

Theoretical Essay

Proposal for a typology of self-employed considering the impact of the business and entrepreneurial engagement

Jéssica Borges de Carvalho^a   e Cândido Borges^a  

^aUniversidade Federal de Goiás, Goiânia, Brasil



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Corresponding author:

Jéssica Borges de Carvalho
jessicacarvalho10@hotmail.com

Abstract

Aim of the study: to propose a typology of self-employed, based on the dimensions of impact of the business and entrepreneurial engagement. **Dilemma/problem or thesis:** it is necessary to understand the different types of self-employed, since examining them as a single category could lead to limitations in the results of a study. **Relevance/originality:** as a criterion for defining the typologies, dichotomous categories were established to help with comparisons. **The categories were:** formalisation (formal or informal), innovation potential (with high innovation potential or low innovation potential), job creation (with an employee or without an employee), persistence in the activity as a TCP (intermittent or continuous), reconciliation of the activity with other professional/economic occupations (partial or full) and motivation (by opportunity or necessity). **The dimensions adopted:** impact of the enterprise and entrepreneurial engagement were considered to identify entrepreneurial activity and because they can be identified through actions. Four types of self-employed workers were proposed. Type 1 (innovator) has high impact and high engagement. Type 2 (explorer) has high impact and low engagement. Type 3 (conventional) has low impact and high engagement. Type 4 (occasional) has low impact and low engagement. **Social contributions:** the proposed typology is not about determining TCPs as being or not being entrepreneurs or assigning value judgements to the types, but about understanding their particularities and entrepreneurial activity, making it possible to choose and justify theories in the field of entrepreneurship and eventually direct appropriate actions and policies to each of the types.

Keywords: Self-employment, Entrepreneurial engagement, Impact of the business, Typology.

Proposta de tipologia de trabalhadores por conta própria considerando o impacto do empreendimento e o engajamento empreendedor

Resumo

Objetivo do estudo: propor uma tipologia de trabalhador por conta própria (TCP), a partir das dimensões impacto do empreendimento e engajamento empreendedor. **Dilema/problema ou tese:** necessita-se compreender os diferentes tipos de trabalhadores por conta própria, uma vez que examiná-los como uma única categoria pode incorrer em limitações para os resultados de um estudo. **Relevância/ originalidade:** como critério para definir as tipologias, foram estabelecidas categorias dicotômicas que auxiliam nas comparações. **As categorias foram:** formalização (formal ou informal), potencial de inovação (com alto potencial de inovação ou com baixo potencial de inovação), geração de empregos (com empregado ou sem empregado), constância na atividade como TCP (intermitente ou contínuo), conciliação da atividade com outras ocupações profissionais/econômicas (parcial ou integral) e motivação (por oportunidade ou por necessidade). **As dimensões adotadas:** impacto do empreendimento e engajamento empreendedor foram consideradas para identificação da atividade empreendedora e por serem identificáveis por meio de ações. Foram propostos quatro tipos de trabalhadores por conta própria. O tipo 1 (inovador) possui alto impacto e alto engajamento. O tipo 2 (explorador) tem alto impacto e baixo engajamento. O tipo 3 (convencional) tem baixo impacto e alto engajamento. O tipo 4 (ocasional) tem baixo impacto e baixo engajamento. **Contribuições sociais:** a tipologia proposta não se trata de determinar os TCPs como sendo ou não empreendedores ou atribuir juízo de valores aos tipos, mas de compreender suas particularidades e atividade empreendedora, possibilitando escolher e justificar teorias do campo do empreendedorismo e eventualmente direcionar ações e políticas adequadas a cada um dos tipos.

Palavras-chave: Trabalho por conta própria, Engajamento empreendedor, Impacto do empreendimento, Tipologia.



INTRODUCTION

Self-employed represent a significant portion of the workforce and play an important role in the economy. In Brazil specifically, this group comprises over 26 million individuals - approximately 26% of the working population - when considering those who engage in self-employment as either their primary or secondary occupation ([Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística \[IBGE\], 2023](#)). In addition to contributing to income generation, self-employed promote innovation, create jobs, and enable a more flexible and rapid response to changes in the economic environment ([Burke & Cowling, 2020](#)).

Despite their representativeness and economic relevance, self-employed do not form a homogeneous group. According to Skrzek-Lubasińska and Szaban ([2019](#)) and Patel and Wolfe ([2021](#)), this diversity should be more thoroughly examined in research, as treating self-employed as a single category can limit the insights gained from studies. Bögenhold ([2019](#)) reinforces this view, arguing that the heterogeneity of this group is often underrecognized. Moreover, the author notes that analyzing the entrepreneurial activity patterns of self-employed is particularly challenging due to the wide variation in sectors, motivations, income levels, and educational backgrounds among them.

Considering the need to pay attention to the heterogeneity of self-employed and the challenges highlighted, one way to understand this group is to organize it into categories and typologies. The construction of types, based on a set of criteria, simplifies reality through description and comparison ([McKinney, 1968](#)), which facilitates the contribution to the advancement of more in-depth knowledge about self-employed. In this case, constructing a typology for self-employed, with criteria traditionally used in the field of entrepreneurship, can not only clarify the diversity of the group, but also deepen the understanding of the nature of the entrepreneurial activity of these individuals and their characteristics. Therefore, in this study, parameters and criteria were established based on two dimensions: **impact of the business** and the **entrepreneurial engagement**.

The **impact of the business** refers to the results of the business and the consequences of entrepreneurial activity for the individual and the environment in which they are inserted. Impact is an element that has been used by other researchers in the elaboration of types of entrepreneurship – for example, Baumol ([1996](#)) in his seminal article uses the impact on society to classify the types of entrepreneurship as productive, unproductive and destructive.

In turn, **entrepreneurial engagement** is a construct used in the entrepreneurship literature to describe an individual's dedication to entrepreneurial activity ([Grilo & Thurik, 2005](#)). Henríquez-Daza et al. ([2019](#)) emphasize the need to understand the different levels of entrepreneurial engagement, as it is directly associated with the performance of a new venture.

Given the dimensions traditionally explored in the field of entrepreneurship and the need to establish clear criteria for understanding self-employed, this theoretical essay addresses the following question: what are the types of self-employed? To answer this, the study proposes a typology of self-employed based on two key dimensions - impact of business and entrepreneurial engagement. The typology aims to classify self-employed by considering individual level characteristics, observable behaviors, and their causal relationship to entrepreneurial activity, following the recommendation by Cornelissen ([2017](#)). The author highlights the importance of developing typologies grounded in strong theoretical foundations that incorporate causal patterns while avoiding purely empirical classifications or unobservable theoretical abstractions.

To methodologically support the typology, this study adopts McKinney ([1968](#)), systematic theory, which outlines procedures for the systematic construction and interconnection of types. Additionally, it draws on Weber's concept of the ideal type - a conceptual tool that facilitates the analysis and comparison of empirical realities ([McKinney, 1968](#)).

Morris et al. ([2018](#)) highlight the importance of recognizing the differences and specificities among entrepreneur types, suggesting that both researchers and policymakers should tailor actions accordingly. In line with this perspective, the typology developed in this study contributes to the field of entrepreneurship by offering a framework that aids researchers in classifying and analyzing the realities of self-employed, while accounting for their unique attributes. By integrating entrepreneurial engagement with the impact of their ventures, this typology provides a structured framework that enhances understanding of how individual characteristics interact with the outcomes of entrepreneurial activity.

BUILDING TYPOLOGIES

Typologies are systematic classifications commonly used in the social sciences to describe empirical phenomena and generalize aspects of reality ([Lozares, 1990](#)). According to McKinney ([1968](#)), types are simplifications of concrete realities, constructed from a set of related characteristics. They enable an articulated understanding of the various elements that constitute a phenomenon ([Lozares, 1990](#)).

Types enhance clarity regarding the object of analysis and its explanatory framework, thus supporting the characterization of social realities ([Roldán, 1996](#)). One of their key functions is to organize concrete data in a manner that facilitates both description and comparison ([McKinney, 1968](#)). Although typologies are part of scientific methodology, they follow a distinct logic, with specific rules and procedures for their construction ([McKinney, 1968](#)).

Various methodological strategies can be used to construct typologies, including systematic theory (the systematic interconnection of observations about a given phenomenon), experimental logic (based on empirical evidence), quantitative techniques (which measure and assign values to qualitative attributes), and historiography or case studies (which focus on processes and unique structures within their spatial-temporal contexts) ([McKinney, 1968](#)). The typology in this study is based on systematic theory, involving article analysis, categorization, and the systematic interconnection of concepts, steps proposed by McKinney ([1968](#)) for typology development.

In addition to these methodological strategies, different logical approaches to typology construction can also be adopted. These include: "ideal" (which compares the extreme or ideal cases) versus "field-extracted" (which compares central tendencies, typically using averages); "general" (which simplifies empirical attributes) versus "specific" (which includes a greater number of characteristics); "scientific" (which tends to be timeless and universal) versus "historical" (which has temporal and contextual boundaries); and "universal" (applicable across various phenomena) versus "local" (restricted to specific contexts). Typologies may also follow a "generalizing" logic (applicable to diverse situations) or an "individualizing" logic (focused on organizing concrete data) ([McKinney, 1968](#)). Comparing ideal types is a way to grasp group heterogeneity and avoid issues related to internal coherence, boundary demarcation, and overlapping categories. Bögenhold ([2019](#)) supports this view by emphasizing the importance of defining diverse types of self-employed, arguing that studies based on averages fail to adequately represent the group's diversity.

Accordingly, the logic of the ideal type underpins this study, as it offers both a conceptual foundation and a systematic approach for analyzing and comparing empirical realities ([Weber, 2008](#)). This typological logic also emphasizes causal attribution, where the effects of individual actions are linked to underlying motivations ([Swedberg, 2018](#)). It assumes a gap between actual and predicted behavior, which contributes to its parsimony and analytical usefulness ([van Riel, 2021](#)).



There are several works in which Weber comments on the ideal type. Swedberg (2018) clarifies that, in the essay “The Objectivity of Knowledge”, from 1904, Weber begins this discussion and develops it in the work “Economy and Society” from 1922. In the 1904 essay, Weber explored the logic of identification and observation of repetition, to identify factors that are grouped together, thus, the combination of different individual characteristics provides a more comprehensive explanation for the group (Weber, 2008). The construction of the typology followed four stages. First, articles from leading scientific journals on entrepreneurship were analyzed, selected based on the Journal Impact Factor™ (JIF) score, linked to the Journal Citation Reports™ from Clarivate Analytics™, 2020 score. The journals selected, with the highest JIF score, were Journal of Business Venturing, Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice, Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal, Small Business Economics, International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal, International Small Business Journal-Researching Entrepreneurship and Entrepreneurship and Regional Development.

To ensure standardization and minimize discrepancies across scientific journal search engines, the Web of Science database was chosen as the primary source for accessing leading journals in the field of entrepreneurship. The article search protocol is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Summary of the protocol for searching scientific articles

Items	Description
Topic of interest	Self-employed.
Search terms	self-employment*, own-account work* and freelancer (comprehensive terms used in the literature for people who work for themselves).
Search fields	Topic [includes title, abstract, author’s keywords and Keywords Plus, the latter according to Clarivate (2022) refers to the keywords indicated according to the content of the article].
Time period	01/2017 to 01/2025.
Inclusion criteria	Scientific articles that discuss work or the self-employed as a research topic and do not use the term generically, without considering the specificities of this group.
Exclusion criteria	Book chapters, essays, editorials and scientific articles that use self-employment only as a broad synonym for entrepreneurship, and articles that mention the topic sporadically.

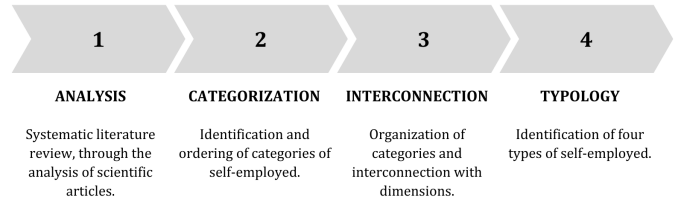
Note: Elaborated by the authors.

This search returned 356 articles, of which 166 were selected for in-depth analysis, based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria outlined in Table 1. The selected articles were written in English, as it is the predominant language of publication in the scientific journals examined. Although potential biases in the article search and selection process must be acknowledged, the choice is justified by the prominence of the selected journals in the field of entrepreneurship.

In the second stage of the typology construction, categories of self-employed were identified from the analyzed articles. In the third stage, these categories were organized and integrated into the dimensions of entrepreneurial engagement and the impact of the business. This organization involved grouping similar terms—such as “partial self-employed” and “hybrid”—as well as identifying dichotomous distinctions, such as “self-employed with employees” versus “self-employed without employees.” Finally, in the fourth stage, four types of self-employed were proposed using a Cartesian

plane to represent ideal types. This typology was then presented to and validated by researchers from an entrepreneurship research group. These stages are summarized in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Flowchart for construction of typology



Note: Elaborated by the authors.

For the construction of the types, this flow was fundamental for the organization of the categories that make up the typology. Following the steps indicated by Cornelissen (2017) for the development of a typology: categorization, grouping of ideas (interconnections) and observations. The next sections will address the categorization stage of self-employed, the dimensions of impact of the business and entrepreneurial engagement and the construction of the typology.

CATEGORIZATION OF SELF-EMPLOYED

Self-employed have been classified and categorized in various ways throughout the literature. Prandi (1976), a pioneering scholar on the subject in Brazil, proposed a classification based on several criteria, including formalization (regular vs. irregular), reason for self-employment (by choice vs. exclusion from the labor market), context of activity (rural vs. urban), demographic factors (such as education level, gender, and age), employment status (ranging from precarious conditions to successful professionals, liberal professionals, and technicians), sector of activity (e.g., goods production, merchandise trading, transportation, technical services, and other services), and dedication (whether the activity is primary or supplementary for income generation).

Another classification framework is offered by D'Amours and Crespo (2004), who identify five main categories: the nature of the clientele (number and type of clients), worker characteristics (education level, experience, network participation, and income), type of product (reproducibility and required skill), work organization (processes, deadlines, and degree of control), and remuneration and protection (including social security and professional risk coverage). These categories serve as the basis for identifying six types of self-employed.

Similarly, Szaban and Skrzek-Lubasińska (2018) propose categories such as independence and autonomy (fully independent vs. dependent on an employer), motivation (by choice vs. lack of alternatives), investment of own capital (those who invest personal funds vs. those who do not or rely on investors), innovation and creativity (those who implement new ideas vs. those who replicate existing models), level of professionalism (high vs. low educational attainment), and financial outcomes (satisfaction vs. dissatisfaction with social and financial results). Based on these categories, the authors define five types of self-employed.

Although these frameworks use different classification criteria, they share a common approach in adopting dichotomous views, placing self-employed at opposing ends of a continuum. Building on the literature reviewed in Section 2, this study proposes six main dichotomous categories of self-employed, which are detailed in Table 2.

A Table 2 presents the following dichotomous categories: formalization, innovation potential, job creation, constancy in activity as a self-employed, reconciliation of activity with other professional/economic occupations, and motivation. These dichotomous categories are extreme points on a continuum and are used for representation purposes. However, it is understood that, within these points, there are variations in terms of the intensity or specificities of the individual. Weber (2008) defends this idealization and representation as a means of establishing clear limits.

The first category refers to formalization, distinguishing between informal and formal (Vladasel et al., 2021). Formal self-employed are people who have businesses are formally registered, while informal self-employed are those who do not have a registration with government agencies and who are usually in more precarious conditions (Colbari, 2015; Jones & Nadin, 2024). In Brazil, there is an incentive for formalization through Complementary Law 123/2006 on Microenterprises and Small Businesses, which provides for the Individual Microentrepreneur (IM) (Colbari, 2015).

The second category concerns the potential for innovation, taking into account both market demand and the income generated (Kwon & Sohn, 2021). Additionally, cognitive skills, work experience (Patel & Ganzach, 2019), and qualifications (Burke & Cowling, 2020) are considered relevant factors. Self-employed professionals with a high potential for innovation are typically in greater demand, as there is often a limited supply of such professionals within their fields. In contrast, self-employed without specialized technical training tend to engage in lower-paid work with limited impact and reduced potential for local innovation.

The third category addresses the capacity for job creation by self-employed. The ability of self-employed to generate employment is debated in the literature. Some authors argue that self-employed may hire others (Sorgner et al., 2017), while others, such as De Vries et al. (2020) and Sarkar et al. (2018), contend that self-employed generally do not employ additional labor. In the Brazilian context, however, public policy has institutionalized the category of the Individual Microentrepreneur (IM), which allows for the hiring of one employee without forfeiting the entrepreneur's IM status.

Table 2

Categorization of the self-employed

Categories	Dichotomous elements	Description	Example	Grounding
1. Formalization	1.1 Formal	1.1 Registered self-employed, who has the National Registry of Legal Entities.	1.1 Individual microentrepreneur with registration who works as a business consultant.	Fossen (2021); Kalenkoski and Pabilonia (2022) and Vladasel et al. (2021); Jones and Nadin (2024).
	1.2 Informal	1.2 Self-employed without formal registration.	1.2 Self-employed seamstress without registration with government agencies.	
2. Innovation potential	2.1. Professional with high innovation potential	2.1 Self-employed worker with technical qualifications, in an area with high market demand.	2.1 Self-employed data scientist.	Burke and Cowling (2020); Gindling et al. (2020); Kwon and Sohn (2021); Nikolova et al. (2023); Patel and Ganzach (2019) and Ribas (2020).
	2.2 Professional with low innovation potential	2.2 Self-employed without technical qualifications or with low market demand.	2.2 Street vendor.	
3. Job creation	3.1 With employee	3.1 Self-employed with employees.	3.1 Owner of a supermarket with auxiliary employees.	Gonçalves and Martins (2021) and Hessels et al. (2017).
	3.2 Without employee	3.2 Self-employed person without employees.	3.2 Hairdresser who owns his own salon and works alone.	
4. Consistency in activity as a self-employed	4.1 Persistent	4.1 Self-employed who has worked continuously over time.	4.1 Person who has a permanent self-employed business.	Koch et al. (2021).
	4.2 Intermittent	4.2 Temporary self-employed who alternates over time between periods of paid employment or unemployment. In other words, he/she is sporadically self-employed.	4.2 Person who has a food stall in a tourist location, during high season.	
5. Reconciliation of activity with other professional/economic occupations	5.1 Full	5.1 Worker exclusively dedicated to self-employment.	5.1 Self-employed who provides technical assistance for cell phones.	Block et al. (2022) and Ganser-Stickler et al. (2022).
	5.2 Partial	5.2 Self-employed who combines time with another occupation, which may be as (5.2.1) main activity or (5.2.1) secondary/complementary activity.	5.2 Night watchman with a formal employment contract who, on alternate shifts, works independently providing technical assistance for cell phones.	
6. Motivation	6.1 By opportunity	6.1 Self-employed who chose to pursue this professional activity.	6.1 Telecommunications technician who decided to start his own business, providing internet in remote areas.	De Vries et al. (2020) and Martiarena (2019).
	6.2 By necessity	6.2 Self-employed who pursues this activity out of necessity.	6.2 Unemployed person who started selling perfumes to earn an income.	

Note: Elaborated by the authors.



The fourth category considers the persistence of self-employment over time, drawing on the typology proposed by Koch et al. (2021). These authors classify self-employed into mixed (without dominant employment), intermittent (with short episodes of self-employment), necessity-driven (experiencing long periods of unemployment between wage and self-employment), and persistent (with continuous self-employment patterns). To simplify analysis - consistent with Weber's concept of the ideal type - this study adopts a dichotomous distinction between intermittent and persistent. Intermittent self-employed engage in self-employment sporadically over time. For instance, a beverage vendor might work at a traffic light for three months, then spend six months as an employee, and later return to self-employment. In contrast, persistent remain self-employed for extended periods without interruption, such as a grocery store owner operating consistently for several years.

The fifth category considers the degree of dedication to self-employment, distinguishing between partial and full-time involvement. Partially dedicated combine self-employment with another economic or professional activity, whereas fully dedicated exclusively as self-employed. Block et al. (2019) examined how social culture influences individuals' likelihood of choosing full-time versus part-time self-employment. Their findings highlight notable differences between these two groups, particularly in relation to risk tolerance, performance orientation, and future focus.

The sixth category examines the motivation to create a business, differentiating between opportunity or necessity. The opportunity-based chooses to work in this activity voluntarily, because it has identified and exploited a market opportunity. In turn, the self-employed out of necessity has no alternative and enters involuntarily (Szaban & Skrzek-Lubasińska, 2018), for example, in a situation of unemployment. This adopted category represents two opposites of classification of motivation for entrepreneurship, similar to that originally used by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM), in the first rounds of its classic research, which used the terms "need" and "opportunity".

The dichotomous categories used will be related to the dimensions presented and discussed in the next section, three related to the impact of the business and three to entrepreneurial engagement.

TYPOLGY DIMENSIONS

Impact of the business and entrepreneurial engagement are dimensions of the typology used in the field of entrepreneurship by authors such as Morris et al. (2015) and Carree and Thurik (2008). These constructs are observable in specific actions and align with Weber's proposal to identify real regularities (van Riel, 2021), which is why they were adopted in this research.

Impact of the Business

The term impact can refer to a result, effect or consequence. In this study, the impact of the business is related to the consequences of the enterprise for the generation of income for both the entrepreneur and the environment in which it operates, for the creation of jobs, innovations and local development.

The use of this construct in entrepreneurship can be traced in studies such as that of Morris et al. (2015), who incorporate impact as one of the key elements in proposing four types of entrepreneurship: survival, lifestyle, managed growth, and high growth. According to these authors, survival enterprises provide a minimal income for entrepreneurs; lifestyle enterprises strengthen local culture and generate well-being for entrepreneurs; managed growth enterprises create jobs and contribute to tax revenue; and high-growth entrepreneurship fosters innovation and drives the rapid creation of new jobs.

Another example of applying business impact to categorize entrepreneurship is Baumol (1996), seminal work, which classifies entrepreneurship types as productive, unproductive, and destructive, based on their societal impact. Similarly, Cumming et al. (2013) examined the impact of entrepreneurship on GDP per capita and patent generation across different countries.

However, there are several ways to measure the impact of entrepreneurship on a society, which can be based on indicators such as job creation, economic performance, innovation, and incorporated (Carree & Thurik, 2008; Laing et al., 2022). In this work, to examine the impact axis, the categories of formalization, innovation potential, and job creation were considered. The formalization category as a measure of impact was identified in the study by Laing, et al. (2022), which distinguishes between the impact of formal and informal entrepreneurship in high- and low-income economies. For the authors, formalization provides benefits by generating a flow of tax revenue and companies within this category are more likely to comply with environmental, wage and health legislation, in addition to having a greater capacity for survival.

As a consequence of formalization, there is greater knowledge about companies, which consequently directs government actions and greater security in relation to the businesses created in terms of compliance with legislation and standards. On the other hand, still for the authors, informal entrepreneurs benefit from the lower cost of starting a business, as it allows testing its viability; however, these businesses may have less growth potential and government ignorance about their characteristics. Informal entrepreneurs tend to have lower productivity and lower growth capacity for businesses, since they operate on a smaller scale and have limited access to public resources and services, consequently, generating less impact (La Porta & Shleifer, 2014).

In terms of innovation potential, this measure refers to the ability to conceive and implement new ideas, create new markets (Morris, et al., 2015), scalability and business growth (van Praag & Versloot, 2007), research and development (Morris, et al., 2015) and partnerships. Therefore, these are people who usually have higher professional qualifications.

Job creation, as a measure of impact, reflects the ability of entrepreneurs to generate employment - not only by directly reducing unemployment rates but also through their social contributions. These contributions include fostering a circular economy, enhancing purchasing power, generating taxes, and supporting broader economic activity (Cumming et al., 2013). Furthermore, entrepreneurship plays a significant role in reducing inequality and poverty, while also increasing productivity (van Praag & Versloot, 2007).

Entrepreneurial Engagement

Entrepreneurial engagement is the literature that precedes discussions on work engagement. According to Kahn (1990), work engagement refers to a person's active presence, whether physical, cognitive or emotional, in their work, considering the different degrees of involvement that an individual can dedicate to their professional activity. Schaufeli et al. (2002) state that it refers to a more persistent situation and is characterized by vigor (referring to the willingness to invest effort and persistence even in the face of difficulties), dedication (involvement that goes beyond the normal level of identification) and absorption (involving immersion and being focused). Engagement can influence work performance (Kahn, 1990) and is also related to well-being, pleasure and commitment (Magnan et al., 2016).

Although most research on work engagement focuses on paid employees, entrepreneurial engagement has also been studied in relation to entrepreneurs (Laguna et al., 2017). In this context, entrepreneurial engagement refers to the entrepreneur's dedication and involvement with a new business (Carree & Thurik, 2008). The literature presents three main perspectives on entrepreneurial

engagement. The first considers engagement as a binary concept - either an individual is engaged or not. The second perspective focuses on varying levels of engagement, while the third explores the extent and manner in which an individual is engaged.

The first perspective on entrepreneurial engagement simply addresses whether or not an individual is engaged in a new business. From this view, when an individual starts a venture and invests time and resources, they are considered engaged in entrepreneurial activity, marking their entry into the business (McMullen et al., 2008).

The second perspective goes beyond the binary engagement status and examines levels of engagement across different stages of the entrepreneurial process. Engagement is typically higher as the process progresses (Hessels et al., 2011). For instance, Henríquez-Daza et al. (2019) categorize engagement into three levels: nascent, new, and established. On the other hand, Hessels et al. (2011) propose six levels of engagement that align with the entrepreneurial process: no engagement, potential, intentional, nascent, new, and established.

The third perspective is interested in knowing how much and in what way this individual is engaged, referring to the entrepreneur's dedication and intensity in relation to his/her enterprise. Expanding on the previous views (binary and procedural), this perspective relates intensity to dedication. It seeks to know whether this engagement is total or combined with another professional activity (Ganser-Stickler et al., 2022) and whether it is constant or only for a short period of days or months (Martinez & Bryant, 2014, 2017), bringing the idea of the person's dedication to work as an entrepreneur, through the physical, cognitive and emotional presence proposed in Khan's concept of work engagement (Kahn, 1990).

To construct the typology proposed in this essay, a broad view of entrepreneurial engagement was adopted. Three categories presented in the previous section were used: constancy in activity, reconciliation of activity with other professional or economic occupations, and motivation.

Regarding constancy in activity, the persistence of entrepreneurial efforts over time is emphasized. More engaged entrepreneurs tend to demonstrate greater consistency in their activities (Martinez & Bryant, 2014, 2017; Schaufeli et al., 2002). In this context, the persistence of a business is directly linked to engagement (Caliendo et al., 2020).

The reconciliation of entrepreneurial activity with other professional occupations is another important category. This refers to the extent of an entrepreneur's dedication to their business, whether full-time or part-time (Ganser-Stickler et al., 2022). Entrepreneurs who dedicate themselves fully to their ventures are considered more engaged, while those who engage only partially are seen as less involved. One alternative approach to studying this reconciliation is by examining the number of hours dedicated to entrepreneurial activity (Obschonka, et al., 2023). The more hours spent on entrepreneurship relative to other occupations, the higher the level of engagement. However, it is crucial to recognize that some entrepreneurs choose to remain hybrid in the long term, balancing their entrepreneurial activities with other pursuits, while others may engage momentarily in side businesses before transitioning to full-time entrepreneurship (Uriarte et al., 2024).

Motivation plays a central role in entrepreneurial engagement, and it can be categorized into opportunity-driven and necessity-driven motivations. Opportunity-driven entrepreneurs pursue business ventures to explore new opportunities, aiming to "make a difference in the world" and "build wealth," as defined by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM, 2023). On the other hand, necessity-driven entrepreneurs start their businesses due to a lack of alternative options, often "to earn a living because jobs are scarce" (GEM, 2023).

PROPOSED TYPOLOGY OF SELF-EMPLOYED

After organizing the categories and dimensions, a structure was formed, as represented in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Categories and dimensions for building the typology

Impact of the business	Entrepreneurial engagement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formalization – formal / informal • Innovation potential – greater innovation potential / lesser innovation potential • Job creation – with employees / without employees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistency in activity – persistent / intermittent • Conciliation with other occupations – full-time / part-time • Motivation – opportunity / necessity

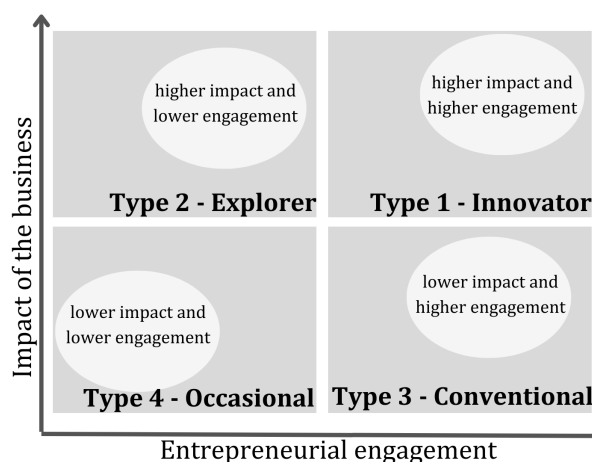
Note: Elaborated by the authors.

Figure 2 presents a structure with two dimensions and their respective categories for the construction of the typology. Each dimension contains three dichotomous categories, chosen because they are observable and because they integrate the constructs addressed in the dimensions. The "impact of the business" dimension includes the categories of formalization, innovation potential and job creation. In turn, the "entrepreneurial engagement" dimension is composed of the categories of persistence in activity, conciliation with other occupations and motivation. By proposing observable categories linked to the theoretical dimensions, this proposal follows what Cornelissen (2017) advises for the construction of typologies.

To present the typology, a Cartesian plane was created, in which the vertical axis represents the "impact of the business" dimension and the horizontal axis contemplates the "entrepreneurial engagement" dimension. Figure 3 illustrates this proposal, which defines four ideal types of self-employed.

Figure 3

Self-employed typology



Note: Elaborated by the authors.

Type 1 self-employed, called innovative, is characterized by having greater impact and greater engagement. For example, an engaged individual whose business has a greater impact on society can be considered. This individual is usually formalized, having registration with government agencies, which helps to cover public spending through the payment of taxes and government control

over the registered activity. He has greater potential for innovation, with technical qualifications in an area with high market demand. Therefore, he tends to have a higher level of education and to supervise the activities of other people (Nikolova et al., 2023). He hires employees or collaborators, contributing to improving employment rates and economic growth. Regarding the level of engagement, this individual tends to work consistently over time, with full dedication and by choice. This self-employed has the potential to scale his business.

Type 2, or the “explorer,” is characterized by a greater potential for impact but lower levels of engagement. In other words, despite the potential for significant impact, this individual does not engage solely in entrepreneurial activities. The term “explorer” reflects the fact that the individual is involved in another professional activity and may still be exploring entrepreneurship. This individual may continue balancing another job until they are confident in the potential income from their business and find satisfaction in their entrepreneurial role. At that point, they could transition into Type 1, becoming fully engaged. However, it is also possible that the Explorer prefers to maintain a hybrid career, balancing multiple professional activities.

This type typically has the greatest potential for innovation, with high market demand and a limited supply of professionals in their field. They may hire employees or outsource part of their work and are generally formalized, holding relevant registrations or operating licenses. The Explorer’s low level of engagement is marked by intermittent involvement over time and partial commitment to self-employment. An example of this type could be an agronomist specializing in soil management who does not dedicate himself exclusively to this activity and employs assistants.

Type 3, or the “conventional” self-employed, has lower impact but higher engagement. These entrepreneurs often have informal businesses with less market demand and lower professional qualifications, resulting in a lower potential for innovation. They tend not to employ others or subcontract work. In terms of engagement, the Conventional self-employed worker is continuously involved in their entrepreneurial activity, having chosen to pursue self-employment as a career option. This type is dedicated to their business, although the venture may be less innovative. As Know e Sohn (2021) suggest, these businesses are more routine. An example of a Type 3 self-employed worker could be an English text translator or Portuguese proofreader who works alone.

Type 4, or the “occasional” self-employed, exhibits both lower impact and lower engagement. In terms of impact, these workers tend to run informal businesses with lower market demand and limited innovation potential. They do not employ others. From the engagement perspective, their involvement is intermittent, with partial dedication to self-employment. These individuals often enter entrepreneurship out of necessity, either to supplement their income or for survival. According to Morris et al. (2015), survival entrepreneurship provides a minimum income for entrepreneurs. These businesses are typically characterized by a lack of facilities, few assets, and limited connections to commercial banks. An example of a Type 4 self-employed worker might be a street vendor selling beverages at markets or events who has not found a permanent paid job. This type often includes individuals who do not necessarily want to be self-employed long-term and may only engage in entrepreneurial activities when needed or during their free time.

IMPLICATIONS AND FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The proposed typology adopts an approach that groups self-employed based on observable categories, considering both the individual’s actions (entrepreneurial engagement) and the results generated (impact of the business). It is understood that, within each type, there are particularities among the self-employed that comprise them; however, this proposal contributes by offering

a practical way to classify and understand them, articulating dimensions traditionally used in the field of entrepreneurship to measure entrepreneurial activity. In addition, this typology follows the logic of Weber’s ideal type, while describing essential characteristics of a phenomenon, capturing extreme profiles and less common types. This approach avoids the exclusion of marginal types, which enriches and increases the typology’s capacity to represent the diversity of self-employed, going beyond a logic based solely on general population averages.

Thus, the following theoretical implications are highlighted: the proposition of a visual model for constructing types; the use of well-defined, observable and dichotomous categories to identify the heterogeneity of self-employed, facilitating the precision of the limits that differentiate one type from another; and suggestion of a new perspective to analyze entrepreneurial activity, using theoretical dimensions simultaneously, such as the impact of the business and entrepreneurial engagement.

In relation to practical implications, this typology helps in understanding the types and provides an understanding of the needs of each of them. Type 1, the innovator, needs support mechanisms that help him boost and scale his business. In this sense, some actions may be appropriate for this type: financial incentives, such as differentiated lines of credit for infrastructure support projects; economic subsidies for science, technology and innovation; and the promotion of meetings and incentives for networking with investors. These incentives include access to new markets.

Type 2, the explorer, among the possible paths, three stand out: dedicating oneself exclusively to one’s business and becoming a type 1 self-employed, continuing to balance one’s professional activities or leaving the entrepreneurial activity. The self-employed who wants to become Type 1, that is, who is exploring an entrepreneurial activity and is in the process of transition, needs financial support, lines of credit for infrastructure, training and qualification programs, as well as networking meetings. For the self-employed who intends to continue balancing activities, it is necessary that he receives, in particular, guidance such as time management and health and well-being programs, since the overload can be an additional challenge. In turn, the self-employed who intends to leave the entrepreneurial activity may be someone who did not like the experience, entered only to supplement his income or opted for his other professional activity because he was unable to balance all his activities. In this case, public policies that reduce the entry barriers to entrepreneurship, such as registration of opening and easy closure or the consideration of a grace period, can allow individuals to test their businesses.

Type 3, the conventional type, which is the engaged self-employed, but with less impact, requires training and qualification programs in management, in addition to knowledge in functional areas such as finance, people management, marketing and production or service. Government programs such as loans with subsidized interest can help in the financial sustainability of the business. If the self-employed intends to become type 1, it may be necessary to identify latent needs or access new markets. Type 4, the occasional type, may be in the business only temporarily, because they were unable to find another job or to supplement their income. There are also cases where the person starts and intends to engage more in entrepreneurial activity. For those who are temporarily in entrepreneurial activity due to lack of alternatives, social policies that promote well-being, employment policies, education and qualification are recommended. The occasional self-employed who uses the activity to supplement their income could benefit from lower barriers to entry and specific regulations for temporary activities. If the self-employed wants to become more engaged, qualification and training programs are recommended, as well as lines of credit and/or financial support for investment, so that the individual can become established as an entrepreneur.



As a limitation of the study, it is important to emphasize that, because it follows an ideal, theoretical logic, the types do not necessarily correspond to an exact reflection of reality, since real situations are complex and heterogeneous. However, the typology portrays well-defined characteristics of the entrepreneurial engagement and impact of the business constructs within the types. In addition, the typology does not consider professional categories, work organization or ties with clients. For future research, it is suggested that studies be carried out that adopt this typology to understand each of the proposed types in depth, exploring the categories, their trajectories, lifestyle, entrepreneurial process and their business. Given the diversity of self-employed, another research recommendation refers to the analysis of existing incentives for these people and the recommendation and proposal of programs and policies.

Declaração de conflito de interesse

Os autores declaram não existir conflito de interesses.

Conflict of interest statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.






Authors' statement of individual contributions

Roles	Contributions	
	Borges de Carvalho, J.	Borges, C.
Conceptualization	■	■
Methodology	■	■
Software	■	
Validation	■	■
Formal analysis	■	■
Investigation	■	
Resources	■	■
Data Curation	■	■
Writing - Original Draft	■	■
Writing - Review & Editing	■	■
Visualization	■	■
Supervision		■
Project administration	■	■
Funding acquisition		N. A.

Note: Acc. CRediT (Contributor Roles Taxonomy): <https://credit.niso.org/>

Open Science: Data availability

The entire data supporting the results of this study was published in the article itself.

Badge	Description
	Not applicable
	Not applicable
	Not applicable
	https://doi.org/10.14211/regepe.esbj.e2549pr
	Not applicable

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