



Time Management for Novice Nascent Entrepreneurs

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Abstract. Starting a business involves a range of time-consuming activities. Time however can be scarce when the nascent entrepreneur is still employed, thus working on the business after hours. In addition, novice nascent entrepreneurs usually cannot use an office to prepare their business. Rather, they operate from home, where cohabitants such as a partner or family may also demand time. The effective use of time – time management – is therefore important in order to complete the pre start-up phase successfully. This paper provides time management strategies for novice nascent entrepreneurs. It discusses using clock time instead of task time, goal setting and prioritizing, the use of schedulers and planning devices, working within one's own preference for organisation, and sharing time management experiences with other business starters.

Keywords: entrepreneurship, time-management, nascent-entrepreneurs.

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurial behaviour has been defined as “all cognitive and behavioural steps from the initial conception of a rough business idea, or first behaviour towards the realization of a new business activity, until the process is either terminated or has lead to an up and running business venture with regular sales” (Davidsson, 2004, p.212). Starting a business typically involves a range of activities such as evaluating a business idea, seeking finance, establishing an organisation, and initiating marketing, amongst many others (for examples of lists of activities see Carter, Gartner, and Reynolds, 1995; Davidsson, 2004). Conducting the range of activities implicated in starting a business takes considerable time.

This paper is written with the typical situation of the novice nascent entrepreneur in mind. Portfolio entrepreneurs and nascent intrapreneurs can start a business during their working days and from their office. In contrast, for novice entrepreneurs this is typically not the case. Many of them try to start a business while being employed, thus starting the business outside work hours (Delmar and Davidsson, 2000). Furthermore, whether employed, student, homemaker, retired, or unemployed, novice entrepreneurs will almost certainly work their way through the pre-startup phase from home.

The above two characteristics are likely to lead to increased time pressures. There can be little spare time available after the working day for a person to start

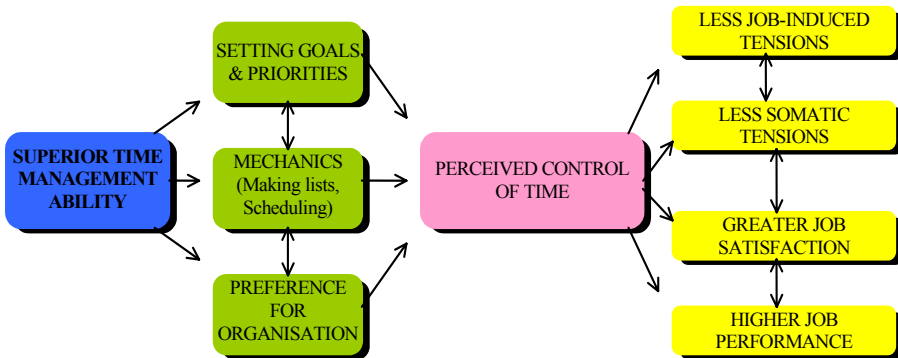
a business. Furthermore, starting a business from home may lead to conflicting time demands from other home users, for example a partner or children. As time constraints have been shown to be a potential threat to the successful completion of the start-up period (Van Gelderen, Thurik, and Bosma, 2005), effective time management should be an important consideration of the start-up entrepreneur. This paper gives a brief overview of the concept of time management. The focus of this paper is on the individuals perceptions of time control, rather than external aspects of temporality (e.g., Lee and Liebenau, 2000a). It specifically discusses strategies which are likely to lead to reduced time stress and increased perceptions of time control for the novice nascent entrepreneur.

2. The Concept of Time Management

Time is arguably our most valuable resource, being directly related to all forms of human activity. However, unlike many other resources it cannot be stored for later use (Sharp, 1981). Given that time must be spent (in one way or another), the central issue becomes how we can use it most effectively. Strategies and techniques that purport to enhance the effective use of time are typically discussed under the heading of time management (Drucker, 1966). Although the accepted term is time management, 'self management' better represents the construct. Time management concerns the processes and outcomes of strategies that people use to manage themselves in relation to time, rather than the management of time per se. That said, the term time management is widely used and understood so will be adopted in this article.

Macan's (1994) process model, shown in Figure 1, identifies three main factors which contribute to effective time management: setting goals and priorities; mechanics (including making lists and task time estimation); and preference for organisation. These three factors all contribute to a person's perceived control of time. The important part of this model is that it is perceived control of time (as opposed to some objective time usage type of measure) that results in the positive outcomes cited on the right-hand side of the figure below.

Figure 1: Macan's (1994) process model of time management



3. Starting a Business from Home

One of the most common issues discussed in the literature in relation to time management for people who work from home is the potential for work and home to conflict (e.g., Adams & Jex, 1999; Jex & Elacqua, 1999). Although work and family can interfere with each other in a number of ways, the most common forms of conflict are time-based ones, whereby the time demands associated with one role interferes with the time demands of another role (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Many home-based workers appear to find it hard to stop work intruding into their 'non-work' times (Spoonley, de Bruin, & Firkin, 2002). This applies especially to employed nascent entrepreneurs, who need to convert previous 'non-work' time into time for business startup activities.

Home-based workers with families often report feelings of unease and/or confusion concerning their availability, especially to children (Tietze & Musson, 2003). Conflict between work and family is potentially even more problematic for women, who still tend to be responsible for the majority of unpaid 'house work' (Batalova & Cohen, 2002; Elloy & Mackie, 2002) – often resulting in even higher levels of time stress (Michelson, 1998; Zuzanek & Smale, 1997). It is worth noting that single people in Tietze and Musson's study also reported similar feelings, usually to a lesser extent, towards co-residents, neighbours, or friends. As a result of this blurring of work and non-work it is essential that nascent entrepreneurs can, through their own self-discipline, implement an appropriate temporal structure for their day.

4. Time Management Strategies

What can be done to reduce the potential for conflict to arise between work and family if you are working from home? One of the biggest challengers appears to

be in “establishing fresh boundaries between work time, non-work time and legitimate availability” (Harris, 2003, p. 432). The use of routines (both temporal and spatial) is a common strategy to create boundaries (Spoonley et al., 2002). Working from home requires a renegotiation of some of the rigid temporal boundaries inherent in the work place and forces a re-negotiation of work and domestic commitments (Tietze & Musson, 2003).

This renegotiation is somewhat inevitable in that typically it is ‘clock-time’ (e.g., “I will work towards finishing this project from 6-8 each night”) which governs action in the workplace, while it tends to be ‘task-time’ (e.g., “I will retire to bed when this project is finished”) with its somewhat more flexible, fluid, and cyclic temporalities which is most predominant in household situations (Adam, 1995; Daly, 1996). Home-based nascents are likely to gain greatest benefit in relation to a perceived control of time by adopting a somewhat clock-based organisation of their day.

Additionally, the three types of time management behaviours described in Macan’s model outlined earlier, can be utilised to contribute to successful completion of the business gestation period.

(a) *Goal setting and prioritizing*. Effective time management involves identifying goals and objectives, ranking them in regard to importance or priority, and then allocating time and resources accordingly (see Landy, Rastegary, Thayer, & Colvin, 1991; Macan, Shahani, Dipboye, & Phillips, 1990). By effectively setting goals and prioritising, the person could clarify which aspects of which role are most important and when. This prioritising and goal setting should result in the person having a lesser sense of being pulled in multiple directions at one time. Likewise, if a person is appropriately organised (see the later section for a discussion of individual difference in relation to organisation) it will be more likely that the demands of both family and work will be met.

(b) *Mechanics*. Whether they are referred to as lists, schedules, diaries, calendars, planners or schedulers, their usage is an important part of many people’s workday, and in many professions it is a ubiquitous personal tool (Kelley & Chapanis, 1982; Payne, 1993). Planning and scheduling devices typically require activity duration/time estimates and activity sequencing – enabling the person to manage their time, and other important information and facts. Benefits such as ‘being able to use your head for more important things’, and stress reduction are widely proclaimed (e.g., Burger, 1974; Hegarty, 1976; Mackenzie, 1990). Additionally, it should be noted that Information and Communication Technology developments such as the Internet make it possible to organize time and work tasks with less value placed on temporal order, accepting events as they arise, and engaging in multiple activities simultaneously (Lee and Liebenau, 2000b).

(c) *Working within your preferences for organisation.* Although many ‘self-help’ books and corporate trainers would have you think otherwise, it is argued that there is no one ‘correct’ way in which to organise yourself in respect to time. Rather, we need to understand and work within the constraints of our personality.

For example, take the management of our email ‘in-box’ as a prototypical case in point. Typically self-help books (e.g., Lamb & Peek, 1995; Langford-Wood & Salter, 1999; Tunstall, 2000; Whalen, 2000) prescribe one preferred way to do things, in the present case it is to utilise clearly labelled folders in which all (or nearly all) new ‘in-box’ messages should be shifted once read. However a study by Forsyth & Chen (2004) suggests that there is no one right way to handle our email. ‘No filers’ (people who do not tend to use folders and therefore have very large inboxes) exhibited equally high scores in all time management factors, including perceived control of time, as ‘frequent filers’ (characterised by few messages in the inbox and extensive use of folders or deletion). It appears that not filing, for these individuals, may be considered effective time management behaviour.

The use of scheduling materials provides another example. It is likely that the type/form of scheduling materials which will provide most utility in increasing perceptions of time control in home-based workers will be dependent on their preference for organisation. For one person this may mean scheduling the completion of all of the day’s tasks (both work and non-work related) in a diary or electronic scheduler, whereas for another all of the day’s requirements will be ‘held in their heads’.

Yet another example is that for some people it may be an effective time management strategy to have a messy home/office. While, Malone (1983) found some evidence that individuals with messy offices had more difficulty finding information, it was also suggested that there was no indication that the effort spent keeping a neat office was met with equal merit. Time perceptions and time control perceptions are highly individual. They cannot be governed or manipulated by universal rules or mechanisms – if it works for you, keep doing it!

5. The Importance of Comparative Information Concerning Other Home-Based Worker’s Time Management Concerns

Formal time management training is a popular way for people to help manage their time. However, research on its effectiveness suggests a more practical (and economical) way to gain similar benefits. Macan (1996) suggests that comparative knowledge (concerning the similar situation other people face) about one’s situation in respect to ‘time pressure’ results in similar positive effects to formal time management training.

This finding is good news for novice nascent entrepreneurs. It suggests that they should be encouraged to discuss issues surrounding their management of time with other business starters. This discussion could easily be achieved through involvement in a pre-starters network. It is likely that informal, ongoing discussion with a variety of other nascent entrepreneurs will result in the most beneficial effects as far as perceived control of time is concerned. Furthermore, given its ongoing nature and specificity (in relation to starting a business), comparative information is likely to provide better effects than any formal time management training could ever hope to achieve.

6. Concluding Comments

The goal of any time management initiative should be to enhance the perception of control of time. Time management is important for novice nascent entrepreneurs as they typically start their business during hours they spend at home, often in addition to being employed. Specifically, the following issues were highlighted.

Firstly, even though a task-based approach to managing the startup process may seem attractive in relation to its perceived autonomy and freedom, it was argued that in the long run utilising a somewhat clock-based organisation is likely to be less frustrating and exhausting, resulting in greater perception of time control for most people. Secondly, time management involves goal setting, goal prioritizing, making time estimates and allocations, and using organizing devices such as schedulers and lists. However, all these techniques should be used in conjunction with one's individual preferences for organisation – there is not necessarily one right way as far as time management behaviours are concerned. Thirdly, it was suggested that similar benefits to formal time management training can be gained by partaking in regular discussions with other home-based workers (ideally other start-up entrepreneurs) regarding time management issues.

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