DISENTANGLING THE AUTONOMY – JOB SATISFACTION RELATIONSHIP FOR SMALL BUSINESS OWNER-MANAGERS: EXPLORING THE ROLE OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND COPING STRATEGIES (SUMMARY)

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SUMMARY

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Principal Topic

Autonomy is one of the most popular motivations for individuals to start their own business (Carter, Gartner, Shaver, & Gatewood, 2003) and it has been found to increase business owner-managers’ job satisfaction (Benz & Frey, 2008). The entrepreneurial process, however, requires owner-managers to work long hours, assume multiple roles to conduct challenging tasks, and meet different stakeholders’ expectations (Buttner, 1992; Wincent & Ortqvist, 2009). This demanding process thus is likely to give rise to stress (Harris, Saltstone, & Fraboni, 1999), which reduces owner-managers’ job satisfaction (Buttner, 1992) and offsets the positive impact of autonomy on job satisfaction. Therefore, it is valuable to explore the boundary conditions for the autonomy – job satisfaction relationship to understand how the positive impact of autonomy on job satisfaction can be sustained over time.

Method

We conducted semi-structured interviews with thirty Canadian small business owner-managers to explore the reason for starting their own businesses, the perceived benefits (including autonomy) and challenges brought by the entrepreneurial process, owner-managers’ degree of job satisfaction and strategies for coping with the challenges and difficulties involved in the entrepreneurial process.

Results and Implications

Two types of autonomy emerge from the data: work-related autonomy (e.g., being able to decide what to do and how to do the job) and life-related autonomy (e.g., flexible personal time; being able to spend time with families). These two types of autonomy affect owner-managers’ job satisfaction through a sense of control and accomplishment and work-life balance, respectively. Furthermore, we find that different coping strategies work with different types of autonomy to sustain job satisfaction. Coping strategies that work with life-related autonomy include making time for family, partitioning roles, rotating attention between roles, integrating roles, and eliminating roles. In contrast, coping strategies that work with work-related autonomy to sustain job satisfaction include hardworking and enhancing business skills and competencies.

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