

## UNIVERSITY FUNCTIONS AS A PERFORMANCE VISION

Liliana PASCHIA, PhD Candidate  
„1st of December 1918” University of Alba Iulia

### **Abstract**

*It can be said that the whole issue of university management is marked by the fact that the "production" of higher education is the cultivation and valorisation of human resources, not of material goods. Teaching and education are carried out in organizations and institutions based on knowledge, even producing and disseminating knowledge. In such a context it is necessary to solve the great issues of the managerial systems and models suitable for higher education. The choice of appropriate academic managerial models is one of the fundamental factors of achieving its objectives. From this point of view, the possibilities are numerous given the scientific achievements, and today there are proposed a great variety of university management models that can be considered.*

**Keywords:** performance, university, quality, organizational management, teaching-learning-research

### **Introduction**

The university can showcase an integrated image of its missions when it is conceived as a learning organization, an institution where learning takes place. It is known that not only students learn - teachers learn and discover as well, but also the institution itself, through its strategy and management, must be able to cope with the challenges of reality, learn from experiences and improve its performance<sup>9</sup>. Management has a triple significance: practical activity (process); decision maker (team or individual), and science<sup>10</sup>. Management is related to the efficient deployment of complex activities in a given context. Proper management gives order and consistency to key features for organizational success such as the quality and profitability of products or services provided<sup>11</sup>.

A very highlighted feature is the link between *teaching, learning and research*. This feature, studied de licentaspesific to university education is not articulated in precise forms. A traditional way of integration is the difference between levels: at bachelor's degree level the interaction is mostly pedagogical, the master student can receive a training towards research, and the PhD thesis is a proper research work. Involvement of Master and PhD students in teacher research activities is another significant phenomenon. A relevant fact at bachelor level is that those who teach have a research experience, and therefore they regard the field of study from an academic perspective, in a critical, synthetic way, with a focus on the new and the unknown.

### **University functions in achieving performance**

Universities have three **fundamental functions**: *research, teaching / learning and community service*, conducted under conditions of institutional autonomy and academic freedom

---

<sup>9</sup> Pânzaru, I.; *Asigurarea calității în învățământul superior din țările Uniunii Europene*, Editura Ars Docendi a Universității București, București, 2005, p. 19-20.

<sup>10</sup> Petrescu, I.; *Fundamentele managementului organizației*, Editura Alma Mater, Sibiu, 2005, p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> Deaconu, A.; Podgoreanu, S.; Rașcă, L.; *Factorul uman și performanțele organizației*, Editura ASE, București, 2004, p. 44.

(UNESCO, 2009). The education provided by universities must anticipate and respond to societal needs and produce that mass of communicators and receptors that define an open society. This process involves research into the development and use of new technologies and the provision of mechanisms for vocational training, entrepreneurship education and lifelong learning.

Universities have an even more important role than to produce and establish social statutes for graduates and members of the academic community, contributing to the configuration of individual personalities, strengthening qualifications and professions, improving and encoding knowledge and creating cultural artifacts. All this leads to individual empowerment and to the increased competitiveness of the society in which it operates. The University is: *a space of learning, teaching and other processes with cognitive effects; an area of scientific, cultural, artistic and sports production; a space where the foundations of the graduate's future social status are established and redefined; a pillar of the integrative approach: the triangle comprised of university, public administration, and the community of economic and social actors.*

Under the conditions of a knowledge-based society, the creation and dissemination of knowledge become basic factors of economic growth. It becomes obvious that a better educated population generates spending minimization in other public sectors. Presently, the importance of vision and mission at the level of university strategies is considerably increasing. While the vision expresses a possible ideal state, the mission expresses a programmatic evolution towards this state. The vision focuses on internalized perception and the aspirations of academic community members, while the mission focuses on the organization's external perception and decision-making determinants. In essence, the mission of a university communicates "what the organization is and what it wants to do for this society."

A successful vision must be characterized by the following elements<sup>12</sup>:

- "the ideal state to be projected in the future must be rooted in the present of the organization;
- The creators of this vision need to be aware of the difficulties that will be encountered and the challenges facing the organization;
- The vision created must generate a trusting attitude in the future and in the organization's ability to develop in the way of transforming the proposed vision into facts;
- A good vision enables all members of the organization to identify their interests and thus to build the necessary motivation for transposing it into real life;
- A good vision is one that can be shared by all members of the organization, not just a part of them. This means that it is accepted and generates innovative ideas and attitudes."

These elements must be realistic and convincing both for the members of the academic community and for the external actors with which it is dynamically related. It is very difficult to formulate clear and convincing visions and missions of the university. However, reality has shown that it is imperative that the university's mission be formulated explicitly and made known to the general public, being both a product and a process. As a *product*, mission development provides the foundation for the proper formulation of strategic objectives and is a targeting of the strategic plan. At the same time, it is a valuable document for university marketing. As a *process*, the mission is formulated and refined in successive stages of consultation of teaching staff and university students, as well as of a wider segment of graduates and their employers.

The modern university must outline its vision and mission as authentic as possible, ensure maximum synergy between the function of intellectual capital formation and scientific research and artistic creation, relate adequately to other societal actors using the values of "spiral logic", become entities engaged in the processes of change and to promote the valences of modern leadership.

We believe that in order to translate the organizational benchmarks into practice, modern universities must have among their strategic priorities the following pivots of the strategic mission:

---

<sup>12</sup> Brătianu, C., Pop, N., *Managementul și marketingul strategic universitar*, Amfiteatrul economic, Anul. IX, nr. 22, 2007.

- promoting a learning community that leads to graduates who value ongoing training, have comprehensive basic education, know how to communicate effectively and are vectors of maximizing welfare at societal level;
- the formation of a highly skilled intellectual capital devoted to education, research and creative activities whose efforts are recognized through criteria defined by their active involvement in the process of creating, disseminating and capitalizing on knowledge;
- involvement in large-scale projects at societal level;
- modernizarea continuă a programelor curriculare pentru a ține seama de tendințele moderne și durabile care apar la nivel societal; Continuously modernizing curricula to take account of modern and sustainable trends at society level;
- fulfilling an active role in the process of changes taking place at regional, national and international level;
- cultivating structured partnerships with other actors in society;
- Creating an integrative and effective functional climate for all members of the academic community who value individual progress, collaborative relationships and are based on honesty, integrity, civility, enthusiasm and the pride of belonging to an organization architecture adaptable to changes;
- Valuation of the continuous improvement process by maximizing the synergy between the modern management functions
- To demonstrate and communicate a high level of quality at the level of study programs and devote excellence to professional and research training processes.

In the process of elaborating the mission of the university, the following axes must be taken into account: **its own set of values** (the university policy towards the members of the university community, the quality of the teaching and learning process, good research practices), **a fundamental goal** (the very reason for existence of the university); **an imagined future** (performance indicators, aspiration model, possible risks).

First of all, it must be mentioned that an efficient organization is the one that fulfills its mission, properly managing its resources and offering a high quality of life at the workplace. The research related to this topic (Burke, J.C., Șerban, A.M. 1999; Cave, M. 1997; Gaither, G., H. 1995; Rupper 1994) pointed out that the performance is determined by the direct relationship between the pursued aims and the results of the organization. Therefore, a correct assessment of the performance of an organization should be seen strictly in the light of its mission. "Thus, a technological research unit can not be put together with a fundamental research unit or an educational institution. They are distinguished by missions and therefore by organization, funding, and motivation. "

We have previously shown that a university has both common and divergent points from any other type of organization, so our approach must take into account both these common and specific aspects. Therefore, a high-performing university would be the institution-organization that manages to fulfill its proposed administrative, educational and research objectives, with an economic cost value comparable to the results achieved.

Logical reasoning requires us, within this framework, to define the mission of the university and, as such, its goals, its objectives in all three directions (administrative, educational-educational and research) in order to be able to speak in the most correct terms of performance of the university organization. As anticipated several times earlier in the pages of this paper, the vision of the university mission is at present a major dilemma for the academic framework. "Contemporary conception of university seems to oscillate between its three meanings: the university for students, the university for science and the university for society."

Personally, we are convinced that the mission of the university is to create pure science in all areas of knowledge as well as to transmit it to the students according to the psychoindividual and age specificities and the natural requirements of the university education level in which they are integrated, the active social insertion of its clients. Therefore, a university must at the same time be a research institute and a teaching institution, and the university professor must be both a researcher and a teacher. You can not be a university professor doing research alone and neglecting didactic activity, then going to work in a research institute. Similarly, you can not be a university professor and you only have to do teaching, neglecting research, then going and supporting teaching activities in pre-

university education. Of course, it's hard to be a teacher and researcher at the same time, but if we want to be worthy of university status, we have to be.

Thus, in order to truly determine the performance of a university and place it in a general and complete ranking, it would be necessary to analyze its performance on the three elements of performance (effectiveness, efficiency and quality of life at work) from three perspectives: administrative, instructive-educational and research. Any analysis made only from one of these points of view would not present the overall performance capacity of that organization, but only the performance achieved in one of the three areas.

The outlined picture of the concept of organizational performance takes us to think of a performance quantification model. The specialized literature presents many such models, more or less compatible with the idea of university organizational performance outlined above. For an overview, we recall some of the most used models: The Shanghai Methodology proposed by Jiao Tong University in Shanghai, US News, Times Higher Education Supplement in Great Britain, or the Ad-Astra Ranking in our country.

Our investigative approach does not propose to develop a system for measuring the organizational performance of the university, but to identify the culture of performance in the Romanian university. We are following this approach because, however difficult it is to develop a system for measuring organizational and organizational performance, it is even more difficult to implement this system, especially if we do not know how university actors perceive the notion of a high performance university.

In order to observe how the Romanian university refers to the concept of university performance, we applied on the above mentioned sample an Assertion Test adapted to the psychological version of the instrument and asking the subjects to complete statements such as: a high-performing university is. Collected data was processed based on content analysis. Thus, we distributed each statement in one of the three perspectives of organizational university performance, then grouped the statements in representative categories and calculated the percentage in which the same category of affirmations appeared in the sample. After these procedures, we determined the weight that every perspective of organizational university performance has in the answers of our subjects. Under these conditions, as can be seen from the table below: the Romanian university environment defines a university performing firstly through managerial-administrative aspects (62%), then with instructive-educational aspects (23%) and lastly those related to research (15%).

Table 1. *Performance culture in the university environment - weight of assertions / performance outlook*

| Managerial - Administrative Perspective                         |            | Instructive - Educational Perspective   |            | Research Perspective                                      |            |
|---|------------|---|------------|---|------------|
| <i>Weight</i>   | <b>62%</b> | <i>Weight</i>   | <b>23%</b> | <i>Weight</i>   | <b>15%</b> |
| Infrastructure  | 20%        | Didactic process focused on the student   | 18%        | National and international recognition of staff           | 31%        |
| Relations with the economic environment of the local community  | 16%        | Scientific training of teachers   | 18%        | Grants won by national and / or international competition | 28%        |
| National and international recognition of the institution       | 10%        | Psycho-pedagogical training of teachers   | 16%        | ISI publications  | 10%        |
| Collaboration with other universities in the country and abroad | 9%         | Standards and ways of performing student assessment (initial, continuous and final) | 10%        | Value of research results                                 | 7%         |
| Employee motivation and selection system                        | 8%         | International compatibility of specializations and curricula                        | 9%         | Organizing national and / or international conferences    | 7%         |

|   |    |                                    |    |  |    |
|---|----|------------------------------------|----|--|----|
| Financial Potential   | 7% | Students' competencies and results | 8% | Doctoral students and master students involved in research | 4% |
| Organizational climate  | 6% | Teaching aids                      | 7% | Students involved in research                              | 4% |
| Organizational development strategy and its application   | 5% | Teacher-student communication      | 6% | Awards received  | 3% |
| Prestige in the community   | 5% | Extracurricular programs           | 5% | Accredited CNCSIS or BDI journals                          | 3% |
| Managerial leadership training  | 4% | Ethics of the teachers             | 3% | Centers of Excellence                                      | 3% |
| The insertion on the labor market of the graduates  | 4% |                                    |    |  |    |
| Addressing student problems   | 2% |                                    |    |  |    |
| The ability to attract students from outside the country or the geographical area where the university is located | 2% |                                    |    |  |    |
| Scholarships  | 1% |                                    |    |  |    |
| Relationship with graduates   | 1% |                                    |    |  |    |

Source: author's synthesis

If we look at Table 1, we could have a way to understand why civil society reproached the Romanian university that it transformed education into a business, that it had poorly trained teachers from psycho-pedagogical point of view, and that it is doing research of poor quality and visibility and its true quality is reflected in some oases of excellence. In our opinion, it can not be any other way as long as the culture of university performance shows, as we could see from the study, that is, speaking in figures: "the university is 62% company, 23% school and 15% research".

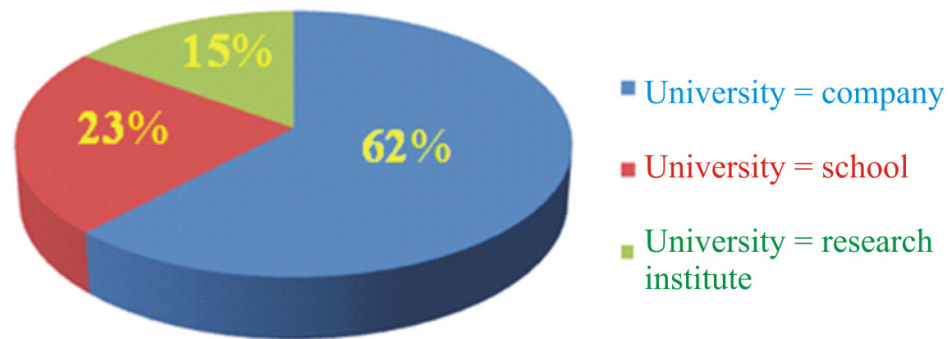


Figure 1. Cultural profile of the performance of the contemporary Romanian university  
Source: author's perspective

Probably we can find a positive aspect in this cultural profile of the performance of the contemporary Romanian university. It is possible that we have an "entrepreneurial university", which would be excellent if entrepreneurship was not an end in itself but a way to support education, research and innovation.

The university can not afford to be "a company in the first place" because it responds to a major social need, the education of the younger generation, so that it is in the first place obliged to

form the consumer, to qualify his requirements and only then to leave formed by the market. Otherwise, the university endangers the social mission to which it is called to answer.

From another point of view it seems that performance and performance culture is a valid criterion for differentiating universities and detaching some of the related categories. In empirical studies, the group of 11 universities in five cluster membership shows that "the five cultural groups results do not seem to be influenced by the factors such as the type of university (in the second group we have medical, polytechnics and classic universities as well) or geographic area (in the first group we have three universities, each one of the three historic provinces of the country: Moldova, Romanian country and Transylvania). A greater impact on cultural grouping seems to have a place in the ranking. Universities in the top ten with the exception of the Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, which are grouped with other organizations present in the first half of the league, but not in the top ten are either in the same category (fourth group) or by themselves in the same category as is the case of the third group where only the West University of Timisoara appears. The placement exception of the Technical University of Cluj-Napoca can be justified by drafting the cultural profile on a number of valid questionnaires lower than in other universities, only 43, especially since qualitative analysis of organizational culture of the university shows special concern for building of the university brand in this organization, which can not be said about the other universities of the second cluster. "

### Conclusions

The university is a crucial institution in generating new knowledge and evaluating possible alternatives. The importance of the university is also relevant in counteracting the concentration of power in the state administration or business circles, especially if it is accepted that the most important factor in the development and economic and social growth is knowledge. If companies such as *Microsoft*, *Apple* and *Google* have changed the world and the way to think millions of people, why would not universities become the vector of change through innovation, on a regional and global scale?

The university contributes to the process of building democratic character, but the fundamental purpose of the university is to protect against the democratic tyranny of ideas. Control of ideas - even if it is exercised by a majority or a minority - undermines democracy. Instead, universities can prevent, by virtue of their autonomy, such attempts by offering a space in which new and unconventional ideas are judged strictly on the basis of their intellectual quality.

### References

1. Brătianu, C., Pop, N., Managementul și marketingul strategic universitar, Amfiteatrul economic, Anul. IX, nr. 22, 2007.
2. Deaconu, A.; Podgoreanu, S.; Rașcă, L.; Factorul uman și performanțele organizației, Editura ASE, București, 2004, p. 44.
3. Pânzaru, I.; Asigurarea calității în învățământul superior din țările Uniunii Europene, Editura Ars Docendi a Universității București, București, 2005, p. 19-20.
4. Petrescu, I.; Fundamentele managementului organizației, Editura Alma Mater, Sibiu, 2005, p. 9.