

## A study of Firm Leaders

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### Abstract

*This research was conducted to evaluate and measure the capabilities of management and operating small and medium-sized enterprises in Hai Phong City. Small and medium-sized enterprises in Hai Phong City with limited resources are facing fierce competition in the context of increasingly deep international integration. A survey was conducted through the analysis of survey data from 210 respondents working in small and medium-sized enterprises in Hai Phong City, including middle managers and employees. Analytical methods such as independent t-tests and ANOVA analyses are used to test and measure the scales. Analysis results based on descriptive statistical methods, comparison methods with an independent T-test, and ANOVA analysis show that, there is no statistically significant difference in the capabilities of management and operating small and medium-sized enterprises in Hai Phong City of Leaders between these different genders, job position, labor scale, and main business sectors. There is a statistically significant difference in the capabilities of management and operating small and medium-sized enterprises in Hai Phong City of Leaders between these different academic levels, and professional seniority. This research uses the contents of the theoretical and practical basis for human resource management in general and the capabilities of management and operating firm leaders in particular. Within the context of international economic integration, these variables are useful solutions for SMEs. The paper's primary contribution is findings that benefit the SMEs in Hai Phong City in the improvement of their scale expansion and business performance. Therefore, SMEs should focus on enhancing the capacity of their board of directors, thereby improving their leadership and management capabilities and contributing to improved business performance.*

**Keywords:** Firm Leaders, Management, Operating, Human Resource Management, Small and Medium Enterprises (Smes), Economics.

## INTRODUCTION

There have been many studies around the world and in the country on business leadership, typically: Woods (1913), Lei et al. (2021), and Le (2021) researched the role of leadership, considering leadership is the key factor determining the success of the organization; Allport (1937), Fiedler (1967), Le (2012), Noruzy et al. (2013), and Iqbal et al. (2020) researched the qualities and capabilities of leaders. Barnard (1968), McGregor (1967), Le et al. (2018), and Le and Lei (2019) researched leadership behavior and leadership style; House (1978) studied situational leadership, attractiveness, and charisma of leadership; Snyder and Graves (1994) studied leadership vision; and Maxwell (1998) studied five levels of leadership.

In fact, when it comes to leadership, most subjects often perceive powerful individuals as having vast strength and influence in all fields, from politics to society to business. When talking about them, we often only choose a forward-looking approach, about the positive side of positive qualities—the factors that create success—without seeing their negative side, and vice versa.

Hai Phong is a coastal city located downstream of the Thai Binh river system in the Red River Delta, with a natural area of 1,507.57 km<sup>2</sup>. In the socio-economic development strategy of the Red River Delta, Hai Phong is identified as a growth pole of the northern dynamic economic region (Hanoi-Hai Phong-Quang Ninh); it is the economic, scientific, and technical center of the Northern Coastal Region and one of the development centers of the Northern Key Economic Region and the whole country (Government, 2023).

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The majority of Vietnamese enterprises are small and medium-sized, characterized by limited capital and technology, and are facing many difficulties in improving their innovation capabilities (Son et al., 2019; Lei et al., 2020). Therefore, the good management and operation abilities of firm leaders will play a huge role in improving business performance and overcoming the above limitations.

There have been many studies on the topic of business leadership from different perspectives, such as Al Showdaid et al.'s (2023) exploration of the impact of transformational leadership style (TLS) on employees' motivation (EM) directly and through psychological capital (PC) and employee' engagement (EE). Estherita et al. (2023) have found that there exists a relationship between transformational leadership and the culture of the organization with a mediating effect of innovative work behavior. Al Doghan et al. (2023) proposed to explore the role of transformational leadership and social entrepreneurship in achieving enterprise performance through creativity among employees of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Egypt, etc.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate and measure the capabilities of management and operating small and medium-sized enterprises in Hai Phong City and compare respondents' feelings about the capabilities of management and operating small and medium-sized enterprises in Hai Phong City.

Starting from the above theoretical and practical gaps, this study was conducted to answer the following research questions:

RQ: How is there a there a significant difference in the capabilities of management and operating small and medium-sized enterprises in Hai Phong City of Leaders between these different genders, job positions, labor scales, main business sectors, academic levels, and professional seniority?

## **Theoretical Basis and Literature Review**

### **Personal Qualities of Leaders**

Schaubroeck et al. (2007) studied the interaction between job characteristics and individual leaders's negative qualities (egotism, cunning, and psychological instability) in relation to the physical and mental stress of employees, their attitudes toward work, and their commitment to the organization.

Judge et al. (2009) argue that the positive and negative qualities of leaders are two-sided and both affect leadership outcomes.

The 2010 standards for evaluating leadership included vision, strategic thinking, capacity people management, the ability to adapt to changes in the business environment, and the capacity to manage resources effectively. The IBM Global Leadship Report (2012) assesses leadership in relation to the economic context of each year and each period. The findings demonstrate that, in a crisis situation, leadership must give careful consideration to sustainable development, operational flexibility, and personnel management.

An important contribution to clarifying the theory of leadership qualities from the field of psychology is the Big Five Personality Model, which includes: open-mindedness; thoroughness; extrovertiness; a pleasant and mild temperament; and control of emotions. This classification clearly identifies the qualities that help leaders succeed. However, the grouping and explanation of the connotations of these qualities is still general and too inclined to the psychological aspect, so it is not really suitable for leaders in the field of management and business (Luong, 2014).

Leadership courage demonstrates the courage to accept difficulties and challenges, persistently pursue goals, dare to take responsibility for assigned work, and be enthusiastic and passionate about the work I do. These qualities help leaders persistently pursue goals and work toward clear goals (Luong, 2014).

Leaders with outstanding ideological qualities always promote perfection in everything they do or that is done by their employees. They always find the best way to do the job and always promote and recognize the achievements of their employees; they are very optimistic, humorous, know how to motivate employees even in difficult circumstances, and believe that efforts will bring good results (Thurn, 2009).

According to Peterson and Seligman (2004), leadership fairness is reflected in the way it views and evaluates others, not letting prejudices affect decision-making. Give everyone fair opportunities to express themselves and prove themselves. Fairness is also shown in the collective spirit: understanding and performing well one's responsibilities as a member of the organization; knowing how to motivate, lead, and influence other team members to complete work together.

### **Capabilities of Management and Operation of Firm Leaders**

Hazucha et al. (1993) conducted research with a sample size of 198 business managers using a combination of the Management Skills Profile and the Management Development Questionnaire. In this study, leaders were evaluated by their subordinates. The end result is very positive and is used in leadership development programs.

Le (2012), with a research sample of 230 Vietnamese small and medium-sized enterprise executives, used the ASK model (attitudes, skills, and knowledge) and the self-assessment method. The results show that many Vietnamese business executives self-assess their abilities to not meet job requirements.

Kaplan and Palus (1994) believe that leadership capacity assessment is a position that needs to be assessed multidimensionally, specifically including the following forms: self-assessment by leaders, assessment by superiors, and assessment by subordinates. Kaplan and Palus (1994) affirmed that there are two reasons for multidimensional leadership assessment. Firstly, it is a position where the work is more complex, challenging, and changing than in other positions. Second, compared to the results of a one-dimensional evaluation, the outcomes of a multi-dimensional assessment—positive or negative—will have greater significance for the leader's reputation and image. Self-evaluation and evaluations from subordinates are frequently employed in tandem during multidimensional appraisal (Mohrman, Mohrman, & Lawler, 1992). However, because subordinates' assessments of leaders are a means of demonstrating their trust in them, this study assesses the operational and managerial skills of corporate leaders from their perspective.

The NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement (2010) has launched leadership assessment tools and reports since 2002 based on three main groups of standards: setting direction standards, service delivery standards (delivering the service), and personal qualities.

Le (2012) conducted a survey using the annual self-assessment leadership method, and the results showed that the strong skills of leaders are communication, presentation, office management, thinking, information processing, and decision-making. In contrast, the weak skills are time management, meeting control, and planning. In addition, team-building skills and relationship-building skills are rated at a fairly average level.

Applying the appropriate leadership style can help administrators make a difference in management efficiency and bring firms to success (Le et al., 2018). Among different leadership styles, transformational leadership emerges as one of the most superior leadership styles, helping administrators arouse and promote employees' potential, effectively use resource capacity, and improve the innovation ability of enterprises (Le & Lei, 2019).

Lei et al. (2021) show that transformational leadership creates positive changes in employee morale, intrinsic motivation, and performance.

Ugwu & Okore (2020) argue that transformational leadership is positively related to creating favorable premises and conditions to enhance the organization's knowledge management capabilities, such as encouraging a learning culture. Within the organization, form a reward system to encourage employees to share and create knowledge. Lei et al. (2021) suggest that under the leadership of transformational leaders, employees become more creative and willing to share their personal knowledge with colleagues.

## **Research Methods**

### **Research Sample**

The research was conducted based on a sample of 100 SMEs operating in Hai Phong City. The research sample was taken by the authors using the convenience sampling method. To meet the research objectives, respondents

are department heads, deputy department heads, or staff such as the administration department, sales department, accounting department, and marketing department.

The study distributed 300 survey questionnaires and collected 250 questionnaires, of which 210 were valid for analysis. The study has five observed variables used to measure the management and operating capabilities of leaders of small and medium-sized enterprises (capabilities of management and operating SMEs in Hai Phong city of leaders, including 5 scales: MO1, MO2, MO3, MO4, and MO5). According to the standards of Hair et al. (1998), the minimum sample size must be 5 times larger than the number of observed variables, corresponding to  $5 * 5 = 25$  votes. Therefore, with 210 valid questionnaires, the study has ensured sample size standards for exploratory factor analysis (see table 1).

**Measure**

Observed variables are measured using a five-level Likert scale (1: Completely disagree, and 5: Completely agree).

**Analysis Tools**

Qualitative research methods include inheriting the results of previous studies, interviewing experts, using techniques of synthesis, comparison, analysis, etc. On the basis of observed variables collected from the scientific research that has been published, the author consulted experts specializing in research on human resource management, leadership style, etc. at a number of prestigious universities in Vietnam, such as the National Economics University, the University of Labour and Social Affairs, and the leaders of some small and medium-sized enterprises in Hai Phong, to calibrate the scale accordingly and develop a questionnaire.

Quantitative research method with SPSS software, using descriptive statistics, independent T tests, and Anova analysis.

**Table 1. Respondents by labor scale, professional seniority, job position, and main business sectors.**

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Labor scale</b>			
Under 50 employees	55	26.2	26.2
From 50 to under 300 employees	79	37.6	63.8
300 employees or higher	76	36.2	100.0
<b>Professional seniority</b>			
Under 5 years	79	37.6	37.6
5 years or older	131	62.4	100.0
<b>Job position</b>			
Employees	113	53.8	53.8
Middle managers	97	46.2	100.0
<b>Main business sectors</b>			
Trade and services	93	44.3	44.3
Industrial production	52	24.8	69.0
Real estate and construction	65	31.0	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

**Source:** Prepared by the authors (2024) and SPSS software.

Information on the data collected is shown in Table 1. It shows that among them, the common labor scale of SMEs which respondents work for, respondents work for SMES which have under 50 employees accounting for 26.2%, respondents work for SMEs which have from 50 to under 300 employees accounting for 37.6%, while the remaining respondents work for SMEs which have from 300 employees or higher accounting for 36.2%. Among the respondents, 37.6% of the participants have professional seniority under 5 years, and 62.4% of the participants have professional seniority 5 years or older. Of these, 113 are employees, accounting for 53.8%; 97 are middle managers, accounting for 46.2%. Respondents working for SMEs doing business in trade and services accounted for 44.3%; industrial production accounted for 24.8%; and the remaining real estate and construction accounted for 31.0%.

## Research Results

### Independent T-test: Genders

A comparison of the results of the evaluation of the differences in the capabilities of management and operating small and medium-sized enterprises in Hai Phong City of Leaders with participants of different genders (males and females) can be seen in Table 2. According to the results shown in Table 2, sig Levene's test is 0.041, which is smaller than 0.05. The variance between males and females is different. Moreover, the sig value t-test is 0.992, which is more than 0.05, which means that there is no statistically significant difference in the capabilities of management and operating small and medium-sized enterprises in Hai Phong City of Leaders between these different genders (Hoang & Chu, 2008; Hair et al., 2009; Hair et al., 2014).

**Table 2. Differences in the capabilities of management and operating small and medium-sized enterprises in Hai Phong City of Leaders with participants of different genders: An Independent Test.**

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
MO	Equal variances assumed	4.235	0.041	0.009	208	0.993	0.00072	0.07909	-0.15519	0.15664
	Equal variances not assumed			0.010	184.287	0.992	0.00072	0.07207	-0.14147	0.14291

Source: Prepared by the authors (2024) and SPSS software.

### Independent T-test: Academic Levels

A comparison of the results of the evaluation of the differences in the capabilities of management and operating small and medium-sized enterprises in Hai Phong City of Leaders with participants of different academic levels (bachelor or higher and college or intermediate level) can be seen in Table 3. According to the results shown in Table 3, sig Levene's test is 0.020, which is smaller than 0.05. The variance between a bachelor's, or higher level, and a college's, or intermediate level, is different. Moreover, the sig value t-test is 0.003, which is less than 0.05, which means that there is a statistically significant difference in the capabilities of management and operating small and medium-sized enterprises in Hai Phong City of Leaders between these different academic levels (Hoang & Chu, 2008; Hair et al., 2009; Hair et al., 2014).

Leaders of SMEs in Hai Phong City have very high educational qualifications. In addition, reality shows that the English level of leaders is also quite good; most leaders can communicate in basic English.

When evaluating leaders, middle managers' subordinates are far more critical of them and want far more leadership than are employees' subordinates.

**Table 3. Differences in the capabilities of management and operating small and medium-sized enterprises in Hai Phong City of Leaders with participants of different academic levels - Independent Test.**

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
MO	Equal variances assumed	5.467	0.020	1.940	208	0.054	0.19592	0.10100	-0.00320	0.39504
	Equal variances not assumed			3.061	99.404	0.003	0.19592	0.06401	0.06892	0.32292

Source: Prepared by the authors (2024) and SPSS software.

### Independent T-test: Job Position

A comparison of the results of the evaluation of the differences in the capabilities of management and operating small and medium-sized enterprises in Hai Phong City of Leaders with participants of different job positions (middle managers and employees) can be seen in Table 4. According to the results shown in Table 4, sig Levene's test is 0.742, which is larger than 0.05. The variance between middle managers and employees is not different. Moreover, the sig value t-test is 0.440, which is more than 0.05, which means that there is no statistically significant difference in the capabilities of management and operating small and medium-sized enterprises in Hai Phong City of Leaders between these job positions (Hoang & Chu, 2008; Hair et al., 2009; Hair et al., 2014).

**Table 4. Differences in the capabilities of management and operating small and medium-sized enterprises in Hai Phong City of Leaders with participants of different job position - Independent Test.**

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
<b>MO</b>	Equal variances assumed	0.109	0.742	0.774	208	0.440	0.05819	0.07519	-0.09005	0.20642
	Equal variances not assumed			0.768	195.123	0.444	0.05819	0.07580	-0.09130	0.20767

Source: Prepared by the authors (2024) and SPSS software.

### Independent T-test: Professional Seniority

A comparison of the results of the evaluation of the differences in the capabilities of management and operating small and medium-sized enterprises in Hai Phong City of Leaders with participants of different professional seniorities (under 5 years and 5 years or older) can be seen in Table 5. According to the results shown in Table 5, sig Levene's test is 0.098, which is larger than 0.05. The variance between under-5 years and 5 years or older is not different. Moreover, the sig value t-test is 0.001, which is less than 0.05, which means that there is a statistically significant difference in the capabilities of management and operating small and medium-sized enterprises in Hai Phong City of Leaders between these professional seniorities (Hoang & Chu, 2008; Hair et al., 2009; Hair et al., 2014).

**Table 5. Differences in the capabilities of management and operating small and medium-sized enterprises in Hai Phong City of Leaders with participants of different professional seniority- Independent Test.**

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
<b>MO</b>	Equal variances assumed	2.767	0.098	3.261	208	0.001	0.24646	0.07559	0.09744	0.39547
	Equal variances not assumed			3.064	134.120	0.003	0.24646	0.08045	0.08735	0.40557

Source: Prepared by the authors (2024) and SPSS software.

### ANOVA –Labor Scale

An ANOVA test was needed to make a comparison of the results of the evaluation of the differences in the capabilities of management and operating small and medium-sized enterprises in Hai Phong City of Leaders between the three subjects, including participants who work for SMEs, which have employees under 50 people, from 50 to under 300 people, and 300 people or higher. Table 6 shows that the sig Levene statistic of 0.087 is larger than 0.05, which means that the hypothesis of homogeneity of variance among the variable value groups

(different labor scales) has not been violated. Table 7 shows that sig. is 0.073, which is larger than 0.05, which indicates that there is not a statistically significant difference in the capabilities of management and operating small and medium-sized enterprises in Hai Phong City of Leaders between the mentioned three groups of labor scale (Hoang & Chu, 2008; Hair et al., 2009; Hair et al., 2014).

**Table 6. Test of Homogeneity of Variances.**

Descriptions	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
<b>MO</b>				
Based on Mean	2.472	2	207	0.087
Based on Median	1.741	2	207	0.178
Based on Median and with adjusted df	1.741	2	162.359	0.179
Based on trimmed mean	2.032	2	207	0.134

Source: Prepared by the authors (2024) and SPSS software.

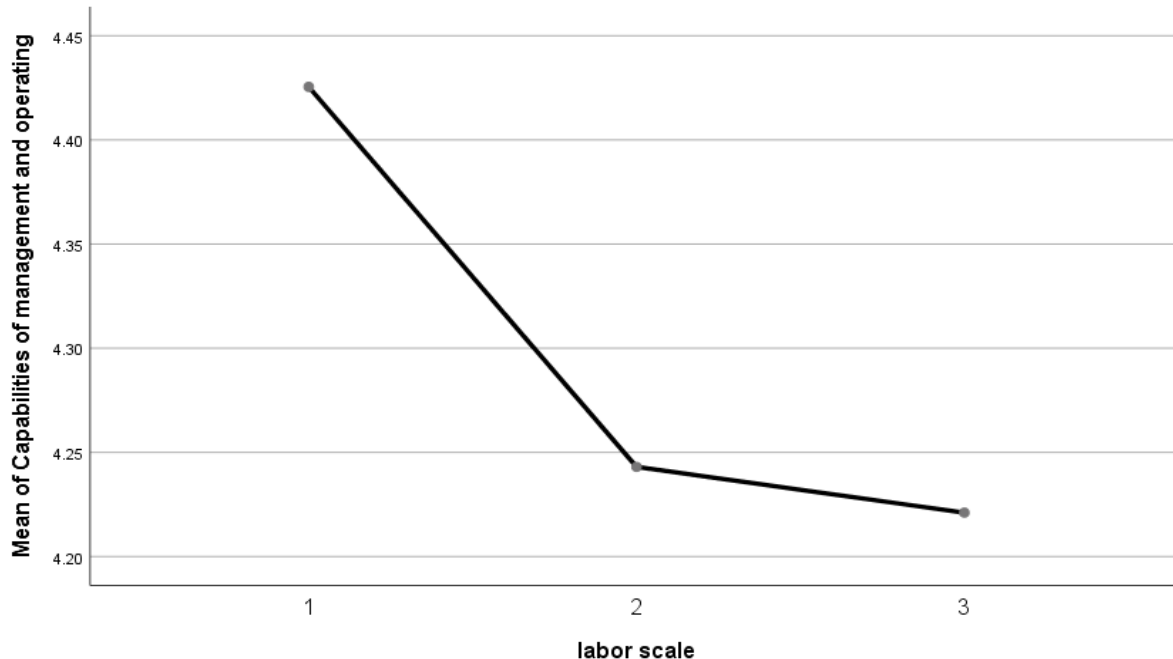
**Table 7. ANOVA MO**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.534	2	0.767	2.645	0.073
Within Groups	60.024	207	0.290		
Total	61.558	209			

Source: Prepared by the authors (2024) and SPSS software.

### The Relationship Between the Capabilities of Management and Operating Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in Hai Phong City of Leaders: Labor Scale

Next, the line graph shows the relationship between the capabilities of management and operating small and medium-sized enterprises in Hai Phong City of Leaders and each respondent's labor scale (Figure 1). Figure 1 shows that this line tends to go down when the respondents work for SMEs, which have 50 to under 300 people, and 300 people or higher.



Source: Prepared by the authors (2024) and SPSS software.

**Figure 1:** The line graph shows the relationship between the capabilities of management and operating small and medium-sized enterprises in Hai Phong City of Leaders and each respondent's labor scale.

**ANOVA – Main Business Sectors**

An ANOVA test was needed to make a comparison of the results of the evaluation of the differences in the capabilities of management and operating small and medium-sized enterprises in Hai Phong City of Leaders between the three subjects, including participants who work for SMEs, which have business lines of commerce and services; industrial production; real estate; and construction. Table 8 shows that the sig Levene statistic of 0.168 is larger than 0.05, which means that the hypothesis of homogeneity of variance among the variable value groups (different main business sectors) has not been violated. Table 9 shows that sig. is 0.415, which is larger than 0.05, which indicates that there is not a statistically significant difference in the capabilities of management and operating small and medium-sized enterprises in Hai Phong City of Leaders between the mentioned three groups of main business sectors (Hoang & Chu, 2008; Hair et al., 2009; Hair et al., 2014).

**Table 8. Test of Homogeneity of Variances.**

Descriptions	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
<b>MO</b>				
Based on Mean	1.800	2	207	0.168
Based on Median	1.199	2	207	0.304
Based on Median and with adjusted df	1.199	2	179.707	0.304
Based on trimmed mean	1.309	2	207	0.272

Source: Prepared by the authors (2024) and SPSS software.

**Table 9. ANOVA MO**

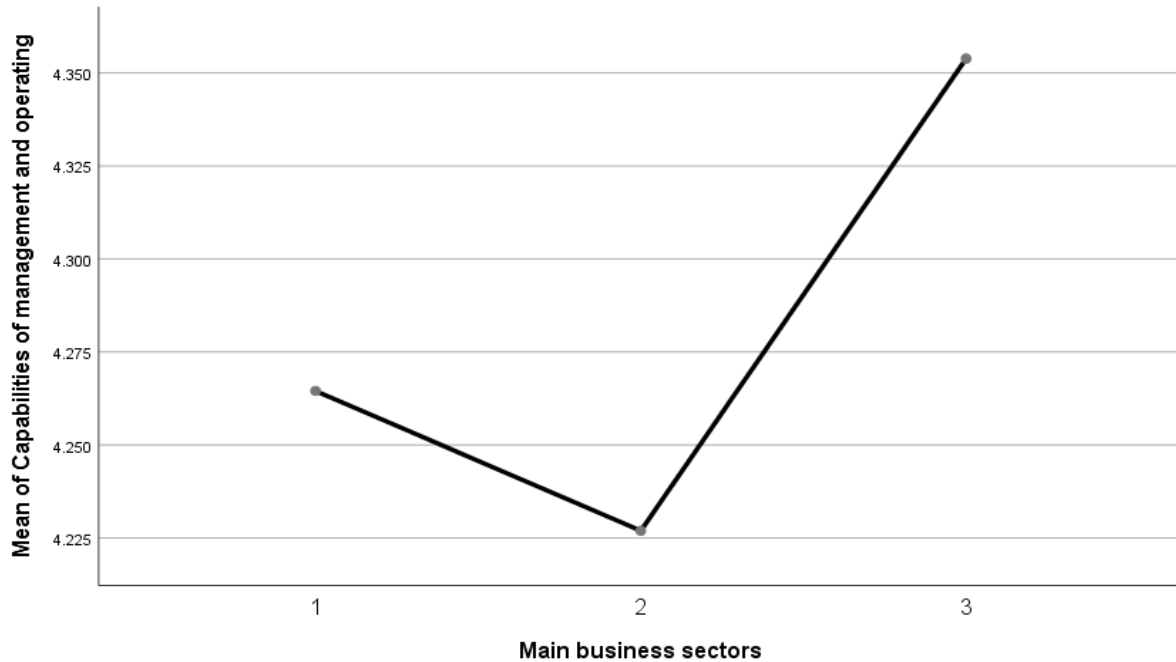
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	0.522	2	0.261	0.884	0.415
Within Groups	61.037	207	0.295		
Total	61.558	209			

Source: Prepared by the authors (2024) and SPSS software.

**The Relationship Between the Capabilities of Management and Operating Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in Hai Phong City of Leaders: Main Business Sectors**

Next, the line graph shows the relationship between the capabilities of management and operating small and medium-sized enterprises in Hai Phong City of Leaders and each respondent's main business sectors (Figure 2). Figure 2 shows this line tends to go down when the respondents work for SMEs, which have business lines in industrial production. But this line tends to slope up when the respondents work for SMEs, which have business lines in real estate and construction.





**Source:** Prepared by the authors (2024) and SPSS software.

**Figure 2:** The line graph shows the relationship between the capabilities of management and operating small and medium-sized enterprises in Hai Phong City of Leaders and each respondent's main business sectors.

## Discussion and Implications

The personal working capacity of leaders of SMEs in Hai Phong City for management and administration is shown as follows: Ability to build relationships, be assertive, communicate and persuade, and manage over time; be drastic in implementing work; quickly identify and resolve arising problems; and respond quickly to changes in the environment.

The business thinking abilities of leaders of SMEs in Hai Phong City include practical thinking, being receptive to new ideas and initiatives, having an excellent sense of opportunities and challenges in their surroundings, having a thorough understanding of functions and expertise, knowing what is important to handle, and consistently putting efficiency and results ahead of appearances. The ability to create and capitalize on business relationships and adapt to the environment has been satisfied by business thinking capacity, but vision capacity is lacking. Leaders also have a lot of experience in management and operations. Therefore, SMEs leaders should improve their capacity in human management and visionary thinking and should focus on systematic management based on human resource development.

SMEs should focus on their communication efforts and connect the outcomes of assessments with initiatives for training and development.

Leadership development is becoming increasingly important for SMEs in Hai Phong City. SMEs should identify leadership capacity assessment as the first and most important step in leadership development.

SMEs should develop a specific method of collecting opinions so that it is not formal and the assessment results reflect true reality.

Transformational leadership is an ideal and effective leadership style, so SMEs should apply it to managers to stimulate knowledge management capacity and improve innovation and business performance.

The employment status of a portion of workers in SMEs is not stable. Therefore, in addition to increasing scale, SMEs should ensure employment stability for their workforce. Such instability not only affects the rights of workers as well as increases costs for firms, but also leads to the waste of social labor resources.

## **CONCLUSION**

Hai Phong City has been urgently building and concretizing mechanisms and policies to support local firms, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, aiming to build firms capable of cooperation with FDI enterprises in processing and manufacturing sectors with high technology and green technology such as electricity, electronics, chips, semiconductors, logistics, etc., to create conditions for local firms to develop, creating internal development for the city.

In addition to the results achieved, the research still has some limitations, such as not fully explaining the causes of the limitations and not identifying and measuring factors that affect the capabilities of management and the operating of leaders. Evaluation results may be subjective because each leader is only evaluated by respondents who are middle-level leaders and employees. Future research can more fully explain the causes of the limitations, measure the factors that affect the capabilities of management and the operations of leaders, and examine the effects of the capabilities of management and the operations of leaders on business performance.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Not applicable.

## **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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