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## Implementation of the Merit System in Initial Placement of Police Academy Graduates and Its Implications for Career Development: A Case Study at the National Police Traffic Corps (Korlantas Polri)

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### Abstract

This study examines the implementation of the merit system in the initial placement of graduates from the Police Academy within Korlantas Polri and its impact on career development. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, it analyzes the challenges faced by junior officers assigned to administrative roles and their implications for motivation and job satisfaction. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with junior officers, Korlantas Polri officials, and relevant stakeholders, supported by document studies. The results indicate that placement based on academic ranking overlooks practical abilities and leadership skills. Administrative roles are often perceived as career roadblocks and can lead to demotivation. The study recommends balancing academic assessments with practical competencies in placement decisions and implementing more flexible and transparent policies to ensure sustainable career development.

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### Introduction

The Indonesian National Police (Polri) is a law enforcement institution that plays a vital role in maintaining societal security and peace. As challenges such as cybercrime and terrorism evolve, the quality of human resources becomes a crucial factor in determining Polri's effectiveness.

According to Law Number 2 of 2002 on the Indonesian National Police, Polri's main duties include maintaining public order and security, law enforcement, and providing protection, guidance, and service to the public. To execute these duties professionally, Polri requires an effective human resource management system, including placement and career development policies.

The merit system is a key approach in modern human resource management within Polri. McCourt defines the merit system as the principle of placing individuals based on competence and performance, rather than personal connections or political interests. This system aims to ensure that every position is filled by the most competent personnel with the best qualifications.

In Korlantas Polri, implementing the merit system for Police Academy graduates faces several challenges. According to Regulation Number 9 of 2016 on Career Development Systems (Sisbinkar), initial placements for junior officers are based on academic ranking and organizational needs. However, research by Setyowati (2016) <sup>[28]</sup> indicates that excessive emphasis on academic achievement may overlook other critical aspects such as practical skills and leadership potential.

Boyatzis highlights the importance of non-academic skills, such as interpersonal and leadership abilities, for operational effectiveness. Placements based solely on academic rankings risk neglecting critical potentials that should be nurtured from the outset. Similarly, Kotter (2012) <sup>[21]</sup> emphasizes that effective leaders must possess the ability to motivate teams and adapt to dynamic situations.

Administrative assignments within Korlantas are often perceived negatively regarding career prospects. Deci and Ryan (2000) <sup>[10]</sup> underline that a mismatch between personal interests and job demands can reduce engagement and job satisfaction. When junior officers expect operational experience but are assigned administrative roles, they may experience what Locke terms as job incongruence, leading to decreased motivation and productivity.

Stigmas surrounding administrative placements are further reinforced by cases of perceived "career compartmentalization." For instance, former Police Commissioner General Dharma Pongrekun highlighted in a podcast how his career was "compartmentalized" after being transferred to the Police Education and Training Division (Lemdiklat Polri). Similar perceptions are associated with Yanma Polri, often viewed as a "dumping ground" for problematic officers.

Christensen and Lægreid stress the importance of adaptability in organizational systems to accommodate changing conditions. However, rigid placement systems can hinder mobility and competence development. This disparity is particularly evident in the differing experiences of officers assigned to operational fields like investigation and Brimob versus those in administrative roles.

This study aims to analyze the implementation of the merit system in the initial placement of Police Academy graduates within Korlantas Polri and its implications for career development. Specifically, it explores three main aspects: (1) how the merit system is applied in initial placements, (2) challenges faced by junior officers in administrative roles concerning motivation and job satisfaction, and (3) the impact of initial placements on long-term career development.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to understanding the effectiveness of the merit system within the Indonesian police context. Mubin and Roziqin (2018) <sup>[24]</sup> assert that an effective merit system must consider not only technical competence but also motivation and professional development. This study aims to provide valuable insights for improving placement systems and mitigating the negative impacts of stigmas related to administrative assignments.

The findings are expected to offer practical contributions to Polri in formulating more effective placement policies. Ali *et al.* (2017) <sup>[2]</sup> emphasize the importance of comprehensive performance evaluation systems in supporting the implementation of the merit system. By capturing the challenges and opportunities in the initial placement of officers, Polri can develop better strategies to ensure sustainable career development for its personnel.

Based on the above overview, this study employs a qualitative approach to deeply explore the experiences and perspectives of junior officers and stakeholders within Korlantas Polri. Through in-depth interviews and document analysis, it aims to generate concrete recommendations for improving placement and career development systems within Polri.

## 2. Literature Review

The literature review in this study encompasses various prior studies and relevant literature on the implementation of the merit system and career development within the police force. Key concepts discussed include the merit system, officer placement, and career development theories.

### Merit System in Human Resource Management

The merit system is a fundamental approach in modern

human resource management. McNamee & Miller (2009) <sup>[22]</sup> define merit as an individual's characteristics that reflect competence and performance. In the context of public organizations, the merit system aims to ensure that recruitment, placement, and promotion are based on abilities and achievements rather than external factors such as personal connections or political affiliations.

McCourt identifies four main components of the merit system: (1) application at all job levels, (2) selection of the best candidates, (3) open access, and (4) transparency of the process. This system serves as a critical foundation for bureaucratic reform and enhancing the professionalism of state apparatus. Setyowati (2016) <sup>[28]</sup> adds that effective implementation of the merit system can improve organizational performance and public trust.

### Officer Placement in the Police Context

Officer placement is a crucial aspect of human resource management within the police force. According to Regulation Number 9 of 2016, the initial placement of Police Academy graduates considers academic achievements and organizational needs. However, argues that placement based solely on academic performance may overlook other critical competencies such as leadership and interpersonal skills.

Research by Umiati *et al.* (2022) <sup>[31]</sup> reveals that placement aligned with competencies significantly impacts officers' work motivation. When officers are placed in positions matching their skills and interests, they tend to demonstrate better performance and higher levels of job satisfaction.

### Career Development Theories

Super, as cited in Sukardi views a career as a series of roles shaping an individual's work-life trajectory. This theory emphasizes that career development is a continuous process involving various stages and decisions. Gibson *et al.* (1995) <sup>[12]</sup> add that effective career management can enhance employee engagement and organizational effectiveness.

Deci and Ryan (2000) <sup>[10]</sup>, through their self-determination theory, highlight the importance of autonomy and competence in work motivation. When individuals feel their work aligns with their aspirations and abilities, they are more likely to be motivated and committed to the organization. This is relevant in the context of administrative roles, which are often perceived as less challenging or limiting to career growth.

### Implications of Placement on Job Satisfaction

Herzberg (1968) <sup>[16]</sup> identifies factors influencing job satisfaction, including recognition, responsibility, and opportunities for personal development. In the context of Korlantas Polri, placement in administrative roles can impact these factors and affect officers' job satisfaction.

Locke emphasizes the importance of alignment between individual expectations and job realities. Job mismatch, occurring when officers are placed in roles misaligned with their expectations, can result in decreased motivation and productivity. Krumboltz's social learning theory adds that experiences and interactions within the work environment influence individual career development.

### Implementation of the Merit System in the Public Sector

Recent studies on the implementation of the merit system in Indonesia's public sector reveal various challenges. Ali *et al.* (2017) <sup>[2]</sup> identify obstacles such as a lack of transparency and

the persistent influence of non-merit factors in placement decisions. Mubin & Roziqin (2018) <sup>[24]</sup> further highlight that the success of the merit system requires strong leadership commitment and objective evaluation systems.

This literature review provides a theoretical foundation for understanding the complexities of implementing the merit system in officer placement and its impact on career development. The theories and findings discussed underscore the importance of balancing academic and practical competencies, as well as the need for a placement system that considers individual career aspirations.

### 3. Research Methodology

This study on the implementation of the merit system in the initial placement of Police Academy graduates at Korlantas Polri employs a qualitative descriptive approach. According to Bogdan and Taylor, qualitative research produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observable behaviors. This approach was chosen for its ability to delve deeply into understanding the experiences and perspectives of the research subjects, particularly regarding the impact of placement on career development.

The research location was selected at the National Police Traffic Corps (Korlantas Polri) due to its unique characteristics, encompassing both administrative and operational aspects. Korlantas provides a rich context for understanding the implementation of the merit system and the impact of administrative assignments on career development. The complexity of tasks and organizational structure at Korlantas allows researchers to observe various dynamics in the placement and career development processes of officers. For data collection, this study uses two types of data sources: primary and secondary. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with junior officers who graduated from the Police Academy, Korlantas Polri officials, and HR policy stakeholders at the National Police Headquarters. Direct observation of work activities in administrative roles was also conducted to gain contextual understanding. Secondary data were collected from policy documents, regulations related to the merit system, performance reports, officer placement statistics, as well as relevant literature and previous studies.

Referring to Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) <sup>[23]</sup>, data collection techniques include in-depth interviews using a semi-structured approach, direct observation, and document analysis. In-depth interviews allow researchers to gather detailed information about the experiences and perspectives of informants, while observations provide direct understanding of work dynamics at Korlantas. Document analysis complements the data with an examination of official documents and records related to the merit system.

Informants were selected purposively, considering their relevance and capacity to provide the necessary data. The main informants were junior officers who graduated from the Police Academy and were placed in administrative roles, supplemented by the perspectives of Korlantas officials involved in personnel placement, HR officials at Polri who understand merit system policies, and observers or scholars focusing on HR management within the police force.

Data analysis adopts the interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) <sup>[23]</sup>, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involves selecting and organizing raw field data, followed by structuring the information for conclusion

drawing. The analysis concludes with the interpretation and verification of research findings.

To ensure data validity, this study employs triangulation techniques that include source triangulation, method triangulation, and theory triangulation. Source triangulation compares information from various data sources, while method triangulation uses multiple data collection methods for verification. Theory triangulation employs various theoretical perspectives to understand the phenomena studied.

This research methodology is designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of the merit system and its impact on the career development of officers at Korlantas Polri. The chosen qualitative approach allows for in-depth exploration of the experiences and perceptions of the research subjects, while data triangulation ensures the validity of the research findings. Through this methodology, the study is expected to produce findings that contribute to the development of placement and career development policies within Polri.

### 4. Result

Implementation of the Merit System in the Placement of Police Academy Graduates: Impact Analysis and Challenges at Korlantas Polri

#### Application of the Merit System and Implementation Gaps

Research findings on the implementation of the merit system in the placement of Police Academy graduates at Korlantas Polri reveal significant gaps between policy and practice. Although Regulation Number 9 of 2016 stipulates that placement should consider competencies and organizational needs, findings indicate that academic ranking remains the dominant factor in decision-making. Interviews with Korlantas HR officials revealed that the evaluation system still heavily relies on academic performance, even though it does not necessarily reflect leadership abilities or operational potential. Transparency issues are also a significant obstacle, aligning with Ali *et al.*'s (2017) <sup>[2]</sup> findings regarding similar challenges in Indonesia's public sector.

#### Psychological Impact and Motivation

The study uncovered a strong correlation between initial placement and the motivation levels of junior officers. Officers placed in administrative positions tend to experience decreased motivation, especially those aspiring to operational roles. This phenomenon aligns with Herzberg's (1968) <sup>[16]</sup> theory on job satisfaction factors, where a lack of challenges and personal development opportunities in administrative positions acts as a "dissatisfier," reducing intrinsic motivation. Deci and Ryan's (2000) <sup>[10]</sup> theory further supports these findings, highlighting the importance of autonomy and competence as fundamental psychological needs in work motivation.

#### Organizational Stigma and Its Implications

The findings reveal a deeply rooted stigma against administrative roles, which are perceived as a "slow track" for career advancement. This perception creates what Kotter (2012) <sup>[21]</sup> describes as a "self-fulfilling prophecy," where negative expectations about administrative roles lead to decreased motivation, further reinforcing the stigma. This situation affects not only individuals but also the overall

organizational dynamics.

### **Career Development Challenges and Adaptation Strategies**

The study identified various obstacles in the career development of administrative personnel, including gaps in operational experience, limited professional networks, and the impact of organizational stigma. However, some individuals successfully developed effective adaptation strategies by leveraging administrative roles to enhance managerial competencies and systemic organizational understanding. These experiences underscore the importance of maintaining a positive perspective in addressing placement challenges.

### **Recommendations and Development Directions**

Based on the findings, several key recommendations are presented to improve the placement system at Korlantas Polri. These include a more comprehensive evaluation system, transparency in placement processes, and the establishment of structured career development programs. Integration of technology, fostering organizational culture, and strengthening mentorship systems are also emphasized as critical areas for development. Implementing these recommendations requires strong leadership commitment and collaboration among all stakeholders within Polri.

### **Competency Training and Development Systems**

The research also highlighted the importance of structured training and competency development systems for officers in administrative roles. Emphasizes that managerial and leadership competencies can be developed through well-designed training programs and work experiences. At Korlantas Polri, the study found that competency development programs for officers in administrative positions remain suboptimal. Interviews with HR training officials revealed: "We recognize the need for specific programs for administrative officers. The challenge is designing programs that can compensate for their limited field experience." This aligns with Mubin & Roziqin's (2018) <sup>[24]</sup> findings on the importance of structured programs in supporting the merit system's implementation.

### **The Role of Leadership in Organizational Change**

Another critical aspect revealed by the research is the significant role of leadership in driving changes in perceptions and organizational culture. Kotter (2012) <sup>[21]</sup> emphasizes that effective organizational change requires strong leadership and a clear vision. At Korlantas Polri, leadership support in altering the stigma surrounding administrative roles needs further strengthening. A senior official explained: "Perception change must start from the top. Leaders need to send a clear signal that administrative career paths are as important as operational roles." Christensen and Lægveid also highlight the importance of leadership support in bureaucratic reforms.

### **Impact of Technology and Modernization**

The digital era presents new challenges and opportunities in police HR management. The research revealed that modernizing administrative systems at Korlantas Polri opens new opportunities for competency development among officers in administrative roles. The implementation of the Electronic Traffic Law Enforcement (ETLE) system, for instance, demands high analytical and managerial skills.

An officer in the ETLE administration unit stated: "Digitalization is transforming the nature of administrative work. We are not just managing documents but also involved in data analysis and strategic decision-making." This transformation aligns with Dwiputrianti's (2020) findings on the role of technology in bureaucratic modernization.

### **Gender and Diversity Aspects**

The study also revealed gender dimensions in placement practices. Although not explicitly stated in policies, there is a tendency to place female officers in administrative roles. This raises questions about equality in career development opportunities.

Sakhiyya & Locke stress the importance of considering diversity in merit system implementation. The research found that gender stereotypes still influence placement decisions, albeit indirectly.

### **5. Conclusion**

The study on the implementation of the merit system in the initial placement of Police Academy graduates at Korlantas Polri revealed several key findings addressing the research questions. Regarding the application of the merit system, the study found that its implementation remains suboptimal despite formally adhering to Regulation Number 9 of 2016. In practice, the evaluation system relies heavily on academic achievements and lacks sufficient consideration of leadership competencies and operational potential. Transparency in the placement process is also limited, with specific criteria used for decision-making not clearly communicated to junior officers.

In the context of challenges faced by junior officers placed in administrative roles at Korlantas, the study identified a decline in work motivation when placements do not align with career aspirations, especially for officers expecting operational assignments. The strong stigma against administrative roles, perceived as a "slow track" for career development, also impacts job satisfaction. Limited access to essential field experience for career progression, coupled with a lack of structured competency development programs, further exacerbates the challenges faced by those in administrative positions.

The impact of initial placements at Korlantas on the long-term career development of junior officers is significant. Initial placements in administrative roles create an experiential gap compared to peers in operational fields, while limited opportunities to build professional networks affect career advancement prospects. Organizational stigma against administrative roles, though informal, has tangible effects on future promotion opportunities. On the other hand, modernization of administrative systems offers new opportunities, but these have yet to be fully leveraged for career development.

The study also highlighted the critical role of leadership in transforming perceptions and organizational culture, which has not been fully realized. Gender dimensions in placements emerged as an issue requiring special attention, with tendencies for gender-based role assignments observed. Utilizing technology for administrative system modernization and performance evaluations stands out as an essential area for further development.

Based on these findings, the study recommends the development of a more comprehensive evaluation system that considers various competency aspects. Enhancing transparency

in the placement process through clearer communication of criteria and decision-making mechanisms is also necessary. Tailored development programs for officers in administrative roles, complemented by an integrated rotation system providing exposure to operational tasks, can help address existing competency gaps.

These conclusions provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of merit system implementation at Korlantas Polri and its impact on officer career development. The research findings can serve as a foundation for improving policies and practices in human resource management within the police force, particularly regarding placement and career development for junior officers. Strong organizational commitment and a systematic approach are required to implement the recommendations derived from this study.

### Further Recommendations

Based on the findings, several additional recommendations can be formulated:

1. Development of an Integrated Rotation Program: This program should enable officers in administrative roles to gain periodic exposure to operational tasks.
2. Utilization of Technology: Create a more objective and comprehensive performance evaluation system through the use of advanced technological tools.
3. Cross-Field Mentoring Programs: Facilitate knowledge and experience transfer between personnel in operational and administrative roles.
4. Policy Development for Gender Equality and Diversity: Establish more explicit policies to support gender equality and diversity in placements and promotions.
5. Strengthening Evaluation and Monitoring Systems: Enhance the evaluation and monitoring of merit system implementation to ensure its effectiveness and continuous improvement.

The implementation of these recommendations requires long-term organizational commitment and adequate resource allocation. Periodic evaluations of program effectiveness are also necessary to ensure the achievement of sustainable human resource development goals within Korlantas Polri.

This study provides a deep understanding of the dynamics of the merit system implementation and its impact on career development for officers at Korlantas Polri. The conclusions highlight the importance of a holistic approach to police human resource management, considering not only the technical aspects of placement but also the psychological, social, and organizational factors that influence the system's effectiveness. The systemic changes recommended require a gradual and consistent approach to achieve optimal results in advancing the professionalism of Indonesia's police force.

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