

# Application of Theories of Motivation, Competencies and Methods in the Arenal Huetar Norte Conservation Area (ACAHN), of the National System of Conservation Areas (SINAC) of Costa Rica, to achieve the Institutional Goals

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## Abstract

**Objective:** This study sought to measure the level of staff motivation, as well as to identify the competencies and methods applied by the heads of the Arenal Huetar Norte Conservation Area (ACAHN), of the National System of Conservation Areas (SINAC) of Costa Rica, to achieve institutional goals.

**Methodology:** A quantitative approach with a descriptive scope and a non-experimental transectional design was used. The population consisted of 23 employees selected by means of a non-probabilistic sample to whom a questionnaire composed of 3 dimensions was applied: Motivation theories, materials and methods, and competencies.

**Results:** It was found that 44% of the Regional Office staff perceived a partial level of motivation. In addition, while more than 50% of the area chiefs apply 360° feedback and evaluation and inspirational leadership was identified in the Subregions Office with 63% incidence, 80% partially disagreed with recognition programs in the Protected Areas Office, and a perception of indifference (60%) towards competencies such as effective delegation and empathy in this same office.

**Conclusion:** The findings underscore the imperative need to boost and strengthen staff motivation at ACAHN by developing comprehensive strategies that address inconsistencies in the application of measurement methods, strengthen key managerial competencies, and significantly improve the quality and effectiveness of recognition programs.

**Keywords:** Motivation, methods and tools, managerial competencies.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In today's companies, measuring employee motivation is crucial for the success and sustainable growth of the organization. Motivation is a powerful driver of individual and collective performance, and understanding how it influences employees is critical to boosting their engagement, productivity, and job satisfaction. Motivation is defined as the set of internal and external reasons, incentives, and desires that guide a person's behavior toward achieving goals and objectives. Measuring motivation allows companies to understand what drives and hinders workers' performance, which is essential to make strategic decisions and design the goals of each employee. (Puma & Estrada, 2020) (Dolores Ruiz et al., 2023)

There are various tools and approaches to measure motivation in the workplace, such as satisfaction surveys, organizational climate assessments, individual or group interviews, and analysis of performance indicators. The benefits of measuring motivation are significant, as it helps to identify problems or areas for improvement in the organization and allows the impact of the initiatives implemented to be evaluated. When employees feel motivated, engaged, and valued, they are more likely to do their best, which drives the company's overall performance. To achieve and maintain a high level of motivation in staff, managers must possess certain key competencies, such as effective communication, inspiring and motivating leadership, and the ability to manage team performance. (Fonseca & Tomasini, 2022) (Torres-Flórez et al., 2019) (Chuman Vásquez, 2023)

In the specific case of the heads of the Arenal Huetar Norte Conservation Area (ACAHN) of the National System of Conservation Areas, of Costa Rica, it is essential that they act as role models in terms of ethics and professionalism. They must set high standards of conduct for their team and foster a positive and trusting work environment. In addition, it is important to consider the professional and technical judgment of officials and to take into account their experience in the context of conservation areas. However, there is a lack of motivation among the staff due to the lack of teamwork and the lower amounts allocated for maintenance and security budgets in the different conservation offices. According to the above, it is necessary to address these problems in order to seek answers to the question (SINAC, 2025) : ***What is the level of motivation, competencies and methods applied by the heads of the conservation area of Arenal Huetar Norte (ACAHN), of the national system of conservation areas (SINAC) of Costa Rica to achieve institutional goals?***

## 2. DEVELOPMENT

To address this study, a brief description of the theories of personnel motivation in organizations was made, as well as the tools, methods and procedures that a manager must know to measure the motivation of people in his organization and the competencies that a manager must develop to measure motivation and contribute to the achievement of institutional objectives and goals.

### 2.1 Theories of motivation in organizations

In the study of motivation and satisfaction in the workplace, there are several theories that have been developed to understand what drives human behavior in organizations. These theories can be grouped into five major approaches such as content theories, process theories, reinforcement theories, job design theories and modern theories.

#### 2.1.1 Content theories

Content theories focus on identifying the needs that motivate people. Among them is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, which states that people must satisfy their needs in a hierarchical sequence, starting with physiological needs and moving up to self-actualization. Alderfer's CKD Theory also classifies human needs into three categories: existence, relationship, and growth (Estrada, 2015). Herzberg's Theory of Two Factors or Motivation-Hygiene Theory that distinguishes between hygienic factors (which prevent dissatisfaction) and motivational factors (which promote job satisfaction). For his part, McClelland proposed the Achievement Motivation Theory, which holds that people are motivated by three key needs: achievement, affiliation, and power. Finally, McGregor presented Theory X and Theory Y, in which the former assumes that people are naturally lazy and require constant supervision, while the latter posits that workers are responsible, creative, and intrinsically motivated (Gómez, 2023)

(Ramos Cayetano, 2023) (Guzmán Vilar et al., 2021) (Romero et al., 2023) (Herreño Pino, 2024) .

### **2.1.2 Process theories**

These theories explain how motivation occurs, rather than what causes it. Adams' Theory of Fairness holds that individuals compare their efforts and rewards with those of others, and are motivated based on the degree of perceived fairness. The Expectation Theory, developed by Vroom and Lawler, states that motivation depends on three elements: the expectation of success, instrumentality (relationship between performance and reward) and valence (value given to the reward). (Pineda Estrada & Avalos Sánchez, 2020) ( Avilés -Peralta, 2024)

### **2.1.3 Reinforcement theories**

This approach is based on behaviorism and focuses on how the consequences of behavior influence motivation. Skinner's Theory of Reinforcement states that behaviors are strengthened or weakened depending on the consequences that follow them. Positive and negative incentives, as well as punishment and extinction, are key tools for shaping work behavior. (Chango- Chimbolema et al., 2023)

### **2.1.4 Theories of job design**

Theories of job design emphasize that the structure of work has a direct impact on employee motivation, satisfaction, and performance. A well-structured design can significantly boost organizational productivity. In this context, Hackman and Oldham proposed the Job Characteristics Model, which identifies factors such as autonomy, variety of tasks, significance of work, and feedback as key elements that influence intrinsic motivation. (Arturo, 2024) (Arturo, 2024)

### **2.1.5 Modern theories**

Modern theories integrate psychological, social, and organizational elements. Among them is Locke and Latham's Goal Setting Theory, which proposes that clear and challenging goals increase performance. Blanch's Theory of Meaning of Work suggests that employees are motivated when they perceive that their work contributes to collective well-being. Branden's Theory of Self-Motivation states that people are motivated when they recognize that they are the protagonists of their own lives. (Ruiz Mitjana, 2019) (Blanch, 2021) (Callejas-Pérez Diana Milena, 2022)

Other relevant theories include the Empowerment Theory, which posits that decision-making increases engagement, and Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory, which focuses on the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relationship. The Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX) emphasizes the quality of the relationship between leaders and subordinates, and Kanfer's Self-Regulation Theory holds that individuals are able to direct their motivation toward specific goals through self-control (González Domínguez et al., 2022) (Delgado-Herrada et al., 2021) ( Лазана et al., 2024) (Giraldo-Portes & González-Molina, 2024) .

Likewise, Atkinson's Theory of Achievement highlights that people are motivated to achieve success and avoid failure. Deci and Ryan's Theory of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation differentiates between motivations that come from within the individual and those that depend on external factors. Feather's 3C Theory, which arises within the expectation-value approach (Ignacio-Rodas, 2024) (Rodríguez Cedeño et al., 2024) of motivation, developed by Norman T. Feather. This perspective holds that the motivation to act is determined by what is expected to happen (expectation) and the value (or valence) that is assigned to the outcome. Feather breaks down this approach into three essential components: criterion, controllability, and consequences that influence how a goal is chosen and valued. (Fernández-Paredes, 2020)

From the sociocultural approach, Vygotsky's Theory of Social Learning argues that motivation is influenced by social interaction, while Bandura, with his Theory of Social Reinforcement, highlights the importance of learning by observation and reinforcement received from the environment. Finally, Csikszentmihalyi's Flow Theory describes an optimal state of motivation in which people feel completely immersed and satisfied in performing a challenging activity, which promotes high levels of productivity and well-being. (Rodríguez-Alfonso & Torres-Barrero, 2023) (Núñez et al., 2022) (Gúipe, 2022)

## **2.2 Methods and tools to measure motivation**

Staff motivation is a critical factor for the success of any organization. A motivated team is more productive, creative, and committed to the company's goals. Therefore, a director, supervisor, or manager must make efforts to measure and understand the level of motivation of their staff. Below are some common methods and tools used by organizations to carry out this task, these instruments must be validated and reliable and must be adapted to the context or work environment of each company or organization supported by technological tools and virtual platforms to carry out the measurement (Dolores Ruiz et al., 2023) (López-Fernández et al., 2020) (López-Fernández et al., 2020).

These include job satisfaction surveys and questionnaires that are used to collect subjective data from employees about their feelings, attitudes, and opinions related to their work and work environment. They provide an overview of motivation and problem areas that need attention. There is also feedback and performance evaluation that provides an indirect way to measure motivation by analyzing indicators such as quality of work, punctuality, initiative and productivity; Constructive feedback helps motivates employees to grow and improve. (Grin, 2022) (Rodríguez-Barboza et al., 2023) (Bohórquez et al., 2020)

Direct observation and continuous feedback is necessary as leaders must pay attention to nonverbal cues and quality of daily interactions to detect demotivation in time. Individual or group interviews allow you to explore in depth the levels of motivation and the factors that influence them. Performance and productivity indicators as high performance and goal achievement suggest strong internal motivation, while a decline in performance may indicate a lack of motivation. Recognition and reward programs also have a significant impact on staff motivation and can include public accolades, monetary incentives, and growth opportunities. 360° feedback and evaluations collect feedback from multiple sources to get a comprehensive and objective view of staff motivation level. Finally, technology platforms and software that are used to facilitate the process of measuring motivation, but can also limit personal contact and in-depth understanding of employee needs (Castro & Rodrigo, 2023) (Rueda Galeano, 2023) (Giraldo-Portes & González-Molina, 2024) (Avilés-Peralta, 2024) (Granados-Ortiz et al., 2023) (Rueda Galeano, 2023).

## **2.3 Competencies of a manager to measure staff motivation**

Key competencies that can help a manager assess and promote staff motivation include effective communication, which involves listening to employees, providing constructive feedback, and clearly conveying goals and expectations through open and transparent communication that fosters trust and motivation in the team. Empathy is also crucial, an empathetic manager can detect the signs of motivation or demotivation in their staff and take steps to address them by establishing positive emotional connections to strengthen the sense of belonging and commitment. Recognition and appreciation, a manager must identify individual and collective achievements and efforts and express their gratitude in a sincere and timely manner, to reinforce the self-esteem and sense of worth of employees, which stimulates their intrinsic motivation (Petroni, 2021) (Mora & Mora, 2020) (Rodríguez Cedeño et al., 2024).

In effective delegation, which involves delegating tasks and responsibilities appropriately, it involves assigning challenging and meaningful projects where employees develop their skills, is providing the support and resources necessary for employees to achieve their goals. Inspiring and exemplary leadership with a clear vision, to convey enthusiasm and act as a role model for their team, encouraging them to reach their full potential and generating a sense of purpose and direction, and finally change management to measure and promote staff motivation, involving employees in the change process and providing support during transitions. Efficient change management reduces uncertainty and stress, and fosters a climate of motivation and commitment (Fuentes-Jiménez et al., 2023) (De la Luz Hernández Espíndola et al., 2023) (Jiménez et al., 2024) (Jiménez et al., 2024).

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology used is a quantitative approach, with a descriptive scope and a non-experimental design to detail the level of staff motivation, competencies and methods applied by the heads of the conservation area of Arenal Huetar Norte (ACAHN), of the National System of Conservation Areas of Costa Rica to achieve institutional goals. (Hernández-Sampieri et al., 2014) (SINAC, 2025) (Bernal-Torres, 2016)

The primary sources were the database of the officials of the Arenal Huetar Norte Conservation Area (ACAHN), the secondary sources were books, journals, degree theses, websites and the internet and the tertiary sources were scientific articles from indexed journals and published references. The population under study were 23 officials from the Arenal Huetar Norte Conservation Area (ACAHN), from Costa Rica, who were chosen through a non-probabilistic sample. (Hernández-Sampieri et al., 2014) (SINAC, 2025)

The instrument used to collect the information was a survey validated by experts and composed of three (3) dimensions, the first dimension was motivation, which was composed of 23 questions, the second was methods and tools to measure motivation with seven (7) questions and the third was the dimension of managerial competencies with six (6) questions. all with response options were worked on a Likert scale and the data analysis was carried out through Microsoft Excel, applying the cross-referencing tables with the dimensions of protected areas or regions and the dimension of motivation, methods and tools to measure the motivation and competencies of managers. (Hernández-Sampieri et al., 2014)

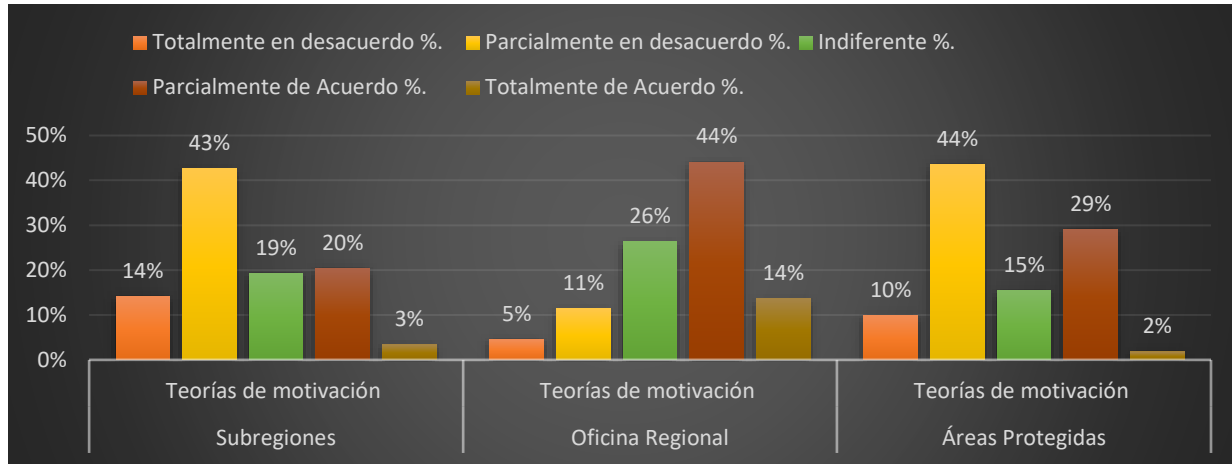
### 4. RESULTS

The results obtained from this study are presented below. In the first position are the results of the motivation dimension, according to the results of the dimension of methods and tools to measure motivation and in third position the findings of the measurement of the competencies of the heads of the conservation area of the Arenal Huetar Norte (ACAHN), of the National System of Conservation Areas (SINAC) of Costa Rica to achieve the institutional goals.

In accordance with the above, in the first place, the heads of the conservation area of the Arenal Huetar Norte (ACAHN) apply some principles of the theories of motivation in the offices of Subregions, in the Regional Office and in the Office of Protected Areas, as can be seen in **Graph 1**, to raise the level of motivation of the officials in their charge. In the Regional Office, officials indicated that they partially agree with 44 per cent, with the application of the

principles of motivation theories, followed by the office of protected areas where they are applied at 29 per cent and finally the office of subregions with 20 per cent.

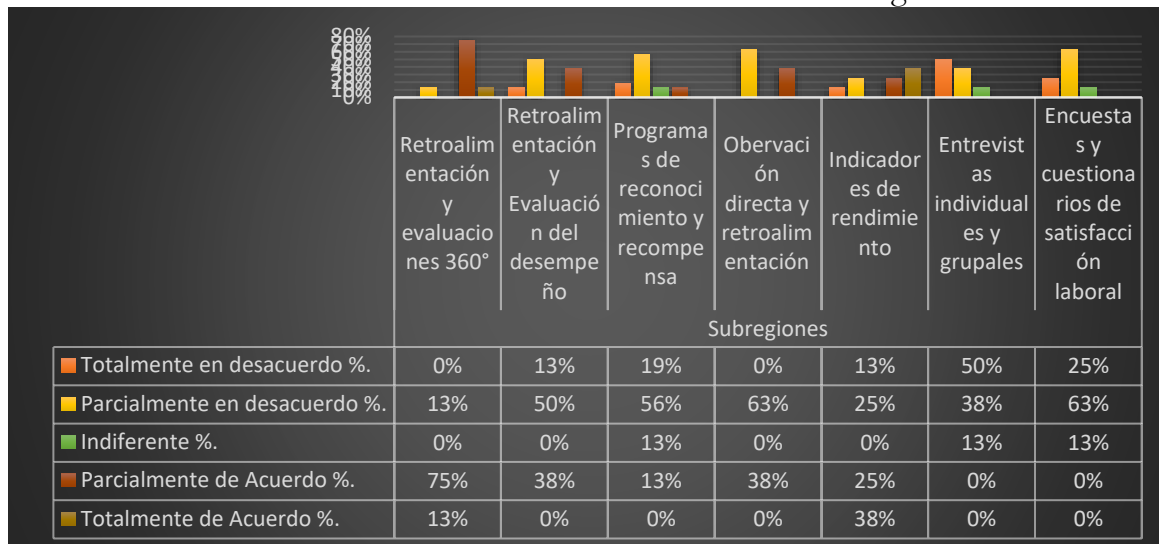
**Chart 1** Theories of motivation in the three conservation areas of the Arenal Huetar Norte.



Source: Own elaboration

In the second position and in relation to the methods and tools to measure the motivation implemented by the heads of the conservation area of the Arenal Huetar Norte (ACAHN), the Office of Subregions highlights the feedback and 360° evaluations with a percentage above 70% for the partially agreed response, followed by the surveys and questionnaires of job satisfaction and direct observation and feedback with a percentage greater than the 60% and one response partially disagree. See **Graph 2**

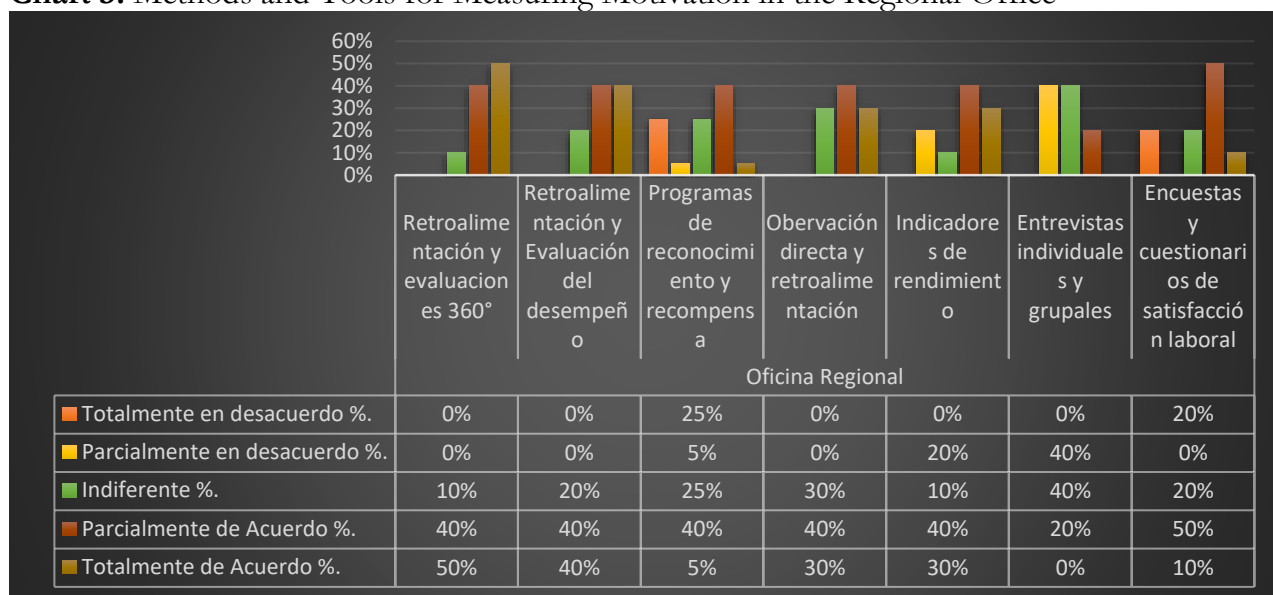
**Chart 2.** Methods and Tools to Measure Motivation Office Subregions



Source: Own elaboration

In the same way, in the Regional Office, the response is in total agreement for feedback and 360° evaluation with 50%. Job satisfaction surveys and questionnaires with 50% for the answer partially agree and for the same answer with 40%, feedback and performance evaluation, recognition and reward programs, direct observation and feedback and performance indicators. See **Graph 3**.

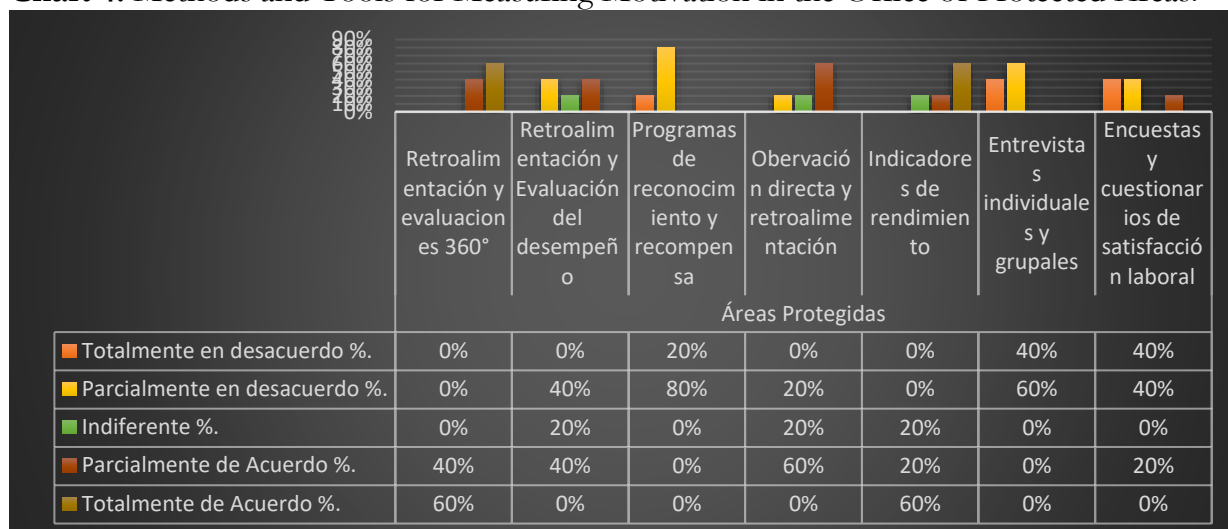
**Chart 3.** Methods and Tools for Measuring Motivation in the Regional Office



Source: Own elaboration

For its part, in the Office of Protected Areas, there are the recognition and rewards programs with 80% for the partially disagree option, followed by the totally agree option with 60% for performance and 360° evaluation and performance indicators with the same percentage, although some officials strongly agree and others partially disagree. **Figure 4**

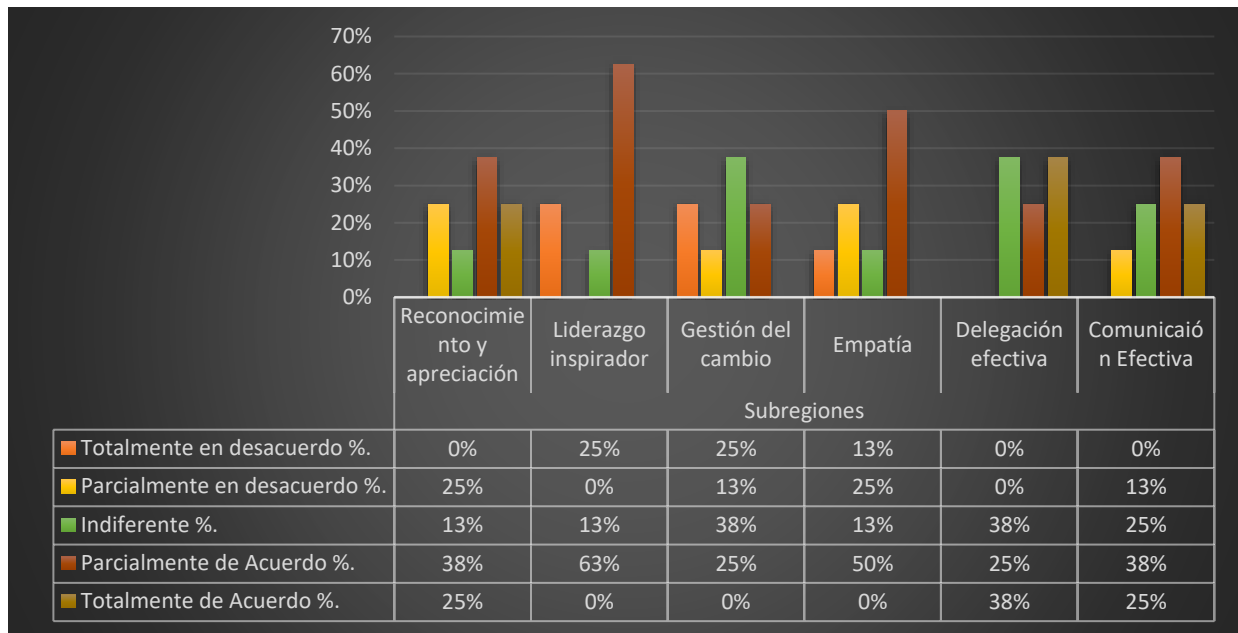
**Chart 4.** Methods and Tools for Measuring Motivation in the Office of Protected Areas.



Source: Own elaboration

In the third position, the results of the competencies applied by the heads of the conservation area of the Arenal Huetar Norte (ACAHN) are presented, to promote motivation in their collaborators, where the competence in the **Office of Subregions** and inspiring leadership stands out, with a response of partially agreement with 63% and empathy with 50%. as can be seen in **Graph 5**.

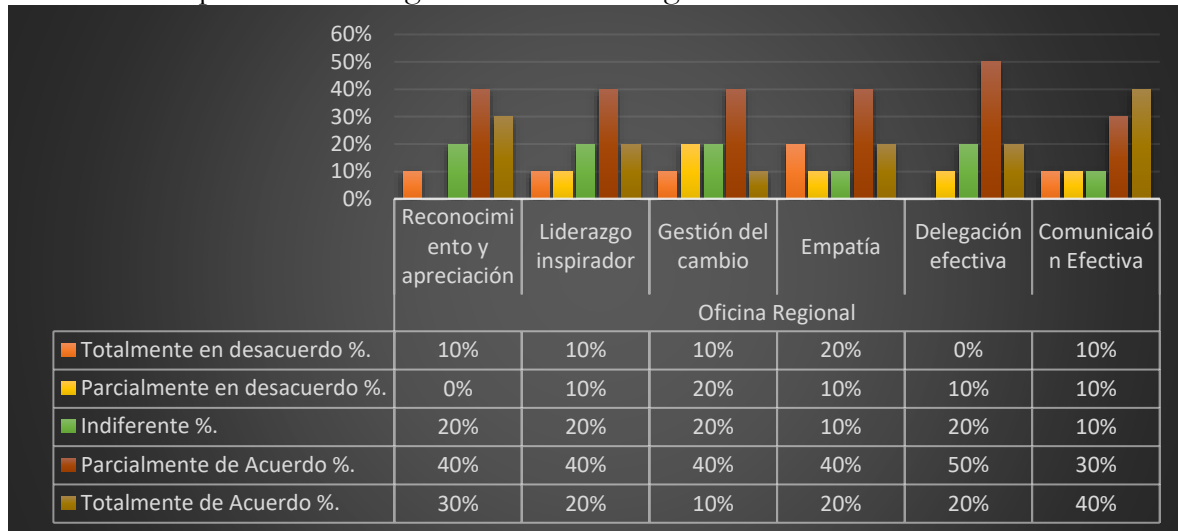
**Chart 5.** Competencies of Sub-Region Managers



Source: Own elaboration

In the **Regional Office**, effective delegation stands out with 50%, as well as empathy, change management, inspiring leadership and recognition and appreciation 40% and a response of partial agreement. **Figure 6.**

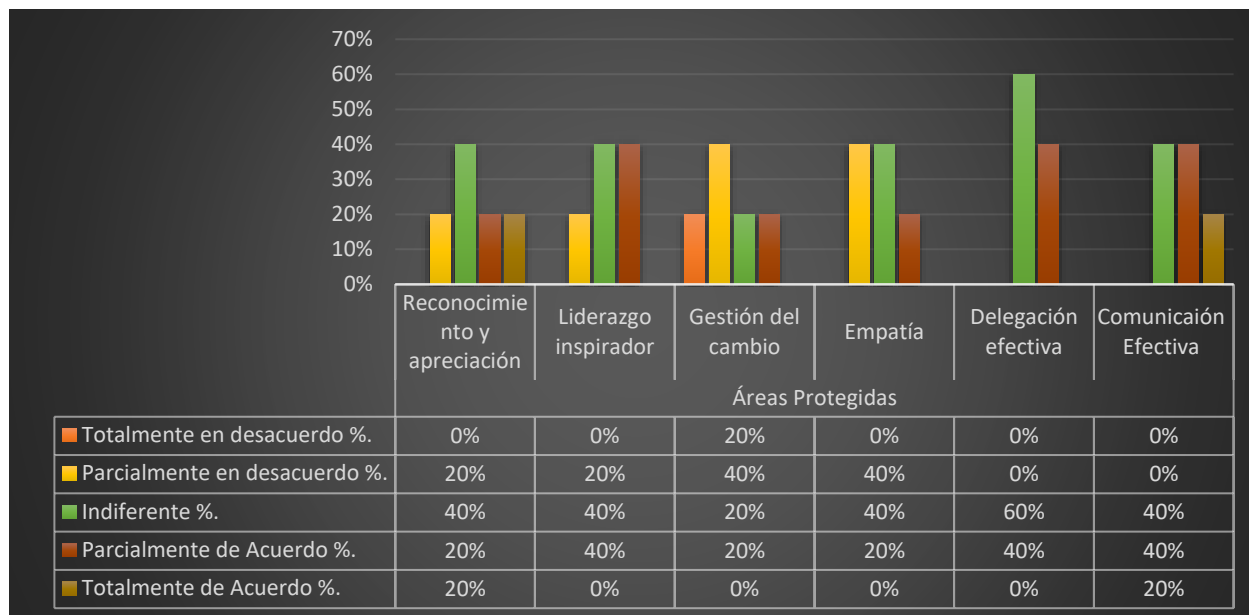
**Chart 6:** Competencies of Regional Office Managers



Source: Own elaboration

In the Office of **Protected Areas**, the indifferent response stands out with 60% for effective delegation, empathy and change management 40% with a response of partially disagreement. **Figure 7.**

**Chart 7.** Competencies of Protected Area Managers



Source: Authors.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The application of motivation theories in the Subregions office, the Regional office and the Protected Areas office, allows them to be analyzed from the five (5) major theoretical approaches. In the Office of Subregions and Protected Areas, partial disagreement predominates (43% and 44%, respectively), which indicates that the basic, social and self-realization needs of the collaborators; core principles of **content theories** such as Maslow's or Herzberg's are not being fully satisfied. This perception could also be due to unmotivating job design, with little autonomy or feedback, as postulated by Hackman and Oldham in job (Gómez, 2023) (Guzmán Vilar et al., 2021) (Castro & Rodrigo, 2023) **design theories** (Arturo, 2024) . In contrast, the Regional Office shows 44% partial agreement, suggesting that employees there perceive more clearly the processes of reward, equity, and achievable goals, in line with **process theories** such as Vroom's (expectation), Adams' (equity), and Locke's (goal-setting). However, the low proportion of "strongly agree" responses in all three units shows that the principles of (Avilés -Peralta, 2024; Pineda Estrada & Avalos Sánchez, 2020) **reinforcement theories**, which emphasize the importance of rewarding desired behaviors in order to strengthen them, are not being applied consistently. Finally, the lack of strong agreement could also signal a limited implementation of practices associated with (Chango-Chimbolema et al., 2023) **modern theories**, such as transformational leadership, intrinsic motivation, and organizational well-being. This suggests the need to rethink organizational motivation strategies from a comprehensive approach that combines individual needs, appropriate work structures, fair processes, clear incentives, and inspiring leadership. (Chuman Vasquez , 2023) (Fuentes-Jiménez et al., 2023)

The results of the dimension of methods and tools to measure motivation reveal that "360° Feedback and Evaluations" is a widely used tool in the Sub-Regions Office and the Regional Office, with more than 70% agreement in Sub-regions and 50% "Strongly Agree" in the Regional Office. However, the perceived effectiveness of other tools varies significantly between offices. While the Sub-Regions show considerable agreement on "Direct Observation and Feedback" and "Job Satisfaction Surveys and Questionnaires" (over 60%), the Regional

Office presents a "Partly Agree" of 40% for various methods, and the Office of Protected Areas stands out for a worrying 80% of "Partly Disagree" with "Recognition and Rewards Programs". This disparity suggests that, despite the implementation of some tools, inconsistency in their application or lack of a strategic focus on key elements such as recognition, may contribute to the partial demotivation of staff observed in the study. (Grin, 2022) (Granados-Ortiz et al., 2023) (Castro & Rodrigo, 2023) (Rueda Galeano, 2023) (Bohórquez et al., 2020)

The results on managers' competencies to measure motivation reveal varied patterns across offices. In the Bureau of Subregions, inspirational leadership (63% partially agree) and empathy (50%) are prominent competencies, suggesting a strong foundation for fostering enthusiasm and emotional connection. The Regional Office, on the other hand, excels in effective delegation (50%), and shows 40% partial agreement on empathy, change management, inspirational leadership, and recognition and appreciation, indicating a diversified application of competencies. In contrast, the Office of Protected Areas presents a 60% indifference towards effective delegation, empathy and change management, which could reflect a gap in the consistent application of these key competencies for staff motivation. In general, although managers have some important competencies such as inspirational leadership and empathy, the disparity in their application and the perception of their effectiveness between different offices suggests the need to strengthen and standardize these skills to have a more consistent impact on staff motivation and, therefore, on the achievement of institutional goals (De la Luz Hernández Espíndola et al., 2023) (Fuentes-Jiménez et al., 2023) (Mora & Mora, 2020)

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the level of motivation, competencies and methods applied by the heads of the Arenal Huetar Norte Conservation Area (ACAHN) reveal a heterogeneous panorama of staff motivation with significant areas for improvement. Although there is an inclination to action in the Regional office where people partially agree with motivational initiatives, it contrasts with the partial disagreement expressed in the Protected Wildlife Areas and Subregions offices. This disparity suggests that a considerable part of the staff does not find their basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relationship fully satisfied, fundamental elements according to the theory of self-determination, which directly impacts their intrinsic motivation and, consequently, commitment and productivity.

Regarding the application of methods and tools to measure motivation, a clear deficiency was identified in their implementation in protected areas and subregions, in contrast to a greater, although not fully effective, application in the Regional Office. While more than 50% of managers use feedback and 360° evaluation, the inconsistency in their use and the perception of their impact indicate that these tools do not always translate into a deep and proactive understanding of the motivational state of the staff. The underutilization of technology, which could optimize measurement processes in terms of cost, time, and relevance, represents an untapped opportunity to obtain real-time data that facilitates evidence-based decision-making and the implementation of timely improvement plans. The limitations in the effective application of these methods and in the ability to promote consistent motivation are intrinsically linked to the institutional culture and the training gaps of the leaderships. The lack of systematic support from human resources departments, who do not actively promote the use and interpretation of these tools, is a key limitation. Many bosses, whose professional training focuses on the protection and management of natural resources, lack the necessary

knowledge in administration and personnel management, which makes it difficult to implement practices aligned with theories such as goal setting or equity.

Despite these areas of opportunity, ACAHN leaders possess strengths in managerial competencies, such as the inspiring leadership present in the Subregions. It's critical to leverage these inherent skills to boost staff motivation across offices. However, to achieve transformative and consistent impact, it is imperative that managers actively seek support and guidance from HR departments. This support should focus on continuous training for the application and correct interpretation of motivation measurement methods, facilitating effective feedback and the development of improvement plans that foster a participatory and democratic work environment, where recognition and rewards (such as thank-you notes or mentions in institutional newsletters) promote the fulfillment of organizational goals and the general well-being of employees.

## **7. Recommendations**

The following recommendations are derived from the findings of the study on the level of motivation, competencies and methods applied by the chiefs of the Arenal Huetar Norte Conservation Area (ACAHN), and are based on the theories of motivation analyzed:

It is recommended that the Regional Directorate of ACAHN develop, design and implement a Comprehensive Program for the Strengthening of Management Competencies Oriented to Motivation, training and systematic awareness, aimed at all area heads. This program should focus on the practical application of motivational theories such as self-determination (promoting autonomy, competence, and relationship) and goal-setting (setting clear and achievable goals). Training should include specific modules on transformational leadership, effective communication, empathy, change management, and recognition and appreciation strategies, given the variability in the perception of these competencies across offices.

It is essential that ACAHN establishes a standardized protocol for the application of motivational measurement tools, such as feedback and 360° evaluation, complementing them with work environment surveys or specific motivation questionnaires. It is suggested to train managers not only in the implementation of these tools, but also in the critical analysis of their results and in the design of derived improvement plans, ensuring that their use is not merely formal, but contributes to evidence-based decision-making. The incorporation of technological tools can improve the efficiency and timeliness of this feedback.

ACAHN's Human Resources departments must take a proactive role in supporting management. This involves providing constant advice on the interpretation of motivation data, guiding the formulation of personalized improvement plans for each team and providing continuous didactic or training resources. Recognizing that the professional training of many bosses is not focused on personnel management, it is crucial to establish a mentoring or accompaniment system that closes these gaps.

Given the low perception of effectiveness of recognition programs in some offices, an exhaustive review of them is recommended. The design of new programs must be equitable, transparent, and diversified, including both intrinsic incentives (public recognition, development opportunities) and extrinsic incentives (tangible rewards). Coherence between performance, effort, and recognition received is vital to reinforce motivation, according to equity theory and expectation theory.

ACAHN management should integrate motivation management as a key strategic objective in its institutional development plans. This involves allocating the necessary resources for the implementation and monitoring of the proposed actions, as well as promoting a culture of

open communication, active participation and teamwork. Creating an environment where staff feel valued and empowered will not only improve motivation, but will also directly contribute to the sustainable achievement of institutional objectives and goals.

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