



RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Architecture of Mission: The *Ratio studiorum* and Leadership in Jesuit Education

Raúl Saiz 

Facultad de Educación y Deporte, Universidad de Deusto, Bilbao, Spain

ABSTRACT

This article examines the structural foundations of Jesuit educational leadership from the *Constitutions* of the Society of Jesus to the *Ratio studiorum* (1599) and contemporary value-based frameworks (1986–2019). It argues that the durability of the Ignatian charism has depended not on inspiration alone, but on a specifying *rationality* capable of translating apostolic intention into accountable institutional form. The *Ratio studiorum* is interpreted as a governing architecture in which offices, responsibilities, and pedagogical order converged to secure corporate coherence.

The article critically examines the transition from prescriptive norms to shared values. While these frameworks articulate identity in plural and lay-led contexts, they relocate coherence toward personal appropriation, creating a potential structural underdetermination of mission.

By retrieving the *Ratio's* generative logic, especially its emphasis on forming those who form, the study proposes a renewed model of Jesuit leadership.

Keywords:

Ratio studiorum; Jesuit education; Ignatian leadership; educational governance; Catholic educational leadership

Correspondence:

Raúl Saiz, Facultad de Educación y Deporte, Universidad de Deusto, Bilbao, Spain;
email: raul.saiz@deusto.es

Introduction

In contemporary educational discourse, one increasingly encounters what has been described as “edu-babble”: a proliferation of vague slogans and rhetorical inflation that can displace sustained reflection on the ethical purposes of schooling.¹ This article approaches that problem through a historical case in which educational language was disciplined by institutional form. In the Jesuit tradition, the central question concerns not only what education ought to mean, but how a shared mission becomes operational and durable within schools.

A telling example is the *Ratio studiorum* of the Society of Jesus. Grounded in the principles articulated in Part IV of Ignatius’s *Constitutions* and codified under Superior General Claudio Acquaviva, the *Ratio* provided a stable and universal framework for Jesuit education.² Through it, mission was rendered not merely aspirational but organizationally durable. What matters here is the kind of *rationality* that makes such durability possible: a way of specifying educational action so that it may be enacted by many actors, in many places, without dissolving into generic aspiration.

This specifying *rationality* is articulated early in *Annotationes* by Diego de Ledesma (1519–75) in 1564, in which universal prescriptions are deemed pedagogically insufficient unless translated into detailed procedures.³ Drawing on analogies from architecture and surgery, Ledesma insisted that foundations, measurements, and arrangements must be concretely defined if the intended work is to succeed. In this sense, *ratio* signifies not an abstract principle but a programmatic logic of action that binds purpose, procedure, and governance into a coherent framework.

Read in this light, the 1599 *Ratio studiorum* should be understood not as a mere list of subjects, but as a formal plan of studies designed to secure fidelity to purpose through regulated and accountable implementation.⁴ Its internal logic orders curriculum, offices, and responsibilities in a hierarchical and articulated manner, ensuring coherence of practice across institutions and contexts.⁵ By binding curricular coherence to defined

- 1 Terence McLaughlin, “The Distinctiveness of Catholic Education,” in *The Contemporary Catholic School: Context, Identity and Diversity*, ed. Terence McLaughlin, Joseph O’Keefe, and Bernadette O’Keefe (Falmer Press, 1996), 138–39.
- 2 Miquel Batllori, “Introducció històrica,” in *Ratio studiorum: Ordenació dels estudis dels Jesuïtes*, ed. Àngel Rubio i Goday (Eumo Editorial, 1999), xxxviii–xxxix.
- 3 Diego de Ledesma, “Annotationes in Rationem studiorum” (1564), in *Monumenta Paedagogica Societatis Iesu*, vol. 2 (1557–1572), ed. Ladislaus Lukács (Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1974), 688.
- 4 Gabriel Codina Mir, “El ‘Modus parisiensis,’” *Gregorianum* 85, no. 1 (2004): 49, 63.
- 5 Josep Maria Margenat Peralta, “El sistema educativo de los primeros jesuitas,” *Arbor: Ciencia, pensamiento y cultura* 192, no. 782 (2016): 7–10, <https://doi.org/10.3989/arbor.2016.192.782>.

roles—provincial, rector, and prefect of studies—the *Ratio* integrates governance and pedagogy within a single institutional architecture.⁶ Mission is thus carried by form, and form sustained by accountable responsibility.

To examine how this durability was constructed historically and how it may be reinterpreted today, the argument unfolds in four movements: first, the articulation of Ignatian leadership as institutionalized charisma; second, the *Ratio studiorum* as its structural embodiment; third, the late twentieth-century shift from prescriptive norms to value-based frameworks; and finally, a proposal for structural leadership capable of sustaining Jesuit identity in contemporary contexts.

Ignatian Leadership as Institutionalized Charism

To understand the institutional rigor of the *Ratio studiorum*, it is first necessary to clarify how leadership was conceived within the early Society of Jesus. This section examines Ignatian leadership as a form of spiritual governance oriented to mission and embodied in a corporate body, highlighting the formative logic that underpins the Society's educational project.

Leadership in the Ignatian Charism: Helping Souls through Formation

To understand the institutional rigor of the *Ratio studiorum*, one must begin with the foundational aim that historically defined Jesuit leadership: the helping of souls (*auxilium animarum*).⁷ This was not a pious abstraction but the operative horizon of apostolic discernment, rooted in the *Spiritual Exercises* and normatively expressed in the *Formula of the Institute*. From the outset, the Society recognized that such service required disciplined formation. The progress of souls presupposed intellectual competence, moral integrity, and pedagogical order. Leadership was therefore inseparable from the responsibility to establish the institutional conditions under which formation could occur.⁸ The rigor of the *Ratio* does not introduce a new principle; it gives structural embodiment to a founding conviction that effective apostolic governance depends upon well-ordered education.⁹

org/10.3989/arbor.2016.782n6001.

6 Carmen Labrador, "La *Ratio studiorum*," in *Diccionario de espiritualidad ignaciana*, ed. Grupo de Espiritualidad Ignaciana (Mensajero-Sal Terrae, 2007), 1532–33.

7 Society of Jesus, *The Formula of the Institute* (1540), §1; *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms*, ed. John W. Padberg, S.J. (Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), §§812–13.

8 *Constitutions*, §307.

9 Ladislaus Lukács, "Ratio studiorum," in *Diccionario histórico de la Compañía de Jesús*, ed. Charles E. O'Neill and Joaquín M. Domínguez (Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu-Universidad Pontificia Comillas, 2001), 3293.

Ignatius's own trajectory makes this logic visible. After his conversion, his desire to help others led him to suspend immediate apostolic activity in order to pursue formal studies in Barcelona and Paris. This decision was not merely devotional but institutionally consequential: it expressed the conviction that helping others effectively presupposes prior formation.¹⁰ In Ignatian terms, leadership oriented toward the *magis* requires submission to the discipline of study.

This formative insight was gradually generalized within the emerging Society and translated into shared institutional practice. What historians have described as the Society's gradual shift toward prolonged and structured formation became a defining feature of Jesuit identity, requiring stable practices capable of forming competent and reliable agents.¹¹ Leadership thus came to be understood less as personal inspiration than as responsibility for ensuring the sustained preparation of others for durable apostolic service.

As the Society developed, this priority crystallized into explicit organizational norms. The *Constitutions* make clear that superiors were responsible not only for spiritual example but for ensuring adequate intellectual preparation in theology, philosophy, and related disciplines.¹² In this way, leadership assumed a generative character: superiors acted as formators of those who would themselves form others, securing continuity through preparation rather than charisma alone. The priority accorded to studies was therefore not ancillary to mission, but one of the principal means by which the *auxilium animarum* was rendered durable through institutional form.¹³

Leadership Rooted in the Constitutions: The Body for Mission

This structural priority finds its fullest expression in the constitutional vision of the Society as a body ordered to mission. The *Constitutions* institutionalize Ignatian leadership by framing the Society as a living body, a corporate identity in which the superior safeguards union and stability through a shared purpose, even as members are dispersed across the globe.¹⁴ Leadership is thus rendered generative rather than merely charismatic: those in authority are responsible for preparing their companions so that mission may endure beyond individual initiative. While unity flows from the head, initiative is entrusted to those closest to the work.

10 Ignatius of Loyola, *A Pilgrim's Testament: The Memoirs of Saint Ignatius of Loyola*, ed. Barton T. Geger, S.J. (Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2020), §§54–55, 71, 85.

11 John W. O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Harvard University Press, 1993), 90.

12 *Constitutions*, §§446–47.

13 O'Malley, *First Jesuits*, 208–15.

14 *Constitutions*, §§655, 820.

Ignatian governance forms part of the very Institute of the Society, integrating juridical structure, delegation of authority, and personal accountability within a spiritual framework. Authority is therefore not merely administrative but personal and discernment-based, exercised through concrete knowledge of persons and ordered toward the common mission.¹⁵

Ignatius's own narrative already anticipates this development. The *Autobiography* recounts his passage from personal conversion to shared deliberation and committed apostolic companionship. What began as an individual spiritual awakening became, through communal discernment and freely embraced obedience, a stable missionary fellowship. The constitutional form did not replace the charism; it gave juridical and structural embodiment to an apostolic communion that had first emerged in practice.¹⁶

Accordingly, the Society is conceived not as a loose aggregation of autonomous individuals but as a single apostolic body ordered toward mission.¹⁷ The organic metaphor is not merely illustrative; it provides both a theological vision of communion and the institutional grammar by which that communion is sustained. Authority, therefore, functions as a constitutive principle of unity, preserving and strengthening the body so that it may effectively pursue its end.¹⁸ The superior, described as *caput*, or the head, is not a monarchical sovereign but the source of cohesion and direction within the whole. Authority is mediated in ordered form—from the general to provincials, and then to the rectors and local superiors—so that unity is maintained across dispersion.¹⁹ Governance thus appears intrinsically relational, binding persons, offices, and works into a coordinated apostolic body directed toward a common mission.

This relational structure was sustained through concrete practices. From the late 1540s onward, continuous correspondence enabled experiences, decisions, and norms to circulate throughout the body, reinforcing alignment between local leadership and universal mission.²⁰ Communication was not ancillary to governance; it was one of its operative mechanisms, integrating local discernment into a broader corporate horizon.

15 Bernard Demoustier, "Les Jésuites et l'enseignement à la fin du XVI^e siècle," in *Ratio studiorum: Plan raisonné et institution des études dans la Compagnie de Jésus*, ed. Adrien Demoustier and Dominique Julia (Belin, 1997), 26.

16 *Pilgrim's Testament*, §§50–53, 57–62, 82–85, 96–99.

17 *Constitutions*, §§659, 821.

18 *Constitutions*, §820.

19 *Constitutions*, §666.

20 *Constitutions*, §§675–76; Dominique Julia, "L'élaboration de la *Ratio studiorum*, 1548–1599," in *Ratio studiorum: Plan raisonné et institution des études dans la Compagnie de Jésus*, ed. Adrien Demoustier and Dominique Julia (Belin, 1997), 29.

Within this framework, authority assumes a distinctive character in three interrelated ways. First, it is exercised as mission-oriented service: superiors foster love, obedience, and union as dispositions that sustain apostolic effectiveness.²¹ Authority exists not for control but for apostolic fruitfulness. Second, governance presupposes concrete knowledge of persons and contexts.²² Leadership thus becomes an ongoing act of apostolic judgment rather than mere administrative oversight. Third, the *Constitutions* articulate a principle of structured delegation.²³ They establish a centralized executive authority sufficiently strong to sustain unity, yet deliberately ordered for wide delegation, with clearly defined responsibilities at every level, from the provincial to the individual professor.²⁴ Authority is relayed through provincials and local superiors, and initiative is entrusted to those closest to the work. In this way, unity flows from the head without suppressing local responsibility.

Crucially, this entire structure is marked by mobility and availability. Leadership remains subordinate to mission and openness to the Spirit, institutionally expressed in the fourth vow of obedience regarding missions.

Ignatian leadership thus emerges as simultaneously structured and flexible, personal and institutional, spiritual and strategic. Rooted in the *Constitutions*, it sustains the unity of an apostolic body in motion, ordered toward mission through concrete discernment rather than abstract prescription. This constitutional grammar provides the conditions for durability and coherence while preserving the freedom required for adaptation in changing circumstances. It reflects a deliberate balance between normative structure and adaptability, consistent with the Ignatian preference for leaving even the *Constitutions* open to future change and regional adaptation.²⁵ The question that remains is how this grammar of unity, delegation, and discernment becomes operational within the concrete organization of studies—a task assumed by the *Ratio studiorum*.

The *Ratio studiorum* (1599) as the Concrete Structure of Leadership

If the *Constitutions* articulate the theological foundations of Jesuit governance, the *Ratio studiorum* gives that governance institutional and pedagogical form within the educational apostolate. This section examines how leadership is exercised through the structural architecture of the *Ratio*, fo-

21 *Constitutions*, §§547, 618, 667, 671, 821.

22 *Constitutions*, §§547, 618, 667, 671, 821.

23 *Constitutions*, §§719–23, see also 675–76.

24 Demoustier, “Les Jésuites et l’enseignement à la fin du XVI^e siècle,” 18–19.

25 Batllori, “Introducció històrica,” xxxix.

cusing on the organization of studies and the offices responsible for carrying mission into daily pedagogical practice.

A Pedagogical Constitution: The Ratio as Leadership in Structure

While the *Constitutions* articulate the theological and spiritual grammar of Jesuit governance, they do not yet specify in detail how that leadership is to be enacted within the concrete practices of schooling. That task is assumed by the *Ratio studiorum* of 1599, which functions as the operational codification of Ignatian leadership in the educational apostolate. Far from being a mere curricular outline, the *Ratio* constitutes what Demoustier describes as a “code des manières de faire,” defining functions and responsibilities across the colleges and ensuring coherence of practice.²⁶ In this sense, it operates as a pedagogical constitution: a normative framework that articulates a unified and integrated educational system, translating the Society’s apostolic vision into the daily rhythms, offices, and procedures of collegiate life.²⁷

In continuity with this understanding, the *Ratio* embodies the conviction that leadership must take institutional form if it is to remain durable across time and place. It is widely acknowledged that the 1599 text was not an abstract blueprint imposed from above, but the culmination of more than five decades of experimentation, consultation, and shared reflection across the entire body of the Society.²⁸ Through this long process, a unified architecture of order was established, one capable of sustaining a common educational mission across diverse cultural and geographical contexts.

This architectural consolidation is precisely what Ladislaus Lukács underscores when he notes that the *Ratio* is not a theoretical treatise but a document with an explicitly practical purpose: it was designed to unify the diverse pedagogical experiments of the early Society into a single, cohesive body.²⁹ Its very format—structured into ordered *regulae* assigned to each office, beginning with the provincial and descending through the rectors, prefects, professors, and finally students—embodies the juridical clarity and internal coherence typical of constitutional governance.³⁰ Leadership here is exercised through normativity: through clearly articulated roles,

26 Demoustier, “Jésuites et l’enseignement,” 19–20.

27 Margenat Peralta, “El sistema educativo de los primeros jesuitas,” 10.

28 Julia, “L’élaboration de la *Ratio studiorum*,” 29, 31, 68.

29 Lukács, “*Ratio studiorum*,” 3293–94.

30 “Rules for the Provincial,” “Rules for the Prefect of Studies,” “Common Rules for All Professors,” and “Rules for the Prefect of Lower Studies,” in *The Ratio studiorum: The Official Plan for Jesuit Education*, ed. and trans. Claude N. Pavur, S.J. (Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2005).

responsibilities, and procedures that bind personal action to a common institutional logic. In this sense, the *Ratio studiorum* gives institutional and operational form to the specifying *rationality* already articulated in Diego de Ledesma's mid-sixteenth-century reflections on pedagogy.

Taken together, these structural features reveal that the *Ratio studiorum* functions as a sustained mediation between the mystical charism of the founder and the concrete social reality of the classroom. Leadership is no longer entrusted to personal intuition, but is exercised through a stable network of offices, norms, and pedagogical rhythms ordered toward the formation of students and the preparation of educators for mission. Sustained by regular communication among provinces and by the progressive consolidation of shared practices, this architecture fosters institutional coherence while preserving room for contextual adaptation. Read from the perspective of leadership, the *Ratio* thus articulates a stable *modus procedendi* in which authority, formation, and responsibility converge structurally: governance becomes an educational act, and education a concrete expression of apostolic governance, ensuring that the helping of souls is durably embodied in the curriculum itself.³¹

The Rector: The Formative Head of the College

This architecture is deliberately organized around offices rather than individuals. Through the interlocking roles of the rector and the prefects, the *Ratio* situates leadership within a stable and enduring framework of responsibilities that bind authority to the supervision of studies and the coherence of educational practice.³² Precisely for this reason, it marks a significant departure from many contemporary European universities, particularly those shaped by the Parisian model.³³ In the Jesuit model, by contrast, governance is structurally institutional. Authority derives from office and mission rather than from representation or personal prominence.³⁴

At the heart of this collegiate structure, leadership at the level of the college is vested in the rector. Governing in the place of the provincial, he is responsible for ordering the institution according to the rules and to the end for which the Society was instituted. As the text itself states, "he should

31 Codina Mir, "El 'Modus parisiensis,'" 44, 49, 62–63; Claude N. Pavur, S.J., "The Curriculum Carries the Mission: Why We Still Need the *Ratio studiorum*, Especially Today," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education* 34 (2008): 30–33; Batllori, "Introducció històrica," xxxvii, li, lvi, lix.

32 Pavur, *Ratio studiorum*, §115; Codina Mir, "El 'Modus parisiensis,'" 49; Batllori, "Introducció històrica," xxxix; Labrador, "La *Ratio studiorum*," 1532.

33 Codina Mir, "El 'Modus parisiensis,'" 49, 63; O'Malley, *The First Jesuits*, 208–15.

34 Lukács, "Ratio studiorum," 3307–12.

devote himself especially to achieving, with the help of God, this final goal that the Society has set before itself in allowing schooling to be part of its mission.”³⁵ This orientation toward the Society’s end is made concrete in his responsibility to ensure that each member faithfully fulfills his office and that concord is preserved among professors, so that the conduct of studies remains consistently ordered to that apostolic purpose.³⁶ The *Ratio* thus presents a model in which academic rigor and spiritual mission are structurally integrated.

Yet the rector’s authority is not self-contained. Accountable to higher governance, he ensures that local practice remains integrated within the wider body of the Society.³⁷ Through this ordered subordination, institutional unity is preserved across dispersed colleges. In this way, mission is sustained not by isolated inspiration, but by an office embedded in a durable and coherent structure capable of carrying apostolic purpose over time.³⁸

The Prefects: Bridging Vision and Execution

If Ignatian leadership consists in ordering persons and practices toward mission, and if the Rector embodies this responsibility at the level of the whole college, the Prefects represent its articulation within the concrete processes of teaching and learning.³⁹ The *Ratio studiorum* establishes the prefect of higher studies and the prefect of lower studies as structural mediators who translate the apostolic horizon of the institution into the daily rhythms of the classroom.⁴⁰ Their role is not ancillary but constitutive: through them, mission becomes pedagogically operative.

In carrying out this mediating function, the prefects safeguard the common *modus procedendi* across disciplines, levels, and teachers.⁴¹ Their authority is technical and formative rather than personal. Rooted in competence and fidelity to the *Ratio* as the Society’s shared educational plan, they ensure that academic activity remains consistently ordered to its formative and apostolic purpose.

This mediation becomes visible above all in the supervision of teaching practice. The prefect of lower studies is charged with frequent classroom visitation, observing the method employed, and ensuring conformity to

35 Pavur, *Ratio studiorum*, §75.

36 Pavur, *Ratio studiorum*, §§76–78.

37 *Constitutions*, §§423–24.

38 Pavur, *Ratio studiorum*, §§75, 99; *Constitutions*, §§719–23.

39 Pavur, *Ratio studiorum*, §8.

40 Pavur, *Ratio studiorum*, §§99, 242–44.

41 Codina Mir, “El ‘Modus parisiensis,’” 49, 63.

the prescribed order of studies.⁴² Through such oversight, he promotes coherence of instruction and attentiveness to both the intellectual progress and moral formation of students. Far from functioning as mere administrative inspection, this supervision reinforces continuity of method across the college and supports teachers in aligning their pedagogical practice with the common educational plan of the Society.

In delegating pedagogical oversight to these offices, the rector exercises leadership through ordered delegation rather than through direct intervention in every aspect of academic life. Authority is thus mediated through coordinated roles, enacted close to the site of instruction while remaining integrated within the common framework established by the *Ratio*.⁴³ Within this structure, decisions concerning method, discipline, and the conduct of studies are made in continuity with the Society's shared educational plan, ensuring that local practice remains aligned with its apostolic end.

Taken together, the coordinated exercise of these offices stabilizes Jesuit educational leadership within a structured network of responsibility. Mission is sustained not by episodic initiative but by roles defined, supervised, and integrated within a common institutional order. In this configuration, the *Ratio studiorum* does more than regulate teaching: it shapes the school as a corporate body in which curriculum, governance, and formation are structurally intertwined.

The Renewal of Jesuit Educational Leadership: From Rules to Values

Following the structural articulation of Jesuit educational leadership achieved through the *Ratio studiorum*, the late twentieth century witnessed a significant reconfiguration of how that leadership was expressed and sustained. In a context increasingly marked by cultural pluralism, global expansion, and the growing participation of lay collaborators, the Society of Jesus sought to preserve its educational identity through forms of articulation no longer dependent primarily on detailed *regulae* and institutional prescriptions.

Rather than reproducing the procedural density characteristic of the early modern period, the Society turned toward a renewed articulation of shared vision and apostolic purpose. This transition found influential expression in *The Characteristics of Jesuit Education* (1986), promulgated during the generalate of Peter-Hans Kolvenbach (1928–2016, g. 1983–2016). The document was not conceived as a new *Ratio studiorum*, nor as a code

42 Pavur, *Ratio studiorum*, §§244–46.

43 Pavur, *Ratio studiorum*, §325.

of governance, but as a statement of identity capable of orienting a global network of institutions amid diverse and rapidly changing circumstances.⁴⁴

This development enabled necessary adaptation and broadened participation across varied cultural and institutional settings. At the same time, it introduces the structural question that frames the present section: How can a mission historically sustained by precise institutional forms continue to endure when those forms are translated into frameworks centered primarily on vision, values, and discernment?⁴⁵

The Shift to Value-Based Frameworks (1986–93)

The structural question just raised finds its first sustained response in the educational documents promulgated between 1986 and 1993. In this period, Jesuit educational leadership was not dismantled but rearticulated: no longer expressed primarily through detailed institutional regulation, it was reformulated through a set of shared principles capable of orienting diverse cultural and institutional contexts. Under Kolvenbach's generalate, the aim was neither to abandon the Ignatian tradition nor to dilute its demands, but to render its governing spirit intelligible and operative within a rapidly changing global landscape increasingly shaped by lay collaboration.

Within this reconfiguration, the twenty-eight "characteristics" function as a contemporary grammar of Jesuit education. They do not codify offices or prescribe procedures; instead, they articulate the spiritual and pedagogical core of the tradition in a form accessible to both Jesuit and lay educators. Presented as a framework for reflection and evaluation, they invite schools into a shared process of apostolic discernment while allowing for contextual adaptation. The transition from prescriptive regulation to value-centered articulation thus appears not as a rupture, but as a deliberate strategy of renewal aimed at sustaining unity across plurality.⁴⁶

The text itself makes this shift explicit. Decisions are described as emerging from an "ongoing process of individual and communal 'discernment,'"⁴⁷ and school policies are said to "encourage reflection and evaluation; they allow for change when change is necessary."⁴⁸ Jesuit schools are portrayed as a network "joined not by unity of administra-

44 Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., "Letter to All Major Superiors," introduction to *The Characteristics of Jesuit Education* (Curia Generalizia della Compagnia di Gesù, December 8, 1986).

45 Pavur, "The Curriculum Carries the Mission," 28–31.

46 International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education, *The Characteristics of Jesuit Education* (Secretariat for Jesuit Education, 1986), §§9–12.

47 *Characteristics of Jesuit Education*, §143.

48 *Characteristics of Jesuit Education*, §145.

tion or uniformity of programs, but by a common vision with common goals.”⁴⁹ Furthermore, the “circumstances of persons and places” require that “courses of studies . . . and the whole life of the school” be adapted to local contexts.⁵⁰ Unity, in this framework, is secured less by regulatory uniformity than by a shared horizon of meaning.

This trajectory was further consolidated in *Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach* (1993). Developed by the International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education (ICAJE), the document formally introduced the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (IPP) as a structured methodological framework—Context, Experience, Reflection, Action, Evaluation⁵¹—explicitly rooted in the dynamic of the Spiritual Exercises and in the Ignatian “interplay of experience, reflection, and action.”⁵² The paradigm seeks to embody the spiritual and educational vision of Jesuit education within the concrete processes of teaching and learning. Within this framework, the teacher “creates the conditions, lays the foundations, and provides the opportunities for the continual interplay of experience, reflection and action,”⁵³ exercising authority through pedagogical mediation and accompaniment rather than primarily through disciplinary control. Educational leadership is thus translated into methodological form: governance becomes embedded within the formative dynamics of the classroom itself.

Yet when this evolution is examined from the standpoint of institutional structure, a certain asymmetry becomes visible. Whereas the 1599 *Ratio studiorum* secured coherence through a clearly defined architecture of offices and oversight—most notably through the coordinated roles of rector and prefects—the post-1986 framework locates unity principally at the level of shared values and personal appropriation. The IPP offers methodological clarity for individual educators but remains comparatively indeterminate regarding institutional governance and collective accountability.

Beyond its methodological formulation, the deeper significance of the IPP lies in its retrieval of a generative intuition already present in early Jesuit schooling: the quality of student formation is inseparable from the formation of those who teach. By linking educational effectiveness to the ongoing professional and spiritual growth of educators, the IPP reaffirms a conviction embedded in the formative practices of the sixteenth centu-

49 *Characteristics of Jesuit Education*, §148.

50 *Characteristics of Jesuit Education*, §147.

51 International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education, *Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach* (Secretariat for Jesuit Education, 1993), §§68, 71.

52 *Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach*, §§22–23.

53 *Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach*, §27.

ry—the mission advances only insofar as those responsible for teaching are themselves continually formed.⁵⁴

At the same time, the early Jesuit system did not rely on personal disposition alone. It integrated apostolic purpose with a unified and methodical organization of studies, supervision, and teacher preparation, thereby securing formation through shared institutional structures rather than through individual improvisation. In this respect, the IPP may be read not as a departure from tradition, but as a selective retrieval of it: strong in spiritual anthropology and pedagogical dynamism, but less explicit in its articulation of institutional mediation.⁵⁵

The contemporary Jesuit educational vision, therefore, confronts a structural question. In the absence of a common *modus procedendi* comparable to that provided by the *Ratio*, the enactment of Ignatian values depends more heavily on local interpretation and personal commitment. This does not invalidate the turn to values; rather, it reveals the need to reconsider how such values might once again be carried corporately and durably within institutional form.

Jesuit Schools: A Living Tradition (2019)

The most recent global framework, *Jesuit Schools: A Living Tradition in the 21st Century; An Ongoing Exercise of Discernment* (2019), presents itself less as a prescriptive plan than as an invitation to renew Jesuit educational identity through discernment within a rapidly changing context. The text explicitly frames itself as “an ongoing exercise of discernment,” and describes the document not as “a static document,” but as “a living text” meant to “inspire, move and encourage” school communities to engage their context proactively.⁵⁶

In structural terms, the document proposes coherence through a shared global horizon expressed in ten “key identifiers.” It states that “there are essential identifiers that must be part of every Jesuit school in the world: no matter the local condition or context,” and then presents “ten key identifiers that should be present in all Jesuit schools.”⁵⁷ This universalizing move is reinforced by the insistence on networking: schools are called to be

54 Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach, §§10, 23, 25, 27.

55 Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach, §§3, 7, 9.

56 José A. Mesa, S.J., “Foreword: The Conversation Must Continue . . .,” in *Jesuit Schools: A Living Tradition in the 21st Century; An Ongoing Exercise of Discernment*, by the International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education (Secretariat for Jesuit Education, 2019).

57 International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education, *Jesuit Schools: A Living Tradition in the 21st Century*, §§19, 23.

“committed to being a Global Network at the service of the Mission,” and the text highlights an online platform intended to connect educators “from Jesuit and Ignatian schools worldwide.”⁵⁸

Viewed through the structural lens developed in the preceding sections, the decisive question concerns not the substance of the identifiers but the kind of institutional cohesion they generate. Historically, the *Ratio studiorum* bound mission to governance through offices, procedural norms, and oversight mechanisms.⁵⁹ *A Living Tradition*, by contrast, organizes unity primarily through common reference points and a shared process of reflection. Its own internal logic is explicit: “The purpose of this document is to invite all stakeholders of Jesuit schools to begin, continue or renew a process of discernment as the way to proceed,” and it underlines “the acceleration of change” and “the ever-changing nature of history” as the condition requiring this approach.⁶⁰

This orientation is not merely rhetorical: the document asks for concrete local processes. It states, “We ask that the directors of our educational ministries set aside the time and organize a process for our faculties and staffs to participate in a discernment,” and immediately adds, “This is a huge commitment of time for our institutions and it is essential.” It then links this institutional discernment to communication and collaboration, asserting that “to communicate and collaborate with our global network is essential.”⁶¹

In other words, the proposed “structure” is processual: time set aside, organized communal discernment, and networked exchange. The implications of this shift become especially visible where leadership must operate without a highly specified institutional grammar. *A Living Tradition* explicitly states that it “does not replace the previous documents; rather, it complements and updates them as an ongoing exercise of discernment.” In addition, it describes itself as “an unfinished discernment” and “an open-ended document” that educators are invited to “enrich . . . with their reflections, experiences and contributions.”⁶²

Read alongside the historical architecture of the *Ratio*, this does not imply rupture, but sharpens a formal question: How can a mission historically sustained through tightly articulated forms of governance remain

58 *Jesuit Schools: A Living Tradition in the 21st Century*, §§24–25.

59 Pavur, “The Curriculum Carries the Mission,” 31–32.

60 *Jesuit Schools: A Living Tradition in the 21st Century*, §8.

61 *Jesuit Schools: A Living Tradition in the 21st Century*, §§9, 10.

62 Arturo Sosa, S.J., “To the Whole Society,” in *Jesuit Schools: A Living Tradition in the 21st Century*.

durable when cohesion is sought chiefly through open-ended discernment processes, shared identifiers, and networked collaboration?

The implications of this shift become particularly visible in contexts where leadership is predominantly lay. *A Living Tradition* itself recognizes the central role of lay collaborators in carrying forward the mission and repeatedly invites institutions to engage in organized communal discernment. Yet in the absence of an institutional grammar comparable to that developed in early Jesuit education, local leaders inevitably operate within broader managerial cultures that shape contemporary schooling.⁶³ Such models are not intrinsically at odds with Ignatian tradition. Their integration, however, requires deliberate and sustained discernment if the school's formative logic is to remain coherent. Historically, the early Jesuit system derived much of its durability from its capacity to translate apostolic intention into a technically articulated way of proceeding—a shared method that stabilized mission across widely dispersed settings.⁶⁴

The 2019 framework places significant emphasis on processes of communal discernment and ongoing formation within the educational community. It explicitly asks that time be set aside and organized for such discernment and describes itself as “an ongoing exercise of discernment,” inviting schools to renew their identity in changing contexts. At the same time, the modalities through which this renewal is to occur are articulated primarily in terms of shared reflection, networking, and collaborative engagement. The document does not codify roles, supervisory structures, or procedural norms comparable to those that characterized early Jesuit educational governance. This difference does not imply regression. Rather, it points to a shift in institutional form: cohesion is fostered through shared identifiers and organized discernment rather than through a tightly specified grammar of offices and procedures. The question that follows concerns not fidelity to mission, but how such shared processes are translated into stable institutional patterns capable of sustaining that mission over time.⁶⁵

Seen in this light, the question facing contemporary Jesuit leadership is not whether to articulate values—this has been done with clarity and conviction—but how to render those values structurally generative. The enduring strength of the original Jesuit educational model lay in its integration of apostolic purpose, intellectual formation, and organizational architecture within a coherent system.⁶⁶ The task confronting twenty-first-century Jesuit schools is therefore not to recover early modern forms, but to dis-

63 Julia, “L’élaboration de la Ratio studiorum, 1548–1599,” 65–66.

64 Codina Mir, “El ‘Modus parisiensis,’” 49, 63.

65 McLaughlin, “The Distinctiveness of Catholic Education,” 141–58.

66 Margenat Peralta, “El sistema educativo de los primeros jesuitas,” 7–10.

cern how a living tradition can continue to produce institutional patterns capable of sustaining its mission over time.⁶⁷ The question, therefore, is not whether discernment is necessary, but whether discernment alone can bear the weight of institutional durability without an articulated grammar capable of stabilizing it.

Forming the Formators: A Generative Model

A central principle inherited from the *Ratio studiorum*, and only incompletely articulated in contemporary Jesuit educational frameworks, is that leadership must be intrinsically generative. From its earliest educational formulations, the Society recognized that the vitality of its schools depends directly on the sustained formation of those who teach. The *Ratio* of 1599 institutionalizes this conviction by treating the preparation and supervision of teachers not as ancillary concerns, but as constitutive elements of apostolic effectiveness. Education, in this sense, is never stronger than the formative depth of its educators.⁶⁸

Within the Ignatian tradition, therefore, the teacher is not merely a transmitter of content but a subject in ongoing formation. As the *Constitutions* state in Part IV, the “greater progress” of students presupposes securing the “greater virtue and learning” of those entrusted with instruction.⁶⁹ Leadership is thus directed not only toward measurable outcomes, but toward cultivating the human, intellectual, and spiritual conditions that sustain mission over time.

The Historical Roots of Jesuit Teacher Formation

The *Ratio studiorum* of 1599 did not entrust the quality of teachers to personal inclination or informal apprenticeship. Rather, it instituted a rigorous and structurally articulated process of preparation in which the provincial and the rector assumed direct responsibility for discerning, forming, and assigning future masters.⁷⁰ The preparation of teachers was thus not a peripheral concern but a constitutive element of the Society’s educational mission. Accordingly, in the *Rules of the Provincial*, §§24–29, the following are regulated:⁷¹

67 Alberto Núñez Fernández, *El eslabón perdido de la pedagogía jesuita: Una propuesta inspirada en la Ratio studiorum* (Ediciones Mensajero, 2024), 126–35.

68 Pavur, *Ratio studiorum*, §§129, 325.

69 *Constitutions*, §440.

70 Pavur, *Ratio studiorum*, §§53, 83.

71 Pavur, *Ratio studiorum*, §§47–52.

- stable dedication to teaching,
- long-term commitment to the apostolate of education,
- gradual progression through the different levels of instruction,
- selection of those who demonstrate greater competence.

As Ladislaus Lukács has shown, this attention to teacher formation was embedded within the very architecture of the Jesuit school system, particularly through norms regulating studies, supervision, and the gradual assumption of pedagogical responsibility.⁷² Miquel Batllori similarly underscored that the strength of the Jesuit educational enterprise lay not only in its spiritual motivation but in its technical organization. He described the formation system surrounding the *Ratio* as the operative core of Jesuit schooling, highlighting the Society's distinctive capacity to institutionalize formation through stable offices, defined procedures, and shared expectations.⁷³ Teachers were thus prepared to become experts in their disciplines while remaining deeply rooted in the spiritual charism of the Society. This synthesis ensured that the *auxilium animarum* was sustained not by zeal alone, but by intellectual rigor and pedagogical discipline integrated within a coherent institutional form.

The Structural Requirement of a Generative Model

Such a generative understanding of leadership cannot be sustained without an adequate institutional framework. As Bernard Demoustier has argued, Ignatian pedagogy presupposes not only personal formation but also institutional structures capable of reflecting on, correcting, and renewing their own practices.⁷⁴ Leadership, from this perspective, extends beyond the formation of individuals to the configuration of an educational ecosystem in which formation is structurally reproduced over time.

As noted earlier, within the classical configuration of the *Ratio studiorum*, this responsibility was concentrated above all in the office of the Prefect of Studies. The prefect's role was conceived as explicitly formative rather than merely supervisory: through classroom visitation, guidance of teachers, and oversight of pedagogical coherence, he functioned as a genuine *formator formatorum*.⁷⁵ This office ensured that pedagogical method, curricular progression, and apostolic purpose remained structurally aligned within the life of the college.

72 Lukács, "Ratio studiorum," 3298–99.

73 Batllori, "Introducció històrica," xxxix.

74 Demoustier, "Les Jésuites et l'enseignement à la fin du XVI^e siècle," 15–18, 24–27, 32–35.

75 Labrador, "La Ratio studiorum," 1532.

Apostolic Vitality and Institutional Continuity

Ultimately, a generative model of leadership protects Jesuit schools from both vocational exhaustion and bureaucratic reduction. As Claude Pavur has argued, the historical *Ratio studiorum* functioned in such a way that “the curriculum carries the mission”: apostolic vitality was embedded within a structured network of offices, rules, and pedagogical responsibilities capable of sustaining formation beyond individual charisma.⁷⁶ When leadership is oriented toward forming those who form, the school remains an apostolic body rather than devolving into a merely functional organization.

This logic of institutional generativity also clarifies the contemporary challenge. The effectiveness of the early Jesuit educational project lay in the articulation of a unified and methodical system in which curriculum, pedagogical practice, and apostolic purpose were coherently integrated. Its strength did not derive from isolated innovation, but from the structured coordination of intellectual formation, spiritual orientation, and institutional organization within a common and reproducible framework.⁷⁷ In that light, the “living tradition” can remain genuinely alive only if each generation of leaders assumes responsibility for preparing the next within similarly articulated structures of formation. Generativity thus emerges not as an optional quality, but as the decisive criterion by which Jesuit educational leadership secures both continuity and renewal across time.

Conclusion and Synthesis: Toward a Structural Leadership for the 21st Century

The preceding analysis has shown that the durability of Jesuit educational leadership has historically rested upon the institutionalization of discernment within governable form. Within the Ignatian tradition, mission was never sustained by inspiration alone, but by an articulated *modus procedendi* capable of carrying the *auxilium animarum* across persons, places, and historical contexts. The early Society resolved the tension between charisma and organization not by privileging one over the other, but by embedding spiritual purpose within structured practices of governance, formation, and pedagogy.

The contemporary turn toward value-based frameworks has enabled broader participation and renewed articulation of Jesuit identity. Yet it also sharpens an enduring structural question: How can apostolic vitality remain institutionally intelligible and governable within complex and professionally managed institutions? If Jesuit education is to remain a living tradition rather than a merely inherited one, leadership must attend

76 Pavur, “The Curriculum Carries the Mission,” 31–32.

77 Margenat Peralta, “El sistema educativo de los primeros jesuitas,” 7–10.

not only to vision and values, but to the institutional mediations through which those values become corporately operative and historically durable.

What is required, therefore, is not a return to the sixteenth century, but a retrieval of its generative logic. Leadership renewal depends not on rhetorical reaffirmation of identity, but on reconstructing the mediations through which identity becomes operative. The original Ignatian synthesis demonstrates that authentic adaptation is possible only when innovation is anchored within a coherent apostolic framework capable of sustaining discernment over time.

Retrieving the “Original Synthesis”

The historical trajectory traced in this study—from the *Ratio studiorum* to the contemporary “Global Identifiers”—reveals a persistent structural insight: charism became historically operative through institutional form. Early Jesuit colleges were organized around a shared curriculum inseparably linked to a common *modus procedendi*, forming a unified educational body ordered to apostolic ends.⁷⁸ Mission was not episodic inspiration but an organized commitment.

The *Ratio studiorum* should not be understood as a static regulatory code, but as an embodiment of the Society’s *modo de proceder*—a disciplined way of organizing mission, discernment, and formation.⁷⁹ Through its systematization of existing practices, mission became governable. Educational purpose and structural form were rendered mutually reinforcing.

The *Ratio* functioned not merely as curriculum but as governance: mission was embedded within shared offices, procedures, and responsibilities that rendered the apostolate institutionally durable. Detached from form, charism dissipates; detached from charism, governance ossifies. The strength of the Jesuit educational tradition lay in the disciplined integration of both.⁸⁰

Such retrieval does not imply nostalgic replication of sixteenth-century regulations. The *Ratio studiorum* itself makes clear that governance was ordered toward formation: administrative offices, academic sequencing, and supervisory structures were explicitly directed *ad maiorem Dei gloriam*.⁸¹ What must be recovered, therefore, is not the literal form of early modern prescriptions, but the structural alignment between mission and institutional order that they embodied.⁸² Historically, teacher formation—

78 Margenat Peralta, “El sistema educativo de los primeros jesuitas,” 7–10.

79 Codina Mir, “El ‘Modus parisiensis,’” 49, 63.

80 Pavur, “The Curriculum Carries the Mission,” 30–31.

81 Pavur, *Ratio studiorum*, §99.

82 Batllori, “Introducció històrica,” li, liii.

exemplified in the *seminaria magistrorum*—was institutionally embedded, not optional. In contemporary lay-led contexts, executive leadership teams bear renewed responsibility for stewarding this synthesis so that institutional architecture and spiritual depth remain integrally aligned.

Practical Pathways for Mission Integrity

Historically, Jesuit governance prevented the isolation of authority through coordinated offices and structured consultation.⁸³ The relationship among the rector, the prefect of studies, and the teachers ensured that leadership operated corporately rather than individually, integrating academic, spiritual, and administrative responsibility within a shared apostolic horizon. Contemporary leadership teams must retrieve this collegial architecture if mission is to remain a corporate undertaking rather than fragment into disconnected managerial functions.

Jesuit leadership has also been characterized by governance through presence. Regular visitation, oversight, and personal engagement were not incidental practices but structural expressions of responsibility for formation. Authority in the *Ratio studiorum* is exercised not only through codified regulations but through structured visitation, regular conferences with teachers, and sustained oversight of instruction and formation. The prefect is required to visit instructors periodically, the rector to convene faculty meetings at regular intervals, and both to ensure that academic practice remains ordered toward the advancement of students in learning and character.⁸⁴

Finally, the *Ratio studiorum* demonstrates that curriculum, schedule, and the distribution of responsibilities function as mediations of mission rather than neutral administrative arrangements.⁸⁵ In the early Society, order rendered inspiration durable by embedding apostolic intention within daily academic rhythms. Contemporary Jesuit schools likewise depend upon the intentional configuration of time, professional formation, and institutional processes so that mission is enacted through practice rather than merely affirmed in principle.

Final Reflection: Toward a Normative Profile of Jesuit Educational Leadership

The enduring significance of the *Ratio studiorum* lies not in the recovery of its specific regulations, but in its governing intelligence: curriculum, office, and formation converged within a shared *modus procedendi* capable of rendering mission structurally operative. From Ledesma's early insistence on articulated procedures and ordered studies to the codification of the

83 *Constitutions*, §§655–66; Pavur, *Ratio studiorum*, §§75–78, 99.

84 Pavur, *Ratio studiorum*, §§92, 99, 102, 247.

85 Julia, "L'élaboration de la Ratio studiorum, 1548–1599," 60, 66.

Ratio, Jesuit educational leadership emerged as a refusal to allow apostolic purpose to remain at the level of abstraction. Discernment required specification; mission required form.

The historical trajectory examined in this study confirms that the durability of Jesuit education has depended upon this specifying rationality. Where mission has been embedded in articulated offices, defined responsibilities, and coherent curricular order, it has proven transmissible across contexts and generations. Where structure weakens, mission risks either rhetorical inflation or managerial reduction.

A normative profile of Jesuit educational leadership today therefore requires three constitutive dimensions. It must remain spiritually rooted, grounded in the dynamic of the Spiritual Exercises and measured by the concrete formation of persons for service. It must be institutionally robust, capable of embedding mission within structured processes of governance, formation, and accountability. Finally, it must be strategically agile, preserving coherence while enabling discerned adaptation within changing contexts.

Fidelity to the Ignatian tradition lies not in replicating early modern regulations, but in sustaining the integration of charism and form first articulated in the early colleges and later systematized in the *Ratio*. The future of Jesuit education will depend less on multiplying identifiers than on reconstructing institutional forms capable of carrying mission with disciplined coherence. Only where discernment assumes structure does mission become history rather than aspiration.

ORCID:

Raúl Saiz  <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-6413-9064>