

THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP, WORK CULTURE, AND TRAINING ON EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF SUMATERA'S NASI LAUK UMKM

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the influence of leadership, work culture, and training on employee performance at the culinary MSME "Nasi Lauk Sumatra." Using a qualitative-descriptive approach through interviews, observations, and documentation involving 15 employees, the findings show that participative builds trust and emotional engagement, creating a comfortable work atmosphere and leadership sense of belonging. A family-based work culture strengthens team cohesion and collaboration despite the absence of formal structures. Informal training facilitates adaptation and skill improvement, although it remains unsystematic. Collectively, these three variables enhance employee efficiency, work quality, and loyalty. However, physical work environment conditions and lack of clear career paths remain challenges affecting long-term job satisfaction. This research provides a holistic view of human resource dynamics in culinary MSMEs and offers recommendations for sustainable development.

Keywords: *participative leadership, work culture, informal training, employee performance, culinary MSMEs*

INTRODUCTION

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are a crucial pillar of national economic development due to their ability to absorb labor, distribute income evenly, and empower the local economy. However, improving MSME employee performance still faces challenges, particularly in managerial aspects such as leadership, work culture, and training. The right leadership style has been shown to have a significant impact, as Azzahra (2022) found, demonstrating that transformational leadership can improve employee performance in the culinary sector of MSMEs. This aligns with the findings of Fahrezy, Lazuardi, and Azhar (2024) regarding the effectiveness of participatory leadership based on collaborative values. Furthermore, a collaborative work culture also contributes to work effectiveness, as demonstrated in a study by Liong & Citta (2024). Furthermore, training is a crucial aspect in bridging the influence of leadership on performance, as explained by Fenny and Setyawan (2024), and reinforced by the findings of Idris, Maryadi, and Nasly (2024) who position training as a dominant factor in improving performance. In the context of the culinary MSME "Nasi Lauk Sumatera", the initial problems that emerged were suboptimal employee performance, delays in completing orders, and weak coordination between the owner and employees in daily operations. Based on these findings, this study aims to examine the interaction between leadership, work culture, and training on employee performance at the culinary MSME "Nasi Lauk Sumatera", using a qualitative approach to provide a holistic and contextual picture.

LITERATURE REVIEW

a. Leadership

Leadership is the ability to influence and direct the behavior of individuals or groups to achieve organizational goals (Robbins & Judge, 2021). In the context of MSMEs, an effective leadership style can create a conducive work environment and improve team performance (Saragih et al., 2023). According to Goleman (2020), inspirational leaders are able to build trust, provide clear direction, and support employee development. Quantitative studies also confirm a positive relationship between transformational leadership and employee performance (Mulyani et al., 2022; Sari & Rachmawati, 2021). Leadership indicators according to Saragih et al. (2023) include:

- Communication skills: conveying vision and direction clearly.
- Exemplary behavior: being an example in work ethics and discipline.
- Decision making: fast, accurate, and participatory.
- Employee empowerment: giving trust and space to grow.
- Supervision and evaluation: constructive and fair work control.

b. Work Culture

Work culture reflects the values, norms, and habits formed within an organization and influences employee behavior (Schein, 2010). A positive culture supports a strong work ethic, collaboration, and results-oriented (Putri et al., 2024). In MSMEs, work culture is a crucial factor in building business identity and operational sustainability (Handayani et al., 2023). Empirical studies have shown that a strong work culture can increase employee loyalty and performance (Yuliana & Ramadhan, 2022). According to Handayani et al. (2023), indicators of work culture include:

- Shared values: working principles that all members believe in.
- Work ethic: discipline, honesty, and responsibility.
- Teamwork: mutual assistance and effective communication.
- Compliance with rules: consistency in implementing SOPs.
- Results orientation: focus on targets and productivity.

c. Training

Training is a systematic process to improve employee knowledge, skills, and attitudes in order to enhance work performance (Noe, 2020). In MSMEs, training plays a crucial role because resource limitations are often offset by improving human resource competencies (Lestari et al., 2022). Literature studies show that relevant and sustainable training has a direct impact on work effectiveness, adaptability, and innovation (Wijaya & Firmansyah, 2023). Training indicators according to Lestari et al. (2022) include:

- Suitability of training materials: relevant to job needs.
- Training methods: interactive, practical, and applicable.
- Duration and frequency: sufficient to achieve competency.
- Training facilitator: competent and communicative.
- Evaluation of training outcomes: real changes in performance.

d. Employee Performance

Employee performance is the work results achieved by individuals based on assigned tasks and responsibilities, both in terms of quantity and quality (Mangkunegara, 2021). In MSMEs, good performance is a key determinant of business continuity because the role of each individual is very significant (Fadilah et al., 2023). Research shows that factors such as motivation, work environment, and training significantly influence performance (Susanti & Wulandari, 2022). Performance indicators according to Fadilah et al. (2023) include:

- Quality of work: accuracy, neatness, and minimal errors.
- Quantity of work: the amount of output according to target.
- Punctuality: completing tasks according to deadlines.
- Initiative: proactively solving problems.
- Responsibility: seriousness in carrying out tasks.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study aims to interpret and understand the phenomena related to the role of work motivation, work environment, and reward systems in improving employee performance in Temporary Business MSMEs (Sugiyono, 2019; Fiantika et al., 2022). The study location was at the Temporary Business MSME located in Batuphat Timur, Jalan Medan Banda Aceh, next to Jasa Bundo. The study was conducted for two weeks, from the beginning to the end of May 2025. The research used was descriptive qualitative, aiming to explore meanings, perceptions, and work experiences through direct observation, interviews, and documentation (Sugiyono, 2019). The subjects in this study were all 15 permanent employees of the Temporary Business MSME, consisting of kitchen staff, cashiers, logistics staff, and cleaning staff. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling as part of the non-probability sampling method, to obtain relevant and in-depth data (Hardani et al., 2020).

Primary data was obtained through direct interviews and participant observation of work activities, while secondary data was collected from internal documents, work records, and organizational structures (Hardani et al.,

2020; Gimnastarina, 2024). Data validity was strengthened by triangulation of techniques and sources to obtain credible and meaningful results (Rozakiyah, 2024). Data analysis was carried out using a six-step approach according to Creswell, namely: (1) preparing and organizing data, (2) reading all data, (3) coding, (4) compiling themes, (5) presenting results descriptively, and (6) interpreting the meaning of data through relevant theories and contexts (Fatimah & Royani, 2025).

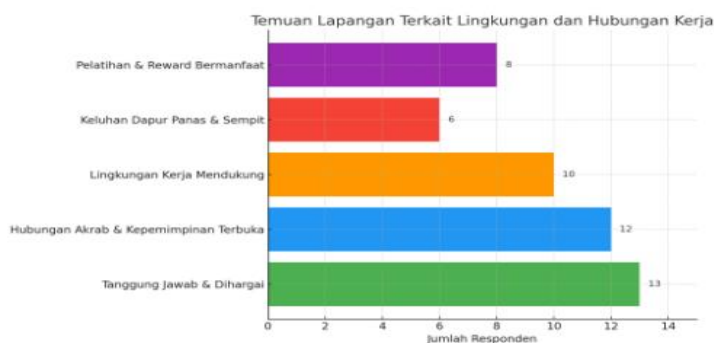


Image:Sumatran Restaurant

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Nasi Lauk Sumatera (Sumatra Rice and Lauk) is a local culinary business established in 2020 in the Taman Setiabudi area of Medan, focusing on authentic and affordable Sumatran cuisine. The business is managed by the owner, who also serves as the main manager, assisted by two daily staff and 15 permanent employees who handle the kitchen, serving, cashiering, packaging, and delivery. Since 2023, some management processes have been digitized, particularly inventory and sales records. Embracing a "family-like work" philosophy, this MSME treats employees as partners and encourages local human resource development through training and a performance-based incentive system.

Field results

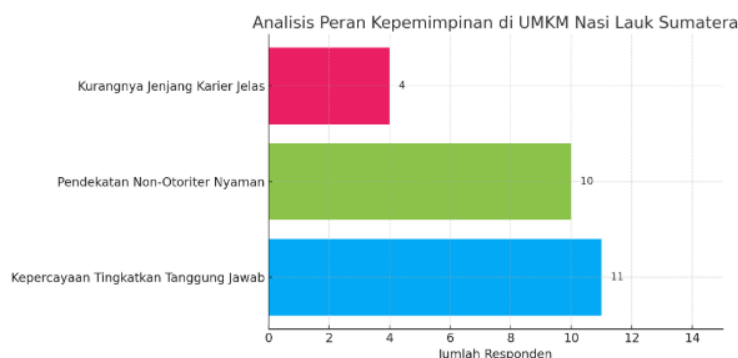


This study used a qualitative-descriptive approach through semi-structured interviews with 15 permanent employees, 10 days of field observations, and triangulation with managers and internal documentation. The majority of employees felt they had a sense of responsibility and were valued by the owner. Twelve respondents cited close

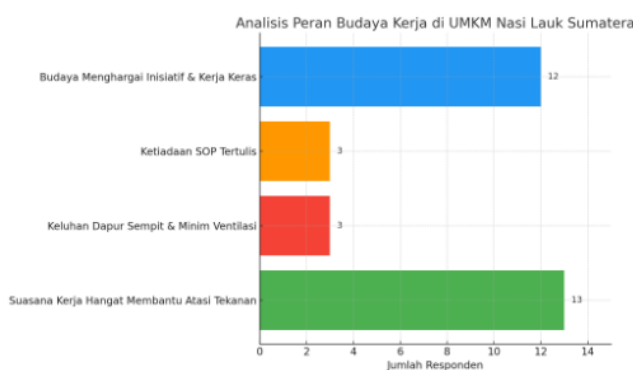
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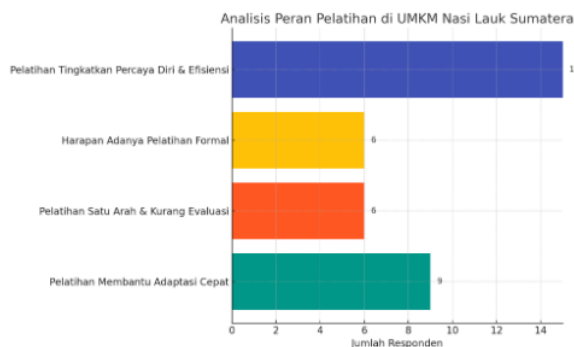
working relationships and open leadership as reasons for their retention. The work environment was considered quite supportive, although the kitchen area was hot and cramped. The informal training system and simple rewards were deemed beneficial, but still needed improvement.



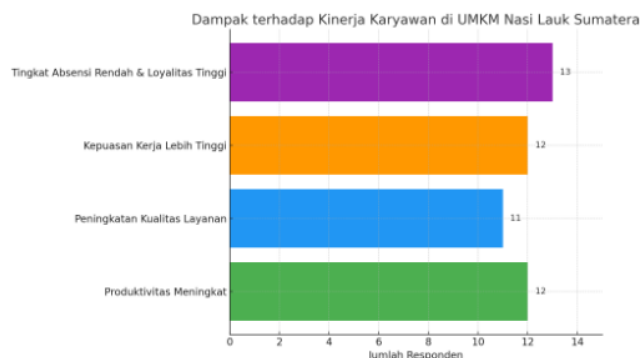
The leadership style at the Nasi Lauk Sumatera MSME is participatory and flexible, with open communication and direct appreciation from the business owner. Eleven respondents stated that trust in completing tasks increases responsibility, and ten felt a non-authoritarian approach creates a comfortable work environment. However, four respondents complained that the lack of a clear career path system, which reduces long-term motivation for senior staff.



The work culture at the Nasi Lauk Sumatera MSME is characterized by personal closeness, collective effort, and a friendly atmosphere. Thirteen out of 15 respondents stated that the warm environment helps manage work pressure. However, three respondents complained about the cramped and poorly ventilated kitchen, and the lack of written SOPs, which makes it difficult for new employees. The culture of valuing initiative and hard work remains prominent, with team success valued over individual achievement.



Training at the Nasi Lauk Sumatera UMKM is informal and internal, typically provided by senior staff or the business owner when there are menu or operational changes. Nine respondents felt the training facilitated rapid adaptation, but six respondents considered it one-way and lacked clear evaluation. Employees expected formal training on customer handling, hygiene management, and basic communication to improve professionalism. Although simple, the training boosted confidence and work efficiency.



This study shows that communicative leadership, a collective work culture, and simple training have a positive impact on employee performance. Twelve of the 15 respondents reported increased productivity in the past year. Work quality has improved, as evidenced by food hygiene, timely delivery, and accurate order recording. Eighty percent of respondents reported greater satisfaction compared to their previous work experience. Low absenteeism and increased loyalty indicate that performance is also reflected in employee commitment and emotional engagement.

Discussion and Interpretation

These findings support the theory that open and participatory leadership plays a significant role in creating a productive work environment, particularly in MSMEs with high levels of personal closeness. A collective work culture supports small organizations with minimal formal structure and resources. Informal, though unstructured, training plays a crucial role in boosting self-confidence and job adaptability. These three variables contribute to loyal, efficient, and responsible employee performance. However, future challenges include the need for formal training systems, career development, and improvements to the physical environment, such as ventilation and workplace safety. Improvements in these areas can drive sustainable human resource performance in MSMEs.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to understand the influence of leadership, work culture, and training on employee performance at the Nasi Lauk Sumatera MSME. Based on interviews, observations, and documentation with 15 employees, it was found that the business owner's participatory leadership builds trust and emotional engagement, creating a comfortable work environment and a sense of belonging. A family-based work culture strengthens team cohesion and collaboration despite the lack of a formal structure. Informal training facilitates adaptation and skill development, although not yet systematic. These three variables collectively improve efficiency, work quality, and employee loyalty. However, the physical aspects of the work environment and the lack of career paths remain challenges that impact long-term job satisfaction.

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