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Socio-emotional Competencies in Public-Sector Labor Productivity

Competencias socioemocionales en la productividad laboral del sector público

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to determine the influence of social-emotional competencies on the work productivity of public sector employees. The research was conducted using a quantitative approach with a descriptive-explanatory scope and a non-experimental cross-sectional design. The population consisted of 842 workers, from which a probabilistic sample of 404 employees was drawn. Data were collected using a survey and a questionnaire validated by expert judgment, achieving a Cronbach's alpha reliability of 0.955 for social-emotional competencies and 0.922 for productivity. The results indicate a moderate positive association (R = 0.619), where the socio-emotional dimensions explain 38.3% of the variability in productivity (R^2 = 0.383); the remaining 61.7% depends on external factors such as infrastructure and technology. The regression analysis demonstrated that the four dimensions (self-regulation, social awareness, self-awareness, and relationship management) have a significant influence (Sig. < 0.05), with self-regulation standing out as the predictor with the greatest relative impact (B = 0.694; Sig. = 0.003). It is concluded that human talent and emotional maturity constitute the critical determinants of government efficiency, validating that strengthening these competencies directly enhances the baseline level of productivity and organizational success.

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Keywords: Social-emotional skills, efficiency, effectiveness, soft skills, workplace productivity.

Resumen

El presente estudio tuvo como objetivo determinar la influencia de las competencias socioemocionales en la productividad laboral de los trabajadores del sector público. La investigación se desarrolló bajo un enfoque cuantitativo, de alcance descriptivo-explicativo y un diseño no experimental de corte transversal. La población estuvo conformada por 842 trabajadores, de la cual se extrajo una muestra probabilística de 404 colaboradores. Para la recolección de datos se utilizó la técnica de la encuesta y un cuestionario validado mediante juicio de expertos, alcanzando una fiabilidad de Alfa de Cronbach de 0.955 para las competencias socioemocionales y 0.922 para la productividad. Los resultados indican una asociación positiva moderada (R=,619), donde las dimensiones socioemocionales explican el 38.3% de la variabilidad en la productividad R^2 =0.383; el 61.7% restante depende de factores externos como infraestructura y tecnología. El análisis de regresión demostró que las cuatro dimensiones (autorregulación, conciencia social, autoconciencia y gestión de relaciones) influyen significativamente (Sig.<0.05), destacando la autorregulación como el predictor de mayor impacto relativo (B=0.694; Sig.=0.003). Se concluye que el talento humano y su madurez emocional constituyen los determinantes críticos de la eficiencia estatal, validando que el fortalecimiento de estas competencias potencia directamente el nivel base de productividad y el éxito organizacional.

Palabras clave: Competencias socioemocionales, eficiencia, eficacia, habilidades blandas, productividad laboral.

Introduction

Soft skills, also referred to as socio-emotional competencies or non-cognitive abilities, comprise a set of essential aptitudes that enable individuals to interact effectively and efficiently within their environment. These capabilities not only foster personal and professional growth but also prove decisive for successful adaptation in shifting labor contexts. According to Cherniss and Goleman (2001), such competencies form the foundation for fluid interaction both within and beyond organizations, allowing workers to understand and manage their emotions so as to confront adverse situations constructively.

Within the framework of the so-called "fourth industrial revolution," driven by globalization, artificial intelligence, and rapid technological advancement, the labor market has undergone a profound transformation in the competitive profiles it demands. In this context, technical knowledge or hard skills alone no longer suffice for success. Modern organizations require human capital capable of cultivating creativity to generate value, demonstrating flexibility in the face of change, and responding proactively to contemporary social challenges, given that people constitute the most important asset of any institution.

Nevertheless, numerous public-sector institutions clearly face crises in the quality of their services, marked by delays in administrative procedures and a steady rise in user complaints, which severely undermines institutional prestige. This critical situation is directly linked to a deficit in the development of staff soft skills, which restricts institutional responsiveness and the fulfilment of established goals. As Gómez (2021) argues, the absence of these skills not only produces inefficient services and distrust but also generates internal conflicts, demotivation, and poor work performance, preventing the levels of productivity and quality that citizens expect.

This issue merits close attention precisely because public administration can only reach adequate quality standards when its staff are engaged and possess the interpersonal aptitudes efficient performance requires. The present study therefore carries both practical and social relevance. From a practical standpoint, it contributes empirical evidence together with descriptive and inferential results that can guide Human Resources offices toward informed decisions on recruiting suitable personnel and designing training programs that strengthen human talent. Socially, cultivating these skills ensures that public officials deliver efficient, quality service, key to meeting user expectations and enhancing an institution's standing in society. Methodologically, the study reinforces technical practice by offering validated, reliable instruments for measuring how human capital drives state competitiveness and innovation. Because human talent is the principal determinant of productivity, these tools allow institutions to design appropriate strategies for optimizing their processes, turning workers' knowledge and experience into tangible gains for both customer service and organizational culture.

It is worth noting that the theoretical grounding of this study rests on the model of emotional intelligence of Cherniss and Goleman (2001), which organizes competencies into four core dimensions:

self-awareness, social awareness, self-regulation, and relationship management. Labor productivity, in turn, is defined following Chiavenato et al. (2009) and Koontz et al. (2016), who understand it as a performance measure that brings together efficiency (the appropriate use of resources), effectiveness (the match between results achieved and results intended) and, finally, efficacy, understood as the satisfactory attainment of goals.

Prior research lends considerable support to the close relationship between these variables. Internationally, the Inter-American Development Bank reports that socio-emotional competencies are the most highly valued by employers across Latin America, even though 90% of them report serious difficulty finding personnel with the required skills. Fontalvo Herrera et al. (2018) similarly argue that human talent ranks among the critical determinants of productivity, since workers' knowledge and experience make it possible to design processes that improve working methods and service quality. In Spain, Pereda et al. (2018) found that skills such as teamwork (65.2%) and motivation (58.4%) exert considerable influence on organizational variables within the public sector. Likewise, research conducted in Guatemala by Ochoa (2019) established motivation as a decisive factor shaping labor productivity, reaching influence levels of 75% where positive interaction among colleagues is present.

At the national level, Peru's Ministry of Labor and Employment Promotion reports that 69% of institutions struggle to find employees with the necessary technical and socio-emotional competencies. According to the ENHAT survey, more than 80% of professionals in the country lack soft skills within their profile, opening a critical talent gap for public management (Gontero & Novella, 2021). Local studies reinforce this close relationship, showing that the influence of soft skills on job performance ranges from the 11.8% reported by Aroni and Peña (2022) in the health sector to figures between 67.8%, as found by Gamarra (2023), and 80.7%, reported by Gutierrez (2021), confirming that a stronger command of these competencies translates into higher worker performance.

Against this backdrop of nationwide talent gaps, the present study was carried out at a public management entity, a decentralized body of the Ministry of Education responsible for overseeing educational quality within its jurisdiction. The institution currently faces critical operational challenges, including documentary backlogs and a pressing need to strengthen pedagogical monitoring, both of which bear directly on user satisfaction. This situation aligns with the literature warning that public officials' performance shapes institutional efficiency and the capacity to respond to a community's shifting demands. Accordingly, a shortfall in socio-emotional competencies not only produces inefficient services and public distrust but also generates administrative delays, confused decision-making, and internal conflict that hinder the fulfillment of institutional goals. Strengthening human capital in this setting is therefore essential for translating individual performance into tangible improvements in citizen service and institutional standing.

Finally, the study proceeds from the hypothesis that socio-emotional competencies significantly influence employee productivity. Accordingly, this article's general objective is to determine the influence of socio-emotional competencies on the labor productivity of workers at a public management entity, with a view to establishing a scientific basis for optimizing efficiency and effectiveness in public-sector organizations.

Methodology

This study followed a quantitative approach, understood as a sequential, evidence-building process that relies on data collection and analysis to test hypotheses grounded in numerical measurement and statistical methods (Hernández Sampieri & Mendoza Torres, 2018).

Type and design of research

The study has a descriptive-explanatory scope. It is descriptive insofar as it seeks to detail the salient characteristics of the phenomenon under analysis, and explanatory insofar as it aims to establish the influence of socio-emotional competencies on the variability of labor productivity. The design is non-experimental and cross-sectional, as no variable was deliberately manipulated and data were gathered at a single point in time, observing the phenomena in their natural setting (Guevara Alban et al., 2020).

Population and sample

The population consisted of 842 public-sector employees. A representative sample of 404 workers was determined through simple random probability sampling, with a 3.5% margin of error and a 95% confidence level, ensuring that every individual had an equal probability of selection.

Data-collection techniques and instruments

The survey served as the data-collection technique, and a structured questionnaire of 46 items in total was applied as the instrument: 26 items measured socio-emotional competencies (self-awareness, social awareness, self-regulation, and relationship management), and 20 assessed productivity (efficiency, effectiveness, and efficacy). Responses were scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “Never” to “Always.”

Validity and reliability

The instrument was submitted to the judgment of three experts, who assigned an average applicability rating of 95.4% for the independent variable and 95% for the dependent variable. Reliability was established through Cronbach’s alpha, yielding coefficients of 0.955 for socio-emotional competencies and 0.922 for labor productivity, indicating excellent internal consistency.

Data processing and ethics

Results were analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as frequency tables, and inferential statistics, including ANOVA tests and regression analysis to estimate the coefficient of determination. The study adhered to ethical considerations of confidentiality, informing participants that data collection served strictly academic and anonymous purposes. The inclusion criterion comprised active employees listed on the public-sector organizational chart during 2024.

Results and discussion

A simple linear regression analysis was applied to determine the influence between variables. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) yielded a significance value of Sig. = 0.000, confirming that socio-emotional competencies significantly influence workers’ labor productivity.

Table 1

Model summary: socio-emotional competencies and labor productivity

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate

1	0.619[a]	0.383	0.377	10.505	

a. Predictors: (Constant), Relationship Management, Social Awareness, Self-Regulation, Self-Awareness

Note: Data processed from the administered survey.

The model yields a correlation coefficient of R = 0.619, indicating a moderate positive association between the set of socio-emotional dimensions and worker productivity. Given a coefficient of determination of $R^2 = 0.383$, the combined predictors (self-awareness, social awareness, self-regulation, and relationship management) account for 38.3% of the variability in labor productivity. Under the study's logic, this finding implies that the remaining 61.7% of productivity depends on external factors unrelated to human talent, such as infrastructure, technology, or the administrative organization of processes.

Table 2

Model summary: dimensions of socio-emotional competencies and labor productivity

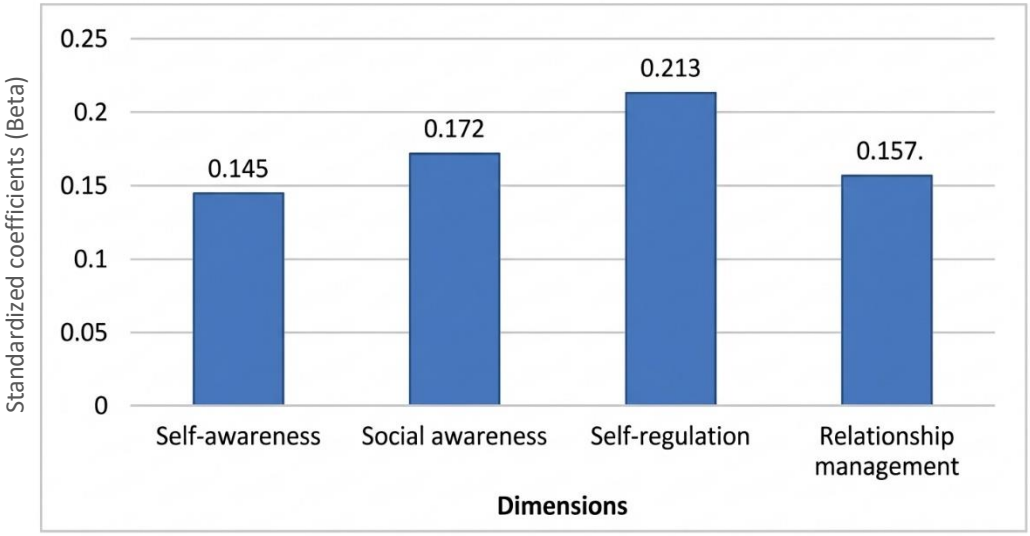
Model				Standardized coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	20.884	3.017		6.922	0.000
	Self-awareness	0.428	0.215	0.145	1.994	0.047
	Social awareness	0.539	0.237	0.172	2.279	0.023
	Self-regulation	0.694	0.231	0.213	3.000	0.003
	Relationship management	0.370	0.172	0.157	2.154	0.032

a. Dependent variable: Labor Productivity

Note: Data processed from the administered survey.

Figure 1

Influence of socio-emotional competencies on labor productivity



The regression coefficients show that all four soft-skill dimensions exert a positive, statistically significant influence on labor productivity, each returning significance values (Sig.) below the 0.05 threshold. Self-regulation emerges as the predictor with the greatest relative weight in the combined model (B = 0.694; Beta = 0.213; Sig. = 0.003), suggesting that the ability to manage moods and emotions appropriately is what most energizes performance within the public entity evaluated. Social awareness follows in order of importance (B = 0.539, Sig. = 0.023), then self-awareness (B = 0.428, Sig. = 0.047), and relationship management (B = 0.370, Sig. = 0.032), confirming that each socio-emotional component contributes uniquely and necessarily to organizational success.

Finally, the constant value (20.884) establishes a baseline level of productivity that is directly enhanced by strengthening these competencies, empirically validating human talent and emotional maturity as the critical determinants of government efficiency.

Discussion

The findings show that command of socio-emotional competencies is the principal driver of productivity in public management, with a confirmed significant influence of 38.3%. This result offers empirical support for the theory advanced by Cherniss and Goleman (2001), who contend that emotional, and not merely intellectual, capacity truly defines how people perform and what they achieve at work. Demonstrating that all four socio-emotional dimensions significantly shape productivity reaffirms emotional maturity as the central axis for reaching institutional goals, acting as a catalyst that amplifies public servants' intellectual abilities. As the study also reveals, however, a critical talent gap persists: Gontero and Novella (2021) report that more than 80% of professionals lack these skills despite their being the most highly valued by employers. This shortfall within the public sector translates into inefficient services and eroded trust, underscoring the urgency of strengthening who employees are, not merely what they know, in order to improve institutional performance.

Comparing these results against prior research reveals solid consistency with the findings of Gutierrez (2021), who reported an 80.7% influence in the teaching sector, and Gamarra (2023), who reported 67.8% within the penitentiary system. Such convergence reinforces the premise that human talent constitutes organizations' most strategic asset for competitiveness. Along similar lines, Ochoa (2019) found that motivation significantly shapes labor productivity, at a level of 75%, highlighting collegial interaction as essential to workers' full development. By contrast, the results diverge from those of Aroni and Peña (2022), who reported an influence of only 11.8%, a discrepancy that may stem from conditions specific to the health sector as opposed to the educational one.

Beyond this, the dimensional analysis showed self-regulation to carry the greatest relative weight (B = 0.694), followed by social awareness (B = 0.539). These findings align with Pereda et al. (2018), who identified self-control and motivation as the competencies most valued within the public sector, given their strong bearing on organizational efficiency. The capacity to manage moods and emotions appropriately under stressful conditions is, in turn, a vital technical asset for averting administrative delays and user complaints, as Gómez (2021) warns in noting that socio-emotional deficits severely damage both productivity and institutional prestige.

Finally, the fact that all four dimensions reach statistical significance (Sig. < 0.05) and add to a baseline productivity constant of 20.884 lends support to Fontalvo Herrera et al. (2018), who regard human capital as the engine of state innovation.

Given the warning of Gontero and Novella (2021) that more than 80% of professionals lack these skills, the results obtained underscore the pressing need for Human Resources offices to build these competencies into minimum hiring requirements, thereby narrowing the gaps in service quality.

Conclusions

The study establishes a moderate positive association (R = 0.619) between socio-emotional competencies and employee performance, with the predictors examined (self-awareness, social awareness, self-regulation, and relationship management) accounting for 38.3% of the variability in labor productivity. This finding indicates that, while the human factor is a critical determinant, the remaining 61.7% of institutional efficiency hinges on external structural factors unrelated to talent, such as physical infrastructure, technological obsolescence, and the administrative organization of processes.

Each component of the Cherniss and Goleman (2001) model can accordingly be said to contribute uniquely and necessarily to organizational success, exerting a positive and statistically significant influence (Sig. < 0.05) on productivity. The constant value (20.884) points to a baseline level of operational performance within public management, one that is enhanced and driven forward in direct proportion to the rigorous strengthening of workers' emotional maturity.

In sum, self-regulation stands out as the dimension with the greatest relative impact within the combined model (B = 0.694; Sig. = 0.003), demonstrating that officials' ability to manage their moods and emotions under workload pressure is the strongest driver of productivity. Social awareness, self-awareness, and relationship management follow in descending order of influence, empirically validating emotional intelligence as the foundation of government effectiveness and a vital technical tool for reducing delays and user complaints.

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