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Passion to Fruition: A Multiple Case Analysis on the Success Stories of Small Business Owners in Davao del Sur

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Abstract

The intention of this qualitative multiple case study was to document the success stories of the small business owners in manufacturing industry in Davao del Sur. Their passion, traits and strategies in navigating challenges towards success were examined utilizing in-depth interviews. The participants were selected through maximum variation sampling and case triangulation was done. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis and generated six emergent themes on the success stories: human-centered, turning passion into profit, faith-based resilience, adaptive and people-focused, recognition and growth, and community stewardship. While, the emergent themes for the strategies in navigating challenges towards success include commitment to reliability, solution-driven autonomy, strategic capital management and resilience against diversities. The cases were generally the same in relation to their success stories manifesting the passion and traits. While, all cases shared a commonality when it comes to being resilient except the two cases who recognized the need to collaborate with suppliers as their strategic capital management. This research provides valuable lessons for other business owners and future start-ups facing similar hurdles. Economic leaders, business experts, academics, and policymakers can better inspire and guide small business owners, creating more opportunities for meaningful engagement in entrepreneurship and driving broader economic growth.

Keywords: *Passion, Small Business Owners, Success Stories, Traits.*

INTRODUCTION

Background

Small businesses are those enterprises who are employing 10-99 total number of employees. In the developing countries, the

productivity of these enterprises is hindered by the failures they encountered (Ndiaye et al., 2018). In the Philippines, more than half of new small-business start-ups usually fail within the first 5

years of operation (Urban, 2021). This is mainly due to the challenges they have to endure during the first 5 critical years in starting a business. According to Gamad (2017), there are management strategies on mitigating these issues that the business has been confronted in attaining success which include product and service differentiation, cost leadership, financial and risk management.

In the province of Davao del Sur, there is a lack of empirical research focused on the successful operational strategies of small businesses (Sam et al., 2016). With this gap, the researcher posits that qualitative research exploring the passion, traits and strategies of successful small business owners is vital for comprehending and tackling the obstacles inherent towards their success.

Consequently, this multiple case study's unique contribution lies in its provision of practical insights for start-ups and policymakers, derived from an in-depth exploration of strategies and experiences crucial for overcoming small business challenges. Hence, the findings from this study will be disseminated to small business owners, concerned government agencies and educational institutions through local or national research conferences or forums. Additionally, the output of this research will be published in a reputable international journal.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this multiple case study was to describe and understand the similarities and differences of the success stories of the small business owners in Davao del Sur. This study also explored in-depth the essence of their challenges and strategies as successful individuals in their field.

Research Question

1. What are the success stories of small business owners in Davao del Sur?
2. How do this small business owners navigate the challenges towards their success?
3. What explains the similarities and differences of each case?

Theoretical Lens

The theoretical lens of this study primarily rooted the Passion Theory in Entrepreneurship (Cardon, et.al., 2009) which posits that a deep, positive feeling and intense enthusiasm that entrepreneurs have for the core activities of their business-like inventing, founding, or developing is a critical driving force behind their motivation, effort, persistence, and ultimately, the potential success of their venture. For the purpose of this multiple case study, this theory was used to find out if the success of the small business owners is based on their passion to pursue their field of business engagement with the characteristics that they possess as entrepreneurs.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed qualitative research specifically a multiple case study. I involved five case units in this study who were the owners of successful small businesses in Davao del Sur. Purposive sampling design and maximum variation sampling techniques were done in determining the participants of the study. Moreover, in-depth interview was conducted with people surrounding the participants for the purpose of validating the veracity of their responses. I used cross-case analysis in examining and exploring the day-to-day experiences of participants.

FINDINGS

Success Stories of Small Business Owner

The cross-analysis of the five study cases revealed three aspects - Passion, Traits and Successes with respective emerging themes representing the success stories of small business owners: *human-centered, turning passion into profit, faith-based resilience, adaptive and people-focused, recognition and growth, and community stewardship*. As presented in Table 1, there are three to five core ideas underscoring each of the themes. Core ideas known as thematic statements are capsulated responses of the common meanings that recur throughout the data where patterns are identified in coming up with themes. These themes are the following.

Human-centered. Two core ideas— Ignited by her passion in managing workers/staff and deeply rooted to make a difference in the lives of the workers represent this theme. Having ignited by the passion in managing employees was experienced only by one informant. While, Case C revealed her passion that is deeply rooted to make a difference in the lives of their people. To highlight, Cases A and C claimed:

The passion that I have poured into the business is mainly coming from my husband. He loves cooking and he enjoys in the actual processing of the products in our business. We supported each other in every decision that we take while I am also more passionate into managing people working for the business (IDI-C1- Q1.2)

I wanted to share my love for food and cooking to the world [. . .]. Now, the business is blessed enough to thrive due to faith in God and the belief that if you put your entire heart into something, then it will eventually lead to something greater (IDI-C3-Q1.2)

Table 1

Success Stories as a Small Business Owner

Essential Theme	Core Ideas
A. Passion	
Human-Centered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ignited by her passion in managing workers/staff. - Deeply rooted to make a difference in the lives of the workers.
Turning Passion into Profit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The husband/business partner enjoys cooking and processing of meat. - Passion for quality—from lay-out to finished product - Passion for farming - Early immersion and familiarity to family business
B. Traits	
Faith-Based Resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Seeking God's guidance for every big business decision - Guided by the character of never-ending hope for success amidst challenges - Being patient with perseverance leads to good business decisions - Being hardworking as a factor of success

Adaptive and People-Focused	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cognizant that people are essential assets of the business - Maintaining an amicable character—being friendly to customers - Not being picky is a significant factor of success - Acceptance of one's limitations—not knowing everything - Innovativeness is a factor for success
C. Successes	
Recognition and Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Being a regional winner of the Kapatid Mentor Me Program of the DTI - Being able to acquire properties/assets and travel around the world - Being a known supplier of corn products in the local market; featured by a vlogger nationwide
Community Stewardship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provision of employment to several individuals is fulfilling (e.g. 100 individuals) - Being able to facilitate the development of the skills of the workers - Provides help to extended families; initiate charity works

Turning passion into profit. All of the participants manifested the passion in doing business to earn profit. They shared that they started business in order to achieve improved life also. They are passionate in managing their business to earn profit. On this matter, Cases B and E claimed respectively:

My passion in focusing to the quality of our products and training my people (IDI-C2-Q1-S3)

Since childhood, I have been exposed in business. I was trained by my parents in farming and corn business. I was exposed in our family business before (IDI-C5-Q1.2-S1)

Faith-based resilience. The informants exhibited their success stories by showcasing their traits or characteristics as small business owner that contributed significantly to their success. As presented in the table, this particular theme accumulated four core ideas. Most of the participants possessed a characteristic of having faith in God which they believe a significant factor that contributed to their success. Among all the participants, Cases C and D had fascinating responses, respectively:

Firstly, it would be to rely heavy on your faith—faith in God, and in yourself (IDI-C3-Q1.3)

Our passion together with my husband match perfectly. He is very persistent to achieve our goal in business (IDI-C4-Q1.2-S1-2)

Adaptive and People-Focused. For this theme, five core ideas were gathered as shown in the table. Cases A, C and E had their own stories to tell in terms of their traits and characteristics that contributed significantly to their success. In fact, Cases C and E had to say this:

Second, be humble enough to know that you don't know everything, thus continue to learn and experiment [...]. Third, maintain an amicable character, for one does not want to purchase if the salesperson is unapproachable (IDI-C3-Q1.3)

My traits of being patience as well as perseverance. I am very hands-on in the business. I, myself are doing the actual work in the milling with the operator [. . .]. Also, my trait of "dili mag-inarte" I believe significantly contributed to the success of our milling business (IDI-C5-Q1.3)

Recognition and Growth. This theme surfaced from three core ideas as presented in the table. Cases A, C, D and E shared their success stories by highlighting their achievements. They mentioned their success in being a regional winner of the Kapatid Mentor Me Program of the DTI, being able to acquire properties/assets and travel around the world, and being a known supplier of corn products in the local market; featured by a vlogger nationwide. Among all the participants, Cases C and D gladly remarked:

Recently, we were featured in GMA as well as videos of vloggers from around the country. It is indeed a pivotal and trending way to boost the business (IDI-C3-Q1.4)

I am proud that we are able to acquire properties and travel around the world because of the improved life brought by the business for our family. We are able to help our extended family also and charity works (IDI-C4-Q1.4)

Community stewardship. As stated in the table, three fundamental ideas were generated for this specific theme. Three informants consider this as highlight of their entrepreneurial journey. Among the three of them, Cases B and E enthusiastically said this:

I am proud that I am able to help unemployed people, I am able to provide them the work they need. I am able to train them also and I am happy to impart them my skills in graphic design (IDI-C2-Q1.4)

I am proud that we are able to acquire properties and travel around the world because of the improved life brought by the business for our family. We are able to help our extended family also and charity works (IDI-C4-Q1.4)

Strategies in Navigating the Challenges Towards Success

The information in Table 2 pertains to the strategies of small business owners in navigating challenges towards success. There are two types of challenges encountered by the informants – challenges faced while developing the business and hindrances encountered in attaining business success. Presented in the third column of the table are the challenges that small business owners face, and out of it, it led to the development of core ideas and the emergence of four themes: *commitment to reliability, solution-driven autonomy, strategic capital management, and resilience against adversities*. Small business owners were confronted with difficulties in managing their business. In spite of that, they have successfully attained business success.

Table 2
Strategies in Navigating the Challenges Towards Success

Themes	Core Ideas	Challenges
Commitment to Reliability	Diligently complied with the requirements	Difficulty of complying with Food and Drug Administration requirements
	Having a return policy	Dealing with customers complaints
Solution-Driven Autonomy	Relying on one-self	Difficulty of managing the absenteeism of workers
	Being patient amidst trials	Competitors' poaching of human resources
	Having a problem-solving mindset	Prolonged period of product innovation that meets market acceptance
Strategic Capital Management	Borrowed money for business funding	Lack of working capital
	Building a good relationship with suppliers	Difficulty of coping with the orders due to low production
Resilience Against Adversities	Persistence amidst business adversities	Struggle of renewing the business license annually including BIR taxes
		High turnover of employees
	Availing the assistance program of DTI and DOST	Cash liquidity issues and innovations
	Partnering with delivery services	Closure of physical stores during the COVID-19 pandemic
	Having dependable employees	Operation delays due machine breakdown and electric black-out

Commitment to reliability. One participant's manner of addressing the challenges encountered while developing the business particularly in dealing with customers' complaints and government compliance garnered two core ideas, as reflected in Table 3. Case A was able to diligently complied with the requirements and successfully managed customer feedbacks by having a product return policy. On this note, Case A deliberately affirmed:

We just complied everything and we did our best to address the challenges that comes our way. We always do our best to manage customer feedbacks through allowing them to return the products they have complains on the taste of the product (IDI-C1-Q2-S2)

Solution-driven autonomy. This theme generated three core ideas which mean that most of the informants' way of responding to the difficulty in managing people and product innovation is to rely to oneself, being patient and having problem-solving mindset. Cases B, C, and D successfully employed their solution to the challenges encountered. Among them, cases B and D had an interesting experience with this as they openly disclosed:

We always keep our service good and invest more on people, employing more to help the business (IDI-C2-Q2.5)

We did our best to build good relationship with suppliers. As we start, we ensure to maintain our good credit standing [. . .]. In terms of managing people, I managed to do it myself during the times when nobody is helping in the store (IDI-C4-Q2.2)

Strategic capital management. To address the problem of the lack of working capital, some of the informants resorted to borrowings for funding. Two core ideas were tallied on this particular theme of which one of which was manifested by two informants - Cases D and E who were able to successfully build a good relationship with

the suppliers as their way of responding to the problem on low production/lack of capital. Cases B and E had an outstanding response on how they addressed financial constraints as they started his business:

Patience and I kept going despite of the challenges. I managed to borrow money for business funding (IDI-C2-Q2)

I have a very supportive family and even my employees. I considered them as my family as well. I have trusted people in the milling business who helped me in overcoming every problem in the facility including corn farmers and suppliers (IDI-C5-Q1.7)

Resilience against adversities. In the midst of the hindrances they have confronted in attaining business success, the informants have their ways and support system in overcoming it. There are four core ideas noted in this theme which convey that all of the participants are resilience enough in times of adversities. At this point, Cases B and C has a riveting revelation:

My Family is my support system in overcoming the challenges, my wife is always supporting me in business (IDI-C2-Q2.4)

We took the risk of delivering the products (through delivery services), and added more products. DOST also assisted the business in terms of financial loan grant (IDI-C3-Q2.3-S4)

Similarities and Differences between Cases

Highlighted in Table 3 are the similarities and differences of the success stories of small business owners.

Success Stories as a Small Business Owner. In the parlance of turning passion into profit/human centered representing the passion of the participants, all Cases manifested the passion in doing

business for profit. The similarities that exist between cases are that they all successfully bridge a personal, heartfelt interest with a societal need by using the for-profit business model as a powerful engine for both financial gain and positive change. It differs as Cases A and C were driven by their passion in managing people aside from being passionate in earning income in business. This means that while all cases focused primarily on perfecting profit, others like Cases A and C rooted their success with their passion in mastering the 'who'—building exceptional teams, culture, and relationships through strong, people-centric management.

Themes	Similarities Across Cases	Differences Across Cases
Turning Passion into Profit/Human-Centered	All cases stem from their desire to share their interest with society by turning it into a lucrative venture.	Cases A and C were driven by their passion to deal with human resources, while the rest utilize their technical knowledge in business ventures.
Faith-Based Resilience	Cases B and E exhibit an optimistic outlook, characterized by patience and perseverance rooted in faith in God. Also, Cases A and C depend on God's guidance while relying on their diligent nature.	Case D manifested faith by being hardworking as a factor of success.
Adaptive and People Focused	Cases A and C acknowledged the significance of a people-oriented character and innovativeness for business endeavors.	Case E recognized that the core qualities of humility and adaptability are essential for achieving business success.
Recognition and Growth/Community Stewardship	Most cases (A, C, D, and E) considered their personal achievement as successes. Also, A and B prioritize their internal responsibility towards their employees.	Case D draws additional fulfillment from external communities through charity work.

In terms of the traits and characteristics of the small business owners that significantly contributed to their success, all cases possessed faith-based resilience. Similarities exist between cases B and E as both of them possessed positive attitude in business rooted in their faith in God. While, Cases A and C depend on God's guidance while relying on their diligent nature. The shared spiritual grounding among all participants is essential because it gives them a reliable internal mechanism—a "built-in battery"—for success: their deep belief consistently produces the patience and

optimism necessary for them to persevere and take steady, long-term action. The critical difference among cases, however, lies in where they draw their power: either from an unshakeable inner belief and faith (Internal/Spiritual) which fuels their perseverance, or from unrelenting discipline, hard work, and self-reliance (External/Personal Effort) which fuels their action and skill. Among the participants, Case D manifested faith by being hardworking as a factor of success. Among the participants, Case D manifested faith by being hardworking as a factor of success. This positions Case D as a hybrid where the Internal/Spiritual strength (faith) is primarily expressed and validated through the External/Personal Effort (hard work).

When it comes to the trait of being adaptive and people focused, Cases A and C acknowledged the significance of a people-oriented character and innovativeness for business endeavors. The similarity across these cases is that both of them agreed on one major thing: a people-oriented character is the secret ingredient. In the simplest terms, their success is significant because no business can thrive alone; it's impossible to win without having great relationships. This means that the success of their business endeavors is fundamentally interdependent; they cannot thrive without positive, trusting relationships with employees, customers, and partners. However, it differs in the case of participant E who recognized that the core qualities of humility and adaptability are essential for achieving business success. This difference among the cases makes Participant E a prime example of the 'How' priority, as humility ensures an owner is always learning and open to correction (strong Character), while adaptability allows the entire business to react swiftly to market changes (healthy Culture), ensuring long-term survival over short-term wins.

For the successes of small business owners, most of them (A, C, D, and E) share a profound similarity as they considered personal recognition and growth as success indicators for them, which demonstrates the successful transition from mere survival to established excellence and expansion. Their achievements signify a critical cycle: internal success generates external validation, which in turn fuels further growth. In addition, similarities emerged between cases A and B as to their community stewardship as they prioritize their internal responsibility towards their employees. This reflects the shared understanding that caring for employees isn't a cost or a secondary concern—it's the most effective strategy for ensuring the long-term health and success of the business itself. In contrast, Case D draws additional fulfillment from external communities through charity work. This highlights a crucial difference among cases: while most of the participants focus on internal success and employee welfare, Case D actively pursues the business's role as a direct agent of community betterment. This commitment to external purpose widens the source of their impact and deepens the owner's personal satisfaction beyond financial metrics.

Strategies in Navigating the Challenges towards Success. The small business owners were confronted with different challenges in managing their business. They were facing various challenges in developing the business even in attaining business success. Notwithstanding, they were able to successfully managed the challenges by employing different strategies and having support systems all throughout their journey. The similarities and differences among the cases is presented in Table 4.

As to commitment to reliability and solution-driven autonomy, Cases A, B, C, D demonstrated commitment to trustworthiness and

self-reliance, to deliver on what is promised. The similarities in particular exist in Cases A and D which demonstrate a commitment to trustworthiness (Integrity), backed by internal fortitude and independent capability (Self-Reliance), to deliver on what is promised. This highlights the shared understanding that Integrity sets the moral standard for their promise—defining their ethics and quality—while Self-Reliance provides the operational strength and resilience needed to ensure that promise is kept reliably and sustainably, even when external factors challenge their business.

Table 4
Similarities and Differences in Navigating the Challenges Towards Success

Themes	Similarities Across Cases	Differences Across Cases
Commitment to Reliability and Solution-Driven Autonomy	Cases A and D demonstrate a commitment to trustworthiness (Integrity), backed by internal fortitude and independent capability (Self-Reliance), to deliver on what is promised.	While Case B and C may not confront market challenges and the threat of competitors' piracy head-on, they meet it with composure and patience.
Strategic Capital Management	Two business people (Case B and C) turned to loans to address the shortfall of working capital.	Cases D and E recognize the need to collaborate with the suppliers to address and sustain the production.
Resilience Against Adversity	Two business owners (Cases A and C) availed of the DTI and DOST funding and technical assistance program.	To cope with the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic, case C made use of delivery services, while the case E depended on their staff during operational delays caused by machinery failures or power outages.

However, the differences emerged in how the participants apply the strategies to market threats, specifically competitor piracy as Cases B and C view such threats as a crisis demanding immediate retaliation, they demonstrate strategic endurance by treating piracy not as a crisis, but as a chronic market condition requiring a calm, sustainable counterstrategy rather than emotional reaction.

The participants are also dealing with problems relative to financial constraints. Cases B and C overcome this challenge by availing of loans while Cases D and E recognize the need to collaborate with the suppliers to address and sustain the production. The similarity lies in their shared experience of a typical financial challenge and their common strategic financial decision to use borrowed funds to bridge that gap and ensure business continuity. Cases B and C exemplify this common decision by overcoming this challenge by availing of loans. In contrast, Cases D and E illustrate an alternative, cooperative financial strategy: they recognize the need to collaborate with the suppliers to address and sustain the production. This comparison highlights two distinct, yet equally

strategic approaches to resilience: using financial leverage (loans) to increase immediate capital (B and C) versus using relational leverage (supplier collaboration) to manage cash flow and sustain operations (D and E).

On the matter related to resilience against adversities, the informants were facing different hindrances in attaining business success. They have transcended the challenges by way of availing assistance and resorting to rely on support systems with persistence, partnering with delivery services during pandemic issues as well as working hand in hand with trusted and dependable employees. This strategic approach to seeking help highlights a shared similarity: a recognition among the cases A and C that external, institutional resources are essential for overcoming specific challenges and achieving sustained growth. They understood that leveraging government programs, financial backing, or mentorship provides the scale and legitimacy needed for expansion, proving they are resource-aware and not purely self-reliant. However, the cases are unique because their specific adaptation efforts differed: one business owner (case C) adapted to a societal/logistical challenge (e.g., managing the flow of products through the community or delivery services), while the other (case E) adapted to a technical/physical challenge (e.g., solving issues related to production quality or equipment functionality), demonstrating different pathways of achieving business continuity.

Confirmation of Theory. The findings of the study align with the Passion Theory in Entrepreneurship (Cardon et al., 2009) which posits that a deep, positive feeling and intense enthusiasm that entrepreneurs have for the core activities of their business-like inventing, founding, or developing is a critical driving force behind their motivation, effort, persistence, and ultimately, the potential success of their venture. This theory confirms that the success of the small business owners is based on their passion to pursue their field of business engagement with the traits and characteristics that they possess as entrepreneurs.

DISCUSSION

The discussion of the results is presented in this chapter. Key findings of the study were elaborated with literature.

Success Stories of Small Business Owners

Human-centered. This essential theme means that participants were driven by their passion in dealing with human resources as well as making a difference in the lives of their workers. Specifically, participants A and C shared similarities in being deeply ignited by a passion for managing workers and staff, with a strong commitment to making a positive difference in the lives of their employees. Both cases reflect leadership styles and entrepreneurial approaches rooted in empathy, care, and active engagement with their teams, which foster motivated, loyal workforce and strong organizational culture. This drive of passion in dealing with human resource aligns with the research of Grewal et al. (2023) emphasizing the importance of a human-centered approach in entrepreneurship highlighting that entrepreneurs who prioritize empathy and engagement with stakeholders—including employees—create resilient, innovative businesses that foster employee motivation and productivity. Similarly, Barucic and Umihanic (2016) expressed that understanding customer needs, intuition, and foresight is a crucial factor in entrepreneurs' ability. Moreover, Ferranco (2025) highlighted that culturally grounded and emotionally intelligent leadership models contribute

significantly to building sustainable and humane workplaces that support entrepreneurial success.

Turning passion into profit. This is a core theme reflecting the participants' drive to successfully commercialize their personal interests and contribute to society through a lucrative business venture. All cases demonstrated that their enterprises stemmed directly from this dual desire to share their interest with society and make it profitable. This finding is aligned with the research of Zhang and Lee (2024), who emphasized that entrepreneurs who transform their passion into profit succeed by deeply immersing themselves in their industry and leveraging psychological resources such as resilience and optimism to convert passion into sustainable business value. Similarly, Aligada (2025) emphasized that Filipino entrepreneurs often begin with a personal passion which, when coupled with strategic thinking and adaptability, leads to profitable business ventures. This combination of emotional investment and market savvy is crucial for sustaining operations and scaling. Furthermore, Mercado (2024) highlighted that motivated Filipino MSME entrepreneurs who are passionate about their fields tend to immerse themselves fully in their businesses, enhancing competencies that translate passion into practical business success. This immersion fosters innovation and resilience that help navigate obstacles and capitalize on market opportunities.

Faith-based resilience/Adaptive and people-focused. This is a key characteristic displayed by the participants as they successfully managed their businesses which means that all cases demonstrated entrepreneurial skills and competencies rooted in a spiritual or faith-based foundation, which provided them with the psychological fortitude to withstand operational challenges. This result is parallel to the findings of Margaça et al. (2022) affirming that spirituality positively mediates the relationship between psychological resilience and entrepreneurial success, helping entrepreneurs sustain effort amid challenges. This viewpoint is further reinforced by Gao et al. (2022), whose research demonstrated that entrepreneurial spirituality has a significant positive contribution to overall business performance, viewing it as a core resource for enterprise adjustment and competitive advantage. Similarly, Purba (2021) found that resilience acts as a mediator, demonstrating that spirituality does not only have a direct influence on an entrepreneur's quality of life but also works indirectly through resilience, solidifying the relationship between faith and success.

Adaptive and people-focused. This is a critical theme reflecting the traits displayed by the participants that contributed significantly to their success where Case A exhibited a unique and vital personality trait: being highly cognizant that people are essential assets of the business. While, differences emerged among the cases, where three cases possessed diverse traits of being adaptive and people focused contributing to success.

The result is congruent with the generalization of Elite Business Magazine (2024) that adaptability involves openness to learning, innovation, and pivoting strategies in response to market shifts, which is crucial for thriving in dynamic business conditions. Supporting this claims, Chavez (2019) stressed that Filipino entrepreneurs demonstrate an achievement-oriented approach while maintaining a personalistic and people-centered style, which supports strong team relationships and contributes positively to firm performance. Adding to this, Li et al. (2021) identified various strategic responses (persistence, innovation, market exit) used by firms to manage health crises, stressing that

organizational resilience is built upon the ability to rapidly reorient strategies in unpredictable environments. Furthermore, Sison et al. (2024) reinforced this concept, showing that adopting people-centered leadership styles significantly improves the job satisfaction of SME owners and ultimately leads to improved perceived financial performance.

Recognition and growth/ community stewardship. This is the final key theme, representing the culmination of the entrepreneurial journey by emphasizing the proud achievements and successes of small business owners. The participants displayed diverse entrepreneurial competencies as they managed and faced the demanding situations of their business. Specifically on community stewardship, the cases showed a clear difference. Unlike the other cases, Case D was satisfied and exceptionally proud of their business achievement because they were able to conduct consistent charity works. Essentially, the uniqueness of this finding lies in recognizing and actively pursuing the business's role as a direct agent of community betterment, thereby widening the source of both its impact and the owner's personal satisfaction.

This result confirms the viewpoint of Cadungon (2025) that small businesses integrate sustainability practices and community engagement despite operational challenges. The study emphasizes that these businesses actively contribute to local economic and social development through responsible management and flexible business practices, reflecting a deep stewardship that goes beyond profit. Furthermore, Manasan and Tabunda (2019) argued that the social embeddedness of MSMEs—their active participation and investment in local community structures—is a significant factor in their long-term resilience and sustained growth in the Philippine context. Moreover, this finding is parallel to the conclusions of Castillo (2018), highlighting that business growth is often supported by active community stewardship, where entrepreneurs invest back into their communities, strengthening social capital and trust.

Strategies in Navigating the Challenges Towards Success

Commitment to reliability/solution-driven autonomy. This is the key theme reflecting the participants' dedication to overcoming challenges and risks through a persistent, problem-solving mindset while building their businesses. Crucially, all cases shared a fundamental similarity regarding this theme: they recognize that Integrity sets the moral standard for the promise of reliability. At the same time, self-reliance provides the operational resilience to ensure that the promise is kept reliably and sustainably.

This finding is congruent with research stating that small business owners who set clear quality standards, respond promptly to customer feedback, and deliver on promises create authentic customer connections that become the foundation of long-term relationships and brand reputation (Pipedrive, 2025; Forbes, 2023). Specifically in the Filipino context, this aligns with Devero Jr. (2025), who found that Filipino business managers demonstrate a very high level of work ethics which directly impacts their decision-making and operational consistency, fostering trust and reliability within organizations. Furthermore, the concept of solution-driven autonomy—or self-reliance—is supported by Charette (2023), who declared that autonomy fosters innovation and strategic flexibility, enabling owners to manage risks effectively, adapt to evolving market demands, and improve leaders' overall resilience and sustainability.

Strategic capital management. This is a key finding reflecting that the participants consistently employed strategic approaches—either through external financial leverage or internal relational leverage—to ensure business continuity. In particular, Cases D and E, unlike Cases B and C, demonstrated this relational strategy by recognizing the necessity of collaborating with their suppliers to address and sustain production. This proactive stance toward capital management is congruent with the findings of Borazon and Supangco (2018), who affirmed that collaboration with suppliers through joint planning, information sharing, and mutual problem-solving not only minimizes production risks but also improves adaptability to changing demands. Moreover, Talavera (2014) found that coordination in materials and production planning between firms and suppliers enhances operational efficiency and trust, which leads to more sustainable business operations. Furthermore, supporting the broader strategic approach, Valerio (2020) emphasized that effective debt utilization and diversified funding sources are crucial determinants of financial stability and scalable growth for MSMEs, demonstrating the necessity of proactively managing both internal and external capital structures.

Resilience against adversity. This is a paramount theme reflecting the participants' core strength in attaining business success. This resilience posed clear similarities across the cases. Specifically, Cases A, C, and E are in commonality, highlighting a recognition among these entrepreneurs that external, institutional resources are essential for overcoming specific challenges and achieving sustained growth. This result is aligned with the findings of Ballesteros and Domingo (2015), who highlighted that disaster resilience among Filipino SMEs relies heavily on organizational capacity building, institutional support, and policy frameworks that facilitate access to information, financial resources, and technical assistance. This claim is further supported by Ates (2025), stating that resiliency involves not only bouncing back from setbacks but also proactively managing risks with strategic selectivity and adaptability. Furthermore, local studies document that resilience among Filipino MSMEs during the COVID-19 pandemic was driven by digital innovation, risk management practices, and proactive coping strategies, especially among younger entrepreneurs and those with lower initial income (Casinillo, 2024). Moreover, this finding also backs up the pronouncement of Olern (2025) that Filipino SMEs adopt an entrepreneurial mindset characterized by adaptability, problem-solving, and Bayanihan-inspired collaboration, which reinforces their resilience amid economic and natural challenges.

CONCLUSION

This study documented the success stories of small business owners of the manufacturing industry in Davao del Sur. The cases were generally the same in relation to their success stories manifesting their passion, traits and strategies. Stepping directly into the lives and minds of these brave owners during the in-depth interviews, I was given the privilege of hearing the powerful narratives of individuals who faced profound early challenges but chose bold action over apprehension. It is therefore concluded that business success is the human courage that moves passion to fruition. It proves that the owner's unwavering belief creates a reality stronger than any fear, transforming a personal dream into a tangible, resilient enterprise.

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