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## Article

# Impact of entrepreneur's commitment on entrepreneurial coaching relationship

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## MANAGEMENT | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Impact of entrepreneur's commitment on entrepreneurial coaching relationship

Fitouri Mohamed<sup>1\*</sup>Samia Karoui Zouaoui<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** The purpose of the study is the influence of the entrepreneur commitment on the success of the entrepreneur-coach relationship. The data were gathered from 350 novice entrepreneur's. The data were analyzed with structural equation modeling. The findings suggest that the success of the entrepreneur-coach relationship is conditioned by the entrepreneur Commitment. Based on the results, for entrepreneurs, it is very useful to know how to manage this relationship. It must understand the importance of psychological determinants in the success of their accompanying relationship. It must also recognise the importance of interaction between the different partners involved in the relationship. This knowledge can help accompaniments raise a share of unknown in the failures of newly created companies despite their accompaniment. Our work contributes to a more precise and concrete knowledge of the entrepreneurial accompaniment relationship which is beyond the level of commitment of the novice entrepreneur.

**Subjects:** Business, Management and Accounting; Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management; Entrepreneurship

**Keywords:** commitment; Coaching- relationship-; Entrepreneur

## 1. Introduction

The goal of any novice entrepreneur is to ensure the performance of their newly created business. To achieve this goal, entrepreneurs turn to coaching organizations. These organizations offer assistance and support to young entrepreneurs to help them learn and acquire the skills they need to succeed. However, statistics show that many entrepreneurs, despite their support, fail.

Some theoretical works have advanced that the degree of commitment of the entrepreneur determines the success of the coaching relationship. We can therefore consider the commitment



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Fitouri Mohamed is at University OF Monastir Tunisia. Fitouri .M has experience of about 10 years in teaching, business, and research. He has published many journal articles.

## PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

The nature of the project and the characteristics of the project leader determine the success of the support. The supported entrepreneur must agree to open up to the coach. As a result, he must recognize that he needs help, maintain confidence in the coach's ability to support him in his learning process. Indeed, a receptive entrepreneur, open to change, committed to and respects the support relationship, allows entrepreneurial support to "bear fruit".

of the entrepreneur as an explanatory variable of the success of the entrepreneurial support relationship. To this end, few research studies have been conducted on the subject. Considering these remarks, a question arises:

What is the impact of the entrepreneur's commitment on the success of the entrepreneurial coaching relationship?

To answer this question, this work will be divided into three parts. The first part is devoted to a review of the literature and the definition of the study's concepts. The second part presents the methodology adopted in this research. The third part presents the results of this research work and the main conclusions are discussed.

## 2. Review of the literature

It should be pointed out that the work done to date on the entrepreneur-coach relationship or even in the field of the organizational or business coaching relationship does not present the commitment in any detail. There are two main reasons for this:

The first reason is the fact that the concept of commitment is still embryonic in the entrepreneurship literature despite the fact that it has been used for a long time by (C. BRUYAT, 1993a).

The second reason is related to the complexity and diversity of the field of antecedents of commitment in management science. However, we believe that following the example of (Fayolle & Cuzin, 2004) and (Berger-Douce, 2007) we can better understand the dynamics of commitment can allow for better support for newly created companies. Indeed, improving the knowledge that one can have of commitment can allow for a more judicious allocation of support resources, by reserving them for entrepreneurs for whom the conditions relating to an acquired or latent commitment are met.

Therefore, a presentation of the term "commitment" seems to be a crucial task. Furthermore, the clarification of the notion of "commitment" also comes back to the dissonance detected by scanning the managerial literature. It puts two different translations of the Anglo-Saxon term "commitment": Engagement and Implication. Indeed, most researchers in France translate "involvement" as "engagement" and "commitment" as "implication".

Similarly, the Quebec literature uses the term "engagement" to designate the notion of "commitment". Indeed, such misunderstandings could in no way systematize the research and consequently create a theoretical framework in the true sense of the term, since there is a controversy as to which term is equivalent to the Anglo-Saxon term.

At this point, it is worth mentioning that the academic literature on the notion of commitment is characterized by a disproportion between, on the one hand, a certain abundance of empirical studies that have sought to identify its determinants or consequences and, on the other hand, a rather small number of theoretical and/or conceptual contributions that have sought to specify the nature of commitment in a more profound manner.

The second observation to be made when examining the synthetic studies carried out by some authors in human resources management is the lack of consensus on the definition of the construct, which is all the more striking when using measures that often do not correspond to the conceptual definition. Nevertheless, we believe that it is useful to present the distinction between the two perspectives of commitment, namely the attitudinal and the behavioral, before proceeding with the inventory of definitions of the term "commitment". Indeed, this distinction is well established by the authors (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Attitudinal commitment, in our case, represents the individual identification (of the entrepreneur) with a target (the company) and the willingness to work for its benefit, whereas the behavioral perspective focuses on an approach

by the attributes of commitment, and which results from the connection of the entrepreneur to his behavioral acts (Giordari, 2004).

Based on a review of the entrepreneurship literature, we can say that, the different definitions of “commitment” could be categorized according to three general themes: an affective attachment to the target, the perceived costs associated with leaving and the obligation to maintain membership (Bruayt, 1993b); (Giordari, 2004); (Valéau, 2006; VALÉAU, 2007, 2017); (Fayolle & Cuzin, 2004).

In this context, (VALÉAU, 2017) published an article on the effects of affective, Calculated, and normative commitment on the intention to stay in the entrepreneurial profession. His results confirm that all three dimensions of the job commitment model apply well to entrepreneurs. Furthermore (Bessière et al., 2015) considers that in order to avoid forms of “escalation in support”, which are possible sources of disappointment, the commitment of the parties is essential. Similarly, committed stakeholders base the support relationship on an interpersonal dimension.

Concerning the measurement of commitment, most authors use the measurement scale of (Meyer & Allen, 1991) to operationalize this concept (VALÉAU, 2017).

A coaching relationship requires a time investment on the part of the dyad. Most programs span years and require meetings between the entrepreneur and his or her coach. In addition to physical availability for meetings, the coach must be intellectually available to focus on the protégé’s problems during and outside of meetings. Cull (2006) emphasizes a strong demand for support, presence and availability on the part of the mentee. The commitment must be mutual for the relationship to be successful; the entrepreneur must voluntarily engage in the relationship and be receptive to coaching (Couteret et al., 2006; Cull, 2006). The coach must also voluntarily commit to the relationship in order to maintain a sufficient level of motivation (Gravells, 2006) and availability. The generosity and availability of the mentor and the fact of being able to count on the reassuring presence of the mentor at all times SIMARD and FORTIN (2008) cite the presence of an experienced person as a factor of satisfaction for entrepreneurs.

The concept of commitment has been the subject of numerous studies since the 1960s. Today, it is considered a key variable in the coaching relationship (VALÉAU, 2017). Cook and Emerson (1978) consider it as “the variable that distinguishes transactional from relational exchanges”. Engagement has become for some researchers the essential ingredient for a successful relationship. Despite this interest in the concept, to our knowledge, there is no consensus today on a characterization and on the use of a measurement tool.

In the field of business coaching, commitment can be defined as the intention of an entrepreneur to continue the relationship with a coach in the sense of (GEYSKENS et al., 1996). Indeed, two reasons can be at the origin of this intention. It can be linked either to a psychological attachment or to an economic constraint (Young & DENIZE, 1995). Consequently, two approaches to commitment can be distinguished. A first approach where researchers have seen in the commitment a psychological constraint that locks the two parties of the dyad in the entrepreneurial support relationship (Frisou, 2000). In this case, the commitment is no longer granted to a promise of relational continuity, but rather translates into investments in time and resources, impossible to redeploy in another relationship (Anderson & WEITZ, 1992). In this first approach, called imposed relationship, the commitment is thus the consequence of economic barriers that arise within the framework of a relationship and whose calculated dimension constitutes the reflection of this approach. The second approach, called the preferred relationship, considers the commitment to be voluntary and intentional, based on the attraction that the relationship has for the entrepreneur. It creates a kind of attachment between the entrepreneur and the coach (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and aims to guarantee the stability of the coaching relationship. The two dimensions of affective and normative commitment reflect this orientation of commitment.

In fact, considering the entrepreneur's commitment as a determining factor in the success of the coaching relationship can be justified by the definitions that have been proposed in the literature for this concept. First, some authors emphasize the desire to maintain a long-term relationship in their definitions of commitment. Commitment to a relationship implies a desire to continue it with a willingness to make the maximum effort to maintain it. Commitment to a relationship is therefore only meaningful over the long term (Walter & Ritter, 2003). Indeed, this relationship must be long term and, above all, it must remain consistent over time (Macintosh & Lockshin, 1997). In this context, authors in entrepreneurship who study the coaching relationship emphasize the duration of the relationship and insist that the relationship must be anchored in time.

Second, other researchers emphasize the willingness to invest in the relationship in their definitions. Commitment can be revealed through the investments made by the dyad in the coaching relationship. According to Wilson and VLOSKY (1998), these investments are non-transferable and cannot be recovered outside of the coaching relationship. The willingness to invest in the relationship demonstrates the trustworthiness of both parties; the greater the investment, the lower the risk of opportunism.

Finally, researchers have defined commitment as a psychological bond. Indeed, to engage in a relationship reflects a certain attachment, an involvement or an identification with the partner. The attachment translates an affective relation towards the companion and expresses a relation of psychological proximity with this one (Lacoeuilhe, 2000). It is defined as a psychological, emotional, strong and lasting relationship (CRISTAU, 2001). A long-term affective relationship depends on the strength of the emotional bond between the two parties (AAKER, 1994). Regarding the dimensions of commitment in entrepreneurship, the work of (Valéau, 2006; VALÉAU, 2017) proposed a multidimensional approach to the concept of commitment facilitating its understanding and thus its definition. The dimensions used in this approach are the affective, calculated and normative dimensions. These dimensions refer to distinct components and each indicates a particular state of mind and motivation linked to the nature of the relationship between the entrepreneur and his or her coach.

Affective commitment has been described in terms of "attitudinal" commitment, "psychological attachment", "identification", "affiliation", "value congruence", "involvement" and "loyalty" (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Calculated commitment is an entrepreneur's perception of maintaining the relationship because of the significant transfer costs of breaking it off (Meyer et al., 1991). It is often considered a "calculating" act and thus labeled as "calculated" because it involves a complete information processing process. This commitment is the result of a subjective estimation of the costs, risks and benefits associated with a change in the coach. Normative commitment is based on a sense of moral obligation (Meyer et al., 1993; Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001).

At the end of this development, we conclude that the coaching relationship must be based on the entrepreneur's commitment, from which we formulate our hypothesis as follows:

H<sup>o</sup><sub>1</sub>: The entrepreneur's commitment positively influences the entrepreneur-coach relationship.

### 3. Research methodology

#### 3.1. Mode of data collection

To achieve our objectives, we chose to collect data using a questionnaire intended for a sample of 350 Tunisian novice entrepreneurs. We asked the entrepreneurs to indicate their degree of agreement with the statements concerning the variables (entrepreneurial commitment; success of the coaching relationship) of our study. Then, these two components are measured by items on a five-point Likert scale.

### 3.2. Measurement of variables

Most of the work in entrepreneurship on commitment borrows from human resource management. To define this construct, we based ourselves on the work of Meyer and Allen (1991). Commitment is a force that pushes the individual to persevere in a specific line of action and the way the individual perceives and gives meaning to his environment. Commitment is a construct that, to our knowledge, has been the subject of only one operationalization in previous studies in entrepreneurship that of (VALÉAU, 2017).

Following the example of the latter, we will take part of the Allen and Meyer (1996) measurement scale to operationalize this construct: (It would be more costly for me to (re) change my companion than to stay with him or her I have invested too much in the relationship with my companion to consider (re) changing my companion; (Re) changing my companion would require too many material and financial sacrifices; My life would be too disrupted if I gave up my companion now; I am proud of my companion; I feel a responsibility to continue with my support person; I would feel guilty if I gave up my support person; I feel a moral obligation to stay with my support person; Even if I found benefits, I think it would not be appropriate to change my support person.)

The relationship between the coach and the entrepreneur is one of exchange where both parties benefit from their collaboration in terms of knowledge and experience.

Among the few research on the coaching relationship, St-Jean (2010, 2011) who was the first to operationalize the entrepreneur-coach coaching relationship. The reliability of the resulting measurement scale is composed of nine items: it is considered very satisfactory. Consequently, we adopt this scale of measurement: (He allows me to have a precise image of myself and my company; He reassures me; He believes that I can succeed as an entrepreneur; I consider him as a friend; He puts me in contact with people he knows; He provides me with information and intelligence related to the business world; Confrontation he would not hesitate to contradict me if he did not agree; He proposes other points of view; He exposes his successes and failures to me).

### 3.3. Data analysis

After collecting data from 350 Tunisian entrepreneurs, we analyzed their answers concerning the impact of the entrepreneurs' commitment on the success of the entrepreneurial support relationship. The data processing is done through structural equation modeling, via PLS regression, using the Smart-PLS.02 software.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Estimation of the model by structural equations

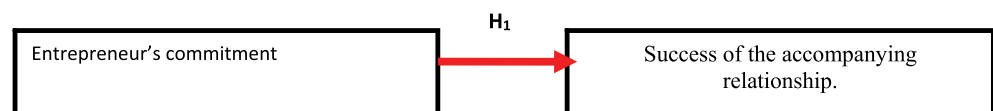
To test our hypothesis through PLS regression. We started with the evaluation of the measurement model, followed by the evaluation of the structural model, as well as the estimation of the results for our hypothesis raised in this study.

#### 4.1.1. The measurement model

This model represents the linear relationships between the constructs and their indicators. (See Figure 1). To test the measurement model, we adopted three evaluation methods

4.1.1.1. *Reliability.* This involves testing the reliability of each of the variables in our research model. Specifically, to measure the internal consistency of our research constructs. This is ensured

Figure 1. Conceptual model.





by checking the Cronbach's alpha of the construct (the minimum alpha threshold is 0.7), and especially the composite reliability (CR), which is considered superior to the traditional measure of consistency (Cronbach's alpha), because it does not depend on the number of indicators (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

From the analysis of the table (Table 1) below, it is apparent that our composite reliability (CR) indicators are all above the acceptance threshold (0.7). They vary between 0.937544 and 0.973685: sufficient reliability to justify a very high level of internal consistency. Similarly, the Cronbach's alpha values of our constructs are very satisfactory and are above 0.927006.

#### 4.1.2. Convergent validity of constructs

Taking into account the criticisms addressed to the Alpha coefficient, particularly its sensitivity to the number of items, it is advisable under the PLS approach to complete the verification of the convergent validity of the constructs by the use of two other indicators. The first is that we will clean the variables, keeping only the indicators with a correlation threshold  $> 0.7$  (Fernandes, 2012). The second is that we will examine the average shared variance (AVE) which must be  $> 0.5$ . To achieve this, we only need to calculate the PLS algorithm that our generate the following results:

According to the (Table 2) above, the convergent validity is ensured since all the items have a correlation threshold  $> 0.7$  (the loadings vary between 0.8 and 0.9) and an average shared variance value (AVE) greater than 0.5 (they vary from 0.9 to 0.80). This last indicator allows us to ensure both the convergent validity of the constructs (Chin, 1998) and the discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

#### 4.1.3. Evaluation of the quality of the model

To judge the quality of the model under the PLS approach, there is no index that allows us to test the quality of the model in its entirety. Nevertheless, three validation steps are allocated in the literature to assess the quality of the model: the quality of the measurement model, the quality of the structural model, and the quality of each structural equation.

**4.1.3.1. Assessing the quality of the measurement model.** First, we note that we evaluated our structural model without the mediating variables. To examine the model quality of the measure, we observe the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) values of each of the dependent variables. This coefficient also allows us to estimate the predictive power of the research model.

The results found generated by the PLS algorithm technique, show that all the variables introduced to our model globally explain ( $R = 48,2\%$ ) the entrepreneur-accompanist relationship. According to the size of our sample which can be considered as a high size, we can see that the  $R^2$  respects the minimum limit of 0.13 suggested by (Wetzels et al., 2009). Thus, the value constitutes an acceptable result and indicates that our model is significant.

**4.1.3.2. Quality assessment of each block of variables.** As we have previously stated, the Stone-Geisser  $Q^2$  coefficient (cv-redundancy) of the endogenous variables allows us to examine the quality of each structural equation. Therefore, to assess this index we had recourse to the Blindfolding technique under the SmartPLS software, the results found show us that the  $Q^2$  indices

**Table 1. Reliability of constructions**

constructs	composite reliability (CR)	the Cronbach alpha
The entrepreneurs' commitment	0,937,544	0,927,006
Success of the accompanying relationship.	0,973,685	0,969,400



**Table 2. The converging validity of the constructs**

Construct	Item's	Loadings	AVE	Composite Reliability
Normative Commitment	ENG1	0,942,347	0,924,292	0,979,918
	ENG2	0,987,506		
	ENG3	0,926,722		
	ENG4	0,987,506		
Calculated commitment	ENG1	0,958,843	0,973,701	0,993,291
	ENG2	0,995,895		
	ENG3	0,995,895		
	ENG4	0,995,895		
Affective commitment	ENG1	0,964,293	0,901,053	0,973,234
	ENG2	0,974,851		
	ENG3	0,974,851		
	ENG4	0,879,591		
Success of the accompanying relationship.	REACC1	0,802,931	0,804,659	0,973,686
	REACC2	0,909,251		
	REACC3	0,913,278		
	REACC4	0,915,418		
	REACC5	0,907,314		
	REACC6	0,933,339		
	REACC7	0,927,569		
	REACC8	0,903,458		
	REACC9	0,852,916		

are positive and different from zero for the accompanying contractor relationship (0.147). These results indicate that the model has predictive validity.

**4.1.3.3. Evaluation of the quality of the structural model.** To evaluate the quality of the structural model we will consider the value of the GOF index. This index is calculated through the average of communality and the average of  $R^2$  of the endogenous variables. So the GOF index is calculated by:

$$GOF = \sqrt{\text{communality} \times R^2}$$

$$GOF = \sqrt{(0.7590865) \times (0.4402675)} = 0.5036.$$

This satisfactory result allows us to proceed to the next step of data analysis.

**4.1.3.4. Validation and evaluation of the structural model.** This paragraph has as objective the evaluation of the structural model, thus, we emphasize the test of the formulated hypotheses. To do this, two non-parametric techniques are used in the PLS approach: the jackknife technique or the bootstrap technique. In this study we used the bootstrap replication analysis ( $n = 350$ , 500 iterations). (Chin, 1998) states that the jackknife is less efficient than the bootstrap in the sense that it is only an approximation, the bootstrap being a more recent resampling method. Therefore, to test the significance of the structural relationships, we use the bootstrap procedure (sample = 500;  $n = 350$ ) by saturating the model. The results obtained are presented in (Table 3) where the first column shows the relationships related to our hypotheses that are significant. The second and third columns show the values of the regression coefficients and Student's  $t$  respectively. The latter must be  $>2.58$  for a significance level  $\alpha = 1\%$ ,  $>1.96$  for an  $\alpha = 5\%$ , or  $>1.65$  for an  $\alpha = 10\%$ .

**Table 3. Significance of structural relations**

hypothesis	Coefficients of correlation ( $\beta$ standard)	Value (t)	Decision
The Entrepreneur commitment ↓ Success of the accompanying relationship.	0,121,486	2,318,925	<b>Confirmed</b>

The analysis of these found results allows us to confirm our research hypothesis. The statistical test highlights a significant relationship between the entrepreneur's commitment and the entrepreneur-coach relationship, thus this hypothesis is validated ( $t = 2.318$ ;  $1.96$ ;  $\beta = 0.121$ ). The fact that the entrepreneur is committed to the coach influences the success of the coaching relationship.

## 5. Discussion

The objective of our model is to answer the research question: "Does the degree of commitment of the entrepreneur impact the success of the entrepreneur-mentor relationship?". It emerges from the empirical phase that our model "the commitment of the entrepreneur explains 48.2% of the success of the entrepreneur-accompanist relationship. The results obtained indicate that the coaching relationship was strongly influenced by the entrepreneur's commitment ( $\beta$  0.121). These results are interesting in the sense that they show, as in rare works, the significant impact of this variable on the quality of the entrepreneur-mentor relationship.

The validation of our hypothesis allows us to confirm the theoretical advances previously discussed. Indeed, the empirical validation of this relationship in previous research in entrepreneurship is almost absent. However, theoretical advances on commitment and the coaching relationship present the entrepreneur's commitment as a determining factor in the success of the relationship, but without defining or measuring it. In this regard, Bruayt (1993b), Fayolle (2004), Giordari (2004), Valéau (2006; VALÉAU, 2007, 2017) and St-Jean (2011, pp. 2012, 2013, 2016) indicate that the more entrepreneurs are committed, the more the benefits of the relationship are assured and obtained. In short, these results offer an answer to the theoretical advances that opened the way to such a possibility for the first time to our knowledge.

## 6. Conclusion

The main purpose of this study is to measure the contribution of the degree of commitment to the success of the entrepreneurial support relationship. To conduct this analysis, we opted for a hypothetical-deductive approach that allowed us to study the relationship between the commitment of entrepreneurs and the success of the coaching relationship through a hypothesis derived from managerial theory. To better understand this relationship, we selected a sample of 350 novice entrepreneurs. To test our hypothesis, we analyzed the data collected from the entrepreneurs by the Smart-PLS software.

The results of this study showed that the commitment of the entrepreneurs contributes to the success of the entrepreneurial coaching relationship. Our work contributes to a more precise and concrete knowledge of the entrepreneurial coaching relationship which escapes the degree of commitment of the novice entrepreneur and not only to the adequacy of the personal characteristics of the two parties. Thus, for the entrepreneurs' coaches, it is very useful to know how to manage this relationship. They must understand the importance of psychological determinants in the success of their coaching relationship. They must also recognize the importance of the interaction between the different partners involved in the relationship. This knowledge can help coaches to remove some of the unknown in the failures of newly created businesses despite their coaching.

Despite the results obtained, our study is limited by the size of the sample, which remains relatively small, as well as the questionnaires used in the process of collecting primary data addressed to the respondents to ask their opinions on a problem that remains subjective and therefore it is delicate to generalize our results. To overcome this limitation, it would be interesting to conduct a study on a larger sample, and since our study was based only on entrepreneurial leaders, it would be appropriate to also take the opinion of the coaches.

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