

Research Article

Transparency and Accountability in the Civil Service (ASN) Promotion Process at the Regional Personnel Agency of Sidoarjo Regency

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Abstract: This research looks into the transparency and accountability in the promotion process for civil servants at the Regional Civil Service Agency (BKD) of Sidoarjo Regency as a component of the continual bureaucratic reform aimed at achieving clean and professional governance. Overall, the promotion process has embraced the digital-based Sidoarjo Smart ASN system and adheres to the merit principle, although obstacles persist in achieving completely transparent and accountable practices. The study centers on four key areas: transparency of public information, responsibility in decision-making, the validity of the merit system, and the efficiency of internal oversight and citizen engagement. A qualitative descriptive method utilizing a case study approach was employed, incorporating in-depth interviews, direct observations, and the analysis of official documents. The results indicate that transparency continues to be administrative in character, accountability is focused vertically instead of being horizontally accountable to the public, and the merit system encounters challenges linked to bureaucratic culture and the integration of competency data. Additionally, internal oversight does not have enough community engagement in assessing promotion procedures. The research suggests improving transparency via interactive publishing, establishing accountability systems based on performance, boosting independent evaluation capabilities, and incorporating digital oversight tools with public engagement. These results are anticipated to provide a basis for creating a civil service management model at the regional government level that is more transparent, accountable, and grounded in integrity.

Keywords: Accountability; Digital Governance; Job Promotion; Merit System; Transparency.

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1. Introduction

Transparency and accountability in the promotion of State Civil Apparatus (ASN) positions are key issues in bureaucratic reform because they are related to professionalism, public legitimacy, and the effectiveness of public services. (Nur et al., 2024); National policy encourages the implementation of a merit system, namely promotions based on competence, performance, and organizational needs, which is intended as the main way to reduce the practice of nepotism and the politicization of positions. However, the implementation of these principles requires clear mechanisms, public access to information, and documented selection procedures so that the public can verify that the process is fair and objective (Sah et al., 2023).

At the regional level, the Sidoarjo Regency Regional Civil Service Agency (BKD) demonstrates its dedication to improving civil servant (ASN) management through various achievements and service innovations documented in regional performance documents, including recognition for the implementation of a merit system and innovation in public services. However, in practice, promotions still face operational challenges such as a lack of transparency regarding the selection process, differences in assessment standards across regional government agencies, and limited independent oversight mechanisms that can guarantee full accountability during the promotion and transfer process.

Several previous studies have found similar barriers: a lack of objectivity and transparency in the civil servant (ASN) promotion process reduces internal and public trust and hinders efforts to establish a professional bureaucracy. Case studies in several districts/cities demonstrate the need for clear competency standards, open documentation, and a publicly accessible complaint and verification system to enhance accountability (Atmojo, 2019; Dani et al., 2025; Samsuri et al., 2024). Initial findings from several regional evaluations indicate that despite the existence of formal regulations (Ministry of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform Regulations/related regulations), their implementation is vulnerable to legal practices and subjectivity in assessments if not supported by a transparent digital system and strengthened assessor capacity.

In the context of Sidoarjo Regency, specific issues that require attention include: (1) the inconsistency between Regional Civil Service Agency (BKD) policies that prioritize the principle of merit and practices in work units that still use informal criteria; (2) the lack of publication of selection results and assessment criteria, which complicates external verification; (3) limited participatory mechanisms for civil servants (ASN) to submit standardized objections or clarifications; and (4) the need for an integrated personnel information system to store and display auditable data on competency, performance history, and assessment processes. These issues pose a risk of demoralizing competent civil servants and hinder long-term organizational performance improvement.

Based on these conditions, this paper will prioritize analysis regarding: the implementation of the level of transparency and accountability of job promotion procedures in the Sidoarjo Regency BKD (from job needs planning, selection criteria, assessment implementation, to the announcement of results), factors that hinder or strengthen these transparent practices, as well as practical recommendations for improving promotion management through policies, information systems, and participatory oversight mechanisms; the purpose of this study is to map gaps in the implementation of the merit system, develop a more transparent and accountable promotion policy practice model, and formulate technical steps (e.g., digitalization of processes, assessment standards, structured complaint channels) that can increase ASN and public trust in the promotion process in Sidoarjo, thereby supporting the professionalism of the regional bureaucracy.

2. Theoretical Review

The theoretical foundation for analyzing transparency and accountability in the ASN promotion process is rooted in the principle of the merit system which is now a national policy requirement (Hakim, 2024); A merit system emphasizes that promotions should be based on qualifications, competence, and performance, thus reducing subjective practices and nepotism, and regulations and technical policies at the national level have emphasized this as a foundation for ASN management in the regions. In practice, the successful implementation of a merit system requires a clear mechanism for assessing competence and performance, as well as public access to information regarding the selection process so that internal and external parties can verify the process (Hakim, 2024; Prabowo, 2024); Therefore, an analysis of the promotion process at the Sidoarjo Regional Personnel Agency (BKD) requires evaluating the extent to which policy documents, selection criteria, and assessment results are published and auditable.

Dwiyanto's theory of public transparency (Lombo et al., 2022) offers a second framework: transparency is not only about the availability of information, but also about information that is relevant, accessible, and understandable to the public to foster social accountability. Recent research highlights that transparency in the promotion process (e.g., publication of criteria, schedules, committees, and results) enhances organizational legitimacy and reduces internal suspicion. In the Sidoarjo context, it is important to examine whether existing publication mechanisms and complaint channels are effective and available, as well as how the Regional Civil Service Agency (BKD) communicates standards and rationale for decision-making to civil servants and the public.

The relationship between bureaucratic accountability and human resource information systems is a third important theoretical aspect; modern human resource management theory views human resource information systems as a key infrastructure for storing evidence of competency, performance records, evaluation results, and track records of promotion processes, resulting in a more auditable and consistent process (Gusty et al., 2020). Studies and implementation assessments show that effective data integration accelerates merit-based promotion decisions and reduces subjectivity, while deficiencies in information systems

increase the likelihood of unplanned practices. Therefore, research is needed to evaluate the technical readiness and data management of the Regional Civil Service Agency (BKD) whether appropriate encryption mechanisms, audit trails, and public access are in place.

Good governance theory and participatory oversight mechanisms emphasize the crucial role of external actors such as professional organizations, civil society, and local media in enhancing accountability (Negoro et al., 2025). An autonomous grievance mechanism and clear complaint resolution procedures not only improve administrative processes but also strengthen civil servants' trust in the promotion system; previous research provides evidence that without efficient external oversight channels, merit standards are vulnerable to being degraded into informal practices (Fahrizi et al., 2021; Rusdiono et al., 2022). Therefore, the analysis should include factors such as access to complaints, whistleblower protection, and public participation in evaluating promotion policies.

An organizational change management framework is crucial because the transition to an open promotion process requires a shift in bureaucratic culture from practices that prioritize personal relationships to one based on rules and evidence. This includes capacity building for assessors, the development of standardized SOPs, and training on ethics and evaluation standards (Barodi et al., 2024). The literature shows that leadership support, resource commitment, and assessor capability are key factors in the successful implementation of merit practices; without structured managerial intervention, digital or regulatory initiatives tend to remain stuck at the formal level without any meaningful change in practice (Rizal & Holivil, 2023; Sulaiman et al., 2025). Therefore, research is needed to evaluate the leadership readiness of the Regional Personnel Agency (BKD) and related work units in managing this transition.

Ultimately, the theory of performance evaluation and public accountability recommends the use of measurable indicators such as the level of information transparency, the percentage of promotions based on competency assessments, the duration of process completion, and the number of complaints resolved as a basis for monitoring and improving policies (Fauzi & Rusi, 2020; Listiani, 2011). An evaluation approach that integrates internal audits, independent reviews, and stakeholder participation allows for flexible learning, ensuring that promotion policies are continuously updated in accordance with merit standards. In the Sidoarjo study, this theoretical advice guided the researchers in creating a clear measurement tool and evaluating empirical evidence on the implementation and outcomes of the promotion process at the Regional Civil Service Agency (BKD) comprehensively.

3. Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to explore in depth the application of transparency and accountability principles in the promotion process for State Civil Apparatus (ASN) at the Regional Civil Service Agency (BKD) of Sidoarjo Regency. This method was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the meanings, practices, and socio-administrative dynamics behind existing formal policies and procedures. This study was conducted through a single case analysis at the Sidoarjo BKD, a purposefully selected research location, considering that this institution is a key institution in implementing ASN career management at the regional level. Data were obtained through three main methods: in-depth interviews with BKD structural officials, the promotion assessment team, and ASN involved in the selection process; participatory observation during the promotion phase, including announcements, administrative selection, competency assessments, and results announcements; and document analysis covering regional regulations, standard operating procedures, performance evaluation reports, and digital process records from the personnel information system. Data validity was strengthened by triangulation of sources and methods to ensure consistency of findings across interviews, observations, and official documents. Data analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The analysis focused on three main aspects: transparency of public information in the promotion process, accountability and oversight mechanisms, and institutional capacity to support the merit system. The results of the analysis are expected to not only reflect the empirical situation of the Sidoarjo Regional Personnel Agency (BKD), but also provide practical and theoretical suggestions for improving the management of ASN promotions based on transparency and accountability at the local government level (Moleong, 2019; Pahleviannur et al., 2022).

4. Results and Discussion

Public Information Disclosure in the Promotion Process

Research findings indicate that the Sidoarjo Regency Regional Personnel Agency (BKD) has attempted to implement public information transparency by utilizing the "Sidoarjo Smart ASN" digital system, designed to facilitate the online distribution of information about job openings, selection schedules, and final promotion results. This initiative is part of a digital-based bureaucratic reform strategy launched in 2022 to reduce the possibility of data manipulation and increase efficiency in administrative processes. However, ASN accessibility to the platform remains limited due to the disparity in digital skills among employees and minimal socialization on how to optimally use the system. As a result, some ASN still use informal communication channels to obtain information, which can undermine trust in the institution's transparency.

Interviews with five ASN involved in the 2024 promotion process revealed that the majority of informants felt they did not fully understand the assessment indicators in the competency assessment. They stated that although the final results were announced openly, the basis for the assessment was not explained in detail, creating a sense of unfairness and secrecy in the selection process. Within the framework of good governance theory Denhart and denhart (2007) This indicates that administrative transparency has not been fully accompanied by substantive transparency, namely openness in the logical explanations behind every bureaucratic decision. Therefore, the Regional Civil Service Agency (BKD) digitalization efforts have not been able to bridge the public's differing views regarding comprehensive information transparency.

The study found that the publication of job promotion results remains unidirectional, with no feedback mechanism or public complaint channel. The principle of open government emphasizes the importance of public participation in evaluating and monitoring the implementation of public administration (Mahardhani, 2023). The absence of a feedback mechanism makes transparency in the Regional Personnel Agency (BKD) more symbolic than participatory. Some civil servants (ASN) even expressed not knowing who to complain to or explain their assessment results. This situation creates a communication gap between implementing bureaucrats and employees targeted by promotion policies.

Furthermore, field observations indicate that promotion data management is still not fully implemented in real time. Data posted on digital portals often lag in updates, especially after the post-assessment stage. This indicates a continued reliance on conventional administration behind the digital system, which should serve as a means of transparency. Therefore, it is recommended that the Sidoarjo BKD improve coordination between sectors to ensure comprehensive and responsive data disclosure. Effective transparency requires not only an information system but also a culture of open, consistent, and understandable public communication for all ASN.

Application of Accountability Principles in Promotion Decision Making

Accountability in the civil servant (ASN) promotion process at the Sidoarjo Regional Personnel Agency (BKD) is essentially outlined in standard regulations and procedures, including the formation of an independent selection team and reporting of selection results to the Regent as the Personnel Development Officer. However, studies indicate that this type of accountability remains vertical, with primary accountability flowing solely from the selection committee to the supervisory officer. There is no horizontal reporting mechanism to civil servants or the public, which should be regulated in Bovens' concept of social accountability (Jabar & Yuniarni, 2025). As a result, civil servants who are unsuccessful in the selection process often do not receive a written explanation of the assessment results or recommendations for career development.

In meetings with BKD structural officials, it was revealed that competency assessment documents are stored in internal archives and are not accessible to promotion candidates for administrative confidentiality. While this rationale is understandable from a civil service law perspective, this practice tends to undermine the principles of transparency and public accountability. Civil servants who participate in the selection process expect their assessment results to be accompanied by notes and recommendations for self-development, allowing them to improve their competencies in the future. Consequently, the implementation of accountability in the BKD has not fully functioned as an organizational learning tool, but rather focuses on procedural responsibilities.

Studies also show that formal accountability is often not accompanied by efficient internal oversight. Promotion results are audited by the Regional Inspectorate, but the audit process emphasizes the conformity of documents rather than the substance of the decision. Substantial accountability, in fact, requires a clear and logical explanation behind every promotion decision. This is in accordance with the explanation in performance-based accountability theory (Porumbescu et al., 2021), Public accountability evaluations must focus on results, not just procedural compliance. Therefore, the Sidoarjo Regional Personnel Agency (BKD) is required to strengthen its reporting system, which includes indicators of tangible results from promotion policies, such as improvements in individual and organizational performance.

Other field findings indicate that the promotion results reporting system has not been linked to the overall ASN performance assessment system. In other words, promotion accountability still operates separately from ASN performance management. This situation makes it difficult to evaluate the role of promotions in improving bureaucratic effectiveness. Therefore, a digital system is needed that links promotion results with performance data and organizational target achievement. This integration will strengthen the relationship between promotions, achievements, and overall public accountability (Andry & Sawir, 2024)

Integrity of the Merit System and Institutional Professionalism

The implementation of the merit system in the Sidoarjo Regional Personnel Agency (BKD) is normatively regulated by the Regent's Regulation and a competency-based selection mechanism, but its implementation still faces significant challenges in terms of integrity and consistency. Several civil servants interviewed acknowledged that seniority and personal relationships with structural officials still influence promotion outcomes for certain positions. This finding supports the opinion of Choirudin et al. (2023) and Alhadad & Rasji (2023) The merit system in the regions is often hampered by a paternalistic bureaucratic culture. Although regulations have strengthened meritocracy, the hierarchical bureaucratic social system remains a major obstacle to the implementation of objectivity in selection.

Institutionally, the Regional Civil Service Agency (BKD) has attempted to implement a talent management system, but the integration of ASN capability data remains partial. For example, training data and evaluation results have not been automatically integrated into a single digital database. This situation presents challenges in evaluating the actual capabilities of ASN who are being promoted. According to human resource management theory (Raharjanto, 2019), The success of a merit system is determined by the extent to which an organization can comprehensively manage performance and competency data. Without solid information, promotion activities are easily influenced by personal factors that undermine bureaucratic integrity.

Furthermore, research shows that competency assessments do not always involve independent assessment institutions. In some situations, evaluations are conducted by internal teams with limited experience in psychological assessment and managerial competency. This has the potential to undermine the credibility of selection results. Policies are needed to expand collaboration between the Regional Personnel Agency (BKD) and external professional organizations to ensure a more objective assessment process and avoid structural interference. Institutional professionalism is determined not only by regulations but also by the integrity of the implementers in maintaining the neutrality of the appointment process.

Recent findings on this aspect indicate that the civil servant (ASN) work culture is still focused on administrative compliance, rather than on achieving work results. As a result, civil servants' motivation to compete fairly in the promotion process is low. Therefore, the Sidoarjo BKD needs to create a merit culture that focuses on achievement by rewarding innovation and tangible work results. This strategy will strengthen the legitimacy of promotions as a sign of professional recognition, not simply a structural increase.

Internal Supervision and Public Participation in ASN Promotion Governance

The latest focus of research reveals that the internal oversight mechanism at the Sidoarjo Regional Personnel Agency (BKD) is functioning well administratively, but has not yet incorporated public participation. The Regional Inspectorate conducts compliance audits on the promotion process, but the results are rarely disseminated widely. In fact, publishing oversight reports is a crucial element of public accountability, as noted by Ansell & Gash (2008) in collaborative governance theory. Without public participation, bureaucratic oversight tends to be closed and only strengthens internal structures.

Interviews with representatives of local NGOs and local media revealed that they lack access to ASN promotion data, even though the process directly impacts the quality of public services. This demonstrates a lack of transparency between sectors, including local government and civil society. Public participation should be realized through discussion forums or the transparent publication of election results with objective records. This way, the promotion process is not solely controlled by internal officials, but also by external elements, protecting the integrity of the merit system.

Studies show that there is no e-monitoring system that relies on public participation to directly monitor the promotion process. The monitoring application connected to the Smart ASN portal can only be accessed by internal BKD staff. In fact, the use of participatory technology can strengthen public oversight systems and increase trust in administrative processes. The BKD can emulate best practices from other regions, such as Banyuwangi Regency, which has been using a public dashboard for open position elections since 2022.

The research findings indicate that low digital literacy and public participation in oversight are due to minimal outreach and officials' concerns about data transparency. Therefore, a new paradigm is needed within the regional bureaucracy, emphasizing that transparency is not a threat, but rather a tool to strengthen legitimacy. Through collaboration between internal oversight and public participation, the Sidoarjo Regional Civil Service Agency (BKD) was able to create a fairer, more trustworthy civil servant (ASN) promotion system that aligns with the principles of transparency and accountability in modern digital governance.

The research findings also support the notion that bureaucratic reform focused on good governance cannot rely solely on formal internal oversight mechanisms but needs to be developed through a collaborative ecosystem between government, civil society, and the media. According to the OECD (2023), a collaborative monitoring model involving public participation through open digital systems can increase accountability by up to 35% in the context of local government in Southeast Asia. Therefore, the Sidoarjo BKD must design an open governance platform that not only displays administrative data related to promotions but also provides channels for public interaction for direct feedback and monitoring (Diawati et al., 2023). This method will make supervision a dialogic process, not just a control tool, which will foster public trust, strengthen bureaucratic ethics, and uphold the principle of meritocracy as the basis for a professional and integrity-based civil servant career in the digital era of modern government.

5. Conclusion

This study shows that transparency and accountability in civil servant (ASN) promotions at the Sidoarjo Regency Regional Civil Service Agency have made significant progress with the implementation of a digital system and merit policy. However, several fundamental implementation challenges remain that need to be addressed immediately. Public information disclosure has been implemented through the Sidoarjo Smart ASN portal, but remains administrative in nature and not fully participatory due to the lack of opportunities for civil servants and the public to provide feedback and receive in-depth explanations of selection results. Accountability remains dominated by internal, vertical accountability without a horizontal reporting mechanism to the public, creating a gap between formal procedures and substantive justice. The merit system, while an important foundation for bureaucratic professionalism, remains hampered by a paternalistic culture, a lack of competency data integration, and the suboptimal use of independent assessment institutions. On the other hand, the internal oversight function has been implemented in accordance with regulations, but has not been supported by adequate public participation due to limited access to information and digital literacy. Based on these findings, this study recommends several strategic steps: expanding digital-based information transparency equipped with public feedback channels, establishing a performance-based accountability system integrated with ASN management, strengthening the implementation of the merit system through independent assessments and talent management development, and encouraging collaborative oversight with civil society. By implementing these steps, the Sidoarjo Regional Personnel Agency (BKD) has the potential to become an example of transparent, accountable regional personnel management that focuses on integrity and fairness within the bureaucracy, while simultaneously addressing the key issues raised in this study.

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