

A Framework for Customizing Balanced Scorecards for Educational Nonprofit Organizations

RALUCA NICOLAESCU, IBRIAN CĂRĂMIDARU
Department of Management and Industrial Engineering,
University of Petrosani,
No.20 Street, Petrosani, Hunedoara,
ROMANIA

Abstract: - The ascent of nonprofit organizations within the social landscape often mirrors an economic model, positioning them as crucial entities addressing unmet societal needs. The Balanced Scorecard tool emerges as a strategic management tool, facilitating objective translation, performance measurement, and initiative formulation. Nonprofits that adopt the Balanced Scorecards recognize its utility in catalyzing strategic transformation and fostering nuanced causal understanding. Implementing the Balanced Scorecards in nonprofit organizations offering educational services requires meticulous planning, stakeholder engagement, and strategic alignment. The current paper delves into the possibility of customizing the Balanced Scorecards for educational nonprofits, beginning with a flexible strategy map useful in aligning with organizational values and mission.

Key-Words: - Balanced scorecards, nonprofit, education, strategy, mission, vision.

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1 Introduction

The social rise of nonprofits is usually portrayed by an economic model in which nonprofits are settings meant to meet social needs that cannot be adequately satisfied by other institutions. Steinberg offers a model of “three failures”, where nonprofits cover for market failures and governmental difficulties [1], in this perspective nonprofits could also fail to fulfill their social role, hence the need for consistent managerial practices suitable for coping with the hindering factors of a nonprofit environment. The “three failures” model seems to neglect the dynamic interplay between the various institutions and their perennial exchange of resources.

If nonprofits do not aim at maximizing profits or revenue growth, how could their microeconomic behavior be described in terms of their organizational goal? According to Hughes and Luksetich, nonprofits are optimizing objectives frequently referring to the maximization of their output, [2]. Achieving higher levels of output delivery requires strategic collaboration with different social counterparts and an ongoing assessment of the net results of collaboration, [3].

An inherent tension is at work between prioritizing various metrics as relevant for nonprofit strategic alignment, this tension exhibited in processes of metric selection is a result of seemingly divergent interests exhibited by peculiar stakeholder

structures. A difference in interests results in a focus on peculiar objectives and the metrics that would substantiate whether those objectives have been reached successfully. For example, external stakeholders such as donors are favoring financial indicators measuring the stability of perennial income flows and the degree to which various budgets are depicting a balance between incomes and expenses. On the other hand, boards and managers might pay more attention to the measurement of objectives related to non-current assets endowments and organizational capacity building through ongoing human resources development. Beneficiaries are leaning more toward metrics ensuring the predictability of output delivery and the ratio of expenses that are designed specifically for educational needs. While these examples can be portrayed as instances of emphasizing either financial or non-financial metrics, even when considering metrics that originate in financial accounting information (liquidity, debt coverage, fund-raising efficiency, program expense efficiency [4], these are to be selected or prioritized according to the informational needs of different stakeholder categories and interests.

The Balanced Scorecard (BSC) is a management tool that facilitates the execution of the organization's strategy by translating it into objectives on a strategy map, and then into

performance measures, targets, and initiatives on a Scorecard.

Nonprofit organizations that embrace the BSC tool recognize its multifaceted utility which extends beyond performance evaluation. The tool serves as a catalyst for strategic transformation within the organization, facilitating the delineation of measurable objectives and the formulation of an execution timetable. With the help of BSC, stakeholders gain a nuanced understanding of the causal relationships between key objectives and the ability to discern both proactive and reactive measures. Such dynamic responsiveness contrasts sharply with conventional paradigms, which often lack real-time insights.

In the current paper, the authors examined the possibility of proposing a framework for customizing BSC for nonprofit organizations offering educational services, by defining a flexible strategy map as a starting point from which a BSC can be adapted and a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) can be established.

2 Research Background

In the context of the current paper, a nonprofit is defined as an organization exhibiting as an institutional trait the restriction of non-distribution of profits (by means of dividends or managerial wages), [5]. Using only a single broad criterion, this definition allows for identifying as nonprofits various organizations from charitable/voluntary sector institutions, to non-governmental organizations, civil society organisms, and social businesses.

An educational nonprofit is identified through the range of services it provides for its main beneficiaries. This range would consist of services that are either linked to formal education (after-school activities, ongoing support for quality improvement in public schools, etc.) or represent a distinct non-formal education service (such as various kinds of experiential education means – outdoor training, service-learning projects, etc.). The main beneficiaries of nonprofit educational services are the youth in search of educational opportunities and/or people at risk who are not able to pursue regular formal education. Besides their beneficiaries, for educational nonprofits, there are two other significant categories of stakeholders: other educational providers (either as competitors – private institutions – or as partners – public schools and government agencies) and the parents/relatives of the direct beneficiaries (which play a significant

part in encouraging the youth to join nonprofit programs).

In the case of parents entrusting their children to nonprofits facilitating educational services, the whole array of principal-agent moral issues arises (as is commonly the case of medical services). Incomplete information and asymmetric distribution of information are almost always a source of ethical concern and moral burden in organizational contexts [6], even more so in nonprofit settings [7], and bear on decision-making processes about strategic instruments' adequacy. The typical categories of informational asymmetry that are at the core of principal-agent difficulties, i.e. informational asymmetry and moral hazard, are also present in educational nonprofit settings. These are instantiated in problems such as donors lacking adequate first-hand acquaintance with the educational experiences of beneficiaries (the same could be stated about the parents of the children enrolled in educational programs); the children/beneficiaries having no understanding of the organizational mechanics of service delivery; informational flows are prone to rely more on short-term, easier to measure outputs than on long term educational gains. Implementing a BSC customized for nonprofits serves as an instrument meant to alleviate such problems through a top-down approach founded on consistent reporting of BSC quadrants that are based on ongoing stakeholder interaction. The latter is always governed by transparency on both metrics' appraisal and factual, firsthand experience, of how educational services are provided. This is consonant with the basic feature of BSC of trying to portray success in terms that are intelligible and desirable for third parties.

The various stages of the measurement "revolution" [8] have witnessed a transition from the preeminence of financial indicators (mainly retrospective and relevant only for comparisons of similar entities) to the utmost relevance of the marketing and quality indicators (stressing the customers, their preferences and their appraisal of goods and services), [8]. This diversification of performance indicators instilled the need for ranking and customizing them for measuring the achievement of strategic objectives. Chelaru et al. propose a hierarchical model of how an educational nonprofit might rank metrics across the relevant BSC perspectives, [9].

In common market transactions, the information flow between suppliers and customers is mediated by prices, in the case of nonprofits the information on how their outputs are valued has to be guided by systematic interaction with their beneficiaries.

Donors are specifically interested in organizations that can substantiate their results, but as Drucker pointed out, there is a tension in nonprofits between the “moral” results (as given in the mission statements) and allocative/economic ones (suitable for metrics), [10]. Some results would still be elusive and at times the concerns of the donors call for a different answer, “for if there is no paycheck, the achievement is the sole reward”, [10].

However, this does not cover yet the need for measuring the social, long-term, impact of the range of educational outputs supplied by nonprofits. Several approaches to social impact measuring propose an aggregated internalization of the outcomes experienced by different stakeholders, [11], [12]. The social impact assessment methodologies are sustained by a theory of social change - linking nonprofit results to social outcomes, the latter are valued using financial proxies/shadow prices for similar marketable goods and services.

In advancing the role and scope of the BSC in the strategic landscape of corporate management, Kaplan and Norton made a smooth transition from focusing on the advantages of putting together multiple metrics, presented in the original four perspectives (financial, customers, internal processes, learning and growth) [13], to pointing the role played by a BSC process of construal in crafting and mapping strategy, leading to a strategic management system revolving around the commitments exhibited in the BSC, [14], [15]. Along the same lines of thought, the BSC initiators emphasized the role of BSC in the appraisal of intangible assets as contributors to strategic achievements, [16].

Some of the most significant benefits of implementing BSC within an organization have been highlighted by Rigby and Bilodeau and can be observed in Figure 1, [17].

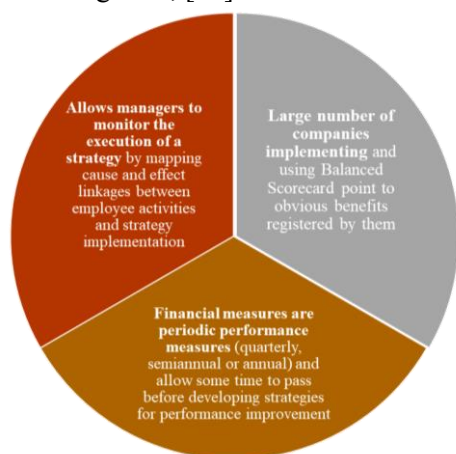


Fig. 1: Three key benefits of BSC

The BSC was shown to be a very versatile instrument adapted to companies operating in very diverse industries, [18]. Certain volumes are dedicated precisely to tailoring the BSC for public or nonprofit organizations, [19]. The fact that educational nonprofits have to start their strategic planning based on their missional commitments is fully compatible with the BSC as a top-down approach which starts planning from the destination onwards. BSC helps coordinate the efforts of companies comprised of multiple business units. For an educational nonprofit, BSC serves, in multi-tiered organizations, to coordinate disparate regional units and departments providing different educational services aiming at common organizational goals.

The steps proposed by Kaplan and Norton for the completion of a BSC refer to a succession of events beginning with a preparatory phase, followed by multiple workshops and interviews, and ending with an implementation plan against which periodic reviews are evaluated, [20]. For the BSC to serve for strategy alignment, the strategic process has to translate the vision into measurements, communicate the BSC, integrate planning and budgeting, and collect feedback generating learning from inadequate construal or implementation of the BSC, [14].

Worldwide efforts to integrate BSC as a management tool at a Higher Education Institution (HEI) level have been observed, with studies proposing the integration of BSC in Kenyan HEIs [21], in non-profit organizations dedicated to furthering early childhood education in Chile [22] as well as in the case of a nonprofit organization from Indonesia which aimed at developing a performance management system framework with BSC at its core, [23]. The BSC framework, at the HEI level, can be used as a performance management tool for regular evaluations of key aspects of the institution such as: whether the institution is delivering inclusive, student-centered quality education, is publishing high-impact research, is engaging with internal and external stakeholders and is improving its financial results, [24]. Some studies highlighted that one of the reasons behind the widespread implementation of BSC in developed countries could be linked to the support received from supervisors regarding the approach used, since correct implementation could provide successful results that could create educational quality and ensure a competitive advantage. Another important aspect considered in this research was the placement of donors in the ranks of investors rather than customers, [25].

Researchers also analyzed the entrepreneurial attitude and self-efficacy for business performance efficiency looked at how the implementation of BSC could impact the overall business performance and used BSC to measure the business's efficiency, [26]. More so, studies also focused on exploring the effect of using BSC as a strategic tool in the context of Jordanian Small and Medium Manufacturing Enterprises (SMME) and the competitive strategies that they employ and discovered that when implementing BSC, a lot of the analyzed companies changed their competitive strategies, especially the focus strategies and the cost leadership strategies, [27]

The BSC, according to its initiators, has little value as a reporting tool for external users, for reasons related to avoiding the disclosure of some internal procedures or to the lack of standardized vocabulary and communities of practitioners, [14], [20]. However, the BSC would be of great help in explaining to their main stakeholders (members, beneficiaries, donors, and boards) how value is added by each of their efforts. For most of the public, nonprofits are still represented by "black boxes" in terms of how they strategically impact their beneficiaries in the long run, what processes are needed for delivering their specific output, what types of skills and technologies they use, and how financing their pursuits benefits society at large.

3 Methodology

Balanced Scorecards are useful in identifying as many cause-and-effect relationships as possible in order to help management and stakeholders appreciate the employee and task roles and their contribution to the company's overall effort, [28]. For this, it encompasses four unifying elements: objectives, measures, targets, and strategic initiatives, [29]

In the current research, the authors examined the possibility and means of implementing the BSC in the case of nonprofit organizations offering educational services. For this, the authors first looked at both the particularities of implementing BSC in a traditional for-profit company and nonprofit organizations. This was done by reviewing the available literature, besides the groundwork of Kaplan and Norton. The main research databases have been queried, and the search results have been refined with the help of the following search parameters: TS=Nonprofit OR TS=nonprofit AND TS=balanced scorecard AND TS=education. The language filter has been set to English-only papers, and the time frame interval

was set to the last ten years, meaning the 2014-2024 period. Web of Science returned only seven results, out of which only three were relevant to the current study.

To help shape the framework proposed in the current research, after the review of the available literature, the authors tried to identify the best insights from the stakeholders and ways to integrate these aspects into the model. For this, the following insights have been taken into account:

- a) Identification of key stakeholders that manifest a significant influence or impact on the nonprofit's success
- b) Identification of stakeholders' expectations and priorities regarding the nonprofit performance and objective expectations
- c) Assessment of stakeholder influence within the nonprofit for better management of relationships and alignment of goals
- d) Identification of potential conflicts or risks to enable proactive measures to address these and minimize their impact on the nonprofit's performance
- e) Identification of opportunities for collaboration or partnerships that could lead to mutually beneficial outcomes and improved performance
- f) Insights for strategy development to develop strategies that are aligned with stakeholder expectations and objectives

Some researchers examined the relationship between Managerial Accounting Information and the effectiveness of the BSC, and revealed that if the organization emphasizes corporate strategy and job-relevant information, this will lead to it reaching its full potential given how both activities are considered crucial parts in every changing situation, [30].

An interesting link has been observed between incorporating the principles of the BSC and pursuing the objectives of digital marketing in the context of promoting a brand amid competition and their respective principles, [31]. This is important as digital tools could be used to support performance measurement in the BSC framework for educational nonprofits by facilitating data collection, analysis, visualization, and strategic alignment. From a financial standpoint, digital tools and solutions could be implemented to better manage the organization's funds, optimize resource allocation, and ensure financial stability. Furthermore, integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools could bring even more advantages by enhancing financial performance measurement, forecasting, and

optimization. AI tools could predict future financial trends, helping these organizations forecast revenues, expenses, and funding needs more accurately.

Some current studies highlighted the relationship between the implementation of digital technologies into the process of financial data modeling and how this significantly increases the potential of the BSC framework by offering real-time, useful information for strategic decision-making. Digital transformation, in this case, is perceived as a catalyst of BSC evolution, and the dynamic changes in digital technologies could create additional opportunities for the implementation and usage of BSC, [32].

4 Balanced Scorecards for Nonprofits in Education

According to Kaplan and Norton, the BSC is used to measure a company's performance from four main perspectives: financial, customer, internal processes, and learning and growth. For this however, a strategy map is recommended to have a visual representation of the company's main objectives within these four areas, [15].

In the same referenced article by Kaplan and Norton, the authors recommend building strategy maps from the top down and considering first the company's mission statement and core values, [15].

In the case of nonprofit organizations, it is a common practice to place an emphasis and start the BSC model by taking the customers or the organization's mission into account, [15].

For the case of the proposed framework, the authors took into account a mission that would focus on empowering individuals through accessible education to transform lives and communities. For this, three main values have been derived:

- **Accessibility.** Nonprofits should design their educational services to be inclusive and accessible to all, regardless of background or circumstances
- **Empowerment.** The main purpose of the educational services should be to empower individuals with the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to achieve their personal goals and make positive changes in their lives and their communities
- **Community impact.** Nonprofits should take into account their impact on the community and strive to make a meaningful and lasting impact on these communities by fostering lifelong

learning, critical thinking skills, and social responsibility.

To promote these core values and the mission statement, three potential strategies that a nonprofit could employ have been identified (Figure 2), with a middle strategy being selected. The *Partnership and Collaboration* strategy would focus on collaborations with other nonprofits, educational institutions, local businesses, and government agencies to enhance the reach and impact of the nonprofit's educational services. This would also allow the nonprofit to access additional resources, expertise, and networks thus allowing it to reach larger audiences and offer more comprehensive programs.



Fig. 2: Potential strategies for BSC in nonprofits offering educational services

The *Diversified Funding Streams* strategy would allow the nonprofit to rely on a variety of funding sources to sustain its operations and expand the offered programs. Additional revenue streams could include individual donations, membership fees, tuition fees for specialized courses or workshops, fundraising events, and merchandise sales among others. Diversifying funding streams could help mitigate financial risks, increase financial stability, and provide a support system for the flexibility required to adapt to changing circumstances and pursue new opportunities for growth and innovation.

The selected strategy for the research is *Community engagement and empowerment* which contains aspects from both other strategies but places an emphasis on building strong relationships within the community, actively engaging with students, parents, educators, and other stakeholders to understand their needs and the challenges they face and involving the community in program development, decision-making processes and outreach efforts. This could lead to better outcomes and sustained support for the nonprofit's mission.

Developing such a comprehensive strategy map for nonprofit organizations offering educational services could help clarify its objectives, ensure that activities are aligned with the mission statement, and track progress toward achieving the established goals.

A proposed strategy map based on the Community engagement and empowerment strategy is presented in Figure 3.

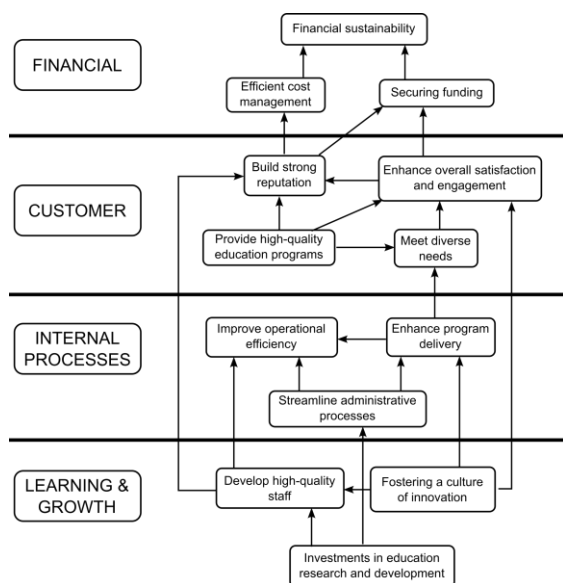


Fig. 3: Proposed strategy map for nonprofits in education

As can be observed from Figure 3, the main objectives of the *financial* segment are: financial sustainability, efficient cost management, and securing funding. These objectives could be tracked and measured with KPIs including revenue growth, fundraising effectiveness and cost per student served.

The *Customer* element could have objectives related to ensuring the satisfaction of the key stakeholders such as: building a strong reputation, enhancing overall satisfaction and engagement, providing high-quality educational programs, and meeting diverse needs. Possible KPIs include: student enrollment rates, retention rates, student satisfaction scores, and graduation rates.

The *Internal processes* element initiatives could include implementing technology solutions, streamlining administrative procedures, and improving program evaluation and assessment, with KPIs such as program delivery efficiency, timeliness of service delivery, and quality of educational materials.

The *Learning and Growth* element objectives could focus on staff training and development, fostering a culture of innovation, and investing in

educational research and development with KPIs such as staff training hours, employee satisfaction scores, innovation metrics, and technology adoption rates.

5 Conclusions

The social ascent of nonprofit organizations often aligns with an economic model, positioning them as entities addressing societal needs unmet by other institutions. One such concern is covered by Steinberg, who introduces in [1] the "three failures" model, suggesting nonprofits mitigate market and governmental failures, yet may themselves falter in fulfilling their social mandate. This underscores the necessity of consistent managerial practices tailored to navigate nonprofit environments. However, this model overlooks the dynamic interplay among institutions and their perpetual resource exchange.

Building the BSC, for the sole purpose of collecting and aggregating measurements for different perspectives and at various organizational levels in a nonprofit, might be of little value if it is not part of a strategic process, whereby the organizational missional and social assumptions are assessed and the objectives are correspondingly linked with the conclusions of that assessment. Otherwise, implementing the BSC might look to the operational staff as another attempt to add reporting tasks to their job descriptions.

Despite nonprofits' divergence from profit maximization, some authors, such as Hughes and Luksetich propose in their study [2] the optimization of objectives, while chiefly focusing on enhancing their output. This pursuit necessitates strategic collaborations and ongoing evaluation of collaborative outcomes. In this context, BSC emerges as a management tool facilitating strategic execution through objective translation, performance measurement, and initiative formulation.

Nonprofits embracing the BSC recognize its utility in transcending performance evaluation, catalyzing strategic transformation, and fostering a nuanced understanding of causal relationships.

As with the introduction of any instrument facilitating strategy casting and ongoing assessment, the implementation of a BSC framework for educational nonprofits raises questions related to the cost-effectiveness of such a managerial pursuit. The costs associated with BSC implementation refer, on the one hand to tailoring the informational systems to the reporting needs of tracking mission compliance and objectives achievement and, on the other hand, to the costs incurred by training key

people in the organization that are going to implement the framework and disseminate know-how on the peculiarities of BSC casting. Now while the benefits of BSC and strategy mapping are rather well documented, especially in for-profit organizations [18], [20] the most pressing issue for nonprofits consists in convincing the main donors to finance such expenses, aiming at organizational capacity building, rather than opting for the short-term impact of financing current educational outputs. To engage donors in the funding process of organizational development expenses, these stakeholders have to be closely and regularly informed on the concrete results of implementing BSC and its relevance for the sustainability of the provided educational services.

The authors of the paper explore the possibility of customizing the BSC for educational nonprofits, commencing with a flexible strategy map. Educational nonprofits, defined by their commitment to profit non-distribution, serve a diverse range of beneficiaries, necessitating stakeholder-centric strategies. Notably, parents, educational providers, and beneficiaries are pivotal stakeholders, necessitating tailored strategies aligning with organizational values and mission.

As the measurement landscape evolves, nonprofits face a paradigm shift from financial to qualitative indicators, necessitating tailored ranking and customization of metrics. Social impact measurement methodologies emerge to quantify long-term outcomes, linking nonprofit efforts to societal change.

Implementing the BSC in educational nonprofits demands meticulous planning, including stakeholder engagement, strategic alignment, and feedback integration. While primarily an internal tool, the BSC aids in articulating value to stakeholders, fostering transparency and understanding.

Developing a comprehensive strategy map clarifies objectives, aligns activities with the mission, and tracks progress toward organizational goals across financial, customer, and internal processes, and learning and growth perspectives.

Future research directions could analyze the form of a BSC implemented within a nonprofit organization that also engages in business activities to cope with funding scarcity and achieve financial sustainability.

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