

Literature Review on Indicators for Measuring the Performance of Business Incubators (Case Study of the UBI Global Report)

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Abstract: The research aims to conduct a theoretical study and a literature review to measure the performance of business incubators by presenting the ideas and various indicators that were listed by researchers to measure the performance of the work of incubators. The most important results obtained are that the performance of business incubators is complex and cannot be measured using only a small number of financial measures. Accordingly, a huge number of indicators were proposed, but researchers were not able to unify them due to the multiplicity and diversity of incubators, and therefore the process of choosing indicators for measuring the performance of incubators seemed to depend on several factors, This is what we touched on in the UBI Global report.

Keywords: Business incubators; Measuring indicators; Performance evaluation; UBI Global.

1. Introduction

Since the 1990s, many creative young people in developed countries have begun to pay attention to the establishment of their own institutions, small start-ups which do not require large sums of money as much as they require support and advice and those who adopt their ideas and help them achieve their goals. Incubators have had an important role in supporting and assisting these institutions.

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Business incubators receive considerable attention from the official authorities and government and academic bodies worldwide, as these incubators have a role in supporting and assisting start-ups in overcoming difficulties and obstacles, by adopting their ideas and striving to bring them to fruition.

Due to the growing interest in incubators, and the expansion of their activities at the regional and international levels, it has become necessary for managers to assess the performance of their companies, successful factors and identify gaps, ranging from quantitative to qualitative and from financial to non-financial aspects...etc. As the saying goes, "If you can't measure it, you can't manage it." There has been growing interest in evaluating business incubators on the one hand for their investment of public funds, and on the other hand for trying to improve their performance by comparing them with each other.

In order to be evaluated, it is necessary to identify indicators to measure its performance.

Many researchers have been theoretically interested in determining indicators for measuring incubators, since 1990, which is the year in which (Allen and McCloskey) made the first effort to measure business intelligence performance. Many researchers also tried to project some indicators into applied studies, the most important of which is UBI Global through the report on classifications and estimates of business incubators around the world since 2019-2020, sponsored by Qatar Development Bank.

1.1. Research Problematic

Accordingly, the study seeks to answer the following problem: What are the most relevant indicators used to measure the performance of business incubators according to the existing literature?

To answer the problem, we ask the following questions:

- What is meant by business incubators, what are their objectives, and what is the purpose of measuring their performance
- What are the indicators and models for measuring the performance of business incubators?

1.2. Research Aims

This study aims to:

- identify and analyze the most important indicators used in the literature to measure the performance of business incubators.
- examine and compare the different models and methods used for measuring and evaluating the effectiveness and performance of business incubators.

1.3. Hypothesis of the Study

Measuring the performance of business incubators is an imperative in light of increasing competitiveness. It depends on a set of different indicators, and performance measurement enables benchmarking and comparison among business incubators.

2. Business incubators Objectives and elements of success

Before addressing the business incubators Objectives and the elements of their success. what are business incubators?

2.1. Definition of business incubators

The process of an enterprise evolving from small to large is fraught with risks and difficulties and often fails, resulting in wasted effort and financial resources. Accordingly, business incubators are designed to raise the success rate of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), as they possess the characteristics that must be fully dedicated to the success of small businesses during their establishment phase, by offering a range of services and necessary tools to achieve long-term success: space, finance, law, accounting, computer services and other essential business management requirements (Lose & Tenenge, 2016, p. 370). Therefore, in order to avoid failure, start-ups seek to operate under the banner of large institutions to gain support, advice and expertise: a model commonly referred to as an "incubator"

Several definitions of business incubators have been put forward by researchers and practitioners, the most important of which are:

- Business Incubators are independent entities (with their own legal status) that provide a

range of services and facilities to small investors seeking to establish small enterprises. The Business Incubators aim to support innovative start-ups and new businessmen by providing them with the necessary resources and support (expertise, workplaces, financial support) to overcome the burdens and challenges of the start-up and establishment phases, which may last a one to two years. It also carries out marketing and product promotion operations for these enterprises. (بوالشعور، 2019، ص420)

-UKBI (UK Business Incubator) defines a business incubator as an ownership with small business units that provide an informative and supportive environment for entrepreneurs at start-up phase and during the early years of the company's life. It is also a dynamic business development process. In other words, business incubators are structures that nurture start-ups, helping them survive and grow during times of uncertainty, particularly during the early stages. They are designed to address inherent market failures and serve as a tool for regional economic development. (Rodrigues & Manuel, 2014/2015,p50).

They are independent entities with legal status that provide services and facilities to small investors who initiate the establishment of creative and innovative small enterprises.

-So incubators are ownership-based organizations whose mission is to develop businesses by aggregating knowledge and sharing resources. In other words, they are independent entities with legal and financial status that provide services and facilities to small investors who initiate the establishment of innovative and creative small enterprises.

Business incubators contribute to the promotion of entrepreneurship and the creation and development of innovative new companies in general, with high potential for value creation, thanks to a range of support systems. They are classified on the one hand according to the main sponsors (private or public) and on the other hand, according to the specific objectives (economic development, cooperation). (Bengamin & Eric, 2011, p. 90)

2.2. Business Incubators Objectives

Based on the previous definitions, the main objectives of incubators are: (Abdelouahed & Razane , 2020, p. 76)|

- Providing physical and administrative infrastructure; providing technical and management advice to companies;
- Building the capacity of new companies to strengthen them and bring them to market;
- Participating in networks and establishing partnerships, which helps reduce costs for companies within the incubator;
- Enabling an increase in the survival rate of incubated companies and adding value to them.

The role and objective of incubators can be summarized as encouraging the establishment of new projects, supporting their survival and providing them with essential support. They aim to foster harmony among several factors – talent, technology and knowledge - to promote entrepreneurial behavior, accelerate the marketing of technology and encourage the development of new Companies. It also allows the development of the ideas of incubated entrepreneurs, as it is a place for the maturation of enterprise projects, by organizing the idea of networks, relationships and talents, and carrying out several functions, the most important of which are: sensitization, detection, training, accompaniment, network activation, organization of the administrative management of the entrepreneur, management of preliminary financial structures...etc (Ministry of Post and Communication, 2021)

2.3. Success factors of business incubators

In order for incubators to achieve their objectives, they must have the following elements: (Rodrigues & Manuel, 2014/2015, p. 51)

-Conducting a feasibility study prior to the launch of the incubator, ensuring that a clearly defined commercial and entrepreneurial market is addressed, so that incubator managers can acquire specific skills that are better suited to the needs of these enterprises.

-Incubators should be a part of a larger local development program. They should not be isolated entities;

-Strengthening incubators through a partnership between key public and private stakeholders involved in the local economy;

-Providing high-quality support and consulting services. Through the quality of four essential areas: entrepreneur training, technological support, entrepreneurial consulting, and access to necessary funding;

-Regularly evaluating and measuring the incubator's performance, according to long-term goals (impacts on businesses and the local economy) more than short-term indicators (occupancy rate, number of businesses created...etc.) ;

-Adopting quality management in incubating start-ups because of its importance in achieving success at the lowest costs.

3.Theoretical framework for performance measurement indicators of business incubators

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Research on measuring the development of a particular phenomenon relies on specific criteria and indicators. Therefore, it is not possible to talk about the evaluation of the performance experience of business incubators, without talking about the indicators and criteria adopted in measuring their performance.

3.1.The concept of performance measurement of business incubators

Having established the importance of business incubators in supporting start-ups and their contributions to entrepreneurship, questions arise that delve deeper into the topic, related to the process of evaluating the performance of incubators, and determining the criteria and indicators for measuring their performance. It was said in management that "what can be measured can be managed," and that everything that can be measured can be detected by the laws and rules of its movement and thus can be effectively reproduced (48 صفحة 2010 ، نجم).

According to Saad Al-Enezi, there is an old saying in the Human Resources Department that says, "If you can't measure it, forget it." The essence of this saying is that if you are unable to demonstrate the contributions you have made, there is little hope that others will pay attention to what you have done (273 صفحة 2009 ، العنزي و صالح).

Measurement is the process of processing and reducing disorder through systemization, it involves the introduction of standardized units to irregular and non-standard variations, and ultimately, it introduces the objective limit to what is subjective, usually infinite or difficult to determine its limits.

Conducting an evaluation and establishing measurement criteria requires answering fundamental questions. Is the subject of the evaluation related to the incubator, the incubate, or the incubation process? Moreover, is there a correlation between the incubation program and the success of the incubator? In this case, will we be able to understand the success of

incubators through the success of the incubate?... etc. The difficulty of answering these questions is the driving force behind many attempts to standardize evaluation methods, especially with the emergence of new incubators that transcend local and regional boundaries (Bouarara & Haddad, 2020, p. 444)

3.2.Reasons for interest in measuring the performance of incubators

Many researchers have been theoretically interested in identifying indicators for the evaluation of business incubators, since 1990, the year in which Allen and McCluskey made the first effort to measure the performance of business intelligence. Many researchers have also tried to project some indicators on applied studies. As previously explained, the importance of incubators in the development of start-ups has increased, along with their number and their forms, and therefore the urgent need to measure and evaluate their performance has emerged, driven by several other factors, including: (Bakkali, Messeghem , & Sammut, 2014, p. 147)

- Increasing pressures to measure and evaluate incubators' performance;
- Measuring and evaluating the performance of incubators will lead to increased interest and awareness, ease of understanding and improved use of incubators;
- The need to provide reliable data in this area for both utilization and management;
- Measuring performance facilitates the standard comparison of incubators and thus allows for general improvement in incubation practices and leads to a reduction in the cost of incubators and the development of start-ups in terms of quantity and quality;
- Measuring the performance of incubators (important for local authorities) allows funds to be better allocated to support incubators.

The above demonstrates the importance of measuring the performance of incubators in order to develop criteria that can be used in assessing the value of knowledge-based initiatives, thereby convincing management and owners to support and invest in them. And to provide a clearer vision for many organizations, their managers and entrepreneurs. Many scholars have attempted to measure the performance of incubators on both theoretical and practical levels.

By knowing the indicators that can be used to evaluate the performance of the support provided by these structures, on the other hand, measuring the performance of incubators has become necessary today, although there are many literature and research issued on the evaluation of incubators, there is still no consensus on certain indicators for several reasons, including: (Bakkali , Messeghem , & Sammut, A I M S, 2013, p1).

- The extreme heterogeneity of the incubator structures, that is, the multiplicity of their forms (regional, general or specialized characteristics. Etc).
- The existence of different national cultures that hinder the generalization of results;
- The influence of formal and informal institutional factors;
- A large part of incubators do not operate according to a profit-driven logic (Bakkali, Messeghem , & Sammut, 2014, p148).

3.3. Business Incubation Measurement Indicators

The question is what indicators can be used to evaluate the performance of incubators. Due to the difficulty of choosing measurement tools to measure the performance of the incubator, this problem has witnessed several attempts and studies, including:

3.3.1. The first study of (Lina Gozali and others.):

This study examines the relationship between incubator performance and business incubator success factors in Indonesia. Information technology has proven to be one of the key factors supporting the performance capabilities of business incubators. Additionally, there are standards that directly support the performance of incubators: monitoring networks; funding; robust infrastructure systems; university regulations. Moreover, government support and protection further strengthen the performance of business incubators. Accreditations and rewards are also important factors in improving the performance of incubators. (Gozali, Masrom, & Yuri, 2020, p. 155)

The study also indicates that after measuring the performance of the business incubator was initially limited to measure financial performance, the model has since evolved and several criteria were proposed to measure the performance of incubators, which are the following five elements: public policy (which stimulates business and provides an infrastructure for business); private sector partnerships for guidance and marketing; knowledge base for learning and research; professional networks at both national and international levels; and community engagement to promote entrepreneurship and cultural change (Gozali, Masrom, & Yuri, 2020, p. 157).

Due to the huge number of indicators that have been put forward, whether related to the incubator or the incubate, other basic indicators related to the impact of incubators on local economic development have been put forward, other important indicators such as business creation, job opportunities creation and the sustainability of its sales growth. As some have focused on the reputation aspect, as it is a key element in the performance of incubators since many entrepreneurs join incubator structures only in order to benefit from the reputation of the latter. Also a key dimension of incubators' performance is the transfer of new knowledge to entrepreneurs (Bakkali, Messeghem, & Sammut, La performance des incubateurs, 2014, p. 151).

3.3.2. The second study of Vedel & Stephany

This study tried to shorten and group the indicators into homogeneous groups, so it focused on choosing the incubators' performance measurement tools from two angles: (Vedel & Stephany, 2011, p. 90)

A- The first angle from an external point of view: What is the incubator's impact on the economic and social fabric? Answering the question allows to legitimize the various funds invested in this type of structure.

B- The second angle from an internal point of view: How does the incubator work? Are the services provided effective and responsive to the beneficiaries' expectations? To answer these questions, two types of indicators were distinguished: objective and subjective.

Table 1: Business Incubator Performance Measurement Indicators by Vedel & Stephany

	Objective variables	Subjective variables
External Analysis	Economic variables (job opportunities creation, survival rate, subsidies received, etc.)	Social Indicators
Internal Analysis	Activity variables (occupancy rate, entry rate, exit rate, etc.)	Satisfaction Variables

Source: (Vedel & Stephany, 2011, p. 91)

This study divides the indicators of measuring the performance of incubators into:

- **Objective variables:** Several types of criteria are used:

-Economic variables: related to the number of start-ups and job opportunities creation and the survival rate of the projects and grants obtained ...etc. It measures the impact of the incubator in the medium and long term and the benefit mainly for the financiers of the incubator structures.

-Activity variables: Refers to the occupancy, entry and exit rate of start-ups. These are linked to incubator selection strategies and policies. As well as comparison with economic data.

- **Subjective variables:** These are social indicators (for example: changes in mindsets regarding the establishment of businesses) or satisfaction. These subjective variables alone do not enable the analysis of incubators but complement objective variables.

3.3.3. The third study of Bouarara & Haddad

This study is more detailed, as these indicators are classified into six groups of indicators: results, incubated, resources, networks, operations and management. This division takes into account internal and external variables of incubator management,(Bouarara & Haddad, 2020, p. 445) even placing the incubator at the center of analysis. (see table below).

Table 2: Business Incubators Performance Measurement Indicators (Bouarara & Haddad)

Transactions	Key indicators
Number of incubated projects Project Completion Rate Jobs Created by Construction Business Survival	Outcome-focused indicators
Satisfaction of the incubatee Selection of incubatees	Incubatee-focused indicators
Access to financial resources/ ease of access to economic and trade partners Reduced operating costs	Indicators focus on financial resources
Identify network actors and resources to be mobilized Embracing inclusion in professional networks	Network-focused indicators
The structure's ability to provide a tailored response Be able to legislate Active participation Providing the tools Proposed Services	Process-focused indicators
Quality of innovation and management Structure-Adapted Information System Sharing good experiences Experience of accompanying persons Ongoing training for escorts Identify resource actors with core skills Networking	Management-focused indicators

Source: (Bouarara & Haddad, 2020, p. 446)

3.3.4. The fourth study by Bakalli and others:

The study focused on having performance indicators balanced from quantitative to qualitative and from financial to non-financial factors, almost similar to the Scorecard (BSC) developed by Kaplan and Norton (2001), who took a four-dimensional approach to organizational performance: financial perspective; client perspective; internal business process perspective; and learning and growth perspective.

Balanced Scorecards are intended to help managers know if their strategy is being implemented, and provide them with enough information to better understand why it is not being implemented. It was desirable to rely on it because it considers many performance axes, and its use in the context of the incubation enables it to reconcile the measurement of goals with an understanding of all aspects of the incubator's performance. It consists of the following four dimensions: (Bakkali, Messeghem, & Sammut, 2014, p. 153)

-Financial perspective: indicators of economic and social development make it possible to judge whether the objectives set, aligned with the financiers, have been achieved or not.

-Clients' perspective: incubated axis indicators to assess the correlation between the incubator and its incubate;

-Operations perspective: indicators related to the incubation process, enabling to measure the effectiveness of internal incubation processes;

-Training perspective: Learning hub indicators allow to guide learning within the incubator.

Bakalli also suggested several models for indicators to measure the performance of business incubators. We chose one of the models that includes several approved indicators. This model includes four basic indicators: economic and social indicators; indicators of the incubate; indicators of the incubator; indicators of the formation within the incubator. (See Appendix1)

According to the above mentioned, it was found that the topic of evaluating the performance of incubators is an important topic, which many thinkers have tried to enrich and these criteria and indicators have not yet been standardized.

4.Global Incubator Classification Report (UBI Global)

In practice, many academic universities are trying to classify incubators, the most important of which is the UBI Global Foundation.

UBI Global is an innovative information company based in Stockholm, Sweden that specializes in mapping and highlighting the world of business incubation. Its goal is to help business incubators improve their programs, increase their overall efficiency and, ultimately, their ability to attract investment. UBI Global has 1,200 incubation programs and more than 100,000 startups, most of which are associated with universities and other centers of excellence. Its map covers more than 90 countries. UBI Global provides matchmaking, classification, standards and research services to companies and business incubation organizations. (UBI Global-organization, 2024)

Since 2013, UBI Global has been assessing the impact of the performance of key players in the global entrepreneurship ecosystem, by identifying global benchmarking studies of incubators with the aim of measuring their ability to create value for their ecosystems, customers, startups and themselves. Every year, it prepares a global report to measure university incubators and accelerators across the world, but since the report (2017-2018), the scope of research has expanded to go beyond business incubators and accelerators associated with the university to include public and private programs and companies. (Meyer & Sowah,

2019, p. 4)

Through the UBI Global (2021-2022) Global Incubator Ranking Report released in 2023, after evaluating a total of 1,895 programs, only 109 programs, from 56 countries, were retained for benchmarking review. The assessed programs were compared using 21 key performance indicators (KPIs) identified by the research literature. KPIs form three main categories, which in turn are divided into seven sub-categories, which are divided into 21 detailed performance indicators used to calculate the impact of the individual program and performance scores (PIPS) for all incubators and accelerators, which are as follows:(Sowah, 2023, p. 9)

Table3: Indicators adopted by UBI Global in the Global Incubator Classification Report (2021/2022)

Main categories	Sub categories	Indicators
Ecosystem value	Strengthening the economy	Job creation and sustainability
		Sales proceeds
		Alumni
		Self-generated revenues
	talent retention	Acceptance of client startups
		Graduate Retention
Startups value	Competency Development Clients	Provided Services
		Training and Orientation Hours
	Access to capital	Total Investment Attracted
		Average Investment Attracted
		Base funding
	Network Reach	Partners (Business Development)
		Events (Stakeholder Engagement)
		Alumni engagement
Program Value	Attractiveness of the program	In-State Applications
		Out-of-State Applications (Reputation - National / Global)
		Attracting sponsorship (brand)
		1 Year Survival Rate (Pass - Probability)
	Post-graduate performance	1 year probability of survival (success - probability)
		High-growth projects
		Eligible Outputs (Pass – Proof)

Source: (Sowah, 2023, p10) (See Appendix2)

The above table indicates the 21 indicators selected by UBI Global to measure the performance of incubators, divided into 3 basic categories (Sowah, 2023, p. 8):

-Ecosystem Value: This category assesses the economic impact and performance of programs, their clients, and startups, as well as the success of programs in retaining human capital and startups in the ecosystem. It includes two sub-categories: boosting the economy and retaining talent.

-Value of Startups: This category assesses the number and efficiency of services provided by programs. Numerous studies have shown that the quantity and quality of services provided is a critical indicator of the long-term success of startups. It is critical for individual startups - as well as the ecosystem in general - that programs function as facilitators for building community and networks. Sub-categories include: competency development, access to funds, and network access.

-Program Value: This category assesses the success of programs in attracting deal flow and their ability to create viable businesses. Sub-categories include program attractiveness and post-graduate performance. After calculating the indicators and comparing the results of the incubators, the best university business incubators in the world are determined.

5. Conclusion

Through this research, it was found that measuring performance facilitates the standard comparison of incubators and thus allows for general improvement in incubation practices and leads to reducing the cost of incubators and the development of emerging institutions quantitatively and qualitatively.

There is a significant development in the interest in the incubator performance research work and in the identification of measurement indicators, it was found that the fact of its performance is complex and cannot be measured using only a few financial measures, but rather more in-depth into the dynamics of the incubator process, at each level of analysis the incubator performance, and the identification of measurement indicators related to the incubator, the incubate and the incubator management process.

Several models of standards for measuring the performance of incubators have been proposed by researchers, there are those who have adopted the balanced scorecard, and some have proposed new indicators in line with the contemporary business environment... However, due to the large number of proposed indicators, several studies have shortened them by making them into homogeneous groups, to try to control and shorten them, but the indicators for measuring the performance of business incubators have not been standardized because of the diversity of their forms and the multiplicity of their patterns.

In the field, UBI Global is an innovative mapping information company that highlights the world of business incubation. Its goal is to help business incubators improve their programs, and increase their overall efficiency, by providing matchmaking, classification, standards and research services to companies and business incubation organizations, featuring more than 1,200 incubation programs and more than 100,000 startups, benchmarking business incubators, especially university ones, through 21 indicators.

This is what we have seen from the theoretical study of the models and standards adopted in the evaluation and classification of business incubators. They are many and varied, and despite the similarity of several indicators used, the compilation and division of these indicators was on different bases in the models, because each study measures performance from a different angle.

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Appendices :

Appendix 1

MODÈLE DE MESURE DE LA PERFORMANCE DES INCUBATEURS APRÈS VALIDATION EMPIRIQUE

Axe 1 : développement économique et social

Incubateurs	Entrepreneurs	Financeurs
• Nombre de projets incubés • Nombre de créations/ Nombre de projets incubés	• Accompagnement du deuil des projets échoués • Revenus des entrepreneurs • CA prévisionnel/CA réalisé • Retour à l'emploi des entrepreneurs	• Nombre d'emplois dans les entreprises créées • Taux de pérennité des entreprises créées • Développement des compétences des entrepreneurs

Axe 2 : incubés

Attraits des services proposés	Relations avec les incubés	Image de l'incubateur
• Mention des financeurs des services proposés • Mention des réseaux professionnels accessibles au travers de l'incubateur	• Taux de satisfaction des incubés • Maintien d'un lien après la création d'entreprise	• Utilisation d'outils de communication • Notoriété de l'incubateur

Axe 3 : processus d'incubation

Processus de gestion de l'incubation	Processus de gestion des incubés	Processus d'innovation
• Respect du cahier des charges • Maîtrise de la législation liée à la création d'entreprise • Utilisation d'outils d'accompagnement • Mise en relation avec des acteurs du réseau • Mise en place d'une démarche qualité	• Animation active de l'incubation • Existence d'un bilan partagé post incubation • Apport de réponses sur mesure aux problématiques des incubés • Adaptation de l'incubation à l'avancement des projets	• Participation à des réflexions collectives sur les méthodes d'incubation • Engagement d'expérimentations au sein de l'incubateur

Axe 4 : apprentissage au sein de l'incubateur

Capital humain	Capital informationnel/ relationnel	Capital organisationnel
• Utilisation de référentiels de compétences pour la gestion du personnel • Formation continue du personnel de l'incubateur • Polyvalence du personnel • Expérience antérieure du personnel dans l'incubation	• Insertion de l'incubateur dans les réseaux locaux • Échange de bonnes pratiques entre incubateurs • Participation à des manifestations liées à l'incubation et à la création d'entreprise • Repérage des acteurs locaux disposant des compétences clés	• Taux de rotation du personnel (<i>Turnover</i>)

Source : (Bakkali, Messeghem , & Sammut, 2014, p. 166)

Appendix 2

BENCHMARK AND RANKING FRAMEWORK



Source: (MEYER & SOWAH, 2019, p. 7)