

Managerial Competencies for Change Management and Innovation in Local Governments: A Case Study in the Municipalities of Bello (Antioquia) and Suba (Bogotá)

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ABSTRACT: This article analyses the essential managerial competencies for managing change and promoting innovation in local governments, based on the case study of the municipalities of Bello (Antioquia) and Suba (Bogotá). It argues that the tension between institutional resistance to change and the need for innovation constitutes a structural challenge that public leaders must balance in order to ensure organizational sustainability. The research, qualitative and descriptive in nature, was conducted through a self-administered questionnaire applied to 109 officials and 11 semi-structured interviews with strategic managers.

The results show that, while there is openness toward transformation processes, critical barriers persist, including high staff turnover, the absence of standardized transition protocols, and cultural resistance to innovation. In contrast, significant opportunities were identified, such as the adoption of digital technologies, continuous training of human capital, and the strengthening of inter-institutional alliances.

The study concludes that the development of competencies in transformational leadership, strategic vision, and knowledge management constitutes a decisive factor in addressing the contemporary challenges of local public administration. It provides a reference framework that links academic reflection with managerial practice aimed at innovation and institutional sustainability.

KEYWORDS: Organizational change, Managerial competencies, Local governments, public innovation, Transformational leadership.

I. INTRODUCTION

In local governments, the ability of managers to manage change and drive innovation constitutes a critical factor in ensuring institutional sustainability. The growing complexity of social, economic, and technological environments demands the development of competencies that enable anticipation of challenges, reduction of uncertainty, and strengthening of organizational adaptation processes. Recent studies reveal that only about 30% of innovation initiatives in the public sector achieve their objectives, reflecting the persistence of structural and cultural limitations in administrative management [1].

This study focuses on the cases of the municipalities of Bello (Antioquia) and Suba (Bogotá), which serve as representative scenarios of the challenges faced by local administrations in Colombia. Among the main difficulties identified are high staff turnover and the absence of standardized transition protocols—factors that affect institutional continuity and restrict innovation capacity [2]. The overall purpose of this research is to identify the managerial competencies required to manage change and innovation in local governments, providing a reference framework applicable to other municipal administrations and contributing to the strengthening of both academic and practical discussions on public management in Latin America.

II. METHODOLOGY

The research adopted a qualitative and descriptive approach, suitable for the analysis of complex organizational phenomena, as it prioritizes in-depth understanding over the generalization of results [3]. This design made it possible to explore in detail the perceptions and experiences of the actors involved in change management and innovation processes in local governments. Complementarily, a bibliometric review was incorporated with the purpose of identifying global trends, gaps in the literature, and areas of opportunity for future research. This analysis included co-occurrence and co-citation indicators, as well as graphical representations and co-authorship networks, which facilitated the mapping of interrelationships among authors, topics, and theoretical frameworks [4]. As a result, this procedure strengthened the understanding of contemporary dynamics of change management in local public administrations.

With regard to fieldwork, the following procedures were applied:

- **Instruments:** A self-administered questionnaire was designed and completed by 109 officials, and 11 semi-structured interviews were conducted with managers possessing strategic decision-making authority.
- **Categories of analysis:** Demographic characterization, managerial competencies for change management, competencies for innovation, organizational barriers, and institutional opportunities.
- **Sampling:** Non-probabilistic convenience sampling, defined according to the availability of participants within the institutional context.

The triangulation between surveys and interviews strengthened the validity of the findings. The population analysed included both permanent staff and contractors from the municipalities of Bello and Suba, which provided a comprehensive view of local administrative realities [5].

2.1 Fieldwork Phases

The fieldwork phases in this research were based on the model proposed by Yin [6], which outlines a systematic process that ensures coherence among data collection, analysis, and interpretation. This model comprises five essential stages: planning, access to the environment, data collection, iterative analysis, and closure. Within this framework, the research developed each phase in a structured manner in order to guarantee the validity and reliability of the results obtained in the study of managerial competencies in local governments.

Therefore, the methodological process of the research was carried out in five stages. In the planning stage, the case study was defined based on the project *"Between Resistance to Change and Innovation: A Challenge for Business Management"*, focused on the municipalities of Bello (Antioquia) and Suba (Bogotá). This allowed for the formulation of the problem, the research question, and the objectives. For the identification of data sources, a self-administered questionnaire was designed and applied to 109 officials from different hierarchical levels, and 11 semi-structured interviews were conducted with managers holding strategic decision-making authority.

In the access-to-environment stage, institutional permissions were managed through meetings with the human resources departments, where the objectives of the study were presented, and informed consent was obtained from the participants. Subsequently, in the data collection stage, the information from the 109 surveys was organized into four analytical categories: demographic characterization, change management, managerial competencies for change management, and managerial competencies for innovation. This information was complemented with qualitative input from the interviews.

During the iterative analysis stage, the data were compared to identify patterns, linking the results with the defined variables and triangulating the information between surveys and interviews to strengthen the reliability of the findings. Finally, in the closure stage, the results were systematized, and both the research question and the overall objective were addressed, aimed at identifying the managerial competencies necessary to manage change and innovation in the municipalities studied

2.2 Categorization

Categorization constitutes a central process in qualitative analysis, as it allows information to be organized and structured systematically to facilitate its interpretation. According to [7], categorization consists of grouping data into sets based on common themes or characteristics, which enables the identification of significant patterns and relationships.

In this research, the first step was the demographic characterization of the work teams, a crucial element for understanding the different perspectives that members contribute and that, in turn, influence the effectiveness of administrative teams and their ability to manage internal diversity. Factors such as age, gender, and educational level directly affect the organizational structure, influencing the way institutions respond to new demands and face the challenges of change [8]. Based on these criteria, an analytical matrix was designed that allowed the classification of information into four categories directly related to the research question and the objectives of the study, namely:

2.2.1 Demographic Characterization.

- Competencias directivas para la gestión del cambio.
- Managerial competencies for innovation.
- Barriers and opportunities in local governments.

Finally, in the interview data categorization matrix, the results reveal that municipal employees recognize the importance of managerial competencies, particularly in leadership and openness to change. The use of digital tools is therefore considered essential for promoting innovation. However, barriers such as resistance to change and lack of training are evident, while opportunities are primarily focused on institutional collaboration and the strategic use of technology. Consequently, the need to strengthen internal capacities and foster an organizational culture grounded in innovation is emphasized, so that change management in public entities may become more effective.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the research in the municipalities of Bello (Antioquia) and Suba (Bogotá) provide a deeper understanding of the organizational dynamics related to change management and innovation. In both institutions, permanent tensions are evident between traditional structures, which tend to preserve stability and bureaucracy, and contemporary pressures that demand openness to innovation, intensive use of technologies, and agile responsiveness to citizens’ needs.

3.1 Demographic Characterization

The characterization of the participating population reflects intergenerational and educational diversity that directly influences change management. Young officials (18–25 years old) are concentrated in technical positions, indicating that their participation is mainly associated with operational tasks with little impact on strategic planning. This finding is relevant, as their involvement in change processes is usually mediated by execution rather than by the definition of institutional guidelines.

The intermediate group (26–45 years old), with a high proportion of professional and specialized education, constitutes the core of the managerial teams, as it combines technical skills with practical experience. This group is perceived as the most strategic for leading processes of innovation and institutional transformation, since it integrates academic competencies with abilities acquired through administrative practice.

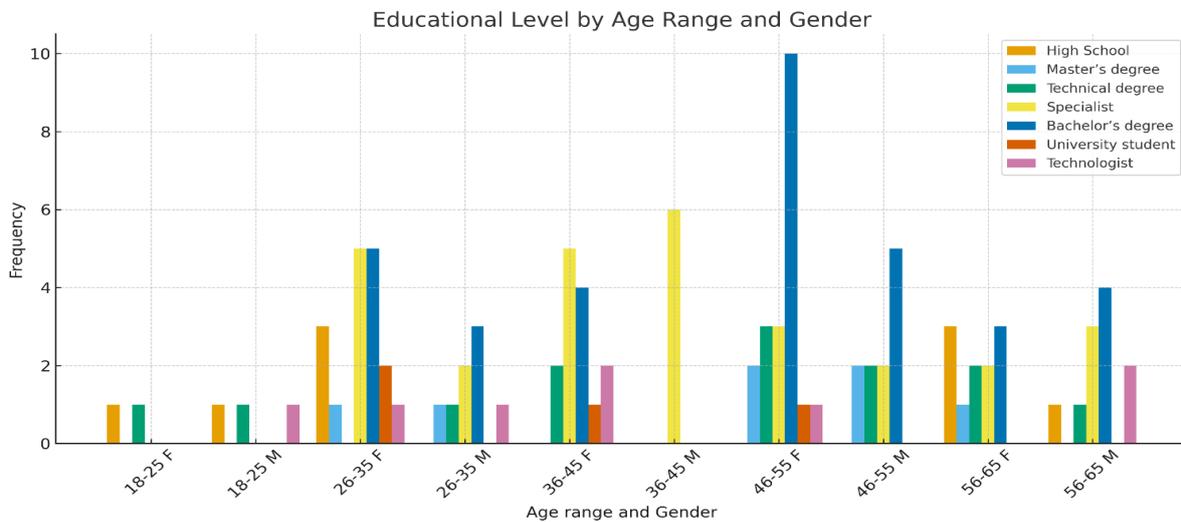


Figure 1. Distribution by educational level and gender according to age range.

For their part, older officials (46–65 years old) contribute accumulated experience and contextual knowledge, although they tend to occupy supervisory or advisory roles. This finding highlights the need to implement mechanisms for intergenerational knowledge transfer, enabling the expertise of senior officials to be leveraged for the benefit of younger generations.

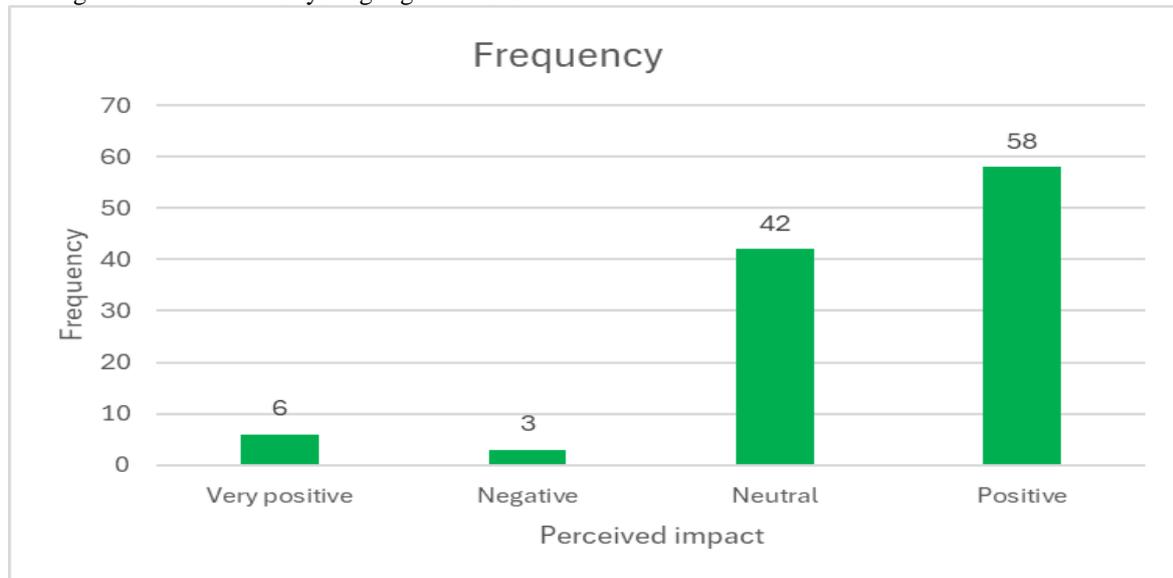


Figure 2. Distribution by educational level and gender according to age range.

Regarding gender, progress toward equity is observed in coordination roles and academic training: women have greater participation at higher education levels, reflecting the opening of opportunities in settings traditionally dominated by men. However, men continue to predominate in political and economic planning functions, which poses a challenge for equity in access to strategic positions.

3.2 Managerial Competencies

The results of the self-administered questionnaire show that more than 50% of participants perceive organizational change processes as positive for institutional performance. This finding suggests a widespread acceptance of transformation, although 42% of responses classified as “neutral” indicate that not all teams are able to link the objectives of change with concrete results. This finding reflects a communication and strategic alignment gap that limits the full appropriation of innovation processes.

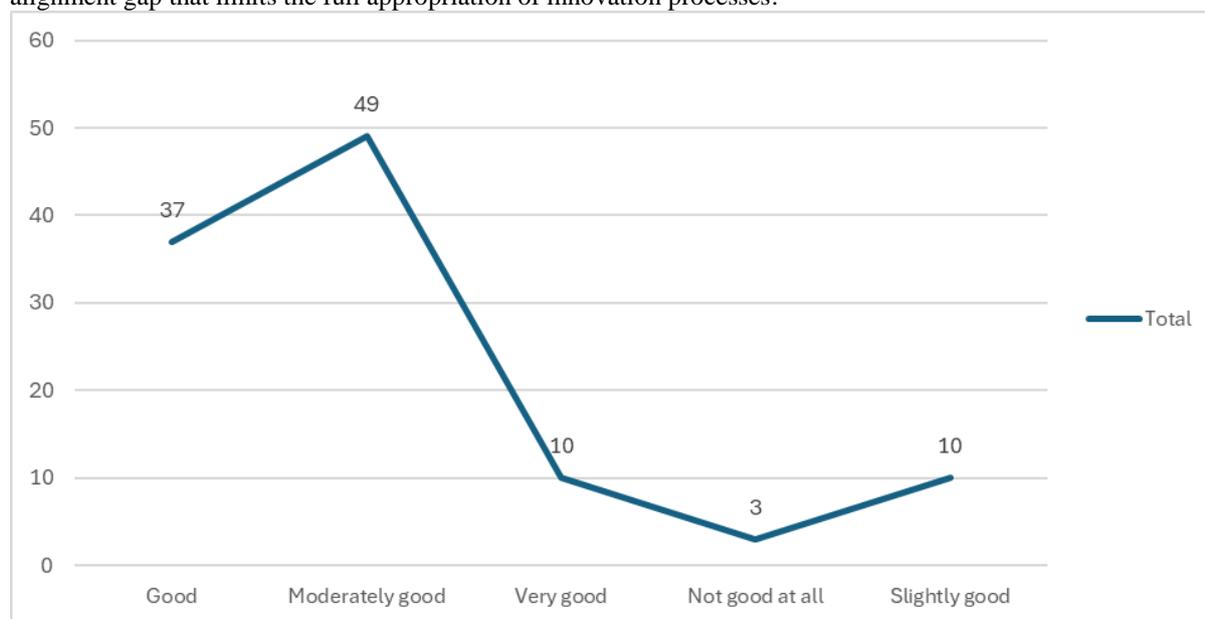


Figure 3. Managerial Competencies for Innovation

Regarding the preparedness of teams for change, most respondents consider them to be “moderately prepared.” This means that functional competencies exist to meet the basic demands of transformation processes, but a strong level of strategic adaptation has not yet been achieved. In fact, nearly 10% of officials reported feeling poorly prepared or not prepared at all, which reveals the persistence of internal resistance and gaps in training.

A cross-cutting aspect identified is organizational communication. Although most respondents perceive it as “effective” or “moderately effective,” deficiencies are evident in the clear transmission of objectives, benefits, and implications of the changes. The lack of consistency in access to information generates perceptions of uncertainty and, in some cases, passive resistance.

With regard to training, the results show that it is generally valued as useful, but not entirely satisfactory. Fifteen percent of participants indicated that the training sessions do not meet expectations, mainly due to their one-off nature and their weak integration into a comprehensive human talent development strategy. This finding underscores the need to move from isolated training sessions to continuous development programs that strengthen leadership, innovation, and organizational resilience competencies.

3.4 Results of the Interviews with Managers

The qualitative analysis of the interviews made it possible to identify three main axes:

- Critical competencies for change:** Managers acknowledge that participatory leadership, emotional intelligence, and strategic vision are indispensable competencies for managing teams in contexts of transformation. The ability to motivate, inspire, and guide diverse groups is regarded as the key differentiating factor between bureaucratic leadership and transformational leadership.

Management opportunities: The interviews reveal that managers identify technological innovation, inter-institutional collaboration, and the building of citizen trust as key opportunities for consolidating change management. They emphasize the need to establish partnerships with universities, companies, and social organizations in order to access knowledge and resources that strengthen public innovation.
- Recurrent challenges:** The main obstacles are related to cultural resistance to change, stemming from entrenched bureaucratic practices; high staff turnover, which disrupts process continuity; and difficulties in adopting new technologies due to training gaps and budgetary constraints. These factors

hinder the consolidation of an organizational culture oriented toward innovation and continuous improvement.

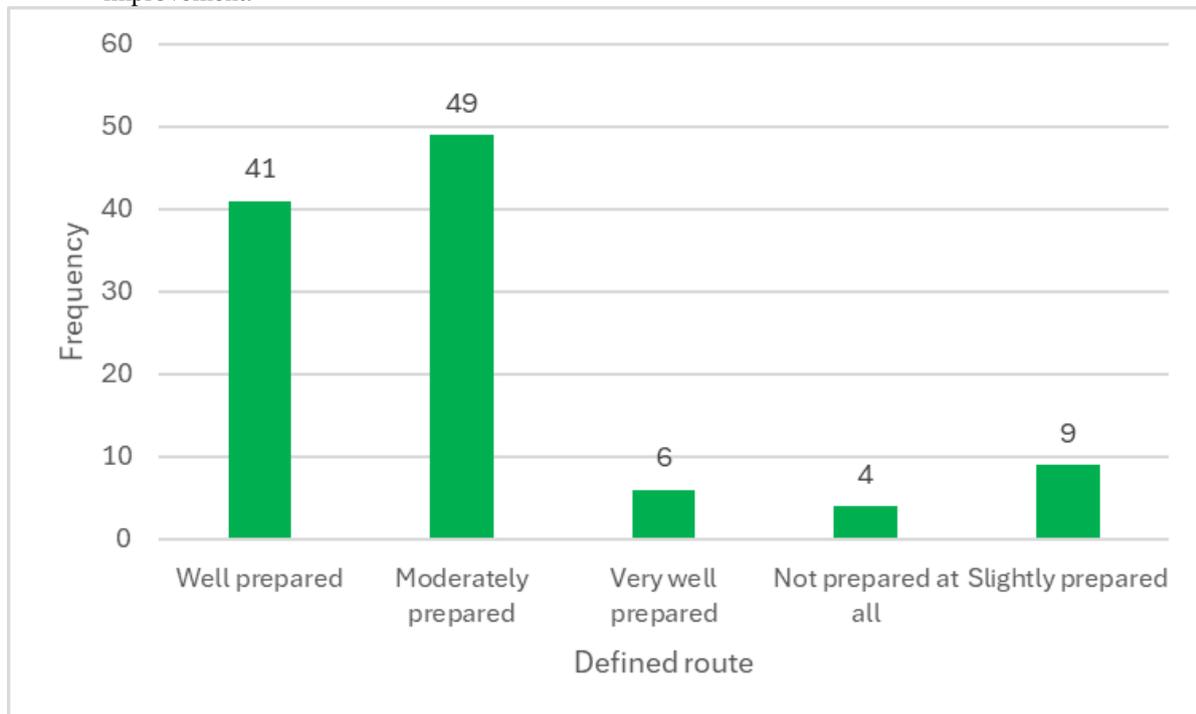


Figure 4. Defined Path for Change

Therefore, a cross-cutting finding is the importance attributed to feedback mechanisms as strategic tools for adjusting change processes. Although most respondents perceive that such mechanisms exist and are moderately effective, the interviews show that their application is neither systematic nor consistent across all hierarchical levels. This limits their potential to become a true instrument of organizational learning.

Finally, the results show that the municipalities of Bello and Suba have a significant foundation of managerial competencies oriented toward change management and innovation; however, notable gaps persist. These include the disconnection between strategic objectives and the results perceived by teams, the insufficient comprehensive preparation of officials to face transformation processes, deficiencies in internal communication, and the limited relevance of training programs. These findings suggest that, in order to consolidate more effective public management, it is essential to strengthen an organizational culture based on continuous learning, technological innovation, and inter-institutional collaboration, which would help reduce cultural resistance to change and ensure the sustainability of modernization processes in local governments.

In conclusion, innovation in territorial entities, particularly in contexts such as the municipalities of Bello and Suba, is established as a necessary support for addressing current social, technological, and environmental challenges. Resistance to change is therefore a natural phenomenon in organizations, one that can be transformed into an opportunity to strengthen leadership, reinforce organizational culture, and foster efficient, transparent, and adaptive public management. In this sense, the development of managerial capacities and soft skills becomes fundamentally important for ensuring sustainable change processes, while also aiming to build solid, inclusive territories committed to the demands of an increasingly active citizenry. Thus, innovation understood from a comprehensive perspective should not only involve technological acquisition but also be directed toward global leadership that promotes strategic planning, organizational learning, and collaborative action as the foundation of territorial progress.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The research shows that success in change management and innovation in local governments largely depends on the strengthening of specific managerial competencies. Although some territories have shown progress in this area, significant limitations persist, associated with resource shortages, insufficient training processes, and the low standardization of administrative practices factors that restrict institutional capacity to implement sustainable changes.

The findings highlight the need to strengthen the skills of local leaders to confront resistance to change while simultaneously leveraging opportunities arising from digitalization, public innovation, and new management practices. In this regard, it is essential that governments invest in continuous training programs and

promote flexible, adaptive approaches capable of responding to the changing conditions of social, economic, and technological environments.

In the specific case of the municipalities of Bello and Suba, the following are identified as priority measures: (i) the implementation of training strategies focused on managerial competencies, (ii) the use of technologies for the systematization and preservation of organizational knowledge, and (iii) the reduction of high staff turnover. These actions constitute fundamental starting points for improving institutional sustainability and strengthening the capacity for innovation in local governments. In summary, the study offers a reference framework applicable to understanding and enhancing change management in Colombian local public administration, with projection toward other Latin American contexts facing similar challenges in leadership, innovation, and governance.

Therefore, resistance to change is a phenomenon that is not foreign to organizations and is in fact unavoidable in any of them, as it generates the need to innovate in the face of competitive pressure, social demands, and the various technological advances that are redefining business models across different fields of market activity [14]. Consequently, within organizations, it is recommended to strengthen training programs in transformational public leadership, as well as to design institutional pathways for succession, mentorship, and shared leadership that foster more resilient, connected, and adaptive teams capable of facing future challenges. Finally, from a critical pedagogy, an intercultural perspective, and a transformative approach, there lies an opportunity to actively contribute to a more humane, just, and emancipatory education within the organizational sphere.

Finally, the diversity of document types published in the field of change management and innovation in public entities reveals a predominantly academic focus, with *articles* representing the majority of publications (115). This reflects significant research and academic activity. Conferences and the inclusion of these topics in book chapters also have a relevant presence, highlighting the great importance of this subject at the research level. However, it is recommended that future research not only examine change management in organizations, its associated resistance, the importance of innovation, and the strengthening of different managerial competencies in territorial entities, but also investigate the impact of artificial intelligence at the organizational level as a transversal innovation model, as well as the various transformations it would generate in processes, particularly within public entities.

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