (p. 29) and that is found very less in the School Management Committee of the school. The communication level with the students, teachers, and parents is not sufficient. Until and unless the activities and goals of SMC are communicated to the stakeholders the development process of the school does not run smoothly.

Social involvement of the school is good since the students are also taken to society for the study and the SMC has also maintained relations with the community. Moreover, SMCs plan to identify the experts in different sectors and invite them to make plan on how they can be involved in the development of students and school helps in the development of the school. In case they are utilized to share their knowledge among the students, the school will be benefited.

Percentage wise, the leadership trait of the SMC is better than management. However; there still are many perceptions to be improved since the students, the major stakeholders of the school, are not in a position to feel better. Decision making is one of the vital qualities of leadership. SMC as a leading body of the school has not been able to make its students feel that the decisions are made on time. The right decision made at right time gives output. The participatory approach in decision making is found very less in the SMC. The decisions made are taken ownership only when the stakeholders have participated while making decision. Moreover, more involvement of the actors adds ideas for decision and their interest is also addressed for “networks in policy context typically link a range of actors who share common interests with regard to policy and exchange resources to pursue shared interests, acknowledging that cooperation is the best way to achieve common goals” (Booyesen, 2019, pp. 143-144). SMC at Kanchanjunga Secondary School is found less participatory in decision making.

Transparency in SMC is found better than other aspects of leadership. The students are positive that their parents know about the decisions made in school. However; 39.67 % of the students said ‘no’ in their answer means SMC has to be more concerned about it. Transparency is the prominent element of governance which almost all definers of governance (like the UN, WHO, the World Bank) incorporate in their definition of governance and (Karatas, 2020) says “the governance approach, which has serious reform proposals in administration, has very critical principals such as transparency, accountability, rule of law and participation” (p. 2663).

The knowledge of governance which “when is detached from power and accountability, globally and locally, it loses both purpose and meaning” (Everatt, 2019, p. 22) is found lacking in SMC from viewpoint of students. But in the case of SMC itself, it claims to be accountable. This shows that though the SMC feels accountable, however, the accountability has not been performed to the stakeholders of the school.

Regarding outcome focused aptitude of leadership in school governance, the SMC was found more goal focused than process focused. The theory of governance, however, focuses on both an input and output as Chhotray and Stoker (2009) say “alongside government developing new tools, governance has become about managing networks in both the input and output practices of governing networks of deliberation and delivery” (p. 17). The students found the SMC to be focused on the outcome. Likewise, the SMC chair also emphasized the outcome of the process.

### Conclusion

The study tried to explore the management and leadership traits of SMC at Kanchanjunga Secondary School. Percentage wise leadership traits were better than management. However, they need a big improvement in leadership and management traits both. From the management viewpoint of governance, they were expected to make their maximum presence in school activities, which actually was less. They lack effective communication too. Their overall planning, which was not documented, lacks sufficient programs to have an attachment to society. Likewise, from the viewpoint of leadership, they have to be more participatory while making decisions. Their transparency level is better than other traits. They have to rethink their accountability. The SMC knows that they should be result oriented but they need knowledge of the ‘how’ part of result orientation.

SMC, being the leading governing body of schools that involves itself in day-to-day activities requires sufficient knowledge of governance. The studied two traits of governance, leadership, and management, perception is not sufficient in the SMC of Kanchanjunga Secondary School. As in the story, Kapil was happy and enthusiastic to be the chair of SMC and he was willing to do for the development of the school as well but the lack of skill and knowledge may lead him to weak performance. So, “they must continually increase their knowledge on education sector ... and further, develop their skills on ethical leaders ... and strategic thinkers” (OPSBA, 2018, p. 56)

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