

The Effects of Talent Management and Competency Development on Career Readiness among Pola Pembibitan Cadets: The Mediating Role of Career Commitment

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Abstract

This study examines the effects of talent management and competency development on career readiness among Pola Pembibitan cadets, with career commitment serving as a mediating variable. A quantitative approach was employed using primary data collected through questionnaires administered to Pola Pembibitan cadets. The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) through measurement and structural model evaluation. The findings indicate that competency development has a positive and significant effect on career readiness, whereas talent management does not demonstrate a significant direct effect on career readiness. Talent management and competency development positively influence career commitment, while career commitment has a positive and significant effect on career readiness. The mediation analysis further demonstrates that career commitment serves as an important mechanism through which talent management contributes to career readiness and strengthens the contribution of competency development to career readiness. Overall, the measurement model demonstrates adequate quality, although the empirical distinction between career commitment and career readiness warrants further attention. These findings emphasize that career readiness among Pola Pembibitan cadets is shaped not only by capability development but also by their commitment to the professional career path they intend to pursue. Accordingly, cadet management should integrate talent mapping, practice-based competency development, mentoring, career alignment, and career commitment enhancement as part of a comprehensive preparation process for professional assignment.

Keywords: talent management, competency development, career readiness, career commitment, pola pembibitan cadets.

INTRODUCTION

Government-affiliated vocational higher education differs from general higher education because the processes of selection, education, guidance, competency development, and the transition to assignment all operate within a relatively structured institutional chain. Under the Ministry of Transportation's "seedling" (*pola pembibitan*) scheme, participants

are selected, educated, and groomed as human resources projected to meet the staffing needs of the Ministry of Transportation, local governments, and other ministries or agencies, in accordance with available vacancies. This context positions the cadets not merely as students, but as part of a public sector talent pipeline that requires systematic management, from the initial entry stage and throughout their education, right up to the point of placement.

Although the placement pathway within the seedling scheme is more structured than the open labor market, this structure does not automatically guarantee career readiness. Career readiness encompasses the ability to apply knowledge and skills, understand organizational expectations, communicate and collaborate, make decisions, adapt to change, and cultivate a mindset oriented toward continuous professional development. Caballero, Walker, and Fuller-Tyszkiewicz (2011) define work readiness through four key domains: personal characteristics, organizational acumen, work competence, and social intelligence. These four domains are highly relevant for cadets in the seedling scheme, as graduation requires them to transition from a structured educational environment to a public sector workplace characterized by more complex demands regarding performance, governance, discipline, and service delivery.

From a human resource management perspective, career readiness can be viewed as an outcome of the quality of the development systems an individual experience. One such system is talent management. Lewis and Heckman (2006) demonstrated that the concept of talent management evolved from practices involving general HR management, talent pools, and talent flows. Subsequently, Collings and Mellahi (2009) emphasized that strategic talent management focuses on identifying strategic positions, establishing high-potential talent pools, and creating an HR architecture that ensures the right individuals are developed and placed in the right roles. Al Ariss, Cascio, and Paauwe (2014) emphasize that talent management research must consider institutional contexts and individual consequences, rather than focusing solely on organizational interests.

Talent management principles can be applied to cadet development programs through the mapping of cadet potential, the provision of tailored developmental experiences, mentoring, periodic assessments, the reinforcement of achievements, exposure to work units, and the alignment of competencies with staffing requirements. Empirical evidence from higher education supports the relevance of this approach. Ramaditya, Effendi, and Fitriani (2023) found that talent management practices contribute to students' work readiness. Pagiu, Pundissing, and Maharani (2025) also demonstrated a positive relationship between talent management and student work readiness. These findings indicate that targeted talent management practices can enhance an individual's ability to navigate the transition from education to the workforce.

A second factor expected to exert a strong influence is competency development. In this article, competency is understood as a capacity manifested through knowledge, skills, behaviors, and the ability to apply learning to work situations. Early on, McClelland (1973) criticized the use of general intelligence as the sole predictor of job success, advocating instead for competency-based assessments that more closely align with performance behaviors. In a vocational context, classroom learning alone is insufficient for competency development; laboratory practice, simulations, fieldwork, on-the-job training, certification, problem-based learning, coaching, and feedback facilitate the transfer of knowledge into actual performance.

The link between competency development and work readiness is well-supported by existing literature. Ismoyo and Wahjudi (2023), for instance, demonstrated that vocational competence influences work readiness through psychological mechanisms that reinforce this relationship. A systematic review by Nugroho, Irianto, and Suryanto (2024) regarding Indonesian higher education further confirmed that internship experiences, soft skills, and

integrated learning play pivotal roles in shaping work readiness. Regarding cadets, Siahaan, Barasa, Malau, and Herawati (2026) highlighted the importance of integrating competency-based curricula with career pathways in the development of maritime cadets; this ensures that learning extends beyond mere technical competency acquisition to connect with professional transitions and workforce sustainability.

While talent management and competency development provide external resources for individual growth, their influence on career readiness is not necessarily entirely direct. Individuals may receive identical development opportunities yet achieve varying levels of readiness due to differences in professional orientation. This is where career commitment becomes crucial. Blau (1985) defined career commitment as an individual's attitude toward their chosen occupation or vocation. It reflects an attachment to a career field, a willingness to persist, and a readiness to invest effort in professional growth within that path.

The mediation mechanism finds indirect support in contemporary literature. Aljbour, Ali, and French (2024) found that perceived career growth serves as a mechanism linking talent management practices to employee outcomes, including commitment. Hosen et al. (2024) demonstrated that organizational commitment can mediate the impact of training and development on performance. Sondakh (2024) identified a link between career commitment and training transfer among millennials. Although the variables and contexts differ, these findings align with the notion that institutional development experiences must be internalized as psychological commitment before fully manifesting as work readiness or behavior.

Research gaps exist in three areas. First, most talent management research focuses on current employees, whereas studies on individuals within the educational talent pipeline remain relatively limited. Second, studies on student work readiness often position competence, internship experience, self-efficacy, or career planning as predictors but have yet to integrate talent management and career commitment into a single model. Third, the “nurturing pipeline” (pola pembibitan) context is unique because the link between education and career pathways is highly structured; consequently, career readiness entails not merely the ability to secure a job, but the capacity to enter, perform in, and sustainably develop a career in public service.

Addressing these gaps, this study aims to empirically examine: (1) the impact of talent management on the career readiness of cadets in the nurturing pipeline program; (2) the impact of competency development on career readiness; (3) the impact of talent management and competency development on career commitment; (4) the impact of career commitment on career readiness; and (5) the mediating role of career commitment in the relationship between talent management/competency development and career readiness. The study's novelty lies in its integrated examination of strategic talent management, competency development, career commitment, and career readiness within the context of a pre-employment public-sector talent pipeline.

METHOD

Design, Respondents, and Data Collection

This study employed a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional design. Primary data were obtained from questionnaires completed by 108 cadets from the recruitment and training program (pola pembibitan), and all complete responses were included in the main analysis. The respondents consisted of 56 males (51.9%) and 52 females (48.1%). Regarding study programs, 44 respondents (40.7%) were from Automotive Technology, 42 (38.9%) from Road Transport Management, and 22 (20.4%) from Logistics Management. The respondents' ages ranged from 19 to 25 years, with a mean age of 22.27 years (SD=1.50; median=22).

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

Characteristics	n	% / Summary
Number of Respondents	108	100%
Male	56	51.9%
Female	52	48.1%
Automotive Technology	44	40.7%
Road Transportation Management	42	38.9%
Logistics Management	22	20.4%
Age	108	Mean 22.27; SD 1.50; median 22; range 19–25 years

Instruments and Operationalization of Variables

The instrument utilized a 1–5 Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The initial questionnaire comprised 20 primary items, with five items each for Talent Management (X1), Competence Development (X2), Career Commitment (M), and Career Readiness (Y). Talent Management measured potential identification/mapping, competence gaps, development opportunities, mentoring/feedback, and alignment with career direction. Competence Development covered technical competence, problem-solving, communication/collaboration, practical experience/OJT, as well as feedback and learning transfer. Career Commitment measured professional identification, persistence, self-investment, desire to remain, and development orientation, while Career Readiness measured readiness to perform professional roles, organizational understanding, problem analysis, social skills, and transition adaptation. Following the outer model evaluation, items X2.2, M.2, and Y.2 were eliminated; consequently, the final model utilized 17 indicators: five indicators for X1 and four indicators each for X2, M, and Y.

Data Analysis Technique

Analysis was conducted using a reflective PLS-SEM approach (Mode A) in SmartPLS 4. The first stage involved evaluating the measurement model via outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (ρ_c), average variance extracted (AVE), the Fornell-Larcker criterion, and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT). The second stage involved evaluating the structural model via path coefficients, R^2 and adjusted R^2 , effect size f^2 , inner VIF, and specific indirect effects. Significance was tested using bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples, employing the Bias-Corrected and Accelerated (BCa) bootstrap method, a two-tailed test, and a 5% significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$). The practical criteria applied were outer loadings ≥ 0.70 , reliability ≥ 0.70 , AVE ≥ 0.50 , HTMT < 0.90 , and VIF < 5 . Mediation is determined based on the significance of the specific indirect effect and the pattern of the direct effect.

The measurement model was evaluated in stages prior to testing the structural model. In the initial model, three indicators, X2.2 (0.656), M.2 (0.688), and Y.2 (0.691), had outer loadings below 0.70. These three indicators were eliminated, and the PLS Algorithm was rerun. In the final model, all 17 retained indicators exhibited outer loadings above 0.70; consequently, the analysis proceeded to bootstrapping for hypothesis testing.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Constructs

Construct	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Skewness
X1 Talent Management	4,437	0,495	2,600	5,000	-0,724
X2 Competence Development	4,523	0,472	3,250	5,000	-0,680
M Career Commitment	4,502	0,485	3,000	5,000	-0,701
Y Career Readiness	4,590	0,441	3,250	5,000	-0,671

Descriptive statistics were calculated based on the indicators retained in the final model. All constructs exhibited mean values above 4.40 on a 1–5 scale. Career Readiness had the highest mean (M=4.590; SD=0.441), followed by Competence Development (M=4.523; SD=0.472), Career Commitment (M=4.502; SD=0.485), and Talent Management (M=4.437; SD=0.495). All skewness values were negative, indicating a concentration of responses in the "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" categories, thereby suggesting a distribution of scores skewed toward the higher end.

Measurement Model Evaluation

Table 3. Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE	Sqrt (AVE)	Reliability and convergent validity
X1 Talent Management	0,841	0,887	0,611	0,781	Met
X2 Competence Development	0,821	0,882	0,651	0,807	Met
M Career Commitment	0,797	0,868	0,622	0,789	Met
Y Career Readiness	0,807	0,874	0,634	0,796	Met

Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.797 to 0.841, and composite reliability (ρ_c) values ranged from 0.868 to 0.887; thus, all constructs met the criteria for internal reliability. AVE values fell within the 0.611–0.651 range, with all exceeding 0.50. Consequently, the final measurement model satisfied the criteria for reliability and convergent validity at the construct level.

Table 4. Indicator Outer Loadings

Items	Outer Loading	Item	Outer Loading
X1.1	0,857	M.1	0,788
X1.2	0,791	M.3	0,809
X1.3	0,730	M.4	0,794
X1.4	0,740	M.5	0,762
X1.5	0,782	Y.1	0,839
X2.1	0,830	Y.3	0,814
X2.3	0,796	Y.4	0,777

X2.4	0,777	Y.5	0,753
X2.5	0,825		

In the final model, all 17 indicators exhibited outer loadings above 0.70, ranging from 0.730 to 0.857. X1 retained five indicators, while X2, M, and Y each retained four indicators following the elimination of X2.2, M.2, and Y.2 during the initial stage. These results indicate that all indicators used in the structural analysis met the criteria for convergent validity at the indicator level.

Discriminant Validity

Table 5. HTMT

Construction Couple	HTMT	Status (<0.90)
X1 ↔ X2	0,838	Fulfilled
X1 ↔	0,862	Fulfilled
X1 ↔ Y	0,826	Fulfilled
X2 ↔	0,799	Fulfilled
X2 ↔ Y	0,837	Fulfilled
M ↔ Y	0,955	Not fulfilled

The HTMT results indicate that five of the six construct pairs fall below the 0.90 threshold. The HTMT values – X1-X2 (0.838), X1-M (0.862), X1-Y (0.826), X2-M (0.799), and X2-Y (0.837) – meet the criteria, whereas the M-Y value of 0.955 exceeds the 0.90 limit. The Fornell-Larcker criterion shows a more favorable pattern: the square root of the AVE for each construct (X1=0.781; X2=0.807; M=0.789; Y=0.796) is higher than the corresponding inter-construct correlations. Thus, discriminant validity is generally adequate; however, the empirical proximity between Career Commitment and Career Readiness warrants attention when interpreting the structural results.

Structural Model Evaluation and Hypothesis Testing

Table 6. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypo	Track	β / Indirect	t	p	BCa CI 95%	f ²	Status
H1	X1 → Y	0,191	1,108	0,268	[-0,157; 0,500]	0,044	No
H2	X2 → Y	0,244	2,030	0,042	[0,010; 0,476]	0,083	Yes
H3	X1 → M	0,500	4,650	<0,001	[0,280; 0,702]	0,287	Yes
H4	X2 → M	0,301	2,473	0,013	[0,057; 0,535]	0,104	Yes
H5	M → Y	0,474	4,221	<0,001	[0,257; 0,693]	0,301	Yes
H6	X1 → M → Y	0,237	3,012	0,003	[0,106; 0,420]	-	Yes
H7	X2 → M → Y	0,143	2,133	0,033	[0,037; 0,308]	-	Yes

Six of the seven hypotheses were supported. H1 was not supported because the direct effect of Talent Management on Career Readiness was not significant ($\beta=0.191$; $t=1.108$; $p=0.268$; 95% BCa CI [-0.157; 0.500]). Conversely, Competence Development had a positive and significant effect on Career Readiness ($\beta=0.244$; $t=2.030$; $p=0.042$; CI [0.010; 0.476]), Talent Management had a positive effect on Career Commitment ($\beta=0.500$; $t=4.650$; $p<0.001$; CI [0.280; 0.702]), Competence Development had a positive effect on Career Commitment ($\beta=0.301$; $t=2.473$; $p=0.013$; CI [0.057; 0.535]), and Career Commitment had a positive effect on Career Readiness ($\beta=0.474$; $t=4.221$; $p<0.001$; CI [0.257; 0.693]). The f^2 effect sizes indicate that the effects of $M \rightarrow Y$ (0.301) and $X1 \rightarrow M$ (0.287) fall into the medium category, whereas $X2 \rightarrow M$ (0.104), $X2 \rightarrow Y$ (0.083), and $X1 \rightarrow Y$ (0.044) fall into the small category.

Table 7. Coefficient of Determination

Endogenous Constructs	R ²	R ² Adjusted	Interpretation
M Career Commitment	0,549	0,541	Moderate
Y Career Readiness	0,664	0,654	Moderate to strong

Table 8. Inner VIF

Endogenous	Predictor	VIF	Status
M	X1	1,930	Safe
M	X2	1,930	Safe
Y	X1	2,484	Safe
Y	X2	2,131	Safe
Y	M	2,219	Safe

The inner VIF values for all predictors range from 1.930 to 2.484. All values are below 3 and well below the threshold of 5; thus, there is no indication of multicollinearity that would compromise the structural path estimates.

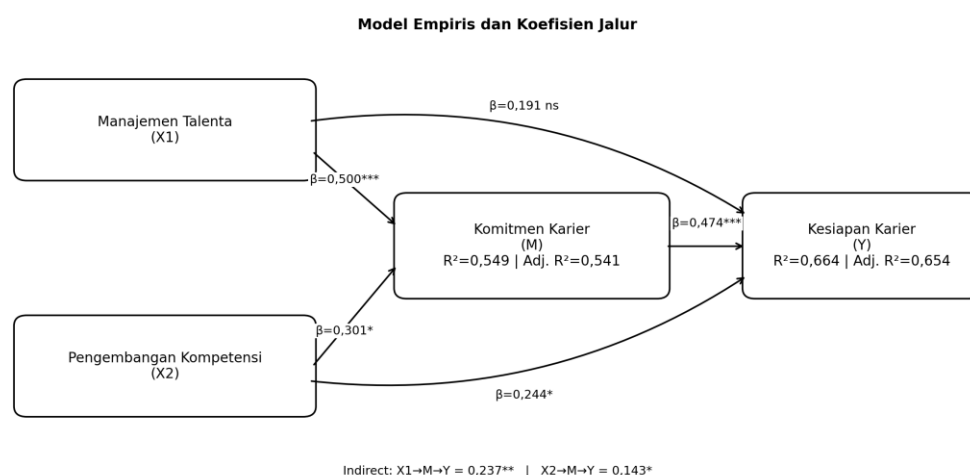


Figure 1. Empirical Model and Path Coefficients

Note: *** $p<0.001$; ** $p<0.01$; * $p<0.05$; ns = not significant.

Mediation Analysis

H6 is supported. The specific indirect effect of Talent Management on Career Readiness via Career Commitment is 0.237 and significant ($t=3.012$; $p=0.003$; BCa 95% CI [0.106; 0.420]), whereas the direct effect ($X1 \rightarrow Y$) is not significant. This pattern indicates "indirect-only mediation," which, in classical terminology, can be understood as "full mediation" meaning that the contribution of Talent Management to Career Readiness in this model is primarily channeled through the strengthening of Career Commitment.

H7 is also supported. The specific indirect effect of Competence Development on Career Readiness via Career Commitment is 0.143 and significant ($t=2.133$; $p=0.033$; BCa 95% CI [0.037; 0.308]), while the direct effect ($X2 \rightarrow Y$) remains positive and significant. This pattern indicates "complementary partial mediation": Competence Development enhances Career Readiness both directly and indirectly through the enhancement of Career Commitment.

Discussion

Talent Management and Career Readiness

The lack of a significant direct effect of Talent Management on Career Readiness (H1) indicates that practices such as potential mapping, development opportunities, mentoring, feedback, and career alignment do not automatically translate into professional readiness when Competence Development and Career Commitment are simultaneously taken into account. This finding differs from the direct support reported by Ramaditya et al. (2023) and Pagiu et al. (2025), yet it does not imply that talent management is irrelevant. Rather, mediation results reveal that its influence operates primarily through Career Commitment. In the context of talent cultivation, talent management practices appear to first shape clarity of direction, professional identification, and the willingness to invest in one's career before impacting readiness.

Competence Development and Career Readiness

H2 is supported, with a coefficient of 0.244 ($p=0.042$). This finding aligns with the logic of competence-based development and evidence that competence and applied learning experiences are crucial antecedents of work readiness. In vocational transportation education, readiness requires not only technical knowledge but also skills in problem-solving, communication, collaboration, the application of competence during on-the-job training (OJT) or practical work, and the transfer of feedback to real-world situations. Although the direct effect size ($X2 \rightarrow Y$) is relatively small ($f^2=0.083$), the significance of the path indicates that enhancing competence makes a tangible contribution to career readiness even when Talent Management and Career Commitment are accounted for.

Antecedents of Career Commitment

Both Talent Management and Competence Development positively influence Career Commitment (H3 and H4). The influence of Talent Management is stronger ($\beta=0.500$; $f^2=0.287$) than that of Competence Development ($\beta=0.301$; $f^2=0.104$). These results support Social Exchange Theory: institutional support, opportunities for growth, feedback, and mastery experiences can be internalized as a sense of attachment to the professional field. For cadets in the recruitment and training program (pola pembibitan), career commitment is not merely a consequence of a relatively structured placement pathway; rather, it is shaped by the perception that the institution assists them in understanding their potential, fostering their growth, and recognizing the link between their competencies and their future professional roles.

Career Commitment as a Predictor and Mediator

Career commitment exhibits the strongest direct coefficient regarding career readiness ($\beta = 0.474$), with an effect size of $f^2 = 0.301$. Based on Cohen's benchmarks, this value falls into the medium-to-large category. These findings reinforce the argument that readiness is not solely a matter of ability, but also involves the willingness and persistence required to pursue the profession. Hypothesis 6 (H6) indicates "indirect-only mediation" within the Talent Management pathway, whereas Hypothesis 7 (H7) indicates "complementary partial mediation" within the Competence Development pathway. Thus, career commitment serves as a psychological mechanism that transforms developmental experiences into self-investment, persistence, and readiness to undertake assignments.

Notes on Construct Validity and Interpretation Implications

Although six hypotheses were supported and the model's explanatory power ranged from moderate to strong, one construct pair failed to meet the HTMT < 0.90 threshold: Career Commitment–Career Readiness (HTMT = 0.955). Conversely, the Fornell-Larcker criterion was satisfied for all constructs. This pattern indicates that the empirical distinction between M and Y requires further strengthening; however, the discriminant validity issue regarding the Competence Development–Career Readiness pair was resolved following the elimination of indicators X2.2, M.2, and Y.2. These findings offer methodological insights for refining the wording of Career Commitment and Career Readiness items in future research.

Managerial Implications for the Management of "Recruitment Pattern" Cadets

Table 9. Managerial Implications

No.	Program	Implementation	Managerial Outputs
1	Early-stage talent mapping	Baseline assessment of potential, interests, competency gaps, and career orientation.	Talent profiles and individual/cohort gap maps.
2	Individual Development Plan (IDP)	Individual development targets reviewed periodically with supervisors/mentors.	More targeted development interventions.
3	Competency gap dashboard	Integration of academic performance, practical work, certifications, on-the-job training (OJT), soft skills, and feedback.	Early warning of gaps prior to placement.
4	Mentoring and career conversations	Dialogue with alumni, practitioners, supervisors, and prospective work units.	Enhanced career clarity and commitment.
5	High-quality work-integrated learning	Evaluation of task relevance, supervision, problem-solving, feedback, and OJT reflection.	Improved learning transfer and readiness.
6	Realistic job preview	Realistic overview of the civil servant (ASN) role, location, work patterns, risks, ethics, and service demands.	More realistic career commitment resilient to transitions.
7	Pre-placement readiness assessment	Simulations covering case studies, communication, teamwork, organizational acumen, and adaptability.	Final readiness profiles and bridging interventions.

8	Post-placement evaluation	Linking readiness to the graduates' initial performance.	Closed-loop talent development.
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The most significant managerial priority emerging from the empirical findings is the integration of talent management systems with competency development and career commitment, rather than implementing them as separate programs. Given that the direct path ($X1 \rightarrow Y$) is not significant while the indirect path ($X1 \rightarrow M \rightarrow Y$) is, talent mapping must be accompanied by career conversations, mentoring, clarity regarding prospects, and the strengthening of professional identity. Simultaneously, competency development must incorporate authentic practical experiences, as these exert both direct and indirect influences on readiness.

CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical evidence that the career readiness of cadets in the recruitment-and-training program (*pola pembibitan*) is shaped by a combination of capability and commitment. Competence Development has a direct positive effect on Career Readiness, whereas Talent Management does not show a significant direct effect once mediators and other predictors are included in the model. However, both Talent Management and Competence Development enhance Career Commitment, which in turn boosts Career Readiness. Mediation analysis reveals that Career Commitment serves as the primary pathway for the influence of Talent Management and an additional pathway reinforcing the influence of Competence Development.

The final model yields R^2 values of 0.549 for Career Commitment and 0.664 for Career Readiness, with adjusted R^2 values of 0.541 and 0.654, respectively. From a practical standpoint, these findings support managing cadets as a public-sector talent pipeline that integrates talent mapping, practice-based competence development, mentoring, career alignment, and readiness assessment. Reliability and convergent validity requirements were met, and the Fornell-Larcker criterion indicates adequate discriminant validity; however, the HTMT value of 0.955 for the Career Commitment–Career Readiness relationship suggests that caution is needed when empirically distinguishing between the two constructs.

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