

# Improvement of management performance in the School System

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**Abstract—** An increasing awareness of the importance of activating long-term positive relations between scholastic institutions, students, families, governmental authority and other structures of public Administration is crucial for a real autonomy in school management. Few resources, rapid changes of the characteristics that influence educational system, high demand for managerial skill and operational autonomy, impose the capability to optimize performance, transparency of behaviour and results. In this ambit, is critical an effectiveness accountability system as starting point for the improvement of the relations between the schools and their stakeholders. The study propose the sharing and the organization of the information to create a Network of Sustainability Reports as lever for an effectiveness stakeholders engagement. The approach proposed is to optimize performance management cycle of the scholastic institutions and the employment of public resource.

**Keywords -** School Governance, Sustainability Report, Transparency and Accountability, Network

## I. INTRODUCTION

The educational system efficacy has always been a central issue in the reform plans of all European Countries, but it is becoming more relevant according to objectives of smart, sustainable and inclusive development supported by the European Union.

At present, the investment in human capital represents a decisive factor for the sustainability and global and future Countries productivity.

In the new millennium assumed particular relevance: the school-territory relationship to promote high quality education in an inclusive and equal opportunities-oriented logic; the educational system reorganization according to autonomy, effectiveness and efficiency; the enhancement of the stakeholders' role.

In the ongoing changing process, autonomy is an essential condition which is connected to the introduction of appropriate governance structures headed by skillful and competent leaders with a high educational culture and, at the same time, remarkable managerial skills.

Actually, the acknowledgement of schools autonomy started to spread in European Countries since the last quarter of the last century and it significantly developed in the United Kingdom (Education Reform Act 1988), Finland, the Netherlands and in Sweden.

The educational system reorganization is connected to the growing need of the spending review which has led the political system to ask administrative boards for costs, use of resources and results evaluation reduction. The transformation of institutional structures of educational systems are based on the principles of vertical and horizontal subsidiarity and managerial autonomy.

In general, normative changes are directed to recognize more autonomy to schools, finding new important critical aspects:

- reduced dependency on the institutional protection ensured by central or local administrative systems (school autonomy in law, education and organization);
- Increasing the sense of responsibility about contents and methods (What are the school responsibilities? Which government bodies assume these responsibilities with respect to third parties? To whom, for what reasons and with which means school should interact with third parties?);
- Development of significant personal relations with relevant actors and management skills needed for an effective governance [1].

The implementation of the regulation still presents difficulties by individual schools because of evident lack of basic management skills. In particular, it is perceived the importance of developing educational process and evaluation systems aimed at the activation of learning process and constant quality improvement of the school system is indeed perceived, but skills and tools are not often available for its implementation.

## II. THE AIMS OF THE STUDY AND METHODOLOGY OF THE ANALYSIS

The school autonomy, introduced through reforms, enlarges the school responsibility area and makes the need of accountability significant.

The aim of this paper is to select the best accountability model that determines the connection between school autonomy and responsibility according to the following priority tasks:

- to fulfil stakeholders' need of knowing the public value created and provide transparency on the way school decisions are taken;
- to carry out the inter-institutional coordination on local development policies in favour of a governance oriented to active citizenship;
- to create the reputational conditions to justify a major economical stakeholders' participation;
- systemizing quality management and institute self-evaluation, acknowledging in accountability the conclusive step of management cycle of school performance.
- on a basic level, the network can be carried out to facilitate the sharing of professional best practices among teachers;
- on a more ambitious level of cooperation, the network can involve groups of teachers and schools which work together with the explicit purpose of improving teaching and organizational conditions;
- on a territorial and national level, the network can link different groups of stakeholders to implement policy specifications;
- network agreements, when multiple groups of networks, belonging or not to the educational sector, work together for systems improvement in terms of social justice, inclusiveness, sustainability.

In this context, characterized by the presence of three categories of main actors (government body, service end user and service supplier), the substantial pursuit of informative mutual and constructive exchange among social partners, at the base of managerial autonomy, starts from the analysis of models of relations management which are associated to the reference context. In this regard, we can observe that in business economics' literature there are several models well-known among which there are those that have had more success in the school system. In alternative to the "traditional bureaucratic model" there are the "Quasi-markets", "Distributed Governance" and "Network Governance" models with their relative accountability procedures [2, 3, 4].

We consider the Network Governance model relationship management as the method of development of the aims of this study. Network is intended as a non-hierarchic structure of interrelated elements, where information flows easily and rapidly. The network implies a huge cultural change at first and then an organizational one. It is a managerial approach which fosters the enhancement of human resources, considered crucial in organizations, the empowerment and the stakeholders' equity of treatment. This is a vision, more and more credited, that sees organizations not only in their structural dimensions as a set of financial and technological resources aimed at developing a mission but also as a set of immaterial resources. In schools, literature and common language, the term network is used to distinguish different situations. Networks are associations among schools but also partnerships that they stipulate with local public institutions. The network can be founded on temporary links, formed around a specific project and for a limited period or it can assume greater stability and be enlarged to different purposes acting on an indefinite period of time.

For this reason social experimentations are ever more frequent and they prefer mechanisms of governance aiming at creating "network agreements" between institutions and stakeholders [5].

Networks are based on the belief that public educational services work better if they are designed and implemented in collaboration with other subjects involved (citizens, companies, civil society organizations, etc.) in order to obtain their approval, energy, experience, culture and ambitions [6]. The networks where schools are involved can operate at different levels and with different aims [7]:

Co-planning and co-production of educational services transform the relations among their end users (students and families) and suppliers (first of all directors and teachers, but also people responsible for policy and other institutions who collaborated with schools), fostering the exchange of competences and experiences and facilitating "the spirit of an authentic partnership to work for common educational objectives" [8]. Some studies underlined the positive relation between students' learning outcomes and the school atmosphere characterized by interaction and collaboration among members [9, 10, 11, 12, 13].

Other studies underlined that school managerial approach implies a real integration with the local community to create a community of relation and learning [14], or a group of «people who share a common purpose and who collaborate to draw on individual strengths, respect a variety of perspectives, and actively promote learning opportunities. The outcomes are the creation of a vibrant, synergistic environment, enhanced potential for all members, and the possibility that new knowledge will be created» [15].

The learning community, as a type of network agreement, does not only facilitate the sharing of knowledge but it increases the potential creation of new learning methods which can be used for the benefit of the community as a whole and/or together with its members singularly [16]. This approach is at the basis of the operation of a *Participated Network* in which the mutual continuous exchange of information, experience, professionalism and performance represents the driving force of growth paths of the whole school system, personal development and rationalization in the use of public resources.

### III. SOLUTION TO IMPROVEMENT OF MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE IN THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

Accountability is the result of an interaction between **process and reporting tool** aiming at informing the stakeholders and managing the relations with the latter underlining with transparency their responsibilities. In particular, the effective fulfilment of stakeholders' expectations is linked to the school ability to manage, in an integrated way, its economic and socio-environmental responsibility.

Therefore, the reporting process, intended as method, requires the consideration of ethical values and principles at the

base of responsibility such as transparency, comparability, inclusiveness, accuracy, completeness, clarity, neutrality and effectiveness.

The adoption of an integrated concept of responsibility focused on effective relations with stakeholders, emphasizes the importance of school communication. Actually, the compulsory school assumes particular importance because it is a compulsory educational path for all citizens and its quality is essential for the education of future human capital.

The contribution given by the compulsory school in favour of a smart, sustainable, inclusive growth, leads to reflect on the incompleteness of an accountability model only focused on social dimension, given the close interrelationship between social function and ability of effective and efficient use of limited available financial resources [17, 18].

In this sense, the Sustainability Report (Fig. 1) represents the most effective instrument of accountability [19, 20] for school system as it can:

- combine schools autonomy and responsibility;
- increase the evaluation culture in schools, tracing the measurement cycle of school performance.

The report will bridge some gaps still exist in the management of the school, such as:

- deficits of transparency in the cycle Resources/Activities/Results of governments that do not allow citizens to evaluate their performance with respect to their base mission [21];
- deficits of measuring results, limited to accounting recording without evaluating destination and allocation
- of resources with respect to their actions and social effects [22].
- deficits of communication to organize and give importance to information flow;

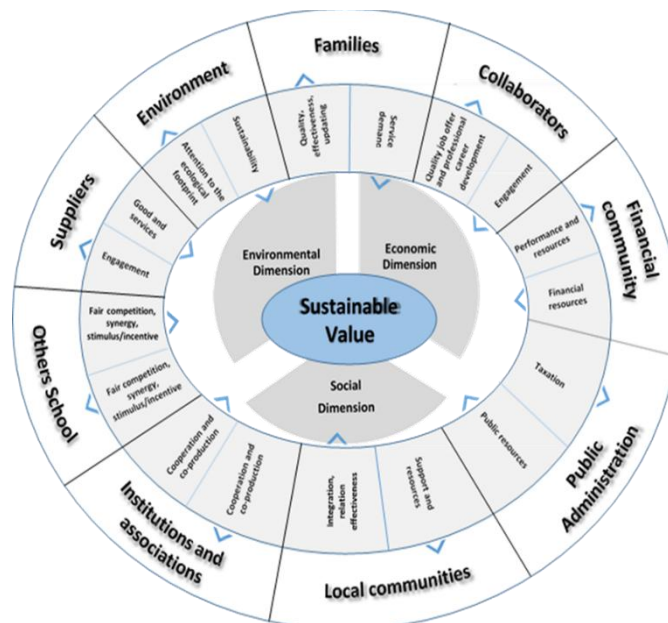


Figure 1. The Map of the stakeholders in the School System

- deficits of governance and connection between different government levels and different ownerships governing the delivery of services in a very difficult context;
- deficits of legitimacy and trust of citizens and companies towards public administrations.

In other words, the social reporting in school aims at:

- consolidating and strengthening tools and evaluation of autonomy;
- improving and mastering mechanisms of control and planning of resources and activities;
- enhancing social communication addressed to all stakeholders to favour the stakeholder engagement and inclusiveness.

With this regard, it is pointed out that the institutional communication of school system has been insufficient and inefficient concerning transparency and information completeness in schools [23].

The introduction of mechanisms of accountability, oriented to sustainability in schools [24, 25], if properly structured and correctly managed, leads to improvements in:

- strengthening the link between statements of mission and adopted strategies, supply design and allocation of economical resources;
- involvement of the social partners both during the phase of activities planning and the appreciation of the results;
- economic reporting directed to underline the “added diffused value” among the main reference stakeholders;

- legitimation of activities made by the school according to a multi-stakeholder vision.

A. *Sustainability Report and Network School Governance to improve Performance Management*

Educational system show a progressive sensibility increase for networks creation and reporting, both according to the need of improving the educational quality and the positive interaction with environment and according to the progressive attention of families and institutions towards the school system. In addition, schools are required to implement, in a relatively short time, the recent regulatory legislations which emphasize the school communication [26].

The growing importance of sustainability in corporate governance involves a greater attention to the principles and values of the dominant internal and external relations, innovation, internal processes of behavioral orientation and external communication. In particular, the enhancement of transparency requirements and the multidimensionality of responsibilities, the objectives and the relevant results recommend the adoption of a sustainable accountability system [27].

In particular, the relationship between expectations, performances and acclaim along the "triple bottom line", highlights the importance of preparation and disclosure of Sustainability Report. With this form of reporting the educational system can: on the one hand, put in evidence the responsible commitments undertaken by school with the goal of autonomy; on the other hand, provide a useful reference for the realization of the processes of evaluation and school self-evaluation, in line with the issues and objectives of the management cycle of public performance.

The divulgation of an effective sustainability report of the schools, to support a proactive stakeholder engagement, allows to value scholastic performance regarding to the impact of this one: on social scope (by explaining "social report" of the school), economics scope (by measuring added value created and distributed by school) and environmental scope (by analysing plants produced by school), by inspiring specific roles of each stakeholder involved in scholastic process (Fig.2).

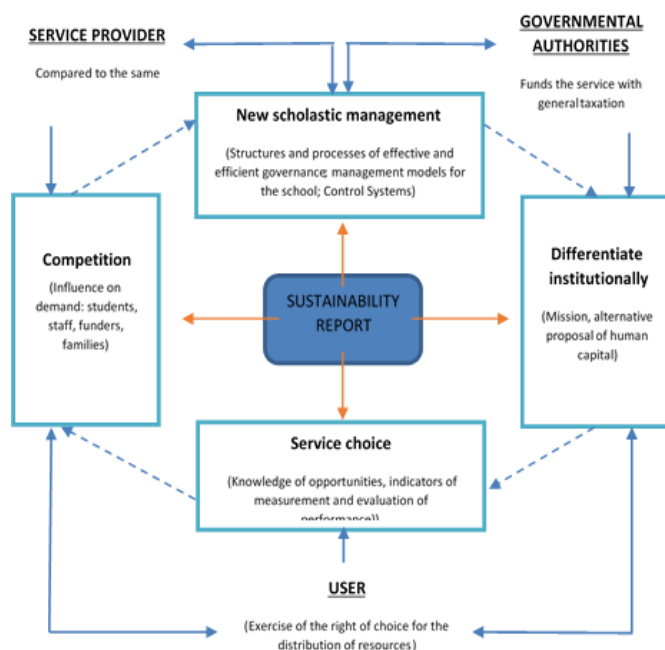


Figure 2. Sustainability Report in the Italian school system

IV. CONCLUSION

The study wants to highlight that thanks to the adoption of accountability models inspired to build a stakeholder network of mutual data exchange, inspired by main standard of sustainability, it's possible to positively feed an effective performance management finalized to highlight a clean and fair management of public funds.

In particular thanks to the possibility to compare sustainability reports of other institutions, the schools receive effective motivations for a clean competition that consequently has a positive influence on school's offer.

The continuous research of the higher levels of scholastic offer is motivated by comparison with other similar situations on the territory, to enlarge opportunities for end users (students and their families) of school's services and to spur on selection processes based on the right of choice supported by key performance indicators reported in sustainability reports.

The running the right of choice by the end users has a positive impact on the selected service providers' success, as it determine the main incentive in funds assigned by the governmental authority to the most deserving schools.

With regards to this, the school's service quality is evaluated against the performances that can produce implementing plans, projects and education courses planned and executed throughout scholastic year.

In fact only by adopting structures and processes of efficient and effective governance, by adopting models of management aiming to the optimization of school organization's performances and using valuable control system that supports management it is possible to hope for the

adoption of institutional and regulatory framework of school system reaching its goals.

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