

# Challenges, Aspirations, and Growth Initiatives of Undergraduate Employees in a Government Agency: Basis for Recommendations for Human Empowerment

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**Abstract.** This research examines the challenges and career aspirations among undergraduate employees at MSWDO in the Local Government Unit (LGU) of the Municipality of Sta. Rosa Nueva Ecija. Through a comprehensive analysis, the study investigates the extent of work-related challenges encountered by employees and their impact on personal growth initiatives and career aspirations. The findings reveal that employees face moderate challenges in the workplace, stemming from various factors such as management styles, personality differences, and organizational dynamics. Despite these challenges, employees demonstrate resilience and remain engaged in their roles, highlighting the importance of effective management and support systems. The research underscores the significance of understanding and managing workplace challenges to foster employee growth and productivity. By aligning management styles with employee preferences and promoting an empowering environment, organizations can mitigate the negative effects of challenges and enhance employee satisfaction and performance. Furthermore, the study identifies a positive correlation between career aspirations and personal growth initiatives, emphasizing the importance of providing opportunities for employees to pursue their professional goals. The implications of the research extend to organizational leaders and managers, who are encouraged to be proactive in addressing workplace challenges and fostering a culture of continuous learning and development. Strategies such as encouraging professional development activities and aligning management practices with employee aspirations can contribute to a more motivated, engaged, and efficient workforce. The study also suggests avenues for future research, particularly in exploring the link between employee personal growth initiatives and job performance. By building upon theoretical frameworks such as the Self-Determination theory, Vroom's Expectancy theory, and Robitschek's Personal Growth Initiative, researchers can deepen our understanding of the factors influencing employee motivation and success in the workplace.

**Keywords:** Career Aspirations; Challenges; Employee Engagement; Personal Growth; Workplace Dynamics

## 1. Introduction

Employees face a variety of challenges at work that can have an impact on their productivity. A workplace is a place where maximum productivity is required. Workplace challenges such as values mismatch, lack of self-efficacy, leadership, and unsettling emotions may result in an unmotivated workforce, damaging the company's efficiency goals (Clark and Saxberg, 2019). Employees may not be capable of putting out the best work if they are not at their best. The

entire contribution of employees in that group is at the heart of every business's growth. As a result, certain HR practices must be implemented to address these issues (Elijah, 2022). Workplace challenges may affect employees' well-being which in turn impacts job performance. According to Harvard Business Review Analytic Services (2019), physically, mentally, and emotionally healthy employees are likelier to perform at their best in the workplace than those who are not. More likely to contribute to the community than members. Working conditions can affect employees physically, mentally, or emotionally, enhancing or impairing their health. Studies have found that the prevalence of obesity, cardiovascular disease (e.g., elevated blood pressure and cholesterol), and other health indicators (e.g., physical activity and diet quality) vary among occupational groups (Gu, Charles, Bang, et al., 2017; MacDonald, Bertke, Hein, et al., 2017). The work environment can also affect an employee's mental health (Giorgi, Leon-Perez, Pignata, Demiral, Arcangeli, 2018). Work-related factors that influence worker well-being include job demands and pressures, level of autonomy and flexibility, quality of interaction with supervisors and peers, frequency of shift work, and working hours (Williams, Kern, Waters, 2017). On the other hand, career aspirations may benefit both the employees and the organization. Coursera (2023) defined career aspirations as long-term desires and hopes shaped based on their experiences, such as their talents, values, lifestyle, etc. Employee career goals represent the company's efficiency and vitality (Gulan and Aguilung, 2021). Employee engagement and organizational retention can be increased by basing employees' career paths and growth on their career aspirations. According to Talentguard (2019), engaged employees are 87% less likely to leave their current employer, and numerous additional benefits will be discovered along the way. Gulan, Xy & Aguilung, Hector. (2021), their study aims to identify significant differences in career aspirations among government employees based on years of service and job level. The results revealed a significant difference in career aspirations when job level and service years were grouped. Hence, career aspirations are considered vital to the long-term success of an organization, Furthermore, personal growth initiative is an individual's active and conscious desire to grow in their key areas (Matsuo, 2021). It may provide new insights into the processes in its momentum toward positive self-transformation (Seidman, Crick, and Wade, 2022). Personal growth is a continuous process of understanding and developing yourself to reach your full potential. Personal development is integral to a person's growth, maturity, success, and happiness. It is the foundation of emotional, physical, intellectual, and mental health. Personal growth and development provide the incentives and the means to become the best possible version of themselves. As ironic as it may seem, personal growth expands one's frame of reference to include the people around them rather than becoming more self-centered (World Minded Team, 2018).

In the study of Buyukgoze (2018), the primary objective is to examine employee levels of a personal growth initiative. The participants were polled using Robitschek's "The Personal Growth Initiative Scale-PGIS." The results showed that new employees have moderate levels of a personal growth initiative, and their PGI levels statistically differ concerning their willingness to attend

advanced studies. Also, in another study by Rapheal (2017), they examined the relationship between personal development initiatives (PGI) and engagement. As a result, it was confirmed that employee motivation for personal growth plays an important role in improving the quality of job performance. Individuals' emotional and social engagement with peers was positively associated with their leadership, and social engagement was associated with a supportive workplace atmosphere. This situation is true for City Social Welfare and Development Office in Municipality Of Sta.Rosa, Nueva Ecija. Out of approximately two hundred CSWDO personnel, fifty-nine undergraduates are employed under the abovementioned scheme. Being deprived of the benefits and perks that those regular employees enjoyed, these groups are assumed to be more vulnerable to challenges. However, despite the challenges encountered, it cannot be underrated that undergraduate employees still have their career aspirations and growth initiatives, which could boost their drive to be successful someday. It is on this basis that the present study was pursued. Very scant literature has been conducted in the target locale, specifically the Municipal Social Welfare and Development Office (MSWDO) in the Local Government Unit (LGU) of the Municipality of Sta.Rosa, Nueva Ecija. Hence, it is hoped that this present study generates new and meaningful information which may help develop the recommendations in the context of MSWDO undergraduate employees. This study attempted to answer the following specific questions:

1. What is the extent of challenges encountered by undergraduate employees in MSWDO of LGU Sta,Rosa, Nueva Ecija in terms of Intrinsic challenges, and extrinsic challenges?
2. What is the extent of career aspirations among undergraduate employees in terms of competition, freedom, management, life balance, organization membership, expertise, learning, and entrepreneurship?
3. What is the personal growth initiative among undergraduate employees in terms of readiness for change, planfulness, using resources, and intentional behaviour?
4. Is there a significant relationship between the challenges encountered and the personal growth initiative of undergraduate employees?
5. Is there a significant relationship between undergraduate employees' career aspirations and personal growth initiatives?
6. Based on the result of the study, what recommendations may be proposed?

## 2. Methodology

This quantitative study employs a descriptive-correlational research design to investigate the relationship between the extent of challenges encountered, career aspirations, and personal growth initiative among undergraduate employees of the Municipal Social Welfare and Development Office (MSWDO) in LGU Sta. Rosa, Nueva Ecija. The study utilizes survey questionnaires to collect data on challenges, career aspirations, and personal growth initiative, employing

Likert scale-based instruments. The weighted mean is used for assessing the extent of challenges encountered, career aspirations, and personal growth initiative, while Pearson's correlation coefficient is utilized to explore significant correlations between variables.

### 2.1. Sampling Procedure

The study utilizes a complete enumeration sampling method to select 70 under-employed respondents currently working in the MSWDO Sta. Rosa, Nueva Ecija. The respondents are chosen based on specific criteria, including age (18 to 55 years old), current employment status in MSWDO, classification as under-education employees, and willingness to participate.

### 2.2. Respondents

The respondents of this study are undergraduate employees of the Municipal Social Welfare and Development Office (MSWDO) in LGU Sta. Rosa, Nueva Ecija. They are aged between 18 to 55 years old, currently employed in MSWDO during the data gathering period, categorized as under-education employees, and willing to participate in the study. The study's sample comprises 70 under-employed respondents, selected via complete enumeration sampling.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1 Challenges Encountered

**Table 1. Extent of Challenges Encountered**

Indicators	WM	Interpretation
Intrinsic challenges	3.02	Moderately challenging
Extrinsic challenges	3.05	Moderately challenging
<b>OVERALL MEAN</b>	<b>3.04</b>	<b>Moderately challenging</b>

Scale = 3.26-4.00 Highly challenging (HC); 2.51-3.25 Moderately challenging (MC); 1.76-2.50 Slightly challenging (SC); 1.00-1.75 Not challenging at all (NC)

Table 1 presents the extent of challenges undergraduate employees encounter in the subject local government unit in terms of intrinsic and extrinsic aspects. Results showed that respondents have been experiencing workplace challenges to a moderate extent (3.04). Results also revealed that the employees moderately experience intrinsic (3.02) and extrinsic challenges (3.05). It can be inferred from the result that although those undergraduate employees experience work-related challenges, it is only experienced to a moderate extent. However, when left unattended and not remediated, such challenges may worsen, consequently affecting the job performance of undergraduate employees. Gu, Charles, Bang, et al. (2017) and MacDonald, Bertke, Hein, et al. (2017) support this finding maintaining that working conditions can adversely affect employees physically, mentally, or emotionally or impair their health. On the other hand, Williams, Kern, and Waters (2017) suggest that a positive work environment may influence worker wellbeing, including the level of autonomy and flexibility,

quality of interaction with supervisors and peers, frequency of shift work, and working hours. The study of Casimiro et al. (2020), illustrates how organizational support for research aligns with the findings, motivating employees to overcome challenges. It highlights how awareness of research benefits, management encouragement, and dissemination strategies contribute to a positive work environment. This aligns with the moderate challenges faced by employees, suggesting that supportive policies can mitigate issues and enhance employee performance.

### 3.2 Career Aspirations

Table 2. Career Aspirations of Under Graduate Employees

Indicators	WM	Interpretation
Competition	3.36	Very high extent
Freedom	3.37	Very high extent
Management	3.34	Very high extent
Life Balance	3.32	Very high extent
Organization Membership	3.18	High extent
Expertise	3.40	Very high extent
Learning	3.34	Very high extent
Entrepreneurship	3.35	Very high extent
<b>OVERALL MEAN</b>	<b>3.33</b>	<b>Very high extent</b>

Table 2 shows the extent of career aspirations among employees in terms of competition, freedom, management, life balance, organizational membership, expertise, learning, and entrepreneurship. Results showed that career aspirations for respondents are very high (3.33). Among those proven to drive these respondents is the goal of developing expertise (3.40) and freedom while at work (3.37). The result indicates that the undergraduate employees in the MSWDO unit have very high extent career aspirations. This is a positive outcome as undergraduate employees enjoy lesser privileges and perks than other employees holding permanent posts hence having such aspirations will eventually benefit them to have a higher probability of being promoted and provided with a more stable career opportunity. This result is well aligned with Cruz (2018), on efficiency of services at NEUST supports the research findings on career aspirations by emphasizing the importance of quality education and efficient services in fostering skill development and career advancement. It underscores the respondents' preference for NEUST's Graduate School due to its quality education and affordable fees, aligning with their high career aspirations. Moreover, the efficient services experienced by respondents at NEUST, particularly in offices like the cashier and registrar, contribute to a positive learning environment and may enhance their motivation for career development. This connection highlights the significance of supportive educational institutions and efficient services in nurturing the career aspirations of employees.

### 3.3 Personal Growth Initiative

**Table 3** Personal Growth Initiative

Indicators	WM	Interpretation
Readiness for Change	3.93	Very high extent
Planfulness	3.91	Very high extent
Using Resources	3.85	Very high extent
Intentional Behavior	3.93	Very high extent
<b>OVERALL MEAN</b>	<b>3.91</b>	<b>Very high extent</b>

Table 3 shows the extent of personal growth initiatives among employees regarding readiness for change, planfulness, using resources, and intentional behavior. Results showed that employees have a very high extent of personal growth initiative (3.91). Furthermore, the readiness to change (3.91) is elicited to be very high, as well as their being planful (3.91), the resource support (3.85), and intent to grow professionally (3.93) are also documented to be at a very high extent. From these findings, it can be inferred that the undergraduate employees' initiative to grow professionally is very high, and such a result is manifested in all four sub-variables. This means that respondents are keen on developing as better individuals, which may benefit the company as this will pave the way for them to become highly efficient and relevant in today's job landscape. The study of Cortez et al. (2021), examines the relationship between job satisfaction and job performance, professionalism, and commitment among teachers, ultimately concluding that there is no significant relationship between job satisfaction and these aspects. This contrasts with prior studies suggesting positive relationships between job satisfaction and various job-related factors. Conversely, the research findings on personal growth initiatives among undergraduate employees highlight their very high extent of readiness for change, planfulness, resource utilization, and intentional behavior. This suggests a proactive approach to personal and professional development among the employees.

### 3.4 Significant Correlation

**Table 4** Significant correlation between the Challenges encountered and Personal Growth Initiative

Variable	R-value	p-value (sig, 2-tailed)	Interpretation
Personal growth initiative	-0.558	0.005	Significant

*p* ≤ 0.05 Significant

Table 4 presents the correlation test between the challenges encountered and the personal growth initiative of undergraduate employees. Results indicate that the correlation is significant at a moderate negative level (p-value, 0.005; R-value, -0.558). Therefore, it can be construed that the challenges employees

encounter increase, their personal growth initiative may decrease, and vice versa. Hence, management must be very keen on addressing such work-related challenges to mitigate the possible decline among employees and initiate personal growth. Mitigating the work-related challenges would likely result in a higher drive among undergraduate employees to pursue personal growth and development, which may benefit the employees and the organization.

**Table 5** Significant correlation between the Career Aspirations and Personal Growth Initiative

Variable	R-value	p-value (Sig, 2-tailed)	Interpretation
Personal growth initiative	0.687	0.000	Significant $p \leq 0.05$ Significant

Table 5 presents the correlation test between the career aspirations and the personal growth initiative of undergraduate employees. Results indicate that the correlation is significant at a moderate positive level (p-value, 0.000; R-value, 0.687). Furthermore, results indicate that as career aspirations among undergraduate employees increase, their personal growth initiative also increases and vice versa. The results of the study by Gabriel et al. (2020), show that the participants' leadership competencies are in the early stages of development. The participants consider building good impression and rapport highlighting the importance of soft skills in leadership, strong sense of respect, reverse mentoring, delegation of tasks, and the ability to handle expectations and performance as factors in managing older employees. Collectively, these findings emphasise the significance of supporting employees' career aspirations and personal growth initiatives while also recognizing the evolving leadership styles and competencies of millennial managers. By fostering a positive work environment and providing opportunities for professional development, organisations can enhance employee satisfaction, productivity, and overall organisational success. Thus, boosting the confidence among undergraduate employees to aspire for the betterment of their careers would lead to their higher pursuit of personal growth which may benefit them and the organization. The management must provide a supportive atmosphere to their employees and encourage them to develop professionally, such as undergoing various trainings and furthering education to be competitive and efficient in their work performance. This result would likely benefit the employees and the organization. Similarly, the of Vilma et al. (2018), underscores the importance of tailored communication for effective dissemination of information, particularly regarding local ordinances, considering factors like audience demographics and local officials' engagement. This aligns with the research findings, emphasizing the need for proactive management strategies to address challenges and foster career aspirations among employees.

#### 4. Conclusions

In conclusion, the study conducted on undergraduate employees at MSWDO in the Local Government Unit (LGU) of the Municipality of Sta. Rosa Nueva Ecija provides valuable insights into the challenges and aspirations within the workplace. It is evident that employees face moderate work-related challenges, which, if left unaddressed, may escalate into more significant issues. Despite these challenges, employees demonstrate resilience and remain engaged in their roles. The research highlights the importance of understanding and managing workplace challenges effectively. By aligning management styles with employees' work preferences and fostering an empowering environment, organizations can support their employees' growth and productivity. Furthermore, encouraging continuous professional development can enhance employees' career aspirations and contribute to their overall job satisfaction. The positive correlation between career aspirations and personal growth initiative underscores the significance of providing opportunities for employees to pursue their professional goals. This not only benefits individual employees but also enhances organizational efficiency and effectiveness. It is crucial for leaders and managers to be aware of the challenges faced by employees and take proactive steps to address them. Additionally, fostering a culture that promotes personal growth and development can lead to more motivated, engaged, and efficient employees. Further research into the link between employee personal growth initiative and job performance is recommended, building upon the theoretical foundations of the Self-Determination theory, Vroom's Expectancy theory, and Robitschek's Personal Growth Initiative. By expanding our understanding of these concepts, organizations can develop strategies to better support their employees' growth and success in the workplace.

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