Designing a Support System for Technology Oriented Starting Entrepreneurs.
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Abstract
As development of knowledge-based businesses is a key factor for revitalization of a region, VentureLab Twente was designed to support entrepreneurs in their ambition in growth. Coaching, or soft support, is known as one of the most valued elements in VentureLab Twente and also in other support systems. But we know very little about the economic effect of soft support. And the aspects that are being researched about soft support are mostly about the content and methods of support. The personal fit between the coach and coachee is recognized as important, but not being researched.

The elements used to support starting entrepreneurs are finance, knowledge, network and strategy; known as the 4S NIKOS model. While almost all participants of VentureLab Twente mention the value of their coach, as fulfilling a key role to develop these element, there is in literature not much known about this. There is also some confusion about the definition of coaching. While some definition focus on a narrow field of support, others use a much broader definition, that enters the fields claimed by mentoring, consulting, teaching etcetera. These fields are collected under soft support. To find out about who is the best person for soft support not only the supporting methods are important. The chemistry or personal fit is seen as a precondition for any result, although there is almost no research known in this field.

While soft support in entrepreneurship education is used in a wide variety of rolls, like teacher, coach, counselor, it would be interesting to research the influence of personal fit at its effectiveness of soft support. Literature shows five factors that could be influencing the personal fit, but that’s not researched well. Still this personal fit is seen as influencing the quality of entrepreneurship education. The question for scholars of entrepreneurship education is if you can get a personal fit with every student when having different personalities in the supporting system of entrepreneurial education?

The questions and discussion are helpful to find improvement for entrepreneurship support. The questions are about the type of people that are needed to support entrepreneurship and how the types of people influence the quality of the support. This includes support by business incubators and by entrepreneurship education. It also gives in indication about the importance of doing research in this field and what can be done with the results.

While most of the teachers for entrepreneurship education are selected by the knowledge on their field, the importance of personal support (coaching) during the start of entrepreneurship is acknowledged as very important. But about how to use this in entrepreneurship education is not well known. This paper gives a new approach on how to improve the personal support of entrepreneurship education and to improve the quality of the personal relation.

Introduction
Enterprises, and specially knowledge-based businesses are very important for the development and revitalization of a region, especially if that region has had a decline of the
traditional industry (Gorman and McCarthy, 2006). This has been also the case in the Eastern Part of the Netherlands. The University of Twente was established especially for this reason. The University of Twente is known for its large number of spinoffs. However the amount of jobs of these spinoffs isn’t that much, due to the relative small number of employees per startup; <10 jobs. (Kreijen and Tilburg, 2003) Enter (2006) showed that there are 4 key success factors for high growth; ambition, multidisciplinary and entrepreneurial team from the start, product/service with grow potential and access to sufficient finance. That’s is the reason why VentureLab Twente was designed. This program, for high tech, high ambition startups, offers a solution for the main problems startups experience in their quest to grow. (Lambalgen et al., 2012)

One of the most valued elements of the VentureLab Twente is the coaching (Pouls, 2011). Each participant get his (or her) own personal coach who is supporting the participant in their ambition to establish a promising enterprise. Although most participants are very satisfied with their coach sometimes they don’t get along with him or her and request a different coach. Some of the experience of supporting entrepreneurs can be translated to educating entrepreneurship. Also students are supported when they aim for entrepreneurial education. Teachers, coaches, mentors and so forth are part of that support system; they support the students.

We know very little about the forces that influence that personal fit between students and supporters. Researchers wrote about coaching, mentoring etc. but most of that is from the psychological field. Articles that don’t focus on psychology (or health) are most about executive coaching and mentoring. That’s why I make use of the knowledge from the fields of health, psychology and executive coaching and mentoring for this paper.

At the end of this paper are some questions to discuss about. They are about the next steps to be taken to improve the personal fit in entrepreneurial education.

**Background**

Enter (2006) has done research on the reasons why startups of the University of Twente didn’t grow as much as they might have. These reasons can be diverted into the four elements of the NIKOS 4S model; knowledge, network, finance and strategy. (Groen et al., 2002) Based on that, the VentreueLab Twente program has been designed. That is why the VentureLab program has knowledge trainings, like marketing, finance and so, trainings on personal- and team skills. VentureLab also helps starting entrepreneurs with their network; access to facilities and to finance. One of the key factors however is that each entrepreneur at VentureLab gets a personal coach. This coach helps the participant with his personal (entrepreneurial) skills and also with his strategy. From evaluation has been found that participants value the coaching as very important, and they also value the coaching as very good. (Pouls, 2011)

The value of a coach for a starting entrepreneur is widely acknowledged. (Bernardez et al., 2007, Devins and Gold, 2000, St-Jean and Audet, 2009) From this perspective the quality of the relationship is identified as the most consistently factor contributing to success of coaching. (Haan, 2008) Very little is known about the impact that coaching can have on SME’s (Peel, 2004, Audet et al., 2006) And also the type of coaching that is best valued is less known.(Klofsten and Öberg, 2008, Hamlín et al., 2009)

**Literature about soft support**

To find out more about the influence that people (can) play in the support systems or education of entrepreneurship we look at the role people (teachers, coaches, mentors) play. It
is known that educating entrepreneurs needs different methods and need to be taught entrepreneurially. (Fayolle, 2006, Gustafsson-Pesonen and Remes, 2012, Gibb, 1996) One of the differences is that a teacher should be like a fellow learner/facilitator instead of leading and being dominant. (Gibb, 1996) That’s where terms like coaching and mentoring are showing up.

Mentoring is already known several centuries ago. In the ancient Greeks coaching and mentoring is used to teach protégées. Known names are Socrates, Plato. Where Socrates is named as Plato’s mentor, teacher end so. And even before; Homer’s mentions in his Odyssey about Ulysses who entrusts his son Telemachus to his friend Mentor. (Garvey et al., 2009, Encyclopedia, 1911, St-Jean and Audet, 2009). In todays practice coaching en mentoring is often used with a wide range of theories and methodologies like executive coaching, business coaching, consulting, counseling, human resource management, training, psychology, therapy, teaching, advising, sponsoring (Greene and Grant, 2003, Ives, 2008, Sperry, 2008, Levinson, 1978, Feldman, 2005) This is also clear when we look at the definitions of coaching, mentoring. There is a large variety in definitions; where Hamlin et al. (2009) collated and grouped 36 definitions of coaching and Haggard et al. (2010) identified approximately 40 different definitions of mentoring.

Some researchers state that coaching and mentoring share the same principles, where coaching is primarily focused on a short-term intervention aimed at performance improvement or developing a particular competence, while mentoring focuses supporting people to manage their won learning in order to maximize their potential develop their skills, improve their performance and become the person they want to be. (Deans and Oakley, 2006) This is also supported by Stone (1999) when she says that coaching helps to improve all employees to do their current jobs and increase their potential to do more in the future and mentoring is reserved for the most talented employees to help them advance to become allies in the future. Stone also states that counseling is for the people with bad habits that have become chronic. It is also stated that one of the differences between coaching and mentoring is that coaching is process orientated and should develop a structure and platform through guidance where mentoring is situation oriented and should transfer personal experiences of doing business and solve specific problems.(Klofsten and Öberg, 2008) The ICF defines coaching as partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential. Coaching is a distinct service and differs greatly from therapy, consulting, mentoring or training. Individuals who engage in a coaching relationship can expect to experience fresh perspectives on personal challenges and opportunities, enhanced thinking and decision-making skills, enhanced interpersonal effectiveness, and increased confidence in carrying out their chosen work and life roles. (ICF, 2010) Where they don’t explain what is that difference. Sometimes the definitions seem to be somewhat contrary.

Others use the terms coaching and mentoring interchangeable or make no difference in the support of the development process in order to enlarge the professionalism of the coachee. (Haan, 2006) Or when executive coaching is taken to be an experiential, individualized, leadership development process that builds a leader’s capability to achieve short and long-term organizational goals. (Gray et al., 2011) It is also stated that coaching can be problem focused and development focused. (Wise and Voss, 2002) Also the coaches themselves use several terms like executive coaching, consultant and personal coach without being clear what the difference is. (Liljenstrand and Nebeker, 2008)
To avoid problems in the use of terms I use the term ‘Soft Support’ for all kind of support that involves personal relations. This includes coaching, mentoring, teaching, consulting, advising, counseling, etc. The person that is supporting (coach, mentor, teacher, consultant) I call ‘Supporter’ and the person that is being supported (coachee, client, student, mentee, protégé) I call ‘Supported’

Personal fit

According to the supported a good supporter is someone that can answer the needs of the supported. Effective supporters often do tell that they educate their clients, they share their mental models, and tell them things when the answer eludes the client and they also spend a lot of time asking. (Cavanagh, 2006) A good supporter can switch roles and can have different approaches but they also have a mostly one or two dominant approaches. (Pouls, 2011) Blackman and Moscardo (2012) found out that similarity in age and gender makes a significant contribution to coaching effectiveness. From research at VentureLab it is found that if there is high similarity (demographic, attitude, interest, etc.) between supporter and supported, at least for some types of support, the satisfaction of the supported is high. (Pouls, 2011)

So it’s important to find out what kind of a supporter fits the best with the supported. While it is not easy to determine the best fit in terms of needs, roles and personal style or agenda this isn’t all of it. There is also the influence of personal connection or chemistry, which even becomes more important in the future, (Hoepfner, 2006) between the supporter and the supported. This personal fit is generally been accepted as one of the most important factors for success in soft support.(Audet et al., 2006, Garvey Berger and Fitzgerald, 2002) Some research claims that personal fit is not that important. Alleman et al. (1984) for example concludes that it’s not necessary or match pairs on various characteristics or to avoid cross-gender pairing. Allen et al. (2005) conclude the opposite as they underscore the importance of personal fit among diverse groups. And Wang et al. (2010) conclude that there is a clear relation between perceived support and trust for supported with a low internal locus of control. Trust is a base for personal fit (Eby et al., 2006) as confidentiality is. Where this relation between supporter and supported is even intimate at times. (Rider, 2002) The similarity with love relationships is also made (Levinson, 1978) where he describes also that the value of this relations is most times best valued after the termination. A supporter describes the approach of an supported as “initial stages involved establishing a relationship of trust and confidence, focusing on the purpose of the coaching process and sharing of mutual expectations.” (Deans and Oakley, 2006) Most of these relations need time to develop and to evolve in a real trustworthiness relation. (Sheppard and Sherman, 1998) That’s why a supporter and a supported should not switch often from soft support. I think that in education this is also important. This is also shown in best practices where being patient, timing, continually show interest are needed to establish an effective coaching relationship. (Allen et al., 2011)

To find out more about what influences the quality of the personal fit between soft supporters and supported the suggestion is that there are 5 factors for this: (1) types of supporter-supported relationships desired; (2) use of impression management tactics; (3) compatibility of personal styles; (4) Career stages and career anchors of supporter and supported; (5) role conflicts for supporter. (Feldman, 1999) In Table 1 these factors are split into more elements. These elements are from a supporters and a supported perspective. This is needed because Fagenson-Eland et al. (1997) concluded that supported and supporters perceptions cannot be generalize to on another. This is the same as in on other relationships where the mutual attraction, respect or interest is not self-evident.
Table 1
Factors Contributing to Poor Initial Linkages Between Supporter and Supported

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of relationship desired</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supported: Seeking social support</td>
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<td>Supporters: Seeking political support</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impression management</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use of deceptive tactics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The time used for the cultivation stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External pressure to find a partner quickly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incentives by the supported to deceive</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incompatible personal styles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Similarity of personal styles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographic dissimilarity resulting in less support activity</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Career stages and career anchors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supporter and supported in same career stage resulting in competitive feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporter in early career stages so not enough reputation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The age and career stage of the supported is out of sync</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incompatible career anchors between supporter and supported</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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<tr>
<th>Role conflict of supporter</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supporter is also (direct) supervisor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Formally assigned supporter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Feldman, 1999)

Although these factors are meant to be used in failing executive coaching by the I think it’s interesting to find out if these factors can also be used in finding a good personal fit. Also Pedler et al. (2005) conclude that it would be interesting to do more research on the specific factors supporters and supported should take under consideration in selecting their support partner and that there are situations where similarity (or dissimilarity) is more or less important. It seems that the more the support is focusing on personal development, it is more important to have a personal fit in order to obtain result. (Allen et al., 2005) Nevertheless it is clear that both, supporter and supported, are influencing this relationship and need to have an active role in the process. (Bloom et al., 2005) So personal fit without having an active role by all that are involved is not working. This is what Steward et al. (2008) also conclude when they say that personality of the supported may impact on coaching success, but their research likely suggests that other factors play a greater role.

**Soft support in entrepreneurship education**

In entrepreneurship education the focus is also on personal development. (Fayolle, 2006, Gustafsson-Pesonen and Remes, 2012) And already an increasing number of schools use soft support as an instrument for leadership development. (Grant et al., 2010) And while research on different sorts of soft support is minimal, the research of soft support in education is even less researched and understood. Griffiths and Campbell (2009) suggest that the process of learning with soft support follow the process of discovery, applying and integration of new knowledge; which has been split into eight steps; questioning, reflecting, listening, holding clients accountable, taking action, taking responsibility, self-coaching, relating. And Illeris (2003) and Poortman et al. (2011) recognize an external (sociality) and internal (sensitivity and functionality meaning) dimension of learning. This makes clear that education cannot be supported by one role of soft support, but that more roles are involved. In Table 2 of Abiddin
and Turiman (2009) describe different roles that an educator can have. The mentor is collective noun in that paper as the educator.

Table 2
Basic roles of a good mentor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles</th>
<th>Good Mentor</th>
<th>Successful Mentoring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adviser</td>
<td>Permissive not authoritarian</td>
<td>Keeping in touch:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Maintains regular contact, demonstrates interest,</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>exchange of information/offers timely and sympathetic</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance</td>
<td>Good time manager</td>
<td>First steps:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Regular, frequent, face-to-fac meetings essential in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>the early stages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Well-educated</td>
<td>Line managers:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- The mentor must take care not to undermine the line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach</td>
<td>Good communicator</td>
<td>“A People’s Person”:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Enjoys working with people, able to spot their</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>positive qualities and abilities, has a strong sense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>of equity and fairness and patience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role model</td>
<td>Knowledge of value of action</td>
<td>Respect:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>learning</td>
<td>- Mentor and mentee give each other a sense of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>worth and dignity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor</td>
<td>Well organized</td>
<td>Clear mission:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- There must be a sense of vision, mission, purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>and objectives associated with mentoring.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Abiddin and Turiman, 2009)

It is clear that there are different roles that influence the entrepreneurial education. And sometimes people fulfill different rolls, but in a lot of organizations there are different people involved in these rolls. Do we need to have educators that can fulfill all these rolls or at least several, or should we look for a different person for every roll? Having one person for all these roll means that a student can have more personal contact with the educator. But is it possible to find people that can fulfill all these rolls? This leads to the question:

- **What type of person can best be involved in entrepreneurship education?**

As stated before the personal fit is very important in fulfilling different rolls in soft support. This sort of soft support, as shown in Table 2, is also important in entrepreneurship education, so we need to know how this can be measured in order to do research on this item. (Leitch et al., 2012) Also Weinberg and Lankau (2010) argue that further research of the mentoring relationships over time is important. That’s why it would be interesting to measure the personal fit between educators and students. Are the 5 factors of Feldman (1999) and it’s elements, as shown in table 1, useful to measure that personal fit?

- **How can ‘personal fit’ between students and mentors and teachers be measured?**

Teachers are traditionally used to educate students in groups. But teaching entrepreneurship involves involve more constructivism in the education principles. (Löbler, 2006) This also
includes that the student is governing the learning process, so the support should be more individual oriented. This is also supported by Blenker et al. (2011) when they suggest that students should leave the traditional lecture room and go for an everyday practice education. Also in other sorts of education, teachers tend to educate in a more personal and active way. (Walter and Dohse, 2012, Neck and Greene, 2011) By the description of an constructivist pedagogy Mathews (2007) concludes that social interaction is an important denominator of the constructivist learning. This seems to make the personal fit very important for entrepreneurship education. An argument against this is that managers already know that they shouldn’t look for advisers that have the same personality. So perhaps it’s the challenge to find an educator that has some similarity, but also find people that can give an new perspective to the student.

- **How important is ‘personal fit’ for entrepreneurship education?**

As said most traditional education tends to be in groups. But also in more innovative educations it is very difficult to find a personal educator for every student. If will be very rare if all people in a group (personally) fit to one educator. That’s why it seems logical that you need a great diversity in educators to find a fit between all the different sorts of students. But the greater the diversity the more difficult it will become to let that group of educators work together. Or is the group of students that tend to be entrepreneurial education not so diverse? Or perhaps isn’t it so important that educators work together? So a group of soft supporters (mentor, coach, teacher, role model) seems to be valuable for entrepreneurship education. This leads to this question:

- **How much personality diversity do you need in education entrepreneurship?**

**Implications**

Traditionally most of the teachers for entrepreneurship education are selected by the knowledge on their field. And as Gibb (2007) suggests, the entrepreneurial classroom is more and more organized around characteristics of entrepreneurship education. This doesn’t imply that teachers, as part of the organization, are also selected by these characteristics. Besides that, although the importance of personal support (soft support) during the educations of entrepreneurship is acknowledged as very important, in most of the situations of entrepreneurship educations personal fit is not seen as a criterion for selecting teachers. Discussing about the questions in this paper will help to learn more about the problem how to improve the soft support by learning more about the personal fit. This discussion also helps to find some directions of research in the fields of soft supporting entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship education.

**Literature**


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