

THE AUTONOMY RESEARCHES AS THE PART OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP¹

Jarosław Karpacz
Jan Kochanowski University, Poland
j.karpacz@interia.pl

Abstract:

The issue of entrepreneurship is one of the most discussed topic in the management studies. At the same time, clear solutions and answers about, for example, measurement of the entrepreneurship level, have not been worked out yet. One of the possibilities of its measurement is entrepreneurship orientation (EO). The researches foreordain EO to be one of the measures of the level of entrepreneurship, as EO reflects the attitude of the companies to be involved in the strategic activities with innovation, proactiveness and risk-taking. The attitude of the company is determined by two endings of a continuum, one representing the conservative firm, and the other entrepreneurial. This is the reason why the researchers point to EO as a kind of a guidance for taking entrepreneurial activities, which are the effect of searching and seizing the opportunities by the firm. However, while all researchers agree to perceive EO as the tool of the entrepreneurial measurement, they cannot reach the agreement on the issues of conceptualization and operationalisation of EO. Recognition of these issues will show the role of autonomy in the development of entrepreneurship both on the organisational and individual level. Therefore, determining the role of the autonomy in the entrepreneurial researches as the objective of the study seems to be well founded. The overview of the scientific studies dealing with the attempt to understand and explain the role of the autonomy in the development of entrepreneurship will lead to ambiguous conclusions. The scientific literature studies revealed a dual character of autonomy in the entrepreneurial researches. Two points of view were presented. The first approach presumes that autonomy is the antecedence of business activity of an entrepreneurial nature, while the other approach points to autonomy as one of the EO dimensions. The views of most researchers are closer to the first approach.

Keywords: entrepreneurship orientation, innovativeness, autonomy, performance

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1. INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship orientation (EO) is one of the domains of the researches on entrepreneurship, where knowledge is developed in many equal ways as well as various levels of analysis. EO as the entrepreneurial measure tool is very popular among the researchers (Todorovic, Todorovic, & Ma, 2015). However, there is a lack of the agreement among them as for the definition of entrepreneurship, especially on the individual level. Some of the problems may be summarized in the observation that entrepreneurship is often discussed and evaluated at different levels (Lee, Lee, & Pennings, 2001). The dimensions of EO may occur in different combinations, each representing a different and independent aspect of the multidimensional concept of EO.

The controversies of the definition of entrepreneurship cast a shadow on conceptualization and operationalisation of EO as its measurement tool. Therefore it is proper to explain the reasons for different interpretations of entrepreneurship, which have an influence on the functions of autonomy of the individual and organizational level. There are at least a few reasons for different views of the researchers about this topic. Starting from controversies of the definition of entrepreneurship, then formulating the ways of its measurement, to the dilemmas of operationalisation of EO in the end. It is worthy to be mentioned here, that the autonomy apart from the competitive aggressiveness is one of the dimensions of EO, which starts a lot of controversies.

This means that the entrepreneurship construct is not clearly understood because we deal with multidimensional phenomena and various activities (Ireland, Reutzell, & Webb, 2005). Entrepreneurship requires courageous avoiding of the clichés, which means it cannot be planned. What is more, it is the opposite of the rational choices among well-defined alternatives of business activeness, as well as, being attached to the vision implemented with the use of power or conviction (Bratnicki, 2007, p. 67). First of all, entrepreneurship is the process realized through the active participation of persons in the company. It means that it is closely connected with the persons who initiate new organizational enterprises and are involved in them (Rauch, Wiklund, Lumpkin, & Frese, 2009). It means that for the firms of entrepreneurship orientation it is important that the persons and working teams have freedom in choice taking and actions, which results in the fact that the decisions and actions will not be impeded with the organizational limitations or strategic parameters. It means that autonomy is the essential condition for the members of the organization to carry on new enterprises (Covin & Slevin, 1989; Miller, 1983; de Jong, Parker, Wennekers, & Wu, 2015). This means, that independent actions of the members of the organisation or by the whole team leading to the achievement of the defined ideas or visions, require the freedom to act. Thus, dealing with this topic is the result of the pragmatic reasons, which come from the business practice. The findings above incline defining the role of the autonomy in the entrepreneurial research as the aim of this study.

2. THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN AUTONOMY AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP ORIENTATION.

Entrepreneurship refers to individual opportunistic activities that create value and bear risk, and that are strongly associated with innovation. Entrepreneurship is based on identifying market opportunities and creating a unique set of resources and capabilities through which to exploit them (Rigtering, Kraus, Eggers, & Jensen, 2014). The level of entrepreneurship within a firm can be assessed according to its EO. Miller (1983) states that EO consists of the three dimensions of proactiveness, innovativeness, and risk-taking. EO as a research area has grown immensely during the last couple of years and is one of the most popular branches within entrepreneurship research (Covin & Lumpkin, 2011). This indicates that the concept is indeed a solid measure of the level of entrepreneurship in companies (Rigtering, Kraus, Eggers, & Jensen, 2014).

Entrepreneurship orientation is defined as the coherent set of interrelated actions and processes (Miles, & Arnold, 1991), which includes the willingness to innovations, risk searching, self-directing of actions and being more proactive and aggressive than the competitors against the market opportunities (Li, Huang, & Tsai, 2009).

That is why, EO is perceived as the hope for the firms to be able to perform in the competitive business environments (Eggers, Kraus, Hughes, Laraway, & Snyckerski, 2013), as it helps people to notice new opportunities, which are not visible for the others (Gupta, Niranjana, Goktan, & Eriskon,

2015). Entrepreneurship orientation is considered to be the driving force of the firm in the direction of the entrepreneurial activeness (Covin, & Wales, 2012). This form of understanding of a company defines it from the entrepreneurial perspective (Ma, & Tan, 2006). It represents the way of thinking about entrepreneurship, which can be reflected in the organizational culture and ongoing processes. This orientation is connected with formulating the strategy of the firm and shaping of attitudes, as well as, the behaviour of the individual employees of the firm (Covin, & Slevin, 1989). EO has often been operationalized in terms of three dimensions identified by Covin and Slevin (1989), Miller and Friesen (1982), viz., 'innovativeness', 'risk-taking' and 'proactiveness', to characterize and test entrepreneurship (Vij, & Bedi, 2012). Covin and Slevin think that the entrepreneurial organization should have a high value of all three dimensions. This assumption was abolished by Lumpkin and Dess, who introduced two new dimensions autonomy and competitive aggressiveness. Finally, in their opinion the dimensions of the construct – the entrepreneurship orientation are: innovativeness, proactiveness, risk taking, aggressive competitiveness and autonomy (Lyon, Lumpkin, & Dess, 2000). The list of the dimensions is still open, as in the scientific literature new alternative EO dimensions keep appearing. (Rauch, Wiklund, Lumpkin, & Frese, 2009). EO is an important measure of the organisation of the firm. It was conceived as a procedural and decision-making action which is used by the entrepreneur to act entrepreneurially (Lumpkin i Dess, 2001; Rauch, Wiklund, Frese, Lumpkin, & 2006;. Kreiser i Davis, 2010).

In conclusion, EO represents the strategic orientation of the firm and it is perceived as the extent of its improvement, with risk taking, aggressive competitiveness and independent and active initiatives. It is worth mentioning that entrepreneurship orientation is a crucial element of the high effectiveness of the firm (Ziębicki, 2014). EO can be found both at the organizational and individual levels. Individual entrepreneurship orientation includes deeply rooted values and convictions connected with being proactive, innovative and risk-taking at the same time (Göktaş, & Gupta, 2015). The latest researches present individual entrepreneurship orientation as a psychological construct which is especially important for understanding individual behaviours and choices at the place of work (Bolton, M. D. Lane, 2012). This results in the pressure on the development and supporting of the entrepreneurial inclinations and practices among the employees on all levels of the firm (Taatila, 2012). Under these circumstances researching on individual entrepreneurship orientation, especially on the role of the autonomy of the employees (the autonomy of an individual level) seems to be highly timely and practically useful.

It is worth to mention, that despite many years of discussions the researchers did not reach an agreement on the definition of the entrepreneurship orientation itself, as well as, its measure tools (Ziębicki, 2014). Generally in the researches of the connection between the entrepreneurship orientation and the business results, autonomy is rarely treated as one of the dimensions used in the orientation measurement. According to the met-analysis of Rauch Wiklund, Lumpkin, & Frese, (2009), only in 3 out of 51 empirical studies, autonomy was included in the measure instruments of entrepreneurship orientation. It means that autonomy is more commonly regarded by the researchers as the antecedence of the entrepreneurship orientation than its dimension (Lim, & Enrick, 2012; Lumpkin, Coglisier, & Schneider, 2009).

The findings of researchers show the connection between the autonomic behaviour in small companies and the level of centralization (Shan, & Song, 2016). It was stated, among other things, that the high level of the entrepreneurial behaviours is usually related to the independent leaders, who possess strong centralized power in small firms. Autonomy is essential as a leverage in the processes of using the strengths of a particular company in order to identify the chances, which are beyond of the possibilities of the firm at that moment, and supporting new enterprises and/or improving business practices (Kanter, & North, 1990). Many researchers claim, that autonomy is an essential condition, but still insufficient for appearing and developing of entrepreneurial initiatives. Therefore, it is a fundamental feature of entrepreneurially oriented companies (Lumpkin, Coglisier, & Schneider, 2009).

3. INDIVIDUAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL OF AUTONOMY ON THE BASIS OF EO – SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE FINDINGS.

Autonomy of an individual level means the “degree to which the work ensures the substantial independence of an individual in the process of work-planning and in determining the procedures of its implementation” (de Jong, Parker, Wennekers, Wu, 2015). In other words, it sets out the scope, in which the employees can decide, which tasks they will do and how (Rapp, Agnihotri, Baker, &

Andzulis, 2015). In the consequence, autonomy provides the employees with the possibility of self-determination, which allows to have a more direct impact on the results of the company (Hartog, & Belschak, 2012).

Providing the employees by the management with a greater level of autonomy is closely connected with their proactive behaviours, which are related to a greater foreseeing and solving problems (Parker, & Collins, 2010) and they contribute to the increase of the effectiveness of the employees (Rapp, Agnihotri, Baker, & Andzulis, 2015), which is defined in praxeology as a positive feature of all the actions resulting in a positive outcome, whether it was intentional or not (Ziębicki, 2014).

Autonomy enables and motivates people to contribute to the company. It encourages the employees at all levels of the firm to act independently and to take initiatives. For example, sales staff frequently have to deal with the demands of the customers in "real time" and therefore they have to act without direct control of the managers. It seems that the higher level of autonomy of these employees will allow them to work actively on the opportunities which can appear while dealing with the customers and/or solving the problems, which occur in such interactions (Rapp, Agnihotri, Baker, & Andzulis, 2015). For the employees autonomy means that they are authorized, independent and self-reliant, therefore they can use all the available resources without the need to discuss it every time with their managers, when they deal with exceptional situations (Rapp, Agnihotri, Baker, & Andzulis, 2015).

From the organizational point of view, the job autonomy is essential for an individual employee. In spite of being important, such practices seem to be time-consuming, destructive and more expensive than the work environments based on rules and procedures (Lumpkin, Brigham, & Moss, 2010). Job autonomy is the degree to which the job provides substantial freedom, independence, and discretion to the individual in scheduling the work and in determining the procedures to be used in carrying it out (De Spiegelaere, Gyes, De Witte, Niesen & Van Hootegem, 2015). Perceived job autonomy refers to the extend to which a job is perceived to allow freedom, independence, and discretion to schedule work, make decision, and choose the methods used to perform task (Buch, Dysvik, Kuvaas, & Nerstad, 2015). Job autonomy is associated with various positive effects of work, such as commitment to work or the innovativeness of an employee. Autonomy of employees means that the management approves to use their (employees') skills (De Spiegelaere, Gyes, De Witte, Niesen & Van Hootegem, 2015).

Job autonomy lets the employee find and develop the way of performing tasks, giving the employee the feeling of having control on how the work is being done. Consequently, the employees have better work results as they are more involved in what they are doing. Moreover, to help the employee become creative and innovative, he or she needs enough space for that. Innovative behaviour is based on experimenting with different alternatives in order to find a new, more accurate solution. It allows the employees to find new ideas and develop them by implementing them on a small scale. What is more, the researches show that employees with greater autonomy are more willing to share their knowledge (Cabrera, Collings & Salgado, 2006). Consequently, autonomy is perceived as a strong indicator of the innovative behaviour of an employee. Autonomy in the workplace is therefore crucial for employees to reveal their innovative behaviours (De Spiegelaere, Gyes, De Witte, Niesen & Van Hootegem, 2015).

Job autonomy is often considered as a main antecedence of the creativity of employees, despite of the ongoing discussion on how it affects the innovative behaviours of the employees (for example, Chang Huang & Choi, 2012; Battistelli, Montaniero & Odoardi, 2013). Moreover, researches do not focus only on examining of the direct connection between job autonomy and innovative behaviours of workers, but they reflect indirect impact of job commitment on this connection. Job commitment has recently received a lot of attention as an important mediator in the relation between job characteristic and the individual results of employees. The independence and the freedom of work perceived by the employees increases the work control. The awareness of the employee, that his/her actions can have negative consequences on equal distribution of the effects when the contribution to them is low, should be strengthen (Greenberg, 2006). For example, increasing the possibilities of controlling operational actions by employees will mean for the them, that their firm treats them fairly according to the work benefits and how they were achieved.

Additional support for providing the employees with autonomy relates it to work rewards and remunerations. According to some researchers (Haar & Spell, 2009), autonomy can be perceived as a

kind of non-monetary reward as it is positively connected to job satisfaction. Autonomy can satisfy the needs of employees and there is no need to pay for it. Other researchers (Campion & Berger, 1990) suggest that work planning (with autonomy as its characteristic feature) can also be perceived as a reward. Then, the meta-analysis by Williams, McDaniel and Nguyen (2006) shows that job autonomy is strongly connected with satisfactory salary. Spell and Arnold (2007) claimed that the sense of control over work is negatively related to anxiety and depression of work. Job autonomy – as it has been already mentioned – is one of the main conditions of realization of innovative behaviours of an employee (De Spiegelaere, Gyes, De Witte, Niesen & Van Hootegeem, 2014).

On the other hand, in the organizational context, autonomy refers to the freedom of taking action, independently from organizational limitations connected to establishing and proper functioning of the enterprise. Independent entrepreneurial actions guarantee the impetus which is needed for exploring business opportunities, selecting business concepts and realizing them (Lumpkin, Cogliser, Schneider, 2009). In the scientific literature on entrepreneurship, autonomy is defined as the extent to which persons or teams are able to perform independently creating new ideas and realizing them (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). Thus, autonomy is treated as the ability and the willingness to be independent in following opportunities (Rauch, Wiklund, Lumpkin, Frese, 2009). These definitions of autonomy reflects the consensus of some manner of using this term by researchers. Historically, autonomy was treated as a uni-dimensional construct with confusing results of the research which showed the weakness of this approach (Rauch, Wiklund, Lumpkin, Frese, 2009). In practice, autonomy can reflect numerous conditions, such as: tight vs. loose control, unified vs. adjusted policy, centralized vs. decentralized processes, which were considered in the initial researches as the ones which affected the results of the firms. At presents, researchers suggest that autonomy should be examined as a multidimensional (Covin & Miles, 2007) construct operationalised by: independent actions of the entrepreneur, implementing of the idea, vision and finalizing them, the ability to be self-directed in the process of searching for opportunities, the actions taken in the firm regardless its rigid framework, contextuality, as autonomy depends on the size of the company, its management style, structure and properties (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996).

Supporting autonomy in the organizational context can be both effective with approaches “from top to bottom” as well as “from bottom to top” (Quinn & Spreitzer, 1997). The companies with entrepreneurial mission use “from top to bottom” approach to encourage entrepreneurship (Birkinshaw, 1997). In such firms, the top management supports the programs and initiatives conducive to creating a business climate of entrepreneurship, which should be treated as a specific variation of the organizational support (Bratnicka, 2010) of the participants while welcoming autonomous decision making. Support of independent thinking and management actions is present in encouraging employees to spend ten percent of their time on creating new ideas, allow to take some risky ventures by each employee of the firm and the support of small teams (Lumpkin, Cogliser, & Schneider, 2009).

Some entrepreneurial ventures are created with “from bottom to top” approach. Individual decision making in such company may involve the need of special incentives and structural solutions in order to create the support risky ventures. The fact, that in some firms even the best ideas are not welcomed by the top management, cannot be ignored (Dougherty & Hardy, 1996). If the entrepreneurial initiatives are not supported or suppressed, the activeness of key (entrepreneurial) persons can be implemented outside, to generate entrepreneurial results there (Burgelman, 1983). Such persons are greatly valuable for the firm, as they provide the impetus needed for realizing the opportunities and implementing the entrepreneurial vision (Bird, 1988; Green, Brush, & Hart, 1999). Persons, who act beyond routines and practices, stimulate the development of entrepreneurship in the firm, being an important source of creativity, initiatives (Ongore & K’Obonyo, 2011) and of promoting of starting entrepreneurial ventures (Lumpkin, Cogliser, & Schneider, 2009).

According to the concept of Lumpkin and others (2009), autonomy has the hierarchic structure, which means that different levels or degrees of autonomy can be controlled by a group depending on actions or decisions. The area, where the group has control and can make decisions about the factors in the work environment is referred as structural autonomy. This kind of autonomy allows the team to solve the problem with self-deciding on the ways of using of resources within provided resources limitations. Structural autonomy is a specific behavior, which uses the advantage of networks collecting information about people and reducing the relations between them. Strategic autonomy or “goal-based autonomy” refers to the degree to which the group has the control over its goals. Strategic autonomy allows the teams to work beyond usual organizational limitations by setting the goals and the ways of

achieving them. As for the scale position, strategic autonomy is situated above structural autonomy. From the perspective of entrepreneurship autonomy refers primarily to the strategic autonomy. Higher levels or strategic dimensions of autonomy allow the team (or the person), not only to solve the problems but actually to define the problems and goals for solving this problem. The level of strategic autonomy can be compared to the way of implementing of strategies or a qualitative autonomy of a goal. The behaviours of the members of the company aiming at innovation depend on the kind of autonomy. The role of the managers is to encourage the employees to experiment and take risks through organizational systems and informal processes both on the individual and team level. The autonomy level possessed by a team is positively connected with the efficiency of knowledge management, as a higher level of autonomy makes creating the transfer and application of knowledge easier. The more strategic autonomy becomes, there is more sharing of different types of knowledge, which supports entrepreneurial results. In sum, autonomy, pursuit of opportunities, and willingness to face challenges are necessary factors in EO (Covin & Slevin, 1989; Miller, 1983).

4. CONCLUSIONS

EO in empirical researches was conceptualized in different ways and described by different number of dimensions. However, at the moment there is no clear answer to the question about the proper number of the dimensions of EO, because the answer depends on the meaning the researchers give to this concept while carrying out a research. EO can be conceptualized in many equal ways and different methods of analysis. Therefore, it can be assumed that autonomy still will be treated by some researchers as one of the EO dimensions, both on the individual and organizational level, while other researchers will treat it as the ascendance of EO. All the researchers agree that appropriately high level of autonomy is essential for entrepreneurial activeness of an individual employee, teams or the company. An interesting direction for researches emerging from this study of scientific literature is recognition of both sides of autonomy, its bright and dark side in multiple situational perspectives. This may mean that it leads both to positive and negative effects.

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