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Abstract

New ventures are vital drivers of national economic growth. However, statistical data indicates that merely 10% of these ventures endure beyond five years and continue their business operations. Research indicates that one reason for startup failure is related to issues in human resource development and a lack of knowledge in organizational development. Limited research exists on how small business as startup develop their organization. Therefore, this study intends to fill the gap by employing a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the HRD practices focusing on the structure, processes, and competency development practices that new ventures employ to establish their organizations and continuously survive and scale up. This study identifies eight principal themes with twelve sub-themes of Human Resource Development (HRD) practices in new ventures in Thailand. In terms of structural design, new ventures employ two primary approaches for their survival: functional departmentalization and the creation of business units, or "startups within a startup." Regarding process development, four critical processes are essential for the survival of new ventures: 1) communication, 2) recruitment, 3) retention, and 4) conflict management. For competencies development, new ventures focus on two main practices: 1) external training, and 2) on-the-job training. These findings provide a comprehensive framework for understanding and enhancing HRD practices in new ventures.

Keywords: New Venture Survival, HRD Small Business, HRD Startup

Introduction

In Thailand, approximately 63,000 new ventures are officially registered in the government database each year. These ventures, comprising small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and startups, create employment for around 12 million people annually and contribute to 39% of the total GDP. However, statistics indicate that only 10% of these new ventures survive beyond five years (Potjanajaruwit, 2019). The high failure rate among SMEs and startups significantly impacts the economic system, notably through increased unemployment rates.

Techsauce (2015) identified twenty reasons for the failure and closure of new ventures, with the top five being: 1) no market need, 2) running out of cash, 3) not having the right team, 4) being outcompeted, and 5) pricing and cost issues. These reasons highlight critical areas related to human resource development (HRD).

1. Team Composition and Recruitment: One major issue is the lack of a well-suited team. Effective recruiting and staffing are essential to ensure that new ventures have the right personnel. The human resource department or management needs to design appropriate organizational structures and assign the right people to the right tasks.

2. Knowledge and Competencies Development: Insufficient knowledge about market needs, pricing, and other relevant business strategies is another significant issue. HRD professionals play a crucial role in designing programs to develop team knowledge and competencies, equipping them with the essential skills to drive business strategy.

By addressing these challenges, HRD practices can significantly enhance the survival rates of new ventures, thereby supporting economic stability and growth in Thailand. Given the phenomena described, it is crucial to learn from new ventures that have successfully survived to understand how they develop their organizations. Human resource development (HRD) research has predominantly concentrated on large organizations, with only a few studies focusing on small-scale enterprises. This paper aims to address this imbalance by investigating HRD practices within smaller organizations in Thailand, thereby enriching the existing literature and providing a more comprehensive understanding of HRD across different organizational sizes. This study aims to address this academic gap by exploring the HRD practices of new ventures. The key research question guiding this investigation is: "How can HRD professionals design the appropriate organizational structure, processes, and competencies development in new ventures?"

Literature Review

Human Resource Development (HRD) theory has evolved significantly since its emergence in the 1960s. Harbison and Myers (1964) initially defined HRD as the process of developing people within a society. L. Nadler and Wiggs (1986) expanded this definition, emphasizing that HRD involves not only processes but also systems designed to unlock the potential of individuals within organizations. Swanson (1995) further broadened the scope by viewing HRD at the organizational level to improve performance, incorporating activities that enhance motivation. McLean and McLean (2001) presented HRD as encompassing any activity aimed at developing the knowledge, expertise, motivation, and productivity of individuals, groups, teams, organizations, communities, and nations. McLagan (1989) described HRD as the integration of training and development, career development, and organizational development, highlighting its dual focus on individual and organizational improvement. Werner and DeSimone (2006) defined HRD as planned activities designed to provide opportunities for members to learn and enhance their skills. Hamlin and Stewart (2011) conducted a comprehensive review of HRD definitions published in academic articles, journals, and textbooks over the past 40 years. They identified four common purposes of HRD: 1) improving individual or group performance, 2) improving organizational performance, 3) developing knowledge, skills, and competencies, and 4) enhancing human growth. Hamlin and Stewart (2011) also compared HRD with organizational development (OD), concluding that OD processes share one or more common purposes with HRD. They emphasized that HRD involves planned activities, processes, or interventions aimed at enhancing organizational effectiveness. HRD is instrumental in improving the performance of individuals, teams, and entire organizations, thereby maximizing organizational benefits.

Nolan and Garavan (2016) conducted a systematic review of the literature on human resource development (HRD) in small and medium enterprises (SMEs). They identified key

characteristics of existing HRD studies in small businesses. These studies typically focus on three main areas as follows: 1) organizational level system characteristics, 2) HRD interventions and practices in organizations, and 3) HRD climate in organizations. HRD in small organizations is often informal. Executives in SMEs frequently do not prioritize structured human resource systems (Paik, 2014). Despite this, the human resource function plays a critical role in enabling firms to design effective organizational functions using selected frameworks (Gopinath & Poornappriya, 2022). These insights underscore the importance of HRD in enhancing the performance and sustainability of small business.

One of the studies about HRD in the startups was conducted by Cho and McLean (2009) in which it revealed HRD practices in successful IT startups in South Korea. They presented the results as follows: 1) HR plays an important role in recruiting talents and change organization structure when they expand the business; 2) Top management characteristics are the key success factors (e.g., being humble, having strong leadership and high morality); 3) The startups' performance depends on the competent employees; therefore, management needed to create the inclusive, diverse, and happy workplace to motivate workers. The challenge, however, appeared to be less in-house training or mentoring program.; 4) Human Resource helps to coordinate and set internal alignment between organization goal and individuals; and 5) The challenge is how to align HRD policy with management vision as well as maintain the hard-working culture when startups are growth.

According to Beaver and Jennings (2001), training and development is one element of HRD. However, it does not recognize as a frequent occurred activities in the small organization. Hill and Stewart (2000) conducted the qualitative research to understand the practices of HRD in small organization by focus on training and development activities. They found that there are different models of HRD in small organizations. Training and development activities are mostly informal methods such as discussing with managers through the regular meeting. There is no HRD professional in the organization. Although there is limited HRD research in small organizations, especially in new ventures (startups), people still recognize that HRD is important.

According to Clarysse and Bruneel (2007), 23% of new ventures fail due to a lack of the right workforce for the team. This finding aligns with the Techsauce (2015) report, which states that two of the top five reasons for startup failures are directly related to organizational development. These insights underscore the crucial role that HRD professionals can play in improving the survival rates of new ventures. HRD professionals are essential in addressing these workforce-related challenges. By implementing effective recruiting and staffing strategies, HRD professionals ensure that new ventures are equipped with well-suited teams. Additionally, they design organizational structures that align with the strategic goals of the ventures, placing the right people in the right roles. Furthermore, HRD professionals can develop training programs that enhance team competencies and knowledge, particularly in areas critical to business success, such as market needs and pricing strategies. By focusing on these areas, HRD professionals can contribute significantly to reducing the failure rates of new ventures and supporting their long-term success.

As aforementioned, HRD covers wide scope that consists of an organizational development, process and system, training and development, career development and others. It has been recognized that the success of new ventures depends on having proper direction to design an organization and utilizing the resources to maximize benefits for the organization. HRD knowledge helps new ventures to design an appropriate structure, workforce plan, and acquire suitable employees to fulfil the tasks. The accurate HRD strategies help to attract the most qualified candidates and create a high-quality team. New ventures that experience in

survival status have been linked to proper talent acquisition and proper employees' data management (Kaur & Randhawa, 2020).

In addition, retaining employees is a part of HR role as it enhances the business growth (Dabić et al., 2011). To retain the employees and drive for the performance, training and development which is a part of HRD activities are essential. In many cases, the primary workforce of new ventures are generalists. HR needs to design training that is appropriate to the required competencies and continuously to develop the employees. An organization needs competent HRD professionals to work on developing plans as well as facilitating a succession plan to ensure that the operation is not compromised when key employees leave (Kaur & Randhawa, 2020). It is the role of HRD to ensure that all employees live up to the values and strategic vision (Knockaert & Ucbasaran, 2013). According to Kaur and Randhawa (2020), most businesses fail due to poor timing, product design issues, venture capital relationship issues, over-reliance on a specific customer base, inappropriate distribution strategy, and flawed teamwork concepts associated with the lack of a robust human resource department. New ventures without strong HRD lack the appropriate organizational design and continuous employees' development.

The human resources development (HRD) department plays a pivotal role in determining the fate of an organization, influencing its success not only in favorable conditions but also during crises. New ventures, which face numerous challenges, require a designated HR department or units specifically tasked with addressing human resource issues (Giachetti, 2018). The growth and survival rates of new ventures are significantly influenced by the effectiveness of their HR operations. Successful HRD practices, including talent recruitment, organizational alignment, employee development, and fostering a positive workplace culture, are essential for equipping new ventures to navigate challenges and achieve long-term success.

According to McLean and McLean (2001); Swanson (1995); Werner and DeSimone (2006), HRD is a systematic process and planned activities to develop, unleash expertise and provide learning. The purpose of HRD is to improve individual skills and knowledge, organizational system, work process, team and individual performance for benefit of an organization, community, nation and whole community in current and future needs. This study, therefore, focuses on HRD activities related to structural, process, and competencies development within startups, aiming to contribute to their survival and growth.

Research Methodology

This study aims to explore the role of human resource development (HRD) professionals in fostering the development of organizations to ensure the persistence and success of new ventures. The primary research question guiding this investigation is: "How can HRD professionals design the appropriate organizational structure, processes, and competencies development in new ventures?"

To address this question, a qualitative research approach was employed. Data were collected through multiple case studies, semi-structured interviews, observations, and information from digital sources about the participants. This comprehensive data collection method ensures a thorough understanding of HRD practices and their impact on new ventures. By analyzing these diverse sources of data, the study seeks to provide actionable insights and practical guidelines for HRD professionals to effectively support new ventures in their growth and development.

Research Participants and Selection Criteria

According to Sharan (2009), there are three types of sampling methods. Probability sampling uses methods based on probability theory to give all population members an equal chance of selection. Nonprobability sampling, or purposeful sampling, selects samples based on specific criteria, without equal opportunity for all population members. Two-tier sampling combines both methods by first selecting cases based on criteria and then interviewing and observing samples within those cases. This study employs a two-tier sampling strategy.

This research focuses on ventures that have demonstrated longevity by operating for at least three years. The target companies must have been established before 2017 and continue to conduct business. The author aims to interview participants from a minimum of 25 such companies. To identify suitable companies, the author will use the following process:

1. List Acquisition: The author visited the National Innovation Agency (NIA) and TechSauce websites to obtain a list of new ventures.

2. Verification: The establishment dates of these companies would be checked against the Department of Business Development (DBD) data warehouse, which maintains a database of all registered companies.

3. Survival Criteria: Companies established before 2017 and still in operation will be considered to meet the survival criteria.

The author then contacted these companies to request their cooperation in providing information for the study. The targeted participants for interviews would be managerial personnel, business owners, or human resource development (HRD) professionals, as these individuals can provide valuable insights into the HRD practices and organizational strategies that have contributed to the ventures' survival and success. Finally, the author received the confirmation and conducted an interview with participants from 31 companies from various business sectors.

Data Collection and Research Instrument

The author employed semi-structured interviews, observations, and document reviews as data collection methods. Due to travel restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, the author requested participants to conduct interviews through online meeting platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and others with which participants are comfortable. The voice and video of these interviews would be recorded, provided respondents consent to participate. By using these methods, the author aims to gather rich, qualitative data that provides a nuanced understanding of how HRD professionals can design appropriate organizational structures, processes, and develop team competencies in new ventures.

Content Analysis

Thematic analysis was applied. Since the samples are from different business sectors, the author realized that they could provide different interview results. Therefore, the author conducted two steps of thematic analysis as follows: 1) the author selected the repetitive themes in each business sector and summarize those themes as the result of each business sector and 2) the author compared the results from business sector and figure the common themes across sectors. These common themes were the results to response the research questions under this study. In the process of developing the open coding framework, a total of 154 codes were identified and subsequently categorized into 12 distinct sub-themes. These sub-themes were further consolidated by the researchers into eight principal themes. Upon identifying the key themes, the researchers developed a conceptual framework illustrating the HRD practices critical for new venture survival. To validate this proposed model, a validation process was

undertaken in which participants were asked to confirm the alignment of the model with their personal experiences, as described during the interview sessions.

Results

Organization structure

There were 2 major themes from a total of 20 occurrences representing the organization structure practices in new venture (startups)

Table 1

Summary of themes and sub-themes of organization structure practices in new venture (startups)

Theme	Sub-theme	Occurrence	Percentage
Functional department	Functional department	15	66.67%
Startups within a startup (Business Unit)	Startups within a startup (Business Unit)	5	33.33%
Total		**20**	100.00%

Theme 1: Functional department

Functional department refers to an organizational structure that separates the departments according to the major areas of expertise that are most important to the business. For example, company DX has 3 functional departments that are sales, developers, customer services. The team members of each functional department will have focused their expertise in their own areas. "There are major 2 functions in my company – business function and product function. Business functions have sales, product, services, management, and administration. For technical function, there are research and development (R&D), AI team, infrastructure team, application development and robotic team." (Interviewee #1M44Acct)

Theme 2: Startups within a startup (Business Unit)

Startup within startup refers to an organizational structure that separates a business unit into smaller one. There are functional departments or teams within each business unit. For example, company DX has two business units. In each business unit, there are sales, administrative, and developers. Each business unit generates income and measures the profit and loss of its own. "When we were small (3-5 people), there was no clear structure. But as we grew up, we started to have departments and I saw that the efficiency was reduced. This is the same as a corporation in which organizational structure is unwieldy. So, I decided to drive and change the design to be startups within a startup. A business unit acts as a startup that has every function in it" (Interviewee #4F38Bio)

Work Process

After reviewing and analyzing all the transcripts, 103 occurrences emerged under four major themes representing the organization work process practices in new venture (startups)

Table 2

Summary of themes and sub-themes of organization structure practices in new venture (startups)

Theme	Sub-theme	Occurrence	Percentage
Retention	Personal growth with company	19	18.45%
	Organizational culture	13	12.62%
	Challenging Job	10	9.71%
Total		**42**	**40.78%**
Communication	Communication	31	30.10%
Total		**31**	**30.10%**
Recruitment	Motivation	7	6.80%
	Competencies	7	6.80%
Total		**14**	**13.59%**
Conflict Management	CEO's decision	9	8.74%
	Consensus	7	6.80%
Total		**16**	**15.53%**
Grand Total		**103**	**100.00%**

Theme 1: Retention

Retention refers to the policy of the startup to retain employees to continue working with the organization. "I have cultivated the idea that everybody will grow with me, with the company; especially four people who have worked together since the beginning stage. They will grow with me. I provide them incentives that are tied to sales. Everybody is a part of sales. I also have top-up percentages from sales volume that adds on the basic salary." (Interviewee #12M30Health)

Theme 2: Communication

Communication refers to the process of exchanging information among the team members. Communication can be a formal or informal discussion. "We need to communicate more often. We need to communicate clear direction. We also must make sure to align the direction of company every month. Every week, I also have a one-on-one direct report with my staff. The target of one-on-one communication is to discuss an improvement plan and whether we would need a support team to overcome the problem. Communication is the heart of team-building process as well." (Interviewee #1M44Acct)

Theme 3: Recruitment

Recruitment refers to the process of screening and selecting an appropriate candidate to work with the company. "When I recruit people, I select the person who has high motivation to work in a startup. Even though I must pay more, I can accept that. I pay attention to know about their motivation." (Interviewee #10M43Fin)

Theme 4: Conflict management

Conflict management refers to the process and methods to resolve disagreement among the CEO/Co-founders. "When there is a conflict or disagreement, we open the room and have a quarrel to get the settlement. We also let our team know that we have a quarrel and finally, we can find the ending point. We are not voting for anything. It does not call for a vote. To identify a solution, CEO makes the final decision. I think business is not democracy. CEO needs to make the decision, especially in difficult issues. I also take responsible on that." (Interviewee #13M40Prop)

Competencies Development

There were 2 major themes from a total of 31 occurrences representing the competencies development practices in new venture (startups)

Table 3

Summary of themes of competencies development practices in new venture (startups)

Theme	Sub-theme	Occurrence	Percentage
Outside training	Outside training	17	54.84%
On the job training	On the job training	14	45.16%
Total		**31**	100.00%

Theme 1: Outside training

Outside training refers to an approach to develop competencies through the training courses outside the company. It can be an onsite or platform an electronic learning (e-learning). The instructors are experts in an area that the course focuses on. Outside training includes private courses or public training. The startups send the people or register to get the training courses that are useful to the organization. "We send team to be trained in several private courses and evaluate the training result through various ways. For example, we evaluate sales through the sales figures. For the products, we evaluate them whether they understand the product specification or not." (Interviewee #2M45Acct)

Theme 2: On-the-job training

On-the-job training refers to an approach to develop competencies through the real working environment. "We develop our team through work like on-the-job training. We listen to users' feedback, then we work on the feedback together. For the product, we listen to what the users want. We also listen to what workers want to learn and arrange the additional content on demand. Essentially, most of the trainings are learning by doing." (Interviewee #6M41Fin)

Model of HRD Practices for New Venture Survival (Startup in Thailand)

Human Resource Development (HRD) encompasses the practices related to structural, process, and competencies development that new ventures employ to establish their organizations and continually enhance individual and team performance. In the context of structural design, new ventures utilize two primary approaches to ensure their survival: functional departmentalization and the creation of startups within a startup (business units). Regarding process development, four critical processes are essential for the survival of new ventures as 1) communication, 2) recruitment, 3) retention, and 4) conflict management. For competencies development, new ventures focus on two main practices as 1) outside training, and 2) on the job training.

The model of HRD Practices for new venture survival (Startup in Thailand) derived from this study, is illustrated in Figure 1. This framework integrates the structural, process, and competencies development practices that are critical for the survival and growth of new ventures in Thailand.

Figure 1

An Emerged model of HRD Practices for New Venture Survival (Startup in Thailand)
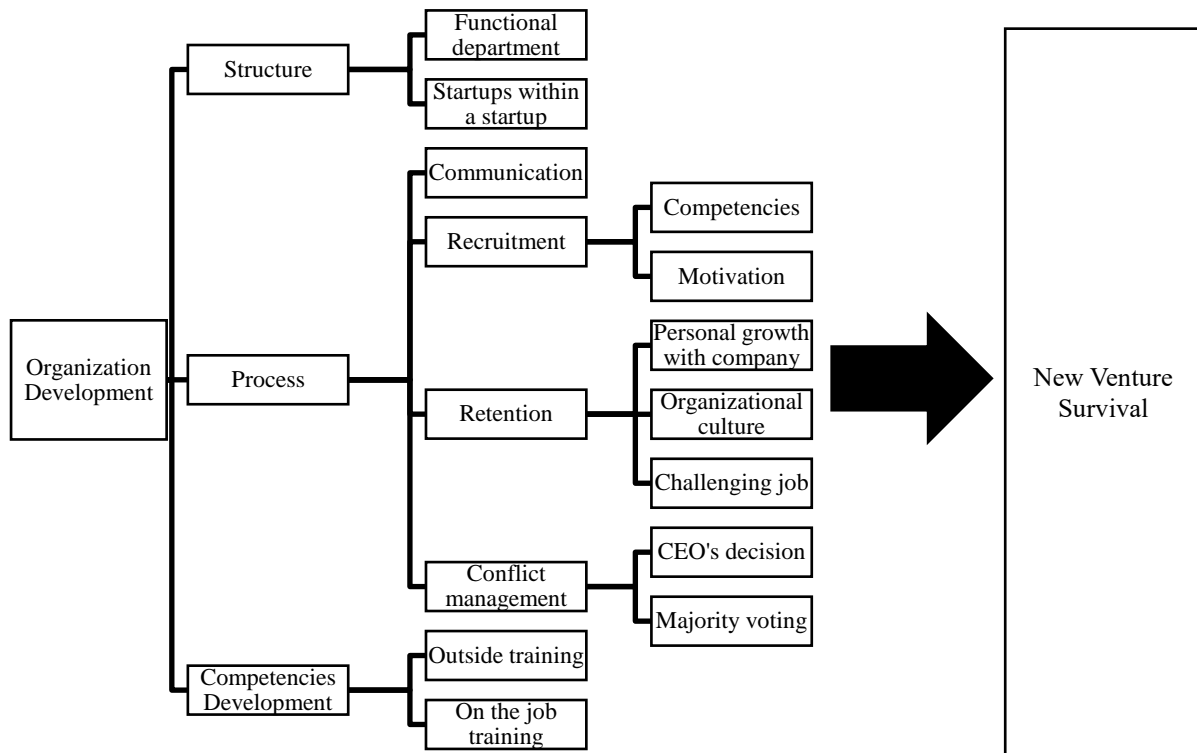
Discussion and Recommendations

Human resource development (HRD) is widely recognized as a key driver of business growth across various industries. Implementing effective HRD interventions is essential for supporting businesses, regardless of their type. The findings from this study can serve as valuable guidance for CEOs, co-founders, HR practitioners, and policymakers. Specifically, these leaders play a crucial role in designing organizational structures that promote efficiency and effectiveness. By leveraging the study's insights, they can develop organizational designs that align with the company's strategic direction, thereby enhancing overall output and performance.

Based on participants' experiences, in the initial stages when startups were small with only a few employees, a functional departmental structure was deemed appropriate. Despite this functional design, employees often had to perform multiple roles. For instance, an individual might handle both accounting and administrative tasks. As the startups grew, many participants in this study shared that they faced challenging situations. This challenge is in line with the study of Awa (2016) that proposed that during a firm's development, there might be bureaucratic bottlenecks that lead to time-consuming process and ineffective communication across functions. Participants reported that they adapted and restructured their organizations, frequently opting for a "startup within a startup" model, essentially creating distinct business

units. This approach allowed for the tracking of profit and loss for each unit, facilitating strategic decisions about whether to continue or close underperforming units. This restructuring strategy not only enhanced organizational flexibility but also motivated employees by granting them the autonomy to think creatively, work independently, and embrace challenges, fostering a strong drive to ensure the survival and success of their business units.

Communication in startups is often a challenging process. this finding is in line with the study of Petrů et al. (2019) who examined startups in Czech Republic. They argued that communication is an internal factor that affects the long-term growth and sustainability of startups. Some participants noted that, despite being CEOs or co-founders, they were required to work in various functions, leaving them with little time to discuss, communicate, or exchange information with team members. Many were unaware of the importance of internal communication until team members raised concerns or resigned. Leader takes an important role in a communication process to influence relationships between an organization and its employees (Hackman & Johnson, 2013). In response, several informants adapted by dedicating more time to communicate with their teams, discussing company directions, inquiring about employees' mental and physical health, and addressing other issues. In the book Dailey (2021), one of the characteristics of effective leadership communication is authentic communication. This authentic communication proved effective, as employees not only received the message but also recognized the care and concern demonstrated by the CEOs or co-founders.

As companies scaled up and the number of employees increased, communication became even more critical. The communication pattern shifted from one-on-one discussions to town hall meetings. To address this, HR practitioners and CEOs/co-founders might consider implementing a variety of communication sessions, including one-on-one discussions, town hall meetings, and informal interactions with employees. Additionally, organizing outings, small parties, team lunches, and company trips can enhance team engagement. These activities help boost employee engagement, which can positively impact the survival and success of new ventures.

Furthermore, most participants disclosed the challenging process of employee retention. . It is not only the knowledge that can be transferred to other companies, but the high turnover also creates the huge cost (Tziner & Birati, 1996). The participants highlighted the difficulty of keeping employees long-term due to startups' limited budgets, which often preclude hiring experienced individuals who demand high salaries. As a result, many employees stay with the company for only 1-3 years before moving to larger corporations offering better benefits and job security. Participants noted that startups typically offer standard or below-market salaries. To compensate for this, they employ alternative strategies to retain employees, such as granting them creative freedom in product development and implementing work-from-anywhere policies.

For sustainable growth, retaining employees for the long term is crucial. HR practitioners play a vital role in gathering employee feedback and understanding the factors influencing their decision to stay. Participants revealed that employees are more likely to remain with the company if they see growth opportunities, align with the organizational culture, and find their work challenging and fulfilling. Mahadi et al. (2020) who indicated that in the

view of employer, the job challenging is a factor to retain employees; whereas from the employees' perspective, a job with limited stress is a factor to retain them to continue working. In this sense, it is possible that the current research revealed that job challenging is the key factor to retain employees because all participants are CEO/co-founders who are the employers in these startups. Conducting employee-experience surveys is an effective method for HR practitioners to identify how to create a positive work environment and develop programs that enhance employee retention. By addressing these factors, startups can improve employee satisfaction and retention, contributing to their long-term success.

Conclusion and Future Research

This research significantly enhances our understanding of human resource development (HRD) practices that support the survival of new ventures. Utilizing a qualitative research methodology, the study identifies eight principal themes, each encompassing twelve sub-themes, that characterize Human Resource Development (HRD) practices in new ventures in Thailand. These findings offer valuable insights derived from participants' experiences, allowing readers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the work practices in these new ventures. More importantly, this study addresses a notable gap in the academic literature by illustrating HRD practices within small companies. The author posits that the findings will be beneficial for practitioners aiming to establish startups in Thailand and for scholars interested in exploring HRD in small organizational contexts.

The author proposed several recommendations for future research based on the study's findings. Firstly, while this study employed a qualitative approach to gather rich data and participant experiences, future research could adopt a quantitative approach to statistically analyze the relationships among determinants affecting new venture survival, thereby strengthening the findings. Secondly, as the study involved 31 Thai startups, the results may not be generalizable to all startups in Thailand. Future research should include a larger and more diverse sample from various business sectors and locations to enhance generalizability. Thirdly, this study primarily involved CEOs or co-founders; future research should interview key staff from different units to gain diverse perspectives. Fourthly, since the participants were Thai startups, future research should consider replicating and testing the findings in other countries to validate the results in different contexts.

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