

Leveraging People Management Practices in Micro and Small Enterprises: Perspectives and Opportunities on their Leaders' Lived Experiences

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Abstract

My study examined how micro and small enterprise (mse) leaders carry out human resource (hr) responsibilities in the absence of formal structures. I used qualitative research, specifically, interpretative phenomenological analysis (ipa) to understand the lived experiences of ten mse owners directly managing employees. To surface their hr practices, deeper narratives influencing their hr approaches, and meanings they associate with hr responsibilities, i conducted semi-structured interviews.

I found out that their hr practices currently revolve around informal talent acquisition, learning, managing performance, total rewards and retention. Characterized as relationship-centric, adaptive and morally guided, their hr approaches are primarily based on trust, empathy and stewardship rather than formal systems. My superordinate theme, all the care, captured their meaning-making of hr, highlighting stewardship across employees, business, and community. Nevertheless, conflicts and gaps likewise surfaced. I developed the employee stewardship and shared responsibility framework, with five components: leading, engaging, adapting, developing, and continuing.

Informal hr practices among mses implied unconscious strategic intent grounded in humanistic leadership. My study highlighted a call for localized hr toolkits, mentorship and collaborative capacity-building initiatives tailored to mse contexts.

Keywords: micro and small enterprises, hr practices, human resource management, strategic hrm, interpretative phenomenology

1. INTRODUCTION

Human resource management (hrm) has significantly evolved in the 21st century from merely traditional and administrative in nature to becoming a strategic business partner. Undoubtedly, there has been an increasing recognition of the value of human capital as source of sustained competitive advantage (sca). Hence, the end-to-end management of hr life cycle, beginning with workforce planning, talent acquisition, training and development, performance management, compensation administration, employee relations, health and safety, to retention and separation, becomes even more vital to align workforce capabilities with the overall business strategies (armstrong & taylor, 2023; noe et al., 2016).

Today's volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (vuca) world likewise pushed this shift to address

various changes in the business arena, including digital disruptions, labor migration and varying workforce expectations. Followed by the presence of climate crises, pandemic, and global instability, business environment has been described as brittle, anxious, non-linear and incomprehensible (bani) that demands workforce resilience and agility (mitzkus, 2022). With that, as posited by yu et al. (2022), strategic hrm now plays a vital role so as to facilitate responsiveness to uncertainty through proactive hr innovations and enhanced recovery capabilities.

Nevertheless, as strategic hrm has gained significant attention, most literatures only focused on large corporations with established hr structures and systems. Research on the adoption of shrm among micro, small and medium enterprises (msmes) remain warranting. In the philippines, msmes constitute more than 99% of businesses and employ over half of the workforce (department of trade and industry [dti], 2023), yet shrm's applicability remains to be understood. While they significantly contribute to economic growth and job creation, formally structured systems, strategies and practices are still lacking (perez, 2021). This then created a pressing concern particularly in significant economic centers like batangas province where mses have a key role in the regional development. Mses tend to experience workforce issues that challenge their long-term viability. To date, there exists a common reality: owners perform the hr functions themselves in the absence of structures. While seemingly reasonable as young and small firms, conflicts and gaps emerge as they began to scale. Fragmented and informal hr practices contribute to high employee turnover risks, inconsistent decision making, owners' burnout and reduced capacity to respond to sudden difficulties (binghay, 2014; evangelista, 2024). With this, traditional hrm needs to be supplemented, if not replaced, by shrm.

My study is primarily grounded on the resource-based view theory and the harvard model of hrm. Rbv theory posits that organizations are competing with one another on the basis of their existing resources and capabilities (barney, 1991 as cited by miles, 2012). Mazzei (20214) added that internal resources including human capital are key sources of sca. While commonly applied to bigger firms and quantitative research, my study extends rbv in mses in interpreting how leaders perceive and manage human capital in resource-constrained environments. Complementing the rbv theory is the harvard model of hrm, a holistic approach for analyzing the broader picture of hr decision-making (vulpen, 2024), emphasizing stakeholder interests, situational factors, hr policy choices, and long-term consequences. The integration of these two frameworks guided the interpretation of how strategic thinking about hrm emerges from the lived experiences, values, and contextual realities of mse owners who informally manage hr practices.

The central research question guiding my study was: how do mse leaders in batangas carry out hr responsibilities in the absence of a formal hr structure? Specifically, i sought to describe their current hr practices, analyze the values influencing their hr approaches, interpret the meaning they associate with hr responsibilities, and develop strategic hr actions tailored to their context.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Research design

My study is qualitative research, specifically employing ipa to examine how mse leaders make sense of their lived experiences while recognizing my role in co-constructing meaning. This is an approach often used to reveal the "essence of phenomena" by exploring how these are actually experienced from a first-person perspective (lim, 2024).

2.2. Research locale and participants

My study was conducted in batangas, philippines, a key economic hub in the calabarzon region. Ten mse

owners who personally handle hr responsibilities for at least one year, without an established hr structure, participated my study. They were selected through purposive and snowball sampling, representing diverse sectors to enhance contextual richness in exploring informal hr practices.

2.3. Data collection

I gathered the data through semi-structured interviews, conducted face-to-face and via online platform. Each interview was voluntarily participated with informed consent and identities were anonymized. Interviews were completed within 40-80 minutes using an interview guide thematically organized based on my research objectives. These were audio-recorded, then, transcribed verbatim. Reflexive journaling was likewise maintained throughout the process to track my bias, emotional responses, and evolving interpretations. Audit trails were also kept, including theme tables and field notes

2.4. Data analysis

All transcriptions were analyzed following the six-step ipa procedure by smith, flowers, and larkin (2009). I began my analysis with reading and re-reading of transcriptions to immerse myself, followed by initial noting where i identified descriptive, linguistic and conceptual notes in the margins of each transcript. This was followed by the development of emergent themes as the third stage of ipa. Step 4 included searching for connections across emergent themes. After fully analyzing one case, i proceeded with analyzing the next case, repeating steps 1-4. Looking for the patterns across cases was the sixth and final step, where i identified the recurring themes, shared experiences, and divergence across all participant accounts.

3. Results

Define abbreviations and acronyms the first time they are used in the text, even after they have been defined in the abstract.

3.1. Current hr practices in mses

Five superordinate themes surfaced that describe how mse leaders perform the hr responsibilities outside the hr structures as shown in table 1.

Table 1: cross-case themes inferred to the current hr practices among mses

| Superordinate themes | Emergent themes |
|---|--|
| Relationship-centric talent acquisition | Reliance on personal networks |
| | Character vs credential as selection criterion |
| | Conditional capability onboarding |
| Knowledge transfer through experiential learning | Owner-led hands-on training |
| | Culture-driven orientation |
| Direct, corrective approach to managing performance | Immediate verbal performance feedback |
| | Outcomes-based performance evaluation |
| Adaptive employee rewards and support as total returns | Contextualized base pay structuring vis-à-vis internal and external business realities |
| | Discretionary performance-based incentives |
| | Alternative benefits and personal support |
| Goodwill-oriented retention and turnover management | Supportive to turnover as career progression |
| | Empathetic exit handling |

Relationship-centric talent acquisition

Hiring practices among mses are often based on referral and networks. Owners heavily rely on personal connection and recommendation rather than formal job posting and standard screening process. Felix and israel believe respectively, “it’s very important that i can trust the person, so the first thing i think of—or my main consideration—when i need someone is who among my contacts can refer someone.”, “there are no requirements like résumés, no background checking, none of that because the person is already known to us, so you can start the next day.” Trust served as the primary filter in identifying potential hires. Further, willingness to learn and attitude significantly matter over formal credentials.

Participants created a meaning of onboarding as a testing ground, making trial as the true selection. Eli shared that a process goes like: “i normally give three months to an agent to prove their worth... we set targets.”. Likewise, a similar process was described by gina: “there’s a 5-day observation period before i hire you... if you can’t handle it within those 5 days, i stop the process.”

Knowledge transfer through experiential learning

Learning and development in mses are hands-on in nature, basically led by the owner himself. Key phrases of participants included “i am the one training them,” “observation first,” “i do it first,” “i’m the one guiding,” “i pass it on,” “i tell them.”, indicating that informal trainings are basically embedded within the day-to-day operations.

Another theme that emerged is the culture-driven orientation. The orientation was portrayed by the participants as brief, personal and an act of welcoming. As ben described, “...in orientation, we explain our history, where we came from, and the activities we do every year. For example, every monday we have a bible study—regardless of your religion, you must participate...” acculturation happens through shared activities, dialogues, and observation of leaders’ behavior. Alex added, “right after they pass, of course you treat them out. It’s like a celebration. We eat out and also orient them. It’s both a celebration and a sort of bonding trip.”

Direct and corrective approach to managing performance

Participants described performance management as immediate, verbal and outcomes-based. Owners tend to address performance issues as soon as they were observed and directly deliver feedback. Gina stated, “we’re very direct, ma’am. Within the day, that performance issue must be addressed—within the day we have a feedback session. For example, ‘i know what happened to you earlier.’ we don’t have a formal paper structure yet—everything is very direct.”

While not formally documented, employee performance is evaluated through measurable outcomes like sales and customer satisfaction. As explained by eli, “performance is based on sales. So at the end of the week, we check in—either friday or monday if we didn’t meet on friday. We meet, ask what happened, who they approached, who they talked to.”

Adaptive employee rewards and support as total returns

It was evident among mses that pay practices were based primarily on business capacity. Participants recognize the need to balance compliance and financial sustainability. While some reported strict adherence to minimum wage requirements, others described financial limitations affecting their pay. Gina mentioned, “minimum wage—whatever dole offers, whatever the minimum wage is, that’s what i give.” On the other hand, joseph remarked, “it turns out what i can offer is just what fits within the budget of my business.”

Discretionary performance-based incentives, however, are adopted and often tied to the targets set by the management. Alex shared, “every quarter, all those who made sales for that quarter—we treat them out or

give incentives.” Beyond cash compensation, leaders explained provision of alternative benefits and personal support to compensate employees, including meals, housing, attendance to emergencies and personal life events. Israel explained, “our workers stay in the housing we provide. We also provide food. And we give them vitamins.”. Similarly, according to alex, “when there are celebrations or events, we need to attend. If someone invites us, it’s our duty to go so they feel supported in their endeavors.” These allowances reflect the integration of material and personal care for employee welfare. Integrating these is simply a reflection of “malasakit” or care.

Goodwill-oriented retention and turnover management

Participants framed retention and turnover as goodwill. Rather than strict retention control, owners expressed empathy as employees leave for better opportunities. Carlo stated, “we need to be ready for fast turnover because all accounting firms are like that... we know that we’re used as training grounds, and we’re actually thankful—we’re happy that we create talent for the market.” Thus, turnover is not viewed negatively among mses.

Mutually fair exit handling reflects respect and empathy. While employees are received with respect and trust during the hiring and placement, employers wish to part ways with them in a respectful manner too. As ben noted, “we always tell them, ma’am, that we require rendering. I say, ‘we accepted you properly, so leave properly as well.’ so we follow 30 days rendering based on dole.” The same decency was expressed by felix saying: “when that happens, the transition is easy. When they leave, sometimes there’s no resignation letter—just verbal notice. Sometimes they say they need to leave in fifteen days or even by tomorrow. Some follow the contract and respect the required thirty days.”

3.2 The deeper narratives that influence micro and small businesses in their approaches to managing people

The hr approaches of mse leaders in managing people seemed to have been a humanistic expression greatly influenced of who they are as an individual. Humanistic stewardship in people management as the superordinate theme revealed the values of mse leaders as their guiding principles, primarily associated to their identity and personal history. Table 2 also shows the emergent themes: upbringing as hr blueprint, moral uprightness and personal values as hr core, experiential learning as practical philosophy.

Table 2: cross-case themes inferred to the deeper narratives influencing hr decisions

| Superordinate themes | | | | Emergent themes | |
|------------------------------|--------------------|-----------|---------------|--|--|
| Humanistic management | stewardship | in | people | Upbringing as hr blueprint | |
| | | | | Moral uprightness and personal values as hr core | |
| | | | | Experiential learning as practical philosophy | |

Humanistic stewardship in people management

it can be noted that hr decisions of mse leaders are rooted in their formation during childhood along with their family experiences. Their styles reflect the family lessons they had in terms of discipline, respect and compassion. As accounted by israel, “we had a difficult life so we grew up doing labor work... that’s why i experienced what real work is like... treat them like family and taking advantage of others is wrong.”

Across cases, participants highlighted that their hr approaches are deeply rooted in their core principles. They are guided by their moral beliefs, strong faith and personal philosophies in life. In the words of dan, “my principle really is to help. That they can have work. If i progress, they should also progress... if i have good food, then they should also have good food.” Their values and convictions generally shape their

hr decisions. As ben reflected, “it’s hard to always follow what is ‘right.’ there’s right and wrong, but doing what is good is something i try to focus on—we should choose to do what is good, not just what is technically right.”

There is indeed wisdom in the past, and this has been the philosophy of mse leaders. Participants were deeply influenced by their personal past experiences including former employment and trial and error approaches which then served as their teacher. Experiential learning as stated by gina, brought her to humane orientation, “you have to learn because they’re strict, you have to do your work or else they will embarrass you. I had a boss like that, so i told myself when i opened this business, i don’t want to be like that because you don’t need to scold your people for them to learn, and you don’t need to shout at them.” Ben added, “i was an employee too, which means i consider what employees feel. When i make decisions, i consider that i used to be an employee too, because whatever i decide is what they’ll have to follow.”

3. 3. The meaning of the hr responsibilities that micro and small business owners handle

The superordinate theme, all the care, encapsulates how mse owners experience managing people not solely as an administrative role. Hr responsibilities for them are not just a system nor process, rather a more personal and paternalistic stewardship. Three emergent themes surfaced that brought to this meaning, i.e. nurturing mandate to people, compliance and processes, and essential to business continuity.

Table 3: cross-case themes inferred to the meaning of the hr responsibilities

| Superordinate themes | Emergent themes |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| All the care | Nurturing mandate to people |
| | Compliance and processes |
| | Essential to business continuity |

All the care

Participants interpreted hr responsibilities as integration of moral responsibilities towards their people and the duty to legally comply and sustain the enterprise. It was consistently framed that hr responsibilities are about genuine concern for the dignity and holistic employee well-being. It is the mandate to nurture and help people grow, rather than viewing people as merely an economic input. As alex articulated, “because i feel that’s the concept of hr... it’s not just handling money that you can move around and easily control. Money is just a resource you can transfer anywhere. But when it comes to people, it’s different — you have to look at their emotions, you have to consider their capacity.” Nonetheless, hr responsibilities are also interpreted as co-existent with compliance and processes as an act of care. Ensuring compliance, due process and basic structure foster fairness among everyone in the small ecosystem. Participants also recognize the importance to comply with the government mandates and practice due process. Alex shared that even in informal setting, he felt the need to uphold proper hr processes within the small enterprise, “of course, you still need to do it. When people enter the company, they expect real hr processes. So somehow, i try... i do my best so that the flow of what i do resembles a real hr process.” Divergence however as stated by ben, our hr task is really about processing, giving due process. But sometimes it hinders the speed of transactions. For example, when i was an employee, there was someone who stole, but management couldn’t fire them immediately — we had to wait months for dole to release a decision. Sometimes due process even gets turned around. That’s why many business owners don’t like how long hr tasks take because time is gold.”

My participants’ stories led me to another emergent theme, realizing that caring for people is inseparable

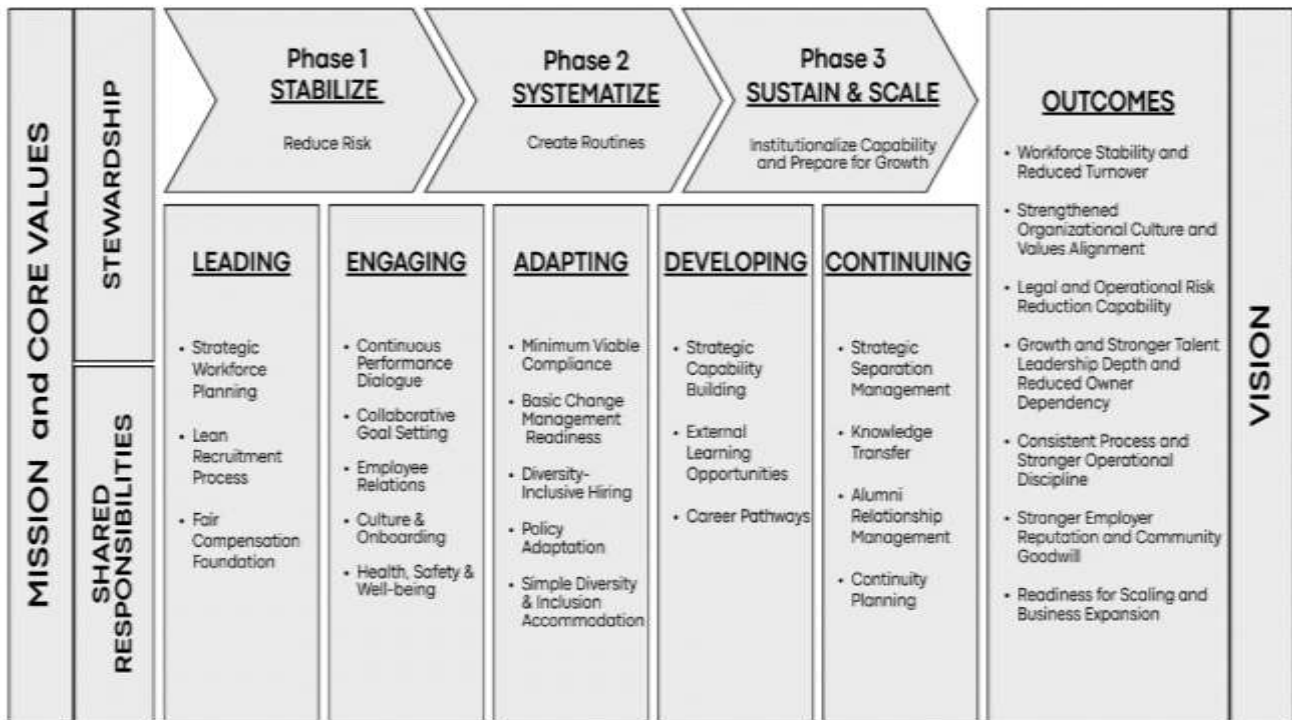
from taking good care of the enterprise itself. Hr responsibilities are interpreted as the very essential to business survival. Eli highlighted, “whatever small hr function we have now is very relevant because recruitment, training, compensation, and benefits — those are all hr functions. Without that, you won’t have people. Without people, you won’t have sales. Without sales, the company will die. Hr is vital whether you’re a small business or a big corporation. It’s very important to sustain the business.”

3.4. Proposed strategic hr action: employee stewardship and shared responsibility framework

Coined as employee stewardship and shared responsibility framework, it attempts to address the significant gap between informal hr practices and strategic business outcomes by transforming their relational people management into a sustainable competitive advantage.

While the findings of the study reveal no evident formally written mission and values statements, their hr practices and decisions reflect their leaders’ values and beliefs about work, fairness and community contribution. Owners remained consistent in expressing how their small firms are grounded in service to their communities, supporting family livelihoods, providing relational-centered and dignified work and pursuing survival and sustainability despite constraints and limitations. By framing mission and values as core elements of this framework and as the starting point of hr strategy, micro and small business are able to become strategic yet not through bureaucracy. It can be noted that existing hr frameworks designed for corporate setting assume formal structures and resources that most micro and small firms lack of. Thus, this framework illustrates how mission and values serve as a de facto governance system among them that offer a theoretical advancement, connecting informal and relational hr with strategic alignment literatures. Guided by stewardship and shared responsibility, the framework undergoes three phases leading towards the organizational outcomes. The three-phased model includes stabilize, systematize, and sustain & scale that progresses through its five components, i.e. leading, engaging, adapting, developing, and continuing. Phase 1, stabilize establishes leading through strategic workforce planning, lean recruitment, and fair compensation foundations as this stage focuses on risk reduction and operational alignment. Engaging comes in as it aims to strengthen performance dialogue, onboarding integration, employee relations, and well-being practices. Adapting then is introduced along with developing in the phase 2, systematize. This is where compliance, change management readiness, diversity and policy adjustments are emphasized in the process. As essential routines are fostered, employees are likewise exposed to capacity building, learning opportunities and clearer career pathways. In phase 3, sustain and scale, there is a continuous development, hence, developing remains active and where separation occurs, continuing process comes in. Hr puts emphasis on knowledge management and business continuity planning, ensuring seamless transition. At the end of the day, the framework reaches its goal: the organizational outcomes. There exist improved workforce stability, strong organizational culture, reduced risk, and readiness for scalability and growth.

figure 1: employee stewardship and shared responsibility framework



4. Discussions

Findings of my study revealed that truly in an informal hr setting, practices are mostly embedded in relationship, empathy and trust. Hr practices revolved around the usual processes, i.e. hiring, training, performance management, and compensation and retention, while the formalized systems are still limited. Talent acquisition among these firms were heavily reliant on referrals and personal networks. Trust on character and attitude then substitute the formal screening process. This aligns with the study of agarwal and jha (2015) that revealed how smaller firms prioritize culture fit through referrals, in view of resource constraints. It likewise appeared that attitude-based hiring strengthens cohesiveness and prevents workplace conflicts which are necessary in small workplaces where everyone interacts closely. Nonetheless, as reflected in the divergence, owners also acknowledged qualifications when roles are complex. Trust however remains to be earned and renewed. It implied that the conditional capability onboarding served as a risk management tool to assess new hires through real-time performance, rather than relying on structured pre-employment tests. Similarly, knowledge transfer through experiential learning is reflected on owner-led experiential trainings. As asserted by coetzer, et. Al (2022), learning in small businesses is often informal and embedded largely to day-to-day operations. Performance feedback then although not documented are direct and immediate, and is based on tangible outcomes. Direct communication relatively enhances clarity among mses. Nonetheless, for consistency and long-term effectiveness, structured documentation may be necessary. Interpreting their stories, compensation is much like being practical, anchored on government mandates and market norms. On the other hand, offering incentives are discretionary and performance-based, designed to motivate employee while protecting the fixed costs. As shared by the participants, physical presence, personal assistance and socialization are not “add-ons” to compensation, but rather are moral equivalents of pay and gratitude that bind them with employees in mutual respect. Interestingly, it really stood out to me how retention and

turnover did not create an opposite view from the participants. These two led to one concept – goodwill. In their own world, retention and turnover are both expressions of binding employer and employees through compassion, respect and understanding. While large companies focus on improving retention rate and minimizing turnover, i noticed in the participants’ narratives that it is the goodwill that relates both intentions to stay and leave. In the context of micro and small business, goodwill bridges retention and turnover.

However, there is seemingly a paradox. Findings imply that trust substituted formal hr processes, yet not without a cost. The same relationships that built trust, can eventually hinder owner’s authority. A trade-off existed in cases where boundary between professionalism and relationship becomes blur, and owners were left to be in silence than in confrontation to preserve relationship and personal reputation. Some owners felt the need to balance his character as being part of the network (whether as part of the family or a friend) and being a “boss”.

Behind these hr approaches are the expression of owners’ identity and values. Mse leaders reflected humanistic stewardship where their personal upbringing, moral uprightness and experiential learning have greatly influenced their approaches in managing people. As mentioned by jacob (2021) the "human face" of the business is its supervisors, wherein an employee's perception of a company is significantly impacted by how well they get along with their boss. It is likely that employees will be more engaged in their work and less likely to leave the company if managers offer support, promote open communication, and sustain excellent working relationships with staff. With that, the more that hr practices among small enterprises manifest the connection between the employer and the employees. Their upbringing brought them to a more humane approach to hiring, discipline and support to employees. They view leadership as responsibility rather than authority, like a father to his son. In addition, respect, integrity and fairness were central to hr decision-making process. In resource-constrained environment like mses, moral reflection has been more evident. Participants likewise portrayed that their decisions were heavily influenced by their past experiences. Rather than relying on formal hr structures, owners believe, cliché as it seems but truly, experience is the best teacher. Zakaria et al. (2018) and nyamubarwa and chipunza (2019) both stressed these hr practices are specifically influenced by their restricted size and limited resources. Rather than implementing "scaled-down" corporate approaches, sme leaders personalize these hr activities, with strong dependence on personal communication, spontaneous training, and flexible performance management approaches anchored to their own experiences.

It then made sense that the meaning of hr responsibilities is an act of balancing the heart that cares for people and the hands that sustain the business. In their worlds, i have seen how they create meanings to hr in the search of protecting employee welfare and relationships without losing their sight of business continuity. Thus, hr responsibilities become an integration of moral responsibility and practical duty, converging in what i coin as my superordinate theme: all the care. It includes how participants convey meanings on being a steward of their ecosystem: care that nurtures the employees, care that governs processes and care that ensures business success. Such an informal culture determines leaders' perceptions of their roles which are no longer as hr experts, but as mentors, role models, and guardians of organizational values, as explained by mustafa and elliott (2019).

A key insight is that the very values that make their hr approaches humane and relational, likewise contribute to the persistence of informal hr practices. The employee stewardship and shared responsibility framework then acknowledges the connection between personal values and limitations. Shared responsibility attempts to address the systemic gaps by repositioning hr not simply as set of administrative

work, rather, in the context of mses, as a distributed management function. Hr practices will be institutional rather than heavily reliant on the owners. The decision making around the people, where they build their trust, now becomes aligned with the mission and vision and values of the enterprise, along with their long-term goals. Hr practices, although aimed at being lean due to resource limitations, become strategic approaches for capability building and not merely compliance driven. Suffice to say that good intentions and relational leadership may not be enough on their own. Hence, even the most caring practices may struggle to truly sustain the business. This implication stresses the opportunity to create a balanced, human-centered approach through this employee stewardship and shared responsibility framework. Rather than asking micro and small business leaders to abandon this approach, this framework presents the phased and lean hr systems that retains values while addressing the gaps. The phased framework makes it realistic for micro and small business to gradually elevate hr practices without overwhelming them that may disrupt the day-to-day operations. Understanding their resource limitations, this framework will follow three (3) strategic phases of hr development as the growth-oriented trajectory. Phase 1 is meant for stabilizing foundations and compliance, phase 2 is eventually building the structure and systems and phase 3 is to sustain, scale and strengthen. It can be noted, as confirmed by literature that company size and structure tend to likewise emerge as determinants of the adoption of formal hr.

5. Conclusions

My study concludes that mses embody a relationship-centric and flexible hr practices, where human stewardship is often prioritized over bureaucratic control. It reflected that the absence of formal hr structures within these businesses does not equate to absence of hr philosophy. Instead, it paves way to redefinition of hr practices as informal yet about fairness, trust, and responsibility lived out in their day-to-day operations.

Hr approaches among mse owners are deeply intertwined with who they are as individuals. Hence, i have drawn to a conclusion that managing people is a humanistic expression of stewardship, grounded on personal upbringing, moral reasoning and lived experiences.

They interpret hr responsibilities as a moral ecosystem that greatly acknowledges the importance of taking care of both the means and the end of managing people. Hence, these are not confined to systems, rather are everyday acts of stewardship to balance everyone's need.

Based on findings, i conclude that these mses necessitate a strategic action that could address the gaps in the current hr approaches. The proposed framework revolves on providing the balance between employee stewardship and shared responsibility. Adopting this shows that strategic hr is not beyond the reach of these mses, but rather only needs to be reframed in the language that their owners live and understand.

6. Recommendations

Drawn from the findings and conclusions of my study, i come up with realistic recommendations basically for policy, practice and academic research.

Given the informal nature of hr practices in mses, i recommend the development of hr toolkits made-easy, tailor-fit to their context. Public and private institutions may co-create checklist, template, tracking sheets, surveys and guidelines among others that will serve as handy tools to deliver hr practices.

Consistent with my proposed framework, i recommend that employee involvement be strengthened in designing and administering hr practices like employee sourcing, peer training and setting performance

targets. Policy makers and business networks can promote this through workshops that highlight participative leadership, along with the orientation on lean practices among entrepreneurs.

As i found out that some owners learn hr mostly through experiences and trial-and-error basis, i recommend that local government units, chamber of commerce, and even universities create local mentorship and capacity building programs to connect the mses to hr professionals and mentors.

Lastly, i recommend that further research to empirically validate my proposed framework be conducted, and also attempt to draw findings using mixed methods research designs to also test my framework quantitatively. Future research may also be conducted to address the limitation of my study and expand the geographic scope. While my study examined the lived experiences of mse owners, employee centered phenomenological study may also be conducted to uncover the gaps between the leaders' intentions and the employee perspectives.

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