



# The Role of Founder-Led Leadership in Online Education Organizations

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**Abstract:** The fast development of digital technologies has brought an essential change to the global education system, giving rise to educational technology (EdTech) platforms and causing their rapid growth. Online education institutions that have been started by founders have been instrumental in the innovation process, increased access to education, and offered new formats of delivering digital education. This study examines how to establish a founder-led model of management and governance that can take an online education school of a brand to scale, specifically focusing on the issue of balancing between entrepreneurial leadership and long-term organization expansion.

**Keywords:** Organizational, Leadership, Governed, business, Administrative, Digital

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## INTRODUCTION

There are a number of benefits to having founders at the helm of online education enterprises. To start, it's not uncommon for founders to show a lot of emotion and dedication to the organization's goal. Increased creativity, boldness, and strategic agility may result from such dedication. To further their ability to see new possibilities and respond swiftly to shifts in the market, founders may have extensive expertise in the field of education and the surrounding technology landscape.

In addition, a strong corporate culture may be nurtured by leadership that is led by the founder. Organizational behavior, institutional identity, and brand impression are all impacted by the fundamental ideas and values that are often established by the founders. The leadership style of the founder has a substantial influence on staff engagement and organizational creativity in online education firms, which are highly dependent on innovation and adaptation.

Organizations are guided, regulated, and managed by their governance structures, which include policies, processes, and methods. Accountability, openness, transparency, and operational efficiency are the hallmarks of a well-governed company. Managing organizational complexity, guaranteeing educational quality, and promoting long-term development are all greatly impacted by governance frameworks in the context of digital education institutions. Governance plays a crucial role in the growth of online education companies. Growing online schools requires reaching more students, creating more courses, enhancing existing ones, acquiring more technology, and penetrating untapped areas. These endeavors need well-coordinated decision-making, careful financial management, adherence to regulations, and strong leadership systems.

Formal governance mechanisms such as academic councils, administrative committees, regulatory

frameworks, and boards of directors are usually relied upon by traditional educational institutions. Nonetheless, a large number of online schools have their roots as sole proprietorships or very tiny businesses run by dedicated individuals. A founder-centered or more loosely structured governance structure may be in place from the outset of such a company. The need for more formal governance structures arises in proportion to the institution's growth. Strategic management systems, advisory boards, committees for governance, and executive leadership teams are all examples of possible frameworks. Delegation of power, increased responsibility within the business, and harmony between long-term objectives and day-to-day operations are all benefits of well-established systems of governance.

## LITERATURE AND REVIEW

**Bano, et al (2020).** In our school system, MOOCs (Massive Online Courses) are all the rage right now. The massive open online course (MOOC) model ushered in a new era of education. The conventional ways of education are complemented by massive open online course (MOOC) offerings. With the help of top institutions and their extensive first-class education system, massive open online courses (MOOCs) have enormous growth potential. In the past, MHRD provided open online courses (OOCs) in India via NPTEL and SWAYAM.

**Olasina, Gbolahan. (2018).** Not everyone will embrace and utilize educational technology, therefore it's important to stress that this is a prerequisite for their success in the classroom. Regrettably, a major problem remains the choice to reject online education. In order to better understand the choice to adopt and utilize technology in the context of developing countries, the present study offered a new perspective. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to examine how various social and individual elements influence the choice to engage in online education. The undergraduates at UKZN served as the backdrop because of their unique circumstances.

**Finch, et al (2017).** A lot of established educational institutions are trying to figure out how to be financially viable and competitive without expanding their physical campuses. Some colleges and universities have started offering three-year undergraduate degrees and online courses to help students save time and money. For example, Ball State University in Indiana, Upper Iowa, and University Bates College in Maine have all done this (Strauss 2009).

**Wilms, et al (2017).** When we talk about how digital technologies are changing many parts of people's lives, we're talking about digital transformation. The majority of prior studies examining the effects of digital transformation have focused on commercial organizations and their operational procedures. The purpose of this research is to analyze the effects of digital transformation on educational institutions and their students. Throughout the university's lifespan, we analyze how various groups of members use collaboration and communication platforms, and how this use varies over time.

**Zheng, et al (2017).** Learning is no longer restricted to the four walls of a classroom, thanks to advancements in information technology. Many people in the education industry are interested in "Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)" because of its potential as a new teaching tool. Using bibliometric analysis and a visual knowledge network analysis tool, this research takes 445 journal papers from 2013–2016 that are part of the China Academic Journal Network Publishing database (CAJD) and discusses

MOOC education. Use CiteSpace to investigate MOOCs thoroughly in areas including development status, trend, and popular educational study topics.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Approach and Context**

The research is grounded in a founder-led online education organization operating as a branded digital learning school. The organization represents an expert-centric model in which governance, instructional quality, and strategic direction are closely linked to founder authority. The study examines how governance structures evolve as the organization scales and how founder-led control is balanced with operational requirements.

### **Data Sources and Collection**

The data used in the study is obtained by a range of qualitative sources, including the governance records, organizational documents, strategic planning materials, and founder reflective practice-based managerial insights. Such sources present information about the alterations in governance through time, history of decision-making processes and quality control systems. The former group includes the organizational documents, such as official strategic plans, records of the governance policy, quality assurance frameworks, curriculum design documentation, and internal procedural standards. Such documents presented organized documents on how governance processes were technically formulated, passed, and disseminated throughout the institution.

### **Data Analysis and Model Development**

The analysis of data was conducted with the help of a structured thematic coding method structured in three consecutive phases, which was aimed at providing analytical rigor and methodological transparency, which suited a practice-based DBA inquiry. Instead of using full-scale statistical intercoder reliability exercises, the coding process was done on the basis of systematic analytical structure that gradually advanced through raw data to consolidated theory of governance. This design is in line with qualitative practice-based research standards, where the objective is interpretive richness and theoretical consistency and not statistical generalizability.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

### **Overview Of Coding Results**

By so doing, 68 primary codes were found in the sources of data gathered. These codes were used as the framework to determine patterns of governance in the organization and were used.

### **Initial Codes Distribution**

**Table 1: Initial Codes Distribution by Domain of Governance.**

<b>Governance Domain</b>	<b>Number of Codes</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
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Founder authority practices	16	23.5%
Delegation structures	14	20.6%
Quality assurance systems	15	22.1%
Legitimacy and institutional credibility	12	17.6%
Scaling constraints and enablers	11	16.2%
Total	68	100%

The dissemination of the first codes means that the governing practices in the case organization are highly centralized and focused on three main areas, namely, founder authority, quality assurance, and delegation dynamics. The combination of these domains represents over sixty-five percent of all the coded observations. This trend indicates that the leadership dilemma of control that is central to the leaders of online education startups is balancing intellectual leadership and scaling of operations. The open coding procedure resulted in the creation of a total of 68 initial codes which are the practices of the governance and the organizational processes.

**Most Frequently Governance Codes**

**Table 2: Most Frequently Observed Governance Codes**

Code	Description	Frequency
Founder Decision Override	Founder directly intervenes in operational decisions	12
Informal Delegation	Tasks delegated without formal hierarchy	10
Quality Monitoring	Regular evaluation of teaching and administrative practices	9
Community Trust Building	Engagement with parents and local stakeholders	8
Expansion Constraints	Challenges faced during scaling of operations	7

The frequency distribution of the governance codes shows that the organizational structure is ruled by founder-led decision-making practices. The code Founder Decision Override is used most and indicates that the founder has a lot of control over major conceptual and operational decisions. There is also informal delegation which shows up in a loose yet less formal managerial system. The practices of quality monitoring show that the organization is focused on the quality of services offered regardless of the limited resources. Community trust building continues to bring out the need of local legitimacy in order to maintain the operations of the institution. Lastly, expansion limitations show the difficulty posed by trying to replicate governance practices by having them grow past the personal control of the founder.

**Thematic governance practice’s structure.**

In the second round of analysis, codes that were conceptually related were clustered into larger governance themes denoting larger organizational patterns.

**Mapping of Codes**

**Table 3: Mapping of Codes to Governance Themes**

Governance Theme	Example Codes	Number of Codes
Founder Authority	Decision override, strategic control, leadership intervention	16
Delegation Dynamics	Informal delegation, role flexibility, operational autonomy	14
Quality Assurance Mechanisms	Monitoring systems, evaluation practices	15
Legitimacy Formation	Community engagement, reputation building	12
Scaling Constraints and Enablers	Resource limitations, management complexity	11
Total	—	68

**Structure of Thematic Coding**

**Table 4: Thematic Coding Structure.**

Theme	Number of Codes	Key Governance Focus
Founder Authority Embedding	16	Strategic control and intellectual capital
Delegation Dynamics	14	Controlled transfer of operational authority
Quality Assurance Mechanisms	15	Institutional quality validation systems
Legitimacy Formation	12	Trust building and governance transparency
Scaling Constraints and Enablers	11	Structural growth factors

### **Analytical Interpretation of Governance Themes**

The research highlights five interrelated themes in organizational governance: Founder Authority Embedding, Delegation Dynamics, Quality Assurance Mechanisms, Legitimacy Formation, and Scaling Constraints and Enablers. Founder Authority Embedding signifies centralized governance by the founder, ensuring consistency in academic philosophy while posing challenges to managerial decentralization. Delegation Dynamics reflects the gradual distribution of operational responsibilities, maintaining strategic power with the founder but allowing flexibility in operations. Quality Assurance Mechanisms demonstrate the organization's commitment to high academic and operational standards through systematic evaluation and monitoring. Legitimacy Formation focuses on building trust and credibility with stakeholders, emphasizing transparency and community involvement. Lastly, Scaling Constraints and Enablers address the complexities of growth and coordination as the organization expands, while indicating a transition towards governance systems that support sustainable development.

### **Triangulation Of Governance Themes Cross-Source**

In order to achieve the validity of the analysis, the evaluation of each theme was done with several independent sources of data.

**Table 5: Governance Evidence Triangulation Matrix.**

Governance Theme	Organizational Documents	Operational Records	Reflective Insights	Validation
Founder Authority Embedding	✓	✓	✓	Strong

Delegation Dynamics	✓	✓	✓	Strong
Quality Assurance Mechanisms	✓	✓	✓	Strong
Legitimacy Formation	✓	✓	✓	Strong
Scaling Constraints & Enablers	✓	✓	✓	Strong

**Table 6: Cross-Theme Governance Relationships.**

Core Theme	Supporting Themes	Governance Function
Founder authority	Quality assurance	Protect intellectual capital
Delegation dynamics	Scaling enablers	Enable operational growth
Legitimacy formation	Quality systems	Build stakeholder trust

### Theme Analysis

#### Founder Authority Embedding

**Table 7: Key Codes Under Founder Authority Theme**

Code	Governance Function
Strategic curriculum oversight	Founder approval for program design
Methodology validation	Verification of teaching approach
Intellectual capital protection	Control over proprietary knowledge
Strategic decision authority	Approval of major organizational changes

**Delegation Dynamics**

**Table 8: Delegation Structure in the Organization**

<b>Governance Level</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
Founder	Strategic and intellectual decisions
Senior instructors	Academic coordination
Instructors	Course delivery
Administrative staff	Student support and operations

**Quality Assurance Mechanisms**

**Table 9: Institutional Quality Control Framework**

<b>Quality Mechanism</b>	<b>Governance Function</b>
Curriculum review checkpoints	Maintain methodological consistency
Instructor training programs	Ensure teaching quality
Course evaluation systems	Monitor student outcomes
Content validation procedures	Protect intellectual integrity

**Legitimacy Formation**

**Table 10: Governance Signals of Institutional Legitimacy**

<b>Governance Mechanism</b>	<b>Organizational Effect</b>
Transparent governance policies	Strengthens stakeholder trust
Defined instructor roles	Clarifies accountability

Documented procedures	Enhances institutional professionalism
Founder visibility	Reinforces brand credibility

### Triangulation And Analytical Validation

**Table 11: Triangulation Matrix - Data Source Affirmation by Theme.**

Governance theme	Org. documents	Reflective insights	Operational records	Confirmed ( )
Founder Authority Embedding	✓	✓	-	Yes (2/3)
Delegation Dynamics	-	✓	✓	Yes (2/3)
Quality Assurance Mechanism	✓	✓	✓	Yes (3/3)
Legitimacy formation	✓	-	✓	Yes (2/3)
Scaling constraints and Enablers	✓	✓	✓	Yes (3/3)

**Table 12: The Distribution of Codes by Frequency, Themes and Data Source.**

Governance theme	Codes from org. Docs	Codes from reflective insights	Codes from operational records	Total codes	% of total
Founder Authority Embedding	9	7	-	16	23.5%
Delegation Dynamics	-	8	6	14	20.6%

Quality Assurance Mechanism	6	4	5	15	22.1%
Legitimacy formation	7	-	5	12	17.6%
Scaling constraints and Enablers	4	3	4	11	16.2%
Total	26	22	20	68	100%

### Governance Model Architecture

#### Founder-Led Education Governance Model



Figure 1: Founder-Led Education Governance Model

The descriptions can give one much-needed contextual background; however, more analytical value is derived by the systematic thematic coding process. The results of this process of coding are displayed in the following sections. The results of these studies show the functioning of governance mechanisms in reality and in the interaction of founder authority, quality assurance systems, delegation systems, strategies of scalability to enable sustainable organizational development. Both focusing on (i) the structural entrenchment of authority and proprietary orientation of the founder, and (ii) the processes of governance conducive to sustainable growth, and quality, consistency, and legitimacy, the findings are organized in alignment of the two study objectives. These subsections are directly traced to one or more of the five thematic dimensions Founder Authority Embedding, Delegation Dynamics, Quality Assurance Mechanisms, Legitimacy Formation, and Scaling Constraints and Enablers, and thus the give and take of the analytical process and the outcomes reported. In the empirical analysis, the qualitative interpretation is attached to the descriptive quantitative indicators based on internal organizational data. These indicators

give objective data on the performance of the organization, student involvement, teacher development, and governance activity within the study period.

## CONCLUSIONS

The current research was conducted to discuss the governance models that are involved in the functioning of an online education organization founded by an individual and comprehend the impact of the proposed models on organizational sustainability, the efficiency of its operation, and its institutional legitimacy. This study thus sought to fill this gap by exploring the structure of governance of a founder-led education institution and creating a conceptual framework that explains how the said organizations can expand sustainably and at the same time maintain their intellectual bases.

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