УДК 338.2
DOI 10.33111/sedu.2021.49.021.033

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BUSINESS INCUBATION AND ACCELERATION PROCESS: THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Abstract. This paper develops the theoretical foundation for the business incubation and acceleration process. Global trends determine the features of modern research and development processes ("sharing economy", "open innovation concept"). These tendencies contribute to growing the role of partnership within the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Therefore, business incubators and accelerators are the crucial elements of innovative infrastructure. In the paper, the definition of the business incubation and acceleration models was determined. Furthermore, three generations of incubation model development depending on the value proposition for the participating ventures were described (since 1980- early 1990s; during 1990s; 2001 — to date). Accelerator could be understood as the new business incubator mechanism.

The role of business incubators as the tool for economic development are the following: high positive impact on economic growth, increasing the competitiveness of companies in the market by providing comprehensive service (assistance) to entrepreneurs at all scales of business (micro-, small and medium-sized businesses). The role of business accelerators is considered in the context of business support institute development. Therefore, the benefits from business accelerators could be classified for different stakeholders group: startups, investors and policymakers.

In particular, the comparative analysis of business incubators and accelerators in a knowledge-based economy presented. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/ Development Assistance Committee's (DAC) Quality Standards for Development Evaluation are suggested for consideration by a startup's team to choose the incubator or acceleration program. In the article, the business incubation process is described. Finally, the paper indicates the key educational approaches for acceleration program — Disciplined Entrepreneurship, the Lean Startup methodology, and Design Thinking.

Keywords: business incubation process; acceleration program; business incubators; accelerators; startup.

Introduction. Key characteristics of the post-industrial economy in the XXI century are multidisciplinarity, development of exponential organizations, and digitalization. New innovative ideas aim to solve customer needs to gain sustainable development goals in a VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity) world. Global trends determine the features of R&D (Research and Development) processes. In particular, new funding tools for innovative ideas (crowd innovation) appear in the "sharing economy" or "open innovation", such as crowdfunding for R&D, infrastructure sharing, microworking, virtual volunteer, social shopping, crowdsourcing challenges for innovation ideas.

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The knowledge-based economy is characterized not only by the availability of "knowledge pools". Therefore, new challenges enable the process of knowledge commercialization, diffusion, and transfer. It is possible due to partnership — combining the efforts of the participants of the entrepreneurial ecosystem to jointly achieve goals based on "co-opetition"[1] and „shared infrastructure"[2] , resulting in a synergistic effect. Business incubators and accelerators are the key components of "soft infrastructure" in the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Researches on topics of business incubation and acceleration are reflected in the works of Cohen (2014), Barber (2014), Pauwels (2016), Hochberg (2016), Ayatse (2017), Mansoori (2019), and others. Due to the lack of research on the peculiarities of business incubation and acceleration, there is a need to study the business incubation and acceleration process.

Research task. The purpose of the article is to define the theoretical foundation of business incubation and acceleration (BIA). To achieve this goal, provided the following tasks. Initially, the business incubation and acceleration models were determined. In particular, through the comparative analysis of business incubators and accelerators, their functions and roles. Then we described the general characteristics of BIA process.Additionally, the criteria used for selecting a business incubator and accelerator by the startup team were explored. Furthermore, we determined the metrics for assessing the effectiveness of BIA process.

The research methodology includes the following methods: analysis, synthesis, generalization, comparison, observation, systematic approach. To sum up, the article is structured as follows. The first part presents a literature review of the business incubation and acceleration phenomenon. In particular, the definitions of business incubation and acceleration, differences between business incubators and accelerators, their role in a knowledge-based economy are presented. The second part describes the process of business incubation and acceleration process: stages of the business incubation process and comparative analysis of educational acceleration programs.

Results. A business incubation program could be defined[3] as "an economic and social program which provides the intensive support to startup companies, coach them to start and accelerate their development and success through business assistance program". According to scholar [4] incubation model is "how an incubation entity provides support to startups to improve the probability of survival of the portfolio companies and accelerate their development". In the study, the researcher determines three generations of incubation model development depending on the value proposition for the participating ventures:

– first-generation — since 1980- early 1990s business incubators offered office space and financial resource support;

– second-generation — during 1990s, business incubation program provides access to knowledge, investors, expertise and networks of mentors, product development support;

– the third generation — in recent years (2001 — to date) business incubators concentrate on "knowledge-intensive business services " instead of only ensuring some rental services. It indicates the need to expand the offer of business incubators through internationalization.It is worth noting that scaling the business idea in the post-industrial economy is vital for startups in the global market. It is possible in case

the idea (solution) of startups has the potential to enter international markets in the early stages of development („born global").

The main shortcomings of "the old" generation of business incubation are the following: ensuring primarily office space and providing in-house business services (Pauwels, 2015, Bruneel, 2012).

Accelerator could be understood as the new incubator mechanism, a fixed-term, cohort-based model providing mentoring and education for startup founders [5], culminates in a public pitch event or demo-day [6] .

One of the most disputed issues in the scientific literature is the differences between business incubators and accelerators. On the one hand, many scientists state that accelerators are a new generation of business incubational models (Pauwels, 2015). Furthermore, startup accelerators are viewed as a mutation of incubators [7] . On the other hand, researchers point out that accelerators are very different from the existing incubators. Indeed, business accelerators focus on a different approach and target audience (startups, investors, policymakers)[8].

The critical differences between incubators and accelerators are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES BETWEEN BUSINESS INCUBATORS AND ACCELERATORS

Criteria	Business incubator	Accelerator
Aim	Support business creation and development	Accelerate business growth
Space provision	Usually made available, there are virtual incubators as well	Occasionally, but there is a greater emphasis on business support services
Service portfolio	Training seminars for skill building Mentoring for business model and company strategy Networking — internal/external Access to finance — grants, seed capital, equity Business services: accounting etc. Specialized equipment — as needed	Focus training seminars for skills building Intense mentoring with focus on growth strategy Networking with other entrepreneurs and actors in the entrepreneurial ecosystem Access to finance — grants, seed capital, equity, VCs, CVC on demoday
Service provision	On-demand	Mandatory and provided in a structured program
Length of support	Often up to 3-4 years or more	Usually 3-6 months
Selection and exit criteria	Admission are typically on-going, and selection is made according to the focus, criteria set by the incubator entry policy	Admissions are typically done in cohorts, through a competitive selection process
Tenants	Often enter at pre startup stage; few if any, employees; little experience	Often enter after startup stage, generally 1or 2 employees, typically experienced
Business model	Mostly non-profit, with operating costs being largely covered by the rental fees collected, often subsidized	Mostly for profit, associated with private venture capitalist funds (in the USA) or a mix of private and public investors (in Europe)
Growth trends	Moderate growth	Moderate to fast growth

Source: [5].

Moreover, it is worth noting that the fundamental differences are the limited length of the acceleration program compared to incubators (Cohen, 2014) and the essential value-added services provided by mentors (coaches) in accelerators[7]. Furthermore, business incubators mainly develop the Minimum Viable Product (MVP). One of the key criteria to apply for accelerators could be the availability of the project's prototype and first customers.

Based on the explored study results of the researchers mentioned above, we can sum up the following findings:

- incubation and acceleration programs are characterized by heterogeneity of models (Pauwels, 2015) as well as heterogeneous outcomes (Cohen, 2014);
- mostly business incubator model is based on the "closed innovation" model, accelerators enable the transition from "innovation — in-house" to the "open innovation" model;
- "accelerators could contribute to the increasing internationalization of startups" [9], therefore the main objective of accelerators is scaling-up the business on global growth (or even entering a new market);
- accelerators aimed for seed-stage startups or early-stage startups (Cohen, 2014);
- both business incubators and accelerators provide mentorship and guidance. However, the focus is different.

Let's consider the role of business incubators in boosting entrepreneurship. The scholars [10] observe that researchers agree on the key objectives of the business incubation in general:

- creation new jobs and therefore reduce the unemployment rate;
- foster technology development and process of commercialization innovations;
- enable the culture of entrepreneurship by the acceleration of industry growth and local/regional economies.

Furthermore, the role of business incubators as the tool for economic development could be expressed by a greater probability of success of graduated companies and their higher positive impact on economic growth [11].Business incubation is "a unique institutional arrangement that is primarily concerned with developing an entrepreneurial culture in a community" as well.

Other crucial functions of business incubators are increasing the competitiveness of companies in the market by providing comprehensive assistance to entrepreneurs at all scales of business, promoting the development of increasing the competitiveness of enterprises and companies in the market by providing comprehensive service to entrepreneurs at all stages of organization and operation of enterprises and supporting micro-, small and medium-sized businesses.

In addition, the role of business accelerators will be considered in the context of business support institute development:

— integration „science-business" via creating new opportunities for researchers and students for developing innovative ideas and fostering youth entrepreneurship among students;

— complex offer for startups, which includes workshops with experienced mentors, indirect access to potential customers, investors, business partners;

— access to large companies, their expertise, and network;

— co-creation of the regional entrepreneurial ecosystem based on the open-innovation model.

Therefore, the benefits from business accelerators could be classified for different stakeholders group [8]:

- startups — access to highly specialized coaching, "smart money", faster global growth;
- investors — access to a better pipeline of startups to invest in; understanding of emerging technologies, reduce transactional costs for due diligence of early-stage startups;
- policymakers — get high-quality content support through partners (accelerators) caused faster decision-making process for innovation brokers, experts in innovation policy, etc.

There are many classifications of business incubators and accelerations in the literature on business incubation and acceleration. These entities are divided into different categories according to various criteria. Therefore, we will start with the business incubator classification. In the study, the research [12] draws the most common four archetypes of business incubators:

- economic development incubators, which are established to reduce inequalities by strengthening local/regional network;
- university-based business incubators, which are created to support technology companies in entrepreneurial universities. Thus, university incubators provide such services as shared office space, rent reduction using university's expertise (training and workshops) and resources (technology transfer centers, laboratories, etc.);
- research incubators, which are the part of research institutions (for instance, MIT) to test the research technology and then to commercialize with partners or to launch a new company as a spin-off company;
- private incubators can be classified into two categories: corporate incubators and independent private incubators.

As we mentioned before, accelerators have a fixed time span (a few months — typically 4-6) and offer network opportunities, mentorship, educational program. Some accelerators provide small seed investments and an equity stake (5-8 percent). One of the critical advantages of start-ups' partnership with accelerators is access to potential investors (business angels and venture capital companies)[13] .

Three different types of accelerator (Pauwels et al. (2015) are determined based on analysis 13 accelerators across Europe:

- the "ecosystem builder" (an accelerator typically set up by corporate companies that wish to develop an ecosystem of customers and stakeholders around their company);
- the "deal-flow maker" (an accelerator that receives funding from investors such as business angels, venture capital funds);
- the "welfare stimulator" (an accelerator that focuses on stimulating start-up activity and fostering economic growth, either within a specific region)

Furthermore, in the paper [4], the author determined types of accelerators using five main building blocks (program package, strategic focus, selection process,

funding structure, and alumni relations) based on the analysis of 13 accelerators across Europe. So far, three types of accelerators have been identified as being potentially significant: ecosystem builder, deal-flow maker, and welfare stimulator. The detailed description of each kind of accelerator according to defined criteria can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2

TYPES OF ACCELERATORS

Criteria	Ecosystem builder	Deal-flow maker	Welfare stimulator
Design theme	*Matching customers with start-ups and build corporate ecosystem*	*Identification of investments opportunities for investors*	*Stimultion of start-up activity and economic development*
Program package	Mentoring provided by internal coaches from corporates. No seed investments or equity engagement	Mentoring provided by serial entrepreneurs and business angels. Standard seed investment and equity engagement	Mentoring provided by serial entrepreneurs and business developers, most extensive curriculum. Mostly seed investment and equity engagement
Strategic focus	Mix of generalists and specialists. Internal focus	Mix of generalists and specialists. Local and/or International focus	Mostly generalists. Local and/or International focus
Selection process	Favour new ventures in later stages with some proven track record	Favour new ventures in later stages with some proven track record	Favour very-early stage new ventures
Funding structure	Funding from corporates	Funding from private investors (business angels, venture capital funds or corporate venture capital	Funding from local, national and international schemes: experimenting with funding structure and revenue model (search for sustainability)
Alumni relations	Established infrastructures to build alumni services	Established infrastructures to build alumni services	Established infrastructures to build alumni services

Source: [4].

The concept of the corporate accelerator has become widely discussed in recent years. In particular, the corporate accelerator is defined as “company-supported programs of limited duration that support cohorts of startups through education, mentoring and company corporate resources”[14]. Corporate accelerators could be divided into two sub-categories: internal and external based on their orientation. Internal accelerators are aimed at supporting the innovation idea within the company. On the other hand, external programs focus on startups created and operated outside the corporation.

A growing interest in new business models of corporate-startup collaboration contributed to broader classification. According to this approach, corporations to foster corporate entrepreneurship could partner with startups via the following innovation business model:

- internal corporate accelerators;
- non-corporate accelerators, e.g., independent acceleration programs;
- public accelerator programs;
- partnership between corporations to build a shared accelerator or join an existing one as an additional partner.

Thus, we can conclude that outsourcing innovation to the startup sector develops faster. Large companies prefer to boost innovative activities via cooperation with startups.

One of the key issues for a startup's team is how to choose the incubator or acceleration program to establish or develop an innovative idea. It depends on a vast number of factors. Therefore, evaluation criteria should be defined. Hence, we suggest using OECD DAC's Quality Standards for Development Evaluation[15].

The critical criteria are relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability. Let's consider in more detail in terms of business incubation and acceleration:

- *relevance* — is the business incubator or accelerator doing the right things? It involves analysis of the incubator or accelerator in the framework of their role in the entrepreneurial ecosystem, main priorities, and policies in development;
- *coherence* — how well does the incubator/accelerator fits? The research of complex business incubator and accelerator offers should be performed to determine value-added activities for a startup team
- *effectiveness* — is the startup achieving its objective? If the choice of program (incubation or acceleration) is made in relevance with goals at a particular stage of startup (innovative idea) development
- *efficiency* — how well are resources being used? The analysis correlation between input resources (time, intellectual, physical, etc.) and output results (sales growth, access to investments, entering the global market).
- *impact* — what difference does the participation in business incubation/ acceleration make? For instance, if the involvement in the acceleration program generates a significant, positive, high-level effect. In this framework, we can analyze the alumni community support as an additional value for a startup in the long-term perspective
- *sustainability* — which the net benefits of participation continue or are likely to continue? Due to the Covid-19, we can observe the formation of new values — employee health and safety, a shift from a widely used consumer approach to developing transparency, focus on environmental impact, and keeping the principles of sustainable development. The seventeenth goal of sustainable development [16] is a global partnership. During the pandemic, the partnership should be based on the trust relationships for all "actors" of the entrepreneurial ecosystem, combining cooperation and competition.

In the paper [17], the business incubation process is defined as an entry-exit process, which could be described into three steps: the selection process, the value-addition activities, and assessing the profitability of ventures. The first step covers the issues related to the selection of new or emerging ideas/startups. The next step is an analysis of provided training/workshops for incubatees to successful development. Thus, the last step is the research of outputs from the incubated or graduated companies. A broader perspective of the business incubation process is presented in Figure 1.

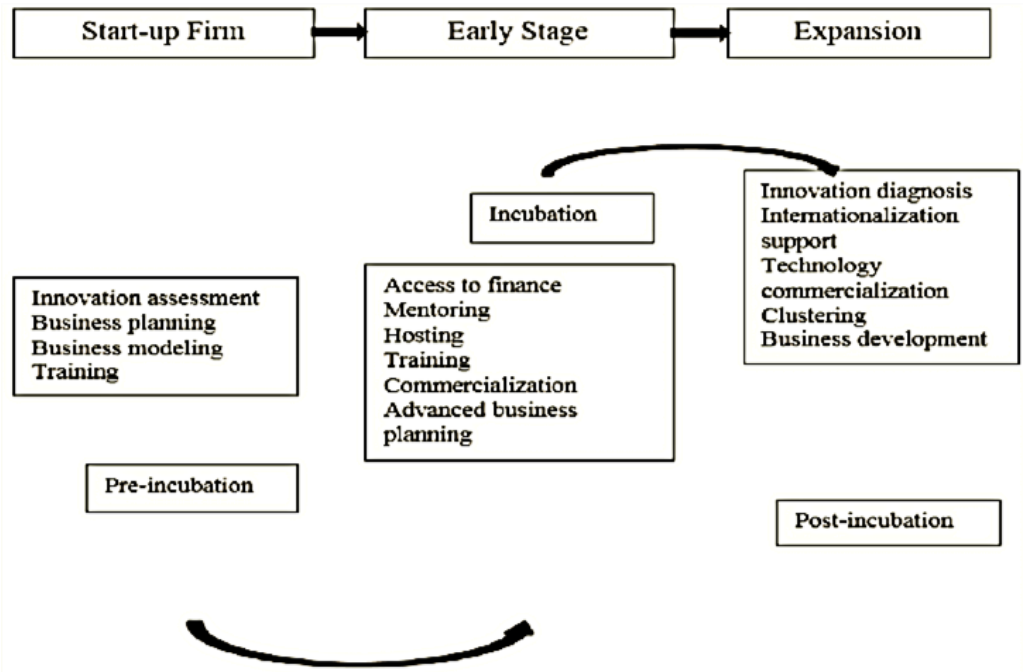

Figure 1. Business incubation process

Source: [18].

According to this approach, the business incubation process consists of three stages: pre-incubation, incubation, and post-incubation. Services should be offered due to the stage of incubation, whether expansion, early-stage, or growth.

Startups are the key players (consumers) of BIAs process, particularly acceleration programs. In this paper, based on the analysis of researches, we defined startup [19, 20, 21] as the newly established organization (institution) designed to develop the innovative idea (product, process or organizational) by scaling its business model to solve customer pain under the condition of extreme uncertainty.

It is worth noting that running a startup and enterprise (a traditional form of business) is different. To start a traditional business could be needed a detailed business plan. However, a startup is based on creative, innovative solutions — a

product or service, which operates under uncertainty. The application of standard management and planning tools doesn't meet startups' needs due to their nature. The startup is looking for a scalable business model. Furthermore, even in the process of acceleration, the main principle is „learning by doing". Therefore, the educational program of the accelerator should respond to these requirements. Key educational acceleration methodologies are Disciplined Entrepreneurship, the Lean Startup methodology, and Design Thinking.

The Lean Startup methodology is an approach to building a startup by testing and iterating innovative ideas in product development based on the customer's feedback. This methodology is effective primarily for high-tech startups, allowing continuously improving initial products without wasting possible resources. The lean startup method starts with developing a minimum viable product (MVP). MVP aims to create a prototype of the future product with key characteristics and immediately receive feedback from the customers. Thus, it occurs to validate the innovative idea with a minimum amount of time and effort. The next step is to measure the results gained from the users of the minimum viable product while working on the current version of the project. As a result, the final stage is to learn from the customer's feedback which components of the products should be improved or developed. Let's consider the benefits of incorporating the lean approach in accelerator's educational program, particularly startup-coach relationships. In the paper [7], the authors assume that lean methodology "enabled coaches to create the sense of trust and competence necessary to establish productive entrepreneur (startup)-coach relationships" and "helped to reduce team conflict by resolving intra-team deadlocks". But it is worth noting that the controversial issue could be the authority and experience of coachers that do not always coincide with the results obtained from the empirical data received by startups (entrepreneurs) through interaction with customers according to the lean-approach.

One of the most common and recently popular methods of creating non-standard innovation solutions and creative ways of thinking is design thinking. Design thinking is defined as "an analytic and creative process that engages a person in opportunities to experiment, create and prototype models, gather feedback and redesign" [22]. This method is based on such principles as a user-centered approach, creative teamwork, developing prototypes under uncertainty, and receiving user feedback to update as fast as possible. Hence, the main statement of design thinking is "fail early to succeed sooner".

Although the above-mentioned approaches have many similarities, the key differences should be noted. In particular, lean startup methodology focuses on startups, and design thinking could be used both for startups and large organizations (for optimizing business processes, creating new services/products, or even developing functional strategies). Moreover, design thinking uses traditional ideation techniques to generate an idea since a lean startup approach starts with a business idea. Interestingly, the lean approach uses business model canvas (Osterwalder's Business model methodology) for a startup. At the same time, design thinking does not apply the business model method for developing innovative ideas. Thus, the researcher [23] suggests the distinctions for both approaches in scope, user research, ideation, business model, etc.

Let's consider one of the most widely known approaches to building innovative products recently — Disciplined Entrepreneurship. This method comprehensively describes the process of implementing a new product or service on the market using the experience of serial entrepreneurship. The framework of this method is based on the assumption that entrepreneurship could be taught [21]. Hence, developing set skills to create "great products" is needed. The key 24 steps of the approach are the following: determine market segmentation, select a beachhead market, build an end-user profile, calculate the total addressable market, build the profile the persona, quantify the value proposition, define your core, chart your competitive position, design a business model, calculate your life-time value, identify key assumption, define the minimum viable business product, etc.

Comparing these educational methodologies for incorporated into the acceleration program, we can conclude that a flexible approach is needed that comprehensively combines the benefits of different programs. It should be noted that in one startup cohort (bath) of acceleration programs can be startups at different stages of development (within one stage).

Therefore, the lean startup approach is a validated learning concept and determined the customers' actual demand (product-market fit). More general techniques (Design Thinking and Business Model Canvas) could be used for both startups and large companies in the process of corporate entrepreneurship. Educational acceleration programs should take into account the expectations of startup teams. This information may be obtained during the selection process.

To sum up, the key expectations of startup's teams are the following:

- knowledge needs. As usual, before the acceleration program, startups have practical knowledge. However, the teams would require "structured" and "applied" ("relevant") knowledge;
- structured knowledge in customer development and product-market fit due to the expertise of mentors;
- applied knowledge means the capability to absorb and implement knowledge. During the acceleration program, startups build their business in "real-time". Therefore the knowledge should be relevant and capable for using;
- verification of business idea and set up subsequent milestones of the development;
- exchange experience and networking among startup teams in one cohort.

In the paper [10], researchers assume that a company's business performance significantly increases when it avails itself to an incubation program. According to the scientists, the business performance indicators most impacted by the business incubation process are the following: employment or job creation, networking and alliance building, revenue growth, and venture funding. Incubators' size, age, and local environment impact the success of the incubation program for companies. According to recent research, only 14–30 % of newly created small enterprises survive within three years of operation. While in the business incubator, this number is growing significantly, states 85-86 %.

Therefore, the key success metrics of business incubation are summarized in research [24]: business incubator occupancy rate/new companies supported; business

incubator space; graduate firms; level of funding (from the state, industry, university); survival rates of incubates; sales growth; employment growth (number of jobs created by incubating companies)

Based on the previous classification, we can suppose that assessing the effectiveness of the BIAs process should cover two dimensions: business incubators (incubator space, occupancy rate, survival rate, etc.) and incubatees (sales growth, employment growth, market share, etc.).

Conclusions. The basic statements of business incubation and acceleration concept are revealed in this paper. In particular, there are three generations of incubation model development, and accelerator could be understood as the new incubator mechanism. The key types of business incubators (economic development, university-based, research, and private) and accelerators (ecosystem builder, the deal-flow-maker, and welfare stimulator) were determined. Furthermore, the comparative analysis of the main educational acceleration programs (Disciplined Entrepreneurship, the Lean Startup methodology, and Design Thinking) identified similarities and key differences. Therefore, using each acceleration educational program can be beneficial, but it should consider the expectations of the startup's teams. The key criteria for choosing the business incubation or acceleration program have been proposed based on the OECD DAC's Quality Standards for Development Evaluation (relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability).

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ИНКУБАЦИЯ И АКСЕЛЕРАЦИЯ БИЗНЕСА: ТЕОРЕТИЧЕСКИЕ ОСНОВЫ

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Аннотация. В данной статье описываются теоретические основы процесса бизнес-инкубации и акселерации. В частности, представлен сравнительный анализ бизнес-инкубаторов и акселераторов в экономике, основанной на знаниях. Стандарты качества OECD DAC для оценки развития предлагаются на рассмотрение команде стартапа при выборе инкубатора или акселерационной программы. В статье описан процесс бизнес-инкубации. В статье представленные и сравниваются ключевые образовательные подходы к программе акселерации — Disciplined, Entrepreneurship, the Lean Startup метод, и Design Thinking.

Ключевые слова: процесс бизнес-инкубации; программа акселерации; бизнес-инкубатор; акселератор; стартап.

ІНКУБАЦІЯ ТА АКСЕЛЕРАЦІЯ БІЗНЕСУ: ТЕОРЕТИЧНІ ОСНОВИ

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Анотація. У статті досліджено теоретичні основи процесу бізнес-інкубації та акселерації. Світові тренди визначають особливості сучасних процесів досліджень і розробок («sharing economy», концепція “open innovations” та ін). Ці тенденції сприяють зростанню ролі партнерства в підприємницькій екосистемі. Бізнес-інкубатори та акселератори є критично важливими елементами інноваційної інфраструктури для розвитку підприємницької екосистеми. Наведено визначення моделей бізнес-інкубації та акселерації. У статті описано три етапи розвитку моделей бізнес-інкубації залежно від ціннісної пропозиції для підприємств-учасників (з 1980-х — початку 1990-х років; протягом 1990-х років; 2001 — по сьогоднішній день). Бізнес — акселератор доцільно характеризувати як новий механізм бізнес-інкубатора.

Роль бізнес-інкубаторів як інструменту економічного розвитку полягає в наступному: посилення позитивного впливу на економічне зростання, підвищення конкурентоспроможності компаній на ринку шляхом надання комплексного обслуговування (допомоги) підприємцям різних масштабів діяльності (мікро-, малого та середній бізнес). Розглядається роль бізнес-акселераторів у контексті розвитку інституту підтримки бізнесу. Таким чином, переваги від бізнес-акселераторів можна класифікувати для різних груп зацікавлених сторін: стартапів, інвесторів та полісімейкерів. Зокрема, представлено порівняльний аналіз бізнес-інкубаторів та акселераторів в умовах знаннєвої економіки. Стандарти якості для оцінки розвитку (Організації економічного співробітництва та розвитку/Комітет сприяння розвитку (DAC) пропонуються для розгляду командою стартапу з метою вибору бізнес-інкубатора або акселератора. У статті детально описано процес бізнес-інкубації та проаналізовано ключові освітні підходи для використання у акселераційній програмі — „Дисциплінноване підприємництво”, методологія Lean Startup та „Дизайн мислення”.

Ключові слова: процес бізнес-інкубації; акселераційна програма; бізнес-інкубатор; акселератор; стартап.

Стаття надійшла до редакції 13.10.2021