

**ECONOMICS***Sociology*

Moreno-Carmona, C., Feria-Domínguez, J. M., & Merinero-Rodríguez, R. (2022). Are university management teams strategic stakeholders within higher education institutions? A clinical study. *Economics and Sociology*, 15(1), 141-159. doi:10.14254/2071-789X.2022/15-1/9

## ARE UNIVERSITY MANAGEMENT TEAMS STRATEGIC STAKEHOLDERS WITHIN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS? A CLINICAL STUDY

**Cristina Moreno-Carmona**  
*Foundation of Pablo de Olavide University,*  
*Seville, Spain*  
 E-mail: [cmorcar@fundacion.upo.es](mailto:cmorcar@fundacion.upo.es)  
 ORCID 0003-3478-7887

**José Manuel Feria-Domínguez**  
*Department of Financial Economics and Accounting, Pablo de Olavide University*  
*Seville, Spain*  
 ORCID 0001-9573-8347

**Rafael Merinero-Rodríguez**  
*Department of Sociology, University of Pablo de Olavide*  
*Seville, Spain*  
 ORCID 0002-3472-6956

*Received:* January, 2021  
*1st Revision:* February, 2022  
*Accepted:* March, 2022

DOI: 10.14254/2071-789X.2022/15-1/9

**JEL Classification:** I23, M12, M14, M53

**ABSTRACT.** The purpose of this paper is to analyze the strategic role played by the University Management Teams (hereafter, UMTs) as a key internal stakeholder for the successful performance and sustainability of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Regarding the UMTs, we focus on four main dimensions: profile (background and professional experience), response to a dilemmatic situation, training needs (technical and managerial skills) and strategic management orientation. By using MAXQDA (v.10) data analysis software, we apply a qualitative methodological approach, based on in-depth semi-structured and reflexive interviews with a sample of UMTs belonging to a young small-sized Spanish university, characterized by its trajectory and involvement in strategic management. We found some consensus regarding the main drivers of the UMTs managerial performance, where the seniority in the academic position, institutional engagement, previous training on management (mentorship), professionalization and strategic thought are crucial to ensuring a more flexible, adaptive, competitive and sustainable HEI in the long term.

**Keywords:** university strategic management, university stakeholders, university management teams (UMTs), training, strategic thought.

### 1. Introduction

Traditionally, the professionalization of the teaching staff has revolved around two clearly defined areas: teaching and research. Villaruel (2012) develops some aspects that influence the figure of the teacher-researcher, among them: the requirement to build a dual professional identity, both teacher and researcher; their scarce and sometimes null preparation

as a teacher and researcher; the lack of institutional programmes oriented to teacher training and research; the lack of a clearly professional profile for the teacher-researcher. However, Bourdieu (1988) already distinguishes three types of professional itineraries for academics: scientific, teaching and management. This third dimension is essential not only to ensure the smooth functioning of the institution, but also for professional self-promotion. Kotter (1989) considers that a manager is the one who directs the planning of all the processes of an organization, leads to the achievement of the objectives and can prepare, manage, control and review budgets. Veciana (1999) defines the managerial function as a dynamic process of a person over another person or other people who guide their actions towards the achievement of shared goals and objectives, in accordance with the decision-making that confers their power. In the context of HEIs, the managerial function falls to a clearly identified stakeholder group (UMT), responsible for guiding and leading the strategic direction, the organizational climate and the appropriate management of conflicts based on consultation, evaluation, and improvement processes. Moore (2002) defines managers as creators of public value, i.e., with the capacity to offer a quality service to citizens that improves living conditions and influences local, regional, or national development. The creation of public value is evidenced in the provision of a quality educational service that contributes to the political, democratic, and participatory training of citizens for the construction of the nation's project and responds to the needs and interests of the university community and the environment. In this sense, Clegg and McAuley (2005) offer an interesting vision of university managers as creative agents of change and innovation in HEIs. This group is perfectly defined because they are people who depend on the institution to achieve their personal goals or on which the existence of the institution depends (Rhenman, 1964); it is a group for which the institution is responsible (Alkhafaji, 1989) and the group can affect or be affected by the achievement of the organization's goals (Freeman, 2004). More specifically, Freeman (2004) distinguishes between primary and secondary stakeholders: the former, which would include UMT, are vital to the growth and survival of the institution (along with prospective students, students, alumni, faculty, researchers, and staff). They are also referred in the existing literature as "key internal constituents" (Jongbloed et al., 2008; Turan et al., 2016). In contrast, secondary stakeholders are in the macro-environment of the institution and can influence primary stakeholders, such as employers, competitors, business and institutions and society at large. Normally, the strategic planning process based on university's stakeholders pro-vides interesting advantages, as it increases cooperation and the commitment of the university community towards the achievement of the institutional strategic objectives. In addition, the university is perceived as a social agent that is presumed to be accountable and transparent (Feria-Domínguez et al. 2013). Ferrero-Ferrero et al. (2018) refers to "university decision makers" as single members governing bodies such as rectors, vice-rectors, deans, or department heads, which may be academic staff. Once the UMTs have been identified as stakeholders, its analysis is crucial to understand how the strategic management system is deployed in an educational organization. As Bayenet et al. (2002) state, without a minimum of support from management teams, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to implement strategic plans or any action involving institutional commitment. While it is true that human capital is the main asset of any organization (Pfeffer, 1998), university management teams can provide competitive advantages. In line with Jackson and Schuler (2003), they contribute to the realization of the Mission, Vision, and Institutional Objectives. Grant (2006) provides several relevant descriptors that directly influence an organization's decision-making:

- Training and experience of human capital.
- Organization's culture of the (values, traditions, norms, etc.).
- Flexibility or adaptability of employees to contribute to their own organizational flexibility and adaptability.

- Social and collaborative skills, which determine the institution's ability to transform human resources into organizational capabilities
- Commitment and loyalty to achieve and maintain a competitive advantage.

In addition, Bass (1985) specifies several characteristics of the educational manager: Charisma; individual consideration; intellectual stimulation; inspiration psychological tolerance. However, in practice, teachers do not usually assume the managerial function as a natural evolution in their professional career, but rather incorporate it as a different task, to which they will dedicate himself for a limited time horizon and which they must try to make compatible with his teaching and research work. To this must be added the lack of specific training with which teachers often arrive at a given managerial position and that, in short, strategic management is key to a correct and effective management. In this regard, Mira et al. (2009) analyzes academic and management positions in a sample of Spanish and European universities, finding significant differences. While Spanish management teams see the main challenges as those associated with changes in curricula, the vision of their European counterparts, focuses on strategic issues such as the professionalization of university management and the commitment to quality, continuous improvement, and innovation. Moreover Llinás-Audet et al. (2011) detect the lack of leadership and professionalization of university management in Spain. However, in the development and performance of management positions, there is an evolution towards more strategic issues. Castro and Tomás (2011) address this process in the case of Catalan universities, identifying three clear phases in the management style of the UMTs: Learning and contextualization, Development of the management tasks and Institutional projection.

In addition to the various methods that can be used in the training of UMTs, Poggi (2001) and Mayor and Sánchez (1999) emphasize the importance of the mentor or companion, describing three fundamental characteristics regarding its benefits, not only in relation to teaching and research but also, and especially, in management. In this sense, an experienced professor-manager can advise or protect a newcomer, generating very positive effects for both and, therefore, for his or her own institution. In this context, the question of the construction of UMT leadership also arises. Thus, Ladyshewsky and Flavell (2011) highlight the importance of the training university managers in aspects such as communication and management tools, also suggesting mentoring in this training process. Likewise, Spendlove (2007) analyzes the skills needed to perform effective leadership in university management positions, competencies that he considers specific to higher education and linked, especially and among others, to knowledge of academia, attitudes such as flexibility, honesty and sensitivity, and behaviors related to credibility, strategic thinking, negotiation skills, delegation, communication, and team building.

The aim of this paper is to address the strategic role played by the UMTs as a key internal stakeholder for the successful performance and sustainability of HEIs, assessing four main dimensions: profile, response to dilemmatic situations, training needs and strategic management orientation.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows: Section 2 describes the methodological approach; section 3 presents the data and sample; section 4 outlines the main results and findings and in section 5, final considerations are drawn.

## **2. Methodological approach**

The qualitative methodological approach is widely used in learning and teaching research and scholarship (Divan et al., 2017). Qualitative interviewing is based on conversation and listening (Warren, 2012) for collecting primary data (O'Leary, 2014). As suggested by Wilson (2012) and Bell and Waters (2014), we use in-depth semi-structured interviews for

allowing flexibility on a sample of UMTs following the sequential procedure described by Cresswell (2009; 2012):

- *Stage 1: Invitations to participants*  
Appointment by telephone or e-mail, and request for their curriculum vitae, with special emphasis on the management positions held.
- *Stage 2: Interviews*  
As a methodological support for data collection, a semi-structured interview was used as a model (see Annex 1). An interview is a face-to-face conversation between a researcher and a participant, involving a transfer of information to the interviewer (Cresswell, 2012). The interviews were structured based on four main pillars:
  - a) *Profile*: biographical data of the interviewed to obtain information on the interviewer's profile (managerial experience, motivation, degree of satisfaction, aspects related to training, etc.).
  - b) *Dilemmatic situation*: The interviewees are asked to describe a complex situation in the exercise of their position to identify its potential impact as well as some type of learning to extrapolate in the future.
  - c) *Training*: To analyze the importance of training for this group. Most of the questions focus on the training needs of managers and the management skills required.
  - d) *Strategic management*: Respondents are asked about those aspects relevant to ensure an effective strategic management system in the university and whether they correspond to those found in the literature.

All interviews were conducted in person, in the offices of the interviewees, and were programmed in their agendas sufficiently in advance for their prior preparation.
- *Stage 3: Data collection*  
Regarding data collection, audio recordings were made, with the prior permission of the participants, corresponding to 12 interviews, in ZVR format and transformed to WAP format. The total recording time is around 6 hours, with an average duration being 29:44 minutes. In addition, during the interview, notes were taken on the body language of the interviewees to enrich the analysis.
- *Stage 4: Processing and Validation*  
All recordings were transcribed and analyzed with MAXQDA software (v.10), available at <http://www.maxqda.com>. This is a powerful textual analysis tool based on qualitative data. The methods used in MAXQDA are based on social research methodology, especially for grounded theory, qualitative content analysis, field research methods, ethnographic methods, and socioeconomic research models.  
As McNamara (2009) points out, a key-point in interviewing is to understand the meaning of what the interviewees say. For this reason, we have enriched our study with a reflexive interview (Pessoa et al., 2019). For this purpose, we set a second appointment, within one week after each interview, to discuss the transcript of the interview with each participant for any necessary corrections or clarifications. By applying this approach, both the researcher and the interviewee are involved in a reflexive process of collective elaboration and understanding of the issues addressed. They can share meanings avoiding arbitrary interpretations and increasing trust. Moreover, the assertive validation of the participant's perspective reinforces the social and scientific relevance of the research.  
In addition, the information contained in the curriculum vitae was crosschecked against each transcript for verification.
- *Stage 5: Coding*

Saldaña (2015) defines coding as "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing and/or evocative attribute to a piece of language-based or visual data". According to Linneberg and Korsgaard (2019), a coding system was designed in the software to code each of the responses to the four blocks of questions that were designed. The coding used was as illustrated in Table 1:

Table 1. Coding design

<b>UMT PROFILE</b>	Name	<b>DILEMATIC SITUATION</b>	Description
	Area		Support
	Position		Right guess
	Management Experience		Knowledge
	Previous positions		Mistakes
	Years in each position		Impact
	Background	<b>EDUCATION</b>	Topic
	Access		Methodology
	Motivation		Type
	Satisfaction		Advice
<b>STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT</b>	Skills, Abilities		
	Mentor		

Source: own compilation

For the general analysis of the data, we followed the coding guide suggested by Tesch (1990) and Brawn and Clarke (2006):

- Carefully read all transcripts and note down some ideas, reflections, and interpretations.
  - Begin the analysis of an in-depth source (in this case, the transcript of each of the interviews).
  - After completing this process, make a list of themes and begin grouping similar themes.
  - Perform coding (see Table 1).
  - Narrow the list of themes into broader categories.
- *Step 6: Grouping the data.*  
We classify the data obtained by assigning them to each block by combining the coding nodes. In this phase of data analysis, the themes that received the most attention during interviews and the most common concepts and ideas emerge.
  - *Step 7: Interpretation.*  
The opinions of the interviewees were compared, leading to the results presented in section 4.

### 3. Data and sample

The HEI that serves as a framework to develop our study is a small public university, one of the youngest universities of the Spanish university map. Its university community is made up of some 10,000 students, 730 members of the teaching and research staff and 350 members of the administration and services staff. In addition, the university community shares deeply rooted values (institutional commitment, vocation for public service, continuous innovation, and culture of possibility, among others) that identify and differentiate it, while making it an attractive choice as a setting for our research.

Once the university has been selected, our study focuses on the analysis of a key main actor such as the UMT. Sánchez-Moreno and López-Yáñez (2013) make an interesting conceptual differentiation between university academic management and administrative management. Within the former, they include those processes by which academics direct the purpose of fulfilling strategic projects, while administrative management falls to the technicians in charge of processing and resolving the decisions made by the former. Specifically, in this research work, we have defined this group strictly, i.e., identifying it exclusively with the teaching and research staff (faculty). In other words, we have excluded those members of the administrative and services staff who hold positions as heads and directors of administrative areas and units, since the content of their jobs would merit a different treatment.

Having identified the stakeholder group under study, the faculty in management positions, we refer not only to the members of the management team at the rector's office level (rector, vice-rectors, general directors, etc.), but also to all those at the level of centers (deans, vice-deans) and departments (Heads of department). In short, the sample is made up of UMTs belonging to different levels of management described above, trying to respect their representativeness (rector's office, centers, departments) as well as gender parity. Specifically, our sample is made up of 6 men and 6 women, located at different levels of management:

- Vice-rectorate: 3 (100% women).
- General Directors: 4 (50% women and 50% men).
- Dean: 2 (100% men).
- Vice-deans: 1 (100% men).
- Head of Departments: 2 (50% women and 50% men).

The UMT members interviewed belong to different disciplines, which are classified according to the academic position they hold in the Table 2:

Table 2. Classification of the sample by academic background and university position

Academic Background	University Position				
	Vice-chancellor	General Director	Dean	Vice-dean	Head of Department
<i>Arts&amp;Humanities</i>	2	1	-	-	1
<i>Law&amp;Social Sciences</i>	-	3	2	1	1
<i>Engineering&amp;Architecture</i>	1	-	-	-	-

Source: own compilation

#### 4. Main results and findings

The results of this research come from the detailed analysis of the interviews conducted with the members of the selected sample, which have been processed using MAXQDA data analysis software, as well as from the observations on the body language used by them during the interview. Below, we present the main results obtained, classified according to the four blocks of the questionnaire:

#### PROFILE

Seniority in the academic position as well as previous management experience are key variables to consider when analyzing UMT performance. In this sense, 58% of the sample has been in the current position for less than two years, while only 8% have been more in the position for more than 10 years, having been relieved with the new rector. On the other hand,

for 58% of respondents, access to the academic position is by appointment or direct designation, while for the remaining 42% it is by election.

Regarding previous management experience, 92% of respondents claim to have previously held other positions, compared to 8% who have no previous experience. As for the previous academic positions, 90% of respondents come from a lower rank than the position they currently hold and only 10% remains with the same rank, as shown in Table 3:

Table 3. University Management Itinerary for the UMT sample

UMT	Academic position		Promotion
	Current	Last	
UMT 1	Head of Department	Responsible for Academic Area	+
UMT 2	Vice-dean	Secretary of Department	+
UMT 3	Dean	Vice-Chancellor	-
UMT 4	General Director	Vice-dean	+
UMT 5	Head of Department	General Director	-
UMT 6	General Director	None	+
UMT 7	General Director	Coordinator	+
UMT 8	Vice-Chancellor	Vice-dean	+
UMT 9	Vice-Chancellor	Vice-dean	+
UMT 10	Dean	Dean	=
UMT 11	General Director	Vice-dean	+
UMT 12	Vice-Chancellor	General director	+

Source: own compilation

Thus, a process of natural evolution is observed within the professional itinerary offered in academic management; that is, in most cases, the current position of respondents is always higher than the previous one. Likewise, 50% of the university managers with experience have acquired it for more than 10 years.

If we add the previous experience in management positions to that acquired in the current one, we obtain, for the whole sample, the historical experience in management. It should be noted at this point that 67% of the respondents have more than 10 years of professional performance, of which 38% have more than 20 years. Another aspect that defines the profile of the UMT is their motivation when it comes to accepting the management position, in the case of direct appointment, or standing as a candidate, in the case of the election. The results in this regard indicate the existence of different factors, which we have grouped into two broad categories:

a) Personal factors: Motivated by social needs, the ability to take on challenges, entrepreneurial and innovative spirit within the institution, etc.

- *"I like it because the teaching and research work is very solitary." (DGP: 5-6).*
- *"Because of the desire to meet people and do different things, basically. Teaching is very routine, and a management position allows you to open your perspective". (DGIE: 3-4).*
- *"I like to manage things and intervene in decision processes and try to solve problems." (VREI: 7-9).*
- *"For a personal challenge." (VIC: 3).*
- *"To face new tasks and diversify in addition to teaching and research." (VTCl: 3).*

b) Factors related to institutional values: In this regard, we highlight two of the values referred to by the interviewees, for example, institutional commitment and vocation for public service.

- *“It is a social service that, sooner or later, everyone should do. At that time, I thought I could be one and I felt like this activity. “Doing military service, but in the university”, because the university is seen from another perspective, it is another magnitude, and it broadens the field of vision a lot. I think that, in the Spanish University, there are three pillars on which the university is based: teaching, research and management; and nobody likes management because it takes a lot of time, a lot of effort and little recognition of your colleagues. It is true that you get paid a little more, but what you get does not compensate for the headaches and the mistreatment of your colleagues”. (DGFPF: 4)*
- *“Contributing to the improvement of the department and the university.” (VTCI: 3).*
- *“I have never accepted them for personal ambition, but for the challenge of doing something different and being able to change things from within. It is important to achieve things in the short term and not simply for the sake of being in the university politics.” (DFCE: 4).*

Although 91% of the interviewees would return to assume management positions, there is a paradox that 45% of them would not recommend this experience to a third party. Thus, some respondents advised against even accepting the position, citing the difficulty involved in the context of the current crisis, or because of the personal sacrifice it entails. Here are the most significant ones:

- *“Patience, may it be mild. I think this will end with the rectors appointing the deans because no one wants to be one and it will determine that, since they are not democratically elected, they will be political commissars who manage the execution from above.” (DFCCS: 14).*
- *“Let him not accept, but if he is highly motivated, let him know that he accepts a burden and not a job.” (DGP: 13).*
- *“Let him run. Let him take things with some distance and take distance from the problems. One thing is urgent and another important.” (DDGHF: 12).*
- *“Patience. This is a social, temporary responsibility, which is voluntary. You meet many people for better and for worse in such an apprenticeship. Nor is management very pleasant because it is complex and sometimes you must face colleagues who have not had any problems at the teaching level, but I encourage people to go through management”. (DGFPF: 13).*
- *•“Right now, I wouldn’t recommend anyone to go into management, because it is becoming less and less recognized.” (DFCE: 11).*

All these responses are further supported by exaggerated nonverbal language (such as sighing, wincing, frowning, etc.), which discourages access to management as a recommendation. As for the skills and abilities that, due to previous management experience, the interviewees consider that, a university manager should have or acquire through training, the following stand out:

- **Organization and Coordination:** this is the ability to raise and order the problems and the organizational principles that allow ideas to come together and give them meaning;

also, to know how to differentiate, always, between what is urgent and what is important. The greater the capacity to organize work and coordinate a team, the more agile and effective the management will be. Along these lines, Poggi (2001) states that, although practice is not always completely rational, it is not always thoughtless either since management can become routine and work against the simultaneity and immediacy that characterize the practices of managers.

- Empathy: formed by emotional, affective, social factors, etc., which offer the manager the ability to feel and understand positions, arguments, and ways of acting different from his own and, as Repetto (1992) points out, this affects the positive development of the management process, favoring it.
- Patience and Temperance: Being able to endure calmly setbacks and difficulties, channeling energies to direct them towards the objective set.
- Good communication skills: to succeed with a correct communication of the message to be transmitted; if it is adequate and clear to the listener, it will be easier to manage. In this sense, there are several authors who highlight the importance of correct communication for managers (Ladyshevsky and Flavell, 2011; Spendlove, 2007; Islas, 2005). The latter places special emphasis on institutional communication, as it anticipates possible conflict situations and facilitates negotiation and mediation in the face of positions antagonistic to those defended by the manager.
- Institutional loyalty: to be loyal and legal to the organization one represents and to place the common good and the collective interest above personal interests. (Institute of Fiscal Studies, 1997).
- Team building: by joining efforts and working as a team, discourse and points of view are enriched and the objectives are achieved with less wear and tear through the distribution of tasks among the different members of the group. In this sense, for Marchesi and Martín (1998), the role of managers has evolved to include not only personal traits such as efficiency, dynamism, organizational capacity, etc., but also the willingness to unit wills in shared projects.
- Leadership: creating and promoting conditions of collaboration and participation for the definition of the Mission, Vision and Values that should characterize the organization (Álvarez, 1998). On the other hand, according to Múgica (2003), the development of an organization is related closely to the leadership exercised in it. In the case of HEIs, successful leadership is required to redesign models of greater institutional autonomy and modern management, meeting the expectations and demands that these educational organizations currently have.

## DILEMMATIC SITUATION

The second block of this study aims to identify specific situations that have been dilemmatic or significant in the performance of a managerial position. The results obtained have made it possible to categorize those issues in which most of the “difficult” situations are concentrated, such as: i) conflict resolution (25%), ii) the introduction of changes in work methodology (42%), iii) the challenges of new projects (33%). Likewise, Table 4 summarizes the dilemmatic situations according to the academic positions.

Table 4. Synopsis of dilemmatic situations by academic position

POSITION	TYPE	DESCRIPTION
Vice-rector	Challenges of new projects	Organization of an institutional visit
Vice-rector	Introduction of changes in work methodology	Traumatic situation of the personnel of an administrative unit
Vice-rector	Introduction of changes in work methodology	Lack of institutional commitment to the request for data
General director	Challenges of new projects	Changes in the university government team and an unfinished project
General director	Introduction of changes in work methodology	Design of a regulation
General director	Conflict Resolution	Conflict generated because of the lack of quality of a degree program
General director	Challenges of new projects	Drafting of regulation
Dean	Challenges of new projects	The Bologna process
Dean	Conflict Resolution	Deriving professional problems to the personal field
Vice-dean	Introduction of changes in work methodology	Management of internships
Head of Department	Conflict Resolution	Conflict generated because of a strike
Head of Department	Introduction of changes in work methodology	Changes in curricula

*Source:* own compilation

Once these categories have been identified, we analyze how UMTs respond to them, if they have received help or collaboration to resolve them and whether any learning has been generated. In this regard, 83% of those interviewed acknowledge having received support or advice, generally from their most direct collaborators, i.e., from other members of their management team, or from a technical level of the administrative staff under their direction. However, the way of dealing with these episodes has been very different, although there is a common characteristic in situations related to conflict resolution. This is associated with states of anxiety and stress caused by the human relationships implicit in such conflicts.

In general, such dilemmatic situations always produce a result, extrapolated in the future, which they assume as a learning experience, and with which they enrich their own managerial experience. Thus, taking distance from problems and not assuming them as personal matters, dealing with them in a short period from their origin, assuming mistakes, as well as the importance of direct communication and negotiation with the parties involved, are clear examples of such learning. These results are aligned with Kolb (1984) for whom learning is a process by which knowledge is created through the transformation of experience; also, with Travieso Nodari et al. (2010) who highlight the importance of experience for professional development, as it increases knowledge, perception and behavior for the development and improvement of future situations. Such events are continuously improved, correcting mistakes and repeating successes, affirming that experience generates accumulation of knowledge.

## TRAINING

This third section examines aspects related to management training. First, we check whether they have received previous training, formal or otherwise. In this regard, only 16% of them have received specific training for their professional performance as managers at university. On the other hand, 25% of the sample had received training in human resources-related subjects (planning, leadership, public speaking, etc.) before taking up the position on their own initiative, thinking that these contents could be useful in the future. The rest of the

managers have not received specific training, although some acknowledge having participated in occasional awareness -rising actions that they define as:

- *"Spiritual sensitization exercises that are not taken as a formative process but as a living together or sharing". (DDGHF: 4-5).*

On the other hand, it is significant that the generalized justification for the lack of managerial training is based on one's own experience. In other words, a large part of the selected sample justifies their little or no management training because they consider experience to be more important. These results are aligned with those obtained by Deem and Brehony (2005) in their study, in which only one third of the UMTs interviewed revealed that they had not received any specific training for their managerial functions. Moreover, the lack of formal training seems to indicate that most UMTs learn to fend for themselves, informally, and to learn in the office (Harris et al., 2004; Rhoades and Sporn, 2002). At this point, we highlight quotes such as:

- *"I have learned based on hearing, common sense and listening a lot. I learn in a self-taught and by sticks." (VIC: 2).*
- *"At the beginning my skills were not very limited and because they were so broad, I dealt with many things and learned from the work of the first months. I learned as I went along and contacted colleagues from other universities in positions like mine and it was very interesting because day-to-day problems are shared. "(DGFPF: 4).*

On another note, the UMT sample differentiates between two types of training:

- A) Technically or specifically oriented to the management position, which is assumed to be already acquired by the manager, or to be attained in a short period from the moment he/she enters the position. Longo (2002) highlights the political dimension of management, understanding it as the manager's ability to relate his or her responsibilities to the institutional and political framework. This necessarily implies an understanding of educational norms and policies and their impact on the design and leadership of strategies, plans and services. Thus, in this section, the interviewees highlight issues related to: University regulations and management, Quality and Strategic planning.
- B) Generalist, i.e., focused on aspects related to managerial, social and communicative skills, such as: Conflict resolution, Empathy, Stress management, Personal communication, Leadership and Teamwork.

More specifically, and as a corollary, we quote the reflection of one of the managers interviewed in relation to the types of management training:

*"Training depends on the type of position, since it is purely academic, the competencies are more technical and focused on planning, organization, communication ... and on knowing the context in which you move and your environment; if, on the other hand, we move in the second or first line of management, where technical decisions are joined with policies, the characteristics must be different and the competencies can be innumerable: knowing how the university moves at all levels, from the point of view of human resources, academic management and economic impact ". (DGP: 9-10)*

Regarding the most appropriate methodological option, 100% of the sample agrees that management training should have an eminently practical component, for example, deployed through the case method and, very occasionally, supported with online training. Furthermore, 60% suggest that these training actions should be supervised by colleagues who are experts in the situations to be analyze and not by theoretical experts in the field. In this regard, it is noted that:

*“The important thing is that they are led by teachers who are people with similar positions so that they can tell their experiences and how they have lived them” (DGP: 11-12).*

Only one of the interviewees abounds more in the methodological issue, differentiating between the design of an initial training for a beginner manager or if it is a re-current training. In his opinion:

*“Initial training should be based on concrete cases so that they see that the cases they are going to analyze are things that have happened to everyone and that they understand that they are not so serious and for this they would validate blended learning. If it is continuous, what they need are small booklets where the key to a case is presented, for example conflict resolution, and small seminars or workshops, focused on participation, communication ...”(DFCCS: 13)*

In any case, there is full agreement in valuing the importance of personal relationships and group interaction in the design job-specific training. On this point, the argumentation of another interviewee stands out:

*“It could be meetings of people with similar characteristics, discussing how they face problems and led by a person who is an expert in those issues. In addition, cooking also because cooking is very structured, orderly, requires a few steps and requires a lot of patience. It would be good to introduce a module of other things that are not strictly related to your job, because other topics can open your mind on how to solve a problem. In the end, it is about managing people. The design of the courses should not be oriented so much to knowledge, but rather to generating personal relationships”. (VREI: 16)*

Another aspect related to training is based on the figure of the mentor and the work of accompaniment that is carried out for colleagues who access a management position. In this regard, 50% of those interviewed have never acted as mentors nor have they provided accompaniment. In general, they attribute this not to a lack of interest on the part of the new manager or to the fact that it is their first position. This is reflected in the following quote:

*“Whoever succeeded me in the position did not take advice. I do not think that is right. I do see it as a good thing to leave his experience somewhere where his successor can go. But by force I do not advise it.” (DGP: 12)*

On the other hand, although it is not a systematized and / or programmed accompaniment, of the remaining 50%, half consider that they do not carry out a follow-up as such. They do recognize that they have occasionally advised and helped those who have replaced them in previous positions; while the rest define their follow-up as a continuous accompaniment of the people who make up their work teams, even organizing ad hoc training actions.

In relation to possible advice and recommendations addressed to beginning managers, we highlight, for reiteration, the following:

- Take the position as temporary and do not forget whom you are.

*“I am a teacher of..., but I am (management position). Now you have this position, but this ends sooner or later, and a lot of people forget who they were before.” (VIC: 15).*

- Institutional loyalty. This aspect is repeated as one of the abilities or skills that must be present in the manager's role.
- To be modest in limitations, to surround oneself with a good team and to know how to listen.
- Take advantage of the opportunity to acquire a very different vision of the university from a management position.

## STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Finally, the fourth thematic block is related to the system of strategic management in HEIs. It is worth noting the time synchrony between the recording of the interviews and the process of participation and open consultation at the university of reference on its IV Strategic Plan (2018-2020). This coincidence, favorably affects the awareness of the interviewees in this regard, reaching a consensus on the main success factors in the strategic planning process.

As Jongbloed et al. (2008) state that one of the main challenges for universities is to better satisfy social demands as well as to redefine their relationship with stakeholders.

The university's strategic plan must be assumed by the entire community, for which the participation and engagement of all its internal and external stakeholders is essential. Paris (2003) highlights this aspect as one of the five key elements in strategic planning. Ferrero-Ferrero et al. (2018) identify the relevant impacts of stakeholder engagement in HEIs. Morant (2009) and Mintzberg and Rose (2003) point out that a university management position must incorporate the ideas and strategies gathered during the consultation and information process. Naidoo and Wu (2011) argue that an organization must incorporate key people so that they commit to the project and achieve the strategic objectives.

- The strategic plan should have a simple structure, be clear and concise, so that it is easily communicated and intelligible. Once the strategy has been formulated, managers must translate it into objectives and measures that are clearly and communicable to all units. From there, it is linked to the objectives related to the critical processes and, ultimately, to the people, technology, organizational climate, and culture necessary for successful strategies execution (Kaplan and Norton, 2008).
- Strategic objectives must be economically viable; otherwise, they would become a utopia that would lead to frustration. However, and in line with Harman (2002), most UMTs assume a higher level of demand with fewer resources.
- Follow-up and monitoring of the plan facilitate its continuous re-evaluation and accountability to society. As Wakim and Bushnell (1999) argue, monitoring and measurement through indicators that respond directly to strategic objectives is crucial.

- Open government principles (collaboration, participation, and transparency) generate new work dynamics in HEIs, turning universities into social agents (Moreno-Carmona et al., 2020). According to Ramírez-Alujas (2011), government and public services must be open to public scrutiny and oversight by society. In addition, Boyko (2009) states that UMTs have the challenge of functioning as a nexus between all institutional levels: university, centers and departments and thus be able to achieve the Open government.

At the same time, based on the university's historical experience in previous strategic plans, the main causes that, in practice, hinder the optimal deployment of the strategic direction have been detected:

- The low applicability and execution of previously designed strategic plans.

*"The main problem is that we do not have a management information system, i.e., we do not have historical indicators or seed values that serve as a reference to set future target values." (DGEI: 14).*

- Skepticism about its real usefulness and viability in the context of the current crisis:

*"With the current situation we have, nobody believes them. We cannot foresee what is going to happen in December and if there is going to be money or if the budget is going to go down ... and without these forecasts we cannot create". (DDGHF: 13).*

- The lack of economic, material, and human resources to make it possible. At this point, Combs et al. (2011) point out that resources are truly strategic when they can generate sustainable competitive advantages over time.

- The failure to disseminate and communicate them to raise awareness among the entire university community.

- The lack of maintenance over time of the general strategic objectives motivated by changes in the university's management teams.

*"The strategy of an HEI should be long term and yet the strategic plans are often linked to rectoral mandates; a new rector enters, for example, and does not finish the previous projects because he or she wants to do something different; this leads to a constant drift." (DDGHF: 13).*

These results connect with the main factors that, for Smolje (2013), cause strategies and plans to fail; that is, poor execution, lack of understanding of the future, and sometimes of the present, and failure to consider sources of uncertainty outside the strategy or plan itself.

## 5. Final considerations

At this point, based on the objectives set and after having presented the main results, and findings, we summarize below some significant, albeit paradoxical, aspects as a final reflection.

In general, we highlight the UMT's negative assessment on managerial experience, i.e., when they must advise a new manager accessing a position. However, it is surprising that when they are asked about their degree of satisfaction with their management performance, it is quite

high; so much, so that most of them do not consider leaving. In fact, 67% of the sample has more than 10 years of experience in university management.

Regarding the profile of the managers, another aspect that emerged, during the interviews refers to the professionalization of the UMT. In this sense, we found two antagonistic positions: the one that maintains that professionalizing management would avoid biased positions and would gain in agility and efficiency; and the one that considers the professional manager to be an excessively rational and aseptic being, who obviates feelings such as affection for the institution and other factors.

As for aspects related to training, most of those surveyed enter the position without specific prior training, although 100% of the sample defends its importance and 8% of the sample even considers it obligatory. Despite this, they are not very motivated or proactive in receiving it. On this point, the daily experience acquired at the head of the position and the fact of being surrounded by a good team weigh more heavily.

As for the type of training required for the management position, the UMT advocates an eminently practical training, focused on either more technical or specific training, or more generalist and related to the management of competencies and personal skills. On the other hand, the figure of the mentor is not very widespread in the university of reference and only 25% of those surveyed understand it as a training tool to be considered.

In the dilemmatic experiences, we found spontaneous sources of learning, which reinforce hypotheses on the relative importance of experience versus systematized training in the UMT. In addition to experience, collaborative work and support in work teams deserve special emphasis when facing and resolving these difficult situations.

The strategic management system is considered a useful tool for HEI management, especially in contexts of uncertainty such as the current one. The internalization of the strategic objectives by the entire university community and its commitment to their achievement depends on the degree of participation and involvement of the same in the strategic planning process. The implementation and monitoring stages ultimately falls to the UMTs who with their experience, motivation, and institutional engagement, contribute to the success of the university strategic management.

## References

- Alkhafaji, A. F. (1989). *A stakeholder approach to corporate governance: Managing in a dynamic environment*. Quorum Books: New York.
- Álvarez, M. (1998). *El liderazgo de la calidad total*. España: Editorial Escuela Española.
- Bass, B. M. (1985). *Leadership and performance beyond expectations. Leadership and performance beyond expectation*. Free Press, New York (1985).
- Bell, J. and Waters, S. (2014) *Doing Your Research Project: A Guide for First-Time Researchers*. McGraw-Hill Education, Maidenhead
- Bourdieu, P. (1988) *Homo Academicus*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Boyko, L. M. (2009). *An examination of academic department chairs in Canadian universities*. University of Toronto Re-search Depository. OISE/TPS. Toronto.
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101, DOI: 10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
- Castro, D. y Tomás, M. (2011). Development of Manager-Academics at Institutions of Higher Education in Catalonia. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 65 (3), 290–307.
- Clegg, S. y McAuley, J. (2005) Conceptualizing middle management in Higher Education: A multifaceted discourse. *Journal of Higher Education and Policy*, 27 (1), 19-34.
- Cresswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approach* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publishing, Inc.

- Cresswell, J. (2012). *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting and Evaluating Qualitative and Quantitative Research* (4th ed.). Boston: Pearson Education Inc.
- Deem R. and Brehony, K. (2005) Management as ideology: the case of 'new managerialism' in higher education, *Oxford Review of Education*, 31(2), 217-235, DOI: 10.1080/03054980500117827
- Divan, A., Ludwig, L., Matthews, K., Motley, P., & Tomljenovic-Berube, A. (2017). Survey of research approaches utilized in the scholarship of teaching and learning publications. *Teaching & Learning Inquiry*, 5(2). <http://dx.doi.org/10.20343/teachlearningqu.5.2.3>
- Feria, J. M., Moreno C., Troncoso A. (2013). *Stakeholders approach versus product-service approach: an innovate application to the strategic planning for universities*. Sixth International Conference of Education, Research and Innovation (ICERI), Sevilla.
- Ferrero-Ferrero I., Fernández-Izquierdo M.A., Muñoz-Torres M.J., Bellés-Colomer L. (2018) Stakeholder engagement in sustainability reporting in higher education: An analysis of key internal stakeholders' expectations, *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, 19(2), 313-336, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSHE-06-2016-0116>.
- Freeman, E. (2004). Ethical Leadership and Creating Value for Stakeholders *Business Ethics*, 82-97.
- Grant, R.M. (2006). *Dirección Estratégica: Conceptos, Técnicas y Aplicaciones*. Madrid: Civitas.
- Harman, G. (2002). Academic leaders or corporate managers: Deans and heads in Australian higher education, 1977 to 1997. *Higher Education Management and Policy*, 14 (2), 52-70.
- Instituto de Estudios Fiscales, (1997). *Valores de Responsabilidad Pública, Módulo de formación para el Cuerpo Superior de Inspectores de Finanzas del Estado*. Madrid: Ministerio de Economía y Hacienda.
- Islas, O. (2005). *De las relaciones públicas a la comunicación estratégica*. Revista Latinoamericana de Comunicación, CHASQUI, Quito.
- Jackson, S. E., y Schuler, R. S. (2003). *Managing human resources through strategic partnerships*. Cincinnati, OH: South-Western.
- Jongbloed, B., Enders, J. & Salerno, C. Higher education and its communities: Interconnections, interdependencies and a re-search agenda. *High Educ* 56, 303–324 (2008). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-008-9128-2>
- Kaplan, R. S., y Norton, D. P. (2008). Dominar el sistema de gestión. *Harvard Business Review*, 86 (1), 40-57.
- Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: experience as the source of learning and development*. Prentice Hall: New Jersey
- Kotter, J. P. (1989). *El factor liderazgo*: John P. Kotter; [traducción, Diorki]. Díaz de Santos.
- Ladyshevsky, R. K. & Flavell, H. (2011). Transfer of Training in an Academic Leadership Development Program for Pro-gram Coordinators. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 40 (1), 127–147.
- Linneberg, S. M. and Korsgaard, S. (2019), "Coding qualitative data: a synthesis guiding the novice", *Qualitative Research Journal*, 19(3), 259-270. <https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-12-2018-0012>
- Llinás-Audet, X., Giroto, M. y Solé Parellada, F. (2011). La dirección estratégica universitaria y la eficacia de las herramientas de gestión: el caso de las universidades españolas. *Revista de Educación*, (355), 3-54.
- Longo, F. (2002, October). *El desarrollo de competencias directivas en los sistemas públicos: una prioridad del fortalecimiento institucional*. In VII Congreso Internacional del CLAD sobre la Reforma del Estado y de la Administración Pública, Lisboa, Portugal (pp. 8-11).

- Marchesi, A. Y Martín, E., (1998). *Calidad de la enseñanza en tiempos de cambio*. Madrid: Alianza editorial.
- Mayor Ruiz, C., Sánchez Moreno, M. (1999). Los equipos docentes: contribución formativa a la calidad del profesor universitario. *XXI Revista de Educación*, 1, 157-176.
- McNamara, C. (2009). General guidelines for conducting research interviews. Retrieved from <http://managementhelp.org/businessresearch/interviews.htm>
- Mintzberg, H., y Rose, J. (2003). Strategic management upside down: Tracking strategies at McGill University from 1829 to 1980. *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences*, 20 (4), 270-290.
- Mira, J., Galan, M., Van Kemenade, E., Marzo, J.C., Blaya, I., Pérez, M.V. (2009). Retos para el gobierno de las universidades en el marco del EEES. *Revista de la Educación*, (357), 445-465.
- Moore, M.H. (2002). *Gerencia para la generación de valor: Estrategia organizativa en las instituciones con fines de lucro, sin fines de lucro y gubernamentales*. Santiago de Chile: INDES 2000.
- Morant, B. D. (2009). Reflections of a novice: four tenets for a new dean. *University of Toledo Law Review*, 40 (2), 385-393.
- Moreno, M. y Yáñez, J. (2013). Buenas prácticas de gobierno y gestión en la universidad. Teoría de la Educación. *Revista Interuniversitaria*, 25 (1), 125-148.
- Moreno-Carmona, Cristina, José M. Feria-Domínguez, and Alicia Troncoso. 2020. Applying the Open Government Principles to the University's Strategic Planning: A Sound Practice, *Sustainability* 12(5), 5: 1826. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12051826>
- Múgica, G. C. C. (2003). Liderazgo en la gestión. *Rev Hosp Gral Quebrada*, 2 (1), 30-35.
- O'Leary, Z. (2014). *The essential guide to doing your research project* (2nd ed.). London: SAGE
- Paris, K. A. (2003). *Strategic planning in the university*. UW-Madison Office of Quality Improvement.
- Pessoa ASG, Harper E, Santos IS, Gracino MC da S. (2019). Using Reflexive Interviewing to Foster Deep Understanding of Research Participants' Perspectives. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. DOI:10.1177/1609406918825026
- Pfeffer, J. (1998). *The human equation*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Poggi, M. (2001). *La formación de directivos de instituciones educativas*. Algunos aportes para el diseño de estrategias.
- Ramírez Alujas, Á. (2011). *Open Government y Gobernanza Colaborativa: El (inevitable) camino hacia un nuevo paradigma de Gobierno y Gestión Pública*. Estado del arte, desafíos y propuestas. In Ponencia presentada en el X Congreso de AECPA: "La política en la red", Murcia, (Vol. 7).
- Repetto, E (1992). *Fundamentos de orientación. La empatía en el proceso orientador*. Madrid: Morata.
- Saldana, J. M. (2015). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications
- Smolje, A. R. (2013). *Un modelo de planeamiento y gestión en incertidumbre*. Revista del Instituto Internacional de Costos, (11), 235.
- Spendlove, M. (2007). Competencies for effective leadership in higher education. *International Journal of Educational Management* 21 (5), 407 – 417.
- Turan, F. K., Cetinkaya, S., and Ustun, C. (2016). A methodological framework to analyze stakeholder preferences and propose strategic pathways for a sustainable university. *Higher Education*, 72(6), 743–760. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26447577>
- Veciana, J. M. (1999). *Función directiva. Servei de Publicacions*. Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona. Bellaterra, Barcelona.

- Villareal, E. (2001). Innovation, Organization and Governance in Spanish Universities. *Tertiary Education & Management*, 7 (2), 181-195.
- Villarruel Fuentes, M. (2012). Identidad docente y exigencia académica: encuentros y desencuentros con la realidad social. *Perspectiva Educativa*, 51 (1), 29-44.
- Wakim, N., y Bushnell, D. S. (1999). Performance evaluation in a campus environment. *National Productivity Review*, 19 (1), 19-27.
- Warren, C. A. B. (2012). *Qualitative Interviewing*. In J. Gubrium & J. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of Interview Research* (pp. 83–102). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412973588>
- Wilson, V. (2012). Research methods: Interviews. *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice*, 7(2), 96–98. <https://doi.org/10.18438/B89P5B>

---

## Appendix A: Interview Protocol for university management teams (UMTs)

---

### Interview Script

---

#### 1. Biographical data of the person interviewed:

- Name
  - Area of specialization
  - Position
  - Time in the position
  - Previous positions
  - Management experience
  - Training for the position (formal o no)
  - Motivation for the position
  - Mechanism of access to the position (appointment/ election)
  - Degree of satisfaction with the performance of the position
- 

#### 2. Specific significant situations in the position performance

- We would like to describe any specific situation that has been particularly significant for you in the managerial position
  - How did situation start? How did it develop? What was your involvement? and finally, how did it end?
  - Was anyone else involved in such situation? In what way?
  - Did you receive any help or advice, from whom, in what way?
  - Could you explain how this situation has been meaningful to you?
- 

#### 3. Impact on your managerial performance and on the dynamics of the institution

- In what way did this situation have repercussions or impact on your managerial performance?
  - And on the dynamics of the institution?
  - What do you think you did well, then?
  - What did you not do that you could have done?
  - Did you make a wrong decision that you would make differently now?
- 

#### 4. Transfer of learning

- What were the lessons learned from the situation you experienced?
  - Have you had the opportunity to apply the lessons learned from such situation to any other similar situation?
- 

#### 5. Need for prior management training

- In your experience, what knowledge/skills/competencies would faculty assuming a university management position need to have?
  - How are they acquired?
  - Would prior training be desirable?
  - What aspects should be contemplated in such training?
  - What modality (face to face, online...) would be ideal to carry it out?
  - Have you contributed to the training of someone (successor or not) who was to assume a management position? Have you acted as mentor?
  - If you were to help a colleague who is starting out in management, what advice, suggestions, guidance, tricks would you give him or her based on your experience and the things that have worked for you in your position?
- 

#### 6. What aspects do you think strategic management should have in order to be effective in the university?

---