



EduSol
ISSN: 1789-8091
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Centro Universitario de Guantánamo
Cuba

Planes Cumbá, Pedro
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EduSol, vol. 17, no. 60, 2017, -March, pp. 70-82
Centro Universitario de Guantánamo
Cuba

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Propuesta metodológica para mejorar el desempeño del jefe de departamento docente universitario

Methodological proposal to enhance the role of the head of the teaching department at the University

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Recibido: 12 de noviembre de 2016

Aceptado: 21 de marzo de 2017

Resumen: El trabajo presenta, desde los estudios de casos, la observación participante, la necesidad declarada, y las regularidades del proceso de evaluación del desempeño, una propuesta metodológica para mejorar del desempeño del jefe de departamento docente universitario. Para su puesta en práctica se reconoce por estos directivos, decanos de diferentes facultades, y el consejo científico de la Universidad de Guantánamo su factibilidad, dados los fundamentos aportados por el diagnóstico del estado inicial, los contenidos que aborda, y su enfoque teórico-práctico-entrenador.

Palabras clave: Propuesta metodológica; Jefe de departamento docente universitario; Desempeño profesional competente; Eslabón de base

Abstract: This paper presents a methodological proposal resulting of the cases study, the participative observation, the declared necessity and the regularities of the process of evaluation of the performance of the heads of department, which aims at enhancing the role of the head of the teaching department at the university level. It has proved to be a practical and viable proposal, based on criteria of several heads of department, deans of some faculties, and the scientific board members of the University of Guantánamo, because of its practical character, and its respect of the foundations provided by a diagnostic test carried out at the beginning of the research. The proposal addresses vital contents and it has an integrative practical-theoretical- and- training character.

Keywords: Methodological proposal; Head of teaching department; Competent professionals; Basic components.

Introduction

The process of economic and social training in Cuba poses challenges to all sectors of society, especially to education, and particularly to higher education, as universities, along with other institutions, are responsible for providing scientific-professional responses to the demands of the development of each territory.

Such challenges lay mainly in the teaching departments as basic units where the staffs of teachers are concentrated. They are responsible for training, as well as improving teaching, research and the university cultural activities that impact the desired development of the territory. The teaching

department is the basis of the university system; it determines the quality of the teaching staff that participates prominently in the substantive processes.

But it is not possible to respond to such challenges if the managers in charge of organizing the work of the teaching departments in the University do not have the necessary training to lead with strategic thinking those substantive processes. In that aspect rests the attainment of the high goals with which the Cuban university has been committed.

In the Diagnosis of the Management System in the Base, carried out by the Ministry of Higher Education (MES) of Cuba (2014), it is stated that: "The preparation of the heads of departments... is not the required to adequately fulfill their attributions and obligations. There is instability in the performance of these responsibilities "(p. 8).

Providing answers to the problem of training the heads of university departments to respond to the challenges indicated is of great interest today, which is in correspondence with the ideas of the First Secretary of the PCC, and General of the Army Raul Castro Ruz who, in his interventions during the VII Congress of the organization, insisted on the need to prepare the directors so that they can undertake with efficiency, discipline and exigency their work.

This paper presents a methodological proposal of permanent training to improve the performance of the head of university teaching department.

Development

An important segment of directors in universities is the group constituted by the heads of teaching departments. In these centers there is a greater responsibility to carry out the processes of professional training, and the continuous training of professionals who have responsibilities in other spheres of social life. This assignment makes them managers of the different processes for the operation and institutional development.

A department is a basic academic unit constituted by a collective of workers that has the responsibility of directing in an integrated way and under criteria of quality, pertinence, efficiency and effectiveness the functions of teaching, research and extension in Higher Education proper of the area of knowledge in question, in accordance with the needs, demands and expectations of the society. It is subordinated to a faculty or the rector. In Cuba we call a "department-career" to those departments that manage one or more majors, and subordinates to a

multi-major faculty. A discipline department is responsible for one or more disciplines and may be subordinate to a faculty-career, a multicultural faculty, or the rector "(MES, 2014, p.4).

It is considered that the head of the department should be an educator of scientific and pedagogical experience, with prestige, authority, qualities and attitudes for the efficient performance of the functions inherent to that position. Given this, the author of this work considers opportune to define the head of university teaching department as an educator of scientific and pedagogical experience with leadership, responsible for a basic academic unit, which makes consensual decisions for its performance in the substantive, strategic processes and support, according to their social order.

The heads of teaching departments are the basis of direction and university progress, they deal with the development of the staff at that level, and the relations with the functional organizations in careers and years. The improvement of its performance is a priority for the development of the institution.

Diagnosis and characterization of the training of heads of teaching departments for the performance of their functions

In correspondence with the above, we show the result of the diagnostic study carried out, aimed at characterizing the training of the heads of teaching departments, from which a methodological proposal is designed, in order to enhance their performance in the substantive processes of Higher Education in the University of Guantanamo.

The characterization began with the selection of Guantánamo University executives: 31 heads of teaching departments who are responsible of the training of professionals under criteria of quality, according to the performance of their functions in substantive university processes. Of them, 16 have experience and training levels, representing a 51% of the total; 10 heads of department, a 32% had been sub managers and vice directors of the department they lead; 15 of them had two or more years as a reserve for department head, a 48% of the total; 15 have the scientific category of Doctor, a 9%; with the academic category of Master 20 heads of department, representing a 64% of the total. Of recent incorporation in the position without having transited as reserve 12 heads of department of the sample, a 38%; with more than three years in office 12, a 38%.

The data reveal the shortcomings that in order to achieve the desired levels of efficiency, exercise the university departments: processes limited by their training and by their experience in this level of direction.

Dimension 1 - Level of training to direct the teaching department

A- Level of training in the basic elements of management

There is a medium level on the knowledge of the basic elements of educational management, but in practice 48% of the heads of teaching departments show limitations to face the current challenges of Higher Education. Therefore, they recognize having attitudes and values in a general way, nevertheless, these are not coherently articulated with a projection that consolidates the substantive processes of Higher Education and its concretion in the performance in the teaching department.

B- Level of training in the socio-psychological aspects of management

The preparation actions conceived have been very limited in the treatment of content related to the socio-psychological aspects of management, and there are very basic theoretical elements on communication, motivation and leadership. It has not been sufficiently demonstrated in practice that the method and style used are the indicated.

C- Level of training in the technical-organizational aspects of management

64% of the total amount of the heads of departments are trained at a medium level to plan the activities to be carried out in the fulfillment of the strategic objectives, and their ability to draw up the annual, monthly and individual plans in correspondence with the substantive processes starting from the Integration of the university* 80% is at a low level. 38% is considered half prepared for delegating authority in their reserves and subordinates, and in the planning of their working time. Only a 58% self-evaluate their performance to make decisions and to carry out the control function, in addition to the methods for measuring the impact of the results obtained.

Dimension 2- Level of training to direct the substantive, strategic, and support processes of Higher Education

* Translator note: the process called by the authors *Integration of the University of Guantánamo* responds to a change of location which took place in 2014, in which several faculties, previously disperse in the city, moved to a single building where the University faculties were restructured, (a new Rector signed in for the complex process of restructuring).

A- Level of training to direct teaching

45% is located at a medium level in the knowledge of normative documents (resolutions, curricula, professional models, legal documents, and others) alleging as causal: being a new promotion as a manager, lack of experience in the Direction in Higher Education, besides, they have not previously received any training course of directing. Their main limitations are how to direct the teaching department, how to address Higher Education and the reaffirmation of the professional orientation, the organization of the assistant students' movement, the direction of the methodological work mainly in the attention to the new teachers and students' performance. There is a coincidence between the aspects declared as inadequacies and the reports of the visits made in the system of control and performance evaluation.

B- Level of training to direct the research process

38% reveal the low level of knowledge of the Regulation of improvement and postgraduate studies, and about the planning and organization of teaching staffs in correspondence with the teaching and scientific category of each professor. Furthermore, there is low importance granted to the results of the scientific research activity, the measurement of impact in the solution of professional problems, and the publications in certified journals.

C- Level of training to manage university cultural and student life

51% of the directives studied show that the main weaknesses are lack of mastery of the content of the normative documents, and few skills to direct university cultural and student life in a harmonious and coherent way of integrating teaching and research in the activities to be developed, and to achieve a positive organizational climate in correspondence with the actions that must be carried out by the department in the community. There have been as well difficulties to insert the students in the social networks.

D- Level of training to guide strategic and support processes

100% is qualified at a medium level to direct the administrative activity related to the processes of support that ensure the activity of substantive processes, expressed in the limitations previously stated on their training, this is associated with the orientations they receive or subjective problems linked to the human resources that direct it.

Dimension 3- The process of permanent training of the heads of university teaching departments

A- Conceptions to be taken into account for its planning.

100% of the interviewees recognize as a conception the institutional strategy for directors, rectored by the Department of Directors. However, in relation to this indicator, they do not know which scientific results have contributed a conception for the training of the heads of university teaching departments in order to improve their performance.

B- Organizational forms

They were recognized as fundamental organizational forms used in the monthly preparation of the directors: specialized conferences, workshops, case study workshops, and seminars. In this sense, although very incipient, steps are being taken in the design of actions specifically for the heads of teaching departments, in order to improve the performance of their functions.

C- Contents addressed in the training activities

In order to approach the contents in the analysis of the triangulation of the training obtained, we start from different points of view: learning needs, a program designed by the Department of Scientific Management and Data, results of the controls, research and methodological regards, among others, which deal with issues of updating in the use of Scientific and Technical Information in the process of training the professional. Other issues regarding leadership, political work and methodological work associated with the direction of disciplines, career and specialties were also discussed.

D- Evaluation of the training process

100% of respondents stated that there is no defined criterion to evaluate the managerial training process that accredits the improvement of the performance of the heads of teaching departments in the substantive processes, only evaluations of compliance with what is planned.

Diagnostic findings

There are limitations in the training of heads of teaching departments that affect the performance of their functions in the substantive, strategic and support processes of Higher Education taking into account the basic link for initial and ongoing professional training.

Methodology for the permanent training of the heads of teaching departments

This methodology aims at recommending the algorithm to follow for the practical application of actions of permanent training, from a systemic approach, to improve the performance of the heads of teaching departments at the University of Guantánamo. It is constituted in a system structured in steps, phases and actions with a participative character, that is based on the cognitive nodes and the organizational forms to use.

The steps to follow for the methodology are: 1) preparation; 2) planning and implementing a lifelong learning strategy; 3) control and post-active evaluation of the strategy of permanent training and its impact.

First step- Preparation

This step ensures the logistics and training needed to carry out the strategy that is designed for lifelong learning. This involves the study and / or updating of the proficiency profile of department heads, the study and / or updating of the indications for the Departmental direction in the substantive, strategic and support processes of Higher Education, and the determination of the individual and collective needs and potentialities of the heads of teaching departments. It goes through three phases: 1) creation and preparation of the Organizing Group in charge of the permanent training; 2) study and / or updating of the competencies profile of the heads of teaching departments; 3) diagnosis of the levels of training of the heads of teaching departments.

First phase - creation and preparation of the Organizing Group of the permanent training of the heads of teaching departments.

The Organizing Group will be chaired by the Head of the Department of Directors, and will comprise the Department of Management Techniques, the Supervising and Postgraduate areas, senior managers, selected specialists, senior executives, boards of directors, as well as experienced heads of department.

The Organizing Group will carry out preparatory activities on the normative documents that govern the life of the teaching department and its management, through socialization workshops, or other ways that it deems appropriate.

Second phase- study of model cognitive nodes

This phase aims at studying the cognitive nodes, considering the profile of political and ideological competence, professional technical competence, and the exercise of leadership, with emphasis on the study of the performance of the heads of teaching departments in the substantive, strategic and support processes of Higher Education.

It is recommended the analysis and evaluation of documents containing the updated demands to their work, resulting from the trans-trainings in Cuban educational policy, in addition to what is referred to in the document explaining the basic principles of Higher Education. It will be of great value the application of participatory techniques that promote the consensus to make decisions about the most appropriate proposals of methods, organizational forms, and contents in correspondence with the results of the diagnosis.

Third phase - diagnosis of the levels of training presented by the heads of teaching departments.

This phase aims at characterizing the state of management towards lifelong learning and the current state of training of the heads of teaching departments to determine the management actions taken, and the individual and collective needs and potential, that must be addressed through the strategy. It will be carried out through three actions: a) planning and organization of the diagnosis; b) collecting data and obtaining training; c) the conclusions of the diagnosis.

The planning and organization of the diagnosis is carried out by the Management Group, and involves: a) defining objectives, contents and methods; b) development of the instruments; c) determining the sources of training; d) motivating the participants; e) planning the implementation schedule.

The diagnosis identifies the limitations and potentialities of the current state of the management process and of the levels of training of heads of teaching departments for the management of substantive university processes, which attest to the performance of their functions from the base.

The contents of the diagnosis will be defined in correspondence with the levels reached in the training of the heads of departments for the management of the substantive processes of Higher Education, taking into account the profile of professionalism in the political-ideological, technical-professional, and exercise of leadership.

Personal training sources are defined by heads of teaching departments, managers, specialists and reserves of the departments, also a definition of management techniques is obtained from other people who interact in their managerial work.

As a motivator socio- psychological methods will be used to mobilize them and create the interest to provide the necessary training. They will proceed through an effective communication of awareness about the need of the Organizing Group to lead the ongoing training process in the differentiated and collective attention of limitations and potentialities in the direction of the teaching department.

The conclusions of the diagnosis are directed to the identification of the learning needs to improve the management of the permanent training of the heads of teaching departments, which, at the same time, improves the performance of their functions, based on comparing the training obtained with the qualities modeled in the profile of competences related to each dimension.

Second step- Planning and implementing the methodology

The purpose of this step is to determine the elements that make up the permanent training strategy that must be fulfilled through the following phases: 1) design of the management strategy for lifelong learning; 2) the pre-active evaluation of the management strategy for lifelong learning; 3) preparation for implementation; 4) implementation of the strategy for lifelong learning.

First phase - design of ongoing training actions for performance

Its purpose is to determine the components of the strategy for lifelong learning, taking as a reference the study and/or updating of the model of the management activity of the heads of teaching departments, their competency profile, and the diagnosis of their needs and educational potential. In this phase the content of the actions to be undertaken by the Organizing Group is defined based on: 1) the policy of permanent training of the heads of teaching departments; 2) the general and specific objectives of lifelong learning; 3) the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that make up the content of lifelong learning, based on consideration of the training offered by the referents, the functions developed by the heads of departments supported by the basic link for the direction of the substantive, strategic and support processes in correspondence with the profile of political-ideological competence, professional technical and for the exercise of leadership; 4) planning, organization execution and evaluation of the actions to be developed by the Organizing

Group; 5) design of the formative actions detailed by the contents; 6) selection of the managers who will carry out the actions for the permanent training; 7) precision of the technological and communication means necessary for the implementation of the strategy of permanent training of the heads of university teaching departments.

Second phase - proactive evaluation of the strategy of permanent training

The central nucleus of this phase consists in obtaining consensus as a result of the evaluative criteria from the consultation of specialists on the relevance of the strategy and its methodology for lifelong learning, which would be possible when using the socialization workshops or their combination, from which the following actions of the Organizing Group are derived: a) preparation of the proactive evaluation process that includes the selection of specialists who will evaluate the design, b) obtaining training and drawing conclusions regarding c) execution of the trans- trainings required to the presented strategy, and d) decision making by the Gestor Group on the implementation of the strategy designed.

Third phase - preparation for implementation

This phase aims at ensuring, through proper planning and organization of the process, the implementation of the strategy designed, for which the following actions are proposed:

- Creation and communication of the schedule for the realization of collective training actions.
- Creation of individual plans that, considering the diverse and the common, declare the objectives and individual actions of the permanent training of each head of teaching department.
- Preparation of the guides that will facilitate the execution of the training actions derived from the previous action, in order to be fully identified with the elements of contents (cognitive nodes) designed in the strategy of permanent training of the heads of teaching departments.
- Design of the general program of the training actions that will have: creation of programs of permanent training from the workplace in the diverse (consultations, exchanges, advice, others, according to particularized diagnostic).
- Development of ongoing training programs from the workplace in general (workshops, specialized conferences, courses, others, according to results of the collective diagnosis)
- Development of methodological activities with the methods and procedures to be used in correspondence with the programs developed.

- Selection of appropriate bibliography, means of communication, selection of Information centers, and sufficient materials for the development of training actions and their materialization.

Fourth phase - implementation of the management strategy of ongoing training of heads of teaching departments

This phase has as purpose the realization of the set of activities that guarantee the fulfillment of the strategy designed, in which the following actions are defined: a) materialization of the programs designed for the permanent training in the teaching-learning process, b) control and interactive evaluation that allow the systematic follow-up and possible adjustments (in the organizational, methodological and material assurance), and analysis of the progression of the levels of training achieved.

For the interactive evaluation, which will happen during the practical implementation of the lifelong learning strategy, the following indicators are proposed: 1) compliance with the actions foreseen in the programs designed in the general strategy of permanent training; 2) objectivity of the control and systematic evaluation of the formative actions; 3) quality of the teaching-learning process of a collective nature; 4) quality of the individualized training actions developed in the workplace; 5) levels of satisfaction in training estimated to be achieved by heads of teaching departments; 6) level of preparation evidenced by the managers of the training actions demonstrated in practice; 7) relevance of technological, material and infrastructure assurance for the development of training actions.

Third step - Post active evaluation of the strategy of permanent training for the improvement of the performance

The purpose of this step is to obtain information on the impact of the ongoing training strategy, which will allow the improvement of performance in the substantive, strategic and support processes for the Higher Education of the heads of teaching departments, which is structured in: 1) planning and organization phase of the evaluation; 2) phase of obtaining training from the evaluation; 3) phase of conclusions of the postgraduate evaluation to know the relevance of the strategy of ongoing training of heads of teaching departments.

First phase - planning and organization of the evaluation

This phase will be carried out through the following actions: a) determination of the objectives of the evaluation process; b) determination of the indicators aimed at evaluating the impact of the implementation of the strategy of permanent training in the improvement of the performance of the heads of teaching departments in the substantive processes of Higher Education, and consequently the results of efficiency and effectiveness in the teaching department; c) determination of the methods, techniques and sources (personal and non-personal) to obtain the training, and preparation of the instruments that will allow the collection of data; d) establishment of coordination relations to carry out the evaluation actions; e) creation of the evaluation schedule; f) definition of means and material resources for evaluation.

Second phase - data collection and retrieval of evaluation in training

In order to collect data and obtain the training of the post active evaluation, it is proposed a sample selection of participants in the management group of the training actions for evaluating the process, and of the heads of teaching departments, with the purpose of issuing considerations based on the apprehension of the contents defined in the strategy and its performance in the substantive university processes. It will also take into account the validation of documents prepared taking into account the proposal of the theoretical model and the development of the methodological strategy.

Third phase - conclusions of the evaluation

The post active evaluation of the strategy of permanent training has as purpose to give an estimate on the pertinence of its planning, organization and execution taking into account the defined indicators. Depending on their results, decisions agreed upon by the participants in the Organizing Group may be taken on the possible changes that must occur in the design or subsequent redesign of the training process. This phase will be carried out taking into account the following actions: a) obtaining training about the previously defined indicators and others that are valuable for the dynamics of the implementation of the strategy; b) analysis and qualitative evaluation of the training obtained for the final evaluation.

Conclusions

Universities, along with other institutions of a formative nature, are in charge of the initial and permanent training of professionals endowed with knowledge, skills and values in

correspondence with the demands of the development of each territory. Such challenges impose other more varied challenges on the teaching departments as basic units of the university system because it decides the quality of the teaching staff that participates prominently in these processes.

The applied diagnosis allowed identifying the limitations in the training of the heads of teaching departments that affects the performance of their functions in the substantive, strategic and support processes of Higher Education, taking into account the basic link for initial and permanent training of the professionals.

The proposed methodology has the algorithm to follow for the practical application of ongoing training actions with a systemic approach, based on steps, phases and actions. Its distinctive feature is its participatory nature in determining the cognitive nodes and organizational forms to be used, which improves the performance of the heads of teaching departments at the University of Guantánamo.

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