ABSTRACT

Intensive shrimp farming operates under rapidly changing biological and environmental conditions. Operational effectiveness therefore depends not only on technology and formal procedures, but also on workers who notice changes, communicate risks, exercise technical judgement, and respond under uncertain conditions. This study examines how workers interpret the involvement of business owners and the leaders who represent them, and how these experiences shape engagement grounded in mutual respect.

The study employed a qualitative interpretive phenomenological approach. Primary data were generated through semi-structured interviews with eleven workers and managers at one intensive shrimp farming unit in Kaur Regency, Indonesia, complemented by non-participatory observation and field documentation. Analysis was iterative and involved repeated reading, descriptive coding, grouping of meaning units, theme development, and later theoretical interpretation using sensitising concepts.

Five themes were identified. First, owner and leadership involvement was experienced through layered forms of presence: physical, responsive, material, and delegated. Second, workers distinguished recognition of personal dignity from recognition of competence and practical knowledge. Third, trust became meaningful when accompanied by autonomy, organisational support, and psychological safety to raise problems, admit mistakes, and disagree. Fourth, recognition and trust were associated with reciprocal forms of engagement, including initiative, vigilance, cross-functional assistance, care for equipment, and persistence. Fifth, positive interpersonal relationships became less credible when organisational systems concerning rewards, procurement, safety resources, and recovery were perceived as inconsistent. This alignment is conceptualised as respect coherence.

Phenomenologically, mutual respect-based engagement is understood as a relational process through which workers interpret authority involvement as recognition, trust, support, and meaningful opportunity to contribute. The findings extend work-engagement research from individual psychological experience toward the human infrastructure that supports coordination and operational responsiveness in aquaculture governance.

Keywords: mutual respect, work engagement, worker voice, owner presence, psychological safety, shrimp farming, phenomenology.