

## Beyond Profit and Stress: Spirituality as a Bridge Between Business and Psychiatry in the Startup Era

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**ABSTRACT:** Micro and small-scale digital startups face intense psychological and operational pressures that often result in burnout, chronic stress, and adjustment problems. Yet, mental health issues within startup ecosystems remain insufficiently addressed and lack structured intervention. This literature review synthesizes cross-disciplinary studies published between 2013 and 2025 to examine how workplace spirituality can be integrated into startup work culture and its potential application within community psychiatry. The review indicates that workplace spirituality enhances mental well-being, reduces stress symptoms, and strengthens resilience, functioning as a psychological buffer for entrepreneurs facing high uncertainty. Spirituality also provides a conceptual bridge between managerial and clinical perspectives, enabling more holistic and human-centered approaches to mental health in startup environments. Integrating spiritual values into entrepreneurial settings emerges as an effective non-clinical strategy to sustain founders' mental health and expand opportunities for contextual community psychiatry interventions. The novelty of this study lies in its cross-disciplinary mapping that links startup management, spiritual psychology, and community psychiatry into a practical and preventive intervention framework.

**Keywords:** Workplace Spirituality, Startup, Burnout, Mental Health, Community Psychiatry, Resilience, Entrepreneurial Well-Being, Non-Clinical Intervention.



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## INTRODUCTION

The global entrepreneurial landscape has been irrevocably transformed by the digital revolution, giving rise to a vibrant ecosystem of micro and small-scale digital startups. In Indonesia, and across many emerging economies, these ventures are celebrated as vital pillars of the creative economy, driving innovation, employment, and economic diversification. This growth narrative, however, conceals a pervasive and often silent crisis: the profound psychological toll exacted on the entrepreneurs at the helm of these ventures. The archetype of the indefatigable founder, working relentless hours in pursuit of a visionary goal, glorifies a reality characterized by heavy workloads, financial precarity, multitasking demands, and a constant state of high uncertainty. This environment creates a "psychosocially unsafe" climate that significantly elevates the risk of burnout, chronic stress, anxiety, and adjustment disorders, ultimately jeopardizing not only the

founder's well-being but also the stability and productivity of the venture itself (Bailey & Dollard, 2024).

Paradoxically, while the startup culture fetishizes hustle and disruption, structured mental health support remains conspicuously absent from mainstream business development policies, incubator programs, and investor checklists. The predominant support systems for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) overwhelmingly prioritize technical upskilling, financial literacy, and market access, inadvertently treating the entrepreneur as a purely rational economic agent while neglecting their psychological and emotional dimensions. This oversight is critical, as evidence suggests that an entrepreneur's psychological capital—their resilience, hope, optimism, and self-efficacy—is a fundamental predictor of venture survival and growth.

Amidst this gap, an emerging body of cross-disciplinary research points to a potent, yet underutilized, resource: workplace spirituality. Moving beyond narrow sectarian or purely religious connotations, contemporary scholarship defines workplace spirituality as the recognition of an inner life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work, facilitated in a context of community (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). It encompasses the pursuit of purpose, the experience of transcendence through one's work, and a sense of connectedness to others and to something larger than oneself. Recent studies indicate that cultivating this dimension can serve as a critical psychological buffer in high-pressure environments. For instance, spirituality has been shown to significantly reduce burnout and turnover intention in the MSME sector, highlighting a direct link between mental well-being and business continuity (Iswati, 2024). Spiritual values and practices enhance self-acceptance, emotional regulation, and resilience, providing individuals with a framework to navigate chronic stress and existential doubt (Abdillah et al., 2022; Al-Hajiri et al., 2021).

Despite growing empirical evidence of its benefits, the systematic integration of workplace spirituality into a coherent framework for startup mental health—particularly one that bridges business practice and community psychiatry—remains nascent and fragmented (Karakas, 2010). Most discussions are siloed within management literature or clinical psychology, with little dialogue between the two. This study, therefore, aims to address this gap by conducting a comprehensive cross-disciplinary literature review. It seeks to map the available evidence from business, psychology, and psychiatry to construct a practical, preventive intervention model. The central thesis is that workplace spirituality can function as a vital conceptual and operational bridge, linking the productivity-oriented world of startups with the healing-oriented domain of psychiatry (Ekowati et al., 2022). By framing spirituality as a form of psychological literacy and a promotive mental health tool, it can be integrated into the fabric of startup culture, offering a contextual, accessible, and destigmatized approach to sustaining entrepreneurial well-being (Esch, 2021).

Consequently, this paper has three primary objectives: first, to delineate the unique psychological challenges inherent in the micro and small-scale startup ecosystem; second, to examine the dimensions, mechanisms, and empirical evidence supporting workplace spirituality as a non-clinical coping and resilience-building framework; and third, to propose pathways for integrating spiritual principles into community psychiatry practice to create holistic, human-centered support models for entrepreneurs (Milliman et al., 2003). Through this synthesis, the study aspires to

contribute a novel, integrative perspective that moves beyond treating mental health as a peripheral concern, positioning it instead as a cornerstone of sustainable and humane entrepreneurship in the digital age.

## METHOD

This study employed a systematic qualitative literature review methodology to synthesize empirical findings, theoretical constructs, and practical insights from diverse academic fields, including business management, psychology, and community psychiatry. The review was designed to build a comprehensive and integrative understanding of how workplace spirituality can serve as a bridge between entrepreneurial practice and mental health support. A systematic process was followed, encompassing identification, screening, analysis, and synthesis of relevant literature. The search for peer-reviewed journal articles was conducted across multiple academic databases, including Scopus, ScienceDirect, PubMed, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar, to ensure breadth and interdisciplinary coverage. The search strategy utilized Boolean combinations of keywords spanning three core domains: business/management (e.g., "workplace spirituality," "entrepreneurial stress"), psychology/mental health (e.g., "resilience," "non-clinical intervention"), and psychiatry/community health (e.g., "community psychiatry," "preventive mental health"). The inclusion criteria were strictly defined to capture relevant studies published between 2008 and 2025, written in English or Indonesian, and explicitly discussing the intersection of spirituality, work environment, and psychological well-being. Editorials, non-empirical commentaries, and duplicate studies were excluded. Following initial searches and removal of duplicates, titles and abstracts were screened for relevance, resulting in 75 articles for full-text review. After a detailed assessment, 45 articles met all inclusion criteria and formed the core corpus for analysis. A thematic synthesis approach was then applied to the selected literature. This involved iterative reading, descriptive coding, and the development of analytical themes that cut across the studies. The synthesis was organized around four emergent dimensions: the nature of psychological distress in startups, the dimensions and mechanisms of workplace spirituality, its alignment with community psychiatry, and practical implementation strategies. To enhance validity and mitigate cultural bias, particular attention was paid to comparing findings from Western and Asian contexts. While this methodological approach allowed for the construction of a novel integrative framework, the review acknowledges limitations, including potential language and publication bias, its reliance on existing literature which precludes causal inference, and the conceptual heterogeneity within the field of workplace spirituality itself.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The systematic review and thematic synthesis of 45 selected studies yielded a coherent mapping of evidence across the interdisciplinary landscape. The findings are organized into four primary thematic clusters that directly address the research objectives.

## Psychological Challenges in the Startup Ecosystem

The synthesized literature consistently characterizes the micro and small-scale startup environment as a high-risk context for psychological distress. Key stressors identified include structural fluidity, role ambiguity, and chronic resource scarcity, particularly financial uncertainty, which induces persistent existential anxiety. The pervasive culture of "hustle" leads to blurred work-life boundaries, inhibiting recovery and fostering emotional exhaustion—a core component of burnout. Beyond workload, studies like Jnaneswar & Sulphey (2023) highlight the prevalence of "existential stress," where founders struggle to find and maintain meaning amid constant pressure. Evidence from community programs, such as the "Mental Warriors" initiative (Algristian et al., 2023), confirms that this unmanaged strain manifests in non-clinical populations as adjustment disorders, anxiety, and sleep disturbances. A critical gap identified is the misalignment of support systems, which predominantly focus on technical and financial training while neglecting psychological resilience as a foundational business competency.

## Dimensions and Mechanisms of Workplace Spirituality

The analysis delineates workplace spirituality through three core, interdependent dimensions derived from the literature: meaningful work (work with purpose and significance), a sense of community (authentic connection and support), and alignment between personal and organizational values (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003). The reviewed studies demonstrate that the presence of these dimensions activates potent psychological mechanisms that buffer against startup stressors. Key mediators include enhanced self-compassion, which allows entrepreneurs to navigate failure with kindness (Jnaneswar & Sulphey, 2023), and increased workplace mindfulness, aiding in present-moment engagement. Empirical evidence from various industries confirms that workplace spirituality is a significant negative predictor of burnout and a positive predictor of well-being and job satisfaction (Chan et al., 2018; Zou & Dahling, 2025). Furthermore, specific spiritual practices, such as the Islamic *dhikr* and self-reflection, are shown to have neuropsychological calming effects, improving emotional regulation (Abdillah et al., 2022)—a skill critically taxed in the startup context. Collectively, these dimensions and mechanisms create what the synthesis identifies as a "protective psychological environment."

## Alignment with Community Psychiatry Paradigms

The review finds strong conceptual congruence between workplace spirituality and the principles of community psychiatry (Chatterjee et al., 2022). Community psychiatry emphasizes prevention, empowerment, functional recovery, and operating within natural social contexts. Spirituality functions effectively as a promotive and preventive tool within this paradigm, building psychological resources upstream of clinical pathology. Studies position spiritual orientation as enhancing stress tolerance (Aarthy & Venkatesan, 2025) and spiritual intelligence as mitigating technostress by fostering ethical climates (Ghobbeh & Atrian, 2024). This positions spirituality not as a clinical treatment but as a form of psychological literacy—an accessible, community-based resource for self-care that can fill the gap between formal clinical services and everyday

psychosocial challenges, thereby reducing stigma and increasing contextual relevance for entrepreneurs.

### Practical Integration Strategies and Frameworks

The synthesis extracted actionable strategies for integrating spiritual principles into the startup environment. These operate at multiple levels: (1) At the foundational level, through value-based leadership that articulates a transcendent organizational purpose and embeds ethical values into all processes (Rego & Cunha, 2008); (2) At the operational level, by weaving practices like structured team reflections, secular mindfulness sessions, and purpose reviews into daily and weekly routines; (3) At the collaborative level, by partnering with community psychiatrists or coaches to develop tailored workshops (e.g., "Resilience for Entrepreneurs") and facilitating peer support networks (Pawar, 2009). A successful adaptation of a community psychiatry model, such as the "Mental Warriors" program, is proposed as a blueprint for a startup-specific intervention ("Founder Warriors"). The synthesis underscores that for broad applicability, spirituality must be framed inclusively as a universal human capacity for meaning and connection, focusing on secular values like purpose, compassion, and ethical community.

The results of this integrative review present a compelling case for repositioning workplace spirituality from a peripheral, soft concept to a central, pragmatic framework for addressing the mental health crisis in the startup ecosystem. The discussion interprets these findings, explores their implications, and situates them within broader theoretical and practical contexts.

### Reconceptualizing the Startup as a Community of Meaning

The findings challenge the dominant narrative of the startup as a purely transactional, hyper-competitive entity. The severe psychological challenges documented—existential stress, isolation, value misalignment—stem not just from external market pressures but from an internal *crisis of meaning*. The discussion posits that the integration of workplace spirituality addresses this core deficit (Chirico et al., 2023). By intentionally cultivating meaningful work, community, and value alignment, a startup transforms into what can be termed a "community of meaning." This reframing has profound implications. It aligns with humanistic management theories that argue for the integration of the whole person at work. When founders and employees see their work as contributing to a larger purpose and experience genuine belonging, the inevitable stressors of the entrepreneurial journey are contextualized within a supportive and significant narrative. This mitigates the alienating effects of chronic pressure, as shown by the mediating roles of self-compassion and mindfulness. The protective psychological environment thus created is not a shield from reality but a lens that makes reality more navigable and meaningful.



## Spirituality as the Operational Bridge: From Clinical Insight to Business Practice

The novel contribution of this review is its detailed mapping of *how* spirituality can operate as a bridge. The mechanisms identified—emotional regulation via practices like *dhikr*, resilience via self-compassion—provide a scientific, transferable language that both business leaders and mental health professionals can understand and utilize. This demystifies spirituality and makes it actionable. (Duchon & Plowman, 2005) For the business community, it translates clinical insights into performance-related outcomes: better decision-making under stress (linked to improved prefrontal regulation), higher team cohesion (linked to a sense of community), and greater retention and loyalty (linked to value alignment and reduced burnout). For community psychiatrists, it provides a set of evidence-based, non-stigmatizing tools—mindfulness, value-clarification exercises, purpose-framing workshops—that can be deployed in business settings. The professional thus transitions from a reactive clinician to a proactive "organizational facilitator" or "well-being architect," co-designing interventions with founders. This bridges the worlds not just conceptually but in professional practice, creating new roles and collaboration models.

## Inclusivity and Cultural Context: Navigating Potential Pitfalls

A critical discussion point arising from the results is the imperative of inclusive implementation. The potential pitfall of spirituality interventions is their perception as imposing specific religious doctrines, which would be counterproductive in diverse teams. The discussion emphasizes that the framework derived from the literature is fundamentally humanistic and psychological. The core dimensions (meaning, community, alignment) are universal. Successful implementation, therefore, depends on secular framing and voluntary participation. Leadership must champion values like "integrity," "service," and "collective well-being" rather than any particular faith. Practices should be offered as tools for mental fitness—such as "guided reflection" or "focus training"—akin to physical exercise for the mind. This approach respects diversity while harnessing the universal human need for purpose and connection, making the model exportable across different cultural and religious contexts, from Indonesia's spiritually rich environment to more secular Western startup hubs.

## Toward a New Metric of Success: Well-being as a Foundational Business Outcome

The synthesis inevitably leads to a discussion on redefining success. The current entrepreneurial paradigm often celebrates growth at all costs, with well-being treated as a personal luxury or a cost to the business. This review's findings contest that view. It argues that founder and team well-being, nurtured through spiritual principles, is not a cost but a critical strategic investment and a leading indicator of sustainable success. A resilient, purpose-aligned, and cohesive team is more innovative, adaptable, and persistent. Therefore, the discussion calls for the development of new metrics. Alongside monthly recurring revenue and user acquisition, startups and their investors should track psychological safety scores, team engagement levels, and well-being indices (Saks, 2011). Incubators and accelerators should evaluate their programs not only on funding raised but on the mental resilience of their cohorts. This shifts the culture from glorifying burnout to valuing

sustainable performance, creating a more humane and ultimately more durable entrepreneurial economy.

## Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

While this review synthesizes a broad evidence base, its limitations point to fruitful future research. First, most cited studies are correlational. Longitudinal and experimental research is urgently needed to establish causality—for example, tracking startups that implement spirituality-based interventions versus control groups on both mental health and business performance metrics over time. Second, more work is required to develop and validate culturally sensitive measurement tools and intervention modules that are inclusive and practical for the fast-paced startup environment. Third, research should explore the role of investors and policymakers in incentivizing well-being-focused practices, examining how funding terms or government grants could reward companies that demonstrate a commitment to holistic founder health. Finally, qualitative, in-depth case studies of startups that have successfully integrated these principles could provide rich, contextual insights into the implementation challenges and facilitators, moving the field from theory to grounded practice.

## CONCLUSION

This comprehensive literature review has traversed the demanding psychological landscape of the startup ecosystem and identified workplace spirituality as a potent, integrative, and practical bridge to greater well-being. The analysis confirms that the intense, uncertain, and often isolating nature of micro and small-scale entrepreneurship generates significant risks for burnout, chronic stress, and existential distress. Conventional support systems, focused on technical and financial aid, fail to address this psychological core, treating the symptom while ignoring the cause.

Workplace spirituality, conceptualized through the dimensions of meaningful work, sense of community, and alignment of values, offers a robust non-clinical framework to address this gap (Walt, 2018). It functions not as an escape from business realities, but as a way to engage with them more resiliently. The mechanisms through which it works—enhancing self-compassion, fostering mindfulness, improving emotional regulation, and providing a transcendent sense of purpose—are supported by evidence from both organizational studies and clinical psychiatry. By creating a protective psychological environment, it buffers the individual against the volatilities of the startup journey. Crucially, this approach aligns seamlessly with the preventive and promotive ethos of community psychiatry. It repositions mental health support from a reactive, clinic-based model to a proactive, community-embedded practice. Spirituality becomes a form of psychological literacy that entrepreneurs can cultivate to navigate their unique challenges, reducing stigma and increasing accessibility.

The bridge built here connects two worlds: the drive for innovation and profit in business, and the imperative for healing and wholeness in psychiatry. In doing so, it proposes a new vision for entrepreneurship—one where success is measured not only in valuation and market share but also

in the well-being, resilience, and sustained vitality of the humans who drive it. This is the foundation for a truly sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystem. The practical implementation of this framework requires a fundamental shift in how entrepreneurial success is defined and measured. Moving beyond financial metrics to include well-being indicators represents a more holistic and sustainable model of entrepreneurship. This paradigm shift empowers founders to build ventures that are not only economically viable but also psychologically sustainable, fostering innovation that is rooted in human flourishing rather than extracted from human capital. Ultimately, embedding workplace spirituality into the startup ethos cultivates an ecosystem where resilience, purpose, and compassion become the true drivers of long-term value creation and societal impact.

Based on the synthesis of findings in this study, several practical implications and future research agendas can be developed to deepen and implement the proposed framework. These recommendations target three main stakeholders: startup ecosystem participants, mental health practitioners, and researchers and policymakers.

For startup founders and leaders, as well as incubator and accelerator organizers, the first critical step is consciously designing and leading with a transcendent purpose. This involves articulating a company mission that extends beyond mere financial profit and committing to embedding ethical and spiritual values—such as integrity, collaboration, and sustainability—into all business processes, from recruitment to decision-making. At the operational level, work culture should be shaped by integrating routine resilience-building practices, such as team reflection sessions, secular mindfulness training, and regular purpose reviews (Fernando & Chowdhury, 2010). Additionally, startup leaders must become mental health advocates by actively requesting and participating in psychosocial support programs offered within their ecosystems, while also developing holistic success metrics that include team well-being indicators alongside financial performance measures. Involvement in designing program evaluations that measure the long-term impact of these interventions on business sustainability will also enrich the empirical evidence in this field.

For mental health practitioners and community psychiatrists, opportunities exist to develop new roles as organizational health facilitators. They can design contextual, evidence-based intervention modules, such as "Resilience for Startup Founders" or "Mindful Leadership" workshops, deliverable in coworking spaces or incubation programs. The approach should be promotive and preventive, positioning practitioners as consultants who build internal organizational capacity rather than merely treating individual pathology. Proactive outreach to entrepreneurship associations, startup hubs, and business schools is a strategic move to demystify mental health support and offer relevant resources.

For academic researchers and policymakers, future research agendas should focus on building stronger causal evidence through longitudinal and experimental studies measuring the impact of spirituality-based interventions on both mental health and business outcomes simultaneously (Kolodinsky et al., 2008). The development of inclusive, culturally sensitive measurement tools and intervention modules is also a priority to enable widespread adoption across various social and religious contexts. At the curriculum level, integrating topics such as entrepreneurial mental health, psychological resilience, and ethical leadership into business and entrepreneurship education is a crucial step toward preparing a more resilient generation of founders. Finally, policymakers can



consider incentives or certification schemes encouraging startups to implement well-being-prioritizing practices, thereby creating an ecosystem environment that not only fosters innovation but also safeguards human sustainability within it. Through this multi-stakeholder synergy, workplace spirituality can transition from an academic discourse into an operational foundation for a more humane and sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystem.

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