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Autonomy is a primary motive for a large majority of small business starters. However, as an explanation of why people want their own (autonomous) business it is largely circular. Therefore we focus on an explanation of the autonomy motive itself. As the current literature of autonomy as a startup motive is limited as well as weakly developed, we provide a theoretical and empirical exposition of autonomy as a startup motive. Specifically, it is questioned why small business starters want autonomy. In answering this question a distinction is made between proximal and distal reasons for wanting autonomy. The motivation for autonomy can be an end in itself (proximal). The small business starter is then motivated by the decisional freedoms and responsibilities with regard to the what, how, and when aspects of work. Autonomy can also be instrumental for the fulfillment of other motives (distal). We discern the following distal autonomy motives: resistance towards bosses or rules, self-congruence/self-endorsement, and power/ control. Our framework is confirmed studying a sample of 167 nascent entrepreneurs motivated by autonomy. The findings suggest that beneath the surface of small business starters striving for autonomy, they differ in their relative emphasis on the underlying sources of the autonomy motive.

“Both [entrepreneurs] articulated goals of personal independence and fulfillment. For White, independence meant security in that he was in control of his destiny; for Dean, it meant the freedom to accept challenges and do what interested and enthused him” (Pitt, 1998, p. 392)

Introduction

The economic importance of small businesses in general and newly started businesses in particular is widely acknowledged nowadays. Research has shown that the small business sector has a large share in creating growth, innovation, and employment, with the share of newly founded businesses being especially large (Audretsch and Thurik, 2001; Carree and Thurik, 2003). This can

be considered an example of Adam Smith's invisible hand operating. How important growth, innovation, and employment may be important from a macro point of view, they are not what motivates the large majority of business starters themselves. A minority may have growth and innovation ambitions, as is established by research on nascent entrepreneurship. For example, van Gelderen, Bosma, and Thurik (2003) find that of those people who are in the process of setting up a business, 82% has no growth motivation and prefers to stay small. However, even those who have firm growth as a goal have their motives for wishing so.

What does motivate people to set up their own business has been studied extensively. One answer that prominently and consistently emerges in this type of research is that the business starter wants autonomy (also labeled as independence or freedom; Blais en Toulouse, 1990; Shane, Kolvereid en Westhead, 1991; Birley en Westhead, 1994; Gatewood, Shaver, and Gartner, 1995; Kolvereid, 1996; Feldman en Bolino, 2000; Carter, Gartner, Shaver, and Gatewood, 2003). People start businesses (amongst others) in order to be autonomous, and in many cases success of their firm is instrumental for achieving that goal. In spite of its empirically proven importance, the research that is currently available on autonomy as a startup motive is scarce. It seems to be taken for granted that small business starters want autonomy. However, the observation that small business starters want autonomy does not amount to very much. There is an element of circularity in people wanting to have an autonomous (independent) business because they want autonomy (independence). The logical next step thus becomes to focus on the explanation of the autonomy motive itself. The question why small business starters want autonomy will be the research question of this paper.

Using the distinction between 'proximal' and 'distal' goals (Kanfer, 1994), we will distinguish proximal reasons for wanting autonomy from more distal reasons. We will describe autonomy from the viewpoint of the motivation that derives from the proximal motivational effects of the work characteristics themselves (for example, the freedom to decide with regard to the what, how, and when aspects of work). While obviously the proximal, operational aspects of autonomy can be valued for the sake of freedom itself, we want to draw attention to the idea that autonomy can also be instrumental to the fulfillment of other, more distal motives. Therefore we will also describe distal

motivational sources of autonomy that guide the choice for self-employment (for example, resisting rules/bosses). We expect people setting up a business to vary in their relative emphasis on these motives. Differences in underlying sources of this driver may have impact on the problems, pitfalls, preferences and performance of the founder and his firm.

The concept of autonomy

Autonomy as a startup motive

The existing literature on autonomy as a startup motive is not only small, it is also weakly developed. First, research on startup motives generally assumes that startup motives exist independent of each other. For example, Gatewood et al. (1995) find that “identification of a market need” is the most offered reason for getting into business. Although the discovery of an opportunity has motivating properties, without considering why someone would like to fill this market need not much knowledge about career reasons is gained. Because of the circularity mentioned above inherent in people wanting an autonomous business because they want autonomy, it becomes important to investigate the role of other startup motives in relation to autonomy. This is even more important as almost all small business starters attach great importance to autonomy¹. In fact, even a control group of non-business starters values autonomy as much as nascent entrepreneurs do (Carter et al., 2003).

Second, few efforts have been made to link autonomy, in a 'deductive' approach, to a theoretical framework. The typical 'inductive' approach has been to categorize empirically by means of factor analysis. In these cases a number of ad-hoc sampled items originally designated to represent different theoretical startup reasons are post-hoc labeled as autonomy. For example, Blais and Toulouse (1990) report on a 14-country study of startup motives. Factor analysis generates "need for independence" as the factor with the largest explained variance. Items originally referring to an 'independence' conceptualization of autonomy belong to the factor: (e.g., control own time; own approach to work;

¹ Autonomy is part of psychological conceptions of entrepreneurial orientation. EO distinguishes entrepreneurs from small business owners. However, since nearly all small business owners consider

work with people I choose; be my own boss; lead, rather than being led). However, the same factor also includes items that theoretically were labeled as “escape” (avoid unreasonable boss), and as “accommodation” (greater flexibility in life; work with people I like).

Studies that use open response formats fare better in terms of consistency, but still define categories on an ad-hoc basis. For example, Kolvereid (1996) classifies the responses of MBA alumni for choosing either for an entrepreneurial career or for organizational employment. Of those who prefer self employment 40% lists autonomy as the prime reason. Responses such as freedom, independence, being one's own boss, and choosing one's own methods are listed as autonomy. Examples of other categories distinguished by Kolvereid are authority (15%, items such as being boss, control, responsibility), self-actualization (12%, realize dream, creative need, create something), and challenge (19%, challenging, exciting, inspiring, motivating). However, it may well be that these are categories all require a certain degree of autonomy in order to be fulfilled. Whether Kolvereid's categorization is correct from a theoretical point of view, and whether we can arrive at an conceptualization and subsequent operationalization of autonomy that will cause (e.g. factor) analyses to generate homogeneous factors, will be investigated in this paper.

A motivational definition of autonomy

Our conceptualization of autonomy rests on the treatment of the subject by philosophers. They first point to the Greek roots of the term. Autonomy is derived from two words: self (autos) and rule or law (nomos). While the Greeks discussed autonomy with respect to the relationships between states, in the 18th century the term starts to refer to individuals (Lindley, 1986). Autonomy becomes an important theme for political philosophers as they discuss the relationship between the state and the individual. According to the large majority of the (Western) political philosophers, the state should not interfere with the autonomy of the individual (providing 'negative freedom'), and according to some, the state should even enlarge the autonomy of the individual (providing 'positive freedom', for example by providing education and jobs). Although individual differences in opinion

autonomy to be important, it is not a discriminating factor.

exist on details (Dworkin, 1988), broad consensus is that autonomy means that individuals make their own choices independent of others (Metaal, 1992). People who value autonomy strive for a state of independent self determination. In this paper we will consider the three elements of this definition (independent, self, determination) as motivational sources of autonomy. Based on this conceptualization of autonomy we expect small business starters to differ individually in their respective emphasis on independence ('others do not determine what I will do'), on self-congruence ('I want to do my own things'), and power to decide ('I want to be the one that sets the rules').

These three motives all require a certain degree of autonomy in order to be fulfilled at work, implying that autonomy is instrumental for their realization. Using the distinction between 'distal' and 'proximal' motivators (Kanfer, 1990; 1994), they can be denoted distal motives for starting a business. Distal motives guide the establishment of an individual's behavioral intentions and choice between alternative courses of action. Distal constructs have indirect impact on behavior and performance (Kanfer, 1990; 1994). With respect to sources of autonomy that are more proximal to work behavior, we will elaborate on a conceptualization of autonomy that concerns task characteristics of a work situation (Hackman and Oldham, 1975). Breugh (1999) distinguishes three so-called 'decisional freedoms' with respect to the what, how, and when aspects of work. He labels these as criteria, method, and scheduling autonomy. These aspects of autonomy are proximal motivators as they are sources of motivation located in the work itself. They are motivational constructs that control the initiation and execution of actions during engagement with the task.

In sum (see Figure 1), we distinguish two types of motives: One proximal motive associated with task characteristics (decisional freedom), and three distal motives for which autonomy is instrumental (to avoid a boss or restrictions; to act in a self-endorsed and self-congruent manner; and to be in charge). We will explore this conceptualization of autonomy as a startup motive both theoretically and empirically. Since behavior is a function of both personal and situational determinants, we will discuss autonomy as a startup motive on the individual level as a psychological motivational construct; on the societal level as a cultural norm; and on the situational level as particular experiences or circumstances can cause someone to want more autonomy. Figure 1 gives an overview

of our research model. After our theoretical review of why people want autonomy, our research question will be explored empirically.

Figure 1. A conceptualization of the motivational determinants of autonomy as a startup reason.

Prerequisites

As a first prerequisite for discussing autonomy as a motive, we will shortly distinguish motives from traits, goals, needs, and values. Following Winter, Stewart, John, Klohnen, en Duncan (1998), we regard a motive as a construct that explains what goals people strive for (in this case, a work situation that offers autonomy), while a trait explains how someone typically behaves. So a motive is an answer to the question 'Why?' and a trait to the question 'How?'. Consider as an example the affiliation motive and the trait of extraversion vs. introversion. Whether someone is high in affiliation motivation is conceptually independent of whether (s)he tries to fulfill this motive in a more extraverted or more introverted manner. In fact, while at first sight extraversion might appear to be related with affiliation, it might as well be that introverts are higher in affiliation motivation, as they have more difficulty establishing contact with other people.

While motives are conceptually distinct from traits, they are conceptually related to goals, needs, and values. The relation between motives, goals and needs is one of specificity. If given priority, motives can be translated into goals, and goals can induce intentional acts (Emmons, 1995). Starting a business can be regarded as intentional behavior. In this case the autonomy motive has been translated into a goal (having one's own business), which has induced particular courses of action (setting up a business). Needs on the other hand can give rise to motives, and in a following paragraph we will discuss the different needs from which the autonomy motive may derive. Values are related to motives in the sense that values have a motivational base (Schwartz and Bilsky, 1987). As values have a quality of "oughtness" in the sense that they specify how individual's beliefs about how he or she "should" or "ought" to behave (Meglino and Ravin, 1998), we will discuss autonomy as a value in the paragraph on autonomy as a cultural norm.

As a second prerequisite, the distinction between autonomy as a motive and autonomy as an ability should be made clear. The latter is emphasized by philosophers (Haworth, 1986; Benn, 1988; Berofsky, 1995; Young, 1996) who state that a certain degree of rationality and competence are necessary conditions for exercising autonomy. As a consequence, small children and mentally handicapped are not considered being capable of autonomous behavior. Also psychologists have written about autonomy as ability. Two opposing strands of research can be discerned (Metaal, 1992). In clinical and in developmental psychology, theory and research are directed towards the promotion of autonomy. For example, in his well known life-cycle theory, Erickson (1950) states that autonomy is the central issue of the second life phase (1,5 till 4 years old), in which the foundations are laid for later autonomous functioning. The fallibility of human rationality on the other hand has been proven repeatedly in cognitive psychology (e.g., Nisbett and Ross, 1980; Fiske and Taylor, 1984), and social psychology has brought forth some famous experiments showing the conformity (e.g. Asch, 1956, 1958) and blind obedience (e.g., Milgram, 1963) of people. The issue of autonomy as a competence will be left aside for now.

Personal and situational determinants of autonomy

Personal determinants of autonomy

On account of the literature we have introduced three distal sources of autonomy (resisting rules/bosses, self-expression/self-endorsement, power/control), and one proximal source (the decisional freedom to decide with regard to the what, how, and when aspects of work). The primary point that this paper tries to make is that the freedoms associated with autonomy can be instrumental for the fulfillment of other motives. Therefore, we will focus on these sources of autonomy for which autonomy is instrumental. For literature on autonomy as a work characteristic we refer to Greenhaus, Callanan and Godschalk (2000).

Independence: resisting constraints. One of the earliest articulators of need theory, Murray (1938) discussed autonomy in the context of rebelliousness. Murray viewed autonomy as one of several psychological needs that concerned human power, and contrasted autonomy with deference

and dominance. People with a strong need for autonomy insist on not being dominated by other persons, avoid influence from others, and show impulsive, obnoxious, and irresponsible behavior (Metaal, 1992). A later motivational theory that emphasizes resistance towards restrictions is reactance theory (Brehm, 1966; Brehm and Brehm, 1981). This theory states that when people perceive that their behavioral freedom is threatened to be reduced or eliminated, they will experience so called reactance effects. This is a state of motivational arousal that leads them to protect or restore their freedom. As a result, the behavior under threat will be more often engaged in and perceived as more valuable. Also, aggression against the prohibitor may occur (Brehm and Brehm, 1981).

In the workplace, reactance effects have been studied under the heading of organizational frustration. Frustration caused by constraints in the work situation that block individuals from achieving valued work goals or attaining effective performance (Fox and Spector, 1999). As a consequence, counterproductive behavior within the organization may occur. Another consequence can be turnover, if the employee tries to become elsewhere employed or self-employed. In fact, when studied as a psychological disposition variable, reactance has been found to be related to entrepreneurial career interests (Buboltz, Woller, and Pepper, 1999). On the positive side, it should be noted that resisting constraints and restraints can facilitate personal development and fulfillment, and can be a healthy expression of a need for freedom.

The self: congruence and actualization. Two researchers that have written extensively on autonomy are Richard Ryan and Ed Deci. In their opinion, any theory of personality should include a notion of self, as it is the self that regulates environmental and interpersonal forces (Deci and Ryan, 1991; Ryan, 1993). These contextual and personal factors can function either to support autonomy or to control behavior (Deci and Ryan, 1987). There can be all kinds of controlling forces: internal to the self (e.g., drives or ego involvements), or from outside the self (e.g., social pressure). Autonomy according to Ryan and Deci means that one acts in accordance with self-endorsed values, needs, and intentions, rather than in response to controlling factors (Ryan, Kuhl, and Deci, 1997)². Thus,

² Deci and Ryan (1985) call their overall theory “self determination theory”. In this paper we will avoid this terminology because we want to distinguish between the self-congruence and the power-to-

"autonomy refers not to independence but rather to volition – the sense that one’s behavior emanates from and is endorsed by oneself" (Kasser & Ryan, 1999, p.937). Thus, autonomous behavior does not imply that one necessarily likes what one is doing - if one endorses a particular obligation or duty, there is still choice. Autonomy as a motivational construct was originally proposed by DeCharms (1968), who stated that people have a primary motivational propensity to be origins of behavior and that they constantly struggle against being confined and constrained by external forces. The prime example of autonomy is the concept of intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation means that one acts for its own sake, because one likes what one is doing. Playful behavior, creative acts, and personality expression are all considered instances of intrinsically motivated and self-endorsed behavior, which are ultimately considered expressions of a generalized need for personal growth (Deci and Ryan, 2000).

Determination: power and control. The wish to be the one who is at the steering wheel and making the decisions can be subsumed under several motivational theories. The first set of theories revolves around need for power. Winter (1973) considered people high on need for power to desire influence, impact, and control. Power striving often centers on a need for dominance, reputation, status, or position (Reeve, 2001). High-need-for-power individuals tend to gravitate towards leadership positions and influential occupations (Reeve, 2001). Need for power is the prime ingredient of the Leadership Motive Pattern developed by McClelland (1975), which has been found to be predictive of leader behavior and effectiveness in small, entrepreneurial organizations (House and Aditya, 1997). However, need for power theories emphasize social influence and impact on others, while the determination aspect of autonomy merely refers to the power to make decisions, whether other people are involved or not. A set of motivation theories that touches on the determination aspect of autonomy are control theories. In these theories control beliefs direct and energize behavior. Two types of control beliefs make up perceived control: efficacy beliefs and outcome beliefs (Reeve, 2001; Skinner, 1996). An efficacy belief is a judgment of whether one is capable to perform a particular behavior; an outcome belief is a judgment whether this behavior will

determine aspects of autonomy

cause a particular outcome. While motivation can arise when efficacy and outcome expectations are high, these theories do not explain why people want control. To this end, desire for control is sometimes explained by competence or effectance motivation (White, 1959), a desire to interact effectively with the environment, to produce desired effects and to prevent undesired effects.

Our discussions above serve to show that the elements of independent self determination - resisting restraints, self-congruence and self-endorsement, and power/control - are treated distinct in motivation theories. They are likely to occur simultaneously, but empirical work has shown that these constructs can produce independent or even opposite effects in certain situations. For example, Patrick, Skinner and Connell (1993) found perceived control and self-determination to have independent effects on behavior and emotions of children in the classroom. Koestner, Gingras, Abutaa, Losier, DiDio and Gagne (1999) found individuals high on reactance ("reactive autonomy") to differ from individuals high on need for self-determination ("reflective autonomy") in their reactions to expert advice.

Situational determinants of autonomy

Cultural norms. The psychological theories discussed above describe personal motivational sources of autonomy. At the same time, autonomy can be reinforced as a cultural norm. Autonomy as a cultural value means that people are socially expected to behave and think independently, and that obedient and following behavior are regarded with suspicion and contempt. Nowadays, autonomy is an explicit ideal in education (Fiala and Lanford, 1987), in psychological health (Seligmann, 1994), and at work (Spector, 1986; Lawler and Finegold, 2000). Autonomy as an explicit (Western) cultural ideal is manifested in the hero of an average Hollywood action movie, who sticks to his judgment even though he stands alone, disobeys his superiors in order to follow his gut feeling, and then deals with the bad guys single handedly. Even the consumer is expected to make up his own mind, despite of huge sums of money spent on advertisement campaigns. Autonomy as a cultural value is interesting in the context of entrepreneurship, because over the last decades autonomy has become an ever more important value in Western societies (Abramson and Inglehart, 1995; Heelas, Lasch, and

Morris, 1996; Inglehart, 1990; 1997). It should be noted, however, that social critics have questioned the actual degree of autonomous behavior in our culture. Critics as Lasch (1978), Riessman et al. (1950), Sennett (1977) and Fromm (1942) point out that people only appear to behave more autonomously, while in fact they are more other-directed than ever.

Autonomy as a cultural norm can be considered as part of a broader syndrome of behavior called individualism (Hofstede, 1980; 1991). Triandis (1995) argues that individualism can be regarded as an attribute of a culture, but also as an attribute of an individual (with individuals within a particular culture behaving more or less individualistic). Exhibit 1 lists the elements that an ideal type of the psychology of the individualist consists of (Kim, 1995, Triandis, 1995, Oyserman, Coon, and Kimmelmeister, 2002). Interestingly, not only the autonomy features (including its distal sources) of the individualistic psychological make-up link conceptually with entrepreneurship, but also other features, such as the ability to innovate and the importance of being successful (need for achievement). Thus, individualization processes should increase the perceived attractiveness of self-employment.

Exhibit 1 Psychological correlates of individualization

The link between individualism and entrepreneurship has been explored in a number of studies (e.g., Weber, 1905; Morris, Avila, and Allen, 1993; Morris, Davis, and Allen, 1994; Tiessen, 1998; Earley en Gibson, 1998). An individualistic orientation increases the attractiveness of self-employment but does not necessarily contribute to the realization of self-employment. On the national level the relationship between degree of individualism and economic performance has been found to be curvilinear (Morris et al., 1993; 1994). Realization and success of self-employment not only depends on individualistic motivations, but for example also on the ability to cooperate with people (Tiessen, 1998). Similarly, successful entrepreneurship requires many non-individualistic skills and abilities. Still, for understanding the future course of entrepreneurship, it is vitally important to realize that increased individualization will result in stronger needs for autonomy. As

individualists strongly prefer working environments in which rewards are distributed individualistically (Triandis, 1989), and in which they can express their individuality, the popularity of self-employment will only increase. After all, running one's own business is the ultimate situation in which one can decide on the what, how, and when aspects of work, plus having the full responsibility for and appropriation of failure and success.

Particular circumstances. Psychology points to the various antecedent motivational sources of autonomy, and sociology points to the influence of collective norms. We should not lose sight of the fact, however, that in many cases the wish for autonomy is determined by the characteristics of the particular situation the business starter was in before starting his business. A particular boss or particular rules can cause someone to start his own business without having a generalized aversion to bosses or rules. Similarly, limited possibilities for personal expression and limited power and influence can cause someone to want more autonomy without necessarily having a generalized need for self-endorsement or for power.

In our empirical section, we try to determine if indeed business starters want autonomy for instrumental reasons. By an open response format, we investigate the relative prevalence of the various distal and proximal sources of autonomy. In that way, our results will give insight into the question why the small business starters wants autonomy.

Method and Results

Sample

Our sample consists of 167 persons who were nascent entrepreneurs in 1998 (interviews were conducted in 2001). Nascent entrepreneurs are people who are busy setting up a business. We chose to use a sample of nascent entrepreneurs because we wanted to conduct a study for all people who try to start a business, not only those people who currently run a business. Our sample is free from survivor bias in the sense that it includes people whose business is not currently operational. Of our sample, 60% had succeeded in setting up a business and was still in business, 10% had succeeded in setting up a business but was already out of business, and 30% had not succeeded in setting up a

business. The sample was collected in 1998 by randomly calling phone numbers. The person who answered the phone was asked: are you currently, alone or with others, setting up a business? If the person answered affirmatively, two exclusions were made. First, it is essential to be active in setting up a business. If he or she is only dreaming about starting up a business, he or she was considered a potential entrepreneur instead of a nascent entrepreneur. Second, someone who set up a business that is already operational, even though in a start-up phase, must be considered an entrepreneur instead of a nascent entrepreneur. In this manner, a random and representative sample of 517 nascent entrepreneurs was created. Because the sample of 517 nascent entrepreneurs had been studied in four waves of previous research, a multitude of data was available on every person.

For this study, we felt that a sample out of the complete sample would suffice. During follow ups since the start of the project, 33 persons had stated that they did not want to be contacted anymore. In the fall of 2001 the remaining 484 persons were contacted three times by telephone. In total 193 persons were interviewed (24 persons refused to participate). The final sample consisted of 167 persons who stated that autonomy was important to them (in the context of starting one's own business). In terms of non-response, participants showed no difference with the remaining sample in terms of age, education, business success (getting started/abandoning the startup effort), and business ambitions. There was a significant difference in age however: participants were on average 37 years old, non-participants 35 years old.

Disadvantage of this procedure is that people needed to remember in 2001 why they wanted to start a business in 1998. Whether people were able to come up with an account was tested and confirmed in a pilot study (n=20). Still, perception of relevant motives etc. might have changed in the meantime. On the other hand, it might also be possible that people offer more accurate information looking backwards because of having a helicopter view instead of being in the middle of it. Table 1 gives some sample characteristics.

Table I Sample characteristics (N=167)

Procedures and classifications

Data was collected using semi-structured interviews. The research question, why people want autonomy, was approached in two manners: indirect questions using an open response format, and direct questions using 4-point-scales. Pilot studies showed that a direct approach using open questions was not viable. In these pilots, respondents were first asked what autonomy meant to them. Then they were asked why they wanted the particular aspects they just mentioned. The large majority of respondents was not able to answer the question. They typically either did not answer the question at all, or they repeated their answer to the first question (e.g., Q: what does autonomy mean to you? A: that you can make your own decisions. Q: why do you find that important? A: because then you can make your own decisions). Besides the fact that autonomy for many people is an end in itself, we believe its high level of abstraction causes the difficulty which respondents had with this question. Indirect evidence (not asking about autonomy directly) was obtained by asking the respondents to tell the story of their startup effort: How it started, what happened, and how it ended up. The respondents were also asked about their motives for setting up a business, their goals and the advantages of self-employment as compared to organizational employment. Up to this point the interviewee did not know that the phone interview was on autonomy. Then, the respondents were asked whether autonomy was important to them (in the context of starting one's own business). If not, the interview was discontinued.

If autonomy was considered to be important (as stated above, this was the case for 167 out of 193 persons), they were asked what autonomy meant to them. Table 2 gives an overview of their answers. Row 1 gives the frequency of the answer "freedom" without reference to a work aspect. Proximal motivational sources of autonomy are decisional freedoms with respect to the what, how, and when aspects of work (Breugh, 1999) (rows 2 and 3 in Table 2). Compared to previous research on autonomy in the workplace, which typically is conducted with employees, business starters emphasize one more aspect: responsibility for decisions and results (row 4 in Table 2). For the expression of the distal motivational sources of autonomy we have made reference to autonomy as instrumental to the fulfillment of other motives (rows 5, 6 and 7 in Table 2: to avoid a boss or

restrictions; to express one's personality and creativity; to be in charge). Still some other meanings were expressed (row 8), notably the instrumentality of autonomy for the appropriation of income. The validity of our research framework is supported by the limited frequencies of meanings outside the framework. Respondents could give as many meanings as they liked.

Table 2 Meaning of autonomy to respondents

Using the total of the indirect questions, respondents were coded as to whether they emphasized a distal source of autonomy. For example, people would be scored for the power motive if someone would indicate that he or she started a business because he or she felt a lack of decision power in his or her previous job. Answers to the question what autonomy meant to the respondents were also used as a basis for classification. Answers reflecting proximal autonomy were distinguished from answers reflecting distal autonomy by means of the particular terminology used in giving the description of autonomy (e.g., "that you can make your own decisions" would be scored as an proximal aspect, while "that you are at the steering wheel" would be scored as a distal power/control motive). The avoid boss/rules motive was scored for 71 persons (43%), the self endorsement/congruence motive for 55 persons (33%), and the power/control motive for 57 persons (34%). Note that people can score on more or less than one motive. In fact, 14 persons (8% of sample) scored on all three motives, 63 persons (43%) scored on two motives, 72 persons (38%) scored on one motive, and 18 persons (11%) scored on none of these motives.

In the third part of the interview the strength of the distal sources for wishing autonomy was quantified. For example with respect to the avoid boss/rules motive the respondents were asked: "one reason to consider autonomy important could be that you dislike working under a boss or to work under externally imposed rules. To what extent does this apply to you". Then a 4-point scale (not important, neutral, important, very important) format was read out to the respondent. A question about the value attached to autonomy as an end in itself (row 1 in Table 2) was added to this list of motives. Table 3 gives the means and standard deviations of the motive scores derived from the 4-

point-scales.

Table 3 Frequency distributions of the distal motive scores

The frequency distributions show that the avoid boss/rules motive is not present for half of the sample, while being important or very important to nearly the other half. The other motive sources are generally considered important. Chi-square analysis shows that the open question-categorizations and the 4-point-scale scores are significantly associated: avoid boss/rules chi-sq 28.13, $p < .01$, endorsement/expression chi-sq. 11.91, $p < .01$, decision control/power chi-sq 8.64, $p < .05$. When looking at the 4-point-scale correlations, it can be seen that the power motive correlates negatively with the boss/rule avoidance motive ($r = -.30^{**}$). This is also the case with the open format results (chi-sq 11.90, $p < .001$). This result is interesting as it indicates that it does not necessarily mean that people want decision power themselves when they dislike being ordered, and vice versa. Using the open response format motive scores as dummy variables, we checked for associations with other variables in the nascent entrepreneurship dataset. The power motive was positively associated with being male (chi-sq 6.76, $p < .01$), with being higher educated (chi-sq 4.58, $p < .05$), and with the amount of intended startup-capital (t-value 2.19, $p < .05$). The self endorsement/expression motive was positively associated with starting out in retail/trade (chi-sq 11.23, $p < .01$), and negatively with starting out in business services (chi-sq 4.44, $p < .05$). There was no association of any of the three motives with eventual success in setting up a business.

Discussion

One of the most important drivers for self-employment is that people want to run a business themselves instead of working for someone else. A large majority of small business starters like to be responsible, to decide on strategy, to decide on working methods, and to regulate their own time. This is called autonomy. Still, our exploratory research indicates that small business starters differ in their relative emphasis on reasons why they like autonomy. Many like autonomy for the sake of autonomy

itself. However, at the same time, the operational aspects of autonomy are necessary conditions for the fulfillment of other motives. People like the freedom associated with autonomy, but they also need freedom as a necessary condition for the fulfillment of other motives. Some are motivated by negative freedom, in the sense that they generally dislike or are currently experiencing a difficult boss or unpleasant rules. Others emphasize the fact that self-employment offers the opportunity to work in accordance with one's goals, values, and attitudes. Still others emphasize the opportunities that self-employment offers for being in charge, for directing, and for leading instead of being lead. Our empirical work shows that these are the main underlying sources of the autonomy motive. They are conceptually associated and often simultaneously present; still when interviewing small business starters about how they got into starting a business it is often easily noticeable that the interviewees emphasis mainly one or two of these sources. So Kolvereid (1996) was indeed correct in distinguishing autonomy, authority, self-realization, and challenge. He has left implicit, however, that these motives might have specific underlying relationships.

An obvious next step is to develop a questionnaire for each motive source in order to conduct a confirmatory factor analysis that might corroborate the motive source pattern that was distinguished and found in our study. Furthermore future research should establish whether the presence of more or stronger motive sources strengthens the autonomy motive as a whole, or whether one must think of the emphasis on motive sources as profiles (Law, Wong, and Mobley, 1998). For the moment, our research only points at the presence of different sources of the autonomy motive. This already has a number of implications.

For people who train small business owners, it is important to know what aspect a trainee who is motivated by autonomy emphasizes. Trainees can claim to be motivated by autonomy as an end in itself while at the same time instrumental, distal sources are operating. These sources bring along their paradoxes and pitfalls. Persons who resist bosses and rules now must be a boss and set rules themselves. Their resistance of constraints and restraints might make it difficult for them to deal with the pressures of customers and suppliers. People who want to express their personality and creativity in their work might be so busy and occupied that there will be little space left for personality and

creativity expression. Moreover, their focus on self endorsement and congruence might make it difficult for them to deal with controlling forces and circumstances that small businesses are often confronted with. People who want autonomy because of the power and control it brings them may find that as a small business owner they often have very little control, if only because they have to deal with several types of uncertainty. A focus on power and control might also make it difficult to empower employees and to retain a relaxed attitude. Trainers and educators in the small business field can make their clients and students aware of these tensions and help them to find appropriate ways of coping.

From a research perspective the differential impact of the multiple sources of the autonomy motive is interesting as it illustrates that distal constructs are not irrelevant to studying small business owners. The study of distal constructs such as personality traits is generally considered to be outmoded in entrepreneurship research (Delmar, 2000), and has been replaced by more proximal constructs such as attitudes or behavior (Rauch and Frese, 2000). However, this research shows that while on the proximal level all may appear the same, distal influences may still be relevant. For researchers who study small business motives using questionnaires, the implication is that they should either operationalize autonomy only in a proximal sense without regard to underlying motive sources (e.g., items such as "regulate own time" or "making one's own decisions"), or take all distal motive sources into account and offer items that reflect these autonomy motive sources.

For policy makers, one of the routes of achieving an entrepreneurial society is to motivate individuals to become entrepreneurs (EC, 2003). We have highlighted the fact that autonomy is an extremely important driver for small business starters, and we have discussed literature that has found that autonomy as a cultural value is becoming ever more important in Western societies. So a lack of need for autonomy is not the bottleneck - it is rather the question why many people in principle would like to start a business but will never succeed in realizing. One issue involved are the paradoxes and pitfalls involved with the various autonomy sources discussed above. Starting or running a business means that a line is drawn - within bounds it is now the small business owner who is autonomous. However, drawing a boundary will not make the outside world go away - on the contrary.

Autonomous small business starters and owners deal with customers, suppliers, competitors, etcetera on a continuous basis, and in doing so need to balance their autonomy wishes with the demands imposed on them by the business environment. Freedom and constraints of freedom are at the heart of the entrepreneurial motivation and practice. The study of how autonomy driven small business starters and owners manage to attain and retain a state of autonomy is therefore an important line of future research, along with a study of the factors that threaten the experience of autonomy.

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Figure 1. Conceptualization of the motivational determinants of autonomy as a startup reason.

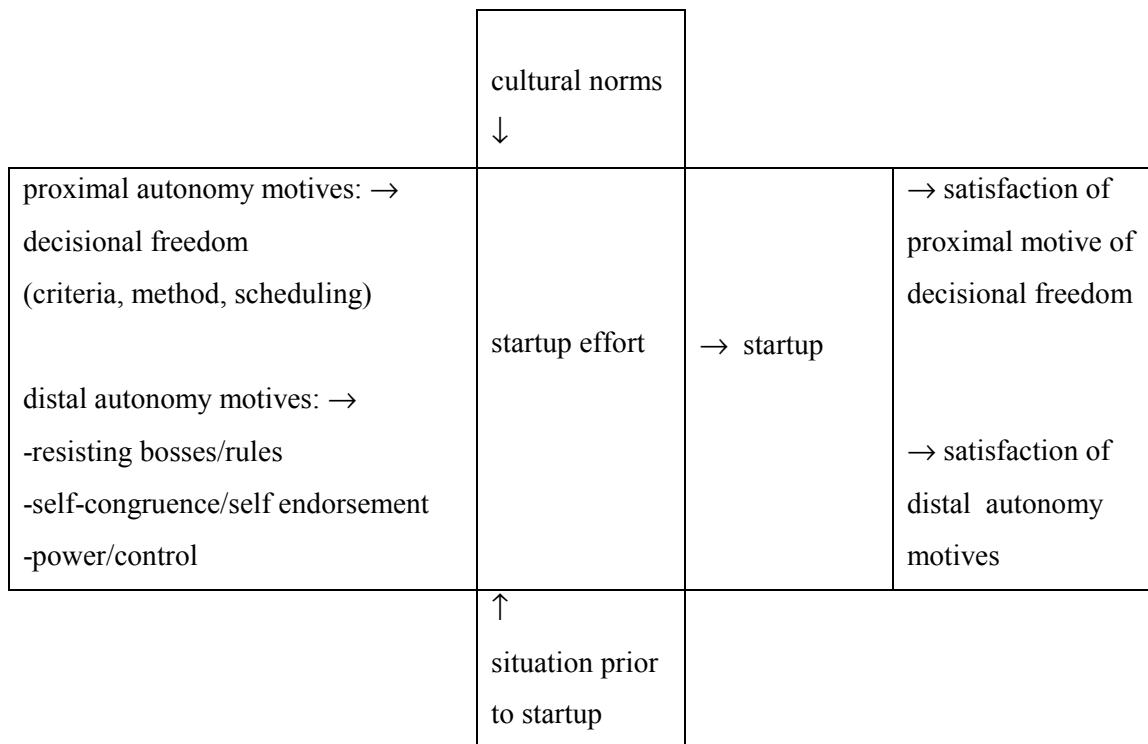


Exhibit 1: Psychological correlates of individualization

• The belief that everyone is a unique individual
• The importance of authenticity
• The importance of individual expression, of expressing one's unique personality
• Identity and self are defined without reference to social context but rather as an independent entity
• Emphasis on personal rights and needs as opposed to obligations and social norms
• Own goals and preferences are more important than those of the group
• The importance attached to freedom of choice
• Independent development of personality, attitudes and opinions
• Truth is based on personal experience instead of on authority figures
• Therefore, innovative behavior, experimentation with opinions as well as with self image
• A hedonistic orientation
• Importance of being successful, as one is responsible himself for what one makes of life
• A certain sense of loneliness as ties with groups are loose
• Therefore, an emphasis on special friendships and romance

Table 1 Sample characteristics (N=167)

Variable	%	Variable	%	Variable	%
Sex		Education		Team	61%
- male	75 %	- low/middle	49 %	- solo	39%
- female	25 %	- high	51 %	- team	
Age		Sector		Startup capital	
- 18-24 years	4%	- industry	10%	- 0-4.500 euro	32%
- 25-34 years	42%	- trade	16%	- 4.500-22.500 euro	37%
- 35-44 years	34%	- business services	31%	- 22.500-45.000 euro	13%
- 45-54 years	17%	- consumer services	16%	- > 45.000 euro	18%
- 55-64 years	4%	- other	27%		
Small - large firm		Make a living - rich		Part time-fulltime	
- wants small firm	80%	- make a living	87%	- start out part time	51%
- wants large firm	20%	- become rich	13%	- start out fulltime	49%

Table 2 Meaning of autonomy to respondents

	N	% (of 167)
freedom	31	19%
making one's own decisions about work goals and methods	74	44%
regulating one's own time	39	23%
responsibility for decisions and for results	26	16%
no boss / no rules	39	23%
self-congruence / self - endorsement	25	14%
being boss / being in control	30	18%
other (e.g., earning your own income)	10	6%

Table 3 Frequency distributions of the distal motive scores

autonomy in order to achieve ...	not im- portant.	neutral	impor- tant	very im- portant	M	SD
independence: avoid boss/rules	83	10	43	30	2.12	1.22
self: endorsement/congruence	13	11	61	82	3.27	.89
determination: decision control/power	29	7	81	50	2.91	1.02