



Human Resource Development Strategy and Institutional Capacity for Enterprise Development in Timor-Leste: A Case Study of IADE

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Keywords	Abstract
Human resource development; institutional capacity; enterprise development; public support institution; Timor-Leste.	Human resource development (HRD) has become a central issue in enterprise development, particularly in developing and post-conflict economies, where business growth is often constrained by limited managerial capacity, weak entrepreneurial skills, and insufficient institutional support. This study examined how HRD strategy and institutional capacity support enterprise development in Timor-Leste through a case study of the *Instituto de Apoio ao Desenvolvimento Empresarial* (IADE). Using a qualitative single-case study design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observation, and document analysis. The findings showed that IADE's HRD strategy functioned as both an internal capacity-building mechanism and an external enterprise support instrument. IADE supported entrepreneurs through training, mentoring, consultancy, business assistance, incubation services, business registration support, and promotional activities. However, the effectiveness of these programs was constrained by limited staff development, insufficient budget allocation, a shortage of qualified trainers, and weak post-training monitoring systems. The study also found that enterprise development outcomes depended not only on the availability of training programs but also on staff competence, trainer availability, continuity of mentoring, and entrepreneurs' managerial commitment. This study contributes to the HRD and enterprise development literature by highlighting the role of public institutional capacity in supporting enterprise development in resource-constrained, post-conflict economies.

INTRODUCTION

Human resource development (HRD) has become a central issue in enterprise development, particularly in developing and post-conflict economies, where business growth is often constrained by limited managerial capability, weak entrepreneurial skills, and insufficient institutional support. In the small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) literature, HRD is understood not only as formal training but also as a broader process encompassing managerial competence development, technical capability enhancement, organizational learning, and adaptive business practices. Nolan and Garavan (2016), through a systematic review of HRD in SMEs, argue that HRD in small firms must be understood within contextual constraints such as limited resources, informal learning processes, and strong dependence on owner-manager capability. Similarly, Harney and Alkhalaf (2021) show that HRM and HRD research in SMEs remains fragmented due to structural differences from large organizations, including resource constraints, informality, and underdeveloped managerial systems.

Recent studies further emphasize that HRD contributes to SME development through both individual and organizational dimensions. Havierníková et al. (2025) identify HRD-

related factors as important determinants of SME performance through employee and organizational development. This indicates that enterprise development depends not only on capital and market access but also on the ability of entrepreneurs and supporting institutions to strengthen knowledge, skills, managerial competence, and organizational capacity. However, HRD effectiveness is highly context-dependent. In developing economies, HRD initiatives may fail to generate optimal outcomes when they are not supported by adequate institutional capacity, qualified trainers, mentoring systems, sufficient budgets, and post-training monitoring mechanisms (Alikali et al., 2025; Kazanskaia, 2025; Kunene, 2017; Nwambuko & Yousuo, 2025).

This issue is particularly relevant in Timor-Leste, where private sector development is a strategic priority for economic diversification, employment creation, and sustainable growth. The World Bank notes that its 2020–2025 Country Partnership Framework for Timor-Leste prioritizes private sector-led growth, economic stability, human capital development, service delivery, and infrastructure improvement (Gomes, 2025). Similarly, the Asian Development Bank emphasizes support for private sector development, economic diversification, infrastructure development, basic services, and regional integration (Growth, n.d.). These priorities indicate that enterprise development is not only a business-sector concern but also a core component of national development strategy (Mueller-Hirth, 2015; Quaye et al., 2026; Van der Straaten et al., 2023).

Within this context, the Instituto de Apoio ao Desenvolvimento Empresarial (IADE) plays a key institutional role in supporting enterprise development in Timor-Leste. Established under Decree-Law No. 24/2012, IADE is mandated to support business development through training, capacity-building, business assistance, consultancy, incubation, registration support, and promotion programs. Thus, IADE functions not only as an administrative body but also as a public enterprise-support institution responsible for strengthening entrepreneurial capacity and supporting micro, small, and medium enterprises (Joseph et al., 2025; Rasheedat, 2019; Sishuba, 2020).

Empirical findings indicate that IADE's effectiveness is constrained by internal human resource and institutional capacity limitations. Interview and document analysis data show limited staff training opportunities, insufficient budget allocation for capacity-building, and a shortage of qualified trainers for Training of Trainers (TOT) and Training of Master Trainers (TOMT). These constraints reduce IADE's ability to deliver intensive training, business assistance, and sustained support to entrepreneurs (Chitamba et al., 2025; Rutarindwa et al., 2024).

Enterprise development support should not be evaluated solely based on the availability of training programs. Field evidence shows that IADE provides business planning assistance, operational review, access-to-finance support, equipment and material facilitation, credit preparation, commercialization support, pricing guidance, and record-keeping assistance. However, the effectiveness of these services depends on staff competence, trainer availability, mentoring continuity, and entrepreneurs' managerial commitment to sustaining their businesses.

Although prior studies have examined the relationship between HRD and SME performance, several gaps remain. First, most studies focus on HRD as an internal firm-level practice, with limited attention to HRD as a public institutional strategy. Second, existing

research predominantly examines SMEs in general contexts, with limited empirical evidence from post-conflict and resource-constrained economies. Third, there is insufficient understanding of how institutional capacity, trainer availability, budget constraints, and mentoring systems influence the effectiveness of enterprise-support programs. These gaps are particularly relevant in Timor-Leste, where enterprise development outcomes depend not only on entrepreneurial capability but also on the institutional capacity of agencies such as IADE.

Therefore, this study examines how IADE implements HRD strategies to support enterprise development in Timor-Leste. Unlike previous research that primarily positions HRD as an internal organizational practice, this study conceptualizes HRD as a public institutional strategy implemented by an enterprise-support agency. The study contributes to the literature by linking HRD strategy, institutional capacity, and enterprise development within a post-conflict developing economy.

Accordingly, the study is guided by three research questions. First, how does IADE design and implement HRD strategies to support enterprise development in Timor-Leste? Second, what institutional and operational constraints affect the implementation of IADE's HRD strategy? Third, how do IADE's training, mentoring, and business assistance programs contribute to enterprise development in Timor-Leste?

Human Resource Development Strategy and Enterprise Development

Human resource development (HRD) is widely recognized as a strategic mechanism for enhancing organizational capability, managerial competence, and enterprise sustainability. In the SME context, HRD extends beyond formal training to include learning processes, mentoring, coaching, knowledge transfer, managerial development, and entrepreneurial capacity strengthening. Nolan and Garavan (2016) emphasize that HRD in SMEs must be understood within contextual constraints such as informality, resource scarcity, and reliance on owner-manager competence. Harney and Alkhalaf (2021) similarly highlight that SMEs differ structurally from large firms due to limited resources, informal systems, and underdeveloped managerial structures.

From a strategic perspective, HRD represents an investment in human capital. Human capital theory posits that knowledge, skills, and competencies are productive assets that enhance organizational performance when effectively developed and applied. In enterprise development, this implies that training and capacity-building initiatives are expected to improve entrepreneurial capabilities in planning, financial management, production, marketing, and business sustainability. Havierníková et al. (2025) further confirm that HRD influences SME development through both individual and organizational dimensions.

However, in developing and post-conflict economies, HRD must also be understood as an externally supported institutional process. Many SMEs rely on public institutions for training, mentoring, and technical assistance. In this study, HRD is therefore conceptualized as a public institutional strategy through which enterprise-support agencies strengthen both internal staff capacity and external entrepreneurial capability, consistent with IADE's mandate.

Institutional Capacity of Public Enterprise-Support Agencies

Institutional capacity is a determining factor in translating HRD strategies into effective enterprise-support outcomes. It refers to an organization's ability to mobilize resources, coordinate programs, develop competent personnel, implement policies, monitor outcomes, and adapt services to field conditions. In enterprise-support institutions, capacity is reflected in

staff competence, trainer availability, budget adequacy, program design quality, monitoring systems, and continuity of assistance.

This dimension is particularly critical in developing economies where public institutions often compensate for underdeveloped market support systems. They provide training, technical assistance, financial guidance, and market facilitation for SMEs. In such contexts, enterprise development outcomes depend not only on entrepreneurs' capabilities but also on institutional effectiveness.

In the case of IADE, institutional limitations significantly affect service delivery. The study identifies constraints such as limited staff training, insufficient capacity-building budgets, and shortages of qualified trainers for TOT and TOMT programs. These findings demonstrate that institutional capacity is a core determinant of HRD effectiveness rather than a peripheral issue.

Training, Mentoring, and Business Assistance as HRD Delivery Mechanisms

HRD in enterprise development is implemented through training, mentoring, coaching, consultancy, incubation, and follow-up support. While training enhances foundational knowledge, it is insufficient without practical assistance in applying knowledge to real business operations.

Mentoring and business assistance are particularly critical for micro and small enterprises with limited managerial experience. These services include business planning support, operational review, access-to-finance facilitation, credit preparation, pricing guidance, transaction recording, and commercialization assistance. These mechanisms align with IADE's operational practices as identified in the study.

Business incubation integrates training, mentoring, and technical support to facilitate enterprise formation and growth. Its effectiveness depends on institutional capacity, trainer competence, follow-up intensity, and entrepreneurial commitment. Therefore, HRD mechanisms must be understood as an integrated system rather than isolated interventions.

Analytical Framework of the Study

This study adopts an institutional HRD framework based on the interaction between HRD strategy, institutional capacity, and enterprise-support mechanisms. HRD strategy refers to how IADE develops staff competencies and structures training programs. Institutional capacity refers to human resources, budget availability, coordination systems, and monitoring mechanisms. Enterprise-support mechanisms refer to the services delivered to entrepreneurs, including training, mentoring, consultancy, incubation, and financial facilitation.

This framework shifts the analysis from a linear HRD-performance relationship to a more contextual understanding of how institutional capacity shapes enterprise-support effectiveness. It positions IADE as a public enterprise-development institution whose effectiveness depends on internal capacity and operational systems.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative single-case study design to examine how human resource development strategies were implemented by the *Instituto de Apoio ao Desenvolvimento Empresarial* (IADE) in supporting enterprise development in Timor-Leste. A case study approach was considered appropriate as the research focused on institutional processes, program implementation, capacity constraints, and enterprise-support practices

within a specific organizational context (Yin, 2018). Rather than measuring statistical effects, the study aimed to develop an in-depth understanding of how HRD strategies were operationalized through training, mentoring, business assistance, and institutional support mechanisms.

The study was conducted at IADE, a public enterprise-support institution responsible for assisting entrepreneurs and small enterprises through capacity-building, consultancy, business incubation, registration support, and promotional activities. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in HRD planning, training implementation, institutional administration, technical assistance, and enterprise-support programs. This approach ensured that data were obtained from informants with relevant institutional knowledge and practical experience related to the research focus (Patton et al., 2015).

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observation, and document analysis. Interviews explored participants' perspectives on HRD strategies, staff capacity, trainer availability, program implementation, operational constraints, and enterprise-support practices. Observation was used to understand institutional routines and service-delivery processes, while document analysis provided supporting evidence from program records, training materials, and institutional documents. The combination of these methods enabled methodological triangulation and strengthened the empirical basis of the study.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, including data familiarization, initial coding, theme development, and interpretation of themes in relation to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The coding process focused on three key categories: HRD strategy implementation, institutional capacity constraints, and enterprise-support mechanisms. To enhance trustworthiness, the study applied source triangulation by comparing evidence across participant groups and method triangulation by integrating interview, observation, and document data. Ethical principles were maintained through confidentiality, academic use of information, and careful representation of participants' perspectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings are organized into five interrelated themes: HRD strategy as an institutional mechanism, institutional capacity constraints, training and business-assistance mechanisms, enterprise-development outcomes, and the relationship between HRD strategy and institutional capacity. These themes show that IADE's contribution to enterprise development depends not merely on the availability of training programs, but also on staff competence, trainer availability, budget support, mentoring continuity, and post-training monitoring.

HRD strategy as an institutional mechanism for enterprise development

The findings indicate that IADE's human resource development strategy is implemented not only as an internal administrative function, but also as an institutional mechanism for supporting enterprise development in Timor-Leste. HRD is positioned as a way to strengthen the capacity of IADE personnel so that they are able to deliver training, technical assistance, consultancy, and business-support services to entrepreneurs. This finding suggests that, in a public enterprise-development institution, HRD has a dual function: it improves internal organizational capability and, at the same time, enables the institution to transfer knowledge and skills to entrepreneurs.

IADE's HRD strategy is reflected in several core activities, including staff capacity-building, client registration, entrepreneurial training, business assistance, business consultancy, business incubation, and information-promotion programs. These activities show that enterprise development is approached through an integrated support model rather than through isolated training sessions. The institutional logic is that entrepreneurs require more than financial assistance; they also need managerial knowledge, technical guidance, market orientation, and continued support to sustain their business activities.

This finding supports the view that HRD in small-enterprise contexts should not be interpreted narrowly as formal training. (Nolan & Garavan, 2016) argue that HRD in SMEs includes learning, knowledge transfer, managerial development, and the strengthening of organizational capability. In the IADE case, this broader understanding of HRD is evident because the institution combines training with business counselling, technical assistance, and incubation. Therefore, IADE's HRD strategy operates as a bridge between public institutional capacity and the practical development needs of entrepreneurs.

However, the findings also show that the effectiveness of this strategy depends heavily on the readiness of IADE's internal human resources. HRD becomes central because the institution's ability to support enterprise development is shaped by the competence, number, and preparedness of its own personnel. This means that IADE's contribution to enterprise development cannot be separated from its internal capacity to train, guide, and monitor entrepreneurs.

Institutional capacity and internal HR constraints

Although IADE has a strategic mandate and a wide range of enterprise-support functions, the findings reveal several internal capacity constraints. The most prominent constraint is the limited number of qualified trainers. Field evidence indicates that IADE has only a small number of trainers available for advanced training functions, including Training of Trainers (TOT) and Training of Master Trainers (TOMT). This limitation affects the institution's ability to expand training coverage and maintain consistent quality in enterprise-development services.

A second constraint concerns the limited allocation of budget for staff development and program implementation. Insufficient budget restricts IADE's ability to conduct regular staff training, improve trainer capacity, and provide sustained support to entrepreneurs. This is significant because HRD requires continuity. Without adequate financial resources, training programs may remain episodic and may not be followed by mentoring, monitoring, or technical assistance. As a result, the institutional capacity to transform training into practical enterprise-development outcomes becomes limited.

A third constraint relates to workload and staff adequacy. Although IADE personnel are described as having relatively good educational backgrounds and commitment to service delivery, the volume of work exceeds the available human resources. This creates a gap between institutional mandate and operational capacity. Staff may possess the willingness and basic competence to support enterprise development, but limited personnel and excessive workload reduce the effectiveness of service delivery.

These findings are consistent with Harney and Alkhalaf's (2021) argument that SME-related HRD practices are often shaped by resource constraints, informality, and limited managerial systems. In the IADE context, however, the constraint is not located only within

SMEs; it is also embedded within the public support institution itself. This expands the discussion of HRD by showing that enterprise-development outcomes in resource-constrained settings depend not only on entrepreneurs' capability, but also on the institutional capacity of the agency responsible for supporting them.

Training, mentoring, and business assistance as enterprise-support mechanisms

The findings show that IADE supports enterprise development through a combination of training, mentoring, counselling, and business assistance. IADE provides entrepreneurial training and several business-development services for both potential and existing entrepreneurs. Through its municipal presence and enterprise-development centres, IADE assists entrepreneurs in identifying business problems, analyzing their situation, and seeking appropriate solutions.

The support provided includes assistance in preparing business plans, reviewing business operations, accessing finance, obtaining materials and equipment, preparing credit applications for financial institutions, improving commercialization, setting prices, and maintaining business records. These activities demonstrate that IADE's role extends beyond basic training. The institution functions as a business-development facilitator that helps entrepreneurs translate knowledge into operational business practices.

This finding is important because training alone is rarely sufficient to ensure enterprise development. Entrepreneurs may understand general business concepts during training, but still face difficulties in financial management, pricing, marketing, production, administration, and access to credit. Therefore, mentoring and technical assistance become necessary mechanisms for converting HRD activities into practical business improvement.

The findings also indicate that IADE uses training need assessment before placing entrepreneurs into training modules. This suggests an effort to align training content with client needs. Such alignment is important because standardized training may fail when entrepreneurs operate in different sectors, possess different levels of experience, or face different operational constraints. In this regard, IADE's approach reflects a more contextual model of HRD delivery, where training is connected to diagnosis, counselling, and follow-up assistance.

This supports (Havierniková et al., 2025), who emphasize that HRD-related factors influence enterprise development through individual and organizational dimensions. In the IADE case, the individual dimension appears in the development of entrepreneurs' knowledge and skills, while the organizational dimension appears in business planning, administration, access to resources, and operational improvement.

Enterprise-development outcomes and implementation limits

The findings suggest that IADE's support contributes positively to enterprise development, but the outcomes remain uneven. Field evidence indicates that approximately 60% of supported businesses were reported to operate relatively well, while around 40% experienced stagnation, discontinuity, or failure after receiving support. This pattern shows that IADE's programs have produced meaningful results for some entrepreneurs, but have not yet generated consistent outcomes across all supported enterprises.

The uneven outcome is linked to several factors. First, some entrepreneurs face difficulties in sustaining their businesses after receiving initial support. In several cases, business owners were reported to lose continuity after obtaining financial or institutional assistance. This indicates that business failure is not caused only by lack of initial support, but

also by weak managerial discipline, limited entrepreneurial commitment, insufficient follow-up, and difficulty adapting to market challenges.

Second, monitoring and post-training assistance remain critical. The findings indicate that some supported entrepreneurs become difficult to track after receiving assistance, making follow-up and evaluation more difficult. This weakens IADE's ability to assess whether support programs produce sustainable enterprise-development outcomes. Without a strong monitoring mechanism, training and assistance may not be fully converted into long-term business growth.

Third, enterprise development depends on the interaction between institutional support and entrepreneur readiness. IADE may provide training, counselling, and technical assistance, but entrepreneurs still need motivation, managerial discipline, and the capacity to apply business knowledge consistently. Therefore, the effectiveness of HRD-based enterprise support is relational: it depends on both institutional capacity and beneficiary commitment.

This finding contributes to the literature by showing that public HRD interventions in enterprise development should not be evaluated only by the number of training programs or beneficiaries. They should be evaluated based on whether training and assistance produce sustained changes in business practices. In this sense, enterprise development is not a direct automatic result of HRD programs, but an outcome shaped by institutional capacity, program continuity, monitoring systems, and entrepreneur agency.

Discussion: linking HRD strategy, institutional capacity, and enterprise development

Overall, the findings show that IADE's HRD strategy is central to enterprise development in Timor-Leste, but its effectiveness is mediated by institutional capacity. IADE has developed relevant enterprise-support mechanisms, including training, mentoring, business counselling, technical assistance, incubation, and promotion. These mechanisms are aligned with the needs of entrepreneurs in a developing economy where managerial capacity, access to finance, and business administration remain key challenges.

However, institutional constraints limit the full realization of IADE's enterprise-development role. Limited trainers, insufficient budget, inadequate staff numbers, and weak follow-up mechanisms reduce the institution's ability to deliver continuous and high-quality support. This indicates that enterprise-development policy should pay greater attention to the capacity of implementing institutions, not only to the design of entrepreneurship programs.

Theoretically, the findings extend the HRD literature by shifting attention from firm-level HRD to public institutional HRD. Much of the existing HRD literature discusses how firms develop employees to improve organizational performance. This study shows that, in a post-conflict developing economy, HRD also operates through public institutions that build entrepreneurial capacity outside the organization. In this context, IADE's staff capacity becomes a precondition for effective enterprise support. The institution must first develop its own human resources before it can effectively develop the capacity of entrepreneurs.

Practically, the findings suggest that IADE needs to strengthen four areas. First, trainer development should be prioritized through continuous TOT and TOMT programs. Second, budget allocation for HRD and enterprise-support activities should be increased to ensure continuity of training and mentoring. Third, post-training monitoring should be institutionalized so that supported enterprises can be tracked and assisted after receiving support. Fourth, enterprise-support programs should be linked more closely to entrepreneurs'

real business needs, including financial management, market access, pricing, record keeping, commercialization, and operational sustainability.

Thus, the study confirms that HRD strategy and institutional capacity are mutually reinforcing. HRD strategy provides the direction for enterprise-development support, while institutional capacity determines whether that strategy can be implemented effectively. In the case of IADE, enterprise development depends not merely on the availability of programs, but on the institution's ability to deliver, monitor, and adapt those programs to the practical needs of entrepreneurs in Timor-Leste.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how human resource development strategy and institutional capacity support enterprise development in Timor-Leste through the case of the *Instituto de Apoio ao Desenvolvimento Empresarial* (IADE). The findings showed that HRD within IADE functioned both as an internal capacity-building mechanism and as an external enterprise-support instrument. Through training, mentoring, consultancy, business assistance, incubation, and promotional activities, IADE contributed to strengthening entrepreneurial capacity and supporting small enterprise development.

However, the effectiveness of IADE's enterprise-support role was constrained by institutional capacity limitations. Limited budget allocation, insufficient staff development, a shortage of qualified trainers, and weak post-training monitoring reduced the continuity and quality of support provided to entrepreneurs. These findings indicate that enterprise development depends not only on the existence of training programs but also on the institutional capacity to deliver, monitor, and adapt those programs to entrepreneurs' practical needs.

This study contributes to the HRD and enterprise-development literature by demonstrating that HRD in resource-constrained and post-conflict economies should be understood beyond firm-level practices. Public institutions such as IADE play a strategic role in transferring knowledge, building entrepreneurial capability, and supporting enterprise sustainability. Future research may extend this study by comparing enterprise-support institutions across municipalities or by applying mixed-method approaches to assess the measurable effects of HRD programs on business continuity, income growth, and enterprise performance.

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