

Directive skills. Notes on the environmental dimension of direction management in the teaching department

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ABSTRACT

The incorporation of the environmental dimension into the management activity of university department heads has exhibited shortcomings at the University of Sancti Spíritus. These shortcomings are linked to the approaches in this domain for enhancing the effectiveness of implementing a set strategic actions aimed at university processes related to the environment and environmental education for sustainable development, particularly in addressing climate change. The objective of this work is to propose procedures within the framework of primary-level management skills in the managerial cycle for department heads to utilize, as it is evident that mastering these skills positions them as key actors in resolving environment issues. Methods such as analytical-synthetic and historical-logical approaches were employed, alongside empirical methods like scientific observation.

Keywords: Incorporation; Environmental dimension; Management skills; Procedure

Introduction

The continuous self-preparation of the department head in function of the direction of university processes and the integration of environmental knowledge in practice is a

requirement of the strategy for the improvement of cadres at the University of Sancti Spíritus, due to the complex environmental problems at present, which have a reflection in educational organizations, and because this entity is a fundamental link in the application of resolutions and implementation instruments related to the environment and environmental education for sustainable development (hereinafter EApDS), and in the dynamization of its contents in the different organizational levels.

The management activity of the department head makes it a fundamental entity for institutional functioning, by leading integrated processes of teaching, research and extension in Higher Education, under quality criteria (Plans, 2017).

The characteristics that define the basic academic unit are revealing of the importance of the department head position, and of the needs of a systematic self-preparation in the proceeding of the management skills of the directive cycle for the efficient fulfillment of the management functions.

Similarly, the head of the teaching department is responsible for the development of teachers at that level, and for relations with functional bodies in careers and years. The improvement of their management activity is essential for the institution, hence the self-preparation of these in the environmental issue should become a main task for the expansion of knowledge in this dimension, and because it is inserted within the current problems and priorities of Cuban Higher Education.

In higher education institutions, the department head is responsible for implementing the educational policy, which is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (hereinafter SDGs). In this context, the environment, as a thematic axis of the economic and social development of the Cuban State, becomes a key element, especially in the face of the current climate variability.

The results in the incorporation of the environmental dimension in the different university processes and areas of management are tangible; however, they have not yet reached the desired state. This is particularly evident in relation to environmental education for climate change. This situation indicates that we should not fall into conformism, but rather maintain a proactive attitude aligned with the demands of the current context.

In the university, in order to comply with goal 13 of sustainable development, which states the need to adopt urgent measures to combat climate change, a thorough integration

of knowledge related to the environmental dimension in the management activity is required.

In correspondence with the above, the objective of this work is to propose procedures to university department heads, within the framework of the managerial skills of the primary level of the managerial cycle, for the incorporation of the environmental dimension in the management activity.

Development

In the management activity of the department head, the environmental dimension requires a previous design and projection for its subsequent dynamization in the different processes of higher education. This implies, among other preparation actions, a systematic self-improvement in certain components involved in the management activity, such as managerial skills.

In this regard, Ascón, García and Lajara (2019), point out that managerial skills are:

the theoretical and practical components necessary to face the challenges of higher education institutions, fundamental information and knowledge such as mastering relevant data and timely professional knowledge, sensitivity to knowledge and facilities for social development. (p. 6)

Based on the above conceptualization, the primary level of the managerial cycle of the pyramid of skills of the university manager is assumed as the main context of action, according to the criteria of Ascón et al. (2019). This is where the management activity of the department head is carried out, as related to the skills of the managerial cycle: planning, organization, execution, control and evaluation. In this sense, the theoretical and practical component referred to is closely linked to the environmental dimension.

Very close to the management cycle skills mentioned above, there are others that are oriented to the spheres of interpersonal and social relations, such as negotiation, which is assumed in this work and is interrelated with planning.

Negotiation as a managerial skill “is considered, according to Madrigal, Delgado and González (2009), a commitment established by means of an argument or element with which the greatest benefit is sought...” (p. 175).

In order to achieve commitments it is important to know through communication what interests the other person. Considering the above statement, we agree with Gil-Díaz, Martínez-Prats and Rodríguez-Garza (2022), that: “organizational communication is part of the process of social construction of reality...” (p. 88).

Likewise, education for sustainable development requires the articulated participation of all social actors in the solution of environmental problems. Hence, the necessary empathy of the department head in negotiating with his workers to guarantee solid commitments in favor of the environment in the organizational context.

Likewise, the managerial skills of the primary level of the managerial cycle are recognized by the application of procedures that correspond to the subject of management, in accordance with the faculties and attributions that correspond to them.

Planning consists of: defining goals, determining objectives, choosing the most appropriate decisions, establishing priorities and setting deadlines for the development of the activities decided upon.

As a continuity of planning, the organization allows to form a structure that is expressed in the establishment of the relationships that must exist between people, and to coordinate methods to achieve their goals. It is also based on grouping, ordering, distributing tasks, defining authority and coordination relationships, establishing the appropriate channels for the flow of information, and assigning functions, responsibility and hierarchy.

Therefore, the essence of control and evaluation is to determine whether the activity being carried out or carried out is or was carried out in accordance with the pre-established (this is from the control system that should be specified in the monthly activity plan, in the individual work plans of the staff and in the teachers' development plans, which is where the goals of the strategic planning are specified).

Both control and evaluation require observation to verify, verify and feel the state of compliance with the projected activities, feedback; the comparison of how the planned activities are carried out and implies the analysis of the causes of deviations, and the determination of corrective measures for their rectification.

PROPOSED PROCEDURE FOR PLANNING

Action 1: study and analysis of the normative documents that guide the work related to the environment.

Steps:

- Self-improvement in the contents of the environmental strategies, both at the national level and at the University of Sancti Spiritus, of the National Program of Environmental Education for Sustainable Development, 2023-2030 (hereinafter PNEADS), and in the resolutions and regulations of the Ministry of Higher Education on the subject, mainly in the priorities.
- Table work in which professors knowledgeable in environmental issues can participate.

This action allows the knowledge of the demands that society poses to the school, in correspondence with the purpose of education, and are the basis for the incorporation of the environmental dimension.

Action 2: obtaining information on environmental problems that are manifested in different spatial contexts: global, national and local related to national and university-specific priorities.

Steps:

- Study of specialized literature on the environment.
- Update on the different environmental problems of the particular local context; that is, the one that transcends the physical and social environment in the academic unit.

Action 3: identification of environmental problems, in the singular local context; that is, the one that refers to the physical and social environment in the academic unit.

Steps:

- Systematic pedagogical observation.
- The diagnosis of the environment includes the state of the natural and social environment components. It also integrates the problems related to the internal physical environment and the one close to the department, such as: hygiene,

environmental sanitation, conservation, rehabilitation, nutritional habits and the participation of the different factors in their treatment,

Action 4: argumentation of the identified environmental problems.

Steps:

- The finding of the causes that originate it.
- Sufficient reasons are offered to justify its behavior or state.

For the solution of an environmental problem it is not enough to know about it and its consequences, but it is necessary to find its different causes.

It should be kept in mind that didactics is approached as environmental problem solving.

Action 5: search for action proposals based on the systematic updating of the environmental diagnosis.

Steps:

- Taking into consideration the assessments made in the different work spaces.
- Socialization of environmental issues, especially those related to climate change.

With this action, conditions are created for the participation of all social actors in order to clarify the actions to be planned.

Action 6: details of the actions.

Steps:

- Determination of the environmental problem to be prioritized.
- Analysis of proposed objectives.
- Visualization of integral actions in the long term (five-year and annual activity plans), medium term (monthly activity plan) and short term (individual work plan of the cadre).
- Negotiation with the teachers of the goals in favor of the environment in the academic unit, and their visualization as a commitment in their individual development plan.

PROPOSED PROCEDURE FOR THE ORGANIZATION

Action 1: following a sequence of interactive steps to derive actions and obtain information to enable decision-making on the prioritized environmental problem.

Steps:

- Conducting meetings, dispatches, interviews and systematic observations of the state of the environment in question (diagnosis).

This action favors the incorporation of the environmental dimension in a coherent way in the management activity, and is the basis for decision making.

Action 2: environmental sizing of the department head's management activity.

Steps:

- Identification of the dimensions of the department head's management activity in terms of the environment and in correspondence with priorities to facilitate their integration.

Among the dimensions may be considered:

- a. University processes: undergraduate training and university extension, in academic, work and research components.
- b. Teaching-methodological work at the different organizational levels, which are fundamental scenarios for the analysis and treatment of the university's environmental strategies, educational, environmental curricula, and the educational potential of their content.
- c. Departmental environment in the university context in which the psychological climate and the physical environment must be considered: environmental sanitation, waste treatment, lighting, chromatism, and ventilation, cultural attention to green areas, water and electricity saving, recovery of recyclable materials, among others.

The referred action allows the department heads a better treatment of the management activity in the environmental dimension focused on priorities.

Action 3: grouping aspects of the environment into different dimensions.

Steps:

- Use the University's environmental strategy.
- Consultation of the requirements of the environmental curricular strategy.
- Direction of the incorporation of the environmental dimension from the model of the professional, the programs of the disciplines, and the educational strategies, curricular of environment, in the documents of the management activity, in the methodological work and the departmental environment.

The normative documents of the Cuban environmental policy and of the Ministry of Higher Education should be studied, and the environmental strategy of the University should be used. It is necessary to go through the different university processes.

Action 4: delegation of actions to incorporate the environmental dimension into the curriculum to a coordinator who represents the department in the university's multidisciplinary group.

Steps:

- Assignment of responsibilities is guaranteed.
- The execution and control of the actions that are projected in all the organizational direction is assured.

The delegation of actions favors the fulfillment of the demands of the department head's management activity, since it prevents the department head from being overloaded with tasks. In addition, it requires the analysis of the participation of all factors and the identification of indicators for measuring and comparing results.

In a department, its head is the main responsible for the incorporation of the environmental dimension from the management process, and this leads to project actions in favor of its quality, with the prior mediation of indicators that allow the evaluation of the environmental transformations carried out under his leadership.

The incorporation of the environmental dimension in the management activity is materialized with the application of the resolutions and current implementation strategies on the environment and the EApDS in the documents of the management activity, in the methodological work and the departmental environment, and it is evident in the solution of the problems of the environment both in what concerns the formative process, the management activity and the methodological work, the university environment; the

taking of corrective measures in favor of the saving of resources, and the improvement of the environmental quality in correspondence with the specific context in question.

In order to achieve the incorporation of the environmental dimension in a department, some indicators are proposed that allow the head of the department to evaluate the EApDS.

Physical environment of the departmental (or internal) environment:

1. Cleanliness of the premises: offices, classrooms, laboratories and warehouses; cleanliness of bathrooms, corridors and rooms.
2. Monitoring and saving of electricity and water.
3. Waste management (collection, treatment and recovery of reusable waste as raw material).

Physical environment of the surroundings close to the department (or external):

4. Existence of landfills, shade trees and gardens.
5. Waste management (collection, treatment, and recovery of reusable waste as raw material. **Disposal of non-recyclable waste, especially those considered hazardous, such as chemical reagents.**)
6. Cultural attention to green areas.

Social environment of the departmental environment:

7. Compliance with social coexistence rules.

Methodological Work:

8. Treatment of the content of the environment and the EApDS at different levels of methodological work on the basis of what is established in the PNEADS.

Management activity:

9. Application of environmental content and the EApDS in environmental educational and curricular strategies, and concretization in the planning system and, specifically, in the individual development plans of teachers, in the different work spaces or scenarios of the department, and in any academic, work, research and extension activities.

Taking corrective measures:

10. Leads to the projection of an improvement plan in relation to the treatment of the EApDS, and the improvement of environmental quality.

PROPOSED PROCEDURE FOR REGULATION OR COMMAND

Action 1: Synchronization of management skills at the primary level of the management cycle.

Steps:

- Coordinated and integral execution of the activity of all the elements and factors involved in the management process in favor of the environment.
- Delegation of authority in the management of tasks related to the environment.

The above-mentioned action favors the assurance of the organization of all the elements and tasks in order to achieve the objectives.

Different ways can be followed: individual exchanges of criteria, creation of work commissions, meetings and offices.

It involves assigning tasks and expected results well in advance.

It includes the attribution of power, especially to the member of the academic unit that is part of the multidisciplinary group of environment in the University for the Projection and control of the work related to the incorporation of the environmental dimension.

Demand of the necessary information on the diagnosis of the environment of the area, and the establishment of a control system that allows the follow-up, monitoring and evaluation of the actions for the solution of the existing problems.

The delegation of authority allows the department head to make appropriate use of his time and to achieve a relevant psychological climate among his subordinates.

Action 2: order the execution of actions towards the environment in correspondence with the specific context to be taken into consideration.

Steps

- The order is expressed clearly, using language that corresponds to the subordinates who receive it.

The department head must take into account the suggestions of the different environmental stakeholders.

Action 3: application of persuasion as a method to achieve adequate discipline towards the environment.

Steps:

- Systematic emphasis is placed on the positive qualities of the different social actors towards the environment.
- Criticize inadequate environmental performance in a constructive manner.
- Positive behavior towards the environment is demonstrated in order to make others aware of the norms and rules of discipline in its favor.
- The objectives and their educational intentionality in relation to the environment are defined.
- Clear instructions on how to incorporate the EApDS into educational strategies, environmental curricula, and discipline programs.
- Adjust to the characteristics of the people working in the academic unit.

Action 4: resolution or solution of environmental problems.

Steps:

- Identification of the problem or conflict in the different environments. This requires the evaluation of what it is desired to change, as well as the definition of the real problem.
- Concepts and terms are clarified: those that in the text of the problem are difficult or doubtful, so that the whole group of teachers shares their meaning.
- Problem definition.
- Analysis of the problem. This involves dividing it into small parts, and looking for causes and responsible parties, as well as determining and evaluating the effectiveness of the control. It is advisable to rely on the pedagogical group.
- It is necessary to determine the place where it occurs and the complications of its location.
- The environmental problem will be discriminated to see if it is part of another more complex problem, and, at the same time, sum of numerous and small problems.
- In the analysis it should be clear whether the problem can be solved by complex and multiple variants, which sometimes depend on small solutions.
- The perception of the environmental problem should include different social spheres, the ideas that teachers and students have about the environment, its importance, the

direct effects on health, the relationship with well-being and quality of life.

- Search for a solution that leads to the determination of the main causes and the deepening of the information.
- Selection of the best alternative.
- Organization of the execution that implies how to think and face the task, the elaboration of the general strategy.
- Control and evaluation. Using partial controls to validate the effectiveness of the actions.

Action 5: Stimulation of creativity and innovation in the treatment in the solution of environmental problems prioritized in the University's strategy.

Steps:

- Collect and file clippings, notes and ideas that seem interesting to you on how to incorporate the environmental dimension.
- Look for possible sources of information on environmental problems, mainly in the local dimension.
- Investigate the polluting sources or key factors of a problem and try to isolate them.
- Question all assumptions made about the problem at hand.
- Write down ideas and various methods that could help solve the environmental problem.
- Impose ideas on yourself that will allow you to select the best variant.
- If you are not making progress, momentarily stop the problem and do something different.
- When you are looking for solutions to an environmental problem, or when you have not yet matured any sufficiently, avoid discussions and meddling.

Action 6: Promote the incorporation of the environmental dimension of the academic unit.

Steps:

- Processing and measuring the results of the treatment carried out in favor of the environment and the EApDS.
- Systematic evaluation of the environmental strategy and EApDS at the different organizational levels.

- The status of the incorporation of the environmental dimension in the departmental environment is socialized, mainly those that are in the process of being resolved or in the process of being resolved.

PROPOSED PROCEDURE FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Action 1: verification of the treatment of the EApDS.

Steps:

- Systematic review of subordinates' roles.
- Review of all projections and agreements of the different levels of management in relation to EApDS.

Action 2: Gathering of information on the fulfillment of the actions of the environmental strategy (feedback).

Steps:

- Use of different ways and methods of monitoring and evaluation: dispatches with all factors throughout the month, field study, discussion in groups, exchanges of ideas and points of view, review of documents for checking agreements; meetings, class visits, interviews, among others.
- Updating of the environmental diagnosis based on the identification of problems in the different areas or environments of the university that are related to the department's management activity.

The solution of environmental problems in a basic academic unit, such as the teaching department, should gradually lead to the improvement of its educational quality. This process depends on the management activity of the head, who, as a leader, must integrate sustainable practices in his management functions. According to Méndez, Carvajal and Marrero (2018), this role implies acting as an environmental educator, promoting environmental awareness and aligning institutional actions with sustainability principles.

Conclusions

In order for the department head to adequately lead the process of incorporating the environmental dimension, they must have acquired the managerial skills of the primary level of the management cycle, as well as others such as negotiation.

Addressing environmental challenges in the academic environment strengthens the management activity under a sustainable approach. The figure of the department head, as an agent of change, should articulate strategies that integrate environmental education. This ensures coherence between pedagogical theory and institutional practice, in correspondence with the SDGs.

The application of procedures for the incorporation of the environmental dimension in the department head's management activity contributes to its dynamization and to the optimization of educational quality. The results have been showing that, by mastering the referred management skills, they positioned as a key factor in the fulfillment of the role as an environmental educator.

The indicators that allow the evaluation of the incorporation of the EApDS in a teaching department could cover different aspects, among these: physical and social environments of the departmental environment, methodological work, management activity and the taking of corrective measures.