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Summary

This paper outlines the background and direction for the study we will conduct and write about in our Master Thesis. The first part of the paper includes a short history of incubators and reasons for why they exist, which is later followed up by the purpose of the paper and the research question.

The second part of the paper includes a literature review of earlier research conducted in this field where we focus on entrepreneurship, business incubators (history, networks, technology business incubators and success criteria in incubators), knowledge and knowledge sharing.

The third part of the paper explains our choice of research method, and the fourth and the fifth part of the paper give information regarding the incubator we will study as well a plan of implementation.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background

It is a known fact that more startups fail than succeed. A study by Shikhar Gosh (2011) reports that 75% of venture-backed startups fail. There are a multitude of reasons for these, and various sources quote: lack of focus, lack of motivation, commitment and passion, failure to identify root cause of customer dissatisfaction, too much pride, taking advise from the wrong people, lack of general and domain-specific business knowledge (finance, operations and marketing) lack of feedback on prototypes, inability to raise capital or raise too much capital too soon, weak teams, etc. This has resulted in the trending phenomenon of business incubators having the sole purpose of helping startup companies off to a good start.

Business incubators provide services to assist other companies to provide knowledge and insight for those less experienced in specific areas. These have proven particularly useful for startups that initially have limited resources. Business incubators can be viewed as hubs of knowledge that its members can access and receive assistance from.

Several studies underline that a firm's business network, directly influence its performance (Eveleens, van Rijnsoever, & Niesten, 2017). Powell et al. (1996), emphasize that a central position in a network and strong relationships usually enhance performance, as one possesses the ability to draw advantages from information, power, learning and resources. On the other hand, it may also add constraints to a firm's ability to perform, as it may be costly to maintain, and potentially blind the firm I regards to alternative and new development areas (Eveleens, van Rijnsoever, & Niesten, 2017).

Network-based incubators aim to facilitate an arena that is providing access to services and resources (Eveleens, van Rijnsoever, & Niesten, 2017) and thereby influence the performance of technology-based startups.

1.2 Purpose/Gap

Theodorakopoulos et al (2014), enlists that a rich and broad variety of conceptualizations, insights and approaches have emerged because of the

increased attention on literature about network-based incubation. Despite the growing interest, business incubators and the process of incubation has not yet reached a status of universal acceptance. An example underlining this is the notion of multiplicity. Theodorakopoulos et al (2014) suggests a broad variation in perception by listing the following terms that clearly refer to the same concept, including *research parks*, *enterprise centers*, *seedbeds*, *science parks*, *technopole*, *industrial parks*, *innovation centers*, *knowledge parks*, *business accelerator*, *cold frames*, *hatcheries*, *hives*, *germinators*, *hubs*, *hot-desks*, *graduators*, *grow-on space*, *spokes*, *ideas labs*, *managed workspace*, *venture labs*, *business centers*, *fertilisators* and the *networked incubator*.

Furthermore, the researchers of the literature have acknowledged two major shortfalls. One being the contradictory result found in the research on network-based influence on startups' performance (Bruneel, Ratinho, Clarysse, & Groen, 2012). While some studies argue that network-based incubators influence startups' performance, others find no direct relation between them. The other shortcoming is based on the limited theoretical depth applied in research of incubation, resulting in a gap around fact based theory describing the diversity in incubator performance (Bruneel, Ratinho, Clarysse, & Groen, 2012). Bruneel et al. (2012), aimed to overcome these shortcomings, and to better understand the literature they used three theoretical management theories as lenses to view the effect of network-based incubators on startups' performance; the resource-based view (RBV), the knowledge-based view (KBV) and the organizational learning (OL), and social capital theory (SCT). Grant (1998), emphasize the importance of KBV, as knowledge is the most crucial resource to drive a firm's performance. This is based on the fact that knowledge can provide a lasting competitive advantage, whilst all other resources are more easily transferred.

1.3 Research Question

There is a comprehensive amount of research and theory within the literature of knowledge sharing. However, there are gaps in the existing literature around how the mechanisms are applied in the underlying construct of a Technology Business Incubator, and how it affects its members' development.

We would like to explore this area through a qualitative research, by observing the knowledge shared in a technological network-based business incubator, in the

interest of seeing if there is a linkage between these factors. We suggest performing an in-depth exploration of how network-based incubators can facilitate arenas for its members to extract and benefit from each other's knowledge, and how this relates to their performance.

In the interest of providing an insight to how knowledge sharing within networks directly contribute to enhanced performance, we have narrowed our research question down to:

> *Considering startups with knowledge-intensive products and/or services: How does the technology business incubator, StartupLab, facilitate a network-based arena for its members to share and acquire knowledge of operational character from each other and the host, and how is this affecting their performance?*

2.0 Literature review

2.1 Entrepreneurship

Reynolds et al. (1999) defined a nascent entrepreneur to be someone who initiates activities to create a new firm. The research has earlier focused on the entrepreneurs and the owners of the ventures, rather than the environment in which they are engaged. However, in more recent time entrepreneurial studies use a process approach to explain the birth of new ventures (Škerlavaj, Štemberger, Škrinjar, & Dimovski, 2007). Korunka et al. (2003) have defined the process as a set of actions or operations that accumulates into a new venture. Despite an easy definition, actions and operations initiated can be of almost any character, and entrepreneurship can differ from startups to fully grown businesses looking to harvest from innovation. This may be one of the reasons why the literature cannot provide a concise definition of the incubator process.

Two perspectives emerge for analysis in this entrepreneurial process view. These perspectives for analyzing expresses the leap from an individual entrepreneurial approach to a collaborative innovative environment that entrepreneurship in incubators consist of. One perspective is around the lifecycle of a venture, while the other is opportunity management. Studies have examined the phases of the

lifecycle, and define them as conception, gestation, infancy and adolescence (Wagner, 2007). The conception and gestation phases is what earlier was referred to as a nascent entrepreneur, whereas one examine the posterity in the infancy phase, and finally adolescence as the growth phase (Wagner, 2007). The second perspective is management of the opportunity. This involves everything to do with the managerial aspect of venture-creation. Shane and Venktaraman (2000) talked about the possibilities to exploit and profit from the opportunities within an innovation process, and that this process is affected by previously gathered knowledge. These opportunities to harvest essential knowledge, not easily obtained elsewhere, can be found within networks. Furthermore, a business network allows startups to acquire and exploit resources through assessing, assembling and deploying them. In the final part of the process ventures achieve validity through previous phases.

Evers et al. (2014) refer to the term entrepreneur used by Richard Cantillon (1979) as: "the agent who purchases the means of production and combines them into marketable products." Even though the definition of new technology-based firms seems to be somewhat open, Bollinger et al. (1983) suggest that such firms have few founders, are independent from larger firms and that "*the primary motivation for founding such enterprises should be to exploit a technically idea … it should be the first time this particular application is being used.*" (Evers, Cunningham, & Hoholm, 2014).

In many cases technology entrepreneurs tend to focus to a large degree on developing their product or service without taking into consideration how their product or service will fit the market or how they will get it out there. In other words, focusing too much on the technical part of their product or service can lead technology entrepreneurs to leave insufficient amounts of attention to other important parts of the entrepreneurial process, such as market-validation or developing a business model around their product or service (Evers et al., 2014).

Technology entrepreneurs in the early stages often lack the required competence and experience when it comes to important parts of the entrepreneurial process, such as strategy, marketing and finance, and so they learn by doing as their firms evolve. Additionally, these entrepreneurs often have limited knowledge of the

best-fitting market for their products and services. They typically have few products/technologies ready for market introduction and the biggest challenge is a lack of a solid business case taking their technology to market with an expectation of profitable business. To be more specific, their challenge is not necessarily invention and innovation, but rather the process of commercialization (Evers, Cunningham, & Hoholm, 2014).

2.2 Business Incubators

2.2.1 Business Incubators' history

The formal concept of business incubators, dating back to 1959 when Joseph Mancuso opened the Batavia Industrial Center (Theodorakopoulos, Kakabadse, & McGowan, 2014), has in recent decades witnessed a massive growth, where more and more companies launch so called startup-programs; i.e. business incubators. Business incubators aim to provide vital expertise to support new ventures in overcoming initial hurdles in the startup phase. Startups often lack resources, experience and a business network. This is where business incubators provide major impact. One critical area for new ventures is the lack of skills, experience and knowledge. We argue that the fundamentals of business incubators are mainly sources for knowledge sharing.

As time has passed, the support required by startups have changed because of changes in the way business is being executed. This is due to changes in external factors such as new emerging technologies, new ways of manufacturing, change in distribution, etc. Trying to facilitate an overview of how business incubators influence performance for its members, mainly network-based incubation, research in the last two decades, has gained considerable interest (Hansen, Chesbrough, Sull, & Nohria, 2000).

As we entered the technology era, more and more technology-based startups have emerged, creating a more extensive market for business incubators than previously. The National Business Incubation Association - NBIA (2014) states that five decades after the first incubator came to life, the number of incubators have surpassed 7 000 worldwide, proving that there is a massive demand for the expertise provided. During this period, the way of supporting startups has changed. Initially, incubators primarily focused on helping to establish

infrastructure. Later the scope expanded to include one-to-one business advice. And finally, incubators have changed their approach with the intention to facilitate network-business (Bruneel, Ratinho, Clarysse, & Groen, 2012). This change in focus, is a result of the realization that startups need wider support due to intangible resources (Eveleens, van Rijnsoever, & Niesten, 2017).

2.2.2 Business Incubator Networks

The foundation of a network are nodes and the ties connecting the nodes (Eveleens, van Rijnsoever, & Niesten, 2017). The nodes are typically assessed at various organizational levels (such as firms, divisions, projects or individuals), but can also be categorized in terms of member types (large firms, small firms, universities, government) (Eveleens, van Rijnsoever, & Niesten, 2017). And the ties are usually referred to as relational characteristics. These relational characteristics includes friendship, cooperation, power, and exchange of advice, assets or information (Eveleens, van Rijnsoever, & Niesten, 2017). Looking at the part of the network affected by network-based incubation, the literature largely agrees on the type of nodes in the startup network, being universities, incubators managers, consultants, financiers and other startups (Eveleens, van Rijnsoever, & Niesten, 2017).

Ratinho et al. (2009) questions if network-based incubation influence startups performance at all, and if so; how? Their research was aimed to investigate to what extent business incubators in fact provides their members with the right tools and resources to overcome their developmental problems (Ratinho, Rainer, & Groen, 2009). Their findings suggested that strategic challenges where among the most frequent and serious problems addressed by the members of the business incubators, and not that of a human capital character which was thought to be the crucially required expertise. The paradox they witnessed, was that there was a mismatch between what startups saw as their initial problems versus what they needed help with (Ratinho, Rainer, & Groen, 2009). The same results can be found in a review done by Hackett and Dilts (2014), who also raise the question of business incubators' impact, and draws the same parallels to the literature in their studies. So, where and how can business incubators provide its members with relevant knowledge and resources?

2.2.3 Technology Business Incubators

As technology-based startups typically require different resources to other entrepreneurs, technology business incubators (TBI) have emerged to accommodate those needs and demands. Smilor and Gill (1986) formulated the notion of TBIs as a linkage between entrepreneurial talent, capital, know-how and technology. These TBIs exists as innovations centers, accelerators, science parks and technology incubators (Mian, Lamine, & Fayolle, 2016), and their purpose is to develop local innovative firms by promoting technology transfer and dispersal of products (EU, 2010). They aim to help startups to survive and grow, by providing members the possibility of joining networks, support with business services, access to resources, capital and professional services (Mian, Lamine, & Fayolle, 2016).

By implementing the essence of networks in TBI, the characteristics of a network-based incubator is that it aims to foster partnership between startup teams and other successful technological firms (Hansen, Chesbrough, Sull, & Nohria, 2000). This is done by ensuring that knowledge, experience and talent is shared across firms, and by nurturing technology and marketing relationship. Startups can, with the help of such an incubator, obtain resources not easily obtained elsewhere, and quickly partner up with others (Hansen, Chesbrough, Sull, & Nohria, 2000). This may allow startups to establish a competitive advantage in the market. Mort and Weerawardena (2006), referred to by Pettersen et al. (2015), found that both when it comes to product development and identifying potential markets, networking capability is an advantage for firms that are developing knowledge-intensive products. By gaining access to larger networks, firms can learn faster, which is critical for startups' ability to develop in a positive direction (Pettersen et al. 2016).

Bergek and Norrman (2008) argue that earlier research on incubators and technology hubs has mainly focused on the internal network and how the relationships and interaction between the members can stimulate new ideas and innovation (Cantù , Ylimäki , Sirén , & Nickell, 2015). At the same time, research has focused less on the incubators ability to connect incubatees with external parties, such as customers, suppliers, potential partners, universities and financiers (Cantù , Ylimäki , Sirén , & Nickell, 2015). Incubators have a role to create a network where the incubatees can gain access to activities supporting their

business and they can also provide networking with different institutions, such as research centers, universities, associations and potential partners (Cantù , Ylimäki , Sirén , & Nickell, 2015).

When it comes to understanding and explaining the local innovation created within incubators, science parks, etc., access to and exchange of local knowledge are some of the most relevant factors (Díez-Vial & Fernández-Olmos, 2015). Lambooy (2010) expressed that the local knowledge found in these places is difficult to access from the outside, and is something the members can take advantage of. Being part of an incubator or a science park, entrepreneurs can get access to local knowledge by reaching out partners such as, researchers, universities and financiers, as well as sharing ideas, experience and advice with other co-located entrepreneurs (Díez-Vial & Fernández-Olmos, 2015).

2.2.4 Incubator success criteria

Much like the broad variety found in previous research when defining incubators, there is no consensus on definition of their success (Theodorakopoulos, Kakabadse, & McGowan, 2014). The reason for this is that each "stakeholder's" objective or expectation affect how they measure success (Lalkaka, 2001). Whereas an incubator manager may look at survival rate as the critical success factor, another may find it dissatisfying unless it is accompanied by an increase in revenue, enhanced competitive advantage, etc. As a result, the literature provides a long list of measures to define efficiency and quality, and which indicators and variables have the biggest impact (Theodorakopoulos, Kakabadse, & McGowan, 2014). However, when evaluating business incubators, Smilor and Gill (1986) identified ten critical success factors;

> "on-site business expertise, access to financing and capitalization, financial support, community support, entrepreneurial networks, entrepreneurial education, perception of success, selection process for members, ties with a university and a concise program with clear policies, procedures and milestones" (Smilor and Gill, 1986).

In the review by Theodorakopoulos et al. (2014), the authors found several studies extending the list of success criteria to include:

> "The clarity of mission and objectives, the monitoring of the performance of business incubation, the sector specificity, the incubatee selection process, the graduation/exit processes, the proximity to a major university, the level and quality of management support, the extent of access to potential internal/external entrepreneurial networks, and last but not least, the competency of the incubator manager to configure hard and soft elements of the business incubation environment and shape the relational context within which incubatee entrepreneurs operate"
> (Theodorakopoulos, Kakabadse, & McGowan, 2014, p 608)

Combining the findings with several other studies led Theodorakopoulos et al. (2014) to derive the following success criteria to be the common denominators:

- Incubatee selection policy
- Exit/graduation policy
- Shared office space and resources
- Incubator manager competences and relationship with incubatees
- Support services management know-how, advice on regulations, technology and RD (research & development), support networking (internal and external) and access to funding
- Monitoring performance

2.3 Knowledge

Teece (2007) argues that knowledge consists of valuable intangible assets for the creation and sustainability of competitive advantage. However, knowledge is not always easy to conceptualize. Ipe (2003) lists three distinct characteristics that separates knowledge from information. Unlike information, knowledge is about beliefs and commitment, meaning that knowledge is a result of perspectives, intentions or stance taken by the individuals. *Furthermore, knowledge provides means to some end, and therefore is about taking action*. And finally, whereas information can be of any sort, knowledge is context specific and relational, and thereby providing meaning.

There are various types of knowledge, differentiated by how they influence performance of a firm (Eveleens, van Rijnsoever, & Niesten, 2017). Nonaka (1994) divides knowledge in two categories; tacit and explicit. The nature of the knowledge is what separates them, meaning the knowledge's codifiability and mechanisms for transfer, which methods are used for acquisition and accumulation, and the potential to be gathered and shared (Ipe, 2003). Where explicit knowledge is a knowledge that can be codified and transmitted through a formal and systematic language due to its nature, tacit knowledge characteristics makes it difficult to formalize and communicate (Nonaka, 1994). Codified knowledge rarely provides critical contribution in new ventures success as it's easily accessible and thereby does not provide any competitive advantage. There may exist explicit knowledge useful for startups, but Gertler (2003) emphasize the importance of tacit knowledge for innovation-based value creation. Research by Wang and Wang (2012) support theories that tacit knowledge sharing influence both operational and financial performance.

Lowendahl, Revang and Fosstenlokken (2001) derives three important types of value creating knowledge in organizations. *Know-how* (subjective and tacit experience-based knowledge), *Know-what* (objective task-related knowledge) and *Dispositional knowledge* (referring to personal knowledge such as talents, aptitudes and abilities). Furthermore, knowledge exists within organizations at multiple levels. De Long and Fahey (2000) divided knowledge into individual, group and organizational levels.

2.4 Knowledge sharing

Bartol and Srivastava (2002) underlines that knowledge sharing is critical to knowledge creation, organizational learning and performance enhancement. For organizations to capitalize on the knowledge they inhabit, they must understand the process of creating and sharing knowledge, and how to use it (Ipe, 2003).

Wang & Noe (2010) emphasize the importance of knowledge sharing in order to succeed in knowledge management. Knowledge sharing can be viewed as the link that allows knowledge to be transferred between individuals and the organizations, and makes an organization be able to convert knowledge into

economic and competitive value (Ipe, 2003). It is referred to as the sharing of both task information and know-how with other people in order to create new solutions and ideas or the implementation of policies or procedures (Wang & Noe, 2010). There are several factors influencing knowledge sharing. Ipe (2003) lists the following; the nature of knowledge, the motivation to share, the opportunities to share, and the culture of the work environment. Depending on these factors, knowledge can be shared through different channels, such as written correspondence, face-to-face communications or documenting, organizing and capturing knowledge from others (Wang & Noe, 2010).

Referring to the knowledge-based view (KBV), when interpreting and acquiring knowledge, networks can play an important part (Eveleens, van Rijnsoever, & Niesten, 2017). In an organizational context, much like a network, people can learn from the experience of others, as well as their own direct experiences (Wang and Wang, 2012). Håkansson and Waluszewski (2007) portrays knowledge as a resource where the value of the knowledge emerges when organizations interact. These interactions are found within networks. Relationships within networks may lead startups to create cohort values together, by allowing startups to develop the knowledge on how to be more effective and efficient with resource utilization. Viewing a network-based incubator as an organization, one can imply that because of interaction among tenants in a network, knowledge gathered from one member can be transferred to their collaborative firms. This can be shared and transferred through feedback, explanation, advice or help (Hutzschenreuter & Horstkotte, 2010).

3.0 Research method and implementation plan

The study will focus on a detailed and intensive analysis of one case. Given our research question, a case study design allows us to focus on understanding "the dynamics presented within single settings" (Eisenhardt, 1989). The aim will be to examine the findings within our framework, and thereby provide descriptions of the phenomena. Our objective is to contribute with meaningful research to the literature, and discuss whether there is transferability in our findings.

To provide context on the phenomena, a qualitative approach has been selected. We believe that conducting semi-structured, in-depth interviews of key stakeholders is the best way to understand how knowledge is shared and facilitated in the tech incubator, StartupLab. Interviews, combined with observations of the incubator, will provide data containing opinions, values and actions by the actors in this social context. To understand the key processes of StartupLab, we will interview incubatees at different stages of the startup process, as well as mentors, partners and other key personnel connected with the incubator. Interviewing startups at different stages and with different requirements will be done with the objective of acquiring an impression of how StartupLab is facilitating its services towards the different incubatees. Interviewing other key individuals, such as mentors, partners etc. will give us extended information regarding how knowledge is shared and facilitated throughout the incubator and how this affects all the collaborators connected to StartupLab.

The main focus will be to interview incubatees with similar characteristics, but at different stages of the start-up process. In order to collect enough data from this part of the study, we will interview a minimum of 5 incubatees. The efficient amount of interviews will depend on when we retrieve findings that collectively establish an overview of the phenomena.

4.0 Sample

StartupLab is the largest tech-incubator in Norway and is located at the Oslo Science Park. They have supported more than 200 technology startups since 2012, 74% of which are still growing. Some of the alumni companies include Zwipe, Kahoot, Remarkable, Huddly and No Isolation, and today the incubator has approximately 80 active members.

The core value of StartupLab is their Network. Their team, members, alumni and external network, consisting of industry experts, serial entrepreneurs, investors and scientists, actively share knowledge that benefit the entire group.

Since the main purpose of the thesis is to evaluate the entrepreneurs perceived value of the assistance provided by the incubator, we find the incubator managers

view on success to be less relevant. However, a thorough research on what the incubator manager portray as essential factors to succeed, will be beneficial understand the dynamic of what StartupLab offers. Based on what start-ups require in order to succeed in the literature of entrepreneurship, and what they can't find, extract or benefit from elsewhere, we find the most relevant type of knowledge to be of the operational character.

We are in dialog with several of the entrepreneurs at StartupLab, and will within a short period of time have established which start-ups we will interview. The common denominator among all the objects for study, is that they all have a technologic product they need help to accelerate into the marked. We are looking at firms in the need of operational knowledge and skills to access the right customers in the right marked, alongside help with the financial aspect of running a firm.

As listed earlier (2.2.4 Incubator success criteria), we will evaluate the performance of StartupLab up against the following criterias and assess how they influence the incubatees:

- Incubatee selection policy
- Exit/graduation policy
- Shared office space and resources
- Incubator manager competences and relationship with incubatees
- Support services management know-how advice on regulations technology and RD support networking (internal and external) access to funding
- Monitoring performance

5.0 Timeline

15th of January	Submission of preliminary Thesis Report
16th of January - 1st of March	Complete literature review
1st of March - 31st of March	Qualitative data design, collection of data
1st of April - 15th of April	Analyze qualitative data
16th of April- 30th of April	Document findings
1st of May - 31st of May	Conclusion, implication and limitation of findings
1st of June - 31st of August	Edit paper and apply finishing touches
3rd of September	Submission deadline

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