International Journal of Current Engineering and Technology
ISSN 2277 - 4106

Available at http://inpressco.com/category/ijcet

Research Article

The Social Perspective: A Valuable Tool for Attaining Pre-Seed-Stage Entrepreneurs Prosperity?

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Accepted 25 November 2013, Available online 01 December 2013, **Vol.3, No.5 (December 2013)**

Abstract

It is proposed that entrepreneurship as a process is largely affected, not only by cognitive factors, but also by social tools. Particularly, it is suggested that entrepreneurs' social skills play a dual role. On the one hand, pre-seed-stage entrepreneurs need social skills in order to develop their social networks. On the other hand, these social skills may help entrepreneurs to gain access to essential resources. In this research, a basic framework of a successful entrepreneurial pre-seed-stage (consisting of two elements: social skills and social networks), is proposed. The conceptual model is empirically tested using a database of 64 Tunisian entrepreneurs operating in the high-technology field. The results show that specific social competencies, relevant to the pre-seed-stage of a venture creation process, have a significant and positive impact on entrepreneurs' social networks encompassing strong, affective and redundant ties.
The findings assist entrepreneurs operating in the high technology sector to understand the dynamic process by which social determinants may interfere and contribute to the trigger's prosperity.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurship, Social skills, Social networks, Social Perspective etc.*

1. Introduction

Previous researches undertaken in several fields such as management, social sciences, cognitive psychology, … have underlined the usefulness and importance of social skills, defined as the ability to perceive interpersonal or social cues, integrate these cues with current motivations, generate responses and enact responses that will satisfy motives and goals (Norton and Hope, 2001, p.60).

In the field of entrepreneurship, Baron and his colleagues (1998, 2000, 2003, 2004, 2007, 2012) have largely emphasized that entrepreneurs who have developed social skills are more likely to trigger new ventures and to transform them into viable companies. Indeed, several empirical studies have been undertaken supporting that social skills, which encompass social perception, social influence, emotional intelligence are useful and beneficial in many entrepreneurial contexts.

More specifically, Baron and Tang (2009) have added that specific social competencies (i.e. impression management, social adaptability, social perception, and expressiveness) have positive impacts on new ventures performance by facilitating entrepreneurs access to essential resources (i.e. information, human resources and financing).Baron and his colleagues have also indicated that social skills may contribute to enlarging entrepreneurial social networks and that these skills are more efficient when networks are developed. However, within the entrepreneurial literature, little empirical evidence was revealed of a direct link between social competencies and social networks extension.

The objective of the current research is to give an initial test of the relationship between entrepreneurs' social skills and social networks in the Tunisian High-Technology context. We seek to add new findings concerning the role of social networks which will enhance the effects of several social competencies.

We have chosen to undertake our survey in the Tunisian context (not yet studied) where entrepreneurship is becoming more welcomed in order to boost the economic growth and reduce the increasing rate of unemployment. More specifically, we have opted for new ventures pre-launched in the High-Technology sector. Indeed, this field witnesses a high environmental turbulence but generates expanding profits. In such a sector, entrepreneurs can also easily invest in new ventures (without overcoming financial barriers). However, they are generally so concentrated on their technical competencies and products that they neglect their social relationships and skills. However, in American, Chinese and England contexts, researches have demonstrated that entrepreneurs should manage well their relationships with key customers, investors, and all key stakeholders in order to gain success.

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2. Conceptual development

To understand the process by which specific social skills exert positive effects on social networks, we hypothesized that: (1) the pre-seed stage of the entrepreneurial process is so critical because entrepreneurs encounter many problems related to the liability of newness, the great lack of legitimacy and the lack of resources (mainly emotional support, information and love money); (2) Specific social competencies would influence entrepreneurs access to emotional support and essential resources; and (3) the link between social skills and access to emotional support and resources would be enhanced by social networks.

2.1 Social skills and their impact on networks development and access to vital resources

In order to capture the dynamic process related to the assessment of social networks and the access to outside vital resources through the entrepreneurs social skills, we conducted a qualitative research (on 10 pre-seed entrepreneurs operating in the high-technology sector) before carrying out a large-scale survey based on a quantitative approach.

To undertake the qualitative study, we referred to diverse sources of information (the agency of Industry and Innovation Development, business centers, communication lead officers in technology parks, respectfully in Tunis, Sousse, Sfax and Monastir). Then, from March to November 2011, we undertook a national survey based on the selected pre-seed-entrepreneurs (in parallel with the collection of data used for our doctoral research). Qualitative data were content-analyzed and results allowed us to contextualize our research and to precise that at the pre-seed stage, entrepreneurs require specific training, information (concerning the market, competitors and suppliers), emotional support, and love money (provided by family members and close contacts).
According to the same interviewees, to gain these kinds of resources, the skills that were required at this first stage of the entrepreneurial process encompass social perception, social adaptability and emotional intelligence. Besides, social networks that are needed for the pre-launching of a High-Tech venture were those which involve strong, redundant and dense ties.

Social perception

Baron and Markman (2003) defined social perception as accuracy in perceiving and understanding others, especially their traits, intentions, and motives. Gartner et al (1992) and Baron and Markman (1998, 2003) have argued that entrepreneurs proficiency at social perception contributes to their success and their access to the potential key stakeholders.

More recent, Baron and Tang (2009, p.286) have added that social perception (and the closely related component of political skill, social astuteness) predict positive outcomes in organizational contexts, such as favorable performance and evaluations by supervisors. These same findings were also supported by Harris et al (2007) as well as Hochwarter et al (2007).

Social adaptability

For Baron and Markman (2000, p.1 10), social adaptability is the proficiency at establishing business relationships with strangers (i.e. cold calls), and working with people from diverse backgrounds. Baron and Markman (2003, p.46) indicated that social adaptability represents the ability to adapt to, or feel comfortable in a wide range of social situations.

Referring to Ferris et al's (2005) findings, Baron and Tang (2009) mentioned that a high level of social adaptability may constitute an important asset for entrepreneurs and it contributes to the success of their projects. They argued that entrepreneurs' social adaptability has a positive influence on the financial performance of their new ventures.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence represents the ability to perceive and express ones feelings adaptively, the adeptness at understanding, regulating and monitoring emotions in oneself and others (Goleman et al, 2002; Mayer et al, 2003).

According to Goleman et al (2002), emotional intelligence could be an important predictor of success not only in personal relationships and family functioning, but also in the workplace and business contexts.

More precisely, Goleman (2001) distinguished between two clusters of emotional skills. The first one is called personal emotional intelligence and refers to self-awareness and self-management (understanding and controlling ones internal states, preferences, intuitions and resources). The second represents social emotional intelligence and encompasses social awareness and relationship management (understanding emotions of other people and dealing efficiently with them).
In this perspective, Bandura (2001) and Gardner (2004) highlighted that self-awareness, self-confidence and self-efficacy have positive impacts on self-fulfilling, handling changes, pursuing goals, and improving success in obtaining the essential resources. Moreover, Sternberg (2004) and Chi et al (2008) have pointed out that entrepreneurs who are adept at social awareness and relationships management experience greater interpersonal functioning, better job-satisfaction and a successful performance.

2.2 Social networks and their role in the pre-launching of the entrepreneurial process

Most of the researchers argued that a social network includes a set of actors (units), their structural and content relations where they interact. This interaction is generally ensured at least informally, with family members, friends or other persons for the purpose of gaining some advantages (Coleman, 1990, Fukuyama, 1995).

In the field of Entrepreneurship, scholars have largely underlined that what matters in a network is both its structure and content (Burt, 1992, 1997, 2000). While structure pertains to the network size, defined as the number of contacts or social ties that the entrepreneur knows and interacts with; the content implies whether theses contacts are strong, weak, redundant[1] and in interaction with one another or not.

A large network involves a big number of contacts. However, a small and tight network encompasses few contacts.

Strong ties, which are characterized by a high degree of interpersonal confidence, attachment and reciprocity frequency, include long-lasting relations established with parents, close friends and the key members of the venture. Weak ties refer to occasional, professional or sporadic acquaintances which don't require an emotional proximity or investment (Dubini and Aldrich, 1991; Granovetter, 1985; Burt, 1995).

The Structural Constraint is the main indicator introduced by Burt (1992, 1997) and used to assess the network density which refers to the proportion of individuals pairs who are connected in a network of relations (Burt, 1997).

On the basis of the previous research findings (whose advocates are Ibarra (1993), Brass and Krackhardt (1994)), it is argued that social networks provide business founders and CEO executives with key channels of business. These networks increase social exchange with key persons and actors of the business arena, leading to a growing sense of personal success and self-confidence.

An additional stream of research has pointed out that entrepreneurs with wide social networks are more successful at identifying excellent business opportunities than those who have narrower social networks (Ozgen & Baron, 2007; Baron and Tang, 2009). Indeed, many scholars have revealed that rich networks allow entrepreneurs to gain access to paramount resources that are more likely to enhance the new venture pre-launching path (Seibert et al, 2001; Shane and Cable, 2002; Cantner and Stutzer, 2010). Moreover, the range and quality of the relationships that the entrepreneur builds and strengthens with other acquaintances influence positively his access to vital resources (i.e. paramount information, love money and emotional support).

Following Witt (2004), Jack et al (2008, 2010) as well as Anderson et al (2010) have emphasized that pre-seed-stage entrepreneurs- operating in uncertain areas and seeking resources- benefit more from their strong, affective and dense ties, than from their weak and non-redundant ties. Indeed, strong ties help these entrepreneurs to acquire the essential resources needed for the pre-launch of their projects. Thus, it seems that social networks make it easier for entrepreneurs to tap what they need and to get things done.

2.3 Social skills: a predictor of social networks development

While scholars have largely demonstrated that social skills are useful in many business and entrepreneurial contexts, it seems worthwhile to undermine how proficiency with respect to specific social skills is closely related to the development of the entrepreneurial social network.

Few lines of evidence proposed that socially skilled entrepreneurs are more likely to develop large and wide friendly relationships. For example, Baron and Markman (2001) reported that « specific social skills, such as the ability to read others accurately, make favorable first impressions, adapt to a wide range of social situations, and be persuasive, can influence the quality of these interactions». They added that « social capital is often the result of such skills».

Diener and Seligman (2002) have also mentioned that persons high in various social skills tend to have wider social contacts than persons low in social skills do.

Besides, Ferris et al (2005) stressed that socially (or politically) skilled persons establish and enlarge more easily social networks. These networks are broader in extent and higher in quality, than those developed by persons who are low in social skills. Ferris et al (2007) as well as Baron (2012) added, then, that entrepreneurs who are adept at social interaction could easily strengthen their relationships with valuable and faithful persons in their social networks.

Consequently, the following hypotheses can be proposed:

Hypothesis 1: Entrepreneurs skill at social perception is positively related to the development of his social network.

Hypothesis 2: The higher the entrepreneurs' skill at social adaptability is the higher his social networks level will be.

Hypothesis 3: Entrepreneurs proficiency at emotional intelligence impacts positively the level of his social network.

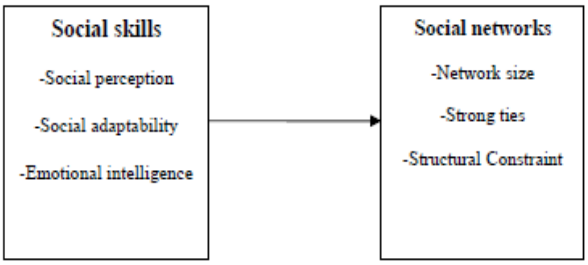

Figure 1: The theoretical model of the study on social determinants of pre-seed-stage entrepreneurs' success

3. Method

In order to understand the dynamic process of assessing social networks through the entrepreneurs social skills, we conducted a qualitative research (on 10 high-technology entrepreneurs) before carrying out a large-scale survey (based on a quantitative approach)[2]. This method enables us to support our theoretical framework.

Table 1: Factor analysis results of social skills

Items	Factor1	Factor2	Factor3	Factor4
Social perception				
1- I can usually recognize others personality accurately by observing their behaviors.	**,527**	-,075	-,412	,061
2- I can usually read others well and tell how they are feeling in a given social situation.	**,477**	-,266	-,539	,300
3- I generally know when it is the right time to ask someone for a favor.	**,595**	-,286	-,392	,007
4- I can tell why people have behaved the way they have in most situations.	**,591**	-,456	-,298	,153
Social adaptability				
5-I can easily adjust to being in just about any social situation.	-,075	**,802**	,067	,384
6-I can be comfortable with all types of people — young or old, people from the same or different backgrounds as myself.	-,1 12	**,742**	,244	,437
7-I can talk to anybody about almost anything.	-,203	**,727**	,176	,328
Emotional intelligence				
10- When faced with a stressful situation, I've made myself think about it in a way that helped me stay calm by adjusting my personal feelings to those of others.	,185	,018	**,527**	-,451
11- I control my emotions and impulses by changing the way I think about the situation I am in.	,252	-,217	**,678**	-,205
12- When I wanted to feel fewer negative emotions, I changed the way I am thinking about the situation.	,213	-,098	**,755**	-,332
13- I generally update my potentialities to reach my personal goals aiming at an excellent standard.	,248	-,255	**,615**	-,299
14-I recognize my own feelings, strengths, capacities, and limits.	,062	,065	,277	**,891**
15-I can manage a group of persons and generate enthusiasm in them.	,134	,069	,3 16	**,882**
16-I am able of working with others creating a group synergy and aiming at reaching the shared collective goals.	,092	,075	,288	**,891**
17- I can establish mutual and lasting relationships with others.	-,3 10	-,503	,479	**,059**
Eigenvalues	2.526	2.524	2.316	2.329
Percentage of explained variance	28.244	19.45	13.326	8.503
Cumulative Percentage of explained variance	28.244	47.695	61.02	69.523

3.1 Participants, sample and procedure

As indicated earlier (in the theoretical development), we have chosen to limit our research to the most common social skills that were highlighted in self-reports by entrepreneurs and experts (social perception, social adaptability and emotional intelligence)[2]. When a first version of the questionnaire was ready, two academicians were consulted to check if the items chosen in our questionnaire transmitted well the content of their appropriate constructs. Furthermore, in order to ensure considerable overlap in language and concepts, we referred to the framework instructed by Brislin (1970) for adapting an international survey instrument.

Then, from March to November 2011, we conducted a national survey based on a representative sample of 64 high-tech pre-seed-entrepreneurs (in parallel with the collection of data used for our doctoral research). To do so, we had recourse to multiple sources of information (the agency of Industry and Innovation Development, business centers, communication lead officers of technology parks, respectively in Tunis, Sousse, Sfax and Monastir).

Among the 320 potential interview subjects whose new ventures average age was 3 months, only 64 accepted to give ample answers, reflecting a response rate of 20%. The interviewees were university graduates aged between 26 and 42 years old.

3.2 Measures

3.2.1 Social skills

We referred to the measures used by Markman and Baron (1998), Baron and Markman (2003) and Baron and Tang (2009) to operationalize social skills. In order to ensure a high operational quality of the scale and to get higher variance in the answers, a 1-5 point Likert type reflective scale ranging from one representing strongly disagree to five representing strongly agree was used to measure the specific social skills that we have chosen in our research. In accordance with Baron and colleagues methodology, each rating was a single item on a 5-point scale. Higher scores reflect higher levels of social skills.

All factors presented eigenvalues greater than one and explained 69.523% of the total variance. (For more details see Table 1).

2For the quantitative approach, we used the SPSS Software.

3 This point was advanced in details in the conceptual development

Social perception

A five-item evaluation of the participants' social perception was taken from the instrument developed and validated by Baron and Markman (1998, 2003). The same instrument was reused, later on, by Baron and Tang (2009). However, in our context, four items loaded on social perception, explaining 60.524% of the total variance (KMO= 0.734). Item 5 was less correlated with other items and so was dropped.

Social adaptability

Items designed to measure social adaptability were taken from the instrument used by Baron and Markman (2003) and reemployed, after that, in the study conducted by Baron and Tang (2009).
Three items loaded on one factor explaining 72.455% of the total variance (KMO= 0.742).

Emotional intelligence

To assess the levels of emotional intelligence, we reused to the eight-item version of the scale suggested by Markman and Baron (1998) who have largely referred to Goleman's framework (1995, 1998).

The eight items loaded on two factors, i.e. personal emotional intelligence (4 items) and social emotional intelligence (4 items). These two factors explain 67.799% of the total variance (KMO= 0.741).

3.2.2 Social networks

Taking the bonding perspective[43] advanced by Burt (1992, 1997, 2000) and reemployed later on by many researchers (such as Seibert et al (2001)), we captured the social network through three aspects: the network size, its Structural constraint- SC- and the number of strong ties it involves. We kept these measures as metric ones. As noted earlier, the size of the entrepreneurs' network corresponds to the number of persons who have helped the entrepreneur, in some way, to the pre-seed of his project during the last six months (the maximum size of the network is ten). Strong ties are close relationships between the entrepreneur and his peers (close friends, members of his family, close partners, etc). These strong ties were also supposed to assist the entrepreneur to pre-launch his new venture.
4 Burt (1992, 1997) proposed two perspectives when dealing with social networks: the bonding view which represents the social network by an homogenous social group built on strong ties, and the bridging view which focuses on relationships build across diverse social actors (or groups)

The structural constraint refers to a restricted place that an individual has in his network leading to his lack of access to social, cultural, economic or political resources (Burt, 1992; Borgatti et al, 2002). This variable measurement arises from Borgatti and his colleagues (2002) software (UCINET VI) which calculates the structural constraint-SC- of each entrepreneurial network.

The network size, the number of strong ties and the SC didn't load on one factor pertaining to social network and they didn't explain together more than 50 % of the total variance. The KMO value of this factor was less than 0.50. For this reason, each item was considered as a variable on itself. This approach allowed us to deduce the effects of specific social skills on each aspect (dimension) of the social network.

Then, we can propose the set of the testable hypotheses as follows:

Hypothesis 1a: Entrepreneurs' skill at social perception is positively related to the development of his strong ties.
Hypothesis 1b: Entrepreneurs' skill at social perception is positively related to the development of his structural constraint.
Hypothesis 1c: Entrepreneurs' skill at social perception is positively related to the development of his networks size.

Hypothesis 2a: The higher the entrepreneurs' skill at social adaptability is the higher his number of strong ties will be.
Hypothesis 2b: The higher the entrepreneurs' skill at social adaptability is the higher his structural constraint level will be.
Hypothesis 2c: The higher the entrepreneurs' skill at social adaptability is the higher his networks size will be.

Hypothesis 3a: Entrepreneurs' proficiency at personal emotional intelligence impacts positively the number of his strong ties.
Hypothesis 3b: Entrepreneurs' proficiency at personal emotional intelligence impacts positively the level of his structural constraint.
Hypothesis 3c: Entrepreneurs' proficiency at personal emotional intelligence impacts positively the size of his network.
Hypothesis 4a: Entrepreneurs proficiency at social emotional intelligence impacts positively the number of his strong ties.
Hypothesis 4b: Entrepreneurs proficiency at social emotional intelligence impacts positively the level of his structural constraint.
Hypothesis 4c: Entrepreneurs proficiency at social emotional intelligence impacts positively the size of his network.

Results

The results of the interaction analyses dealing with the network size, the number of strong ties and the structural constraint as dependant variables are reported in table 2.

As shown in the table, results provided support for the prediction that entrepreneurs' several social skills are significantly related to their social networks.

Indeed, the results indicated that social emotional intelligence and social adaptability are positively and significantly related to the number of strong ties, supporting a large effect of social emotional intelligence (=40.2%) in comparison with social adaptability.

4 Burt (1992, 1997) proposed two perspectives when dealing with social networks: the bonding view which represents the social network by an homogenous social group built on strong ties, and the bridging view which focuses on relationships build across diverse social actors (or groups)

Table 2: Regression analysis results

Independent variables	Non Standardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.
	A	Standard Error	Bêta		
Dependant variable : Number of strong ties					
(Constant)	1,594	,139	-,498	11,478	,000
Personal Emotional Intelligence	-,625	,159	,402	-3,942	,000
Social Emotional Intelligence	,505	,158	,353	3,206	,002
Social Adaptability	,444	,151		2,949	,005
Dependant variable : Structural constraint					
(Constant)	2,349	,076	-,484	31,048	,000
Social Perception	-,319	,089	,356	-3,565	,001
Social Adaptability	,234	,089		2,620	,011
Dependant variable :Access to outside vital resources					
(Constant)	3,568	,121	,285	,000	,000
Personal Emotional Intelligence	,285	,122		2,342	,022
Dependant variable : Network Size					
(Constant)	3,781	,204	,327	18,537	,000
Social Adaptability	,561	,206		2,729	,008

(=35.3%). Personal emotional intelligence has a significant, but a negative impact on entrepreneurs strong ties, supporting a large negative effect (=49.8%); whereas social perception has no influence on entrepreneurs strong ties. Hypotheses 2a and 4a were then corroborated. Hypotheses 1a and 3a were rejected.

Social adaptability has a significant and positive impact on entrepreneurs structural constraint (=35.6%). Hypothesis 2b is then supported. Nevertheless, social perception has a negative effect on the entrepreneurs structural constraint (=48.4%) whereas no support was found for emotional intelligence. Hypotheses 1b, 3b and 4b were so corroborated.

Concerning networks size, it was exclusively explained by social adaptability (=32.7%). Hypothesis 2c is then supported. However, no support was obtained for other social skills and hypotheses 1c, 3c and 4 c were then refused.

On the basis of all these research findings, it seems that social adaptability is the most efficient social skill, as it has an influence on all the measures of entrepreneurs' social networks (networks size, number of strong ties, structural constraint). Then, social emotional intelligence is the second competence that the entrepreneur can use in order to increase the number of his strong ties. Concerning personal emotional intelligence and social perception, results indicated that they were negatively related to entrepreneurs' social networks.

Overall, the results provided some evidence that socially skilled entrepreneurs are more likely to enlarge their social networks. These networks are especially affected by social adaptability and emotional intelligence. They will, in turn, help entrepreneurs to trigger successfully the pre-seed stage of their new ventures.

Discussion

The results of the current study are consistent with the findings of the previous studies which have largely underlined, without an empirical proof, that specific social skills of American entrepreneurs may have a significant impact on their social networks (Baron and Markman, 1998; 2003; Baron and Brush, 1999; Baron, 2004).

Additional findings reported by Chi, Baron et al (2008) have also drawn attention to the mediating role of social networks (based on strong ties) in New England. These networks may interfere between the entrepreneurs social skills (social influence, social intelligence, apparent sincerity and networking capability) and his new venture performance. Zhao et al (2010) have also emphasized that, in the Chinese context (Beijing and Xunyi), the entrepreneurs comprehensive social competence (social perception, social adaptability, expressiveness, proactive social strategies, and relational perseverance) has a positive influence on his network size.

However, unlike previous researches, conducted in the American and Chinese contexts (focusing especially on social perception, social persuasion, impression management and expressiveness), we have selected social competencies which are the most relevant in the Tunisian High-Technology context and at the pre-seed stage of the entrepreneurial process (i.e. social perception, emotional intelligence and social adaptability).

Moreover, we aimed at shedding new light on the central role of entrepreneurs' social skills in networks extension.

Baron and Marksman's (2003) assumption indicated that social capital may well exert its primary impact early in the process … whereas the effects of social skills in interacting may persist and continue to shape the nature of the entrepreneurs' relations with such persons on a long-term basis. However, we provided several lines of evidence for predicting that, even in the pre-seed stage of

the entrepreneurial process (which is a problematic momentum), social skills may exert some positive effects leading to success. Hence, the entrepreneur requires some support from his relatives and intimate acquaintances to get information and emotional assistance needed for his potential activities. On the basis of an extensive body of research advancing that social skills enhances the entrepreneurs social networks (based on redundant, dense and strong ties), we believed, as mentioned earlier, that specific social competencies have a great influence on the development of the entrepreneurial social network. In this perspective, four sets of testable hypotheses were proposed leading to four clusters of results.

First, the hypotheses proposed on the basis of Baron and Tangs reasoning supported that the specific social skills stressed above, especially social adaptability, exert strong effects on the entrepreneurs network size, structural constraint and number of strong ties. In other words, strong ties are raised mainly through social adaptability, but also by social emotional intelligence. However, networks size and structural constraint are developed only by social adaptability.

On the one hand, these findings arent surprising because close and lasting relationships entertained with relatives, the members of the family, and intimate friends are based on confidence, mutual trust, intimacy and honesty. Indeed, to develop this kind of relations, entrepreneurs require certain adeptness at understanding, managing the persons they like and adapting to their emotions, situations and attitudes. These statements were also advanced by Baron and Brush (1999) who demonstrated that the most critical skill at the pre-launching stage of the entrepreneurial process is social adaptability. Then, adeptness at social persuasion, impression management and emotional intelligence may be efficient at obtaining the financing required for the establishment of the new venture.

Moreover, the findings of this study are consistent with Baron and Markman's (1998) framework which indicated that social perception and emotional intelligence (compared to expressiveness, social influence, and impression management), aren't so efficient for biotechnology entrepreneurs.

On the other hand, results make us think that self-efficacy, emotional self-control and self-assessment and social perception would be more effective when dealing with social networks based on diverse, non redundant and weak ties. Such relations are developed with different persons who may interact with entrepreneurs, but aren't so close to them. For this reason, when the entrepreneurial process evolves, talented entrepreneurs need to be understanding, self-confident and able to come up with logical and structured arguments. Such capabilities help them to attract the key stakeholders and induce positive reactions on them (Shane and Cable, 2002; Batjargal and Liu, 2004; Zacharakis et al, 2007). Bhagavatula et al (2010) have also revealed that entrepreneurs may use different social skills according to whether they are in a stable or uncertain environment, in the pre-launching or the growth stage of the entrepreneurial process. These scholars added that entrepreneurs may take advantage of their strong ties mainly in the pre-seed stage of a venture creation process and in a stable environment. Their findings are consistent with results obtained by Jack et al (2008) as well as Anderson et al (2007, 2010, 2012).

Second, in the Tunisian business context, it seems that the key persons who are willing to help the entrepreneur, such as the intimate friends, relatives, or proximity contacts, aren't very tempted by self-efficacy, self-confidence or social perception of the entrepreneur. These persons are, however, influenced by the entrepreneurs' proficiency at social intelligence and adaptability. In this perspective, it is important to underline that the entrepreneurs' social adaptability, related to the adeptness at adapting to different social situations and persons with different backgrounds, exerts a strong impact on the development of their social networks (strong ties, network size and structural constraint). This means that the more the entrepreneur is socially adaptive and intelligent, the greater the contacts he will have (especially strong and redundant ties, which are more important and beneficial than weak ties at the pre-launching stage, and in the High-Technology field (Elfring and Hulsink, 2003; Bhagavatula and al, 2010)).

Finally, the results support the prediction that specific social skills contribute to the development of social networks. These findings constitute an important addition to previous studies conducted by Baron and his colleagues, underlining especially that strong ties are more likely to enhance access to financial resources (Cable and Shane, 2002; Batjargal and Liu, 2004). The current research indicates that, even these strong ties are developed thanks to specific social skills.

The hypotheses suggested in order to fill the gap between social skills and social networks are corroborated. This result confirms the previous assumptions revealed by Baron and his colleagues.

Conclusions, limitations and implications for future researches

The findings of the present research have several important implications.

First, at the broader level, this study explains the process by which entrepreneurs can enlarge their social networks at a critical stage of the entrepreneurial process: the pre-seed of the new venture. At this phase, entrepreneurs encounter several problems such as resources scarcity, uncertainty, and lack of emotional support…Therefore, they have to enhance their access to problems and establish their new ventures.

Effective tactics based on social adaptability, social emotional intelligence and other enhancement efforts have largely been developed by psychologists and even professionals to improve careers success. This current research is consistent with the growing argument which advanced that such techniques could also be used in guiding training programs. These programs are dedicated to entrepreneurs in order to enhance their social

effectiveness at interaction and communication with people from a wide range of backgrounds and cultures enabling them to avoid social errors and achieve their goals in different social settings.

Second, this study adds a new line of evidence to the existent body of knowledge by exploring the way by which specific social skills assist entrepreneurs in enlarging their social capital. In other words, we have helped to shed some light on the slight theoretical framework dedicated to the relationship between social skills and social networks. Indeed, some previous studies conducted by Baron and Markman (2000), Baron and Markman (1998, 2003) have indicated that socially skilled entrepreneurs are more likely to have high levels of social capital, without providing any empirical support. The current research provides some empirical support for the impact of several social skills (especially social adaptability and social emotional intelligence) on the extension of the entrepreneurial social networks. This network measure is based on its size as well as on the number of strong and redundant ties it includes. In this way, we attempted to offer some practical understanding of the process by which social factors adhere to raise High-Technology entrepreneurs' success.

We believe that this study has also some limitations that should be mentioned as follows.

First, there is a bias impact of some measures related to social competencies and social networks in the sense that social skills measures are based on Likert-scale responses and provided, in a part, by experts and entrepreneurs interviewed in the qualitative research. Besides, while the social networks has been operationalized by referring to strong and redundant ties that an entrepreneur had built during his entrepreneurial process; other researchers have assessed social network with weak and diverse ties, especially when talking about its effects on access to information and essential resources (Shane, 2003; Inpken and Tsang, 2005; Jack et al, 2010). Thus, it is worth noting how our measures of social networks and Batjargal and Liu's ones (2004) complement one another regarding the results they provide for entrepreneurs performance. In a similar manner, other scholars underlined that social networks should be approached either by strong and dense ties it involves, or by the mix of weak/strong ties they involve (Hite and Hesterly, 2001; Elfring and Hulsink, 2003). That's why another perspective could be oriented to the measurement of the social network by the set of strong and weak ties it encompasses in order to study their joint benefits on the entrepreneurial success.

A second empirical limitation that could be addressed in the future is related to the investigation period in which the data were taken. Our research was undertaken at a definite time, with reference to the cross-sectional method. It didn't allow us to assess the entrepreneurs' social competencies and social networks at various and successive moments. It is so recommended to carry out a longitudinal analysis to outline the enlargement of the social capital through time, as long as the social skills are improved.

Third, the present findings are related only to the Tunisian High-Technology sector. Therefore, we cannot confirm whether the specific social skills we have chosen (ig. social adaptability and social emotional intelligence) are so relevant in other fields.

An additional stream of researches would be addressed to other contexts in order to replicate our conceptual model in other sectors. Hence, it is recommended that several lines of studies explore the process by which proficiency at social interaction would enlarge the social networks of the entrepreneur and ease his access to essential resources in other fields, such as Agriculture, Industry and Biotechnology and at different momentums of the new venture creation process.

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