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Article Research

# The Epistemological Status of Office Administration and Its Implications for Research Processes: The Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica Experience

## El estatus epistemológico de la Administración de oficinas y sus implicaciones para los procesos de investigación: La experiencia de la Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica

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## Abstract

This study addresses the relationship between the epistemological status of office administration and the research lines of the School of Professional Secretarial Studies at the Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica (UNA), as well as its implications for research management. An exploratory qualitative approach was adopted using documentary, discourse, and lexicometric analyses. The study examined theoretical sources, seven academic programs selected through snowball sampling with the participation of ten professionals, and a corpus comprising summaries and excerpts from the proceedings of eight national and international conferences in the field held between 2007 and 2021. The corpus was processed using T-LAB 10 through co-occurrence analysis, co-word analysis, and multidimensional scaling based on Sammon's method. The results indicate that administration constitutes the epistemological core of the field, understood as an auxiliary discipline, while its professional and research practices develop interdisciplinarily. The academic programs present heterogeneous definitions of the object of study and the professional profile. The lexicometric analysis revealed the centrality of the concepts of administration, office, work, organization, and process, as well as four discourse clusters and eight institutional research lines that can be articulated through the dimensions of structure, behavior, and processes. It is concluded that the administrative management of the office could serve as the organizing core of research. Its adoption would make it possible to establish shared criteria for formulating, classifying, and evaluating projects, prevent thematic fragmentation, and leverage interdisciplinarity without diluting the field's object of knowledge.

**Keywords:** Office administration; Epistemology; Research; Interdisciplinarity; Higher education; Research management.

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**Resumen**

Este estudio aborda la relación entre el estatus epistemológico de la administración de oficinas y las líneas de investigación de la Escuela de Secretariado Profesional de la Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica (UNA), así como sus implicaciones para la gestión de la investigación. Se adoptó un enfoque cualitativo exploratorio mediante análisis documental, discursivo y lexicométrico. El estudio examinó fuentes teóricas, siete programas académicos seleccionados mediante muestreo de bola de nieve con la participación de diez profesionales, y un corpus integrado por síntesis y fragmentos de las memorias de ocho congresos nacionales e internacionales del campo realizados entre 2007 y 2021. El corpus se procesó con T-LAB 10 mediante análisis de co-ocurrencias, análisis de co-palabras y escalamiento multidimensional basado en el método de Sammon. Los resultados indican que la administración constituye el núcleo epistemológico del campo, entendido como una disciplina auxiliar, mientras que sus prácticas profesionales e investigativas se desarrollan de manera interdisciplinaria. Los programas académicos presentan definiciones heterogéneas del objeto de estudio y del perfil profesional. El análisis lexicométrico reveló la centralidad de los conceptos de administración, oficina, trabajo, organización y proceso, así como cuatro agrupaciones discursivas y ocho líneas institucionales de investigación que pueden articularse mediante las dimensiones de estructura, comportamiento y procesos. Se concluye que la gestión administrativa de la oficina podría funcionar como núcleo articulador de la investigación. Su adopción permitiría establecer criterios compartidos para formular, clasificar y evaluar proyectos, prevenir la fragmentación temática y aprovechar la interdisciplinariedad sin diluir el objeto de conocimiento del campo.

**Palabras clave:** Administración de oficinas; Epistemología; Investigación; Interdisciplinariedad; Educación superior; Gestión de la investigación.

## Introduction

The academic offerings from higher education institutions reveal epistemological discourses and perspectives that prioritize or marginalize fields of knowledge. In Costa Rica, the shaping of the institutional identity of public universities and majors reflected Benjamín Núñez's and Rodrigo Facio's ideas about a social state under the rule of law and a modern social vision. During the 1970s, some majors with this approach emerged at the Universidad Nacional and the Universidad de Costa Rica; nevertheless, their discursive articulation with the modernity project did not occur with the same intensity or clarity in all fields of knowledge (Salas Ocampo & Fuster Baraona, 2023).

The epistemological status of a discipline also depends on its research focus. In office administration, the historical linkage with administration, technology, communication, and transformations of workspaces and processes generated an interdisciplinary configuration with a conceptual core that is not always clearly delimited. This situation hinders the establishment of distinctive phenomena, the alignment with its fields of knowledge, and the way in which its epistemological

framework guides the research. Thus, the epistemological status is also related to the articulation among theoretical knowledge, the validation methods used, and the practical and reflexive exercise performed in its professional field (Mendoza, 2018).

This article analyzes the relationship between the epistemological status of office administration in Costa Rica and the research lines of the School of Professional Secretarial Studies of the Universidad Nacional during the 2023–2024 period. Its implications for research processes are understood in terms of the effects that the exercise of epistemological boundary-setting has on the formulation, classification, and evaluation of projects, the articulation of institutional research lines, and the definition of disciplinary contributions involved in studying the office.

## Method

The research question is: What is the alignment between the epistemological status of office administration in Costa Rica and the research lines of the School of Professional Secretarial Studies of the Universidad Nacional during the 2023–2024 period? This field was selected for epistemological delimitation because of its professional relevance in Costa Rica. According to the 2022 data of the Labor Observatory of Professions of the National Council of Rectors of Costa Rica (Observatorio Laboral de Profesiones [OLAP], 2023), office administration is among the disciplines with the highest employability, job satisfaction, and expectations of further study among professionals.

This study aims to:

1. Identify the characteristics of the disciplinary thinking of office administration in relation to the theoretical frameworks of administration and other disciplines, in order to establish its conceptual tools for professional practice.
2. Examine the relationship between the field-level approach to knowledge and the professional profiles targeted by international institutions offering the major, compared with the academic offering at the Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica.
3. Determine the potential lines of research development based on consolidated areas of knowledge from the School of Professional Secretarial Studies of the Universidad Nacional.

Due to the emerging nature of the field, a qualitative exploratory approach was adopted. Lexicometric procedures were used to reveal associations among the units within the documentary corpus. Theoretical works were analyzed with a primary focus on the School of Professional Secretarial Studies of the Universidad Nacional. The selection and processing of documents were aligned with each specific objective (See **Table 1**).

**Table 1.** Inquiry Concordance Framework

| Construct | Category of analysis | Subcategories |
|---|---|---|
| Epistemological status | Mechanisms to construct thought | Binding nature to management and architecture |
| Area of knowledge | Discourse orientation | Discursive Location of the Area in the Evolution of the Social Sciences |
| | Use of discourse in operational areas | Approach to higher education offerings |
| | Evolution of professional career | Exercise of academic reflection in the field |
| Lines of research | Identification of management areas | Structural link with the construction of the object |
| | Taxonomy of institutionalized work areas | Clarification of thematic lines |

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

## Theoretical and documentary review

Classical administration theory was reviewed to establish alignments with office administration. Sources related to the epistemology of administration, fields of knowledge, the evolution of workspaces, and transformations of the office were prioritized. Sources from Fayol (1994), Penrose (1959), Haeckel (2000), Saavedra Mayorga (2006) and Jurado Jurado (2018) provide inputs for the objective. The studies of Mendoza (2018), Gómez Marín (2010), Creswell (2014), Mannheim (2004), and Salas Ocampo and Fuster Baraona (2023) contributed to defining the scope of the epistemological status and to the construction of objects of knowledge. Cracogna Blasco (2019), Myerson and Ross (2002, 2003) and Brinkø et al. (2015) made it possible to address the concept of the office and its spatial, technological, and organizational transformations. The analysis focused on identifying concepts, disciplinary links and theoretical premises that would allow characterizing the object of study and establishing its link with administration and other areas of knowledge.

## Selection and analysis of academic programs

A qualitative sample was developed using the snowball sampling technique. Ten Costa Rican professionals with academic experience in the field from Universidad Nacional and Universidad Estatal a Distancia were interviewed. The criteria for selecting them were experience and participation in programs, projects, and academic activities. In the first stage, they identified institutions and majors with which they had maintained professional or academic ties. In the second stage, external links, contacts, and references related to the previously mentioned offerings were examined. To consolidate the selection, the following criteria were applied.

- Availability of relevant academic programs aligned with the target discipline.
- Availability of verifiable institutional data
- Availability of a defined professional profile
- Available information on the functions and competencies of the graduates.
- Possibility to establish comparisons with the major of Office Administration from the Universidad Nacional

The chain of referrals made it possible to identify seven institutions that met the defined criteria. All of them were selected, and there were no exclusions.

1. EAE Business School Online in Spain.
2. School of Professional Secretarial Studies of the Universidad Nacional
3. School of Social Sciences and Humanities from Universidad Estatal a Distancia de Costa Rica.
4. Fanshawe College.
5. Riverside City College.
6. Universidad de Puerto Rico en Bayamón.
7. Universidad Ana G. Méndez de Puerto Rico.

There is a concentration of institutions in the Americas and Europe due to the academic and professional networks of the people interviewed and the links identified during the sampling. For this reason, the selection does not claim to represent the entire international offering. For each institution, the determination and definition of the field, the professional profile, the core functions of graduates, and the emphasis given to technical and socio-professional competencies were analyzed. In addition, the curricula of the Office Administration and Commercial Education majors corresponding to 2021 were examined separately through a documentary analysis. Curricular organization, areas of training, the professional profile, and their connection with the delimitation of the domain of knowledge were considered. These documents were not incorporated into the corpus processed by T-LAB.

### Analysis of institutional work areas and research lines

Documents from different areas of the School of Professional Secretarial Studies of the Universidad Nacional were examined. The research findings derived from the Methodological Innovation Program within UNA's School of International Relations resulted from the workshop developed by academics of this faculty during 2023 to delve deeper into the topic. These inputs enabled cross-examination to contrast the categories derived from the theoretical and lexicometric analysis with the institutionalized areas of work.

### Corpus Formation

The corpus comprises eight proceedings of national and international conferences held between 2007 and 2021: five on office administration and three on commercial education. These studies demonstrate the thematic, conceptual, and professional evolution of the field. A synthesis highlighting core contents was developed and key excerpts concerning the definition of office administration, areas of knowledge, professional practice, and research orientation were selected. The names, concepts, and relevant expressions of the original documents were retained to preserve the lexical-discourse pattern analyzed. The syntheses and selected excerpts were combined into a unified corpus to identify the lexical associations and the conceptual patterns across the field's discourse rather than to compare congresses individually.

### Processing via T-LAB

A quantitative analysis of the discourse was performed using T-LAB software, version 10.6.4 (Lancia, 2023). The corpus revealed 686 occurrences and 321 different lexical forms of which 229 correspond to unique instances of occurrence. The corpus was segmented into 23 core contexts, used as units to calculate the relationships of co-occurrence. Lemmatization was applied and a minimum threshold of four occurrences was established for their selection. Furthermore, a co-word analysis was conducted to identify links of proximity and conceptual associations within the corpus. In addition, Sammon's stress analysis was used to represent the relationships between lexical units in a two-dimensional space by means of multidimensional scaling, which made it possible not only to graphically identify four lexical clusters, differentiated by color, but also to examine the proximities among terms that comprise the discursive space. The technique contributed to identifying convergences and tensions between traditional and emerging concepts linked to office administration. In addition, the concepts preceding and succeeding the term office were examined. The term was selected because it is the central nucleus of the field studied. The results were compared with the curricular framework, the school's work areas, the institutional research lines, and the 2023 workshop products.

## Results

### An approach to the epistemological status of office administration

Establishing the epistemological status implies understanding how knowledge is acquired, alongside the criteria for verifying truth and its typologies. Epistemology combines existing theoretical knowledge with methods of validation through a practical and reflexive exercise. It involves revealing where thoughts are conceived and their discursive structure, how knowledge is produced, and how it is applied (Mendoza, 2018). It demands coherent alignment among the object, theoretical foundations, methods of production, knowledge validation, and the possibilities of

application within organizations. In this study, administration is conceived as a social science that articulates theoretical, methodological, and practical dimensions while maintaining interdisciplinary links that help interpret organizational complexity (Tantalean Tapia, 2023).

## An approach to office administration from the management perspective

The object of study in administration is the organization. It addresses processes that guide people toward the fulfillment of institutional goals (Penrose, 1959; Haeckel, 2000). Administration encompasses teleological functions of the organization (vision-mission-objectives), its structural definition, the design of management mechanisms and performance monitoring. Within this framework, the question arises: from what foundation can an area of knowledge such as office administration be established, based on the disciplinary specificity of administration? Drawing from the functions of the organization, the concepts of broad and restricted administration emerge (Fayol, 1994). The former undertakes the governance of the organization whereas the latter deals with technical assumptions. The administrative function is one of the six functions Fayol defined, particularly coordination, which encompasses linking, uniting, and harmonizing all actions and efforts (Fayol, 1994). Scientific management provides a distinct focus for office management, as it operationalizes one of the core theoretical premises of its approach: direct intervention in a basic unit such as the office.

> Oversight by the director ensured the appropriation of the workers' practical knowledge about their work, reducing it to a mechanism of standardized time and motion that excluded traditional methods considered inefficient compared to management's intensive designs. This dynamic gave rise to an administrative function grounded in a categorical disassociation and hierarchy between manual and intellectual work (Jurado Jurado, 2018, p. 84).

Management of office procedures fosters the technical appropriation of knowledge of frontline office staff to apply mechanisms that affect general functions of the organization, and thus intellectual work directly influences the manual work of the organization. This perspective makes it possible to observe the transition of a specialized worker who relies on technical knowledge to perform intellectual work at the office. The office worker aligns technical abilities with intellectual capabilities. Office administration also encompasses workplace transformation processes that generate substantive actions, understanding the impact that the decisions of middle operational levels have on final products and processes.

In administration, it is understood that an office-centered field of knowledge does not have an independent epistemological particularity; instead, it serves as an auxiliary discipline for specific administrative processes that operate at restricted and technical levels or provide a potential connection between manual and intellectual

levels in the administrative function. This condition does not imply that it is restricted to the technical execution of administrative tasks. Its focus is developed by articulating knowledge derived from administration, technology, communication, information management, and human relationships within organizational contexts. Such convergence reveals its interdisciplinary character, as office management requires integration of knowledge, tools, and competencies from multiple disciplines. In the educational domain, office administration has been recognized as able to establish interdisciplinary links with other professional fields by integrating technology, collaborative workflows, and competencies oriented to active employment (White & Miller, 2014).

## What is technically meant when talking about the office?

The concept of the office has multiple approaches, though it has rarely been deeply explored from a theoretical perspective. Two aspects have been considered useful for establishing its epistemological foundations: first, architecture, and second, higher education offerings.

## The architectural approach

The office was conceived as a physical space for administrative, productive, and storage functions. Its conception evolved within the framework of economic, social, and technological transformations of work, moving from hierarchical structures inspired by industrial production to more flexible spaces designed for interpersonal interaction (Cracogna Blasco, 2019).

In the twenty-first century, Myerson and Ross (2002; 2003) establish four conceptions of office: narrative, nodal, neighborhood, and nomadic. Each of them shows the identity of the organization, the knowledge circulation, social interaction, and the possibility to work from different locations. In addition, hybrid, remote, and distributed work modalities deepen this transformation as they align activities, relationships and technological resources beyond a defined physical space (Itam & Warrier, 2024). The evidence also suggests that hybrid work is associated with increased job satisfaction and reduced turnover (Bloom et al., 2024).

This process, from the architectural perspective, allows us to understand the office as a product of organizational design where space, technology, communication, information, coordination, and human resources converge. Therefore, the office emerges as an object of study of the social sciences that connects specific operational tasks to the broader functioning of the organization, moving beyond a purely physical analysis. This expansion fosters new lines of research related to digital transformation, hybrid work, document and information management, organizational communication, innovation, professional competencies, and human relationships, all conceived as articulated dimensions around office administration management.

## Insights into the evolution of the social sciences and the approach to office administration

Creswell highlights the importance of inquiring into epistemology, theories of knowledge, theoretical perspectives, philosophical positions, action plans that align with methods, results, and techniques in the research process to approach the construction of objects of study (Creswell, 2014). Looking back at the historical trajectory, it is essential to see how office administration has established itself as a domain of knowledge. Social sciences have visualized two perspectives. One seeks to explain the totalizing sense or teleological nature of reality; the other seeks to understand the human being through their individual or collective particularities.

In their evolutionary process, areas such as economics or political science have been framed in that totalizing perspective. Likewise, disciplines such as anthropology have tackled the challenge of interpreting cultural signification processes based on different scopes and particular practices.

Ever since the economic outlook became clear around 1750, a world-system with diverse variables of understanding and interpreting the relationships among economic actors was developed (Wallerstein, 1984). Between 1870 and 1911, administration underwent a period of theoretical formulation and conceptualization where the scientific foundations of the discipline were created (Saavedra Mayorga, 2006). This emerging field captured both the overall systemic dynamics and operations, giving rise to office administration as a field of knowledge that operationalizes this synergy. This became its launchpad, intersecting with secretarial work, which gained more relevance in 1873 with the invention of the typewriter. This technological advancement revolutionized the ways of approaching administrative practices and professionalized secretarial roles. These administrative dynamics created an intermediate professional profile between macro-level administrative goals and specific operational tasks within the office environment.

In 1950, the number of secretarial professionals expanded, centered on technical and operational tasks, in roles that would ultimately evolve toward complex intellectual labor. In Costa Rica, after the 1948 Civil War, a social state was structurally developed in line with Weberian principles of bureaucratic rationality, and an extensive institutional apparatus was established to position the state as a primary employer across social domains. With this expansion and the growing commercial dynamics fostered by the import substitution model, the demand for office support—specifically, secretarial professionals—surged rapidly. This trend developed in Latin America as a movement toward professional institutionalization. A key manifestation of this was the founding of the Inter-American Federation of Secretaries in 1970 (Federación Interamericana de Asociaciones de Secretarias [FIAS], 2024), in which Costa Rica, with other neighboring countries, actively advocated for elevating the discipline to university-level academic status.

## Office administration in higher education curricula

The current higher education offerings reveal a wide array of terms used to designate the professional field and divergent perspectives of the discipline's scope. This approach privileges operational skills while showing limitations in establishing a clear object of study from an epistemological point of view. This may imply the absence of a specific object of study or the dilution of its identity in other adjacent fields, complicating the theoretical justification of the office as the essential object of study. This results in using specific theoretical frameworks from administration to analyze the office environment; however, a heterogeneous diversity of research interests from other fields outside the social sciences renders the discipline diffuse. Academic offerings may reflect an identity conflict between two poles. On one side, the confinement to technical secretarial tasks; on the other, an interdisciplinary struggle over areas of knowledge to include in the education offerings that shape the direction of the research in the field. **Table 2** illustrates the curricular landscape.

**Table 2.** Office administration programs in selected higher education institutions (2024).

| Institution, program, and country | Definition of the field of knowledge | Definition of the professional in the field |
|---|---|---|
| EAE Business School, Diploma - Spain | Allocation of physical resources—such as supplies and office space—and scheduling of internal events. | Person responsible for administrative activities of the company or organization (Equipo EAE Online, 2023). |
| School of Professional Secretarial Studies, Universidad Nacional, Diploma, bachelor's, and licentiate degrees - Costa Rica | The object of study is the office where the remaining disciplines converge. Hub for interpersonal interaction, information management, and development of processes. | Manages information, and technological and material resources; applies technical skills in Spanish and English; and organizes and coordinates administrative assistance tasks (Universidad Nacional, 2024). |
| School of Social Sciences and Humanities, UNED, Diploma - Costa Rica | Does not explicitly define the object of knowledge. | Critically analyzes their environment, manages problems and conflicts through leadership, and promotes fair and equitable environments (Universidad Estatal a Distancia, 2024). |
| Fanshawe College, Diploma - Canada | Does not explicitly define the object of knowledge. | Develops basic communication skills, problem solving, computer applications, accounting, and office procedures (Fanshawe College, 2024). |
| Riverside City College, Diploma - United States | Knowledge and skills to perform intermediate-level administrative and office tasks. | Performs secretarial tasks and uses accounting software to produce management information (Riverside City College, 2024). |

Table 2 continues on next page

Office administration programs in selected higher education institutions (2024) (Cont.).

| Institution, program, and country | Definition of the field of knowledge | Definition of the professional in the field |
|---|---|---|
| Universidad Ana G. Méndez, Bachelor's degree in Business Administration with a concentration in Administrative Secretarial - United States (Puerto Rico) | Application of software programs and use of specialized office equipment. | Performs administrative tasks, prepares financial documents and reports, trains and supervises support staff, and interacts effectively with clients (Universidad Ana G. Méndez, 2024). |

Source: Information gathered by the authors from the websites of the educational institutions.

The field of knowledge focuses on the management of physical resources, coordination of internal events, and administrative support. Practice, seen through educational offerings, privileges an epistemological status along the lines of office administration as an auxiliary discipline of administration. Some institutions define their fields more as a practical administrative focus; others emphasize social interaction and interdisciplinarity with the social sciences.

The professional is characterized as the person who handles administrative tasks ranging from organizing meetings and writing reports to overseeing administrative processes and supervising staff. Effective communication is strongly emphasized. Notably, differences arise in the scope of responsibilities. Some institutions view the professionals as decision-makers with a leading role in project management; others see them strictly as administrative support. Furthermore, some institutions aim to train professionals with strong technical abilities (hard skills), while others, instead, focus primarily on qualities like leadership and professional ethics.

## Lexicometric evidence on the knowledge structures of office administration

The discourse mirrors the construction of knowledge. Words reveal the differences, consensus, and tensions within the professional reality of the actors. This study sought to identify the predecessor and successor concepts surrounding the notion of office. Previously, office administration was established as an auxiliary discipline to management; however, it lacks a clearly defined conceptual roadmap for actions beyond secretarial techniques. **Figure 1** illustrates the discourse behavior of the School of Professional Secretarial Studies and its relation to the concept of office.

Administration as a concept supports and justifies the term office. Associated words such as work, organization, and process suggest the relevance of Fayol's perspective of restricted administration and of scientific management regarding the appropriation of workers' knowledge and the need to generate intellectual work (Jurado Jurado, 2018). These epistemological views of administration could be deeply embedded in the underlying structure of the language used by office administration professionals.

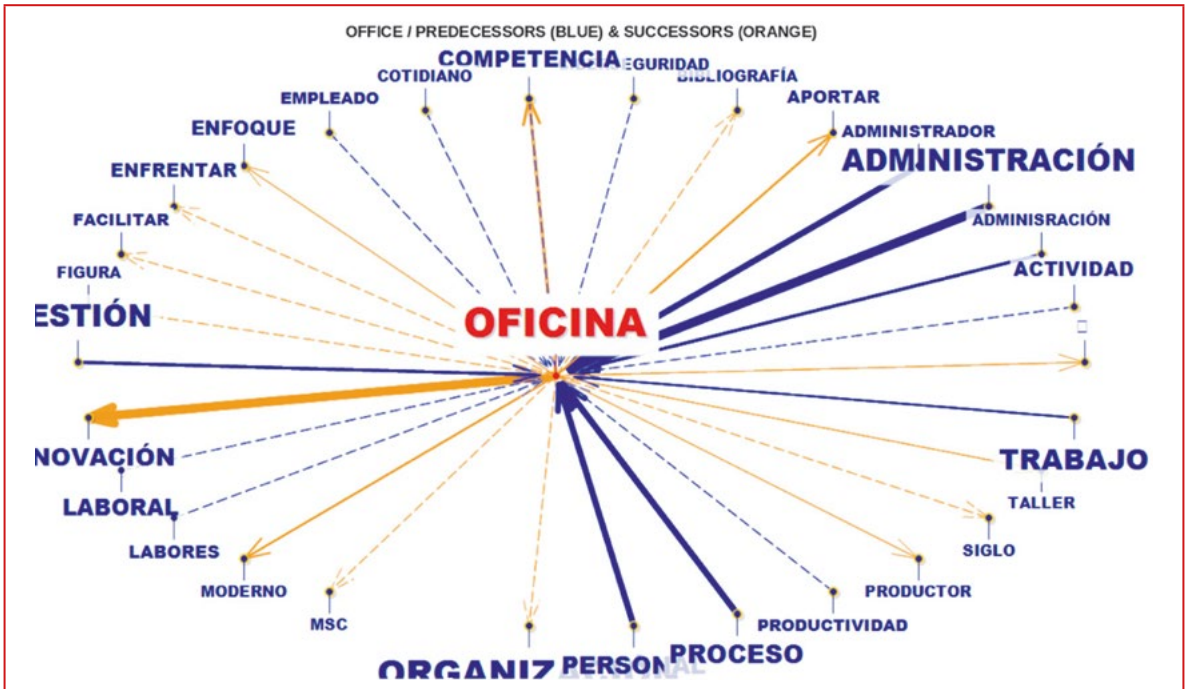



**Figure 1.** Predecessor and successor concepts of "office" in UNA's institutional corpus

Source: Data collected by the authors using T-LAB software. Terms appear in Spanish as in the original corpus.

Language constitutes a system of finite and infinite sentences governed by generative rules that allow the creation of new expressions. There are two levels of structure (Chomsky, 2004): deep structure (core meaning) and surface structure (the intention to execute an action through parameters of comprehension). The successor concepts suggest the existence of the first structure, which shapes and re-signifies specific practices of the knowledge domains. From there emerge concepts such as innovation, modernity, and competence, which align with other fields that are beginning to emerge within the School of Professional Secretarial Studies as they interface with language and technology. This situation becomes more evident when analyzing the Sammon's Stress matrix derived from the document corpus (See **Figure 2**).

A two-dimensional representation makes it possible to examine relative proximities among lexical units and to identify four graphically distinct discursive clusters. They reveal proximity among concepts traditionally linked to the administrative core (administration and organization). This pattern, alongside professional contributions, suggests some tension between the field's administrative foundation and its interdisciplinary expansion. This tension is institutionally revealed in the research lines of the School of Professional Secretarial Studies at UNA where traditional and emerging areas converge. They are:

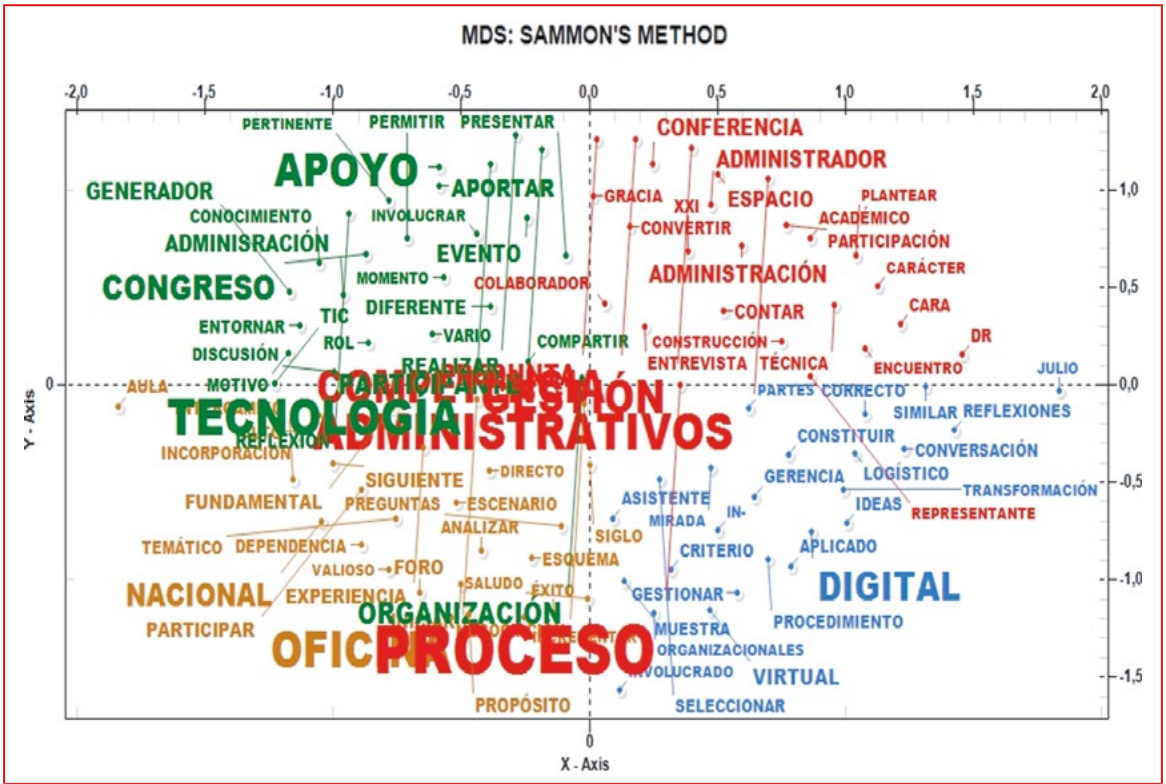



**Figure 2.** Sammon's map of the UNA secretarial studies corpus

Source: Data collected by the authors using T-LAB software. Terms appear in Spanish as in the original corpus.

1. Administrative Processes in the Office
2. Information Technologies
3. Communication in Office Processes
4. Innovation in Office Management
5. Innovation in Documents Management
6. Secretarial Competencies in Office Management
7. Document Production in Management
8. Linguistic Competencies in Office Management

Updating these research lines highlights the need to consolidate office administration as the articulating core and, consequently, to review the curricula, programs, and criteria of the Graduation Project Committee.

## Notes toward a consolidation proposal within the epistemological framework of the discipline

The status of the School of Professional Secretarial Studies at Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica suggests some guiding lines for research. Firstly, the direct alignment with administration and business sciences grants a more favorable epistemological

foundation for the professional practice. In this regard, **Figure 3** illustrates the epistemological positioning of office administration from this perspective.

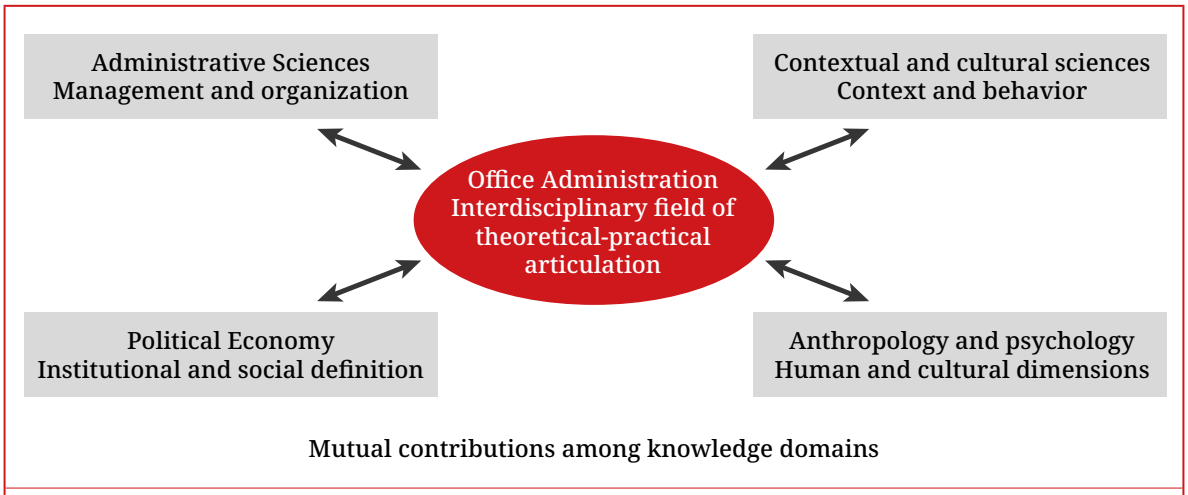



**Figure 3.** Epistemological status of office administration in Costa Rica

Source: Data gathered by the authors.

Office Administration as a supporting discipline to management allows it to address a core structural concern, as it is the teleological overview of organizational reality with contextual, group, and individual dimensions. This presents a strategic window for integrating areas such as communication and language, soft skills, and technical competencies that have an impact on professional positioning processes (students, graduates, academics, employers).

The taxonomic approach grounded in the reality of UNA's School of Professional Secretarial Studies demonstrates that office administrative management is the overarching conceptual framework that integrates three substantial elements of the discipline. Office administration management connects to both narrow and broad concepts of administration, as well as the transition from manual or mechanical organizational tasks to their rationalization. In the case of UNA, the structure, behavior, and administrative management processes of the office constitute the three dimensions of the object of study, as illustrated in **Figure 4**.

The structure encompasses the mechanisms for establishing functional entities within the organization (which links to the concept of office), the institutional management of rational levels of corporate bureaucratization and its functional organization (which links to work division processes), and the hierarchical dynamics for middle-management operations. Behavior is understood as the various communicative, psychosocial, and political processes generated around management; thus, disciplines such as communication and complementary fields contribute to supporting this auxiliary discipline. Processes refer to a sequence of specific steps that the office performs to carry out its operations from a logical perspective aimed at generating

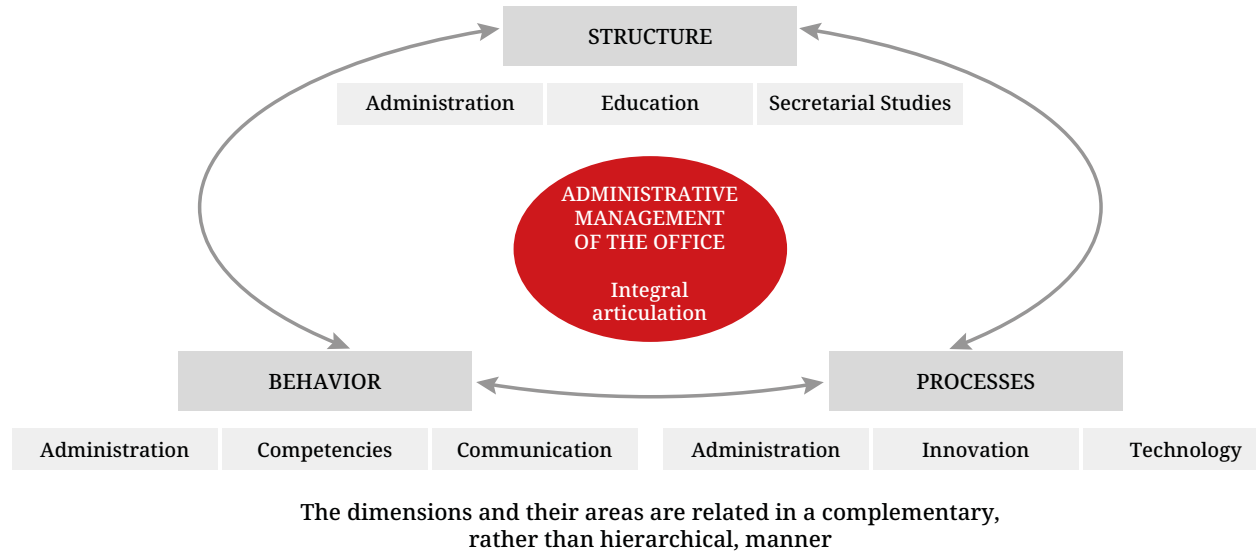



**Figure 4.** Object of study of Office Administration

Source: Data collected by the authors.

efficient and effective actions. This connects directly with the domains of innovation and technology.

This visualization suggests two pivotal decisions that allow the implementation of this proposed object of study in office administration. The first is recognizing the rich epistemological and conceptual framework of the administrative sciences to address office-centered phenomena and its capacity to link with other areas of knowledge. The second is identifying the cross-cutting nature of this domain, across the behavior and the processes of the office. These elements, as foundational pillars of this supporting discipline, are interlinked with administration, technology, communication and research. It is argued that the actions generated by UNA within this academic unit, encompassing activities of continuous improvement, quality management and degree accreditation processes, aimed at achieving national and international standards, represent a step in the right direction.

## Discussion

In response to the research question, the epistemological status of office administration is linked to the research lines of UNA's School of Professional Secretarial Studies, as it provides them with a conceptual core derived from administration. Meanwhile, academic and professional initiatives expand this core through technological support, communication, innovation, document management and professional competencies.

The results of the three objectives converge in demonstrating that the field possesses an identifiable administrative foundation, a heterogeneous educational offering, and interdisciplinary lines of research that require coordination mechanisms that prevent the fragmentation of its object of study.

A constitutive tension has emerged in office administration arising from its epistemological status and its practices, where the former states the field's conceptual foundation while the latter develops at both the professional and research levels through interdisciplinary relationships. Interdisciplinarity is not opposed to its status of auxiliary discipline; rather, it expands its scope to study the office as a complex organizational reality. However, its strength carries implications for research management. Without tools that facilitate recognition of the administrative core of the addressed problems, and simultaneously, explain collaboration from other disciplines, the risk is that research lines break down into distinct thematic areas. If this tension is not addressed, the research projects could swing like a pendulum between a restricted view of secretarial tasks and a broad interdisciplinary approach that would end up diluting the office as an object of study. Substantive and hard-to-reconcile differences might emerge regarding the criteria to select research topics, methodological approaches, and technical orientations alongside management issues in making decisions on final graduation projects. It is argued that this tension is manageable. The results suggest adopting administrative office management as the articulating core of research. Restrictive hierarchies among areas should be avoided; instead, the areas should converge as contributing dimensions to understand issues related to organization, human relations, information, and office-based processes.

The secretarial tradition provides a historical and identity foundation for the field, but its own evolution has demonstrated that it cannot be confined to carrying out technical tasks; rather, it has allowed office administration to establish an identifiable epistemological origin, along with an identity framework for expansion. Thus, research management should leverage this dual condition: maintaining the clarity of the administrative foundation while fostering interdisciplinarity as a mechanism of conceptual, methodological and professional enrichment. Consolidating shared criteria to formulate, classify, and evaluate research would transform the observed tension into a source of disciplinary development.

## Conclusions

It is established that office administration possesses an identifiable epistemological core within administrative sciences. Its epistemological status belongs to an auxiliary discipline. This does not limit it to performing technical tasks; rather, it provides a foundation to address the office as an organizational space where people, information, technology, processes, and professional relationships converge.

The comparison of seven educational programs demonstrates a heterogeneous delimitation of the field and professional profiles. This diversity confirms the interdisciplinary nature of the professional practice and reveals the urgency to explicitly define and manage an object of study capable of integrating its diverse areas, preventing office administration from diluting into independent disciplinary fields.

At UNA's School of Professional Secretarial Studies, the discursive analysis revealed the centrality of concepts such as administration, office, work, organization, and process alongside emergent domains related to technology, communication, innovation, document management, and professional competencies. The eight identified research lines suggest a link between the administrative foundation and interdisciplinary field expansion. To strengthen this articulation, administrative office management and the dimensions of structure, behavior, and processes will play a pivotal role. The main consequence for UNA's research is the need to establish an epistemological and technical starting point to enable the creation of shared criteria for formulating, classifying and evaluating projects according to the administrative management problem addressed, the dimension where they are situated, the disciplinary contributions they incorporate, and the institutional research line to which they contribute. Thus, interdisciplinarity becomes a potential source of conceptual and methodological enrichment, rather than a cause of thematic fragmentation or conflicts over the domain of specific areas. Consolidating this would strengthen research lines and final graduation projects, and would support the updating of the School's academic curricula.

## Limitations

A limitation is the intentional nature of the snowball sampling, based on referrals from ten professionals. Consequently, the selected institutions do not represent the entirety of international degree offerings, resulting in a geographical concentration of cases from the Americas and Europe.

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### Ethical Considerations

The authors declare that there are no ethical implications that need to be reported regarding the preparation and publication of this article.

### Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest. Furthermore, they state that they have no personal circumstances or interests that could be perceived as inappropriately influencing the presentation or interpretation of the research results.

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The authors declare that no artificial intelligence tools were used in the design, analysis, interpretation of results, or writing of this manuscript.

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