

# **Towards an Understanding of Multi-stakeholder Relationships in Technology Enabled Entrepreneurial Ventures in the UAE**

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## **Summary**

Given the prevalence of business scandals we hear on regular basis, it is natural for people to attribute them to carry unethical, selfish, and narrowly defined profit-driven constructs. Several stakeholder theorists have argued that there is an alternative way to look at businesses in our society. According to them, it is in the businesses' interest to align their functioning with a myriad of stakeholders. In the North American or Western cultures, many technology-driven entrepreneurial ventures have difficulty aligning their interests with multiple stakeholders. However, for a holistic understanding of the discipline, similar inquiries are required in the context of the Middle Eastern cultures, such as in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). In this study we attempt to fill this research gap. We borrow concepts from the stakeholder theory and apply the repertory grid technique (personal construct theory) to advance our understanding about the relationships between tech-industry stakeholders, belonging to the Middle Eastern cultural background. It is expected that tech-venture owners focus on managing their relationships and commitments with value adding, as well as competing stakeholder groups to succeed. However, the true essence of 'value creation' is not properly captured and defined in the context of different cultures. We contend that these definitions will differ largely due to diverse cultural backgrounds, which may have an impact on the success of these ventures. Therefore, we use the repertory grid technique, which is a structured interviewing method that allows researchers to elicit 'personal constructions' from the target population. The repertory grid allows us to develop a path between the elements and the study's objective through various personal constructs or attributes to all intents and purposes. These constructs are generally described as ideas expressing perceptions of the participants for making sense of elements, either introduced by the researcher or provided by the study participants (Hardison & Neimeyer, 2012). This interviewing technique was developed by George Kelly (1955) to investigate people's cognitive constructions without influencing their references (Diaz De Leon & Guild, 2003; Shah & Guild, 2017). It is relevant to investigate our proposition that technology start-up venture founders have idiosyncratic mental models and abilities to make business decisions that influence the sustainability and success of their ventures in the long-term.

In this article, three organizational examples are included to propose a model for ‘intervention’ to better manage multiple stakeholder interests. Each interview with the respondents, who identify themselves with the UAE culture, but reside in Canada lasted for about an hour. For data analyses, we used the RepGrid V software to conduct an idiosyncratic analysis through Principal Component Analysis and FOCUS correlational graphs. Initial findings from this exploratory study depict that the company founders mostly thought about the ‘economic’ value-creating stakeholders as important. Our data also show that respondents mentioned several other stakeholder groups, which may be unique in the context of the UAE culture. It raises the importance of running a confirmatory study with the tech-industry accelerator centres, and technology transfer and commercialization offices that enable technology ventures in the UAE to foster long-lasting value-creating activities in the region. It may include a follow-up survey study with a large sample size to confirm the underlying propositions.

We think some useful and practical implications follow from our work. This study would allow the UAE government and institutions, especially universities to develop a holistic policy for revamping their education curricula and executive training programs that are geared towards promotion of tech-entrepreneurship in the country and region. Early interventions of this kind may also result in ethical technology development, which has a better chance of translating and growing into a mature stage organization (Shah & Guild, 2022).

## References

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