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MONITORING TRANSPORTATION IN THE AMAZON: A study on socio-emotional competencies of waterway transportation regulators

COMO ACONTECE A FISCALIZAÇÃO DO TRANSPORTE NA AMAZÔNIA? Um estudo sobre competências socioemocionais de reguladores do transporte aquaviário

¿QUIÉN INSPECCIONA EL TRANSPORTE EN LA AMAZONÍA? Un estudio sobre las habilidades socioemocionales de los reguladores del transporte acuático

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Abstract

Purpose: The study aims to understand how Brazilian waterway transportation regulators use socio-emotional competencies to carry out their activities, based on Mâcedo and Silva's model (2020).

Methodology: This qualitative research was conducted through semi-structured interviews with 21 civil servants. Data collected was submitted to content analysis.

Findings: The results show that regulators feel the call to public service and demonstrate empathy toward waterway transportation users and regulated operators. Also, they have positive emotions regarding their work, and working in pairs strengthens the sense of partnership. The findings suggest that civil servants are aware of the precariousness of transportation in the Amazon and observe that the central office of the regulatory agency knows little about the reality people experience in the north of Brazil. Finally, the research showed that the regulatory agency is understaffed to monitor transportation in the Amazon and that regulators are working in challenging – even life-threatening – conditions.

Originality: The literature on socioemotional competencies has been mainly quantitative. This study contributes by applying qualitative approach and an in-depth engagement with the participants. The approach allowed us to understand the meaning the regulators attributed to the social and human issues faced in monitoring waterway transportation in the Amazon.

Theoretical and practical contributions: As for managerial and political contributions, it was possible to identify the lack of resources, personnel and institutional support to carry out the monitoring the waterway of transportation in Amazon, as well as observe the civil servant's challenging – sometimes life-threatening – work conditions.

Keywords: Socio-emotional skills, Civil servants, Amazon, Waterway Transportation.

Resumo

Objetivo da pesquisa: O artigo tem por objetivo compreender como as competências socioemocionais são utilizadas no exercício das atividades de reguladores aquaviários.

Enquadramento teórico: O estudo é conduzido com base no modelo competências socioemocionais de Mâcedo e Silva (2020), que as classifica em "Consciência emocional", "Regulação emocional", "Consciência social", "Autocontrole emocional" e "Criatividade emocional".

Metodologia: Esta pesquisa é caracterizada como qualitativa, descritiva e exploratória realizada mediante entrevistas semiestruturadas com 21 servidores, analisadas por meio de análise de conteúdo.

Resultados: Os resultados demonstram que os reguladores sentem o dever de serem servidores. O trabalho acontece em duplas, o que fortalece o sentimento de parceria. Verificou-se um sentimento de empatia pelas condições do usuário do serviço e pelos regulados, e a sede do órgão pouco conhece a realidade vivenciada no norte do país. O estudo conclui que os servidores demonstraram emoções positivas em relação ao trabalho e da conscientização realidade precária do transporte da Amazônia. Observou-se a necessidade de um maior efetivo, e os servidores trabalham sob condições difíceis, como risco à vida.

Originalidade: As pesquisas realizadas até então sobre o constructo das competências socioemocionais são de caráter quantitativo. Assim, este estudo trata de uma pesquisa qualitativa, a qual busca uma intensa aproximação com os participantes, de modo a melhor compreender o significado que o grupo de indivíduos analisados atribuem às questões sociais e humanas que enfrentam na regulação do transporte aquaviário.

Contribuições teóricas e práticas: Como contribuições gerenciais e políticas, o estudo observou que há uma necessidade de uma ampliação dos recursos materiais e que os servidores trabalham sob condições difíceis, como risco à vida. Além disso, observou-se que a falta de apoio institucional, dificultou a realização das atividades inerentes à fiscalização. Ademais, observou-se a necessidade de um maior efetivo.

Palavras-chave: Competências socioemocionais, Servidor Público, Amazônia, Transporte Hidroviário.

Resumen

Objetivo de investigación: El estudio tiene como objetivo comprender cómo los reguladores de las vías navegables utilizan las habilidades socioemocionales en el ejercicio de sus actividades.

Marco teórico: El estudio se realiza a partir del modelo de Mâcedo e Silva (2020).

Metodología: Esta investigación cualitativa se realizó a través de entrevistas semiestructuradas con 21 servidores públicos. Los datos recopilados fueron sometidos a análisis de contenido.

Resultados: Los resultados muestran que los reguladores sienten el llamado al servicio público y demuestran empatía hacia los usuarios del transporte fluvial y los operadores regulados. Además, los reguladores tienen emociones positivas con respecto a su trabajo, y trabajar en parejas fortalece el sentido de asociación. Los hallazgos sugieren que los servidores públicos son conscientes de la precariedad del transporte en la Amazonía y observan que la oficina central de la agencia reguladora sabe poco sobre la realidad que viven las personas en el norte de Brasil. Finalmente, la investigación mostró que la agencia reguladora no tiene suficiente personal para monitorear el transporte en la Amazonía y que los reguladores trabajan en condiciones desafiantes, incluso con riesgo para sus vidas.

Originalidad: La literatura sobre competencias socioemocionales ha sido principalmente cuantitativa. Este estudio contribuye aplicando un enfoque cualitativo y un compromiso profundo con los participantes. El abordaje permitió comprender el significado que los reguladores atribuían a las problemáticas sociales y humanas enfrentadas en el monitoreo del transporte fluvial en la Amazonía.

Aportes teóricos y prácticos: En cuanto a las contribuciones gerenciales y políticas, fue posible identificar la falta de recursos, personal y apoyo institucional para realizar el monitoreo de la vía fluvial de transporte en Amazonas, así como observar las condiciones de trabajo desafiantes, a veces mortales, de los servidores públicos.

Palabras clave: Habilidades socioemocionales, Empleado estatal, Amazonía, Transporte fluvial.

INTRODUCTION

The transportation sector in the Amazon region is primarily developed through waterway transportation, facilitating the movement of people and goods within the area. This mode of transportation is crucial in the urban development of the region. Notwithstanding, the

existing vessels, along with the transportation routes, service regularity, embarking and disembarking conditions, and conditions within the vessels themselves, are precarious (Morgado, Portugal, & Mello, 2013).

The civil servants known as ‘regulators’ oversee private companies offering waterway transportation services for passengers and cargo in the Amazon region. These regulators hold a significant social responsibility, as citizens’ mobility and the supply of communities in this area heavily rely on this transportation system (ANTAQ, 2021; Morgado, Portugal, & Mello, 2013). Regulators are in direct contact with users and the companies operating the services. Although the state does not carry out the transportation services directly, regulators are in charge of the policy implementation and are responsible for the perception of the state in the eyes of the citizens (Lotta, 2012). Regulators face high workloads, harsh weather conditions, and limited local infrastructure. The policies they must implement are devised by central authorities and often lack relevance to the local context.

The regulators’ roles encompass some discretion when there are no specific guidelines, observing the legislation. Thus, although guided by established norms and organizational structures, the nature of their responsibility means that a significant portion of the activities involves individual decisions. Cavalcanti, Lotta, and Pires (2018) identified that these street-level bureaucrats play a critical role in implementing public policies, even though they often have to make decisions with limited information while interacting with citizens. Despite their constraints, street-level bureaucrats become a crucial entry point for citizens to access the state and exercise their social rights (Cavalcanti, Lotta, & Pires, 2018).

The research by Bonelli, Fernandes, Coêlho, and Palmeira (2019) reveals the importance of analyzing how competencies and attributes (including intellectual, emotional, and cognitive skills) of a specific profile of street-level bureaucrat are connected to different types of public policies. This discretionary authority enables the state to provide services to citizens and convert planning into effective policies (Fernandez & Guimarães, 2020; Ferreira & Medeiros, 2015). Against this backdrop, the research question posed in this study is: How do waterway transportation regulators utilize socio-emotional competencies to develop their activities?

This study is significant due to the growing emphasis on socio-emotional competencies in academic circles and society (Marin et al., 2017; Oliveira et al., 2022; Santos, Silva, Spadari, & Nakano, 2018). Furthermore, within the work context, research has highlighted that individuals possessing these competencies are less susceptible to absenteeism, disciplinary issues, unemployment, and low wages, thereby enhancing worker productivity.

REGULATORS AND WATERWAY TRANSPORTATION

The Brazilian National Waterway Transportation Agency – ANTAQ was established through Law 10233, enacted on June 5, 2001. Its responsibilities encompass regulating and monitoring waterway transportation infrastructure under the federal government’s jurisdiction. They evaluate requests and grant authorization to interstate navigation companies, as well as supervise activities related to interstate and international navigation services (ANTAQ, 2021). Inland waterways, as described by Segovia, Rajaoarisoa, Nejjari, Duviella, and Puig (2019), constitute extensive systems comprising natural rivers and artificial channels predominantly used for transporting passengers and cargo.

According to data available on the ANTAQ’s online portal, 21 companies are authorized to offer waterway transportation for passengers and 79 for both passengers and cargo (mixed transportation) in interstates or international routes, all operating in the Amazon Hydrographic Region. Caris, Limbourg, Macharis, Van Lier, and Cools (2014) assert that inland navigation can significantly enhance supply chain performance. However, when considering that quality waterway transportation involves effective management,

efficiency, safety, integration into the intermodal chain, a skilled workforce, and adherence to environmental standards, an increase in the use of inland waterway transportation implies substantial investment and research efforts.

In light of its geographic, social, and economic characteristics, the Amazon region heavily relies on river navigation as the principal mode of transportation for its population and urban supply. A collaborative study conducted by ANTAQ in partnership with the Federal University of Pará estimates that in 2017, waterways facilitated the movement of approximately 9.8 million passengers and 3.4 million tons of cargo within the states of Pará, Amazonas, Amapá, and Rondônia (ANTAQ, 2018).

Navigation has played a pivotal role in the occupation of the territory in Brazil since the colonization era, significantly contributing to the establishment of cities. The Amazon region's largest and most prominent cities are accessible via rivers (Neves et al., 2021), a characteristic that has propelled regional development by facilitating the transportation of goods, people, and commodities (Gomes et al., 2018). Thus, waterway transportation services are paramount for the population in that region, which faces a lack of economic resources and proper infrastructure.

Brazilian regulatory agencies, such as ANTAQ, establish a close relationship with the organizations they oversee (regulated entities), which are fewer in number and better organized than service users. Agencies are criticized for this proximity, allegedly losing administrative independence and failing to meet the expectations regarding technical expertise. When considering that regulatory agencies operate in adverse contexts, a pertinent issue that reinforces the importance of this research is how civil servants working in regulatory agencies respond to the reality they experience, the environment, and the organizational culture (Cunha, 2018).

SOCIO-EMOCIONAL COMPETENCES AND THE PUBLIC SECTOR CONTEXT

Many studies have analyzed the issue of socio-emotional competencies based on different definitions and assessments (Marin et al., 2017; Oliveira et al., 2022). According to Souza, Marra, Borges, and Lima (2023), emotions within organizations are intricately interwoven with labor dynamics and organizational practices, discernible through the social interplay that unfolds in everyday routines. Consequently, in the organizational milieu, emotions shape power dynamics and social interactions and embody social practices.

The construct of socio-emotional competence refers to skills encompassing other constructs such as attitudes, beliefs, emotional and social attributes, and personality traits. Thus, in order to understand socio-emotional competencies, one has to be familiar with the concept of emotional intelligence (Marin et al., 2017). For Salovey and Mayer (1990, p. 189), emotional intelligence is the "ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions." Boyatzis (2009, p. 757), on the other hand, offers a definition of emotional intelligence considering a behavioral approach reinforcing competence as a manifestation of emotional and social intelligence. For the author:

"- an emotional intelligence competency is an ability to recognize, understand, and use emotional information about oneself that leads to or causes effective or superior performance;

- a social intelligence competency is the ability to recognize, understand and use emotional information about others that leads to or causes effective or superior performance."

Oliveira et al. (2022) explain that a precise definition of socio-emotional competence is challenging given the multitude of concepts and criteria employed over time, varying across

different fields of study. For Gondim, Morais, and Brantes (2014), socio-emotional competence combines awareness, expression, regulation, and management of emotions concerning oneself and others to improve subjective, psychological, and relational well-being. For Goodman, Joshi, Nasim, and Tyler (2015), socio-emotional competence encompasses the abilities associated with self-beliefs, interpersonal interactions, and motivation for personal behavior. Macêdo and Silva (2020) emphasize that individuals with socio-emotional competence adeptly discern, understand, regulate, and articulate their emotions. This proficiency contributes to performance, learning, problem-solving, and relationship management. Such skills facilitate adaptation to the intricate demands of personal growth, thus enhancing well-being and the quality of social interactions during an individual's life.

According to Vigoda-Gadot and Meisler (2010), the supremacy of rationality in public administration suggests that the management of emotions significantly influences the outcomes of individuals and public administration as a whole. Thus, emotions and feelings are valuable tools for fostering secure relationships with citizens, social groups, public officials, and other stakeholders within the public domain. Emotional public administration involves stakeholder emotions reflecting responses to environmental shifts, encompassing distinct experiences, cognitions, physiological states, and situational assessments.

Cognitive competencies have been emphasized traditionally. However, the combination of cognitive and socio-emotional competencies has gained prominence in public and educational policies, acknowledging their significance across diverse contexts (Santos et al., 2018). Since the 1990s, competence studies adopted a more performance-oriented perspective, focusing on the necessary skills and embracing a multilevel outlook scrutinized from behavioral, social, and strategic standpoints (Silva, Bispo, & Ayres, 2019).

The widely accepted model for socio-emotional competencies remains the "Big Five" personality traits, with the categories: (i) emotional self-awareness; (ii) management of emotions; (iii) productive control of emotions; (iv) empathy; and (v) management of relationships. Boyatzis (2016) developed the Emotional and Social Competencies Inventory (ESCI), which gauges intrapersonal recognition and management of one's emotions, influence on interpersonal interactions with others, and the ability to perceive and manage emotions in others.

Table 1 illustrates the characteristics of competencies outlined by Macêdo and Silva (2020). The Socio-Emotional Competencies Scale is a self-report featuring 25 items that measure the frequency of expression of socio-emotional competencies. This scale was meticulously tailored to the nuances of Brazilian culture and underwent validation with public managers.

Table 1 Characteristics of socio-emotional competencies

Competence	Definition
Emotional awareness	Ability to recognize and understand one's own feelings and emotions and those of others, keeping a compassionate attitude, mutual trust, and acting empathically in relationships and decision-making moments
Emotional regulation	Ability to properly manage emotions to achieve satisfactory performance in stressful situations, in the medium and long term; Adapt to changing situations with flexibility and handle pressure
Social awareness	Ability to cooperate when working in a team, assuming responsibility for one's own actions, demonstrating empathy, and being able to collaborate, recognizing and understanding others' difficulties
Emotional self-	Ability to control one's own emotions in stressful situations, in the short

control	term, showing respect for the behavior of others
Emotional creativity	Ability to use emotions creatively to solve problems, manage conflicts constructively, create opportunities to experience positive emotions, and establish partnerships to pursue the public interest and social welfare

Source: Adapted from Macêdo and Silva (2020).

The literature review corroborates the pertinence of using socio-emotional competencies to study street-level bureaucrats, and the model proposed by Macêdo and Silva offers an adequate theoretical framework to carry out the research. The following section presents the methodological procedures adopted in this study.

METHOD

This research adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and exploratory approach (Collis & Hussey, 2005). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with regulators in the field of waterway passenger transport. The study encompasses a population of 33 civil servants, including specialists (with higher-level training) and regulation technicians (with mid-level training), working in offices in northern Brazil, in the cities of Belém, Manaus, and Porto Velho.

The group working in the North of Brazil was selected because waterway transportation of passengers is the primary means of population movement and supply, unlike other regions where cargo transportation prevails. Therefore, civil servants in the Amazon region work intensively with both users and regulated entities in the Amazon region, which allows us to study the socio-emotional competencies of street-level bureaucrats engaged in waterway operations. A total of 21 out of the 33 civil servants were interviewed (three of them were absent due to illness, and the other nine chose not to participate in the research). Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes.

The research participants were identified as “regulators” and numbered 1 to 21 according to the order they were interviewed. Table 2 shows their profile, including their age, position, and tenure as regulators.

Table 2 Characterization of the research subjects

Regulators	Age	Position	Job tenure (years)
Regulator 1	38	Specialist	11
Regulator 2	49	Technician	15
Regulator 3	43	Technician	11
Regulator 4	31	Technician	6
Regulator 5	45	Specialist	15
Regulator 6	40	Specialist	6
Regulator 7	49	Technician	15
Regulator 8	62	Technician	15
Regulator 9	65	Technician	15

Regulator 10	40	Specialist	11
Regulator 11	42	Technician	6
Regulator 12	36	Specialist	11
Regulator 13	40	Technician	15
Regulator 14	35	Specialist	11
Regulator 15	40	Specialist	6
Regulator 16	62	Technician	15
Regulator 17	27	Technician	6
Regulator 18	46	Technician	15
Regulator 19	40	Technician	6
Regulator 20	39	Specialist	2
Regulator 21	31	Technician	2

Source: Research data.

For confidentiality purposes, gender information was omitted from Table 2, but three of the 21 interviewees were female. Eight participants occupied positions that required higher education (specialists), while thirteen were in mid-level positions (technicians). As for the distribution of the interviewees per office, five were located in Porto Velho, six in Manaus, and ten in Belém. The interviews were conducted online via the Google Meet® platform. They were recorded and transcribed for analytical purposes. The interviews used a semi-structured script inspired by Macêdo and Silva's (2020) Socioemotional Competence Scale. The decision to use such a scale in this qualitative research was justified since the sample was formed of Brazilian professionals, which requires a scale that acknowledges cultural and contextual factors (Oliveira et al., 2022). Furthermore, this instrument had previously proven its relevance within public service studies.

The interview data underwent content analysis, employing Bardin's three-phase model (2011) and using the software Atlas.ti, version 22. Bardin's model involves (1) pre-analysis, with the organization and systematization of research materials to facilitate the final interpretation, (2) exploration of the material, seeking to understand the participants' perspectives on the research corpus, and (3) treatment of results, involving inference, interpretation, and categorization. Thus, the scale by Macêdo and Silva (2020) was submitted to a reanalysis, and the following categorization of socio-emotional competencies was established: "Emotional awareness," "Emotional regulation," "Social awareness," "Emotional self-control," and "Emotional creativity." Analysis units were extrapolated from the interview data, and the subsequent section presents the results.

RESULTS ANALYSIS

Following Bardin's analysis framework (2011), the central construct of this study, socio-emotional competencies, was discerned in consistent excerpts from the interviewees' contributions, culminating in the definition of distinct categories of analysis. These categories were emotional awareness, emotion regulation, social awareness, emotional self-control, and emotional creativity. Table 3 provides an overview of the findings.

Table 3 Summary of the codes obtained in the research

Construct	Categories	Results
Socio-emotional competence	Emotional awareness	Consciousness of being a civil servant
		Take control of one's own emotions
		Awareness of the emotions of others
		Absence of sense of cooperation
		Adaptation to the environment
		Self-defense in dangerous situations
		Pursuing the objectives of the regulatory agency
	Emotional regulation	Team relationship management
		Good performance in stressful situations
		Inability to handle team conflicts
		Maintain emotional balance
		Positioning defense
	Social awareness	Empathy with the regulated entity
		Empathy with the user
		Lack of empathy with colleagues
		Superiors do not know about the reality experienced in the field
		Lack of socialization
		Adapting to working with new colleagues
		Awareness of the societal impact of their work
		Sense of cooperation
		Degree of regulation
	Emotional self-control	Sense of not belonging to the institution
		Lack of awareness of one's own emotions
		Ability to manage one's own emotions
	Emotional creativity	Sense of team
		Communication with other members
		Conciliation of conflicts
		Adaptability to new management models
		Creativity to solve problems
		Creation of new experiences

Source: Elaborated by the authors (2023).

The category “emotional awareness” gathers the content related to the consciousness of being a civil servant, aligning actions and emotions and considering the context and the others sharing the same environment.

Regarding the absence of a sense of cooperation, it was possible to observe a connection between regulators operating individually and avoiding cooperation and an adverse organizational climate. The lack of cooperation among regulators can significantly impact the organization's performance and efficiency. Regulator 3's speech exemplifies this dynamic:

So, the performance declines. I say that to the human resources department, you have to invest in people management, emotional, and interpersonal management, right? It's a challenge for our public sector, which faces staff shortages and does not hire new personnel (...) A colleague requested a transfer to Brasilia, and the organizational climate was a key reason for them to leave (Regulator 3).

Adaptation to the environment refers to understanding the unique experience of living in the Amazon region and the capacity to adjust accordingly. Such adaptability is pivotal for regulators' individual and collective accomplishments. An examination of the conditions of waterway transport and ports in the region reveals the precariousness, as stated by Regulator 5:

They're terrible, just terrible. Picture a place without security, illumination, protection from rain or sun – there's nothing. It's not even paved. There are some piers, and they're basically makeshift. Sometimes we have to walk through one boat to reach our boat (Regulator 5).

The competence of self-defense in dangerous situations is related to the local conditions. Regulators often work in remote areas near borders, which are hotspots for criminal activities like drug trafficking, smuggling, illegal mining, and child exploitation. Regulator 12 reflects on this:

At times, some situations involve threats, and dangers to the regulator's physical well-being, especially when they're in a red zone with high incidence of drug trafficking and other crimes; the regulator is fully aware, they get scared without support from the police; we don't have possession of firearms (Regulator 12).

Consequently, a shared sense of trust emerges among the regulators, alongside the capacity for empathetic actions within relationships and decision-making (Macedo & Silva, 2020). Moreover, the discretionary authority held by civil servants is evident (Fernandez & Guimarães, 2020; Ferreira & Medeiros, 2015). An instinctive mutual trust and the adeptness at empathetic conduct among colleagues reinforce the importance of a collaborative and supportive work environment.

The interviews showed an inclination to act in pursuit of the objectives of the regulatory agency, as conveyed by the statement: "So, we represent the state, closely interact with the users, and carry out regulatory functions... I always emphasize, it's here that we truly witness action taking shape" (Regulator 1).

Subsequently, an exploration was undertaken to comprehend how regulators navigate their emotions, encapsulated within the category of "emotional regulation." This pertains to their skill in managing relationships. The interviews revealed distinct outcomes, encompassing team relationship management, staunch advocacy of positions, difficulty handling divergent viewpoints within the team, preservation of emotional balance, and effective performance under stressful circumstances.

The analysis revealed the need to improve team relationship management and interaction among team members to obtain a better organizational climate. The interviews pointed out an absence of mutual comprehension among regulators, such as in the statement by Regulator 3: "lately, when I've interacted with them (...) each person has their own viewpoint, but people only hear what they want to hear, right?!"

Some regulators find it challenging to handle team conflicts, which leads to a lack of mutual understanding when it comes to the high workload and the limited number of staff. This challenge is stated by Regulator 3:

So, for instance, if you are not in a managerial position for specialists, which pays more than [positions] for technicians, it is not worthwhile. One does not take on a leadership position for the bonus compensation. (...) We have regional units that are more complex than managerial departments in Brasilia but pay one-fourth of the bonus compensation paid in Brasilia. So, people have left these places [regional units].

Statements like these show conflict among civil servants in the region, where specialists and technicians perform comparable roles in workload and responsibility yet receive disparate remuneration.

The interviews showed that regulators have the ability to maintain emotional balance.

This ability is essential for navigating the challenging scenarios faced by passengers on water vessels. Regulator 11 expressed:

Sometimes I feel we need to get a more understanding treatment, you know? Considering the challenges we face here... This [lack of compassion] indirectly destroys – and this is natural of human beings – that enthusiasm, that drive [of getting things done], right? But we always strive to find a balance; you might feel disheartened one moment, then soon after, you're back at it, finding more work to do; that's more or less what I do" (Regulator 11).

This interviewee demonstrated emotional intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1990), showing empathy to deliver quality service continuously. These attributes align with the social and emotional competencies outlined by OECD (2018), where civil servants empathize with both the population and service providers. Furthermore, they carry out their duties with self-assuredness, accountability, and cooperation, ensuring the consistent delivery of services. Emotional self-regulation was also discernible in the interviews, aligning with the conclusions of Macêdo and Silva (2020), who contend that civil servants can adeptly manage their emotions to sustain satisfactory performance, even under stressful conditions.

The third category, social awareness, encompasses fostering meaningful connections, nurturing positive relationships, and cultivating a collaborative work environment. Within this context, it was possible to observe themes such as empathy with the regulated entity, empathy with service users, lack of empathy with colleagues, or lack of empathy from superiors (i.e., superiors do not know about the reality experienced in the field), lack of socialization, adapting to working with new colleagues, awareness of the societal impact of their work, sense of cooperation, and degree of regulation.

Regarding the issue of empathy with regulated entities, the interviewees showed an understanding of the adverse reactions and reservations from the companies they oversee. These reservations may stem from inadequate infrastructure or limited access to technology and communication channels. Regulator 3 elucidates:

No, we developed the ability to work with people from the Amazon region (...) When we started, there was no regulation. Just imagine you operate without any regulation, and then regulations start taking shape; you tell them they must obtain authorization.

Hence, regulators demonstrated to be able to assess reality and endeavor to operate under legal frameworks (Ferreira & Medeiros, 2015). This indicates a rational control over their emotions, which bears relevance in shaping the outcomes of public administration, as previously noted by Vigoda-Gadot and Meisler (2010).

Empathy, a social competence highlighted by the OECD (2018), manifested within the regulators' interactions with users, as evidenced by numerous statements. Regulators exhibit empathy and solidarity toward users' vulnerability.

Once, a wheelchair user was traveling on top of the engine room. So there she was, in her wheel chair, and her children lying on top of the engine room. Because the vessel has two decks, right? So she couldn't go up, and that deck she was on was cargo; she was cargo. So she couldn't go up, why? In a wheelchair, the stairs are very narrow, and to hold it, she had the children, and ANTAQ requires, the norm requires a cabin with accessibility (Regulator 1).

In this situation, the regulator made a decision that was unusual. They did not allow the vessel to leave, ensuring the user's safety and using their discretionary power (Fernandez & Guimarães, 2020). This case corroborates the study by Silva, Bispo, and Ayres (2019) since the regulator demonstrated the necessary attributes to develop competencies based on specific professional experiences, which reinforces the importance of action and empathy.

The interviews revealed the issues of lack of empathy with colleagues and the regulators' perception that their superiors in Brasilia do not know about the reality experienced in the

field. In this regard, Regulator 1 mentioned, “The challenge for us [here] in the North, sometimes, is to make people in Brasilia understand.”

The statements of Regulator 1 revealed that the regulatory agency’s management in Brasilia was unaware of the conditions faced by civil servants in the Amazon, i.e., the professionals working in the central office did not understand the reality in that region (Macêdo & Silva, 2020). In this case, the agency withheld the civil servants’ daily allowances for vessel trips simply because the managers in the central office did not know the conditions in the field.

The issue of lack of socialization was observed during the interviews, emerging as an element adversely impacting team dynamics and fostering an environment of individualism. Regulator 10 expressed: “Ever since I moved [to a higher hierarchical unit], I’ve felt like I’m in heaven [...] I’ve stopped having face-to-face interactions, and my interpersonal interactions have plummeted, significantly; it improved my mental well-being significantly.” In contrast, Regulator 12 stated that:

So, I see that it is important for us to strengthen these ties somehow, even if through periodic meetings. Conversations, conversations like the one we are having here online, are also of paramount importance [...] It is about talking, (...), strengthening bonds between people at work, and I notice that they like it, they like it. (Regulator 12).

As for adapting to working with new colleagues, civil servants arriving in a new office are instructed about the ground rules, and the team works to accommodate personal interests and limitations. Moreover, these regulators are aware of the societal significance of their work, recognizing the importance of serving riverside communities – which are the primary users of waterway transportation – in the country’s northern region. This aligns with Vigoda-Gadot and Meisler’s (2010) assertion that regulators’ emotions and sentiments play a pivotal role in fostering effective management and robust relationships with citizens, social groups, public officials, and other stakeholders within the public domain.

Examining their approach to regulation, it is evident that the regulators possess a discerning perspective concerning regulations and the companies they oversee. They acknowledge the adverse local conditions that even economically robust entities contend with:

We often find ourselves having to navigate through... how should I put it..., this sort of gradation (...) because while there is a single rule in place that we must apply, there are instances where it becomes impractical. So, we end up needing to approach each operator uniquely, right? If we were to enforce the standard strictly, it might render numerous companies unviable and potentially harm the users (Regulator 6).

Thus, corroborating Silva, Bispo, and Ayres (2019), regulators can evaluate real-world experiences and perform their tasks in a manner that contributes positively to society. Furthermore, the interviews that highlighted awareness of the societal impact of the regulators’ work show the need to keep developing socio-emotional skills. These regulators stressed the importance of combining cognitive and socio-emotional competencies, which has gained space in public policies, as Santos et al. (2018) observed.

Subsequently, the analysis approached the fourth category, emotional self-control, which addresses the regulators’ integration into a team through their emotions. The analysis observed the issues of a lack of awareness of one’s own emotions and a sense of not belonging to the institution.

Several statements revealed a lack of awareness of emotions, where regulators expressed discomfort with the organizational climate, often opting to work remotely – a preference that heightened after the COVID-19 pandemic. Notably, there were cases where individuals chose to attend the workplace on days when colleagues were absent. Regulator 6 remarked, “It’s better to work alone (...) I avoid saying to a colleague (...) that I do not agree with something they said; (...) it may cause conflict, then I prefer working alone.” Statements like

this one reveal a deficiency in socio-emotional skills among regulators, as conceptualized by Gondim, Morais, and Brantes (2014). These competencies entail harmonizing knowledge and actions concerning oneself and others, ultimately influencing the organizational climate.

Additionally, resistance to integrating new team members was observed in two of the three offices analyzed. Such reluctance can be interpreted as a sense of not belonging to the institution, as evidenced by Regulator 8:

I came here from [another location], I didn't receive a warm welcome, you know, I was an outsider; "what is [person from another region] doing here?" This is a [type of] resistance, it was a resistance, and it persists today. It wasn't just me (...). So, it is a strictly professional and formal setting, and friendship doesn't hold much weight; each person plays their role professionally, delivering results, you see? Others went through rejection before, it is not related to me personally; it happens to any person from outside (Regulator 8).

Lastly, the final category, emotional creativity, encompassed a sense of team, communication with other members, conciliation of conflicts, adaptability to new management models, creativity to solve problems, and creation of new experiences. This category relates to fostering information exchanges and expanding horizons.

Regarding the sense of team, a prevailing inclination among regulators was to work independently or consistently with the same partners. As expressed by Regulator 4, "I'm always in a rush, you know? I just get on with it; not much waiting around. If someone wants to assist me, great. If not, it's fine too, I won't be upset; it [the work] will be done. Understand?" Drawing from this insight and informed by Boyatzis (2009), social intelligence competencies refer to recognizing, understanding, and effectively leveraging emotional cues from others. In this context, the colleagues' limited proactivity prompts these interviewees to resolve work challenges independently.

As for adaptability to new management models, the following statements about telework were collected: "I must say, I prefer it a thousand times over. Especially since I have a young son; it helps a lot having this flexibility. And the productivity doesn't decrease. At least not mine, because we have targets to meet, right? I prefer it" (Regulator 5). Regulator 3 adds, "theres just one problem, many of us in telework, you have no social contact here, between colleagues, you loose this contact, you have to devise a strategy (...) I even suggested organizing meetings with the Brasilia teams, so they would feel part of the agency." Additionally, from the statement, "I've proved to be more productive working from home. However, the interpersonal aspects like conversation, leadership, and motivation, which were inherent in our daily interactions, have been somewhat compromised" (Regulator 12). Within this context, a dichotomy emerges concerning contact with colleagues. This phenomenon can be explained through the lens of emotional public administration, as illuminated by Vigoda-Gadot and Meisler (2010). This framework delves into stakeholders' emotions within public administration, reflecting their responses to environmental changes. This includes experiences, cognitive assessments, physical states, and ongoing situational evaluations.

The sense of team was observed also in the statement, "We had an urgent demand, you see, to regulate a nearby port, so I made myself available to go with the inspection team. Whenever sensitive matters arise, I'm always there to support the team" (Regulator 12). This shows the regulator's collaborative ethos and willingness to confront novel situations, aligning with Macêdo and Silva's (2020) assertion regarding the importance of forging partnerships to pursue public interest and social welfare.

The item "communication with other members" was evidenced in reports from interviewees working in the three offices. They mentioned frequent interactions, both with immediate supervisors (Regulators 1 and 10) and co-workers: "I often reach out to my boss and seek guidance from Brasilia. I also assist my colleagues, and I'm not hesitant to ask

questions. I'm eager to clarify doubts; if needed, I will pursue them until I find the answers" (Regulator 4). The regulators points to a lack of attention from the Brasilia unit towards their Amazon regional counterparts, alongside the challenges posed by capacity transfers. It shows the necessity for more effective skills management, enabling the organization to equip its personnel with tools for various stages of the people management cycle and offering pragmatic parameters for workforce planning (Capuano, 2015).

Concerning the conciliation of conflicts, regulators must mediate disputes between regulated entities and users. These conflicts often arise due to violations of laws, such as fare exemptions or luggage issues. Regulator 1 says, "We are there to mediate; it's our job." This data analysis thus reinforces the need, as presented by Macêdo and Silva (2020), for adept relationship management to effectively navigate complex growth demands and enhance personal well-being and the quality of social interactions throughout these civil servants' careers.

Finally, some of the interviews identified the creation of new experiences. The statements reveal the proactive role of civil servants in enhancing operational practices within the sector. For instance, a regulator highlighted a practice of embarking on vessels at intermediate points of the routing—inspections (Regulator 1). Another interviewee highlighted cross-inspection initiatives, wherein inspectors from one unit collaborate in other locations, forming distinct teams (Regulator 7).

FINAL CONSIDERATION

This study aimed to understand how waterway transportation regulators use socio-emotional competencies to carry out their activities. The analysis stressed the relevance of developing these socio-emotional competencies in order to deliver a high-quality, efficiently managed, safe, and standards-compliant service with a competent workforce. The data unveiled disparities across the offices examined (Belém, Manaus, and Porto Velho). While all offices are located in the Amazon region, the job satisfaction and positive emotions from employees in one of them were apparent. Conversely, statements from personnel in other units revealed latent team conflicts, resulting in reduced positive emotions and a need for enhanced interactivity and efficiency among staff.

In terms of emotional awareness, the interviewees display an awareness of their roles as civil servants, compelling them to strive for the regulatory agency's objective of offering quality transportation to the local population. They acknowledge their own emotions and utilize their experience of monitoring waterway transportation in remote regions when exercising discretionary powers to ensure continued transport operations. Nevertheless, a lack of cooperation among the regulators poses an additional obstacle to carrying out their activities.

Emotion regulation analysis revealed that even during moments of despondency when they feel like they are 'going in circles,' regulators adeptly handle their emotions to sustain their focus on work. Furthermore, they primarily work in pairs, engaging minimally with other colleagues. They can navigate amidst diverging ideas without exacerbating tensions, fostering positive relationships when there are potential conflicts.

Social awareness manifests when they empathize with less educated service users and with regulated entities, acknowledging that non-compliance can stem from ignorance. Despite limited socialization among regulators, they demonstrate adaptability when receiving new colleagues. In addition, the regulators pointed out that their colleagues who work in the central office in Brasilia have little knowledge about the reality experienced in the North of Brazil. The interviewees showed emotional self-control, showcasing their awareness of and competence in managing emotions when circumstances warrant. Notably,

two interviewees conveyed a sense of not belonging to the institution; intriguingly, one of these regulators had previously worked in an office in another region of Brazil.

Lastly, the interviewees demonstrate emotional creativity, skillfully communicating with both service users and providers and upholding user rights. Notably, during the COVID-19 pandemic, they swiftly adapted to telework, displaying their aptitude for suggesting improvements for the agency's offices and fostering positive experiences for themselves.

According to the interviews, bonus compensation for leadership positions must be increased because of staff shortages and heavy workloads. Moreover, the scarcity of personnel leads technicians to undertake tasks that should be carried out by professionals in positions requiring higher education (specialists) without receiving the appropriate incentives. The study highlights the demand for intensified relationship management, specifically conflict resolution, across the three analyzed units, given the limited interaction among the staff. This article contributes to the literature by expanding the perspective of socio-emotional competencies that still need further development within the public sector, offering a qualitative exploration of the construct.

The study boasts significant theoretical and societal implications, tackling socio-emotional competence within the public service – a subject relatively unexplored in existing literature. Moreover, it highlighted the precarious conditions in waterway transportation in Northern Brazil, which is vital for passengers and supplies. The findings highlight the need for more resources and improved working conditions for civil servants, who frequently face life-threatening risks when performing their duties. The study also underscores the lack of institutional support that jeopardizes the regulators' work in the field and the issue of understaffing in ANTAQ's offices in the North of Brazil, indicating the urgency for new recruitment processes, considering the agency has held only three competitive hiring processes since its inception (the last one in 2014). The managerial and political ramifications entail resource optimization, improved working conditions for civil servants, increased professionalization for operators transporting passengers and cargo, and more robust management of relationships and conciliation of conflicts within the agency's offices researched.

Regarding limitations, it was hard to get in contact with regulators, and several said they were unavailable to participate, particularly in the Manaus unit.

As recommendations for future research, as this is a preliminary study, we suggest exploring quantitative research employing the socio-emotional competence scale (Macêdo & Silva, 2020) with regulators from all regions of Brazil, facilitating comparative analysis. Moreover, extending the scope to other street-level bureaucrats would offer a broader understanding of socio-emotional competencies in different contexts.

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