
International Forum
Vol. 21, No. 1
June 2018
pp. 150-172

FEATURE

Empowering Persons with Disabilities Through Training and Employment: A Case Study

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Abstract. *Empowering persons with disabilities (PWDs) involves ensuring their independence and self-reliance by creating job opportunities for them. However, PWDs are marginalized when it comes to employment. In the Asia Pacific region alone, the unemployment rate for PWDs is 80% or more. One way to address this issue is to utilize social enterprise (a business for profit and social responsibility) as a mechanism for the inclusion of PWDs in the economy. This qualitative case study examined the effort of empowering PWDs through training and employment by “Handcrafted by Harl’s,” a social enterprise in Laguna, Philippines. The findings indicate a few things including the following: (a) A social enterprise was a viable an ethical mechanism for the inclusion of PWDs in the economy. (b) Mentoring was a successful way of training PWDs for skills development that promotes a sense of value. (c) A social enterprise could be an avenue for the empowerment of PWDs leading to their participation in socio-economic activities if healthy conditions supporting their experiences on their psychological needs were provided. Finally, the result of this study supports findings of previous studies that suggest that disability is socially constructed.*

Keywords: Persons with disabilities, social enterprise, empowerment, self-esteem, social model of disability, employment, sustainable skill development, self-determination theory

Introduction

Empowering persons with disabilities (PWDs) means supporting the development of their willingness to take responsibility for their growth and

development within their community (Jyothi, 2016). In his message during International Day of PWDs in 2009, the United Nations (UN) Secretary General Ban Ki-moon insisted that the UN would advance its Millennium Development Goals (MDG) only after the PWDs and their community have become the focus of the UN's effort. He believes that "when persons with disabilities are empowered to participate and lead the process of development, the entire community opens up. Their involvement creates opportunities for everyone—with or without a disability" (UN, 2009, para. 9). For this reason, empowering PWDs plays an important role in improving the lives of the poor and marginalized (UN, 2015) since they are among the world's poorest population (UN, 2017).

Employment can be an avenue for PWDs' empowerment. Thus, one way to empower PWDs is to ensure independence and self-reliance by creating job opportunities for them (Furuoka, Pazim, Lim, & Mahmud, 2011). Unfortunately, PWDs are marginalized and discriminated especially when it comes to employment. Further, the employment of PWDs is a complicated issue in the labor market due to several barriers (Furuoka et al., 2011) such as knowledge of the employers, attitudes of the employers, and fear of cost by employers (Sellevoll, 2016). In the Asia Pacific region alone, the unemployment rate of PWDs is over 80% (UN, 2007). Specifically, statistics in the Philippines indicate that less than 10% of the employable PWDs are wage-employed (Mina, 2013). This reality confirms that PWDs have less access to employment, especially in the Philippines.

A social enterprise (SE) can facilitate the employment of PWDs as emphasized by Designing Enabling Economies and Policies (2017), Katz and Kauder (2011), and Varga (2011). For example, the "Virtualahan" (an internet-based SE) in Davao City, Philippines trains, employs, and provides employment support for PWDs as transcriptionists and customer service representatives, among others (*Mindanao Times*, 2018). The British Council (2016) however observes that the "potential contribution of SEs remains largely unrealised in the Philippines" (para. 4), especially among the marginalized groups such as the PWDs. For this reason, this study endeavors to gain insights into the empowerment of PWDs through skills training and job opportunities by an SE and explores the impact it brings by examining its training process and workplace environment.

Review of the Literature

This study explores an SE empowering PWDs through training and employment. This literature review deals specifically with the discrimination of PWDs, empowering PWDs, training and employment of PWDs, and SE and PWDs.

Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities

It appears that PWDs suffer what appears to be “regular” discrimination and in some cases severe discrimination. Discrimination refers to the way one negatively or unfairly deals with another person or a specific group because of race, sex, skin color, or disability (Discrimination, 2017; UN Human Rights, 2014) but only disability directly applies to this study. The UN Human Rights (2014) admits that the discrimination on PWDs is one of the main problems it faces. Even in inclusive nations, PWDs in the rural areas are in terrible conditions (Miller, 2008).

Severe discriminatory practices include “trafficking and killing of people with mental illness, oculocutaneous albinism and angular kyphosis, raping of women with mental illness and the employment of children with disabilities for alms-begging” (Etieyido & Omiegbe, 2016, Abstract section). Severe discrimination of PWDs is in the areas of employment, education, cultural life, and access to public places and services (UN, 2015). In many Asian countries, going to high school is “uncommon for disabled children” (Miller, 2008, p. 36). In addition, disabled children are also among the world’s poorest population with poorer health outcomes (UN, 2017).

Empowering Persons with Disabilities

Empowering PWDs has been given the utmost attention by the UN (2009) in its MDG because PWDs not only compose a significant number of the population but also are one of the most disadvantaged groups in the society (Mina, 2013). One out of ten persons in the world has a disability, a majority of them are poor, and most are given improper medical aid (UN, 2017).

The principle of empowering PWDs is their willingness to take responsibility for their growth and development within their community (Jyothi, 2016). According to a UN (2013) report, empowering PWDs means enabling them “to live independently and participating in all aspect of life” (p. 9). This definition is supported by Rappaport’s (1984) definition of empowerment: “a process: the mechanism by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their lives” (p. 1). Empowering PWDs can minimize their discrimination, exclusion from the society, and incapability to have control over their lives. Instead, they can become active participants economically, socially, and politically in the society (Naami & Mikey-Iddrisu, 2013).

Further, empowerment on PWDs impacts not only their lives but also the community. In fact, in an earlier UN (2009) report indicated that once PWDs are empowered, the local and global community can have benefits such as poverty alleviation. In a study conducted in Ghana, researchers conclude that empowering PWDs can reduce poverty (Naami & Mikey-Iddrisu, 2013). However, in spite of the clear interconnection of PWDs and poverty, PWDs have often been excluded in

programs that promote development and poverty reduction (Braithwaite & Mont, 2009).

Self-esteem is a contributing factor to the empowerment of PWDs. The result of Naami and Mikey-Iddrisu's (2013) study shows the importance for PWDs to gain some confidence so that they can challenge issues concerning their oppression and marginalization and eventually fully participate in the community (see also Omolayo, 2009). In another study conducted examining the experiences of women with disabilities, researchers concluded that those with higher self-esteem are more likely to be employed and engage in health promoting activities compared to their counterparts with lower self-esteem (Nosek, Huges, Swedlund, Taylor, & Swank, 2003).

Training and Employment of Persons with Disabilities

Empowered PWDs have the mindset and capability to live a life of independence and self-reliance. One way to achieve this is through vocational rehabilitation and job opportunities. Vocational rehabilitation includes skills training for labor market entry, counseling, and looking for a suitable job for the PWDs (World Health Organization, 2011). Wltavsky, Lebar, and Bitenc (2014) emphasize that the best measurement for successful vocational rehabilitation of PWDs is their employment. Their study has determined that "these services have a significant impact on efficiency in the field of work" (Wltavsky et al., 2014, Abstract section). A systematic review of peer-reviewed literature shows that among the eight studies that met the inclusion criteria (peer-reviewed and published between 1990 and January 2014, addresses vocational program for PWDs, respondents or participants were 50% youth who were PWDs), six of these studies report that majority of the participants were employed after undergoing a vocational rehabilitation. More than half of the studies also indicate improved vocational outcomes (Hanif, Peters, McDougall, & Lindsay, 2017).

The Philippine government supports the vocational rehabilitation and employment of PWDs through the Republic Act No.1179. Among the provisions made are that vocational skills training is provided to PWDs for a specific job or task and then these PWDs are assisted in securing employment suitable to their ability. However, the government does not normally provide employment opportunities for PWDs after their training. Instead, the government in partnership with local non-government organizations looks for suitable wage employment for the PWDs (Lobrin-Satumba, 2016). Other PWDs are given livelihood grants by the Department of Labor and Employment. Unfortunately, only 3,078 PWDs were beneficiaries in 2012 and the number drop to 1,621 as of the 1st semester of 2015 (Lobrin-Satumba, 2016). Thus, Lobrin-Satumba (2016) recommends for an expansion of the training and employment opportunities for PWDs.

In 2013, a case study on the employment of PWDs was conducted in Metro Manila and Rosario, Batangas by Mina (2013). Key findings reveal that more PWDs are employed in the urban area than in the rural and around half of those PWDs who can work are unemployed. The highest number of PWDs working in urban areas are the visually impaired while the hearing impaired are the majority in the rural. Most PWDs in both areas either are self-employed or do not receive a salary (Mina, 2013). A more recent study by Tacadao and De Luna-Narido (2016) created a profile of employment among PWDs in the selected regions (National Capital Region, Region IVA, and Region III) in the Philippines. The key findings of the study showed that majority of the PWDs rely on family members and friends to find a job. The study found that skills training and education are important factors that help PWDs become employable (Tacadao & De Luna-Narido, 2016).

Providing suitable and sustainable employment for PWDs is key to their empowerment because it will lead to their independence and self-reliance. Unfortunately, most skill-training programs do not make provisions for employment. Usually, after the training, many capable PWDs remain unemployed. Thus, this necessitates to look into the SE for training and employment of PWDs.

Social Enterprise and Persons with Disabilities

SEs has the potential to promote inclusive growth and create skills development for marginalized groups such as the PWDs because it utilizes business solutions to solve social problems (Ballesteros & Llanto, 2017). An SE is involved in business for profit and social responsibility (Ballesteros & Llanto, 2017; Katz & Kauder, 2011). The main mission of an SE is to help create a healthy community (Ballesteros & Llanto, 2017; Katz & Kauder, 2011) and in this case, to empower PWDs.

Even though large companies have been employing for PWDs, there seems to be a need for a more sustainable avenue for their employment. Thus, SE has now been the focus for the employment of PWDs over the past decade (Canadian Association for Supported Employment, 2015). The British Council (2016) believes that an SE can tackle the issue of the unemployment of PWDs. However, the literature related to this is scarce.

A business research report by Katz and Kauder (2011) agrees that an SE is a good way of creating jobs for PWDs. Their research identifies business models and operations for SEs and examples of SEs that provide stable and productive employment for PWDs. Broad and Saunders's (2006) research report explores areas for improvement on the policies for SEs employing PWDs recommended by Ontario Disability Support Program. The study supports the value of SEs for creating jobs for PWDs. Unfortunately, the study found that a small number of SEs are qualified to employ PWDs (Broad & Saunders, 2006). In South Korea, 154 Korean SEs have reached out to PWDs. However, the main objectives of these SEs

are to provide social services for the PWDs not to create employment opportunities for them (Kim, 2009).

Ironically, even though there are many SEs in the Philippines, these have been underutilized for the employment of the PWDs. For example, 30,000 SEs were estimated to be running in the Philippines in 2007 (Dacanay, as cited in British Council, 2015) providing 3 million jobs for the poor (Rodriguez, 2015). In spite of this, majority of these SEs are unable to provide employment for PWDs (British Council, 2016). Thus, there is a need to emphasize the importance of SEs in providing employment for the PWDs.

The review of existing literature highlights the great potential of SE to provide economic inclusion opportunities for PWDs. However, we found few research articles exploring the training and employment for PWDs through an SE. In the Philippines, there seems to be no empirical study that has explored its potential role as an avenue to the socio-economic inclusion of the PWDs.

Theoretical Framework

The empowerment of PWDs through training and employment of an SE is based on two theories. These are the social model of disability and self-determination theory. The social model of disability identifies physical problem as impairment while disability as “a disadvantage that stems from a lack of fit between a body and its social environment” (Goering, 2015, Abstract section; see also Oliver, 2013). Thus, PWDs are people, whose physical impairments are taken into less consideration by the society, restricting them from participating in socio-economic activities (Goering, 2015). Self-determination theory investigates the “inherent growth tendencies and innate psychological needs that are the basis for their self-motivation and personality integration, as well as for the conditions that foster those positive processes” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 68). Using empirical process, Ryan and Deci (2000) identified such needs: competence, relatedness, and autonomy. When social and cultural factors foster healthy conditions supporting people’s (especially the PWDs) experiences on these needs, they can develop healthy self-motivation and are able to participate in social and economic activities (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2004).

Both theories informed this study because they explain the empowerment issues PWDs face. These theories have been the basis for developing programs that would include PWDs in societal activities (Disability Resource Centre, 2017). Over all, these theories support that the employer of the SE can empower PWDs by providing a healthy workplace environment that supports their psychological and physiological needs.

Research Questions

1. How did “Handcrafted by Harl’s” begin as a social enterprise?
2. What process has been employed to train and employ PWDs by “Handcrafted by Harl’s”?
3. What is the impact of training and employing PWDs?

Methodology

The goal of this research is to understand how an SE can empower PWDs through skills training and job opportunities leading to their socio-economic inclusion. To achieve this, a qualitative case study is utilized for an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon involved.

Research Design

In this study, we explored the practices of an SE in empowering PWDs through training and employment using a single case study design in order “to gain an in-depth understanding of a situation and meaning for those involved” (Merriam, 1998, p. 19). Yin (2003) further claims that this research design involves presenting rich descriptions especially for a unique situation (see also Patton, 2002).

Research Setting

The research setting is the “Handcrafted by Harls” located in Laguna, Philippines. The production is done in a bungalow house converted into a manufacturing area. The products are leather bags, belts, pouches, and others. It has a store in Makati. This SE is beginning to get recognition both locally and internationally due to its unique nature. This particular SE was selected because of the following reasons: (a) It is just a small SE with no funding from an outside source. (b) This SE has been recognized locally and internationally receiving awards from the government and non-government organizations. (c) Major television networks in the Philippines have featured this SE in their programs.

Sampling

As recommended by Creswell (2012) for a qualitative study, we utilized purposive sampling for this study. The case of this study is informed by nine participants: the owner of Handcrafted by Harl’s, five PWD workers, one non-PWD worker, and two neighbors. Although this SE has five PWDs employees (one crippled and four mute and deaf), only the crippled one has worked in this SE for 3 years. Due to the language barrier and unavailability of an interpreter, the mute and

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deaf workers could not be interviewed. They were only observed and the observation was documented in our field notes. The two neighbors were selected because they lived just across the SE. One non-PWD worker was selected because he was a pioneer worker in that enterprise.

Data Collection

The data collected through semi-structured interviews were recorded digitally. Before the interview, we informed them of their rights as participants of the study. The interview with the PWD lasted for 32 minutes while the interview with the business owner lasted for 41 minutes. The neighbors were also interviewed for more than 30 minutes. Probing questions were also asked. The interview was conducted in Tagalog and was transcribed and translated into English. For the observation, we had to go to the SE four times to observe. We spent not less than 6 hours each observation time. One of those days, there was a birthday celebration in the workplace. We observed how they interacted with everyone in the party and how the owner and other members of workplace treated them. Majority of the observation time was on how the PWDs did their work and how the owner supervised the entire process. All my observations were written in our field notes.

Documents (photographs, videos, and brochures) were part of the data collection. The photographs document how the PWD looked like before and how they look like now. Other photographs such as the awards the SE received and the PWDs with their relatives were also collected. Documentary videos from ABS-CBN, NET 25, and GMA (television networks in the Philippines) were utilized as data. The various ways of data collections ensure the credibility of the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). We also used member check to ensure the accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2009; Merriam 1998).

Data Analysis

After data collection, all interviews were transcribed verbatim and translated into English. The data were then grouped according to their attributes and then each group was labeled. We then identified and explored the critical relationships between the groups. After this, we made inferences about the data. From the data, themes were generated to answer the research questions.

Ethical Consideration

To observe ethical consideration, we gave the participants an informed consent form, emphasizing that their participation is voluntary and they could withdraw any time. We also explained that their confidentiality would be respected. However, they gave the permission to use their names in the study.

Researchers' Reflexivity

To secure the integrity of this study, we have to present our position in the research (Merriam, 2009). My wife and I were Christian missionaries before being employed in a Christian educational institution. Thus, helping the marginalized is an issue close to our hearts. Further, the owner of the SE is a childhood friend.

Results

The result of this study is presented based on the individual research questions. The findings suggest the following. First, an SE was a viable an ethical mechanism for the inclusion of PWDs in the economy. Second, mentoring was successful way of training PWDs for skills development that promotes a sense of value. Third, an SE could be an avenue for the empowerment of PWDs leading to their participation in socio-economic activities if healthy conditions supporting their experiences on their psychological needs were provided. Finally, the result of this study supports findings of previous studies that suggest that disability is socially constructed.

Research Question 1: How Did “Handcrafter by Harl’s” Begin?

Harley Dave Beltran, the owner of the Handcrafted by Harl’s, started his business in 2014 with the help of his friends. Initially, he wanted to start a business for money and fame. However, less than three months of operation, he met Ronald, a crippled man begging for money in Harley’s village. Harley and his wife approached and asked him if he wanted a stable and decent job. At first, Ronald was hesitant because he felt his disability hindered him from being productive but later on agreed. Harley confessed that this was the turning point of his life. He saw the importance of helping PWDs and the direction of his business changed towards social enterprising. At first, he did not know that what he was doing was social enterprising. He just did what he thought was best to help the PWDs. He only learned about SE after he met people in the same line of business (Owner, Interview, 4a-7a).

A month after employing Ronald, a neighbor was curious about what they were doing and particularly asked why a PWD would come to his place every day. After Harley explained everything, the neighbor requested him to employ some of the PWDs who were under the mute and deaf program of her church (Owner, Interview, 7k-9a). As he was financially incapable of employing more workers, Harley agreed to employ one PWD from the church.

However, after 3 days, the church sent three PWDs to work for him. He had no money to pay their salary because his business was just starting. Motivated to help the PWDs, he employed all three and surrendered it all to God. Miraculously, within that same week, he was able to open a store in Makati. Reflecting from this

experience, he said, “If you look at it, God provides the problem; He also provides the solution” (Owner, Interview, 11k). Harley confessed that he was strengthened by this miracle and this has motivated him to continue helping the PWDs in his community (Owner, Interview, 9m-11k).

Harley also acknowledged that starting an SE needs a lot of money. He had to borrow money from the bank and his friends. He and his wife even temporarily used the education fund for their daughter. In fact, based on his knowledge, he disclosed that he is the only poor social entrepreneur in the Philippines. Most SEs in the Philippines are owned by rich individuals (Owner, Interview, 17a-j). The British Council (2015) supports this by mentioning that individuals who own SEs in the Philippines also own large businesses.

Currently, he employs four mute and deaf and one crippled PWDs. They receive the same basic salary and benefits as other employees of their level. His long-term vision for them is to have their own business someday (Owner, Interview, 13m). He is optimistic of the future in helping PWDs because in his words, “Based on my experience in this business when God gives problems, blessings also come in abundance” (Owner, Interview, 12a).

Harley tells the PWDs, “We are not helping you. We are helping each other” (Owner, Interview, 45b-g). As an example, he said that his forte is selling. But in order to sell, he needs products. So the PWDs help him by making the products. Thus, they are helping each other. The owner of this SE promotes this mindset: “We have to work. That is the objective here. Our motto is help yourself” (Owner, Interview, 46d-k). He discourages self-pity. Instead, he promotes an environment that develops their sense of independence.

Unknowingly, Harley’s action leads to empowering the PWDs as both the social disability model (Oliver, 2013) and self-determination theories (Ryan & Deci, 2004) propose that social factors can affect a person’s self-esteem and sense of volition. As the owner of the SE, Harley promoted the empowerment of the PWDs by providing a healthy workplace environment that supports their psychological and physiological needs (see Travis 2014).

Research Question 2: What Process Has Been Employed by “Handcrafted by Harl’s” to Train and Employ Persons with Disability?

Using transcripts from interviews with the owner and the workers and field notes from the observations, Research Question 2 revealed the process employed by Handcrafted by Harl’s. These are sustainable skill development through mentoring, spiritual development through Bible study, and social development through sign language and financial management classes.

Sustainable skill development through mentoring. Sustainable skill development is the core of training the PWDs. This SE employs mentoring to train new workers. Based on the interview and observation, the data show that in *June 2018, Vol. 21, No. 1*

Handcrafted by Harl's, an expert worker is partnered with a novice one. When the novice does something wrong, the expert worker immediately corrects the mistake and guides the novice worker on how to do it right. The novice worker can also ask the assigned expert worker for help (Field Notes, J-P2). This system has also developed the bond between the workers. When the novice worker becomes an expert, he is then tasked to help the new ones.

Without his knowledge, the owner is employing *mentoring* to train his employees. Mentoring is an effective way of orienting and integrating new workers into their new workplace and at the same time develop their skills (Haines, 2003; Thomas, 2008). This kind of process is "framed through a mentor-protégé model" (Thomas, 2008, p. 47). In addition, mentoring has been found to contribute to the empowerment of those involved and the enhancement of their sense of value to their community (Lang, 2010; Thomas, 2008).

Harley also claims that the training process he has developed enables his workers to learn skills that can sustain them economically even if they are no longer working for him (Owner, Interview, 13m-u). His long-term goal is for his workers to have their own handicraft enterprise someday, so each worker is trained to know how to make every item in the shop.

Other businesses only assign one particular job to an employee. For example, if you are assigned to cut, that will be your job for the entire duration of your employment. Yes, they can have a salary but it is not sustainable. I don't want that we are dependent on each other forever. So I train them to make from a simple item to a more complicated one. For example, when they are new here, they make small purses and then when they are good at it, I start teaching them how to make bags. All of them can manufacture all the products that we have here. (Owner, Interview, 14-16a-s)

In a study conducted by Mina (2013), the researcher reports that most unemployed or underpaid PWDs do not have a college degree. Thus, training and employing PWDs that would eventually lead to start their own enterprise is one way of addressing the issues PWDs face in employment. In addition, developing their skills with the goal of having their own business promotes healthy self-esteem among the PWDs (see Magsanem-Conrad & Lee, 2016; Mruk, 2013).

Spiritual development through Bible study. Bible studies are conducted weekly in Handcrafted by Harl's. The enterprise is open to any religion that wants to share the Word of God (Owner, Interview, 28i-k; Field Notes, P3). Harley believes that as much as one must feed his or her body, he or she must also feed his or her spiritual life (Owner, Interview, 28a-c). He wants that he is able to help his workers not only financially but also spiritually. He thinks that spiritual growth can positively affect their lives. Further, he believes that Bible study is important for

him and his workers because the “requirement here [Handcrafted by Harl’s] is not the skill but the attitude” (Owner, Interview, 281-p).

Some authors suggest that spirituality (as an emotional and psychological factor) contributes to the empowerment of PWDs (Sabado, Tanjasiri, Alii, & Hanneman, 2013) especially those who are in difficult situations in life. Another study positively associates spirituality with self-esteem and personal empowerment (Uota, 2012). Sabado et al. (2013) reveal that people tend to “[turn] to God for guidance and relief” to cope with the challenges in life (para. 1). Spirituality contributes to the empowerment of the marginalized especially the PWDs. When PWDs often suffer discrimination and rejection from the society, their faith in a divine being can help them cope with their adverse situation in life. In this study, Handcrafted by Harl’s has promoted PWD empowerment through spiritual development.

Social development through sign language and financial management classes. Sign language and financial management classes are conducted in this SE. A church supports this SE by providing a sign language teacher. Harley even had to learn sign language to be able to communicate with the mute and deaf workers (Owner, Interview, 24c-e). All the people in Handcrafted by Harl’s are able to use sign language to improve the efficiency and flow of their work (Field Notes, OJ-P1).

In addition to a sign language class, Harley also teaches the PWDs financial management. He said, “I also teach them about the impact of the savings. It’s not how much you earn but how much you save” (Owner, Interview, 29a-j). Trainings such as these put the PWDs in the center of the development so that they can interact with the society and move forward to the direction of self-sufficiency leading to empowerment (see Hanif et al., 2017; World Health Organization, 2011; Wltavsky et al., 2014).

Research Question 3: What Is the Impact of Training and Employing Persons with Disability?

The analysis of the data revealed emerging themes on the impact of training and employing PWDs by Handcrafted by Harl’s. Subthemes are discussed under the main themes: impact on the community and impact on the PWDs’ life.

Impact on the community. Three subthemes emerged and were grouped under this main theme. This SE has an impact on the community by changing the mindset towards PWDs. It has created awareness on the needs of the PWDs. Handcrafted by Harl’s through training and employing the PWDs has benefited the community economically.

First is *the change of mindset towards PWDs*. Harley reports that one American businessperson who owned a factory in Laguna, Philippines visited Handcrafted by Harl’s. He was impressed with how this SE emphasizes on *June 2018, Vol. 21, No. 1*

employing PWDs and how they are able to manufacture quality products despite their impairments. As a result, he opened a mute and deaf department in his company and started hiring mute and deaf PWDs (Owner, Interview, 2a-g). Harley recognizes that his enterprise has “not only impacted the PWDs but also the mindset of others who have seen what we [they] are doing here” (Owner, Interview, 38i-r).

One worker (without disability) in Handcrafted by Harl’s surprisingly reveals that his PWD coworkers are easier to work with than some non-PWDs. They “are motivated and they carefully listen to instructions” (worker, interview, 4a-c). He explains that PWDs do their work efficiently and they do not complain even if the work is difficult (worker, interview, 5j-m). Harley has also observed that PWDs “are motivated to work. In fact, he [referring to Ronald, a crippled man] lives very far but he reports to work the earliest” (Owner, Interview, 39a-c). Harley infers that he has no problem with PWDs regarding their work ethics and efficiency. Overall, PWDs are efficient and productive in Handcrafted by Harl’s.

This result directly opposes the negative image on PWDs regarding employment such as low productivity and inefficiency in their workplace as found in other studies such as one done by (Cortes, 2013). The change of mindset especially on the capabilities of PWDs allows them to have equal opportunities in the job market (Lobrin-Satumba, 2016) and eradicates the barriers in their inclusion to the society resulting to their empowerment (Etieyibo & Omiegbe, 2016; Miller, 2008).

Second is that this SE has created *awareness on the needs of PWDs*. More and more people and companies want to invest in Handcrafted by Harl’s (Owner, Interview, 29n-u) because they have realized the importance of supporting PWDs through their training and employment. Local television networks such as the NET 25, GMA News TV, and DZMM Radio TV have covered the work of Handcrafted by Harl’s in one of their segments (document-Video 1, document-Pictures 1, Pictures 2) highlighting the need to support the needs of PWDs toward their empowerment. One neighbor even claims that because of this SE, he became aware that PWDs also need support (Neighbor, Interview, Ca-n).

Awareness is important so that the society can support the needs of the PWDs (Tacadao & De Luna-Narido, 2016). Based on the social model of disability, the awareness of the society on the needs of the PWDs can eliminate the discrimination and other barriers that hinder their empowerment (Goering, 2015).

Third is the economic benefits *that the employment of PWDs has on the community*. The community has now a viable and sustainable employment for PWDs. This SE has also provided the community a solution for those PWDs begging in the community. The church that could not find sustainable employment for PWDs (Neighbor, Interview, 7k-9a) now sends them to Harley for employment.

The ripple effect of employing PWDs in SEs cannot be understated because of its all-round effect in the lives of the employees, employers, and community. Employed PWDs not only have a sense of fulfillment because they are learning skills and earning an income but also are now able to contribute to the economic development of their community and country because they are now taxpayers. Overall, the benefits are recognizable because the PWDs who were once a burden to the community are now included in the economic growth.

This result has long been promoted by the UN (2015) saying that eradicating poverty must begin with the economic inclusion of the PWDs. Further, this socio-economic inclusion of the PWDs has been linked to poverty alleviation and economic growth (Naami & Mikey-Iddrisu, 2013). Ballesteros and Llanto (2017) have already seen the potential of an SE in promoting inclusive economic growth for the PWDs. The economic inclusion of the PWDs is a factor of their empowerment (UN, 2009).

Impact on the persons with disability's life. After analyzing the data, three subthemes emerged under this main theme. The training and employing of PWDs by Handcrafted by Harl's has (a) provided sustainable skill development, (b) developed positive self-esteem, and (d) promoted a sense of independence and self-reliance.

First, data showed that Handcrafted by Harl's has provided *sustainable skill development*. Ronald (the first PWD employed by Harl) recalls, "I did not have any skill. Although I studied basic electronics, I cannot apply it to earn a living" (PWD Worker, Interview, 4b-h). Asked if he feels he has now the skills that he can use to earn money, he answers, "Craft, I make leather bags and wallets" (PWD Worker, Interview, 4b-h 5e-h). Looking at the documents, we can conclude that Ronald and the other PWDs produce world-class quality products as many of the products from Handcrafted by Harl's are patronized even outside the country (document, Pictures 3, Pictures 5; Field Notes, OJ-P3).

Both local and international organizations have emphasized the importance of a sustainable skill development for the PWDs that ushers their inclusion in the job market (Lobrin-Satumba, 2016; World Health Organization, 2010). Wltavsky et al. (2014) also support that the best measurement of skill development training is on the employability of the PWDs. The willingness and initiative of the PWDs to grow and develop support the principle of empowerment (Jyothi, 2016).

Second is the *development of positive self-esteem*. When asked if how he sees himself now compared to before, Ronald reveals,

I feel good about myself now. Before, I felt embarrassed because I begged for money. Now, I feel like a normal person because I have a decent work like normal people. I don't feel and think that I have a disability. I feel like I am like others that can work. (PWD Worker, Interview, 4b-h 10-12b-j)

Ronald's statement implies when his social condition became healthy and supportive, his self-esteem has improved and he sees himself as an abled person in spite of his existing impairment. Ronald's positive self-esteem is enhanced because he now supports his family: For him, his impairment is no longer a disability.

Before, wherever I went, I felt like people looked at me as a beggar. Now not anymore, I can look at others eye to eye. (PWD Worker, Interview, 4b-h 14c-1)

Omolayo's (2009) study supports that self-esteem does not depend on PWDs' impairment but their mindset. Both the social model of disability and self-determination theory uphold this result because both support that disability is a socially constructed condition rather than a medical one (Goering, 2015; Oliver, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2004). Further, Naami and Hayashi (2011), Naami and Mikey-Iddrisu (2013), Nosek et al., (2003) and Yeo (2006) propose that positive self-esteem of the PWDs contributes to their inclusion of PWDs in the society.

Third, the data show that one of the impacts of this SE on PWDs is the *development of sense independence and self-reliance*. The PWDs in Handcrafted by Harl's are not dependent on others, especially for money. Ronald used to be a beggar. Now, he is the one supporting his family:

I am now helping my family. I share money to buy milk for my niece. I also support her for her education at the kindergarten level. I used to beg for money before here. Now that I am here, I work and earn money properly. Before, I was unsure if I would earn money. Now, I have weekly income. (PWD Worker, Interview, 4b-h, 21-23b-m)

During the interview, Ronald spoke with pride when he described how he earns money from his work in Handcrafted by Harl's and how he provides money for this family (Field Notes, P-20).

The skills training and the suitable and sustainable employment for PWDs provided by this SE have helped them become independent and self-reliant (see also Foruoka et al., 2011). Their economic independence is an avenue of addressing their poverty. Their independent lives and their participation in socio-economic activities are evidence of their empowerment.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to gain insights into the ways a local SE in Laguna, Philippines has empowered PWDs through training and employment and its impact on the community and the PWDs. Handcrafted by Harl's is an SE owned by Harley Beltran. Harley showed the potential of SE in creating a supportive environment to empower PWDs. For him, his PWD workers may be differently abled but they are definitely empowered (document-Picture 6). Handcrafted by Harl's employs three major components in training PWDs workers: (a) sustainable skill development through mentoring, (b) spiritual development through Bible study classes, and (c) social development through sign language and financial management classes.

The training and employing of PWDs by Handcrafted by Harl's have impacted the community and the lives of the PWDs. A number of individuals have changed their mindset on the work ethics and work efficiency of PWDs. Through Handcrafted by Harl's, the community has become aware of the needs of the PWDs in terms of their economic inclusion. Finally, the community has found a way to lessen its poverty rate as Handcrafted by Harl's provides job opportunities for unemployed PWDs.

The interpretation of the data also revealed that an SE could impact the lives of the PWDs. They have developed skills to start their own business. Positive self-esteem has also been developed as one of the participants claimed that he no longer sees himself as disabled. Finally, the employment has led to healthy sense of independence and self-reliance.

One of the major findings of this study is the viability of an SE as an ethical mechanism for the inclusion of PWDs in the economy. The result of this study also shows that mentoring can be an effective way of training PWDs for vocational skills development that can benefit both the mentee PWDs and the mentor PWDs. This study has also provided support on the social model of disability. A striking statement from the PWD participant "I don't feel and think that I have a disability" strengthens that disability is socially constructed.

This study puts forward the following recommendation. First, the government must support SEs for the employment of PWDs such as certain tax exemptions for SEs. Researchers can further explore the relationship of spiritual development and empowerment of PWDs. Finally, business owners can try to open their doors for sustainable employment of PWDs.

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