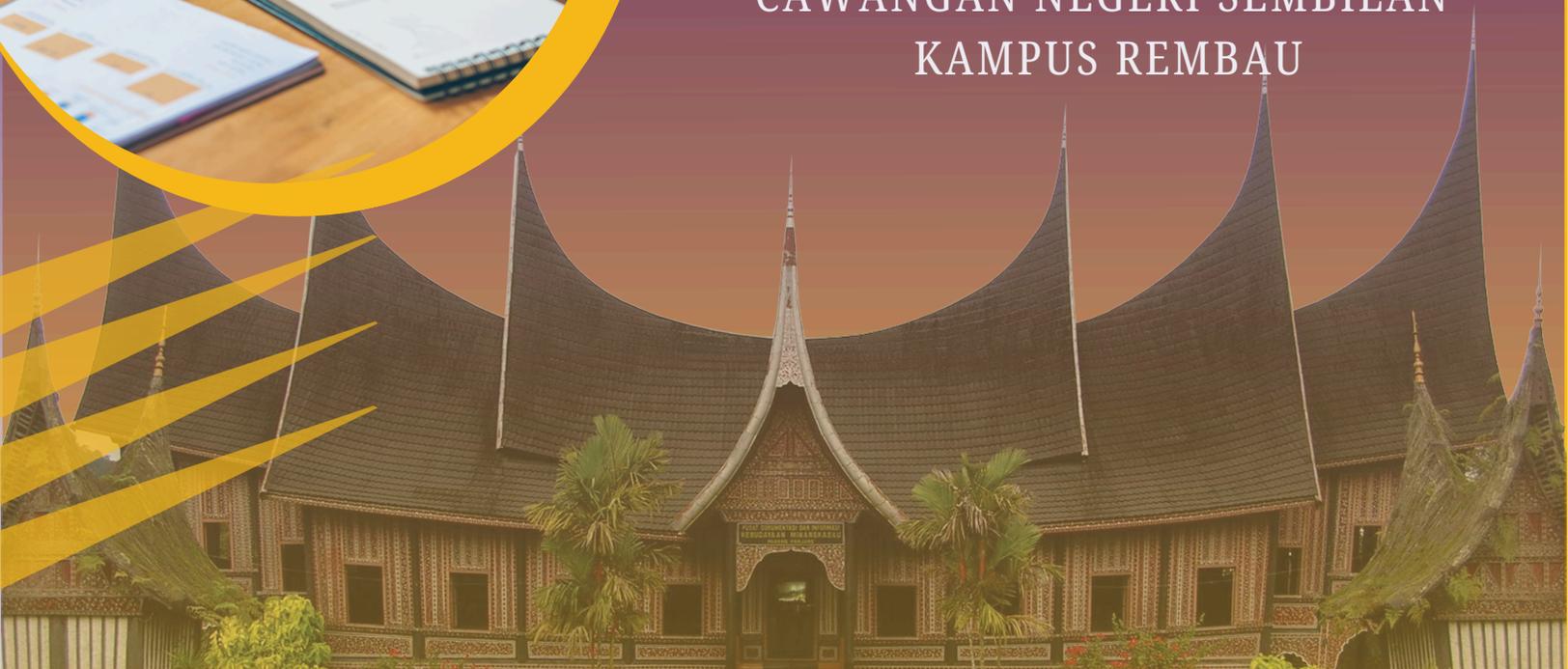# RONA TINTA

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NAVIGATING SMALL BUSINESS WELLBEING, LEADERSHIP, AND RESILIENCE IN TIMES OF CHANGE

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This article presents a thematic synthesis of recent scholarly insights into the wellbeing of small business managers, the role of leadership in shaping organizational climates, and the resilience strategies employed during disruptive events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Drawing from multiple studies, it highlights the evolving challenges and adaptive responses within small enterprises, offering valuable considerations for institutional policy, support mechanisms, and future research.

Managerial Wellbeing Across Growth Phases

Ahmadi et al. (2024) provide a nuanced view of how managerial wellbeing fluctuates throughout the lifecycle of small business growth. In the early stages, managers often face intense workloads, limited resources, and poor work–life balance, which collectively pose significant risks to their physical and mental health. However, as businesses expand, the accumulation of organizational resources such as staffing, systems, and financial stability contributes to improved wellbeing. Managers also develop greater self-awareness and coping mechanisms, enabling them to navigate stress more effectively. This trajectory suggests that institutional support should be tailored to the specific growth phase of a business, with early-stage interventions focusing on workload management and mental health safeguards.

Leadership as a Catalyst for Health and Safety Climates

The role of leadership in shaping workplace climates is underscored by Shore et al. (2020), who argue that leadership behaviours directly influence employee perceptions of safety and health. In small organizations, where hierarchical structures are often flatter and interpersonal relationships more pronounced, leadership has an outsized impact. Positive leadership fosters trust, encourages participation in wellness initiatives, and promotes proactive health behaviours among employees. These findings reinforce the need for leadership development programs that emphasize emotional intelligence, communication, and inclusive decision-making, particularly in resource-constrained environments.

Picture 1: Leading with Empathy: Building Safer, Healthier Workplaces

Barriers to Wellness Program Implementation

Despite the recognized benefits of workplace wellness programs, McCoy et al. (2014) highlight the persistent gap in adoption between small and large businesses. Structural limitations such as lack of dedicated HR personnel, limited budgets, and competing operational priorities often hinder implementation. Moreover, small business owners may lack awareness of available programs or perceive them as irrelevant to their context. Addressing these barriers requires a multi-pronged approach: simplifying program design, offering modular and scalable options, and enhancing outreach through local chambers of commerce or industry associations. Institutional actors can play a pivotal role by curating wellness resources that are culturally and operationally appropriate for small enterprises.

Resilience, Recovery, and Equity in Aid Distribution

Katare et al. (2021) provide a detailed analysis of small business recovery strategies during the pandemic. Adaptive measures such as increasing social media presence and modifying service delivery models were common, though not uniformly effective. Notably, smaller and female-owned businesses faced greater challenges in accessing aid and recovering from disruptions. The study highlights the importance of equitable and locally responsive aid programs. While the Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) program was positively associated with resilience, the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) faced criticism for its implementation gaps. These findings call for a re-evaluation of aid mechanisms to ensure they are accessible, transparent, and tailored to the diverse realities of small business owners.

Picture 2: Resilience Strategies and Challenges in Accessing Support During the Pandemic

In conclusion, small business wellbeing is shaped by dynamic factors including growth stages, leadership quality, and access to support systems. As the studies show, effective leadership and tailored wellness strategies can significantly enhance resilience, especially during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. Moving forward, institutional policies must prioritize inclusive, phase-sensitive support to ensure small enterprises not only survive but thrive.

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