Autonomy and its dynamics

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ENTREPRENEURIAL AUTONOMY AND ITS DYNAMICS

ABSTRACT

Founding and owning an independent business does not automatically provide the owner/founder with autonomy. Autonomy-motivated entrepreneurs must often make an effort to achieve and maintain autonomy. The aim of this research is to investigate the experience of autonomy, its variations over time, and how it is affected by a range of internal and external conditions as well as the actions of the entrepreneur. The research design utilizes a qualitative methodology, asking 61 business owner/founders to respond to a range of vignettes that depict autonomy-related tensions. The results indicate that whether a business owner actively experiences autonomy is best assessed by not only asking for the degree of decisional freedom he or she currently enjoys, but also whether that degree of freedom is chosen voluntarily. Other main findings are that customers regularly represent challenges to autonomy, whereas business partners are often seen to enhance it. The results reveal various autonomy dynamics, showing movements between currently exercised, temporarily sacrificed, and involuntarily lost decisional freedoms. These movements are influenced by a range of factors, including the importance of particular customers or assignments, the phase in the business life cycle, and the financial performance of the business.

Keywords: autonomy, freedom, independence, self-endorsement, control, entrepreneurship, business-ownership.

INTRODUCTION

The popular business book entitled The E-myth Revisited (Gerber, 1995) revolves around a woman named Sarah, who runs her own pie-baking operation. From early morning till late at night she bakes and sells pies, cleans the bakery and the shop, does the books, and manages the finances. Even though she originally dreamed of the freedom that running her own business would provide, she now feels her life is a treadmill. Sarah is an example of an owner of an independent business who can be described as having not achieved a state of autonomy. Where and why did things go wrong? In the book, the business guru intervenes and restores her experience of autonomy. Without him, she might have given up, even though the customers love her pies and the business is viable.

The present paper is about the experience of autonomy of entrepreneurs, particularly how the experience of autonomy varies over time, and the factors that explain these variations. Given that there are many different definitions of entrepreneurship, some key terms are clarified first. This study uses the term entrepreneur as a generic term that includes those people who establish a business and those who own and manage a business. The study is conducted with participants who have founded and still currently own an independent business that employs at least one individual other than the owner. Entrepreneurial autonomy is defined as a business owner/founder having decision rights regarding what work is done, when it is done, and how it is done. The first aspect also includes strategic autonomy, which means setting the strategic direction of the firm (Lumpkin, Cogliser, and Schneider, 2009) and criterion autonomy, which means deciding what constitutes success, and the levels of achievements that are strived for (Breaugh, 1999). The second and third aspect the literature refers to as scheduling and method autonomy, respectively (Breaugh, 1999).

Although autonomy is a primary motivator for entrepreneurs (Shane, Locke & Collins, 2003), there is a dearth of entrepreneurship research on the fulfilment of the autonomy motive. This is partly due to an overemphasis on financial performance at the expense of subjective outcomes (Frese and Gielnik, 2014), and partly due to the assumption that owners of independent businesses have autonomy automatically (cf. Lumpkin, Cogliser & Schneider, 2009; Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). In contrast, many studies have investigated and discussed levels of job autonomy for employed workers (for example, Bakker and Demerouti, 2007; Barrick and Mount, 1993; Hackman and Oldham, 1976; Humphrey, Narhrgang and Morgeson, 2007; Langfred, 2004; Parker, Wall and Cordery, 2001; Spector and Fox, 2003). The present paper aims to further understanding of the construct of autonomy from the perspective of entrepreneurs. It will show that, for business owners/founders, the actual experience of autonomy is not at all guaranteed, that autonomy-motivated entrepreneurs must make an effort to attain and maintain autonomy, and that the degree to which entrepreneurs experience autonomy can vary over time. This study aims to reveal patterns of these variations and their determinants. It does so by utilizing a qualitative methodology. I analyze 61 business owners/founders' autonomy-related experiences elicited in response to a range of vignettes (mini case studies) depicting autonomy-related challenges or tensions. The owners were asked to explain how they behave in such situations, and to relate and reflect on their own experiences with regard to autonomy-related challenges, and to provide further related stories of their own.

AUTONOMY AND BUSINESS OWNERSHIP

Research on decisional freedom at work has traditionally been conducted with employees, rather than entrepreneurs. Autonomy was originally studied as a unitary concept (Hackman and

Oldham, 1976). Later, various aspects of autonomy were discerned, such as scheduling, method, and criterion autonomy. These aspects respectively refer to decision rights regarding when work is done, how it is done, and according to which criteria it is evaluated (Breaugh, 1999). In the context of employees working for entrepreneurial firms, Lumpkin, Cogliser, and Schneider (2009) further discern strategic autonomy, which refers to the freedom to set the strategic direction of the venture. The measurement of employee autonomy has differed in terms of emphasis on grounded, objective measures or more perceptual ones. Objective measures have been based on job descriptions, databases of occupations, or observable, behavioral measures (e.g., how often permission had to be asked) (Daniels, 2006; Spector & Fox, 2003). This paper indicates that objective measures of entrepreneurial autonomy are problematic.

When investigating entrepreneurs, autonomy has mostly been investigated as a fixed trait, need or motive. Autonomy (also referred to as freedom or independence) is the most commonly listed reason for people to start and run their own venture (Alstete, 2008; Carter, Gartner, Shaver, & Gatewood, 2003; Dawson, Henley & Latreille, 2009; Feldman & Bolino, 2000; Wilson, Marlina, & Kickul, 2004). The promise of freedom from business ownership applies in both developed and developing countries (Sen, 1999). In many cases, the financial success of a firm is a way of meeting that goal. However, autonomy even spurs some entrepreneurs to persist when their firm is underperforming financially (Gimeno, Folta, Cooper, & Woo, 1997). The available research evidence shows that business owners rate themselves as having a high degree of work-related autonomy (Benz and Frey 2008a, 2008b; Hundley, 2001; Lange, 2012; Schjoedt, 2009). Autonomy is not only a dominant entrepreneurial motivation, but also a dominant source of entrepreneurial satisfaction. Differences in levels of satisfaction compared to employees can be explained to a large extent by the level of autonomy enjoyed (Benz & Frey, 2008a, 2008b;

Hundley, 2001; Lange, 2012; Prottas, 2008; Schjoedt, 2009). This study investigates autonomy as the experience of decisional freedom that entrepreneurs have at work, rather than as a fixed trait, need or motive. Not being fixed, the experience of autonomy can vary over time.

Although the literature reports on higher levels of autonomy for business owners, the above example of Sarah the pie-baker suggests that the actual experience of autonomy cannot be guaranteed. The challenges in attaining and maintaining autonomy are suggested by a study of Van Gelderen and Jansen (2006), who investigated the reasons why business starters want autonomy. They find that the autonomy motive operates on two levels: intrinsic and instrumental. On the intrinsic level, autonomy is valued for its own sake. Most business founders say that they enjoy deciding on strategy and working methods, to regulate their own time, and to have responsibility. At the instrumental level, Van Gelderen and Jansen (2006) find that business founders sometimes do not (only) want autonomy because they enjoy having decisional freedom, but also because autonomy can be a prerequisite to the fulfillment of yet other motives. The study identifies three such motives. Some business founders are motivated by 'negative' freedom, which means that they generally dislike, or had recently experienced, a (perceived) difficult boss or stifling organizational rules. In other words, it is not just the autonomy that they like, but also the absence of a boss. A second motive is self-expression. Entrepreneurial autonomy offers entrepreneurs the opportunity to work according to their own goals, values, tastes, and beliefs. These respondents need autonomy to do particular things, or do them in a particular way. Thirdly, some respondents emphasize that autonomy provides opportunities to be in charge, to direct, and to lead rather than being led. The study finds that these motives are not mutually exclusive, and can occur concurrently or not at all (Van Gelderen & Jansen, 2006).

Van Gelderen and Jansen (2006) discuss that these autonomy motivations bring associated paradoxes and pitfalls. On the intrinsic level, autonomy to set the strategic direction of the firm and to decide on how these strategic aims are to be achieved may be accompanied by feelings of inadequacy for making optimal decisions, and concerns following from the responsibility for those who are affected by these decisions, such as employees and their dependents. In terms of the regulation of working hours, people may enjoy having discretion over when they are working, but may also find themselves unable to refrain from working very long hours. Moving to the instrumental level, instead of working for a boss, the owner must now deal with the demands of clients, suppliers, and other stakeholders. The business owner may enjoy doing his or her own thing, or doing them in a specific way, but customers may want him or her to work according to their specifications. And the owner may be in control within the firm, but uncertainty with regard to stakeholders outside the company can be severe. Furthermore, a focus on power and control may be challenged by autonomy minded employees.

The finding that business owners enjoy higher autonomy, and higher satisfaction as a result, appears to suggest that they successfully navigate these tensions. Moreover, there is an assumption among entrepreneurship researchers that autonomy comes automatically with business ownership. For example, Lumpkin and Dess (1996, p. 141) posit: “In a firm where the primary decision maker is the owner/manager, autonomy is implied by the rights of ownership.” However, there are three reasons for questioning this assumption. Firstly, studies show considerable variation in autonomy and satisfaction scores within the group of business owners (satisfaction is relevant here as it is driven by autonomy). For example, the descriptive statistics reported in Benz and Frey (2008a) show relatively high standard deviations, suggesting considerable overlap of the distributions of employed and business owners, with sizeable

numbers of business owners being less satisfied than employed people. Secondly, with the exception of Benz and Frey (2008a), the studies report cross-sectional data, leaving the possibility that those with lower autonomy scores give up business ownership. In fact, Benz and Frey (2008a) report that 'out movers' (p. 370) become slightly more satisfied with their jobs after they have left business ownership. Thirdly, it is possible that autonomy scores are high at the same time as sizeable autonomy constraints are present. Even Sarah, from the example in the introduction, may report high scores when asked about her decisional freedom. After all, she can potentially decide on the what, how, and when aspects of the business at any time. Still, she feels unhappy about the actual amount of freedom that she experiences on a daily basis.

When linking the autonomy experience and its challenges to theories in Work and Organizational Psychology, a parallel can be seen with the job demands-control model (Karasek, 1979) and later iterations such as the job demands-resources model (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner & Schaufeli, 2001). These are occupational stress models studying ratios of levels of demands on the one hand, and levels of control or resources on the other, the key idea being that control or resources buffer the impact of demands on job strain (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Kain & Jex, 2010). Although these models have been formulated for employees rather than entrepreneurs, the entrepreneur also balances autonomy and stakeholder demands. However, there are also qualitative differences. One is that, for employees, the degree of assigned autonomy is part of their job description. In contrast, entrepreneurs have no fixed job description and can decide which tasks to outsource and which to do themselves. Moreover, although employees can pro-actively strive to increase their autonomy (Grant & Parker, 2009; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), it is negotiated mostly within the organization versus colleagues and entities above, below, or at equal level in the organizational hierarchy. For entrepreneurs, by

contrast, autonomy is more established vis-à-vis the outside world. Surely, within teams of business partners, there can be autonomy conflicts between team members, and autonomy tensions can also arise in relation to employees. However, many autonomy-related tensions involve stakeholders outside the organization, such as customers, competitors, suppliers, and financers or investors. And when dealing with these external pressures, entrepreneurs cannot defend themselves by pointing out formal responsibilities associated with a job description or invoke layers higher in the hierarchy for help, because the entrepreneurs are at the top of the hierarchy. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the challenges noted by Van Gelderen and Jansen (2006) are often directed at the decision rights themselves. For example, if a powerful investor, supplier, or customer applies pressure in re-negotiating a contract, the autonomous employee may be authorized to make a decision, but the entrepreneur can potentially experience the renegotiation itself as an infringement of autonomy. Therefore, the challenges suggested by Van Gelderen and Jansen are perhaps better characterized as autonomy demands than as job demands.

The special nature of entrepreneurial autonomy has been overlooked by the entrepreneurship literature. Here, autonomy is primarily discussed in the literature on entrepreneurial orientation (EO), which is focused on the autonomy of employees within an organization to decide on the strategic direction for certain projects, and to decide on work method and scheduling aspects (Lumpkin, Cogliser and Schneider, 2009). In contrast, the present study is an individual-level study of owner/founders, who may or may not decide to give their employees a lot of autonomy. The EO literature takes the autonomy of the owner/founder for granted; for example, Lumpkin et al. (2009, p. 63) maintain: “Autonomy may not be an issue among independently owned and managed entrepreneurial firms because such founders are already acting autonomously.” In

reality, one can imagine a quadrant in which the owner/founder and those working for the venture each have either high or low autonomy.

In sum, this study does not take it for granted that business ownership implies autonomy as a lived experience. Instead, it investigates the experience of autonomy and how it varies over time. This research aims to identify patterns in the variations of the experience of autonomy. I expected that a range of conditions and circumstances, individual as well as firm level, will influences the autonomy experience, as well as the actions that business owners take to attain and retain autonomy. Given the lack of preceding research, this study is exploratory. It utilizes a qualitative methodology that is explained in the next section.

METHOD

Sample

A total of 64 people who started and still own their own business were interviewed for this study. Initially, 23 respondents were sampled from the database of (alumni) entrepreneurs from the VU University Amsterdam, the Netherlands, maintained by the Amsterdam Center for Entrepreneurship at VU (AcE@VU). Therefore, the first participants comprised business owners with an academic background. The reason for conducting this research with higher-educated entrepreneurs, rather than a random sample, was to initially carry out this exploratory research with participants who had training in abstract thinking and reflection. Given their academic degrees, these participants were likely to be able to reflect on autonomy and its challenges. A non-random sample is advocated if it furthers the aims and purpose of the research (Davidsson, 2004). Of the 23 business owners, 21 were in business services, one in consumer services, and one in manufacturing. Given the lack of business to consumers (B2C) and manufacturing

companies in our sample, a further sample was drawn in the hospitality industry (all restaurant owner/founders, N=12) and in fashion production (N=12) to corroborate the findings obtained with the first sample. Restaurant owners were chosen because that sector is known for conditions that potentially affect autonomy, such as having to work long hours, having to deal with demanding customers, and starting with a team of founders, which allowed issues relating to business partners to be explored further. The fashion industry was also chosen because it includes segments of producers of slow fashion and of fast fashion, with autonomy dilemmas playing a role in both the small batch (more exclusive, sustainable fashion production) and in the competitive, fast-to-market circumstances of fast fashion. An additional 17 respondents were sampled at random. Thus, the overall sample represents different sectors (see Table 1). The purpose of the study was not to analyze sector differences, but to identify generic patterns with regard to the experience of autonomy and its development over time that apply across a variety of settings and sectors.

A number of further criteria were taken into account in putting the sample together. Primarily, the degree of importance attached to autonomy was ascertained. Only respondents who considered autonomy to be either important or very important on a five-point scale were included in the study. Accordingly, the study does not report on business owners who give autonomy less priority and does not study variations in need for autonomy or autonomy motivation. Three business owners gave autonomy a ranking lower than 4, so only the data of 61 respondents have been included in this study. Furthermore, the respondents had to be founders of at least one independent business. The respondents needed to have at least one employee in their businesses, because a business with employees takes on additional responsibilities and management tasks and works on a larger scale. Many autonomy-related issues concern

management and leadership aspects that may not surface for freelancers or people who are otherwise self-employed without employees; those individuals may encounter a qualitatively different set of autonomy-related challenges. A number of other variables that might impact autonomy were also recorded, including the numbers of business partners, businesses founded, and businesses still involved with, as well as the economic outlook for the firm(s) (see Table 1). The number of employees was also noted, with the businesses being predominantly small. All participants were interviewed face-to-face, with the interviews being recorded (if permitted) and transcribed.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Measures

This research investigates the actions of business owners/founders when dealing with autonomy-related challenges. To elicit these strategies, nine vignettes (mini-cases) were developed, each of which described a challenge related to the various autonomy motives as distinguished by Van Gelderen and Jansen (2006) (the vignettes are listed in Table 2). Two cases illustrated the intrinsic autonomy motive, while the remainder referred to instrumental motives (avoiding a boss (two cases); self-congruence and self-expression (two cases); and being in charge and in control (three cases)). The respondents were asked, firstly, whether they can relate to the example; secondly, to provide examples from their own practice, including any actions that were taken; thirdly, what the result was of the applied strategy in this situation; and fourthly, to give advice to the main character in this example. In addition, respondents were asked to provide further examples of situations where they had to put effort into attaining or defending their autonomy,

including the actions that were taken. Furthermore, respondents were asked how their experience of autonomy developed over time, and what factors caused the level of experienced autonomy to change. Finally, just preceding the presentation of the vignettes, the participants were asked what autonomy meant to them, and how they define autonomy.

The idea behind this research design is that the vignettes would prompt thinking about autonomy-related issues and invoke the respondents' memories of autonomy-related experiences. In that way, the responses could be used to infer autonomy dynamics, and their determinants. The vignettes were adapted in the interviews with the restaurant owners and the fashion producers to take place in the context of running a business in those industries.

The study uses a retrospective design, rather than a longitudinal, prospective design, in which the level of experienced autonomy would be ascertained at various time points. While the latter design has merits, the purpose of this study is to have business owner/founders identify how their experience of autonomy has changed over time, so a retrospective view allows respondents to consider and relate multiple relevant events. Eliciting personal stories that include actual behaviors reduced the risk of hindsight bias and post-hoc rationalizations, although they cannot be ruled out. The validity or credibility of the study was also furthered by inductive probing, which allows the interviewer to clarify and verify stories told by the participants. Furthermore procedures of deviant case analysis were followed (Guest, 2012), looking for evidence diverging from (or even contrary to) prevailing patterns in the data.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Analysis

All 61 interviews were transcribed and the answers were tabled for each vignette and for each self-generated example. Respondents were able to give advice to each protagonist of each vignette, producing stories of their own experience in response to at least two-thirds of the vignettes. If respondents could not relate their own experiences, it would often be because the vignette was not applicable to their situation. An example is the case of autonomy struggles between team members for respondents who run a business on their own. Furthermore, 80 percent of the respondents offered experiences related to attaining and retaining autonomy when asked to relate further examples of their own (rather than being solicited by the vignettes).

Given the lack of previous studies on the experience of autonomy for business owner/founders, thematic analysis procedures were followed to analyze the data, as thematic analysis is highly suitable for exploratory and inductive research designs (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Guest, 2012). Thematic analysis is a qualitative method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It does not involve counting phrases or words as is done in content analysis. Instead, the data are first coded after which themes (patterns derived from the codes) are identified. Only the stories of the respondents' own, first-hand experience were used for the analyses (not the advice given to the protagonists in the vignettes if it did not refer to the respondents own experience). These stories typically concern a challenge to autonomy, a response taken, and the effect of the response. In particular, references to changes in the experience of autonomy, whether positive or negative, were noted. The responses were considered from a dynamic perspective, analyzing temporal aspects of developments and events related by the participants, in order to arrive at autonomy trajectories.

With thematic analysis one goes back and forth between the writing and the data, which is not coded just once, but continuously. In the first round a wide range of codes were applied regarding anything that could impact the experience autonomy. The initial codes were based on the topic involved: meanings of autonomy, actions taken to attain and retain autonomy, determinants of the autonomy experience, changes in the experience of autonomy over time, and determinants of those changes. Themes were then derived from the codes, in an interpretative and inductive manner. In thematic analysis it is imperative that the themes do not directly correspond directly to the questions posed to the respondents, because if so, there would be no analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In subsequent rounds codes were continued to be added, in particular in response to negative case analysis, coding for content that would disconfirm or qualify identified themes. To further reliability of the application of codes, a subjective assessment was conducted (Guest, 2012). Two colleagues each independently codes 10 interview transcripts, after which the double-coded text was reviewed section by section. Each time the coders reach a point where their coding does not agree, the reasons for the discrepancy are discussed, a solution is agreed on, and codes are revised if necessary.

Themes concern interpretations of patterns in the data, based on communalities, differences, or relationships (Guest, 2012). Themes are reflected in the authentic responses (based on the respondents' own experience) of at least five participants. This minimum prevalence of occurrence was used to ensure that the findings presented in this article do not reflect idiosyncratic responses, but responses shared by at least some respondents - in line with established guidelines for thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Table 3 provides an overview of themes, which will be explained in the findings section right below, and their associated codes.

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

FINDINGS: THE EXPERIENCE OF AUTONOMY

The experience of autonomy is affected by a wide range of individual and firm level conditions and circumstances. It is also affected by the actions of the entrepreneur. This section presents some generic themes that emerge from the data. The subsequent results section specifically focuses on autonomy dynamics.

The respondents were first asked to reflect on the nature and meaning of autonomy in the context of their work. The typical and widely shared response was that autonomy means having decisional freedom; this is in line with the definition used in this study. Reference was also regularly made to the instrumental motives discerned by Van Gelderen and Jansen (2006) (freedom from a boss, self-expression, and exercising control). Some respondents would specify certain decisional freedoms, such as setting work hours or methods, designing the organization and its culture, and decisions concerning the strategy and the future of the company. Some mention the freedom to develop products and services; for example: "My business partner did an assignment where he worked 500 hours without being paid. In the end the project was of such high quality that we now still profit from it. If he had worked for a boss he could not have made that decision so easily." Many respondents further added that autonomy means having responsibility and being responsible, which therefore is intertwined with having decision-making rights. This is in line with Karasek's (1979) model, in which responsibility belongs to job control, not to job demands. Only in negative circumstances did the owner/founders refer to responsibilities as a job demand; typically, when having to let go of people. Entrepreneurs

generally view freedom and responsibility as being connected rather than in conflict; with responsibility come decision-making rights and vice versa.

A theme that emerges from the data is that high levels of perceived autonomy can go together with high constraints. According to some of the interviewees, it is the freedom to think about decisions that provides a feeling of autonomy. Moreover, it is felt that there is often an option, at least in principle, to refuse or decline whatever it may be that threatens autonomy; the respondents may not have had this feeling if they had been employees. At the same time, the majority of entrepreneurs mention that it is impossible in practice to be fully free. One is constrained by the responsibility for stakeholders such as employees and customers, by the competition, by governmental laws, and regulations. Thus, the word autonomy suggests freedom, but remains a suggestion: "Autonomy feels like freedom, but in the end I am responsible for my employees and customers", states one respondent. Another says: "I wanna be free, I wanna be that… But ok, you have to make money and you have to listen to the market. So, what is freedom? Of course, you're free but you have to respond to the demand of the market." Freedom is relative, and autonomy is about the freedom to take action within constraints and boundaries. Of course, this applies not just to business owner/founders, but it is relevant to note, given that autonomy is the most frequently listed motive to start one's own business, and that freedom is so strongly associated with business ownership in the popular mind. Of importance is that, for the business owners, autonomy is actually not only about having decisional freedom but also about their actions being self-endorsed, even if these actions subsequently limit autonomy. Constraints can be deliberately and voluntarily chosen. Whether a business owner actively experiences autonomy is thus not best assessed by merely asking for the degree of decisional freedom, but

also by asking whether that degree of freedom is chosen voluntarily. This theme will be revisited in the section on Autonomy Dynamics.

Nearly all of the examples of autonomy related challenges generated by the participants concern either customers or people the owner works with, be it business partners, employees or advisors. Starting with the first, a theme is that customers or clients are often perceived to be a potential threat to the experience of autonomy. This is not just because some of the vignettes concerned customers – reference was also made to customers in several of the self-generated examples. From the perspective of optimizing autonomy, the customer is not always king. As one respondent states, "You have to consider very carefully which customers are important enough to influence you." Autonomy in relation to customers is considered to be threatened when customers have demands that conflict with business owners' beliefs and norms, or when customers renegotiate terms and conditions. One respondent relates: "We had to organize an event for a customer. We were not ready yet, while an individual of the other party continuously mentioned that the project would still take place, although we were still deciding what was best to do. As the situation went on and pressure was put on us by this individual, we had an urgent consultation and eventually the event was cancelled. I had the feeling that I had totally lost control of the situation and had to fight for my autonomy during this process." With customers renegotiating contracts or imposing demands, the customer rather than the owner appears to decide the rules of the game. This was found to be especially prevalent when a large customer dictates the relationship with a vast number of small suppliers: "For example, [a large upmarket warehouse in Amsterdam] is very demanding about how they want to pick their clothes and about the box. It's a huge customer so, of course, it's important that you do it right."

The management of relations with customers plays a main part in realizing the autonomy motive. Another theme is that business partners are often seen as a solution to autonomy-related challenges, rather than partners representing a threat to autonomy. Many of those interviewees who have business partners tend to use those partners to organize their autonomy experience at the team level. There is broad consensus among respondents that there must be clear roles and assigned responsibilities within teams. Given these conditions, however, business partners are then seen as contributing to better decisions that still feel autonomous. One respondent states: “I like to be influenced by my business partners. I enjoy discussing matters and what I can do to improve.” Another says: “That’s one of the reasons I’m now beginning to work with a partner. You do have expertise but not in all fields and then it’s very nice to have someone you can share it with and exchange opinions. Then you know that you’re on the right track.” It should be noted, however, that some respondents reported on conflicts with partners leading to separation. For example, one respondent relates: “I’m a bit of a control freak and I want to retain the lead. I once teamed up with someone who had a different agenda. I immediately broke up the partnership, this was not going to work.” In this case, the business partner threatens rather than furthers autonomy.

When interests are competing (with a supplier, for example), the “other” is seen as autonomy-reducing. When interests are aligned (such as with a team of founders), the “other” can be seen as autonomy-enhancing. As long as there is no conflict, many prefer consultation or shared decision making. In other words, freedom of choice (including the freedom to reach a joint decision with a partner) is more important than making decisions by oneself. Concurring with business partners (and if these are unavailable, the advisors or employees) helps mitigate the feelings of uncertainty that come with having to make important decisions. Partners are also

helpful to become more powerful in terms of financial resources, knowledge, and networks. Moreover, having a business partner also serves social needs, as one respondent states: “The more individuals you work with, the more limitations an entrepreneur has. But I am ready to give that up, because I think it is more important to work together than to do things alone. It is about connecting.”

A higher order theme is that the amount of autonomy experienced tends to be a function of the balance between of power, which furthers autonomy, and dependencies, which serve to reduce autonomy. Power can be defined as the ability or capacity to do something or act in a particular way, and dependency refers to the state of relying on or being controlled by someone or something else (Oxford Online Dictionary, 2015). “We are so big now, the biggest player in the Netherlands, that instead of focusing on what the customer wants, it becomes more easy to say: ‘Customer, this is how we will do it’.“ says one respondent. Power and dependencies often correlate negatively, but not necessarily. One respondent reports: “It was a very small company, which I had next to my job … It was good. I think it was at the top the whole time. It was really for myself. It had nothing to do with money. It’s more about getting your own space, to do what you want.” In such cases, power may be low, but so are dependencies. Conversely, increases power can be accompanied by an increase in dependencies. “If the organization grows bigger you get limited aby all kinds of factors, so autonomy is hard to achieve” says one respondent.

In the context of power, it is important to note that several respondents remark that autonomy requires confidence and trust in one’s own abilities and vision. One respondent says: “You have to be so confident, so competent, that customers accept what you will tell them.” Some respondents see autonomy as a prerequisite for being an entrepreneur: “As an entrepreneur you need to be autonomous. Otherwise you cannot be successful. A company has a product or

service, but there must be a vision behind it. The entrepreneur's vision ..." Another entrepreneur says: "Stick with your plan and your ideas and never ever compromise". Autonomy helps the owner to retain a clear sense of direction. Thus, although one may associate decisional freedom with flexibility, autonomy often serves, in practice, to limit flexibility in favor of adherence to a strategic direction of the firm that the business owner finds important.

AUTONOMY DYNAMICS

In order to understand how the experience of autonomy varies over time, it is necessary to first establish the state of autonomy at the start of the business. Using the degree of currently exercised decision rights and the volitional nature of these decisions as dimensions, businesses start their journey in one of four quadrants (Figure 1). Currently experienced (CE) autonomy (top right quadrant) is high from the start if dependencies are low. For example, respondent says: "I have consciously chosen for this to remain a hobby I get paid for. I can do this, because I don't need to earn my bread with this venture." This is also the case if the business has immediate earning power; for example, if the new venture has great demand from the start and the product or service is received with great anticipation. In contrast, autonomy is immediately lost under a set of different conditions that allow the entrepreneur few decisional rights (top left quadrant). A typical case would be a franchise in which the franchisor retains all or most decisional freedoms. Other cases are represented by markets in which the customer has all decision rights (as in services with a great degree of personal service and customization), or the buyer (as in supply chains where a small venture is a supplier of a much larger company), or the investor (when the investor but not the entrepreneurs holds the decision rights; in the exceptional case that the investor provides the entrepreneur with a carte blanche to spend the money, then experienced

autonomy would be high from the start). However, given that the lack of autonomy in these cases can be anticipated, it can be assumed that these business starters willingly accept this situation and that autonomy is not an important motive for them. Therefore, the label voluntarily lost (VL) is used. In contrast, the same quadrant is also occupied by those business owners who willingly accept an initial temporary loss of decisional authority (TS), reckoning that autonomy will be gained at a later stage. The temporary sacrifice of autonomy can also occur in later phases, for a variety of reasons and in a variety of conditions that will be elaborated later in this section.

Low endorsement and low levels of current decision rights are encountered by pseudo-entrepreneurs (lower left quadrant). By these I mean former employees in reorganized occupations or professions who are now self-employed. For example, trucking as well as package delivery companies in the Netherlands outsource their jobs to self-employed drivers, rather than hiring these people as employees, to avoid paying for labor entitlements such as pensions, payments in case of illness or unemployment, and to circumvent union regulations and requirements. Often these drivers were former employees who were first made redundant and then re-hired as self-employed individuals. Still doing the same work as they did as employees, as pseudo-entrepreneurs they lack both autonomy and consent (Dutch News, 2015). Hence, the figure uses the label involuntarily lost (IL). Finally, from the perspective of endorsement, the necessity entrepreneur finds him or herself having decisional autonomy without having asked for it as these entrepreneurs would rather not run their own business at all (lower right quadrant). For these instances, the figure uses the label UA (unsought autonomy). As only those who find autonomy important or very important are represented in this study, those who willingly forfeit autonomy, pseudo-entrepreneurs and necessity entrepreneurs will not be considered in the next

section, which instead outlines movements between the CE, TS, and IL space for autonomy-motivated business owners/founders.

From the starting positions outlined above, movements between the currently exercised (CE), temporarily sacrificed (TS), and involuntarily lost (IL) 'spaces' may occur in the course of the business (Figures 2a-d). The temporary but voluntary sacrifice of autonomy (Figure 2a) in the initial phase of the company is hoped to result in increased decisional freedom later on (dotted arrow). One respondent illustrates this point as follows: "In the beginning I had no idea what day it was. I was only working. I didn't mind, because I had the bigger picture in mind and I knew that in the future it would be very likely that I would reap the benefits of all my hard work." Of course there is the risk that the entrepreneur will become trapped in this situation, annulling the temporary aspect, and will therefore end up in the IL space (solid arrow). One owner/founder who signals this threat says: "If you're short on money you have to be willing to make concessions. But it's better to say goodbye immediately to these assignments because otherwise you'll get more of them because everyone thinks that this is what you do." Another entrepreneur recalls involuntarily losing autonomy: "Start-up, young company, first company. I think I was 21 or 22 years lot. A lot of people are taking advantage of it. Like: "Oh yeah, do this project for free and then next one…" Oh great, but somehow the next one never comes."

In later phases, many respondents are willing to temporary sacrifice their autonomy when there is an opportunity to work on a very important assignment or for a very important customer (Figure 2b). Here the entrepreneur relinquishes decision rights in the expectation that the business will increase greatly in power later as a result of having done that assignment or working for that customer (for example, increased financial resources, or legitimacy, status and reputation effects, Bitektine, 2012). As one respondent states: "Because it is a big customer I let

it go and just accepted it while I knew it was unreasonable." Another adds: "Depending on how important the customer is, do it. Bend over backwards." Also in the opposite case, when the concession is very minor, many respondents are willing to temporarily sacrifice their autonomy voluntarily. In this case, the cycle depicted in Figure 2b is fast: "Even if I think it's nonsense, if it doesn't cost much effort or energy, we will choose to accommodate the customer."

Whether autonomy means experiencing decisional freedoms from the outset or emerging from the temporary sacrifice space, it is not necessarily guaranteed to continue. One mentioned condition was pressure due to poor financial results, because of insufficient demand, high costs, increased competition, or poor economic conditions (Figure 2c). In such circumstances, the firm is under pressure to downsize, or to change its ways and to re-invent itself. Faced with an assignment she would rather refuse, a respondent says: "It depends on how well your company is running. If you don't have an income for the last three months you don't have a choice." Unless the owner is not dependent on the financial revenues, the decisional freedoms with regard to the what, how, and when aspects of work may have to be given up, at least temporarily, or if that fails, indefinitely.

Conversely, financial success (Figure 2d) can allow for upward movements in the CE space or for moves from the TS or the IL space into the CE space (dotted arrows). According to one entrepreneur: "Once I started my own company it increased. You get even more freedom when you're successful. The more money people make of you the more they actually listen. That's really nice." Another states: "When the business peaks then you think that you're a god and that you can do anything." Another respondent who recently hired her first employee says: "If I'm a day not at the office I'm not afraid that things won't be picked up because I know that there's somebody here to pick up everything. That gives me a lot of more time to breathe. If I receive a

phone call and I'm not able to get to the phone I say: "Viktor, I saw that bla bla called me, please call him back. This greatly enhances my autonomy'."

Autonomy and growth, however, have a complex relationship, depending on perceptions and beliefs of the owner/founders. For some respondents, a virtuous cycle appears to be the case. In the context of pursuing autonomy, one respondent remarks: "Now, in the beginning you cannot afford employees so it means you have to do 20 jobs and if one job would do 36 hours and you're far more energetic you could do that 36 hours job in 20 hours you could still do only 4 jobs in 80 hours. If you start a company you can't employ people. That means you have to do it yourself. There's basically no intelligent solution until you can employ people." A number of respondents state that having or achieving a financial buffer was an important condition to set this cycle in motion. Because of the freedom provided by having a financial buffer, products or services can be developed, employees can be hired, and better decisions can be made, which leads to better financial performance. These finances can then be utilized to make further autonomous decisions and actions, which lead to further positive results. In contrast, others associate autonomy with smallness. As one respondent says: "So, I think at the start of the business, it was very high. Then you work with people and I'm the kind of person who also wants to give other people space. I think I did it too much, which caused me to have less autonomy."

DISCUSSION

This research provides insights into how business owner/founders experience autonomy, the factors that impact on it, the actions they take to attain and maintain it, and how the experience of autonomy evolves over time. As such, it makes a number of contributions. It has been known for

a long time that autonomy is a primary motivator of entrepreneurship, yet very little research has been conducted on the realization of the autonomy motive. The study problematizes the idea that autonomy comes automatically with being a business owner. Business ownership can indeed provide autonomy, and autonomy provides satisfaction. But in the daily practice of a fully operational business, autonomy is regularly challenged. This study makes clear that entrepreneurial autonomy is not a 'given' that comes with ownership rights. Instead, autonomy is challenged and autonomy-motivated entrepreneurs must often make an effort to achieve and maintain autonomy. Rather than incorporating autonomy into a study as a fixed individual motive, need, or trait, this study explores the experience of entrepreneurial decisional freedom and finds that it is often contested. The exposition of autonomy dynamics suggests that autonomy is best studied over time.

This study has also highlighted some distinct qualities of entrepreneurial autonomy. Pressures and constraints on autonomy do not prevent the owners in the sample from feeling that they have a high degree of autonomy. Often, the promise of autonomy appears to be feeding the experience of autonomy, as in the case of the business owner who routinely works 80 hours a week but feels that he could take a day off if he wished to do so, but never does. High autonomy ratings often went together with high demands and constraints. Thus, models such as those proposed by Karasek (1979) and Demeroutis et al. (2001), which depict job resources or job decision latitude on the one hand and job demands on the other, may to some extent be applicable to entrepreneurs, although for business owners neither is a question of work design. Two people can have the same formal decisional freedom that comes with owning a firm, and operate in equally demanding environments, but one may be feeling far more autonomous than

the other. What is interesting about autonomy is how business owners manage to negotiate autonomy vis-à-vis their business environment.

A distinct feature of entrepreneurial autonomy, overlooked by previous studies, is that not only decisional freedom is subjectively relevant, but endorsement as well. Entrepreneurs have the autonomy to decide to forego autonomy. This has direct methodological implications as researchers should not only assess the degree of currently exercised decisional freedom, but also the level of endorsement. To this end it appears suitable to incorporate the volitional element in the understanding of autonomy by Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan and Deci, 2000). According to Deci and Ryan, autonomy means that one acts in accordance with self-endorsed values, needs, and intentions, rather than in response to controlling factors. Thus, "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). Autonomous behavior also does not imply that one necessarily likes what one is doing. If one endorses a particular obligation or duty, it is still chosen. In the context of business ownership, one can autonomously decide to give up autonomy temporarily and work 16 hours a day. Many entrepreneurs have made this choice in the early phases or their business, despite having given great importance to autonomy. Also, those who aimed to attain high growth businesses outlined these choices, which in their experience were made autonomously. However, in terms of SDT these sacrifices can represent varying levels of internalization (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

SDT also comes to mind when interpreting another theme of this study, namely that business partners are regularly seen as enhancing autonomy. Business partners are seen as reducing the burdens that come with decisional freedoms; as increasing power in terms of knowledge, skills, and networks; and as increasing opportunities to distribute tasks within the team. Thus,

autonomy-oriented entrepreneurs are not necessarily individualistic; rather, many seem to prefer to make decisions in consultations with others. These can be business partners, but also employees or external advisors. Several business owners expressed the idea that running a business is as much about connectedness as autonomy. SDT sees not only the need for autonomy as fundamental, but also the needs for relatedness, and mastery. Autonomy and relatedness can be compatible rather than in conflict (Hodgins, Koestner & Duncan, 1996).

A generic theme derived from the data is that autonomy is that those who have high power and few dependencies experience more autonomy. The understanding of autonomy as an outcome of the balance between power and dependencies is shared by Resource Dependence Theory (Hillman, Withers & Collins, 2009; Drees & Heugens, 2012). The main prediction of this organization-level theory is that organizations respond to resource dependencies by forming interorganizational arrangements such as alliances and joint ventures. This increases their autonomy and is seen as the freedom to make decisions without outside interference. Very few respondents in this study referred to making such arrangements, perhaps because most firms in the sample were small and alliances with more powerful partners are risky for small entrepreneurial firms (Alvarez & Barney, 2001). However, on a smaller scale various respondents did make arrangements to stabilize income, forging deals with customers that gave them a steady or predictable income stream.

Going beyond the individual autonomy experience, the findings have wider implications. The autonomy motive often serves to limit growth, a point already noted by Lumpkin and Dess (1996). With Wiklund, Davidsson and Delmar (2003), this study finds that entrepreneurs typically diverge in terms of whether they see a small or a large firm size as enhancing autonomy. Therefore, successfully dealing with autonomy-related challenges may have

consequences for business performance, as well as for the wider economy. It is an open question whether, on the national level, developing the capacity for autonomous action will increase economic growth, employment, and innovation.

For growth-oriented firms, autonomy remains important in the context of business development. Several study participants feel that autonomy can be sacrificed in the initial stages to gain more leverage once the business is more settled. However, other respondents say that although some worries can disappear, eventually they will be replaced by others, depending on the development stage of the company. This phenomenon is also described in literature, for example the life-cycle growth model of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) by Greiner (1972). The model explains five stages of small business growth. Each stage ends with a crisis – and all of them can be seen as autonomy-related (the crisis for the second stage in their model is actually called crisis of autonomy). As a fully grown business, one challenge is to maintain the entrepreneurial spirit. Small businesses can make swift decisions and take action accordingly. In large organizations, this flexibility may be lacking. Therefore, whatever the growth stage of the business, there may always be factors that can impact negatively on autonomy.

This research has certain limitations, which can be remedied by future research. First, the study infers the autonomy pathways or trajectories from the responses elicited by the vignettes and by the experiences of the participants. The retrospective approach taken may be prone to hindsight bias. A longitudinal study that tracks autonomy over time may provide additional insight and may be less vulnerable to bias, particularly if the degree of experienced autonomy would also be rated by a second observer in the network of the participant. Second, the study is limited by the fact that all of the participating firms were still in business at the time the study was conducted. This means that the described patterns may not apply to firms that have gone out

of business, although participants could also reflect on any past ventures. A future design could avoid success bias by sampling business owners who have quit their business because of insufficient returns, whether financial or intangible. Third, factors were studied in isolation. In reality, a constellation of autonomy-related considerations may present itself, forcing trade-offs between different aspects; for example, in the case of a labor-intensive assignment where the entrepreneur relinquishes any say over working times, but has great freedom in designing the product or service.

In addition, this research has limits in scope which directly follow from the choices made when designing the study. First, although it only reports on themes that were shared by a number of cases, this exploratory study could not aim to measure the prevalence of various themes and trajectories, as they still had to emerge from the data. Second, no attention is given to any effects of autonomy, whether on the individual level (e.g., satisfaction) or on the firm level (e.g., profit). Third, I only studied owner/founders whose current firm had at least one employee. For self-employed without employees, a different picture may present. Fourth, although this study sampled respondents from a variety of sectors, it did not analyze differences between settings in the autonomy experience and its development over time. Fifth, I only sampled those owner/founders who gave great importance to autonomy. Future research may wish to study the experience of autonomy by those who were not keen to have such autonomy, necessity entrepreneurs being a case in point.

The findings highlight that, from the perspective of optimizing autonomy, the customer is not always king, and a future research direction would be to further investigate which customers provide more autonomy for the business owners, and under what conditions. Another interesting research topic would be the experience of autonomy at the team level. When taking independent

self-employment professionals out of the equation, more than half of new U.S. firms are founded by teams (Ruef, Aldrich, & Carter, 2003). In our sample, even when excluding the restaurant owners, more than half of the respondents had business partners. This descriptive statistic is interesting by itself in relation to the strong autonomy motivation that is expressed. It may be investigated whether autonomy motivations are stronger for solo entrepreneurs than for those in team-based ventures. Moreover, business partners are regularly mentioned as a solution to autonomy-related challenges. The fact that so many autonomy-oriented entrepreneurs have business partners, and in fact use those business partners to optimize autonomy, suggests that team owners organize their autonomy experience at the group level. How do business partners fulfill their autonomy motives both as a collective, and as individuals in the group?

Developments in the labor market may cause this study to have increased practical significance. In recent years, entrepreneurial autonomy has taken on wider relevance as the roles of many in the labor force have taken on characteristics resembling those of entrepreneurs. In the Netherlands alone (the country in which this study was conducted) in addition to 600,000 business owners who have employees, there are close to 800,000 so-called zzp'ers (self-employed without employees), out of a working population of 7.2 million (Annink & Den Dulk, 2014; Central Bureau for Statistics, 2015). Moreover, 1.8 million people work on temporary contacts, and these figures are increasing at the expense of the number of people in permanent employment. Young people in particular move from one project assignment, temporary job, freelance work, or part-time job to the next. Several occupations and professions have re-organized work in such a way that those who used to work as employees still do the same work, but now as self-employed people working for an uncertain income. New career concepts such as the Protean Career theory (Hall, 1986; Briscoe and Hall, 2006) study these trends and emphasize

that individuals are responsible for their careers, that people should be self-directed in their careers, and that success does not just concern salary and position, but also satisfaction, learning, work-life balance, and autonomy (Gubler et al., 2014; Sullivan, 2011). Business owners often work under conditions of novelty, uncertainty, resource scarcity, and time pressure (Gibb, 1993, Baron, 1998). With increasing amounts of (formerly employed) people facing these conditions, lessons can be learned from studying the entrepreneurial setting.

Business owner/founders see autonomy as an attractive and satisfying aspect of firm ownership, despite the challenges featured in this study. Returning to the example of Sarah, the protagonist in the E-Myth (Gerber, 1995), Gerber's solution is for her to start a franchise operation in order to optimize her autonomy (and finances). The respondents in this sample use a wide range of strategies to further autonomy, and they sometimes even decide to forfeit it temporarily. Freedom and constraints of freedom are at the heart of entrepreneurial motivation and practice. Entrepreneurs need to balance their autonomy wishes with the demands imposed on them by customers, suppliers, competitors, governmental authorities, as well as stakeholders internal to the firm. Therefore, the study of how autonomy-driven business owner/founders manage to attain and retain a state of autonomy over time is an important line of future research, along with a study of the factors that threaten the experience of autonomy.

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Table 1 Descriptive Sample Statistics (N=61)

Variable	*Category*	*N*	*% of 61*
Gender	Male	46	75%
	Female	15	25%
Economic Outlook	High Growth	18	30%
	Growth/Stable	38	62%
	Decline	5	8%
Number of Business Partners	0	22	36%
	1	26	43%
	2	7	12%
	3	2	3%
	4	4	7%
Sector	Production	13	21%
	Retail	16	26%
	Business Services	26	43%
	Consumer Services	6	10%

Variable	*M*	*SD*	*Min*	*Max*
Age of respondent	41.8	11.3	25	68
Age of oldest running firm	12.2	10,8	1	45
Number of businesses founded	3.5	5.5	1	40
Number of businesses still being owned	2.1	2.4	1	12
Number of employees	68*	170	1	800
Importance of autonomy (range 1–5)	4.5	0.6	4	5

* Excluding two large businesses with 6000 and 6500 employees, respectively

Table 2 Vignettes describing autonomy-related challenges

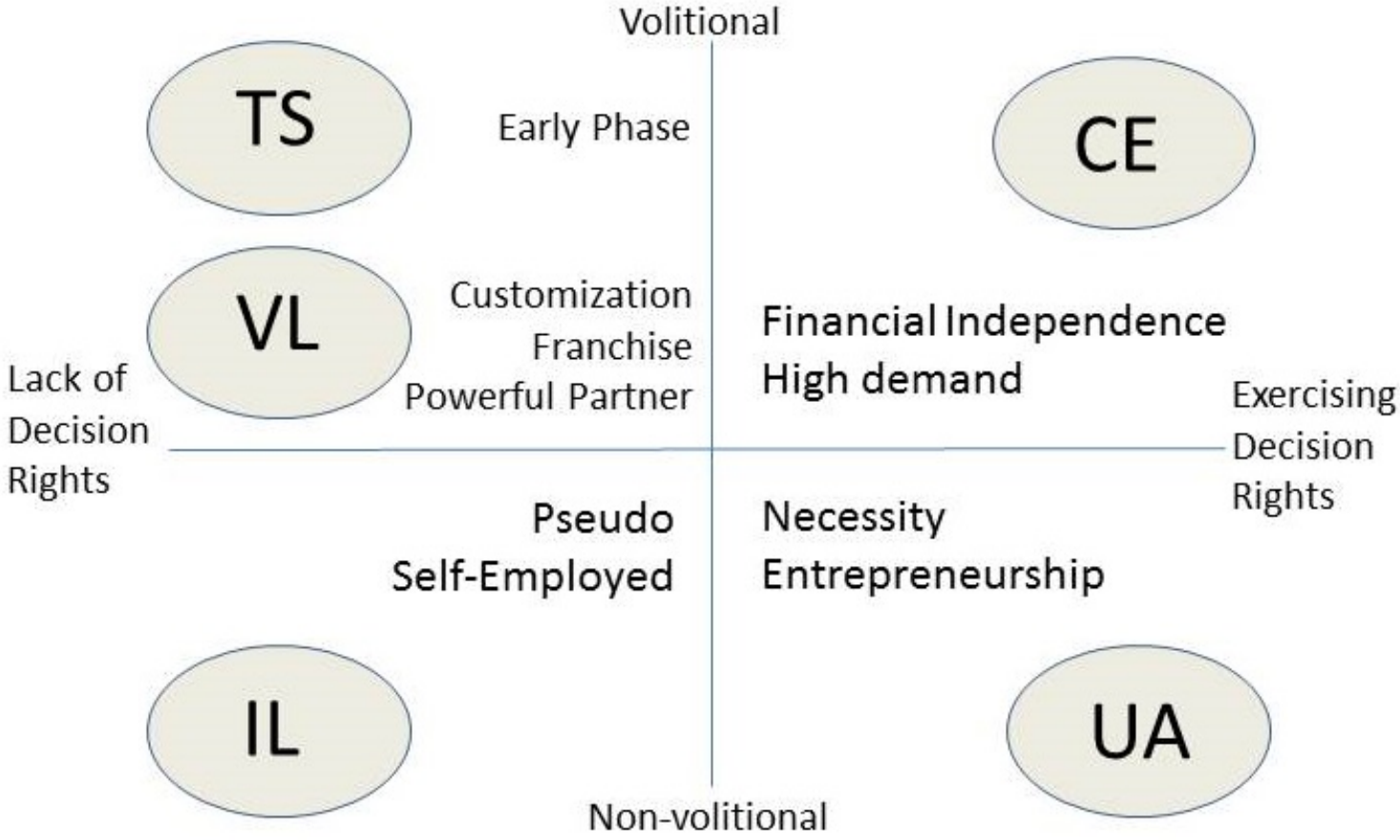
1	Johan, an entrepreneur in the real-estate business, likes being self-employed so that he can arrange his own working schedule and take a day off whenever he likes. After he runs his business for a couple of months, he notices that he is working more than 80 hours per week and finds it difficult to take time off for himself. (A)
2	Fred, a portfolio entrepreneur in the internet sector, likes to make his own decisions. However, he sometimes finds it difficult to be solely responsible for the decisions made concerning his various companies. (A)
3	Ted is a young man who quit his job to start his own financial business, as he does not like to be told what to do. However, a demanding customer has many difficult and detailed requests regarding the way he should set up the financial administration of the customer's company. (B)
4	Jenny chose to have her own firm as she does not like authorities telling her what to do. She has hired an employee who, as it turns out, also does not like authorities. Jenny is now in the position of being a boss or authority of someone who does not like authorities. (B)
5	Bart is an entrepreneur who has discovered a new form of vacuum cleaning. He wants to bring the product to the market. He has applied for many entrepreneurial competitions and won various innovation prices. However, the market shows little interest in his innovative product. (C)
6	Shanna is a web designer and has a small company. She likes to do things her own way because she wants to express her creativity in her designs. An important client asks her to deliver a website that Shanna finds to be below her standards and not in line with the way she would normally design a website. (C)
7	Vera is an entrepreneur in the creative industries. She likes to be in control, yet she operates in a challenging and uncertain market and it is unclear how much she will earn this month. (D)
8	Carlo, a young entrepreneur who just finished his master's degree, wants to set up a retail business in his own way. However, he is bound to various rules and regulations from the government concerning the manner in which he must set up his business.(D)
9	Vermont owns a hairdresser business. He wants to be more in control of the marketing and branding side of the business, but his business/financial partner disagrees and sticks to his opinion. (D)

A = Intrinsic enjoyment of autonomy; B = Avoiding a boss; C = Self-expression; D = Control.
Original version in Dutch.

Table 3 Themes, codes and quote examples

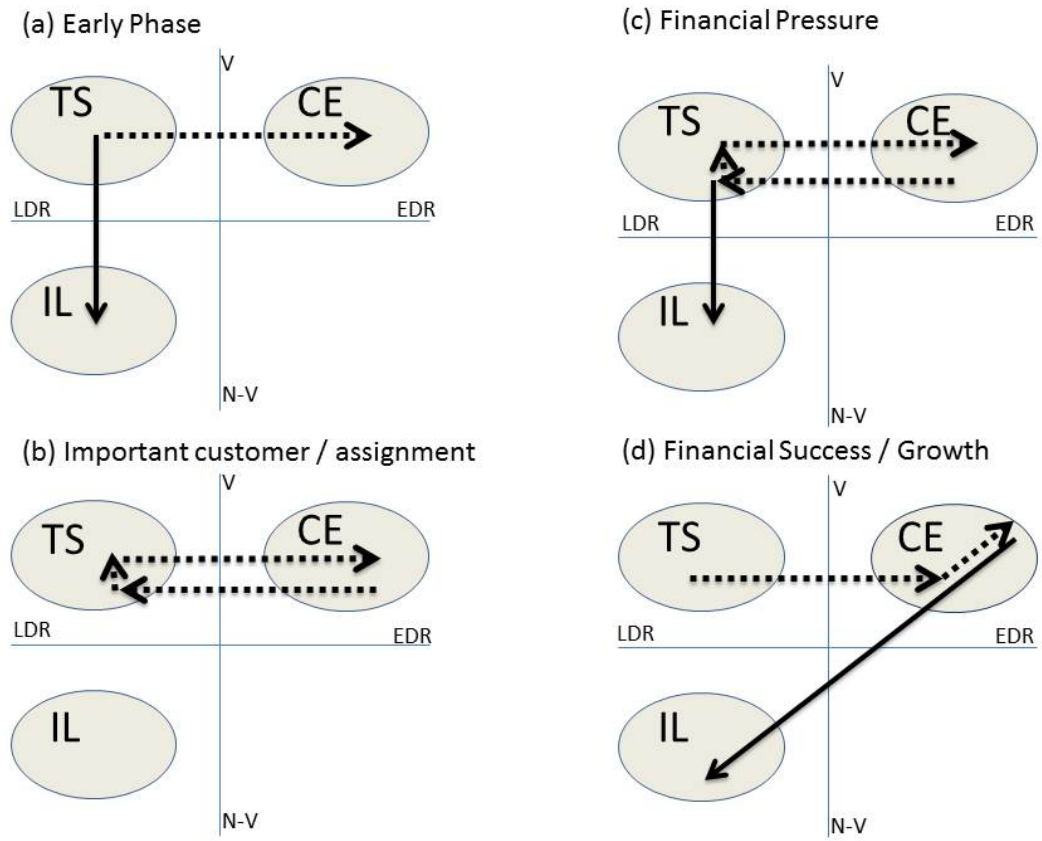
Theme	*Examples of codes*	*Example of quote*
customer threatening autonomy	renegotiations; conflicting demands; (did not) compromise; (did not) adjust; boundaries; norms; ethics; dependence; reputation; name; protect brand; secretly comply;	"Never let them change the concept of the brand. That's going to be the end of your business."
business partner enhancing autonomy	shared decision making; shared goal; shared vision; advice, discussion, consultation, sparring (to arrive at better / more confident decisions;	"Totally alone, that wouldn't feel good. I like working with other people. Then you can make a better decision."
autonomy and confidence	confidence; belief, vision; knowledge; patience; trust (in product); trust (in own abilities); competence; informal authority; pride	"You have to be so confident, so competent, that customers accept what you will tell them."
volitional nature	was expected; planned for; now … later; once … then; knew in advance; dependent on business cycle phase; temporary; sacrifice;	"I knew beforehand that if you start a restaurant, you know you have to work very long hours until it is a success."
experience of autonomy as well as constraints	*occurrence of codes in same interview of CE of autonomy and constraints:* make own decisions; being free; not adjust to market; not adjust to customer *and* constraints (customers, employees, partners, regulation); adjust; give in; compromise; autonomy is relative;	"Freedom is great. I can go horse riding midweek, and I do. But the work piles up and still needs to be done."
power versus dependencies	adjust/give in/compromise if poor financial position; if early phase, if financially dependent; adjust; market leads; customer is king; if unimportant; if little effort; importance of customer; relevance of customer; if not busy; survival; (refuse) investors; buffer, financial backup; financial independence;	"If the organization grows bigger you get limited by all kinds of factors, so autonomy is hard to achieve."

Figure 1 Autonomy at the start of the business



CE = Autonomy Currently Experienced; TS = Autonomy Temporarily Sacrificed; VL = Autonomy Voluntarily Lost; IL = Autonomy Involuntary Lost; UA = Unsolicited Autonomy.

Figure 2 Autonomy dynamics in relation to various determinants



Dots: movement towards more autonomy; Solids: movement towards less autonomy
CE = Autonomy Currently Experienced; TS = Autonomy Temporarily Sacrificed; IL = Autonomy Involuntary Lost
EDR=Exercising Decision Rights; LDR=Lack of Decision Rights; V=Volitional (Voluntary); N-V=Non-Volitional