

Exploratory Factorial Model of University Governance in the Covid-19 Era

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Abstract

University governance is a configuration of attributes and traits that distinguish institutions in the face of a risk scenario. The objective of the study was to empirically test an explanatory model of the dimensions and features of university governance in the face of the pandemic and in the scenario of returning to the face-to-face classroom. The results show the prevalence of the structure consulted in the literature, but with the recommendation to include a fourth factor related to stigma or attributes of risk of infection and contagion to health professionals.

Keywords: COVID-19 • University Governance • Identity • Image • Exploratory Model • Reputation

Introduction

Until April 2023, the pandemic has killed more than four million people in the world (WHO, 2021). In Mexico, it has claimed the existence of close to a million (PAHO, 2021). Both contexts reflect the mitigation and containment policies that governments have implemented in the face of the health crisis. In this way, the mitigation and containment policies of the SARS CoV-2 coronavirus and the Covid-19 disease have focused their attention on the distancing and confinement of people. In this sense, the public administration of educational services guided the transition from the traditional classroom to the electronic blackboard. This educational policy changed once immunizations increased, even though young people have not been vaccinated against Covid-19. In response to this policy, the most important public universities in Mexico have decided to remain in a distance system. Both conflicting positions have been exacerbated by the complaint by the federal prosecutor's office to prosecute academic researchers for administrative violations of their collective agreement.

This is how the asymmetries between the State and public universities have escalated to reach legal instances to resolve their differences [1]. In this section, the theoretical axes and conceptual matrices for the analysis of the return to the face-to-face classroom are exposed, considering a review of the empirical studies, as well as the policies of lack of confinement [2]. It is proposed to address the differences between the parties from international guidelines and standards applied in other latitudes and that can be imported into the case of Mexico. The scope and limits of these policies of lack of confinement are specified, considering the optics of social representations as a reducing panorama of asymmetries between the parties and as an orientation of dispute resolution mechanisms.

The transition towards governance lies in the identification of the conflict and the recognition of this situation between the parties [3]. Once the

scenario of asymmetric relations has been established, conflict management can be oriented towards the establishment of negotiations, recognition of the common problem, as well as possible alliances in order to overcome shared adversity. Immediately afterwards, the negotiation rounds with or without follow-up between the parties can be reoriented towards a consensus. As long as the parties involved consider that the common problem depends on their resources, they will reach an agreement. However, when one of the parties assumes that the resources are inferior to the demands or common problems, then dissent emerges.

Dissent does not mean the exhaustion of negotiations between the parties, although it is directed towards the relativization of common problems and towards the exercise of power by the State as a reflection of its stewardship [4]. It is a social representation of conflict, agreement and co-responsibility that depends on the input, processing and communication of information to reach agreements. The model includes peripheral nodes of social representation that allude to the objectification and anchoring of conflict and resolution [5]. These are instances in which the parties involved generate conflicts, debates, consensus and dissent in order to build a management of risk events such as the pandemic. Around this health crisis management node, the de-confinement policies are distinguished by calling for the return and normalization of essential activities; productive and cultural. Given this federal regulation, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are committed to community immunization, although the State only considers the vaccination of teachers and administrators in a first phase and of students in a second phase pertinent. In the objectification process, the categorization of the parties involved with respect to the resources before the common problem is a relevant phase [6]. This is so because the expectations that the parties have about the conflict and its resolution depend on a comparative management of resources. As one of the parties considers that an abundance of resources prevails, they manage a common problem that can be resolved in the short term. In contrast, a perception of limited resources conditions a position of conflict, negotiation and agreements based on the costs of the problem.

From the perspective of social representations as the figurative core of the pandemic, the parties involved assume that the surrounding information determines the demands [7]. If either party assumes that the pandemic has minimal impact on their resources, then they will support a divided resolution of a conflict. In the case of the academic community, it may see itself as a victim of lockdown policies. By executing a posture of adversity, the academic community builds a figurative core of state power. Immediately afterwards, he relativizes the solutions based on the immunization promoted by the State. In this way, the return to the face-to-face classroom will depend on the history of the relationship between the State and the university. The interrelation between the figurative core and the peripheries of symbolization allows the scope of the conflict between the State and universities. At this point of conflict, the academy proposes an asymmetric relationship with the State, but recognizes resolution passages where the reconciliation of interests continued the non-hostility pact. Both actors, politicians and academics, can choose to follow the anti-Covid-19 policy, but also to move towards coupling resources to reduce the effects of the pandemic on the return to face-to-face classrooms.

The cessation of information would indicate a disagreement, but the flow of data supposes a possible agreement between academia and the State [8]. In fact, the objectification of the conflict and its categorization as a viable option to consensus or dissent warns the export of asymmetries to other actors. Once both parties recognize common interests, mediation can be a conflict reduction option. There is a close relationship between the social representation of symbolic categories of power such as selective immunization. This is a categorization of information concerning the vaccination deadlines for academics, students, and administrators. It is true that this site proposes agreements to return to the face-to-face classroom, but there are underlying negotiations around the critical path for lack of confinement. In the negotiation process between the parties, academia and

the state may find themselves overcome by their common problem, which lies in an exponential growth of infected, sick and dead [9]. If this is the case, then the interested parties move towards a renegotiation of their demands, but also towards a readjustment of their resources. Consequently, conciliation and mediation are no longer viable options. Arbitration emerges as the final instance in the renegotiation of the management of the health crisis. In other words, academia and public administration are reorienting the management of the pandemic towards a pragmatic sphere. In this way, the objectification, categorization and anchoring of the conflict are symbolized as management opportunities and barriers between the parties involved [10]. Academy and State assume themselves as managers of a crisis if they symbolize their differences as transitory in the face of a permanent risk event. In the case of Covid-19, since it is assumed to be a common and transitory problem, it can be represented as a common risk between the parties. Consequently, the urgency of its prevention is imposed before any state regulation of lack of confinement or return to the face-to-face classroom. It is possible to see that a prolonged pandemic, the exponential increase in victims and limited resources make up a fatalistic scenario of risk appetite [10]. According to the theory of social representations, the parties involved will assume the costs of a return to the face-to-face classroom, even when the vaccination scheme is partial, and the number of victims increases. On the contrary, the most optimistic scenario supposes the participation of the parties in the establishment of assertive discourses [11]. Stable communication channels that define the problems and guide decisions and actions towards co-responsibility. There is a propensity for risk as a hallmark of the asymmetries between the parties and also as a consensus between them. To guarantee the continuity of the negotiations, the academy and the State are advancing towards the return to the face-to-face classroom. They establish points of agreement that allow clarifying their responsibilities in specific cases of contagion, illness and death. In fact, they delegate biosecurity to people. In other words, risk prevention is in the hands of individual self-care protocols.

Special mention for the government of the commons and corporate governance which, unlike governance, are disseminated as emblematic cases of pandemic management [12]. The governance of the commons differs from governance in that it poses an extreme fatalistic scenario where the only resolution of differences lies in the adoption of common resource management. In the government of common goods, the problems can be assumed as irreversible. In addition, management is a transitory instrument of risk appetite. Consequently, the parties involved know that in one way or another they will end up fused in the face of a shared problem. This co-management model is positioned as a permanent resolution with no possibility of transition to governance or corporate governance. This is so because the government of the commons is committed to collaboration between the parties. Such an assignment suggests a system of expected scarcity of resources and the consequent optimization.

Corporate governance, unlike governance of the commons, aspires to spread its influence to other systems [13]. In this way, corporate governance focuses its interest on conciliating the growing and expansive interests of the parties in conflict. As political and academic actors form a corporation, they reduce their differences until they reach an isomorphism. These are protocols that institutions follow as the core matrix develops. The governments of the commons were questioned by the theory of social representations by posing a tragedy of the commons [14]. In a scenario of risk events, resources tend to decrease as the problem brings the parties involved together. In the end, the theory states that one of the parties will choose to suppress the other in order to guarantee their stay. Faced with this criticism, the government of the commons has shown that the more the problem intensifies, the more risk prone it generates and collaboration replaces unilateralism. Cooperation is exalted before competition, guaranteeing the survival of the parties involved.

In a government of the commons, the academy could not do without the State in that it supplies the resources [15]. In the same way, the public administration cannot do without the academy because it legitimizes its expenditure of resources and encourages contributions. Rather, the government of the commons supposes a null autonomy of the universities. Even the collaboration suggests optimization schemes that the academy cannot guarantee because its research expenses are variable.

Therefore, corporate governance as state influence on universities is a more viable alternative to governance of the commons [16]. It is a decision scheme dictated from the regime, form of state or political system. The

academy is an intermediary of state decisions, as well as the optimization of resources determined from the public administration. University autonomy persists, but social policy has a direct influence on the evaluation, accreditation and certification of HEIs. In this way, corporate governance is an effective state management instrument to legitimize the results of managing the pandemic in terms of infected, sick and dead. A talent training system for its conversion into intangible assets of knowledge-creating organizations [17]. This is the definition of corporate governance in which state policies are legitimized through knowledge. It is a system of co-management of demands and resources. State and academy converge in the formation of human capital with emphasis on its intellectuality and creativity. In the face of the pandemic, the parties involved are interested in reducing the risks, but immunization is exhausting. Consequently, the State is committed to a cultural and creative city policy to reactivate its economy. The return to the face-to-face classroom is only one indicator of the post-Covid-19 city project. In this process, corporate governance involves the establishment of guidelines for attracting talent, human and intellectual capital that will soon become intangible assets of universities and organizations. In this project, the return is an imperative determined by the policy of reactivation of tourism to the cultural city and its entertainment industry.

Both commons governance and corporate governance are limited by the symbiosis between State and academia [18]. It is there where governance, understood as the synthesis of a diversity of participations of sectors and actors involved, reaches its relevance. It is about the co-management of demands and resources as the differences between the parties intensify. In other words, the greater the asymmetries will correspond to systems that manage, produce and translate knowledge. This is so because governance is a flexible system of abilities, capacities, resources and knowledge oriented towards the coexistence of the parties.

Governance explains the differences between universities and the State [18]. Based on participatory mechanisms, the contribution of actors and sectors distinguishes them from other forms of government. In the case of the pandemic, governance proposes and facilitates discussion on an open agenda. The axes and topics of debate are concentrated in an agenda where the actors and sectors influence each other. It is possible to notice that governance achieves interdependence between the parties. Unlike governance of the commons and corporate governance that focus on conflict between parties, governance assumes that differences are transitory. In fact, the asymmetries between the parties are the preamble to their participation.

There are different clusters of participation that imply open or delimited governance [19]. In this way, the pandemic is a situation that activates resources from different sectors. This is the case of the academy as a central actor in the management, production and transfer of knowledge. It is not by chance that public universities bet on the virtual classroom when the State determined the return to face-to-face classrooms. The knowledge that universities accumulate is enough to legitimize their confinement decisions. In contrast, the public administration tries to legitimize its decisions from community and civil participation. Faced with the militants, sympathizers and adherents of the government who adopt the policies of lack of confinement and return to the face-to-face classroom, the academy simply activates its citizen participation from the training of talents.

It is true that corporate governance can become governance whenever the dependency between State and academy is possible, but governance suggests that such a scheme coexists with other participatory models [20]. Unlike corporate governance that activates management protocols such as biosafety, governance simply opens participatory channels. While corporate governance tries to justify its structure in the face of a contingency, governance suggests that such a threat is necessary for debate.

Other differences between corporate governance and governance can be seen in conflict resolution [21]. Corporate governance requires the unanimous or majority agreement of the stakeholders. Governance is only possible when the parties involved recognize that they are different. Consequently, corporate governance bypasses conciliation or mediation to adopt arbitration. Governance, on the other hand, suggests that none of these management instruments is necessary.

From the government of the commons, it is essential that the vaccines be disseminated among the parties to guarantee the conservation of resources

in the face of future contingencies. In contrast, governance only keeps communication channels open to guarantee a discussion that will inevitably generate an agreement based on differences and similarities. It means then that participation is a diversity of criteria and opinions that distinguish the actors and sectors. From this distinction, governance is built as a management alternative to the government of common goods.

Regarding conflict resolutions, the government of common goods is only sustained from shared objectives, tasks and goals. Governance is a series of divergent and convergent proposals that regulate themselves. A contribution turns out to be more significant if the previous one is insufficient. A contribution will be more relevant if its predecessor is abandoned by either party. Governance is then expected to be the management system that the interested parties need to settle their differences, consolidate their projects and develop their capacities.

Governance by summoning and feedback from the existing forms of participation reaches a status of co-management [22]. This means that it is not built from duality. It is not a unilateral and unidirectional system where one of the parties is hegemonic until the other is emancipated. It is a scenario where participations converge through surrounding information in the media and electronic networks. It is a public agenda open to discussion of its contents. A global critique of its themes and a systematic review of its elements. In the face of the pandemic, governance is a structure of data and decisions oriented from the proximity of risk events and their aversions as well as their propensities.

In its conciliatory mode, governance highlights disagreements to establish common ground in the near future [23]. In this way, the pandemic is a common problem between the parties. Each one establishes its management criteria, but the extension of the crisis forces the discordant parties to converge in an alliance to reduce the cases. This management principle begins with a truce between state and academia. It continues with a review of the opportunities, challenges and challenges. Next, the concordant parties assume that their common problem intensifies along with their coincidences. Very soon, management proposals emerge that overlap one another. At the end of the process, only those inclusive forms of participation that contributed to the reduction of Covid-19 cases remain.

This is the case of the universities that adopted the distancing and confinement policies reduced to the virtual classroom [24]. Once the immunizations increased, the agreements between the discordant parties also increased until the conflict agenda was reversed in a retributive collaboration. The parties in conflict had never assimilated that their differences would lead to co-management. While their asymmetries decreased, their agreements intensified, not only because of a common problem. A sense of community has also emerged that has reduced infections, illnesses, and deaths associated with the SARS CoV-2 coronavirus. The key to this resolution lies in the participation from different places and positions.

Precisely, governance has been questioned because of its degree of openness to different participations [25]. From this inclusion it is assumed that the actors can only collaborate in the face of an imminent deterioration of their well-being, but the parties would not be opposed without diverse interests. In fact, it is assumed that governance should be shaped by win-oriented participation by all parties. It is true that a crisis activates the sense of community, attachment to place and belonging to a group. The parties in conflict would not be in that situation without first seeing themselves as exclusive.

From the government of the commons, it is noted that the interested parties are means of diffusion of the differences between those who assume that the goods should be public or private [26]. From corporate governance it is evident that unilateralism allows consensus. Governance, by betting on the competition of the best ideas, assumes the well-being of those who debate a collective action. The parties involved seek their well-being from the minor impact of a crisis on them and on their adversaries. This basic principle of a common enemy makes the parties allies, but it does not guarantee a redistribution of resources based on the vulnerability of the parties.

Therefore, lines of analysis and discussion on the asymmetries between the parties will open the debate on the type of participation that governance requires in the face of a common problem [27]. In the case of the health

crisis caused by the Covid-19 disease, it remains to discuss the type of participation that would reduce the number of infected, sick and dead. Co-management derived from the participation of actors and sectors will allow imminent risk scenarios to be anticipated. The objective of the present work is to analyze the conflict from the social representations of the actors to discuss the possible ways of mediation, conciliation and arbitration in the resolution of the problem. In order to contribute to the discussion of political and academic positions, the theory of social representations provides a perspective on which it is possible to reach agreements and co-responsibilities that lead the interested parties towards a governance of public health in the spaces of teaching learning as the traditional and face-to-face classroom.

The question that guides the present work is: Can the mitigation and containment policies of the pandemic be oriented towards a distancing and confinement of people that supposes a staggered and safe return for the academic community in the terms that the State demands without disrupting university autonomy? The premises that guide this study suggest that the differences between the parties reflect their positions on a common problem such as the pandemic [28]. In addition, the conflicts between the actors affect an escalation of negotiation, agreements and joint responsibilities as a preamble to governance. In this process of management and management of the pandemic in academic spaces, the parties involved express their positions, as well as their asymmetries. Immediately, the institutional mechanisms of mediation, conciliation and arbitration are activated to reduce the conflict. Mediation as the central axis of a discussion supposes the facilitation of positions, as well as an orientation towards the reduction of differences based on knowledge of the demands and resources between the parties. Conciliation follows the trajectory of mediation. It begins with the recognition of the positions and continues with the contrasting of these before a common problem. In this sense, conciliation is a management tool that guides opposing positions from a negotiation of common needs. Therefore, when mediation and conciliation are exhausted, arbitration emerges as a regulated instance of conflict resolution. Based on established protocols, the State and the university community can reach an agreement.

Thus, the contribution of this paper includes: 1) a discussion of the conflict between the parties and their resolution mechanisms; 2) a genealogical approximation of the differences and alternatives of co-responsibility between the parties from the social representations; 3) a discussion on the scope and limits of the theoretical perspective in the framework of a construction of the governance of the return to the face-to-face classroom.

Method

A cross-sectional, psychometric and exploratory study was carried out with a sample of 100 academics ($M = 45.3$ and $DE = 13.2$ of age, as well as $M = 28'976.00$ and $DE = 3'542.00$ of monthly income) and students ($M = 21.8$ and $DE = 2.1$ years old, as well as $M = 7,908.00$ and $DE = 243.00$ monthly income) from a public university in central Mexico, considering their participation in the committee to return to the face-to-face classroom, as well as their political ideology [29].

The Carreon University Governance Inventory (2020) was used, which includes 24 items and three dimensions: Image or external perception of well-being in the face of risks, contingencies or threats ("The university can intelligently contain an outbreak of COVID-19"); reputation or expectation of control of the situation ("The university prevents COVID-19 through its communication channels") and identity or perception of the union of members before the risk event ("The university can synchronize its activities to reduce risks of contagion of COVID-19"). Each item includes five response options ranging from 0 = "not at all likely" to 5 = "quite agree". The instrument has been reported as reliable at an alpha threshold of .68 up to an alpha value of .75 as well as validity with factorial weights ranging between .326 and .546 considering the structure of three principal components and varimax rotation. In the present work, the inventory reached an alpha value of .69 and an omega value of .73, as well as factorial weights that make up three components and that range from .325 to .489. Participants were contacted through their institutional email. They were informed about the purpose of the study and those responsible for carrying it out. Their consent was requested to carry out the survey prior guarantee of confidentiality and anonymity [30]. The protocol of the

American Psychological Association in its section with studies in humans was followed at all times.

Reliability, adequacy, sphericity, validity, fit, and residual estimates were carried out using the alpha, omega, Bartlett, Kayser-Meyer-Olkin, and goodness-of-fit and residual parameters. The values that approached the unit were taken as evidence of contrast of the null hypothesis regarding the differences between the theoretical structure and the empirical findings.

Results

The values that indicate the adequacy and validity of the governance construct, indicated by three main components with promax rotation (Table 1). The coefficients are at the threshold required to establish the internal consistency of the instrument, as well as the convergence of indicators in the factors or components.

Table 1. Adequacy and validity values

	MSA	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Uniqueness
	0.776				0.946
r1	0.531				0.24
r2	0.902	-0.821		0.808	0.256
r3	0.696	0.433		0.426	0.761
r4	0.776				0.118
r5	0.876	-0.932		0.611	0.21
r6	0.723	0.696	0.649		0.385
r7	0.645	0.472	-0.425		0.162
r8	0.881	0.756		-0.863	0.183
r9	0.791		0.818		0.325
r10	0.793				0.413
r11	0.824	-0.417			0.739
r12	0.572	-0.486	-0.54		0.685
r13	0.611			-0.965	0.099
r14	0.766		0.721		0.413
r15	0.783				0.157
r16	0.882	0.901			0.397
r17	0.802	0.698	0.511	0.517	0.408
r18	0.827				0.158
r19	0.835	-0.904			0.076
r20	0.821	0.939	0.406		0.833
r21	0.459		-0.668		0.372
r22	0.798		-0.989		0.023
r23	0.786			0.785	0.364
r24	0.808				

Source: Prepared with study data, promax rotation. Bartlett's test: $\chi^2 = 3245.336$ (276 df) $p > .0001$

The values compared between the observed data and the simulation of the model. Minimal differences are appreciated from the low eigenvalues. That is, the contrast of the hypothesis regarding the significant differences between the relationships reported in the literature with respect to the observed data and the simulated data suggests that the assumption is not rejected [31].

The structure of the three main components with respect to the 24 observed indicators [32]. There are positive and negative relationships that indicate the relevance of the exploratory model with respect to the findings reported in the literature. In addition, the instrument could be reduced based on the suppression of the indicators that are negatively related to the three factors and prioritizing the positive relationships between the three dimensions and their 24 traits [$\chi^2 = 1401.678$ (207 df) $p > .0001$; RMSEA = 0.258; TLI =

0.450]. In summary, the exploratory factorial structure of three components and 24 indicators has been empirically tested. The results show that the model could be reduced: the identity would have four indicators (r8, r16, r17 and r20), the reputation would include (r7, r10, r15), the image would include (r3, r6, r24).

Discussion

The contribution of this work to the state of the art lies in the empirical proof of the structure reported in the literature from 2020 to 2023. The results show the prevalence of identity, reputation and image as main components of university governance [33]. In an institutional sense, university governance is distinguished by its diversification in the face of crises. In the case of the proposed empirical model, the literature consulted notes the inclusion of a fourth factor related to stigma. In this way, university governance could be more diversified and explain the threats and contingencies in a context such as that of COVID-19. In relation to risk communication, the proposed model warns that if damage control is oriented towards image, then a governance centered on relationships, conflicts, agreements and internal co-responsibilities will be appreciated.

Conclusion

The contribution of this study to the literature consulted lies in the analysis of a conflict between universities and public administration of higher education. The discussion offered suggests that the parties in conflict can reach consensus and co-responsibility from different management mechanisms such as conciliation, mediation and arbitration. Underlying this bunch of offers is governance as a result of participation in different areas and instruments. From the sense of community, participation suggests a management system in which common goods define decisions and actions. Based on a political ideology, the corresponding participation assumes that the parties will maintain their differences, but in the end the alliances will prevail in the face of a global problem. Considering the appropriation of spaces, citizen participation makes it clear that governance must follow the guidelines of coexistence and equity in the face of the pandemic. Each type of participation suggests to the academic community forms of organization, decision-making, and action oriented from a biosecurity perspective. The prevention of illnesses and accidents prevails over any participatory trait, defining governance by its self-care. In this way, the conflict between universities and public administration is advancing towards a multilateral and inclusive agreement. This feature of governance that begins with the internal dialogue of the parties until reaching agreements between rival actors distinguishes it from other proposals. Faced with the government of common goods and corporate governance, governance stands out as an agenda open to change, a repository of proposals, and a regulator of differences. Faced with a global crisis such as the pandemic, governance is envisioned as a turning point for humanity. Unlike democracies where the inclusion of all is assumed by a principle of diversity and equity, governance is for those who participate until they reach the status of contributors to a global problem. It is not about a participation embodied by followers, militants and adherents to a political ideology, charismatic leader or interpretation of the basic needs and expectations of the agents. It is a contribution between the parties that have the potential to discuss the issues on the public agenda. Governance is a construction of those who demonstrate both in the streets and in the media. Dissidents of a regime that claims to be democratic. Critics of an apparently inclusive and democratic system. Contributors to the formation of talents. Facilitators of intangible assets in organizations that create knowledge.

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