

STRATEGY FOR IMPLEMENTING THE MERIT SYSTEM IN THE MANAGEMENT OF STATE CIVIL APPARATUS: A CASE STUDY IN THE CITY OF BINJAI

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ABSTRACT

This research delves into the intricacies of implementing the merit system within the management of state civil servants in Binjai City, drawing insights from Charles O. Jones's policy implementation theory. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the research meticulously gathered data through interviews, document reviews, and field observations. Upon evaluating the implemented system, significant deficiencies were uncovered across various critical areas including leadership, inter-organizational coordination, human resource capacity, communication efficacy, performance evaluations, and adaptability. The study proposes a series of targeted recommendations to address these shortcomings. These recommendations include strengthening leadership qualities, fostering improved collaboration among different organizational units, enhancing the capacity of human resources through training and development initiatives, refining communication strategies for greater clarity and effectiveness, establishing regular performance assessment mechanisms, and fostering a culture of adaptability to circumstances. The insights garnered from this research offer valuable guidance for policymakers, aiding in the formulation of effective strategies to fortify the merit system in Binjai City. By implementing these recommendations, policymakers can strive towards enhancing public service effectiveness and overall welfare in the city. Ultimately, this research serves as a vital tool for informed decision-making and proactive measures to optimize governmental performance and service delivery in Binjai City.

Keywords: *Merit system, Management, Civil Servants, Binjai City.*

A. INTRODUCTION

Effective and responsive government is the foundation for a country's progress. To carry out government policy, the bureaucracy becomes the main engine as the actor implementing the policy (Ulfa K. et al., 2020). The main key to successful bureaucracy is human resource management. Professional and

quality human resources are very important for every organization, including the State Civil Apparatus (Budiaji et al., 2024). Human resource management is becoming increasingly important because the success of an organization depends greatly on the quality and performance of employees (Idrus et al., 2023). Quality human resource management is the key to increasing government effectiveness and efficiency, especially in the era of globalization which demands high responsiveness and professionalism. During the dynamics of globalization and increasingly tight market competition, it is important for a government entity to have a system that allows optimal management of human resources. Performance management of Civil Servants is very dependent on the management and implementation of employee performance which is determined by the quality of human resources from the leadership to the implementers (Asropo et al., 2022). Therefore, implementing effective HR management policies is very important for companies in the global business era (Arifudin et al., 2021). The HR management system, starting from employee planning, procurement to dismissal, must be implemented well. If not, it will produce incompetent human resources (Fathaya, 2017).

One approach applied in this context is the merit system, according to Undang-Undang Nomor 20 Tahun 2023 concerning State Civil Apparatus. The Merit System is the implementation of the ASN Management system in accordance with the principle of meritocracy. What is meant by the principle of meritocracy is the principle of managing human resources based on qualifications, competence, potential and performance, as well as integrity and morality which is implemented fairly and fairly without discriminating against ethnic background, race, skin color, religion or origin. , gender, marital status, age, or special needs in accordance with the explanation article by article in Undang-Undang Nomor 20 Tahun 2023 concerning State Civil Apparatus.

Based on the Merit System Guidelines in the Management of State Civil Apparatus which are regulated by Kementerian Pendayagunaan Aparatur Negara dan Reformasi Birokrasi Republik Indonesia Nomor 40 Tahun 2018, there are 8 (eight) aspects of criteria that must be adopted by government agencies. These aspects include: needs planning aspects, procurement aspects, career development aspects, promotion and transfer aspects, performance management, payroll, rewards and discipline aspects, protection and service aspects, and information system aspects. From 2018 to 2022, the State Civil Apparatus Commission (KASN) has carried out an evaluation of the implementation of the merit system in 460 government agencies, including Ministry/Agency, Provincial and Regency/City levels. The results of the 2022 Merit System in Figures Report by KASN show that of the total of 460 government agencies evaluated, 172 agencies were categorized as implementing a merit system with a "Poor" level. Furthermore, there are 71 agencies in the "Poor" category, 157 agencies in the "Good" category, and 60 agencies in the "Very Good" category (KASN, 2022).

Regarding the topic, researchers conducted a study concerning the implementation of the merit system in managing public servants within the Binjai City government. To gauge the success of implementation, the capacity and sustainability of the program are evaluated, as indicated by prior work (Bastian,

2021). According to Charles O. Jones (1996), program implementation hinges on three key components: organization, interpretation, and execution. Firstly, organization entails establishing an organizational structure to ensure competent resources are available for program management. Secondly, interpretation involves executing the program in alignment with established plans or directives, often guided by specific guidelines or technical instructions. Lastly, implementation requires clear procedures to ensure the program operates efficiently and effectively towards its intended objectives.

To increase the effectiveness and efficiency of public services, the Binjai City Government has taken steps to adopt a merit system in the management of state civil servants. These efforts have the target of realizing good governance and improving the quality of public services (Baihaqi et al., 2023). However, the results of the evaluation carried out by the State Civil Service Commission in the period 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2022 showed that the implementation of the merit system in the city was rated as "Poor". From the total score of 149.5 obtained from a maximum score of 400, as well as an Index of 0.37 from a maximum score of 1, it becomes clear that there are significant challenges in implementing the merit system at the regional level. This evaluation underscores the need for special attention to several aspects that may become obstacles in achieving the Binjai City government's goal of improving the quality of public services through a merit system. These challenges may range from inadequate planning, lack of understanding or awareness of the importance of the merit system, to operational problems in implementing the system.

In the context of the theory proposed by Charles O. Jones (1996), the three main variables that influence policy implementation are organization, interpretation, and application. The implementation of the merit system in Binjai City can be seen from these three variables. Organizational aspects include structure, governance, and organizational capacity to implement the policy. Meanwhile, interpretation includes understanding and interpreting policies and how these policies are interpreted and understood by implementers in the field. According to Widiaworo (2017), understanding is the ability to connect the information that has been studied into one complete concept in memory. Meanwhile, applications relate to the process of implementing policies in daily activities, including how these policies are implemented effectively and consistently by all relevant parties. By considering these three variables, there needs to be more focused efforts in improving the implementation of the merit system in Binjai City. This includes increasing organizational capacity, conveying better information, and understanding to implementers in the field, as well as improving the policy application process to be more systematic and effective.

According to Charles O. Jones, implementation is an essential process within program execution (Bastian, 2021). Referring to policy implementation, Jones, as cited in Auldrin M. Ponto et al. (2016), defines it as "a series of activities aimed at realizing a program," underscoring that implementation involves a sequence of actions geared towards achieving specific outcomes. These activities encompass organizing, interpreting, and executing the program. Clear procedural guidelines can significantly aid program implementers in understanding the

objectives and methodologies of their work. Therefore, drawing upon Jones's framework, a researcher conducted a study on the implementation of the merit system in the management of state civil servants within the Binjai city government. This research utilizes Jones's theory, focusing on the pivotal activities of organizing, interpreting, and implementing, to analyze and identify aspects that can enhance the potential of the research setting.

In this context, this research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the strategy for implementing the merit system in ASN management in Binjai City. By analyzing the challenges, strategies, and potential improvements in implementing the merit system, it is hoped that this research can provide a valuable contribution to efforts to improve bureaucratic performance and public services in Binjai City as well as provide useful insights into the broader regional government context.

B. LITERATUR REVIEW

Policy Implementation Theory:

Implementation according to Charles O. Jones in Timur, A et al (2023) states that the implementation of a program can be influenced by three components, namely organization, interpretation, and implementation. (1) organizing; which includes the need for an organizational structure in the implementation program, so that competent resources are formed in managing the operations program, (2) interpretation; implementers can carry out programs in accordance with plans or directions, in this case there are guidelines or technical instructions related to the implementation of the program being implemented, (3) implementation; contains clear program implementation procedures so that the work program can run according to its objectives.

In the context of policy implementation, theories such as those put forward by Charles O. Jones (1996) can provide an in-depth understanding of the factors that influence the success of implementing a merit system. This theory highlights the importance of organization, interpretation, and application in the policy implementation process, which is relevant to understanding how merit systems are implemented and run at the local government level. In the merit system policy, the organization includes effective leadership, clear organizational structure, efficient inter-organizational coordination, and adequate resource capacity. Leadership provides direction and support, while the organizational structure ensures clarity of roles and decision-making processes. Inter-organizational coordination facilitates collaboration between different entities involved in implementation. Resource capacity ensures sufficient resources for effective implementation. Interpretation involves understanding policy objectives, addressing threats to interests, and maintaining effective communications. Understanding policy objectives will align actions with desired outcomes, while addressing threats will mitigate implementation risks. Effective communication fosters mutual understanding and commitment among stakeholders. Implementation includes compliance with guidelines and procedures, monitoring and supervision, performance evaluation, and response to change. Adherence to guidelines ensures consistency, while monitoring tracks progress and addresses challenges.

Performance evaluation informs improvement, and adaptability ensures relevance amidst changing circumstances. Together, these variables play an important role in ensuring successful policy implementation.

By understanding and paying attention to these three variables, policy makers can design more effective strategies for implementing the policies they propose. This includes increasing organizational capacity, effective communication, as well as improvements in the policy application process to better achieve policy goals.

Principles of Meritocracy:

The concept of the principle of meritocracy is the main basis for the merit system. The principle of the merit system carries aspects of work performance, competency, qualifications, fairness, and openness, with the aim of achieving ASN professionalism (Rakhmawanto, 2018). References to the explanation of the principle of meritocracy according to Law Number 20 of 2023 concerning State Civil Apparatus as well as in-depth research on this principle can provide a deeper understanding of the concept of meritocracy and its relevance in the merit system. In the context of the merit system in state civil service management, the principle of meritocracy is realized through selection, promotion and reward processes that are based on work performance and individual competence. This means that every employee, regardless of background or status, has the same opportunity to achieve promotions or awards if they can demonstrate superior performance and meet the predetermined criteria.

The principle of meritocracy also emphasizes the need for fair and transparent treatment in HR management. This means that decisions regarding procurement, promotions or awards must be based on objective and equitable evaluations, as well as processes that are open and accountable. There shall be no preference or discrimination based on factors that are not relevant to an individual's performance or competence. By implementing the principle of meritocracy, the government can ensure that the human resources it has have the quality and competence in accordance with job demands and organizational goals. It can also increase employee motivation and performance, as they feel valued and recognized for their contributions and achievements. This principle also supports the creation of an inclusive and fair work environment, where every individual has the same opportunity to develop, and advance based on his abilities and efforts.

Merit System Implementation Case Study:

These studies can provide insight into various approaches, strategies, and challenges faced in implementing a merit system in state civil service management. References to merit system evaluation results, both successful and those facing obstacles can be a source of inspiration for discussing the implementation of the merit system at the regional level.

Several previous studies, such as research conducted by Halifa & Lilie (2021), examined the Implementation of the Merit System in the Management of Civil Servants at the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia. According to Halifa & Lilie, the implementation of the merit system at the Ministry of Finance has shown positive progress, with the score increasing from 363 in 2018

to 382.5 in 2019. The Ministry of Finance is considered successful in implementing the merit system because it has full support from the leadership of the Ministry of Finance. In line with the opinion above, Sandinirwan et al., (2022) conducted a study on the Factors that Influence the Successful Implementation of the Merit System in Indonesian Government Organizations.

Based on the analysis that has been carried out, it was found that leadership plays a key role in the successful implementation of the merit system. Then research was conducted by Meyrina (2016) who examined the factors that influence the successful implementation of the merit system. The results showed that improving performance through the merit system within the Ministry of Law and Human Rights had not been socialized in units within the Ministry of Law and Human Rights so that understanding was not optimal. This research highlighted issues in communication. Then, research by Roza et al., (2021) revealed that there were still many regional officials who did not understand the rules or concept of the merit system. The research highlights the lack of interpretation of the merit system concept.

C. METHOD

The research method used in this study is based on a qualitative approach, which allows researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of how the merit system is implemented in the management of state civil servants in Binjai City. A qualitative approach provides space for researchers to explore the various perspectives and experiences involved in implementing a merit system. This research uses a descriptive research design, which aims to provide an accurate picture of the existing situation regarding the implementation of the merit system in Binjai City government agencies.

Data collection techniques include interviews, document studies and field observations. Researchers conducted interviews with various related parties, including government officials, civil servants, and public administration experts. Interviews were conducted to gain an in-depth understanding of how the merit system is implemented in practice, as well as to identify the challenges and opportunities faced. Data was also collected through document studies, including policies, regulations and official documents related to the implementation of the merit system in Binjai City. Document analysis helps in understanding the existing formal framework and the practices that have been adopted. Researchers conducted direct observations of the process of implementing the merit system in the workplace to gain a more complete understanding of how the policy is applied in practical, everyday situations. The data collected was analyzed using a qualitative approach. Analysis was carried out by examining patterns, general findings, and differences in responses and experiences expressed by respondents. This approach allows researchers to explore the complexity of implementing merit systems in more depth.

D. EXPLANATION

After going through the data collection and analysis process, various findings that are relevant to the implementation of the merit system in the

management of state civil servants in Binjai City have been identified. An explanation of the findings can be presented as follows:

Organization

Organizations, according to Jones, are an important element in implementing public policy. In the context of government, organizations are often identified with the concept of bureaucracy proposed by Weber. Jones emphasizes that internal organizational factors, such as leadership, organizational structure, inter-organizational coordination, and resource capacity, play a key role in influencing how a policy is understood, translated, and implemented by implementers within the organization. In implementing merit system policies, leadership has a very important role in managing organizational variables that influence the implementation process. An effective leader must be able to change the organizational culture to better support the principle of meritocracy, communicate the importance of the merit system policy to all members of the organization, and ensure that the policy is implemented consistently and fairly. Inter-organizational coordination is also needed to ensure that merit system policies can be implemented effectively across all entities involved. Apart from that, resources are also a crucial factor in implementing merit system policies. The provision of adequate resources is it budget, personnel, or infrastructure, is very necessary to support the policy implementation process well. Without adequate resources, organizations may face obstacles in implementing merit system policies effectively. Therefore, leaders need to ensure appropriate resource allocation to support the successful implementation of merit system policies.

Based on interviews and field analysis, it was found that leadership plays an important role in determining the success or failure of achievement system policies. Effective leadership, especially from key figures such as mayors and regional secretaries, is critical in providing the direction, support and commitment necessary for the adoption and implementation of these policies across the organization. Their strong support is evident in their oversight of ASN career paths and their dedication to advancing talent management initiatives. In addition, there is significant commitment from stakeholders, including institutional leadership and department heads, which set ambitious targets and actively seek to increase the value of the achievement system over time. However, cost-related challenges still remain, indicating that despite strong support, implementation of the merit system still faces obstacles.

In addition, organizational structure plays an important role in shaping efficiency, coordination, and overall performance within an institution. It is hoped that the restructuring of BKPSDM from two sectors to three sectors will provide opportunities to increase the value of the merit system. Nevertheless, financial challenges are a significant consideration because structural changes must be accompanied by adequate resource allocation to optimize the implementation of the merit system. Nonetheless, the new organizational structure has facilitated the implementation of a more effective merit system, although challenges remain regarding ambiguity in the new structure. In the contemporary work environment, effective coordination between organizations is essential to ensure smooth operations, achievement of goals, and efficient utilization of resources. Although

the importance of coordination is recognized, challenges remain in its effective implementation, especially amidst structural changes and new policies. Therefore, joint efforts to strengthen coordination between organizations are very important to achieve common goals optimally. In addition, resource capacity is a determining factor in operational success and achievement of organizational goals. In the context of implementing the merit system policy in the Binjai City Government, limited budget resources are the main obstacle in increasing human resource capacity at BKPSDM. Regular evaluation of budget allocations and results is very important to ensure that government investments have maximum impact on the progress and prosperity of Binjai City. Therefore, efficient and effective management of budget resources is important to support human resource capacity in implementing merit system policies.

Interpretation

Jones emphasized the importance of interpretation in policy implementation, which includes the understanding and interpretation of policy content by implementers. According to him, for an effective policy, implementers must clearly understand what is expected of them in implementing the policy. This view is like the opinion of Edward III quoted by Jones, who stated that implementation instructions must be clear so that implementers are not confused and have the freedom to apply their own views. The interpretation variable in Jones' theory refers to the way policy implementers understand and interpret the contents of the policy that has been formulated, which can influence the way the policy is implemented, and the results obtained.

In the context of a merit system policy, interpretation is important because it can influence implementers' support and commitment to the policy. Different views of merit system policies, such as viewing them as an opportunity for promotion based on merit or as a threat to personal interests, can influence how the policy is implemented. A clear understanding of policy objectives is key because it can influence how policy implementers interpret and implement the policy. Interest threats also need to be considered because conflicts of interest can disrupt policy implementation. To address diverse interpretations, effective communication of the principles of meritocracy is essential. Policymakers need to openly communicate about the goals and values to be achieved through merit system policies, as well as provide implementers with a deep understanding of the concept of meritocracy. In this way, it is hoped that a common perception and strong commitment will be created from all parties in implementing the policy effectively.

Based on extensive interviews and field analysis, it becomes evident that a profound understanding of policy objectives serves as the cornerstone for the successful implementation of the merit system policy. Stakeholders, especially leaders within BKPSDM and the major exhibit a robust understanding of the merit system's goals and acknowledge its pivotal role in effective governance. This comprehensive understanding empowers them to steer policy initiatives with precision and vigor, reinforcing their dedication to utilize the merit system as a means to position individuals based on merit and performance criteria. However, implementation amidst efforts, various threats to vested interests begin to surface,

potentially derailing the process. These threats manifest from both internal and external sources. Internally, challenges arise from a depth of effective leadership in comprehending and executing the merit system. Externally, political interference aimed at manipulating position placements poses a significant threat. Hence, effective coordination and communication among all stakeholders emerge as imperative strategies to mitigate these threats effectively.

Lack of communication between organizations, particularly between BKPSDM and other entities, emerges as a formidable challenge that necessitates resolution. Establishing robust inter-organizational communication channels is essential to foster uniform understanding and foster seamless cooperation in implementing the merit system. As a result, grasping policy objectives, identifying threats to interests, and enhancing inter-organizational communication emerge as crucial steps in ensuring the seamless and successful implementation of merit system policies within local government structures. By fostering a shared understanding of policy objectives, proactively addressing threats to interests and enhancing communication channels between stakeholders, local governments can navigate the complexities of implementing merit system policies with resilience and efficacy, thereby advancing organizational effectiveness and bolstering public trust in governance processes.

Application

Policy application, according to Jones, refers to the routine implementation of all decisions and regulations by carrying out activities aimed at achieving policy goals. This includes the provision of goods and services as well as other program objectives. Implementation is often a dynamic process in which implementers are guided by program guidelines or actual conditions. Adaptations to guidelines or rules may occur in practice, but essentially, the rules are made to be applied honestly, not to be broken. The application variable in the policy implementation theory proposed by Jones highlights the concrete steps taken by policy implementers to implement the policies that have been formulated. The importance of not only understanding and interpreting policies, but also implementing them appropriately and effectively in the field was emphasized by Jones.

In the context of implementing the merit system policy, this application is related to the implementation of established guidelines and procedures for assessing employee performance based on the principle of meritocracy. Policy implementers need to ensure that the evaluation process is carried out fairly and transparently in accordance with established meritocracy criteria. Response to changes that occur in the field is also part of policy application, where policy implementers need to be able to adapt quickly and effectively to changing conditions or needs that influence policy implementation. Based on interviews and field analysis, it is evident that the implementation of the merit system policy hinges on four key aspects: Implementation of Guidelines and Procedures, Monitoring and Supervision, Performance Evaluation, and Response to Change.

Firstly, the implementation of guidelines and procedures is crucial to ensure fairness and transparency in employee selection, assessment, and placement processes. However, challenges arise, particularly at the regional level, due to

obstacles in regulatory spending procedures, which often impede prompt responses to regulatory changes. Secondly, effective monitoring and supervision by various parties such as the Inspectorate, KPK, and KASN are essential to enhance accountability and transparency in policy implementation. Their oversight contributes significantly to ensuring adherence to established guidelines and procedures. Thirdly, performance evaluation, whether through self-assessment or external evaluation, plays a vital role in enabling government agencies to assess the merit system's implementation and identify areas for improvement. Regular evaluations provide valuable insights that inform strategic decisions and policy adjustments. Lastly, responding to change is imperative to adapt to evolving regulations, technology, and organizational dynamics. However, obstacles such as lack of incentives, understanding, and slow coordination can hinder effective responses to change. Therefore, efforts to enhance response to change must encompass the provision of adequate incentives, increased understanding among stakeholders, and effective cross-sectional coordination and collaboration. Addressing these four key aspects is paramount for the successful implementation of the merit system policy. By focusing on implementing guidelines and procedures, ensuring robust monitoring and supervision, conducting comprehensive performance evaluations, and fostering adaptive responses to change, government agencies can maximize the benefits of the merit system and improve overall organizational effectiveness and efficiency.

E. CONCLUSION

From this research, it can be concluded that the implementation of the merit system in the management of state civil servants in Binjai City faces a series of challenges that require serious attention. Although efforts have been made to implement the principles of meritocracy, the results still show stagnation. Nevertheless, the research findings provide valuable insights for identifying areas that require improvement or further development.

1. **Strengthening Leadership:** Leaders at the regional level need to take an active role in ensuring the successful implementation of the merit system. This includes providing full support for the principle of meritocracy, building commitment from all levels of employees, and facilitating changes in organizational culture that supports the implementation of the merit system.
2. **Improved Inter-organizational Coordination:** There needs to be better coordination between units and departments within the Binjai City government to ensure consistency in the implementation of the merit system. This can be achieved through creating a more flexible organizational structure, adjusting responsibilities, and promoting cross-unit collaboration.
3. **Increasing Human Resource Capacity:** Investment in developing employee skills and knowledge is the key to supporting the successful implementation of the merit system. Targeted training and development can help employees understand the principles of meritocracy and improve their performance in accordance with merit criteria.
4. **Effective Communication:** The importance of effective communication about the goals and values of the merit system needs to be strengthened. Policy

makers need to openly communicate about the importance of the merit system, provide implementers with a deep understanding of the concept of meritocracy, and ensure that information about merit policies and procedures is well distributed throughout the organization.

5. Regular and Objective Performance Evaluation: Regular and objective performance evaluation is an important basis in ensuring the success of the merit system. Clear and measurable assessment of individual performance contributes to building a work culture that is achievement and performance oriented.
6. Responsiveness to Change: Organizations need to be responsive to changes in the internal and external environment to maintain the relevance and effectiveness of the merit system. Rapid and adaptive response to environmental changes allows organizations to adapt merit policies and procedures to changing dynamics.

The importance of proactive and strong leadership in setting direction and providing support for the implementation of a merit system cannot be doubted. Effective leadership is the key to building commitment, facilitating change, and overcoming obstacles that may arise in the implementation process. Apart from that, inter-organizational coordination, flexibility of organizational structure, and increasing human resource capacity are also key factors in the successful implementation of a merit system. Challenges such as vested interests, lack of effective communication, inadequate performance evaluation, and lack of response to change also need to be taken seriously.

Recommendations for improving inter-organizational coordination, adjusting organizational structures, developing human resource capacity, strengthening monitoring of interest threats, improving communication, improving performance evaluation, and developing adaptive responses to change are concrete steps that can be taken to increase the effectiveness of implementing the merit system in Binjai City. The Binjai City Government needs to take strategic steps to overcome these challenges and strengthen the implementation of the merit system so that it can have a significant positive impact on the management of the state civil service. Thus, the conclusions of this research provide a basis for policy makers to formulate more effective strategies in improving the merit system in Binjai City.

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