

# The lived experiences of occupational therapist and speech pathologist on the business culture of therapy centers in Bulacan

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**Abstract:** *The emergence of industries related to spa, beauty, therapy and wellness has obviously made waves in the recent years and paved the way for businesses catering to people with disabilities and special needs. This can be attributed to people's continuous consciousness in their well-being, increase in demand and awareness including the involvement of some government and non-government sectors. This phenomenological research focused on determining the nature of work and business customs of therapy centers based on perceptions of occupational therapists, speech pathologists, therapy clinic owners, special education teachers and parents. It would aid in making readers understand what it is like to deal with therapy centers. Additionally, it aims to discover means in addressing the needs of people with disabilities through the intervention of therapists and therapy centers to better face the challenges in the community and the society. Data from questionnaires, interviews, observations and immersion aimed to provide insight and promote awareness. The process of coding made it easier to formulate themes. In this study, these themes emerged, (1) Bridging Connections, (2) Developing Positive Organization and (3) Committing to Its Goals. Findings highlighted the culture of the organization, its effects to the business and to the people around it. Contrary to what has often been assumed, the organization of this kind of business does not focus on marketing and competition but rather on the expertise of its human resources. It was obvious that the centers acquired, learned and applied the clinical business practices of other existing therapy centers. The friendly and family-oriented culture within the organization allowed therapists to professionally practice with freedom and independence. These findings confirmed that the foundation of therapy centers being rooted in friendship and vocation led to a smooth sailing organization. The study identified that the therapy centers in the city of Malolos, Plaridel and Pulilan showed business growth potentials. Likewise, through the perspectives of therapists, owners and clients, policy and programs for people with disabilities would possibly be modified and enhanced. The study recommended actions to increase the profitability and marketability of the therapy centers particularly focusing on its main sources of profit. By strengthening the quality of services of therapists and continuously building its connections in the community, the business could improve its branding and standing. In order to make a mark in the industry and aid in the cultural acceptance and recognition, active involvement and proper registration were recommended. The formation of a monitoring body was highly recommended to set some standards in the industry.*

**Keywords—** occupational therapist, speech pathologist, therapy centers

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Philippines boasts its rich cultural history. Having been exposed to numerous inhabitants including Chinese and Malay brought about cultural influences in Filipinos' way of living. The Spanish and American colonialism though obviously influenced us the most with Christianity playing a big role. The country's culture is said to be a combination of the East and West then. Through the years, Filipinos have been accustomed to many old practices and beliefs and up to this day, the richness of culture applies through festivities, religious habits, medical myths, eating and cooking practices, trading and doing business to name a few. Culture has been a part of everybody's daily activities from what people do at home, in the community, in the workplace or anywhere they go. It is acknowledged as an essential factor in building either personal or business relationships. Though culture evolves over time, it continually plays a pivotal role behind any individual or group's failure or success.

Due to the country's exposure to various business culture influences, numerous interpretations and adaptations had been here and there. Yet there is no exact business culture suitable for all types of business but there is such a thing as a unique Filipino business culture. Doing business in the Philippines entails face-to-face and personal dealings. Filipinos value intimate relationships and try to involve personal touch with business. (Scroope, 2016)

As business culture is related to one's behavior, ethics, etiquette, etc. and it comprehensively includes an organization's values, visions, working style, beliefs, habits and practices, it is but natural for all of these factors to change as years pass. Business culture involves not only how individuals understand the work within the organization but also how others see the business. One's business identity can be shaped by its culture which highly contributes to growth and success. ([businessculture.org](http://businessculture.org))

Whether a business is product or service based, its culture formed from experiences would be necessary to promote an effective organization and have a business identity. Some similar studies may have mentioned and supported this fact. Jaques (2014), Investigating Culture: A Qualitative Study of a Human Service Organization's Culture included and emphasized the power of culture in terms of affecting performance and long term effectiveness in human service organizations. Another is that of Sy (2017), a study about Filipino therapists' experiences and attitudes of interprofessional education and collaboration. The study described how occupational therapists, physical therapists and speech-language pathologists could be professionally prepared for a collaborative practice-ready workforce through the interprofessional education. Both studies mentioned perceived experiences, identified gaps and made recommendations for the improvement of the organization and the system.

In this particular study, the focus is on therapy centers' business culture. It aims to discover the essence of business culture from the perspectives of its primary respondents, the owners and therapists of therapy centers. Clinical therapy centers in the Philippines have seen potential growth over the past 5 years. Although mainly thought of as centers that provide clinical assistance to patients with physical difficulties, they have evolved to cater to mentally challenged individuals including those with behavioral issues. In Metro Manila, the therapy centers have long been accepted as part of the culture and they have grown successfully as businesses. However, in the provinces the situation is quite different especially in areas where exposure to this kind of therapy service is unknown.

The government had made policies and laws to uplift the lives of people with disabilities. Republic Act No. 7277 or the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons outlines the rights and privileges of disabled persons including the prohibition on discrimination of PWDs while Republic Act No. 10070, or the Creation of Person with Disability Affairs Office in each Province, City and Municipality which aims to ensure that implementation of programs and services are provided for persons with disabilities. Under Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities stipulate the necessity for countries to ensure that persons with disabilities have access to education.

Fortunately, Bulacan is one of the most progressive provinces in Central Luzon primarily because of its proximity to Metro Manila. Its geographic location is an advantage for the development of the province. Bulacan is categorized and separated into twenty one (21) municipalities and three (3) cities. It holds the position of being the most populous in Region 3 and ranked second in the whole country (bulacan.gov.ph). It is therefore, not a surprise for the province to be identified by companies, corporations and businessmen as a good location for their industries. In fact, it even caters to small and medium enterprises.

Bulacan is known for its rich history and culture. Aside from being recognized as homes of famous heroes and

national artists, it also boasts its historical structures which contribute to the province's culture representation. The people of Bulacan are mostly likely open to adapting the business culture similar to that of Metro Manila but they have remained intact with their own culture and for that matter some of the Bulakenyos are conservative. Thus, some of them may have reservations in accepting businesses that promote and expose the physical or mental disabilities of people.

There is no lucid explanation though as to why the individuals with disabilities or special needs are increasing. This hapless situation is undeniably occurring and the way to address it is a challenge. As observed, the number of therapists in the Philippines is not sufficient to deal with the demand. There is an increase in the number of individuals with special needs and those people who need specific therapeutic treatment. In the Philippines, occupational therapy and speech pathology are not common courses in the university. To identify the big difference between the number of schools offering occupational therapy and speech pathology in the country. Moreover, there are only twelve (12) therapy centers offering speech pathology services in Bulacan as indicated in Figure 1.

Aside from not being popular, these professions do not generally pose a promising economic future. To mention, only five universities in the Philippines offer Speech Pathology courses namely, University of the Philippines (UP Manila), University of San Jose-Recoletos, University of Santo Tomas (UST), Cebu Doctor's University (CDU) and De La Salle Health Sciences Institute (CHED, 2017). Additionally, graduates from these courses have not surmounted ever as compared to other not so popular medical courses. They are also not considered sought after jobs in the country.

In addition, therapy centers and therapists themselves caught the attention of the researcher. Looking for center and finding the therapist who matches the child's schedule and need is already a predicament. Visiting these facilities personally had become a part of the researcher's routine since the day the researcher's youngest son was diagnosed with a language and learning disability. Her personal dealings with therapists intrigued her at how they perform their tasks as medical and business practitioners at the same time since most of the therapy centers are mainly owned, managed and run by the therapists themselves. Furthermore, the researcher could not directly fathom how these therapists address the issues linked to the sensitivity of their profession and how they probe the cultural aspect as part of their careers.

As generally practiced, those belonging to the human sciences field do not usually engage themselves in business and if they do, the business or entrepreneurial knowledge is of great advantage. Thus, this study hopes to contribute to the field of education whether or not it is of necessity to incorporate basic business subjects in these human sciences and medical related courses. Lastly, the researcher considers the development of the therapy industry in the future to better provide the needs of children with

special conditions as the most important contribution of this study.

## BACKGROUND

The main purpose of the study is to provide information about therapy centers as to its Business Cultures in Bulacan, specifically in the areas of Malolos, Plaridel and Pulilan due to its proximity and the researcher is also a client of one of these centers. The scope of this study took into account the perspectives of a total of six (6) occupational therapists, speech pathologists and special education teachers, and ten (10) parents based on their personal experiences in these therapy centers. It also included the perceptions of managers or owners of the centers. The study provided personal information such as gender, age and educational attainment. The full names and the therapy center they belong to were not directly identified.

There are five (5) therapy centers in focus, three (3) of which are located in the City of Malolos, and the other two (2) in the towns of Plaridel and Pulilan. The researcher included these therapy centers due to proximity. Apart from convenience sampling, respondents were chosen based on their ownership of the therapy centers. Some declined to participate leading to a small number of respondents.

As this study is of qualitative nature, generalization of findings and drawing causal conclusions were not included. Likewise, there is a limitation pertaining to the validity and reliability of the study primarily because the research is under the natural setting.

## FORESHOWED PROBLEMS

The central problem of the study is “How may the lived experiences of therapists, owners and parents contribute to the understanding of the business culture of therapy centers?”

1. What clinical practices do therapy centers experience?
2. How are therapy centers organized?
3. What is the socio-economic relevance of therapy centers in Philippine society?
4. How do therapy centers respond to learning needs of children with special conditions? and
5. What actions may be recommended based on the outcome of the study?

## METHODOLOGY

The main concern of this study is to investigate the real lived experiences of occupational therapists and speech pathologists involved in the therapy centers in Bulacan, specifically in the areas of Malolos, Plaridel and Pulilan. Its primary purpose is to understand the essence of business culture from the perspectives of therapists, owners and clients who are directly involved and affected by the business. This study would allow the readers to discover the existing therapy

business practices, the business challenges and the business strategies alongside culture.

This study was designed to be qualitative. Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, J.W. 1994). Occupational therapists and speech pathologists in private practice deal with people of all ages with special needs and treatment. These practitioners sustain a relatively demanding task in addressing each patient’s situation. It has also been observed that generally, therapists practice their profession and run the business at the same time. Although this scenario might have already been common to some other medical professions, therapy centers unique encounter with patients may be different. In order to appropriately describe the phenomenon, a qualitative approach to this study indicated the magnified descriptions of the lived experiences of therapists in the therapy centers.

Phenomenology is a pertinent methodology that is used to describe a certain phenomenon. It is concerned with the study of experience from the perspective of the individual, setting aside assumptions and usual ways of perceiving. Phenomenology as a research method is the study or inquiry into how things appear, are given, or present in lived experiences. In this case, the phenomena of therapists involved in therapy centers will be the main focus of the study.

Phenomenology does not seek to find cause-effect relationships nor does it intend to generalize (Porter, 1999). It does not attempt to create a theory nor does it seek to address problems. It is a process of observing and analyzing “the things themselves” (Husserl, 1962) in a wider perspective. It pays attention to individual’s experiences and emphasizes on making these experiences distinct. Despite the many ways phenomenology was defined and criticized, most philosophers acknowledge that no particular approach is suitable to all types of phenomena. In order for a study to be successful, researchers must develop a keen eye for phenomenology which can be used to strongly scrutinize the complexities and uniqueness of a certain phenomenon.

Therefore, the goal of this phenomenological study is to create a better understanding based on the perspectives of therapists, owners and parents and not to create a theory based on relationships.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. CLINICAL PRACTICES DO THERAPY CENTERS EXPERIENCE – THE PHILIPPINE BUSINESS CULTURE SETTINGS

Therapy centers in Plaridel, Pulilan and Malolos acquired and applied what other therapy centers were practicing. They made use of almost the same business

clinical practices from assessment to acquisition of therapists and clients, to marketing and growing the business. It's their human resources and connections which primarily made them grow not to mention their reliance to word-of-mouth referrals from parents, co-therapists and developmental pediatricians.

Therapists acted as consultants or freelancers and they were called "teachers" by clients. They were given free will to choose their schedule and the method of intervention to provide. Equal opportunities were given despite differences in the manner of dressing, hairstyle, preferences and gender. Therapists were paid on a per hour session basis and a portion of their pay goes to the clinic owners.

Therapists give feedback to parents after every session and keep track of the patients' progress. If there need be, they hold therapist-parent-teacher conference or directly coordinate with developmental pediatricians.

The basic information about disabilities in the Philippines and how the government addressed issues related to it, as supported by existing laws and programs. The services offered in the therapy centers and the professional functions of occupational therapists, speech pathologists and special education teachers were individually described. The discussion led to the role of therapy centers and these professionals who handle various concerns of people with disabilities. Some gaps were identified particularly the lack of schools offering Speech Pathology, the inadequate number of therapy centers in Bulacan as well as the challenges faced by people with disabilities despite government efforts. A data presented indicated that the increasing presence of therapy centers in some areas obviously was a general response to the demand in regions where the number of people with disabilities was significantly higher. Therefore, in order to meet the demand, this industry needs support from the government, the education sector and the society as a whole.

Fig. 1, presents the existing number of therapy clinics in Bulacan. Based on the chair of Philippine Association of Speech Pathologists (PASP) have a total of twelve (12) therapy centers in the whole of Bulacan listed under their association. The table below however was based on both PASP and Philippine Academy of Occupational Therapist (PAOT) which identified the percentage of the therapy centers in Bulacan.

Figure 1

Town / City	No. of Therapy Centers	Percentage
Plaridel	1	8.33
Pulilan	2	16.67

Malolos	4	33.33
Other location	5	41.67
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>100</b>

2. THERAPY CENTERS ORGANIZED – THERAPY, WHAT IS THERE TO KNOW?

Therapy centers were formed by either a single or group of therapists, developmental pediatricians, teacher or any medical practitioner. They used an initial capital ranging from Php 70,000 (\$1,400) to as much as Php 200,000 (\$4,000). The capital was used for space or area, therapy equipment, learning materials and salary for a few members. Every therapy center had ways to brand themselves. Most of them used the words "therapy", "play" and "talk" and pictures of "kids", "blocks" and other school related stuff. Therapy centers were guided by their mission and vision statement. Therapy centers opened its services to anyone who needed them regardless of the family's socioeconomic status in society. They mainly offer occupational therapy, speech therapy and physical therapy which costed between 500 to 700 pesos per hour. The hourly therapy session fee was fixed and most therapy centers applied the same rate in Bulacan.

The owners realized the need of more therapists, services, facilities and centers in Bulacan. Some of them responded by applying therapy modifications while some expanded their centers and services. The family oriented and friendly organization within the centers were believed to have been effective in operating their business. Due to the sense of belongingness and immense support from a team, the professional abilities of each therapist were enforced.

This gave importance to the therapists' personal and professional background. Their stories indicated the typical scenario of Filipinos who aim to go abroad for greener pasture and who choose to practice their careers in other countries because of lack of opportunities in the country. They all have their aspirations as well which mostly focused on professional growth. Because these therapists belonged to the young group of professionals, their aggressiveness to explore more in the future was obvious and their desire to have fun and experience freedom while working was a priority.

3. THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC RELEVANCE OF THERAPY CENTERS – THERAPIST, WHAT IS THERE TO KNOW AND THE INS AND OUTS OF THERAPY BUSINESS

Therapy centers opened work opportunities to occupational therapists, speech pathologists, physical therapists, SpEd teachers, administration and



maintenance staffs. These people were compensated for their services therefore therapy centers have an impact on an individual's income and value. The increase of therapy centers contributed to the economic growth in the municipality. The therapy center registered as a business, got business permit thus they complied with business tax policies and regulations.

Therapy centers had basic supplies such as tables, chairs, mats, air conditioner, fans, cleaning agents and toiletries. They made use of therapy equipment, learning tools and devices, learning materials and educational toys to supplement patients' therapeutic needs. They likewise paid rent, water and electricity bills, phone bills and other supplies.

The objective was to make readers understand the scenario inside therapy centers specifically the processes involved in assessment and acquisition of therapists and clients, scheduling of sessions and marketing the business were discussed in detail. Their practices confirmed that every therapy center just apply what they know or have heard from others in the industry. It was confirmed from this chapter that culture plays an important role because most of the therapists just conveniently followed what currently existed. Moreover, they all acknowledged the importance of having a set of rules and beliefs to follow for an organization to flourish smoothly. They all admitted though that there was no room for extreme strict policy implementation within the organization as they are not considered employees and they particularly applied a family oriented system.

This also stated the use of social media as the most used form of advertisement in the therapy center industry. This confirmed the impact of technology and convenience in marketing a certain product or service. On the other hand, as mentioned, therapy centers didn't focus on marketing strategies to gain clients, they relied more on organizations, pediatricians and clients' word of mouth referrals for business.

#### 4. THE BUSINESS CHALLENGES AND EXPECTATIONS

Therapy centers being a business had been actively interacting with people by responding to the behaviors and needs of the community and society. Active participation in awareness programs launched by the local government units or some organizations played a significant role in educating individuals and groups. Aside from that, therapists attend local and international seminars or conferences that would also educate them further in addressing the needs of special children. They continued enhancing their knowledge and skills not only by constantly practicing their profession but also ensuring that they were updated and informed of the latest developments in their fields. When opportunities therapists' professional capabilities as they completely rely on these services.

arose, they pursued to be better. Therapy centers continuously partnered with developmental pediatricians, co-therapists, associations, organizations and schools to further expose themselves to the demand and the needs of these people with disabilities. They found it necessary to collaborate with people who would be part of creating a support system for clients and parents.

Therapists were directly involved in the intervention made to the client. They did school visits and made necessary coordination with school teachers and authorities to ensure client's academic and social needs were addressed. Therapists ensured that parents were well informed of the intervention provided to clients and how progress of each one was valued.

Therapy centers' owners and therapists experienced many peaks and valleys from the beginning to the current status of their business. This chapter focused on how they started, the challenges they went through as well as their expectations from the community and society. The challenges featured in this chapter highlighted the patient-therapist ratio demand and supply issues as well as how therapy centers addressed the marketing and branding the clinics. This confirmed the need for the community and the society to have a full understanding of the industry and in order for the business to succeed, the support from the government, non-government organizations and the general public is of vital importance.

#### 5. IN THE EYES OF A MOTHER

This focused on what mothers, parents and guardians experienced in their child's journey to wellness in the therapy center industry. The objective of this chapter was for readers to gain understanding of the parents' perspectives and learn from their experiences. Most of the parents shared their observations, comments and suggestions about the therapy centers, the therapists and the support they were getting from the school sector, non-government organizations and local government as well. All of them mentioned how friendly the environment was in the therapy center and how their children progressed from their conditions after every therapy session. This situation confirmed that having a good relationship was essential for the business to succeed because these satisfied clients recommend the therapy centers to others. This further strengthened the fact that people with disabilities and children with special needs call for improvement in addressing their concerns especially when it comes to financial support. Likewise, parents identified the necessity for therapy centers to keep on improving their services, their facilities especially the

#### 6. EMERGENT THEMES

There were three emergent themes: Bridging Connections, Developing Positive Organization in the Workplace and Committing to Its Goals were presented and supported with specific details from responses to interviews and written questionnaires. The data gathered from occupational therapists, speech pathologists, Special Education (SpEd) teachers and parents underwent scrutiny and analysis to determine what was commonly shared by the informants. Although the thematic analysis process involved repeated readings and coding, its validity was only based on how the answers were categorized and understood. The aim of this study was to allow people to understand the therapy center industry, its business operation and organization culture through the perceptions and experiences of therapists and parents thus categorizing them into themes naturally created a better picture.

#### 7. WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS FOR THE THERAPY CENTERS

Upon gaining the understanding of the business culture of therapy centers in Plaridel, Pulilan and Malolos Bulacan, some recommendations for the growth of the business, the industry and for the benefit of the people with disabilities came up. A more strategic approach in

#### CONCLUSION

The responses of occupational therapists, speech pathologists, owners, special education teachers and some parents identified the significant business and cultural practices in the therapy centers. Their detailed description provided a clear picture of the business scenario and created an understanding of its business and organizational culture. The results identified its business strengths and likewise some areas which can be improved on. Moreover, the study highlighted the necessity to develop a more interactive marketing method and enhance therapists' skills to gain continuous patronage. The therapy center industry showed a lot of growth

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

Therapists included in the study confirmed that an effective organizational culture and that establishing good relationships with co-therapists, clients and other concerned individuals in the community and society were of great significance to therapy business success in Plaridel, Pulilan and city of Malolos, Bulacan. Despite being a stable business, there were some areas that still need to be improved as believed by the respondents themselves. Their experiences in dealing with challenges after years of operation and their passion to commit and serve people with disabilities clearly contributed to how they sustained the business.

After a thorough analysis of the data gathered, presented here are some recommendations:

terms of marketability and earning profit was of course a major consideration. The therapists should be properly equipped and supported to perform their tasks and it is one of the roles of the organization within to sustain it.

In order for the therapy industry to compete and level up, proper acknowledgement and categorization from the government, from authorities or leaders in allied sciences field and from the education sector may be helpful.

Regardless of how short or long the therapy center businesses have been operating, the therapists and owners had their share of learnings and understandings. Based on their experiences, they have realized the vital role of awareness, involvement and acceptance in understanding the business culture of the therapy centers as a whole particularly in the province of Bulacan. They believed that every client or customer, every school, group or organization had to recognize the therapy centers' contributions in building bridges to connect the people with disabilities to every part of the community and the society they belonged to. Their intention to gain more profit would eventually come from their continuous exposure to these forces and ensuring that they do their share in discovering their edge and honing their professional skills. All these were specifically laid down in the recommended action plan

1. A formation of a therapy control unit or monitoring body to determine the performance of therapy center businesses, the rate of growth in a certain community or per region and to assess the quality of services being rendered to clients is highly recommended. It may in the future have the power to gauge or grade the level of therapy centers similar to rating them 5 stars or such. This body may have the authority to thoroughly identify those who perform therapy treatments or services without professional licenses and clinics which do not have business permits. This monitoring body can most importantly raise the standards of the therapy center industry as they would in the long run be able to formulate guidelines and policies beneficial to both clients and therapists.
2. Incorporating business management subjects to allied medical courses should be considered to properly equip therapists and other similar professionals for business. Likewise, compelling allied science graduates to serve the country for a certain number of years prior to working abroad might also be considered to cope with the demand of therapists in the country.
3. Requiring all graduates of each allied science field to become members of existing organizations and associations was seen significant in locating and properly identifying

- therapists by area or region. Both therapists and clients would benefit from this process.
4. The study recommends that every therapy center be properly registered in the area. This would ensure validity of business operation.
  5. There is a need to build alliances among parents, concerned citizens that would further support the children with special needs and the people with disabilities. With such, the rights of the patients could be heard, laws and policies can be implemented for their benefit and the families' needs can be supported with programs by the government or private sectors.
  6. A formation of a group consisting of therapy owners per province or per region may be ideal to improve clinical business practices. This would ensure up-to-date facilities, services and intervention.
  7. The outcome of the study strongly recommends for the therapy centers to fully utilize the quality services of therapists as the main source to generate profit. Investing on the talent of each individual and providing support in their personal and professional growth would definitely contribute to the success of the centers. Joining forces with other reputable institutions locally and internationally can develop skills and keep the performance level of therapists at par.
  8. Therapy centers must consider widening their customer base by continuously interacting with parents, with the community and with developmental pediatricians. Utilizing social media and constantly making their presence by attending seminars and awareness programs would increase their exposure.
  9. The need to further determine business culture of therapy centers in other areas or regions is highly recommended. Exploring the impact of various aspects of business culture could lead to more bases of comparison which could be helpful in identifying issues and developing improvements or solutions. Other researchers may consider challenging this study's validity by using a quantitative approach.

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