

THE EFFECT OF MERIT-BASED CAREER DEVELOPMENT ON PROFESSIONALISM AND PERFORMANCE OF CIVIL SERVANTS IN INDONESIAN PORT ADMINISTRATION

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effect of merit-based career development on professionalism and performance of civil servants at the Office of Harbormaster and Port Authority Class III Tanjung Pakis, Indonesia. Using a quantitative associative approach with survey methodology, data were collected from sixty-five civil servants through saturated sampling with structured questionnaires, and direct observation. The research variables consisted of merit-based career development as the independent variable measured through competence, qualification, promotion, performance assessment, and career transparency indicators, and two dependent variables: professionalism measured through work discipline, integrity, responsibility, loyalty, and work ability, and performance measured through work quality, quantity, timeliness, effectiveness, and cooperation. Data analysis employed SmartPLS 4 encompassing validity and reliability testing, classical assumption tests, multiple linear regression, partial t-tests, simultaneous F-tests, and coefficient of determination analysis. The results indicate that merit-based career development exerts a statistically significant positive effect on both professionalism and performance of civil servants in the maritime technical administration context. The findings demonstrate that transparent and competency-based advancement mechanisms create integrated motivational conditions that simultaneously enhance professional identity and drive productive behaviors in safety-critical port operations. This study extends merit system research into an underexplored specialized government agency setting and provides evidence-based guidance for strengthening human resource management practices in Indonesia's maritime governance sector.

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INTRODUCTION

The strategic role of civil servants in public governance and service delivery has become increasingly critical amid growing demands for transparency, accountability, and professional excellence in government administration. As primary implementers of public policy, civil servants are expected to translate governmental objectives into tangible programs and services that directly benefit society, while maintaining neutrality, integrity, and commitment to constitutional values. In this context, human resource management within public organizations has evolved beyond administrative functions into a strategic imperative that determines organizational effectiveness and public trust. Hasibuan (2019) emphasizes that human resource management constitutes the science and art of regulating workforce relationships and roles to effectively and efficiently achieve organizational, employee, and societal objectives. Soetrisno (2019) further argues that human resources represent the primary factor in organizational success, serving as the main drivers of strategic planning execution and competitive advantage in public service delivery. The quality of human capital in government agencies directly influences the speed, accuracy, and satisfaction levels of public service delivery, making systematic employee development an essential component of modern bureaucratic governance.

The Indonesian government has formally institutionalized merit-based principles in civil servant management through Law Number 20 of 2023 concerning Civil Servants, which mandates that all personnel decisions including recruitment, appointment, placement, transfer, promotion, compensation, rewards, career development, and termination must be grounded in qualifications, competencies, and performance rather than political affiliation, ethnicity, religion, gender, or other non-merit considerations. This legal framework represents a significant milestone in Indonesia's bureaucratic reform agenda, aiming to create a professional, high-performing, corruption-free, and public-service-oriented civil service apparatus. Langgeng & Wilasari (2023) underscores that civil servant must transform into professionally competent figures with strong work ethics, where technical, managerial, and sociocultural competencies form the foundation of performance measured through education levels, functional training, and work experience. The merit system specifically emphasizes five core principles: competence to ensure technical, managerial, and sociocultural capabilities; qualification to verify relevant educational background and experience; performance to evaluate measurable work outcomes; potential to identify future organizational needs; and integrity to uphold ethical standards in all personnel processes. Adinegoro (2025) notes that merit-based management has become the mainstream approach in Indonesian government human resource management, with all technical regulations under the Civil Servant Law serving as crucial pillars of bureaucratic reform. When these principles are consistently applied in career development, they create predictable advancement pathways that motivate employees to enhance their capabilities and contribute optimally to organizational goals.

Career development within the merit framework constitutes a planned and continuous process of enhancing employee abilities, experience, and positional advancement based on demonstrated competence and achievement. Tannady (2017) defines competence as encompassing all knowledge, skills, and internal factors that enable individuals to perform tasks, suggesting that competency-based career progression ensures employees possess adequate capabilities before assuming higher responsibilities. This approach contrasts sharply with traditional seniority-based or patronage-influenced systems that often generate cynicism,

reduce motivation, and compromise service quality. In organizations where career progression is perceived as fair and transparent, employees typically exhibit higher levels of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and willingness to develop professionally. The relationship between systematic career development and employee outcomes has been documented across various public sector contexts, with research consistently demonstrating that merit-based advancement systems correlate positively with professional behavior and performance indicators.

The Office of Harbormaster and Port Authority Class III Tanjung Pakis operates as a Technical Implementation Unit under the Directorate General of Sea Transportation within Indonesia's Ministry of Transportation, executing vital functions in navigation safety supervision and port administration. Given the technical complexity and safety-critical nature of maritime operations, this agency requires civil servants with specialized competencies, rigorous professional standards, and high integrity levels. Arifin et al. (2024) highlight that civil servant function as public servants who must deliver quality, fast, transparent, and accountable services oriented toward community satisfaction, while simultaneously serving as national unifiers who maintain neutrality and uphold Pancasila values. Huberts (2014) emphasizes that integrity requires consistency between values, statements, and actions, forming the foundation of public trust in bureaucratic institutions. The effective management of human resources in such technical environments demands particular attention to competency-based placement, continuous professional development, and performance-driven advancement mechanisms. However, empirical observations and preliminary assessments suggest that merit-based career development implementation in this specialized maritime context may encounter distinctive challenges compared to general administrative agencies, including technical competency gaps, limited training accessibility, and potential subjectivity in performance evaluation for specialized functions.

Previous scholarly investigations have established important empirical foundations regarding merit systems in Indonesian public administration. Manik (2025) conducted a quantitative associative study using multiple linear regression analysis to examine merit system effects on civil servant professionalism, finding that objective recruitment processes, fair promotion mechanisms, and transparent performance assessment explained approximately sixty-four percent of professionalism variance among government employees. Their research, published in a public administration journal, demonstrated that merit principles significantly enhance professional attitudes including regulatory compliance, work discipline, and technical mastery. Lamtiar et al. (2025) employed path analysis methodology to investigate professionalism impacts on employee performance in regional government agencies, revealing strong positive linear relationships between professional conduct and quantitative organizational achievement indicators. Their findings confirmed that professionalism serves as a crucial driver of performance outcomes in public sector contexts where service quality directly affects community welfare. Nurhadi et al. (2026) utilized SEM-PLS methodology with Likert-scale questionnaires to examine merit system implementation effects on performance through professionalism mediation, discovering that merit systems influence performance both directly and indirectly via professional attitude formation mechanisms. Their study in a central ministry environment demonstrated that merit-based management creates cascading effects where fair career systems first enhance professional identity, which subsequently improves measurable work outputs. While these studies contribute significantly to understanding merit-

professionalism-performance relationships, they predominantly examine general government or regional autonomy contexts rather than specialized technical agencies with safety-critical mandates.

The maritime port administration context presents distinctive characteristics that warrant specific scholarly attention. Port authorities operate at the intersection of technical regulation, safety enforcement, and public service delivery, requiring civil servants to possess specialized knowledge in navigation law, marine engineering, cargo handling procedures, and environmental compliance. The vertical organizational structure under central ministry supervision creates unique dynamics in human resource management compared to decentralized regional governments. Furthermore, the safety-sensitive nature of port operations means that competency failures or performance deficiencies can have immediate operational and environmental consequences, elevating the stakes of effective career development systems. These contextual specificities suggest that findings from general administrative agencies may not fully translate to maritime technical environments, creating a substantive knowledge gap in public sector human resource management literature. Hutapea & Thoha (2008), as cited in career development research, identify key competency indicators including education level, work experience, analytical ability, self-control, self-confidence, work flexibility, work attitude, and cooperation capacity, all of which assume heightened importance in technical maritime functions where errors may compromise safety compliance. (Mangkunegara, 2021) defines performance as the qualitative and quantitative work results achieved by employees in executing their assigned responsibilities, while Gomes identifies performance indicators encompassing work quantity, work quality, job knowledge, creativity, cooperation, reliability, initiative, and personal qualities, dimensions particularly relevant to port administration where multi-faceted competence determines operational success.

This study addresses these gaps by examining how merit-based career development influences professionalism and performance among civil servants at the Office of Harbormaster and Port Authority Class III Tanjung Pakis, thereby extending existing research into an underexplored technical administration context. The investigation specifically analyzes whether established relationships between career development systems, professional behavior, and work performance hold in maritime governance settings where technical competence and safety compliance constitute paramount organizational requirements. By focusing on this specialized operational environment, the research aims to generate context-specific insights that complement broader findings from general public administration studies. The empirical evidence produced will theoretically contribute to public sector human resource management literature by testing merit system effectiveness in a technically demanding bureaucratic setting, while practically providing evidence-based guidance for leadership in strengthening competency-based placement, transparent promotion mechanisms, and performance-driven development programs. Ultimately, the findings are expected to support ongoing bureaucratic reform initiatives within Indonesia's maritime governance sector and inform comparable technical agencies in optimizing their human capital management approaches.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative associative approach with survey methodology at the Office of Harbormaster and Port Authority Class III Tanjung Pakis, following Sugiyono (2015)

positivist framework for hypothesis testing through statistical analysis. The entire population of 65 civil servants served as respondents through saturated sampling, comprising 59 permanent civil servants, 2 government employees with employment agreements, and 4 part-time government employees with employment agreements. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires using 5-point Likert scales as defined by Sugiyono (2015), supplemented by direct observation and documentation of organizational employment data and performance reports. The research variables consisted of one independent variable, merit-based career development measured through competence, qualification, promotion, performance assessment, and career transparency indicators, and two dependent variables, professionalism measured through work discipline, integrity, responsibility, loyalty, and work ability, and performance measured through work quality, quantity, timeliness, effectiveness, and cooperation, operationalized according to (Hutapea & Thoha, 2008; Khoirum & Manafe, 2022; Manafe et al., 2024).

Data analysis was performed using SmartPLS 4 encompassing instrument validity testing through Pearson product-moment correlation, reliability testing through Cronbach's Alpha with threshold above 0.60, and classical assumption tests including Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality, tolerance and variance inflation factor multicollinearity, and Glejser heteroscedasticity tests, followed by multiple linear regression analysis with equations $Y_1 = a + b_1X + e$ and $Y_2 = a + b_2X + e$ as employed by Dewi & Wangsanegara (2025), partial hypothesis testing through t-test with p-value criterion below 0.05, simultaneous testing through F-test, and coefficient of determination analysis, consistent with analytical procedures by Rahma et al. (2024) and Perkasa (2023).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Profile and Data Collection

The data collection process yielded a complete response rate of one hundred percent from sixty-five civil servants at the Office of Harbormaster and Port Authority Class III Tanjung Pakis, indicating high participation willingness and data reliability for subsequent analysis. The respondent characteristics revealed diverse demographic profiles including variations in age, gender, education level, and tenure, which collectively represented the organizational composition and ensured generalizability within the specific maritime administration context.

Instrument Validity and Reliability

The instrument testing procedures confirmed that all questionnaire items met the required psychometric standards, with validity testing through Pearson product-moment correlation demonstrating that every item exceeded the critical r-table value at five percent significance level, thereby confirming that each statement accurately measured its intended construct. Reliability testing through Cronbach's Alpha further validated instrument consistency, as all variables produced coefficients exceeding the threshold of zero point sixty, indicating that the measurement scales could reliably capture respondent attitudes and perceptions without substantial random error.

Classical Assumption Testing

The classical assumption testing preceded the main regression analysis to ensure that the statistical model satisfied the criteria for Best Linear Unbiased Estimator. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test produced significance values above zero point zero five, confirming that the residual data followed a normal distribution pattern suitable for parametric analysis. Multicollinearity testing through tolerance values above zero point ten and Variance Inflation Factor values below ten indicated no problematic correlation among independent variables, while the Glejser heteroscedasticity test and scatterplot observation revealed no systematic pattern in residual variance, thereby validating the regression model's appropriateness for hypothesis testing.

Regression Analysis Results

The multiple linear regression analysis yielded the following mathematical models for the relationships between merit-based career development and the two dependent variables. For professionalism, the equation was formulated as Y_1 equals forty point three two six plus zero point five nine seven X , indicating that each unit increase in merit-based career development implementation would enhance professionalism by approximately zero point six units when other factors remained constant. For performance, the equation was Y_2 equals thirty-eight point one five four plus zero point six one three X , demonstrating a slightly stronger coefficient suggesting that merit system implementation contributed marginally more to performance enhancement than to professionalism improvement. Both equations included positive constants and positive regression coefficients, confirming the unidirectional positive relationship between merit-based career development and both outcome variables in the maritime public sector context.

Table 1. Summary of Regression Analysis Results

Variable	Equation	Constant (a)	Coefficient (b)	Interpretation
Professionalism (Y ₁)	$Y_1 = 40.326 + 0.597X$	40.326	0.597	Positive effect of merit system on professionalism
Performance (Y ₂)	$Y_2 = 38.154 + 0.613X$	38.154	0.613	Positive effect of merit system on performance

Hypothesis Testing Results

The partial hypothesis testing through t-test revealed that merit-based career development exerted a statistically significant positive effect on professionalism, as evidenced by a t-count value exceeding the t-table threshold and a significance probability below zero point zero five, leading to the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis that merit-based career development significantly influences civil servant professionalism in the port administration environment. Similarly, the effect on performance was statistically significant, with the calculated t-statistic

surpassing the critical value and the p-value falling below the predetermined alpha level, thereby confirming that merit-based career development also significantly enhances employee performance in maritime technical operations.

The simultaneous hypothesis testing through F-test produced a significance value below zero point zero five, indicating that merit-based career development collectively and significantly affected both professionalism and performance as dependent variables. The coefficient of determination analysis revealed that merit-based career development explained a substantial proportion of variance in both professionalism and performance, with the adjusted R-square values indicating that the model accounted for a meaningful percentage of the variability in employee professional behavior and work achievement.

Table 2. Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

Test	Variable	t-count	t-table	Sig.	Decision	R ²
Partial (t-test)	Professionalism (Y ₁)	> t-table	1.669	< 0.05	H ₁ accepted	-
Partial (t-test)	Performance (Y ₂)	> t-table	1.669	< 0.05	H ₁ accepted	-
Simultaneous (F-test)	Y ₁ and Y ₂	> F-table	3.15	< 0.05	H ₁ accepted	Substantial

Discussion of Merit System Effects on Professionalism

Theoretically, the findings reinforce the established human resource management principle that systematic career development grounded in meritocratic principles enhances employee professional identity and productive capacity, consistent with Hasibuan (2019) foundational proposition that human resource management constitutes the science and art of regulating workforce relationships to achieve organizational objectives effectively and efficiently. Soetrisno (2019) further supports this interpretation by emphasizing that human resources serve as the primary determinant of organizational success, particularly in public sector contexts where service quality directly affects community welfare.

In the specific context of port administration operations, these findings carry particular significance given the safety-critical and technically demanding nature of maritime governance functions. The finding that merit-based career development enhances professionalism supports Langgeng & Wilasari (2023) argument that civil servant transformation requires competency-based professional identity formation, where technical, managerial, and sociocultural capabilities become the foundation of performance. When employees at KSOP Class III Tanjung Pakis recognize that their promotion and career progression depend upon mastery of navigation safety regulations, port administration procedures, and environmental compliance standards, they are incentivized to deepen their technical knowledge and maintain rigorous professional discipline. This mechanism explains the significant positive coefficient for professionalism, as meritocratic career signals direct employee attention toward competence acquisition and ethical conduct that align with organizational mission requirements.

These findings align with Dewi & Wangsanegara (2025), who demonstrated that merit system implementation substantially improves ASN professionalism through transparent career pathways and objective performance assessments. The positive and significant coefficients suggest that when civil servants perceive their career advancement as contingent upon demonstrated competence and measurable achievement rather than seniority or patronage, they respond by elevating their professional standards to meet the objective criteria established by the merit system.

Discussion of Merit System Effects on Performance

The slightly stronger coefficient for performance compared to professionalism suggests that merit-based career development may exert more immediate and observable effects on measurable work outputs than on attitudinal professional identity. This interpretation aligns with (Mangkunegara, 2021) conceptualization of performance as the qualitative and quantitative work results achieved by employees in executing their assigned responsibilities, where tangible outputs such as document processing speed, inspection thoroughness, and service delivery accuracy can be directly observed and rewarded within merit systems. Gomes' comprehensive performance indicators encompassing work quantity, quality, knowledge, creativity, cooperation, reliability, initiative, and personal qualities provide a framework for understanding how merit-based career signals can simultaneously enhance multiple performance dimensions in port administration operations where multifaceted competence determines operational success.

This finding corresponds with Rahma et al. (2024), who established that professionalism constitutes a significant determinant of employee performance in municipal government agencies. The simultaneous significance of merit-based career development on both professionalism and performance suggests an integrated mechanism where fair career systems enhance professional identity, which subsequently improves work outputs, although this study did not formally test mediation given its focus on direct effects. This interpretation finds indirect support from Perkasa (2023), who demonstrated that motivation serves as a mediating mechanism between organizational rewards and employee performance, suggesting that merit-based career systems may operate through similar psychological pathways where perceived fairness enhances motivational states that drive both professional attitude formation and performance improvement.

Contextual Factors and Implementation Challenges

The contextual factors supporting merit system implementation at KSOP Class III Tanjung Pakis include the existence of ASN regulatory frameworks, bureaucratic reform momentum, established performance assessment systems, and organizational commitment to human resource quality improvement. However, inhibiting factors encompass limited competency development opportunities through education and training, organizational culture that has not fully adapted to meritocratic principles, and persistent perceptions of subjectivity in career advancement decisions. These findings correspond with Chairiah et al. (2020), who identified that merit system implementation in Indonesian ASN faces challenges including inadequate socialization, limited budget allocation for competency development, and cultural inertia from traditional seniority-based practices. Nurnadhifa & Syahrina (2021) similarly noted that central

government agencies encounter specific obstacles in translating merit principles into operational practices, including vertical organizational dynamics that complicate performance-based promotion decisions.

Rahmawati & Hermawati (2024) further support this integrated perspective by demonstrating that electronic performance systems and professionalism indices are mutually reinforcing in ASN management, suggesting that objective performance measurement and professional identity development co-evolve within systematic human resource management frameworks. Soantahon (2022) emphasizes that professionalism formation in special autonomy contexts depends upon multiple institutional and environmental factors beyond career systems alone, suggesting that port administration agencies should adopt holistic human resource development approaches that complement merit-based career mechanisms with supportive leadership, adequate infrastructure, and continuous learning opportunities.

Practical Implications

The practical implications of these findings extend to policy formulation and organizational management within KSOP Class III Tanjung Pakis and comparable maritime technical agencies. Leadership should strengthen consistent and objective merit system application, particularly in promotion, transfer, and career development processes, to ensure transparency and competency-based advancement. Institutional investment in education and training programs should expand to support competency development aligned with position requirements and evolving public service technology. Periodic evaluation of performance assessment systems should be institutionalized to ensure fair, measurable, and accountable career progression processes. Individual civil servants should proactively enhance their competence, professionalism, discipline, and work motivation to compete effectively within merit-based career frameworks. Organizational culture transformation toward professional, adaptive, and subjectivity-free work environments should accompany structural merit system reforms to ensure sustainable implementation.

CONCLUSIONS

The investigation into merit-based career development at the Office of Harbormaster and Port Authority Class III Tanjung Pakis has established that merit-based career systems significantly enhance both civil servant professionalism and performance in maritime technical administration settings. Employees respond to transparent, competency-based advancement mechanisms by elevating professional standards, ethical conduct, and technical mastery, while simultaneously improving measurable work outputs including service quality, operational efficiency, and regulatory compliance. This integrated effect validates the positioning of professionalism and performance as parallel outcomes of merit system implementation, confirming that established career development theories retain explanatory power in technically demanding bureaucratic environments while generating context-specific insights that distinguish maritime administration from conventional government agencies. The study successfully extends merit system research into an underexplored specialized domain, achieving its objective of demonstrating how merit principles translate into professional and performance outcomes in safety-critical organizations under central ministry vertical supervision.

The practical applications of this research provide evidence-based guidance for leadership in strengthening competency-based placement, transparent promotion mechanisms, and performance-driven development programs, while identifying actionable challenges including limited training opportunities, incomplete cultural adaptation to meritocratic principles, and perceptions of advancement subjectivity that require holistic intervention combining structural reforms with supportive leadership and continuous learning environments. For individual civil servants, the findings reinforce the importance of proactive competence enhancement and professional discipline to maximize opportunities within merit-based frameworks. The study contributes to broader bureaucratic reform agendas by demonstrating that merit-based career development serves as a foundational mechanism for building professional, high-performing civil service apparatus in technically complex public sector environments, while opening pathways for future investigations incorporating leadership quality, organizational culture, and technological support as additional explanatory variables in specialized government agency contexts.

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