

Joanna Pyrkosz-Pacyna*

AGH University of Science and Technology
ORCID: 0000-0002-9112-8629

TASK PERCEPTION AS A MODERATOR OF MOTIVATION–SATISFACTION RELATION AMONG NASCENT POLISH ENTREPRENEURS**

Tasks undertaken by nascent entrepreneurs are oftentimes distant from their main scope of interest and skills. The question emerges whether the perception of those tasks influences the motivational processes of entrepreneurs and their work satisfaction. In this empirical study of nascent Polish entrepreneurs, we were able to observe that indeed in some cases the perception of the performed tasks moderates the relation between entrepreneurs' motivation and work satisfaction. For example, among those entrepreneurs who assessed the educational value of performed tasks highly, the relation between intrinsic motivation and work satisfaction was positive. Those findings are of significant importance when it comes to supporting entrepreneurship activity. It is advised to be aware of factors influencing entrepreneurs' motivation to work in order to sustain their productivity and engagement.

Keywords: entrepreneurship, motivation, work satisfaction, job characteristics, entrepreneur

THEORETICAL INTRODUCTION

The perception of performed vocational tasks has been proven to have a significant impact on key work aspects such as work motivation, satisfaction, perseverance, performance and absenteeism (Casey and Robbins 2010; Hackman and Oldham 1975). According to the classic Hackman and Oldham's Job Characteristics Model, there are several job dimensions that have a crucial impact on workers' job experience. In their theory, the authors pointed out five crucial factors: *skill variety* – the degree to which a job requires a variety of different activities and the use of different talents; *task identity* – the degree to which a job requires a completion of a whole and identifiable piece of work from beginning to end; *task significance* – the degree to which a task has an influence and impact on the lives of other people; *autonomy* – the degree to which a job provides freedom and independence in terms of scheduling and other

* Corresponding author: Joanna Pyrkosz-Pacyna, AGH Akademia Górniczo-Hutnicza, Wydział Humanistyczny, ul. Gramatyka 8a, 30-071 Kraków; e-mail: jpyrkosz@agh.edu.pl.

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procedures required to carry out the task; and *feedback* – the degree to which completing the task results in obtaining direct and clear information regarding one’s effectiveness and performance. According to the theory and research (Hackman and Oldham 1975), these factors influence workers’ motivation, performance and satisfaction. Influence of task parameters can be found in other studies as well. Thomas and Velthouse (1990) focused on four similar factors when investigating task propensities and their impact on motivation: *autonomy*, *competence*, *meaningfulness* and *impact*. According to Karasek (1979) job *demands* when paired with lack of *control* are vastly influential in terms of experienced work stress. Karasek’s Job Demands-Control model was further developed by Demerouti and colleagues (2001) who proposed a Job Demands-Resources model (JD-R). According to the JD-R model, workers’ well-being is dependent on the job demands faced (e.g. complexity, role ambiguity, responsibility) and unique resources possessed (e.g. craftsmanship, social climate, trust in management) (Schaufeli and Taris 2014). When the demands are too overwhelming and resources are insufficient, employees may experience burnout and a general decline in efficiency.

Numerous studies support the assumption that some aspects of work characteristics lead to a positive outcome in terms of motivational processes which in turn lead to better performance (Gagne and Deci 2005). In recent years, however, most of the studies regarding task propensities have been conducted among employees, omitting those who are self-employed. Carrying out tasks as an entrepreneur is an utterly different experience than while being employed and managed by others. What is so unique about the entrepreneurial tasks? Firstly, they are rarely the output of careful work design creation, but rather the outcome of emerging needs. Secondly, tasks that nascent entrepreneurs undertake are usually new and unfamiliar, making them potentially stressful and intimidating. Also, the variety of tasks needed to be carried out by an entrepreneur are usually wide, and they do not easily fit into all their predominant skill sets. For example, nascent entrepreneurs are expected to deal with many organizational aspects of company organization and management such as financing, marketing, and recruitment, among many others. Entrepreneurs are personally responsible for all decisions and their work is characterized by high autonomy. Entrepreneurs have a deep understanding of the purpose of each performed task so they experience the meaningfulness of making an impact, and the possibility to do so, differently than employed staff. They carry out various duties daily, so they can utilize many of their skills. Those work conditions have a unique influence on entrepreneurs’ work experience that cannot be easily comparable with those of employees. It is to be expected that facing such demanding and pressing activities might moderate the ongoing processes between motivational state and entrepreneurial satisfaction.

A vast body of research indicates that entrepreneurs are predominantly highly motivated individuals with clear goals, need for achievement, perseverance, and internal locus of control (Baron and Shane 2004; Baum and Locke 2004; Baum, Frese and Baron 2007; Frese 2009; Markman, Baron and Balkin 2005; Rotter 1966). These lines of studies suggest that entrepreneurial motivation is not secondary to task characteristics but rather occurs as a baseline, as the starting point of entrepreneurial activity. On the other hand, the relation between motivation and many effectiveness determinants such as work satisfaction is very well-established (Gagne and Deci 2005). Motivation is said to be strong predictor of

entrepreneurial efficacy in terms of firm creation as its profitability (Collins, Hanges and Locke 2004; Rauch and Frese 2007).

The relation between motivation and work satisfaction is well established in previous research, yet types of duties undertaken in the entrepreneurial process may influence this relationship, especially when considering the specific type of motivation. Self Determination Theory (Gagne and Deci 2005; Gagne et al. 2010) provides a solid framework for investigating motivational processes in the work setting. The theory describes a continuum of motivational states, where intrinsic motivation is described as the most desirable in terms of engagement and effectiveness. Intrinsic motivation has been proven to be associated with long-term commitment, stronger perseverance and better work results in comparison to extrinsic motivation, which is dependent on external rewards such as money or social recognition (Gagne et al. 2010). A supplementary type of motivation described in the Self Determination Theory (Gagne and Deci 2005) is integrated motivation, which is characterized as the internalization of extrinsic motives. Internalization occurs when a person realizes the importance of performed tasks and pursues them even though they are not particularly interesting or pleasant. It is a manifestation of commitment and in this way, it is close to intrinsic motivation. The type of initial motivation is hypothesized to be related to satisfaction differently when considering the perception of the performed task.

It is worth mentioning that the moderating effect of job characteristics on the relation between work motivation and work satisfaction has not been investigated in entrepreneurial setting thus far. Most of the data we have and can use to predict interactions between situational (tasks characteristic) and dispositional (motivation) factors is based on studies on employees or managers. Research that combines both situational and dispositional aspects of work activity is scarce in general. It is possible that among those employees and managers whose work is similar to entrepreneurial behaviors (managers, artists, etc.) similar effects would appear. The results of meta-analysis (Rauch and Frese 2007; Zhao et al. 2006) in entrepreneurship psychology suggest that the most adequate data in this field of studies can be obtained while considering complex models that include both individual and situational factors set in a highly specific context (Wang et al. 2010). The presented study is an example of such a multi-factor approach.

RESEARCH QUESTION AND HYPOTHESES

The aim of the presented study was to establish whether perceived characteristics of performed tasks moderate the motivation–work satisfaction relationship among nascent Polish entrepreneurs. The characteristics of the tasks considered in the study are: *educational value* of the task – the degree to which one finds performed duties as informative and useful in terms of professional skills development, *difficulty* of the task – the degree to which one perceives carried out tasks as demanding, *satisfaction* of performing the task – the degree to which one experiences satisfaction and personal contentment when performing the task, and *taking interest in performing* the task – the degree to which one finds their performed tasks interesting and engaging. The type of initial motivation (at the very beginning of starting

the company) is hypothesized to be related to satisfaction differently when considering the perception of the performed task. The tested assumption is that intrinsic and integrated motivation is connected to higher work satisfaction when performed tasks are more challenging and stimulating (high difficulty, high educational value, high satisfaction, high interest in performed tasks) as is theorized in the Job Characteristics Model (Hackman and Oldham 1975) and the Job Demands-Resources Model (Karasek 1979). Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is hypothesized to be connected to higher work satisfaction when evaluation of performed tasks is low on the described dimensions.

METHOD

The study was conducted as a part of the three-year-long research project “Psychological aspects of entrepreneurship. Motives, mechanisms and consequences of entrepreneurial activity” in the Małopolska region. A group of nascent entrepreneurs was enrolled in the research project. Participants were recruited during their obligatory training as part of an entrepreneurship enhancement program. During the research period, the participants started and ran their own companies in various domains (retail, IT, high-tech or innovative solutions, etc.) and on different scales (self-employment, small company with employees, family firm, etc.). Participants filled in several questionnaires over the three years of the research project. The research team contacted participants annually via email, sending links to online questionnaires. First, participants filled in the RMAWS motivation scale described below ($N = 99$)¹. This group consisted of 68 females and 31 males, age = 29.6 ($SD = 6.9$), 57 single (58%) and 42 married (42%); 67 participants (80%) were university graduates (BA degree or higher). In the following year, participants were asked to fill in questionnaires regarding task perception and work satisfaction (described below). Due to several factors (e.g. the duration of the research, multiple measurements used in the study, loss of those of participants who decided to terminate their entrepreneur activity) the number of participants included in the final analysis was significantly reduced. In the final analysis 28 participants were considered. Female = 20, male = 8; Age: 37.6 ($SD: 9.7$); 20 married (71%) and 8 single (29%); 23 participants (92%) were university graduates (BA degree or higher). When compared to the first group, the final group of participants differs slightly but not significantly in terms of age, education and marital status. The final sample consists of older married participants with higher level of university education. Participants in the first analysis did not differ in terms of motivation (RMAWS) from the final sample².

Questionnaires used in the study are described below:

- 1) RMAWS Revised Motivation at Work Scale, Polish adaptation by Krzych and Tokarz (2011) is a scale aimed at measuring different types of motivation including intrinsic, extrinsic and integrated in accordance with self-determination theory. The instructions state: “Using

¹ Within the entire group of recruited participants 99 filled in the RMAWS scale.

² External motivation ($t = .08, df = 43, p = .93$), Internal motivation ($t = .15, df = 57, p = .87$), Integrated motivation ($t = -.43, df = 56, p = .66$).

the scale below, please indicate for each of the following statements to what degree they presently correspond to one of the reasons for which you are doing this specific job”, and this is accompanied by the scale 1 = not at all; 2 = very little; 3 = a little; 4 = moderately; 5 = strongly; 6 = very strongly; 7 = exactly. The exemplary items are: Because I enjoy this work very much (for intrinsic motivation subscale), I do this job for the paycheck (for extrinsic motivation subscale).

- 2) The Work Satisfaction Scale of Anna Zalewska (2003) is a five-item scale containing statements like “If I had to decide again, I’d choose the same job” or “I am satisfied with the work” with a 7-point response scale (1 = I strongly disagree, 7 = I strongly agree).
- 3) Task perception scale developed for the purpose of the study. The scale focuses on the following aspects of the performed task: educational value of the task, difficulty of the task, satisfaction of performing the task, and taking interest in performing the task. Participants were asked to enlist the most common tasks performed in their companies and to rate them in the four mentioned dimensions. The range of answers was 1 (very boring/very easy/not at all satisfying/did not teach me anything) to 7 (very interesting/very difficult/very satisfying/taught me a lot). The aggregated data show to which extent entrepreneurs find executed tasks difficult, educationally relevant, interesting, and satisfying. The questionnaires were sent to participants via mail at two points in time: one year after starting their own company (RMAWS) and three years after starting their company (Task perception and Work Satisfaction Scale).

The reliability coefficient was as follows: RMAWS Revised Motivation at Work Scale: intrinsic motivation subscale – .82; RMAWS Revised Motivation at Work Scale: integrated motivation subscale – .69; RMAWS Revised Motivation at Work Scale: extrinsic motivation (social) subscale – .81; Work Satisfaction Scale – .85; Task perception scale: educational value of the task – .85; Task perception scale: Satisfaction with performing the task – .72; Task perception scale: Task difficulty – .79; Task perception scale: taking interest in performing the task – .70.

RESULTS

Perceived educational value of performed tasks. Interaction between intrinsic motivation and educational value of the tasks was statistically significant ($b = 0.40$, $SE = 0.17$, $\beta = .66$, $p = .030$, R^2 change: .16). Simple slope analysis showed that intrinsic motivation was a positive predictor of satisfaction when educational value of the tasks was rated as high ($b = 0.83$, $SE = 0.27$, $\beta = .87$, $p = .006$), but it did not predict satisfaction when the educational value of the tasks was rated as low ($b = -0.00$, $SE = 0.25$, $\beta = -0.00$, $p = .982$). The model was statistically significant ($F(3, 24) = 3.00$, $p = .050$, $R^2 = .27$). To find the specific value of the moderator that marks the point of transition, we used the Johnson-Neyman technique. It produced one value (5.5; 57% cases above this value). Above this value of educational value of the task, the effect of motivation on work satisfaction was significant and positive, while below this value, the effect was non-significant.

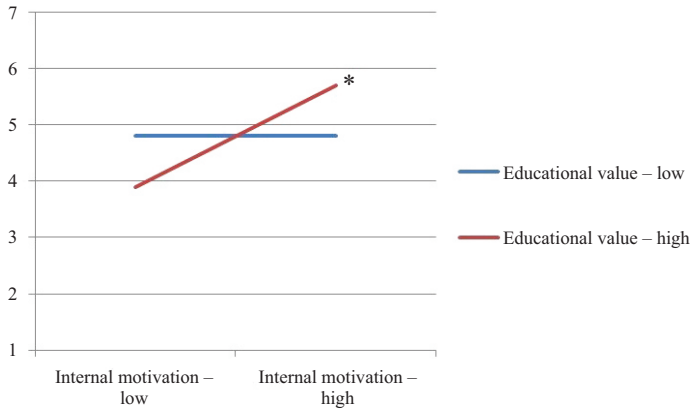


Figure 1. Work satisfaction as a function of internal motivation and educational value of tasks

Perceived satisfaction of performing the tasks. Interaction between integrated motivation and satisfaction with performing the tasks was statistically significant ($b = -0.66, SE = 0.24, \beta = -.92, p = .013, R^2$ change: .18). Simple slope analysis shows that integrated motivation was a negative predictor of work satisfaction when satisfaction of performing tasks was high ($b = -0.87, SE = 0.41, \beta = -.80, p = .042$) but it was not significant when it was low ($b = 0.40, SE = 0.26, \beta = 0.36, p = .141$). The model was statistically significant ($F(3, 24) = 4.5, p = .012, R^2 = .36$). To find the specific value of the moderator that marks the point of transition, we used the Johnson-Neyman technique. It produced two values (3.9; 92% and 6.1; 25% cases above this value). Above this value of satisfaction of performing the tasks, the effect of motivation on work satisfaction was significant and positive, while below this value, the effect was non-significant.

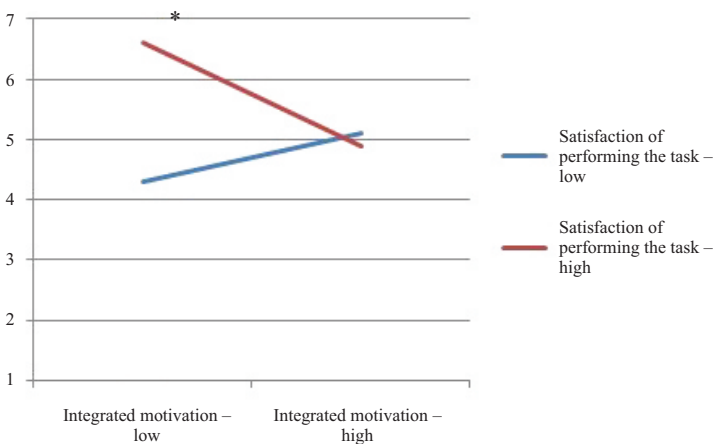


Figure 2. Work satisfaction as a function of integrated motivation and satisfaction of performing the tasks

Perceived difficulty of the task. Interaction between external motivation and task difficulty was statistically significant ($b = 0.30, SE = 0.14, \beta = .57, p = .04, R^2$ change: .13). Simple slope analysis shows that external motivation was a negative predictor of work satisfaction when the task difficulty was low ($b = -0.57, SE = 0.18, \beta = -0.75, p = .004$), but not when the task difficulty was high ($b = 0.09, SE = 0.21, \beta = .12, p = .64$). The model was statistically significant ($F(3,25) = 3.7, p = .024, R^2 = .30$). To find the specific value of the moderator that marks the point of transition, we used the Johnson-Neyman technique. It produced one value (4.5; 51% cases above this value). Above this value of the task difficulty, the effect of motivation on work satisfaction was significant and positive, and below this value, the effect was non-significant.

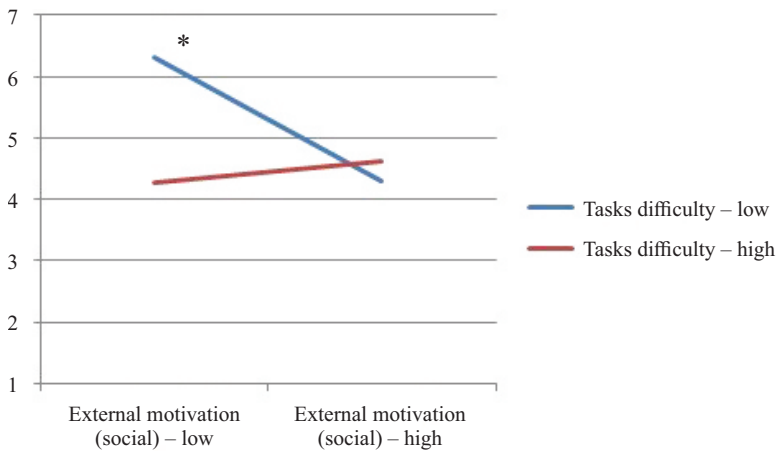


Figure 3. Work satisfaction as a function of external motivation and tasks difficulty

DISCUSSION

The results show that in some cases the perception of the performed tasks moderates the relation between entrepreneurs’ motivation and work satisfaction. Among entrepreneurs who assessed the educational value of performed tasks highly, as opposed to those who thought their tasks were low in educational value, the relation between intrinsic motivation and work satisfaction was positive. This result shows that intrinsically motivated individuals tend to be more satisfied with their work while conducting tasks of high educational value, as opposed to low-motivated individuals. This result is consistent with SDT (Gagne and Deci 2005) and highlights the connection between high intrinsic motivation and holding developmental attitudes. It would seem that the entrepreneurs who lack intrinsic motivation would not benefit from educational opportunities in the same manner as the highly motivated ones. In the group that assessed satisfaction of tasks performance highly, the relation between integrated motivation and work satisfaction was negative. In other words, there was no difference in

work satisfaction in highly motivated groups but there was among poorly motivated individuals; those who were satisfied with the tasks were also satisfied with their work in general. This result is quite interesting as it points out the specificity of integrated motivation. Also in line with the main assumptions of DT (Gagne and Deci 2005), we can observe that in cases of highly motivated individuals who internalized the goals (recognized them as important even though they are not their main interest), whether the tasks performed are satisfying or not is not important for their general work satisfaction. It is to the contrary when we take into account those with a low level of internalization. For those entrepreneurs, general work satisfaction is connected to perception of the tasks. When tasks are perceived as enjoyable, work satisfaction of those entrepreneurs is significantly higher than among those who see their duties as unpleasant. As for difficulty of the tasks, the data show that the relation between extrinsic (social) motivation and work satisfaction was negative. Again, those highly motivated individuals did not differ in work satisfaction irrespective of a task being easy or tough. At the same time, there was a significant difference in work satisfaction among low-motivated individuals who perceived their daily tasks as easy (high work satisfaction) and those who perceived them as hard (lower work satisfaction). This result is not in line with the main assumptions; thus it is not easy to justify. Perhaps high social motivation also strengthens the likelihood of putting in some effort, no matter the difficulties, whereas low need of social recognition is in line with the general effort avoidance approach. No significant interaction was found when taking into account the moderating role of taking interest in performing the task and motivation-work satisfaction relation. Taking up tasks because one has an interest in them is fundamental in SDT (Gagne and Deci 2005), especially when discussing intrinsic motivation. We should bear in mind, however, that we are dealing here with a very specific group of participants. Entrepreneurs are by extension people who design their work setting by choosing a subject they are interested in (even if down the line they need to take on some other undesirable tasks). Sims and Szilagyi (1976) prove that the higher and more independent the position, the lesser the relationship between the diversity of tasks and job satisfaction. Perhaps this mechanism is similar in the entrepreneurial setting, where independence is in a way evident. Undoubtedly, the relatively low amount of the final study sample represents a challenge for the statistical analysis and the generalization of the results. Hence, the presented study may prove useful as a stepping stone to subsequent, more in-depth analysis. This is encouraged as the gathered results suggest that task perception may have an important moderating effect on entrepreneurs' work satisfaction, especially when taking into consideration individuals' levels of motivation. Those findings are in accordance both with Self-Determination Theory (Gagne and Deci 2005) and the Job Characteristics Model (Hackman and Oldham 1975), but they shed some new light on the matter. Another interesting scope of research would be to test the alternative moderation, where motivation moderates the relation between task perception and satisfaction. We believe that these three factors are highly interdependent, and further investigation of possible relations will be very illuminating. As mentioned above, research that includes moderation effects is rare in the area of entrepreneurship (as in other fields of psychological research) and should be conducted more often. These results may be implemented in entrepreneurship support organizations in a few ways. For one thing, by showing the possible impact of performed tasks on crucial

entrepreneurial processes or by stressing the importance of founders' motivation. It should be noted, however, that the study of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs is characterized by a certain uniqueness. It allows observation of a very specific group in a very specific context. Rarely can this data be directly extrapolated to other entrepreneurs due to specific factors such as the industry, company stage of development, the country in which the company operates, or number of employees. This does not mean, however, that this area of research is not useful. On the contrary, each additional analysis enables better understanding of the mechanisms occurring in the entrepreneur process. Future research on the subject would call for extending the number of participants and including other aspects of task characteristics like feedback and social support as well as possible changes in initial motivation over time due to task characteristics.

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POSTRZEGANIE WYKONYWANYCH ZADAŃ JAKO MODERATOR RELACJI MOTYWACJA–SATYSFAKCJA WŚRÓD POCZĄTKUJĄCYCH POLSKICH PRZEDSIĘBIORCÓW

Zadania podejmowane przez początkujących przedsiębiorców są często dalekie od ich głównego zakresu zainteresowań i umiejętności. Pojawia się więc pytanie, czy postrzeganie tych zadań wpływa na procesy motywacyjne przedsiębiorców i ich satysfakcja z pracy. W badaniu początkujących polskich przedsiębiorców, byliśmy w stanie zaobserwować, że w niektórych przypadkach postrzeganie wykonywanych zadań moderuje relację między motywacją przedsiębiorców a satysfakcją z ich pracy. Wśród tych przedsiębiorców, którzy wysoko ocenili edukacyjną wartość wykonywanych przez siebie zadań, relacja między motywacją wewnętrzną a zadowoleniem z pracy była pozytywna. Wyniki te mają istotne znaczenie, jeśli chodzi o wspieranie działalności przedsiębiorczej. Świadomość czynników wpływających na motywację przedsiębiorców do pracy może przyczynić się do zwiększonej produktywności i zaangażowania w aktywności przedsiębiorczej.

Słowa kluczowe: przedsiębiorczość, motywacja, satysfakcja zawodowa, charakterystyki pracy, przedsiębiorca