

Psychological Capital and Proactive Coping as Strategic Resources: Extending the Resource-Based View in Informal Micro-Entrepreneurship

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Abstract

This article examines how informal micro-entrepreneurs in Kinshasa mobilize their psychological resources and the coping mechanisms to navigate an institutionally hostile and economically uncertain environment. Drawing on the Resource-Based View (RBV), proactive coping theory, and the concept of psychological capital, the study investigates the role of intangible resources in sustaining and enhancing entrepreneurial functioning. A sequential mixed-method design—combining twelve focus groups (n = 104) and a longitudinal survey using the PCQ-24 scale with 632 micro-entrepreneurs—reveals four main coping registers: anticipatory, preventive, instrumental, and meaning-oriented. Through these mechanisms, entrepreneurs transform vulnerability into productive resilience. The findings show high levels of psychological capital, varying significantly by business sector and firm age. The article contributes to contextualizing the RBV, extending proactive coping theory, and advancing the notion of collective psychological capital within the African informal entrepreneurship.

Keywords

Psychological Capital, Proactive Coping, Resource-Based View, Informal Entrepreneurship, Resilience

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship refers to all forms of self-employment in which individuals seek to create value by offering products or services on their own account and at their

own risk (Weber et al., 2023). In developing economies, entrepreneurship often takes a different form than that observed in more advanced contexts—namely, informal entrepreneurship. This form of entrepreneurship constitutes a core component of developing economies, particularly in African urban settings, where it compensates for institutional deficiencies and the shortcomings of formal labor markets (Webb et al., 2020), accounting for nearly 90% of entrepreneurial activities (Salvi et al., 2023). Informal entrepreneurship encompasses a wide range of activities, often micro in scale, where entrepreneurs operate outside formal regulatory frameworks while maintaining localized social legitimacy (Webb et al., 2020). Far from being a marginal or transitory phenomenon, informal entrepreneurship reflects a socio-economic adjustment logic, mobilizing individual, social, and psychological resources to cope with a hostile entrepreneurial environment (Salvi et al., 2023; Webb et al., 2020, 2009).

In African urban environments such as Kinshasa, informal entrepreneurship unfolds within an entrepreneurial ecosystem marked by hostility-limited access to finance, absence of public support, economic instability, cumbersome bureaucracy, corruption, administrative harassment, unfair competition, restricted access to key resources (human and infrastructural), and regulatory volatility (JICA, 2023; World Bank, 2022). These extreme conditions require specific adaptive capacities, often grounded in psychological resources such as resilience, self-efficacy, creativity, and emotional regulation, which enable entrepreneurs to survive, adapt, and occasionally succeed (Lengnick-Hall & Beck, 2005; Spigel & Harrison, 2018).

Although the literature on informal entrepreneurship has expanded considerably in recent years (Salvi et al., 2023), it remains largely dominated by economic and structural approaches. The psychological and subjective dimensions of entrepreneurial action in hostile environments remain underexplored. The psychological resources and coping mechanisms mobilized by informal micro-entrepreneurs in such contexts continue to represent a blind spot in mainstream research (Ahmed et al., 2022). This article draws on five years of mixed-method research (2019-2023) conducted in Kinshasa to explore entrepreneurial coping strategies and the psychological resources of informal micro-entrepreneurs. It aims to deepen the understanding of entrepreneurship under constraint by mobilizing a contextual and psychological reading of entrepreneurial practices.

The study contributes to the literature in three keyways through an empirically grounded analysis in an African context that remains underrepresented in international academic publications. First, it contextualizes the Resource-Based View (RBV) by demonstrating that the strategic value of a resource depends on its socio-institutional embeddedness. Second, it extends proactive coping theory by incorporating a dimension of community-based proactivity. Finally, it introduces the notion of collective psychological capital, highlighting the collective nature of resource mobilization in informal settings.

The article is structured as follows. The next section reviews the literature on

informal entrepreneurship. Section 2 presents the theoretical framework, detailing the RBV, entrepreneurial coping, and psychological resources in hostile environments. The mixed-method approach (qualitative and quantitative) is then described, followed by the presentation of empirical results. The paper concludes with a discussion of theoretical and practical implications and future research directions.

Informal Entrepreneurship: Between Economic Resilience and Institutional Complexity

Due to its global prevalence and growing significance, informal entrepreneurship has received increasing academic attention over the past two decades (Salvi et al., 2023; Bruton et al., 2012; Darbi et al., 2018). However, early studies date back to the 1990s, when several scholars began describing phenomena related to what is now defined as informal entrepreneurship. In communist states, informal entrepreneurship referred to any privately owned enterprise prohibited by centrally planned economies but socially accepted among populations facing resource scarcity. In developed economies, it was associated with what was termed the “underclass” (Salvi et al., 2023).

Informal entrepreneurship refers to all entrepreneurial activities conducted outside official regulatory frameworks, yet often benefiting from local social and economic legitimacy (Webb et al., 2009; Williams & Nadin, 2012). These activities are carried out by individual informal entrepreneurs who identify and exploit opportunities (Bygrave & Hofer, 1992; Ireland & Webb, 2007; Shane, 2003) in socially accepted ways while failing to comply fully with legal requirements governing the provision of goods and services in their countries—such as registration, record-keeping, or formal employment contracts. In African contexts, informal entrepreneurship constitutes a pragmatic response to institutional voids, economic precarity, and exclusion from formal labor markets (Salvi et al., 2023).

Academic literature published up to 2008 generally treated informality in binary terms, distinguishing between formal and informal activities based on business registration (e.g., Arimah, 2001; Coate et al., 2006; House et al., 1993; Sepulveda & Syrett, 2007). Godfrey (2011) was among the first to highlight the complex and multidimensional nature of informality. He argued for a shift beyond the issue of legal registration to encompass the broader range of laws and regulations bypassed by informal entrepreneurs—including taxation, environmental norms, labor regulations, and health and safety standards. This conceptual reframing profoundly altered how scholars understand both informal and formal entrepreneurship. A fully formal enterprise, according to this view, is not merely one that is legally registered but also one that complies with the entire body of relevant national, regional, and local regulations (Godfrey, 2011). Consequently, the number of truly “formal” businesses is far smaller than the number of registered firms—even in advanced economies, where many formally registered enterprises partially violate existing regulations.

The integrative review by Salvi et al. (2023) identifies four key dimensions of informality: business registration, tax payment, employee registration, and compliance with health, safety, and environmental standards. A high level of informality occurs when an enterprise displays total or partial noncompliance across three or four of these dimensions (e.g., unregistered business, tax evasion, unregistered employees). Conversely, low informality corresponds to total or partial noncompliance in only one or two dimensions (for instance, a registered and tax-paying enterprise with unregistered workers or poor HSE compliance). Entrepreneurial activities with low levels of informality may thus be considered *semi-formal*. Recent work by Salvi et al. (2023) proposes a dynamic typology of informal entrepreneurship, distinguishing three trajectories: reactive formalization, proactive formalization, and informalization. This perspective underscores the fluidity of entrepreneurial status and the ability of actors to navigate between social legitimacy and regulatory compliance. Informal entrepreneurs are not merely economic “survivors”; they are also agents of social transformation capable of innovation, resilience, and job creation in both developing and transitional economies (Weber et al., 2023; O'Donnell et al., 2023; Sheriff & Muffatto, 2014; Lee & Hung, 2014; Maloney, 2004) as well as in advanced economies (Choi & Perez, 2007). In Kinshasa, for example, seven out of ten people work in informal enterprises (Mufungizi & Tiemann, 2012; Institut national de Statistique, 2015). Nonetheless, informal entrepreneurship also generates negative macroeconomic consequences, such as reduced tax revenues and unfair competition for formal firms (Webb et al., 2013).

Despite its growing prominence, the literature on informal entrepreneurship remains insufficiently connected to psychological dimensions and coping mechanisms. This study adopts an integrative perspective, aiming to fill this gap by examining the psychological resources and adaptive strategies of informal micro-entrepreneurs operating within a hostile African urban environment—Kinshasa.

2. Theoretical Background: Resource-Based View, Psychological Capital, and Proactive Coping in Informal Micro-Entrepreneurship

2.1. Resource-Based View in Constrained Environments

For more than three decades, the Resource-Based View (RBV) has remained one of the most influential theoretical frameworks for understanding the sources of competitive advantage and organizational performance (Barney, 1991; Peteraf, 1993). At its core lies the idea that sustained performance stems primarily from the internal heterogeneity of a firm's resources rather than from its external market positioning. The RBV posits that firms—or, more broadly, entrepreneurial units—achieve durable performance when they possess and mobilize resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, non-substitutable, and efficiently organized (VRIN) (Barney, 1991). These attributes give resources a strategic status by creating barriers to imitation and shielding the organization from competitive erosion.

Although initially formulated to explain the performance of large firms operating in competitive markets, contemporary literature increasingly emphasizes the need to contextualize the RBV in environments characterized by structural scarcity and institutional weakness (Mair & Marti, 2009; Newbert, 2007). Its underlying logic has since been extended to a wide range of organizational forms, including small enterprises, micro-units, and informal activities (Alvarez & Busenitz, 2001; Kelliher & Reindl, 2009; Sirmon et al., 2011; Campbell & Park, 2017; Pereira & Bamel, 2021).

Within entrepreneurship research, this perspective highlights that success depends not only on the possession of tangible resources—financial capital, equipment, infrastructure—but also on the ability to identify, combine, and leverage intangible and idiosyncratic assets. Two theoretical and methodological implications directly follow for the study of micro-enterprises. First, the notion of “resource” extends beyond material or financial assets to include heterogeneous and intangible forms such as knowledge, networks, routines, and identities. Second, the RBV has evolved to incorporate temporal dynamics: the creation, recombination, and protection of resources unfold through evolutionary processes of dynamic capabilities that explain how constrained actors can nonetheless generate adaptive advantages (Teece et al., 1997). This dynamic approach opens a conceptual space to integrate psychological and cognitive capacities as meta-resources that enable entrepreneurs to anticipate, orchestrate, and reconfigure their assets under constraint (Corner et al., 2017; Sirmon et al., 2011). In this sense, psychological resources can be seen as levers of strategic coping—mental and behavioral dispositions oriented toward resilience and proactivity in hostile environments.

For micro-entrepreneurs operating in informal and hostile settings where access to material and financial resources is limited, the mobilization of internal, human, and psychological resources becomes decisive. Extending the RBV to the individual level thus leads to viewing the entrepreneur as a repository of capabilities, dispositions, and competencies that constitute the foundational strategic resources of the venture (Kor et al., 2007). Applying the RBV to informal and resource-scarce contexts reveals important nuances. In such environments—marked by institutional voids, economic and political instability, and limited infrastructural access—the traditional sources of advantage (formal financing, property rights, institutional support) are often absent or unreliable (Webb et al., 2011). Entrepreneurs therefore evolve within what may be termed adverse resource environments, where success depends less on acquiring external assets than on generating and sustaining adaptive internal resources. Under these conditions, psychological resources emerge as central strategic assets: they support coping behaviors, sustain persistence, and ensure the minimal functioning and survival of the economic unit. The articulation of the RBV with the literature on psychological capital and coping therefore provides a coherent explanatory framework for understanding the functioning of informal micro-entrepreneurship in hostile environments such as Kinshasa.

2.2. Psychological Capital: A Strategic Intangible Asset

The concept of psychological capital (PsyCap), introduced by Luthans and colleagues (2007), provides a robust framework for understanding how individuals' internal dispositions can function as strategic resources in the sense of the Resource-Based View (RBV), particularly within constrained or hostile environments. PsyCap consists of four interdependent dimensions: *hope* (the capacity to generate alternative pathways and pursue goals), *self-efficacy* (the belief in one's ability to mobilize the necessary efforts to achieve success), *optimism* (the tendency to attribute positive and stable causes to favorable events), and *resilience* (the ability to recover and adapt after failure or shock). These dimensions interact synergistically to strengthen persistence, creativity, and adaptability in the face of adversity (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017).

In institutionally fragile and economically precarious environments, psychological capital acquires a particularly strategic scope (Bullough et al., 2014; Shepherd & Williams, 2020; Baluku et al., 2024). It functions simultaneously as a buffer against external stressors and as a driver of proactive entrepreneurial behavior. In other words, PsyCap represents a resource that does not deplete through use; instead, it regenerates through learning experiences and social interactions. This self-reinforcing property distinguishes it from tangible resources and grants it the potential for sustainable advantage consistent with the RBV's criteria of rarity, inimitability, and non-substitutability.

Moreover, recent research has begun to extend the notion of PsyCap from the individual to the collective level (Chen et al., 2025; Hannah et al., 2022; Rego et al., 2017; Dulin, 2022). Within networks of informal actors, collective emotions, shared beliefs, and narratives of success or survival generate a collective psychological capital—a socially embedded resource that fosters mutual trust and coordinated agency in the face of structural vulnerability. This phenomenon is particularly salient among communities of urban micro-entrepreneurs, where solidarity, mutual support, and symbolic recognition operate as essential mechanisms of both emotional and economic stabilization.

2.3. Proactive Coping Theory: An Anticipatory Approach to Entrepreneurial Adaptation

The foundational work in stress psychology by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) conceptualized coping as the set of cognitive and behavioral efforts individuals deploy to manage demands perceived as exceeding their available resources. This classical view was progressively extended by proactive coping theory (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997), which moves beyond reactive responses to stress and introduces an anticipatory and self-determined orientation toward resource construction. In this perspective, individuals do not wait for stressful events to occur but instead engage in forward-looking strategies aimed at detecting, preventing, or transforming potential threats into opportunities for learning and growth.

Proactive coping is therefore grounded in prevention and preparation rather

than reaction. According to [Schwarzer and Taubert \(2002\)](#), it involves specific cognitive and motivational processes: the early recognition of weak signals of threat, the mobilization of personal resources (such as self-confidence, optimism, and self-efficacy), the strategic planning of possible responses, and the active search for social or informational support before a crisis emerges. These dimensions give proactive coping a distinctly agentic quality—the individual becomes an anticipatory actor of adaptation rather than a passive subject of environmental constraint.

Applied to entrepreneurship, this theory has proven particularly fruitful in explaining how entrepreneurs deal with uncertainty, market turbulence, and resource scarcity ([Aldrich & Yang, 2014](#); [Uy et al., 2013](#)). In hostile or informal institutional contexts—such as those found in many African and Latin American economies—entrepreneurs face persistent structural constraints (lack of formal financing, regulatory instability, market volatility). In these environments, reactivity alone is insufficient: survival and performance depend on the capacity to anticipate threats and to create or recombine resources before they become critical ([Williams & Shepherd, 2016](#); [Boudreaux et al., 2019](#)). Entrepreneurial coping thus constitutes a central mechanism in building entrepreneurial and organizational resilience, as an enterprise's ability to withstand, adapt, and continue functioning despite adversity largely depends on its leaders' capacity to devise alternative strategies, stimulate creativity, and inspire confidence during critical moments ([Ahmed et al., 2022](#)).

While early research treated proactive coping as an individual process, recent studies suggest that it can also manifest collectively or in a distributed manner within entrepreneurial teams and economic communities ([Chen et al., 2025](#); [Greer & Cavalhieri, 2019](#); [Rego et al., 2017](#); [Lyons et al., 1998](#)). In the context of informal micro-entrepreneurship, this collective dimension materializes through mechanisms of mutual assistance, resource pooling, and knowledge exchange designed to anticipate economic shocks (e.g., price increases, supply disruptions, political crises). This form of collective proactive coping rests on social dynamics of trust, solidarity, and mutual learning—all intangible resources that constitute collective psychological capital ([Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017](#)).

Proactive coping thus serves as a theoretical bridge between psychological capital and the RBV. It is the mechanism through which psychological resources—hope, optimism, resilience, and self-efficacy—are translated into strategic behaviors and forward-oriented decisions. In this sense, it represents the conversion of intangible resources into dynamic capabilities ([Corner et al., 2017](#)), enabling entrepreneurs to orchestrate their limited resources within unstable environments. In this study, these three theoretical frameworks are integrated within a mixed-method (qualitative and quantitative) approach to examine and explain entrepreneurial practices in the constrained context of Kinshasa.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Context

The empirical setting of this study is Kinshasa, the capital city of the Democratic

Republic of the Congo (DRC)—a megacity of over 15 million inhabitants where informal micro-entrepreneurship predominates. This form of entrepreneurship is largely driven by high unemployment rates and limited access to formal employment in a context characterized by material scarcity, economic fragility, and chronic institutional uncertainty (World Bank, 2022). In Kinshasa, informal micro-entrepreneurship plays a critical socio-economic role. Microenterprises account for nearly 70% of total employment in Kinshasa and generate about 89.5% of household income (Institut national de Statistique, 2015; Mufungizi & Tie-mann, 2012). According to national legislation, microenterprises are defined as economic units employing up to five workers, with an annual turnover not exceeding USD 10,000, and operating under a centralized management structure (Ministère des PME, 2016). These enterprises benefit from a simplified tax regime, including free accounting and a flat quarterly tax (Ordonnance-Loi No. 13/006, 2013). Their growth has been striking: from approximately 15,000 units in 2005 to nearly 2.5 million in 2014—an increase exceeding 16,500% (Ministère des PME, 2016; PNUD, 2009). Beyond their economic contribution, these micro-units fulfill vital social functions: they facilitate access to essential goods and services, provide self-employment opportunities for a youth population excluded from the formal labor market, and serve as informal spaces for experiential learning and skill circulation. Nevertheless, Kinshasa’s entrepreneurial ecosystem remains marked by systemic hostility—characterized by the absence of public support, pervasive corruption, administrative harassment, economic and institutional instability, unfair competition, and limited access to resources such as financing, infrastructure, energy, and skilled labor.

3.2. Research Design and Epistemological Positioning

This study adopts a mixed empirical design that integrates both qualitative and quantitative approaches, consistent with Creswell and Plano Clark’s (2018) recommendations for studying complex phenomena in emerging contexts. A sequential explanatory design was chosen to enable an initial exploratory understanding of entrepreneurs’ coping strategies, followed by a statistical assessment of the underlying psychological resources. The objective was to capture how coping mechanisms operate within institutionally and economically hostile environments, and how levels of psychological resources (low, medium, or high) manifest among micro-entrepreneurs (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017).

The study follows an abductive logic, combining empirical induction with progressive deductive verification to link field observations to coping-strategies theory, the Resource-Based View, and positive psychology applied to entrepreneurship. While the quantitative measurement of PsyCap (via the PCQ-24) captures individual psychological dispositions, triangulation with qualitative materials (interviews and focus groups) enabled the emergence of the construct collective psychological capital. This construct—inferred from the intersubjective convergence of shared beliefs in hope, optimism, self-efficacy, and resilience—exceeds the mere

aggregation of individual capitals and denotes an emergent property socially co-constructed within networks of collective coping. Conducted as part of a longitudinal research program (2019-2023), the study aims to contribute to the literature by offering an empirically grounded perspective from an urban African context—one that remains largely underrepresented in leading entrepreneurship journals.

3.3. Study Population

The target population consists of informal micro-entrepreneurs operating in five municipalities representative of the city's socioeconomic diversity: Bandalungwa, Lemba, Masina, Matete, and N'djili. An initial database of 15,847 informal micro-entrepreneurs was compiled from the 2018 municipal registries of 24 municipalities in Kinshasa. Although municipal registration remains partial, it nevertheless implies a minimal administrative process and confers a semi-formal recognition status in the sense described by [Salvi et al. \(2023\)](#), signalling an entrepreneurial intent that goes beyond mere subsistence activity. The five selected municipalities accounted for 6723 active informal micro-entrepreneurs in 2018 (approximately 40% of the total). This database served as the sampling frame for both phases of the study, ensuring inter-municipal and intersectoral representativeness across commerce, craftsmanship, food services, and proximity-based service activities.

3.4. Qualitative Phase

3.4.1. Objectives and Sampling

The qualitative phase aimed to explore the entrepreneurial coping strategies developed in response to institutional, economic, and social constraints, while ensuring a qualitative representativeness of entrepreneurial profiles based on relevant sociodemographic, economic, and experiential variables. The qualitative sample comprised 104 informal micro-entrepreneurs, selected through purposive sampling consistent with the principles of diversity and thematic saturation ([Guest et al., 2006](#)). Participants were not acquainted prior to the group interviews, which helped reduce conformity bias and foster spontaneous exchanges.

In terms of industry distribution, the sample mirrors the economic structure of Kinshasa's informal micro-entrepreneurship. Commercial activities, both wholesale and retail, formed the majority (45 participants), reflecting commerce as the dominant sector of the urban informal economy. Artisanal manufacturing (12 participants) included woodworking, pastry making, tailoring, shoemaking, beverage production, and metalwork. On-site consumption activities (bars, kiosks, food stalls) involved 11 participants. Artistic trades (hairdressing, beauty care, decoration, screen printing) were represented by 7 participants. Other service sectors such as laundry, office services, bookstores, and small-scale digital or supply businesses included 9 entrepreneurs, while mechanical maintenance and repair accounted for 8 participants. Finally, agricultural and fishery activities involved 10 micro-entrepreneurs, and restaurant operators numbered 2. This sectoral diversity ensured a balanced coverage of informal entrepreneurial practices in Kin-

shasa and allowed for a nuanced understanding of the variety of survival and adaptation strategies across activity types.

Regarding age distribution, all age categories were fairly represented, reflecting the intergenerational nature of informal entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs under 29 years old: 25 participants; 30 - 39 years old: 29 participants; 40 - 49 years old: 30 participants, and 50 years and above: 20 participants. This distribution indicates that informal micro-entrepreneurship constitutes an intergenerational space, where necessity-driven entrepreneurship and aspirations for economic autonomy coexist with processes of professional consolidation and experiential learning. Gender parity was also pursued to capture potential gender-based variations in entrepreneurial coping. The sample comprised 47 women and 57 men, offering an analytical balance to compare access, perceptions, and coping mobilization. This gender mix mirrors the socioeconomic reality of Kinshasa, where women play a strategic role in commerce and neighbourhood services. With regard to enterprise age, the distribution was nearly symmetrical: 53 firms were younger than five years, and 51 firms were five years or older. This balance made it possible to include both emerging trajectories and consolidated experiences, enabling a longitudinal interpretation of resilience and business continuity mechanisms. Finally, a criterion of experienced economic or institutional hardship was required for inclusion. All selected entrepreneurs had faced at least one significant episode of constraint—such as an economic crisis, regulatory instability, capital loss, or limited resource access. This ensured empirical relevance to the study's focus on coping mechanisms under hostile conditions. Taken together, the sample composition provides robust qualitative representativeness—sector and socio-demographic—and allows for a deep understanding of the subjective, social, and contextual dynamics shaping entrepreneurial responses to uncertainty in Kinshasa.

3.4.2. Data Collection and Procedure

Twelve focus groups were conducted between March and June 2019, each bringing together eight to ten participants. The collective interviews aimed first to identify entrepreneurial coping strategies, and subsequently to validate psychological resource categories through deductive triangulation. A semi-structured guide, developed from prior research by [Mufungizi and Tiemann \(2012\)](#) and [Munkulu Mbata \(2008\)](#) on informal practices and solidarity systems in Africa, framed discussions around key themes: Entrepreneurial difficulties encountered; Coping strategies mobilized; Duration, outcomes, and perceived effectiveness of these responses. With participants' consent, all discussions were fully transcribed and anonymized to ensure confidentiality and analytical rigor.

3.4.3. Data Aggregation

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic content analysis ([Braun & Clarke, 2006](#)). Meaning units were inductively coded and aggregated into conceptual categories representing active coping strategies and their dimensions. To ensure cod-

ing reliability, a researcher triangulation process was implemented, involving multiple analysts in the interpretation of emerging themes. This initial phase yielded a typology of adaptive behaviors, serving as the empirical foundation for the subsequent quantitative phase of the study.

3.5. Quantitative Phase

3.5.1. Objectives and Sampling

The second phase of the study, designed as a longitudinal quantitative investigation (2019 and 2020), aimed to empirically assess the levels and structure of psychological resources among micro-entrepreneurs and to test their stability over time. We worked with a stratified and matched random sample of 632 micro-entrepreneurs, drawn from a population of 6723 units, using two stratification criteria: municipality and business sector. The attrition rate between the first survey wave ($n = 663$) and the second ($n = 632$) was 31 observations. All analyses were conducted exclusively on matched cases ($n = 632$) to ensure intra-individual consistency and comparability. Attrition analyses revealed no systematic bias related to sector, firm age, or municipality. A subset of participants from the qualitative phase was also included to ensure analytical continuity and to facilitate cross-validation of emergent insights. This final sample represents 9.4% of the reference population identified across the five municipalities. It exhibits a balanced gender composition, with 57% men ($n = 359$) and 43% women ($n = 273$), reflecting the significant participation of women in the urban informal entrepreneurial fabric of Kinshasa.

Regarding age structure, 12% of respondents were under 29 years old ($n = 74$), 30% were between 30 and 39 years old ($n = 190$), 41% between 40 and 49 years old ($n = 258$), 15% between 50 and 59 years old ($n = 97$), and 2% were older than 59 ($n = 13$). This distribution indicates a predominantly adult entrepreneurial population at the height of their working life, often shaped by cumulative experiential trajectories rather than early entry into entrepreneurship. With respect to educational attainment, the results reveal substantial heterogeneity: 3% of participants reported two years of post-primary education ($n = 19$), 2.2% had completed four years post-primary ($n = 14$), while 39.2% held a secondary school diploma ($n = 248$), 29.1% had non-university higher education ($n = 184$), and 26.4% held a university degree ($n = 167$). These figures suggest a notable elevation of human capital within Kinshasa's urban micro-entrepreneurship, challenging the prevailing narrative of a sector dominated exclusively by low-educated actors. Concerning sectoral distribution, the majority of respondents operated in trade (69%, $n = 437$), followed by manufacturing (11.2%, $n = 71$), artistic activities (8%, $n = 52$), miscellaneous services (4%, $n = 27$), maintenance and mechanical repair (4%, $n = 25$), catering (2.8%, $n = 15$), and agriculture (1%, $n = 5$). This structure confirms the strong commercial orientation of Kinshasa's informal micro-entrepreneurship, characterized by low entry barriers and low capital intensity.

Analysis of the enterprise age distribution reveals a relatively young entrepreneurial landscape. Nearly half of all economic units (46.2%, $n = 292$) were less

than four years old, reflecting a dynamic and emerging informal sector. Intermediate-age microenterprises (four to six years old) accounted for 28.3% ($n = 179$), while older enterprises (more than six years old) represented 25.5% ($n = 161$)—a progressively stable and resilient minority. Finally, the geographic distribution of respondents by municipality highlights notable concentrations in specific urban areas: Lemba (37%, $n = 236$), Bandalungwa (29%, $n = 182$), N'djili (12%, $n = 76$), Masina (11%, $n = 71$), and Matete (11%, $n = 67$). These municipalities, marked by dense commercial activity and pronounced socioeconomic heterogeneity, represent major informal economic hubs within the capital city. Taken together, this sample structure captures the full diversity of entrepreneurial profiles in Kinshasa and allows for a representative assessment of coping experiences and psychological resource mobilization within an informal and institutionally constrained context.

3.5.2. Measures and Instrument

Psychological resources were assessed using the Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ-24) developed by Luthans et al. (2007). The instrument underwent a rigorous back-translation process (Brislin, 1980) to ensure semantic and cultural equivalence in Congolese French. The four dimensions of psychological capital—hope, self-efficacy, optimism, and resilience—were measured using a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 6 (“strongly agree”). The instrument demonstrated high internal reliability both globally ($\alpha = 0.91$) and across all subscales ($\alpha > 0.80$), confirming its psychometric robustness in this context.

3.5.3. Procedure and Statistical Analyses

Data were collected through two survey waves—the first between June and September 2019, and the second between July and October 2020—to capture the temporal stability of psychological resources. Statistical analyses included Student's *t*-tests comparing observed mean scores to the theoretical averages of the PCQ-24 (72 for the overall scale; 18 for each subdimension), as well as comparisons between the first and second waves to assess change over time. Descriptive and inferential analyses were conducted using SPSS version 27, enabling an integrated examination of both central tendencies and variability patterns within the sample.

3.5.4. Validation and Contextual Anchoring

To ensure ecological validity and contextual relevance, a second series of focus groups was conducted between June 2022 and April 2023 with the 104 participants from the initial qualitative phase. These sessions served to cross-validate quantitative trends through local interpretive frameworks, enriching the understanding of observed dynamics and reinforcing their sociocultural meaning. This participatory validation process forms part of a reflexive knowledge anchoring approach, designed to bridge theoretical constructs with the lived realities of informal entrepreneurs.

3.6. Ethical Considerations and Methodological Robustness

All research procedures adhered to established ethical standards in social science research, including informed consent, anonymization, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at any point. The research protocol received formal approval from the Ethics Committee of the University of Kinshasa. Methodological robustness was strengthened through triangulation of methods, sources, and measurement times, ensuring both internal and external validity. The sequential integration of the three phases—qualitative exploration → quantitative measurement → qualitative validation—provided a holistic understanding of entrepreneurial coping mechanisms and the strategic role of psychological resources within constrained and institutionally fragile environments.

4. Results

4.1. General Dynamics Entrepreneurial Coping Strategies

The findings reveal that micro-entrepreneurs in Kinshasa deploy a wide range of coping practices designed to stabilize their businesses amid chronic economic, administrative, and relational stressors. Twelve major coping mechanisms were identified: *trade credit, tool lending with payment, informal (unpaid) tool sharing, free services, paid services, social ties through friendship, kinship, or influence, affiliation with NGOs or Non-Profit Associations, membership in solidarity and savings groups, micro-financial sponsorship, informal money lending, rotating savings and credit associations (ROSCAs)* and the so-called “*Buakisa card*” (an informal cashier system that receives deposits of small sums from customers and close people unable to save in the bank). These practices are characterized by flexibility, strong social embeddedness, and a cumulative use of mechanisms: most entrepreneurs simultaneously mobilize multiple coping devices, often in a sequential and adaptive manner depending on contextual fluctuations. This proliferation of strategies illustrates a form of resilience entrepreneurship (Béné et al., 2012), in which survival and business continuity take precedence over immediate growth.

An inductive analysis of the qualitative interviews reveals that these practices are structured around four main coping registers: anticipatory, preventive, instrumental, and meaning-oriented coping. These registers overlap with three complementary logics: the mobilization of scarce resources (Resource-Based View), adaptive proactivity (proactive coping), and the development of psychological resources (psychological capital). Together, these dimensions reflect an entrepreneurial capacity to convert structural vulnerability into a strategic resource, illustrating how micro-entrepreneurs transform adversity into a platform for resilience, continuity, and adaptive agency.

4.2. Structural Patterns of Coping and Psychological Resources

4.2.1. Anticipatory Coping: Foreseeing Constraints and Securing the Future

Anticipatory coping encompasses the practices through which micro-entrepre-

neurs seek to protect themselves from future risks—particularly institutional and financial. Three dominant mechanisms were identified: affiliation with NGOs or Non-Profit Associations (ASBLs), membership in solidarity mutuals, and the “*Buakisa card*” savings system. *Affiliation with an NGO or a Non-Profit Association* provides some entrepreneurs with a form of semi-formal recognition, facilitating access to protected markets or temporary tax exemptions. This strategy reflects an anticipation of regulatory constraints and the internalization of institutional risks within day-to-day planning. By aligning with a legally recognized entity, entrepreneurs convert an external institutional resource into symbolic and protective capital. From a Resource-Based View (RBV) perspective, such affiliation represents an intangible asset that enhances perceived legitimacy and the capacity to mobilize other resources.

Similarly, *solidarity mutuals* and “*Buakisa card*” savings systems illustrate a forward-looking approach to financial crises through the creation of collective safety nets. These arrangements promote financial discipline, self-control, and long-term planning—core dimensions of proactive coping theory. By informally acting as local deposit collectors, receiving small daily deposits from clients and peers, micro-entrepreneurs cultivate trust-based relationships and community engagement, thereby strengthening their psychological capital through hope and optimism. These mechanisms also support resource renewal—a central tenet of the RBV—by maintaining liquidity and working capital continuity. Thus, these anticipatory strategies combine proactive planning with relational risk management, reflecting an endogenous form of proactivity typical of informal economies, where institutional uncertainty is integrated as a routine parameter of entrepreneurial practice.

4.2.2. Preventive Coping: Reducing Exposure to Institutional and Financial Threats

Preventive coping refers to practices aimed at reducing the likelihood or impact of external threats. Three major mechanisms illustrate this logic: trade credit, micro-financial sponsorship, and the use of personal relationships (friendship, kinship, or influence). *Trade credit* represents an informal innovation through which micro-entrepreneurs obtain goods on credit from suppliers. This system allows continuity of operations without formal debt, reducing vulnerability to currency volatility. From an RBV perspective, this practice demonstrates the valorization of relational resources (trust-based assets) and the creation of temporary competitive advantages rooted in interpersonal trust. It also reflects proactive vigilance—anticipating potential supply chain disruptions—consistent with the principles of preventive coping. *Micro-financial sponsorship* operates under a similar logic of risk reduction, but within relationships with the formal system. The sponsor—often an experienced entrepreneur, acquaintance, or loyal customer—assumes moral and financial responsibility for the novice. This hybrid mechanism combines social and symbolic capital, converting reputation into a resource of solvency. It exemplifies the instrumentalization of collective psychological capital,

where mutual trust becomes a productive asset. Finally, *relationships based on friendship, kinship, or “protection”* reflect a preventive rationality in the face of institutional constraints. These ties enable entrepreneurs to navigate bureaucratic harassment and maintain a degree of regulatory stability. Although morally ambiguous, these arrangements embody adaptive resilience, as entrepreneurs mobilize social networks as institutional shields. This strategy aligns with the RBV logic of socially complex resources, highlighting the pragmatic dimension of preventive coping in informal environments.

4.2.3. Instrumental Coping: Optimizing Available Material and Relational Resources

Instrumental coping refers to practices that directly compensate for the lack of material or financial resources. These include borrowing tools (with or without payment), exchanging services (free or paid), and informal money lending. Such practices follow a logic of pragmatic rationality and proximity-based economy. *Tool borrowing*, whether paid or unpaid, allows micro-entrepreneurs to overcome initial investment barriers. Equipment becomes a circulating resource within the community, sustained by mutual trust and reciprocity. According to the RBV, these mechanisms reflect a pooling of tangible resources that maximizes collective productivity without increasing fixed capital. They also demonstrate contextual intelligence, whereby entrepreneurs learn to “do with what is available,” exemplifying adaptive creativity or entrepreneurial bricolage. *Free or paid service exchanges* extend this logic further, reflecting the structuring of an informal service market where cooperation takes precedence over competition. Actors exchange value through time, storage, or technical assistance. These arrangements constitute collective instrumental coping, embodying a form of social learning where solidarity becomes a cost-sharing mechanism. Psychologically, these interactions reinforce self-efficacy and mutual trust, two key components of psychological capital (Luthans et al., 2007). Finally, *informal money lending* complements this coping register. Despite occasionally high interest rates, such mechanisms offer crucial flexibility in environments where formal credit is inaccessible. Access is based on reputation and trust—two intangible resources central to the RBV. Rather than indicating dependence, these loans reveal an ability to leverage social capital as financial capital, sustaining both business continuity and individual economic resilience.

4.2.4. Meaning-Focused Coping: Creating Collective Meaning from Adversity and Economic Survival

Meaning-focused coping encompasses practices that provide moral, identity-based, and communal meaning to entrepreneurial action. It primarily includes rotating savings and credit associations (ROSCAs), solidarity mutuals, and free service exchanges. These mechanisms ground resilience not only in material resources but also in shared values—solidarity, dignity, and mutual recognition.

ROSCAs function on principles of collective discipline and reciprocal trust.

Each member contributes periodically to a common fund, distributed in turn according to a predetermined order. This rotational savings model provides protection against economic shocks while reinforcing the sense of belonging. It embodies a meaning-focused coping dynamic, where entrepreneurial survival becomes a shared collective project. Members support one another not only financially but also morally, constructing a collective sense of achievement amid structural precarity. Within the framework of psychological capital, such arrangements nurture emotional resilience, collective hope, and self-reinforcement capacity. *Solidarity mutuels*—previously discussed under anticipatory coping—also represent a symbolic form of coping. By pooling risks, they foster a culture of shared responsibility and trust. Their very existence reflects an organizational mode grounded in cooperation, consistent with the RBV’s emphasis on social and emotional assets as inimitable resources. Finally, *free services*, though economically modest, embody a logic of mutual recognition. Offering services without immediate compensation reinforces trust, reaffirms the value of solidarity, and sustains an atmosphere of mutual assistance amid structural uncertainty. These symbolic exchanges strengthen group cohesion, constituting a shared psychological resource—a community-based capital of hope that supports both emotional and economic endurance.

4.3. Measurement and Profile of Psychological Resources (Quantitative Results)

Findings from the quantitative survey ($n = 632$) confirm and further elaborate the qualitative trends. The mean scores on the Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ-24) from the first wave of data collection (T1, June–September 2019), following translation and contextual validation, indicate an overall average psychological capital (PsyCap) level of $M = 91.4$ ($SD = 10.8$), which is significantly higher than the theoretical mean of 72 ($t = 11.83$; $p < 0.001$) (see **Table 1**). This result suggests that, despite the structural precariousness of their activities, informal micro-entrepreneurs display a relatively high level of psychological capital. Examining the PsyCap subdimensions reveals the following mean scores: hope ($M = 22.3$), optimism ($M = 22.5$), resilience ($M = 23.1$), and self-efficacy ($M =$

Table 1. Comparison of Mean PsyCap Scores ($N = 632$).

	T1 (Moyenne théorique = 72)					T2 (Moyenne théorique = 72)					T1 ≠ T2	
	M	SD	Min.	Max.	t	M	SD	Min.	Max.	t	t	p
Hope	22.3	4.2	21	36	9.87	25.3	5.8	18	36	7.12	5.7	0.00
Optimism	22.5	4.7	18	36	8.73	26.1	5.7	20	36	8.81	4.2	0.00
Resilience	23.1	4.4	19	36	9.12	26.5	6.4	19	36	9.27	4.8	0.00
Self-efficacy	23.5	5.3	23	36	9.27	26.7	7.9	21	36	8.23	4.6	0.00
Global PsyCap	91.4	10.8	64	118	11.83	104.6	14.6	68	122	15.1	5.3	0.00

Note: The theoretical averages of the PCQ-24 are 72 for the overall scale and 18 for each subdimension.

23.5). The moderate standard deviations (ranging from 4.2 to 5.3) indicate a degree of interindividual homogeneity in these psychological resources. These findings corroborate Luthans et al. (2007)'s proposition that psychological capital functions as a "meta-resource", facilitating the mobilization of other resources—financial, social, and cognitive—essential for entrepreneurial functioning and persistence in constrained environments.

Results from the second wave of data collection (T2, July-October 2020) reveal a higher overall level of psychological capital, with a mean score of $M = 104.6$ ($SD = 14.6$), again significantly above the theoretical mean of 72 ($t = 15.1$; $p < 0.001$) (see **Table 1**). Across the four subdimensions of PsyCap, the observed means are as follows: hope ($M = 25.3$), optimism ($M = 26.1$), resilience ($M = 26.5$), and self-efficacy ($M = 26.7$). Moderate standard deviations (ranging from 5.7 to 7.9) confirm a consistent degree of interindividual homogeneity. Comparisons between the two measurement periods (T1 and T2) indicate statistically significant increases across all dimensions ($T2 > T1$; $\Delta = 13.2$), with $t = 5.3$; $p < 0.01$ for the overall PsyCap and $t \geq 4.2$; $p < 0.01$ for each dimension. These findings suggest that, despite persistent structural precarity, informal micro-entrepreneurs demonstrate a high and progressively developing level of psychological capital, strengthening over time through experience and adaptive learning.

Further analyses from T2 reveal significant variations in psychological capital levels by sector of activity ($t = 3.67$; $p < 0.05$)¹ and firm age ($F = 4.12$; $p < 0.05$), but not by gender, age, educational attainment, or commune of operation (see **Table 2**). Artisans, manufacturers, and service providers, often exposed to high income volatility, display the highest resilience scores, whereas retail entrepreneurs

Table 2. Variation of psychological capital by entrepreneurial characteristics (N = 632; T2).

Variable	Category	Hope		Optimism		Resilience		Self-efficacy		PsyCap	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Activity sector	Commerce	28.4	3.6	27.8	3.9	24.6	4.8	29.2	4.1	110.0	10.2
	Others	27.9	4.0	27.1	3.8	32.2	3.4	29.0	3.7	116.2	9.2
	t-test									3.67	
	<i>p</i>									<0.05	
	df									631	
Firm Age	<4 ans	27.5	4.0	26.8	4.1	28.6	4.5	28.4	4.3	111.3	10.1
	4 - 6 years	28.0	3.8	27.3	4.2	30.2	4.1	28.8	4.0	114.3	9.7
	>6 years	28.8	3.6	28.2	3.7	31.7	3.6	29.5	3.8	118.2	8.9
	ANOVA (F)									4.12	
	<i>p</i>									<0.05	
	df									2 & 629	

¹Given the marked imbalance in sample sizes across sectors, all activity branches other than Commerce were consolidated into a single, homogeneous group to ensure comparability with the Commerce category.

report slightly higher levels of hope and optimism. These patterns highlight differentiated adaptive profiles within the informal entrepreneurial ecosystem, suggesting that psychological resources evolve in response to the specific forms of uncertainty and constraint inherent to each sectoral configuration.

Microenterprises in the intermediate age range (four to six years) and those older than six years display significantly higher and progressively stronger levels of resilience and PsyCap compared to their younger counterparts. These differences confirm that psychological capital is neither a stable nor a universal resource, but one that develops dynamically through the interaction between contextual conditions, experiential learning, and coping strategies (Shepherd & Patzelt, 2018).

4.4. Integration of Qualitative and Quantitative Findings: Toward a Contextualized Model

The integration of both empirical strands reveals that micro-entrepreneurs in Kinshasa do not merely react to a hostile environment; rather, they actively construct hybrid resilience mechanisms that combine anticipation, prevention, instrumentalization, and meaning-making. These mechanisms are organized around three complementary logics: 1) the logic of resource mobilization (Resource-Based View); 2) the logic of adaptive proactivity (proactive coping); and 3) the logic of collective, socially and culturally embedded psychological capital. Within the resource mobilization logic, entrepreneurs identify, reallocate, and combine material, social, and symbolic resources available in their environment. Although limited, these resources become strategic through their local specificity and relational inimitability. Informal networks—such as rotating savings associations, community-based NGOs, cooperatives, and kinship or friendship ties—provide not only material support but also symbolic and emotional recognition, thereby strengthening trust and perseverance. In this sense, the findings support the propositions of the extended Resource-Based View (Kraaijenbrink et al., 2010), according to which social and psychological resources represent strategic assets on par with economic ones.

Under the logic of adaptive proactivity (proactive coping), the observed practices are far from merely reactive. They reflect a built-in anticipation of future threats, where entrepreneurs plan, save, and collaborate to buffer foreseeable shocks. This transition marks a shift from reactive survival toward the construction of a proactive rationality of endurance. The change is closely tied to accumulated experience and a heightened perception of personal control over market fluctuations. Quantitative data confirm this pattern: microenterprises with more than four years of operation exhibit significantly higher PsyCap scores than those with fewer than four years, underscoring the developmental and experiential character of psychological capital.

Finally, the logic of collective, socially and culturally embedded psychological capital suggests that emotional and moral resources—hope, optimism, trust, and

resilience—constitute a shared form of psychological capital that sustains entrepreneurial perseverance. This collective capital functions as a multiplier of economic resources. The psychological capital observed among these entrepreneurs appears deeply socially and culturally rooted. Far from being a mere individual disposition, it draws strength from community interactions, economic solidarity, and religious faith. Many entrepreneurs—particularly women—explicitly associate their perseverance with a spiritual or moral dimension: *“I believe that God gives me the strength to continue, even when everything falls apart.”* This spiritual orientation operates as an endogenous psychological resource, reinforcing persistence in environments of extreme uncertainty (Markman & Baron, 2003). In sum, this integrated model suggests that in contexts of informality and institutional hostility, entrepreneurial resilience depends less on the possession of resources than on the ability to transform social ties into productive and meaningful resources. Micro-entrepreneurs in Kinshasa do not merely survive despite institutional fragility—they transform it into a space of organizational creativity and social innovation.

5. General Discussion

5.1. Revisiting the Resource-Based View (RBV) Considering Entrepreneurial Informality

The findings highlight a profound reconfiguration of the Resource-Based View (RBV) (Barney, 1991; Peteraf, 1993) when applied to informal entrepreneurial contexts. The RBV posits that firm performance derives from the possession and strategic combination of resources that are rare, valuable, inimitable, and non-substitutable. Yet, within the Kinshasa ecosystem—characterized by institutional instability and the chronic scarcity of tangible resources—this logic is inverted: *entrepreneurs do not possess resources; they construct and continuously negotiate them through social arrangements.* The twelve coping practices identified in this study illustrate a form of “improvised RBV,” in which the strategic value of a resource does not stem from its objective rarity but from its capacity to be socially activated. For instance, a simple trust-based relationship or supplier credit becomes a strategic resource precisely because it is embedded within a web of local reciprocity. Here, scarcity is relational rather than economic. This shift invites a reconceptualization of the RBV—from a theory of possession to a theory of social resource mobilization. Such contextualization yields three major theoretical contributions: 1) Resources as processes rather than stocks: In informality, resources are fluid, unstable, and negotiated. Their value depends on the actor’s ability to activate them at the right moment. 2) Competitiveness as a function of relational flexibility: Competitive advantages are temporary and rooted in the density of trust-based relations rather than tangible assets. 3) The moral dimension of resources: Solidarity relations, mutual aid associations, and rotating savings systems represent both economic and ethical resources. Their activation presupposes shared values—such as honor, loyalty, and mutual assistance—that structure eco-

nomic exchange.

Thus, when contextualized to informal entrepreneurship, the RBV evolves from a theory of ownership to a theory of relational capability — the capacity to maintain, convert, and regenerate socially embedded resources. This theoretical reorientation aligns with the contextualized RBV advanced by Kraaijenbrink et al., (2010), which argues that resources become strategic only within the social and institutional contexts that give them meaning.

5.2. Proactive Coping in Constrained Contexts: From Individual Planning to Collective Vigilance

Applying the proactive coping model (Schwarzer & Taubert, 2002) to informal entrepreneurship reveals a transformation in the paradigm of proactivity. Whereas in formal entrepreneurship, proactivity is often expressed through strategic planning, competitive monitoring, or incremental innovation, in the informal entrepreneurial settings of Kinshasa it manifests as a form of collective vigilance, rooted in survival networks and community practices. Rotating savings schemes, associative affiliations, and supplier credit systems demonstrate that micro-entrepreneurs actively anticipate shocks collectively, through shared mechanisms of self-protection. This shared anticipation does not rely on forecasting a measurable future but on preparing for an uncertain one—a future perceived as potentially threatening but manageable through collective effort. This contextualized proactivity resembles a “precautionary proactivity,” distinct from the conquest-oriented proactivity typical of formal entrepreneurship. Two dimensions of this reinterpretation are particularly salient: 1) Proactivity as community resilience: in unstable institutional environments, to anticipate means above all to strengthen social ties, diversify sources of support, and build collective margins of manoeuvre; 2) Proactivity as social learning: planning is not an isolated act but an emergent practice of collective learning derived from shared experiences of crisis. Each disruptive event (e.g., currency fluctuations, administrative harassment, loss of suppliers) becomes a space for communal learning, where preventive management “scripts” are exchanged and internalized.

Consequently, the theory of proactive coping gains explanatory depth when it integrates this collective dimension. In informal contexts, proactivity is not about controlling the future but weaving a social safety net to absorb it. It becomes a strategy of “anticipation through connection,” where social cohesion substitutes for institutional stability.

5.3. Collective Psychological Capital: A Contextual Extension of PsyCap

The concept of Psychological Capital (PsyCap)—defined by Luthans et al., (2007) as a combination of hope, optimism, resilience, and self-efficacy—has been widely mobilized to explain individual entrepreneurial performance and perseverance in adversity. However, our findings call for an extension of the concept toward a

collective and contextual dimension, suited to informal environments. Among Kinshasa's micro-entrepreneurs, the four dimensions of PsyCap are not merely individual traits but are co-constructed within interdependent social networks. Hope is shared through mutuality (*"If the group stands, I will stand"*); resilience is collective (*"We have survived worse"*); and optimism and hope are grounded less in rational expectations than in communal faith (*"I believe God gives me the strength to continue, even when everything collapses"*). Moreover, self-efficacy transforms into perceived collective efficacy—the belief that collective action yields tangible outcomes, even in failing environments. This collective reading of PsyCap involves three key shifts: 1) From the individual to the communal: entrepreneurial psychology extends beyond personal cognition to encompass mutual support dynamics and interpersonal trust; 2) From resource to infrastructure: Psychological capital becomes an invisible infrastructure sustaining entrepreneurial continuity despite institutional fragility; 3) From stability to plasticity: PsyCap dimensions fluctuate with events but are maintained through social interactions and the collective narration of resilience. This perspective aligns with [Luthans and Youssef-Morgan's \(2017\)](#) framework of positive organizational behavior, transposed here to a community level. In this sense, collective psychological capital operates as a psychic and moral buffer essential to the survival of microenterprises in environments of deep uncertainty. It should be noted that collective psychological capital was not measured directly but conceptually inferred from the inter-subjective convergence observed during group interviews. The PCQ-24, used in this study, captures individual dispositions whose similarity and co-expression within entrepreneurial communities make it possible to infer a collective dynamic. This approach adopts an exploratory perspective aimed at laying the conceptual groundwork for a community-level PsyCap, which will later be subject to formalization and dedicated psychometric validation.

5.4. Toward an Integrated Model: Entrepreneurial Resilience as an Ecosystem of Resources and Meaning

By integrating the contextualized RBV, community-based proactivity, and collective psychological capital, this study proposes an integrated model of entrepreneurial resilience specific to African informal entrepreneurship. This model rests on four structural principles: 1) Interweaving of economic and social resources: Resources are not divided between the economic and the social; they are co-produced through relationships, where value emerges from trust, reputation, and shared meaning. 2) Plurality of entrepreneurial rationalities: Practices do not follow a linear logic of profit maximization but a logic of protecting the possible, where survival and dignity take precedence over growth. 3) Adaptive temporality: Resilience develops over time through the accumulation of experiences and the transmission of practical knowledge. 4) The moral function of entrepreneurship: Coping practices both produce and signify; they reaffirm the dignity of work and solidarity as foundational values of economic action.

This model moves beyond the traditional dichotomy between survival entrepreneurship and growth entrepreneurship, suggesting the existence of an intermediate form—resilience entrepreneurship—characterized by the combination of adaptive practices, moral values, and social resources. Its goal is not to escape vulnerability but to manage it strategically.

6. Implications

6.1. Theoretical Implications

At the theoretical level, this study contributes to three major debates in the field of entrepreneurship: the contextualization of the Resource-Based View (RBV), the extension of proactive coping theory, and the enrichment of the concept of Psychological Capital (PsyCap). First, the study demonstrates that the strategic value of a resource depends on its socio-institutional contextualization. In institutionally weak environments, intangible resources—particularly psychological and social—become decisive for entrepreneurial performance and survival. This finding calls for an explicit integration of psychological and social capital into the RBV as dynamic, context-sensitive resources. In other words, the RBV must account for the fluidity and negotiability of resources in informal economies, where assets are not owned but enacted through relationships (Contextualized RBV). Second, the study extends the proactive coping model (Schwarzer & Taubert, 2002) by introducing a dimension of collective proactivity, in which anticipation is co-constructed through social cooperation under uncertainty (Extension of Proactive Coping). Third, the study introduces the notion of collective PsyCap as a lever of community-based rather than individual performance, grounded in interdependence and reciprocity. By showing that psychological capital can emerge and grow amid systemic adversity, the research nuances universalist models of entrepreneurial psychology. PsyCap is not merely a stable individual asset, but a dynamic construction shaped by cultural, social, and economic conditions (Enrichment of Psychological Capital). By integrating these three contributions, this research advances toward a contextualized theory of entrepreneurial coping in constrained environments, where resources, proactivity, and positive psychology are socially co-produced rather than individually possessed.

6.2. Managerial and Policy Implications

6.2.1. Managerial Implications

From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that entrepreneurial training in informal economies should build upon existing dynamics of collective resilience, rather than on imported models of individualized management. Three primary implications emerge: 1) Strengthening community-based savings and solidarity mechanisms: Rotating savings associations (ROSCA) and mutual aid networks act as informal incubators of trust, discipline, and financial literacy. Entrepreneurial development programs should partner with these local institutions to promote financial sustainability and peer mentoring. 2) Developing collective

proactivity training: Capacity-building initiatives should include modules on collaborative foresight, participatory planning, and crisis co-management, emphasizing group-based anticipation rather than individual risk management. 3) Institutional recognition of informal resources: Entrepreneurial support systems should acknowledge and integrate informal financial and social instruments—such as supplier credit, mentorship, or community-based lending—as legitimate forms of organizational innovation. Additional managerial implications include: 4) Embedding psychological capital development in entrepreneurship training: Programs should incorporate experiential modules that strengthen hope, resilience, optimism, and self-efficacy, complementing technical and financial training. 5) Leveraging informal social structures for business incubation: Local associations and cooperatives could serve as micro-incubators, facilitating collective learning, emotional support, and resource pooling for nascent entrepreneurs.

6.2.2. Policy Implications

On the policy front, these findings call for a re-examination of formalization strategies. Instead of attempting to “correct” informality, public policy should build upon the self-organizing capacities already embedded within local economic systems. 1) Promoting inclusive formalization: Legal recognition of informal savings and credit associations, the creation of hybrid microfinance schemes co-managed by community actors, and the valorization of social capital as an economic asset are key pathways toward inclusive entrepreneurship. 2) Supporting endogenous innovation: Public institutions and development partners should support indigenous coping innovations—such as supplier credit systems, apprenticeship networks, and informal mentorship—by creating enabling legal and fiscal frameworks. Additional policy implications include: 3) Integrating psychological resilience into entrepreneurship policy: Government and donors could fund psychosocial resilience programs for entrepreneurs exposed to chronic uncertainty. 4) Decentralizing entrepreneurial support: Municipal authorities should be empowered to co-develop localized mechanisms of collective insurance, savings, and training aligned with community practices.

6.2.3. Social Implications

Beyond the managerial and policy domains, this study carries significant social implications: 1) Reinforcing community cohesion and social trust: The recognition and strengthening of informal networks can bolster social capital, reduce economic exclusion, and foster local solidarity in fragile institutional settings. 2) Enhancing gender inclusion and empowerment: As women constitute a large share of informal entrepreneurs, community-based coping systems can serve as platforms for female empowerment, economic autonomy, and intergenerational skill transfer.

7. Conclusion, Limitations, and Future Directions

This research highlights the organizational and psychological strength of informal entrepreneurial resilience. Informal micro-entrepreneurs in Kinshasa do not

merely survive; they continuously invent forms of cooperation and meaning that transform precarity into a productive resource. Their experience invites a rethinking of entrepreneurship theory—not as a narrative of conquest, but as a moral economy of perseverance. In this sense, the study reaffirms the dual theoretical and practical ambition of entrepreneurship: to understand it not only as an economic function, but as a situated human practice, shaped by vulnerability, solidarity, and hope.

This study underscores the strategic importance of psychological and social resources in sustaining entrepreneurial activity under institutional and economic adversity. For practitioners, the findings suggest that strengthening collective resilience mechanisms—such as rotating savings groups, mutual aid associations, and informal mentorship networks—can enhance financial discipline, emotional stability, and adaptive capacity. Entrepreneurial training programs should therefore integrate modules on collective proactive coping, emphasizing peer learning, shared planning, and crisis management within community settings. Supporting the psychological dimensions of entrepreneurship—particularly hope, optimism, and self-efficacy—should complement traditional business and financial skills training. For policymakers, the results call for a shift from formalization as regulation toward formalization as empowerment. Policies should recognize and support existing informal financial systems as legitimate instruments of economic coordination. Legal recognition and technical support for community-based savings associations, simplified tax regimes for micro-entrepreneurs, and co-managed microfinance schemes can increase both stability and inclusion. Development agencies and municipal authorities should prioritize programs that build on endogenous coping practices, transforming them into scalable models of social innovation. By integrating psychological and relational resources into entrepreneurship policies, governments can strengthen not only economic survival but also the moral and social fabric of local economies.

Despite its rigorous mixed-method design and representative sampling, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the self-reported nature of PsyCap measures may introduce a social desirability bias. Second, while the contextual adaptation of the questionnaire was locally validated, it would benefit from further comparative studies across sub-Saharan African regions to strengthen external validity. Future research could explore how coping strategies evolve alongside the gradual formalization of micro-enterprises, as institutional conditions and resource access improve. It would also be relevant to examine the interaction between spirituality, entrepreneurial identity, and resilience—dimensions frequently mentioned in focus groups but still underrepresented in dominant theoretical frameworks. Cross-urban comparisons (for instance, with Abidjan, Douala, or Nairobi) could help assess the transferability of the collective coping model. Finally, advanced psychometric analyses could refine the measurement of collective psychological capital, a construct still rarely investigated in African entrepreneurship studies.

Another limitation concerns survival bias. Although the longitudinal analyses

show a significant increase in PsyCap between T1 and T2, this evolution may partly reflect a selection effect: entrepreneurs initially endowed with higher PsyCap may have been those who survived over the observation period. Since the study tracked only the 632 paired cases (out of 663 initially), caution is required when interpreting causal relationships. Future research should follow a complete cohort of microenterprises from their inception—including those that fail—to empirically isolate the psychological development effects linked to entrepreneurial experience. The present study does not account for microenterprises that ceased operations between the two survey waves. While this exclusion ensures intra-individual consistency in comparisons, it limits understanding of failure mechanisms. Future longitudinal studies could combine data on surviving and discontinued firms to explore how trajectories of psychological capital influence—or result from—entrepreneurial survival. Finally, the hostile environment was approached in a global and undifferentiated manner. Yet qualitative data reveal that forms of hostility vary in both nature (institutional, economic, social) and perceived intensity. Future research should develop a multidimensional measure of entrepreneurial hostility to better identify how specific types of constraints trigger distinct coping strategies and psychological responses.

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Data Availability Statement

The datasets collected, generated, and/or analyzed during the study are not publicly available due to data protection and confidentiality requirements. However, they may be obtained from the corresponding author upon reasonable written request and subject to approval by the university's ethics committee.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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