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Job Specialization and Employee Productivity in a Thrift Fashion MSME: A Case Study of Regina Hema Thrift in Medan

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ABSTRAK

Usaha mikro, kecil, dan menengah (UMKM) kerap mengandalkan pembagian kerja yang fleksibel, tetapi tanggung jawab yang tidak jelas dapat menghambat kegiatan operasional sehari-hari. Penelitian ini mengkaji peran spesialisasi kerja dalam produktivitas karyawan Regina Hema Thrift, UMKM fesyen pakaian bekas di Kota Medan. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara dengan pemilik dan karyawan, observasi langsung terhadap aktivitas usaha, serta dokumentasi kegiatan operasional. Analisis dilakukan melalui reduksi data, penyajian temuan secara sistematis, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Kajian difokuskan pada pembagian tugas dalam pengadaan barang, penyortiran produk, pencatatan persediaan, penjualan, dan pemasaran digital. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pembagian tanggung jawab yang lebih jelas membantu karyawan memusatkan perhatian pada pekerjaan sesuai kemampuan dan mengurangi tumpang tindih tugas. Penataan peran juga mendukung kelancaran koordinasi, konsistensi penyelesaian pekerjaan, dan tanggung jawab individu. Meskipun demikian, spesialisasi kerja tetap memerlukan komunikasi antarkaryawan, terutama ketika satu kegiatan berkaitan dengan kegiatan lainnya. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa spesialisasi kerja berpotensi memperkuat produktivitas operasional UMKM apabila kejelasan tugas diimbangi dengan fleksibilitas dalam menghadapi perubahan beban kerja. Kajian ini memberikan masukan praktis bagi pengelolaan sumber daya manusia pada usaha berskala kecil dengan sumber daya terbatas.

***Keywords**: Spesialisasi Kerja; Produktivitas Karyawan; Pembagian Tugas; Manajemen Sumber Daya Manusia; UMKM Fesyen Bekas*

ABSTRACT

Small businesses often rely on flexible work arrangements, but poorly defined responsibilities can disrupt daily operations. This study examines how job specialization shapes employee productivity at Regina Hema Thrift, a secondhand fashion MSME in Medan, Indonesia. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through interviews with the business owner and employees, direct observation of routine activities, and business documentation. The data were analyzed through reduction, systematic presentation, and interpretation of findings. The analysis focused on task allocation across procurement, product sorting, inventory recording, sales, and digital marketing. Findings show that clearer assignments helped employees concentrate on responsibilities suited to their abilities and reduced overlaps in day-to-day work. More defined roles also supported smoother coordination, more consistent task completion, and greater individual accountability. However, specialization did not eliminate the need for communication between employees, particularly when activities depended on one another. The study suggests that job specialization can strengthen operational productivity in small businesses when task boundaries remain clear yet flexible enough to accommodate changing workloads. These findings offer a practical perspective on human resource management in resource-constrained MSMEs.

Kata Kunci: Job Specialization; Employee Productivity; Work Allocation; Human Resource Management; Thrift Fashion MSMEs

INTRODUCTION

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play an important role in Indonesia's economy, particularly through employment creation and the development of local business activities (Muhtadin et al., 2026; Nugraheni et al., 2026; Wibowo et al., 2026). Despite their economic contribution, many small businesses continue to face difficulties in managing employees and organizing daily operations. Limited staffing often requires workers to perform several functions simultaneously, making flexible task assignments a common practice. Although such arrangements allow businesses to operate with fewer employees, they can also create uncertainty over individual responsibilities, disrupt workflow, and reduce operational efficiency. These challenges highlight the importance of examining how work is organized within small enterprises, where productivity depends not only on employee capabilities but also on the effectiveness of task allocation.

These managerial challenges are particularly relevant to Regina Hema Thrift, a secondhand fashion MSME operating in Medan, Indonesia. Its daily activities involve product procurement, sorting and quality assessment, inventory recording, pricing, sales, and digital marketing. Each activity requires different skills, yet the relatively small workforce creates situations in which employees must handle multiple responsibilities. Preliminary field observations indicated that task boundaries were not always clearly defined, resulting in overlapping assignments and difficulties in coordinating operational activities. Such conditions may delay task completion and make it difficult to maintain consistent work quality. The central issue, therefore, is not merely the number of employees available but how their responsibilities are distributed and coordinated throughout the business process.

Job specialization offers a managerial approach to addressing these challenges by assigning specific responsibilities according to employees' skills, experience, and operational requirements. Clearer task boundaries may help employees develop familiarity with their work, minimize unnecessary duplication, and complete routine activities more consistently. However, specialization in small businesses cannot simply replicate the rigid division of labor commonly associated with larger organizations. MSMEs operate with limited personnel, fluctuating workloads, and overlapping operational needs. Employees may still need to assist one another during periods of high demand or when particular activities require immediate attention. Consequently, effective specialization in this setting requires a balance between individual responsibility and the flexibility needed to maintain uninterrupted business operations.

Understanding this balance remains an important issue in human resource management (Gano et al., 2024; Theotokas et al., 2024; Vangana & Mutero, 2026). Conventional approaches to job specialization generally emphasize task efficiency, employee competence, and clearly defined organizational roles. Such principles are useful, but their application becomes more complicated when businesses operate without formal departments or extensive managerial structures. In small enterprises, individual tasks are closely interconnected, and changes in one activity can affect the completion of others. The thrift fashion business provides a particularly relevant setting because product conditions vary, sorting and pricing require individual judgment, and sales activities depend on accurate inventory information. These operational characteristics raise questions about how task specialization can improve productivity without restricting the cooperation that small businesses depend on (Widyastuti et al., 2023; Chimucheka et al., 2025).

This study addresses that issue by examining job specialization as an operational practice rather than merely a formal division of responsibilities. Its contribution lies in exploring how employees

understand their assigned roles, manage overlapping duties, and coordinate activities across different stages of the business process. By focusing on Regina Hema Thrift, the study considers the relationship between role clarity and employee productivity within a resource-constrained business environment. This perspective also recognizes that specialization is not necessarily effective simply because tasks have been divided. Its practical value depends on whether assignments correspond to employee capabilities, whether responsibilities are understood, and whether coordination remains effective when workloads change.

From a managerial perspective, these considerations are relevant to MSME owners seeking to improve productivity without substantially expanding their workforce (Fizzanty, 2024; Sun & Zhang, 2024; Probohudono et al., 2025). A more deliberate distribution of responsibilities may support efficient use of working time, consistent task completion, and clearer employee accountability. Nevertheless, excessive separation of duties could introduce coordination difficulties when employees become less responsive to activities outside their assigned roles. Examining both the benefits and practical limitations of specialization is therefore necessary to understand how small businesses can develop work arrangements suited to their organizational capacity. Rather than assuming that greater specialization automatically produces higher productivity, this study investigates the conditions under which clearer task assignments contribute to more effective daily operations.

Against this background, the study aims to examine the role of job specialization in employee productivity at Regina Hema Thrift in Medan. Specifically, it explores how responsibilities are allocated across operational activities, how employees and the business owner perceive the implications of task specialization for work efficiency and coordination, and what challenges arise in maintaining clear yet flexible work arrangements. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research seeks to provide a context-specific understanding of job specialization in a small fashion retail business. The findings are expected to contribute to discussions on human resource management in MSMEs and offer practical considerations for organizing work more effectively under limited staffing and operational resources.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach using a single-case study design to examine how job specialization was practiced and experienced within a small business setting (Creswell & Poth, 2023). The design was selected to explore the organization of daily work, the distribution of employee responsibilities, and their perceived implications for operational productivity. Rather than measuring productivity through statistical indicators, the study focused on understanding how task allocation influenced work processes, employee coordination, and the completion of routine activities. Regina Hema Thrift was treated as a bounded case, allowing the analysis to consider job specialization within its actual organizational and operational context.

Research Setting and Period

The research was conducted at Regina Hema Thrift, a secondhand fashion MSME located at Jl. Williem Iskandar No. 231A, Medan Tembung District, Medan, Indonesia. The business was purposively selected because its operations involve several interconnected activities, including product procurement, sorting, inventory management, sales, and marketing. These activities provided a relevant setting for examining how responsibilities were assigned and coordinated within a limited workforce. Fieldwork took place in September 2025, covering preliminary observation, interviews, documentation,

and the examination of daily operational practices.

Research Participants

Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in business operations and their knowledge of existing work arrangements. The informants included the business owner and sales employees. The owner provided information concerning managerial decisions, employee assignments, and the organization of operational activities. Sales employees contributed firsthand accounts of their responsibilities, daily work experiences, and coordination with other operational functions. These perspectives enabled the study to examine job specialization from both managerial and employee viewpoints.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, direct observation, and documentation (Almusaed et al., 2025). Semi-structured interviews explored how responsibilities were assigned, how employees understood their roles, and what operational difficulties emerged from overlapping tasks. Questions also addressed perceived changes in work efficiency, task completion, and coordination.

Direct observation focused on routine workplace activities, particularly the sequence of operational tasks, interactions among employees, and the distribution of responsibilities during business operations. This approach provided contextual information that could be compared with participants' accounts. Documentation included available activity photographs, administrative records, and business-related materials relevant to employee assignments and operational procedures. The use of multiple data sources allowed the study to examine the reported practices alongside observable workplace conditions.

Research Instruments

The researchers served as the primary instruments in collecting and interpreting qualitative data. Semi-structured interview guides, observation sheets, and field notes were used to maintain consistency across field activities while allowing relevant issues to emerge during data collection. The interview guide focused on role allocation, employee competencies, work coordination, and perceived productivity. Observation notes recorded operational activities, task overlaps, and interactions associated with daily workflow. These instruments supported a systematic examination of job specialization without restricting the analysis to predetermined responses.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed descriptively through three interconnected stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Interview accounts, observation notes, and supporting documents were first reviewed to identify information relevant to job specialization and employee productivity (Cooper & Schindler, 2002; Miles et al., 2018). The data were then organized around recurring issues, including role clarity, task allocation, workflow efficiency, employee coordination, and operational constraints.

The findings were subsequently interpreted by comparing participants' accounts with observations and available documentation. Particular attention was given to whether clearly assigned responsibilities supported smoother operations and where overlapping duties continued to create

difficulties. Conclusions were developed from patterns across the collected evidence, with the interpretation limited to the operational circumstances of Regina Hema Thrift. This analytical approach enabled the study to explain how job specialization functioned within the business rather than establish a causal relationship between specialization and productivity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Work Organization and the Implementation of Job Specialization

The findings indicate that Regina Hema Thrift organizes its daily operations through a division of responsibilities covering procurement, product management, marketing, sales, and financial administration. According to the business owner, employees are assigned tasks that correspond to their abilities and experience. This arrangement is intended to establish clearer responsibilities and prevent employees from handling activities outside their primary areas of work. Observations of product sorting, merchandise arrangement, and customer service provided additional context for understanding how these operational functions are carried out.

The division of labor reflects an effort to introduce greater structure into a business that operates with limited human resources. In small retail enterprises, employees frequently perform multiple activities because operational demands change throughout the day. Although such flexibility can help businesses respond to immediate needs, responsibilities may become difficult to distinguish when several workers handle similar tasks. The arrangement described at Regina Hema Thrift attempts to address this difficulty by identifying the main duties associated with each operational function.

Job specialization, however, involves more than assigning employees to different activities. Its effectiveness depends on whether individuals understand their responsibilities and possess the skills needed to complete them. At Regina Hema Thrift, the owner's emphasis on matching tasks with employee competencies suggests that specialization is used as a means of organizing work around existing capabilities. This approach may support greater familiarity with routine procedures while allowing managerial attention to be directed toward coordination and supervision.

An important consideration is the owner's preference for keeping employees within their designated responsibilities. Clear boundaries can reduce uncertainty, but strict separation may also limit responsiveness when workloads become uneven. Procurement, sorting, inventory management, and sales are closely connected activities. Delays in one function can affect subsequent tasks, regardless of how clearly individual responsibilities have been defined. The case therefore illustrates the need to consider specialization alongside coordination rather than treating task separation as sufficient for effective work organization.

Job Specialization, Work Efficiency, and Task Completion

The business owner associated job specialization with improvements in the organization and completion of daily tasks (Molina-García et al., 2025; Padi et al., 2025; Zumalia et al., 2025). Employees assigned to familiar activities were considered better able to concentrate on their responsibilities without repeatedly shifting between unrelated duties. This was particularly relevant to operational activities requiring continuous attention, such as merchandise sorting, product arrangement, sales transactions, and customer service. From the owner's perspective, a clearer allocation of work supported a more orderly workflow and reduced unnecessary overlap between employee responsibilities.

These findings point to the role of task familiarity in operational efficiency. When employees repeatedly perform activities suited to their capabilities, they may require less guidance in completing

routine assignments. Familiarity with work procedures can also reduce interruptions arising from uncertainty over who should perform a particular task. In this sense, specialization may improve efficiency not simply by reducing the number of activities assigned to each employee but by establishing greater consistency in how those activities are performed.

The relationship between specialization and task completion is particularly relevant in the thrift fashion business. Merchandise must pass through several stages before reaching customers, including procurement, condition assessment, sorting, pricing, display, and sales. Each stage requires attention to different operational details. A clearer assignment of responsibilities can help employees concentrate on the requirements of their respective activities while making it easier for the business owner to identify where delays occur.

Nevertheless, operational efficiency should not be interpreted solely in terms of individual working speed. The completion of one task often depends on information or materials provided by another employee. Faster sorting, for example, may offer limited benefits if inventory information is not communicated accurately to employees responsible for sales. The findings therefore suggest that specialization supports productivity most effectively when individual task performance is accompanied by coordination across operational functions. Although the owner reported improvements in work efficiency, the available evidence does not establish the magnitude of these changes through measured completion times or productivity records.

Work Accuracy, Product Quality, and Customer Service

Another finding concerns the relationship between specialized responsibilities and the consistency of work outcomes. According to the business owner, employees who regularly perform tasks within their areas of expertise are less likely to make mistakes because they become familiar with the procedures and standards associated with their work. This perception is particularly relevant to product handling and sales activities, where errors may affect merchandise quality, inventory accuracy, and customer transactions.

Unlike retailers dealing primarily with standardized products, thrift fashion businesses must assess merchandise that differs in condition, quality, appearance, and selling value. Product sorting consequently requires employees to recognize defects, evaluate garment suitability, and distinguish items according to their characteristics. Experience in these activities may help employees make more consistent judgments and reduce the need for repeated corrections. Similarly, employees responsible for customer service benefit from familiarity with available products, transaction procedures, and customer inquiries.

The relationship between specialization and work accuracy can therefore be understood through repeated exposure to similar tasks. Employees who routinely handle a particular activity have opportunities to strengthen the practical knowledge needed to identify problems and complete assignments consistently. In Regina Hema Thrift, the owner's account suggests that this familiarity contributes to greater confidence in work execution and reduces dependence on continuous managerial guidance.

However, a distinction must be maintained between perceived improvements and documented reductions in errors. The available findings do not include comparative error records or systematic measurements of product defects and transaction accuracy. Consequently, the results support the interpretation that specialization is perceived to facilitate more accurate work, rather than establishing

a measurable reduction in error rates.

Customer service represents another important consideration. Clear responsibilities may help sales employees devote more attention to customers instead of dividing their time among unrelated activities. Yet service quality also depends on product availability, communication, and the ability to respond to unexpected requests. The implications of specialization for customer satisfaction should therefore be understood as potential operational benefits rather than confirmed changes in customer perceptions.

Owner-Led Training and Employee Work Experience

The implementation of job specialization at Regina Hema Thrift is supported by practical training provided directly by the business owner. Training focuses on the activities employees are expected to perform rather than following a formal organizational training program. Sales employees receive guidance on customer interaction, transaction procedures, and merchandise presentation. Employees involved in procurement and product sorting are introduced to quality assessment and pricing considerations based on garment condition.

This form of training illustrates how employee competence can be developed through routine business activities. Direct guidance allows the owner to explain work procedures in relation to immediate operational needs. It also provides opportunities for employees to become familiar with the expectations associated with their assigned responsibilities. In a business with limited managerial resources, such arrangements offer a practical alternative to more formal training systems.

Training also helps explain the relationship between job specialization and work performance. Assigning responsibilities according to employee capabilities may improve the initial fit between individuals and their tasks, but effective performance still requires familiarity with operational standards. Practical guidance enables employees to develop this familiarity and adapt their existing skills to the specific requirements of the business. Specialization and training can therefore be understood as complementary practices: task allocation establishes responsibility, while training supports the ability to carry it out.

The business owner further associated appropriate task assignments with employee confidence, motivation, and job satisfaction (Marín-Palacios, 2023; Sánchez-Medina et al., 2024). Employees who understand their responsibilities and are familiar with their work were perceived as more comfortable in performing daily activities. This interpretation suggests that clearer roles may influence employee experiences in addition to operational performance.

Nevertheless, employee satisfaction requires careful interpretation. The evidence presented primarily reflects the owner's assessment rather than detailed accounts from employees themselves. It therefore cannot establish how employees independently evaluate their workloads, opportunities for skill development, or satisfaction with assigned duties. Greater clarity may reduce uncertainty, but highly repetitive responsibilities could also limit learning opportunities if employees have little flexibility to develop additional competencies.

These considerations show that specialization should not be evaluated solely through task completion. Its longer-term effectiveness may also depend on whether employees receive sufficient guidance, understand the purpose of their responsibilities, and have opportunities to develop skills as the business evolves.

Managerial Implications and Future Development of Job Specialization

The owner of Regina Hema Thrift expressed an intention to strengthen job specialization as the

business develops. This plan reflects a managerial preference for clearer responsibilities and more systematic operational arrangements. As business activities become increasingly complex, maintaining informal task assignments without adequate coordination may create difficulties in supervision, employee development, and the consistency of work processes.

The findings suggest that the potential contribution of specialization extends beyond individual productivity. Clear responsibilities can provide a basis for monitoring daily activities, identifying training needs, and recognizing operational problems. For small businesses, these functions are important because owners frequently combine managerial responsibilities with direct involvement in routine operations. More structured task allocation may help reduce this dependence, particularly when employees become sufficiently familiar with their responsibilities to perform routine work independently.

At the same time, the case highlights a potential tension between specialization and organizational flexibility. The owner's emphasis on restricting employees to their assigned duties may create greater accountability, but the business still requires cooperation across interconnected activities. A rigid interpretation of specialization could become problematic when employee availability changes, customer demand increases, or urgent tasks arise outside established responsibilities.

A more suitable approach for a small retail business may therefore involve clearly defined primary responsibilities alongside limited cross-functional support. Employees can retain accountability for their principal tasks while developing sufficient familiarity with related activities to assist when necessary. Such an arrangement would preserve the benefits of specialization without creating unnecessary barriers between operational functions.

The broader implication is that job specialization in MSMEs should be viewed as an adaptive managerial practice rather than a fixed organizational structure. Its value lies in improving the alignment between employee capabilities, task requirements, and operational demands. Training and coordination remain necessary to ensure that specialization strengthens the overall workflow instead of producing isolated improvements in individual activities.

Taken together, the findings indicate that job specialization at Regina Hema Thrift is perceived to support clearer work responsibilities, more consistent task execution, and improved operational coordination. The study also identifies owner-led training as an important mechanism for developing task-specific competencies. However, these findings primarily reflect the organizational practices and managerial perceptions examined within a single business. They do not establish a quantified increase in employee productivity or demonstrate that similar arrangements would produce equivalent outcomes in other MSMEs. The contribution of this case lies in showing how role clarity, employee competence, practical training, and operational flexibility interact in the organization of work within a resource-constrained retail enterprise.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of job specialization in employee productivity at Regina Hema Thrift, a secondhand fashion MSME in Medan, Indonesia. The findings indicate that assigning responsibilities according to employee competencies supports clearer work arrangements, more consistent task execution, and better coordination across operational activities. Job specialization also helps employees develop familiarity with their duties, while practical training provided by the business owner strengthens the skills required to perform them. However, its effectiveness depends not only on

clearly defined responsibilities but also on maintaining communication and flexibility between interconnected tasks. These findings suggest that specialization can support operational productivity when implemented in accordance with the organizational characteristics and resource limitations of small businesses.

The study has several limitations. Its single-case design restricts the transferability of findings to MSMEs with different organizational structures and operational conditions. The evidence also relies heavily on the business owner's perspective, while employee experiences and productivity changes were not independently examined through systematic performance measurements. Nevertheless, the findings offer practical implications for MSME management. Business owners may benefit from establishing clearer task assignments, providing competency-based training, and maintaining coordination across operational functions. Such practices can help improve work organization without requiring complex managerial structures or substantial additional resources.

Future research could examine job specialization across MSMEs operating in different business sectors and organizational settings to identify how its implementation varies according to workforce size, operational complexity, and managerial practices. Studies involving broader employee participation would also provide a more balanced understanding of job satisfaction, motivation, and workplace experiences. In addition, longitudinal or mixed-methods research could investigate changes in task completion time, error rates, service quality, and employee productivity following the introduction of specialized work arrangements. These approaches would extend the present findings by clarifying the conditions under which job specialization contributes to sustainable organizational performance in small businesses.

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