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LEADERSHIP

ROLE AMBIGUITY BETWEEN TEACHING AND RULING ELDERS IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF EAST AFRICA: A CASE STUDY OF NYANDARUA PRESBYTERY

Dorcus Waithira Kuria
Faculty of Leadership, Business and Technology, Pan Africa Christian University.

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: To examine role ambiguity between teaching and ruling elders in the Presbyterian Church of East Africa within Nyandarua Presbytery.

Statement of the problem: Constitutional parity between teaching and ruling elders does not always specify their distinct decision-making responsibilities. Uncertain jurisdiction, overlapping authority, and limited procedural transparency can complicate shared governance. Existing literature offers limited context-specific analysis of these dimensions in Nyandarua Presbytery.

Research methodology: The paper adopted a qualitative single-case framework informed by interpretivism and proposed triangulation of interviews, observations, and church documents. It organized inquiry around jurisdictional ambiguity, authority overlap, governance opacity, and the institutional conditions surrounding these experiences. The supplied manuscript does not report completed fieldwork or analyzed participant data.

Findings: The literature-based analysis identified jurisdictional ambiguity, authority overlap, and governance opacity as three analytically distinct dimensions of role ambiguity. It also identified Presbyterian polity, organizational culture, and information practices as relevant contextual influences. These are conceptual findings rather than verified empirical results from interviews or observations.

Conclusion: The article concludes that clarity about decision rights, reporting pathways, and interpretation of church rules is central to accountable shared governance. Its integrated

theoretical framework provides a basis for further empirical assessment without treating parity of office as a weakness in itself.

Recommendations: The study recommends that church courts should clarify the allocation and review of decisions through agreed role charters or decision-rights matrices. The Presbytery should strengthen access to governing rules, induction, and consistent recordkeeping. Relevant authorities should establish accessible procedures for resolving jurisdictional questions while protecting the principle of co-equality.

Keywords: *Role ambiguity, Presbyterian polity, teaching elders, ruling elders, church governance, Nyandarua Presbytery*

INTRODUCTION

Role ambiguity, the absence of adequate and actionable information about what is expected of an office holder, is one of the most consistently studied role stressors in organizational research (Kahn et al., 1964; Rizzo et al., 1970; Biddle, 1986). Meta-analytic and recent evidence links it to tension, lower commitment, withdrawal, and turnover (Jackson & Schuler, 1985; De Clercq & Pereira, 2023; Junça Silva & Rodrigues, 2024). This literature, however, concerns individual employees in business organizations, and little is known about governance bodies in which authority is deliberately shared between co-equal offices.

Presbyterian polity is such a body. Rooted in the Reformed tradition, it vests government in a plurality of elders who rule jointly through graded courts: the Kirk Session, the Presbytery, the Region, and the General Assembly (Calvin, 1960/1559; Hodge, 1997/1878; McGrath, 2018). Teaching elders (ordained ministers) and ruling elders (lay leaders) are co-equal in these courts, which promotes accountability and mutuality. Parity of status, however, is not identity of function. In the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA), governed by its Manual of Laws and Regulations (PCEA, 2022), the practical boundaries of each office are only partly specified, and evidence from the wider African Presbyterian family shows recurring tension between clerical and lay authority (Ross & Chilongozi, 2024). PCEA scholarship has addressed leadership style, structure, and growth (Kariuki et al., 2026; Kamau, 2019), and analyses of Kenyan churches note governance challenges and procedural paralysis (Kinyanjui, 2012; Njoroge, 2017), but none isolates the ambiguity between the two eldership offices.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The PCEA constitutionally affirms the parity of teaching and ruling elders, yet in Nyandarua Presbytery that parity is not operationally defined. Where the Manual is silent, general, or open to more than one reading, elders must settle who initiates, authorizes, executes, and reviews a decision through interpretation, precedent, and personal negotiation. This produces role ambiguity in three forms. Jurisdictional ambiguity is uncertainty about which office or court holds primary authority. Authority overlap arises when intersecting mandates generate competing claims of oversight. Governance opacity is limited clarity about procedures, reporting pathways, and constitutional mechanisms. Reported consequences include interpersonal tension, delayed institutional processes, and weakened accountability at Kirk Session and Presbytery Court levels. No empirical study has examined this ambiguity, and workplace research on role ambiguity has not been applied to co-equal ecclesiastical offices in East Africa. Without such evidence, the Presbytery and the PCEA lack a basis for clarifying the Manual or for training elders in their distinct and shared functions.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND SIGNIFICANCE

The study examines the nature, extent, and sources of role ambiguity between teaching and ruling elders in Nyandarua Presbytery, intending to generate evidence for clearer and more accountable shared governance. Its six objectives are to assess jurisdictional ambiguity (O1), analyze the sources of authority overlap (O2), evaluate governance opacity in court procedures, reporting pathways, and constitutional mechanisms (O3), determine how Presbyterian polity contributes to ambiguity (O4), identify contextual influences (O5), and recommend strategies for reducing ambiguity (O6). Being qualitative and exploratory, the inquiry is guided by research questions and three theory-informed propositions: that gaps in the Manual produce competing claims about primary authority, that formal parity coexists with informal hierarchies, and that unequal access to rules and records fosters opacity.

The study is significant academically, because it extends role theory to co-equal ecclesiastical offices and breaks ambiguity into observable indicators. It is significant institutionally, because it informs revision of the Manual and the induction of new elders, and educationally, because it strengthens leadership training in the PCEA and other connectional denominations. It also provides the descriptive groundwork for later effect-testing, since consequences can be responsibly measured only once the forms, boundaries, and sources of ambiguity are established (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2018).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was structured as a qualitative single-case inquiry within the interpretivist paradigm. Nyandarua Presbytery constituted the bounded case, with Kirk Sessions, the Presbytery Court, and standing committees as embedded units of analysis. The framework assumed that role boundaries were socially constructed, so depth and information richness take precedence over statistical representation, and theory serves as a sensitizing lens rather than a hypothesis to be tested. Evidence is triangulated across semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation (primary) and document analysis of 2021 to 2025 minutes, committee records, and the Manual (secondary), organized around the six objectives.

From a population of 81 leaders, approximately 22 participants were proposed for selection through purposive criterion and snowball sampling, with recruitment continuing until saturation. They comprise six teaching elders, eight ruling elders, four standing committee members, and four principal officers. Interviews of 45 to 60 minutes were proposed in English, Kiswahili, or Gĩkũyũ, and observations were planned for at least three Presbytery Court and two Kirk Session sittings. The analytic plan followed Braun and Clarke's six phases, with a deductive codebook built on the three indicators and extended inductively, and with matrices comparing teaching and ruling elders, Kirk Session and Presbytery levels, and the three evidence sources.

The design addressed rigor through an audit trail, a written codebook, double-coding of at least 20% of transcripts, member checking, negative-case analysis, thick description, and a reflexive journal. Planned ethical safeguards included institutional authorization, a research permit, informed consent, pseudonyms, and secure data storage under the Data Protection Act, with the researcher's dual role disclosed. As a single case, the findings are not statistically generalizable, so analytic and theoretical transferability is sought instead. Possible under-reporting of conflict, translation effects, and incomplete records are addressed through confidentiality and triangulation. The study is confined to the two eldership offices in Nyandarua Presbytery and excludes leadership performance and other outcome variables.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is grounded in Role Theory, Agency Theory, and Organizational Polity Theory, which together trace a single explanatory chain: from the individual elder's experience of ambiguity, through structural accountability deficits, to the theological design that makes both possible (Kahn et al., 1964; Jensen & Meckling, 1976; Oswald & Kroeger, 1992).

Role Theory

Role Theory views organizations as systems of positions, each carrying expectations that are communicated to occupants who must interpret and enact them (Biddle, 1986; Katz & Kahn, 1978). Ambiguity arises when the expectations sent are unclear, incomplete, or contradictory (Kahn et al., 1964), and Rizzo et al. (1970) distinguish uncertainty about goals and expected behaviors from uncertainty about the means of fulfilling them. The theory explains how constitutional parity between teaching and ruling elders generates ambiguity in the day-to-day governance experience of the individual elder, and it supplies the primary lens for jurisdictional ambiguity and authority overlap.

Agency Theory

Agency Theory models governance as a principal–agent relationship in which information asymmetry and weak monitoring create agency costs (Jensen & Meckling, 1976; Eisenhardt, 1989). In church governance, congregations and courts act as principals, and elders and officers as agents. Where it is unclear who answers to whom for what, monitoring weakens, and information is unevenly held. The theory therefore explains how ambiguity between co-equal offices converts into institutional-level opacity, and it is the main lens for governance opacity. Because the theory originates in economics and assumes self-interest, it is used here for its information logic only, and governance tensions are read alongside Cornforth's (2004) paradox perspective, which treats them as enduring features of governance rather than failures.

Organizational Polity Theory

Organizational Polity Theory holds that ecclesiastical polity embeds theological commitment, so structure is never neutral (Oswald & Kroeger, 1992; Van Gelder, 2007). In Presbyterianism, the commitment to shared, non-hierarchical governance derives from the Reformed tradition (Calvin, 1960/1559; Hodge, 1997/1878) and requires continual negotiation between constitutional co-equality and operational effectiveness. The theory explains why ambiguity may be a by-product of principled design rather than a drafting error, and it anchors the objectives on polity and context.

Theoretical Integration

Role Theory explains ambiguity at the level of the individual role occupant, Agency Theory explains how it hardens into structural opacity and answerability gaps, and Polity Theory explains why the structure exists and why it resists simple correction. Integrated, they provide a multi-level lens in which Role Theory guides the coding of jurisdictional ambiguity and

authority overlap, Agency Theory guides governance opacity, and Polity Theory frames sources and context. Together they explain why clarification must respect Reformed commitments while improving workable procedure.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Jurisdictional Ambiguity

Jurisdictional ambiguity concerns uncertainty about where authority to act resides. Rizzo et al. (1970) established that unclear authority and unclear procedures are separable components of ambiguity, and Jackson and Schuler's (1985) meta-analysis shows that such uncertainty is consistently associated with tension and withdrawal. Khawaldeh (2023) reaffirms through qualitative analysis that ambiguity arises where role boundaries are not communicated or are contradictory. In Reformed polity, authority is distributed across courts of ascending jurisdiction (McGrath, 2018), which makes the question of which court or office decides a standing governance issue. Empirically, the construct is observed along five dimensions: initiation, authorization, execution, court-level, and office-boundary uncertainty. Typical markers are matters referred repeatedly between courts, decisions revisited, and disputes over who convenes, chairs, or signs.

In practice, jurisdictional ambiguity is likely to surface in five decision domains of church governance: pastoral and spiritual oversight (worship, sacraments, and discipline), finance and property (budgets, land, and development projects), personnel and administration (employees and records), court procedure (convening, agenda-setting, and chairing), and ministerial matters (placement, support, and accountability). For each domain, the study asks the same four questions of the evidence: who may start the matter, who must approve it, who carries it out, and who reviews the outcome. Uncertainty at any of the four points is coded as jurisdictional ambiguity, while uncertainty that is consistently resolved in favor of one office is analyzed separately as a possible signal of informal hierarchy.

Authority Overlap

Authority overlap occurs when legitimate mandates intersect. Takayama (1975) shows how formal polity interacts with structural change in denominational assemblies, so that formally equal bodies develop uneven influence, and Cornforth (2004) argues that governing bodies face inherent paradoxes, such as control versus partnership, which cannot be resolved once and for all. In the African Presbyterian setting, Ross and Chilongozi (2024) document recurring tension between clerical and lay authority. African scholarship on community and leadership suggests

that authority is relational and graded by age and status (Mbiti, 1969; Mugambi, 1995; Maluleke, 1998), implying that formal parity may coexist with informal hierarchy. Overlap is therefore examined through mandate intersection, competing legitimacy claims, contested oversight, duplication and bypassing, informal hierarchy, and resolution practice.

Two features of this indicator deserve emphasis. First, overlap is not equivalent to conflict: shared mandates can be productive where the offices have agreed routines for collaboration, so the study distinguishes overlap that is acknowledged and managed from overlap that produces competing assertions. Second, the legitimacy on which each office relies differs in kind. Teaching elders may appeal to ordination, theological training, and denominational posting, whereas ruling elders may appeal to congregational election, local knowledge, tenure, and standing in the community. Where neither basis is formally ranked, as the principle of co-equality implies, the decisive factor in a contested matter may be informal, which is why resolution practice is treated as a distinct sub-dimension.

Governance Opacity

Governance opacity refers to limited transparency about how decisions are taken and reported. Systematic reviews of nonprofit governance treat role clarity, accountability mechanisms, and information flows as recurrent themes (Alregab, 2026; Ortega-Rodríguez et al., 2024). For Kenyan churches, organizational analyses link governance challenges and paralysis to unclear procedures (Kinyanjui, 2012; Njoroge, 2017), and Kamau (2019) situates PCEA governance within its institutional history. From an agency perspective, opacity is expressed as information asymmetry between offices, weak traceability of decisions in minutes, and uneven familiarity with the Manual. It is examined through procedural clarity, reporting pathways, constitutional literacy, information asymmetry, decision traceability, and communication of outcomes.

Opacity differs from jurisdictional ambiguity in that it concerns not who holds authority but whether the process by which authority is exercised can be seen, followed, and checked. An elder may know that a matter belongs to the Presbytery Court and still be unable to say how it should be tabled, what papers must accompany it, to whom its outcome is reported, or how the decision may be traced afterwards. Constitutional literacy is central: if elders hold different understandings of the same Manual provision, or only a few officers have ready access to the text, the rules exist formally but cannot function as a shared reference, and interpretation becomes an instrument of whoever holds the information. The study therefore treats the

minutes themselves as evidence, asking whether decisions, movers, and responsible persons can be identified.

Polity, Context, and Sources of Ambiguity

Scholarship on the PCEA has treated structure mainly as a moderator of leadership effects (Kariuki et al., 2026), and role-clarity studies in Kenyan religious nonprofits link clarity to organizational functioning (Muriuki, 2016), but neither explains where ambiguity comes from. Congregational systems literature suggests that unclear boundaries between leaders' strain relationships (Parsons & Leas, 1993), and studies of congregations in Africa stress the need for context-sensitive methods (Hendriks, 2004). The present study therefore treats the Manual, organizational culture, and local church context as potential sources of ambiguity, to be established empirically.

Summary of the Research Gap

The literature reveals three gaps. The theoretical gap is that role theory has not been applied to dual-authority ecclesiastical structures in East Africa. The contextual gap is that no study has examined role ambiguity between teaching and ruling elders in the PCEA or Nyandarua Presbytery. The conceptual gap is that existing work treats ambiguity as a single scale or as a by

CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK		
Polity structure (O4) Manual provisions; principle of co-equality	Culture, tenure and status (O5) Seniority, deference, respect for age or training	Local church context, records and communication (O5) Size, past disputes, minutes and circulars

▼ Intensify

INDEPENDENT VARIABLE Role ambiguity between teaching and ruling elders		DEPENDENT / OUTCOME ELEMENT
Jurisdictional ambiguity (O1) Who initiates, authorizes, executes, and reviews; which court or office decides	→	Profile of role ambiguity Extent, forms, sources and office-based perspectives (O1–O5)
Authority overlap (O2) Intersecting mandates; competing legitimacy claims; informal hierarchy	informs ▼	
Governance opacity (O3) Unclear procedures, reporting pathways and constitutional literacy; weak decision traceability		Strategies for clearer shared governance (O6) Decision-rights matrices, role charters, induction

product of other variables, rather than disaggregating it into jurisdictional ambiguity, authority overlap, and governance opacity with observable markers.

Workplace studies of ambiguity (Jackson & Schuler, 1985; Khawaldeh, 2023; De Clercq & Pereira, 2023; Junça Silva & Rodrigues, 2024) are not situated in church courts or co-equal offices and concern individual outcomes in business settings. Church-focused work is either historical and descriptive, leaving ambiguity operationalized (Ross & Chilongozi, 2024), or concerned with style and growth (Kariuki et al., 2026), or identifies governance challenges and

role clarity without isolating elders' role boundaries (Kinyanjui, 2012; Njoroge, 2017; Muriuki, 2016).

Conceptual Framework and Theoretical Anchoring

The first indicator, jurisdictional ambiguity, answers O1 and is anchored in Role Theory. It captures uncertainty over who initiates, authorizes, and executes decisions and over which court or office a matter belongs to, and it is observed through initiation, authorization, execution, court-level, and office-boundary uncertainty. Illustrative markers include matters referred back and forth between courts, decisions repeated or reversed, and disputes over who convenes, chairs, or signs in finance, property, personnel, discipline, and worship matters.

The second indicator, authority overlap, answers O2 and is anchored in Role Theory and the paradox perspective. It captures intersecting mandates, competing legitimacy claims (ordination and training versus election and local standing), contested oversight, duplication and bypassing, and informal hierarchy by tenure, status, or expertise. It also covers resolution practice through precedent, negotiation, appeal, or deference. Markers include parallel instructions to staff or committees, minuted dissent on competence, overlapping committee terms of reference, and visible deference patterns in meetings.

The third indicator, governance opacity, answers O3 and is anchored in Agency Theory. It captures unclear procedures, reporting pathways, constitutional literacy, and unequal access to information, observed through procedural clarity, reporting pathways, interpretive consensus on the Manual, information asymmetry, decision traceability in minutes, and communication of outcomes. Markers include different provisions cited for the same matter, incomplete or inconsistent minutes, late circulation of papers, and requests in meetings for "the rules".

Polity Theory anchors the contextual factors, which are not outcome variables or competing explanations but conditions that may intensify or soften the three indicators. Presbyterian polity structure, meaning the provisions of the Manual and the principle of co-equality, addresses O4. Organizational culture and eldership tenure and status (norms of seniority, deference, and respect for age or training) and local church context and records and communication practice (congregational size and resources, past disputes and precedents, and how minutes, circulars, and reports are produced and shared) address O5. Each factor is explored inductively, so the analysis shows not only whether ambiguity exists but under what conditions it appears. Finally, the profile produced by O1 to O5 is translated into strategies for clearer shared governance, which answers O6.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYTICAL LOGIC

The study is designed so that findings can be interpreted indicator by indicator. Role ambiguity will be treated as substantial on an indicator where participants of both offices describe the uncertainty, where it recurs across Kirk Session and Presbytery Court levels, and where at least two of the three evidence sources converge. It will be treated as office-specific where teaching and ruling elders describe the same decision differently, which is itself evidence of ambiguity. Divergence between what the Manual provides and what elders report will be read as evidence of interpretive gaps, whereas convergence between minutes and interview accounts will be read as evidence of embedded practice. Ambiguity will be graded as limited, moderate, or substantial for each indicator. It is limited where both offices name the same initiator, approver, and implementer and overlaps are handled through agreed routines; moderate where agreement on routine matters coexists with uncertainty on non-routine or cross-court matters; and substantial where accounts diverge even for routine matters and records are incomplete.

Interpretation will proceed through the theoretical chain. Accounts of uncertainty over who decides will be read through Role Theory, patterns of unequal information, weak traceability, and unclear reporting through Agency Theory, and explanations that appeal to Reformed commitment or cultural expectations of eldership through Polity Theory. Negative cases, where elders report clear roles, will be analyzed to identify the practices, such as written delegations or consistent minuting, that sustain clarity, since these inform the recommendations.

The analysis will be reported objective by objective so that the argument keeps a single line of flow. For O1, the evidence will show which decision domains, and which of the four points of initiation, approval, execution, and review, attract uncertainty, and whether it is concentrated at the boundary between the Kirk Session and the Presbytery. For O2, it will show whether competing claims rest on the different bases of legitimacy attached to the two offices, and whether disputes are settled by rule, by precedent, or by deference to status. For O3, it will show whether the procedures that carry decisions through the courts can be seen and followed by all members, and whether minutes allow a decision to be traced to its mover and its executor. For O4 and O5, it will examine the conditions under which the three indicators intensify or ease, particularly where the Manual is silent, where eldership tenure confers informal weight, and where record-keeping is weak. For O6, the strategies proposed will be drawn from practices that participants and negative cases show to sustain clarity, so that recommendations are grounded in the Presbytery's own experience.

The analytical logic also guards against two errors. The first is to treat every difference of view between the offices as ambiguity, when some disagreement reflects legitimate theological or pastoral judgment rather than unclear boundaries. The study therefore codes ambiguity only where participants cannot say, or disagree about, who is entitled to act, not where they merely disagree about what should be done. The second is to treat ambiguity as a deficiency of the Manual alone, when it may equally arise from how the Manual is read and used. Keeping these distinctions explicit allows the findings to be read as a description of shared governance under pressure rather than as a verdict on either office.

Three patterns are anticipated, although the design leaves room for others. The first is that ambiguity will cluster in non-routine matters, such as disciplinary cases, property transactions, and disputes across courts, while routine matters proceed on custom. The second is that teaching and ruling elders will describe the same boundaries differently, with each office more readily seeing the other's encroachment than its own. The third is that opacity will be least visible to those who hold information, such as principal officers, and most visible to those who depend on them. Finding any of these would not be treated as proof of fault, but as evidence of where the Manual and local practice leave shared authority under-specified.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings are expected to generate five implications. First, the Presbytery and the PCEA Secretariat may clarify provisions of the Manual identified as open-textured and issue authoritative interpretations of recurring disputes. Second, courts could adopt role charters or decision-rights matrices stating who initiates, authorizes, executes, and reviews standard categories of decisions. Third, elders should receive structured induction in the Manual and in the distinct and shared functions of the two offices. Fourth, minute-keeping and reporting standards, including circulation timelines and decision registers, should be strengthened to reduce opacity. Finally, a simple mechanism for seeking binding clarification of jurisdictional questions could be established, so that disputes do not stall court business.

Each implication follows from a specific objective. Evidence on jurisdictional ambiguity (O1) bears most directly on the drafting of decision-rights matrices and role charters. Evidence on authority overlap (O2) bears on the design of committee terms of reference and on mechanisms for resolving contested claims fairly, so that outcomes do not depend on the status of the persons involved. Evidence on governance opacity (O3) bears on minute-keeping, circulation of papers, reporting standards, and easy access to the Manual for every elder. Evidence on

polity and context (O4 and O5) indicates where the Manual itself needs interpretation or amendment and where training and culture, rather than text, must change. Evidence on strategies (O6) will show which of these measures' participants regard as workable, which is essential if the Presbytery is to adopt them without eroding the parity that the polity protects.

Any reform should also respect the theological reasons for shared governance. The aim is not to concentrate decisions in one office or to reduce the role of lay leaders, but to specify the points at which the two offices act together and the points at which each acts for the court, so that co-equality is practiced and not merely affirmed. The recommendations will accordingly be framed as clarifications that serve Reformed commitments, and will be offered to the Presbytery for discernment through its own courts.

SCHOLARLY CONTRIBUTION

The study contributes theoretically by extending role theory from individual employees in corporate settings to co-equal offices in an ecclesiastical governance structure, and by integrating Role, Agency, and Polity theories into a single multi-level lens. It contributes conceptually by disaggregating role ambiguity into three indicators with explicit sub-dimensions and empirical markers adapted to church courts, giving later researchers a vocabulary and coding frame that does not exist in current PCEA scholarship. It contributes practically by offering the Presbytery, the PCEA, and other Reformed denominations in Africa evidence for improving the clarity of shared governance.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could use the indicators and sub-dimensions developed here to construct and validate a context-specific measure of role ambiguity for church leaders, adapting the established scale logic of Rizzo et al. (1970), and then test the prevalence of ambiguity in survey-based, multi-presbytery studies. Comparative case studies across presbyteries and across Reformed denominations would clarify how far the findings travel. Once the construct is established, mixed-methods studies may examine the consequences of role ambiguity for outcomes such as leadership performance and governance effectiveness, which this study deliberately excludes.

CONCLUSION

Presbyterian polity deliberately shares authority between co-equal offices, and that design is a strength, but it places a heavy demand on the clarity of the rules that allocate decisions between them. Where the Manual is silent or open to more than one reading, ambiguity can arise as

uncertainty about who decides, as competing claims of oversight, and as limited visibility of procedure, and each of these can slow decisions and weaken accountability. By disaggregating role ambiguity into three observable indicators, aligning each indicator and each contextual factor with a specific objective, and combining Role, Agency, and Polity theories in a single multi-level lens, the study provides a coherent basis for empirical inquiry in Nyandarua Presbytery. The evidence it is designed to generate should help the Presbytery and the wider PCEA to clarify provisions, support elders in their distinct and shared functions, and sustain the parity on which Reformed governance depends.

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