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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

Administrative sciences

**BARRIERS TO STRATEGIC DIRECTION IN COMMUNITY-BASED SOCIAL  
ORGANIZATIONS**

**BARRERAS PARA EL DIRECCIONAMIENTO ESTRATÉGICO EN LAS  
ORGANIZACIONES SOCIALES DE BASE COMUNITARIA**

**BARREIRAS À DIREÇÃO ESTRATÉGICA EM ORGANIZAÇÕES SOCIAIS  
COMUNITÁRIAS**

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### **Abstract**

The objective of this study was to analyze possibilities for strategic direction according to the ways in which management processes are arranged in community social organizations which are anchored in local territories. The qualitative processes of data collection and analysis were developed with a phenomenological design through in-depth interviews, considering that reality is understood from the interactions and meanings that social leaders give to the management of community organizations. The findings were constructed inductively from the texts of the interviews to configure three categories: a) The administrative processes of community social organizations; b) Identity with the corporate platform of these organizations and c) Internal and external analysis of their dynamics. It was found that, although these organizations formally have a legal constitution that defines their purpose and government and documentation is available on administrative processes such as planning, their management practices are empirical and based on traditional experience. It was found that deficiencies in the commitment to the corporate platform, situational analysis and business conception are factors that become barriers for social managers to advance with strategic direction, seeking resources and increasing the scope of programs and projects.

**Keywords:** manager; management; regional organization; strategic planning; ethnic group.

**JEL:** D23; D60; D64; J54; M14.

### **Resumen**

El objetivo del artículo fue analizar posibilidades para el direccionamiento estratégico de acuerdo con las formas como se gestionan los procesos gerenciales en organizaciones sociales comunitarias ancladas en territorios locales. Los procesos cualitativos de obtención y análisis de datos se desarrollaron con un diseño fenomenológico a través de entrevistas en profundidad, considerando que la realidad se comprende a partir de las interacciones y significados que los líderes sociales le dan a la gestión de las organizaciones comunitarias. Los hallazgos se construyeron de manera inductiva desde los textos de las entrevistas para configuración de tres categorías: a) los procesos administrativos de las organizaciones sociales comunitarias; b) la

identidad con la plataforma corporativa de esas organizaciones y c) el análisis interno y eterno de sus dinámicas. Se encontró que, aunque estas organizaciones formalmente tengan una constitución jurídica que define su objeto y gobierno y se disponga de documentación sobre procesos administrativos como la planeación, sus prácticas gerenciales son empíricas y basadas en la vivencia tradicional. Las carencias relacionadas con la aprehensión de la plataforma corporativa, el análisis situacional y la concepción empresarial, son factores que se convierten en barreras para avanzar en direccionamiento estratégico, gestión eficiente de los recursos e incremento de los programas y proyectos.

**Palabras clave:** gerente; gestión; organización regional; planificación estratégica; grupo étnico.

**JEL:** D23; D60; D64; J54; M14.

### Resumo

O objetivo foi analisar possibilidades de direcionamento estratégico de acordo com as formas como os processos de gestão são geridos em organizações sociais comunitárias ancoradas em territórios locais. Os processos qualitativos de coleta e análise de dados foram desenvolvidos com desenho fenomenológico por meio de entrevistas em profundidade, considerando que a realidade é compreendida a partir das interações e significados que os líderes sociais atribuem à gestão das organizações comunitárias. Os achados foram construídos indutivamente a partir dos textos das entrevistas para configurar três categorias: a) Os processos administrativos das organizações sociais comunitárias; b) A identidade com a plataforma corporativa destas organizações e c) A análise interna e eterna da sua dinâmica. Verificou-se que, embora estas organizações tenham formalmente uma constituição legal que define a sua finalidade e governo e esteja disponível documentação sobre processos administrativos como o planejamento, as suas práticas de gestão são empíricas e baseadas na experiência tradicional. As deficiências relacionadas ao entendimento da plataforma corporativa, à análise situacional e à concepção do negócio são fatores que se tornam barreiras para avançar na direção estratégica, gestão eficiente de recursos e aumento de programas e projetos.

**Palavras-chave:** gerente; gerenciamento; organização regional; planificação estratégica; grupo étnico.

**JEL:** D23; D60; D64; J54; M14.

### **Introduction**

The research problem was the alignment in the management of community social organizations with the conceptions of strategic direction. The dilemma is whether this management, which is visible in local territories with the participation of leaders who collaboratively assume the commitment to social cooperation, is focused with strategic processes. Community social leaders are energizers, with high convening power, they know the history of the territories because they have lived it together with their ancestors, they demonstrate altruism in their actions and exhibit a collaborative spirit. However, their community organizations such as groups, networks, collectives, community action boards, administrative boards, committees or associations sometimes enter into crisis, due to uncertain management routes and the absence of strategic direction factors.

Taking as reference community social organizations that develop actions with the NARP community (Blacks, Afro-Colombians, Raizals and Palenqueras), the problem described was addressed. The initial assumption was that in formalized groups of this type, management models based on participatory and affiliative leadership prevail, based on empirical knowledge, with actions that do not obey specific improvised motivations and decisions without strategic direction. The insufficient managerial training of leaders and the complexity of territorial contexts due to the presence of cultural, socioeconomic, ideological ancestral elements, among others, were raised as causes.

Based on the above, the following question was posed: In the management of community social organizations, what barriers interfere with implementing shared strategic direction between the community and leaders, in order to achieve self-sustainability in the territories?

### **Theoretical framework**

Within the typology of formal social organizations, there is the third sector group (civil society organizations) whose actions can be social, political or economic, with a democratic regime and local territorial coverage of urgent and palliative actions to address multidimensional poverty or its consequences and with objectives related to philanthropy or welfare (Monroy, 2022). Organizations focused on social action are:

Participatively organized communities have become a forceful tool for the presentation of proposals for community development, this in theory allows the community to be the one to make decisions about the future of its population, in addition this would facilitate the objective of achieving an improvement in the quality of life of the communities. (Merchán & Saavedra 2022, p. 9)

A special type of social organizations are those that are community-based. They are social organizations in which power is expressed in the commitment of individuals to the objectives in the particular territory, flowing as multidimensional scenarios, where socioeconomic, political, historical or cultural interests converge (Carvajal & Lizano, 2021). A territorial organization acquires the nuances of a community organization.

According to Hernández (2020), community social organizations are characterized because they are not within the structure of the State, they have a legal institutional framework, they do not operate for profit, they are based on volunteering, they have autonomous government, they are based on altruistic orientations of leaders and managers, promulgate solidarity, and generally, among their members there are pre-existing links of coexistence, friendship, neighborhood or affinity of their origins. Likewise, they operate with democratic criteria because they promote distribution, participatory management, understand political action as a response to inequality and manage processes, guaranteeing consensus and deliberation.

Community-based organizations are the object of social management, although it must be clarified that this management has a variety of options for its exercise. In Ortiz (2012) several approaches are considered: a) social management focused on publics that assume objectives

related to co-responsibility, multipolarity (recognizes that actors are different and their thoughts are individual), participatory management and concertation; b) social management focused on social development (body of knowledge and practices for intervention in problem solving); c) social management with a focus on management (approach to the organization, policies and objectives with indicators and goals). In the words of Maggiolo (2022, p. 13):

Social management is based on three fields, namely, social development, politics and public management, which allow the development of programs especially aimed at the welfare of the population, of social order, with which organizations can achieve goals of social responsibility, translated into collective benefits, particularly for integral community health.

Community social organizations, with the roots and passion of their leaders, seek to fill the gaps left by the State for territorial development, and also serve as a link for the implementation of programs or projects decided by public governments. But the effectiveness of their management is limited, among other reasons, by the lack of strategic vision and strategies to represent the horizon of the activities that are developed, which causes disjointed administrative processes (Gavilanes & Pillaga, 2019).

Strategies have a more encompassing meaning than the specific objectives of a community social organization; they represent the general approach for the organization to remain balanced in the environment, to emerge from crises or to increase its achievements. Formulating and implementing a strategy means defining the global purposes to be achieved, the way they will be achieved and the definition of a control system to contrast with the actual results (Herrera et al., 2022). Its implementation requires that the social organization naturally learns to adapt to the changing environment, which may imply that deep restructurings have to be made to interpret the vision correctly and a business approach from the complexity (Aguirrea & Peña, 2021).

According to Aguilera (2010), strategic management processes seek to combine and integrate means to achieve objectives and, in addition, to establish effective links with the environment in order to match strategies with external requirements. In this way, the future

strategy requires the analysis of objectives, internal situation, external situation and the valuation of key intangibles. The strategic direction is justified by the challenges of companies for their competitiveness in the market, which is why it is necessary to know weaknesses, strengths, opportunities and threats, and, also, knowledge about the structure, processes, human capital and know-how is indispensable (Gutiérrez et al., 2019). In community social organizations, the challenges are embodied in order to strategically obtain the self-sustainability of social projects, so as to ensure the continuity of services in the territory. These authors also state that strategic direction implies adjusting the dynamics of the organization intelligently according to the conditions of the moment, but considering that there are some substantial factors such as the mission, vision, corporate philosophy, and macro objectives. The organizational environment constituted by the organizational culture and climate should also be considered as determining factors within the strategic gear (Gutiérrez et al., 2019).

These authors also propose that strategic direction involves adjusting the dynamics of the organization intelligently in accordance with the conditions of the moment, but considering that there are substantial factors such as the mission, vision, corporate philosophy, and macro objectives. The organization's environment, constituted by culture and organizational climate, must also be considered as determining factors within the strategic mechanism (Gutiérrez et al., 2019).

The strategic planning process, specifies the trajectories for the fluidity of strategic direction in an organization, takes the form of an instrument to execute activities in a controlled manner. It allows the planning process with a broad perspective of the business to undertake actions and changes that lead to macro objectives (Ramírez et al., 2019). Strategic planning has as a requirement for its effective development the consensus of the different interest groups on “what is and what can be expected” (p. 65). This leads to shared planning, the implementation of which is the basis for collaborative administration, understood as action processes that coordinate interactions and the collaborative work of different internal groups (stakeholders) (Viveros and Camargo, 2020).

A particularity found is that strategic direction and planning are not always conducted with managerial commitment, remaining as decorative elements, since the efforts focus on the organization, the clarity of the processes, the quality assurance systems and the operations. from day to day. This has been stated by Urribarrí & Romero (2019) as a result of a research project carried out with managers of industrial companies. In their investigations with managers from the city of Medellín, they found a gap between the strategic discourse proposed and the management approach oriented towards compliance with quality assurance systems. The study showed that the managers' concern is placed on the processes codified with the technical quality standards and on the organization of work for the current tasks, giving less importance to the strategic direction for the future, despite of having missionary formulations, corporate conceptual platforms or strategic plans. That is, the priority is placed on the organization of current operations, giving less importance to the direction for the sustainable future in the market.

Regarding the central topic of the research, several similar works were found. Patiño (2020) studied strategic direction within the framework of a second-level solidarity company in the health sector, identifying its strengths and threats for the formulation of a management proposal. Hernández & Granados (2015) delved into the management forms of local administrative boards with the purpose of generating well-being in the community through the implementation of programs and arrived at a strategic platform for sustainable management. While García & Doumet (2017) presented a tourism management model for the development of a province of Ecuador, applying a methodology that consisted of phases of diagnosis, analysis and determination of a strategic plan.

### **Methodology**

A qualitative research was developed with a phenomenological design, aimed at interpreting the ways in which management is enhanced in community social organizations. In qualitative social research, the production of knowledge is influenced and transversalized by perceptions, values, judgments or subjective meanings of the reporting actors. This research approach “builds knowledge of social reality from multiple and heterogeneous social actors; Knowledge of the human is based on a subjective and intersubjective epistemic reality” (Galeano, 2004, p.18). Generalizations of the results based on statistical data are not sought, considering these concepts, the analyzes were made from the speeches and feelings of leaders of community-



based social organizations that develop intervention processes in the NARP community of communes 7, 13 and 60 of the City of Medellín.

The purpose of the phenomenological study was to characterize the ways in which the administrative management of community social organizations is carried out and to understand the possible origins or reasons for their administrative practices, from the perspectives of leaders and managers of the NARP population.

The sample population was established with 14 community leaders from communes 7, 13 and 60 of Medellín (Colombia) who do social work in four organizations. In 2020, commune 7 had a population of 177,874 inhabitants distributed in 22 neighborhoods, while the 13th housed 140,758 inhabitants in 19 neighborhoods and the 60th had 86,315 inhabitants in the district of San Cristóbal. These populations correspond to 7%, 5.5% and 3.4% respectively of the population of Medellín in that year. In the three communes, the low socioeconomic stratum prevails (stratum 2 on the scale from 1 to 6) and vulnerabilities originating from multidimensional poverty are evident (Alcaldía de Medellín, 2021a; 2021b; 2021c). It is a population mostly from the departments of Bolívar and Chocó and the Antioquia subregions of Urabá, Bajo Cauca, Magdalena Medio and Suroeste (National Department of Statistics - DANE, 2021). 93% of the population does not know how to read or write, 62% come from dispersed populated and rural centers, the size of households ranges between 3 and 5, 47.8% have Unsatisfied Basic Needs - UBN and 19.2 % are in conditions of misery (DANE, 2021). Among the reasons for migration Towards Medellín there is forced displacement due to violence, the precarious living conditions in their territories, the desire for better job options and family reunification.

In-depth interviews were conducted with 14 leaders of social organizations from these communities. The issues discussed in the interviews revolved around the following central questions:

a) The ways in which the planning, organization, direction, control and evaluation exercises carried out in organizations flow.

b) The central issues of the mission, vision, principles, values or what they stand for, and the way in which they relate or are linked to the operations and management of the organizations.

c) The mechanisms that are used to diagnose the internal state of organizations, their capabilities, weaknesses and strengths.

d) Knowledge about the external influences of the environment that can affect the good performance of organizations and the ways in which they react to their intensities.

e) The way in which community organizations foresee their future and the continuity of the services they build in the community.

## **Results**

An inductive categorization was established consisting of the coding of the interview texts, according to the similarity of their meanings or descriptions. Operationally, we proceeded with the identification of information patterns to make sense of the analysis and structure the findings, taking into account the theoretical background of the project. The analysis of the texts was done inductively to link processes of pattern discovery, coding and relating. As a result, the following units of analysis of community social organizations were obtained:

- a) Characteristics of the administrative processes of community-based social organizations.
- b) Identity with the missionary platforms of social organizations
- c) Internal and external incident conditions of community social organizations

### **Characteristics of the administrative processes of community-based social organizations**

Strategic direction nor social management are part of the discourse of social leaders, according to the interviews. It was observed that the speeches did not transmit meanings that would suggest that administrative practices in community organizations are the result of the leaders' cognition and practice on strategy and management; Even the traditional processes of planning,

organization, execution and control are not fully considered, noting that the administrative process is carried out by hand according to the present circumstances of the organization.

It was found that usually the planning and organization processes are contracted with external collaborators or advisors of the organizations, due to the lack of knowledge of the leaders and managers. A common practice that was found is that matters such as project formulation, formalization of proposals, completion of documents to participate in contests or bids, management reports, planning processes or project closure, are carried out by actors external to the organizations, under different forms of action. One leader stated:

In the mayor's office there are many procedures to grant resources and there are requirements for management or expense reports. They have formats for the projects and for everything we must do, so we look for someone to help us. Sometimes they charge us, other times people help us, they collaborate with us with the procedures. (R. Abadía, personal communication, September 4, 2021)

Regarding the justifications for the disconnection of community-based organizations with strategic processes, the inconvenience of bringing models from private companies to community organizations was argued, because the goal is not profit, but rather the creation of capabilities in the community. According to one leader:

Companies are focused on exploiting workers to obtain profits, while we are organized in the territories seeking social growth and the empowerment of people with solidarity and that is why capitalist business management does not fit with our organizations. It is a difference in the administrative form. (M. Martínez, personal communication, September 11, 2021)

In the interviews, it was found that community organizations have the following common characteristics: legal constitution, formal declaration of a social purpose, definition of the form of government, democratic and voluntary participation, collegial government and solidarity as a basic principle. Not all organizations have regulations that regulate the actions and responsibilities of

the participants, and although all of them have established functions of their government, voices were heard about distances between the written statements and the ways in which they are governed in practice, since several interviewees agreed that it is really a few people who assume decision-making and energize management, leaving few options for the other participants.

Someone stated “we have legal status and some lines of order and everyone's functions and how to manage are written down, but what we do is approve everything that two people decide, no one alleges, no one says anything” A. Castro (personal communication, September 10, 2021).

Furthermore, community-based organizations value their legal status and formal records more for the convenience of receiving public aid or participating in calls and tenders than for the legitimacy of their order and organizational architecture.

According to the interviews, contradictions arose regarding participation and shared responsibilities. On the one hand, the autocratic concentration of management that a leader or manager assumes to act and make decisions was criticized, while the democratic participation and collaborative enthusiasm of the participants was mentioned with some reiteration. Likewise, it is paradoxical that the altruistic sense that is the basis of social organizations is sometimes fractured by occurrences such as the following: social organizations are facades to hide lucrative interests or politicking of the managers and founders; Participation is conditional on the delivery of specific personal gifts or advantages; Internal conflicts arise because not everyone is pulling in the same direction or because there are personal misunderstandings between the participants.

It was found that the basis of management is rooted in the territory that exudes ties of cultural and historical affinity between the neighborhood. The interviewees highlighted this aspect of territoriality, since empathy and trust are generated between leaders and the community. According to the sources, basically the fabric of social organizations is in the interrelationships between the participants, who share needs, friendship, enthusiasm and expectations, turning the groups into collections of subjects eager to participate in the community. An interviewee stated that “participating requires time and family sacrifices and many things, but it is a joy to meet

neighbors, people. Serving people is what makes you passionate.” R. Abadía (personal communication, September 4, 2021).

### **Identity with missionary platforms**

The informants stated that their organizations have a corporate platform declaration (missions, visions, values, creeds or principles), which constitutes the conceptual basis of operations. However, difficulties were evident in explaining its scope and how it relates to operations and administrative management. In some cases, it was discovered that there is not even awareness about the origin of the platform or the way it is defined.

However, in the dialogues, the leaders spoke out in defense of principles such as ethics, coexistence, solidarity or respect, these being the most frequent. One of the leaders said that ethical and moral behaviors constitute “the red line that no one can cross, it is a moral line. But it has happened and will happen that this line is not respected, because we are human” N. Córdoba (personal communication, September 16, 2021). And, in addition, cases were brought about people who broke harmony, leaving themselves exposed to trials in the groups.

The desire to serve for the common good was expressed in the discernments regarding the action of organized groups in the community. This intentionality, not because it is explicitly in the mission directly declared in documents, but because it is part of their ideology, is what moves the leaders, according to their speeches. The informants even highlighted that there are origins of organizations formalized in altruistic efforts and decisions of groups of friends and family motivated to forge solutions for the community. Likewise, the leaders' identification with the stated vision was not fully demonstrated in perceptions related to future purposes (in no case was an articulated dissertation noted to explain the foundations of the stated vision). However, as a non-formalized vision, for the leaders the ideal is to last a long time in the territory, serving the community and they repeatedly mentioned that the challenge is to ensure that the social welfare programs of the Mayor's Office of Medellín are not interrupt, since they consider that this is the source of resources that ensure development in the community.

What do we want in the future? Much and little. It's the truth. The desire is to stay all the time, for others to come and for the services to continue, that is the little. That we contribute to the community and that progress and services are valued, that is what matters a lot. (J. Fabra, personal communication, September 4, 2021)

In summary: social organizations, as a requirement for their legal status, have some declared corporate platform, however, the leaders did not demonstrate that they understood it or considered it in their executions. But in the interviews they argued about mission, vision and principles, partially coinciding with those formalized in documents and supported by their actions and ideas.

### **Internal and external incident conditions of community social organizations**

It was found that the self-evaluation processes do not obey systemically focused management practices, nor established improvement policies. Without exception, the discourses did not support procedures to plan, develop, organize and systematize institutional self-evaluations; Furthermore, the issue of self-assessment or periodic diagnoses was not attractive to the leaders and it could easily be concluded that it is not part of their agendas. They shed light on the internal behavior of organizations, finding relevance in the following:

a) Leaders understand that a challenge is the establishment of organized forms of management and that this lack has sometimes placed them in a fragile situation. There are groups that have been disqualified from projects, calls and tenders due to deficiencies in their organizational architectures.

b) The informality in the lines of hierarchy and the weaknesses in the control of participation have led to discrepancies, cases of abusive positions, imprudence in management or irresponsible behavior that have impacted the normal development of activities.

c) The know-how of its specific social objects is a strength. The groups know their capabilities in this sense, for the leaders it is clear what the experiences and knowledge are that profile the different groups for social recognition.

d) On several occasions, reference was made to the value of the sense of belonging as a fundamental axis for the execution of activities. For leaders, this is the most precious aspect within organizations, because from there human efforts are ensured so that programs, projects and activities are strengthened for the community.

With respect to external relations, a diversity of opinions were found that put community organizations in balance between risks and opportunities. Within the analysis, the following factors were established from the texts of the interviews:

a) A challenge for formal community organizations is coexistence with other non-formal groups, but incidents in the community, such as criminal gangs, political groups, unscrupulous merchants, drug traffickers or prostitution networks. One interviewee stated:

Our group is cheerleading, we have children and teenagers. In the neighborhood there are other groups, some are Christians, others rockers, others play sports, others are crime gangs, others are animal rights... as you can see there are other groups that may have good or negative interests, we respect them all and they do not prevent let our cheerleaders train. The best way for all groups in the neighborhood to coexist is simply respect and not stepping on anyone's hose. (J. Arboleda, personal communication, September 8, 2021)

b) For social leaders, the support of the Mayor's Office of Medellín is essential and therefore requires the effort to contact public leadership, be in connection with political leaders, participate in public programs and be attentive to movements in the official sector.

They expressed disenchantment with the universities because, according to them, they use the community for their research or to promise achievements that remain an expectation. One leader said “they came with the story of a network of job opportunities to excite young people and at the same time they did not return. They used us, we gave them information and spaces and nothing more was heard from them” M. Martínez (personal communication, September 11, 2021).

c) Leaders do not expect much from companies, since, from their perception, community work does not yield economic gains. According to one of the interviewees, companies rarely present gifts for children at Christmas and one cooperative said that “sometimes they bring snacks and recreationists, but in exchange for spreading propaganda in all the houses. They are not sincere, they are interested in obtaining clientele or associates to add to the name of the cooperative” J. Fabra (personal communication, September 4, 2021).

d) They affirmed that the groups' strong relationship is with the community and that this is really the best motivation they have. They said that the community is linked with the groups and leaders, in an intense way, but they warned that sometimes they encounter barriers and misunderstandings and, in some cases, even harassment. According to one leader, the most motivating part of his experiences in the territory has been seeing very happy people and the greatest disappointment when he finds that other people are against him for no visible reasons.

e) In the interviews, two leaders highlighted processes for public participation in the communities, such as the Participatory Budget, the Local Administrative Boards (JAL) and the Community Action Boards (JAC). They affirmed that from these instances links are established, not only with public policies, but also with social sectors that are incident in the territories.

### **Analysis and discussion**

From the interviews, some analyzes were made on strategic direction in community social organizations, emphasizing phenomenological understanding and without the intention of generalizations, since qualitative studies focus on the description and interpretation of social phenomena from the testimony of people.

According to the findings, organizational issues such as strategic direction, management, knowledge management or social innovation were not found within the expectations and discourses of the leaders of community social organizations, inferring that they are not within their practice and cognition. That is, leaders are not aware of their importance and necessity and that is why they are meaningless for the organizations they lead, since:



There are attributions that only make sense to make to sentient or conscious individuals. Only a conscious individual can believe something, desire something, perceive something, be afraid of something, be interested in something, decide to do something, say something, have a purpose, etc. (Fernández, 2022, p. 57)

In the same sense, Pizarro (2018, p. 15) states that “discourse is knowledge for people who build their discernment of the world and who adapt their representations to the contexts in which they live.” From the speech it was evident that administrative practices do not have the framework of strategic management, they are empirically based and manifest in informality, despite the fact that there are formal documents such as budgets or planning; But really such shortcomings are not considered transcendental within the community groups, since the focus is on operations for the present service.

One of the problems detected was that the preparation of formal processes such as strategic plans or operational plans is contracted with external actors to meet the requirements of tenders or public agencies, or failing that, it is carried out by some internal collaborator, under their decision and personal judgment. Such practices are antithetical to the purposes and development of participatory strategic direction for governance, because the sense of participatory planning is weakened, since it is not developed as a process that must be shared in the organization from the bottom up, as affirms Morales. et al. (2023) and Niccolas et al. (2023). Strategic direction is configured with the internal and external diagnostic analysis phases; formulation of strategic lines and strategies; implementation of strategies with annual operational plans; evaluation and monitoring, using control boards (Murillo, 2010). This direction seeks to align the objectives of each area with those of the organization; synchronize their action plans with the strategic lines; continually measure the achievement of the outlined strategies; obtain feedback to make necessary changes (Rodríguez et al., 2021). If these conceptual frameworks are compared with the results, the unfavorable environment for attempting strategic direction in community-based social organizations is concluded.

In addition to the above, it was discovered that community organizations are characterized because they have their legal body where elements such as the social purpose, form of government,

functions they perform and the philosophical basis for their existence are made explicit. That is, they have a formal composition. But, although they comply with the legal requirements and have support for administrative processes such as planning, the fragility of the administrative processes was revealed, since decision-making is exposed to artificial or manipulated information and the subjectivity of the leaders. This is because the external experts hired do not know the institutional framework and probably build the processes, considering reference frameworks from other companies or because the formal documentation is no more than a resource for the legal situation, without being considered as the conceptual foundation of the organization. The lack of commitment to the strategic mission and planning, as well as the disregard for formal documentation in administrative work, are barriers to the strategic management option, since decisions are not made based on fundamental information to ensure the sustainability of projects and interventions.

It is difficult to speak of shared planning (a basic issue of strategic direction) in community social organizations, because the objectives and strategies are proposed temporarily and are imposed without taking into account the performance and experiences of the collaborators, managers, leaders or users of the services (strategic planning is presented that does not go beyond being documents, remaining in the institutional log as decorative elements or as requirements to obtain registrations or to participate in tenders or contracts). In this way, it is not possible to speak of participatory management focused on the actions of leaders so that the group participates in decision-making (Galíndez, 2021). Likewise, these non-participatory practices are discordant with one of the foundations of community social organizations, which is shared and democratic participation (Chacin et al., 2022).

Another barrier to incorporating strategic direction in community social organizations is the preconception about the impossibility of adapting business foundations, with the argument that private companies focus on exploiting humans to achieve profit. Even when it is stated that community social organizations are not companies, one can fall into denialism to strictly include the basic administrative processes in social management. These perceptions heard in the interviews contradict the dimension of social management, understood as a management model for the development of initiatives that transversally generate social mobility, common well-being,

participation and inclusion under the magnifying glass of efficient resource management, responsibility, ethics, and sustainability over time (Cáceres & Salcedo, 2017).

According to those interviewed, community social organizations have articles of incorporation and other documents that constitute their legality and their corporate platform. But such statements are neither shared nor understood, as if they did not exist, and in practice they remain as ornaments; However, paradoxically, in the work of these organizations, practices are evident that are governed by principles that are present in the perspective of the members, without the awareness of being constitutive of the missionary platform. This contradiction shows another barrier to strategic management, since, as stated by Armijo et al. (2020, p.109):

The formulation of strategies is of utmost importance because strategies must be defined in accordance with the mission (the organization's reason for being), the vision (what it wants to be in the future), and according to its characteristics.

The incongruity between the declared missionary structure, neither understood nor practiced, and the other, present in the groups' judgments, shared and practiced, explains the artisanal management of community organizations and therefore the reductionism to some elements chanted, but not formulated as Serving for the community, acting ethically, promoting coexistence or acting with solidarity eventually become clichés; For this reason, it could be said that the strategic direction to achieve the objectives and goals for the organizational development of community organizations is not even within the agenda of their leaders.

In strategic direction, a central issue is internal and external situational analysis. In accordance with Tóala et al. (2022), knowledge of weaknesses, strengths, opportunities and threats is the source for the design of strategies and, in addition, becomes an input to diagnose the state of progress with respect to the formulated objectives. According to the interviewees, in community organizations, there is knowledge about the internal and external situation that is obtained empirically from praxis and experiences in the territories; However, it is not systematized or organized knowledge according to logical processes based on structured information. The other problem is that when this knowledge is constructed by external advisors outside the territories,

even if it remains a logically organized document, its composition can be left with assumptions or assertions detached from reality. Thus, if the situational analysis is empirical or if it is an unrealistic construction, then there are very weak bases to initiate processes such as planning or strategic direction.

The barriers described for strategic direction become challenges for social managers, since their commitment is inherent to the efficiency of resources to achieve greater coverage and quality in services for the community. In the words of Alfaro (2021, p.21) “Among the important challenges that social management has is that of promoting the comprehensive development of communities, combining the quality of the projects and their sustainability”. Furthermore, it states that “Communities, associations, cooperatives and other interest groups that develop it require a view from management and strategy, in order to increase their real participation in the resolution of economic, social and environmental problems” (p. 16). It is deduced from these concepts of Husain et al. (2021), that it is the responsibility of social managers to activate strategic management processes and therefore the challenge of redefining the management guidelines of organizations, having to overcome prejudices and preconceptions related to the ways in which their structures are conceived.

The impact of strategic management on communities is anticipated from the capacity of community social organizations to meet their goals in the short, long and medium terms and the perspective of their leaders to understand the complexity of the internal and external contexts. so that lines of action can be drawn for economic, social, environmental and political sustainability. With these conditions, programs, projects and initiatives can be developed with greater certainty to generate capacities in the territories that expand the options for a dignified life, equity, inclusion and participatory democracy.

### **Conclusions**

The administrative processes of the social community organizations that participated in the field work are characterized by the informality of their administrative practices, although they formally have a legal constitution that defines their purpose and government and documentation on administrative processes such as planning is available.

Two issues that are fundamental in strategic direction are the corporate platform made up of the mission, vision and principles, among other elements, and the internal and external situational analysis. It was found that, although there are formal declarations, in practice, leaders share and introject other orientations that are part of their territorial experience and that, despite knowing internal and external factors incident to operations, they do not fully have models that guide them. relate in logical order. In short, although the inputs are available, there is not enough awareness to organize and systematize them for the establishment of strategic axes, which constitutes a barrier to implementing strategic direction. Another barrier is the absence of criteria for shared and participatory planning, since management focuses on these concepts as a documentary situation and not as complex elements for the continuity of services over time.

The above is an obstacle for social management, because the purposes of creating social innovations to contribute to the integral development of the territories are deprived of instruments for rationalization of resources and the establishment of processes that guarantee the sustainability over time of the programs and projects.

Three other barriers that are significant for the introduction of strategic management are, not conceiving in community social organizations the management processes and strategies coming from private companies, because they are outside the profit motive; focus management believing that the link with the territory is sufficient as a sufficient requirement for the successful continuity of services for the community; and hire or delegate to external parties, processes such as planning, the formulation of the corporate platform or management reports, since they are not developed considering their internal realities and do not collaboratively commit their collaborators or the users of their services.

It is a challenge for social managers to overcome the barriers to strategic direction in order to administrative implementations that lead to their appropriation and development. This can be achieved by creating collective awareness within community groups about training in management, knowledge management and innovation.

### **Ethical considerations**

The researcher is responsible for everything related to the research, ensuring the privacy of the participants, they were duly informed about the objective of the research, the use of the information obtained, the processes in which they participated, having the right to know the results of the study, if they wish to do so.

### **Interest conflict**

All authors made significant contributions to the document and declare that there is no conflict of interest related to the article.

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