

## **Strategic planning, results-based management and organizational learning; contextualization to Higher Education Institutions**

Elizandro Fernández Mijares<sup>1\*</sup> <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4122-6327>

Máryuri García González<sup>2</sup> <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2734-6541>

Inidia Rubio Vargas<sup>2</sup> <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0525-3571>

<sup>1</sup>Facultad de Ciencias Médicas de Artemisa. Cuba.

<sup>2</sup>Universidad de la Habana. Cuba.

\*Autor para la correspondencia: [elizandrofm@infomed.sld.cu](mailto:elizandrofm@infomed.sld.cu)

### **ABSTRACT**

Through the growth of science, technology and innovation, man has had to face increasing challenges. In this sense, university management, and within it, planning as a basic function of management has played a leading role in the efficient confrontation of these challenges. The expertise achieved by medical universities in this subject, imposes the need to deepen in the dialectic relationship established between these concepts, for its application in the Faculty of Medical Sciences of Artemisa; this being the main purpose of the article.

**Keywords:** Strategic approach; Strategic planning; Organizational learning; Medical University; University management.

### **Introduction**

Educational institutions are like human beings, they are born when they are founded; they grow as they work on the continuous improvement of their processes; they develop through an efficient and effective management that strengthens them and makes them

sustainable in time for society. They treasure the best of man, knowledge, sensitivity and flexibility, to adapt to the challenges imposed by the environment in which they develop.

In the study on the concept of institution, its main characteristic feature emerges, the one related to the actors that sustain it since its conformation, the human resources. They guarantee the fulfillment of its social mission and objectives, in the process of solving the professional tasks they are responsible for, and therefore constitute the main resource of the institution, especially in today's society where the knowledge they carry, empowers the institution by providing an increasingly valuable structural capital.

The Universities of Medical Sciences in Cuba are increasingly achieving a greater impact on human and sustainable development with the training of their professionals. These institutions belonging to the Ministry of Public Health, as part of the management of their institutional processes, implement strategic planning; with a vast experience, which is kept in constant improvement from the institutional development itself in the fulfillment of its social task.

From this perspective, the Faculty of Medical Sciences of Artemisa deepens studies on Strategic Planning (SP), Results-Based Management (RBM) and Organizational Learning (OL) in order to contribute to the continuous improvement of its management. According to Almuñías Rivero and Galarza López (2019, p. 134) this is a subject that should be studied because of its direct influence on the quality of the management processes that take place in higher education.

It is therefore necessary to deepen the dialectical relationship between the concepts of SP, OL and RBM in the Faculty of Medical Sciences of Artemisa from the theoretical references consulted.

## **Development**

### **Vision of university management from its context**

The international context evidences the need to improve the management of Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in order to face contemporary problems, the media monopoly of developed countries that dominate the dissemination of knowledge, the

competition between institutions in developed countries and those in less developed countries, with asymmetries that are expressed in world and regional rankings, access to state-of-the-art technologies to increase the quality of substantive processes, among other elements that open large gaps, which have a negative effect on social development.

Despite the above elements, efforts are being made at the international level to compensate for this imbalance in development. Thus, in June 2018, in the III Declaration of the Regional Conference on Higher Education (RCHE) for Latin America and the Caribbean, the strategic role of tertiary education in the desired human and sustainable development was made explicit. As a result of this great event, the RCHE Action Plan (2018) was developed from the concept of strategic planning, which demonstrated the effectiveness of this work philosophy

In the particular case of Cuba, work is being done to update the economic model, with a projection based on a medium and long-term strategic vision, to face the existing complex problems and, at the same time, to become a driving force for the future economic development of the country and for raising the standard of living of the population. A privileged place in these changes is being given to HEI management.

It is important to clarify that HEI management seeks to apply the general principles of management, which have been present in the theory of administration, to the specific field of higher education. The object of educational management as a discipline is the study of the organization of work in the field of higher education, therefore, it is influenced by theories of administration, but there are also other disciplines that have enriched the analysis, such as: administration, philosophy, social sciences, psychology, sociology and anthropology, among others. Botero Chica (2007)

Management is associated with the actions carried out by a group of people guided by a leader. This group of subjects executes a series of concrete actions aimed at achieving common objectives. Therefore, another of the conditions of university management practice requires the recognition of similarities and differences on the part of the educational collective.

In view of the marked influence of administration on educational management, the same schools of administrative thought have been transferred to university management. Botero Chica (2007). Today there is a general consensus that educational management

has three major schools: classical, human relations and administrative behavioral sciences.

If the objective of management is to intervene in the cycle of administration in the phases of planning, organization, execution, evaluation and control, it is pertinent to reflect on university prospective in the planning phase.

It is also valid to specify that from the management functions, where in practice they are all performed at the same time, the time and duration of each one being different, they are therefore cyclical, which does not deny that there is a certain order given by common logic, where planning is basic for the rest of the functions. Each of these has its own well-defined characteristics. García González et al., (2016).

The current moment points then to a strengthening of planning to align the planned objectives, actions and budget and where the plan becomes the guiding category of the management process in all entities of the country.

### **Distinctions from medical universities**

The Institutions of Higher Medical Education (HMEIs) have a strategic role in the economic and social development of the nation, with international reach and impact. This is one of the challenges that imposes on them, as one of their challenges, to raise the quality in the management of their processes, from an interdisciplinary management, in which even with the results obtained can study in depth, issues such as the interrelationship of the concepts SP, OL and RBM.

Medical practice has changed substantially nowadays, so it is necessary to improve more and more the management process of the Institutions of Higher Medical Education (HMEIs), which must face the challenges imposed by the environment in which they develop, as well as problems related to the health care system at the international and national level.

The Faculties of Medical Sciences (FMC) have the social responsibility to train competent professionals in a culture of participation.

From this point of view, it is easy to understand that the very conception of the health education system in Cuba is by nature participatory, and it is not possible to achieve quality results in the training of future physicians and health personnel, if a participatory

management is not carried out in all agencies and actors involved, both internally and externally of the institutions.

### **Relationship between strategic planning and performance management**

The literature consulted shows that there is still much research to be done on strategic planning and organizational learning, both concepts directly related to results-based management.

The aforementioned corroborates their importance in HEIs. It enables a comprehensive analysis of the actions to be implemented to meet each measurement criterion or indicator because it enables a panoramic view of the whole (Annual Activity Plan) and its parts (individual development plan, institutional strategy, monthly work plans), with a strategic thinking and holistic approach.

To understand in depth the relevance of strategic<sup>1</sup> planning in contemporary university management, it is appropriate to consult the scientific productions of classic<sup>2</sup> authors, such as: Anshoff, (1965); Vancil and Lorange, (1975); Hofer and Schendel, (1978); Steiner, (1979); Matus, (1985); Godet, (1991). Others, more current as Vázquez (2010); Ferriol (2011); Almuiñas Rivero and Galarza López (2020); Ascón Villa and García González, (2021), who agree that:

- Influences the future of an HEI through a prospective vision;
- Strengthens institutional self-knowledge;
- Allows the management of tacit and explicit knowledge of the HEI;
- Promotes the participation of the university community;
- Strengthens the methodological work system;
- Improves the processes of decentralization and deconcentration of functions;
- Allows for greater control in institutional self-management;
- Enriches the work with improvement plans and invites to the permanent reflection of the continuous work of the manager as a systematic process;
- Greater understanding of institutional objectives;
- Better analysis in the distribution of material, economic and human resources;

---

<sup>1</sup> Other essential aspects associated with strategic planning: a) It is an eminently political act; b) It is a global decision-making process; c) It is inseparable from strategic direction; d) It refers to the present, not to guessing the future; e) It is systemic in nature; f) It is a form of organization for action; g) It considers real problems and opportunities; h) It requires effective resources; and i) It takes the form of development plans.

<sup>2</sup> These authors are to be mentioned as founders of strategic planning and do not appear in the bibliographic reference.

- It manages with greater interdisciplinarity the university processes;
- Allows a comparative analysis of the partial and final results of the institution;
- Allows for continuity in the development and implementation of strategic plans to obtain the expected results;
- Allows the integration of complex systems that facilitate continuous future decision making.

All these elements converge towards the achievement of the institution's work objectives, which is the purpose of strategic planning. These results have different moments of analysis and require efficient management by managers, a process referred to by some specialists as RBM

In order to interrelate SP, RBM and OL, it is necessary for managers to encourage the members of the university community:

- a) The institution's work objectives;
- b) The methodological needs based on the diagnosis made, which should be reflected in the institution's problem bank;
- c) Through teamwork, draw up the strategic projection with representation from the board of directors, the year group, the academic council, among others.

From this analysis, it is relevant to point out that results-based management takes into account, among other aspects, the study and analysis of the abstract report of the year of instruction, which allows focusing attention on the most difficult processes. Results-based management helps to improve the quality of institutional management, as well as to monitor and evaluate the improvement of strategic planning in order to compare the initial result with the one obtained. Fernández and Rubio (2020)

It is necessary to consider that RBM should be applied in the study and analysis, not only for the current year, but also as an institutional self-evaluation in three or five-year periods. This enables a diagnosis of the behavior of institutional management and thus of the manager's performance. In this way, a horizontal and vertical study is carried out that allows detecting the weaknesses, threats, strengths and opportunities in which the entity develops, as well as a self-critical and reflective vision.

For these reasons, one question to consider is what importance is given to results-based management and organizational learning?

## **Organizational learning, role in university management**

Managerial practice has shown that to the extent that planning is improved, it contributes to the improvement of the institution's work. From this, the point of analysis of Febrero et al., (2020), continuously improves the learning acquired by the organization, both processes are fed back with the implementation of the institutional strategy, which contributes to better results.

It is convenient to understand that the criteria consulted on OL<sup>3</sup> have points of coincidence from the different theoretical positions, as shown below:

- It is associated to the change of institutional behavior, as well as to the creation of a knowledge base that supports it as a fundamental link.
- It is produced by the response capacity of the university community to the changes generated by the environment.
- It allows the modification of the existing strategies and norms with the objective of adjusting them to the purposes of each institution.
- It is necessary to achieve an adequate use of the skills of the institution's human talent.
- It implies the creation of a work environment that encourages people to learn more and more.
- It implies the management of the institution's tacit and explicit knowledge.
- It is associated with the institutional culture.
- It is an indispensable basis for improvement in an organization.
- It is managed from the base in the self-evaluation processes, which allow reflection and dialogue at individual and group level.

According to Vásquez (2014); Megret et al., (2014), Megret and Galarza (2018), to be considered organizational, it must be assumed by the university guild through epistemological artifacts in the organizational environment.

---

<sup>3</sup> In the consulted literature, the researcher Vásquez (2014) systematizes the organizational learning origins, its first authors, as well as the meaning and evolution of the term up to 2014.

The authors of this article agree that these elements allow understanding that Organizational Learning (OL) in HEIs is nothing more than the knowledge<sup>4</sup> acquired by the members of the university community from:

- a) The changes generated in the macro and micro environment;
- b) The results obtained in the management of university processes;
- c) Individual learning and team work; d) the results obtained in the management of university processes; e) the results obtained in the management of university processes.
- d) From this position a reference point of view to take into account, is granted to Lombillo, Ávila and Pérez (2018) when they highlight:

Organizational learning is a dynamic process that involves individuals, groups and organizations in a process of continuous improvement, which is why it plays an important role in innovation, strategy, productivity, decision making and organizational change, increasing performance and results. Thus, (OL) becomes a process to be promoted in organizations seeking to maintain excellence and high levels of competitiveness. To this end, they must be willing to adopt change as part of their philosophy of action and people as their main resource, the most important one, and the one that adds the greatest value to their processes (p. 179).

An interesting view based on the above described, allows highlighting that the OL leads the learning organization, from the creation, acquisition, dissemination, socialization of what has been learned to the members of the organization. It encourages the modification of behavior as a result of what has been learned, producing a significant personal and organizational change, which contributes to individual and collective growth.

We agree with Lombillo, Ávila and Pérez (2018) when referring that: "Organizations are constantly learning with themselves and with the environment from a systemic and innovative vision that, in addition to transforming them, develops them in a successful way (p. 169)".

All of the above reveals points of coincidence with RBM, from which one learns to know the state of the organization. The same happens with SP, which generates the

---

<sup>4</sup> According to Lombillo, Avila and Perez (2018, p. 174) to the extent that the members intellect of the university community, their skills and knowledge (individual, adaptive and generative learning), as well as their axiological formation are developed; organizational knowledge is strengthened.



organization's capacity to plan, dose, modify and adapt to internal changes from the external factors that the institution must face in order to fulfill its social responsibility.

In this regard, Domínguez (2018, p. 48) substantiates the relevance, of strategic thinking from planning, seated among other elements in the OL for quality management; to which RBM is incorporated.

A synthesis of the theoretical integration in relation to the conceptual nodes under study is made by Lombillo, Ávila and Pérez (2018) who agree that:

The strategic planning process is of utmost importance to achieve success in the organization and to create an assertive communication environment (...) Organizational learning should be one of the foundations of this process, as part of the management philosophy (p. 172).

From the preceding argumentation, it can be deduced that PE as a component of strategic management develops a vocation for permanent OL based on systematic improvement, with great knowledge of the environment and its changes. It should be emphasized then, the importance of developing organizational learning, which implies change.

In this regard Domínguez (2018), states that it is a process through which organizations transform information into knowledge, disseminate and exploit it in order to increase their innovative and competitive capacity.

It is therefore a powerful tool to increase the intellectual capital of any organization, increasing its ability to solve increasingly complex problems and adapt to the environment.

It is known that the manager projects a work plan based on the measurement criteria and indicators to be met, but through the practical activity of the same and in the implementation of the plans themselves, these are enriched. They serve as a reference for subsequent courses through the results obtained after their implementation and the experience acquired by the manager in his or her performance.

Studies on this subject show the concern that on many occasions:

- a) The improvement plans that currently exist in some universities are not based on the theory and good practices of OL.

- b) The work plans are generic, which does not allow for an accurate evaluation of the fulfillment of tasks, which can affect the fulfillment of the university's strategic objectives.

Although this is not the case in all HEIs, one element to consider in order to eradicate this problem is the analysis in this article of the dialectic relationship established in the triad presented.

The prevailing view reveals the close interrelationship between strategic planning, management by results and organizational learning. This triad implies:

- The active participation of the members of the university community;
- A prospective vision on the part of the directors;
- Greater institutional self-knowledge;
- Greater operationalization in the management of university processes;
- A proactive attitude towards the challenges imposed by the environment and contribute to its transformation;
- Decreases the possibilities of error, demotivation and repetition;
- Greater sustainability of the plans;
- Identify and define which processes need to be improved according to existing problems or weaknesses;
- A progressive management of the institutional processes aligned with the objectives of the institutional strategy;
- Acting with a strategic thinking and attitude;
- Propose alternative solutions that contribute to the achievement of institutional objectives;
- Results with quality as a philosophy of praxis.

This can be more clearly understood in Figure 1, shown below:

Source: Self elaboration



Figure: 1 Conceptual relationship between the triad strategic planning-organizational learning-process management.

Finally, it is necessary to emphasize that university management, based on the three basic pillars represented in Figure 1, is an institutional learning mechanism to achieve greater effectiveness in the strategic projection of HEIs. From the gradual derivation of objectives, indicators and measurement criteria, appropriate to the different contexts in which they are developed and interrelated with the annual plan of activities, monthly and individual work plan of managers, teachers and non-teaching staff.

The reflections made up to this point make it clear that every action carried out by the manager in his professional performance is necessary to manage the quality of higher education. Assuming this as a multidimensional concept, which encompasses all institutional functions and activities, as well as its resources, processes and results UNESCO (2018, p. 11).

From this point of view, according to the criteria of Abarca Infa et al. (2021), it is important to raise the need for a professional identity for management, recognized by the university community, which is at the basis of the exercise of leadership. Therefore, the exercise of a real leadership commits to energize the educational institutions. In this sense, the managerial leadership of educational institutions is an important and determining factor that contributes to educational improvement from different aspects.

## **Conclusions**

The theoretical study carried out on the theoretical integration of the SP-RBM and OL triad, provides contributions to the scientific theory regarding the management of the IEMS and reveals that:

Not all processes have the same influence and impact on the social responsibility of the institution, as well as on the fulfillment of the institutional strategy; nor do they all entail the same material, human and economic resources. Hence the relevance of strategic planning based on OL and RBM, in order to visualize which process or processes to strengthen.

The study of these theoretical cores contributes to multidisciplinary management.

The improvement of university management requires an organization that learns and develops from the theory and practice of organizational learning.