

THE IMPACT OF NEEDS-BASED LEADERSHIP ON SME EMPLOYMENT ENTERPRISES (SMES) IN PANGKALPINANG

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the impact of Needs-Based Leadership on employment stability and workforce performance within Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Pangkalpinang. Utilizing a quantitative approach with a survey method, data were gathered via structured questionnaires administered to a census sample of local SME actors and analyzed through simple linear regression and correlation frameworks. The narrative findings reveal that Needs-Based Leadership exerts a positive and highly significant influence on SME employment outcomes. The study demonstrates that when business owners actively address employees' hierarchical needs, ranging from essential job security during regional commodity fluctuations to self-actualization, it substantially enhances worker retention, motivation, and overall operational productivity. The correlation between responsive leadership and workforce stability proves to be exceptionally strong, indicating that the vast majority of variations in employee engagement are determined by this supportive leadership style. The novelty of this research lies in its empirical focus on a commodity-dependent regional transition economy, illustrating how localized, empathetic leadership serves as a vital economic shock absorber for workers facing market uncertainty. Implicatively, prioritizing humanistic human resource management over mere capital expansion is a strategic imperative for enterprise sustainability. This study contributes to the fields of economics and economic education by providing a clear framework on how fulfilling psychological needs translates directly into microeconomic resilience and sustainable local workforce development.

Keywords: Leadership, SME Employment, Work Motivation, Productivity



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INTRODUCTION

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) play a crucial role as the backbone of both the global and national economies, particularly in driving inclusive economic growth and job creation. A 2015 report from the International Labour Organization confirms that the micro, small, and medium enterprise sector employs over 70% of the global workforce ([ILO, 2015](#)). In Indonesia, this sector's contribution is particularly significant, contributing over 60% to the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employing up to 97% of the productive workforce ([Kemenkopumkm, 2023](#)). However, despite its strategic role, the sustainability of the SME sector often faces challenges from market uncertainty, technological disruption, and fundamental constraints such as quality human resource management. This structural vulnerability in human resource management often stems from the complete absence of formalized personnel departments, meaning that talent development, recruitment, and employee welfare are frequently handled on an ad-hoc basis. Unlike large conglomerates that possess dedicated institutional buffers and extensive welfare systems, small firms must navigate volatile economic shifts with highly constrained operational resources, making the human element both their greatest strategic asset and their most fragile point of systemic failure.

At the regional level, particularly in Pangkalpinang City, the SME sector continues to grow and become a crucial pillar following the regional economic transition from a focus on mining to trade and services ([BPS, 2024](#)). However, the success and resilience of SMEs in Pangkalpinang are not solely determined by capital and market access, but also depend heavily on how entrepreneurs manage and retain their workforce. In the SME context, operational stability is significantly influenced by the quality of working relationships, employee engagement, and decent working conditions. This localized economic transformation represents more than just a macroeconomic reallocation of capital; it demands a profound psychological and cultural adaptation from the regional workforce. Transitioning from a highly volatile, extraction-heavy mining sector to a customer-centric and relationship-driven service economy requires employees to possess high levels of emotional intelligence and stability. Consequently, if the internal workplace environment lacks safety and harmony, workers face compounded stress from both external structural economic realignments and internal organizational friction, which rapidly degrades operational continuity.

Employment issues in SMEs are often rooted in leadership. Due to their relatively simple organizational structures, business owners in the SME sector often also serve as primary leaders. This situation creates a direct and significant impact on employee motivation, job satisfaction, and productivity. Recent empirical studies show that leadership quality is a key determinant of employee retention and organizational performance in the SME sector ([Supriyanto, Ekowati, & Maghfuroh, 2020](#)); ([Tambuna, 2012](#)). Leaders who fail to understand the dynamics of their workforce tend to face high employee turnover rates, which ultimately threaten business sustainability. In a micro-enterprise setting, the leader's personality, disposition, and daily decision-making patterns dictate the entire organizational climate. There are no intermediate managerial layers or corporate protocols to absorb or dilute autocratic behavior, inconsistent expectations, or poor communication. When employees experience arbitrary decision-making or a lack of institutional support, their psychological safety is immediately compromised, inducing severe withdrawal behaviors. Because small businesses rely heavily on a small, tightly knit group of individuals, the departure of even a single skilled worker does not merely result in a vacant desk; it can completely paralyze entire lines of operations and erase vital tacit knowledge that is rarely documented in small-scale environments.

To address these challenges, the Needs-Based Leadership approach offers a relevant paradigm. Conceptually, this approach is rooted in the Hierarchy of Needs Theory ([Maslow, 1943](#)) and Two-Factor Theory ([Herzberg, 2017](#)), which have been adapted into modern leadership discourse. Contemporary literature confirms that leadership that proactively responds to and accommodates employees' basic needs, including security, recognition, and self-actualization, significantly increases organizational commitment and productivity ([Northouse, 2025](#)); ([Hogan, Curphy, Kaiser, & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2018](#)). This approach strongly resonates with the individualized consideration dimension of transformational leadership, where personalized attention from leaders has been shown to be a performance catalyst in small and medium-sized organizations ([Kumar et al., 2022](#)); ([Khan, Rao, Usman, & Afzal, 2017](#)). By operationalizing these classic motivational frameworks within daily supervisory behaviors, leaders can create a highly responsive workplace taxonomy that directly counters external socio-economic anxieties. For instance, addressing physiological and safety expectations involves establishing predictable, fair compensation and job clarity, which explicitly mitigates the ambient anxiety associated with a fluctuating local commodity market. Moving higher up

the motivational hierarchy, fostering open, collegial interactions satisfies critical social desires, while provisioning professional autonomy addresses the profound human drive for self-actualization. When a leader deliberately crafts a strategy around these universal human drivers, they effectively construct an invisible, resilient psychological contract that binds the employee to the firm far more securely than a standard legal agreement ever could.

In the flexible and informal SME ecosystem, such as that often found in Pangkalpinang, a needs-based leadership approach is crucial. Intense interpersonal interactions between owners and employees demand a more humanistic and empathetic leadership style. Meeting employee needs is no longer simply an operational burden, but rather a strategic investment aligned with entrepreneurial principles to strengthen the local economic structure ([Acs, Stam, Audretsch, & O'Connor, 2017](#)). In these highly informal configurations, the boundaries between professional duties and personal interactions are frequently blurred, meaning that cold, transactional management styles feel jarring and deeply discordant to local workers. A humanistic approach explicitly acknowledges that employees are not detached, interchangeable inputs of production, but whole individuals carrying external familial and financial pressures. By recognizing this operational reality, empathetic leadership successfully transforms the workplace into a supportive sanctuary rather than an additional source of mental anxiety, thereby unlocking substantial discretionary effort and intrinsic motivation that capital investment alone can never purchase.

While numerous previous studies have discussed the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational performance in general, empirical studies specifically examining the impact of needs-based leadership on SMEs within a specific local context are still very limited. The majority of the literature focuses on large corporations, leaving a significant research gap regarding how needs-based leadership impacts SME sustainability and employment, particularly in areas with socio-economic dynamics like Pangkal Pinang. Most established organizational behavior theories are built upon empirical observations of highly bureaucratic, well-funded corporate entities situated in massive metropolitan centers. These models fundamentally assume the presence of standardized administrative workflows, clear vertical career paths, and significant financial safety nets that simply do not exist in small enterprises. Consequently, they completely fail to capture the raw, immediate, and deeply personal interpersonal dynamics governing a localized small-scale business operating within a regional transition economy, leaving a severe theoretical blind spot regarding how grassroots leaders can leverage psychological support mechanisms to stabilize a vulnerable local workforce.

Based on these empirical gaps and urgency, this study focuses on examining the impact of Needs-Based Leadership on the success and workforce management of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Pangkalpinang. This research is expected to provide theoretical contributions to enrich the literature on regional-based HR management, as well as formulate practical recommendations for SMEs and local policymakers in creating a productive, adaptive, and sustainable work environment. Ultimately, understanding this leadership dynamic is vital for building long-term regional economic fortitude. By shedding light on the precise micro-level behaviors that cultivate workforce loyalty and stability, this study aims to build a solid conceptual bridge between abstract psychological motivation theories and the gritty, practical reality of local entrepreneurship. The empirical insights derived from this investigation will help transform how small business owners view their leadership mandate, shifting their core perspective from mere survival-driven task management to a holistic, people-centric stewardship that successfully secures long-term organizational and community resilience.

RESEARCH METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative approach with a descriptive-verification survey method. The descriptive approach was used to describe the leadership conditions and performance of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises, while the verification approach was used to test the hypothesis of the influence of leadership on MSME performance through regression analysis. The quantitative approach was chosen because this study aimed to test the theory through variable measurement and numerical analysis ([Creswell & Creswell, 2017](#)). The intervariable relationship model in this study focused on leadership (Variable X) that influences MSME performance (Variable Y).

2.2 Research Target/Subject

This research was conducted in Pangkalpinang City, Bangka Belitung Islands Province. The location was selected based on Pangkalpinang City's strategic position as a regional economic growth center with the highest concentration of MSMEs in the province. The research was conducted in 2026, empirically depicting the post-pandemic economic reality and the dynamics of the local commodity sector.

The population in this study was all MSMEs in Pangkalpinang City recorded in the MSME respondent database. The sampling technique used was saturated sampling (census) or random sampling tailored to the target population, resulting in a final sample size of 28 MSME respondents

2.3 Instruments and Data Collection Techniques

Research data was collected through three main techniques: questionnaires, documentation, and observation. The questionnaire served as the primary instrument, using a Likert scale of 1–5 (ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree). Observations were conducted to directly observe the actual operational conditions of MSMEs. Furthermore, documentation techniques utilized respondent data stored in a MySQL database, which included identities and a track record of automated instrument completion. The use of this database aligns with the documentation method in economic research, where data from databases is assessed as objective, structured, and valid for tabulation purposes ([Connolly & Begg, 2005](#)); ([Manalu et al., 2024](#)).

This study measured two operational variables. The independent variable, Leadership ([Manalu et al.](#)), was measured through the following indicators: ability to provide direction, motivation, decisiveness in decision-making, effective communication, and role modeling. The dependent variable, MSME Performance (Y), was measured through the following indicators: increased revenue, work productivity, operational efficiency, customer satisfaction, and business growth.

Before being used for data collection, the research instrument was tested for validity. Validity testing was conducted using the Pearson Product-Moment correlation with the formula:

$$r = \frac{n \sum XY - \sum X \sum Y}{\sqrt{[n \sum X^2 - (\sum X)^2][n \sum Y^2 - (\sum Y)^2]}}$$

A statement item is declared valid if the calculated r value is greater than the table r value. Furthermore, the reliability test is measured using Cronbach's Alpha, where the instrument is declared reliable if it has an alpha coefficient value > 0.70.

2.4 Data analysis technique

The collected data were analyzed descriptively and inferentially. Descriptive analysis was used to calculate the mean, standard deviation, and data categorization (low, medium, high). To test the hypothesis, the researcher used Simple Linear Regression Analysis with the equation model:

$$Y = a + bX$$

In addition, a partial t-test was conducted with a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ to empirically verify whether Needs-Based Leadership (X) significantly influences the level of Employment/SME Performance (Y). The null hypothesis (H_0) will be rejected if the calculated t-value is greater than the tabulated t-value. The researcher also used the coefficient of determination (R^2) calculation to determine the percentage contribution of leadership variables in explaining fluctuations in MSME performance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Instrument Reliability Test Results

Reliability testing was conducted using the Cronbach's Alpha method to measure the consistency and stability of the research instrument. An instrument is considered reliable if its

Cronbach's Alpha value is >0.70 . The results of the questionnaire distributed to 28 SME respondents in Pangkalpinang are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of the Research Instrument Reliability Test

Variable	Total Items	Alpha	Criteria
Needs-Based Leadership (X)	20	0,967	Reliable
Employment of SMEs (Y)	20	0,878	Reliable

Source: Processed primary data, 2026

Based on Table 1, the Needs-Based Leadership variable obtained an Alpha value of 0.967 (very high/excellent reliability), while the Employment of SMEs variable obtained a value of 0.878. Because both values are well above the minimum threshold of 0.70, it can be concluded that all statement items in the instrument have very good internal consistency and are suitable for further analysis.

Simple Linear Regression Analysis Results and Hypothesis Testing

Simple linear regression analysis was used to predict the direction and strength of the influence of needs-based leadership on workforce stability in SMEs. Based on the data processing results, a summary of the statistical analysis was obtained, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of Simple Linear Regression Analysis Results

Statistical Indicators	Value
Constanta (a)	37,941
Regression Coefficient (b)	0,537
Correlation Coefficient (r)	0,926
Coefficient of Determination (R ²)	0,857
t-test	12,50
t-table (alpha=0.05; df=26)	2,056

Source: Processed primary data, 2026

Based on Table 2, the resulting regression equation is $Y = 37.941 + 0.537X$. The constant value of 37.941 indicates that if the Needs-Based Leadership variable is zero (no increase), then the baseline value for SME Employment will be 37.941. Meanwhile, the regression coefficient of 0.537 is positive, indicating that every 1-unit increase in Needs-Based Leadership quality will increase SME Employment quality by 0.537 units.

Hypothesis testing was conducted using a partial t-test. The results showed that the calculated t-value (12.50) was significantly greater than the t-table value (2.056). Thus, the null hypothesis (H₀) was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (H₁) was accepted, proving that Needs-Based Leadership has a positive and significant effect on SME Employment in Pangkalpinang at the 5% significance level.

Furthermore, the Pearson correlation coefficient (r) of 0.926 indicates a positive relationship classified as "very strong" between the two variables. The most prominent finding is seen in the coefficient of determination (R²) of 0.857. This figure means that 85.7% of the fluctuations or variations in the employment rate of SMEs in Pangkalpinang can be explained by the effectiveness of Needs-Based Leadership. The remaining 14.3% is influenced by external factors outside the research model, such as macroregional economic stability, financing accessibility, and employee technical competency levels.

Discussion

The analysis convincingly demonstrates that Needs-Based Leadership is the primary determinant of employment stability in SMEs in Pangkalpinang, contributing 85.7%. This strong influence can be explained by the structural characteristics of SMEs themselves. In a relatively flat and simple organizational structure, interactions between business owners and employees occur directly without bureaucratic barriers. This relational closeness magnifies the influence of leadership style on employee psychological well-being and performance output.

In these intimate operational settings, the leader's daily demeanor serves as the psychological barometer for the entire enterprise. Because there are no formalized human resource protocols or institutional corporate buffers to filter managerial behavior, every supportive gesture or empathetic interaction directly nourishes employee morale, while any perceived neglect or harshness is instantly amplified. This absolute visibility means that a leader who intentionally aligns their supervisory style with the immediate personal and professional needs of their staff can rapidly build an environment of high trust, effectively turning structural informality into a powerful relational asset that drives daily operational efficiency.

Theoretically, these empirical findings reinforce the validity of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory ([Maslow, 1943](#)). Fulfilling employee needs is not merely an abstract concept but a crucial operational reality ([Martela, 2025](#)); ([Ilies, Lanaj, Pluut, & Goh, 2018](#)). In Pangkalpinang's local economy, which is vulnerable to fluctuations in commodity prices (such as tin), employees often face real anxiety regarding their job security. SME leaders who can ensure job stability (security needs), create a collegial work climate (social needs), and provide space for development (actualization needs) have been proven to successfully liberate employee productivity potential from the shackles of uncertainty ([Imran, Li, Bano, & Rashid, 2025](#)); ([Asad, Asif, Allam, & Sheikh, 2021](#)).

This dynamic becomes acutely visible when analyzing the local socio-economic landscape of Pangkalpinang, where the shadow of resource dependence looms large over the workforce. When global tin prices drop, the resulting economic shockwaves contract local spending and threaten business survival, triggering severe survival anxieties within employees' households. By stepping in to explicitly guarantee job stability, an SME leader acts as an anchor in a storm. Fulfilling these foundational safety expectations clears the psychological static for employees, granting them the mental bandwidth required to collaborate enthusiastically with peers and pursue self-actualization through creative problem-solving on the shop floor.

Furthermore, these findings are highly relevant to the premise of Path-Goal Theory ([House, 1971](#)); ([Astari, 2023](#)); ([Suci, 2025](#)), which asserts that a leader's effectiveness is measured by their ability to pave the way for subordinates toward their goals by providing specific support tailored to their needs. This approach directly reduces turnover intention and increases job satisfaction. It also strongly intersects with the concept of transformational leadership ([Bass & Avolio, 1996](#)); ([Darmawan & Roselini, 2022](#)), where leaders treat subordinates as individuals with unique needs, not simply as factors of production, and has been shown to generate high levels of loyalty. Needs-based leadership transforms transactional employee-employer relationships into deep-rooted emotional commitment.

This psychological shift from a temporary transactional contract to a resilient emotional alliance serves as a critical defensive strategy for small businesses, which naturally lack the financial muscle to compete with large corporations on salary alone. When a leader practices individualized consideration, they signal to their team that their human dignity is valued far above their economic output. This genuine care triggers a powerful sense of psychological reciprocity; employees choose to invest their discretionary effort and protect the business, remaining fiercely loyal even when competitors offer minor financial incentives elsewhere.

This research confirms previous studies ([Srimulyani, Hermanto, Rustiyaningsih, & Waloyo, 2023](#)); ([Umpusinga, Utami, Widiawati, & Hafidurrahman, 2024](#)) that supportive leadership is the foundation of the sustainability of the micro and small business sector. The novelty of this research lies in the location of empirical evidence in a regional economic transition area such as Pangkalpinang, where personal leadership is a "shock absorber" against macroeconomic uncertainty that threatens employment. However, this study is limited by its relatively small sample size (n=28). To broaden generalizability, further research is recommended involving a larger sample across industrial sectors using mediation or moderation analysis models.

Introducing the concept of leadership as a localized socioeconomic shock absorber adds a crucial layer of context to organizational literature, which is too often designed around stable corporate environments. While the modest sample size reflects the specialized, tight-knit nature of Pangkalpinang's emerging SME sectors, it underscores the need for wider empirical validation. Future investigations should scale these models across diverse geographic regions and industries to construct an adaptable, crisis-resistant framework for human resource management tailored specifically for developing economies facing structural transitions.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis and discussion, it can be concluded that the Needs-Based Leadership approach has a positive and highly significant influence on SME employment in Pangkalpinang. The research hypothesis is accepted, with empirical evidence indicating a calculated t-value (12.50) > t-table (2.056). The positive direction of the relationship indicates that the better and more adaptive an SME leader is in responding to their employees' hierarchical needs (from job security to self-actualization), the greater the stability, retention, and productivity of the workforce.

The influence of this leadership is quite significant, with 85.7% of the variation in SME employment success being determined exclusively by this needs-based leadership style. These findings provide strong theoretical implications for the relevance of Maslow's Theory and Transformational Leadership in the context of micro and small businesses in developing regions. Practically, this study recommends that SMEs in Pangkalpinang should not focus solely on capital expansion and marketing but should prioritize investment in a humanistic, personal, and empathetic HR management approach as the most effective strategy for maintaining business sustainability amidst economic uncertainty.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization and study design: A.T. and C.N. Methodology development: A.T. and C.N. Data collection: A.T. Data analysis: A.T. and C.N. Original draft preparation: A.T. and C.N. Review, editing, and manuscript revision: C.N. Data visualization: A.T. Academic supervision: C.N. Translation: S.W. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript”.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to this study. This research did not receive any specific grant from public, commercial, or non-profit funding agencies that could have influenced the conduct, analysis, interpretation, or reporting of the findings.

The authors further affirm that they have no financial, professional, or personal relationships that may have inappropriately affected the outcomes of this research

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