
Original Research Article

From Helper to Supervisor: Career Advancement Based on Meritocracy and Islamic Work Values

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Article history: Received 7 January 2026; Accepted 14 February 2026; Published 30 April 2026

ABSTRACT

Career advancement is an important mechanism to improve employee motivation, productivity, and organizational sustainability. However, in many small and medium enterprises (SMEs), promotion systems are often informal and vulnerable to subjectivity. This study investigates how meritocracy and Islamic work values influence internal career advancement at PT. Mecca Abadi Sejahtera steel structure manufacturing company in Sidoarjo. The company applies a structured internal hierarchy consisting of helper, machine operator, coordinator operator, and production supervisor. Promotion decisions are based on job rotation experience, technical competence, communication skills, and responsibility. This study employed a mixed-method approach involving all 35 employees through census sampling and interviews with management. Quantitative data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), while qualitative findings supported contextual interpretation. The results indicate that competence, empowering leadership, self-efficacy, and Islamic work values significantly affect career advancement. Transparent merit-based systems were also found to strengthen employee trust and work motivation. This study contributes to the literature of Islamic Human Resource Management by demonstrating the practical relevance of amanah (trustworthiness), kafa'ah (competence), and fairness in promotion systems within manufacturing SMEs.

Keywords: Career Advancement, Meritocracy, Islamic HRM, Empowering Leadership, Competence, SMEs

HOW TO CITE: Johni Harius Putranto (2026). From Helper to Supervisor: Career Advancement Based on Meritocracy and Islamic Work Values, Vol 10 (1), April 2026. DOI Link: <http://doi.org/10.21070/perisai.v10i1.2039>

1. Introduction

Human resources are central to organizational growth and long-term competitiveness. In manufacturing industries, especially labor-intensive sectors such as steel fabrication,

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Peer reviewed under responsibility of Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidoarjo.

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organizational success depends not only on machines and capital, but also on employee capability, discipline, and leadership readiness. One of the most strategic human resource management functions is career advancement. Employees who perceive clear opportunities for promotion tend to demonstrate stronger commitment, better performance, and lower turnover intentions. Conversely, unclear or unfair promotion systems may create dissatisfaction, internal conflict, and declining motivation.

In many SMEs, career systems are often underdeveloped. Promotion may rely on owner preferences, seniority, or personal closeness rather than competence. While SMEs commonly face limitations in formal HR systems, they also possess flexibility to implement direct supervision and practical talent development. PT. Mecca Abadi Sejahtera, located in Sidoarjo, represents a relevant case for examining internal career systems. Operating in steel structure manufacturing, the company employs 35 workers and applies a progressive hierarchy: helper, machine operator, coordinator operator, and production supervisor. Promotion is preceded by job rotation to ensure cross-functional understanding. Employees are then evaluated based on technical ability, communication competence, and capacity to coordinate work.

This practice reflects a meritocratic system where advancement is earned through demonstrated capability rather than favoritism. It also aligns with Islamic economic principles emphasizing justice, competence, and trustworthiness in organizational responsibility. Islam places strong emphasis on appointing qualified individuals to positions of responsibility. Qur'an Surah Al-Qashash (28:26) states that the best person to employ is one who is strong and trustworthy. In organizational context, strength may be interpreted as competence, while trustworthiness reflects integrity and amanah.

Despite growing studies on career success and leadership, limited research explores how Islamic values shape promotion systems in manufacturing SMEs. Therefore, this study aims to examine the determinants of career advancement at PT. Mecca Abadi Sejahtera through the lenses of meritocracy and Islamic Human Resource Management.

a. Career Advancement

Career advancement has become one of the central themes in contemporary human resource management because employees increasingly expect not only compensation, but also opportunities for long-term growth, recognition, and upward mobility. In modern organizations, career advancement reflects the process through which employees gain higher responsibilities, broader authority, improved status, and better rewards as a result of their contribution and competence. It is widely recognized that organizations with transparent career

systems tend to attract stronger talent and maintain higher levels of employee commitment. Career advancement therefore functions not merely as an administrative outcome, but as a strategic tool for sustaining motivation and organizational competitiveness (Joseph Mofokeng et al., 2025).

Scholars argue that career advancement is closely associated with employees' perceptions of fairness and opportunity within the organization. When workers believe that promotions are based on merit, competence, and performance, they are more likely to demonstrate stronger engagement and organizational loyalty. Conversely, unclear promotion systems often create frustration, reduce trust in management, and stimulate turnover intentions. This indicates that career advancement is not solely determined by vacancies or hierarchy, but also by how employees interpret organizational justice and developmental opportunities (Zhu et al., 2024).

From the perspective of career theory, advancement can be categorized into objective and subjective dimensions. Objective career advancement refers to observable outcomes such as promotion, salary growth, job title enhancement, and managerial authority. Meanwhile, subjective career advancement concerns personal feelings of success, satisfaction, self-development, and meaningful progress. Many employees may remain in similar positions but still perceive advancement when they gain mastery, autonomy, or broader influence. Therefore, modern HRM literature emphasizes that career advancement should be measured beyond formal promotion alone (Rungo et al., 2024a).

Leadership has been consistently identified as an important driver of career advancement. Empowering leaders who delegate authority, provide coaching, and recognize employee potential create stronger developmental climates. Employees under supportive leadership are more likely to gain confidence, acquire new competencies, and become ready for higher roles. Particularly in SMEs and family-owned businesses, direct interaction between leaders and workers often accelerates learning and talent recognition, making leadership behavior a decisive factor in internal promotion pathways (Watkins & Marsick, 2023).

Individual capability also plays a significant role in determining career advancement. Employees with strong technical competence, communication skills, adaptability, and self-efficacy are generally more prepared to assume broader responsibilities (Rungo et al., 2024b). Self-efficacy, or confidence in one's ability to perform tasks successfully, encourages workers to accept challenges and demonstrate initiative. As a result, organizations often view high-efficacy employees as future supervisors or coordinators. This suggests that career

advancement is shaped by the combination of organizational opportunities and individual readiness (Brites da Silva et al., 2021).

Organizational commitment is another variable widely associated with career advancement. Employees who identify strongly with company goals and demonstrate long-term loyalty are often entrusted with greater responsibility. Management tends to invest in workers who are perceived as stable, responsible, and dedicated to organizational continuity (Grant, 2019). At the same time, when employees observe fair promotion opportunities, their commitment becomes stronger. This reciprocal relationship shows that commitment can function both as a cause and consequence of career advancement (Thurasamy et al., 2011).

Career advancement also has important psychological and strategic implications. Employees who perceive realistic promotion opportunities tend to be more motivated, confident, engaged, and willing to improve their skills, whereas stagnant careers often reduce morale and commitment. Overall, career advancement is shaped by meritocracy, leadership quality, competence, commitment, and ethical governance. For SMEs, transparent internal promotion systems can become a source of competitive advantage by developing talent sustainably and rewarding demonstrated capability (Laud & Johnson, 2012).

b. Meritocracy

Meritocracy is commonly understood as a system in which rewards, promotions, and career advancement are determined by individual merit such as competence, achievement, talent, and performance. In organizational contexts, meritocracy is often presented as a fair mechanism that places the most capable individuals in positions of responsibility. Through this principle, employees are expected to progress based on demonstrated ability rather than personal connections, favoritism, or inherited privilege. As a result, meritocracy is frequently associated with efficiency, fairness, and professionalism in modern management systems (Herendy et al., 2022).

Within human resource management, meritocracy functions as an important basis for recruitment, promotion, compensation, and leadership succession (Lewis & Simpson, 2010). Meritocracy is also closely linked to the concept of organizational justice. Employees are more likely to feel satisfied and committed when they believe that decisions are made objectively and transparently. When promotions are based on merit rather than favoritism, organizations can reduce internal conflict, jealousy, and perceptions of discrimination. Therefore, meritocracy is not only a mechanism for selecting talent but also a tool for maintaining harmony and legitimacy within the workplace (Castilla & Benard, 2010).

However, contemporary literature highlights that meritocracy is not always neutral in organizational practice. Although organizations claim to reward talent and performance fairly, the definition of “merit” is often influenced by existing power structures, cultural norms, and managerial bias. Access to mentoring, development opportunities, and organizational visibility may not be equally distributed, causing some individuals to appear more deserving of advancement because of structural advantages rather than solely superior capability. In this sense, meritocracy can sometimes mask underlying inequalities behind the language of fairness and objectivity.

This debate is particularly relevant in studies of gender and career progression. Women in professional settings are frequently expected to balance career achievement with traditional domestic responsibilities, while the organizational barriers shaping those expectations remain overlooked. As a result, career outcomes are often framed as individual choices or personal capabilities, even though institutional constraints and gendered expectations continue to influence advancement opportunities. Therefore, meritocracy may function more as an ideal principle than a fully realized practice within many organizations (Castilla, 2008).

Despite these criticisms, meritocracy remains valuable when implemented through transparent, inclusive, and fair organizational systems. Clear performance indicators, equal access to training and development opportunities, open promotion criteria, and objective evaluation processes can reduce bias and strengthen the credibility of merit-based decisions. From an Islamic management perspective, meritocracy is also aligned with the principles of amanah, justice, and competence, where positions of authority should be entrusted to individuals who are capable, trustworthy, and ethically responsible. Therefore, meritocracy should not only emphasize technical performance and achievement, but also fairness, equal opportunity, integrity, and moral accountability in organizational decision-making. (Jin & Ball, 2020)

c. Empowering Leadership

Empowering leadership is a leadership style that focuses on providing autonomy, trust, participation in decision-making, and developing subordinates’ capacities so that they are able to work independently and responsibly (Qamari et al., 2026). Theoretically, empowering leadership is rooted in the concept of psychological empowerment, which consists of four main dimensions: meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. Meaning relates to the extent to which work is perceived as meaningful; competence refers to an individual’s belief in their own capability; self-determination concerns freedom in carrying out tasks; while

impact describes the individual's real influence on organizational outcomes. Leaders who empower others foster these four aspects through delegation of authority, coaching, open communication, and trust. Therefore, empowerment is not merely task delegation, but a process of building the internal strength of organizational members (Rahman & Rahman, 2025)

In non-Islamic or general management contexts, many studies show that empowering leadership is positively associated with job satisfaction, organizational commitment, innovative behavior, and employee well-being. When subordinates are given room to make decisions, they tend to become more creative, proactive, and responsible. However, recent studies also indicate that the effectiveness of empowering leadership is highly dependent on situational context. During crises or periods of high uncertainty, excessive autonomy may instead trigger confusion, psychological pressure, and fatigue because members require clearer direction. This means that empowering leadership is not a universal style, but one that must be adapted to the readiness level of members and environmental conditions (Pandey et al., 2025)

From the perspective of Islamic leadership, the essence of empowering leadership strongly aligns with the values of *shura* (consultation), *amanah* (trustworthiness), *'adl* (justice), and *ta'awun* (cooperation). Leaders in Islam do not act authoritatively, but involve members in decision-making processes while encouraging their best potential. The principle of consultation reflects collective participation, while *amanah* emphasizes that authority is a trust that must be used for the benefit of the community. Thus, empowerment in Islam is not merely a managerial strategy, but also a moral and spiritual responsibility of a leader (Gusli et al., 2025)

Furthermore, empowering leadership in Islamic-based institutions requires a balance between granting freedom and safeguarding values (Kusumaningtyas et al., 2022). Leaders are expected not only to encourage innovation, but also to ensure that such innovation remains aligned with ethics and Sharia principles (Rusydi, 2025). From the viewpoint of organizational behavior, empowering leadership also strengthens the social exchange relationship between leaders and members. When leaders demonstrate trust, support, and appreciation for subordinates' capabilities, members tend to reciprocate through loyalty, extra effort, and stronger commitment. Within the Islamic framework, this reciprocal relationship is in line with the concept of *ihsan*, namely giving one's best beyond formal obligations. Therefore, empowering leadership has the potential to create a work culture that is not only productive, but also full of integrity and mutual respect (Bauer et al., 2025)

Empowering leadership faces implementation challenges because not all organizational members are equally prepared to handle high levels of autonomy, as some still require

direction, training, and emotional support to perform effectively. Without adequate coaching and supervision, empowerment may create role ambiguity and reduce performance. From an Islamic perspective, empowerment must always be balanced with responsibility, accountability, and ethical values. Therefore, empowering leadership can be understood as a leadership approach that develops employees' competence, confidence, and sense of meaning at work while balancing autonomy with guidance, productivity with ethics, and professional achievement with moral as well as spiritual responsibility.

d. Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is a central concept in Social Cognitive Theory developed by Albert Bandura. Theoretically, self-efficacy influences three major dimensions of human behavior: cognitive, motivational, and affective processes. In the cognitive domain, individuals with strong self-efficacy are more capable of planning strategies, solving problems, and making sound decisions. In the motivational domain, they are more likely to set ambitious goals, persist longer, and exert greater effort. In the affective domain, self-efficacy helps reduce anxiety, fear of failure, and emotional distress when facing demanding situations. Therefore, confidence in one's capability often determines whether a person perseveres or withdraws under pressure.

According to Bandura, self-efficacy is shaped through four primary sources. First, mastery experience, which refers to successful past experiences that strengthen confidence. Second, vicarious experience, where individuals learn by observing others succeed. Third, verbal persuasion, involving encouragement, constructive feedback, and social support. Fourth, physiological and emotional states, meaning that stress levels, mood, and physical condition can influence self-belief. In organizational settings, these sources can be developed through training, mentoring, coaching, and supportive leadership practices (Rino et al., 2026).

In the workplace, self-efficacy is strongly associated with job performance. Employees with high self-efficacy tend to be more proactive, resilient, and willing to take initiative when facing difficult tasks. They are generally more prepared to learn new skills, adapt to changing systems, and respond positively to organizational demands. In contrast, workers with low self-efficacy often hesitate to make decisions, avoid challenging responsibilities, and underestimate their own potential despite having sufficient competence (Karimi et al., 2024).

Self-efficacy also plays an important role in career development. Based on Social Cognitive Career Theory, beliefs about personal capability influence career choices, expected outcomes, professional goals, and developmental behaviors. Individuals with stronger self-efficacy are more likely to pursue competitive positions, apply for promotions, engage in

continuous learning, and actively manage long-term career pathways. For younger employees and graduates, self-efficacy is particularly valuable in building career confidence and future orientation (Gerçek & Özveren, 2025). From a psychological well-being perspective, self-efficacy functions as a protective factor against work-related stress and burnout. Employees who believe in their ability to manage challenges are more likely to maintain emotional stability during uncertainty, technological change, or heavy workloads (He et al., 2026).

The practical application of self-efficacy in organizations can be achieved through job designs that allow gradual success experiences, constructive feedback systems, coaching from supervisors, exposure to internal role models, and experiential training programs. Leaders who provide trust, autonomy, and developmental support can significantly strengthen employee self-efficacy. When workers successfully complete meaningful tasks independently, their confidence increases and reinforces future performance (Junaidi, 2025).

e. Islamic Work Values

Islamic work values refer to a set of ethical principles derived from Islamic teachings that guide individual attitudes and behavior in the workplace. These values emphasize that work is not merely an economic activity, but also a form of worship (ibadah) when conducted sincerely, responsibly, and in accordance with Sharia principles. In organizational contexts, Islamic work values are increasingly recognized as an important foundation for shaping employee commitment, integrity, productivity, and ethical decision-making. Core dimensions commonly associated with Islamic work values include amanah (trustworthiness), kafa'ah (competence), ihsan (excellence), discipline, justice, and responsibility (Nisa et al., 2025).

Islamic Work Values consist of several important dimensions that guide employee attitudes and behavior in the workplace. The first is amanah (trustworthiness), which emphasizes honesty, responsibility, and the ability to fulfill obligations faithfully. Employees who uphold amanah are expected to work transparently, avoid misconduct, and maintain organizational trust. The second dimension is kafa'ah (competence), referring to the knowledge, skills, and professional capability required to perform tasks effectively. This principle supports merit-based recruitment, training, and career development to ensure employees contribute optimally to organizational goals. The third dimension is ihsan (excellence), which encourages individuals to perform work with sincerity, high quality, and continuous improvement beyond minimum standards. Employees who practice ihsan tend to show initiative, creativity, strong motivation, and superior performance, making these values highly relevant for organizational effectiveness and competitiveness.

2. Methodology

This study employs an explanatory mixed-method approach by combining quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data are used to examine the effects of Competence (X1), Empowering Leadership (X2), Self-Efficacy (X3), and Islamic Work Values (X4) on Career Advancement (Y), while qualitative interviews and observations are conducted to strengthen the interpretation of findings. The population consists of all 35 employees of PT. Mecca Abadi Sejahtera, and due to the limited number of employees, this study applies a census (saturated sampling) technique in which all employees are selected as respondents. Most respondents are aged 20–35 years, predominantly educated at the SMA/SMK level, and occupy positions ranging from helper to supervisor. Data collection was conducted through structured questionnaires using a five-point Likert scale, semi-structured interviews with owners and supervisors, and workplace observations to assess employee behavior and organizational practices. The operational indicators include knowledge, skills, and adaptability for Competence; delegation, support, and autonomy for Empowering Leadership; confidence, persistence, and initiative for Self-Efficacy; amanah, ihsan, discipline, and justice for Islamic Work Values; and promotion opportunities, recognition, and career growth for Career Advancement. Data analysis was performed using SmartPLS (PLS-SEM) and thematic qualitative analysis. The quantitative analysis includes descriptive statistics, validity testing through loading factors (>0.70), reliability testing using Composite Reliability (>0.70) and AVE (>0.50), hypothesis testing through path coefficients, T-statistics (>1.96), and P-values (<0.05), as well as R^2 analysis to measure explanatory power.

Qualitative Analysis:

Interview data are analyzed through coding, categorization, and theme interpretation.

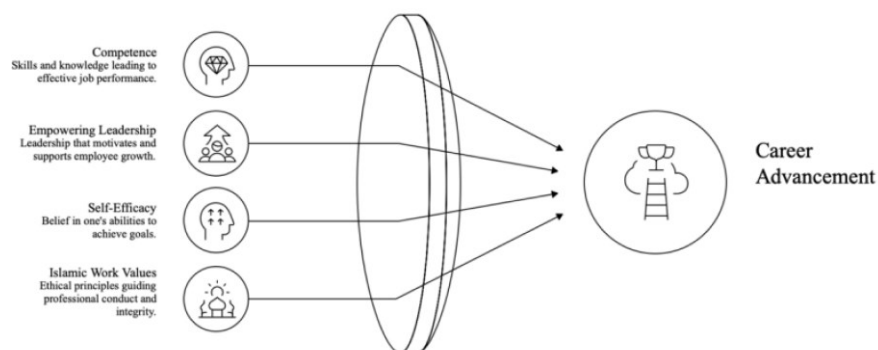


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of factors influencing career advancement.

3. Result and Discussion

A. Result

The descriptive findings indicate that most employees perceive that career advancement opportunities are available and visible within PT. Mecca Abadi Sejahtera Respondents generally agreed that promotion is possible for employees who demonstrate good performance, commitment, and readiness to take greater responsibilities. This suggests that employees recognize the existence of a career path within the company rather than viewing positions as static or closed.

Employees also understand that promotion is not based solely on tenure, but requires the development of several important competencies. The most frequently recognized factors include technical skill mastery, particularly the ability to operate equipment, understand production processes, and solve work-related problems efficiently. Employees believe that those who show stronger job competence have greater chances to be considered for higher positions.

In addition, respondents highlighted the importance of communication skills. Workers perceive that employees who can coordinate with colleagues, communicate instructions clearly, and maintain positive workplace relationships are more likely to advance into coordinator or supervisory roles. This finding indicates that soft skills are considered as important as technical ability in the promotion process. Another commonly perceived requirement is readiness for job rotation and broader responsibilities. Employees acknowledged that career growth often requires flexibility to learn new tasks, adapt to different departments, and accept changing work demands. Those who are willing to take on new assignments are seen as more prepared for advancement opportunities.

Quantitative Findings:

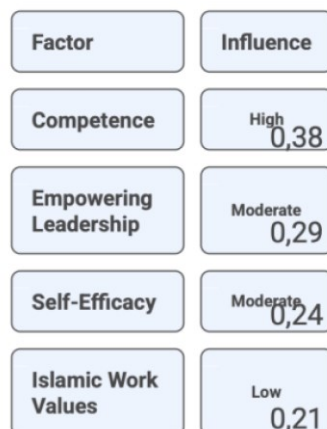
The quantitative analysis was conducted using PLS-SEM (SmartPLS) to examine the influence of Competence, Empowering Leadership, Self-Efficacy, and Islamic Work Values on Career Advancement. The results indicate that all independent variables show positive relationships with employee career advancement, although the strength of each effect differs.

Table 1. Structural Model Results

Relationship	Path Coefficient	Effect Strength	Result
Competence → Career Advancement	0.38	Strongest	Significant
Empowering Leadership → Career Advancement	0.29	Moderate	Significant
Self-Efficacy → Career Advancement	0.24	Moderate	Significant
Islamic Work Values → Career Advancement	0.21	Moderate	Significant

Table 1 shows that all independent variables have a positive and significant effect on Career Advancement. This means that increases in competence, empowering leadership, self-efficacy, and Islamic work values are associated with better employee career progress. Among all variables, Competence has the strongest influence ($\beta = 0.38$), indicating that technical ability, work knowledge, and job capability are the main considerations for promotion.

Meanwhile, Empowering Leadership ($\beta = 0.29$) has a moderate positive effect, suggesting that leaders who provide trust, autonomy, and support can enhance employee promotion opportunities. Self-Efficacy ($\beta = 0.24$) also contributes positively, meaning confident employees are more likely to pursue and achieve career growth. Islamic Work Values ($\beta = 0.21$) show a significant effect, implying that trustworthiness, discipline, and ethical behavior support advancement decisions. The results indicate that career advancement is influenced not only by competence, but also by leadership support, psychological confidence, and ethical work values

**Figure 2.** Research Model Result

The findings show that Competence has the strongest effect on Career Advancement. This means employees with stronger technical ability, work knowledge, and problem-solving skills tend to receive greater opportunities for promotion and higher responsibilities. In the manufacturing environment of PT. Mecca Abadi Sejahtera, competence is a major consideration because operational performance depends heavily on employee capability.

Empowering Leadership also demonstrates a significant positive effect. Employees who receive trust, guidance, autonomy, and developmental support from supervisors are more likely to grow professionally and become ready for higher positions. Leaders who delegate responsibility can help employees gain experience needed for advancement.

The results further indicate that Self-Efficacy positively influences Career Advancement. Employees who believe in their ability to complete tasks, handle pressure, and learn new responsibilities tend to be more proactive and confident in pursuing career growth. High self-efficacy supports initiative and persistence in the workplace.

Lastly, Islamic Work Values show a significant positive effect, particularly in strengthening employee trustworthiness, discipline, and readiness for responsibility. Values such as amanah, ihsan, and justice appear to shape positive work behavior, which increases managerial trust and promotion potential.

The model suggests that career advancement at PT. Mecca Abadi Sejahtera is influenced by both technical competence and behavioral factors. While competence remains the most dominant predictor, leadership support, confidence, and ethical work values also play meaningful roles in employee career progression.

Qualitative Findings:

The qualitative findings, based on interviews with the owner, supervisors, and several employees, reveal that career advancement at PT. Mecca Abadi Sejahtera is strongly influenced by direct managerial observation and practical performance assessment. Respondents explained that the owner is actively involved in daily operations and frequently supervises employees on the production floor. This hands-on leadership approach allows management to closely monitor employee discipline, technical ability, work attitude, and readiness for additional responsibilities.

Interview results also indicate that management regularly identifies individual employee strengths and potential through daily interaction rather than relying only on formal evaluations. Employees who demonstrate initiative, consistency, and problem-solving ability are more

likely to receive greater trust from management. Supervisors stated that such direct observation helps the company recognize capable workers more accurately, especially in a relatively small organizational setting.

Another important finding is the practice of job rotation before promotion. Employees are often assigned to different tasks or work sections to test adaptability, broaden skills, and evaluate whether they can handle more complex responsibilities. This rotation system is considered useful because it enables management to assess employees not only in one position, but across multiple operational functions. Workers who perform well in several areas are viewed as stronger candidates for advancement.

Most employees perceive this promotion system as fair and merit-based. Respondents believe that higher positions are earned through proven capability, willingness to learn, and demonstrated performance rather than favoritism or seniority alone. The requirement to master multiple tasks before promotion is seen as a reasonable standard because supervisors and coordinators are expected to understand broader operational processes.

Overall, the qualitative findings support the quantitative results by showing that competence, leadership support, adaptability, and trustworthiness are central considerations in career advancement decisions. The promotion process at PT. Mecca Abadi Sejahtera appears to emphasize practical readiness and observable contribution, creating a transparent pathway for employees seeking career growth.

B. Discussion

The findings indicate that internal promotion systems in SMEs can function effectively even without sophisticated human resource structures. At PT. Mecca Abadi Sejahtera, career advancement is primarily influenced by direct supervision, continuous observation, and daily performance evaluation rather than formalized corporate procedures. This shows that effective talent management in SMEs can be achieved through consistent managerial involvement and clear performance expectations. The study also reveals that practical meritocracy may serve as an alternative to formal bureaucracy, where promotion decisions are based on demonstrated competence, adaptability, discipline, and readiness to take broader responsibilities rather than favoritism or seniority alone. Such an approach is particularly relevant for SMEs because it supports faster, more flexible, and operationally realistic decision-making processes.

The study found that competence is the strongest determinant of career advancement at PT. M, particularly because the company operates in a technical and production-oriented industry where operational accuracy directly influences productivity, quality, and safety.

Employees with stronger technical knowledge, machine-handling skills, and problem-solving abilities are considered more prepared for higher positions, making competence a central factor in internal promotion. Nevertheless, advancement is not based solely on technical expertise. Communication ability, coordination readiness, and the capacity to guide others also play important roles, especially for supervisory positions that require employees to manage workflow, resolve conflicts, and provide clear direction. These findings indicate that career advancement represents a transition from operational contribution to managerial responsibility, highlighting the importance of developing both hard skills and soft skills in employee promotion preparation.

From an Islamic Human Resource Management (HRM) perspective, the promotion system at PT. Mecca Abadi Sejahtera reflects the values of amanah and kafa'ah. Amanah refers to trustworthiness, responsibility, and integrity, while kafa'ah refers to competence and capability. Promotion is not treated as an automatic reward, but as a trust that must be earned through proven responsibility and adequate ability. Employees who consistently show discipline, honesty, and dependable performance are considered more worthy of leadership roles. This demonstrates that Islamic values can be practically integrated into modern HR decisions without reducing efficiency.

These findings offer an alternative model for SMEs seeking ethical, efficient, and low-cost talent management systems. Instead of depending on expensive HR technology or rigid corporate bureaucracy, SMEs can build internal promotion systems based on direct leadership engagement, transparent criteria, skill development, and moral accountability. Such a model is especially suitable for growing businesses that need to maintain fairness while remaining operationally agile.

Table 2. Key Promotion Determinants

Factor	Role in Career Advancement	Strength
Competence	Technical ability, problem-solving	Strongest
Communication Skill	Coordination and supervision	High
Empowering Leadership	Guidance and opportunity	Moderate
Self-Efficacy	Confidence and initiative	Moderate
Islamic Work Values	Trust, discipline, ethics	Moderate

The table shows several factors that contribute to career advancement and the relative strength of each factor. Overall, the findings indicate that career progression is influenced by a

combination of technical competence, interpersonal abilities, leadership support, self-belief, and work values.

Competence appears as the strongest factor influencing career advancement. This suggests that technical expertise, professional knowledge, and problem-solving ability are the most important considerations in promotion and career development decisions. Employees with higher competence are generally viewed as more capable of handling greater responsibilities.

Communication Skill is categorized as high, indicating that effective communication plays a major role in career growth. The ability to coordinate with others, supervise teams, and express ideas clearly is highly valued in organizations. Individuals with strong communication skills are often considered suitable for leadership and managerial roles.

Empowering Leadership has a moderate effect, meaning that supportive leaders who provide guidance, trust, and development opportunities can positively influence employee career advancement. When supervisors encourage participation and delegate responsibility, employees are more likely to demonstrate their capabilities and grow professionally.

Self-Efficacy also shows a moderate influence. This means that confidence in one's own abilities, initiative, and willingness to take on challenges can support career progress. Employees with high self-efficacy are usually more proactive, resilient, and motivated to pursue advancement opportunities.

Islamic Work Values are likewise classified as moderate, suggesting that values such as trustworthiness, discipline, honesty, and ethical conduct remain important in supporting long-term career success. Although their influence may not be as strong as competence, these values help build a positive reputation and organizational trust.

The findings imply that career advancement is not determined solely by technical ability. It is also shaped by soft skills, leadership environment, psychological confidence, and ethical work values. Nevertheless, competence remains the primary foundation for achieving career growth.

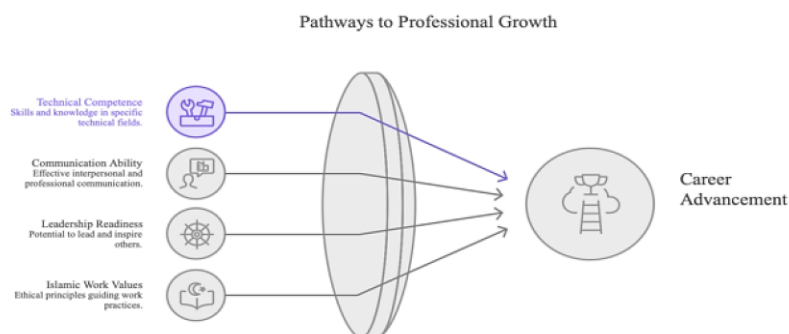


Figure 3. SME Internal Promotion Model

Figure 3 illustrates a conceptual model showing how several employee qualities contribute to career advancement through a fair internal promotion system. The model indicates that career growth does not occur automatically, but is influenced by multiple competencies and evaluated through a transparent managerial process.

The first factor, Technical Competence, refers to employees' ability to perform tasks effectively, solve operational problems, and master work-related skills. In industrial and manufacturing environments, technical competence is a fundamental requirement because promotion decisions often prioritize individuals who can maintain productivity and work quality. The second factor, Communication Ability, reflects employees' capacity to interact clearly with supervisors and coworkers, coordinate tasks, and deliver instructions effectively. This skill becomes increasingly important as employees move into higher positions that require teamwork management and cross-functional coordination.

The third factor, Leadership Readiness, reflects an employee's preparedness to take responsibility, guide others, make decisions, and manage work processes. Advancement into coordinator or supervisory positions requires not only technical expertise but also the ability to lead and support team performance effectively. The fourth factor, Islamic Work Values, includes principles such as amanah (trustworthiness), ihsan (excellence), discipline, justice, and responsibility. These values strengthen ethical behavior, employee credibility, and managerial trust, making them important considerations in leadership selection and promotion decisions.

These four elements are assessed through a Fair Evaluation Process, in which promotion decisions are based on objective criteria such as performance, competence, discipline, and readiness rather than favoritism or seniority alone. Such a system increases employee motivation because career advancement is perceived as achievable through merit. Employees who successfully pass this evaluation stage may receive Internal Promotion, referring to movement into higher roles within the same organization. Internal promotion not only rewards capable employees but also helps organizations retain talent and reduce recruitment costs. Ultimately, successful promotion leads to Career Advancement, reflected in higher positions, greater responsibility, improved income, and wider professional development opportunities. Overall, the model suggests that career progression is most effective when organizations integrate competence, leadership readiness, ethical values, and fair promotion practices.

Table 3. Islamic HRM Interpretation

Islamic Value	Practical Meaning in Company
Amanah	Promotion based on trustworthiness
Kafa'ah	Promotion based on competence
Ihsan	High-quality work performance
Justice	Fair promotion opportunity
Responsibility	Readiness for larger duties

The table illustrates how Islamic values can be applied as practical principles in career advancement and promotion systems within organizations. These values provide an ethical framework to ensure that promotion decisions are not only performance-oriented but also fair and trustworthy. Amanah emphasizes trustworthiness and integrity, meaning that employees who are honest, reliable, and responsible are more likely to gain managerial trust for higher positions. Meanwhile, kafa'ah refers to competence and professional capability, implying that promotion should be based on skills, knowledge, and performance rather than favoritism or personal relationships. Together, these principles support a merit-based and ethically grounded promotion system.

Ihsan represents excellence and the pursuit of high-quality performance, encouraging employees to work with dedication, professionalism, and continuous improvement. Employees who consistently deliver outstanding results are therefore considered strong candidates for career advancement. Justice emphasizes fairness and equal opportunity, meaning that promotion decisions should be based on merit and transparent evaluation criteria rather than bias or favoritism. Responsibility reflects employees' readiness to handle broader duties and accountability for organizational outcomes. Together, these findings suggest that Islamic values provide a strong ethical foundation for human resource management, where promotion is determined not only by performance and seniority, but also by trustworthiness, competence, excellence, fairness, and accountability, creating a more sustainable and ethical workplace environment.

5. Conclusion

Empowering leadership is an effective leadership style for improving performance, individual development, and career readiness through the provision of trust, autonomy, and capacity-building support. This leadership approach encourages subordinates to become more

confident, proactive, responsible, and capable of making independent decisions. Therefore, empowering leadership contributes positively to productivity, innovation, job satisfaction, and career advancement opportunities.

However, the effectiveness of empowering leadership is neither automatic nor universal. Its success depends greatly on employee readiness, organizational culture, and work conditions. If autonomy is provided without sufficient direction, training, or supervision, it may create role ambiguity, declining performance, and work pressure. Thus, ideal empowering leadership is not merely about delegating authority, but also about providing coaching, evaluation, and continuous guidance.

From an Islamic perspective, empowering leadership is consistent with the values of shura (consultation), amanah (trustworthiness), justice, responsibility, and ta'awun (cooperation). Leaders are expected not only to improve organizational outcomes, but also to develop individuals who are professionally competent and morally grounded. Therefore, empowering leadership can be understood as a modern leadership model that is managerially effective and aligned with Islamic ethical principles, as it balances freedom with responsibility and productivity with moral and spiritual values.

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