

## Human talent and meritocracy in public institutions in the department of Norte de Santander

### Talento humano y meritocracia en instituciones públicas del departamento Norte de Santander.

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**Cómo citar:** Gómez - Arias, G. M., y Quintero - Bayona, B. T. (2023). Talento humano y meritocracia en instituciones públicas del departamento Norte de Santander. Revista Científica Profundidad Construyendo Futuro, 19(19), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.22463/24221783.3958>

**Recibido:** 02 de Febrero de 2023 / **Aprobado:** 12 de Mayo de 2023

#### Resumen

La investigación describe los factores relacionados con el talento humano y la meritocracia en instituciones públicas del departamento Norte de Santander, en virtud de la relevancia de las personas como factor crítico de éxito en la gestión de estas organizaciones. El objetivo general es relacionar la gestión del talento humano y la meritocracia en instituciones públicas del departamento Norte de Santander. Se desarrolló una investigación enmarcada en el método cuantitativo de campo, con nivel descriptivo y correlacional, el estudio de campo fue aplicado a principios del año 2022 a una muestra intencional conformada por 66 trabajadores a través de un cuestionario tipo Likert de cinco opciones contentivo de 21 preguntas en las Secretarías de gobierno de la Gobernación del Norte de Santander. Entre los resultados más relevantes se encontró que existe una diversa pluralidad de enfoques sobre la meritocracia desde las distintas ramas del saber. Los encuestados mayoritariamente manifestaron tener una percepción positiva de la gestión del talento humano y de la meritocracia. No obstante, al analizar las dimensiones propuestas en el estudio, se determinó que la organización del trabajo recibió la mejor calificación, mientras que la gestión de la compensación fue la menor puntuada. La percepción de meritocracia y la gestión del talento humano revelaron una relación estadísticamente significativa con una correlación positiva alta.

**Palabras claves:** meritocracia, organizaciones públicas, talento humano, percepción sobre meritocracia

#### Abstract

The factors related to human talent and meritocracy in public institutions of the Department of Norte de Santander are described, by virtue of the relevance of people as a critical success factor in the management of public organizations. The general objective is to relate the management of human talent and meritocracy in public institutions in the department of Norte de Santander. A research framed in the quantitative method, field, with descriptive and correlational level was developed. The field study was applied at the beginning of 2022 to an



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intentional sample made up of 66 workers through a Five-option Likert questionnaire containing 21 questions in the Government Secretariats of the Government of Norte de Santander. Among the most important results, it was found that there is a diverse plurality of approaches to meritocracy from the different branches of knowledge. The majority of respondents reported having a positive perception of human talent management and meritocracy. However, when analyzing the dimensions proposed in the study, it was determined that the organization of work received the best rating, while the management of compensation was the lowest scored. The perception of meritocracy and the management of human talent revealed a statistically significant relationship with a high positive correlation.

**Key words:** human talent, meritocracy, perception of meritocracy, public organizations

## **1. Introduction**

The development of an organization, regardless of its product or service focus, seeks customer acceptance and appreciation of its offering. This framework requires a management team with recognized capabilities that enable them to interact with and direct their staff, recognizing that many of these capabilities are subjective and difficult to assess, given that they often need to assume different roles at different times.

Therefore, it is important to enhance the skills and talents of employees and recognize their achievements to avoid a drop in productivity, apathy, or resignation from their positions, compromising the expected results in the organization. Various researchers and authors have questioned whether strategic management of human talent, strengthened through meritocratic processes with competent public servants, contributes to the creation of public value through quality services for and on behalf of citizens. As defined by Cortázar et al. (2016), the effectiveness of merit systems is a selection mechanism that allows addressing the politicization of public employment. However, it is not possible to establish with certainty whether the appointment of public servants based on merit leads to better performance in State institutions.

In organizations, regardless of their nature, whether public (government entities or non-profit associations) or private (businesses, companies), to achieve objectives, actions are coordinated between people and therefore there are limitations since it depends on the limitations and possibilities of those who work there. Malavé (1997) states that organizations share three characteristics: a) They are made up of people; b) They have defined purposes; c) Positions and formal roles are defined and the behavior of the members is stipulated.

Among the most relevant factors in business management, human talent management is of special importance since it must address the needs and perceptions, generally of a subjective nature, that emerge from individuals and that in one way or another influence their performance. ( Muchinsky , 2000), Corrales (2018), Espin et al., (2015), Pagani (2010) refer to the functions and objectives of public administration.

Public-law state organizations are those state institutions whose administration is the responsibility of the authorities and whose purpose is to provide necessary public services to citizens (de Pacheco, Fernández, & Guédez , 2017). Furthermore, these organizations are essentially subject to a process of review and approval by citizens and the state. Officials, as described by Isaza (2014), are important in encouraging the state to be impartial and

objective and to pursue professionalism in the public sector.

One of the factors that has generated the most discussion in recent years and has occupied much of the discussion is meritocracy and its relationship with people's job performance, especially in the field of public administration. For Scully (2015) and Yair (2007), meritocracy is a social system where merit or talent is the basis for classifying people into positions based on their achievements and merits; that is, those with the greatest personal talent occupy the positions of greatest power. The Royal Spanish Academy, for its part, defines meritocracy as a system of government in which positions of responsibility are awarded based on personal merit.

Meritocracy and human talent management have been studied by several researchers, including Cao et al., (2021); Castillo et al., (2019); García (2006); Moretti & Contreras (2021) present a broad and in-depth analysis of the theoretical foundation of meritocracy. For his part, González (2021) interprets Weber (1946), who points out that meritocracy exists when, in the public sector, non-elected positions are held by those who, through a selection process, lead those chosen to opt for promotions in positions based on an administrative career adjusted to the laws and regulations of the sector and the State. For example, Campoverde (2016) presents the characteristics of meritocracy and its applicability in Ecuador, and especially in the Institute of National Higher Studies, sharing the mechanisms of meritocracy that are correctly combined in the implementation of the purposes aimed at achieving the common interest and work of the country and the equality of its citizens.

In Colombia, Amezquita (2017) states that the selection of public managers is clearly shown in Law 909 of 2004, which establishes: "The

criteria of merit, personal capacities and professional experience are the substantive elements of the selection processes of the personnel that integrates the public function. Such criteria may be adjusted to public jobs of free appointment and removal, without prejudice to the discretion that characterizes them, in accordance with the provisions of this law." For their part, Bohórquez (2015), Camargo et al., (2018), Chica (2011), Pastrana & Prieto (2015) have developed studies related to meritocracy and human talent management.

The investigation was conducted in the departments of the Norte de Santander governor's office. A preliminary review found that, in the department, the CNSC has not issued any departmental calls to conduct merit-based competitions and fill freely appointed positions. Therefore, it is suggested that, in the department's government departments, the application of meritocracy has limitations for human talent management.

At the local level, research related to the topic is quite limited, and therefore, the consulted works did not provide information or empirical evidence that would allow for further investigation into the relationship between meritocracy and human talent management in public service organizations in the Norte de Santander department. This work focuses on relating meritocracy and human talent management, in order to determine whether strategic human talent management, strengthened through meritocratic processes with competent public servants, contributes to the creation of public value through quality services for and on behalf of citizens. This is in order to propose a program of good practices to support administrative management in the secretariats of the government of the Norte de Santander department.

This study follows the theoretical postulates of Cao et al. (2021); Castillo et al. (2019); García (2006); Moretti & Contreras (2021). The study was framed within a quantitative descriptive-relational research; fieldwork was carried out on an intentional sample of 66 employees from the Government Secretariats of the department's Governorate. A five-option Likert-type questionnaire consisting of 21 questions, structured in five dimensions, was applied.

The overall objective of this paper is to explore the relationship between meritocracy and human resource management in the Secretariats of the Government of the Department of Norte de Santander.

### **Theory of Public Administration**

For Longo (2004, p. 298), people management is increasingly important for leaders of governments and public sector organizations. The demand for ideas, strategies, methods, and tools to improve it has increased significantly. Longo (2004) points out the importance of people in public organizations in order to actively incorporate them into this type of administration. For their part, Chica & Álvarez (2008) affirm that public administration is originally understood as the administration of the state, the development of state organizations, that is, in the activities of the State, and is therefore related to the study of public policies. Meanwhile, Uzcátegui (2010) explains that public organizations in any state are grouped around a large number of entities that manage services, define public policies, obey orders from some political parties, have organizational successes, expectations, problems, and issues.

### **Meritocracy**

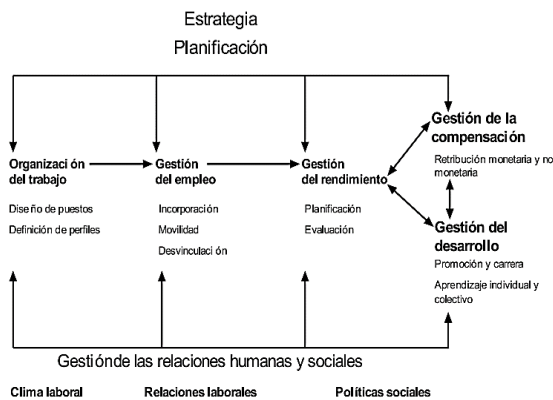
According to Scully (2015), meritocracy is a social system in which merit or talent is the basis for classifying and rewarding people, so that

positions of maximum authority are occupied by those with the greatest merit. The concept of meritocracy is considered to enter into the ethical discussion about whether social systems can be evaluated based on the extent to which they fulfill meritocratic promises or whether the moral basis of meritocracy as a distributive system can be evaluated.

Following Yair (2007), the term meritocracy has three interrelated meanings. First, it refers to a form of social order that rewards individuals based on criteria of individual merit. Second, the concept refers to an elite social class, a group of people who enjoy high prestige because some individuals have demonstrated merit based on their unique skills and achievements. Third, it refers to the criteria for assigning positions, prestige, and economic reward, by which excellent individuals benefit excessively relative to others.

### **Theory of Human Resource Management**

Longo (2004) suggests that human resource management is an integrated management system that serves the organization's strategy, which aims to produce results in line with it. Longo (2004) adds that achieving this strategic harmony in a public environment is difficult due to its inherent ambiguity and instability, leading to a strategy dilemma. Human Talent Management is developed based on the Human Resource Management Model prepared by Longo (2004).



**Figure 1**Human Resources Management Model. Source: Longo (2004) .

Likewise, Chiavenato (2011) is of the opinion that organizations would never exist without the people who give them life, energy, drive, creativity and rationality, demonstrating that human behavior is difficult to separate from organizational behavior.

Calderón (2004) comments on the importance of human management and points out that it is not only an organizational necessity, but is also a constitutional mandate.

2. Methods

The effectiveness of merit systems is a selection mechanism that allows us to address the politicization of public employment. However, it is not possible to establish with certainty whether the appointment of public servants based on merit leads to better performance in state institutions. Today, the laws and regulations governing Colombia provide the framework for addressing the great challenge of public management. According to Articles 123 and 125 of the Political Constitution and Framework Concept 07 of 2017, the Colombian State provides five forms of public employment: public employees, members of public corporations, public sector workers,

workers governed by private law, and supernumerary workers. The questionnaire designed for the development of this research was administered to this workforce.

This research is quantitative, descriptive and relational. Fieldwork was conducted in late 2021 and early 2022. A purposive sample of 66 workers was consulted using a questionnaire containing 21 Likert-type questions with five options. The questionnaire was structured with two variables and five dimensions to study the perception of meritocracy and human talent management, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**subdimensions for analyzing job satisfaction

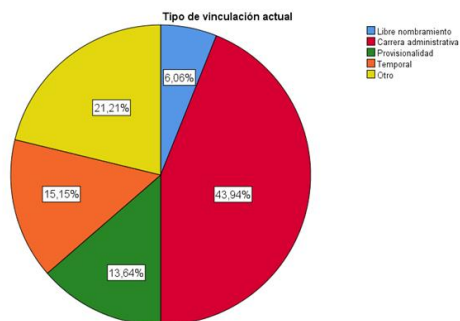
Variable	Dimensions
Meritocracy	-Regulations
	-Descriptive
	-Subjective: Perception of meritocracy
Human talent management	Work organization
	Employment management

The data was processed using SPSS v25 software. The results were analyzed for each indicator, then the dimensions, and finally each variable was characterized. The two variables and their dimensions were then related.

3. Results

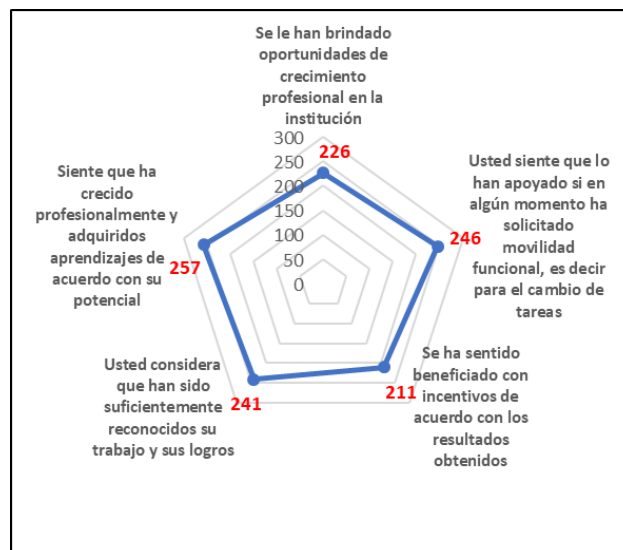
First, the type of contractual relationship identified in the unit of analysis is shown. Figure 2 shows that 43.9% of respondents reported having an administrative career, while 21.21%

reported other types of relationships. These included four contractor employees and nine service-provided employees. Meanwhile, 15.15% held temporary positions and 13.64% held provisional positions. Meanwhile, 6.1% reported holding freely appointed positions. The type of employment relationship shows that 50% of the workforce is outside of career positions.



**Figure 2** Type of contractual relationship in the Secretariats of the Government of the Department of Norte de Santander.

Regarding the perception of meritocracy, it was found that 34.9% had a high perception of meritocracy, while 27.3% rated it very high, 25.8% had a neutral perception, 10.6% had a low perception, and 1.5% had a very low perception of meritocracy. Figure 3 presents the classification of the associated indicators. The item "Feels that he or she has grown professionally and acquired knowledge in accordance with his or her potential" stood out, receiving the highest score from respondents. On the other hand, the proposition "Has felt benefited from incentives based on the results obtained" was the lowest rated.



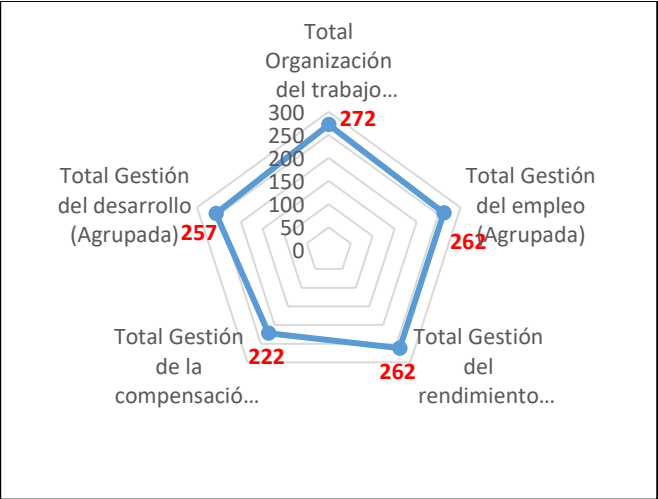
**Figure 3.** Perception of Meritocracy in the Secretariats of the Government of the Department of Norte de Santander.

As Castillo et al. (2019) point out:

Higher income can be associated with individual effort, and therefore, the perception that meritocracy works well in society could be linked to the justification of inequality. This finding is reinforced by the subjective status variable, since those who perceive themselves as occupying higher positions on the social ladder also perceive meritocracy as working better. Conversely, the negative relationship between education and the perception of meritocracy (controlled by the income variable) could indicate a situation of relative deprivation, where people who have strived to achieve higher credentials do not see their efforts and/or talents rewarded. (pp. 21-22)

The following presents the perception of Human Talent Management in the Secretariats of the Government of the Department of Norte de Santander (Figure 4). The findings show that 77.27% perceived Human Talent Management positively, 16.67% neutrally, and 6.07%

negatively. It is evident that the highest score was achieved by the work organization dimension with 272 points, in second place were employment management and performance management with 262 points each, in third place was development management with 257 points, while the lowest rated was compensation management with 222 points.



**Figure 4.** Perception of Human Talent Management in the Secretariats of the Government of the Department of Norte de Santander.

When analyzing Human Talent Management, it is evident that, in the Ministries, the compensation management dimension was also the lowest-rated; that is, respondents perceived compensation as unfavorable from a human talent management perspective, as well as from a meritocracy perspective. However, in this regard, there are regulatory and legal factors that limit public institutions from establishing incentive plans, and they must therefore comply with legal requirements.

The correlation between the study variables is presented below: perception of meritocracy and human talent management (Table 2). The result confirms a high degree of positive correlation between these variables, meaning they move in the same direction and the trend is strong between the variables. The results are

statistically significant at a 95% confidence level. The result shows that a favorable perception of meritocracy is associated with favorable human talent management. However, a deeper study of the variables reveals the results in line with those presented by Castillo et al. (2019), who state that the relationship between socioeconomic variables and meritocracy does not allow for a clear scenario to be outlined, given that there is evidence that these variables are mainly related to perceptions of meritocracy, but generally inversely.

**Table 2** Correlation between the perception of meritocracy and human talent management in the Secretariats of the Government of the Department of Norte de Santander

		Total, Perception of meritocracy (Grouped)
Spearman's Total	Human	Correlation ,766**
Rho	Talent	
	Management (Grouped)	

\*\*. The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

The correlation between perceptions of meritocracy and the dimensions of human talent management is shown below. It is evident that the variables are positive, that is, they move in the same direction. It is verified that compensation management showed the highest level (0.800), followed by employment management (0.766); then development management (0.701); these dimensions showed a high positive correlation. Meanwhile, the dimensions of performance management (0.560) and work organization (0.554) presented a moderate positive correlation. The results are statistically significant at a 95% confidence level (Table 3).



**Table 3** *Correlations between the perception of meritocracy and the dimensions of human talent management in the Secretariats of the Government of the Department of Norte de Santander*

		Total Perception of Meritocracy (Grouped)	Coefficient r <sup>2</sup>
Spearman's Rho	Total Work Organization (Grouped)	,554 **	30.7%
	Total Employment Management (Grouped)	,766 **	58.7%
	Total Performance Management (Grouped)	,560 **	31.4%
	Total Compensation Management (Grouped)	,800 **	64.0%
	Total Development Management (Grouped)	,701 **	49.1%

According to the results of the  $r^2$  coefficient, it can be indicated that compensation management is the dimension that most explains variations in the perception of meritocracy with 64%, followed by employment management with 58.7%, then development management with 49.1%, then performance management with 31.4%, and finally work organization explains variations in the perception of meritocracy with 30.7%. In other words, the compensation dimension is the one perceived as most critical by those surveyed.

#### 4. Conclusions

Having completed the research work whose general objective was to relate meritocracy and human resource management in the Government Secretariats of the Territorial Entity

"Gobernación" of the Department of Norte de Santander, the following can be concluded:

It was found that staff in the Department's Government Secretariats have a positive perception of meritocracy. A significant percentage also responded neutrally to the questions posed in the study. The findings show that the feeling of professional growth received the highest rating, while the perception of benefits and incentives based on results was the lowest.

In the evaluation of human talent in the Government Secretariats, the majority of respondents responded positively to human talent management, which allowed us to determine that work organization has the highest perception, while compensation management received the lowest score. That is, compensation is a specific satisfaction and, by nature, human beings will judge it as improvable.

The relationship between the perception of meritocracy and human talent management in the Interior Secretariats of the Department of Norte de Santander presented a high, positive correlation with a statistically significant relationship. The analysis of the dimensions associated with human talent management showed that compensation management in the Interior Secretariats is the most influential variable in the perception of meritocracy, while work organization had the lowest level of influence. This study allows us to deduce that human beings adopt behaviors that can be further studied to increase information on the topic, which in turn can serve as input for analysis and action by the leaders of human talent in territorial entities. This is even more so when the SDGs speak of the great challenge of Decent Work, with several goals that these organizations must undoubtedly promote as strategies for economic growth and the quality of life of their inhabitants.



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