

REVIEW ARTICLE

# Influence of neuroleadership in Higher Education Management in Cumaná, Venezuela

Influencia del neuroliderazgo en la Gestión de Educación Superior en Cumaná, Venezuela

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Received: 02 August 2025 / Accepted: 18 October 2025 / Published online: 30 January 2026

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**Abstract** The management of higher education institutions in Cumaná, Venezuela, has become progressively complex due to resource scarcity and the need for rapid adaptation to a constantly changing environment. Given this scenario, the present study analyzes the influence of neuroleadership (neuroleadership) on strategic decision-making and organizational climate, providing a theoretical contribution to the existing literature that connects neuroleadership with educational management. To achieve this, a documentary research methodology was employed, based on an exhaustive review and a critical analysis that triangulated the theoretical contributions of neuroleadership with the contextual reality of Cumaná's universities. The findings revealed that neuroleadership emerges as a strategic tool, capable of optimizing decision-making by fostering emotional regulation and self-awareness in leaders. Likewise, it was emphasized that traditional management models, based on pure rationality, are insufficient to address the challenges involving stress, decisional fatigue, and the cognitive biases inherent in managerial work. As a closing thought, it is highlighted that the principles of neuroleadership, focused on social cognition and empathy, are fundamental for building a climate of trust and collaboration, even in high-pressure environments. In short, this research argues that neuroleadership is not just an emerging discipline, but an operational necessity for resilient and effective educational management in the Cumaná region.

**Keywords** neuroleadership, educational management, decision-making, organizational climate.

**Resumen** La gestión de las instituciones de educación superior en Cumaná, Venezuela, se ha tornado progresivamente compleja debido a la escasez de recursos y la necesidad de adaptaciones rápidas a un entorno en constantes cambios. Ante este panorama, el presente estudio analiza la influencia del neuroliderazgo en la toma de decisiones estratégicas y el clima organizacional, plasmando un aporte teórico a la literatura existente que conecta el neuroliderazgo con la gestión educativa. Para ello, se empleó una metodología de investigación documental, basada en una revisión exhaustiva y un análisis crítico que trianguló los aportes teóricos del neuroliderazgo con la realidad contextual de las universidades cumanesas. Los hallazgos revelaron que el neuroliderazgo emerge como una herramienta estratégica, capaz de optimizar la toma de decisiones al fomentar la regulación emocional y la autoconciencia en los líderes. Así mismo, se enfatizó que los modelos de gestión tradicionales, al basarse en la racionalidad pura, son insuficientes para abordar los desafíos que implican el estrés, la fatiga decisional y los sesgos cognitivos inherentes a la labor directiva. Como reflexión de cierre, se puntualiza que los principios del neuroliderazgo, enfocados en la cognición social y la empatía, son fundamentales para construir un clima de confianza y colaboración, incluso en entornos de alta presión. En definitiva, esta investigación sustenta que el neuroliderazgo no es solo una disciplina emergente, sino una necesidad operativa para una gestión educativa resiliente y efectiva en la región de Cumaná.

**Palabras clave** neuroliderazgo, gestión educativa, toma de decisiones, clima organizacional.

## How to cite

Cárdenas, D. J. (2026). Influence of neuroleadership in Higher Education Management in Cumaná, Venezuela. *Journal of Management and Human Resources*, 4(1), 29-36. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18271249>

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## Introduction

In today's dynamic and complex higher education environment, efficient management has become essential for institutional progress and academic excellence. Universities face unprecedented challenges, including adapting to technological advancements, managing limited resources, and the growing need to create a work environment that fosters innovation and productivity (Robbins & Judge, 2024). In this context, the quality of strategic decision-making by leaders and the structuring of a healthy organizational environment are key components for achieving success. This aspect has typically been analyzed from well-established fields such as organizational psychology, sociology, and management. These fields were championed in the 1990s by George W. Bush as the "Decade of the Brain," a movement that aimed to unite efforts with the rise of neuroscience applied to the organizational context through neuroleadership.

In this regard, recent advances in cognitive neuroscience and neuropsychology have given rise to an emerging field known as Neuroleadership. This discipline proposes that an understanding of brain mechanisms, particularly those related to decision-making, emotional regulation, and social cognition, offers valuable insights for optimizing management (Rock & Schwartz, 2006). In other words, neuroleadership seeks to equip leaders with tools grounded in brain biology to enhance their effectiveness and that of their teams, establishing itself as an essential cognitive instrument for innovative and effective management in any organization (Pedler et al., 2020). It also offers the added value of providing a wealth of knowledge, methodologies, and tools for understanding the dynamics involved in leadership, opening a new field of research into management styles.

However, despite its growing relevance, there is a notable lack of publications on research that specifically explores, based on empirical evidence, the direct impact of Neuroleadership on strategic decision-making and organizational climate within the specific context of higher education institutions in Cumaná, Sucre State. This represents a significant informational need, a crucial starting point that would allow educational managers to improve not only their cognitive and emotional performance but also to plan more effective organizational strategies that consider the neurobiological basis of human behavior.

This perception could lead to better-informed and more assertive decision-making, improved talent management, and ultimately, the promotion of higher-performing, collaborative, and resilient work environments within the institutions of interest. From this perspective, it is proposed that the conscious and strategic application of Neuroleadership principles would have a positive impact on both the quality of strategic decision-making and the substantial improvement of the organizational climate in higher education institutions

in Cumaná.

## An approach to understanding reality

To understand the significance of neuroleadership in university institutions, it is first necessary to define its concept and its innovative role in management. This is because management in higher education institutions in present-day Venezuela, and particularly in Sucre State and the city of Cumaná, has become increasingly complex and demanding. Educational managers must navigate a dynamic environment characterized by resource scarcity, the need to adapt to new technologies, the diversity of talents among teaching and administrative staff, and the pressing demand for academic results and student well-being. In this context, the effectiveness of an educational manager cannot be limited to the application of traditional administrative models; it requires a deeper understanding of the internal processes that drive decisions, interactions, and organizational resilience. As García (2022) points out, the way of thinking and acting of today's manager becomes a philosophy of life that, from a transdisciplinary perspective, gives rise to new onto-epistemic positions to address emerging situations that management faces.

However, despite advances in educational leadership and organizational behavior, much of the literature and management practices still focus on purely psychological and sociological dimensions, without delving into their neurobiological underpinnings. This approach limits managers' ability to understand crucial aspects, such as why certain motivational or communication strategies are more effective than others, how the stress inherent in the managerial role affects decision-making, or how the brain's executive functions are decisive for adaptability and innovation in changing environments. Hersey and Blanchard (1982) already suggested this when they emphasized that an effective leader not only listens and observes but also requires a sense of direction to know where their management is headed, as well as the ability to activate effective communication to showcase achievements—skills intrinsically linked to the brain's cognitive and emotional processes.

Thus, with the emergence of neuroleadership as a discipline, the direct influence of brain function on key aspects of managerial behavior has begun to be revealed. In this regard, BeUp (2023) highlights that psychological makeup is a crucial factor in leadership. According to one's own perceptions, it allows for a more effective understanding and approach to the needs and behaviors of collaborators, underscoring the importance of a deep examination of neurobehavioral substrates. However, its systematic application in the specific context of educational institutions is still in its early stages. There is a lack of theoretical and empirical frameworks that explicitly connect neuroleadership with organizational be-

havior in educational management. Ignoring this dimension means missing out on significant potential for developing more conscious and effective educational leaders, capable of fostering optimal work environments.

Therefore, this practical and informational gap hinders the design of innovative management training programs, the formulation of relevant personnel development policies, and the implementation of strategies that consider the neurobiological basis of efficiency and well-being. It is from this problem that the need arises to investigate the influence of neuroleadership on strategic decision-making and organizational climate.

The present analysis finds its justification in the implicit relevance given its dimensions: theoretical, practical and social; particularly in the context of educational management in higher education institutions in Cumaná, Venezuela.

### **Theoretical Relevance**

At a theoretical level, this research seeks to contribute to an emerging and still incipient field of knowledge in the educational field, regarding the influence of Neuroleadership on educational management. This research aspires to:

Connecting neuroscience with educational management: highlighting the gap between traditional management models, based on psychology and sociology, and the neurobiological perspective, offering a more complete conceptual framework.

To provide a foundation for future research: to lay the theoretical groundwork that will allow future studies to empirically explore the application and results of neuroleadership in the Venezuelan education sector.

### **Practical Relevance**

From a practical perspective, the findings of this study will offer valuable tools for educational managers in Cumaná. The research will help to: 1) Improve strategic decision-making: by highlighting how understanding cognitive biases and emotional regulation can lead to more informed and effective decisions, leaders will be equipped with knowledge that goes beyond intuition or experience. 2) Optimize the organizational climate: by providing guidance to managers to understand the neurobiological foundations of motivation, communication, and empathy, enabling them to design more productive, collaborative, and neuro-healthy work environments. 3) Design training programs: the results can serve as input for the design of workshops, diplomas, and management training programs that incorporate neuroleadership principles, addressing the need for innovative leadership training.

### **Social Relevance**

At a societal level, the impact of this research transcends institutions. More effective educational management and a healthier organizational climate have a cascading effect that benefits the entire academic community:

Promoting institutional resilience: informed and conscious management is better able to lead institutions through contexts of crisis and resource scarcity, ensuring the continuity and quality of education.

Human capital development: by promoting a positive and empathetic work environment, we contribute to the well-being and development of teaching and administrative staff, which translates into an improvement in the quality of teaching and the service offered to students.

In summary, this research not only seeks to generate knowledge, but is also projected as a catalyst for the tangible and sustainable improvement of educational management, which is vital for the academic and social development of the State of Sucre and the country.

### **Onto-epistemic contributions**

#### **The Neuroleadership Revolution in Strategic Decision Making**

Understanding the importance of neuroleadership in university institutions, this discipline has emerged as a field that integrates knowledge from cognitive and affective neuroscience to optimize leadership and organizational management processes (Rock & Schwartz, 2006). Its main purpose is the practical application of this knowledge to “enable the school organization to function effectively and achieve the objectives established with the institutional community” (Elías, 2021). This perspective proposes that knowledge of brain function serves as a tool to support university leaders in improving their management skills and, at the same time, effectively influencing the behavior and performance of their teams.

In this sense, neuromanagement and neuroleadership are highly valuable for educational institutions, as well as for any structured organization, since their principles are directly oriented towards improving the actions of a leader whose main task is focused on managing academic and administrative processes (Pedler et al., 2020). Their relevance, therefore, lies in the contributions that help enhance leadership capabilities in order to optimize the performance of those responsible for management, using knowledge about brain mechanisms to take actions that improve organizational functionality and effectiveness.

#### **Traditional View of Decision Making**

In this context, and highlighting the revolution of neu-

roleadership in strategic decision-making, it is appropriate to mention Kahneman's (2011) observation regarding the classical perspective on decision-making, which conceived of human beings as "Homo Economicus," purely rational individuals who carefully calculated advantages and disadvantages to obtain the greatest possible gain. In contrast, neuroleadership and neuroscience studies have consistently demonstrated that decision-making is a much more complex process, substantially influenced by emotions, cognitive biases, and unconscious processes, thus moving away from being exclusively rational.

### Neuroscientific perspective on leadership

This neuroscientific perspective is based on four fundamental aspects that impact decision-making:

**The role of emotions:** Contrary to the idea that emotions are an obstacle, neuroscience maintains that they are fundamental for making sound decisions. Without the ability to access emotional information, people may struggle to make even simple choices, since emotions warn us about potential risks, guide us toward potential rewards, and assist us in evaluating different alternatives.

**Cognitive biases and heuristics:** This refers to the human brain's capacity to employ cognitive simplifications that, while effective, frequently lead to distortions in thinking, as occurs when confirmation or anchoring bias is involved. These biases influence the selective processing of information and decision-making without the individual being fully aware of it. Therefore, neuroleadership explores the neural bases of these biases in order to minimize them. A particular example is the application of neuroleadership to recognize and reduce biases linked to ego or self-projection, which can manifest as narcissistic behavior in leaders. This type of bias can lead to decisions that prioritize personal validation at the expense of collective well-being or institutional objectives, distorting the impartiality required for effective strategic management.

**Unconscious processing:** A significant portion of our decisions originate outside of conscious perception. The brain processes vast amounts of information and generates rapid responses based on experience, memories, intuitions, and known patterns; this typically occurs before conscious reason has a chance to intervene.

**Decision fatigue:** refers to the depletion of the brain's cognitive resources due to the constant process of making continuous decisions. This condition reduces the capacity for self-control and affects the quality of subsequent decisions, leading to the selection of simpler or default options, not necessarily those that would represent the most appropriate or strategic solutions.

These manifestations are based on the functioning of certain brain structures involved in decision-making:

**Prefrontal cortex (PFC)** (Figure 1): essential for executive functions such as planning, complex decision-making, memory, and impulse control. Structurally, the ventromedial prefrontal cortex (vmPFC) plays a key role in integrating emotional information during decision-making, while the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (dlPFC) is linked to analytical reflection and planning.

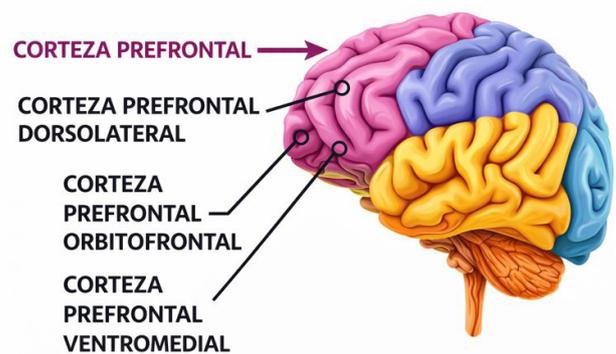


Figure 1. Prefrontal cortex.

**Amygdala** (Figure 2): fundamental in the management of emotions (fear, anger, reward). It intervenes in decision-making through emotional signals, verbal or non-verbal, guiding or altering behavior.

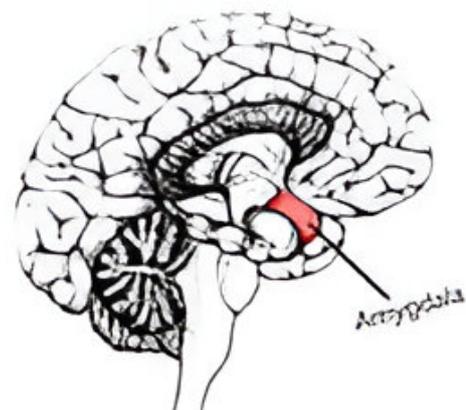


Figure 2. Amygdala.

**Insula** (Figure 3): processes conscious sensations that come from the body's internal organs, and is also related to emotional self-awareness, risk assessment, and loss aversion, contributing to intuitive intelligence or gut reaction during decision-making.

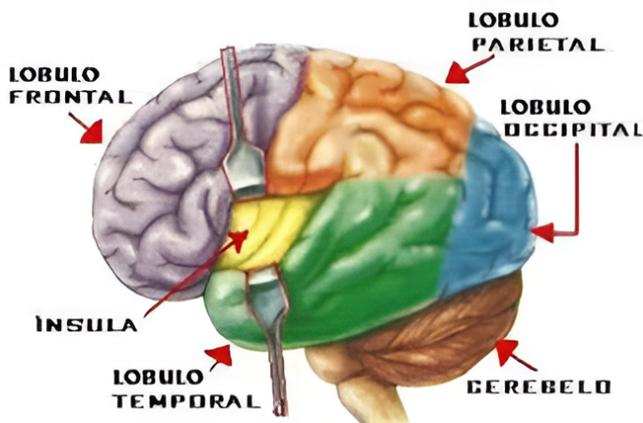


Figure 3. Insula.

As can be seen, neuroleadership suggests that an educational leader cannot rely solely on reason. It is essential that they understand and manage the complexity related to emotions, biases, and unconscious processes that occur both in their own mind and in the minds of their team. This understanding is key to making more informed, intentional, and strategically effective decisions in the ever-changing landscape of university educational management.

### The Influence of Neuroleadership on Improving Organizational Climate

Beyond optimizing decision-making, neuroscience, and specifically neuroleadership, extends its fundamental impact to the realm of organizational climate, a vital aspect for unity, collaboration, and performance in any educational institution. The quality of the work environment is not merely a subjective perception but is deeply rooted in how the mental processes of the individuals within the work team interact.

From this perspective, neuroleadership empowers leaders to:

**Fostering Empathy and Social Cognition:** The human brain is naturally designed to establish social connections. Knowledge of mirror neurons and the systems that facilitate empathy allows educational leaders to understand the emotions, motivations, and intentions of their teaching and administrative staff. A leader who demonstrates empathy, is able to interpret nonverbal cues, and appreciates others' perspectives, can more effectively address the team's needs, reduce conflict, and foster relationships based on mutual trust. In contrast, the absence of genuine empathy, often linked to narcissistic behavior in leaders, can create an environment of distrust and resentment. Neuroleadership provides leaders with the tools to overcome these barriers and avoid toxic environments centered on the managerial ego.

**Optimizing effective communication:** the way information

is transmitted directly impacts the neural responses of the recipient. Neuroleadership states that direct, honest communication, free of ambiguity or threats, contributes to creating an environment of psychological safety within the team. Likewise, communication that stimulates the brain's reward systems through recognition, participation, and positive feedback fosters intrinsic motivation and teamwork. This is fundamental for building environments where ideas flow and innovation flourishes.

**Building trust and collaboration:** Trust is the element that holds together any healthy organizational structure. Its development is based on neurobiological principles linked to the release of oxytocin and the reduction of activity in brain areas associated with fear and mistrust. A leader who implements neuroleadership principles is able to create environments where honesty, consistency in actions, and fulfillment of commitments strengthen the bonds of trust among team members. This fosters cooperation, reduces conflict, and optimizes collective efficiency in favor of achieving institutional objectives.

**Managing stress and promoting well-being:** Prolonged stress in the workplace has detrimental effects on brain function, impacting decision-making, information recall, and emotional regulation. Neuroleadership provides leaders with tools to identify signs of stress in their teams and, more importantly, to implement strategies that minimize its impact. This includes promoting work-life balance, providing cognitive recovery environments, and developing wellness programs that protect the mental health of the workforce, contributing to a more harmonious and productive organizational climate.

Based on these observations, neuroleadership transforms the perception of organizational climate into a concept rooted in human neurobiology, rather than solely linked to sociological aspects. By applying these principles, educational leaders can consciously influence the neural interactions of their teams, fostering a healthy and optimal environment for performance and job satisfaction.

**Implications and Applicability in the Context of Cumaná, Sucre State.**

In this context, the relevance of neuroleadership principles, both for improving strategic decision-making and for optimizing the organizational climate, takes on a fundamental dimension when situated within the reality of higher education institutions in Cumaná, Sucre State. These institutions operate in an environment that presents specific challenges related to the country's socioeconomic and cultural complexity. From this perspective, neuroleadership offers highly useful tools, among which the following can be highlighted:

**Resilience and Management Under Pressure:** In the educational context of Cumaná, resource limitations, infrastruc-

ture shortcomings, and a constantly changing environment are common. The capabilities offered by neuroleadership to enhance a leader's emotional regulation skills and mental resilience are fundamental. An educational manager who is aware of their brain's reactions to stress develops the ability to make calmer, fairer, and more objective decisions, serving as a role model of resilience for their team in order to navigate uncertain circumstances without disrupting the organizational climate.

**Leveraging human talent:** By understanding internal motivators and brain reward systems, leaders can demonstrate the ability to design environments that foster greater engagement and satisfaction, even with limited resources. This is crucial for preserving the productivity and sense of belonging of human talent within the academic sphere of Cumaná's institutions.

**Promoting innovation and local adaptability:** Strategic decisions in Cumaná's institutions need to consider the specific characteristics of their environment to ensure their effectiveness. Leadership that understands the potential of neuroscience can foster greater cognitive adaptability in the decision-making process, promoting innovative responses and solutions tailored to the local context. This approach enhances pedagogical creativity and administrative performance, enabling institutions to respond quickly and effectively to the region's unique demands and opportunities.

**Strengthening institutional cohesion:** a favorable organizational climate, based on trust and effective communication, is a priority for building a unified educational community. In scenarios where neuroleadership is relevant, considering the skills that facilitate the formation of better integrated and more efficient teams, capable of working in harmony to achieve the institution's common goals.

From a global perspective, the application of neuroleadership in higher education institutions, and particularly those in Cumaná, represents not only theoretical progress, but also a significant strategic investment aimed at providing leaders with skills in understanding brain function and, in turn, empowering them to address local challenges with greater resilience, as well as improving their competencies for more informed decision-making, enabling the creation of work environments that maximize human potential in favor of balanced development and the growth of higher education in the region.

## Methodology

The research process unfolds from a documentary methodological perspective, employing a qualitative approach. This selection is considered appropriate given the stated object of study, as the intention is not the collection of primary data in the field, but rather the analysis, interpretation, and

synthesis of information from diverse sources, comparing it with the realities experienced by university institutions in Cumaná. Furthermore, it takes into account the observations of Reyes, Ruiz, and Alvarado (2020), who state that documentary research, in essence, consists of an indirect approach to reality, based on the study of documents, articles, books, and other existing academic works. Its primary purpose is to obtain a comprehensive and systematic overview of the subject matter, establishing relationships and contrasting data from multiple, dispersed sources.

This methodological process unfolds in three main stages, designed to ensure the rigor of the analysis:

**Phase 1. Information Gathering:** An exhaustive search was conducted using academic data, university repositories, and specialized search databases. Documents (scientific articles, theses, books, and conference papers) were selected that address the main categories: neuroleadership, educational management, decision-making, and organizational climate.

**Phase 2. Content Analysis and Synthesis:** This stage involves comparing, critiquing, and interpreting the content and information extracted from the selected documentary sources. The information was organized into predefined categories of analysis, such as the principles of neuroleadership (emotional regulation, social cognition) and their impact on the study variables (decision-making and climate). Using content analysis techniques, the aim is to identify patterns, recurring themes, and relationships between the main conceptualizations (Dulzaides & Molina, 2004).

**Phase 3. Theoretical-Contextual Triangulation:** The application of documentary triangulation techniques aims to contrast theoretical findings with the reality of university management in Cumaná. This critical analysis validates the relevance of neuroleadership theory and generates coherent reflections that connect the principles of this discipline with the specific needs and challenges of the local environment

## Results and discussion

To understand the true relevance of neuroleadership in the university environment of Cumaná, it is essential to make a critical triangulation between the challenges of local management, the limitations of traditional models and the transformative potential of this new approach. This exercise in contrast and synthesis allows us to go beyond theory to validate its relevance in a context of socioeconomic complexity.

### The Context of Cumaná: A Challenge to Traditional Rationality

The management of higher education institutions in Cumaná operates in an environment that challenges the assumptions of the traditional management model. This model,

based on unlimited rationality, as Simon (1957) termed it, assumes that decisions are made in an ideal scenario with complete information and sufficient resources. However, the local reality is characterized by:

**Resource scarcity:** the constant need to make decisions under the pressure of limited budgets generates a high level of stress and decision fatigue in managers.

**Changing environment:** rapid adaptation to technological changes and community demands require flexibility and agility that traditional bureaucratic systems cannot offer.

**Diversity of talents and conflicts:** managing staff with different motivations and the tensions generated by working conditions mean that the simple application of administrative protocols is insufficient to maintain a healthy organizational climate.

At this point, the “Homo Economicus” model proves insufficient, as it does not consider the emotional and cognitive impact that these pressures exert on the leader, leaving an analytical gap regarding the real causes of poor performance or conflicts.

### Neuroleadership as a point of analysis. Connecting Theory and Reality

This is where neuroleadership emerges as a perspective that not only explains the problems but also offers solutions applicable to the Cumaná context. By triangulating observed reality with its neuroscientific principles, we can generate the following connections:

**Decision-making under pressure** (Rock & Schwartz, 2006): Neuroleadership explains that decision fatigue and stress directly affect the prefrontal cortex, the brain region key to planning and logic. Triangulating this principle with the reality of Cumaná suggests that training in emotional regulation and the identification of cognitive biases is not a random option, but a necessity for managers to maintain mental clarity and make effective strategic decisions despite limitations.

**Improving the organizational climate:** In a tense environment, trust and collaboration are fragile. Neuroleadership, by focusing on social cognition and empathy, offers a framework for understanding and reversing this situation. Understanding the neurobiological foundations of motivation allows leaders to foster a work environment that activates the brain’s reward system, promoting employee engagement instead of relying on incentives that, in today’s reality, are scarce.

**Resilience and adaptability:** the ability of universities in Cumaná to survive and thrive in their environment depends on their resilience. Neuroleadership, through the concept of brain plasticity, maintains that leaders can develop new skills

to manage change. This knowledge not only legitimizes continuous training but also transforms it into a strategic tool for building a leadership capable of reinventing itself.

In general terms, this critical analysis argues that the application of neuroleadership in the educational management of institutions in the city of Cumaná is not only a theoretical advancement but also a strategic investment. It offers a direct response to the limitations of traditional models by providing a scientific basis for understanding human behavior at work. By triangulating the general aspects of the local context, it demonstrates that neuroleadership is not an abstract concept but a set of practical tools for developing more conscious, strategic leaders capable of building productive and resilient work environments, even under demanding conditions that can sometimes be limiting.

### Conclusions

This study examines the influence of neuroleadership on educational management in the city of Cumaná, emphasizing its role in strategic decision-making and organizational climate. Based on a literature review, the analysis positions neuroleadership as a transformative framework that goes beyond traditional management models by incorporating insights from human neurobiology to explain managerial behavior. The findings indicate that strategic decisions are shaped not only by rational analysis but also by emotions, cognitive biases, and mental fatigue, and that awareness of these neural processes can enhance the quality and effectiveness of leadership decisions. Likewise, the organizational climate is closely associated with neuro-informed leadership practices, as principles such as emotional regulation, social cognition, and empathy contribute to trust-building, effective communication, and collaborative work environments. Overall, the integration of neuroleadership into educational management emerges as a strategic necessity for higher education institutions in Cumaná, offering a means to improve leadership performance, strengthen team dynamics, and enhance educational quality. Future research is encouraged to empirically assess its application in Venezuelan universities, particularly regarding its effects on staff performance and well-being.

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### Conflicts of interest

The author declares that she has no conflicts of interest.

### Author contributions

**Conceptualization:** Cárdenas, D. J. **Data curation:** Cárdenas, D. J. **Formal analysis:** Cárdenas, D. J. **Research:** Cárdenas, D. J. **Methodology:** Cárdenas, D. J. **Supervision:** Cárdenas, D. J. **Validation:** Cárdenas, D. J. **Visualization:** Cárdenas, D. J. **Writing the original draft:** Cárdenas, D. J. **Writing, review and editing:** Cárdenas, D. J.

### Data availability statement

The datasets used and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

### Statement on the use of AI

The author acknowledges the use of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies to improve the readability and clarity of the article.

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