

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Formulating a strategic plan for a medical educational institution using organizational development

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: The purpose of this study was to develop a strategic plan using organizational development (OD) for the College of Allied Medical Professions (CAMP) to guide its management in facilitating its growth. This specific college in the study had faced various challenges due to changes such as a change in leadership and the occurrence of the global COVID-19 pandemic. This research assessed the different aspects of CAMP and proposed strategies for continuous improvement and adaptation to changes, whether internal or external.

Methodology: The study utilized frameworks such as the McKinsey 7-S Model, SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results), and Appreciative Inquiry (AI). These frameworks would help evaluate the institution's internal and external environment and provide input for the possible milestones of the OD roadmap. Data was to be collected using surveys, focus group discussions (FGDs), and key informant interviews (KIIs) with faculty, staff, and other stakeholders.

Results: The findings highlighted CAMP's commitment to academic excellence, interdisciplinary collaboration, and innovative research, among other things. The college's structure, resource allocation, and staff development also needed improvement. Certain strategies were identified in accordance with CAMP's identity, current status, and desired outcomes.

Conclusion: The finalized strategic plan, using the OD interventions, showcased the identified strategies to enhance research capacity, collaboration, communication, and well-being among the college's constituents. Long-term and short-term objectives were established to ensure resilience during leadership transitions and other changes throughout the college's lifetime.

Introduction

Change is inevitable. Alas, even if it is constant, it affects everyone positively and negatively, no matter how small or big the change is. No organization is exempted from change. It can be a change in leadership, management, system, place, unit, or position. The College of Allied Medical Professions (CAMP) has experienced and will persist in experiencing change. It wasn't always known as CAMP as it is now widely known. The University of the Philippines Manila (UPM) underwent organizational restructuring in April 1988. As part of the reorganization, the School of Allied Medical Professions (SAMP), which was established as a complementary unit to the College of Medicine, was raised to the college level to acquire better opportunities and sustain its development objectives. It was to offer graduate-level courses, research expansion, and extension services. Additionally, due to the past pandemic, the school was compelled to adopt a nonconventional teaching approach to its students, operate from employees' homes, and embrace the new normal. Lastly, similar to other colleges or schools, CAMP, to this day, is being led and managed by a dean. The dean was only to have three years of tenure, which could be extended for another term only if that dean was reappointed. To avoid situations where employees experience stress and harassment from the change of deans, programs and best practices of a former dean should be continuously implemented by the incumbent dean.

Ashkenas (2013) presented three common organizational or management change issues whenever they occur: resistance of employees, breakdown of communications, and the introduction of new technologies or strategies. This is particularly true for CAMP, a health sciences colleges, where evolving leadership, advancements in technology, and challenges like leadership changes warrant continuous improvement in the way the organization is structured, the practices of management, and the engagement of employees. Organizational development (OD) was deemed essential to institutions aiming to sustain growth and adaptability in the face of change [1]. As such, an OD roadmap, developed through strategic planning, is to be crafted for CAMP.

Key theoretical models and theories in both organizational development and strategic management, including the McKinsey 7-S Framework [2], SOAR [3], Appreciative Inquiry (AI) [4], Model of Planned Change [5], Fred David's (2009) Strategic Management Model, allowed this study to identify its internal and external environment, while providing a structured planning process on

how to utilize these and a formula for a culture that would be more willing to accept change and transformation that the organization would experience [6]. Past studies (Turner, 2017; Eickhoff, 1991; Hechanova *et al.*, 2018; Caringal-Go *et al.*, 2021), both in the Philippines and globally, had shown support for applying these frameworks in educational institutions enhancing organizational performance [7-10].

Turner (2017) conducted a qualitative case study of system implementation in a major university [7]. His findings noted that successful organizational change depends on clear communication, effective leadership, and employee engagement. Similarly, Eickhoff (1991) noted in his study that comprehensive strategic planning is essential in driving organizational change [8].

With that, the research was guided by the hypothesis that a strategic OD roadmap, developed through a process involving collaborations in all levels and a strengths-based approach, fostered alignment among faculty, staff, and leadership, leading to improved organizational performance and resilience, enhance the college's internal operations, and ensure its sustained contribution to the field of medical education in the face of ongoing and future changes, which would largely benefit its major recipients, the students. This approach was reflected in the conceptual framework of the study.

Methodology

Research Design

Kurt Lewin, a German social psychologist known for establishing the concept of action research, defined it as "comparative research on the conditions and effects of several forms of social action and research leading to

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Keywords: strategic plan, organizational development, change management, strategic management, roadmap, transition

Date submitted: October 22, 2024

Date accepted: April 15, 2025



social action." Thomas Gilmore provided a more explicit and concise definition of action research. He stated that action research intends to help address the rational issues of people in a current challenging state and advance the objectives of social science altogether. Therefore, in action research, there was a two-fold promise to study a system and simultaneously work in partnership with participants to transform it in what was deemed a promising direction. Undertaking these two goals entailed a dynamic collaboration between the researcher and the customer. Hence, it highlighted the value of co-learning as a critical part of the research process [11].

For this study, the researcher used the definition stated by Bryman and Bell (2011), wherein the researcher and the customer worked together to analyze the problem and create a solution based on the analysis [12]. This description fit the study as the researcher collaborated with CAMP to find solutions to the issues and effects of change in academic leadership and the adverse impact of unforeseen events.

Study Population and Sampling

This study's participants were all members of CAMP—academic leaders, employees, and other stakeholders such as industry partners, associations related to allied health professions, and students. Purposive sampling was used to achieve the objectives of this research and answer the outlined research questions.

The participants in this study were selected from the college community, comprising a diverse range of stakeholders, including academic leaders, employees, industry partners, associations related to allied health professions, and students. The selection process included various groups for different components of the research. Any person who was not part of the stakeholders of the CAMP and/or was a minor was excluded from the study.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

In order to diagnose the internal and external environment of the institution and aid in strategic planning, the research employed three interrelated OD frameworks: the McKinsey 7-S Framework, SOAR Analysis, and Appreciative Inquiry (AI). The three frameworks were chosen for their individual contribution towards assessing and strengthening various aspects of CAMP's organizational health and future direction.

1. McKinsey 7-S Framework

This system assesses organizational success by analyzing seven interdependent factors: Strategy, Structure, Systems, Shared Values, Style, Staff, and Skills [2]. It was applied chiefly to quantify the internal coherence within CAMP. The survey instrument was constructed based on these factors to quantify the "hard" dimensions (strategy, structure, systems) as well as the "soft" dimensions (shared values, style, staff, skills) of the college. This approach gave an extensive diagnostic base in terms of organizational capacity and deficits of the college.

2. SOAR Analysis (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results)

SOAR is a strategic planning methodology based on strengths that shifts the attention from limitations to opportunities [3]. SOAR was employed during the FGDs to identify CAMP's best practices, accessible opportunities, aspirations of stakeholders, and measurable outcomes wanted. Unlike SWOT analysis, SOAR encourages participation, optimism, and collective ownership in the planning process, which is in line with CAMP's vision to develop visionary leadership and cooperative innovation.

3. Appreciative Inquiry (AI)

As the overall engagement philosophy, Appreciative Inquiry (AI) established tone and form to data collection, especially for key informant interviews (KIIs) and validation roundtable discussions (RTDs). Proceeding through a four-step cycle, AI is Discovery (determining positive practices), Dream (imagining potential futures), Design (co-creating an ideal future), and Destiny (sustaining transformation) [4]. By positioning the conversation in a positive frame, AI facilitated a constructive, participative, and transformational dialogue among the members of CAMP.

In alignment with this approach, a well-designed and semi-structured interview tool and guide were developed for use in both the KIIs and focus group discussions (FGDs). Questions were crafted to be a mix of open-ended

and close-ended formats to elicit meaningful insights into CAMP's management practices and organizational structure. The instrument was designed to meet the analytic goals of both the AI and SOAR frameworks. Specific questions, follow-ups, and probes were adapted dynamically to fit the natural flow of each discussion, ensuring depth while maintaining flexibility.

The survey used questions to determine and identify the "hard" and "soft" elements of the McKinsey 7-S models present within the college. For the survey, all employees of the college, as well as representatives from external stakeholders, such as industry partners and parent-teacher associations, were invited to participate. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with selected representatives from each department, including faculty administrators, senior faculty, instructors, and students, to ensure a broad range of perspectives.

Key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with current members of the executive committee and the Deans Management Team (DMT) of the CAMP, as they held critical roles in leadership and decision-making within the institution. Finally, participants from the KIIs were invited to join the validation round table discussion (RTD), along with other college stakeholders, to validate the study's findings.

Results

Utilizing the SOAR analysis, the participants highlighted several themes of the strengths and achievements of the college. First and foremost was its commitment to academic excellence, reflecting the dedication of the college to uphold high educational standards and align with its directional strategies, which reflect the college's identity. The availability of resources and its commitment to providing the necessary resources and tools for academic and research endeavors was evident. They were also recognized for their effectiveness in nurturing competent, responsive, and grounded critical thinkers through the curricula they produced. The educational programs were acknowledged as robust and aligned with the goal of producing high-caliber health professionals, which was observed in the strong sense of pride in the college name that was observed among the participants. This pride was not only a source of motivation but also contributed to the positive reputation of the institution.

Moreover, the commitment of the college to pioneering advancements in both research and teaching was acknowledged. According to them, the institution has been proactive in staying at the forefront of developments in the field. They also appreciated the adaptability of its key programs to the needs of society. The provision of quality continuing professional education activities for both post-graduate students and faculty was identified as a strength. Participants acknowledged the plethora of opportunities for service, research, and professional development. The institution's environment, according to them, fosters growth and exploration in these areas. Another notable strength was the culture of interdisciplinary collaboration. Based on the data collected, faculty, administrative staff, and students actively engaged in collaborative efforts across disciplines in the college.

There were also aspirations for the future. Participants wished for even more commitment to academic excellence and sought greater internal collaboration. They expressed a desire for cross-disciplinary initiatives to foster innovation and national and international partnerships to expand the college's reach. Additionally, strategic communication with stakeholders was identified as an aspiration, along with the goal of becoming leaders in the industry. Participants also hoped for a deeper community impact, ensuring the college's contributions reached broader audiences.

In terms of areas for improvement, several key themes emerged. One major area was strategy, particularly regarding remote work. Participants felt that there was a lack of buy-in from those practicing remote work, resulting in misalignment with the college community, and suggested that clearer strategies were needed to address this challenge. Regarding structure, participants noted the need for infrastructure improvements and better resource allocation, as limited resources led to inefficiencies in organizational structure and workflows. The college's systems were also identified as outdated, with bureaucratic inefficiencies and challenges related to remote work and staff development hindering smooth operations.

Shared values emerged as another area that would need improvements, with participants calling for more focused alumni engagement strategies and better communication channels to reinforce these values across the

organization. Leadership style was another area needing attention, with participants pointing out the absence of a comprehensive succession plan, which raised concerns about the sustainability of leadership. This was not limited to the leadership as there was an apparent lack of permanent positions which affected the efficiency of the college due to the lack of long-term faculty and staff. Finally, gaps in skills were noted, particularly in terms of global-level competencies and skills needed for partnerships, which participants identified as critical areas for improvement.

The college's general aspiration was to mold future leaders and influencers in occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech pathologists, and clinical audiologists. It desires not only to output graduates who are competent in their professions, but also for all members of the college to be leaders in their chosen fields, as well as influential figures, driving forward the industry through the initiatives they take. This was believed to be possible by fostering the college's desire to nurture competent, healthy, agile, and future-oriented members of the college. Its aspirations extend beyond student life, focusing on the culture of its environment. The respondents emphasized that the college should further increase its culture of collaboration and quality, further contributing to discovering innovative solutions through research and public service.

On the other hand, several participants, when asked regarding their desired outcomes for the college, highlighted inefficiencies related to bureaucratic processes, particularly in the context of remote work. They emphasized the need for streamlined processes in remote settings. Concerns were also raised regarding the need for comprehensive staff development initiatives and the recognition of uncredited work. Participants expressed a desire for a more structured approach to staff development.

In terms of its faculty, the potential for improving faculty profiles through higher degrees was identified. Participants suggested a strategic focus on encouraging and supporting faculty members in pursuing advanced degrees. A need for additional faculty and administrative staff was also mentioned. This requirement was seen as essential to managing the workload effectively and ensuring the quality of education and administrative processes.

Furthermore, participants identified a lack of awareness and information sharing as an area for improvement. Enhancing communication channels to disseminate information more effectively was suggested. Concerns were also raised regarding insufficient resources for work-at-home setups. Participants emphasized the importance of providing adequate resources to ensure the productivity and well-being of staff working remotely. Challenges related to the lack of physical space and funds for development were raised as well. Participants expressed the need for strategic planning to address these constraints.

While alumni support was recognized as a strength, there were suggestions for further enhancing collaborations and communication channels with alumni to leverage their potential effectively. The potential for growth by attracting senior high school students to health-related degrees was suggested. Participants proposed exploring strategies to increase enrollment in these programs.

Furthermore, concerns were raised about personal circumstances affecting performance. Participants emphasized the need for supportive measures to address personal challenges that may impact academic and administrative responsibilities. Instances of dissatisfaction among the student body were also highlighted. Participants stressed the importance of addressing student concerns to enhance overall satisfaction and engagement. Issues related to workload management and remuneration were also discussed. Participants emphasized the need for a fair and effective system to manage workloads and ensure adequate compensation. Participants also underlined the importance of strategizing to increase research funding and grants. Suggestions included actively seeking external funding, fostering partnerships, and enhancing the research ecosystem. The well-being of the college constituents was also recognized as a critical objective. Strategies involved implementing programs and policies that prioritize mental and physical health, creating a supportive work environment, and fostering a sense of community.

Strategies for infrastructure development and garnering awards/recognition surfaced. Participants also highlighted the need for effective strategies to harness alumni support and strengthen external linkages. It was also documented that quality enhancement strategies were identified as integral to long-term objectives. This involves continuous improvement in academic programs, research endeavors, and administrative processes through targeted development initiatives.

Ensuring the success of graduates and student programs was also acknowledged as a key objective. Strategies included refining academic programs, providing career support, and fostering a conducive learning environment to enhance student success. As a complement, strategies to enhance the visibility, impact, and influence of the college locally and internationally were discussed.

Aligning program and human resource development with identified strengths emerged as a foundational approach. This involves tailoring academic programs and professional development initiatives to capitalize on existing strengths. Participants also stressed the importance of capitalizing on opportunities for research, clinical practice, and alumni support. Integrating these elements into strategic planning ensures a holistic approach to organizational development. A strategic focus on strengthening linkages and visibility both locally and internationally surfaced. This involves actively pursuing collaborations, participating in global initiatives, and showcasing the college's achievements on a broader platform.

In the overall implementation, feedback mechanisms were highlighted as essential for quality enhancement. Creating structured channels for feedback from all stakeholders ensures continuous improvement aligned with the identified strengths and opportunities.

Four key guiding principles were identified to be considered for decision-making and positive collegial relationships. The first key guiding principle was based on the identified significance of fostering a positive and inclusive environment that values the well-being of all members. The second key guiding principle was on creating an atmosphere where diverse ideas are welcomed, and open communication was emphasized. The third guiding principle involved recognizing and utilizing the expertise among faculty and staff. This principle encourages a culture where the unique skills and knowledge of individuals are acknowledged and leveraged for the benefit of the entire organization. As for the last guiding principle, participants emphasized the importance of creating a sense of shared purpose, accountability, and community spirit.

In pursuit of identifying the short-term objectives (2 to 3 years), participants recognized the need to address bureaucratic inefficiencies and remote work challenges. Strategies include streamlining processes and implementing effective remote work solutions. Short-term objectives also involve initiating staff and faculty development programs to enhance competencies and skills, ensuring a well-equipped and skilled workforce. Infrastructure improvement and resource allocation should also be prioritized to create a conducive work environment and provide the necessary tools and facilities. Furthermore, engaging alumni through purposeful strategies and collaborative channels is identified to be a short-term objective to harness their support and strengthen connections.

Long-term objectives focused on securing research funding and developing programs to enhance the research landscape and ensuring the health and well-being of constituents is a long-term objective, involving the implementation of comprehensive programs for physical and mental wellness.

The formulated roadmap began with a clear focus on self-awareness among faculty and staff. In the first stage, the college would encourage individuals to reflect on their roles and responsibilities within the institution, recognizing that meaningful change starts with personal ownership. This phase would lay the foundation for deeper engagement, where each member would align their personal goals with the college's overarching directional strategies. Building on this self-awareness, the second stage focused on aligning personal mission, vision, and values with those of the institution. Faculty and staff were guided to define their individual purpose, ensuring that their personal aspirations were in harmony with the institution's goals. This alignment was crucial for fostering a unified sense of purpose and direction. Once personal alignment was established, the roadmap would emphasize the collective ownership of values. In the third stage, the institution would work to ensure that every member internalized and upheld the college's core values. This collective commitment could reinforce a cohesive culture and prepare the institution for the next phase—collaboration.

The roadmap then transitioned into a phase of teamwork and synergy. Departments and teams were encouraged to collaborate more effectively, breaking down silos and fostering a culture of cooperation. This collaborative spirit was key in creating a dynamic and interconnected institution, where

faculty and staff worked together toward shared goals. The focus would then shift to shared directional strategies, both within the institution and with external stakeholders. In this stage, the college would emphasize collaboration beyond its walls, forming new partnerships with local, international, and alumni communities. These partnerships were to be instrumental in expanding the college's reach and resources, ensuring it remained relevant and impactful in the broader healthcare and academic ecosystems.

The next major milestone to be tackled in the roadmap was empowerment, as the college recognized the importance of empowering its faculty and staff to achieve global professional growth. Through various development programs, members of the institution were to be provided with opportunities to advance their careers and gain recognition on an international scale. Simultaneously, the institution would pursue process improvements. After such, the college would turn its attention to its contributions to industry as a whole, which would position itself as a key player in the development of innovative solutions. This focus on innovation would lead to the development of more patents and groundbreaking research. Apart from innovation and research, the college would begin to take an active role in policy-making. Faculty and experts from the institution would be expected to become involved in shaping health policies. This was to expand the college's impact beyond academia and break into the realm of the larger whole of public health and governance. These phases of the roadmap were to be monitored by a balanced scorecard (BSC).

Discussion

It should be noted that the scope of this study was limited to the crafting of the strategic plan and the organizational development (OD) roadmap. As such, this study does not assess the implementation or long-term success of the plan. The behaviors observed during this research were those exhibited throughout the planning process, such as engagement, collaboration, and alignment with the institution's strategic goals. However, no data were collected on post-planning behaviors or the outcomes of the plan's implementation, as this was beyond the scope of the current study.

This limitation meant that while the study highlights the institutional dynamics during the planning phase, it couldn't provide insights into how these strategies translate into actual organizational change or behavioral outcomes in the long term. Future research should therefore focus on evaluating the effectiveness of the strategic plan once implemented, examining its impact on CAMP's academic performance, research productivity, operational efficiency, and institutional resilience. Longitudinal studies could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how organizational development interventions contribute to sustainable growth and adaptation within higher education institutions.

On that note, the study was consistent with Verghese (2007) and Schroeder (2011), who stressed the importance of OD in bridging the gap between an institution's current state and its future aspirations, wherein CAMP's strategic planning process demonstrated how educational institutions can leverage OD frameworks to align with their mission of academic excellence. The use of the McKinsey 7-S Model, SOAR Analysis, and Appreciative Inquiry (AI) in CAMP's context provided a structured approach to evaluating internal and external environments, offering a clear pathway for organizational growth amidst leadership transitions and global disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

This study also reinforced existing literature on the critical role of strategic planning in fostering collaboration and innovation within educational institutions. Eickhoff's (1991) work, which highlighted the transformative power of strategic planning when supported by teamwork and innovation, found parallels in the findings from CAMP. The participants recognized the institution's strength in promoting interdisciplinary collaboration and advancing research, positioning these as key elements of CAMP's strategic identity. This reflected broader trends in higher education, where collaboration and innovation are increasingly seen as vital for institutional competitiveness and resilience (Aziz *et al.*, 2019). CAMP's proactive approach to research and teaching innovations demonstrated how strategic planning could serve as a catalyst for institutional advancement, aligning with the best practices highlighted in the literature.

There were challenges, however, that were identified, specifically related to resource allocation, infrastructure, and remote work. This underscored

persistent organizational issues that mirrored findings in previous studies. Turner (2017) identified similar challenges in organizational change processes, particularly where there were gaps in communication, support, and resource management. In CAMP's case, participants pointed to misalignments in remote work strategies and outdated systems, issues that have likely been exacerbated by the global shift towards more flexible work environments during the time of the pandemic. However, this would be less of an issue these days due to the return to face-to-face interactions. The necessity of not only crafting a strategic plan but ensuring that its implementation was supported by robust infrastructure, clear communication channels, and adequate resources would be highlighted by the study, aligning with the conclusions drawn by Turner (2017).

The concern, particularly the lack of a comprehensive succession plan over leadership transitions, which was to be expected particularly of the dean of CAMP, aligned as well with the work of Santhidran *et al.* (2011) and Hechanova *et al.* (2018). Both studies emphasized the importance of leadership in navigating organizational change and ensuring commitment to new strategic directions. CAMP revealed a similar dynamic, where participants expressed unease about the sustainability of leadership in the absence of permanent positions and clear succession planning. This showed the critical role of leadership development and succession planning in maintaining organizational stability and readiness for change, particularly in educational institutions undergoing significant transitions. The mentioned literature suggested that without such mechanisms in place, institutions are at greater risk of operational disruptions, which can undermine the long-term effectiveness of strategic initiatives.

Conclusion

The integration of Appreciative Inquiry and strength-based OD interventions such as SOAR may be key to a successful and meaningful progression of the college towards its goals. Considering what had already been achieved by the college, the positive and strengths-based approach had already been integrated within its strategies and activities. Instead of having to focus on the fact that college had limited resources, both material and human, and was of small size, compared to other colleges and academic institutions, it had capitalized on its strengths and opportunities, whether it be its interdisciplinary nature or its many partnerships in local and international stages. Thus, it had propelled itself to a very advantageous position, earning itself significant achievements and large leaps in its progression.

Focusing on the weaknesses and being wary of threats would have delayed the progress of impactful achievements. This was as resources would be poured to defend the college against these weaknesses and threats.

Having a more positive approach when it came to dealing with the college, its personnel, faculty, staff, and students would lead to a more positive-minded culture. As such, more motivated workers and students perform better, being more informed as to the strengths and opportunities that they have or are available to them. This, in turn, provides a better performance of the college overall. With a motivated community, the concept of having shared values and shared goals no longer remains a concept but turns into a reality upon the application of this type of approach.

To continue to catalyze the growth of the college, the formulation and implementation of the formulated OD roadmap would stand as a foundational pillar. This roadmap, coupled with a combination of a motivated workforce and student bodies, a fertile ground for collaboration and partnership, a focus on the use of OD interventions such as Appreciative Inquiry and their integration, identification and empowerment of change champions, and institutionalized succession planning that hopes to continue the good practices already put in place, will pave the way for holistic organizational development.

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