




ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Professionalization and strategic performance evaluation at Encanto Hotels in Isla Azul, Sancti Spíritus

Profesionalización y evaluación estratégica del desempeño en los Hoteles Encanto de Isla Azul, Sancti Spíritus

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Abstract The professionalization of human capital in the tourism sector is a strategic pillar for increasing the competitiveness of destinations. This article analyzes the redesign of the performance evaluation system at Hoteles Encanto de Isla Azul, in Sancti Spíritus, Cuba, to align it with ongoing training processes, effective feedback, and competence development. A qualitative methodology, based on semi-structured interviews with middle managers and human resources specialists, was employed, complemented by a documentary analysis of training plans and performance reports. The results reveal that the current system focuses on operational indicators and lacks training tools, which limits its impact on professional improvement. An evaluation model centered on key competencies, structured feedback, and individualized development planning is proposed, responding to the demands of contemporary international tourism. The study concludes that a profound transformation of the evaluation system, based on the professionalization of human talent, can decisively contribute to improving service quality, strengthening organizational culture, and consolidating the Encanto hotel chain's position as a benchmark within Cuban tourism.

Keywords performance management, professionalization, Cuban tourism, competence-based evaluation, continuing education.

Resumen La profesionalización del capital humano en el sector turístico constituye un eje estratégico para elevar la competitividad de los destinos. Este artículo analiza el rediseño del sistema de evaluación del desempeño en los Hoteles Encanto de Isla Azul, en Sancti Spíritus, Cuba, con el objetivo de alinear dicho sistema con procesos de formación continua, retroalimentación efectiva y desarrollo de competencias. Se empleó una metodología cualitativa basada en entrevistas semiestructuradas a mandos medios y especialistas en recursos humanos, complementada con análisis documental de planes de formación y reportes de desempeño. Los resultados revelan que el sistema actual se enfoca en indicadores operativos y carece de herramientas formativas, lo que limita su impacto en la mejora profesional. Se propone un modelo de evaluación centrado en competencias clave, retroalimentación estructurada y planificación individualizada del desarrollo, que responda a las exigencias del turismo internacional contemporáneo. El estudio concluye que una transformación profunda del sistema evaluativo, basada en la profesionalización del talento humano, puede contribuir decisivamente a elevar la calidad del servicio, fortalecer la cultura organizacional y consolidar el posicionamiento de la cadena hotelera Encanto como referente dentro del turismo cubano.

Palabras clave gestión del desempeño, profesionalización, turismo cubano, evaluación por competencias, formación continua.

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Introduction

Tourism is a driving force of the economy of many countries; it has undergone a series of transformations derived from international contexts and situations, adversaries that pose new challenges in terms of improving marketing strategies and creating new products (Orgaz & Moral, 2016).

The specialized literature identifies performance evaluation as an essential process for continuous improvement in the hotel industry. Several authors highlight its potential as a tool for aligning individual performance with business objectives, fostering motivation, and identifying training needs (Vuong & Nguyen, 2022).

Performance appraisal has been a fundamental practice in organizations for several decades. However, in recent years, its role has undergone a profound transformation, transforming it from an administrative tool used to measure the fulfillment of tasks and responsibilities to a key strategic element in human resource management within organizations. This evolution has been driven by an increasingly competitive global business environment, where innovation, service quality, talent retention, and alignment with strategic objectives are closely dependent on effective and well-founded appraisals.

It is essential for talent management, providing valuable information on the effectiveness of processes and the alignment of employees with the company's mission and vision (Rožman et al., 2023).

In this context, performance evaluation has become a crucial tool for optimizing human resources, identifying areas for improvement, fostering professional development, and ensuring that employees are aligned with long-term organizational objectives. In tourism environments where human capital is a competitive advantage, performance management cannot be limited to administrative metrics. In Cuba, and particularly in Sancti Spiritus, Encanto Hotels face the challenge of transforming their evaluation practices into tools for professional development and service quality assurance.

In particular, recent studies have shown that well-structured performance appraisal systems not only contribute to employee career growth, but also improve customer satisfaction and, ultimately, strengthen an organization's competitiveness in the marketplace.

Effective appraisals allow for the identification of high-performing employees, providing opportunities for their recognition and development, while also helping to manage the performance of those who need to improve. Furthermore,

performance appraisals are closely linked to other processes (Rožman et al., 2023) that, when properly implemented, contribute to the creation of a system geared toward an organizational culture based on constant feedback, learning, and innovation.

Globally, major hotel chains such as Marriott, Hilton, Accor, and other industry leaders have adopted increasingly sophisticated performance evaluation models. These models are based not only on the measurement of traditional performance indicators, such as productivity or work quality, but also on the incorporation of key competencies such as emotional intelligence, problem-solving skills, innovation, and teamwork (Wynn & Jones, 2022). These chains have also integrated emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and big data analytics, to monitor performance more accurately and in real time. These innovations make it possible to tailor evaluations to market needs and facilitate more informed decisions regarding training, promotion, and talent retention.

However, in many local contexts and in developing countries, such as Cuba, the implementation of advanced performance evaluation models faces significant barriers. Technological limitations, a lack of specialized training, and rigid organizational structures constitute challenges that hinder the adoption of these advanced systems. In particular, the Cuban hotel industry, characterized by a transitioning infrastructure and a rapidly evolving tourism market, faces additional challenges in implementing performance evaluations that are aligned with international best practices.

The Cuban tourism sector has proven to be one of the strongest pillars of the national economy. It represents approximately 10% of Cuba's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and is responsible for the creation of more than 500,000 direct and indirect jobs, according to data from the Ministry of Tourism (2024). This industry is not only crucial to the country's economy but also to its social and cultural development, given that tourism in Cuba is closely linked to the preservation and promotion of historical and cultural heritage, as well as to the creation of employment opportunities in various regions of the country.

Cuba has experienced sustained growth in the number of international tourists in recent years, and its tourism offering remains attractive to travelers from around the world. The combination of paradisiacal beaches, a rich cultural history, the warmth of its people, and a unique atmosphere makes the island a preferred destination. However, increasing competition in the sector, both regionally and globally, has placed Cuban hotels under constant pressure to improve the quality

of service and customer experience.

In this context, Hoteles Encanto de Isla Azul stands out as a prime example of how the Cuban hotel sector can differentiate itself in the global market. This hotel chain has successfully combined an authentic offering that highlights Cuban culture with a focus on sustainability and personalized guest service. Hoteles Encanto not only seeks to attract international tourists but also local visitors seeking a deeper and more enriching experience. However, competitiveness within the hotel sector, especially in a globalized and dynamic market, requires constant innovation in service quality.

To maintain their relevance and ensure long-term growth, Encanto Hotels must focus on the professionalization of their staff, especially in critical areas such as customer service, management of emerging technologies, and operational sustainability. In this sense, performance evaluation is an essential component to ensure employees are prepared to face the challenges of the industry, improve their skills, and actively contribute to the competitiveness and sustainability of hotels.

Charming Hotels of Isla Azul in Sancti Spíritus

The Encanto Hotels of Isla Azul are located in the Sancti Spíritus region, one of Cuba's most iconic areas, known for its cultural richness and colonial architecture. This location not only gives them a unique historical and cultural value but also allows them to offer tourists an authentic and distinctive experience. The hotels in the Encanto chain are recognized for their picturesque architecture and focus on integrating Cuban cultural heritage into every aspect of the hotel experience, from the décor to the activities offered to guests.

Despite its success and unique appeal, Hoteles Encanto de Isla Azul faces several challenges related to the professionalization of its staff and the need to adapt to the growing demands of the global market. These challenges include ongoing employee training, updating customer service best practices, and implementing technologies that improve operational efficiency. This is where performance evaluations become a key tool, as they identify areas where employees can improve, objectively measure their performance, and offer them the necessary opportunities for development.

Challenges in performance evaluation in Encanto Hotels

Despite the importance of performance evaluations, the current Hoteles Encanto de Isla Azul system presents serious deficiencies that limit its effectiveness. According to employees

and supervisors, evaluations are conducted irregularly and lack a formal methodology for consistently measuring employee performance. Furthermore, the indicators used to evaluate performance do not always reflect the key competencies and skills necessary for quality service, such as problem-solving skills, creativity in customer service, and proper use of technological tools.

The lack of continuous feedback is also a significant problem, as employees do not constantly receive the guidance and resources necessary to improve. This is exacerbated by the absence of adequate training programs, which limits the development of core competencies to meet the demands of modern tourists. As a result, service quality suffers, and Encanto Hotels' competitiveness is compromised in an increasingly demanding market.

The growing demands of international tourism impose high standards that require highly competent, adaptable, and committed personnel in a context of new technologies (Vázquez & Pupo, 2012). In this framework, performance evaluation must be reconfigured as part of a professionalization ecosystem, integrating continuous training, helpful feedback, and connection with organizational objectives.

This study aims to thoroughly analyze the performance evaluation system for service workers at the Encanto Hotels of Isla Azul to identify strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement. Through a comprehensive analysis, the study seeks not only to diagnose existing problems but also to propose practical solutions that can be implemented to improve performance evaluation, aligning it with the demands of the tourism market and international standards.

Methodology

The study used an exploratory mixed-method approach to assess job performance at Isla Azul Encanto Hotels, combining quantitative employee surveys with qualitative interviews of supervisors. Surveys measured key performance indicators such as punctuality, attitude, service quality, and teamwork, while interviews offered insights into evaluation practices and system effectiveness. Internal documents from 2021–2024 supported the analysis.

A purposive sample of 50 frontline employees from various service roles and five supervisors was selected to ensure broad representation. Surveys used Likert-scale questions and were distributed anonymously to promote honest responses. Interviews addressed performance appraisal training, system implementation, and suggestions for improvement.

Data collection occurred in phases, starting with informa-

tional meetings, followed by anonymous survey distribution and private interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, and qualitative responses were examined through content analysis to identify key themes and perceptions.

Results and discussion

The results were presented separately for each data type, beginning with a descriptive analysis of the quantitative responses and then a qualitative interpretation of the interviews. This approach allowed for an in-depth discussion of Encanto Hotels' performance evaluation system's strengths and weaknesses and the identification of opportunities for improvement.

Integrating quantitative and qualitative results provided a holistic view of job performance evaluation, providing practical, evidence-based recommendations to optimize current processes and better align them with the demands of the international tourism market.

Combining objective and subjective techniques, this mixed methodological approach provided a broad and detailed perspective on job performance at the Encanto Hotels of Isla Azul. It also provides a solid foundation for future interventions and improvements in human talent management in the Cuban hotel industry.

The results obtained from surveys conducted among service workers at the Encanto Hotels of Isla Azul revealed that most employees (75%) consider themselves competent in their daily tasks, highlighting a sense of competence in fulfilling assigned responsibilities. However, only 50% of employees were satisfied with the current performance evaluation system.

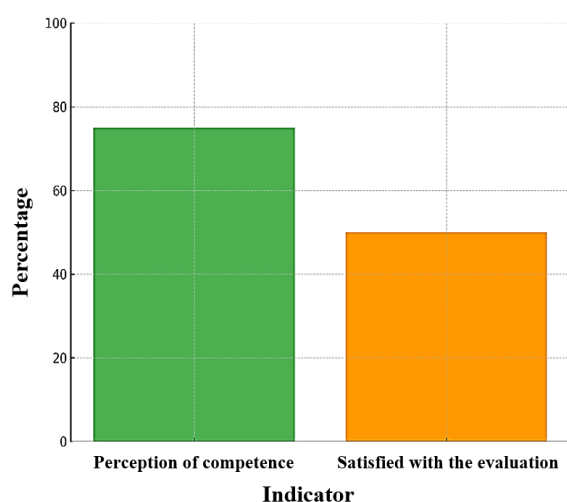


Figure 1. Employee perception of their performance.

This discrepancy suggests that, although employees perceive they are doing an adequate job, the evaluation system does not adequately reflect their performance or effectively contribute to their professional development. The areas with the lowest scores in the surveys were ongoing training and internal communication. Regarding training, only 53.8% of employees reported receiving regular training to improve their skills, highlighting a significant gap in professional development within the organization.

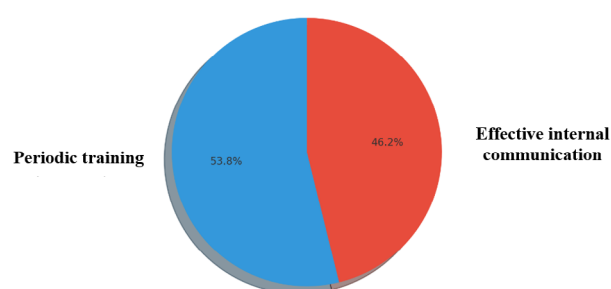


Figure 2. Perception of training and internal communication.

Regarding internal communication, only 46.2% of workers considered communication between themselves and management to be effective, reflecting a lack of clarity and alignment in work expectations and organizational objectives. This lack of communication can be one of the primary barriers to optimal performance and setting clear, achievable goals. Finally, indicators such as punctuality, attitude, service quality, and teamwork were presented, along with their respective means and standard deviations.

Table 1. Key performance indicators

Indicator	Average	Standard deviation
Punctuality	4.2	0.8
Attitude	3.9	0.7
Quality of service	3.8	0.6
Teamwork	4.1	0.7

Interviews with supervisors revealed that, although performance appraisals are conducted, they are infrequent and inconsistent in their implementation. Supervisors expressed that appraisals do not follow a fixed schedule or are not structured consistently, making it difficult to monitor and improve job performance continuously. Furthermore, the lack of ongoing feedback was identified as a significant obstacle to the early identification of areas for improvement. According to supervisors, without regular feedback, employees do not have the opportunity to correct their mistakes or enhance

their skills in real-time, which can impact the quality of service they provide to customers

Table 2. Qualitative interview topics

Issue	Supervisors' perception	Suggestions for improvement
Frequency of evaluations	Infrequent	Periodic evaluations
Feedback	Absent and irregular	Constant feedback
Performance indicators	Inadequate	Include customer service indicators

The absence of a formal, periodic evaluation system can contribute to employees feeling insufficiently valued and recognized for their efforts, which may negatively impact their motivation and commitment to the organization. Supervisors also mentioned that the current evaluation system does not include specific indicators related to customer service, which represents a significant weakness given that interaction with guests is key to success in the hotel industry.

The results of this study provide a clear understanding of the key areas that affect job performance at Hoteles Encanto de Isla Azul. Although employees fulfill their basic responsibilities, the lack of a structured and regular performance evaluation system significantly limits their potential for development and continuous improvement. This finding is consistent with previous studies, which have shown that the absence of a formal evaluation system can create a disconnect between organizational expectations and actual employee performance (Oliva, 2024).

One of the most relevant aspects highlighted in the results is the lack of training programs. Despite the importance of ongoing training in the hotel sector, particularly in meeting the challenges of the globalized tourism market, employees often do not receive sufficient training. The lack of opportunities to improve and update their skills becomes a barrier to maintaining high-quality service, which is essential for meeting tourist expectations and enhancing competitiveness in the industry. This highlights the need for Encanto Hotels to implement more robust and accessible training programs, focusing on key areas such as customer service, advanced technology management, and operational sustainability.

Assessment is an essential tool not only for measuring performance but also for providing employees with the necessary feedback that allows them to identify their strengths and areas for improvement, contributing to personal and professional growth. As part of the results, a comparative table is created between different sectors over a given period, relating to the performance evaluation processes. Observed trends

- Multidisciplinary approach: Performance evaluation

has expanded from human resources to fields such as engineering, nursing, and technology.

- Growing interest in well-being and work environment: Several studies highlight the relationship between psychosocial conditions and individual performance (Sonnentag & Hadar, 2023).
- Use of technological tools: The adoption of clinical simulation and digital systems to measure performance more objectively is observed.
- Structural and environmental performance: This also extends to physical contexts, such as buildings and soils, as indicators of sustainability.

The findings suggest that implementing a more rigorous and regular evaluation system could lead to improvements for both employees and the organization as a whole. A formal and ongoing evaluation system can provide employees with greater insight into their achievements and areas for improvement, fostering an environment that promotes professional growth.

Furthermore, a well-designed performance appraisal system has the potential to contribute to improved customer service quality directly. More skilled employees, who are aware of their strengths and weaknesses, would be better equipped to deliver high-quality, customer-focused service, thereby reducing the socio-psychological factors that affect performance (Vuong & Nguyen, 2022).

This study, while providing valuable results, has some limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the sample used was relatively small, with only 50 employees and five supervisors. This limits the representativeness of the results and the ability to generalize them to other contexts or hotel chains in Cuba or other countries. A larger sample, including a greater diversity of employees and supervisors, could provide a more comprehensive view of the dynamics of work and the effectiveness of performance evaluation systems in various contexts.

Furthermore, the study's methodology was based on the subjective perceptions of employees and supervisors. Although these perceptions offer important insight into staff experience, they may be influenced by personal factors, emotions, or past experiences that may not fully reflect the objectivity of the evaluation processes. Subjective bias could have affected both employee responses in the surveys and the interviews with supervisors. To overcome this limitation, future research could benefit from implementing more objective evaluation methods, such as performance analyses based on quantitative indicators and direct observation.

Another relevant limitation is that the study focused on a single point in time. Performance appraisal is a dynamic process that can change over time, and the effects of any intervention or change in the appraisal system cannot be ful-

Table 3. Analytical summary: performance evaluation (2020–2024)

Scope	Approach	Main objective	Key results
Higher education	Quantitative, managerial management	Improve organizational performance in admissions	Direct relationship between management planning and results in efficiency and profitability
Public services (EsSalud)	Case study, performance indicators	Analyze the impact of planning on operator performance	Identified gaps in internal communication as a limiting factor
Human talent in Ecuador	Systematic review	Relationship between work environment and productivity	Strong evidence that organizational climate impacts performance
Clinical neuropsychology	Functional assessment	Studying executive functions in adults with bipolar disorder	Deficits in working memory and sustained attention affect performance
Structural engineering	Dynamic simulation	Evaluate the seismic performance of hospitals	Hardening strategies improve security in critical infrastructure
Telecommunications	Experimental, laboratory	Testing an OTFS system	The effectiveness of the model was validated under simulated conditions
Agroindustrial sector	Ecological indicators	Evaluate the performance of soil fauna in oil palm	Biodiversity correlates with soil health and productivity

ly measured without longitudinal monitoring. The lack of a long-term focus limits the ability to evaluate how changes in appraisal systems affect performance as the organization evolves. A longitudinal study assessing the impact of interventions over an extended period could provide a deeper understanding of the sustainable effects of improvements in performance appraisal.

The implications of the results are significant for both practice and theory in the field of performance management in the hospitality sector. The findings suggest an urgent need for Hoteles Encanto de Isla Azul to implement a more formal, structured, and regular performance appraisal system. This system should be multidimensional, encompassing not only quantifiable aspects of performance, such as punctuality and the number of tasks completed, but also more subjective yet equally important qualities, including customer attitude, teamwork, and problem-solving skills.

The evaluation system should be accompanied by continuous feedback, which will allow employees to adjust their performance proactively. Regular feedback can enhance employees' sense of ownership and motivation to achieve higher goals, ultimately leading to improved service quality. Furthermore, there must be precise alignment between individual and organizational goals, so that employees understand how their performance directly impacts customer satisfaction and the hotel's overall success.

The transition to a professionalized evaluation model requires a cultural shift. Management must promote a view of

errors as a learning opportunity and align incentive systems with continuous improvement. Furthermore, training should be viewed as a strategic investment for Encanto Hotels. Training must be ongoing and continually adapted to meet new market needs, such as the adoption of new technologies, sustainable management practices, and enhanced customer experiences. Training programs should be designed to enable employees not only to acquire new skills but also to develop greater job satisfaction and commitment to the organization.

Training must be accessible, relevant, and ongoing. Instead of focusing exclusively on technical courses, it is recommended to incorporate modules on soft skills, technology applied to tourism, and customer service in multicultural contexts. Digitizing evaluation processes would enable the systematization of data, facilitating the tracking of each employee's professional development, and generating reports that inform strategic decisions.

The implementation of new technologies, such as digital performance management platforms, can provide an efficient solution to overcome some of the current system's limitations. Integrating data analysis tools and real-time feedback can improve the objectivity of evaluations, allowing for a more agile and accurate response to the needs of employees and the organization. Automating specific processes could also free up supervisors' time to focus on higher-value activities, such as mentoring and talent development.

Ultimately, this study underscores the significance of a robust organizational commitment to performance manage-

ment. Encanto Hotels must recognize that implementing an appropriate evaluation system not only benefits employees but also strengthens organizational competitiveness, improving the customer experience and increasing customer loyalty.

This approach redefines performance evaluation as a value-generating process, capable of energizing organizational culture and aligning employees with Encanto Hotels' objectives. Continuous professionalization ceases to be an isolated policy and is now operationally integrated into the talent management process.

Conclusions

The proposal presented seeks to move beyond the control-centered evaluation model and move toward a system that enhances the professionalization of staff at Encanto Hotels. This will not only contribute to improving service quality but also strengthen corporate identity and customer loyalty. The results suggest that implementing a more structured and frequent performance appraisal system would be essential to ensure accurate and continuous measurement of employee effectiveness. Such a system would allow employees to understand clear expectations, receive ongoing feedback, and adjust their performance promptly. The lack of a formalized process in the current appraisal process impedes continuous improvement, which directly impacts the quality of service provided to guests. Likewise, the need to strengthen training programs is identified; the lack of ongoing training limits the development of key competencies in employees, especially those related to customer service. By integrating appropriate training programs, workers could improve their skills and better address the challenges of the work environment.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Author contributions

Conceptualization: Oliva, A., & Murillo, J. P. **Data curation:** Oliva, A., Barrios, S., & Murillo, J. P. **Formal analysis:** Oliva, A., Barrios, S., & Murillo, J. P. **Research:** Oliva, A., Barrios, S., & Murillo, J. P. **Methodology:** Oliva, A., Barrios, S., & Murillo, J. P. **Supervision:** Oliva, A., Barrios, S., & Murillo, J. P. **Validation:** Oliva, A., Barrios, S., & Murillo, J. P. **Visualization:** Oliva, A., Barrios, S., & Murillo, J. P. **Writing the original draft:** Oliva, A., Barrios, S., & Murillo, J. P. **Writing, review and editing:** Oliva, A., Barrios, S., & Murillo, J. P.

Data availability statement

The datasets used and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Statement on the use of AI

The authors acknowledge the use of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies to improve the readability and clarity of the article.

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