PRAISE FOR THE GOVERNANCE CORE 2.0

In this important book, Campbell, Fullan, and Kavanaugh have filled a cavernous gap in the educational leadership. The authors send the strong message that accountability is a two-way street. Providing explicit, practical, and applicable strategies, this book is a gift to the world of education and should be studied not only by board members, but also by legislators, city councilors, county commissions, and others who influence the funding and policies of schools.

—Douglas Reeves Author, Fearless Schools Boston, Massachusetts

The Governance Core 2.0 is a must-read with much needed examples and suggestions for improvement that address the challenges of heightened polarization across communities. Campbell, Fullan, and Kavanaugh are at the forefront of new developments in governance that help focus and strengthen how we run schools. This book provides hope for humanity.

—Sandy Sanchez Thorstenson Partner, Leadership Associates Glendora, California

The Governance Core 2.0 offers much needed learning for trustees and boards as we work together to build optimal conditions for student achievement. Campbell, Fullan, and Kavanaugh provide guidance for locally elected boards to strengthen relationships between school boards and superintendents while examining the critical balance between governance and operations.

—Carolyn Broady

President, BC School Trustees Association Vice-president, Canadian School Boards Association

This ground-breaking book calls on governing board members and superintendents to seize the moral and policy high ground, develop a governance mindset, and commit to a focus on continuous improvement. It is filled with real-world examples that illuminate important principles needed for effective governance.

—Vernon M. Billy

Executive Director, California School Boards Association West Sacramento, California

Like an oasis in the desert, *The Governance Core* 2.0 is lifesaving for school board trustees, especially those without prior experience as elected officials. Campbell, Fullan, and Kavanaugh provide a true north that is reassuring and inspiring, helping board members learn about effective governance and how to coalesce and flourish together.

—Julie Kelly

Vice President, Vista Unified School District Board of Education Vista, California

As a new superintendent I found this book to be incredibly valuable as our governance team navigated the creation of new district goals and a shared vision for our community.

-Matthew Harris

Superintendent, Petaluma City Schools Petaluma, California

The authors provide useful tools and techniques to improve local governance culture. One of my favorite themes is that the power of governance rests with the board itself working as a coherent team. It is an easy-to-read guide for new trustees and a useful reminder to seasoned board members and superintendents.

-William G. Ruff

Associate Director of Center for Bilingual and Multicultural Education Montana State University, Bozeman Governance matters. This book is a must-read for districts trying to make a difference for all students. Students are best served when board members, district leaders, and school staff work together for the betterment of every student. Campbell, Fullan, and Kavanaugh outline the key considerations that district leaders and board members should employ to support students' success.

—John Malloy

Superintendent, San Ramon Valley Unified School District Danville, California

The Governance Core 2.0

The Governance Core 2.0

School Boards, Superintendents, and Schools Working Together

Davis Campbell

Michael Fullan

Babs Kavanaugh





FOR INFORMATION:

A SAGE Company

Corwin

2455 Teller Road

Thousand Oaks, California 91320 (800) 233-9936

www.corwin.com

SAGE Publications Ltd.

1 Oliver's Yard

55 City Road

London EC1Y 1SP

United Kingdom

SAGE Publications India Pvt. Ltd.
Unit No 323-333, Third Floor, F-Block
International Trade Tower Nehru Place
New Delhi 110 019
India

SAGE Publications Asia-Pacific Pte. Ltd. 18 Cross Street #10-10/11/12 China Square Central Singapore 048423

Vice President and

Editorial Director: Monica Eckman

Content Development

Manager: Desirée A. Bartlett
Senior Editorial Assistant: Nyle De Leon

Project Editor: Amy Schroller
Copy Editor: Sarah J. Duffy
Typesetter: C&M Digitals (P) Ltd.
Cover Designer: Candace Harman
Marketing Manager: Melissa Duclos

Copyright © 2025 by Corwin Press, Inc.

All rights reserved. Except as permitted by U.S. copyright law, no part of this work may be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

When forms and sample documents appearing in this work are intended for reproduction, they will be marked as such. Reproduction of their use is authorized for educational use by educators, local school sites, and/or noncommercial or nonprofit entities that have purchased the book.

All third-party trademarks referenced or depicted herein are included solely for the purpose of illustration and are the property of their respective owners. Reference to these trademarks in no way indicates any relationship with, or endorsement by, the trademark owner.

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Campbell, Davis W., author. | Fullan, Michael,

author. | Kavanaugh, Babs, author.

Title: The governance core 2.0 : school boards, superintendents, and schools working together / Davis W. Campbell, Michael Fullan, Babs Kavanaugh.

Other titles: Governance core

Description: Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin, 2025. | Revised edition of: The governance core. 2019. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2024013454 | ISBN 9781071934340 (paperback) | ISBN 9781071954911 (epub) | ISBN 9781071954935 (epub) | ISBN 9781071954942 (pdf)

Subjects: LCSH: School board-superintendent relationships—United States. | School management and organization—United States. | Educational leadership—United States.

Classification: LCC LB2831 .C26 2025 | DDC 371.2/011 — dc23/eng/20240429

LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2024013454

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

24 25 26 27 28 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

DISCLAIMER: This book may direct you to access third-party content via Web links, QR codes, or other scannable technologies, which are provided for your reference by the author(s). Corwin makes no guarantee that such third-party content will be available for your use and encourages you to review the terms and conditions of such third-party content. Corwin takes no responsibility and assumes no liability for your use of any third-party content, nor does Corwin approve, sponsor, endorse, verify, or certify such third-party content.

Contents

Acknowledgments	XIII
About the Authors	xvii
Introduction: Politics, Governance, and	
System Improvement	1
Unity of Purpose: Driven by a Shared Moral Imperative	2
Updates in This Edition	5
Politics, Governance, and System Improvement	7
How This Book Is Structured	10
Governance Drivers	12
Concluding Comments	14
Moral Imperative and the Governance Core	15
The Nature of Governance	16
A Fundamental Choice	18
The Three Pillars of Effective Governance	23
Concluding Comments	28
PILLAR I. GOVERNANCE MINDSET	29
2. The Governance Mindset	31
Systems Thinking	37
Strategic Focus	42

Copyrighted Material www.corwin.com

	Deep Learning	48
	Managing Manner	55
	Concluding Comments	61
3.	The Governance Mindset in Action	63
	Importance of Board/Superintendent Strategic Relationships	63
	Key Elements of Successful Board/Superintendent Relationships	72
	Concluding Comments	78
4.	Onboarding: Welcoming New Trustees	79
	Strengthening the Governance Foundation	80
	The First 100 Days: What the Board	
	Should Do	81
	The First 100 Days: What New Trustees Should Do	0.4
		84
	Concluding Comments	90
PII	LLAR II. GOVERNANCE CULTURE:	
CC	DHERENCE AND SYNERGY	93
5.	Governing With Coherence and Synergy	95
	E Pluribus Unum	95
	Unified vs. Uniform	97
	Distractions and Challenges to Coherence	107
	Concluding Comments	122
6.	The Governance Responsibilities of the Board	123
	Strategic Direction	125
	Policy Direction and Approval	130
	Stewardship and Support	133
	Oversight and Accountability	135
	Community Leadership and Engagement	137
	Concluding Comments	138

PILLAR III. GOVERNANCE INFRASTRUCTURE	141	
7. Governance Infrastructure	143	
Governance Principles	144	
Governance Norms	147	
Governance Protocols to Facilitate Governance Leadership	151	
Concluding Comments	157	
8. Governance Tools	159	
Discussion/Conversation Meetings	161	
Board Planning Calendar	166	
Governance Handbooks	167	
Board Self-Evaluation	169	
Board Continuing Education	172	
Concluding Comments	173	
9. New Pathways	175	
Appendix I. Establishing Formal Structures		
and Processes	179	
Appendix II. Three Comparisons of Effective		
Governance Principles	181	
References	185	
Index		

Acknowledgments

From Davis: None of this would have been possible without the partnership developed over the past years with the gifted governance leaders, trainers, and facilitators in the California School Boards Association (CSBA). For me, four people stand out. Leslie DeMersseman, former president of CSBA, the incredible fighter for quality and a dedicated trainer; Sherry Loofbourow, also former president of CSBA, the calm, studious deep governance thinker; my coauthor Babs Kavanaugh, perhaps the best facilitator and governance/policy trainer I have worked with; and Dr. Emanuel Scrofani, my thought partner for years in developing the comprehensive governance system on which this book is based. The fingerprints of all four are all over this book. It is difficult to mention everyone who had an impact on this work, but special recognition needs to go to the late Maureen DiMarco, long-term school board trustee president of CSBA and the first secretary of education and child development in California, a friend and colleague and one of the best governance thinkers ever. Most importantly, I want to acknowledge and thank those dedicated, courageous, and committed school board trustees and superintendents who have led the way with effective governance in some of the most difficult times we have experienced. Their success is the source for so much that we know about effective governance.

Most profoundly, for the love, encouragement, and reassurance for fifty-two years, my late wife Jan. She was and continues to be my inspiration and support, without whom nothing I have done would have been possible.

From Michael: I have learned about governance from many fabulous superintendents and directors (as we call them in Ontario) over the years. In all cases, the most effective ones developed strong, bonded partnerships with their boards. Thanks to Bill Hogarth, John Malloy, Denise Andre, Laura Schwalm, Chris Steinhauser, and Sandy Thorstenson for the opportunities to learn from them—lessons upon lessons as they adapted to the challenges of evolving governance. My team, too numerous to mention here, has become a cadre of great "system leaders" around the world in the districts, municipalities, states, and provinces in which we work. I learn from them every day. My family—wife Wendy and sons Bailey and Conor—serve to some extent as my personal board. Thanks for avoiding micromanagement while ensuring that the fundamentals are always in order.

From Babs: Thank you! The opportunity to work on the second edition of this book—and to join this amazing team—is a true gift. I am deeply honored to collaborate with Michael Fullan and Davis Campbell. Thank you, Davis, for your commitment to the democratic process and for your intention to elevate the roles of school boards as community representatives. Thank you also to Michael, who has such a rich understanding of our systems and articulates so well the conditions needed to transform them.

Thank you to my life partner, Mike Witte, for his unwavering commitment to do what is right in serving our community and always imagining ways to surmount barriers to positive change.

Thank you to our four adult children and six grandchildren for always reminding me of the critical importance of public education and why it matters to the health and well-being of our communities.

And thank you to my talented graphic designer and partner, Joan Clark. Joan and I have worked together for over twenty years. I describe a vision, and she creates one on paper. How lucky for us to have Joan on our team.

PUBLISHER'S ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Debbie Arakaki, Implementation Coach Title I Coordinator, Kauluwela Elementary School Honolulu, Hawaii

William Richard Hall Jr., Director of Elementary Education Henrico County Public Schools (Retired) Henrico County, Virginia

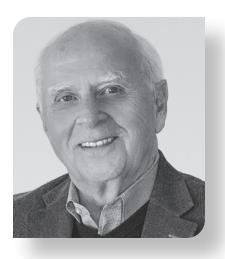
Jacie Maslyk, Educational Consultant Corapolis, Pennsylvania

Delia Racines, Administrator Rossier School of Education University of Southern California Los Angeles, California

John C. Robinson, Director of Human Resources Newton-Conover City Schools Newton, North Carolina

William G. Ruff, Professor and Associate Director Center for Bilingual and Multicultural Education Montana University Bozeman, Montana

About the Authors



Davis Campbell is the former Executive Director of the California School Boards Association and is Chair of the University of California Davis, School of Education Advisory Board and a Senior Fellow at the Center for Applied Policy in Education.

Campbell has a deep and broad background in public education. He served for twelve years

in the California Department of Education, serving six of those as Deputy State Superintendent of Public Instruction in charge of all education programs. In 1988 he was appointed Executive Director of the California School Boards Association, serving in that capacity until his retirement in 2001. He has also served as an elected trustee on the Yolo County Board of Education. In 2020, Campbell was awarded the 2020 University of California Davis Alumni Association Distinguished Achievement Award.

Campbell maintains an active consulting practice in effective governance in education as well as nonprofit agencies at both the state and international levels. In California, in addition to continuing education governance programs with school districts, Campbell has provided workshops for

nonprofit organizations as well as governance workshops and presentations with cities, counties, and special districts. Campbell's international work includes governance support for American and international schools in Madrid (fifteen years) and Barcelona, Spain; Lisbon, Portugal; Paris, France; Rome and Milan, Italy; Tunis, Tunisia; Cairo, Egypt; and British Columbia, Canada.



Michael Fullan, OC, is Professor Emeritus at OISE/University of Toronto, Co-Director of New Pedagogies for Deep Learning, and former Dean of OISE.

Fullan served as Premier Dalton McGuinty's Special Policy Adviser in Ontario from 2003 to 2013. He received the Order of Canada (OC) in December

2012 and holds five honorary doctorates from universities around the world. His "interim autobiography," *Surreal Change*, covers his work to 2018. Michael and his colleagues are now working diligently on field-based comprehensive system change in several countries. This work operates under the umbrella of what they call the "shared humanity paradigm"—equity, engagement, excellence—deep change that integrates local (school and community), middle (district/regional), and state (policy) entities.

Fullan's favorite method of learning is to partner with groups that are engaged with change and to learn together with them. (And then to write another book about the experiences and what was learned.)

Fullan's latest books are *Nuance* (2019), *Spirit Work and the Science of Collaboration* (with Mark Edwards, 2022), *The Principal* 2.0 (2023), and *The Drivers* (with Joanne Quinn, 2023). For more information on books, articles, videos, and podcasts please go to www.michaelfullan.ca.



Babs Kavanaugh has a diverse management background. She has over thirty years' experience in organizational development. Her professional background includes governance consultant and trainer, human resources director, marketing director, community health center executive director, and small business owner.

Babs began her consulting career in the U.S. health care system in 1992, focusing on community-based

primary health care services, as executive director of a rural community health center in Point Reyes, California.

In 1999 Babs expanded her focus into the education system, joining the staff of the California School Boards Association as a governance trainer. She has worked with over 350 school districts throughout California, training school district governance teams in effective governance and leadership skills. She assists them in improving their organizational effectiveness, keeping the district's efforts focused on all students' learning, achievement, and well-being.

One important aspect woven through Babs's work is the support of styles of communication and learning. Babs has a strong foundation as a trainer in conflict management, supporting organizations to strengthen their leadership skills and improve overall effectiveness. She works from the premise that mutual respect and trust are essential to the development of successful and cohesive teams. She believes that highly functional groups are systems unto themselves and that they flourish when the focus is on group relationships rather than on individuals. Her focus is on facilitating the flow of communication in which positive interactions become the norm rather than the exception.

Introduction

Politics, Governance, and System Improvement

"The most remarkable thing about our country is this: ordinary citizens control almost every major institution, public and private.... Does this make sense? What it makes is a democracy. We, the people, govern ourselves."

> Brickell and Paul (1988), Time for Curriculum

s Brickell and Paul's observation from 35 years ago as true today as it was in the 1980s? Perhaps it is less true because we did not secure the operational involvement of more and more people involved in the well-being and learning of all students and those who seek their betterment in an ever-complex society. It is not too late—indeed it is essential—for us to find new forms of learning and development that will match, and even leverage, the challenges we know.

What if more than merely extolling the democratic principles underlying it, we considered how local education governance could, in every district, become an exemplar of highly effective decision making, leadership, and action? Effective, as in major improvements in the capacity of local entities to bring about significant measurable improvements in the learning and lives of all students under their watch and care.

We believe that most trustees want to make a difference in the lives of students and to improve the district and the system as a whole. Strangely, they get little help in defining and fulfilling this role. Paul Richman, former executive director of California's Parent Teacher Association, drew a similar conclusion when he told us:

At a time when taking a coherent, system-wide approach to serving all kids and improving schools is more important than ever, effective governance is perhaps the least understood and most underutilized component for success and sustainability. School board members, superintendents, and their local communities especially need to understand and focus on effective governance. (personal communication, August 2018)

UNITY OF PURPOSE: DRIVEN BY A SHARED MORAL IMPERATIVE

Our vision is of a governance system—school board and superintendent—working together as a cohesive, unified team with a common vision driven by a shared moral imperative.

A common vision driven by a shared moral imperative. That is what this book is about. Our vision is of a governance system—school board and superintendent—working together as a cohesive, unified team with a common vision driven by a shared moral imperative. This is a dynamic, powerful role for school boards. It assumes that governance is a basic function of the organization, an integral part of the system, setting the direction of the district, ensuring the achievement of strategic goals and the moral imperative, holding the district accountable, and providing leadership to the community. Most importantly, it is a governance system that fulfills its responsibility to all the children and the community it serves.

In the first edition of *The Governance Core* we wrote:

The question of the improvement of local education governance comes at a critical time for society. There are signs that the world is facing formidable, seemingly impossible obstacles with respect to both physical and social climate. There is rapidly growing inequity between the rich and the poor in almost every country. Stress and anxiety among the young and old becoming more marked and affecting younger and younger children. Trust in societies is worsening. Schooling is also becoming less and less engaging for the majority of students as they go up the grade levels. Education cannot be expected to solve everything, but it is increasingly clear that it is the one social institution that has the potential to make a major difference for humanity in a troubled world. On the positive side we have new powerful education ideas that have the potential to deepen learning for all students, especially those that are most disconnected from life and schooling (see Fullan, Quinn, & McEachen, 2018). More than ever, we need effective core governance at the local level led by trustees and superintendents who not only work jointly with each other but form powerful partnerships with their schools and communities. (Campbell & Fullan, 2019, p. 2)

What we wrote in 2019 was true and still is true today. However, the COVID-19 pandemic happened. Unattended inequities and the failings of a public system that has been around for over 200 years were dramatically exposed. The pandemic did not cause fundamental difficulties—it exposed them. The education world changed dramatically. And that change has profoundly affected governance. It has created new, unprecedented challenges, many of which fall directly into the governance wheelhouse. Coming out of the pandemic portal, educators and parents faced a radically changed education landscape.

The physical school shutdown resulted in a pattern of regression in student learning and achievement across the country,

by as much as two years in some states. Many students suffered from mental and emotional stress, evidenced in classrooms as they readjusted to the learning environment. Teachers also suffered from stress as they confronted the changed educational environment in the classroom, feeling unprecedented pressure from political attacks that too frequently focused on classrooms and related to implementing district and state policies on masking and other safeguards. Add to this the fact that the specter of gun violence on school grounds causes almost all districts to conduct mandatory lockdowns on a regular basis. Teachers were also facing the external forces of book banning and challenges to curriculum as a result of culture wars focused on public education. It is not surprising, then, that teachers as well as principals and superintendents have been leaving public education in larger numbers than ever before. Many express concern that "they had not signed up for this." It's not that some versions of these challenges have been experienced by school districts over the past years; it's that everything has been happening all at once.

How these challenges are met will be determined by the effectiveness of the governance system in the district. This is what this book is about, that the governance core presented in this second edition will provide the framework and direction to address these challenges.

These events are major system challenges. As such they are clearly the responsibility of district governance: school board and superintendent. How these challenges are met will be determined by the effectiveness of the governance system in the district. This is what this book is about, that the governance core presented in this second edition will provide the framework and direction to address these challenges.

The US Department of Education issued a strong statement in 2023: "All students deserve learning environments that are

safe, inclusive, supportive, and fair. Schools can keep their school community—including students and school staff—safe while ensuring every student is included, supported, and treated fairly" (p. 3).

We wrote the first edition of this book because we believed there is an urgent need for better and markedly more effective schools districts. Trustees, superintendents, schools, and communities working together can generate this new social presence and power. Oddly, there was (and still is) very little written on district and school governance—a crucial oversight in our assessment.

We made the case that little attention has been paid to the study and improvement of school district governance. The education research and reform community have seriously neglected the potentially powerful role of governance in sustaining long-term improvement. People seem to think that "it is what it is." Too often given actions have become stereotypes whether justified or not: individual trustees are often cast as the bad guys, boards as a whole are seen as part of a bureaucracy that is removed or unable to act responsively, and superintendents are cast as victims of meddling and micromanagement. In this way superintendents are absolved of building genuine working relationships with their boards, and we end up with variations on we—they relationships, with the best case scenarios from superintendents being "my board is great; they leave me alone to do my job."

UPDATES IN THIS EDITION

In *The Governance Core* 2.0 we take a different tack with local school boards and their trustees and superintendents. We go to the core, the basic foundation of understanding local efficacy: the mindset of high-performing trustees and superintendents carrying out the critical function of governance, the cohesion and synergy of boards working together to overcome the challenges, and the structure that creates a foundation to support both.

The Governance Core 2.0 represents a significant update from our 2019 book.

- Here we focus specifically on both the challenges to governance post-COVID and the opportunities for significant positive change.
- We emphasize the critical, essential role that governance—the board and superintendent—plays in leading the school district through the challenging and difficult education landscape post-COVID while maintaining laser focus on achieving the moral imperative and creating pathways to high standards of achievement and well-being for all students.
- We take the basic foundation of *The Governance Core* published in 2019 and drill down to how specifically the governance system works to meet the challenges of 2024.
- We reorganize the basic elements of the 2019 book into three foundational pillars (governance mindset, coherence and synergy, and governance infrastructure) that are necessary for effective governance in these difficult times.
- We provide new and specific examples of how, within each pillar, an effective governance team works to provide strategic direction, stability, and focus.
- To this edition we added Suggestions for Implementation to better guide readers in applying the lessons in the book.

We believe that school boards are vastly underutilized at precisely the time when they are most needed. We hold another fundamental premise that we will position in the course of this book: the vast majority of school board members want to improve the public education system. But the irony is that the neglect of the critical role of governance by the broader education community has made ineffectiveness a self-fulfilling prophecy for all too many districts. Many school board associations have done a good job in providing training programs for trustees but their capacity and ability to reach all school boards in any given state is limited. Our approach is to get at the heart of how to maximize unifying

action of boards and superintendents together. Governance is needed that will benefit all students, all teachers, and in turn parents and the public. Our point: we are in danger of squandering this potential because we have almost totally neglected the vital function of school board governance within the larger system of education change.

POLITICS, GOVERNANCE, AND SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT

There is great danger that boards are becoming battlegrounds for the culture wars that have dominated so much of the national and state-level debate.

There is great danger that boards are becoming battlegrounds for the culture wars that have dominated so much of the national and state-level debate. Boards were created as non-partisan bodies for a reason. It has been a long-held view that public education is not the place to inject political party agendas and ideologies. However, new developments are seriously challenging this status quo. The erosion of the separation of political party and educational pedagogy is a new and powerful challenge to public education in the United States.

Forty-one states currently require nonpartisan local school board races, the product of historical efforts to separate education governance from divisive politics. Four states currently have partisan [tied to official political parties] school board races. Three more allow some form of partisanship. Bills proposed in six states this spring would require or allow local school board candidates to declare a party affiliation on the ballot. (Blad, 2023)

In addition, six states had bills in 2023 that would require or allow local school board candidates to declare a party affiliation (Ballotpedia, 2023).

Concepts of politics and governance are tricky because they have wide and varying definitions. Some definitions refer to politics as the art of governing; others refer to it as competing power struggles. Playing politics or office politics, or blatant attempts to get and keep power, conceives of politics as negative. Overall, we are going to define politics as holding and using power, which by itself does not mean that you can get things done just because you have power. Governance, on the other hand, concerns the day-to-day running of government. So, bear with us and think of "holding and using power" as politics, and "exercising authority on a daily basis" as governance. For the sake of clarity and to get to the solution—good politics and good governance—we need to contrast the two elements as they play out in real conditions.

Politics: Holding and using power

Governance: Exercising authority on a daily basis

Politics Without Good Governance

- Peaks before, during, and just after elections
- Caters to special interest groups
- Often superficial: bumper sticker style
- Can be sincere but weak on implementation
- Harmful when lacking good governance
- Limited lasting benefit

Politics With Good Governance

- Politics dominate during election
- Shifts to focus on governance after election
- Builds capacity relative to the core agenda

- Recognizes that government is for all the people
- Long-term as well as short-term perspectives

Our main goal in this book is to spell out what good governance consists of at the local district level so that well-intended politics can combine with the governance core to produce continuously improving education results. We have one other major point that takes us back to the quotes from Brickell and Paul as well as Richman at the beginning of this chapter. We need to update the meaning of "what makes for good democracy" in education. For us it means combining politics and good governance to achieve system improvement at both the local and state levels and in their interactive relationship. This is the essence of our book: good politics plus good governance wrapped in a system perspective is the future of public education. Moreover, participation in governance has expanded greatly—learning, well-being, and governance need to become interrelated, as we shall see in some of our best examples.

We are unabashedly forward about our solution: there needs to be a fundamental change in the culture and mindset of superintendents and board members in terms of how they see their roles and role relationships. Moreover, we predict that existing and future incumbents of these roles will embrace the new situations that we outline in this book once they experience and understand how they could operate differently in practice.

Within this new mindset we integrate Fullan and Quinn's parallel work in Coherence: The Right Drivers in Action for Schools, Districts, and Systems (2016) and The Drivers: Transforming Learning for Students, Schools, and Systems (2024). The coherence framework has become enormously popular among school districts seeking greater focus in their work. Yet the concept of coherence had barely found its way into governance discussions; two exceptions are the excellent work of the California School Boards Association and the Iowa School Boards Association, but even these examples did not go deeply into coherence in school board governance. New work on the "drivers" of system change has provided valuable new perspectives on governance.

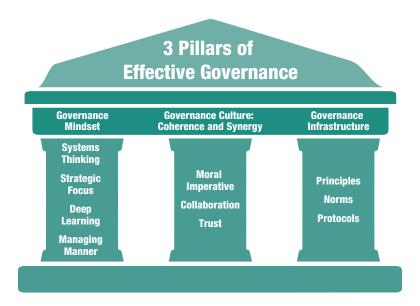
Taken together, the new developments focus on a new purpose for schooling—to help students develop global competencies (the 6 Cs: compassion/character, citizenship, collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking). It immerses students as partners in learning with teachers, other students, communities, businesses, and other agencies. It gives students a strong sense of belonging and enables them to develop as effective in society and for society. It equips them to cope with and become successful in an increasingly complex world.

All of this represents a system change, which gives school boards a deeper role. In this work the drivers of the system can no longer be just the state and its policy. This shift puts new responsibility at the local level to be a proactive partner, with the flow of energy more bottom and middle up. We express this as *build the bottom* (local school), *strengthen the middle* (school districts), and be active in *pushing policy* as well as responding to it. Our point is twofold: it represents a worldwide problem and set of solutions, and it places new proactive system responsibilities on local governance. Quality governance becomes a local, state, and worldwide phenomenon!

Several of the detailed cases we feature in this book are based on our work in California and beyond. Fullan and Quinn (2024) report on five case studies from Australia, Canada, the United States, Uruguay, and related work. The focus on governance is a worldwide phenomenon.

HOW THIS BOOK IS STRUCTURED

Like the first edition, this book is divided into three main parts. However, in *The Governance Core* 2.0, the parts are now envisioned and reorganized as pillars—each one a foundation upon which effective governance stands. The pillar metaphor works. It makes the point clearly that the structure (in this case, effective governance) cannot stand on one or two pillars; it takes all three working in conjunction to bear the weight.



Pillar I: Governance Mindset

The first pillar contains three chapters that form the foundation of what we call Mindsets for Efficacy, which that lay at the heart of the shift in culture we advocate: Chapter 2: The Governance Mindset, Chapter 3: The Governance Mindset in Action, and Chapter 4: Onboarding: Welcoming New Trustees.

Pillar II: Governance Culture

For the second pillar of effective governance, we take up the challenge of integrating coherence and governance in two chapters: Chapter 5: Governing With Coherence and Synergy and Chapter 6: The Governance Responsibilities of the Board.

Pillar III: Governance Infrastructure

For the third pillar upon which effective governance stands, we discuss the essential governance structure that provides the framework and guard rails for the board and superintendent to sustain effective governance. Together the two

chapters map out a new more powerful system that we call the Governance Core: Chapter 7: Governance Infrastructure and Chapter 8: Governance Tools.

GOVERNANCE DRIVERS

We have one more front-end organizer: Fullan's fundamental concepts of wrong and right policy drivers (Fullan, 2011a). A driver is a policy intended to make a positive difference in practice. A wrong driver is a policy that turns out not to make a difference, and in some cases actually backfires. Fullan identified four wrong drivers: punitive accountability, individualism, technology, and ad hoc policies. The corresponding right drivers are capacity building, collaboration, pedagogy, and systemness (when most people realize and act with the system in mind). We have since updated the drivers in our system work: well-being and learning, social and machine intelligence, equity-equality investments, and systemness (Fullan & Quinn, 2024).

Systems thinking represents a situation in which people are concerned with their own role expectations but also see themselves as part of a bigger picture. They realize that their responsibilities extend to contributing to the bigger entity and to learning from others. The end result is greater satisfaction for individuals and greater efficacy for the system itself.

Sorting out right and wrong drivers is at the heart of effective governance. Our solution is to frame the agenda around the right drivers for local governance. Systems thinking mainly involves the capacity to see one's role in the larger perspective of what other factors and relationships might be determining actions and outcomes. A key feature of systems thinking is that a small number of key factors interact with each other. Each factor itself is important, but the *interaction effects* make the difference. Such thinking is based on the orientation: how do I carry out my own role in a way that I contribute to and benefit from the larger system locally and beyond? The positive and negative drivers listed in Figure 0.1 provide context for this shift, which we will pursue in subsequent chapters.

FIGURE 0.1 Governance Drivers

NEGATIVE DRIVERS	POSITIVE DRIVERS
Focus on school boards	1. Focus on governance
2. Focus on board behavior	2. Focus on governance mindset
3. Board presentations (audience)	3. Engaging the board (owner)
4. Counting votes	4. Counting understanding
Tactical (operations)-driven agenda	5. Strategic (goals)-driven agenda
6. Damage control perspective	Proactive, forward-thinking culture
7. Care and feeding of the board	Supporting the governance functions of the board
8. Board-superintendent relations	8. Board-superintendent cohesion

The eight negative drivers narrow the agenda, present endemic frustrations, and unwittingly hamper the work and impact of local governance. A shift to the positive drivers represents a change in culture, mindset, and behavior. It represents, in other words, a system change. As such, it will not be easy. We devote much of this book to detailing what this change in mindset looks like and how to achieve more of it. Once board members and superintendents see and experience what it entails, it will become more attractive. Once their constituents (teachers, students, parents) and their "bosses" (the electorate and policy makers, elected or otherwise) experience the success of the positive drivers, they will become more excited about and committed to their own roles. Put differently, it is in the best interest of school board members and superintendents to become more effective in improving the lot and learning of all those whom they are expected to lead. We know that quality change stands or falls at the local level. If we want systems to change, as we surely do, we better enlist the power of local governance with its schools and communities.

We examine the role of school boards by turning to their most important and basic function, governance, while showing how the concepts of governance mindset and coherence increase the

clarity, status, and efficacy of the roles of trustees and superintendents. Governance mindset refers to the shared attitudes and beliefs that school boards and superintendents must develop and possess related to the action and manner of governing.

Concluding Comments

▶ We trust that the reader is sensing where we are heading. In order to gain a shared understanding, local communities must engage in the give-and-take of ideas. In short, they must interact with purpose. More specifically, two fundamental characteristics are at stake for effective governing. The first is that school board members and superintendents must continually develop a governance mindset individually and together to become a unifying force for fulfilling the moral imperative of raising the bar and closing the gap for all students. The second characteristic concerns the content of the governance mindset that, as we will see in subsequent chapters, consists of the moral imperative, systems thinking, strategic focus, deep learning, and manner. In this way, they learn together to appreciate the big picture and the details that make it effective or not. In the end, those with a governance mindset accomplish more—much more—for their local community and the larger system they serve.

Districts also need to develop a governance handbook to guide their actions (we provide guidance and examples in Chapter 8). The overall message is that, to be effective, you need to meld individual and collective action. The issues are complex, and the action to resolve them through effective governance is doable and essential at this stage of our evolution. Read, discuss, and use the ideas in this book. They are of the utmost importance.

CHAPTER 1

Moral Imperative and the Governance Core

onpartisan governance of local school districts by citizen boards is a basic tenet of American democracy. Given the increasing presence of conflict and the corresponding stress and tension in the public school system around the country, there has never been a time when highly effective governance is more needed. The delegation of responsibility for education to the state and subsequently to the local school districts as agents of the state places local school boards as critical linchpins in the system. How well boards carry out their governance responsibilities in many ways determines the quality of the education for the students they serve.

How well boards carry out their governance responsibilities in many ways determines the quality of the education for the students they serve.

While effective local governance was the original intent in establishing school boards, the system of local governance has evolved without much research and development of what might be the most effective forms of school boards and superintendents working together to maximize individual student learning. We maintain that the study and development of ever better forms of effective local governance has been education's neglected child.

Democratic systems have changed dramatically over the past 200 years, all the more so in the past twenty years as expectations have risen, only to be increasingly thwarted. The digital world has dramatically increased access to information while presenting greater confusion about what might be true or not. The role of education itself has become incredibly complex: tackling growing inequity with many factors outside the control of school boards is ever more daunting, students are more diverse and different in so many ways, jobs and the economy are almost completely unpredictable, the world itself feels more mysterious and dangerous, and anxiety and stress are on the rise for young and old alike. Almost everyone feels that they should have a say in the matter. On top of all of this, in 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic erupted, and the world—including education—changed.

Intuitively, it seems that quality education for all would be one of the very few positive pathways forward. All of this and more make the matter of governance remarkably complicated. Yet we venture to say that very few people, even those in decision-making positions, stop to think about what is governance anyway? In short, governance is crucial and neglected—so let's start with this elusive concept.

THE NATURE OF GOVERNANCE

We have already made the point that there is a big difference between politics and governance. Of course, there is always politics, but at certain times—such as before, during, and just after elections—blatant politics is more pronounced. At those times politics can lose perspective as it becomes preoccupied

with single hot-button issues that are inevitably superficial or otherwise incomplete. Most effective solutions must consider diverse views and get beneath surface issues to take up the combination of factors essential for solving problems. In this sense we can see the governance core discussed in this book as a corrective factor for narrow agendas. We do recommend focus, but we also show across the chapters how the governance relationships between trustees and superintendents must develop mutual coherence—shared focus, if you like about new ideas more suitable to the problems and challenges of the day. Our advice, then, is yes, keep focused on your key priorities, but take into account diverse views relative to implementing such matters and be open to other priorities that might be held by others, or might arise from the environment. (But don't fall prey to "initiativitis," a continuous stream of ad hoc new priorities and programs.) Nobody said the job was easy!

As an organizational function, governance is often misunderstood and underappreciated. Defining governance isn't easy because it is a lot of different things. Governance derives from the Greek word kubernésis, "to steer a ship." Donald McAdams (2005, p. 9) adds, "Simply put, governance is steering; management is rowing." What is generally understood is the commonly held notion that school boards deal with policy and staff deal with administration. Unfortunately, it's not that simple. Governance is much more than just adopting policies. One of the unique aspects of local government in the United States is that, unlike federal and state government, the legislative, administrative, and judicial functions are centralized under one governing authority, the elected or appointed school board. This is an important point because this has a major impact on the role of governance in the school district. Because the school board appoints the chief executive (the superintendent), an oversight and stewardship responsibility is created for the board in addition to the setting direction and policy functions. While the notion that governing boards adopt policies is widely accepted, the responsibility of providing some level of school district oversight and support is not—at least not until something goes wrong.

Governance is the process whereby the direction of the organization is set, the structure is established, and accountability—both fiscal and programmatic is ensured.

Governance is the process whereby the direction of the organization is set, the structure is established, and accountability—both fiscal and programmatic—is ensured. Governance is the connection between communities and professionals, between policy and application, between strategy and tactics. Generally, governance is about defining the "what" of the organization and administration is focused on "how" policy gets implemented.

There are currently 13,194 school boards with roughly 82,423 trustees governing school districts throughout the United States. Most research on governance to date has focused solely on relatively narrow board roles; in contrast, our approach focuses on how boards govern. Under a broad and rarely defined concept of policy, the traditional definition of board responsibilities seems designed to inhibit or constrain the board's scope of leadership. But governance is not just passing policies; it is what boards and superintendents do together and how they do it.

Governance is not just passing policies; it is what boards and superintendents do together and how they do it.

A FUNDAMENTAL CHOICE

A major decision for trustees on any board is how as a group they choose to govern. This choice has a major impact on how the board navigates the difficult course it faces. Governance is one of the few functions in which participants have the option to choose how they will govern. No one forces a trustee or board to govern well or poorly. Do trustees work solely as individuals, or do they strive to form a cohesive force? The choice is entirely theirs. This is the critical fork in the road that all boards must face (see Figure 1.1). Their decision, in large part, determines whether the board will lead the school district or will be sitting on the sidelines or, worse, become a negative, incoherent force. Will the board own the direction it sets or the programs it adopts, or will the board members simply be observers? When board members function mostly as observers, it is difficult for the board to be a part of system-wide coherence making that is so fundamental to high-performing districts. As owners, on the other hand, the board can be a vital part of that coherence. The board should be the ultimate coherence maker. More importantly, the board can be the link that ensures long-term sustainability of successful programs that guarantee high-quality education for all students in the district.

FIGURE 1.1 A Fork in the Road

a collection of individuals, each with their own agenda

a board that will lead the school district as a cohesive, unified team



Do trustees work solely as individuals, or do they strive to form a cohesive force? The choice is entirely theirs.

There are those who argue that all trustees need to do is attend their board meetings and vote. There are also those who claim that boards should be totally independent of the agencies they govern and that their fiduciary and oversight responsibilities require them to maintain distance from the staff and the programs the agency administers. Or, as we argue in this book, will the board choose to coalesce into a unified team working together to create a common vision driven by a shared moral imperative? This is a dynamic, powerful role for the board. It assumes that governance is a basic function of the organization, an integral part of the system, setting the direction of the district, ensuring the achievement of strategic goals and the moral imperative, holding the district accountable, and providing leadership to the community.

Effective school board governance makes a huge difference in the long-term success of quality education programs. The board and superintendent together can be an essential force for equity, excellence, and achievement. Donald R. McAdams, former trustee and president of the Houston Independent School District, is an expert on urban education governance. In his book *What School Boards Can Do: Reform Governance for Urban Schools*, he writes:

Only boards, because of the democratic power they derive from the people, because of their close links with the people, and because of their stability, can provide the leadership required to redesign and sustain over decades school districts that provide equity and results for all children. That most have chosen not to do so is not an argument for stripping them of their power. Rather it is an argument for showing them how to exercise their power. (McAdams, 2005, p. 11)

What McAdams recognizes is that despite the difficulties and frequent controversies surrounding school board governance, shared local leadership is a fundamental function of every major public institution. But much more importantly, when board governance is effective, when it works well, it not only makes a significant contribution to the quality of education programs, but also creates a long-term sustainable commitment to quality and continuous improvement. Our experience and our research have generated a commonsense set of guidelines for trustees (as someone once said, sometimes common sense is not all that common).

Guidelines for Serving on the Board

- Reserve judgment. Trustees with a governance mindset understand that making assumptions or holding on to preconceived views of other trustees, particularly individuals with divergent philosophical and ideological points of view, can seriously undermine the ability to communicate.
- 2. Listen empathetically. Often the manner or behavior of a person (especially one who has not yet adopted a governance mindset) distracts others from the substance of what they are saying. Remember to step back and be analytical so you can cut through issues of manner and behavior to understand the core message being given. Even the most aggressive trustee representing a minority view or opinion has important wisdom or perspective to offer. Be open to learning what the person is communicating.
- 3. Stay focused on content, not behavior or style. Ignore rhetoric. Do not allow issue differences to become weapons in personal disputes on the board. Remain committed to deep learning and to understanding in depth the core issues of a moral imperative. It is okay to have many styles on a board, but there can be only one moral imperative.
- 4. Always be true to the norms of the board. It is during times of stress and difficulty that norms and protocols are most important. Treat every trustee with respect, and demonstrate the core values of the board.
- 5. Do not take differences personally. Stay grounded as a systems thinker with a strategic focus. Remember, the only behavior a person can control is their own. Admittedly, this can be challenging at times—we are all human—but the governance mindset requires it.

(Continued)

(Continued)

6. If all else fails after many attempts to accommodate the views or behaviors of a given trustee, it is important for the board to move forward in fulfilling its governance responsibilities. Irreconcilable differences or behaviors that repeatedly violate the agreed-upon norms cannot be allowed to keep the board majority from doing its job. Nor can the board allow itself to become consumed by the situation at the expense of carrying out its critical responsibilities. If the board has been fair in trying to resolve the differences over time, the difficult board member will receive little support from peers. In most cases, however, issues will be resolved by following Steps 1 through 5.

Effective governance is not easy. It's complicated. But one thing is true: with a combined 100 years of working with governance and school boards, we have never seen a divided, dysfunctional board be successful in carrying out its leadership duties. Let us be clear and straight to the point: we believe that no school district can function effectively with a divided governing board characterized by instability in decision making, lack of focus, unresolved ideological differences, and treating the board as a battleground with winners and losers. A board must find unity of purpose around shared strategic goals and a moral imperative in order to be successful in carrying out its profoundly important responsibilities.

We believe that no school district can function effectively with a divided governing board characterized by instability in decision making, lack of focus, unresolved ideological differences, and treating the board as a battleground with winners and losers.

THE THREE PILLARS OF EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

This book is a road map to high-quality, effective governance for school district trustees and superintendents. It is based on three major foundational pillars upon which effective governance rests:

- 1. **Governance Mindset:** Highly effective trustees and superintendents must have a governance mindset to govern effectively.
- Governance Culture: Effective school boards are coherence makers and govern with a unity of purpose. A shared moral imperative must drive the work of the board, the superintendent, and the strategic direction of the district.
- 3. **Governance Infrastructure:** Effective school boards govern within a stable, consistent, and highly focused governance structure.

These three functional pillars are the foundation that makes effective governance possible. Lose one and the long-term sustainability of effective governance is seriously jeopardized. All three are necessary and in sequential order. Governing with a governance mindset, with coherence and synergy and within a sound, workable board-approved structure will ensure high-quality governance.

Governance Mindset

The single most powerful governance force is the governance mindset displayed by the most successful, high-performing board trustees and superintendents. It requires an understanding of the dynamics of a complicated, organizationally diverse organization like a school district. It is virtually impossible to effectively govern complex organizations such as school districts without the key policy makers and chief executive officers operating with a common mindset. Governance mindset

requires a fundamental understanding of all elements of the organization. Governance is about systems, not just units or programs.

The single most powerful governance force is the governance mindset displayed by the most successful, high-performing board trustees and superintendents.

Thus, governance is a strategic, not an administrative, function. At the outset, it is important for trustees to understand that governance as an organizational function is fundamentally different than administration and curriculum/instruction. While curriculum/instruction and administration are functions carried out by administrators and teachers, governance is a policy, strategic-based function carried out by elected trustees. This is a crucial point because of the potential role confusion for board members if they do not understand this fundamental difference. Governance is a well-defined organizational function that requires specific skills different from administration and curriculum/instruction. Board members are elected to govern, not to manage or teach. And to complicate matters even more, boards—not individual trustees—govern.

The concept of a professional mindset is not new. We know that professionals in curriculum/instruction have an instructional/pedagogical mindset. They would not be able to teach if they did not have the required knowledge and skills. To become an administrator, individuals go through extensive training and certification to develop an administrative mindset. Doesn't it make sense that an organizational function as important as governance should also require a specialized mindset? One that is geared to the roles and responsibilities unique to governance.

Governance Culture

What is the glue that holds a board together? Why do some boards consistently function at a high level, working together

toward achieving the strategic direction and goals set by the board? Boards, working closely with their superintendent, establish a stable, consistent, and focused governance environment. These boards and superintendents have found common ground, a shared moral imperative that underlies all their work. A moral purpose—a shared relentless commitment to the learning and well-being of all students, no exceptions—drives the work of the board and its members' individual and collective action.

The moral purpose is geared to authentic, concrete educational goals for students. It is not so much a philosophical belief as it is a commitment to shared purposeful action.

The moral purpose is geared to authentic, concrete educational goals for students. It is not so much a philosophical belief as it is a commitment to shared purposeful action. If there is not a clear moral imperative, if there is not a specific means of implementing it in practice, if there are not measurable outcomes that mark progress and attainment, and in the context of this book, if the board and the superintendent cannot articulate the state of play about the moral imperative as a system in action, then it does not exist in reality.

For many years, vision was seen to be the way forward. Vision statements are important, but over time vision has lost its cachet and become routine. Time and again we see yet another vision statement and set of lofty goals about putting students first. As it turns out, vision statements as statements of intent, or aspiration, without being grounded in intensity of action have a poor track record. Every district has a vision statement on paper, but too few of them get realized in practice. (As someone once observed, all vision statements look alike if they are only in a document or on flip chart paper). By contrast, our Governance Core model is based on the depth of moral imperative. The moral imperative is about all students learning. It consists of strategies to ensure that the learning occurs. It involves rapport between the trustees

and the superintendent. It consists of strong, focused relationships between the board and staff. It sorts out what is and is not working in specific terms. It zeroes in on indicators of progress. It combines excellence and equity. At its heart, the Governance Core is a force for raising the bar and closing the gap of learning for all students in the district—not just as an aspiration, but as a reality. Beliefs are not strategies. In short, the moral imperative embodies an emotional and empirical commitment that all students can and will learn.

When trustees, superintendent, staff, faculty, and parents all operate with the same broad understanding of the moral imperative, the district can accomplish amazing learning—year after year.

The moral imperative, deep focus, constructive monitoring, and corresponding action are an unstoppable combination. When this shared moral imperative is lacking, it is difficult to see how a long-term, stable governance system is possible, much less for one to perform in an effective manner.

The moral imperative, deep focus, constructive monitoring, and corresponding action are an unstoppable combination.

Governance Infrastructure

Is it enough to govern with a shared moral imperative, a governance mindset, and coherence? How will a board sustain these qualities during the stress and strain of meeting-to-meeting board sessions? The answer is to build a strong governance infrastructure built on a board–superintendent agreed-upon definition of board roles and responsibilities and to codify board governance principles, norms, and protocol agreements in writing.

The guidelines we recommend throughout this book should address most problems, but we acknowledge that now and then a situation arises where nothing seems to help. Our main recommendation is don't jump to this conclusion prematurely, or before exploring other avenues. Addressing this challenge requires patience and the ability to continually refocus the board's time on the work at hand, which is governing. There is no such a thing as a quick fix; rather, what's needed is an approach that seeks to strengthen the relationships and culture over time. From time to time there will be setbacks. The important thing is to learn from them—to return to basic principles and their underpinnings.

Let's return to the key theme and organizer of this book. One of the characteristics of school district governance is that in most cases it functions without an agreed-upon, well-established organizational structure. In many districts, governance is defined by what the board does when it meets, with little or any framework within which to work. Many school boards make up their modus operandi as they go. The basic functions are identified and understood (usually at a very general level), but there usually is limited definition of how best to carry out the full set of the board's responsibilities.

This book is based on the assumption that highly effective governance requires a well-defined governance infrastructure that provides definition, guidance, and direction. For a number of years, renowned Harvard professor Richard Elmore has focused on the importance of the instructional core in curriculum and instruction. The instructional core is about the relationship and interaction between student, teacher, and content. The governance core presented here is based on the same principle of interdependence and symbiotic relationships. Effective trustees and superintendents with governance mindsets, a shared moral imperative, and unity of purpose utilizing sound principles and practices are the keys to effective governance.

Highly effective governance requires a well-defined governance infrastructure that provides definition, guidance, and direction.

The Governance Core represents an integrated, systemic approach to effective governance. It is dynamic, grounded in transforming a moral imperative into measurable, high-quality outcomes. As applied to education, these outcomes will substantially improve the lives of the students the system serves. This system is based on a firm belief that successful organizations require a high level of coherence shared by boards of trustees, superintendents, staff, principals, teachers, and parents. All must share an understanding of the nature of the work of the system. Once a moral imperative is shared, all aspects of the organization can be harnessed to deliver outstanding results. Boards can govern strategically, becoming deep learning organizations unto themselves.

Concluding Comments

▶ In this book we take the position that trustees and superintendents must examine more comprehensively their core governance responsibilities. Their mindset should be: how do I become better at what I do as a trustee and what we do as a board? The ideas and guidelines in this book should be invaluable as a guide to greater individual and collective efficacy.

We do not think that this development will be an onerous task. Indeed, we predict that the yield will be considerable. Unresolved conflict takes a heavy toll. At the end of the day, by working out a strong governance system, trustees and superintendents will find their work together to be much more satisfying and impactful. In short, we will all benefit!

We make the assumption in this book that the large majority of trustees want to become more effective in their role. Notice we said "effective"—at getting important things done. Effective outcomes over time are the hallmark of a successful board.

Now to the first pillar: Governance Mindset.

3 Pillars of **Effective Governance Governance Governance Culture:** Governance Mindset **Coherence and Synergy** Infrastructure **Systems Thinking** Moral **Strategic Principles Imperative Focus** Norms **Collaboration** Deep **Protocols** Learning Managing Manner

Pillar I

Governance Mindset