

**MOTIVATION OF FIRST-GENERATION ENTREPRENEURS
WITHOUT FAMILY BUSINESS BACKGROUNDS: A STUDY OF
PERSISTENCE ADMIDST CHALLENGES**

SAW THURA NI WIN

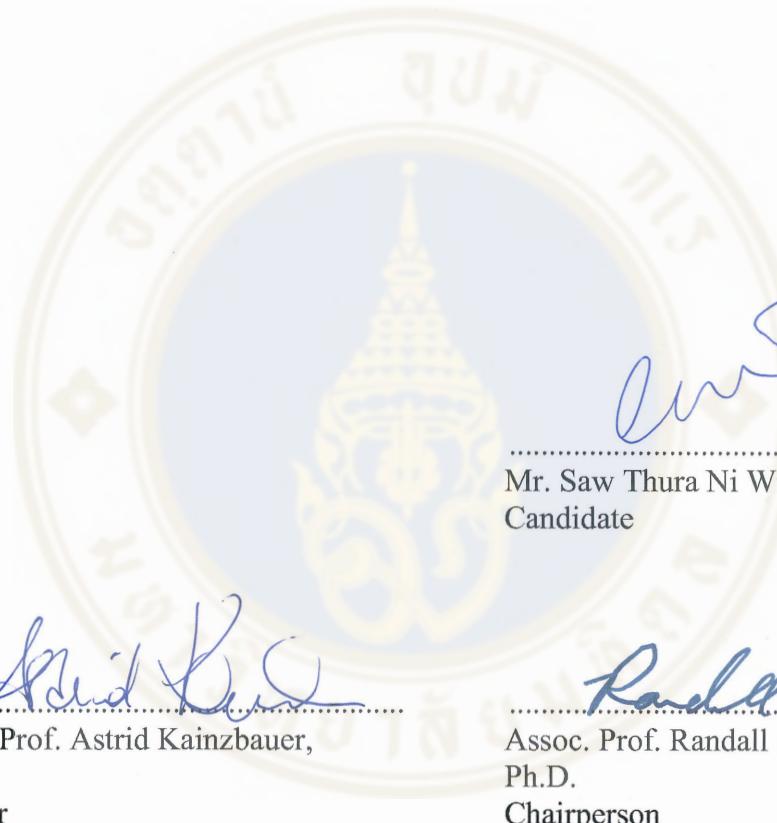


**A THEMATIC PAPER SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF MANAGEMENT
COLLEGE OF MANAGEMENT
MAHIDOL UNIVERSITY
2025**

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Thematic paper
entitled
**MOTIVATION OF FIRST-GENERATION ENTREPRENEURS
WITHOUT FAMILY BUSINESS BACKGROUNDS: A STUDY OF
PERSISTENCE AMIDST CHALLENGES**

was submitted to the College of Management, Mahidol University
for the degree of Master of Management
on
3 May 2025



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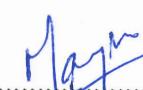
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my associate professor, Dr. Astrid Kainzbauer, for her dedicated support, insightful guidance, and encouragement throughout this project. Her expertise and thoughtful feedback have been instrumental in shaping the quality and direction of my work.

I am also deeply thankful to all the participants who generously agreed to be interviewed. Your openness and willingness to share your experiences have provided valuable perspectives that enriched this study. I would also like to thank my friends and family for their unwavering support, understanding, and encouragement during this research journey.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the College of Management at Mahidol University (CMMU) for providing a dynamic and supportive academic environment. I am particularly thankful to the faculty members and staff whose dedication and expertise have not only contributed to this research but also fostered my professional growth. CMMU has played a vital role in equipping me with the skills, knowledge, and perspective needed to complete this project and prepare for future challenges.

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ADMIDST CHALLENGES**

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the motivations and resilience factors of first-generation entrepreneurs without family business backgrounds. Through qualitative research involving interviews with five entrepreneurs from diverse industries and nationalities, the study examines what drives these individuals to pursue entrepreneurship and how they sustain their ventures amidst challenges.

The findings reveal that motivations for first-generation entrepreneurs' starting businesses are both intrinsic and extrinsic. 3 factors of intrinsic and 2 factors of extrinsic motivation were identified. All participants were classified as opportunity-driven entrepreneurs, demonstrating proactive and goal-oriented behaviors. Personal factors contributing to their resilience include self-belief, believing in the importance of continuous learning, hard-work and dedication, and an unwavering attitude towards challenges. Contextual factors highlight the importance of social networks and family support systems. Recommendations were provided in the conclusion and recommendation session.

KEY WORDS: First-Generation Entrepreneurs/ Entrepreneurial Motivation/ Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation/ Entrepreneurial Resilience/ Non-Family Business Backgrounds

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Entrepreneurship is one of the key drivers of economic growth and innovation as they create new businesses which contribute to new jobs and new markets. Most companies or businesses, at one point, are initiated by a founder or a group of founders. While they are usually regarded as the first-generation entrepreneurs, this paper defines the first-generation entrepreneurs as entrepreneurs who do not inherit family businesses nor who were not born into a business family. Among the many successful first-generation entrepreneurs, some of them started their businesses without having exposure to businesses through their lineage. This is an important difference to look at as those without family business background may experience distinct obstacles and challenges compared to those who have the advantage of inherited knowledge and experience, social capital, and financial support.

First-generation entrepreneurs without a family business background usually start their businesses from scratch, crafting their own path through limited access to finance, mentorship and social capital. Unlike those born into family businesses, these entrepreneurs must independently learn to make business decisions, build networks, and secure resources to start and sustain their businesses. For these entrepreneurs, entrepreneurship is a journey that requires them to overcome one challenge after another. Despite these difficulties, many of them continue to walk the path. This raises an interesting question of Why do these first-generation entrepreneurs without a family business background refuse to give up and continue their journeys despite the odds? What motivates them to persist?

There are many research papers that study the motivation of entrepreneurs. However, many studies usually focus on a broad category of entrepreneurs. Often, the first-generation entrepreneurs without family business influences are grouped together with non-first-generation entrepreneurs or other entrepreneurs who inherit business

knowledge and pre-existing networks, creating a gap in research studies regarding those who begin their entrepreneur journey without having those advantages. This study seeks to explore the motivation, and the resilience of first-generation entrepreneurs who start their business ventures from an underprivileged starting point.

1.2 Research Objectives

This area of research is of personal interests as I am the first generation in my family to venture into entrepreneurship. However, this research may also benefit other stakeholders. Those with non-family business backgrounds who are inspired to become entrepreneurs may gain insights into the challenges they may face and the psychological conditions they must prepare to persist.

1.3 Research Questions

The research questions are as follows:

1. What are the factors that drive first-generation entrepreneurs to pursue entrepreneur ventures?
2. What critical supporting factors contribute to the resilience of the first-generation entrepreneurs in their entrepreneurial journey?

This paper is structured as follows: First, a literature review will be conducted to examine existing research on entrepreneurial motivation, and challenges that underprivileged first-generation entrepreneur faced, and entrepreneurial psychology to overcome obstacles. Next, the research methodology, which details the methods of data collection and analysis, will be explained. The findings and discussion section will then present key insights from the research, highlighting the findings of first-generation entrepreneurs without a business background's motivations, psychology, and strategies. Finally, the paper will conclude with key takeaways and provide recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Entrepreneur Motivation

The motivation of entrepreneurs has been studied extensively through different theories and frameworks. Some of the commonly used theories and frameworks are intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, necessity-driven and opportunity-driven entrepreneurs, and push and pull entrepreneurs.

2.1.1 Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

Many researchers look at the entrepreneurial motivation through the concepts of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation which derives from Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by psychologists Edward Deci and Richard Ryan. According to Deci and Ryan (2008), Intrinsic motivation involves individuals choosing to engage in activities for their pleasure, interest, enjoyment and satisfaction that comes from pursuing those activities. In contrast, extrinsic motivation is defined as individuals performing activities not because they enjoy them, but because the activities are necessary to reach their goals, or to avoid an undesirable outcome or consequences.

Edelman et al. (2010) conducted research to study the motivations of starting and growing businesses among the black and white entrepreneurs using an entrepreneurial expectancy theory framework. The study found that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors present in black and white entrepreneurs when it comes to starting businesses, and there are no differences across the two races when it comes the motivations to start businesses. The factors the authors looked at include self-realization, financial success, recognition, innovation, and independence.

In another study, Benzing, Chu, and Kara (2009) investigates the motivational factors of Turkish entrepreneurs by looking at the extrinsic motivational factors such as Income increase, job security; and extrinsic motivational factors such as independence and personal satisfaction. The findings reveal that most Turkish

entrepreneurs are motivated by extrinsic factors such as increasing income and obtaining job security. The authors pointed out that entrepreneurs motivated extrinsically is common in developing countries where there is unstable economy and high unemployment rates. Although entrepreneurs in the developing countries like Turkish are extrinsically motivated, the author highlights that intrinsic motivational factor like the desire for independence and personal growth still plays important role.

2.1.2 Necessity-Driven and Opportunity-Driven Entrepreneurs

The motivations of Entrepreneurs are also viewed necessity-driven and opportunity-driven perspectives. Lantai, Hauge, and Mei (2024) conducted a study that examines the motivations of immigrant micro enterprises (IMEs) owners in eastern Norway. The authors stated that there are two reasons why entrepreneurs pursue the path of entrepreneurship. The first reason is out of necessity and the other is because of opportunity. In other words, entrepreneurs are categorized into Necessity-driven Entrepreneurs (NDEs) and Opportunity-driven Entrepreneurs (ODEs). NEDs are defined as individuals who must venture into entrepreneurship because of unemployment, job dissatisfaction, limited access to essential resources or absence of other work options. ODEs, on the other hand, are described as individuals pursuing achievements because of market opportunities. They exploit innovative ideas and business opportunities. Becoming entrepreneurs is their choice, and it is not because other employment opportunities are unavailable. In this study, Lantai, Hauge, and Mei (2024b) discovers that most IME owners initially start their businesses out of necessity because of limited job opportunities. However, as their businesses become more settled, the owners exhibit opportunity-driven entrepreneurs' traits.

In another study about necessity and opportunity entrepreneurship, Fairlie and Fossen (2018) suggest the definitions of necessity entrepreneurs as those who were previously unemployed and actively looking for jobs before starting a business; while opportunity entrepreneurs were defined as those previously employed, in school, and not actively looking for jobs before starting a business. The authors, through a secondary source of data, found that 80% of entrepreneurs in the US and 90% in the Germany are opportunity entrepreneurs.

2.1.3 Push and Pull Factors

The motivations of entrepreneurs are also described using the terminology of “Push” and “Pull” entrepreneurship. Dawson and Henley (2011) suggest that push and pull entrepreneurship has a similar definition to Necessity and opportunity entrepreneurship. Through the secondary source of data that examines the motivations of men and women entrepreneurs in the UK, the authors identify that most entrepreneurs, both men and women, are pulled into entrepreneurship. Only 13% of the responses reported that they are pushed into Entrepreneurship, and most of the responses likely come from women.

2.2 Supporting Factors for Resilience in Entrepreneurship

In a study about resilience, Hartmann et al. (2022) stated that resilience plays a significantly important role in entrepreneurship as entrepreneurs often tend to face many challenges, including financial difficulties, societal marginalization, and psychological challenges such as self-doubt and burn out. According to Williams et al. (2017, p.742), as cited in Hartmann et al. (2022), entrepreneurial resilience is “the process by which an entrepreneur builds and uses their capability endowments to interact with the environment in a way that positively adjusts and maintains functioning prior to, during, and following adversity.”

Through numerous literature reviews, Hartmann et al. (2022) suggest that two group of factors - personal factors and contextual factors - cultivate entrepreneurs' resilience. The authors use the following framework to illustrate it:

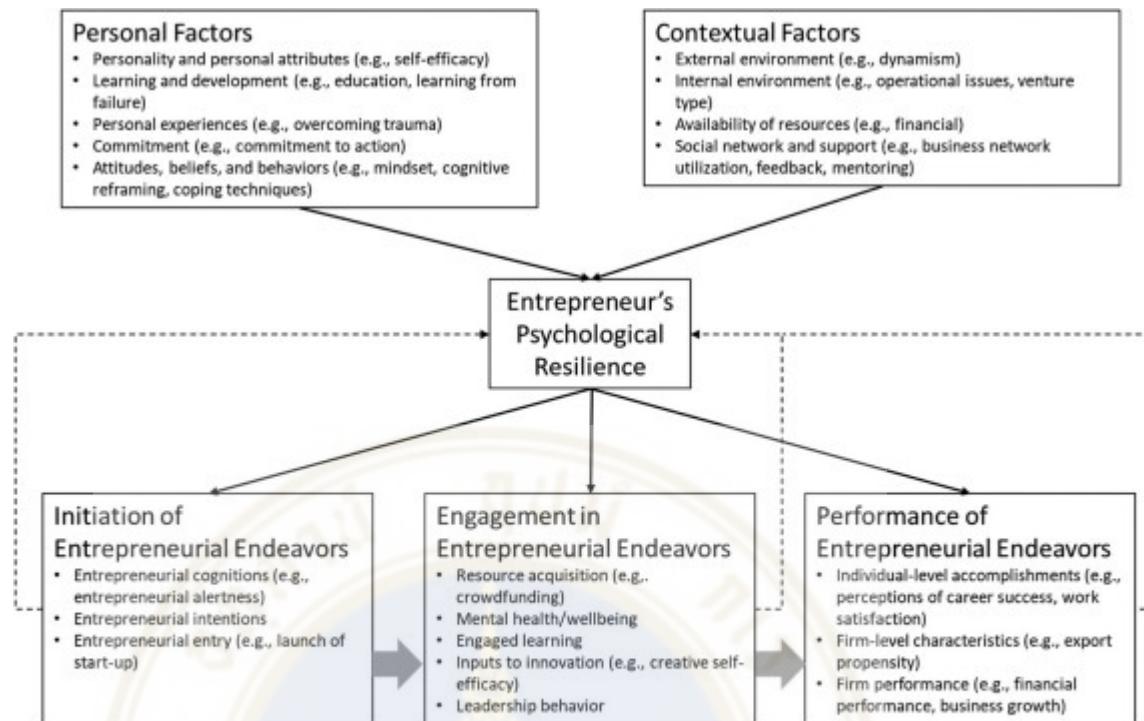


Figure 1. Overview and categorization of existing research on psychological resilience of entrepreneurs. Solid arrows illustrate empirical research reviewed in this manuscript; Dashed arrows illustrate feedback loops that are likely to exist, but have not been investigated yet; gray arrows illustrate the entrepreneurial process based on Shepherd et al. (2019).

Hartmann et al. (2022) cited the following resilience supporting mechanisms from other literatures:

Personality and personal attributes: Personal attributes such as self-efficacy and grit are positively related to resilience as they help recognize entrepreneurial opportunities and contribute to perseverance respectively. Perceived behavioral control and Internal locus of control, along with passion are also positively linked to resilience.

Learning and Development: Many research studies suggest that learning experiences both in formal and informal educational settings such as entrepreneur education, business development programs, listening to stories of other entrepreneurs overcoming challenges, and programs that focus on collaboration and coaching are positively related to resilience. Additionally, learning from past failures and challenges also help entrepreneurs cultivate resilience for future endeavors.

Personal Experiences: It is founded that having experiences in personally overcoming challenges or difficulties of starting a business is associated with the build-

up of resilience. Receiving learning opportunities to deal with challenges in early childhood also can strengthen resilience.

Commitment: Having a strong commitment to keep on going by learning from the past failures also foster entrepreneurs' resilience.

Attitudes, belief and behaviors: Studies found that having an attitude to focus on developing an ability to deal with failures, having a positive attitude to take responsibilities or growth mindset are positively related to entrepreneurs' resilience and provide necessary persistence in uncertain situations. Believing in and having a sense of meaning in their work, religious beliefs, and alignment between their personal and business values also influence entrepreneurs' resilience.

The contextual factors include:

External environment: Studies reveal that entrepreneurs' resilience can be enhanced by operating in highly volatile and dynamic environments such as abruptly changing competition and working with different clients. It is because such environments can increase their resourcefulness and their ability to adapt. Facing adversity can help entrepreneurs can trigger their entrepreneurial spirits to think and act resiliently.

Internal environment: The studies found that entrepreneurs who have greater control over their business's day-to-day operations usually have more resilience. In addition, it is discovered that entrepreneurs being in a resource-based and skill-based type of business also have a higher resilience.

Resources: Entrepreneurs who prepare resources like financial savings, connections, or emotional supports in advance before a crisis happens are found to be more resilient when challenges arise.

Social networks and support: It is discovered that having broader social network like the business networks, having mentors, and having immediate social support like entrepreneurs' family can enhance resilience of entrepreneurs.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Approach

The literature review in Chapter 2 provided valuable insights into entrepreneurs' motivation and resilience factors. However, there are limited research available on the first-generation entrepreneurs without family business backgrounds. To address this gap, primary data collection is essential to support this paper and to gain in-depth insights into the motivations and resilience factors of the first-generation entrepreneurs. This study will adopt qualitative research approach to explore the lived experiences of these entrepreneurs through discussing about their personal experiences and challenges that lead to their motivations to start businesses and to persist despite the odds.

3.2 Interview Method

The primary data will be collected through a mixed of online and face-to-face interviews with first-generation entrepreneurs from various industries and backgrounds. The semi-structured interview will allow flexibility for the interviewees to share their unique experiences in detail while maintaining the focus on the core topics of motivation and resilience.

The interview for this research will be in two sessions:

The first section will ask the participants to provide general information about their personal and career information, including age, gender, marital status, education level and the industry they operate in and years in business. In the second section, pre-determined open questions will be asked, and probing questions will be followed if it is deemed necessary.

3.3 Sample selection

The sample of this study is designed to ensure diversity and representativeness. Therefore, the participants in this research study will consist of first-generation entrepreneurs from different nationalities, industries, and backgrounds. The participants are selected based on the following criteria: Entrepreneurs who do not inherit or grow up in family businesses and started their businesses on their own and who have been operating their businesses at least three years to ensure that they have faced challenges and demonstrate resilience.

A total of 5 participants, 3 males and 2 females, that meet the above criteria will be interviewed. There will be two Thai entrepreneurs who are from different industries, two Myanmar entrepreneurs operating their businesses in different countries, and one American entrepreneur who has migrated from Thailand and started a business in the US. A list of interviewees is listed in the following table:

Table 3.1 Interviewee List

Code	Nationality	Industry	Education Level	Years in business	Marital Status	Age	Gender
RS-1	Thai	Cosmetic Industry	PhD	14	Single	37	Male
RS-2	Myanmar	Agriculture & Hospitality	Master	9	Married	42	Male
RS-3	American	Logistics & Auto mechanic service & Accounting & tax service	Bachelor	11	Married	41	Male
RS-4	Myanmar	Consulting Service and Heavy machinery Rental service	Master	21	Married	43	Female
RS-5	Thai	Interior design and construction	Bachelor	19	Single	42	Female

3.4 Open-ended questions

To understand the motivation and resilience factors of first-generation entrepreneurs, the following opened-ended questions will be used. The pre-determined opened questions along with probing techniques will allow the research to gain a deeper understanding of a response, to clarify vague answers, and to obtain specific answers.

Open-ended questions are divided into three sections: Questions on Motivation, Question on Push (necessity-driven) and Pull (opportunity-driven) Entrepreneur, and Questions on Factors for Entrepreneur Resilience.

Table 3.2 Questions on Motivation

No.	Questions
1	Reflecting on your early entrepreneurial days, can you think about what inspired you to start your own business?
2	What were your primary goals when starting your business?
3	What was your situation before starting your business (e.g., unemployed, employed, looking for opportunities)?

Table 3.3 Questions on Factors for Entrepreneurial Resilience

No.	Questions
1	What were the biggest challenges you faced when starting your business? Can you share one or two?
2	Have you ever considered giving up? If so, what kept you going?
3	What personal qualities do you believe have helped you persist despite difficulties?
4	How do you cope with failures or setbacks in your business?
5	Who or what has been your biggest source of support (e.g., family, mentors, friends, business networks)?
6	What advice would you give to other first-generation entrepreneurs facing similar struggles?

3.5 Research Framework

The study will adopt a conceptual framework that combines an expectancy framework of Dawson and Henley (2011) that explores entrepreneurs' intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, Edelman et al. (2010) 's Pull and Push Factors into entrepreneurship framework, and Hartmann et al. (2022)'s Entrepreneur's psychological resilience framework. The framework will explore the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of first-generation entrepreneurs want to achieve, and the reasons, whether pull or push, that they are pursuing entrepreneurship. The framework also looks at the factors that build up first-generation entrepreneurs' resilience through two factors – personal and contextual factors.

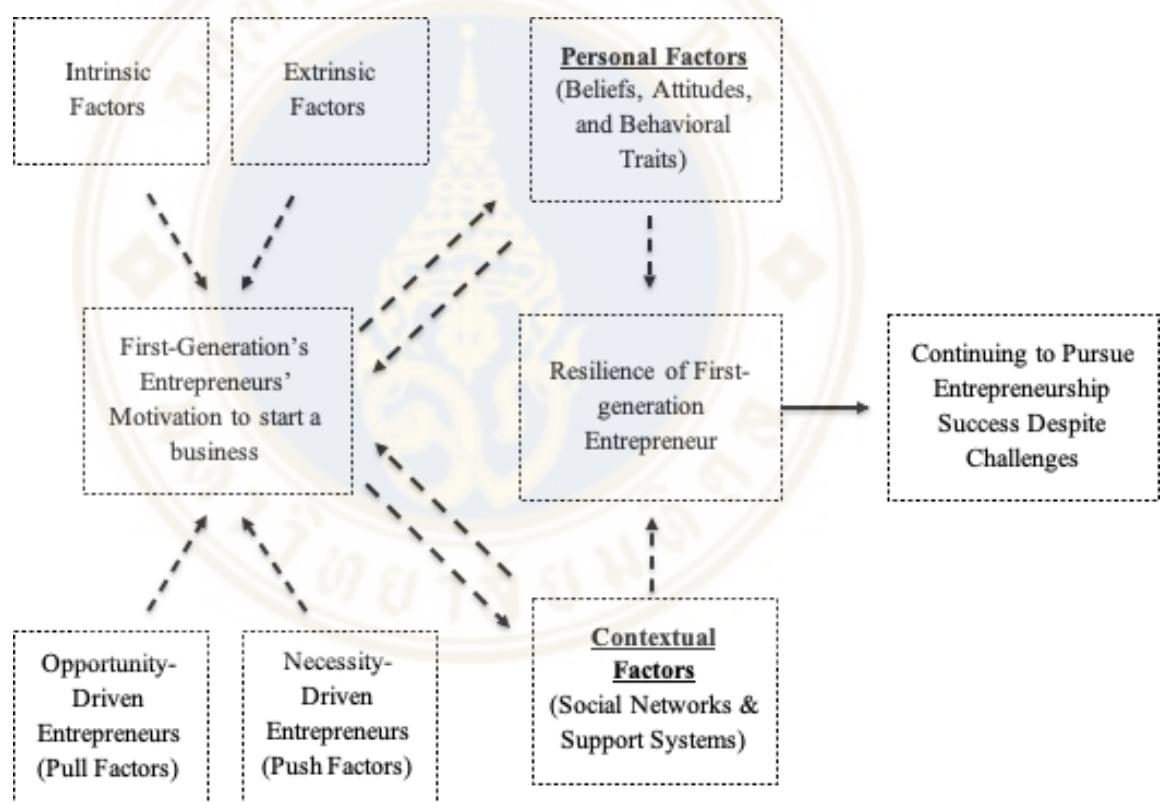


Figure 3.1: Research Framework

This research aims to find out the similar and distinct motivational factors among fist-generation entrepreneurs and non-first-generation entrepreneurs have. The paper also aims to answer the crucial supporting systems that foster their resilience.

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DATA ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

Qualitative research through both in-person and online interviews were conducted. The interviews were recorded with the permissions of the interviewees and under a condition of deleting them after analyzing it. The analysis of the interviews was performed by repeatedly listening to the recordings and by finding the patterns, similarities, and differences in the responses of the first-generation entrepreneurs. The key findings are categorized into 4 main topics which are characteristic of the interviewees, motivation of the first-generation entrepreneurs, key supporting factors that foster first-generation entrepreneurs' resilience and first-generation entrepreneurs' recommendations.

4.1. Characteristics of the Interviewees

This session summarizes the characteristics of the interviewed first-generation entrepreneurs. This topic is divided into background information and how first-generation entrepreneurs compensate the business knowledge they lack compared to entrepreneurs with family business backgrounds.

4.1.1. Background Information of the Interviewees

The interviewees are first-generation entrepreneurs who fit the research criteria of having no family business backgrounds and who have been running businesses for at least 3 years. The age of the interviewees is in the range between 37 and 43 years old. The interviewees are selected from different industries and countries to represent diversity. Through the research it is identified that the interviewees have at least 9 years being entrepreneurs and operating their businesses. It is also found that some entrepreneurs experienced many turning points, resulting in changing their businesses along their entrepreneurial journeys. Out of the five interviewees, two of them started with corporate jobs. Two started with local SME companies, and another

one has always been entrepreneur in her career. Each interviewee has unique entrepreneurial journeys and challenges.

RS-1 is the first person in his family to become a business owner. He comes from a farmer family in a rural area of Suphan Buri, a province of Thailand. He began his journey as a marketing officer in a local Thai SME specializing in cosmetic OEM. Through dedication and hard work, he rose to the position of managing director with partial ownership in the company within a few years. Over nearly a decade, he played a significant role in driving the company's revenue and growth, which was on track for an IPOs. However, His journey took a challenging turn when his partner attempted to involve him in a Ponzi scheme when they were preparing for an IPO. When he refused to participate, he was forced to leave the company. The experience left him burned out and depressed. After taking a few months to recover, RS-1 made a comeback by launching new businesses and building an ecosystem around the cosmetic business services he currently owns.

RS-2 was also the first business owner in his family. His parents were government servants in Myanmar. He started his career by working for a Hongkong international trading company in Bangkok after graduating with a master's degree. He was relocated to Hong Kong, Vietnam, and eventually assigned to be a director to oversee Myanmar market. Currently, he has an agriculture company and hotel business in Myanmar and Thailand respectively. RS-2 shared a similar story with RS-1 about his entrepreneurial life. He began his first business as a mobile phone distributor when his trading company left Myanmar market. Besides the mobile phone business, he also started a travel and tour company later. Unfortunately, he faced a fierce competition from his competitors in the mobile phone market. To kick him out of the market, his competitors slashed prices right after he imported his stocks, causing severe financial losses and destroying his business completely. After being depressed for months from the collapse of his business, RS-2 then made a comeback by venturing into agriculture sector, initially focusing on fresh produce before transitioning into rice export business which is very successful.

RS-3 was a refugee on the Thailand-Myanmar border. His family moved to USA when he was still young. His father worked as a social worker and his mother is a nurse. He is the first entrepreneur and business owner in his family. He started his career

by working with a renowned multinational law firm for 7 years before becoming a full-time entrepreneur. RS-3 shared that he started one of his current businesses, an auto-mechanic shop, as a side project while working for the law firm. With his background in finance and tax, RS-3 handled administrative and tax-related tasks from a different state while his brother who lives in another state managed mechanical operations. When RS-3 traveled to the state where his side project is, he identified a potential in growing the business. Seeing this opportunity, he left his corporate career and relocated to manage the business full-time. Over time, he expanded his entrepreneurial portfolio by establishing an auto hauler company which became his main business.

Similar to RS-2, RS-4's parents were government officers in Myanmar. Her family was not in a good financial position when she was young. Therefore, she started working at the age of 15 and have taken various odd-jobs and part-time work —like reselling burgers and working at supermarkets—to support herself and help cover her educational expenses. After high school, RS-4's career began as a sale assistant at local Myanmar company before moving to another local Myanmar company that just started. The new company engaged in various activities such as trading, government tenders, hotel projects, and many other services. The company was like a family, and she had a very supportive boss who allows her to attend university and work at the same time. RS-4 worked hard and get promoted to a senior management level in few years. Through her connection with that company, she started her first company as a side project, which is a heavy machinery rental business while she was still working for the company in the senior management level. RS-4 also shared an interesting story of how she unexpectedly started a second business in Dubai, UAE a few years ago. She had never been to Dubai before and initially travelled there to apply for a visa to move to another country due to the worsening political situations in Myanmar. However, her family's visa application was denied, and she ended up remaining in Dubai, where she discovered business opportunities and went on to establish her second company. The second company provides business consultation services such as company registration in UAE, UAE residence visa, and many others.

RS-5 is also the first-generation entrepreneur and business owner. Her mother was a maid and her father did not have a certain job. RS-5 shared that she started her entrepreneur journey right away as soon as she graduated from university. Before

she started her current interior design and construction company, she tried out many businesses which include selling skincare products. When she realized that the profit margin from selling skincare products was very thin, she later ventured into curtain business by selling them online. RS-5 said that she did not have stocks, she just took pictures online and post it on her social media platforms. When she got orders, she contacted the factories. From this curatin business, she raised the capital to start her current business of interior design and construction company.

4.1.2. How First-Generation Entrepreneurs Bridge the Business Knowledge Gap Compared to Those with Family Business Backgrounds

From the interviews, it is found that all the interviewed first entrepreneurs have at least a bachelor's degree. Four out of them, RS-1, RS-2, RS-3, and RS-4, have a business-related bachelor's degree, and these same four people shared that they have worked in other companies prior to starting their businesses. These four interviewees agreed that their previous jobs and education have taught them a lot and have helped them set up many valuable connections who, one way or another, reconnect in their entrepreneurial journeys.

Distinctly, RS-5 stated that she does not have a business-related degree nor has never worked for other companies. She ventured into entrepreneurship right away once she graduated from university with her degree in communication art. However, she did admit that she paid to attend informal classes and online classes related to the businesses that she was interested in. For instance, RS-5 paid a curtain garment cutter to teach her how to cut, measure, and calculate curtain prices in just one day. Additionally, she attended in-person marketing seminars and online marketing classes while she was selling curtains online. She mentioned that the knowledge gained from these online marketing classes helped her better understand her customers and make effective changes to her marketing strategies, resulting in increased sales. One significant change she implemented was making her product prices transparent, which enabled her to close more deals and boost customer trust.

4.2 Motivation of the First-generation Entrepreneurs

In this section, the findings related to first-generation entrepreneurs' motivations are presented. The motivations of entrepreneurs are looked at from the aspects of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations and pull & push motivation also known as opportunity-driven and necessity-driven motivations.

4.2.1 Intrinsic & Extrinsic Motivations

When asked what motivated them to pursue entrepreneurial lives, the answers of the three entrepreneurs fall into the category of intrinsic motivation – sense of purpose, personal growth and enjoyment of challenges, and desire for independence, while the other answers fall into extrinsic motivations –financial freedom and financial rewards. The three entrepreneurs whose answers categorized as intrinsic shared their motivations as follows:

Sense of Purpose: RS-3 said he started the mechanic shop and logistics company because he wanted to help his fellow ethnic people by creating more jobs for them. He felt a sense of purpose in doing it. Through these businesses, he was able to employ many ethnic mechanics and truck drivers whose income increases many times.

Personal Growth and Enjoy Challenges: RS-1, on the other hand, said he loves challenges and likes to keep himself busy. When he worked for a multinational company as an intern, he felt like he was too free even after finishing all the assigned tasks. That was the reason he rejected a permanent role from that company and moved to an SME company which later offered a position of managing director. He loves his job because it is challenging and there are always problems to solve.

Desire for Independence: RS-2 said that he already has a goal of becoming his own boss by the age of 35. He wants to be his own boss and loves entrepreneur life. Although he worked for another company in his early years, he never planned to be an employee forever, and he knew that very clearly at the start of his career.

The other two shared the following stories related to their extrinsic motivations:

Financial Freedom: RS-4 shared that when she worked at a supermarket as a staff at the age of 17, she reflected and asked herself if she wanted to be a staff like this forever. She then knew the answer that being an employee was not her life goal.

She wanted to be financially free and get out of poverty and established herself in the business community in Myanmar.

Financial Rewards: Unlike others, RS-5 gave a straightforward answer “money” when asked what motivated her to pursue her entrepreneurial journey. She said she wants to live a good and luxurious life. When probed further, it was found that another reason for choosing to become self-employed was because she wanted her family to live a good life and wanted to help them break free from poverty.

However, it seems like their motivation has changed as time passed. Regardless of whatever reasons they started their business, they seem to enjoy the journey. When asked if they ever wanted to go back and work for other companies again when they encountered failures in their businesses, they all answered “no”.

Based on the answers of the five entrepreneurs, it is found that the first-generation entrepreneurs’ motivations of starting a business can be either intrinsic or extrinsic motivations or it can be both. These motivations are shaped by their backgrounds and upbringing experiences. Specifically, the findings revealed that their motivations include a sense of purpose, a desire for personal growth and enjoyment of challenges, a pursuit of independence, and the aspiration for financial freedom and rewards.

4.2.2 Opportunity-driven Entrepreneurs (Pull) & Necessity-driven (Push) Motivation

Lantai, Hauge, and Mei (2024b) defined opportunity-driven entrepreneurs as individuals pursuing achievements because of market opportunities. Becoming entrepreneurs is their choice, and it is not because other employment opportunities are unavailable. According to this definition, all the first-generation entrepreneurs in this study are pulled into entrepreneurship or opportunity driven entrepreneurs. RS-2, RS-3, and RS-4 held well-paying jobs and did not need to leave to start their own businesses out of necessity. RS-1, despite being forced to leave the company, had multiple job offers from investors and could have continued working elsewhere. Even RS-5, who has never worked for any company, admitted that she did not apply for jobs because she knew that office work salaries would not support the expensive lifestyle she desired.

The findings of what opportunities pull each interviewee into entrepreneurship are described below:

RS-1, through his decade of experiences in cosmetic industries in Thailand, is well connected and understood the need of the market. After being forced to leave the company he served as a managing director, he decided not to go back to that company even though investors invited him back. According to him, he already identified an opportunity or a need of being an independent cosmetic ingredient and product testing center and verifier in Thailand. Capitalizing on this opportunity, he teamed up with a renowned Thai university and its researchers that already have know-hows and set up a lab in that university.

RS-2 is an entrepreneur who has keen eyes for opportunities. His companies are founded based on opportunities. While working as a director on behalf of his Hong Kong international trading company, he acquired many business connections. Through his connections, he learned about a famous international mobile phone company looking for distributors in Yangon, Myanmar, and he took that opportunity. Similarly, his rice exporting business was founded based on opportunity. When attending a networking event, RS-2 met an ambassador of Czech Republic, and he asked if the Czech Republic is interested in importing his dried fruit products. The ambassador replied, "No, our country has better quality dried fruit products. But we are interested in Myanmar rice." RS-2 shared that although he already started thinking about commodity trading business, he was thinking about trading maize grain, not rice back then. However, when he saw an opportunity of exporting rice to the Czech Republic, he told the ambassador that he can do it without hesitating. That was how he started the rice exporting business, and now he has been expanding it to a few more countries.

RS-3 was drawn into entrepreneurship by helping his brother's auto mechanic shop with administration and tax management as a side project. When he visited the state where his side project was, he saw an opportunity of growing this business beyond what it was. Inspired by this opportunity, he resigned from his corporate job and relocated to the state to focus on growing the venture. The auto hauler company was founded in a similar spirit of opportunity. RS-3 noticed that most truck drivers earned significantly more than factory workers, yet there were few drivers from his own ethnic background. Realizing that more people from his community could

benefit from these higher-paying jobs, he established the auto hauler company, initially offering administration and tax services to truck drivers of the same ethnicity. Later, he purchased auto hauler trucks himself and created even more job opportunities for others from his community.

While working at a local Myanmar company that has many business activities which include importing auto parts from different countries and real estate businesses. RS-4 learned that there was a need for heavy machine rental services for construction. She also had connection with heavy machine suppliers from Japan, the connection she acquired from the company she was working for. RS-4 capitalized on this opportunity and started her first company.

Unlike the other four first-generation entrepreneurs, RS-5 has always been an entrepreneur after her college studies. She experimented a few businesses, including reselling skincare products and curtains online, before founding her first registered interior design and construction company. The foundation of her first company was the online curtain business. After learning that the skincare business was making only thin margins, she started to search other products that she could sell and make bigger profit margins. Through an online post, she learned that curtains business has a huge profit margin. She shifted her focus on to curtain businesses and paid a curtain garment cutter to teach her how to cut, measure, and calculate curtain prices. She then took pictures from curtain suppliers' websites and post them on her Facebook. Combining it with the knowledge she gained from online marketing classes, her curtain business became so successful that she makes millions of baht each month. With this capital, she expanded her offerings to include more interior design-related products, and gradually transforming her business into a full interior design and construction company.

4.3 Supporting Factors that Foster First-generation Entrepreneurs' Resilience

This section summarizes the findings of the factors that support and contribute to first-generation entrepreneurs' resilience. The factors are divided into two subtitles - personal factors and contextual factors.

4.3.1 Personal Factors

Under this subtitle, the findings related to the first-generation entrepreneur's personal traits—beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors—are discussed, which allow them to face challenges head-on and refuse to give up when faced with difficulties. The findings from the interviews indicate that beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors play a significant role in the first-generation entrepreneurs' unwavering resilience.

4.3.1.1 Beliefs – Believing in Themselves and their Abilities, Believe in the Importance of Continuous Learning, Hard-work, and Dedication

When it comes to beliefs, all the first-generation entrepreneurs in the interview agreed that believing in oneself is important. For example, even, RS-2 and RS-4 who are very religious and who said they draw their strengths from God, agreed that believing in themselves is essential to be entrepreneurs. Along with believing in themselves, they also emphasized that continuous learning, hard-working and dedication are essential. For example, RS-1 said that when a person is running a business as an entrepreneur for real, he or she cannot just rely on the advice of consultants. Entrepreneurs are responsible for learning to understand their businesses thoroughly, making decisions through critical thinking, and having commitment in what they do.

4.3.1.2 Attitudes – Accept Challenges as Normal, Have a Spirit of Not Giving Up

There is a similar finding about the attitudes of the first-generation entrepreneurs. They all believe that challenges are normal, and they have an attitude of not giving up. When asked if they ever wanted to give up, almost everyone replied “no”. SR-3 said he sometimes questioned himself why he left his corporate jobs, but when asked if he would go back if he was given a second chance, he said “no”.

4.3.1.3 Behaviors – Proactive, Go-getter

Through the research, a pattern of behaviors among the first-generation entrepreneurs are identified. They all are proactive and go-getters. RS-2 shared the story of himself finding suppliers. When RS-2 learned from the ambassador of one of the European countries that they want to import rice, he promised the ambassador that he can do it. Then, he drove to a city which is famous for rice production and went to factories by factories to talk with the owners. Similarly, RS-5

also shared that she is not shy or timid to meet with new people. For example, when she attends networking event and meets smart people, she is not afraid to walk up to them and introduce herself and get their contacts. Later, she would text them to invite them for lunch or dinner as an attempt to make business friends.

4.3.2 Contextual Factors

This section discovers the first-generation entrepreneurs' external support systems that contribute to their resilience.

4.3.2.1 Social Networks and Support Systems

Research findings suggest that social networks play a crucial role in fostering entrepreneurial resilience.

When asked who their biggest support was when they needed support in their businesses or when they faced failures, all interviewees replied that it was either their social networks or their families. Social networks here include networks that the first-generation entrepreneurs acquired from universities, their previous employments, and their business networks from their entrepreneurial activities.

RS-1 shared that when he was suddenly forced to leave the company, he was depressed and did nothing for a few months. During that time, a lot of people from his business and university connections sent him words of encouragement, and some of them came to visit him and checked on him. RS-3 also shared similar stories

when his auto-mechanic shop was burned down from unidentified arsonists. He said that his former boss reached out to him and sent words of encouragement. A community organization that recognizes his contribution to the community by creating more employments also started a GoFundMe to help him raise funds to rebuild his workshop.

Four of the interviewees also agreed that families were their biggest support during their down time. For example, RS-2 said when he was out of the mobile phone business, he was very depressed, and it was his wife who encouraged him to get up and to draw strength from God. RS-4 said her sons were her greatest strengths when her family's visa was denied and struggled a few months in Dubai, UAE before establishing a business there. RS-1 said his mother comforted him, and he drew strength from the need of supporting his family to get back up. RS-3 also said his mother and siblings emotionally supported him.

RS5, on the other hand, insisted that herself was her biggest support, which helped her get back up every time she faced downsides during her entrepreneurial journey.

4.4 First-generation Entrepreneurs' recommendations

When asked what recommendations they would give to other people who are inspired to become first-generation entrepreneurs, the interviewees provided the following recommendations:

RS-1 emphasized the importance of cultivating critical thinking skills for first-generation entrepreneurs. He explained that throughout their entrepreneurial journey, entrepreneurs will encounter a variety of people, including established entrepreneurs and consultants, who will offer suggestions and ideas. It is essential to critically evaluate these recommendations. RS-1 shared an example from his own experience when he pitched his business idea at a start-up event. During the pitch, a judge dismissed his concept of creating an independent cosmetic testing center as unfeasible, claiming that the revenue model did not make sense. However, RS-1 chose not to heed the judge's advice because he had already conducted market validation with major cosmetic companies, which confirmed a demand for his service. Had he followed the judge's advice, his company might not have existed today. He concluded by noting that, as a true entrepreneur, one must take full responsibility for both the success and the challenges faced by the company. Therefore, he stressed that critical thinking is essential for entrepreneurs to determine which recommendations to pursue and which to disregard.

RS-2, an entrepreneur with a strong sense of opportunity, advised taking calculated risks. He emphasized that when an opportunity arises, it's important to be bold and take action, but also to have a solid plan in place. According to him, if you let the fear of failure hold you back, you'll never take the first step.

RS-3 emphasized the importance of establishing clear policies and ensuring that employees understand the consequences before they begin working. He shared this advice based on his experience with employees who had struggled with addiction. In an effort to help, he hired them, but while some turned out to be successful employees,

others did not. When he had to fire the underperforming employees, it created a risk, as those individuals may have harbored ill intentions toward his business. RS-3 believes that clear policies could help mitigate such risks. Although he did not explicitly state it, he implied that his auto mechanic shop may have been set on fire by former employees whom he had fired.

RS-4 recommended that aspiring first-generation entrepreneurs should prepare themselves mentally to face challenges. She shared her personal experience of being looked down upon by peers and partners when she first started her company. Many doubted her abilities, and some even attacked her, questioning her lack of experience. According to her, nearly every entrepreneur encounters such skepticism, and it is crucial to have a strong mindset to overcome it.

RS-5 advised entrepreneurs to immerse themselves in their businesses as if they were getting to know someone they care about. She recommended giving themselves a trial period of six months to test the potential of their business ideas. During this period, entrepreneurs should fully dedicate themselves and put in the effort. Once they realize the business has potential, they should double down and work even harder. RS-5 shared this advice based on her own experience. When she entered the curtain business, she treated the first six months as a trial period, taking online marketing classes and hiring curtain garment cutters to help her understand the business. After seeing positive results and making money within the first six months, she put in even more effort, eventually growing her business to generate millions of baht per month.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

In this paper, the research questions of what factors that drive first-generation entrepreneurs to pursue entrepreneur ventures and what critical supporting factors contribute to the resilience of the first-generation entrepreneurs in their entrepreneurial journey were investigated by interviewing five first-generation entrepreneurs from different countries and industries. It is concluded that the motivations of first-generation entrepreneurs can be either intrinsic or extrinsic or both when they first ventured into entrepreneurship. They shared similar belief, attitudes, and behaviors when it comes to personal factors that contributes to resilience. All entrepreneurs agreed that social network and family support play important roles in their resilience. 4 out of 5 interviewees say that family is a big source of support during their difficult times.

Figure 5.1 summarizes the findings of the research on the first-generation entrepreneur's motivation to start businesses and resilience factors that allow them to continue to pursue entrepreneurship success despite challenges. The findings of this study reveal that the motivations of first-generation entrepreneurs are both intrinsic and extrinsic, similar to other entrepreneurs identified in the literature. Intrinsic motivations such as a sense of purpose, personal growth, enjoyment of challenges, and the desire for independence, along with extrinsic factors like financial freedom and rewards, were observed among the interviewees, aligning with previous studies, such as Edelman et al. (2010). All participants were opportunity-driven entrepreneurs, confident in their abilities with an unwavering attitude towards challenges, which they viewed as normal aspects of life. Their behaviors were proactive and goal oriented. Additionally, they emphasized the importance of maintaining social networks from college and past employment, alongside building business networks as essential support systems for their ventures.

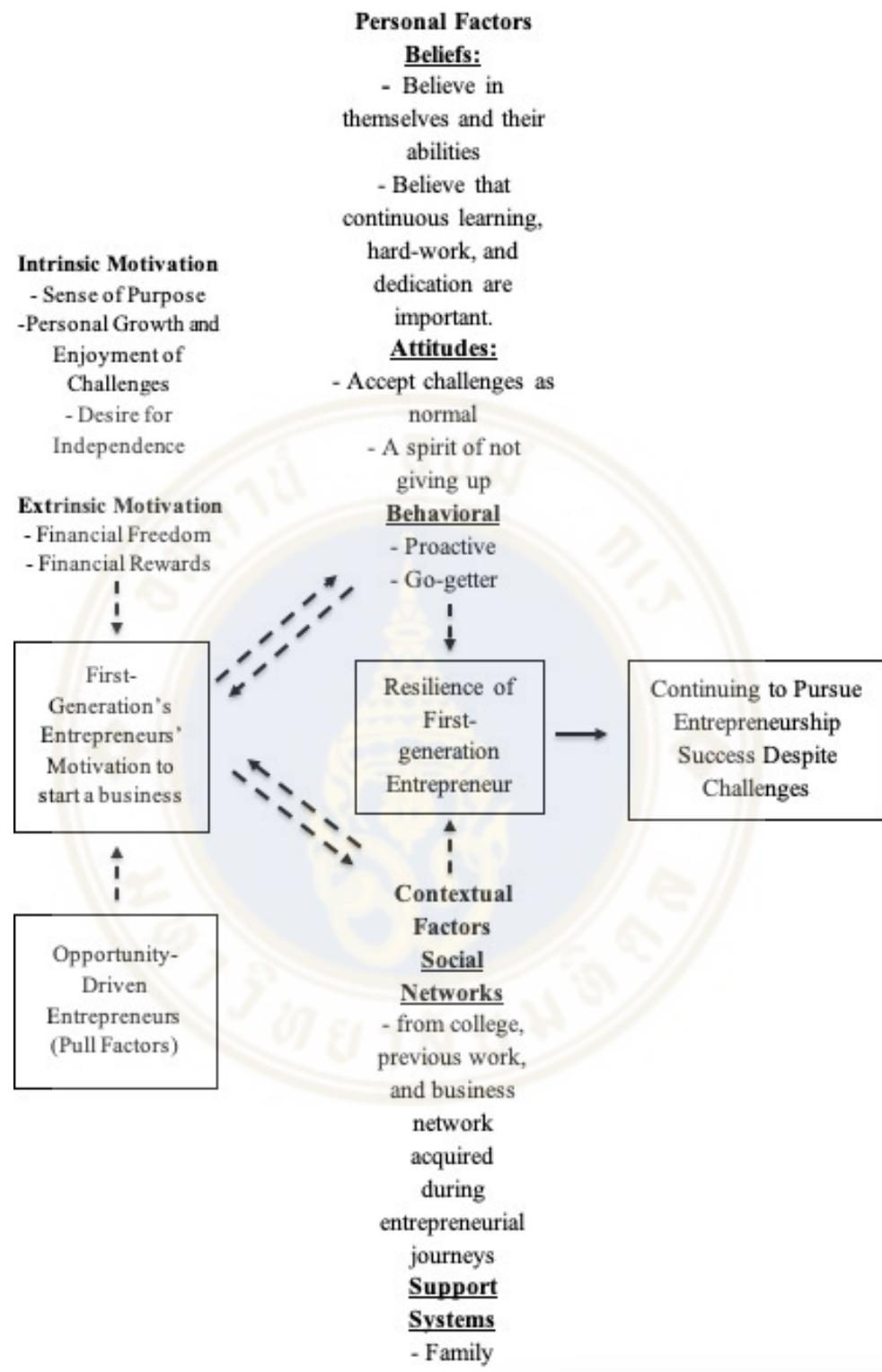


Figure 5.1. Summary for the research framework of First-generation Entrepreneurs' motivation to start a business and resilience factors that allow them to persist entrepreneurial journey despite challenges

5.2 Recommendations

The recommendations given by the five interviewed first-generation entrepreneurs to aspiring first-generation business owners are summarized below:

Cultivate critical thinking — At the end of the day, the decisions are yours. While consultants offer advice, you're the one accountable for your company's debts and outcomes.

Take calculated risks — Don't fear taking risks, but ensure they are well thought out.

Establish clear policies — Set expectations and communicate consequences to employees from the start to protect your business from potential risks.

Immerse yourself in your business and give it all during a trial period — Understand it deeply, just like you would get to know someone you care about. When trying out your business idea, dedicate six months and work really hard to implement your idea. If you smell the money, double down and work even harder.

Build mental resilience — Prepare yourself to face challenges head-on and persist, whether you have external support or not.

5.3 Limitations

The limitations of this study include the small sample size because it is based on interviews with only five first-generation entrepreneurs from different industries and countries. While this diversity provides valuable insights, it may limit the generalizability of the findings. The experiences and perspectives shared may not fully represent the broader population of first-generation entrepreneurs. Additionally, cultural and economic differences across countries could influence the results, making it challenging to draw universally applicable conclusions. Future research with a larger, more homogeneous sample or comparative studies within specific regions could offer a more comprehensive understanding of the topic.

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