

Managerial Perspectives on Work Complexity, Engagement, and Commitment in a Philippine Micro-Business: An Exploratory Case Study

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.15858037

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Abstract:

This qualitative case study explored managerial perspectives on work complexity, work engagement, and continuance commitment within a micro-business enterprise in Cadiz City, Philippines. The study focused on a growing micro-enterprise engaged in hauling and food services, characterized by informal work structures and a multi-functional blue-collar workforce. Through semi-structured interviews with the owner-manager and operations supervisor, four key themes emerged: multifaceted job roles and informal learning as responses to work complexity; relational engagement sustained through close interpersonal ties and recognition; economic necessity as the primary driver of continuance commitment; and the risk of role overload and burnout in an informal work setting. Findings revealed that blue-collar workers in this context regularly navigate complex, cognitively demanding tasks without formal training systems, relying instead on experiential learning. Managers highlighted the importance of relational strategies and informal recognition in sustaining worker engagement but acknowledged the limitations of such approaches, particularly under conditions of operational stress. Worker retention was largely attributed to limited employment alternatives rather than strong organizational loyalty. This study underscores the distinct challenges and adaptive strategies in micro-business workforce management, offering practical insights for small business owners, policymakers, and researchers. It also calls for further qualitative research that incorporates worker perspectives to enrich understanding of employment dynamics in micro-enterprise settings.

Keywords: *micro-business enterprise, blue-collar workers, work complexity, work engagement, continuance commitment, case study, qualitative research*

Introduction:

Micro-business enterprises (MBEs) occupy a central role in many developing economies, particularly in the Philippines, where they account for a significant share of economic activity and employment. Defined as enterprises with fewer than ten employees and limited capital resources, MBEs fuel local economies through entrepreneurship, informal trade, and grassroots innovation (Leonoras & Quingco, 2020; Pedraza, 2021). According to the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI, 2015), over 90% of registered businesses in the Philippines fall under the micro-business category. Despite this remarkable presence, MBEs often face persistent challenges, including operational vulnerability, high employee turnover, and weak formalization of human resource management systems.

Blue-collar workers are essential to these enterprises, performing diverse manual, technical, and skilled labor tasks that drive daily operations. Unlike in larger firms with specialized roles, workers in micro-enterprises frequently assume multiple responsibilities, ranging from logistics and production to customer service, requiring not only physical labor but also flexibility, adaptability, and interpersonal skills (Khan & Suriseti, 2023). However, blue-collar workers are underrepresented in workplace research, with most studies focusing on white-collar or professional employees. This gap in the literature is particularly pronounced in the context of MBEs in developing economies, where labor informality, limited protections, and evolving market pressures complicate workers' realities (Beshay, 2025).

Understanding the experiences of blue-collar workers in MBEs necessitates examining the concept of work complexity. Traditionally applied to managerial and cognitive roles, work complexity encompasses the difficulty, variability, and ambiguity inherent in job tasks (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). In recent years, this concept has expanded to include blue-collar roles, as technological change and heightened customer expectations introduce new

demands on manual workers (Saari et al., 2021). In MBEs, these demands are intensified by operational constraints and informal learning environments, pushing workers to navigate tasks that require both physical effort and mental agility. However, many studies continue to categorize blue-collar work as low-complexity and routine, a misconception that overlooks the growing cognitive and organizational dimensions of these roles.

Work engagement is another crucial yet underexplored construct in this context. Defined as a fulfilling and positive state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2006), work engagement is widely recognized as a driver of productivity, well-being, and organizational sustainability (Gallup, 2021). Nevertheless, research on engagement has largely concentrated on white-collar professionals and knowledge workers, leaving a gap in understanding how blue-collar workers in micro-enterprises experience engagement. These workers often face unstable working conditions, limited advancement opportunities, and inconsistent workloads, all of which shape their ability to remain engaged in ways distinct from their counterparts in larger organizations (Saks, 2006).

Closely linked to these dynamics is the concept of continuance commitment, which refers to an employee's decision to remain with an organization based on the perceived costs of leaving, such as job insecurity or financial hardship (Allen & Meyer, 1990). In many MBEs, especially in resource-constrained settings, workers may continue employment not out of loyalty or satisfaction, but due to limited alternatives and the need to avoid economic instability (AIHR, 2025; Quality Improvement Center for Workforce Development, 2023). While such commitment may provide short-term workforce stability, it can also suppress innovation, entrench dissatisfaction, and contribute to a cycle of disengagement and turnover.

Although existing research has begun to explore the relationships among work complexity, engagement, and commitment—often through models like the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework (Bakker et al., 2023)—most studies have prioritized quantitative methods and larger organizational settings. There remains a lack of in-depth qualitative inquiry into how these constructs are understood and managed within micro-business environments, particularly from the perspectives of those responsible for organizational decision-making. The managerial viewpoints in these enterprises—often deeply intertwined with ownership, daily operations, and personal relationships—offer unique insights into how complexity, engagement, and commitment are perceived and addressed at the ground level.

Furthermore, MBEs differ fundamentally from larger firms in their management structures and employment relationships. Characterized by informal work practices, personalized leadership styles, and limited access to formal human resource systems, micro-enterprises foster distinct workplace cultures (Santhanam & Srinivas, 2019). While such settings can promote flexibility and close social bonds, they also pose risks of role ambiguity, overload, and blurred boundaries between work and personal life. Yet, few studies have explored how these dynamics shape managerial strategies related to work complexity and worker engagement, particularly in developing economies like the Philippines.

Against this backdrop, the present study aims to explore managerial perspectives on work complexity, work engagement, and continuance commitment within a growing micro-business enterprise in Cadiz City, Philippines. The business in focus—originally a small, family-operated food and hauling service—has expanded its operations over the years, now employing over twenty blue-collar workers, many of whom are engaged in multi-functional roles. The organization's growth, paired with recurring challenges such as employee turnover and operational strain, makes it an ideal case for examining how managers navigate the overlapping concerns of job complexity, worker engagement, and retention in a micro-enterprise setting.

Framed as an exploratory qualitative case study, this research draws from in-depth interviews with two key managerial informants—the owner-manager and the operations supervisor—both of whom are deeply involved in the enterprise's labor management and strategic decision-making. Although the study acknowledges its small sample size, it positions these managerial narratives as valuable lenses through which to understand organizational practices and managerial reasoning within the micro-business context. Rather than seeking generalizability, the study aims to provide rich, contextualized insights into how workplace dynamics are perceived and shaped by managers in this setting.

Ultimately, this study seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on micro-businesses by offering a qualitative, manager-focused perspective on worker-related challenges in blue-collar contexts. It underscores the need for more nuanced, context-sensitive research on labor dynamics in micro-enterprises and offers practical insights for other small business owners, human resource practitioners, and policymakers seeking to enhance worker well-being and organizational resilience in similar environments.

Methodology:

This study adopted a qualitative exploratory case study design to investigate managerial perspectives on work complexity, work engagement, and continuance commitment within a micro-business enterprise. The case study approach was chosen for its suitability in providing deep, contextualized understanding of organizational processes and managerial insights in small, bounded settings (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Rather than seeking to generalize findings, the study aimed to explore how key decision-makers in a micro-enterprise make sense of complex workplace dynamics, offering rich, nuanced accounts grounded in their lived managerial experiences.

Research Setting and Context

The study was conducted in a growing micro-business enterprise located in Cadiz City, Philippines. The enterprise specializes in hauling and food services and has undergone gradual expansion in recent years. It currently employs more than twenty blue-collar workers who engage in various operational tasks. Cadiz City, recognized for its agro-industrial economy, provided a relevant backdrop for this inquiry, offering insights into employment conditions within a local micro-enterprise operating under common constraints such as limited resources and informal work arrangements. The business is characterized by a familial management style, minimal formal human resource systems, and high employee turnover, making it a compelling case for exploring workplace dynamics in the Philippine micro-business context.

Participants and Sampling Technique

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, targeting individuals with in-depth knowledge of the business's labor dynamics and managerial decision-making processes. Two managerial-level informants participated in the study: the owner-manager and the operations supervisor. Both participants were deeply involved in overseeing daily operations, supervising employees, and making strategic decisions related to work assignments, employee engagement, and retention. Their perspectives provided valuable managerial insights into how the enterprise navigates work complexity, fosters engagement, and addresses employee commitment. While the small sample size represents a limitation, it reflects the organizational structure of the case and the study's aim of gaining in-depth managerial perspectives.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured face-to-face interviews conducted on-site at the business premises. A semi-structured interview guide was developed based on the study's key themes: work complexity, work engagement, and continuance commitment. This format allowed for flexibility, enabling participants to elaborate on their experiences while ensuring that core topics were covered consistently across interviews.

Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and was conducted in a private setting to maintain confidentiality. The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' informed consent. In addition to audio recordings, the researcher took detailed notes during the sessions to capture non-verbal cues and contextual observations. Follow-up questions were posed as needed to clarify responses and deepen understanding.

Data Analysis

The collected interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the framework outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The process began with transcription of the audio recordings, followed by repeated reading to immerse the researcher in the data. Initial codes were generated based on recurring words, phrases, and concepts that related to the study's central themes. These codes were then reviewed and organized into broader themes, with particular attention given to managerial reasoning, workplace practices, and organizational challenges.

Themes were refined through constant comparison and iterative analysis to ensure that they accurately reflected the participants' perspectives. The analysis sought to identify both shared viewpoints and unique insights that characterized managerial approaches to work complexity, engagement, and commitment within the micro-enterprise. To maintain rigor, the researcher kept an audit trail documenting analytic decisions throughout the process.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, strategies such as prolonged engagement, triangulation of data sources (interview transcripts and field notes), and member checking were employed. After transcription and preliminary analysis, participants were invited to review their transcripts and provide feedback or clarifications, ensuring that their perspectives were accurately represented.

The study complied with strict ethical standards throughout its implementation. Ethical clearance was secured from the institution's ethics review board prior to data collection. Participants were fully informed of the study's purpose, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Confidentiality was ensured by assigning pseudonyms to participants and removing identifying details from the transcripts. All data were securely stored in password-protected files. Additionally, the research adhered to the provisions of the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act 10173) of the Philippines, ensuring the secure handling and confidentiality of personal data.

Results:

Through thematic analysis of the interviews with the owner-manager and the operations supervisor, four key themes emerged that describe how work complexity, work engagement, and continuance commitment are perceived and navigated within the micro-business enterprise. These themes reflect the managerial viewpoints on the operational realities, challenges, and practices that shape the experiences of blue-collar workers in this setting.

Theme 1: Multifaceted Job Roles and Informal Learning as a Response to Work Complexity

Both participants described the inherently complex nature of blue-collar work within the enterprise. Workers were reported to engage in a wide range of tasks that extend beyond traditional job descriptions, including physical labor, customer interactions, and logistical coordination. This multifaceted approach to work, driven by the small scale and limited resources of the enterprise, requires employees to be adaptable and capable of managing shifting responsibilities.

The owner-manager explained, *"Here, there is no such thing as 'this is not my job.' Everyone does everything—lifting, cleaning, cooking, and even driving if needed."* This statement underscores the expectation for flexibility in task assignments, which contributes to elevated work complexity.

In the absence of formal training programs, both informants highlighted the role of informal learning. Workers typically acquire new skills through observation, trial and error, and peer support. The supervisor elaborated, *"We don't have formal training; they learn by doing and watching others. It's faster, and it works for us."* This reliance on experiential learning was described as a necessity given the enterprise's limited resources and fast-paced work environment.

Theme 2: Engagement Sustained Through Close Relationships and Recognition

Despite the high demands of their roles, workers were perceived by managers to exhibit strong engagement, which was largely attributed to the close-knit, familial atmosphere of the enterprise. Both participants emphasized the importance of interpersonal relationships and managerial recognition in fostering a sense of belonging and motivation among workers.

The supervisor noted, *"They stay because they feel they belong here. We work together like family, and we celebrate together when we can."* The owner-manager added that simple forms of recognition, such as verbal praise, shared meals, or team bonding activities, were effective in sustaining worker morale and dedication.

This relational form of engagement appeared to compensate for the lack of formal incentives or structured career advancement pathways. However, both informants acknowledged that sustaining engagement requires continuous attention, particularly during periods of intense workload.

Theme 3: Economic Necessity as a Driver of Continuance Commitment

A recurring theme in both interviews was the role of economic necessity in shaping workers' commitment to the enterprise. Both managers agreed that many workers remained in their jobs not because of deep loyalty to the organization, but because of the limited availability of alternative employment options within the local economy.

The supervisor stated, *"Let's be realistic. Most of them stay because this is their only option. Jobs are hard to find here."* Similarly, the owner-manager acknowledged, *"We know they are not staying forever. They stay because they need the income, and we try to make it worthwhile for them."*

This pragmatic perspective on retention highlights the complex interplay between personal financial needs and organizational stability. While continuance commitment provided short-term workforce reliability, managers recognized its limitations in fostering long-term loyalty or engagement.

Theme 4: Risk of Role Overload and Burnout in Informal Work Structures

While the flexibility of the enterprise was seen as a strength, both participants also expressed concern about the potential for role overload and burnout among workers. The expectation for workers to handle diverse and demanding tasks, coupled with limited staffing, was described as a double-edged sword.

The owner-manager reflected, *"Sometimes, we push them too much without meaning to. We're short-staffed, and we have deadlines."* The supervisor similarly observed, *"It's not easy to balance everything. They work hard, but it can take a toll on their energy and well-being."*

Both informants acknowledged that without formal systems for workload monitoring or worker support, there was a risk of losing workers to fatigue or dissatisfaction. This theme highlights the ongoing tension between operational flexibility and worker well-being in micro-enterprise settings.

Summary of Findings

Overall, the findings reveal a nuanced managerial understanding of the challenges and strengths inherent in running a micro-business reliant on blue-collar workers. Work complexity is both inevitable and necessary in this context, requiring adaptable workers who learn through experience. Engagement is sustained through relational management and informal recognition, while retention is shaped primarily by economic necessity rather than long-term organizational commitment. However, managers also recognize the vulnerabilities posed by role overload and the need to balance operational demands with worker well-being.

These themes illustrate the unique dynamics of micro-business workplaces and provide valuable insights into how managers navigate competing priorities in sustaining their workforce.

Discussion:

This exploratory case study investigated managerial perspectives on work complexity, work engagement, and continuance commitment within a micro-business enterprise in Cadiz City, Philippines. The findings offer valuable insights into the unique challenges and strategies that characterize workforce management in a micro-business setting, particularly concerning blue-collar workers performing multifaceted roles. Several key insights emerged from the data, which align with, extend, or challenge existing scholarly literature.

The study revealed that blue-collar workers in this micro-business routinely manage high levels of work complexity. Both managerial informants described how workers were expected to perform a wide range of tasks, often across physically demanding, customer-facing, and logistical functions. This reflects the increasingly blurred lines between

manual and cognitive labor within small enterprises, particularly as firms seek flexibility and efficiency with minimal staffing (Saari et al., 2021; Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006).

Consistent with prior research, the findings confirm that micro-businesses tend to lack formal job descriptions and training structures, leading to reliance on informal learning as a primary mechanism for skill development (Santhanam & Srinivas, 2019). Workers in this case were expected to “learn by doing,” with peer guidance and observation serving as the main sources of workplace learning. While such practices enable rapid adaptation in resource-constrained environments, they may also perpetuate inconsistencies in task execution and limit opportunities for systematic skills advancement.

These findings reinforce calls in the literature for greater recognition of the complex cognitive demands placed on blue-collar workers in micro-enterprises—an issue often overlooked in studies that still frame such work as low-skilled or routine (Khan & Surisetti, 2023; Saari et al., 2021).

The study also highlighted how work engagement in the enterprise is largely fostered through close interpersonal relationships and informal recognition. Managers emphasized the familial atmosphere of the business and the role of simple, consistent gestures—such as verbal encouragement or shared meals—in sustaining worker motivation. These findings echo earlier research showing that in small and informal businesses, employee engagement often stems from social bonds, mutual trust, and a sense of belonging, rather than from formal incentive structures (Saks, 2006).

This relational form of engagement contrasts with traditional models such as the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework, which focuses on the balance between job demands and formal resources (Bakker et al., 2023). In this case, relational support substitutes for formal HR resources, enabling high engagement despite limited material incentives.

However, the findings also suggest that this form of engagement is fragile, as it depends on continuous social interaction and personal investment from managers. This vulnerability is consistent with Gallup’s (2021) observation that informal engagement mechanisms, while powerful, can be difficult to sustain during periods of operational stress or turnover.

Another key theme was the role of economic necessity in shaping workers’ continuance commitment. Both informants acknowledged that many workers remained with the enterprise not because of deep organizational attachment, but due to the lack of alternative employment options in the local area. This mirrors findings from prior studies, which indicate that continuance commitment in micro-businesses is often driven by limited opportunities and financial pressures, rather than emotional loyalty (Allen & Meyer, 1990; AIHR, 2025; Quality Improvement Center for Workforce Development, 2023).

In this study, managers expressed a pragmatic understanding of this reality, recognizing that workers’ commitment was often temporary and contingent on their financial circumstances. Such findings underline the complex ethical and operational dilemmas faced by micro-enterprises that rely on vulnerable workers to maintain operations while being unable to offer long-term career growth.

While flexibility and multitasking were seen as necessary in the enterprise, both managers also voiced concerns about role overload and burnout among workers. The expectation for employees to manage diverse and demanding tasks, especially without formal support systems, was described as a potential source of stress and dissatisfaction. These concerns are consistent with studies that highlight the risks of excessive work complexity, particularly when organizational resources are scarce (Koekemoer & Masenge, 2023; Bai et al., 2021).

The findings suggest that while work complexity may contribute to engagement and operational efficiency in the short term, it can also lead to fatigue and turnover risks if not carefully managed. This reinforces the need for balance between flexibility and worker well-being, particularly in informal enterprises that may lack formal safety nets.

A unifying thread across these themes is the adaptive role of managers in navigating competing organizational demands. The managerial informants in this study acted not only as operational leaders but also as informal HR practitioners, balancing productivity goals with concern for worker morale and retention. Their narratives reveal how

managerial discretion and relational leadership serve as key coping mechanisms in the absence of formalized structures.

These findings extend previous research on micro-businesses by emphasizing the active, pragmatic role of managers in shaping workplace dynamics through personal relationships and situational judgments (Santhanam & Srinivas, 2019). However, they also suggest limits to such adaptive strategies, particularly as enterprises scale up or face external shocks that strain personal ties.

This study contributes to the growing body of literature advocating for context-sensitive research on blue-collar workers and micro-enterprises. It demonstrates that managerial perspectives can yield valuable insights into how informal enterprises navigate complex labor dynamics under resource constraints. Additionally, the study highlights the need for tailored interventions that respect the specific conditions of micro-businesses—such as accessible training programs, community-based HR support, or simple workload management tools.

For practitioners, the findings suggest that relational leadership and informal recognition can be powerful tools for sustaining engagement—but these must be complemented with efforts to monitor workload, prevent burnout, and provide opportunities for skills development.

In sum, the findings of this case study reinforce the view that blue-collar work in micro-enterprises is far more complex and dynamic than often assumed. Managers in such settings play a pivotal role in mediating work complexity, engagement, and commitment through adaptive, relational strategies. However, sustaining these approaches requires constant attention to worker well-being, operational capacity, and economic realities. These findings invite further qualitative research on the nuanced practices that characterize micro-business employment, particularly in developing economies.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

This exploratory case study examined managerial perspectives on work complexity, work engagement, and continuance commitment within a micro-business enterprise in Cadiz City, Philippines. The findings illuminate the intricate ways in which managers in micro-enterprises navigate the competing demands of sustaining business operations while supporting their blue-collar workforce under conditions of limited resources and informal structures.

The study highlights that work complexity is an inherent feature of employment in micro-businesses, where workers are expected to perform diverse and cognitively demanding tasks. Informal learning emerged as the primary strategy for skill development, with workers relying on observation, peer support, and hands-on experience in the absence of formal training programs. These findings challenge traditional assumptions that blue-collar work in small enterprises is routine or low-skilled.

The study also underscores the importance of relational engagement, where interpersonal relationships, mutual support, and managerial recognition play pivotal roles in sustaining employee motivation and commitment. However, this relational approach to engagement, while effective, remains vulnerable to operational pressures and role overload, particularly during periods of heightened demand or staff shortages.

Moreover, the findings reveal that continuance commitment in this context is largely driven by economic necessity rather than organizational loyalty. Managers openly recognized that workers often remain with the enterprise due to a lack of alternative employment opportunities, emphasizing the pragmatic nature of worker retention in micro-enterprises.

Taken together, these insights suggest that micro-businesses operate through a delicate balance of flexibility, relational management, and economic constraints. While such enterprises may succeed in maintaining engagement and operational continuity through informal practices, they also face risks related to worker burnout, turnover, and limited opportunities for long-term workforce development.

This study contributes to the broader understanding of labor dynamics in micro-enterprises by offering a qualitative, manager-centered perspective. It highlights the need for more research that attends to the specific realities of small,

resource-constrained workplaces, particularly in developing economies where such enterprises play a vital role in employment generation.

Future research should expand the scope by including the perspectives of blue-collar workers themselves, as well as by exploring similar enterprises across different industries and regions. Studies that examine the long-term sustainability of relational management strategies and informal learning practices would also be valuable. Such efforts can inform policy interventions and management practices aimed at supporting worker well-being, enhancing productivity, and fostering organizational resilience in micro-enterprises.

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