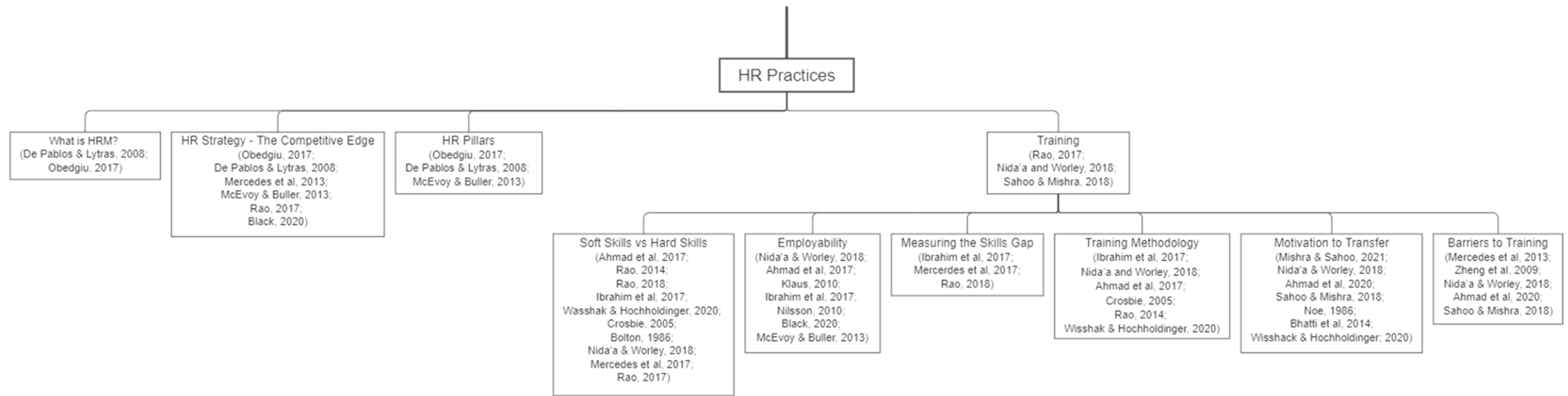# The Impact of Soft Skills Training in Micro and Small Enterprises – A Grounded Theory Study within the Maltese Context.

Ilaria Spiteri Axiak

Literature Review

The Impact of Soft Skills Training in Micro and Small Enterprises

HR Practices

What is HRM?
(De Pablos & Lytras, 2008; Obedgiu, 2017)

HR Strategy - The Competitive Edge
(Obedgiu, 2017;
De Pablos & Lytras, 2008;
Mercedes et al, 2013;
McEvoy & Buller, 2013;
Rao, 2017;
Black, 2020)

HR Pillars
(Obedgiu, 2017;
De Pablos & Lytras, 2008;
McEvoy & Buller, 2013)

Training
(Rao, 2017;
Nida'a and Worley, 2018;
Sahoo & Mishra, 2018)

Soft Skills vs Hard Skills
(Ahmad et al, 2017;
Rao, 2014;
Rao, 2018;
Ibrahim et al, 2017;
Wasshak & Hochholdinger, 2020;
Crosbie, 2005;
Bolton, 1986;
Nida'a & Worley, 2018;
Mercedes et al, 2017;
Rao, 2017)

Employability
(Nida'a & Worley, 2018;
Ahmad et al, 2017;
Klaus, 2010;
Ibrahim et al, 2017;
Nilsson, 2010;
Black, 2020;
McEvoy & Buller, 2013)

Measuring the Skills Gap
(Ibrahim et al, 2017;
Mercerdes et al, 2017;
Rao, 2018)

Training Methodology
(Ibrahim et al, 2017;
Nida'a and Worley, 2018;
Ahmad et al, 2017;
Crosbie, 2005;
Rao, 2014;
Wisshak & Hochholdinger, 2020)

Motivation to Transfer
(Mishra & Sahoo, 2021;
Nida'a & Worley, 2018;
Ahmad et al, 2020;
Sahoo & Mishra, 2018;
Noe, 1986;
Bhatti et al, 2014;
Wisshack & Hochholdinger; 2020)

Barriers to Training
(Mercedes et al, 2013;
Zheng et al, 2009;
Nida'a & Worley, 2018;
Ahmad et al, 2020;
Sahoo & Mishra, 2018)

Methodology

| 1. Research topic identified | 2. Gaps in literature identified | 3. Sampling | 4. Data gathering | 5. Selective coding | 6. Reflexive memoing | 7. Constant comparative analysis | 8. Theoretical sensitivity | 9. Preliminary theory |

Steps 4 to 8 used in repetition for all cases

Presentation of Findings

According to the conditional matrix suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998)

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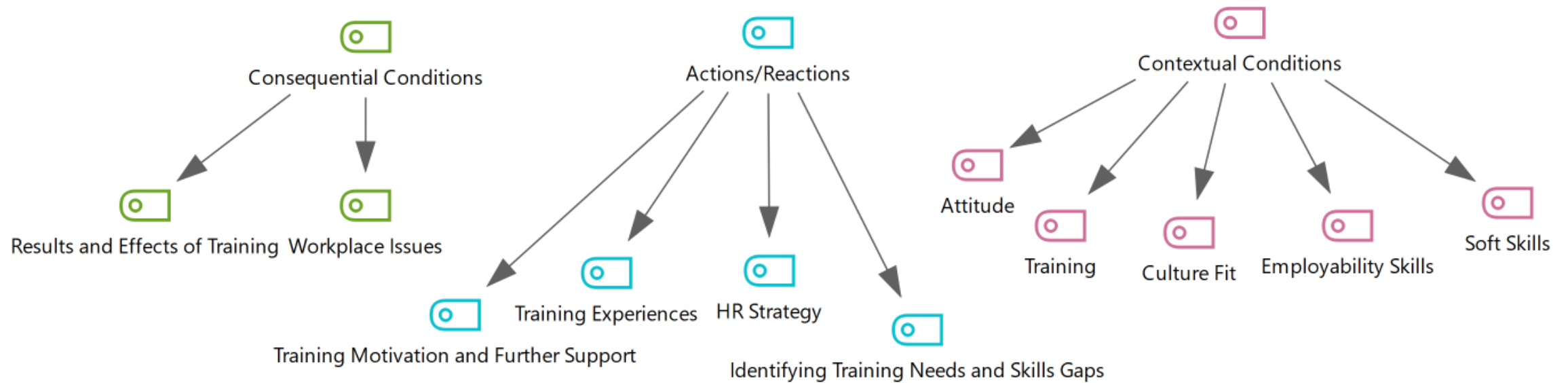
Contextual Conditions

- Soft Skills
  - Have been identified as those that support doing a technical skill more efficiently

- Employability Skills
  - Have been identified as those that make an employee employable for the company and have the right skills the nature of work would require

- Culture Fit
  - Training employees, preferably fresh graduates, to mould them into the culture built by the company's vision

- Training – Methods and Delivery
  - Most preferred methods were in-house customised, coaching and mentoring, time-spaced learning and self-training
  - Training should be delivered by internal managers who are aware of what training is needed, or by external trainers who "should be [a] brand ambassador"

- Attitude
  - Time is an issue
  - Employees prefer to be trained to improve "portfolio" rather than to be simply better at their job
  - Managers "are usually so engross different operations that they see this as being extra"

Actional/Reactions

- ## HR Strategy
  - There is no HR strategy/HR person in SMEs due to lack of funds, so the lack of HR resources does not tackle skills gaps in the way it is expected to

- ## Identifying Training Needs and Skills Gaps
  - There is "a very big gap" of soft skills across companies from top to bottom, and such skills gap analyses are not investigated in the way it is expected to

- ## Training Experiences
  - Overall, training experience has always had a positive outcome due to a safe space created in the training room

- ## Training Motivation and Further Support
  - Employees always feel motivated to be trained when done for the right reasons, and managers are constantly being challenged to use training as a means to have their employees reach their full potential for companies to gain the competitive edge

Consequences and Outcomes

- Workplace issues
  - Conflict and time management
  - Use of training as an opportunity to learn from others
  - Passive attitudes towards training and ways of increasing productivity
  - More focus is made on output rather than positive aspects that can create productive output

- Results and effects of training
  - Short term: training leaves employees feeling motivated
  - Long term: training creates more conflict because the actual issues in the workplace (such as poor leadership and conflict between staff members) are not being tackled due to training needs not being properly identified

Gaps in primary data:

- the unclear objective of which point the training is delivered, be it at recruitment stage or after;

- the notion of self-training like reading articles and watching videos on the internet rather than having training delivered by an expert trainer; and

- a clearer understanding on an operational strategy in micro and small enterprises and how this affects training.

Limitations of the study:

- sampling was very limited, using only three types of stakeholders;

- gaps were found in the data allowing the conclusions leave room for more concrete theories; and

- the study did not reach theoretical saturation but only a preliminary theory.

Further research for a better understanding of:

- what strategies are used to implement training – be it through the HR strategy as discussed in this study, or other strategies;

- expectations from employees to be able to discover the soft skills required and how they would impact on performance and company growth; and

- a better understanding of what is expected from micro and small enterprises on a national level, to be able to discover what soft skills can impact this and how it can be implemented through soft skills training.