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The Role of Work Motivation in Mediating Human Resource Competence on MSME Performance in Serang City

Salapudin[1*], Ihwan Satria Lesmana[2]
Universitas Bina Bangsa, Indonesia
Corresponding Author: Salapudin: salapudin606@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the mediating role of work motivation in the relationship between individual competency and the performance effectiveness of MSMEs in Serang City. This study adopted a quantitative methodology with a purposive sampling technique, targeting business owners with at least one year of experience. Based on comprehensive data analysis, it is evident that improving human resource competency directly drives MSME performance improvement and strengthens work motivation. Furthermore, work motivation acts as a significant mediating variable, indicating that business efficiency depends not only on professional skills but also on a strong work drive. Therefore, sustainable MSME development strategies must integrate skills enrichment with motivational enhancement programs to achieve optimal operational results.

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INTRODUCTION

Management is an integrative process that involves the systematic planning and control of resources to achieve organizational efficiency. Along with the development of modern management theory, human resource management is now positioned as a key pillar in ensuring business success. The synergy between technical expertise (competence) and internal stimulus (motivation) is believed to drive more stable and sustainable performance outcomes. Therefore, in the context of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), managerial policies oriented toward talent development and work motivation have become crucial strategies in responding to constantly evolving market dynamics.

The effectiveness of MSME performance is a strategic aspect in economic acceleration, particularly in relation to its contribution to job creation and income distribution. In addition to functioning as a national economic pillar, this sector also serves as a driving force for regional economic stability. However, the progress of MSMEs is still constrained by several classic challenges, including limited access to capital, disparities in workforce quality, and low levels of innovation adoption. Referring to the study by Damayanti & Sitohang (2025), the performance of this sector is highly dependent on internal variables, particularly the level of competence and motivation of personnel. This highlights that improving human resource quality must be a primary agenda in strengthening MSMEs.

Serang City has a wide diversity of MSME sectors, ranging from trade services to handicrafts, which support the economy of the capital of Banten Province. However, the growth of this sector is still hindered by the limited managerial capabilities of its actors. According to research by Ramadhan and Wandi (2023), although individual competence and work engagement influence business effectiveness, the results indicate that further strengthening is needed. This suggests the existence of a research gap regarding other determinant factors. Therefore, the integration of work motivation as a mediating variable is considered crucial to strengthen the relationship between human resource quality and MSME performance in the region.

Human resource competence is a combination of cognitive aspects, practical skills, and attitudinal orientation that supports individual work performance. Adequate competence plays a vital role in transforming the capabilities of MSME actors, particularly in management effectiveness, strategic decision-making, and adaptability to competitive industrial changes. Research by Srijani and Ardiyani (2025) states that improving human resource competence significantly enhances MSME competitiveness and performance. However, strong competence alone cannot be fully actualized without sufficient internal motivation. In an operational context, work motivation is a determining factor that directs the energy and persistence of individuals in achieving organizational goals. According to Hariroh et al. (2024), high motivation not only directly contributes to improved MSME performance but also acts as a catalyst that strengthens the relationship between competence and performance outcomes.

Based on a preliminary survey conducted among several MSME actors in Serang City, it was found that most business actors still face limitations in

competence, particularly in financial management, digital marketing, and product innovation. In addition, work motivation among MSME actors tends to be unstable, influenced by market conditions, competition, and fluctuating income levels. This condition impacts suboptimal MSME performance, both in terms of business growth and sustainability. This phenomenon indicates a gap between possessed competence and achieved performance, suggesting the need for an intervening variable capable of bridging this relationship.

The reality of MSME research in Serang City indicates a discrepancy between the rapid growth in the number of business actors and the effectiveness of performance achieved. This phenomenon shows that the increasing number of business entities has not been accompanied by proportional improvements in performance quality, creating challenges in maintaining local competitiveness. On one hand, MSME growth continues to increase due to easier business access and government support. On the other hand, not all MSME actors demonstrate significant performance improvements. This is reflected in low productivity, limited product innovation, and weak capability in utilizing digital technology for marketing. These conditions indicate that human resource competence has not been fully optimized to improve business performance. Furthermore, varying levels of work motivation among MSME actors also influence business outcomes, reinforcing the assumption that motivation plays a strategic role as a mediating variable between competence and performance.

Several problems identified in this study relate to internal aspects of MSME actors. First, there are still limitations in managerial and technical skills, which affect suboptimal business management. Second, low internal motivation leads to inconsistency in running businesses, especially under market pressure and competition. Third, competence has not been fully utilized in creating added value through product innovation and marketing strategies. Fourth, there is a discrepancy between possessed capabilities and actual performance outcomes, indicating that human resource development strategies have not been fully optimized. These conditions highlight the urgency of conducting a more comprehensive study to evaluate the role of work motivation as a mediating variable in linking individual competence to MSME performance. Through this approach, the study is expected to produce more practical and contextually relevant strategic recommendations.

The relevance of human resource competence and work motivation in accelerating MSME performance has been validated by various previous studies. Research by Putri and Kurniawan (2022) confirms that the capacity of business actors significantly affects performance effectiveness, particularly in product innovation and business management. Similarly, Lestari and Nugroho (2023) identify work motivation as a key factor in maintaining productivity stability amid market fluctuations. Furthermore, Sari et al. (2024) demonstrate that the integration of competence and motivation produces significantly better outcomes compared to single-variable approaches. More specifically, Wibowo and Santoso (2022) position work motivation as an intervening variable that strengthens the relationship between human resource quality and organizational success in small-scale enterprises. In addition, Rahmawati and Yusuf (2025)

emphasize that improving human resource quality supported by strong internal motivation leads to more sustainable and adaptive MSME performance. These findings indicate that the synergy between competence and motivation is a crucial factor in MSME success.

Based on a mapping of previous research findings, several limitations or research gaps can be identified. While the significance of individual competence in improving micro-organizational performance has been validated (Putri & Kurniawan, 2022; Sari et al., 2024), a deeper understanding of supporting variables is still needed, indicating that the relationship has not been fully explained in specific contexts. Other findings suggest that this influence is inconsistent without the support of psychological factors such as work motivation (Wibowo & Santoso, 2022). Previous studies, such as Lestari & Nugroho (2023), tend to position motivation as a single predictor directly influencing performance. As a result, the mediating mechanism of work motivation in linking competence to MSME performance has received limited attention in academic discourse. Therefore, there is a need for further investigation to examine whether work motivation can act as an intervening variable that strengthens the effectiveness of competence on business outcomes. Moreover, most studies have been conducted in different regional contexts, leaving local characteristics such as the socio-economic and cultural conditions of Serang City underexplored. These discrepancies and limitations highlight a theoretical gap that requires further investigation, emphasizing the importance of a more integrative approach to bridge differences in findings and expand the generalizability of research results.

The novelty of this study lies in the integration of competence and work motivation variables within a single research framework, positioning motivation as an intervening variable. By focusing on the geographical context of Serang City, this study offers insights that are highly relevant to the unique characteristics of MSMEs in the region. This approach aims to examine how competence can be transformed into superior performance through the strengthening of work motivation among business actors. Essentially, this research contributes to the enrichment of talent management theory and provides an empirical foundation for stakeholders in formulating strategies to enhance the sustainable competitiveness of the MSME sector.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Human Resource Competence and MSME Performance

Human resource competence represents an individual's capability to integrate cognitive aspects, technical skills, and professional behavior to achieve optimal work outcomes. In the micro, small, and medium enterprise (MSME) sector, managerial capability is a critical determinant of operational management effectiveness, policy precision, and product creativity. Various studies confirm that strengthening competency standards is positively correlated with improved business performance, as competent entrepreneurs demonstrate higher flexibility in responding to dynamic and fluctuating industry conditions (Fahmi

& Siregar, 2023; Nugraha & Prasetyo, 2022). Therefore, human resource competence is a key determinant of MSME success.

H1: Human resource competence has an effect on MSME performance.

Human Resource Competence and Work Motivation

Human resource capacity not only influences performance outcomes but also determines an individual's level of professional motivation. Individuals who possess strong expertise and high self-efficacy tend to have greater internal drive to achieve organizational goals. Thus, competence serves as a psychological foundation that strengthens individual commitment to business success. This occurs because competence fosters a sense of capability (self-efficacy), which enhances work motivation. Empirical studies indicate that competence is positively associated with work motivation in small business contexts (Yuliana & Hadi, 2024; Kurniawati & Adi, 2023). Therefore, competence acts as a driving factor for the emergence of work motivation.

H2: Human resource competence has an effect on work motivation.

Work Motivation as a Mediator of MSME Performance

Work motivation is understood as an internal stimulus that regulates the intensity and direction of individual behavior in carrying out tasks. In the MSME ecosystem, motivation functions as a reinforcing mechanism that bridges the relationship between human resource competence and performance outcomes. Individuals with strong motivation tend to be more effective in utilizing their competencies to enhance business output. Referring to the findings of Saputra & Firmansyah (2022) and Dewi & Anwar (2024), work motivation has been proven to act as a vital mediating variable in constructing the relationship between competence and organizational effectiveness. This places motivation in a strategic position within the framework of MSME performance development.

H3: Work motivation mediates the effect of human resource competence on MSME performance.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is based on the premise that MSME success is not solely determined by functional capabilities but is also influenced by psychological factors underlying individual behavior. Human resource competence is positioned as an independent variable reflecting the quality of business management, with a direct impact on performance. However, to ensure that competence is transformed into optimal outcomes, work motivation is required as an internal driving force. Therefore, this study positions work motivation as a mediating variable that bridges the causal relationship between human resource competence and MSME productivity.

The relationship among variables suggests that strengthening competence will first activate work motivation, which subsequently acts as a catalyst for accelerating overall organizational performance.

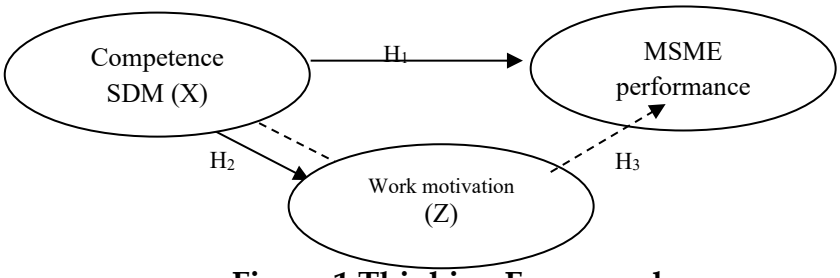

Figure 1 Thinking Framework

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology serves as a crucial foundation in scientific procedures to obtain accurate and highly valid information. This study adopts a quantitative approach focused on testing the relationships among variables through objective, numerical data analysis. The selection of this paradigm is based on its ability to provide empirical evidence regarding the mediating role of work motivation in the relationship between individual competence and MSME performance effectiveness in Serang City using measurable and systematic parameters (Sugiyono, 2022; Creswell, 2023).

Type and Research Approach

The research design applied in this study is a quantitative method with an associative approach. This approach is intended to analyze the degree of relationship among the variables studied while also validating the mediating function within the constructed conceptual model. Through this strategy, the researcher can draw conclusions regarding the strength and direction of relationships among research variables statistically. The quantitative approach is considered appropriate as it allows hypothesis testing through measurable and objective statistical analysis (Sugiyono, 2022). Additionally, the associative approach is used to empirically examine the relationships between human resource competence, work motivation, and MSME performance (Sekaran & Bougie, 2023).

Research Location and Time

This research was conducted among MSME actors in Serang City, Banten Province. The selection of this location was based on the rapid growth of MSMEs and its relevance to the research problem. The study was scheduled to take place over a three-month period, from December 2025 to February 2026. This timeframe was utilized intensively to complete the research cycle, including primary data collection, data processing using statistical tools, and comprehensive analysis of the findings. This duration is considered adequate for conducting a thorough evaluation of all variables studied.

Population and Sample

The population in this study includes all MSMEs actively operating in Serang City. Considering the heterogeneity and large size of the population, data collection was carried out using a sampling technique. The method applied was purposive sampling, where subjects were selected based on specific criteria, namely business actors who have been operating for at least one year. To ensure representative results, the sample size was determined using the Slovin formula

at a 10% significance level, resulting in a total of 100 respondents. This number is considered sufficient to generalize the research findings to the population (Sugiyono, 2022).

Data Collection Techniques

The primary data collection instrument used was a structured questionnaire developed from the indicators of each research variable. The assessment of respondents' perceptions regarding individual competence, motivational stimulus, and organizational performance effectiveness was conducted using a Likert scale. The use of this scale aims to obtain standardized and consistent responses, facilitating hypothesis testing and generalization of findings. In addition, supporting data were obtained through documentation studies and relevant literature to strengthen the theoretical foundation and analysis (Creswell, 2023).

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted using an inferential statistical approach to test the proposed hypotheses. The analysis began with validity and reliability tests to ensure that the research instruments were accurate and consistent. The next stages included classical assumption testing, regression analysis, and mediation testing using path analysis or Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). This procedure aims to examine the significance of the mediating role of work motivation in linking human resource competence to MSME performance outcomes (Hair et al., 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Results

This study presents empirical findings based on the processing of questionnaire data collected from MSME actors in Serang City. The analysis was conducted in stages, starting from instrument testing to hypothesis testing. Data are presented in tables to ensure a systematic and clear understanding, accompanied by interpretations to explain the meaning of each analytical result obtained in this study.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

Description	Frequency	Percentage
Male	55	55%
Female	45	45%
Total	100	100%

Source: Processed primary data (2026)

Based on the table above, the composition of respondents in this study shows a relatively balanced gender distribution between males and females. The male group accounts for a slightly higher percentage at 55% of the total sample. This indicates that participation in the study is not heavily dominated by one gender, thereby providing a balanced perspective in the data analysis. It also suggests that women play a significant role in MSME activities in Serang City. This condition reflects the inclusive nature of the MSME sector, which offers broad opportunities for various groups to participate productively in economic activities.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev
Human Resource Competence	3.85	0.52
Work Motivation	3.78	0.48
MSME Performance	3.90	0.50

Source: Processed primary data (2026)

Based on the data presented, all variables have mean scores above 3.70, placing them within the "good" category. Comparatively, MSME performance records the highest mean score, followed by human resource competence and work motivation. These descriptive findings confirm that MSME actors in Serang City generally hold positive and optimistic perceptions regarding their individual capabilities, professional motivation, and overall business performance.

Table 3. Validity Test

Item	r-count	r-table	Description
X1.1	0.65	0.30	Valid
X1.2	0.70	0.30	Valid
X2.1	0.68	0.30	Valid
X2.2	0.72	0.30	Valid
Y1.1	0.75	0.30	Valid
Y1.2	0.77	0.30	Valid

Source: Processed primary data (2026)

Based on the results of the validity test, it is confirmed that each statement item has an r-count value exceeding the r-table threshold of 0.30, and is therefore categorized as valid. This achievement indicates that each indicator used to measure human resource competence, work motivation, and MSME performance has adequate accuracy in representing the constructs under study. Thus, the instrument meets the technical requirements to be used in subsequent data analysis procedures.

Table 4. Reliability Test

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Description
Human Resource Competence	0.82	Reliable
Work Motivation	0.80	Reliable
MSME Performance	0.85	Reliable

Source: Processed primary data (2026)

Based on the test results, all variables in this study have Cronbach's Alpha coefficients exceeding the threshold value of 0.70, indicating that they are reliable. This result reflects that the instruments used possess high stability and internal consistency in measuring the research variables. Therefore, the data collected through the questionnaire are considered highly credible and meet the requirements for further statistical hypothesis testing.

Table 5. Normality Test

Variable	Sig.
Residual	0.200

Source: Processed primary data (2026)

Based on the normality test results, the significance value is 0.200, which exceeds the critical threshold of 0.05. This finding indicates that the residual data in this study are normally distributed. With the normality assumption fulfilled, the regression model is considered appropriate for further testing using inferential statistical procedures. A normal data distribution is a crucial prerequisite to ensure that hypothesis testing results are reliable and precise.

Table 6. Multicollinearity Test

Variable	Tolerance	VIF
Human Resource Competence	0.75	1.33
Work Motivation	0.75	1.33

Source: Processed primary data (2026)

The results of the multicollinearity test indicate that the tolerance values are above the threshold of 0.10 and the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values are below 10. This confirms that there is no multicollinearity or extreme linear relationship among the independent variables. Therefore, human resource competence and work motivation can be included simultaneously in the regression model without the risk of bias that could distort the accuracy of the analysis results.

Table 7. Regression Test

Variable	Coefficient	Sig.
Human Resource Competence → Performance	0.45	0.000
Human Resource Competence → Motivation	0.50	0.000
Motivation → Performance	0.40	0.000

Source: Processed primary data (2026)

The regression analysis results confirm that all relationships among variables in this research model have significance values below the 0.05 threshold. This finding proves that human resource competence has a significant direct effect on both work motivation and MSME performance. In addition, work motivation is also identified as a factor influencing business effectiveness. The positive regression coefficients indicate a positive linear relationship, meaning that strengthening competence and motivational stimulus will consistently accelerate performance outcomes in the MSME sector.

Table 8. Mediation Test

Path	Effect
Direct	0.45
Indirect	0.20

Source: Processed primary data (2026)

Based on the mediation test results, the indirect effect through the work motivation variable is 0.20. This finding indicates that work motivation significantly amplifies the direct effect of human resource competence on MSME performance. Thus, work motivation functions as a mediating variable that integrates individual capacity with business effectiveness, creating a stronger and more comprehensive causal relationship. In other words, increasing work motivation will optimize the utilization of competence in improving business performance.

DISCUSSION

The discussion section interprets the research findings by linking empirical results with relevant theories. The analysis is based on hypothesis testing results and compared with previous studies to strengthen scientific arguments and provide deeper insights into the phenomenon under investigation.

1. The Role of Human Resource Competence on MSME Performance

Based on the analysis results, it is evident that human resource competence has a significant positive effect on MSME performance. This finding confirms that the ability of business actors to effectively manage and utilize resources is crucial for business sustainability. This result reinforces the findings of Fahmi and Siregar (2023) regarding the importance of competence in enhancing organizational productivity. Furthermore, it is consistent with the study by Nugraha and Prasetyo (2022), which shows that competence is a key instrument in improving competitiveness in the micro sector. Therefore, strengthening competence can be considered a fundamental prerequisite for achieving superior MSME performance outcomes.

2. The Role of Human Resource Competence on Work Motivation

The research data indicate that human resource competence positively contributes to strengthening work motivation. Excellence in knowledge and technical skills enhances self-confidence, which in turn stimulates stronger internal drive to achieve business goals. This finding aligns with Yuliana and Hadi (2024), who emphasize the central role of competence in building strong work motivation. Additionally, Kurniawati and Adi (2023) highlight that competence is a crucial prerequisite for developing intrinsic motivation in the workplace. Therefore, investing in the development of business actors' competencies can be seen as a fundamental step in increasing work enthusiasm and dedication within the MSME sector.

3. The Role of Work Motivation as a Mediator on MSME Performance

The analysis results show that work motivation effectively mediates the relationship between human resource competence and MSME performance. This indicates that the impact of competence becomes more substantial when supported by strong motivational stimuli. This finding is consistent with previous research by Saputra and Firmansyah (2022), which highlights motivation as a mediating variable. Furthermore, Dewi and Anwar (2024) also provide empirical evidence that motivation strengthens the causal relationship between competence and performance outcomes.

Thus, the effectiveness of individual competence in enhancing MSME competitiveness largely depends on how well work motivation is integrated into daily operational activities.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the performance of MSMEs in Serang City is highly dependent on internal individual factors, particularly human resource competence and work motivation. Empirical data confirm that competence significantly contributes to improving business performance outcomes. This suggests that managerial capability, reflected in knowledge mastery and technical skills, serves as a key pillar in determining competitiveness and achieving organizational targets in the local market.

Human resource competence is also proven to enhance work motivation. MSME actors equipped with strong competencies tend to have higher self-efficacy, which in turn stimulates work enthusiasm and managerial commitment in managing their businesses. In this context, work motivation acts as a crucial determinant in regulating how effectively intellectual and technical capacities are translated into business operations. Without strong internal motivation, competence may not be fully transformed into tangible performance outcomes.

Furthermore, empirical findings confirm that work motivation serves as an intervening variable that bridges the relationship between human resource quality and MSME success. This indicates that competence alone does not automatically lead to superior performance without the presence of motivation as an internal driving force. The optimization of business actors' capabilities largely depends on their level of motivation in managing operational activities. Therefore, strategies to enhance MSME competitiveness in Serang City should include a dual approach: strengthening competence and reinforcing work motivation. The harmonization of these two internal factors is a fundamental key to achieving adaptive and competitive performance in response to dynamic business environments.

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