

Building Organizational Performance through Trust-Based Leader Member Exchange: Evidence from Rattan SMEs

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Abstract

This study examines how Amanah-based Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) enhances organizational performance by emphasizing trust as a central relational mechanism in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Drawing on Social Exchange Theory and relational leadership perspectives, the study addresses an important gap in the LMX literature by positioning trust not merely as an outcome, but as a key pathway through which leadership relationships translate into performance outcomes. The research focuses on labor-intensive rattan SMEs in Solo Raya, Indonesia, where organizational performance depends heavily on close leader–employee interactions and relational coordination. Using a quantitative explanatory design, data were collected through a cross-sectional survey of 189 employees working in rattan SMEs. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed to test the proposed model linking three dimensions of Amanah-based LMX (respect, obligation, and trust) to affective commitment and organizational performance. The results demonstrate strong explanatory power, with the model explaining 78.6% of the variance in organizational performance and 74.5% in affective commitment. The findings reveal that Amanah Trust is the most influential predictor of affective commitment and organizational performance, both directly and indirectly through affective commitment. Respect and obligation dimensions also show positive direct effects on commitment and performance, although their indirect effects through affective commitment are weaker or non-significant. These results indicate that trust serves as the primary relational catalyst that converts ethical and supportive leadership behaviors into sustained performance outcomes in SMEs. This study contributes to the leadership literature by extending Leader–Member Exchange theory through the integration of Amanah-based trust as a central explanatory mechanism, offering a culturally grounded yet broadly applicable framework for understanding leadership effectiveness in resource-constrained organizational contexts. Practically, the findings underscore the importance of trust-oriented leadership development for enhancing commitment-driven performance in SMEs operating in competitive and uncertain environments.

Keywords: *Leader Member Exchange, Trust, Affective Commitment, Organizational Performance, SMEs.*

Introduction

Rattan small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Solo Raya, particularly those concentrated in Trangsan Village, Gatak District, Sukoharjo Regency, constitute one of the most significant rattan craft industry clusters in Indonesia. This cluster has long been recognized as a major center for export-oriented rattan furniture production, characterized by labor-intensive business structures and deep integration into global furniture value chains [1], [2]. Empirical evidence indicates that the Trangsan cluster comprises approximately 200–220 active business units and employs around 5,000–6,000 workers. Under optimal conditions, its production capacity reaches 100–150 shipping containers per month for both domestic and export markets, as reported in studies on rattan industry clusters in Central Java [1], [3]. This scale positions rattan SMEs in Solo Raya as labor-intensive organizations with high operational complexity, where labor productivity, consistency in product quality, and on-time order fulfillment are critical prerequisites for sustaining organizational performance [4], [5]. The economic

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contribution of this cluster is further reflected in its export activities, with each shipment valued at tens of thousands of U.S. dollars, underscoring the importance of internal performance stability in maintaining global competitiveness [3], [6].

Despite their considerable economic potential, rattan SMEs in Solo Raya continue to face persistent and structural organizational performance challenges. Previous studies on Indonesia's rattan clusters report fluctuations in labor productivity, inconsistencies in product quality, limited process control, and vulnerability to delivery delays caused by weak internal coordination [1], [2]. These challenges are often exacerbated by internal organizational factors, including unclear leadership direction, limited employee involvement in operational decision-making, weak customer-oriented service practices, and insufficient support for employee ideas and innovation characteristics commonly observed in cluster-based manufacturing SMEs [4], [7]. In labor-intensive SME contexts, such conditions directly affect critical organizational performance indicators, including work effectiveness, customer satisfaction, employee retention, and the organization's capacity for continuous improvement [5].

The organizational behavior and leadership literature consistently emphasizes that such performance-related issues are closely linked to the quality of relationships between leaders and organizational members. Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) theory conceptualizes leadership as a social exchange relationship that evolves through mutual support, communication quality, role clarity, and member involvement in work processes [8], [9]. Empirical research demonstrates that high-quality LMX contributes to improved productivity, goal attainment, service quality, and employee innovation, including within small and medium-sized enterprises [5], [7]. However, growing evidence suggests that the effect of LMX on organizational performance is not purely direct; rather, it depends critically on the development of trust as a psychological mechanism that strengthens commitment, cooperation, and employees' willingness to exert extra effort for organizational goals [10], [11].

Although the relationships among LMX, trust, and performance have been widely examined, a significant research gap remains in the context of export-oriented manufacturing and craft-based SME clusters, such as rattan SMEs in Solo Raya. First, much of the existing LMX and trust research has focused on large organizations or service sectors, limiting its generalizability to labor-intensive SMEs characterized by simple structures and highly centralized leadership [5], [7]. Second, many studies assess performance at the individual level such as employee performance or turnover intention while SME organizational performance is inherently multidimensional, encompassing labor productivity, target achievement, customer satisfaction, staff retention, and innovation culture [4]. Third, trust is often treated as a supporting or contextual variable, rather than being explicitly examined as a primary pathway through which LMX quality is translated into superior organizational performance under conditions of resource constraints [11], [12].

Addressing these gaps, the present study develops and tests a model that positions trust as a central mechanism linking Leader–Member Exchange to organizational performance in the context of rattan SMEs in Solo Raya. Rather than focusing solely on the direct effects of LMX on performance, this study integrates trust as a strategic pathway explaining how relational leadership enhances productivity, target achievement, customer satisfaction, employee retention, and sustained innovation simultaneously. Consequently, this research contributes theoretically by extending the LMX and trust literature to cluster-based manufacturing SMEs in a developing-country context, while offering practical insights for strengthening leadership practices and sustaining organizational performance among rattan SMEs facing intense global competition and market volatility.

Subject of the Study & Research Design

This study was conducted among rattan small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the Solo Raya region, with a particular focus on the rattan industry cluster located in Trangsan Village, Gatak District, Sukoharjo Regency, which is widely recognized as one of the largest rattan production centers in Indonesia. The study population comprised employees of rattan SMEs who interact directly with business owners or enterprise managers as their immediate supervisors. A total of 189 respondents participated in the study.

Respondents were selected based on specific inclusion criteria: having a minimum tenure of one year and being actively involved in daily operational activities. These criteria ensured that participants possessed sufficient work experience and organizational familiarity to provide informed assessments of the quality of Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) relationships and the level of trust in their leaders.

The study employed a quantitative explanatory research design using a cross-sectional survey approach to examine the causal relationships among LMX, trust, and organizational performance. Data were collected through structured questionnaires measured on a five-point Likert scale. The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), which enables the simultaneous testing of direct and indirect (mediating) effects within a model involving multiple latent constructs. This analytical approach is particularly appropriate for labor-intensive SME contexts characterized by resource constraints and heterogeneous respondent characteristics, as it offers robustness in handling complex models with relatively small sample sizes.

Tool of the Study

The research instrument consisted of a structured questionnaire measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). All measurement items were adapted from previously validated scales and carefully contextualized to reflect the operational characteristics of rattan SMEs in the Solo Raya region.

Amanah Respect

Amanah Respect captures the extent to which leader–member relationships are grounded in mutual respect and recognition of employees' contributions. This construct was measured using four indicators assessing leaders' ability to understand employees' work-related needs, acknowledge employees' potential, apply their expertise in problem-solving, and appreciate employees' professional competence. The scale was adapted from the Leader–Member Exchange framework developed by Graen and Uhl-Bien[9] and its subsequent refinements (Balovich,; Maltem et al.,)[13], [14].

Amanah Obligation

Amanah Obligation reflects leaders' moral responsibility to support and assist employees in accomplishing their tasks and achieving organizational objectives. This construct was operationalized using five indicators evaluating leaders' willingness to help employees resolve work-related issues, provide assurance and support, instill confidence, foster cooperative relationships, and influence employees to support organizational decisions. The scale draws on the affective commitment framework of Allen and Meyer[15] and the LMX perspective of Graen and Uhl-Bien [9], with recent conceptual developments by Vin Le and Jarrod [16].

Amanah Trust

Amanah Trust measures the level of trust between leaders and employees as manifested through honesty, integrity, and the consistent fulfillment of rights and obligations. This construct was assessed using five indicators capturing leaders' fairness toward employees, awareness of employees' job satisfaction, personal integrity, trustworthiness in collaborative problem-solving, and consistency in fulfilling mutual obligations. The measurement items were adapted from the organizational trust scale developed by Mayer and Davis [17].

Affective Commitment

Affective Commitment represents employees' emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization. This construct was measured using seven indicators assessing employees' sense of pride, loyalty, belongingness, willingness to exert extra effort, and alignment between personal values and organizational goals. The scale was adapted from the affective commitment model proposed by Meyer and Allen [15] and further developed by Meyer et al. [18].

Organizational Performance

Organizational Performance captures the extent to which organizational goals are achieved as a function of leadership effectiveness. This construct was measured using six indicators reflecting employee productivity, target achievement, customer satisfaction, employee retention, innovation capability, and overall work effectiveness. The measurement items were adapted from established organizational performance frameworks developed by Robbins and Judge [19] and Lee and Tsang[20].

Results and Discussion

General Characteristics of Study Respondents

The general characteristics of the subjects are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. General Characteristics of Study Respondents (N=189)

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	65	34.4
	Female	124	65.6
Age (years)	20–25	51	27.0
	26–35	57	30.2
	36–45	28	14.8
	46–55	49	25.9
	> 55	4	2.1
Education Level	Elementary School	1	0.5
	Senior High School	49	25.9
	Diploma	17	9.0
	Bachelor's Degree	117	61.9
	Master's Degree	5	2.6
Work Tenure (years)	1–5	31	20.7
	6–10	59	26.7
	11–20	53	28.7
	21–30	29	12.7
	> 30	17	11.3

Source: Primary data processed (2025).

The sample consists predominantly of female respondents (65.6%), while 34.4% are male, indicating substantial female participation in the operational activities of rattan SMEs in Solo Raya. Regarding age, most respondents are within the productive working-age groups, with the largest proportions in the 26–35 years (30.2%) and 20–25 years (27.0%) categories, followed by those aged 46–55 years (25.9%). This distribution suggests a workforce combining both early-career and experienced employees.

In terms of educational background, the majority of respondents hold a bachelor's degree (61.9%), followed by senior high school graduates (25.9%) and diploma holders (9.0%), indicating a relatively well-educated workforce capable of evaluating leadership practices and organizational processes. With respect to tenure, most respondents report substantial work experience, with 28.7% having worked for 11–20 years and 26.7% for 6–10 years. This tenure distribution suggests that respondents possess sufficient organizational familiarity to provide reliable assessments of leader–member exchange, trust, and organizational performance.

Measurement and Structural Model Evaluation

The measurement model Figure 1 demonstrated satisfactory face and content validity, established through a comprehensive review of the literature on Amanah, Leader–Member Exchange, and Social Exchange Theory, as well as expert judgment confirming item clarity and relevance. Convergent validity was supported, as all indicator loadings were significant and exceeded the recommended threshold ($p < 0.001$), while composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha values for all constructs were above 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency. Discriminant validity, assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion, showed that each construct was empirically distinct, with the square root of AVE exceeding inter-construct correlations.

The structural model exhibited strong explanatory and predictive power. The R^2 values indicated that the model explained 78.6% of the variance in organizational performance and 74.5% in affective commitment, reflecting substantial explanatory capacity. Furthermore, the Q^2 value of 0.944 confirmed excellent predictive relevance and overall goodness of fit. Collectively, these results demonstrate that the proposed model is robust and suitable for hypothesis testing.

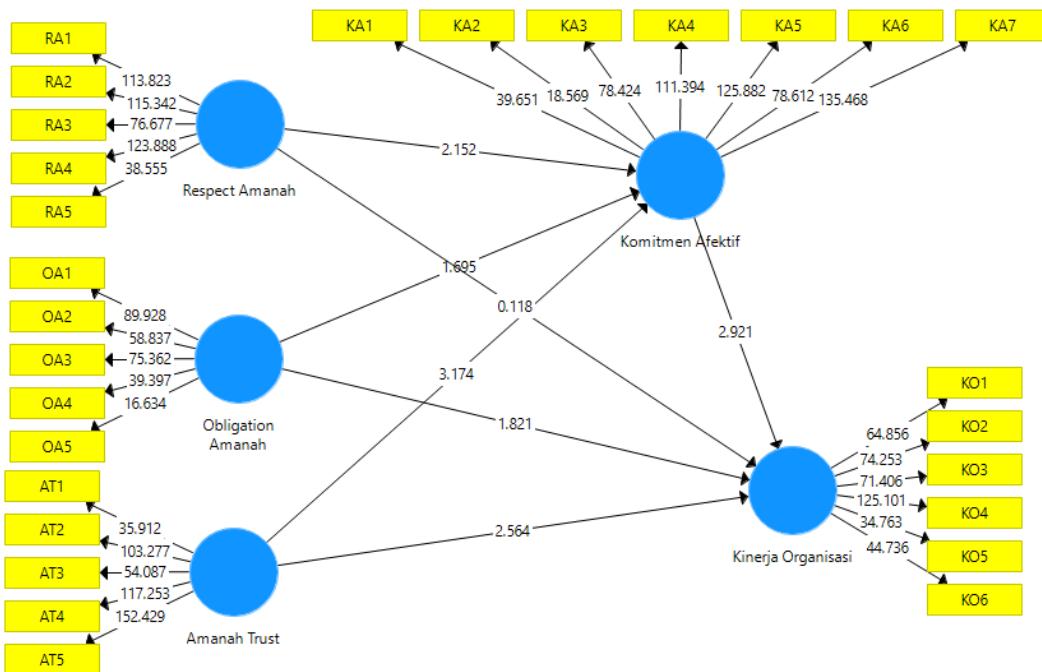


Figure 1: Structural Equation Model

Results (Hypothesis Testing)

Table 2. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Structural Relationship	Path Coefficient (β)	t-Statistics	p-Values	Decision
H1	Respect Amanah → Affective Commitment	0.254	2.152	0.032	Supported
H2	Obligation Amanah → Affective Commitment	0.230	2.021	0.045	Supported
H3	Amanah Trust → Affective Commitment	0.411	3.174	0.002	Supported
H4	Affective Commitment → Organizational Performance	0.379	2.921	0.004	Supported
H5	Amanah Trust → Organizational Performance	0.331	2.564	0.011	Supported
H6	Obligation Amanah → Organizational Performance	0.222	2.095	0.049	Supported
H7	Respect Amanah → Organizational Performance	0.181	2.008	0.049	Supported
H8	Amanah Trust → Affective Commitment → Organizational Performance	0.156	2.033	0.043	Supported
H9	Obligation Amanah → Affective Commitment → Organizational Performance	0.087	1.390	0.165	Not Supported
H10	Respect Amanah → Affective Commitment → Organizational Performance	0.096	1.694	0.091	Not Supported

Source: Processed Primary Data, 2025

Hypotheses were tested using PLS-SEM with bootstrapping. As shown in Table 1, all direct paths were statistically significant. Respect Amanah positively predicted affective commitment ($\beta = 0.254$, $t = 2.152$, $p = 0.032$), and Obligation Amanah also had a positive effect on affective commitment ($\beta = 0.230$, $t = 2.021$, $p = 0.045$). Amanah Trust emerged as the strongest antecedent of affective commitment ($\beta = 0.411$, $t = 3.174$, $p = 0.002$), suggesting that trust-based leader-member relationships provide the most salient relational resource for strengthening employees' emotional attachment. In predicting organizational performance, affective commitment exerted a significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.379$, $t = 2.921$, $p = 0.004$), confirming its role as a proximal attitudinal driver of performance outcomes. Amanah Trust also directly enhanced organizational performance ($\beta = 0.331$, $t = 2.564$, $p = 0.011$), while Obligation Amanah ($\beta = 0.222$, $t = 2.095$, $p = 0.049$) and Respect Amanah ($\beta = 0.181$, $t = 2.008$, $p = 0.049$) showed smaller but significant direct effects. Mediation analysis (Table 4.13) further indicated that affective commitment significantly transmitted the effect of Amanah Trust to organizational performance ($\beta = 0.156$, $t = 2.033$, $p = 0.043$), whereas the indirect effects of Obligation Amanah ($\beta = 0.087$, $t = 1.390$, $p = 0.165$) and Respect Amanah ($\beta = 0.096$, $t = 1.694$, $p = 0.091$) through affective commitment were not statistically significant. Collectively, these findings support the centrality of trust as both a direct performance driver and an indirect driver via affective commitment, while suggesting that obligation and respect may influence performance primarily through more immediate operational mechanisms rather than through emotional attachment alone.

Discussion

H1 (Respect Amanah to Affective Commitment). The findings demonstrate that Respect Amanah has a positive and significant effect on affective commitment, indicating that leader behaviors reflecting appreciation, recognition, and professional respect strengthen employees' emotional attachment to the organization. This result is consistent with Leader-Member Exchange theory, which posits that mutual respect constitutes a core dimension of high-quality relational exchanges between leaders and followers[9]. Recent empirical studies confirm that respectful leadership enhances affective commitment by fostering psychological safety and perceived dignity at work, particularly in collectivist and labor-intensive organizational settings [7], [21]–[23]. In SMEs, where interpersonal interactions dominate daily operations, respectful treatment functions as a relational signal that strengthens employees' identification with the organization.

H2 (Obligation Amanah to Affective Commitment). The results support the positive relationship between Obligation Amanah and affective commitment, suggesting that leaders' moral responsibility to support, guide, and protect employees enhances emotional attachment. From a social exchange perspective, obligation-oriented leadership communicates benevolence and care, encouraging employees to reciprocate with loyalty and affective commitment [24]. Recent studies indicate that supervisory support and moral obligation significantly predict affective commitment, especially in organizations with limited formalized HR systems [5], [11], [12], [25], [26]. This finding highlights the relevance of obligation-based leadership as an affective bonding mechanism in SMEs.

H3 (Amanah Trust to Affective Commitment). Amanah Trust emerges as the strongest predictor of affective commitment, underscoring trust as the central psychological mechanism linking leadership relationships to emotional attachment. Trust reduces relational uncertainty, enhances perceptions of fairness, and encourages employees to internalize organizational membership as part of their self-concept. This finding aligns with organizational trust theory and recent empirical evidence demonstrating that leader trustworthiness is a primary antecedent of affective commitment across sectors and cultures [11], [27]–[30]. In SME contexts, trust substitutes for formal controls and becomes a critical relational resource sustaining commitment.

H4 (Affective Commitment to Organizational Performance). The results confirm that affective commitment positively influences organizational performance, indicating that emotionally attached employees are more willing to exert discretionary effort, maintain quality standards, and support collective goals. This finding supports the affective commitment model, which identifies emotional attachment as the most performance-relevant form of commitment [31]. Recent studies consistently show that affective commitment enhances productivity, service quality, innovation, and retention particularly in SMEs where performance relies heavily on employee dedication rather than structural advantages [5], [7], [12], [32].

H5 (Amanah Trust to Organizational Performance). The direct effect of Amanah Trust on organizational performance is significant, indicating that trust-based leadership relationships enhance

performance beyond attitudinal outcomes. Trust facilitates coordination, reduces conflict, and enables faster problem-solving, which are critical in export-oriented and time-sensitive production environments. This finding is consistent with recent leadership research demonstrating that trust improves organizational effectiveness by strengthening cooperation and knowledge sharing [11], [28]–[30]. Thus, trust functions as both a relational and operational asset in SMEs.

H6 (Obligation Amanah to Organizational Performance). The positive effect of Obligation Amanah on organizational performance suggests that leaders' moral responsibility and willingness to assist employees directly enhance operational outcomes. Obligation-based leadership likely improves performance through faster issue resolution, stronger coordination, and sustained employee persistence during high-demand periods. Recent studies confirm that supportive and morally grounded leadership positively affects performance, particularly in small organizations where leaders are closely involved in daily operations [25], [26], [33].

H7 (Respect Amanah to Organizational Performance). Respect Amanah also shows a positive, though comparatively weaker, effect on organizational performance. This suggests that respectful treatment contributes to performance primarily by creating a cooperative and psychologically safe work climate. Prior studies argue that respect functions as a foundational relational condition that enables, rather than directly drives, performance outcomes unless reinforced by stronger mechanisms such as trust and empowerment [22], [23], [26], [27].

H8 (Amanah Trust, Affective Commitment to Organizational Performance). The significant indirect effect confirms that affective commitment partially mediates the relationship between Amanah Trust and organizational performance. This finding indicates that trust enhances performance not only directly but also by strengthening employees' emotional attachment, which motivates sustained effort and cooperation. This result aligns with recent integrative models of trust and performance, which emphasize affective commitment as a key psychological transmission mechanism [27]–[30].

H9 (Obligation Amanah, Affective Commitment, to Organizational Performance). The indirect effect of Obligation Amanah through affective commitment is not significant, suggesting that moral obligation alone does not sufficiently translate emotional attachment into performance gains. Prior research indicates that support-oriented leadership often requires complementary mechanisms such as empowerment, autonomy, or role clarity to produce strong performance outcomes [4], [7], [32].

H10 (Respect Amanah, Affective Commitment to Organizational Performance). Similarly, the mediated effect of Respect Amanah is non-significant, indicating that respect enhances performance primarily through direct relational and climate-based pathways rather than through affective commitment alone. This finding supports recent leadership literature suggesting that respectful treatment shapes psychological safety and cooperation, but its performance impact depends on reinforcement through trust-based exchanges [21], [23], [27].

Conclusion

This study advances the literature on leadership and organizational performance by demonstrating that Amanah-based Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) constitutes a critical relational mechanism through which trust and affective commitment enhance organizational performance in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Drawing on Social Exchange Theory and relational leadership perspectives, the findings reveal that trust grounded in amanah principles emerges as the most influential driver of affective commitment and organizational performance, both directly and indirectly. This underscores the centrality of trustworthiness, integrity, and consistent fulfillment of obligations in shaping high-quality leader–employee relationships within labor-intensive SME contexts.

The results further indicate that affective commitment functions as a partial transmission mechanism, particularly in the relationship between Amanah Trust and organizational performance. Employees who perceive their leaders as trustworthy and morally reliable are more likely to develop strong emotional attachment, which subsequently translates into higher productivity, stronger cooperation, and improved organizational outcomes. In contrast, respect- and obligation-oriented leadership behaviors, while positively associated with commitment and performance, demonstrate weaker or non-significant indirect effects, suggesting that trust represents the core relational catalyst that converts ethical leadership into sustained performance advantages.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study contributes to the LMX literature by extending its explanatory power beyond traditional relational dimensions and integrating trust as a central pathway

rather than a peripheral attitudinal outcome. By operationalizing amanah as a multidimensional construct encompassing respect, obligation, and trust, the study enriches relational leadership theory and offers a culturally grounded yet universally applicable framework for understanding leadership effectiveness in SMEs. This integration also responds to calls for contextualized leadership models that capture relational dynamics in emerging economies and collectivist work settings.

Practically, the findings suggest that SME leaders should prioritize trust-building behaviors such as transparency, fairness, and consistency over solely emphasizing formal authority or episodic support. In environments characterized by limited resources and high coordination demands, trust-based leadership can substitute for formal control systems and foster commitment-driven performance. Policymakers and SME development programs may also leverage these insights by incorporating trust-oriented leadership development into capacity-building initiatives for export-oriented and cluster-based industries.

Despite its contributions, this study has limitations that open avenues for future research. The cross-sectional design restricts causal inference, and future studies may employ longitudinal or mixed-method approaches to capture the dynamic evolution of trust and commitment over time. Additionally, future research could explore alternative mediators such as work engagement, psychological safety, or empowerment and examine boundary conditions that may strengthen or weaken the trust–performance relationship across different cultural and industrial contexts.

Acknowledgments

This research was supported by Sultan Agung Semarang University in supporting research.

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