

ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND HEALTH: AN EXISTENTIAL PERSPECTIVE

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Entrepreneurship and Health: an Existential Perspective

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A field is emerging at the interface between research into entrepreneurship, psychology, biology, and mental and physical health. This special issue contributes to this emergence in two ways: first, it adds a philosophical perspective, i.e., that of existentialism. Existentialism is a much-neglected view of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs (small business founder/owners/managers) tend to view their business as the centre of their existence. Three concepts will be introduced to show the link between existentialism and mental and physical health: subordination, suffering and salutogenesis. Second, we will summarize the six articles of the present special issue that address the links between physiological states, mental health, well-being, mental disorders and psychiatric symptoms on the one hand and entrepreneurship on the other. They are based on conceptual and empirical research examining these relationships in different countries and entrepreneurial contexts.

— *Keywords: Entrepreneurship, health, existentialism, subordination, suffering, salutogenesis*

Un domaine émerge à l'interface entre la recherche en entrepreneuriat, la psychologie, la biologie et la santé mentale et physique. Ce numéro spécial contribue à cette émergence de deux manières : Tout d'abord, il y ajoute une perspective philosophique, celle de l'existentialisme. L'existentialisme est une vision très négligée de l'entrepreneuriat. Les entrepreneurs (fondateurs/propriétaires/gérants de petites entreprises) ont tendance à considérer leur entreprise comme le centre de leur existence. Trois concepts seront introduits pour montrer le lien entre l'existentialisme et la santé mentale et physique : la subordination, la souffrance et la salutogénèse. Ensuite, nous résumerons les six articles du présent numéro spécial qui abordent les liens entre états physiologiques, santé mentale, bien-être, troubles mentaux et symptômes psychiatriques d'une part et l'entrepreneuriat d'autre part. Ils sont fondés sur des recherches conceptuelles et empiriques examinant ces relations dans différents pays et contextes entrepreneuriaux.

— *Mots-clés* : *Entrepreneuriat, santé, existentialisme, subordination, souffrance, salutogénèse*

1. Introduction

Investigations into the links between entrepreneurship and physical and mental health started only recently. Results show that the health of entrepreneurs is relatively good (Algava *et al.*, 2012; Torrès, 2012-a), better than that of employees (Hariharan *et al.*, 2009; Stephan and Roesler, 2010; Yoon *et al.*, 2013; Sewdas *et al.*, 2018) or better than that of the general population (Piatecki *et al.*, 1997; INSERM, 2011). At the same time, other studies seem to show the opposite result (Jamal, 1997; Lewin-Epstein and Yuchtman-Yaar, 1991). For instance, some studies show that the level of burnout of entrepreneurs is higher than that of employees (Jamal, 2007; Kuan-Han, Chau-Chung, Tzong-Shinn, Tien-Shang et Yen Yuan, 2020).

These results seem contradictory. However, they can be considered complementary if seen through the lens of the distinction between pathogenic and salutogenic effects¹ on the one hand and existentialism on the other. What characterizes the entrepreneur is the ability to create their own existence. They tend to define their work environment as if their life depends on it. In that sense, the German term *Existenzgründer* for business owners is well chosen, as it emphasizes not only the founding of the activity (*Gründung*), but also the role of the existence of the founder (*Existenz*). In the present paper, the term entrepreneur represents any individual with the skills and motivation to create and manage an economic activity, such as (small) business founder, owner or manager.

In many entrepreneurship theories, an existential view is often implicit, and that *Existenzgründung* bears a crucial consequence, i.e., the 'subordination' of the health of the entrepreneur to interest of the business². Such a view clarifies the effects of the owner's health with suffering on the one hand and a salutogenic role on the other.

1. In the present special issue, Heichelbech and Paraschiv (2022) contribute to mainstream research by investigating how entrepreneurship affects health depending on the entrepreneurial project evolution and the state of health of the entrepreneur.

2. We propose the term 'subordination' because we want to stress that, next a simple priority of activities (work activities before personal activities), there is also the power of necessity. In many situations work determines, or even dictates, the personal existence of the entrepreneur for the better (salutogenesis) or for the worse (suffering).

1.1. Existentialism is the philosophy of action

Existentialism is a branch of philosophy that considers the individual to be in charge of his own destiny, responsible for his deeds and free to decide which values and norms guide him (Colette, 2019). In *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*, Jean Paul Sartre explains that human beings determine the course of their lives by their choices: "existence precedes essence" (Sartre, 2007, p. 22). He maintains that existentialism is inherently optimistic since "... man's destiny lies within himself" (Sartre, 2007, p. 40). Existentialism is a belief system ("a morality of action and commitment") that fits perfectly with the entrepreneurial way of life.

Control of one's destiny is one of the core foundations of existential psychology. Relatedly, the quest for meaning also became the foundation of existential psychology (Bernaud, 2021). Frankl (1976, p. 154) wrote that "the striving to find meaning in one's life is the primary motivational force in man". Malach Pines *et al.* (2002, p. 176) add: "if one accepts the premise that many people today are trying to derive a sense of existential significance from their work, the next question to address is why do they choose to do it through a particular career? Why does one person try to achieve a sense of meaning by being a manager and another by being an entrepreneur?" Also, "it can be expected that entrepreneurs' issues will be more loaded emotionally and thus lead to a greater identification with work and a greater existential significance attributed to it" (Malach Pines *et al.*, 2002, p. 176).

1.2. The existential dimension and entrepreneurship theories

The existential dimension is widespread in theoretical thinking about entrepreneurship beginning with Weber, who in *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism* wrote "that business with its continuous work has become a necessary part of their lives" (Weber, 1992, p. 32). He also said that "at the same, time expresses what is seen from the view-point of personal happiness, so irrational about this sort of life, where a man exists for the sake of his business, instead of the reverse" (Weber, 1992, p. 32). Similarly, Schumpeter describes the existence of the entrepreneur as follows: "first of all, there is the dream and the will to found a private kingdom, usually, though not necessarily, also a dynasty [...] a sensation of power and independence [...] from spiritual ambition down to mere snobbery [...] Then there is the will to conquer: the impulse to fight, to prove oneself superior to others, to succeed for the sake, not of the fruits of success, but of success itself [...] the financial result is a secondary consideration [...] Finally there is the joy of creating, of getting things done, or simply of exercising one's energy and ingenuity ..." (Schumpeter, 1934, p. 93). This desire to create a destiny or rather a dynasty is attributed to the Schumpeterian entrepreneur, a motivation that complements specific economic aims.

It is tempting to make a connection here with the need for achievement view, which also goes beyond the 'just working' interpretation. McClelland (1967) famously showed that high levels of need for achievement and self-realization in entrepreneurs had effects on economic growth. Collins *et al.* (2004) found that achievement motivation was significantly correlated with both choice for an entrepreneurial career and entrepreneurial performance. The needs for self-determination, achievement and self-realization are existential in the sense that they give meaning and freedom to one's life.

Among the entrepreneurship thinkers, the most existentialist to date is William Gartner. In his famous debate with Carland *et al.* (1988), he essentially maintained that entrepreneurs' deeds matter and not their traits (Gartner, 1988). This is fully in line with Sartre's

view that “reality exists only in action” (Sartre, 2007: p. 37) and “man is nothing other than his own project. He exists only to the extent that he realizes himself, therefore he is nothing more than the sum of his actions” (Sartre, 2007: p. 37). For Gartner, “research on the entrepreneur should focus on what the entrepreneur does and not who the entrepreneur is” (Gartner, 1988, p. 57).

Many years later, Shir and Ryff attempt to reformulate this standpoint in a more explicit fashion: “entrepreneurship, in other words, serves as a unique and crucial force of engagement that grants individuals the freedom to align their moral vision with the actions they take in the material world of the market.” (Shir et Ryff, 2021, p. 3). In addition, “given its self-organized dynamics, entrepreneurship ought, crucially, to be seen not only as a process of business making, but also as a political, ethical, and communitarian force. It can and does change the lives and characters of societies and individuals alike.” (Shir and Ryff, 2021, p. 19).

Many researchers have struggled with the existentialist view of entrepreneurship without mentioning the term, but have made a link with health, including well-being. Of course, losing one’s business often means losing personal, financial and other investments. However, more importantly, the identity, self-image and well-being of entrepreneurs are strongly connected to their business (Stephan, 2018, Torrès *et al.*, 2021-a). Job loss, unemployment and ‘external events’, such as economic, technical and natural disasters, are more harmful and cause more distress for entrepreneurs than for employees (Backhans and Hemmingsson, 2012; Hetschko, 2016; Stephan, 2018).

1.3. The French school is existentialist

French authors often stress the joint economic and existentialist entrepreneurial logics. For them, entrepreneurship is not a goal in itself but deeply intertwined with the ‘self’.

Bruyat presents the field of entrepreneurship research as the dialogic³ between the individual creator and a new business project (Bruyat, 1993; Bruyat et Julien; 2001), stressing that business creation is a ‘project of life’ and beyond the level of having just economic components (Bruyat, 1993, p. 232). Business creation is more than just work. In his view, the project of business creation and the ‘project of life’ can be seen as complementary, which is the essence of entrepreneurship (Bruyat, 1993, p. 185). For Fayolle, entrepreneurial activities can never be disjunct from other activities (Fayolle, 2004, p. 31). Verstraete mentions the symbiotic relation between the entrepreneur, their organization (Verstraete, 2001, p. 8) and their existential trajectory (Verstraete, 2005, p. 138). For Schmitt acting in an entrepreneurial fashion means taking one’s destiny into one’s own hands (Schmitt, 2018, p. 149).

1.4. Existentialism and the small business

A principal feature of a small business is the predominant role of the entrepreneur (Marchesnay, 1991; Julien, 2020). Hence, the small business can be seen as the extension of the personality of the entrepreneur, as the focal point of their existence. Expressions demonstrate this, including “me, myself and I” (Gumpert and Boyd, 1984), “the business is

3. The concept of dialogic was introduced by Edgar Morin who aims to understand and describe the complexity of opposing forces in organizations. See Morin (2007) for an English version.

the ego” (Gibb, 1997), “Le Moi, Ici et Maintenant” (Torrès, 2003), the 3-M model consisting of “Me, My project and My ecosystem” (Schmitt, 2018), the use of the prefix “self”, such as in *self-employed* and *self-made* or the French prefix “auto”, such as in *auto-entrepreneur* (self-employed). They are witness to the egocentric character of entrepreneurial activity. Generally, the smaller the size of the business, the more it exacerbates the “egotrophy” of the entrepreneur (Torrès, 2003). Leung *et al.* (2020) showed that narcissism in the sub-clinical domain is associated with entrepreneurial manifestations. Taken together, the personalized, narcissistic and egocentric modus operandi of the entrepreneur meets no barriers in the context of small businesses. Moreover, these businesses allow for deep existential links between person and project, which, as we will see below, does not fail to have health consequences for the entrepreneur. With these deep existential links as a mediating mechanism, the significance of mental and physical health for entrepreneurs, their functioning and their performance become immediately clear. At least, this is what we want to demonstrate in the remainder of the present paper.

2. Existentialism and its three dimensions: subordination, suffering and salutogenesis

The consequences of the links between existentialism and entrepreneurship will be explored and their three dimensions presented: subordination, i.e., business activities trump health and well-being; suffering, i.e., bad health and ill-being outcomes; and salutogenesis, i.e., good health and well-being outcomes.

It seems as if health and well-being are just second order outcomes for entrepreneurs. In the words of Stephan *et al.* (2020, p. 26), “entrepreneurship—like a continuous rollercoaster ride—offers potential for experiencing both positive and negative well-being (i.e., joy and satisfaction but also anxiety and burnout)”. The existential view may help explain why entrepreneurs accept these swings.

2.1. Subordination of health and other personal aspects to work activities

The subordination consequence of the existentialist view is clarified in six aspects that are not necessarily entirely independent. For entrepreneurs, work activities come before health issues, professional life comes before personal life, work activities come before holidays, leisure, sleep and recovery activities and that entrepreneurs say they have good stress.

Research shows that entrepreneurs devote less time to maintaining good health⁴. They visit general physicians and medical specialists less often than do employees (Piatecki *et al.*, 1997; Riphahn *et al.*, 2003; Stephan and Roesler, 2010; Pfeifer, 2013). They would rather go to an osteopath than a physiotherapist, probably because it is quicker, although they know it is costlier (Torrès, 2012-a). Entrepreneurs report less sick leave (Pfeifer, 2013), and when they do, they resume their professional activities quicker (RSI, 2008)⁵. Resuming

4. In her PhD thesis Rose-Myriam Mondelus (2016) tells the story of an entrepreneur who only worries about his health if he goes to a bank for a loan.

5. One of the authors of the present article once had a medical operation. At the question how long it would take before resuming work, the surgeon answered that this would typically depend on the occupation, entrepreneur or not. In his experience, entrepreneurs started after one week and for employees it may be as long as two months.

professional activities while still being ill occurs more often among entrepreneurs than among employees (Benavides *et al.*, 2000; Monneuse, 2013). A study on permanent disability (RSI, 2008) shows that for entrepreneurs, two-thirds of the recognized disabilities are archived as 'partial' instead of 'total', while for employees, it is the other way around, and two-thirds are 'total'.

The phenomenon of sickness presenteeism (working while ill despite a probable lower productivity) is even proposed (Aronson *et al.*, 2000). It is observed often among entrepreneurs (Monneuse, 2013).

2.1.1. *Professional before personal life and leisure*

The option to combine professional and non-professional (in particular family) activities (Eddleston and Powell, 2012; Heilman and Chen, 2003; Jennings and McDougald, 2007) is often mentioned as one of the reasons to become an entrepreneur. However, research shows that entrepreneurs are generally not satisfied with the equilibrium between the two because they feel that professional activities usually have priority (Parasumaran et Simmers, 2001) or they lack time for recovery (Williamson *et al.*, 2021).

Entrepreneurs generally allow themselves less time for holidays and leisure time, including hobbies, and experience lower leisure satisfaction than do employees (Binder et Coad, 2016; Van der Zwan *et al.*, 2015; Odermatt *et al.*, 2017). This may be due to an existentialist relationship of the entrepreneur to his business: holidays and hobbies seem to be sacrificed for work reasons. This subordination is also found concerning the entrepreneur's meals, which provides yet another moment of relaxation. Entrepreneurs allow themselves less time for meals, particularly breakfast and lunch, while this does not seem to be the case for dinner (Giorgi-Font, 2017).

2.1.2. *Work before sleep*

The subordination of sleep to work is witnessed by several studies showing that entrepreneurs suffer from lack of sleep (Mullens, 2011; Guilliani, 2016; Guilliani et Torrès, 2018). A large French sleep study shows that entrepreneurs are overrepresented in the category of those who sleep less than six hours per day (Léger et Adrien, 2012). Further studies show that this lack of sleep has negative effects on the health of entrepreneurs (Murnieks *et al.*, 2020; Levasseur *et al.*, 2019), on entrepreneurial behaviour (Gish *et al.*, 2019; Gunia, 2018; Guilliani et Torrès, 2017; Guilliani, 2016) and on managerial behaviour (Barnes *et al.*, 2016, 2015; Gunia *et al.*, 2014). Guilliani (2016) showed that 54% of her sample of entrepreneurs suffered from sleeplessness, while only 19% of French generally did. It seems that entrepreneurs view sleep as a residual activity, as if they consider it as time lost and this has many negative effects on professional and other activities.

2.1.3. *Work before recovery*

Recovery activities, such as detachment, relaxation, mastery and control, reduce stress (Sonnentag and Fritz, 2015), emotional exhaustion (Donahue *et al.*, 2012), and affective ruminations (Taris *et al.*, 2008) and have favourable well-being effects (Feldt *et al.*, 2013; Kinnunen *et al.*, 2013). All these analyses pertain to employees, while only a few studies consider entrepreneurs (Wach *et al.*, 2020; Williamson *et al.*, 2021). However, there is no reason to believe that for entrepreneurs, the results are comparable with those for employees.

For instance, using the Sonnentag and Fritz (2015) scale, Torrès (2022) show that entrepreneurs arrive at a lower level of recovery than do employees. Of the four types of recovery experiences, detachment from work seems problematic (Torrès *et al.*, 2022). Taken together, lower levels of recovery by entrepreneurs seem to prevail although empirical results are few. There seems to be a paradox in that entrepreneurs who need recovery most are least inclined to devote time to it (Sonnentag, 2018). Existentialism plays a role in the lives of entrepreneurs that they find it difficult to think of other things besides work.

2.1.4. *Bad stress and good stress*

Numerous epidemiological studies have identified the pathogenic effects of stress, such as leading to lower levels of well-being (Shigemi *et al.*, 1997), higher levels of burn-out (Iacovides *et al.*, 2003), problems with sleep (Martire *et al.*, 2020), a higher probability of depression (Iacovides *et al.*, 2003), heart attacks (Kivimäki *et al.*, 2006), and diabetes (Lloyd *et al.*, 2005). Generally, entrepreneurs suffer from high levels of perceived stress⁶ (Boyd and Gumpert, 1983; Akande, 1992; Buttner, 1992; Lechat, 2014; Lechat and Torrès, 2016 and 2017; Saraf *et al.*, 2018). However, they tend to give this stress a positive loading (Kariv, 2008). Moreover, dealing with stress can be learned (Yeager *et al.*, 2022).

Several studies (Leung *et al.*, 2008; Salehi *et al.*, 2010; Picu, 2015; Srivastava and Krishna, 1991) show the inverse U-shaped link between stress and performance: a (too) low or a (too) high level is harmful for performance, but a medium level is positive. This U-shaped link may explain entrepreneurs' capacity to turn stress into something positive since they may have more room than employees to 'choose' their most effective stress level. Another way of explaining why entrepreneurs perceive 'positive' stress is to discriminate between challenges (with stressful, as well as stimulating effects) and hindrance (with merely stressful effects) (LePine *et al.*, 2005; Podsakoff *et al.*, 2007; Rodell and Judge 2009, Widmer *et al.*, 2012). Entrepreneurs may prefer the challenge view over the hindrance view. According to Widmer *et al.* (2012), "this concept of challenge stressors may help to explain why many people do not reduce challenge stressors even when they could: feeling good about themselves and their lives may, at least temporarily, outweigh the strain". The access room of entrepreneurs in the above two examples may be created by their existentialist approach. Cardon and Patel (2015) show that entrepreneurs suffer from more stress than employees, but that they benefit in terms of the positive link with turnover, while the link with well-being is negative. Returning to our existentialist approach, when an entrepreneur experiences 'good stress', it means good for the business, which is why he interprets it as stimulating; again, it is work before health.

2.2. Existentialism and its link with suffering of entrepreneurs

Suffering is a state of acute malaise or according to Kahn and Steeves (1986), defined "as an individual's experience of threat to self and is a meaning given to events such as pain or loss". Le Breton (2015, p. 77) does not explicitly mention existentialism but could have:

6. In the present special issue, Block, Millan, Moritz and Ramos-Poyatos (2022) investigate the link between working time quality, flexibility, and perceived stress in three different groups of self-employed individuals.

“comme le rappelle l'étymologie, souffrir est toujours subir, endurer, être de quelque façon en position d'impuissance. Plus elle dure et plus elle altère le sentiment d'identité du sujet”.⁷

Suffering is not a state of mind entrepreneurs are willing to admit they experience because it is at odds with their leadership image, the connotation of success and a dissociation of failure (Torrès, 2011). However, as with any uncertain and risky adventure, there may be difficult periods and episodes to such a degree that entrepreneurship scholars resort to theories of grief and talk of traumata and existential risks, such as suicide and burnout. Below, views are presented in connection to three events from which entrepreneurs may suffer: forced liquidation, business take-over and the COVID-19 pandemic. Not just for purposes of exposition but also because of recent literature, liquidation is connected to the risk of suicide, business take-over to the theory of grief and the pandemic to the risk of burnout.

2.2.1. *Liquidation and risk of suicide*

Liquidation is arguably the most dramatic moment in the life of an entrepreneur (Lechat and Torrès, 2017), in particular, having to let go of or fire employees (Torrès, 2011). Shepherd *et al.* (2009) introduced the notion of anticipated grief, while Augustin (2021) spoke of “entrepreneurial morbigenesis”, which can lead to depression or even risk of suicide (Bortolussi, 2012; Bah and Gaillon, 2018; Kinowski-Moysan, 2021; Bah *et al.*, 2022). Entrepreneurial existentialism can thus lead to the most extreme form of health risk, that of suicide. Verstraete (2001, p. 8) provides a challenging description “la relation entre l'entrepreneur et l'organisation est de type symbiotique, à terme, l'un ou l'autre peut devenir commensal (il vit sur son hôte en détournant une partie des ressources de ce dernier sans lui causer trop de préjudices) ou pire parasite (il infecte son hôte et peut causer sa mort)”.⁸

2.2.2. *Business take-over and theory of grief*

Ultimately, every business will end up in some form of transfer. Cadieux and Deschamps (2009) even talk of repreneurship. From an existential viewpoint, this can be seen as a disruption or even an ordeal (Boussaguet, 2012). Fromenty (2014) speaks of a traumatic risk and gambling with not just professional but also existential elements; Bah (2009, p. 129) speaks of the last turning point in life; Boussaguet (2012, p. 62) speaks of the loss of meaning of life; Pailot (1999, p. 27) speaks of identity and narcissistic loss. Not surprisingly, the theory of grief is often used to understand the emotional side (Pailot, 1995 and 1996; Bah, 2009). These emotions seem to persist even when the take-over is perceived as a relief (Fromenty, 2014) or when it is a financial success for the seller (Lechat, 2014).

2.2.3. *The COVID-19 pandemic and the risk of burnout*

Pines researched burnout from an existential viewpoint (Malakh Pines *et al.*, 1981; Pines, 1993 and 1994; Malach Pines 2000 and 2002; Ben Tahar, 2014). Grebot (2019, p. 124) states that: “les individus frappés par le burnout partagent plutôt une conception

7. “As the etymology reminds us, suffering is always to submit, to endure, to be in some way in a position of powerlessness. The longer it lasts, the more it alters the subject's sense of identity”.

8. “the relationship between the entrepreneur and the organization is of a symbiotic type, eventually, either one or the other can become commensal (he lives on his host by diverting part of the resources of the latter without causing him too much harm) or worse parasite (infects its host and may cause death)”.

existentielle de leur travail, c'est-à-dire associant le travail à l'épanouissement personnel"⁹. Malach Pines (2000, p. 634) is more precise saying: "success gives highly motivated individuals a sense of existential significance and partially heals their childhood wounds. When they feel that they have failed (to do the work the way it 'should' have been done), when the work does not give their life a sense of meaning, they burn out. Indeed, research shows that when people enter their careers with high expectations and high ego involvement, and they fail to derive a sense of existential significance from their work, the result is burnout".

In particular, concerning entrepreneurs, they "described themselves as having a greater sense of significance in their work" (Malach Pines *et al.*, 2002, p. 172), which became particularly apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, entrepreneurs, more than employees, experienced the risk of loss of turnover, possibly leading to a threat to the survival of their business (Caliendo *et al.*, 2022) and hence higher levels of perceived burnout or a lower perception of physical and mental well-being in general (Torrès *et al.*, 2021-b)¹⁰. More precisely, Torrès *et al.* (2021-c) showed the existence of the 'syndrome of impediment exhaustion' that is because entrepreneurs felt immobilized. This immobility conflicts with their tendency to be hyperactive (Wismans *et al.*, 2020-a; 2020-b, Yu *et al.*, 2021). Torrès *et al.* (2021-a) also showed that the probability of catching the virus with dire consequences had less of an impact compared to the threat of bankruptcy. As previously mentioned, entrepreneurs may be less occupied by their personal health than their business.

The existential threat of COVID-19 undoubtedly affected entrepreneurial health because "when individuals choose a career path, such as business ownership, success represents a sense of existential significance". However, in the face of losing this sense of meaning and the spirit of life, "failure is a powerful cause of burnout" (Pines, 1994, p. 383).

2.3. Existentialism and its link with salutogenesis of entrepreneurs

Salutogenesis is "an approach to human health that examines the factors contributing to the promotion and maintenance of physical and mental well-being, rather than disease, with particular emphasis on the coping mechanisms of individuals which help preserve health despite stressful conditions" (Merriam Webster dictionary). It does not just focus on the negative factors, like mortality, morbidity, disability, inability, etc., but also on the positive sides (Antonovsky, 1979 and 1987; Lindström and Eriksson (2005). Salutogenesis is not just connected to the areas of positive psychology (Joseph and Sagi, 2017) and the psychology of health (Bruchon-Schweitzer, 2002), but can also be connected to existential psychology (Bernaud, 2021). Just as existential psychology points to pathogenic effects (suffering), there is also a salutogenic effect (Rajkumar, 2021).¹¹

9. "Individuals affected by burnout share an existential conception of their work, that is to say associating work with personal fulfilment".

10. In the present special issue, there are two articles about the COVID-19 period. St-Jean, Chouchane and Tremblay (2022) address the issue of psychological health, well-being, and entrepreneurial career commitment in a particular socio-health context, that of the COVID-19 pandemic, which had unprecedented repercussions on many companies. Adopting two waves of a longitudinal approach, Battisti, Hatak and Zhou (2022) examine how general rumination and COVID-19 related rumination influence entrepreneurial well-being.

11. It is not surprising that, given the clinical work of the Observatoire Amarok, the connection between salutogenesis and entrepreneurship was made in Torrès (2012-b).

2.3.1. *The existential interpretation of salutogenesis*

The existential interpretation of salutogenesis can be traced back to various philosophical thinkers, such as Frankl (1969 and 1976), Yalom (1980) and Antonovsky (1987 and 1993). Antonovsky (1993) introduced the concept of a sense of coherence consisting of three dimensions: comprehensibility (of external events), manageability (of coping resources) and meaningfulness (given one's value system), which become important concepts in existential psychology (Bernaud, 2021).

This sense of coherence fits perfectly with the life of an entrepreneur who operates in an environment that he should understand to the point that he can exercise control and connect to his value system. This is all the more essential for an entrepreneur who starts their own business. Schmitt (2018, p. 35) puts it as follows: "le projet entrepreneurial est avant tout une quête de sens par rapport à une intentionnalité où la notion de cohérence prend une dimension importante en entrepreneuriat".¹² In their empirical study, Debray *et al.* (2016) show that entrepreneurs display a high level of coherence. Shir and Ryff turn this sense of coherence and the quest for it into their central theme: "the unique quality of entrepreneurship underscored by the self-organizing view is thus not the existence of opportunities to create profit, but rather that of opportunities for individuals to explore and exercise their agency—to set and strive for what they envision to be meaningful ends" (Shir et Ryff, 2021, p. 3). This is the entrepreneur as *Existenzgründer* the success of whom creates salutogenic effects.

Creating and/or running one's own business seems all encompassing in terms of meaning and coherence leading to general salutogenic effects (Torrès, 2012-b; Lechat, 2014; Torrès and Thurik, 2019). This sense of coherence protects (Eriksson and Lindström, 2005) and leads to beneficial effects concerning physical health (Bower *et al.*, 1998; Eriksson and Lindström, 2006) and mental health (Davis *et al.*, 1998; Gaucher, 2012). Shir and Ryff state that: "given its self-organized dynamics, entrepreneurship ought, crucially, to be seen not only as a process of business making, but also as a political, ethical, and communitarian force. It can and does change the lives and characters of societies and individuals alike. When it is successful, it results in greater eudaimonia, for oneself and for others, and contributes to our shared sense of security, that is, to the fundamental trust we have toward each other and the world." (Shir et Ryff, 2021, p. 19).

The ability and freedom to search for coherence probably explains the high level of work satisfaction among entrepreneurs, which is the subject of the next section.

2.3.2. *Work and life satisfaction of entrepreneurs*

Much empirical research shows that entrepreneurs are more satisfied with work than employees (Andersson, 2008; Blanchflower and Oswald, 1998 and 2004; Benz and Frey, 2004 and 2008, Block and Koellinger, 2009; El Harbi and Grolleau, 2012; Lange, 2009; Parasuraman and Simmers, 2001; Taylor, 2004) and that this effect is persistent (Van der Zwan *et al.*, 2018).

The results concerning satisfaction with life are less unanimous but seem to favour entrepreneurs. No significant effect was reported in Blanchflower and Oswald (2004), Block

12. "The entrepreneurial project is above all a search for meaning in relation to an intentionality where the notion of coherence takes on an important dimension in entrepreneurship".

and Koellinger (2009) and Andersson (2008), while many other studies report a higher level of life satisfaction for entrepreneurs than for employees (Naughton, 1987; Blanchflower and Oswald, 1998; Kapoor, 2001; Larsson and Thulin, 2019). On the basis of a large study covering more than 110.000 individuals in some 70 countries, Larsson and Thulin (2019) conclude that entrepreneurs are more satisfied with life than employees and that this effect dominates for opportunity entrepreneurs and is due to independence and job control. This is again in line with the sense of coherence view. Necessity entrepreneurs are often confronted with hardship and poverty (Nakara, 2022), negatively touching their health and well-being (Fayolle and Nakara, 2017).

2.3.3. *The power of salutogenesis*

Salutogenesis is a powerful countervailing force when one is confronted with difficult situations. Augustin (2021) shows that after a forced liquidation of one's business with traumatic personal, economic and financial perspectives, an entrepreneurial rebound can still have salutogenic outcomes as a consequence of the dynamics of a new project with strong opportunities for renewed personal and professional coherence. Illuminating is the analysis of Raffin (2018) about handicapped entrepreneurs, who maintains that of the three dimensions of Antonovsky's sense of coherence, it is mainly meaningfulness that drives handicapped entrepreneurs.¹³

3. Conclusion

Entrepreneurs tend to turn their business and its professional activities (in terms of time, money and emotions) into the centre of their existence and a primary meaning they give to their life. Considering existential viewpoints provides an analytical framework that improves the understanding of the subordination of personal to professional notions and the subordination of the self to the health of the business. In such a framework, there is not just room for pathogenic effects (i.e., suffering) and salutogenic effects (leading to satisfaction), but also for the comprehension of the power of the salutogenic effects over pathogenic ones. It is tempting to use the term 'existential health' in an analysis confronting salutogenic and pathogenic effects. We keep it for a later and more profound exploration. Torrès *et al.* (2021-a, p. 734) assert: "further research may dig deeper into this existentialist view and the propensity to become an entrepreneur". However, the existential view with its subordination of personal to professional notions, combined with the discrimination between pathogenic and salutogenic effects, explains why entrepreneurs sometimes score low on multiple health and well-being scales.

4. Overview of the six articles

Heichelbech and Paraschiv (2022) explore the salutogenic and pathogenic effects of entrepreneurship. The research methodology based on grounded theory relies on a qualitative survey consisting of interviews of sixteen French entrepreneurs about their entrepreneurial

13. In the present special issue, Tran, Wiklund, Luke, Antshel and Hilts (2022) analyse the relationship between entrepreneurial intention and experiences, and a variety of physical and psychiatric disabilities.

project and how it affects their health and well-being. They demonstrate that an entrepreneur's attitudes towards health evolve over time through four main phases: denial, breakdown, awareness, and action to restore physical and mental health. Their findings show that these different phases result in different mental or physical outcomes for entrepreneurs. Adding a time dimension, they show that it is important to consider the within-person changes in health behaviours because an entrepreneur's mental or physical health may vary under certain circumstances.

Block, Millan, Moritz and Ramos-Poyatos (2022) investigate how working time quality differs between types of self-employed individuals and what the effects are on perceived stress at work. Furthermore, they try to understand whether variable levels of working time quality and working time flexibility explain differences in perceived work stress between different groups of self-employed individuals. Data were analysed from the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS 2010 and 2015) for the EU-28, containing some 47.000 observations, of which some 5.000 (10,8%) refer to self-employed individuals. Comparing the three groups of self-employed (i.e., independent self-employed, dependent self-employed who outsource most activities, and self-employed with employees), the results show that independent self-employed individuals with employees have the most working hours and the lowest working time flexibility and the highest perceived stress levels.

The COVID-19 pandemic led to the closure of thousands of businesses. The crisis created threats to the physical and mental wellbeing of entrepreneurs, but also shows their coping mechanisms and psychological resources. Using a Job Demand-Resources model and the Conservation of Resources Theory, St-Jean, Chouchane and Tremblay (2022) examine the resources needed in times of crisis to ensure the well-being and career commitment of entrepreneurs. The results from their empirical study of approximately 500 Canadian entrepreneurs surveyed three months after the lockdown show that entrepreneurial career commitment is negatively affected by work demands. However, work demands increase quality of sleep if the entrepreneur has access to the appropriate resources to deal with it.

There are very few longitudinal studies on the mental or physical health of entrepreneurs, especially during situations of crisis. Battisti, Hatak and Zhou (2022) deal with the relationship between the maladaptive side of rumination and entrepreneurial wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic. Drawing upon control theory and rumination literature, they conduct two waves of a longitudinal study on 470 English entrepreneurs starting in October 2020. The results show that general rumination has the unexpected effect of improving entrepreneurial well-being, while specific COVID-19-related rumination decreases it. Their longitudinal approach allows for a better understanding of the within-person variations in well-being and health states and provides information about the micro foundations of these states.

Despite the growing interest in the well-being and mental health of entrepreneurs, there is a lack of research exploring the link between entrepreneurship and health in specific contexts, such as entrepreneurial teams. Smith, Thiel and Wuebker (2022) propose a theoretical framework for how the basic psychological needs of founding team members are critical antecedents of a team's well-being. They argue that autonomy, competence, and relatedness shape team cohesion and conflict, two important antecedents of team and venture performance. Two research questions arise: 1) how the thwarting of individual needs directly impacts individual behaviours and 2) how these individual performances, depending on basic psychological needs, such as satisfaction or thwarting, impact team functioning.

The past few years have witnessed an increase in the number of papers on the role of neurodevelopmental disorders in entrepreneurship. However, there are many gaps in the knowledge on how severe health conditions are linked to entrepreneurship. Tran, Wiklund, Luke, Antshel and Hilts (2022) examine the relationship between students' physical impairments (hearing and mobility) and psychiatric disabilities (attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, dyslexia, depression, and anxiety) and their entrepreneurial intentions. Drawing on person-environment (P-E) fit theory, they collected data from 300 graduate and undergraduate students from a business school at a private university in the north-eastern United States. The results show no link between physical and psychiatric disabilities and entrepreneurial intention.

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