

The Perception of Entrepreneurial Success in University Incubators at the University of Douala-Cameroon (UDO)

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Abstract: The objective of this article is to understand the perception of incubated entrepreneurs on the notion of entrepreneurial success. It adopts a qualitative approach based on the content analysis of discourses collected from eight entrepreneurs from the two business incubation centers of the University of Douala. The horizontal and vertical manual analysis of the data reveals results that confirm the definitional complexity of the concept of entrepreneurial success. Moreover, entrepreneurial success is more likely to be assessed by subjective elements related to the motivation of the incubated entrepreneurs. However, objective criteria do not stand aside.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial success, university incubators, entrepreneurial motivation, multiple case study, purposive sampling.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Schumpeterian view sees entrepreneurship as a significant indicator of economic development because it creates wealth and employment. This makes it an indicator of a reduction in the unemployment rate. The GEM report (2016) from Cameroon mentions that the entrepreneurial phenomenon is tending to become a societal phenomenon despite the little attention it receives from the media. However, the process of wealth creation is fraught with difficulties and the support of entrepreneurs remains indispensable. For this reason, the Cameroonian state, through the law on innovation and research of 12 July 1999, has linked entrepreneurship to higher education by providing its state universities with business creation incubation centres. These structures act as intermediaries to create a favourable environment for business creation and a bridge between the supported enterprises and their external environment [1]. In addition, the second general census of businesses in Cameroon carried out by the National Institute of Statistics (INS) in December 2019, counted 209,482 businesses created on Cameroonian territory. However, despite the supervision of entrepreneurs, entrepreneurial activity is exposed to two phenomena that it cannot do without, namely entrepreneurial failure and entrepreneurial success. Consequently, according to data collected by the Centre for Analysis and Research on Economic and Social Policy published in the Jeune Afrique Economie newspaper on 29 December 2016, the average survival rate of businesses is less than 30%; therefore, more than 70% of businesses created from 2010 to 2015 had not survived by May 2016. These results challenge researchers to understand success.

Thus, this article explores entrepreneurial success from the perspective of incubated entrepreneurs. [2] define entrepreneurial success as the ability of entrepreneurs to achieve the goals they set for themselves over a time horizon. Based on the following research question : **How do incubated entrepreneurs perceive entrepreneurial success?** This article aims to understand the perception of incubated entrepreneurs of entrepreneurial success. To do so, our article focuses on four main points : The presentation of the theoretical framework of entrepreneurial success (I), the description of the methodology adopted (II), the presentation of the results (III) and the discussion of these results in order to highlight the theoretical and managerial contributions(IV).

II. Theoretical framework for entrepreneurial success

Several conceptual and empirical works published from 2010 to 2021 provide a theoretical triptych on entrepreneurial success.

2.1. An attempt to define entrepreneurial success

The literature on entrepreneurial success is emerging but still underdeveloped [3]. It is a multidimensional concept [3],[4],[2] with synonyms such as "entrepreneurial success or simply success [5],[6], [3],[7]. Moreover, it is a polysemic concept that each researcher analyses according to his or her choices [8]. Traditionally, entrepreneurial success refers to the performance of firms [9];[4]and can be conceptualised according to the unit of analysis (firm or entrepreneur) [10]. This entrepreneurial phenomenon is contextualised and continuous [11],[12],[7],[2]. For [9], it is the ability of a company to achieve a turnover. Entrepreneurial success is defined in terms of the professional and personal goals of each entrepreneur Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2012). Success is also a network of partnerships [13]. But how is it measured?

2.2. Criteria for assessing the concept of entrepreneurial success

This section presents the different criteria for measuring or assessing entrepreneurial success. This assessment has undergone a major evolution. There has been a shift from the classical to the so-called reformist approaches. However, entrepreneurs value and understand success differently depending on their experiences [10].

2.2.1. Objective criteria for entrepreneurial success

The objective approach requires the researcher to have previously defined the criteria of entrepreneurial success that he or she will submit to the interviewees [4].The objective criteria of entrepreneurial success can be studied on the societal and environmental aspect [9]. Researchers explain objective entrepreneurial success in terms of business performance, which incorporates economic indicators of efficiency such as turnover, business survival and profits [14], [9],[4],[6],[2]. In addition to this, customer satisfaction is also an issue for [15]. For [6], objective entrepreneurial success is economic; it is financial gain. Using a structural equation modelling technique, [16]clearly demonstrate that firm size is an important factor in explaining the success of business owners. Performance can be economic and personal or mixed [17]. In addition, the objective approach to entrepreneurial success also takes into account firm growth which can be either firm performance [18]; productivity, number of employees and financial results [19]. But, using human capital theory, the inconclusive result of [20]contradicts the assessment of growth by the number of employees. Growth can be economic related to entrepreneurship through new goods and services in new markets [21].

However, entrepreneurial success cannot be simply summarised as business performance let alone financial reward [22] The single use of related economic indicators of business performance does not necessarily better explain this entrepreneurial phenomenon [6]. Therefore, the development of subjective criteria is important to complete the understanding of this concept [4], [10], [2]. Also, exclusively quantitative criteria limit the in-depth appreciation of entrepreneurial success [23],[4], [17] and [2].

2.2.2. Subjective criteria for entrepreneurial success

According to [6], subjective entrepreneurial success is the individual understanding and evaluation of the achievement of criteria that are personally important to entrepreneurs. Indeed, [24] categorises the subjective elements according to their importance and according to the entrepreneurs, to highlight three groups of subjective criteria. The least important (innovation and business survival/continuity), the important (functioning of the external environment, stakeholder satisfaction, public recognition, good reputation and social utility) and the most important (personal satisfaction and work-life balance related to time spent with family, friends and leisure activities). However, the subjective criteria that emerge more in the literature include entrepreneurial satisfaction and pride [3] and entrepreneurial satisfaction with business performance [24]. Furthermore, satisfaction with motivational factors indicates a positive achievement of success [6]. In Tunisia, [25] confirm that the motivation of the Sfaxian entrepreneur is one of the key factors that determine his remarkable success compared to entrepreneurs in other Tunisian regions.

2.2.3. Complementary criteria for entrepreneurial success

The mixed approach combines both objective and subjective elements of entrepreneurial success. Furthermore, this success includes both real and intangible measures [26] or is measured by non-financial and financial criteria [5]; [2].

In the end, entrepreneurial success can be assessed in different contexts, sectors, genders, etc. It makes sense to also take into account the perception of the incubated entrepreneurs.

III.Context of the study and epistemological stance

3.1. State of play of university incubators in Cameroon

This study is being carried out in Central Africa, in Cameroon, at the University of Douala, which houses two business creation incubators. In Cameroon, the creation of university incubators is governed by the law on innovation and research of 12 July 1999 with a partnership involving public or semi-public actors (MINESUP, Ministry of SMEs, Ministry of Youth, National Hydrocarbon Company), private institutions (Orange Cameroon, MTN Cameroon, NOFIA, RFI), friendly countries (Israel, France, etc.) and international organisations (UNDP, European Union). These structures are currently installed in seven Cameroonian State Universities.

3.1. Justification of the epistemological stance

The originality of this article lies in the understanding of the perception of entrepreneurial success. As such, it is part of a comprehensive logic and is positioned in the interpretivist paradigm in the sense of Cuba and Lincoln, which develops the relativist ontological hypothesis that there are multiple socially constructed realities that are not governed by natural, causal or other laws. Entrepreneurial success is not governed by a natural law, yet remains a social phenomenon that falls within the entrepreneurial domain. Furthermore, the empirical-inductive reasoning employed allows us to interpret this perception by asking the incubated entrepreneurs what do you mean by entrepreneurial success ?

3.2. Qualitative methodology based on a multiple case study

This research is in line with the continuity of works that mobilise qualitative methodology and show the importance of giving a voice to entrepreneurs to give their opinions on an entrepreneurial phenomenon under study [23],[4],[17]and [2],[27]. To conceptualise the perception of entrepreneurial success by incubated entrepreneurs, we use the methodological rigour of case studies by [28],[29]. Thus, the use of a case study approach in the sense of [27]is necessary.

3.3. Data collection and analysis

Indeed, the eight incubated entrepreneurs were selected using a purposive sampling technique previously used by Fisher et al. They are entrepreneurs who have completed their coaching and are awaiting state funding, and also incubates already operating in the field. The semi-directive interviews with open questions developed in four themes of the interview guide allowed us to collect their opinions, their views, their feelings on the notion of entrepreneurial success. However, the life discourses of the selected cases were recorded on the back of them. Stenographic note-taking was deployed. The interviews ended with socio-demographic questions such as gender, number of years the business had been in existence, number of employees and sector of activity. To preserve their anonymity, UA1 to UA8 are the codes of the incubated entrepreneurs. The average duration of the interviews is 29 minutes and the investigation period is March 2021. This gives a total of one hundred and seventy-five minutes corresponding to twenty-three pages of transcriptions of life discourses. This article favours manual content analysis with data coding adapted from [29] and also uses the matrix analysis grid used by [4],[17] and [2] which are in turn inspired by the analysis grid of [9]. The characteristics of the sample are presented in the table below.

TABLE 1: Characteristics of the eight selected incubated entrepreneurs

Characteristics of the eight incubated entrepreneurs			
Elements		Incubator of the Ecole Supérieure Polytechnique	ESSEC Incubator
Type		05 men	03 men
Level of study		Higher education	Higher education
Characteristics of incubated projects/companies			
Companies created	Restaurant "bouillie Haricot	-	01
	Debt collection agency	01	-
	Egg distribution	01	-
Companies in the process of being set up	Making ginger jam and juice	-	01
	Floating bar	01	-
	Deaf and Dumb Algorithm	01	-
	Production of "Bilibili Beer	-	01
Number of companies in operation		00	02
Lifetime less than or equal to 03 years		00	00
Lifetime of more than 03 years		00	02

Source : Adapted from [4]; [27][17] and [2]

The synoptic view of this table shows a sample made up entirely of men and two large groups of entrepreneurial projects. Technological projects for the business incubation centre of the Ecole Supérieure Polytechnique and tertiary projects for the ESSEC center. All the selected entrepreneurs have a higher education level. However, one entrepreneur out of the eight selected has experienced entrepreneurial failure.

IV. Results of the study

The presentation of our results focuses on three elements from our interview guide: the perception of entrepreneurial success, the appreciation of entrepreneurial success and the entrepreneurial motivation of the eight incubated entrepreneurs.

4.1. Diversity in the definition of entrepreneurial success

Our results show a diversity of definitions of entrepreneurial success. For three incubated entrepreneurs, success is the development of a solution to a problem or used in everyday life that can be touched and visualised. **UA2** says: 'For me I have already succeeded, because I have already developed a real solution'. It is the development of an idea and being able to make a living from it, as **UA5** says. "To be successful is to be able to develop an idea, to set it up and to make a living from it". It is also the autonomous operation of the business created, **UA7** says: "For me, success in

this activity is when the business can run itself". Entrepreneurial success is the vision of the entrepreneur as defined by **UA5**: "an entrepreneur who wants to succeed must have a strong vision because vision can take you anywhere, it's like someone who is in love, when you are in love you are ready to do anything". Success is the achievement of objectives according to **AU8** "For me, success means achieving the objectives that we have set for ourselves in the medium term". It is also the sustainability of the business, as mentioned by **AU3**: "You have to be able to create the business, for the business to work, and above all for it to be sustainable".

4.2. Plurality of perceptions and criteria for measuring entrepreneurial success

Just as the definition, perception and measurement criteria of entrepreneurial success are plural. Three incubated entrepreneurs satisfy their personal needs, two reinvest in their business, two others get young people out of unemployment, one lives well, another renovates his solution, and one participates in the development of families. The following are fragments of their speeches. (**UA6**) "The use I make of what this activity produces for me is the satisfaction of my personal needs". (**UA7**) "What I earn from this activity, I reinvest". (**UA5**) " To succeed internally, you must have this feeling of satisfaction that you have been able to give people jobs, to get young people out of unemployment ". (**UA5**) "To succeed is to allow certain families to flourish like you. What I earn I reinvest and that also allows me to live well, I don't suffer, I live well". (**UA1**) "A successful entrepreneur is an entrepreneur who never stops improving the solution he has created, i.e. he is constantly looking for ways to improve the solution he has created.

Our results show objective, subjective and mixed criteria for entrepreneurial success. Performance and growth are the two objective criteria identified. Two incubated entrepreneurs measure their entrepreneurial success in terms of numbers. (**UA8**) states: 'Of course also financially successful and able to reach a certain level of turnover'. The extension of the activity is a success for (**UA6**) who says: "If in two or three years, I see my business expanding from the University of Douala to Yaoundé 1, Dschang, Ngaoundéré, etc". With regard to the subjective criteria for entrepreneurial success, our results show more singularities in the responses than similarities. Only four entrepreneurs, two in each of the two centres, rated their success by the satisfaction of the population with the solution created, the federation of stakeholders, the empowerment of young people and participation in the development of the country. (**UA5**): "Success is the power to develop an idea, I find a need in the city, I bring a solution to this problem; the population also finds satisfaction". (**UA1**) 'I will have succeeded when I have enabled my country to develop through the value that my business brings me. For me, entrepreneurial success is also measured by an entrepreneur's ability to unite stakeholders around him/her. (**UA7**) "The ability to bring young people into the entrepreneurial field". However, there are some unique responses. Success is assessed on the basis of the appreciation given by consumers of his solution (**UA2**) "I think it's the consumers, the people who have already tasted the product. It is this feedback that gives me the impression that I have already succeeded'; or by the attitude adopted after a success (**UA1**) 'I would have succeeded as an entrepreneur if, despite the fact that I have succeeded, I remain as I am today'; or again the ability to create partners (**UA8**) 'Success for me is to create partners'. Furthermore, the results reveal a mixture of criteria for measuring entrepreneurial success. Only two incubated entrepreneurs combine objective and subjective criteria to explain their success. (**UA8**) "You can't say you've succeeded in entrepreneurship if you don't see the figures, the big cars, the costas, a nice house. For me it's the visible. Now inside you have to have this feeling of satisfaction that you have been able to give people jobs, get young people out of unemployment, allow some families to blossom like you.

4.3. Predominance of Pull-type entrepreneurial motivations of the eight incubated entrepreneurs

Three dimensions of entrepreneurial motivations (Pull motivations, Push motivations and Mixed motivations) reveal eighteen factors that explain the success of incubated entrepreneurs ; eleven Pull motivations versus seven Push motivations. The Pull motivational factors detected in our results are : The passion for entrepreneurship, the search for self-satisfaction, the seizure of a business opportunity, the creation of an exciting solution, the personal commitment, the desire to create more wealth, the prestige of being the CEO of a company, the vision of entrepreneurship, the daring to do things, being part of an entrepreneurial adventure and the management of companies by individuals. The following table presents the statements of the incubated entrepreneurs. (**UA1**)"I was assigned to the Faculty of Industrial Engineering, where I found a different environment that fascinated me because the industrial sector is dominated and must or should carry the economy of a country. The experience of a coordinator should not be limited to management, he must himself be part of an entrepreneurial adventure.(**UA8**)"I got wind of an opportunity. I studied the market and then I realised that there was an opportunity to be made; so I could do the same thing too.(**UA2**)"The first thing that motivates me or my motivation is that all companies today are individuals, something I don't know.(**UA3**)"What drives

me or attracts me to entrepreneurship is self-satisfaction, that's the biggest strength of entrepreneurship. You have to be able to dare to do the things that people in your environment might not do, you have to dare to do them and succeed."(UA6) "So I put the money in, and then an older sister called me to set up a fish shop in Zoétélé, and she told me how much I had to contribute. In short, the more the days went by, the more the desire to do even more was born.(UA4)"To set up technological projects that will be able to compete with products on an international scale is where the entrepreneurial vision goes, that's where the energy is drawn from, that's where it's at.

In contrast, the push motivational factors that emerged from the results were: Fulfilment of a parent's dream, resilience following business closure, registration as a nationalist, socio-economic background, setting up on one's own and solving problems without waiting for the end of the month. The life stories of our entrepreneurs is:(UA2)"My father, when I was passing the engineering competition, he told me my son you have to become a general manager and when I came here, I saw that there was a possibility to be a general manager and to honour my father through this.(UA5)"What allowed me to get into it here is that I don't like working for someone, I'm the kind of person who doesn't want to be too dependent on someone because for me it doesn't allow me to give 100 %. (UA3)"What motivates me to undertake is also a socio-economic struggle.(UA7)"Something is happening that COFINEX, I'm shocked because there are mothers who braise fish who put their money there and lost their savings. I think, I say ok, I can do something that this kind of event doesn't happen anymore".(UA4)"If I had the opportunity to register with Mohamed Kaddaffi, Tomas Sankara, Um Nyobé, that is to say those who defended the country, I would register with them.

Finally, our results show a singularity of response from two incubated entrepreneurs who are motivated by both Pull and Push factors. (UA3) says: "my dad when I was passing the engineering competition, he told me my son you have to become a general manager and when I come here, I hear this expression of entrepreneurship and in my research I saw that there was a possibility to be a general manager and to honour my dad through that. Unlike normal procedures I enter as an engineer and what attracts me more is the solution I want to bring to the market.

V. Discussion of the results

The discussion focuses on the comparison of the results obtained with those of the existing literature. It first presents the theoretical contributions, then the managerial contributions and finally the limits of the study and future research directions.

5.1. Theoretical contributions

Our results corroborate with those of [12] who attest that entrepreneurs have a broad conception of success and that success is a double-hatted concept. Drawing on work in European [4]and African [2] contexts, we propose a matrix that operationalises the definition of entrepreneurial success in UDO university incubators. This matrix adds an additional domain to the four identified by [4]; [2]. However, the time horizon identified in the work of [2] and absent in [4], is included in our results. On the other hand, the behavioural aspect oriented on the attitude of an entrepreneur following his first success is a new element of this research. For this reason, we can define entrepreneurial success as a construct that takes into account the economic, social and partnership aspects of the entrepreneur, obtained either individually or collectively, and that is likely to be continuous. The following operational matrix illustrates this definition.

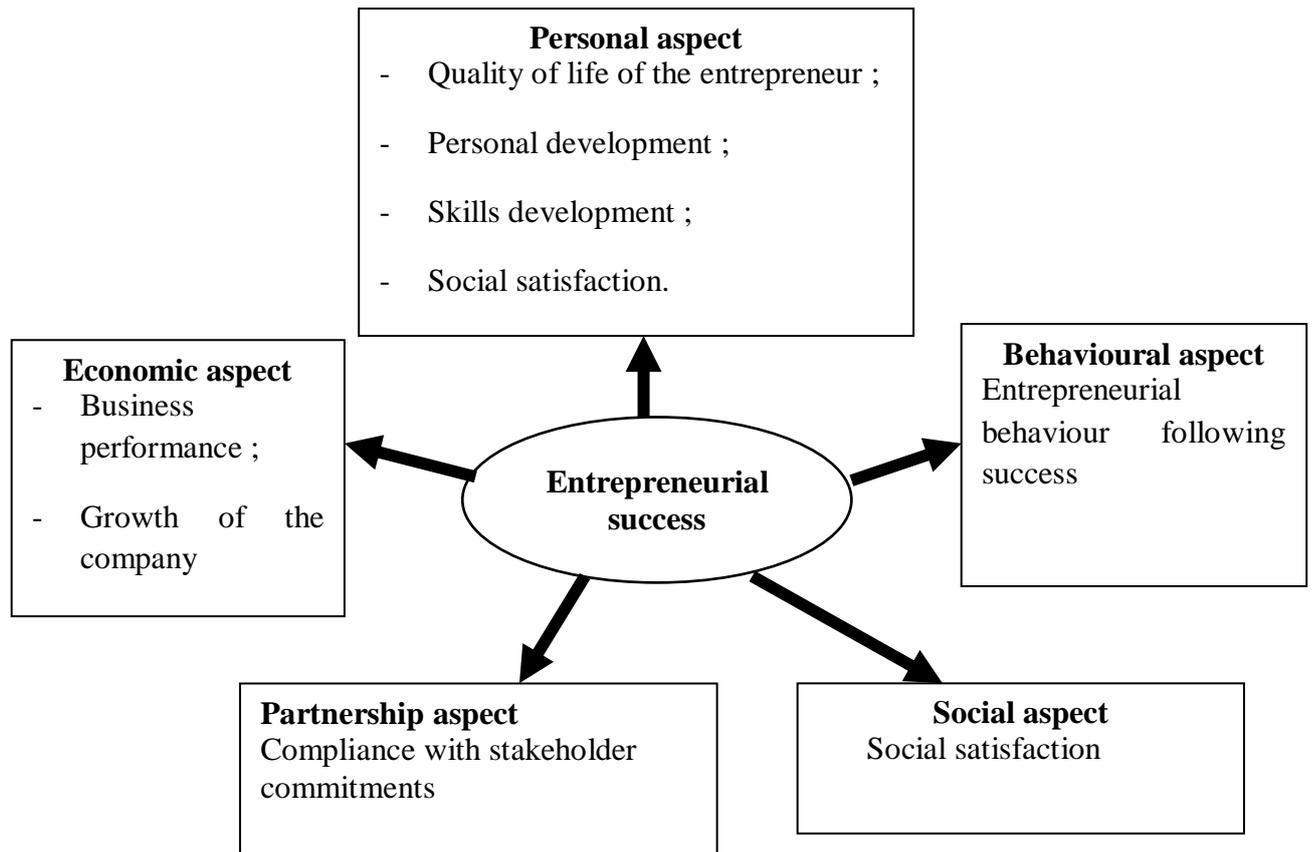


Figure 1: Proposed operational matrix for defining entrepreneurial success

Source: Adapted from [4]; [2]

Furthermore, our results confirm those of [10] who attest that entrepreneurs vary in the way they interpret the meaning of entrepreneurial success criteria and this impacts the way it is measured. Business performance measured by turnover [15],[9],[4],[6],[2] is also included in our results. However, the social and environmental performances mentioned by [9] are absent in this research. On the other hand, growth in our results is the quest for new markets as testified by [21]. Entrepreneurial success as reinvestment of activity obtained by [4] in the French context is visible in our results. Also, our results explore success from the settlement of certain charges by the firm itself. Thus, we say that this is a reality of Cameroonian entrepreneurs because [2] demonstrated it with a similar study oriented to the informal sector. Furthermore, our entrepreneurs understand entrepreneurial success as tribalists, individualists, evolutionists and revolutionists identified by [10] with a phenomenographic approach. The entrepreneurs of the Ecole Supérieure Polytechnique are evolutionists by the fact that, their entrepreneurial success is simply about creating a solution. They are therefore technological innovators. Regarding motivational factors, our results confirm a strong link between motivations and success as [6]. It appears from our results that all of the eight incubated entrepreneurs are entrepreneurs of opportunity, contrary to the results of [30], who state that the majority of Cameroonian entrepreneurs operating in the informal sector are entrepreneurs of necessity. However, an individual's entrepreneurial motivation can vary and change over time depending on the circumstances they encounter and/or interpret [31]. The entrepreneurial failure of an incubated entrepreneur in this article confirms this result and also boosts him to rethink his initial idea to improve it better as demonstrated [16] and [32] and [7]. The presence of motivational factors such as the seizure of an opportunity and self-satisfaction are consistent with the work of [33].

In addition, this article has many limitations. The first limitation is related to the sample size. The representativeness of the female gender is almost absent in the constitution of our sample. Future research can extend the research to other university incubators in other universities in Cameroon to look for the presence of female entrepreneurs. Furthermore, we were not able to interview all cohorts of incubated entrepreneurs who graduated from the ESSEC Douala center due to the restriction of barrier measures to the COVID 19 pandemic. The second limitation is

the lack of comparison of results between the two university incubators. Future research could build on this to highlight the specificity of each business incubation centre in terms of assessing the notion of entrepreneurial success. The third limitation is that this research does not develop a theory for understanding entrepreneurial success in university incubators. Further research using a quantitative approach will yield further results.

5.2. Managerial contributions

The objective of the creation of university incubators by the Cameroonian government is to support entrepreneurs in order to reduce the unemployment rate of higher education graduates. These structures are a springboard for the socio-professional integration of young people. For this to happen, their proper functioning at all levels remains crucial. However, in view of the disparate responses given by the eight incubated entrepreneurs, we note that these two support structures, embedded in the same university, operate in autarky. As a result, a symbiotic operation is born as a result of the seminars and colloquiums proposed, which will enable the incubated entrepreneurs to acquire the same managerial, technical, commercial and logistical skills and will give them the same level of understanding of entrepreneurial phenomena. The support of technological and industrial entrepreneurial projects requires the mobilisation of qualifying expertise. However, recourse to international expertise seems more expensive than national expertise. To this end, the state should evaluate entrepreneurship training programmes in higher education and strengthen them with teaching units of high or rare scope. Furthermore, state funding of projects should be consistent with the nature and type of project. The categorisation of a scale of funding for entrepreneurial projects allows incubated entrepreneurs to create not just VSEs, but SMEs that will recruit more young people. This article calls on the coordinators of the centres to cultivate entrepreneurial success and also to follow up on the businesses created until they reach maturity. The field reports that one entrepreneur out of the eight interviewed has already experienced entrepreneurial failure since 2019 without the knowledge of the ESSEC business incubation centre. The development of monitoring sheets for the enterprises created can serve as a basis for evaluating the effectiveness of the operation of the enterprises created.

CONCLUSION

Studies based on the entrepreneurial success of incubated entrepreneurs and companies are still rare. The aim of this article was to understand the perception of incubated entrepreneurs on the notion of entrepreneurial success. To this end, a multiple-case study approach was used to interview eight incubated entrepreneurs, selected through the purposive sampling technique. The results from the manual analysis of the life stories show entrepreneurial success as a multidimensional concept. However, a proposal for an operational matrix to define this concept was made. This matrix provides the literature with an additional dimension for understanding this notion. Also, our results conclude that entrepreneurial success is assessed more by subjective than by objective elements. Similarly, incubated entrepreneurs are entirely motivated by Pull motivational factors. However, the multiple case method used in this research does not allow for a generalisation of the perception of entrepreneurial success in university incubators. But it does provide a broader understanding of entrepreneurial success with new elements.

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