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Bureaucratic Transformation in The Development of Human Resource Competencies Among Civil Servants in The Riau Islands Province

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Abstract

Bureaucratic transformation has become one of the government's key strategies for achieving professional, adaptive, and service-oriented governance. This study aims to analyze bureaucratic transformation in the development of Civil Servant (ASN) competencies in the Riau Islands Province, Indonesia. The research employed a descriptive qualitative approach and was conducted at the Human Resources Development Agency (BPSDM) and the Regional Civil Service Agency (BKD) of the Riau Islands Province. Informants were selected purposively and consisted of BPSDM officials, BKD officials, trainers (widyaiswara), and civil servants participating in training programs. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and documentation and were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The findings indicate that bureaucratic transformation has been implemented through five dimensions: organizational reform, bureaucratic digitalization, Smart ASN development, professionalism and merit system implementation, and improvement of public service quality. Organizational reform is characterized by structural simplification and changes in work systems, while digitalization has been realized through blended learning, a Learning Management System (LMS), the Ligat Kepri platform, and webinars. Smart ASN development has been carried out through the enhancement of technical, managerial, socio-cultural, and digital competencies. The implementation of the merit system is supported by competency assessments, competency mapping, Employee Competency Potential and Performance Assessments (AKPK), Human Capital Development Plans (HCDP), as well as coordination between BKD and BPSDM. These transformation efforts have contributed to improving the quality of public services by strengthening the competencies of civil servants to become more professional, adaptive, and responsive to organizational and societal needs.

Keywords: Bureaucratic Transformation, Competency Development, Merit System, Public Service, Smart ASN.



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INTRODUCTION

The transformation of bureaucracy has become a central agenda in contemporary public administration as governments worldwide confront the challenges posed by digital disruption, technological innovation, demographic shifts, and increasingly complex public service demands. Across both developed and developing countries, bureaucratic reform is no longer limited to institutional restructuring but increasingly emphasizes the development of human resource competencies capable of supporting adaptive, responsive, and innovation-oriented governance systems. The emergence of digital government, artificial intelligence, and data-driven decision-making has accelerated the need for civil servants to acquire new competencies that extend beyond traditional administrative skills. Public organizations that fail to invest in competency development risk experiencing declining organizational performance, reduced service quality, and weakened institutional legitimacy. Within this context, bureaucratic transformation is understood as a strategic process through which public institutions redesign organizational capacities and human capital to respond effectively to dynamic environmental changes and evolving citizen expectations (Utami, 2023; Yasa et al., 2021).

Previous studies have consistently demonstrated that human resource competency development constitutes a critical determinant of bureaucratic transformation and public sector performance. Research conducted by Al et al. (2025) indicates that the success of bureaucratic reform in Indonesia is closely associated with the capacity of state civil apparatus management systems to facilitate continuous

competency enhancement and organizational adaptability. Similar findings are presented by Lubis et al. (2024), who argue that the Smart ASN framework has become a strategic instrument for strengthening digital competencies and supporting public service transformation. Studies focusing on digital governance further reveal that competency development is increasingly linked to the implementation of electronic-based government systems, where technical proficiency, digital literacy, and adaptive capabilities significantly influence organizational effectiveness (Sarjito & Djati, 2025). A critical synthesis of these findings suggests that competency development functions not merely as an administrative requirement but as a transformative mechanism through which bureaucratic institutions reshape organizational culture, improve service delivery, and enhance public sector resilience in the face of technological and societal change. Despite the growing body of literature, important conceptual and empirical limitations remain evident. Existing studies frequently focus on national-level reform programs or highly urbanized administrative contexts, resulting in a limited understanding of how bureaucratic transformation unfolds within geographically dispersed and institutionally diverse regions.

Research concerning Smart ASN, digital competency development, and merit-based management systems often assumes relatively uniform organizational conditions, overlooking regional disparities in infrastructure availability, institutional capacity, and socio-administrative contexts (Lubis et al., 2024; Septiningrum et al., 2024). The literature also exhibits inconsistencies regarding the primary drivers of competency development, with some scholars emphasizing technological adaptation while others highlight organizational culture, leadership commitment, or meritocratic personnel systems as the dominant explanatory factors. These divergences indicate that the relationship between bureaucratic transformation and competency development remains insufficiently examined within specific regional governance settings where structural and contextual factors may substantially influence implementation outcomes. The unresolved issues within the literature acquire greater significance when considered in relation to the Riau Islands Province, a strategically important archipelagic region characterized by geographical fragmentation, cross-border interactions, and increasing demands for digitally enabled public services.

The province's administrative environment requires civil servants to operate within complex governance networks that connect island communities, regional institutions, and national policy frameworks. Such conditions create distinctive challenges for competency development because bureaucratic effectiveness depends not only on technical knowledge but also on adaptive capacities, digital readiness, and collaborative skills. Contemporary bureaucratic reform agendas increasingly emphasize merit systems, talent management, and competency-based human resource development as mechanisms for improving institutional performance, yet empirical evidence concerning how these initiatives shape bureaucratic transformation in archipelagic governance contexts remains limited (Septiningrum et al., 2024; Al et al., 2025). The absence of context-specific knowledge constrains both theoretical understanding and policy formulation regarding the development of competent and adaptive civil servants in geographically complex regions.

This study is positioned within the intersection of bureaucratic transformation, public sector human resource management, and competency development research. Unlike previous studies that predominantly examine bureaucratic reform through broad national indicators or sectoral perspectives, this research focuses specifically on the development of civil servant competencies as a core mechanism driving bureaucratic transformation within the Riau Islands Province. The study seeks to explore how competency development initiatives are designed, implemented, and experienced by civil servants operating within an archipelagic administrative environment. Such a focus contributes to addressing the empirical gap concerning regional variations in bureaucratic transformation processes while simultaneously enriching ongoing debates regarding the interaction between organizational change, human capital development, and public sector modernization (Utami, 2023; Yasa et al., 2021; Sarjito & Djati, 2025).

This research aims to analyze the process of bureaucratic transformation in the development of civil servant competencies within the Riau Islands Province by examining institutional strategies, competency development practices, and the challenges encountered during implementation. The study seeks to generate a comprehensive understanding of how competency development contributes to the transformation of bureaucratic institutions in a geographically dispersed governance context. Theoretically, the research is expected to expand existing knowledge concerning the relationship between bureaucratic transformation and human resource competency development in public

organizations. Methodologically, the study contributes by providing an in-depth contextual analysis of competency development practices within an archipelagic provincial administration, offering insights that may inform future studies and policy interventions aimed at strengthening public sector capacity and bureaucratic adaptability.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a descriptive case study design to explore the process of bureaucratic transformation in the development of civil servant competencies in the Riau Islands Province. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it enables a comprehensive understanding of social phenomena, organizational dynamics, and actors' experiences within their natural settings (Creswell, 2018; Sugiyono, 2023). The research focused on examining how competency development programs are implemented, how bureaucratic transformation is perceived by relevant stakeholders, and what challenges and opportunities emerge during the process. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their involvement and experience in human resource management and bureaucratic reform initiatives, including officials of the Regional Personnel Agency, organizational leaders, training administrators, and civil servants participating in competency development programs (Hadi, Tanjung, & Mulyadi, 2021). Documentary sources consisted of government regulations, strategic planning documents, competency development reports, and other official records relevant to bureaucratic transformation and civil service management.

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. The analysis process was carried out continuously throughout the research in order to identify patterns, themes, and relationships among the collected data. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, triangulation of sources, methods, and documents was employed by comparing information obtained from different informants and data collection techniques. Member checking was also conducted to confirm the accuracy of interpretations and to enhance the validity of the research results (Creswell, 2018). Through this analytical framework, the study sought to generate an in-depth understanding of how bureaucratic transformation contributes to the development of civil servant competencies and how institutional, organizational, and individual factors influence the effectiveness of competency development initiatives within the governance context of the Riau Islands Province.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Institutional Transformation and Competency Development Policy Framework

The findings indicate that bureaucratic transformation in the Riau Islands Province has increasingly been oriented toward strengthening competency-based human resource management. Interviews with officials from the Regional Human Resource Development Agency revealed that competency development is no longer perceived as a routine administrative activity but as a strategic instrument for organizational adaptation. Informants consistently emphasized that the transformation agenda seeks to align individual competencies with institutional performance objectives. This orientation reflects contemporary bureaucratic reform approaches that prioritize adaptive and professional civil service systems (Al et al., 2025).

Data obtained from policy documents demonstrate that competency development has been formally integrated into regional development planning. Government officials explained that competency enhancement programs are linked to broader public service modernization initiatives. Such integration indicates that human resource development is positioned as an essential component of governance reform rather than an isolated personnel function. Similar tendencies have been observed in studies examining adaptive bureaucracy in the era of Society 5.0 (Yasa et al., 2021).

Interviews further revealed that institutional transformation is supported by regulatory instruments operating at both national and regional levels. Informants highlighted the importance of competency standards, talent development mechanisms, and performance-based management systems in guiding implementation. The existence of formal regulations has provided organizational legitimacy for competency development initiatives. The legal foundation for these initiatives is reinforced through Law Number 20 of 2023 concerning the State Civil Apparatus and Governor Regulation of the Riau

Islands Number 51 of 2023 concerning Civil Servant Competency Development (Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 20 Tahun 2023; Peraturan Gubernur Kepulauan Riau Nomor 51 Tahun 2023).

Respondents reported that organizational transformation has encouraged greater participation in training and professional development activities. Employees increasingly recognize competency development as an integral aspect of career progression and organizational contribution. Such perceptions indicate a shift from compliance-oriented learning toward developmental learning. Research on competency-based public sector management similarly emphasizes the importance of cultivating learning-oriented organizational cultures (Lubis et al., 2024).

The qualitative findings also suggest that leadership commitment plays a critical role in facilitating bureaucratic transformation. Several informants stated that organizational leaders actively encourage participation in competency development programs. Leadership support influences employee motivation and enhances institutional readiness for change. Previous studies identify leadership commitment as a crucial driver of successful bureaucratic transformation initiatives (Utami, 2023).

The institutional dimensions identified during fieldwork are summarized in Table 1. The table illustrates the major components supporting competency development within the provincial bureaucracy. These findings reveal the interaction between regulatory, organizational, and managerial factors. The observed patterns indicate that transformation processes are supported by multiple institutional mechanisms.

Table 1. Institutional Components Supporting Competency Development

Institutional Component	Current Condition	Transformation Implication
Regulatory Framework	Strong	High policy legitimacy
Leadership Commitment	Moderate to High	Increased participation
Organizational Support	Moderate	Improved implementation capacity
Learning Culture	Developing	Enhanced adaptability
Strategic Planning Alignment	High	Strong institutional integration

Analysis of Table 1 indicates that strategic alignment constitutes one of the strongest elements supporting bureaucratic transformation. Competency development programs are linked to the Regional Medium-Term Development Plan and institutional strategic priorities. This alignment strengthens policy consistency across administrative levels. The Regional Development Plan of the Riau Islands Province explicitly identifies human resource quality as a key development objective (Peraturan Daerah Provinsi Kepulauan Riau Nomor 3 Tahun 2021).

Interview data also revealed that bureaucratic transformation has altered perceptions regarding employee development responsibilities. Competency enhancement is increasingly viewed as a shared responsibility between institutions and individual civil servants. This shift encourages greater initiative among employees seeking professional improvement opportunities. Talent-oriented approaches to human resource management similarly emphasize shared accountability for competency development (Badan Kepegawaian Negara, 2022).

Several respondents noted that institutional transformation remains an ongoing process rather than a completed achievement. Organizational adaptation continues to face challenges related to changing technological demands and evolving public expectations. Continuous adjustment is required to maintain relevance within dynamic governance environments. Research concerning merit-based civil service management likewise emphasizes the importance of sustained institutional adaptation (Komisi Aparatur Sipil Negara, 2023).

The findings demonstrate that bureaucratic transformation in the Riau Islands Province is characterized by the strengthening of institutional arrangements that support competency development. Regulatory support, leadership commitment, organizational alignment, and strategic planning collectively shape the implementation environment. Evidence from interviews and document analysis suggests that competency development has become a central mechanism through which bureaucratic reform objectives are operationalized. Comparable conclusions have been reported in studies examining

public sector transformation and human resource modernization in Indonesia (Al et al., 2025; Lubis et al., 2024).

Digital Competency Development and Capacity Building of Civil Servants

The findings reveal that digital competency development has become one of the most prominent dimensions of bureaucratic transformation in the Riau Islands Province. Interviews with civil servants and training administrators indicated that digital skills are increasingly regarded as essential competencies for supporting administrative efficiency and public service innovation. Informants explained that technological adaptation is no longer limited to information technology personnel but extends across all organizational units. This trend is consistent with contemporary public administration perspectives that position digital capability as a core requirement for modern governance systems (Sarjito & Djati, 2025).

Participants reported significant changes in learning patterns following the expansion of digital-based competency development programs. Online training platforms, webinars, and virtual knowledge-sharing forums have increased employee access to professional development opportunities. Civil servants located in geographically dispersed island areas stated that digital learning mechanisms reduced barriers associated with distance and travel costs. Similar findings have been identified in studies examining Smart ASN initiatives and digital transformation within public organizations (Lubis et al., 2024).

Interview data further demonstrated that competency development activities are increasingly integrated with electronic government implementation strategies. Respondents explained that employees are encouraged to improve digital literacy in order to support data management, electronic administration, and online public services. Such integration reflects the growing interdependence between competency development and digital governance systems. The implementation of Electronic-Based Government Systems has been formally mandated through Presidential Regulation Number 95 of 2018 concerning Electronic-Based Government Systems (Peraturan Presiden Republik Indonesia Nomor 95 Tahun 2018).

Several informants noted that digital competency development contributes to greater organizational flexibility. Employees possessing stronger digital skills were perceived as more capable of adapting to changes in work procedures and service delivery models. Adaptability has become increasingly important in administrative environments characterized by rapid technological change. Research on bureaucratic innovation suggests that digital competence functions as a key driver of organizational resilience and service responsiveness (Utami, 2023).

The findings also indicate that digital learning programs have strengthened inter-organizational knowledge exchange. Respondents highlighted the role of online seminars and virtual forums in facilitating communication among civil servants from different agencies. Knowledge-sharing activities expanded access to best practices and innovative administrative solutions. Such collaborative learning mechanisms are frequently associated with adaptive governance capacities (Yasa et al., 2021).

The patterns identified through interviews and document analysis are summarized in Table 2. The table presents major forms of digital competency development implemented within the provincial bureaucracy. Each activity contributes differently to organizational learning and administrative transformation. The findings demonstrate the growing institutionalization of digital learning practices.

Table 2. Digital Competency Development Activities in the Riau Islands Province

Activity Type	Main Objective	Observed Outcome
Online Training Programs	Improve technical competencies	Enhanced digital literacy
Virtual Seminars	Expand professional knowledge	Increased knowledge sharing
Webinar Series	Support policy understanding	Greater institutional awareness
E-Learning Platforms	Continuous learning access	Flexible competency development
Digital Collaboration Forums	Strengthen coordination	Improved organizational communication

Analysis of Table 2 indicates that digital competency development extends beyond technical training functions. The activities also facilitate organizational learning, institutional communication, and professional networking among civil servants. Such outcomes support broader bureaucratic transformation objectives focused on adaptability and innovation. Previous studies have similarly emphasized the strategic role of digital competency development in supporting public sector modernization (Sarjito & Djati, 2025).

Interview findings revealed that webinar-based learning programs have become particularly influential in strengthening employee competencies. Informants frequently referred to the Ngopi-Time Webinar and BerAKHLAK Webinar initiatives as important platforms for professional development. Participants reported improved understanding of organizational values, leadership principles, and administrative innovations following their involvement in these activities. Internal reports produced by the Regional Human Resource Development Agency document substantial participation rates and positive learning outcomes associated with both programs (Badan Pengembangan Sumber Daya Manusia Provinsi Kepulauan Riau, 2025a; Badan Pengembangan Sumber Daya Manusia Provinsi Kepulauan Riau, 2025b).

Another significant finding concerns the relationship between digital competency development and public service performance. Respondents stated that employees with stronger digital capabilities were generally more effective in utilizing information systems and managing administrative processes. Improved technical proficiency contributed to faster service delivery and more accurate information management. These findings correspond with provisions contained in Government Regulation Number 71 of 2019 concerning Electronic Systems and Transactions and Minister of Home Affairs Regulation Number 70 of 2019 concerning Regional Government Information Systems, both of which emphasize the importance of digital governance capacity (Peraturan Pemerintah Republik Indonesia Nomor 71 Tahun 2019; Peraturan Menteri Dalam Negeri Republik Indonesia Nomor 70 Tahun 2019).

The findings also reveal several challenges affecting digital competency development efforts. Informants identified differences in technological readiness, learning motivation, and digital proficiency among employees. Older civil servants occasionally experienced greater difficulty adapting to technology-intensive learning environments compared with younger employees. Similar challenges have been documented in studies addressing digital transformation within public sector organizations (Lubis et al., 2024).

Evidence from interviews, observations, and institutional documents suggests that digital competency development has become a central mechanism supporting bureaucratic transformation in the Riau Islands Province. Digital learning initiatives enhance employee adaptability, strengthen organizational learning, and facilitate the implementation of technology-based governance systems. The findings indicate that competency development programs contribute not only to individual capacity enhancement but also to broader institutional modernization objectives. Comparable conclusions have been reported in studies examining Smart ASN implementation, digital governance, and competency-based public administration reform in Indonesia (Lubis et al., 2024; Sarjito & Djati, 2025; Utami, 2023).

Merit-Based Talent Management and Sustainable Competency Development

The findings indicate that bureaucratic transformation in the Riau Islands Province has increasingly incorporated merit-based talent management as a strategic instrument for competency development. Interviews with human resource managers revealed that employee development programs are progressively aligned with competency mapping, performance evaluation, and career planning mechanisms. Informants explained that competency development is no longer conducted solely to fulfill administrative requirements but is linked to broader organizational objectives. This orientation reflects the growing adoption of meritocratic principles within public sector human resource management systems (Septiningrum et al., 2024).

Respondents reported that competency development initiatives are increasingly guided by organizational needs assessments. Training priorities are determined based on competency gaps identified through performance reviews and institutional evaluations. Such practices contribute to a more targeted allocation of development resources. Studies on talent management emphasize that competency-based planning enhances the effectiveness of human resource development programs (Badan Kepegawaian Negara, 2022).

Interview data further demonstrated that talent management mechanisms have encouraged greater employee motivation to participate in professional development activities. Civil servants perceived competency improvement as an important factor influencing career advancement opportunities. Employees who actively engaged in training programs reported stronger commitment to organizational goals. Similar patterns have been identified in studies examining merit system implementation within Indonesian public administration (Komisi Aparatur Sipil Negara, 2023).

Several participants highlighted the role of competency assessments in supporting bureaucratic transformation. Assessment results were utilized to identify leadership potential, technical expertise, and developmental needs among employees. Informants noted that assessment-based decision making improved transparency in human resource management processes. Contemporary public administration literature increasingly recognizes competency assessment as an essential component of adaptive governance systems (Al et al., 2025).

The findings also revealed that institutional support remains necessary for sustaining competency development efforts. Employees emphasized the importance of access to training opportunities, mentoring programs, and organizational learning resources. Development initiatives were perceived as more effective when accompanied by supportive managerial practices. Previous research suggests that organizational commitment significantly influences the long-term effectiveness of competency enhancement programs (Utami, 2023).

The major findings concerning talent management and competency development are summarized in Table 3. The table presents the principal mechanisms identified through interviews and document analysis. These mechanisms contribute to the institutionalization of competency-based human resource management practices. The observed patterns indicate a gradual shift toward a more strategic approach to employee development.

Table 3. Talent Management Mechanisms Supporting Competency Development

Talent Management Mechanism	Primary Function	Observed Contribution
Competency Mapping	Identify skill gaps	Targeted development planning
Performance Evaluation	Measure achievement	Improved accountability
Talent Pool Identification	Recognize high-potential employees	Leadership succession support
Professional Training Programs	Enhance competencies	Increased organizational capacity
Career Development Planning	Align talent with organizational needs	Stronger employee motivation

Analysis of Table 3 demonstrates that competency development is increasingly embedded within broader talent management structures. Competency mapping and performance evaluation provide the foundation for evidence-based human resource decisions. Such integration strengthens the relationship between individual development and organizational performance. Similar observations have been reported in studies examining merit-based public sector management systems (Septiningrum et al., 2024).

Interview findings also revealed that sustainable competency development requires continuous organizational learning. Informants stressed that rapid technological and administrative changes create ongoing demands for skill enhancement. Employees acknowledged that competencies acquired through formal training require continuous updating to remain relevant. The importance of lifelong learning has become a recurring theme in discussions concerning adaptive bureaucratic reform (Yasa et al., 2021).

Another significant finding concerns the role of strategic planning in supporting competency development. Institutional documents indicate that competency enhancement programs are integrated into the strategic agenda of the Regional Human Resource Development Agency. Development priorities are linked to organizational performance targets and long-term governance objectives. The Strategic Plan of the Regional Human Resource Development Agency for 2025–2029 identifies competency development as a key pillar of bureaucratic modernization and institutional strengthening (Badan Pengembangan Sumber Daya Manusia Provinsi Kepulauan Riau, 2025).

The findings further suggest that bureaucratic transformation involves a gradual transition from traditional personnel administration toward strategic human capital management. Competency development, talent management, and merit system implementation increasingly function as interconnected components of organizational reform. Employees and managers alike recognized the importance of aligning individual capabilities with institutional needs. Such alignment reflects broader shifts in public administration toward performance-oriented and competency-based governance models (Komisi Aparatur Sipil Negara, 2023).

Evidence derived from interviews, observations, and documentary analysis demonstrates that merit-based talent management plays a critical role in sustaining bureaucratic transformation within the Riau Islands Province. Competency development initiatives are increasingly supported by structured assessment systems, strategic planning mechanisms, and organizational learning processes. The findings indicate that sustainable bureaucratic reform depends not only on regulatory change but also on the continuous development of human capital capable of responding to evolving governance challenges. Comparable conclusions have been reported in studies addressing talent management, merit systems, and competency-based public sector transformation in Indonesia (Septiningrum et al., 2024; Al et al., 2025; Lubis et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that bureaucratic transformation in the Riau Islands Province is closely associated with the strengthening of human resource competencies through institutional reform, digital capacity development, and merit-based talent management. The transformation process has shifted the orientation of civil service management from administrative compliance toward strategic competency development that supports organizational adaptability and public service improvement. Regulatory support, leadership commitment, competency-based planning, and digital learning initiatives have collectively contributed to creating a more responsive and professional bureaucracy. The implementation of webinars, online training programs, competency assessments, and talent management mechanisms has expanded opportunities for civil servants to enhance their knowledge, skills, and professional capabilities in accordance with evolving governance demands.

The study further reveals that sustainable bureaucratic transformation requires the integration of competency development within broader organizational and strategic management frameworks. Digital competencies, continuous learning practices, and merit system implementation function not only as instruments for individual capacity enhancement but also as mechanisms for strengthening institutional performance and governance effectiveness. The empirical evidence highlights that competency development becomes more impactful when supported by coherent policies, adaptive leadership, and systematic talent management processes. These findings contribute to the growing body of knowledge on public sector transformation by providing contextual insights from an archipelagic provincial government and emphasizing the importance of human capital development as a fundamental driver of bureaucratic modernization and long-term administrative resilience.

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