



RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Institutional Barriers to Merit-Based Career Development in the Police: A Review of Global and Local Perspectives

Ricky Neygersan Lado<sup>1</sup>, Eko Prasajo<sup>2</sup>, Lina Miftahul Jannah<sup>3</sup>

Faculty of Administrative Science, Universitas Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia<sup>1,2,3</sup>

\*Corresponding Author: [rickyneygersan61@gmail.com](mailto:rickyneygersan61@gmail.com)

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Keywords

meritocracy, police reform, career development, intelligence, Baintelkam Polri, public administration, institutional barriers.

### ABSTRACT

This article critically examines the institutional barriers to implementing merit-based career development systems within police organizations, with a particular focus on Indonesia's Intelligence and Security Agency (Baintelkam Polri). Through a systematic review of 50 peer-reviewed articles indexed in Scopus and Web of Science, the study identifies four dominant barriers: rigid bureaucratic hierarchies, cultures of patronage and nepotism, weak performance evaluation systems, and gaps between policy and practice. Drawing from international best practices—including the competency-based framework of the UK's College of Policing, participatory evaluation systems in the U.S., and multi-stakeholder assessments in Scandinavian countries—the paper offers a comparative lens to evaluate the structural shortcomings of Baintelkam's existing career development policies. Despite formal regulations endorsing meritocracy (e.g., Perkap No. 9/2016), Baintelkam continues to exhibit symptoms of organizational inertia and political discretion, undermining fairness and strategic workforce planning. The paper proposes a hybrid model tailored to the intelligence context, integrating transparent selection processes, structured rotations, and competency-based progression while respecting operational confidentiality. This model aligns with broader public sector reform efforts aimed at enhancing institutional legitimacy, performance, and public trust. The study contributes to the literature by filling a critical gap in meritocracy discourse, particularly in semi-militaristic and intelligence-driven environments where traditional HRM frameworks often falter. It also provides actionable insights for reforming personnel systems in high-stakes bureaucracies through a more contextualized and strategic application of merit principles.

## INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary landscape of public sector governance, the call for professionalization and accountability in law enforcement institutions has gained



renewed urgency. Among the most pivotal levers to drive institutional integrity and effectiveness is the implementation of a robust merit-based career development system. Meritocracy, in its ideal form, refers to the allocation of career advancement based on individual qualifications, competencies, and performance, excluding subjective or non-job-related criteria such as patronage, nepotism, favoritism, and political loyalty (Castilla & Benard, 2010); (Woodard, 2000). Within policing institutions, where public trust and institutional legitimacy are intrinsically linked to integrity and professionalism, the adoption of merit systems is no longer optional—it is imperative (Feeney & Rainey, 2009); [(Battaglio & Condrey, 2009)]. Yet, in practice, the implementation of merit-based systems within police organizations has proven to be anything but straightforward. Across both developed and developing contexts, career progression in police services continues to be influenced by informal structures, political bargaining, hierarchical favoritism, and resistance to performance-based accountability [(Darling, 2022); (Els & Meyer, 2023); (Oliveros & Schuster, 2016)]. Such institutional pathologies not only undermine the fairness of personnel decisions but also obstruct the broader goals of police reform, human capital development, and public service delivery [(Mangelsdorf & Reeves, 1989); (Stazyk & Goerdel, 2010); (Mutanga et al., 2023)].

Theoretically, the merit system is aligned with Weberian principles of bureaucracy, which call for impersonality, objectivity, and rule-based promotion within public institutions [(Weber, 1947); (Ingraham, 1995)]. However, institutional theory, particularly the concept of institutional isomorphism as articulated by DiMaggio & Powell (1983), reveals that public agencies often adopt the form of modern systems like meritocracy without their substance. That is, they may formally commit to merit principles in laws and regulations, but operational practices remain captured by legacy norms, cultural inertia, or political expediency [(Sen, 2000); (Low, 2013)]. This paradox is especially salient in police organizations in the Global South, including Southeast Asia and Latin America, where attempts to institutionalize merit are often symbolic rather than substantive [(Poocharoen & Brillantes, 2013); (Rubin & Kellough, 2011)]. A review of cases from Mozambique, Georgia, Ecuador, and the Dominican Republic demonstrates that without strong leadership commitment, credible performance evaluation systems, and protections against political interference, the merit system is unlikely to take root [(Linder, 2009); (Paul Battaglio Jr. & Condrey, 2009); (Miller, 2012)].

Within Indonesia, the reform of the police force (Polri) has been an ongoing process since the post-authoritarian transition, marked by significant structural and normative changes. Yet, despite formal progress in adopting meritocratic principles—such as through the Civil Service Reform Law and internal Perkap regulations (e.g., Perkap No. 9 of 2016)—implementation gaps persist, particularly in elite functions such as the Intelligence and Security Agency (Baintelkam). Studies by Simbolon & Prasojo (2019) and Wiratama & Prasojo (2019) indicate that although recruitment and career management have been standardized on paper, in practice, political patronage, personal networks, and opaque decision-making still influence personnel mobility.

Globally, best practices from countries like the United Kingdom illustrate the potential of structured, competency-based career pathways in police intelligence roles. These models emphasize structured education and training, continuous professional development, and performance-linked promotion systems—elements that are largely



absent or inconsistently applied in many developing country contexts [(UK College of Policing, 2023); (Cordner & Scarborough, 2010)].

This article seeks to address the critical question: What are the institutional barriers that hinder the implementation of merit-based career development in police institutions? Using a qualitative, theory-informed literature review of 50 peer-reviewed articles from Scopus and Web of Science databases, this study aims to map global trends, identify recurring institutional obstacles, and explore implications for localized reforms. Specifically, it focuses on synthesizing insights relevant to law enforcement agencies operating under semi-military bureaucracies and hierarchically rigid structures, such as Baintelkam Polri.

By drawing from diverse contexts and theoretical traditions—ranging from public administration, political science, organizational behavior, to critical institutionalism—this article contributes to three main goals:

1. To develop an integrative understanding of the tension between formal merit frameworks and informal institutional practices in police HR systems;
2. To analyze the unique challenges faced by intelligence units within policing organizations in operationalizing merit;
3. To offer a conceptual foundation for designing context-sensitive policy recommendations for career development in police agencies, particularly in Indonesia.

Ultimately, by illuminating these institutional barriers, this study seeks to offer both theoretical refinement and practical pathways toward strengthening meritocracy, professional integrity, and performance legitimacy in the police sector.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative systematic literature review (SLR) approach to examine the institutional barriers to implementing merit-based career development systems in policing organizations. The SLR method was selected due to its ability to synthesize a wide range of empirical and theoretical studies systematically, enabling a nuanced understanding of both global trends and local dynamics (Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003). To integrate insights from diverse sources, a narrative synthesis technique was used, allowing for flexibility in analyzing studies with varying methodologies, disciplinary origins, and geographic contexts.

The inclusion criteria for this review were carefully defined to ensure relevance and academic rigor. Only peer-reviewed journal articles indexed in Scopus or Web of Science (WoS) were included, and the publication window was set between the years 2000 and 2024 to capture both historical and recent developments in the field. Eligible articles had to focus on the intersection of public sector human resource management, merit-based career development, and police institutions. Articles written in English were included, while studies that dealt exclusively with military institutions or omitted any discussion of merit-based frameworks were excluded.

To collect relevant studies, a comprehensive search was conducted across three major academic databases—Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar—using Boolean



search terms such as: ("merit system" OR "meritocracy") AND ("career development" OR "career advancement") AND ("police" OR "law enforcement") AND ("institutional barriers" OR "organizational challenges"). The initial search yielded 148 articles. These were then screened through a multi-stage process. The first stage involved reviewing titles and abstracts to assess the thematic relevance of each article. A total of 82 articles passed this initial screening. In the second stage, a full-text review was conducted to further filter studies according to the eligibility criteria, resulting in a final selection of 50 articles for in-depth analysis. This review process followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) flow diagram as a standard for transparency and replicability (Page et al., 2021).

For each of the 50 selected studies, data was extracted systematically using a structured data collection matrix. This matrix recorded key elements such as author, year of publication, geographic and institutional context, methodological design, primary themes, and key findings. To identify recurring patterns and themes, the data was coded using an inductive approach with the aid of NVivo software. The thematic coding process led to the emergence of three primary analytical categories: (1) structural and institutional barriers to meritocracy, (2) challenges in implementation practices, and (3) models and innovations in merit-based career development systems.

To guide the analysis, a conceptual framework was developed by integrating institutional theory, meritocracy in public administration, and career development theory. Institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) helped explain how coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphism contribute to institutional inertia and hinder reform efforts within police organizations. Meanwhile, meritocratic governance theory (Sen, 2000; Woodard, 2000) informed the normative principles of fairness, transparency, and competence that should underpin career systems in the public sector. Career development theory (Super, 1957; Greenhaus et al., 2010) was also applied to interpret organizational mechanisms for supporting employee growth and aligning individual aspirations with institutional needs.

This integrated methodology allowed for a holistic understanding of how and why institutional barriers to merit-based career development persist within police forces, particularly in hierarchical, semi-militarized settings such as those found in many parts of the Global South.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The systematic literature review of 50 peer-reviewed articles reveals critical institutional barriers and practice gaps that hinder the implementation of merit-based career development systems in police organizations globally. The discussion is categorized into four major themes: (1) institutional structures and cultural impediments, (2) operational challenges in merit system implementation, (3) emergent best practices, and (4) contextual reflection on Baintelkam Polri.

### **1. Institutional Barriers to Merit-Based Career Development in Police Organizations**

#### ***1.1 Rigid Bureaucratic Structures and Hierarchies***



Police organizations across the globe are deeply influenced by Weberian bureaucratic ideals—systems of formalized rules, hierarchical command, and procedural uniformity designed to ensure control and predictability. While these features lend themselves to institutional stability, they often become counterproductive when attempting to implement merit-based career development systems that prioritize competence, innovation, and dynamic leadership over mere longevity or hierarchical rank.

In practice, police institutions typically structure career progression through rank-based ladders, where seniority and tenure serve as *de facto* prerequisites for promotion. As highlighted by Ariza-Montes et al. (2022) and Zhao and Ren (2021), the reliance on these criteria fosters a rigid environment in which merit—especially in the form of professional performance, innovative thinking, or cross-functional competence—is undervalued or overlooked. This rigidity leads to what has been termed “career stagnation traps”, particularly for officers serving in specialized or non-combat units like intelligence, where their contribution is not always directly measurable through traditional performance indicators such as arrest quotas or field command. Furthermore, the vertical command-and-control model discourages flexibility in assigning personnel to roles where their skills are most needed. Officers with analytical, cyber-intelligence, or strategic planning expertise may find their advancement hindered simply because their profiles do not align with the operational command hierarchy that dominates promotion pathways. As a result, human capital is underutilized, and organizational adaptability suffers.

Bazine et al. (2022) note that within such rigid structures, there is also limited room for implementing horizontal learning mechanisms—such as cross-departmental assignments, job shadowing, or lateral promotions across different functional domains. These methods are essential components of merit-based systems because they provide opportunities to assess and reward officers based on demonstrated competencies rather than fixed tenure or political allegiance. However, in many police forces, career mobility remains closely tied to the linearity of command rank progression, which entrenches status quo dynamics and resists the integration of more holistic talent management strategies.

Another structural problem lies in the lack of mechanisms for bypassing traditional promotion routes for high-potential candidates. Many police systems lack “fast-track” programs or leadership acceleration pipelines for officers who consistently outperform their peers in innovation, strategic thinking, or inter-agency coordination. Without such programs, meritocratic recognition becomes confined to formal hierarchical promotion, which is often slow, highly competitive, and influenced by political or informal factors—thereby diluting the core principles of meritocracy. Additionally, the centralization of decision-making within rigid hierarchies leaves little room for local-level experimentation in HR innovation. Field units or departments with unique staffing needs—such as cybercrime or counter-terrorism intelligence—are often unable to design their own criteria for identifying and nurturing talent. This centralization not only reduces organizational agility but also impedes the alignment between human resource strategies and rapidly evolving operational requirements.

To address these barriers, comparative studies suggest the need to decouple authority and advancement from strictly hierarchical norms. For instance, Els and Meyer (2023) advocate for hybrid models that retain the institutional discipline of hierarchy while





embedding modular competency frameworks that enable both vertical and lateral progression. These frameworks allow for the recognition of diverse skill sets—including leadership, analytical capabilities, and public engagement—which are increasingly essential in modern policing, especially in units responsible for complex, strategic functions such as intelligence.

In conclusion, rigid bureaucratic hierarchies, though historically functional in maintaining police discipline and accountability, have become structural impediments to merit-based career development. For meritocracy to thrive in policing, institutions must adopt more adaptive personnel models—ones that reward demonstrated competence, create flexible career paths, and permit the institutional recognition of talent beyond traditional command structures.

## ***1.2 Organizational Culture of Patronage and Nepotism***

While the architecture of police reform often centers on structural adjustments and policy innovations, one of the most tenacious impediments to meritocratic career development lies within the deeply rooted organizational cultures of patronage and nepotism. These informal institutional logics not only compete with but often override formal bureaucratic rules and standards. In many police organizations—especially in developing and transitional democracies—career progression is shaped less by codified merit indicators and more by loyalty to power brokers, informal networks, and political alignments (Oliveros & Schuster, 2016; Mangelsdorf & Reeves, 1989).

Such environments foster what could be termed "dual career logics": one visible and anchored in formal regulations, and the other shadowed, driven by unwritten norms of favoritism, seniority, and social capital. Officers embedded within influential patronage networks often enjoy accelerated promotions and prime assignments, regardless of their objective competencies or performance records. Conversely, competent but politically unaffiliated officers may face stagnation, marginalization, or strategic sidelining (Mangelsdorf & Reeves, 1989; Simbolon & Prasajo, 2019).

In Indonesia, Simbolon & Prasajo (2019) identified how formal regulatory frameworks, such as Perkap No. 9/2016, nominally establish merit-based promotion procedures within the Indonesian National Police (Polri), including Baintelkam. However, these procedures are frequently co-opted by informal practices, transforming regulatory mechanisms into "procedural façades" rather than effective evaluative systems. Promotions are often pre-determined through opaque consultations among internal elites, rendering interviews and written exams largely ceremonial.

This dynamic reflects the argument of Poocharoen & Brillantes (2013), who assert that meritocratic reform must go beyond institutional design and address the socio-political context in which public organizations operate. In societies where clientelism and political loyalty are embedded into administrative culture, the legal architecture of meritocracy becomes a rhetorical instrument—invoked for legitimacy but rarely upheld in practice.

These cultural distortions not only undermine the legitimacy of promotion systems but also erode organizational morale and trust in leadership. When personnel perceive that performance and professional development are decoupled from career advancement, it diminishes motivation, reinforces cynicism, and perpetuates mediocrity across the



ranks. Moreover, such environments are resistant to external oversight, making reform efforts challenging and frequently unsustainable.

Addressing these issues requires cultural transformation initiatives that go hand in hand with institutional reforms. This includes embedding integrity values in training, creating safe channels for whistleblowing, developing independent oversight mechanisms, and fostering leadership committed to ethical governance. Ultimately, unless informal cultures are transformed, formal reforms will remain brittle and susceptible to reversal.

## **2. Implementation Gaps in Merit Systems**

Even in contexts where merit-based principles are codified into law or policy, there remains a significant gap between policy design and implementation. This "institutional decoupling" occurs when official mandates are not translated into practice due to administrative, cultural, or political inertia.

### ***2.1 Disjunction Between Policy and Practice***

Despite the formalization of meritocratic ideals in civil service legislation and organizational policies, police institutions frequently struggle to actualize these norms in day-to-day personnel management. This incongruity—often referred to as *institutional decoupling*—is characterized by a visible gap between the normative content of regulations and the actual administrative behavior on the ground. It reflects what Brunsson (1989) conceptualizes as the "organizational hypocrisy" whereby organizations maintain ceremonial conformity to institutionalized norms without real behavioral alignment.

In practice, multiple studies have shown how merit-based procedures—such as standardized testing, objective assessments, and transparent criteria—are vulnerable to being overridden by discretionary authority and informal power arrangements. In the Dominican Republic, Mangelsdorf and Reeves (1989) identified a dual structure where civil service exams formally existed but had minimal influence over final appointment decisions. Political actors maintained control over key appointments, effectively bypassing the merit-based track and reinforcing clientelist networks.

Similarly, in the Indonesian context, Wiratama and Prasojo (2019) observe that while regulatory instruments such as *Peraturan Kapolri* (Perkap) No. 9 of 2016 explicitly endorse a merit-based career framework—emphasizing factors like qualifications, competence, and performance—their operationalization remains weak. Particularly in high-stakes, strategic units like *Baintelkam Polri* (the Intelligence and Security Agency), the absence of rigorous enforcement and monitoring mechanisms allows for opaque decision-making processes. Promotions may be influenced more by seniority, geographic representation, or allegiance to influential figures than by a demonstrable record of competence or achievement.

Moreover, this gap is often exacerbated by a lack of institutional capacity. Many policing organizations lack robust HR infrastructure, including digitalized personnel records, comprehensive performance databases, and independent promotion boards. As McCourt (2007) argues, the success of a merit-based system depends not only on its formal design but also on the operational tools that ensure fairness and integrity in



application. When these tools are absent, the result is often a hybrid system in which formal rules coexist with informal practices, undermining both legitimacy and effectiveness.

The persistence of such disjunctions erodes internal morale and external trust. Talented officers may become demotivated, perceiving the system as arbitrary or politicized. Meanwhile, the broader public may question the professionalism of the force, particularly in sensitive roles like intelligence where discretion and strategic judgment are crucial. This illustrates the paradox of formal merit systems: their symbolic presence may serve institutional legitimacy, but without structural commitment to implementation, they risk becoming tools of bureaucratic window dressing.

## ***2.2 Weak Performance Evaluation Mechanisms***

A cornerstone of any credible merit-based career development system is a reliable, objective, and multidimensional performance evaluation process. In theory, such systems ensure that promotions, rewards, and career advancement decisions reflect actual competence, contribution, and potential. However, in the context of police organizations, performance appraisal often remains one of the most underdeveloped and distorted components of human resource management.

Bernardin and Russell (1993) offer an early but enduring critique of police appraisal systems, arguing that most are structurally aligned with bureaucratic stability rather than adaptive performance. Evaluation tools frequently emphasize compliance with procedure and administrative tidiness over results, creativity, or collaborative behaviors. As a result, officers who maintain the status quo or avoid risk may be perceived as high performers, while more dynamic or reform-minded individuals are overlooked. This compliance-centered appraisal logic is particularly incompatible with the evolving demands placed on policing—especially in areas like cybercrime, community engagement, and intelligence analysis, where innovation, initiative, and adaptability are paramount.

Furthermore, performance appraisals in many police agencies remain highly subjective. Supervisors often act as the sole arbiters of evaluation, allowing for personal biases, favoritism, and political considerations to distort the process. Feeney and Rainey (2009) found that in the absence of structured multisource feedback—such as peer evaluations, 360-degree assessments, or even citizen input—performance assessments tend to reward visibility and proximity to power rather than actual value-added to organizational goals.

This issue becomes even more pronounced in specialized or strategic roles such as intelligence, where outputs are often intangible, long-term, and shielded from public visibility. Unlike frontline officers who can showcase arrests or community engagement metrics, intelligence officers operate in domains that prioritize confidentiality, discretion, and strategic foresight. Without customized appraisal metrics that account for these attributes, such personnel are often excluded from performance-based rewards, leading to morale issues and retention risks in critical units (Els & Meyer, 2023).

Moreover, the lack of clear Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and the tendency to recycle outdated evaluation templates further weakens the legitimacy of the process. As





McCourt (2007) and Roberts (1994) emphasize, merit systems must be supported by robust performance management frameworks that combine quantitative targets with qualitative judgments, include goal-setting discussions, and provide developmental feedback loops. In their absence, performance appraisals devolve into mere bureaucratic exercises, disconnected from both institutional strategy and individual growth.

This systemic flaw also undermines accountability. Without credible performance metrics, it's difficult to hold leaders responsible for underperformance, manage succession planning, or identify high-potential officers. In such contexts, meritocracy becomes a rhetorical façade, lacking the empirical foundations necessary for effective implementation.

### **3. Best Practices in Merit-Based Career Development**

Amidst systemic barriers, certain jurisdictions have developed models that embody the principles of meritocracy while accommodating the unique challenges of law enforcement.

#### ***3.1 Competency-Based Pathways in the United Kingdom***

Among the jurisdictions that have made significant strides in embedding meritocratic principles into police career development, the United Kingdom stands out for its robust institutionalization of competency-based frameworks. Central to this system is the *College of Policing*, a national professional body that provides structured pathways for development, assessment, and promotion across various policing functions, including the highly specialized realm of intelligence and counterterrorism.

The UK's model reflects a deliberate departure from seniority- or patronage-based promotion practices, replacing them with transparent, skill-based mechanisms. Each career stage—whether in general policing, specialist operations, or intelligence—is mapped with clearly articulated competency benchmarks. These benchmarks encompass technical skills, ethical standards, interpersonal capabilities, and decision-making acumen. Officers seeking advancement must demonstrate mastery of these competencies through standardized assessments, performance portfolios, and structured interviews, aligning individual readiness with institutional needs (College of Policing, 2022).

This approach addresses one of the primary deficiencies found in traditional performance systems—namely, the ambiguity and subjectivity of promotion criteria. By setting objective and role-specific standards, the UK model ensures that advancement is earned rather than granted through informal networks or institutional inertia. As noted by Els and Meyer (2023), competency-based progression systems have the dual benefit of enhancing transparency and supporting long-term strategic workforce planning, particularly in intelligence functions where precision and trust are paramount.

Another key feature of the UK framework is the requirement for *Continuing Professional Development* (CPD). CPD is not merely encouraged but mandated, with officers expected to engage in ongoing learning, scenario-based exercises, and role-specific training modules. These may include leadership development programs, behavioral science workshops, cyber-intelligence certifications, or simulation-based intelligence gathering



techniques. By institutionalizing this lifelong learning culture, the system avoids the risk of “promotion plateaus,” where officers become stagnant after achieving a higher rank. Instead, each promotional tier serves as both a reward and a renewed developmental obligation.

Moreover, the UK system incorporates regular role revalidation and capability reviews, further reinforcing the notion that career progression must correspond with sustained performance and growth. Performance appraisals in the UK police are increasingly integrating 360-degree feedback mechanisms and community input, especially for leadership positions. These mechanisms not only provide more nuanced evaluations but also strengthen the legitimacy of promotion outcomes in the eyes of both internal staff and the public (Home Office, 2020).

Importantly, the UK's model does not operate in isolation but is embedded within broader institutional reforms that emphasize ethical policing, community responsiveness, and evidence-based leadership. The fusion of competency-driven assessments with strong ethical oversight helps mitigate the risks of technocratic elitism or managerialism that some critics associate with meritocratic systems (Van den Brink, 2010).

In sum, the UK's experience demonstrates how police institutions can integrate technical, ethical, and developmental considerations into a cohesive merit-based framework. The institutional scaffolding provided by the College of Policing, combined with a culture of continuous development and transparent evaluation, offers a replicable model for jurisdictions seeking to operationalize meritocracy in law enforcement—particularly in strategic units like intelligence that require discretion, trust, and advanced expertise.

### ***3.2 Participatory Evaluation Systems in the United States***

The evolution of performance appraisal systems in U.S. law enforcement has increasingly favored participatory models—particularly in jurisdictions seeking to strengthen both legitimacy and internal accountability. Traditional top-down evaluations, often characterized by unilateral supervisor assessments, have been criticized for perpetuating managerial bias, reinforcing hierarchical norms, and failing to accurately capture the multidimensional nature of police work (Bernardin & Russell, 1993; Feeney & Rainey, 2009). In response, a growing number of police departments have adopted participatory evaluation systems that integrate employee self-assessment, peer review, and collaborative performance planning.

Rubin and Kellough (2011) highlight how these participatory approaches foster a more dialogical and reflective evaluation culture. Rather than being passive recipients of performance judgments, officers are encouraged to actively reflect on their professional growth, identify areas of improvement, and co-construct development goals with supervisors. This shared responsibility fosters a sense of ownership and internal motivation, which has been linked to higher engagement and organizational commitment.

A defining characteristic of the U.S. approach is its decentralization. Unlike more centralized models found in countries like the UK, American police departments often retain autonomy in designing their appraisal systems. This flexibility enables local



jurisdictions to tailor evaluation metrics and processes to their unique operational environments, community expectations, and institutional priorities (Rainey & Steinbauer, 1999). For example, departments in urban high-crime areas may prioritize community engagement and de-escalation tactics, whereas rural agencies may emphasize multi-role versatility and resource efficiency. Such contextual calibration enhances the relevance and face validity of evaluation instruments, a factor critical to sustaining meritocratic legitimacy (McCourt, 2007).

Importantly, participatory evaluation mechanisms also address the inherent challenges of measuring performance in non-visible policing roles—such as intelligence analysis, cyber forensics, or administrative leadership. These roles often lack easily quantifiable outputs, making them vulnerable to marginalization in standard appraisal systems. By incorporating multisource feedback—such as from peers, subordinates, and even community stakeholders—departments can generate a more holistic and triangulated view of an officer's contribution, especially in areas requiring discretion, collaboration, and long-term strategic thinking (Miller, 2012).

Additionally, collaborative goal-setting—a key component of participatory systems—aligns individual aspirations with departmental objectives. Officers are empowered to set specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals that reflect both career aspirations and organizational needs. Research by Roberts (1994) demonstrates that such alignment not only boosts performance outcomes but also cultivates psychological contract fulfillment, reducing attrition and burnout.

However, challenges remain. The effectiveness of participatory systems is contingent on supervisor training, the integrity of peer feedback mechanisms, and the existence of a trust-based organizational culture. Where organizational trust is low or political patronage remains entrenched, participatory systems may be perceived as symbolic gestures rather than substantive reforms (Castilla & Benard, 2010). Thus, for participatory evaluation to function as a genuine pillar of meritocracy, it must be institutionalized alongside transparency safeguards, grievance mechanisms, and cultural change strategies.

In summary, participatory evaluation systems in the U.S. represent a promising practice for operationalizing meritocracy in policing. They promote fairness, motivation, and relevance, particularly when integrated into decentralized and context-sensitive performance management frameworks. For strategic units such as intelligence, where performance is often intangible, these systems offer a viable mechanism for identifying, developing, and promoting talent based on genuine merit rather than informal influence or opaque criteria.

### ***3.3 Multi-Stakeholder Assessment in Scandinavian Countries***

Scandinavian countries—long celebrated for their high standards of governance and administrative transparency—offer an advanced model of merit-based career development in law enforcement by institutionalizing multi-stakeholder assessment frameworks. Unlike systems that rely solely on internal hierarchies or managerial discretion, Scandinavian police organizations actively engage external reviewers, community representatives, and independent oversight panels in the performance appraisal and promotion processes (Miller, 2012).



This model reflects a broader governance philosophy rooted in egalitarianism, deliberative democracy, and institutional trust, which permeates both political and administrative systems in the region. Within this context, career progression in policing is not only a matter of fulfilling internal metrics but also of demonstrating public legitimacy, ethical integrity, and service accountability (Christensen & Lægheid, 2007).

A critical innovation in the Scandinavian model is the role of independent review boards in evaluating appointments to senior leadership positions, particularly in sensitive or strategic divisions. These boards are typically composed of high-ranking officers from other departments, representatives from civilian oversight bodies, and, in some instances, academics or professionals from related fields. The involvement of diverse evaluators introduces checks and balances that mitigate institutional bias, nepotism, and the risk of insular decision-making (Brænder & Andersen, 2013).

Moreover, some Scandinavian jurisdictions extend the evaluative framework to include public input in the form of community advisory panels. These panels are tasked with reviewing not only the conduct of officers but also assessing leadership candidates based on broader reputational criteria—such as their community engagement history, conflict resolution skills, and commitment to ethical policing (Miller, 2012). Such mechanisms help align career advancement with normative expectations of public service, rather than narrow, internal performance benchmarks.

This inclusive and horizontal model strengthens meritocracy in at least three distinct ways:

1. It increases transparency by opening the promotion process to scrutiny beyond the chain of command.
2. It promotes holistic performance evaluation, factoring in interpersonal competencies and ethical behavior, which are often overlooked in traditional appraisal systems.
3. It builds public trust, as citizens perceive the process to be fair, deliberative, and responsive to community values—an outcome particularly vital in democracies where police legitimacy is foundational to public order (Lipsky, 1980; Christensen et al., 2016).

Critically, this system does not sacrifice administrative efficiency for the sake of inclusion. On the contrary, empirical evidence suggests that officers promoted through multi-stakeholder processes exhibit higher organizational commitment, better crisis-handling capabilities, and lower incidences of misconduct (Andersson & Tengblad, 2009). These outcomes underscore the strategic value of democratizing performance evaluation, especially in an era where law enforcement institutions are under growing scrutiny from civil society.

For countries like Indonesia—where hierarchical rigidity and closed performance systems continue to dominate—this model offers a powerful reference point. Implementing even partial elements of this system, such as external audits of promotion outcomes or stakeholder involvement in setting appraisal criteria, could enhance the fairness and integrity of career development processes, particularly in elite units like Baintelkam Polri.



#### **4. The Case of Baintelkam Polri: Challenges and Strategic Opportunities**

The Indonesian National Police's Intelligence and Security Agency (Baintelkam Polri) embodies a critical paradox in the implementation of merit-based career systems: while formally regulated under frameworks such as Perkap No. 9/2016, the actual operationalization of these principles remains fragmented, opaque, and heavily influenced by legacy structures. This gap between normative intention and practical reality echoes broader patterns of "institutional decoupling" frequently observed in post-authoritarian and transitional bureaucracies (Wiratama & Prasajo, 2019; Mangelsdorf & Reeves, 1989).

##### ***4.1 Structural and Cultural Constraints***

Baintelkam's strategic positioning within the national security apparatus grants it institutional power, but this is often coupled with a deeply entrenched culture of secrecy, hierarchy, and internal gatekeeping. Simbolon & Prasajo (2019) document how these features inhibit the flow of information and opportunities across units, reinforcing loyalty-based advancement and discouraging innovation. As a result, the organization often overlooks high-performing personnel who lack internal political sponsorship or tenure-based legitimacy.

Moreover, the high-stakes and confidential nature of intelligence work introduces unique constraints to standardizing merit-based frameworks. Unlike general policing units where outputs are often measurable (e.g., case resolution rates, arrest data), intelligence success is subtle, strategic, and long-term, making it difficult to define and track objective performance metrics (Feeney & Rainey, 2009). This lack of measurable benchmarks has often been exploited to justify opaque promotion practices or the bypassing of formal qualifications.

##### ***4.2 Impact on Personnel Morale and Institutional Effectiveness***

Rivai (2013) argues that the success of career development systems lies in their ability to simultaneously foster employee motivation, institutional legitimacy, and adaptive capability. In Baintelkam, however, rigid hierarchies and discretionary promotions have generated what could be described as "career stagnation zones"—roles where talent remains underutilized due to the absence of transparent career ladders and clear succession planning.

This stagnation has strategic consequences. Intelligence operations demand officers who are analytically astute, technologically agile, and ethically grounded, qualities that are best cultivated through structured development pathways, mentorship, and role diversification. Without systematic talent identification and mobility, Baintelkam risks operational myopia, where experience is accumulated vertically within narrow silos rather than horizontally across functional and geographic areas.

##### ***4.3 Strategic Opportunities for Reform***

Given these challenges, reform should not aim for a wholesale transplantation of Western meritocracy models, but rather pursue a context-sensitive hybrid model. This model should balance the confidentiality of intelligence work with the transparency and





fairness of merit-based governance. Based on cross-jurisdictional best practices and institutional diagnostics, the following reform components are proposed:

- *Competency Frameworks Aligned with National Threat Landscapes:* These frameworks should define core and functional competencies across different ranks and specializations within intelligence work. Regular reviews are needed to ensure alignment with evolving threats, such as cybercrime, digital radicalization, and transnational terrorism (Els & Meyer, 2023; College of Policing, UK).
- *Structured Career Mapping and Rotational Postings:* Officers should undergo planned rotations across operational, analytical, and policy units, including temporary secondments to inter-agency or international bodies. This would broaden strategic exposure and develop leadership capacity beyond technical expertise.
- *Transparent and Accountable Promotion Panels:* Selection committees should include a mix of internal superiors, human resource specialists, and external observers or auditors, possibly from national intelligence oversight bodies. This mechanism would reduce bias and promote professional norms over patron-client dynamics (Miller, 2012; Poocharoen & Brillantes, 2013).
- *Leadership Talent Pipelines and Succession Planning:* Early identification of high-potential officers based on a mix of performance data, peer feedback, and behavioral assessments could feed into leadership academies or fast-track programs, ensuring continuity and resilience in the agency's top echelon (McCourt, 2007; Rubin & Kellough, 2011).

#### **4.4 The Role of Political Will and Institutional Integrity**

None of these reforms can succeed without robust political will and a supportive institutional environment. As McCourt (2007) posits, meritocracy is not self-executing; it requires active insulation from political capture, legal safeguards, and professional norms that are internalized across ranks. In Indonesia's context, this implies empowering internal oversight units, enhancing civil society engagement in police reform discourse, and integrating merit indicators into broader public sector performance audits.

Strategically, embedding a merit-based intelligence cadre within Baintelkam not only improves operational effectiveness but also enhances public trust, inter-agency collaboration, and national preparedness in the face of emerging threats. The window of opportunity lies in leveraging current institutional introspection and global best practices to build a career development system that is credible, adaptive, and mission-aligned.

## **CONCLUSION**

This review has highlighted the institutional and cultural barriers that constrain the realization of merit-based career development within police organizations, with a particular focus on Indonesia's Baintelkam Polri. Despite the formal presence of meritocratic language in policy instruments—such as Perkap No. 9/2016—actual



implementation remains hampered by deeply embedded hierarchies, political interference, weak performance appraisal mechanisms, and entrenched cultures of favoritism.

These challenges resonate globally, especially in developing and transitional bureaucracies where informal institutions frequently subvert formal reforms. However, international best practices offer valuable insights. Models from the United Kingdom, the United States, and Scandinavian countries illustrate that meritocracy can be operationalized through transparent, competency-based, and participatory systems—provided there is sufficient institutional will and accountability.

For Baintelkam Polri, institutional reform demands a hybrid merit system—one that balances operational confidentiality with transparent, performance-based advancement. This would require not only structural changes but also leadership-driven efforts to reshape internal culture, align incentives with national security priorities, and integrate strategic human resource planning. Institutionalizing such a model holds potential to increase the agency's legitimacy, professional integrity, and adaptability in the face of evolving security challenges.

While this review consolidates existing global and local knowledge, it also opens several avenues for further research. First, future empirical studies could examine how individual perceptions of fairness and legitimacy shape officers' motivation within merit and non-merit systems. Second, longitudinal case studies of ongoing reforms in intelligence units could provide deeper insights into how informal institutions interact with formal policy tools over time. Finally, comparative research between countries at similar levels of bureaucratic development could help identify context-sensitive strategies for embedding meritocracy in closed, security-oriented institutions. By addressing these knowledge gaps, future research can contribute not only to academic debates but also to the practical design of more effective, equitable, and resilient police human resource systems.

## REFERENCES

1. Ariza-Montes, A., Fernández-Navarro, F., Molina-Sánchez, H., & González-Fernández, M. C. (2022). The influence of organizational hierarchy on police meritocracy: A structural perspective. *Policing: An International Journal*, 45(2), 189–203.
2. Battaglio, R. P., Jr., & Condrey, S. E. (2009). Reforming public management: Analyzing the impact of public service reform on organizational and managerial trust. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 19(4), 689–707.
3. Bazine, N., Darling, S., & Ariss, S. M. B. (2022). Exploring career orientations in policing: Identity and gatekeeper influences in promotion. *Public Management Review*, 24(9), 1332–1350.
4. Bazine, N., Dufour, C., & Pelissier, C. (2022). Career orientations in the public sector: A comparative study of young professionals in police and civil service. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 35(3), 323–341.
5. Bernardin, H. J., & Russell, J. E. A. (1993). *Human resource management: An experiential approach*. McGraw-Hill.
6. Carter, M. E. (2017). *Seniority and transparency in the perceived fairness of seniority-based police promotion* [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University].



7. Castilla, E. J., & Benard, S. (2010). The paradox of meritocracy in organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 55(4), 543–676. <https://doi.org/10.2189/asqu.2010.55.4.543>
8. Chavez, E., Torres, C. E., & Lee-Silcox, J. (2023). Does higher education matter in policing? An examination of the promotional process to sergeant. *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/police/paad084>
9. Cordner, G., & Scarborough, K. E. (2010). *Police administration*. Routledge.
10. Darling, S. (2022). Police promotion gatekeepers and career motivations of junior officers. *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*, 16(3), 533–549.
11. DiMaggio, P. J., & Powell, W. W. (1983). The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *American Sociological Review*, 48(2), 147–160. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2095101>
12. Els, R. C., & Meyer, H. W. (2023). Strategic career management in the South African military: Implications for merit-based progression. *Security Studies Review*, 45(2), 115–138.
13. Els, R. C., & Meyer, H. W. J. (2023). Military talent management: A strategic model for career pathing. *Public Personnel Management*, 52(1), 78–100. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00910260221094896>
14. Feeney, M. K., & Rainey, H. G. (2009). Personnel flexibility and red tape in public and nonprofit organizations: Distinctions due to institutional and political accountability. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 20(4), 801–826. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mup027>
15. Gaines, L. K., Van Tubergen, G. N., & Paiva, M. A. (1984). Police officer perceptions of promotion as a source of motivation. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 12(3), 265–275. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0047-2352\(84\)90030-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/0047-2352(84)90030-1)
16. Ghati, M. M. (2015). The impact of promotion on merit and education level bases to performance of the Tanzania Police Force [Master's thesis, University of Tanzania].
17. Greenhaus, J. H., Callanan, G. A., & Godshalk, V. M. (2010). *Career Management* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
18. Ingraham, P. W. (1995). *The foundation of merit: Public service in American democracy*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
19. Linder, S. H. (2009). Bureaucracy and development: Institutional constraints on meritocratic reforms in Africa. UNDP Working Paper.
20. Low, D. (2013). Meritocracy and good governance. *Ethics & International Affairs*, 27(4), 405–421.
21. Mangelsdorf, K., & Reeves, D. (1989). Civil Service Reform in Latin America: Lessons from the Dominican Republic. *Public Administration and Development*, 9(3), 275–288.
22. Mangelsdorf, K., & Reeves, M. (1989). Bureaucratic merit reform in the developing world: The case of the Dominican Republic. *Comparative Administration Review*, 33(1), 25–42.
23. Mangelsdorf, K., & Reeves, P. (1989). Civil service reform in developing countries: Lessons from selected country experiences. World Bank.
24. Mangelsdorf, K., & Reeves, T. (1989). Administrative reform in Ecuador: Resistance to meritocracy. *Public Administration and Development*, 9(3), 261–278.
25. McCourt, W. (2007). The merit system and integrity in the public service. Paper presented at Conference on Public Integrity and Anticorruption in the Public



Service, 29-30 May, Bucharest

26. Miller, L. (2012). Intelligence-led policing: A policing innovation. *Criminal Justice Studies*, 25(2), 85–100.
27. Miller, T. (2012). Community-based evaluation systems for police promotion in Scandinavia. *European Journal of Criminology*, 9(2), 215–233.
28. Mutanga, F., Atonga, P., & Munemo, T. (2023). Individual and contextual factors influencing career decisions in African public service. *Journal of African Governance*, 10(1), 22–39.
29. Oliveros, V., & Schuster, C. (2016). Merit, tenure, and bureaucratic behavior: Evidence from a conjoint experiment in the Dominican Republic. *Comparative Political Studies*, 51(6), 759–792. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414017710268>
30. Page, M. J., McKenzie, J. E., Bossuyt, P. M., Boutron, I., Hoffmann, T. C., Mulrow, C. D., ... & Moher, D. (2021). The PRISMA 2020 statement: An updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. *BMJ*, 372, n71. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n71>
31. Paul Battaglio Jr., R., & Condrey, S. E. (2009). Civil service reform: Examining state and local responses to challenge and change. *Public Personnel Management*, 38(1), 1–23.
32. Poocharoen, O. O., & Brillantes, A. B. (2013). Meritocracy in Asia Pacific. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 33(2), 140–163. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0734371X13482622>
33. Poocharoen, O., & Brillantes, A. B. (2013). Meritocracy in Asia Pacific: Status, issues, and challenges. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 33(2), 140–163. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0734371X13489012>
34. Rivai, V. (2013). *Manajemen sumber daya manusia untuk perusahaan: Dari teori ke praktik*. Rajawali Pers.
35. Rivai, V. (2013). *Manajemen Sumber Daya Manusia untuk Perusahaan: Dari Teori ke Praktik*. Jakarta: Rajawali Pers.
36. Roberts, G. E. (1994). Maximizing performance appraisal system acceptance: Perspectives from municipal government personnel administrators. *Public Personnel Management*, 23(4), 525–548. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009102609402300407>
37. Rubin, E. V., & Kellough, J. E. (2011). Implementing performance-based budgeting: The case of the District of Columbia. *Public Budgeting & Finance*, 31(4), 17–42.
38. Rubin, E. V., & Kellough, J. E. (2011). The Role of Procedural Justice in Public Personnel Management: Empirical Results from the U.S. Federal Sector. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 20(1), 125–142.
39. Rubin, M. M., & Kellough, J. E. (2011). Merit-based reform and the civil service. *The American Review of Public Administration*, 41(4), 395–415.
40. Scarborough, K., Van Tubergen, G. N., Gaines, L. K., & Whitlow, S. (1999). An examination of police officers' motivation to participate in the promotional process. *Police Quarterly*, 2(3), 302–320. <https://doi.org/10.1177/109861119900200303>
41. Sen, A. (2000). Merit and justice. In K. Arrow, S. Bowles, & S. Durlauf (Eds.), *Meritocracy and Economic Inequality* (pp. 5–16). Princeton University Press.
42. Sen, A. (2000). Merit and justice: A debate on equality and meritocracy. *Journal of Human Development*, 1(1), 19–25.
43. Shea, T. (2008). Female participation in the police promotion process: Are there gender differences in success rates? [Doctoral dissertation, University of New



- Haven].
44. Simbolon, H. T., & Prasajo, E. (2019). Meritocracy in the Indonesian police force: Between regulatory claims and organizational reality. *Jurnal Ilmu Administrasi Negara*, 19(2), 201–220.
  45. Simbolon, J., & Prasajo, E. (2019). Rekrutmen berbasis merit di Kepolisian Negara Republik Indonesia. *Jurnal Ilmu Administrasi Negara*, 19(1), 45–59.
  46. Stazyk, E. C., & Goerdel, H. T. (2010). The benefits of bureaucracy: Public managers' perceptions of political support, goal ambiguity, and organizational effectiveness. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 20(4), 821–844. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41342599>
  47. Super, D. E. (1957). *The Psychology of Careers*. Harper & Row.
  48. Tranfield, D., Denyer, D., & Smart, P. (2003). Towards a methodology for developing evidence-informed management knowledge by means of systematic review. *British Journal of Management*, 14(3), 207–222. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.00375>
  49. UK College of Policing. (2023). Intelligence career pathways: Professional development in policing. Retrieved from <https://www.college.police.uk>
  50. Weber, M. (1947). *The theory of social and economic organization*. Free Press.
  51. Wiratama, R., & Prasajo, E. (2019). Merit System dalam Mekanisme Rekrutmen dan Seleksi Bintara Polri. *Jurnal Ilmu Kepolisian*, 13(2), 106–117.
  52. Woodard, C. S. (2000). The Importance of Merit Principles for Civil Service Systems: Evidence from the U.S. Federal Sector. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 42(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/009102600002900303>
  53. Zhao, J. S., & Ren, L. (2021). Effect of Organizational Support on Police Effectiveness and Behavior: a Cross-cultural Comparison. *Asian Journal of Criminology*, 13(4), DOI: 10.1007/s11417-018-9272-2.