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The Well-Being–Innovation Nexus: A Theoretical Framework for Entrepreneurial Contexts

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ABSTRACT

This research develops an integrative theoretical framework examining the influence of psychological well-being on innovative work behavior among entrepreneurs, with particular attention to the African context. Drawing rigorously on Whetten's (1989) theory-building approach, we structure our analysis around four foundational pillars: the key constructs (what), their relationships (how), the explanatory mechanisms (why), and the boundary conditions (who, where, when). Our model proposes that psychological capital, psychological safety, and work engagement mediate the relationship between psychological well-being and entrepreneurial innovative behavior, under the moderating influence of individual, organizational, and contextual factors specific to African environments. This theoretical contribution addresses a gap identified in recent scholarship (Ibrahim *et al.*, 2023), which highlights the rapid academic growth of this research theme since 2018 and the pressing need for studies conducted in diverse work environments, particularly in underexplored African contexts. The model offers new perspectives for understanding the psychological underpinnings of entrepreneurial innovation and proposes managerial implications tailored to the realities of emerging economies.

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary entrepreneurial landscape has undergone significant transformation, marked by a growing recognition of the central role that psychological factors play in shaping entrepreneurial success and innovation outcomes (Stephan, 2018; Nikolaev *et al.*, 2020). Entrepreneurial innovation constitutes a strategic lever for economic development, particularly in African contexts where entrepreneurship represents a response to the challenges of job creation and sustainable development (George *et al.*, 2016). The African continent, with its 1.3 billion inhabitants and predominantly young population, presents considerable entrepreneurial potential that demands theoretical approaches sensitive to its contextual specificities.

A recent systematic review by Ibrahim *et al.* (2023) reveals that research at the intersection of well-being and innovation has experienced sharp academic growth since 2018, yet studies focusing on African countries remain scarce. This gap underscores the need for research in diverse work environments and justifies our focus on the African context. In Morocco, for instance, governmental initiatives reflect a national commitment to promoting entrepreneurial innovation as an engine of growth, while entrepreneurs operate in environments characterized by specific challenges: economic instability, limited access to financing, developing infrastructure, and distinctive sociocultural pressures (Elouaourti & Ibourk, 2024).

These contextual conditions exert a significant influence on the psychological well-being of entrepreneurs, who must navigate elevated levels of stress and uncertainty. Concurrently, organizational psychology scholarship increasingly recognizes psychological well-being as a key determinant of work performance (Tisu *et al.*, 2023). Psychological well-being, conceptualized through Ryff's (1989, 2019) multidimensional model — encompassing six components: self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, autonomy, positive relations with others, and environmental mastery — significantly shapes individuals' capacity to generate creative ideas and engage in innovative behaviors (Koburtay *et al.*, 2022).

In the African context, this relationship takes on a particular dimension. African entrepreneurs often draw their motivation from strong communal values and a desire to contribute to the development of their communities (Frese, 2024). This collective orientation, characteristic of African cultures, can shape both the nature of psychological well-being and its effects on innovation. Ubuntu, the African philosophy of human interdependence, exemplifies this communal dimension of well-being that extends beyond Western individualism.

Despite the importance of these issues, the literature presents a fragmented understanding of the relationships between psychological well-being and entrepreneurial innovation, particularly in non-Western contexts. Existing research reflects a piecemeal approach, with some studies emphasizing hedonic well-being or psychological capital, while others focus on contextual factors such as leadership or organizational climate (Atalay & Tanova, 2021; Wang & Kim, 2023; Battistelli *et al.*, 2023). Moreover, there is a notable gap in the exploration of the theoretical relationships and practical applications of Ryff's model

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in entrepreneurial domains, particularly within African contexts (Koburtay *et al.*, 2022).

Against this backdrop, our central research question is: *How does psychological well-being influence the innovative work behavior of entrepreneurs in the African context?*

The research objectives are fourfold:

- To develop an integrative theoretical model linking psychological well-being and entrepreneurial innovative behavior, following Whetten's (1989) theory-building approach
- To identify the mediating mechanisms underlying this relationship
- To specify the moderating boundary conditions within emerging African contexts
- To propose theoretical and managerial implications adapted to African realities

Theory-Building Approach: Whetten (1989)

This research draws on the systematic theory-building approach developed by Whetten (1989), recognized as a "rudimentary yet robust" analytical framework (Loilier & Tellier, 2011) for evaluating any theoretical contribution. This approach structures conceptual development around four fundamental questions that allow the theoretical contribution of a model to be assessed.

The "what" corresponds to the constructs, variables, and factors that form the building blocks of the theory. This dimension requires precise identification of the central concepts and their operational definitions. In our context, this means clearly defining entrepreneurial psychological well-being and innovative work behavior.

The "how" concerns the nature of the relationships between constructs. It involves specifying causal links, correlations, and mechanisms of influence among the model's variables, including mediating and moderating variables that explain how key factors are connected (causality, complementarity, substitutability).

The "why" explains the underlying theoretical mechanisms that justify the proposed relationships. This dimension draws on established theories to explain why certain relationships exist, addressing the question: what are the underlying dynamics that justify the selection of factors and their connections?

The "who, where, when" defines the boundary conditions of the theory, including the contexts, populations, and situations in which the proposed relationships hold or are modified. This section establishes the temporal and contextual limits of the model's scope and applicability.

This systematic approach ensures the conceptual rigor and significant theoretical contribution of the model developed, while meeting the methodological requirements for sound theory construction.

The "What": Core Constructs of the Model

Entrepreneurial Psychological Well-Being

The psychological well-being of entrepreneurs is conceptualized through Ryff's (1989, 2019) multidimensional model, which is particularly well-suited to the African context. This approach moves beyond purely hedonic conceptions of well-being to integrate eudaimonic dimensions centered on meaning, growth, and self-actualization (Koburtay *et al.*, 2022). The designation "entrepreneurial psychological well-being" is justified by the specificity of the entrepreneurial context, which requires particular adaptations of the general dimensions of well-being (Stephan, 2018; Tisu *et al.*, 2023).

Ryff's six dimensions of psychological well-being take on distinctive coloring in African entrepreneurial contexts. Self-acceptance encompasses a positive self-regard, recognition of one's multifaceted nature, and acceptance of one's past. For African entrepreneurs, this dimension includes accepting contextual challenges and trusting one's capabilities despite environmental constraints. Personal growth involves the sense of ongoing development, openness to new experiences, and realization of one's potential. This dimension aligns particularly well with African entrepreneurial motivations characterized by a pursuit of personal development and social impact (Padilla-Angulo *et al.*, 2023). Purpose in life reflects the conviction of having goals and direction. In African contexts, this dimension is often nourished by the desire to address community problems and contribute to local development (Shir *et al.*, 2019). Autonomy represents independence and self-determination, particularly relevant in entrepreneurial contexts where independence and meaningful work are central motivations, though this must be understood within the framework of African communal values that temper Western individualism. Positive relations with others include warm and satisfying relationships, crucial in African contexts where entrepreneurs rely heavily on social and community networks to access resources and opportunities. Environmental mastery corresponds to the capacity to effectively manage one's life and surroundings, which for African entrepreneurs includes navigating complex institutional environments and adapting to local constraints.

Innovative Work Behavior

Innovative work behavior is defined as a multiphase process that extends beyond mere creativity to encompass systematic processes of identifying, developing, and implementing opportunities. Unlike innovation as an outcome, innovative work behavior refers to the individual actions and processes that lead to innovation (de Jong & Den Hartog, 2010; Battistelli *et al.*, 2023).

A four-component model of innovative work behavior has proven particularly valid for understanding entrepreneurial innovation processes (ÖZKAN *et al.*, 2022; Sjahruddin *et al.*, 2024). Opportunity exploration and recognition involves the active search for problems, inefficiencies, or improvement opportunities. In African contexts, this stage is often grounded in intimate knowledge of local needs and the identification of solutions adapted to specific constraints. Idea generation and development corresponds to the production of creative solutions and their conceptual elaboration, which for African entrepreneurs draws on context-specific resources and constraints, often requiring frugal innovation approaches. Idea championing and promotion encompasses the efforts to secure support and acceptance for ideas among stakeholders, requiring an understanding of local sociocultural dynamics and context-specific legitimation mechanisms. Finally, idea implementation and realization involves transforming concepts into operational solutions, a phase that must contend with the infrastructural and regulatory realities of African countries and demands particular adaptive competencies and perseverance.

The "How": Relational Architecture of the Model

Core Mediating Variables

Psychological capital comprises four fundamental psychological resources that act as critical mediators between psychological well-being and innovative behavior (Hermina, 2024; Luthans *et al.*, 2007). Contemporary research has consistently demonstrated the mediating role of psychological capital in linking well-being to innovative behavior (Khan *et al.*, 2023; Rahmi *et al.*, 2024; Battistelli *et al.*, 2023). Self-efficacy corresponds to confidence in one's ability to mobilize the resources needed to accomplish specific tasks; in the African context, this includes confidence in navigating complex and uncertain environments (Bandura, 1997). Hope determines the will to pursue goals despite obstacles and the capacity to generate alternative pathways; for African entrepreneurs, hope is often sustained by the conviction that they are contributing to community development (Snyder, 2002). Optimism represents the set of positive attributions about current and future success, enabling entrepreneurs to maintain a positive outlook despite contextual challenges (Seligman, 1998). Resilience constitutes the capacity to bounce back from adversity or failure, particularly valued in entrepreneurial environments characterized by uncertainty and structural constraints (Luthans, 2002).

Psychological safety represents the shared belief that it is possible to take interpersonal risks, voice ideas, and experiment without fear of negative consequences for one's image, status, or career (Edmondson, 1999). Recent studies confirm that psychological safety partially mediates the relationship between psychological capital and innovation (Sun & Huang, 2019). In African entrepreneurial contexts, this dimension interacts with hierarchical dynamics and specific sociocultural norms.

Core Relational Propositions

Proposition 1: *Entrepreneurial psychological well-being is positively associated with psychological capital.*

This relationship draws on broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2003) and finds empirical support across several recent studies. Tisu *et al.* (2023) demonstrate that the components of well-being act as antecedents of psychological capital. Hedonic well-being generates positive emotions that reinforce self-efficacy and optimism. Eudaimonic well-being, through the autonomy and meaning it provides, fosters hope and resilience. Positive relations with others, particularly important in African communal contexts, strengthen all components of psychological capital through social support and recognition (Baluku *et al.*, 2018).

Proposition 2: *Entrepreneurial psychological well-being is positively associated with psychological safety within their organizations.*

Entrepreneurs with high psychological well-being create more positive and supportive organizational climates. Their positive emotional state promotes high-quality interpersonal relationships, encourages open communication, and reduces defensive behaviors (ÖZKAN *et al.*, 2022). This relationship is particularly relevant in African contexts where interpersonal relationships carry major cultural significance.

Proposition 3: *Entrepreneurial psychological capital is positively associated with innovative work behavior.*

This relationship finds robust empirical support in recent scholarship. Gao *et al.* (2020) demonstrate the positive influence of psychological capital on the creative and innovative behavior of entrepreneurs. Hermina (2024) confirms this relationship in the SME context. Self-efficacy shapes the setting of ambitious innovation goals and persistence in the face of obstacles; hope enables the generation of creative alternative pathways; optimism encourages engagement in risky projects; and resilience facilitates learning from failure and perseverance through iterative processes.

Proposition 4: *Psychological safety in entrepreneurial organizations is positively associated with innovative work behavior.*

Psychological safety reduces the perceived costs of innovation by minimizing the fear of failure and sanction (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). It facilitates the sharing of tacit knowledge, encourages experimentation, and promotes collective learning. In African contexts, where power dynamics and respect for authority can inhibit the expression of new ideas, psychological safety becomes a crucial prerequisite for innovation.

Mediation Mechanisms

Proposition 5: *Psychological capital partially mediates the relationship between psychological well-being and innovative work behavior.*

This mediation finds empirical support across multiple recent studies. Khan *et al.* (2023) demonstrate the mediating role of psychological capital between thriving at work and innovative behavior. Battistelli *et al.* (2023) confirm that psychological capital mediates the relationship between well-being and autonomous motivation, which is itself linked to innovation. This mediation is explained by the fact that psychological well-being first shapes the development of individual psychological resources, which in turn facilitate engagement in innovative behaviors.

Proposition 6: *Work engagement mediates the relationship*

between psychological capital and innovative work behavior.
Koroglu and Ozmen (2021) empirically demonstrate that work engagement significantly mediates the relationship between psychological well-being and innovative work behavior. This mediation is explained by the fact that engagement represents the psychological state of vigor, dedication, and absorption that sustains innovative effort over time.

Reciprocal and Dynamic Relationships
Proposition 7: *Innovative work behavior positively influences entrepreneurial psychological well-being, creating a reciprocal dynamic.*
This bidirectional relationship draws support from Kim's (2024) work revealing complex relationships in which innovation influences well-being, though curvilinear effects may emerge in cases of excessive innovation demand. Successful innovation generates a sense of accomplishment, strengthens self-esteem, and contributes to purpose in life. This reciprocal relationship creates a positive spiral in which well-being and innovation mutually reinforce each other (Wiklund *et al.*, 2019).

The "Why": Theoretical Foundations
Broaden-and-Build Theory
This theory (Fredrickson, 2003) constitutes the primary explanatory foundation of our model. It posits that positive emotions, as central components of hedonic well-being, broaden individuals' cognitive and behavioral repertoires. In the entrepreneurial context, this cognitive expansion facilitates creative thinking, the identification of unconventional opportunities, and the generation of innovative solutions. Entrepreneurs with high well-being develop broader perspectives that are conducive to innovation (Bledow *et al.*, 2013). Recent research by Peiró *et al.* (2023) extends this theory by demonstrating that innovative behaviors and eudaimonic well-being mutually reinforce each other, creating a positive dynamic of expanding creative capacities and personal flourishing.

Conservation of Resources Theory
According to Hobfoll (2002), individuals are motivated by the acquisition, conservation, and protection of their resources. Psychological well-being constitutes a meta-resource that enables entrepreneurs to develop and maintain other resources crucial for innovation. This theory explains why entrepreneurs with high well-being are more inclined to invest in risky innovative activities: they possess the psychological resources necessary to absorb the potential costs of failure.

Self-Determination Theory
This theory (Ryan & Deci, 2001) identifies three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The satisfaction of these needs fosters eudaimonic well-being and intrinsic motivation, major predictors of innovative behavior. Padilla-Angulo *et al.* (2023) empirically demonstrate that need satisfaction is associated with well-being and entrepreneurial motivation. In African contexts, this theory is enriched by the communal dimension in which the satisfaction of individual needs interacts with collective aspirations (Littlewood *et al.*, 2022).

Positive Organizational Behavior Theory
This theoretical approach, developed by Luthans (2002), provides the conceptual framework for understanding psychological capital as a set of positive psychological resources. It explains how self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience act as transmission mechanisms between well-being and innovation. Recent work by Abbas and Khattak (2024) confirms the importance of this approach in entrepreneurial contexts.

Social Exchange Theory
This theory (Blau, 1964) explains how positive exchange relationships generate a climate of mutual trust that fosters psychological safety. Entrepreneurs who invest in their teams' well-being receive in return an enhanced commitment to innovation. This reciprocity is particularly evident in African cultures characterized by values of solidarity and mutual support (Khavul *et al.*, 2009).

The "Who, Where, When": Boundary Conditions and Contextual Moderators
Individual Moderators
The relationship between psychological well-being and psychological capital may be modulated by entrepreneurial experience. Frese (2024) demonstrates the importance of entrepreneurial psychological preparedness in Africa, suggesting that experience modifies the impact of well-being on psychological resources.
Proposition 8: *Entrepreneurial experience moderates the relationship between psychological well-being and psychological capital, with this relationship being stronger for novice entrepreneurs who face greater uncertainty.*
Recent research reveals significant moderating effects of gender. Youne and Jeon (2024) demonstrate that gender moderates the relationship between psychological capital and innovative behavior. Jumriaty *et al.* (2024) confirm these effects in the context of female entrepreneurship, highlighting the importance of context-specific factors.
Proposition 9: Gender moderates the relationships in the model, with differential effects depending on the dimensions of well-being and African cultural contexts.

Organizational Moderators
Leadership styles emerge as particularly important moderators. Wang and Kim (2023) demonstrate that entrepreneurial leadership moderates the relationship between psychological well-being and innovative work behavior. Islam *et al.* (2024) confirm the moderating role of ethical leadership.
Proposition 10: *Leadership styles (transformational, ethical, entrepreneurial) moderate the relationships in the model, with these relationships being strengthened by leaderships that promote*

autonomy and innovation.

Contextual Moderators Specific to African Environments

The level of economic development and institutional quality may moderate the proposed relationships. Elouaourti and Ibourk (2024) demonstrate the importance of contextual factors in African entrepreneurship, suggesting that fragile institutional environments may attenuate the positive effects of well-being on innovation.

Proposition 11: *Institutional development moderates the relationships in the model, with these relationships being stronger in more developed institutional environments.*

Limited access to financial resources, characteristic of African entrepreneurial ecosystems, may moderate the relationship between psychological capital and innovation. Elouaourti and Ibourk (2024) demonstrate the crucial role of financial inclusion as a mediator in African entrepreneurship.

Proposition 12: *Resource availability and financial inclusion moderate the relationship between psychological capital and innovative work behavior, with this relationship being attenuated by significant resource constraints.*

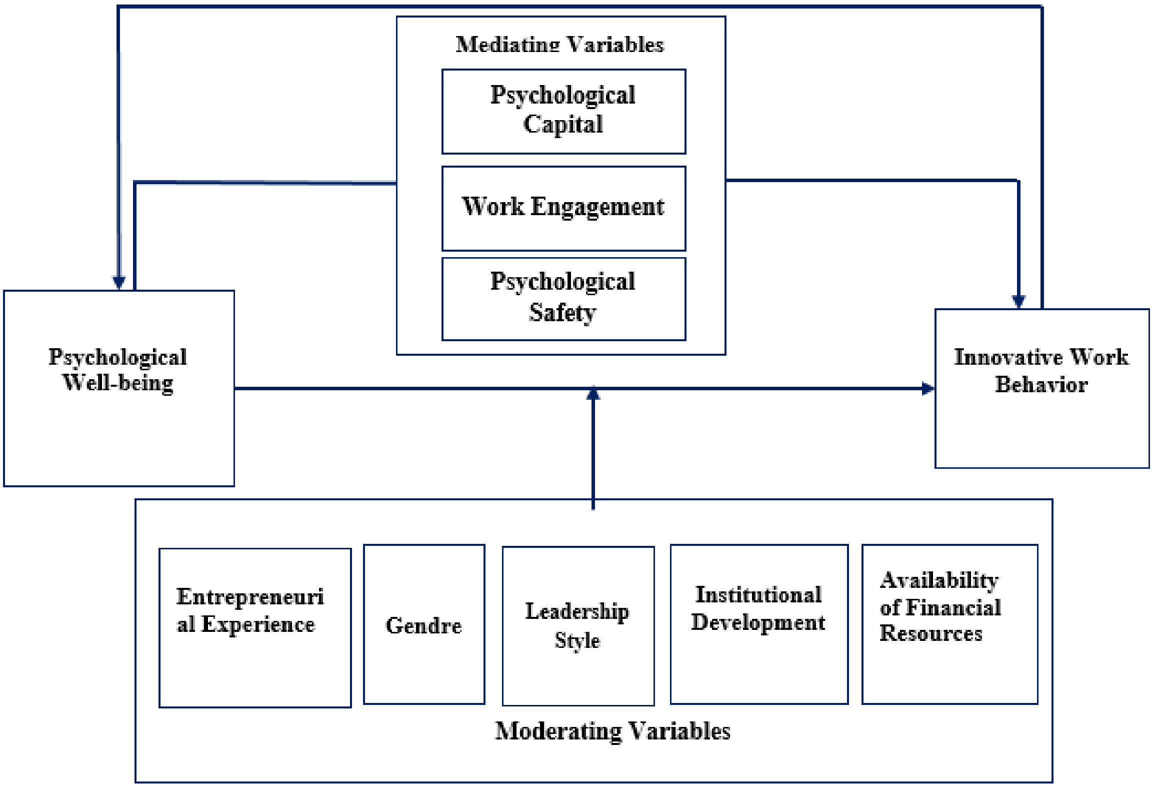

Figure 1: Proposed Integrative Model
Source: authors

Theoretical Contributions and Managerial Implications

Theoretical Contributions

This model makes several significant contributions to the literature, directly addressing gaps identified by recent scholarship.

Comprehensive conceptual integration: Unlike previous fragmented approaches, we propose a unified framework linking the literatures on well-being (Ryff's model), entrepreneurial innovation, and African contexts. This integration responds directly to the need for integrative theoretical approaches identified by Ibrahim *et al.* (2023).

Precise explanatory mechanisms: The identification of psychological capital and psychological safety as multiple mediators illuminates the processes through which well-being influences innovation. This contribution moves beyond simple correlations to explain the underlying causal mechanisms, meeting the theoretical rigor requirements of Whetten (1989).

Rigorous African contextualization: The model systematically integrates African cultural, economic, and institutional specificities, filling a major gap in a literature dominated by Western contexts. This contextualization draws on recent work by Frese (2024), George *et al.* (2016), and Williams *et al.* (2022) to develop a nuanced understanding of African entrepreneurial dynamics.

Managerial Implications for African Entrepreneurs

Strategic investment in personal well-being: Entrepreneurs should regard their psychological well-being as a strategic investment in their innovative capacity. This includes stress management, maintaining a life-work balance appropriate to the context, and cultivating enriching social relationships. Research by Tisu *et al.* (2023) confirms that well-being acts as an antecedent of entrepreneurial performance.

Targeted development of psychological capital: Entrepreneurs can benefit from development programs specifically designed to strengthen self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience. These programs must be adapted to African realities and integrate local cultural values. Interventions documented by Frese (2024) in STEP programs provide concrete examples of effective approaches.

Creating psychologically safe environments: Entrepreneur-leaders should foster organizational climates in which collaborators feel safe to express ideas and experiment. Research by Edmondson and Lei (2014) underscores the importance of this dimension, which is particularly critical in African contexts where traditional hierarchical dynamics can inhibit innovation.

Implications for Entrepreneurial Support Actors

Integration of well-being in support programs: Incubators, accelerators, and support programs should integrate modules on psychological well-being and entrepreneurial stress management. Entrepreneurs operating in challenging environments benefit from targeted psychological support as much as from financial and technical assistance.

Assessment and development tools: The development of psychological capital assessment tools adapted to African contexts and the proposal of personalized development pathways are needed. Interventions documented by Savickaite-Kazlauske and Bendaraviciene (2023) demonstrate the effectiveness of targeted interventions on psychological capital and creative self-efficacy.

Awareness of psychosocial risks: Training support actors in the psychological specificities of entrepreneurship and the signs of psychological distress, drawing on Stephan's (2018) work on entrepreneurial mental health, would strengthen the support ecosystem.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Nature and Design of the Research

This article adopts a purely theoretical approach to research, consistent with the formal standards of theory-building scholarship (Whetten, 1989). Rather than collecting primary empirical data, our methodology consists of the systematic analysis, synthesis, and conceptual integration of existing scientific literature drawn from multiple disciplinary traditions. This choice is deliberate and methodologically justified: the objective of the present work is not to test a pre-existing model, but to construct a new integrative framework capable of generating novel propositions about the relationship between psychological well-being and entrepreneurial innovative behavior in the African context.

Theoretical articles of this nature occupy a well-recognized and indispensable role in the scientific ecosystem. As Whetten (1989, p. 490) observes, "what constitutes a theoretical contribution" is precisely the capacity to add to a field's conceptual repertoire — not through data collection, but through the rigorous articulation of constructs, mechanisms, relationships, and boundary conditions that empirical researchers have yet to formalize. Our work responds to this standard by structuring the theoretical contribution around Whetten's four foundational pillars: the "what" (constructs), the "how" (relationships), the "why" (underlying mechanisms), and the "who, where, when" (boundary conditions and contextual scope).

Literature Search Strategy and Source Selection

The theoretical model developed in this article is grounded in a multi-source, multi-disciplinary literature review spanning the fields of organizational psychology, entrepreneurship research, positive organizational behavior, and African management studies. Sources were identified through systematic searches of the following academic databases: Web of Science, Scopus, PsycINFO, Google Scholar, and JSTOR. The searches were conducted using combinations of the following keywords: "psychological well-being AND entrepreneurship," "innovative work behavior," "psychological capital AND innovation," "psychological safety AND entrepreneurship," "work engagement AND creativity," "African entrepreneurship," and "theory building AND management."

Inclusion criteria prioritized peer-reviewed articles published in internationally recognized journals, with particular attention to publications from 2018 onward — the inflection point identified by Ibrahim *et al.* (2023) at which research at the intersection of well-being and innovation began to expand significantly. Foundational theoretical works predating this period (e.g., Whetten, 1989; Ryff, 1989; Luthans *et al.*, 2007; Fredrickson, 2003; Hobfoll, 2002) were systematically included given their structural importance to the conceptual architecture of the model. Book chapters and institutional reports were selectively incorporated when they provided indispensable contextual information unavailable in peer-reviewed outlets, particularly with respect to African entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Overall, the theoretical framework presented in this paper synthesizes and critically engages with more than fifty scientific sources spanning multiple disciplines, geographical contexts, and methodological traditions — including quantitative studies employing structural equation modeling (e.g., Khan *et al.*, 2023; Battistelli *et al.*, 2023), qualitative investigations (e.g., Frese, 2024), systematic literature reviews (e.g., Ibrahim *et al.*, 2023), and conceptual essays (e.g., George *et al.*, 2016; Wiklund *et al.*, 2019). This breadth is itself a deliberate methodological choice: the heterogeneity of sources ensures that the propositions advanced in the model are not artifacts of any single disciplinary lens or methodological paradigm.

Theoretical Construction Following Whetten (1989)

The methodological backbone of this article is Whetten's

(1989) framework for theory construction, which remains one of the most cited and operationally precise guides to conceptual contribution in management and organizational science. Whetten (1989) argues that a theory is not merely a collection of variables or findings, but a structured account that must respond to four essential questions: What are the key factors? How are they related? Why does this relationship hold? And for whom, where, and when does the theory apply? These questions correspond, respectively, to the dimensions of constructs, relational architecture, theoretical foundations, and boundary conditions — all of which are developed systematically in sections 3 through 6 of this article.

What distinguishes Whetten's (1989) approach from a simple literature review is its normative demand: a genuine theoretical contribution must not only describe existing knowledge but add something new to the conceptual toolkit of a field — a novel construct, a previously unspecified relationship, a new explanatory mechanism, or a refined understanding of boundary conditions (Loilier & Tellier, 2011). Our model responds to this demand by proposing, for the first time, an integrative framework that connects psychological well-being, psychological capital, psychological safety, work engagement, and innovative work behavior within a single coherent architecture explicitly calibrated to the African entrepreneurial context. Each section of the article is constructed to satisfy one of Whetten's four criteria, and each proposition is formulated to reflect a logical and literature-grounded extension of existing knowledge rather than a simple restatement of known findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Principal Theoretical Findings

The systematic analysis of the literature and the application of Whetten's (1989) framework yield a number of significant theoretical findings that advance our understanding of the well-being–innovation nexus in entrepreneurial and African contexts.

First, the integration of Ryff's (1989, 2019) multidimensional model with the entrepreneurial context reveals that psychological well-being cannot be treated as a monolithic or culture-neutral construct. The six dimensions of well-being self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, autonomy, positive relations with others, and environmental mastery each manifest differently when filtered through the lived realities of African entrepreneurs. Purpose in life, for instance, acquires a distinctly communal coloring in Ubuntu-influenced cultural environments, while autonomy must be reconciled with the collective decision-making norms that characterize many African organizational cultures. This contextualized reading of Ryff's model represents a theoretical refinement that the existing literature, dominated by Western samples and assumptions, has systematically underexplored (Koburtay *et al.*, 2022; George *et al.*, 2016).

Second, the identification of a dual mediation pathway operating through both psychological capital and psychological safety constitutes a conceptually novel contribution. Prior research has tended to examine these mediators in isolation: some studies focus exclusively on psychological capital (Hermina, 2024; Khan *et al.*, 2023), others on psychological safety (Sun & Huang, 2019), and still others on work engagement (Koroglu & Ozmen, 2021). Our model is the first to propose that these three mechanisms operate simultaneously and complementarily within a single relational architecture, generating a more complete and realistic account of how well-being translates into innovative behavior. This finding has direct implications for theory: it suggests that intervention at any single mediating node may be insufficient and that the full mobilization of innovative potential requires the simultaneous cultivation of individual psychological resources, interpersonal trust, and organizational engagement.

Third, the articulation of twelve theoretical propositions covering individual, organizational, and contextual moderators demonstrates that the well-being–innovation relationship is not universal but highly contingent. Institutional fragility, limited financial inclusion, gender dynamics, and leadership styles all emerge from the literature as boundary conditions that can attenuate or amplify the core relationships in the model (Elouaourti & Ibourk, 2024; Jumriaty *et al.*, 2024; Wang & Kim, 2023). This finding aligns with a growing call in international entrepreneurship research for theorizing that takes context seriously rather than treating it as background noise (Frese, 2024; Williams *et al.*, 2022).

Discussion: Positioning the Model in the Broader Literature

The integrative framework presented in this article speaks to several ongoing debates in the literature and repositions them within a more nuanced theoretical space.

One such debate concerns the directionality of the well-being–innovation relationship. Much of the extant literature implicitly treats well-being as an antecedent of innovative behavior — an assumption reflected in our propositions 1 through 6. However, Kim's (2024) recent finding of curvilinear and reciprocal effects between these constructs complicates this linear narrative. Proposition 7 of our model explicitly acknowledges this bidirectionality, arguing that successful innovation generates a sense of accomplishment that feeds back into psychological well-being, creating a positive spiral. This is consistent with Peiro *et al.*'s (2023) demonstration of mutually reinforcing dynamics between innovative behaviors and eudaimonic well-being, and extends the broaden-and-build framework (Fredrickson, 2003) by proposing that innovation itself functions as a resource-generating activity, not merely a resource-consuming one.

A second important debate concerns the applicability of Western psychological theories to African organizational contexts. Critics have rightly noted that constructs such as self-efficacy, autonomy, and individualistic well-being may carry different meanings and functional consequences in collectivist, high-power-distance cultural environments (Frese, 2024; Littlewood *et al.*, 2022). Our model does not dismiss Western psychological theories — broaden-and-build, conservation of resources, self-determination, and positive organizational behavior theory all remain foundational pillars of the explanatory architecture — but it does insist that their application to African contexts must be mediated by an understanding of communal values, Ubuntu philosophy, and the specific institutional constraints that characterize African entrepreneurial ecosystems. In this regard, our work contributes to a growing body of African management scholarship that seeks to engage with global theory while insisting on its contextual adaptation (George *et al.*, 2016; Williams *et al.*, 2022).

A third contribution of our discussion concerns the role of psychological safety in African entrepreneurial organizations. The literature on psychological safety has been developed primarily in large Western corporate settings (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson & Lei, 2014), and its relevance to small and medium enterprises operating under high power distance and strong deference to authority has been assumed rather than demonstrated. Our analysis of the literature suggests that psychological safety may be even more consequential — and more fragile — in African entrepreneurial contexts, precisely because hierarchical norms can suppress the expression of novel ideas and inhibit the constructive failure that innovation demands. This theoretical claim points toward an important practical implication: in African entrepreneurial settings, building psychological safety is not simply a desirable organizational feature but a necessary precondition for translating individual well-being into collective innovative outcomes.

Synthesis: What the Model Adds to Existing Knowledge

Taken together, the results of this theoretical exercise demonstrate that the well-being–innovation relationship in entrepreneurial African contexts is better understood as a dynamic, context-sensitive, and multi-mechanistic process than as a simple bivariate correlation. The model advances the literature in three principal respects. It provides conceptual precision by translating broad intuitions about "well-being being good for innovation" into a set of formally specified propositions with clearly articulated mediators, moderators, and theoretical justifications. It provides contextual grounding by systematically integrating African cultural, institutional, and economic specificities into a framework that had previously existed only in Western guise. And it provides theoretical coherence by showing that multiple previously isolated streams of research — on psychological capital, psychological safety, work engagement, and eudaimonic well-being — can be organized into a unified explanatory architecture consistent with the requirements of Whetten's (1989) theory-building standard.

These findings invite a recalibration of the way entrepreneurship researchers think about psychological factors in emerging market contexts. Rather than treating well-being as a peripheral variable of secondary concern to economic performance, the model positions it as a strategic resource with direct consequences for the innovative capacity that African economies urgently need. This repositioning is not merely theoretical; it carries immediate practical implications for how entrepreneurs are trained, supported, and evaluated in African incubation ecosystems and policy environments.

Limitations and Critical Considerations

Theoretical Limitations

This conceptual model presents several limitations that warrant recognition. First, its primarily conceptual nature requires rigorous empirical validation to confirm the proposed relationships. The 12 formulated propositions require sophisticated methodologies to be adequately tested, potentially involving complex structural equation modeling analyses. Second, the model may omit other important mediating or moderating variables. For instance, personality traits, specific situational factors, or spiritual dimensions noted by Koburtay *et al.* (2022) may play significant roles not captured by the current model.

Future Methodological Challenges

The empirical validation of this model will require mixed methodological approaches combining quantitative analyses to test the proposed relationships with qualitative approaches to capture the contextual nuances of African environments. Future research will also need to consider longitudinal effects and the temporal dynamics of well-being-innovation relationships.

CONCLUSION

This research develops an integrative theoretical framework linking psychological well-being and innovative behavior among entrepreneurs, applying Whetten's (1989) theory-building approach with rigor. The proposed model suggests that psychological capital, work engagement, and psychological safety mediate the relationship between well-being and innovation, under the moderating influence of individual, organizational, and contextual factors specific to African environments.

The contributions of this research are multiple and respond to gaps identified in contemporary scholarship. Theoretically, it integrates previously fragmented literatures and proposes precise explanatory mechanisms adapted to non-Western contexts. It acknowledges the specificity of African entrepreneurial environments characterized by strong communal values, particular institutional challenges, and constrained resources, thus responding to the call by George *et al.* (2016) for management research more firmly centered on Africa.

Practically, the model provides entrepreneurs, support actors, and policymakers with concrete levers for fostering innovation through well-being. It highlights the importance of holistic approaches that account for the psychological dimensions of entrepreneurship, particularly relevant in contexts where personal and professional challenges are deeply intertwined.

The originality of this approach lies in its systemic perspective, which acknowledges the complexity of the relationships between psychological factors and innovative behaviors in specific cultural contexts. It paves the way for a new generation of empirical research and practical interventions adapted to African realities, building on recent work by Frese (2024) on African entrepreneurial learning. Ultimately, understanding how psychological well-being influences entrepreneurial innovation becomes crucial in a context where Africa must address major development challenges that demand endogenous innovative solutions. This theoretical model constitutes a first step toward this integrated understanding, offering a robust framework for future research and practical applications in service of African entrepreneurial development.

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