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Citation: Hidayat, B. A., Erlyn, P., & Saksono, H. (2026). Strengthening the Civil Service Merit System through Assessment Center Governance and the Utilization of Assessment Results: A Multi-Case Study Synthesis in the Palembang City Government. *Jurnal Bina Praja*, 18(2), 301–316. <https://doi.org/10.21787/jbp.18.2026.3430>

Submitted: 18 July 2026

Accepted: 6 August 2026

Published: 13 August 2026

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ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

Strengthening the Civil Service Merit System through Assessment Center Governance and the Utilization of Assessment Results

A Multi-Case Study Synthesis in the Palembang City Government

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Abstract: The merit system is central to Indonesia's bureaucratic reform agenda, which seeks professional, objective, and competency-based civil service governance. The assessment center is among the principal instruments developed to support it, yet many local governments still struggle to ensure that assessment results actually inform personnel decisions. This study analyzes the relationship between assessment center implementation and the utilization of assessment results in strengthening the civil service merit system in the Palembang City Government, and formulates a governance model integrating the two. A qualitative multi-case design was used. The first case examined assessment center implementation at the Palembang City Civil Service and Human Resources Development Agency; the second examined the utilization of assessment results. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentary analysis of regulations, official reports, and institutional records, and their credibility was established through source triangulation. The data were analyzed using thematic cross-case synthesis. The findings indicate that assessment center implementation is supported by institutional arrangements, regulations, and relatively adequate assessment mechanisms, but that assessment results are not yet fully utilized in personnel decision-making, resulting in a gap between the institutional capacity of the assessment center and the utilization of its outputs within the merit system. The study proposes an integrated assessment governance model comprising institutional capacity, competency intelligence, governance integration, and merit system strengthening, and offers it as a reference for competency-based talent management policy and for sustaining merit system implementation at the local level.

Keywords: assessment center governance; utilization of assessment results; merit system; civil service.

1. Introduction

One of the Indonesian government's strategic agendas is bureaucratic reform to realize good governance. The civil service is positioned as the primary actor determining the success of government administration; therefore, the management of civil service human resources must be carried out based on the principles of competence, performance, and integrity (Maysura, 2025). Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 20 Tahun 2023 tentang Aparatur Sipil Negara [Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 20 of 2023 on the State Civil Apparatus] stipulates that civil service management must be implemented on the basis of the merit system, namely a policy and management system founded on qualifications, competence, and performance, and implemented fairly and reasonably without discrimination based on political background, race, religion, origin, gender, marital status, age, or disability. The merit system serves as the foundation for building a professional bureaucracy while improving the quality of public services (Dewi et al., 2023).

The implementation of the merit system requires instruments capable of providing objective information on civil servants' competencies as a basis for decision-making in personnel management (Saputra, 2023). One of the most widely used instruments is the assessment center, a competency assessment method conducted through a series of simulations, competency-based interviews, psychological tests, case studies, and other assessment techniques designed to measure individual capabilities comprehensively. In civil service management practice, the assessment center is used not only for the selection of senior leadership positions but also as the basis for promotion, transfer, career development, talent pool development, and planning to address employees' competency development needs (Elazhari & Siregar, 2025). The assessment center therefore occupies a strategic position in supporting the implementation of the merit system.

The implementation of assessment centers has become one of the strategies widely adopted by local governments to support the merit system in civil service management. However, the establishment of an assessment center does not automatically guarantee the successful implementation of the merit system. Many local governments have established assessment center units and conducted periodic competency assessments for civil servants, yet assessment results have not always been utilized optimally in personnel decision-making processes. In several cases, discrepancies remain between competency assessment results and job placement decisions, indicating that assessment centers have not fully functioned as objective instruments for talent management. This condition suggests that the primary challenge lies not only in the quality of assessment implementation but also in the governance of assessment centers, which encompasses planning, assessment implementation, utilization of assessment results, inter-organizational coordination, and personnel decision-making mechanisms (Fadilla, 2025).

The merit system aims to ensure that all aspects of civil service management, including promotion, transfer, and career development, are conducted on the basis of competence, qualifications, and performance in an objective, transparent, and accountable manner. Within this framework, the assessment center serves as a strategic instrument for generating competency information that supports personnel decision-making. The effectiveness of an assessment center is therefore determined not only by the validity and reliability of its assessment instruments but also by governance arrangements that ensure assessment results are consistently, transparently, and accountably incorporated into every personnel management decision.

The Palembang City Government, through the Badan Kepegawaian dan Pengembangan Sumber Daya Manusia Kota Palembang [Palembang City Civil Service and Human Resources Development Agency] (BKPSDM), has implemented an assessment center as part of its competency-based civil service management policy. Nevertheless, field observations conducted for this study indicate that the implementation of the assessment center continues to face several challenges that may affect its effectiveness in strengthening the merit system. First, the competence and number of assessment center personnel remain insufficient to support comprehensive and sustainable assessment implementation. Second, the assessment center is still largely perceived as an administrative and procedural requirement, so that its strategic role as a competency-based human resource management instrument is not yet fully institutionalized. Third, although the organizational structure and standard operating procedures have been established, coordination among organizational units in utilizing assessment results for promotion, transfer, and career development has yet to function optimally. These conditions indicate a gap between the intended objectives of merit system implementation and the actual practice of assessment center implementation within the Palembang City Government.

Previous studies have examined assessment centers from various perspectives. Some have focused on the implementation of assessment center policies in supporting competency-based civil service management, while others have emphasized the effectiveness of utilizing assessment results for the promotion, transfer, and career development of civil servants (Assidiqie & Sakapurnama, 2025; Matindas et al., 2024). Further studies have discussed the implementation of the merit system as part of bureaucratic reform and the improvement of human resource management quality in the public sector (Novitasari et al., 2025; Rizke et al., 2025). These findings contribute to explaining the function of assessment centers; most of them, however, still treat policy implementation, utilization of assessment results, and the merit system as separate issues, and therefore do not yet provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationships among these components.

These limitations indicate that the challenges surrounding the implementation of assessment centers extend beyond the technical aspects of conducting competency assessments. They also involve the governance framework that regulates the interrelationships among regulatory policies, institutional arrangements, assessment implementation, the utilization of assessment results, and personnel decision-making processes. A more comprehensive perspective is therefore needed to understand how assessment center governance contributes to strengthening the merit system.

2. Methods

This study employed a multi-case study approach to analyze assessment center governance in the Palembang City Government. This approach was selected because the study does not merely aim to describe policy implementation within a single organization but also to analyze the relationships among phenomena occurring in two interrelated units of analysis within civil service management governance. Through a multi-case study design, the research is able to produce a deeper empirical synthesis than a single-case study, particularly in explaining how policy implementation contributes to competency-based personnel decision-making practices. The analysis covered the successive stages of assessment center implementation, from policy implementation, assessment processes, and utilization

of assessment results, to their contribution to strengthening the civil service merit system.

The research was conducted at the Palembang City Government during the period January–June 2026 with two units of analysis. The first unit of analysis was BKPSDM, as the organization responsible for conducting the assessment center. The second unit of analysis was Kalidoni subdistrict, as a representation of the utilization of assessment results in the placement of urban village head (*lurah*) positions. The selection of these two units of analysis was based on the functional relationship between the competency assessment implementation process and the utilization of assessment results in the implementation of the merit system. This study therefore does not view the two cases as independent phenomena but as a series of interconnected governance processes in civil service management.

Research informants were selected using purposive sampling, based on their level of knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in the implementation and utilization of the assessment center. The informants are presented in [Table 1](#).

Table 1. Informants of the Study

Informant Group	Selection Criteria	Number	Code
Officials of the Badan Kepegawaian dan Pengembangan Sumber Daya Manusia Kota Palembang [Palembang City Civil Service and Human Resources Development Agency]	Hold authority in formulating policies and managing civil service affairs and in organizing the assessment center in the Palembang City Government	1	A1
Assessor	Directly involved in the civil servant competency assessment process, from conducting assessments to preparing recommendations from assessment results	1	A2
Head of the Civil Service Competency Development Division	Responsible for planning, coordinating, and implementing civil servant competency development, including the implementation of the assessment center	1	A3
Head of the Unit Pelaksana Teknis Daerah Assessment Center Kota Palembang [Palembang City Assessment Center Regional Technical Implementation Unit]	Responsible for managing assessment center operations, from planning and implementation to managing assessment results	1	A4
Civil Servants Directly Involved in Assessment Implementation	Have participated in the assessment center and have direct experience with the assessment process and the utilization of assessment results	1	A5
Subdistrict Head	Has participated in the assessment center and serves as a user of assessment results in career development or structural position placement	1	A6
Urban Village Head	Has participated in the assessment center and has experience with competency assessment implementation in civil service management	1	A7
Total		7	

Source: Field data, processed (2026).

Data collection continued until information saturation was reached, at which point additional interviews no longer produced substantially different findings. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentary analysis of regulations, official reports, and institutional records, covering assessment center implementation, the utilization of assessment results, factors influencing personnel decisions, and merit system implementation.

Data analysis was conducted through within-case analysis to examine assessment center implementation and the utilization of assessment results at BKPSDM, followed by cross-case analysis to identify the patterns, relationships, and mechanisms linking assessment center governance to the strengthening of the merit system.

Trustworthiness was established through source, technique, and time triangulation, as well as member checking with key informants. An audit trail was

also maintained to document the research process and to strengthen the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the findings.

The analytical process produced a conceptual synthesis of the relationship between assessment center implementation and the utilization of assessment results, which became the foundation for developing the integrated assessment governance model as a framework for incorporating competency information into civil service talent management, promotion, transfer, career development, and position placement.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Governance of the Assessment Center in Competency-Based Civil Service Management

The governance of the assessment center in the Palembang City Government forms part of the implementation of competency-based civil service management aimed at supporting the merit system. The assessment center functions as a strategic instrument for generating objective competency information as a basis for decision-making in personnel management (Hidayat, Faturohim, et al., 2024; Maysura, 2025).

The governance of the assessment center in the Palembang City Government can also be reflected in the annual number of civil servants participating in competency assessments, which indicates that the assessment center has become an integral part of civil service human resource management.

Table 2. Palembang City Civil Servants Participating in Competency Assessment at the Assessment Center, 2022–2025

No.	Year	Number of Participants
1	2022	137
2	2023	128
3	2024	68
4	2025	113
Total		446

Source: Badan Kepegawaian dan Pengembangan Sumber Daya Manusia Kota Palembang [Palembang City Civil Service and Human Resources Development Agency], data processed (2026).

Table 2 shows that a total of 446 civil servants in the Palembang City Government participated in competency assessments through the assessment center from 2022 to 2025. Participation fluctuated from year to year rather than following a sustained upward trend, declining from 137 in 2022 to 68 in 2024 before recovering to 113 in 2025. This pattern indicates that assessment center implementation was adjusted to organizational needs and civil service management processes at different times. These data indicate that the assessment center has become part of the civil service human resource management mechanism supporting competency mapping as a basis for career development and position placement.

The implementation of the assessment center in the Palembang City Government rests on a defined regulatory foundation. The unit was established by Peraturan Walikota Palembang Nomor 8 Tahun 2022 tentang Pembentukan, Susunan Organisasi, Uraian Tugas dan Fungsi, serta Tata Kerja Unit Pelaksana Teknis Daerah Assessment Center Kota Palembang pada Badan Kepegawaian dan Pengembangan Sumber Daya Manusia Kota Palembang [Palembang Mayoral Regulation No. 8 of 2022 on the Establishment, Organizational Structure, Duties and Functions, and Working Procedures of the Palembang City Assessment Center Regional Technical

Implementation Unit at the Palembang City Civil Service and Human Resources Development Agency]; the unit established by that regulation is referred to below as the UPTD Assessment Center. BKPSDM plays a central role in formulating policies and implementation mechanisms for the assessment center within the Palembang City Government. It is also responsible for coordinating the implementation of assessments, setting job competency standards, and ensuring that assessment results are utilized objectively and transparently in civil service management.

BKPSDM acts as the body responsible for formulating policies, technical guidelines, and implementation mechanisms for the assessment center to ensure they comply with legislation and the organization's needs. Furthermore, BKPSDM is also tasked with coordinating the implementation of assessments, establishing job competency standards, and ensuring that assessment results can be utilized in civil service management in an objective and transparent manner. (A1)

These findings indicate that the implementation of the assessment center by the Palembang City Government is underpinned by an adequate regulatory and governance framework. The role of BKPSDM is not limited to organizing assessment activities but also encompasses the development of systems and mechanisms that ensure the assessment process is conducted in a standardized and accountable manner, aligned with the organization's needs and the principles of the merit system.

The Civil Service Competency Development Division plays a strategic role in supporting the implementation of the assessment center as part of civil service human resource development.

The Civil Service Competency Development Division plays a role in supporting the implementation of the assessment center through the formulation of civil service competency development programs, the coordination of assessment requirements, and the utilization of assessment results as a basis for planning civil service training and career development. Furthermore, this division also plays a role in ensuring that assessment results can be integrated into sustainable civil service human resource development. (A3)

These findings indicate that the assessment center in the Palembang City Government not only serves as a tool for assessing competencies but also forms the basis for the formulation of civil service competency development policies that are more targeted, sustainable, and aligned with the organization's needs.

Coordination between units within BKPSDM is one of the key mechanisms supporting the utilization of assessment center results in civil service management. Coordination is carried out by communicating assessment results to the relevant units, holding coordination meetings, and discussing organizational needs and civil service development strategies.

Coordination with other units within BKPSDM is carried out through the dissemination of assessment results, coordination meetings, and discussions regarding organizational needs and civil service development. Assessment

results are used as a basis for consideration in staff transfers, promotions, competency development, and civil service talent mapping, so that personnel decisions are more objective and aligned with job requirements. (A2)

These findings indicate that internal coordination within BKPSDM plays a role in integrating assessment center results into various civil service management functions. The assessment results serve as strategic information supporting competency-based decision-making, thereby strengthening the implementation of the merit system in civil service human resource management.

The interview findings indicate that the availability and competence of human resources at the UPTD Assessment Center remain among the challenges to its effective operation. The limited number of certified assessors, administrative staff, and assessment result analysts affects the unit's capacity to conduct assessments comprehensively and sustainably.

The number and competence of human resources at the UPTD Assessment Center generally remain a challenge to the comprehensive and sustainable implementation of assessments. The limited number of certified assessors, administrative staff, and assessment result analysts can affect the effectiveness of implementation. Furthermore, the need for specific competencies, such as the ability to observe behavior, develop assessment instruments, and interpret assessment results, requires continuous capacity building of human resources through training and certification. (A4)

These findings indicate that strengthening human resource capacity is a key prerequisite for improving the quality of assessment center operations. In addition to ensuring adequate staffing levels, enhancing competencies through training and assessor certification, as well as developing skills in instrument design, behavioral observation, and the interpretation of assessment results, is necessary to ensure that assessments are conducted in an objective, reliable, and accountable manner.

The institutional capacity of the assessment center rests in part on its assessors. The informants reported that the assessment process must often be conducted in stages, because the number of participants is high relative to the number of assessors available.

Table 3. Assessors at the Unit Pelaksana Teknis Daerah Assessment Center Kota Palembang [Palembang City Assessment Center Regional Technical Implementation Unit], 2026

No.	Assessor Grade	Number
1	Ahli Pertama [First Expert Assessor]	1
2	Ahli Muda [Young Expert Assessor]	1
3	Ahli Madya [Middle Expert Assessor]	2
Total		4

Source: Badan Kepegawaian dan Pengembangan Sumber Daya Manusia Kota Palembang [Palembang City Civil Service and Human Resources Development Agency], data processed (2026).

Table 3 shows that the UPTD Assessment Center is supported by four assessors across the Ahli Pertama, Ahli Muda, and Ahli Madya grades. The presence of assessors at different grades enables the assessment process to be carried out

professionally through a distribution of tasks based on experience and competence, supporting the objectivity and credibility of competency assessment results. The composition nevertheless remains small relative to the volume of participants reported in [Table 2](#).

The implementation of the assessment center proceeds through several assessment stages designed to identify participants' competencies through observation of behavior, communication skills, and problem-solving abilities.

I understand that the assessment center is not merely a matter of fulfilling administrative procedures but serves as a tool for mapping the competencies, potential, and development needs of civil servants. Through the assessment, their strengths and weaknesses can be identified, which can then form the basis for future career development and the enhancement of their competencies. (A5)

These findings indicate that the assessment process allows participants to demonstrate managerial ability, leadership ability, communication skills, decision-making ability, and problem-solving skills appropriate to workplace situations. The assessment process is conducted professionally using predetermined competency indicators. Several participants nevertheless noted that the process requires careful preparation because all activities are assessed comprehensively by assessors.

The implementation of the assessment center is based on the principles of objectivity and established competency standards. The diversity of assessment methods allows each competency to be evaluated more comprehensively, producing an individual competency profile that can be used as a basis for civil service development. These findings indicate that regulations, organizational arrangements, assessor competence, assessment instruments, and budgetary support collectively represent the institutional capacity required for effective assessment center governance.

3.2. Implementation of the Assessment Center in Civil Service Management

The implementation of a merit system in civil service management requires mechanisms capable of producing objective and measurable competency information to support accountable decision-making. The assessment center is no longer positioned merely as an instrument for selecting candidates for positions but as part of a human resource governance system that provides a competency-based foundation for personnel decision-making. The research findings indicate that the Palembang City Government has established the institutional foundation of the assessment center through the establishment of the UPTD Assessment Center within BKPSDM, the development of operational standards for assessment implementation, the provision of assessors, and the development of competency assessment mechanisms referring to national regulations. This condition demonstrates organizational commitment to supporting the implementation of the merit system through strengthening institutional capacity.

From a policy implementation perspective, the existence of regulations and organizational structures provides legitimacy for the implementation of the assessment center. Regulations serve as instruments that ensure procedural certainty, while organizational structures ensure a clear distribution of tasks and responsibilities at each stage of the assessment process. The research findings

indicate that competency assessments have been carried out systematically, from participant selection and planning, competency simulations, and behavioral observation to the preparation of assessment result reports and the submission of recommendations to the Pejabat Pembina Kepegawaian [Civil Service Supervisory Officer]. This mechanism indicates that the assessment center has been implemented procedurally in accordance with the principles of objectivity, accountability, and professionalism (Erlyn et al., 2022; Matindas et al., 2024).

The assessment center not only evaluates technical and managerial competencies but also identifies behavioral characteristics, decision-making abilities, emotional control, interpersonal communication skills, and the ability to work under pressure. These competencies represent important components of individual readiness in carrying out leadership responsibilities.

Nevertheless, the research findings also indicate that institutional readiness has not yet been fully matched by adequate organizational capacity. One of the main challenges is the limited number of certified assessors relative to the growing need for competency mapping. This condition affects the frequency of assessment implementation and the number of participants who can take part in the assessment center. In addition, the development of assessor competencies, improvement of assessment facilities, and continuity of budgetary support remain factors influencing the effectiveness of assessment center implementation. The success of policy implementation is determined not only by the existence of regulations and organizational structures but also by the organization's ability to provide sufficient resources to ensure the sustainability of assessment services.

Another finding that emerged was the commitment of BKPSDM leadership to developing the assessment center as part of civil service management reform. This commitment is reflected in efforts to expand assessment coverage, improve assessor quality, and encourage the utilization of assessment results in various employee development policies. The assessment center is not only utilized to fulfill requirements for position promotion but also as an instrument to map the potential and competencies of civil servants, enabling the local government to have a more objective basis for planning employee career development. The assessment center has begun to be understood as a center of competency intelligence rather than merely an organizer of competency tests. This shift is an important prerequisite for strengthening the merit system, because it enables the organization to obtain more comprehensive information regarding the capacity, potential, and development needs of each employee.

The interview findings indicate that the appointment of urban village heads has generally taken into account the alignment of competencies with the demands of the position. One informant emphasized, "So far, appointments have been in line with the required competencies, but these could be complemented by consideration of the ability to demonstrate leadership and serve the community." (A6)

These findings suggest that the appropriateness of urban village head appointments is determined not only by the alignment of competencies with the role but also by leadership competencies and social skills in building relationships with the community.

The interview findings indicate that, at the time of the research, there had been no changes in position following participation in the assessment center. The informants nevertheless considered that their current positions were aligned with their competencies, supported by their background in public administration.

To date, there have been no changes in position following the assessment. My current position is in line with my competencies because I am a graduate of STPDN [Sekolah Tinggi Pemerintahan Dalam Negeri, the national college of home affairs governance, now the Institut Pemerintahan Dalam Negeri]. (A7)

These findings indicate that the results of the assessment center do not always lead directly to changes in position. Position assignments are nevertheless perceived to have taken competency alignment and educational background into account, reflecting the principle of “the right person in the right position.”

From the perspective of policy implementation theory, these findings indicate that the success of assessment center implementation cannot be measured solely by the completion of assessment activities but also by the organization’s ability to build an institutional environment that supports the sustainable utilization of assessment results. Communication among actors, adequacy of resources, commitment of implementers, and a clear bureaucratic structure interact with one another in determining the quality of policy implementation. The implementation of the assessment center is a complex institutional process that requires comprehensive organizational support in order to generate strategic benefits for civil service management (Hidayat, Apriliana, et al., 2024; Novitasari et al., 2025).

The findings of this study reinforce previous studies indicating that assessment centers are effective instruments for generating more objective competency information than conventional assessment approaches. However, this study also indicates that the success of assessment implementation does not automatically result in the strengthening of the merit system. The institutional capacity developed still needs to be complemented by mechanisms capable of integrating assessment results into personnel decision-making processes. The success of assessment center implementation should be understood as a prerequisite for the merit system rather than the final objective of civil service management reform (Widodo & Idris, 2025).

Conceptually, these findings indicate that the strategic function of the assessment center does not end with providing competency information but also extends to serving as a foundation for talent management development within local government institutions. Higher-quality assessment center implementation provides greater opportunities for organizations to develop career development policies that are objective, transparent, and evidence-based (Sobandi, 2019). Strengthening the institutional capacity of the assessment center should be positioned as a long-term investment in building a professional bureaucracy that is adaptive to the demands of bureaucratic reform and modern governance. These findings indicate that competency assessment results function as strategic competency intelligence and constitute the governance integration dimension by linking competency information with personnel management processes.

3.3. Utilization of Assessment Center Results in Competency-Based Placement

The effectiveness of the assessment center is determined not only by the implementation of competency assessments but also by the extent to which assessment results are utilized in personnel decision-making. The Palembang City Government has used assessment center results as a consideration in filling administrator, supervisory, and urban village head positions by providing information

on competencies, potential, and leadership capacity. Assessment results have not yet become the sole basis for decision-making, however, because position placement still considers other factors, such as organizational needs, work experience, performance records, and leadership considerations.

This condition indicates a gap between the normative function and the empirical function of the assessment center. Normatively, assessment results are expected to become the primary basis for implementing the merit system. Empirically, however, assessment results more often serve as supporting information rather than the main determinant in decision-making processes. This finding indicates that the transformation toward a merit-based system requires not only high-quality assessment instruments but also changes in organizational culture and stronger leadership commitment to making competency information the primary foundation of personnel policies (R. Firdaus et al., 2025; Simanullang, 2025).

Interviews with the informants reinforced these findings. Most informants stated that assessment results have provided benefits in mapping competencies and assisting in identifying potential candidates for positions. They also acknowledged, however, that final decisions continue to consider the actual conditions of the organization and public service needs. Based on interviews with A1 and A3, assessment center results serve as an important reference in the position placement process because they provide information regarding competencies and potential. Both informants explained that position placement decisions are not based solely on assessment results but also consider organizational needs, work experience, track records, and employee readiness to carry out duties in accordance with regional characteristics and institutional requirements.

These statements indicate that the local government seeks to balance a competency-based approach with organizational needs. From a public management perspective, this condition can be understood because public sector organizations face greater complexity than private organizations. The placement of officials is determined not only by competency alignment but also by organizational stability, the characteristics of the work area, and the need to provide services to the community.

However, if assessment results do not receive adequate weight in the decision-making process, the strategic function of the assessment center as an instrument for implementing the merit system will be diminished. Competency information generated through a systematic assessment process has the potential to lose its strategic value if it is not consistently utilized in personnel policies. This condition may ultimately reduce employees' trust in the objectivity of the merit system and weaken motivation to develop competencies through the mechanisms provided by the organization (M. R. Firdaus, 2025; Syafriyani & Kurli, 2023).

From the perspective of public policy evaluation, these findings indicate that the utilization of assessment results still faces challenges in terms of effectiveness, appropriateness, and responsiveness. Effectiveness has not been fully achieved because assessment results have not yet become the dominant basis for all personnel decisions. In terms of appropriateness, the assessment mechanism has generated relevant information; however, it has not always been utilized at appropriate stages of the decision-making process. In terms of responsiveness, the organization has demonstrated a commitment to utilizing assessment results, although the utilization of assessment results is still influenced by various organizational dynamics (Fadilla, 2025; Hidayat et al., 2023).

The findings of this study indicate that strengthening the merit system requires a shift in organizational orientation from merely conducting assessments to managing competency information as a strategic organizational asset. The success of the assessment center should not be measured only by the number of participants assessed or the number of reports generated but by the extent to which assessment results are actually utilized in the processes of promotion, transfer, position placement, talent development, and workforce planning.

These findings also extend previous studies that generally position assessment centers as competency assessment instruments. The strategic value of the assessment center lies in its capacity to support evidence-based personnel decision-making. Improving the quality of the merit system cannot be achieved solely through the refinement of assessment mechanisms but must be accompanied by strengthening governance to ensure that assessment results are consistently utilized throughout the civil service management cycle.

Cross-case analysis was conducted to understand the relationship between assessment center implementation as a competency assessment process and the utilization of assessment results in personnel decision-making. Unlike case-specific analysis, which focuses on the characteristics of each unit of analysis, cross-case analysis aims to identify patterns of relationships, similarities, differences, and mechanisms that explain how assessment center implementation contributes to strengthening the merit system in the Palembang City Government.

3.4. Synthesis of Assessment Center Governance in Strengthening the Merit System

The findings indicate that the Palembang City Government has established institutional capacity for the assessment center through regulations, organizational support, assessors, and competency-based assessment mechanisms. The utilization of assessment results in civil service management nevertheless remains limited, because personnel decisions continue to consider various other factors, resulting in an implementation–utilization gap. The success of the assessment center should therefore not be measured only by operational indicators but by its capacity to transform competency information into objective, transparent, and evidence-based personnel decisions.

From a governance perspective, this condition indicates that the assessment center should be positioned as part of the civil service talent management system rather than as a unit that operates administratively and separately from the personnel management process. The competency information generated needs to be connected with workforce needs planning systems, competency development, performance management, succession planning, and career evaluation. Without such integration, assessment results have the potential to become merely documentary information and may not generate substantive changes in the quality of personnel decision-making (Kusumawardani et al., 2025; Sumiati et al., 2024).

The cross-case analysis indicates that the strengthening of the merit system depends on the interaction between assessment center implementation and the utilization of assessment results, and that leadership commitment influences the extent to which that interaction is sustained. Competency information becomes valuable only when it is integrated into civil service management decisions. Strengthening the merit system therefore requires a shift from an assessment-oriented approach to evidence-based talent governance, in which assessment results serve as strategic assets for talent development, promotion, placement, and

succession planning. The main challenge is not the implementation of assessments but ensuring consistent governance and utilization of assessment results in personnel decision-making. These findings indicate that the merit system is strengthened when competency information is consistently integrated into transparent, objective, and accountable personnel decision-making, thereby reinforcing professionalism and organizational performance.

Based on the synthesis of the two cases, this study develops the integrated assessment governance model as a conceptual framework for explaining the relationship between assessment center implementation, the utilization of assessment results, and the strengthening of the merit system within an integrated governance framework—a scope wider than assessment center governance alone, since it extends beyond the unit to the utilization of its outputs in personnel decision-making. The model rests on the understanding that the assessment center is not merely a unit responsible for conducting competency assessments but a strategic node connecting the processes of competency identification, talent management, and evidence-based personnel decision-making.

The cross-case synthesis indicates that the findings can be grouped into four interrelated governance dimensions. These dimensions emerged inductively from the analysis of institutional arrangements, assessment implementation, competency information utilization, and personnel decision-making. The synthesis indicates that strengthening the merit system depends on the interaction among these governance dimensions, which collectively form the proposed integrated assessment governance model.

The model consists of four components. The first component is institutional capacity, which includes regulations, organizational structure, standard operating procedures, assessor competence, assessment instruments, and budgetary support. Institutional capacity functions as the foundation that ensures the assessment process is conducted objectively, reliably, and accountably. Without adequate institutional capacity, assessment results will not have sufficient legitimacy to serve as a basis for personnel policies.

The second component is competency intelligence, which refers to assessment-generated data on competencies, leadership potential, and individual development needs that should be managed as a strategic organizational asset within the civil service management system. The third component is governance integration, which connects assessment results with civil service management processes, including placement, promotion, transfer, competency development, succession planning, and talent management. This study indicates that the main challenge in the Palembang City Government is not the quality of assessment implementation but the limited integration of competency information into personnel policies and decision-making processes.

The fourth component is merit system strengthening, which refers to a condition in which all personnel decisions are based on the principles of objectivity, transparency, accountability, competency suitability, and organizational needs. Within this component, the merit system is understood not merely as compliance with regulations but as an organizational culture that makes competence the primary basis for civil service management. Strengthening the merit system is, in turn, expected to lead to greater professionalism, greater organizational effectiveness, improved public service quality, and greater public trust in local government bureaucracy (Elazhari & Siregar, 2025; Hidayat et al., 2021).

Based on these relationships, this study argues that the effectiveness of the assessment center should be measured not only by the number of assessments conducted or participants involved but by the extent to which assessment results are utilized in personnel decision-making. The integrated assessment governance model offers a perspective that integrates institutional capacity, competency intelligence, governance integration, and merit system strengthening, in which competency information informs evidence-based personnel policies (Assidiqie & Sakapurnama, 2025; Dewi et al., 2023; Hidayat, Supartoyo, et al., 2024; Limariana et al., 2024). Practically, local governments need to strengthen mechanisms that integrate assessment center results with talent management and personnel information systems to support objective, adaptive, and sustainable civil service management.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that assessment center governance plays a key role in strengthening the civil service merit system in the Palembang City Government through the integration of policy implementation, assessment processes, utilization of assessment results, and competency-based decision-making. The effectiveness of the assessment center is determined not only by the quality of assessment implementation but also by the consistency with which assessment results are used in the processes of promotion, transfer, rotation, and career development. The synthesis of research findings yielded an integrated assessment governance model consisting of four main components—institutional capacity, competency intelligence, governance integration, and merit system strengthening—which collectively support the strengthening of the merit system in civil service management.

The Palembang City Government needs to strengthen assessment center governance by strengthening the utilization of assessment results as a primary basis for civil service management decisions, improving institutional capacity and assessor competence, and integrating assessment center results with talent management and personnel information systems. Consistent commitment from the Pejabat Pembina Kepegawaian [Civil Service Supervisory Officer] and all stakeholders is also required to ensure that every decision regarding promotion, transfer, and career development is implemented in accordance with merit system principles. Future research is recommended to validate the model in other local governments or government institutions in order to obtain broader empirical validation and to further develop the model for application at the national level.

DECLARATIONS

AI Use Statement

The author used ChatGPT only for analysis, and final writing remain the responsibility of the authors.

Author Contributions

B.A.H.: conceptualization, methodology, writing-original draft; P.E.: data curation, formal analysis, visualization; H.S.: supervision, validation, writing-review & editing.

Funding

The authors received no specific funding for this research.

Competing Interests

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest related to the publication of this article.

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