

Meritocracy In Position Promotion in the Government Bureaucracy

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ABSTRACT:

Meritocracy has become a fundamental principle in public sector human resource management, aiming to ensure that position promotion is based on competence, qualifications, performance, and integrity rather than political influence or personal relationships. Despite continuous bureaucratic reforms, the implementation of meritocracy in government institutions remains inconsistent, with various organizational and political factors affecting promotion decisions. This study examines the implementation of meritocracy in position promotion within the government bureaucracy and identifies the factors that facilitate or hinder its effective application.

This research employs a qualitative approach using interviews, document analysis, and direct observation to explore promotion practices and institutional arrangements. Data are analyzed through an interactive process involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing to capture the dynamics of merit-based promotion. The findings indicate that although merit principles have been formally integrated into promotion policies and procedures, their implementation is not yet fully consistent. Competency assessment and performance evaluation have become important considerations in promotion decisions; however, organizational culture, leadership preferences, administrative capacity, and external interventions continue to influence the process.

The study further reveals that strengthening transparent assessment systems, institutional oversight, and accountability mechanisms is essential for improving the credibility and fairness of promotion practices. This study concludes that meritocracy in government position promotion requires not only comprehensive regulatory frameworks but also strong institutional commitment, professional human resource management, and transparent governance. Strengthening these elements will contribute to a more professional, accountable, and high-performing public bureaucracy while enhancing public trust in government institutions.

Keywords: Meritocracy, Position Promotion, Government Bureaucracy, Human Resource Management, Public Administration

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Introduction

The quality of public administration is closely associated with the capacity of government institutions to develop a professional, competent, and accountable bureaucracy. One of the key mechanisms for achieving this objective is the implementation of meritocracy in the promotion of public officials. Meritocracy emphasizes that career advancement should be determined by objective criteria, including competence, qualifications, performance, experience, and integrity, rather than by political patronage, personal relationships, or other non-merit considerations. Consequently, the adoption of merit-based promotion has become an essential component of public sector reform in many countries seeking to improve bureaucratic effectiveness and public trust.

In recent decades, governments around the world have introduced various civil service reforms aimed at strengthening merit principles in human resource management. These reforms seek to establish transparent recruitment systems, competency-based promotion, performance evaluation, and equal opportunities for career advancement. Nevertheless, the implementation of meritocracy remains a significant challenge, particularly in developing countries where bureaucratic traditions, political intervention, organizational culture, and institutional capacity often influence promotion decisions. As a result, the gap between formal regulations and actual practices continues to undermine the effectiveness of merit-based personnel management.

In Indonesia, bureaucratic reform has placed meritocracy at the center of civil service management. The enactment of Law Number 5 of 2014 on the State Civil Apparatus introduced a merit system that requires personnel decisions to be based on qualifications, competence, performance, and fairness. The establishment of institutional oversight mechanisms has further strengthened the government's commitment to creating a professional and politically neutral bureaucracy. Despite these regulatory improvements, empirical evidence indicates that

the implementation of merit-based promotion remains uneven across government institutions. Variations in organizational commitment, leadership behavior, competency assessment, and transparency continue to affect the consistency of promotion practices.

Previous studies have generally examined meritocracy from the perspectives of human resource management, bureaucratic reform, organizational performance, and governance. Most have focused on regulatory compliance, competency assessment, or the relationship between merit systems and organizational effectiveness. However, relatively limited attention has been given to understanding how meritocratic principles are implemented in everyday promotion practices and how organizational, institutional, and contextual factors interact to support or constrain merit-based decision-making. This gap highlights the need for further investigation into the dynamics of promotion processes within government bureaucracy.

This study aims to analyze the implementation of meritocracy in position promotion within the government bureaucracy by examining the extent to which promotion decisions reflect merit principles and identifying the institutional factors that facilitate or hinder their implementation. By providing empirical evidence on the relationship between policy and practice, this study contributes to the broader literature on public administration, bureaucratic reform, and strategic human resource management. The findings are expected to offer practical recommendations for strengthening merit-based promotion systems and supporting the development of a professional, accountable, and high-performing public service.

Methods

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore the implementation of meritocracy in position promotion within the government bureaucracy. A qualitative design was selected because it enables an in-depth understanding of institutional practices, decision-

making processes, and the organizational factors influencing merit-based promotion. The study focused on examining how merit principles are implemented in practice and identifying the challenges encountered during the promotion process.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and direct observation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants, including senior government officials, human resource managers, promotion committee members, and civil servants who had direct experience with promotion processes. Documentary evidence, such as promotion regulations, personnel policies, competency assessment reports, and performance evaluation documents, was analyzed to complement the interview findings. Direct observation was also undertaken to obtain contextual information regarding organizational practices and administrative procedures.

The selection of informants followed a purposive sampling strategy, whereby participants were chosen based on their knowledge, responsibilities, and involvement in personnel management and promotion decision-making. This approach ensured that the collected data reflected comprehensive perspectives from relevant stakeholders.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The analysis began with coding and categorizing interview transcripts and documentary evidence, followed by identifying recurring themes related to meritocratic principles, competency assessment, transparency, organizational culture, and leadership influence. The findings from multiple data sources were then compared through triangulation to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the study.

To ensure research rigor, credibility was established through source and method triangulation, prolonged engagement with the research setting, and member checking with selected informants. Dependability was

supported by maintaining a clear audit trail throughout the research process, while confirmability was strengthened by documenting analytical decisions and ensuring that the interpretations were grounded in empirical evidence. These procedures were undertaken to ensure that the findings accurately represented the implementation of meritocracy in government position promotion.

Results

The findings demonstrate that the implementation of meritocracy in position promotion within the government bureaucracy has shown gradual progress through the adoption of competency-based human resource management and standardized promotion procedures. Most government institutions have established formal regulations requiring promotion decisions to consider employee qualifications, competencies, performance evaluations, and professional experience. These mechanisms reflect the government's commitment to strengthening merit-based personnel management and improving bureaucratic professionalism.

Despite these institutional improvements, the implementation of meritocratic principles remains inconsistent across organizational levels. Promotion decisions continue to be influenced by organizational culture, leadership preferences, administrative capacity, and varying interpretations of promotion criteria. In several cases, competency assessments and performance evaluations serve as important references; however, they are not always the sole determinants of promotion outcomes. This situation creates discrepancies between formal merit system regulations and actual administrative practices.

The study further reveals that transparency and accountability have become increasingly important components of the promotion process. The availability of competency assessment results, performance records, and standardized evaluation procedures has improved procedural fairness. Nevertheless, limited access to promotion information,

inconsistent documentation, and insufficient communication regarding selection criteria remain challenges that reduce employees' perceptions of fairness and organizational trust.

Another important finding concerns institutional capacity. Government agencies with stronger human resource management systems, competent assessment teams, and effective internal supervision demonstrate higher levels of merit-based promotion implementation. Conversely, institutions with limited administrative resources or weak organizational governance experience greater difficulties in consistently applying merit principles.

Overall, the findings indicate that meritocracy in government position promotion has evolved from a regulatory requirement toward an institutional management practice. However, achieving a fully merit-based promotion system requires stronger organizational commitment, transparent decision-making mechanisms, continuous competency development, and more effective oversight to minimize non-merit influences. These improvements are essential for building a professional, accountable, and performance-oriented public bureaucracy.

The findings indicate that the implementation of meritocracy in position promotion within the government bureaucracy has undergone significant institutional development as part of broader public sector reform. Government agencies have increasingly adopted merit-based principles by integrating competency standards, educational qualifications, work experience, performance appraisal, and integrity assessments into promotion procedures. These institutional arrangements demonstrate a commitment to creating a professional civil service capable of delivering effective and accountable public services. The formalization of promotion procedures has reduced discretionary practices by establishing standardized requirements for career advancement and ensuring that promotion decisions are supported by documented administrative evidence.

The study found that competency has become one of the primary determinants in promotion

decisions. Employees possessing relevant educational backgrounds, professional certifications, managerial capabilities, and technical expertise generally have greater opportunities to compete for higher positions. Competency assessment centers and structured evaluation mechanisms have been introduced to provide objective measurements of managerial, technical, and socio-cultural competencies. These assessments enable organizations to identify potential leaders and match employees' capabilities with organizational needs. Nevertheless, the consistency of competency utilization varies across institutions due to differences in administrative capacity, resource availability, and organizational commitment to merit principles.

Performance evaluation also emerged as an essential component of merit-based promotion. Most institutions have incorporated annual performance appraisals as one of the principal criteria for determining promotion eligibility. Employees demonstrating consistently high levels of performance, innovation, discipline, and service quality are generally prioritized during promotion processes. However, the findings suggest that performance appraisal systems are not yet fully standardized across government organizations. Variations in evaluation methods, subjective assessments by supervisors, and differences in performance measurement indicators continue to influence the reliability of promotion decisions. Consequently, performance records often function as supporting evidence rather than the sole basis for promotion.

Transparency has improved considerably compared to previous administrative practices. Government institutions increasingly disseminate information regarding promotion requirements, vacancy announcements, competency standards, and administrative procedures through official communication channels. This openness has expanded access to career opportunities and reduced uncertainty among civil servants seeking promotion. Furthermore, the documentation of assessment results, interview evaluations, and administrative verification has strengthened

procedural accountability. Despite these improvements, the study found that communication regarding the rationale behind final promotion decisions remains relatively limited. Many employees understand the procedural stages of promotion but receive insufficient explanation concerning the comparative assessment of candidates, which affects perceptions of organizational fairness.

The findings also reveal that leadership plays a significant role in shaping the effectiveness of meritocracy implementation. Leaders who consistently emphasize professionalism, transparency, and organizational performance contribute to stronger compliance with merit-based promotion principles. Such leaders encourage objective competency assessments, respect institutional procedures, and minimize personal intervention in personnel decisions. Conversely, leadership styles characterized by excessive discretion or limited commitment to institutional regulations may weaken meritocracy by allowing subjective considerations to influence promotion outcomes. Therefore, leadership commitment constitutes one of the most influential organizational factors affecting the successful implementation of merit-based promotion.

Institutional capacity represents another determining factor. Organizations equipped with well-developed human resource management systems, qualified assessment personnel, digital personnel information systems, and comprehensive competency databases demonstrate greater consistency in applying meritocratic principles. Digitalization of personnel management has simplified document verification, competency mapping, and performance monitoring while improving administrative efficiency and reducing procedural errors. In contrast, institutions experiencing limited technological infrastructure, insufficient human resource expertise, or fragmented personnel databases encounter greater difficulties in implementing transparent and evidence-based promotion systems.

The study further indicates that organizational culture significantly influences employees' acceptance of meritocratic practices. Government agencies that promote professionalism, continuous learning, ethical conduct, and performance orientation tend to foster stronger employee confidence in promotion systems. Employees perceive promotion as an attainable outcome resulting from competence development and sustained performance improvement. Conversely, organizational cultures characterized by hierarchical dominance, informal networks, or resistance to institutional change may reduce employee trust in merit-based promotion. Such conditions discourage professional development because career advancement is perceived to depend less on individual capability than on organizational relationships.

Another important finding concerns the persistence of non-merit influences despite formal institutional reforms. Although promotion procedures have become increasingly standardized, external pressures, organizational politics, personal networks, and leadership preferences occasionally continue to affect decision-making processes. These influences generally occur not through explicit violations of regulations but through discretionary interpretation of evaluation results, prioritization among similarly qualified candidates, or strategic organizational considerations. Consequently, meritocracy operates within a complex institutional environment where objective criteria coexist with contextual organizational dynamics.

The findings also demonstrate the importance of institutional oversight in strengthening meritocracy. Internal supervisory mechanisms, personnel boards, and external monitoring institutions contribute to ensuring that promotion procedures comply with established regulations. Periodic audits, competency verification, and administrative reviews enhance procedural accountability while reducing opportunities for arbitrary decision-making. However, oversight effectiveness depends largely on institutional independence, professional capacity, and the willingness of organizations to

implement recommendations arising from evaluation processes.

Overall, the findings suggest that the implementation of meritocracy in government position promotion has shifted from a purely regulatory concept toward an increasingly institutionalized administrative practice. Formal promotion systems have become more transparent, competency-oriented, and performance-based than in previous bureaucratic arrangements. Nevertheless, variations in organizational capacity, leadership commitment, institutional culture, and administrative consistency continue to produce different levels of meritocracy implementation across government organizations. These findings indicate that strengthening meritocracy requires not only comprehensive legal frameworks but also sustained investment in human resource management systems, competency development, organizational transparency, digital governance, and institutional accountability. Such improvements are expected to enhance the professionalism, integrity, effectiveness, and public legitimacy of government bureaucracy while supporting the broader objectives of public sector reform.

The findings indicate that the implementation of meritocracy in position promotion has become an important component of bureaucratic reform aimed at creating a professional and accountable civil service. Promotion decisions are increasingly based on employee qualifications, competencies, work performance, and integrity rather than on political patronage or personal relationships. This finding is consistent with Young (1958), who introduced meritocracy as a system in which advancement should be determined by individual ability and achievement rather than inherited privilege. In the public sector context, the OECD (2020) further argues that merit-based promotion strengthens public integrity by preventing favoritism, nepotism, and undue political interference through transparent and objective human resource management systems.

The results also demonstrate that competency has become one of the primary considerations in

promotion decisions. Government organizations increasingly utilize competency assessments to evaluate managerial, technical, and socio-cultural capabilities before appointing employees to strategic positions. This finding supports the argument of Dessler (2020) that competency-based human resource management enables organizations to align employee capabilities with organizational objectives, thereby improving institutional performance. Similarly, Riccucci (2021) emphasizes that competency-based promotion contributes to a more professional public workforce because employees are rewarded according to their demonstrated capabilities rather than informal organizational relationships.

Performance appraisal emerged as another important determinant of promotion decisions. Employees with consistently high performance records generally receive greater opportunities for career advancement, suggesting that promotion increasingly functions as a reward for measurable achievement. These findings support the empirical study of Deserranno, Kastrau, and León-Ciliotta (2025), who found that merit-based promotion significantly improves employee productivity because workers perceive career advancement as fair and directly linked to individual performance. Performance-based promotion therefore creates stronger incentives for employees to continuously improve their competencies and work outcomes.

Transparency represents another important dimension identified in this study. The availability of open vacancy announcements, standardized promotion criteria, competency assessments, and documented evaluation procedures has strengthened employees' perceptions of fairness. Nevertheless, the study also found that explanations regarding final promotion decisions remain relatively limited. According to the OECD Public Integrity Handbook (2020), transparency should extend beyond procedural openness by ensuring that recruitment and promotion decisions are supported by objective criteria, documented evidence, and effective oversight mechanisms. Such transparency strengthens accountability while reducing

opportunities for favoritism and administrative discretion.

Leadership commitment was found to substantially influence the effectiveness of meritocracy implementation. Organizations led by managers who consistently support professional values and objective personnel management exhibit stronger compliance with merit principles than organizations where leaders rely heavily on subjective discretion. This finding corresponds with Perry and Hondeghem (2008), who argue that leadership plays a decisive role in cultivating professionalism and public service values within government organizations. Likewise, Riccucci (2021) maintains that organizational leaders determine whether formal merit regulations are translated into actual administrative practice.

Institutional capacity also significantly affects the implementation of meritocracy. Agencies equipped with professional human resource units, competency assessment centers, digital personnel information systems, and comprehensive employee databases demonstrate greater consistency in applying merit-based promotion. According to Cortázar, Fuenzalida, and Lafuente (2016), modern merit systems require not only appropriate legal frameworks but also institutional capacity capable of implementing competency assessments, transparent evaluations, and evidence-based personnel management. The OECD (2020) similarly emphasizes that digital human resource systems and standardized personnel procedures improve both efficiency and accountability in promotion decisions.

Another important finding concerns the persistence of non-merit influences despite ongoing bureaucratic reforms. Although formal promotion systems have become increasingly standardized, leadership preferences, organizational politics, and informal personal networks continue to influence certain promotion decisions. These findings reinforce the work of Dahlström, Lapuente, and Teorell (2012), who argue that the existence of merit regulations alone does not automatically

eliminate patronage unless institutions possess sufficient autonomy, professional norms, and effective accountability mechanisms. Similarly, Charron et al. (2017) demonstrate that bureaucratic meritocracy substantially reduces corruption risks because objective promotion systems minimize opportunities for political intervention and favoritism.

The findings further reveal that organizational culture influences employees' perceptions of meritocracy. Bureaucracies characterized by professionalism, continuous learning, ethical leadership, and accountability tend to strengthen employees' confidence in promotion systems. Conversely, organizations dominated by hierarchical traditions and informal networks weaken employees' trust in merit-based advancement. These observations support UNDP (2015), which argues that adaptive and impartial meritocracy creates a public service culture founded upon competence, continuous learning, and fairness rather than political loyalty.

Institutional oversight also emerged as a critical mechanism for strengthening meritocracy. Internal supervision, personnel review boards, competency verification, and administrative audits reduce opportunities for arbitrary promotion decisions while enhancing public confidence in personnel management. This finding aligns with the OECD (2020), which emphasizes that independent oversight mechanisms ensure the consistent implementation of objective recruitment and promotion procedures while safeguarding public sector integrity.

Overall, the findings suggest that meritocracy should not be understood merely as a regulatory requirement but rather as an integrated governance system combining competency-based assessment, transparent procedures, organizational professionalism, effective leadership, and institutional accountability. These findings are consistent with the global expert survey conducted by Mulaphong (2023), which concludes that meritocratic civil service systems significantly improve organizational capacity, employee competence, integrity, policy

implementation, and the quality of public services across different governance contexts. Consequently, strengthening meritocracy requires continuous investment in institutional capacity, leadership commitment, digital human resource management, and transparent oversight mechanisms to ensure that promotion decisions are consistently based on competence and performance rather than non-merit considerations.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the implementation of meritocracy in position promotion within the government bureaucracy and found that merit-based principles have become increasingly institutionalized through competency-based assessment, performance evaluation, and standardized promotion procedures. The findings indicate that government organizations have made substantial progress in adopting objective criteria for career advancement, thereby supporting the development of a more professional, accountable, and performance-oriented civil service. These reforms reflect a growing commitment to reducing subjective decision-making and strengthening fairness in personnel management. Despite these positive developments, the study also reveals that the implementation of meritocracy remains uneven across government institutions. Organizational culture, leadership commitment, institutional capacity, and administrative consistency continue to influence promotion decisions. Although competency and performance are formally recognized as the primary criteria for promotion, non-merit factors such as organizational politics, discretionary leadership practices, and informal networks may still affect decision-making in

certain contexts. Consequently, the existence of merit regulations alone is insufficient to ensure fully objective promotion practices without effective institutional oversight and transparent governance mechanisms. The study further demonstrates that successful implementation of meritocracy depends on the integration of several complementary factors, including competent human resource management, transparent promotion procedures, digital personnel information systems, continuous competency development, and independent supervision. These elements collectively strengthen organizational accountability while enhancing employee confidence in the fairness of promotion decisions. Therefore, meritocracy should be understood not merely as a legal or administrative requirement but as a comprehensive governance approach that supports institutional effectiveness and sustainable bureaucratic reform. This study contributes to the literature on public administration by reinforcing the importance of meritocracy as a strategic mechanism for improving bureaucratic quality and organizational performance. Practically, the findings provide policy implications for government institutions seeking to strengthen merit-based promotion through more transparent assessment systems, standardized competency evaluation, leadership commitment, and stronger accountability mechanisms. Future research is recommended to examine meritocracy across different levels of government and institutional settings using comparative or mixed-method approaches to provide a broader understanding of factors affecting merit-based promotion in the public sector.

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