

Organizational Performance in Salvadoran Public Sector Companies

El desempeño organizacional en las empresas del sector público salvadoreño

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To evaluate the performance of public sector workers in El Salvador from individual and social perspectives, as well as its impact on the execution of their job duties.

Design/Methodology: Data was collected using an online survey consisting of 22 questions divided into four categories: (i) personal and (ii) social awareness competencies, and (iii) individual and (iv) social behavioral competencies. The study adopted a mixed-methods (quantitative and qualitative) approach to ensure a comprehensive data analysis. Given the limited number of previous studies on the topic in El Salvador, this research is classified as exploratory in nature.

Results: Employees over the age of 50 demonstrated better social awareness and individual behavioral competencies, while those over the age of 60 excelled in personal awareness and social behavioral competencies. When competencies were analyzed by organizational size, it was observed that employees in large companies (more than 100 employees) exhibited superior performance in these areas.

Conclusions: The performance of public sector workers is influenced by individual and social factors, as well as by age and organizational size. In particular, employees over the age of 60 showed higher performance in all four competency groups under analysis. Similarly, public sector workers in larger institutions achieved better results, a consideration that decision-makers should take into account for better performance evaluations.

Originality: This study provides a clearer picture of organizational performance in the public sector in El Salvador by identifying employees' competencies based on age and organizational size. Furthermore, the instrument used here can serve as a complementary tool for evaluating job performance.

Keywords: organizational performance, public sector, employee competencies, workforce development, behavioral competencies.

Highlights

- Public sector workers over the age of 60 are highly influential.
- Job performance varies according to organizational size.
- In the public sector, older employees demonstrate a well-developed ability to manage their emotions.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Evaluar el desempeño de las personas trabajadoras del sector público desde las perspectivas personales y sociales y su impacto en el desarrollo de sus funciones laborales.

Metodología: Se utilizó una encuesta en línea con 22 preguntas divididas en cuatro categorías: las competencias de conciencia personal y social y, las competencias de comportamiento personal y social. El estudio empleó un enfoque mixto (cuantitativo y cualitativo) para un análisis integral de los datos. Dado el escaso estudio previo sobre el tema en El Salvador, la investigación se clasifica como de carácter exploratorio.

Resultados: Las personas trabajadoras mayores de 50 años tienen un mejor dominio de las competencias de conciencia social y de comportamiento personal; mientras que, aquellos mayores de 60 años se destacan por sus competencias de conciencia personal y de comportamiento social. Al desarrollar el análisis según el tamaño de la organización, resulta que las personas trabajadoras de las empresas grandes (más de 100 empleados), muestran un desempeño superior en estas áreas.

Conclusiones: El desempeño de las personas trabajadoras del sector público está influenciado por factores personales, sociales, así como por la edad y el tamaño de la organización. Además, las personas trabajadoras mayores de 60 años, presentan mejores resultados en los cuatro grupos de competencias estudiadas. En la misma línea, es en las grandes empresas donde se observa un mejor desempeño de las personas trabajadoras del sector público salvadoreño, dato que debería ser tomado muy en cuenta por los tomadores de decisiones para una mejor evaluación del desempeño laboral.

Originalidad: Este estudio proporciona una visión más clara del desempeño organizacional en el sector público de El Salvador, identificando las competencias de las personas trabajadoras según su edad y el tamaño de la organización. Además, el instrumento utilizado también puede servir como una herramienta complementaria para evaluar el desempeño laboral.

Palabras clave: desempeño organizacional, sector público, competencias laborales, desarrollo de la fuerza laboral, competencias conductuales.

Highlights

- Los trabajadores del sector público mayores de 60 años ejercen una influencia significativa.
- El desempeño laboral varía en función del tamaño de la organización.
- En el sector público, los trabajadores de mayor edad muestran una sólida capacidad para manejar sus emociones.

1. INTRODUCTION

In a globalized and increasingly competitive world, the survival of any company depends on its overall performance. According to Bautista Cuello et al. (2020), organizational performance is related to the actions and behaviors of workers that allow the organization's objectives to be attained.

In this sense, it becomes important to evaluate organizational performance to ensure that the desired results are achieved. Importantly, such evaluation should not focus only on financial aspects, since there are different internal and external factors that affect job performance, including the work environment, professional development, leadership style, resources, and motivation (Faiz Rasool et al., 2025; Irfani Hendri, 2025). By assessing all these factors, better decisions can be made to ensure a company's success (Barradas Martínez et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2023). Moreover, the appropriate management of human talent plays a crucial role in this (Obaid Semaihi et al., 2023).

For public sector institutions that are in charge of territorial development and citizen well-being, organizational performance represents a critical aspect (Schoeman & Chakwizira, 2023). However, studies on this topic in El Salvador are basically non-existent. This study was therefore undertaken to evaluate the performance of public sector workers from a comprehensive perspective—considering both individual and social dimensions, as well as their impact on job functions.

In order to better understand the factors influencing public sector workers, the first part of this article provides a theoretical framework. Specifically, it addresses topics such as the importance of performance assessment, the composition of the public sector in El Salvador, and new challenges in human talent management. Following this, the methodology section describes the use of a questionnaire administered to 292 individuals via Google Forms. Using a Likert scale, respondents' degree of agreement with a series of statements was assessed.

Subsequently, the results section presents findings related to behavioral and awareness components, which were analyzed according to individual and social factors. In addition, the analysis took into account workers' age and organizational size as key variables. Finally, the paper concludes with a general assessment, highlighting the main findings and discussing their implications for the performance of public sector institutions in El Salvador.

Overall, it is important to keep in mind that human talent is the most important resource in any organization. Thus, understanding individuals' internal and external elements that shape an organization's performance is essential.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section outlines the theoretical foundations for understanding the complexity of organizational performance in public institutions, the challenges they face, and the ways in which this complexity affects employees.

The public sector in El Salvador

To contextualize this study, it is first necessary to understand what is meant by public sector and to describe its composition. In El Salvador, the public sector encompasses all State-run entities, including the legislative, executive, and judicial branches, as well as autonomous agencies, municipalities, and public institutions like those providing healthcare and education. This sector serves the population by delivering essential services and fulfills the State's objectives, as established in the Government Ethics Law (Asamblea Legislativa de la República de El Salvador, 2011).

Table 1 presents the composition of the workforce in El Salvador for the first quarter of 2021 and 2022. As shown, the Economically Active Population (EAP) increased by 6.5% in 2022, primarily due to a rise in female participation—from 41% to 60% of the EAP.

Table 1. The Salvadoran workforce distributed by sex as of June 2022
Tabla 1. Población activa salvadoreña distribuida por sexo a junio de 2022

Category covered	June 2021		June 2022		Variance		%	
Total population covered	1,837,466		1,964,343		126,877		6.9%	
Total contributors	1,057,864		1,118,170		60,306		5.7%	
Active contributors	880,068		937,195		57,127		6.5%	
Sex	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	%	Women	%
Active contributors by sex	519,240	360,828	374,878	562,317	-144,362	-27.8%	201,489	38.8%
Private sector workers	692,857		746,073		53,216		7.7%	
Sex	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	%	Women	%
Private sector workers by sex	408,786	284,071	298,429	447,644	-110,356	-27%	163,572	57.6%
Public sector workers	187,211		191,122		3,911		2.1%	
Sex	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	%	Women	%
Public sector workers by sex	110,454	76,757	76,449	114,673	-34,006	-30.8%	37,917	49.4%
Retirees	177,796		180,975		3,179		1.8%	
Beneficiaries	779,602		846,173		66,571		8.5%	

Source: Cañas Herrera et al. (2022).

Moreover, the public sector workforce experienced a 2.1% increase from 2021 to 2022. This growth was primarily driven by a significant rise (49.4%) in female participation. In contrast, the male workforce declined by 30.8% over the same period. This variation can be attributed to the fact that there has been a growing momentum in movements for equality and inclusion in recent years. These movements have led to the creation of more opportunities for women across various institutions and have been key in encouraging them to enter the labor market.

Organizational performance

For any organization, whether public or private, meeting short-, medium-, and long-term goals is critical for survival. A desk review indicates that, according to Barradas Martínez et al. (2021), organizational performance can be defined as the degree of success of an organization as measured in the achievement of its financial and non-financial goals.

Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that organizational performance largely depends on the skills and knowledge of employees (Aman-Ullah et al., 2022). They are responsible for attaining objectives, satisfying various stakeholders, and creating value for clients. Nevertheless, results also hinge on sound administration and the strategies implemented to enhance employees' capacities (Bernal González et al., 2020).

As stated by Chiavenato (2020), performance can be understood as the set of characteristics, capabilities, and behaviors demonstrated by an individual, team, or organization in alignment with the strategic objectives established by the entity. This concept involves transforming what has been conceived, planned, or envisioned into concrete actions, which in turn requires careful planning, organization, and leadership to enable subsequent evaluation.

In this context, one of the most critical aspects of performance management is human performance at its various levels of decision-making and action, as it constitutes a key element in achieving organizational success (Mendonça et al., 2021). Consequently, human performance management becomes the cornerstone of the relationship between the company and its employees. This process directly impacts the achievement of organizational results, as it fosters collaboration between leaders and their teams to meet the organization's expectations. It entails defining clear expectations, planning activities and tasks, providing leadership, executing plans, and delivering timely feedback (Chiavenato, 2020).

Since individuals are responsible for executing the company's strategies, strategic human capital planning is essential (Hemmati & Adab, 2024). As noted by Werther and Davis (2019), this refers to the way human capital management contributes to achieving organizational objectives by aligning employees' talents and competencies with the company's needs and goals. In this regard, the identification and definition of competencies play a central role in organizational performance, as they are directly linked to the most effective ways of reaching objectives. Competencies represent the behaviors that lead to results; therefore, it is vital for each employee to understand their goals and how their work contributes to the success of the business strategy, thereby strengthening their connection with the organization (Alles, 2010).

Finally, as Bautista Cuello et al. (2020) point out, job performance is a fundamental tool for organizational growth. It helps establish strategies, enhance employee effectiveness, and generate benefits that drive continuous improvement while strengthening the company's competitiveness.

Challenges in human talent management

People are an organization's greatest asset. They are the key to achieving its goal, which is why managing talent effectively is crucial. This management focuses on leveraging employees'

knowledge, capacities, and skills to maximize the company's short- and long-term competitiveness (Eslava Arnao, 2004).

According to Peña (2010), cited by Chiavenato (2020), human talent managers must be able to adapt to a variety of anticipated and unforeseen situations that may arise within organizations. Additionally, they need to understand the culture, values, organizational structure, core business, resources, and processes that define each institution.

Once the concept of human talent management is understood, it becomes evident that it constitutes a fundamental pillar in every organization. It acts as the bridge between the organization's different departments and its workforce. However, in striving to enhance efficiency and competitiveness, human talent managers face a series of challenges that can hinder the achievement of this overarching goal. These include employee discouragement and turnover, absenteeism, an inadequate organizational climate, dependence on others for decision-making, and a lack of autonomy (Ascencio Vargas et al., 2016).

Organizational analysis and its importance

In any institution, maintaining a commitment to continuous improvement is essential, as it can have a direct or indirect impact on organizational performance. As Alarcón Gavilanes (2017) explains, continuous improvement is a key pillar for business success in times of constant transformation because it focuses on the ongoing enhancement of processes through a disciplined approach centered on quality, productivity, customer satisfaction, cycle-time reduction, and cost control.

To translate this philosophy into tangible results, it is necessary to implement changes in business strategy, team structures and dynamics, internal processes, functions and activities, production systems, and even relationships with customers and suppliers. In short, improvements must extend to all areas related to organizational management (Zayas Barreras, 2022).

Moreover, the adoption of continuous improvement practices enables organizations to enhance their competitiveness by raising quality and productivity standards, eliminating process errors, and fostering a culture of learning among employees. Within this framework, many companies choose to implement total quality management models, understood as management philosophies aimed at delivering products that meet or exceed customer expectations while also promoting employee motivation and satisfaction. According to Miranda González et al. (2025), this is achieved through a continuous improvement process applied to organizational procedures, with the active participation of all individuals who are part of the company or are directly connected to it.

At the same time, organizational analysis represents a specialized field within management that uses scientific methods and research to examine the challenges faced by organizations. It aims to identify solutions that lead to positive outcomes (Jauregui, 2016). Conducting an organizational analysis can help pinpoint key aspects that contribute to understanding institutional administrative performance. Specifically, it allows organizations to:

- Understand institutional operations.
- Determine and interpret main organizational issues.

- Identify cause-and-effect relationships.
- Recognize opportunities to pursue a course of action or improvement actions.

The relationship between continuous improvement and organizational analysis is therefore complementary and synergistic. While continuous improvement drives the ongoing pursuit of optimization, organizational analysis provides the evidence base and foundation needed to guide these initiatives effectively. Together, they enable organizations not only to respond to market changes but also to anticipate them, thereby building a sustainable competitive advantage over the long term.

Relevance of assessing organizational performance

To gain an in-depth understanding of an institution's performance, it is crucial to begin with its employees and, by extension, examine how they carry out their activities and the results they achieve.

As stated by Velázquez (2022), this practice is important for pinpointing areas in which both employees and supervisors can improve. Moreover, it should be noted that this process could be an opportunity to boost motivation. When performance expectations are laid out, employees understand what is required of them and, in turn, can share their own professional goals with their supervisors.

It is also important to emphasize that performance assessments evaluate worker competencies to ensure they possess the necessary skills to succeed in their roles. In addition, evaluators can act as guides, helping to strengthen these competencies and empower the professional and personal development of employees (Orozco Jordan, 2023).

In the public sector of El Salvador, between 32.8% and 100% of personnel working in these institutions are evaluated. This process provides a valuable opportunity to detect areas for improvement and training needs. In certain cases, it can help to identify employees that may need to be terminated. Unfortunately, these assessments are often perceived as a burden and frequently lack the depth required to develop comprehensive improvement plans (Instituto Nacional Demócrata, 2019).

Tools for assessing organizational performance

Recognizing the importance of employee performance evaluations is crucial for selecting the appropriate tools that facilitate analyses tailored to meet the specific needs of each organization.

Parra (2022) identified four main types of evaluations commonly applied in organizations:

- **Self-evaluation:** Workers reflect on their own performance and answer questions that help identify internal strengths and weaknesses. Subsequently, evaluators assist in analyzing areas for improvement.
- **180-degree evaluation:** Evaluators study employee outcomes and provide feedback to improve performance and support professional growth. This can also include a self-evaluation by the employee.

- **360-degree evaluation:** This method involves internal and external stakeholders, such as coworkers, supervisors, subordinates, clients, and suppliers, to obtain a more comprehensive analysis.
- **Competency-based performance evaluation:** This approach analyzes each worker's responsibilities and measures their performance.

Furthermore, for a more comprehensive performance evaluation, financial factors should also be considered. By contrasting financial and accounting results with other qualitative elements derived from employee evaluations, it is possible to identify cause-and-effect relationships and establish courses of action aimed at improving organizational performance.

Importance of acknowledgment and reward for workers

Although performance evaluation is key in organizations, it must be kept in mind that achieving goals requires workers' effort and determination. Such effort and determination stem from both internal and external factors that shape a person's life. One key factor is motivation itself, which can be strengthened by acknowledging employees' achievements and rewarding them for their performance.

Organizational motivation refers to the level of intensity, enthusiasm, and willingness individuals demonstrate when striving to achieve the organization's goals and objectives while simultaneously seeking to fulfill their own personal needs (Saeteros-Zamora & Orbe-Guaraca, 2021).

In this regard, Puma and Estrada (2020) point out that there is a strong, direct, and significant relationship between work motivation and organizational commitment. This means that higher levels of motivation lead employees to develop greater commitment to their organization. Likewise, greater commitment tends to reinforce motivation. Motivation, therefore, is a crucial factor that directly influences employees' commitment. It encourages them to identify with the organization, embrace its goals as their own, remain loyal to it, and actively engage in their tasks, ultimately contributing to appropriate job performance.

To gain a deeper understanding of motivation, it is important to consider various theories, such as Herzberg's two-factor or dual-factor theory. According to Saeteros-Zamora and Orbe-Guaraca (2021), this theory suggests that individuals possess two distinct and independent categories of needs that influence their behavior in different ways.

The first comprises motivational or satisfaction factors, which are linked to the job's content and include elements such as achievement, recognition, advancement, the nature of the work itself, development opportunities, and responsibility. These factors are intrinsic to the individual and foster satisfaction and personal fulfillment, as they are directly related to the role and largely connected to the person's inner world.

The second category consists of hygiene or dissatisfaction factors, whose absence or inadequacy can lead to discomfort in the workplace. These factors are associated with the job's context and work environment, including salary, physical conditions, company policies, job security, and organizational climate (Saeteros-Zamora & Orbe-Guaraca, 2021).

In general terms, rewards refer to economic incentives provided in recognition of positive performance, while acknowledgment involves identifying and highlighting employees' good performance as a result of their skills and its impact on the organization. Both mechanisms serve as a source of motivation that promotes a greater sense of commitment and improved performance (Montenegro, 2013).

Ortega (2022) identified several incentives that are considered the most appropriate for measuring worker motivation within organizations. These include:

- **Acknowledging achievements:** This enables the organization to demonstrate to employees how important their work is, express gratitude for their efforts, and encourage them to continue striving to achieve the organization's goals.
- **Flexible work hours:** Flexibility is highly valued by workers, as it allows them to devote time to personal priorities such as family, education, or caregiving. When organizations trust their employees, the latter are more motivated to organize their time and complete their tasks successfully.
- **Openness to workers' points of view:** Listening to employees' opinions and taking them into account in decision-making processes makes them feel valued and important, which in turn motivates them to improve their performance.
- **Bonuses:** Cash incentives can motivate workers to achieve goals, particularly those that are more difficult to attain.

Foregoing such forms of acknowledgment often results in dissatisfaction and demotivation, which can spread to other external parties such as customers. Consequently, this situation has a negative impact on organizational performance.

For this reason, it is the responsibility of management and senior leadership to design and implement policies that foster employee motivation. Indeed, human behavior theories, including Herzberg's, show that an effective balance between monetary and non-monetary compensation can significantly enhance motivation. Accordingly, it is recommended that companies provide not only financial incentives but also non-financial benefits that employees highly value—such as autonomy in decision-making, recognition of achievements, and a positive work environment with supervisors and colleagues (Madero Gómez, 2019).

3. METHODOLOGY

Considering that the fundamental objective of this research is to evaluate the performance of public sector workers from both individual and social perspectives, as well as the impact of these factors on the development of their job functions, the study is classified as mixed in nature because it integrates quantitative, qualitative, descriptive, and exploratory methods. Moreover, following the perspective of Barrantes Echavarría (2014), this research is framed within the naturalistic or naturalistic-humanistic-interpretive scientific paradigm, as it focuses on the analysis and interpretation of results derived from human activity and life in society. As stated by Abarca Rodríguez et al. (2012), despite their discrepancies, both qualitative and quantitative data possess an equivalent epistemological value, given that both are collected using precise techniques and methods.

In line with Hernández Sampieri (2014), this study combines quantitative and qualitative approaches, since it aims to share findings that can be generalized to a broader population. Furthermore, it is descriptive in nature because it focuses on determining the singularities or characteristics of the population under study, and exploratory, given that this phenomenon has not been extensively investigated within the Salvadoran labor context. Consequently, the results presented cannot be considered fully conclusive.

Concerning the unit of analysis—that is, the population and the determination of the sample size—it should be noted that the study was conducted at the national level, based on a universe that, according to Pineda (2023), consisted of 197,279 public employees. From this population, a sample of 292 workers from various Salvadoran public sector institutions was selected. Importantly, the sample was calculated using the formula for infinite population, as the total universe exceeded 100,000 observation units and the selected sample size represented less than 5% of the total population under study.

The statistical parameters used to calculate the sample were a 2.5% confidence Level (Z), 95% probability of acceptance of the desired attribute in the population (p), 5% probability of rejection of the desired attribute in the population (q), and an estimated error (e) of 2.5%.

Regarding data collection, the process took place between March and August 2022. Primary data were obtained using a survey developed in Google Forms and through the snowball sampling strategy. This approach began by identifying a small group of Salvadoran public employees from the executive, legislative, and judicial branches who met the criteria to be part of the study. Subsequently, this group of participants was asked to share the survey with other of their colleagues, and the process continued until the desired sample size was reached. Regarding the selection and review of secondary sources, this process involved an extensive and diversified examination of reliable publications in which the research topic has been widely studied.

The survey instrument, created in Google Forms, was carefully designed to ensure that the questions aligned with the intended Likert-scale responses. It consisted of 22 questions aimed at assessing the level of performance of public sector workers in El Salvador and its impact on the development of their job functions, as perceived by the workers themselves.

It is also worth noting that this same instrument was previously used in the research project *An Approach to Organizational Performance in Public Sector Organizations in El Salvador*, developed in 2022 as a bachelor's thesis by a group of graduates from the Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas to obtain their degree in Business Administration. One of the authors of the present article served as the thesis director for that project.

With respect to the 22 questions included in the instrument, they were grouped into four main categories:

- **Classification 1:** Questions 1 to 4, designed to evaluate personal awareness competencies.
- **Classification 2:** Questions 5 to 7, intended to evaluate social awareness competencies.
- **Classification 3:** Questions 8 to 13, designed to evaluate individual behavioral competencies.
- **Classification 4:** Questions 14 to 22, aimed at evaluating social behavior competencies.

Table 2 presents the instrument used to collect the data, which was validated through expert consultation in order to assess the understanding, ambiguity, and clarity of each question.

Table 2. Instrument used for data collection

Tabla 2. Instrumento usado para la recopilación de datos

Questions	Classification
Q1. Do I acknowledge my own emotions and the way they may affect my behavior within the organization?	<i>Personal awareness competencies</i>
Q2. Am I able to identify my own strengths, weaknesses, and limitations?	
Q3. Do I feel that my self-esteem is high?	
Q4. Do I acknowledge and trust my own capabilities when performing my work?	
Q5. Am I able to perceive the feelings and points of view of my team members and show genuine interest in their concerns?	<i>Social awareness competencies</i>
Q6. Am I aware of the emotional dynamics and power relationships in my work team?	
Q7. Am I able to foresee, recognize, and satisfy the needs of my internal and external customers?	
Q8. When a conflict arises, am I able to manage my emotions and impulses?	
Q9. Do I maintain high standards of honesty and integrity?	<i>Individual behavioral competencies</i>
Q10. Do I always take responsibility for my actions?	
Q11. When there is a change, am I flexible and able to cope with it successfully?	
Q12. Do I consider that I make daily efforts to improve my performance and achieve a high standard of excellence?	
Q13. Am I willing to take initiative when opportunities for improvement arise?	
Q14. Can I identify opportunities for improvement in my coworkers and help strengthen their capabilities?	<i>Social behavioral competencies</i>
Q15. Do I consider myself capable of inspiring and guiding teams and individuals?	
Q16. Do I consider that I am able to use tactics to effectively persuade my team for the benefit of the organization?	
Q17. Am I able to listen openly to my coworkers and share messages convincingly?	
Q18. Do I feel capable of managing or initiating some kind of change within the organization?	
Q19. Do I consider myself a person who can negotiate and solve disputes?	
Q20. Do I see myself as someone who promotes good social relationships?	
Q21. Am I the kind of person who can work in a team?	
Q22. Am I able to foster synergy (teamwork) within my work group to achieve goals?	

Source: Authors' own work using data from Cañas Herrera et al. (2022).

Furthermore, it should be noted that the survey was designed using a Likert scale for the response options. This type of scale is considered the most appropriate for measuring the degree to which respondents agree or disagree with each statement. As a result, the instrument included a series of gradual multiple-choice options, arranged from positive to negative (or vice versa) across all questions. The response options for each item ranged from 1 to 5, as follows:

1. Totally disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Totally agree

Overall, the questions included in the survey were aimed at capturing the impact of individual and social factors on the job functions of workers in the Salvadoran public sector.

Regarding data analysis, the tables presented in the results section were constructed by cross-referencing each of the 22 questions from the survey instrument with the following classification variables:

- Age of workers
- Size of the institution where they work

The importance of conducting studies of this nature lies in identifying the effects of personal and social awareness competencies and individual and social behavior competencies on employees' motivation, commitment, and sense of identification within public institutions. Additionally, such findings provide valuable input for decision-makers, enabling them to implement continuous improvement processes, which may positively impact worker motivation, commitment, and sense of identification with their organization. Ultimately, the aim is to foster an employer–employee relationship grounded in a win–win situation.

4. RESULTS

The study's findings focus on evaluating and understanding competencies related to personal awareness, social awareness, individual behavior, and social behavior among public sector workers in El Salvador. These results were analyzed based on the age of respondents and the size of the institutions where they work.

Personal awareness competencies

Awareness is commonly understood as the human capacity to discern between right and wrong. However, Stepanenko Gutiérrez (2011) states that, despite the existence of multiple theories on the matter, there is a general consensus that awareness represents the personal point of view an individual experiences or adopts in different situations.

Understanding the role of personal awareness and self-awareness in work performance is essential, as these elements influence how employees establish interpersonal relationships and foster personal growth and decision-making. Specifically, self-awareness refers to the ability to identify and understand one's own emotions, feelings, and thoughts, as well as how these can affect others. In addition, it enables individuals to understand themselves better, helping them to identify their own strengths and weaknesses (Centro de Estudios de Psicología, 2023).

Analyzing this dimension is therefore crucial to understanding the performance of public sector workers in El Salvador and identifying what factors most strongly intervene in an organization’s productivity.

Personal awareness competencies by age of workers

An analysis of the data shown in Table 3 reveals that workers over the age of 60 obtained the highest scores in the personal awareness competencies evaluated in the survey. These results may be attributed to their extensive work experience, the various situations they have encountered in life, and the maturity they have developed over time—all of which have contributed to greater self-reliance and self-esteem. As a result, such employees understand what they are capable of accomplishing and what areas they need to improve. In turn, this translates into better emotion management, helping them to prevent emotions from interfering with their work.

Table 3. Personal awareness competencies by age of workers

Tabla 3. Competencias de conciencia personal según la edad de los trabajadores

Questions	Under 20	Aged 20 to 30	Aged 31 to 40	Aged 41 to 50	Aged 51 to 60	Over 60
Q1. Do I acknowledge my own emotions and the way they may affect my behavior within the organization?	4.43	4.16	3.97	4.00	4.25	5.00
Q2. Am I able to identify my own strengths, weaknesses, and limitations?	4.29	4.05	3.99	4.12	4.25	4.80
Q3. Do I feel that my self-esteem is high?	3.57	3.73	4.15	4.15	4.45	5.00
Q4. Do I acknowledge and trust my own capabilities when performing my work?	3.86	4.04	3.97	4.20	4.65	5.00

Source: Cañas Herrera et al. (2022).

It is also noteworthy that the group of workers with the second-highest scores in questions about emotion acknowledgment and management skills comprised those under the age of 20. This is because as new generations grow up, they generally receive more support in their development, understand themselves better, and are more open to seeking professional help to enhance their emotional intelligence. Nonetheless, their scores regarding self-esteem and confidence in their own knowledge were the lowest among all age groups. This may be due to the fact that, at these ages, they are transitioning from adolescence to adulthood, facing different challenges and even comparisons with societal expectations. Consequently, these factors may have a direct effect on their mental and emotional well-being.

Workers’ personal awareness competencies by organizational size

As businesses grow, they must define additional goals or broaden the scope of their existing ones. Consequently, they require employees with the appropriate competencies to meet these

objectives—individuals who demonstrate a strong sense of responsibility, motivation, and commitment to supporting the organization.

According to Urzua (2021), mindset has a significant effect on physical health. For individuals to achieve their goals and maintain good relationships with others, they need to remain focused and confident in their own capabilities, which ultimately enhances their performance. This aspect is key for individuals who work in any company, as employees who are aware of the importance of their contributions and trust in their own capacities are better equipped to meet the demands of their roles.

As illustrated in Table 4, when personal awareness competencies—such as the acknowledgment of emotions, strengths, and weaknesses, as well as levels of self-esteem and confidence—were analyzed by organizational size, employees in large companies displayed higher scores. As mentioned before, this may be because such institutions tend to need individuals with specific skills and a well-developed sense of confidence. In addition, these organizations often demand goal-oriented employees to ensure higher productivity.

Table 4. Workers’ personal awareness competencies by organizational size

Tabla 4. Competencias de conciencia personal de los trabajadores según el tamaño de la organización

Questions	Large business (over 100 employees)	Medium-sized business (51 to 100 employees)	Small business (11 to 50 employees)	Microbusiness (1 to 10 employees)
Q1. Do I acknowledge my own emotions and the way they may affect my behavior within the organization?	4.24	3.85	3.97	3.78
Q2. Am I able to identify my own strengths, weaknesses, and limitations?	4.21	3.71	4.07	4.11
Q3. Do I feel that my self-esteem is high?	4.07	3.49	3.73	3.78
Q4. Do I acknowledge and trust my own capabilities when performing my work?	4.30	3.63	4.03	3.78

Source: Cañas Herrera et al. (2022).

Social awareness competencies

By nature, human beings are social creatures who spend their entire lives surrounded by others with whom they must coexist. The workplace is no exception.

Social awareness refers to an individual’s capacity to identify and understand the needs, problems, and emotions of those around them. For this reason, social awareness is also quite important when addressing organizational performance; it is a key part of interpersonal relationships. It enables workers to recognize that what may be affecting a coworker can impact everyone else. As a result, it

leads to decisions that consider the common good of both the institution and its members (Agencia de la ONU para los Refugiados, 2016).

Understanding and analyzing employees' social awareness competencies is therefore essential to gaining a clearer picture of organizational dynamics and the ways these competencies may influence overall performance.

Social awareness competencies by age of workers

Table 5 presents an evaluation of three social awareness competencies. It is worth noting that workers aged 51 to 60 achieved the highest scores. This may be attributed to their extensive professional experience, during which they have learned to get along with different individuals and understand their points of view and emotions. As Henríquez (2018) states, when older individuals are part of a work team, their maturity and emotional balance help reduce conflicts and improve interpersonal relationships.

Moreover, their experience and expertise enables them to identify internal and external customer needs more easily and to find the best ways to address them. Customers often feel more confident when more mature employees assist them, which can contribute to better results for the institution.

Table 5. Social awareness competencies by age of workers
 Tabla 5. Competencias de conciencia social según la edad de los trabajadores

Questions	Under 20	Aged 20 to 30	Aged 31 to 40	Aged 41 to 50	Aged 51 to 60	Over 60
Q5. Am I able to perceive the feelings and points of view of my team members and show genuine interest in their concerns?	3.86	4.14	3.87	3.93	4.25	4.40
Q6. Am I aware of the emotional dynamics and power relationships in my work team?	3.71	3.99	3.76	3.90	4.45	4.40
Q7. Am I able to foresee, recognize, and satisfy the needs of my internal and external customers?	3.86	3.92	3.93	3.83	4.15	4.40

Source: Cañas Herrera et al. (2022).

Workers' social awareness competencies by organizational size

In recent years, senior management across various institutions has become aware that, beyond the necessary technical knowledge, workers must also possess strong social skills, particularly in the terms of communication and interpersonal relationships. This is especially important in public institutions, where employees are in direct contact with citizens.

When comparing companies of different sizes, it appears that workers in large institutions have a better command of social awareness competencies, as shown in Table 6. This might reflect the emphasis these organizations place on training.

Since 2021, El Salvador has operated the *Escuela Superior de Innovación en la Administración Pública* (School of Innovation in Public Administration), which oversees the professional development of public officials and public servants, focusing on those in the executive branch and municipal offices. Its programs cover both technical aspects like regulations, as well as soft skills like leadership and ethics (Escuela Superior de Innovación en la Administración Pública, n.d.).

Table 6. Workers' social awareness competencies by organizational size

Tabla 6. Competencias de conciencia social de los trabajadores según el tamaño de la organización

Questions	Large business (over 100 employees)	Medium-sized business (51 to 100 employees)	Small business (11 to 50 employees)	Microbusiness (1 to 10 employees)
Q5. Am I able to perceive the feelings and points of view of my team members and show genuine interest in their concerns?	4.19	3.69	3.87	3.89
Q6. Am I aware of the emotional dynamics and power relationships in my work team?	4.10	3.63	3.77	3.89
Q7. Am I able to foresee, recognize, and satisfy the needs of my internal and external customers?	4.15	3.46	3.67	3.56

Source: Cañas Herrera et al. (2022).

Individual behavioral competencies

Personal or individual behavior refers to a person's own way of acting. It is shaped by different factors, such as personality, culture, environment, and life experiences (Rodríguez Puerta, 2022). Understanding and identifying worker behavior is indispensable for an organization's performance because individuals' ability to collaborate in the achievement of institutional goals depends on this.

Individual behavioral competencies by age of workers

When analyzing individual behavioral competencies, it is noteworthy that employees over the age of 50 scored higher across all factors under study, as shown in Table 7. Given their long professional background and diverse life experiences, these individuals manage their emotions more effectively, take greater responsibility for their actions, and adapt to change more easily. In addition, being aware of the limited employment opportunities for people their age, they make more of an effort to improve their performance and demonstrate the value of their work.

By contrast, there was an evident difference among workers under the age of 20, specifically in terms of managing their emotions during conflict. Clearly, new hires may feel out of their depth in situations that are totally unfamiliar to them and may lack experience to respond assertively.

Importantly, in areas such as making an effort and being willing to improve performance and working with honesty and integrity, there were no significant differences between all age groups. This shows that, regardless of life stage, employees are always motivated to give their best, particularly if they feel comfortable and valued at the workplace.

Table 7. Individual behavioral competencies by age of workers

Tabla 7. Competencias conductuales individuales según la edad de los trabajadores

Questions	Under 20	Aged 20 to 30	Aged 31 to 40	Aged 41 to 50	Aged 51 to 60	Over 60
Q8. When a conflict arises, am I able to manage my emotions and impulses?	2.86	3.92	3.87	4.10	4.30	4.20
Q9. Do I maintain high standards of honesty and integrity?	4.57	4.36	4.21	4.42	4.90	4.80
Q10. Do I always take responsibility for my actions?	4.57	4.34	4.16	4.47	4.70	5.00
Q11. When there is a change, am I flexible and able to cope with it successfully?	4.29	3.98	3.94	4.10	4.50	5.00
Q12. Do I consider that I make daily efforts to improve my performance and achieve a high standard of excellence?	4.57	4.15	4.06	4.23	4.70	5.00
Q13. Am I willing to take initiative when opportunities for improvement arise?	4.43	4.22	4.04	4.25	4.70	5.00

Source: Cañas Herrera et al. (2022).

Individual behavioral competencies by organizational size

Although the analysis by company size revealed no significant differences, workers in large organizations achieved higher scores across all individual behavioral competencies under study.

However, it is worth noting that competencies like flexibility during change and ongoing improvement were strongly present in both micro- and large businesses, as indicated in Table 8. It is particularly interesting that these behaviors appeared consistently across both, regardless of their vastly different workforce sizes and objectives. One possible explanation is that both types of companies face pressures to achieve goals with the resources at hand, which encourages employees to increase their efforts and remain open to change for the benefit of the institution.

Table 8. Individual behavioral competencies by organizational size

Tabla 8. Competencias conductuales individuales según el tamaño de la organización

Questions	Large business (over 100 employees)	Medium-sized business (51 to 100 employees)	Small business (11 to 50 employees)	Microbusiness (1 to 10 employees)
Q8. When a conflict arises, am I able to manage my emotions and impulses?	4.07	3.66	3.90	3.67
Q9. Do I maintain high standards of honesty and integrity?	4.55	4.03	4.13	4.33
Q10. Do I always take responsibility for my actions?	4.56	4.00	3.97	4.22
Q11. When there is a change, am I flexible and able to cope with it successfully?	4.19	3.69	4.00	4.22
Q12. Do I consider that I make daily efforts to improve my performance and achieve a high standard of excellence?	4.36	3.88	3.97	4.22
Q13. Am I ready take initiative when opportunities for improvement arise?	4.39	3.86	4.10	4.11

Source: Cañas Herrera et al. (2022).

Social behavioral competencies

The environment often influences a person's behavior. Consequently, social behavior refers to the ways in which people within the social environment shape one another's actions—actions that vary according to the situation and arise from social interactions (Sánchez Acosta, 2021).

Understanding social behavior is crucial for any organization, as workers' capacity to interact and work with their colleagues is key to achieving success.

Social behavioral competencies by age of workers

Table 9 presents the results of the analysis of nine social behaviors. As observed, employees over the age of 60 stood out in all aspects. They are capable of inspiring others, listening attentively, and identifying opportunities for their coworkers' improvement, and they are key in conflict negotiation and resolution. These abilities are a result of their efforts developing a variety of soft skills through personal and professional experience.

Conversely, the findings show that workers under the age of 20 have a harder time with these aspects of social behavior, particularly in influencing their coworkers through communication, persuasion, inspiration, negotiation, and even fostering group synergy. This is a recurring pattern

during the early stages of working life, when individuals are still adapting and getting to know their coworkers.

Table 9. Social behavioral competencies by age of workers
 Tabla 9. Competencias sociales y conductuales según la edad de los trabajadores

Questions	Under 20	Aged 20 to 30	Aged 31 to 40	Aged 41 to 50	Aged 51 to 60	Over 60
Q14. Can I identify opportunities for improvement in my coworkers and help strengthen their capabilities?	4.29	4.05	4.04	4.20	4.35	4.80
Q15. Do I consider myself capable of inspiring and guiding teams and individuals?	4.57	3.80	3.85	4.20	4.45	5.00
Q16. Do I consider that I am able to use tactics to effectively persuade my team for the benefit of the organization?	3.71	3.81	3.90	4.17	4.30	5.00
Q17. Am I able to listen openly to my coworkers and share messages convincingly?	3.86	4.02	3.94	4.22	4.70	5.00
Q18. Do I feel cap able of managing or initiating some kind of change within the organization?	3.71	3.71	3.81	4.03	4.40	4.80
Q19. Do I consider myself a person who can negotiate and solve disputes?	3.71	3.93	3.96	4.12	4.45	4.60
Q20. Do I see myself as someone who promotes good social relationships?	4.00	4.17	3.87	4.17	4.75	4.80
Q21. Am I the kind of person who can work in a team?	3.29	4.21	4.07	4.33	4.75	4.80
Q22. Am I able to foster synergy (teamwork) within my work group to achieve goals?	3.29	4.20	3.94	4.13	4.75	5.00

Source: Cañas Herrera et al. (2022).

The National Democrat Institute (Instituto Nacional Demócrata, 2019) states that, in companies, older people with extensive experience ought to coexist with younger ones to enable the transfer of knowledge. This, in turn, helps the new generation prepare for different situations they may come up against at work. Such learning is not restricted to technical know-how—it is especially valuable in the development of soft skills that enable individuals to improve their performance.

Social behavioral competencies by organizational size

The results in Table 10 highlight the outstanding performance of workers in large companies, who are good at identifying opportunities for improvement among coworkers, inspiring and guiding them toward the organization’s goals, negotiating to resolve conflicts, and promoting good interpersonal relationships.

In large companies, teamwork is indispensable, and employees must handle interpersonal relationships effectively while keeping the organization's best interests in mind.

It is also important to emphasize that workers in microenterprises were also found to be able to inspire their coworkers, listen actively and share key messages, and build team synergy to meet goals. As there are fewer people, it is possible to have more closely-knit relationships, characterized by trust and camaraderie.

Table 10. Social behavioral competencies by organizational size

Tabla 10. Competencias sociales y conductuales según el tamaño de la organización

Questions	Large business (over 100 employees)	Medium-sized business (51 to 100 employees)	Small business (11 to 50 employees)	Microbusiness (1 to 10 employees)
Q14. Can I identify opportunities for improvement in my coworkers and help strengthen their capabilities?	4.26	3.77	4.00	4.11
Q15. Do I consider myself capable of inspiring and guiding teams and individuals?	4.12	3.65	3.77	4.22
Q16. Do I consider that I am able to use tactics to effectively persuade my team for the benefit of the organization?	4.07	3.69	3.83	3.89
Q17. Am I able to listen openly to my coworkers and share messages convincingly?	4.27	3.72	3.90	4.00
Q18. Do I feel capable of managing or initiating some kind of change within the organization?	4.02	3.48	3.80	3.78
Q19. Do I consider myself a person who can negotiate and solve disputes?	4.19	3.71	3.80	3.44
Q20. Do I see myself as someone who promotes good social relationships?	4.32	3.77	3.93	4.00
Q21. Am I the kind of person who can work in a team?	4.43	3.78	4.07	3.89
Q22. Am I able to foster synergy (teamwork) in my work group to achieve goals?	4.38	3.65	3.93	4.00

Source: Cañas Herrera et al. (2022).

5. DISCUSSION

This study made it possible to identify that, although public sector workers generally demonstrate positive performance, certain variables influence or predispose individuals toward higher levels of performance in specific areas.

In the case of age, as individuals mature, they develop stronger self-regulation skills, which enables greater personal and social awareness. This translates into better emotional recognition, positive self-esteem, and sensitivity to the needs of others. In addition to this, older individuals exhibit improved behavioral management—both in the personal and social levels—reflected in, for instance, their ability to persuade, adapt to change, and control themselves in the face of conflicts. These findings align with Henríquez's (2018) assertion that the maturity and emotional balance of older individuals within work teams contribute to reducing conflicts and enhancing interpersonal relationships. The ability to perceive and understand one's own emotions, strengths, and weaknesses (personal awareness), as well as those of others (social awareness), strengthens with age and experience, allowing for more conscious decision-making and better performance in work interactions.

This point is further supported by the work of Vaquerano Amaya and Mártir (2024), who reported that the longer individuals remain employed in a public organization, the higher their personal and social performance is. In particular, employees with more than 20 years of experience exhibited improved results, having developed strong social skills and learned from different experiences.

Similarly, Vidal Rischmoller (2022) evaluated the relationship between organizational commitment and job performance across different age groups. He found that job performance was higher among older employees (aged 36 to 50) and that organizational commitment varied with age, directly influencing performance. This is because older workers tend to view their relationship with the company through stronger affective and continuance commitment.

Another key variable identified was organizational size. As the size of the company increases (considering the number of employees), performance levels also tend to rise, which can be attributed to the greater demands present in large organizations. This trend can also be observed in other economic sectors, such as the commercial industry, where, after evaluating personal and social awareness and behavior, individuals working in large companies demonstrated better performance. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight the efforts of medium-sized and microenterprises to improve in these same areas (Vaquerano Amaya et al., 2024).

These findings underscore the relevance of job performance evaluation as a fundamental tool—not only for measuring results but also for identifying areas for improvement and training needs among employees. As Velázquez (2022) and Orozco Jordan (2023) point out, competency assessments help ensure that workers possess the necessary skills while facilitating both professional and personal development. Furthermore, effective human talent management—which seeks to maximize employees' knowledge and skills—is a fundamental pillar for organizational competitiveness. The results of this study within the Salvadoran context corroborate this perspective. Identifying the key personal and social competencies that drive performance, as well as understanding how factors such as age and organizational size influence them, provides a solid basis for designing more effective talent management strategies within the Salvadoran public sector.

In contrast, in the industrial sector, the analysis focused on workers' sex and revealed that, despite there being minimal differences between men and women, each group performed better in distinct areas. As indicated by Vaquerano Amaya and Mártir (2023), men tended to excel across most of the evaluated elements, while women stood out in their ability to recognize and understand the emotions of others and in their efforts to demonstrate their capabilities. This pattern was also observed in the public sector, where despite minimal performance differences, women achieved higher scores in personal and social awareness competencies (Vaquerano Amaya & Mártir, 2024).

The results of this study, which show differences in competency performance according to age and organizational size, suggest that motivation and recognition strategies should be tailored accordingly. Herzberg's two-factor theory (Saeteros-Zamora & Orbe-Guaraca, 2021), along with the recommendations of Ortega (2022) and Madero Gómez (2019), highlights the need to combine monetary and non-monetary incentives—including recognition of achievements, flexible hours, and consideration of employees' viewpoints—to foster greater commitment and better performance. In this regard, leaders of Salvadoran public institutions must consider these variables when seeking to optimize employee performance, thereby promoting a mutually beneficial environment for both staff and the organization.

These observations are further reinforced by Lupano Perugini (2017), who found that employees who exhibit better performance and feel satisfied with their jobs are those who perceive their work as relevant to achieving the organization's objectives. This sense of purpose is particularly significant among older employees and those in leadership positions, as they feel their work is important, which motivates them to continue performing well and improving their performance.

Although the study yielded positive results, future research in the field should carry out a more integrated analysis that simultaneously considers the various variables mentioned here (sex, age, tenure, organizational size) or combine different measurement tools to obtain a more objective assessment of job performance. Such an approach would facilitate more informed managerial decision-making.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Clearly, workers over the age of 60 are a highly influential and decisive group in the overall performance of public organizations. When evaluating components like individual and social awareness and behavior, their outcomes consistently surpassed those of the other age groups.

Specifically, older adults demonstrated a well-developed ability to manage their emotions and to understand what those around them are going through. This is reflected in their strong sense of empathy, which is key to maintaining good social relations that generate synergy within work teams.

In addition, they exhibited a high level of self-confidence and trust in their own capabilities when performing their duties. As a result, they are able to promote and lead change and constantly seek improvement within organizations. Furthermore, they motivate their colleagues to continue growing and developing their skills to the fullest.

Taken together, these findings highlight the importance of valuing older employees, as they possess not only extensive technical knowledge but also a rich set of soft skills. By sharing these with younger generations, they help enhance their competencies and support their professional growth, which in turn contributes to improving organizational performance.

It should also be noted that work performance varies according to organizational size. In institutions with a large number of employees, greater efforts are often made to achieve better results. Employees in these settings tend to demonstrate stronger empathy, responsibility, and flexibility when dealing with change, while also cultivating important negotiation and conflict resolution skills.

Small organizations, for their part, continue to perform commendably. In several aspects of the study, their results were comparable to the highest scores, reflecting a strong level of commitment to organizational growth.

Finally, it is essential that managers in public institutions take these insights into account when making decisions and creating programs aimed at strengthening employees' personal and social competencies. At the same time, they should consider that certain elements of the work environment are equally crucial in improving overall productivity.

CONFLICTS DE INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest that could have inappropriately influenced the results or interpretations of this study.

AUTHORS CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors made a significant contribution to the conceptualization, design, and development of the research, as well as to the preparation and final review of the manuscript.

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