

The Influence of Career Development, Employee Placement, and Competence on Employee Performance through Work Motivation at the Center for Environmental Pollution Control Facilities (PUSARPEDAL), Ministry of Environment

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze and explain the influence of career development, employee placement, and competence on employee performance through work motivation as an intervening variable at the Center for Environmental Pollution Control Facilities (PUSARPEDAL), Ministry of Environment. Organizational phenomena indicate dynamics in human resource development that are suspected to affect fluctuations in work productivity within a technical government agency. The research method used is a quantitative approach. Data analysis used Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) based on Partial Least Square (PLS) version 3.9 to test the relationships among the research variables. The results show that of the seven hypotheses proposed, four were accepted and three were rejected. Partially, career development and competence have a positive and significant effect on work motivation, while employee placement has no significant effect. Furthermore, competence and work motivation are proven to have a positive and significant effect on employee performance, whereas career development and employee placement have no significant direct effect on employee performance. These findings confirm that competence is the most dominant factor influencing performance, both directly and through strengthening work motivation. The implications for PUSARPEDAL management include the importance of prioritizing the improvement of employees' technical and managerial competence and strengthening the motivation system to optimize organizational performance. Career development programs need to be more closely integrated with the performance appraisal system to generate a more tangible impact on future employee productivity.

Introduction

Public organizations, particularly government institutions, play a crucial role in achieving state objectives and providing excellent service to the public. The success of a government institution depends heavily on the performance of its employees, where civil servants (ASN) are required to

demonstrate high, professional, and accountable performance in line with Law Number 5 of 2014. Optimal employee performance reflects the effectiveness and efficiency of the bureaucracy, which ultimately determines the quality of public service and the achievement of organizational goals. The Center for Environmental Pollution Control Facilities (PUSARPEDAL) is one of the technical centers under the Ministry of Environment responsible for formulating technical policies in the laboratory field, planning the development and implementation of national reference laboratories, and providing technical services and guidance to environmental laboratories, in accordance with Ministerial Regulation Number 1 of 2024 on the Organization and Administration of the Ministry of Environment. Ensuring that employee performance at PUSARPEDAL remains excellent is therefore essential, given its critical role in the success of national environmental programs. Achieving and sustaining such excellent performance is not easy, as various internal challenges often need to be analyzed in depth.

In the current era of bureaucratic transformation, government institutions are required to produce optimal work results. For PUSARPEDAL, employee performance is not merely a number but a manifestation of effectiveness, efficiency, quality, and quantity in maintaining national environmental standards (Nurhayati et al., 2024). Achieving peak performance, however, is not a simple matter, as it is influenced by various managerial and psychological factors. According to Nurhayati et al. (2024), employee performance is the work result achieved by an employee in carrying out their duties and responsibilities according to the standards set by the organization, viewed from the aspects of quality, quantity, and timeliness.

The first crucial factor is career development. According to Handoko (2020), career development is the process of improving an individual's work capability in order to achieve a desired career through career planning and organizational support. PUSARPEDAL needs to ensure that indicators such as achievement, exposure, and management support (Handoko, 2020) function properly; when employees feel that their career path is blocked, their commitment to their duties tends to decline.

In addition, employee placement plays a vital role. According to Zulfahmi (2020), employee placement is the process of assigning an employee to a particular position within the organization that matches their competence, experience, and work ability, so that the employee can work effectively and improve organizational performance. In technical institutions such as PUSARPEDAL, the accuracy of placement based on education, knowledge, expertise, and work experience (Zulfahmi, 2020) is critical to avoid a mismatch between workload and individual capability.

Complementing these structural aspects, competence forms the personal foundation of every employee. Competence is the characteristic of individual ability that includes knowledge, understanding, skills, attitude, and interest used to carry out work effectively and efficiently (Aisyah et al., 2021). Without adequate knowledge, skills, and interest (Aisyah et al., 2021) in the field of environmental control, even the most sophisticated technology at PUSARPEDAL cannot be managed optimally.

However, having a clear career path, suitable placement, and high competence does not necessarily result in high performance unless there is internal encouragement within the employee. This is where work motivation acts as a bridge. According to Novita (2022), work motivation is an impulse arising from within or outside an individual that generates enthusiasm, willingness, and readiness to work optimally to achieve both organizational and personal goals. Drawing on the

needs theory cited by Novita (2022), the fulfillment of physiological, security, and self-actualization needs becomes the fuel that drives PUSARPEDAL employees to transform potential (competence and placement) into achievement (performance).

In practice at PUSARPEDAL, challenges remain in aligning technical qualifications with available positions and in determining how career schemes can stimulate achievement motivation. Fluctuations in the achievement of effectiveness and quality targets indicate the need for an in-depth analysis of how career development, placement, and competence interact to influence performance through motivation as an intervening variable.

The unstable performance trend also signals that work motivation has not yet functioned as a strong intervening variable in driving employees toward maximum performance. This empirical evidence strongly underpins the need to analyze these variables at PUSARPEDAL.

This study fills a research gap, since most prior studies on career development, placement, and competence have examined their direct effects on performance without comprehensively testing work motivation as an intervening mechanism within a technical, laboratory-based government institution. The use of data from a technical center under the Ministry of Environment adds value, as the work characteristics and performance standards it faces reflect the demanding requirements of scientific and technical public service. The researcher is therefore interested in conducting a study entitled “The Influence of Career Development, Employee Placement, and Competence on Employee Performance through Work Motivation at the Center for Environmental Pollution Control Facilities (PUSARPEDAL), Ministry of Environment.”

Career Development

Career development is the process of improving an individual's work capability achieved in pursuit of a desired career, through career planning and organizational support (Handoko, 2020). Key indicators include achievement, exposure, organizational opportunity, mentors and sponsors, opportunities for growth, and management support. When these indicators are absent, employees tend to perceive their career path as uncertain, which may reduce their commitment to organizational tasks.

Employee Placement

Employee placement refers to the process of assigning an employee to a specific position within the organization that matches their competence, experience, and ability, enabling them to work effectively and contribute to improved organizational performance (Zulfahmi, 2020). The relevant indicators include education, job knowledge, work skills, and work experience. Inaccurate placement relative to an employee's educational background may hinder organizational performance, particularly in technical institutions.

Competence

Competence is defined as an individual's capability encompassing knowledge, understanding, skills, attitude, and interest used to carry out work effectively and efficiently (Aisyah et al., 2021). In scientific-technical institutions such as PUSARPEDAL, mastery of these dimensions is an absolute prerequisite, since even advanced technology cannot produce optimal outcomes without adequate human competence.

Work Motivation

Work motivation is an impulse, whether originating from within or outside an individual, that generates enthusiasm, willingness, and readiness to work optimally toward organizational and personal goals (Novita, 2022). Motivation is commonly explained through the fulfillment of physiological, security, social, esteem, and self-actualization needs, which collectively drive employees to convert competence and career opportunities into tangible performance.

Employee Performance

Employee performance is the work result achieved by an employee in carrying out duties and responsibilities in accordance with organizational standards, assessed in terms of quality, quantity, and timeliness (Nurhayati et al., 2024). Performance is widely regarded as a key determinant of organizational goal achievement, particularly within technical public-sector institutions.

Research Method

This study employs a quantitative approach, which relies on objective measurement and mathematical (statistical) analysis of data collected through questionnaires, surveys, or other research instruments to test the hypotheses proposed in the study. The quantitative approach is grounded in the philosophy of positivism, applying research instruments and statistical data analysis to test predetermined hypotheses (Sugiyono, 2018). This research is correlational in nature, examining the relationships between two or more variables, and was conducted at PUSARPEDAL, Ministry of Environment, over a period of six months from proposal preparation to completion.

The population in this study consists of all employees of PUSARPEDAL. Given the relatively small population size, a saturated sampling technique (sensus) was applied, in which the entire population was used as the research sample (Sugiyono, 2019).

This research uses five variables: career development (X1), employee placement (X2), and competence (X3) as exogenous variables; work motivation (Z) as the intervening variable; and employee performance (Y) as the endogenous variable. All variables were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5). Primary data were obtained directly from respondents through questionnaires, while secondary data were drawn from books, scientific journals, and supporting documents.

Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling based on Partial Least Square (SEM-PLS) with the SmartPLS 3.9 software. SEM-PLS was selected because it analyzes the relationships between latent constructs and indicators and can test several dependent variables simultaneously using several independent variables, and it is well suited to relatively small sample sizes without strict assumptions about data distribution (Hair et al., 2017; Ghazali, 2013). The outer model was evaluated through indicator reliability (outer loading factor > 0.70), internal consistency reliability (Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha > 0.70), convergent validity (Average Variance Extracted > 0.50), and discriminant validity using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. The inner (structural) model was evaluated through the coefficient of determination (R^2), path coefficients, and bootstrapped t-statistics, with a path considered significant when the t-statistic exceeds 1.96 and the p-value is below 0.05 (Hair et al., 2017).

Result and Discussion

Of the respondents at PUSARPEDAL, the age distribution was dominated by mature employees: 35.0% were aged 41-50 years, 25.8% were aged 31-40 years, another 25.8% were above 50 years, and only 13.3% were aged 20-30 years. By gender, 55.8% of respondents were male and 44.2% were female. In terms of education, the majority held a bachelor's degree (S1) at 57.5%, followed by senior-high-school graduates (33.3%), master's-degree holders (5.0%), and diploma (D3) graduates (4.7%). These demographic patterns indicate a workforce with substantial maturity and experience, supported by an academically adequate educational background for technical laboratory functions, although the relatively small proportion of younger employees suggests a future regeneration challenge.

Descriptive analysis of the research variables shows that all variables fall within the "good" category. For career development, the highest-rated indicator was the perception that work results are the organization's primary consideration for promotion (mean = 3.91), while the lowest-rated indicator concerned the adequacy of appreciation received for work achievements (mean = 3.58). For employee placement, employees rated the alignment between their education level and current position requirements highest (mean = 3.91), while the relevance of their academic background to daily technical tasks scored lowest (mean = 3.58). For competence, the highest mean was found for proactive attitude and accountability (3.96), while broad insight into environmental control issues scored lowest (3.65). For work motivation, physical comfort in the office and the social pride associated with one's position both scored highest (3.93), while opportunities to develop creative ideas scored lowest (3.72). For employee performance, optimal time management scored highest (3.96), while compliance with quality and precision standards scored lowest (3.80), though still within the "good" category.

The outer model evaluation showed that all indicator loadings exceeded 0.70, confirming that every indicator validly measured its corresponding construct. Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha values for all constructs exceeded the 0.70 threshold, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeded 0.50, demonstrating adequate convergent validity. The Fornell-Larcker criterion further confirmed discriminant validity, as the square root of each construct's AVE exceeded its correlation with other constructs.

Table 2. Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

Endogenous Variable	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Employee Performance	0.768	0.760
Work Motivation	0.648	0.639

Source: SmartPLS 3.9 processed data

The R^2 value for work motivation is 0.648, indicating that career development, employee placement, and competence jointly explain 64.8% of the variance in work motivation, while the remaining 35.2% is explained by factors outside the model, such as leadership style or financial compensation. The R^2 value for employee performance is higher, at 0.768, indicating that career development, employee placement, competence, and work motivation jointly explain 76.8% of the variance in employee performance. This high value confirms that the structural paths constructed in this model are well suited to explaining employee performance at PUSARPEDAL.

Table 3. Path Coefficients, T-Statistics, and P-Values

Path	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	STDEV	T-Statistics	P-Values
Career Development → Work Motivation	0.271	0.320	0.147	2.036	0.047
Employee Placement → Work Motivation	0.096	0.052	0.152	0.633	0.527
Competence → Work Motivation	0.512	0.506	0.130	3.924	0.000
Career Development → Employee Performance	0.006	0.013	0.072	0.081	0.935
Employee Placement → Employee Performance	0.053	0.063	0.103	0.516	0.606
Competence → Employee Performance	0.507	0.498	0.119	4.249	0.000
Work Motivation → Employee Performance	0.380	0.384	0.091	4.172	0.000

Source: SmartPLS 3.9 processed data (bootstrapping)

Career development was found to have a positive and significant effect on work motivation ($t = 2.036 > 1.96$; $p = 0.047 < 0.05$), so the first hypothesis (H1) is accepted. This finding indicates that organizational clarity regarding career paths, fair promotion, and opportunities for further education serves as a psychological stimulus that enhances employees' enthusiasm for work, consistent with Iis et al. (2022) and Sitorus et al. (2022).

Employee placement was found to have no significant effect on work motivation ($t = 0.633 < 1.96$; $p = 0.527 > 0.05$), so the second hypothesis (H2) is rejected. This suggests that the specific position or work unit to which an employee is assigned does not automatically alter their motivation level, consistent with Mahmudin (2023) and Nasution (2022). The insignificance at PUSARPEDAL is likely attributable to an already established collective work culture or to rotation processes regarded as routine rather than motivating events.

Competence was found to have a positive and highly significant effect on work motivation ($t = 3.924 > 1.96$; $p = 0.000 < 0.05$), so the third hypothesis (H3) is accepted, making competence the strongest determinant of motivation in this model. Employees with strong technical proficiency in laboratory testing and environmental analysis tend to have higher self-efficacy, which in turn increases their willingness to engage more deeply in their work, consistent with Tallo and FoEh (2025) and Masrurroh et al. (2023).

Career development was found to have no significant direct effect on employee performance ($t = 0.081 < 1.96$; $p = 0.935 > 0.05$), so the fourth hypothesis (H4) is rejected, consistent with Jannah et al. (2024) and Suwidia et al. (2023). Although career paths are available, this does not directly raise productivity unless accompanied by tangible skill improvement or work-facility support; career

development tends to be long-term in nature, so its impact on day-to-day, technical laboratory output is not immediately visible in this direct-effect model.

Employee placement was found to have no significant effect on employee performance ($t = 0.516 < 1.96$; $p = 0.606 > 0.05$), so the fifth hypothesis (H5) is rejected, consistent with Junita and Mukmin (2022) and Heliyani and Hardi (2021). This indicates that the effectiveness of PUSARPEDAL employees' work is determined more by adherence to standard operating procedures than by the suitability of their specific position; performance remains at a standard level due to strict supervisory systems and organizational targets rather than position-specific placement.

Competence was found to have a positive and very strongly significant effect on employee performance ($t = 4.249 > 1.96$; $p = 0.000 < 0.05$), so the sixth hypothesis (H6) is accepted, representing the most dominant relationship in this study, consistent with Johari et al. (2022), Hajiali et al. (2022), and Sudaryana (2021). Given that PUSARPEDAL requires high accuracy as an environmental impact control facility, competence (knowledge, skills, and attitude) is an absolute prerequisite; without adequate competence, sophisticated equipment and large budgets will not yield high-quality environmental analysis reports.

Work motivation was found to have a positive and significant effect on employee performance ($t = 4.172 > 1.96$; $p = 0.000 < 0.05$), so the seventh hypothesis (H7) is accepted, consistent with Astuti et al. (2024), Ogbogu (2021), Sudaryana et al. (2026), and Mogi et al. (2026). Motivation acts as an effective mediating variable, converting employees' latent potential into actual performance: employees with strong achievement drive tend to work more carefully, disciplined, and innovatively, collectively improving the organization's overall performance achievement.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the analysis, this study concludes that: (1) career development has a positive and significant effect on work motivation ($t = 2.036 > 1.96$; $p = 0.047 < 0.05$); (2) employee placement has no significant effect on work motivation ($t = 0.633 < 1.96$; $p = 0.527 > 0.05$); (3) competence has a positive and significant effect on work motivation ($t = 3.924 > 1.96$; $p = 0.000 < 0.05$); (4) career development has no significant direct effect on employee performance ($t = 0.081 < 1.96$; $p = 0.935 > 0.05$); (5) employee placement has no significant effect on employee performance ($t = 0.516 < 1.96$; $p = 0.606 > 0.05$); (6) competence has a positive and significant effect on employee performance ($t = 4.249 > 1.96$; $p = 0.000 < 0.05$); and (7) work motivation has a positive and significant effect on employee performance ($t = 4.172 > 1.96$; $p = 0.000 < 0.05$). Overall, competence emerges as the most dominant factor influencing employee performance at PUSARPEDAL, both directly and indirectly through the strengthening of work motivation.

These findings have practical implications for PUSARPEDAL management. The institution is advised to initiate formal mentoring programs, such as in-house training, in which senior employees transfer knowledge to junior staff to support career development. A review of educational requirements for certain positions is also recommended, with the possibility of providing study-leave facilities where mismatches are found, so that employees' formal qualifications remain aligned with job-competence standards. Strengthening a professional work culture through coaching or soft-skills training related to work ethics, supported by a reward-and-punishment system tied to discipline and procedural compliance, is recommended to raise professionalism standards. The institution may also consider adjusting performance allowances or providing more competitive merit-based incentives, given that financial motivation was rated comparatively lower than pride or

self-actualization factors. Finally, a more equitable distribution of workload, along with recognition for employees who voluntarily take on responsibilities beyond their routine duties, is recommended to sustain employee willingness and the quality of additional work output.

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