

MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN MSEs OF VERY LONG LIFE IN A REGIONAL ENVIRONMENT


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Abstract: The article is a descriptive study of micro and small enterprises (MSEs) in the city of Tehuacán, Mexico. The analysis of the responses to a questionnaire, enable us to understand the management practices that have allowed the companies to survive in the long term, remaining as MSEs. In the survey carried out in 2023, 67 cases were considered. 46 MSEs were identified that had been founded before the year 2000 and twenty-one in that year. However, the publication aims to study are the cases of MSEs that have survived for more than ten years in the markets where they are located. The Mexican government has recognized that MSEs have a useful life of less than 8 years, and that once reached, MSEs grow and jump to the next level of business size or otherwise, they reach a closing point resulting from the increase in costs above the marginal income line, and their exit from the market. Descriptive statistics measurements were performed, a normality test was run, and linear regression was developed to understand the perceptions of their business line. Selected results are presented that show why these businesses have achieved longevity in their regional market.

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Introduction

The case of micro and small businesses (MSEs) in the case of the regions of Mexico has become an object of analysis because their economic relevance is important due to the flexibility of their managerial and business practices, the ability to generate jobs and their limited number of years surviving in competitive markets. Normally, MSEs are business units that offer a particular service or are dedicated to a certain commercial activity that allows them to meet a small part of the demand for the products they sell.

Previous studies such as that of Posada et al. (2015) have pointed out that despite their economic importance, MSEs exhibit numerous limitations, such as operating in markets with exacerbated business competition, having legal disadvantages, which require legal and tax responsibilities like those of larger companies, and the constant pressure of crime on businesses. These phenomena end up reducing the limited financial capacity of MSEs. A significant number of these small businesses even operate without registration and outside the authorities because their profits are limited and their growth is slow over time (Aguilar Rascón et al., 2020). The businesses that have managed to survive have done so because they began operating as monopolistic competition companies, with clearly differentiated products and services. Over the years the competition imitated them and they all managed to remain because they found market niches. It is also perceived that the MSEs which have managed to survive for many years is due to the fact that in one way or another they have managed to make enough profits to continue with their business activities in an ossified manner.

However, the most important activities for MSEs, with a 98.3% participation in the gross domestic product, are commercial activities and services, and in a small percentage, manufacturing production (Peña Ahumada & Aguilar Rascón, 2023).

Nevertheless, what this work aims to study is the case of MSEs that have survived for more than ten years in the markets where they are located. The government of Mexico has recognized that MSEs have a lifespan of 7.8 years, and that once reached, MSEs grow and jump to the next level in business size or, otherwise, reach a closure point resulting from increasing costs above the line of marginal income, and their exit from the market. The case has attracted attention since 2020, in which surveys prepared for other studies have revealed the appearance of these companies. The general objective of this work is to understand their management practices, through descriptive analysis, and with surveys, to learn how they have managed to achieve longevity at the regional level.

The case of the city of Tehuacán has already been explained in other previous studies. This city is located southeast of Mexico City and its main activity is the manufacture of textile garments that are sold nationally and internationally. There are also other activities such as the production of poultry and pork. The rest of the

activities are agriculture, which serves regional markets. These types of activities have created an economic environment that has allowed entrepreneurs to accumulate significant sums of money, but the average income of the working population is below the average for the entire state of Puebla.

Literature review

One of the important dilemmas that managers face in large companies is achieving an adequate balance between operational efficiency and strategic effectiveness (Drucker, 2006). While efficiency focuses on doing things correctly, optimizing resources and processes, effectiveness involves doing the right things, aligned with the objectives and needs of the organization. Managers must navigate between these two demands, while avoiding falling into the trap of being efficient in irrelevant activities or effective in initiatives that do not generate value (Mintzberg, 2010).

Another key dilemma is determining the optimal degree of centralization or decentralization in decision making (Galbraith, 2014). Centralization allows greater control and coordination but can limit flexibility and responsiveness at the local level. Decentralization, on the other hand, encourages autonomy and innovation, but it can generate problems of alignment and the duplication of efforts. Managers must find the right balance according to the characteristics of their organization and its environment (Mintzberg, 2010). In the case of MSEs, internal control is what allows them to carry out efficient management and achieve a certain level of business profitability (Alva Mellisho, 2023). The internal control of information and communication, supervision and monitoring are particularly important (De La Cruz Maldonado et al., 2022).

Managers also face the dilemma between maintaining stability and promoting organizational change (Kotter, 1995). Stability is necessary to ensure the efficiency and reliability of operations, but change is crucial to adapt to an increasingly dynamic change, while preserving the key elements of organizational culture and identity (Schein & Schein, 2016). Morales et al. (2023) found in a sample of 210 micro and small businesses in Colombia that business performance is highly related to transformational leadership.

A fundamental challenge for managers is to attract, develop and retain the talent necessary to achieve organizational objectives (Cappelli, 2009). This involves creating a stimulating work environment, offering opportunities for growth and development, and appropriately managing compensation and benefits. Additionally, managers must be able to identify and develop leadership potential in their teams (Goleman et al., 2001).

Another important challenge is to foster a culture of innovation and continuous adaptation (Christensen, 1997). This requires managers to promote creative thinking, experimentation, and organizational learning. They must be attentive to market trends and opportunities as well as be able to anticipate and respond quickly to changes (Hamel & Prahalad, 1994). Innovation is perceived as an element that is related to access to financing. Lara and Gonzales (2023) conducted a case study

where they found that the small company did have its own funds in addition to financing from third parties such as banks, and that long-term loans are preferred, although more expensive than short-term loans to grow.

In a study carried out by Hernández and Cáceda (2024) on the factors that influence the profitability of MSEs, which faced problems derived from the 2020 pandemic in Peru, it was shown that profitability is more related to the environment and the size of the company and less to the use of technology.

Finally, managers face the challenge of integrating sustainability and social responsibility into their management practices (Porter & Kramer, 2010). This involves considering the impact of organizational decisions and actions on the environment, society and stakeholders. Managers must be able to balance the demands for short-term profitability with the need to create long-term value for all stakeholders (Freeman, 2010). In the case of MSEs, Falcón Muñoz & Aguilar Rascón (2022) correlated competitive advantage variables with those valuing social responsibility in a sample of 298 micro and small enterprises, finding positive correlations.

Research methodology

The null hypothesis of this work is: H_0 : The MSEs under study have not grown owing to other factors that are not associated with their management practices; while the alternative hypothesis is H_a : The MSEs under study have not grown due to their management practices.

In this case, in the city of Tehuacán there are about 30,223 MSEs according to the National Statistical Directory of Economic Units (INEGI, 2024). All the micro and small businesses that employ between 2 and 50 workers and that have been established in Tehuacán and the metropolitan area that includes the municipalities of Ajalpan, Altepexi and Santiago Miahuatlán were considered. A representative research sample was calculated with a 95% confidence level and a 5% error. The calculated representative research sample occurred to be 380 companies to survey. Different micro and small entrepreneurs participated in the collection of information, conducted with the help of 120 students from the Business Development educational program of the Technological University of Tehuacán from March to April 2023. The information was collected by means of questionnaires using the survey methodology known as computer assisted personal interviewing (CAPI). Once the questionnaires were completed by the entrepreneurs, the information was uploaded to a platform that performed part of the data analysis.

This research is part of a larger study that intended to understand the differences between the management styles of male and female micro and small business owners. From a larger sample, 24 companies were chosen that met the condition of being active in the market for more than 20 years and are still carrying out their activities today. The companies that said that they began their activities in the year 2000 were taken into account, which is 24 years of survival, in addition to all those that said that their companies were founded before the year 2000. Thus, 67 companies in total were considered. 46 of them stated that they had been founded before the year 2000 and 21 in that year.

For the practical purposes of this work, the following aspects of the dilemmas in companies were taken into account: the divergence between efficiency and effectiveness; centralization and decentralization and the dilemma between stability and change; as well as the challenges of talent management, innovation and adaptation, as well as sustainability and social responsibility.

Results

According to the obtained data, there are MSEs that were founded by the grandparents of the current entrepreneurs (See Figure 1), in this case there are 15, and they are companies that have been existing for more than 40 years. 18 companies were founded by parents or siblings and that have been functioning for more than 20 years; there are also companies that are more than 10 years old and that were founded by the current entrepreneurs. The case of three MSEs that have been in operation for more than 20 years is included, but they were founded by other people who do not belong to the families of the current owners.

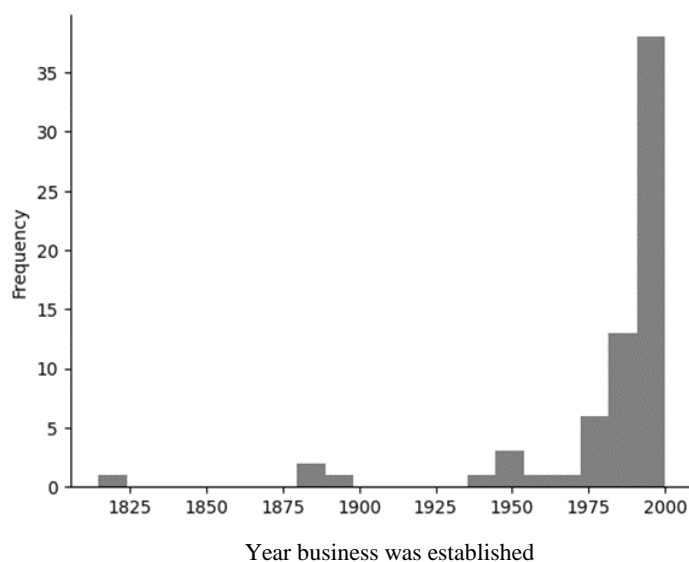


Figure 1. Longevity of MSEs in Tehuacán and metropolitan area

Source: 2023 survey results

Regarding the main strategy of the business (See Figure 2), the three most important strategies are: firstly, obtaining enough clients to consolidate the business; secondly, achieving a balance between income and expenses to survive and the third is divided between consolidating the company to take advantage of what it has grown and investing the profits well to make the business grow more. Fourthly, the reason why the owners of MSEs have managed to survive is because there is an intention to refine the product or service and make it attractive to customers. Technically, the vast majority serve local clients and a small percentage serve national clients.

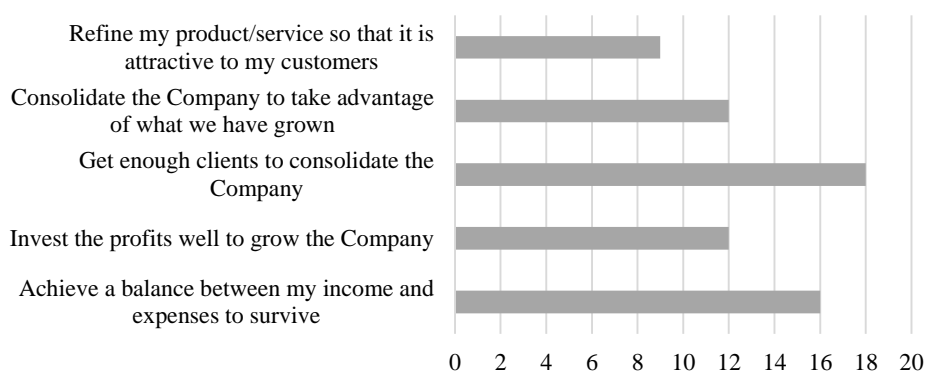


Figure 2. Owner's perception about main strategy to lead the company

Source: 2023 survey results

The main business activities are divided among three main activities: 51 of these are dedicated to commerce; 13 are dedicated to services such as food sales, the sales of various items, technical and professional services, and three are dedicated to manufacturing, which are textile maquiladoras. Regarding the frequency distributions (See Table 1), it is very interesting to see that 1 MSE has survived since 1815, another one since 1880, one more since 1890, 2 MSEs since 1950, 1 since 1968, 2 since 1979, 3 of them since 1985, 7 since 1990, 6 since 1997, and 28 since year 2000. In Table 1, an attempt was made to analyze the data, specifically the years in which the MSEs were created. At the end of the table, the data was divided into three parts. The data indicate that the constant of the companies created in the history of the place were companies with sales activities. Another fact that seems interesting is the average year of founding of the MSEs, which is 1982. That was a year of transition for the Mexican economy because it was when Mexico had to pay its external debt to the creditor countries and it was the beginning of a period of high inflation, a significant economic crisis and a fall in the most relevant macroeconomic indicators.

Table 1. Frequency analysis of company founding data.
1 = Trade, 2 = Services, 3 = Manufacturing

Statistics	Year of beginning operations	Business type
N	67	67
Mean	1982	1
Standard error of the mean	4.0408	0.6
Standard deviation	33.0756	0.5
Variance	1094	0
Quartile 25	1982	1.0000
Quartile 50	1994	1.0000
Quartile 75	2000	1.0000

Source: Prepared based on 2023 survey results

According to the literature review, a dilemma that companies face is being able to balance operational efficiency with strategic effectiveness, as shown in Table 2. The normality test shows the absence of statistical significance, and a mean of 3.7015, which is below the value of 4, revealing a weak perception about the company's strategy.

The second dilemma for micro and small businesses is centralization. Table 2 shows the third statement about decision making by consensus, where the responses have an average of 3.9254, which on a Likert scale is interpreted as a response of agreement among the surveyed entrepreneurs. In this, it is observed that the statistical significance is equal to zero and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic reached a value of 0.346.

Table 2. Normality test for entrepreneur's perception about the way of managing their business

Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a normality test				
Entrepreneur's perception of way of managing the business	Statistic	df	SS	Mean
I motivate my employees to work under precise criteria to ensure that materials, products, processes and services are consistent	0.345	67	0	4.1940
I do not usually plan the company's strategy in advance, but rather it emerges as I see the best way to achieve our objectives	0.363	67	0	3.7015
I prefer that business decisions be made by consensus	0.346	67	0	3.9254
When I make decisions, I think and reflect on the facts and their consequences. I don't like to improvise	0.270	67	0	4.3284
The company has managed to obtain a very loyal work team.	0.360	67	0	4.0149
I develop or pay to innovate the way I run the company	0.332	67	0	3.3134
In my company we try to prevent pollution and the production of waste that impacts the ecosystem, as well as recycle and care for the environment	0.340	67	0	4.1045
(a) Lilliefors significance correction				

Source: Prepared based on 2023 survey results

In the case of the third business dilemma between stability and change, the posed question was: *When I make decisions, I think and reflect on the facts and their consequences. I don't like to improvise*, the normality test value is 0.270, there is absence of statistical significance and the mean value is 4.3284, which demonstrates the businessmen's behavior to control every choice for the business's operations.

For the part of the challenges, there were three key questions on the survey, the first one was workforce loyalty, institutional innovation and the organization's sustainability. The first question: *The company has managed to obtain a very loyal work team*, the normality test value is 0.360, there is absence of statistical significance and the mean value is 4.01. In this case, the answers could denote the entrepreneurs' clear agreement about the importance of the business' employees. This is not a challenge, but in the question about the companies' innovation, the obtained normality test result is 0.332, there is an absence of statistical significance, the mean is 3.3134, which denotes indifference among the businessmen to make innovations. Moreover, regarding the firm's sustainability, the question: *In my company we try to prevent pollution and the production of waste that impacts the ecosystem as well as recycle and care for the environment*, the normality test shows 0.340, there is an absence of statistical significance and the mean value is 4.1045, which in the response options of the Likert scale, shows agreement in the responses of the businessmen.

Finally this paper presents a correlation analysis where the results between the answers can be compared to understand the possible relationships (See Table 3). The first one, the statement *I motivate my employees under precise criteria to ensure the materials, products, processes and service are consistent*, has a strong relationship with the statement which says, *When I make decisions, I think and reflect on the facts and their consequences. I don't like to improvise* (0.437), and with the statement: *In my company we try to prevent pollution and the production of waste that impacts the ecosystem, as well as recycle and care for the environment* (0.415).

The statement *I do not usually plan the company's strategy in advance, but rather it emerges as I see the best way to achieve our objectives*, is related to the statement: *In my company we try to prevent pollution and the production of waste that impacts the ecosystem, as well as recycle and care for the environment* (0.330) and it is related to the statement, *I develop or pay to innovate the way I run the company* (0.316).

In third place, the statement which says, *I prefer that business decisions be made by consensus*, is strongly related to the idea, *In my company we try to prevent pollution and the production of waste that impacts the ecosystem, as well as recycle and care for the environment*, (0.334) and negatively related to the statement, *I develop or pay to innovate the way I run the company* (0.013).

In fourth place, the statement, *When I make decisions, I think and reflect on the facts and their consequences. I don't like to improvise*, correlates with the statement, *The company has managed to obtain a very loyal work team* (0.360) and is significantly related to the idea, *In my company we try to prevent pollution and the production of waste that impacts the ecosystem, as well as recycle and care for the environment* (0.266).

In fifth place, the sentence which says, *The company has managed to obtain a very loyal work team*, is related to *In my company we try to prevent pollution and the production of waste that impacts the ecosystem, as well as recycle and care for the environment* (0.1600).

In sixth place, the statement, *I develop or pay to innovate the way I run the company*, is strongly related to the sentence, *In my company we try to prevent pollution and the production of waste that impacts the ecosystem, as well as recycle and care for the environment* (0.321).

Table 3. Correlation matrix between answers about management practices of MSEs

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
(1)	1						
(2)	0.103	1					
(3)	0.024	0.155	1				
(4)	0.437	0.089	0.258	1			
(5)	0.269	0.194	0.093	0.360	1		
(6)	0.11	0.316	-0.013	0.055	0.115	1	
(7)	0.415	0.330	0.334	0.266*	0.16	0.321	1

- (1) I motivate my employees to work under precise criteria to ensure that materials, products, processes and services are consistent
- (2) I do not usually plan the company's strategy in advance, but rather it emerges as I see the best way to achieve our objectives
- (3) I prefer that business decisions be made by consensus
- (4) When I make decisions, I think and reflect on the facts and their consequences. I don't like to improvise
- (5) The company has managed to obtain a very loyal work team
- (6) I develop or pay to innovate the way I run the company
- (7) In my company we try to prevent pollution and the production of waste that impacts the ecosystem, as well as recycle and care for the environment

Source: Prepared based on 2023 survey results

The last measurement is linear regression in which the dependence variable is *I motivate my employees to work under precise criteria to ensure that the materials, products, processes and services are consistent* and the others as independent variables. The statement: *I do not usually plan the company's strategy in advance, but rather it emerges as I see the best way to achieve our objectives*, is inversely related – -0.021; *I prefer that business decisions be made by consensus*, is directly related – 0.30; *When I make decisions, I think and reflect on the facts and their consequences. I don't like to improvise*, is directly related – 0.348; *The company has managed to obtain a very loyal work team*, is also directly related – 0.105; *I develop or pay to innovate the way I run the company*, is inversely related – -0.085; and *In my company we try to prevent pollution and the production of waste that impacts the ecosystem; as well as recycle and care for the environment*, is directly related – 0.332.

The results observed in the tables suggest that the entrepreneurs have total power in their businesses and the lack of innovation and long-term planning is what allows them to survive in the long term. This is a result of their way of managing their businesses.

Conclusions

Responding to the questions at the beginning of the article, the statistical analysis shows that the main activity for the MSEs in the city are the sales of products and services. With regard to the question of the method of management, the data shows the main strategy is to gain more clients to consolidate the company, which indicates that the firm's owner must be a good seller.

Regarding management practices, Table 2 shows that the management style is highly centralized in the decisions of the business owners since the highest numbers of responses were observed in the motivation of workers, the making of cautious decisions, the choice of workers and social responsibility actions.

Concerning the lack of business growth, Table 3 offers an explanation, in that the decisions are made by the owner, and normally, owners do not want to lose control over the business operations. Besides, the linear regression can give us a little hint: the businessmen do not plan the business strategy as the regression value was negative. The results could suggest that the owners' goal is to achieve a sufficient income, but it is not their intention to have good business competition or achieve social recognition.

The results in Tables 1 to 3 show that micro and small business owners perceive a certain level of comfort in being entrepreneurs, in owning a business in which all the workers and collaborators have to abide by the owners' decisions, despite there being a certain consensus for making decisions both organizational and those concerning the environment.

The statistical significance of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests in the responses to the questionnaires allows us to reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis and with it, the fact that micro and small businesses have survived, and have not grown due to their management practices.

The results of this study are incomplete and it is suggested to conduct a qualitative study in order to obtain more information to identify other conditions that can explain how the MSEs have been able survive in the long run.

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ORGANIZACJA ZARZĄDZANIA W FIRMACH MMŚP O BARDZO DŁUGIEJ ŻYWOTNOŚCI W ŚRODOWISKU REGIONALNYM

Streszczenie: Artykuł stanowi opisowe badanie dotyczące mikro- i małych przedsiębiorstw (MMŚP) w mieście Tehuacán w Meksyku. Analiza odpowiedzi na kwestionariusz pozwala zrozumieć organizację zarządzania, która umożliwiła firmom przetrwanie w dłuższej perspektywie, pozostając MMŚP. W badaniu przeprowadzonym w 2023 roku wzięto pod uwagę 67 przypadków. Zidentyfikowano 46 MMŚP, które zostały założone przed rokiem 2000, i 21 utworzonych w tym roku. Jednak publikacja ma na celu zbadanie przypadków MMŚP, które przetrwały ponad 10 lat na rynkach, na których są zlokalizowane. Rząd Meksyku uznał, że MMŚP mają okres użytkowania krótszy niż 8 lat, a po jego osiągnięciu rosną i przeskakują na następny poziom wielkości biznesu lub, w przeciwnym razie, osiągają punkt zamknięcia wynikający ze wzrostu kosztów powyżej linii dochodu marginalnego i ich wyjścia z rynku. Dokonano pomiarów statystyk opisowych, przeprowadzono test normalności i opracowano regresję liniową, aby zrozumieć postrzeganie ich linii biznesowej. Przedstawiono wybrane wyniki, które pokazują, dlaczego te przedsiębiorstwa stały się długowieczne na rynku regionalnym.

Słowa kluczowe: dylematy organizacji, firmy rodzinne, zarządzanie organizacją, MMŚP

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