

STRUCTURAL GOVERNANCE SHORTCOMINGS IN BUSINESS MODEL CANVAS USE

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The Business Model Canvas (BMC) is widely used to structure strategic dialogue, yet recurring problems with the organisation and continuity of BMC initiatives remain under-theorised. This study examines structural governance shortcomings in BMC practice and their implications for organisational learning. Drawing on twenty-three semi-structured interviews across multiple sectors, the analysis identifies recurring breakdown patterns characterised by episodic use, fragmented ownership, limited feedback routines, weak validation practices, and insufficient technological support. These shortcomings reflect governance misalignments rooted in coordination dynamics, accountability structures, and interpretive processes rather than in the artefact's technical limitations. The study contributes an empirically grounded typology of governance shortcomings and outlines a minimal governance configuration to embed BMC processes more sustainably within organisational routines.

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1 Introduction

Contemporary organisations operate in dynamic environments (Oberländer et al., 2025; Teece, 2010). To sustain competitiveness, they must continuously adapt strategic orientations, organisational processes, and structural configurations (Ahokangas & Myllykoski, 2014; Krüger & Teuteberg, 2018). In many sectors, these adaptations result in digital transformation, as digital technologies reshape value creation logics and coordination mechanisms (Krüger & Teuteberg, 2018; Liu et al., 2025; Vial, 2019). Organisations address this by using conceptual models that provide structure and orientation (Caccamo et al., 2023; Holtmann et al., 2025). In information systems (IS) research, such models are represented as business models and enterprise models. Business models capture the external logic of value creation (Teece, 2010; Wirtz, 2020). Enterprise models describe the capabilities, processes, and governance that realise these choices and, where relevant, represent inter-organisational interfaces and ecosystem dependencies (Lantow et al., 2022; Tsai et al., 2022). They link external logics with internal structures and cross-boundary coordination (Tsai et al., 2022). In organisational practice, one of the most widely used tools for articulating and discussing business models is the Business Model Canvas (BMC) (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). Purposeful adaptation of business models to changing environments is referred to as business model innovation (BMI). BMI is widely regarded as a key mechanism for sustaining competitiveness in dynamic settings. Within IS research, and particularly in the domain of BMI, the BMC is frequently referenced and widely applied in both research and practice (George & Bock, 2011; Kamariotou & Kitsios, 2022). Besides modelling, it structures discussions and legitimises decisions (De Man & Luvison, 2019; Perkmann & Spicer, 2010). Yet studies report recurring weaknesses: canvases are often applied as static templates with limited iteration, fragmented ownership, and weak feedback loops (Demil & Lecocq, 2010; Massa & Tucci, 2013; Wirtz & Daiser, 2018). At the same time, such patterns are not necessarily problematic in themselves, as BMC use is often inherently episodic and strategically oriented (Teece, 2010; Wirtz & Daiser, 2018). However, they become analytically relevant when they constrain organisational learning, continuity across modelling iterations, and cross-organisational coordination (Van Capelleveen et al., 2025). Despite its widespread adoption, limited research has systematically examined which structural shortcomings characterise the governance of BMC use in organisational practice. This gap concerns the governance of BMC use, understood as the routines,

ownership structures, information flows, and informal dynamics through which meaning, power, and legitimacy are negotiated during modelling activities (Cabantous & Gond, 2011; Kaplan, 2011). Prior studies describe BMC use and business model innovation processes but provide limited explicit conceptualisation of how these processes are structured and governed over time (Andreini et al., 2022; Foss & Saebi, 2017). Recent synthesis work has begun to consolidate recurring patterns, including undocumented iteration, fragmented ownership, and weak feedback mechanisms, yet it has not explicitly conceptualised their governance implications (Van Capelleveen et al., 2025). Rather than assuming that the identified patterns reflect inherent limitations of the BMC as an artefact, this study interprets them as manifestations of governance arrangements that shape how modelling activities are organised and sustained. This study addresses this gap by analysing recurring shortcomings in the organisational embedding of BMC use from a governance perspective. The guiding research question is: *What structural shortcomings characterise the governance of Business Model Canvas (BMC) use in organisational practice?*

2 Related work

The related work is organised into two streams: (1) fragmentation and process variation in business model innovation (BMI) research, and (2) recurring shortcomings in Business Model Canvas (BMC) use and their governance implications. Research on business models has produced numerous conceptual approaches across IS and management studies (Wirtz, 2020; Zott & Amit, 2010). This diversity reflects the conceptual fragmentation of the field across strategic, organisational, technological, and ecosystem perspectives (Foss & Saebi, 2017). As a result, the business model has become a central concept for articulating how organisations create and capture value (Teece, 2010). Subsequent research therefore shifted towards processes of business model innovation (BMI) (Chesbrough, 2007; Massa & Tucci, 2013). BMI research shows considerable variation in how innovation processes are conceptualised. Some studies describe structured phases such as analysis, ideation, prototyping, and implementation, whereas others emphasise the situated and negotiated character of BMI practices (Ahokangas & Myllykoski, 2014; Foss & Saebi, 2017; Wirtz & Daiser, 2018). These perspectives contrast rational design models with practice-based accounts highlighting improvisation, sensemaking, and political dynamics (Perkmann & Spicer, 2010; van Nistelrooij & Homan, 2019). However, limited attention has been paid to how specific business

model tools used in BMI processes are organised and governed in practice. Business model tools not only represent strategic choices but also structure participation, documentation, and follow-up in business model development. Within this context, the Business Model Canvas (BMC) builds on the business model ontology originally proposed by Osterwalder (2004). The BMC has since emerged as one of the most widely adopted tools for representing and analysing business models in both research and practice (George & Bock, 2011; Kamariotou & Kitsios, 2022). Conceptually, the BMC can be understood as a boundary object that coordinates heterogeneous actors around a shared representation of value creation. However, this coordinating function depends in part on how the tool is embedded within organisational routines rather than on the canvas structure alone. Empirical studies report recurring shortcomings in how the BMC is applied. Research identifies deficits such as undocumented iteration, fragmented ownership, and missing feedback mechanisms (Demil & Lecocq, 2010; Massa & Tucci, 2013). A recent review consolidates these into four structural shortcomings: undocumented iteration, absent feedback loops, fragmented ownership, and insufficient ecosystem reflection (Van Capelleveen et al., 2025). These shortcomings directly affect governance of BMC use by limiting transparency, accountability, and organisational learning across modelling iterations. From a governance perspective, modelling practices often exhibit ambiguous ownership structures and limited rationale documentation, echoing broader concerns in enterprise modelling regarding accountability and traceability (Koç et al., 2018). Governance mechanisms in modelling environments remain comparatively immature (Pappas et al., 2023). In addition, performative perspectives emphasise that management tools such as the BMC do not merely represent organisational realities but actively shape discussions and decisions (Cabantous & Gond, 2011; Kaplan, 2011). However, BMC research has rarely conceptualised these recurring shortcomings as structural governance challenges embedded in organisational routines. While deficiencies such as fragmented ownership and missing feedback loops have been documented, they have rarely been analysed as a coherent configuration of governance mechanisms shaping how the BMC is organised and sustained in practice. The literature identifies recurring weaknesses in BMC use but does not explain how they jointly shape governance and continuity. An empirically grounded analysis of governance shortcomings in BMC use is therefore required to understand how these breakdown patterns emerge and how they constrain continuity and organisational learning in practice.

3 Methods

3.1 Study design

This study sought detailed, practice-based testimonies on practitioners' experiences of governing BMC use, including concrete routines for decision rights, ownership, collaboration, iteration, feedback, and documentation, as well as their interpretations of recurring shortcomings. Given the research focus, people rather than documents were the primary information sources. Internal documents rarely captured day-to-day governance breakdowns, and such shortcomings were often articulated retrospectively by those involved. Therefore, we targeted experts with direct BMC application experience, specifically consultants who facilitated BMC work and organisational stakeholders (e.g., product owners, innovation leads, strategy managers) who participated in or sponsored BMC-driven projects. To uncover coordination and governance shortcomings not yet fully articulated, a qualitative research approach was deemed most appropriate. Because we sought to document and explain recurring structural shortcomings in the governance of BMC use, semi-structured interviews were preferred to obtain rich, contextualised accounts and allow probing where necessary (Myers & Newman, 2007). Open-ended questions elicited concrete experiences and examples. The study adopts an abductive orientation, iteratively moving between empirical material and sensitising theoretical concepts to refine and stabilise categories of governance shortcomings. The coding procedure was structured according to the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2013).

3.2 Participant selection and data collection

Participants were selected using a purposive sampling strategy to ensure that all respondents were actively involved in strategic or innovation projects in which the Business Model Canvas (BMC) played a central role. The sample comprised twenty-three professionals, including consultants, innovation managers, and project or programme leaders with 8–20 years of experience in business model design and digital transformation. Participants represented diverse sectors, including energy, ICT, financial services, agritech, creative industries, and public administration, spanning corporate organisations, public agencies, start-ups, and independent consultancies. Sampling continued until conceptual sufficiency was reached, meaning that additional interviews no longer contributed substantively new

governance-related themes relevant to the research question. This assessment was made during iterative coding and team discussions rather than defined a priori. The interview guide was derived from prior literature on BMC practice and documented governance shortcomings (Andreini et al., 2022; Kamariotou & Kitsios, 2022; Wirtz & Daiser, 2018) and was used to structure questions on decision-making, ownership, documentation, iteration, and feedback coordination (Demil & Lecocq, 2010; Wirtz & Daiser, 2018). The guide consisted of open-ended questions prompting respondents to describe the process flow, key decision points, collaboration mechanisms, and the rationale for documentation. Questions covered the governance chain from scoping and ownership through iteration, documentation, validation, and feedback, and examined breakdowns, perceived causes, consequences, and mitigation practices. Given the need to elicit concrete experiences while allowing analytical probing, a semi-structured interview format was used, balancing consistency across interviews with flexibility to explore contextual variation (Myers & Newman, 2007). The guide was pilot-tested once for clarity, and minor wording adjustments were made before the full application. Interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and were conducted either via videoconference or on-site. All sessions were recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, anonymised, and stored in a secure research environment prior to systematic coding.

3.3 Data analysis

The analysis followed a structured qualitative approach aligned with the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2013). All transcripts were reviewed iteratively to identify statements related to BMC use, encountered shortcomings, and perceived consequences. During first-order coding, meaningful fragments were labelled to capture concrete actions, coordination routines, and perceived obstacles. Codes captured recurring coordination breakdowns, including missing ownership (“no one felt responsible for follow-up”), disrupted iteration (“each session restarted from scratch”), and information discontinuities (“lost notes” or “missing post-its”). Codes were continuously refined and merged across multiple rounds of analysis to ensure conceptual consistency. From the transcripts, 485 first-order fragments were identified and progressively abstracted into 67 first-order codes. These were then consolidated into ten second-order themes that captured structural shortcomings in the governance of BMC use. The coding process was iterative and abductive, moving

between the empirical material and emerging conceptual categories until stable thematic distinctions were achieved. After consolidation, the coding framework was systematically applied across all twenty-three interviews to ensure analytical consistency. A second researcher was involved in validating code definitions, category boundaries, and interpretation, rather than performing full independent recoding. This validation process ensured shared understanding of inclusion criteria and thematic distinctions. Reflexive memos documented analytical decisions and interpretive assumptions throughout the process. This data structure is reflected in the Results section, where second-order themes are presented as empirically grounded categories, and further synthesised into higher-level governance dimensions in Appendix 2. The trustworthiness of the study was strengthened through complementary strategies addressing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility and dependability were supported by transparent coding procedures, iterative category refinement, and researcher triangulation. An audit trail documented coding iterations, category revisions, and inclusion decisions. All participants provided informed consent, and transcripts were anonymised and securely stored in accordance with institutional ethical standards.

4 Results

This section presents empirical findings from twenty-three semi-structured interviews with consultants, innovation managers, project leaders, and policy professionals involved in Business Model Canvas (BMC) initiatives. From the transcripts, 485 first-order fragments were identified and assigned descriptive labels during first-order coding. This iterative process yielded 67 distinct codes, which were continuously refined through cross-case comparison and researcher reflection. The fragments were consolidated into ten second-order themes that capture structural governance shortcomings in BMC use. The analysis shows how individual experiences converged into recurring patterns across cases. The resulting data structure is reflected in the second-order themes below and further synthesised into higher-level governance dimensions in Appendix 2.

4.1 Overview of structural shortcomings in the governance of BMC use

The inductive coding process revealed ten recurring themes that capture structural shortcomings in how organisations govern the use of the Business Model Canvas (BMC). Appendix 1 (Table A1) summarises these shortcomings and their relative occurrence across the dataset. Fragment counts indicate the number of coded excerpts associated with each theme and reflect analytical salience within the dataset rather than statistical generalisability. Themes are presented in descending order of fragment counts. Themes 9* and 10* are treated as emerging observations because they were mentioned by a single respondent and therefore do not constitute structurally recurring patterns within the dataset. Together, these themes represent empirically grounded categories that link first-order observations to broader governance-related patterns. **Theme 1** highlights the most salient shortcoming: the absence of cumulative learning and structured feedback loops. Respondents reported that BMC workshops rarely produced cumulative learning cycles. Once completed, canvases were rarely revisited or compared with earlier versions. As one respondent explained, “We make one every year, but we never look back.” As a result, modelling activities were frequently restarted rather than building cumulative organisational understanding. **Theme 2** concerns fragmented ownership and weak governance arrangements. Ownership of the BMC process was often diffuse, and no single actor was responsible for maintaining versions, ensuring follow-up, or linking the canvas to ongoing strategy execution. One respondent noted that “after the consultant leaves, nobody feels responsible for it anymore.” Consequently, the BMC often remained an event-based artefact rather than an institutionalised coordination mechanism. **Theme 3** shifts attention to the internal quality of modelling discussions, revealing an emphasis on form over substance. Participants often prioritised completing the template over critically examining its underlying assumptions. As one participant remarked, “It looks nice on the wall, but it doesn’t really change anything.” In such cases, the canvas served more as a procedural ritual than as a space for analytical reflection. **Theme 4** reveals considerable variability in BMC application across organisational contexts. Teams frequently adapted terminology and the model’s interpretation to local project language or departmental practices. While this flexibility enabled contextual tailoring, it reduced comparability across initiatives and weakened opportunities for cross-organisational learning. The absence of shared interpretive standards limited the development of consistent governance routines. **Theme 5** highlights power and consultancy-driven process

dynamics. Workshops were sometimes dominated by consultants or senior managers, limiting broader participation in modelling discussions. One respondent described such sessions as “consultant theatre; we just nodded along.” These dynamics reinforced dependence on external facilitation and constrained internal ownership of modelling outcomes. **Theme 6** identifies insufficient validation and limited knowledge sharing as structural weaknesses. Canvases were often developed through internal reasoning rather than through empirical testing with customers, partners, or external data. As one respondent admitted, “We never check if what we wrote is actually true.” Consequently, assumptions remained largely unchallenged, and experiential knowledge stayed confined to individual projects. **Theme 7** concerns the operational drift of modelling efforts. In many organisations, BMC work shifted rapidly from exploration to execution. Once initiatives moved into implementation, the canvas often lost visibility and relevance. This weakened the link between modelling activities and subsequent learning from implementation. **Theme 8** addresses the limited technological support surrounding BMC processes. Participants reported relying primarily on analogue tools, such as sticky notes or static PowerPoint templates, without systematic version tracking. The lack of structured documentation and version control contributed to fragmentation and information loss. Digital tools, where available, were rarely integrated into formal governance routines. **Theme 9** identifies a performative use of the BMC as a legitimising ritual. In isolated instances, the canvas served primarily to signal strategic competence rather than to support collective learning. In such situations, modelling functioned more as managerial theatre than as a mechanism for structured organisational reasoning. Finally, **Theme 10** concerns limited stakeholder involvement and ecosystem engagement. External actors, such as customers or partners, were rarely structurally included in modelling activities. When modelling remained internally oriented, the canvas could not serve as an ecosystem coordination device. Governance arrangements in such cases appeared weakly embedded within broader stakeholder networks.

5 Discussion

This study examined structural governance shortcomings in the use of the Business Model Canvas (BMC). The findings show that coordination, validation, and learning remain weakly institutionalised across organisations. Building on the ten shortcomings summarised in Appendix 1 (Table A1), the analysis indicates that

modelling practices are often episodic and weakly embedded within organisational routines. Taken together, the shortcomings reveal a recurring configuration rather than isolated deficiencies, pointing to a broader governance pattern that shapes how BMC activities are organised and sustained in practice. This pattern can be understood through governance arrangements that combine formal coordination mechanisms, such as accountability and traceability (Koç et al., 2018), with informal processes of influence and meaning-making (Cabantous & Gond, 2011; Kaplan, 2011). Viewed through this lens, the identified shortcomings cluster around two interrelated dimensions. The first concerns formal and procedural mechanisms oriented towards control, traceability, and accountability. The second concerns social and interpretive processes centred on meaning-making, influence, and legitimacy. **Figure 2 in Appendix 2** offers a conceptual synthesis of these governance dimensions, as emerging from the empirical findings. When these dimensions are weakly aligned, modelling processes remain episodic and fail to support cumulative organisational learning. The formal–procedural dimension concerns mechanisms that ensure continuity over time, such as version control, rationale documentation, and feedback routines. The absence of such mechanisms leaves modelling practices weakly connected to experimentation and organisational learning, echoing earlier observations in enterprise modelling about accountability and traceability (Koç et al., 2018) and the need for structured design principles (Aier et al., 2011). Limited feedback loops reduce validation and follow-up, causing modelling to become detached from implementation and learning (Demil & Lecocq, 2010; Wirtz & Daiser, 2018). As a result, modelling outputs remain weakly embedded in organisational memory. The social–interpretive dimension captures the interactional processes by which participants negotiate meaning and legitimacy during modelling activities. Within this dimension, ownership is often diffuse, facilitation may substitute for commitment, and external perspectives are rarely integrated. Power asymmetries and local vocabularies shape what becomes visible on the canvas and what remains implicit (Culot & Battistella, 2024; Tsai et al., 2022). Respondents frequently described modelling sessions as producing convincing yet transient outcomes, sometimes resembling consultant theatre (Perkmann & Spicer, 2010). Taken together, the findings indicate that recurring shortcomings cannot be explained by artefact design or facilitation style alone, but are embedded in governance arrangements that structure continuity, accountability, and reflection. Prior studies have repeatedly observed limited iteration and feedback in business model innovation but have provided little explanation of their organisational origins.

While Demil and Lecocq (2010) and Wirtz and Daiser (2018) characterised these shortcomings as procedural weaknesses, the present study suggests that they reflect structural governance misalignments that fragment coordination, accountability, and learning over time. The findings also align with performative perspectives on modelling, which argue that management tools not only represent organisational realities but also actively shape behaviour and decision-making (Cabantous & Gond, 2011; Perkmann & Spicer, 2010). In practice, the act of “completing the canvas” may symbolise rational planning and control, substituting for sustained reflection and illustrating how modelling can function as a legitimising practice rather than a cumulative learning mechanism. Building on these insights, recurring deficiencies in BMC use can be understood as governance-related rather than artefact design limitations alone. By distinguishing structural coordination mechanisms from interpretive dynamics, the study develops a governance perspective that clarifies how formal routines and social processes jointly shape modelling outcomes. Structural mechanisms concern ownership, traceability, documentation, and continuity across iterations. Interpretive dynamics concern dialogue, participation, influence, and negotiated meaning. When these dimensions are weakly aligned, modelling practices remain weakly embedded in organisational learning processes. The study’s contribution is to conceptualise these recurring shortcomings as a governance configuration underpinning BMC use. This configuration can be understood as the minimal governance framework required for sustained BMC use, comprising explicit ownership structures, traceability and documentation routines, feedback and validation mechanisms, and scheduled review cycles. This shifts analytical attention from artefact adequacy to organisational embedding and helps explain the persistence of discontinuous BMC use despite its widespread diffusion. A recurring theme was the limited technological support for BMC processes. Participants noted the absence of structured documentation systems, version control mechanisms, and shared repositories linking canvases across iterations. These observations focused primarily on continuity, traceability, and coordination rather than technological innovation itself. Participants framed digital and AI-based tools as exploratory support mechanisms for documentation, transparency, and analytical reflection, rather than as autonomous remedies. The findings indicate that improving business model innovation processes requires explicit attention to governance arrangements for using the Business Model Canvas. Organisations should clarify ownership structures, define responsibilities for follow-up, and establish routines for revisiting and validating assumptions over time. Without such mechanisms, the BMC remains

an event-based artefact rather than an institutionalised coordination device. Sustained innovation capability depends on institutionalising governance routines that integrate structural discipline with reflective dialogue.

6 Conclusion, limitations and future research

This study examined structural shortcomings in the governance of Business Model Canvas (BMC) use within organisational practice. Drawing on twenty-three interviews, it identified ten governance-related shortcomings that constrain continuity, accountability, and organisational learning. The findings show that recurrent deficiencies in BMC practice are less attributable to artefact design than to governance misalignments that shape ownership, documentation, validation, and temporal embedding. These shortcomings are consistently characterised by fragmented ownership, missing feedback loops, weak documentation, and limited validation, which together reflect a broader governance misalignment. By conceptualising these patterns as structural governance conditions, the study shifts analytical focus from facilitation techniques and artefact design to organisational embedding and governance arrangements. This suggests that BMC use is not primarily a modelling problem but a governance problem, in which weakly defined roles, coordination routines, and feedback structures impede cumulative organisational learning. The study has several limitations. First, the findings are based on qualitative interviews and therefore do not permit conclusions about statistical prevalence. Although the respondents represented diverse sectors and organisational roles, the results reflect interpretive accounts of practice rather than direct observation of modelling processes. Future research should examine how governance routines around BMC use evolve over time and under which organisational conditions modelling becomes embedded as a sustained learning process. Further research should also explore how digital infrastructures and collaborative modelling environments support traceability, coordination, and collective sensemaking in business model innovation, and how such mechanisms can operationalise governance structures across iterative modelling cycles.

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Appendix 1

Appendix 1 provides a comprehensive overview of the coded fragments associated with each identified theme. Table A1 summarises the ten structural shortcomings in the governance of Business Model Canvas (BMC) use, identified through the inductive coding process across the interview dataset. Fragment counts indicate the number of coded excerpts associated with each theme and reflect analytical salience within the dataset rather than statistical prevalence. Themes marked with an asterisk (*) represent emerging observations mentioned by a single respondent and therefore do not constitute structurally recurring patterns within the dataset.

Table A1: Recurring governance shortcomings in BMC use identified across interviews

| Nr. | Second-order theme (n = 23 interviews, 485 coded fragments) | No. of coded fragments | No. of respondents mentioning theme |
|------|---|------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 | Lack of learning and feedback loops | 154 | 18 |
| 2 | Fragmented ownership and weak governance arrangements | 70 | 18 |
| 3 | Emphasis on form over substance in model use | 51 | 16 |
| 4 | Inconsistent and context-dependent BMC application | 48 | 17 |
| 5 | Power and consultancy-driven process dynamics | 47 | 16 |
| 6 | Insufficient validation and knowledge sharing | 45 | 10 |
| 7 | Operational focus with little reflective learning | 44 | 11 |
| 8 | Low level of technological support | 19 | 9 |
| 9 * | Performative use of the BMC as a legitimising ritual | 6 | 1 |
| 10 * | Low stakeholder involvement and ecosystem engagement | 1 | 1 |

Appendix 2

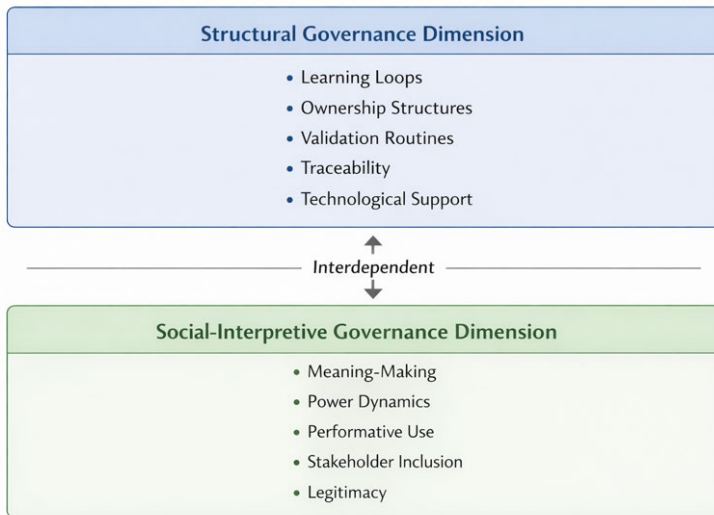


Figure 2: Conceptual synthesis of governance dimensions emerging from the ten identified themes

Source: Authors