

LABOR COMPETENCIES IN THE STRENGTHENING OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT PUBLIC MANAGEMENT IN PERU: TOWARDS ACHIEVING SDG 16

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The study examines how labor competencies encompass technical knowledge, soft skills, attitudes, and values that are fundamental for the modernization and improvement of local public management. The research aligns with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16, emphasizing effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions.

Method: The methodology is a systematic literature review using academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, SciELO, and JSTOR, with specific inclusion and exclusion criteria for articles published between 2019 and 2024.

Results and Discussion: The results reveal a significant gap between the required competencies and those currently possessed by many Peruvian local government officials, identifying challenges such as a shortage of trained technical cadres, clientelistic practices in hiring, lack of investment in continuous training, difficulties in retaining talent, and weaknesses in competency assessment. **Conclusion:** The study proposes a framework for implementing competency systems tailored to Peru's local realities, supporting the design of development programs, recruitment systems, and performance evaluations. It highlights the potential of aligning these initiatives with SDG 16 to enhance institutional effectiveness and public trust.

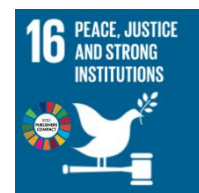
Research Implications: The article suggests future lines of research, including comparative studies and analysis of the impact of technology on competency management in local governments.

Keywords: labor competencies, subnational public management, peruvian local governments, human capital development, municipal administration, SDG 16, performance evaluation, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Received: Oct/11/2024

Accepted: Dec/13/2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47172/2965-730X.SDGsReview.v5.n02.pe04065>



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1 INTRODUCTION

In the current scenario of Peruvian public administration, local governments face increasingly complex challenges that demand efficient, transparent and citizen-oriented management (Dupuits and Cronkleton, 2020). In recent decades, Peru has experienced a series of reforms in the public sector aimed at improving the quality of services and the effectiveness of implemented policies. However, the effectiveness of these reforms depends to a large extent on the labor competencies of the civil servants and public officials who implement them, especially at the local level (Zarychta *et al.*, 2021).

Labor competencies in the field of public management have gained relevance in recent years, being recognized as a determining factor in institutional performance and in the capacity of local governments to respond to the needs of their communities (DiSalvo *et al.*, 2023). These competencies encompass not only the specific technical knowledge of each area of public administration, but also the soft skills, attitudes and values necessary for modern and efficient public management (Vasil'eva, 2020).

However, a significant gap has been identified between the competencies required for effective public management and those currently possessed by many local government officials in Peru (Kruyen and Genugten, 2019). This disparity poses significant challenges for the effective implementation of public policies, the delivery of quality services, and the promotion of sustainable local development (Jong, 2019). Factors such as the lack of adequate training programs, high staff turnover and, in some cases, the persistence of hiring practices that do not prioritize competencies contribute to perpetuate this problem.

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2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 LABOR COMPETENCIES IN LOCAL PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

Local public management plays a fundamental role in the well-being of communities and the development of territories. Local governments are the first line of contact between citizens and the public sector, as they provide essential services that directly impact people's quality of life (Vogl *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, having highly trained and competent public officials is a priority to ensure efficient, effective and transparent management (Narbón *et al.*, 2020).

Labor competencies in local public management encompass a set of knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes that public employees need to develop to perform their functions optimally (Dingelstad *et al.*, 2022). These

competencies are not only related to specific technical aspects of each position, but also to transversal skills that enable comprehensive and quality management.

Some of the key competencies in local public management include leadership and team management, strategic planning and decision making, effective communication, innovation and adaptability, ethics and transparency, and resource and financial management (Kulik and Beck, 2021). Public managers must be able to lead and motivate their teams, foster collaboration and collaborative work, and resolve conflicts effectively (Wal, 2020).

On the other hand, effective leadership is essential to drive positive change and achieve organizational objectives. Long-term planning and the ability to make informed decisions are essential for results-oriented public management. Professionals must be able to analyze information, identify priorities, and make evidence-based decisions (Enghiad and Ewashen, 2021). Clear and transparent communication with citizens, work teams and other stakeholders is essential for successful public management. In turn, public employees must be able to convey complex information in an accessible manner and foster constructive dialogue. In a constantly changing environment, the ability to innovate and adapt is crucial (Lee and Ryu, 2021).

Public managers have to be willing to explore new ideas, technologies and approaches to improve public processes and services, while adapting nimbly to changing circumstances (Mergel *et al.*, 2020). Integrity, ethics and transparency are fundamental pillars of citizen trust in public institutions. Professionals must be able to act with honesty, responsibility and transparency in all their decisions and actions. In turn, the ability to efficiently manage public resources, both human and financial, is essential to optimize spending and ensure the responsible use of public funds (Blom *et al.*, 2020).

In this sense, labor competencies in local public management are a set of skills and knowledge that enable public employees to perform their duties effectively, efficiently and ethically. Strengthening these competencies is crucial to improve the quality of public services, foster citizen trust and contribute to the sustainable development of local communities.

2.2 TECHNICAL SKILLS REQUIRED

Municipal administration is a task that involves complexities that go beyond the mere execution of routine procedures and tasks. It requires from local public servants a multidimensional set of knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable effective performance in pursuit of the common good (Hess, 2022; Stapleton, 2022).

In the first place, it is essential to have broad expertise in public policies, in order to make a correct diagnosis of citizens' needs, and thus formulate strategic programs and projects that have a positive impact on the quality of life of the community (Yoshioka, 2020). Likewise, a deep knowledge of public finances is required to identify and strengthen endogenous sources of income, prioritize investment areas, carry out rigorous budget programming and execution, and manage the always scarce municipal resources in an efficient and transparent manner (Daniel *et al.*, 2020).

Another cardinal technical competence is expertise in public contracting and project supervision, since this guarantees timely compliance with technical, legal and economic specifications in any intervention to be carried out in the local territory. In addition, the growing technification and digitization of public processes makes it imperative that municipal managers possess solid skills in information technology, software management, networks, databases, as well as in the effective implementation of digital government policy for the benefit of municipalities (ElMassah and Mohieldin, 2020).

Similarly, contemporary demands require local managers to demonstrate high competencies in strategic planning, project management, conflict resolution, leadership and teamwork, which enable them to lead human groups, mediate disputes, make informed decisions and foster inter-institutional cooperation around common objectives (Konrad *et al.*, 2020).

2.3 CRITICAL SOFT SKILLS

Historically, the focus has been on the technical skills or hard skills that every public official must possess in order to perform his or her responsibilities



properly (Dalamore, 2021). However, in recent decades, the idea has gained strength that there is another set of skills called soft skills, of an attitudinal and relational nature, which are equally decisive for the success of any local manager (Bettaglio, 2020).

Firstly, transformational leadership is absolutely essential, since it implies the ability to inspire a sense of shared purpose in the work team, giving meaning to daily tasks and stimulating the internal motivation of the different actors (Sheehan *et al.*, 2020). This type of leadership is clearly different from the authoritarian model of yesteryear, as it is committed to encouraging the creativity, participation and cooperation of staff members around common goals, making them feel that their contribution is valuable (Huang and Chang, 2021).

Another critical soft competence is emotional intelligence, in which the leader must handle the know-how of his own emotions in order to manage them constructively. At the same time, he/she requires a high level of empathy to be in tune with the motivations and affections of his/her collaborators (Zhang *et al.*, 2021). This will allow him/her to understand behaviors, optimize teamwork and resolve conflicts when they arise, through assertive and proactive communication with the various actors involved. Likewise, the capacity for resilience is essential to face and quickly overcome adverse situations, failures in planning or unforeseen obstacles (Hsu and Badura, 2022). Hand in hand with resilience, proactivity is key to anticipate emerging contingencies, as well as self-management to optimally manage not only one's own time and energy, but also that of other team members. All these soft skills together are what will ultimately determine the success or failure of any local initiative.

Despite these advances in the understanding of labor competencies in local public management, unresolved issues persist. For example, there is a need for further research on how these competencies are manifested and developed in specific local government contexts in Peru, considering the geographical and socioeconomic diversity of the country. In addition, more research is needed on how to effectively measure and evaluate these competencies in the context of Peruvian local public administration.

In conclusion, this literature review justifies the need for further studies in this area, specifically on how labor competencies influence the strengthening of local government public management in Peru. Therefore, further research is required to identify key competencies and their impact on administrative efficiency and the quality of public services in the Peruvian context.

3 METHODOLOGY

This systematic review follows a qualitative methodological approach based on the collection, analysis and synthesis of previous research on labor competencies in the context of public management in subnational governments. Exhaustive searches were conducted in relevant academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, SciELO and JSTOR (Table 1). Likewise, filters were applied to include only peer-reviewed articles published in high impact journals in the last five years (2019-2024).

Table 1

Search equations by database.

Database	Search equation
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY("competencias laborales" AND "gestión pública" AND ("gobiernos subnacionales" OR "gobiernos locales")) AND (LIMIT-TO(PUBYEAR,2023) OR LIMIT-TO(PUBYEAR,2022) OR LIMIT-TO(PUBYEAR,2021) OR LIMIT-TO(PUBYEAR,2020) OR LIMIT-TO(PUBYEAR,2019))
Web of Science	TS=("competencias laborales" AND "gestión pública" AND ("gobiernos subnacionales" OR "gobiernos locales")) AND LANGUAGE: (Spanish OR English) AND DOCUMENT TYPES: (Article) Timespan: 2019-2023
SciELO	("competencias laborales" AND "gestión pública" AND ("gobiernos subnacionales" OR "gobiernos locales")) AND year_cluster:("2019" OR "2020" OR "2021" OR "2022" OR "2023")
JSTOR	("competencias laborales" AND "gestión pública" AND ("gobiernos subnacionales" OR "gobiernos locales")) AND la:(spa OR eng) AND year:[2019 TO 2023]

Source: Own elaboration.

Regarding the inclusion and exclusion criteria, empirical and theoretical studies and literature reviews that address labor competencies in the public management of subnational governments, their trends, challenges and opportunities were included. Articles that were not directly related to the research topic or that did not meet academic quality standards were excluded.

The aforementioned is specifically expressed and detailed in Table 2.

Table 2

Inclusion and exclusion criteria for the systematic review

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Articles published in peer-reviewed journals and conferences	Articles published before 2019
Empirical and theoretical studies and literature reviews related to labor competencies in the public management of subnational governments.	Studies not directly related to labor competencies in subnational public management.
Articles that address the trends, challenges, and opportunities of labor competencies in the strengthening of subnational public management.	Articles that do not meet academic quality standards (e.g., lack of methodological rigor, superficial analysis, etc.).
Publications in English and Spanish	Publications in languages other than English and Spanish
Studies published from 2019 to the present date.	Book chapters, theses, technical reports and other types of non-peer-reviewed publications

Source: Own elaboration.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the systematic review are represented using the Prisma flow (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses). Table 3 below shows the description of each stage of the Prisma flowchart, as well as the number of articles found.

Table 3

Item selection and extraction

Stage	Number of items
Identification	724
Screening	531
Eligibility	87
Including	28
Data extraction	25

Source: Own elaboration

The results of the systematic review are represented using the Prisma flow (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses). Table 3 below shows the description of each stage of the Prisma flowchart, as well as the number of articles found.

In the "identification" stage, 724 potentially relevant articles were

initially found in the aforementioned databases. After "screening", where duplicates were eliminated, 531 articles remained. In the "eligibility" stage, articles that did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded after reviewing titles and abstracts, leaving 87 articles for a full-text review. Thus, after reviewing the full texts, 25 articles were included in the systematic review for data extraction. Finally, a thematic analysis and narrative synthesis of the extracted data were performed to identify patterns, trends, and recurrent perspectives concerning the objectives of the review.

In this sense, this methodology made it possible to obtain a comprehensive and updated view of labor competencies for strengthening public management in subnational governments, their trends, challenges, and opportunities, thus contributing to achieving the objectives of the proposed systematic review.

Building upon these methodological insights, labor competencies have emerged as a fundamental pillar for strengthening public management in subnational and local governments, acting as a catalyst for the transformation and modernization of public administrations at the regional and municipal levels. This approach, which transcends the mere acquisition of technical knowledge, represents an integral paradigm that encompasses skills, attitudes, values, and cognitive capacities, all of which are essential to face the complex challenges that characterize contemporary governance at the levels closest to the citizenry.

The implementation of a competency-based system at the local and subnational government level operates across multiple interconnected dimensions, each of which contributes significantly to improving the efficiency, effectiveness, and quality of public services (Alonge *et al.*, 2019). This holistic approach recognizes the multifaceted and dynamic nature of the responsibilities that fall on these levels of government, especially in a context of increasing decentralization and increasingly sophisticated citizen demands.

The process of strengthening public management through labor competencies begins with a crucial stage of identifying and defining key competencies. This exercise, far from being a mere administrative formality, constitutes a deep organizational analysis involving multiple actors (Lopushniak

et al., 2022; Sudirman *et al.*, 2019). In the context of local governments, for example, this process could involve the participation of career civil servants, political leaders, public administration experts, civil society representatives, and, in some cases, even citizens committed to the development of their community.

The definition of competencies for a local government should consider not only the traditional functions of municipal administration but also the new responsibilities emerging in areas such as environmental sustainability, technological innovation, crisis management, and the promotion of local economic development (Wang *et al.*, 2023). For example, an urban development officer in a modern local government would not only need technical competencies in urban planning, but also skills in community mediation, data analysis for evidence-based decision-making, and the ability to integrate climate change considerations into development plans.

Once the competency framework is established, its integration into human resource management processes becomes the driver of institutional transformation. In the area of recruitment and selection, for example, adopting a competency-based approach allows local governments to move beyond traditional assessment methods (Malik *et al.*, 2020; Ali *et al.*, 2021). Rather than focusing exclusively on academic credentials or work experience, selection processes can incorporate situational assessments, competency-based interviews, and case studies to identify candidates with the skills and attitudes needed to meet specific local management challenges.

This approach is particularly valuable in the context of local governments, where proximity to citizens requires officials who are not only technically competent but also empathetic, adaptable, and committed to public service. For example, a selection process for a citizen service position in a municipality could include simulations of interactions with citizens in stressful situations, assessing not only procedural knowledge, but also the candidate's problem-solving skills, emotional intelligence, and service orientation.

Professional development and continuous training acquire a new dimension under the labor competencies approach in subnational governments. Training programs cease to be generic and disconnected events and become



strategic and personalized interventions (Remington and Yang, 2020; Tuguskina *et al.*, 2022). In a regional government, for example, this could translate into the implementation of individualized development plans for each civil servant, based on regular assessments of their competencies. These plans could combine various learning modalities, from formal courses and mentoring to temporary assignments in different areas of government or even exchanges with other local or regional administrations.

Linking competency development to career paths within local or subnational government is another crucial aspect. This not only motivates civil servants to invest in their development but also helps to retain talent in the local public sector, a recurring challenge in many administrations (Chen *et al.*, 2019; Bonneton *et al.*, 2019; Kinsella and Waite, 2020; Harris, 2022). For example, a regional government could establish clear competency-based "career paths" where an official can visualize how developing certain skills and demonstrating specific competencies can lead to roles of greater responsibility or specialization.

Competency-based performance evaluation emerges as a powerful tool to promote continuous improvement and accountability in local and subnational governments (Kim *et al.*, 2020; Huang *et al.*, 2022). This approach allows for a more holistic and fair assessment of the performance of officials, considering not only quantitative results but also how these are achieved and what competencies are demonstrated in the process. In a municipality, for example, the evaluation of a project manager would not be limited to measuring compliance with deadlines and budgets, but would also consider his or her ability to manage diverse teams, communicate effectively with stakeholders, and adapt plans in the face of unforeseen events.

The implementation of a competency-based evaluation system in local governments may face initial resistance, especially in contexts where more traditional practices prevail or where there are strong political influences on personnel management (Hamza *et al.*, 2020). However, the transparency and objectivity offered by this approach can contribute significantly to the professionalization of the local public service and the building of both internal and external trust.

It is important to note that the adoption of a job competency approach in subnational and local governments is not without its challenges. The initial investment required, both in financial terms and in terms of time and organizational effort, can be significant. In addition, the complexity of implementing a comprehensive competency system can be overwhelming for smaller administrations or those with limited resources.

To address these challenges, a gradual and adaptive approach is essential. Local governments could start with pilot projects in critical or high-impact areas, such as citizen services or development project management. These pilot experiences not only allow the model to be adjusted to local realities but also generate tangible evidence of the benefits, facilitating subsequent expansion to other areas of the administration.

Intergovernmental collaboration and sharing of best practices play a crucial role in the successful implementation of competency systems in subnational and local governments (Nielsen *et al.*, 2019; Igalla *et al.*, 2019). Associations of municipalities or regional governments can act as platforms for sharing experiences, resources, and tools, reducing costs and accelerating learning. For example, several small municipalities could collaborate on developing a common competency framework for certain shared roles, and then adapting it to their specific contexts.

The role of technology in the implementation and management of labor competency systems in local and subnational governments deserves special mention. Digital solutions can significantly facilitate processes such as competency assessment, performance management, and professional development (Alao and Brink, 2022). Customized e-learning platforms, cloud-based talent management systems, and data analytics tools to identify skills gaps are examples of how technology can leverage this approach, even in resource-constrained administrations (Mihai *et al.*, 2023).

The adaptability of the competency model to local realities is one of its greatest strengths. Each local or subnational government has its own unique set of challenges, priorities, and cultural characteristics. The competency framework must reflect these particularities to be truly effective. For example, a coastal municipality might include specific competencies related to marine

resource management and sustainable tourism, while a regional government in an agricultural zone might emphasize competencies in rural development and agricultural value chain management.

The implementation of a job skills system also has the potential to promote greater equity and diversity in local and subnational governments (Filippetti and Guy, 2020). By focusing on demonstrated and potential capabilities, rather than formal credentials or connections, this approach can open up opportunities for groups traditionally underrepresented in public administration. This is particularly relevant in local contexts where social and economic disparities can be pronounced.

The impact of the job competency approach on the organizational culture of local and subnational governments should not be underestimated. By promoting a culture of continuous learning, innovation, and continuous improvement, this approach can catalyze a broader transformation in the way public service is conceived and practiced at the local level. Empowered officials, with a clear understanding of their roles and the competencies needed to perform them, tend to be more proactive, innovative, and citizen-oriented.

In the context of the increasing complexity of the challenges facing local and subnational governments, from climate change to social inequality and digital transformation, the job competency approach offers a flexible and robust framework for building institutional capacities. It enables these administrations not only to respond to current demands but also to anticipate and prepare for future challenges.

The long-term sustainability of competency systems in local and subnational governments depends to a large extent on their capacity to evolve and adapt. This implies a periodic review and updating of the competency framework, taking into account new realities and expectations. Local governments could establish permanent competency committees, involving various stakeholders, to ensure that the system remains relevant and aligned with the changing needs of the community and the organization.

In this sense, labor competencies function as a multifaceted and powerful mechanism for strengthening public management in subnational and local governments. Through its integration into human resources processes,

from recruitment to professional development and performance evaluation, this approach promotes a comprehensive transformation in the quality and effectiveness of public service at the local and regional levels. By aligning individual capabilities with institutional objectives and community needs, workforce competencies contribute to creating more agile, innovative, and citizen-centered governments.

However, the success of this approach depends on careful implementation, committed leadership, and continuous adaptation to changing local contexts. Subnational and local governments that succeed in effectively implementing job skills systems not only improve their operational efficiency but also strengthen their legitimacy and capacity to generate public value in their communities. Ultimately, this approach has the potential to transform the way local governance is conceived and practiced, preparing these administrations to face the complex challenges of the 21st century.

Now, how do labor competencies influence the strengthening of local government public management in Peru? The development of competencies in local governments in Peru is an area of public management that is deficient and with profound challenges ahead. Despite the decentralization efforts of recent decades, the vast majority of provincial and district municipalities show serious limitations in terms of human capital to exercise the functions and powers that have been transferred from the national government (Navarro *et al.*, 2022).

The first challenge lies in the shortage of technical personnel sufficiently trained in key areas such as public administration, financial management, project management, government contracting, municipal taxation, and urban planning. The high turnover of civil servants with each change of authority, the weakness of administrative career systems, and the precariousness of salary incentives deepen these deficits of qualified personnel at the local level (Schwalb and Seas, 2021).

A second challenge is related to the persistence of clientelist and patrimonialist practices in the incorporation of new personnel into the municipal bureaucracy. Even though the Servir Law has imposed certain meritocratic filters, the positions of trust appointed by the current administrations are often far from covering the technical profiles required by

the different managerial and specialized positions (Berens and Ruth-Lovell, 2021).

A third challenge lies in the scarce municipal investment in continuous training and competency development of their personnel. Whether due to budgetary restrictions or lack of strategic vision, very few municipalities have systematic training planning linked to previously diagnosed competency gaps. The external training offer is fragmented and insufficient to cover massive requirements on a national scale (Sexton, 2022).

A fourth challenge stems from weaknesses in retaining talent and transferring tacit knowledge before the departure of valuable officials after the usual management changes every four years. The abrupt interruption of hard-won projects, initiatives, and inter-institutional relationships seriously compromises the continuity of local development-oriented policies (Jiménez, *et al.*, 2020). Finally, the evaluation and certification of competencies as mechanisms to guarantee the professional suitability of municipal personnel constitute a fifth challenge that is still incipient. Only in recent years, some provincial municipalities have begun to implement annual performance exams for their civil servants under the Servir guidelines. However, there is still a long way to go to consolidate an evaluation culture that rewards merit and sanctions inefficiency at the local level.

5 CONCLUSION

This study has examined in depth the influence of labor competencies in strengthening local government public management in Peru, shedding light on a critical area for the development and effectiveness of public administration at the sub-national level. The main ideas that emerge from this research demonstrate that labor competencies are fundamental for the modernization and improvement of local public management, encompassing not only technical knowledge but also soft skills, attitudes, and values.

A significant gap has been identified between the competencies required and those currently possessed by many local government officials in Peru, which poses significant challenges to the effective implementation of public policies

and the delivery of quality services. The implementation of a competency-based system in Peruvian local governments faces multiple challenges, including a shortage of trained technical cadres, clientelistic hiring practices, lack of investment in continuous training, difficulties in retaining talent, and weaknesses in the evaluation and certification of competencies.

However, the adoption of a labor competencies approach has the potential to transform the organizational culture of local governments, promoting a culture of continuous learning, innovation, and constant improvement. The results obtained demonstrate the urgent need to address the development of labor competencies as a strategic priority to strengthen local public management in Peru. The novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive approach, which not only identifies existing gaps but also proposes a framework for the implementation of competency systems adapted to local Peruvian realities. The practical use of these results is evident and potentially transformative.

This research aligns with SDG 16 by promoting effective, accountable, and transparent institutions at the local level through the development of professional competencies. Peruvian local governments can use this analysis as a basis for designing more effective competency development programs oriented to the specific needs of each locality, implementing competency-based recruitment and selection systems, establishing more objective performance evaluation mechanisms aligned with institutional goals, and creating talent retention strategies that reduce the high turnover of qualified personnel.

For future scientific research, it is suggested to conduct comparative case studies between municipalities that have implemented competency systems and those that have not, to investigate innovative models of collaboration between local governments for the development of competencies, to analyze the impact of technology on the implementation and management of competency systems, and to conduct longitudinal studies to evaluate the evolution of labor competencies in local public officials over time and their relationship with local development indicators.



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