

Experiences of HR Practitioners in Handling Labor Relations

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of Human Resource (HR) practitioners in managing labor relations within private companies in General Santos City, Philippines. Against a backdrop of evolving labor laws, growing employee awareness, and socio-economic challenges, HR professionals often serve as key figures in resolving workplace conflicts, enforcing policies, and advocating for both organizational goals and employee rights. The study aims to capture how these practitioners understand, navigate, and respond to the everyday realities of labor relations, particularly in non-unionized settings where formal grievance mechanisms are often limited or absent.

Using a qualitative, descriptive phenomenological approach, the research engaged ten HR practitioners from various sectors—including retail, manufacturing, hospitality, services, and other private enterprises. Participants were selected through purposeful sampling method and aided by snowball technique to ensure relevance and depth of experience. Data collection was done through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, and Colaizzi's seven-step method was applied to analyze the narratives, revealing recurring patterns and shared meanings.

From the thematic analysis, six major themes emerged: emotional resilience, adaptive labor relations, negotiating influence within organizational power structures, balancing compliance with compassion, contextualizing labor practices, and a continuous commitment to improvement. These themes reflect the emotional intensity, strategic complexity, and ethical balancing acts that characterize the HR role. They also highlight how local culture, economic conditions, and organizational structures influence how labor relations are practiced on the ground.

Ultimately, the study enriches the conversation on human-centered HR management by presenting an authentic view of HR practitioners' challenges and strategies in a regional, real-world context. It offers practical insights for strengthening HR systems, shaping responsive labor policies, and supporting the mental and professional well-being of HR professionals. These findings are especially relevant for policymakers, organizational leaders, and future researchers aiming to create fairer, more compassionate, and culturally attuned approaches to labor relations.

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CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

➤ *The Problem and its Setting*

Labor relations is a critical dimension of human resource management, encompassing the policies, practices, and processes that shape interactions between employers and employees. These relationships are central to conflict resolution, communication, disciplinary action, grievance handling, employee engagement, and the cultivation of a collaborative and respectful workplace culture. Effective industrial relations enhance organizational productivity, promote employee commitment, and foster a healthy workplace environment (Armstrong & Taylor, 2017; Bratton & Gold, 2017). Conversely, poorly managed employee relations can lead to workplace tensions, low morale, high turnover, and potential legal conflicts stemming from perceived injustices or unresolved grievances.

The increasing complexity of workplace dynamics, both globally and locally, has intensified the demand for deeper insights into how human resource (HR) practitioners manage employee relations. Internationally, the rise of labor-related tensions—exemplified by the “Great Resignation” in the United States and parts of Europe—reflects employees’ growing dissatisfaction with work conditions, limited career growth, and weak managerial relationships (Cook, 2022). De Smet et al. (2021) report that modern workers are not only concerned with compensation, but are also driven by the desire for meaningful work, open communication, and respectful treatment. These shifting employee expectations place significant responsibility on HR professionals to manage engagement, retention, and workplace harmony amid increasing volatility.

In addition to voluntary exits, structural labor policy changes have exacerbated these challenges. A study by Jones and Smith (2023), published in the *Labor Studies Journal*, found that right-to-work laws in the United States—designed to limit union power—are correlated with a rise in unfair labor practice charges. This suggests that weakened collective bargaining environments may lead to increased employer misconduct and deteriorating employee relations. As traditional worker protections erode, HR practitioners are called upon more than ever to uphold fairness, mediate disputes, and enforce labor standards in often under-regulated and high-pressure environments.

In the Philippine context, labor relations remain strained by persistent issues such as unfair labor practices, contractualization, low union representation, and wage disparities. While the Labor Code of the Philippines and Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) regulations are designed to safeguard workers' rights, their enforcement is frequently inconsistent—often influenced by organizational culture, regional policies, and managerial discretion (DOLE, 2021). Studies by Lansang and Almoite (2020) and Magsino (2019) have highlighted the difficulties HR professionals face in reconciling legal compliance with operational performance expectations. Filipino HR practitioners often find themselves mediating between management objectives and employee welfare, requiring them to demonstrate not only regulatory expertise but also emotional intelligence, discretion, and resilience.

Culturally, the Philippines’ high power distance and collectivist orientation—emphasizing authority, group harmony, and deference to superiors—create unique dynamics in workplace relations. According to Hofstede Insights (2021), these cultural attributes make it more challenging for employees to express grievances openly, thus placing the burden on HR practitioners to detect, interpret, and resolve issues proactively. However, despite these complexities, there is limited scholarly literature that captures the lived experiences of HR professionals who function as the central mediators in this delicate balance.

Locally, in General Santos City—a fast-developing economic zone in Southern Mindanao—HR practitioners face even more context-specific challenges. The city's economy is driven by labor-intensive sectors such as agribusiness, fishing, canning, and logistics, which are often marked by low job security, safety concerns, and minimal worker protections. Data from the National Labor Relations Commission (NLRC, 2022) indicate a steady rise in labor complaints and mediation requests in Region XII, pointing to unresolved workplace issues that require skilled and empathetic HR intervention. Moreno and de la Cruz (2021) emphasize that disparities in HR practices across regions lead to increased workplace friction and dissatisfaction, especially in industries characterized by physical risk and economic instability.

Despite these national and local realities, there remains a significant gap in empirical research focused on the firsthand experiences of HR practitioners in the Philippines, particularly in secondary cities like General Santos. Most existing studies prioritize employee perspectives or organizational outcomes using quantitative approaches, often overlooking the rich, subjective experiences of those responsible for managing employee relations on the ground (Garcia & Reyes, 2018). A qualitative, phenomenological design—focusing on lived experiences—offers the opportunity to surface these untold narratives and provide a deeper, more human-centered understanding of HR work in complex labor environments.

Thus, this study is both timely and necessary. It aims to explore and document the lived experiences of human resource practitioners in General Santos City as they navigate the intricate realities of employee relations. By amplifying their voices, the study seeks to inform more responsive, localized, and culturally attuned HR policies and practices. Ultimately, it aspires to contribute to a more inclusive and grounded discourse in the field of human resource management—one that not only considers

institutional frameworks and labor trends but also values the insights of those working at the intersection of policy, people, and practice.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section of the study discusses the theoretical/conceptual framework of the study and facts and principles to which the present study is related. The review of literatures and studies serve as the foundation of the study by providing a frame of reference for the current research.

➤ *Experiences of HR Practitioners in Handling Labor Relations*

The experiences of Human Resource (HR) practitioners in handling labor relations are shaped by various organizational, cultural, and legal factors. The literature indicates that HR professionals play a critical role in managing and resolving labor disputes, navigating complex labor laws, and maintaining a balance between the interests of management and employees. In the context of City, HR practitioners encounter unique challenges and employ a range of strategies to address labor-related issues.

Kaufman and Taras (2020) emphasize the evolving nature of labor relations, with HR professionals needing to balance the competing interests of employees and employers.

This dynamic is particularly relevant, where businesses across diverse sectors, such as retail, manufacturing, and services, face pressures from both local labor laws and organizational goals. HR practitioners in the city navigate these pressures by employing flexible labor relations strategies that align with both the legal framework and the company's objectives.

Becker and Strauss (2021) highlight the importance of HR practitioners' personal experiences in managing labor conflicts. They argue that conflict management is not just a technical skill but also involves personal judgment and experience. HR professionals share similar experiences, often recounting how they mediate disputes by using a combination of negotiation, empathy, and legal knowledge. These practitioners often express the need to develop strong interpersonal skills to handle sensitive issues, such as employee grievances or disputes over labor conditions, which are common in the city's private sector.

In exploring the intersection of workplace culture and labor relations, Kaufman and Givens (2020) reveal that organizational culture profoundly influences HR practices. HR professionals adapt to different organizational cultures, which vary across industries like retail, manufacturing, and hospitality. They develop culturally sensitive approaches to labor relations that ensure compliance with both national labor laws and the unique needs of the employees within specific sectors. For example, HR professionals in the manufacturing sector may focus more on labor safety and working conditions, while those in the service industry might emphasize conflict resolution related to employee performance and customer service.

Harris and Naylor (2020) discuss the importance of HR practitioners' perspectives on conflict resolution. In City, HR professionals report that managing labor conflicts requires a delicate balance between legal compliance and maintaining employee morale. The city's rapidly growing sectors, such as retail and hospitality, present frequent challenges in managing labor disputes, particularly in light of employee turnover and rising labor demands. HR practitioners in these sectors often rely on structured conflict resolution mechanisms, such as mediation and employee assistance programs, to address workplace disputes effectively.

Michaels and Sharrock (2021) examine how HR practitioners align company policies with national labor laws. This issue is particularly salient in City, where HR professionals must navigate the complexities of labor law compliance, including the implementation of minimum wage standards and workers' rights to benefits. As the legal landscape evolves, HR practitioners must stay updated on changes in national labor regulations, ensuring that company policies reflect these legal requirements. This legal alignment is critical in maintaining harmonious labor relations and avoiding costly litigation or regulatory penalties.

Phillips and Brown (2020) discuss the transformation of HR's role in labor relations, noting that HR professionals are increasingly involved in shaping labor relations strategies that go beyond mere compliance. HR practitioners in City mirror this trend, with many taking proactive roles in fostering a positive workplace culture that emphasizes collaboration and mutual respect. They recognize that effective labor relations are not just about enforcing policies but also about creating a work environment where employees feel valued and heard.

Jenkins and Smith (2021) focus on experiential learning for HR professionals, arguing that continuous learning is crucial for effective labor relations management. HR practitioners in City often cite training and professional development as key factors in their ability to handle labor relations effectively. Workshops on conflict management, labor law, and communication skills are commonly mentioned as tools that enhance their ability to resolve disputes and improve employee satisfaction.

Warren and Gilbert (2021) explore the challenges HR professionals face in balancing the interests of management and employees. This challenge is particularly pronounced in City, where HR practitioners must often navigate the tension between the operational goals of private companies and the rights of their workers. HR professionals report that they must manage competing demands—ensuring compliance with labor laws, addressing employee concerns, and helping the company maintain profitability.

Kellerman and Aitken (2022) provide insight into the strategies HR practitioners use to handle labor relations. HR professionals in City often implement conflict resolution strategies such as employee feedback systems, mediation, and collaborative decision-making. These strategies help create an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect, which is essential for resolving disputes and preventing future conflicts.

Finally, Carter and Wilson (2020) discuss how HR professionals in the Philippines approach labor relations challenges within the private sector. In City, HR practitioners adopt strategies that are tailored to the local socio-economic conditions, such as understanding the specific needs of workers in various industries and aligning their practices with the broader goals of the community. This localized approach is critical for fostering effective labor relations in the region, where HR professionals must also be attuned to cultural nuances and economic challenges unique to the area.

➤ *Challenges Encountered by HR Practitioners*

The challenges faced by HR practitioners in implementing labor relations strategies are multifaceted and vary depending on the sector, organizational culture, and external factors such as labor laws and socio-economic conditions. Research from various sources reveals that HR professionals consistently face difficulties in navigating the complexities of labor disputes, the balancing of management and employee interests, and the application of labor laws effectively in dynamic environments.

One significant challenge identified by Smith and Jensen (2021) is the difficulty small businesses face in implementing labor relations strategies. These organizations often lack the resources and structures to manage labor relations effectively, leading to a reactive rather than proactive approach. This is in contrast to larger firms, where more formalized HR processes are often in place. Similarly, Jameson and Ricci (2020) discuss how HR professionals often encounter barriers to effective strategy implementation due to unclear organizational policies or inadequate training for HR staff in handling complex labor issues.

Another key issue is the conflict between labor relations strategies and the organizational culture, as highlighted by Martinez and Owens (2022). Structural and cultural barriers, such as entrenched power dynamics or lack of communication, hinder HR's ability to mediate between labor and management. In many cases, HR practitioners struggle to advocate for employee needs while maintaining organizational priorities, particularly in environments where top management does not prioritize labor relations as a strategic concern.

The hospitality and small business sectors, in particular, face unique challenges. According to Nguyen and Phillips (2020), HR professionals in the hospitality industry must contend with high turnover rates and a diverse workforce, which complicates the management of labor relations. Similarly, Lee and Khan (2021) found that HR professionals in the private sector encounter challenges related to varying industry standards, which require tailored approaches to labor relations that differ from one business type to another.

Moreover, global challenges, as explored by Walker and Chapman (2022), emphasize the importance of understanding labor relations in a cross-cultural context. Global HR professionals face the additional challenge of balancing international labor standards with local regulations and company-specific practices, further complicating the implementation of labor relations strategies.

These challenges are compounded by external factors such as legal constraints, as discussed by Gonzalez and Estrada (2020) in their study on the Philippines. HR professionals in General Santos City, as in many parts of the world, must ensure compliance with local labor laws, including regulations on wages, benefits, and dispute resolution. The complex legal landscape often requires HR professionals to stay updated with evolving labor laws and adjust strategies accordingly.

➤ *Practices and Approaches are Employed by HR Practitioners*

HR practitioners employ various strategies and approaches to manage and resolve labor-related conflicts in the workplace, and these strategies are essential in fostering harmonious relationships between employees and management. According to Caldwell and Davis (2021), one of the primary practices HR professionals use to address conflicts is through structured conflict resolution strategies. These strategies typically involve open communication, negotiation, and in some cases, the use of third-party mediators to facilitate dialogue and find mutually agreeable solutions.

Kelley and Thomas (2022) suggest that HR interventions play a critical role in resolving workplace conflicts. These interventions include mediation, where HR professionals act as neutral parties to help disputing employees reach a resolution. Mediation techniques, as discussed by Green and James (2021), involve fostering understanding between conflicting parties, encouraging empathy, and guiding them to explore collaborative solutions. In situations where mediation may not be sufficient, HR may employ negotiation tactics to ensure that both parties come to a fair agreement, as emphasized by Parker and Johnson (2021).

In addition to mediation and negotiation, HR professionals in unionized environments often use arbitration as a conflict resolution tool. Johnson and Robinson (2021) highlight that arbitration provides a formalized method for resolving disputes,

where a neutral third party makes binding decisions based on the issues presented. This process is particularly relevant in labor relations where unions are involved, as it provides a legal framework for dispute resolution.

Bell and Wilson (2020) further examine the diverse range of conflict resolution strategies available to HR practitioners, which include proactive strategies like creating clear workplace policies and fostering a supportive organizational culture that encourages collaboration and open communication. These approaches are designed to prevent disputes before they arise, ensuring that employees feel heard and valued.

Chavez and Cooper (2022) provide insights into strategic HR practices aimed at long-term conflict management. These strategies include developing training programs for managers and employees on effective communication, conflict resolution techniques, and stress management. This proactive approach to conflict management is vital for maintaining a positive working environment.

King and Shaw (2020) emphasize that HR practitioners play a significant role in establishing and maintaining effective labor relations strategies in the private sector. They recommend creating clear guidelines for conflict resolution and ensuring that HR professionals are well-trained in applying these strategies when necessary. This training enables HR practitioners to respond quickly and effectively when conflicts arise.

Morgan and Miller (2022) highlight the importance of adapting conflict resolution strategies to the specific context of the workplace, recognizing that each situation may require a tailored approach. Whether dealing with personal conflicts, collective bargaining issues, or management-employee disagreements, HR professionals must be equipped to handle each situation with a strategy that aligns with the organization's values and goals.

In multinational companies, as noted by Evans and Chang (2021), HR best practices for labor dispute resolution involve understanding and respecting diverse cultural perspectives, which may influence how conflict is perceived and managed. Effective HR conflict resolution strategies in these settings often require cross-cultural training and sensitivity to ensure that all parties are treated fairly.

HR practitioners employ a variety of conflict resolution approaches, ranging from mediation and arbitration to proactive training and policy development. The effectiveness of these strategies depends on the specific context of the dispute, the organizational culture, and the available resources, but they all share the common goal of fostering a positive and productive workplace environment.

➤ *Organizational Policies, Labor Laws, and Local Socio-Economic*

National labor laws provide a foundational framework that governs employment practices, ensuring fair treatment and protection of workers' rights across regions. However, in practice, HR practitioners must adapt these national regulations to the unique challenges posed by their local environment (Hernandez & Morales, 2020). Organizational policies are often crafted to align with labor laws, but they also reflect internal company priorities such as productivity, efficiency, and employee engagement (Javier & Flores, 2020). These policies must remain flexible to accommodate the changing demands of both the workforce and the law (Pimentel & Santiago, 2021). Additionally, the socio-economic landscape characterized by varying levels of economic development, employment opportunities, and income disparities further complicates the labor relations environment. Companies operating in areas with high unemployment or poverty may face pressures to offer competitive wages and benefits while maintaining compliance with labor standards (De Guzman & Reyes, 2021; Torres & Silva, 2021).

HR practitioners must therefore balance organizational interests with employee welfare, navigating challenges such as compliance, labor disputes, and workforce retention in an economically diverse setting (Manalo & Villar, 2022). The enforcement of labor laws can also vary depending on local economic conditions, with some businesses struggling to meet legal standards due to resource constraints (Ramos & Cruz, 2022). Ultimately, the effective management of labor relations in General Santos City hinges on the ability of HR professionals to harmonize legal obligations, internal policies, and the socio-economic realities of their workforce (Bautista & Ramos, 2022; Fernandez & Garcia, 2020).

➤ *Theoretical Framework*

This study is grounded in three interrelated theories—Systems Theory, Equity Theory, and Psychological Contract Theory—which together illuminate how Human Resource (HR) practitioners navigate labor relations within complex organizational environments.

Systems Theory (Von Bertalanffy, 1968) conceptualizes an organization as an open system of interdependent subsystems, including HR processes, management decisions, employee behaviors, and external regulatory bodies. In labor relations, a change in one subsystem (e.g., disciplinary action) inevitably affects others (e.g., employee morale, union responses), creating ripple effects throughout the organization. Effective HR practice, therefore, requires holistic coordination across these subsystems to maintain stability, productivity, and legal compliance (Kast & Rosenzweig, 1972).

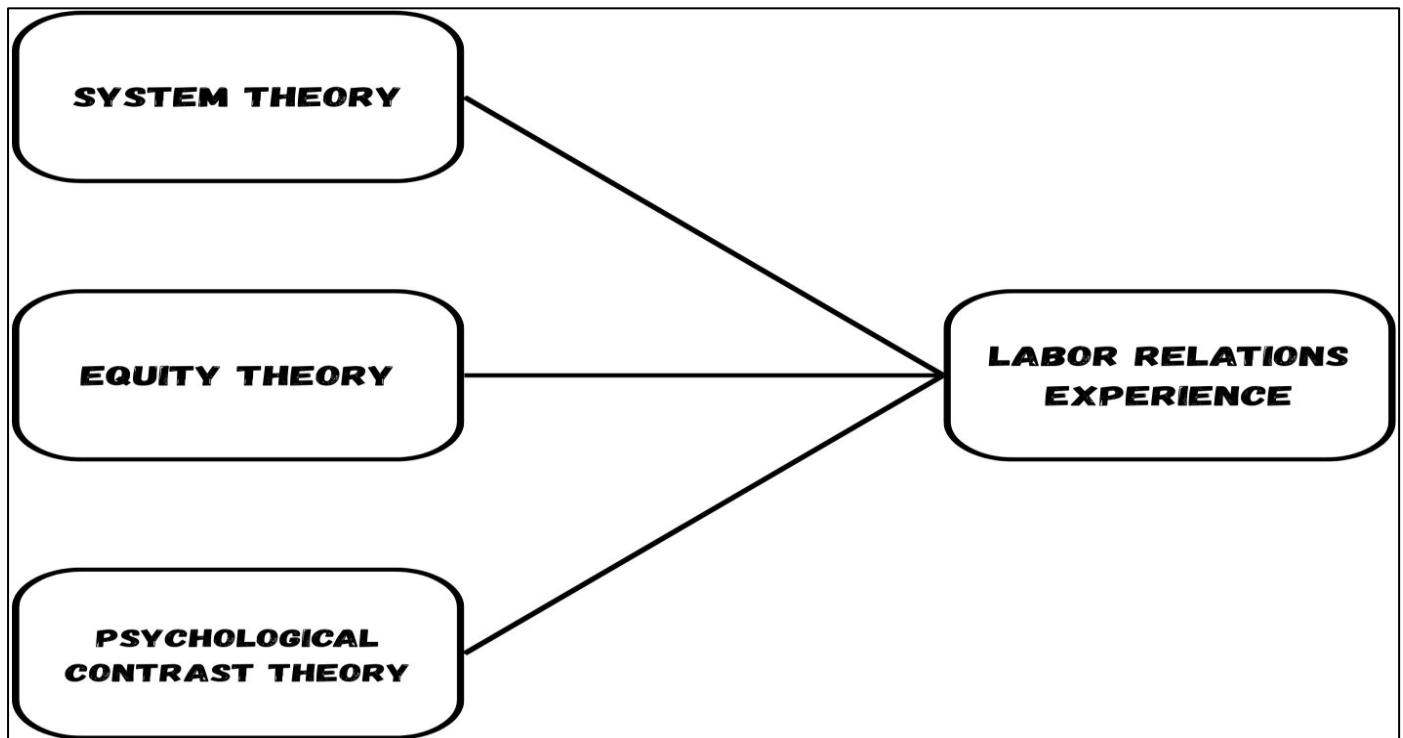


Fig 1 Theoretical Framework

The Equity Theory (Adams, 1963) centers on perceptions of fairness: employees compare their inputs (effort, skills, experience) and outcomes (salary, recognition, advancement) against those of their peers. When perceived inequities arise, they can trigger dissatisfaction, conflict, and labor disputes—areas directly managed by HR practitioners. By designing transparent compensation, promotion, and disciplinary processes, HR can mitigate perceptions of injustice and foster workplace harmony (Greenberg, 1990).

On the other hand, Psychological Contract Theory (Rousseau, 1989) highlights the tacit, unwritten promises that form between employers and employees, encompassing expectations of job security, career growth, respectful treatment, and reciprocal support. Breaches of these psychological contracts—often occurring during organizational change or unresolved grievances—can lead to feelings of betrayal, eroded trust, and diminished engagement. HR practitioners play a pivotal role in identifying contract violations, clarifying expectations, and restoring trust through open communication, renegotiation, and supportive interventions.

Together, these three theories provide a comprehensive lens for examining how HR practitioners in General Santos City experience, manage, and adapt to the multifaceted challenges of labor relations. Systems Theory situates HR within the broader organizational ecosystem, Equity Theory explains the motivational and fairness-based drivers of conflict, and Psychological Contract Theory uncovers the emotional and relational dynamics that formal policies alone cannot address.

➤ *Statement of the Problem*

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand and describe the lived experiences of Human Resource (HR) practitioners in handling labor relations in General Santos City. At this stage in the research, the labor relations is generally defined as the HR practitioners' approaches, perceptions, and challenges in managing employee engagement, resolving workplace conflicts, ensuring fairness, and maintaining harmonious employer- employee relationships within the organizational system.

➤ *Scope and Delimitation*

This study explores the lived experiences of Human Resource (HR) practitioners in managing labor relations within the private sector of General Santos City, Philippines. It specifically examines the practices, challenges, and strategies that HR professionals use in addressing key labor-related concerns, including conflict resolution, grievance handling, disciplinary procedures, employee engagement, and compliance with labor laws and internal company policies. The primary objective is to understand how HR practitioners interpret and carry out their roles amid the intersecting demands of legal frameworks, organizational priorities, and socio-cultural norms.

The study takes place in the year 2025, a period marked by evolving labor practices due to regulatory reforms, post-pandemic workplace transitions, and increasing employee awareness of workplace rights. The geographical focus is limited to General Santos City, a fast-growing economic center in Southern Mindanao known for its industries in agribusiness, fisheries, logistics, and manufacturing. These sectors present distinct labor concerns, making the location a relevant and timely context for the

research.

The study focuses on HR practitioners—including managers, officers, and specialists—who are directly involved in labor relations within private companies. It excludes HR professionals from government agencies, public institutions, and non-governmental organizations, as well as other labor stakeholders such as union leaders, employees, and external consultants. By concentrating on HR practitioners, the research aims to capture authentic, first-hand narratives from those primarily responsible for implementing labor-related policies and handling employee relations on the ground.

The study employs a qualitative phenomenological research design, using in-depth interviews (IDIs) as the primary method of data collection. This approach allows the researcher to gather rich, descriptive accounts of personal and professional experiences, rather than rely on numerical data or generalizable trends. While some supporting contextual information—such as company background or the frequency of labor cases—may be referenced, the research remains fundamentally qualitative and interpretive in nature.

It is important to note that the study does not aim to evaluate the overall effectiveness of national labor laws or corporate policies, but instead centers on the experiential dimension of how such frameworks are applied and negotiated by HR practitioners in their daily work. As such, the findings are not intended for nationwide generalization, but are context-specific to General Santos City. This focused scope allows for a deeper and more meaningful understanding of HR-led labor relations within a defined socio-economic and cultural context, offering insights that contribute to more responsive HR practices, localized policy development, and future academic inquiry.

➤ *Significance of the Study*

This study provides critical insights into the lived experiences of human resource (HR) practitioners in General Santos City, specifically within the private sector. As workplace dynamics continue to evolve—marked by changes in labor laws, increasing employee awareness of rights, and the growing prevalence of hybrid work models—HR professionals face increasingly complex and under-researched challenges. By utilizing a phenomenological approach, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the practical realities involved in labor dispute resolution, policy enforcement, and employee engagement, filling a significant gap in both academic and professional HR research.

For government agencies and policy making bodies like, the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), the National Conciliation and Mediation Board (NCMB), and the National Labor Relations Commission (NLRC) as it provides empirical insights into the lived experiences of HR practitioners handling labor disputes, policy enforcement, and employee relations within the private sector in General Santos City. By uncovering the challenges faced by HR professionals, this research supports the refinement of labor policies, dispute resolution mechanisms, and compliance strategies. It offers valuable input for enhancing the relevance and responsiveness of labor programs, particularly in regional contexts, and aids in the development of more targeted interventions and training initiatives. Ultimately, the findings contribute to the formulation of inclusive, context-sensitive labor governance strategies that promote harmonious industrial relations and protect both employer and employee interests.

For HR practitioners, this study offers a valuable opportunity to reflect on their professional experiences, challenges, and coping strategies. By sharing these insights, HR professionals in the region engage in peer learning, inspiring improvements in HR policies and practices. Additionally, the findings prompt HR departments to enhance their conflict management frameworks and adopt strategies that better align with evolving employee expectations and labor law reforms.

The company management and business owners will benefit from the study by gaining a clearer understanding of the support HR departments' need to handle labor-related issues effectively. This research highlights the practical demands HR professionals face in navigating labor relations and offers actionable insights that help improve organizational practices, foster positive employee relations, and enhance overall workforce productivity. Strengthening HR capacity at the organizational level leads to better retention, improved workplace morale, and a more resilient organizational culture.

For future researchers, this study provides a clear pathway for further exploration of HR practices in regional settings, particularly in secondary cities where the dynamics of labor relations may differ from major urban centers. Researchers interested in expanding the field of HR management use this work as a reference point for comparative studies, longitudinal research, or interventions aimed at improving labor relations practices. Additionally, future studies may delve deeper into specific industries, employee demographics, or cultural influences that shape HR practices in other parts of the Philippines or Southeast Asia.

For the researcher, this study represents an opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the field of human resource management and labor relations in the Philippines. By exploring the lived experiences of HR practitioners, the research brings a more nuanced, context-sensitive understanding of labor relations to the academic community and HR professionals. This study also informs the researcher's personal growth, providing a deeper appreciation for the challenges and ethical considerations involved in navigating the intersection of organizational objectives, employee welfare, and labor law compliance.

CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the different procedures on how the study will be conducted. This includes discussion of the over-all design of the study as well as the locale, respondents, research instrument, and how the data will be analyzed.

➤ *Research Design*

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological descriptive research design to explore and describe the lived experiences of Human Resource (HR) practitioners in handling labor relations. A phenomenological approach was deemed appropriate as it focuses on capturing and interpreting participants' lived experiences to understand how they perceive and make meaning of specific phenomena in their professional lives (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). In particular, descriptive phenomenology provides a structured way to present the essence of these experiences without superimposing the researcher's interpretations, aligning well with the study's goal to understand HR practitioners' perspectives in their natural context (Giorgi, 2009).

The phenomenological method has been widely used in studies that seek to understand professional and organizational experiences, especially in human resource and organizational behavior research. For instance, a study by van Manen (1990) emphasized the relevance of phenomenology in understanding workplace dynamics and practitioner experiences, noting that such an approach provides depth, authenticity, and nuance to subjective experiences.

To identify suitable participants, the study employed purposeful sampling, specifically the snowball sampling technique. Purposeful sampling is a common strategy in qualitative research where participants are selected based on specific characteristics relevant to the study (Palinkas et al., 2015). Snowball sampling, a subset of this approach, allows initial participants to refer other qualified individuals, enabling the researcher to reach informants with direct experience and expertise in labor relations—an area where access to professionals may be limited (Noy, 2008).

The participants of the study were HR practitioners based in General Santos City who are actively engaged in labor relations functions, including employee grievance handling, dispute resolution, disciplinary procedures, and union negotiations. These practitioners were selected because of their firsthand involvement in managing the dynamics between employers and employees, which is essential to the study's aim of capturing real-world insights.

Data were gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews, which are widely regarded as an effective tool in qualitative research for eliciting detailed and rich data (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). This method allowed the researcher to guide the conversation using a flexible interview guide while also permitting participants to freely share their thoughts and experiences. The semi-structured format enabled probing into emerging themes while maintaining consistency across interviews.

This research design is suited to meet the objectives of the study, which focus on understanding the lived experiences, challenges, coping strategies, and reflective insights of HR practitioners in the labor relations context. It aligns with other qualitative studies in HR and labor relations, such as those conducted by Bingham and Nabatchi (2010), who highlighted the value of qualitative approaches in capturing the complexities of dispute resolution processes in organizations.

➤ *Selection of Participants*

The participants for this study will be selected using purposeful sampling specifically the snowball technique, a method commonly used in qualitative research to identify individuals with specific knowledge or experience related to the research topic. In this case, the participants will be Human Resource (HR) practitioners who are actively involved in handling labor relations within private companies in General Santos City. To ensure the participants have relevant expertise, the study will target HR professionals with at least two years of experience in managing labor relations, such as resolving conflicts, handling grievances, ensuring compliance with labor laws, and overseeing disciplinary actions. The selection will aim to include a diverse group of participants from various industries, including retail, manufacturing, hospitality, and services, in order to capture a wide range of experiences and challenges encountered by HR professionals in different organizational contexts. Participants will be recruited based on their role and direct involvement in labor relations management. The study will exclude HR practitioners from public sector organizations or those with limited exposure to labor relations. A total 10 participants will be selected to ensure that the data collected is rich and reflective of the various practices and challenges faced by HR professionals in the region. Ethical considerations, such as informed consent and confidentiality, will be strictly adhered to throughout the participant selection process and data collection.

Table 1 Distribution of Participants

Industry Sector	Number of Participants	Criteria
Retail	2	HR practitioners from private retail companies in General Santos City
Manufacturing	2	HR practitioners from private manufacturing companies in General Santos City
Hospitality	2	HR practitioners from private hospitality (hotels, restaurants, etc.)

Services	2	HR practitioners from private service- oriented businesses (e.g., call centers, healthcare)
Other (e.g., IT, Real Estate)	2	HR practitioners from other private sectors in General Santos City
Total	10	A diverse representation of private sector HR professionals

Table 1 provides a detailed distribution of the study's participants across various industry sectors within the private sector in General Santos City. A total of 10 HR practitioners will be selected from five different sectors: retail, manufacturing, hospitality, services, and other industries such as IT and real estate. Each sector will contribute two participants, ensuring a diverse representation of HR professionals who can offer insights into the unique challenges and practices in managing labor relations within their respective industries. HR practitioners from the retail sector will provide perspectives on handling high employee turnover, seasonal staffing, and customer-related grievances. Participants from the manufacturing sector will offer insights into labor relations in unionized environments and safety-related issues. In the hospitality sector, HR professionals will share experiences related to high-stress working conditions, part-time staff, and employee retention challenges. The services sector participants, coming from industries like call centers and healthcare, will discuss managing shift work, employee well-being, and interpersonal conflicts. Finally, the other sectors, such as IT and real estate, will bring additional perspectives on handling highly skilled labor, competitive compensation, and project-based work. This diverse sample ensures a comprehensive exploration of labor relations management practices across different contexts, providing valuable insights into the challenges and strategies employed by HR practitioners in General Santos City.

➤ *Research Instrument*

The primary research instrument for this study will be a semi-structured interview guide, designed to explore the experiences of Human Resource (HR) practitioners in managing labor relations within private companies in General Santos City. This approach allows for flexibility, enabling participants to share their personal insights while ensuring that key research questions are addressed. The interview guide will include open-ended questions that focus on several key areas: the lived experiences of HR practitioners in handling labor disputes and grievances, the challenges they face in implementing labor relations strategies, the practices and approaches they use to manage and resolve conflicts, and how organizational policies, labor laws, and local socio-economic conditions influence their practices. Additionally, participants will be asked for recommendations to improve labor relations within their organizations. The semi-structured format will allow the researcher to probe deeper into responses and explore issues as they arise, providing a comprehensive understanding of labor relations management. Interviews will be conducted either in-person or via online platforms, depending on participant availability, and will be audio-recorded with the participants' consent to ensure accurate data collection. The transcribed responses will be analyzed using thematic analysis, identifying common themes and patterns to provide valuable insights into the labor relations practices of HR professionals in General Santos City.

➤ *Data Gathering Procedure*

The data gathering procedure for this study will follow a systematic and ethical approach to accurately capture the experiences of HR practitioners in managing labor relations within private companies in General Santos City. Initially, ethical approval will be obtained from the relevant research ethics board, and participants will be informed of the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to confidentiality. Each participant will be asked to sign an informed consent form, which details the study's purpose, the interview process, and how the data will be used, ensuring transparency and ethical conduct.

The participants will be selected using purposive sampling, targeting HR practitioners with at least two years of experience in labor relations. They will be contacted via email or phone to schedule the interview. Once consent is obtained, interviews will be scheduled at times and locations convenient for the participants, either in person, over the phone, or through online platforms like Zoom or Skype, depending on their availability. The interviews will be semi-structured, allowing the researcher to use a pre-designed guide while also providing flexibility for further exploration based on the participants' responses. Each interview will last around 45 to 60 minutes and will be audio-recorded with the participants' consent to ensure accuracy.

After the interviews, the audio recordings will be transcribed verbatim, with the transcripts stored securely and anonymized to maintain confidentiality. Thematic analysis will be used to analyze the transcribed data, identifying recurring themes and patterns related to labor relations practices, challenges, and strategies. Finally, the findings will be compiled into a report and shared with participants upon request, providing valuable insights and recommendations for improving labor relations practices in private companies in General Santos City. This structured process ensures that the data collection is conducted ethically, thoroughly, and with attention to participant confidentiality.

➤ *Data Analysis*

For this study, Colaizzi's (1978) method of phenomenological data analysis will be employed to thoroughly examine and interpret the data collected from semi-structured interviews with HR practitioners. This method provides a structured and rigorous framework that is particularly well-suited for uncovering the rich, lived experiences of individuals. The analysis will begin with

the researcher immersing themselves in the data by carefully reading and re-reading the interview transcripts.

This initial step of familiarization allows the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' perspectives, contexts, and emotions related to handling labor relations. Following this, significant statements relevant to the research questions will be identified and extracted from the transcripts. These statements include participants' descriptions of challenges, strategies, interactions, and perceptions in managing labor relations, and serve as the foundational elements of the analysis.

Once these significant statements are collected, the researcher will move to the next step: formulating meanings from each statement. This involves interpreting the underlying significance or essence of the statements while remaining grounded in the participants' original words and intent. The researcher carefully reflects on each statement's context to ensure that the formulated meanings accurately represent the participants' experiences without distortion or bias.

After formulating meanings, the researcher will group these into clusters of themes. These thematic clusters organize the data into coherent categories that highlight recurring patterns or shared experiences across participants, such as conflict resolution methods, compliance challenges with labor laws, communication difficulties, or the socio-economic factors influencing labor relations practices.

Building on these clusters, an exhaustive description of the phenomenon will then be constructed. This description synthesizes all the emergent themes into a detailed, integrative narrative that portrays the complexity, depth, and nuance of HR practitioners' experiences in handling labor relations. The researcher will then distill this exhaustive description into a fundamental structure—a concise yet comprehensive statement that captures the core essence of the phenomenon as experienced by the participants. This fundamental structure serves as a clear summary that encapsulates the main findings of the study.

In accordance with Colaizzi's emphasis on validation, the researcher will return the findings to the participants through member checking. This step allows participants to review and confirm whether the analysis accurately reflects their lived experiences, ensuring credibility and authenticity in the study's results. Participants may provide feedback or clarification, which will be thoughtfully integrated into the final analysis. Finally, the findings will be compiled into a comprehensive report that presents the themes and insights derived from the data, offering valuable implications and recommendations for improving labor relations practices among HR practitioners in private companies within General Santos City. Through this meticulous and reflective seven-step process, Colaizzi's method ensures a thorough, credible, and meaningful analysis that faithfully represents the lived experiences of HR practitioners managing labor relations.

➤ *Ethical Consideration*

Ethical considerations are fundamental in ensuring the trustworthiness of qualitative research, especially when dealing with human participants. This study adheres to Lincoln and Guba's four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, by integrating ethical principles throughout the research process.

To establish credibility, the study emphasizes informed consent and transparency. Participants will receive a comprehensive consent form that explains the purpose of the research, the nature of their involvement, the use of semi-structured interviews, and the expected time commitment. Participation is entirely voluntary, and participants may withdraw at any time without consequences. Transparency is also demonstrated through the researcher's commitment to integrity—ensuring that data collection, analysis, and reporting are conducted honestly and objectively. Participants will be offered the opportunity to review and verify the interpretations of their responses, enhancing the authenticity of the findings.

For transferability, the study provides sufficient contextual detail in its methodology and ethical design to allow others to assess the relevance of the findings to other settings. The informed consent form includes clear descriptions of the participants' roles, data collection methods, and interview structure, which contribute to a thick description of the research context. Additionally, the study will undergo formal ethical approval from a recognized research ethics board to ensure adherence to standard ethical guidelines, further supporting the potential applicability of the findings to other contexts.

In terms of dependability, the research process will follow systematic and well-documented procedures. The standardized use of informed consent, consistent application of data collection protocols, and careful management of participant rights—such as the option to withdraw without penalty—ensure reliability in how the study is conducted. All interview data, including audio recordings, will be securely stored in password-protected files accessible only to the researcher and authorized personnel. Ethical approval will provide an external audit trail confirming the dependability of the research process.

Lastly, to achieve confirmability, the study ensures that findings are grounded in participant responses rather than researcher bias. Confidentiality and anonymity are strictly maintained by anonymizing participants' identities and securely storing all data. No personal identifiers will be used in the reporting of results. The researcher will conduct interviews with sensitivity to participants' mental well-being and privacy, allowing them to skip any questions they find uncomfortable. These measures safeguard the

neutrality and objectivity of the research. Ethical approval and a clear audit trail also reinforce confirmability, ensuring that the data and interpretations are supported by transparent documentation and ethical oversight.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter presents the findings of the study using Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological method. It explores the lived experiences of Human Resource (HR) practitioners in managing labor relations, compliance, organizational challenges, and emotional demands. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, from which significant statements were extracted and analyzed to identify formulated meanings. These meanings were grouped into theme clusters, ultimately leading to the development of six emergent themes. These themes reflect the core experiences of HR professionals as they navigate complex organizational landscapes and balance the needs of both management and employees.

The narratives revealed key insights into how HR practitioners respond to various internal and external pressures within their organizations. The researcher identified twenty (20) significant statements, which were synthesized into six (6) emergent themes. These emergent themes reflect the central experiences of HR professionals and the dynamic contexts in which they operate. The emergent themes are as follows:

➤ *Theme 1: Emotional Resilience*

The emergent theme of emotional resilience highlights the ability of Human Resource (HR) practitioners to manage and withstand the emotional and psychological demands inherent in handling labor relations. This theme surfaced strongly in the narratives of HR professionals who shared their experiences in navigating conflicts, grievances, employee discipline, and organizational change—all of which often involve high levels of stress and emotional labor.

The corresponding cluster identified under this theme is emotional and psychological pressures in HR practice. These pressures stem from the complex role HR plays as both the voice of the management and the advocate for employees, requiring a delicate balance between empathy and objectivity. HR practitioners frequently deal with sensitive employee issues, such as mental health concerns, interpersonal conflicts, and ethical dilemmas, which can take a toll on their own emotional well-being.

• *Participant Stated that:*

“One of the biggest challenges is maintaining neutrality. As HR, we are expected to stand as the middle ground between employees and management. But emotionally, it's tough—especially when you know that some grievances are deeply personal. There's also the fear of backlash from either side if one party feels unheard or unfairly treated.”

(Transcript 1, Page 1, Line 17-21)

“Honestly, there's burnout. Sometimes it feels like you're absorbing everyone's stress. When employees vent frustrations or cry in the office, we carry that emotionally. There are nights I go home thinking about unresolved issues or whether I handled a case fairly. It takes a toll mentally if you don't learn how to set boundaries.”

(Transcript 1, Page 2, Line 27-30)

“It takes a toll mentally if you don't learn how to set boundaries.”

(Transcript 1, Page 2, Line 34-35)

In the interview, participants discussed the emotional challenges faced by HR Practitioners, particularly in conflict resolution and handling sensitive issues such as termination. They emphasized the importance of maintaining emotional resilience to handle the stress and emotional burden that come with HR responsibilities. HR practitioners often bear the emotional weight of their decisions, especially when dealing with employees' job security and personal issues. The participant's insights into the HR processes revealed a significant emotional toll, especially during mediation, legal compliance, and termination processes. The HR role demands not just professionalism but also emotional fortitude, as it involves balancing company policies with human concerns, making it an emotionally taxing profession.

Their approach to boundary-setting in conflict resolution, ensuring fairness, and providing employees a chance to voice their concerns highlights how HR professionals must guard their emotional well-being while being empathetic to others. This reflects a deep emotional resilience that enables HR professionals to continue their duties despite the challenging circumstances.

Kaufman and Taras (2020) emphasize the evolving nature of labor relations, with HR professionals needing to balance the competing interests of employees and employers. This dynamic is particularly relevant, where businesses across diverse sectors, such as retail, manufacturing, and services, face pressures from both local labor laws and organizational goals.

➤ *Theme 2: Adaptive Labor Relations*

The second emergent theme is Adaptive Labor Relations, which highlights the strategic efforts of HR practitioners to manage workplace dynamics and employee relations in a non-unionized environment. The corresponding theme cluster is strategic labor relations, emphasizing proactive and flexible HR approaches in the absence of formal union structures.

In non-unionized settings, HR professionals are required to develop alternative mechanisms to ensure employee voice, promote fairness, and effectively address grievances. These mechanisms include implementing open-door policies, initiating regular employee engagement activities, and utilizing internal communication platforms that promote transparency and trust. Instead of relying on collective bargaining agreements, HR practitioners leverage clear policies, consistent rule enforcement, and informal negotiation processes to manage workforce concerns.

• *As Stated by the Participant:*

“In the absence of a union, we place greater emphasis on proactive employee engagement. We maintain open lines of communication, conduct regular feedback sessions, and provide platforms where employees feel safe to express their concerns. This approach helps us stay attuned to workplace issues and make timely adjustments to our strategies, ensuring that employee welfare is still prioritized even without formal union representation.”

(Transcript 2, Page 7, Line 131-136)

“We make it a point to involve them early. We hold open discussions and encourage them to voice their side. It's important they feel part of the solution, not just recipients of a decision.”

(Transcript 3, Page 10, Line 194-196)

“In non-unionized settings, like us, there's more flexibility. We can resolve issues quicker, usually through direct HR intervention or departmental meetings.”

(Transcript 3, Page 10, Line 186-188)

These insights reveal that adaptive labor relations entail proactive HR strategies that foster engagement, promote effective communication, and strengthen overall employee relations. HR practices must be dynamic and responsive to meet the evolving needs of both employees and the organization. The ability to engage employees meaningfully and maintain open communication channels is critical.

Employee engagement initiatives serve as key tools for maintaining motivation and satisfaction (Kular et al., 2008). Consistent interaction between HR and employees, combined with prompt responsiveness to concerns, ensures that the workforce feels heard and valued. Maintaining open communication through feedback sessions and one-on-one dialogues not only improves employee trust but also allows early identification of potential issues, mitigating conflicts before they escalate (Wilkinson, Dundon, Donaghey, & Freeman, 2014).

Direct HR intervention also emerged as a critical strategy in non-union contexts. This involves HR taking immediate and visible actions to resolve grievances, address performance concerns, and guide workplace behavior. As noted in the literature, direct intervention is often more effective in smaller or flatter organizational structures, enabling quicker conflict resolution and reinforcing a culture of support and accountability (Marchington & Wilkinson, 2012).

➤ *Theme 3: Negotiating Influence within Organizational Power Structure*

The third emergent theme, Negotiating Influence Within the Organizational Power Structure, captures the nuanced role of HR practitioners as they navigate organizational barriers and internal constraints to assert their influence and drive labor relations strategies. This theme illustrates the delicate balancing act HR professionals perform to gain legitimacy and decision-making authority within hierarchical systems that may traditionally marginalize the HR function.

• *As per the Participant:*

“We face resistance to change, limited resources, and sometimes a lack of buy-in from top leadership. Externally, labor laws, compliance demands, and union involvement add layers of complexity. Aligning all these elements with the company's objectives is not always straightforward.”

(Transcript 2, Page 5, Line 91-94)

“We have rigid reporting protocols that discourage employees from directly communicating with HR. Also, performance evaluation tools that aren’t regularly updated can become a source of misunderstanding and dissatisfaction, which in turn affects labor harmony.”

(Transcript 3, Page 6, Line 109-112)

“Labor relations require continuous engagement—dialogues, surveys, trainings— but when we’re short-staffed or have limited budgets, these programs get delayed or deprioritized. For example, we wanted to launch a grievance mediation workshop last year, but budget constraints pushed it back indefinitely.”

(Transcript 2, Page 6, Line 114-117)

One of the major challenges highlighted in the interview is the negotiation HR professionals face within the broader organizational structure, particularly with top management. The participant emphasized that having the necessary buy-in from top-level executives is crucial for implementing effective HR strategies and policies. Without the support or approval of higher-ups, HR practitioners can face resistance when attempting to enact new policies or enforce existing ones, leading to a lack of progress in critical areas like labor relations, compensation adjustments, or employee welfare improvements.

Moreover, the participant mentioned that rigid protocols, while necessary for legal compliance, often pose a challenge, as they can hinder flexibility in addressing unique employee situations. For instance, if a protocol is too rigid, it may not allow HR to provide personalized solutions or offer exceptions when needed, which could harm labor relations.

Resources also emerged as a common challenge. Limited resources, both in terms of budget and manpower, can greatly impede HR’s ability to implement initiatives or support employees effectively. This highlights the struggle HR professionals face in balancing organizational demands with the available resources to carry out their duties.

One significant challenge identified by Smith and Jensen (2021) is the difficulty small businesses face in implementing labor relations strategies. These organizations often lack the resources and structures to manage labor relations effectively, leading to a reactive rather than proactive approach. This is in contrast to larger firms, where more formalized HR processes are often in place. Similarly, Jameson and Ricci (2020) discuss how HR professionals often encounter barriers to effective strategy implementation due to unclear organizational policies or inadequate training for HR staff in handling complex labor issues.

Kelley and Thomas (2022) suggest that HR interventions play a critical role in resolving workplace conflicts. These interventions include mediation, where HR professionals act as neutral parties to help disputing employees reach a resolution. Mediation techniques, as discussed by Green and James (2021), involve fostering understanding between conflicting parties, encouraging empathy, and guiding them to explore collaborative solutions. In situations where mediation may not be sufficient, HR may employ negotiation tactics to ensure that both parties come to a fair agreement, as emphasized by Parker and Johnson (2021).

➤ *Theme 4: Mediating between Compliance and Compassion*

The fourth emergent theme, Mediating Between Compliance and Compassion, emphasizes the HR practitioner’s complex role in balancing policy, legal, and compliance realities with empathy and human-centered decision-making. This theme reflects the constant tension HR professionals face as they uphold organizational policies and labor laws while also addressing the individual needs and emotional well-being of employees.

The corresponding cluster, policy, legal, and compliance realities, includes strict adherence to labor laws, company regulations, due process in disciplinary actions, and regulatory reporting. These formal requirements often leave little room for flexibility, especially in situations involving employee infractions, terminations, or contractual obligations.

• *Participant Stated that:*

“We conduct regular internal HR audits, and we review our compliance checklist quarterly. We also require department heads to attend labor-related seminars. Most importantly, we document every HR process—from hiring to termination—to protect both the company and the employee.”

(Transcript 4, Page 12, Line 239-242)

“Termination of employment is the most sensitive. Even with just cause, if due process isn’t followed, we risk legal complaints. Other challenges include contractualization issues and ensuring correct computation of final pay and benefits.”

(Transcript 4, Page 12, Line 244-246)

“DOLE’s regular inspections push us to always review and update our practices. We can’t ignore the legal framework—it drives many of our initiatives.”

(Transcript 2, Page 7, Line 126-128)

The participant’s experiences also reflect the delicate balance HR practitioners must maintain between compliance with legal demands and demonstrating compassion towards employees. A recurring challenge mentioned was the termination of employees, which is a sensitive process that can often lead to legal disputes if not handled carefully. According to the participant, even when termination is necessary for just cause, HR must follow the due process meticulously to avoid complications such as legal complaints from the affected employee. This places HR practitioners in a position where they must comply with strict legal requirements while also being mindful of the human element involved.

Additionally, HR professionals are tasked with ensuring that employees’ rights are protected while also maintaining the company’s best interests. This balancing act requires compassion, especially when HR is dealing with personal issues such as employee grievances or disciplinary actions. The participant highlighted the importance of showing empathy and providing clear communication, even when enforcing company policies, which makes HR’s role particularly challenging.

DOLE inspections, as mentioned in the interview, are another example of how legal requirements constantly shape HR practices. The pressure to ensure compliance with labor laws and regulations often adds to the HR burden, as failure to adhere to these standards can lead to significant consequences for the company. This reinforces the need for HR practitioners to manage the tension between legal obligations and their commitment to creating a fair and compassionate work environment.

In addition to mediation and negotiation, HR professionals in unionized environments often use arbitration as a conflict resolution tool. Johnson and Robinson (2021) highlight that arbitration provides a formalized method for resolving disputes, where a neutral third party makes binding decisions based on the issues presented. This process is particularly relevant in labor relations where unions are involved, as it provides a legal framework for dispute resolution.

Another key issue is the conflict between labor relations strategies and the organizational culture, as highlighted by Martinez and Owens (2022). Structural and cultural barriers, such as entrenched power dynamics or lack of communication, hinder HR’s ability to mediate between labor and management. In many cases, HR practitioners struggle to advocate for employee needs while maintaining organizational priorities, particularly in environments where top management does not prioritize labor relations as a strategic concern.

➤ Theme 5: Contextualized Labor Practices

The fifth emergent theme, Contextualized Labor Practices, underscores the importance of adapting HR and labor relations strategies to the socio-economic context and local workforce realities. This theme reflects the understanding that labor practices cannot be uniformly applied across different settings, as they are heavily influenced by external conditions such as regional economic disparities, cultural norms, education levels, and employment alternatives available to the local labor force.

The corresponding cluster theme, impact of socio-economic context and local workforce realities, emphasizes how factors such as poverty, underemployment, rural versus urban dynamics, and community expectations shape the way HR practitioners approach employee engagement, discipline, compensation, and workforce development. For instance, in economically disadvantaged areas, job security and livelihood stability are often more valued than benefits or organizational perks, requiring HR to frame policies with a high level of cultural and economic sensitivity.

• As Stated by the Participant:

“Many workers here are breadwinners. So, we must be extra sensitive to their concerns about wages, job security, and health benefits.”

(Transcript 4, Page 13, Line 254-256)

“We try to stay above the minimum wage to retain skilled workers. Given inflation and rising living costs in Gensan, we also offer meal subsidies and transportation support when possible. We’re aware that even small benefits can make a big difference.”

(Transcript 4, Page 13, Line 259-261)

“We keep our communication very local and culturally sensitive. We also partner with local service providers, like health clinics and micro-finance institutions, to provide support. We know that by helping our workers with real-life issues, we also strengthen labor relations.”

The participant's insights also revealed a strong awareness of the local realities of General Santos City, particularly the socio-economic conditions that impact their labor practices. As they mentioned, many workers in Gensan are breadwinners, and their concerns about wages, job security, and health benefits are shaped by the economic conditions of the region. In response, Evo Gene Seeds Corporation adopts compensation strategies that go beyond the minimum wage and offer additional benefits like meal and transport subsidies, which are directly informed by the local socio-economic setting.

Moreover, HR strategies are adapted to ensure that employees, regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds, are treated fairly. The participant spoke about how disparities in income and education affect employee behavior and voice within the company, leading to tailored HR strategies that focus on educating employees about their rights and ensuring access to grievance mechanisms. Their integration of local cultural aspects into HR practices, such as communicating in a culturally sensitive manner and partnering with local service providers, is another example of how labor practices are contextualized. This sensitivity to the local environment, culture, and economic landscape forms an integral part of HR practitioners' lived experiences, helping them create effective and responsive labor practices.

➤ *Theme 6: Commitment to Continuous Improvement in Labor Relations*

The sixth emergent theme, Commitment to Continuous Improvement in Labor Relations, emphasizes the proactive stance of HR practitioners in evaluating and sustaining effective labor strategies. This theme reflects the recognition that labor relations is not a static function, but a dynamic and evolving practice that requires regular assessment, innovation, and adaptation to remain effective and aligned with organizational goals.

The corresponding cluster, evaluating and sustaining effective labor strategies, focuses on the importance of feedback mechanisms, data-driven decision-making, benchmarking, and reflective practice in HR. It involves using employee feedback, grievance trends, exit interviews, audit results, and performance metrics to assess the effectiveness of existing policies and interventions. Based on these insights, HR practitioners revise or redesign strategies to better address employee needs and prevent recurring issues.

• *The Participants Stated that:*

“We look at turnover rates, the number of grievances filed, and the results of our employee satisfaction surveys. But beyond numbers, we also assess the overall morale in the workplace—whether employees feel heard and supported.”

(Transcript 4, Page 14, Line 268-271)

“One success was the implementation of our Labor-Management Committee, which helped reduce disputes and encouraged employee participation. On the downside, we once launched a performance incentive program that created confusion and resentment due to unclear criteria. That was a learning moment—we realized that communication and clarity are key to successful implementation.”

(Transcript 1, Page 3, Line 52-56)

Another critical theme from the interview was the commitment to continuous improvement. The participant emphasized the importance of monitoring tools such as turnover rates and grievance metrics as vital for assessing the effectiveness of HR strategies. These tools help HR practitioners track trends in employee satisfaction, performance, and potential areas of concern. For example, high turnover rates can signal deeper issues within the organization, while frequent grievances may indicate dissatisfaction that requires intervention.

The use of monitoring tools aligns with the HR department's commitment to adapting and improving its labor practices based on real-time data. By continuously analyzing turnover and grievance metrics, HR can implement timely changes to policies or interventions to enhance employee satisfaction and retention.

Additionally, the implementation of Labor Management Committees (LMCs) is another key strategy highlighted by the participant. LMCs are collaborative platforms where both management and labor representatives discuss issues and collaborate on solutions. These committees serve as a practical approach to improving labor relations by promoting direct dialogue between employees and management, ensuring that grievances are addressed in a timely and constructive manner. This collaborative approach strengthens the relationship between HR, management, and employees, fostering a culture of continuous improvement.

CHAPTER FIVE

IMPLICATION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study highlight the complex and evolving role of HR practitioners as they navigate the intricate interplay between organizational dynamics, legal compliance, and interpersonal relationships within the workplace. Central to these findings is the recognition that HR professionals face significant emotional demands, underscoring the necessity for institutional support mechanisms. Research by Brotheridge and Lee (2002) emphasizes that emotional labor in HR roles, especially in conflict resolution and employee relations, can lead to burnout if left unaddressed. This study's findings reinforce the critical need for organizations to establish structured psychological support and peer networks, which have been shown to mitigate stress and enhance job satisfaction (Halbesleben, 2006). Without such systems, the emotional toll on HR practitioners may undermine their effectiveness, ultimately impacting organizational performance.

Additionally, the study reveals that in non-unionized environments, HR practitioners adopt a dual role as both advocates for employees and enforcers of organizational policies. This duality calls for a proactive and people-centered HR strategy that fosters trust while managing conflicts. As noted by Kaufman (2015), non-unionized workplaces demand more nuanced labor relations approaches, where HR must balance compliance with employee engagement. This strategic approach is essential to prevent adversarial relationships and maintain a cooperative workplace culture.

Moreover, the findings point to organizational barriers that limit HR's influence, reflecting a need for greater executive recognition of HR as a strategic partner. Ulrich's (1997) model of HR business partnering supports this by emphasizing that HR must move beyond administrative functions to become integral in shaping organizational strategy. Without such empowerment, HR's capacity to implement meaningful changes and advocate for employees is constrained, reducing overall organizational agility.

The challenge of upholding labor laws while demonstrating empathy further underscores the need to recalibrate company policies. Studies by Gittell et al. (2006) highlight how compassionate organizational policies that also comply with legal standards improve employee morale and reduce turnover. This balance is essential in fostering a legally sound yet human-centered workplace culture, which is increasingly recognized as vital in contemporary HR management.

Finally, the study identifies budget constraints and staffing shortages as critical barriers to effective labor relations management. This finding aligns with the work of Paauwe and Boselie (2005), who argue that adequate resource allocation is fundamental to sustaining HR initiatives and achieving long-term organizational goals. Insufficient resources not only hamper continuity but also risk compromising the quality of employee relations, which are pivotal for organizational stability and growth.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, several key conclusions can be drawn about the role and practices of HR practitioners in the given context. Firstly, HR professionals demonstrate a high degree of emotional resilience, effectively managing the stress and emotional burden associated with labor relations. They show a deep awareness of local socio-economic realities and cultural factors that shape their daily practices. This is evident in their conscious effort to set boundaries that balance professional duties with personal well-being, while simultaneously addressing the broader social and economic challenges faced by employees. Contextualized labor practices are essential, with HR adapting compensation packages, such as offering wages above the minimum and providing additional benefits like meal subsidies and transportation, to meet the specific needs of the local workforce. This culturally sensitive approach fosters a supportive and inclusive workplace environment that strengthens labor relations.

Secondly, HR practitioners operate within complex organizational power structures where securing top-level support and adequate resources often presents significant challenges. These limitations sometimes compel HR to enforce rigid protocols, reducing flexibility in addressing employee concerns. Nevertheless, HR professionals continually strive to balance strict legal compliance with compassion, particularly in sensitive matters such as employee terminations and contractualization. Navigating legal demands, including compliance with DOLE inspections and termination procedures, requires careful adherence to due process, yet practitioners consistently demonstrate empathy to ensure fair and humane treatment of employees even under difficult circumstances.

Thirdly, the study reveals a strong commitment among HR professionals to continuous improvement through proactive labor relations strategies. Rather than adopting a purely reactive stance, HR actively engages employees via open communication channels and direct intervention. The use of tools like turnover rates and grievance tracking enables HR to monitor satisfaction levels and identify areas needing enhancement. Initiatives such as Labor-Management Committees and other feedback mechanisms exemplify HR's ongoing efforts to evolve labor relations practices to better align with the needs of both the organization and its workforce, reflecting adaptability to changing external and internal conditions.

Finally, the findings highlight the critical importance of balancing legal obligations with empathy in HR decision-making. National labor laws heavily influence HR strategies, especially regarding employee terminations and compliance with regulatory requirements. Ensuring due process and thorough documentation is fundamental to safeguarding the interests of both employees and the organization. Simultaneously, HR remains sensitive to the socio-economic realities faced by employees, many of whom serve as breadwinners in challenging financial circumstances. The local economic environment, including minimum wage issues and cost-of-living pressures, plays a significant role in shaping HR policies. By offering wellness programs, training opportunities, and support for personal growth, HR demonstrates a holistic approach that addresses not only legal compliance but also the well-being and development of employees, ultimately fostering more resilient and positive labor relations.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed to improve HR practices and labor relations within organizations.

To address the emotional resilience required of HR practitioners, organizations should collaborate with external wellness providers or mental health professionals to design tailored emotional resilience training programs, integrating these into regular professional development initiatives.

Additionally, holistic employee support programs that include mental health services and personal development opportunities can help reduce burnout and promote overall well-being. In line with the need for adaptive labor relations, companies are encouraged to offer flexible benefits packages that allow employees to customize their benefits, such as healthcare, childcare, or transportation allowances, helping to alleviate financial burdens. Formalizing and regularly updating Labor-Management Committees with clear guidelines and sufficient resources will also foster collaborative problem-solving and strengthen labor relations.

To enhance HR's influence within organizational power structures, HR departments should present regular impact assessments demonstrating the tangible benefits of HR initiatives—such as improved retention, reduced turnover costs, and increased productivity—to secure consistent top-level support and resource allocation.

Balancing legal compliance with compassion requires HR professionals to engage in specialized training, including workshops or certification programs on labor laws and conflict management, utilizing case studies and role-playing to better prepare them for complex, sensitive situations. Given the importance of contextualized labor practices, HR teams should collaborate with cultural and socio-economic experts to design policies that reflect workforce diversity, incorporating cultural awareness training, financial literacy workshops, and family support programs to enhance employee engagement.

Finally, a commitment to continuous improvement calls for organizations to implement continuous feedback loops and regular employee check-ins to dynamically monitor satisfaction and adjust policies as needed. Maintaining and strengthening mechanisms such as Labor-Management Committees and other feedback systems will ensure HR policies evolve in response to workforce needs. For future research, longitudinal studies could examine the long-term effects of HR initiatives on employee outcomes, comparative studies might explore differences across industries and cultures in legal compliance approaches, and investigations into HR technology's impact on employee engagement and practitioner resilience would be valuable. Additionally, exploring socio-economic disparities' effects on employee perceptions of HR policies could inform the creation of more equitable workplaces.

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“APPENDIX A”



NOTRE DAME OF DADIANGAS UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL
DOCTOR IN MANAGEMENT PROGRAM
Marist Avenue, General Santos City



April 30, 2025

Dear Sir / Madam:

Good day!

I am **Ranie P. Pacheca**, a Doctor in Management student majoring in Human Resource Management at Notre Dame of Dadiangas University. I am conducting a study titled *“Experiences of HR Practitioners in Handling Labor Relations.”*

You have been identified as a key participant due to your professional experience in HR. I respectfully invite you to participate in a 45–60-minute in-depth interview at your preferred time and location, either in person or virtually.

Your participation is voluntary, and all information will be treated with strict confidentiality. The data collected will be used solely for academic purposes. With your permission, the interview may be recorded for accuracy.

Thank you for considering this invitation. I look forward to your insights. Sincerely,

MR. RANIE P. PACHECA

Researcher Noted by:

DR. RUE FLORA P. RUIZ

Adviser

INFORMED CONSENT AND DATA PRIVACY ASSURANCE FOR SURVEY PARTICIPATION

Dear Participants, Greetings!

I am Ranie P. Pacheca, a graduate student of Doctor in Management major in Human Resource Management at Notre Dame of Dadiangas University. I am conducting a research study entitled:

"Experiences of HR Practitioners in Handling Labor Relations"

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the lived experiences of HR Practitioners in handling labor relations in General Santos City. You are invited to participate in a one-on-one interview, where your thoughts, insights, and reflections will provide valuable contributions to this academic endeavor.

Participation in this study will involve a recorded interview lasting approximately 30 to 60 minutes. You may decline to answer any question and may withdraw from the interview at any point without any consequences.

This research adheres to the ethical standards set by the **Data Privacy Act of 2012 (RA 10173)**. All information shared during the interview will be kept strictly confidential. Your name and any identifying details will be anonymized in the final report to protect your identity. The recordings and transcripts will be securely stored and will only be accessible to the researcher and academic adviser for validation purposes.

By participating in this interview, you are acknowledging that you have been informed of the study's purpose, voluntary nature, and your rights as a participant.

Kindly indicate your consent by checking (✓) the box below:

- **YES**, I have read and understood the purpose of the study. I voluntarily agree to participate and give my consent for the use of my responses for academic research purposes.
- **NO**, I do not wish to participate in the study.

“APPENDIX B”**➤ “Experience of Human Resource Practitioners in Handling Labor Relations” (Human Resource Practitioners)****• Directions:**

The purpose of this interview is to gain insights into the experiences, challenges, and strategies employed by Human Resource (HR) practitioners in handling labor relations in General Santos City. Your responses will contribute to a deeper understanding of labor relations practices and the dynamics that HR professionals face in managing these relationships within various organizational settings.

- Main Question 1: What are the lived experiences of HR practitioners in handling labor relations in General Santos City?
- Research Guide Question 1.1: What personal challenges do HR practitioners face when dealing with labor relations in General Santos City?
- Developing Question 1.1.1: How do HR practitioners describe their personal experiences in managing employee disputes in the workplace?
- Developing Question 1.1.2: What emotional or psychological challenges do HR practitioners encounter in labor relations management?
- Developing Question 1.1.3: How do HR professionals cope with the pressure of balancing organizational goals with employee rights and welfare?
- Research Guide Question 1.2: How do HR practitioners perceive the effectiveness of labor relations strategies in General Santos City?
- Developing Question 1.2.1: In your experience, how effective are current labor relations strategies in promoting employee satisfaction and productivity?
- Developing Question 1.2.2: What successes or failures have HR practitioners encountered when implementing labor relations strategies?
- Developing Question 1.2.3: How do HR professionals measure the success of labor relations strategies in their organizations?
- Main Question 2: What are the common challenges encountered by HR practitioners in the implementation of labor relations strategies?
- Research Guide Question 2.1: What organizational barriers do HR practitioners face in implementing labor relations strategies?
- Developing Question 2.1.1: How do company leadership and organizational culture influence the implementation of labor relations strategies?
- Developing Question 2.1.2: Are there any specific policies or practices within your organization that hinder effective labor relations?
- Developing Question 2.1.3: How do resource constraints, such as budget or manpower, impact the implementation of labor relations strategies?
- Research Guide Question 2.2: How do external factors (e.g., government regulations, labor unions) affect the implementation of labor relations strategies?
- Developing Question 2.2.1: How do national labor laws and regulations influence the strategies HR practitioners adopt in General Santos City?
- Developing Question 2.2.2: How do labor unions play a role in shaping HR strategies for labor relations in the workplace?
- Developing Question 2.2.3: What external pressures (e.g., economic conditions, societal attitudes) impact labor relations strategy implementation?
- Main Question 3: What practices and approaches are employed by HR practitioners to manage and resolve labor-related conflicts?
- Research Guide Question 3.1: What conflict resolution techniques do HR practitioners use in addressing labor-related disputes?
- Developing Question 3.1.1: What specific methods (e.g., mediation, negotiation) do HR practitioners use to address conflicts between employees and management?
- Developing Question 3.1.2: How do HR professionals approach the resolution of conflicts in unionized versus non-unionized workplaces?
- Developing Question 3.1.3: How effective do HR practitioners perceive these conflict resolution methods to be in terms of long-term workplace harmony?
- Research Guide Question 3.2: How do HR practitioners involve employees in conflict resolution processes?
- Developing Question 3.2.1: To what extent do HR practitioners involve employees in decision-making during the conflict resolution process?
- Developing Question 3.2.2: How do HR practitioners ensure that both management and employees have a fair opportunity to present their perspectives during conflict resolution?
- Developing Question 3.2.3: What role does communication play in resolving conflicts, and how do HR practitioners facilitate open dialogue during disputes?

- Main Question 4: How do organizational policies, labor laws, and local socio-economic conditions influence labor relations practices in General Santos City?
- Research Guide Question 4.1: How do national labor laws shape the labor relations practices of HR practitioners in General Santos City?
- Developing Question 4.1.1: How do HR professionals in General Santos City ensure compliance with national labor laws in their organizations?
- Developing Question 4.1.2: What are the most common legal challenges HR practitioners face in implementing labor relations practices?
- Developing Question 4.1.3: How do changes in national labor laws impact HR strategies and practices in General Santos City?
- Research Guide Question 4.2: How do local socio-economic conditions influence labor relations practices in General Santos City?
- Developing Question 4.2.1: How do the economic conditions of General Santos City impact HR decisions regarding wages, benefits, and employee welfare?
- Developing Question 4.2.2: How do socio-economic disparities among employees affect HR practices related to labor relations and conflict resolution?
- Developing Question 4.2.3: How do HR practitioners adapt labor relations strategies to address the unique socio-economic realities of their workforce in General Santos City?