







# Competence-Based Training and its Articulation with Sustainable Development in the Public Sector

## *La formación basada en competencias y su articulación con el desarrollo sostenible en el sector público*

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### Abstract

This paper addresses competency-based training (CBT) in public servants and its relationship with Sustainable Development (SD). In a global context marked by environmental, social, and economic challenges, the ability of government officials to effectively address these issues has become crucial. CBT is fundamental for the preparation of public servants, enabling them to acquire the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to perform effectively in their roles. The objective of this study is to provide a comprehensive overview of the importance of CBT in public servants as a driver of change towards SD. This article conducts a review of existing literature on the topic, exploring different theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches used in research. The research is based on a qualitative approach, utilizing the bibliographic research method and document analysis technique. This study highlights the variety of definitions of the topic, its contextualization, as well as the different scientific positions on the subject in the region. Additionally, emerging trends are identified and areas for future research in this field are suggested. In conclusion, this article provides a comprehensive view of the importance of CBT in public servants as a means to achieve Sustainable Development Goals at local, national, and international levels.

**Key words:** Sustainable Development; Competency-Based Training; Public Servants; Knowledge Management; Public Administration.

### Resumen

Este trabajo aborda la formación basada en competencias (FBC) en los servidores públicos y su relación con el Desarrollo Sostenible (DS). En un contexto global marcado por desafíos ambientales, sociales y económicos, la capacidad de los funcionarios gubernamentales para abordar eficazmente estos problemas se ha vuelto crucial. La FBC es fundamental para la preparación de los servidores públicos, permitiéndoles adquirir las habilidades, conocimientos y actitudes necesarios para desempeñarse efectivamente en su labor. El objetivo de este estudio es proporcionar una visión integral sobre la importancia de la FBC en los servidores públicos como motor de cambio hacia un DS. Este artículo realiza un análisis de la literatura existente sobre el tema, explorando diferentes perspectivas teóricas y enfoques metodológicos utilizados en la investigación. La investigación se basa en un enfoque cualitativo, utilizando el método de investigación bibliográfica y la técnica de análisis documental. A partir de este estudio, se destaca la variedad de definiciones del tema, su contextualización, así como las diferentes posiciones científicas sobre el objeto de estudio en la región. Además, se identifican tendencias emergentes y se sugieren áreas para futuras investigaciones en este campo. En conclusión, este artículo proporciona una visión integral de la importancia de la FBC en los servidores públicos como un medio para alcanzar Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible a nivel local, nacional e internacional.

**Palabras clave:** Desarrollo sostenible; formación de competencias; servidores públicos; gestión del conocimiento; administración pública.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the current times, marked by the complexity of global challenges, competence-based training (CBT) for public servants has become increasingly important. The ability of government officials to effectively address environmental, social and economic problems, as well as to foster SD, is fundamental to the well-being of modern societies. This literature review focuses on exploring and analyzing the relationship between CBT, the role of public servants and Sustainable Development (SD).

The BCT has a variety of applications, as it involves a continuous learning process that integrates work with study. This enables individuals to enhance the value they bring to organizations by demonstrating their performance. The competences cultivated, which include dedication, ethical standards, principles, decision-making skills, leadership skills, empathy, and innovative thinking, demonstrate people's ability to excel in diverse environments and their cognitive aptitude in various settings (Cejas *et al.*, 2019, p. 98).

For its part, the concept of SD has gained importance on political and social agendas in recent decades. There is growing recognition of the importance of reconciling economic progress with environmental protection and social equity, thus ensuring that the requirements of present generations are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In this context, government officials occupy a key position in the formulation and implementation of strategies and initiatives that promote sound and sustainable progress (United Nations, 1987).

This review sought to answer how CBT influences public servants in the promotion and achievement of SD (local, national and international). The fundamental purpose was to provide a comprehensive view on the importance of CBT in public servants as a driver of change towards SD, emphasizing the need for continuous and flexible training, while offering tangible suggestions for improving the skills of government employees and fostering better and more accountable management of public funds.

## METHODOLOGY

The approach employed was based primarily on bibliographic research and the documentary analysis technique. The bibliographic research provided a wide range of primary and secondary sources, including books, academic articles, government reports and institutional documents, essential to understand the current state of understanding on the topic and to recognize future patterns and debates.

Documentary analysis, on the other hand, consisted of critically examining and synthesizing the information gathered from the selected bibliographic sources. This technique involved a thorough review of relevant texts to identify patterns, recurrent themes, theoretical approaches and key findings related to CBT in the field of public administration and SD.

To ensure the quality and relevance of the theoretical information included, rigorous selection criteria were applied, including the relevance of the content, the credibility of the sources and the currency of the information. In addition, a process of data triangulation was carried out, contrasting and comparing different perspectives and resources to acquire a more complete and improved understanding of the topic.

In summary, the combination of the bibliographic research method and the documentary analysis technique provided a solid and rigorous framework to address the objective of this research, allowing for an in-depth and critical exploration of CBT in public servants in the context of SD.

In this review, strict ethical standards were followed in the citation and access to sources, guaranteeing academic integrity and respect for copyrights. All sources used were verified and properly referenced to ensure accuracy and transparency in the information presented.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Theoretical considerations regarding the conception of development

Throughout history, the concept of development has historically been based on erroneous assumptions, unfulfilled promises and ineffective resolutions. Various empires have exercised control over individuals, social groups, communities, societies, economies, regions and even entire continents by manipulating tangible and symbolic strategic elements through systems of authority. These empires, in order to justify the injustices derived from their fundamental inconsistencies, construct a dominant narrative that legitimizes their authoritarian rule. This narrative serves as the basis for the establishment of norms, assumptions, social behaviors, entities, truths and realities that perpetuate their claim to supremacy (De Souza Silva, 2004).

In this change of approach to the concept, it is essential to revisit Marx's work, where, although the concept of development is not explicitly defined, fundamental guidelines are presented, such as the substitution of a mode of production through the industrial revolution. In addition, the emancipation of the being and the growing satisfaction of their needs are highlighted as premises of progress and transformation (Martini Willeman, 2024). The above aspects introduced new perspectives on the concept of development, based on the socioeconomic changes manifested in the world scenario, which made it possible to visualize the term development according to different characteristics such as context, beneficiaries, scope and perspective.

In the United States, in 1947, a concept postulating development as a movement to improve community life in general with the active participation of the community was introduced, based on the use of this idea by the English government in 1942. Subsequently, several new definitions of community development emerged in the following years. One such definition emerged in 1956, which considered community development as the fusion of the efforts of community members and government authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of the community, foster the integration of the community into national life, and empower it to contribute positively to the progress of the nation (Díaz Ozuna *et al.*, 2013).

Regarding this issue, research indicates that, as a result of the crisis in industrialized countries in the 1970s, awareness of the value of small economies began to grow and grassroots development was taken up again, assuming it as an alternative to the globalized crisis. Greater participation was granted to citizens with their own initiatives, thus emerging the new social actors (Cárdenas & Michel, 2018; Torregrosa, 2020; Bugallo, 2016).

Development is characterized by a multifaceted progression that encompasses economic, social, cultural, territorial and environmental dimensions. By enhancing self-governance processes, empowering citizens and consolidating emancipatory moral values, it aims to satisfy material and socio-cultural needs while maintaining a harmonious coexistence with the natural environment (Bugallo, 2016, p. 12). This shift allowed for a more nuanced interpretation of development, moving from the narrow perspective of economists, focused solely on economic growth, to a broader understanding of the various factors influencing the process. By proposing a shift towards the prioritization of human beings, the new perspectives advocate changing their progress and corresponding support policies. It is worth mentioning that the PNUD introduced the Human Development Index (HDI) as a novel approach to measuring development, which led to the publication of several reports starting in 1991 analyzing the global landscape from a human development (HD) perspective (PNUD, 1991).

The reflection on development has evolved over time, and one of the most significant transformations has been the incorporation of the human aspect as the central axis of the development process. This change in methodology has led to the emergence of the concept of HD, which has gained importance in the context of the UN framework. This methodology stresses the importance of following a path toward SD with explicit objectives: meeting fundamental human requirements, achieving steady economic expansion, improving the quality of economic progress, taking into account demographic factors, choosing appropriate technological alternatives, utilizing, preserving and replenishing natural assets and preventing the depletion of these resources.

The emergence of the formulation of the human development approach can be understood as a critical response to the prevailing paradigm of development economics, which prioritized economic growth as the supreme objective. HD, on the contrary, argues that economic growth should be considered as a means to a broader end: human welfare. In this context, development should be understood as an integral process that seeks not only economic growth, but also the promotion of human well-being in all its dimensions: physical, emotional, social and spiritual (Ramos Rodríguez *et al.*, 2021).

Hernández (2008) provides a definition of HD focused on its evolution and the dimensions that define it as a process through which new opportunities are presented to people, allowing them to improve both themselves and their institutions by improving their abilities to oversee resources of diverse nature, with the objective of achieving a sustainable and equitably distributed progress that facilitates an improvement in their standard of living in line with their personal objectives, (...) (p.37).

In this research, the human development approach is assumed as the basis of current development processes, starting from the bases and principles of human development theories, where priority is given to the environment, research and education in connection with culture. It also adopts the conception that the subjects are the protagonists of the social transformations that occur in specific contexts.

Therefore, development, as a holistic and multidisciplinary process, articulates the actors of the economy, academia, civil society and government with the objective of realizing interests and satisfying common social needs in order to achieve higher levels of quality of life. This objective is achieved through the conscientious use of natural resources and human capacities, generating sustainable alternatives for the population based on fairness and social justice. All this finds its best implementation in the local scenario, where it is assumed that its value lies precisely in its distinctive nature and the potential it presents to establish horizontal connections, form agreements and express itself in detail. Local development implies improving the living conditions of the population in a specific geographic area through economic and productive growth. However, it is important to consider that, in some cases, not all communities

within the same territory experience simultaneous progress or manage to satisfy their basic needs in an equitable manner (Vargas & Esquivel, 2023).

Local development encompasses the complex interactions between cultural, economic, political, social and psychological factors, with the objective of improving the quality of life, individual well-being and preparation for the future of the inhabitants. This process is based on human capital, behaviors and skills that arise from present needs, circumstances and opportunities (Bustos Aguayo *et al.*, 2020). In this research, it is assumed that local development is a process where interests and objectives converge, from the particular perception of the various actors involved and the relationship between local demands and needs.

De Franco (2000) argues that integrated and sustainable local development is a methodology aimed at fostering the advancement of specific socio-territorial entities through a series of practices. He further states that the key components of sustainable local development encompass capacity building for local governance, the establishment of a novel participatory institutional framework, the collaborative shaping of local public needs, and the empowerment of civil society. Based on this methodology and from the approach presented in this research, it is considered that the current methodology to promote SD management is based on: CBT related to the management of development in the actors and servants of the process; the articulation among government, university, business and community, emphasizing the synergy of economic actors; and the generation of innovative socioeconomic alternatives that respond to local demands and aspirations.

### **Knowledge management in relation to SD**

The understanding of development as a multi-dimensional phenomenon implies the need to establish inter- and transdisciplinary strategies within the university environment, involving diverse areas of knowledge. This partnership extends beyond the tangible boundaries of the educational establishment, reaching out to the government and society as a whole, in order to identify, understand and address the challenges they face. This integral approach to development seeks to propose effective and sustainable solutions to identified problems (Laguna & Marcelín, 2016).

At present, a human and inclusive SD is unthinkable without the existence of knowledge capabilities in science, technology and innovation.

The perspective of local space is addressed from a holistic approach to the process, considering the interaction and integration of the dimensions of development and, in turn, of transversal axes such as participation and social equity. Therefore, knowledge management is oriented from the analysis of these categories (Núñez & Pérez, 2018). From this approach, knowledge represents an invaluable resource in organizations, and its proper management allows an effective response to unexpected changes and contingencies. In addition, it facilitates sound decision making, strengthens staff capabilities and contributes to the successful implementation of action plans (Quiroz-Palma *et al.*, 2020).

Although research on knowledge management in the public sector is scarce, the existing research is of great importance and its adoption in governmental organizations is recommended to improve their performance, always considering the particularities of public administration. Likewise, knowledge transfer is one of the factors that influence the quality of public services. Therefore, it is recommended that senior executives of organizations support the adoption of a knowledge transfer mechanism as a strategic approach to overcome bureaucratic obstacles that impede their progress (Al Ahababi *et al.*, 2019; Ncoyini & Cilliers, 2020).

At the state level, it is imperative to recognize that the advancement of knowledge management should not be limited only to developed countries, but should also be adopted by developing countries. Such action could effectively mitigate problems related to lack of organizational commitment and labor productivity. It is recommended to implement specific initiatives to improve knowledge management in the public domain, adapted to the particularities of each government entity (Razzaq *et al.*, 2019). If knowledge is not available to build development strategies, i.e., to formulate, implement, monitor and evaluate policies, programs and projects for local transformation, development is compromised. If the strategies are available, but their growing knowledge demands are not addressed, development is compromised (Núñez & Pérez, 2018).

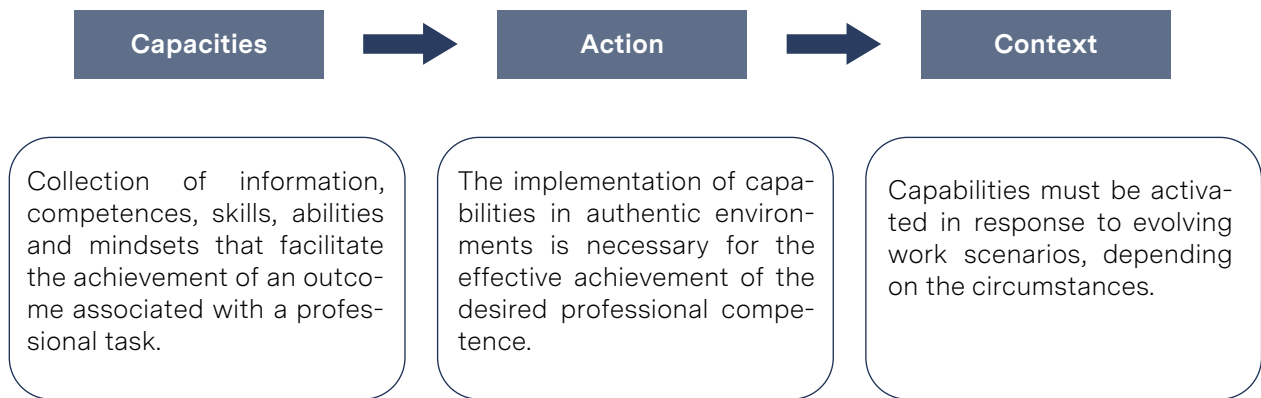
In this sense, governments face the challenge of establishing public policies that encourage the generation and use of knowledge and innovation in the constant search for social transformation. Putting knowledge in the hands of decision-makers makes it possible to be better prepared to solve demands, to take better advantage of the capacities generated in the context, and to articulate and link processes from their essential logics. All this has a direct influence on the efficiency and effectiveness of public sector administration, and is fundamental for managing local, territorial and national development.

### **CBT in public servants and SD**

Currently, the capabilities-based approach to work has undergone a remarkable strengthening and development in both the United States and Europe (including the United Kingdom and France since the 1970s). This development has led to the formalization of this approach, generating a variety of definitions and implementation strategies. The aim of this evolution is to address the new training expectations of contemporary society. The term “competence”, coined by Noam Chomsky in the 1960s, describes performance and interpretive ability, or the ability to understand and use language.

In this context, the initial definitions linked to the concept of competence are described as a set of attributes closely related to the effective execution of a specific task or function (Boyatzis, 1982; Spencer & Spencer, 1993; Ansorena, 1996). Other perspectives supported the idea of competence as a facet of transparent and observable actions that enable a person to function effectively (Wordruffe, 1993).

**Figure 1.**  
Key elements of the concept of competence.



Adaptation based on Del Pozo (2013)

The complexity of contexts motivates human beings to cultivate, take advantage of and manage their personal skills and creative and communicative abilities to generate solutions to the needs of the workplace, institutions and society as a whole. In short, competences consist of putting into action in a combined and integrated manner all the resources (skills, knowledge and attitudes) in a given context, to successfully solve problems and solve diverse situations (Sánchez Díaz, 2010).

Sergio Tobón highlights various interpretations of the term competence, which can be applied in different social, educational and labor contexts:

competence as authority, competence as a training process, competence as suitability, competence as rivalry, competence among people, competence as a requirement for the performance of a job and competence as a sporting activity (Tobón, 2008). In this way, notions such as knowledge, competences, skills, abilities, capacities, dispositions, interpersonal skills, anticipations and participation in social norms, among others, are illustrated in the description that suggests that an individual is competent to demonstrate knowledge, capacity, behavior and character, which encompasses technical, procedural, collaborative and community competences (Echeverría, 2002).

**Figure 2.**  
Definition of competence.

**Competencia Social/Personal.**

Actitudes y habilidades para comunicarse, trabajar en equipo y cooperar.

**SABER SER**

**Competencia Metodológica.**

Procedimientos y Habilidades para aplicar los conocimientos profesionales.

**SABER SER**

**Competencia Social/Personal.**

Actitudes y habilidades para comunicarse, trabajar en equipo y cooperar.

**SABER SER**

**Competencia Participativa.**

Dominio de habilidades, destrezas y capacidades para participar en la organización del entorno laboral.

**SABER SER**

Echeverría (2002)

Scholars have emphasized the importance of CBT, arguing that they are not derived from a singular paradigm, but have been influenced by a variety of contributions from various theoretical domains such as philosophy, psychology, linguistics, sociology, economics, and vocational education. This variety of perspectives has strengthened the understanding of the concept and its utilization in various sectors spanning social, business, educational and scientific domains (Bustamante *et al.*, 2015; Cejas *et al.*, 2019; Echeverría, 2002).

Over the years, several authors have explored the behaviors that drive performance according to the demands of a specific social situation. This variety of approaches has given rise to new definitions of the concept, each influenced by the author's perspective, as well as by their contributions and limitations in their application in different contexts, which has led to the emergence of new trends. An example of this is the classification proposed by Mertens (2000), who identifies behaviorism, functionalism and holism as the predominant approaches. However, Saracho (2005) considers holism more as a methodology than as a movement.

Blas (2007) and Del Pozo (2013) share views on the classification of professional competences. Blas proposes a functional model focused on the ability of workers to perform specific tasks within the work context, establishing the task-performance relationship. This model underpins specific professional CBT (Blas, 2007). Del Pozo complements this vision with the behavioral model, which focuses on personal characteristics and aptitudes, linking attitudes with the ability to solve work problems. This model establishes key and transversal competences based on personal capabilities (Del Pozo, 2013). For this author, the constructivist model of Blas (2007) is intrinsic in this approach, as it depends on communication and exchange. Both authors agree on a holistic model that integrates work tasks, personal attributes and context, thus forming a comprehensive approach to professional competences.

Theoretical frameworks on CBT in professional practice allow the redefinition of professional roles in a fluid and contemporary manner, in addition to guiding initial and continuous training programs (Del Pozo *et al.*, 2013, p. 35). As the context changes rapidly in all areas, the skills needed to improve organizational performance

also evolve, which generates the need for a teaching-learning process adaptable to these transformations (Gorgoy, 2020).

In the field of public administration, professional competences are defined as the set of skills (including abilities, aptitudes and attitudes) that public servants must possess in order to identify, locate and manage the information and knowledge needed to improve their job performance (Casañas, 2020, p. 51). It is imperative that public servants methodically monitor the needs of the population in order to address them effectively. They further list coveted competences such as dedication to public service, citizen-centered focus, determination and vigor, innovative strategic thinking, assimilating lessons from mistakes, analytical skills, cultivating a critical mindset, fostering regulatory exchange, encouraging collaborative efforts, and conscious education (Carmona *et al.*, 2020, pp. 141-142).

Cejas *et al.* (2019) proposed three fundamental domains that enrich the understanding of educational objectives: cognitive, affective and psychomotor. These domains are interconnected and are linked to the following aspects: knowledge (knowing), competences (knowing how to do) and attitudes (personal commitment). For its part, the FBT educational model focuses on enabling individuals to be autonomous in their learning, managing their own learning process and taking responsibility for planning, developing and evaluating their progress. This approach seeks that the students acquire skills to achieve high performance in various areas, integrating complex, holistic, ethical and moral thinking (Rodríguez, 2022, pp. 13-16).

Of these approaches, the importance of evaluating behaviors as a starting point for training, development and validation of competencies is highlighted. This approach represents a break with the traditional educational paradigm based on memorization, as it challenges people to apply their knowledge in diverse situations and recognizes learning as a gradual and integral process in which mistakes play a crucial role. It emphasizes more holistic educational processes, where the acquisition and assimilation of knowledge encompasses knowing how to know, knowing how to do, knowing how to be and knowing how to live together, topics that will be developed later (Ramírez-Díaz, 2020).

The objectives of the BCT procedure are clearly described to specify the accomplishments to be achieved, which forms the basis for the design of the training plan. These objectives are expected to focus on several elements, such as productivity, quality, strategic workforce planning, employee morale, fringe benefits, welfare, job security, attendance, and individual growth (Cejas *et al.*, 2019, p. 98). Deepening this knowledge and developing this expertise requires much research combined with experimental innovation programs. Pedagogical strategies based on problematization encourage inquiry, search and autonomy in knowledge management.

In order to achieve effective socioeconomic progress and improve social welfare, it is essential to ensure the maintenance of public order and tranquility, safeguard the rights of individuals, enforce their responsibilities and defend the cultural, ethical and moral values of the community. The CBT of public servants has proven to be a key element in addressing the complex challenges associated with the SD. Learning and developing specific skills such as strategic thinking, service orientation, environmental management and leadership are essential to foster more effective government practices towards a sustainable future. Public servants must therefore be empowered to play a key role in building a future that is more just, equitable and respectful of the natural and social environment.

### **Contributions to knowledge**

By analyzing various theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches, effective practices and policies were identified that strengthen the capacities of public servants, which is crucial for the successful implementation of SD policies. In addition, practical recommendations are provided that can be adopted by government institutions to improve resource management and effectiveness in public administration.

### **Limitations**

The focus on theoretical studies may not fully reflect variations in the practical implementation of CBT in different contexts. In that sense, future research could benefit from more diverse empirical studies and data sources to validate and extend these findings.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Throughout this literature review focusing on CBT between public servants and its relationship to SD, a number of key issues have been examined that form the intersection of these themes. SD is a complex process in which various social actors work together to articulate interests and meet common needs through the responsible use of natural resources and human capacities. Within this framework, knowledge management plays a key role in connecting people with knowledge centers in different domains, enabling the use of information, technologies and communication as ways to address the requirements and ambitions of organizations and communities, while recognizing the unique characteristics of each context.

There is a substantial theoretical and methodological basis supporting the enhancement of competences within public administration for the SD. However, there is a recognized need for further research and depth in this area, particularly in terms of assessing the influence of skills development programs on the efficiency and longevity of government policies and initiatives. The training and professional growth of public servants should be designed in an integral manner to cover both technical elements and general competences. This involves integrating SD-related knowledge into training curricula and fostering interpersonal skills, such as appropriate communication, teamwork and problem solving.

### **Conflicts of interest**

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.



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