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Bridging the Farm-to-Input Gap: Opportunity Recognition and Design Thinking in a Philippine Animal Agri-Products Trading Company

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Abstract. Animal agri-products trading companies occupy a critical but under-examined position in the Philippine livestock value chain, connecting farmers, veterinarians, and feed mills to veterinary, breeding, nutritional, and biosecurity inputs. Despite the sector's importance to food security and rural livelihoods, limited research examines how such companies recognize market opportunities and build viable, trusted enterprises. This study, conducted on a start-up Philippine animal agri-products trading company (pseudonym "AgriVet Co."), determined the extent to which the company practices opportunity recognition, creativity and ideation, design thinking application, trust-building and relationship management, and feasibility validation; examined the relationships among these five domains; explored, through the founder's and staff's experiences, how the company's market opportunity was recognized, creatively explored, and validated; and proposed evidence-informed strategies to strengthen these areas. A mixed-method case study combined a five-point Likert-scale survey of 14 respondents with key informant interviews of the founder and three senior staff, covering all 18 direct-hire personnel. Weighted means assessed each practice's extent, and thematic analysis examined the qualitative data; reliability was excellent (Cronbach's alpha = 0.89). The company practiced the examined behaviors overall, with trust-building and relationship management the strongest area, supported by farm visits and technical consultations, while feasibility validation was less formally practiced, particularly in financial and organizational assessment. The five domains proved interrelated, with trust-building linking opportunity recognition to validation and substituting for the more formal creativity and feasibility practices that scored lowest. The founder's technical and distribution experience strongly shaped opportunity recognition, while trust-building proved central to serving a technically demanding client base. The study recommends formalizing the company's informal opportunity-scanning and feasibility practices, introducing lightweight structured ideation techniques, and developing a repeatable feasibility checklist to sustain founder-driven strengths as the company scales.

Keywords: Creativity; effectuation; feasibility validation; Philippine agribusiness; trust-building.

Introduction

The Philippine livestock sector depends on a distribution layer that is often overlooked in entrepreneurship research: the trading companies that connect global and domestic manufacturers of veterinary medicines, breeding materials, feed additives, and biosecurity products to the farmers, veterinarians, and feed mills that use them. These animal agri products trading companies operate at the intersection of technical expertise and commercial distribution, requiring not only reliable supply chains but also the credibility to advise farmers on products that directly affect animal health, productivity, and, ultimately, farmer income. For start-up trading companies entering this environment, the challenge is not merely logistical; it is the recognition of an underserved technical or commercial gap, the creative development of a market entry approach suited to a relationship-driven and often risk-averse client base, and the iterative validation of that approach before scarce capital is committed.

Opportunity recognition theory in entrepreneurship examines how, why, and when individuals identify, discover, or create commercially viable ideas for new products, services, or ventures (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). Two dominant theoretical perspectives inform this inquiry. The discovery view,

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rooted in Kirzner's (1997) concept of entrepreneurial alertness, holds that opportunities exist objectively in the market as inefficiencies or information asymmetries, waiting to be noticed by an alert observer. The creation view, rooted in Schumpeter's (1934) theory of creative destruction, holds that opportunities do not simply pre-exist but are enacted and built through social interaction, iterative prototyping, and creative execution. Sarasvathy's (2001) effectuation framework adds a further dimension relevant to resource-constrained, early-stage ventures: rather than reasoning from a fixed goal to the means required to achieve it, expert entrepreneurs often reason from the means already at hand (who they are, what they know, and whom they know) toward whatever opportunities those means make possible.

Once an opportunity is recognized, creativity determines how widely the solution space is explored before a course of action is chosen. Structured techniques such as brainstorming exist precisely to counteract the tendency of resource-constrained ventures to converge prematurely on the first plausible idea. Design thinking (Brown, 2009) then provides the operating discipline that sequences empathy, problem definition, ideation, prototyping, and testing into an iterative validation loop, positioning the customer at the center of the process rather than consulting them only after a solution has already been built. Because a creatively explored opportunity is not yet a viable venture, a feasibility screen across market, technical/operational, financial, and organizational dimensions remain necessary before the concept is carried into a formal business model (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010) or tested through the build–measure–learn cycle of the lean startup methodology (Ries, 2011).

Despite this interlocking theoretical foundation, empirical evidence on how opportunity recognition, creativity, and design thinking actually unfold in relationship-driven, technical business-to-business trading firms remains scarce, particularly outside the digital platforms and consumer-facing startups that dominate the existing literature, where trust and technical credibility, rather than technology alone, may be the primary mechanism through which opportunities are validated. This gap is especially pronounced in the Philippine setting: existing agritech and logistics case studies concentrate on digital marketplace and last-mile delivery models, while the Philippine veterinary and animal-health literature examines regulatory and public-health outcomes rather than the entrepreneurial and organizational practices of the trading companies operating within that same environment. To date, no known study has examined opportunity recognition, creativity, design thinking, trust-building, and feasibility validation together within a single Philippine animal agri-products trading company which this study addresses that gap.

This study examines the extent and nature of these interlocking practices as experienced by a start-up animal agri-products trading company in the Philippines, specifically one that distributes veterinary products, artificial insemination and breeding materials, feed additives, and biosecurity solutions to livestock farms, feed mills, and veterinary practitioners. At the company's request, and to protect proprietary and competitively sensitive information, the company is referred to throughout this study by the pseudonym “AgriVet Co.” and is not otherwise identified. Understanding how the company recognized its market opportunity, tested its early approach, and screened that approach for feasibility should be useful to practitioners, researchers, and policymakers working to strengthen the input-distribution layer of the Philippine livestock value chain.

Research Questions

This study aimed to determine the extent and nature of opportunity recognition, creativity, and design thinking practices employed by a start-up animal agri products trading company in the Philippines. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the extent to which the company employs practices related to:
   1.1 Opportunity Recognition;
   1.2 Creativity and Ideation;
   1.3 Design Thinking Application;
   1.4 Trust-Building and Relationship Management; and
   Feasibility Validation?
2. What is the relationship among these practice domains, and how do they interact in the company's opportunity development process?
3. What insights from the founder's and staff's experiences and reflections explain how the company's market opportunity was recognized, creatively explored, and validated?
4. Based on the findings, what evidence-informed strategies can be proposed to strengthen the company's capacity for opportunity recognition, creative problem-solving, and design-oriented validation?

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Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study is scoped to a single start-up animal agri products trading company (pseudonym: AgriVet Co.) operating in Southern Luzon, Philippines. Several delimitations define the boundaries of this research. First, the study is delimited to one case organization and does not extend to other animal agri products trading companies, competitors, or the broader Philippine livestock input distribution industry; findings are therefore illustrative of this company's experience rather than statistically generalizable across the sector. Second, the investigation is confined to five pre-defined practice domains identified through the literature review: Opportunity Recognition, Creativity and Ideation, Design Thinking Application, Trust-Building and Relationship Management, and Feasibility Validation. Practices outside these domains were not assessed. Third, participation was delimited to 14 management and operational personnel for the survey and the founder together with three senior staff for the key informant interviews, selected through purposive sampling; together, these 18 participants represented the entirety of AgriVet Co.'s direct-hire workforce, as a portion of the company's manpower is outsourced and therefore fell outside the scope of this study. The perspectives of clients, competitors, suppliers, and regulators were not directly captured. Fourth, at the request of company management and to protect proprietary commercial information, the company's actual name, precise location, and identifying financial details are withheld and replaced with a pseudonym throughout this study. Finally, the study is cross-sectional and substantially retrospective, capturing the founder's and staff's current recollections and perceptions of practices that, in some cases, occurred at the company's founding rather than tracking those practices as they unfolded in real time. Given these delimitations, the findings are contextualized within the Philippine animal agri products trading environment and may not be directly generalizable to trading companies in substantially different product categories, regions, or organizational contexts.

Literature Review

Opportunity Recognition

Opportunity recognition theory explains how entrepreneurs identify and act on exploitable market gaps through cognitive mechanisms, market conditions, and individual characteristics (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). Kirzner's (1997) discovery view treats opportunities as objectively existing and identifiable through entrepreneurial alertness, whereas Schumpeter's (1934) creation view sees opportunities as enacted through innovation. Shane and Venkataraman (2000) emphasize that recognition depends on both environmental opportunities and the entrepreneur's prior knowledge and cognitive capabilities, making domain expertise particularly important in technical trading businesses. Sarasvathy's (2001) effectuation framework further suggests that resource-constrained ventures rely on existing means, including knowledge, skills, relationships, and networks, rather than predetermined plans. Recent studies reinforce this perspective, showing that entrepreneurial passion enhances recognition through alertness (Zhu et al., 2024), while self-efficacy and alertness jointly influence recognition (Otache et al., 2024); social intelligence and social capital also strengthen the transition from recognition to exploitation in emerging economies (Azam et al., 2026). Despite these advances, research remains concentrated on digital and developed-market contexts, leaving limited evidence on opportunity recognition in resource-constrained, technical B2B sectors such as agricultural input distribution. This study addresses this gap by examining opportunity recognition within such an emerging-market context.

Creativity

Creativity in the entrepreneurial process is understood as an oscillation between divergent thinking, which generates the widest possible range of options without premature judgment, and convergent thinking, which applies feasibility and resource criteria to narrow that range (Osborn, 1953). Structured techniques exist to operationalize this oscillation: brainstorming (Osborn, 1953) encourages quantity and deferred judgment; SCAMPER (Eberle, 1996) provides a transformation checklist (Substitute, Combine, Adapt, Modify, Put to another use, Eliminate, Reverse) well suited to reworking an existing product or service line rather than starting from a blank page; and Six Thinking Hats (de Bono, 1985) structures parallel group thinking across facts, emotion, caution, optimism, creativity, and process to vet a shortlisted idea for blind spots. A common critique of novice ventures is that they converge too early, committing to the first plausible idea before the solution space has been adequately explored (Osborn, 1953). This effect is not merely conceptual: in a controlled experimental study with entrepreneurship students, Farrokhnia et al. (2023) found that groups using SCAMPER during brainstorming generated business ideas rated as more original, with greater depth of exploration within idea categories, than groups using unstructured brainstorming, providing recent, entrepreneurship-specific empirical support for structured ideation techniques.

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Design Thinking

Design thinking, formalized by IDEO and Stanford's d. school, provides a human-centered and iterative alternative to linear business planning, emphasizing empathy, prototyping, experimentation, and learning from early failure (Brown, 2009). Its five stages—Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test—combine divergent and convergent thinking and allow repeated cycling as new insights emerge. In technical trading ventures, practices such as farm visits, product demonstrations, and after-sales consultation can serve as ongoing forms of user empathy and engagement. Recent research shows that design thinking and effectuation reinforce one another, with user focus, prototyping, and experimentation translating effectual principles into practical entrepreneurial behaviors (Klenner et al., 2022), while design practices can actively shape opportunity development rather than merely refine existing ideas (Magistretti et al., 2023). However, resource-constrained SMEs tend to emphasize observation and empathy over formal prototyping and testing because later-stage activities require greater time, expertise, and facilitation resources (Demir et al., 2025). Thus, informal field engagement and customer interaction may represent practical forms of design thinking in founder-led technical trading businesses, even without formal adoption of the methodology.

Trust-Building and Relationship Management

Trust is a key foundation of effective business-to-business (B2B) collaboration, particularly for technically complex and quality-uncertain products where buyers cannot easily verify supplier claims before purchase. A systematic review of 139 studies found that trust in agri-food value chains operates at interpersonal, inter-organizational, and institutional levels and facilitates not only risk reduction but also knowledge exchange, collaboration, and value co-creation (de Vries et al., 2023). For founder-led trading companies, trust develops cumulatively through repeated technical engagement with farmers, veterinarians, and feed mills rather than being established at the outset. In animal agri-products trading, clients may also rely heavily on suppliers for accurate product selection and usage guidance, making trust a core mechanism for recognizing, testing, and sustaining business opportunities (Barroga et al., 2020; Pineda-Cortel et al., 2024). In the Philippine context, De Ocampo (2026) identified motivational, attentional, and interpretive mechanisms through which agri-service providers build farmer trust through tangible support, sustained technical competence, and long-term engagement. These findings suggest that practices such as farm visits, technical consultations, and continuous client support represent broader mechanisms through which credibility and enduring business relationships are developed in Philippine animal agri-products trading.

Feasibility Analysis and Venture Validation

A recognized, creatively explored opportunity is not yet a viable venture until it clears a feasibility screen across market, technical/operational, financial, and organizational dimensions. Osterwalder and Pigneur's (2010) Business Model Canvas provides the standard tool for capturing a feasibility-screened concept across nine building blocks, while Ries's (2011) lean startup methodology operationalizes the design-thinking test stage through a continuous build–measure–learn cycle, using a minimum viable offering to validate the riskiest assumptions in the business model before significant resources are committed. More recent scholarship has reframed feasibility validation as an ongoing process rather than a one-time pre-launch screen: Sanasi (2023), synthesizing the business model dynamics literature, characterizes validation, scaling, and pivoting as continuous, iterative activities that recur throughout a venture's life as new assumptions arise. This view is consistent with how founder-led trading companies may revisit feasibility judgments informally each time a new product or client segment is considered, rather than treating it as a discrete step completed once at founding. Addressing the practical difficulty smaller firms have applying such frameworks, Chumaidiyah et al. (2024) integrated the Business Model Canvas with functional-organization and supply-chain-management principles into a simplified "Feasibility Model for SMEs," arguing that existing feasibility tools are frequently too resource-intensive and conceptually complex for micro- and small enterprises to apply consistently, and that a lightweight, practitioner-facing checklist is more likely to see sustained use than a full formal analysis.

The Philippine Animal Health and Livestock Input Distribution Context

Recent Philippine-focused veterinary and agricultural literature helps ground this study in context. Pineda-Cortel et al. (2024) reviewed the regulatory landscape governing veterinary medicinal products in the Philippines and found that, despite existing legislation assigning oversight to multiple government agencies, weak implementation and enforcement remain a persistent challenge, contributing to problems such as the unregulated use of antimicrobials among livestock producers. Barroga et al. (2020) reached a related conclusion in a qualitative pilot study of backyard and commercial poultry and swine farms in the Philippines, documenting that farmers routinely purchase antimicrobial veterinary products directly from

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local agri-veterinary (agrovet) retail and trading outlets, often without a prescription and with limited technical guidance on proper use. Read together, these studies suggest that Philippine animal agri products trading companies operate within a regulatory and informational environment where farmers depend heavily on the trading companies themselves, not on formal veterinary oversight, for accurate product selection and usage guidance. That gives empirical weight to this study's emphasis on trust-building and technical credibility as central, not peripheral, practices for firms operating in this space.

Across the literature reviewed, there is broad agreement that opportunity recognition, creativity, and design thinking work together rather than in sequence: recognition identifies that a gap exists, creativity widens the range of possible responses, and design thinking tests those responses against real users before capital is committed. Recent scholarship (Klenner et al., 2022; Magistretti et al., 2023; Zhu et al., 2024) adds that these constructs are also affectively and behaviorally bound up with effectuation, not just cognitive or sequential stages, while Azam et al. (2026) and Demir et al. (2025) further show that, under resource constraints, relational and social mechanisms tend to substitute for the more formal, tool-driven versions of opportunity recognition, creativity, and design thinking described in the founding literature. The literature is less settled, however, on how these constructs play out in relationship-driven, technical B2B trading businesses, as distinct from digital platforms or consumer-facing startups, where trust and technical credibility, more than technology on its own, may be the main mechanism through which opportunities get validated, with empirical evidence specific to Philippine animal agri products trading companies remaining especially scarce (Barroga et al., 2020; De Ocampo, 2026; Pineda-Cortel et al., 2024).

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-method case study design (Yin, 2014) that integrates quantitative survey data with qualitative interview findings and a literature review. Yin's (2014) case study framework was applied in its original form to guide the integration of the quantitative and qualitative components. The case study approach was selected for its capacity to generate deep, contextually rich insight into a complex organizational and entrepreneurial phenomenon. This approach was particularly appropriate for examining how interrelated opportunity-recognition, creativity, and design-thinking practices manifested within a single founder-led trading company. The subject organization, AgriVet Co., is a start-up animal agri products trading company in the Philippines distributing veterinary products, artificial insemination and breeding materials, feed additives, and biosecurity solutions. The quantitative component employed a structured five-point Likert-scale survey to measure the perceived extent of practices across five domains. The qualitative component employed semi-structured key informant interviews with the founder and senior staff to provide depth, context, and founding-era detail for the quantitative ratings.

Sampling Design

This study employed a purposive sampling design to identify participants who possessed relevant knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in the founding, operations, and strategic decision-making of the case company. The study involved a total of 18 respondents (100 percent of AgriVet Co.'s direct-hire workforce; a portion of the company's operational manpower is outsourced and was therefore excluded from the sampling frame), comprising 14 who participated in the structured survey questionnaire and 4, including the founder, who served as key informants for the semi-structured interviews. Survey respondents represented various functional areas within the organization (sales, technical/veterinary support, warehousing and logistics, and administration) to capture diverse perspectives across the five practice domains, while key informants were selected based on their direct involvement in the company's founding and early strategic decisions.

Research Locale

The study was conducted at the principal place of business of AgriVet Co. in Southern Luzon, Philippines, with client operations spanning livestock farms, feed mills, and veterinary clinics across Luzon. At the request of company management, the specific locale is withheld, and the company is referred to by a pseudonym throughout this study to protect proprietary and competitively sensitive information.

Research Participants

The respondents of the study comprised a total of 18 management and operational personnel of AgriVet Co. (the company's entire direct-hire workforce, since a portion of its manpower is outsourced and falls outside the scope of this study), selected through purposive sampling to ensure representation of all

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functional areas relevant to the five practice domains. Of these, 4 served as key informants for the interview component: the company's Founder/Chief Executive, the Operations Manager, the Technical/Veterinary Consultant, and the Sales Manager, all of whom were directly involved in the company's founding or early strategic decisions. The remaining 14 were survey respondents, spanning the broader staff team, including sales representatives, technical support staff, warehouse and logistics personnel, and administrative staff.

Research Instrument

Two primary data collection instruments were employed in this study: a semi-structured interview guide and a structured survey questionnaire, both developed by the researchers specifically for this study and grounded in the five practice domains identified through the literature review. The interview guide, covering opportunity recognition, creativity, design thinking, trust-building, and feasibility validation, was developed and validated by a three-member expert panel prior to use. Interviews were conducted in person and lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes. The survey questionnaire consisted of 20 items assessing the perceived extent of practices across the five domains using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Not at All Practiced, 2 = Slightly Practiced, 3 = Moderately Practiced, 4 = Practiced, and 5 = Highly Practiced), interpreted using the following scale: 4.20–5.00 = Highly Practiced; 3.40–4.19 = Practiced; 2.60–3.39 = Moderately Practiced; 1.80–2.59 = Slightly Practiced; and 1.00–1.79 = Not at All Practiced. Prior to the actual data collection, the questionnaire was pilot-tested with 10 industry practitioners from comparable agri-input trading firms, yielding an overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.89, indicating excellent internal consistency (Nunnally, 1978), consistent with contemporary guidance on interpreting alpha values in applied research instruments (Taber, 2018).

Data Gathering Procedure

The data gathering process was conducted systematically to ensure the integrity and credibility of the study. First, approval to conduct the study was secured from the University of Luzon's Research Ethics Committee. Once this approval was obtained, informed consent was secured from all participants prior to their involvement, including explicit consent regarding the confidential treatment of the company's identity. The five-point Likert-scale survey was then administered to 14 respondents over a three-week period to assess the perceived extent of opportunity-recognition, creativity, and design-thinking practices. Subsequently, key informant interviews were conducted with the founder and three senior staff to obtain in-depth insight into how these practices manifested during the company's founding and growth. Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis following the framework of Braun and Clarke (2006), as later refined into their reflexive thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Meanwhile, survey data were encoded, cleaned, and subjected to statistical analysis (weighted means and verbal interpretation). Finally, the quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated and synthesized to develop a comprehensive analysis and formulate evidence-informed recommendations.

Results and Discussions

Research Question 1: What is the extent to which the company employs practices related to opportunity recognition, creativity and ideation, design thinking application, trust-building and relationship management, and feasibility validation?

Table 1. Extent of Practices in terms of Opportunity Recognition

	Indicators	Mean	Verbal Description	Interpretation
1.	The founder's prior technical/industry knowledge was used to identify farmer or client needs.	4.72	Highly Practiced	Very High Extent
2.	The company systematically scans the market for gaps in available veterinary or animal health inputs.	3.94	Practiced	High Extent
3.	The company is alert to underserved client segments (e.g., smallholder livestock raisers).	4.33	Highly Practiced	Very High Extent
4.	Client and farmer feedback is actively used to identify unmet needs.	4.06	Practiced	High Extent
	Over-all Mean	**4.26**	**Highly Practiced**	**Very High Extent**

AgriVet Co. scored high on opportunity recognition overall, with a weighted mean of 4.26. The highest-rated indicator was the founder's use of prior technical and industry knowledge to identify client needs (4.72, Highly Practiced), while systematic market scanning came in comparatively lowest (3.94,

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Practiced), though still a substantial figure. This is consistent with Shane and Venkataraman's (2000) opportunity-individual nexus: respondents see the company's ability to spot gaps as tied closely to the founder's accumulated domain expertise rather than to a formal, repeatable scanning process, meaning opportunity recognition here runs more on alertness exercised by knowledgeable individuals than on structured market research. This also echoes Azam et al.'s (2026) finding that, in resource-constrained settings, social capital and relational networks (here, the founder's prior industry contacts) tend to carry more weight in converting recognized gaps into exploitable opportunities than does formal market scanning.

Table 2. Extent of Practices in terms of Creativity and Ideation

	Indicators	Mean	Verbal Description	Interpretation
1.	Structured brainstorming is used to generate new product or service ideas.	3.17	Moderately Practiced	Moderate Extent
2.	SCAMPER-type techniques (substituting, combining, adapting existing offerings) are applied to the company's product line.	2.89	Moderately Practiced	Moderate Extent
3.	Idea generation involves multiple functions (e.g., sales, technical, veterinary staff).	3.61	Practiced	High Extent
4.	The company explores multiple options before committing to a solution.	3.44	Practiced	High Extent
	Over-all Mean	**3.28**	**Moderately Practiced**	**Moderate Extent**

Creativity and ideation practices scored only moderately overall (mean of 3.28), the second-lowest of the five domains, ahead of only Feasibility Validation. Structured techniques such as SCAMPER (2.89) and formal brainstorming (3.17) rated lowest, while cross-functional idea generation (3.61) rated highest. That split matches comparable case literature on relationship-driven trading ventures: creativity at AgriVet Co. looks informal and cross-functional rather than technique-driven, with ideas emerging through everyday interaction among sales, technical, and veterinary staff rather than dedicated ideation sessions using tools like SCAMPER (Eberle, 1996) or Six Thinking Hats (de Bono, 1985).

Table 3. Extent of Practices in terms of Design Thinking Application

	Indicators	Mean	Verbal Description	Interpretation
1.	Staff engage directly with farmers or clients to understand their needs (empathize).	4.61	Highly Practiced	Very High Extent
2.	Client problems are clearly framed before a solution is proposed (define).	3.78	Practiced	High Extent
3.	New products or services are piloted with a small client base before full rollout (prototype/test).	3.50	Practiced	High Extent
4.	Offerings are iteratively refined based on field feedback.	4.11	Practiced	High Extent
	Over-all Mean	**4.00**	**Practiced**	**High Extent**

Design thinking application was practiced overall (mean of 4.00). Direct client engagement (the empathize stage) rated highest (4.61, Highly Practiced), while small-scale piloting (the prototype/test stage) rated comparatively lowest (3.50, Practiced). That split echoes Brown's (2009) observation that design thinking is non-linear and that ventures often over-invest in empathy relative to formal prototyping. For AgriVet Co., the consistently high empathize rating points to farm visits and client consultations as the company's primary, most habitual design-thinking practice, while structured piloting of new offerings stays comparatively less formalized. This mirrors the pattern Demir et al. (2025) documented across resource-constrained SMEs more broadly, where empathize- and observe-type activities are sustained because they fit naturally into everyday client contact, while prototype/test activities lag because they require dedicated facilitation time and structure that smaller firms rarely have on hand.

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Table 4. Extent of Practices in terms of Trust-Building and Relationship Management

	Indicators	Mean	Verbal Description	Interpretation
1.	The company conducts personal or technical engagement (e.g., farm visits, consultations) with clients.	4.83	Highly Practiced	Very High Extent
2.	Credibility is built through technical expertise and product demonstrations.	4.67	Highly Practiced	Very High Extent
3.	The company is responsive to client concerns and provides after-sales support.	4.56	Highly Practiced	Very High Extent
4.	Long-term relationships are actively managed with farmers, veterinarians, and feed mills.	4.72	Highly Practiced	Very High Extent
	Over-all Mean	**4.70**	**Highly Practiced**	**Very High Extent**

Trust-Building and Relationship Management came out as the most highly practiced domain overall (mean of 4.70), with all four indicators rated Highly Practiced. Personal and technical engagement through farm visits and consultations rated highest (4.83), which matches comparable case literature on relationship-driven agri-trading ventures, where personal, technical trust-building substitutes for paid marketing in low-trust, cash-based markets. For AgriVet Co., the uniformly high ratings across all four indicators point to trust-building as something more than a peripheral marketing activity: it functions as the company's central operating practice, doubling as its opportunity-validation mechanism and its design-thinking empathize stage, and standing as its main competitive differentiator in a technical product category where counterfeit or unreliable suppliers are a recognized market concern. Mapped onto De Ocampo's (2026) trust-building mechanisms observed among Philippine smallholder farmers, the top two indicators here (personal engagement and expertise-based credibility, both 4.7 and above) correspond closely to attentional trust-building through sustained technical extension, while the sustained relationship-management indicator (4.72) corresponds to the interpretive mechanism of signaling durable, non-transactional commitment; taken together, the pattern suggests AgriVet Co.'s trust-building operates through much the same mechanisms documented among other Philippine agricultural service providers, rather than being unique to this company.

Table 5. Extent of Practices in terms of Feasibility Validation

	Indicators	Mean	Verbal Description	Interpretation
1.	Market demand is assessed before introducing a new product.	3.33	Moderately Practiced	Moderate Extent
2.	Technical and operational capability (e.g., cold chain, storage, logistics) is evaluated before offering a new product.	3.61	Practiced	High Extent
3.	Financial viability and capital requirements are considered before committing resources.	3.06	Moderately Practiced	Moderate Extent
4.	The organization's team competency is assessed before expanding into a new offering.	2.94	Moderately Practiced	Moderate Extent
	Over-all Mean	**3.24**	**Moderately Practiced**	**Moderate Extent**

Feasibility Validation is the least practiced domain overall (mean of 3.24), and the only one where more than one indicator fell into the Moderately Practiced range. Organizational/team-competency assessment rated lowest (2.94), followed closely by financial viability assessment (3.06), while technical/operational evaluation held up comparatively strongest (3.61). AgriVet Co., in other words, validates the dimensions closest to its existing operational and technical strengths more consistently than it validates financial and organizational readiness. This pattern broadly matches Sarasvathy's (2001) effectuation logic, where resource-constrained ventures lean on existing means and operational judgment rather than formal financial or organizational planning. It also matches the diagnosis behind Chumaidiyah et al.'s (2024) simplified SME feasibility model: full-scale Business Model Canvas or lean-startup validation processes are often too resource-intensive for small, founder-led firms to sustain, which helps explain why AgriVet Co.'s feasibility practice concentrates on the technical/operational dimension nearest its existing competence while financial and organizational assessment remain comparatively informal.

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Research Question 2: What is the relationship among the practice domains, and how do they interact in the company's opportunity development process?

Table 6. Integration of Opportunity Recognition, Creativity, Design Thinking, Trust-Building, and Feasibility Practices

	Domain	Mean	Verbal Description	Interpretation
1.	Trust-Building and Relationship Management	4.70	Highly Practiced	Very High Extent
2.	Opportunity Recognition	4.26	Highly Practiced	Very High Extent
3.	Design Thinking Application	4.00	Practiced	High Extent
4.	Creativity and Ideation	3.28	Moderately Practiced	Moderate Extent
5.	Feasibility Validation	3.24	Moderately Practiced	Moderate Extent
	Over-all Mean	**3.90**	**Practiced**	**High Extent**

Putting the weighted means from Tables 1 through 5 side by side, a clear rank order emerges: Trust-Building and Relationship Management (4.70) > Opportunity Recognition (4.26) > Design Thinking Application (4.00) > Creativity and Ideation (3.28) > Feasibility Validation (3.24), for a grand weighted mean of 3.90 (Practiced) across all domains. The top three domains appear to build on one another: opportunity recognition, grounded in the founder's prior technical knowledge, gets sustained and validated in the field through trust-building practices (farm visits, consultations, demonstrations), which in turn double as the company's de facto empathize stage within design thinking. Trust-building, in effect, is the connective tissue linking recognition to validation for AgriVet Co., filling in for the more formal, technique-driven creativity and feasibility practices that scored lowest. That fits Sarasvathy's (2001) effectuation logic: the founder's own knowledge, relationships, and field presence, not capital, formal market research, or structured ideation tools, seem to have carried the venture through its highest-uncertainty period. The lower ratings for Creativity and Ideation and Feasibility Validation mark these two domains as the company's clearest room for improvement, especially as it looks to scale beyond founder-led, relationship-based decision-making.

Research Question 3: What insights from the founder's and staff's experiences and reflections explain how the company's market opportunity was recognized, creatively explored, and validated?

Consistent with the data-analysis procedure described earlier, the qualitative findings below were derived through reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019), with interview transcripts from the founder and three senior staff key informants coded inductively and grouped into the four cross-cutting themes presented next.

Theme 1: A Technical Knowledge Corridor Into an Underserved Gap

The founder's account of the company's origin centered on several years of prior experience distributing veterinary and animal health products for another firm, during which repeated exposure to backyard raisers and small-scale poultry and swine growers revealed a persistent, unmet need: farmers in the founder's service area either could not access quality veterinary and breeding inputs or lacked the technical guidance to use them correctly.

> **Founder:** *"Before I started the company, I was doing sales and servicing for a distributor — veterinary products — for almost eight years. And in that time, I just kept running into the same thing, backyard raisers, small growers, who either couldn't get their hands on what they needed, or they had it but didn't really know how to use it right. Nobody was really taking care of that group."*

This maps most closely onto Shane and Venkataraman's (2000) opportunity-individual nexus: the underserved segment was, in principle, visible to any distributor working the same territory, yet it took the founder's accumulated technical and relational knowledge to turn the gap into a recognizable, actionable opportunity rather than background noise. The gap itself pre-existed the founder's decision to act on it, but

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building a dedicated company to serve this segment leans toward Schumpeter's (1934) creation view, given that no comparable, dedicated service existed locally at the time

Theme 2: Trust as the Primary Creative Response

Across interviews, the founder and senior staff consistently identified trust, not product availability or price, as the company's central early obstacle. Farmers were reported to be wary of new suppliers due to prior experience with counterfeit or substandard veterinary products circulating in the market.

> **Sales Manager:** *"In the beginning, farmers were suspicious. There were stories of fake or expired products going around, so trust was really our biggest hurdle, not price or supply. We had to show up personally, do free consultations, and sometimes even assist during actual farm procedures just so they'd believe we were legitimate."*

Rather than reach for a specific structured creativity technique like brainstorming or SCAMPER, the company's response was fundamentally relational: personal, technical engagement stood in for advertising and incentive promotions. That fits both the comparatively lower Creativity and Ideation ratings in Table 2 and the comparatively higher Trust-Building ratings in Table 4, and it echoes patterns in comparable agri-trading case literature, where relationship-based problem-solving, not any specific ideation tool, resolved the venture's biggest early obstacle.

Theme 3: Field Engagement as a Persistent Empathize Stage

Both the Technical/Veterinary Consultant and the Operations Manager described ongoing, routine farm visits as the company's primary channel for identifying product gaps and service adjustments, a practice that has continued well past the company's founding period.

> **Technical/Veterinary Consultant:** *"Even now that we're bigger, I still do farm visits every week. That's really where we learn what to adjust — a feed additive that isn't moving the way we expected, or a service farmers keep asking for that we don't offer yet."*

This is consistent with the empathize stage of Brown's (2009) design thinking framework, and the fact that it persists over time reflects the non-linear, recurring nature of the framework: rather than treat empathize as a one-time founding activity, AgriVet Co. seems to have built it into an ongoing operational habit, matching the high weighted mean recorded for indicator 3.1 in Table 3 (4.61, Highly Practiced). It also fits Demir et al.'s (2025) observation that resource-constrained firms sustain the empathize/observe stages of design thinking far more readily than the later, resource-intensive prototype/test stages, since informal field contact fits naturally into daily operations in a way that structured piloting does not.

Theme 4: Feasibility Reconstructed Retrospectively

When asked how early product and service decisions were evaluated for viability, the founder and Operations Manager both acknowledged that no formal feasibility process existed in the company's first years, and that financial and organizational assessment remain the least structured aspects of the company's decision-making even at present.

> ***Founder:*** *"Honestly, in the first year we didn't have a formal way of deciding if a new product was worth carrying. I just knew, from experience, which one's farmers needed. It's only in the last couple of years that we started tracking margins and demand more systematically."*

> ***Operations Manager:*** *"We're good at knowing if something will work technically on the farm. Where we still struggle is really sitting down and working out whether we have the manpower or the capital to support it properly before we commit."*

This matches the comparatively low ratings recorded for Feasibility Validation in Table 5, especially for financial viability (3.06) and organizational/team-competency assessment (2.94). It also supports Sarasvathy's (2001) effectuation logic: without formal feasibility tools such as the Business Model Canvas (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010) or a lean startup validation cycle (Ries, 2011), the founder's experiential judgment stood in for structured analysis during the company's highest-uncertainty period. That substitution looks only partly resolved even now that the company has scaled, reinforcing the case, made by Chumaidiyah

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et al. (2024), for a simplified feasibility model scaled to what a founder-led SME can realistically sustain rather than a full formal analysis attempted only after the fact.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to established ethical principles to protect the dignity, rights, and interests of all participants and the subject organization. Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Luzon's Research Ethics Committee prior to data collection, and informed consent was secured from all respondents, who were informed of the study's purpose and their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. At management's request, and to protect sensitive commercial information, the company's identity is withheld and replaced with the pseudonym "AgriVet Co." throughout this study, a condition disclosed to and accepted by all participants. Individual confidentiality was maintained by referring to key informants by role rather than name, and all data were stored securely and accessed only by the researcher. Participants faced no physical, psychological, professional, or commercial risk, and the researcher-maintained objectivity and transparency throughout data collection and analysis to uphold the credibility of the findings.

Conclusion

This study concluded that opportunity recognition, creativity, design thinking, trust-building, and feasibility validation practices were evident within the start-up Philippine animal agri-products trading company, although their development varied across areas. The findings showed that trust-building and relationship management were the company's most established practices, followed by opportunity recognition and design thinking, while creativity and ideation and feasibility validation were comparatively less developed. The qualitative findings further revealed that the founder's prior technical and distribution experience played an important role in recognizing the market opportunity, while trust-building served as a primary approach in responding to the needs of a low-trust and technically demanding client base. Regular farm visits and client consultations also demonstrated the practical integration of customer understanding into the company's activities, particularly in identifying client needs and informing product-related decisions. In contrast, feasibility decisions, particularly those involving financial and organizational considerations, were largely guided by experience and intuition rather than by systematic and documented analysis. Overall, the findings indicate that the company's entrepreneurial practices were strongly shaped by founder expertise, technical knowledge, direct customer engagement, and relationship-based approaches. Trust emerged as an important organizational practice that supported customer relationships, opportunity development, and business decision-making. However, the relatively less developed practices in structured creativity and feasibility assessment indicate opportunities for the company to strengthen its entrepreneurial processes through more systematic ideation, evaluation, and validation mechanisms. These findings provide insights into how resource-constrained, technically specialized animal agri-products trading ventures can develop and sustain entrepreneurial practices while balancing experiential knowledge with more formal approaches to business development. Future research could examine additional animal agri-products trading companies, explore how these practices evolve as businesses grow, and incorporate the perspectives of clients, farmers, and other stakeholders to provide a broader understanding of entrepreneurial practices in the sector.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, discussion, and conclusions, the following evidence-based recommendations are offered: The company should formalize its existing informal market-scanning practices, such as farm visits and veterinary consultations, into a structured and periodically reviewed log of observed client needs and market gaps. The founder's and senior technical staff's domain expertise should also be documented as an explicit organizational asset and incorporated into the onboarding and knowledge-transfer processes for new sales and technical personnel to reduce reliance on individual tacit knowledge. To strengthen Creativity and Ideation, the company should introduce lightweight and structured ideation activities, such as brief SCAMPER-style reviews of existing product lines, before major product or service decisions, while the existing cross-functional idea generation among sales, technical, and veterinary personnel should be formalized through a regular forum for generating, discussing, and evaluating new product or service ideas. For Design Thinking Application, farm visits and client consultations should be formalized as structured "empathize" practices using a simple template to capture client pain points and ensure that these insights are systematically considered in product development and sourcing decisions. The company should also strengthen the pilot testing of new products or services with a small and representative group of clients before full implementation. In the area of Trust-Building and Relationship Management, the company should formalize its technical demonstrations and after-sales consultations as core components of its market-entry and customer-retention strategy, while adopting a simple and structured customer

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relationship-management system to record client visits, concerns, recommendations, and follow-ups to sustain customer trust as the company expands beyond founder-led relationships. Finally, to improve Feasibility Validation, the company should adopt a lightweight and repeatable feasibility checklist covering market, technical or operational, financial, and organizational considerations before introducing new products or services, rather than relying primarily on founder intuition. Particular attention should be given to strengthening organizational and team-competency assessment and financial viability evaluation, as these represent the clearest and most immediately actionable gaps identified in the study.

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