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GIVE ME MORE: THE SYMBOLIC AND AUTHENTIC MEANING IN SOCIAL SUPPORT DYNAMICS (SUMMARY)

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Summary

GIVE ME MORE: THE SYMBOLIC AND AUTHENTIC MEANING IN SOCIAL SUPPORT DYNAMICS

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Principal Topic

What explains why certain nascent entrepreneurs abandon the firm emergence process while others succeed and end up selling their products (Carter et al. 1996)?

It is well established that social support embedded and obtained from social networks matters for both individuals’ entry into nascent entrepreneurship and their subsequent success in starting their business (Davidsson & Honig 2003). However, prior research has mainly investigated the impact of social support as a stable phenomenon ignoring its dynamic nature.

This is problematic because the variation over time determines whether such support is truly authentic support, which enhances the entrepreneurial process, or only symbolic support, lacking important trustworthy support intentions that may limit and restrict the entrepreneurial process (Avolio & Gardner 2005).

In this study, we investigate not only how the level of support impacts entrepreneurs’ startup success but also the authentic versus the symbolic characteristic of this support, captured by support dynamics.

Method

We test our hypotheses on a longitudinal dataset of nascent entrepreneurs collected in Denmark from 2012-2013 (N=245). The DaPSED asked the well-established screening question for nascent entrepreneurs ‘Are you currently, alone or together with others, in the process of starting a business?’ (Davidsson & Gordon 2012).

We measure startup success in wave 2 based on whether nascent entrepreneurs have made any sales or not. Our formative scales of informational support and emotional support are based on combinations of the position-generator approach and the resource-generator approach. We measured whether the support was authentic or symbolic using a dichotomy capturing the increase versus decrease in support for respectively informational and emotional support.

Results and Implications

As hypothesized, we found that both the level of social support as well as its authentic versus symbolic nature matters for entrepreneurs’ startup success in the form of sales. Our study makes two significant contributions to prior literature. First, we show that variation in social support over time matters more than the original level of support extending prior research on network dynamics primarily focuses on structural issues. Second, our conceptualization of authentic and symbolic support introduces a more fine-grained understanding of support that extends beyond a uni-dimensional construct.

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