

The Effect of Career Development on Civil Servant Performance Mediated by Competence: A Study at the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Rokan Hilir Regency

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the effect of career development on the performance of Civil Servants (ASN) at the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Rokan Hilir Regency, with competence positioned as a mediating variable. The research adopts a quantitative approach using an explanatory design. Data were collected from 72 ASN respondents through structured questionnaires measured on a five-point Likert scale. The analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling based on Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) with SmartPLS 4.1.0.9 to examine both direct and indirect relationships among variables. The findings indicate that career development has a positive and significant effect on ASN performance. Competence also demonstrates a positive and significant influence on performance. However, the relationship between career development and competence is not statistically significant. Consequently, competence does not function as a significant mediating variable in the relationship between career development and performance. These results suggest that while career development initiatives contribute directly to improving ASN performance, they have not yet effectively strengthened employee competence. The study recommends enhancing the relevance, transparency, and effectiveness of career development systems, alongside strengthening competency development programs to achieve sustainable improvements in civil servant performance within the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Rokan Hilir Regency.

Keywords : Career Development, Competence, Performance, Civil Servants (ASN), Ministry of Religion

1. Introduction

The Ministry of Religious Affairs of Rokan Hilir Regency, as a vertical governmental institution, holds a strategic role in delivering public services in the areas of religious affairs, Islamic and madrasah education, religious community development, the administration of Hajj and Umrah, and the promotion of religious moderation at the regional level. Within the broader framework of bureaucratic reform and the advancement of good governance, the quality of human resources particularly Civil Servants (Aparatur Sipil Negara/ASN) constitutes a decisive factor in determining organizational effectiveness. Civil servants function not merely as technical executors of public policy, but also as representatives of the state in providing professional, responsive, transparent, and accountable services to the community.

Empirical evidence, however, indicates that the level of professionalism among ASN within the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Rokan Hilir Regency remains a matter of concern. Data from the 2023 Civil Servant Professionalism Index (IP-ASN) reveal that out of 137 civil servants, 81 fall into the "Very Low" category and 55 into the "Low" category, while only one is categorized as "Moderate," and none achieve the "High" or "Very High" levels. These figures suggest that the majority of civil servants have not yet met the competency and professionalism standards expected under a merit-based civil service management system. The low IP-ASN scores reflect not only individual limitations but also systemic challenges in human resource management, particularly in the areas of career development and competency enhancement.

From the perspective of modern human resource management, ASN performance cannot be separated from the quality of structured career management and competency development. Career development refers to a systematic process designed to facilitate employees' professional advancement through clear, performance-based career pathways. Wardhana (2023) emphasizes that effective career planning must integrate organizational needs with individual aspirations in order to ensure alignment between institutional objectives and employee growth. In practice, however, career stagnation often occurs due to mismatches between employee competencies and job requirements, limited transparency in promotion mechanisms, and the inconsistent implementation of merit-based principles.

Competence, as the primary capital of civil servants in performing their duties, also requires continuous development. Competence encompasses a combination of knowledge, technical skills, professional attitudes, managerial capabilities, and social abilities necessary for executing bureaucratic responsibilities. Siregar and Sembiring (2022) argue that employees with strong competencies are able to complete tasks efficiently and achieve organizational program targets. Similarly, Setyo Widodo and Yandi (2022) highlight the close relationship between competence and performance, noting that improvements in competence directly enhance the quality and quantity of work outcomes. In the public service context, ASN competence is essential to respond effectively to regulatory complexity, policy dynamics, and increasingly critical and participatory citizens.

The low IP-ASN levels at the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Rokan Hilir Regency may be attributed to several key factors. First, educational qualifications may not fully align with the strategic requirements of specific positions. Second, competency development programs whether formal or informal have not been optimally implemented and may lack systematic training needs analysis. Third, performance evaluation systems have not been fully integrated with reward and sanction mechanisms, thereby limiting employee motivation. Fourth, unclear and insufficiently transparent career development pathways may lead to stagnation and reduced morale among civil servants.

Previous empirical studies consistently demonstrate that competence significantly influences employee performance. Triono and Abriyosos (2023) found that higher levels of competence directly improve employee performance. Natasya Rizkia Rahmadona et al. (2023) similarly concluded that competence has a positive and significant impact on performance, whereas career development does not always produce a significant effect. These findings suggest that while career development remains important, its impact on performance may depend largely on the extent to which it effectively enhances employee competence. In this regard, competence potentially functions as a mediating variable linking career development to performance outcomes.

Within the context of local government bureaucracy, the relationship among career development, competence, and performance becomes more complex due to hierarchical organizational structures, strict regulatory frameworks, and resource limitations. If career development initiatives are not strategically aligned

with competency enhancement, their impact on performance may be limited. Conversely, when career development systems effectively foster relevant competencies aligned with job demands, ASN performance can improve significantly.

Given the empirical challenges and the inconsistencies identified in previous research, there is a clear need to examine more comprehensively how career development influences ASN performance while considering competence as a mediating variable. This study aims to analyze the direct relationship between career development and ASN performance, the relationship between career development and competence, and whether competence mediates the effect of career development on performance within the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Rokan Hilir Regency.

Theoretically, this research is expected to contribute to the development of public sector human resource management literature by providing empirical evidence regarding the mediating role of competence in the relationship between career development and performance. Practically, the findings are anticipated to serve as a reference for evaluating career development systems and designing more targeted, competency-based development strategies. Ultimately, this study supports broader bureaucratic reform efforts and the enhancement of public service quality through strengthening human resource capacity within the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Rokan Hilir Regency.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

This study is grounded in Human Capital Theory and Competency-Based Management Theory, both of which emphasize the strategic importance of employee development in enhancing organizational performance. Human Capital Theory posits that knowledge, skills, and abilities represent valuable assets that increase individual productivity and institutional effectiveness. Within public sector organizations, particularly government institutions such as the Ministry of Religious Affairs, investment in human resource development is essential to support bureaucratic reform and improve service quality. Competency-Based Management further asserts that organizational success depends largely on the alignment between employee competencies and job requirements. Competence encompasses technical expertise, managerial capability, and social skills that enable civil servants to perform their duties effectively and professionally.

Career development plays a central role in strengthening human capital within organizations. It refers to a structured and systematic process that facilitates employees' professional growth through training, promotion opportunities, mentoring, and performance-based advancement. Wardhana (2023) explains that effective career planning integrates organizational needs with individual aspirations, thereby creating a coherent and progressive career pathway within the institutional structure. In public organizations, transparent and merit-based career systems are expected to increase motivation, commitment, and accountability, ultimately leading to improved performance outcomes. Empirical findings support this relationship, suggesting that well-designed career development mechanisms positively influence employee performance by fostering engagement and organizational loyalty. Therefore, it is hypothesized that career development has a positive and significant effect on civil servant performance.

In addition to its direct influence on performance, career development is theoretically linked to competence enhancement. According to Human Capital Theory, professional development initiatives should increase employees' knowledge and skill levels, which in turn improve their capacity to fulfill organizational objectives. Structured training programs, job rotation, and promotion systems based on merit are expected to strengthen employee competence. However, the effectiveness of career development in enhancing competence depends on the relevance and quality of training as well as the alignment between career pathways and job demands. Previous research presents mixed findings regarding this relationship, indicating the need for further empirical verification. Based on this theoretical reasoning, it is proposed that career development positively and significantly influences civil servant competence.

Competence itself is widely recognized as a fundamental determinant of performance. Civil servants who possess strong technical knowledge, administrative skills, managerial abilities, and effective communication competencies are better equipped to manage workloads, respond to regulatory changes, and deliver high-quality public services. Siregar and Sembiring (2022) argue that competent employees are capable of completing tasks efficiently and achieving program targets, while Setyo Widodo and Yandi (2022) highlight the strong linkage between competence and work outcomes. Empirical studies by Triono and Abriyosos (2023) as well as Natasya Rizkia Rahmadona et al. (2023) further confirm that competence significantly and positively affects employee performance. Accordingly, it is hypothesized that competence has a positive and significant effect on civil servant performance.

The relationship between career development and performance may also operate indirectly through competence. From a theoretical perspective, career development initiatives should enhance performance by first strengthening employees' competencies. In this framework, competence functions as a mediating variable that explains the mechanism through which career development contributes to improved performance. If career development effectively builds relevant knowledge and skills, employees' enhanced competence should translate into higher productivity and better service delivery. Conversely, if career advancement mechanisms are not closely aligned with competency development, the mediating effect may not occur. Therefore, this study proposes that competence mediates the relationship between career development and civil servant performance.

Overall, this conceptual framework integrates structural human resource practices and individual capability factors to explain ASN performance within the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Rokan Hilir Regency. By examining both direct and indirect relationships among career development, competence, and performance, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how human resource management strategies influence public sector performance outcomes.

3. Method

This study employs a quantitative research approach with an explanatory research design aimed at examining causal relationships among variables. The explanatory design is appropriate for testing hypotheses and explaining the influence of independent variables on dependent variables, including the mediating effect within the proposed research model. The population of this study consists of all Civil Servants (Aparatur Sipil Negara/ASN) at the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Rokan Hilir Regency, totaling 257 employees. From this population, 72 respondents were selected as the research sample using an appropriate sampling technique.

Data were collected through a survey method, with questionnaires distributed directly to respondents via an online Google Form platform. The measurement instrument employed a five-point Likert scale. According to Sugiyono (2022), the Likert scale is used to measure attitudes, opinions, and perceptions of individuals or groups toward social phenomena. Each indicator of the variables was measured using response categories ranging from strongly positive to strongly negative, allowing for quantitative scoring and structured multiple-choice responses.

The data analysis procedures included both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. Descriptive analysis was used to present an overview of the research variables based on sample data without generalizing beyond the observed sample. Inferential analysis was applied to test the research hypotheses and examine the relationships among variables. As noted by Furadantin (2018), statistical analysis provides researchers with appropriate tools aligned with the proposed research model.

Structural Equation Modeling based on Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) was utilized to analyze the data using SmartPLS version 4.1.0.9. The analysis involved evaluating the measurement model (outer model) to assess validity and reliability, as well as the structural model (inner model) to test the hypothesized relationships. According to Duryadi (2021), validity refers to the extent to which an instrument accurately measures what it is intended to measure. An instrument is considered valid if it provides accurate, relevant, and appropriate information. Reliability testing, as described by Sugiyono (2022), was conducted to ensure internal consistency and stability of the measurement instrument. To assess the mediating effect, the structural model was evaluated through path coefficient analysis. This study applies a simple mediation model, as only one mediating variable is included. The significance of direct and indirect effects was determined through the examination of path coefficients and statistical significance values generated by the SEM-PLS analysis.

4. Result and Discussion

This section presents an integrated analysis of the descriptive and inferential findings to comprehensively explain the relationships among career development, competence, and the performance of Civil Servants (ASN) at the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Rokan Hilir Regency. The discussion not only interprets the statistical results but also situates them within the broader framework of human resource management theory and public sector organizational practice.

4.1 Descriptive Findings

The descriptive analysis indicates that respondents generally perceive career development (mean = 3.10) and competence (mean = 3.11) at a moderately positive level. However, the mean score for performance (2.93) is slightly lower, although still within a moderate range. The overall mean score ($M_1 = 3.05$) suggests that, on average, ASN perceive the institutional environment relatively favorably in terms of career opportunities and competence levels. Nevertheless, the lower mean score for performance may signal a disconnect between

perceived human resource practices and actual performance outcomes. While employees acknowledge the existence of career development mechanisms and recognize certain competency attributes, these elements may not yet be fully optimized to generate consistently high performance. This gap highlights potential inefficiencies in aligning human resource strategies with performance management systems. It also suggests that positive perceptions alone are insufficient to ensure improved organizational outcomes without structural and systemic reinforcement.

4.2 Measurement Model Evaluation

The evaluation of the outer model confirms that the constructs meet acceptable standards of validity and reliability. All retained indicators demonstrate outer loadings above the minimum threshold of 0.50, satisfying convergent validity requirements. Indicators related to career development show varying degrees of strength, with some items demonstrating stronger representation of the construct than others. The competence indicators display particularly strong loadings, indicating that respondents clearly recognize the core elements of competence within their organizational roles. Similarly, performance indicators show adequate loading values, confirming that the selected items sufficiently represent the performance construct. Discriminant validity, assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, confirms that each construct is empirically distinct from the others. The square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each variable exceeds the correlations between constructs, indicating that career development, competence, and performance measure different conceptual dimensions. Reliability analysis further supports the robustness of the measurement model, with Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values exceeding 0.70 for all variables. These findings indicate strong internal consistency and confirm that the measurement instruments are stable and reliable. The satisfactory measurement model strengthens the credibility of subsequent structural analysis and ensures that the relationships observed among variables are not artifacts of measurement error.

4.3 Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

The structural model evaluation reveals important insights into the dynamics among career development, competence, and performance. First, competence has a positive and statistically significant effect on ASN performance ($\beta = 0.465$; $t = 4.080$; $p < 0.001$). This indicates that competence is a strong predictor of performance within the Ministry. Employees who possess higher levels of knowledge, technical skills, and professional capabilities tend to demonstrate better work outcomes. This finding is consistent with human capital theory, which posits that investment in skills and knowledge directly enhances productivity and organizational performance. In the public sector context, competence becomes even more critical due to the complexity of regulatory frameworks and service demands. Thus, strengthening competency development programs emerges as a strategic priority for performance improvement.

Second, career development has a positive and statistically significant effect on performance ($\beta = 0.360$; $t = 2.114$; $p = 0.035$). This suggests that structured career progression mechanisms contribute directly to improved performance. Career development may enhance employees' motivation, organizational commitment, and sense of fairness, which in turn encourages greater work effort and engagement. However, the magnitude of its effect is smaller compared to competence, indicating that while career development influences performance, it does not do so as strongly as competency enhancement.

Third, the relationship between career development and competence is not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.035$; $t = 0.142$; $p = 0.887$). This finding is particularly noteworthy because it suggests that the existing career development system does not significantly strengthen employee competence. In other words, promotions, career pathways, or advancement opportunities within the organization may not be closely aligned with structured competency development. This misalignment implies that career progression may function more as an administrative or tenure-based mechanism rather than a merit-based, competency-driven system.

4.4 Mediation Analysis and Theoretical Implications

Because the path between career development and competence is not significant, the indirect effect of career development on performance through competence is also not significant. The mediation hypothesis is therefore rejected. Competence does not mediate the relationship between career development and performance in this model. This finding has important theoretical implications. In theory, career development should enhance competence by providing training opportunities, mentoring, and structured progression aligned with skill acquisition. However, the absence of a significant relationship indicates that career development practices within the institution may not effectively incorporate competency-based principles. This disconnect suggests that career management and competency development operate as parallel systems rather than as integrated components of a strategic human resource framework.

4.5 Broader Organizational Interpretation

The findings collectively indicate that competence is the most influential factor in determining ASN performance within the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Rokan Hilir Regency. While career development positively affects performance, its impact appears to stem more from motivational or psychological mechanisms than from direct competency enhancement. Employees may perceive career opportunities as signals of recognition or organizational support, thereby improving their work engagement. However, without systematic linkage to skill development, career advancement alone cannot substantially elevate professional capability. These results highlight the need for institutional reform that integrates career development with competency-based management systems. A merit-based promotion system aligned with structured training programs, competency mapping, and performance appraisal would likely strengthen the relationship between career development and competence. Such integration would enable career progression to function not merely as administrative advancement but as a strategic instrument for sustainable performance improvement. Overall, the study underscores that enhancing ASN performance requires prioritizing competence development while simultaneously reforming career management practices to ensure alignment with organizational capability needs. Without such integration, improvements in career systems may yield only partial and short-term performance gains.

5. Conclusion

The study on Career Development Mediated by Competence among Civil Servants (ASN) at the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Rokan Hilir Regency provides a comprehensive overview of ASN perceptions regarding career development, competence, and performance. Based on responses from 72 participants, the findings indicate that respondents generally perceive career development initiatives positively, particularly in terms of the availability of training programs. However, although training opportunities are accessible, their effectiveness and relevance to actual job requirements still require improvement. The promotion process is considered relatively efficient, yet issues related to transparency and consistency remain areas of concern. Institutional support and facilities for career development are viewed as adequate, but access to resources, information, and structured career planning needs to be strengthened to ensure clearer and more systematic career pathways aligned with organizational objectives. In terms of competence, respondents demonstrate relatively strong technical capabilities, especially in religious subject mastery and administrative skills. Managerial and social competencies are also perceived positively, indicating that ASN possess foundational capacities necessary for effective public service delivery. Nevertheless, there is room for improvement, particularly in structured work planning, strategic task management, and professional communication, which are essential for enhancing organizational effectiveness. Regarding performance, perceptions are generally favorable, reflecting a moderate level of achievement in fulfilling job responsibilities. However, challenges remain in managing high workloads while maintaining quality standards and completing tasks within designated timelines. These findings suggest that although career development and competence are progressing in a positive direction, greater alignment between training effectiveness, competency enhancement, and workload management is necessary to ensure sustained improvements in ASN performance.

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