

## Business incubators role in fostering entrepreneurship: A comprehensive review of entrepreneurs' selection process

 Fozi Ali Belhaj<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Business Studies, Arab Open University, Saudi Arabia; f.belhaj@arabou.edu.sa (F.A.B.).

**Abstract:** The study aims to review the status and an effective selection process of entrepreneurs from business incubators in Hadhramout, Yemen, as the most important process that primarily aims to investigate the innovative and creative ideas that orient small and medium-scale enterprises desirous of commercializing R&D results, especially from the research institutions, with a view to promoting innovation and entrepreneurship development. The study adopted a combination method of observing the status of the business incubators and conducting unstructured interviews with the educational institutions' managers who provide entrepreneurship programs. The study's results found that business incubators have a significant contribution to fostering entrepreneurship in the Yemeni business environment and also revealed that the steps and practices followed to select entrepreneurs play a major role in enhancing benefits and reducing the costs of the entrepreneurs' process. Theoretically, the study contributes to improving understanding of business incubators and introduces an effective process to select entrepreneurs. In addition, it reviews the role of business incubators in fostering entrepreneurship. The study also presents a practical contribution to public and private leaders to raise awareness of the importance of business incubators for promoting entrepreneurship at the small and medium enterprise level around the world.

**Keywords:** *Business Incubators, Entrepreneur, Entrepreneurship, Selection Process.*

### 1. Introduction

A key component of economic structure, entrepreneurship plays a crucial role in wealth creation, income production, employment creation, poverty alleviation, and economic development [1, 2]. In the rapidly growth of global business environment, business incubators are considered important instruments of creativity and innovation [3]. Business incubators become the source for promoting entrepreneurship development and technological innovation at the small and medium enterprise level in both developed and developing countries [1]. The emerge of the business incubators is the reason when the small and medium enterprises play an important role in the economy and to minimize the failure rates those enterprises might head to in their starting-up [4-6]. In addition, business incubators play a major role on economic development, support for entrepreneurial ecosystems in most countries around the world [2, 7].

Some studies have indicated that governments and private sectors have effective to support entrepreneurship through development of a dynamic ecosystem life cycle model centralized on inbound marketing of knowledge [8]. However, there is a lack of studies related to the business incubator in the middle east especially in Yemeni context, where some studies have been obtained in a limited manner Albort-Morant and Ribeiro-Soriano [9] that indicated the role of incubators in students' developmental business models during training [10, 11].

Effective skills and knowledge bases are essential to ecosystem development, which requires collaborative industry with universities and educational institutional efforts [11]. Therefore, this study

reviews the status of business incubators and the followed steps of selection process of entrepreneurs in Hadhramout, Yemen as the most important process that primarily aims at investigate the innovative and creative ideas that oriented small and medium scale enterprise desirous of commercializing R&D results,

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is a complex phenomenon, exhibits a rich history of theoretical contributions, but lacks a unifying theory. Entrepreneurship is modeled as an economic phenomenon, with elements for the individual, the firm, and the environment, each of which influences success [12].

Entrepreneurship research has been criticized in the past as having breadth but little depth. In much of the extant research, scholars have drawn from theories and

frameworks from other fields, such as economic, psychology, marketing and strategy ;however without clear boundaries and/or unique variables , Entrepreneurship cannot develop into separate field [13].

The entrepreneur is the ultimate general manager, responsible for orchestrating relationships among all parts of the enterprise. In same context, what does entrepreneurial mean? Managers describe entrepreneurship with such terms as innovative, flexible, dynamic, risk taking, creative and growth oriented. The popular press, on the other hand, often defines the term as starting and operating new ventures [14].

As mentioned by Low [15] that entrepreneurship occurrence a cross five levels of analysis: individual, group, organization, industry, and society. They suggest that important insight about entrepreneurship can be gained. When researchers are able to conduct studies that are multilevel do not appear to offer a specification of level of analysis in their arguments, though their use of citations to other scholarship would seem to imply that they would concur with a view of entrepreneurship that was multi- level in nature. While their discussion of the discovery and exploitation of opportunities centers on arguments that appear to require the actions of individuals, they expand their insights from individuals to firms and institutions via modes of exploitation [16].

It's worth noting that organizations overcoming its crisis and problems by focusing on the positive attempts to encourage the entrepreneurial spirit and risk taking [17]. This could be called as an entrepreneur, on the other hand, some organizations may be considered as entrepreneurial organization or business even in the large size of the organizations

Additionally, in literature, previous research involved in the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor(GEM) documented various forms of entrepreneurial activity across countries and regions over the years concluding that establishing business incubators in less developed countries can be valuable option for improving economic development [18]. More recently, previous studies have defined the variables that can improve young people's entrepreneurship such as entrepreneurial education and self-perceived creativity to shape young individuals' attitudes towards entrepreneurship Abdelfattah, et al. [19] that require to establish business incubators.

### 2.2. Business Incubators

Incubation is collaborative process that is useful to motivate people improve their creative and innovative ideas. Furthermore, at the practitioner level, several conferences have been organized by national and multilateral bodies at which thought provoking papers have been presented to compare situational similarities and differences as well as the emerging challenges facing business incubators in different settings [20]. Some of the bodies that have been active in this area include the United Nations Fund for Science and Technology Development (UNFSTD), The German Association of Technology and Business Incubation Centers as well as the National Business Incubation Association in the U.S [1].

Business incubator term may be used to describe a wide range of companies that help entrepreneurs develop their creative ideas from conception to launch a new business [21]. It may be defined as an

organization that facilitates the process of creating successful new small enterprises by providing them with a comprehensive and integrated range of goods, services and process, and provide an atmosphere where companies receive facilities and support according to opportunities and risks in the early stages of the venture Nair and Blomquist [22] by providing early-stage businesses with existing infrastructure, networking services, promotions, and support facilities, business incubators are companies that speed up the process of creating enterprises [23-25]. Business incubators provide the fundamental resources needed for a company to turn an innovative, technology-based idea into a reality [26].

### 2.3. Incubator Costs and Benefits

Besides the costs to launch and operate business incubators and conducting entrepreneurship programs such as capital resources, operating funds, and cost of services, there are many benefits for different stakeholders [27-29][28]. Such as:

*Tenants* benefit from increased success rates, increased credibility, skill development, client-firm synergy, and easier access to seed money, knowledge, and mentors;

For *governments*, the incubator fosters regional cooperation and helps address market problems, growth, produces revenue, jobs, and taxes, and serves as a manifestation of the political commitment to small enterprises.

For *research institutes and universities*: the BIC helps increase links between university-research-industry, encourages research commercialization, and creates possibilities for faculty/graduate students to better utilize their strengths.

For *companies*, the BIC can create chances to acquire spin-offs, supply chain management, and innovations while also assisting them in fulfilling their social obligations; For *national community*: fosters self-worth and an entrepreneurial culture, in addition to local revenue because most graduating enterprises remain in the local market.

Finally, for the *global community*, it creates trade and technology transfer opportunities between client firms and their host incubators, improves comprehension of business culture, and facilitates experience sharing through partnerships and affiliations.

### 2.4. The Importance of Entrepreneurship for the Society

Entrepreneurs are one of the critical resources to the success of any local economy. Entrepreneurs perceive opportunities within the local or global marketplace and create business enterprises around these opportunities, their endeavors lead to the creation of jobs ,income ,and wealth for themselves and others in the area [20]. However most entrepreneurs do not bring a full set of skill to the process of enterprise creation thus their success is dependent on their ability to access support services within the local market, furthermore, entrepreneurs operating in rural markets ,the limited support service infrastructure creates significant obstacle to business creation and growth .The development of an entrepreneurial support infrastructure in rural region is an important strategy for encouraging entrepreneurship and rural economic development [30].

No one doubts the importance of entrepreneurship but the merits of the specific approaches to its study have been the subject of prolific debate. It is explicitly asked by Low [15] two questions about that: what exactly should be studied about entrepreneurship and how should we be doing it? And they pointed out a basic evolutionary principle: entrepreneurs are socially important not because they exit, but because they succeed in creating organization, as intellectually stimulating as it may be to find out what motivates entrepreneurs and how they differ from ordinary mortals the more critical question is how these individuals manage to create and sustain successful organization, despite severe obstacles [14].

### 2.5. The Entrepreneurship and Business Incubators

Success for today's startups requires powerful connections. Current entrepreneurial business models involve selling components of a solution, and these demand industry partnerships. Entering any sizable

market calls for channel agreements, original equipment manufacturer OEM contracts or other partnerships, which typically require seasoned executive to negotiate them. Today's startup also faces a demanding global market place in which Leaders need international experience. And with Initial Public Offering IPO's largely out of reach, young companies need expertise in handling mergers and acquisitions [13].

The basic factors that influence a successful business start-up are as follows: a qualified entrepreneur, a profitable business idea, a strong business plan, and adequate capital. Before you proceed, you should assess both your own entrepreneurial skills and the viability of your business concept. If it is not feasible (profitable) for you and your business concept to succeed, you will not need to spend time writing a business plan and seeking financing [16].

Any incubator need to many requirements in order to operate such as an Agribusiness focus, out wall entrepreneurs, cost per job, entrepreneurial training, management skills, financing and government policy [31].

A number of respondents also indicated that they have attempted to start a small business on the side in order to secure an additional source of income some of them were not successful due to government red tape and the lengthy process required to set-up a business. Their business ideas were also not creative and new, but based on emulating those who were successful in their own communities according to them, it is hard to come up with a new idea, and copying a successful trend minimizes their risks [32].

By providing entrepreneurs with the foregoing services on a 'one-stop' basis, and enabling tenants to reduce their overhead costs by sharing facilities, business incubators are able to significantly improve the survival and growth prospects of new start-ups. However, it should be pointed out that in its generic sense, the term business incubator is also used to describe a wide range of organizations that in one way or another help entrepreneur to develop their ideas from inception to full commercialization [33].

Despite the important of business incubator in business world, there is a little attention has been given to business incubators to support and encourage sustainable entrepreneurship during the first steps of business development. Indeed, during the incubation phase, start-ups are supported in their institutional and strategic evolution by different services provided by business incubators [34]. It is important to policymakers, and researchers to understand the value of business incubator to fostering entrepreneurship that help towards actions and strategies that enhance the overall success of startups in the entrepreneurial landscape [35].

### 3. Methods

This research employed both observation that made on review the status of business incubators practices and unstructured interview with 32 employees and managers in 4 business incubators and educational institutions in Hadhramout, Yemen who have concerning and offer entrepreneurship initiatives and programs. The data were collected and analyzed for both observation and interview.

### 4. Results

#### 4.1. General Characteristics of the Participants

Table 1, mentioned to the participants' information, that indicated 56.25% males and 43.75% female that reflect the nature of Yemeni culture that male more involved with business than female. In addition, the age of participants showed that majority 59.3% was youth category from 21-30 years, and the rest 25% from 31-40 years followed by 15.7% from 41-50 years. This result indicated to the youth category who is more interesting to entrepreneurship activities. In terms of managerial level, among the 32 respondents, 12.5% were from the top management, and 40.6% from middle and 46.9% from the first level. Regarding to the education, most of the participants 65.6% were bachelor holders, followed by master 15.7% and 6,2% who hold PhD.

**Table 1.**  
General characteristics of the participants (N = 32).

Gender	No.	Percentage
Male	18	56.25
Female	14	43.75
Age		
21–30	19	59.3
31–40	8	25
41–50	5	15.7
Managerial Level		
Top	4	12.5
Middle level	13	40.6
First level	15	46.9
Education		
Secondary school and less	4	12.5
Bachelor	21	65.6
Master	5	15.7
PhD	2	6.2
Total	32	100%

#### 4.2. Overview of Business Incubators Services

Based on the observation and interview results, the incubators and institutions who offer entrepreneurship programs provide valuable services to entrepreneurs which are: logistical, strategic, and operational support services.

##### 4.2.1. Logistical Support Services

The logistical services include ready to move in office space units that are fully finished, equipped, and networked. They also include office support services such as reception, secretarial services, meeting rooms, faxing and telephone facilities, and photocopiers.

##### 4.2.2. Strategic Support services

The strategic support services offer valuable access to strategy and financial planning services, product development, contacts and partnerships development, interim executive management, business development, sales, and marketing support, as well as legal and accounting advice and support.

##### 4.2.3. Operational support Services

Through the network of professional services providers, there are facilitate access to qualified, cost efficient, and industry level operational support services such as legal, accounting marketing web development, technical development, public relations, and other operational support services typically required by entrepreneurs and start –ups.

##### 4.2.4. Qualifying Members

Entrepreneurs, start-ups, and high growth companies in business sector can apply for membership in the incubators and join their programs. Successful candidates who pass the followed selection process can qualify for membership in the incubators.

##### 4.2.5. Business Model

The incubators objective is to support entrepreneurship and innovation in the business sector, and to that extent services are highly subsidized and come at a much lower cost that comparable services in the market. The strategic support services are valuable ones and are difficult to seek and obtain in the market. In addition, contribute towards part of the logistical and support services cost, and directly cover their operational services cost and, obviously, their capital and human resource requirements.

#### 4.3. *The Selection Process of the Entrepreneurs*

According to participants' response and observation of the incubators' status, the selection process of entrepreneurs that followed by business incubators can be summarized as follows:

##### 4.3.1. *Deal Sourcing*

The process of deal sourcing refers to the proactive identification of potential sources of entrepreneurs, start-ups, and innovative ideas, introducing the incubators for them, and encouraging them to present themselves to the incubator.

Tapping into the right sources of deal flow is essential to reach the right candidates and will ensure efficient usage of the incubators resources.

A key part of this process is spreading awareness about the value and role of incubators at large, as well as the specific characteristics and model of the certain business incubator and its targeted incubates. This can be achieved through the dissemination of awareness material such as the incubator's brochure, a document of frequently asked questions, as well as face-to-face presentations and meetings in a reach out process to the Jordanian entrepreneurial and start-up community.

##### 4.3.2. *Screening*

As a result of the deal sourcing activities, entrepreneurs and start-ups will approach the incubator with the seed of idea, a partially-completed business plan, or a complete business plan. Before investing valuable time in meeting the entrepreneurs or evaluating the business plan, the incubator will conduct an initial screen of the application to assess its viability and determine whether it meets the incubator criteria.

This initial screen will be facilitated through a comprehensive preliminary application questionnaire that will be available on the incubator's website as well as distributed through the deal sourcing activities and upon request from the incubator's management.

Upon receiving and reviewing the questionnaire, the incubator management and / or advisors will either invite the entrepreneur for a meeting, or convey an apology if the candidate does not meet the minimum incubation criteria for the particular incubator.

This meeting will allow the incubator to interview the candidate and verify its scoring of the information provided in the questionnaire. As a result of this meeting, candidates may be "qualified to proceed to the evaluation stage, or an apology will be issued for them in case the interview was not successful.

Successful qualifying candidates who already have a completed or partially completed business plan may immediately enter the evaluation phase. Those who do not have a business plan at all will be asked to develop one. If the management feels that the candidate can develop a business plan on his own, then he or she will be requested to do so.

In the case of candidates who need advising and guidance in developing the business plan, the incubator will assign to them an Advisor who will work with them, through limited "per-incubation" guidance meetings and identification of business planning resources working towards developing a partial or completed business plan.

The role of the advisor will not be to develop the business plan on behalf of the entrepreneur, but rather to engage in a limited number of sessions to guide the entrepreneur and provide feedback and support

##### 4.3.3. *Evaluation*

To enter this stage, the incubation candidate will need to have a partially or fully completed business plan. In addition, the business plan will subsequently go through a formally scoring and approval process and due diligence by the incubator's management and/or advisors, the result of which will either be initial approval of the candidate or an apology.

Once the business plan has been formally scored and approved, the incubator's management and advisors will conduct preliminary due diligence and prepare a report outlining the logistical and support requirements of the candidate, and accordingly issue an (Incubation term sheet), and present it to the candidate.

#### *4.3.4. Admission*

If the candidate and the incubator management / advisors agree on the incubation term sheet, the management and/or advisors will prepare a comprehensive report that outlines the logistical and support needs of the candidates and a recommendation of the scope of support that the incubator will grant to the candidate. This report will include the budget required for both the logistical support subsidy as well as the strategic support subsidy.

This report will be submitted to the incubator's management for approval of admission and provision of logistical and support services to the incubates as well as approval of the level of support (including a detailed budget of the anticipated cost of supporting the candidate).

Upon the incubator managements' approval, the required contracts will be signed between the incubators management, the entrepreneur, and the provider of support services, and the candidate will be successfully admitted to the incubator.

#### *4.4. The Post-Selection Process of the Entrepreneurs*

##### *4.4.1. Reporting and Evaluation*

Post-selection, the start-up, and its assigned support service provider will be required to communicate to the management of the incubator the performance of the company according to standard key performance indicators, which may include securing financing, successful development of products, reaching sustainability status, or other indicators.

All through this process, key milestones will be set for periodic reporting to the incubators board and objectives will be set towards graduating the candidate of terminating the incubation process if the start-up consistently fails to achieve its targets.

##### *4.4.2. Graduation / Termination*

According to the initially approved admission document, which will detail the incubation period and set of support services, and the on-going reporting and evaluation of the incubates, the graduation milestone should be reached after fulfilling the graduation criteria, or alternatively the incubation will be terminated in case of failure of achieving this criteria within the preset framework.

In either case, the start-up and its support services provider will deliver a final report to the management of the incubator who will recommend graduation or termination to the board of the incubator.

The needed release documents will be developed, approved, and signed, ending the relationship of the incubates with the incubator.

## **5. Discussion**

According to the content analysis and unstructured interviews have been conducted with all participants, the results highlighted that the Yemeni culture especially in Hadramout discourage the entrepreneurial activities, also the society doesn't have sufficient infrastructure and motivates to enhance those activities. Moreover, business incubators play major role in fostering the entrepreneurship, especially in the emerging countries such as Yemen which lack to economical, social, and cultural motivations.

Business incubators as entrepreneurial model that offer by particular institutions support Yemeni economy, create jobs and wealth, especially in business sector especially in technology sector. In same context, the results revealed that most of specializes in business incubators provide more services to the



entrepreneurs such as logistical support services, strategic support services, operational support services ...etc.

In terms of the selection process and approaches, the result showed that there are effective criteria have to select, evaluate and monitor the entrepreneurs before, through and after the incubation period. It has institutionalization system to incubate the entrepreneurs. Furthermore, the incubators motivate and enhance the entrepreneurs by serial and nascent system. The result also, indicated that social relationships and networks activities help the entrepreneurs to achieving their goals.

Besides that, entrepreneurs have successful companies that reflect the capabilities of business incubators in fostering the entrepreneurs effectively.

Finally, the participants mentioned to main challenges and restrictions that faced business incubators such as: governmental support, private sector support, community awareness and support, supportive culture to motivate entrepreneurship activities, select the location, formal procedures, capital, professionals and clear practices of entrepreneur's program.

## 6. Recommendations

To overcome the challenges and limitations, there are some recommendation that suggested to enhance entrepreneurship such; launching a nation-wide campaign in order to introduce the competence of entrepreneurship and the role of business incubators. Besides that, revisit the curriculum of all educational institutions and introduce the concept of entrepreneurship at an early age. Furthermore, the study recommended to encourage the private sector and public sectors to provide funds and training in order to support existing and potential entrepreneurs. Establishing promotion programs and supportive culture to attract and guide more entrepreneurs are recommended.

Additionally, the study has some limitations and challenges in practice and research filed. Therefore, to enhance generalizability, future research should include other samples from other Yemeni cities and other countries who have business incubators and educational institutions such as universities who are involving to entrepreneurship.

## 7. Conclusion

This study is an important that helps to highlight the role of business incubator in fostering entrepreneurship. It focused on the status and an effective selection process of entrepreneurs from business incubators in Hadhramout, Yemen as a crucial process to investigate the innovative and creative ideas that oriented small and medium scale enterprise in Yemeni context. The study indicated that business incubators has significant contribution in fostering entrepreneurship in the Yemeni business environment, and also found that followed process, criteria and practice to select entrepreneurs' lead to enhance benefits of entrepreneurs' process that followed in business incubators.

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### Transparency:

The author confirms that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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