

# Integrating Positive Psychology, Spirituality, and Meaning in Life to Foster Resilience Among Solopreneurs

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## Abstract

*From natural disasters and public health crises to economic shocks, conflict, and war, unforeseen challenges can repeatedly disrupt lives and businesses, often posing significant hurdles for solo entrepreneurs and self-employed individuals running their own small businesses. Even in the face of such adversity, these challenges create conditions that, when navigated effectively, can open up opportunities for developing resilience, growth, and adaptive strategies. This study, drawing on theoretical perspectives such as Conservation of Resources theory, resilience theory, and Frankl's Will to Meaning theory, explores the literature on the intersection of positive psychology, spirituality, and meaning in life, particularly as these concepts apply to solo entrepreneurs navigating challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic. The study emphasises the necessity of avoiding toxic positivity while advocating for a grounded, holistic approach to entrepreneurial well-being and productivity during crises. Practical implications include strategies and evidence-based insights for fostering adaptability, resilience, and well-being in solo entrepreneurs, also known as solopreneurs. Based on well-established theoretical foundations and by integrating positive psychology constructs, spiritual and mindful practices, and purpose-driven approaches, this study proposes a conceptual map as a guiding tool for enhancing resilience in solopreneurs. While acknowledging its limitations, this study contributes to an underexplored area of solopreneurship and entrepreneurial psychology literature, providing a foundation for further scholarly investigation. Future research directions are suggested, focusing on demographic diversity, cross-geographical comparisons, and resilience-building interventions, particularly exploring the impact of spiritual practices and positive psychology constructs during crises. This work contributes to the gradually expanding, yet still limited, body of literature on resilience, well-being, and sustainable productivity among solopreneurs.*

## ARTICLE INFORMATION

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## INTRODUCTION

Welter et al. (2019) observed that “the world changes: indeed, it changes in part as a result of entrepreneurship” (p. 326). Entrepreneurs understandably contribute to this change through their innovative ideas, products, services, and by creating new businesses and job opportunities. However, the world also undergoes change due to unforeseen and disruptive events, such as natural disasters and public health crises, which can significantly impact the lives of people and businesses on local and global scales. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) officially declared COVID-19 a global pandemic (Canet-Juric et al., 2023). Subsequently, many countries globally enacted stringent lockdown measures to curb the transmission of SARS-Cov-2. For instance, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Australia implemented its first national lockdown on March 29, 2020 (Australian Government Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2023). Melbourne experienced the world's longest COVID-19 lockdown, with stay-at-home orders and travel restrictions enforced for a cumulative 262 days between March 2020 and November 2021 (McLaren et al., 2023).

Countries adopted varying approaches to lockdown measures during the pandemic. For instance, Brazil implemented region-specific lockdowns, while Uruguay relied on nationwide restrictions (Dunford et al., 2020), China adopted a strict Zero-COVID policy, implementing stringent lockdowns and mandatory restrictions (García-Herrero, 2022). In contrast, Sweden took a more relaxed approach, relying on voluntary measures and emphasizing individual responsibility to adhere to the guidelines (Nilsen et al., 2023). Four years after the onset of the pandemic, over 771 million confirmed cases and 6 million deaths have been reported globally to date (Jing et al., 2024).

Solopreneurs are entrepreneurs who manage every aspect of their business independently, without a team (Belt et al., 2015), and experience greater autonomy (Jain, 2024). Merriam-Webster dictionary defines solopreneur as “one who organises, manages, and assumes the risks of a business or enterprise without the help of a partner” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). While the COVID-19 pandemic posed significant challenges for self-employed small business owners and solopreneurs, it also forced many to adopt new attitudes, business models, or thinking styles to survive such an unprecedented event and nonnormative shock (Katare et al., 2021). The challenges included financial instability (Bartik et al., 2020), disrupted supply chains (Ramanathan et al., 2022), and varied revenue declines for many small businesses (Harel, 2021). Some studies indicated that self-employed individuals were more likely to experience income losses during the COVID-19 pandemic (Caliendo et al., 2023a). Additionally, these financial hardships were compounded by psychological burdens such as isolation, uncertainty, and mental distress (Wolfe & Patel, 2021), which were understandably intensified for self-employed small business owners and solo entrepreneurs due to their heavier reliance on personal networks, heavier workload, and the constraints of their limited resources (Williamson et al., 2021). The literature clearly indicates that solo entrepreneurs, also known as solopreneurs, often experience entrepreneurial loneliness (Cardon & Arwine, 2024) and lack the typical social and team support that comes with traditional work environments (Williamson et al., 2021).

These factors, combined with the ongoing pressure to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances, can undermine resilience, performance, productivity, and well-being. Therefore, it is crucial for solo entrepreneurs and self-employed small business owners to develop personal and professional strategies and capabilities that foster an adaptive mindset, resilience, overall well-being, and constructive behavioural styles. These strategies can effectively mitigate the financial, psychological, and broader impacts of unforeseen events, such as public health crises, natural disasters, and economic or environmental shocks, both locally and globally. Among these strategies and capabilities, entrepreneurial resilience seems to be among the key factors for successful entrepreneurial endeavours. Garrett and Zettel (2021) describe entrepreneurial resilience as a set of capabilities, emphasising that it involves distinct psychological and behavioural traits or tendencies that equip entrepreneurs to effectively navigate and overcome adversity.

While numerous studies have explored the roles of positive psychology, spirituality, and meaning independently, this article uniquely integrates these concepts to address their collective impact on resilience among solopreneurs during major disruptions. The study's objectives are twofold: first, to develop a conceptual map that illustrates the interplay of these constructs in fostering resilience, well-being, and productivity to be utilised by solopreneurs, and second, to highlight practical implications in an under-explored area of research with the aim of better supporting solo entrepreneurs facing challenges. By considering the COVID-19 pandemic as a contextual backdrop, this paper explores insights and strategies that can be applied during similar unforeseen and disruptive crises. The guiding question that helps clarify the article's focus is: How do acts of service, spiritual and mindful practices contribute to a sense of resilience, purpose, well-being, and productivity in solo entrepreneurship during crises?

This study offers a comprehensive, though non-systematic, literature review, deliberately avoiding a narrow focus on a single demographic group or geographic region. Instead, it takes a broad approach to ensure its discussions are applicable across diverse populations and locations. While the nonsystematic nature of the review may introduce potential bias and is acknowledged as a limitation, the study provides extensive insights that lay a foundation for further exploration. Future research could benefit from more targeted investigations into specific demographic groups, allowing for rigorous cross-comparisons and deeper understanding.

## THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

This study is grounded in several theoretical frameworks that provide a foundation for understanding the dynamics of resilience, well-being, performance, and personal growth during challenging times. Viktor Frankl's Will to Meaning theory (Frankl, 1963) posits that the primary drive in human beings is the pursuit of meaning, which can be particularly crucial during periods of suffering. This theory emphasizes that finding purpose can lead to profound resilience and psychological well-being.

The ways people define a meaningful life differ widely, encompassing everything from seeking pleasure and adhering to spiritual teachings to crafting a personal and subjective sense of purpose (Klemke, 2017). The Will to Meaning theory, rooted in the work of Viktor Frankl, is central to Logotherapy, an existential therapeutic approach he developed. Logotherapy is built on three fundamental principles: first, that life holds meaning in all situations, including those that seem hopeless; second, that the primary motivation for humans is the search for meaning in life; and third, that individuals possess the freedom to choose their attitude, even in the face of unavoidable suffering (Frankl, 1959). There are notable similarities between Frankl's Will to Meaning and Positive Psychology, as both focus on the pursuit of a meaningful life. However, each approach is grounded in distinct principles and carries its own unique perspective and emphasis (Wong, 2014).

Positive Psychology focuses on identifying and nurturing human strengths to promote optimal functioning, with key constructs including resilience, hope, gratitude, and optimism (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive psychology is widely applied across various domains, including workplace and professional coaching practices (Ebrahimi, 2024), clinical and organisational psychology interventions (Duckworth et al., 2005; Townsley et al., 2023), and entrepreneurship research (Feng & Chen, 2020; Laguna, 2010), among others. The PERMA model—positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement—provides a robust theoretical framework for enhancing well-being and adaptability (Seligman, 2011). Some researchers go a step further and consider physical activity as *positive psychology in motion*, as it helps generate positive emotions, foster engagement, and enhance a sense of accomplishment (Faulkner, 2019). Positive Psychology, however, is not without criticism. For example, Van Zyl and Rothmann (2022) assert that Positive psychology is based on weak metatheoretical assumptions. Similarly, Van Zyl et al. (2023) argue that “positive psychology lacks proper theorizing and conceptual thinking” (p.213).

While entrepreneurs' subjective well-being is closely linked to factors such as experiencing flow, having intrinsic definitions of success, and maintaining high productivity, all of which align with key principles of Positive Psychology (Sherman et al., 2016), resilience plays a crucial role in supporting their ability to adapt and thrive in the face of challenges (Kipkosgei, 2022). Resilience represents a dynamic interplay of factors that foster positive adaptation in the face of challenging life experiences (Cabanyes-Truffino, 2010). Resilience Theory (Wagnild & Young, 1993) explores how individuals adapt positively to adversity. It highlights the importance of personal strengths and social support in overcoming challenges, which is essential for entrepreneurs facing the uncertainties of business ownership.

The Conservation of Resources (COR) theory is another psychological framework that describes how individuals respond to stress. According to COR theory, “people strive to retain, protect, and build resources and are threatened by the potential or actual loss of these valued resources” (Egozi et al., 2022, p.2). Since its introduction in 1988, COR theory has served as a foundation for understanding the processes related to experiencing, coping with, and building resilience to various forms of stress (Holmgreen et al., 2017). From the perspective of COR theory, research like the one conducted by Egozi et al. (2022) during the COVID-19 pandemic identified personal and community resilience as the most effective protective factors for reducing psychological distress.

Spirituality and its practices, such as meditation, prayer, gratitude journaling, and mindfulness, are valuable sources that greatly enrich human life (Vivek & Amrith, 2017). Fowler's Stages of Faith provides insight into spiritual development,

outlining a progression through six stages. The fourth stage, Individuative-Reflective Faith, highlights a phase where individuals critically evaluate their beliefs and values (Fowler, 1995). Fowler's model of faith development defines "faith" as the pursuit and preservation of meaning, guided by core values that may or may not be religious or spiritual (Mallery & Mallery, 2022). Therefore, it is reasonable to propose that evaluating one's beliefs and values during hardships and adversity is connected to their pursuit of meaning in life.

Holistic body movements, yoga, and mindfulness meditation are integral to spiritual practices and holistic wellness, fostering balance and harmony (Maurya et al., 2021; Van Ness, 1999; Varambally & Gangadhar, 2012). Yoga practice is connected to spirituality, focusing on the pursuit of wisdom, meaning, and inner peace (Csala et al., 2021). Similarly, mindfulness practices such as meditation are reported to foster contentment and cultivate a sense of inner well-being (Chandran & Sasidharan, 2024). Mindfulness Theory emphasizes the practice of being present and fully engaged in the moment, which not only fosters emotional regulation and reduces stress but also aligns closely with spiritual principles (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Spirituality often encourages self-awareness, compassion, and an understanding of interconnectedness, all of which are enhanced through mindfulness practices. The connection between mindfulness and spiritual practices can be exemplified by Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), a behavioural medicine program rooted in meditative spiritual traditions (Greeson et al., 2011). One noted result of mindfulness highlighted in the literature is an increase in eudaimonic well-being, which is characterised by a sense of meaning and purpose (Sgherza et al., 2022).

The aforementioned theoretical perspectives are closely linked to the importance of examining the resilience, well-being, and productivity of entrepreneurs, as well as the ways in which the integration of positive psychology, meaning in life, and spirituality can enhance entrepreneurial resilience and well-being. Wiklund et al. (2019) define entrepreneurial well-being as "the experience of satisfaction, positive affect, infrequent negative affect, and psychological functioning in relation to developing, starting, growing, and running an entrepreneurial venture" (p.582).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Spirituality and Mindful Practices

In the Euro-American context, spirituality has historically been associated with Christianity (Ronkainen & Nesti, 2019). In modern Christianity, authors like McColman (2023, p. 3) engage in a discourse on Christian mysticism, which emphasizes that it 'encourages an optimistic, positive outlook towards other people, despite everyone's human feelings,' all through a spiritual lens. Contemporary discussions of spirituality in Western psychology appear to straddle the line between religious traditions and a personal journey focused on seeking purpose and meaning, with varying levels of belief in a higher power or universal force. Tart (1975) defines spirituality as "that vast realm of human potential dealing with ultimate purposes, with higher entities, with God, with love, with compassion, with purpose" (p. 4). More recently, Tanyi (2002) defines spirituality as "a personal search for meaning and purpose in life, which may or may not be related to religion. It entails connection to self-chosen and/or religious beliefs, values, and practices that give meaning to life, thereby inspiring and motivating individuals to achieve their optimal being" (p. 506).

Kauanui et al. (2010), in the study *Entrepreneurship and Spirituality: A Comparative Analysis of Entrepreneurs' Motivation*, posits that spirituality is linked to qualities such as compassion, tolerance, forgiveness, contentment, and a sense of responsibility. Entrepreneurship frequently entails substantial uncertainty and a high risk of failure (Su et al., 2020). In such contexts, qualities like compassion, tolerance, forgiveness, and contentment play a crucial role in fostering entrepreneurial resilience. Berenbaum et al. (2018) conducted a study with 154 college students and found that contentment was positively associated with participation in mastery activities. Aly et al. (2021) explain that entrepreneurs frequently face disappointment and frustration during their ventures, but these emotions can be alleviated through emotional mastery, which may be further supported by spiritual practices.

The COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected the mental health of many people (Cullen et al., 2020), with some researchers calling it "pandemic depression" (Caliendo et al., 2023a), particularly among self-employed individuals, who have faced unique challenges during this crisis. A study by Li et al. (2022) examined the outcomes of a self-help online mindfulness course conducted in Australia during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. The research aimed to address mental health impacts during the crisis through mindfulness interventions. A total of 5,058 adults participated, with 3,696 in the pre-COVID group (2016-2019) and 1,362 in the during-COVID group (March-July 2020). Participants completed measures of psychological distress and well-being. Results revealed that the course had a positive effect on both groups: it reduced psychological distress to a moderate degree (with effect sizes between 0.49 and 0.55), and it also led to small improvements in well-being. While the study by Li et al. (2022) does not focus on solo entrepreneurs, its findings on mindfulness interventions could be explored to determine whether similar approaches could potentially help solo entrepreneurs manage psychological distress and improve well-being.

Greeson et al. (2011) conducted a study published in *JAMA Psychiatry*, where researchers at Georgetown University Medical Center found that Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) is as effective as the antidepressant escitalopram for treating anxiety disorders. This landmark clinical trial involved a diverse sample, including denominational Christians, Buddhists, and individuals without religious affiliation, who participated primarily to improve mental health, manage stress, engage in personal growth, and enhance physical health. Results indicated similar reductions in anxiety symptoms for both the MBSR and medication groups, with an average decrease of approximately 30% in anxiety severity.

Mindfulness practices take different forms. Some researchers describe mindfulness as the act of observing without judgment, aimed at achieving mental balance and a mindful state marked by calm awareness and alertness to distractions (Zhu et al., 2021). In parallel with studies reporting benefits of mindfulness practices, research on healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic also shows that spirituality directly fosters resilience, which then positively impacts work engagement. The literature suggests that "a spiritual entrepreneur looks for the benefit of others" (Raco et al., 2019, p. 33). A survey of 233 healthcare professionals in Pakistan, analysed using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM), demonstrated that spirituality helps healthcare workers develop resilience, which acts as a mediator, strengthening their engagement at work (Ahmed et al., 2021).

The literature on business management and spirituality highlights the significance of prosocial behaviours associated with gratitude, as an emotional response, moral virtue, and or a personality trait (Sansone & Sansone, 2010). Gratitude is viewed as a moral response that not only occurs when someone benefits from prosocial actions but also motivates the recipient to act in a prosocial manner in return (McCullough et al., 2001). Gratitude is also described as a general life orientation that enhances an individual's awareness of the positive aspects of life (Wood et al., 2010). Although research on gratitude in entrepreneurship is limited, studies on workplace and employee behaviour provide evidence that gratitude plays a key role in fostering helping behaviours at work. Research suggests that mindfulness can help employees experience gratitude, which in turn promotes helping behaviour at work, which is important for collaboration and teamwork (Sawyer et al., 2022). Prosocial activity, recognised as positive social behaviour (Alamri & Al-Abyadh, 2024) that includes helping others and demonstrating kindness and generosity, extends beyond just workplaces and teamwork. This form of behaviour can manifest in a variety of contexts.

If we consider gratitude as a powerful human emotion (Chowdhury, 2019) that not only "tends to foster positive feelings" (Sansone & Sansone, 2010, p. 9), but also enhances mood and self-efficacy (Mills et al., 2015), and is associated with spiritual beliefs, providing a stronghold during difficult times (Büssing et al., 2021), it holds significant potential for improving entrepreneurial well-being. Further, the literature suggests that gratitude can reflect an individual's appreciation for experiences that may not directly benefit them but can still lead to positive outcomes, which is widely regarded as a positive moral emotion (Fehr et al., 2017). Additionally, research in positive psychology, as this paper will explore, shows that gratitude, along with a sense of awe, is strongly associated with positive emotions like contentment, happiness, and hope—some of the core elements of positive psychology (Snyder & Lopez, 2001).

As demonstrated in the discussions above, there appears to be a strong connection between spirituality and mindful practices. The literature confirms that mindfulness and spirituality contribute to reducing stress, enhancing resilience, motivation, and creativity in individuals (Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Furthermore, the literature suggests that finding meaning and purpose in life has been linked to increased motivation, job satisfaction, and well-being (Frankl, 1963). These connections become particularly relevant in the context of entrepreneurship, as explored in this paper, where we seek to address the question: How do acts of service, spiritual and mindful practices contribute to a sense of resilience, purpose, well-being, and productivity in solo entrepreneurship during times of crisis?

## Finding Meaning and Purpose in Life

According to Dr. Viktor Frankl, a Holocaust survivor and pioneer in contemporary psychology, human beings must find meaning in their lives to function effectively (Wong, 2014). Meaning in life may act as a safeguard during challenging and potentially traumatic events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Seidel et al., 2022). Frankl (1985) suggests that meaning can transcend personal suffering by focusing on deeply meaningful pursuits, such as work, spirituality, or family. Applying Frankl's insights to entrepreneurship, meaningful pursuits, when coupled with a sense of purpose and passion for entrepreneurship (Hu et al., 2022), can help counteract negative behaviors such as rumination and disengagement, which often arise from distress. It is reasonable to assume that solo and self-employed entrepreneurs could benefit from strengthening their sense of meaning and purpose, particularly when navigating through hardships.

Frankl's insights on meaning in life resonate strongly with the idea that entrepreneurs can find purpose amidst challenges. As Frankl (2000) asserted

*I can see beyond the misery of the situation to the potential for discovering a meaning behind it, and thus to turn an apparently meaningless suffering into a genuine human achievement. I am convinced that, in the final analysis, there is no situation that does not contain within it the seed of meaning (p.53).*

This perspective highlights the importance of adopting an attitude that seeks deeper meaning in the face of hardship, a mindset particularly relevant to entrepreneurs facing struggles. It invites further exploration into how entrepreneurs can cultivate purpose and meaning in their work and life, contributing to resilience, well-being, and productivity.

The literature highlights a clear connection between spirituality, happiness, and meaning in life, suggesting that these elements are interlinked in shaping well-being (Park, 2013; Rivera et al., 2020). In the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle describes happiness as a form of thriving and living well. He viewed happiness as a reflection of spiritual life. This idea is echoed in the biblical passage: "For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves" (Luke 22:27, New King James Version). This emphasis on service and acts of compassion resonates with Lao Tzu's philosophical teachings, which trace back to ancient Chinese traditions and have been identified by researchers as a potential source of inspiration for encouraging entrepreneurs to engage in acts of service within their communities and workplaces (Shang, 2024).

The perspective on service as a spiritual practice resonates with contemporary research; the study conducted by Klein (2016) explored the connection between prosocial behaviour, specifically serving others, and the perception of meaning in life. Utilizing a nationally representative sample of adult Americans, Study 1 examined the correlation between volunteering and meaning in life while controlling for demographic variables. Study 2 further manipulated prosocial behaviour by investigating the effects of spending money to benefit others on self-reported meaning in life, providing causal evidence for this relationship. Finally, Study 3 identified key mechanisms underlying this effect, including increased self-worth, social connection, personal control, and affirmation of moral values. The findings underscored the positive outcomes associated with serving others, particularly in enhancing one's sense of meaning in life.

The benefits of acts of service are also examined in a business context by researchers focusing on leadership styles among small business entrepreneurs. For instance, Franklin (2010) investigated the potential relationship between entrepreneurs' levels of spirituality (i.e., virtuousness) and their practice of servant leadership. Franklin's findings highlight two key dimensions of spirituality—humility and servanthood—referred to as behavioural dimensions of spirituality. These dimensions, according to Franklin, play a significant role in fostering hope and cultivating a sense of positive self-belief in individuals. The idea of humility, servanthood, self-belief, and hope, rooted in the literature on both spirituality and meaning in life, aligns closely with Caliendo et al.'s (2023b) discussion in their publication, “Self-efficacy and entrepreneurial performance of start-ups”, which highlights self-efficacy as the confidence in one's ability to overcome challenges and achieve success. The authors emphasize the significance of this concept in entrepreneurial resilience, stating that “this belief can outweigh other doubts or self-beliefs, enabling us to remain resilient on our path to achieving goals” (p. 1027).

Another study conducted by Sharma and Yukhymenko-Lescroart (2024) examined how life purpose influenced college students' resilience and persistence during the COVID-19 pandemic. It identified three dimensions of life purpose—awareness of purpose, awakening to purpose, and altruistic purpose—utilising a cross-sectional design. Structural equation modelling revealed that both resilience and persistence were significantly predicted by awakening to purpose. In addition, a study on organisational resilience conducted by Liu et al. (2022) highlights the critical role of entrepreneurs in shaping their businesses' adaptability during crises. Their research involving 180 entrepreneurs managing small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in China during the COVID-19 pandemic found that entrepreneurial mindfulness positively impacts organisational resilience, with entrepreneurial resilience partially mediating this effect. This suggests that entrepreneurs who cultivate mindfulness, along with a sense of meaning in their work, can enhance both their own resilience and their business's ability to withstand challenges.

Previous studies in the literature point to the positive role that helping others plays in increasing the meaningfulness of work (Allan et al., 2018) and that those who engage in generous behaviour experience pleasure from doing so (Aknin & Whillans, 2020). For instance, on social entrepreneurship, it is recognized that two distinct cultures influence the field: the long-standing tradition of charity and the more modern culture of entrepreneurial problem-solving (Dees, 2012). Both cultures stem from our psychological responses to the needs of others. It is reasonable to assume that entrepreneurs who frequently engage in voluntary acts of kindness to assist others can, in turn, positively impact their own subjective well-being.

While the findings of a systematic review and meta-analysis of experimental kindness literature indicate that performing acts of kindness enhances the well-being of the person performing them (Curry et al., 2018), a study on Sri Lankan Buddhist entrepreneurs engaged in altruistic actions as part of their compassion-driven ventures during COVID-19 pandemic shows that these actions also contribute to community vitality (Dissanayake et al., 2024). Therefore, it can be understood that voluntary acts of service, motivated by compassion, benefit both the individuals offering the service and those receiving it.

The studies referenced highlight the role of life purpose and altruism in enhancing entrepreneurial resilience. For instance, awakening to life purpose has been shown to support resilience and persistence in entrepreneurs during challenging times (Sharma & Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2024). Additionally, engaging in altruistic acts benefits both the well-being of entrepreneurs and the communities they serve (Aknin & Whillans, 2020; Dissanayake et al., 2024). Furthermore, Frankl's Will to Meaning theory and perspective on meaning in life further reinforce this, suggesting that purpose can transform suffering into growth, making it particularly relevant for solopreneurs navigating hardships (Frankl, 1985, 2000). Research also highlights the link between service, meaning, and well-being, showing that prosocial behaviour enhances one's sense of purpose and resilience (Klein, 2016; Shang, 2024). These insights suggest that purpose-driven actions and compassion can strengthen resilience in entrepreneurs and solopreneurs alike.

## Positive Psychology and Its Applications

Positive psychology is described as “the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions” (Gable & Haidt, 2005, p.103). Positive psychology emerged as a distinct field of study in 1998, with pioneers such as Seligman (2003) framing it as the exploration of positive human behaviour. This shift was a response to the prevailing 20th-century emphasis on understanding and addressing negative behaviours, offering a more balanced perspective on human functioning and well-being. Positive psychology in the business context has been shown to improve happiness at work and job satisfaction (Allen & McCarthy, 2015), enhance emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995), boost resilience and workplace well-being (Oosthuizen, 2021), foster subjective well-being and positive emotions (Hendriks et al., 2021), and increase work motivation and productivity (Martin, 2005). These benefits are equally relevant and valuable in the entrepreneurial context.

A study by Abonil et al. (2024) on resilience and well-being among expatriate entrepreneurs highlighted how positive psychology constructs, such as resilience and relationship-building, played a vital role in navigating crises like COVID. While research on self-employed solo entrepreneurs is relatively limited, existing literature highlights connections between entrepreneurship, positive psychology, life satisfaction, and overall quality of life. For instance, a study on aspiring entrepreneurs with intellectual disabilities found that engaging in entrepreneurial endeavors positively impacted both their quality of life and life satisfaction (Barba-Sánchez et al., 2024).

Building on the previously discussed studies, another research study conducted by Trzebiński et al., (2024) in Poland examined the impact of meaning in life, life satisfaction, and beliefs in orderliness and positivity on emotional and cognitive responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Involving 317 participants recruited online during the early increase of the pandemic, this study found that higher levels of meaning in life and life satisfaction correlated with lower state anxiety and COVID-19 stress. Mediation analyses revealed that basic hope enhances both meaning in life and life satisfaction, which in turn help reduce anxiety. Notably, this connection underscores the principles of positive psychology, which emphasize positive expectations for the future (Laranjeira & Querido, 2022). These findings contribute to the growing body of evidence highlighting the protective role of meaning and life satisfaction, key components of positive psychology, in mitigating emotional distress during the pandemic.

Earlier in this article, evidence was presented regarding the association between spirituality, meaning, and experiences of gratitude, and their subsequent impact on positive emotions. These factors are important for building resilience, improving well-being, and may also enhance entrepreneurial productivity. The literature on positive psychology further highlights the importance of gratitude in fostering hope, optimism, and happiness —qualities that are especially important in the face of hardship and adversity. A 2018 study by Witvliet et al (2018) investigated the effects of a gratitude-based writing intervention on hope and happiness. Involving 153 participants, the experiment had them write about a meaningful, desired outcome, then assess their levels of hope and happiness. Participants were randomly assigned to either reflect on a past hope that had been fulfilled (grateful remembering) or to a control group. Results revealed that those in the grateful remembering group experienced significant increases in both hope and happiness compared to the control group, highlighting the potential benefits of grateful reflection in enhancing current well-being and future optimism (Witvliet et al., 2018). It is important not to confuse gratitude with ignoring the reality of unfortunate circumstances that may arise in life or falling into the trap of toxic positivity. As Snyder and Lopez (2001) highlight,

*An attitude of gratitude may be one means by which tragedies are transformed into opportunities for growth, being thankful not so much for the circumstances but rather for the skills that will come from dealing with it (p.467).*

While a growing body of research highlights the positive business and personal development outcomes associated with spiritual practices and the integration of positive psychology into workplaces, there are also increasing reports warning



of the dangers of toxic positivity. Recent research highlights that toxic positivity can marginalize individuals by discouraging the expression of emotions that are not consistently positive (Collins, 2022; Tufvesson, 2020). In essence, toxic positivity imposes an unrealistic expectation to maintain optimism, disregarding the context of the situation (Reynolds, 2022). Upadhyay et al. (2022) describe toxic positivity as a phenomenon in which positivity is used to downplay or dismiss one's certain emotional experiences. Similarly, other researchers refer to toxic or forced positive discourse, characterised by communication that promotes an excessively optimistic view of the world (Lecompte-Van Poucke, 2022). It seems that it is important to recognise the fine line between positive psychology, mindful and spiritual practices, and the potential risk of slipping into patterns of toxic positivity.

## METHODOLOGY

This study is grounded in multiple theoretical frameworks, offering a foundation for understanding the dynamics of resilience and well-being. Employing a conceptual research design without reliance on empirical data, it aims to bridge theoretical gaps and connect disciplines. The research explores the intersection of positive psychology, spirituality, and meaning in fostering resilience among solo entrepreneurs. Conceptual research focuses on developing frameworks and theoretical models to address complex phenomena without relying on primary empirical data (Jaakkola, 2020). This approach is particularly suitable for synthesising existing literature and proposing integrative models, as it allows for the generation of new insights by connecting diverse theoretical perspectives (MacInnis, 2011). Therefore, a conceptual approach is appropriate for this study as it enables the synthesis of existing theoretical perspectives on resilience, positive psychology, and meaning in life, facilitating the development of a conceptual map that enhances understanding of solopreneurs' resilience, without relying on empirical data collection.

Prior to the literature selection process, I identified keywords and key phrases most closely aligned with the central theme of this study. Although non-systematic, the literature selection process was guided by the study's objectives and the guiding research question. The process prioritised peer-reviewed journal articles, books and book chapters, industry papers from reliable practitioner sources, and authoritative reports, with a strong emphasis on refereed articles. I conducted a comprehensive literature search using three major databases and one supplementary source: ScienceDirect, Scopus, APA PsycNet, and Google Scholar. Rather than applying rigid inclusion or exclusion criteria typical of systematic reviews, I prioritised a broad yet targeted selection of scholarly material focused on positive psychology, spirituality, and meaning in life, particularly in relation to entrepreneurship and resilience. This approach allowed for the identification of relevant theoretical frameworks, empirical findings, and emerging perspectives, providing a comprehensive understanding of their interconnections. The study specifically included research examining the implications of these constructs during crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and associated uncertainty, to enhance practical relevance within this context. Therefore, terms such as "COVID-19," "COVID Pandemic," "Pandemic," "COVID-19 pandemic," and "uncertainty" were included in various search queries through the use of *advance* search option to narrow the results to sources most relevant to the study's focus.

As noted earlier, due to the absence of primary data, a conceptual approach was adopted to construct a comprehensive understanding of the topic by identifying knowledge gaps and exploring potential relationships between various concepts. A potential limitation of the chosen research design, given the absence of primary data or the adoption of a systematic review, is how the empirical phenomenon is conceptualised in this study. As Jaakkola (2020) notes, by selecting specific concepts and theories, the study may inherently reflect particular assumptions about the key components of the phenomenon under investigation. While this approach is essential for framing the research, it may inadvertently exclude alternative perspectives or dimensions that could further enrich the understanding of the topic. To address this potential limitation, I have employed three strategies. First, in alignment with the criteria proposed by Baethge et al. (2019) for evaluating the quality of nonsystematic or narrative reviews, I have clearly elaborated on the importance of this study in contributing to an area that is progressing at a much slower pace compared to similar fields in entrepreneurship research. I have also formulated clear objectives and a focused research question for this study. Second, I have ensured that the concepts are clearly linked, providing a theoretical explanation for these connections

wherever possible to demonstrate the logical relationships between them, as suggested by King and Lepak (2011). Third, the structure of arguments throughout the paper, particularly those derived from the literature review and key theories relevant to the study's objectives, has been designed with clarity in mind. This ensures that each important point is explained in a way that allows the chain of argumentation to be easily followed. As Hirschheim (2008) emphasised, a clear structure guarantees that nothing important is omitted and that all elements are presented logically, avoiding redundancy.

It is important to note that the literature on solopreneurship is still growing, and this research could not have been conducted solely by relying on articles focused only on resilience within the solopreneurship context, given the limited studies available in this area. Therefore, this paper seeks to contribute by filling this gap in research.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study underscores the interconnectedness of spirituality, positive psychology, and the pursuit of meaning in fostering resilience among solo entrepreneurs. The literature revealed that these concepts, while often studied independently, can collectively form a robust guideline to enhance psychological and entrepreneurial resilience and well-being. Spiritual practices, such as mindfulness, prayers, meditation, and gratitude, emerge as pivotal in mitigating stress and promoting resilience. For instance, meditation, yoga practices, and mindfulness-based interventions have been found to reduce psychological distress and improve well-being. Similarly, gratitude, as both an emotional response and moral virtue, enhances resilience by fostering hope, self-awareness, contentment, and emotional stability (Sansone & Sansone, 2010; Witvliet et al., 2018). Their integration into entrepreneurial contexts demonstrates potential in countering the isolation and uncertainties that solopreneurs face, particularly during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic (Cullen et al., 2020; Williamson et al., 2021).

A recurring theme in the literature is the transformative power of meaning in life. Rooted in Frankl's existential perspectives, the pursuit of meaningful goals offers a psychological buffer against adversity (Frankl, 1963). For solo entrepreneurs, meaning serves not only as a motivator but as a mechanism to reinterpret challenges as opportunities for growth. This aligns closely with findings suggesting that prosocial behaviours, often driven by spiritual values, amplify one's sense of purpose and resilience (Klein, 2016; Dissanayake et al., 2024). Entrepreneurs who engage in acts of service, guided by humility and gratitude, not only contribute to their communities but also enhance their emotional and psychological resources (Franklin, 2010).

The literature on positive psychology complements these insights by emphasizing constructs such as hope, optimism, positive emotions, and emotional intelligence. These elements contribute to an entrepreneurial mindset characterised by adaptability and perseverance (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Goleman, 1995). For instance, mindfulness practices are shown to improve emotional regulation, enabling solopreneurs to navigate the psychological demands of self-employment and operating their entrepreneurial ventures (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). The integration of these practices with spirituality further deepens their efficacy, as evidenced by studies linking spiritual engagement with enhanced resilience and well-being (Ahmed et al., 2021; Greeson et al., 2011).

Together, these findings suggest that the intersection of spirituality, positive psychology, and meaning is not merely additive but synergistic. This synergy has the potential to support a holistic approach to foster resilience among solopreneurs, fostering a balanced perspective that mitigates risks of toxic positivity while promoting sustainable productivity and well-being (Collins, 2022; Snyder & Lopez, 2001; Tufvesson, 2020).

### A Conceptual Map of Integrated Positive Psychology, Meaning, and Spirituality for Resilience in Solopreneurship

This section of discussions in the present study concludes with a conceptual map of Integrated Positive Psychology, Meaning, and Spirituality, as illustrated in Figure 1, which aims to provide the reader with a holistic

understanding of what could potentially enhance resilience, well-being, and productivity in entrepreneurs—particularly solo entrepreneurs, who often face additional challenges such as limited resources, increased risk of distress, and isolation—during difficult times. A brief overview of the key overlapping areas is outlined below.

### *Positive Psychology + Spirituality*

Positive Psychology and Spirituality intersect in their shared emphasis on practices that promote emotional regulation, resilience, and well-being. Key constructs from Positive Psychology—such as gratitude, positive emotions, optimism, and positive relationships—align with spiritual practices like mindfulness, meditation, prayer, and acts of kindness. These practices collectively have the potential to enhance resilience by fostering emotional stability, emotional intelligence, and hope during challenging times. For instance, mindfulness practices, as outlined by Kabat-Zinn (2003), are shown to reduce psychological distress and improve focus, which are critical for solopreneurs managing high levels of uncertainty and workload. Similarly, gratitude, as explored by Witvliet et al. (2018), fosters a sense of hope, happiness, and contentment, offering solopreneurs a psychological buffer against adversity.

This intersection emphasises the power of self-awareness and intentional action. Spiritual practices, guided by principles of compassion and interconnectedness, deepen the efficacy of Positive Psychology interventions by aligning individual aspirations with broader values and purposes, which can contribute to improved resilience, well-being, and productivity.

### *Positive Psychology + Meaning in Life*

The integration of Positive Psychology and Meaning in Life underscores how cultivating purpose contributes to psychological resilience and well-being. Viktor Frankl's Will to Meaning theory (Frankl, 1963) provides a foundational perspective, highlighting that purpose-driven actions can transform adversity into opportunities for growth. Positive Psychology constructs such as hope, engagement, and positive emotions further strengthen this intersection by providing tools to navigate stress and uncertainty.

Acts of service, often driven by a sense of purpose, demonstrate how Positive Psychology principles can amplify well-being. For example, Klein (2016) found that prosocial behaviours enhance individuals' sense of meaning and self-worth, contributing to resilience. This overlap also highlights the role of intrinsic motivation, as solopreneurs who find deeper meaning in their work are better equipped to sustain motivation and adaptability during crises.

### *Spirituality + Meaning in Life*

The connection between Spirituality and Meaning in Life emphasises how spiritual practices, combined with the pursuit of purpose, foster resilience and well-being. Practices such as meditation, gratitude journaling, and acts of service cultivate awareness and contentment, even amidst hardship. Frankl (1985) highlighted that meaning can transcend suffering by focusing on higher purposes, a concept that resonates strongly in entrepreneurial contexts.

Entrepreneurs who engage in spiritual practices often develop a heightened sense of humility and self-awareness, enabling them to navigate challenges with greater emotional balance. Spiritual values, such as compassion and interconnectedness, also encourage acts of service, which further reinforce resilience by fostering social connection and affirming moral values (Klein, 2016; Dissanayake et al., 2024). This intersection underscores how spiritual growth and a meaningful life are mutually reinforcing, creating a robust foundation for enduring adversity.

The convergence of positive psychology, meaning in life, and spirituality creates a powerful synergy that fosters resilience, well-being, and productivity. By integrating these three domains, individuals can not only cope with adversity but also thrive in both personal and professional settings. This intersection enhances emotional balance, strengthens the capacity to adapt to challenges, and increases productivity by aligning one's sense of purpose with practical actions. This integration mitigates the risks of toxic positivity by grounding optimism and resilience in authentic practices and self-awareness (Collins, 2022). It promotes a balanced approach to well-being and productivity, avoiding the pitfalls of unrealistic expectations or dismissing negative emotions.

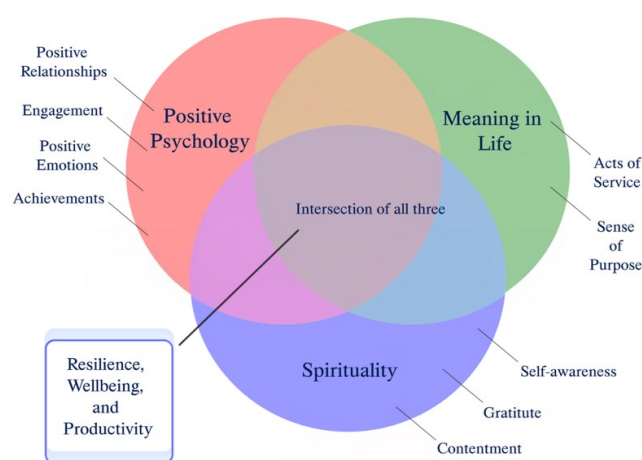


Figure 1: A Conceptual Map of Integrated Positive Psychology, Meaning and Spirituality for Resilience in Solopreneurship (Developed by the author)

## CONCLUSIONS

Many researchers emphasise the critical importance of entrepreneurial individuals maintaining effective and optimal performance before, during, and after disruptive events (Williams et al., 2017). Additionally, resilience is recognized as a key factor in navigating such challenges, enabling individuals to adapt and recover effectively (Hartmann et al., 2022; Shepherd & Williams, 2020). This article highlighted the interplay of spirituality, mindful practices, meaning and purpose, and positive psychology in fostering resilience, well-being, hope, motivation, and productivity in solo entrepreneurship during times of adversity and hardships. The article concludes that acts of service, a sense of gratitude, mindfulness practices, and spiritual activities—along with an intentional effort to find meaning during hardships—can contribute to improving solo entrepreneurs' resilience, well-being, performance, and productivity. These qualities can in return contribute to improving life satisfaction as the literature has confirmed. By continually developing spiritually and personally, fostering positive emotions, and maintaining optimistic expectations for the future, without mistaking this for toxic positivity, these factors may help sustain proactive engagement in entrepreneurial activities, even in the face of adversity.

Beyond offering a conceptual map, this study provides actionable insights for solopreneurs, educators, institutions, researchers, and policymakers. Integrating positive psychology, spirituality, and meaning into solopreneurial practices

could inform training programs, entrepreneurship education, resilience-building workshops, business and leadership coaching interventions, and holistic well-being initiatives for aspiring or practising solopreneurs. These approaches have the potential to not only support individual growth and productivity but also contribute to the development of more sustainable, resilient, and supportive entrepreneurial ecosystems. Future research should further explore the applicability of these constructs across diverse cultural and demographic contexts.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

As this study adopts a conceptual approach, it does not involve empirical data collection or a systematic review. This limits the generalizability of the findings. As such, the insights drawn from this study should be interpreted with caution, as they may not be universally applicable across all contexts. This study offered a conceptual map that could be further explored and potentially expanded in future research. Investigating its application in different contexts or cultures may provide deeper insights into the role of positive psychology, spirituality, and meaning in life in solopreneurs' experiences across the various life cycles of their ventures.

It would be beneficial if future research examines the experiences of solo entrepreneurs from diverse cultures, demographic backgrounds and industries. Future studies, for example, could conduct cross-geographical comparative research on the use of spiritual practices and positive psychology constructs among solo entrepreneurs. These studies could also explore how different groups experience changes in resilience, well-being, and productivity before and after engaging in practices similar to what was discussed in this study, particularly during times of crises such as public health, natural disasters, or major economic disruptions. Given that there is an association between productivity, resilience, and well-being, the PERMA model of well-being, rooted in positive psychology, for instance, could be employed to assess well-being markers in one group of participants, with results compared to those of a baseline or control group that does not engage in these practices.

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