

Innovative Local Leadership and Community Enterprise Development: A Participatory Governance Approach in Maha Sarakham Province, Thailand

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between entrepreneurial characteristics, business innovation, and operational success among small and medium-sized manufacturing enterprises (SMEs) in the Upper Northeastern Region of Thailand. A quantitative research design was employed using a structured questionnaire administered to 350 entrepreneurs, selected through stratified sampling based on Taro Yamane's formula with a 0.05 margin of error. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis via the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) method. The findings revealed that four entrepreneurial characteristics—creativity, innovativeness, risk acceptance, and expertise had statistically significant positive effects on operational success, while perseverance did not. Together, these characteristics explained 61.0% of the variance in operational success (Adjusted $R^2 = .610$). Additionally, innovativeness, perseverance, and creativity were the strongest predictors of business innovation, explaining 70.4% of its variance (Adjusted $R^2 = .704$). Business innovation also had a significant positive effect on operational success, accounting for 44.1% of the variance (Adjusted $R^2 = .441$). However, when tested as a mediating variable, business innovation did not significantly mediate the relationship between entrepreneurial characteristics and operational success. These findings underscore the importance of fostering entrepreneurial creativity, innovation, and expertise to enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of SMEs. The results provide practical insights for policymakers and support agencies aiming to design entrepreneurship development programs that strengthen innovation capacity and operational performance in regional enterprises.

Keywords: entrepreneurial characteristics, business innovation, operational success, SMEs, Thailand, entrepreneurship development

Introduction

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) play a crucial role in Thailand's economic system, encompassing manufacturing, trade, and services, and accounting for more than 99% of all enterprises nationwide (Chantarasombat, 2021). SMEs not only contribute to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employment at the national level but also serve as key drivers of economic development at both the local and national levels (Worapongpat, 2025e). Consequently, the government has prioritized enhancing SMEs' competitiveness to ensure sustainable business operations, particularly by promoting the adoption of technology and innovation in business practices (Gqamane & Taylor, 2013). This emphasis prepares SMEs for competition in the new economic paradigm characterized as an innovation-driven economy while also fostering high-potential entrepreneurs as catalysts for long-term economic development (Worapongpat, 2025d).

In the context of the Upper Northeastern Region, SMEs—particularly those in the manufacturing sector—have been instrumental in driving regional economic growth (Kania, Anggadwita, & Alamanda, 2021). Nevertheless, these enterprises face challenges arising from rapidly changing economic, social, and technological conditions (Worapongpat, 2025c). Entrepreneurs must therefore possess suitable characteristics such as skills, knowledge, creativity, risk acceptance, and adaptability to ensure their enterprises' survival, growth, and long-term success (Karnsomdee, 2022).

This situation raises a critical question: How do entrepreneurial characteristics and business innovation influence the operational success of SMEs in the manufacturing sector of the Upper Northeastern Region? Accordingly, this study investigates the interrelationship between entrepreneurial characteristics, business innovation, and operational success, aiming to generate policy recommendations and practical guidelines to enhance SMEs' adaptability and competitiveness in the current economic landscape.

Conceptual Framework

1. Conceptualizing Community Business Innovation

Community business innovation represents the capacity of local enterprises—often small-scale, socially embedded, and resource-constrained—to generate new products, services, or processes that create both economic value and social welfare (Mulgan, 2006; Phon Phuangpanya, 2024). Unlike corporate innovation, which prioritizes profit maximization, community innovation emphasizes shared prosperity, environmental sustainability, and the empowerment of local stakeholders.

From a theoretical standpoint, this concept is rooted in the Innovation Systems Approach (Lundvall, 1992), which posits that innovation arises from systemic interactions among individuals, organizations, and institutions. Within community contexts, innovation is thus not a linear or isolated act but a collective learning process shaped by local resources, social norms, and knowledge networks.

Three interrelated dimensions are commonly highlighted in the literature:

Entrepreneurial Innovation Capacity The creative and risk-taking abilities of local entrepreneurs who adapt indigenous knowledge and skills to develop contextually relevant innovations (Bessant & Tidd, 2015; Schumpeter, 1934).

Collaborative Networks and Social Capital Innovation emerges through trust-based relationships that foster resource exchange, knowledge sharing, and co-creation among community members and stakeholders (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998).

Institutional and Policy Support The enabling environment provided by governance systems, public policies, and institutional structures that facilitate innovation and reduce barriers to enterprise development (Osborne & Brown, 2011; Barney, 1991).

This multi-dimensional view aligns with the Triple Helix Model of Innovation (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000), which underscores the dynamic interaction among government, academia, and industry. In community contexts, local administrative organizations (LAOs) embody the governmental helix bridging policy frameworks with grassroots innovation by fostering collaboration with educational institutions and community enterprises.

2. The Role of Local Administrators in Driving Community Innovation

Local administrators function as pivotal institutional actors who translate policy frameworks into actionable community innovation strategies. Their leadership extends beyond bureaucratic management to encompass strategic facilitation, capacity development, and collaborative governance (Worapongpat, 2025a; Covin & Slevin, 1991).

Empirical research indicates that local administrators influence community innovation through several mechanisms: Policy and Strategic Direction: By defining local development priorities, administrators create enabling conditions for innovation and entrepreneurship (Buratti, Sillig, & Albanese, 2022).

Capacity Building and Knowledge Transfer: Training initiatives, technical support, and partnerships with academic institutions enhance entrepreneurs' skills in innovation and management (Bygrave & Hofer, 1991). Network Facilitation and Partnership Development: Local administrators act as network orchestrators, connecting community enterprises with funding agencies, private sectors, and NGOs, fostering collaborative innovation (Chompotjananan & Vichit-Vadakan, 2022). Institutional Legitimacy and Resource Mobilization: Administrative endorsement legitimizes community enterprises, facilitating access to financial resources and policy support Chompotjananan, P., & Vichit-Vadakan, N. (2022). Monitoring and Sustainable Governance: Local authorities ensure that innovation efforts align with environmental sustainability and social equity goals (Khaenamkhaew, Onjun, Damrongwattana, & Prathum, 2023). This perspective reflects Participatory Development Theory, emphasizing that innovation is most effective when communities actively engage in decision-making and co-create solutions with local governments (Lim & Chuangchai, 2023).

3. Integrating Community Innovation and Local Administrative Leadership

Synthesizing these insights yields a Community Innovation Ecosystem Framework, where innovation arises from the interactive relationships between entrepreneurs, local administrators, and external partners. This ecosystem comprises:

Inputs: Entrepreneurial characteristics (creativity, innovativeness, expertise, and risk-taking) and institutional resources provided by local governments.

Processes: Collaboration, knowledge sharing, and co-creation among entrepreneurs, administrators, and academic or private stakeholders.

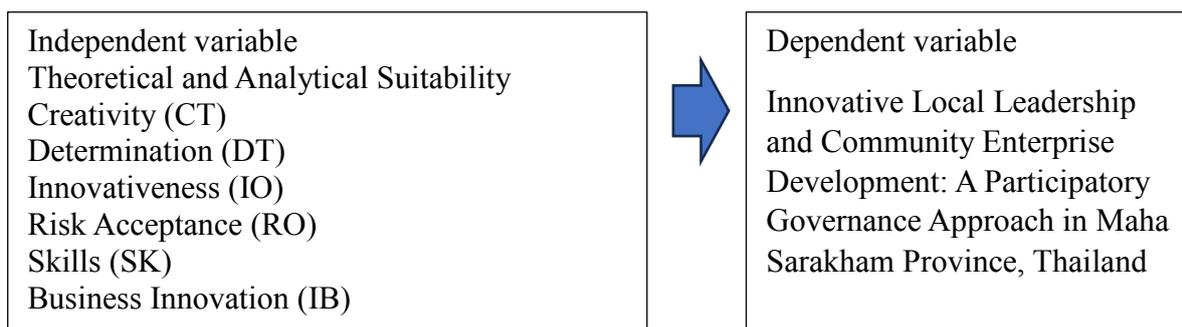
Outputs: Development of innovative products, services, and processes that enhance competitiveness and social impact.

Outcomes: Increased business success, local income generation, and community well-being contributing to sustainable regional development.

This integrated framework extends the Resource-Based View (RBV; Namwong & Chansirisira, 2020) and Dynamic Capabilities Theory (Nua-amnat, Brahmakappa, Punturian, & Soonthondachar, 2021) to the community level, suggesting that local innovation capacity depends on both internal entrepreneurial resources and external institutional support.

4. Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, integrating local administrative leadership into community innovation advances understanding of how institutional capacity interacts with entrepreneurial dynamism to foster inclusive economic growth. Practically, it highlights the importance of empowering local administrators to act as innovation catalysts, providing governance, vision, and partnership facilitation rather than solely regulatory oversight (Worapongpat, 2025b; Phimkoh, Tesaputa, & Somprach, 2015).



Figure's 1 Research conceptual framework

Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between entrepreneurial characteristics and operational success.
2. To examine the relationship between entrepreneurial characteristics and business innovation.
3. To examine the relationship between business innovation and operational success.
4. To examine the mediating effect of business innovation on the relationship between entrepreneurial characteristics and operational success.

Methodology

This research employed a quantitative approach, with the following procedures:

Population and Sample

The population comprised entrepreneurs of small and medium-sized manufacturing enterprises (SMEs) in the Upper Northeastern Region of Thailand, specifically in Loei, Nakhon Phanom, Bueng Kan, Mukdahan, Sakon Nakhon, Nong Khai, Nong Bua Lamphu, and Udon Thani, totaling 2,544 enterprises. The sample size of 350 respondents was determined using Yamane's formula with a 0.05 margin of error. A systematic sampling method was applied to select respondents.

Research Instrument

The primary research instrument was a questionnaire, consisting of three parts:

Part 1: General information about respondents.

Part 2: Entrepreneurial characteristics, business innovation, and operational success, measured on a five-point rating scale.

Part 3: Open-ended questions soliciting additional opinions and suggestions.

The questionnaire's quality was verified as follows:

It was reviewed and revised based on feedback from the research advisor.

It was assessed by three experts for content validity, with an Index of Item–Objective Congruence (IOC) ranging from 0.67 to 1.00, consistent with the acceptable standard. This ensured the instrument's content validity.

Data Collection

Data were collected using an online questionnaire distributed through Google Forms. The survey link was shared via social media platforms, particularly Facebook, to facilitate accessibility and convenience. Additionally, respondents were asked to share the survey link on relevant company pages, thereby increasing the likelihood of reaching qualified participants across the eight provinces in the Upper Northeastern Region.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, including frequency and percentage, were used to describe the general characteristics of SMEs and the sample population.

Opinions regarding entrepreneurial characteristics, business innovation, and operational success were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to determine overall levels.

Hypothesis testing involved multiple regression analysis using the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) technique to examine the relationships among entrepreneurial characteristics, business innovation, and operational success.

Statistical Tools

Descriptive statistics: percentage, mean, and standard deviation.

Reliability testing: Cronbach’s alpha coefficient.

Validity testing: Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA).

Inferential statistics: Multiple Regression Analysis using the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) technique to test relationships among variables.

Research Results

General Information of Respondents The demographic characteristics of the respondents revealed that the majority of entrepreneurs were female, accounting for 186 individuals (53.10%). Most respondents were between 30 and 40 years of age, totaling 273 individuals (67.60%). With respect to organizational position, 194 respondents (55.40%) were top-level executives. Regarding educational attainment, 283 respondents (80.90%) had completed a bachelor’s degree. In terms of entrepreneurial experience, 147 respondents (42.60%) had operated their businesses for 6–10 years. Concerning monthly income, the majority of entrepreneurs, representing 195 respondents (55.70%), reported an average monthly income between 100,000 and 500,000 Baht.

Validity and Reliability Measurement The validity and reliability of the research instruments were assessed. The factor loadings of all variables ranged from 0.57 to 0.81, exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.40, thus demonstrating acceptable construct validity for each variable. Reliability testing using Cronbach’s Alpha Coefficient (α) indicated that all variables had α values between 0.56 and 0.66, which fall within the acceptable range of 0.50–0.70. This reflects a moderate level of reliability and confirms that the measurement instruments met the reliability testing criteria.

Table 1: Mean, Standard Deviation, and Correlation Coefficients

Variables	Mean	S.D.	CT	DT	IO	RO	SK	IB	BS
CT	4.00	.45	1						
DT	4.01	.48	.74**	1					
IO	3.99	.46	.75**	.73**	1				
RO	4.04	.46	.69**	.79**	.70**	1			
SK	4.09	.46	.58**	.62**	.62**	.55**	1		
IB	4.07	.47	.73**	.75**	.78**	.69**	.62**	1	
BS	4.01	.51	.67**	.60**	.74**	.67**	.59**	.66**	1

Note: **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05

As shown in Table 1, the correlation analysis revealed that the independent variables were interrelated, with the highest Pearson correlation coefficient reaching 0.79. This value falls within the acceptable threshold (not exceeding 0.80), indicating that the variables were sufficiently independent of one another. The correlation coefficients therefore validate the suitability of the dataset for further regression analysis

Table 2: Results of OLS Regression Analysis

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable			
	BS	IB	BS	BS
Creativity (CT)	.132** (2.289)	.142*** (2.282)		
Determination (DT)	.006 (0.094)	.224*** (4.371)		
Innovativeness (IO)	.388*** (6.589)	.363*** (7.063)		
Risk Acceptance (RO)	.222*** (4.196)	.118*** (2.549)		
Skills (SK)	.147*** (3.254)	.111*** (2.816)		
Business Innovation (IB)			.665*** (16.62)	
CT × IB			-.045 (-.819)	
DT × IB			.046 (.837)	
IO × IB			-.016 (.289)	
RO × IB			.039 (.767)	
SK × IB			.039 (.947)	
R ² / Adjusted R ²	.617 / .611	.709 / .704	.443 / .441	.620 / .608

***p < 0.01, **p < 0.05, *p < 0.10, (N = 350)

Table 2 presents the results of the OLS regression analysis. The Durbin–Watson statistic was 1.858, falling within the acceptable range of 1.50–2.50 thereby confirming the independence of residuals. Furthermore, multicollinearity diagnostics indicated tolerance values ranging from .321 to 1.000 and VIF values between 1.000 and 3.116, all within acceptable thresholds This demonstrates that multicollinearity did not threaten the validity of the regression model.

The analysis revealed that four entrepreneurial characteristics—creativity (CT) ($\beta = .132$, $p < 0.05$), innovativeness (IO) ($\beta = .388$, $p < 0.01$), risk-taking orientation (RO) ($\beta = .222$, $p < 0.01$), and technical skills (SK) ($\beta = .147$, $p < 0.01$)—had a significant positive effect on business success (BS). In contrast, determination (DT) ($\beta = .006$, $p > 0.05$) did not exert a significant effect. Among these, innovativeness emerged as the most influential predictor, followed by risk-taking orientation, technical skills, and creativity. Collectively, these variables accounted for 61.0% of the variance in business success (Adjusted R² = .610).

With respect to business innovation (IB), all five entrepreneurial characteristics were significant predictors: creativity (CT) ($\beta = .142$, $p < 0.01$), determination (DT) ($\beta = .224$, $p < 0.01$), innovativeness (IO) ($\beta = .363$, $p < 0.01$), risk-taking orientation (RO) ($\beta = .118$, $p < 0.01$), and technical skills (SK) ($\beta = .111$, $p < 0.01$). Innovativeness was again the strongest determinant, followed by determination, creativity, risk-taking, and technical skills. Together, these factors explained 70.4% of the variance in business innovation (Adjusted R² = .704).

Furthermore, business innovation (IB) was found to have a strong positive impact on business success (BS) ($\beta = .665$, $p < 0.01$), explaining 44.1% of the variance (Adjusted $R^2 = .441$). This confirms the mediating role of innovation as a critical driver of business performance.

However, when tested as a moderating variable, the interaction effects between business innovation (IB) and each entrepreneurial characteristic (CT, DT, IO, RO, SK) were not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$). This suggests that while business innovation directly predicts business success, it does not strengthen the relationship between entrepreneurial characteristics and performance outcomes.

Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the pivotal role of entrepreneurial innovativeness as the most critical determinant of both business success and innovation, emphasizing its centrality in sustaining competitive advantage. This aligns with (Worapongpat & Kangpheng, 2025). innovation theory, which posits that entrepreneurial innovation drives economic development through creative disruption. The results also resonate with the Resource-Based View (RBV), which asserts that firm-specific capabilities—such as creativity, risk orientation, and expertise constitute valuable, rare, and inimitable resources that underpin superior performance (Charoensuk, 2022; Worapongpat & Song, 2025). In this context, innovativeness functions as a dynamic capability that enables entrepreneurs to identify and exploit market opportunities, thereby enhancing operational success and long-term competitiveness.

The significant contributions of risk-taking orientation and technical expertise further validate the principles of the Dynamic Capabilities Theory (Sirisawat & Chaiya, 2025; Worapongpat & Kangpheng, 2025). suggesting that the ability to reconfigure internal competencies in response to environmental changes is vital for maintaining growth. Entrepreneurs who demonstrate calculated risk-taking and leverage specialized skills are better positioned to adapt to uncertainty and technological shifts an increasingly important competency in Thailand's rapidly evolving SME sector (Sinjindawong, Nuchniyom, & Pakakaew, 2023; Worapongpat & Arunyakanon, 2025). Although creativity was a significant predictor, its relatively weaker effect compared to innovativeness indicates that ideation alone does not guarantee success unless effectively transformed into actionable innovations. This finding aligns with the Entrepreneurial Process Model (Worapongpat, 2025g). which conceptualizes entrepreneurship as a sequential process where opportunity recognition must be followed by resource mobilization and implementation to achieve performance outcomes. Thus, creativity serves as an antecedent to innovation but requires complementary managerial and strategic capabilities to generate measurable results.

Interestingly, perseverance was not a significant predictor of business success, diverging from prior research emphasizing determination as a key performance driver (Singhalert, 2017; Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997). This deviation can be interpreted through the lens of the Contingency Theory, which posits that the effectiveness of managerial attributes depends on contextual factors. In resource-constrained environments such as regional Thai SMEs, persistent effort may not translate into performance if it is not accompanied by innovation, financial capacity, or adaptive management practices.

Moreover, business innovation emerged as both a direct predictor of performance and an outcome of entrepreneurial characteristics, suggesting a dual role within the entrepreneurial success mechanism. (Thirawan, 2025; Worapongpat, 2025f). While the

absence of a significant mediating effect implies that innovation functions more as a conduit than an amplifier, this finding complements the Integrated Model of Entrepreneurial Performance which emphasizes the reciprocal influence of entrepreneurial orientation and innovation on firm performance. In practice, this indicates that innovation is necessary but insufficient on its own it must be embedded within effective leadership structures and organizational systems to fully realize its potential impact.

Collectively, these findings extend existing theoretical models by illustrating how entrepreneurial characteristics interact dynamically with innovation to drive SME performance in a regional and developing-economy context. The study contributes to theory by empirically demonstrating that while entrepreneurial orientation dimensions are essential antecedents, their performance outcomes are contingent upon the firm's innovation capacity and contextual adaptability offering a nuanced understanding of entrepreneurial success beyond traditional linear models.

New Knowledge and Contributions

This study contributes new insights to the literature on entrepreneurship and business performance in three key areas: Centrality of Innovativeness, Innovativeness surpasses other entrepreneurial traits in predicting both innovation outcomes and business success, underscoring its strategic value for entrepreneurs operating in dynamic markets.

Mediating Role of Business Innovation, Innovation functions as an intermediary between entrepreneurial traits and business success, reinforcing its pivotal role in value creation and competitive advantage.

Contextual Limitations of Determination Unlike prior findings, determination did not significantly predict success, suggesting that perseverance alone is insufficient in environments lacking managerial effectiveness, resources, or supportive leadership. This highlights the importance of systemic and organizational conditions in shaping entrepreneurial outcomes.

Suggestions

1. Practical Implications

1.1 Academic Implications

The findings of this study provide a robust empirical foundation for advancing theoretical understanding of the relationship between entrepreneurial characteristics and business performance, particularly within small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Specifically, creativity, innovativeness, risk-taking orientation, and technical skills were identified as significant predictors of both business innovation and success. These insights can inform the development of frameworks for entrepreneurial education, emphasizing the cultivation of traits that enhance adaptability, competitive differentiation, and innovative problem-solving capabilities in dynamic markets.

1.2 Managerial Implications

Although some entrepreneurial traits and business innovation did not show statistically significant direct effects on business success, the practical implications are nonetheless noteworthy. Entrepreneurs are encouraged to: Develop creative capabilities to differentiate products and services and generate novel business opportunities. Foster innovativeness to enhance competitiveness and operational efficiency. Cultivate a balanced approach to risk-taking to exploit market opportunities without compromising stability. Strengthen technical and managerial competencies to improve decision-making and minimize operational errors. These traits, when integrated with effective management practices and

strategic oversight, can significantly enhance organizational performance and long-term sustainability.

2. Recommendations for Future Research

2.1 External Environmental Factors

Future studies should examine the impact of external factors such as market volatility, technological change, and governmental policies on the relationship between entrepreneurial characteristics, innovation, and business success.

2.2 Action Research Approaches

Adopting action research methodologies could allow researchers to test interventions and practical solutions in real-world business settings, providing more actionable insights.

2.3 In-Depth Analysis of Innovation Processes

Further research should explore how specific innovation processes contribute to business success, including implementation strategies, barriers encountered, and the role of emerging technologies such as AI, Big Data, and IoT in shaping innovation outcomes.

2.4 Case Studies on Success and Failure

Analyzing both successful and unsuccessful entrepreneurial ventures can provide nuanced understanding of how particular traits and management practices influence outcomes, offering guidance for evidence-based entrepreneurial decision-making.

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