

The relationships amongst career patterns, neutrality and organizational performance: the case of local government organizations in South Konawe District, Indonesia

Career patterns, neutrality and performance

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to investigate the relationships amongst career patterns, neutrality of the state civil apparatus, and organizational performance of the local government in South Konawe District, Southeast Sulawesi Province in Indonesia.

Design/methodology/approach – Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to investigate the relationships between variables through direct and indirect influence testing.

Findings – The findings reveal that career patterns influence neutrality and organizational performance. Neutrality of the state civil apparatus in politics mediates career patterns and local government organizational performance. The findings indicate that, first, promotions most significantly influence the organization's neutrality and performance. Second, demotions have the least influence on the organization's robustness and performance.

Originality/value – This paper is among the first to examine the relationships amongst career patterns, neutrality, and organizational performance. Recommendations are provided to improve neutrality and organizational performance, that is, the need to increase promotions and reduce demotions.

Keywords Career patterns, Neutrality of state civil apparatus, Organizational performance, Indonesia

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Improving the performance of government organizations that provide public services is a universal demand of citizens worldwide. In countries with democratic systems, government leaders who enjoy strong public support are expected to improve the quality of governance (Charron and Lapuente, 2010; Tavits, 2006). Moreover, satisfactory performance of government organizations is essential for attracting investors, as studies on developing



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countries demonstrate that those with good governance receive the majority of investments ([Morrissey and Udomkerdmongkol, 2012](#)). The development of suitable government organizations is also a demand for donor countries and international institutions in allocating foreign aids ([Johnson and Zajonc, 2006](#)).

Organizational performance is influenced by several factors. [Shiu and Yu \(2010\)](#) identify a correlation between organizational performance and factors such as marketing, organizational culture, and job satisfaction. Organizational performance is also related to knowledge management ([Rasula et al., 2012](#)), work environment ([Chandrasekar, 2011](#)), leadership style ([Ejere and Abasilim, 2013](#)), motivation ([Muogbo, 2013](#)), emotional intelligence ([Suan et al., 2015](#)), and organizational learning ([Yeo, 2003](#)). Furthermore, [Higgins and Dillon \(2007\)](#) assert that career patterns significantly influence organizational performance. [Kim \(2020\)](#) explains that employees who are promoted may encourage better organizational performance.

A person's career patterns are influenced by various factors. [Zuckerman \(1978\)](#) identified structural factors affecting access to career patterns in his study of medical officers in the United States. Another study by [Xie et al. \(2022\)](#) in China found that age, tenure, job type, career development awareness, legal awareness, professional mentality, psychological training, and career development paths are important factors affecting employee career promotion. In government bureaucracies, career progression, typically in the form of promotions, is influenced by both formal and informal factors. Formally, the recruitment and promotion process of civil servants is based on merit and less on seniority considerations, although political criteria and representativeness can be important selection criteria ([Veit, 2020](#)). Informally, promotions are strongly influenced by position, family relationships, membership in organizations, similar hobbies, wives, and friendship. [Coates and Pellegrin \(1957\)](#) mentioned that informal factors are often considered when formal rules are unclear.

[Rosen et al. \(2006\)](#) found that low political engagement has positive implications for organizational performance, whereas higher political engagement has negative implications for organizational performance. This finding appears to reflect the perception of many people that political involvement has a negative impact on organizational performance. Contrary to this assumption, [Solís and Monroy \(2015\)](#) determined that political involvement has a positive influence on organizational performance.

These studies indicate that organizational performance and career patterns are influenced by several factors and indicate relationships between them. However, none of these studies investigated the relationships amongst career patterns, neutrality, and organizational performance. A general unresolved issue is the influence of career patterns when faced by the non-neutrality of civil servants in politics. Will the career patterns become better or vice versa? How will this influence the performance of civil servants in government organizations? Examining these questions underlies the importance of this research, which includes the neutrality variable of the state civil apparatus as a mediator between career patterns and organizational performance.

The importance of testing the neutrality variable in mediating career patterns and the performance of government organizations in Indonesia is relevant, considering that the history of bureaucracy in Indonesia is closely related to politics. The strong political influence in Indonesian bureaucracy is inseparable from the history of bureaucratic formation. According to [Mageda \(1989\)](#), the bureaucracy during Indonesia's colonial era was inherited from the aristocracy. After independence, when the old order was in power, the bureaucracy included political party partisans ([Rozi, 2006](#)). This indicates that since its inception, the Indonesian bureaucracy has not reflected professional characteristic. Indonesia's recruitment system is considered far behind that of Singapore, which consistently promotes employees according to merit, and it is common for younger employees to replace less-competent seniors ([Satish, 2004; Sudrajat, 2016](#)).

According to [Soemerjan \(1996\)](#), the Indonesian bureaucracy at the beginning of independence (1945-1950) was far from the Weberian ideal of bureaucracy. In the New Order era, the military (ABRI), bureaucracy, and Golkar became the pillars of Soeharto's power ([Suryadinata, 1997](#)). During the decentralization era, the relationship between bureaucracy and politics became more diffused within local government units ([Hadiz, 2004; Turner et al., 2022](#)). The behavior of the bureaucratic apparatus in Indonesia is different from that proposed by social scientists such as [Weber \(1947\)](#), [Albrow \(1970\)](#), and [Etzioni-Halevy \(1985\)](#), who describe bureaucracy as a modern organization that has professional characteristic and is neutral to political interests.

This paper investigates the factors influencing the performance of local government organizations in the South Konawe District, Southeast Sulawesi Province in Indonesia. One factor affecting this is mutation, a change in position — whether horizontal or vertical — within an organization ([Hasibuan, 2000](#)), influencing the career patterns of the civil state apparatus. In Indonesia, mutations of positions within local government organizations often occur before and after the election of regional managers, carried out by both incumbent and newly elected regional heads. Political factors generally influence the mutations that occur before and after regional elections. Beyond political factors, mutations are also driven by the desire to redistribute civil servants. This approach addresses the uneven distribution of civil servants ([Atmojo et al., 2016](#)). Recently, mutations have also been driven by a policy aimed at streamlining the bureaucratic structure, as mandated by Law No. 5 of 2014 concerning the state civil apparatus. The implication of this policy is a gradual transfer of positions from structural to functional positions ([Rahayu and Rahmayanti, 2019](#)).

The implementation of rotations, promotions, and demotions provoked condemnation in South Konawe District. First of all, this policy violates regional election law, as it was implemented within six months of the forthcoming election. Second, promotions, rotations, and demotions were made on short notice, in violation of the Indonesian state civil apparatus law, without a prior performance review. Third, demoted officials are not given a position. These acts may jeopardize the bureaucracy's political neutrality, as well as the performance of local government agencies and staff career paths.

Mutation often ignores employees' professionalism and competence. The placement of unprofessional officials is reflected in assigning positions that do not correspond to their field of expertise. The abandonment of competence is evident from positions that are assigned without meeting the requirements of the rank; for example, the second echelon position is occupied by a group that remains low in terms of banding. Furthermore, the abandonment of competence is reflected in the placement of employees in positions that have never passed leadership education and training or have never passed structural positions. This practice is often found in the appointment of lecturers who work in universities (functional positions) to become heads of service (structural positions) in regional apparatus organizations. This phenomenon causes the career patterns of civil servants to be uncertain and has implications for the ineffectiveness of organizational performance.

Literature review

Career patterns

Career patterns concern the sequence of work positions that a person holds during their life ([Pant et al., 2018](#)). [Ivancevich and Konopaske \(2013\)](#) define a career pattern as a position in which an organization transfers its employees to different positions to develop employees in the appropriate positions. This position-transfer process, also known as mutation, entails changes in an employee's position/place/job, which can occur horizontally or vertically (promotion/demotion) within an organization ([Hasibuan, 2000](#)). The career pattern of civil servants/the state civil apparatus can be horizontal, vertical, or diagonal ([Rakhmawanto, 2018](#)).

A promotion in the office implies an increase in power and responsibilities beyond the previous level (Manullang, 2001). Conversely, a demotion involves decreased income and responsibilities (Siagian, 2008). Position rotation refers to horizontal moves within a job, aimed at preventing burnout and enhancing employees' knowledge and expertise (Harindja, 2003). Mutation is common and acceptable when it serves career development, enhances employee abilities, and meets organizational needs (Winarsih and Ratminto, 2011).

The development of career patterns in Indonesian government agencies is termed the career patterns of civil servants. As mandated by Law No. 5 of 2014 concerning the state civil apparatus, the career pattern of civil servants in Indonesia adheres to the merit system, which is based on qualifications, competencies, and performance in a fair and reasonable manner without distinguishing political background, race, color, religion, origin, gender, marital status, age, or disability conditions (Puspitapuri, 2017).

Political neutrality

Neutrality is defined as an attitude of not deviating from or taking sides with one party over another, staying away from intrigue, maintaining reputation, having no position or an unknown position toward competition between two or more parties, and not engaging in political struggle (Caiden, 1996; Johnson, 2016; Macdonald and Birdi, 2019; Rubin, 1988). De Vries (1996) describes neutrality as: to keep a distance, not to be involved, be impartial toward either side, not to do or say something that is not in one's authority, and not belong to political and ideological groupings. From the perspective of public administration (Caiden, 1996), the idea of neutrality is based on the separation between politics and administration, in which political duties are performed by politicians, and administrative tasks are performed by administrators.

The principle of civil service neutrality stipulates that civil servants must not actively engage in party politics, participate in electoral campaigns, or run for office unless they first resign; they can vote, but cannot publish their political beliefs (Sharma, 1996). Moreover, civil service neutrality is reflected in loyalty to the incumbent government within legal constraints, maintenance of confidentiality in decision-making, implementation of government policies regardless of political affiliation, having limited political rights, and impartiality in implementing rules (Scott, 1996).

Organizational performance

According to Martin and Kettner (1996), at least two primary approaches to measuring organizational performance exist, the behavioral approach and the results approach. The behavioral approach investigates behaviors directly related to the implementation of job tasks (Kim, 2022). The results approach (result-oriented criteria) examines whether the results obtained have been in accordance with the demands of the needy party and have been provided the best quality or distributed fairly to those in need. This study measures organizational performance from four perspectives: customer, internal business process, innovation/learning, and financial perspectives (Kaplan and Norton, 1992).

First, from the customers' perspective, the performance of an organization is assessed using four indicators: time, quality, service, and cost. Thus, the quality of service from the customers' perspective should be cheaper, better, and faster. Second, the perspective of internal business processes is related to the advantages that an organization has over other organizations. Organizational excellence, for example, can be measured from the competence of employees and the technology used. Employees' competence largely determines the success of their organizational performance. Similarly, technological excellence creates efficiency and effectiveness in service processes. Third, from the innovation perspective, public products and services create value. An organization's ability

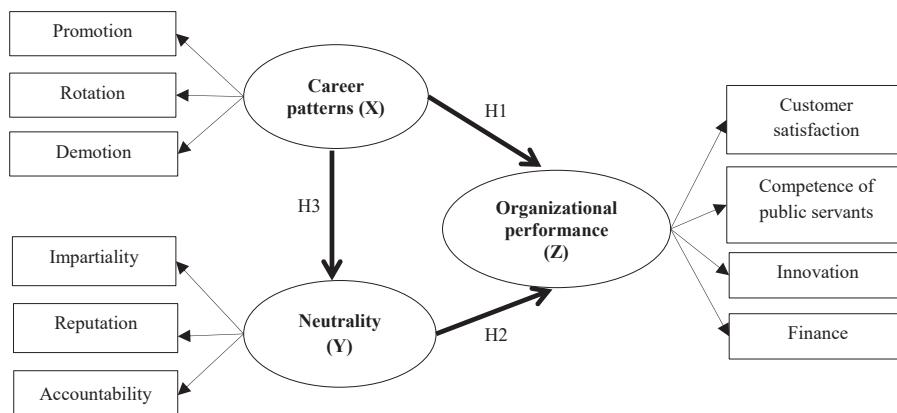
to innovate adds value to organizational performance. Fourth, the financial perspective of recognizing the failure or success of organizational performance can be considered in the process of planning, using, and reporting synchronized finances. Satisfactory organizational performance can be measured by the appropriate and inappropriate use of financing. If there is financial misuse, lack of budget realization, and unacceptable findings of auditors in an organization, then the organization will be judged to have poor performance.

Methodology

The research was based on a quantitative method (Creswell and Creswell, 2018) with an explanatory approach to investigate the relationships between variables (Kothari, 2004). The population comprised 5,963 civil servants in the local government of South Konawe District in 2020. Data collection was done through distributing questionnaires to members of the sample of population selected through simple randomization. The sample consisted of 220 respondents, based on the sample size formulation of Bungin (2011). Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework.

Career patterns were measured using the indicators of promotion, rotation, and demotion (Ivancevich and Konopaske, 2013). The neutrality of the state's civil apparatus was measured by indicators of impartiality, reputation, and accountability (De Vries, 1996). Organizational performance was measured by customer satisfaction, competence of public servants, innovation, and finance (Kaplan and Norton, 1992). The hypotheses of this research were formulated by the conceptual framework: H1: Career patterns (X) positively influence organizational performance (Z). H2: Neutrality (Y) positively influences organizational performance (Z). H3: Career patterns (X) positively influence neutrality (Y).

The analysis model used Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) through a measurement model test (outer model) and a structural model test (inner model). The measurement model test used the partial least squares algorithm, whereas the structural model test used the bootstrap method.



Source: By authors

Figure 1.
Conceptual
Framework

Results

Measurement analysis models (outer model)

a. Construct validity analysis

In this research, a validity test was conducted using SmartPLS 3.3.9, with the PLS algorithm procedure. Validity tests include convergent and discriminant validity assessments. The convergent validity test was conducted by examining the outer loading values with the condition that they should be greater than 0.5, and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values with the condition that they should also be greater than 0.5. Both criteria were used to establish the validity of the relationships between the indicators and their associated latent variables. [Table 1](#) shows that 12 out of 13 outer loading values are above 0.5, suggesting that most of the indicators are valid. However, one indicator, N1, has a loading below 0.5 and will be considered for further analysis.

The subsequent test of convergent validity was to examine the average variance extracted (AVE). The AVE values, as presented in [Table 2](#), were greater than 0.5 for each variable, confirming their validity.

The second validity test was a discriminant validity test that aimed to determine the extent to which a variable is not correlated with other variables. The condition for discriminant validity is that the correlation between variables must be smaller than the correlation of the variable with itself. The discriminant validity test conducted in this study

Indicators	Career Patterns	Neutrality	Organizational Performance
CP1	0.919		
CP2	0.918		
CP3	0.873		
CP4	0.809		
CP5	0.927		
CP6	0.830		
CP7	0.806		
CP8	0.887		
CP9	0.883		
N1		0.204	
N2		0.922	
N3		0.854	
N4		0.808	
N5		0.908	
N6		0.854	
N7		0.794	
N8		0.881	
N9		0.882	
OP1			0.934
OP2			0.882
OP3			0.829
OP4			0.925
OP5			0.882
OP6			0.829
OP7			0.889
OP8			0.821
OP9			0.771
OP10			0.858
OP11			0.863

Table 1.
Outer Loading
Indicator
Questionnaire Value
Test Results

Source: By authors

was used to test the cross-loading value and the value of the Fornell-Larcker criterion. Calculating the value of the Fornell-Larcker criterion involves comparing the square roots of the AVE values with the correlations between variables.

The results of the discriminant validity test presented in [Table 3](#) indicate that all values of the Fornell-Larcker criterion, with the value in the correlation of latent variables, have a greater value than the correlation with other variables. This assessment was also observed in other variables, with the square root of the AVE value being greater than the correlation values between the variables. Thus, the discriminant validity test for all variables was met.

The discriminant validity of cross-loading follows the same principle as the validity of the discriminant based on the Fornell-Larcker criterion. In this case, the indicators of the variables are correlated with other variables. [Table 4](#) presents the value of the cross-loading test, with the value of the correlation of the indicator with the variable itself having a higher value than the correlation with other variables; thus, discriminant validity was met.

b. Construct reliability analysis

The next research instrument test was a reliability test using Smart PLS 3 with the PLS algorithm procedure. The reliability test was conducted by considering the Cronbach's alpha value and composite reliability for each of the variables presented in [Table 5](#). The table indicates that the value of Cronbach's alpha met the minimum threshold of 0.70. The minimum value requirements for the composite reliability were also satisfied. It was concluded that the instruments used in this study were reliable because the respondents' answers were consistent.

Structural model analysis (inner model)

a. Multicollinearity Test (collinearity)

The multicollinearity test was conducted to ensure the absence of free or exogenous variables that have high correlation so that the predictability of the model is not compromised ([Sekaran and Bougie, 2016](#)) and to confirm that there is no reciprocal relationship between independent variables. The standard needed to prevent multicollinearity is a Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) value below 5 ([Hair et al., 2017](#)).

Based on [Table 6](#), the inner VIF values for all variables were less than 5. This indicates that there was no multicollinearity falsification in the research model.

Variables	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Information
Career Patterns	0.763	Valid
Neutrality	0.746	Valid
Organizational Performance	0.745	Valid
Source: By authors		

Table 2.
Value Test Results
Average Variance
Extracted (AVE)

Variables	Organizational performance	Neutrality	Career patterns
Organizational Performance	0.863		
Neutrality	0.864	0.995	
Career Patterns	0.870	0.873	0.874
Source: By authors			

Table 3.
Discriminant Validity
Test Results (Fornell-
Larcker Criterion)

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Indicators	Career Patterns	Neutrality	Organizational Performance
CP1	0.919	0.847	0.842
CP2	0.918	0.835	0.850
CP3	0.873	0.768	0.796
CP4	0.809	0.731	0.752
CP5	0.927	0.818	0.814
CP6	0.830	0.659	0.656
CP7	0.806	0.623	0.617
CP8	0.887	0.766	0.757
CP9	0.883	0.751	0.743
N2	0.811	0.934	0.922
N3	0.744	0.882	0.854
N4	0.711	0.829	0.808
N5	0.812	0.908	0.895
N6	0.715	0.854	0.836
N7	0.673	0.794	0.771
N8	0.761	0.881	0.858
N9	0.773	0.882	0.863
OP1	0.811	0.922	0.934
OP2	0.747	0.850	0.882
OP3	0.712	0.806	0.829
OP4	0.809	0.911	0.925
OP5	0.751	0.849	0.882
OP6	0.711	0.808	0.829
OP7	0.819	0.889	0.901
OP8	0.716	0.821	0.835
OP9	0.673	0.711	0.794
OP10	0.761	0.858	0.881
OP11	0.773	0.863	0.882

Table 4.
Discriminant Validity
Test Results (Cross
Loading)

Source: By authors

Table 5.
Reliability Test Results
(Composite Reliability
and Cronbach's Alpha)

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha >0,7	Composite Reliability >0,7	Evaluation
Organizational Performance	0,965	0,970	Reliable
Neutrality	0,951	0,959	Reliable
Career Patterns	0,961	0,967	Reliable

Variables	Organizational Performance	Neutrality	Career Patterns
Organizational Performance			
Neutrality	4,11		
Career Patterns		1	
Source: By authors			

b. Causal relationship analysis

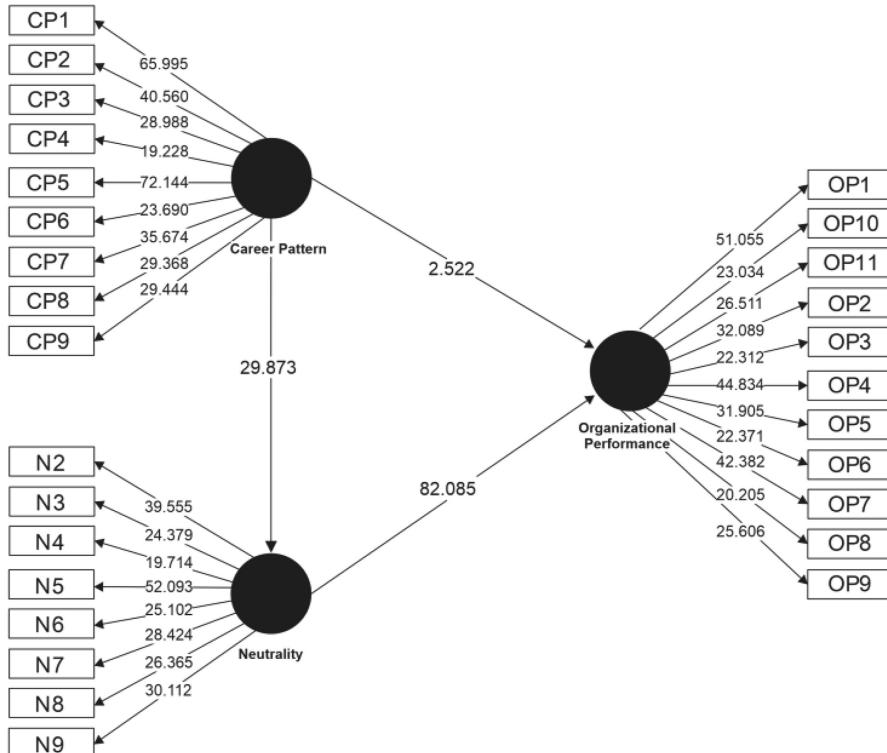
This section presents the analysis of the causal relationships between each variable. This was a one-tailed research using the bootstrap method with a significance level of 0.05 or 5 percent,

Table 6.
Inter-Variable
multicollinearity Test
Results

which means that the significance value or p-value cannot be more than 0.05. The influence of the latent variables is positive and significant if the t-value is greater than or equal to 1.96. To determine the extent to which the variation in the independent variable affects the description of the variation in the dependent variable, the coefficient of determination (R^2) was used. To determine the indirect effect, a mediation test was conducted.

In [Figure 2](#), one can see the path of the structural model along with the t-value of each relationship resulting from the software SmartPLS. The path diagram was derived from the direct effect test by examining the significance of the direct path coefficient of the relationship between each variable.

Based on the t-values from [Table 7](#), the path of career pattern → organizational performance, neutrality → organizational performance, career pattern → neutrality had a significant influence. The hypothesis tests are discussed in the following sections.



Information:

CP = Career pattern,

N = Neutrality,

OP = Organization performance

Note: Analysis Results via Smart PLS software

Source: By authors

Figure 2.
Path Diagrams and
T-Value Structural
Models

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Indirect influences were also measured using mediation tests. This mediation test was conducted by analyzing the output from the SmartPLS software in the section specific to indirect effect.

Based on [Table 8](#), it was found that career patterns and neutrality had a significant indirect influence with a t-value (2.51) greater than 1.64. Researchers tested coefficient of determination or R Square to demonstrate prediction accuracy, where the independent variable can explain variations in the dependent variable in the regression model. According to [Chin \(1998\)](#), an R square value of 0.67 is considered strong, 0.33 is moderate and 0.19 is weak.

Based on [Table 9](#) results, the R square value for organizational performance was 0.799, which categorizes it as strong, indicating that the career patterns account for approximately 79.9 percent of the variance in organizational performance. The remaining 20.1 percent of the variance is likely due to other factors not included in the model. Similarly, the R square value for neutrality was 0.757, which is also in the strong range. This suggests that the career patterns explain roughly 75.7 percent of the variance in neutrality, with the remaining 24.3 percent influenced by external variables not captured by the model. In summary, the career patterns have a strong influence on the organizational performance (79.9 percent) and neutrality (75.7 percent).

Hypothesis testing

This research has three hypotheses: the authors tested the hypotheses by using the SmartPLS software, focusing on the t-value in structural models. [Table 10](#) presents the results of the hypothesis testing.

Table 7.
Intervariable Direct
Effect Test Results

Hypothesis	Path	Path Coefficient	T-Values	P-Values	Information
H1	Career Patterns → Organizational Performance	0.33	2.522	0.012	Significant
H2	Neutrality → Organizational Performance	0.967	82.085	0.000	Significant
H3	Career Patterns → Neutrality	0.870	29.873	0.000	Significant

Table 8.
Inter-Variable Indirect
Effect Test Results

Path	Path Coefficient	T-Values	P Values	Conclusion
Career Patterns → Neutrality → Organizational Performance	0.870	2.514	0.000	Significant

Table 9.
Inter-Variable Indirect
Effect Test Results

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Organizational Performance	0.799	0.784
Neutrality	0.757	0.756

Discussion

The results of the data analysis have revealed three aspects. First, career patterns positively influence organizational performance. This implies that the better an employee's career pattern, the better the organization's performance. Conversely, the worse the employee's career pattern, the worse the organization's performance. The results of this study supported the findings of [Naseer et al. \(2015\)](#) with respect to the impact of career success on organizational performance in the healthcare sector. In this study, promotion reflected a good career pattern, whereas demotion reflected a bad career pattern. Structuring employee career patterns through promotion, mutation, and demotion policies is important for improving the performance of public organizations. However, structuring employees' career patterns ahead of regional elections has the negative implication of neutrality, which can affect organizational performance. The implementation of promotions, rotations, and demotions ahead of regional elections may be interpreted as having a political tendency that encourages the bureaucratic apparatus to engage in practical politics. The implementation of mutations of 21 echelon II officials and 84 echelon III officials in the South Konawe District in 2020, which was in close proximity to the implementation of the Regional Elections, provided the impression of mutations based on system spoils and retained the impression of mutations based on senior systems and system merit.

Second, neutrality has a positive influence on organizational performance. Therefore, the higher the neutrality of employees, the better the performance of the organization. Conversely, the impartiality of employees damages organizational performance. Based on data submitted by the Election Supervisory Agency of the Republic of Indonesia at the hearing of the Commission III House of Representatives, Wednesday, November 18, 2020, there were at least 938 recommendations for violations of state civil apparatus neutrality in the 2020 simultaneous regional elections. The State Civil Apparatus Commission of the Republic of Indonesia has stated that brotherly ties and career interests were the causes of the civil apparatus being non-neutral. In South Konawe District during the 2020 simultaneous regional elections, the election supervisory agency cracked down on at least 6 state civil servants out of 11 cases of alleged violations of neutrality in the regional elections ([Bawaslu, 2020](#)).

The motives for the involvement of the state civil apparatus in South Konawe District include fraternal ties with candidates and career advancement. Social and economic motives also drive the political involvement of civil apparatuses in the country. Individuals holding positions in government organizations enjoy a higher social status than those without such positions. Economically, bureaucratic officials earn additional income from the payroll system and distribution of fees (gratuities) for government procurement. Civil servants who become bureaucratic officials earn additional income in the form of office and operational benefits. In addition, bureaucratic officials who occupy such positions automatically have

Hypothesis	Hypothesis Statement	Path Coefficient	T-Values	P-Values	Information
H1	Career Patterns have a positive influence on Organizational Performance	0.33	2.522	0.012	Data support hypothesis
H2	Neutrality has a positive influence on Organizational Performance	0.967	82.085	0.000	Data support hypothesis
H3	Career Patterns have a positive influence on Neutrality	0.870	29.873	0.000	Data support hypothesis

Source: By authors

Table 10.
Summary of the Result
of Research Hypothesis
Testing

power over government budgets. This budgetary authority becomes a target for state civil servants seeking promotions. Consequently, the neutrality of the civil apparatus has a negative effect on its performance. Based on the assessment results of the Financial Audit Agency of the Republic of Indonesia, the financial statements of the South Konawe District government for the year 2020 revealed a record of inadequacies; therefore, they received a ‘reasonable with exceptions’ predicate ([Financial Audit Agency of the Republic of Indonesia, 2021](#)). Moreover, in the results of the regional innovation assessment, the Ministry of Home Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia noted that the South Konawe District was categorized as ‘less innovative’ ([Ministry of Home Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2020](#)).

Third, career pattern positively influenced neutrality. This implies that the better an employee’s career pattern, the more neutral he or she will be. Conversely, the worse an employee’s career pattern, the worse his/her neutrality. Structuring the career pattern of the state civil apparatus through the merit system, that is, placing the most qualified or best person in a job, can prevent neutrality of the civil apparatus of the state. In Indonesia, after the enactment of the State Civil Apparatus Law, the implementation of a merit system became necessary in the process of promotion, rotation, and demotion. However, in practice, this regulation becomes difficult to implement because of the strengthening of the patronage political system ([Pierskalla and Sacks, 2020](#)). Relatively solid bureaucratic organizations are used by incumbent politicians to mobilize the masses and politicize government programs and public services for electoral purposes ([Berenschat, 2018](#)).

The findings support the three hypotheses proposed in this research. In addition, this research revealed that the neutrality of the civil apparatus mediates the relationship between career patterns and organizational performance. There are two interesting findings. First, promotions significantly influence the neutrality and performance of organizations. That is, the more often a person is promoted, the higher the neutrality and performance of the organization. Conversely, the less frequently a person is promoted, the lower the neutrality and performance of the organization. Second, demotion has the least influence on an organization’s neutrality and performance. That is, the fewer the demotions, the higher the neutrality and performance of the organization. Conversely, the more frequent the demotions, the lower the neutrality and performance of the organization. These findings indicate that neutral civil servants often receive promotions, whereas those who are not neutral rarely receive promotions.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the findings of this research, first, career patterns have a positive influence on organizational performance. This implies that the better an employee’s career pattern, the better the organization’s performance. Conversely, the worse the employee’s career pattern, the worse the organization’s performance. A good career pattern is reflected in promotions and a bad career pattern is reflected in demotions. The logic is that promotions improve organizational performance, while demotions worsen it. Second, neutrality has a positive influence on organizational performance. Therefore, the higher the neutrality of employees, the better the performance of the organization will be. Conversely, the impartiality of employees damages organizational performance. Neutrality is reflected in political involvement, partisanship, and the abuse of authority. Greater neutrality enhances organizational performance, while the lack thereof diminishes it. Third, career patterns positively influence neutrality. This implies that the better an employee’s career pattern, the higher their neutrality. Conversely, the worse an employee’s career pattern, the lower their neutrality. The logic is that promotions encourage neutrality within the state civil apparatus, whereas demotions undermine it. The structuring of career patterns ahead of regional elections has negative implications for bureaucratic neutrality, which leads to poor

organizational performance. Therefore, arrangement of career patterns should be distinct from the implementation of regional elections. Career patterns should be structured by increasing promotions and minimizing demotions.

During the management of career patterns of civil servants, it is important to consider the principle of neutrality, especially in countries that have a strong political and bureaucratic interface. The principle of neutrality has been taken into consideration in the filling of bureaucratic positions in Indonesia, especially since the enactment of the State Civil Apparatus Law in 2014. Its implementation is executed by the State Civil Apparatus Commission tasked with maintaining neutrality, supervising and fostering the state civil apparatus profession. The Commission has been quite successful in encouraging a merit system in filling state civil apparatus positions. However, after the revision of the Law at the end of 2023, the Commission was abolished which is a cause for concern. The authors recommend, first, in order to supervise the behavior of the state civil apparatus not to side with certain political interests and realize a professional bureaucracy, it is necessary to restore and strengthen the functions of the Commission. This will consistently encourage the implementation of transparent, competitive and merit-based management of the state civil apparatus, as well as improving the quality of public services, in order to realize strong government institutions as one of the goals of sustainable development. Second, it is necessary to strengthen internal government supervisors at the local level (such as the inspectorate) to prevent the behavior of state civil servants who deviate from their main duties and functions. Third, there is a need to involve professional organizations such as the Indonesian Association of Public Administration to monitor the behavior of bureaucratic apparatus in the regions. Fourth, the establishment of the Commission can be adopted by other countries that experience similar problems in maintaining the neutrality of the state civil apparatus, especially those experienced by developing countries.

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