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What if every school had a public dashboard of trust?

Visible Integrity: Reframing Accountability Through Relational Metrics

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Opening Reflection

Accountability is often framed in numbers, pass rates, budgets, attendance. But what if we measured something deeper? What if, by 2030, every South African school had a public dashboard of trust, a transparent, community-facing platform that reflected not just performance, but integrity, inclusion and relational health? This would be more than data. It would be a mirror of culture.

The Scenario

By 2030, the Department of Basic Education, building on the Data Driven Districts Programme and aligned with the Schooling 2030 Action Plan, launches the Trust Dashboard Initiative (TDI). Each school maintains a public dashboard, co-designed with stakeholders, displaying:

- Relational indicators: learner-teacher trust, parent-school engagement, staff cohesion
- Ethical governance metrics: transparency in admissions, procurement, disciplinary processes
- Wellbeing and inclusion data: bullying reports, support services, language equity
- Community feedback loops: anonymised surveys, suggestion tracking, response timelines
- Narrative snapshots: stories of care, innovation and restorative practice

Dashboards are updated quarterly and displayed in school foyers, websites and district portals. They are designed to be accessible, multilingual and context-sensitive. Pilot schools report improved stakeholder engagement, reduced conflict and stronger school identity. However, concerns arise: some fear reputational risk, others struggle with data literacy and facilitation.

What It Reveals

This scenario reveals the power of relational transparency. Trust is not built by hiding flaws, it is built by naming them, addressing them and inviting dialogue.

It also exposes the limitations of traditional accountability, which often rewards compliance over culture.

From a systems-thinking lens, dashboards of trust are feedback ecosystems, not just performance monitors. They invite schools to become learning organisations, not just delivery units.

Why It Matters

South African schools are complex, relational spaces. When trust erodes, between learners and teachers, parents and principals, staff and leadership, learning suffers. A dashboard of trust affirms that culture is measurable, and that accountability must be ethical, not extractive.

Philosophically, this scenario touches on epistemic justice, relational governance, and Ubuntu-informed transparency. It asks us to make integrity visible, not just assumed.

Reflective Responses

What does a dashboard of trust look like in practice?

It looks like a school displaying its commitment to fairness, care and responsiveness. It means metrics that reflect relationships, not just results.

How do we ensure dashboards are meaningful and not performative?

By co-designing indicators with communities, embedding narrative context, and using data to guide dialogue, not judgement.

What risks emerge if dashboards are imposed or misused?

Shame, manipulation and superficial compliance. Without trust, dashboards become surveillance, not stewardship.

Sidebar: Facts and Philosophy

Insights from South African Data Initiatives (2023–2025):

- The Data Driven Districts Dashboard visualises learner performance across 22,000 schools, positioning South Africa as a global leader in education data use
- The Schooling 2030 Action Plan calls for improved accountability, stakeholder engagement and ethical governance
- The WCED's Open Schools pilot includes community feedback mechanisms and relational indicators

“Trust is not a soft metric, it is the foundation of learning. When schools make trust visible, they make transformation possible.” - <i>Prof. Jonathan Jansen</i>
