

Meritocracy and Dynamic Governance in Practice: A Case Study of Civil Service Reform in Bekasi City, Indonesia

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 15 April 2025	<p>The phenomenon of weak bureaucratic performance at the regional level underscores the need for civil service reform that goes beyond regulatory frameworks by integrating the principles of meritocracy and adaptive governance. This study aims to evaluate the implementation of the merit system and the concept of dynamic governance in civil service management within the Bekasi City Government—an area that previously experienced a governance crisis due to successive corruption cases but has since recovered and achieved a "Very Good" category in the ASN merit index according to KASN in 2023. The methodology used is a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study, involving in-depth interviews, policy document analysis, and direct observation of civil service management practices. The research findings indicate that this transformation was supported by strategic leadership, regulatory reinforcement through Mayor Regulation No. 12 of 2022, and the application of dynamic governance principles such as "thinking ahead," "thinking again," and "thinking across." Nevertheless, challenges remain, particularly related to resistance from entrenched work culture and limited integration of personnel information systems. Recommendations include enhancing civil servants' literacy on the merit system and information technology, as well as digital integration across regional agencies. These findings reinforce the importance of meritocracy and dynamic governance as foundational elements in building a professional, adaptive, and accountable bureaucracy, which can be replicated by other regions with appropriate contextual adjustments.</p>
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I. BACKGROUND

Bureaucratic reform in Indonesia has become one of the main pillars in efforts to improve the quality of governance. The main focus of this reform is to create a bureaucracy that is professional, accountable, and responsive to the dynamic needs of society. Amidst the challenges of the VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity) era, new approaches are needed to ensure that the bureaucracy is able to adapt to rapid and unpredictable changes. One approach that is relevant in this context is the concept of dynamic governance—a governance framework that emphasizes the ability of government to continuously learn, innovate, and collaborate across sectors (Neo & Chen, 2007)

In line with this approach, meritocracy is an important foundation in building a superior state civil apparatus (ASN). The merit system, which places qualifications, competencies, and performance as the main basis in HR management, is a crucial instrument in creating a performance-based bureaucracy, not political connections or nepotism. The implementation of this system has been realized through various regulations in Indonesia, one of which is the ASN Law and the 2020-2024 Bureaucratic Reform Roadmap.

However, the implementation of meritocracy in various regions still faces structural and cultural challenges. For example, research shows that an uneven understanding of the concept of merit among local bureaucrats, limited resources, as well as political influence, are serious obstacles in adopting this system optimally (Rahman et al., 2023).

In that context, the Bekasi City Government emerged as an example of a region that was able to show significant transformation in ASN management based on the principles of meritocracy and dynamic governance. Previously, Bekasi City had experienced a governance crisis due to corruption cases of two consecutive mayors. But in recent years, the city has been able to rise by progressively adopting a merit system. Based on the KASN assessment in 2023, Bekasi City obtained a score of 334.5 or entered the “Very Good” category in the ASN merit index—a figure that reflects a big leap from the previous condition.

This transformation did not happen by chance. One of the important policies taken is the implementation of Bekasi Mayor Regulation No. 12 Year 2022 on ASN talent management. This regulation is designed to support the merit system through competency and performance-based selection, not political preferences. This is in line with the findings of a recent study, which showed that the placement of merit-based officials significantly encourages innovation in public services (Oliveira et al., 2024).

Not only stopping at the regulatory framework, Bekasi City also emphasizes aspects of dynamic capabilities that are at the core of the dynamic governance concept, such as “thinking ahead”, “thinking again”, and “thinking across”. Through continuous training, structural reform, and rotation of officials based on performance evaluation, the city government encourages the transformation of ASN work culture towards a more adaptive and innovative direction. As shown in other studies, an institutional culture that supports continuous learning is essential in maintaining the sustainability of meritocracy (Sufianti et al., 2021).

Nationally, data shows that only 12.8% of regional agencies in Indonesia are categorized as “good” or “very good” in implementing the ASN merit system (Rahman et al., 2023). This means that there are still many regions that have not succeeded in effectively implementing the principles of meritocracy. Therefore, the success of Bekasi City is an important reference as a national best practice that can be replicated in other regions.

Furthermore, the success of this transformation strengthens the argument that leadership commitment and policy consistency are two key elements. Studies of ASN merit policy implementation in West Java, including Bekasi City, reveal that the main challenges come from the lack of information system integration, limited supporting infrastructure, and external interventions that interfere with the objectivity of the ASN promotion process. To ensure the sustainability of these reforms, continuous evaluation, a transparent oversight system, and the strengthening of a meritocratic culture within the bureaucracy are needed. If these aspects are strengthened, the merit system will not only be a tool for employee selection, but also a driving force for the transformation of governance towards a dynamic and globally competitive bureaucracy.

By considering the achievements and strategies implemented by Bekasi City, it is important to evaluate the practice of meritocracy and the implementation of dynamic governance. This study is expected to provide applicable policy recommendations that can be replicated in the context of other local governments in Indonesia.

II. LITERATURE RESEACH

1. Meritocracy in ASN Management

Meritocracy is a principle of human resource (HR) management that bases recruitment, promotion, and career development decisions on employee qualifications, competencies, and performance. This system aims to create a bureaucracy that is professional, fair, and free from the practice of nepotism and political intervention. In Indonesia, meritocracy is formally reinforced through Law No. 5/2014 on the State Civil Apparatus.

A study by Rindaningsih, (2024) states that the merit system provides opportunities for ASN to develop competencies, protect their careers from political influence, and increase motivation through performance-based rewards (Aminuddin & Rindaningsih, 2025).

However, the implementation of meritocracy at the regional level still faces obstacles. Research in Ogan Komering Ulu District shows that although merit policies have been introduced, budget constraints, political intervention, and lack of understanding from stakeholders are the main barriers to successful implementation (Dwiputrianti et al., 2024).

2. Dynamic Governance

The concept of dynamic governance emphasizes the importance of a bureaucracy that is capable of “thinking ahead” (future-oriented), “thinking again” (reflective and adaptive), and “thinking across” (collaborative between sectors). This approach is particularly important in an era of public policy complexity and rapid social change.

Khan, (2023); Natsir et al., (2023) found that dynamic governance has a direct influence on public service innovation and the efficiency of government organizations. When the bureaucracy is empowered to think across boundaries and adjust quickly to change, public service outcomes become more responsive and innovative.

On the other hand, the implementation of dynamic governance in Indonesia is still limited. One of the challenges is the low technology literacy and change management among ASNs. Therefore, the success of Bekasi City in integrating aspects of dynamic governance with the merit system is an interesting thing to study more deeply.

3. The Relationship between Meritocracy and Dynamic Governance

Meritocracy is an important prerequisite for realizing dynamic governance. Without a professional and competent human resource base, the adaptive capacity of the bureaucracy will be limited. Studies in Majene and Pekanbaru show that the successful implementation of dynamic governance is directly influenced by the effectiveness of merit systems and competency-based talent management (Rahman et al., 2023). Objective merit-based recruitment also helps the bureaucracy to avoid the practice of political payback, which has been one of the main obstacles in the development of effective public governance (Mofokeng et al., 2025; Smotritskaya, 2024).

4. Implementation Challenges at the Regional Level

The implementation of meritocracy and dynamic governance at the local level such as Bekasi City faces challenges from the aspects of policy, organizational structure, to work culture. A study by Mulyadi et al. (2025) in West Java identified obstacles such as the lack of integration of central-regional information systems, limited digital infrastructure, and lack of synergy between organizational units (Priyadharma, 2021; Susilowati et al., 2025).

However, the same study also emphasized the importance of political support from regional leaders as well as investment in ASN capacity building to overcome these challenges.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research used a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study type, which focused on the implementation of the merit system and dynamic governance in ASN management within the Bekasi City Government. The research location was carried out at relevant agencies such as the Civil Service and Human Resources Development Agency (BKPSDM) and the Organization and Management Section (Ortala). Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews with key informants, documentation studies of regulations and ASN performance reports, and direct observation of HR management practices. Informants were determined purposively based on their strategic position and involvement in ASN policy transformation. Data analysis was conducted through thematic analysis method with the stages of data reduction, categorization, interpretation, and conclusion drawing. To maintain data validity, this research applies source and method triangulation, as well as member checking to selected informants.

IV. RESEARCH RESULTS

This study found that the Bekasi City Government has undergone a significant transformation in the management of the state civil apparatus (ASN) through the implementation of a merit system and dynamic governance. This transformation is marked by an increase in the ASN merit system score assessed by the State Civil Apparatus Commission (KASN), which amounted to 334.5 points in 2023, which led Bekasi City into the “Very Good” category. This reflects success in creating an ASN management system based on competence, performance, and integrity.

Structurally, the Bekasi City Government has established Mayor's Regulation No. 12 of 2022 on ASN Talent Management, which serves as the legal basis for implementing a comprehensive merit system. This document regulates the process of recruitment, rotation, promotion, and development of ASN in an open, objective, and measurable manner. In practice, this policy has fostered a performance-based work culture and strengthened the integrity of government institutions.

Data shows that the implementation of the merit system in Bekasi City has resulted in significant changes in the mechanism for filling positions. The open selection process for high leadership positions (JPT) has been carried out transparently by involving an independent selection committee and KASN supervision. This is different from previous practices that were often influenced by political considerations. Interviews with key informants from BKPSDM also revealed that since the merit system was implemented, there has been an improvement in the quality of strategic decision-making at the structural level (Ambarawati et al., 2024; Malik & Prasojo, 2023).

In terms of dynamic governance, the application of the “thinking ahead” principle is reflected in competency-based managerial training designed to equip ASN with adaptive capabilities in facing the challenges of the digital and VUCA era. In addition, the principle of “thinking again” is manifested in periodic evaluations of ASN management policies, including revisions to organizational structures, competency mapping, and workload analysis. Meanwhile, “thinking across” is applied through collaboration across regional apparatus and with external partners such as KASN and national training institutions.

The research also found that this reform cannot be separated from the commitment of regional leaders in encouraging a professional and adaptive bureaucracy. The Bekasi Mayor plays a central role in ensuring synergy between regional apparatus and in providing a special budget allocation for ASN HR development. This strengthens the literature's argument that strategic leadership is a key factor in the successful implementation of the merit system (Rahman et al., 2023).

Nonetheless, challenges remain. Researchers found that understanding of the merit system has not been fully shared among executive-level ASNs. Some ASNs still consider the promotion and transfer process as a mere form of formality. In addition, the digital infrastructure supporting the personnel information system is still limited and not fully integrated between work units. This has caused the process of collecting and analyzing ASN data to not run efficiently.

Another challenge is the resistance of the old work culture that is still inherent in some sectors. Some employees are still more comfortable with patronage systems and are reluctant to adapt to results-based work patterns. This shows that the transformation towards a merit-based bureaucracy takes time and a sustainable approach to changing organizational culture.

Overall, the findings of this research show that Bekasi City is one of the regions that has successfully carried out bureaucratic reform through strengthening the merit system and implementing dynamic governance. This success can serve as a best practice model for other regions that are working to strengthen institutional capacity and ASN professionalism.

V. DISCUSSION

The transformation of ASN management in Bekasi City did not happen instantly, but through a sustainable, adaptive, and planned process. The implementation of the merit system has become a starting point in building a bureaucracy that is clean, competent, and responsive to community needs.

In this context, the discussion is directed at evaluating the effectiveness of meritocracy implementation, its relationship with dynamic governance, and the challenges and opportunities ahead.

Normatively, the merit system is the main foundation in realizing good governance. This principle ensures that ASNs are recruited, developed, and promoted based on capacity, not connections. The implementation of merit in Bekasi City has shown positive results in improving efficiency and accountability. In the KASN evaluation, Bekasi City was recognized as one of the cities with the best ASN management performance, in line with other big cities in Indonesia.

This success cannot be separated from the implementation of dynamic governance, which according to Neo & Chen, (2007) prioritizes institutional capacity to continue learning (learning capacity), adapt (change capacity), and establish collaboration (collaborative capacity). In the context of Bekasi City, these three capacities are realized through structural reforms, continuous training, and cross-sector collaboration. For example, competency-based training and job competency tests are part of the “thinking ahead” strategy aimed at preparing ASN to face future challenges.

The principle of “thinking again” can be seen from internal evaluations that are carried out regularly to assess the effectiveness of talent management policies. The city government also dares to review the organizational structure and redistribute positions according to needs and workload. Meanwhile, “thinking across” is shown through cooperation with various institutions such as LAN, BKN, and KASN to support the implementation of the merit system and ASN development.

However, as stated by Rindaningsih & Sidoarjo, (2024) the implementation of meritocracy at the regional level cannot be separated from political bureaucratic challenges. One of the biggest risks in meritocracy is political intervention in filling positions. Bekasi City has managed to suppress this influence through strong leadership commitment and clear regulations. This shows that the role of the regional head is very important in ensuring the independence of the bureaucratic process (Indiahono, 2022; Jati & Listyorini, 2022).

In addition to political challenges, aspects of work culture are also an important issue. Some ASNs show resistance to the new system which is considered more demanding and competitive. The old work culture that tends to be bureaucratic and hierarchical is a barrier to a competency and results-based system. To overcome this, an approach that encourages changes in values and behavior through role models from leaders and fair and consistent reward and punishment mechanisms is needed (Rindaningsih, 2024).

In terms of technology, the integration of personnel information systems is still a chore. Many work units still rely on manual data or applications that are not centrally connected. This hampers the process of monitoring and evaluating ASN performance in real time. In fact, information technology is a key element in supporting an objective and transparent data-based merit system.

This finding is in line with a study by (Rahman et al., 2023) which emphasizes that the merit system requires support for digitization, sufficient budget allocation, and ASN literacy in technology. Bekasi City has shown positive initiatives by developing an internal personnel information platform, but increased digital capacity is still needed for this system to run optimally across all regional apparatus (Anugrah et al., 2022).

As a form of learning, Bekasi City's practices can serve as a reference for other regions in developing merit-based ASN management and dynamic governance. However, it should be emphasized that policy replication must be adjusted to local conditions, institutional capacity, and socio-cultural characteristics of each region (Barton et al., 2021; Järvelä, 2023). Therefore, flexibility and innovation remain important elements in the preparation of bureaucratic transformation strategies (Nahrudin, 2024; Secchi et al., 2024).

VI. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Bekasi City Government has successfully implemented a merit system in ASN management effectively through regulatory support, leadership commitment, and a dynamic governance approach. This transformation encourages increased professionalism, accountability, and bureaucratic efficiency, as shown through the achievement of the ‘Very Good’ category in the KASN

assessment. Despite challenges such as cultural resistance and limited information systems, strategic measures such as competency-based training, cross-sector collaboration, and digitisation are supporting success factors. Bekasi City is an example of good practice in merit-based ASN reform that can be replicated by other regions with local context adjustments.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

To strengthen and maintain this achievement, the Bekasi City Government needs to continue to improve ASN literacy on merit systems and information technology through continuous training. In addition, it is necessary to integrate digital personnel systems between regional apparatus to support data-driven processes. The central government and KASN are advised to provide policy incentives and assistance to other regions so that meritocratic practices and dynamic governance can be widely and sustainably replicated throughout Indonesia.

VIII. REFERENCES

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