

**PERCEPTIONS OF MANAGERS IN A NETWORK OF FAITH-BASED SCHOOLS
REGARDING THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THEIR PROFESSIONAL ROLE**

***PERCEPÇÕES DOS GESTORES DE UMA REDE DE ESCOLAS CONFESSIONAIS
SOBRE AS ATRIBUIÇÕES DE SUA FUNÇÃO PROFISSIONAL***

***PERCEPCIONES DE LOS GESTORES DE UNA RED DE ESCUELAS
CONFESIONALES SOBRE LAS ATRIBUCIONES DE SU FUNCIÓN PROFESIONAL***



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ABSTRACT: This article analyzes school managers' perceptions of their professional roles and how they organize their practices in everyday institutional contexts. Grounded in the understanding of school management as a complex and integrated process, it examines the clarity of roles and the articulation among different managerial functions within a network of faith-based schools. This qualitative study, approved by a Research Ethics Committee, involved 46 managers from eleven institutions. Data were collected through identification forms and group discussions and analyzed using content analysis. The findings highlight challenges such as role overlap, excessive personalization of management, and expanded responsibilities, as well as opportunities related to professional experience, continuing education, and functional integration. It is concluded that role clarity is constructed in daily practice and depends on organizational conditions and professional engagement, indicating the need for institutional mechanisms of cooperation and functional delimitation.

KEYWORDS: School management. Administrator responsibilities. Professional competencies. School daily life.

RESUMO: *O artigo analisa as percepções de gestores escolares sobre suas atribuições e a organização de suas práticas no cotidiano institucional. Compreendendo a gestão escolar como um processo complexo e integrado, problematiza-se a clareza das funções e a articulação entre diferentes papéis em uma rede de escolas confessionais. Trata-se de uma pesquisa qualitativa, aprovada por Comitê de Ética, com 46 gestores de onze instituições. Os dados foram produzidos por fichas de identificação e discussões em grupo e analisados por meio da análise de conteúdo. Os resultados indicam desafios como sobreposição de funções, personalização da gestão e ampliação de responsabilidades, além de oportunidades relacionadas à experiência, formação continuada e articulação entre funções. Conclui-se que a clareza das atribuições é construída no cotidiano, dependendo das condições organizacionais e do engajamento profissional, o que demanda mecanismos institucionais de cooperação e delimitação funcional.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Gestão escolar. Atribuições do gestor. Competências profissionais. Cotidiano escolar.*

RESUMEN: *Este artículo analiza las percepciones de gestores escolares sobre sus atribuciones profesionales y la organización de sus prácticas en el cotidiano institucional. Desde la comprensión de la gestión escolar como un proceso complejo e integrado, se problematiza la claridad de las funciones y la articulación entre distintos roles en una red de escuelas confessionales. Se trata de un estudio cualitativo, aprobado por un Comité de Ética, con la participación de 46 gestores de once instituciones. Los datos se obtuvieron mediante fichas de identificación y discusiones grupales, y fueron analizados a través del análisis de contenido. Los resultados evidencian desafíos como la superposición de funciones, la personalización excesiva de la gestión y la ampliación de responsabilidades, así como oportunidades vinculadas a la experiencia profesional, la formación continua y la articulación entre funciones. Se concluye que la claridad de las atribuciones se construye en la práctica cotidiana y depende de las condiciones organizacionales y del compromiso profesional.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Gestión escolar. Atribuciones del gestor. Competencias profesionales. Cotidiano escolar.*

INTRODUCTION

School management, in the contemporary context of education, is configured as a central element for the organization and development of socio-educational processes in educational institutions, especially regarding the definition, distribution, and daily experience of the duties of school managers. According to Vieira et al. (2020, p. 17), “school management refers to the scope of educational establishments situated in the micro sphere—when compared to educational management.” Far from being restricted to administrative or operational tasks, the manager’s actions involve the intentional mobilization of people, material, pedagogical, and symbolic resources, with a view to building educational environments capable of sustaining coherent, effective, and socially relevant pedagogical practices. In this scenario, the professional duties assumed by managers become a structuring axis of institutional functioning, directly influencing the organization of schoolwork and the quality of educational processes.

It is within this context that the present study, qualitative in nature, is situated, analyzing the perceptions of school managers regarding their professional duties and the organization of their practices in the institutional daily routine, problematizing the clarity of these duties and the articulation between different management functions in a network of confessional schools. By focusing on the perceptions of the managers themselves, the study seeks to understand how such duties are interpreted, negotiated, and operationalized in the daily routine of school management (Cunha, 2024).

Studies developed in the Brazilian context have pointed out that school management is characterized by the expansion of responsibilities, the complexity of institutional demands, and the constant need for articulation between different dimensions of school work. Educational literature highlights that managerial action requires a combination of leadership, planning, the capacity for collective articulation, and a commitment to the continuing training of education professionals. From this perspective, Martins and Brocanelli (2010, p. 81) state that “managing a school is organizing, mobilizing, and articulating all the material and human conditions necessary to ensure the advancement of the schools’ socio-educational processes.” In a convergent perspective, analyses such as those by Melo and Silva (2018) and Bravo (2011) indicate that contemporary challenges in school management demand more flexible organizational models, capable of responding to the social and educational transformations that permeate the daily life of educational institutions, directly impacting the configuration of managerial responsibilities.

Authors such as Lück (2009) and Libâneo (2010) understand the school manager as a mediator between different dimensions of institutional life, responsible for promoting integration between the pedagogical project, teaching practices, administrative organization, and the participation of the school community. This role requires not only technical mastery but also political, ethical, and relational sensitivity, which are fundamental for building a democratic and collaborative school culture. Such an understanding reinforces the centrality of the manager's professional duties as an articulating element of these multiple dimensions.

From this perspective, school management cannot be understood as a fragmented set of functions but as an articulated process sustained by principles, values, and strategies that guide decisions and actions in the school's daily routine. As Lück (2009) points out, educational management establishes unity and direction for schoolwork, ensuring coherence between objectives, practices, and results. This approach highlights that clarity of duties constitutes a fundamental condition for the articulation between different management functions, contributing to the coherence of the institutional educational project.

However, despite the centrality of the management function, several studies indicate that the delimitation of duties and responsibilities still constitutes a recurring challenge. According to Martins and Brocanelli (2010, p. 82), "daily, school managers are faced with problematic situations, having to solve them at different levels and planes." The overlapping of functions and the expansion of social expectations regarding the school tend to produce ambiguities in professional practice, directly affecting how managers perceive and exercise their duties. Libâneo et al. (2012) highlight that school management requires specialization and functional differentiation, so that the pedagogical, administrative, financial, and relational fields are conducted with competence and intentionality.

Thus, understanding how school managers perceive their professional duties and how these duties are articulated in institutional daily life becomes fundamental for the improvement of management practices. As Vieira et al. (2020, p. 12) state, "school management assumes a strategic dimension for guaranteeing the quality of education." More than ensuring the regular functioning of the school, school management acts as a catalyst for educational processes, which reinforces the relevance of empirically investigating management duties based on the perceptions of the subjects involved themselves.

More recent studies have emphasized that the expansion of the school manager's duties is associated with processes of work intensification and increasing individual accountability for

institutional results, demanding the continuing education of this group (Nascimento *et al.*, 2020).

In this scenario, school management begins to demand competencies that go beyond the technical-administrative domain, incorporating relational, emotional, and political dimensions, as pointed out by contemporary analyses of educational leadership and management (Furlan, 2025). These analyses reinforce the need to investigate how such demands materialize in the duties concretely assumed by managers within the school context.

As stated by Lopes *et al.* (2024), in the contemporary context, school management is configured as a complex field, marked by structural and institutional challenges that directly impact the quality of education, such as resource limitations, professional devaluation, and social problems that permeate daily school life. At the same time, it points to promising perspectives, such as democratic management, project-based organization, and the use of digital technologies, which can contribute to the strengthening of management practices. In this sense, school management reaffirms itself as a central element for the improvement of educational processes, requiring collective commitment, critical reflection, and proactive actions from the different actors involved.

Therefore, in light of the above, the present study aims to analyze the perceptions of school managers—principals, pedagogical coordinators, and educational counselors—from a network of confessional schools regarding the duties of their professional role, as well as to understand how such duties are articulated in the institutional daily life. It also seeks to identify challenges and possibilities related to the clarity of management functions, the overlapping of responsibilities, and the organizational conditions that influence the exercise of school management.

Methodologically, this is a qualitative research study (Gil, 2010), developed through data collection from school managers (Cunha, 2024) working in different roles, whose accounts were analyzed in light of content analysis (Bardin, 2016). The articulation between the theoretical framework and the empirical data allowed for relating conceptions of school management to the perceptions and practices effectively experienced by managers within the investigated institutional context.

Competencies and skills of the school manager: an integrated approach to the various dimensions of action

The school manager plays a central role in conducting the institutional daily routine, being responsible not only for the administration of the school environment but also for team leadership and the articulation of the different dimensions that support the pedagogical process. Their work involves dealing with recurring challenges, such as internal disagreements, resistance to institutional guidelines, communication difficulties, school dropout, frequent absences, and interpersonal conflicts. Such challenges are part of the complexity inherent to contemporary educational management and require a proactive, reflective, and mediating stance from the manager.

In this context, leadership assumes a strategic function. By mobilizing teachers, coordinators, inspectors, counselors, and other school professionals, the manager creates conditions for collaborative work and for the construction of a more cohesive and functional institutional environment. As Lück (2017, p. 20) highlights,

leadership in school is an essential characteristic of school management. The manager must mobilize, guide, and coordinate the team's work, inspiring them to apply their best in carrying out sociocultural actions aimed at the continuous improvement of teaching and learning. This requires a proactive attitude, enthusiasm, and high expectations from the manager regarding their ability to influence results.

The competencies required of the school manager, therefore, are not restricted to technical-administrative mastery. They relate to the ability to articulate knowledge, skills, and attitudes in a contextualized way, responding to the institutional and human demands that emerge in daily school life. The notion of competence, in this sense, is related to the intentional mobilization of knowledge for decision-making and for the management of processes that directly impact the quality of teaching and learning.

Lück (2000) reinforces this understanding by stating that the effectiveness of school management is associated with the manager's ability to organize, articulate, and mobilize resources in favor of a common educational project. According to the author,

effective school leaders are leaders; they encourage teachers and school staff, parents, students, and the community to use their potential in promoting a positive educational school environment and in developing their own potential, oriented toward learning and the construction of knowledge, to be creative and proactive in problem-solving and facing difficulties. (Lück, 2000, p. 12)

This perspective highlights that the manager's leadership is not exercised in an authoritarian or isolated manner, but through the building of relationships, the encouragement of participation, and the strengthening of the collective sense of schoolwork. Nascimento (2007) points out that acting in school management involves a complex process that articulates planning, leadership, organization, and evaluation. Planning defines goals and guides actions; leadership mobilizes and engages the school community; organization rationalizes resources; and evaluation feeds back into the process, allowing for adjustments and continuous improvements.

The permanent challenges of school management also require the development of interpersonal skills that complement technical competencies. Abud Junior and Gonçalves (2022, p. 40) observe that “well-developed human skills are capable of generating synergy, understanding, and tolerance for the growth of social and work groups in which the manager's influence is exercised with dedication, perseverance, and competence.” In this regard, skills such as clear communication, active listening, empathy, and mediation abilities become fundamental to building a healthy and collaborative institutional climate.

Freitas and Mourão (2019) emphasize that such interpersonal skills are decisive for strengthening professional relationships and for preventing conflicts that can compromise pedagogical work. School management, therefore, demands a constant balance between technical rationality and human sensibility, recognizing that people constitute the main resource of the educational institution.

Furthermore, the school manager's performance needs to be understood as a dynamic process under permanent revision. Melo and Silva (2018, p. 83) highlight that “it is crucial to continuously review school management, adapting it to social, technological, and educational changes. It is fundamental to rethink traditional models and promote a more flexible, inclusive, and results-oriented management.” This perspective reinforces the need for leadership open to innovation, capable of interpreting transformations in the educational context and responding to them in a critical and responsible manner. Such a process can occur both in the daily exchange between peers and in continuing training. Nascimento *et al.* (2020, p. 313) emphasize that the continuing education of managers and teachers needs to reverberate both in professional performance and in the individual dimension, “making them better people”.

In the set of these reflections, it is evident that effective school management depends on the integration of different types of competencies. Technical competencies involve knowledge of planning, organization, resource management, and the evaluation of results. Interpersonal

competencies, on the other hand, relate to the ability to lead people, promote teamwork, communicate effectively, and build relationships of trust. The balanced articulation of these competencies allows the manager to face challenges, promote continuous improvements, and ensure institutional conditions favorable to the educational process.

In this sense, understanding the dimensions of school management contributes to a broader and more integrated view of the manager's performance. Lück (2009) proposes a model that organizes school management into interdependent areas and dimensions, highlighting that none of them act in isolation. Table 1 summarizes the dimensions and competencies in the context of school management, as described by Lück (2009).

Table 1.
Areas and dimensions of school management

ORGANIZATION AREA		IMPLEMENTATION AREA	
DIMENSIONS	DEFINITION	DIMENSIONS	DEFINITION
1. Foundations and principles of education and school management	Organizational dimensions encompass activities related to the preparation, organization, provision of resources, systematization, and feedback of the work to be carried out in the school. Their purpose is to ensure a basic structure necessary for the implementation of educational objectives and school management. Although they do not directly promote the desired results, they are fundamental for other dimensions and educational actions to be carried out effectively. These dimensions include the conceptual and legal basis of education and educational management, planning, monitoring, and evaluation of actions in the school, as well as the management of results, with the objective of promoting student learning and development with social quality. (Lück, 2009).	5. Democratic and participatory management	Implementation dimensions play a crucial role in promoting changes and transformations in the school environment. Their purpose is to expand and improve educational practices, seeking a significant impact on education. The competencies associated with this dimension encompass democratic and participatory management, people management, pedagogical management, administrative management, school culture management, and daily school life management. All these competencies are directed toward boosting student learning and development, with a special emphasis on promoting social quality. These dimensions play an essential role in developing effective strategies for improving educational practices and for the success of the educational process as a whole. (Lück, 2009).
2. Planning and organization of schoolwork		6. People management	
3. Process monitoring and institutional evaluation		7. Pedagogical management	
4. Management of educational results		8. Administrative management	
	9. School culture management		
	10. Daily school life management.		

Note. Prepared by the authors, adapted from Lück (2009) - Dimensions of school management and their competencies.

According to Lück (2009), it is fundamental to recognize that the different areas and dimensions of school management, although they can be analyzed separately for theoretical purposes, constitute an interdependent and dynamic system whose effectiveness depends on the

articulation between its components. These dimensions vary according to the institutional context and the specific demands of the school, being operationalized in a linked manner in the daily routine of management. A management action, even if situated in a specific field, demands the simultaneous mobilization of multiple dimensions, both at the organizational level and at the implementation level.

Understanding school management as an integrated process implies recognizing that emphasis or exclusive dedication to a single dimension tends to limit the scope and effectiveness of institutional actions. Each dimension performs a strategic function within a broader set, contributing to the coherence of administrative, pedagogical, and relational practices. Thus, school management cannot be reduced to fragmented technical procedures but must be conceived as an interactive process, guided by educational intentionality and commitment to the formation of the individuals involved.

This integrated understanding reinforces the need for management action capable of coordinating human, financial, and material resources in favor of pedagogical work. In this sense, “school management plays a fundamental role by encompassing all activities related to the educational environment, aiming to optimize the available human, financial, and material resources to create an environment conducive to the realization of pedagogical work” (Vieira et al., 2020, p. 41).

Thus, it is evident that efficient school management exerts a direct influence on the success of the teaching-learning process. By promoting the organization and integration of different institutional resources, the manager contributes to the construction of a school environment that favors both pedagogical development and the strengthening of professional and community relations. Thus, the quality of education is closely linked to the competence and effectiveness of school management, highlighting the importance of strategic and well-structured management.

METHOD AND PROCEDURES

This study adopts a qualitative approach aimed at understanding the perceptions and practices of school managers in the exercise of their functions. The choice of this approach allows for the analysis of meanings, interpretations, and experiences constructed within the institutional context, considering the complexity of the relationships and processes that characterize school management.

The study was submitted to and approved by a Research Ethics Committee (CEP), and all participants were informed about the research objectives and were guaranteed anonymity, confidentiality of personal data, and the exclusive use of the information for scientific purposes.

Forty-six managers participated in the investigation, including school principals, pedagogical coordinators, and educational counselors; they work in eleven private schools belonging to a confessional education network located in the central region of the state of São Paulo. These professionals hold strategic roles in leading the institutions, being directly involved in decision-making processes, pedagogical coordination, administrative management, and monitoring students' educational development.

Data production occurred through three articulated procedures. The first consisted of an analysis of specialized literature on school management, with the objective of theoretically supporting the analytical categories and the dialogue with the results. The second involved filling out personal and professional identification forms, enabling the characterization of participants regarding their education, length of service, professional trajectory, and perception of the duties performed. The third procedure corresponded to conducting group discussions, organized according to the managers' areas of activity, creating a space for sharing experiences, challenges, and practices related to the daily routine of school management.

The group discussions allowed for a deeper exploration of aspects raised in the identification forms, favoring an understanding of the convergences and tensions present in the exercise of management functions. This procedure contributed to the construction of a more integrated reading of the duties, responsibilities, and challenges faced by different school management professionals.

For data analysis, content analysis was used, as described by Bardin (2016). The data were initially organized and systematized, followed by the identification of recurring meaning units, which were subsequently grouped into thematic categories. This process enabled the interpretation of the meanings attributed by managers to their practices and functions, ensuring analytical consistency and coherence between the empirical data and the adopted theoretical framework.

These methodological procedures allowed for a contextualized understanding of how managers perceive their duties and organize their practices in daily school life, providing insights for the analysis of educational management dynamics and their impacts on the school environment.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

Data analysis shows that school management, in the investigated context, is organized based on a broad and interdependent set of duties, the execution of which requires constant articulation between administrative, pedagogical, and relational dimensions. Managers' perceptions reveal that the exercise of the role occurs in a scenario marked by simultaneous demands, permanent negotiations, and decision-making in contexts of high institutional complexity. These findings allow for a dialogue with the authors addressed in this text, among them Lück (2009) and Libâneo (2010), by highlighting that school management is constituted as an integrated process, yet strained by organizational ambiguities that impact the clarity of duties.

A first identified challenge refers to the lack of definition and the overlapping of duties. Principals, pedagogical coordinators, and educational counselors recognize that their roles are formally distinct but operationally intertwined, which generates ambiguities in daily management. This overlap tends to blur functional boundaries and concentrate responsibilities on certain individuals, especially in management positions, increasing the risk of overload and hindering the consolidation of a clearly defined professional identity.

Associated with this aspect, a second challenge emerges, related to the excessive personalization of school management. The data indicate that institutional functioning depends heavily on the initiative, experience, and individual engagement of the managers. Although this commitment is often sustained by ethical, vocational, and professional motivations, it also reveals organizational weaknesses, insofar as the absence of clear institutional mechanisms for coordination and distribution of responsibilities leads managers to take on tasks that go beyond their formal duties.

The diversity in age and length of service of the participants highlights a third challenge, linked to the management of teams with heterogeneous professional backgrounds. Managers at the start of their tenure tend to take on multiple responsibilities intensively, while those with more experience demonstrate a greater capacity for prioritization and mediation. This difference suggests that the clarity of duties is not just a normative issue, but also the result of practical learning processes, which may indicate limitations in the institutional processes of training and induction into the management role.

Regarding academic background, the data reveal a fourth challenge related to the expansion of institutional expectations due to the managers' qualifications. Diversified training and the pursuit of continuing education expand the professionals' scope of action, but also tend

to intensify the assignment of responsibilities, reinforcing the logic of accumulating roles. Thus, training, although essential, does not in itself guarantee greater organizational clarity and may even contribute to the intensification of managerial work.

Alongside the challenges, the data also allow for the identification of relevant opportunities for strengthening school management. A first opportunity relates to the managers' previous professional experience, especially those who formerly worked in teaching or in intermediate management roles. This trajectory contributes to a broader understanding of institutional operations and favors more qualified mediation practices among the different sectors of the school.

A second opportunity concerns the coordination between management functions. Despite the identified ambiguities, the data indicate that principals, pedagogical coordinators, and educational counselors recognize the interdependence of their duties. This perception creates favorable conditions for the development of collaborative practices and for the construction of a more integrated management, provided it is accompanied by institutional mechanisms that favor cooperation and functional delimitation.

Continuing training emerges as a third opportunity, as it contributes to the development of technical and interpersonal skills necessary for school management. When linked to spaces for collective reflection and institutional support processes, professional development can favor not only individual improvement but also the consolidation of a clearer and shared organizational culture.

Finally, the data analysis points to the possibility of strengthening democratic management as a fourth opportunity, based on the recognition of the multiple dimensions that permeate daily school life. The valuing of collective work, communication, and the participation of different actors in the school community appears as a potential element to reduce excessive centralization of decisions and promote a greater balance in the distribution of responsibilities.

Overall, the identified challenges and opportunities indicate that school management, in the analyzed context, is sustained by a delicate balance between individual commitment and institutional structure. The clarity of duties, far from being a pre-established fact, is configured as a continuous construction, which depends both on organizational conditions and on the experiences and dispositions of the managers. This finding reinforces the need to understand school management as a dynamic process in which the articulation between people, functions, and institutional structures is decisive for the sustainability of educational practices. The

implementation of this model is strengthened in various ways, such as through the valuing of active listening, the strengthening of school councils, the appreciation of the team, and, above all, the need for training managers capable of mediating conflicts and encouraging participatory practices, among others (Furlan, 2025).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The analysis developed in this article makes it evident that school management, in the investigated context, is not organized based on rigidly delimited boundaries between functions, but as a field of expanded responsibilities, sustained by the articulation between different institutional dimensions and by the intensive performance of managers. The clarity of duties thus emerges not as a consolidated institutional given, but as a daily construction, heavily dependent on organizational conditions and professional engagement.

The results indicate that the effectiveness of school management stems less from the existence of formal regulations and more from the managers' ability to interpret demands, mediate relationships, and respond to complex challenges. This dynamic highlights permanent tensions between articulation and overload, in which ethical commitment and identification with the role tend to operate as compensatory mechanisms for organizational weaknesses.

In this sense, school management reveals itself as a practice that is deeply relational and contextual. Its sustainability depends not only on the individual competencies of managers, but on institutional structures that favor the delimitation of roles, cooperation between functions, and the sharing of responsibilities. The absence of these mechanisms tends to intensify processes of management personalization, with risks of wear and tear and the weakening of managerial action over time.

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings reinforce the understanding of school management as an integrated process in which different dimensions interrelate dynamically. However, the study indicates that this interdependence, when not accompanied by consistent organizational criteria, can generate operational ambiguities and compromise the clarity of duties.

On a formative level, the results point to the need to rethink the processes of preparation and monitoring of school managers, expanding the focus from technical training to include organizational complexity, conflict mediation, and people management. In this context,

continuing training assumes a strategic role in building clearer and institutionally sustained professional identities.

Finally, the study contributes to the debate on clearer, collaborative, and sustainable school management models that are capable of articulating ethical commitment, institutional organization, and educational quality. Future research can deepen these issues in different school contexts, exploring institutional strategies that promote a better balance between duties, responsibilities, and working conditions in educational management.

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