


## Career Growth and Employee Performance in the Agribusiness Industry: Insights from a Qualitative Case Study in Central Java

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### ABSTRACT

Work performance and career development are essential components in fostering a productive and sustainable work environment. This study aims to explore the relationship between work performance and career development processes within agribusiness companies in Sukoharjo, Central Java. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed, utilizing in-depth interviews with purposively selected employees and managers. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns, themes, and factors influencing both work performance and career development. The findings indicate that work performance is assessed through dimensions of productivity, work quality, and innovative capability. Career development programs, such as training and mentorship, were found to play a crucial role in enhancing employee skills, motivation, and loyalty. Furthermore, transparent performance evaluations and equitable reward systems contribute to cultivating a positive work climate. This study concludes that the systematic integration of work performance and career development significantly contributes to improving both individual and organizational outcomes. It is recommended that companies continue to strengthen their human resource development strategies through continuous training initiatives and performance-based reward policies.



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## Introduction

In recent decades, the agribusiness sector has increasingly been recognized as one of the fundamental pillars of economic development in many developing countries, including Indonesia. As an industry that integrates agricultural production, processing activities, and distribution networks, agribusiness plays a strategic role in generating employment opportunities, enhancing rural household income, and strengthening national food security (Gustiana, 2017; Harlan et al., 2021). In the midst of intensifying global competition and rapid digital transformation across production systems, issues related to career growth and employee performance have become central concerns for agribusiness companies that seek to maintain competitive advantages and ensure long-term business sustainability (Parjito et al., 2023).

While prior research has underscored career growth as a key driver of individual

performance in organizational settings, the majority of such studies have concentrated on the manufacturing and service sectors. For instance [Zulwisli et al., \(2022\)](#), demonstrate that employees' perceptions of career development opportunities significantly influence work motivation, engagement, and productivity. However, agribusiness remains considerably underrepresented in this body of literature, particularly within developing country contexts such as Indonesia. Existing research, including that of [Sholikhah, \(2021\)](#) suggests that work dynamics in the agribusiness sector are shaped by distinctive structural factors such as land ownership arrangements, agricultural policy frameworks, and technological accessibility that differ substantially from other industrial domains. These unique sectoral conditions raise critical questions regarding how career development is understood, navigated, and experienced by employees within agribusiness organizations ([Simamora, 2023](#)).

Moreover, a notable gap persists in understanding the linkage between career growth and employee performance through qualitative inquiry. Much of the existing scholarship is dominated by large-scale quantitative surveys ([Fahriza et al., 2025](#); [Karen et al., 2021](#)), which, although useful for generating generalizable findings, often fail to capture the contextual depth and subjective experiences of employees. To address these limitations, there is a need for a more nuanced and interpretive approach that can illuminate how employees in agribusiness settings construct meaning around career opportunities and how such interpretations shape their everyday work performance.

To respond to this need, the present study employs a qualitative case study design focusing on a selected agribusiness company in Central Java Province. This methodological approach enables an in-depth exploration of employees' lived experiences, perceptions, and personal strategies in pursuing career advancement amid the structural complexities of the agribusiness sector. Through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, the study seeks to systematically examine how organizational structures, workplace culture, and leadership practices influence employees' perceptions of career growth and their associated performance outcomes.

Theoretically, this research aims to contribute to the growing body of literature on human resource management within the agribusiness sector, particularly in developing countries that continue to face substantial challenges in human capital development. From a practical perspective, the findings are expected to provide evidence-based insights that may assist agribusiness organizations in formulating career development strategies that are more contextual, sustainable, and inclusive.

In light of the foregoing, the primary objective of this study is to explore employees' experiences and perceptions of career growth and its implications for performance in the agribusiness sector, using a qualitative case study approach in Central Java. The remainder of this article is structured as follows: the next section reviews relevant literature and presents the conceptual framework; this is followed by an explanation of the research methodology, a presentation and discussion of the findings, and finally, the conclusion along with practical implications.

## **Method**

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to obtain an in-depth understanding of how employees in the agribusiness sector construct meaning around career growth and its relationship to work performance. According to [Robert K Yin, \(2014\)](#),

a case study enables researchers to examine a phenomenon comprehensively within its real-life context. This approach was selected because issues related to career development and employee performance in agribusiness are inherently complex and strongly influenced by organizational culture as well as structural conditions within the company.

The research was conducted in a medium-sized agribusiness company located in Central Java Province, Indonesia, operating in the production and distribution of agricultural commodities. The site was purposively selected based on its formal human resource development system and high employee retention rates. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and a review of internal documents such as career development guidelines and annual performance reports.

The study involved 12 permanent employees from various divisions and 2 human resource managers, selected using purposive sampling based on the criteria of at least three years of work experience and active participation in career development programs. Interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, were audio-recorded with participant consent, and subsequently transcribed verbatim.

**Table 1.** Profile of Research Participants

Participant Code	Position/Division	Gender	Length of Service (Years)	Additional Information
P1	Production	Male	8	Participated in technical training
P2	Administration	Female	5	Active in mentoring program
P3	Marketing	Male	7	Consistently meets high performance targets
P4	Production	Male	4	Recently promoted to supervisor
P5	HRD	Female	10	HR Manager
P6-P12	Various Divisions	Mixed	3-9	Permanent employees across different levels

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, as outlined by Yin, (2009). The process involved coding the data, identifying themes, and deriving meaning from participants' experiences. Data from interviews, observations, and documents were cross-checked to ensure triangulation and enhance the validity of the findings. NVivo 12 software was used to facilitate data coding and management.

Data trustworthiness was maintained by adhering to the four criteria proposed by L.J Moleong, (2022), credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was strengthened through member checking and triangulation, while transferability was supported by providing detailed contextual descriptions. Dependability and confirmability

were ensured through systematic documentation of the analytic procedures and researcher reflexivity.

Ethical considerations were addressed by obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring anonymity through the use of coded identifiers, and restricting the use of data solely for academic purposes. With this methodological framework, the study is expected to generate a comprehensive and reflective understanding of how career growth influences employee performance within the agribusiness sector in Central Java.

## **Findings**

### **Employee Perceptions of Work Performance**

Employees' understanding of work performance in the agribusiness environment is closely linked to daily operational conditions, production targets, and the observable quality of outputs. In the hatchery company that served as the research site, employees demonstrated a strong performance orientation toward physical results, particularly the quality of hatching eggs and the success rate of incubation. This perception is shaped by the predominantly technical nature of their work, which requires a high degree of accuracy and consistency. One production employee provided a detailed account of how he evaluates his own performance based on everyday field experiences. He emphasized that work performance extends beyond merely being present and completing assigned tasks; it is also a moral responsibility to maintain product quality and ensure production stability.

*"For me, work performance is measured by how quickly and accurately I can complete my tasks in the hatchery. Every day we deal with thousands of eggs, so accuracy is extremely important. If the hatch results are good and the number of rejects is low, that's when I feel my work is recognized. I also feel satisfied when the supervisor does not complain much about my work. So the quality of the results really determines our confidence here." (W1).*

In addition, several employees stated that they often rely on personal judgment to evaluate whether they have performed well, given the absence of written performance indicators. A machine maintenance technician explained that performance in the technical division is highly situational and strongly influenced by equipment conditions and daily workloads. He emphasized that the lack of clear standards forces employees to rely on their best estimations.

*"There is no written standard, so we just do our best. Sometimes the supervisor says it's good, but the next day it may be different. Machines can also break down suddenly, so we work based on experience. Sometimes I feel unsure whether my work meets expectations or not, because there is no definite guideline." (W2).*

Field observations reinforced these statements. Morning briefings were generally brief and focused on daily production targets, without detailed descriptions of quality parameters or performance indicators. This situation required employees to interpret for themselves what constitutes "good performance." Such ambiguity may lead to inconsistent performance evaluations and potential unfairness in the assessment process.

### **Unequal Access to Training and Career Development**

Training and career development emerged as one of the most frequently raised issues by participants. Most employees acknowledged that training opportunities existed, yet they

described them as inconsistent, unstructured, and not inclusive of all employee levels. Several employees recounted that the most recent training session they attended was brief and merely informative, offering no mentoring or hands-on practice. One operator emphasized that training felt more like a formality than a meaningful developmental effort.

*"Training exists, but it's not routine. The last training I attended was two years ago. It was only theory without any practical sessions. There hasn't been any since. Our work procedures change a lot due to seasonal factors, so we really need more frequent training. If we are only told to learn from seniors, then we just learn as much as we can." (W3)*

Senior employees also expressed dissatisfaction, noting that training tends to be allocated only to new workers. They stressed that long-term employees still require ongoing learning opportunities because hatchery technologies and procedures continue to evolve.

*"Training is mostly for new employees. Those of us who have worked here longer are rarely included. We also need skill improvement. Sometimes there are new machines or new procedures, but we have to figure them out ourselves. The company has good intentions, but the implementation is not evenly distributed." (W4)*

A newly hired employee further emphasized that unclear career pathways create uncertainty and reduce motivation. He explained that although he aspired to higher positions, he was unaware of the required criteria or competencies.

*"I want to move up, but the pathway is unclear. We don't know whether we need training, certain scores, or a supervisor's recommendation. So we just work and hope for opportunities. It feels less motivating when the career path is uncertain." (W7)*

Management acknowledged these challenges, stating that although the company intended to build a more structured career system, the effort was hampered by industry fluctuations, changing market demands, and resource limitations.

*"Career planning sometimes has to be flexible because the industry is very volatile. We want to create a clear career path, but production conditions frequently change. So we must adjust and cannot be too rigid." (W8)*

The thematic interpretation suggests that career development cannot function effectively without consistency and clear direction. This uncertainty contributes to reduced employee motivation and stagnation in individual performance.

### **The Role of Supervisors in Shaping Performance**

Supervisors play a critical role in hatchery operations, providing direction, monitoring workflow, and ensuring the quality of outputs. However, interviews revealed that supervisors were often more focused on meeting daily production targets than on employee development. One supervisor openly acknowledged that production demands left little time for coaching or career-related guidance.

*"Sometimes I am too focused on daily targets, so communication about career development is overlooked. We must chase numbers and deadlines. So guidance or discussions about employee growth often get postponed." (W5)*

Employees echoed this sentiment. During peak production periods, communication tended



to be one-directional, consisting of rapid instructions without contextual explanations.

*"During peak season, we are told to work quickly without detailed explanations. The priority is finishing fast. I often want to ask questions, but the supervisor is in a rush, so we just follow instructions." (W6)*

Field notes suggest that such a supervisory approach may be appropriate during emergency or high-pressure situations; however, when sustained over long periods, it hampers employee learning and limits long-term career development. The interpretation indicates that a heavily task-oriented leadership style is not aligned with principles of sustained employee growth.

### **Work Environment Challenges in Agribusiness**

Employees face demanding working conditions, including high temperatures, strong odors, and rapid work rhythms. One employee described the emotional and physical pressures of working in a hatchery:

*"Working in a hatchery is full of pressure. It's hot, it smells, and the pace is fast. Without mental and technical training, many people quit quickly because they cannot handle it. I've seen several new employees leave because they couldn't cope. You really need strong mental readiness." (W9)*

A supervisor added that external factors, particularly weather conditions, can disrupt production outcomes regardless of employee effort.

*"Sometimes we work at maximum capacity, but the results still decline. Weather greatly affects the hatching process. So no matter how good our performance is, there are factors beyond our control." (W10)*

Field observations noted signs of monotony and fatigue among employees, especially during extended periods of repetitive work. These insights indicate the need for career development approaches that prioritize both physical and psychological well-being.

### **Impact of Career Development on Performance**

Despite the limited availability of training and rewards, both were found to positively influence motivation and performance. A quality control staff member described in detail how the training he received enhanced his technical abilities and confidence.

*"After the training, my performance improved. I understood the correct quality standards and what to do when problems occur. I felt more confident. My colleagues also said I worked faster after the training." (W11)*

Even small forms of recognition were perceived as meaningful:

*"Even small rewards make us want to work better. It feels like our efforts are acknowledged. Even if we don't always receive them, seeing our names on the list is enough to make us happy." (W12)*

These findings illustrate that recognition and training serve as reinforcement mechanisms that enhance intrinsic motivation and performance.

Table 2. Triangulation of Research Findings

Theme	Interview Data	Observation Data	Additional Documents	Triangulation Result
Performance perception	Employees evaluate performance based on speed & accuracy (W1, W2)	Morning briefings emphasize targets without clear indicators (FL2)	No written performance SOP	Performance standards are not clearly documented
Training & career	Training is irregular and limited to new employees (W3, W4)	Training sessions are brief and one-directional (FL3)	Minimal and unplanned training schedule	Training is uneven and unstructured
Supervisor role	Supervisors focus on targets; limited communication (W5, W6)	Instructions given rapidly during peak season	No employee coaching modules	Supervisory style is largely task-oriented
Agribusiness work pressure	Hot environment, fast rhythm (W9, W10)	Stuffy rooms, strong odors, heavy workload (FL1, FL4)	High turnover among new employees	High work pressure affects performance
Career development impact	Training improves performance, rewards motivate (W11, W12)	Employees appear enthusiastic when recognized (FL5)	Monthly recognition records	Recognition & training enhance motivation

Source: Researcher Triangulation

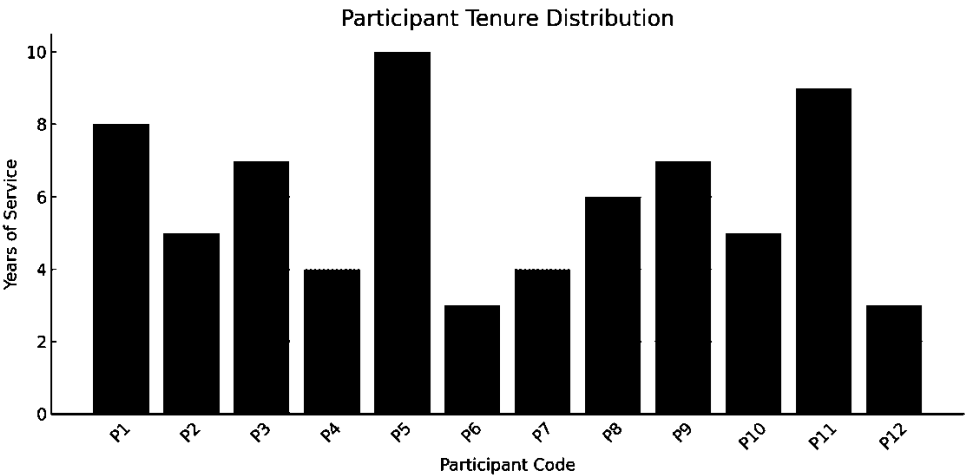


Figure 1. participant code

The distribution of participants' length of service reflects substantial variation, ranging from three to ten years. This variation enriches the depth of the data by providing perspectives from employees at different stages of their career trajectories those in early adaptation, mid-level development, and more mature stages. Participants with longer tenures, such as P1, P3, P5, P9, and P11, offered comprehensive insights into long-term work dynamics, shifts in company policies, and evolving supervisory patterns.

Meanwhile, the majority of participants, with four to seven years of service, appear to be in stable phases of their career development but remain vulnerable to issues such as stagnation, limited training opportunities, and unclear promotion pathways. Conversely, participants with shorter tenures, such as P6 and P12, provided valuable insights into early adaptation processes, basic training experiences, and challenges associated with understanding undocumented performance standards.

Overall, the distribution of length of service indicates a relatively high retention rate within the company while simultaneously highlighting the need for a more systematic career development structure tailored to employees at different stages of their professional growth.

## **Discussion**

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive picture of the complex interplay between career development and work performance in the agribusiness industry, a sector characterized by high operational demands, challenging physical environments, and fluctuating production dynamics. Overall, the results indicate that employees' perceptions of work performance are largely shaped by technical and output based indicators, such as hatchability rates and minimal operational errors. This interpretation aligns with Performance Management theory [Fatikhah & Andriani, \(2024\)](#), which posits that performance is often conceptualized based on directly observable indicators. However, in this context, the absence of written performance standards amplifies subjectivity in evaluations, leaving room for bias and potential inequities, an issue also noted in studies conducted within manufacturing and labor intensive production sectors ([Supeni & Sujana, 2021](#)).

The findings regarding limited training opportunities and unstructured career pathways are consistent with Human Capital Theory ([Primandari, 2020](#)), which emphasizes that continuous training constitutes a crucial investment for productivity enhancement. Nonetheless, within the context of this study, the training provided appears sporadic, uneven, and oriented toward short term operational needs rather than long term competency development. This stands in contrast to the findings of [Yusoff et al., \(2015\)](#), which suggest that structured career development contributes significantly to long term employee engagement. Instead, the results affirm literature indicating that agribusiness, as a labor intensive sector, tends to prioritize daily operational demands over strategic long term human resource investments ([Ardianto et al., 2020, 2025](#)). This indicates a fundamental gap between organizational strategic needs and employees' expectations for clear and equitable career advancement structures.

From a leadership perspective, the findings reveal that supervisors predominantly employ a task oriented approach characterized by direct instructions, tight control, and a strong focus on meeting daily production targets. This style is consistent with the Situational



Leadership model (Siagian et al., 2022), particularly within contexts of high production pressure that require rapid responses and technical precision. However, such a leadership style is insufficient for supporting long term employee development, as it neglects essential elements such as coaching, empowerment, and constructive feedback. These results stand in contrast to contemporary literature on transformational leadership (Ardianto et al., 2025), which emphasizes the importance of supervisory support in fostering intrinsic motivation and facilitating career growth.

Nevertheless, counterarguments exist that justify the relevance of directive leadership in the agribusiness context. Several studies (Green et al., 2018; Kumar et al., 2021) argue that in sectors characterized by rigid procedural structures and high technical risk, directive approaches may enhance operational accuracy and stability. Field data in this study reveal that supervisors resort to directive communication largely due to production pressures and time constraints rather than personal leadership preference. Thus, when interpreted theoretically, the leadership style identified in this study reflects a functional adaptation to organizational needs rather than managerial inadequacy.

Employees' reports regarding physically demanding work conditions also resonate with the Job Demands Resources framework (Abdullahi & Mahmud, 2024). High temperatures, strong odors, and rapid work rhythms constitute job demands that heighten risks of fatigue, stress, and turnover. Conversely, elements such as training, recognition, and rewards function as job resources that enhance psychological well-being and motivation. These findings support earlier research demonstrating that even modest forms of recognition can significantly elevate motivation in labor intensive environments (Matejun & Ratajczak, 2019). However, recognition mechanisms in this study are not yet supported by transparent performance criteria, thereby reducing perceptions of fairness and accountability.

Interestingly, the results reveal a clear misalignment between employees' expectations and management's approach to career development. Employees desire consistent training, transparent career pathways, and meaningful supervisory guidance, whereas management argues that agribusiness volatility requires flexibility and short term orientation. This tension mirrors theoretical debates between the Dynamic Capabilities perspective (Ardianto et al., 2023), which emphasizes organizational adaptability, and Employee Engagement theory (Ardianto et al., 2024), which underscores the importance of structured work systems for sustaining employee motivation. The findings of this study position themselves between these perspectives: career development is indeed essential, yet its implementation must consider the dynamic and operationally demanding nature of agribusiness work.

Taken collectively, the findings of this study reinforce the notion that the relationship between career development and work performance in the agribusiness sector is inherently multidimensional and emerges from the dynamic interplay among organizational structures, operational contingencies, and employees' subjective interpretations of their work environments. This study contributes to the scholarly discourse by demonstrating the ways in which the distinctive operational realities of agribusiness shape human resource management practices in non conventional ways, particularly with regard to training provision, supervisory approaches, and career progression mechanisms. Such insights underscore the need to conceptualize agribusiness not merely as a labor intensive industry, but as a context in which structural constraints, environmental pressures, and human capital considerations interact to produce unique patterns of workforce development that diverge

markedly from those observed in more formalized industrial settings.

## **Conclusion**

This study provides an in depth understanding of how career development and work performance interact within the agribusiness industry, a sector characterized by labor intensive operations, high production pressures, and demanding physical conditions. The findings show that employees' perceptions of work performance are largely shaped by technical and output oriented indicators, such as hatchery quality and the minimization of operational errors. However, the absence of structured performance standards leads to subjective evaluation processes, creating potential risks of bias and perceived inequities.

Career development within the company remains limited to training programs that are irregular, unevenly distributed, and predominantly short term in nature. Although training demonstrates positive effects on employees' competence and motivation, the lack of clear career pathways and minimal formal documentation restricts its long term impact. From a leadership perspective, supervisory practices are predominantly directive and task focused, reflecting the urgency of operational demands. While such a style is effective for achieving daily targets, it provides insufficient support for sustained competency development and long term career progression.

The challenging agribusiness work environment further intensifies these issues, as physically demanding conditions can heighten fatigue and diminish motivation. Nevertheless, the presence of recognition and reward mechanisms continues to have a positive influence on employee morale, although these systems are not yet underpinned by transparent performance criteria. Collectively, the study affirms that the relationship between career development and work performance is multidimensional, shaped by the interaction among organizational structures, supervisory practices, working conditions, and employees' psychological perceptions.

The primary contribution of this study lies in demonstrating how the operational characteristics of the agribusiness sector shape human resource management practices in ways that differ from more formalized industrial contexts. The findings underscore the importance of establishing clear performance standards, designing continuous training programs, and cultivating supervisory approaches that balance task achievement with employee development. Implementing these measures is expected to enhance both individual performance and organizational effectiveness within the dynamic agribusiness environment.

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