

Business Incubation in Uganda: Services, Processes and Incubatee Perceptions- A case study

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Abstract

Purpose-This paper examines the nature of services and processes of business incubation. Its specific objectives are to establish the nature of services offered by business incubation centers in Uganda, examine the incubation process and to establish the perception of business incubatees about business incubation services using a case of FinAfrica a private social enterprise.

Methodology-This paper presents findings from one incubation center FinAfrica as a case study. Ethnographic design is adopted while observation and interview methods are used to collect data.

Results-Key services offered by FinAfrica incubation center include entrepreneurial training, provision of office space, legal and accounting services, mentoring, coaching, entrepreneurial networks and general office administration. The centre has a unique business incubation model which starts with motivating people to start businesses, capacity building, business registration, and ends with graduation after attaining capability for self-sustainability. Incubatees perceive the services offered by the incubation centre as helpful through training, affordable office space, entrepreneurial ecosystem and opportunities for a lean startup.

Implications- While this study does not offer statistical inferences for generalisation because of the qualitative design and single case, the exploration of FinAfrica provides insights about how Incubation centers need to plan for positive and sustainable entrepreneurial impact for startups. There is need for more Government and other development partners' involvement in business incubation and post incubation support for competitiveness and growth.

Originality/value- This study provides insights about the key services offered in the incubation process and provides insights into the perceived benefits of business incubation. It also contributes to literature about business incubation with practical evidence from an emerging economy whose focus is on private sector development and innovation promotion.

Key words: Business incubation, incubation process and services, entrepreneurship, startup, FinAfrica.

Introduction

The 21st century has witnessed a strong need for entrepreneurial activity. This has specifically been evidenced in the need to increase economic resource utilisation through business start-ups. Having a high level of startups helps to curb unemployment (Venessaar & Loomet, 2006), reduces crime associated with redundancy (Fatoki & Chindoga, 2011) increases national revenue through export gains (Ahimbisibwe & Abaho, 2013), improves social economic welfare of households as well as increasing innovation and creating activities of economic industries (Smith, 2010). The mantle of increasing business startup has become a global agenda across all economies including international institutions such as the United Nations in cooperation with the regional blocks like the African Union through the theme of the Sustainable Development Goals.

In a local perspective, the Ugandan government strongly believes that favoring and supporting entrepreneurial startups especially at SME level plays a strategic role in economic

growth and development by contributing to wealth creation, employment and income generation (Kasekende & Opondo, 2003). With increased business startup, the government anticipates that the Ugandan economy can attain middle income status by the year 2020 (National Development Plan II). The Government of Uganda through the Vision 2040 sees all Ugandans becoming resourceful and prosperous through gainful employment, savings and investments (Rwendeire, 2012). However, the country's ranking in competitiveness is still very low. Specifically, the World Economic Forum Report (2015-2016) indicates that Uganda ranks 115 out of 142 countries in terms of overall competitiveness of its goods and services. Some of the key antecedents to this low competitiveness include low levels of innovation, poor infrastructure, low and inappropriate entrepreneurial skills, weak financial markets, poor technology, low labour market efficiency, high cost of finance and limited access to credit. In view of this, the idea of business incubation was generated to reduce these challenges (World Economic Forum (WEF, 2012-2016)).

Business incubation refers to the process of developing entrepreneurial productivity, triggering the development of feasible business ideas through exposure to different industrial and sectoral practices and shielding competition (Buys & Mbwewana, 2007; Aggarwal, 2012; Akhuesmonkhan, Raimi, Patel and Fadipe, 2014). Business incubation also involves training and guiding the feasible assessment of the proposed venture resources such as finances, office space, operating space and administrative support (Xu, 2009; Aggarwal, 2012; Meru & Struwig, 2011). The primary rationale behind business incubation is to stimulate the role of small business in economic growth and social development and to address the challenges of failure of small businesses during the formative years (WEF, 2012-2016; Aggarwal, 2012).

One of the boldly mentioned strategies to achieve Uganda's Vision 2040 is to invest directly in strategic areas to stimulate the economy and facilitate private sector growth (Uganda Vision 2040 Policy paper). Some of the efforts include supporting the establishment of business incubation centers to gestate innovative businesses (Kyaruzi & Hales, 2009; Meru & Struwig, 2011). Business incubation has proved to be a key development tool for most economies such as Nigeria (Akhuesmonkhan, et. al., 2014), South Africa (Dubihlela & Schaikwyk, 2014), Rwanda (Aggarwal, 2012) and others to enhance job creation, wealth creation and economic development in the society.

The concept of business incubation has been well received in Uganda at different levels providing different services. For example, institutions of higher learning such as Makerere University, Makerere University Business School and Kyambogo University have established business incubation centers to develop and churn out strong and self-sustainable businesses to drive the economic transformation of Uganda. Others include the Uganda Industrial Research Institute Business incubation center where a number of startups have been incubated, Enterprise Uganda has been running business incubation for more than eight years, FinAfrica has been running since the year 2009, Management and Training Advisory Center, Hive Calob and Commonwealth Association Uganda. All these centers have different services offered and target different sectors. This study focuses on one incubation centre (FinAfrica) to gain a deeper understanding about the process and perception of the incubatees about incubation services. This will help to build a conceptual foundation for future research and a groundbreaking insight about the nature of business incubation in Uganda.

Although the objective for which business incubation centers are established is to develop innovative and sustainable ventures (Akhuesmonkhan et al., 2014; Aggarwal, 2012; WEF, 2016), it is not known whether the purpose for which the incubatees join the incubation centers is congruous with that of the centers (Meru & Struwig, 2011). The subject of business incubation is not new but it is an understudied area from the perspective of Uganda and largely Africa. There is little research that establishes the contextual nature of services and critically examines

how the incubation services are delivered. This challenge is particularly prevalent in emerging economies where related studies are still nascent and scanty (Vij & Jhanji, 2013; Akhuemonkhan, et al., 2014; Wann, et al., 2017). This has not only limited efforts for further improvement of business incubation services but also may increase the risk of orphaned incubatees after exit from business incubation centres.

Theoretically, business incubatees are expected to have learnt the best practices and rules of the game of business in their respective sectors (Hackett & Dilts 2004; Xu, 2009). Knopp (1997) reports that to determine when it is time for an incubatee to leave the incubator, most centers set graduation or exit policies. Some of the most common reasons for clients to leave the incubator are that they have outgrown the available space, have spent the maximum allowable time in the incubation programme, have achieved mutually agreed upon milestones or have failed to meet certain deliverables of the programme. This has raised a number of concerns from the development partners, policy makers and some sections of the academia about the nature and relevancy of incubation services.

This study was guided by two key objectives; to examine the nature of services and processes of business incubation and to establish the perception of business incubatees about business incubation from the Ugandan perspective. The significance of this paper is three fold; to the policy makers it guides the government on how to improve business development services. Academically, it presents the debate about the effectiveness of business incubation services while practically, the paper presents business incubation from the nascent entrepreneurship perspective and suggests pragmatic interventions that can improve the effectiveness of business incubation services.

Context of the study

Business incubation programs are reported to catalyse the process of starting and growing companies by providing entrepreneurs with the expertise, networks and tools they need to make their ventures successful (Xu, 2009; Knopp, 1997). Sponsors of these programs include academic institutions, economic development groups, local governments, and community organizations (WEF, 2012; Akhuemonkhan et al., 2014; Wann et al., 2017). While incubators are designed to help entrepreneurs in building successful business ventures, research in establishing what incubatees expect and what incubators provide is still scanty (Hackett & Dilts, 2004). Even then, a detailed nature of these incubation services is not clear (Bulsara, Gandhi & Porey, 2013). The lack of clarity is tagged on the limited research efforts on business incubation process. Thus, "...it is clear that research has just begun to scratch the surface of the incubator-incubation phenomenon. While much attention has been devoted to the description of incubator facilities, less attention has been focused on the incubatees, the innovations they seek to diffuse, and the incubation outcomes that have been achieved. As interest in the incubator-incubation concept continues to grow, new research efforts should focus not only on these under-researched units of analysis, but also on the incubation process itself" (Hackett & Dilts, 2004: page 55). This has left a lot of empirical gaps in the understanding of the effectiveness of business incubation services especially in causing business startups and their subsequent success.

While the need for business incubation is ardently presumed to be the best course of action for better quality start-ups in developing economies (Mutambi, Byaruhanga, Trojer, & Buhwezi Akhuemonkhan, 2010; 2014; Wann, 2017), there is still less academic research that has tried to explain the right "formula" for success. There has been a strong mix-up between strategic management principles and entrepreneurial orientation in explaining this phenomenon (Cassia & Minola, 2012). Thus, the key question is with regard to the quality of opportunities or the quality of readiness to seize the opportunities. The strategic direction of

business incubation has been well spelt and the measures of failure or success, processes and alternative interventions are clear. However, as observed by Vij and Jhanji, (2013), research in developing economies has not been well focused due to its nascence. A particular problem associated with this empirical lacuna is that it remains hard to develop valid theories related to the understanding of effective business incubation. In a scholarly perspective, there is need to gather more robust empirical evidence and other pragmatic contexts of business incubation and its impact on sustainability of incubatees.

Business incubation- Services and processes

Business incubation programs are designed to accelerate the successful development of entrepreneurial companies through an array of business support resources and services, developed or orchestrated by the incubation programme manager, and offered both in the incubator and through its network of contacts (Shalaby, 2007). The main goal of business incubation is to create successful firms that will leave the incubation programme financially viable and freestanding. Critical to the definition of an incubator is the provision of management guidance, technical assistance, and consultancy that is tailored to the needs of new enterprises (Xu, 2009).

In a study about the nature and perceptions of business incubation in Kenya, Meru and Struwig (2011) established that there is a big difference between what business incubation service providers offer and what actually is expected by the beneficiaries. Specifically, it was reported that although entrepreneurs attach great importance to business-incubation services, actual services received fall short of their expectations. This is because most incubators are driven by the need for profit hence abandon the focus on effective service delivery. The duo define a business incubator as a nurturing environment for start-ups that provide business-support programmes and networking including physical infrastructure (in some cases) that enable businesses to develop within a controlled environment. Because some of them are based on the foundation of technical empowerment to their clients, several incubators provide training in entrepreneurship and other vocational competencies (Bøllingtoft & Ulhøi, 2005). This is usually intended to equip them with conceptual and operations management savvy.

Business incubators employ staff that usually play roles of facilitators and bridging entrepreneurs to firms and individuals providing services they need. Notable networking sessions include forming the young investors clubs (FinAfrica, 2012). In developed economies like the United States of America that started business incubation as way back as 1959 in Batavia, New York, it is reported that 83% of incubators provide entrepreneurs with access to seed capital, 76% provide assistance in obtaining federal grants while 74% assist entrepreneurs in preparing financial proposals (NBIA, 2009).

About FinAfrica

This is an enterprise development centre that was established in Uganda since 2009. The center's primary mission is to provide a hand-holding service to new and existing enterprises by providing business skills, office incubation, business advisory services and technical support for upcoming and developing entrepreneurs. FinAfrica is located at UWEAL House in the Uganda Manufacturers' Association Trade fair grounds, Lugogo Kampala. The centre was founded by Mr. Carmello Cocuzza who has done extensive entrepreneurship development work within the Sub-Saharan Africa region through the European Investment Bank. The centre has since inception nurtured a number of enterprises in various sectors ranging from services, agriculture, ICT and energy. For operations, the centre relies a lot on donor support but this is not reliable and largely unsustainable. This keeps the services disrupted by insufficient financial resources.

Theoretical review

The utilisation of theory in research has been strongly regarded by a number of scholars. Most importantly, theory helps to put research phenomena in context as stated by Parsons, (1938: pg.14) “..... I must categorically disagree with the view that any empirical science can be developed to a high point without reference to generalised conceptual schemes to theory”, while enabling the researcher to develop relevant hypotheses (Carlsson, 1958). In this study, the social networking theory is considered because of its relevance in the understanding of business incubation and its dynamic causal and correlational frameworks. The social network theory is key in this study because it helps to understand how incubate firms benefit more through synergetic transactions from incubation centers than if they were running individually (Muniz et al, 2013).

It is also reported that while under the care of an incubation facility, firms build networks under the umbrella brand of the hosting incubator (Bøllingtoft& Ulhøi, 2005). Such social networks help the members to access entrepreneurial resources such as market leads, ideation sessions and other non-financial but strategic capital such as supply and value chain bridging. In this ideation process, social capital becomes an important factor of innovativeness, organisational advantage and value creation (Adlešič & Slavec, 2012). This study therefore utilises insights of social capital and networking of firms in incubators to evaluate the performance of incubators from the perspective of their incubatees. Hannon (2004) emphasises that business incubation plays a role of a “germinator” by supporting new ventures to grow with the help of local support services and entrepreneurial networks. It is further suggested that building strong and relevant networks requires incubation programmes to ensure appropriate matches between entrants’ capabilities, growth potential, resource base and management capability of the incubator environment (Hannon, 2004).

Business incubation success- Drivers and indicators

Lewis, Harper-Anderson and Molnar (2011) report that no single incubator practices, policy, or service is guaranteed to produce an incubation programme successfully alone. Instead, it is the synergy among multiple practices, policies and services that produce optimal outcomes. Lewis, Harper-Anderson, and Molnar proposed a number of factors that are antecedent to the success or failure of an incubation service provider namely; sharing common management practices, incubator advisory board composition, size and age of an incubator, not focusing on profit, ownership and source of support such as public sector investment. Programs with more financial resources have more capacity to deliver critical client services and are more stable.

According to Buys and Mbwewana (2007), incubators that operate in conducive environments tend to be more successful than those that are not in such a setting. An important finding of this research was that the success factors that showed strong correlation with incubator success were also strongly correlated with each other. In the authors’ view, a conducive environment comprises of access to science and technology expertise and facilities, availability of funding, quality of entrepreneurs, stakeholder support, supportive government policies, competent and motivated management, financial sustainability and networking opportunities. A key observation from Buys and Mbwewana (2007) is that for incubators to be successful, they need to develop a network so as to benefit from backward and forward linkages. From the literature, it is seen that incubator success is a function of three key factors namely good initial idea, good entrepreneur and good support. A good initial idea must be marketable, technically feasible, and innovative (Xu, 2009). The logic behind this is that if the idea is not suitable enough or entrepreneur and enterprise manager are not competent, the support of the incubator cannot develop to startup no matter how excellent it may be (Barrow, 2001).

The viewpoint of incubator support is comprehended in resource preparation, interacting with startups and entrepreneurial capacity building. Although the idea of business incubation has captured wide attention from development agencies, researchers and practitioners as an avenue for entrepreneurial stimulation, setting up a business incubator, besides sufficient resources, requires good knowledge of the target markets and industries, as well as local conditions. It is also important to note that there are different intentions for which business incubators are initiated. The purposes are based on the resources, mandate and environment in particular the business and entrepreneurial needs of the potential incubatees. Dunaj (2013) proposes the most prevalent incubation models as advisory-centric, facility-centric, management-centric and investment-centric. Dunaj (2013) reports that the advisory-centric model is predominant in the United States since there is a strong community of incubator founders and people with a lot of start-up management expertise. In this model, there is a lot of coaching and mentorship for start-up entrepreneurs. One of the benefits of this approach is the access to numerous ideas, entrepreneurs and potential acquisition targets.

The facility-centric model consists of shared office space model that works to create a cluster of entrepreneurial activity thereby enhancing collaboration among start-ups. The investment-centric model is used by large venture capital firms that couple their venturing efforts with direct participation and involvement in start-up management focusing on start-up management teams and entrepreneurially minded talents. In the management-centric model, the incubator acts as a co-founder in a start-up's early stage, providing intensive support. The model intensively involves initiation of the business idea and active involvement in start-up management. The only difference is that it offers more social capital and less financial support.

Methodology

The study employed an ethnographic approach. Ethnography involves understanding of human actions and their behavior through observing their actions without necessarily taking active roles in what they are doing (Ybema, Yanow, Wels, & Kamsteeg, 2010). This was an intrinsic case study because the focus was on gaining a deeper understanding of the business incubation process at one centre. This is different from using multiple and/or instrumental case studies where a comparison is made across various case studies and not having the interest of the case study as secondary with the researchers' interest as primary. According to Stake (2005) a researcher can use one case study if the research objective is intrinsic as was with this study. Detailed notes were taken and carried out progressive analysis. The choice of ethnography was deemed as appropriate in this study because it gives an opportunity to extensively and freely interact with the study phenomenon. Gold (1958) presents four core strategies for observation in ethnographic research namely; complete participant (concealing the researcher role from the group to enable activity progression without bias), participant as observer (a researcher becomes a member of the group under study and the group is aware of the research), observer as participant (researcher is given a role to collect data while the group being studied knows of the researcher's observation activities) and complete observer (researcher is completely hidden from view by the group being studied while observing). In this study, the strategy of complete participant was used because it helped participants to behave freely in a natural environment. As noted by Stake (2005), ethnography can be used as a research design as well as a data collection tool. In this case, it was used as a data collection tool to capture the incubates perceptions, ideas, actions and nature of interaction with the incubation environment.

While it is acknowledged that there is a risk of bias in carrying out observation in an ethnographic setting, the focus was put on the human experiences and activities of the incubatees. During that period, strategies suggested by Stake (2005) and Russell (1994) namely falsification and replication of repeat experiences were largely utilized to avoid getting entangled

into the personal friendship bias with the people under study. The usage of ethnography in business research is not nascent. Bøllingtoft, and Ulhøi (2005) used ethnography to study the effectiveness of networking in a business incubation setting and the results were reliable and valid.

In Uganda, the approach has been used by many such as Schneidermann (2014) while examining the everyday meanings and practices of hip-hop (a type of music). This study acknowledge other methods of research such as surveys but by the nature of the population and business processes under study, it would be difficult to answer the research questions using quantitative means because of the complexity of group behaviors and interrelationships among multifaceted dimensions of group interactions in a business incubation centre setting. Data was collected between 2010 and 2014 through interaction and observation. For purposes of scope, this paper only focuses on the nature of services, processes of business incubation and the perception of business incubatees about business incubation services. Six (6) incubatees were involved in the study. This included observing them before start-up, during the earlier stages of their businesses, the way they interacted with their clients and fellow incubatees, the way they interacted with staff at the host centre as well as their business processes. Intensive interviews were also carried out to establish more insights about the perceptions of the incubatees about FinAfrica incubation services.

Type of data	Data collection methods	Analysis strategy
Qualitative Ethnographic data	Unit of inquiry and analysis was an incubate. Structured and Unstructured Interviews: <i>Open questions that enable a free development of conversation</i>	Development of thematic models
	Observation: <i>Taking notes using log books and diaries</i> Interactions: <i>Participating in incubatees' meetings as a member of the centres, participating in management meetings of the centres, training the incubatees in entrepreneurial skilling, participating in the "Entrepreneurs' Club" on every last Friday of the month.</i>	

Table 1:
Data collection
methods

In this study, an incubatee referred to someone who had registered a company through an incubation centre, had administrative operations managed by the center and was registered as an incubation client by the centre.

Results

The results are presented in tables and thematic models. The key results include; most important incubation services offered by FinAfrica, the centre's business incubation process and the perceptions of the incubatees about the services offered to them.

Service portfolios	Details
Entrepreneurship training	Developing the entrepreneurial mindset, opportunity identification, business planning, finance management, marketing management.
Office space	Work station, office telephone, meeting room
Legal advisory and accounting services	Contracting, budgeting, financing decisions, branding, registration
Mentoring, coaching	Interacting with senior consultants at FinAfrica by presenting the challenges being encountered in business and getting remedial strategies. Most of the reported challenges include marketing, bad debts and seasonality of business.
Entrepreneurial networks	The introduction of an entrepreneurs' club (e-club); a platform where nascent and practicing entrepreneurs meet every last Friday of the month to share business experiences and challenges. The club meeting time is usually 6:00-8:00 PM. The e-club attracts "senior" entrepreneurs who share success tips and how they have managed to beat the business odds.
General office administration	This involves telephone calls and general customer care, internet services, stationary and pantry services.

Table 2: Key incubation services offered by FinAfrica

It is observed in the findings that most of the services offered were advisory-centric except for office space which is facility-centric. This implies that there is no sufficient service coverage for the incubatee needs because other essential incubation services such as investment incubation for venture capital were missing. At the end, this affects the performance of the incubator because one of the key challenges of entrepreneurial startups in Uganda is lack of seed capital which could be acquired from incubation programmes. While this study acknowledges that each incubatee has own unique challenges, hence special business support needs, the challenge of venture capital is cross cutting. Thus, it is recommended that incubator managers should take interest in learning the special needs of their clients so that the support rendered to them matches their priorities and industrial context.

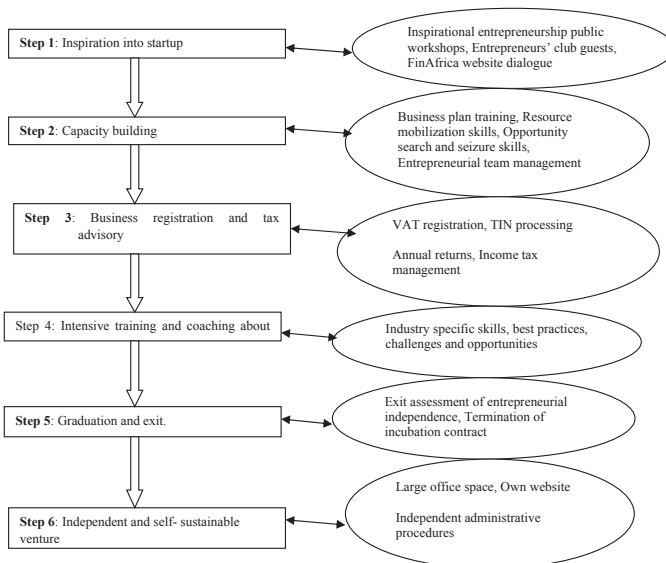


Figure 1: The FinAfrica business incubation process

It is observed in the study that FinAfrica follows six steps in the incubation process. Steps 1-6 indicate that FinAfrica nurtures from scratch and develops them into sustainable ventures. While it is a good strategy because of tailoring the special behaviors and skills required for a particular business, it is time consuming and costly in terms of resources. It also denies the incubatees an opportunity to access other experiences from the environment unless the incubators plan for benchmark engagements so as to expand the learning scope. Another observation in the results was the lack of motivation to formalise business operations (at step 3) where the incubators are expected to facilitate business registration and tax advisory, it is recommended that incubation programmes should engage other stakeholders such as National revenue authorities and Business registration bureaus to engage the incubatees in changing their mindsets about business formalisation. Such can begin with the initial step of inspiration with emphasis on the benefits of institutionalising business operations.

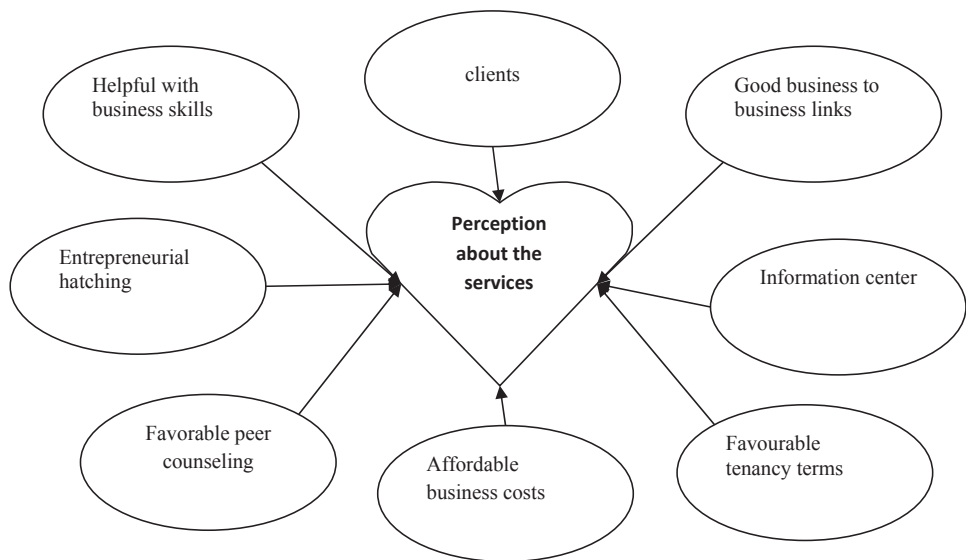


Figure 2:
Perception of
incubation services
by incubatees

The study revealed that incubatees at FinAfrica take training services as helpful in developing their business skills and enables them to easily access clients through entrepreneurial network ties. It is also revealed that incubatees benefit from favourable tenancy terms characterised by affordable business costs such as administration, accounting and secretarial services. Being a business development centre, the incubatees recognise incubation offerings as a good platform for entrepreneurial hatching through information sharing and access to entrepreneurial peer counseling. This positive and constructive perception provides a good environment for innovation and creativity for the incubatees.

Discussion and contributions of the study

Contextual findings from this study indicate that entrepreneurial training, office space, legal advisory and accounting services, mentoring, coaching, entrepreneurial networks and general office administration are the key services offered at the FinAfrica Incubation centre.

New insights were observed about the incubation services. The FinAfrica experience is more of the facility-centric model. This is contrary to what is practiced in places like the USA where the predominant model is the advisory-centric (Dunaj, 2013). This raises a question of whether the differences in incubator services affect success. While scholars such as Gillotti and Ziegelbauer (2006) present business incubation in the context of business administration services, this study finds that there is more entrepreneurial empowerment through coaching and mentoring as well as entrepreneurial networking. From a theoretical point of view, the current study supports the social networking theory which posits that through social networks (both for the business owner and the “business’s friends”) there is increased opportunity to learn and access business resources at a relatively low price. The evidence for entrepreneurial networking at FinAfrica is seen through the participation of incubatees in the E-Club that meets every last Friday of the month. Other networking activities are in the peer business counseling among the centre’s incubates, social support and guidance with the intervention of professionals. Customer referrals were also common practices within the incubation centre and this was based on the internal network ties among the incubatees.

In this study, it is observed that incubatees at FinAfrica can easily access the would-have been expensive services such as ICT, and legal from the internal environment due to the entrepreneurial eco-system. That could be the reason Leyden, Link and Siegel (2013) found the social networking theory key in explaining entrepreneurial success through creating opportunities and how these opportunities are formed and seized endogenously by the entrepreneurs in a closed social business environment. For the training aspect, the incubatees first receive a general training about entrepreneurship, its benefits both at individual and macro-economic level. According to the management of FinAfrica, this helps the incubatees to get inspired into the career of entrepreneurship. From there, the trainees are skilled in the key entrepreneurial procedures such as business planning. This is expected to facilitate incubatees in opportunity identification and assessment before committing business resources. Interaction with the incubatees indicates that the business training sessions help them to learn how to write business proposals while marketing their products.

In other areas such as entrepreneurial networking, the respondents acknowledged that they were able to apply the acquired skills in utilising their personal networks to access clients. A technology incubatee indicated that “[..... after the training, I recalled that I had a number of friends I used to work with at a certain bank and they gave me an opportunity to set up their network system....]. Another language services provider said;[.....I use the resources at FinAfrica to widen my knowledge about business through trainings. I would highly recommend it to other starters...]. This indicates that from a practical point of view, training should be focused on the specific needs of the incubatees. Thus, incubate training needs assessment is key before instituting any form of training to avoid offering irrelevant skills.

For mentoring and coaching services, it was observed that FinAfrica has different categories of mentoring and coaching namely; a) dedicated and scheduled mentors who are contracted and assigned by the incubation centre. Incubatees are attached to the mentors for a specific period during which reports about the progress of the incubatee are made to identify the milestones and challenges, b) non-routine mentoring. Here, an incubatee can freely seek advice from any of the consultants of FinAfrica even without a scheduled appointment. For coaching, the same approach is used as mentoring.

For the incubation process, results indicated that FinAfrica clients undergo business incubation process which starts from inspiration towards startup, capacity building (through training), business registration and graduation towards exit for self-sustainability broadly classified as pre-incubation support, production and marketing support, and maturity with exit. While this process is what the incubation centre views as desirable, some incubatees

come when they have the skills and they start right away by utilising the services and develop more entrepreneurial competences through business-to-business interaction and mentoring. For instance, a social entrepreneurship incubatee explained that “[.....] I came to FinAfrica because I was stuck with expensive rent in town and I found it conveniently affordable to come to this facility. I have been able to save a lot of my working capital”. The findings imply that while some incubatees do not go through the entire process of business incubation, they benefit from every stage of the process.

Evidence that the incubatees benefit from the business incubation process can be seen from the perception of the incubatees about the services. A case in point is a financial service incubatee who acknowledged that “[...I have been able to transform my business idea into a proper business with structures, a solid brand and a reasonable growing small devoted clientele. I have recommended quite a good number of people and yes, I would do it again. I believe most start-ups are in desperate need of some of the services. FinAfrica offers specifically the training about the Entrepreneurial Mindset, Business Plan. Also, the incubation office setting enables one to conduct meaningful business since it is a very professional setting with the core facilities of a solid enterprise such as P.O. Box, Conference Room, Internet, and secure ample parking space”. It can be seen in this response that while the administrative part of the incubation services is key, there are other “hygiene” benefits that the incubatees consider important in the service package such as parking space. This implies that in the location decision of business incubation centres, factors like parking and accessibility by the incubatees clients are fundamental.

Asked about FinAfrica activities such as the E-Club; an entrepreneurs’ networking platform which meets every last Friday of the month, an incubatee who invested in marketing management and public relations believed that “.....another important factor is the E-club which gives us ability to network and learn from successful entrepreneurs as well as receiving free tips and knowledge from experienced professionals. The same incubatee expressed that “[.....]; Yes I benefit from FinAfrica because some E-Club members become my clients, while for others I become their client, most importantly I have formed beneficial relationships with my fellow incubatees”.

After a critical synthesis of the perceptions, services and business incubation process, a business incubation model is proposed in Figure 3. The model is a result of synthesis of the case and it emerges from a deductive fusion of the results. Some of the aspects of the model include role modeling. Role modeling as a behavioral and social learning construct borrows from the Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1969).

In a business incubation setting, role modeling manifests itself through incubatees learning from one another through observation, imitation and inspiration. This builds incubatee attention, memory and motivation to succeed through either direct contact or indirect knowledge about the centre’s success stories through reciprocal determinism. This model can guide the operations of other business incubation centers as well as other individuals and organisations that intend to open up business incubation centers. Theoretically, this model can be used by entrepreneurship researchers and business development service providers as a tool in examining the role of business incubation in the entrepreneurial process. At the terminal point of graduation and exit, the incubatees become alumni of the centre and some are taken up as coaches and mentors since they will have accumulated the experiences and lessons learned. This supports the development of an entrepreneurial ecosystem. Future research can utilise the model in examining the role of different incubation services in entrepreneurial growth and sustainability. Future research should evaluate entrepreneurs’ perceptions of business incubation services in Uganda based on longitudinal studies, including an in-depth analysis of the effect of incubation on growth of the business.

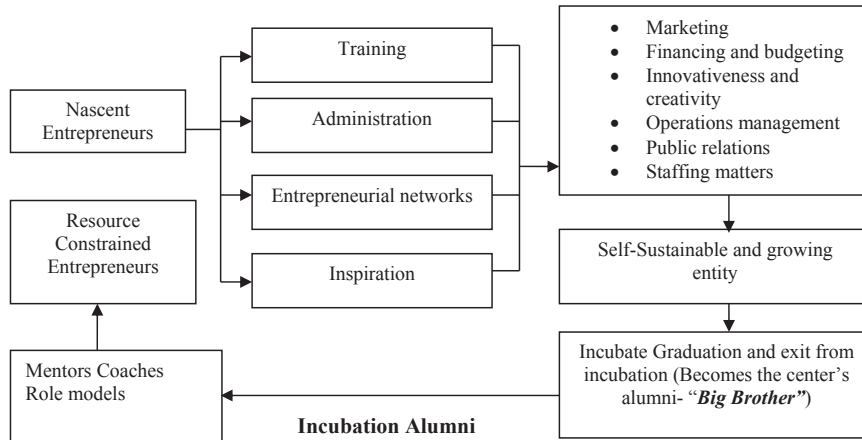


Figure 3:
The Business
Incubation Model

Conclusion and recommendations

From the FinAfrica experience, a contextual conclusion that the services offered by business incubation are key in the success of any start-up is made. Incubation programmes create opportunities of entrepreneurial fast-tracking, networking and relatively cheaper access to technical services. That is why some respondents were saying that they found the rent conveniently affordable hence able to save a lot of working capital alongside other benefits such as ability to network and learn from successful entrepreneurs as well receiving free tips and knowledge from experienced professionals.

From the managerial and policy context, there is need for more stakeholder engagement in the incubation process. In this, the government, development partners, private sector and academia should come together to develop effective incubation programmes. In such relationships, the government regulates and provides convenient and supportive environment while on the other hand, stakeholders such as private sector focus on generating creative and innovative strategies for commercialisation and strategic growth. Institutions of higher learning can join the incubation equation through the provision of skills and carrying out research for competitive innovation. If done well, stakeholder involvement in business incubation helps to make research outcomes of SMEs useful for economic growth and entrepreneurship development in Uganda and other related economies.

By the nature of the limitations of qualitative research, future studies need to introduce quantitative contexts especially on the econometric measures of incubatees' success. In order to strengthen the debate about the services offered by business incubators, future research can also carry out tracer studies to establish how well or bad the incubatees perform after exiting the programmes. This will help to establish their post-incubation business support needs. In Africa this has been a big challenge where most people have received start-up support and only end up failing due to lack of sufficient technical support.

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