



Beyond Reprimand: Performance Counseling as a Humanistic Strategy for Civil Servants at Satpol PP Medan City

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Abstract

This study examined the implementation of performance counseling as a developmental, non-punitive strategy for civil servants (Aparatur Sipil Negara/ASN) who received "Poor" or "Very Poor" performance ratings at the Civil Service Police Unit (Satpol PP) of Medan City, Indonesia, following the issuance of Ministerial Regulation PANRB No. 6 of 2022. A sequential exploratory mixed-methods design was used, prioritizing in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation, supplemented by a descriptive questionnaire distributed to eleven ASN counseling participants through total sampling. The findings showed that counseling was implemented through a structured sequence of performance evaluation, problem identification, counseling sessions, guidance, and follow-up monitoring, facilitated by a professional psychologist and grounded in PermenPANRB No. 6/2022 and Medan Mayoral Regulation No. 49/2021. The intervention produced positive outcomes across organizational culture, work motivation, peer relations, stress reduction, loyalty, self-confidence, and the quality of public service delivery; nearly all participants perceived a tangible improvement in their performance. Success was shaped jointly by employees' willingness to change, leadership commitment, and counselor competence. The study concludes that performance counseling functions as a humanistic alternative to administrative punishment and recommends sustained monitoring, stronger leadership involvement, and continued institutional support for ASN counseling programs.

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Introduction

Public sector organizations across the world are increasingly required to demonstrate higher levels of accountability, responsiveness, and service quality in order to meet citizens' expectations. In this context, civil servants are no longer viewed merely as administrative actors, but as strategic human resources whose performance determines the effectiveness of public service delivery, institutional trust, and government legitimacy. Recent studies on public sector performance management emphasize that modern government institutions need systems that are not only capable of measuring outputs, but also able to align individual behavior with organizational goals, public values, and continuous performance improvement (Siddiquee, 2024; Adams & Ama, 2024). Therefore, performance management in the public sector should be understood as a developmental mechanism that integrates planning, monitoring, feedback, coaching, counseling, and follow-up actions to improve both individual and organizational performance.

In Indonesia, the reform of civil servant performance management has been strengthened through the issuance of Ministerial Regulation of the Ministry of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform No. 6 of 2022 on the Management of Civil Servants' Performance. This regulation shifted the performance management system of Aparatur Sipil Negara (ASN) from a predominantly administrative and document-based approach toward a more dynamic model that emphasizes expectation clarification, continuous performance dialogue, evidence-based performance documentation, behavioral assessment, and follow-up mechanisms. The regulation is also aligned with the ASN core values known as BerAKHLAK, namely service-oriented, accountable, competent, harmonious, loyal, adaptive, and collaborative. These values position work behavior as an essential component of civil servant performance, particularly in relation to service orientation and ethical responsibility in public institutions (Ministry of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform, 2021, 2022).

Theoretically, this study is grounded in the concept of performance management as a continuous and developmental process. Contemporary performance management literature highlights that effective performance systems should not stop at appraisal or rating, because performance ratings without constructive feedback may fail to generate behavioral change. Instead, performance management should be supported by regular feedback, coaching, and counseling that help employees understand performance gaps, identify the causes of underperformance, and formulate realistic improvement strategies (Adams & Ama, 2024; Cannon-Bowers et al., 2023). Workplace coaching has been found to produce positive organizational outcomes, particularly when it is structured, goal-oriented, and supported by a clear understanding of employee development needs (Cannon-Bowers et al., 2023). Similarly, workplace counseling can support employee performance by improving morale, emotional stability, communication, and problem-solving capacity (Monyake & Ramoroka, 2025). Thus, in the context of ASN performance management, performance counseling can be conceptualized as a humanistic and developmental intervention aimed at restoring work effectiveness rather than merely imposing punitive sanctions.

This issue becomes particularly important in the Civil Service Police Unit (Satuan Polisi Pamong Praja/Satpol PP) of Medan City. Satpol PP has a strategic mandate to enforce regional regulations and regional head regulations, maintain public order and public peace, and provide community protection. These tasks demand high levels of competence, discipline, service orientation, emotional control, integrity, and professionalism, because Satpol PP officers often deal directly with citizens in situations involving regulation enforcement and social order. Consequently, the

performance of ASN within Satpol PP is not only an internal bureaucratic issue, but also a matter of public service quality and institutional credibility.

However, evaluation data from the Medan City Personnel and Human Resources Development Agency (BKPSDM) show that several ASN at Satpol PP Kota Medan continued to receive “Poor” and “Very Poor” performance ratings in 2023 and 2024. Although the number of employees in these categories is not large, the persistence of low performance ratings across two consecutive years indicates a performance gap that requires systematic institutional attention. The data are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of ASN with “Poor” and “Very Poor” Performance Ratings at Satpol PP Kota Medan, 2023–2024

Performance Category	2023	2024
“Poor”	2 employees	2 employees
“Very Poor”	4 employees	3 employees

Source: BKPSDM Kota Medan, 2025; reproduced from Nasution (2026, Table 1.1).

The data in Table 1 suggest that the implementation of performance management at Satpol PP Kota Medan needs to be examined not only from the perspective of performance results, but also from the perspective of how the institution responds to underperformance. Under the current ASN performance management framework, employees with low performance ratings should not automatically be positioned as disciplinary objects. Rather, they should be provided with coaching, counseling, and structured improvement support so that the causes of underperformance can be identified and addressed. This approach is consistent with recent public sector performance management studies which argue that feedback and developmental support are central to improving employee performance, work efficiency, and organizational productivity (Adams & Ama, 2024; Siddiquee, 2024). It is also relevant to the finding that public service motivation, meaningful work, and work engagement have significant effects on employee performance in public sector organizations (Nababan & Desiana, 2023).

Previous studies on Satpol PP performance have generally focused on discipline, organizational culture, leadership, competence, motivation, performance allowances, and work ability as predictors of employee performance. These studies have contributed to explaining the factors that influence Satpol PP performance; however, they have not sufficiently examined how performance counseling is implemented as a follow-up mechanism for ASN who receive “Poor” or “Very Poor” performance ratings. In addition, studies on public sector performance appraisal in Indonesia have highlighted that appraisal systems may be affected by bias, hierarchical culture, and procedural limitations, indicating the need for more transparent, objective, and developmental approaches to performance improvement (Tarigan et al., 2025). This condition demonstrates a research gap: while determinants of performance have been widely studied, the specific implementation and impact of performance counseling under the newest ASN performance management regulation remain comparatively under-examined, especially in local government enforcement agencies such as Satpol PP.

As an alternative solution, performance counseling offers a more constructive approach to managing low performance. Rather than relying only on sanctions, counseling enables supervisors and employees to engage in structured dialogue regarding work targets, behavioral expectations, personal obstacles, competence gaps, and improvement commitments. In this sense, performance counseling can function as a bridge between performance appraisal and performance improvement. It also

reflects a shift from a punitive bureaucracy toward a developmental bureaucracy that places employee growth, service ethics, and organizational learning at the center of public sector reform. Such an approach is particularly relevant for Satpol PP Kota Medan because the quality of its personnel directly affects public order, regulatory enforcement, and citizens' perceptions of local government professionalism.

The state-of-the-art in public sector performance management indicates a growing shift from annual, administrative, and compliance-based appraisal systems toward continuous feedback, coaching, developmental conversations, and evidence-based performance improvement. Nevertheless, the empirical application of this shift in Indonesian local government institutions remains limited. Most existing studies still examine performance as an outcome variable influenced by leadership, discipline, motivation, or organizational culture, while relatively few studies analyze the institutional process through which low-performing ASN are counseled, guided, and supported after receiving poor performance ratings. Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in its focus on performance counseling as a regulatory, managerial, and developmental instrument within the implementation of PermenPANRB No. 6 of 2022 at Satpol PP Kota Medan.

Based on this gap, this study aims to investigate how performance counseling is implemented for ASN with "Poor" and "Very Poor" performance ratings at Satpol PP Kota Medan and to analyze the impact of such counseling on individual employees and the organization. The urgency of this study lies in its potential contribution to strengthening local government capacity in operationalizing ASN performance management reform. Empirically, the findings are expected to provide evidence on whether performance counseling can function as an effective mechanism for improving employee behavior, work discipline, service orientation, and organizational performance. Practically, this study may offer policy recommendations for BKPSDM, Satpol PP, and other local government agencies in designing counseling mechanisms that are fair, humanistic, measurable, and aligned with the BerAKHLAK values.

Methods

This study employed a mixed-methods approach using a Sequential Exploratory Design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), in which qualitative data collection and analysis preceded and informed the subsequent quantitative phase. The qualitative strand, treated as the dominant method, relied on in-depth semi-structured interviews, field observation, and documentation review to obtain a rich understanding of how counseling is implemented, the obstacles encountered, and its perceived impact on ASN performance. Primary qualitative informants included the Secretary of BKPSDM Kota Medan, the Head of the Personnel Division of BKPSDM, the Secretary of Satpol PP Kota Medan, the Head of the General Affairs Subdivision of Satpol PP, and members of the public who interact directly with Satpol PP officers in the field. The quantitative strand used a Likert-scale questionnaire administered through total sampling to all eleven ASN who had participated in performance counseling, and the resulting data were analyzed descriptively through frequency and percentage distributions. Consistent with the supportive role of quantitative data in an exploratory design, the survey results were used solely to corroborate and reinforce the qualitative findings rather than to test statistical relationships between variables. The two strands were subsequently integrated to produce a comprehensive account of the counseling process, its outcomes, and the factors shaping its success.

Results and Discussions

The findings are organized into three themes that emerged from the integration of qualitative and quantitative data: (1) the method of implementing performance counseling, (2) its impact on ASN and the organization, and (3) the factors influencing its success.

1. Method of Implementing Performance Counseling

Performance counseling at Satpol PP Kota Medan is implemented as a structured, regulation-based mechanism rather than an ad hoc disciplinary measure. As the Secretary of BKPSDM Kota Medan explained, the policy basis lies explicitly in PermenPANRB No. 6 of 2022 on ASN Performance Management and Medan Mayoral Regulation No. 49 of 2021 on ASN Competence Development, with the explicit aim of coaching rather than punishing underperforming employees. The process begins with the annual performance evaluation; ASN who are rated “Poor” or “Very Poor” are registered by the relevant local government unit (OPD) and referred to BKPSDM, which then schedules a session to identify the underlying problem whether related to discipline, workload, or personal circumstances before providing direction, guidance, and a tailored solution, followed by monitoring and evaluation of subsequent performance.

This sequence is consistent with performance-management theory (Aguinis, 2013), in which evaluation functions not merely to judge past output but to identify development needs through coaching or counseling, and with Edward III's (1980) policy-implementation framework, which links effective implementation to clear communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure. The presence of an internal guideline at BKPSDM though not yet codified as a fully detailed Standard Operating Procedure further reflects Weber's (1947) bureaucratic principle that consistent task execution requires clear rules and procedures.

Counseling sessions are conducted by a professional psychologist assigned by BKPSDM, who serves as a facilitator helping ASN articulate and resolve work-related or personal difficulties. Respondents rated the counselor's competence favorably: of the eleven ASN surveyed, seven (63.6%) agreed and four (36.4%) strongly agreed that the counselor demonstrated good competence, with none expressing disagreement. This finding aligns with Rogers' (1951) client-centered counseling theory, which holds that empathy, unconditional acceptance, and strong communication skills on the part of the counselor are prerequisites for a counselee's openness and self-directed problem-solving. Overall, the implementation method reflects an evidence-based, regulation-grounded, and psychologically informed approach to ASN development consistent with strategic human resource management principles (Armstrong, 2014) that call for personnel decisions to be guided by measurable performance indicators rather than ad hoc judgment.

2. Impact of Performance Counseling on ASN and the Organization

Performance counseling generated a broad range of positive outcomes for both individual ASN and the organization as a whole. Interviewees consistently reported a shift toward a more open work culture, in which ASN became more willing to disclose work-related obstacles and more aware of the importance of teamwork an outcome consistent with Robbins and Judge's (2017) view that organizational culture is shaped by recurring patterns of behavior, communication, and shared values. Several informants also noted that ASN gained a deeper understanding of their role as public servants rather than as employees merely executing routine instructions, echoing the notion of public service motivation advanced by Perry and Wise (1990).

Work motivation likewise improved: ASN reported feeling that the organization still valued and invested in them rather than abandoning them after a poor evaluation, a pattern consistent with Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs and Herzberg's (1959) two-factor theory, in which recognition and developmental opportunity function as motivators. Improved individual performance was, in turn, associated by informants with easier attainment of organizational targets, in line with the organizational-performance perspective of Gibson, Ivancevich, and Donnelly (2012).

Interpersonal and communicative outcomes were also evident. Seven respondents (63.6%) agreed and four (36.4%) strongly agreed that their working relationships with colleagues had improved after counseling (Table 4.7 of the source dissertation), consistent with Elton Mayo's (1933) human relations theory. The Head of the General Affairs Subdivision further noted that ASN who previously relied on a harsh, confrontational manner with the public had shifted toward a more persuasive and humanistic communication style an outcome that resonates with Goleman's (1995) account of emotional intelligence and interpersonal skill, and one corroborated independently by a community member interviewed for this study, who observed that Satpol PP officers now provide explanation and persuasion before enforcement action, reducing friction in the field.

Counseling was also associated with a reduction in work-related stress: eight respondents (72.7%) agreed and three (27.3%) strongly agreed that their stress levels had decreased following counseling (Table 4.8 of the source dissertation), a result consistent with Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model of stress, in which coping support helps narrow the gap between perceived job demands and personal capacity. Several informants linked this reduction to greater emotional self-regulation in the field, aligning with Goleman's (1995) construct of self-management.

The most direct indicator of impact ASN's own perception of performance improvement after counseling showed an overwhelmingly positive pattern. As illustrated in Figure 1, eight of the eleven respondents (72.7%) agreed and three (27.3%) strongly agreed that their performance had improved after participating in counseling, with no respondent selecting a neutral or negative category. This near-unanimous positive perception supports Skinner's (1953) behavioral premise that sustained guidance and reinforcement can shape more disciplined and responsible work behavior, and is consistent with McLeod's (2010) finding that workplace counseling tangibly improves employees' work performance and psychological wellbeing.

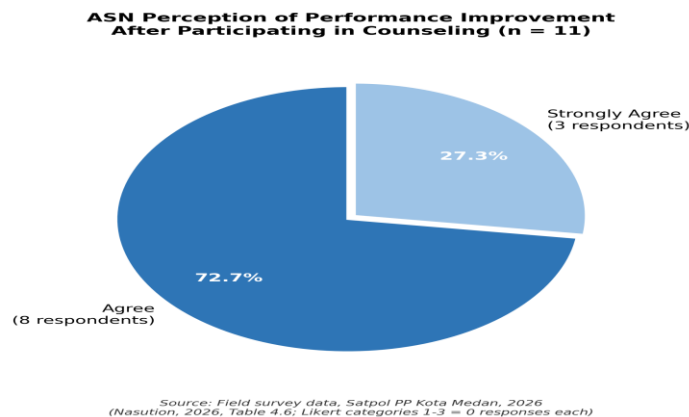


Figure 1. ASN perception of performance improvement after participating in counseling (n = 11)

Source: Field survey data, Satpol PP Kota Medan, 2026 (Nasution, 2026, Table 4.6)

Beyond performance itself, informants reported increased organizational loyalty and self-confidence among counseled ASN, consistent with Meyer and Allen's (1991) organizational-commitment theory and Bandura's (1977) concept of self-efficacy. Taken together, these findings indicate that performance counseling at Satpol PP Kota Medan produces effects that extend well beyond the immediate performance deficit that triggered the referral, reaching into organizational culture, interpersonal relations, psychological wellbeing, and the lived experience of public service recipients.

3. Factors Influencing the Success of Performance Counseling

Three interrelated factors emerged as decisive for the success of performance counseling. The first, and most frequently emphasized by informants, is the individual ASN's own willingness and awareness to change. Both the Secretary of BKPSDM and the Secretary of Satpol PP independently stressed that counselors and the agency can only facilitate and direct the process; without genuine intent on the part of the employee, coaching outcomes remain limited. This finding corresponds closely with Kurt Lewin's (1951) theory of behavioral change, which holds that change requires the individual's own readiness, and with Rogers' (1951) client-centered premise that counseling outcomes hinge on the client's own preparedness to engage with the process.

The second factor is leadership commitment and support. Eight respondents (72.7%) agreed and three (27.3%) strongly agreed that leadership support for the counseling program was important (Table 4.9 of the source dissertation), and informants explained that leaders who actively monitor and maintain close communication with subordinates create conditions in which ASN feel comfortable disclosing problems and more receptive to guidance. This pattern is consistent with Hersey and Blanchard's (1982) situational leadership theory and with Bass's (1985) account of transformational leadership, both of which link leader engagement to subordinates' receptiveness to behavioral change.

The third factor is counselor competence, particularly the counselor's communication skill and capacity to understand each ASN's specific circumstances. Informants noted that a counselor able to build rapport and tailor their approach to the individual rather than applying a uniform method helps ASN feel safe enough to disclose sensitive problems, consistent with DeVito's (2013) interpersonal communication theory and Brammer and MacDonald's (2003) helping-relationship framework. Supportive organizational conditions, including continuous monitoring and a conducive work climate, further reinforced these three core factors, in line with Eisenberger et al.'s (1986) construct of perceived organizational support and Deming's (1986) principle of continuous improvement.

Conclusion

Performance counseling for ASN at Satpol PP Kota Medan, mandated by PermenPANRB No. 6 of 2022, is implemented as a structured developmental mechanism rather than a punitive instrument: it proceeds from performance evaluation, through problem identification and counselor-facilitated sessions, to monitoring of subsequent performance. The intervention produces wide-ranging positive effects, including a more open and collaborative work culture, stronger work motivation, improved peer relationships, reduced work-related stress, greater organizational loyalty and self-confidence, and a more humanistic, communicative style of public service that is directly perceptible to the community. Nearly all ASN respondents perceived a genuine improvement in their own performance after counseling.

The success of this intervention depends jointly on three interdependent factors: ASN's own willingness to change, the commitment and active involvement of leadership, and the communicative competence of the counselor. Local governments seeking to strengthen ASN performance management under PermenPANRB No. 6/2022 should therefore invest not only in counseling provision itself, but in leadership engagement, counselor capacity, and sustained post-counseling monitoring to ensure that behavioral gains are consolidated over time.

Based on these findings, BKPSDM Kota Medan is encouraged to intensify post-counseling monitoring and evaluation so that behavioral change is sustained rather than confined to the initial guidance session; Satpol PP leadership should take a more proactive role in supervising and supporting ASN whose performance declines; the Medan City Government should ensure continued institutional support for ASN counseling as part of broader competence development; and future researchers are encouraged to examine performance counseling in relation to additional variables such as job satisfaction, organizational culture, and public service quality, using broader samples and complementary research designs.

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