Role de a d o tra t a d ho e The a t o o te t a d takeholder e e tat o o e ator a a er' trate a e

by

Gwarega Dambud o

Submitted in fulfilment of the re uirements for the degree of

Doctor of Business dministration

at the Gordon Institute of Business Science,

niversity of Pretoria

Supervisor

Professor onathan Marks

Co Supervisor

Professor ohan L. Olivier

October

Declaration

I, Gwarega Dambudzo, declare that this thesis, which I hereby submit to the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria, in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) degree, is my own work and has not been previously submitted for any degree or examination at this or any other institution.

I further declare that the necessary authorisation and consent were sought and obtained to conduct this research, which was conducted in compliance with the ethical clearance granted for the study.

.....

Signature

Date

□□k□o□led□e□ e□t□□

Completing this doctorate thesis has been a challenging yet rewarding □ourney, and it would not have been possible without the unwavering support and encouragement of many individuals. First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisors, Prof. □onathan Marks and Prof. □ohan Olivier. Your insightful guidance, constructive criticism, and support have been invaluable.

I am also immensely grateful to the GIBS Doctorate □dmin office for their support. Dr. Vivienne Spooner, Mamello Ngwenya, and Mpho □laardt, your regular updates, follow□ups, and advice on administrative matters ensured everything ran smoothly, especially when I needed an extension of time to complete my thesis.

Thank you to the participating organisations and individual research respondents for agreeing to participate in this study during the challenging COVID□□□ pandemic. Your willingness to share your experiences was crucial to the success of this research.

Special thanks to Dr. Gabi Nudelman, who became my academic friend abroad and encouraged me to push through the most challenging moments of data analysis. Your mantra, "The only way out is through," kept me motivated and determined to go through the ma□e and complete the □ourney.

I would also like to acknowledge the various doctorate cohorts for the inspiration, criti□ue, and challenges during our work□in□progress sessions. Your intellectual camaraderie and shared experiences have been a source of strength. □s the □ourney became lonely, I held on to the encouragement from those who graduated ahead of me and shared their stories. Your success stories have been a beacon of hope.

To my wife, □osie, and our sons, Tino, TG, and Thabo, I cannot thank you enough for your understanding and holding the fort as we navigated life in a foreign land amidst my studies. Your patience, love, and support have been my anchor.

To Mashudu, thank you for your invaluable assistance in typing significant portions of this thesis. Finally, to my friends and extended family who felt isolated during the study period and everyone who has been a part of this □ourney, your support, encouragement, and belief in me have made this achievement possible.

□□□tra□t□

This study examines how stakeholders' expectations influence the behaviour of business incubator managers, as demonstrated by their strategic agency. While existing research acknowledges the potential of effective business incubator management in fostering successful new ventures, it does not delve into this role□s complex and contextual nature, particularly in developing economies. □nderstanding how stakeholder expectations influence incubator managers' strategic agency enhances understanding of managerial role behaviours in different operating contexts and helps improve business incubation practices. Role theory posits that a role occupant's behaviour is shaped by the demands and constraints emanating from the members of the role□set's expectations, with little focus on the occupant's agency. However, organisation and management literature show managers have agency and can enact their roles. Therefore, foregrounding this literature, the study answers, "In what way do stakeholders' role expectations enable and□or constrain the strategic agency of business incubator managers in a resource□ constrained context□"□The study uses a □ualitative, multiple case study design involving six business incubators purposively selected in South □frica, a resource□constrained emerging economy in sub□Saharan □frica. The data were thematically analysed using abductive reasoning anchored by the role theory framework. The findings underscore the continuous struggle of incubator managers to gain and maintain the incubator□s legitimacy. Gaining legitimacy hinges on delivering visible performance impacts, adhering to the incubator□s mandate, and bolstering its reputation. This balance between performance impact, incubator sustainability, and reputation is the central driver of the incubator manager's strategic agency. The findings enrich role theory by illustrating that the demands managers face, driven by stakeholders□expectations, can act simultaneously as both constraints and enablers of strategic agency. For practice, the findings inform policy regarding entrepreneurship support through business incubation in a resource□ constrained context. Moreover, practitioners can benefit from insights into how misaligned stakeholder expectations constrain incubator managers' strategic agency. Furthermore, insights into the impact of organisational structures on incubator managers' performance can inform incubator institutional arrangements and management practices suited to the contextual demands.

Ke□□ord□□

Business incubation, Case study, Incubator manager, Legitimacy, Resource constraints, Role expectations, Strategic agency, Incubator mandate, Organisational sponsorship, Stakeholders

Contents

Declaration ii

Acknowledgement iii

Abstract iv

List of figures vi

List of Tables vii

Chapter 1: Introduction 1

1.1 Background 1

1.1.1 Importance of small, micro, and medium enterprises 1

1.1.2 SMMEs' mortality rate and business incubation 2

1.1.3 Business incubation definition 3

1.1.4 Business incubator management 4

1.1.5 Role theory 5

1.1.6 Expectations 6

1.1.7 Incubator managers' strategic agency 7

1.2 Research problem 8

1.3 Research purpose 9

1.3.1 Research question 9

1.4 Research contribution 9

1.4.1 Theoretical contribution 9

1.4.2 Practical contribution 9

1.5 Structure of the document 9

Chapter 2: Literature review 11

2.1 Business incubation and management 11

2.1.1 Introduction 11

2.1.2 Definition of business incubation 11

2.1.3 Business incubation management 11

2.1.4 Business incubator stakeholders 11

2.1.5 Business incubation and legitimacy 11

2.1.6 Business incubator sponsorship models 11

2.1.7 Business incubation and resource constraints 11

2.1.8 Summary business incubation management 11

2.2 Role theory .... □□
□.□.□ Definition□role theory .... □□
□.□.□ Criticism of the organisational role theory .... □□
□.□.□ Theoretical lens for the study .... □□
□.□.□.□ The utility of the DCC model .... □□
□.□.□ Incubator management and role perspective .... □□
2.3 Role expectations .... □□
□.□.□ Role expectations definition .... □□
□.□.□ Managing uncertainty related to role□set expectations .... □□
2.4 Managerial strategic agency .... □□
□.□.□ Introduction .... □□
□.□.□ Strategic agency definition .... □□
□.□.□ Theoretical background .... □□
□.□.□ Managerial strategic agency in other disciplines .... □□
□.□.□ Strategic agency in business incubator management .... □□
2.5 Research gap, research □uestions and propositions .... □□
□.□.□ Research gap .... □□
□.□.□ Conceptual framework .... □□
□.□.□ Research □uestions and propositions .... □□
2.6 Chapter summary .... □□
□ha□ter□□□ □Re□ear□h □ett□□ .... □□
3.1 Introduction .... □□
3.2 South Africa's historical context and socioeconomic status .... □□
3.3 □ntrepreneurial activity in South □frica .... □□
3.4 Black economic empowerment legislation and entrepreneurship .... □□
3.5 □mergence of business incubation in South □frica .... □□
3.6 Chapter summary .... □□
□ha□ter□□□ □Re□ear□h de□□□a□d□ ethodolo□□ .... □□
4.1 Research philosophy .... □□
4.2 Research design .... □□
4.3 □nit of analysis .... □□
4.4 Population .... □□
4.5 Sample .... □□
□.□.□ Case selection .... □□
□.□.□ Pilot study .... □□
□.□.□ Respondent selection .... □□

4.6 Data generation and collection methods ..... □□
□.□.□ Primary data□semi□structured interviews ..... □□
□.□.□ Secondary data□archival data ..... □□
□.□.□ Field notes□research diary ..... □□
□.□.□ Data saturation ..... □□
4.7 Data □nalysis ..... □□
4.8 □thical consideration ..... □□
4.9 □uality assurance ..... □□
4.10 Limitations of the data ..... □□
4.11 Chapter summary ..... □□
□ha□ter □□□ □Re□□lt□o□ th□□a□e□a□al□□□□ □□
5.1 Chapter introduction ..... □□
5.2 VioletInc case overview ..... □□
□.□.□ Stakeholders' role expectations of the incubator manager ..... □□
□.□.□ Managing perceived □ob demands ..... □□
□.□.□ Managing perceived □ob constraints ..... □□
□.□.□ VioletInc case summary ..... □□
5.3 IndigoInc case overview ..... □□
□.□.□ Stakeholders□role expectations of the incubator manager ..... □□
□.□.□ Managing perceived □ob demands ..... □□
□.□.□ Managing perceived □ob constraints ..... □□
□.□.□ IndigoInc case summary ..... □□
5.4 BlueInc case overview ..... □□
□.□.□ Stakeholders□role expectations of the incubator manager ..... □□
□.□.□ Managing perceived □ob demands ..... □□
□.□.□ Managing perceived □ob constraints ..... □□□
□.□.□ BlueInc case summary ..... □□□
5.5 GreenInc case overview ..... □□□
□.□.□ Stakeholders□role expectations of the incubator manager ..... □□□
□.□.□ Managing perceived □ob demands ..... □□□
□.□.□ Managing perceived □ob constraints ..... □□□
□.□.□ GreenInc case summary ..... □□□
5.6 OrangeInc case overview ..... □□□
□.□.□ Stakeholders□role expectations of the incubator manager ..... □□□
□.□.□ Managing perceived □ob demands ..... □□□
□.□.□ Managing perceived □ob constraints ..... □□□

5.5.1 OrangeInc case summary ... 000
5.7 RedInc case overview ... 000
5.7.1 Stakeholders' role expectations of the incubator manager ... 000
5.7.2 Managing perceived job demands ... 000
5.7.3 Managing perceived job constraints ... 000
5.7.4 RedInc case summary ... 000
5.8 Chapter summary within case analysis ... 000
Chapter six: Results of cross-case analysis ... 000
6.1 Cross-case analysis ... 000
6.1.1 Sponsorship, organisational structure, and incubator mandate ... 000
6.1.2 Stakeholders' expectations ... 000
6.1.3 Managing perceived job demands ... 000
6.1.4 Managing perceived job constraints ... 000
6.2 Chapter summary cross-case analysis ... 000
Chapter seven: Discussion of findings ... 000
7.1 Introduction ... 000
7.2 Conceptual model ... 000
7.3 Enablers and constraints of managers' strategic agency ... 000
7.3.1 Misaligned stakeholder expectations ... 000
7.3.2 Achieving incubator impact ... 000
7.3.3 Maintaining incubator reputation ... 000
7.3.4 Incubator sustainability ... 000
7.3.5 Leadership ... 000
7.4 Summary of the discussion of findings ... 000
Chapter eight: Conclusion ... 000
8.1 Introduction ... 000
8.2 Research context and why it matters ... 000
8.3 Status of extant research and theory ... 000
8.4 Research question ... 000
8.5 Methodological approach and its appropriateness ... 000
8.5.1 Research design ... 000
8.5.2 Case and respondent selection ... 000
8.5.3 Data generation and analysis ... 000
8.6 Findings and interpretation ... 000
8.6.1 Stakeholders' main role expectations ... 000

[illegible] Managing job demands ..... [illegible]
[illegible] Managing job constraints ..... [illegible]
[illegible] Interpretation of findings ..... [illegible]
8.7 Implications for scholarship ..... [illegible]
8.8 Implication for practice ..... [illegible]
8.9 Areas of further research ..... [illegible]
8.10 Limitations and delimitations of the study ..... [illegible]
References ..... [illegible]
Appendices ..... [illegible]

List of Figures

Figure [illegible]: Business incubator continuum showing the development of incubators. ..... [illegible]
Figure [illegible]: Multi-level interaction between the incubator manager and stakeholders. ..... [illegible]
Figure 3: Stewart's (1982) model of demands, constraints and choices (DCC). ..... [illegible]
Figure 4: Conceptual framework: stakeholders' expectations and business incubator manager's strategic agency during the incubation process. ..... [illegible]
Figure [illegible]: Expectations, Demands, Enablers, Constraints, and Agency ([illegible]D[illegible]C[illegible]) model ..... [illegible]

List of Tables

Table [illegible]: Categorisation of incubator manager stakeholders selected for this study ..... [illegible]
Table [illegible]: Stress items and categorisation as challenge, hindrance, or other ..... [illegible]
Table [illegible]: Research sub-questions and propositions ..... [illegible]
Table [illegible]: Number of incubators contacted for participation and the final selection ..... [illegible]
Table [illegible]: Summarised details of the respondents ..... [illegible]

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Importance of small, micro, and medium enterprises

Business incubator managers play a vital role in the survival of new ventures within the small, micro, and medium enterprises (SMMEs) sector. Consequently, many governments and private corporations are adopting business incubation as one of the mechanisms to promote entrepreneurship (Amezcua et al., 2013; Bollingtoft, 2012; Ratinho et al., 2015). The rationale, especially in developing economies, is that SMMEs are vital drivers of economic growth (Ayyagari et al., 2011), employment creation (Shih & Chaboen, 2012), and poverty alleviation (Maksimov et al., 2017; Sutter et al., 2019). There is, therefore, a growing appreciation of the role of SMMEs in sustaining regional and global economic recovery (Ayyagari et al., 2011), hence the effort to support new venture creation.

1.1.2 SMMEs' mortality rate and business incubation

The contribution of SMMEs to the economy tends to be negated by the high failure rate of SMME start-ups (Brown & Mawson, 2013; Hunter & Lean, 2018; Shih & Chaboen, 2012), with empirical evidence from developed economies showing that four out of every five start-ups fail in their first five years of establishment (Aerts et al., 2015; Amezcua et al., 2013; Harper-Anderson & Lewis, 2018). The situation is more pronounced in resource-constrained contexts where many people pursue entrepreneurship for survival purposes (Haugh, 2007; Sutter et al., 2019), even though they lack basic entrepreneurial capabilities (Mrkajic, 2017). Promoting entrepreneurship in such contexts requires extensive support to ensure the new ventures survive the turbulent early years while the entrepreneurs acquire the necessary entrepreneurial and managerial skills (Mrkajic, 2017). Therefore, business incubation is one mechanism that can reduce new start-ups' failure rates (Aerts et al., 2015; Amezcua et al., 2013). However, due to the limited entrepreneurial capabilities of aspiring entrepreneurs in developing economies, business incubator managers are confronted by potential entrepreneurs with diverse needs and expectations (Lecluyse & Knockaert, 2018) when these entrepreneurs are selected as incubatees.

1.1.3 Business incubation definition

Scholars have yet to agree on a universal definition of business incubation. Several definitions have been advanced in the literature, a situation that has been criticised for hampering the understanding of the phenomenon (Hausberg & Korreck, 2020; Theodorakopoulos et al., 2014). Following a review of several definitions found in the literature, this study builds on the definitions proposed by Hackett and Dilts (2004), Bergek and Norrman (2008) and the European Commission

□□□□□□ and define business incubation for the current study, as a strategic value□adding intervention which entails a uni□ue and highly flexible combination of targeted resources and services such as business development support, infrastructure and people, designed to nurture fledgling businesses during their early development stages. The study adopts Hausberg and Korreck's (2020) definition of a business incubator as an organisation established to□

> Support the establishment, growth and success of new entrepreneurial businesses through the orchestration of tangible □e.g., physical space, capital, shared e□uipment, and administrative services□and intangible □e.g., knowledge, coaching, mediation, counselling□ resources during a flexible period and are funded by a sponsor and□or are self□funded by taking rent or e□uity from incubatees □p. □□□□.

1.1.4 Business incubator management

The success of a business incubator depends on the calibre and leadership capabilities of the incubator manager. □xtant research shows that the incubator manager is actively involved in strategy development and implementation □Bergek □ Norrman, □□□□□Scillitoe □ Chakrabarti, □□□□□Vanderstraeten □ Matthyssens, □□□□□. The role involves strategic choices and managing the resources, routines, and capabilities □□aboen, □□□□□□hmad □ Thornberry, □□□□□Kakabadse et al., □□□□□, which is critical for nurturing business start□ups. The four main domains of business incubation management entail branding of the incubator □□aboen, □□□□□, selection of the incubatees □□erts et al., □□□□□Bergek □ Norrman, □□□□□, provision of business support services and network mediation □Bruneel et al., □□□□□Shih □ □aboen, □□□□□.

Moreover, the incubator manager role interacts with several stakeholders, such as policymakers, sponsors, incubatees, knowledge workers who are the incubator staff □Messeghem et al., □□□□□, and universities □Mc□dam et al., □□□□□, each holding different expectations of the manager. The incubator managers must make choices in performing their routines and balance these expectations, with some choices entailing modifying the routines □Steen, □□□□□. However, extant business incubation literature does not ade□uately address the relationship between the incubator managers' strategic agency and the expectations of various stakeholders, with scholars focusing mainly on the expectations of sponsors and incubatees □Kakabadse et al., □□□□□and most studies using a developed economy context. Regarding the other stakeholders, Baraldi and Ingemansson Havenvid □□□□□□recognise that "… their interactions with the incubators are not penetrated in detail in the extant literature" (p.53).

However, understanding the expectations of the incubator's stakeholders is vital, considering that stakeholders confer legitimacy □Deephouse et al., □□□□□ Suchman, □□□□□ to organisations.

□xisting research shows that organisations that gain legitimacy have easier access to resources and markets and a higher chance of long□term survival □Deephouse, □□□□□. Performance and values are vital to gaining and maintaining legitimacy, with organisations that fail to meet their goals or align with societal values risking losing legitimacy □Bitektine, □□□□□Deephouse et al., □□□□□. Thus, the incubator manager's role is critical in gaining and maintaining the incubator's legitimacy among the stakeholders.

Therefore, understanding the stakeholders' expectations gives insights into their legitimacy□ conferring criteria and how such expectations constrain and/or enable incubator managers' strategic agency, which deepens the understanding of the business incubation management process. The need is warranted in resource□constrained contexts, where business incubation is increasingly becoming one of the mechanisms adopted for entrepreneurial support.

1.1.5 Role theory

Role theory is "a science concerned with the study of behaviours characteristic of persons within contexts and with various processes that presumably produce, explain, or are affected by those behaviours" (Biddle, 1979, p.4). Organisational role theory, which is used in the current study, conceptualises organisations as open system networks of employees enacting specific patterned activities, also called roles, that are expected and re□uired by others in the system □Biddle, □□□□□ Dierdorff et al., □□□□□Wickham □ Parker, □□□□□. The theory posits that roles are a result of shared expectations about role behaviour □Hindin, □□□□□Turner, □□□□□. Therefore, researchers who study roles are not interested in the individual but in the individual executing and influencing the mandatory activities □Fondas □ Stewart, □□□□□ Veloutsou □ Black, □□□□□. Moreover, role frameworks and concepts focus on relational exchanges, a managerial activity of great interest to researchers □Fondas □ Stewart, □□□□□Mantere, □□□□□.

In studying the behaviour of managers, Stewart □□□□□b, □□□□□ used role theory to develop a framework to analyse demands and constraints faced by managers in their role and the choices available to them. Demands and constraints on the manager are created by the role□set's expectations and contextual factors, respectively, while the manager's role behaviour, including the choices made, gives the role□set an indication of the manager's level of compliance with expectations □Fondas □ Stewart, □□□□□Stewart, □□□□□. Popularised as the demands, constraints and choices □DCC□model, the framework has been widely used in managerial studies in several disciplines □Lowe, □□□□□. It was recently used in the context of business incubation research by Kakabadse et al. □□□□□.

The current research adopts Stewart's (1982) model as a lens to understand how stakeholders' expectations enable and/or constrain business incubator managers' strategic agency in a resource-constrained context. The model incorporates agency in the role theory view to overcome the limitations of the functionalist role theory perspective (Mantere, 2005), which overlooks managers' agency (Giddens, 1984; Powell, 2011). Some scholars advocate that the managerial roles discourse should include both role expectations as well as role enactment (Fondas & Stewart, 1994), a concept that involves agency and context (Mantere, 2005).

1.1.6 Expectations

Expectations are a construct that emanates from role literature and is defined as norms, beliefs, or preferences of the requirements for successful role performance (Biddle, 1986; Hindin, 2007). Expectations can be both about the activity and attribute necessities of role performance (Broderick, 1998; Dierdorff et al., 2009) and are held by both role incumbents and members of their role-set. A view of expectations as norms, which implies that expectations are prescriptive, is dominant among role theorists (Biddle, 1986; Hindin, 2007). Each view of expectations determines how a role is conceptualised, leading to different orientations of role theory. This current study adopts the dominant view of expectations as norms, the foundation of organisational role theory (Biddle, 1986; Hindin, 2007), which underpins this study.

Since members of a role-set may occupy different roles, they often hold different and conflicting expectations of the role occupant (Turner, 2005), thereby exerting demands and constraints on the role occupant (Fondas & Stewart, 1994). The subsequent role strain (Goode, 1960; Hindin, 2007) affects the role occupant's effective role performance (Merton, 1957). When faced with the role-set members' expectations, the role occupant tries to decide which expectations are to be prioritised in role performance (Merton, 1957; Veloutsou & Black, 2005), including trying to alter some of the expectations (Fondas & Stewart, 1994). The prioritised expectations are then exhibited in the role occupant's actions, thereby shaping the role attributes focal individuals place on themselves (Dierdorff et al., 2009).

Likewise, incubator stakeholders, who play different roles in the incubator's network, hold different and likely contradictory expectations of the incubator manager role (Theodoraboen, 2009; Baraldi & Ingemansson Havenvid, 2015; McAdam et al., 2019), thereby causing strain on the incubator managers. However, literature on actor agency (Giddens, 1984) suggests that actors, such as the incubator manager, in this case, can capitalise on some of the expectations and enact their role and incubator strategies. As such, stakeholders' expectations can enable and/or constrain the incubator managers' ability to act purposively for the benefit of the incubator. However, existing

business incubation scholarship does not adequately address how stakeholders' expectations influence incubator managers' strategic agency.

1.1.7 Incubator managers' strategic agency

Research on managerial roles has shown that managers have agency, including strategic agency (Beckert, 1999; Mantere, 2008; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011), to enact their roles (Fondas & Stewart, 1994) and influence organisational strategies, irrespective of institutional conditions (Beckert, 1999). Strategic agency is defined as "an individual's capacity to have a perceived effect upon the individual's own work on an issue the individual regards as beneficial to the interests of his or her organisation" (Mantere, 2008, p.298). Irrespective of whether incubator managers are considered as part of senior or middle management, they, like the top and middle managers in other organisations (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Weiser et al., 2018), are involved in undertaking strategic activities, including developing and implementing incubator strategy (Ahmad & Thornberry, 2017; Bergek & Norrman, 2008; Vanderstraeten & Matthyssens, 2012).

Recent research on strategy implementation is shifting the focus from strategy development to "how strategies are continuously enacted and adapted in the implementation process" (Weiser et al., 2018, p. 1040), a process that is driven by the strategic agency of managers (Beckert, 1999). Moreover, other research (e.g., Dierdorff et al., 2009; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011) also show an increasing interest in understanding how middle managers' agency influences organisational strategy. Therefore, research seeking to understand how stakeholders' expectations constrain and/or enable incubator managers' strategic agency is considered relevant and vital in deepening the understanding of managers' agency in the entrepreneurship domain, particularly in the context of business incubation in a resource-constrained setting.

1.2 Research Problem

The evolution of business incubation as it is adopted in new contexts, particularly in emerging and resource-constrained economies, requires a better theoretical and empirical understanding of how the incubator managers' strategic agency is affected by the expectations of incubator's stakeholders (Kakabadse et al., 2003). The various stakeholders working with incubator managers, such as policymakers, sponsors, incubatees, and incubator knowledge workers (Alsos et al., 2003; Messghem et al., 2017), hold several expectations regarding the incubator managers' role. Thus, incubator managers are central to the incubation process, with some scholars positing that an incubator's effectiveness and attractiveness to potential incubatees depends on the incubator manager's calibre (Aaboen, 2009; Kakabadse et al., 2003; Ratinho & Henriques, 2010). Seemingly, incubator managers' performance depends on how best they balance the expectations

of the stakeholders (Kakabadse et al., 2015; Messeghem et al., 2018). Meeting the expectations of stakeholders gains the incubator's legitimacy. However, achieving legitimacy is complex, as it entails satisfying multiple stakeholders with varying expectations and criteria for conferring legitimacy (Deephouse et al., 2017). For incubator managers in developing and emerging contexts where incubation is nascent, the challenge of gaining legitimacy is exacerbated by the liability of newness and smallness (Audretsch et al., 2015; Vanderstraeten et al., 2014), with incubators struggling to prove their value and objectives (Aerts, 2007; Desa & Basu, 2013; Lukes et al., 2019).

While the role of the incubator manager involves executing the adopted strategy, which prior research suggests being significantly influenced by the founders and sponsors (Ratinho & Henriques, 2010; Vanderstraeten & Matthysenns, 2012), some of the stakeholders' expectations may require strategic responses that alter the adopted strategy. Such instances may result in incubator managers enacting their roles to influence incubator strategies. Research addressing managerial role enactment (Fondas & Stewart, 1977) and strategy enactment (Weiser et al., 2018) attribute the role and strategy enactment to managers' agency. However, business incubation literature exploring how incubator managers enact their roles and influence incubator strategies amidst stakeholders' expectations is still limited (Mian et al., 2016; Theodorakopoulos et al., 2014).

Although an incubator's performance, synonymous with the incubator managers' performance (Hackett & Dilts, 2004; Kakabadse et al., 2015), is mainly based on the incubator's founding objectives (Barbero et al., 2014), researchers have suggested that the views of a range of stakeholders should be considered in evaluating incubator performance (Gassmann & Becker, 2006; Lukeš et al., 2019; Messeghem et al., 2018). A role expectations perspective, therefore, argues that a manager's perceived compliance with some stakeholders' expectations results in that role-set judging the manager to be effective (Fondas & Stewart, 1977), while failure to meet other role-set members' expectations, called disconfirmation of expectations, results in dissatisfied stakeholders (Lecluyse & Knockaert, 2018). Thus, in line with this view, incubator managers' failure to meet specific stakeholders' expectations may result in such stakeholders judging the manager, and by extension, the incubator, as ineffective (Lecluyse & Knockaert, 2018). The perceived non-performance can lead to the incubator failing to gain or maintain legitimacy with such stakeholders (Deephouse et al., 2017). However, this view assumes that managers passively receive the role expectations and have no influence on them (Raffel, 2009), i.e., they have no agency, contrary to arguments by Giddens (1984) and Whittington (1992).

Furthermore, Mantere (2008) finds that stakeholder expectations can either enable or constrain managers' strategic agency, and Beckert (1999) suggests that managers' entrepreneurial behaviour drives strategic agency. Therefore, it can be inferred from the micro-strategy literature

that incubator managers' strategic agency can be enabled or constrained by stakeholders' expectations. However, existing business incubation literature needs to adequately address how this unfolds during the incubation process. Business incubation's complex and multifaceted nature (Baraldi & Ingemansson Havenvid, 2020; McAdam et al., 2020) makes it difficult to infer managerial behaviour from extant organisation and management research undertaken in conventional organisational contexts. This study, therefore, seeks to respond to calls by scholars such as Mantere (2013), who encourage the intensification of our understanding of managerial roles, particularly understanding "what enables agency for managers operating under specific role expectations" (p. 297). The current study focuses on incubator managers in a resource-constrained context, with a specific purpose described in the following section.

1.3 Research Purpose

The primary purpose of this research is to understand and describe how stakeholders' expectations constrain and/or enable business incubator managers' strategic agency in a resource-constrained context.

1.3.1 Research question

Literature on managerial work provides a fair account of what managers do (Fondas & Stewart, 1994), although such literature is very limited in a business incubation context (Kakabadse et al., 2020). Furthermore, literature on managerial behaviour shows that managers, to some extent, self-define their work and responsibilities (Fondas & Stewart, 1994); thus, they do have agency (Giddens, 1984; Mantere, 2013). To this end, the current study builds on such literature to extend Kakabadse et al.'s (2020) study by asking the following main research question:

In what way do stakeholders' role expectations enable and/or constrain the strategic agency of business incubator managers in a resource-constrained context?

The main research question has been reduced to three sub-questions to meet the research objectives.

i. *What are the main stakeholders' role expectations of business incubator managers in a resource-constrained context?*
ii. *How do business incubator managers in a resource-constrained context manage the perceived job demands?*
iii. *How do business incubator managers in a resource-constrained context manage the perceived job constraints?*

1.4 Research contribution

1.4.1 Theoretical contribution

Despite the importance of their role, research focusing on incubator managers remains limited. Extant literature has primarily focused on other aspects of business incubation, using theoretical lenses such as network theory, resource-based view, real options, and institutional theory (Sohail et al., [illegible] Mian et al., [illegible]). However, the incubator manager is crucial as "a leverage factor influencing most of the other key success factors … thus their role is a crucial part of the theory development puzzle" (Theodorakopoulos et al., [illegible], p. [illegible]). Furthermore, Mia et al. [illegible] argue for the use of diverse theories to study business incubation to enhance understanding.

This study follows Kakabadse et al. [illegible], who first applied role theory in business incubation. Given the importance of context in incubation strategy and process development (Sohail et al., [illegible] McAdam et al., [illegible]), the current research focuses on incubator managers in a resource-constrained setting. The research enriches role theory by challenging and expanding Stewart's [illegible] Demand, Constraints, and Choices (DCC) model. The new Expectations, Demand, Enablers, Constraints, and Agency [illegible] (DECA) model developed in the current study illustrates how job demands, driven by stakeholders' expectations, can simultaneously constrain and enable managers' strategic agency.

1.4.2 Practical contribution

This research offers practical insights for entrepreneurial business incubator managers, sponsors, and policymakers in resource-constrained environments. It emphasises the crucial role of legitimacy (Suchman, [illegible]) in the success of a business incubator, suggesting how legitimacy can be gained by consistently delivering performance impact aligned with the original incubator mandate. The study suggests how the misaligned expectations from sponsors and incubatees can be reduced, how incubator managers can effectively utilise public and private sponsorship, how to leverage the enabling role of the economic transformation regulations for business incubation sponsorship and how the constraining effects of specific organisational structures can be avoided.

For incubator founders and sponsors, the findings underscore the detrimental effects of misaligned stakeholder expectations on an incubator manager's role. Merton [illegible] notes that role strain for the manager persists as long as stakeholders cannot reconcile their conflicting expectations. Thus, the stakeholders must mitigate misalignments and enhance relationships, reducing the managerial burden and maximising incubation benefits.

Furthermore, the study shows the importance of public sponsorship in gaining incubator legitimacy in resource-constrained contexts. Thus, policy conditions for accessing public sponsorship should be designed to avoid diluting the incubator's mandate and model. Economic transformation regulations can be leveraged to mobilise resources, with private corporations' budgets for enterprise and supplier development effectively managed to sustainably fund incubators in the respective sectors.

Lastly, sponsors and founders can adopt organisational structures that minimise operational impediments for incubator managers. Growth strategies, including spatial expansion, must consider the impact of underdeveloped labour markets affecting the available expertise in emerging economies and the agility required by the incubator manager's role.

1.5 Structure of the document

The rest of the document is organised as follows. Chapter 2 reviews relevant literature on business incubation, starting with its significance as an entrepreneurial support mechanism. The definitions of business incubation and business incubators, the role of business incubator managers in the incubation management process, the incubator stakeholders, how incubators gain legitimacy, incubator sponsorship modes, and the impact of resource constraints on business incubation are also reviewed. Next, literature covering the two constructs, strategic agency and role expectations, are discussed before the anchor theory, role theory, is briefly discussed. Chapter 3 gives an overview of the research setting, highlighting the legacy of the setting's political history, the emergence of the economic transformation and inclusion legislation, and the promotion of entrepreneurship through business incubation. The chapter justifies why the setting is most appropriate for answering the research question. Chapter 4 opens with the justification for using an interpretivist philosophy that underpins the chosen qualitative research strategy. The multiple case study research design, sampling frame, data generation and data analysis methods are presented together with the quality assurance process followed during this study. Chapter 5 presents the within-case analysis of the findings from the six cases in the study, leading to Chapter 6, where the findings of the cross-case analysis are presented. Chapter 7 discusses the study's findings against the extant literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The chapter also discusses a conceptual model developed from the study and the findings' implications for theory and practice. The entire study's execution, findings, and implications are summarised in the concluding Chapter 8.

□ha□ter □□□□□L□terat□re□re□e□□

2.1□□□□□e□□□□□□□at□o□a□d□□a□a□e□e□t□

2.1.1 Introduction

Business incubation has become a pivotal strategy for fostering entrepreneurship across developed and developing economies. This approach is grounded in the critical role that SMM□s play in □ob creation and economic growth, a fact well□documented across various studies □□me□cua et al., □□□□□Haugh, □□□□□Ratinho et al., □□□□□. In emerging markets, SMM□s, often new start□ups, contribute to new employment □Haugh, □□□□□and exhibit higher growth and sales rates than their larger counterparts within the first five years of operation □□yyagari et al., □□□□□. This trend underscores the sector□s significant association with enhancements in a nation□s gross domestic product per capita □□yyagari et al., □□□□□.

Further, the operational advancements within SMM□s have been identified as instrumental in poverty alleviation, especially in developing regions. These enterprises typically employ low□ skilled workers from the lower economic tiers, with the potential to elevate both entrepreneurs and their employees above the poverty threshold through e□uitable wage distribution □Sutter et al., □□□□□Maksimov et al., □□□□□. Despite a study by Beck and Levine □□□□□□suggesting a doubtful impact of SMM□s on entrepreneurship and market competition, the overarching consensus recognises their essential contribution to regional and global economic growth and sustainability □□yyagari et al., □□□□□, thus validating the imperative for business incubation.

Business incubator managers are central to this ecosystem, providing critical support to new ventures during their formative years. The support extends beyond mere resource provision□it encompasses creating a resource□rich environment tailored to each entrepreneurial venture□s uni□ue needs □□me□cua et al., □□□□□Dutt et al., □□□□□. This nuanced approach to resource allocation, emphasising the importance of bespoke entrepreneurial support, is fundamental to the success of business incubation efforts □□aboen, □□□□□Scillitoe □ Chakrabarti, □□□□□Shih □ □aboen, □□□□□.

Conse□uently, some governments enact regulations to promote business incubation and entrepreneurship, creating a potentially complex situation. While regulations aim to promote entrepreneurial activities, extant research shows their impact is contingent upon the regulations□ nature and the entrepreneurs□awareness and understanding of the institutional environment □D□ankov et al., □□□□□□ac□uemin □ □anssen, □□□□□. This interplay between regulatory frameworks and entrepreneurial alertness highlights the nuanced challenges and opportunities within the

domain of business incubation, an intermediary aimed at supporting entrepreneurs (Dutt et al., □□□□□, as their effectiveness can also be affected by such regulations.

2.1.2 Definition of business incubation

The definition of business incubation has been debated among scholars, leading to diverse interpretations that have sometimes obscured the concept's clarity (Hausberg & Korreck, 2020; Theodorakopoulos et al., □□□□□. Initially conceptualised as offering primarily real estate benefits to start-up businesses (Allen & McCluskey, □□□□□, business incubation has evolved to encompass a wide range of enterprise development services (Barbero et al., □□□□□Bruneel et al., □□□□□. This shift signifies a deeper engagement with the value-adding management systems and practices of incubators, signalling a maturation in the understanding and implementation of incubation models (Aerts et al., □□□□□Grimaldi & Grandi, □□□□□Hackett & Dilts, □□□□□.

The landscape of business incubation has further diversified with the advent of virtual incubators, which deliver support services digitally (Carayannis & Von Zedtwitz, □□□□□Mian et al., □□□□□, and accelerators, which are distinct in their cohort-based, short-term focus aimed at speeding ventures to their next growth phase (Cohen et al., □□□□□Hallen et al., □□□□□. Meanwhile, corporate incubators represent a strategic initiative by private firms to foster new ventures that align with their innovation goals (Gassmann & Becker, □□□□□.

This proliferation of models and concepts akin to business incubation has muddied the understanding of the phenomenon. Nonetheless, the core intent of business incubation remains the rapid development of young and small firms into competitive businesses, setting it apart from related concepts like science parks and innovation hubs, which cater to more established entities (Hausberg & Korreck, □□□□□Lindelof & Hellberg, □□□□□and firms offering various training services to small businesses. Thus, a clear demarcation is essential for theoretical clarity and practical application, ensuring incubation efforts are effectively targeted and time-bound to avoid wasting resources (Vernoudt, □□□□□.

The current literature calls for a nuanced definition of business incubation that avoids conflating it with other forms of entrepreneurial support. Emphasising business incubators as actively managed organisations (Hausberg & Korreck, □□□□□, this study adopts the definitions by Hackett and Dilts (□□□□□, Bergek and Norrman (□□□□□, and the European Commission (□□□□□, framing business incubation as a strategic, value-adding intervention characterised by a bespoke mix of resources and services such as business development support, infrastructure and people, designed to nurture nascent businesses through their early stages of development. Following Hausberg and Korreck (□□□□□, business incubators are defined as organisations designed to□

> Support the establishment, growth, and success of new entrepreneurial businesses through the orchestration of tangible (e.g., physical space, capital, shared equipment, and administrative services) and intangible (e.g., knowledge, coaching, mediation, counselling) resources during a flexible period and are funded by a sponsor and/or are self-funded by taking rent or equity from incubatees (p. 304).

Figure 2 presents a modified version of the business incubator continuum by Allen and McCluskey (1991), pinpointing the specific focus of this study on business incubators that contribute value through enterprise development services. Rather than categorising incubators by type, this research emphasises the service provision model, reflecting the diverse incubator typologies and models discussed in the literature (e.g., Bruneel et al., 2012; Carayannis & Zedtwitz, 2005; Grimaldi & Grandi, 2003).

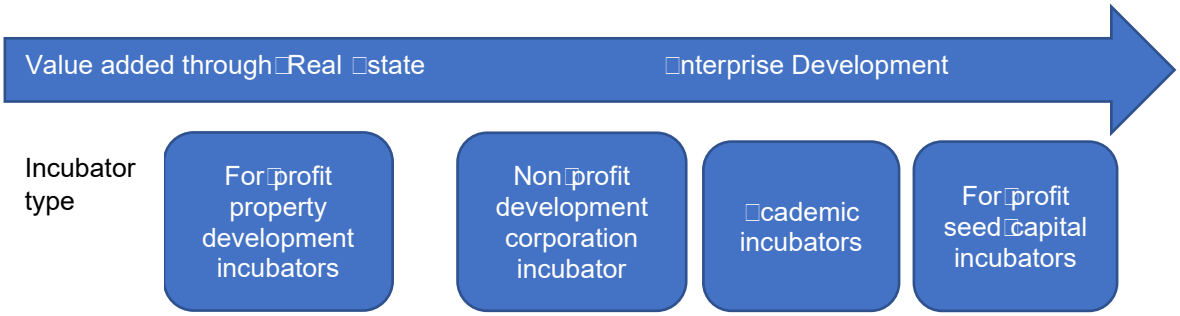


Figure 2: *Business incubator continuum showing the development of incubators from being mainly providers of real estate to start-ups, to being value-adding interventions providing enterprise development services to start-up businesses. Adapted from Allen and McCluskey (1991).*

2.1.3 Business incubation management

The role of a business incubator manager remains less formally defined than other professional positions, lacking a standardised qualification pathway. Managers in this field "often rely on imagination, previous business experience, and learning on the job" (Ahmad & Thornberry, 2018, p. 2). The responsibilities encompass developing and implementing strategies (Bergek & Norrman, 2008; Scillitoe & Chakrabarti, 2010), reflecting the multifaceted and demanding role of the incubator manager. The broad role scope is emphasised by Kakabadse et al.'s (2015) view of the shifting functions of the role, i.e., manager, entrepreneur and technician. Despite the significant attention given to understanding various facets of business incubation, from service offerings and typologies to performance evaluation (Grimaldi & Grandi, 2003; Sohail et al., 2006), studies focusing specifically on the critical role of incubator managers are comparatively scarce (Kakabadse et al., 2015). Yet, the success of incubation processes is increasingly attributed to incubator managers (Aaboen, 2009; Ahmad & Thornberry, 2018), particularly how effectively they

balance the expectations of diverse stakeholders (Kakabadse et al., 2005; Messeghem et al., 2017).

Drawing parallels with the management of professional service firms, Maboen (2014) highlights the essential domains of incubation management: branding, incubatee selection, business support, and network mediation. These areas encompass the broader corporate and incubation services management categories, as Ahmad and Thornberry (2010) defined. Corporate management oversees staff, assets, and overall organisational sustainability, whereas incubation services management focuses on directly supporting the incubatees and their ventures (Ahmad & Thornberry, 2010). This distinction clarifies the multifunctional role of incubator managers in fostering both the incubator's internal development and the incubated businesses' external success. Moreover, other research suggests that incubator managers in emerging economies play a vital role in closing the commercial institutional voids by developing the market infrastructure required for entrepreneurship to thrive (Amezcua et al., 2013; Dutt et al., 2016). The following sections discuss the primary responsibilities involved in each domain of business incubation management highlighted in this section.

2.1.3.1 Incubator branding

Incubator branding aims to appeal to potential sponsors and showcase the incubator's capabilities to potential incubatees. Ahmad and Thornberry (2010) highlight that incubator managers dedicate significant efforts to fostering a community-oriented culture within the incubators and promoting it to external stakeholders and the broader community. While most business incubators receive public funding (Gassmann & Becker, 2006; Hausberg & Korreck, 2020; Mrkajic, 2017), there is a growing trend towards private funding (Baraldi & Ingemansson Havenvid, 2017; Gassmann & Becker, 2006; Tsai et al., 2016). Additionally, funding models that blend public and private sources are rising (Aerts et al., 2007; Bergek & Norrman, 2008). Irrespective of the sponsorship mode, incubator managers often grapple with the dual challenges of securing sufficient resources and effectively nurturing incubatees (Ahmad & Thornberry, 2010). Successful incubatees serve as brand ambassadors, which helps secure ongoing sponsor support. Consequently, a strong reputation is crucial to attracting new sponsors and incubatees.

2.1.3.2 Incubatee recruitment and selection

Incubator managers are responsible for selecting incubatees, significantly influencing incubation performance (Lecluyse & Knockaert, 2018; Sohail et al., 2006). Selection criteria vary among incubators, with some prioritising the incubatee's business idea and others the entrepreneur's character, aiming to maximise success chances (Baraldi & Ingemansson Havenvid, 2017; Bergek & Norrman, 2008). The selection process demands extensive business acumen, market insight,

and entrepreneurial experience □□erts et al., □□□□□Bergek □ Norrman, □□□□□. However, overly stringent criteria that overlook market trends and the entrepreneurial environment may exclude viable ideas or entrepreneurs □Welter et al., □□□□□. Given the dynamic nature of business incubation, findings from studies on earlier incubator generations, such as those on selection criteria, should be applied cautiously in new contexts to avoid misalignments that could undermine incubation benefits □□aboen, □□□□□Mrkaic, □□□□□.

2.1.3.3 Hiring and management of incubator staff

Despite the evolution of business incubation, organisational structures have largely remained lean, although some incubators have expanded significantly □Bruneel et al., □□□□□Baraldi □ Ingemansson Havenvid, □□□□□. In smaller incubators, the dual role of the incubator manager as both leader and mentor is vital for the growth and sustainability of the organisation □□hmad □ Thornberry, □□□□□. Thus, closely linked to selecting capable incubatees, hiring and managing knowledge workers, the staff supporting the business incubator manager is a vital task □□aboen, □□□□□Shih □ □aboen, □□□□□. □specially in resource□limited settings, incubator managers must balance the need for experienced staff against budget constraints. □dditionally, retaining these workers depends on the availability of stimulating and challenging business ideas from incubatees □□aboen, □□□□□Frit□et al., □□□□□Tampoe, □□□□□. However, resource limitations can impede hiring essential expertise, leading to work overload for managers and potentially unsatisfactory performance.

Moreover, conflicts may also arise between incubator managers and experienced knowledge workers who seek autonomy, while managers may need to maintain control to ensure productivity and efficiency □□aboen, □□□□□Tampoe, □□□□□. This dynamic can compel managers to hire less experienced staff, potentially compromising the incubator□s performance and reputation. Therefore, recruiting and retaining skilled workers presents strategic challenges for incubator managers, re□uiring skills in leadership, conflict resolution, problem□solving, staff motivation and effective communication □□hmad □ Thornberry, □□□□□.

2.1.3.4 Entrepreneurial support to incubatees

Business support is the cornerstone of the business incubation process, encompassing entrepreneurial training, coaching, mentoring, business development, and essential management practices like marketing, legal affairs, finance, and accounting □Bergek □ Norrman, □□□□□Bruneel et al., □□□□□Shail et al., □□□□□. The delivery of these services is shaped by the incubator managers' perception of their roles. Managers who view themselves as direct managers actively shape incubatees' business strategies and operations □Bergek □ Norrman, □□□□□Kakabadse et

al., □□□□□. □lternatively, those who see their role as facilitators adopt a more reactive, episodic approach □Bergek □ Norrman, □□□□□. This strategic choice affects the nature of support services provided within the incubator and influences whether knowledge workers are hired in□house or outsourced.

Moreover, incubator managers must tailor their support to meet the evolving needs of incubatees at different development stages. Lai and Lin □□□□□□ note that incubatees in the post□ entrepreneurial phase re□uire enhanced pro□ect services, such as business planning and executive strategy, which differ from the resources services like office space and networking needed in the entrepreneurial phase. Incubator managers are tasked with appropriately developing and providing these capabilities to meet incubatees' expectations and avoid potential dissatisfaction at various stages □Lecluyse □ Knockaert, □□□□□. Considering the broader role of incubators as open systems intermediaries addressing the institutional voids in emerging economies, Dutt et al. □□□□□□ categorise incubator managers' responsibilities into market infrastructure development □MIB□and business capabilities development □BCD□services. The MIB services align with Lai and Lin's (2015) categorisation of resources services, which include office space and financial resources. However, MIB services include market□wide activities such as lobbying governments for policies and regulations favouring new ventures and small businesses, such as lower taxes and reducing bureaucracies that constrain entrepreneurship development. □me□cua et al. □□□□□□classify these services as part of the buffering mechanism, protecting the new ventures from the environment, which is assumed to be a source of competition and resource dependence. Such services benefit not only the incubatees but the broader entrepreneurial ecosystem.

On the contrary, Dutt et al.'s (2016) BCD services entail training and consulting services aimed at building the business management capabilities of the incubatees, and these align with pro□ect services conceptualised by Lai and Lin □□□□□□. Therefore, the incubator manager's role includes responsibilities focused on enhancing the capacity of the incubator, building the business capabilities of the incubatees, and helping develop the market conducive to thriving entrepreneurship.

2.1.3.5 Network mediation

Recent scholarship on business incubation has emphasised network mediation, which involves connecting incubatees with vital players in the entrepreneurial ecosystem □Shih □ □aboen, □□□□□. Since incubatees typically lack established networks, bridging them with these network partners is crucial for survival post□incubation □□me□cua et al., □□□□□□□□□□. One assumption of the bridging mechanism is that the environment comprises various stakeholders who can potentially offer new

ventures the social capital and legitimacy needed to establish a competitive advantage □□me□cua et al., □□□□□. Therefore, incubator managers serve as intermediaries, linking incubatees with external sources of essential resources □Bergek □ Norrman, □□□□□Clarysse et al., □□□□□. □aboen □□□□□□ describes incubators as integral components of the regional network, acting as the connective □glue□that facilitates resource integration □p.□□□□. This mediation role can extend beyond regional boundaries to an international scope, expanding the stakeholder network for incubator managers □Bergek □ Norrman, □□□□□. □ challenge for incubator managers in resource□ constrained contexts would be to have network partners endowed with resources critical to the incubator□s work, considering the pervasive nature of resource scarcity in such contexts.

2.1.3.6 Summary: business incubation management

The role of business incubator managers is complex and evolves in response to the needs of new business ventures. Their duties encompass branding initiatives to attract sponsors and display capabilities to potential incubatees while cultivating a community□focused culture critical for garnering support. The selection of incubatees is a pivotal task that demands considerable business acumen and market awareness, as it substantially influences outcomes. Managers also navigate staffing challenges within budget constraints, striving to balance control and autonomy to ensure effective team dynamics and performance. Moreover, they offer vital entrepreneurial support by training, coaching, and managing essential business functions, tailoring their service delivery based on whether they see themselves as direct interveners or facilitators. □ssisting with market infrastructure development and connecting incubatees with essential stakeholders is crucial for their post□incubation survival, positioning incubator managers as vital intermediaries.

Despite their central role, the responsibilities of incubator managers are not well□defined, often re□uiring managers to rely on prior business experience and learning on the □ob. The focused academic exploration of their role still needs to be improved, mainly in how they manage diverse stakeholder expectations. These internal and external stakeholders impose various expectations that influence managerial actions. The incubator manager role re□uires multiskills from leadership, management, and entrepreneurship. □nderstanding how these expectations shape the incubator manager's strategic agency, particularly under resource constraints, could enhance our understanding of business incubation management. Steen □□□□□ suggests that sociology literature promises to provide a better understanding when pursuing en□uiries of this nature□thus, this research adopts a role theoretic perspective. Conse□uently, there is a need to understand the diverse nature of the stakeholders involved, which is discussed in the subse□uent section before turning to role theory. This understanding is crucial for exploring the complex interplay between expectations and the manager's strategic agency in the incubation process.

2.1.4 Business incubator stakeholders

The preceding subsection highlights the pivotal role of incubator managers in maintaining relationships with diverse stakeholders who contribute significantly to the incubator's operations. These stakeholders may include sponsors (Hillemane et al., 2020; Mrkajic, 2020), policymakers (Kakabadse et al., 2012; Klofsten et al., 2019), incubatees, and knowledge workers (Laboen, 2002; Messeghem et al., 2017), and academic and governmental institutions (McAdam et al., 2019; Mian et al., 2016). The composition of these stakeholders varies depending on the incubator's type, mission, and funding model (Baraldi & Ingemansson Havenvid, 2020; Messeghem et al., 2017) and is also influenced by the incubator's contextual environment (McAdam et al., 2019; Phan et al., 2005; Sohail et al., 2006).

Stakeholder management literature underscores managers' need to identify their stakeholders and understand their specific interests within the firm (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). Freeman's definition of a stakeholder as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation's objectives" (Freeman & Mcvea, 2006, p. 183) has been widely accepted and used by scholars. Thus, understanding stakeholders' interests is crucial as not all stakeholders warrant the same level of attention from managers (Eckermann & Eden, 2011; Mitchell et al., 1997). Managers must, therefore, strategise and allocate resources in ways that align with the respective stakeholders' claims (Garriga & Melé, 2004). Scholars offer various typologies to categorise a firm's stakeholders based on their attributes. However, there is consensus on the importance of stakeholders' power, interest, and the legitimacy of their relationships with the organisation (Laplume & Litz, 2013).

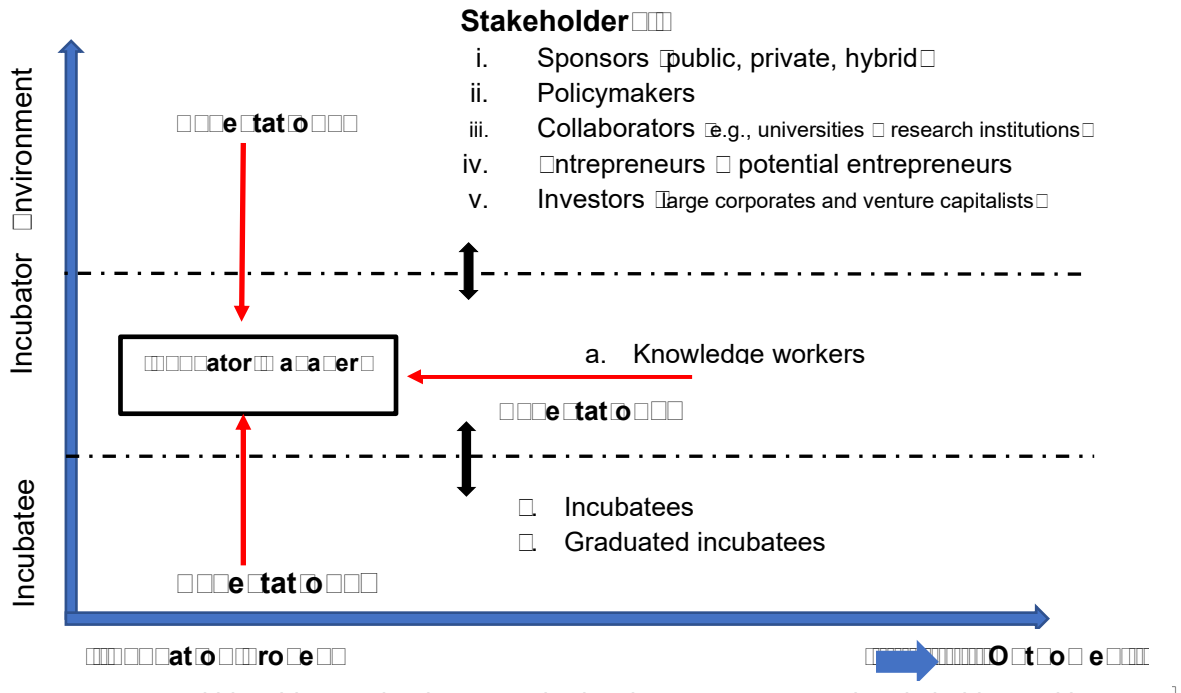
The stakeholder identification and salience model proposed by Mitchell et al. (1997) is particularly relevant here. It classifies stakeholders based on their power, legitimacy, and urgency, positing that the interaction of these attributes creates different types of stakeholders with varying expectations of the firm, with stakeholder salience defined as "the degree to which managers give priority to competing stakeholders' claims" (Mitchell et al., 1997, p.854). This model, which has been supported empirically despite some criticisms (Driscoll & Starik, 2004; Laplume & Litz, 2013), helps understand the dynamics of stakeholder influence on organisational actions.

In the stakeholder identification and salience model, power is conceived as the ability of a party in a relationship to gain access to normative, coercive or utilitarian means to impose its desired outcome in the relationship (Mitchell et al., 1997; Parsons et al., 1960), while legitimacy refers to "a generalised perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). While power and legitimacy can exist independently, they can combine

and result in authority (Merton, [illegible] Mitchell et al., [illegible]). The third attribute, urgency, refers to "the degree to which a stakeholder claim warrants immediate attention" (Mitchell et al., 1997, p. [illegible]).

Mitchell et al.'s [illegible] model produces three stakeholder classes—latent, expectant, and highly salient, each comprising different stakeholder types such as dormant, discretionary, demanding, dominant, dangerous, dependent, and definitive. These classifications assist managers in prioritising stakeholder claims based on the degree of influence stakeholders hold over the firm. Therefore, this stakeholder typology is used in the current study.

Moreover, Hausberg and Korreck's (2020) multi-level framework on the antecedents and outcomes of business incubation is utilised to explore the interaction between incubator managers and the stakeholders within their operating environment. This framework, presented in Figure [illegible], helps to position the various stakeholders discussed in extant literature by examining the interactions at different levels—between the incubator and the environment and between the incubator and the incubatees. The subsequent discussion will integrate the characteristics of these stakeholder types with the description of the incubator stakeholders, providing a comprehensive understanding of how these relationships shape the functioning of incubators.



[illegible] *Multi-level interaction between the incubator manager and stakeholders, with arrows pointing at the incubator manager box representing stakeholders' expectations from each level. Hausberg and Korreck (2020) adopted the multi-level interaction concept, which presented the antecedents to incubation, the incubation process, and the incubation outcomes at the three levels. The current adaptation focuses only on the incubation process to highlight the stakeholders and their interaction with the incubator manager. The list of stakeholders, incubator manager box and expectation arrows are not part of Hausberg and Korreck's (2020) framework.*

2.1.4.1 Dormant stakeholders

Dormant stakeholders, such as large corporations, venture capitalists and angel investors, are perceived to have power but limited legitimacy (Mitchell et al., □□□□). These stakeholders place performance demands on incubators and, in return, offer funding and sometimes entrepreneurial ideas (Gassman & Becker, □□□□; von □edtwit□, □□□□). The group also includes potential entrepreneurs, whom incubator managers seek to attract if they have high-potential ideas (Bergek & Norrman, □□□□). However, such entrepreneurs may only sometimes apply to □oin an incubator, especially in developed economies where competition for innovative entrepreneurial ideas among incubators is intense (Messeghem et al., □□□□). Conse□uently, while potential entrepreneurs wield power, they typically lack a legitimate or urgent relationship with the incubator.

2.1.4.2 Discretionary stakeholders

Incubator managers view universities and research institutions as sources of entrepreneurial ideas due to their research outputs (Soetanto & Geenhui□en, □□□□, □□□□), which incubators may commercialise. Therefore, they are discretionary stakeholders, especially for incubators without direct university links. □ngagement with these stakeholders is optional (Mitchell et al., □□□□). Moreover, bureaucratic challenges with university actors often deter incubator managers from pursuing such engagements (Benneworth et al., □□□□). Furthermore, universities and research institutions may compete with incubators for funding from potential sponsors. □s a result, in most cases, universities are seen as having legitimacy but need more power to influence incubators or present an urgent claim. □niversities become definitive stakeholders only within university-affiliated incubators (Carayannis & □edtwit□, □□□□).

2.1.4.3 Dominant stakeholders

Government policymakers and sponsors are considered dominant stakeholders of incubators due to their power and legitimacy, and they can become definitive stakeholders depending on the urgency of their claims (Friedman & Miles, □□□□; Mitchell et al., □□□□). Policymakers wield symbolic and normative power, shaping the operating guidelines for incubators (Barbero et al., □□□□). In many countries, governments are primary sponsors of incubators, alongside private sponsors, establishing a legitimate and influential relationship with incubator managers (Klofsten et al., □□□□). Formal mechanisms, such as representation on incubator advisory boards, typically exist to recognise and facilitate the relationship between incubators and these dominant stakeholders (Mitchell et al., □□□□).

2.1.4.4 Dependent stakeholders

Knowledge workers, as employed staff of the incubators, have legitimate and urgent claims in the relationship with incubators but lack the power to execute their will□hence, they fit in the dependent stakeholder type □Mitchell et al., □□□□□. In this relationship, power is not reciprocal, re□uiring advocacy, other stakeholders' guardianship or internal management values for the power to be exercised. Thus, knowledge workers rely on their managers' actions or the advocacy of workers' representatives to exercise their power.

2.1.4.5 Dangerous stakeholders

□nselected potential entrepreneurs □ualify as dangerous stakeholders of incubator managers. Managers perceive dangerous stakeholders as possessing power and urgency but lacking legitimacy □Mitchell et al., □□□□□. Such stakeholders are coercive and dangerous to the organisation since they can use violence to advance their claims □Friedman □ Miles, □□□□□. In an environment such as South □frica, where unemployment is very high and opportunities for business incubation are limited, unselected potential entrepreneurs can mobilise desperate unemployed community members to gain coercive power and advance their urgent claim for empowerment.

2.1.4.6 Definitive stakeholders

Sponsors, policymakers, and incubatees are identified as definitive stakeholders of incubator managers, possessing power, legitimacy, and urgency in their claims, as delineated by Mitchell et al. □□□□□. The urgency of claims from sponsors and policymakers can escalate at any time, categorising them within the definitive stakeholder group. Incubatees, having been formally selected for the incubation programme, maintain a legitimate relationship with incubator managers. They exert utilitarian power indirectly, as the financial contributions from sponsors and revenue from facility rentals can hinge on the number of incubatees □Klofsten et al., □□□□□. However, since incubatees do not control the sponsors□resources directly, they may also □ualify under the dependent stakeholder group, where their influence is conditional upon the actions of others.

2.1.4.7 The temporality of the stakeholder-incubator relationship

□s incubators progress through various development phases, their stakeholders□expectations and salience to the managers will likely evolve □Liu, □□□□□. The dynamic nature of these relationships is theoretically captured by the stakeholder identification and salience model, which suggests that stakeholders can shift between classes by ac□uiring additional attributes of power, legitimacy, or urgency □Mitchell et al., □□□□□. This potential movement underscores stakeholder management□s

fluidity and temporal importance (Friedman & Miles, 2006) within the incubation process. This perspective illustrates how the interactions between stakeholders and incubator managers may change over time, reflecting the changing needs and influences within the incubation ecosystem. Mitchell et al. (1997) emphasise this critical dynamic in the following observation:

> "Even though most theorists might try for static clarity, managers should never forget that stakeholders change in salience, requiring different degrees and types of attention depending on their attributed possession of power, legitimacy, and/or urgency and that levels of these attributes (and thereby salience) can vary from issue to issue and from time to time" (p. 874).

Therefore, understanding how these stakeholders' expectations influence the strategic agency of incubator managers in a resource-constrained context contributes to a nuanced understanding of business incubation management. Table 2 shows the classification and types of incubator stakeholders expected in the current research. Latent stakeholders will not be selected in this study since they are inactive; thus, incubator managers do not experience their demands. While dangerous stakeholders are not part of the latent stakeholders, the absence of a legitimate relationship with incubator managers makes their demands and expectations of no consequence on the incubator managers.

Table 2.2 ***Categorisation of incubator manager stakeholders selected for this study based on Mitchell et al.'s (1997) stakeholder typology***

Stakeholder group	**Stakeholder class**	**Stakeholder type**	**Targeted for the study**
Sponsors	Highly salient	Definitive	Yes
Policymakers	Expectant	Dominant	Yes
Knowledge workers	Expectant	Dependent-definitive	Yes
Universities and research institutions	Latent-highly salient	Discretionary-definitive	Only if it is a definitive stakeholder
Incubatees	Highly salient	Definitive-Dependent	Yes

2.1.5 Business incubation and legitimacy

In section 2.1.3, legitimacy was defined and discussed as one of the three attributes that determine the salience of each stakeholder to an organisation. Legitimacy has gained increased scholarly attention in the decades following Suchman's (1995) work (e.g., Bitektine, 2011; Deephouse, 2000; Deephouse & Suchman, 2008). Often needing clarification with concepts such as status and reputation, some scholars propose excluding 'desirable' from the definition to reduce ambiguity (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008). The increased interest in deepening the understanding of legitimacy, particularly among management scholars, is the claimed association between legitimacy and an organisation's chances of survival.

The literature shows legitimate organisations have easier access to resources and markets, giving them a higher chance of long-term survival (Deephouse, [illegible]; Deephouse et al., [illegible]). Moreover, the existence and activities of such organisations are less likely to be questioned (Clarke, [illegible]; Pollock & Rindova, [illegible]). However, achieving legitimacy is complex, as it entails satisfying multiple stakeholders with varying expectations and criteria for conferring legitimacy (Deephouse et al., [illegible]). Extant business incubation literature (e.g., Desa & Basu, [illegible]; Reynolds et al., [illegible]) suggests that achieving legitimacy is particularly challenging for emerging incubators in resource-constrained environments where newness and smallness (Audretsch et al., [illegible]; Vanderstraeten et al., [illegible]) add to the difficulty of obtaining legitimacy and resources necessary for success. Legitimacy is not self-claimed but conferred by various sources, including the state, government agencies, professional organisations, the media, public opinion, and individuals (Deephouse et al., [illegible]). Notably, business incubator stakeholders, entailing policymakers, sponsors, incubatees, and staff, come from these identified groups (Alsos et al., [illegible]; Hausberg & Korreck, [illegible]), which confer legitimacy to the incubators based on their respective criteria.

Consequently, extant research points to four potential outcomes of an organisation's pursuit of legitimacy—acceptance, proper, debated, or illegitimate (Deephouse et al., [illegible]). The debated state "reflects the presence of active disagreement within the social system, often among different stakeholders or between dissident stakeholders and the organisation. Debate often includes questions or challenges by stakeholders about the organisation's activities or its fundamental values" (Deephouse et al., 2017, p. [illegible]). The literature explicates that as organisations navigate the regulatory, pragmatic, moral, and cultural-cognitive dimensions of legitimacy, they face challenges when their value-creation or purpose is questioned (Deephouse et al., [illegible]).

For instance, in a context where business incubation is still nascent, incubators often find themselves in a state akin to debated legitimacy due to scepticism about their value and objectives (Alberts, [illegible]; Lukes et al., [illegible]). They must go to great lengths to legitimise their activities with potential funding organisations to attract sponsorship and overcome resource constraints (Desa & Basu, [illegible]). Moreover, incubator managers, especially in contexts with limited resources, often face the challenge of demonstrating a genuine commitment to their mission to attract and justify external resources (Ahmad & Thornberry, [illegible]; Desa & Basu, [illegible]). The heavy reliance on external resources and the pressure to meet sponsor-imposed performance targets can lead to deviation from their original mandate, leading to potential legitimacy challenges with the public. Furthermore, failure to achieve performance targets, such as new venture growth and job creation (Kakabadse et al., [illegible]), results in further challenges, leaving the incubator with a debated legitimacy.

Therefore, such an operating context underscores the importance of business incubator managers balancing delivering on the incubator's mission while carefully navigating various stakeholders' expectations to gain and maintain legitimacy, which is crucial for resource mobilisation and survival. The providers of resources are discussed in the following section.

2.1.6 Business incubator sponsorship models

A business incubator requires ample resources to effectively support its incubatees, relying on the environment to secure these essential inputs, including financial sponsorship (Klofsten et al., 2019; Shih & Chaboen, 2020). According to the resource dependency perspective, sponsors as definitive stakeholders significantly shape the incubator's strategic objectives, mission, and performance criteria (McAdam et al., 2014; Mrkajic, 2017). Consequently, the expectations placed on incubator managers depend heavily on the type of sponsorship received.

There are three primary modes of incubator sponsorship: public, private, and hybrid. Public sponsors primarily aim to boost entrepreneurship, stimulate regional economies, reduce unemployment, and alleviate poverty, often with less focus on financial returns (Aerts et al., 2007; Mrkajic, 2017). This type of sponsorship usually brings stringent bureaucratic requirements, attracts many stakeholders and may only partially meet the financial needs of incubators, especially in resource-constrained settings (Aerssens et al., 2013; Kakabadse et al., 2012). Conversely, private sponsors focus on achieving positive financial returns directly or through successful ventures spun off from the parent company (Gassmann & Becker, 2006). Incubators with private funding tend to have boards of professionals chosen for their expertise rather than political considerations (Benneworth et al., 2016; Hackett & Dilts, 2004) and face fewer bureaucratic hurdles.

Hybrid sponsorship combines public and private funding and is an increasingly common model of incubation funding (Mungila Hillemane et al., 2014). In emerging economies, this model often involves corporate social investments by large corporations aiming to empower marginalised communities, sometimes prompted by government legislation (Haugh, 2007; Lourdan & Kivleniece, 2018). Hybrid-sponsored incubators typically enjoy better resources and effectiveness than those solely publicly funded (Autio & Rannikko, 2016; Motoyama & Knowlton, 2017). However, due to the diverse funding sources and stakeholders, managers of such incubators must navigate a complex array of stakeholder demands and expectations.

The following section reviews how resource constraints further complicate the pressures faced by incubator managers, influencing their decisions amidst competing stakeholder demands.

2.1.7 Business incubation and resource constraints

Resource constraints significantly impact business incubators' establishment, growth, and performance, as the availability of financial and human capital resources alongside effective management practices are crucial for incubation success (Harper-Anderson & Lewis, 2017). However, resource constraints can be counterintuitive, causing some managers to become innovative (Hewitt-Dundas, 2006). Nevertheless, these limitations typically pose significant challenges for small organisations in emerging economies, potentially leading to chronic shortages (Baskaran & Mehta, 2016).

Kornai (1980) describes resource constraints as physical or technical limitations, including labour, materials, and equipment, treating financial constraints separately. This view is supported by a resource-based perspective that categorises firm-specific resources and capabilities as financial, human, and organisational (Hewitt-Dundas, 2006).

Financially, business incubators in emerging economies often struggle to secure funding, relying heavily on public sponsors amidst a backdrop of fiscal decline and competing social needs, leaving insufficient funds for entrepreneurial support (Aerts et al., 2015; Lalkaka, 2002; Mrkajic, 2017). Additionally, emerging venture capitalists and business angels typically prefer investing in proven initiatives (Hewitt-Dundas, 2006; Lalkaka, 2002). The situation creates a context with hard budget constraints, which "constrain action and the freedom of choice" (Kornai, 1979, p. 807) for incubator managers.

Human resources present another critical challenge. The calibre of the incubator manager is crucial for building an incubator's capabilities, yet inadequate managerial capabilities are a common issue in emerging economies (Lalkaka, 2002; Mrkajic, 2017). Managers lacking requisite business experience or networks face significant pressures in strategic decision-making, which can further impair the incubator's human resource capabilities.

Moreover, incubators must integrate specialist knowledge workers to augment internal knowledge sources (Hewitt-Dundas, 2006) and effectively support incubatees. However, in resource-constrained settings, specialists may be scarce and expensive (Kornai, 1980), forcing incubator managers to decide between insourcing and outsourcing such expertise.

In conclusion, resource constraints act similarly to resource endowments—they affect an incubator's ability to accumulate resources and succeed. The inherited resource position influences strategic choices that maximise or minimise temporary advantages or disadvantages (Hewitt-Dundas, 2006). In resource-constrained contexts, the inherited resource limitations are

likely to influence the strategic agency of incubator managers in response to stakeholders' expectations.

2.1.8 Summary: business incubation management

The preceding section explored vital aspects of business incubation management, including the roles of incubator managers, stakeholder dynamics, sponsorship models, resource constraints, and legitimacy. These elements are crucial for understanding the expectations placed on incubator managers, a theme that is further developed in subse□uent sections. Next, the literature on role theory, which forms the theoretical foundation of this study, is reviewed, leading to the discussion of role expectations and strategic agency, the primary constructs of the study. □xploring role theory elucidates how it can be applied to understand how stakeholders□ expectations constrain and□or enable the strategic agency of incubator managers.

2.2□ Role□theor□□□

2.2.1 Definition: role theory

In conceptualising role theory, the founding scholars □e.g., Gross et al., □□□□□Khan et al., □□□□□ Levy, □□□□□Mead, □□□□□Moreno, □□□□□Parsons, □□□□□, whether they were from the psychology, ethology, sociology or anthropology discipline, agreed on the central focus of the theory, the patterned human behaviours (Biddle, 1979). Role theory is thus defined as "a science concerned with the study of behaviours that are characteristic of persons within contexts and with various processes that presumably produce, explain, or are affected by those behaviours" (Biddle, 1979, p.□□. Diverse orientations of the theory emerged over time, leading to five main perspectives□ functional, symbolic interactionism, structural, cognitive and organisational □Biddle, □□□□□Hindin, □□□□□Veloutsou □ Black, □□□□□. □cross these orientations, the common assumption is that people almost exhibit similar behaviours, which are somehow predictable once the person□s identity and context are known. The main distinctions emanate from the scope of roles each orientation is prepared to consider and the conditions under which predictions about the roles can be made □Hindin, □□□□□.

Organisational role theory, used in the current study, conceptualises organisations as open system networks of employees enacting specific patterned activities, called roles, that are expected and re□uired by others in the system □Biddle, □□□□□Dierdorff et al., □□□□□Wickham □ Parker, □□□□□. The theory posits that roles are a result of shared normative expectations about role behaviour □Hindin, □□□□□Turner, □□□□□, i.e., "those who exhibit the role are stimulated to do so because they learnt what behaviours are expected of them, while others are stimulated through their own expectations to teach and enforce appropriate behaviours for those who are members

of a position" (Biddle, 1979, p.5). However, norms vary from person to person and may reflect official organisational demands and informal groups' demands (Biddle, 1986; Hindin, 2007 Veloutsou Black,). The multiple sources of norms result in role occupants contending with antithetical norms and conflicting demands, leading to role strain, which must be resolved if the individual is to be happy and perform well in the role Goode, Hindin, .

Therefore, in service provision organisations, a role theoretic perspective posits that service provision success depends on their clear understanding of how the client expects them to behave and the behaviours that may influence the client to respond positively Broderick, . Thus, role discrepancy results when a client's explicit expectations are unmet, leading to dissatisfaction. In contrast, role congruence is achieved when the parties involved reach a mutual understanding of role expectations and behaviour Broderick, Veloutsou Black, .

2.2.2 Criticism of the organisational role theory

The general functionalist view of role theory, which likens organisational members to body parts where each member serves a specific purpose in the body, suffers setbacks when attempting to explicate individuals' behaviours in micro-social contexts because it is too prescriptive and disregards agency Mantere, Turner, . Agency, as defined by Giddens , entails intentional action by reflexive agents who possess the capacity to change their circumstances. Contrary to this notion of agency, role theory traditionally anticipates uniform responses from individuals confronted with identical role expectations Mantere, .

Role theorists, thus, use the role concept to explicate individuals' behaviour by considering constraints external to the individual, with role discussions typically taking an objectivist view Mantere, . However, other extant research focusing on strategy-as-practice e.g. Beckert, Whittington, challenges this view by recognising that knowledgeable agents engage reflexively with their environments, understanding to some degree the structural conditions that influence their agency. This research stream highlights managers' strategic agency, emphasising the development of theories sensitive to practice Mantere, .

Moreover, the foundational assumptions of organisational role theory, which portray organisations as rational and stable entities where all conflicts are inherently role-related, may be overly simplistic Hindin, Turner, . The assumptions imply that resolving such conflicts should lead to satisfaction and productivity among role occupants, limiting the study of evolving roles and roles emanating from nonnormative expectations Biddle, .

Despite these criticisms, role theory's value lies in its dual analytical capacity. It intersects individual and organisational behaviours, making it a potent tool for examining the impacts of role expectations on managerial actions and how individual preferences shape behaviour (Fondas & Stewart, 1994, p. 84). Given its significance in business and organisational studies (Hindin, 2007), role theory is considered appropriate for the current study, which focuses on the micro-level of the role of the incubator manager.

2.2.3 Theoretical lens for the study

To understand how stakeholders' role expectations enable or constrain business incubator managers' strategic agency, the current study adopts Stewart's (1982) Demands, Constraints, and Choices (DCC) model as a theoretical lens. The DCC model was developed from role theory to understand managerial roles and behaviour (Stewart, 1982b), considering the constraints within the manager's operating environment, the role's demands, and the managers' choices.

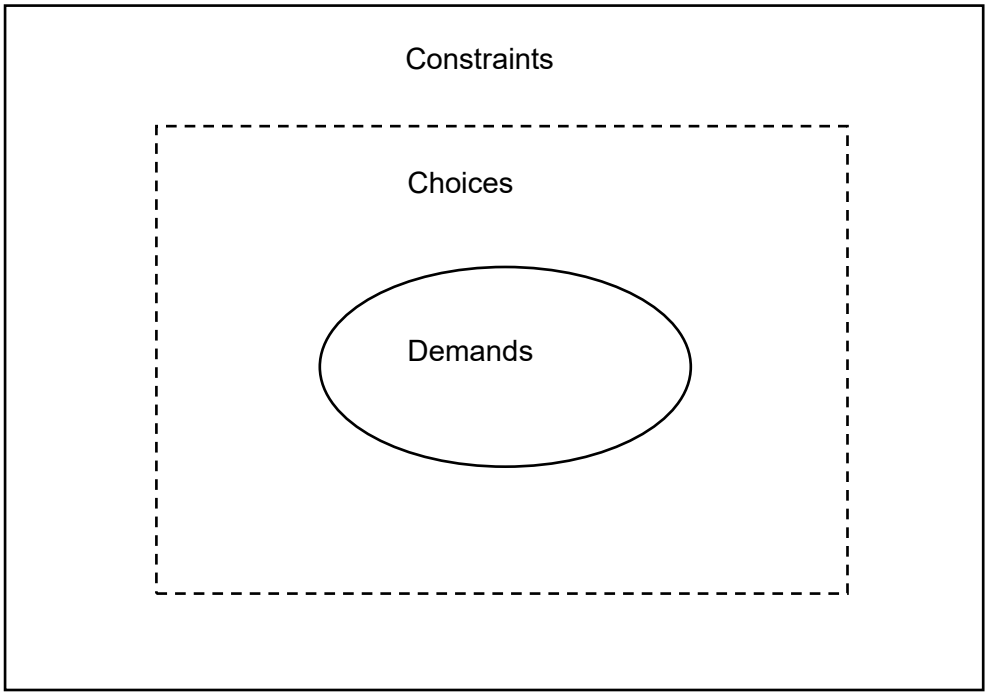
While several role concepts are used in managerial behaviour literature, the concepts adopted in this study are briefly explained based on the DCC model. Fondas and Stewart (1994) explain that every managerial role has a role-set, which entails all the stakeholders interacting with the manager and having expectations about the manager's performance. These stakeholders communicate their role expectations and influence on the manager during their interpersonal interactions, giving rise to the sent role concept, what the manager is expected to do and not do. How the manager perceives the messages received becomes the received role. Role behaviour is defined as "what the manager does in response to the messages he or she has perceived and in response to his or her own perception of the job" (Fondas & Stewart, 1994, p. 84). Thus, demands and constraints on the manager are created by the role-set's expectations and contextual factors, while the manager's role behaviour, including the choices made, gives the role-set an indication of the manager's level of compliance with expectations (Fondas & Stewart, 1994; Stewart, 1982).

The DCC model posits that the job demands trigger the manager's choices. These job demands include job requirements, targets, nature of work, available personnel's experience, the degree of a manager's involvement, e.g., level of supervision needed or administrative work required, and mandatory communications (Stewart, 1982; 1994). In addition, the performance criteria for the role also introduce another set of demands (Lowe, 1992). Considering the nature of these triggers, they are often found in most managerial roles, including the business incubator manager's role. However, how the incubator managers experience these demands needs to be understood within their operating context.

Furthermore, the DCC model suggests that occupational constraints, such as inaccessibility of resources, technological inade□uacies, legal and geographic restrictions, reliance on the attitudes of others, as well as the intelligibility of □ob boundaries, also proscribe a manager's choices (Lowe, □□□□□. For business incubators, resource constraints, as discussed under sub□section □.□.□, and the broad scope of the role, i.e., manager, entrepreneur and technician □Kakabadse et al., □□□□□, all suggest the constraints within the operating environment.

Stewart □□□□□□summarises the managerial choices as □□□what aspects of the □ob the manager chooses to emphasise in terms of time, effort, and commitment of resources□□□□how and what tasks are delegated□and □□□how the manager manages his or her boundaries □p. □□. Since managers can choose how to execute their roles in the presence of the demands and constraints of the role, this signifies the domain of managerial agency.

Therefore, using the DCC model for the current study enables the explication of the stakeholders' expectations as demands and constraints on incubator managers and how these constrain and□or enable incubator managers' strategic agency. Figure □ summarises the DCC model discussed in this section.



□□□**re**□□□ *Stewart's (1982) model of demands, constraints and choices (DCC).* □dapted from Lowe □□□□□.

2.2.3.1 The utility of the DCC model

The DCC model has been widely applied across several disciplines to study managerial roles and is valued for its simplicity and flexibility, which facilitates integration with diverse theoretical frameworks (Kakabadse et al., [illegible] Lowe, [illegible]). Its ability to incorporate managerial agency enhances its applicability to dynamic roles where incumbents must navigate evolving demands and constraints (Fondas & Stewart, [illegible] Lowe, [illegible]).

The model has been utilised in job performance (Black, [illegible]), organisational commitment (Stroh et al., [illegible]), and project management (Rwelamila & Gudries, [illegible]). Recently, Kakabadse et al. ([illegible]) extended the model's application to the entrepreneurship sector to examine business incubator managers' perceptions of their roles and performance. The study underscores how managers' perceptions of their roles and engagement with structural constraints affect their performance. However, despite Stewart's (1982) model's apparent utility, some limitations and criticisms have been levelled against it, as discussed in the subsequent section.

2.2.3.2 Limitations of the DCC model

The DCC model has been criticised for its limited recognition of job demands as both enablers and constraints for managers. Scholars such as Demerouti and Bakker ([illegible]) and Podsakoff et al. ([illegible]) fragment job demands into challenges and hindrances. These scholars define job demands as encompassing "physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological (cognitive and emotional) effort or skills and are therefore associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs" (Demerouti & Bakker, [illegible], p. [illegible]). These demands are not inherently harmful; they become hindrances only when an employee cannot recover from the effort required, impairing their ability to achieve goals (Demerouti & Bakker, [illegible]).

Conversely, challenges such as high workloads, time pressures, and cognitive demands are efforts that foster personal growth, learning, and goal achievement (Demerouti & Bakker, [illegible]; Podsakoff et al., [illegible]). These challenges are linked to increased job involvement, satisfaction, motivation, and performance (Podsakoff et al., [illegible]).

Nevertheless, distinguishing between challenges and hindrances can be complex as the perception of demands varies based on context (Demerouti & Bakker, [illegible]). Cavanaugh et al. ([illegible]) attempted to categorise some of these job demands into challengers and hindrances, illustrating this taxonomy in their research, as summarised in Table [illegible].

This nuanced understanding of □ob demands underscores a gap in the DCC model, suggesting a need for its adaptation to more accurately reflect the dual nature of □ob demands as enablers and constraints in managerial roles.

Ta□le□□□*Stress items and categorisation as challenge, hindrance, or other (not clearly falling in either category) from Cavanaugh et al. (2000)*□

□halle□□er□□	H□□dra□□e□□	Other□
• The number of pro□ects and□or assignments I have. • The amount of time I spend at work. • The volume of work that must be accomplished in the allotted time. • The amount of responsibility I have. • The scope of responsibility my position entails.	• The degree to which politics rather than performance affects organisational decisions. • The inability to clearly understand what is expected of me on the □ob. • The amount of red tape I need to go through to get my □ob done. • The lack of □ob security I have. • The degree to which my career seems 'stalled'.	• The amount of time I spend in meetings. • The number of phone calls and office visits I have during the day. • The extent to which my position presents me with conflicting demands. • The opportunities for career development I have had. • The amount of travelling I must do.

In summary, despite the perceived shortcomings, the DCC model has stood the test of time and continues to be applicable in the study of managerial roles. The model incorporates agency in the role theoretic view to overcome the limitations of the functionalist role theory perspective. Moreover, the model's developer believed that intensive qualitative analyses lead to a better understanding of managerial behaviour "than through the study of empirical correlates among selected variables" (Lowe, 2003, p. 205); therefore, it is suited to the current research, which takes a □ualitative paradigm. Furthermore, scholars argue that the managerial roles discourse should not only be centred on role expectations but also consider role enactment, which involves agency □Fondas □ Stewart, □□□□□Mantere, □□□□□. In the current research, a role analysis considers individuals occupying the role of incubator managers enacting their obligatory activities. Therefore, the model is considered an appropriate lens for the study, which seeks to understand how stakeholders' expectations constrain and/or enable incubator managers' strategic agency in a resource□constrained context.

2.2.4 Incubator management and role perspective

The literature on business incubation shows that the role of the business incubator manager entails maintaining vital relationships with several stakeholders, as discussed in section □.□.□. The stakeholders form part of the manager's role□set and hold expectations on the performance of the incubator manager. The incubator manager's role□set for the current study thus includes policymakers, sponsors, incubatees and incubator's knowledge workers (Alsos et al., 2013;

Kakabadse et al., □□□□□Messeghem et al., □□□□□. □s postulated by organisational role theory, the stakeholders□expectations often conflict□thus, incubator manager role strain □Goode, □□□□□ Hindin, □□□□□is expected. □s summarised in the following paragraphs, extant research signals some of the typical tensions between the incubator managers and some of their stakeholders.

In the era of evidence□based policy development □Somsuk □ Laosirihongthong, □□□□□Sternberg, □□□□□, policymakers expect incubator managers to support policy prescriptions, especially where business incubation is adopted as a policy instrument □Barbero et al., □□□□□Messeghem et al., □□□□□. Thus, policymakers hold expectations of incubator managers from performance and reporting perspectives □Gassmann □ Becker, □□□□□Messeghem et al., □□□□□. However, such reporting re□uirements add to the bureaucratic burdens that incubator managers consider unnecessarily time□consuming □Kakabadse et al., □□□□□. Moreover, performance measurement metrics may need to align with the long□term ob□ectives of the incubator □Kakabadse et al., □□□□□ Messeghem et al., □□□□□. □s a result, incubator managers must prioritise their activities and grapple with balancing long□term and short□term ob□ectives, actions governed by the dynamics of the role□set □Fondas □ Stewart, □□□□□.

Furthermore, irrespective of the sponsorship mode, as discussed in section □.□.□, sponsors expect the incubator managers to meet the agreed incubator ob□ectives □□erts et al., □□□□□Baraldi □ Ingemansson Havenvid, □□□□□Mrka□ic, □□□□□. These ob□ectives can be grouped as for□profit or not□for□profit □Theodorakopoulos et al., □□□□□. Incubatee selection □□erts et al., □□□□□ and incubator performance evaluation criteria □Hackett □ Dilts, □□□□□Messeghem et al., □□□□□reflect sponsors□expectations and may exert much pressure on incubator managers. For incubators relying on rental and service fees, pursuing incubator occupancy rates for financial self□sufficiency can distract incubator managers from focusing on providing the necessary support to incubatees □Kakabadse et al., □□□□□, while fear of failure may encourage picking only winners □□utio □ Rannikko, □□□□□during the recruitment stage, at the expense of those entrepreneurs re□uiring much support.

□s for public incubators, policy□driven expectations often follow political changes, affecting the incubators' strategic focus and sustainability (Benneworth et al., 2017). In addition, the calibre of incubatees recruited determines the intensity of support from the incubator managers □Barbero et al., □□□□□Sutter et al., □□□□□and is contingent on the policy ob□ectives. For example, such ob□ectives may promote recruiting incubatees with limited entrepreneurial know□how □Mrka□ic, □□□□□, no business□related □ualifications □Gassmann □ Becker, □□□□□, or unclear business ideas, re□uiring more resources to nurture successfully.

Moreover, incubatees present a myriad of expectations for the incubator manager. Incubatees come from potential entrepreneurs within a region and are at different personal and entrepreneurial development stages (Lecluyse et al., 1999; Bergek & Norrman, 2008; Clarysse et al., 2005). The different credentials result in different expectations of the incubator manager. For instance, Lecluyse and Knockaert (2007) find that firms establishing on science parks cite service-based or location-based expectations. Based on the close similarity between science parks and business incubators (Hausberg & Korreck, 2020), similar expectations to those found by Lecluyse and Knockaert (2007) are likely to be placed on incubator managers by incubatees. However, while science park tenants can relocate from the science park if their expectations are disconfirmed, incubatees may not have such a choice due to the differences in the support models between an incubator and a science park (Ng et al., 2009); thus, managers' choices will be influenced by the presence of dissatisfied incubatees.

2.3 Role expectations

2.3.1 Role expectations definition

Role expectations emanate from role theory and are defined as norms, beliefs, or preferences of the requirements of successful role performance (Biddle, 1986; Hindin, 2007). Expectations can be both about the activity and attribute necessities of role performance (Broderick, 1998; Dierdorff, 2009; Merton, 1957) and are held by role incumbents and members of their role-set. Each view of expectations determines how a role is conceptualised, leading to different orientations of role theory, although scholars' conceptualisation of expectations often overlaps (Biddle, 1986). The current study adopts the dominant view of expectations as norms, which is the foundation of organisational role theory (Biddle, 1986; Hindin, 2007) underpinning the study.

Role theory posits that within social structures, such as organisations, each social status or role, defined as "a position in a social system with designated rights and obligations" (Merton, 1957, p. 368), is associated with several other roles, leading to the role-set concept (Floyd & Lane, 2000; Merton, 1957). The exchange of expectations between role occupant and members of the role-set was described in section 2.2.2. The stakeholders' expectations are often conflicting and contradictory (Turner, 2002) since role-set members occupy different social statuses, leading to significant interference with the role occupant's effective role performance (Merton, 1957), leading to role strain (Goode, 1960; Hindin, 2007). When faced with the expectations of the various role-set members, the role occupant tries to make choices of expectations to be prioritised in role performance (Merton, 1957; Fondas & Stewart, 1994). The prioritised expectations are then exhibited in the role occupant's actions, thereby shaping the role attributions focal individuals place on themselves (Dierdorff et al., 2009).

For professional services firms, a role-set can be viewed as a set of working relationships creating the service provision process, which helps enumerate the vital collaborative elements within the service provision (Broderick,). This perspective requires the management of internal service roles as well as "mutual coordination of appropriate role behaviours by clients" (Broderick, , p.). In business incubation, these elements involve the stakeholders that are part of an incubator's network (Aaboen,) and are, therefore, members of the incubator manager's role-set. The provision of incubation services can thus be envisaged to entail harmonising appropriate behaviours between the incubator manager and the various stakeholders and managing the internal relationship between the incubator manager and, the knowledge workers, the incubator staff, all governed by expectations held by each party on the other.

2.3.2 Managing uncertainty related to role-set expectations

Prior research proposes some mechanisms to manage the uncertainty caused by divergent expectations of the role-set, which lead to role strain on the role occupant (Turner,). Role strain is "the difficulty felt in fulfilling role obligations" (Goode, , p.). The first mechanism is the social hierarchy of the various members involved in the role-set (Goode, ; Merton,). The diverse expectations of role-set members are mitigated by the basic social differentiation of the members and their level of involvement in the relationship with the role occupant.

The power differential among members of the role-set (Merton,) is another stabilising mechanism. Social structures inadvertently end up with power and authority differentials (Giddens,), with power referring to the imposition of one's will against others in social actions (Mitchell et al.,), while authority is the culturally legitimised organisation of power (Merton,). Members of the role-set who monopolise power will see their demands prioritised (Goode,). Where conflicting members of the role-set's powers neutralise each other, the role occupant gains autonomy to proceed as she or he wishes (Merton,).

Furthermore, the degree of insulation of role activities from observability by members of the role-set is another possible mechanism. Merton (1957) defines observability as “the extent to which social norms and role performances can readily become known to others in the social system” (p.). The more the social structure insulates the observability of the role occupant, the lower the role strain (Goode,), with an optimum level of insulation necessary to ensure performance and accountability (Merton,).

Another mechanism, termed observability of the conflicting demands (Goode, ; Merton,), postulates that members of the role-set may not realise the conflicting nature of their

demands on the role occupant, in which case they are likely to persist at the expense of the role occupant. However, if they become aware, they can either compromise or strive for power, in both cases reducing the constraints on the status occupant. If they decline into a power contest, the role occupant may be left autonomous to perform as he or she wishes.

Lastly, abridging the role-set (Merton, □□□□□) involves the termination of some relationships between the role occupant and members of the role-set. However, since the role occupant does not choose the role-set but depends on the role (Turner, □□□□□), this mechanism only works if the role occupant can continue to function without the curtailed relationship. Nevertheless, where it happens, a greater level of consensus is envisaged among the remaining members of the role-set (Merton, □□□□□).

While social theorists suggest the possible stabilising mechanisms that may assist in reducing role strain on role occupants due to the expectations of their role-set, the business incubation literature still needs to explore these mechanisms adequately. Therefore, the current study, which seeks to understand how stakeholder expectations constrain and/or enable incubator managers' strategic agency, will examine if some of these mechanisms are evident among the incubator managers' role-set. Strategic agency as a construct for the current study is discussed in the next section.

2.4 Managerial strategizing

2.4.1 Introduction

Conceptualising an organisation as a social system comprised of multiple agents involved in social interaction (Biddle, □□□□□; Dierdorff et al., □□□□□; Wickham & Parker, □□□□□) implies the importance of agency (Mantere, □□□□□). Agency has, thus, attracted much interest among scholars of organisational strategy over the years (Mantere, □□□□□; Whittington, □□□□□). At both senior and middle levels, managers are actively involved in the organisational strategy process, either as strategy developers, strategy implementers, or both (Beckert, □□□□□; Mantere, □□□□□; Weiser et al., □□□□□). However, research seeking to understand managerial behaviour is often driven from an organisational structures perspective, which is macro-oriented, whereas strategic action is undertaken by individuals, making agency more micro-oriented (Beckert, □□□□□; Mantere, □□□□□). Thus, research seeking to understand managers' strategic roles focuses on the micro-activities of strategy and the practices directing and driving these activities and falls under the emerging literature on micro-strategy (Bruton et al., □□□□□; Steen et al., □□□□□; Whittington, □□□□□). The current study, which considers role expectations "a classical sociological constraint on the behaviour of individuals" (Mantere, □□□□, p. □□□), draws from this extant literature and aims to contribute to the managerial role literature in the entrepreneurship support field, specifically business incubation.

While there may be other factors within the operating environment of business incubators that contribute to the tensions experienced by incubator managers, the current research focuses on the tensions experienced due to the role expectations of various stakeholders, which may constrain and/or enable the incubator manager's strategic agency.

2.4.2 Strategic agency definition

According to Giddens (1984), agency entails intentional action by reflexive agents who are also able to act to change their circumstances. Building on this view of agency, Mantere (2008) defines strategic agency as "an individual's capacity to have a perceived effect upon the individual's own work on an issue the individual regards as beneficial to the interests of his or her organisation" (p. 298). While individuals at all levels of an organisation have personal interests (Macintosh & Scapens, 1990; Steen et al., 2006), these interests become strategic if the beneficial outcome is for the organisation and not personal (Mantere, 2008). This perspective is aligned with the view of strategy as an interpretive construct aimed at motivating actors to act in a manner that benefits the organisation (Beckert, 1999). Thus, agency involves the rational behaviour of actors, who are considered knowledgeable and reflexive (Giddens, 1984). Beckert (1999) emphasises this rationality by defining strategic agency as the "planned persuasion of ends (profit) based on rational assessment of available means and strategic conditions" (p. 779). Rational assessment and conception of desired ends require actors to reflect on the existing organisational and market conditions. Therefore, managers' strategic tasks include screening the external and internal environments for potential opportunities.

While there may be several perspectives on strategic agency (e.g., Steen et al., 2006), the current study, whose central thesis is that the incubator manager has strategic agency, which is constrained and/or enabled by the stakeholders' role expectations, adopts Mantere's (2008) definition of strategic agency as "an individual's capacity to have a perceived effect upon the individual's own work on an issue the individual regards as beneficial to the interests of his or her organisation" (p. 298) is adopted.

2.4.3 Theoretical background

While the discussion of strategic agency within organisations is often driven by the constraining nature of institutions (Macintosh & Scapens, 1990), strategic agency can also be viewed from the enabling and constraining nature of stakeholders' expectations of managers' role (Mantere, 2008). The constraining view of institutions can only stand if a weak correlation between managers' intentionality and organisational outcomes is assumed, implying a highly uncertain environment (Beckert, 1999). Thus, highly stable environments are posited to allow entrepreneurial actors to

take risky strategic alternatives, often in violation of the existing institutional structures and strategies (Beckert, □□□□□), which are the defined expectations that managers must comply with.

However, an emphasis on stability implies that organisational routines and capabilities are stable since routines are also postulated to guide the behaviour of actors (Steen, □□□□□). Nevertheless, empirical evidence shows that actors have some degree of choice on whether to uphold or shift the routine (Fondas & Stewart, □□□□□; Steen, □□□□□), which challenges the idea of stability. Moreover, Giddens (□□□□□, □□□□□) shows that the taken-for-granted nature of institutions can be reconciled with the concepts of purposiveness and intentionality. This view enables organisational development and change studies to focus on entrepreneurial actors' agency instead of external threats (Bruton et al., □□□□□; Giddens, □□□□□). However, considering the institutional arrangement of business incubators, the strategic agency of the incubator manager can be constrained or enabled by the multiple stakeholders' expectations (Kakabadse et al., □□□□□). Nevertheless, extant business incubation literature does not explain how such institutional expectations influence the strategic agency of incubator managers operating within a resource-constrained context. Therefore, the current study will provide insights to address that knowledge gap.

2.4.4 Managerial strategic agency in other disciplines

Several studies on managers' strategic agency have been undertaken in diverse organisations and contexts. Research on strategy implementation is shifting from strategy development to "how strategies are continuously enacted and adapted in the implementation process" (Weiser et al., □□□□, p. □□□□), a process that is driven by the strategic agency of managers (Beckert, □□□□□). For instance, Rouleau and Balogun (□□□□□) focus on understanding the strategic agency of middle managers working in organisations undergoing change and restructuring, while Mantere (□□□□□) delves into the general strategic agency of middle managers working in organisations across different sectors.

While middle managers are expected to act strategically, most of them often lack role authority to act as expected; thus, Rouleau and Balogun (□□□□□) focus on understanding "how middle managers … deploy their discursive abilities" (p. 956) when executing their strategic tasks. On the other hand, appreciating that top management exercises role expectations on middle managers, Mantere's (□□□□□) objective is "to understand conditions under which role expectations enable middle management strategic agency" (p. □□□). Rouleau and Balogun (□□□□□) find that during organisational transformation, middle managers' strategic agency is exercised through two discursive activities, namely, "performing conversation and setting the scene" (p. □□□). These are vital in middle managers' sensemaking, which occurs in a relational context between the middle managers and the various stakeholders; thus, managers must understand multiple stakeholder

interactions (Rouleau & Balogun, 2011). These interactions also require behavioural complexity and flexibility to enable the managers to recognise the needs and goals of different stakeholder groups and adopt a relevant personal approach accordingly. Such behavioural traits will also be expected from incubator managers since they relate to several stakeholders with varying expectations of the incubator manager.

Mantere (2013) finds that role expectations can be constraints and enablers of middle managers' strategic agency. While top management places expectations on middle managers, middle managers also place expectations on top management, which are the enabling conditions for middle managers' strategic agency (Mantere, 2013). Thus, Mantere (2013) suggests extending the functional view of the strategic roles of middle managers to a reciprocal view, continuously being re-enacted due to the interface of diverse narrative logics (Barry & Elmes, 1997; Mantere, 2013). These findings suggest the likely interaction between the incubator managers and each stakeholder, influencing the incubator manager's strategic decisions in response to the dynamic stakeholder expectations. Therefore, the current study focuses on understanding how these expectations constrain and/or enable incubator managers' strategic agency.

2.4.5 Strategic agency in business incubator management

Limited research focuses on managers' strategic agency within the context of business incubation. However, vital insights can be obtained from studies in related fields that consider managers' strategic agency. Benneworth et al.'s (2016) investigation of "the role of universities in regional innovation systems" (p. 905) is one such study. The study explores the strategic agency of contemporary university leaders. These universities are increasingly being transformed from traditional teaching and research tasks to being entrepreneurial (Etzkowitz et al., 2000; Berbegal-Mirabent et al., 2013). The new role has encouraged the establishment of university business incubators aiming at nurturing and supporting spin-off firms (Soetanto & van Geenhuizen, 2015), (2016) to commercialise knowledge from university research output (Klofsten et al., 2019; Mian et al., 2016).

However, a perceived reputational impairment is linked to the universities' association with regional innovation systems, which calls for the university leaders' strategic agency. Most universities prefer to be viewed as global academic players; thus, additional objectives may leave them overloaded, compromising their core research and teaching objectives (Benneworth et al., 2016). Moreover, scientists and researchers' career progression is linked to published research quality (Leahey et al., 2017). Thus, university institutional entrepreneurs intending to pursue regional innovation initiatives may encounter challenges in their academic careers (Berbegal-

Mirabent et al., 2015). This situation calls for university leaders' strategic agency to balance the academic and socioeconomic contribution to regional entrepreneurial efforts.

Consequently, university leaders exercise their strategic agency to balance the conflicting expectations. On one hand, universities obtain vital resources from regional partners only when the universities commit to participating in regional innovation activities (Benneworth et al.,). On the other hand, academic stakeholders hold expectations of university leaders to maintain the university's excellence, legitimacy, and credibility (Benneworth et al.,). The stakeholders' conflicting expectations require the leaders' social intelligence (Boal & Hooijberg,) to manage the various demands. The dialogical and reciprocal views of expectations (Mantere,) are evident.

The dilemma university leaders face resembles that of business incubator managers when engaging with stakeholders who provide critical resources. Incubator managers may have to comply with some bureaucratic requirements to continue receiving sponsors' resources, even though they may perceive the requirements as unnecessary (Kakabadse et al.,). Furthermore, the uncertainty brought about by potential changes in political and policy environments threatening universities and other regional partners (Benneworth et al.,) resembles the challenges incubator managers face, mainly if they depend on public sponsorship. These insights indicate the importance of understanding how managers use their strategic agency in situations of conflicting demands. Therefore, the current study addresses the knowledge gaps described in the following section.

2.5 Research gap and research objectives

2.5.1 Research gap

The evolution of business incubation as it is adopted in new contexts, particularly in emerging and resource-constrained economies, requires a better theoretical and empirical understanding of how the behaviour of incubator managers is affected by the expectations of incubator's stakeholders (Kakabadse et al.,). Similar to universities in regional innovation systems (Benneworth et al.,), business incubators play a vital role in the revitalisation of regional economies (Messeghem et al., ; Sohail et al.,) through the promotion of innovation and nurturing of new businesses, which in turn create employment and alleviate poverty (Sutter et al.,). Policymakers have high expectations of the role of business incubators in regional economic development, "yet these expectations place such pressure on incubator managers that the temptation is at times great to concentrate on short-term performance goals" (Messeghem et al., , p.). Besides policymakers, stakeholders such as sponsors, incubatees, and incubator

knowledge workers hold several expectations regarding the incubator managers□ role. Role literature shows that such expectations, which are often conflicting and contradictory, either constrain or enable the behaviour of the role occupant □Merton, □□□□□Turner, □□□□□. Role theory further posits that if role strain is not removed, the role occupant may not perform the role effectively □Biddle, □□□□□Goode, □□□□□Hindin, □□□□□.

Moreover, business incubation literature shows that most incubators are relatively small organisations □□aboen, □□□□□□thus, incubator managers get involved in strategic activities at the development and implementation levels □Scillitoe □ Chakrabarti, □□□□□ Vanderstraeten □ Matthyssens, □□□□□□thus, their optimum performance is vital. While the sponsors□ strategic ob□ectives, reflected as role expectations on the incubator managers, tend to take precedence, studies of managerial roles in conventional organisations show that managers have the agency to enact their roles □Beckert, □□□□□Giddens, □□□□□Mantere, □□□□□. Thus, strategy scholars are paying more attention to strategy enactment □Weiser et al., □□□□□Whittington, □□□□□, focusing on the micro□ strategising activities of managers driven by strategic agency. However, within the business incubation literature, research addressing how incubator managers respond to stakeholders□ expectations and how these expectations constrain and□or enable incubator managers□ strategic agency is still limited.

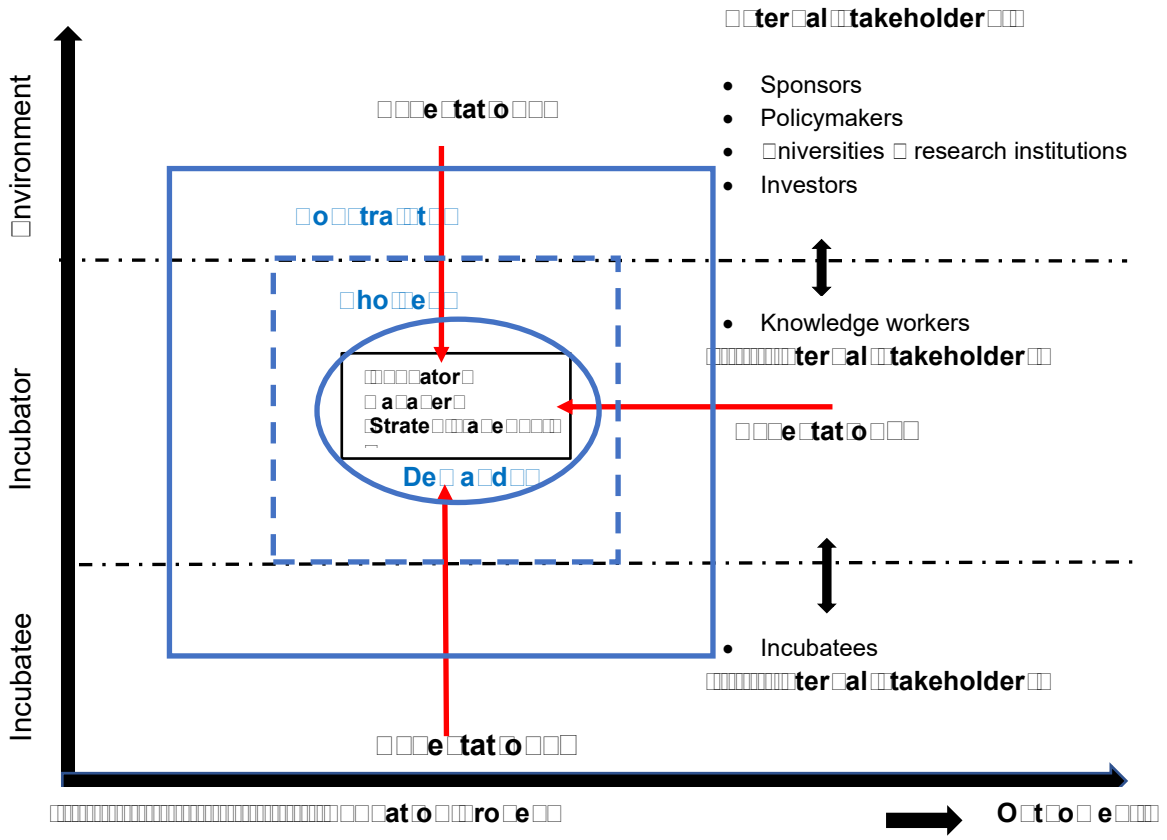
Nevertheless, a recent study by Kakabadse et al. □□□□□□focuses on the role of the incubator manager, examining how incubator managers perceive their role and performance. The study highlights some incubator managers□ demands and constraints, particularly from sponsors□ expectations. However, the research only considers the views and perceptions of the incubator managers□ thus, the explicit expectations of the stakeholders are not considered. Specifically, Kakabadse et al. □□□□□□indicate that “the incubator managers’ individual perceptions were the main focus of the □…□study and, therefore, their definition of success prevailed” (p. 488).

The exclusion of incubator stakeholders in Kakabadse et al.□s □□□□□□ study leaves a gap in knowledge of the different stakeholders□ expectations and how they affect incubator managers□ strategic agency. Thus, the current study does not seek to replicate Kakabadse et al.□s □□□□□□ focus on business incubator managers□ perception of their role or performance success but instead on the strategic agency of the incubator managers and how it is constrained and□or enabled by the expectations of the stakeholders. □s discussed in sections □.□.□ and □.□.□, expectations can present constraints and opportunities to managers□ strategic agency □Mantere, □□□□□Merton, □□□□□. However, explicit expectations must be known to consider how stakeholders□ expectations enable and□or constrain the incubator managers□ strategic agency. Including various stakeholders in the current study avoids reliance on the incubator managers□ perceptions of the

stakeholders expectations but instead gets the stakeholders to explicate their real expectations. Knowing stakeholders stated expectations enables examining whether or not the stakeholders expectations are correctly interpreted by the incubator managers, which is the sent role, and received role concepts in the role set concept. The received role shapes the manager s behaviour Fondas Stewart, thus, it is vital to understand the stakeholders' expectations before considering the manager's strategic agency.

2.5.2 Conceptual framework

Overlaying Stewart s DCC model on Hausberg and Korreck s multi level interaction of incubator managers and their stakeholders, focusing specifically on business incubators towards the enterprise development service offering as presented in section , Figure , a conceptual framework, as shown in Figure , emerges. This framework depicts the expectations of stakeholders, particularly those classified as expectant and highly salient Mitchell et al., , discussed under section , directed at the incubator managers. These expectations create demands on the incubator manager in addition to contextual constraints, such as resource constraints. The essence of this study is to understand how these stakeholders expectations constrain and or enable incubator managers strategic agency.



re *Conceptual framework: stakeholders' expectations and business incubator manager's strategic agency during the incubation process for incubators providing enterprise development services.*

2.5.3 Research questions and propositions

While caution is re□uired in □ualitative studies to avoid data analysis being heavily influenced by what is already known from literature and theory □Dubois □ Gadde, □□□□□, some form of preunderstanding is necessary before the research commences, especially in □ualitative interpretive studies □□lvesson, □□□□□ Baxter □ □ack, □□□□□ Mantere □ Ketoviki, □□□□□. Conse□uently, the developed conceptual framework was a preliminary representation of the main propositions advanced in this study. The propositions only assist in providing a focused analysis of the data generated from the cases to avoid pursuing exciting data superfluous to the research □uestions □Baxter □ □ack, □□□□□. The explicit propositions are presented with the research □uestions later in this section.

The current study builds on Kakabadse et al.□s □□□□□□research by asking one main research □uestion and three sub□□uestions.

The main research □uestion is□

In what way do stakeholders' role expectations enable and/or constrain the strategic agency of business incubator managers in a resource-constrained context?

The first sub□□uestion, seeking to delve deep into understanding the expectations of the various incubator managers' stakeholders, thus asked□

i. What are the stakeholders' role expectations of business incubator managers in a resource-constrained context?

The current research posits that the business incubation operating context and other conventional organisational contexts are heterogeneous. Business incubation□s uni□ue, complex and multifaceted nature is highlighted in extant literature □e.g., □hmad □ Thornberry, □□□□□Baraldi Ingemansson Havenvid, □□□□□Mc□dam et al., □□□□□Soetanto □ □ack, □□□□□. There still needs to be clarity on whether a business incubator is a client or a customer in some stakeholder relationships □□aboen, □□□□□Messeghem et al., □□□□□. Moreover, the diversity of the incubatees in terms of ideas and background creates a complex mix of internal stakeholders. Stakeholder literature shows that stakeholder salience changes over time □Mitchell et al., □□□□□, with some business incubation literature suggesting the temporal nature of stakeholder expectations over the incubator□s development tra□ectory □Liu, □□□□□, implying a dynamic relationship between stakeholders and incubator managers. Role theorists argue that contextual and situational pressures contribute significantly to the moulding of role behaviours □Biddle, □□□□□Dierdorff et al., □□□□□. Therefore, the complex organisational context in business incubators presents an opportunity to study the managers□strategic agency in such a context. Kakabadse et al. □□□□□□

recommend further research to focus on "constraints facing incubator managers, and what steps they could implement to reduce the negative impact of these obstacles" □p. □□□□.

Thus, after understanding the expectations of the various stakeholders as per the first sub□ □uestion, the following two sub□□uestions sought to gain insight into the management and micro□ strategising activities of the incubator managers and thus asked□

ii. *How do business incubator managers in a resource-constrained context manage the perceived job demands?*
iii. *How do business incubator managers in a resource-constrained context manage the perceived job constraints?*

The corresponding propositions for the two sub□□uestions are outlined in Table □.

Ta□le□□□ ***Research sub-questions and propositions***

Re□ear□h□□□□□□e□t□o□□	**□ro□o□t□o□□□**
i. How do business incubator managers in a resource-constrained context manage the perceived job demands?	*P1: Expectations of internal stakeholders, i.e., knowledge workers and incubatees, enable incubator managers to become innovative, working within the resource constraints to meet the needs of these internal stakeholders.* *P2: Expectations of internal stakeholders, i.e., knowledge workers and incubatees, enable incubator managers' strategic agency to leverage these stakeholders' expectations to negotiate with other stakeholders (sponsors, policymakers, and universities) for the critical resources required by the incubator.* *P3: Performance expectations from definitive stakeholders enable incubator managers' strategic agency to become innovative in using scarce resources to achieve better results, maintain the existing sponsorship, and negotiate better terms.*
ii. How do business incubator managers in a resource-constrained context manage the perceived job constraints?	*P4: Incubator managers terminate relationships with stakeholders whose expectations are perceived as constraints if they are not part of the definitive stakeholder group.*

Re□ear□h □□□□□□e□t□o□□	□ro□o□t□o□□□
	P5: Incubator managers prioritise the expectations of external stakeholders they consider part of the definitive stakeholder group at each stage of the incubator's development. *P6: Incubator managers deliberately reinterpret external stakeholders' constraining expectations in a way that enables them (the incubator managers) to meet the expectations.*

2.6□ □ha□ter□□□□ □ ar□□□

The business incubator manager role is multifaceted and pivotal in an incubator□s success. The role is complex, encompassing incubator branding, incubatee selection, entrepreneurial support, staff management, and stakeholder management. Incubator managers must navigate stakeholders' diverse expectations. These stakeholders, which form the incubator manager's role□ set, include policymakers, sponsors, incubatees, and knowledge workers, each with distinct demands that shape managerial behaviour. Incubator managers' ability to build and sustain stakeholder relationships is essential for gaining and maintaining incubator legitimacy. □xtant research shows that legitimacy enables organisations to secure the resources and support necessary for success and sustainability.

However, few studies focus on incubator managers, mainly on how the stakeholders' expectations influence their behaviour. This paucity underscores the need for further research on how diverse and often conflicting expectations influence incubator managers' strategic agency. Such research is especially essential for developing and emerging contexts, which are currently under□ researched. Moreover, some scholars encourage taking multiple theoretical perspectives in studying phenomena such as business incubation. Role theory is one of the theories rarely used in business incubation research. Organisational role theory enables the study of individuals□ interactions with others based on expectations placed on each other. One criticism of role theory is its prescriptive nature and disregard for agency. On the contrary, research on organisational strategy and development emphasises managers' agency, with managers□ strategic agency seen as crucial in navigating □ob demands and pursuing organisational ob□ectives.

Therefore, a nuanced understanding of how incubator managers make strategic choices in response to multiple stakeholders' expectations within the constraints of their environment can inform better management practices and policy frameworks to support the critical function of business incubators in fostering entrepreneurial development.

□ha□ter □□□□ Re□ear□h □ett□□□

3.1 □ □trod□□t□o□□

Context matters in management and organisation scholarship □ohns, □□□□, □□□□□. Defined as "the internal and external factors and the nature of the human actors influencing behavioural change" (Denyer, 2008; Sohail et al., 2023), context is particularly vital in entrepreneurship, which is highly affected by the environmental, cultural and social milieux □Suddaby et al., □□□□□. □ntrepreneurship, in general, is under□researched in resource□constrained contexts such as □frica □George et al., □□□□□. In particular, recent literature reviews □e.g., Hauberg □ Korreck, □□□□□Sohail et al., □□□□□highlight the need for more business incubation research in developing and emerging countries. Context is an essential determinant of the business incubation strategy and model adopted □Mc□dam et al., □□□□□□thus, understanding business incubation management from a resource□constrained context helps to deepen the understanding of the phenomenon across different contexts. Therefore, the current study is undertaken in South □frica, where business incubation is becoming a popular policy option to support entrepreneurship and economic transformation □Hewitt □ □anse van Rensburg, □□□□□Masutha □ Rogerson, □□□□□. This chapter delineates South □frica□s socioeconomic and legislative backdrop, highlighting its significance as a research context for studying the impact of stakeholders□ expectations on business incubator managers□ strategic agency within a resource□constrained setting.

3.2 □South Africa's historical context and socioeconomic status□

South □frica presents a uni□ue and complex setting for studying business incubation due to its resource□constrained context and the lingering effects of its apartheid history. The apartheid system, which institutionalised racial discrimination and economic disenfranchisement between 1948 and 1993, left an indelible mark on the country's socioeconomic landscape (Ntim □ Soobaroyen, □□□□□. The era systematically marginalised the ma□ority black population, restricting their access to □uality education, healthcare, and economic opportunities □Ntim □ Soobaroyen, □□□□□. The marginalisation resulted in entrenched socioeconomic disparities that persist today □ntiase et al., □□□□□ Barnard et al., □□□□□. □ccording to Statistics South □frica □□□□□□, the unemployment rate in South □frica stands at □□.□□ , with youth unemployment even higher at □□.□□ . The Gini coefficient, which measures income ine□uality, is among the highest globally at □.□□ □Sulla et al., □□□□□. Furthermore, the legacy of apartheid has resulted in spatial and economic segregation, with Black South □fricans disproportionately affected by inade□uate infrastructure, limited access to markets, and lower levels of educational attainment □McKeever, □□□□□. □ccess to and □uality of education are vital as they are central to perpetuating other ine□ualities, including access to economic opportunities □McKeever, □□□□□.

Conse□uently, South □frica's socio□economic reality impacts the country's fiscus, with about □□□ of the national revenue budgeted for social spending □S□ National Treasury, □□□□□. Therefore, despite being the second□leading economy in sub□Saharan □frica, South □frica remains a resource□constrained country □World Bank, □□□□□. These conditions and limited access to □uality education create a challenging environment for entrepreneurial activities, necessitating targeted support mechanisms such as business incubation.

3.3□ □□tre□re□e□r□al□a□t□□□t□□□□So□th□□r□□a□

□ driver of persistent unemployment in South □frica and many other □frican countries is non□ inclusive economic growth □Ngepah, □□□□□. The recent low economic growth □World Bank, □□□□□ exacerbates the problem, as □ob seekers at different education and skill levels compete for a few □ob opportunities. The situation forces some to consider entrepreneurship an option despite the challenges associated with access to know□how, lack of entrepreneurial skills, and access to capital, common in resource□constrained contexts □Masutha □ Rogerson, □□□□□Mrka□ic, □□□□□. This kind of entrepreneurship is mainly driven by a need for survival □Haugh, □□□□□Sutter et al., □□□□□, with many survivalist entrepreneurs operating in the economy's informal sector. The situation has resulted in a dualistic socioeconomic structure in the country, demarcated across informal and formal contexts, with the informal economy estimated to employ about □□□ of the labour force □Charman et al., □□□□□.

Moreover, the Global □conomic Monitor □G□M□ shows that South □frica's total early□stage entrepreneurial activity □T□□□, the percentage of the population aged □□ to □□ years that are either new entrepreneurs or owner□managers of a new business, increased from □□ in □□□□ to □□.□□□ in □□□□ □Bosma □ Kelley, □□□□□. The statistic indicates increased entrepreneurial activity in the country despite many new businesses remaining survivalists □S□D□, □□□□□. The country has about □.□ million SMM□s, with those considered formal at most □□□ □O□CD, □□□□□S□D□, □□□□□. However, the country's structural and fiscal constraints □World Bank, □□□□□result in inade□uate resources to provide critical economic infrastructure and build key institutions vital to supporting entrepreneurship, especially SMM□s □□tiase et al., □□□□□.

3.4□ □la□k□e□o□o□ □□e□ □o□er□ e□t□le□□□lat□o□a□d□e□tre□re□e□r□h□□

The new political dispensation ushered in □□□□ necessitated a review of several legislation and policies in South □frica, with the government implementing various policies and programs to address historical in□ustices and promote economic inclusion □Ntim □ Soobaroyen, □□□□□. The Broad□Based Black □conomic □mpowerment □B□BB□□□ □ct of □□□□ and its subse□uent amendments aim to increase the participation of Black South □fricans in the economy through

ownership, management control, socioeconomic development, skills development, and enterprise development (DTIC, 2019). The legislation is envisaged to increase the participation of black people in three ways. First, by gaining ownership and management control of large companies owned predominantly by non-South Africans. Second, by gaining relevant skills for further career development. Finally, they can start their businesses to participate in the various economic sectors and with support from large businesses through enterprise and supplier development initiatives (Bowmans, 2019).

Therefore, businesses owned by non-South Africans, particularly those doing business with the government, must meet specific compliance targets for each component to maintain a B-BBEE rating level, ranging from level one to eight, with one being the highest and eight the lowest (NRF, 2018). These ratings determine a business' preferential procurement status when doing business with the government. Government bodies also consider a company's B-BBEE level when issuing any business operating licence or other authorisation (Bowmans, 2019). Moreover, a company can improve its B-BBEE rating by procuring goods and services from other private entities with higher B-BBEE ratings (NRF, 2019). Therefore, the B-BBEE legislation plays a significant role in the country's business transactions and entrepreneurship development.

Specifically, enterprise and supplier development are critical components in promoting the participation of black people in entrepreneurship. Supplier development is any initiative a large company adopts to upgrade its black-owned business supplier's capabilities, performance and adoptive improvements (van der Westhuizen & Ntshingila, 2019), including direct procurement from these suppliers (Bowmans, 2019). Therefore, companies are expected to spend a certain percentage of their procurement budgets on goods and services from black-owned businesses and on supportive programs for suppliers (Bowmans, 2019). Therefore, supplier development fosters market access for black-owned suppliers and integrates them into the supply chains of larger, established companies. As for enterprise development, companies must support the growth of black-owned enterprises through financial and non-financial assistance. The assistance can include grants, loans, credit guarantees, training, mentoring, and infrastructure support (Bowmans, 2019; DTIC, 2019).

Consequently, companies that fail to meet the enterprise and supplier development targets are penalised by discounting their overall B-BBEE rating by one level (DTIC, 2019), potentially affecting their business opportunities. Therefore, the legislation has become a vital part of the South African economy, ensuring that companies actively contribute to the economic upliftment of Black South Africans through tangible support to black-owned businesses. However, like many economic and entrepreneurship regulations (Jacquemin & Janssen, 2019), the B-BBEE legislation

has received criticism for impeding economic freedom and combining contradictory objectives (Ponte et al., 2007). Moreover, the fact that the compliance expectations set in the legislation are not legally binding makes compliance by large companies a voluntary decision, potentially reducing the effectiveness of the legislation (Ntim & Soobaroyen, 2013). Nevertheless, the legislation creates a conducive environment for business incubators to assist large companies, particularly those doing business with the government, but consider enterprise and supplier development a non-core activity for which they want to avoid creating internal capacity to deliver.

3.5 Overview of the development of business incubation in South Africa

In addition to the BEE Act legislation, the South African government initiated a specific programme to support the growth of the SMME's sector of the economy. The initiative started in the early 1990s, focusing on biomedical and biotechnology start-ups, leading to the establishment of the initial technology incubators in the country (Masutha & Rogerson, 2014). The government's commitment to supporting SMME's and promoting entrepreneurship was intensified by the formation of the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA) in 2004, under the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), mandated to spearhead the national economy and enterprise development (DTI, 2005). Supporting the SMME sector remains at the centre of the country's economic vision, with 90 per cent of the 11 million new employment opportunities envisaged in the National Development Plan (NDP) to be created by 2030 being expected from the SMME economy (National Planning Commission, 2011).

However, the persistent high failure rate of new start-ups in South Africa is a significant concern. Recent reports show that about 70% of the country's SMME start-ups fail within their first year of establishment, the lowest survival rate by global comparatives (BER, 2013). Central to the high failure rate is the continuous lack of access to finance, failure to access market opportunities, and ineffective supporting environment (Masutha & Rogerson, 2014). Nevertheless, the positive impact of the pilot incubators supported through the SEDA Technology Programme (STP) launched in 2005 was encouraging. The survival rate of incubated start-ups improved compared to unincubated start-ups in the country (Masutha & Rogerson, 2014). The positive performance spurred government efforts to embark on an ambitious Incubation Support Programme (ISP) launched by the DTI in 2006 (DTI, 2007). A target of increasing the population of business incubators to 100 by 2014 is an acknowledgement of business incubation as a feasible mechanism to support the formation of start-ups and the development of SMME's into sustainable and competitive enterprises with the potential to contribute to the growth of both national and local economies (DTI, 2007; Masutha & Rogerson, 2014; van Eck et al., 2013).

Reviews of the business incubation evolution in South □frica indicate rapid growth between □□□□ and □□□□, rising from only four incubators to □□ in nine years □Masutha □ Rogerson, □□□□□, making South □frica home to more business incubators □van □ck et al., □□□□□ than any other □frican country. Masutha and Rogerson □□□□□□ further note that □□□ of the business incubators are part of the ISP, receiving public sponsorship through S□D□, while □□□ are privately funded. Regarding sector specialisation, □□□ of the incubators are sector□specific, focusing mainly on manufacturing activities, such as chemicals, furniture, agro□processing, □ewellery, aluminium fabrication and stainless□steel production. In comparison, □□□ are generalists □Masutha □ Rogerson, □□□□□. □ few incubators focus on small□scale mining, the ICT sector, and construction □DTI, □□□□□.

However, initiatives such as the ISP attract the interest of several stakeholders with various expectations about the programme. Stakeholders other than the entrepreneurs come from different constituencies, including the private sector, non□governmental organisations, and all levels of government □Masutha □ Rogerson, □□□□□. Moreover, a review of business incubation in the country shows that □□□ of businesses incubated under the STP were black□owned □Masutha □ Rogerson, □□□□□, confirming the ISP□s alignment with the B□BB□□ legislation. The ob□ective of increasing black South □fricans□ participation in the economy, evident in the policy position of the ISP, can create entitlement expectations for black entrepreneurs, constraining incubator managers.

□ further concern expressed in a recent review of the performance of the ISP relates to the limited funding allocated to the programme □Masutha □ Rogerson, □□□□□, signalling the impact of resource constraints. □n annual budget allocation of R□□ million per incubator over three years □Masutha □ Rogerson, □□□□□, with a target of supporting at least □□□ incubators, is not only ambitious but can also constrain incubator managers. Considering that sponsors often set stringent performance targets for the incubators □Kakabadse et al., □□□□□Sohail et al., □□□□□, achieving expected performance targets with a limited budget, given the support needed by the calibre of the prospective entrepreneurs found in the research setting can be challenging. While the available funding could be ade□uate to cover the incubator operations, entrepreneurs also need working capital for their businesses, creating a dilemma for incubator managers, who must manage incubatees with unfulfilled expectations. The public sponsorship does not include funding for incubatees' businesses; instead, incubator managers are expected to facilitate access to funding for the incubatees. This expectation can be constraining, considering the challenge of accessing resources in a resource□constrained context □Desa □ Basu, □□□□□Mrka□c, □□□□□. □t the same time, the public sponsor expects positive performance to □ustify allocating public resources towards business incubation.

3.6 Chapter Summary

The context prevailing in South Africa presents a suitable setting to study how stakeholders' expectations enable or constrain business incubator managers' strategic agency. In addition to the resource constraints and varied stakeholders involved in the incubation process, the substantial concentration of relatively new business incubators pursuing various models presents a sizeable population to select varied research participants, unlike other African countries. Studying business incubation in this particular setting addresses a concern noted in the literature, where most empirical studies are conducted in developing countries with relatively similar contexts, with a paucity of studies using contexts of developing and emerging economies that present different socioeconomic challenges. The challenges that incubator managers confront may differ from those faced by their counterparts in developed countries.

□ha□ter □□□□ Re□ear□h □de□□□ a□d □ ethodolo□□□

4.1 □ Re□ear□h □h□lo□o□h □□□

□ □ualitative, interpretivist approach underpins this study. Interpretivism as a philosophy suits this study, which aims to gain a deep understanding of the observed phenomena □Fleetwood, □□□□□ Heeks □ Bailur, □□□□□. Ontologically, interpretivism accepts the existence of more than one absolute reality □Heeks □ Bailur, □□□□□, while epistemologically, it assumes that knowledge is sub□ectively and socially constructed through the interaction of researcher and participants □Hlady□ Rispal □ □ouison□Laffitte, □□□□□. While the philosophy does not explicitly deny the existence of the real world, it does not make any assertions about it. □xiologically, interpretivism assumes that research is a product of the values of those undertaking it □Gregg et al., □□□□□□thus, researcher bias is not seen as negatively affecting the research findings but instead accepted as part of the process of sub□ectively constructing knowledge □Cunliffe □ Coupland, □□□□□Lincoln □ Guba, □□□□□. These philosophical assumptions align with the ob□ectives of this study, as summarised below.

The current study sought to understand how stakeholders' role expectations enable and□or constrain business incubator managers' strategic agency in a resource□constrained context. The interactions between business incubator managers and their stakeholders were likely to elicit different strategic choices from the incubator managers, who construct their idiosyncratic social realities as they are exposed to different role expectations from the various stakeholders□thus, no single view of reality can be assumed across the incubator managers. Therefore, to gain the depth of knowledge re□uired for theorising, there is a need to interact directly with the incubator managers and their stakeholders, a process of socially creating the knowledge. Thus, interpretivism, whose primary mode of reasoning is induction □□isenhardt, □□□□□Welch et al., □□□□□, was considered an appropriate philosophy for the study since it enabled capturing the participants□multiple realities.

4.2 □ Re□ear□h □de□□□□

□ □ualitative, multiple case study □□isenhardt, □□□□□ □□□□□research design was used for this study. The study sought to gain a deep insight into the strategic agency of incubator managers across various incubation models, an ob□ective that can only be achieved through a □ualitative approach □Bryman, □□□□□Gehman et al., □□□□□Suddaby et al., □□□□□. Research □uestions seeking to understand how context□embedded phenomena unfold □Henry □ Foss, □□□□□can best be addressed using case study designs. Moreover, a case study is an approach best suited for studies focusing on gaining an in□depth understanding of a complex case, which can be an

individual, a collective, or a phenomenon□hence, it is often termed the study of the particular because of the detailed en□uiry of a real□life event or phenomenon □□hmad □ Thornberry, □□□□□ Rosenberg □ Yates, □□□□□. The research design allows for thick descriptions of the concerned case and enables multi□unit and cross□case analyses, leading to multiple perspectives □□hmad □ Thornberry, □□□□□. Thus, the case study design aligns well with the interpretivist philosophical position adopted for this study.

Furthermore, a multiple□case design was chosen over a single□case design owing to the advantages presented by a multiple□case design. For instance, case comparison enabled the identification of stakeholder expectations experienced by managers of incubators with a particular sponsorship mode. Likewise, comparative analyses provide opportunities for prescriptive learning □□hmad □ Thornberry, □□□□□, with effective management practices that can be transferred across incubators irrespective of the sponsorship mode identified. Lastly, more rigour is achieved in research entailing comparative studies since generalisations can be tested □□hmad □ Thornberry, □□□□□. In this study, such generalisations included the dominant incubator sponsorship modes and management practices. Thus, a multiple□case design was chosen to study how the strategic agency of incubator managers across the three modes of sponsorship is enabled or constrained by their multiple stakeholders' expectations.

The main categories □□isenhardt, □□□□□of incubators found in the research setting were thus included to capture maximum variation in stakeholder expectations' enabling and□or constraining effect on incubator managers' strategic agency. Analysing cases selected for maximum variation enabled the discovery of vital common patterns across cases, which is vital considering the heterogeneity of the sampled cases □Lecluyse □ Knockaert, □□□□□Patton, □□□□□. In this study, a multiple□case study including participants from the differently sponsored incubators generated rich data, which, when analysed following a thematic analysis approach □□isenhardt, □□□□□Gehnman et al., □□□□□Welch et al., □□□□□, produced concepts, themes and aggregate data that were compared across the cases for common and meaningful insights, leading to rigorous theorising.

4.3□ □□t□o□a□al□□□□□

Distinguishing between a case and the unit of analysis is vital as they are directly related to □uestions about epistemology and transferability □Grunbaum, □□□□□. Several scholars □e.g., Patton, □□□□□Miles □ Huberman,□□□□□Yin, □□□□□confound the case and the unit of analysis, which diminishes some of the case studies' authenticity, transferability, and fittingness results □Grunbaum, □□□□□. To avoid such convulsion, in this study, whose primary purpose is to understand how stakeholders' role expectations impact business incubator managers' strategic agency, the incubator manager is the unit of analysis, while the incubator is the case. However,

since a case study seeks to gain an in□depth, holistic understanding of a contemporary phenomenon within its context (Yin, 2003), the incubator manager's working context needs to consider multiple stakeholders included in this study. The case constitutes the macro□analytical levels and has layers that are logically closely related to the unit of analysis at the micro□analytical level of analysis □Grunbaum, □□□□□. □s presented in this study□s conceptual framework, the relationship between the incubator manager and internal and external stakeholders suggests the layers in this study's cases. It is these "contextual bonds (i.e., the case layers) that palpably influence the understanding of the unit of analysis to become more apparent" (Grunbaum, 2007, p. □□□. Therefore, this chapter presents how the collected data were analysed, with the unit of analysis as a central focus, to understand how stakeholders' expectations constrain and/or enable business incubator managers' strategic agency within a resource□constrained context.

4.4□ □o□□lat□o□□

The study population entailed formally registered business incubators active in the South □frican provinces of Gauteng, Kwa□ulu Natal and Western Cape. Hewitt and □anse van Rensburg □□□□□□ estimated about □□□ active business incubators in South □frica, with □□ operating in the three provinces chosen for this study. Therefore, the three provinces were chosen because of a substantial assortment of incubators sponsored by private, public, and hybrid sponsors. The population enabled the selection of a mixed sample to enrich the research findings.

4.5□ Sa□ □le□

4.5.1 Case selection

The multiple case study included six cases, i.e., six business incubators selected through a non□ probabilistic, purposeful sampling strategy □Crowe et al., □□□□□□tikan, □□□□□Welch et al., □□□□□ aimed at capturing maximum variation in the expectations of stakeholders on the incubator managers and the impact on their strategic agency. The purpose of the study was not to test theory but rather to develop it, which □isenhardt and Graebner □□□□□□suggest is achieved by using the most relevant cases□thus, the cases for the current study were deliberately selected to maximise learning opportunities through cross□case analyses. The selection criteria aimed to capture the contextual characteristics of business incubation in the research setting across the main differentiating dimensions of sponsorship mode, geographical location, and operating sector. These characteristics constitute the main dimensions of variation among incubators □Klofsten et al., □□□□□S□D□, □□□□□.

Considering the dual ob□ectives of theoretical replication and analytical generalisation, two cases per dimension of variation, particularly sponsorship mode and geographical location, were

considered adequate for this study. Extant research (e.g., Ahmad & Thornberry, 2013) suggests that when using multiple cases, the selection of cases must result in either (a) literal replication or (b) theoretical replication. Literal replication focuses on predicting similar results, while theoretical replication entails the development of contrasting results but for predictable reasons (Ahmad & Thornberry, 2013). The objective of using multiple cases for this study was to compare and contrast results across the cases, a theoretical replication. Stewart's (2012) DCC model was used as the basis for a theoretical template for an analytical generalisation of the empirical results instead of a statistical generalisation (Yin, 2013). A similar approach was adopted by Ahmad and Thornberry (2013), where two cases were used to explore "specific structural properties of incubators that facilitate the organisational form's replication and performance in a range of institutional contexts" (p.1190). Results from two cases were found to suffice, given the same study objectives as for this study, i.e., maximising learning through cross-case comparison, theoretical replication and analytical generalisation of findings.

Regarding sponsorship mode, incubators were distinguished as public, private, or hybrid-funded. The sponsorship mode is considered to impact the number and nature of incubator stakeholders (Baraldi & Ingemansson Havenvid, 2009; Messeghem et al., 2013), resulting in a variation in the expectations exerted on incubator managers. Concerning geographical location, the calibre of entrepreneurs approaching or attracted by the incubators varies across the regions (McAdam et al., 2009; Phan et al., 2005), which ultimately determines the nature of expectations placed on the incubator managers. Thus, incubators from three provinces were selected. As for the operating sector, incubators operating in different sectors were selected to ensure maximum variation in the challenges related to industry sectors, which in turn influence support expectations from incubatees (Klofsten et al., 2019). Therefore, the selected incubators operated in diverse sectors, such as agriculture, manufacturing, technology, and construction. Sponsorship mode was taken as the primary variation dimension in this study; thus, in terms of sponsorship mode, the study sample included two private-sponsored incubators, two public-sponsored incubators and two hybrid-sponsored incubators. The heterogeneity of the sample enabled the grounding of the findings as the dimensions of variation enabled the extension of the theory by eliminating alternative explanations, as Santos and Eisenhardt (2009) encourage.

Furthermore, incubators with at least three identifiable stakeholder groups were eligible for selection. The stakeholders included sponsors, policymakers, knowledge workers in incubator staff, and incubatees. Moreover, the incubator must have operated under the same manager for at least three years. Literature (Berkek & Norrman, 2008; Mian, 2011; Rothaermel & Thursby, 2005) suggests a minimum incubation period of three years for most incubators. Thus, selecting

incubators with a minimum of three years under the same manager aimed to increase the chances of getting a sample with mixed incubatees at different incubation phases, but importantly, to get incubator managers and incubatees that have experienced the entire incubation cycle and can enrich the findings.

The selection of incubators was preceded by a search on the publicly available incubator database maintained by the SEDA, a government agency managing the government's Incubation Support Programme (ISP). The database contained information about the incubator's name, geographical location, and website address. In addition, the database arranged the incubators into three categories: private sector incubators, SEDA incubators, and ISP incubators. The private sector incubators referred to the privately sponsored ones, while SEDA incubators referred to those in which SEDA played a part in establishing, even though some are now independent of SEDA. The ISP incubator list contained those incubators that were part of the ISP. ISP incubators could be either privately or publicly owned. In addition to the SEDA database, other publications, such as the Open Network of Development Entrepreneurs (van Eck et al., 2018) report on the landscape of incubators and accelerators in South Africa, were also checked. Ultimately, a Google search for incubators in South Africa also produced a list of incubators, although most were already on the SEDA database.

Consequently, the SEDA database, which contained 300 organisations, was used to select the incubators in Gauteng, KwaZulu Natal and Western Cape provinces for further scrutiny. Eighty-nine incubators were indicated as being based in Gauteng, 20 in KwaZulu Natal and 20 in the Western Cape. The websites of these incubators were visited for a brief review against the set selection criteria. The initial focus was identifying potential private- and hybrid-sponsored. Literature on incubation in South Africa (e.g., van Eck et al., 2018; Masutha & Rogerson, 2015) suggested that there were more public-funded incubators; hence, the challenge was to get adequate numbers of private and hybrid-funded incubators. The review of the websites eliminated several organisations listed as incubators, but their services did not meet the definition of an incubator adopted for this study. Most of them were training providers and consulting firms offering no incubation services.

The targeted incubators meeting the selection criteria were reduced to 40, with their distribution as indicated in Table 1, summarising the location of the final sample of selected cases. It is evident from the table that cases selected from each geographical region were not from the same sponsorship mode, which was deliberate to enable maximum variation for analyses within dimensions and across dimensions. These incubators' email addresses and telephone numbers were obtained from their websites, and introductory emails were sent requesting the incubators'

participation in the study. In addition, a two□page research introduction was sent with the introductory emails.

□s anticipated, private incubators were not keen to participate in the study. Two of the six private incubators declined to participate in the study for related reasons. While one insisted on being credited as a contributor and not only as a respondent in the study, the other cited a lack of ade□uate appreciation by previous academic researchers. These reasons highlighted to this researcher the importance of managing the expectations of research participants to avoid ethical violations. Conse□uently, securing the second privately sponsored incubator for the study took an extended period. While all the other incubators were selected and confirmed between September □□□□ and □anuary □□□□, the second privately sponsored incubator was only secured in September □□□□.

Table 1: *Number of incubators contacted for participation and the final selection*

	Total number of incubators contacted				**Number of incubators which have agreed to participate**				**Selected sample for final analysis**			
Location of Incubator	**Private**	**Public**	**Hybrid**	**Total**	**Private**	**Public**	**Hybrid**	**Total**	**Private**	**Public**	**Hybrid**	**Total**
Gauteng	10	10	10	30	10	10	10	30	10	10	10	30
Kwa-ulu Natal	10	10	10	30	10	10	10	30	10	10	10	30
Western Cape	10	10	10	30	10	10	10	30	10	10	10	30
Total	30	30	30	90	30	30	30	90	30	30	30	90

4.5.2 Pilot study

The interviews with the respondents for this study were preceded by a pilot study undertaken with one of the incubator managers in a different branch of one of the selected cases. The primary objective of the pilot study was to pretest and familiarise with the semi-structured interview guide, ascertain the terminology used by business incubation practitioners in the study context and refine the interview guide appropriately. This researcher followed the advice of scholars such as Krauss et al. [illegible], who encourage researchers to consider developing an appropriate interview guide as an integral part of qualitative research deserving great attention. Moreover, several qualitative researchers of business incubation have undertaken pilot studies to develop comprehensive interview guides (e.g., Baskarana & Mehta, [illegible]; Fischer et al., [illegible]; Mrkajic, [illegible]). Since the questions posed by the researcher to the respondents and the following probing result in the generation of the data the researcher relies on to make the findings, the interview guide becomes a crucial data-gathering instrument (Yazan, [illegible]).

For this study, which focuses on the strategic agency of incubator managers, the pilot study enhanced the consistency and validity of the study. Following incubation researchers in emerging developing economies, like Mrkajic [illegible], this researcher enhanced consistency by refining interview questions to be more precise and non-ambiguous, avoiding theoretical terminology in favour of practitioner terminology. For instance, incubation practitioners rarely used the term incubatee, preferring terms such as beneficiary, client and customer. In addition to what this researcher found in the extant literature, the pilot study ascertained the key stakeholders to be included among the respondents, enhancing the study's validity (Mrkajic, [illegible]). The semi-structured interview guide was refined after the pilot study to capture the peculiar nuances associated with incubators within the study context.

4.5.3 Respondent selection

The role responsible for managing the incubator's operations, including interacting with all the stakeholders involved, is the focal role of this study. The role is referred to by different titles depending on the structure and size of the incubator. Titles such as chief executive officer (CEO), chief operating officer (COO), centre manager and incubator manager were noted among the selected incubators. All these titles are referred to as the incubator manager in this research. Therefore, at each incubator, the first interview was held with the incubator manager. Initial scanning of the targeted incubators' websites helped identify the appropriate respondents. Furthermore, in cases where the incubator manager was not the authorised representative of the incubator, initial contact with the incubator representatives requested an indication of the most

appropriate respondent as per the role definition adopted for this study. This initial contact was done through emails, with telephone follow□ups where responses were not received after a week.

One of the interview □uestions with incubator managers solicited them to share the incubator stakeholders and the role each of them played in the functioning of the incubator. Conse□uently, each interview ended with a re□uest for the contact details of at least three names under each targeted stakeholder group for the subse□uent interviews. These stakeholder groups included internal knowledge workers working with the incubator manager, sponsors, and incubatees. The incubator managers were re□uested to provide contact details of the longest□serving knowledge workers, sponsors' representatives designated to work with the incubator, and incubatees nearing their exit or graduation stage from the incubator. Since the ISP is a national policy, no re□uest was made from the incubator managers for the contact details of the policymaker representative.

In most cases, incubator managers shared the re□uested stakeholders' contact details with this researcher. However, others were still grappling with the implications of the Protection of Personal Information □POPI□ □ct. The recently promulgated legislation governs the data protection and privacy law in South □frica □POPI□, □□□□□. Therefore, the managers were unwilling to share any details of external parties besides the company names. In such instances, this researcher relied on the websites of the provided company names to get the contact details. Telephone calls were made to these companies to en□uire about the most appropriate department handling the stakeholder relationship with the concerned incubator and the direct contact details of the responsible personnel. □mail and□or telephone communication was made with the referred officials, and the snowballing continued until the appropriate respondents were found. Moreover, there were instances where this researcher had to rely on professional networks to access respondents in some of the stakeholder organisations.

However, where targeted respondents declined to participate in the study, alternative respondents were selected. For instance, where the longest□serving knowledge workers declined to participate, any other knowledge worker with more than one year of working with the incubator manager was selected. Similarly, in instances where incubatees nearing the exit stage were inaccessible or declined to participate, recently graduated incubatees were then selected.

□s mentioned earlier, the national government drives the policy formulation and implementation of the ISP. For this reason, a senior official involved in conceptualising and championing the programme was selected as a representative of the policymaker. Coincidentally, the respondent was also the representative of the public sponsor, S□D□, an agent of the government responsible for the ISP. The representative was identified by studying the organogram of S□D□ and identifying

the appropriate role. Initial contact was established through an email, and further telephonic discussions confirmed that the identified role was the most appropriate for the interview, both as a representative of the policymaker and public sponsor.

4.6 Data Generation and Collection Method

The study of complex phenomena seems to favour case studies, with qualitative interviews as tools for primary data collection. For instance, Lecluyse and Knockaert use interviews within a multiple-case study design to explore when and how science parks tenants cope with low satisfaction. Similarly, in trying to shed light on the specific structural properties of incubators that facilitate their replication and performance in various institutional contexts, Ahmad and Thornberry turned to semi-structured interviews to collect data from multiple cases in their study. This trend is not unique to the study of business incubators but also in general management studies. For example, in concluding "that role expectations have the potential to both enable and constrain middle managers' strategic agency," Mantere , p. relies on in-depth interviews with middle managers. Similarly, semi-structured interviews enabled this researcher to ask open-ended questions and probe the respondent to gain deeper insights into stakeholder expectations and incubator managers' strategic agency. As Gioia et al. suggest, the probing reveals insights that current theories may not have covered, hence the prominent use of semi-structured interviews in qualitative research.

4.6.1 Primary data: semi-structured interviews

This study generated primary data from in-depth, semi-structured interviews with six business incubator managers and stakeholders working with the selected incubators. For each case, interviews were held with the incubator manager, sponsor representatives, knowledge worker and incubatee. Two sponsor representatives were interviewed for hybrid-funded incubators, one private and the other public. Moreover, two incubatees availed themselves for the interview from one of the incubators, and they were interviewed separately.

The interviewing process was informed by Patton , with most questions being open-ended to avoid leading the respondents, which could result in biased answers. In addition, open-ended questions allow the emergence of unexpected themes (Wahyuni, , which enrich the findings. Therefore, although semi-structured interview guides were followed, the respondents were free to answer the questions as they understood and followed the vital themes. The semi-structured interviews also enabled probing the respondents beyond the specific questions in the interview guide, allowing the respondents time and scope for reflection.

The first case interview with an incubator manager was conducted in February □□□□, with the sixth case incubator manager interview happening in September □□□□. The final interview for the study, held with one of the stakeholders of the sixth case, was only conducted at the end of October □□□□. However, a follow□up interview with a private sponsor of one of the incubators was undertaken in □anuary □□□□ to probe some of the initial responses provided in an earlier interview session.

□s shown in Table □, the □□ interviews conducted for this study generated □ □□□ minutes of recording and about □□□,□□□ transcribed words. Six interviews were conducted with incubator managers, while 18 were with the incubators' stakeholders. These interviews were conducted during one of the most challenging periods for researchers, with the travelling and face□to□face meeting constraints imposed by the COVID□□□□related lockdown. Conse□uently, a mix of virtual and face□to□face interviews was adopted to generate rich data for this study, as explained below.

Interviews with incubator managers were held face□to□face at the incubator premises, except for one held at a conference venue where the incubator manager was a delegate. While introductory □uestions to incubator managers dealt with the origins of the incubator, mode of sponsorship and the manager's professional background, among others, the main objective of the interviews was to establish the incubators' stakeholders and their roles, as well as the managers' perceptions of the stakeholders' expectations. Secondly, the interviews aimed to understand how the incubator managers manage their perceived role demands and constraints.

While interviews with incubator managers were all longer than □□ minutes, more combined time was spent interviewing the incubator managers' role□set, the stakeholders, whose expectations are a central construct in this study. □s shown in Table □, a combined total of □□□ minutes was spent interviewing the stakeholders. However, for each case, interviews with stakeholders only commenced after the interview with the incubator manager. The primary ob□ective of the interviews with stakeholders, which lasted between □□ and □□ minutes, was to understand their expectations of the incubator manager role. □nderstanding these expectations is central to answering the main research question for this study, which seeks to understand how incubator managers' strategic agency is constrained and/or enabled by the multiple stakeholders' expectations. While some of the interviews were as short as □□ minutes, the respondents shared their expectations of the incubator role, which was the primary focus of the interview. The semi□structured interview guides for incubator managers and stakeholders are included in □ppendix □.

4.6.2 Secondary data: archival data

While the interviews generated primary data for this study, secondary data was also collected in the form of archival data. The archival data included incubator strategy documents, company profiles, incubatee recruitment criteria, annual reports, service level agreements with sponsors, and incubator managers' performance agreements, where available. The incubator managers provided some of these documents, while others were downloaded from the incubators' websites in cases where they could not be obtained from the incubator managers. The archival data was considered vital to understand the incubator□s history and operational processes and to □uxtapose the interview findings with some documentary evidence for triangulating □□isenhardt, □□□□□Fusch □ Ness, □□□□□ the emerging impact of stakeholders' expectations on incubator managers' strategic agency. For instance, memoranda of agreements between incubators and sponsors were used to ascertain incubators' performance targets as set by sponsors. These were taken as part of the documented expectations of the sponsors on incubator managers since most of them were replicated in the incubator managers' performance agreements with their supervisors. Similarly, service level agreements between incubators and incubatees were reviewed to verify the documented expectations between incubators and incubatees. The expectations contained in these secondary data sources were triangulated with the primary data generated from interviews, thereby enhancing the credibility of the study findings.

Ta□le□□□□*Summarised details of the respondents*□

□a□e□□ □er□□□ □a□e□□a□ e□a□d□ □□o□□or□h□□□□ ode□	Re□□o□de□t□role□	Re□□o□de□t□ □de□t□□er□	□□ter□□e□ □date□	□□ter□e□ □ □ ed□□□ □	□o□□t□	□□ter□□e□ □ le□□th□□□ □□□□□	Tra□□□r□□t□□ □ord□□o□□t□
□ VioletInc Private	Incubator manager	VioletInc□IM	□□□Feb□□□	Physical	□	□□	□□ □□□
	Sponsor Representative	SR□□	□□□□pr□□□	Virtual	□	□□	□ □□□
	Incubatee	□N□□	□□□□ug□□□	Virtual	□	□□	□ □□□
	Knowledge worker	KW□□	□□□May□□□	Virtual	□	□□	□ □□□
□ IndigoInc Public	Incubator Manager	IndigoInc□IM	□□□Mar□□□	Physical	□	□□□	□□ □□□
	Sponsor □ policymaker representative	SR□□	□□□□ug□□□	Virtual	□	□□	□ □□□
	Incubatee	□N□□	□□□□pr□□□	Virtual	□	□□	□ □□□
	Knowledge worker	KW□□	□□□□un□□□	Virtual	□	□□	□ □□□
□ BlueInc Hybrid	Incubator Manager	BlueInc□IM	□□□Mar□□□	Physical	□	□□□	□□ □□□
	Sponsor Representative	SR□□	□□□Sep□□□	Virtual	□	□□	□ □□□
	Incubatee	□N□□.□□	□□□□un□□□	Virtual	□	□□	□ □□□
	Incubatee	□N□□.□□	□□□□un□□□	Virtual	□	□□	□ □□□
	Knowledge worker	KW□□	□□□□un□□□	Virtual	□	□□	□ □□□
□ GreeInc Hybrid	Incubator Manager	GreenInc□IM	□□□Mar□□□	Physical	□	□□	□ □□□
	Sponsor Representative	SR□□	□□□□ug□□□	Virtual	□	□□	□ □□□
	Incubatee	□N□□	□□□□ul□□□	Virtual	□	□□	□ □□□
	Knowledge worker	KW□□	□□□□ul□□□	Virtual	□	□□	□ □□□
□ OrangeInc□IM Public	Incubator Manager	OrangeInc□IM	□□□May□□□	Physical	□	□□	□□ □□□
	Incubatee	□N□□	□□□□ug□□□	Virtual	□	□□	□ □□□
	Knowledge worker	KW□□	□□□□ul□□□	Virtual	□	□□	□ □□□
□	Incubator Manager	GPBI□□BIM	□□□Sep□□□	Physical	□	□□	□ □□□
	Sponsor Representative	SR□□	□□□Oct□□□	Virtual	□	□□	□ □□□

□a□e□□ □er□□ □a□e□a□ e□a□d□ □□o□□or□h□□□ ode□	Re□□o□de□t□role□	Re□□o□de□t□ de□t□□er□	□□ter□e□ date□	□□ter□e□ □ ed□□□ □	□o□□t□	□□ter□e□ □ le□□th□□□ □□□□□	Tra□□□r□□t□□ □ord□□o□□t□
RedInc	Incubatee	□N□□	□□□Oct□□□	Virtual	□	□□	□ □□□
Private	Knowledge worker	KW□□	□□□Sep□□□	Physical	□	□□	□□ □□□
TOT□L□□			□□		□□□	□□□□□□	□□□□□□□□
	□□□□□**ator**□□ **a**□**a**□**er**□**o**□**l**□□				□□	□□□□	□□□□□□□
□□	□				□	□	□
□	**Stakeholder**□□**o**□**l**□□				□□□	□□□□	□□□□□□□

Notes. The Pseudonyms for the respondents are assigned as follows□

□. The incubator manager's name adopts the incubator name with a suffix IM. For example, the incubator manager for VioletInc is named VioletInc□IM.

□. The sponsor representative is named with the initials SR, followed by the case number indicated in the first column in the table. For instance, the private sponsor representative in VioletInc, case □, is named SR□□.

□. The public sponsor, also a policymaker representative, is named SR□□□PMR.

□. The knowledge worker, the incubator staff member, is named with the initials KW followed by the case number. For example, the knowledge worker for RedInc, case □, is named KW□□.

□. The incubatee takes the initials □N, for entrepreneur, followed by the case number indicated in the first column in the table. For instance, the incubatee for GreenInc, case □, is □N□□.

□. Where more than one respondent from a stakeholder group is involved, an additional identifier is added to distinguish the respondents. For example, the two incubatees for BlueInc, case □, are □N□□.□□ and □N□□.□□.

4.6.3 Field notes: research diary

The five on□site interviews with incubator managers were followed by a site walkabout where the incubator managers explained the incubator set□up and operations. □ny notable observations from these walkabouts were recorded in a research diary that this researcher kept to record any thoughts, perceptions, reflections, experiences, and frustrations throughout the research period. This researcher referred to this diary during data analysis to reflect on some of the observations and thoughts □ournaled during the data generation stage, which assisted in making sense of some of the themes coming out of the data. During the interviews, notes were taken regarding the interview setting, interviewees□ non□verbal gestures, the researcher□s reactions or feelings, and any other salient contextual data that further provided clarity during data analysis, as Montgomery and Bailey □□□□□encouraged.

4.6.4 Data saturation

Since the unit of analysis for this research is the incubator manager, focusing on how their strategic agency is enabled and/or constrained by their multiple stakeholders' expectations, a decision to self□transcribe the interviews with incubator managers enabled this researcher to determine the data saturation point. No new information would be generated concerning the central research constructs beyond saturation □Fusch □ Ness, □□□□. Therefore, after interviewing the sixth incubator manager and the respective stakeholders, this researcher realised that no new expectations were being mentioned, and no other new stakeholder categories were being identified□thus, cross□case saturation was deemed to have been reached. Fusch and Ness □□□□□ suggest that data saturation is achievable with at least six interviews when semi□structured interviews are used within a relatively homogeneous sample. Moreover, the respondents are knowledgeable participants within their respective working environments□thus, a large sample si□e was not likely to improve the richness of the data □Fusch □ Ness, □□□□. The richness of the data is vital in theory development using case studies, not necessarily the number of cases □□isenhardt, □□□□□Welch et al., □□□□□. □isenhardt □□□□□recommends the number of cases to be between four and ten, cautioning that less than four cases make the theorising and findings doubtful, while more than ten cases introduce complexity in data analysis. Therefore, the rich data generated from the six incubator managers and □□ stakeholders interviewed for this study and the secondary archival data collected were ade□uate to analyse and theorise.

4.7 □Data□□ □al□□□□

□ualitative data analysis is an iterative process of reaching an interpretive sensemaking of the respondents' experiences, triangulated with other secondary data collected. This researcher commenced the preliminary data analysis while transcribing the interviews with incubator

managers. □s extant literature suggests, a thorough understanding of the transcript is the basis for identifying themes emanating from the data □□isenhardt, □□□□□ Gehman et al., □□□□□. Therefore, once all the transcripts were produced, all documents were uploaded onto □tlas.ti, the computer software for data analysis. The analysis proceeded as described in the subse□uent paragraphs.

First, all the documents loaded onto □tlas.ti were grouped into several groups□per case, per respondent stakeholder group, i.e., incubator managers, sponsors, incubatees, and incubator staff and sponsorship mode. The grouping was aimed at providing a structure for the analysis. Second, all transcripts related to each stakeholder group were coded successively before proceeding to the next group, starting with the incubator managers. Coding transcripts from the same respondent group successively helped maintain consistent codes since the primary codes were generated from respondent□centric terminology as suggested by extant research □e.g., Gioia et al., □□□□□. When new codes emanated from subse□uent transcripts, the earlier transcripts were re□analysed and further coded with the new codes generated. This iterative process continued until all the transcripts in each respondent group were coded.

The third step entailed reviewing and interrogating more than two hundred primary codes generated from all the transcripts and merging codes with similar meanings. □xamples of merged codes include guidance and mentorship, scale□up and growth, and credibility and reputation. Such an exercise resulted in the primary codes reducing to below one hundred. In the fourth step, the respondent□informed primary codes were then analysed to generate analytical codes following the approach suggested by Gioia et al. □□□□□. These were further aggregated into categories in the fifth step. The aggregation process involved this researcher's imagination, which was informed by extant literature, as suggested by Mantere and Ketoviki □□□□□. The imagination was informed by the reviewed literature regarding stakeholder expectations, □ob demands and managerial choices. For instance, while incubatees did not explicitly refer to the transformation regulations, this researcher could only imagine how their expectations are shaped by their prior knowledge of such regulations, as □ac□uemin and □anssen □□□□□posit. Moreover, linking stakeholders' expectations and the resultant □ob demands and how the demands could either be categorised as a challenge or a hindrance □Bakker, □□□□□ Podsakoff et al., □□□□□ to the incubator manager involved imagination. The final step, which entailed the development of overarching themes from the categories, was guided by the two research constructs□stakeholder expectations and managerial strategic agency. □s Weick □□□□□suggests, this conceptual leap re□uires courage and disciplined imagination, and Klag and Langley □□□□□explain that the process entails "navigating among and around a series of dialectic tensions□between deliberation and serendipity□between engagement

and detachment□between knowing and not knowing□and between social connection and self□ expression" (p. □□□□. This abductive process is fortified by the synthesis of opposites, a form of 'bricolage', with the creative researcher as the bricoleur □Klag □ Langley, □□□□□.

Therefore, after contending with doubt, confusion, uncertainty, and ambiguity, this researcher paused the analysis to step back from the data, enabling greater clarity and creative thinking. Conse□uently, when the analysis resumed after pausing for a month, self□expression emerged as five ma□or themes for each construct. For instance, the theme of reputation was initially identified under private sponsors aiming to gain a reputation through corporate social responsibility. However, a fresh look at the coded data for incubator managers regarding their mandates and the misaligned expectations of some stakeholders brought insights into their grappling with preserving the incubator□s reputation. The emerging themes were further substantiated using the secondary data collected during the study. The data, particularly the incubator annual reports, incubatee selection documents, service level agreements with sponsors, and incubator manager performance agreement, were analysed with relevant content regarding the stakeholders' expectations and incubator managers' choices and coded with the analytical codes established in the primary data analysis. For instance, memoranda of agreements between incubators and sponsors and incubator manager's performance agreements were analysed to ascertain the sponsors□expectations. Likewise, the analysis of incubators' annual reports indicated the strategic choices made by incubator managers. By □uxtaposing the secondary and primary data analysis output, the data were triangulated as recommended by scholars such as □isenhardt □□□□□□and Fusch and Ness □□□□□□, enhancing the credibility of the emerging themes and the study findings.

The advantage of computer□aided data analysis is that the enormous volume of data generated from □ualitative research □□isenhardt, □□□□□ can be managed and exercised easily. The advantage was evident in the current study, where □□ documents were analysed. The document grouping done within □tlas.ti made it easy to produce network diagrams of relationships between codes and categories within each case, facilitating the within□case analysis. □ltimately, each case was written up following the study's research questions but informed by the outcome of the data analysis. Similarly, cross□case analysis was done by comparing and identifying the similarities and differences across the cases. The analysis proceeded by reading the within□case write□ups of the selected cases to identify differences and similarities in the patterns. The network diagrams of selected cases were superimposed in □tlas.ti, enabling the comparative analysis of the similarities and differences. While some propositions were advanced as part of this study, these were not allowed to restrict the data analysis□thus, while the propositions were tested against the empirical data, alternative explanations were sought for the emerging themes.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

In their essay on quality in qualitative research, Jarzabkowski et al. (2021) argue that "… achieving quality involves a process of navigating the tensions between structure and creativity, and between accountability and professionalism" (p. 37). Accountability entails adherence to acceptable standards in undertaking research. At the same time, professionalism encompasses researchers' discretion in being creative, with an understanding that their training, ethics and public service ethos will guide them to appropriate judgement calls (Jarzabkowski et al., 2021). Such ethos includes the need for voluntary participation by all research participants, which was strictly followed in this study.

Therefore, all participating incubators submitted signed permission letters consenting to their organisation's participation in the study, including access by this researcher to potentially confidential organisational documents. Furthermore, all individual respondents signed consent statements confirming that they were voluntarily participating in the study and could opt out at any stage without any consequences. While these consent statements were emailed to the participants in advance, on the day of the interview, they were discussed with the respondents to ensure that they understood the meaning of their consent. Moreover, respondents were guaranteed anonymity since no identifying information about them, or their organisations was included in the research's final products. The data were generated and collected in compliance with the conditions of the ethics clearance granted.

Furthermore, to ensure permission was obtained from all relevant organisational representatives, some of the incubators were requested to explain the appearance of the SEDA logo on their letterheads and websites, suggesting that SEDA could be a shareholder in these incubators. Consequently, the incubators clarified that as participants in the ISP, it was a condition that all programme participants displayed SEDA's logo. The analysis of findings chapter, in which the cases are profiled, explains SEDA's role in these incubators.

Moreover, no incentives were offered to the participating organisations or the individual respondents to reduce bias. This researcher selected only willing voluntary participants to maintain the professionalism and accountability expected of researchers (Jarzabkowski et al., 2021), even though this extended the data-gathering period.

In line with ethical considerations, permission was requested from all respondents to record the audio of the interviews. No participant objected to the recording. This researcher further endeavoured to complete the interviews within the scheduled time agreed upon by the

respondents. In two instances where the scheduled time was exceeded, the respondents agreed to continue and complete the interviews.

4.9 Quality criteria

Validity, reliability and bias are the criteria used to measure the quality of research findings irrespective of the research design (Yazan, 2015). However, as a qualitative researcher who is careful to make correct linguistic choices (Welch et al., 2011; Yazan, 2015), this study used the criterion of trustworthiness instead of validity and reliability. Trustworthiness entails credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the findings (Kallio et al., 2016; Pratt et al., 2020). Trustworthiness was built into the research process, from the conception of the research question through the research execution until the reporting of the findings.

First, two semi-structured interview guides, one for the incubator managers and the other for stakeholders, were carefully framed to ensure credibility. The interview guides were utilised to get responses addressing the research questions' core interests. In addition, relevant probing through follow-up questions was done to ensure enough relevant data were generated. Moreover, instead of relying only on the primary data from the interviews, secondary data in the form of archival data were also collected for data triangulation purposes, further enhancing the credibility of the findings (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Second, while interpretivism does not view researcher bias negatively (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), undeclared researcher bias can affect the credibility of the findings (Yazan, 2015). Disclosure lets readers appreciate how the biases might have influenced conclusions and findings. As a practising small business owner, this researcher was drawn towards this research topic by his perceived view on the impact of the support provided to SMMEs in resource-constrained contexts such as South Africa. Having struggled to access some of the support reserved for small businesses, this researcher's views might have been biased by the general notion that government bureaucracy is central to the failure of most programmes, despite resource munificence. Therefore, this researcher was cautious while undertaking this research to avoid being judgemental of the respondents' answers and allowed the conversations to unfold. At the end of the interview, this researcher noted the initial perception and impression from the interview as part of the field notes.

Other biases, such as non-response, sampling, social desirability and recall biases (Roulston & Shelton, 2015), were also addressed in this research. For instance, confirmation of interviews and follow-ups before the scheduled dates of the interviews addressed non-response bias. While some interviews, particularly with the sponsors' representatives and some incubatees, had to be rescheduled several times due to respondents' commitments, they were ultimately conducted. In

addition, adherence to the purposive sampling criteria eliminated sampling bias, while social desirability bias was avoided during interviews by avoiding asking leading □uestions and too much elaboration. Similarly, recall bias was reduced by re□uesting respondents to share typical examples of events or incidents that demonstrated the veracity of their responses, where necessary.

Third, the thick descriptions of the data generation and analysis processes enhance the transferability of the findings. Transferability is concerned with the natural generalisability of findings □Henry □ Foss, □□□□□Stake, □□□□□and not a statistical generalisation. Furthermore, □ustifying the chosen cases is vital for transferability as the selection in multiple□case design can result in a literal or theoretical replication □Yin, □□□□□. In this research, purposive sampling enabled a thorough □ustification of the chosen cases and the respondents, aiming at maximum variation, as explained in section □.□. Thus, the results from the multiple cases were compared and contrasted for theoretical replication.

Fourth, the diary entries and field notes taken during the data generation period and the detailed codebooks and code group definitions produced by □tlas.ti provide the vital audit trail □Phillippi □ Lauderdale, □□□□□ to enhance dependability and credibility. Moreover, audio□recording the interviews, transcribing, and storing the data in a retrievable system contribute to the research confirmability re□uirements.

Fifth, this researcher's reflexivity during data analysis, as demonstrated by reflective □ournaling and analytical memos, enhances the confirmability of the findings. □s Saldana □□□□□encourages, the goal is for researchers to engage in reflexivity regarding the entire data set, critically analysing their actions and motivations, □uestioning their own assumptions, and acknowledging how their thoughts, actions, and decisions influence their research process and findings. In addition, ade□uate direct □uotations from the interviews were included to support the descriptions of the findings as part of research confirmability. Finally, the semi□structured interview guides included in □nnexure □ further enhance the transparency and trustworthiness of this □ualitative research process.

4.10 L□□ tat□o □□□o□ the□data□□

While rich data were generated from the interviews with respondents, the effects of COVID□□□ were visible during the data collection stage, which imposed limitations on the collected data. Most incubators were not allowing their incubatees to work regularly at the centres, and some of the incubatees' businesses had closed during the lockdown period. Consequently, the walkabouts around some centres did not witness the activity experienced before the pandemic. In a case

study design, a holistic analysis includes evidence from observation undertaken around the case (Gioia et al.,) thus, the limited site data collected in this study limited the extent of triangulation that could be done. Moreover, some incubator managers were still grappling with the implications of the POPI ct and thus were uncomfortable sharing some of the requested archival data. As such, only what could be publicly accessed from such organisations' websites was collected. Nevertheless, despite these potential limitations, the collected data were comprehensive, sufficient and rich enough for the intended analyses and theorising.

4.11 hapter ar

The research employed a qualitative interpretivist approach to understanding how stakeholder expectations influence business incubator managers strategic agency in a resource constrained context. The study used a multiple case design, selecting six incubators from three provinces for their varied sponsorship modes and operational sectors to capture maximum variation. This approach facilitated comparative analyses, enabling prescriptive learning and the identification of effective practices across different incubators.

Primary data were collected through semi structured interviews with six incubator managers and stakeholders, including sponsors, the policymaker, knowledge workers, and incubatees. These interviews, conducted face to face and virtually due to COVID restrictions, provided in depth insights into the managers perceptions of stakeholder expectations and their strategic responses. The pilot study refined the interview guides to enhance consistency and validity, avoiding theoretical argon and favouring practitioner terminology.

Secondary data included incubator strategy documents, company profiles, and performance agreements, which were used to triangulate the interview findings, enhancing the credibility of the results. The data were analysed using tlas.ti, allowing for the organisation and coding of transcripts into consistent categories. The iterative analysis process, informed by extant literature and reflective ournaling, identified key themes related to stakeholder expectations and managerial strategic agency.

uality assurance was ensured through trustworthiness criteria, entailing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Data triangulation, detailed audit trails, and researcher reflexivity were employed to address potential biases and enhance the robustness of the findings. The rich data generated from the diverse sample were deemed adequate and sufficient to answer the research questions, providing a comprehensive understanding of stakeholder expectations and how they enable and constrain incubator managers' strategic agency. The results of the within case analysis are presented in the following chapter.

□ha□ter □□□Re□lt□o □th □a□e a□al □□□□

5.1 □ha□ter □trod□t□o □□

The primary purpose of this multi-case study is to understand how stakeholders' expectations constrain and/or enable business incubator managers' strategic agency in a resource-constrained context. The selection of the six cases and the respondents for this study was discussed in Chapter 4, and this chapter presents the results of the within-case analyses undertaken. The results of each case are structured to address the research questions in Chapter 2, while a cross-case analysis is presented in the following chapter with a detailed discussion of the findings. In the analysis and discussion of findings, the pseudonyms of respondents indicated and explained in Table 5 in section 4.6.1 are used.

5.2 □ □olet □□□a□e□o□er□e□ □

VioletInc's mandate is grounded in social entrepreneurship and aims to nurture entrepreneurs in underprivileged rural areas to address socio-economic challenges within communities. The incubator primarily targets private companies in the energy sector as sponsors, securing funding through competitive bidding. In this study's setting, private corporations doing business with the government must comply with the broad-based black economic empowerment (B-BBEE) legislation and regulations. The activities to be undertaken in compliance with the legislation, such as enterprise and social economic development, are not part of the private corporations' core business; hence, these are outsourced to business incubators specialising in this activity.

VioletInc_IM, the chief executive officer (CEO), is the incubator manager and reports to the board of incubator trustees. The incubator manager role interacts with several stakeholders, including policymakers, sponsors, incubatees, and incubator staff, who have numerous expectations for the role. Stakeholders interviewed for this study include SR01, a sponsor representative; KW01, a staff member; EN01, an agricultural entrepreneur; and SR02_PMR, a policymaker and public sponsor representative. The expectations of these stakeholders regarding the role of the incubator manager are explored in the following section, which is followed by a presentation of how the incubator manager manages the demands emanating from the expectations.

5.2.1 Stakeholders' role expectations of the incubator manager

5.2.1.1 Policymaker expectations

Economic impact

The South African government introduced the Incubator Support Programme (ISP) to enhance the accessibility of incubation services to emerging entrepreneurs in the country. The expectation is

that through access to incubation programmes, entrepreneurship can be promoted nationwide, resulting in economic growth to address the persistent challenges of poverty and unemployment in the country. In an environment where unemployment continues to rise, and the mainline economy fails to create suitable jobs to absorb most of the job seekers, the government tries to encourage entrepreneurship as an alternative profession. Successful entrepreneurs are expected to create job opportunities for others, particularly those with low skills, which are prevalent nationwide, lifting many households above the poverty line. SR02_PMR articulates this expectation in the following excerpt:

> *"If that process is scaling entrepreneurship, which is what you need in a country, then it's money well spent." (SR02_PMR, p.15).*

Effective leadership

Creating successful entrepreneurs depends on effective leadership. Since the role of the policymakers is often to create an enabling environment, particularly regarding business and entrepreneurship, the policymaker relies on the leadership expertise of private entrepreneurial leaders to embrace the promotion of entrepreneurship through business incubation. Consequently, the ISP policy aims not to create government-owned incubators but to leverage private expertise and partner with private incubators. Such support is envisaged to entrench best practices in business incubation nationwide, including effective corporate governance. Therefore, the policymaker expects proper governance structures to be established and maintained within the incubators partnering with the government. Insisting on all beneficiary incubators registering as NPOs, with proficient boards to which the incubator leader must account, seems to be aimed at mitigating possible self-serving endeavours by some individuals. A high level of responsible leadership is envisaged to ensure the responsible use of public funds to produce tangible impact. SR02_PMR underscores this critical aspect in the following statement:

> *"… the governance of the incubator, … determines whether you are going to be sustainable, having partners that also want to work with you (SR02_PMR, p.10).*

Economic transformation

One of the policymaker's objectives is to promote the national economic transformation and inclusion legislation and regulations. The regulations govern everyone who does business with the government, such as the sponsors of VioletInc. Through an integrated approach, the policymaker infuses aspects of the black economic empowerment legislation in formulating the ISP to ensure that priority for business incubation is afforded to targeted groups. The ISP is, therefore, seen as a mechanism that can be used to drive the government's objective of creating sustainable new businesses from previously excluded population groups. Incubators participating

in the ISP, just like any other corporation doing business with the government, are expected to comply with and promote the transformation regulations. SR02_PMR accentuates this expectation in the following excerpt:

> *"… for instance, in a sector transformation, ensuring that there are new entrants in terms of previously disadvantaged or black-owned businesses" (SR02_PMR, p.5).*

5.2.1.2 Sponsor expectations

VioletInc is wholly sponsored by private funds secured through competitive bids to private corporations. These private corporations enlist the services of organisations such as VioletInc to assist them with complying with their transformation obligations as they execute government programmes. VioletInc_IM confirms this funding model in the following quote:

> *"Most of our clients are in the renewable energy industry. All the Independent Power Producers are our funders ... No government funding for us…" (VioletInc_IM, p.5).*

The expectations of these private sponsors are analysed in the following sections.

Regulatory compliance: economic transformation regulations

The government's major infrastructure programmes have enterprise development and socio-economic development compliance requirements that align with the economic transformation and inclusion regulations. Meeting these regulations enhances the private corporations' credentials to continue doing business with the government, which seems to be a vital objective for the corporations. Non-compliance also attracts some immediate financial penalties from the government and long-term reputational damage. Consequently, as the private sponsors focus on their core business of developing renewable energy infrastructure, they procure the services of entities such as VioletInc to assist them in meeting compliance requirements through implementing incubation programmes. SR01 confirms this expectation in the following excerpt:

> *"… it's something we don't want to have additional staff doing … we needed someone that specialises in incubation programmes …" (SR01, p.4).*

Growth and sustainability of incubatees' businesses

While the sponsors' primary expectation is regulatory compliance, they also expect some form of impact regarding sustainable entrepreneurs developed in the communities. The private corporations seek to establish a reputation they can use as a reference for contributing to the local communities in compliance with economic transformation. Such deliverables also increase these corporations' social acceptability among their communities. The projects these private corporations implement often face resistance from communities as they are usually associated

with some environmental damage. Within the research setting of the current study, community protests have stopped or disrupted several major infrastructure projects at a cost to the involved companies. Therefore, being perceived as caring for the local communities, evidenced by developing sustainable community-based entrepreneurs, is important for successful project execution, protecting private corporations' staff, and protecting the developed infrastructure. The following quote from SR01 elucidates this expectation:

> *"If, at the end, we have a sustainable, independent entity, then we know it has been a success, then we can start with a new business …" (SR01, p.7).*

Consequently, the sponsor anticipates that the incubator manager will regularly provide reports containing both quantitative and qualitative metrics demonstrating the performance achieved by the pertinent entrepreneurial support provided to empower the local entrepreneurs. SR01 elucidates the sponsor's reporting expectations in the following quote:

> *"… there are monthly reports … in terms of what is [the] performance from a business perspective.… It's also looking at their growth holistically …" (SR01, p.5).*

Effective leadership

Private corporations recognise the importance of effective leadership because of the risks associated with working in poor, rural communities among disgruntled people. Effective risk management and promptly identifying innovative solutions to emergent challenges are paramount. Consequently, the sponsors rely on the leadership expertise of the incubator manager, expecting a proactive and transparent leader with adept communication skills. Such skills are crucial in managing relationships with the communities and the sponsor throughout the programme, diffusing tensions and finding solutions to emerging challenges. SR01 encapsulates the leadership attributes sought after by the sponsor:

> *"The first thing is communication. It is about having a meeting ... determine the root cause… how [will] we remedy it? … we want it to work" (SR01, p.8).*

5.2.1.3 Incubatee expectations

Entrepreneurial support

Incubators focusing on under-resourced communities often encounter entrepreneurs with low skill levels. As such, when joining the incubator, the incubatee expects to receive entrepreneurial support that encompasses basic entrepreneurial skills training. However, offering training alone is not always adequate, depending on the baseline skills of the prospective entrepreneur. Therefore, entrepreneurial mentorship aimed at guiding entrepreneurs to apply the acquired knowledge in effectively managing and scaling their new ventures is crucial for ensuring the growth and

sustainability of the business. EN01 emphasises the significance of this mentorship in the following excerpt:

> *"…mentorship is very excellent and with the training, … they gave [me] a very good certificated skills training [in] finance and business planning …" (EN01, p.5).*

Moreover, access to finance allows entrepreneurs to invest in the assets needed for business expansion. Gaining knowledge is vital, and having a mentor is critical; however, without financial capital, an entrepreneur cannot achieve much. While other start-ups require significant amounts of financial capital to start, others require minimal amounts. However, in a resource-constrained context, even what is considered minimal can be difficult to raise for aspiring entrepreneurs. Therefore, the incubatee expects the incubator manager to facilitate access to finance to materialise the business vision. EN01 underscores this expectation in the following statement:

> *"… we need a little bit of funding … [for] a [small] shade, … vehicle to transport, then also a building. That will be the [goal] for the next three years … " (EN01, p.3)*

Growth and sustainability

The value of business incubation is most evident when it translates into tangible growth and long-term sustainability for the business. As such, incubatees anticipate witnessing notable business growth throughout the incubation period to fully appreciate the interventions' efficacy. The promise of business incubation is to nurture new entrepreneurs and their business ideas for them to grow and become successful. This promise sometimes leads entrepreneurs to expect that the incubator manager will provide everything that is required for the entrepreneur's business to thrive. However, when the message is framed correctly, and entrepreneurs are intrinsically motivated by their entrepreneurial dreams, they take the necessary entrepreneurial risk. In the following quotation, EN01 exemplifies the growth expectations despite lacking adequate finances.

> *"… we want to put production up.… we have more than 100 customers in the community. This year, we want to grow and go a little bit bigger" (EN01, p.3)*

5.2.1.4 Staff expectations

Incubator mandate preservation

Seasoned professionals develop a passion and commitment to their profession, which almost becomes a life purpose. Within the incubation sector, witnessing new businesses' development and growth and socio-economic impact in communities motivates the staff. Thus, one of the incubator staff's expectations is preserving the incubator mandate, which KW01 exemplifies in the following statement.

"… this isn't a job; it's a life journey. If there have to be any changes in [the] direction of what we've been doing all these years, that might make me leave…" (KW01, p.6).

Given a continuously changing incubator operating environment, new entrepreneurial activities are required to address community challenges. Therefore, in preserving the mandate, the incubator manager must respond to these changes by continuously improving the incubation strategy and model to remain relevant. This delicate balance may often lead to mandate dilution if not managed carefully, especially when responding to threats from competitors who may gain preference with sponsors. KW01 highlight this expectation in the following quote:

"… continually adjust[ing] ourselves to improve the work that we do … [to] influence and assist communities to develop economically and socially" (KW01, p.6).

Incubator sponsorship and sustainability

The survival of the incubator, thus, the continued engagement of the staff, depends on the availability of adequate resources to sustain the operations. Consequently, resource mobilisation is a critical responsibility that the staff expects the incubator manager to prioritise. KW01 stresses this expectation in the following excerpt:

"The functional role, apart from being head of the organisation, is focused on sales. … [making] sure that the pipeline is there" (KW01, p.3).

The preceding quote demonstrates that the incubator staff's primary focus is providing entrepreneurial support to entrepreneurs. The staff expect the incubator manager to ensure that there is adequate work for them to provide their services and resources to sustain the incubator. Nevertheless, it does not mean that the incubator manager may not be required in the incubation process. When difficult situations arise, the incubator manager must intervene, highlighting the dual nature of the incubator manager as leader-manager, whose associated demands are discussed in section 5.2.2.

Visionary leadership

Leadership, anchored in a clear vision informed by foresight and good stakeholder management, helps the incubator manager to be a good ambassador for the incubator, attract and retain competent staff, and champion the incubator in the right direction. Such visionary leadership is envisaged to contribute to the growth and sustainability of an impactful incubator. KW01 supports this expectation in the following statement:

"In terms of being the CEO, all the normal support that one would expect of a CEO of the company - good management, vision, foresight…" (KW01, p.3).

The preceding quote further highlights the dual role of the incubator manager as a leader-manager. Most incubators are small organisations with very lean structures, requiring the incubator manager to provide overall leadership and handle the management functions as well. Thus, the staff expect the incubator manager to be a visionary leader and a good manager.

5.2.2 Managing perceived job demands

Chapter □, under section □.□.□, covered a detailed description of □ob demands. Cognisant that 'challenge job demands' promote growth, while 'hindrance job demands' present constraints limiting the achievement of goals, the following sections present VioletInc□IM's lived experiences managing the incubator manager's perceived □ob demands. The analysis follows the □ob demands defined in the reviewed extant literature discussed in Chapter □.

5.2.2.1 Meeting minimum criteria of performance

□nnually, the incubator manager concludes a performance agreement with the incubator board outlining the key performance indicators against which the role performance is evaluated. The performance targets include the overall impact of the incubator, as expected by the sponsors. Performance against the targets has significant consequences on the incubator's ability to mobilise resources in the future. □s such, the incubator manager is cognisant that the overall performance of the incubator is a significant part of the role's responsibilities. VioletInc_IM reinforces the performance monitoring arrangement in the subse□uent □uote□

> *"I am held accountable. I have KPIs, I have an employment contract with [VioletInc]" (VioletInc_IM, p.22).*

Therefore, demonstrating the achievement of the set performance targets is very important for the incubator manager. While the primary recipient of the performance report is the sponsor, these reports are further shared with the government and the public when the private corporations report on their compliance with the transformation regulations. Conse□uently, the incubator manager implements a performance management system to monitor the incubation programme performance against the specific stakeholders□expectations. □chieving the performance targets builds the incubator's reputation among the stakeholders. In the following □uotes, VioletInc□IM highlights the demand associated with demonstrating performance to sponsors, especially the tedious reporting re□uirements□

> *"… you must see the reports we have to do; it's insane, actually. … very templated, very formal, very MBA..., but we can do it because we have to" (VioletInc_IM, p.11).*

Furthermore, in pursuit of meeting the performance targets, the incubator manager becomes proactively resourceful, leveraging existing networks to mobilise additional resources required to nurture the entrepreneurs towards achieving the outcomes and impact the stakeholders expect. These network partners play an important role in the functioning of the incubator, as VioletInc_IM explains in the following quote:

> *"…thirdly [are] all the stakeholders that we plug in .... we can't propose a solution if we don't know there's a support system for that solution nearby" (VioletInc_IM, p.13).*

5.2.2.2 The scope of responsibility the role involves

The incubator manager plays a pivotal role in achieving community impact. As a linchpin connecting multiple stakeholders, the manager deftly navigates a complex web of shared and distinct expectations, growing the incubator and overseeing incubation programmes and staff management. As presented in section 5.2.2.1, the stakeholders have several expectations that the incubator manager must meet. The delicate equilibrium ensures that each stakeholder remains content while safeguarding the incubator's sustainability. The symbiotic relationship between resource infusion and impact realisation underscores the manager's strategic acumen. VioletInc_IM illuminates this intricate balancing act:

> *"… the balancing act between growing the business and implementing the programmes, finding the funding, stakeholder engagements, it's very hard" (VioletInc_IM, p.14).*

The intricate balancing act demanded of the incubator manager necessitates robust leadership and effective management skills. These competencies, rooted in self-awareness and a willingness to learn, are honed through personal development initiatives and reflective practices. It is apparent from VioletInc_IM's experience that incubator managers often learn on the job since prior experience may not have prepared them for the intricacies involved in leading and managing an organisation whose primary objective is nurturing new businesses. This task is exacerbated by the lean structure associated with the incubator organisation, where the leader must wear many hats—as a leader, a manager, and an entrepreneur. Consequently, recruiting competent staff and judiciously delegating responsibilities to the most capable individuals is necessary. VioletInc_IM's experiential learning journey underscores the importance of willingness to learn:

> *"I had to go through quite a journey to delegate and to actually learn that … to strategically look after the growth of [VioletInc], I have to step back and allow [the servants] the freedom of testing their strengths …" (VioletInc_IM, p.14).*

5.2.3 Managing perceived job constraints

5.2.3.1 Resource limitations

Resource limitations are the incubator manager's first constraint in a resource-constrained context. For incubators operating in rural communities, the resource limitations are exacerbated by lacking basic infrastructure, institutions, and facilities. For instance, limited access to education determines the calibre of entrepreneurs joining the incubator, while limited access to information technology infrastructure presents a significant communication challenge. These prevailing circumstances necessitate a critical review of the incubation strategy and implementation model to align with prospective entrepreneurs' characteristics. Potential entrepreneurs lacking basic entrepreneurial skills require more time to nurture to ensure business sustainability.

While such strategy and incubation model modifications are necessary to make the programme effective, they are associated with additional resource requirements, which are scarce in the operating context, creating a strategic dilemma for the incubator manager. Proceeding with a misaligned model may be less expensive but could damage the incubator's reputation due to poor performance, while model evolution requires additional resources, which are not readily available. VioletInc_IM provides insight into the impact of resource limitations in the following quote:

> *"… even three years is almost not enough because of the incredible backlog in education, [and] access to resources …" (VioletInc_IM, p.3).*

5.2.3.2 Regulatory constraints: economic transformation regulations

Regulations wield a dual impact on incubator managers, offering opportunities while imposing constraints. Economic transformation and inclusion regulations create a sponsorship avenue for the incubator as it assists private corporations in meeting their compliance requirements. However, the same regulations limit incubatee selection for incubator managers, leading the incubator manager to choose from a pool of suboptimal entrepreneurial ideas. The selection criteria directly influence incubation costs and overall performance. VioletInc_IM succinctly captures this constraint:

> *"… we can only ever help black beneficiaries, … but it couldn't just open it so slightly that if we can bring that other person that's more privileged … that person can create 15 times more jobs and transfer skills. ... that is a compliance constraint" (VioletInc_IM, p. 20).*

The preceding quotation exemplifies the constraint imposed by the policymaker's expectations. While redressing historical economic segregation and injustices is noble, the inconsideration of contextual factors negates the other objective of creating sustainable entrepreneurs capable of

creating employment opportunities in the communities. This constraint jeopardises the incubator manager's performance targets.

5.2.3.3 Misaligned expectations

The incubator manager grapples with constraints arising from misalignment between the sponsor's expectations and the entrepreneurial potential within communities. Sponsors often favour glamorous ventures that garner media attention, increasing their organisational reputation. In contrast, the incubator manager prioritises community needs that align with local skills and can sustain entrepreneurial efforts. Pursuing sponsors' preferred programmes introduces the risk of damaging the incubator's reputation and a loss of moral legitimacy among the communities. VioletInc_IM summarises this quandary in the following excerpt:

> *"They all want the likes of the kids with little teeth, smiling, and that's a much nicer picture, much more glamorous. Our frustration and challenges are to help the client to view other things in a more positive light … aligning the client's need to meet the expectation of the community is a nightmare." (VioletInc_IM, p.9).*

To navigate these complexities, the manager must be adept at persuasion and creative programme design to satisfy sponsors. Incubator managers are actors of agency; while they may need sponsor resources, they are cognisant of the reputational damage associated with significantly deviating from the incubator's mandate for the sake of obtaining resources. Therefore, the incubator manager craftily navigates the balance of the sponsor's expectations, community needs, and the incubator's mandate to achieve a win-win outcome. VioletInc_IM aptly illustrates this strategic management approach in the following quotes:

> *"… you almost have to make up these beautiful photographs so the client can keep funding us… we just adjust the sales slightly so that we can make it fit" (VioletInc_IM, p.10).*

5.2.3.4 Difficult working relationships

The incubator manager grapples with challenging stakeholders, particularly prospective incubatees. Resource constraints in the operational environment expose the incubator manager to opportunistic individuals seeking incubator resources without a genuine commitment to the incubation programme. This scenario impacts both the performance and reputation of the incubator. Moreover, some of these opportunistic entrepreneurs can become a threat to the incubator staff if their expectations are not met. Such a context compels the incubator manager to employ risk management strategies, including narrative control, feigned ignorance of opportunistic demands, and legal warnings to safeguard the incubator's reputation. VioletInc_IM sheds light on typical scenarios:

"… but no matter how peaceful you try to be, there will always be community members that will demand the money; they just don't want to get through the programme …" (VioletInc_IM, p.9).

The preceding excerpt further reinforces the importance of transparent engagement with stakeholders, especially incubatees, regarding programme structure and expectations in fostering trust. In resource-constrained environments, unscrupulous service providers exploit community needs without genuine development intentions, breeding mistrust and suspicion among community members, detrimental to organisational legitimacy. Open recruitment process further solidifies trust between the incubator and community members, reducing the potential for disgruntlement and disruption of the incubation programme and the sponsor's projects. Therefore, transparency is pivotal in building trust with beneficiaries, as VioletInc-IM reinforces in the following quote:

" … once they trust us and see that we are not [going] away and abandon them, they start opening up; that's when the development magic starts" (VioletInc_IM, p.10).

5.2.4 VioletInc case summary

In conclusion, the incubator's stakeholders have diverse expectations that influence the strategic agency of the incubator manager. Policymakers emphasise effective leadership, governance, and economic transformation, while sponsors prioritise regulatory compliance and tangible impact. Incubatees seek robust entrepreneurial support and sustainable growth, while incubator staff value visionary leadership, preservation of the incubator's mandate, and continuous incubation improvement.

Therefore, the incubator manager strategically navigates the demands and constraints stemming from the stakeholders' expectations and the operating environment. The demands include meeting the performance targets and managing the broad scope of responsibilities of the role. Instituting a performance management system, collaborating with strategic partners, and embracing delegation of duties contribute to the incubator manager's role performance. Job constraints include resource limitations, stakeholders' misaligned expectations, complex relationships, and regulatory compliance. However, proactive resourcefulness and fostering collaborative partnerships mitigate resource limitations, while challenging relationships are terminated. Moreover, by tailoring programmes to align with sponsors' economic transformation compliance requirements, the incubator manager balances community needs while mobilising resources for the incubator. Therefore, economic transformation regulations simultaneously enable and constrain the incubator manager's strategic agency.

The following section presents the results of the IndigoInc case, one of the two cases selected for this study from public-funded incubators.

5.3 Case description

IndigoInc's mandate is to develop small businesses in the manufacturing industry. It receives all its funding from SEDA and other public entities, such as national and provincial government departments and municipalities. The incubator has a board responsible for governance, to which the CEO reports. IndigoInc's IM, one of the incubator managers, reports to an executive-level manager. The incubator manager's staff include knowledge workers with different expertise required in the incubation programme. KW02 is one of the knowledge workers who participated in this study. EN01 was selected from the entrepreneurs, while SR01_PMR is the policymaker and sponsor representative. These stakeholders interact with IndigoInc's IM at various levels and hold several expectations for the incubator manager role. The following section presents the stakeholders' expectations of the incubator manager's role.

5.3.1 Stakeholders' role expectations of the incubator manager

5.3.1.1 Policymaker expectations

The policymaker expectations presented in section 5.2.1.1 under the VioletInc case apply to all the other incubators in this study; hence, they will not be reproduced under each case. However, the analysis of the result of each case will infuse relevant insights from those expectations.

5.3.1.2 Sponsor's expectations

Regulatory compliance – economic transformation regulations

The public sponsor enforces government legislation and interests as a government representative. In section 5.2.1.2, economic transformation was highlighted as one of the primary expectations of the policymaker in initiating the ISP. Therefore, the public sponsor enforces the policymaker's expectation by insisting that partnering incubators comply with the transformation agenda. Considering the scarcity of resources in the operating environment, this strategy seems to be effective. Several private incubators are attracted by easy access to public resources and are committed to complying with the economic transformation regulations. However, as discussed in later sections, this decision proves to be one of the constraints to incubator managers' strategic agency. In the following quote, SR01_PMR elucidates the importance of complying with government priorities:

> *"… [we] allocate the resources for the number of incubators that we need to support and set priorities in terms of government interests" (SR02_PMR, p. 4).*

Growth and sustainability of entrepreneurs' businesses

In establishing incubation programmes, governments include some measurable targets to enable the monitoring and evaluation of the programmes. The ISP exemplifies this approach, as the public sponsor explained during the interview. S□D□ was given a target of increasing the number of active incubators in the country to □□□ over three years starting in □□□□. The logic behind this target seems to be the correlation between business incubation and the promotion of entrepreneurship. Therefore, the sponsor expects the incubators to produce the desired impact by increasing the number of new businesses established in the country. SR□□□PMR reinforces this expectation in the following □uote□

> *"We want to see them assisting SMMEs to establish businesses, and those businesses must be sustainable; they must grow in revenue" (SR02 ^0 PMR, p. 6).*

Conse□uently, the public sponsor expects incubator managers to comply with reporting requirements, including validated performance reports to demonstrate the incubators' performance impact. While reporting is a standard expectation in most roles, it is the preoccupation with the □uantitative measures that becomes a burden to incubator managers, although the sponsor has a different perspective, as explained by SR□□□PMR□

> *"… we even make it easier and look at a Growthwheel reporting system [to ensure] that it's not a tedious process to report… " (SR02_PMR, p. 11).*

Incubator sustainability

The public sponsor emphasises the importance of having an incubator sustainability strategy to mitigate total dependence on public sponsorship. □nsuring the incubator□s survival is crucial for maintaining the desired performance impact over time. The public sponsor views its role as an enabler of the incubator to attract other sponsors□thus, incubator managers are expected to be innovative, build their reputation to attract sponsors, and even establish other revenue□generating enterprises to ensure incubator and incubatees□sustainability.

> *"How will the incubator survive beyond the SEDA funding. We wanted them to self-sustain in the end" (SR02_ PMR, p.13).*

However, while the sponsor pursues the noble ob□ective of promoting business incubation in the country by supporting the establishment of more incubators, this seems to create a legitimacy challenge for the incubator manager. Several service providers have rebranded themselves as business incubators, but the services they offer do not meet the basic tenets of a business incubator. Therefore, there is a concern over the value created by business incubators, as most new establishments fail to produce visible results. □ related problem is the increased competition

in the operating environment, particularly for the scarce sponsorship resources. □s such, achieving self□sustaining re□uires gaining and maintaining uncontested legitimacy from several stakeholders to avoid desperate dilution of the mandate to access readily available funding. The public sponsor cautions against this risky behaviour among incubator managers□

> *" … it is important that they balance their own sustainability efforts with clients' sustainability and not move away from the key objective of that incubator because you can get money, but not all money is good money. If it erodes [the] performance of the incubator, then that money was not good" (SR02 ^0 PMR, p. 7).*

Ethical leadership

□thical leadership and good governance are essential for building an incubator□s reputation. Governance is considered so vital that public sponsorship could be terminated if the incubator manager does not uphold good governance. □n ethical, passionate, and strategic leader would make the right decisions, including hiring appropriate skills, allocating resources correctly, building a solid network and being proactively resourceful to provide the necessary inputs to capacitate the incubatees and sustain the incubator. The public sponsor expects to partner with incubation practitioners who care more about developing entrepreneurs than amassing personal wealth, an expectation that can be contested, considering the primary motivation of starting a private business. To mitigate this contestation, the public sponsor insists that all incubators receiving public funds be constituted as non□profit organisations □NPOs□ with independent boards of trustees. SR□□□PMR emphasises this expectation in the following □uote□

> *"… [we] expect them to uphold good governance practices … we would pull out funding if we see that this institution is self-serving. … [with] money … going to people's pockets … instead of supporting SMMEs …" (SR02 ^0 PMR, p. 8).*

Furthermore, responsible leadership ensures the selection of entrepreneurial ideas aligned with the incubator□s mandate and ade□uately supports the incubatees in developing the ideas into sustainable ventures.

Lean organisational structure

The public sponsor expects incubator managers to work with a lean structure, with the incubator manager playing an active strategic and operational role in the incubator. While this expectation may emanate from best practices worldwide, particularly for new incubators, it may also be driven by the need for the public sponsor to support many incubators. Therefore, lean structures reduce the incubator's overhead costs and the funding allocation from the public sponsor. However, a lean structure may not be the preferred option in every situation and may create excessive □ob

demands on the incubator manager. The following comment by SR□□□PMR gives an insight into the lean structure expectation□

> *"… they work with teams that are very lean, lean structures … you need just the right fitting person in terms of skills and the right strategic level" (SR02_PMR, p. 14).*

In this section, the expectations of the public sponsor were elucidated□the following section delves into the expectations of the incubatee.

5.3.1.3 Incubatee expectations

IndigoInc recruits and selects entrepreneurs wishing to manufacture any of the products falling under the low□tech classification within IndigoInc□s sector irrespective of their skills or knowledge of manufacturing processes. The following are some of the expectations highlighted by □N□□, one of the incubatees of IndigoInc.

Growth and sustainability

The interview with □N□□ shows that when the incubatee □oins the incubation programme, they expect to receive the entrepreneurial support necessary to start and grow a sustainable business capable of competing in the open market. □N□□ confirms this expectation in the following □uote□

> *"… joining the incubation programme further cemented that [the] vision could be realised. I could, one day, be a mass producer in the fast-moving consumer goods industry ... that was the expectation" (EN02, p. 3).*

Entrepreneurial support

The entrepreneurial support interventions the incubatee expects include appropriate training, access to infrastructure, mentorship, financial support, access to markets, and network mediation. Selected, indicative interventions are explained in detail in the following paragraphs.

□□□**ro□r□ate□tra□□□□□** training, such as product formulation and manufacturing processes, provides the knowledge novice entrepreneurs re□uire to start and grow manufacturing businesses. The incubatee is sometimes dissatisfied with the training level offered within IndigoInc's programme, underscoring the importance that incubatees attribute to industry□recognised and relevant training.

> *"… the trainings that SEDA gives, you sometimes wonder if they have any value because they also seem unaccredited. … very basic, entry-level" (EN02, p. 12).*

□□□**e**□□□**to**□□□**ra**□**tr**□□**t**□**re**□critical infrastructure, including manufacturing workshops, e□uipment, and workspace, is scarce for start□up ventures. Conse□uently, incubatees who participate in incubation programs anticipate accessing these essential resources within the incubator.

Me□**tor**□**h**□□□□**k**□**o**□**led**□**ea**□**le**□□ **e**□**tor**□□the expertise of incubator staff and strategic partners with relevant experience significantly contribute to supporting the incubator manager in mentoring the incubatees. Incompetent support staff increases the manager's workload and potentially damages the incubator's reputation. □N□□ underscores the pivotal role played by knowledgeable mentors in the following excerpt□

> *"[previous lab manager] was the only one who could resolve [several] issues within the processes… he had a technical background ... he was brilliant" (EN02, p. 10).*

Market□□□**a**□**d**□**a**□□**e**□□□**to**□□ **arket**□□□new entrepreneurs often lack skills and capabilities such as product marketing and advertising, which are crucial in selling their products. Therefore, the incubatee expects the incubator manager to facilitate access to such capabilities as underlined by □N□□ in the following □uote□

> *"… they should have more relationships with marketers' distribution channels. … if you don't have a market to sell to, your product will expire" (EN02, p. 12).*

□□□**a**□□**al**□ □□□□**ort**□ numerous nascent ventures, especially in resource□constrained environments, encounter sluggish growth due to restricted access to financial capital. □ven when viable business prospects emerge, these opportunities often elude entrepreneurs because of insufficient working capital. □pon □oining an incubator, the incubatee anticipates that the incubator manager will facilitate access to critical funding resources. EN02's frustration serves as a clear illustration of this expectation.

> *"Finance from the incubation side has been an uphill; there has been no finance and no short-term loans to support any form of challenge … even if it is a short-term [loan] to [complete a] project, … you would never get [it] ..." (EN02, p. 5).*

□**et**□**ork**□□□**o**□□**ort**□□□**t**□**e**□□□N□□ stresses that□incubatees actively seek to cultivate collaborative relationships and alliances with their fellow incubatees within an incubator. □dditionally, they anticipate discovering valuable opportunities through peer interactions. Conse□uently, the provision of networking opportunities among incubatees within the incubator becomes a central expectation.

Accessibility, proactiveness and resourcefulness

Regarding the personal attributes expected of an incubator manager, the incubatee anticipates a pragmatic, knowledgeable, and accessible manager. The manager's hands-on experience working with small businesses is also highly valued. These attributes are envisioned to enable the incubator manager to be proactively resourceful and creative in their role, as KW02 aptly explains.

> *"Did you knock on doors to say this is my client… I need these resources to make this thing a success for him … he has been with us for so long?" (EN02, p. 14).*

The preceding sections expound upon the expectations of the sponsors and incubatees, and the ensuing section focuses on the expectations of the incubator staff.

5.3.1.4 Staff expectations

KW02 joined IndigoInc through the organisation's internship program and reported directly to IndigoInc_IM. This section outlines KW02's primary expectations of the incubator manager's role.

Mentorship

Junior incubator staff often seek guidance and mentorship from more experienced colleagues. In particular, the staff expects the incubator manager to possess superior knowledge of business incubation management. Therefore, a close working relationship with the incubator manager is perceived as an opportunity for learning. This expectation is exemplified by KW02, who regards IndigoInc_IM as a knowledgeable and experienced mentor capable of providing valuable support for professional career development.

> *"… I wanted to gain more knowledge. … [IndigoInc_IM] has over ten years of experience [and] knows everything that happens within incubation" (KW02, p.2).*

Transparent leadership

Given the multifaceted responsibilities inherent in the role of an incubator manager, the incubator staff deems effective time management critical. Additionally, proficient communication facilitates clear task delegation, engagement with external stakeholders, and accurate reporting. Problem-solving skills are essential, as the incubator manager must address challenges faced by staff and incubatees. Furthermore, the staff expect the incubator manager to be appropriately qualified, have business acumen, be transparent and give voice to team members. KW02 succinctly articulates some of these expectations in the following excerpt:

> *"Communication, problem solving, [and] time management. There are many deadlines … many SMMEs come up with a lot of problems, how can [the incubator manager] help come up with solutions" (KW02, p. 4).*

Having presented the stakeholders' expectations in the preceding sections, section 5.□.□ focuses on how the incubator manager manages the perceived □ob demands stemming from the expectations.

5.3.2 Managing perceived job demands

5.2.2.1 Meeting minimum criteria of performance

□nsuring compliance with minimum performance criteria is a paramount ob□ective for an incubator manager. In this vein, the incubator manager concludes a performance agreement with the C□O, outlining key performance indicators pertinent to the role. These indicators encompass the incubator□s performance expectations as stipulated by the sponsor. Conse□uently, the incubator manager's preoccupation with achieving the sponsor's targets can potentially lead to overlooking some value□adding interventions, particularly if the expectations are short□term focused. The magnitude and fre□uency of the performance reporting re□uirements can be onerous and demanding, further augmenting the already substantial workload that the incubator manager must manage within a specified timeframe. IndigoInc□IM elucidates the challenges of some procedures in the following □uote□

> *"I admire SEDA because they have sustained the incubators for a long time. But their reporting and data collection is tedious …" (IndigoInc_IM, p. 12).*

Therefore, the incubator manager collaborates with external partners within the network to ade□uately support the incubatees, mitigating the impact of inade□uate staffing due to resource constraints and the prescribed lean structure. Conse□uently, actively cultivating valuable networks with diverse partners becomes a deliberate goal for the incubator manager.

Moreover, meeting performance is viewed not only from the sponsor's perspective but also from the incubatees□thus, the incubator manager employs strategic innovation to address the evolving demands of incubatees. For instance, incubatees actively monitor market trends to identify relevant training opportunities and stay attuned to the contemporary business landscape. Furthermore, the rapid pace of technological advancements necessitates adaptive changes in the incubation offerings. Failure to adapt to market changes may diminish the incubator□s relevance and legitimacy, threatening the incubator's sustainability. IndigoInc□IM provides insights into some of the strategic innovations□

> *"… we are forming a training institution where we can have accredited training done under [IndigoInc] …" (IndigoInc_IM, p. 5).*

5.2.2.2 The scope of responsibility the role involves

The role of the incubator manager encompasses multifaceted responsibilities that re□uire skilful balancing. In addition to managerial and administrative tasks, the manager is actively involved in implementing various programmes. The re□uired balancing exercise suggests why some stakeholders expect an incubator manager experienced in small business management. The manager may have to take a hands□on approach, working with entrepreneurs to find solutions while also managing the incubator staff and driving the growth and sustainability of the incubator. This demand outstretches the manager, re□uiring strategic choices for longevity. IndigoInc□IM provides insights into some of the responsibilities of the role□

> *“I am required to give support, train, facilitate funding opportunities, link the SMMEs, and help SMMEs with distribution contracts …" (IndigoInc_IM, p. 11).*

Conse□uently, the incubator manager delegates some tasks to the staff and avoids burnout associated with excessive □ob demands. Delegation allows the incubator manager to redirect focus towards other demands re□uiring management attention while also empowering the staff. Delegation also ensures that tasks are assigned to the most skilled individuals.

> *"… financials are the one thing that's lacking [for me] ... [BDO name] … is a key assistant with the financials, cashflows, and everything else" (IndigoInc_IM, p. 110).*

Furthermore, the incubator manager engages in rigorous, strategic, and astute negotiations to safeguard the interests of incubatees and protect the incubator’s reputation. Doing so helps maintain the incubator□s moral legitimacy among the entrepreneurs and the public. IndigoInc□IM exemplifies the extent of negotiation involved and the difficult choices that must be made in the following □uote□

> *"We said fine, keep your funding, but we've SMMEs … you cannot expect [them] to [go] and manufacture [at a distant site] … they agreed… " (IndigoInc_IM, p. 4).*

□chieving incubator sustainability is a □ob demand that evokes innovation among incubator managers but can also constrain them when the options for innovation are restricted. The increasing number of incubators supported by the public sponsor diminishes public funding spurring the incubator manager to innovate to achieve the incubator□s sustainability. Some of the initiatives lead to the evolution of the incubator strategy, ensuring its alignment with contemporary entrepreneurial needs and enhancing its appeal to entrepreneurs. IndigoInc□IM realises the urgency of strategy evolution□

"… if [IndigoInc] doesn't re-strategise and implement a few changes, we could be redundant. … any organisation should make sure that they try to be as innovative…" (IndigoInc_IM, p. 18).

The preceding statements by the incubator manager demonstrate the importance of maintaining legitimacy in business incubation. □s discussed in section □.□.□.□, incubatees are □uestioning the validity of some of the training, challenging the legitimacy of the incubator. Failure of incubatees' products on the market could damage the entrepreneurs' businesses and the incubator's reputation. EN02's experience exemplifies this risk:

"… things that I saw at [IndigoInc] and learned in the training, I then manufactured…. However … the product would separate, so that was a write-off…" (EN02, p. 4).

5.3.3 Managing perceived job constraints

5.3.3.1 Resource limitations

Resource limitations hinder effective incubator operations and financial sustainability in a resource□constrained context. These limitations result in incubators' high dependence on public sponsorship, given its relatively easy accessibility. However, such dependence can inadvertently pose additional risks and constraints for the incubator manager, particularly considering the inefficiencies associated with some public institutions. Other than the late processing of agreed sponsorship allocations, the public sponsor does not fund other necessary initiatives that increase the performance and legitimacy of the incubator. Such initiatives would enable the incubator to generate additional revenue, improve incubatee development, and enhance the incubator□s reputation. The resultant performance could help to build and maintain the incubator□s legitimacy, potentially attracting other sponsors. IndigoInc□IM underscores how dependence on public funding □eopardises the effectiveness of the incubator□

"If the funds that [were] meant to come in from our sponsor [were] delayed, it delayed the entire project… we were struggling financially" (IndigoInc_IM, p. 3).

While the preceding statements demonstrate how limited resources hamper proposed initiatives, the incubator manager proactively cultivates resourcefulness, sei□ing every networking opportunity with potential sponsors and intensifying marketing efforts. The manager effectively assumes the role of brand ambassador, leveraging personal social media platforms to promote the incubator. Furthermore, the incubator manager capitalises on new graduates□internship programmes to bolster entrepreneurial support and mitigate limitations in internal skills capacity. IndigoInc□IM serves as a compelling example of social networking for the benefit of the incubator□

"… I do a whole lot of marketing on my social media, and [many] people now identify [IndigoInc] [with me] ..." (IndigoInc_IM, p. 15).

Moreover, the incubator manager recognises the untapped potential of existing incubator assets in generating essential revenue and alleviating resource constraints. For instance, infrastructure utilised by incubatees possessing unused capacity can be leased to non-incubated entrepreneurs for a fee. Such strategic leverage of the available assets reshapes the incubation strategy and drives innovative models, outpacing increasing competition within the operating environment. IndigoInc-IM acknowledges the criticality of listening to incubatees in this strategic evolution to ensure the incubator's ongoing relevance:

"… SMMEs, are the best to tell us where we must go … [otherwise] they [will] leave and go to another incubator that is serving their current needs" (IndigoInc_IM, 18).

5.3.3.2 Regulatory compliance: economic transformation regulations

The incubator manager contends with the significant power of the public sponsor to assert their expectations, sometimes against the manager's preferences. The heavy reliance of the incubator on public sponsorship exacerbates such power imbalances, necessitating the incubator manager's strict adherence to the sponsor's requirements to ensure the incubator's survival. For example, while the incubator's mission asserts that prospective entrepreneurs are recruited and selected impartially, a review of recruitment documents reveals a focus on black entrepreneurs, signalling an alignment with the public sponsor's economic transformation expectations. This exclusive focus on black entrepreneurs could limit the incubator manager's ability to attract other potential sponsors who see no opportunity to support deserving entrepreneurs who do not fall under the public sponsor's preferred demographics. In the following statement, IndigoInc-IM highlights the effect of the incubator's reliance on public sponsorship, citing a dearth of alternative funding sources:

"SMMEs suffer because we don't have funding as we depend on this grant funding that comes in [from the public sponsor]" (IndigoInc_IM, p. 7).

5.3.3.3 Misaligned expectations

Some incubatees, especially those associated with influential societal figures, often have misaligned expectations and a sense of entitlement and expect preferential treatment from the incubator manager. When their expectations are unmet, the resultant untenable relationships emotionally drain the incubator manager, a form of job constraint that needs to be resolved. The strained relationships can adversely impact both personal and incubator reputations. Such incubatees may sabotage the incubator manager's work by refusing to cooperate in performance

reporting, thereby affecting the incubator's performance and reputation. IndigoInc_IM reinforces the view of entitlement in the following statement:

> *"The most painful stakeholder is the SMMEs. We get good SMMEs, and [then] those that are entitled. Sometimes they know important people" (IndigoInc_IM, p. 12).*

Nevertheless, the incubator manager relies on the intrinsic motivation to continue working in such an environment. Furthermore, inspiration from past success stories, understanding and embracing the diversity inherent in human interactions and acknowledging the varying reactions when expectations are unmet motivate the incubator manager. However, when relationships with such stakeholders reach an impasse, the manager terminates them. Notably, stakeholders sometimes initiate the termination when relationships become untenable, as IndigoInc_IM elucidates:

> *"... those we lose throughout our journey as an incubator,[are] those that feel like, 'this is not working for me anymore'" (IndigoInc_IM, p. 21).*

5.3.3.4 Lack of authority in the role

In a large organisational structure, where the incubator manager reports to an executive role, limited role authority constraints the incubator manager, particularly in decision-making over essential matters affecting role responsibilities. Furthermore, limited interactions occur between the incubator manager and specific stakeholders, resulting in the manager receiving filtered information regarding critical performance-related issues. Moreover, the executives can turn down proposals that the incubator manager considers critical for the incubator's performance improvement and sustainability. Such a lack of role authority can demoralise the incubator manager, resulting in poor performance. IndigoInc_IM provides insight into this structural-related constraint.

> *"… important financial decisions and organisational structuring and responsibilities, the executives [make them] … " (IndigoInc_IM, p. 11).*

5.3.4 IndigoInc case summary

The incubator's stakeholders share common expectations centred around entrepreneurial growth and sustainability, ethical leadership, and effective governance. However, policymakers and sponsors prioritise economic transformation, sustainable impact, and incubator sustainability. Incubatees seek comprehensive entrepreneurial support, including access to finance, access to markets, mentorship, and networking opportunities. The incubator staff anticipate mentorship, transparent leadership, and effective management from an appropriately qualified incubator manager.

In navigating the demands from stakeholders' expectations, the incubator manager grapples with employing strategic responses to maintain the incubator's relevance. While public sponsorship has sustained the incubator since its inception, the resources remain inade□uate to meet increasing incubatee re□uirements. In contrast, focusing on economic transformation increases the resource re□uirements to support the selected entrepreneurs. The expectation to achieve incubator self□sustenance and the demand of managing incubatees with misaligned expectations cause immense constraints on the incubator manager. Therefore, proactive networking and innovative leveraging of incubator assets to generate additional revenue are aimed at enhancing the incubator□s sustainability beyond public funding. However, the incubator manager is further constrained by the limited role authority resulting from the incubator's organisational structure, where corporate decisions are made by executives who may not appreciate the operational demands that the incubator manager faces. The incubator manager focuses on guaranteeing incubator sustainability, enhancing the □uality of entrepreneurial support, and protecting the incubator□s reputation by terminating relationships with some stakeholders. Nevertheless, the scarcity of resources still leaves the incubator manager reliant on constraining public sponsorship.

The following section presents the results of the BlueInc case, one of the two cases selected for this study from hybrid□funded incubators.

5.4□ □I□e□□□□a□e□o□er□e□ □

BlueInc is one of the hybrid□sponsored incubators. The incubator is an initiative between the local business chamber and the members to assist the local community□s entrepreneurs, particularly those in the □material□manufacturing sector. The incubator has a board of trustees, to which the incubator manager, BlueInc□IM, reports. While BlueInc is hybrid□sponsored, it receives most of its funding from private sponsors. BlueInc□IM works with a lean staff responsible for several roles necessary to support entrepreneurs. BlueInc_IM's stakeholders include internal staff, from whom KW□□ was selected for this study's interview, the policymaker, public sponsor, and incubatees, such as □N□□.□□ and □N□□.□□, who agreed to be interviewed for the study. SR□□ represents [sponsor02], one of BlueInc's private sponsors.

□s with the other cases, the interview with SR□□□PMR, the public sponsor and policymaker representative, also applies to BlueInc. □s such, their expectations are not reproduced as they have been presented under sections □.□.□.□ and □.□.□.□. Therefore, the following sections present the expectations of the rest of BlueInc□s stakeholders who were interviewed for this study regarding the role of the incubator manager.

5.4.1 Stakeholders' role expectations of the incubator manager

5.4.1.1 Private sponsor expectations

Regulatory compliance: economic transformation regulations

Many private corporations who sponsor the incubator do business with the government and must comply with the economic transformation regulations. Sponsoring organisations such as business incubators is no longer a voluntary philanthropic act but a strategic imperative to remain compliant with the re□uirements to do business with the government. Therefore, the private sponsor expects the incubator manager to assist the corporation in achieving the transformation compliance targets set in the legislation. SR□□ highlights this imperative in the following □uote□

> *"… as [the] transformation cause became more part of business, we then continued to work with the incubator" (SR03, p. 3).*

Growth and sustainability of entrepreneurs' businesses

While the private sponsor's primary objective is compliance with the economic transformation regulations, successful new ventures created through sponsorship enhance their reputation as responsible corporate citi□ens. Conse□uently, the private sponsor expects the incubator to produce a visible impact within the surrounding community, demonstrated by the growth of sustainable new businesses capable of creating employment opportunities for others. The following statement by SR□□ reflects this expectation□

> *"… take someone off the streets, they start a registered business, hopefully become successful, and … grow to start employing others" (SR03, p. 4).*

Incubator sustainability

The sustainability of the incubator continues to benefit private corporations in meeting their regulatory compliance obligations. Thus, while acknowledging that self□sufficiency is challenging for NPOs, the private sponsor still expects the incubator manager to diversify incubator sponsorship to ensure self□sufficiency and reduce dependence on the public sponsor and a few private sponsors. Such expectations, □xtaposed with the reduction in public sponsorship, highlight the uncertainty of the sponsorship arrangements, re□uiring the incubator manager to be resourceful. SR□□ elucidates this expectation in the following statement□

> *"The Centre manager has to … market the brand of the incubator and let people understand the value they add so that they could raise funds from … other avenues rather than just relying on [Sponsor02] and SEDA" (SR03, p. 5).*

□s highlighted in the preceding excerpt, the emphasis on the need to demonstrate the incubator□s value to the public suggests the importance of a good reputation and gaining legitimacy with

several stakeholders, who are envisaged to be attracted by the incubator's impact. The incubator manager is expected to cultivate, promote, and strategically leverage the incubator's reputation to attract more sponsors. The vitality of the incubator's reputation extends beyond sponsor attraction to also appeal to entrepreneurs with high-potential ideas.

Entrepreneurial leadership

Delivering entrepreneurial impact and attracting resources requires astute leadership. Such leadership upholds good governance, is proactive and innovative, identifies and attracts competent support staff, and establishes and effectively manages relationships with partners that can support the incubator with diverse resources. These attributes suggest an incubator manager with business experience and a network of partners built over time, a demand that the incubator manager must grapple with. SR03 reinforces some of these leadership attributes in the following excerpt:

> *"… the Centre manager must have a very good network, … [in] the community [and] government bodies … that's where much support could come from…" (SR03, p. 5).*

5.4.1.2 Incubatee expectations

Growth and sustainability

Growth and sustainability constitute the primary expectations of incubatees who join business incubators. The incubatee is attracted by a promise for entrepreneurial support provided in an incubator to enable business growth. Consequently, during the incubation process, the incubatee begins to envision their business flourishing and achieving long-term sustainability. EN03.02 exemplifies this growth mindset:

> *"… you start learning about saving … by the closing time of the year … we have new equipment. … we have grown from thinking tomorrow to thinking what will happen in 20 years" (EN03.02, p. 5).*

Entrepreneurial support

The growth and sustainability of the incubatee's business are the results of the entrepreneurial support provided by the incubator manager and the staff. Therefore, the incubatee expects to be empowered through various entrepreneurial support interventions, such as access to infrastructure, access to markets, networking, and training, as discussed in the following sections.

Access to infrastructure: many new ventures do not have adequate capital to afford equipment and operating premises; hence, joining an incubator provides access to such infrastructure, as confirmed by EN03.02 in the following statement:

"… it's a big advantage because [we] get to use the machinery at the incubator as well. … I cannot afford to buy the machines …" (EN03.03, p. 4).

Tra□□□□a□d□ e□tor□h□□□ nascent business owners often re□uire training and mentorship across critical domains, such as administration, finance, technical skills, marketing, and general management. The need is compounded by the shortage of skilled labour in the incubator's operating environment, as indicated by one incubatee. Therefore, the incubatee expects the incubator to provide several skills training and mentorship for their staff.

□□**e□□□to□□ arket□□□** network mediation plays a pivotal role for incubatees, enabling them to access business opportunities and secure essential resources through the incubator manager's network partners. Conse□uently, incubatees anticipate leveraging these networks to gain entry into markets and sei□e business opportunities. □N□□.□□ accentuates this expectation in the following statement.

"… we are having these programs with [incubator's partners], but they don't [provide business opportunities] … they need to open doors to us…" (EN03.03, p. 6).

□**et□ork□□□o□□ort□□t□e□□□** incubatees anticipate that the incubator manager will be crucial in fostering relationship□building among fellow incubatees to facilitate potential collaborations for mutually beneficial business opportunities. □N□□.□□ shared examples of long□term beneficial business relationships built with other incubatees in the incubator.

Proactive leadership

The proactive resourcefulness of an incubator manager is pivotal in addressing incubatees' problems, meeting staff needs, and safeguarding the incubator's reputation. However, association with certain service providers may not always benefit the incubator, potentially risking reputational damage. Therefore, incubatees expect the incubator manager to proactively review relationships with various partners and continually assess incubatees' satisfaction with the provided incubation services. □N□□.□□ underscores the critical imperative for such proactive engagement□

"… the incubator needs to look at specialised ways of improving [their] incubatees. They [should] be going out looking for [business opportunities]" (EN03.03, p. 7).

5.4.1.3 Staff expectations

KW□□, a longstanding staff of BlueInc, works closely with the incubator manager, supporting incubatees and assisting with resource mobilisation for the incubator. Based on KW03's interview, the staff□s expectations are presented in the following sections.

Incubator performance impact

Senior incubator staff seem to appreciate the significance of the incubator's demonstrated impact on the community rather than merely pursuing □uantitative targets. □s a result, the incubator manager must balance this expectation against the performance targets set by the public sponsor, which are biased towards □uantitative metrics. Convincing the public sponsor to reconsider the performance measurement criteria is pivotal to balancing these expectations, but this may negatively impact the sponsorship, which is often linked to the number of incubatees supported. KW□□ underlines the expectation in the following excerpt□

> *"If the [Business Development Officer] can have [say] 27 or maybe 20 SMMEs, then you would see real growth, job creation [and] impact in the community [and] the economy" (KW03, p. 10).*

Incubator sustainability

The incubator must secure ade□uate resources for sustained operations to maintain its envisaged impact. Thus, the staff anticipates that the incubator manager will actively pursue diversified sponsorship to reduce dependence on a few sponsors. KW□□ highlights the expectation for the incubator's financial sustainability in the following quote:

> *"… we expect someone who [can] go out and look for funding, [who can] engage with different stakeholders and find new opportunities for SMMEs" (KW03, p. 3).*

The preceding statement suggests the inherent concern among incubator staff regarding their □ob security and livelihoods. If the incubator fails to receive ade□uate resources, some of them could lose their □obs, which could also constrain the incubator manager. □ncertainty about their □obs could negatively affect staff and incubator performance.

Adequate staffing

□de□uate incubator staffing reduces each employee□s workload, prevents burnout, and improves overall performance. However, the public sponsor's prescribed lean incubator structure introduces constraints to the incubator manager. The inability of the incubator manager to hire ade□uate expertise poses a performance risk to the incubator and incubatees. Incubatees' business clients expect the incubator to provide sufficient support to incubatees, enabling them to meet □ob specifications effectively. However, the insufficient human resources within the incubator can directly impact incubatees' ability to secure business contracts from potential clients, diminishing overall prospects for business growth. KW□□ illuminates this issue in the following □uote□

> *"… It is important for all the incubators to have [a health and safety officer]. [However], SEDA thinks there should only be a BDO and the Centre Manager" (KW03, p. 10).*

Proactive leadership

The incubator manager must balance mentorship and autonomy when engaging with senior members of staff. These members expect a manager who embodies visionary leadership and a growth mindset, prioritising good governance, stakeholder engagement and resource mobilisation over micro□management. □dditionally, the staff underscores the importance of inclusivity, pragmaticism, open□mindedness, transparency, and supportive leadership. KW□□ highlights some of these leadership attributes in the following statement□

> *"… we expect a leader … who can engage with different stakeholders, find new opportunities for SMMEs and grow the sector we deal with …" (KW03, p. 3).*

The preceding sections outlined the stakeholders□ expectations, while the subse□uent sections will delve into the incubator manager□s response to the □ob demands stemming from these expectations.

5.4.2 Managing perceived job demands

5.4.2.1 Meeting minimum criteria of performance

The incubator manager concludes an annual performance agreement with the incubator board, to whom the role reports and accounts. The key performance indicators include the sponsors□ incubator performance expectations and some corporate targets. Therefore, cognisant of the performance expectations and the importance of meeting performance targets, the incubator manager institutes a performance management system to monitor and report performance and collaborates with individual experts and institutions within existing networks to secure resources to meet incubator performance targets. BlueInc□IM highlights the value of a comprehensive performance management system□

> *"… we give detailed reports to say your [fund] has helped us to support [SUN], these are the results…. It's a tick on their side, expectation met…" (BlueInc_IM, p. 12).*

Moreover, innovating to find better ways of providing entrepreneurial support and developing new products for incubatees is deemed vital for business success. Therefore, the incubator manager promotes creativity among staff and incubatees, such as the collaborative design of new products between incubatees and incubator staff.

> *"… they're able to play around in [the design studio] … then involve some incubatees keen to make such things so that innovation flows …" (BlueInc_IM, p. 15).*

5.4.2.2 The scope of responsibility the role involves

The role of an incubator manager encompasses diverse corporate and incubation management responsibilities. There are several expectations that the incubator manager grapples with balancing. However, while the role has a lot of responsibilities, what seems to matter most to stakeholders is the performance results, which the incubator manager must demonstrate to substantiate the incubator's relevance. Demonstrating relevance builds legitimacy, attracting more sponsors. The incubator manager acknowledges the difficulty of balancing the competing broad responsibilities and their necessity for the incubator's sustainability. BlueInc□IM underscores the magnitude of this balancing act□

> *"It is a nightmare, but a good nightmare [because] [BlueInc]'s life depends on it. … if no funding [comes] in, we cease to exist" (BlueInc_IM, p. 15).*

To manage the role's broad scope, the incubator manager delegates some of the responsibilities to knowledge workers, making the availability of competent staff critical. The incubator manager also involves staff in significant meetings and decision□making processes to empower them, ensuring that some primary responsibilities can be delegated confidently. This inclusive approach fosters teamwork and commitment. During the interview, BlueInc□IM shared several examples of teamwork and staff commitment.

Guaranteeing the incubator's sustainability is one of the expectations the incubator manager constantly grapples with. Dependence on a few regular sponsors can make the incubator manager complacent. This reality only surfaces in times of economic crisis affecting the regular sponsors, when the incubator manager must innovate to mobilise more resources and avert organisational failure. BlueInc□IM exemplifies the risk posed by dependence on a few sponsors and punctuated events like COVID□□□□

> *"Whatever funds [sponsors would] normally direct to [us], they had to utilise for themselves. … that informed our … self-sustainability strategy" (BlueInc_IM, p. 19).*

□s an agentic actor, the incubator manager has the capacity for innovative thinking when confronted with critical challenges. Crises often compel managers to reevaluate their business strategies and analyse the utilisation of available assets, which often leads to strategy evolution and efficient use of assets and resources. BlueInc□IM demonstrates this strategic agency in the following statement□

> *"[BlueInc] can survive…; our own Sustainability Plan…. [involves securing] external funders other than SEDA and through whatever [assets] we have that we are trying to generate income from" (BlueInc_IM, p. 18).*

5.4.2.3 Difficult working relationships

The incubator manager role involves managing several risks threatening the incubator's reputation. Some of the risks emanate from relationships with some stakeholders. Misaligned incubatee expectations and inconsiderate sponsor requirements are the primary causes of straining relationship management for the incubator manager. Therefore, the incubator manager relies on several risk mitigation options, including terminating some relationships, taking legal action, or a delicate balancing act, all aimed at protecting the incubator's reputation. BlueInc_IM confirms the adoption of some of the options to protect the incubator's reputation:

> *"… we could not continue hosting somebody like that; we had to exit [them] from the programme. … we don't want to be associated with such things" (BlueInc_IM, p. 6).*

Moreover, the working relationship with the public sponsor frequently gives rise to frustration and emotional fatigue for the incubator manager. The role of the public sponsor, as the champion of the policymaker's expectations, empowers them to be insistent on several requirements. Consequently, the incubator manager must possess strong negotiation and prioritisation skills to effectively manage such difficult stakeholders' demands. In the following statement, BlueInc demonstrates agency in managing complex relationships:

> *"… when I have other commitments, I don't accept. Yes, I need you; you are a key stakeholder to me, but let's be fair; treat me like a partner in this whole thing … I have my own commitments ..." (BlueInc_IM, p. 17).*

5.4.3 Managing perceived job constraints

5.4.3.1 Resource limitations

During the interview conducted for this study, an unexpected electric power failure briefly interrupted the conversation with the incubator manager. The manager clarified that they relied on a generator due to electricity load-shedding, which interrupted the switchover. This incident is a practical illustration of the lived experiences of incubator managers operating within resource-constrained environments. Below, BlueInc_IM provides further insight into this challenge:

> *"Sorry about that, we were using a generator because we didn't have electricity. Now the electricity is back. ... we are suffering with this load-shedding" (BlueInc_IM, p. 4).*

The myriad challenges confronted by incubator managers operating within resource-constrained environments drive incubator managers to seek public sponsorship, which, while readily accessible, comes with its own set of constraints. For example, the funding is often accompanied

by conditions and performance targets that restrict the autonomy of the incubator manager, as elucidated by BlueInc□IM in the following □uote□

> *"They will give you, [say], a million rand, yet they expect you to support 80 incubatees…You [cannot] fully support these SMMEs the way you would love to …" (BlueInc_IM, p. 20).*

When □xtaposed with the prescribed lean organisational structure and inade□uate staffing concerns shared by the staff, the sponsor□s expectation outlined in the □uoted statement presents considerable constraints to the incubator manager. Nevertheless, the manager relies on proactive resourcefulness to manage the impact of inade□uate resources. For instance, they recruit new graduates as interns to augment the gaps in human resources. The cost of hiring interns is much lower than hiring experienced professionals. Therefore, the manager's strategic agency helps alleviate the impact of resource limitations while pursuing the incubator's mandate and complying with the public sponsor's re□uirements. BlueInc□IM exemplifies this proactive resourcefulness in the following □uote□

> *"… because of a lot of work that we do, we have hired interns to support with finance [person] and [the] business development officer …" (BlueInc_IM, p. 11).*

5.4.3.2 Regulatory constraints: economic transformation regulations

The economic transformation regulations are a double□edged sword for the incubator manager. While they provide avenues to secure sponsorship, the associated stringent incubatee□selection criteria narrow down the choices available to the manager. This restricted selection process tends to attract entrepreneurs with a survivalist and opportunistic mindset rather than those capable of making significant contributions to the intended impact, thereby impacting the performance of the incubator. BlueInc□IM provides an example of such survivalist characteristics of some of the entrepreneurs□

> *"… when [they] start a business, as much as [they] know there are issues related to [creating] jobs, their focus is [not necessarily] on doing that; they just want to live comfortably and have money" (BlueInc_IM, p. 13).*

However, consistent underperformance by the incubator negatively affects its reputation, leading to diminished legitimacy. The public expects new ventures to create □obs to reduce unemployment and poverty; that's their criteria for the incubator's impact. Thus, the incubator manager tries to eliminate survivalist and opportunistic entrepreneurs during the early stages. Lack of commitment leads to the termination of the relationship. BlueInc□IM elaborates on this selection process as follows□

"We have put criteria to say we can [only] move you [from pre-incubation] to the next stage if you reach [a certain] level of turnover, we see your commitment, [and] you are fully compliant with all the business regulations" (BlueInc_IM, p. 5).

Furthermore, some incubatees may exit the incubator with considerable deficiencies, leading them to fail soon after leaving. Such failure can damage the incubator's reputation. Hence, the incubator manager reviews the incubation strategy and model, making certain concessions to mitigate potential reputational damage from the selected entrepreneurs. However, such concessions can be costly considering the resource limitations. BlueInc□IM underscores this approach in the following □uote□

"… if we know one has graduated but is struggling and cannot afford some of the things, we keep the same rates for them as for the programme" (BlueInc_IM, p. 7).

5.4.3.3 Misaligned expectations

The public sponsor□s exertion of their authority over the incubator manager often disregards other stakeholders' expectations, causing frustration for the incubator manager. Moreover, particular demands made by the public sponsor, such as inflexible reporting re□uirements, conflict with the incubator□s vital management systems, which are essential for its certification. Disregarding the incubator's established processes and systems can affect the incubator's accreditation, an essential element of legitimation. BlueInc□IM articulates the sentiment of frustration in the following □uotes□

"We end up duplicating work … we still have to be aligned with our [ISO-approved Quality Management System], but at the same time, we must make SEDA happy with their templates. That is where the nightmare comes in …" (BlueInc_IM, p. 16).

The frustrating and constraining demands from the public sponsor's misaligned expectations seem to be exacerbated by the incubator□s dwindling public sponsorship allocation. The prevailing circumstances compel the incubator manager to seek alternative sponsors innovatively. Nevertheless, until ade□uate sponsorship is secured from alternative channels, the incubator manager must comply with the public sponsor's expectations to sustain the incubator.

5.4.4 BlueInc case summary

The incubator manager navigates a myriad of stakeholder expectations. Common themes emerge across stakeholders, such as economic impact, incubator sustainability, effective leadership and the development of sustainable businesses. However, each stakeholder also brings uni□ue expectations. Policymakers and public sponsors prioritise economic transformation, good governance, and lean structures. Private sponsors seek compliance with transformation

regulations. Incubatees expect robust entrepreneurial support, while incubator staff members emphasise adequate staffing and proactive incubator leadership.

The stakeholders' expectations lead to job demands requiring proactive strategies by the incubator manager to meet performance criteria, manage a broad scope of responsibilities, and address challenging relationships. Performance management systems, collaboration with partners, staff empowerment, and innovation promotion enable the incubator manager to manage the demands. However, resource limitations, misaligned expectations and economic transformation requirements emerge as substantial constraints. The manager relies on the selection processes to eliminate opportunistic entrepreneurs and extend support for some incubatees. Despite a challenging relationship with the public sponsor and unrealistic expectations, the incubator manager remains resilient, pursuing autonomy through innovative asset utilisation and private sponsorship. Furthermore, unsustainable relationships are promptly terminated. These strategies suggest a focus on leveraging public sponsorship while pursuing innovative revenue generation to enhance the incubator's sustainability, performance and reputation, which all contribute to the incubator's legitimacy as a contributor to the community's socioeconomic development.

The subsequent section unveils findings from the GreenInc case, the second hybrid-sponsored incubator in this study.

5.5 Three-dimensional framework for GreenInc

GreenInc was established as a private-funded incubator with a mandate to help entrepreneurs build specialised technology businesses. It became a hybrid-sponsored incubator after accepting public sponsorship ten years after its establishment. GreenInc leverages public sponsorship to create a complex organisational structure, including several subsidiaries aimed at raising revenue to fund the incubation programmes. The incubator is managed by GreenInc-IM, who reports to the board of trustees. The incubator manager's other stakeholders include the incubatees, policymakers, private and public sponsors, and staff members. KW-01, interviewed for this study, joined GreenInc through the incubator's entrepreneurs-in-residence program. Other respondents include SR-01, the private sponsor representative, the founder of GreenInc and GVF-01N-01, an entrepreneur in the incubation programme and SR-01-PMR, the public sponsor and policymaker representative.

Like other cases, SR-01-PMR's expectations were presented in sections 5.3.3.3 and 5.3.4.3 and will not be reiterated here. Consequently, the ensuing sections outline the expectations of the remaining stakeholders of GreenInc-IM regarding the role of the incubator manager.

5.5.1 Stakeholders' role expectations of the incubator manager

5.5.1.1 Private sponsor expectations

Growth and sustainability of entrepreneurs' businesses

□nlike the public sponsor, whose primary ob□ective is to promote entrepreneurship and economic growth, the private sponsor prioritises entrepreneurs with potential commercial success to maximise financial returns. Conse□uently, the private sponsor expects the incubator manager to attract and nurture ventures across broader □urisdictions and demographic groups. This approach increases the chance of finding entrepreneurial ideas with high success potential. SR□□ supports this perspective in the following excerpt□

> *"… we want to build [specialised] technology businesses on the African continent that can be sustainable … and scalable onto the international market" (SR04, p. 5).*

The private sponsor□s expectations re□uire a different set of performance metrics than the public sponsor□s. □s a commercially driven investor, the private sponsor expects the incubator manager to deliver businesses primed for investment with market□ready products. Such an approach may only focus on selecting a few entrepreneurs whose entrepreneurial ideas can bring significant investment returns, which is often common in the technology sector. In contrast, the public sponsor focuses on the □uantities of incubated entrepreneurs. SR□□ emphasises investment readiness as a critical performance in the following statement□

> *"… if you are unable to demonstrate that you can consistently achieve the outcomes of the incubator, which is building businesses that are ready to invest in and ready to go to market, then … you are not up for this role" (SR04, p. 10).*

Incubator sustainability

□n incubator, especially a nascent one, re□uires a steady provision of resources to operate effectively and fulfil its performance ob□ectives. Hybrid incubators are better positioned to have a reliable flow of resources as they depend on private and public sponsors, augmenting each other. Therefore, the incubator manager must address the re□uirements of sponsoring stakeholders to ensure continued sponsorship support. However, satisfying the conflicting sponsors□ expectations becomes a substantial constraint for the incubator manager. SR□□ emphasises the importance of meeting all sponsors□ expectations in the following □uote□

> *" If you cannot give your partners, who are essentially your clients … what they're looking for, in terms of reporting, input, feedback and deliverables, then you are not fit for the job ..." (SR04, p. 9).*

Moreover, as the number of organisations purporting to offer incubation services grows in the country, distinguishing the incubator's offerings becomes essential for attracting suitable incubatees. Therefore, proactive efforts are needed to promote the incubator's brand to attract entrepreneurs with viable ideas, positioning the incubator as a catalyst for their successful growth. SR□□ reinforces this re□uirement in the following statement□

> *"You need to be able to attract opportunities …" (SR04, p. 10).*

Committed leadership

Leading an incubator demands individuals of unwavering commitment and genuine enthusiasm for fostering entrepreneurial growth beyond monetary incentives. □ profound understanding of the specific industry, industry□related □ualifications, ability to mentor others, and a robust business management background distinguish prime candidates for the role of incubator manager. Conse□uently, the private sponsor expects the incumbent to exhibit a fervent dedication to entrepreneurship, not □ust employment□seeking behaviour.

> *"… incubation is a little bit like the priesthood; it's a calling, you are not going to make lots of money" (SR04, p. 1).*

Preservation of the incubator mandate

□n incubator's reputation is paramount for its sustainability. □ny deviation from its original mandate can □eopardise its legitimacy among the public, incubatees and potential sponsors. Misalignment between the expectations of the public and private sponsors can dilute the incubator's mandate, leading to an impaired reputation. Conse□uently, the private sponsors, particularly founders, endeavour to preserve the incubator's mandate against the public sponsor's influence. Such a balancing exercise is □uite delicate for the incubator manager, with losing legitimacy seeming detrimental□thus, terminating the relationship with the public sponsor becomes a viable option rather than compromising the mandate. SR□□ underscores this perspective in the following statement□

> *"… we are actively working extremely hard to move away from SEDA; they impact our mandate. We do not want to change our mandate just to make one government agency happy" (SR04, p. 8).*

5.5.1.2 Incubatee expectations

Growth and sustainability

The incubatee aspires to build a venture that will emerge as a recognised brand proficient in delivering technology products. Therefore, the incubatee anticipates an incubator to assist them in realising the envisaged growth □uickly, often disregarding the natural progression of a new

technology venture, which involves some product failures. The following □uote from □N□□ articulates these expectations□

> *"… we want to get this thing made properly on a mass scale so that it's cost-effective to make, making it cost-effective to the end user … we just don't have that kind of funding until we are in the market, and one day, we are big enough ...." (EN04, p. 6).*

Entrepreneurial support

The growth and sustainability of incubated businesses hinge upon the structured entrepreneurial support provided within the incubator. The incubator manager is expected to proactively advocate for and facilitate the provision of re□uisite entrepreneurial support to incubatees. Such support encompasses access to infrastructure, markets, financial backing, training, mentorship, and networking opportunities, elucidated further in the ensuing paragraphs.

□□□**e**□□□**to**□□□**ra**□**tr**□□**t**□**re**□□the incubatee places great importance on access to infrastructure, expecting the incubator manager to foster partnerships with relevant entities possessing critical facilities and resources that incubatees can utilise. Failure to secure access to such essential infrastructure often results in disappointment and frustration for incubatees, as articulated by □N□□□

> *"… that's a reasonable expectation ... that they have relationships with a manufacturing process. … we cannot build a factory…" (EN04, p. 6).*

□□□**e**□□□**to**□□ **arket**□□□in the technology industry, swift market entry is essential for market penetration and dominance. The incubatee recognises the criticality of delivering technological products □uickly to stay ahead of competitors. Conse□uently, the incubator manager is expected to expedite the production process and facilitate rapid market access to realise anticipated financial returns. When hurdles are encountered, the incubatee perceives the incubator manager to have failed to mitigate them proactively or find appropriate solutions. □N□□s frustration exemplifies this expectation□

> *"… we want to enter the market as quickly as possible because people are hungry for the device. … so I'm sitting in a very frustrating part" (EN04, p. 5).*

□□□**e**□□□**to**□□**et**□**ork**□□□the incubatee expects the incubator manager to leverage their connections and relationships to access essential resources and expertise. When this expectation is not met, the incubatee □uestions the relevance and preparedness of the incubator manager to address their needs. □N□□s statement below reinforces this□

“One of the expectations [was] that we are going to a specialised incubator, [and] that those relationships are already set up …" (EN04, p. 4).

Tra□□□□□a□d□□ e□tor□h□□□□ incubatees benefit from holistic training and mentorship that covers technical and business administration aspects. While technical mentorship aids in developing entrepreneurial ideas into marketable products, guidance on business management, including marketing strategies, is essential for fostering business growth. During the interview, □N□□ was concerned about the unavailability of engineering expertise, which they attributed to the delay in product development.

□□a□□**al**□ □□□□**ort**□□ technology development demands significant financial investment, encompassing research, development, prototyping, and testing phases, which are resource□ intensive. However, securing funding for these stages is challenging, particularly in resource□ constrained contexts with limited investor interest. Hence, incubatees expect the incubator to facilitate access to financial support internally or through network partners. □N□□ acknowledges the pivotal role of access to financial support□

"They helped us find seed funding, [and] we were able to smash [many] milestones, develop better prototypes, develop some software …" (EN04, p. 3).

5.5.1.3 Staff expectations

KW□□ was recruited through GreenInc□s entrepreneur□in□residence programme. Like GreenInc□IM and other staff members, KW□□ serves both GreenInc and GVF. The following sections present KW□□□s expectations regarding the incubator manager role.

Incubator funding and sustainability

The incubator must receive ade□uate resources for the staff to sustain employment and realise the intended incubator impact. Thus, the primary expectation of the knowledge worker is the incubator□s sustainability, with the incubator manager expected to spearhead resource mobilisation efforts. KW□□ emphasises this expectation in the following excerpt□

"… fundraising should … be a collaboration, but it would largely come from the people who work with the investors and the CEO..." (KW04, p. 9).

The staff□s concern for the incubator□s sustainability influences their perspective on sponsorship strategies. □cknowledging the pitfalls of relying too heavily on certain sponsors, such as public sponsorship, the staff seems concerned about losing a willing sponsor because of power imbalances and possible mandate dilution, which may affect the incubator□s financial position. Therefore, the incubator manager is expected to actively seek alternative sponsors capable of

offering more significant resources, thereby reducing the public sponsor's dominance instead of terminating the relationship.

> *"… we need SEDA, but we need somebody else so that if SEDA doesn't come to the party, [it's okay], but [if] they come, they do [so] on our terms" (KW04, p. 6).*

Mentorship and capacitation

When the staff initially joins the incubator, they depend on the incubator manager for guidance and mentorship while adapting to the role. Mentorship enhances the staff's confidence, simultaneously allowing both parties to comprehend each other's expectations. Additionally, trust is cultivated between the incubator manager and the staff, fostering a positive working environment. KW□□ exemplifies the mentorship expectation□

> *"… I would always try to do stuff myself before I asked … like a mentoring type of relationship … I would pull them into the meetings if required …" (KW04, p. 5)*

Voice and appreciation

The incubator manager needs to acknowledge the competence and capability of staff once they have settled into their role and have received adequate mentoring. Staff expectations change as they become more experienced and confident in their role□therefore, the expectation shifts towards the need for recognition and appreciation for their expertise and insights. KW□□ exemplifies this evolution in expectations□

> *"… I've managed to develop new [client] relationships … when somebody [suggests] how we can approach [them], I will say, 'well, I have had the conversation, that's not going to work, we need to do it like this ..." (KW04, p. 9).*

Therefore, if the incubator manager fails to value the perspectives of the knowledge worker, this can lead to feelings of disappointment and animosity, ultimately undermining their trust.

Assertive and agile leadership

The role of the incubator manager is multifaceted and needs a diverse range of skills and qualities. Therefore, the staff expects the individual filling this role to be well□trained, open□minded, agile, assertive, proficient in time management, and capable of effectively managing processes. KW□□ underscores some of these attributes in the following quote.

> *"… that role needs somebody who has multiple [skills] that can perform highly [at] different levels … somebody confident, agile …" (KW04, p. 6).*

This section clarified the stakeholders' expectations. Subsequent sections outline the incubator manager's response to the perceived job demands and constraints stemming from these expectations.

5.5.2 Managing perceived job demands

5.5.2.1 Meeting minimum criteria of performance

Annually, the incubator manager finalises a performance contract with the incubator's board of trustees, delineating performance expectations. The key performance indicators encompass most of the performance expectations from the incubator's sponsors and corporate objectives. GreenInc_IM provides insights into some key performance indicators:

> *"… your toughest KPI target is to, jointly, always be working towards … building a bigger and more effective [GreenInc]" (GreenInc_IM, p. 13).*

Achieving the performance targets is beneficial not only to the incubator manager but is imperative to the incubator's gaining and maintaining legitimacy among the stakeholders. Some sponsorship is only accessed upon meeting performance targets, necessitating proper performance demonstration. Therefore, the incubator manager employs various strategies to meet performance expectations, including establishing a robust performance management system to monitor and report on achieved performance relative to targets. GreenInc_IM elaborates on the reporting system:

> *"… we report on those targets quarterly, and the performance on the previous quarter determines whether [we] get full agreed allocation for the coming quarter" (GreenInc_IM, p. 4).*

Moreover, accomplishing performance targets and managing the volume of work associated with regular reporting depends on the capabilities of support staff. Consequently, the manager devises ways to attract and develop highly qualified knowledge workers to provide customised entrepreneurial support to incubatees. GreenInc_IM exemplifies the endeavour to build a competent team:

> *"The recruitment for the entrepreneur-in-residence program gets pitched through … LinkedIn … [then] send to main business schools as well …" (GreenInc_IM, p. 5).*

5.5.2.2 The scope of responsibility the role involves

The role of the incubator manager entails a broad scope that requires proper planning and management. The responsibilities include growing the incubator and coordinating the incubation services. Where incubators are part of complex organisational structures, the scope of the

incubator manager's responsibilities becomes extensive. If the workload is not appropriately managed, it can result in stress and burnout, ultimately affecting the incubator's performance. GreenInc_IM exemplifies the broad scope of the role:

> *"… we swap hats every now and then in terms of who we are working for … on paper, my time is 20% for [GVF] and 80% of the incubator" (GreenInc_IM, p. 4).*

The incubator manager relies on delegating some responsibilities to the support staff to free up time to focus on prioritised tasks. In resource-munificent contexts, the incubator manager's time would be dedicated to improving the incubation management process and assisting entrepreneurs. However, in resource-constrained settings, revenue-generation activities are considered equally important for the manager, although this has the potential to affect the quality of the incubation services. The presence of experienced staff becomes pivotal to balancing the workload.

Attracting more private sponsors and high-potential incubatees necessitates the incubator manager's focus on building and maintaining the incubator's reputation, particularly amidst the proliferation of organisations claiming to be incubators. Therefore, the manager undertakes several initiatives to elevate the profile of the incubator and its affiliated entities, an exercise that further increases the workload. GreenInc_IM affirms the importance attributed to the incubator's reputation:

> *"We are currently doing quite a bit of work on raising the profile of the [Group] to bring in more projects to make it more sustainable ..." (GreenInc_IM, p. 8).*

5.5.2.3 Difficult working relationships

The predominance of the public sponsor engenders a discordant dynamic with other stakeholders, particularly the private sponsor. When the private sponsor also assumes the role of the incubator's founder, their engagement in the incubator's operations intensifies, heightening the probability of conflicts with the public sponsor, who is similarly actively engaged in the incubator's affairs. Consequently, the incubator manager becomes entangled in a deteriorating relationship between the sponsors. The private sponsor expresses dismay over the public sponsor's treatment of incubators and other stakeholders. Furthermore, exacerbating the frustration for the incubator manager and the private sponsor, the public sponsor's inefficiency in disbursing funds to the incubator poses a significant reputational risk.

> *"… government funders are quite vindictive. …, you tell them the truth, they don't like it, and then suddenly you find that your approval processes … take eight months …" (SR04, p. 11).*

Despite the private sponsor's frustration, they cannot cover all the incubator's operational costs, making terminating the relationship with the public sponsor challenging. Thus, the incubator manager chooses to be resilient and innovative in leveraging public sponsorship to find alternative sponsors. GreenInc_IM exemplifies the dilemma.

> *"… they are a necessary evil … we do need them …. to enable the things we do. There [are] very few self-sustainable incubators anywhere in the world that [can] seed-fund at an early stage with high-risk projects" (GreenInc_IM, p. 8).*

5.5.3 Managing perceived job constraints

5.5.3.1 Resource limitations

The effects of resource constraints were evident from the incubator's inception, requiring the founders to bootstrap for funding. Despite efforts, the situation did not improve, leading to the shelving of several strategic plans due to resource limitations. For an ambitious incubator seeking entrepreneurial ideas across a broader jurisdiction, the scarcity of resources hampers the expansion of incubation services to some geographical regions, potentially missing an opportunity to find promising entrepreneurs. GreenInc_IM provides insights into the impact of resource constraints.

> *"… we proposed to SEDA to support our expansion drive and make some additional operational budget, [but that] was not accepted" (GreenInc_IM, p. 12).*

The incubator manager's strategic agency is demonstrated by proactively addressing the impact of resource limitations by pursuing the expansion strategy through a virtual incubation model for entrepreneurs outside the incubator's location. The virtual model became pivotal during the COVID-19 pandemic and was utilised to serve all the incubatees. The virtual incubation model has since been integrated into the overall incubation strategy as explained by GreenInc_IM.

> *"… we are a predominantly virtual incubator serving clients all over the country, but we don't have a physical presence in [province two] …" (GreenInc_IM, p. 12).*

The operating environment's resource constraints often compel the incubator manager to opt for public sponsorship, albeit with acknowledged challenges. While vital for the incubator's survival, reliance on public sponsorship does not mitigate associated difficulties, particularly concerning inefficiencies inherent in public institutions, which can tarnish the incubator's reputation. SR04 illustrates the inconveniences caused by such inefficiencies.

> *"… we've been part of the SEDA program for eight years. … we budget that they're going to pay us between four and six months late every single time" (SR04, p. 8).*

5.5.3.2 Regulatory constraints: economic transformation regulations

The incubator manager faces the complex task of adhering to transformation regulations mandated by the public sponsor, which are conditional for accessing sponsorship. While the manager prefers an objective incubatee selection criteria, the transformation objectives of the public sponsor necessitate the relaxation of certain criteria. This compromise may result in selecting entrepreneurs who do not align with the incubator's usual standards, potentially affecting its performance. GreenInc_IM elucidates this compromise in the following excerpt:

> *"… for the benefit of SEDA, … we would take stuff that we … are not convinced they have commercial potential" (GreenInc_IM, p. 10).*

> *"… at times, we bend our criteria … introducing a level of additional flexibility that you wouldn't otherwise have. That is part of strategically keeping all the stakeholders you need happy, to fulfil your goal" (GreenInc_IM, p. 12).*

The assertion underscores the significant influence wielded by the dominant stakeholder over the incubator manager's decisions. Compliance with the expectations of the public sponsor, acting as the dominant stakeholder, becomes imperative for the incubator's sustenance. However, selection criteria are designed to objectively eliminate entrepreneurial ideas that have a low chance of meeting performance targets, especially commercial performance. When such criteria are relaxed, chances of failure increase, potentially impacting the incubator's reputation.

5.5.3.3 Misaligned expectations

The incubator manager navigates the delicate balance of reconciling divergent expectations from both the public and private sponsors. While the private sponsor is motivated by commercial objectives, the public sponsor prioritises economic transformation and inclusivity. The private sponsor is adamant that the small compromises the incubator manager makes to appease the public sponsor will lead to total erosion of the incubator's mandate. Deviating from the incubator's stated mandate often attracts penalties from the public, with potential loss of legitimacy. The proliferation of several organisations purporting to be business incubators has convoluted the operating environment; thus, true incubators need to distinguish themselves through performance and preserving their original mandate. SR04 illuminates the conflicting expectations between the sponsors:

> *"… the next thing we will be training bricklayers because [we want to] tick boxes and get our funding. … We don't want to change our mandate …" (SR04, p. 8).*

Moreover, the public sponsor is guided by the government interests, which often flow political cycles and are time-dependent. Consequently, the public sponsor anticipates immediate

successes, contrasting with the private sponsor's commitment to supporting incubatees until commercial goals materialise. This expectation misalignment constrains the incubator manager's agency as they attempt to accommodate select requirements from the public sponsor while maintaining a commitment to the core incubator mandate. GreenInc_IM articulates the ensuing conflict:

> *"We work with incubatees for as long as they require our help and are not self-sustainable … we don't graduate companies as SEDA wants us to, and we come under [some] pressure for that …" (GreenInc_IM, p. 8).*

5.5.4 GreenInc case summary

In conclusion, all stakeholders seek the incubator's financial sustainability, growth and sustainability of incubatees' businesses, and effective incubator leadership. Knowledge workers further value the voice and appreciation of the incubator manager. Incubatees desire comprehensive support, including mentorship, access to infrastructure, networks, markets, and financial support. Policymakers and public sponsors prioritise economic transformation, good governance, and lean structures. Conversely, the private sponsor prioritises commercial viability, expecting the manager to nurture businesses until investment-ready and preserving the incubator's reputation.

The manager employs performance management, resourcefulness, innovation, task prioritisation, delegation of responsibilities, risk mitigation, and evolving incubator strategy to meet the job demands emanating from stakeholder expectations. While compliance with the economic transformation expectations enables access to public sponsorship, the incubator manager grapples with navigating the potential threat to the incubator's mandate. Therefore, the strategies adopted aim to preserve the incubator mandate, enhance performance and mobilise adequate private sponsorship before terminating the relationship with the public sponsor.

In the subsequent section, findings from the OrangeInc case, the second public-sponsored incubator in this study, are presented.

5.6 Ora e a e o er e

The mandate of OrangeInc, established with support from SD, is to nurture entrepreneurs within the product manufacturing sector. The incubator has branches across multiple provinces. It has a board of trustees and an executive management team led by a CO. Despite primarily relying on public sponsorship, OrangeInc has initiated revenue-generating projects to supplement public funding. OrangeInc_IM is an incubator manager overseeing two operational centres in province one and reports to the organisation's COO and CO. The incubator manager engages

with several internal and external stakeholders, such as KW□□, one of the staff, who participated in this study alongside □N□□, an incubatee, and SR□□□PMR, a public sponsor and policymaker representative. These stakeholders have expectations of the incubator manager role. SR□□□PMR's expectations, presented in sections □.□.□.□ and □.□.□.□, also apply to OrangeInc, so they will not be reiterated here. The expectations of other stakeholders are discussed in the subse□uent section, followed by how the incubator manager responds to the demands stemming from the expectations.

5.6.1 Stakeholders' role expectations of the incubator manager

5.6.1.1 Incubatee expectations

While the expectations of incubatees vary based on their stage of development, the growth and sustainability of their ventures remain one of the main expectations when they □oin the incubator. Incubatees that have passed the nascent stage expect the incubator manager to facilitate access to more significant business opportunities to accelerate business growth. The views of □N□□ support this expectation□

> *"They give us leads, but I feel like they are not big enough ... for the sustainability of our business" (EN05, p. 5).*

Entrepreneurial support

Despite growth and sustainability being the main expectation of the incubatee, entrepreneurial support is still re□uired to empower the incubatee and create business systems for a growing business. Therefore, the incubatee emphasises the following entrepreneurial support activities.

□□□**e**□□□**to**□□**ro**□**e**□□□**o**□**al**□□**er**□□□**e**□□□□□**d**□□□□**a**□**d**□□ **arket**□□□as the business grows, the incubatee increasingly values proper bookkeeping, financial accounting, accessible business financing, and larger markets. They acknowledge the critical role of the incubator manager□s networks in accessing such services and expect the incubator manager to facilitate access and provide relevant information. The following excerpts from □N□□ provide insights into these expectations□

> *"… we wanted access to the professional services … also just connections on how to get proper funding. … also for leads for our sales" (EN05, p. 4).*

Tra□□□□□**a**□**d**□□ **e**□**tor**□**h**□□□□business incubation encompasses the dual facets of technical and business management development. □pon achieving proficiency in technical aspects, the incubatee's needs shift towards enhancing business development and management capabilities. The incubatee gets frustrated if the incubator manager neglects that aspect of entrepreneurial support. □N□□ illustrates this transition succinctly in the subse□uent statements□

"They teach us how to do the work but not how to run the business" (EN05, p. 5).

Furthermore, the incubatee underscores the significance of pertinent and reputable training administered by competent professionals possessing relevant expertise. This training should be tailored to industry standards and current market trends, as □N□□ stresses□

"[We] felt they're not teaching them stuff relevant to the market" (EN05, p. 6).

□□□**e**□□□**to**□□□**ra**□**tr**□□**t**□**re**□□new ventures often face challenges in securing sufficient capital to procure essential infrastructure, including machinery, e□uipment, office space, and associated facilities crucial for operational success. Moreover, the prohibitive infrastructure rental or hiring costs compound these financial constraints for incubatees. Conse□uently, many turn to business incubators in pursuit of access to such indispensable resources. □s □N□□ highlighted during the interview, the incubator's offices further provide a professional image to the incubatee's business, especially when meeting with business clients.

□**e**□□**oke**□□□□□**ort**□□generic entrepreneurial support often proves ineffective due to the uni□ue nature of each business, each at varying stages of development and encountering distinct challenges. Therefore, the incubatee expects the incubator manager's ability to discern these individual stages and provide customised support accordingly. □N□□ reinforces this view in the following statement□

"… the manager should be able to tailor some of the services to the business instead of generalising everything for everyone…" (EN05, p. 9).

Proactive leadership

The incubator manager promotes innovation and collaboration, encouraging incubatees to work alongside the incubator□s team to co□create solutions to their challenges. However, the incubatee perceives this process as cumbersome, preferring the incubator manager to proactively devise solutions to address their needs, suggesting a misalignment of expectations. In addition, the incubatee appreciates characteristics such as open□mindedness, cordiality, and the incubator manager□s ability to motivate and hold them accountable. □N□□ underscores these expectations in the following excerpt□

"I needed the manager to put some ideas up to her team … [but] most of the things they want [us] to do on our own, and then present [a] proposal to them" (EN05, p. 8).

5.6.1.2 Staff expectations

KW□□ is the longest□serving staff member working with OrangeInc□IM, with expertise and experience in □product□manufacturing. Below are the primary expectations articulated by KW□□ regarding the role of the incubator manager.

Incubator growth and sustainability

The sustainability of the incubator is essential for ensuring ongoing benefits for all stakeholders, including continued employment for the staff. Conse□uently, the staff expects the incubator manager to prioritise the growth of the incubator by attracting new incubatees. The following excerpt from KW□□ underscores this expectation□

> *"… we expect the Centre [manager] to bring more clients into our organisation ... be able … to bring new business for the [incubatees] …" (KW05, p. 4).*

Continuous improvement

Preserving the reputation of the incubator is paramount in attracting new incubatees and potential sponsors and retaining existing ones, all crucial for ensuring the incubator□s sustainability. The primary way of preserving the incubator□s reputation is continually enhancing the incubator□s operational efficiency to meet the set ob□ectives. KW□□ supports this perspective in the following statement□

> *"… continuous improvement is one thing that is required from the Centre Manager, … and ensuring that the owner's requirements are met" (KW05, p. 4).*

Appreciation, voice, and trust

The senior staff serve as specialists tasked with aiding the incubator manager in guiding incubatees through developing their entrepreneurial concepts. While their expertise may not encompass the broader spectrum of business administration responsibilities overseen by the incubator manager, they possess deep knowledge within their respective domains. Conse□uently, the staff anticipate that the incubator manager will place trust in their expertise and acknowledge their pivotal role and contributions to the incubator□s operations. KW□□ articulates these expectations in the following excerpt□

> *"… my input is [significant], and when used, I am happy because I'm thinking a lot about [the] input I'm giving" (KW05, p. 6).*

Effective leadership

□ffective leadership is pivotal in engaging internal and external stakeholders to achieve the incubator's objectives. Therefore, an ideal leader□manager should possess relevant □ualifications,

sector□specific knowledge, strong communication skills, and a commitment to integrity. □dditionally, they should demonstrate respect, consideration, and cordiality in their interactions with staff and stakeholders. Such a leader□manager balances stakeholder expectations while steering the incubator toward optimal performance. KW□□ exemplifies these expectations in the following excerpts□

> *"… a manager is there to manage the [incubatees] and the employees that work here; manage them with proper conduct, … with respect and be able to assess the staff … pass information from the staff to higher management" (KW05, p. 4).*

This section outlined the stakeholders□expectations□the following section will outline the strategies employed by the incubator manager to address the perceived □ob demands stemming from these expectations.

5.6.2 Managing perceived job demands

5.6.2.1 Meeting minimum criteria of performance

The incubator manager□s performance is governed by a contract concluded with the C□O, with critical indicators often derived from the incubator's performance agreement with sponsors. Conse□uently, the incubator manager aims to meet the minimum performance criteria indicated in the contract, which has a bearing on the incubator's continued sponsorship receipt. OrangeInc□IM elucidates these expectations in the following excerpts□

> *"… the number of SMMEs you support, the number of SMMEs that are established, the jobs they create, the turnover they generate. Those are some examples of some of the targets" (OrangeInc_IM, p. 20).*

Therefore, the incubator manager implements a performance management system to monitor and evaluate entrepreneurial support and the development of incubatees regularly. Moreover, collaborating with partners possessing essential resources and expertise enhances the incubator□s capabilities to support incubatees. The ensuing statements from OrangeInc□IM exemplify these approaches□

> *"We monitor them monthly. When we reach the end of three months, if something hasn't been achieved for a valid reason, we could extend …" (OrangeInc_IM, p. 8).*

> *"… [GreyInc] [is] an ICT incubator … they are bringing the 4IR technology. That relationship … benefits our SMMEs and their SMMEs …" (OrangeInc_IM, p. 12).*

Furthermore, by tailoring entrepreneurial support to the individual stages of development and the distinct requirements of each incubatee, the manager proactively addresses incubatees' needs for customised intervention. OrangeInc□IM reinforces this approach□

> *"[the support] is very individualised because no two businesses are the same" (OrangeInc_IM, p. 20).*

Moreover, promoting creativity within the incubator drives innovation, fosters new venture growth, and helps meet performance targets. Therefore, the incubator manager integrates contemporary tools and techni□ues to empower staff and incubatees to develop market□aligned products. Such innovations help keep the incubator ahead of or at par with competitors. OrangeInc□IM reinforces the importance of fostering creativity□

> *"… we brought in design, [enabling] us to work with different SMMEs ... we need to innovate to stay relevant and … compete in the incubation space" (OrangeInc_IM, p. 4).*

5.6.2.2 The scope of responsibility the role involves

The role of the incubator manager encompasses a wide array of responsibilities, necessitating a delicate balance to mitigate failure and burnout. Conse□uently, the manager prioritises tasks based on complexity, delegating others to the staff. Nevertheless, the incubator manager remains accountable for the tasks delegated to the staff□thus, building the capacity of the staff plays a pivotal role in mitigating managerial overload. OrangeInc□IM affirms the extensive scope of this role in the following □uote□

> *"… the job of the Centre Manager is very demanding and stressful; you carry a lot of load … based on everything you are responsible for" (OrangeInc_IM, p. 16).*

Growing and sustaining the incubator□s operations places a high level of accountability on the incubator manager. The manager must proactively build relationships, mobilise resources, maintain the incubator□s reputation, and attract entrepreneurs, all contributing to incubator sustainability. Moreover, the manager oversees the expansion efforts as operations expand within a region, adding to their responsibilities and the role strain. OrangeInc□IM exemplifies this experience□

> *"… I carry two centres at the moment. ... In addition to that, I have some national portfolios that I'm responsible for" (OrangeInc_IM, p. 17).*

Therefore, situational awareness and self□discipline are crucial to preserving a healthy work□life balance. However, a lean support staff often forces the incubator manager to overwork.

5.6.3 Managing perceived job constraints

5.6.3.1 Resource limitations

In resource-constrained contexts, incubator managers face significant constraints, mainly due to limited resources and reliance on public funding. These limitations impede their capacity to fulfil both their operational plans and the requirements of their incubatees. The incubator manager's ability to provide adequate infrastructure, such as modern technology, machinery, equipment, and appropriate office space, is constrained. External shocks that shift the sponsor's financial priorities exacerbate the situation. OrangeInc-IM illustrates this predicament with the following example:

> *"…the landscape has changed in the country in terms of lack of funding … over the past two to three years, from COVID, flooding, and looting - government's priority has shifted a little bit…" (OrangeInc_IM, p. 4).*

Considering the resource limitations, the incubator manager recommends adapting the incubation model by introducing paid services for incubatees, thereby generating additional revenue to offset operational costs. Furthermore, the manager capitalises on existing networks and relationships to mobilise resources and facilitate access to support platforms for incubatees. The following statements by OrangeInc-IM lend credence to these strategies:

> *"… we've made a change; we have moved to a little bit more, not 100% market-related fees, but to a pay-per-use model" (OrangeInc_IM, p. 4).*

> *"… after COVID, … we started a campaign and got [local municipality] to agree to do marketing videos for the [incubatees'] businesses [which] they could then showcase" (OrangeInc_IM, p. 23).*

Nevertheless, some interventions inadvertently impose adverse effects on the incubatees, thereby impacting the overall objectives of both the incubatees and the incubator. Increasing the incubation fees makes the services unaffordable to some incubatees, and attracting new incubatees could become problematic. Striking a delicate balance between the incubator's financial sustainability and incubatees' needs presents a challenge for the manager, particularly amidst mounting competition from other incubators and service providers. The following statement by OrangeInc-IM's underscores the perpetual nature of this dilemma:

> *"… this has had an impact on the number of clients we have, [those] who remained in the system and how we attract people, how we compete …" (OrangeInc_IM, p. 4).*

5.6.3.2 Misaligned expectations

The prevailing operating environment fosters an entitlement mentality among some entrepreneurs, who often anticipate receiving free services and having everything done for them. Conse□uently, the incubator manager contends with incubatees whose expectations diverge from the incubator□s strategy and model. This misalignment introduces constraints since such incubatees may withdraw from the programme voluntarily or face expulsion due to underperformance or non□compliance with incubation agreements. However, reduced cohort si□e hurts the sponsorship allocation from the public sponsor, challenging the incubator manager□s strategic agency. OrangeInc□IM provides an illustrative example of these misaligned expectations in the following □uote□

> *"… SMMEs expect funding when they come here [and] a sense that they won't have to pay for anything. … some [expect] that we will provide work, [while others] think that the incubator might actually run their businesses ... (OrangeInc_IM, p. 9).*

However, some incubatees hold legitimate expectations for essential infrastructure and expertise within the incubator to fulfil their needs. Such expectations often go unmet due to resource constraints. Hence, the manager adopts a proactive approach to find innovative solutions to partially meet the expectations of the incubatees that cannot be fully met due to resource constraints. OrangeInc□IM provides insight into this compromise□

> *"… our big suppliers will be the machine [and] technology suppliers, and some of the roles they play [entail] collaborating with [us] on technology demonstrations and even [showcasing] new products on the market" (OrangeInc_IM, p. 11).*

5.6.3.3 Regulatory compliance: economic transformation regulations

The incubator□s reliance on public sponsorship necessitates compliance with economic transformation regulations. □ constraint faced by the incubator manager is the limitation on the demographic groups from which incubatees can be selected. Moreover, fulfilling specific re□uirements proves challenging due to the nature of the incubation environment. □n industrial manufacturing environment poses a health and safety risk to those working there, but for some targeted population groups, such as people with disabilities, the risk is higher. Despite this, the public sponsor does not consider mitigating circumstances when evaluating the incubator□s performance. The following excerpt from OrangeInc□IM underscores the constraints in meeting some performance targets□

> *"… part of our funding comes from the government; the strictest requirement is that [the incubatees] have to be African citizens. … There is a focus on differently abled individuals;*

unfortunately, sometimes, just based on the space that we work in, it is challenging to try to fit these individuals into the incubator.… sometimes it's quite dangerous to work on those machines, even as a non-disabled person" (OrangeInc_IM, p. 5).

Since the public sponsor may withdraw sponsorship if their requirements are not fulfilled, and given the incubator's substantial reliance on public funding, the cessation of sponsorship threatens the incubator's financial viability. Consequently, the incubator manager endeavours to adhere to the expectations despite the constraints.

5.6.3.4 Lack of authority in the role

In large incubators with extended organisation structures, the significant responsibility borne by the incubator manager is not commensurate with the authority given to the role within such structures. The role has limited authority over certain decisions. This restricted role authority imposes constraints on the manager, including the rejection of proposals to enhance incubator operations and delays in executing actions. Given the incubator manager's lack of authority to modify the organisational structure, these constraints can significantly impact the manager's morale and motivation, potentially leading to a decline in role performance. OrangeInc_IM's statement provides insight into the impact of these constraints.

"… because of how our organisation is structured, in terms of some of the authority levels, it does impact how you do your job, or how quickly you can do it" (OrangeInc_IM, p. 22).

Moreover, preserving an agile, performance-focused culture presents challenges as incubators expand and develop larger organisational structures. The incubator manager observes lapses in performance from other organisational members without any consequence management from the executives. This non-performance overloads the incubator manager, exacerbating the constraints inherent in the role. The absence of consequences for underperforming members demoralises others and has the potential to impede organisational performance, ultimately tarnishing the incubator's reputation. OrangeInc_IM's statements shed light on the potential constraints stemming from the organisational culture of large incubators.

"That also contributes to how you feel within the organisation… many of us are pulling our weight … [but] other individuals [don't care] …" (OrangeInc_IM, p. 17).

5.6.3.5 Difficult relationships

The incubator manager is strained by the exercise of power by the public sponsor, thereby complicating the working relationship. While the public sponsor, as the primary funder, demands compliance with their expectations, the manager is frustrated by the sponsor's disregard for other

stakeholders, particularly the incubatees, whom the manager regards as the most significant stakeholders in the incubator's ecosystem. This disregard disrupts planned work, leading to organising constraints and disadvantaging incubatees. Nonetheless, understanding the public sponsor's vital role in sustaining the incubator, the manager prioritises their demands despite the objectionable behaviour. OrangeInc_IM provides insight into the extent of this inconsideration.

> *"… [when SEDA] … urgently need [some] information from the incubator; everything has to be dropped so that we can focus on [their needs]. That has an impact on some of your other activities .... [that's] a potential constraint" (OrangeInc_IM, p. 22).*

5.6.4 OrangeInc case summary

OrangeInc's stakeholders share some common expectations while considering specific factors relevant to their respective groups. Their collective expectations centre around fostering sustainable businesses and achieving economic impact through a sustainable incubator under a proactive leader. Incubatees seek access to business funding, mentorship, and market opportunities. Simultaneously, incubator staff prioritise incubator sustainability, operational improvement, personal recognition, and a conducive work environment. Policymakers and the public sponsor emphasise inclusive economic transformation, ethical leadership, good governance, and streamlined organisational structures.

To meet the objective demands of these expectations, the incubator manager implements various strategies such as performance management systems, tailored incubator support, and fostering innovation to achieve performance targets. Additionally, the incubator manager delegates tasks to staff to empower them and ensure compliance with sponsor requirements to guarantee continued sponsorship. However, the incubator manager grapples with balancing incubator sustainability and achieving the intended impact, both of which are critical. Moreover, some economic transformation requirements constrain some of the performance targets. Furthermore, a large organisational structure diminishes the incubator manager's role authority, substantially constraining the manager's ability to execute the role effectively.

In the subsequent section, we delve into findings from RedInc, the second private-sponsored incubator in our study.

5.7 RedInc case overview

RedInc was established as a private-funded corporate incubator for Sponsor[redacted], with SR[redacted], an executive at Sponsor[redacted], spearheading the venture. Its core mandate is to align major corporations' enterprise and supplier development obligations in the sector with promoting sustainable businesses owned by historically disadvantaged individuals, following economic

transformation regulations. Over time, RedInc expanded the mandate to offer its services to other big businesses within the sector seeking to comply with the economic transformation legislation. Moreover, RedInc strategically partnered with some public entities as sponsors. The expanded mandate and access to public sponsorship necessitated a change in legal status to an independent NPO.

RedInc is headed by a C□O, who reports to a board of trustees, with a COO managing the incubator operations. The COO role occupied by RedInc□IM is the focus of this study. The role interacts with many stakeholders, including policymakers, sponsors, incubatees, and internal staff, who hold several expectations of the role. □mong the stakeholders are KW□□, a staff member□ □N□□, a recent graduate incubatee□SR□□, a private sponsor representative□and SR□□□PMR, the public sponsor and policymaker representative. SR02_PMR's expectations, discussed in sections □.□.□.□ and □.□.□.□, also apply in this case and will not be reproduced in this section. Therefore, the following section presents the expectations of the rest of RedInc□IM's stakeholders interviewed for this study.

5.7.1 Stakeholders' role expectations of the incubator manager

5.7.1.1 Policymaker expectations

The expectations of the policymaker and public sponsor presented under sections □.□.□.□ and □.□.□.□ also apply to RedInc. However, the contribution of the public sponsor to the incubator's funding is minimal compared to the private sponsorship, which significantly reduces the public sponsor's influence on the incubator. Therefore, the incubator manager has the autonomy to decide whether or not to access public sponsorship, a view supported by RedInc_IM's statement:

> *"A very small component of our funding is public sector. It was a strategic decision for us rather than wanting to access public funding deliberately" (RedInc_IM, p. 5).*

5.7.1.2 Private sponsor expectations

RedInc is predominantly privately funded, with □□□ of the sponsorship from large corporations in the □sector□ SR□□, a representative from □sponsor□□□, one of the private sponsors, articulates the following salient expectations regarding the role of the incubator manager.

Regulatory compliance: economic transformation regulations

RedInc has positioned itself as an incubator helping big corporations within the □sector□meet their economic transformation regulations and continue doing business with the government. Therefore, this becomes the private sponsor's primary expectation for supporting the incubator. Since enterprise and supplier development are not part of the private corporations□ core

businesses, they rely on the expertise of the incubator, which is competent in implementing incubation programmes. The following excerpt from SR□□ provides insight into this expectation□

> *"… the main expectations [were] multiple, … ensure that it aligns to the compliance needs from a BEE perspective" (SR06, p. 3).*

However, as industry re□uirements evolve, private sponsors view the incubator as a provider of solutions to most compliance matters□thus, they expect the incubator manager to help them comply with related global performance re□uirements. This expectation can extend the incubator□s mandate and may call for different skills to what exists in the incubator, pressing a challenge to the incubator manager. SR□□ exemplifies this expectation in the following statement□

> *"We wanted [RedInc] to ensure that they also focus on ESG alignment for businesses in the program" (SR06, p. 4).*

Corporate reputation preservation

Maintaining a good reputation with the public and the government is vital for big corporations, as it helps to enhance their legitimacy. Therefore, the private sponsor expects the partnership with the incubator to assist in posturing them as a responsible corporate citi□en, addressing economic and social challenges in the country. SR06's statement supports this expectation:

> *"… creating a good reputation for their business as a good corporate citizen, focusing on economic inclusion and job creation as key drivers" (SR06, p. 8).*

Growth and sustainability of entrepreneurs' businesses

Supplier and enterprise development programmes aim to develop sustainable businesses within specific demographic segments. These nascent ventures are envisaged to evolve into potential suppliers for private corporations. The □uality of services or products delivered by these emerging enterprises significantly impacts the overall offerings provided by the corporations. Therefore, beyond regulatory compliance, the private sponsor expects the incubator manager to nurture entrepreneurs capable of maintaining long□term relationships as reliable suppliers. SR□□ articulates this expectation in the following excerpt□

> *"… the main expectations [were] … supporting small businesses. ... that it [will] have a positive impact, not just on the organisation in terms of its supply chain, but to the needs [of] the South African economy …" (SR06, p. 3).*

Incubator growth and mandate expansion

Private corporations in the □sector□ encounter community□related challenges during pro□ect implementation. Consequently, the private sponsor anticipates the incubator's sustainability and

an expanded role in assisting corporations with social challenges, an expectation that may obscure the incubator's original mandate. SR06 succinctly expresses this expectation:

> *"… we were able to engage [RedInc] to start … expanding the mandate to also focus on … local economic development support" (RedInc_SR06, p. 3).*

Effective leadership

The private sponsor perceives an experienced business leader as an indispensable characteristic of an efficacious incubator manager. The sponsor emphasises personal attributes such as robust business acumen, adept people management skills, and effective programme management capabilities. Such a leader is envisaged to ensure the delivery of tangible impacts to the stakeholders, enhancing the incubator's reputation and safeguarding the financial sustainability of the incubator. SR□□ underscores the importance of these attributes in the following statement□

> *"… have a track record in client engagement, program execution, people management, financial acumen" (SR06, p. 5).*

5.7.1.3 Incubatee expectations

□t the time of the interview for this study, □N□□ had □ust graduated from the incubator, having □oined the incubator □ust before the COVID□□□ pandemic. □N□□s business provides professional services to the □sector□, and the expectations for □oining the incubation programme are delineated in this section.

Business growth and sustainability

While some entrepreneurs may opt to maintain the scale of their ventures at a level conducive to sustaining the proprietor□s livelihood, others aspire for business growth. Conse□uently, such an entrepreneur actively seeks avenues to foster such growth. □oining an incubator represents a strategic option for realising this ob□ective. □N□□ exemplifies such an aspiration□

> *"I thought they would help us grow the business through work opportunities …; that was my main expectation" (EN06, p. 2).*

Access to work opportunities

In some sectors, the incubator□s sponsors serve as stewards of various business opportunities that incubatees aspire to access to realise their growth ob□ectives. Often, these opportunities are accessible to businesses that already have relationships with the sponsors. □ccordingly, by □oining the incubation programme, the incubatee expects commitment from the incubator manager and the sponsor to facilitate business opportunities. The inability to access the opportunities undermines the primary expectation of achieving business growth and sustainability and risks the

discrediting of the incubator□s value by the incubatee. □ balance between entrepreneurial support geared towards enhancing business management capabilities and facilitating access to relevant business opportunities is ideal for the incubatee. □N□□ reinforces this perspective in the following statement□

> *"… I got a lot in terms of mentorship, support, and softer things about the business … but it wasn't going to contribute to sustainability immediately" (EN06, p. 6)*

Having voice

Within typical incubation programmes, incubatees commonly confront challenges and experience some dissatisfaction with the services offered by the incubator. □dditionally, they may have suggestions to improve specific processes or offerings to enhance their business growth. Hence, the incubatee anticipates a receptive environment where they can voice their concerns, with suggestions being ob□ectively evaluated concerning the entrepreneurial support dispensed. □N□□ underscores the significance of this expectation□

> *"… being able to express yourself, that made a big difference… I was able to share the things that work, things that don't work for me, what is frustrating" (EN06, p. 7).*

Responsive leadership

□ffective leadership is pivotal in facilitating decisions that are beneficial to the incubatees. □n incubator manager with prior experience as an entrepreneur or in managing startup ventures embodies leadership □ualities that incubatees value. Such a leader leverages effective communication and is supportive and responsive in facilitating relevant entrepreneurial support. □N□□ succinctly captures this leadership expectation in the following statement□

> *"… hands-on experience definitely expands your understanding. It would be easier to mentor someone if you have been in that position yourself" (EN06, p. 10).*

5.7.1.4 Staff expectations

KW□□ fulfils a pivotal role as an aide to the incubator manager, tasked with coordinating the efforts of multiple RedInc staff members to support the incubatees. This section will elucidate the expectations articulated by KW□□.

Incubator growth and sustainability

The incubator□s growth and sustainability give the staff tenure security to continue providing their service while positioning the incubator as a reputable leader in business incubation. Therefore, the staff expects the incubator manager to be sei□ed with securing sponsorship and providing

efficient management of the resources to foster the growth and sustainability of the incubator. KW□□ reinforces these expectations in the following statement□

> *"… securing finance. ... How do you take a market position, [to say], I have 10% market share, how do I grow to 15%?" (KW06, p. 11).*

Incubatees' business growth and sustainability

The efficacy of the incubator□s efforts is manifested in the calibre of businesses emerging from the incubation process. □ successful incubation programme produces businesses that demonstrate sustained growth, demonstrated through customary metrics used to gauge the performance of incubated enterprises. The staff anticipates the positive impact facilitated by the incubator to validate the incubator mandate and set it apart from other competing organisations. KW□□ underscores this expectation in the ensuing excerpt□

> *"The impact metric - so your revenue growth of businesses on your programme, jobs sustained in the current market, new jobs created …" (KW06, p. 11).*

Adequate staffing

□nsuring entrepreneurial support for incubatees re□uires ade□uate resources, including skilled human capital. The incubator manager delegates responsibilities to the incubator staff, who assume various roles aligned with the organisational structure. Challenges such as excessive workloads, understaffing, and competency gaps can significantly impact incubator performance, impairing reputation. Therefore, the staff expects the incubator manager to proactively recruit and maintain a competent workforce to deliver entrepreneurial support to incubatees effectively. KW□□ stresses this expectation in the following excerpt□

> *"… I want this person to come work in my department. … I will tell the COO … he must make it happen. … there's a functional gap in my department" (KW06, p. 12).*

Mentorship and capacitation

Skills gaps among staff members can impede the incubator□s effectiveness, potentially tarnishing its reputation due to consistent underperformance. □s a result, the staff looks to the incubator manager to play a central role in fostering staff mentorship and capacity building. This proactive strategy seeks to bolster the delivery of efficient and practical support to incubatees. KW□□ reiterates this expectation in the subse□uent excerpt.

> *"… the centre manager [must] look [at the organisation] from outside and be able to pick up certain notes, behavioural elements, leadership challenges, staff performance, and then capacitate people according to who steps up" (KW06, p. 5).*

However, the staff acknowledges that effective mentorship only happens when there is trust in the mentor□mentee relationship between the staff and the incubator manager. Thus, the staff expects the incubator manager to foster a trust□based relationship rooted in transparent communication. Furthermore, trust cultivates strategic alignment across various organisational tiers, facilitating cohesive progress. However, as KW□□ acknowledges, "That level of trust only happens over time, □and□is a two□way street" □KW□□, p. □□.

Voice and appreciation

Occasionally, incubator managers enlist external strategic partners to aid staff development, although capable and proficient staff members who can transfer their expertise to others may exist within the incubator team. This situation could undermine the competent staff□s confidence and appreciation. The staff anticipates that the incubator manager will recognise and value their competence, appreciating their organisational contributions, including providing opportunities for these skilled individuals to upskill their peers. KW□□ reinforces this expectation in the following excerpt□

> *"There are fancy development plans, people going on expensive programmes, but … I'm there right now; I have all the ability and information …" (KW06, p. 5).*

Incubator mandate preservation

The incubator manager often encounters stakeholders with divergent expectations. Nevertheless, upholding the incubator's mission is critical for safeguarding its reputation. Therefore, the incubator manager must proactively defend the incubator's mandate, especially against potential external influence from public sponsors and government stakeholders. However, this stance is only possible if the incubator has gained the support of most stakeholders or those controlling significant resources through unchallenged performance. The following excerpt from KW□□ underscores this expectation□

> *"Our centre manager can go back to the government stakeholder and say, 'We are not going to do this, we don't want to do that; because we know from an impact perspective, our data pushes you up to satisfactory'. Centre managers can leverage that effectively. That's critical in their role …" (KW06, p. 15).*

Agile leadership

The staff regards an agile leader as crucial in establishing a proactive, responsive, and impactful incubator. Such a leader must also be visionary, demonstrate foresight regarding market trends, and deeply understand business processes. □dditionally, the leader should be a shrewd negotiator, inspiring and motivating the staff to perform at their optimum level while aligning with

the organisational vision. Such a leader should have a high emotional intelligence to manage different stakeholders successfully. KW□□ provides insight into these expectations□

> *"… being able to map out the entire business process, align the organisation to strategy … able to create human-centred approach … able to round the tribe around you to bring their best … a strong level of agility at the 10th hour …" (KW06, p. 4).*

While this section has focused on stakeholders□ expectations, subse□uent sections delve into how the incubator manager responds to the demands and constraints arising from these expectations.

5.7.2 Managing perceived job demands

5.7.2.1 Meeting minimum criteria of performance

The incubator manager□s role is performance□driven, with most performance indicators emanating from the stakeholders□ expectations. Therefore, the incubator manager and the C□O agree on an annual performance contract outlining the key performance indicators for the manager. Conse□uently, the incubator manager operates within the framework of these performance targets, adopting multiple strategies to attain and demonstrate performance. First, the incubator manager relies on a performance management and impact measurement system to monitor the effectiveness of the incubation programme. The results inform reviews and enhancements of the incubation strategy and model. RedInc□IM underscores the significance of this performance management system in the following □uote□

> *"We have our own impact measurement and management framework and methodology [to] measure that level of improvement" (RedInc_IM, p. 13).*

The satisfaction of existing private sponsors with the incubator's performance attracts more sponsors to □oin and collaborate with the incubator to achieve broader incubator ob□ectives. Such a tripartite relationship of incubator performance, reputation enhancement, and sponsorship attraction is vital for the incubator's legitimacy and sustainability. RedInc_IM's insights further underscore the importance of visible incubator performance□

> *"… the partners see the benefit of using [RedInc] …. We are one of those incubators who are quite fortunate [to] we have a stable pool of funders committed to a longer-term journey" (RedInc_IM, p. 5).*

Second, the incubator manager strategically collaborates with public sponsors to attract additional private sponsors seeking to establish government connections. □nsuring incubator sustainability is a key performance indicator for the incubator manager. Therefore, strategic collaboration with

the public sponsor draws substantial sponsorship from private corporations. RedInc□IM underscores the importance of this strategic collaboration□

> *"Public sector funding is not a driver for us. We see it more strategically to leverage and get other partners on … [RedInc] becomes that platform where they can have an association with the likes of government" (RedInc_IM, p. 5).*

Third, the incubator manager employs proactive resourcefulness, innovation, and a commitment to continuous learning to cultivate an environment conducive to ongoing improvement within the incubator. These factors collectively contribute to enhanced performance, setting the incubator apart as an exemplar in the sector. RedInc□IM exemplifies this focus on incubator continuous improvement□

> *"… when we get insights from the partners, we reflect on how [that] enhances what we are doing …" (RedInc_IM, p. 10).*

Fourth, the incubator manager strategically leverages knowledge of the sponsors' processes to tailor bespoke entrepreneurial support programmes that cater to the specific expectations of each sponsor rather than adopting a generic approach. This customised approach aims to increase the chances of meeting the stakeholders□expectations and uphold the incubator□s reputation. RedInc□IM provides insights into this approach□

> *"If our focus is supplier development, then it's looking at the supply chain of the partners that we are working with and identifying businesses with potential … [for] the size of partners we deal with…" (RedInc_IM, p. 4).*

Finally, effectively navigating the evolving market conditions within the sector drives the incubator manager to be pragmatic. The dynamic changes significantly influence stakeholder expectations, necessitating an adaptive approach from the incubator. Therefore, the incubator's offerings must align with these shifting expectations to keep the stakeholders satisfied with the incubator's services. RedInc□IM exemplifies this proactiveness□

> *"… [what] we were able to do for one of the partners is to put together a policy to drive a proactive and a more structured engagement … [the] policy … is [now] part of the way they do their business and [not] an exception" (RedInc_IM, p. 12).*

5.7.2.2 The scope of responsibility the role involves

The role of the incubator manager encompasses a broad scope, divided between corporate responsibilities and incubation obligations. Growing the incubator by engaging with potential sponsors, managing policymakers, attending to staff matters, and corporate reporting form part of

the corporate responsibilities, while incubatee recruitment and selection, regular engagements with incubatees, and incubation performance reporting form part of the incubation management responsibilities. To effectively manage this multifaceted role, the incubator manager strategically delegates specific responsibilities to the staff. This delegation frees the incubator manager's time while empowering and capacitating the staff. RedInc_IM provides valuable insights into the various levels of delegation within the incubator.

> *"[the] programme manager is the first point of call. The second is the head of programme management, who oversees those cohorts. There can be an escalation to him, failing which then it would come to me" (RedInc_IM, p. 10)*

Consequently, the incubator manager strives to recruit highly competent staff to ensure effective delegation of responsibilities, thereby meeting the expectations of the incubatees. However, incubator managers often struggle to find candidates with relevant experience working with startup businesses. Hence, they must spend time mentoring the hired personnel until they have gained the relevant skills, which takes part of the incubator manager's constrained time.

5.7.3 Managing perceived job constraints

5.7.3.1 Resource limitations

The resource-constrained operating context is the primary constraint that the incubator manager faces. Specifically, this context is susceptible to opportunistic entrepreneurs who initially feign commitment to the incubation programme, only to reveal their true intentions later. These entrepreneurs present a dilemma to the incubator manager, who must choose to continue with such uncommitted entrepreneurs on the programme, with the potential of unsatisfactory performance results, or terminate the relationships with them, affecting the programme goals. RedInc_IM articulates this constraint in the following excerpt:

> *"Unfortunately, when people [enter] the process, they've also learned how to cheat the system. … but [in] three to six months … the real intent [emerges]. For that reason … we've got about a 75% success rate … " (RedInc_IM, p. 9).*

The statistics shared in RedInc_IM's preceding statement underscore that the risk posed by opportunistic entrepreneurs can only be partially mitigated through the selection process. Accordingly, the incubator manager often struggles with opportunistic entrepreneurs who successfully evade the selection criteria.

5.7.3.2 Misaligned expectations

It is common for stakeholders to hold expectations that misalign with the incubator's mandate. Some of these misaligned expectations present opportunities for the incubator manager to be innovative and find solutions for the stakeholders, while others pose constraints that risk damaging the incubator's reputation. The incubator manager has to delicately balance meeting stakeholders' expectations and protecting the incubator's reputation, a demand that can introduce uncertainty. RedInc□IM exemplifies the innovative approach in responding to misaligned sponsor expectations□

> *"… we have mitigated that through another social enterprise, we have called [social entity], which is meant to be more industry agnostic. We take the learnings out of [RedInc] as the offerings into other industries" (RedInc_IM, p. 12).*

However, certain misaligned expectations, especially those from incubatees, may remain unaddressed, resulting in frustration and disappointment among incubatees despite the incubator manager□s concerted efforts to communicate the programme ob□ectives to the incubatees upon their entry into the incubation programme. Conse□uently, if the relationship becomes untenable, the incubator manager terminates the relationship with the incubatee. Such a decision aims to preserve the incubator's mandate and mitigate potential poor performance, which would damage the reputation. RedInc□IM highlights the conse□uences of misaligned expectations in the following excerpt□

> *"… the business may want to be on this programme to get access to a partner and don't need [our] support … [they] just need to get a physical opportunity. … that kind of behaviour results in them contravening some of the elements of the SLA and then we would exit them" (RedInc_IM06, 8).*

Similarly, sponsors□expectations regarding economic transformation regulatory compliance can constrain the incubator manager, especially involving private corporations with a narrow compliance focus. These corporations often prioritise short□term goals, neglecting the long□term sustainability of the incubated businesses. This narrow focus undermines the other stakeholders□ intended expectations, i.e., the development of sustainable ventures from targeted demographic groups. RedInc□IM highlights this constraint in the following □uote.

> *"… it [demands] a particular type of behaviour to be able to redress some of those challenges [of] the past, but [how] you implement it sometimes doesn't become sustainable" (RedInc_IM, p. 6)*

Notwithstanding this, the incubator manager skilfully employs innovative strategies to sway private sponsors toward a favourable perspective on economic transformation. The manager cleverly shapes the narrative by encouraging sponsors to transcend mere compliance and consider transformation holistically. Consequently, this deliberate narrative control enhances the sponsors' reputation as responsible corporate citi□ens. □ poignant excerpt from RedInc□IM further underscores the manager's skilful orchestration of the narrative.

> *"We want to justify that with the appropriate level of social return that shows [the sponsors] that this compliance burden can generate a return on investment into [their] business and should be aligned to [the] business strategy" (RedInc_IM, p. 6).*

5.7.3.3 Attitude of some sponsors

Some corporate entities are reluctant to allocate substantial budgets to the incubation programme and business prospects to the incubatees, impacting the incubator manager's envisioned outcomes. The failure to access business opportunities is a disconfirmation of the incubatees' expectations. Therefore, the incubator manager skilfully employs strategic interventions to influence sponsors' mindsets and reshape their perceptions. A pertinent illustration of this strategic approach emerges from RedInc_IM's incubatee selection process□

> *"… we will include [their] representatives … the decision-makers [on the panel]; we want to start socialising to them that these businesses are there. ... we plant in their mind that this is someone you could be dealing with ... psychologically, [they are] saying, I want to work with this business, what additional support do I think they need?" (RedInc_IM, p. 10).*

Moreover, the origin of an incubator can engender limitations in attracting sponsors, particularly in the case of incubators originally established as corporate incubators, exclusively catering to their founding corporations. Other corporates exhibit reluctance to engage with the incubator due to confidentiality concerns, prompting the incubator manager to strategically rebrand it, distinguishing it from its founding corporate sponsor to gain legitimacy from potential sponsors across the sector. The goal is to establish an independent identity for the incubator. RedInc□IM exemplifies this rebranding strategy□

> *"We have been trying to work quite hard to establish that independence for the benefit of bringing on board other partners who are competitors" (RedInc_IM, p. 5).*

5.7.4 RedInc case summary

RedInc□s stakeholders share common expectations, such as the growth and sustainability of new businesses, economic impact, incubator sustainability, compliance with economic transformation regulations, and effective incubator leadership. However, each stakeholder group also holds

unique expectations. The public sponsor emphasises governance and ethical leadership, while private sponsors seek to preserve corporate reputation. Incubatees anticipate access to business opportunities and other resources, while incubator staff aspire to be recognised, have a voice, and have a trust-based relationship with the incubator manager.

In response to the demands stemming from the various expectations, the incubator manager makes management choices such as deploying a performance management system, collaborating with partners, delegating responsibilities, implementing innovative interventions, terminating untenable relationships with stakeholders, and controlling the narrative about economic transformation. The incubator manager successfully leverages economic transformation regulations and association with public sponsors to mobilise sufficient resources for the incubator. Additionally, the incubator manager demonstrates pragmatism and clear communication, initiating incubator rebranding efforts to attract additional sponsors. These strategic choices intend to maintain alignment between stakeholder expectations and the incubator mandate, ensure incubator sustainability and effectiveness in nurturing sustainable businesses and foster economic transformation within the sector. Nevertheless, the incubator manager's strategic agency is constrained by some of the demands from the misaligned stakeholders' expectations.

5.8 Cha[illegible]ter [illegible] ar[illegible]th [illegible]a[illegible]e a[illegible]al [illegible]

The within-case analysis of the six cases demonstrates how demands emanating from stakeholder expectations shape the strategic responses of incubator managers. Some core themes emerge across these cases, yet each presents some unique challenges and managerial adaptations, reflecting the complex interplay between expectations and managerial strategic agency. The expectations for economic impact through the development of sustainable SMMEs, incubator sustainability, promotion of economic transformation, and effective leadership are common across all cases. Incubator managers adopt strategies that align with these dominant expectations while preserving the incubators' mandates. This is particularly evident in how managers tailor their incubation programmes to secure public sponsorship, which often comes with strings attached, particularly adherence to the imperative of economic transformation. While this approach secures sponsorship, it also presents some constraints to the incubator managers, demonstrating some expectations' simultaneous enabling and constraining nature.

Sustainability emerges as a pivotal theme. Stakeholders consistently express a need for both the incubator and its incubatees to thrive over the long term. Managers try to innovate, collaborate with partners, and mobilise private sponsorship to address this. These strategies aim to improve operational efficiency and provide robust entrepreneurial support, improving the incubator's

reputation and enhancing its relevance in a competitive landscape. Positive reputation and unchallenged relevance pave the way for easier resource mobilisation.

Furthermore, leadership and governance also emerge as critical themes, as stakeholders expect incubator managers to demonstrate strategic vision, ethical leadership and good governance. Managers respond by engaging in strategic stakeholder management, empowering staff through delegation and mentorship, restructuring organisational practices to optimise alignment with stakeholder expectations, and providing regular incubator performance reports to the stakeholders.

Despite these similarities, the role of private versus public sponsors introduces a significant divergence among the cases. Some incubator managers are strategically pivoting towards private funding to alleviate public funding constraints. This shift enables more flexibility in operations and a focus on commercial viability for some incubators. In contrast, other incubators heavily rely on public funds, which limits their operational flexibility and demands compliance with governmental expectations. Specific expectations also vary among stakeholder groups, adding another layer of complexity. Incubator managers navigate these varied demands, sometimes by evolving incubation strategies and models.

□dditionally, organisational structure is critical in shaping managerial autonomy and responses. In instances where managers en□oy greater autonomy, they can pursue aggressive and innovative strategies. Conversely, in settings where large organisational structures and distributed authority prevail, managers are constrained and are compelled to adopt more conservative strategies focused on sustaining operations and maintaining compliance.

Chapter □, which focuses on the cross□case analyses of the findings, delves deeper into these themes, their similarities across the cases, and specific differences of particular interest.□

□ha□ter □□□□Re□□lt□o □□ro□□□a□e□a□al□□□□

This chapter focuses on a comprehensive cross□case analysis of the findings presented in Chapter □. This analysis explicates the similarities and differences across the multiple cases examined in the study. While the overall presentation structure follows the order of the research □uestions, the cross□case analysis delves into the emergent themes identified during the within□case analysis conducted in Chapter □. Subse□uently, in Chapter □, the insights gleaned from the cross□case analysis will be discussed in relation to the pertinent literature reviewed for this study.

6.1□ □ro□□□a□e□a□al□□□□

The following section presents the main similarities and differences between the incubators included in this study. The first section presents an overview of the incubators' sponsorship models, organisational structures, and mandates. The similarities and differences of these incubator attributes are also highlighted before turning to the stakeholders□expectations.

6.1.1 Sponsorship, organisational structure, and incubator mandate

VioletInc and RedInc are privately funded business incubators, albeit RedInc has partnered with select public sponsors for strategic reasons. Nonetheless, the extent of public sponsorship in RedInc remains marginal compared to private sponsorship, resulting in minimal influence from public sponsors. The autonomy provided by less dependency on public sponsorship is evident in the absence of some characteristic constraints that other incubators' managers, such as IndigoInc and OrangeInc, which heavily rely on public sponsorship, grapple with. RedInc □IM and VioletInc□IM confirm the strategic avoidance of depending on public sponsorship□

> *"Public sector funding is not a driver for us. We see it more strategically to leverage and get other partners on … " (RedInc_IM, p. 5).*

> *"No government funding for us whatsoever, nothing! Because we don't go looking for it" (VioletInc_IM, p.5).*

In contrast to VioletInc, which secures sponsorship from private entities through competitive bidding processes, RedInc adopts a collaborative approach in soliciting support from private sponsors. The incubator manager presents private sponsors with a compelling value proposition centred around aiding them in meeting their regulatory compliance obligations related to economic transformation and inclusion. Subse□uently, these private entities sponsor the incubator's activities aimed at fulfilling regulatory re□uirements. These commitments primarily revolve around developing enterprises and suppliers from specific demographic segments specified in the regulations. Conse□uently, the relationship between RedInc and its sponsors is characterised by

a collaborative dynamic, wherein both parties contribute synergistically towards achieving mutually beneficial outcomes, with the incubator manager mobilising more resources than VioletInc's manager and all other incubator managers in the study. RedInc's example suggests the importance of a strong incubator value proposition to potential sponsors, making the incubator's mission unchallenged. The unchallenged status makes it easier for the incubator manager to mobilise the critical resources required by the incubator, as confirmed by RedInc_IM:

> *"We are one of those incubators who are quite fortunate that we have a stable pool of funders committed to a longer-term journey" (RedInc_IM, p. 5).*

Moreover, although the two sectors differ, RedInc and VioletInc target private corporations working in specific sectors as sponsors. VioletInc exclusively targets private corporations within the renewable energy sector, while RedInc targets corporations in the construction sector. However, both incubators focus on assisting private corporations with compliance with economic transformation regulations by implementing incubation programmes to achieve the corporations' supplier and enterprise development obligations, which is the primary expectation of the private sponsors. Therefore, the incubator managers capitalise on the opportunity presented by the government's economic transformation regulations to mobilise sponsorship for the incubators to circumvent the resource constraints in the operating environment instead of relying on direct government grant funding from the ISP. However, like all other cases, the demands associated with the economic transformation requirements manifest in how the incubator managers select and manage incubatees. VioletInc_IM provides insight into some of the demands:

> *"… we are only allowed to work with communities that live within a 50-kilometre radius ... that constrains us … " (VioletInc_IM, p.20).*

IndigoInc and OrangeInc represent two distinct models of public-sponsored business incubators within the manufacturing sector. While IndigoInc relies solely on public sponsorship for its operations, OrangeInc has diversified its revenue streams by establishing a training institute, thus augmenting public funding. Moreover, the incubator collects some incubation service fees from the incubatees. The reliance on public sponsorship presents inherent challenges for both managers, as they must adhere closely to the requirements imposed by their primary sponsor to ensure organisational sustainability. This heavy reliance on public funding often constrains the autonomy of the incubator managers, particularly in selecting incubatees. The calibre of incubatees has a bearing on the overall performance of the incubator and the ultimate reputation. Moreover, the increasing government fiscal commitments and changing priorities make heavy reliance on public sponsorship risky for the incubators' sustainability, prompting incubator

managers to grapple with diversifying their sponsorship. IndigoInc□IM and OrangeInc□IM highlight some of these risks in the following excerpts□

> *"… SEDA was like, 'we have got incubators that have been existing since inception with SEDA, those now need to [be self-sustaining]'…" (IndigoInc_IM, p. 6).*

> *"…the landscape has changed in the country in terms of lack of funding … from COVID, flooding, and looting - government's priority has shifted a little bit…" (OrangeInc_IM, p. 4).*

Moreover, both incubators share other commonalities□ larger organisational structures and multiple branches nationwide, features that do not exist in other cases. The si□eable organisational structure restricts the incubator manager□s role authority, constraining them from executing their tasks. The agility and pragmatism re□uired in the role favour managers with full role authority to make □uick decisions as situations dictate. Both IndigoInc□IM and OrangeInc□IM reinforce this perspective□

> *“… and my main managerial responsibilities for SMMEs - I have no buy-in, I'm not involved in any financial decisions" (IndigoInc_IM, p. 16).*

> *"… because of how our organisation is structured, in terms of some of the authority levels, it does impact how you do your job" (OrangeInc_IM, p. 22).*

□dditionally, like in all other cases, incubator managers must navigate the demands of economic transformation regulations. Compliance with these regulations is pivotal for maintaining public sponsorship and sustaining operations, mirroring the compliance expectations faced by managers of their privately funded counterparts.

BlueInc and GreenInc were chosen as the two hybrid□funded business incubators for this study. □lthough OrangeInc operates under a similar hybrid model, it differs from BlueInc and GreenInc in that its non□public funding is internally generated solely from the incubator□s related activities. In contrast, BlueInc□s private sponsors consist of independent private corporations, while GreenInc□s private sponsorship is derived from private entities established by the incubator□s founders. In this hybrid sponsorship mode, private and public sponsors substantially influence the incubator□ thus, the managers must balance the expectations of both parties. The funding arrangements are confirmed in the following □uotes□

> *“I will say, private 70% and 30% public. … Even with SEDA as the main stakeholder, we are around R2m, R2.5m” (BlueInc_IM, p. 7).*

“If you look at the broader [GreenInc] network, [SEDA] are probably just over 10% of our overall budget from a [GreenInc] perspective” (SR04, p. 4).

However, akin to IndigoInc and OrangeInc, the involvement of the public sponsor presents both opportunities and challenges for BlueInc and GreenInc. While public sponsorship offers accessible funding, the emphasis on economic transformation poses notable constraints for incubator managers. The public sponsor often emerges as a dominant stakeholder, prioritising their expectations over those of other stakeholders. In GreenInc’s case, the public sponsor’s influence threatens the incubator’s commercial drive, leading to the private sponsor’s concern about mandate dilution, creating strained working relationships with the incubator manager. The expectation for compliance with the economic transformation imperatives, which is a common feature across all incubators, exemplifies the enabling and constraining nature of some of the stakeholder expectations, as highlighted in the following excerpt□

"… for the benefit of SEDA, … we need to work with more youth, women, black-owned businesses. … We would take stuff that we … are not convinced they have commercial potential" (GreenInc_IM, p. 10).

One of the main differences between BlueInc and GreenInc is the nature of the entrepreneurs they seek to nurture. While both incubators support entrepreneurs in the manufacturing sector, BlueInc focuses on those in the metal industry, and GreenInc supports ventures in the hardware technology industry. Considering the iteration involved in technological product development, this difference is vital, which signifies the importance of financial support for entrepreneurs in that industry. Conse□uently, GreenInc’s incubation model differs from the other five incubators, which are cohort□based, with graduation happening after two to three years of incubation, irrespective of the entrepreneurs□business performance. This model variation causes conflicts between the private and public sponsors. The public sponsor’s focus on the □uantitative performance metrics puts pressure on incubator managers, who may be compelled to graduate businesses that have less chance of survival on exiting the incubator. Such an eventuality works against the incubator’s reputation□thus, incubator managers like GreenInc□IM are cautious about following a model incompatible with their target entrepreneurs□calibre, as GreenIlc□IM explains□

“We work with incubatees for as long as they require our help and are not self-sustainable … we don't graduate companies as SEDA wants us to, and we come under [some] pressure for that …" (GreenInc_IM, p. 8).

Overall, only VioletInc receives no public sponsorship and is focused on entrepreneurs in rural communities. □ll six incubators are registered as not□for□profit organisations and have a board of

trustees overseeing their governance, a demand placed on most incubators by the public sponsor to be eligible for public sponsorship. Moreover, only VioletInc and RedInc focus on entrepreneurs from non-manufacturing sectors. Furthermore, only publicly funded incubators have larger organisational structures with limited role authority for the incubator manager and several branches nationwide. The rest of the incubators have lean structures, with the incubator manager responsible for operations and decision-making. There is a prevalence of the use of new graduates as interns in all incubators where the public sponsor is dominant, a development reflecting the lean structure preference of the public sponsor. Across all the incubators, the economic transformation regulation plays a pivotal role in enabling access to sponsorship from private and public sponsors, despite the accompanying constraints related to incubatee selection and the level of support required.

These similarities and differences in the sponsorship mode, organisational structures and incubator mandate are further infused in subsequent sections' analyses of expectations and managerial choices.

6.1.2 Stakeholders' expectations

Understanding stakeholder expectations lies at the core of this study's purpose, as these expectations serve as the source of role demands that incubator managers grapple with. Section 6.1.2 analyses these demands. Meanwhile, the subsequent sections present the cross-case analysis of the main themes of stakeholder expectations emanating from the within-case analyses.

6.1.2.1 Socioeconomic impact

Despite variations in metrics, all stakeholders share the common expectation that incubator managers will create a visible impact through the incubation program. Policymakers, public sponsors, and incubator staff define impact as promoting entrepreneurship within the country. This impact is assessed using diverse metrics, including job creation and contributions to national revenue through taxation. The prevalence of such quantitative performance measurement metrics tends to ignore the qualitative aspect of business incubation performance. Irrespective of the support provided by incubator managers, some incubatees may not achieve the developmental targets within the incubation period, suggesting poor performance for the incubator. Such a performance measurement approach can create excessive demands on the incubator manager for fear of failure. Poor performance impacts the incubator's reputation and ability to access resources. The following excerpts highlight the prevalence of such performance measurement metrics among policymakers and other stakeholders:

“If that process is scaling entrepreneurship, which is what you need in a country, then it’s money well spent.” (SR02_PMR, p.15).

"… then you would see real growth, job creation [and] impact in the community [and] the economy" (KW03, p. 10).

"The impact metric - so your revenue growth of businesses on your programme, jobs sustained in the current market, new jobs created …" (KW06, p. 11).

Private sponsors, particularly those for incubators with a commercial focus, evaluate the impact in terms of the return on funds invested in incubated businesses. □dditionally, other private sponsors gauge impact based on the incubated businesses□ability to serve as capable suppliers to their operational needs. The variation in the performance measurement metric suggests what each stakeholder prioritises. However, it also highlights the several demands that incubator managers must balance to gain legitimacy from each stakeholder, particularly where public and private sponsors are involved. The following are variations of the expected incubation impact□

"… consistently achieve the outcomes of the incubator, which is building businesses that are ready to invest in and ready to go to market …" (SR04, p. 10).

"... that it [will] have a positive impact, not just on the organisation in terms of its supply chain, but to the needs [of] the South African economy …" (SR06, p. 3).

“… we also look at taking them into our supply chain where they then can source opportunities within our business as well” (SR03, p. 4).

The incubatees□ emphasis on business growth and sustainability aligns with the broader socioeconomic impact of business incubation. These entrepreneurs often establish businesses not solely to create employment opportunities but to address immediate survival needs, with other socioeconomic benefits emerging as business success outcomes. However, their products and services contribute to regional and national economic growth, and the experience and knowledge they get from incubation programmes can be shared with others, helping to promote entrepreneurship in the country□

“I want to choose other young people who want to come into the business to help them, especially agriculture, like crops. I can give my skills to them …” (EN01, p.4).

“I could, one day, be a mass producer in the fast-moving consumer goods industry ... that was the expectation" (EN02, p. 3).

"… we want to enter the market as quickly as possible because people are hungry for the device" (EN04, p. 5).

Therefore, the expectation for socioeconomic impact produces a performance-related job demand, with the incubator manager striving to meet the minimum performance criteria ascribed by each stakeholder. Section 6.1.3 details how the incubator managers respond to this job demand.

6.1.2.2 Growth and sustainability

The expectations of incubatees participating in incubator programs primarily revolve around growth and sustainability. However, while achieving growth should be the desire of every entrepreneur, pursuing rapid growth can cause entrepreneurs to prioritise accessing resources and business opportunities over strict adherence to incubation programme requirements. Such a scenario can adversely affect the incubator's performance against key performance indicators, as some entrepreneurs become demoralised by the failure to access opportunities quickly. The following representative quotes from incubatees highlight the emphasis on growth and stability across the incubators.

"… we want to put production up…. This year, we want to grow and go a little bit bigger" (EN01, p.3).

"... we want to be big, we want to be empowered … " (EN02, p. 13).

"I thought they would help us grow the business … that was my main expectation" (EN06, p. 2).

The growth and sustainability of incubatees' businesses facilitate the achievement of the overall socioeconomic impact envisaged by all the stakeholders. While differences exist between public and private sponsors, particularly in performance metrics and preferred incubation models, they share a common vision to foster the development of thriving and sustainable businesses through incubators. Those private sponsors motivated by commercial objectives have compelling incentives to drive the growth of new ventures as their investments yield higher returns when these ventures succeed. Other private sponsors gain recognition as responsible corporate citizens supporting the government's economic transformation and inclusion efforts. Moreover, some of the new ventures become suppliers to these private corporations.

Therefore, incubator managers contend with job demands focused on instilling discipline and grit in entrepreneurs as they pursue sustainable growth, often part of the minimum criteria for an incubator manager's performance. Producing sustainable new businesses enhances the

incubator mandate, as it differentiates business incubators from other entrepreneurs□support organisations such as training institutions. However, true sustainability is not measured while the business is still in the incubator□it is realised when it competes in the open market beyond the incubation period. Therefore, incubator managers must be conscious of this reality, which impacts the incubator's reputation. Representative statements from sponsors confirm the expectations:

> *"If, in the end, we have a sustainable, independent entity, then we know it has been a success …" (SR01, p.7).*
>
> *"We want to see them assisting SMMEs to establish businesses, and those businesses must be sustainable; they must grow in revenue" (SR02_PMR, p. 6).*
>
> *"… that's the expectation, to take someone off the streets, they start a registered business, then hopefully become successful …" (SR03, p. 4).*
>
> *"… we want to build businesses, [specialised] technology businesses … that have the ability to be sustainable and successful …" (SR04, p. 5).*

6.1.2.3 Entrepreneurial support

The achievement of growth, sustainability, and the anticipated economic impact hinges on targeted entrepreneurial support for incubatees. The nature and extent of this support vary based on the incubatees' position along the entrepreneurial development tra□ectory. Therefore, expectations from incubatees encompass a spectrum of needs, including access to infrastructure, markets, financial backing, professional services, networks, mentorship, training, and marketing. While some support expectations are ade□uately provided, lack of access to finance and business opportunities or markets proves to be a source of dissatisfaction for most incubatees. The following representative □uotes offer insight into the range of entrepreneurial support expected□

> *"… we need a little bit of funding … [for] a little bit of shade … a vehicle… then also a building " (EN01, p.3).*
>
> *"But finance from the incubation side has been an uphill; there's been no finance … that expectation was mentioned before ..." (EN02, p. 5).*
>
> *"… that's a reasonable expectation to have about a [sector specialisation] incubator, that they have relationships with a manufacturing process" (EN04, p. 6).*
>
> *"I thought they would help us grow the business through work opportunities in their business; that was my main expectation" (EN06, p. 2).*

Similarly, sponsors anticipate that incubator managers will exhibit creativity in ensuring essential entrepreneurial support for incubatees.

> *"Don't incubate a client that you know for sure that you have nothing to offer" (SR02_PMR, p. 11).*

> *"… be able to provide [an] effective and impactful program to support small businesses …" (SR06, p. 3).*

The expectations for such comprehensive and, at times, tailored entrepreneurial support to each incubatee are challenging to provide in a resource-constrained environment. However, when founders establish business incubators in such contexts, they still claim their passion for developing entrepreneurs, which is the primary goal of business incubation. Section [illegible] delves into analysing how incubator managers confront the demands of delivering entrepreneurial support amidst resource limitations.

Moreover, a significant distinction emerges between commercially driven, public, and private sponsors motivated by compliance with transformation and inclusion regulations. Commercially driven private sponsors offer sustained entrepreneurial support until new ventures achieve commercial viability. [illegible]dditionally, they facilitate investment opportunities and access to finance for incubatees. In contrast, public sponsors and private corporations motivated to sponsor incubators by the obligations to comply with the transformation regulations do not grant incubatees access to finance. Moreover, when incubators receive private and public sponsorship, the influence of the public sponsor prevails, and the public sponsor's preferred incubation model guides the incubator manager's decisions. Such a model entails a limited incubation period, with incubatees graduating from the programme irrespective of their business performance. Therefore, balancing the misaligned expectations becomes a significant [illegible]ob demand. The following excerpts provide insights into the two main incubation models[illegible]

> *" We work with incubatees for as long as they require our help and as long as they are not self-sustainable …" (GreenInc_IM, p. 8).*

> *"The incubation programme is cohort-based …. And there's a defined incubation period for an SMME, which is a minimum of three years" (SR02_PMR, p. 4).*

The preceding statements demonstrate the variable incubation period in the cohort-based model. When considering the calibre of entrepreneurs and the resources available, the incubation period becomes a vital aspect of entrepreneurial support. Furthermore, delivering comprehensive

entrepreneurial support to the calibre of entrepreneurs within a resource□constrained context is a role demand worth exploring.

6.1.2.4 Incubator sustainability

The sustainability of the incubator benefits all the stakeholders, irrespective of the differing motivations. Without a sustainable incubator, the rest of the targets and goals will be futile. Therefore, all stakeholders expect the incubator manager to drive the incubator□s financial sustainability and continue to deliver the envisaged impact. The policymaker facilitates allocating resources to incubators through the incubation support programme, which fosters collaboration between the public sponsor and private incubators. Public sponsorship, while valuable, is insufficient to meet all incubators' needs indefinitely. Therefore, the incubator managers are expected to proactively mobilise additional resources from diverse sources to reduce the incubators' dependence on public funding. The following representative □uote reinforces the public sponsor's expectations:

> *"… we are not expecting them to be profitable entities [as such] …, but we were expecting to lessen the dependence on SEDA …" (SR02_PMR, p. 5).*

Private sponsors similarly expect the incubator not to rely on one sponsor. This expectation applies to all incubators, including VioletInc, that secure sponsorship through competitive bidding. Competitive bidding implies no guarantee for continued sponsorship from the same sponsor. □ven for incubators such as RedInc, which have ade□uate resources, the need for insight into the industry trends to respond with relevant incubation models is aimed at keeping the incubator pertinent to stakeholders and guaranteeing sustainability.

> *" … market the brand of the incubator and let people understand the value they add so that they could raise funds from … other avenues rather than just relying on [Sponsor02] and SEDA" (SR03, p. 5).*

> *"… an organisation like an incubator needs the support of its partners, particularly in the early days … in order to be successful" (SR04, p. 9).*

Furthermore, the continued employment of staff depends on the financial sustainability of the incubator. For incubators heavily reliant on public sponsorship, diversified sponsorship is envisaged to diminish the influence of the public sponsor, enabling the incubator manager to hire additional human resources. Moreover, while incubatees do not explicitly discuss incubator sustainability, it can be inferred from their entrepreneurial support expectations that they expect the incubator to remain sustainable, provide the re□uired services, and expand their offerings to include more services and support, such as facilitating access to finance and business

opportunities. Notably, GreenInc stands out by facilitating seed funding to the incubatees, a resource many incubatees expect incubators to provide. However, as most incubator managers focus on ensuring ade□uate resources for incubator sustainability, the financial needs of incubatees are a secondary matter. The following representative □uotes showcase the staff□s common expectations regarding incubator sustainability□

> *"… we expect someone who [can] go out and look for funding, [who can] engage with different stakeholders…" (KW03, p. 3).*
>
> *"… meet the financial requirements of the Centre, obviously the budget and able to know the cost … when it comes to the financial part of the Centre" (KW05, p. 8).*
>
> *"… securing finance. ... How do you take a market position, [to say], I have 10% market share, how do I grow to 15%? … managing the budget … " (KW06, p. 11).*

Conse□uently, balancing the mobilisation of ade□uate resources to guarantee the financial sustainability of the incubator and providing comprehensive incubation services is an expectation that keeps them awake at night. This expectation is exacerbated by the increasing scarcity of resources in the operating environment□ thus, incubators end up with a broad scope of responsibilities and a □ob demand that re□uires multifaceted skills.

6.1.2.5 Compliance with economic transformation regulations

Compliance with economic transformation regulations is a fundamental aspect of all business incubators included in the study and significantly influences incubator sponsorship in the country. Thus, stakeholders universally expect incubator managers to adhere to these regulations for various reasons. □conomic transformation and inclusion rank among policymakers□ primary ob□ectives in fostering business incubation. □s government representatives, public sponsors must ensure compliance with the regulations for all incubators receiving public funding. Private sponsors aiming to enhance and maintain B□BB□□ ratings rely on incubator managers to ensure compliance with these regulations. However, while some incubator founders and managers access public sponsorship to circumvent the resource constraints, they later realise the risk imposed by the re□uirements to comply with the economic transformation regulations, particularly potential mandate dilution and incubation model variation. Such realisations and subse□uent concerns strain incubator managers, who must balance compliance and mandate preservation. The following selected □uotes highlight the influence of economic transformation regulations across the incubators irrespective of the sponsorship mode□

> *"… we do have certain obligations in terms of economic development to the local communities…"(SR01, p. 3).*

“… for instance, in a sector transformation, ensuring that there are new entrants in terms of previously disadvantaged or black-owned businesses” (SR02_PMR, p.5).

"… as [the] transformation cause became more part of business, we then continued to work with the incubator" (SR03, p. 3).

"… the main expectations [were] multiple … that it will also ensure that it aligns to the compliance needs from a BEE perspective" (SR06, p. 3).

The incubator staff do not specifically mention compliance with economic transformation as an expectation. Still, the staff recognise the critical role of public sponsorship in sustaining incubator operations and thus expects adherence to the public sponsor’s re□uirements, which include transformation regulations. Similarly, incubatees do not explicitly mention the regulations. However, their participation in the incubation programmes as targeted beneficiaries suggests an understanding of the regulations□ importance, leading to an implicit expectation of compliance from incubator managers. □n incubatee from one of the cases subtly refers to the regulations in the following statement□

“… they need to open up their doors to us because [the] government just said, ‘Women, please go and do business’…” (EN03.03, p. 6).

Therefore, compliance with the economic transformation regulations is both an enabler and a constraint of incubator managers’ strategic agency as they seek to balance regulatory compliance to access sponsorship and excellent performance to preserve the incubator’s reputation amidst compromised incubatee selection criteria. Section □.□.□ addresses how incubator managers struggle with this □ob demand.

6.1.2.6 Governance and leadership

Both the policymaker and public sponsor prioritise good governance in incubator operations. The public sponsor expects adherence to incubation management best practices, accountability, and timely performance reporting, while the policymaker re□uires incubators to register as NPOs with active independent boards of trustees. □ll studied incubators, including VioletInc, which does not access public sponsorship, are registered as NPOs, suggesting the importance of sending a morally appealing message to the general public. Operating as a not□for□profit organisation suggests that incubators are driven by a socially beneficial mission of nurturing aspiring entrepreneurs. This legal status may shield the incubators from close public scrutiny of their performances, supposedly because they do not make a profit. While private sponsors also value good governance, they are less stringent than public sponsors. They do not withhold sponsorship for governance lapses such as delayed annual reports. In contrast, the public sponsor enforces

strict penalties, including suspension or withdrawal of sponsorship for non-compliance and reduced allocation for unsatisfactory reporting. The importance of governance is demonstrated in the following selected quotes:

> *"… [we] expect them to uphold good governance practices" (SR02_PMR, p. 7).*
>
> *"… they are strategically selected, our board. … at every quarterly board meeting …. I am held accountable" (VioletInc_IM, p. 22).*
>
> *"We went through the exercise of defining the roles to an extent forced by our board … which we all found quite painful" (GreenInc_IM, p. 13).*

The above statements suggest that good governance and ethical leadership are essential to building the incubator's reputation and are necessary to attract resources. Consequently, incubator staff expect an incubator leader who upholds good governance to meet sponsor expectations and guarantee continued sponsorship. Active and effective boards assist in holding the incubator executives to account, ensuring that the reputation of the incubator is maintained. Thus, the public sponsor insists on good governance for two reasons: first, where public funds are involved, proper stewardship is required to ensure responsible and effective use of the funds; second, building an accountable organisation with a good governance reputation proffers legitimacy to the organisation, helping to attract other sponsors. Often, board members of NPOs are independent, work voluntarily, and are not driven by financial rewards. Therefore, they are deemed to consider the interests of all stakeholders fairly. Consequently, the incubator manager must ensure that the incubator observes good governance and ethical leadership principles. RedInc-IM and BlueInc-IM's assertions exemplify the importance of good governance:

> *"We've been trying to work quite hard to establish that independence … now we are our own NPC, on an independent board…" (RedInc_IM, p. 5).*
>
> *"… my board has overstayed their term, to the point that they are used to that. … when [I] came, [I] hit the ground running, that gave them comfort to say [BlueInc] is in good hands, let's relax " (BlueInc_IM, p. 23).*

Furthermore, all incubator stakeholders emphasise the importance of leadership skills for an incubator manager. An incubator manager's leadership skills significantly influence the incubator's image, relationship with stakeholders, and overall performance; thus, stakeholders anticipate specific leadership attributes in the incubator manager. Across all studied incubators, sponsors seek strategic leaders who are passionate about entrepreneurship, possess business acumen, and excel in people management. Likewise, incubator staff value qualified, experienced, agile,

and visionary leaders who delegate responsibilities, communicate transparently and make decisions openly. Similarly, incubatees seek committed, knowledgeable, proactive, resourceful, and experienced leaders. The following are indicative statements highlighting the various leadership attributes expected by stakeholders□

> *"... a leader of the incubator who is passionate will even know the calibre of people [to] employ …. So, it must be a strategic leader" (SR02_PMR, p. 12).*
>
> *"… have a track record in terms of client engagement, program execution, people management, financial acumen" (SR06, p. 5).*
>
> *"... there needs to be somebody confident, agile, knows how to speak to people and is not afraid to get what they want to be able to do their job …" (KW04, p. 6).*
>
> *"… hands-on experience definitely expands your understanding. It would be easier to mentor someone if you have been in that position yourself" (EN06, p. 10).*

□ notable contrast exists between □unior and senior or long□tenured staff expectations. □unior staff seek mentorship and guidance from the incubator manager, while senior staff prefer autonomy and recognition of their competencies and initiatives. Similarly, while incubatees seek committed, knowledgeable, proactive, resourceful, and experienced leaders, the nature of the desired experience varies among incubatees. Some emphasise the manager□s sector□specific experience, while others prioritise the incubator manager□s prior experience in running their businesses.

Therefore, the various leadership attributes expected by the stakeholders demonstrate the complexity of the incubator manager role, which demands that the occupants be versatile, understand various leadership styles, and adopt the most appropriate one in each situation.

6.1.2.7 Summary of stakeholders' expectations

Stakeholder expectations can lead to □ob demands that promote an incubator manager to effectively use their knowledge and skills, learn new skills, innovate, and establish new and beneficial relationships. While these □ob demands are intellectually challenging and enhance the incubator manager's professional growth, they can also become constraints to performance. The cross□case analysis unearthed the □ob demands that incubator managers grapple with, such as meeting the minimum criteria for performance, resource limitations, a broad scope of responsibilities, regulatory compliance, misaligned expectations, complex relationships and organisational structures. Thus, incubator managers must be multiskilled and agile leaders capable of navigating several □ob demands within prevailing conditions to produce the re□uired impact.

Subse□uent sections demonstrate how these demands influence the incubator manager□s strategic agency, focusing on similarities across the cases and highlighting essential differences. The cross□case analysis leads to the discussion of the research findings in Chapter □.

6.1.3 Managing perceived job demands

6.1.3.1 Meeting minimum criteria of performance

Regardless of their sponsorship mode, all incubator managers confront the demand of meeting predefined performance criteria outlined in their performance contracts. The key performance targets typically align with sponsors' expectations, emphasising the incubator's overall impact. A practical demonstration of the incubator□s performance impact re□uires diligent monitoring, measurement, validation, and reporting. Thus, incubator managers implement performance management systems to monitor operations and generate comprehensive reports. Incubators funded by public sponsors must utilise the sponsor□provided performance management system while others develop their own. Demonstrating performance helps incubator managers secure the critical resources to continue operating□hence, they all strive to meet sponsors□onerous reporting re□uirements. The following selected □uotes demonstrate how managers grapple with demonstrating performance.

> *"… you must see the reports we have to do; it's insane, actually. … very templated, very formal, very MBA..., but we can do it because we have to" (VioletInc_IM, p.11).*

> *"… we report on those targets quarterly, and the performance on the previous quarter determines whether you get your full agreed allocation for the coming quarter" (GreenInc_IM, p. 4).*

> *"... we monitor them monthly so when we reach the end of three months, if something hasn't been achieved for a valid reason, we could extend …" (OrangeInc_IM, p. 8).*

□dditionally, incubator managers collaborate with various network partners to secure essential resources and expertise for achieving performance targets. Being resourceful and proactive in finding solutions and mobilising resources is a skill that entrepreneurs need to ac□uire, and incubator managers are poised to model these skills to entrepreneurs as they collaborate with various partners to meet the needs of the incubator and the incubatees. However, failure by incubator managers to mobilise ade□uate resources signals a lousy example to incubatees, who may lose trust in the manager. This could be why incubatees expect an incubator manager with experience as an entrepreneur.

> *"… hands-on experience definitely expands your understanding. It would be easier to mentor someone if you have been in that position yourself" (EN06, p. 10).*

Depending on the incubator's focus, collaborative partners may include knowledge partners, material suppliers, technology providers, other incubators, educational institutions, and government institutions. These partnerships may be one-off, short-term, or long-term, with resources and expertise benefiting the incubator or its incubatees.

> *"…thirdly [are] all the stakeholders that we plug in .... we can't propose a solution if we don't know there's a support system for that solution nearby" (VioletInc_IM, p.13).*

> *"… through our partnership now with the TIA … we have strategically targeted … to provide better services and access to finance to our clients" (GreenInc_IM, p. 12).*

> *"That relationship has been established between [OrangeInc] and [GreyInc]; it benefits our SMMEs, and their SMMEs could also benefit …" (OrangeInc_IM, p. 12).*

However, finding partners with adequate resources and establishing strategic relationships takes substantial time and effort in a resource-constrained context. Some partners may be concerned about associating with organisations that are not aligned with their values or are self-serving but disguised as business incubators, which can damage their reputation. Therefore, demonstrating performance and positioning the incubator's mandate as indispensable is critical to gaining support. Thus, incubator managers dedicate time to building networks and relationships with partners who can provide diverse resources. A representative quote from GreenInc-IM exemplifies the demand associated with establishing such relationships:

> *"Those were, in many cases, long protracted discussions, requiring lots of work and convincing to get them over the line. … they've all contributed to a more complete service offering …" (GreenInc_IM, p. 12).*

Other than collaborating with various partners and instituting performance management systems, incubator managers strive to provide comprehensive bespoke entrepreneurial support to meet the expectations of incubatees. Considering the myriad entrepreneurial support activities highlighted by the incubatees, this is a demanding requirement. The demand is exacerbated by several factors—the mix of incubatees, whose businesses are at different stages, requiring varying levels of support—the need for experienced mentors—and prescribed lean structures. These challenges require incubator managers to be proactive in finding solutions. Failure to meet the incubatees' expectations can cause the incubator's reputational damage, considering that entrepreneurs in the same sector tend to exchange information on various platforms. Most incubatees join incubators because of recommendations from others who have gone through the incubator or other stakeholders with information about it. Such referrals are essential in legitimising the incubator as a value-adding entity in the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Therefore, feedback from

performance management systems, following market trends, and a growth mindset are critical for fostering continuous improvement of the entrepreneurial support mechanics. The following statements demonstrate how incubator managers across sponsorship modes grapple with meeting entrepreneurial support expectations□

> *"… those incubatees are at different stages and require different amounts of our time and effort. Some we work very hands-on with …" (GreenInc_IM, p. 9).*
>
> *"… the [support] is very individualised because no two businesses are the same" (OrangeInc_IM, p. 20).*
>
> *"… we realise that they also need that level of support on-site … someone like [mentor01], who is a [industry specialist] to accompany them …" (RedInc_IM, p. 10).*

6.1.3.2 The scope of responsibility the role involves

The role of the incubator manager comprises two primary components□corporate responsibilities involving the growth and administration of the incubator organisation and staff management, then overseeing the business incubation programmes. These components involve several tasks and activities relating to growing the business, managing staff, implementing the incubation programmes, mobilising resources, and managing stakeholders. The role□s broad scope of responsibilities is a demand that stretches the incubator managers□leadership and management capabilities, including prioritising tasks to focus on and managing potential risks that can damage the incubator□s reputation. However, balancing the various activities related to the two role components is a substantial challenge, potentially leading to manager burnout, an experience one of the interviewed incubator managers called a nightmare. The following excerpts confirm the demand imposed by the broad scope of the role□

> *"… the balancing act between growing the business and implementing the programmes, finding the funding, stakeholder engagements, it's very hard" (VioletInc_IM, p.14).*
>
> *"I head up the incubator, but I also have a role in [GVF], and I also deal with the [Group] through [Green Capital], that's all part of the bigger picture. It's not defined, in terms of how many hours I should put …" (GreenInc_IM, p. 13).*
>
> *"… the job of the Centre Manager is very demanding and stressful because you carry a lot of load in terms of the things that you have to do …" (OrangeInc_IM, p. 16).*

Conse□uently, to manage the breadth of these responsibilities, incubator managers rely on delegation, particularly for tasks related to business incubation. Depending on the incubation programme design, these tasks are mostly delegated to the knowledge workers, who are

professional and specialist staff members working closely with incubatees as mentors, coaches, and trainers. Delegating responsibilities hinges on the incubator manager's situational and self awareness, allowing them to gauge their capacity to maintain work life balance. Moreover, delegation is a multifaceted tool within business incubators, contributing to staff empowerment, recognition, and inclusivity. However, effective delegation requires trust between managers and the staff.

Therefore, recruiting competent and well aligned incubator staff becomes critical for the manager. However, such experienced knowledge workers are not readily accessible to incubator managers for two reasons the scarcity of qualified personnel with experience working with startup businesses and the lean incubator structure prescribed by the public sponsor. It is evident from the interviews that resource constraints influence the sponsor's preference for a lean structure. These constraints lead the incubator managers to dedicate time to mentoring and training interns to develop them into competent mentors, which adds to the managers' workload. Moreover, complete reliance on the competence of such mentors is not possible, requiring the incubator manager to remain closely involved. The following examples demonstrate the dependence of incubator managers on delegating tasks and responsibilities

> *"I had to go through quite a journey to delegate and to learn that … to strategically look after the growth of [VioletInc], I have to step back …" (VioletInc_IM, p.14).*
>
> *"I treat them equally … say I'm going to be away, I delegate - I don't necessarily focus on choosing one person, I rotate all of them" (BlueInc_IM, p. 14).*
>
> *"I tend to focus more on value-adding tasks and stuff that require my attention … I spend more time trying to equip them to do it themselves" (OrangeInc_IM, p. 17).*

However, despite delegating some tasks, the incubator manager still faces an intricate challenge juggling competing corporate responsibilities that cannot be delegated while simultaneously overseeing the incubation programmes. For instance, mobilising resources to ensure incubator sustainability stands out as one of the significant corporate responsibilities, requiring substantial time investment in activities such as incubator marketing, sponsorship proposal preparation, and relationship building with strategic partners and potential sponsors.

Securing adequate sponsorship and upholding the incubator's reputation are paramount responsibilities. Policymakers, sponsors, and incubator staff emphasise these expectations, linking the incubator manager's performance directly to the centre's reputation and sustainability. Meeting these expectations is imperative, as failure has severe consequences, including the closure of the incubator. Even incubators that manage to get more reliable sponsors, such as

RedInc, continue to exercise diligence to maintain the privilege. The following □uotes support the perception of the □ob demand stemming from pursuing incubator sustainability□

> *"… SEDA was like, 'we have got incubators that have been existing since inception with SEDA, those need to now depend on their own …" (IndigoInc_IM, p. 6).*
>
> *“We are currently doing quite a bit of work on raising the profile of the [Group] to bring in more projects to make it more sustainable …” (GreenInc_IM, p. 8).*
>
> *“… our value proposition to our partners is that we can take care of the compliance, … [they] also need to be thinking about this longer term” (RedInc_IM06, p. 7).*

Incubator managers adopt several strategies to address the demand for incubator sustainability. The strategy pursued depends on the authority of the incubator manager, the existing sponsorship mode, and market demands from sponsors and entrepreneurs. □s discussed in section □.□.□, incubator managers find it easier to access public sponsorship□hence, most receive public funding, albeit structured only to cover the incubator’s running costs. However, some managers solely depend on such sponsorship while others leverage it to attract private sponsors or start other revenue□generating entities to augment the public sponsorship. This results in incubators such as IndigoInc and OrangeInc remaining as being publicly sponsored. However, a change in government priorities is reducing sponsorship to such incubators, compelling the managers to scramble for alternative sponsorship. The alternatives for such managers include leveraging existing incubator assets and founders□expertise to generate revenue. Moreover, a change in the operating environment, particularly an increase in competition, is forcing incubator managers to review their incubation strategies and models. The following statements demonstrate such a strategy□

> *"… we would do more if we had enough [funding]. And the enough though, will come in once the lab and the training institute are accredited ..." (IndigoInc_IM, p. 98).*
>
> *“Our skills development activities also generate money for the incubator. … my CEO does consulting work … like helping another incubator set up, then those add up funds that come in” (OrangeInc_IM, p. 11).*

On the other hand, incubators such as RedInc and VioletInc, which depend primarily on private sponsorship, use different approaches to mobilise resources. □ttracting private corporations through a partnership strategy, where they sponsor the incubator to implement the corporations’ incubation programmes in compliance with the economic transformation obligations, creates a symbiotic relationship between the incubator and the private corporations, cementing the

incubator's value to the corporations. To guarantee incubator sustainability, the incubator manager can leverage the incubator's relationship with some public sponsors to lure more private sponsors who seek close interaction with government institutions. RedInc□IM exemplifies this approach, capitalising on the regulatory compliance re□uirements to offer large private corporations a compelling promise of a positive return on investment for partnering with the incubator to achieve genuine transformation beyond regular compliance re□uirements.

> *"Public sector funding is not a driver for us. We see it more strategically to leverage and get other partners on so then they can see that link to government, [RedInc] becomes that platform …" (RedInc_IM, p. 5).*

In contrast, incubator managers can depend on competitive bidding to private corporations to secure sponsorship. While the foundational ob□ective is to assist private corporations with meeting their economic transformation regulatory re□uirements, the competitive bidding approach does not guarantee that the bids will succeed every time. Nevertheless, relationship management and a good reputation from previous performance are still crucial in the incubator manager's strategic endeavours. Therefore, in addition to submitting more bids, the incubator manager pursues building relationships with potential sponsors through various platforms, such as attending sector conferences and direct marketing. VioletInc□IM relies on this approach and explains the aggressive direct marketing involved□

> *"… when I get rejected, I will haunt them …. Almost all the clients come back to us sooner or later because I never let them go. I will … haunt [them] passively. [They'll] get my newsletter every month, once a quarter ..." (VioletInc_IM, p. 19).*

The incubator managers' struggle to balance the broad scope of the role responsibilities is amplified in hybrid□funded incubators. While this is more evident in incubators where private sponsors prioritise commercial ob□ectives, it is also common in incubators where private sponsors are primarily motivated by compliance with economic transformation ob□ectives. □s each sponsor brings value to the incubator, they also exercise their power to enforce their expectations, placing the incubator manager at a crossroads. Balancing the expectations of public and private sponsors is a job demand that stretches the managers' stakeholder management skills. The following excerpts from GreenInc□IM and one of the private sponsors exemplify this scenario□

> *"[… given the time and effort we commit to keeping [SEDA] happy … we're actively working to reduce that component so we can work without them" (SR04, p. 7).*

> *"… we need [public sponsors] to continue supporting what we do. For that, we need to adhere to their requirements" (GreenInc_IM, p. 8).*

Similarly, BlueInc□IM expresses the same sentiments as GreenInc□IM, reinforcing the dilemma incubator managers face in balancing the expectations of the private and public sponsors in pursuit of incubator sustainability. The resource□constrained operating environment presents limited options for incubator managers to mobilise sponsorship, breeding a culture of dependency on limited sponsors, particularly the public sponsor. BlueInc□IM summaries the incubator managers' experience of balancing the sponsors' expectations□

> *"It's a nightmare. … we are … a nonprofit [organisation] … if no funding [comes] in, we cease to exist. So, [it is] a nightmare, but that is necessary for the organisation's survival (BlueInc_IM, p. 15).*

Nevertheless, incubator managers exercise their strategic agency, making choices they consider beneficial to the incubator despite the challenges. These choices aim to balance preserving the incubator□s mandate and achieving sustainability. Deviating from the incubator mandate to please one sponsor can harm the incubator□s reputation, which is central to attracting potential sponsors. On the other hand, terminating the relationship with sponsors before securing alternative sponsors threatens the incubator□s sustainability. Conse□uently, the incubator manager strategically complies with some of the dominant sponsor□s expectations while leveraging the availed sponsorship to mobilise other resources. Other strategies include the innovative use of incubator assets to generate revenue. The following statements demonstrate the strategy being employed by the managers of hybrid□funded incubators□

> *"We are currently doing quite a bit of work on raising the profile of the [Group] to bring … on other stakeholders ..." (GreenInc_IM, p. 8).*

> *"We are also trying to find ways to make sure that [BlueInc] remains open through the external funders other than SEDA and through whatever [assets] we have that we are trying to generate our income from" (BlueInc_IM, p. 18).*

However, while all incubator managers face some common challenges in ensuring incubator sustainability, organisational structures and levels of authority can significantly influence their ability to navigate these challenges effectively. IndigoInc□IM and OrangeInc□IM operate with lower levels of authority, reporting to executive managers within their organisations, while others report to incubator boards of trustees, affording them greater accountability and authority. This distinction reinforces the agility and pragmatism re□uired in the incubator manager role, an expectation expressed by incubatees and incubator staff.

6.1.3.3 Difficult working relationships

Making tough decisions for the benefit of the incubator is a critical leadership attribute for incubator managers. Relationships between the incubator and some stakeholders can become untenable for several reasons, including misaligned expectations, breach of agreements, and unethical and opportunistic behaviour. Bad relationships with stakeholders can affect incubator performance and reputation. Performance, reputation and good relationships are critical to attracting entrepreneurs and sponsors, considering the prevalence of the referral system in the recruitment of potential entrepreneurs, as confirmed by the following selected excerpts□

> *"… we get a lot of referrals from previous clients, fellow professionals, … guys that we've worked with over many years" (GreenInc_IM, p. 6).*
>
> *"I got to hear about [RedInc] through another business that had been on the program, and we had been at university together with the founders" (EN06, p. 2).*
>
> *"… we have a few different ways [of] recruit[ing]. One is through our stakeholders. … if somebody goes into their offices asking for information, that's how they are referred" (OrangeInc_IM, p. 6).*

Therefore, incubator managers resort to diverse strategies for effectively managing the difficulties that arise from complex working relationships to maintain the reputation of the incubator. Terminating relationships, particularly involving incubatees or staff, is a common approach all incubator managers adopt. Other managers, exemplified by BlueInc, VioletInc, and RedInc, further resort to legal action to address problematic relationships. □t the same time, negotiation is used to improve stakeholder dynamics, particularly with sponsors, while terminating relationships with a sponsor is considered a last resort. These examples demonstrate that untenable relationships can occur with any stakeholder. However, the strategy deployed depends on the stakeholder□s salience to the incubator. The following representative □uotes showcase the range of approaches incubator managers rely on to manage untenable relationships□

> *"... if people really challenge us to a point… we will thrash it out legally …" (VioletInc_IM, p.9).*
>
> *"… we could not continue hosting somebody like that; we had to exit [them] from the programme. … we don't want to be associated with such things" (BlueInc_IM, p. 6).*
>
> *"… if we suggested and tried everything, it comes to a point where we need to realise this is not working for you, and this is not working for us …" (OrangeInc_IM, p. 10).*

The range of approaches incubator managers employ reflects the diverse challenges encountered in their relationships with stakeholders. While termination and legal action are common responses to challenging relationships, negotiation and compromise vary among incubator managers based on their organisational context and relationship dynamics. What is apparent is that developing bad relationships with stakeholders is a common risk that incubator managers cautiously manage using various strategies to protect the incubator's reputation.

6.1.4 Managing perceived job constraints

6.1.4.1 Resource limitations

Among the six incubator managers in this study, RedInc's manager is the only one who does not share instances where resource constraints significantly influenced managerial decisions and incubator operations. Resource scarcity in the operating environment makes meeting stakeholders' expectations much more difficult. Raising critical resources for the incubator and incubatees in such an operating environment is arduous.

Two predominant strategies are observed among incubator managers in addressing resource limitations. First, incubator managers capitalise on readily available public sponsorship, forming partnerships with the public sponsor to secure funding. However, such access to public sponsorship can promote complacency and perpetuate a culture of dependence among incubator managers. The resultant strict adherence to the sponsor's stipulations, particularly regarding the economic transformation and onerous reporting requirements, supports the notion of dependence. These requirements increase the role demands, which often become constraints to incubator managers. The following quotes demonstrate the prevalent reliance of incubator managers on public sponsorship, which is received by all incubators in the study except VioletInc:

> *"SMMEs suffer because we don't have funding as we depend on this grant funding that comes in [from the public sponsor]" (IndigoInc_IM, p. 7).*
>
> *"When there is a problem with our funding from SEDA … that has happened once or twice…" (GreenInc_IM, p. 3).*
>
> *"SEDA … is a funder of our business and a partner, as well as the PIC" (RedInc_IM06, p. 5).*

However, while public sponsorship is easily accessible, it can only cover the incubator's operational costs and cannot be extended to incubatees desperately needing financial resources. This situation reduces the impact that incubators could make, a matter of grave concern to incubator managers. Failing to provide the critical entrepreneurial support expected by incubatees, such as access to finance and markets, challenges incubators' mandates. It raises questions

about the motivation to establish the incubator□a genuine desire to support entrepreneurs or a self□serving endeavour to access easily accessible public resources. Conse□uently, incubator managers endeavour constantly to signal that incubatees are their most important stakeholders. Moreover, they strive to demonstrate that they are not motivated by financial returns but by a passion and desire to develop successful entrepreneurs. Such narratives seek to legitimise the incubator mandate, but these need to be augmented by tangible performance impact to substantiate the claims. The following representative statements by incubator managers demonstrate this attempt to elevate the salience of the incubatees□

> *“We are not in it for the money; we are in it for the rewards in the change we create. We have to get paid ... but it's not our motivation …" (VioletInc_IM, p.13).*
>
> *"… the most important stakeholder is the [incubatee]. Everybody else plays a supporting role in helping that business …" (OrangeInc_IM, p. 16).*
>
> *"… we want to build sustainable businesses …, as the old adage says, 'there's nothing wrong with doing well out of doing good'…" (GreenInc_IM, p. 7).*

Second, incubator managers become innovative in mobilising resources to mitigate the impact of a resource□constrained context. For instance, incubators exemplified by GreenInc leverage public sponsorship to establish a conglomerate of private entities to generate revenue for the incubator. Such revenue can be used to provide seed funding to the incubatees, addressing the critical needs of the entrepreneurs.

> *“… the [Group] encompasses [GVF], [Green Capital], and [GreenInc], but ultimately, it's all about the same goal - to build sustainable businesses” (GreenInc_IM, p. 7).*

Other incubator managers, prompted by the dwindling public sponsorship, diversify resource mobilisation efforts by broadening the scope of targeted sponsors. Simultaneously, these managers, exemplified by BlueInc, IndigoInc, and OrangeInc managers, leverage existing assets and expertise to generate additional revenue. By offering specialised services to the broader entrepreneurial community and renting out venues and e□uipment to entrepreneurs beyond the incubation programme, these managers generate income to sustain operations. However, the revenue generated from such initiatives can support the incubator’s operations but is inadequate to provide financial support to incubatees. Therefore, the incubator managers continue to grapple with unfulfilled incubatee expectations, risking the legitimacy of the incubators. Considering the incubatee’s entrepreneurial support expectations, distinguishing business incubators from ordinary business training organisations is vital for gaining and maintaining legitimacy as

organisations capable of nurturing entrepreneurs. The following statements exemplify the innovative strategies adopted by incubator managers to generate additional funding□

> *"We are also setting up a [manufacturing] plant. … it will be fully automated. It will also work more like a contract manufacturer" (IndigoInc_IM, p. 7).*
>
> *"… the drive is to try and make sure that the casting centre is also used by external people who are not necessarily the incubatees … a whole lot of equipment [at] the back … that will bring us a serious sustainability" (BlueInc_IM, p. 18).*
>
> *"… our skills development activities also generate money for the incubator. … my CEO does consulting work … those add up funds that come in" (OrangeInc_IM, p. 11).*

While incubator managers endeavour to implement the initiatives to supplement public sponsorship, RedInc's manager demonstrates a successful strategic leveraging of the partnership with public sponsors to attract private sponsors, diversifying the sources of sponsorship. RedInc exemplifies the relationship between gaining legitimacy and the ability to access resources. When stakeholders who control resources identify the value added by the incubator, they are keen to support it, helping to alleviate the resource constraints. Furthermore, the case demonstrates the critical role of incubator leadership, which is instrumental in identifying the target sector in which to operate and potential sponsors. The strategic leveraging of public sponsorship opens avenues for accessing multiple sponsors to avoid dependence on a single dominant sponsor. The following □uote supports the validity of the perspective on legitimacy and access to resources□

> *"Our value proposition to our partners is that yes, we can take care of the compliance, … you also need to be thinking about this longer term. That's why we have quite successfully been able to retain our clients. They can see that incremental improvement …" (RedInc_IM06, p. 7).*

6.1.4.2 Regulatory constraints: economic transformation regulations

The economic transformation and inclusion regulations are a double□edged sword for incubators, offering avenues for sponsorship from private and public sources while imposing notable constraints on incubator managers. Four incubator managers grapple with the imperative of compliance with the regulations. This compliance often compels managers to make decisions that may deviate from their preferred criteria for selecting entrepreneurs, potentially □eopardising the performance of the incubator. GreenInc's manager, for instance, acknowledges the compromise in their selection process, opting for incubatees they may not choose under normal circumstances. Similarly, VioletInc's manager desires relaxed regulations to enable the selection of entrepreneurs with more promising ideas capable of fostering more significant □ob opportunities within

communities. Additionally, concerns arise regarding the feasibility of accommodating specific target populations, such as individuals with disabilities, within the incubator's facilities, leading to unmet performance targets. Incubator managers grapple with the impact of adhering to the economic transformation regulations on the incubator mandate and performance. Failure to meet the incubator performance targets threatens the incubator's legitimacy and ability to attract entrepreneurs and more sponsors. The following excerpts from some of the incubator managers sum up the concerns of the incubator managers:

> *"… we can only ever help black beneficiaries in their community … but it couldn't just open it so slightly that if we can bring that other person that's more privileged … that person can create 15 times more jobs and transfer skills" (VioletInc_IM, p. 20).*

> *"… for the benefit of SEDA … we need to work with more youth, women, black-owned businesses. … We would take stuff that we … are not convinced they have commercial potential" (GreenInc_IM, p. 10).*

The preceding quotes confirm incubator managers' challenge in balancing the regulatory requirements of accessing sponsorship and achieving performance targets. Economic transformation is a justifiable objective for policymakers when considering the country's historical political and economic segregation ideology. However, using the regulations to underpin the incubation support programme, which aims to promote entrepreneurship in the country, seems counterintuitive, considering the limited resources allocated to the programme and the calibre of incubatees attracted through the insistence on the economic transformation regulations. Therefore, incubator managers adapt their incubation strategies and models to navigate the demands and ensure organisational sustainability without deviating from their mandates. The following quote from one incubator founder expresses the concern over incubator mandate dilution, a concern that incubator managers grapple with in executing their role:

> *"… we are actively working extremely hard on moving away from SEDA because they are impacting our mandate" (SR04, p. 8).*

Some of the strategies adopted by the incubator managers include extending the incubation period and introducing post-incubation support, which also increases the incubation cost. Considering the general resource constraints and the limited public sponsorship availed to incubator managers, the burden of meeting the demand is excessive. Incubator managers cannot adequately provide the comprehensive entrepreneurial support required by the calibre of entrepreneurs selected, leading to reduced impact, "setting people up to fail" (SR, p.). The situation worries incubator managers because business incubation's value and esteem diminish

through poor performance, e□uating them to organisations providing information and business training courses. Private sponsors and incubator staff confirm the challenge faced by incubator managers as highlighted in the following representative statements□

> *" … they are giving new incubators 2.8 million Rand a year. How are you supposed to build a viable and decent incubator staffed by people who know what they are doing for 2.8 million Rand a year?" (SR04, p. 9).*

> *"… we've been trying to tell SEDA that the targets they give us are outrageous … you don't see any impact on the SMMEs, they fall away or they always stay in the incubation programme, [since] the development is not done properly" (KW03, p. 10).*

Only RedInc's manager does not cite regulatory compliance as a significant constraint. The incubator, established to leverage economic transformation and inclusion regulations to foster entrepreneurship in a specific sector, views these regulations as an enabler in attracting sponsorship. Conse□uently, compliance with economic transformation regulations stands out as a demand enabling and constraining incubator managers' strategic agency.

6.1.4.3 Misaligned stakeholder expectations

Incubator managers fre□uently grapple with misaligned expectations from stakeholders, which can have profound implications for incubator operations and reputation. While some instances of misalignment present opportunities, many result in dissatisfaction among stakeholders, leading to negative evaluations of the incubator□s performance and damaging its reputation. Managing these misaligned expectations places significant constraints on incubator managers, who must navigate complex decisions to address them effectively.

For example, the manager of VioletInc faces divergent expectations from sponsors and incubatees. Sponsors prioritise flashy, media□friendly programmes over those addressing genuine community needs, while incubatees seek direct financial support instead of business assets aligned with programme ob□ectives. Similarly, the manager of IndigoInc contends with opportunistic entrepreneurs and frustrated incubatees, while managers of BlueInc, OrangeInc, and RedInc confront demands to facilitate access to business opportunities for incubatees. GreenInc□s manager, meanwhile, struggles with public sponsor expectations that undermine the incubator□s mission and reputation. The following statements present typical examples of misaligned expectations that incubator managers grapple with□

> *"They all want the likes of the kids with little teeth, smiling, and that's a much nicer picture, much more glamorous. Our frustration and challenges are to help the client to view other things in a more positive light …" (VioletInc_IM, p.9).*

"The most painful stakeholder is the SMMEs. We get really good SMMEs, and [then] those that are entitled" (IndigoInc_IM, p. 12).

"It's sometimes very difficult working with these government and quasi-government organisations because they don't have the same commercial drive or incentives as effectively a private entity does" (GreenInc_IM, p. 8).

□ critical analysis of the misaligned expectations suggests that three pertinent factors cause them. First, the incubation models do not address the actual needs of the entrepreneurs, offering generic support which can be obtained outside an incubator. For instance, entrepreneurs may have viable ideas that can only be realised through comprehensive support, including financial support and market access. However, if the incubator cannot provide such support, even though these are misaligned with what the incubator offers, the expectations are genuine for an entrepreneur □oining an incubation programme.

Second, an underlying conse□uence of a resource□constrained context is the emergence of opportunistic entrepreneurs, whose primary interest lies in resource accumulation without a corresponding commitment to the incubation programme. Such entrepreneurs have no grit and are □uick to give up when their disguised ob□ective is unmet. Third, some private sponsors may be driven by narrow, self□centred interests, particularly those seeking compliance with the economic transformation regulations to improve their B□BB□□ ratings. Such sponsors expect the incubator manager to provide services that primarily benefit them, some of which may be outside the incubator□s service offering. For instance, expecting an incubator to help corporates comply with environmental, social and governance □□SG□re□uirements is self□serving for the private corporations as it does not nurture entrepreneurs.

These misaligned expectations exacerbate the challenge of incubator managers attaining performance targets, conse□uently affecting the reputation of the incubator. The following representative □uotes highlight some of the misaligned expectations□

“… SMMEs expect funding when they come here [and] a sense that they won't have to pay for anything. … some [expect] that we will provide work, [while others] think that the incubator might actually run their businesses ... (OrangeInc_IM, p. 9).

"The business may want to be on this programme to get access to a partner and [think], 'I don't need your support’…. That kind of behaviour results in them contravening the elements of the SLA, and we would exit them" (RedInc_IM, p. 8).

In response to these challenges, incubator managers employ two main strategies finding innovative ways of meeting the stakeholders misaligned expectations or terminating relationships with them. Managers of IndigoInc, GreenInc, and BlueInc exemplify the relationship termination strategy when expectations are irreconcilable. Terminating relationships is much easier when the involved stakeholder is an incubatee or incubator staff. However, for a sponsor, the incubator managers exhaust other options, such as negotiation and moral appeal, before terminating the relationship. This approach suggests the salience attributed to the relationship with each stakeholder, with sponsors considered highly salient, as they provide resources necessary for the incubator s sustainability. Nevertheless, as discussed in section , incubator managers are morally constrained by the need to present the incubatee as the most important stakeholder, creating a dilemma. This dilemma often causes incubator managers to prolong some relationships with incubatees with misaligned expectations as a legitimation strategy. The following excerpts demonstrate the deployment of the relationship termination strategy

> *“The guys that we have had to drop along the way, it's often due to a lack of focus…” (GreenInc_IM, p. 15).*

> *“… if we suggested and tried everything, it comes to a point where we need to realise this is not working for you and this is not working for us …” (OrangeInc_IM, p. 10).*

On the contrary, innovation is often deployed to manage misaligned expectations from sponsors, as demonstrated by GreenInc s creation of income generating entities to address funding gaps and RedInc s establishment of separate entities to meet private sponsors expectations. RedInc also strategically reframes private sponsors’ narrow compliance expectations to focus on broader transformation ob ectives, appealing to sponsors and policymakers. This strategy demonstrates how incubator managers view problems as opportunities to be capitalised on in pursuit of the main objective. The approach hinges on the incubator manager’s awareness and willingness to learn when interacting with stakeholders, a process explained succinctly by OragneInc IM

> *"… once something is said or pops up that strikes the light bulb somewhere, I jot it down. I might not sit immediately and work with it, [but] I do try to make time to put it in writing and come up with a proposal" (OrangeInc_IM, p. 19).*

The creative process highlighted in the statement above is the foundation of the entrepreneurial innovation passed on to incubatees by incubator managers. In several instances, incubator managers’ creative minds are ignited by situations encountered in executing their roles. For instance, RedInc’s manager capitalises on misaligned sponsor expectations to create a solution that benefits the entrepreneurial ecosystem and prevents the dilution of RedInc’s mandate.

Moreover, the solution positions the incubator as a valued solution provider to the sponsors, thereby enhancing the incubator's legitimacy. Similarly, VioletInc's manager becomes creative to meet the misaligned publicity needs of the sponsors while addressing the needs of the beneficiaries, and the manager of IndigoInc responds to the incubatees' expectations for accredited training by initiating the formalisation of a training institute□

> *"… we have mitigated that through another social enterprise … which is meant to be more industry agnostic. We take the learnings out of [RedInc] as the offerings into other industries" (RedInc_IM, p. 12).*
>
> *"…you got to use these tactics so that you can keep benefiting the community, and now you almost have to make up these beautiful photographs so that the client can keep funding us…" (VioletInc_IM, p. 10).*
>
> *"We also decided to formalise the training … we now want to formalise and have … qualifications that are accredited …" (IndigoInc_IM, p. 57).*

These examples demonstrate incubator managers□concern regarding unfulfilled stakeholder expectations. While they are careful not to accommodate every expectation that may dilute the incubator mandate, they are also cognisant of the negative conse□uences of stakeholders' unmet expectations. This situation is both enabling and constraining to incubator managers' strategic agency, presenting opportunities to innovate in certain instances, while in others, they have no option but to terminate the stakeholder relationships.

6.2□ □ha□ter□□□ □ ar□□□ro□□□a□e□a□al□□□□□

The cross□case analysis of the results shows that despite the incubators being selected from different geographical locations within the country, having different sponsorship modes, and focusing on entrepreneurs in different sectors, their managers grapple with similar demands emanating from stakeholders' expectations. Therefore, their typical strategic responses share several commonalities.

The similarity in results stems from the contextual factors that shape the stakeholders' expectations, which are generally shared across the different incubators, albeit with some nuances. For instance, all the stakeholders prioritise the socioeconomic impact, growth, and sustainability of the incubator and its incubated ventures, as well as effective leadership. Incubatees particularly seek entrepreneurial support tailored to their needs, while staff anticipate mandate preservation and appreciation. Compliance with economic transformation regulations is crucial for public and private sponsors and policymakers, who value good governance and ethical

leadership from incubator managers. □dditionally, public sponsors re□uire incubators to maintain lean organisational structures.

Conse□uently, incubator managers make various choices when confronting □ob demands and constraints stemming from stakeholders' expectations, which ultimately impact the performance and sustainability of their organisations. Managers implement performance management systems to meet predefined performance criteria and collaborate with partners to secure vital resources. Moreover, innovation is paramount to ensure stakeholder satisfaction and the incubator's financial sustainability. The broad scope of responsibilities presents additional demands, addressed through delegation and strategic planning to maintain efficacy. Complex relationships with stakeholders necessitate termination of relationships or legal action, with negotiation and compromise strategies varying across circumstances.

Resource limitations pose significant constraints, prompting innovation in resource mobilisation and reliance on public sponsorship, which offers a lifeline, albeit with stringent re□uirements. Compliance with economic transformation and inclusion regulations is one of the constraining re□uirements of accessing public sponsorship. The constraint necessitates adaptive strategies, with some managers advocating for relaxed regulations while others leverage the regulations to mobilise more resources. Public sponsors wield significant power, influencing organisational structures and posing risks to managerial autonomy. Misaligned stakeholder expectations further constrain incubator managers, necessitating creative solutions and occasionally relationship terminations.

Overall, the incubator managers from the selected cases exercise strategic agency through diverse approaches tailored to ensure incubator sustainability, achieve the envisaged performance impact, and protect the incubator□s reputation. The findings suggest that incubator managers operating in a resource□constrained context grapple with demonstrating the value added by an incubator, distinguishing it from other organisations that provide information, training and business and entrepreneurship courses. Conse□uently, in this operating context, the legitimacy of the business incubator as an organisation established to nurture new ventures can be easily challenged. The subse□uent chapter discusses how these findings relate to the extant literature reviewed in Chapter □. □dditionally, the implications of these findings to the theoretical framework employed in this study are discussed before transitioning to the concluding Chapter □.

Chapter 7: Discussion

7.1 Introduction

This study responds to calls by scholars such as Kakabadse et al. (2015) and Mantere (2013) to deepen our understanding of managerial roles and behaviour, particularly regarding "what enables agency for managers operating under specific role expectations" (Mantere, 2013, p. 214). Kakabadse et al. (2015) advocate for research focusing on "constraints facing incubator managers and what steps they could implement to reduce the negative impact of these obstacles" (p. 453). Consequently, the primary aim of this study is to describe how the expectations of multiple stakeholders constrain and/or enable the strategic agency of business incubator managers within a resource-constrained context. The following primary research question guides the subsequent discussion of the findings:

"In what way do stakeholders' role expectations enable and/or constrain the strategic agency of business incubator managers in a resource-constrained context?"

7.2 Conceptual Model

The research findings presented in Chapters 5 and 6 signal that incubator managers operating in a resource-constrained context grapple with demonstrating the legitimacy (Suchman et al., 1995) of the business incubator as an organisation established to nurture sustainable new ventures. The incubator must distinguish itself from other organisations providing closely related services, such as business and entrepreneurship training, to gain and maintain legitimacy. However, such distinction and legitimacy are effectively achieved by delivering a visible impact of sustainable new business ventures aligned to the incubator mandate (Deephouse et al., 2017). Such performance requires adequate resources to sustain the incubator and provide a resource-rich environment for entrepreneurs to develop their ideas and businesses. Consequently, balancing incubator sustainability, delivering impact, and preserving the incubator mandate is central to the incubator manager's strategic agency.

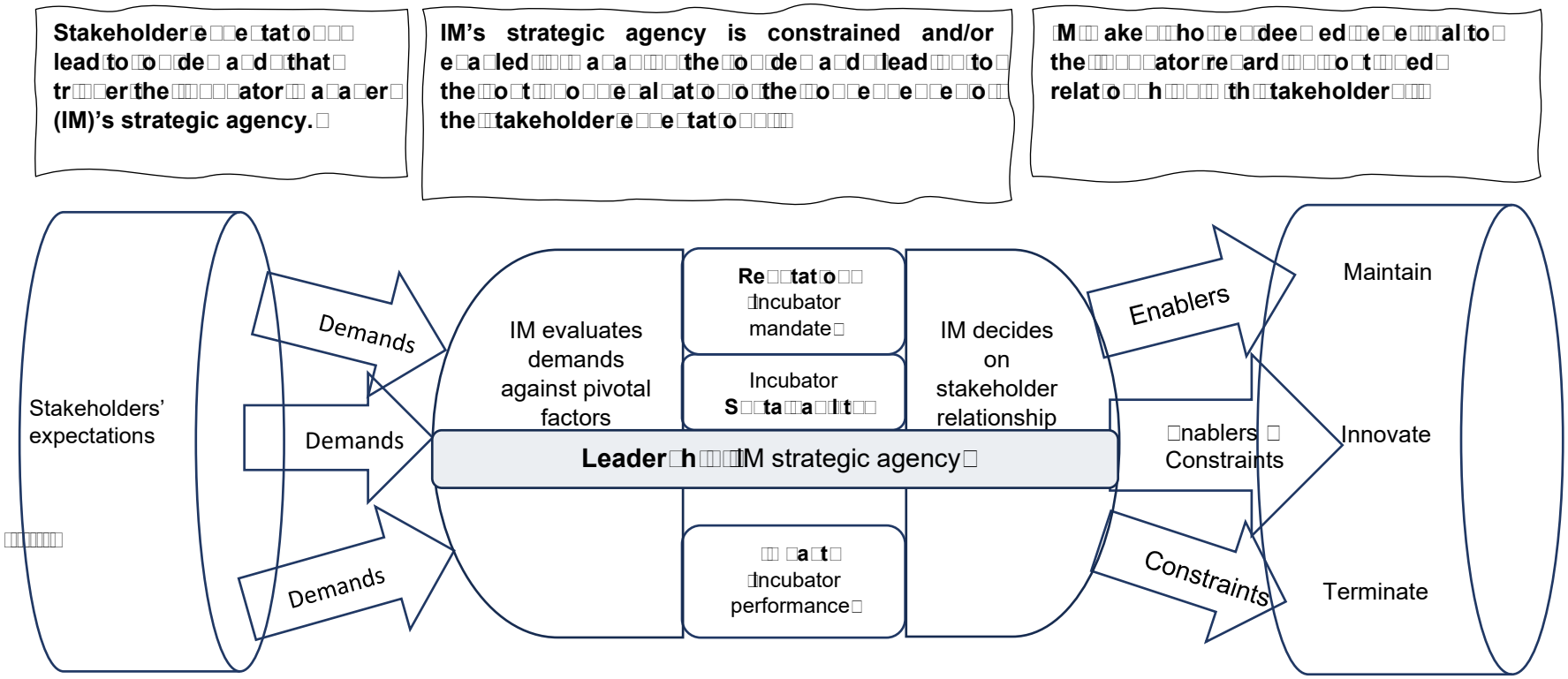
The research findings are the foundation for the conceptual model depicted in Figure 7. The model is designed to elucidate how stakeholders' expectations enable and/or constrain the strategic agency of business incubator managers. Stewart's (1982) Demand, Constraints, and Choices (DCC) model, rooted in organisational role theory, serves as a theoretical framework in this study to analyse the demands and constraints incubator managers face arising from stakeholders' expectations. Although Stewart's model posits that the demands and constraints managers encounter are inherently mutually exclusive, the empirical findings of this study reveal a more

nuanced reality. Specifically, stakeholders' expectations for incubator sustainability, compliance with economic transformation regulations, and SMMEs' growth and sustainability can simultaneously act as constraints that challenge incubator managers and as enablers that facilitate strategic decision-making. This discovery prompts a re-evaluation of the DCC model, proposing a more nuanced interpretation of how demands and constraints interact within business incubation, particularly in a resource-constrained context.

The conceptual model delineates the three pivotal factors that incubator managers must balance: performance impact, incubator sustainability, and incubator reputation. Accordingly, incubator managers assess each stakeholder's expectations based on their anticipated effects on these three factors. Stakeholder expectations that positively contribute to all three dimensions enhance the legitimacy of the incubator and enable the manager's strategic agency, thereby fostering continued engagement with the stakeholder. Conversely, when a stakeholder's expectations jeopardise all three dimensions, the manager's agency is constrained, and discontinuing the relationship with such stakeholders becomes a viable option.

Moreover, certain expectations may positively impact one or two factors while undermining others, creating a scenario where the manager's agency is both constrained and enabled. In such instances, managers must innovate to mitigate threats while maximising the beneficial aspects of their relationships with stakeholders. The exercise of the manager's agency is evidenced through the decisions made in assessing stakeholder expectations and determining the nature of the relationship with them. These decisions are influenced by the manager's leadership style and capabilities.

The model's design symbolises the dynamic relationship between the incubator and stakeholders, resembling an axle with two wheels. The left wheel represents stakeholder expectations, while the right wheel symbolises the choices made by the incubator manager. The domain between the two wheels signifies the realm of the incubator manager's strategic agency, where leadership is exercised to maintain equilibrium and propel the incubator forward. The manager's decision-making process is continuous since stakeholder expectations often evolve throughout the relationship (Liu, 2020). The axle metaphor illustrates the incubator manager's leadership role in balancing stakeholder expectations with the strategic objectives of the incubator, ensuring smooth progression and adaptation as circumstances change.



re *Expectations, Demands, Enablers, Constraints, and Agency (EDECA) model*

The following sections discuss the components represented in the conceptual model, focusing on how the strategic agency of incubator managers within a resource-constrained context is influenced. The meaning and significance of the study's findings are discussed in relation to the extant literature, and alternative interpretations of some of the findings are advanced.

7.3 Enablers and constraints of managers' strategic agency

7.3.1 Misaligned stakeholder expectations

7.3.1.1 Misaligned incubatee expectations

This study makes a notable contribution by extending the application of role theory within entrepreneurship support, particularly in business incubation, where its utilisation has been limited (Kakabadse et al.,). The scarcity of studies employing role theory in the examination of business incubation can be attributed partly to the predominant focus on the different aspects of business incubation (Sohail et al.,), such as incubator typologies (Clarysse et al., ; Sedita et al.,), incubation process (aboen, ; Bruneel et a.,), performance evaluation (Barbero et al., ; Lukes et al.,), and the ecosystem (me-cua et al., ;), with less attention directed towards the behaviour of the incumbent in the role of incubator manager, which serves as the focal point of this study.

Traditionally, scholars examining organisations and their stakeholders have predominantly turned to stakeholder theory (Mitchell et al.,). (lsos et al.) use the stakeholder theory to explore how technology incubators manage stakeholders' expectations. Conducted from a developed economy context, (lsos et al.'s (2013) study focuses on the relationship between the incubators and the stakeholders, with the incubator as the unit of analysis. Considering the current study's focus on the incubator manager as the unit of analysis, role theory emerges as the most suitable theoretical lens for elucidating how stakeholder expectations influence the incubator manager's strategic agency. In role theory, these stakeholders are regarded as members of the incubator manager's role-set. Role theory posits that roles emerge from shared normative expectations regarding role behaviour (Hindin, ; Turner,). However, norms exhibit variation among individuals (Biddle, ; Hindin,), resulting in role occupants contending with conflicting norms and demands, thereby experiencing role strain, which necessitates resolution for optimal performance and contentment in the role (Goode, ; Hindin,).

The findings of this study reaffirm the straining effect of expectations that give rise to conflicting demands and those that diverge from the role occupant's expectations. Expecting incubator managers to provide comprehensive entrepreneurial support to the increasing number of incubatees while the available sponsorship is declining is counterintuitive. Conventional logic

expects the performance targets to be reduced in such instances. Moreover, an incubator is conceptualised as a resource□munificent environment created to provide new ventures with the support necessary to overcome the critical formative years □□me□cua et al., □□□□□. However, the findings show that the dominant incubation model in the resource□constrained context is designed to provide basic entrepreneurial support, with no access to financial support and markets, the incubatees' critical needs (Sohail et al., 2023). This results in the disconfirmation of incubatees' expectations □Lecluyse □ Knockaert, □□□□□, risking incubator reputation damage. Therefore, the findings demonstrate how incubator managers are faced with conflicting expectations □Fondas □ Stewart, □□□□□Merton, □□□□□of providing ade□uate support to incubatees while, at the same time, they are grappling with the incubator's financial sustainability, a situation that challenges their strategic agency. □s one of the interviewed incubatees indicated, the entrepreneurial support fell short of their expectations□

> *"Finance from the incubation side has been an uphill; there has been no finance and no short-term loans to support any form of challenge … even if it is a short-term [loan] to [complete a] project, … you would never get [it] ..." (EN02, p. 5).*

Furthermore, the general functionalist perspective of role theory is often criti□ued for its limitations when applied to elucidate individual behaviours in micro□social contexts due to its overly prescriptive nature and disregard for agency □Mantere, □□□□□Turner, □□□□□. The findings of this study contribute to reinforcing this perspective, illustrating how managers in a resource□ constrained context exercise their strategic agency in response to demands stemming from stakeholder expectations. Notable actions in this regard include incubator managers terminating relationships with stakeholders whose expectations threatened the incubator□s reputation. Benneworth et al. □□□□□□ highlight how leaders□strategic agency is called upon when their organisations□ association with some stakeholders may result in reputational impairment. Preserving organisational reputation is pivotal in gaining and maintaining legitimacy □Bitektine, □□□□□□thus, incubator managers make choices beneficial to the incubator because they have agency, contrary to the prescriptive conceptualisation of role theory.

7.3.1.2 Misaligned sponsors' expectations

Sponsorship significantly influences incubator managers□ strategic orientation, performance metrics, and stakeholder relations. □xisting scholarship categorises incubator sponsorship into three principal types□public, private, and hybrid □□erts et al., □□□□□Mrka□ic, □□□□□. □s holders of critical resources re□uired by incubators to become sustainable and deliver the expected impact, sponsors confer legitimacy to incubators that meet their criteria for gaining legitimacy □Deephouse

et al., □□□□□. In resource□limited settings, public sponsorship is more prevalent, making public sponsors dominant stakeholders and profoundly influencing incubator performance and stakeholder engagement □Mrkaic, □□□□□.

This current study□s findings confirm the dominance of public sponsorship within incubator operations, aligning with prior findings from scholars such as Kakabadse et al. □□□□□□and Lalkaka □□□□□□. However, incubator managers in resource□constrained contexts perceive the level of public sponsor□s involvement in the incubators□operations to be excessive. This finding points to the importance of balancing accountability and autonomy. Public sponsors need to account to the public for the use of public funds □□erts et al., □□□□□□thus, good governance and effective reporting are crucial. Therefore, they consider themselves empowered to intervene when they perceive public resources threatened by abuse. The threat of public resource abuse is an urgent claim, and considering the power and legitimate status of the public sponsor, they have the authority to act □Mitchell et al., □□□□□.

Nevertheless, a restrained exercise of authority remains necessary to provide incubator managers autonomy to manage the incubators without concern of un□ustified interference. This perspective aligns with Merton□s □□□□□□view that members of the role□set may not realise the impact of the conflicting expectations on the role occupant, perpetuating a strain that can affect the incumbent□s performance. The following statement from one of the incubator managers exemplifies the unfolding of this scenario□

> *"… [they have] this sense of ownership to the incubator.… They sometimes fail to understand that we are a unit on our own (BlueInc_IM, p. 16).*

The rising trend towards hybrid sponsorship models □Mulinga Hillemane et al., □□□□□illuminates another critical challenge related to the dominance of the public sponsor□the misalignment of expectations between private and public sponsors. The study reveals that while public sponsorship is essential for incubators in resource□scarce contexts, it leads to a power imbalance detrimental to managing hybrid□sponsored incubators. This imbalance arises from divergent goals□public sponsors are driven by non□commercial policy ob□ectives □□erts et al., □□□□□Mrkaic, □□□□□, while private sponsors aim for financial returns from commercial success □Gassmann □ Becker, 2006). The study's findings show how incubator managers navigate these differences discreetly to retain crucial public funding while seeking alternative sponsorships, making public sponsorship simultaneously an enabler and a constraint to their strategic agency. The GreenInc case is a typical example, as highlighted by the following statement from the incubator manager□

"It's sometimes very difficult working with these government and quasi-government organisations because they don't have the same commercial drive or incentives as effectively a private entity does" (GreenInc_IM, p. 8).

This scenario is aptly explained by Merton's □□□□□theory regarding the influence of stakeholder proximity on managerial behaviour. Hybrid incubator managers tend to align with private sponsors□ expectations due to their direct involvement and oversight, thus ensuring the incubator's core ob□ectives are met despite formal accountability to public sponsors. □s extant literature □e.g., Benneworth et al., □□□□□Hackett □ Dilts, □□□□□suggest, private sponsors insist on having board representatives chosen for their expertise rather than political considerations. These board members insist on managing risks such as those introduced by the misaligned expectations of the public sponsors that can impair the incubator's reputation. The incubator manager's strategic agency is demonstrated in leveraging public sponsorship to establish innovative ways of generating revenue, enabling the incubator to terminate the relationship with the public sponsor to protect the incubator's mandate.

Therefore, the study delineates the difficulty of balancing diverse funding ob□ectives without compromising the incubator's mandate. It underscores the importance of establishing clear partnership agreements and shared ob□ectives among sponsors to prevent expectation misalignment. However, the urgent need for resources can compel incubator managers to enter compromises that become difficult to reverse, embedding these concessions deeply into the sponsorship relationship, a concern expressed by one incubator founder□

"… it's a typical sort of insidious process where it's like, one step at a time, we are gonna move you away from your mandate. The next thing we will be training bricklayers because we [want to] tick boxes and get our funding" (SR04, p. 8).

□dditionally, the findings provide insight into the strategic acceptance of public sponsorship by private incubators despite the potential for mandate dilution. This strategy is driven by the need for legitimacy in attracting private investment, especially for nascent incubators in resource□ constrained contexts. Such contexts create □hard budget constraints□□Kornai, □□□□□, severely limiting strategic choices for incubator managers. Public sponsorship, therefore, becomes a tactical means to □uickly gain legitimacy and attract funding from private sponsors who seek proven initiatives □Lalkaka, □□□□. Innovative incubator managers who successfully leverage inade□uate public sponsorship to attract private sponsors or establish other reliable revenue□ generating initiatives that can be used to support entrepreneurs gain legitimacy as resourceful managers whose true mission is to nurture new ventures, becoming an entrepreneurial example

rather than being perpetually dependent on public funds □□ernoudt, □□□□□Brown □ Mawson, □□□□□.

> *"… we are not expecting them to be profitable entities [as such] … but we were expecting to lessen the dependence on SEDA …" (SR02_PMR, p. 5).*

This research further highlights the prevalence of misaligned expectations across most incubators, irrespective of sponsorship mode. Managers of privately funded incubators also struggle to balance sponsor expectations with the incubator□s mission. Such misalignments are not unexpected for private sponsors motivated by the need to comply with the economic transformation regulations. While private corporations can embark on philanthropic community development and empowerment pro□ects through corporate social investments, some do so in response to government legislation □Haugh, □□□□□. The focus of such corporations tends to be meeting the minimum expected by the legislation, which may be inade□uate to deliver sustainable and meaningful development. This study□s findings illuminate the enabling and constraining effect of such regulations.

□xtant research shows that the impact of regulation aiming to promote entrepreneurial activities depends on the nature of the regulations and the entrepreneurs' awareness and understanding of the institutional environment □D□ankov et al., □□□□□□acquemin & Janssen, 2013). This study's findings show that incubator managers aware of the opportunities presented by the economic transformation regulations leverage them to raise sponsorship from private corporations. They design incubation strategies and models tailored to meet the expectations of the corporations, demonstrating an understanding of the institutional environment. □s extant research shows, once an organisation meets the expectations of the stakeholders who control resources, it gains legitimacy and can easily access the resources re□uired for long□term survival □Deephouse, □□□□□. The importance of prior knowledge to capitalising on regulations and the resource□accessing advantage of gaining legitimacy is confirmed in the following statements by one of the incubator managers capitalising on the economic transformation regulations to mobilise sponsorship□

> *"… the partners see the benefit of using [RedInc] …. We are one of those incubators who are quite fortunate [to] have a stable pool of funders committed to a longer-term journey" (RedInc_IM, p. 5).*

However, private corporations expect more from incubator managers, particularly upholding the image of the private corporations at the expense of the incubator□s mandate and addressing other non□incubation challenges the corporations encounter in the communities. Private corporations are concerned about gaining the trust of local communities □□ourdan □ Kivleniece, □□□□□and

maintaining their image as responsible corporate citi□ens who comply with government legislation rather than focusing on developing sustainable entrepreneurs. This behaviour is expected since their sponsorship of the incubators is not voluntary□it is a cohesion through legislation □Haugh, □□□□□□thus, there is no intrinsic motivation to develop new entrepreneurs who can become potential competitors. The only incentive is to avoid the penalties that accompany regulations. In the context of this study, the penalty is the low B□BB□□ rating of the corporations, which □eopardises their potential to continue doing business with the government. One incubator manager stressed that compliance with regulations is good and bad because it demands a particular type of behaviour to redress some of the challenges of the past, but how compliance is implemented sometimes needs to become more sustainable □RedInc□IM, p. □□. The following statement from another incubator manager showcases the noncommittal behaviour of private corporations□

> *"… remember the money they have to part with is like paying insurance; they don't actually want to [spend] money …. It's such a waste of [their] money, but they won't say it out loud, but you know that's the issue" (VioletInc_IM, p.15).*

Conse□uently, the primary challenge for private incubator managers is managing these misalignments□ strategic implications. Legitimacy re□uires organisations to adhere to their foundational missions □□hmad □ Thornberry, □□□□□Deephouse et al., □□□□□rather than deviating in pursuit of funding opportunities. The broader stakeholders can perceive un□ustified deviations from the mission as chance□taking, signalling a self□serving motive. Thus, incorporating the misaligned expectations of sponsors into the incubator mandate to please sponsors dilutes the mandate and impairs the incubator□s reputation. Hence, creating separate entities to respond to sponsors□ non□incubation re□uirements, exemplified by RedInc□IM, aims to protect the incubator□s foundational mandate and maintain legitimacy.

Therefore, incubator managers must navigate a complex landscape of sponsor expectations, organisational sustainability, and incubator mandate while operating under resource constraints. The strategic decisions made in this context are crucial for balancing these competing demands and ensuring the incubator□s legitimacy is upheld, thereby facilitating the continued attraction of resources needed to develop sustainable new ventures.

7.3.2 Achieving incubator impact

The existing body of literature highlights the role of business incubation programmes across both developed and emerging markets, emphasising their significance in fostering the inception, survival, and growth of startups □□me□cua et al., □□□□□Han et al., □□□□□Sohail et al., □□□□□. These

startups are seen as pivotal in driving regional and national economic development, evidenced by their contributions to employment growth rates (Haugh, 2007; Lukes et al., 2019), GDP per capita enhancement (Vyyagari et al., 2012), and poverty reduction (Sutter et al., 2019). Nonetheless, despite ongoing academic efforts to establish robust metrics and methodologies for assessing business incubators' effectiveness (e.g., Messeghem et al., 2017; Rathore & Agrawal, 2020; Soetanto & Geenhuizen, 2019), a unified framework for measuring their impact remains elusive (Ahmad & Thornberry, 2017). This ambiguity undermines the perceived legitimacy of incubators.

This study underscores the challenges incubator managers face due to the absence of agreed-upon performance metrics. These challenges are compounded by the influence of dominant sponsors on the selection of performance indicators. Consistent with previous findings that dominant stakeholders shape managerial directions (Han et al., 2019; Merton, 1968; Mitchell et al., 1997), this study reveals that while incubator managers are aware of the necessary support to nurture sustainable entrepreneurship and the metrics for impact assessment, sponsor-imposed criteria predominate. Notably, public sponsors' focus on quantitative outcomes, such as the number of incubatee graduations, might fulfil immediate objectives and secure short-term funding for incubators but does not necessarily translate to the legitimacy derived from the sustained success of incubated enterprises. As Aerts et al. (2007) indicated, this discrepancy challenges incubators' assumed efficacy, where no significant performance difference is observed between incubated and non-incubated startups. The following representative statements from the respondents support this concern with the measurement metrics:

> *"… don't measure us on how many people we pushed through some […] training program that doesn't help … we are a star performer when it comes to actual achievements and building businesses that take products offshore…" (SR04, p. 8).*

> *"They will give you, [say], a million rand, yet they expect you to support 80 incubatees… You [cannot] fully support these SMMEs the way you would love to …" (BlueInc_IM, p. 20).*

The reliance on output-based metrics offers a limited view of performance, potentially misleading managers and aligning with the short-term goals of public sponsors rather than ensuring long-term impact. Messeghem et al. (2017) suggested that a balanced scorecard approach could offer a more comprehensive performance evaluation framework, reducing bias regardless of the sponsorship model. However, impacts such as regional economic development, job creation, and financial returns typically manifest beyond the incubation period, with incubator managers having minimal influence over ventures post-graduation. This creates a performance evaluation dilemma, especially in resource-limited environments, where managers are primarily concerned with immediate operational challenges and organisational sustainability.

However, demonstrating performance impact is pivotal to long-term organisational sustainability. As existing research shows, performance and values are vital to gaining and maintaining legitimacy, with organisations that fail to meet their goals or align with societal values risking losing legitimacy (Deephouse,). The previous section focused on the potential risk of misaligned stakeholder expectations, which may impair the incubator mandate, pointing to the incubator's link to the societal values of promoting entrepreneurship. Incubator impact is concerned with demonstrating the organisation's performance through visible results to gain legitimacy. However, legitimacy is not self-claimed—it is conferred by various sources, including the state, government agencies, professional organisations, the media, public opinion, and individuals (Deephouse et al.,)based on their different criteria. This research's findings illustrate how the absence of an agreed framework for measuring incubator performance impact makes achieving legitimacy complex, as it entails satisfying multiple stakeholders with varying expectations and criteria for conferring legitimacy (Deephouse et al.,). This quagmire is central to the strategic agency of incubator managers in a resource-constrained context. They grapple with making choices that balance demonstrating performance impact without deviating from the mandate while pursuing incubator sustainability, an exercise that requires meeting several stakeholders' legitimacy-conferring criteria.

This study does not advocate for a specific incubation model but indicates that prevalent approaches within the research context favour short-term achievements over long-term impacts. Such a focus may not align with the broader objectives of business incubation programmes and plunge the business incubator organisation into a debated legitimacy state (Deephouse et al., 2017), with stakeholders questioning the incubator's activities and fundamental values, i.e., what differentiates the incubator from entrepreneurship and business training organisations, and what motivates the founders to establish an incubator, an organisation claiming to support the birth, survival, growth of new ventures (Sohail et al.,), in an operating environment with resource constraints. This debate is further fuelled by the nascency of the business incubation phenomenon in the study context, exposing most incubator managers to the same liabilities of newness and smallness that the founders and managers of new startups face (Audretsch et al., ; Vanderstraeten et al.,). The debated legitimacy necessitates re-evaluating current incubation practices to better support sustainable entrepreneurial success in resource-constrained contexts.

7.3.3 Maintaining incubator reputation

The contribution of reputation to an organisation's legitimacy has been acknowledged in existing literature. For instance, within the incubation and regional innovation systems, university leaders

grapple with balancing their traditional and research tasks and the contemporary drive for being more entrepreneurial (Wissheim et al., 2021). At the centre of the dilemma is some stakeholders' concern about the institution's reputational impairment and the resultant impact on the university's legitimacy (Benneworth et al., 2016). While some research focuses on reputation as a distinct construct, there is a strong relationship with legitimacy (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008).

The findings of this research elucidate how the pursuit of incubator legitimacy influences incubator managers regarding the incubator's reputation. Incubator reputation is crucial for attracting sponsors and incubatees with promising entrepreneurial ventures and is substantially influenced by its perceived performance impact (Aaboen, 2009). While incubator managers contend with resource constraints and dominant stakeholders' enforcement of their expectations, they could adopt a laissez-faire approach (Bergek & Norrman, 2008) in the management of the incubation process, aligning with the expectations of dominant stakeholders for the sole purpose of incubator sustainability. However, incubator managers exercise their strategic agency (Mantere, 2013), prioritising stakeholder expectations that enhance the incubator's reputation and finding ways to mitigate the impact of enforced expectations that may affect performance. This concern is underscored by the role of word-of-mouth endorsements from graduated incubatees and referrals from other stakeholders, which can considerably influence the incubator's reputation. Dissatisfaction among the incubation alumni, or the failure of businesses post-graduation, poses reputational risks (Ahmad & Thornberry, 2017).

Moreover, reputation is built by remaining loyal to the organisational mission and demonstrating to stakeholders the commitment to the purpose for which the organisation was established. Existing literature elucidates that as organisations navigate the regulatory, pragmatic, moral, and cultural-cognitive dimensions of legitimacy, they face challenges when their value-creation or purpose is questioned (Deephouse et al., 2017). Therefore, taking a legal form as an NPO is inadequate to demonstrate a compelling purpose to all stakeholders. In an operating context with high unemployment and extreme poverty, many stakeholders, including the public, have a vested interest in the activities of incubators, particularly those receiving public funds. Since all stakeholders confer legitimacy on organisations based on their own criteria (Deephouse et al., 2017), remaining committed to the stated mandate is vital. Incubators that brand themselves as leaders in particular sectors, i.e., sector specialisation (Klofsten et al., 2019), must stay true to such sectors. While diversifying and becoming generalists has benefits, if that decision and transition are not managed properly, it risks impairing the incubator's reputation. For these reasons, this study's findings help to clarify why incubator managers are constrained by stakeholder expectations that threaten to dilute their mandate.

“We are actively working extremely hard on moving away from SEDA because they are impacting our mandate. And we don't want to change our mandate, just to [please] one government agency”(GreenInc_SR04, p. 8).

Furthermore, the findings illuminate the strategic choices available to incubator managers concerning stakeholders□ expectations and preserving the incubator□s reputation. Managers may either conform to these expectations, seek to modify them through innovative approaches or sever ties with sponsors to avert potential reputational damage. The decision to terminate relationships aligns with Merton□s □□□□□□concept of role□set abridgement to ease role□related strains. However, as discussed in the literature □e.g., Merton, □□□□□ Turner, □□□□□, the feasibility of severing relationships depends on the organisation□s ability to function without the stakeholder. Conse□uently, this study□s findings elucidate the salience of each stakeholder□s relationship with the incubator manager. □nding relationships with incubator staff and incubatees is much easier for the incubator manager as their absence does not critically impact operations. This confirms that while the incubator□incubatee relationship is mutually beneficial, neither party is significantly disadvantaged without the other □□hmad □ Thornberry, □□□□□. This finding further supports the perspective advanced in this thesis that incubator managers endeavour to position the incubatee as a highly salient and definitive stakeholder to gain moral legitimacy, although they are fully aware that sponsors are the uncontested definitive stakeholders. Sponsors, as providers of critical resources, possess power, legitimacy, and urgency in their claims □Mitchel et al., □□□□□□thus, incubator managers grapple with meeting sponsors□ expectations.

Therefore, the dissolution of relationships with sponsors is more complex and typically considered only when alternative funding sources have been secured. □s extant role literature suggests, the relationship cannot be severed without affecting the manager’s performance (Merton, 1957; Turner, □□□□□. This situation highlights the strategic agency of incubator managers in navigating the constraints they face, underscoring their role in maintaining the incubator□s reputation and operational viability through creative resourcefulness.

7.3.4 Incubator sustainability

The envisaged incubator□s performance impact and reputation can only be realised if the incubator sustains its operations. In operating contexts where resources are limited, maintaining the operational continuity of small organisations, including many business incubators, presents significant challenges □Baskaran □ Mehta, □□□□□ Desa □ Basu, □□□□□. This difficulty is compounded by the distinctive dynamics between business incubators and new ventures where critical entrepreneurial support is vital during the early, volatile phases of the ventures□ development □Han et al., □□□□□ Incubators must provide a nurturing environment rich in resources

to support the new ventures growth and sustainability me cua et al., Dutt et al., . lternatively, incubator managers must leverage their networks, bridging the incubatees with relevant partners to secure the resources necessary for their growth and survival me cua et al., utio Rannikko, Shih aboen, . However, establishing rich and extensive networks is an endeavour that relies on the incubator s legitimacy status, with those with unchallenged legitimacy easily accessing resources and increasing their chances of survival Clarke, Deephouse, , while those who fail to gain the necessary legitimacy become dependent on the killing kindness Brown Mawson, of public sponsors.

This study s findings demonstrate that gaining the legitimacy necessary to secure critical resources is a more complex exercise for organisations operating in resource constrained contexts. The general scarcity of partners with ade uate resources to sponsor incubators leaves the public sponsor as the primary funder accessible to incubator managers. Therefore, despite the constraints associated with receiving public sponsorship, incubator managers consider the sponsorship a lifeline. This observation suggests that the public sponsor s criteria for conferring legitimacy to incubators are more relaxed than those of private sponsors. However, the less stringent criteria are a double edged sword for the incubator managers. While it provides easy access to public sponsorship, it increases competition as incubators increase, fuelled by the government programme to promote entrepreneurship through incubation support DTI, . To raise additional resources from other potential sponsors, incubator managers must meet such stakeholders criteria for conferring legitimacy Deephouse, . Otherwise, the incubator becomes heavily dependent on the meagre resources from public sponsorship and fails to produce a tangible performance impact, leading to a bad reputation and threatening the incubator s sustainability. In the absence of ade uate resources to sustain the incubator and extend to the incubatees, the buffering mechanism me cua et al., is not achieved as incubatees still need to compete for resources in the environment and compete with established ventures on the market. On the contrary, incubator managers who capitalise on public sponsorship and innovate to gain legitimacy with other stakeholders uickly can attract more resources, guaranteeing incubator sustainability. These two scenarios are depicted in the following statements

> *“Our SMMEs suffer because we don't have funding as we depend on this grant funding that comes in. We are moving along now the route of making sure that we have got our operational, at least, covered” (IndigoInc_IM, p. 7).*

"We are one of those incubators who are quite fortunate to have a stable pool of funders committed to a longer-term journey. Public sector funding is not a driver for us. We see it more strategically to leverage and get other partners on …" (RedInc_IM06, p. 5).

This study's findings emphasise that incubator managers contend with achieving legitimacy with various stakeholders to attract resources and guarantee the incubator's sustainability. This focus on the incubator's sustainability, as IndigoInc_IM stresses, is prevalent across most incubators. The findings corroborate existing literature that shows that incubator managers prioritise the survival of the incubator, often at the expense of the new ventures' developmental needs (Ahmad & Thornberry, 2017; Kakabadse et al., 2003). While this is the reality of incubator managers' challenges, it reinforces the debated legitimacy status (Deephouse et al., 2017) of the incubator as an organisation, especially in resource-constrained contexts, advanced in this thesis. The dilemma the incubator managers grapple with is demonstrating the incubator's value when the organisation struggles to raise resources beyond its survival. Consequently, how can the entrepreneurs receive the expected comprehensive entrepreneurial support to achieve a tangible impact? Without performance impact, the incubator's reputation and legitimacy remain challenged, access to resources becomes difficult, and the circle continues.

The other double-edged sword that incubator managers grapple with in their quest for the incubator's sustainability is the economic transformation regulations. Taking advantage of the regulations through compliance as required by the public sponsor or designing incubation programmes to address compliance requirements of private corporations meets the legitimacy-conferring criteria for these organisations. Thus, incubator managers can access the necessary resources. Moreover, beneficiaries of the economic transformation regulations, the incubatees, embrace the role of the incubator managers in advancing the regulations' objectives, mainly if the incubation programme provides the required entrepreneurial support, conferring further legitimacy on the incubator.

However, there are drawbacks associated with the economic transformation regulations. First, the regulations' restrictive incubatee selection criteria have the potential to impact incubator performance and reputation, directly impacting the incubator's ability to gain and maintain its legitimacy. The criteria for selecting entrepreneurs, traditionally based on the entrepreneurial idea's potential for success and the entrepreneur's motivation (Aerts et al., 2007; Baraldi & Ingemansson Havenvid, 2017; Bergek & Norrman, 2008), face restrictions under the transformation regulations, impacting the diversity and scope of incubatee recruitment. Compliance with these regulations, aimed at socioeconomic development and inclusivity, narrows the selection to specific demographic groups, constraining managers' ability to fulfil their

organisational mission. The following pleading by one incubator manager exemplifies the concerns of incubator managers regarding the regulations.

> *"… we can only ever help black beneficiaries in their community … but it couldn't just open it so slightly that if we can bring that other person that's more privileged … that person can create 15 times more jobs and transfer skills" (VioletInc_IM, p. 20).*

Second, some resource holders do not consider the economic transformation regulations appropriate, often considering them discriminative and counter-progressive. Such stakeholders find no reason to commit their resources to supporting organisations directly or indirectly championing unjust legislation. If they did not do business with the government and were not obliged to comply with the legislation, they would not sponsor any incubation. Therefore, complying with the economic transformation regulations is considered a burden. This attitude is evident in the following statement from one incubator manager.

> *"We want to justify that with the appropriate level of social return that shows [the sponsors] that this compliance burden can generate a return on investment into [their] business and should be aligned to [the] business strategy" (RedInc_IM, p. 6).*

These findings demonstrate how incubator managers contend with balancing the various stakeholders' criteria for conferring legitimacy. The multiplicity of legitimacy that an organisation can gain (Deephouse et al.,) further exacerbates the incubator managers' nightmares. While an incubator can gain pragmatic legitimacy, conferred by the individual evaluator's overall sociopolitical evaluation of the organisation, others prioritise moral legitimacy, which depends on the evaluator's social group (Deephouse et al.,). Yet, still, others judge the organisation based on preexisting cognitive categories, comparing if the focal organisation meets the category traits (Bitektine,). Therefore, while leveraging the transformation regulations confers some legitimacy on the incubators, more is needed to satisfy the major stakeholders, particularly private sponsors, who control resources, leaving incubator managers grappling with guaranteeing the incubator's sustainability. As one respondent echoed, incubator managers who fail to gain the legitimacy of the major private sponsors gravitate towards dependency on public sponsorship.

> *"Because we have been able to get different funders on board, our SEDA dependence for operational funding is less. ... If you look at [other] incubators, if [they] don't have an external funder, then in essence, [public sponsorship] needs to pay the salaries … that's the biggest challenge, the dependency on funding" (KW06, p. 16).*

The study's findings further underscore the significant role of regulatory frameworks in fostering entrepreneurship, particularly in its early stages, by creating conducive conditions for venture

development, as advanced by □ac□uemin and □anssen □□□□□□. Incubator managers, cognisant of opportunities emerging from adherence to economic transformation and inclusion regulations, leverage these to secure sponsorship from both public bodies and private corporations. Nevertheless, as D□ankov et al. □□□□□□ argue, the nature of the regulation can introduce impediments to the thriving of entrepreneurship. Regulations creating too many formalities for beneficiaries to leverage discourage them. □ac□uemin and □anssen □□□□□□ recommend that policymakers be transparent about the conditions of the regulations and the potential gains. This research□s findings build on that perspective, showing that in resource□constrained contexts, where gaining the necessary legitimacy to access the resources is difficult, entrepreneurial actors overlook the adverse conditions associated with the regulations to access the available resources.

However, as their organisations evolve and re□uire more resources that cannot be met by those provided through the regulatory provisions, incubator managers become concerned about the adverse conditions of the regulations. This strategic navigation demonstrates the transitory nature of legitimacy depending on the organisation□s developmental stage, as Deephouse et al. □□□□□□ explain. Once the incubator manager has secured the basic resources for survival or encounters threatening events, they begin transitioning towards seeking further legitimacy to access more resources. Therefore, in agreement with Suchman□s □□□□□□ tri□partite categorisation of scenarios, incubator managers are constantly involved in either gaining and maintaining legitimacy or responding to legitimacy challenges in pursuit of the incubator□s sustainability. In this case, the tri□partite scenario is brought to light by the pivotal role of regulations in facilitating business incubation sponsorship in a resource□constrained context and the potential threat it poses to incubator performance and reputation.

7.3.5 Leadership

□xisting literature underscores the significance of the incubator manager□s role in fostering the development of capabilities and capacities necessary for business incubation, including the enhancement of human resource capabilities, which are essential for the continuous evolution and adaptation of organisational competencies □Thornberry et al., □□□□□ Hewitt□Dundas, □□□□□. Furthermore, most business incubators are characterised by small, lean organisational structures, wherein the incubator manager is intricately involved in various operational aspects □□hmad □ Thornberry, □□□□□ Bruneel et al., □□□□□. This streamlined structure affords incubator managers a degree of agility and pragmatism crucial for navigating the dynamic business incubation environment □Bergek □ Norrman, □□□□□ to meet the various stakeholders□ criteria for conferring legitimacy.

This study contributes to the discourse by illuminating the influence of organisational structure on incubator managers' autonomy and decision-making capacity, highlighting the limitations imposed by larger, more complex organisational structures. Managers within smaller, leaner structures wield comprehensive control over decision-making processes and operations, holding accountability for their choices. Conversely, in more extensive organisational settings, typically seen in publicly funded incubators that expand to operate multiple centres, incubator managers experience diminished authority, which restricts their decision-making capabilities and access to key stakeholder relationships. These findings expand on Kakabadse et al.'s (2020) findings regarding the constraints imposed by the institutional arrangements related to incubator funding and reporting structures. While Kakabadse et al. (2020) focus on the macro-meso level interaction between the incubator and the ecosystem, the current study zooms into the meso-micro interaction level, the individual level of the incubator manager grappling with the constraints emanating from the organisational structure.

The expansion of publicly funded incubators, evidenced by their growth into larger structures with multiple centres, suggests that reliance on public sponsorship impacts growth in two ways. First, as Kakabadse et al. (2020) found, public sponsors emphasise the quantity of incubated and graduated entrepreneurs with less consideration for long-term viability post-incubation. This emphasis prompts incubator managers to establish numerous centres to meet these quantitative targets. Meeting these targets is, therefore, part of the criteria for the public sponsor to confer legitimacy on incubators since the public sponsor perceives the many graduated incubatees as good performance. Second, the allocation of sponsorship based on the number of selected incubatees incentivises opening additional centres to secure more funding. However, as this study's findings illuminate, the expansion complicates the organisational structure, diluting the decision-making authority of incubator managers compared to those in privately or hybrid-funded incubators who enjoy both the responsibility and authority to make swift, autonomous decisions. Swift decision-making is vital in determining the fate of stakeholder relationships, particularly those involving misaligned expectations.

Despite the operational constraints of specific organisational structures, the incubator managers exhibit strategic agency, navigating through challenges with adept leadership. As prior research found (e.g., Ahamd & Thornberry, 2020; Kakabadse et al., 2020), quickly transitioning from being a leader to a manager, an entrepreneur, and a technician several times a day defines an effective incubator manager. The ability to make this transition requires a multi-skilled individual. As extant literature shows, no academic qualification prepares people for such a role (Ahmad & Thornberry, 2020), making the role challenging and stressful. Incubator managers interviewed in this study

expressed frustration and feeling overwhelmed with inade□uate support. Making strategic choices that balance stakeholders□ expectations to gain and maintain incubator legitimacy is a constant strain for managers. □s extant literature posits that organisations that gain legitimacy from stakeholders are shielded from the scrutiny of their activities, providing easy access to resources re□uired for long□term survival □Clarke, □□□□□Deephouse et al., □□□□□, incubator managers in a resource□constrained context are constantly in a state of uncertainty, akin to a hard budget constraint situation explained by Hewitt□Dundas □□□□□□. In exploring the effect of resource constraints, Hewitt□Dundas □□□□□□links the expectations and behaviour of managers to the ex□ ante resource constraints, which can lead to organisational failure.

Furthermore, this study□s findings also reaffirm Hewitt□Dundas□□□□□□□ assertion that resource limitations can be counterintuitive, spurring innovation among managers and enabling them to devise creative solutions. The increasingly competitive incubation environment, declining public sponsorship, and punctuated events impacting potential private sponsors are spurring innovation among incubator managers as they endeavour to gain and maintain organisational legitimacy. However, this spurring innovation raises further debate regarding the legitimacy of the incubator organisation in a resource□constrained context, particularly about the founders□ motivation. □s Brown and Mawson □□□□□□argue, sponsorship can □uickly degenerate into killing kindness. It may lull sponsored organisations into complacency, resulting in their failure to build the necessary capabilities re□uired for sustainability after the sponsorship period □□me□cua et al., □□□□□. This view applies to the incubator and the incubatees. For an incubator, initial sponsorship should bridge the incubator with other sources of critical resources to guarantee sustainability. If this does not happen, an incubator dies or perpetually depends on sponsors, creating a constraining dependency □Hillman et al., □□□□□. The findings of this study confirm the flaws of the public sponsorship model in the study setting and the complacency that develops when incubator managers become complacent. The following statement highlights the potential for resourcefulness that lurks behind complacency□

> *"… an eye opener was the COVID situation. … Whatever funds [sponsors would] normally direct to [us], they had to utilise for themselves. … that informed our … self-sustainability strategy" (BlueInc_IM, p. 19).*

7.4□ S□□ □ ar□o□the□d□□□□□□o□o□□□d□□□□

This chapter comprehensively discusses how stakeholders□ expectations enable and□or constrain incubator managers□ strategic agency in resource□constrained contexts. The empirical findings reveal a nuanced interaction between demands and constraints, challenging the traditional view of their mutual exclusivity as presented in the DCC model.

Overall, incubator managers in a resource-constrained context grapple with navigating a complex landscape where legitimacy is vital to organisational sustainability. The legitimacy of a business incubator hinges on its ability to deliver tangible impacts through nurturing sustainable new ventures that align with its mandate. This task requires balancing the incubator's mandate, securing adequate resources, and maintaining a resource-rich environment for entrepreneurs. The findings indicate that stakeholders' expectations can simultaneously act as constraints and enablers of attaining legitimacy and sustainability, influencing managers' strategic decisions. Therefore, incubator managers must evaluate stakeholder expectations based on their impact on performance, sustainability, and reputation.

First, the study identifies misaligned expectations of incubatees and sponsors as an enabler and a constraint to the incubator manager's strategic agency. Sponsors and incubatees often expect incubator managers to provide comprehensive entrepreneurial support, which may not be feasible due to limited incubator resources, leading to potential reputation damage because of disconfirmed expectations. Similarly, for hybrid sponsorship, the divergent goals between public and private sponsors complicate the incubator manager's role. The divergence creates a strategic enigma for the incubator manager, who must strategically navigate these misalignments to maintain incubator sustainability and reputation. The strategy involves leveraging public sponsorship to attract private funding while ensuring the incubator's mandate is not compromised. Thus, strategic innovation and adaptive leadership are essential in managing these complex relationships and sustaining the incubator.

These findings have implications for the prevailing public sponsorship funding model, which must be re-evaluated to focus on the critical entrepreneurial support required by the entrepreneurs instead of a generic basic support programme. Furthermore, considering the importance of public sponsorship to gaining incubator legitimacy, the conditions for incubators to access public sponsorship must be carefully considered to maintain the incubator's mandate and incubation model.

Second, the study identifies the lack of standardised performance metrics for incubators as another constraint. Public sponsors, the dominant stakeholders, impose their performance criteria, focusing on short-term outputs rather than long-term impacts. This reliance on short-term output-based metrics can mislead managers and misalign with the broader objectives of business incubation. However, demonstrating performance impact is crucial for the incubator's reputation, gaining legitimacy from various stakeholders and accessing resources. The study suggests that incubators must be evaluated through a balanced scorecard approach to provide a more

comprehensive evaluation framework, ensuring that incubators meet diverse stakeholders' legitimacy-conferring criteria.

Third, achieving incubator sustainability in a resource-constrained context is a challenge. The sustainability of incubators is paramount if the envisaged performance impact is to be achieved. The findings suggest that performance impact, crucial for gaining and maintaining legitimacy, precedes sustainability. They further highlight the double-edged nature of public sponsorship, which, while essential as an enabler for incubator managers to keep operating, often promotes the complacency of incubator managers and leads to excessive dependency. To be successful, managers must leverage public funding to gain legitimacy and attract additional resources, ensuring the incubator's long-term sustainability. The findings reinforce the merits of re-evaluating the public sponsorship model, considering a fixed duration of public sponsorship. The failure of incubator managers to be weaned off public sponsorship sends a negative signal to the incubatees, perpetuating a culture of dependency. Managers who leverage public sponsorship to innovate and diversify funding sources are exemplary and can motivate entrepreneurs using their experiences, further enhancing the incubator's reputation and maintaining legitimacy.

Fourth, the economic transformation regulations present opportunities and challenges to incubator managers. While these regulations enable managers to secure resources, they impose restrictive selection criteria that may impact incubator performance and reputation. Incubator managers must navigate these regulations strategically, balancing compliance with maintaining the incubator's foundational mission, which is difficult as it entails some uncomfortable compromises. These findings have implications for policymakers who must consider the appropriateness of enforcing some legislative requirements on programmes such as incubation aimed at promoting entrepreneurship and economic growth. Pursuing several objectives through a single initiative may result in conflicting expectations. Driving economic transformation through the incubation support programme may be theoretically feasible, but, as this study's findings illustrate, this creates constraints that diminish the envisaged outcomes in practice.

Fifth, the incubator's organisational structure is pivotal in shaping the incubator manager's leadership style. Organisations with large structures constrain incubator managers by diminishing their role authority, limiting their ability to respond quickly to stakeholders or to implement solutions autonomously like their counterparts in incubators with lean structures. However, very lean structures dictated by resource constraints result in an excessive workload on the incubator manager, resulting in burnout and diminished performance. These findings have implications for incubation practitioners who must balance incubator growth with the available expertise and level of agility required by the incubator manager role. The motivation for expanding incubator

operations must be evaluated to avoid establishing several operational centres in pursuit of narrow, graduate-based performance measurement criteria that overlook qualitative performance. Such strategies affect incubator legitimacy.

Finally, the findings are used to develop a conceptual model that extends the DCC model, delineating the dynamic interplay between stakeholder expectations and the strategic agency of incubator managers. The model elucidates how incubator managers exercise their strategic agency in managing stakeholders' expectations against the three pivotal factors: performance impact, incubator sustainability, and incubator reputation, which are the foundations of the incubator's legitimacy. Stakeholder expectations aligning positively with these dimensions enhance the incubator's legitimacy and strategic agency, fostering continued stakeholder engagement. Conversely, misaligned expectations can constrain managers, necessitating the termination of the stakeholder relationship, or can present an opportunity for strategic innovation to mitigate threats and maximise benefits. Managers must continuously demonstrate leadership in balancing the demands emanating from the stakeholders' expectations in pursuit of the incubator's legitimacy.

Therefore, the study underscores the importance of adaptive leadership, strategic innovation, and comprehensive performance evaluation in navigating the complexities of stakeholder relationships and sustaining business incubators. The findings further enrich the role literature by deepening understanding of how the job demands emanating from stakeholders' expectations enable and constrain incubator managers' strategic agency in a resource-constrained context.

□ha□ter □□□□□□□o□□l□□□o□□

8.1□ □□trod□□t□o□□

Calls by scholars such as Kakabadse et al. □□□□□□and Mantere □□□□□□□for research seeking to understand the factors inspiring agency among managers operating under specific conditions prompted this current study. Therefore, the study concentrated on managers within the business incubation field operating within a resource□constrained context. It aimed to elucidate the influence of stakeholders□expectations on incubator managers' strategic agency. Mantere □□□□□□defines strategic agency as an individual□s ability to influence their work on matters they deem beneficial to their organisation. □s managerial behaviour significantly impacts organisational performance □□aboen, □□□□□ □hmad □ Thornberry, □□□□□, gaining insights into managerial agency under distinct operational circumstances, primarily when influenced by the expectations of various stakeholders, represents a scholarly pursuit that advances role theory. Organisational role theory conceptualises organisations as open systems comprising employees fulfilling predetermined activities, termed roles, which are both expected and necessary within the organisational framework □Biddle, □□□□, □□□□□. Conse□uently, role scholars are concerned with how individuals execute and influence obligatory activities and relational interactions within the organisational context □Biddle, □□□□□Dierdorff et al., □□□□□, with role expectations defined as norms, beliefs, or preferences of the re□uirements of successful role performance □Biddle, □□□□□Hindin, □□□□□.

By focusing on business incubator managers' strategic agency, this study contributes to the ongoing development of the business incubation phenomenon □Hausberg □ Korreck, □□□□□as a means of supporting entrepreneurship. It achieves this by elucidating how incubator managers in a resource□constrained context grapple with navigating a complex landscape where legitimacy is vital to organisational sustainability. The study finds that the legitimacy of a business incubator hinges on its ability to deliver tangible impacts through nurturing sustainable new ventures that align with its mandate. This task re□uires balancing the incubator□s mandate, securing ade□uate resources, and maintaining a resource□rich environment for entrepreneurs. Therefore, incubator managers must evaluate stakeholder expectations based on their impact on performance, sustainability, and reputation. The findings enrich role theory by illustrating that the demands managers face, driven by stakeholders□expectations, can act simultaneously as both constraints and enablers of strategic agency. For practice, the findings inform policy, incubator institutional arrangements and management practice regarding entrepreneurship support through business incubation in a resource□constrained context.

8.2 Research context and why it matters

The study was conducted in South Africa, which faces significant resource constraints despite being one of the leading economies in Sub-Saharan Africa (Meufack et al., 2021). Despite its economic prominence, South Africa grapples with persistent socioeconomic challenges that create an environment characterised by limited resources (World Bank, 2021). However, recognising the potential of entrepreneurship as a driver of economic transformation, the South African government has implemented policies to support entrepreneurship, including establishing an Incubation Support Programme (ISP) (DTI, 2008). This initiative has led to a proliferation of business incubators across the country, with the overarching goal of fostering the development of sustainable ventures capable of stimulating local economies and addressing societal needs. The ISP has played a pivotal role in popularising the concept of business incubation in South Africa, resulting in a surge in the number of incubators supported through various funding modes, including public, private, and hybrid models combining public and private sponsorship (DTI, 2008).

Scholars in management and organisation emphasise the significance of context, particularly in entrepreneurship, where environmental, cultural, and social factors exert substantial influence (Johns, 2006, 2017; Suddaby et al., 2017). However, despite this acknowledgement, entrepreneurship and business incubation in resource-constrained contexts such as Africa remains relatively under-researched (George et al., 2016). Therefore, the distinctive context prevailing in South Africa, characterised by a burgeoning population of relatively new business incubators operating under diverse models, provided an opportune context for this study.

8.3 State of the art research and theory

In the past three decades, research on business incubation has experienced significant growth, driven by the widespread adoption of business incubators to support entrepreneurship in developed and developing economies (Bruneel et al., 2012; Ratinho et al., 2020; Sohail et al., 2021). This surge in research has encompassed various facets of the business incubation phenomenon, including its processes, models, performance evaluation, and evolutionary trajectory (Bergek & Norrman, 2008; Grimaldi & Grandi, 2005; Sohail et al., 2021). While some attention has been directed towards understanding business incubator managers and their relationships with stakeholders, most of the existing research has been conducted within the context of developed economies (e.g., Ahmad & Thornberry, 2010; Isabelle, 2013; Kakabadse et al., 2012). These studies have demonstrated the positive contribution of business incubation on the creation, survival, and growth of new ventures, particularly high-technology startups, which have been the focus of much research in developed nations (Hausberg & Korreck, 2020; Sohail et al., 2021).

□lthough there has been a recent increase in studies examining business incubation within emerging economies and resource□constrained contexts, the bulk of current findings remain rooted in the experiences of developed economies □Mrkaić, □□□□□Sohail et al., □□□□□. These studies emphasise the pivotal role of business incubators in fostering the success of ventures within the small, micro, and medium enterprises □SMM□s□sector. Furthermore, there is growing acknowledgement of the importance of SMM□s in driving regional and global economic growth, employment generation, and poverty reduction □□yyagari et al., □□□□□Maksimov et al., □□□□□ Sutter et al., □□□□□.

However, despite the acknowledged importance of incubator managers in facilitating the performance and impact of business incubation programmes, scholarly attention explicitly dedicated to understanding their role remains limited □Kakabadse et al., □□□□□. Drawing from role theory, which posits that the behaviour and performance of individuals in a role are influenced by the expectations of various stakeholders within their role□set □Fondas □ Stewart, □□□□□Stewart, □□□□b, □□□□□, it is evident that the expectations of incubator stakeholders, such as policymakers, sponsors, incubatees, and staff members □Kakabadse et al., □□□□□Messeghem et al., □□□□□ Sohail et al., □□□□□, can enable and constrain the strategic agency of incubator managers. □xtant literature further suggests that meeting stakeholders□expectations helps organisations gain and maintain legitimacy □Suchman, □□□□□, attracting the resources re□uired to continue operating □Bitektine, □□□□□Deephouse, □□□□□Deephouse et al., □□□□□. However, existing literature on business incubation has yet to thoroughly explore how these dynamics manifest throughout the incubation process.

Business incubation□s complex and multifaceted nature presents challenges in extrapolating insights from conventional organisational research. Conse□uently, this study sought to address this gap by focusing on incubator managers' strategic agency. Specifically, the research aimed to elucidate how stakeholders□expectations enable and□or constrain the strategic agency of incubator managers within a resource□constrained context.

8.4□Re□ear□h□□□e□t□o□□

To meet the aim of the study, the following primary research □uestion guided the in□uiry□

In what way do stakeholders' role expectations enable and/or constrain the strategic agency of business incubator managers in a resource-constrained context?

However, to enable the execution of the study, the main research □uestion was reduced to three sub□□uestions. The first sub□□uestion delved deep into understanding the expectations of the various incubator managers' stakeholders. As role theory suggests, the stakeholders□

expectations produce role demands that the incubator manager grapples with. Thus, the sub□ □uestion asked□

i. What are the main stakeholders' role expectations of business incubator managers in a resource-constrained context?

□pon comprehending the expectations of the diverse stakeholders, the research focused on illuminating the managerial and strategic choices of the managers in response to the demands stemming from the expectations. Scholarly investigations into □ob demands have underscored the distinction between challenge demands, which foster managerial innovation, and hindrance demands, which impede managerial effectiveness □Bakker, □□□□□ Podsakoff et al., □□□□□. Stewart□s □□□□□□DCC model, a guiding framework for structuring the sub□□uestions, suggests a differentiation between constraints and demands. □ccordingly, the following two sub□□uestions were formulated□

ii. How do business incubator managers in a resource-constrained context manage the perceived job demands?

iii. How do business incubator managers in a resource-constrained context manage the perceived job constraints?

8.5□ Methodolo□□□al□a□□roa□h□a□d□t□a□□ro□r□ate□e□□□

8.5.1 Research design

□ □ualitative, multiple□case study □□isenhardt, □□□□□ □□□□□research design was employed to address the research □uestion. Following the scholarly guidance of scholars such as Bryman □□□□□□, Gehman et al. □□□□□□, and Suddaby et al. □□□□□□, a □ualitative approach was considered most appropriate, given the study□s ob□ective of delving deeply into the strategic agency of incubator managers across diverse incubation models. Furthermore, case study designs are well□ suited for exploring context□embedded phenomena □Henry □ Foss, □□□□□, such as business incubation, examining intricate details, and allowing for cross□case analyses leading to multiple perspectives □□hmad □ Thornberry, □□□□□ The multiple perspectives align with the interpretivist philosophical stance □Fleetwood, □□□□□Heeks □ Bailur, □□□□□embraced in this study. □s the study did not seek statistical generalisation of its findings □Yin, □□□□□, the findings will be limited to the study context, providing rich insights into the real□world phenomenon of business incubation in a resource□constrained context. Nevertheless, using the same theoretical lens, the study□s findings can still be used for analytical generalisation □Yin, □□□□□in similar contexts. Thus, the study exploited the strength of the case study research design.

Furthermore, a multiple-case design was favoured over a single-case design due to its inherent advantages. Case comparisons facilitated the identification of stakeholder expectations pertinent to incubator managers under specific sponsorship modes. Comparative analyses facilitated prescriptive learning, unveiling effective management practices transferable across incubators irrespective of sponsorship mode. Additionally, comparative studies enhance research rigour by enabling the testing of generalisations (Ahmad & Thornberry, 2020). In this study, such generalisations pertained to dominant incubator sponsorship mobilisation strategies, incubation models and strategic choices in stakeholder relationship management.

The main categories of incubators identified in the research setting were included to capture maximal variation (Eisenhardt, 1989) in stakeholder expectations (enabling and/or constraining effects on incubator managers' strategic agency. Analysing cases selected for maximum variation enabled the identification of critical common patterns across cases, which was crucial given the heterogeneity of the sampled cases. Including participants from differently sponsored incubators in a multiple-case study yielded rich data, which, upon analysis, yielded themes and aggregate insights compared across cases, fostering rigorous theorising.

8.5.2 Case and respondent selection

Six business incubators, two from each of the three funding categories (private, public, and hybrid, were purposively selected (Crowe et al., 2011; Welch et al., 2011) from South Africa's population of active business incubators. The selection criteria aimed to capture contextual characteristics across main differentiating dimensions (sponsorship mode, geographical location, and sector specialisation, which are significant sources of variation among incubators (Klofsten, 2019).

The incubator manager was the unit of analysis in the study. Therefore, the incubator managers were the first responders. The research also included interviews with the longest-serving staff within each incubator, representatives of the incubator sponsors, at least one incubatee, and a national government policymaker representative.

8.5.3 Data generation and analysis

Semi-structured interviews were used to generate data from the six incubator managers and the selected stakeholders, informed by insights from a pilot study. Secondary data in the form of incubator documents were also gathered. A total of 22 interviews were conducted, amounting to 1 320 minutes and approximately 220 thousand words of transcriptions. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to enhance reliability. Subsequently, thematic analysis, aided by the Atlas.ti software tool was employed to interpret the data generated, facilitating the identification of common patterns and themes across cases. This rigorous thematic analysis

□isenhardt, □□□□□Gehman et al., □□□□□contributed to developing nuanced insights on how stakeholders□role expectations enable and□or constrain the incubator manager□s strategic agency in a resource□constrained context.

8.6□ □□d□□□□a□d□□ter□retat□o□□

The study's main findings are summarised in this section in relation to the sub□□uestions that guided this research.

8.6.1 Stakeholders' main role expectations

Incubator stakeholders, ranging from incubatees and staff to sponsors and policymakers, uniformly emphasise the importance of socioeconomic impact from sustainable new business ventures alongside the incubators□ growth and sustainability. However, nuances in their expectations reflect their distinct roles and ob□ectives. Incubatees seek comprehensive, personalised entrepreneurial support, whereas staff members expect strategic leadership, incubator mandate preservation, and appreciation from the incubator manager. Compliance with economic transformation regulations is critical for sponsors and policymakers, who also prioritise good governance and ethical leadership. The public sponsor further expects a lean incubator structure.

Two other vital findings entail the misalignment between the expectations of sponsors and incubatees and the incubators□ mandates. These findings highlight the complex, multifaceted role of incubator managers, who must navigate a web of demands that either stimulate their innovativeness and adaptability or restrict their operational freedom, impacting their ability to achieve strategic goals.

8.6.2 Managing job demands

The study reveals that incubator managers grapple with a spectrum of □ob demands driven by stakeholders□ expectations. These demands include achieving predefined performance targets, managing a broad scope of responsibilities, addressing misaligned expectations among stakeholders, and navigating challenging stakeholder relationships. To meet these challenges, managers adopt several vital strategies.

□. Implementing performance management systems and collaborating with several partners are essential to meet key performance indicators.
□. Innovation is critical for satisfying stakeholders□ misaligned expectations and ensuring the incubator□s financial sustainability.

- To manage the extensive workload related to wide-ranging responsibilities, managers delegate tasks to staff and engage in effective strategic planning to maintain operational efficiency. Managers also use delegation to empower staff.
- Managing challenging relationships involves negotiation, compromise, legal action, and eventually terminating some stakeholder relationships.

These findings highlight the diverse nature of job demands incubator managers encounter. While these demands intellectually challenge the incubator manager's knowledge and skills and promote learning and growth, some may become excessive, constraining the manager's performance (Bakker,). The incubator manager's constraints are summarised in the next section.

8.6.3 Managing job constraints

This research delineates incubator managers' job constraints, comprising resource limitations, regulatory compliance demands, complex stakeholder relationships, and misaligned expectations. An organisational structure is a notable constraint applicable only to managers of incubators heavily dependent on public sponsorship. Incubator managers grapple with these constraints through the following strategies:

- Resource limitations in the operating environment necessitate innovative resource mobilisation efforts and a significant reliance on public funding.
- Adherence to economic transformation regulations is pivotal in securing public and private sponsorship for incubators within the study's context. This compliance, while enabling, also imposes constraints, particularly on incubatee selection, prompting some managers to compromise their mandates and incubation models to accommodate the requirements.
- The challenge of managing complex stakeholder relationships leads to severing such ties. Public sponsors, in particular, exert considerable influence, impacting managerial autonomy.
- When faced with stakeholders' misaligned expectations, managers' approaches vary from employing innovative strategies that balance stakeholder demands with the incubator's mandate to terminating relationships with the stakeholders.

In navigating these constraints, incubator managers employ varied strategic approaches to ensure the incubator's sustainability, achieve desired performance outcomes, and safeguard its reputation.

8.6.4 Interpretation of findings

This study draws on organisational role theory, specifically leveraging Stewart's DCC model as its theoretical anchor. The interpretation of the findings, guided by the role theory, DCC

framework, and the existing business incubation and organisational management literature reviewed, aims to elucidate how the strategic agency of business incubator managers working in a resource□constrained context can be constrained and enabled by the stakeholders□ expectations. In response to Mantere□s □□□□□□en□uiry, the interpretation seeks to provide insights into what drives the managers□agency in their operating context.

The findings align with organisational role theory, showing that stakeholders□expectations are crucial in defining the role demands placed on incubator managers. □xtant research suggests that role demands stem from the expectations of the role□set□s members □Fondas □ Stewart, □□□□□. Refined through the lens of □ob demands into challenge and hindrance categories □Demerouti □ Bakker, □□□□□, this nuanced understanding of □ob demands allows for exploring how the demands enable managers to devise beneficial strategies for the incubator or impede their strategic objectives. Importantly, this study's findings elucidate how job demands act simultaneously as constraints and enablers to the incubator managers' strategic agency, refining the mutually exclusive treatment of demands and constraints conceptualised in Stewart's (1982) DCC model. Moreover, the study acknowledges managers□agency, challenging the traditional criti□ue of role theory □Mantere, □□□□□Turner, □□□□□that views role occupants□actions as wholly determined by external expectations.

Moreover, the findings underscore the continuous struggle of incubator managers to gain and maintain the legitimacy of the incubator within a resource□constrained context. □s existing research suggests, gaining and maintaining legitimacy with stakeholders enables organisations easier access to resources and markets necessary for long□term survival □Deephouse et al., □□□□□ Suchman, □□□□□□attaining incubator legitimacy is critical for attracting sustainable sponsorship. □me□cua et al. □□□□□□ posit that an incubator's value to the incubatees is realised through buffering, bridging and curating processes, all enabled by the resource□munificent environment created in an incubator □□me□cua et al., □□□□□. The ability to buffer incubatees from the harsh economic environment re□uires the incubator to provide ade□uate resources needed by incubatees to grow and develop their internal capabilities to compete when they graduate from the incubator. However, the current research's findings challenge this conceptualisation, with most incubatees receiving no financial support from the incubators. Thus, the posited buffering process may not be realised in a resource□constrained context. However, gaining incubator legitimacy hinges on delivering visible performance impacts, adhering to the incubator mandate, and bolstering its reputation. This balance between performance impact, incubator sustainability, and reputation is the central driver of the incubator manager□s strategic agency.

Therefore, incubator managers evaluate stakeholder expectations based on their potential impact on these critical factors, exercising strategic agency through three possible actions□sustaining and enhancing existing relationships, innovating to navigate risks while sei□ing opportunities, or severing ties with detrimental stakeholders. □xpectations that bolster all three factors promote incubator legitimacy and enable managers□ strategic agency, encouraging maintaining the relationship with the stakeholders. In contrast, expectations that threaten these aspects limit managerial agency, often leading to the termination of relationships. When expectations have a mixed impact, incubator managers are tasked with innovatively balancing these effects to leverage beneficial aspects while mitigating the threats.

Regarding incubator sponsorship, the current study confirms extant research highlighting the prevalence of public sponsorship as the primary source of resources in a resource□constrained context □Lalkaka, □□□□□Mrka□ic, □□□□□Sohail et al., □□□□□. Conse□uently, incubator managers grapple with terminating relationships with the public sponsor. However, as □ourdan and Kivleniece □□□□□□argue, this reliance on public sponsorship has a dual effect on performance. For instance, the current study's findings show the vitality of public sponsorship. It enables the incubator to accumulate sufficient resources to operate, attract incubatees and provide primary infrastructure□based services □Dutt et al., □□□□□, thereby gaining cognitive legitimacy. Therefore, severing the relationship with the pubic sponsor is not ideal□it is only necessitated when the sponsor's expectations infringe on the incubator mandate, which is the foundation of the incubator's reputation.

Nevertheless, over□reliance on public sponsorship encourages complacency in incubator management, resulting in inefficient allocation of resources and utilisation of assets □Brown □ Mawson, □□□□□□ourdan □ Kivleniece, □□□□□. The complacency leads to failure in raising more resources from other potential sources, affecting the incubator's ability to create a genuinely resource□munificent environment. While □ourdan and Kivleniece argue that there is a threshold of public sponsorship beyond which performance decreases, which this researcher argues may not be reached in a resource□constrained context, the mechanism underpinning their argument is a plausible support for the prevailing situation in a resource□constrained context. The absence of value□based exchange or residual □rent□based□ claims in the resource transfer transactions between the sponsor and the receiver of the resources □□ourdan □ Kivleniece, □□□□□provides no incentives for prudent resource allocation and performance. Commercial performance ob□ectives are not often the driver of public sponsorship. Thus, incubator managers may not have any incentives for diligence allocation of resources to maximise performance. The often misaligned performance targets the public sponsor sets exacerbate the situation, encouraging short□term

□uantitative performance rather than the long□term commercial performance of the incubated new ventures.

8.7□ □□ □l□□at□o□□□□or□□□holar□h□□□

The study enriches two areas of academic discourse□ role theory and entrepreneurship, specifically within the context of entrepreneurial business incubation. First, it challenges and expands upon Stewart□s □□□□□□DCC model by illustrating that the demands managers face, driven by stakeholders□ expectations, can act simultaneously as both constraints and enablers of strategic agency. This insight leads to the development of an enhanced conceptual model, the □xpectations, Demand, □nablers, Constraints, and □gency □□D□C□□model, which refines the DCC model by acknowledging the dual nature of □ob demands as sources of both constraint and enablement.

Second, this research contributes to the entrepreneurship literature, particularly the study of entrepreneurial business incubation, by addressing previously identified research gaps concerning what enables agency for managers operating in specific contexts □Mantere, □□□□□and specifically how incubator managers manage the constraints they encounter □Kakabadse et al., □□□□□. The study describes how stakeholders□ expectations present □ob demands that pose either challenges or hindrances to incubator managers. It then sheds light on the pursuit of legitimacy as a mechanism through which incubator managers in resource□constrained environments can activate their strategic agency.

□dditionally, the study offers insights into the gap identified by Dutt et al. □□□□□□regarding the role of incubation sponsorship modes in the evolution of business incubators as open systems intermediaries addressing commercial institutional voids in emerging economies. While Dutt et al. □□□□□□suggested a parallel path for private and public sponsorship, the current study sheds light on a possible se□uential utilisation of public and private sponsorship. It shows how incubator managers use easily accessible public sponsorship to gain social capital and initial incubator legitimacy □□me□cua et al., □□□□□, enabling them to gain the reputation to appeal to private sponsors providing substantial sponsorship. The relationship with public sponsors is strategically maintained as part of legitimacy maintenance □Deephouse et al., □□□□□, enabling the incubator to play an intermediary role between private corporations and public institutions, further attracting private sponsors. However, when expectations of public sponsors threaten the incubator mandate, incubator managers terminate the relationship and rely on private sponsorship. Thus, the termination of public sponsorship is contingent on the incubator manager gaining legitimacy and mobilising substantial private sponsorship, making public sponsorship a minority.

8.8 Implications for practice

This research offers practical insights for business incubator managers, sponsors, and policymakers navigating the complexities of resource-constrained environments. The findings illuminate the crucial role of legitimacy in the survival and success of business incubators, showcasing strategic manoeuvres undertaken by managers. These strategies include terminating relationships with some stakeholders, innovatively addressing risks to sustain partially beneficial relationships, and nurturing beneficial relationships that enhance the incubator's legitimacy. Additionally, it reveals the constraining effect of specific organisational structures on business incubators and the dual nature of economic transformation regulations as both an enabler and constraint to business incubation sponsorship.

For incubator founders and sponsors, the findings underscore the detrimental effects of misaligned stakeholder expectations and complex relationships on an incubator manager's role. Merton (1957) notes that role strain for the manager continues for as long as the stakeholders cannot identify the effect of their conflicting expectations. Therefore, these stakeholders have a clear call to action to mitigate misalignments and enhance relationships, reducing the managerial burden and maximising incubation benefits. Misaligned incubatees' expectations stem from the inadequate entrepreneurial support provided through incubation programs, particularly the lack of access to finance and markets, which are critical interventions in business incubation (Dutt et al., 2016; Sohail et al., 2015). Even with the other support provided by incubators, incubatees see little value if they cannot meet the financial requirements for their businesses.

Therefore, resource-constrained contexts and underdeveloped markets in emerging economies require business incubators to balance the market infrastructure development and business capabilities services (Dutt et al., 2016). Therefore, in line with Dutt et al.'s (2016) propositions, business incubator practitioners in emerging economies need to enhance their market infrastructure development services, which entail creating access to capital for entrepreneurs, lobbying governments for policies and regulations favourable to supporting new ventures, such as lower taxes, rather than focusing heavily on business capabilities development services. Business incubators that incorporate seed funding and facilitate access to markets and business opportunities in their models gain legitimacy from entrepreneurs. Alternative and innovative forms of funding, such as crowdfunding (Sohail et al., 2015), can be explored to raise capital for incubatees' businesses. Providing such market infrastructure development services positions business incubators as vital open systems intermediaries, closing the gap caused by

underdeveloped commercial institutions in emerging economies (Dutt et al., 2016; Mrkajic, 2017) and enhancing the legitimacy of business incubators to other wider stakeholders.

Similarly, the misaligned sponsor expectations emanate from the performance measurement. Performance targets are not aligned with the resources provided by the sponsors, and performance metrics focus on short-term objectives. A balanced scorecard performance measurement approach proposed by Messeghem (2003) can be a panacea, considering the different stakeholders' criteria to balance long-term and short-term performance targets. Such an approach must also consider the incubator's model. As Bergek and Norrman (2008) suggest, models focused on picking winners during incubatee selection tend to provide dedicated, active management of the incubation process, investing substantial resources to ensure the success of the incubatee's business. While this model is typical for incubators where commercial returns are expected, this study's findings suggest that this model, properly funded through public sponsorship, can help incubators gain the necessary legitimacy to attract additional private sponsorship. Carefully selecting incubatees enables the incubator managers to maximise the use of the available limited resources (Sohail et al., 2007) and addresses incubator sustainability, one of the three pivotal factors impacting incubator managers' strategic agency. As Amezcua et al. (2013) caution, copying successful business incubation models from one region to another may not result in successful incubation. Thus, business incubator practitioners must appreciate the different environmental founding conditions (Amezcua et al., 2013) that favour particular incubation models and avoid misaligned models that will result in misaligned performance expectations and causing hindrance to demands on incubator managers.

Furthermore, considering the importance of public sponsorship to gaining incubator legitimacy in a resource-constrained context, the policy conditions for incubators to access public sponsorship must be carefully considered to maintain the incubator's mandate and incubation model. Similarly, incubator managers must not quickly terminate relationships with sponsors as that affects their network mediation capabilities. Literature positions the business incubator within an entrepreneurial ecosystem and a network of resource providers (Theodoraboen, 2009). Part of their value-adding activities includes bridging the incubatees with members of their networks (Amezcua et al., 2013; Bøllingtoft, 2012), enabling them to access various critical resources. Therefore, terminating relationships affects the breadth of the incubator network, ultimately isolating the incubator from the ecosystem. In this regard, incubator managers need to enhance their stakeholder management skills and use the initial legitimacy gained through public sponsorship, augmented by their market infrastructure development activities, to position themselves as vital partners of

private corporations, particularly multinational companies aiming to make a social impact in the communities where they do business.

In line with Webb et al.'s □□□□□□findings on the partnership of non□governmental organisations and multinational companies in bottom□of□the□pyramid economies, such corporations lack the local knowledge and trust of the local communities. Therefore, partnering with knowledgeable and trusted local business incubators to promote entrepreneurship in their economic sectors may be attractive. The current research further finds that some graduated incubatees become suppliers to these private corporations, highlighting the importance of business incubators in creating an entrepreneurial hub within local communities around private corporations. Such an endeavour re□uires business incubator managers to increase their social embeddedness □Webb et al., □□□□□ to offer this uni□ue value to private corporations, becoming legitimate intermediaries between local entrepreneurs and resource holders. For instance, this study□s findings suggest that the economic transformation regulations can be leveraged to mobilise ade□uate resources to sponsor incubators in the study context. The private corporations□budgets for enterprise and supplier development obligations could be used to effectively fund business incubators and provide the critical financial resources the incubatees re□uire. □xemplary incubators capitalise on this targeted partnership with private corporations in specific sectors to build a successful incubation model. Therefore, there is potential to replicate the model at a large scale across different economic sectors to provide ade□uate incubator sponsorship.

However, the public sponsorship mechanism can be enhanced by collecting the ring□fenced supplier and enterprise development funds from private corporations and centrally managing them through a public sponsoring agent to fund incubators within the corporations□ respective sectors. There is an opportunity for business incubation practitioners to use their agency as part of their market infrastructure development services □Dutt et al., □□□□□to influence policy regarding public sponsorship. Such an approach addresses the constraints associated with competitive bidding for sponsorship highlighted in extant research □e.g., Kakabadse et al., □□□□□and confirmed by this study. Moreover, it manages some private corporations□ self□serving and reluctant behaviour to effectively support initiatives promoting economic transformation regulations. □ltimately, this model will increase resources available to business incubators, ensuring sustainability and creating a genuinely resource□munificent environment for effective business incubation.

Finally, sponsors and business incubator founders can leverage insights regarding the constraints associated with organisational structures and adopt structures that minimise operational impediments for incubator managers. Incubator growth, particularly the spatial expansion of operations, must consider the available expertise and level of agility re□uired by the incubator

manager's role. While expansion helps to increase the social embeddedness of the incubator in the local communities, which increases incubator cognitive legitimacy (Webb et al., 2020), the market development constraints typical in emerging economies (Bourdan & Kivleniece, 2020; Mrkajic, 2020) cannot be ignored. In particular, the underdeveloped labour markets (Dutt et al., 2016) affect the availability of skilled managers to manage the incubator operations effectively. The current study emphasises the need for agility in the incubator manager's role as it is required to balance the market infrastructure development and business capabilities services, depending on the market and incubator development stages. Therefore, the incubator organisational structure must afford the incubator manager sufficient role authority commensurate with the role responsibility to reduce structural constraints affecting performance.

8.9 Areas for further research

This study sheds light on several intriguing phenomena within the business incubation landscape, suggesting avenues for future research to deepen understanding and extend the current findings. Recommended areas for further investigation include:

i. Investigating the perspectives of entrepreneurs who either drop out of incubation programmes or those within at least a year post-graduation, represents a valuable research direction. Understanding their expectations and how they perceive their incubation experience in meeting those expectations can offer critical insights into programme efficacy and areas for improvement.

ii. The current study hints at the complex role of regulations, such as those aimed at economic transformation and inclusion, in shaping access to incubation sponsorship. This role, characterised by its dual nature as both an enabler and a constraint, warrants further exploration. A large-scale quantitative study could elucidate the broader implications of such regulations on incubator management and strategic decision-making.

iii. This study's conceptual model, integrating the dynamics of expectations, demand, enablers, constraints, and agency (DDC), requires further refinement and empirical testing. Future research should aim to statistically validate this model through quantitative analysis to confirm its applicability and utility in explaining the complexities of business incubation management.

By addressing these areas, future research can significantly contribute to the body of knowledge on business incubation, offering actionable insights for practitioners and policymakers and enhancing support mechanisms for entrepreneurs within these critical ecosystems.

8.10 Limitations and delimitations of the study

This study was designed to address the research question effectively while minimising potential weaknesses. The delimitations incorporated in this study ensured that a focused analysis could be undertaken within the allowed period to provide a nuanced understanding of the research problem. The delimitations of this study are discussed in the subsequent paragraphs to enable the study's findings to be properly contextualised.

First, the study intentionally excluded incubatees who had graduated from the incubation programs from its respondents to minimise recall bias, focusing instead on current participants and recent graduates. This approach was chosen because these individuals could more accurately recount their experiences and interactions with incubator managers. However, this decision may overlook the valuable perspectives of graduated incubatees, whose insights on the incubation programme's long-term impact on their ventures could provide a more comprehensive understanding of its effectiveness. Graduated entrepreneurs, particularly those who initially left with unmet expectations, may gain an appreciation for the programme's value as they encounter real-world business challenges that leverage the knowledge and skills acquired during incubation.

Second, the study's context presents its own set of limitations. Conducted within South Africa, a country characterised by its emerging economy and significant socioeconomic disparities, the findings may not universally apply to other upper-middle-income countries. The specific economic transformation and inclusion regulations that play a crucial role in the incubation landscape might not have equivalents in other contexts, potentially limiting the broader applicability of the study's insights.

Re□ere□□e□□

□aboen, L. □□□□□□. □xplaining incubators using firm analogy. *Technovation*, *29*□□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□. □□□□□□technovation.□□□□.□□.□□□

Ackermann, F., & Eden, C. (2011). Strategic management of stakeholders : Theory and practice. *Long Range Planning*, *44*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□lrp.□□□□.□□.□□□

□ernoudt, R. □□□□□□. Incubators□Tool for entrepreneurship□ *Small Business Economics*, *23*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□B□SB□□.□□□□□□□□□□□□.□□□□□□.□□

□erts, K., Matthyssens, P., □ Vandenbempt, K. □□□□□□. Critical role and screening practices of □uropean business incubators. *Technovation*, *27*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□technovation.□□□□.□□.□□□

□hmad, □. □., □ Thornberry, C. □□□□□□. On the structure of business incubators□de□coupling issues and the misalignment of managerial incentives. *Journal of Technology Transfer*, *43*□□□, □□□□–□□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□s□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□y

□llen, D. N., □ McCluskey, R. □□□□□□. Structure, policy, services, and performance in the business incubator industry. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, *15*□□□, □□–□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

□lsos, G. □., Hytti, □., □ L□unggren, □. □□□□□□. Stakeholder theory approach to technology incubators. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research*, *17*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

□lvesson, M. □□□□□□. Beyond neopositivists, romantics, and localists□□ reflexive approach to interviews in organi□ational research. *Academy of Management Review*, *28*□□□, □□–□□.

□me□cua, □., Grimes, M. G., Bradley, S. W., □ Wiklund, □. □□□□□□. Organi□ational sponsorship and founding environments□□ contingency view on the survival of business□incubated firms, □□□□□□□□□. *Academy of Management Journal*, *56*□□□, □□□□–□□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□am.□□□□□.□□□□

□me□cua, □., Ratinho, T., Plummer, L. □., □ □ayamohan, P. □□□□□□. Organi□ational sponsorship and the economics of place□How regional urbani□ation and locali□ation shape incubator outcomes. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *35*□□□, □□□□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□busvent.□□□□.□□□□□□

□sheim, B. T., Boschma, R., □ Cooke, P. □□□□□□. Constructing regional advantage□Platform policies based on related variety and differentiated knowledge bases. *Regional Studies*, *45*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□.□□□□.□□□□□□

□tiase, V. Y., Mahmood, S., Wang, Y., □ Botchie, D. □□□□□□. Developing entrepreneurship in □frica□Investigating critical resource challenges. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, *25*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□SB□D□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

□udretsch, D., Colombelli, □., Grilli, L., Minola, T., □ Rasmussen, □. □□□□□□. Innovative start□ups and policy initiatives. *Research Policy*, *49*□□□□, □□□□□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□respol.□□□□.□□□□□□□

□utio, □., □ Rannikko, H. □□□□□□. Retaining winners□ Can policy boost high□growth entrepreneurship□ *Research Policy*, *45*□□□, □□–□□. https□□doi.org□□□. □□□□□□□respol.□□□□.□□.□□□

□yyagari, M., Beck, T., □ Demirguc□Kunt, □. □□□□□□. Small and medium enterprises across the globe. *Small Business Economics*, *29*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□s□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

□yyagari, M., Demirguc□Kunt, □., □ Maksimovic, V. □□□□□□. *Small vs. young firms across the world: Contribution to employment, job creation, and growth.* □Report No. □□□□□. World Bank. http□□papers.ssrn.com□sol□□papers.cfm□abstract□id□□□□□□□□□

Baraldi, □., □ Ingemansson Havenvid, M. □□□□□□. Identifying new dimensions of business incubation□□ multi□level analysis of Karolinska Institute's incubation system. *Technovation*, *50–51*, □□–□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□technovation.□□□□.□□.□□□

Barbero, □. L., Casillas, □. C., Ramos, □., □ Guitar, S. □□□□□□. Revisiting incubation performance□ How incubator typology affects results. *Technological Forecasting & Social Change*, *79*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□techfore.□□□□.□□.□□□

Barnard, H., Cuervo□Ca□urra, □., □ Manning, S. □□□□□□. □frica business research as a laboratory for theory□building□□xtreme conditions, new phenomena, and alternative paradigms of social relationships. *Management and Organization Review*, *13*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□mor.□□□□.□□

Barry, D., □ □lmes, M. □□□□□□. Strategy retold□Toward a narrative view of strategic discourse. *Academy of Management Review*, *22*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□MR.□□□□.□□□□□□□□□□□

Baskaran, S., □ Mehta, K. □□□□□□. What is innovation anyway□ Youth perspectives from resource□ constrained environments. *Technovation*, *52–53*, □–□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□technovation.□□□□.□□.□□□

Baxter, P., □ □ack, S. □□□□□□. Case study□Implementation for novice researchers. *The Qualitative Report*, *13*□□□, □□□–□□□.

Beck, T., & Levine, R. (2005). SMEs , growth , and poverty : Cross□country evidence. *Journal of Economic Growth*, *10*, □□□–□□□.

Beckert, □. □□□□□□. □gency, entrepreneurs, and institutional change. The role of strategic choice and institutionalised practices in organisations. *Organization Studies*, *20*□□□, □□□–□□□.

Benneworth, P., Pinheiro, R., □ Karlsen, □. □□□□□□. Strategic agency and institutional change□ Investigating the role of universities in regional innovation systems □RISs□. *Regional Studies*, *51*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□.□□□□.□□□□□□□□

B□R. □□□□□□. *The small, medium and micro-enterprise sector of South Africa*. S□D□. https□□www.seda.org.□a□Publications□Publications□The□ □□Small,□ □□Medium□ □□and□ □□Micro□ □□□nterprise□ □□Sector□ □□of□ □□South□ □□□frica□ □□Commissioned□ □□by□ □□Seda.pdf

Berbegal□Mirabent, □, Ribeiro□Soriano, D. □., □ S□nche□Garc□a, □. L. □□□□□□. Can a magic recipe

foster university spin□off creation□ *Journal of Business Research*, *68*□□□□, □□□□–□□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□□busres.□□□□.□□.□□□

Bergek, □., □ Norrman, C. □□□□□□. Incubator best practice□□ framework. *Technovation*, *28*□□–□□, □□–□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□technovation.□□□□.□□.□□□

Biddle, B. □□□□□□. *Role theory: Expectations, identities and behaviors*. □cademic Press.

Biddle, B. □□□□□□. Recent developments in role theory. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *12*□□□, □□–□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□annurev.soc.□□.□.□□

Bitektine, □. □□□□□□. Toward a theory of social □udgments of organi□ations. *Academy of Management Review*, *36*□□□, □□□–□□□.

Black, □. S. □□□□□□. Coming home□The relationship of expatriate expectations with repatriation ad□ustment and □ob performance. *Human Relations*, *45*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Boal, K. B., □ Hooi□berg, R. □□□□□□. Strategic leadership research□Moving on. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *11*□□□, pp. □□□–□□□.

B□llingtoft, □. □□□□□□. The bottom□up business incubator□Leverage to networking and cooperation practices in a self□generated, entrepreneurial□enabled environment. *Technovation*, *32*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□technovation.□□□□.□□.□□□

Bosma, N., □ Kelley, D. □□□□□□. *Global entrepreneurship monitor: 2018/2019 Global report*. Global □ntrepreneurship Monitor http□□www.gemconsortium.org□report□□□□□□

Bowmans. □□□□□□. *Guide 1 – B-BBEE in South Africa: An overview*. https□□bowmanslaw.com□wp□content□uploads□□□□□□□□B□BB□□□Guide□□□□□.□□.□□□□.V□.pdf□□□□text□□RL□□□□□□https□□□□□F□□Fbowmanslaw.com□□Fwp

Broderick, □. □. □□□□□□. Role theory, role management and service performance. *Journal of Services Marketing*, *12*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Brown, R., □ Mawson, S. □□□□□□. Targeted support for high growth firms□Theoretical constraints, unintended conse□uences and future policy challenges. *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*, *34*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□X□□□□□□□□□

Bruneel, □., Ratinho, T., Clarysse, B., □ Groen, □. □□□□□□. The evolution of business incubators□Comparing demand and supply of business incubation services across different incubator generations. *Technovation*, *32*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□technovation.□□□□.□□.□□□

Bruton, G. D., □hlstrom, D., □ Li, H. L. □□□□□□. Institutional theory and entrepreneurship□Where are we now and where do we need to move in the future□ *Entrepreneurship: Theory and Practice*, *34*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□.□□□□□□□□□□□□.□□□□.□□□□□□x

Bryman, □. □□□□□□. The debate about □uantitative and □ualitative research□□ □uestion of method or epistemology□ *The British Journal of Sociology*, *35*□□□, □□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□□□□□□

Carayannis, □. G., □ Von □edtwit□, M. □□□□□□. □rchitecting gloCal □global□local□, real□virtual incubator networks □G□RVINs□ as catalysts and accelerators of entrepreneurship in

transitioning and developing economies□Lessons learned and best practices from current development and business incubation. *Technovation*, *25*□□□, □□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□S□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Cavanaugh, M. □., Boswell, W. R., Roehling, M. V., □ Boudreau, □. W. □□□□□□. □n empirical examination of self□reported work stress among □.S. managers. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *85*□□□, □□–□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□.□□.□.□□

Charman, □. □. □., Petersen, L. M., Piper, L. □., Liedeman, R., □ Legg, T. □□□□□□. Small area census approach to measure the township informal economy in South □frica. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, *11*□□□, □□–□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Clarke, □. □□□□□□. Revitali□ing entrepreneurship□How visual symbols are used in entrepreneurial performances. *Journal of Management Studies*, *48*□□□, □□□□–□□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□.□□□□.□□□□□□.x

Clarysse, B., Wright, M., Lockett, □., Van de Velde, □., □ Vhora, □. □□□□□□. Spinning out new ventures□□ typology of incubation strategies from □uropean research institutions. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *20*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□□busvent.□□□□.□□.□□□

Cohen, S. L., Bingham, C. B., □ Hallen, B. L. □□□□□□. The role of accelerator designs in mitigating bounded rationality in new ventures. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *64*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Crowe, S., Cresswell, K., Robertson, □., Huby, G., □very, □., □ Sheik, □. □□□□□□. The case study approach. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*. https□□eds.a.ebscohost.com□eds□pdfviewer□pdfviewer□vid□□□sid□□□fbece□□ab□□□□c□□□ □□□□□□□□□b□fd□□b□□□ □□sdc□v□sessmgr□□

Cunliffe, □., □ Coupland, C. □□□□□□. From hero to villain to hero□Making experience sensible through embodied narrative sensemaking. *Human Relations*, *65*□□□, □□–□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Dalmarco, G., Hulsink, W., □ Blois, G. V. □□□□□□. Creating entrepreneurial universities in an emerging economy□□vidence from Bra□il. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, *135*, □□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□techfore.□□□□.□□.□□□

Deephouse, D. L. (1999). To be different, or to be the same? It's a question (and theory) of strategic balance. *Strategic Management Journal*, *20*□□□, □□□–□□□.

Deephouse, D. L., □ Suchman, M. C. □□□□□□. Legitimacy in organi□ational institutionalism. In R. Greenwood, C. Oliver, K. Sahlin, □ R. Suddaby □□ds□ *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism (*pp. □□–□□□. Sage.

Deephouse, D. L., Bundy, □, Tost, L. P., □ Suchman, M. C. □□□□□□. Organi□ational legitimacy□Six key □uestions. In Greenwood, R., Oliver, C., Lawrence, T., □ Meyer, R. □□ds□ *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism* □□nd ed.□ □pp. □□–□□□. Sage. http□□ssrn.com□abstract□□□□□□□□

Del Sarto, N., Isabelle, D. □., □ Di Minin, □. □□□□□□. The role of accelerators in firm survival□□n fs□C□ analysis of Italian startups. *Technovation*, *90–91*, □□□□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□technovation.□□□□.□□□□□□□

Demerouti, □., □ Bakker, □. B. □□□□□□. The □ob demands□resources model□Challenges for future research. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, *37*□□□. https□□doi.org□□□. □□□□□□sa□p.v□□i□.□□□

Denyer, D., Tranfield, D., □ Van □ken, □. □. □□□□□□. Developing design propositions through research synthesis. *Organization Studies*, *29*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Desa, G., □ Basu, S. □□□□□□. Optimi□ation or bricolage□Overcoming resource constraints in global social entrepreneurship. *Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal*, *7*□□□, □□□□□.

Dierdorff, □. C., Rubin, R. S., □ Bachrach, D. G. □□□□□□. Role expectations as antecedents of citi□enship and the moderating effects of work context. *Journal of Management*, *38*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

D□ankov, S. □□□□□□. The regulation of entry□□ survey. *World Bank Research Observer*, *24*□□□, □□□–□□□.

Donaldson, T., □ Preston, L. □. □□□□□□. The stakeholder theory of the corporation□Concepts, evidence, and implications. *Academy of Management Review*, *20*□□□, □□–□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□□□□□□

Driscoll, C., □ Starik, M. □□□□□□. The Primordial stakeholder advancing the conceptual consideration of stakeholder. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *49*, □□–□□.

DTI. □□□□□□. *South Africa business incubator establishment handbook - A guide to establishing business incubators in South Africa*. Department of Trade and Industry. https□□www.seda.org.□a□WhatsHappening□Incubation□ □□Documents□sa□incubator□handbook.pdf

DTIC. □□□□□□. Broad□based black economic empowerment □B□BB□□□ □mendment □ct. *Department of Trade, Industry and Competition* http□□www.thedtic.gov.□a□financial□and□non□financial□support□b□bbee□broad□based□black□economic□empowerment□

Dubois, □., □ Gadde, L. □. □□□□□□. Systematic combining□ □n abductive approach to case research. *Journal of Business Research*, *55*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□S□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Dutt, N., Hawn, O., Vidal, □., Chatterji, □., McGahan, □., □ Mitchell, W. □□□□□□. How open system intermediaries address institutional failures□The case of business incubators in emerging□market countries. *Academy of Management Journal*, *59*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□am□□□□□□.□□□□□

□isenhardt, K. M. □□□□□□. Building theories from case study research. *Academy of Management Review*, *14*□□□, □□□–□□□.

□isenhardt, K. M. □□□□□□. Better stories and better constructs□The case for rigor and comparative logic. *Academy of Management Review*, *16*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□amr.□□□□□.□□□□□□□□

Eisenhardt, K. M., & Graebner, M. E. (2007). Theory building from cases : Opportunities and challenges. *Organizational Research Methods*, *50*□□□, □□–□□. http□□doi.wiley.com□□□.□□□□□□□.□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□.□□□□□.□□□□□□.x□ □□

□tikan, I. □□□□□□. Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, *5*□□□, □–□. https□□doi.org□□□□.□□□□□□□□.ajtas.□□□□□□□□□.□□

□uropean Commission. □□□□□□. *The smart guide to innovation-based incubators (IBI)*. □uropean Commission Publications Office. https□□data.europa.eu□doi□□□.□□□□□□□□□□

Fischer, D., Brettel, M., □ Mauer, R. □□□□□□. The three dimensions of sustainability□□ delicate balancing act for entrepreneurs made more complex by stakeholder expectations. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *163*□□□, □□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□s□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Fleetwood, S. □□□□□□. Ontology in organi□ation and management studies□ □ critical realist perspective. *Organization*, *12*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Floyd, S. W., □ Lane, P. □. □□□□□□. Strategi□ing thorughout the organisation□Managing role conflict in strategic renewal. *Academy of Management Journal*, *25*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Fondas, N., □ Stewart, R. □□□□□□. □nactment in managerial □obs□□ role analysis. *Journal of Management Studies*, *31*□□□, □□–□□□.

Freeman, R. □., □ McVea, □. □□□□□□. □ stakeholder approach to strategic management. In M. □. Hitt, □. S. Harrison, □ R. □. Freeman □□ds.□, *The Blackwell Handbook of Strategic Management* □pp. □□□–□□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□b.□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□.□□□□□.□□□□□□x

Friedman, □. L., □ Miles, S. □□□□□□. Developing stakeholder theory. *Journal of Management Studies*, *39*□□□, □–□□.

Fritz, C., Chak, F. L., & Spreitzer, G. M. (2011). It's the little things that matter: An examination of knowledge workers□energy management. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, *26*, □□–□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□dlo.□□□□.□□□□□□aaa.□□□

Fusch, P. I., □ Ness, L. R. □□□□□□. □re we there yet□ Data saturation in □ualitative research. *Qualitative Report*, *20*□□□, □□□□–□□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□.□□□□

Garriga, □., □ Mel□, D. □□□□□□. Corporate social responsibility theories□Mapping the territory. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *53*, □□–□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Gassmann, O., □ Becker, B. □□□□□□. Gaining leverage effects from knowledge modes within corporate incubators. *R and D Management*, *36*□□□, □–□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□.□□□□□ □□□□.□□□□□.□□□□□□x

Gehman, □., Glaser, V. L., □isenhardt, K. M., Gioia, D., Langley, □., □ Corley, K. G. □□□□□□. Finding theory–method fit□□ comparison of three □ualitative approaches to theory building. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, *27*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

George, G., Corbishley, C., Khayesi, □. N. O., Haas, M. R., □ Tihanyi, L. □□□□□□. Bringing □frica in□Promising directions for management. *Academy of Management Journal*, *59*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□am.□□□□□.□□□□

Giddens, □. □□□□□□. *The Constitution of Society.* California □niversity Press.

Gioia, D. □., □ Chittipeddi, K. □□□□□□. Sensemaking and sensegiving in strategic change initiation. *Strategic Management Journal*, *12*□□□, □□□–□□□. http□□www.□stor.org□stable□□□□□□□□

Gioia, D. □., Corley, K. G., □ Hamilton, □. L. □□□□□□. Seeking □ualitative rigor in inductive research□Notes on the Gioia methodology. *Organizational Research Methods*, *16*□□□, □□–□□. https□□doi.org□□□. □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Goode, W. □. □□□□□□. □ theory of role strain. *American Sociological Review*, *25*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□. □□□□□science.□□□.□□□□.□□□

Gregg, D. G., Kulkarni, □. R., □ Vin□□, □. S. □□□□□□. □nderstanding the philosophical underpinnings of software engineering research in information systems. *Information Systems Frontiers*, *3*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□. □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Grimaldi, R., □ Grandi, □. □□□□□□. Business incubators and new venture creation□□n assessment of incubating models. *Technovation*, *25*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□S□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Gross, N., Mason, W. S., □ Mc□achern, □. W. □□□□□□. *Explorations in role analysis: Studies of the school superintendency role*. Wiley.

Gr□nbaum, N. N. □□□□□□. Identification of ambiguity in the case study research typology□What is a unit of analysis□ *Qualitative Market Research*, *10*□□□, □□–□□. https□□doi.org□□□. □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Hackett, S. M., □ Dilts, D. M. □□□□□□. □real options□driven theory of business incubation. *Journal of Technology Transfer*, *29*, □□–□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□B□OTT.□□□□□□□□□□□□.□□□□□□.□□

Hallen, B., Bingham, C., □ Cohen, S. L. □□□□□□. Do accelerators accelerate□ If so, how□ *Organization Science*, *31*□□□, □□□–□□□.

Han, S., Su, □., Lyu, Y., □ Liu, □. □□□□□□. How do business incubators govern incubation relationships with different new ventures□. *Technovation*, *116*, □□□□□□□.

Harper□□nderson, □., □ Lewis, D. □. □□□□□□. What makes business incubation work□ Measuring the influence of incubator □uality and regional capacity on incubator outcomes. *Economic Development Quarterly*, *32*□□□, □□–□□. https□□doi.org□□□. □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Haugh, H. □□□□□□. Call the midwife□Business incubators as entrepreneurial enablers in developing economies. *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development*, *32*□□–□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□. □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□.□□□□□.□□□□□□□□

Hausberg, □. P., □ Korreck, S. □□□□□□. Business incubators and accelerators□a co□citation analysis□based, systematic literature review. *Journal of Technology Transfer*, *45*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□s□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□y

Heeks, R., □ Bailur, S. □□□□□□. □naly□ing e□government research□Perspectives, philosophies, theories, methods, and practice. *Government Information Quarterly*, *24*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□gi□.□□□□.□□.□□□

Henry, C., □ Foss, L. □□□□□□. Case sensitive□ □ review of the literature on the use of case method in entrepreneurship research. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research*, *21*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□□BR□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Hewitt□Dundas, N. □□□□□□. Resource and capability constraints to innovation in small and large plants. *Small Business Economics*, *26*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□s□□□□□□□□□□□□

Hewitt, L. M. M., & Janse van Rensburg, L. J. (2019). The role of business incubators in creating sustainable small and medium enterprises. *The Southern African Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management*, *12*(1), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.4102/sajesbm.v12i1.211

Hillman, A. J., Withers, M. C., & Collins, B. J. (2009). Resource dependence theory: A review. *Journal of Management*, *35*(6), 1404–1427. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206309343469

Hindin, M. J. (2015). Role Theory. In *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology* (pp. 1–3). John Wiley and Sons. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405165518.wbeosr013

Hlady-Rispal, M., & Jouison-Laffitte, E. (2014). Qualitative research methods and epistemological frameworks: A review of publication trends in entrepreneurship. *Journal of Small Business Management*, *52*(4), 594–614. https://doi.org/10.1111/jsbm.12114

Hsieh, H. F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, *15*(9), 1277–1288. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687

Hunter, L., & Lean, J. (2018). Entrepreneurial learning – a social context perspective: evidence from Kenya and Tanzania. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, *25*(2), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1108/JSBED-08-2017-0252

Jacquemin, B., & Janssen, F. (2009). Role of regulation in facilitating entrepreneurship: A study of incubation in Belgium. *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business*, *20*(4), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1504/IJESB.2013.057264

Jarzabkowski, P., Langley, A., & Nigam, A. (2019). Navigating the tensions of quality in qualitative research. *Strategic Organization*, *19*(1), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1177/1476127019879484

Johns, G. (2006). The essential impact of context on organizational behavior. *Academy of Management Review*, *31*(2), 386–408. https://doi.org/10.5465/AMR.2006.20208687

Johns, G. (2017). Reflections on the 2016 decade award: Incorporating context in organizational research. *Academy of Management Review*, *42*(4), 577–595. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2017.0223

Jourdan, J., & Kivleniece, I. (2017). Too much of a good thing? The dual effect of public sponsorship on organizational performance. *Academy of Management Journal, 60*(1), 55–77.

Kakabadse, N., Karatas-Ozkan, M., Theodorakopoulos, N., McGowan, C., & Nicolopoulou, K. (2020). Business incubator managers' perceptions of their role and performance success: Role demands, constraints, and choices. *European Management Review*, *17*(1), 383–398. https://doi.org/10.1111/emre.12376

Kallio, H., Pietilä, A. M., Johnson, M., & Kangasniemi, M. (2016). Systematic methodological review: developing a framework for a qualitative semi-structured interview guide. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, *72*(12), 2954–2965. https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.13031

Kahn, R. L., Wolfe, D. M., Quinn, R. P., Snoek, J., Rosenthal, R. A. (1964). *Organizational stress: Studies in role conflict and ambiguity*. Wiley.

Klag, M., & Langley, A. (2013). Approaching the conceptual leap in qualitative research.

International Journal of Management Reviews, 15, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□. □□□□□□.□□□□□□ □□□□. □□□□. □□□□□.x

Klofsten, M., Fayolle, □., Guerrero, M., Mian, S., □rbano, D., □ Wright, M. □□□□□. The entrepreneurial university as driver for economic growth and social change □Key strategic challenges. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, *141*, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□. □□□□□□techfore.□□□□. □□. □□□

Klofsten, M., Lundmark, □., Wennberg, K., □ Bank, N. □□□□□. Incubator speciali□ation and si□e□ Divergent paths towards operational scale. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, *151*, □–□□. https□□doi.org□□□. □□□□□□.techfore.□□□□. □□□□□□

Kornai, □. □□□□□. Resource□constrained versus demand□constrained systems. *Econometrica*, *47*□□□, □□□–□□□.

Krauss, S. □., Ham□ah, □., Omar, □., Suandi, T., Ismail, I. □., □ahari, M. □., □ Nor, □. M. □□□□□. Preliminary investigation and interview guide development for studying how Malaysian farmers' form their mental models of farming. *Qualitative Report*, *14*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□. □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□. □□□□

Lai, W. H., □ Lin, C. C. □□□□□. Constructing business incubation service capabilities for tenants at post□entrepreneurial phase. *Journal of Business Research*, *68*□□□, □□□□–□□□□. https□□doi.org□□□. □□□□□□.busres.□□□□. □□. □□□

Lalkaka, R. □□□□□. Business incubators in developing countries□ Characteristics and performance. *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation Management*, *3*□□–□□, □□–□□. https□□doi.org□□□. □□□□□□ijeim.□□□□. □□□□□□

Laplume, □. O., □ Lit□, R. □. □□□□□. Stakeholder theory□Reviewing a theory that moves us. *Journal of Management*, *34*□□□, □□□□–□□□□. https□□doi.org□□□. □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Leahey, □., Beckman, C. M., □ Stanko, T. L. □□□□□. Prominent but less productive□The impact of interdisciplinarity on scientists' research. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *62*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□. □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Lecluyse, L., □ Knockaert, M. □□□□□. Disentangling satisfaction of tenants on science parks□□ multiple case study in Belgium. *Technovation*, *98*, □□□□□□. https□□doi.org□□□. □□□□□□technovation.□□□□. □□□□□□

Lee, S., □ Osteryoung, □. S. □□□□□. □ comparison of critical success factors for effective operations of university business incubators in the □nited States and Korea. *Journal of Small Business Management*, *42*□□□, □□□–□□□.

Levy, M. □ □□□□□. *The Structure of Society*. Princeton □niversity.

Lincoln, Y. S., □ Guba, □. G. □□□□□. Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, □□□–□□□.

Liu, Y. □□□□□. The micro□foundations of global business incubation□Stakeholder engagement and strategic entrepreneurial partnerships. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, *161*, □□□□□□. https□□doi.org□□□. □□□□□□techfore.□□□□. □□□□□□

Lowe, K. B. □□□□□. Demands, constraints, choice and discretion□□n introduction to the work of

Rosemary Stewart. *Leadership Quarterly*, *14*(4–5), 409–421. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843(03)00040-0

Lukeš, M., Longo, M. C., & Zouhar, J. (2019). Do business incubators really enhance entrepreneurial growth? Evidence from a large sample of innovative Italian start-ups. *Technovation*, *82–83*, 25–34. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.technovation.2018.08.004

Macintosh, N. B., & Scapens, R. W. (1990). Structuration theory in management accounting. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, *15*(5), 455–477. https://doi.org/10.1016/0361-3682(90)90005-S

Maksimov, V., Wang, S. L., & Luo, Y. (2017). Reducing poverty in the least developed countries: The role of small and medium enterprises. *Journal of World Business*, *52*(2), 244–259. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2016.12.004

Mantere, S. (2008). Role expectations and middle manager strategic agency. *Journal of Management Studies*, *45*(2), 294–316. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2007.00750.x

Mantere, S., & Ketokivi, M. (2013). Reasoning in organization science. *Academy of Manaagement Review*, *38*(1), 70–89. https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.5465/amr.2011.0250

Masutha, M., & Rogerson, C. M. (2014). Small enterprise development in South Africa: The role of business incubators. *Bulletin of Geography*, *26*, 109–126. https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.2478/bog-2014-0028

Mc-dam, M., Miller, K., & Mc-dam, R. (2016). Situated regional university incubation: A multi-level stakeholder perspective. *Technovation*, *50–51*, 35–45. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.technovation.2015.11.002

McKeever, M. (2016). Educational ine-uality in apartheid South Africa. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *61*(1), 1199–1216. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764216674621

Mead, G. H., & Mind, H. (1934). *Mind, self and society.* University of Chicago.

Merton, R. K. (1957). The role-set: Problems in sociological theory. *The British Journal of Sociology*, *8*(2), 106–120.

Messeghem, K., Bakkali, C., Sammut, S., & Swalhi, A. (2017). Measuring nonprofit incubator performance: Toward an adapted balanced scorecard approach. *Journal of Small Business Management*, *56*(1), 104–128. https://doi.org/10.1111/jsbm.12328

Mian, S. A. (1994). US university-sponsored technology incubators: an overview of management, policies and performance. *Technovation*, *14*(7), 451–462. https://doi.org/10.1016/0166-4972(94)90008-6

Mian, S. A. (1996). Assessing value-added contributions of university technology business incubators to tenant firms. *Research Policy*, *25*(3), 325–335. https://doi.org/10.1016/0048-7333(95)00846-7

Mian, S., Lamine, W., & Fayolle, A. (2016). Technology business incubation: An overview of the state of knowledge. *Technovation*, *50–51*, 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.technovation.2016.02.005

Miles, M. B., □ Huberman, □. M. □□□□□□. *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* □□nd ed.□ Sage.

Mitchell, R. K., □gle, B. R., Wood, D. □., □ Mitchell, R. K. □□□□□□. Toward a theory of stakeholder identification and salience□Defining the principle of who and what really counts. *Academy of Manaagement Review*, *22*□□□, □□□–□□□.

Montgomery, P., □ Bailey, P. H. □□□□□□. Field notes and theoretical memos in grounded theory. *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, *29*□□□, □□–□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Moreno, □. L. □□□□□□. *Who Shall Survive?* Nervous and Mental Disease Publishing Co.

Motoyama, Y., □ Knowlton, K. □□□□□□. From resource munificence to ecosystem integration□The case of government sponsorship in St. Louis. *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development*, *28*□□–□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□.□□□□.□□□□□□□□

Mrkaic, B. □□□□□□. Business incubation models and institutionally void environments. *Technovation*, *68*, □□–□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□technovation.□□□□.□□.□□□

Mungila Hillemane, B. S., Satyanarayana, K., □ Chandrashekar, D. □□□□□□. Technology business incubation for start□up generation□ □ literature review toward a conceptual framework. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research*, *25*□□□, □□□□–□□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□IJEBR□□□□□□□□□□□□□

National Planning Commission. □□□□□□. *National development plan: Economy and employment*. National Planning Commission. https□□www.nationalplanningcommission.org.□a□assets□Documents□NDP□Chapters□NDP□ □ □□□□□□CH□□□conomy□ □□and□ □□employment.pdf

Ng, W. K. B., □ppel□Meulenbroek, R., Cloodt, M., □ □rent□e, T. □□□□□□. Towards a segmentation of science parks□□ typology study on science parks in □urope. *Research Policy*, *48*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□respol.□□□□.□□.□□□

Ngepah, N. □□□□□□. □ review of theories and evidence of inclusive growth□ □n economic perspective for □frica. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, *24*, □□–□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□cosust.□□□□.□□.□□□

NRF. □□□□□□. *Broad-based black economic empowerment - Basic principles.* Norton Rose Fulbright. https□□www.nortonrosefulbright.com□en□□a□knowledge□publications□fe□□cd□□□broad□based□black□economic□empowerment□□basic□principles

Ntim, C. G., □ Soobaroyen, T. □□□□□□. Black economic empowerment disclosures by South □frican listed corporations□ The influence of ownership and board characteristics. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *116*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□s□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

O□CD. □□□□□□. *Financing SMEs and entrepreneurs 2022: An OECD scoreboard*. O□CD. https□□www.oecd□ilibrary.org□sites□□bada□a□□en□index.html□itemId□□content□component□□bada□a□□en□□□□text□Of□ □□the□ □□estimated□ □□□□.□□ □□million,about□ □□□□□□ □□□□ □□are□ □□considered□ □□formal

Parsons, R., Lacey, □., □ Moffat, K. □□□□□□. Maintaining legitimacy of a contested practice□How the minerals industry understands its “social licence to operate.” *Resources Policy*, *41*□□□, □□–□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□resourpol.□□□□.□□.□□□

Parsons, T. □□□□□□. Culture and social system revisited. *Social Science Quarterly*, *53* □□□, □□□–□□□. https□□www.□stor.org□stable□□□□□□□□□

Pauwels, C., Clarysse, B., Wright, M., □ Van Hove, □. □□□□□□. □nderstanding a new generation incubation model□ The accelerator. *Technovation*, *50–51*, □□–□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□technovation.□□□□.□□.□□□

Patton, M. □. □□□□□□. Two decades of developments in □ualitative in□uiry□□ personal, experiential perspective. *Qualitative Social Work*, *1*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Phan, P. H., Siegel, D. S., □ Wright, M. □□□□□□. Science parks and incubators□Observations, synthesis and future research. *Journal of Business Venturing, 20*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□busvent.□□□□.□□.□□□

Phillippi, J., & Lauderdale, J. (2020). A guide to field notes for qualitative research : Context and conversation. *Qualitative Health Research*, *28*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Podsakoff, N. P., Lepine, □. □., □ Lepine, M. □. □□□□□□. Differential challenge stressor□hindrance stressor relationships with □ob attitudes, turnover intentions, turnover, and withdrawal behavior□ □ meta□analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *92*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□.□□.□.□□□

Pollock, T. G., □ Rindova, V. P. □□□□□□. Media legitimation effects in the market for initial public offerings. *Academy of Management Journal, 46*□□□, □□□–□□□.

Ponte, S., Roberts, S., □ van Sittert, L. □□□□□□. Black economic empowerment, business and the state in South □frica. *Development and Change*, *38*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□.□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□.□□□□□.□□□□□□.x

POPI□. □□□□□□. *Protection of Personal Information Act (POPI Act).* https□□popia.co.□a□

Po□□ebon, M. □□□□□□. The influence of a structurationist view on strategic management research. *Journal of Management Studies*, *41*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□.□□□□□□ □□□□□.□□□□□.□□□□□□.x

Pratt, M. G., Kaplan, S., □ Whittington, R. □□□□□□. □ditorial essay□The tumult over transparency□ Decoupling transparency from replication in establishing trustworthy □ualitative research. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *65*□□□, □–□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Raffel, S. □□□□□□. Revisiting role theory□Roles and the problem of the self. *Sociological Research Online*, *4*□□□, □–□□.

Ratinho, T., □me□cua, □., Honig, B., □ □eng, □. □□□□□□. Supporting entrepreneurs□□ systematic review of literature and an agenda for research. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, *154*. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□techfore.□□□□.□□□□□□□

Ratinho, T., □ Henri□ues, □. □□□□□□. The role of science parks and business incubators in converging countries□ □vidence from Portugal. *Technovation*, *30*□□□, □□□–□□□.

https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□technovation.□□□□.□□.□□□

Revest, V., □ Sapio, □. □□□□□□. Financing technology□based small firms in □urope□ What do we know□ *Small Business Economics*, *39*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□s□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Reynolds, O., Sheehan, M., □ Hilliard, R. □□□□□□. □xploring strategic agency in sustainability□oriented entrepreneur legitimation. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research*, *24*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□I□□BR□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Rosenberg, □. P., □ Yates, P. M. □□□□□□. Schematic representation of case study research designs. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, *60*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□.□□□□□□□□□□.□□□□.□□□□□□.x

Rothaermel, F. T., □ Thursby, M. □□□□□□. Incubator firm failure or graduation□□ The role of university linkages. *Research Policy*, *34*□□□, □□□□–□□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□.respol.□□□□.□□.□□□

Rouleau, L., □ Balogun, □. □□□□□□. Middle managers, strategic sensemaking, and discursive competence. *Journal of Management Studies*, *48*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□.□□□□□□□□□□.□□□□.□□□□□□.x

Roulston, K., □ Shelton, S. □. □□□□□□. Reconceptuali□ing bias in teaching □ualitative research methods. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *21*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Rwelamila, P. D., □ □dries, R. □□□□□□. Pro□ect procurement competence and knowledge base of civil engineering consultants□ □n empirical study. *Journal of Management in Engineering*, *23*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□asce□□□□□□□□□x□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

S□ National Treasury. □□□□□□. *National budget 2024*. South □frican National Treasury. https□□app.powerbi.com□view□r□ey□rl□oi□T□yM□Y□ODgtNDIx□i□□N□iwLThmN□MtYm□kYT□□N□□□Y□V□iwidCI□I□FhND□□NDhmLT□yY□□tNGY□YS□hN□□□LTc□OD□mNmRkM□I□NSIsImMiO□h□

Santos, F. M., □ □isenhardt, K. M. □□□□□□. Constructing markets and shaping boundaries□ □ntrepreneurial power in nascent fields. *Academy of Management Journal*, *52*□□□, □□□□□□□.

Salda□a, □. □□□□□□. *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* □□rd ed.□ Sage.

Schwart□, M., □ Hornych, C. □□□□□□. Speciali□ation as strategy for business incubators□ □n assessment of the Central German Multimedia Center. *Technovation*, *28*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□.technovation.□□□□.□□.□□□

Scillitoe, □. L., □ Chakrabarti, □. K. □□□□□□. The role of incubator interactions in assisting new ventures. *Technovation*, *30*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□.technovation.□□□□.□□.□□□

S□D□. □□□□□□. *SMME quarterly update: 3rd quarter 2022.* S□D□. https□□www.seda.org.□a□Publications□Publications□SMM□□ □□□uarterly□ □□□□□□□□□ □□ □□□□□□□.pdf

Shih, T., □ □aboen, L. □□□□□□. The network mediation of an incubator□ How does it enable or constrain the development of incubator firms' business networks? *Industrial Marketing Management*, *80*, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□.indmarman.□□□□.□□.□□□

Soetanto, D. P., ack, S. L. . Business incubators and the networks of technology based firms. *Journal of Technology Transfer*, *38*, –. https doi.org . s

Soetanto, D., & van Geenhuizen, M. (2015). Getting the right balance: University networks' influence on spin offs' attraction of funding for innovation. *Technovation*, *36*, –. https doi.org . technovation. . .

Soetanto, D., van Geenhui en, M. . Life after incubation The impact of entrepreneurial universities on the long term performance of their spin offs. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, *141*, –. https doi.org . techfore. . .

Sohail, K., Belitski, M., Castro Christiansen, L. . Developing business incubation process frameworks systematic literature review. *Journal of Business Research*, *162*, . https doi.org . busres. .

Somsuk, N., Laosirihongthong, T. . fu y HP to prioriti e enabling factors for strategic management of university business incubators Resource based view. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, *85*, –. https doi.org . techfore. . .

Statistics South frica. . *Quarterly labour force survey*. Statistics South frica. https www.gov. a news media statements statistics south africa uarterly labour force survey uarter three
text The results of the uarterly,million during the same uarter

Steen, , Coopmans, C., Whyte, . . Structure and agency ctor network theory and strategic organi ation. *Strategic Organization*, *4*, –. https doi.org .

Sternberg, R. . Success factors of university spin offs Regional government support programs versus regional environment. *Technovation*, *34*, –. https doi.org . technovation. . .

Stewart, R. (1976b). To understand the manager's job: Consider demands, constraints, choices. *Organisational Dynamics*, *4*, –.

Stewart, R. . model for understanding managerial obs and behavior. *Academy of Management Review*, *7*, –. https doi.org . amr. .

Stewart, R. . Chairmen and chief executives n exploration of their relationship. *Journal of Management Studies*, *28*, –. https doi.org . . .tb .x

Stroh, L. K., Gregersen, H. B., Black, . S. . Triumphs and tragedies xpectations and commitments upon repatriation. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *11*, –. https doi.org .

Suchman, M. C. . Managing legitimacy Strategic and institutional approaches. *Academy of Management Review*, *20*, –. https ournals.aom.org doi abs . MR. .

Suddaby, R., Bruton, G. D., Si, S. X. . ntrepreneurship through a ualitative lens

Insights on the construction and□or discovery of entrepreneurial opportunity. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *30*□□□, □–□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□□busvent.□□□□.□□.□□□

Sulla, V., □ikhali, P., □ Cuevas, P. F. □□□□□□. *Inequality in Southern Africa: An assessment of the Southern African Customs Union (English)*. World Bank. http□□documents.worldbank.org□curated□en□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□P□□□□□□□□c□□a□f□□b□a□ae□□e□□eadd□a□□

Sutter, C., Bruton, G. D., □ Chen, □. □□□□□□. □ntrepreneurship as a solution to extreme poverty□□ review and future research directions. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *34*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□□busvent.□□□□.□□.□□□

Tampoe, M. □□□□□□. Motivating knowledge workers□the challenge for the □□□□s. *Knowledge Management and Organisational Design*, *26*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Theodorakopoulos, N., Kakabadse, N. K., □ McGowan, C. □□□□□□. What matters in business incubation□ □ literature review and a suggestion for situated theorising. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, *21*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□SB□D□□□□□□□□□□□

Tsai, F. S., Hsieh, L. H. Y., Fang, S. C., □ Lin, □. L. □□□□□□. The co□evolution of business incubation and national innovation systems in Taiwan. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, *76*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□techfore.□□□□.□□.□□□

Turner, R. H. □□□□□□. Role theory. In □. H. Turner □□d□, *Handbook of Sociological Theory (*pp. □□□–□□□□. Retrieved from https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

van der Westhui□en, □., □ Ntshingila, L. □□□□□□. The effect of supplier selection, supplier development and information sharing on SME's business performance in Sedibeng. *International Journal of Economics and Finance Studies*, *12*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□□ijefs.□□□□□□□□□□

van □ck, L., Yorke, M., □ Martens, N. □□□□□, May□ *A knowledge brief of South Africa's incubator and accelerator landscape*. □spen Network of Development □ntrepreneurs.

Vanderstraeten, □., □ Matthyssens, P. □□□□□□. Service□based differentiation strategies for business incubators□□xploring external and internal alignment. *Technovation*, *32*□□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□technovation.□□□□.□□.□□□

Vanderstraeten, □., van Witteloostui□n, □., □ Matthyssens, P. □□□□□□. Organi□ational sponsorship and service co□development□□ contingency view on service co□development directiveness of business incubators. *Technovation*, *98*, □□□□□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□technovation.□□□□.□□□□□□□

Veloutsou, C., □ Black, I. □□□□□□. Creating and managing participative brand communities□The roles members perform. *Journal of Business Research*, *117*, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□busres.□□□□.□□.□□□

von □edtwit□, M. □□□□□□. Classification and management of incubators□ □ligning strategic ob□ectives and competitive scope for new business facilitation. *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation Management*, *3*□□–□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□ijeim.□□□□.□□□□□□□

Wagner, M., Schaltegger, S., Hansen, □. G., □ Fichter, K. □□□□□□. □niversity□linked programmes for sustainable entrepreneurship and regional development□How and with what impact□ *Small Business Economics*, *Sedlacek 2013*. https□□doi.org□□□. □□□□□s□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Wahyuni, D. □□□□□□. The research design ma□e. *Journal of Applied Management Accounting Research*, *10*□□□, □□–□□. https□□doi.org□□□. □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Webb, □. W., Kistruck, G. M., Ireland, R. D., □ Ketchen □r, D. □. □□□□□□. The entrepreneurship process in base of the pyramid markets□ The case of multinational enterprise□nongovernment organi□ation alliances. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, *34*□□□, □□□□□□□□.

Weick, K. □. □□□□□□. Theory construction as disciplined imagination. *Academy of Management Review*, *14*□□□, □□□–□□□.

Weiser, □. K., □ar□abkowski, P., □ Laamanen, T. □□□□□□. Completing the adaptive turn□ □n integrative view of strategy implementation. *Academy of Management Annals*, *14*□□□, □□□–□□□□. https□□doi.org□□□. □□□□□annals.□□□□.□□□□

Welch, C., Piekkari, R., Plakoyiannaki, □., □ Paavilainen□M□ntym□ki, □. □□□□□□. Theorising from case studies□Towards a pluralist future for international business research. *Journal of International Business Studies*, *42*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□. □□□□□□ibs.□□□□.□□

Welter, F., Baker, T., □udretsch, D. B., □ Gartner, W. B. □□□□□□. □veryday entrepreneurship □□ call for entrepreneurship research to embrace entrepreneurial diversity. *Entrepreneurship: Theory and Practice*, *41*□□□, □–□□. https□□doi.org□□□. □□□□□etap.□□□□□

Whittington, R. □□□□□□. Putting Giddens into action□Social systems and managerial agency. *Journal of Management Studies*, *29*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□.□□□□□□.□□□□□ □□□□.□□□□.tb□□□□□.x

Whittington, R. □□□□□□. The work of strategi□ing and organi□ing□For a practice perspective. *Strategic Organization*, *1*□□□, □□□–□□□.

Wickham, M., □ Parker, M. □□□□□□. Reconceptualising organisational role theory for contemporary organisational contexts. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, *22*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□. □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Wonglimpiyarat, □. □□□□□□. The dynamic economic engine at Silicon Valley and □S government programmes in financing innovations. *Technovation*, *26*□□□, □□□□–□□□□. https□□doi.org□□□. □□□□□□technovation.□□□□.□□.□□□

World Bank. □□□□□□. *Africa's pulse (*No. □□□. World Bank. https□□doi.org□□□. □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

World Bank. □□□□□□. *World Development Indicators*. World Bank. https□□databank.worldbank.org□source□world□development□indicators

World Bank. □□□□□□, □anuary□. *Global economic prospects.* World Bank. doi□□□. □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Ya□an, B. □□□□□□. Three approaches to case study methods in education□Yin, Merriam, and Stake. *The Qualitative Report*, *20*□□□, □□□–□□□. https□□doi.org□□□. □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□v□i□□.□□□□

Yin, R. K. □□□□□□. Designing case studies. *Qualitative Research Methods*, *5*□□□□, □□□–□□□.

Yin, R. K. □□□□□□. *Case study research: Design and methods* □Vol. □□. Sage.

□eufack, □. G., Calderon, C., Kambou, G., Kubota, M., Korman, V., Catalina, C., □ □viomoh, H. □. □□□□□□. *Africa's Pulse* □No. □□ □. World Bank. https□□doi.org□□□. □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

□□□e□d□□e□□

□□□e□d□□□□□Se□ □□tr□□t□red□□ter□e□ □□□de□or□□□□□e□□□□□□ator□□ a□a□er□□

Re□ear□h□S□□□ □□e□t□o□□	□□r□o□e□o□ke□□ □□e□t□o□□	Ke□□□e□t□o□□□	□ollo□ □□□□□e□t□o□□□
i. What are the main stakeholders' role expectations of business incubator managers in a resource-constrained context? □	□stablishing rapport with the interviewee and obtaining relevant background information about the incubator and the incubator manager.	□. Please share a brief professional background of yourself, including indicating when and how you became the manager of this incubator□ □. Share with me the origins of this incubator, including its funding, founding ob□ectives and strategy.□	a. How has the original incubator strategy changed in recent years□ □
	Identifying the incubator managers' stakeholders, their roles and perceived expectations.	□. Who are the incubator□s various internal and external stakeholders that you interact with in executing your role□ Please elaborate on their respective roles and expectations in the functioning of the incubator□□	a. How do you categorise the various incubator stakeholders□□ b. How do stakeholders make their expectations known to you□ c. How do the stakeholders influence the incubator's strategy□□
ii. How do business incubator managers in a resource-constrained context manage the perceived job demands?	Soliciting the incubator manager to share his□her strategic actions emanating from the expectations of the various stakeholders.	□. How do you manage the conflicting expectations of these multiple □internal and external□ stakeholders in your strategic decisions□ □	a. Describe instances where some stakeholders' expectations enable you to make the best strategic choices for the incubator□
iii. How do business incubator managers in a resource-constrained context manage the perceived job constraints?	To gain insight into the constraints that incubator managers face in their role and how incubator managers□ strategic choices are either constrained or enabled by incubator expectations.	□. Please share with me the constraints you encounter in executing your role as an incubator manager□ □	a. Please share any instances when your strategic proposals for the incubator were not adopted□ b. Describe to me instances where some stakeholders' expectations constrain your ability to make the best strategic choices for the incubator.□

□□□e□d□□□□□Se□ □□□tr□□t□red□□□ter□□e□ □□□□de□or□□□□□□ator□□takeholder□□

Re□ear□h S□□□ □□e□t□o□□	**□□r□o□e□o□ke□□ □□e□t□o□□**	**Ke□□□□e□t□o□□□**	**□ollo□ □□□□□□e□t□o□□□**
i. What are the main stakeholders' role expectations of business incubator managers in a resource-constrained context? □	Obtaining relevant background information about the incubator manager's stakeholders and their relationship with the incubator.	□. Please describe your background and your role in the formation, management and functioning of the incubator□□	a. Please elaborate on how your working relationship with the incubator manager is like□ □
	Getting an insight into the stakeholders' expectations of the incubator manager.	□. What are your main expectations of the incubator manager role□ □	a. Tell me more about the importance of these expectations to you□ □
	□nderstanding how incubator managers' stakeholders try to influence incubator managers' strategic decisions, thereby exerting demands on incubator managers.	□. How do you use your role to influence the incubator strategy□ □	a. How do you make your expectations known to the incubator manager□ □
	Gaining insight into how stakeholders use their role expectations to evaluate the performance of the incubator manager and the conse□uence of positively disconfirmed expectations.	□. How do you evaluate the performance of the incubator manager□	a. How would you respond if your expectations were not met□
	Gaining insight into how stakeholders relate with each other and how they value the importance □salience□of each other to the incubator.	□. Who are the other incubator stakeholders, and how do you relate to them□	a. How do you categorise these various stakeholders working with the incubator manager□
	□xamining if stakeholders can perceive the conflicting nature of their expectations on the incubator manager.	□. Share with me examples of when stakeholders' expectations tend to conflict and how these conflicts are addressed.	

□ □

Appendix 3

□□or□ ed□□o□□e□t□□□ □thor□□ed□re□re□e□tat□□e□o□□□□□□ator□□

Re□ear□h□To□□□□Role Demands, Constraints □nd Choices□The Impact Of Context □nd Multiple Stakeholders' Expectations On Business Incubator Managers' Strategic Agency

Re□ear□h□□o□□□□This research focuses on business incubation management and seeks to understand how the strategic choices made by incubator managers are influenced by the expectations of incubators' multiple stakeholders. Since the stakeholders play different roles in the incubator's operations, their norms and beliefs about acceptable incubator manager role performance also vary and can be conflicting. Some of these norms and beliefs, which concern the activities to be undertaken and the manager's attributes, can enable incubator managers to make choices that benefit the incubator. However, on the other hand, some norms and beliefs can impede incubator managers' strategic choices, while others can act as enablers and constraints depending on prevailing conditions. Therefore, this study seeks to deepen understanding of how the stakeholders' expectations influence business incubator managers' behaviour, as demonstrated by their strategic choices.

The study uses a multiple case study design involving several incubators operating in South □frica. Targeted participants for this study include incubator managers, incubatees, specialist mentors□coaches, incubator sponsors, policymakers, and university representatives.

It is essential to highlight that participation in this study is voluntary, both for the organisation and the individual participants. However, you will need to agree with the terms and conditions in this consent statement for your organisation to participate. Moreover, the individual participants will also be re□uired to give their consent to participate in the study. Nevertheless, participants can withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty.

Data will be collected through semi□structured interviews conducted in □nglish by the researcher. The interviews, which will last for approximately □□ minutes, will focus on the multiple stakeholders' expectations of the incubator manager, the interaction of the stakeholders, and how the business incubator manager balances the demands of the various stakeholders in executing his□her strategic role.

The interviews will be recorded for later transcription□research field notes will be taken during the interview. Other data, such as incubator reports, manager performance reports and incubatee□selection reports, will also be collected, if available. These documents will be re□uested directly from the incubator manager or accessed from the

organisation's website if they are publicly available. These reports are necessary to corroborate the primary data generated through the interviews. Furthermore, notes will be taken about any observations made around the incubator premises and operations. Such observations may be insightful in addressing the research □uestions.

□ll data provided will be securely stored with no fields or identifiers that will enable identification of their source. For example, file names will contain neither the organisation nor the participant names□instead, a uni□ue file naming convention only known to the researcher will be used. Moreover, electronic folders containing the research data will be password□protected.

It is imperative to understand that the data collected for this study will not be confidential, as the research results will be reported in the final thesis and □ournal publications. Nevertheless, anonymity is guaranteed as no identifying features about your organisation will be included in the research outputs. While participants' names, positions, and organisations will be recorded during the interview and transcriptions, these will not be contained in the final thesis and □ournal articles. In addition, any direct □uotations from the transcribed interviews will be used anonymously.

No reward will be provided for participating in this study, but a copy of the final research report will be shared with you and any respondents who wish to receive it. Furthermore, there are no known risks associated with this study. No data related to the organisation's financial information and operational secrets will be reported in the findings.

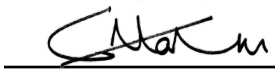
By signing this consent statement, you certify that you understand, agree to and approve of the conditions of your organisation's participation in the study, including the re□uired access to the relevant personnel □selected participants□, operating premises for observation purposes, and relevant organisational records and information. You further confirm your ability to read, write, and speak in □nglish. Should you have any □ueries or concerns, including after the study, please contact my supervisors or myself. Our details are provided below.

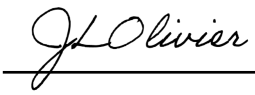
Researcher Name□Gwarega Dambud□o □mail □ddress□gwaregad□ gmail.com
Mobile Number□□□□□□ □□□ □□□□

Research Supervisor Name□Dr. □onathan Marks □mail □ddress□marks□ gibs.co.□a
Phone Number□□□□ □□ □□□ □□□□

Research Co□Supervisor Name□Prof. □ohan L. Olivier
□mail □ddress□olivier□ gibs.co.□a Phone Number□□□□ □□ □□□ □□□□

Researcher Signature Date 07/11/2021

Supervisor Signature  Date 8 November 2021

Co-Supervisor Siganture  Date 7 November 2021

Name of Incubator's Authorised Representative Signature Date

Name of Incubator

Appendix 4

□□□or□ ed□□o□□e□t: Busin e ss □□□□□ator□□ a□a□er

Re□ear□h□Topic: Role Demands, Constraints □nd Choices: The Impact Of Context □nd Multiple Stakeholders' Expectations On Business Incubator Managers' Strategic Agency

□□ter□□e□er: Gwarega Dambud□o **□□ter□□e□ee**:_____

Re□ear□h□F ocus: This research focuses on business incubation management and seeks to understand how the strategic choices made by incubator managers are influenced by the expectations of incubators' multiple stakeholders. Since the stakeholders play different roles in the incubator's operations, their norms and beliefs about acceptable incubator manager role performance also vary and can be conflicting. Some of these norms and beliefs, which concern the activities to be undertaken and the manager's attributes, can enable incubator managers to make choices that benefit the incubator. However, on the other hand, some norms and beliefs can impede incubator managers' strategic choices, while others can act as enablers and constraints depending on prevailing conditions. Therefore, this study seeks to deepen understanding of how the stakeholders' expectations influence business incubator managers' behaviour, as demonstrated by their strategic choices.

It is essential to highlight that participation in this study is voluntary, and you need to agree to the terms and conditions in this consent statement for you to participate. However, you can withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty.

Data will be collected through semi□structured interviews conducted in □nglish by the researcher. The interviews, which will last for approximately 90 minutes, will focus on how you balance various stakeholders' demands while executing your strategic role as a business incubator manager.

The interviews will be recorded for later transcription; research field notes will be taken during the interview. Other data, such as incubator reports, manager performance reports and incubatee□selection reports, will also be collected, if available. These documents will be re□uested from you or accessed from the incubator's website if they are publicly available. These reports are necessary to corroborate the primary data generated through the interviews. Furthermore, notes will be taken about any observations made around the incubator premises and operations. Such observations may be insightful in addressing the research □uestions.

□ll data collected will be securely stored with no features that will enable easy identification of the data source. For example, file names will contain neither the

incubator nor your name. Instead, a uni□ue file naming convention known only to the researcher will be used. Moreover, electronic folders containing the research data will be password□protected.

It is imperative to understand that the data collected for this study will not be confidential, as the research results will be reported in the final thesis and □ournal publications. Nevertheless, anonymity is guaranteed as no identifying features about you, or the incubator will be included in the research outputs. While your name, position, and organisation will be recorded during the interview and transcriptions, these will not be contained in the final thesis and □ournal articles. In addition, any direct □uotations from the transcribed interviews will be used anonymously.

No reward will be provided for participating in this study, but a copy of the final research report will be shared with you if you wish to receive it. Furthermore, there are no known risks associated with this study. No data related to the incubator's financial information and operational secrets will be reported in the findings.

By signing this consent statement, you certify that you understand, agree to and approve of the conditions of your participation in the study, which include an interview, recording of that interview and access to performance reports. You further confirm your ability to read, write, and speak in □nglish. Should you have any □ueries or concerns, including after the study, please contact my supervisors or myself. Our details are provided below.

Researcher Name□Gwarega Dambud□o □mail □ddress□gwaregad□ gmail.com
Mobile Number□□□□□□ □□□ □□□□

Research Supervisor Name□Dr. □onathan Marks □mail □ddress□marks□□ gibs.co.□a
Phone Number□□□□ □□ □□□ □□□□

Research Co□Supervisor Name□Prof. □ohan L. Olivier
□mail □ddress□olivier□□ gibs.co.□a Phone Number□□□□ □□ □□□ □□□□

Researcher Signature□ _____ Date□ 07/11/2021

Supervisor Signature□ _____ Date□ 8 November 2021

Co□Supervisor Siganture□ _____ Date□ 7 November 2021

□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□
Participant Signature Date□_____

Appendix 5

□□□or□ ed□□o□□e□t: Stakeholder

Re□ear□h□Topic: Role Demands, Constraints □nd Choices: The Impact Of Context □nd Multiple Stakeholders' Expectations On Business Incubator Managers' Strategic Agency

□□ter□□e□er: Gwarega Dambud□o **□□ter□□e□ee**:_____

Re□ear□h□F ocus: This research focuses on business incubation management and seeks to understand how the strategic choices made by incubator managers are influenced by the expectations of incubators' multiple stakeholders. Since the stakeholders play different roles in the incubator's operations, their norms and beliefs about acceptable incubator manager role performance also vary and can be conflicting. Some of these norms and beliefs, which concern the activities to be undertaken and the manager's attributes, can enable incubator managers to make choices that benefit the incubator. However, on the other hand, some norms and beliefs can impede incubator managers' strategic choices, while others can act as enablers and constraints depending on prevailing conditions. Therefore, this study seeks to deepen understanding of how the stakeholders' expectations influence business incubator managers' behaviour, as demonstrated by their strategic choices.

It is essential to highlight that participation in this study is voluntary, and you need to agree to the terms and conditions in this consent statement for you to participate. However, you can withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty.

Data will be collected through semi□structured interviews conducted in □nglish by the researcher. The interviews, which will last for approximately 90 minutes, will focus on your expectations of the incubator manager and how you relate with other incubator stakeholders.

The interviews will be recorded for later transcription; and research field notes will be taken during the interview.

□ll data collected will be securely stored with no features that will enable easy identification of the data source. For example, file names will contain neither the company nor your name. Instead, a uni□ue file naming convention known only to the researcher will be used. Moreover, electronic folders containing the research data will be password□protected.

It is imperative to understand that the data collected for this study will not be confidential, as the research results will be reported in the final thesis and □ournal publications. Nevertheless, anonymity is guaranteed as no identifying features about you, or your organisation will be included in the research outputs. While your name, position, and organisation will be recorded during the interview and transcriptions, these will not be contained in the final thesis and □ournal articles. In addition, any direct □uotations from the transcribed interviews will be used anonymously.

No reward will be provided for participating in this study, but a copy of the final research report will be shared with you if you wish to receive it. Furthermore, there are no known risks associated with this study. No data related to the incubator's financial information and operational secrets will be reported in the findings.

By signing this consent statement, you certify that you understand, agree to and approve of the conditions of your participation in the study, which include an interview and the recording of that interview. You further confirm your ability to read, write, and speak in □nglish. Should you have any □ueries or concerns, including after the study, please contact my supervisors or myself. Our details are provided below.

Researcher Name□Gwarega Dambud□o □mail □ddress□gwaregad□ gmail.com
Mobile Number□□□□□□ □□□ □□□□

Research Supervisor Name□Dr. □onathan Marks □mail □ddress□marks□□ gibs.co.□a
Phone Number□□□□ □□ □□□ □□□□

Research Co□Supervisor Name□Prof. □ohan L. Olivier
□mail □ddress□olivier□□ gibs.co.□a Phone Number□□□□ □□ □□□ □□□□

Researcher Signature□ _____ Date□ 07/11/2021

Supervisor Signature□ _____ Date□ 8 November 2021

Co□Supervisor Siganture□ _____ Date□ 7 November 2021

□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□
Participant Signature Date□_____

□□□e□d □□□□□Data □□tr□□t□re □□takeholder□e□□e□tat□o□□

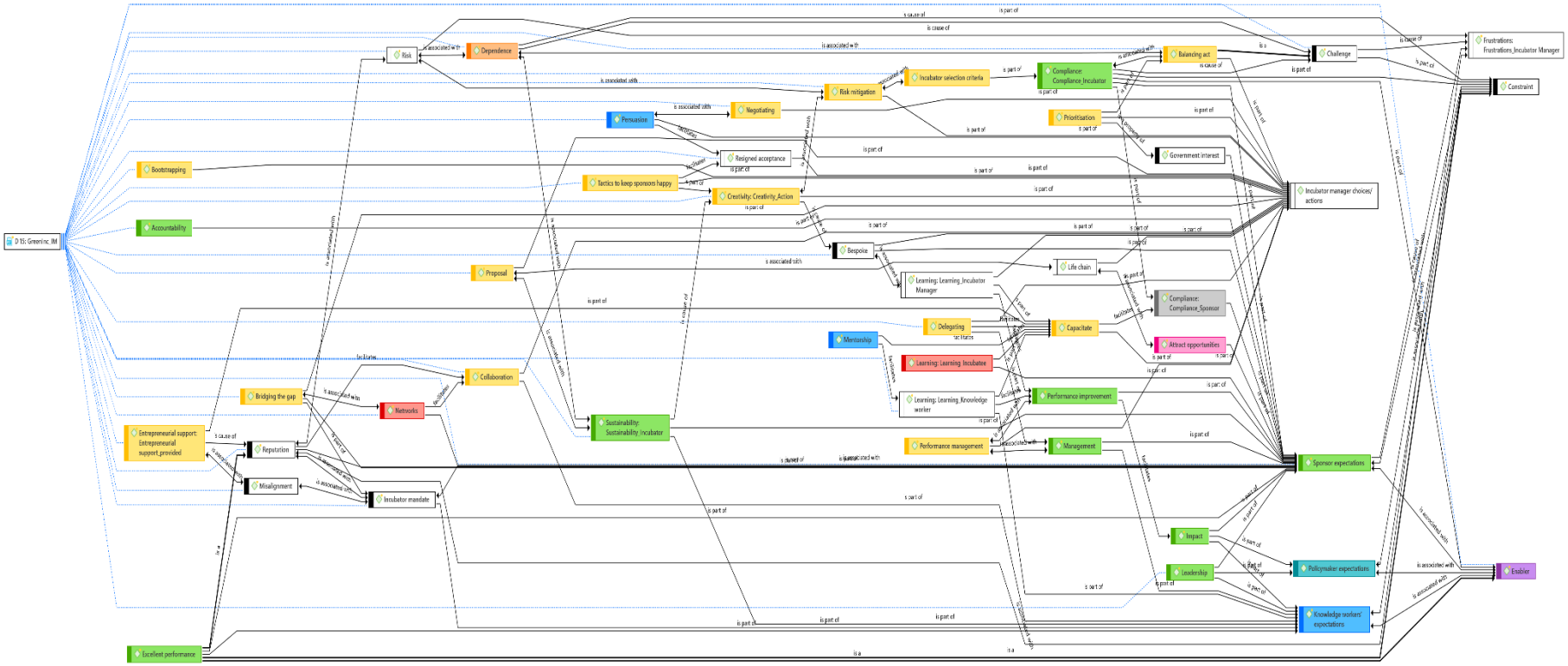
□□or□ a□t□ter□ □	□□al□t□al□ode□	□□□re□ated □e□o□d□order□ □ate□or□e□	O□erar□h□□□d□ e□□o□□
expectations in terms of the growth of business or □ob□ creation ob□ectives.	Growth	SMM□ growth and sustainability	□er□or□ a□□e□□□ □a□t
and now it's going□ smooth, we want to put production up, yeah			
It□s also looking at their growth holistically			
That was the expectation to now mass□produce and rollout the product to the market, to your market.			
we would also look at the growth of those businesses in terms□ of their revenue			
So, we have grown from thinking tomorrow to thinking what will happen in □□ years			
□nd then to see them grow better, especially seeing them recruiting and employing others.			
build businesses, that, ... have the ability to be sustainable and successful and scalable on to the international market.			
they do give us leads but I feel like they□re not big enough... for the sustainability of our business.	Sustainability□Incubatee		
I thought they would help us grow the business through work opportunities	□ccess to work opportunities		
to train some entrepreneurs and so after that, you□ can do your own business	Training	□ntrepreneurial support	
learning your manufacturing processes			
networking opportunities facilitated	Networking		
we had an intention of forming a corporative	Collaboration		
business.	□ccess to work opportunities		
they□ try and if there are opportunities they actually push	□ccess to opportunities		
little bit bigger.	□ccess to markets		
what I think they should have is more□ relationships with marketers, distribution channels.			
business.			
we want to get into the market as □uickly as possible			
maybe they could guide us on which route to take if they can also for, for leads for our sales.			
our business wasn□t paralysed entirely because of not having access to raw materials because of COVID	Inputs		
I still had a mentor who was showing me these things	Mentorship		
but it□s the financial side of it, has been the worst part	Financal support		
funding opportunities			
If we need funding for our business			
Teach us about tenders.			
bookkeeping	Professional services		
□ust the professional services from them to us as a small business,			
the office space	Workspace		
somebody subsidi□ing your office space			
the most important thing that we wanted to gain from□ being there is the machinery	Infrastructure		
make changes in the lives of people, have an□ impact in what we do, bring change in communities	Impact	Impact	
It's really about, is there value for money…?			
they will have numbers out there,□ but as you go to impact, they will not be meeting the impact results.			
then you would see real growth, you'd see job creation in the communities, you'd see the impact in the community in the economy			
So that always interests us as to then what□s the impact, you know, of our investment			
The other□ element is, is sort of growth, you know, so that□s one□finance, that I would evaluate them on, number two would be impact			
that it does have a positive impact			
our goal is to build □specilised□technology businesses that build products on the □frican□ continent			
You need to be a cross□cutting incubator in order to find the depth of opportunity that you□re looking for to be viable.	Incubator selection criteria	Incubator sustainability	□□□□ator□□□ta□a□□lt□
How will the incubator survive beyond the S□D□ funding	Sustainability□Incubator		
We wanted them to self□sustain in the end			
where S□D□ does want the incubators to be self□sufficient enough, financially self□sufficient.			
the person has to be very aware of looking for funding and making the business self□sustainable			
so we expect the Centre to bring more clients into our organi□ation			
Her functional role, apart from being head□ of the organi□ation, is focused on sales	Funding	Resource mobilisation	
□nd how do you fundraise□ How do you develop a business plan for your own incubator□			
we□ expect someone who is able to go out and look for funding			
the person has to be very aware of□ looking for funding and making the business self□sustainable.			
I think it will be actually a collaboration, but it would largely come from the people who work□ with the investors and the C□O			
It□s about making sure that the businesses that we are incubating have an ability to get funded,			
manager goes out and sees clients to apply for funding for□ the Centre.			
securing finance. That□s what I□m saying.			
sector transformation, you know, ensuring that there are new entrants in terms of previously disadvantaged□owned businesses or black□owned businesses	Transformation	Transformation	□o□ □la□□e□□th tra□□or□at□o□□ re□□lat□o□□
□nd then later on as a transformation cause became more part of business			
we report the outputs at a board level at … our social ethics and transformation committee.			
we had a strong focus on, on gender and□ gender diversity in our supply chain.	Demographics		
we would put in certain targets as part of their□ minimum re□uirements to be responsive to the tender.	Compliance□Compliance□Sponsor		
how dedicated are you□ as the manager to seeing results in your own incubator	Leadership	Leadership	**Leader□h□**
it□s about who is the leader of the incubator, because if there□s a leader of the incubator who is passionate			
we can put a lot of money in it, if you did not appoint the right leader for the□ incubator, you are dead.			
we expect a leader as not someone who would micromanage			
So, business savvy, financial savvy, and then also managing people you know, because people do work with the incubator			
being able to round the tribe around you to bring their best and understand that their intention is impact	Motivation		
□nd then a level□ of agility, we need a strong level of agility at the □□th hour	□gility		
and I think capacity comes□ with a level of trust	Trust		
good management, vision, foresight	Vision		
be able to communicate effectively with clients	Communication		
The first thing is communication.			
It will be uhm, communication skills			
we talk often, so if there□s any concerns, then we discuss it and resolve issues			
I think communication with internal stakeholders.			
need to be□ able to pass information from the staff to higher management			
be able to communicate effectively with clients			
communicating and letting us understand			
that was the expectation, and we expect them to uphold good governance practices as well.	Governance	Governance	
if we see that the governance is very much compromised, we pull our funding out of those□ particular incubators			
Mo□s signed with stakeholders who are also in the similar, similar work that we are doing, and the governance			

□□□e□d□□□□□Data□□tr□□t□re□□□ a□a□er□al□re□□o□□e□

Re□□o□de□t□tate□e□t□	□□al□t□al□ode□	□□□re□ated□e□o□d□order□ate□ore□	O□erar□h□□□d□□e□□o□□
balancing act I have to run the □local tertiary institution□and □facility three□, and also all S□T□□funded programs. I do the proposals internally. It□s a nightmare…but that is necessary for the survival of the organi□ation how we balance you marry the business requirements with stakeholder requirements with your personal requirements… But we balance that against what we believe in as an organi□ation. in terms of obviously trying to balance things that's the balance that you're trying to find.	□ala□□□□a□t	□r□ort□e	
gives us sleepless nights you have to stop everything and attend to that That□s why they are key they select the key, maybe one or two key areas that they want to focus on at the moment I don't have much time to think about - it's pretty hard to think about other things. your priorities □ust change a little	□r□ort□at□□		
we know their landscape very well we are always applying with the SMM□s. we have signed a Memorandum of □greement is more aimed at technology businesses, which is where we fall in. they do an Mo□ with us □ lot of our partners want to be able to establish the link between the two. and we initiate the programmes, it□s understanding the client□s need	K□o□led□e□o□□□o□□or□□□ro□e□□e□a□d□ re□□□re□e□t□	□□o□ate	□ho□e□
the mitigation of the risk is always the same almost we can□t risk abandoning them because everybody abandons them what we have tried to do is that we do everything like in the first month, So, whether or not we have our financial issues, eh, the supplier is there, the raw material is going, we had to manage that crisis ability to seed□fund at a really early stage with high□risk pro□ects. making sure that even between the partners, we have that separation when it comes to sensitivities, and sharing of information.	R□□k□□t□□at□□		
we tried to mitigate that in our selection process that has been built in more strictly into our selection criteria these days, the committee would □udge based on the information presented and if this is a viable, viable business idea So, the □IndigoInc□programme doesn□t in anyhow sideline anyone then we have a panel, you know, like Dragon□s Den. when we see your commitment and the improvement within the first three months, we then move you to the actual incubation an extensive process, the criteria that we have in place, which obviously aligns to the B□□ legislation	□□□□ator□ele□t□o□□rter□a		
we could not continue eh hosting somebody like that, we had to exit the person from the programme The guys that we have had to drop along the way we exit you throughout, any point within the programme if we see that you lack commitment it comes to a point where we need to realise this is not working for you and this is not working for us	Ter□ □ate□relat□□h□□		
two out of every □□ dropping out those that, uhm, we lose throughout our □ourney as an incubator, there is an exit clause around what constitutes an exit, if you are not participating I want to exit	Dro□o□t□	Ter□ □ate	
there□s a fraud case against the person, you bring the lawyers we will bring ours and then we will thrash it out legally I could end up in court fighting	Le□al□a□t□□		
we need to make sure that if S□D□ takes away their funding □BlueInc□s life depends on it. if there is no funding coming in, we cease to exist. S□D□ still gives us assurance that even the merger will not affect the incubators you know for sure, □sponsor□□□ has your back as an incubator, When there□s a problem with our funding from S□D□ one of the constraints is maybe if you□re dependent on somebody else	De□e□de□□e	Ma□ta□□	
a small amount of money could change their entire life. we were struggling financially as □IndigoInc□is a nonprofit organisation. we do our level best given whatever resources we have. had to do a lot of consulting work to make the books balance and significant salary sacrifices We were looking at ways to either get additional funding… people are seeing incubators and accelerators as channels to… access funding	D□□□□lt□to□a□□e□□□re□o□r□e□	Re□o□r□e□□o□□tra□□t	S□r□□□al
so now we write our proposal and we work out the budget and we give it to the client the □Indigoshop□was an idea that I came up with we are busy with the application for the □obs Fund because we would like to also get support from the □obs Fund our partnership now with the TI□, through our proposals to the □GVF□ the proposal was, if that was the minimum fee why not collect on the first of the month. there□s a number of conversations between some of the partners currently	□ro□o□al	Re□o□r□e□□o□□□at□o□	
we depend mainly on public funding So our main funder and our support in terms of administration, for this incubator is S□D□ they □S□D□□have been supporting our baseline costs we do get funding from government in this case, S□D□, for the incubation programme So a very small component of our funding is public sector No government funding for us whatsoever, nothing. □lp□Because we don□t go looking for it.	S□o□□or□□S□o□□or□h□□□□□l□□	S□o□□or□h□□o□t□o□□	
we rely on donor funding from different funders, both private and public sector it was a privately funded incubator,…up to □□□□,… but we then partnered up with the S□D□. I would say □□□ to public and yeah □□□ to private it's probably 95% private, 5% public	S□o□□or□□S□o□□or□h□□H□□rd		
It changed dramatically, the funding lockdown kicks in; now we can't source, we can't import, we can't export we need to be strict on change management, as an organisation the only time … where people eh are sort of worse than they came in, it was now in □□□□, because of COVID We have over the past few years anyway become more virtual as we□ve gone on through COVID I think two to three years from the COVID and flooding and the looting and all of that it has also been a very big ad□ustment for me personally	Dra□at□□□ha□□e	□ha□□e□□a□a□e□e□t	
put together a policy to drive a proactive and a more structured engagement. □nd over and above that, we also decided to take an intern for □ust that part at the back. that then, I suppose branches out into the different entities that we□ve got to enable us, they sparked an idea in my head and I need to make time to write this down so I can present it … □nd you now become positioned as a solution provider. We can□t really propose to the client a solution if we don□t know there□s a support system for that solution nearby	□roa□t□□e□re□o□r□e□□l□e□□	□□□□ator□□□□ta□□a□□lt□□	
since some business owners are creative, then you get creative we have to be very creative sometimes to fit it we are now trying to become eh, or to handle marketing and sales for our incubatees we added □GVF□to the stable … there□s a synergistic relationship between □GVF□and the incubator. we need to innovate what we are doing …, □ust to stay relevant we have mitigated that through another social enterprise that we have called □social entity□	□reat□□t□□		
If we don't keep the clients happy, there will be no [servants], we are very cognisant of keeping them happy as far as we possibly can it is also part of playing the game of ensuring that we keep our stakeholders happy we will include the representatives from □sponsor□□□but specifically the procurement people	Ta□t□□□to□kee□□□o□□or□ha□□□		
we can't just provide one size fits all support. Some we work very hands□on with, others we work much, much more ad hoc with it□s very individualised because no two businesses are the same. we work very much on a coaching□mentorship kind of model	□e□□oke	□al□a□□tate	□□□a□t
I delegate □I don□t necessarily focus on choosing one person, I rotate all of them □ven some of the critical meetings, I put them there, I involve them Do they have the skills and resources that they need to do the □ob that needs to be done. now I spend more time trying to e□uip them to do it themselves. the work that we do is really centered around enterprise and supplier development I had to go through □uite a □ourney to delegate and to actually learn that I cannot do this on my own He is a key assistant with the financials, cashflows, and everything else He knows interesting people and I think he will bring a lot to the pot in that aspect as well. obviously delegation is passed down with overall responsibility lying with the manager. Skills development	dele□at□□□		
Then for three years we train them, we teach them how to run that as a business we then developed manuals, we did research formulations, ingredients that are used shared infrastructure for the SMM□s looking for all these funding opportunities formalising you as a business, like all the compliance issues, post incubation support, as and when you need it you build the technology and the business at the same time. two types of mentorship here□we do business mentorship, we do technical mentorship	□□□tre□re□e□r□al□□□□ort□□ro□□ded		
then together we can teach each other and support each other we re□uested that they train us on how to label. we then sat down, and thought that it would work if we can have, …, like Mercedes Ben□, for example, they would have their supplier in□house. I want them to be part of it so that they understand the re□uirements and expectations from the external stakeholders We pair them up with one or two of our client companies to work really hands□on with those businesses. remember, I mentioned the personal development….as a person you need to grow your skills and your knowledge. We get the insights, we react, we get immersed, we take the learnings and we find ways to continuously improve	Lear□□□□□Lear□□□□□K□o□led□e□□orker		

Re□□o□de□t□tate□e□t□□	□□al□t□al□ode□	□□□re□ated□e□o□d□order□ate□or□□	O□erar□h□□□d□□e□□o□□
I like to partner or collaborate, we sometimes have programmes together with these corporates We came to an arrangement, and they have been supporting our baseline costs since □□□□ we collaborate with them on technology demonstrations and even new technology or new products on the market. I think other incubators as well, because we are able to collaborate with some of them because it□s not often that you find competitors collaborating with each other	□olla□orat□□	□olla□orat□□	□□ □a□t
Then I took their business cards, I went back to the office, and I gave them phone calls and then got chatting to □executive director□who□s the founder of □GreenInc□ □RedInc□becomes that platform where they can have an association with the likes of government	□et□ork□□□		
we would mostly plug into what is in that town I ended up having two contacts from the □local municipality□ I would meet someone who is stuck and I would say, ... I know someone who may assist, and then I link them up He has got □uite a strong network □nd that□s purely because of the relationship that we have established with them.	□et□ork□		
underprivileged and under□resourced spaces in our own country and connect people and help them bridge that gap So, our □b□ is to bring the two together they will be able to e□uip people and the gap that is there under employment is covered our funder in □GVF□has made available additional funds to bridge the gap	□r□d□□□□the□□a□		
you must see the reports we have to do we closely monitor your growth throughout the programme we report on those targets on a □uarterly basis we monitor them on a monthly basis we have got our own impact measurement and management framework	Re□ort□□□re□□re□□e□t□ □al□dated□□er□or□□a□□e □er□or□a□□e□□a□a□e□□e□t □□ □a□t	□er□or□a□□e□□a□a□e□□e□t	
definitely in implementation we have tweaked a lot. mainly the changes were aligned to having □Indigo□Inc□sustainable, So, the strategy had to change the model has evolved to an extent where previously it was a privately funded incubator we started off, we started off almost as a division under □sponsor□□□ We have changed our model a little bit over the past couple of years	□□□□□at□□□trate□□□e□ol□t□□	Re□□tat□□	Re□□tat□□
what the whole mission of our lives what we are mandated to do as the Centre with the goal of looking at early□stage businesses our mandate fundamentally as an incubator, the overall ob□ective of □Orange□Inc□ the mandate of the incubator	□□□□□ator□□a□date		
information that could ruin my career and the organisation□s reputation because we don□t want to be associated with such things. it□s almost a matter of pride to see them to a commercial outcome a level of brand reputation players had seen the benefit of the work that we do as □RedInc□and have subse□uently recognised us as an industry initiative we □ust send them some nice pictures that look all wonderful,	Re□□tat□□		
aligning the client□s need to meet the expectation of the community is a nightmare make sure that they are aligned with our customer needs. □nd come to align, aligning with what the organisation is complying with so does it fit the portfolio, does it fit our mandate□ and it should be aligned to your business strategy our information sessions play a role in curbing that expectation at the very beginning	□l□□□□e□t	M□al□□□□e□t	
The misfit for us aligning the client□s need to meet the expectation of the community is a nightmare the lab was there for testing, but we were getting funding from S□D□ to educate SMM□s they don□t have the same commercial drive or incentives as a, as effectively a private entity does expectations are important for us to manage upfront because sometimes businesses perceive sometimes there□s an expectation that you kind of are solving all the problems that partners have	M□al□□□□e□t		
nobody knew where to put us,... I was like her daughter, everybody knows in the office. they are part of us, while they are not part of us, we swap hats every now and then in terms of who we are working for the lines are a bit blurred I always say we have two clients, it□s our funders, and it□s the businesses that we support.	□□ □□□□t□		
delicate negotiations in the beginning We said, okay, fine, keep your funding, but we've got SMMEs...they agreed you are a very key stakeholder to me, but let□s be fair, you know, treat me like I□m also a partner in this whole thing. long protracted discussions and re□uiring lots and lots of work and convincing I don□t think we have ever had a programme that we haven□t managed to convince the client we want to □ustify that with the appropriate level of social return that shows them that this compliance burden can generate a return	□e□otiat□□□ □er□□a□□o□	□e□otiat□□□	Leader□h□□
It□s very open, very transparent and very ob□ective it's an open process we have got some □ob descriptions for you guys and employment agreements, when you□re presenting that it cannot be met, there needs to be valid reasons as to why it cannot be met. we need to win their trust, if I will have an emergency that will take me away from being here, I have capable people who □st steer the ship to continue, I think there□s a very deep level of trust between us how we are ensuring that we kind of overcome this trust deficit	Tra□□□are□□□ Tr□□t	□te□r□t□□	
now they are calm, they see we are not gonna go away the whipping horse I believe 'No' stands for 'not over' the turning down of that strategic proposal... has no material effect on how we work anywhere.	Re□□le□□e	Re□□le□□e	

□□□e□d□□□□□□□□a□ □le□o□□□et□ork□d□a□ra□ □□ro□ □□tla□t□□–incubator manager'□re□□o□□e□□to□□takeholder□e□□e□tat□o□□□



□