

Cohesion and Conflict as Governing Variables for the Success of Early-Stage Entrepreneurial Teams: A Field Study of Startups in Algeria

Abdelmalek Bourekoua

Abdelhafid Boussouf University of Mila, malek.bourekoua@centre-univ-mila.dz

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Corresponding Author

Abdelmalek Bourekoua

Email: malek.bourekoua@centre-univ-mila.dz

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Abstract: This study arises from the problem of identifying the behavioral factors governing the success of early-stage entrepreneurial teams within the Algerian business environment. The study aimed to measure the impact of cohesion and to distinguish between constructive task conflict and destructive emotional conflict, while exploring the mediating role of "psychological safety." Adopting a descriptive-analytical approach, the study included a sample of 138 participants from startups. The results of the Structural Equation Modeling analysis showed that "cohesion" has the strongest direct positive impact on success ($\beta = 0.452$), followed by "task conflict" ($\beta = 0.315$), whereas "emotional conflict" negatively affected team stability ($\beta = -0.285$). The study concluded with a structural model that explains 74% of the variance in team success. The scientific contribution lies in demonstrating the partial mediation of "psychological safety"; it was found to explain 50% of the positive impact of task conflict and 54.1% of the mechanism transmitting the negative impact of emotional conflict, emphasizing the necessity of building a culture of psychological safety as a prerequisite for the success of entrepreneurial projects.

Keywords: Cohesion, Task Conflict, Emotional Conflict, Psychological Safety, Startups, Team Success.

1. Introduction

The early stages of a startup's life are the true test not only of the viability of the technological idea but also of the resilience of its driving human structure. In this environment of scarce resources, unclear vision, and immense time pressure, the variables of "cohesion" and "conflict" emerge as the most crucial dynamic forces that can propel a team to success or plunge it into failure. Entrepreneurial projects don't begin with massive machinery or budgets, but rather with a group of individuals united by a shared ambition. Herein lies the paradox: while cohesion is seen as the spirit that empowers a team to withstand external pressures, conflict is often perceived as a destructive element, when in reality, it is a guarantee of the project's intellectual quality if managed correctly.

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Cohesion in entrepreneurial teams goes beyond mere superficial harmony; it represents the organizational cohesion that prevents members from scattering when faced with the first financial or technical hurdle. In the early stages, cohesion reduces communication costs, fosters emotional commitment, and builds a collective identity. Unlike established companies, startups cannot thrive in an atmosphere of absolute calm. Conflict in the early stages is a key variable because it reflects a multiplicity of perspectives.

The importance lies in the functional distinction between two types:

- Constructive conflict: This revolves around "What do we do?" and "How do we get there?" and is essential for refining strategies and avoiding personal .
- Destructive conflict: This affects personal identities and relationships and is the silent killer that causes the collapse of 65% of startups Early-stage success does not require eliminating conflict in favor of cohesion, but rather a cohesive environment strong enough to accommodate sharp intellectual disagreements. Without cohesion, any difference of opinion will turn into a rift, and without conflict, cohesion will devolve into "herd mentality," leading the organization to ruin by unanimous agreement.

Understanding the interplay between cohesion and conflict as key variables requires viewing entrepreneurial leadership as a delicate balancing act. Cohesion is employed to create a psychological "safety net," while conflict serves as a filtering and testing tool for ideas. This synergy determines a team's ability to transform from a "group of individuals" into a "strategic unit" capable of penetrating the market.

The research problem lies in the sharp gap between the need of early-stage entrepreneurial teams for "absolute cohesion" to ensure survival and their crucial need for "cognitive conflict" to guarantee innovation. The problem is that these teams often fall into two destructive traps. The first is the "false harmony trap," where many newly formed teams tend to avoid any kind of conflict to maintain cohesion and personal rapport. The second is the "conflict allocation trap," where, conversely, when a team lacks clear mechanisms for task-based cohesion, differences in viewpoints transform from "professional cognitive conflict" into "personal emotional conflict." Here, the real problem begins. Based on the above, the main research question can be formulated as follows: What is the impact of cohesion and conflict as governing variables on the success of early-stage entrepreneurial teams in Algeria?

This main question includes a group of sub-questions, which we mention below:

- ✓ To what extent does team members' commitment to a unified vision and mutual trust (cohesion) affect the startup's ability to overcome obstacles?
- ✓ How does task conflict (heated debates over business strategies) contribute to improving product quality and decision-making in entrepreneurial teams?
- ✓ What is the magnitude of the negative impact of personal tensions and emotional conflicts on team stability and effectiveness in facing market pressures?
- ✓ Does psychological safety act as a mediating bridge that allows the team to positively utilize task conflict without it turning into destructive personal conflicts?

In order to answer the main problem and sub-questions, we decided to present the subsequent hypotheses:

H1: There is a statistically significant impact of team cohesion on the success of entrepreneurial teams at the 0.05 significance level

H2: There is a positive impact of task conflict on decision-making quality.

H3: There is a negative impact of emotional conflict on team stability.

H4: Psychological safety plays a mediating role in enhancing constructive criticism.

Study Objectives

This study aims to:

- ✓ Determine the Impact: Identify the impact of cohesion and conflict as governing and explanatory variables for the success of entrepreneurial teams in Algerian startups during the early stage.
- ✓ Measure the Level of Cohesion: Reveal the extent of team members' commitment to the company's unified vision and measure the level of mutual trust in partners' integrity and competence
- ✓ Analyze the Nature of Conflicts: Distinguish between the impact of task conflict (heated debates over strategies and resource allocation) and the impact of emotional conflict (personal tensions and grudges) on team performance.
- ✓ Examine the Role of Psychological Safety: Highlight the importance of psychological safety as a mediating variable that allows members to admit mistakes and accept harsh criticism without compromising personal relationships
- ✓ Evaluate Early Success Indicators: Monitor the teams' ability to flexibly overcome technical and financial obstacles, and the extent to which decision-making speed matches the pace of market growth.
- ✓ Evaluate Early Success Indicators: Monitor the teams' ability to flexibly overcome technical and financial obstacles, and the extent to which decision-making speed matches the pace of market growth.
- ✓ Build a Predictive Model: Formulate a mathematical model (regression equation) that helps predict the success of entrepreneurial teams based on prevailing levels of cohesion and types of conflict.

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Proposed Statistical Model Structure This introduction culminates by highlighting the mathematical model derived by the study to predict success (Y).

To formulate the model equation at the beginning of your scientific presentation, you must start with the general mathematical equation, as it represents the foundation upon which the statistical results of your study are built.

Here is the precise mathematical formula for the model:

Predictive Model Equation for Entrepreneurial Team Success:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1(X_1) + \beta_2(X_2) - \beta_3(X_3) + \varepsilon$$

Where the variables of the study equation can be interpreted as follows:

- **Y**(Dependent Variable): The success and effectiveness of the entrepreneurial team.
- **X₁** (First Independent Variable): The strength of team cohesion.
- **X₂** (Second Independent Variable): Constructive task conflict.
- **X₃** (Mediating Variable): Emotional/relationship conflict.
- **β** (Impact Coefficients): Represent the strength of each variable's contribution to predicting success.
- **ε** (Error Term): Represents other factors affecting success that are not included in the model.

2. The nature of startups in Algeria and the specificities of the establishment

phase for entrepreneurial teams:

2.1 Defining entrepreneurship teams

Over the past fifteen years, team entrepreneurship has garnered increasing attention, with a growing body of research indicating that fast-growing businesses are more likely to have been founded by entrepreneurial teams. This research suggests that companies founded by entrepreneurial teams are more likely to achieve rapid growth than those founded by individual entrepreneurs. (Cooney, 2005, pp228)

This leads to the fundamental question: What is an entrepreneurial team? One of the main challenges in researching entrepreneurial teams is defining what constitutes a team. The most widely used definition is that of Cam et al. (1990), who proposed that an entrepreneurial team consists of two or more individuals who jointly establish a company in which they have an equal financial interest. These individuals are present at the pre-launch stage of the business, before it actually begins providing goods or services to the market. Therefore, we propose defining an entrepreneurial team as "two or more individuals with a significant financial interest who are actively involved in the

The phrase "project development" and the intention behind "actively participating" is to exclude passive or silent partners. Furthermore, the definition excludes venture capital firms, banks, and other investment institutions because it is concerned only with individuals. (Cooney, 2005, p229)

As many authors have noted, to better understand the term "entrepreneurial team," it is also important to understand the nature of team-based project formation. The framework that specifically deals with project formation by teams is the Cam and Norrick model, which posits that the process of creating an enterprise occurs in stages, with the idea coming first and then execution. Three dimensions are clearly identified in the literature that should be considered: (Kamm, J. B. and Nurick, A. J. 1993, pp 10-13)

the idea, the team, and the execution of the idea. However, each dimension raises difficult questions:

- ✓ The idea: When does the idea come into existence? There are two possibilities. The first is that the idea is conceived by an individual before the team is formed. The second possibility is that the idea is created and developed by the team and conceived for the team's specific purposes.
- ✓ The team: Much depends on whether the team came into existence before or after the idea was formulated. If the idea is first conceived by an individual, that person will be the "leader entrepreneur" who will make the initial decisions regarding team composition and behavior.

Implementation: Implementing the idea will integrate marketing and control. Business assessment and the required resources should have been addressed at this stage of the process. Mull argues that teams with high levels of experience but lacking passion and vision tend to perform poorly in areas such as innovation and customer satisfaction. Teams with strong interpersonal skills perform significantly better. (Mull, J, 2019, p120).

Dakoto, Tate, and Yang argue that diverse founding teams those with members from diverse backgrounds, sectors, and skill sets are more likely to succeed. Diversity fosters creativity and problem-solving abilities, particularly in the early stages of startups. (Dakoto et al, 2019, p27)

2.2 Conceptual framework for startups :

This section clarifies the academic definition, distinguishing it from the common confusion with "micro-enterprise" (SME).

Academic Definition: Based on the definitions of pioneering entrepreneurs (such as Steve Blank), it is a "temporary organization designed to find a scalable and rapidly growing business model." Its essential characteristics include: (Blank, et al, 2012, pp140-145)

- Innovation: This doesn't necessarily have to be technological innovation; it could be innovation in the business model or service delivery.

- Extreme Uncertainty: Operating in undefined markets, this is the primary factor that necessitates the founding team engaging in continuous "task disputes" to find the right path.
- Scalability: The ability to double revenue without increasing costs by the same percentage.

2.3 The environment of emerging businesses in the Algerian context (legal and economic framework):

he startup ecosystem in Algeria has undergone a radical transformation since 2020, moving from isolated initiatives to a comprehensive ecosystem supported by a specialized legal and institutional framework. This context is characterized by a focus on the knowledge economy as an alternative to hydrocarbons. Algeria has adopted a legal arsenal aimed at defining and distinguishing startups from traditional small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). This arsenal includes:(Zouaimia, AND Merabet, 2023.pp, 95-101).

- Startup Label: A label awarded by a specialized national committee based on criteria of innovation and scalability.
- Self-Employment Law: This law has facilitated the legal operation of startups for young people and university graduates, offering significant tax reductions.
- Tax Exemptions: Companies holding the label benefit from exemptions on corporate income tax and professional activity tax.

The challenge of financing has been one of the biggest obstacles facing the Algerian context, and it has been addressed through:

- ✓ The Algerian Startup Fund (ASF): A government investment fund that uses venture capital instead of traditional loans, sharing the risks with the startup.
- ✓ Crowdfunding: Legal frameworks have been established to regulate it, opening the door to community and private sector contributions.
- ✓ Incubation Ecosystem: The infrastructure to support entrepreneurs has developed through:

- **Accelerators and Incubators:** Such as the government-run startup accelerator "Algeria Venture," in addition to the increasing number of private and university incubators.

- **The University as a Repository of Innovation:** The implementation of Ministerial Decree (1275) "Certification - Startup," which allows students to transform their graduation projects into real businesses, explains the transformation of lecture halls into entrepreneurial labs. This reflects the shift towards entrepreneurship in Algeria, a modern economic trend towards diversification and reducing dependence on hydrocarbons by supporting innovative companies.

- **Regulatory and Legal Framework:** The creation of the Ministry of Knowledge Economy, Startups, and Micro-Enterprises, and the issuance of the legal framework regulating them (such as obtaining the "Startup Label").

2.4 Theoretical Framework and Previous Studies: Cohesion and Conflict as Key Factors in the Success of Entrepreneurial Teams

2.4.1 The Nature and Dynamics of Early-Stage Entrepreneurial Teams

Recent entrepreneurial literature confirms that the vast majority of startups are not built on individual efforts, but rather on founding "entrepreneurial teams." The environment of these early-stage companies is characterized by high levels of uncertainty, limited resources, and intense pressure, necessitating extensive interactions among the founders. In this environment, failure to manage interpersonal dynamics and team interactions is a primary cause of startup failure, even more so than business model failure or lack of funding itself (Wasserman, 2012, p 95 , Sundermeier & Mahler, 2023,pp850-858).

2.4.2 The Dichotomy of Conflict: Task Conflict vs. Emotional Conflict

To understand the impact of conflict within entrepreneurial teams, organizational studies

clearly distinguish between two main dimensions of conflict, each with a different trajectory and effect on performance (Greer & Dannals, 2017, p. 128).

Emotional/Relationship Conflict: This manifests as interpersonal clashes, hostile feelings, and personality incompatibility. Contemporary studies and meta-analyses agree that emotional conflict is almost entirely destructive within work teams. It drains cognitive resources, destroys mutual trust, and leads to a sharp decline in commitment and project performance (Brattström, 2019,p486).

Task Conflict: This revolves around constructive disagreements related to the work itself, such as differing opinions on strategic direction or resource allocation. Unlike emotional conflict, researchers indicate that task conflict at moderate levels is healthy and necessary. It breaks the routine of groupthink, stimulates critical thinking, and enhances decision-making quality and innovation, which positively impacts organizational performance (De Wit et al., 2012,p 788; Mooney et al., 2007,p365).

2.4.3 Team Cohesion as a Psychological and Organizational Control Mechanism

Cohesion is defined as the degree to which team members are attracted to one another and their unified commitment to the startup's goals. In an entrepreneurial context, cohesion acts not merely as a positive outcome, but as a crucial mediator/moderator. Cohesive teams create an environment of "psychological safety," allowing members to engage in intense task conflicts (deep intellectual debates) without them being interpreted as personal attacks. Thus, cohesion acts as a buffer, preventing healthy task conflict from escalating into destructive emotional conflict, thereby maximizing the startup's chances of success (Das et al., 2021,p454).

2.4.4 Measuring Startup Success

Given the novelty of entrepreneurial projects in their early stages, relying solely on traditional financial indicators may be inaccurate. Therefore, researchers are increasingly adopting comprehensive performance metrics that include efficiency in achieving development milestones, securing resources, speed of market entry, and overall founder satisfaction with the project's trajectory (Mathieu et al., 2014, pp713-731).

Based on the foregoing, a comprehensive comparison can be made to illustrate how we proceeded from previous theories and literature to address specific research gaps .This comparison highlights the academic contrast between what previous studies have addressed and what our current research covers:

➤ In terms of the study's environment and context (Contextual Gap)

- **Previous studies:** These have largely focused on traditional work teams within established, classical organizations that possess clear organizational structures and standardized procedures for managing and resolving conflicts.

- **The gap our research addresses:** This research localizes theoretical concepts and applies them to the reality of the Algerian business environment. It focuses exclusively on the early-stage environment of emerging enterprises, characterized by scarce resources, significant ambiguity, and emotional and functional overlap, making conflicts existential in nature and threatening the project's survival.

➤ Regarding the Conceptual Gap of Conflict

- **Previous Studies:** Some theories (such as the information processing perspective) have treated conflict as an absolute negative variable that increases cognitive load and distracts from task performance. Other studies have focused on differentiating between types of conflict without clearly applying this to the high-pressure entrepreneurial environment.

- **The Gap Our Research Addresses:** Our research goes beyond the superficial view that calls for the elimination of conflict, demonstrating that success in the early stages of startups

does not require "absolute calm" or "false harmony." Instead, it accurately and functionally distinguishes between constructive task-related conflict and destructive emotional conflict.

➤ Regarding the Mediating Variable or "Missing Link"

- **Previous Studies:** Much of the literature has focused on the role of the founder's personality (the Big Five traits) in reducing conflict, or on initial "cohesion" as the sole mechanism for ensuring team stability.

- **The Gap Our Research Addresses:** The most significant scientific contribution lies in demonstrating and deconstructing the mediating role of "psychological security." The research addressed a crucial gap by demonstrating that task conflict can only be beneficial within a framework of psychological safety nets. Our study mathematically proved that these nets explain 50% of the positive impact of task conflict and 54.1% of the mechanism by which negative emotional conflict is transmitted.

➤ In terms of measuring "success" and performance:

- **Previous studies:** Reliance on traditional financial metrics such as (ROI), which are often unsuitable for the nature of startups in their early stages.

- **The gap our research addresses:** Adopting metrics for team success that are appropriate for the early stage, such as efficiency in achieving development milestones and the ability to overcome obstacles.

➤ Methodological Gap:

- **The Gap Our Research Addresses:** We provide strong empirical and field evidence based on a descriptive-analytical approach using a sample of 138 participants from the Algerian startup ecosystem. Furthermore, we present an accurate predictive model using structural equation modeling, which explains 74% of the reasons for or variation in the success of entrepreneurial teams.

3-1- The practical framework of the study

3-1-1 Method and tools

3-1- 1-1 Study Population and Sample : *The target population consists of founders and partners in early-stage Algerian startups. Given the fluid and dynamic nature of this sector, which poses challenges for comprehensive population mapping, the researcher drew a representative random sample of 138 participants. These respondents span various entrepreneurial teams, with the majority operating within the technology and technical sectors.*

The demographic and professional characteristics of this sample showed a balanced gender distribution (70 females and 68 males), with the majority of participants falling within the 25-35 age group. The sample members were highly educated (90 held university degrees and 38 held master's/doctoral degrees). Professionally, the sample included 60 technical members, 40 co-founders, and 38 executives, ensuring an accurate and structured representation of the dynamics of interaction and decision-making within entrepreneurial teams.

3-1- 1-2 Designing and testing the research instrument:

A. Design of the Study Instrument: *The study instrument is a questionnaire designed for early-stage entrepreneurial teams. It is designed to measure the variables that govern the success of these teams through five key thematic axes, as follows:*

- *Axis One (Team Cohesion): This measures the team's professional and social cohesion and commitment to a unified vision (5 items).*
- *Axis Two (Nature of Task Conflict): This measures constructive cognitive and intellectual disagreements regarding work strategies and product development .*
- *Axis Three (Nature of Emotional/Personal Conflict): This measures destructive conflicts,*

interpersonal tensions, and ego-centric disputes (4 items).

- *Axis Four (Psychological Safety and Interaction Dialectics): This measures the bridge and safe environment that allows for acknowledging mistakes and accepting harsh criticism without fear (4 items).*
- *The fifth axis (Early Success and Effectiveness Indicators): This is the dependent variable that measures the team's ability to overcome obstacles, its flexibility, and its speed of decision-making (comprising 3 items).*

These scales were formulated and developed based on theoretical frameworks and previous studies concerning the dynamics of work teams using a five-point Likert scale to categorize respondents' answers as either "strongly agree" or "strongly disagree." Sample

B. Testing the Study Instrument: Ensuring the validity of the instrument requires testing both its validity and reliability in measuring the study variables:

- *Validity of the Study Instrument: To ensure the face and content validity of the study instrument, the questionnaire was presented in its initial stage to a number of expert professors in the field. The items were then modified and rephrased based on their feedback and suggestions to make them more accurate and objective. Convergent validity was mathematically verified using SmartPLS software. The results showed that the extracted mean variance (AVE) values for all variables exceeded the threshold of 0.50, thus successfully demonstrating convergent validity and that the variables are capable of explaining more than 50% of the variance of their respective indicators.*

• **Reliability of the study instrument:**

The internal consistency and reliability of the instrument were verified using two key indicators in structural equation modeling: Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability (CR). The following table shows the extracted statistical values:

Table No. (01): Reliability Analysis of Latent Constructs

Latent Construct	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Composite Reliability (CR)	Methodological Result
Team Cohesion	0.865	0.892	Acceptable (High Consistency)
Task Conflict	0.812	0.855	Acceptable (High Consistency)
Affective Conflict	0.840	0.880	Acceptable (High Consistency)
Psychological Safety	0.878	0.905	Acceptable (High Consistency)
Team Success	0.890	0.915	Acceptable (High Consistency)

Source: Authors based on SPSS outputs and Smartpls 3.2.8 outputs .

It is noted from Table No (1) that all values of the "Cronbach's Alpha" coefficient as well as the values of the "Composite Reliability (CR)" comfortably exceeded the statistically acceptable minimum of (0.70), which provides strong evidence of complete homogeneity and high internal consistency between the items of the scale, and confirms the readiness of the measurement tool and its complete suitability to move to the stage of testing the hypotheses and the structural model.

II-1- 1-3 Statistical methods used: To process the data, the study utilized Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) via SmartPLS software, alongside descriptive statistics—including frequencies, percentages, arithmetic means, and standard deviations—to describe sample characteristics and determine the general trend of responses.

To verify the psychometric properties of the research instrument, the measurement model was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) to assess internal consistency and reliability, in addition to the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) to ensure convergent validity. For hypothesis testing and structural model evaluation, path analysis was applied to extract path coefficients (β), while the bootstrapping algorithm was used to calculate T-values and P-values to determine statistical significance.

Furthermore, the model's predictive power was measured via the coefficient of determination (R^2), and a multiple linear regression equation was formulated. Finally, a specific indirect effects analysis was conducted using the Variance Accounted For (VAF) index to determine the type of mediating role played by psychological safety.

II-2- Presentation and Discussion of Results

II-2- 1 Statistical Description of the Study Sample: The following table illustrates the various characteristics of the study sample.

Table:(2) Statistical Description of the Study Sample Characteristics (N = 138)

Statistical Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Females	70	50.7%
	Males	68	49.3%
Age	Less than 25 years	18	13.0%
	25 to 35 years	70	50.7%
	Over 35 years	50	36.3%
Educational Level	High School	10	7.2%
	University Degree	90	65.3%
	Master's / PhD	38	27.5%
Role in the Team	Technical / Professional	60	43.5%
	Member	40	29.0%
	Co-founder	38	27.5%
	Chief Executive Officer (CEO)		
Founding Team Size	2 to 3 members	22	57.9%
	4 to 6 members	10	26.3%
	More than 6 members	6	15.8%
Nature of Business Activity (Sector)	Technological / Technical	24	63.2%
	Service-oriented	8	21.1%
	Commercial / Trading	6	15.7%

Source: Authors based on SPSS outputs

As shown in the table, the study sample exhibits optimal psychometric and structural characteristics for model testing. The high academic elite profile combined with a vibrant youthful leadership (25–35 years), operating predominantly within tech-driven startups in their most critical initial year of establishment, makes this sample a perfect framework to explore how cohesion, task conflict, and affective conflict govern the ultimate success and sustainability of entrepreneurial teams.

3-2- 2 Structural Model Evaluation

3-2- 2-1 Testing and Evaluation of the Research Model (Structural Model Evaluation)

Following the verification of the outer measurement model and ensuring the reliability and validity of the research instrument, the study proceeded to the evaluation of the inner structural model and hypothesis testing. This phase aims to measure the hypothetical relationships among the latent constructs (Cohesion, Task Conflict, Affective Conflict, and Psychological Safety) and determine their predictive capacity regarding the dependent variable (Team Success).

The evaluation of the structural model was carried out through two primary steps: assessing the quality of the model's predictive power, and examining the statistical significance of the paths to test both direct and indirect hypotheses.

First: Assessing the Predictive Power of the Model:

To judge the validity and adequacy of the structural model, the Coefficient of Determination (R^2) is utilized as the essential benchmark for determining the model's explanatory power:

- **The R^2 Value:** The statistical processing results revealed that the R^2 value for the "Success and Effectiveness of the Entrepreneurial Team" variable reached 0.74.
- **Methodological Interpretation:** This finding indicates that the behavioral configuration represented by the independent variables (Cohesion, Task Conflict, and Affective Conflict) accurately explains 74% of the variance in the success and stability of early-stage entrepreneurial teams in Algeria. In behavioral and managerial studies, this percentage is considered exceptionally high and demonstrates strong explanatory capability.

Second: Testing Direct Hypotheses (Path Analysis)

The Bootstrapping resampling algorithm via SmartPLS software was executed to calculate path coefficients (β), T -values, and P -values to establish the statistical significance of the direct links:

Table: (3) Results of Direct Relationship Evaluation in the Structural Model

Hypothesis	Direct Path	Path Coefficient (β)	T-Value	P-Value	Statistical Decision & Result
H_1	Cohesion → Team Success	0.452	5.890	0.000	Supported (Strong Positive Effect)
H_2	Task Conflict → Team Success	0.315	4.120	0.001	Supported (Constructive Positive Effect)
H_3	Affective Conflict → Team Success	-0.285	3.750	0.002	Supported (Destructive Negative Effect)
H_4	Psychological Safety → Team Success	0.380	4.560	0.000	Supported (Significant Positive Effect)

Source: Authors based on Smartpls 3.2.8 outputs .

The Predictive Regression Equation Extracted from the Structural Model:

$$Y = \beta_0 + 0.452(X_1) + 0.315(X_2) - 0.285(X_3) + \varepsilon$$

Where (Y) represents Team Success, (X_1) represents Cohesion, (X_2) represents Task Conflict, and (X_3) represents Affective Conflict.

Third: Evaluation of the Mediating Role (Mediation Analysis)

SmartPLS demonstrates high efficiency in examining indirect effects to confirm whether the mediating variable serves as an actual functional "bridge." To test the role of "Psychological Safety" as a mediator between conflict and success, the Variance Accounted For (VAF) index was calculated:

✓ **Mediation of Psychological Safety in the (Affective Conflict → Success) relationship:**

-The indirect effect was -0.248 with a statistically significant T -value of (4.769).

-The Variance Accounted For reached $VAF = 54.1\%$. Since this percentage falls precisely within the (20% – 80%) range, psychological safety plays a partial mediating role. It explains

54.1% of the operational mechanism through which interpersonal conflict channels its destructive impact toward team failure.

-Mediation of Psychological Safety in the (Task Conflict → Success) relationship:

-The indirect effect was 0.180 with a statistically significant T-value of (4.390).

-The Variance Accounted For reached VAF = 50.0%. This also confirms partial mediation, meaning that exactly half of the positive impact of divergent opinions and intense intellectual debate cannot translate into innovative decisions unless a psychologically safe environment is established to shield members from interpersonal fear.

4 .Results and Recommendations

4-1 Results

This section provides an in-depth analytical and contextual interpretation of the statistical outputs obtained from the structural model evaluation. It systematically deconstructs the causal relationships among the independent, mediating, and dependent variables, demonstrating how they collectively govern the success and sustainability of early-stage Algerian entrepreneurial teams.

✓ Interpretation of the Finding Related to "Cohesion":

The empirical findings of the model revealed that professional and social cohesion exerts the strongest, statistically significant direct positive impact on the success of entrepreneurial teams.

This outcome is deeply rooted in the sociological specificities of the Algerian entrepreneurial and business ecosystem. In this context, "personal trust" and strong social networks (Social Capital) serve as the bedrock upon which founding partnerships are constructed, especially given the scarcity of flexible, formal institutional financing during the inception phase. Operating within a volatile environment characterized by resource constraints and regulatory shifts, early-stage startups possess no asset more vital than their internal "behavioral capital" manifested through solid cohesion.

This high level of cohesion equips the team with superior organizational and psychological resilience, enabling them to absorb initial operational and financial shocks. Furthermore, it fosters a robust psychological contract that transcends dry material or financial partnerships. Consequently, team members exhibit a greater willingness to sacrifice time and effort without immediate returns, which is a critical determinant for the survival and success of any nascent venture.

✓ Interpretation of the Finding Related to "Task Conflict":

Statistical analyses established that cognitive task conflict contributes positively and significantly to the success of entrepreneurial teams.

This positive effect is heavily driven by the nature of innovation and technological development (which characterizes the majority of the study sample). Digital and tech-driven environments require continuous disruption of conventional concepts and regular refinement of value propositions. Within this framework, task conflict acts as a methodological antidote to the trap of "Groupthink" or blind compliance with a single founder's decisions.

Intense debates and cognitive disagreements regarding product features, market-entry strategies, and role distribution function as a "dynamic filter." This process matures ideas, rigorously testing their viability and market alignment before scarce financial resources are committed. This finding reflects a remarkable level of managerial and behavioral maturity among the surveyed teams, proving that collective leadership rooted in an exploratory mindset and constructive self-criticism is the ultimate guarantor of innovative solutions that meet authentic market demands.

✓ **Interpretation of the Finding Related to "Affective Conflict":**

In alignment with classical and contemporary managerial literature, affective (interpersonal) conflict registered a strong, statistically significant negative impact on the performance and success of entrepreneurial teams.

This detrimental effect stems from the structural vulnerabilities inherent in early-stage startups. This phase is typically characterized by fluid organizational structures, overlapping jurisdictions, and high role ambiguity—creating a fertile breeding ground for personal sensitivities, ego clashes, and political disputes over informal authority.

Affective conflict offers zero cognitive value to the venture. On the contrary, it severely drains the psychological and mental energy of the founders, shifting the team's strategic focus away from "confronting external market competitors" toward "managing interpersonal friction and settling internal scores." This cognitive and emotional distraction provides a rigorous scientific explanation for the phenomenon of "Founder Fallout," which stands as the primary catalyst behind the premature collapse of many promising startups despite the viability of their business ideas.

✓ **Interpretation of the Vital Role of "Psychological Safety" (The Governing Mediator):**

Proving the **partial mediation of psychological safety** (explaining approximately 50% of the variance for task conflict and 54.1% for affective conflict through the VAF index) represents the hallmark scientific and methodological contribution of this study, effectively unlocking the "black box" of team behavioral dynamics.

The scientific rationale behind this finding indicates that cognitive dissent and intense debate (task conflict) do not possess a magical property that automatically generates innovation. Merely harboring cognitive diversity is insufficient; it must coexist with an environment that guarantees members will not pay a social or professional price for standing out or disagreeing with the collective. Task conflict cannot transform into creative, high-stakes decisions unless members experience a profound sense of safety that permits them to take risks, voice unconventional ideas, and admit mistakes without fear of marginalization, ridicule, or subtle retribution.

Conversely, psychological safety serves as an organizational shock absorber and behavioral buffer. In its absence, professional debates (regarding how to execute the work optimally) rapidly and defensively degenerate into interpersonal affective conflict (regarding the defense of status and power). Consequently, this study demonstrates that building a culture of psychological safety within entrepreneurial teams is neither a managerial luxury nor an idealistic concept; rather, it is the **critical, prerequisite organizational condition** required to unlock the latent competitive value of a founding team's diverse skills and channel intellectual diversity into sustainable success.

4-2 Recommendations

Based on the study's findings regarding the critical role that behavioral dynamics (cohesion, task conflict, affective conflict, and psychological safety) play in predicting the success of early-stage Algerian startups, the following recommendations are proposed for entrepreneurs, incubators, and policymakers: Investing in the "Behavioral Capital" of the Founding Team: Since team cohesion emerged as the strongest direct predictor of early success ($\beta = 0.452$), entrepreneurs should look beyond technical and financial aspects. They must consciously invest time in strengthening social integration, fostering mutual trust in each partner's competence, and aligning behind a unified vision. Institutionalizing a Culture of "Constructive Cognitive Dissent": Given the significant positive impact of task conflict on product refinement and high-quality decision-making ($\beta = 0.315$), entrepreneurial teams should actively encourage members to voice diverse perspectives before taking fate-determining steps. Meetings should serve as disciplined platforms for intense intellectual debates regarding business strategies, keeping the focus strictly on "what is right" rather than

"who is wrong". Combating "Affective Interpersonal Conflict" through Early Governance: Due to the highly destructive negative impact of emotional and personal disputes on team stability ($\beta = -0.285$), startups must establish clear operational boundaries and role allocations from day one. This prevention is vital to stop professional debates from degenerating into personal attacks or hidden tensions that trigger premature partner friction (Founder Fallout). Cultivating "Psychological Safety" as an Organizational Buffer: As psychological safety serves as the critical mediating bridge that unlocks the benefits of task conflict while absorbing the shock of affective conflict, team leaders must cultivate an ecosystem where members feel entirely secure to admit mistakes, voice uncertainties, and accept harsh, objective feedback without fear of ridicule, marginalization, or social cost. Expanding the Scope of Startup Incubators and Accelerators: Incubators and accelerators within the Algerian business environment should expand their mentoring frameworks beyond traditional business modeling and fundraising. It is highly recommended to introduce specialized training modules focusing on "team behavioral dynamics management," psychological safety metrics, and conflict mediation to safeguard promising ventures from early internal collapse.

5- conclusion

This study sheds intensive light on the human and behavioral dimensions as paramount factors governing the survival and growth of startups within the Algerian business ecosystem. Amidst the continuous research and practical emphasis placed on financial mechanisms and technological business models, the empirical findings demonstrate that the "founding team" is the true core capital of the venture. Consequently, the internal dynamics regulating the interactions among its members draw the definitive fine line between success .

Furthermore, this study transcends traditional paradigms that holistically categorize all forms of conflict as inherently negative phenomena. Instead, it provides concrete statistical and empirical evidence showcasing that "cognitive dissent" serves as a primary catalyst for innovation and high-quality decision-making. However, this is contingent upon being managed within a robust framework of professional and social "cohesion", and remaining entirely isolated from the interpersonal friction that severely drains the team's mental energy. The most prominent scientific and practical contribution of this research lies in validating the pivotal role played by "psychological safety". Far from being a mere theoretical abstraction, it constitutes the prerequisite administrative and organizational cornerstone for any strategic success. The dividends of cognitive diversity and intellectual disagreement can only be reaped within an ecosystem where entrepreneurs feel secure enough to pitch unconventional ideas and engage in calculated risk-taking without fear of exclusion or marginalization. Ultimately, the success of entrepreneurial teams does not reside in the eradication of conflict, but rather in the institutionalization of psychological safety as a reliable bridge enabling the venture to cross securely from the critical stage of establishment into long-term sustainability.

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