



## SUPPORTING EARLY-STAGE ENTREPRENEURS

Over the past five years, ERI researchers have examined **how** university business incubators (UBIs) support early-stage entrepreneurs, and **why** entrepreneurs differ in their ability to benefit from incubation.

### Key insights

There is a lot of variation in what UBIs are trying to accomplish and how they operate

*We distinguish between commercial and educational orientations to elaborate these differences and draw implications for assessing UBI performance*

#### A Framework for Exploring Heterogeneity in University Business Incubators

Entrepreneurship Research Journal  
<https://doi.org/10.1515/erj-2018-0190>

Establishing a UBI does not guarantee that it will succeed

*Using a case study of the DMZ, we explain how the pursuit of resources and organizational legitimacy shapes the development of UBIs along key strategic and operational dimensions, and affects performance over time*

#### Entrepreneurial ecosystems and the lifecycle of university business incubators: An integrative case study

International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11365-019-00622-4>

There is an absence of theory explaining how incubators create value for stakeholders

*We develop a conceptual model that explains how the entrepreneurial logic in-use by an incubator influences the incubation process (selection criteria and service offering) and the performance of both the ventures and the incubator*

#### Entrepreneurial logic and fit: a cross-level model of incubator performance

International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11365-019-00622-4>



# The Incubation Experience Study

In a series of five papers, we draw on the **lived experience of incubated entrepreneurs** to examine **how UBIs create value for early stage entrepreneurs**. Our research is based on qualitative interviews involving 45 entrepreneurs and 6 incubator directors at 10 Canadian university incubators.

## Mentorship fit matters

The **'fit'** between **entrepreneur's needs** and **mentoring services** matters to the **outcomes** of business incubation.

Mentoring fit is conceptualized along three dimensions: content, quality, and availability. When fit is low, it is inadequate to support **social learning** and mentoring will not have positive effects.

[Journal of Applied Business and Economics, 2020, 22\(14\): 23-29.](#)



## Gender matters

**Venture development** is supported by **coaching service design** (at the incubator level) and by **coaching content and rapport** (at the entrepreneur-coach dyad level). Gender differences were observed in the emphasis placed on accessibility of coaching services provided by the incubator and the guidance provided by the coaches. We theorize that these findings reflect **differences in entrepreneurial learning** between men and women.

[Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development, 2022, 29\(5\): 742-763. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JSBED-09-2021-0355>](#)

## Not all entrepreneurs benefit

This study presents a **typology** of incubated entrepreneurs, based on their **entrepreneurial competence** and **capacity for learning**. The data provides evidence that for three of the four entrepreneurial types, **incubation may be counterproductive** to the goals and objectives of their host incubators.

[Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development, 2024, 31\(2\), 395-417 <https://doi.org/10.1108/JSBED-04-2023-0181>](#)



## Tech and Creative entrepreneurs have different needs

This is the **first comparative study** to explore the support needs of these two groups. Our findings reveal that:

- Entrepreneurs in **tech ventures benefit** from physical capital supporting proof of concept, financial grants, and technical and industry-specific knowledge capital.
- Entrepreneurs in **creative ventures benefit** from physical capital supporting product development, financing of smaller-scale projects, and knowledge capital focused on business basics.
- **External legitimacy** was more important to tech entrepreneurs, while internal **social capital** mattered more to creatives



<https://doi.org/10.1080/00472778.2022.2073360>

## Incubation helps entrepreneurs get embedded



<https://doi.org/10.1080/08985626.2022.2121858>

Incubators add value when they **connect tangible and intangible resources**. They do this by creating a physical environment (Place) that enables **meaningful interactions** among peers, coaches, volunteers and interns (People). This People-Place nexus **benefits entrepreneurs** in three ways:

- it supports venture development through **entrepreneurial learning**, which helps the entrepreneur **refine the opportunity** and start-up the business;
- it creates **community**, which fosters **collaboration and mutual support** for entrepreneurs as they address start-up challenges; and
- it signals **legitimacy** to external stakeholders, which facilitates **access to resources**.