GOAL SETTING, GOAL STRIVING, AND GOAL ATTAINMENT: A LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF ENTREPRENEURS’ MOTIVATION (SUMMARY)

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GOAL SETTING, GOAL STRIVING, AND GOAL ATTAINMENT: A LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF ENTREPRENEURS’ MOTIVATION

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Principal Topic

Goal setting and goal striving are critical factors in goal attainment (Gollwitzer, 1990). Because goal setting focuses entrepreneurs’ behavior (Bird, 1989), goals are recognized as an important factor in entrepreneurship (Naffziger, Hornsby, & Kuratko, 1994). However, little work has been done beyond assessing entrepreneurs’ goal dimensions. One exception is provided by Davidsson (1989). Presently, no published study has addressed goal striving based on established theories.

Theory and Conceptual Model

Motivation theories are individually incomplete (Mitchell, 1982). Five motivation theories form the foundation for our goal striving model. Goal setting theory (Locke & Latham, 1990) advocates that goals are determinants of human action. Expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964) claims that motivation to accomplish a goal depends on the expected outcome of the goal. While both are cognitive theories, they have different foci and purposes. Goal setting theory focuses on the goal itself whereas expectancy theory focuses on the outcomes of goal attainment. The purpose of goal setting theory is to examine between-person relationships whereas the purpose of expectancy theory is to explain within-person relationships. Control theory (Carver & Scheier, 1990) recognizes entrepreneurs have, at any time, nascent, in-progress, revised, abandoned, and attained goals. By extension, self-management theory (Thomas, Jansen & Tymon, 1997) lays out a four step goal striving process. Combining these five theories into one provides a goal setting-goal attainment model that explains between- and within-person patterns in entrepreneurs’ goal striving and behavior.

Implications

The study advances the literature by identifying entrepreneurs’ goal striving process. By combining motivation theories into a cognitive model of the goal setting-goal attainment process that explains between- and within-person patterns in goal striving, a more comprehensive motivation model that holds potential to improve understanding of entrepreneurs’ behavior is provided.

An important implication from this study is the illustration of a need to move beyond between-person analyses in individual-level entrepreneurship research. This is because important findings maybe unearthed from the within-person analyses. Furthermore, the use of within-person analyses and self-set goals hold promise to enhance understanding of entrepreneurs’ escalation of commitment and entrepreneurs’ cognitive mechanisms (Baron, 1998) from a resource allocation perspective (Kanfer & Ackerman, 1997).

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