

Systemic Vulnerabilities: How School Organizational Culture Shapes Mobbing Practices and Pedagogical Interventions

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ABSTRACT

While peer-to-peer aggression is often treated as a series of isolated interpersonal conflicts, school mobbing is fundamentally embedded within the broader institutional framework of the educational environment. This article examines the "systemic vulnerabilities" of primary and secondary schools, exploring how school organizational culture actively shapes both the manifestation of collective mobbing practices and the efficacy of pedagogical interventions. Drawing upon organizational sociology and critical pedagogy, this paper analyzes how institutional variables—such as rigid administrative hierarchies, lack of collaborative teacher networks, competitive school climates, and passive leadership—create fertile ground for systematic peer exclusion. We argue that a toxic or indifferent organizational culture inadvertently deprives educators of the systemic support and pedagogical agency required to address complex group dynamics effectively. Consequently, standard anti-bullying protocols often fail because they treat the symptoms rather than the institutional pathology. By reframing mobbing as a symptom of organizational dysfunction, this study provides a conceptual model for school administrators and educational theorists to diagnose structural weaknesses, transform school ethos, and build resilient, socio-pedagogically sound environments that reject collective marginalization.

Keywords: *School Mobbing; Organizational Culture; Pedagogical Interventions; Systemic Vulnerability; Educational Sociology; Institutional Leadership.*

INTRODUCTION

The increasing behavioral problems, aggression, violence, phenomena that may also be associated with delinquent behaviors, constitute a worrying reality in modern schools. We are inevitably led to a critical view of the role of the school and the educational system in general and its ability to manage crises. The serious effects of intra-school violence on the physical and mental health of children make it imperative to take measures to prevent and effectively deal with the phenomenon (Karolidou et al., 2016). Bullying at school is a pattern of aggressive behavior between two or more children with main characteristics: (a) the intention to cause harm, (b) repetition (or threat of repetition) over a long period of time, (c) the existence of a "power difference" between the students who bully and those who are bullied. In this sense, bullying is differentiated from conflicts or fights that occur between children with similar physical, psychological, or social power (Smith & Brain, 2000).

Recent research increasingly recognizes schools as complex social organizations rather than merely instructional environments (Fullan, 2016; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Organizational culture shapes expectations regarding collaboration, conflict management, inclusion, and professional responsibility, thereby influencing how teachers, school leaders, and students collectively interpret and respond to aggressive behaviors (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). When organizational cultures are characterized by hierarchical rigidity, fragmented professional collaboration, weak trust, or passive leadership, they may unintentionally create conditions that normalize exclusion, discourage intervention, and perpetuate systemic forms of victimization (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Spillane, 2006). Despite growing interest in school climate and organizational

leadership, existing scholarship has largely examined bullying prevention through student-centered interventions, social-emotional learning programs, or behavioral management strategies (Salmivalli, 2010; UNESCO, 2019). Comparatively little attention has been devoted to understanding how organizational culture itself functions as a structural determinant of school mobbing or how institutional weaknesses undermine the effectiveness of pedagogical interventions (Potamias, & Kanari, 2026; Nikolidakis, & Kota, 2025). This represents a significant theoretical and practical gap within the educational sociology and school leadership literature.

This article addresses that gap by introducing the concept of systemic vulnerabilities, referring to organizational characteristics that unintentionally facilitate the emergence, normalization, and persistence of collective mobbing within schools. Drawing upon organizational sociology, educational leadership, school effectiveness research, and critical pedagogy, the paper proposes the Systemic Vulnerability Framework (SVF), a conceptual model explaining how organizational culture, institutional leadership, professional collaboration, and school climate interact to shape mobbing dynamics (Potamias, & Kanari, 2026). Rather than conceptualizing mobbing solely as an interpersonal phenomenon, the proposed framework repositions it as a symptom of organizational dysfunction requiring systemic rather than exclusively individual interventions. The article therefore contributes to the literature in three principal ways. First, it extends current understandings of school mobbing by integrating organizational theory into educational research. Second, it develops an original conceptual framework capable of explaining the institutional mechanisms through which collective aggression becomes normalized. Third, it proposes a socio-pedagogical perspective that positions organizational transformation as a prerequisite for sustainable anti-mobbing interventions, offering practical implications for school leaders, policymakers, and educational researchers (Potamias, & Kanari, 2026).

THEORETICAL CONCEPTUALIZATION OF SCHOOL MOBING AND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

The conceptualization of school aggression has historically been dominated by psychological and behavioral perspectives that primarily focus on individual perpetrators, individual victims, and direct interpersonal interactions. Within this tradition, bullying has been defined as intentional, repeated aggressive behavior involving a power imbalance between the aggressor and the target (Olweus, 1993). This definition has provided an influential foundation for prevention programs worldwide; however, it has also been criticized for insufficiently accounting for the organizational and institutional contexts within which aggressive practices emerge, become normalized, and persist (Thornberg, 2013; UNESCO, 2019).

School mobbing represents a distinct but related phenomenon. Unlike conventional bullying, which may involve one or more aggressors targeting an individual, mobbing refers to a sustained process of collective exclusion, social degradation, and psychological marginalization enacted by a group against a targeted individual or subgroup (Einarsen et al., 2020; Leymann, 1996). The defining characteristic of mobbing is not merely the presence of aggression but the collective and systematic nature of exclusionary practices. These practices may include social isolation, communication restrictions, reputational attacks, professional undermining, and the gradual construction of a negative identity attributed to the target (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018).

In educational organizations, mobbing requires particular analytical attention because schools are complex social systems where professional relationships, authority structures, informal networks, and institutional norms interact continuously. A teacher, student, or member of the school community may become marginalized not only because of individual conflicts but also because organizational cultures may implicitly support conformity, silence, and exclusion (Hauge et al., 2011; Salin & Notelaers, 2020). Therefore, mobbing should be understood as an organizational process embedded within specific social conditions rather than as a collection of isolated aggressive acts.

Recent research on workplace and educational mobbing emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between interpersonal conflict and systematic organizational victimization. While ordinary conflict may involve disagreements between individuals with relatively balanced power relations, mobbing develops when negative behaviors become repetitive, asymmetric, and supported by formal or informal organizational mechanisms

(Einarsen et al., 2020). In schools, this distinction is particularly significant because educational institutions often operate through strong professional cultures where informal alliances, shared narratives, and collective interpretations of events influence how individuals are perceived and treated (Kelchtermans, 2017).

The concept of institutional exclusion extends this analysis by highlighting how organizations may unintentionally reproduce marginalization through everyday practices, routines, and decision-making processes. Institutional exclusion does not necessarily require explicit discriminatory intentions; rather, it can emerge through organizational arrangements that systematically disadvantage certain individuals or groups by limiting participation, recognition, or access to professional and social resources (Lemke, 2022). Within schools, such processes may appear through exclusion from collaborative networks, unequal participation in decision-making, restricted professional opportunities, or the delegitimization of particular voices.

Similarly, the notion of organizational victimization emphasizes that individuals may experience harm not only through direct interpersonal hostility but also through organizational structures and climates that fail to protect them. Research on organizational justice and psychological safety demonstrates that perceptions of fairness, trust, and institutional support significantly influence whether individuals feel protected or abandoned within their professional environments (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). When schools lack mechanisms for dialogue, conflict resolution, and collective responsibility, organizational victimization becomes more likely.

From this perspective, school mobbing can be conceptualized as a multilevel phenomenon operating simultaneously at three interconnected levels: the interpersonal level, involving interactions between perpetrators, targets, and bystanders; the organizational level, involving leadership practices, professional relationships, institutional norms, and school climate; and the systemic level, involving broader educational policies, accountability structures, and cultural assumptions about authority, competence, and belonging (Potamias, & Kanari, 2026). This multilevel approach challenges reductionist interpretations of school aggression by demonstrating that mobbing is produced through the interaction between individual actions and organizational conditions. Consequently, prevention strategies that focus exclusively on modifying individual behaviors may remain insufficient because they fail to address the structural conditions that enable collective exclusion to emerge.

The transformation of peer aggression into institutionalized mobbing represents a gradual organizational process through which exclusionary behaviors become accepted, normalized, and reproduced. Rather than appearing suddenly, mobbing typically develops through a sequence of social and organizational mechanisms involving perception formation, group alignment, silence, and institutional reinforcement (Leymann, 1996; Salin, 2018). A central mechanism in this process is the creation of collective narratives about the targeted individual. Within organizations, individuals rarely respond to events solely based on objective information; instead, interpretations are shaped by shared meanings constructed through communication and social interaction (Schein & Schein, 2016). When dominant groups develop negative narratives about a colleague, student, or member of the school community, these narratives can gradually become accepted as organizational truths, reducing empathy toward the target and legitimizing exclusionary actions.

Another critical factor is the role of organizational silence. Silence does not simply represent the absence of communication; it can function as an active mechanism through which problematic behaviors remain unchallenged (Morrison, 2023). In school contexts, teachers or administrators may avoid intervention because of fear of conflict, concerns about professional relationships, uncertainty about procedures, or the belief that intervention may create additional problems. Consequently, passive responses may unintentionally communicate acceptance of exclusionary practices.

Leadership practices play a decisive role in determining whether aggressive group dynamics escalate or are interrupted. Research in educational leadership demonstrates that schools characterized by distributed leadership, relational trust, and collaborative professional cultures are more capable of addressing complex social problems because responsibility is collectively shared (Spillane, 2006). Conversely, passive leadership, authoritarian decision-making, or the absence of transparent conflict-management procedures may create organizational environments in which mobbing practices can persist (Potamias, & Kanari, 2026).

Teacher professional cultures represent another important dimension. Schools are communities of practice where teachers construct professional identities through interaction with colleagues (Wenger, 1998). However, when professional communities become fragmented or dominated by closed informal groups, they may produce exclusionary networks that determine who belongs, whose perspectives are valued, and whose professional legitimacy is recognized (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Such informal structures can reinforce mobbing by transforming professional disagreement into personal marginalization. The role of bystanders is also fundamental. Contemporary research on bullying and workplace aggression demonstrates that observers are not passive actors but influence the social dynamics of aggression through intervention, reinforcement, or silence (Salmivalli, 2010; Thornberg, 2013). In organizational contexts, bystander inaction may contribute to the normalization of harmful practices because the absence of resistance is interpreted as organizational approval.

Furthermore, institutional policies may paradoxically fail when they are disconnected from everyday organizational realities. Many schools implement anti-bullying procedures, codes of conduct, and reporting mechanisms; however, these formal structures may remain ineffective if they are not supported by a corresponding culture of trust, collaboration, and accountability (UNESCO, 2019). This creates a policy-practice gap in which schools formally reject exclusion while informally reproducing the conditions that allow it. School mobbing emerges when repeated negative interactions become socially accepted, organizational silence prevents corrective action, leadership fails to establish protective mechanisms, professional networks become exclusionary, and institutional routines reinforce dominant group norms (Potamias, & Kanari, 2026). The concept of systemic vulnerability captures precisely these organizational conditions. A school becomes vulnerable to mobbing not because individual actors necessarily intend collective harm, but because the organizational environment lacks the relational, structural, and pedagogical capacities required to interrupt exclusionary dynamics (Nikolidakis, & Kota, 2025).

Organizational culture constitutes one of the most significant theoretical lenses through which school mobbing can be understood as a systemic rather than merely interpersonal phenomenon. Schools are not neutral administrative settings; they are complex social organizations characterized by shared meanings, professional traditions, implicit expectations, power relations, and collective interpretations of appropriate behavior. These cultural dimensions influence how members of the school community understand conflict, respond to difference, define professional legitimacy, and determine who is included or excluded within organizational life. Schein's influential model conceptualizes organizational culture as consisting of three interconnected levels: visible artifacts, espoused values, and underlying basic assumptions (Schein & Schein, 2016). While artifacts include observable practices, communication patterns, and organizational routines, the deeper levels of culture involve taken-for-granted assumptions regarding authority, trust, competence, loyalty, and belonging. In the context of school mobbing, these underlying assumptions are particularly important because they shape whether exclusionary practices are challenged or silently accepted (Potamias, & Kanari, 2026).

Educational organizations develop distinctive cultures through historical experiences, leadership practices, professional interactions, and institutional expectations. According to Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), professional cultures in schools may support collaboration and collective learning, but they may also develop into cultures of individualism, competition, or professional isolation. These cultural patterns directly affect the capacity of schools to identify and address relational problems. A school characterized by strong collaborative norms is more likely to recognize exclusion as a collective concern, whereas a fragmented professional culture may allow harmful practices to remain invisible. From an organizational sociology perspective, culture functions as a mechanism of social regulation. It establishes implicit rules about acceptable behavior and determines which voices are recognized as legitimate within the institution (Ball, 2017; Bourdieu, 1990). In schools, these processes influence not only students' experiences but also teachers' professional identities and relationships. Informal cultural expectations may determine who is considered a good teacher, whose expertise is valued, and whose perspectives are marginalized. Consequently, organizational culture can become a mechanism through which symbolic forms of exclusion are reproduced.

Recent research on school climate and organizational trust further demonstrates that relational dimensions of school life significantly influence institutional functioning. Bryk and Schneider (2002) argue that relational trust among teachers, leaders, students, and families constitutes a fundamental resource for school

improvement. When trust is weak, uncertainty increases, communication decreases, and individuals become more vulnerable to social isolation. In such contexts, mobbing dynamics may develop more easily because organizational members lack the collective capacity to challenge harmful behaviors. Leadership represents a central cultural mechanism in shaping these processes. Contemporary educational leadership research emphasizes that leaders do not merely manage existing cultures; they actively construct, reinforce, or transform organizational meanings and practices (Fullan, 2020). Transformational and distributed leadership approaches promote collaboration, shared responsibility, and professional dialogue, creating protective conditions against exclusionary practices (Harris, 2014; Spillane, 2006). Conversely, passive or authoritarian leadership may contribute to organizational vulnerability by allowing informal power structures and unresolved conflicts to dominate everyday interactions.

A critical dimension of organizational culture concerns the relationship between formal structures and informal practices. Schools often possess official policies promoting inclusion, cooperation, and democratic participation; however, everyday organizational life may be shaped by informal norms that contradict these principles. This discrepancy between formal discourse and lived organizational reality represents a key mechanism through which systemic vulnerabilities emerge (Ahmed, 2021; Ball, 2017). A school may officially reject exclusion while simultaneously tolerating practices that marginalize particular individuals or groups. Therefore, organizational culture should be conceptualized not as a static background variable but as an active mechanism that shapes the emergence, escalation, and prevention of mobbing. It influences how conflicts are interpreted, how responsibility is distributed, and whether individuals experience the school as a psychologically safe or threatening environment (Edmondson, 2018). In this sense, school mobbing reflects not only the actions of individuals but also the cultural capacity of the organization to regulate relationships, protect vulnerable members, and promote collective responsibility.

While formal organizational structures are easily identifiable through policies, regulations, and administrative procedures, the informal dimensions of school culture often exert a stronger influence on everyday practices. These hidden organizational norms represent unwritten expectations, assumptions, and patterns of interaction that shape behavior without necessarily being explicitly acknowledged (Schein & Schein, 2016). In relation to school mobbing, such invisible cultural mechanisms are particularly significant because they can normalize exclusion while maintaining the appearance of institutional neutrality. One of the most important hidden norms is organizational silence. Silence emerges when individuals choose not to express concerns, challenge problematic practices, or report harmful behaviors because they anticipate negative consequences or believe that speaking up will not lead to meaningful change (Morrison, 2023). In schools, organizational silence may occur when teachers avoid confronting colleagues, when leaders minimize relational problems, or when students perceive reporting mechanisms as ineffective. Over time, silence becomes a cultural pattern that protects existing power relations and allows exclusionary practices to continue.

A second hidden mechanism concerns conformity to dominant group norms. Schools, like other organizations, develop informal standards regarding acceptable professional behavior, ideological positions, communication styles, and relational expectations. Individuals who challenge dominant assumptions may become perceived as problematic or disruptive (Kelchtermans, 2017). This process can contribute to professional marginalization, where disagreement is interpreted not as constructive dialogue but as evidence of insufficient commitment to the group. The emergence of informal power structures represents another critical dimension of systemic vulnerability. Although schools operate within formal administrative hierarchies, informal networks often determine influence, access to information, and social legitimacy (Ball, 2017). Teacher alliances, professional coalitions, and long-established relational groups may function as hidden organizational systems that shape inclusion and exclusion. When these networks become closed or defensive, they may create environments in which certain individuals are systematically isolated.

Teacher alliances and professional coalitions are not inherently negative. Collaborative professional communities can enhance learning, innovation, and collective efficacy (DuFour & Fullan, 2013). However, when collaboration becomes restricted to exclusive groups, professional communities may transform into mechanisms of boundary construction. Individuals outside dominant networks may experience reduced participation, limited recognition, and diminished professional agency. Thus, the same social processes that strengthen organizational cohesion can also generate exclusion when they are based on conformity rather than

openness. Another important hidden norm is the normalization of exclusionary practices. Organizational research demonstrates that repeated behaviors become institutionalized when they are incorporated into everyday routines and no longer perceived as problematic (Tolbert & Zucker, 1996). Within schools, exclusion may gradually become normalized through practices such as ignoring particular voices during meetings, excluding individuals from informal communication networks, minimizing reported concerns, or attributing responsibility for conflicts exclusively to the marginalized person.

This process is closely connected to the concept of institutional injustice. Organizational members may experience unfair treatment not because of explicit discriminatory actions but because institutional routines systematically fail to provide recognition, participation, and protection (Ahmed, 2021). Therefore, systemic vulnerability emerges when organizational cultures lack mechanisms of reflexivity and self-correction. The concept of psychological safety provides an additional framework for understanding these dynamics. Edmondson (2018) argues that psychologically safe organizations allow members to express concerns, acknowledge mistakes, and participate in collective learning without fear of humiliation or retaliation. Schools characterized by low psychological safety are less likely to address emerging conflicts because individuals protect themselves through avoidance and silence.

Based on this analysis, hidden organizational norms create systemic vulnerabilities through five interconnected mechanisms: organizational silence, which prevents early identification and intervention; conformity pressures, which marginalize individuals who challenge dominant expectations; informal power structures, which determine belonging and legitimacy beyond formal roles; exclusive professional networks, which restrict participation and collaboration; and normalization of exclusion, which transforms harmful practices into accepted organizational routines. Consequently, school mobbing should be understood as a cultural and organizational phenomenon produced through the interaction between visible practices and invisible assumptions. The prevention of mobbing therefore requires more than the implementation of behavioral rules or disciplinary procedures; it requires the transformation of the cultural foundations of school organizations by strengthening trust, distributed leadership, professional collaboration, and collective responsibility. Within the proposed Systemic Vulnerability Framework (SVF), organizational culture functions as the central mediating mechanism connecting institutional conditions with mobbing practices. Schools become resilient against collective exclusion when their cultures actively promote dialogue, inclusion, professional solidarity, and democratic participation. Conversely, when hidden organizational norms remain unexamined, they may silently reproduce the very conditions that allow mobbing to emerge and persist.

SYSTEMIC VULNERABILITIES OF SCHOOL ORGANIZATIONS: THE SVF MODEL

The concept of systemic vulnerability provides a theoretical framework for understanding why certain school organizations become more susceptible to the emergence and persistence of mobbing practices. While traditional approaches tend to locate the causes of aggression within individual characteristics, systemic perspectives emphasize that harmful behaviors are shaped by interactions among organizational structures, cultural norms, leadership practices, and institutional conditions (Potamias, 2026a; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Fullan, 2020). In this article, systemic vulnerability is defined as the reduced organizational capacity of a school to identify, prevent, and transform exclusionary processes because of structural, cultural, and relational weaknesses embedded within its everyday functioning. A vulnerable school organization is not necessarily characterized by the presence of openly aggressive actors; rather, vulnerability emerges when institutional conditions allow harmful dynamics to develop without effective mechanisms of reflection, intervention, and collective responsibility.

This perspective draws upon ecological theories of human development, organizational sociology, and educational change research. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) demonstrated that individual experiences are embedded within multiple interacting systems, suggesting that behaviors cannot be separated from the environments in which they occur. Similarly, organizational research emphasizes that workplace aggression is often associated with psychosocial environments characterized by role ambiguity, inadequate leadership, social isolation, and weak organizational support (Einarsen et al., 2020; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018).

Applied to schools, the concept of systemic vulnerability shifts the analytical question from "Why does an individual engage in aggressive behavior?" toward "What organizational conditions allow collective exclusion to emerge, persist, and become normalized?" This shift is theoretically significant because it positions school mobbing as an organizational symptom rather than merely an interpersonal problem.

The Systemic Vulnerability Framework (SVF) proposed in this article identifies six interconnected organizational vulnerabilities that may increase the likelihood of mobbing practices: rigid administrative hierarchies; fragmented teacher collaboration; competitive organizational climates; passive or ineffective leadership; weak emotional climate and reduced psychological safety; and the gap between formal policies and everyday organizational practices. These dimensions do not operate independently; instead, they interact dynamically, producing organizational conditions in which exclusionary behaviors may become socially reinforced and institutionally embedded (Potamias, 2026a).

A first systemic vulnerability concerns organizational structures characterized by excessive hierarchy, centralized decision-making, and limited opportunities for participatory governance. Although schools necessarily operate within formal administrative frameworks, excessive bureaucratization may reduce communication, weaken professional autonomy, and discourage collective problem-solving (Hoy & Miskel, 2013). Educational organizations with highly centralized structures may unintentionally create conditions in which conflicts remain unresolved because communication flows primarily vertically rather than horizontally. Teachers may hesitate to express concerns, challenge dominant perspectives, or report relational problems because they perceive limited institutional support or fear professional consequences (Morrison, 2023). From an organizational justice perspective, perceptions of fairness are strongly connected to participation and voice. When individuals believe that decisions are imposed without consultation, trust decreases and organizational commitment weakens (Colquitt et al., 2013). In such environments, informal power structures may compensate for limited formal dialogue, creating hidden networks of influence that can reinforce exclusion. Within mobbing dynamics, rigid hierarchies may contribute to reduced visibility of emerging conflicts, limited opportunities for mediation, and unequal access to institutional protection. A target of mobbing may therefore experience not only peer exclusion but also organizational abandonment when formal structures fail to provide effective mechanisms of support.

A second major vulnerability concerns the fragmentation of professional relationships among teachers. Contemporary educational research consistently identifies collaboration and professional learning communities as essential conditions for school improvement (DuFour & Fullan, 2013; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). However, when collaboration is weak or symbolic, schools may become collections of isolated individuals rather than cohesive professional communities. Teacher isolation reduces opportunities for collective reflection and weakens the social networks necessary for addressing complex relational problems. In isolated organizational environments, individuals are more likely to interpret conflicts through personal rather than systemic perspectives, increasing the risk that disagreements become personalized and escalated. Wenger's (1998) theory of communities of practice highlights that professional belonging develops through participation in shared activities and collective meaning-making. When access to such communities is restricted, individuals may experience professional marginalization. In extreme cases, exclusion from professional networks may constitute a form of organizational victimization. Within school mobbing processes, fragmented collaboration can facilitate the formation of closed professional groups, the circulation of negative informal narratives, reduced collective responsibility, and the isolation of targeted individuals. Thus, the absence of authentic collaboration does not merely reduce organizational effectiveness; it may create social conditions in which exclusion becomes easier to organize and maintain.

A third systemic vulnerability emerges in organizational cultures dominated by competition, comparison, and individual performance orientation. Although accountability and professional excellence are important dimensions of educational improvement, excessive competition may undermine trust and transform professional differences into sources of tension. Within such environments, standardized assessment often loses its formative purpose and functions instead as a mechanism of exclusion, reinforcing student marginalization and peer comparison. Transitioning toward differentiated, process-oriented evaluation is therefore crucial for dismantling competitive school cultures and ensuring that assessment acts as a motivational tool rather than a punitive verdict (Eleftherakis, 2026). Research on school improvement

demonstrates that sustainable educational change depends more strongly on collective capacity than on individual achievement alone (Fullan, 2020). When organizational cultures reward individual visibility rather than collective contribution, teachers may perceive colleagues as competitors rather than collaborators. Competitive climates can influence mobbing dynamics by creating conditions in which professional disagreement becomes personal conflict, alternative approaches are perceived as threats, and individuals who challenge dominant practices become marginalized. Bourdieu's (1990) concept of symbolic power is useful for understanding these processes. Organizations construct implicit hierarchies of recognition, competence, and legitimacy. Individuals who do not conform to dominant definitions of professional success may gradually lose symbolic status within the organization. Therefore, competitive cultures may unintentionally encourage exclusion by transforming diversity of thought into organizational instability rather than recognizing it as a resource for learning (Potamias, 2026b).

Leadership constitutes one of the most influential organizational mechanisms shaping how schools respond to conflict, exclusion, and relational tensions. Although leadership is not the sole determinant of organizational behavior, research consistently demonstrates that school leaders play a central role in constructing organizational cultures, establishing norms of interaction, and creating conditions that either support or inhibit collective responsibility (Leithwood et al., 2008). Within the context of school mobbing, passive leadership represents a significant systemic vulnerability because it allows problematic dynamics to remain unresolved. Passive leaders may avoid addressing interpersonal conflicts, minimize reports of exclusion, or adopt a neutral position in situations where institutional intervention is required. Although such responses may be motivated by the desire to maintain organizational stability, they often contribute to the normalization of harmful practices by communicating that exclusionary behaviors are tolerated. Leadership research has identified the importance of proactive, relational, and ethically grounded leadership for developing inclusive school environments. Transformational and distributed leadership approaches emphasize dialogue, shared decision-making, professional trust, and collective agency (Harris, 2014; Spillane, 2006). In contrast, leadership characterized by avoidance, ambiguity, or excessive reliance on formal procedures may weaken the school's capacity to respond effectively to emerging social problems. A critical dimension of passive leadership is the diffusion of responsibility. Within complex organizations, responsibility for addressing relational problems may become fragmented among administrators, teachers, and support personnel. When everyone assumes that someone else should intervene, harmful dynamics may continue without effective interruption (Darley & Latane, 1968). Passive leadership contributes to mobbing processes through several mechanisms: failure to establish clear expectations regarding respectful interaction, inadequate monitoring of organizational climate, insufficient support for targeted individuals, avoidance of difficult conversations, and reliance on individual solutions for systemic problems. Therefore, leadership functions as a preventive organizational resource that shapes whether exclusionary practices become possible in the first place.

A fifth systemic vulnerability concerns the emotional dimension of school organizations. Although schools are traditionally examined as cognitive and instructional environments, contemporary educational research increasingly emphasizes that emotions, relationships, and belonging constitute fundamental components of organizational functioning (Hargreaves, 2001). The emotional climate of a school refers to the collective perceptions regarding trust, respect, belonging, recognition, and interpersonal security among members of the educational community. When emotional climates are characterized by low trust and weak relational bonds, individuals may become more vulnerable to exclusion because the organization lacks the social resources required to protect members during periods of conflict. The concept of psychological safety, introduced in organizational research by Edmondson (1999, 2018), provides an important theoretical lens for understanding these processes. Psychological safety refers to the shared belief that individuals can express concerns, ask questions, acknowledge mistakes, and challenge existing practices without fear of humiliation or negative consequences. Schools with high psychological safety encourage dialogue and collective learning, whereas schools with low psychological safety often develop cultures of avoidance and silence. In relation to mobbing, low psychological safety creates conditions where individuals hesitate to report harmful behaviors, colleagues avoid supporting targeted persons, conflicts remain hidden until escalation occurs, and dominant groups maintain control over organizational narratives. Furthermore, emotional climates influence the development of empathy and moral responsibility within school communities. When relationships become instrumental or competitive, members may become less responsive to others' experiences of exclusion. As a result, the target

of mobbing may gradually become socially constructed as an outsider whose marginalization is perceived as acceptable or deserved (Potamias, 2026a).

A final systemic vulnerability concerns the gap between formal institutional policies and everyday organizational practices. Contemporary educational systems increasingly implement anti-bullying policies, safeguarding procedures, codes of conduct, and intervention frameworks; however, the existence of formal regulations does not necessarily guarantee meaningful transformation of school culture (UNESCO, 2019). The policy-practice gap emerges when institutional documents communicate values of inclusion and protection, while everyday organizational routines continue to reproduce silence, exclusion, and unequal participation. This discrepancy reflects a broader challenge in educational reform: policies are interpreted and enacted through local organizational cultures rather than implemented mechanically (Ball et al., 2012). In relation to school mobbing, formal procedures may fail because they may conceptualize aggression primarily as an individual behavioral problem rather than an organizational phenomenon, they may focus on incident management rather than cultural transformation, they may lack mechanisms for monitoring relational dynamics, and they may depend excessively on individual reporting rather than collective responsibility. As a result, schools may develop symbolic compliance, where institutional requirements are formally fulfilled while underlying organizational conditions remain unchanged. Critical policy studies emphasize that educational policies acquire meaning through everyday practices, negotiations, and interpretations within institutions (Ball, 2017). A systemic approach requires schools to move beyond reactive procedures toward continuous organizational learning, including systematic examination of school climate, professional development focused on relational competence, collaborative structures for conflict resolution, participatory decision-making, and mechanisms for early identification of exclusionary patterns (Potamias, 2026b).

The six vulnerabilities identified in the Systemic Vulnerability Framework operate as mutually reinforcing organizational mechanisms: rigid hierarchy reduces opportunities for collaborative dialogue; weak collaboration strengthens informal power networks; competitive climates increase interpersonal tensions; passive leadership fails to interrupt emerging exclusion; low psychological safety discourages reporting; and policy-practice gaps create institutional inconsistency. Together, these conditions create an organizational ecology of exclusion, in which mobbing becomes possible because the organization lacks sufficient protective structures. The central proposition of the SVF is that school mobbing emerges when organizational vulnerabilities reduce the capacity of educational communities to regulate conflict, maintain trust, and protect belonging. The framework proposes a transition from an individual-centered interpretation toward an organizational perspective: Individual aggression leads to Group dynamics, which lead to Organizational vulnerabilities, leading to Institutional normalization, and ultimately Systemic exclusion. Through this framework, school mobbing is repositioned as a socio-organizational phenomenon requiring systemic pedagogical responses, democratic leadership, and culturally embedded prevention strategies (Nikolidakis, & Kota, 2025).

MULTIMODAL SOCIO-PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES AND EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS

While previous sections have demonstrated that school mobbing emerges from organizational vulnerabilities, a deeper understanding of exclusionary processes requires attention to the ways in which meaning is produced, communicated, and normalized within school environments. Organizational practices are not transmitted exclusively through formal policies or verbal interactions; they are constructed through multiple semiotic modes, including language, visual representations, spatial arrangements, digital communication, institutional documents, gestures, routines, and patterns of participation (Jewitt, 2014; Kress, 2010). From a social semiotic perspective, schools are inherently multimodal organizations. Every institutional practice communicates meanings about belonging, competence, authority, and legitimacy. Classroom arrangements, staffroom interactions, meeting structures, school websites, newsletters, evaluation documents, digital platforms, and informal communication channels function as meaning-making resources through which organizational identities are constructed (Nikolidakis, & Kosmas, 2025; Bezemer & Kress, 2016; Kress, 2010).

Within this framework, school mobbing can be conceptualized as a multimodal process of exclusion. Exclusion is not produced only through explicit verbal aggression but also through accumulated semiotic signals that communicate marginalization. A teacher who is systematically excluded from informal communication networks, a student whose contributions are visually or spatially marginalized in classroom practices, or a professional whose expertise is repeatedly ignored in institutional narratives experiences exclusion through interconnected communicative and organizational modes. Therefore, mobbing should be examined not only as a social process but also as a process of semiotic construction of difference, where the targeted individual becomes progressively represented through negative meanings that circulate within the organization.

A central contribution of a multimodal approach is the recognition that organizations construct identities through representational practices. Following Hall's (1997) theory of representation, identities are produced through systems of meaning. In school organizations, the construction of a problematic individual frequently emerges through repeated narratives, descriptions, visual cues, and interactional patterns. An educator may gradually be represented through recurring organizational narratives such as "not cooperative," "difficult to work with," "resistant to change," or "not aligned with the team." Although such descriptions may appear neutral, their repeated circulation can produce a stable organizational identity that influences how future behaviors are interpreted. A similar process may occur among students, where labels associated with ability, behavior, ethnicity, social background, or academic performance become embedded within school discourse. From the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis, language actively contributes to producing social relations and power structures (Fairclough, 2010). A multimodal perspective expands this analysis by examining how verbal, visual, spatial, and embodied modes operate together: language mode (negative narratives, labels, informal comments), visual mode (symbolic visibility or invisibility in institutional materials), spatial mode (exclusion from physical spaces or meetings), embodied mode (gestures, avoidance, interactional positioning), and digital mode (communication platforms and information access) (Nikolidakis, & Kosmas, 2025).

The Systemic Vulnerability Framework (SVF) can therefore be extended through a multimodal dimension: Organizational Structures lead to Cultural Norms, which lead to Multimodal Representations, producing Social Interpretations and resulting in Exclusionary Practices. This means that systemic vulnerability operates through both organizational and communicative mechanisms. For instance, passive leadership may be communicated through silence during meetings, avoidance of difficult discussions, lack of public recognition, and absence of inclusive narratives. Similarly, fragmented teacher collaboration becomes visible through selective communication networks, unequal participation opportunities, restricted access to information, and exclusion from professional conversations. Thus, multimodality provides analytical tools for identifying early warning signs of organizational exclusion before mobbing becomes fully institutionalized (Potamias, 2026b).

Building upon previous research on organizational analytics, learning analytics, and educational monitoring, this article proposes the development of a Multimodal Early Warning System (MEWS) and an integrated Multimodal Organizational Risk Assessment Framework (MORAF) for identifying emerging patterns of exclusion within schools. Unlike traditional approaches that rely primarily on incident reports, a multimodal system examines multiple sources of organizational meaning across distinct dimensions: the discursive dimension (recurring negative labels, exclusionary narratives, blame-oriented language leading to identity degradation), the relational/social dimension (collaboration patterns, professional isolation, network fragmentation leading to social exclusion), the leadership dimension (silence, avoidance, unequal recognition leading to institutional inaction), the spatial dimension (restricted participation, symbolic marginalization leading to reduced belonging), the digital dimension (exclusion from communication channels leading to information inequality), and the emotional dimension (low trust, fear, reduced psychological safety leading to organizational withdrawal). Capturing these dynamic dimensions effectively requires a methodological shift away from static, retrospective self-reports toward dynamic systems modeling. By treating technology-enhanced learning environments as multimodal sensors, schools can monitor behavioral and psychophysiological data streams in real-time, gaining a granular understanding of affective states and enabling proactive, context-aware interventions before exclusionary patterns escalate (Moukatzi, Eleftherakis, & Zaranis, 2026). Such an approach aligns with contemporary educational research emphasizing the

importance of data-informed decision-making while maintaining sensitivity to qualitative and contextual dimensions of school life (Nikolidakis et al., 2026; Selwyn, 2019; Williamson, 2017). The purpose of multimodal monitoring is not surveillance of individuals but organizational reflection and support for democratic school development (Potamias, 2024; Potamias, 2026b).

A systemic and multimodal understanding of mobbing requires a transformation of intervention strategies. Traditional anti-bullying programs often focus on identifying perpetrators, supporting victims, and modifying individual behaviors; while valuable, they are insufficient when exclusion is embedded within organizational culture. A socio-pedagogical intervention model should include five interconnected dimensions: First, Democratic and Distributed Leadership, where school leaders cultivate cultures of participation, transparency, and shared responsibility, creating conditions for collective learning (Nikolidakis, & Kota, 2025; Potamias, 2024; Harris, 2014; Spillane, 2006). Second, Professional Learning Communities, providing teachers with structured opportunities for dialogue, reflection, and collaborative inquiry to protect against isolation and fragmentation (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Third, Multimodal Critical Literacy, enabling educators and students to critically examine representations, narratives, and practices that contribute to exclusion (Jewitt, 2014; Kress, 2010). Fourth, Restorative and Relational Practices, moving conflict resolution beyond punishment toward restoring relationships, rebuilding trust, and strengthening collective belonging. Fifth, Continuous Organizational Reflection, through which schools regularly examine their cultural patterns, communication practices, and inclusion mechanisms via participatory evaluation processes (Nikolidakis, & Kota, 2026).

Integrating organizational theory, critical pedagogy, and social semiotics, this framework extends into a Multimodal Systemic Vulnerability Framework (MSVF). The MSVF argues that school mobbing emerges through the interaction of structural vulnerabilities (hierarchy, weak collaboration, ineffective leadership), cultural vulnerabilities (silence, conformity, normalization of exclusion), semiotic vulnerabilities (exclusionary narratives, negative representations, unequal visibility), and pedagogical vulnerabilities (insufficient relational competence, limited critical literacy, weak democratic participation) (Nikolidakis, & Kota, 2025). The central proposition of the MSVF is that school mobbing is not only an organizational failure but also a failure of meaning-making systems, emerging when institutional structures, cultural practices, and multimodal representations converge to construct exclusion as acceptable or invisible. Sustainable prevention requires schools to transform not only behaviors but also the meanings, narratives, and communicative practices through which belonging is produced.

The theoretical development of the MSVF suggests that school mobbing requires research approaches capable of capturing the interaction between individual experiences, organizational structures, cultural meanings, and communicative practices. Existing studies have generated valuable knowledge regarding prevalence, psychological consequences, and behavioral patterns, but many investigations continue to privilege individual-level variables and quantitative indicators (Einarsen et al., 2020; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018). Future research should adopt a multilevel perspective integrating individual experiences of victimization, interpersonal interaction patterns, organizational culture, leadership practices, professional networks, and multimodal communication environments (Potamias, 2024; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Espelage & Swearer, 2011). Methodological directions include Multimodal Discourse Analysis (examining linguistic, visual, spatial, digital, and embodied practices) (Potamias, 2024; Nikolidakis, & Kosmas, 2025), Organizational Ethnography (examining everyday routines, informal conversations, and professional rituals) (Ybema et al., 2009), Social Network Analysis (mapping communication flows and isolated positions) (Borgatti et al., 2018), and Multimodal Organizational Analytics (MOA).

Because research on mobbing involves vulnerable individuals and sensitive organizational dynamics, ethical considerations are central. Ethically responsible research requires informed consent, protection of anonymity, careful interpretation of organizational narratives, avoidance of stigmatizing labels, and participatory approaches involving school communities. The purpose of multimodal analysis is to reveal systemic conditions that require transformation rather than to expose individuals, aligning with critical educational research traditions that argue knowledge production should contribute to empowerment, inclusion, and social justice (Potamias, 2024; Freire, 2005; Giroux, 2020). Empirical studies can adopt a four-phase mixed-methods case design: Phase 1 (Organizational Diagnosis through climate surveys and leadership questionnaires), Phase 2

(Multimodal Data Collection through documents, interviews, and observations), Phase 3 (Analytical Integration via thematic, multimodal, and network analysis), and Phase 4 (Intervention Design encompassing leadership development, professional learning, restorative practices, and multimodal critical literacy) (Potamias, 2024).

OPERATIONALIZING THE MULTIMODAL SYSTEMIC VULNERABILITY FRAMEWORK (MSVF) IN SCHOOL SETTINGS: A METHODOLOGICAL ROADMAP FOR PREVENTING INSTITUTIONALIZED EXCLUSION AND WORKPLACE MOBBING. METHODOLOGICAL ROADMAP AND OPERATIONALIZATION OF THE MSVF

The Multimodal Systemic Vulnerability Framework (MSVF) is proposed as an integrative methodological framework that translates theoretical understandings of workplace mobbing from an individual-centered perspective into a systemic, organizational, and multimodal approach suitable for real school environments. While traditional approaches to workplace bullying and mobbing have frequently focused on the identification of perpetrators, victims, and specific aggressive behaviors, the MSVF conceptualizes mobbing as an emergent organizational phenomenon produced through the interaction of institutional structures, professional relationships, leadership practices, communicative routines, and symbolic systems. Within educational organizations, exclusion rarely appears immediately as an explicit hostile act; rather, it develops gradually through repeated patterns of marginalization, unequal participation, restricted access to information, professional isolation, and the normalization of silence. Therefore, the prevention of mobbing requires methodological tools capable of identifying not only visible conflicts but also the subtle multimodal processes through which organizational vulnerability is produced and maintained (Vranjes, et al. 2017; Einarsen et al., 2020; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018; Potamias & Kanari, 2026).

The first phase involves the establishment of institutional readiness and ethical foundations for MSVF implementation. The role of school leadership is central because leaders influence the organizational climate, patterns of communication, and possibilities for professional participation. However, leadership within the MSVF is not understood as centralized control but as a distributed process in which responsibility for organizational well-being is shared among members of the educational community (Spillane, 2006). School administrators initiate the process by communicating that the purpose of the framework is preventive and developmental rather than disciplinary. The focus is placed on understanding how institutional routines may unintentionally generate vulnerability rather than identifying individual responsibility for conflict. This distinction is particularly important because organizational responses based exclusively on blame may reinforce defensiveness and silence, whereas reflective approaches encourage collective ownership of improvement processes (Edmondson, 2014).

At this initial stage, schools establish procedures regarding confidentiality, participation, ethical data management, and collaborative interpretation. Teachers and staff members need to understand that the MSVF does not function as a surveillance mechanism but as a reflective organizational tool. Psychological safety constitutes a fundamental prerequisite because individuals are unlikely to disclose experiences of exclusion or communication difficulties if they fear negative consequences. According to Edmondson (2014), psychologically safe environments enable members of organizations to express concerns, acknowledge mistakes, and participate in collective learning. Therefore, the successful implementation of MSVF depends not only on methodological procedures but also on the creation of a culture where professional voices are valued.

The second phase involves multimodal organizational mapping. This phase represents one of the distinctive contributions of the MSVF because it extends beyond conventional approaches that examine bullying primarily through verbal reports or formal complaints. Instead, it investigates the entire semiotic environment of the school. The analysis considers how teachers communicate during staff meetings, how decisions are represented in official documents, how digital platforms distribute information, how physical spaces influence interaction, and how participation opportunities are organized within everyday professional practices.

For example, a teacher who is systematically excluded from informal communication networks may not experience a single identifiable act of aggression. However, repeated delays in receiving information, limited invitations to collaborative activities, minimal acknowledgment during professional discussions, and restricted opportunities to contribute may collectively indicate a pattern of organizational marginalization. From an MSVF perspective, these signals are not interpreted separately but as interconnected multimodal indicators of systemic vulnerability. The framework therefore seeks to identify patterns of accumulation rather than isolated incidents.

This approach draws upon multimodal discourse analysis, which emphasizes that meaning is produced through relationships between different communicative resources and social contexts (Jewitt et al., 2016; Mills, et al., 2022). In educational organizations, institutional power is communicated not only through explicit decisions but also through subtle forms of representation, visibility, participation, and recognition. Consequently, MSVF examines how organizational cultures are materialized through every day practices and how seemingly neutral routines may reproduce unequal professional positions.

The third phase concerns the identification and interpretation of systemic vulnerabilities. The MSVF organizes vulnerability analysis around four interconnected dimensions: structural, communicative, relational, and cultural vulnerability. Structural vulnerability refers to organizational arrangements that create unequal access to decision-making, professional opportunities, or institutional resources. Examples include excessive hierarchy, unclear responsibilities, centralized authority, and unequal distribution of professional tasks. Such conditions may increase dependency and reduce teachers' sense of agency.

Relational vulnerability concerns the quality of interpersonal relationships within the school community. Declining collegial trust, reduced collaboration, professional isolation, and the emergence of passive bystander cultures may allow exclusionary practices to persist. Research on workplace bullying has repeatedly demonstrated that organizational climates characterized by low social support and weak collegial relationships increase the likelihood of sustained negative experiences (O' Halloran, et al., 2010; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018).

Finally, cultural vulnerability concerns the underlying values, assumptions, and norms that shape organizational behavior. Drawing upon organizational culture theory, schools may unintentionally reproduce vulnerability when silence is interpreted as professionalism, disagreement is perceived as disloyalty, or competition replaces collaboration as the dominant professional norm (Schein & Schein, 2016).

The fourth phase involves collaborative interpretation and intervention planning. A fundamental principle of the MSVF is that organizational vulnerability cannot be transformed through isolated administrative decisions. Instead, schools require collective processes of reflection in which teachers, leaders, and relevant stakeholders examine the relationship between institutional routines and professional experiences. Reflective dialogue enables schools to move from individual explanations of conflict toward systemic understanding.

At this stage, multimodal evidence collected through observations, institutional documents, communication patterns, and professional discussions is analyzed collaboratively. The purpose is not to establish a definitive diagnosis but to generate shared understanding regarding organizational processes that require improvement. This participatory methodology aligns with contemporary approaches to educational leadership, which emphasize collaboration, teacher agency, and professional learning communities as foundations of sustainable school development (Fullan, 2020; Spillane, 2006).

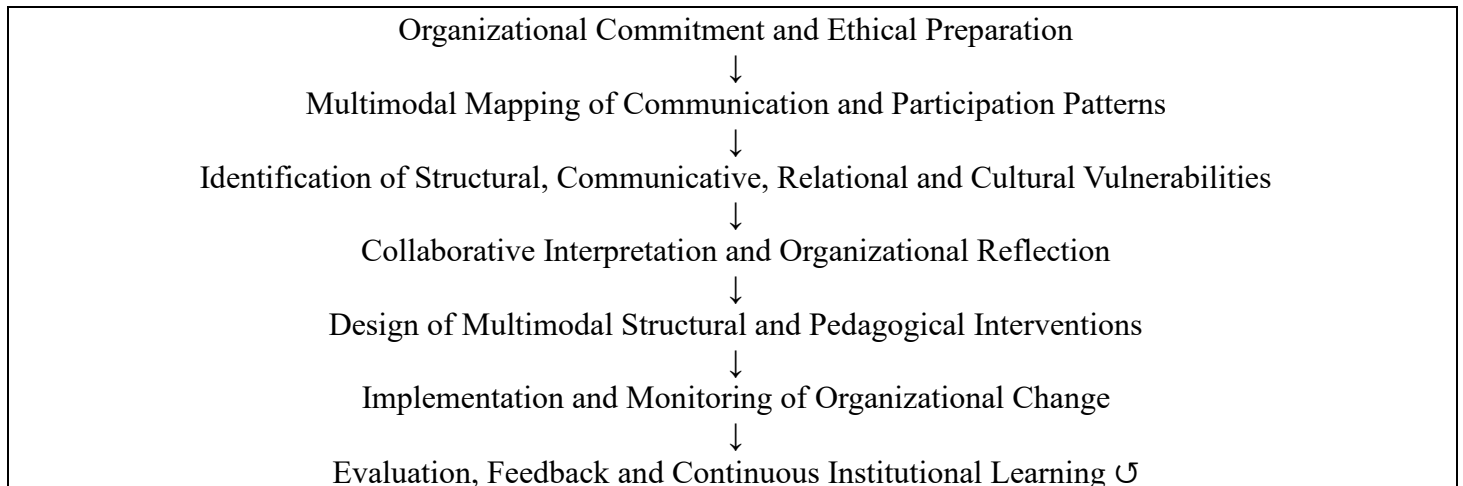
In this sense, the MSVF does not treat mobbing as an exceptional event requiring only reactive management. Instead, it conceptualizes prevention as an ongoing process of organizational resilience-building. This perspective is consistent with Potamias' (2024) argument that contemporary educational environments require expanded pedagogical competence capable of addressing complex communicative, technological, and social conditions through multimodal approaches. Similarly, Potamias and Kanari (2026) emphasize that multimodal interpretation provides a valuable analytical lens for examining how meanings, identities, and power relations are constructed within educational contexts.

Algorithmic systems, digital records, and technology-supported management practices may either strengthen transparency or reproduce existing inequalities depending on how they are designed and implemented (Hargreaves, & O' Connor, 2018). A critical multimodal perspective is therefore necessary to ensure that digital transformation supports inclusion rather than amplifies hidden organizational asymmetries (Edmondson & Lei, 2024; Nikolidakis & Kosmas, 2025; Potamias, 2026). This is particularly evident in AI-driven assessment environments, such as Computerized Adaptive Testing (CAT), where algorithmic 'blindness' to students' psycho-emotional states can inadvertently generate profound systemic vulnerabilities (Eleftherakis, Linardakis, & Zaranis, 2024). Research indicates that the relentless algorithmic pursuit of measurement precision can trigger a 'Toxic Cocktail' of high difficulty and intense time pressure, leading to 'Metacognitive Pessimism' even among high-achieving individuals (Eleftherakis & Linardakis, 2025). This performance paradox underscores that without deliberate pedagogical design, digital tools can induce severe anxiety and exclusion (Eleftherakis & Linardakis, 2026). To counteract this, schools must transition toward 'Precision Education' by deploying emotionally intelligent assessment systems capable of interpreting behavioral indicators and providing targeted, real-time psychological support. Furthermore, when technological tools, such as experiential Augmented Reality (AR) frameworks, are aligned with process-oriented pedagogies, they have the potential to heal the student-subject relationship, actively reducing affective barriers like anxiety while promoting structural appreciation and inclusion (Eleftherakis & Moukatzi, 2026). In this respect, the MSVF complements current discussions regarding artificial intelligence, educational equity, and teacher mediation by emphasizing that technological innovation must remain embedded within ethical and human-centered pedagogical frameworks (Nikolidakis & Kota, 2025; Nikolidakis & Kota, 2026).

The following synthesis table summarizes the relationship between systemic vulnerabilities identified through the MSVF and the corresponding multimodal interventions.

Systemic vulnerability dimension	Manifestation within school organizations	Multimodal indicators	MSVF-based intervention	Expected organizational transformation
Structural vulnerability	Centralized decisions, unclear roles, unequal distribution of responsibilities	Limited participation in decision-making, unequal access to opportunities, hierarchical communication patterns	Distributed leadership structures, transparent role allocation, participatory decision-making	Increased teacher agency and organizational fairness
Communicative vulnerability	Fragmented information flow and exclusion from professional networks	Delayed information, selective digital communication, unequal access to institutional knowledge	Inclusive communication protocols, transparent digital platforms, collaborative information systems	Improved organizational transparency and trust
Relational vulnerability	Weak collaboration, professional isolation, reduced collegial support	Limited interaction, avoidance behaviors, reduced participation in collective activities	Mentoring, professional learning communities, restorative dialogue	Strengthened professional relationships and psychological safety
Cultural vulnerability	Normalization of silence, competition, resistance to dialogue	Acceptance of exclusionary routines, lack of feedback culture, symbolic marginalization	Reflective organizational practices, inclusion-oriented norms, collective professional learning	Development of resilient and inclusive school culture

The methodological process of the MSVF can be represented as a continuous organizational cycle:



This cyclical model emphasizes that vulnerability prevention is not a one-time administrative intervention but a permanent process of organizational self-reflection. Schools that adopt such approaches move from reactive management of conflict toward proactive development of inclusive professional cultures.

From a theoretical perspective, the MSVF contributes to the literature by connecting workplace mobbing research with multimodal discourse analysis and educational organizational theory. Existing research has extensively examined the psychological consequences of workplace bullying and the organizational factors associated with its development (Bush, 2020; Einarsen et al., 2020; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018). Furthermore, the framework extends discussions on educational leadership by suggesting that prevention requires leaders capable of interpreting complex organizational signals. School leaders must therefore develop not only managerial competence but also multimodal organizational literacy: the ability to recognize how communication systems, digital environments, spatial arrangements, and professional interactions contribute to inclusion or exclusion. This argument aligns with contemporary perspectives on educational leadership, teacher professionalism, and inclusive innovation (Fullan, 2020; Zhang, & Bednall, 2016; Spillane, 2006).

The integration of MSVF into school improvement processes can therefore provide educational organizations with a theoretically grounded and practically applicable framework for strengthening institutional resilience. By identifying vulnerabilities before they become institutionalized patterns of exclusion, schools can cultivate environments characterized by collaboration, psychological safety, professional recognition, and democratic participation.

CONCLUSIONS

The present article has proposed the Multimodal Systemic Vulnerability Framework (MSVF) as a theoretical model for understanding school mobbing beyond individual-level explanations. The central argument developed throughout this study is that collective exclusion within educational organizations cannot be adequately explained solely through interpersonal hostility, personality characteristics, or isolated incidents of aggression. Rather, mobbing emerges through the interaction between organizational structures, cultural assumptions, leadership practices, and multimodal processes of meaning-making. This perspective contributes to existing research by repositioning school mobbing as a phenomenon embedded within the institutional ecology of schools. While previous research has extensively examined bullying prevention, victimization processes, and psychosocial consequences, comparatively less attention has been devoted to how organizational cultures produce the conditions under which exclusion becomes normalized (Einarsen et al., 2020; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018).

The MSVF extends this literature by arguing that schools possess different levels of systemic vulnerability depending on their capacity to maintain trust, regulate conflict, support professional relationships, and critically examine their own practices. Consequently, mobbing should be interpreted not simply as a failure of individuals but as an indicator of organizational dysfunction. This theoretical repositioning changes the focus

of intervention: instead of asking only how individuals should behave differently, schools must examine how their organizational environments construct meanings of belonging, legitimacy, and exclusion. A major contribution of this article is the integration of organizational sociology with multimodal social semiotics, demonstrating that organizational vulnerability operates not only through institutional arrangements but also through representational practices across multiple modes (language, visual representations, spatial arrangements, digital communication, and embodied interactions) (Nikolidakis, & Kosmas, 2025).

The findings of this analysis have direct implications for educational leadership, teacher professional learning, and educational policy. School leaders must move beyond administrative efficiency to act as architects of organizational cultures based on relational trust, democratic participation, distributed responsibility, ethical decision-making, and organizational learning (Edmondson, 2018; Spillane, 2006). Teacher professional learning must incorporate relational competence, conflict transformation, inclusive communication, critical reflection on organizational culture, and multimodal literacy. At the policy level, educational systems must challenge approaches that treat mobbing primarily as an individual behavioral problem, incorporating systemic indicators related to school climate, teacher collaboration, psychological safety, and participation structures into whole-school improvement frameworks (UNESCO, 2020).

Future empirical research should focus on longitudinal developments of mobbing processes, comparative cross-cultural studies, multimodal organizational analyses, ethical educational analytics, and the systematic evaluation of socio-pedagogical interventions (Nikolidakis, & Kota, 2025). In conclusion, school mobbing represents one of the most complex challenges facing contemporary educational organizations because it emerges at the intersection of individual experiences, collective dynamics, institutional structures, and cultural meanings. The Multimodal Systemic Vulnerability Framework (MSVF) demonstrates that exclusion becomes institutionalized when schools lose their capacity to maintain trust, recognize difference, support belonging, and critically examine their own practices. Ultimately, preventing school mobbing requires a transformation of the educational organization itself, moving from reactive management of incidents toward proactive cultivation of democratic, inclusive, and psychologically safe cultures. School mobbing is not only a problem of harmful behavior; it is a problem of organizational meaning-making, and sustainable prevention requires transforming the structures, cultures, and multimodal practices through which schools define belonging and exclusion.

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