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## The Aspiring Entrepreneur Model for Flourishing - A Model Designed to Keep Aspiring Entrepreneurs Engaged, Committed, and Flourishing

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## Abstract

The entrepreneurial experience is not for the faint of heart. Due to the stress associated with starting a new business, it can challenge the well-being of even the best intended entrepreneurs, especially those early on in their journey, whom I call aspiring entrepreneurs (AE). It is possible for an AE to flourish, where they thrive and continue to grow through the experience, as long as they invest in certain key well-being dimensions that positive psychology researchers and practitioners have identified as foundational to entrepreneurial flourishing. This paper explores three of these dimensions, (1) purpose in life, (2) autonomy, and (3) positive relationships with others; and provides a literature review on their potential impact of the AE's ability to flourish, even during difficult trials and challenges.

## Keywords

entrepreneur, entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial, purpose in life, purpose, autonomy, positive relationships, environmental mastery, personal growth, self-acceptance, positive psychology, PWB model, psychological well-being, flourish, flourishing, entrepreneurial flourishing, self-determination theory, competence, relatedness, self-efficacy, positive functioning, spirituality, self-organizing, self-organization, entrepreneur self-efficacy, eudaimonia, eudaimonic

## Disciplines

Business | Business Administration, Management, and Operations | Business and Corporate Communications | Business Intelligence | Cognition and Perception | Cognitive Psychology | Entrepreneurial and Small Business Operations | Industrial and Organizational Psychology | Interpersonal and Small Group Communication | Leadership Studies | Organizational Behavior and Theory | Organizational Communication | Organization Development | Other Business | Performance Management | Personality and Social Contexts | Training and Development

# THE ASPIRING ENTREPRENEUR MODEL FOR FLOURISHING

**The Aspiring Entrepreneur Model for Flourishing (AEM for Flourishing):** A model designed to keep aspiring entrepreneurs engaged, committed, and flourishing early on in their entrepreneurial journey

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MAPP 800: Capstone Project

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August 1, 2022

### **Abstract**

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## Introduction

In 2002, WorldCom, a global telecom organization that was once the icon in a growing industry, was now bankrupt and its CEO Bernie Ebbers convicted of financial fraud and sentenced to 25-years in prison. As a National Account Manager for WorldCom at the time, I took this as a sign that it was time for me to leave the corporate world, including the negative culture I was experiencing at the time, and pursue my dream of being an entrepreneur. I clearly remember the excitement that I was taking the entrepreneurial leap into a field that felt far more purposeful and meaningful, in-home elderly care. As I prepared for this venture, I recall experiencing what many aspiring entrepreneurs (AEs) feel: autonomy, purpose, and a special closeness to my wife and family (Shir & Ryff, 2021). This helped carry me for a while but within a couple of months I was already experiencing burnout due to the long hours, added financial stress, and heavy workload that often comes with entrepreneurship (Omrane et al., 2018), and I had not even hired my first employee. My well-being was suffering and to say I was discouraged would be an understatement.

My early entrepreneurial journey with all the difficulties, is common and experienced by millions of AEs worldwide, where stress from the initial phase of entrepreneurship can lead to many negative physical and psychological challenges (Shephard, et al., 2010). When entrepreneurs are first envisioning their new business venture, they are thrown into unfamiliar experiences and decisions that can cause stress, anxiety, and cognitive overload, negatively impacting their life satisfaction, (Omrane, 2018). It is with little wonder that overall, the AE experiences lower levels of life satisfaction, happiness, and subjective vitality, than someone who is unemployed (Van Gelderen, et al., 2015). It is at this point, in the initial stages of their entrepreneurial journey, where the AEs resolve to continue with their venture is challenged (Shir



& Ryff, 2021), often resulting in not just burnout but quitting their journey long before they experience the financial and emotional fruits of their early labors (Van Gelderen, et al., 2015). Even more alarming is the fact that burned out entrepreneurs have an extremely negative impact on the well-being of their employees, causing absenteeism, mediocre performance, and high turnover (Wiklund, et al., 2019). Conversely, entrepreneurs can be a source of incredible positive change within society, due to their key role in creating workplaces that allow people to thrive and grow (Wiklund, et al., 2019).

Unfortunately, stress is not only accepted in entrepreneurial life but often celebrated and encouraged (Shepherd, et al., 2010) by society. Burnout for the entrepreneur may take on a variety of different forms and can look different than the non-entrepreneur. Entrepreneurs, for example, are often fully invested in their venture, where they feel the full weight and responsibility of making up the slack that might be left by other team members (Fernet, et al., 2016). This often requires the entrepreneur to work long hours, well beyond what is normal or helpful for their overall well-being (Fernet, et al., 2016). According to Gallup, small-business owners (entrepreneurs), work an average of 52 hours a week, with only one-day off (Gallup, 2005). Therefore, entrepreneurial burnout can affect individuals in a variety of unique negative ways, psychological and physical. The physiological impact can include severe headaches, sleep disorders, muscle tension, diabetes, flu, hypertension, (Foletti, 2012), heart disease, ulcers, and many other health challenges (Fernet et al., 2016). Psychological impacts include work withdrawal (Foletti, 2012), anxiety, depression, sleep disturbance, and lack of focus (Bahrer-Kohler, 2013). Just as important, entrepreneurial burnout can cause founders to be less creative, innovative, productive, and persistent, directly influencing their ability to flourish (Stephan, 2018). Though others may struggle with any of these negative effects, it is compounded for the

entrepreneur due to the responsibilities they have to take on to keep their entrepreneurial venture alive.

If burnout is so prevalent among entrepreneurs, with some fairly severe health, mental, and behavioral challenges as a result, why do entrepreneurs choose this path? There are various scholarly studies that have identified one primary reason; to experience a higher degree of independence than they had with their employer (Shir et al., 2019). To spread their wings in a sense and find their own path to flourishing. Some entrepreneurs find this path, even AEs, but to do so, they must be able to weather the intense storms that come with starting and running a business. To increase the odds of an AEs success, greater attention on ways they can find the strength to persevere through the early challenges, will have a positive and lasting impact on the health of their well-being and that of their future organization they hope to create (Omrane, et al., 2018).

### **The Purpose of This Work**

As I reflect on my twenty-year entrepreneurial journey, my heart is filled with gratitude for the incredible experiences I have been fortunate to go through. Even the challenging times have become some of my most cherished learning opportunities. However, my present gratitude likely stems from the fact that my life as an AE is in the far distant past and I am no longer stressing out over my ability to pay my bills, take care of my family, and start a new business. Life as an AE was extremely hard and often painful; psychologically, physically, and financially. At the time, I did not believe flourishing was even possible. However, as I have discovered through this Masters of Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP) program, it did not have to be like that. I lacked the tools, resources, knowledge, and most importantly; the awareness, to truly flourish as an AE. My story is not unique, but shared by millions of AEs throughout the world,

and my primary motivation driving the purpose of this paper: to help AEs find the path to flourishing, regardless of circumstances. I draw upon evidenced based research to recommend a flourishing well-being model for AEs, entitled the Aspiring Entrepreneur Model for Flourishing, otherwise called *AEM for Flourishing* (AEMF). I will explore three key dimensions, first outlined by Shir & Ryff (2021), and reinforced by the theory and research of others, with the intent of uncovering why and how these dimensions can help AEs find the motivation to keep going and flourish early on in their entrepreneurial journey.

### **The Four Entrepreneurial Phases and The PWB Model**

AEMF falls in line with the first of four goal-oriented action phases designed by Gollwitzer (1990), that were later adapted for the entrepreneur by Nadav Shir and Carol Ryff (2021). Gollwitzer and colleagues developed their model to explore the motivational origins behind actionable outcomes, throughout various phases of a chosen goal (Gollwitzer, et al., 1990). Ultimately, their purpose was to break out the motivational phases that are required to achieve a desired outcome. Gollwitzer and colleagues broke these phases into four segments, which were as follows: (1) pre-decisional, where one will deliberate on what actions are required to achieve a specific goal; (2) post-decisional, where an individual might experience doubt and unresolved concerns on whether or not the goal is achievable; (3) actional, is where actions are taken towards the goal; and (4) post-actional, where one reviews and evaluates the result of the goal (Gollwitzer, et al., 1990).

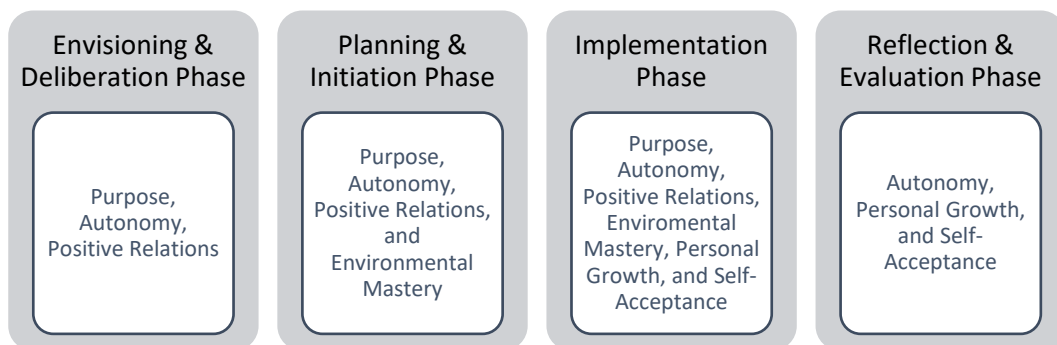
By using Gollwitzer and colleagues action phase model, Shir and Ryff (2021) created the four entrepreneurial action phases, that accompany the entrepreneurial journey: (1) Envisioning and deliberation (pre-decisional), where the entrepreneur envisions the new venture and deliberates whether or not to move forward with it; (2) Planning (post-decisional), where the

entrepreneur decides the what, when, how, and duration of key activities that are aligned with their morals and future vision of their venture; (3) Implementation and enactment (actional), where they enact and persist with their planned activities, creating a mobilization of social, mental, and physical resources; and (4) Reflection and evaluation (post-actional), where the entrepreneur assesses their progress and accomplishments, evaluating whether or not to continue with the entrepreneurial venture (Shir & Ryff, 2021).

Throughout each of these phases of the entrepreneurial journey, the AE must remain engaged early on in order to move from being an AE to a flourishing entrepreneur. As part of the four entrepreneurial action phases introduced by Shir & Ryff (2021), they incorporated the six dimensions of the Psychological Well-Being (PWB) Model, developed by Ryff (1989) decades ago. Shir & Ryff connected the various PWB dimensions to each phase. The PWB dimensions are (1) Purpose in life; (2) Autonomy; (3) Positive relationships; (4) Environmental mastery; (5) Personal growth; and (6) Self-acceptance (Ryff, 2019). See table 1 below of the PWB model and how the various dimensions tie to each of the four entrepreneurial phases:

**Table 1**

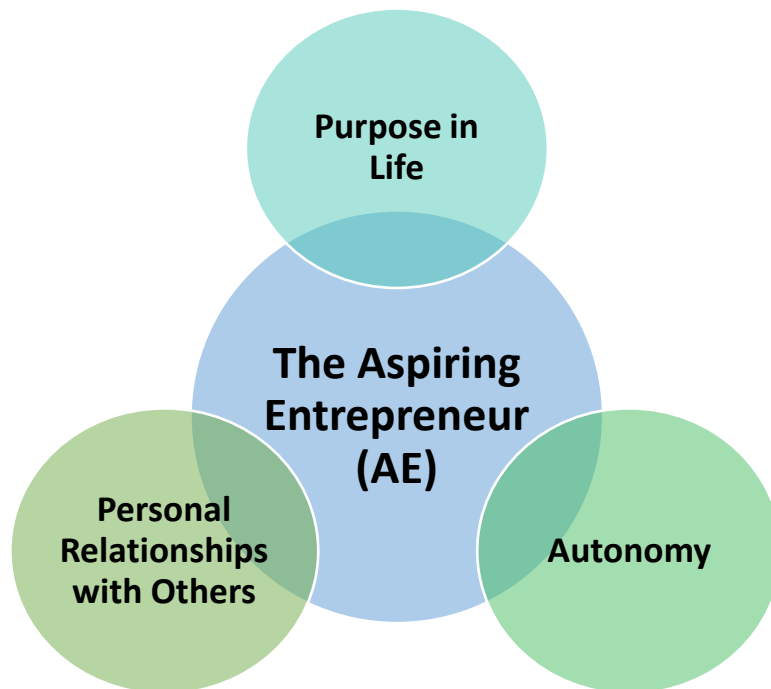
***Entrepreneurial Action Phases and Their Correlating PWB Dimensions***



Notice in table 1, the three-dimensions (purpose, autonomy, and positive relationships) attached to the envisioning and deliberation phase. Because my primary audience for this paper are AEs, who are still in this first phase of their entrepreneurial journey, the focus of this paper will be on these first three dimensions, that Shir and Ryff (2021), among others, have found to contribute the most to well-being during this first phase. These three dimensions, initially make up the AEMF. However, this model is dynamic and could be added to at a later point. Dimensions like self-efficacy, for example, might add greater depth to AEMF for future evolutions. I chose to keep the AEMF simple for now and focused on the evidenced based research conducted on the impact these first three dimensions have on the AE. See figure 1, below, for a visual representation of the AEM for Flourishing.

**Figure 1**

***The Aspiring Entrepreneur Model (AEM) for Flourishing***



Here is how I will proceed to make the case that the dimensions of AEMF address the need for flourishing in the envisioning and deliberation phase of entrepreneurship. In chapter 1, I will deepen our understanding of the intersection between positive psychology, the PWB model, flourishing, and the aspiring entrepreneur. In Chapters 2-4, the primary focus of this paper, I will take a deeper dive into three key dimensions that make up the Flourishing Model for Aspiring Entrepreneurs (AEMF), including limitations for each. In the conclusion, I will summarize AEMF, bringing it all together. In the appendices, I have also included preliminary recommendations for measuring AEMF and AEMF positive interventions for AEs.

## **Chapter 1 – The Aspiring Entrepreneur’s Need for Positive Psychology**

### **What is Positive Psychology?**

When asked to describe positive psychology in a few words, Chris Peterson, co-founder of positive psychology, stated “other people matter” (Peterson, 2006). Of course, this definition, on its own, does not necessarily tell the story but it does drive home the point that well-being in our lives is often derived from our most cherished relationships, the people we enjoy being around. Chris Peterson also elaborated on what positive psychology is by stating that it is the study of what makes life worth living, from birth until death (Peterson, 2006). In one sentence, applied positive psychology might be best described as a field of positive psychology practitioners, who are enthusiastic about understanding how individuals, communities, and organizations thrive, in good times and bad (Seligman, 2011).

Sometimes it is best to describe what positive psychology is not, in order to understand its overarching purpose. Positive psychology is not meant to disparage or ignore unpleasant experiences in life, or to tell everyone to put on “rose colored glasses!” It is not the denial of human suffering (Gable & Haidt, 2005). Positive psychology is not happiology, where the

measurement of well-being is whether someone is smiling or not (Peterson, 2006). Positive psychology is also not the complete opposite of clinical psychology, which is often pre-occupied with the negative things in life (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive psychology is simply the study of ordinary human virtues and strengths, to find out what leads individuals, organizations, and communities to live up to their full potential and thrive (Sheldon & King, 2001; Seligman, 2011).

Positive psychology was first launched publicly in 1998 during Martin Seligman's address to the American Psychological Association (APA), as its new president (Seligman, 1999). In this address, Seligman believed it was a time for a new kind of psychology, which focused on positive qualities such as courage, optimism, work-ethic, social responsibility, and insight. He further described that psychology, as they knew it then, had moved away from its purpose of making the lives of all people better and more fulfilling and was far too focused on the key area of mental health.

It was a fortuitous meeting in the winter of 1997 between Seligman and another well-known psychologist, who is known for his work on *flow*, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, that the idea of a common community of likeminded scholars, could come together and study the positive, first took root (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003). It was during this time that Seligman realized the field of psychology had overall failed in its purpose and had been far too focused on a disease model ideology (Maddux, 2009).

Following Seligman's presidential address to the APA, the Positive Psychology Steering Committee was created, then the Positive Psychology Network formed, later changing its name to the Positive Psychology Center of University of Pennsylvania, and then in 2006, *The Journal Positive Psychology* was launched (Linley, et al., 2006). Fast forward to 2022, and positive

psychology has become a movement with thousands of positive psychology practitioners dotting the globe, conducting hundreds of research studies, writing thousands of meaningful articles, teaching thousands of students, guiding thousands of U.S. military members, and consulting thousands of organizations; for the primary purpose of helping our world (people, organizations, and communities) learn how to flourish and thrive, regardless of circumstance. Positive psychology's historical impact in the past, present, and future; cannot be understated.

### **The Psychological Well-Being (PWB) Model**

Though the official launch of positive psychology is often traced back to 1999, when Seligman made his presidential address to the APA (Seligman, 1999), topics that help individuals, organizations, and communities thrive have been with us for thousands of years. These topics include optimism, love, positive relationships, accomplishment, self-actualization (Maslow, 1971), and "healthy mindedness," which was first written about by William James' in 1902 (James, 1902).

Therefore, it may not be any surprise that Carol Ryff first produced the PWB model (purpose, autonomy, positive relations, environmental mastery, self-acceptance, and personal growth) in 1989, ten years prior to Seligman making his address to the APA. This well-being model falls well in line with positive psychology and its focus on the conditions that help people, groups, and communities' flourish (Gable & Haidt, 2005).

Ryff's purpose in creating the model was due to her discovery that many aspects of positive human functioning were not appropriately measured and represented in empirical studies (Ryff, 1989). These previous studies were focused on overall happiness measures rather than the well-being elements that are present when one reaches their true human potential (Ryff,



1989). In her view, happiness is only one aspect of well-being and does not fully describe positive psychological functioning (Ryff, 1989). Ryff felt that the works of early psychologists, such as Rogers, Maslow, Franz, and Allport; were being dismissed by researchers of the day due to the lack of empirical studies and measurements available. She felt that the work of these earlier scholars could be revitalized and operationalized to truly identify what elements make up the positive functioning person (Ryff, 1989). It was for this reason that she conducted a study, which would confirm the earlier findings that eudaimonic well-being traits have significantly greater impact on well-being than their hedonic counterparts.

Ryff's hypothesis was that the typical hedonic measures of well-being, such as life-satisfaction and self-esteem, were not as impactful on well-being as eudaimonic components such as personal growth, purpose, and autonomy. Eudaimonia, as we will discuss throughout this paper, stems from Aristotle's view of well-being, where one's true human potential is discovered and positive functioning is experienced irrespective of challenges and extends well-beyond pleasurable happiness (Disabato et al., 2016). Eudaimonia captures the essence of human flourishing and is central to the PWB model dimensions covered by Ryff in her study.

The following descriptions of each of the PWB dimensions as applied to the entrepreneur (Table 2 below), have been summarized from Shir and Ryff's 2021 paper, entitled "Entrepreneurship, Self-Organization, and Eudaimonic Well-Being: A Dynamic Approach." Each dimension is its own construct, can exist exclusive of the others, and have each been researched independently.

**Table 2*****The Six Dimensions of the PWB Model (Shir & Ryff, 2021)***

<b><i>PWB Model</i></b>	<b><i>Entrepreneur Application</i></b>
<b><i>Purpose in Life</i></b>	The entrepreneur's business activities must be in alignment with their purpose and values, as they continually pursue their entrepreneurial goals.
<b><i>Autonomy</i></b>	When the entrepreneur experiences the freedom to choose the behaviors that they feel will best elevate their personal vision, instead of being forced or coerced into taking actions with which they may not agree.
<b><i>Positive Relations with Others</i></b>	Having close family, friends, and colleagues, with whom the entrepreneur can share their vision, and who will get excited about it with them.
<b><i>Environmental Mastery</i></b>	The venture creation process can be unpredictable at times and so to the extent that an entrepreneur can utilize their skills to align their purpose, virtues, and aspirations into an environment that they can influence and control, can give them feelings of confidence and self-efficacy.
<b><i>Personal Growth</i></b>	For the entrepreneur, personal growth represents a forward progression towards their personal core values, along with enhancing their abilities to improve and grow during the venture creation process.
<b><i>Self-acceptance</i></b>	Self-acceptance, for the entrepreneur, comes down the overall opinion of themselves and their full acceptance of the personal strengths and weaknesses they bring into their venture creation. This acceptance can grow stronger throughout each phase of their entrepreneurial journey.

If an AE can integrate the PWB model into their entrepreneurial experience, they may gain experience, deepen their engagement, and increase their capacity to flourish.

What Ryff found was that the PWB dimensions were intercorrelated more closely with well-being than some of the previous well-being factors, such as life satisfaction, self-esteem, depression, and internal control (Ryff, 1989). Why is that? What is so unique about these

dimensions as opposed to long standing measurements such as life satisfaction? The dimensions found in the PWB model, are all defined by Ryff (2019), as eudaimonic, because of their impact on virtuous action, a key component in Aristotle's definition of eudaimonia. Consider the first dimension of the model, purpose in life, as an example of a eudaimonic trait. If an AE has a clearly defined purpose and allows this purpose to guide their decisions during their new start-up, their ability to positively function, regardless of whether they are experiencing pain or pleasure, increases. Positive human functioning, regardless of the circumstance, is central to eudaimonia and the PWB Model.

### **The Aspiring Entrepreneurs Need for Eudaimonic Flourishing**

Much of the research on entrepreneurship has focused on overall outcomes and performance and not on the entrepreneur's purpose and overall well-being (Wiklund, et al, 2019). However, for the entrepreneur, the pursuit of their business venture is a highly self-organizing act, intertwined with their development and overall desire to flourish personally and professionally (Shir & Ryff, 2021). Many entrepreneurial ventures have a significant impact on others well-being as well, not just the entrepreneurs. If these entrepreneurs neglect their own well-being and are in danger of burnout, they can cause a ripple effect of burnout and stress throughout their personal and professional relationships (Wei et al., 2015).

Tapping into the research, knowledge, and key findings of positive psychology, can help us better understand ways in which we can help the entrepreneur live a life worth living and make a significant impact on themselves and the individuals, families, and communities in which they live.

If entrepreneurship is truly a self-organizing act (Shir & Ryff, 2021), where they have the freedom to organize and create their own personal pursuit towards excellence, then an

Aristotelian eudaimonia approach (Ryff, 2019) to AE flourishing is vitally important. However, much of the research on entrepreneurial well-being has focused on the hedonic forms of well-being, such as life-satisfaction, happiness, and positive affect (Bartels, et al., 2019). For an entrepreneur to flourish and instill well-being on those they are surrounded by, eudaimonic well-being is truly the holy grail of flourishing for the AE.

Hedonic well-being is defined as the way to maximize pleasure and minimize pain (Tatarkiewicz, 1976). However, eudaimonia is more representative of total human flourishing and living up to one's potential (Disabato, et al., 2016). Each contribute to flourishing, but eudaimonic well-being is particularly closely aligned with an entrepreneur's journey of creating, organizing, and growing a successful business that has a broader impact on society. Eudaimonic well-being is foundational to long-term flourishing for an entrepreneur because it taps into their deeper virtues and purpose, keeping them grounded when the challenges arise and moving them forward. Hedonic well-being, such as life-satisfaction, has its place in well-being but is subject to change based upon current circumstances and external forces (Disabato, et al., 2016). For example, if an AE identifies a financial obstacle to starting their new venture and they measured their well-being based on the satisfaction with their life at that current moment, then finding a way around their financial obstacle might not be worth it to them at that point. However, if this same AE has clearly defined their purpose in life, a eudaimonic attribute, and it is aligned with their entrepreneurial venture, they would be far more likely to find a way around the obstacle and move forward with the venture creation process.

The need for a eudaimonic view to entrepreneurial well-being has never been greater. Consider how an entrepreneur moves from thinking of their business idea to putting into action and how the internal dynamics of moving between one phase of their venture to another, requires

the entrepreneur to constantly reassess and determine whether the venture is worth pursuing or not (Shir & Ryff, 2021).

As I have emphasized, the entrepreneurial journey is not an easy one. Due to the effort involved in creating and growing a new venture, entrepreneurs are often working longer hours and struggle turning their minds to non-work-related activities when they are not at work. Couple this with other unique factors entrepreneurs deal with, such as people problems, immersing themselves in the creative process, social isolation, and their willingness to accept larger risks than the average employed worker, entrepreneurs deal with unique challenges that bring on added stress and frustrations (Shepherd, et al., 2010).

## **Chapter 2 – Entrepreneurial Purpose in Life**

### **Finding Purpose...Even in The Midst of Struggle**

Finding one's purpose is a self-organizing act (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009), as is entrepreneurship (Ryff, 2019). Finding purpose in life is a goal directing behavior, where we are seeking guidance on where we might be able to make our highest and most valuable contributions in life. Once purpose is found, then our motivation to dedicate finite personal resources that help achieve our purpose, our life's goals, grows and expands (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009).

Based on a cross-sectional study conducted by Sheldon & Kasser (2001), where they measured well-being using a 20-item scale that measured positive and negative responses; those who lead their lives with purposeful goals, have better immune systems, higher levels of optimism, increased energy levels, and overall enhanced physical and mental health. Those who are void of real purpose might struggle more with substance abuse, eating disorders, anxiety disorders, and other challenges that lead to the deterioration of goal directed endeavors (Muraven

& Collins, 2002), such as entrepreneurship. For an entrepreneur, finding their purpose can be their most powerful tool to lift their company from start-up to a high performing business, because when purpose is present, it helps one self-organize important life goals into a central aim that can echo across time and various conditions (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009).

Entrepreneurism is often a roller-coaster ride, full of unforeseen challenges, failures, unique stress, and anticipated trials (Nikolaev, et al., 2020). These challenges can make life difficult for an entrepreneur, which as stated earlier, can lead to burnout, and ultimately cause them to quit before their entrepreneurial goals have been achieved (Wei, et al., 2015). So how can the entrepreneur fight burnout, which many of their peers are plagued with?

Viktor Frankl's story of finding purpose, even amidst the greatest of challenges, is a good backdrop to the power of purpose and the role it can play for the entrepreneur. Frankl, a psychiatrist himself, was a prisoner of war in a German concentration camp in WWII. In his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Frankl breaks out the prisoner's mental experiences into three phases: (1) the period following his admission; (2) the entrenchment of camp routine; (3) and then the period following their release / liberation (Frankl, 1992). Frankl identifies various emotions that are experienced during each of these phases, such as shock, curiosity, detachment, embarrassment, fear, longing for something else, constant disappointments, and the effort to blunt emotions (Frankl, 1985). Each of these emotions, though often felt at a deeper level by Frankl and other prisoners, are also emotions that can be applied to the entrepreneurial journey throughout each of the four entrepreneurial action phases (Shir & Ryff, 2021).

In order for Viktor to find meaning and purpose, even during some of the most horrific events of the past century, he was able to glean some of his defining core principles that not only kept him alive but allowed him to thrive, especially in the third phase, liberation. These core

principles are integrated into Frankl's therapeutic system designed to help one find personal meaning and fulfillment to work and everyday life (Pattakos & Dundon, 2017). These core principles included the ability to choose our attitude in any circumstance, to realize that we have the will to find meaning and purpose, to embrace what we find meaningful, to look at ourselves from a difference perspective, to shift our attention from what is hard to what is meaningful, and perhaps most importantly; learn to get outside of ourselves and focus on how we can serve those around us (Pattakos & Dundon, 2017).

Each one of these core principles track closely with an AEs need for flourishing early on in their journey, providing the lift needed to transition from the envisioning and deliberation phase to the planning phase. Envisioning, for example, requires the entrepreneur to consistently remind themselves of their purpose, ensuring it aligns with who they are and want to become (Ryff, 2019) and why they are conducting the actions to see their idea/venture come to life. When problems arise, they need to shift their focus back on their purpose, find meaning in the challenging moment, and exercise the freedom to choose their attitude towards the problem, all of which are part of Frankl's principles. Like Frankl did in the prison camp, entrepreneurs can use their purpose to distract and draw their attention away from discouraging challenges and obstacles.

For the non-entrepreneur, personal purpose might be overridden by their employer's purpose (Kauanui, et al., 2010). In contrast, entrepreneurs have more control over their workplace than their employees because they can create their own environment, controlling the activities that connect to their purpose. If entrepreneurs can first find their purpose, especially in the envisioning and deliberation action phase, their ability to control and ultimately achieve their goals is far more likely thus impacting their well-being in a positive and productive way.

On the flipside, if the entrepreneur fails to connect to their purpose, their why, they will respond like so many do when they lose control over their workplace environment, causing burnout and all the negative ramifications that come with it. Workplace burnout is often fueled by the feeling that one may lack the necessary resources, mentally and physically, to keep up with the job demands or requirements needed for professional goal achievement (Wei, et al., 2015).

For an AE, identifying their purpose and then keeping their business in alignment with it, is challenging. To respond to this challenge, I will explore one powerful way in which an AE can identify their purpose and then a couple of ways to keep their business venture aligned with that purpose. I have also included a positive intervention, under appendix B, designed to help AEs find their purpose.

### **Identifying Purpose Through Spirituality**

It is difficult to talk about purpose in life and entrepreneurial flourishing and not bring in the topic of spirituality. This aligns with Frankl's 7<sup>th</sup> core principle to meaning, extending beyond oneself, tapping into the human spirit. Spirituality at work has become a popular topic among human resource practitioners looking to solve modern day well-being challenges for employees (Garg, 2017). These challenges include technological changes, structure changes, excessive optimization that can lead to layoffs, all of which negatively impact the self-esteem of the employees (Garg, 2017).

Some describe spirituality as super intelligence, others as meaning giving, or a transformative state of mind (Garg, 2017). For the most part, the research and definitions of spirituality detach it from any particular religion or denomination. Rather, spirituality is about the human spirit, and it incorporates a wide array of characteristics such as love, forgiveness,



personal responsibility, harmony with self, patience, compassion, and overall contentment with one's environment (Fry & Nisiewicz, 2020). One definition of spirituality states that it is the recognition of one's inner life, nourished by purpose and meaningful work, in the context of the larger community in which they operate (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000).

The overall study of entrepreneurship and its success has been mostly focused on economic growth but many of these studies find that financial gain is not the primary motivation behind the desire to start a new business (Balog, et al., 2014). Researchers are finding that the primary motivators are intrinsic in nature, often seeing their role as a personal calling to give back and make a larger impact than they might be currently making (Balog, et al., 2014). Perhaps this is a form of meaning making?

This sense of calling drives an entrepreneur's purpose in life and can fuel their entrepreneurial aspirations to make a larger impact, beyond just life satisfaction and other hedonic attributes (Godwin et al., 2016). Since entrepreneurship is a value-driven exploration, there is a great deal of personal meaning placed on entrepreneurial pursuits, which aligns with the previous definition that meaningful work can nourish one's purpose in life. This personal meaning comes from somewhere and recent attention has focused on the impact spirituality has on an entrepreneur's overall purpose, especially at the beginning of their venture, in starting and growing their business (Balog, et al., 2014). Spirituality is a powerful way for the AE to cultivate and deepen their purpose, leading to greater eudaimonic flourishing.

### **Aligning Venture Creation With Purpose**

Once the AE identifies their purpose, they must consistently keep it at the forefront of their mind, to keep their new business in alignment with it. Otherwise, they could lose focus and

find themselves struggling to stay engaged. One positive intervention that has found traction in helping entrepreneurs, is called *opportunity thinking*, a cognitive process that if mastered, can elevate the entrepreneur's well-being (Godwin, et al., 2016).

Opportunity thinking, as it relates to the entrepreneur, in this case the AE, is when the entrepreneur assesses a present stressor and focuses on constructive ways of dealing with the challenge, rather than *obstacle thinking*, where they look at the same challenges as obstacles and find ways to retreat from them (Godwin, et al., 2016). The key to this intervention is for the AE to reflect on what the stressor is and bring it back to what they are learning and how it can help bring them closer to their overall purpose. Knowing one's purpose proves the core motivation from which an entrepreneur draws to be effective at opportunity thinking.

A similar but perhaps more formal process to opportunity thinking, is called the Thought Self-Leadership (TSL) framework (Neck & Milliman, 1994). This is done by (1) journaling existing assumptions, beliefs, and patterns of thoughts; (2) evaluating how conducive those patterns of thoughts are with one's core values; (3) then writing out positive beliefs and creating positive mental images of those beliefs that replace the negative ones. Like opportunity thinking, the TSL framework can help improve the psychological well-being of the AE by helping them reframe negative thoughts and beliefs, and or challenges, into opportunities that better serve their overall purpose and vision.

### **Limitations of Purpose in Life**

The trap many new entrepreneurs fall into is being overly optimistic about the success they will find in their venture, often fueled by allowing their purpose to blind them of certain challenges in front of them. The expectations they set for themselves, in the deliberations action phase, prior to launching their venture, is often due to underestimating the challenges and heavy

workload required for entrepreneurial success (Odermatt, et al., 2017). Based on a study conducted with entrepreneurs in Germany, who were in business for five years or longer; their life satisfaction scores dropped within five years of start-up (Odermatt, et al., 2017). Life satisfaction is a hedonic well-being measurement but there can be some important takeaways when it comes to the impact this over optimism may have on eudaimonic flourishing.

Research conducted in the past couple of decades has shown that a cognitive bias in decision making is negatively influenced by overoptimism among entrepreneurs, critically influencing whether or not their new venture is sustainable (Lowe & Ziedonis, 2006). Overoptimism, though capable of driving greater action by the entrepreneur early on, can cause them to underestimate the realities of their circumstances (Van den Steen, 2004). This cognitive bias, to look on the bright side of life, often driven by an entrepreneur “higher purpose,” can lead to higher exit rates among entrepreneurs, (Dawson & Henley, 2012), when challenges arise for which, they did not prepare. This “higher purpose” leads to unrealistic expectations on the outcome of their future life satisfaction rather than the impact their venture will have on their daily life, where they will be required to work longer hours and spend more time at work than with their loved ones (Odermatt, et al., 2017).

The evidence that supports that overoptimism leads to higher exit rates was perhaps best demonstrated by research conducted by the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) (Dawson & Henley, 2012). Their primary hypothesis was that excessively overoptimistic entrepreneurs exited at faster rates than entrepreneurs who were more realistic about the challenges of entrepreneurship. 1,358 entrepreneurs were identified and asked two key questions: (1) *Looking ahead, how do you think you will be financially a year from now: better than you are now, worse than you are now, or about the same?* (2) *Would you say that you are better off, worse off or*

*about the same financially than you were a year ago?* Based upon their responses, they identified the high pessimists, moderate pessimists, realists, moderate optimists, and high optimists and followed their progress as entrepreneurs over a 4-year period. Of the 142 respondents that lasted four or more years, 2.8% were high pessimists, 18.3% were moderate pessimists, 52.1% were realists, 17.6% were moderate optimists, and 9.2% were high optimists! The contrast between optimists and realists, is profound and demonstrates the trap that AEs could fall into.

To combat overoptimism and underestimating the heavy workload required to move from the deliberation action phase through to the planning and implementation phase (Shir & Ryff, 2021), entrepreneurs must learn to anticipate that the first phase of entrepreneurship can bring on feelings associated with positive well-being as they transition from regular employment to self-employment (Odermatt, et al., 2017). These positive emotions can create biased expectations relative to the intensity and duration of the challenges that accompany entrepreneurship (Odermatt, et al., 2017), leading to improper expectations. If these positive emotions are aligned with the entrepreneur's life's purpose and what their long-term goals are, then a false sense of short-term well-being may be the end result, setting her up for disappointment when the stressors of the venture increase. Becoming aware of this, will help keep this overoptimistic mindset in check.

In appendix B, I explore a positive intervention designed to help AEs identify their 3-year purpose, that they can refer to in the face of stress, challenges, and times of overoptimism.

### **Chapter 3 – Entrepreneurial Autonomy**

With a clear purpose, the entrepreneur is better prepared to align their actions and behaviors to meet their personal vision and values. This gives the truly autonomous entrepreneur the freedom to choose the actions that lead to goal attainment rather than making decisions based

on pressures, financial or otherwise (Shir & Ryff, 2021). Of all six dimensions of psychological well-being, autonomy is the only one identified as being vital throughout each of the four entrepreneurial action phases.

### **Self-Determination Theory and Autonomy**

Autonomy is a well-documented construct of well-being, particularly as it relates to self-determination theory (SDT). SDT states that the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are vital to our ability to function and experience greater well-being (Deci, et al., 2001). SDT provides a broad and humanistic approach to motivation and well-being, centered on the idea that humans, when they are at their best, are self-determined by nature, driven by their own *inherent growth tendencies*. These tendencies include curiosity, self-motivation, agentic, continuously learning, pushing themselves, taking responsibility, and mastering new talents and skills. These inherent growth tendencies are characteristics that tend to blossom when the three elements of the self-determination theory (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) are fully utilized as a motivational tool towards flourishing and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Consider these three elements of SDT the nutrients for these inherent growth tendencies.

Ryan and Deci (2000), define autonomy, as an intrinsically motivated need to act in accordance with our desire to be self-reliant, independent, and have the freedom to control our own destiny. For the AE, autonomy, is particularly important due to the fact that AEs must feel free to mobilize their psychological and physical energies to pursue their purposefully driven venture creating activities (Shir, et al., 2019). Starting and growing a new business requires AEs to have control over their time, resources and people they interact with, the key ingredients to entrepreneurial autonomy.

AEs who experience the value of autonomy, resulting from their entrepreneurial venture, can stimulate motivation to achieve their bigger goals and pursue deeper relationships with others (Shir, et al., 2019). Autonomy fulfills an AEs intrinsic psychological need of having more control over their resources and time, positively impacting their ability to flourish (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Though there are many notable and well documented pitfalls that come with being an entrepreneur, compared to those who work for someone else, entrepreneurs experience an overall higher level of well-being, but only when all three basic needs of SDT are present, including autonomy (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

Why is this? If you consider how traditional companies are organized, they rely heavily on existing operating procedures in order to achieve greater efficiencies in their business, but this also limits the autonomous opportunities their employees get to engage in, that are vital to psychological well-being. They are following the directions from top management, who often prefer the following of processes rather than allowing the freedom of their employees to produce new and better ways of doing things. Autonomy provides the independence for AEs who are accustomed to being constantly supervised and provides respite from having managers looking over their shoulders all the time (Shane et al., 2003).

However, is autonomy or the absence of managerial limitations, the cause of greater well-being among entrepreneurs? Shir (2019) and colleagues found that while most studies have historically focused on the negative effects of managerial oversight on well-being more recent research findings demonstrate that entrepreneurial work tasks, compared to non-entrepreneurial work tasks, have a more positive impact on an individuals' psychological autonomy, which is related to their ability to flourish.

### **Autonomy and Its Impact on Entrepreneurial Well-Being**

In 2011, a study was conducted based on the Swedish Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) survey (Bosma, 2013). Shir and colleagues took a sampling of this survey (251 engaged entrepreneurs, 138 intended entrepreneurs, and 1,586 regularly employed), which identified entrepreneurs (engaged and intended/AEs), which had been in business less than 42-months, many of which qualify as AEs. Their primary hypothesis was that entrepreneurs, who were engaged and enjoyed autonomy in their work tasks, would experience higher levels of psychological well-being than non-entrepreneur individuals who were also engaged in their own work tasks.

Shir and colleagues conducted the analysis in three steps: (1) Well-being regressions were calculated, to further understand if those engaged in entrepreneurial tasks reported stronger levels of well-being than the standard employee; (2) they evaluated the relationship between well-being, psychological needs, and entrepreneurial activity; and (3) they assessed their findings for robustness and efficacy.

In their first step, they found that the overall well-being index was higher for entrepreneurs, compared to non-entrepreneurs, when engaged in autonomous work-related tasks. In their second step, the researchers found that entrepreneurship was directly correlated to increased autonomy and psychological well-being but not directly correlated to relatedness and competence. Autonomy was the common SDT denominator to entrepreneurship. To illustrate autonomy's influence on its SDT counterparts towards entrepreneurial well-being, see figure 4 below, with corresponding explanation table 3.

What this figure and table show, is that entrepreneurship is a driving force to greater autonomy and ultimately well-being. These three are very closely related. However,

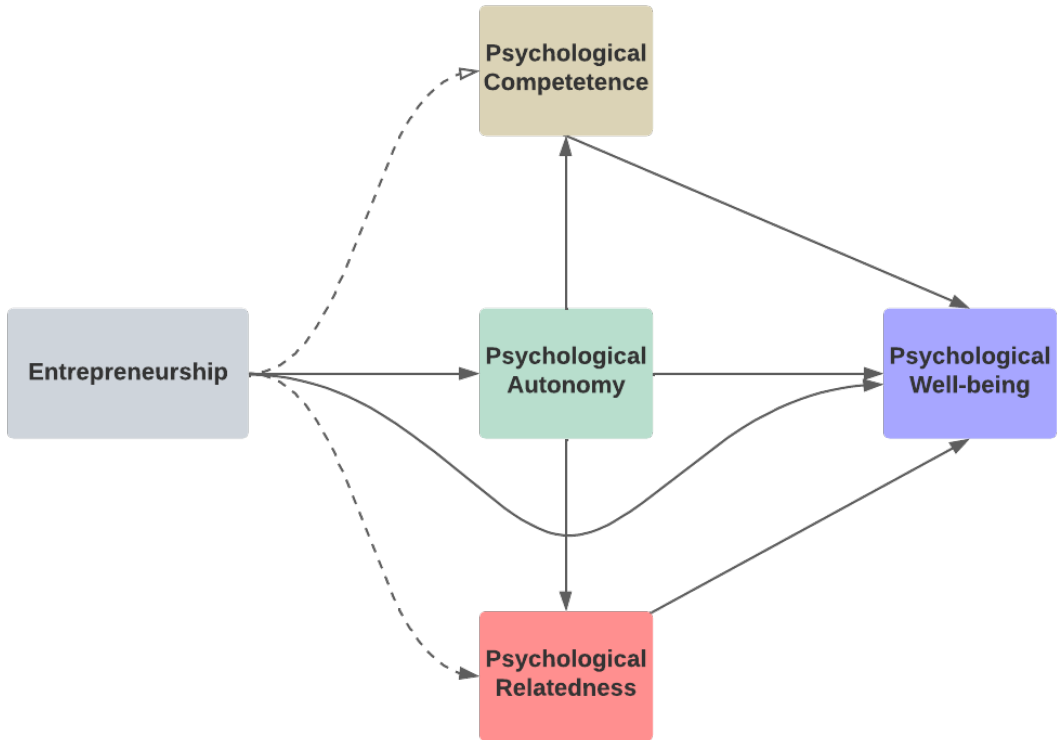
entrepreneurship only positively influences relatedness and competence, through autonomy. For example, an entrepreneur who has more autonomy over their daily schedule, can possibly invest more time into their relationships (relatedness) and technical skills (competence). Also, irrespective of entrepreneurship, Shir and colleagues found that all SDT motivational needs still had a significant relationship to well-being, whether the respondent was an entrepreneur or not. However, there was a stronger correlation between autonomy and well-being, for entrepreneurs versus non-entrepreneurs, if they experienced greater autonomy over work tasks.

Lastly, one other significant finding of this study was in connection of what they called intended entrepreneurs versus engaged entrepreneurs. By their definition, intended entrepreneurs, synonymous with aspiring entrepreneurs (AEs), are those that have not yet entered the planning phase of their entrepreneurial journey. They found that compared to non-entrepreneurs, engaged entrepreneurs had a higher level of well-being compared to AEs. Though this was not a primary point of their study, it does raise the question of why AEs have a lower level of well-being than entrepreneurs further in their journey? Shir and colleagues did not explain the reasons for this in their study and so further research could help us understand why there was a separation of well-being between intended and engaged entrepreneurs, which could lead to additional contributing factors that can lead AEs to greater flourishing. One probable reason could be due to the lack of autonomy due to early burnout, as pointed in the next section of this chapter, the limitations of autonomy. As Shir and colleagues found, if autonomy is lacking, a high sense of well-being becomes elusive for entrepreneurs.



**Figure 2**

*Correlation of Entrepreneurship and SDT Model on Well-Being*



Note: Dotted lines = Non-significant relationships. Solid lines = Significant relationships (Shir et al., 2019)

**Table 3***Explanation table of Figure 2*

	<b>Autonomy</b>	<b>Competence</b>	<b>Relatedness</b>	<b>Well-Being</b>
<b>Entrepreneurship</b>	0.004 ** Significant relationship	0.503* Non-significant relationship	0.936* Non-significant relationship	0.037** Significant relationship

*Note:* P-value is a statistical calculation that represents the significance of whether a hypothesis is true or false. P-value baselines, as represented in table 3, vary, based on variables analyzed in the research study. P-values that are smaller, and closer to the p-value baselines noted in asterisks below, are considered to show significant relationships. P-values over the and larger than the baseline is considered non-significant. \*\*p < 0.01, \*p < 0.05, \*p < 0.1

In summary, this study validates the need for AEs to find ways to increase their autonomy early on, thus increasing their chances of moving through the planning, implementation, and reflection action phases (Shir & Ryff, 2021) of their entrepreneurial journey. Furthermore, this research made a strong case that competence and relatedness, are more indirectly correlated to well-being, via entrepreneurial autonomy.

### **Limitations of Autonomy**

The first limitation to autonomy is the fact that many AEs have a challenging time experiencing it. As mentioned in the introduction, entrepreneurial burnout can cause a host of physiological, psychological, and behavior challenges. It can also rob the AE of their independence and autonomy. As we have already discussed, autonomy has shown to be a key driver as to why an entrepreneur wants to start their own business in the first place (Gelderren, 2016) and if limited, can cause them to lose their self-determination to continue from the envisioning and deliberation phase to the planning phase.

The second limitation of autonomy, for an AE, is wanting it for reasons that may not sustain them through their entrepreneurial journey. Researchers Van Gelderen and Jansen (2006) identified two types of autonomy motives for “start-up” entrepreneurs: (1) *proximal motives*, where the entrepreneur wants decisional freedom and control over their life purpose; and (2) *distal motives*, where the AE is looking to avoid restrictions put on by their employer or to avoid negative experiences they have had as an employee. Therefore, autonomy might mean something different from one AE to the next and depending on the type of autonomy motive, proximal vs. distal, may determine whether or not the AE will be self-determined enough to transition from the envision and deliberation phase to the planning and implementation phase. Van Gelderen and Jansen point out the importance of early-stage entrepreneurs (AEs) to understand which type of autonomy motive they tend to lead with, in order to better navigate the challenges of a start-up business. We might also hypothesize that proximal motives are more likely to fall in line better with eudaimonic well-being, intrinsic motivation, and their overall purpose in life.

In appendix B, we explore a positive intervention designed to help AEs identify their motives for entrepreneurial autonomy and how to uncover more proximal motivates that would help them become more self-determined to keep going to the next phase of their journey.

## **Chapter 4 – Entrepreneurial Positive Relationships with Others**

### **Positive Relationships and Flourishing**

Positive relationships can blossom from diverse types of connections we find through marriages, friendships, neighbors, and even virtually through social media. Scholars have debated for decades on what type of relationships contribute the most to our well-being, some saying that strong marriages contribute to well-being the most (England et al., 2001), while others argue that single people can develop long-lasting relationships that are more fulfilling

(DePaulo & Morris, 2005). However, positive relationships, regardless of the type, have a significant impact on well-being (Caughlin & Huston, 2010). Therefore, for the purposes of this work, I will focus on the importance of positive relationships for the AE, irrespective of type, with the hope to create a clear picture of why they are central to an AEs ability to move from the envisioning and deliberation phase to the planning phase of their entrepreneurial journey.

Like purpose and autonomy, positive relationships with others aid in helping AEs dig deeper and become more self-determined to push through the difficult challenges of starting their new venture. Perhaps the key word, for an AE, who needs reassurance early on in their venture, is “support.” No entrepreneur can truly succeed, or fail, without close relationships with those around them. If an AE has the positive support from others during the envisioning and deliberation phase, their likelihood of making it to the following three phases of their journey increase (Ryff, 2019). From an alternative view, during the pre-startup phase (envisioning and deliberation), the AE relies a great deal on their personal relationships to help get their venture off the ground, versus in the later phases, the success of their venture is more dependent on professional business relationships (Butler & Hansen, 1991; Welter, 2012;). Knowing this reality can help the AE pay particular attention to the personal relationships they have and spend more quality time early on with those who will help support them through this early phase of their venture. Positive relationships with others, also includes finding people who are not just cheerleaders of the new venture but have the ability to provide guidance and mentorship early on.

### **The Aspiring Entrepreneur Needs Positive Mentor Relationships**

One of the primary reasons start-up ventures may not survive is due to the lack of experience and competent business skills of their new entrepreneurs (Baldwin, 1997). That said,

research also suggests that improving these skills early on is a key factor to whether or not the new venture survives or dies (Gartner et al., 1999). Referring back to SDT, competency is an intrinsically motivated need that can build one's belief they have the necessary skills to succeed long-term (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and for the AE, investing in positive relationships with trusted mentors, has demonstrated a positive impact on the likelihood of a successfully launched and thriving venture (St-Jean & Audet, 2013).

What is mentorship and what are the potential impacts it could have on an AEs ability to flourish and move from the envisioning to the deliberation phase? Mentoring has been identified as a relationship between an in-experienced "mentee" or "learner" and a more experienced "mentor" or "teacher," for the desired purpose of developing and improving the mentee's abilities and skills (Hunt & Michael, 1983). Over the past couple of decades, scholars have noted that the mentor and mentee relationship has grown into a more mutually beneficial relationship (Wanberg et al., 2003), where interdependence, empathy, personal growth, and empowerment; enrich the well-being of both mentors and their mentees (Ragins, 2005).

Early on as an AE, I would go to lunch with a different mentor nearly every week. These lunches were mutually beneficial and extremely satisfying for me and my mentors, due to our focus on helping one another live up to our own human potentials. As in my own personal example, this kind of positive relationship with a mentor, cannot only provide direction on how to navigate the early start-up obstacles, but to also provide encouragement and mutual friendship, which has shown to boost the self-efficacy of early entrepreneurs (St-Jean & Tremblay, 2020). Self-efficacy is when one believes in one's ability to produce a specific desired outcome (Bandura, et al., 1999). In the case of an AE, collaborating closely with a trusted mentor, who consistently encourages them early on, can help the AE deepen their belief, their self-efficacy,

that they can see their entrepreneurial venture all the way through to the last entrepreneurial phase of reflection and evaluation (Shir & Ryff, 2021).

AEs with high self-efficacy, will likely look at difficult tasks as something to be overcome rather than be avoided (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy has been found to be a driving force of entrepreneurial intention, the precursor to entrepreneurial action (Bird, 1988). Entrepreneurial intention can be rightfully placed into Shir and Ryff's (2021) first action phase of the entrepreneurial journey, the envisioning and deliberation phase, due to the fact that the intention to start a new venture must first be envisioned and deliberated by the hopeful entrepreneur. In order for certain behaviors and actions to follow the deliberation phase, the entrepreneur must feel a sense of control in the outcome of their new venture, otherwise the likelihood of them moving forward is low (Liñán, et al., 2011). Entrepreneurial intention is therefore driven by one's desire to see something through and have the confidence to know that the end result will be exactly what they initially envisioned. This is self-efficacy and is a key factor to lighting the fire of motivation for an AE.

If mentorship can help boost the self-efficacy of an AE, their ability to flourish through their venture is far more likely. Consider the findings of a recent research study, where researchers wanted to know if a mentor can help increase the self-efficacy for "novice" (AE) entrepreneurs. This study, conducted by St-Jean & Tremblay (2020), was based on a sample of 219 mentees, all entrepreneurs at various phases of their journey, who were separated by what is called their level of learning goal orientation (LGO). LGO is a psychological propensity towards the ability to master skills for goal achievement, such as starting an entrepreneurial venture (Dweck, 1986, Godshalk & Sosik, 2003). St-Jean and Tremblay were curious if mentors help what they called, entrepreneurial self-efficacy opportunity recognition (ESE-OR) the belief that

the entrepreneur has the competence to consistently recognize ongoing opportunities throughout their entrepreneurial journey.

The researchers did a comprehensive cross-sectional analysis, where they looked at the data at two specific points in time, the first survey and then the longitudinal survey three years later. This helped them compare and contrast the impact mentorship had in the initial stages of entrepreneurship and if that impact lasted. The ESE-OR survey was based on a 7-point Likert scale (traditional opinion survey). One interesting finding was that the ESE-OR score improved for low LGO entrepreneurs, where many AEs would be classified as, from a 5.610 to 5.809 on the Likert scale, if they stayed with their mentor (e.g., 5.6/7 on the scale, where 7 represents the highest ESE-OR score possible). Alternatively, low LGO entrepreneurs, who did not stay with a mentor, saw their ESE-OR scores drop, 5.789 to 5.331. From a statistically significant standpoint, researchers put the baseline p-value at  $< 0.10$  (instead of the traditional  $p < .05$ , due to the smaller sampling size). The LGO entrepreneurs, who had a relationship with their mentor for at least 3-years, had a p-value score of  $< .092$ , which was slightly lower and remarkably close to the baseline, showing a significant correlation between LGO, time, and their increased ESE-OR score. This study demonstrates the impact a mentor can have on the self-efficacy of an AE, as long as the AE sticks with the mentor relationship for an extended period of time.

AEs who typically lack the business skills and self-efficacy to start a new business, should seek out positive relationships with mentors they trust. By doing so, they will not only learn new skills but more importantly, AEs will receive a consistent boost to their self-efficacy by reminding them they have what it takes to start their new entrepreneurial venture and flourish as an AE.

### **Limitations of Positive Relationships with Others**

It is difficult to produce limitations to having positive relationships with others but for AEs, there are a couple I found which could challenge them during the envisioning and deliberation phase of their journey.

Research has been conducted on entrepreneur extraversion, a socio-personal skill, which can fuel burnout for entrepreneurs (Sulea et al., 2015). Researchers have found that extraversion for an entrepreneur can lead to professional exhaustion (Gustafsson et al., 2009), irrespective of whether or not the relationship is positive or not. Entrepreneurs who find themselves extra social, extroverts, might be overly optimistic with their ability to manage the time and energy spent socializing and connecting with others (O'Neill & Xiao, 2010), therefore, allowing their desire to connect, to push them to exhaustion.

Ironically, another limitation to positive relationships is the stress that comes with keeping them healthy and active while starting a new business. Referring back to entrepreneurial burnout, this stress to stay present and engaged during the envisioning and deliberation phase, can cause a vicious cycle, leading to further burnout. As this burnout continues, the AEs interpersonal relationships deteriorate due to conflicts arising from work life balance (Omrane et al., 2018).

*Equity theory* is a term used for when relationships, which includes friendships (personal and professional), only continue to be strong as long as both parties believe they are equally benefiting from the relationship (Walster et al., 1976). Once the relationship turns inequitable, where one party is no longer benefiting from the relationship, it can cause a negative impact to the well-being of both parties (Peterson, 2006). In the case of an AE, this can happen when a once positive relationship, erodes over time, due to AE using the relationship to help them in



their business but not reciprocating the favor in the form of information, services, goods, money, or love (Peterson, 2006).

Consider the case made for positive relationships with mentors and how researchers have found that even in that mentor to mentee relationship, each party wants to mutually benefit from collaborating with each other (Wanberg et al., 2003). Therefore, if an AE loses the support of a mentor, or other important positive relationship, because they neglected the relationship; it can negatively impact their self-efficacy and desire to continue moving forward with their new venture.

In appendix B, I review a positive intervention designed to help AEs identify a positive mentor and then plan activities that will cultivate an ongoing equitable relationship with that mentor.

## **Conclusion**

If the AE fails to take the time to identify their purpose in life, they are at risk of being pulled in directions with their venture that are unfulfilling. If the AE is seeking autonomy *from* a difficult boss rather than autonomy *to* have decisional freedom (Van Gelderen & Jansen, 2006), then they may find themselves unable to push through some of the entrepreneurial challenges that will surely come their way. If the AE allows entrepreneurial burnout to get in the way of their most important positive relationships, such as their family, friends, and mentors; then the emotional support needed to navigate the highs and lows of entrepreneurship will erode and eventual lead the AE to give up long before their venture could fulfill its originally designed purpose. As I have argued in this paper, each of these three dimensions, are crucial to an AEs ability to flourish during the early phase of their entrepreneurial journey.

AEMF is still a work in progress. It is a preliminary model, largely inspired by Shir and Ryff's (2021) work on the PWB model and the dimensions most closely tied to the envisioning and deliberation phase of the entrepreneurial journey. Each of the three dimensions have been thoroughly researched by many, beyond Shir and Ryff's work, to have a positive impact on the wellbeing of early-stage entrepreneurs. However, there are other important dimensions of wellbeing that positively impact flourishing for the AE that should be further explored in future research. Well-being constructs such as self-efficacy, self-determination, self-regulation, positive habits, and competence; should all be explored as possible additions to AEMF.

Now comfortably in the fourth phase of my entrepreneurial journey, the reflection and evaluation phase; it is inspiring for me to reflect back on all of the experiences I have had along the way. Each of the four phases have taught me incredible life lessons that have influenced my life for the better. However, without any doubt, the envisioning and deliberation phase, was the phase that tried my well-being more than any other. As mentioned in my introduction, much of my struggles stemmed from my lack of knowledge on how to flourish as a young AE. My hope is that positive psychology practitioners, who read this paper, will become intrinsically motivated to join me in helping AEs acquire the knowledge necessary for a flourishing entrepreneurial experience.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A – AEM for Flourishing and The PWB Measuring Scale

When Ryff (1989) first developed the Psychological Well-being (PWB) Model, she also included a measuring tool called the PWB Scale, designed to measure one's current level of each of the six well-being dimensions of the PWB model. The original PWB scale started with 44-items of psychological well-being, which other researchers have since validated as a successful scale to measure eudaimonic well-being (Kallay & Rus, 2014). Since the original scale, other versions of it have been produced, specifically an 18 and 42 question scale. For the purposes of measuring AEMF, and specifically one's purpose in life, autonomy, and positive relationships, the 42-scale assessment would be the recommended measurement tool due to its long-standing validity. However, in order to be the most effective, only those questions related to those three dimensions would need to be answered. See example of the 42 items, with the questions related to the three dimensions of AEMF highlighted. This sample was provided by SPARQTools.org.

The goal of this survey is to create awareness for the AE on where they stand with the three dimensions and possible opportunities to increase each. The positive interventions provided earlier should also help them increase their scores on the scale over time.

#### **PWB Model Measurement Scale**

**Age:** Adult

**Duration:** 6-8 minutes

**Reading Level:** 6th to 8th grade

**Number of items:** 42

**Answer Format:** 1 = strongly agree; 2 = somewhat agree; 3 = a little agree; 4 = neither agree nor disagree; 5 = a little disagree; 6 = somewhat disagree; 7 = strongly disagree.

**Scoring:**

**The Autonomy** subscale items are Q1, Q13, Q24, Q35, Q41, Q10, and Q21. The Environmental Mastery subscale items are Q3, Q15, Q26, Q36, Q42, Q12, and Q23. The Personal Growth subscale items are Q5, Q17, Q28, Q37, Q2, Q14, and Q25.

**The Positive Relations with Others** subscale items are Q7<sup>[SEP]</sup>, Q18, Q30, Q38, Q4<sup>[SEP]</sup>, Q16, and Q27.

**The Purpose in Life** subscale items are Q9, Q20, Q32, Q39, Q6, Q29, and Q33. The Self-Acceptance subscale items are Q11, Q22, Q34, Q40, Q8, Q19, and Q31.

Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q6, Q7, Q11, Q13, Q17, Q20, Q21, Q22, Q23, Q27, Q29, Q31, Q35, Q36, Q37, Q38, and Q40 should be reverse scored. Reverse-scored items are worded in the opposite direction of what the scale is measuring. The formula for reverse-scoring an item is:

$$((\text{Number of scale points}) + 1) - (\text{Respondent's answer})$$

For example, Q7 is a 7-point scale. If a respondent answered 3 on Q7, you would re-code their answer as:  $(7 + 1) - 3 = 5$ .

In other words, you would enter a 5 for this respondents' answer to Q7.

To calculate subscale scores for each participant, sum respondents' answers to each subscale's items.

**Sources:**

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**Instructions:** Circle one response below each statement to indicate how much you agree or disagree.

1. **(Autonomy)** “I am not afraid to voice my opinions, even when they are in opposition to the opinions of most people.”

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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2. “For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth.”

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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3. “In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live.”

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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4. **(Positive Relations)** “People would describe me as a giving person, willing to share my time with others.”

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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5. “I am not interested in activities that will expand my horizons.”

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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6. **(Purpose)** “I enjoy making plans for the future and working to make them a reality.”

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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7. **(Positive Relations)** “Most people see me as loving and affectionate.”

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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8. “In many ways I feel disappointed about my achievements in life.”<sup>[L]  
[SEP]</sup>

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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9. **(Purpose)** “I live life one day at a time and don't really think about the future.”<sup>[L]  
[SEP]</sup>

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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10. **(Autonomy)** “I tend to worry about what other people think of me.”<sup>[L]  
[SEP]</sup>

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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11. “When I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out.”

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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12. “I have difficulty arranging my life in a way that is satisfying to me.”<sup>[L]  
[SEP]</sup>

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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13. (Autonomy) “My decisions are not usually influenced by what everyone else is doing.”

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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14. “I gave up trying to make big improvements or changes in my life a long time ago.”

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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15. “The demands of everyday life often get me down.”<sup>[SEP]</sup>

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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16. (Positive Relations) “I have not experienced many warm and trusting relationships with others.”

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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17. “I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how you think about yourself and the world.”

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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18. (Positive Relations) “Maintaining close relationships has been difficult and frustrating for me.”<sup>[SEP]</sup>

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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19. “My attitude about myself is probably not as positive as most people feel about themselves.”<sup>[1]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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20. (Purpose) “I have a sense of direction and purpose in life.”

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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21. (Autonomy) “I judge myself by what I think is important, not by the values of what others think is important.”

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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22. “In general, I feel confident and positive about myself.”

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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23. “I have been able to build a living environment and a lifestyle for myself that is much to my liking.”

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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24. (Autonomy) “I tend to be influenced by people with strong opinions.”<sup>[1]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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25. “I do not enjoy being in new situations that require me to change my old familiar ways of doing things.”

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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26. “I do not fit very well with the people and the community around me.”

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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27. “I know that I can trust my friends, and they know they can trust me.”

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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28. “When I think about it, I haven’t really improved much as a person over the years.”

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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29. **(Purpose)** “Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them.”

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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30. **(Positive Relations)** “I often feel lonely because I have few close friends with whom to share my concerns.”

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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31. “When I compare myself to friends and acquaintances, it makes me feel good about who I am.”

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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32. (Purpose) “I don’t have a good sense of what it is I’m trying to accomplish in life.”

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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33. (Purpose) “I sometimes feel as if I’ve done all there is to do in life.”

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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34. “I feel like many of the people I know have gotten more out of life than I have.”

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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35. (Autonomy) “I have confidence in my opinions, even if they are contrary to the general consensus.”

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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36. “I am quite good at managing the many responsibilities of my daily life.”

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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37. “I have the sense that I have developed a lot as a person over time.”

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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38. (Positive Relations) “I enjoy personal and mutual conversations with family members and friends.”

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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39. (Purpose) “My daily activities often seem trivial and unimportant to me.”<sup>[SEP]</sup>

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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40. “I like most parts of my personality.”

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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41. (Autonomy) “It’s difficult for me to voice my own opinions on controversial matters.”<sup>[SEP]</sup>

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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42. “I often feel overwhelmed by my responsibilities.”<sup>[SEP]</sup>

Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	A little agree	Neither agree nor disagree	A little disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
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## Appendix B – AEMF Positive Intervention Recommendations

James Pawelski (2020) developed a positive intervention process entitled *The Elements Model*, as a way to organize and personalize positive interventions to one's own needs. I will briefly describe each of the five elements of the model (Pawelski, 2020) and then use the model to outline the positive interventions for AEMF:

1. Desired Outcome – The well-being effect of the desired change
2. Target System – The primary domain of where the change takes place
3. Target Change – The desired change within the primary domain
4. Active Ingredient – The very activity that causes the change with the target system
5. Activity – The intended actions that are encouraged and recommended by the facilitator of the positive intervention

Using the Elements Model, I will now identify one positive intervention for each of the three dimensions of the AEMF:

1. **Purpose in Life** - In this positive intervention, the AE will create alignment between their personal purpose and their 3-Year Vision for their entrepreneurial venture. Long-term goals can be huge motivating drivers of positive activity (Bandura, 1997). Bandura's social cognitive theory, states that future goal attainments are critical to human motivation (Bandura, 1997). Setting larger long-term goals can help AEs better define what is profoundly important to them, helping them visualize their purpose in life.

### *a. The Positive Intervention - The AEs Purpose Driven 3-Year Vision*

- i. Desired Outcome – Align their personal purpose with their 3-Year Vision for their entrepreneurial venture

- ii. Target System – Purpose in Life
- iii. Target Change – Decrease possible entrepreneurial burnout and increased self-determination to move forward with their entrepreneurial venture
- iv. Active Ingredient – Defined purpose and vision for the future
- v. The Activity / Intervention prescribed to the AE
  - 1. Step 1 - Answer the following question: *“Fast forward 3-years from now and write down one personal and one professional achievement, that if you accomplished them in 3-years, would allow you to live your most purposeful life?”*
  - 2. Step 2 – Then write out several success criteria required to achieve these 3-year goals and create a brief plan for each.

**2. Autonomy** – For this intervention, the AE will identify whether or not their motivation for autonomy is driven by proximal or distal motives (Van Gelderen & Jansen, 2006). This exercise is meant to help AEs become more self-aware of their reasons for wanting autonomy and the impact their motives can have on their self-determination to move from the envisioning and deliberation phase to the planning and implementation phase.

***a. The Positive Intervention – Your Primary Motive for Entrepreneurial***

***Autonomy***

- i. Desired Outcome – Identify the AE’s motive for autonomy and whether or not it is driven by eudaimonic or hedonic wellbeing dimensions.
- ii. Target System – Autonomy
- iii. Target Change – Greater awareness of autonomy motives

- iv. Active Ingredient – Attention towards what drives their desire for autonomy
  - v. The Activity / Intervention prescribed to the AE
    1. Step 1 – AE answers the following questions:
      - a. How did autonomy play a role in your decision to become an entrepreneur?
      - b. Why was that important for you?
    2. Step 2 – Review their answers and identify what kind of motive is behind their desire for autonomy. The positive psychology practitioner will need to educate the AE on the difference between proximal and distal motives, as outlined by Van Gelderen and Jansen (2006). Help them become aware of their motive and the implications it has on their self-determination relative to their entrepreneurial journey.
    3. Step 3 – Have the AE write down 1-3 daily routines, which will help increase more proximal motive autonomy in their entrepreneurial journey. Help them develop a plan to implement and track these routines using a daily journal.
- 3. Positive Relationships with Others** – This intervention is designed to help the AE cultivate and create an equity rich positive relationship with at least one new mentor. As previously discussed, I shared several reasons why a positive mentor relationship for the AE can be mutually beneficial. However, if they fail to invest in that relationship, it can turn a positive relationship with a mentor into an unequitable one (Peterson, 2006).



*a. The Positive Intervention – Create and Cultivate Positive Mentor Relationships*

- i. Desired Outcome – Identify and learn to cultivate at least one positive relationship with a trusted mentor.
- ii. Target System – Positive Relationships
- iii. Target Change – Equitable relationship with a mentor
- iv. Active Ingredient – Mindfulness of the relationship needs of their trusted mentor
- v. The Activity / Intervention prescribed to the AE
  1. Step 1 – Create a list of three possible business mentors they currently know and trust. Circle the one that they feel they have the greatest mutual respect and trust with.
  2. Step 2 – Schedule a recurring meeting with this mentor, at least once a month, and on the first meeting, ask them how they would want to benefit from the relationship and write them down for future meetings.
  3. Step 3 – For all the meetings thereafter, first focus on the needs they expressed in the first meeting and find creative ways to meet those needs. Alternatively, come prepared to each meeting with a brief list of questions and/or needs that they can help you with.