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Relational Leadership and Stakeholder Co-Production for Quality Education: Advancing SDG 4 and SDG 17 in Catholic Secondary Schools in Eastern Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Investigates how school principals convert relational managerial capabilities into stakeholder co-production that advances Sustainable Development Goal 4 and Sustainable Development Goal 17 across three Catholic secondary schools in Eastern Indonesia. **Method:** A focused secondary thematic analysis was conducted on a qualitative multi-site case-study dataset generated through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentary analysis. Within-site and cross-site analyses examined communication, listening, motivation, recognition, delegation, stakeholder participation, and partnership mobilisation. **Results:** Six interdependent practices emerged: establishing relational safety, facilitating dialogic sensemaking, institutionalising participatory planning, delegating according to competence, integrating recognition with reciprocal accountability, and mobilising family-school-foundation-community partnerships. These practices strengthened teacher commitment, programme ownership, student support, access to additional resources, and community legitimacy. Context shaped enactment: the resource-constrained school depended more heavily on external networks, whereas the seminary school embedded participation within a shared formation mission. **Novelty:** The study proposes a relational co-production pathway in which trust and stakeholder participation operate as organisational infrastructure rather than supplementary programmes. The model explains how relational leadership connects school-level managerial practice with quality education (SDG 4) and sustainable partnerships (SDG 17) in faith-based and resource-differentiated settings.

INTRODUCTION

The global commitment to Sustainable Development Goal 4 frames quality education as an inclusive, equitable and lifelong social project rather than a narrow test-performance target. Yet schools do not achieve this ambition through instructional resources alone. They require organisational relationships that enable teachers, students, families, governing bodies and communities to coordinate knowledge, responsibility and support. This relational requirement also connects quality education to Sustainable Development Goal 17, because partnerships are often the means through which schools acquire legitimacy, additional resources and collective problem-solving capacity (United Nations, 2015).

Research on school leadership consistently shows that principals influence learning mainly through indirect organisational pathways. They establish direction, create working conditions, support professional learning and shape the climate in which teachers collaborate and students participate (Anand et al., 2023; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2020; Tan et al., 2022). This indirect-effects perspective has moved attention from the heroic individual leader toward the social and organisational conditions that make school improvement possible.

One of those conditions is relational trust. Trust develops when stakeholders experience competence, integrity, respect, personal regard and reliable communication. It lowers the interpersonal risk associated with admitting problems, accepting feedback, sharing responsibility and experimenting with new practices. Recent evidence associates socially and emotionally responsive principal leadership with teachers' organisational trust and job performance (Sezer & Uzun, 2023), while studies of principal leadership and school climate similarly emphasise supportive relationships and community (Sanchez et al., 2022). Emerging research further indicates that psychological safety and trust help translate leadership into teacher collaboration, organisational citizenship and commitment (Kavgacı, 2026; Savaş et al., 2026).

Relational leadership is therefore more than courtesy or interpersonal warmth. It is a form of organisational work through which leaders create shared interpretations, negotiate expectations, address conflict and establish credible norms of reciprocity. Freeman and Fields (2023) demonstrate that the relationship between leadership, trust, collective efficacy and teacher commitment depends on the organisational context. Sahlin (2022) likewise shows that teachers make sense of principals' leadership through their experiences of collaboration both within and beyond the school. These findings suggest that relational practice should be analysed as a mechanism, not merely as a leader trait.

The same argument applies to family and community engagement. Principals can create conditions that make families feel recognised, informed and able to contribute. Smith et al. (2021) found that collegial principal leadership was positively associated with family engagement across elementary and middle schools. Broader reviews and meta-analyses show that well-designed family-school partnerships can improve academic, behavioural and social-emotional outcomes (Garbacz et al., 2017; Sheridan et al., 2019). A recent study also reports a positive relationship between family-school-community collaboration and academic achievement, partly through students' learning processes and teacher feedback (Lv et al., 2025).

However, engagement is not automatically co-production. Schools may invite parents or committees to meetings while retaining all substantive decision authority. Co-production is stronger: stakeholders contribute information, judgement, labour, networks or material resources to the design and implementation of educational work. In leadership terms, co-production requires principals to listen, explain, delegate, recognise contributions and maintain accountability. It therefore intersects with distributed leadership and teacher agency. Research indicates that distributed leadership is associated with professional learning, commitment, innovativeness and agency when relational conditions such as trust, motivation and reflection are present (Bellibaş et al., 2024; Hilal et al., 2024; Ibrahim et al., 2026; Lin, 2022).

Important contextual questions nevertheless remain. Much of the empirical literature is drawn from large public systems or high-income settings. Leadership and partnership may operate differently in geographically peripheral schools, faith-based organisations and institutions with unequal facilities. In such settings, principals cannot assume that formal authority or state resources are sufficient. They must often mobilise social capital, negotiate with foundations and committees, and adapt organisational practices to local expectations. Context-sensitive leadership research cautions against treating effective practice as context-free (Brauckmann et al., 2023; Hallinger, 2018; Tan, 2024).

Faith-based schools add a normative dimension. Their stakeholders may judge quality not only through achievement, graduation and organisational efficiency but also through character, service, discipline, faith and community confidence. These values can strengthen solidarity, but they can also become rhetorical unless translated into

participatory routines and accountable practice. Relational leadership is one means through which a shared mission becomes socially credible: stakeholders are more likely to support demanding programmes when they perceive that their perspectives are heard and their contributions respected.

The present study draws on a multi-site qualitative investigation of three Catholic senior secondary schools administered by the Yayasan Persekolahan Umat Katolik Ngada (Yasukda) in East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia: Regina Pacis Catholic High School in Bajawa, St Thomas Aquinas Catholic High School in Mataloko and St John Berkhmans Seminary High School in Todabelu-Mataloko. The schools share foundation governance and broad Catholic values but differ in institutional history, educational mission, infrastructure and performance profile (Missa, 2023). This combination provides a useful comparative setting for examining how relational work operates under common values but differentiated organisational conditions.

This article is analytically distinct from a broader managerial-skills interpretation of the same dissertation dataset. It undertakes a focused secondary thematic analysis of the human-skill, stakeholder-participation and partnership evidence. Rather than asking how conceptual, human and technical skills integrate as a whole, the present analysis asks how relational practices convert formal leadership into collective educational capacity. This distinction is important both theoretically and ethically: the article reports a separate research question, coding frame, cross-site matrix and explanatory model while clearly disclosing the shared data source.

The study uses relational trust, distributed leadership and stakeholder co-production as sensitising concepts. Relational trust draws attention to respect, competence and personal regard; distributed leadership highlights the movement of responsibility across people and situations; co-production focuses on the joint creation of educational value by professional and non-professional stakeholders. Together, these concepts direct attention to the sequence through which relationships become organisational outcomes.

Accordingly, the study addresses three questions: (1) How do principals enact relational leadership through communication, listening, motivation, recognition and non-authoritarian interaction? (2) How do these practices enable teachers, committees, families, foundations and communities to participate in the planning and implementation of school improvement? and (3) What cross-site mechanism explains the contribution of relational leadership and stakeholder co-production to quality education?

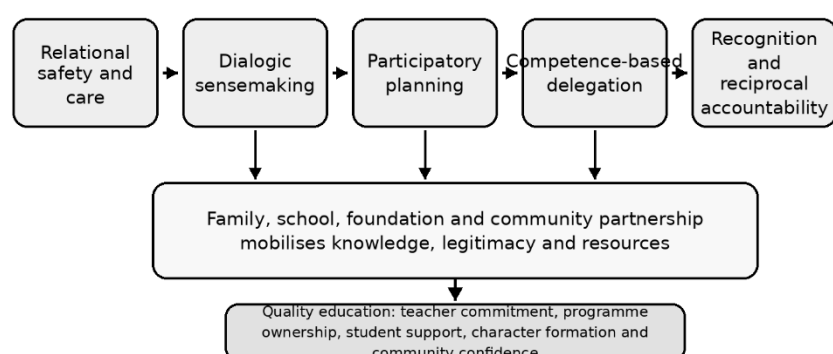


Figure 1. Relational co-production pathway linking school leadership to SDG 4 and SDG 17

RESEARCH METHOD

Research design

Research design and focused secondary analysis

The original investigation used a qualitative multi-site case-study design to understand principal managerial practices in their natural organisational settings. The design was appropriate because the research questions concerned how leadership was enacted, how participants interpreted it and why similar quality aspirations were pursued differently across sites. The present article does not introduce new participants or new field data. It reports a focused secondary thematic analysis of the relational evidence contained in the original interviews, observations, documents, within-site findings and cross-site matrices.

A focused secondary analysis was selected because the source dataset contained a substantial strand of evidence on communication, listening, motivation, recognition, delegation, committee involvement, community networking and partnership that could not be examined in full within a broad managerial-skills article. The new analysis remained within the scope of the original consented topic principal managerial practice and school quality while applying a more specific theoretical frame. No new claims were made about participants beyond what the source material supports.

Study setting and evidence base

The three cases were purposively selected Catholic senior secondary schools under one educational foundation in Ngada Regency, East Nusa Tenggara. Shared governance supported comparison, while differences in history, mission, facilities and programme profile created meaningful variation. Regina Pacis was characterised by strong community demand and broad academic and extracurricular programming. St Thomas Aquinas operated with more visible facility and funding constraints but maintained substantial arts, sports and student-development activity. St John Berkhmans Seminary combined the national secondary curriculum with a distinctive formation mission and a long institutional history.

Table 1. Cases and relational evidence emphasised in the focused analysis

Case	Context relevant to relational leadership	Relational evidence emphasised
Site 1: Regina Pacis Catholic High School, Bajawa	General Catholic secondary school with strong community demand and extensive programming.	Listening channels, committee consultation, recognition during school ceremonies, teacher welfare, additional tutoring and broad community relations.
Site 2: St Thomas Aquinas Catholic High School, Mataloko	General Catholic secondary school facing more visible resource and facility constraints.	Family-like climate, democratic interaction, teacher teams, student dialogue, community involvement and resource-sensitive partnerships.
Site 3: St John Berkhmans Seminary High School, Todabelu-Mataloko	Seminary secondary school with a distinctive formation mission and long institutional history.	Shared mission, collaborative planning, committee involvement, professional responsibility, recognition and external relationships.

Participants were selected purposively because of their direct knowledge of leadership and school improvement. The source dissertation identifies principals, vice-principals, teachers, school-committee representatives, students, and the foundation chair as the relevant participant categories. Because the dissertation does not report a single

consolidated participant total in its methods narrative, this secondary analysis reports participant roles rather than introducing an unsupported numerical sample size.

The evidence base comprised in-depth interviews, participant observation and documentary analysis. Interviews elicited concrete accounts of planning meetings, staff motivation, recognition, communication, conflict resolution, supervision, student support and relationships with families and committees. Observations were used to examine whether reported interaction patterns were visible in meetings and routine school activity. Documents including school plans, budgets, vision and mission statements, supervision records, organisational structures and programme records provided evidence of whether participation was translated into formal decisions.

Analytic procedure

The focused analysis proceeded in five stages. First, all source passages coded under human managerial skill were re-read together with adjacent evidence on planning, supervision and quality outcomes. Second, deductive codes were developed from relational trust, distributed leadership and co-production: respect and care, open communication, listening, psychological safety, shared interpretation, stakeholder voice, delegation, recognition, reciprocal accountability, networking and resource mobilisation. Third, inductive codes were added when recurring practices did not fit neatly within the initial frame, including family-like climate, public recognition during school ceremonies, mission-based responsibility and the use of dialogue to make formal plans understandable.

Fourth, a within-site relational profile was constructed for each school. The analysis asked who was involved, what the principal did, how stakeholders responded, what organisational resource was produced and what quality contribution was claimed or observed. Fifth, cross-site comparison identified common mechanisms and contextual variation. The final model was not inferred from frequency alone; it was constructed by tracing sequences across different evidence types for example, a principal's invitation to dialogue, stakeholder participation in a meeting, inclusion of proposals in a work plan and subsequent implementation through teacher or committee responsibility.

Data condensation, display and conclusion verification followed the interactive logic of Miles et al. (2014). Cross-case reasoning used replication logic and pattern matching (Yin, 2018). Negative and limiting evidence was retained. Relational practices were not assumed to eliminate structural constraints, and stakeholder participation was not treated as proof that all groups held equal influence.

Trustworthiness, researcher role and ethics

The researcher served as the primary instrument for field engagement and interpretation. Trustworthiness procedures reported in the source study included prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation across informants and methods, peer debriefing, attention to negative cases, member checking, dependability review, confirmability and thick description. The multi-site design strengthened credibility by testing whether an apparent mechanism was present across schools with different institutional conditions rather than relying on a single favourable case.

The focused secondary analysis introduced an additional reflexive risk: relationally positive statements could be overinterpreted as evidence of uniformly harmonious schools. To reduce this risk, the analysis distinguished reported intentions, observed routines and inferred mechanisms. It also retained contextual differences, including resource limitations and unequal reliance on external networks. Quotations were

translated from Indonesian and lightly edited for readability without changing their substantive meaning.

The source dissertation reports participant information procedures, voluntary participation, respectful interviewing, permission to record, and confidentiality safeguards. This article reproduces no participant names and uses only role-based codes and site identifiers. No new participant contact or data collection occurred. Formal ethics-approval details were not available in the source records reviewed; consequently, no approval number is reported. The corresponding author remains responsible for confirming that institutional requirements and the original consent permit publication of this focused secondary analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Cross-site analysis produced six interdependent relational practices. They were not linear stages in every interaction, but they formed a recurrent pathway: principals created relational safety; used dialogue to construct a shared account of problems; invited stakeholders into planning; delegated responsibility according to competence; combined recognition with reciprocal accountability; and mobilised family, foundation and community partnerships. The organisational products were trust, commitment, shared ownership, professional agency, additional support and public legitimacy.

Table 2. Cross-site relational leadership and co-production matrix

Relational practice	Cross-site evidence	Contextual variation	Contribution to quality education
Relational safety and care	Respectful communication, personal approach to teacher and student difficulties, authoritarian problem solving.	Site 2 stressed family-like democratic climate; non-connected care problem formation; Site 1 linked care with staff welfare and school welcome routines.	Psychological safety, reduced interpersonal risk and a climate conducive to teaching and learning.
Dialogic sensemaking	Meetings, listening, clarification of plans, discussion of problems and acceptance of suggestions.	Site 1 formalised committee listening channels; Sites 2 and 3 emphasised dialogue and shared discussion of plans.	Shared understanding of priorities, credible decisions and stronger stakeholder voice.
Participatory planning	Teachers, committees, parents and community representatives contributed to development meetings and programme design.	Participation was especially important where resources were constrained or mission alignment was central.	Programme ownership, contextual relevance and legitimacy.
Competence-based delegation	Teachers were assigned roles according to expertise; teams coordinated extracurricular, student support and instructional work.	Site 2 used teams for scouting, arts and sports; Site 3 linked student-responsibility to support and instructional formation and mission.	Teacher agency, distributed expertise and implementation capacity.

Relational practice	Cross-site evidence	Contextual variation	Contribution to quality education
Recognition and reciprocal accountability	Praise, rewards, public recognition, professional development and supportive evaluation.	Recognition occurred through Monday assemblies, school feedback and expectations.	Motivation, commitment and acceptance of performance
Partnership and resource mobilisation	Committees, families, foundation, education authorities and community figures supported programmes, facilities and additional learning.	The more resource-constrained case relied more visibly on external collaboration.	Additional resources, continuity, confidence and stronger school-community alignment.

Relational safety: Making openness and improvement socially possible

Across the three sites, relational leadership began with the principal's everyday accessibility. Participants described principals who greeted school members, asked about difficulties, listened to concerns and responded through dialogue rather than immediate sanction. This did not mean that discipline or hierarchy disappeared. Rather, authority was made more acceptable by being exercised through respect, explanation and personal regard. Teachers were more willing to discuss instructional or organisational problems when evaluation was not experienced as humiliation.

At Site 1, relational safety was associated with attention to teacher welfare, appreciation of achievement, welcoming routines at the school gate and an explicit channel for suggestions from teachers and committees. The principal framed the school as a community in which the quality of the environment, teachers and students was interconnected. Observational evidence supported the claim that communication was visible during development meetings and in routine interaction.

At Site 2, participants repeatedly used the language of family, democracy and example. The principal described the responsibility to provide direction, generate ideas and offer encouragement while maintaining a safe and comfortable environment. Teachers connected this communication to a clearer understanding of what they had to do. The relational climate was particularly significant because the school operated with more visible resource constraints: internal cooperation had to compensate for limited material capacity.

At Site 3, care was integrated with the seminary's formation mission. The principal's conversations with teachers and students were interpreted as both motivational and formative. Participants linked good social relationships to progress in student achievement, teacher performance and staff responsibility. The evidence suggests that relational safety was not a soft alternative to performance; it was the condition under which demanding expectations could be communicated without undermining commitment.

"I try to create a safe and pleasant working environment, communicate well with teachers, parents, the committee and the surrounding community, and give recognition to teachers and students who achieve. When people feel respected, they respond with enthusiasm and stronger performance."

Principal, Site 1 (translated from Indonesian; W1/KS, 28 July 2023)

Dialogic sensemaking: Converting information into shared priorities

Communication served a more complex function than transmitting instructions. Principals used meetings and informal conversations to help stakeholders interpret school problems, connect activities to the vision and negotiate feasible responses. Dialogue therefore produced shared sensemaking. Teachers and committees were not merely informed that a programme existed; they were invited to discuss why it mattered, how it should be implemented and what constraints needed to be addressed.

At Site 1, the committee reported that the principal was willing to discuss programmes, listen to community views and provide solutions. One committee proposal was the provision of additional tutoring outside regular school time. The principal's positive response illustrates how stakeholder knowledge could enter programme design. The pattern was not evidence that every suggestion was automatically accepted, but that proposals were treated as legitimate inputs rather than external interference.

At Site 2, dialogic sensemaking was closely tied to role clarity. Teachers described open explanation of task distribution and teaching schedules, followed by discussion of new ways to protect or improve school quality. The principal's work plans and budgets became socially meaningful because they were discussed in a collegial forum. At Site 3, the same process connected regular work plans and budgets to the school's mission. Dialogue helped teachers understand how individual responsibilities contributed to a larger institutional purpose.

Student voice was less systematically documented than adult stakeholder participation, but the source material includes principals asking students about learning difficulties and students providing input related to school purposes. This evidence should not be overstated as a fully institutionalised student-governance system. It nevertheless shows that relational leadership extended beyond adult professional relationships and included direct attention to students' experiences.

"We are invited to dialogue about how to build and maintain school quality. We discuss programmes, search for solutions and offer suggestions, and the principal responds constructively."

Teacher representative, Site 2
(translated from Indonesian; W2/GMP2, 9 August 2023)

Participatory planning and competence-based delegation

Participation became co-productive when stakeholder input was connected to formal planning and assigned responsibility. Across sites, teachers and committee members contributed to discussions of school development plans, annual programmes and budgets. Principals linked participation to concrete instruments such as the RKS, RKAS and annual work plan. This movement from conversation to documentation mattered because it created continuity beyond a single meeting and made responsibilities more visible.

Delegation was generally described as competence-based. Principals attempted to place teachers and staff in roles consistent with professional expertise, interest and experience. At Site 2, the formation of teams for scouting, arts and sports converted teacher talents into extracurricular opportunities and school achievement. At the other sites, teachers were similarly assigned coordination and student-support responsibilities. Delegation therefore distributed implementation work while retaining principal oversight.

The evidence also connects delegation with professional development. Principals encouraged teachers to join training, workshops, subject communities, study visits and

further education. These opportunities functioned both as recognition and capacity building. They communicated confidence in teachers while expanding the expertise available to the school. This is important because distributed responsibility without learning support can become simple task transfer; in these cases, the stronger pattern combined role allocation with motivation, guidance and access to development.

Participation was not symmetrical. Principals remained the formal decision-makers, and the source data do not demonstrate equal power among all stakeholders. The more defensible interpretation is guided participation: principals opened spaces for contribution, selected and integrated inputs, assigned roles and remained accountable for coherence. This form of co-production is compatible with formal leadership when authority is used to organise collaboration rather than monopolise all educational work.

Recognition and reciprocal accountability

Recognition was a recurring relational practice. Principals praised or rewarded teachers and students who achieved, often during Monday assemblies, school celebrations or other public moments. The form of recognition was sometimes modest verbal appreciation, certificates, symbolic gifts or opportunities for training but its organisational meaning was substantial. It made valued behaviour visible and linked individual effort to the collective identity of the school.

Recognition was paired with accountability rather than used as a substitute for it. Principals evaluated teacher performance, clarified expectations, monitored responsibilities and used supervision evidence to recommend improvement. The relational contribution was the manner in which accountability was enacted: non-authoritarian evaluation, private or personal approaches, explanation and support. Teachers could therefore interpret feedback as part of professional development rather than solely as control.

This combination created reciprocal accountability. The principal was expected to listen, provide direction, support development and recognise contributions; teachers and staff were expected to fulfil responsibilities, prepare instruction, assist students and participate in school programmes. Committees and families were invited to contribute ideas and support, while the school was expected to respond transparently. Reciprocity does not remove unequal authority, but it makes expectations mutual and therefore more legitimate.

Partnership as knowledge, legitimacy and resource mobilisation

External partnership was the point at which relational leadership expanded beyond the school workforce. Principals maintained relationships with school committees, parents, the Catholic foundation, education authorities, community figures and other partners. These relationships supplied three forms of value. First, they provided contextual knowledge about family expectations, student needs and local conditions. Second, they strengthened legitimacy by demonstrating that development plans were discussed with stakeholders. Third, they mobilised resources, including support for facilities, programmes, additional tutoring and professional learning.

The relative importance of these functions differed across sites. Site 1 had stronger demand and a broad programme profile, so partnerships supported expansion, additional learning and community confidence. At Site 2, partnership had a more compensatory role because internal facilities and funding were more constrained. Community collaboration and teacher teamwork helped sustain arts, sports and student development despite limitations. At Site 3, partnership was shaped by foundation

governance and the seminary's formation mission; shared values supported participation but also required the principal to align diverse contributions with a distinctive institutional purpose.

Partnership was therefore not simply a list of external contacts. Its quality depended on the relational practices already identified: respectful invitation, listening, transparent explanation, role clarity and responsiveness. A network without trust may produce episodic donations but little shared responsibility. Conversely, trust without organisational translation may produce goodwill but no sustained improvement. The cross-site evidence shows that productive partnership combined relationship building with plans, roles and accountability.

"I am proud that teachers, staff and committee members discuss development programmes together. Their responsibility becomes visible when the agreed annual plan and budget are implemented collectively."

Principal, Site 3 (translated from Indonesian; W3/KS3, 14 August 2023)

The relational co-production pathway

The central cross-site finding is a relational co-production pathway. Principals first created a minimum level of safety and personal regard. They then used dialogue to develop a shared interpretation of needs and priorities. Stakeholders entered participatory planning, after which responsibilities were distributed according to competence. Recognition reinforced valued contributions, while supportive evaluation sustained accountability. External relationships supplied knowledge, legitimacy and resources. The resulting outcomes teacher commitment, programme ownership, student support, character formation and community confidence fed back into future interaction and planning.

The sequence is recursive rather than strictly linear. For example, a committee partnership may precede formal planning, and recognition may occur throughout the year. Nevertheless, the pathway clarifies why individual relational behaviours matter organisationally. Listening contributes to quality only when it changes understanding or decisions; delegation contributes only when responsibility is supported and coordinated; partnership contributes only when external resources or knowledge are integrated into educational work.

Table 3. Relational co-production propositions generated from the cross-site analysis

Proposition	Mechanism	Expected organisational contribution
P1. Relational safety precedes productive voice.	Respect, care and non-humiliating interaction reduce the risk of reporting problems or offering dissenting suggestions.	More credible information, earlier problem identification and openness to feedback.
P2. Dialogue converts diverse perspectives into shared priorities.	Principals connect stakeholder experience with vision, plans and feasible decisions.	Strategic understanding and stakeholder legitimacy.
P3. Participation becomes co-production when connected to plans and roles.	Suggestions are translated into work plans, budgets, teams and assigned responsibilities.	Programme ownership and implementation capacity.

Proposition	Mechanism	Expected organisational contribution
P4. Recognition sustains accountability when expectations are reciprocal.	Leaders value contributions while stakeholders accept responsibility, monitoring and improvement.	Commitment, persistence and professional learning.
P5. Partnership is most productive when relational and technical systems interact.	Networks provide knowledge and resources that are integrated through planning, delegation and reporting.	Resource mobilisation, continuity and community confidence.

Discussion

Relational trust as productive organisational infrastructure

The findings reinforce the argument that trust is not merely an affective outcome of good leadership. It is productive infrastructure. By lowering interpersonal risk, relational safety allowed teachers and stakeholders to share information, accept feedback and participate in collective work. This interpretation is consistent with evidence linking principals' social-emotional leadership to organisational trust and teacher performance (Sezer & Uzun, 2023), and with research showing that psychological safety mediates leadership effects on teacher collaboration (Savaş et al., 2026).

The qualitative evidence adds process detail to those associations. Trust was built through repeated micro-practices: greeting people, asking about difficulties, explaining decisions, listening before responding, recognising effort and addressing problems without unnecessary public embarrassment. These practices accumulated into expectations about how the principal would behave. Organisational trust therefore emerged not from one inspirational speech but from consistency between relational claims and everyday action.

The results also explain why trust and accountability should not be treated as opposites. Participants valued principals who listened and provided recognition, but they also described clear tasks, schedules, performance expectations and evaluation. Relational leadership made accountability more developmental and legitimate. This complements Kavgacı's (2026) emphasis on trust as a relational condition shaping the effects of distributed leadership and organisational citizenship.

From stakeholder participation to co-production

The concept of co-production sharpens the interpretation of committee and community involvement. Participation can remain symbolic when stakeholders attend meetings but have no influence on decisions or implementation. The Yasukda cases contained stronger examples: committee suggestions entered programme discussions; teachers formed teams and coordinated activities; families and community representatives supported additional learning or development priorities; and plans were documented in formal work and budget instruments.

This finding aligns with research showing that collegial principal leadership can strengthen family engagement (Smith et al., 2021) and that parent-organisation leadership matters for durable school partnerships (Povey et al., 2016). It also supports the broader proposition that family-school-community collaboration contributes to student development when it improves the quality of interaction and feedback rather than functioning as occasional ceremonial involvement (Lv et al., 2025).

At the same time, the study avoids romanticising participation. Principals retained agenda-setting and decision authority, and not all stakeholder groups were equally

represented. Co-production in these schools was guided and bounded by formal leadership, foundation governance, curriculum requirements and institutional mission. The practical challenge is therefore not to remove leadership authority but to use it transparently to organise meaningful contribution.

Distributed responsibility, teacher agency and professional learning

Competence-based delegation connected relational leadership to distributed leadership. The principals did not simply assign more work; they identified teacher strengths, formed teams, provided encouragement and linked roles to school priorities. This supports recent evidence that distributed leadership is associated with teacher commitment, agency and innovativeness, especially when trust, reflection and well-being support participation (Bellibaş et al., 2024; Hilal et al., 2024; Ibrahim et al., 2026; Lin, 2022).

Professional learning was a critical bridge. Teachers were encouraged to join workshops, subject communities, further education and study visits. Such opportunities expanded the competence required for delegated responsibility. Pan and Chen (2021) and Huang et al. (2023) similarly show that principal leadership influences teacher learning partly through participation, teacher leadership and collaborative processes. The present findings suggest that recognition and professional development can operate together: opportunities to learn communicate trust while increasing organisational capacity.

The cross-site variation is important. Distributed responsibility was not enacted through identical structures. Site 2 formed teams around extracurricular strengths partly to respond to contextual constraints and opportunities. Site 3 connected responsibility to a seminary formation mission. This supports context-sensitive accounts of leadership: the principle of shared responsibility may travel across settings, but its practical form should be generated from local expertise, mission and need rather than copied mechanically (Hallinger, 2018; Tan, 2024).

Quality education and partnership across SDG 4 and SDG 17

The relational co-production pathway links SDG 4 and SDG 17 at the organisational level. Quality education requires competent teaching, student support, inclusive participation and character development. Partnerships provide the knowledge, legitimacy and resources needed to sustain these processes, especially where formal resources are limited. In this sense, partnership is not external to quality; it is one of the mechanisms through which quality is produced.

The findings also broaden the meaning of quality. Community confidence was connected to academic and non-academic achievement, but also to discipline, respectful conduct, integrity and the perceived quality of relationships. In faith-based schools, these normative dimensions cannot be treated as incidental. Yet values become educational quality only when they are visible in routines: how stakeholders are heard, how responsibility is allocated, how success is recognised and how problems are handled.

For policy and principal preparation, the results suggest that relational competence should be assessed through evidence of organisational consequences. Training should move beyond generic communication workshops. Aspiring principals should practise stakeholder mapping, difficult conversations, participatory planning, delegation, meeting facilitation, recognition systems, conflict resolution and partnership accountability. Evaluation should ask whether communication produces better information, whether participation changes plans, whether delegation develops capacity and whether partnerships contribute sustained resources or learning opportunities.

For school foundations and education authorities, partnership support should include governance clarity. Committees and families need understandable information about priorities, budgets and roles. Principals need discretion to respond to local conditions but also safeguards against tokenism, elite capture or opaque resource use. A relational approach is strongest when respectful participation is accompanied by documented decisions, transparent responsibilities and review.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding: Relational leadership contributed to school quality through a co-production pathway rather than through interpersonal goodwill alone. Principals created relational safety, facilitated shared sensemaking, opened planning to stakeholder knowledge, delegated responsibility according to competence, combined recognition with reciprocal accountability and mobilised family, foundation and community partnerships. These practices generated teacher commitment, programme ownership, student support, additional resources and community confidence. **Implication:** The model positions relational competence as organisational infrastructure linking SDG 4 and SDG 17. Principal preparation and appraisal should examine whether communication, listening and participation produce observable changes in plans, roles, professional learning, resources and accountability. School partnerships should be designed as continuing co-production arrangements, not occasional meetings or ceremonial support. **Limitation:** The analysis is based on three Catholic secondary schools governed by one foundation in one Indonesian regency. Shared values strengthen comparison but limit transferability to public, secular, or differently governed schools. The source dissertation does not report a consolidated participant total, and the dataset was not originally designed to measure relational trust or power distribution with standardised instruments. Positive accounts may also reflect social desirability or the researcher's access relationships. **Future Research:** Future studies should test the proposed pathway using longitudinal mixed methods, including network analysis, repeated measures of trust and psychological safety, meeting observations, stakeholder influence mapping and indicators of programme implementation. Comparative research should examine public and private schools, different faith traditions, urban and remote contexts, and cases where stakeholder participation fails or produces conflict. Research should also investigate student voice as a distinct component of co-production.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Remigius Missa: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, and Writing-Original Draft. **Maria Veronika Roesminingsih:** Supervision, Conceptual Guidance, Validation, and Writing-Review & Editing. **Bambang Sigit Widodo:** Supervision, Methodological Guidance, Validation, and Writing-Review & Editing. All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that they have no financial, professional, or personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the research process, interpretation, or reporting of the findings.

ETHICAL COMPLIANCE STATEMENT

The study followed principles of voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, respectful interviewing, and responsible use of institutional documents. Participant identities are protected through role-based reporting. The supplied dissertation documentation did not record an institutional ethics-review approval or exemption number; therefore, no approval number is claimed in this manuscript. The authors affirm that the article is original and was prepared in accordance with research and publication ethics.

STATEMENT ON THE USE OF AI OR DIGITAL TOOLS IN WRITING

OpenAI's ChatGPT was used to support English-language editing, structural refinement, consistency checking, and alignment with the JOCSIS template. The tool was not used to generate, alter, or independently interpret the empirical data. All AI-assisted suggestions were critically reviewed and verified against the source study, and the authors retain full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the final manuscript.

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