

Conceptual Paper

The Crisis-Responsive Solopreneur Resilience Model (CRSRM): The Role of Motivation, Learning, and Social Support

Submitted on 13th march 2025

Accepted on 21st april 2025

Evaluated by a double-blind review system

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Resilience is crucial for solopreneurs as they navigate crises and unforeseen disruptions such as epidemics, natural disasters, and economic downturns, which can have severe negative consequences for individuals and businesses. This study aims to explore the factors that contribute to the resilience of solopreneurs during crises, with a specific focus on how continuous learning, professional development networks, social support, and intrinsic motivation interact to strengthen their ability to adapt and thrive under challenging circumstances.

Methodology: This study employs a narrative literature review. Through concept mapping and inductive thematic analysis, the study synthesizes key findings from peer-reviewed and authoritative sources to develop a conceptual model.

Results: The study reveals that solopreneurs who actively engage in learning activities and develop strong social and professional networks are better equipped to cope with adversity. Additionally, intrinsic motivation, driven by autonomy, competence, and relatedness, plays a key role in fostering engagement with these resilience-building activities. The study presents the Crisis-Responsive Solopreneur Resilience Model (CRSRM) helping solopreneurs adapt to challenges during times of crisis.

Practical implications: The presented model indicates that solopreneurs who invest in ongoing learning, engage with support networks, and cultivate intrinsic motivation are better positioned to maintain business continuity and personal well-being during crises. This framework can inform the design of support initiatives and professional development programs tailored to the needs of aspiring and established solopreneurs.

Originality: While not a new theory, this study provides novel insights into the dynamics of solopreneur resilience, an area that has been underexplored in entrepreneurship research.

Keywords: *Solopreneur, Resilience, Intrinsic Motivation, Social Support, Continuous Learning.*

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1. Introduction

A field progresses when previous research is logically integrated and built upon the findings of earlier studies (Paul & Criado, 2020). Entrepreneurship is primarily defined by the identification and pursuit of business opportunities (Bhattacharyya & Kumar, 2020). Entrepreneurship can take place within established organizations and is not limited to the creation of new start-ups. Additionally, individuals may start a new business for various reasons, many of which are not necessarily driven by the desire to capitalize on a novel idea (Doran et al., 2018). Entrepreneurs play an important role in stimulating economic growth (Doran et al., 2018), creating new markets and improving employment rates (Komninos et al., 2024), solving consumer problems (McKenzie et al., 2007), and contributing to addressing environmental and social issues (Veleva, 2021).

Entrepreneurial endeavors can involve entrepreneurs who hire employees and work as team startups (Bergmann et al., 2023), or solopreneurs, also known as solo entrepreneurs, who do not. The literature on solopreneurship is still evolving, albeit at a very slow pace. Solopreneurs are defined as business owners who manage and operate their businesses individually, without additional partners or hiring employees (Cieřlik et al., 2023; Kluver, 2019). While entrepreneurship in general presents many challenges, ranging from financial fragility and budgetary issues (Okeke et al., 2024), time pressure and resource constraints (Cardon & Arwine, 2024), to a high risk of failure (Welsch, 2004), solo entrepreneurs and solo founders, who benefit from higher levels of autonomy (Jain, 2024), may have to rely heavily on motivation to navigate additional challenges that they face such as loneliness (Cardon & Arwine, 2024), work stress (Blanchflower, 2004), and difficulties in achieving work-life balance (Aichele, 2022).

In March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared the COVID-19 pandemic following the global spread of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2). While businesses across various sectors experienced diverse impacts during the COVID-19 pandemic, self-employed workers faced disproportionately severe challenges, compounded by simultaneous financial uncertainty and limited government support in many countries (Battista, 2020; Block et al., 2022; Kalenkoski & Pabilonia, 2022; Sharma & Dev, 2024). Solopreneurs were no exception.

The COVID-19 pandemic, an unforeseen crisis with a significant impact on the global economy, aligns with 'sudden crises', one of the four typologies of hardships in

entrepreneurship presented by Simarasl et al. (2024). This typology is described by the authors as the unexpected onset of significant events, such as a natural disaster or a pandemic. Hacks (2015) emphasized the critical importance for solo entrepreneurs to recognize the unpredictability of disasters in business and to prioritize resilience building to navigate such challenges effectively. As such, identifying strategies to sustain or enhance solopreneurs' resilience became a critical priority.

Since solopreneurs operate outside traditional organizational structures—where established learning cultures, development opportunities, and access to networks and social support are common—they face unique challenges. These benefits, which are typically available in larger entrepreneurial firms, are vital for building resilience, developing skills, and formulating strategies to overcome obstacles. Given this gap, it is crucial to explore how solopreneurs navigate these challenges in their solo ventures. This area remains significantly underexplored, as much of the entrepreneurship literature tends to neglect the experiences and needs of solopreneurs, focusing instead on larger firms or team startup contexts.

In this article, I explore whether continuous learning in the form of participation in online learning communities, professional development activities and professional networks during crises can serve as a resilience enhancer for solopreneurs and contribute to both productivity and well-being. Additionally, I will examine whether such activities contribute to enhancing social support networks for solopreneurs, which, in turn, may further strengthen their entrepreneurial resilience. Further, given the challenges solopreneurs face, such as limited resources and the responsibility of managing their businesses alone, I explore intrinsic motivation's role in their ability to build resilience during times of crisis.

In this paper, while the focus is on the aforementioned concepts, particularly their application during uncertain and unforeseen circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic—a context that significantly disrupted businesses and entrepreneurs—I do not intend to explore the pandemic itself in detail. Instead, the paper centers on its objective: to explore and understand how learning and development activities, social support, and motivation interact to strengthen resilience in solopreneurs, especially in the face of adversity, crises, instability, and significant events that impact both their personal and venture performance.

This work, which is methodologically based on a narrative review of the literature, draws on selective studies that assist in addressing the objective of this paper. Narrative reviews do not adhere to formal guidelines or rigid inclusion and exclusion criteria (Gregory & Denniss, 2018). Narrative reviews are more suitable for examining broad topics and offering a comprehensive overview of diverse perspectives (Baethge et al., 2019). This study is guided by the research question: How do continuous learning, social support, and intrinsic motivation interact to strengthen resilience in solopreneurs during times of crisis? The following sections will provide theoretical foundations, followed by a literature review, a brief clarification of the research methodology, and conclude with a concise discussion of the findings, presenting a conceptual model. The paper provides final conclusions, reflecting on post-pandemic challenges and opportunities, along with a concise note on the study's limitations.

2. Theoretical Perspectives

To provide context for the investigation in this article, I explore key concepts from the fields of entrepreneurship, social learning, and psychology that are closely aligned with the main theme of this paper exploring solopreneurs' resilience in the face of extreme events. According to Eisenhar's definition, a theoretical guideline is "a structure that guides research by relying on a formal theory...constructed by using an established, coherent explanation of certain phenomena and relationships" (1991, p. 205). Discussing theoretical foundations is crucial to linking the current discussion to established theories, which helps to ground the research in the broader academic framework (Grant & Osanloo, 2014).

2.1. Resilience in Entrepreneurship

Resilience is a concept that is explained and understood differently in different fields of research (Hartmann, et al., 2022) and spans several academic disciplines, including engineering, public health, psychology, sociology, and business administration, to name a few (Bonanno, 2004; Estêvão et al., 2017; Kaye-Kauderer et al., 2021; Righi et al., 2015; Zimmerman, 2013). In broad terms, resilience refers to the ability to recover (Hedner et al., 2011), and for entrepreneurs it means they are able to overcome challenges

and adapt to uncertainties (Lee & Wang, 2017). Entrepreneurs are historically known for their ability to tolerate ambiguous situations and effectively cope with and manage uncertainty and risks (Ahmed et al., 2022; Sexton & Bowman, 1985; York & Venkataraman, 2010). Resilience capacity is crucial in empowering entrepreneurs to effectively navigate and overcome adversity and hardships (Duchek, 2018).

Entrepreneurial resilience refers to the ability of business owners to adapt and stay focused on future opportunities despite facing challenging market conditions and frequent disruptions (Bernard & Barbosa, 2016). It involves the capacity to handle personal and professional difficulties, navigate destabilizing events, and maintain a proactive, forward-thinking mindset.

2.2. Learning Organization Theory

"Learning is a social activity" (Orr, 2022, p. 1), and entrepreneurial ventures—whether led by a group of entrepreneurs or a solopreneur—must foster learning. Peter Senge's seminal work on learning organization theory underscores the importance of systems thinking, personal mastery, shared vision, mental models, and team learning as foundational disciplines for fostering knowledge generation and sharing (Senge, 1990; Senge, 1996). In business context, leaders play a critical role in shaping such learning cultures, managing systems that encourage ongoing development and organizational growth (Schein, 2010). However, solopreneurs—who lack the structural support of formal organizations—face distinct challenges in cultivating these disciplines. Despite these barriers, external learning programs, peer learning, and professional networking provide solopreneurs with opportunities to enhance their skills and adapt to evolving demands (O'Toole & Pulkkinen, 2021).

It is crucial to explore whether engaging in external learning opportunities allows solopreneurs to align with the broader theoretical framework of learning organizations, and how this alignment can contribute to developing entrepreneurial resilience, as well as enhancing performance and productivity when faced with unforeseen challenges. The literature explicitly suggests that "to remain a life-long master, we must develop systems that encourage a passion to engage in life-long learning and professional development" (Tranquillo & Stecker, 2016, p.198).

2.3. Social Support Theory

The most relevant definition of social support in the context of this paper is provided by Shumaker and Brownell (1984), who define it as “an exchange of resources between two individuals perceived by the provider or the recipient to be intended to enhance the well-being of the recipient” (p.11). Social Support Theory (SST) has been widely applied to entrepreneurship, emphasizing the importance of support networks in fostering entrepreneurial success. Solopreneurs, in particular, often operate in isolation and may face unique challenges. In this context, social support from family, peers, mentors, and professional networks can play a critical role in providing emotional, informational, and practical assistance, which helps entrepreneurs navigate difficult situations (Hoang & Antoncic, 2003). Supportive relationships have been shown to enhance resilience, foster motivation, and improve overall well-being, particularly during times of stress and crisis (Uzzi, 1997; Baron & Markman, 2003). The presence of social support is also vital for long-term business sustainability, as it enables solopreneurs to adapt, overcome obstacles, and innovate in competitive environments.

There are additional theories in social support, such as those focusing on sustainable and long-term support, also important in the context of entrepreneurship. The convoy model of social support (Kahn & Antonucci, 1980), for example, builds on Bowlby’s work (Bowlby, 1969), highlighting the significance of interpersonal relationships throughout one’s life. Other closely aligned theories, such as socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 1992) suggest that in the context of social support research, Potts (1997) found that older adults experienced different levels of social support both within and outside retirement communities, which was influenced by the varying sizes of their social networks in these settings. These aspects of social support are also pertinent to solopreneurship research, as they may shed light on whether factors like age group, network size, or common interests (e.g., interest in digital products or healthcare entrepreneurship) affect reciprocal social support, and motivation, particularly in professional networks and online learning communities during times of crisis.

2.4. Crisis Management Theory

Crisis Management Theory and Sensemaking Theory provide important perspectives on how solopreneurs navigate crises. Crisis Management Theory emphasizes the need for

preparation, effective responses, and recovery strategies during unexpected events (Mitroff & Pearson, 1993). Meanwhile, Sensemaking Theory explains how individuals interpret ambiguous and uncertain situations, guiding decision-making processes in times of crisis (Weick, 1993). These theories are crucial for understanding how solopreneurs adapt to and manage disruptions while maintaining resilience.

2.5. Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) posits that intrinsic motivation, driven by the fulfillment of basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, is crucial for fostering sustained engagement in entrepreneurial activities (Deci & Ryan, 2000). For solopreneurs, this internal drive becomes especially significant during challenging times or crises, where external motivators may fall short in maintaining momentum and productivity. Intrinsically motivated solopreneurs are more likely to engage in reflective practices that align with their personal values and long-term goals, which can fuel resilience and persistence in the face of adversity (Hamed & Mehdiabadi, 2021).

Ryan and Deci (2000) defined intrinsic motivation as the spontaneous tendency “to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one’s capacity, to explore, and to learn” (p.70). Intrinsic motivation is especially valuable for solopreneurs, as it can drive their active engagement in learning and development activities, particularly in the face of challenges and adversity, as will be explored further. In the absence of the organizational culture and structured learning environments typically found in larger entrepreneurial firms, intrinsic motivation becomes even more critical for solopreneurs, acting as the primary force behind their ongoing personal, professional, and business growth. This internal drive enables solopreneurs to adapt, innovate, and sustain their ventures in ways that external motivators alone may not facilitate.

Closely related to solopreneurship and aligning with Self-Determination Theory are Alderfer's ERG theory and Maslow's theory of human needs. Alderfer's ERG theory (Alderfer, 1969), which highlights the concepts of existence, relatedness, and growth, is commonly applied in workplace settings to enhance morale and productivity, as noted by Caulton (2012). Similarly, Maslow's theory, which identifies belonging as one of the core human needs, provides a complementary perspective on motivation (Maslow, 1943,

1954). Almost all these motivation theories and their key constructs align with principles of social support, which are critical in addressing human needs and motivation. These theoretical components are foundational for fostering resilience, enhancing well-being, and improving productivity among entrepreneurs and solopreneurs alike.

2.6. Reinforcement Theory

Reinforcement Theory, introduced by Skinner (1957), suggests that the outcomes of actions influence the likelihood of those actions being repeated. Previous research has shown that engagement and participation in entrepreneurial programs improve the need for achievement and internal locus of control of reinforcement among entrepreneurs (Baskaran, 2018; Hansemark, 1998). For solopreneurs, particularly during times of crisis, participation in online learning communities can be driven by the perceived positive outcomes, such as skill acquisition, improved coping abilities, and the social and professional support from peers and networks. These rewards can potentially enhance their intrinsic motivation, resilience, and productivity. On the other hand, if there is no positive reinforcement or if the outcomes are negative, the motivation to continue these activities may decrease or disappear (Cameron & Pierce, 1994). This highlights how reinforcement through positive outcomes, such as skill development and peer support, can sustain a solopreneur's engagement in online learning communities, ultimately boosting their resilience, coping mechanisms, and productivity.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Social Support and Resilience Across Contexts

Since 2008, there has been a notable surge in interest surrounding the topics of resilience and entrepreneurship (Korber & McNaughton, 2017). However, as previously mentioned, the literature on solopreneurship, also referred to as solo entrepreneurship, is still evolving at a much slower pace, with most published work focusing mainly on entrepreneur development (e.g., intentions), venture growth and scaling, profit, and other operational mechanics, such as finance (e.g., crowdfunding), risk-management, and digital marketing. This section begins by introducing four studies as part of an effort aligned with the objective of this paper, focusing on the role of social connection, learning, and

support in fostering resilience across various contexts. Following this, the next sections of the literature review will zoom in further on the interplay of continuous learning, social support, motivation, and their specific relevance to solo entrepreneurship.

Bentley et al. (2022) focused on addressing the negative well-being impacts of social isolation caused by COVID-19 lockdowns. Researchers developed an online activity, GROUPS 2 CONNECT (G2C), to enhance social connections in the absence of face-to-face interactions. Data from 1,021 participants across four studies revealed improvements in perceived social connection, the ability to maintain relationships, and overall well-being. Longitudinal results indicated these benefits were sustained over time for two studies, with participants who completed their social connection goals reporting consistently higher gains. This research highlights the effectiveness of structured online activities, which can become a resource of social support, in mitigating the adverse effects of isolation, something that solo entrepreneurs also experienced (Hussain & Li, 2024).

Research has long established that socially supportive relationships and robust social networks have therapeutic benefits for both mental and physical health (Pearson, 1986). Both psychology and entrepreneurship literature highlight that social support aids coping (Seffren et al., 2018; Simarasl et al., 2024), which is particularly crucial in solo entrepreneurship, especially when solopreneurs face challenges like the unforeseen impact of events such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mustafa et al. (2021) explored the social and psychological challenges encountered by women entrepreneurs in Pakistan during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using a qualitative approach, the researchers identified multiple obstacles, including social, cultural, economic, mental health, and lifestyle-related crises. Their findings also revealed that many women entrepreneurs sought to adapt by shifting their business models toward digitization. Crucially, the study underscored the importance of strong emotional support in helping entrepreneurs navigate the crises brought about by the pandemic. This emotional support was highlighted as a key factor in mitigating stress and enabling resilience during times of uncertainty. Coe et al. (2024) support these findings, proposing that building a social support network can foster emotional and mental resilience. Furthermore, research by Tucker and Quintero-Ares (2021) suggests that participation in online professional learning communities played a significant role in supporting resilience, productivity, and self-care during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Inkaew et al. (2024) examined factors influencing the success of online solopreneurs in Thailand during the pandemic. By analyzing responses from 400 solopreneurs using statistical methods, the study found that in addition to demographics such as age, education, and experience, critical business functions—particularly human resources—emerged as key contributors to solopreneurs' success. While the literature lacks direct insights into the continuous learning and professional development activities of solopreneurs during COVID-19, the findings by Inkaew et al. (2024) point to a crucial factor: the role of human resources. In larger entrepreneurial firms, human resources are typically responsible for designing and implementing learning and development initiatives for employees. Another critically important function of a Human Resources department is fostering a culture of continuous learning, which aligns with the earlier discussion in this paper regarding the principles of learning organizations. In the case of solopreneurs, who are solely responsible for their own continuous learning and development, this function remains highly important but is often underexplored in research.

Cao et al. (2024) investigated the relationship between social support, resilience, and coping styles among 665 university students in China, a demographic identified as high-risk for depression. Using structural equation modeling and correlation analysis, the study found that social support positively impacts psychological resilience. Their research findings emphasize the importance of social support networks and guiding individuals toward mature coping styles (problem-solving and help-seeking) to build resilience and improve mental health outcomes. The literature shows that for established entrepreneurs and aspiring entrepreneurs, critical and creative thinking skills, including problem-solving, are essential for success (Hatthakijphonng & Ting, 2019), as these skills are enhanced through continuous learning, collaboration with peers, and the formation of social networks (El Mawas & Muntean, 2018), which in turn foster resilience (Stewart & Sun, 2004) and promote well-being (Grant et al., 2006; Watson et al., 2018).

The four studies collectively highlight that resilience is shaped by a combination of social connection, support, and individual capabilities, though each context underscores different aspects of this process. Bentley et al. (2022) show how structured online activities can mitigate the negative effects of isolation, thereby enhancing social connections and overall well-being. This aligns with Cao et al. (2024), who also emphasize the role of social support in building resilience, particularly in populations at

risk for mental health issues like university students. The literature on entrepreneurs' mental health and well-being has previously indicated that entrepreneurs can be at high risk for mental health issues (Gish et al., 2022). Hence, efforts aimed at improving the resilience and well-being of solopreneur populations are not only important but also necessary.

Meanwhile, Mustafa et al. (2021) provide a nuanced perspective by focusing on the emotional and psychological challenges faced by women entrepreneurs, emphasizing the critical role of emotional support in fostering resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. This finding is further echoed by Coe et al. (2024), who advocate for the importance of social support networks in enhancing emotional and mental resilience. Inkaew et al. (2024) add an entrepreneurial dimension by pointing out that, while human resources typically drive learning and development in larger firms, solopreneurs—who are responsible for their own professional growth—face unique challenges that remain underexplored in existing research.

Together, these studies, which underpin this section of the literature review, highlight that resilience is a multifaceted process. It requires not only external support, such as social connections and networks, but also the internal strategies of individuals—specifically, adaptive coping mechanisms and the capacity to navigate challenges through both personal and professional development.

3.2 Social Networks and Learning in the Context of Building Resilience

Having access to networks and social support is crucial for enhancing resilience in individuals (Cao et al., 2024). This support becomes especially vital during times of crisis, as demonstrated by the widespread challenges faced during the COVID-19 pandemic (Li et al., 2021), where individuals who were better connected to support systems exhibited greater resilience in the face of adversity. The pandemic forced many entrepreneurs, including solopreneurs already in business, to transition to online platforms (Inkaew et al., 2024). While solopreneurs may not heavily rely on networks for business development, despite the entrepreneurship literature emphasizing the significance of networks in this regard, they do recognize the value of networks for their personal well-being (Belt et al., 2015). However, there is still a lack of sufficient knowledge about the broader impact of participating in online learning and development courses or attending

educational and professional development events, particularly in terms of how these activities contribute to solopreneurs' resilience. In addition to skill-building, such engagement may offer valuable benefits related to social support, networking, and resilience enhancement.

Aldrich and Zimmer (1986) argue that entrepreneurs are situated within a social network that significantly influences the entrepreneurial process. More generally, social networks are characterized by a group of actors (e.g., individuals or other firms) and the connections that link them (Brass, 1992). Building on the idea of the interconnectedness of entrepreneurs within social networks, it is important to recognize the increasing complexity of our environments. As Lapointe (1998, as cited in Fillion et al., 2014) states:

Our environments are more and more complex, more and more interdependent, more and more fleeting, more and more unstable, and more and more unforeseeable. In addition, this shift of change of growing complexity is continually accelerating. Thus, this new context continually requires greater capabilities of adaptation, relegating to us the responsibility of our learning, and it is asking for the creation of a culture of continuous change and learning (p.10).

Engagement in robust professional networks and participation in well-structured learning programs are pivotal for fostering continuous personal and professional development (Tranquillo & Stecker, 2016). There are many opportunities for entrepreneurs to engage in learning and development. Such opportunities encompass access to coaches and mentors, the acceptance of change as a natural aspect of life, and the ability to reframe crises as manageable challenges rather than insurmountable obstacles (Davidson, 2000). Coaching, which has emerged as an increasingly popular learning and development tool (Ebrahimi, 2024a) and aims to enhance performance and growth (Ebrahimi, 2024b), and mentoring, which aims to improve the performance of the mentee (Goh & Richardson, 2024) and is described as "a process for the informal transmission of knowledge, social capital, and psychosocial support" (Short et al., 2014, p. 3), are among the key resources available to entrepreneurs. For solo entrepreneurs, who often navigate distinctive challenges, engaging in these learning opportunities not only provides vital support but also holds significant potential to improve their resilience, particularly in the face of adversity.

Entrepreneurship often involves significant uncertainty and is often associated with a high risk of failure (Su et al., 2020). A study that surveyed 204 entrepreneurs from two major

towns in Kenya found that online social support positively moderated entrepreneurial resilience (Kipkosgei, 2022). Similarly, Sherman et al. (2016) conducted a survey with 191 entrepreneurs in Florida and California, using factor analysis, correlation, and regression to analyze the data. The study found that entrepreneurial well-being increases with the presence of flow, intrinsic definitions of success, and productivity. These factors, much like online social support in the Kenyan study, contribute to enhancing entrepreneurs' resilience, fostering both well-being and the ability to overcome challenges.

A study by van de Pol et al. (2022) reported that integrating personal and professional development activities into a core medical curriculum significantly improved student well-being. Implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic, the program demonstrated that a proactive, holistic approach focusing on resilience, self-reflection, and study-life balance could effectively support students' mental health and personal growth, even in highly challenging and uncertain times. The literature on learning organizations also highlights the importance of creating a culture that prioritizes learning, innovation, and growth which is linked to both personal and professional development (Senge, 1990).

While the creation of organizational culture in small businesses has been shown to positively impact innovation among entrepreneurs (Sanchez et al., 2020), there is still limited understanding of how solo entrepreneurs create systems of values, beliefs, rituals, and norms that shape the culture of their ventures. Furthermore, it remains unclear how they establish a culture of continuous learning and development to support their professional growth and build resilience in times of hardship.

Solo entrepreneurs often face unique challenges in creating such a culture due to the lack of internal support and peer learning opportunities (Gibb, 2002). In parallel with the need to foster a culture of learning and continuing professional development by entrepreneurs and small business owners, is the necessity for improving motivation, resilience, creativity, productivity, work-life balance, and well-being.

Existing literature also confirms that social connections through online communities during the COVID-19 pandemic improved well-being of individuals engaged in online activities (Bentley et al., 2022; Ebrahimi, 2024c) while findings of a research by Humphrey and Vari (2021) which collected survey data from 260 Australian participants

during the pandemic reported that intrinsic-based aspirations relate positively to meaning in life and that meaning in life predicts less stress and worry associated with COVID-19.

Resilience can often be seen as a product of deliberate design rather than a mere innate trait. In education context, for example, Naidu (2021) highlights that students opting for distance learning are drawn to the flexibility it offers, enabling them to balance formal studies with responsibilities like paid work and family care. This adaptability is a choice that, particularly when students receive support from their educators and peers, enhances their resilience. Drawing from this context, it may be reasonable to suggest that solo entrepreneurs, too, benefit from intentionally engaging in online learning programs, professional networks, and communities. This adaptability is a deliberate choice that not only offers flexibility for managing entrepreneurial ventures but also creates opportunities to access various forms of support, including social, psychological, educational, and peer-driven resources. Such engagement has the potential to aid entrepreneurs in overcoming challenges while fostering personal and business growth. Moreover, this deliberate choice-making appears to align closely with motivation, as will be explored further below.

3.3 Intrinsic Motivation in the Context of Engagement in Learning and Development

Falk (2023) highlights that our brains often resist tasks that don't immediately spark interest, prioritizing energy conservation. Intrinsic motivation, however, can overcome this, driving growth and success even in challenging circumstances. Intrinsically motivated behavior, characterized as freely engaged actions driven by pleasure and interest without a need for external rewards, arises from the satisfaction of three fundamental human needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Boga, 2017; Ryan et al., 1995, 1996; Sheldon et al., 1996). Domenico and Ryan (2017) state that advances in neuroscience, supported by numerous experimental and field studies, have revealed a strong link between intrinsic motivation and improvements in learning, performance, creativity, and emotional experiences.

In 1971, Deci conducted a study in which two groups of participants worked on simple puzzles. Group A completed three rounds of puzzles without any reward, while Group B received a reward only after the second round. The study focused not on puzzle-solving

ability, but on the duration participants continued working on puzzles after being instructed to take a break. The goal was to explore how external rewards influence intrinsic motivation. The results indicated that the reward in round two significantly reduced Group B's intrinsic motivation in the third round. This study laid the foundation for self-determination theory, which centers on the idea that people are motivated when they feel their actions are driven by their own free will.

Deci's 1971 study revealed the power of intrinsic motivation and how easily it can be undermined by extrinsic rewards. This finding laid the groundwork for self-determination theory, which posits that people thrive when they feel their actions are self-directed, rather than externally controlled. For solo entrepreneurs, this insight is particularly valuable—intrinsic motivation could play a crucial role in driving interest in continuous education and professional development, even when such activities seem challenging or disconnected from immediate rewards.

However, this connection between continuous learning, professional development, and intrinsic motivation, especially in the context of solo entrepreneurship, remains underexplored. The potential benefits of these engagements—such as increased resilience, improved coping strategies, stronger social support, and enhanced productivity—remain underexplored. That being said, several key points are clear: 1) Solopreneurship is an autonomous entrepreneurial model in which personal interests play a central role in all aspects of operating a venture (Jain, 2024); 2) Autonomous motivation is critical in driving individuals to take initiative for their well-being and personal development (Ryan, 2012); and 3) The literature stresses the significance of ongoing peer support as a self-care behavior (Laban-Sharman & Majumdar, 2021), with intrinsic motivation being positively linked to self-care practices and healthy behavior (Seifert et al., 2012).

Autonomy, recognized as a fundamental human need, refers to the desire to independently organize one's experiences and actions in alignment with a coherent sense of self (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000). On one hand, Carver and Baird (1998) suggest that the impact of intrinsic versus extrinsic goals on well-being stems from intrinsic goals being driven by autonomous motivations, while extrinsic goals are typically guided by controlled motivations. On the other hand, entrepreneurial loneliness and burnout, which present significant challenges for entrepreneurs (Gowing & Evenson, 2020), can be

mitigated by intrinsic goals that intentionally focus on enhancing well-being and resilience. This interplay is critical, as it can be argued that if intrinsic goals are autonomously motivated, a solopreneur's intrinsic commitment to engage in activities that improve their resilience, and well-being could yield positive outcomes. As reinforcement theory highlighted earlier, if these positive outcomes are reinforced, the commitment to pursue intrinsic goals is likely to strengthen further.

Building on the notion that intrinsic goals are autonomously motivated, it is pertinent to connect this to earlier discussions in this paper regarding the challenges solopreneurs face in: 1) creating a learning organization, and 2) navigating unforeseen and challenging circumstances, such as those experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. These challenges include social isolation and loneliness (Cardon & Arwine, 2024), the compulsory transition of most businesses to online platforms (Lai, & Widmar, 2021), and the pervasive sense of uncertainty and instability caused by the pandemic (Shengelia, 2023). By tapping into their intrinsic motivation, solopreneurs can engage in continuous learning, actively participate in online professional learning communities, and seek opportunities for support from peers and social networks. These efforts, as the literature confirmed earlier in this article, can foster stronger social networks, ultimately contributing to resilience at both the individual level and within their entrepreneurial ventures.

4. Methodology

Narrative reviews, also known as non-systematic reviews, provide “general debates, appraisal of previous studies and the current lack of knowledge” (Ferrari, 2015, p.231). The methodology for this research involves a non-systematic review of the literature. According to Synder (2019), “literature reviews are useful when the aim is to provide an overview of a certain issue or research problem” (p. 334).

4.1 Literature Search and Study Selection

This paper does not include primary data collection. The literature review draws from peer-reviewed sources, including empirical articles, books, and book chapters, as well as limited non-refereed practitioner and industry publications. To ensure rigor, relevant

keywords were identified to guide the literature search. Articles were sourced from two reputable databases, Scopus and ScienceDirect, along with Open Access publications in peer-reviewed journals across entrepreneurship, business, psychology, and management. The search included terms such as solopreneur, motivation and solopreneurship, solopreneur development, entrepreneurship and resilience, solopreneurs and learning, crisis and solopreneurship, crisis in entrepreneurship, solopreneurs and social support, supporting solopreneurs, and various combinations of these keywords. Since this paper presents an in-depth narrative review rather than a systematic review or meta-analysis, frameworks such as PRISMA were not applied.

Abstracts and full text of the selected articles were carefully reviewed to select papers that aligned with the research question and adhered to the academic rigor expected of scholarly work. For industry and practitioner-oriented articles, I prioritized sources with established authority and reputation. The inclusion of non-refereed sources, such as doctoral dissertations and articles from platforms like Harvard Business Review, was deliberately limited, averaging no more than 10 articles, to maintain a scholarly balance. After reading the selected abstracts, I delved deeper into the shortlisted papers, reading them in full, and ultimately selected studies that were included in the literature review which assisted to provide a broad exploration. It is important to note that while there is no universally accepted framework or standardized process for conducting narrative literature reviews (Baumeister & Leary, 1997), and despite the significant overlap between writing empirical papers and literature reviews (Bem, 1995), one inherent limitation of narrative reviews is that the selection and evaluation of literature often lack a structured guideline. This absence of a formalized process can introduce bias (Ferrari, 2015). That said, as noted by Grant and Booth (2009), non-systematic reviews are particularly valuable for synthesizing existing knowledge and highlighting gaps in literature, providing a broad perspective on the research topic. This methodology is well-suited for addressing complex issues, particularly in the context of emerging fields or where comprehensive data collection is not feasible.

The research question that guides the exploration in this study is: How do continuous learning, social support, and intrinsic motivation interact to strengthen resilience in solopreneurs during times of crisis?

4.2 Concept Mapping and Thematic Analysis

To synthesize the diverse insights from the reviewed literature and develop the Crisis-Responsive Solopreneur Resilience Model (CRSRM), a dual analytic approach was employed. First, a concept mapping process was conducted to extract and visually organize key constructs—namely, continuous learning, social support, and intrinsic motivation—from the selected studies. This iterative mapping process involved coding salient concepts, clustering them based on theoretical affinity, and establishing the relationships among them.

Subsequently, an inductive thematic analysis was applied following the procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Although the above mentioned constructs were predefined, the analysis allowed for patterns and relationships to emerge organically rather than being imposed by a rigid framework. The process entailed familiarization with the literature, systematic coding, and the identification and refinement of themes that recurred across studies. This stepwise analysis ensured that emergent patterns were grounded in the literature and that the interconnections between themes were accurately reflected in the conceptual model. The integration of these qualitative techniques not only enhanced the analytical depth of the review but also provided a robust framework for interpreting the interplay between the identified constructs (Grant & Booth, 2009).

5. Results and Discussion

The literature reviewed and the theoretical discussions presented earlier in this paper reveal that: 1) solopreneurs bear sole responsibility for establishing a learning culture within their ventures and initiating learning and development activities; 2) engagement in learning and development, professional networks, and diverse learning communities can equip solopreneurs with the skills and knowledge needed to navigate crises with greater resilience, while also fostering innovation and productivity; and 3) the positive outcomes associated with these activities can reinforce repetitive behaviors (e.g., ongoing participation in learning communities and professional networks), which prove especially beneficial when facing major disruptions and unforeseen events, such as a pandemic, that induce isolation, loneliness, uncertainty, stress, and anxiety.

The findings suggest that intrinsic motivation, driven by autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000), has potential to play a pivotal role in solopreneurs' engagement in continuous learning and resilience-building activities. The literature enhanced our understanding of the role of intrinsically motivated drives that could empower solopreneurs to pursue learning opportunities, professional and social support networks, which in turn foster adaptive coping mechanisms and enhance their capacity to overcome challenges (Hamed & Mehdiabadi, 2021; Tranquillo & Stecker, 2016). This internal drive also seems to contribute to encouraging proactive problem-solving and creative thinking, which are essential for navigating periods of uncertainty and instability.

Additionally, the integration of social support with intrinsic motivation may have a strong potential to reinforce solopreneurs' ability to maintain well-being and productivity. Social support, as defined by Shumaker and Brownell (1984), complements intrinsic motivation by providing a framework for emotional and practical assistance, particularly during crises. By participating in professional networks and peer communities, solopreneurs gain access to valuable resources and connections that not only alleviate feelings of isolation but also sustain their intrinsic motivation to persist, all of which are crucial for building or maintaining resilience and well-being during times of crisis. These synergistic interactions create a feedback loop where social support and motivation mutually reinforce resilience, ultimately enabling solopreneurs to more productively navigate unforeseen and distressing circumstances.

5.1 Crisis-Responsive Solopreneur Resilience Model (CRSRM)

The Crisis-Responsive Solopreneur Resilience Model (CRSRM) presented in this paper, and as shown in Figure 1, integrates three critical factors—continuous learning, social support, and intrinsic motivation—as key drivers of resilience-building among solopreneurs, particularly in response to crises and unforeseen disruptions.

Continuous learning in this model encompasses solopreneurs' intrinsically motivated participation in professional development, online learning communities, professional networks, and self-directed education. These activities enable solopreneurs to upskill, adapt to evolving market demands and unforeseen challenges, and gain insights into tools and frameworks that support their well-being, resilience, and productivity. This, in turn, fosters resilience, self-efficacy, and both personal and professional growth.

Existing research indicates that individuals who sustain their academic engagement despite facing personal or external difficulties exemplify resilience within educational contexts (Abdolrezapour et al., 2023; Shengyao et al., 2024). Similarly, in organisational settings, studies have highlighted the role of a positive and supportive learning culture in creating conditions that enhance individuals' confidence and willingness to confront challenges, thereby strengthening their capacity for adaptability and resilience (Ahsan, 2025; Prayogo et al., 2025). For solo entrepreneurs, ongoing learning and active participation in professional networks and learning communities hold particular significance. Although entrepreneurial behaviour is often observed among employees within innovative firms (Souto et al., 2022), individuals operating entrepreneurial ventures independently face distinct challenges. For them, the development of emotional competencies, such as sustaining optimism and fostering hope, is especially critical (Hartmann et al., 2022), and these qualities are often strengthened through involvement in peer-based support and collaborative learning environments.

This commitment and drive to engage in continuous learning also contribute to establishing a learning culture within their solopreneurial ventures. Such a culture is critical for fostering an environment of learning and development that helps solopreneurs find better solutions and reflect on their personal and business performance during times of crisis.

Social support, first, can be considered as one of the by-products of engagement in learning and development activities, as highlighted in the literature reviewed in this paper, while simultaneously complementing the learning process by providing access to emotional, informational, and practical resources through facilitators, peer networks, coaches, mentors, and professional online communities. This support, particularly during times of crisis, not only mitigates feelings of isolation commonly experienced by solopreneurs but also strengthens their ability to persist in adversity. Additionally, the literature provides evidence suggesting that social support is closely linked to motivational constructs and human needs such as belonging, relatedness, and esteem (Alderfer, 1969; Maslow, 1943, 1954). Further, belonging and peer support are recognized as factors contributing to well-being in the workplace (Ebrahimi, 2025a).

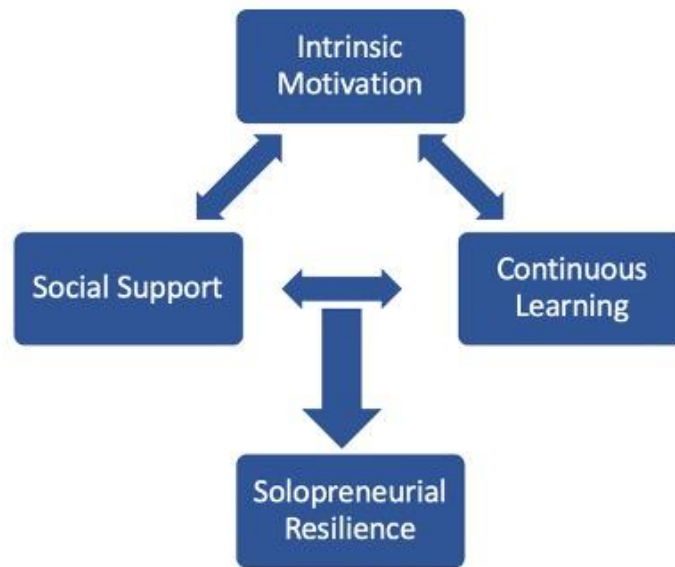
An expanding body of literature demonstrates that continuous learning and social support jointly foster resilience by enhancing intrinsic motivation (Bächtold et al., 2024; Chen et

al., 2024; Pap et al., 2021; Ridwan et al., 2024). In the proposed Crisis-Responsive Solopreneur Resilience Model illustrated below, intrinsic motivation serves as the driving force connecting continuous learning and social support to resilience. Rooted in Self-Determination Theory, intrinsic motivation reflects the solopreneurs' internal desire for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which fuels sustained engagement in resilience-building activities. For solopreneurs, intrinsic motivation, alongside positive psychology constructs such as hope, social support, and positive relationships, has been reported to play a key role in enhancing their resilience in the face of hardships (Ebrahimi, 2025b). Intrinsic motivation may also be instrumental to drive proactive engagement in learning opportunities and facilitate meaningful connections within support networks. In contrast, extrinsic motivation—defined as the drive to perform an activity to achieve positive outcomes (e.g., financial incentives) or avoid negative ones (e.g., penalties) (Deci & Ryan, 2000)—is not proposed in this paper as the primary motivator for solopreneurs to participate in learning communities, professional development networks, or social support activities aimed at enhancing resilience.

However, some researchers have found evidence showing that extrinsic motivation exerts stronger effect than intrinsic motivation on entrepreneurial intentions (Al-Jubari et al., 2019). While other researchers have also suggested that extrinsic motivation influences individuals seeking to upskill for promotions or salary increases in traditional employment contexts (Kuvaas et al., 2017), this paper proposes that it is reasonable to consider intrinsic motivation as a key driver for solopreneurs to engage in learning activities aimed at enhancing their resilience and well-being, both personally and within their ventures.

Intrinsic motivation, continuous learning, and social support converge to strengthen entrepreneurial resilience, enabling solopreneurs to overcome obstacles, maintain well-being, and thrive in dynamic environments—both individually and within their ventures. This model aims to highlight the interconnected nature of these concepts, offering a conceptual approach to understanding how solopreneurs can cultivate and sustain resilience amidst challenges. While other concepts and constructs may contribute to entrepreneurial resilience, exploring them falls outside the scope of this paper.

Figure 1. Crisis-Responsive Solopreneur Resilience Model (CRSRM)



Source: Developed by the author

6. Limitation

The primary limitation of this study lies in its non-systematic approach to the literature review, where the selection of primary articles is subjective and lacks structured inclusion and exclusion criteria (Paré & Kitsiou, 2017), which could potentially lead to biased interpretations or conclusions (Green et al., 2006). However, despite this limitation, the limited research available on the experiences, resilience, learning, motivation, and social support dynamics of solopreneurs in times of crisis highlights the value of the discussions and the proposed conceptual model. While this study is descriptive and the conceptual model has not been tested using statistical methods, it offers valuable insights and has the potential to inspire further research. The author acknowledges that the presented model is conceptual and that further empirical validation would be beneficial. The model can also serve as a practical guideline for aspiring and practicing solopreneurs, offering actionable strategies for resilience, productivity, well-being, and business continuity in challenging times, with careful consideration of the acknowledged limitations.

7. Conclusion and Post-Pandemic Reflections

Overall, this study demonstrates that solopreneurs can enhance their resilience by engaging in continuous learning, building professional networks, and harnessing intrinsic motivation. The Crisis-Responsive Solopreneur Resilience Model (CRSRM) integrates these elements into a robust framework that supports both personal well-being and business continuity during crises.

In the post-pandemic era, digital transformation has created unprecedented opportunities. The transition to online learning communities and digital professional networks (Bentley et al., 2022) has expanded access to vital development resources and enabled social connections that transcend geographic limits, opening new avenues for innovation and growth.

The COVID-19 pandemic sparked an unforeseen surge in global entrepreneurship, with Americans, for example, launching businesses at unprecedented rates. Equally surprising has been the lasting nature of this boom. As reported by Fikri and Newman (2024), by October 2023—more than three and a half years after the pandemic began—Americans were still submitting 59% more applications to start new businesses compared to pre-pandemic levels.

Looking ahead, entrepreneurs in the post-pandemic era continue to face challenges such as tight credit conditions and rising operational costs (Van Nostrand, 2024), they also stand to gain considerably by continuing to leverage intrinsic motivation, fostering a commitment to professional growth and lifelong learning, and expanding their social and professional support networks—all of which are key to navigating the evolving entrepreneurial landscape in diverse economic and entrepreneurial climates.

As interest in establishing entrepreneurial ventures continues to grow post-pandemic, there has also been a notable increase in the availability of flexible learning communities (Cutajar, 2024), AI-driven personalized learning (Kerimbayev et al., 2025; Khan & Omar, 2023), and collaborative professional development programs (Moser & Wei, 2023). These developments provide valuable support, enabling both established and aspiring solopreneurs to engage in continuous learning and build social and professional networks. Such resources are especially important for preparing businesses and entrepreneurial ventures to navigate potential future disruptions at local or global levels.

Future research should empirically evaluate the Crisis-Responsive Solopreneur Resilience Model (CRSRM) through mixed-method, longitudinal studies that track how continuous learning, social and professional networks and intrinsic motivation jointly sustain resilience in solopreneurs facing real-world crises. Comparative investigations across sectors and cultural contexts will also help identify the specific barriers and enablers of resilience, informing the design of targeted support programs and policy measures. Future research could also explore how solopreneurs in different sectors and regions engage with emerging technologies and AI-driven platforms for learning and support during crises.

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