

Artificial Intelligence as a Catalyst for Organizational Creativity: A Conceptual Framework for Incubator Performance

L'Intelligence Artificielle comme Catalyseur de la Créativité Organisationnelle : Un Cadre Conceptuel pour la Performance des Incubateurs

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Abstract

As innovation ecosystems undergo digital transformation, researchers have renewed their focus on how organizational and technological factors shape incubator performance. Organizational creativity, understood as the individual, collective, and structural mechanisms that produce novel and valuable ideas, continues to underpin entrepreneurial success. This conceptual article presents a framework that treats Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a multidimensional catalytic variable influencing four established levers of organizational creativity: the creative climate, leadership for creativity, knowledge processes, and resource optimisation. In this model, organizational creativity acts as the principal mediating construct that converts AI-enabled capabilities into stronger incubator performance. The framework contributes to organizational creativity theory by incorporating the dynamics of digital transformation, broadens incubator management research by conceptualising AI-supported innovation ecosystems, and offers practical guidance to incubator directors who aim to use digital tools in a strategic way.

Keywords: Organizational Creativity ; Artificial Intelligence ; Generative AI ; Incubator Performance ; Knowledge Management ; Innovation Ecosystems.

Résumé

La numérisation des écosystèmes d'innovation a ravivé l'attention des chercheurs sur les facteurs organisationnels et technologiques qui influencent la performance des incubateurs. La créativité organisationnelle, entendue comme l'ensemble des mécanismes individuels, collectifs et structurels par lesquels émergent des idées nouvelles, demeure un déterminant clé de la réussite entrepreneuriale. Cet article théorique présente un cadre conceptuel qui envisage l'intelligence artificielle (IA) comme un catalyseur multidimensionnel agissant sur quatre dimensions de la créativité organisationnelle : le climat créatif, un leadership propice à la créativité, les processus de gestion des connaissances et l'allocation optimale des ressources. Dans ce modèle, la créativité organisationnelle joue un rôle médiateur central en convertissant les capacités de l'IA en gains de performance pour les incubateurs. Le cadre proposé contribue aux travaux sur la créativité et le management des incubateurs, et avance des orientations managériales à l'attention des responsables d'incubateurs souhaitant mobiliser de manière stratégique les outils numériques.

Mots clés : Créativité Organisationnelle ; Intelligence Artificielle ; IA Générative ; Performance des Incubateurs ; Gestion des Connaissances ; Écosystèmes d'Innovation.

Introduction

In a period marked by intensifying global competition and rapid digital change, innovation has become the main determinant of organisational resilience and longevity (Anderson et al., 2014). A consistent stream of research shows that creativity within organisations precedes both innovation and competitive advantage (Amabile, 1988; George, 2007). Within this dynamic, business incubators hold a key structural place. Created to turn entrepreneurial ideas into viable firms, they serve as environments that nurture creativity by concentrating mentoring, resources, networks, and knowledge (Aernoudt, 2004; Hackett & Dilts, 2004).

Despite extensive work on organisational creativity, the classic frameworks proposed by Amabile (1988), Woodman et al. (1993), and Ford (1996) were developed before the rise of advanced AI. The spread of machine learning, natural language processing, and generative AI is transforming the conditions under which creative work unfolds. These systems are increasingly embedded in professional routines; by late 2024, ChatGPT alone reported more than 300 million weekly active users (Zhang et al., 2025).

This study addresses that gap by advancing a conceptual framework that treats AI as a catalytic variable acting on four established levers of organisational creativity. The guiding research question is: *To what extent does the integration of Artificial Intelligence strengthen organisational creativity and, through this mediating mechanism, improve the performance of business incubators?*

The article is organised as follows. Section 1 details the methodological approach. Section 2 reviews the theoretical foundations of organisational creativity. Section 3 analyses indicators of incubator performance. Section 4 investigates how AI can enhance each creativity lever. Section 5 sets out the conceptual model and hypotheses. Sections 6 present theoretical contributions, implications, limitations, and the conclusion.

1. Research Methodology

Scientific inquiry seeks to address gaps, resolve problems, and synthesise concepts within a given field. It is therefore important to understand how AI can simultaneously shape organisational creativity and raise performance in incubators. Although AI is increasingly present in innovation ecosystems, conceptual work that integrates these three dimensions remains limited (Mariani & Dwivedi, 2024; Dwivedi et al., 2021).

This theoretical paper employs a holistic literature review. Unlike systematic reviews or bibliometric analyses, a holistic review aims to integrate knowledge across multiple domains, specifically artificial intelligence, incubator management, and organisational creativity, rather

than merely listing findings. This choice reflects the interdisciplinary nature of the question. No single disciplinary corpus contains all the conceptual elements needed to theorise the triangular relationship among AI, creativity, and incubator performance. A holistic stance enables conceptual integration and a comprehensive view of how AI-driven capabilities intersect with creative processes and performance outcomes in organisational and incubator settings.

In contrast, a systematic review or a bibliometric study would likely have limited the corpus to a single discipline, preventing the cross-domain synthesis needed to theorise how AI, creativity, and incubators interact. A holistic strategy also makes it possible to mobilise seminal texts alongside recent studies, thereby reflecting both the theoretical heritage of organisational creativity research and the latest empirical evidence on generative AI. We selected sources using three criteria: (i) direct relevance to at least one of the three core constructs (AI capabilities, organisational creativity, incubator performance); (ii) publication in peer-reviewed journals listed in recognised academic indices and rankings (Scopus, AJG, CNRS); and (iii) a publication window from 2015 to 2025, complemented by pre-2015 foundational works when required for theoretical grounding. This transparent selection rationale aligns with the study's positivist epistemology, in which propositions are specified with sufficient precision to enable subsequent quantitative testing through structured questionnaires administered to incubator managers and resident startups.

The literature search drew on major academic databases, including Scopus, JSTOR, Springer, and ScienceDirect. Search queries combined terms such as "artificial intelligence capabilities", "theory of organizational creativity", "innovation", "AI implementation in organizations", "business incubators", and "incubator performance". The corpus was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles, relevant conference papers, and conceptual studies published between 2015 and 2025, complemented by foundational works when theoretical grounding required it. Target journals included Research in Organizational Behavior, Academy of Management Review, Creativity and Innovation Management, Journal of Business Research, and British Journal of Management.

The synthesis produced by this review forms the basis for the conceptual framework presented in Section 5, which links organisational creativity, incubator performance, and AI capabilities. It also prepares the ground for future empirical validation (Brown et al., 2024) and offers practical guidance for incubator directors operating across diverse innovation ecosystems, including emerging economies such as Morocco.

2. Organisational Creativity: Theoretical Foundations and Levers

2.1. Definitions and Conceptual Development

Organisational creativity has been examined across several disciplines, yet its incorporation into core strategic management theories has lagged behind (Parmentier et al., 2018). Amabile's foundational work (1988) conceived creativity as a multi-component phenomenon at the individual level, later expanded by interactionist and evolutionary perspectives. Table 1 summarises the principal definitional contributions.

Table N°1: Selected Definitions of Organisational Creativity

Author(s)	Definition
Amabile (1988)	Generating ideas that are both original and useful in any field, with creativity at the individual and team levels serving as the launch point for innovation.
Woodman, Sawyer & Griffin (1993)	Within complex social systems, people collaborate to develop new and valuable products, services, concepts, methods, or processes.
Ford (1996)	A domain-bound and inherently subjective evaluation of how novel and valuable a given action or result is.
Drazin, Glynn & Kazanjian (1999)	Active engagement in a creative approach, irrespective of the eventual quality of the output.
Mumford (2000)	Producing innovative and useful products, services, or procedures that domain experts recognise as genuinely new.
George (2007)	A process in which individuals, supported by organisational resources, solve problems or create opportunities through novelty that is both useful and institutionally accepted.
Anderson et al. (2014)	Complex interactions between individuals and their work environment that enable the development of solutions that are at once innovative and practical.
Parmentier et al. (2018)	A powerful way to build, consolidate, and sustain competitive advantage.

Source: Authors compilation

2.2. Seminal Theoretical Models

2.2.1. Amabile's Componential Model (1988)

Teresa Amabile (1988) identifies three individual antecedents that together underpin creative performance: domain-relevant expertise, creativity-relevant processes, and intrinsic task motivation. In later work, Amabile (1998) argued that intrinsic motivation is the most delicate element; managerial practices that constrain autonomy can depress creative output even among highly skilled individuals.

2.2.2. Woodman, Sawyer & Griffin's Interactionist Model (1993)

Woodman and colleagues (1993) propose a multilevel interactionist perspective in which creativity stems from interplay across three levels: individual (cognitive style, personality, intrinsic motivation, knowledge), group (composition, norms, cohesion, task structure), and organisational (culture, strategy, resources, HRM practices). Because incubators operate across all three levels simultaneously, this tripartite creative context is especially pertinent to their functioning.

2.2.3. Ford's Evolutionary Theory (1996)

Ford (1996) presents an evolutionary view that treats creativity as domain-specific and shaped by internal forces such as culture and reward systems, alongside external forces like environmental turbulence and competitive pressure. His emphasis on sensemaking as a precursor to creative action is particularly relevant for incubators working in volatile markets.

2.2.4. Levers of Organisational Creativity

Integrating insights from these foundational models, Dechamp and Szostak (2016) group organisational creativity levers into five categories. Table 2 provides a consolidated overview.

Table N°2: Synthesis of Organisational Creativity Levers

Category	Dimension	Key References
Individual	Domain expertise & skills	Amabile (1996); Shalley et al. (2004)
Individual	Intrinsic motivation	Amabile (1993); Zhou & Shalley (2003)
Individual	Personality traits (openness, tolerance for ambiguity)	Feist (1998)
Group	Group dynamics & collaborative ideation	Paulus & Nijstad (2003)
Group	Leadership for creativity	Mumford et al. (2002)
Organisational	Creative climate & culture	Ekvall (1996)
Organisational	Organisational structures	Jansen et al. (2006)
Organisational	HRM policies	Laursen & Foss (2003)
Organisational	Reward systems	Eisenberger & Rhoades (2001)
External	Networks & inter-organisational collaboration	Hargadon & Sutton (1997)
Processual	Innovation management processes	Van De Ven (1986); Anderson et al. (2014)

Source: Authors' compilation

These levers do not act independently; their cross-level interactions are decisive for creative outcomes. As AI becomes more deeply embedded in organisations, it operates as a transversal

factor cutting across all five categories (Li et al., 2022), which underpins the framework advanced in this paper.

The model rests on two complementary theoretical lenses. First, the Resource-Based View (RBV), introduced by Barney (1991), holds that sustained competitive advantage comes from resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN). Applied to incubators, AI-enabled capabilities, such as intelligent knowledge management systems, predictive resource allocation tools, and adaptive mentoring platforms, operate as strategic resources that meet VRIN conditions and are difficult for competitors to replicate quickly. The Knowledge-Based View (KBV), developed by Grant (1996), extends this reasoning by arguing that value creation in knowledge-intensive organisations primarily depends on the creation, integration, and exploitation of knowledge assets. Because incubators are inherently knowledge-intensive, the KBV is especially apt for explaining how AI accelerates the four creativity levers in this framework: the creative climate, leadership for creativity, knowledge processes, and resource optimisation. Taken together, the RBV and KBV indicate that adopting AI in incubators is more than a technical upgrade; it is a deliberate strategic investment in organisational capability, whose returns are mediated by the quality of organisational creativity it enables (Teece et al., 1997).

3. Incubator Performance: Conceptualisation and Indicators

3.1. Conceptualising Incubator Performance

Organisational performance is commonly defined as the capacity to achieve strategic goals, evidenced by quantitative and qualitative results (Neely et al., 1995). For incubators, performance reflects how effectively they foster the growth and long-term viability of new ventures (Aerts et al., 2007). Typical indicators include startup survival, innovation output, stakeholder satisfaction, and contributions to the regional economy (Phan et al., 2005).

Crucially, incubator performance is not limited to the financial results of resident startups. It also encompasses the quality of support provided, the richness of the learning environment, the effectiveness of networks, and the ability to attract high-potential founders. These multidimensional outcomes are strongly shaped by the organisational creativity levers outlined in Section 2.

3.2. Performance Indicators: A Theoretical Synthesis

Table N°3: Theoretical Synthesis of Incubator Performance Indicators

Performance Indicator	Description	Key References
Learning and Entrepreneurial Development	Effectiveness of training programmes and increases in entrepreneurial competencies	Bøllingtoft (2012); Hackett & Dilts (2004)
Resource Utilisation Efficiency	Prudent allocation of funding, mentor time, and physical resources.	Hackett & Dilts (2004)
Stakeholder Satisfaction	Perceived value and effectiveness of incubator services as judged by startups, mentors, and investors.	Allen & Rahman (1985)
Creative Climate Quality	Extent to which the environment encourages autonomy, risk taking, and idea generation.	Ekvall (1996)
Entrepreneurial Skills Development	Improvement in opportunity recognition, risk management, and strategic decision making.	Mitchelmore & Rowley (2010)
Startup Financial Performance	Revenue growth, profitability, and financial sustainability after incubation.	Bruneel et al. (2012)
Network Effectiveness	Quality and utility of professional and investor networks.	Soetanto & Jack (2016)
Startup Survival Rate	Durability and subsequent growth of graduated startups.	Lumpkin & Dess (1996)

Source: Authors' compilation

Taken together, this synthesis highlights organisational creativity levers as proximate drivers of several performance indicators. The quality of the creative climate (Ekvall, 1996), the effectiveness of networks (Hargadon and Sutton, 1997), and learning outcomes (Bøllingtoft, 2012) depend directly on how well the incubator designs and manages its creativity-enabling infrastructure.

4. How Artificial Intelligence Enhances Organisational Creativity in Incubators?

The rise of generative AI, defined as systems that create original text, visuals, and analyses from large training sets, signals a qualitative change in how technology contributes to creative work (Mariani & Dwivedi, 2024). In contrast with earlier AI focused mainly on automation, generative AI takes an active role in ideation, recombining knowledge, and exploring solution spaces (Raisch & Krakowski, 2021). Bibliometric evidence points to a sharp acceleration in research on AI and creativity, including a 34% growth in publications between 2023 and 2024

(Zhang et al., 2025). At the same time, MIT Sloan (2025) notes that creativity gains appear chiefly among users with strong metacognitive strategies, a key boundary condition for scholarship and practice.

4.1. AI and the Creative Climate

A creative climate rests on autonomy, psychological safety, openness to experimentation, and easy access to knowledge (Ekvall, 1996). AI strengthens each of these pillars. It opens up access to market intelligence and competitive benchmarks that were previously difficult for resource-limited startups to obtain (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2017). It takes over mentally taxing routine tasks, lowers cognitive load, and allows entrepreneurs to focus on higher-level creative activities (Amabile & Pratt, 2016; Huang & Rust, 2020). It also provides personalised feedback tools that build creative self-efficacy throughout the ideation process (von Krogh, 2018; Dellermann et al., 2021).

That said, AI does not enhance the creative climate in a uniform way. Over-reliance on algorithms can dampen exploratory thinking and intrinsic motivation, particularly when AI-generated suggestions are presented as definitive answers rather than as cognitive scaffolding (Amabile & Pratt, 2016). Surveillance features embedded in AI monitoring tools may erode psychological safety, a cornerstone of creative climates (Ekvall, 1996), if employees perceive them as instruments of control rather than as supportive feedback mechanisms. Moreover, the homogenising tendencies of large language models, which draw on pre-existing knowledge distributions, can constrain radical novelty and reinforce dominant cognitive schemas instead of disrupting them (Raisch & Krakowski, 2021). These boundary conditions suggest that AI functions as a positive catalyst for the creative climate mainly when its deployment is intentionally designed to augment human agency rather than to restrict it.

4.2. AI and Leadership for Creativity

Leadership is a crucial moderator of organisational creativity (Mumford et al., 2002). AI can enhance leadership effectiveness in two main ways. First, AI-driven decision-support tools enable the form of human and AI symbiosis described by Jarrahi (2018). Second, AI broadens the reach of mentoring by giving immediate access to benchmarks, case repositories, and business model templates (von Krogh, 2018). As Raisch and Krakowski (2021) argue, these tools augment rather than replace human judgment.

4.3. AI and Knowledge Processes

At the individual level, AI can distill vast, domain-specific literatures at speeds far beyond human capability (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2019; Dwivedi et al., 2021). At the inter-organisational

level, AI-enabled collaboration platforms support knowledge exchange among incubatees who might otherwise never connect (Seeber et al., 2020; Dellermann et al., 2021). Importantly, Mariani and Dwivedi (2024) contend that generative AI can reshape the full innovation journey, moving from problem exploration and idea generation to synthesis and evaluation.

4.4. AI and Resource Optimisation

AI helps mitigate resource constraints by allocating mentoring time, training opportunities, and financial support more intelligently (Davenport, 2018; Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2017). It also extends the incubator's service reach through virtual incubation capabilities (Nambisan et al., 2019). Empirical findings indicate that AI-enabled service innovations improve user experience and the quality of problem solving, outcomes that matter directly for incubator support performance (Gursoy et al., 2019). Together, these mechanisms suggest that AI does not displace existing creativity levers but rather amplifies and stretches them, acting as a force multiplier for both creative and operational capacity in incubators.

5. Proposed Conceptual Framework and Research Hypotheses

5.1. Framework Overview

Building on the literature synthesised in Sections 2 to 4, we put forward a conceptual model that treats AI as a multidimensional catalyst acting upon four established creativity levers. The model brings together foundational theories of creativity (Amabile, 1988; Woodman et al., 1993; Ford, 1996; Mumford et al., 2002) and recent research on AI-enabled innovation (Mariani & Dwivedi, 2024; Raisch & Krakowski, 2021; von Krogh, 2018).

The core logic of the framework is as follows. Integrating AI directly strengthens four dimensions of the organisational creativity system. In combination, these improvements raise the incubator's overall level of organisational creativity. Higher organisational creativity then drives better incubator performance across seven dimensions. Organisational creativity therefore acts as the mediating mechanism that links AI to performance outcomes.

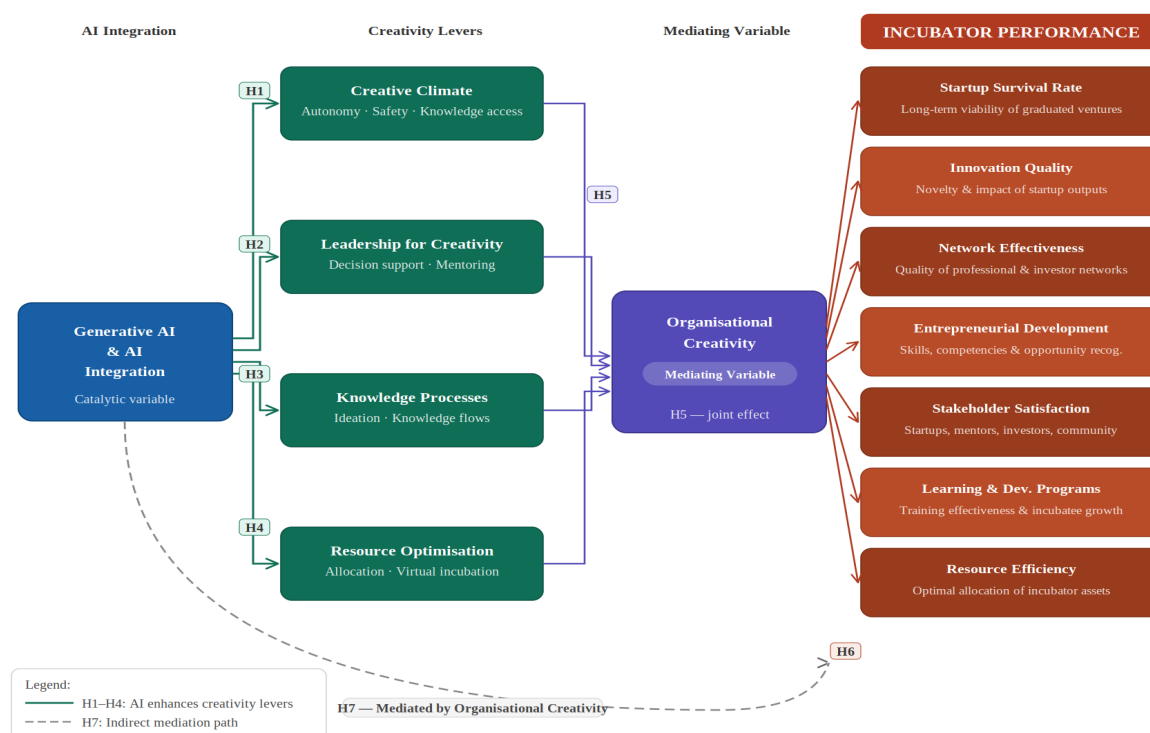


Figure N°1: Conceptual Framework - AI, Organisational Creativity, and Incubator Performance

Source: Authors

5.2. Research Hypotheses

Table N°4: Research Hypotheses and Theoretical Foundations

Hypothesis	Statement	Key Foundations
H1	When incubators adopt AI, the creative climate improves because knowledge becomes more accessible to all, cognitive effort is reduced, and individuals gain greater confidence in their creative abilities.	Ekvall (1996); Brynjolfsson & McAfee (2017); von Krogh (2018); Amabile & Pratt (2016)
H2	Integrating AI strengthens leaders' capacity to foster creativity by offering improved decision support and enabling more substantive mentoring interactions.	Mumford et al. (2002); Jarrahi (2018); Raisch & Krakowski (2021)
H3	In incubators, AI adoption accelerates knowledge processes, supporting idea generation, knowledge exchange across startups, and opportunity recognition.	Dwivedi et al. (2021); Seeber et al. (2020); Mariani & Dwivedi (2024)
H4	AI use enhances resource allocation, allowing mentoring, training, and funding to be distributed more effectively.	Davenport (2018); Nambisan et al. (2019); Gursoy et al. (2019)

Hypothesis	Statement	Key Foundations
H5	Taken together, the four AI-enabled creativity levers (H1–H4) jointly and positively elevate the overall level of organisational creativity within incubators.	Woodman et al. (1993); Amabile (1988); Ford (1996)
H6	Organisational creativity exerts a positive and significant effect on incubator performance across its seven key dimensions.	George (2007); Anderson et al. (2014); Ekvall (1996)
H7	Organisational creativity mediates the relationship between AI integration and incubator performance; AI influences performance mainly through its enhancement of creativity.	Amabile (1988); Raisch & Krakowski (2021); Mariani & Dwivedi (2024)

Source: Authors

6. Discussion

6.1. Theoretical Contributions

This study offers three main contributions. First, it refreshes organisational creativity theory for the context of generative AI. Classic frameworks (Amabile, 1988; Woodman et al., 1993; Ford, 1996) were formulated before AI became a significant organisational actor. By aligning contemporary AI capabilities with the established lever taxonomy, the paper adapts foundational creativity theory to the digital era and addresses ongoing calls to develop theory at the intersection of AI and management (Raisch & Krakowski, 2021; Brown et al., 2024).

Second, it advances incubator management scholarship by reframing incubators as innovation ecosystems supported by AI. Earlier work largely examined human-centred mechanisms, including mentoring quality, network structure, and access to resources (Bøllingtoft, 2012; Hackett & Dilts, 2004). The proposed framework redirects analytical focus to the digital backbone of incubation and the implications this has for performance.

Third, the paper clarifies how AI affects performance by specifying the mediating role of organisational creativity. In knowledge-intensive environments such as incubators, AI influences outcomes primarily through its capacity to elevate organisational creativity, adding to recent work on generative AI and innovation management (Mariani & Dwivedi, 2024; Dwivedi et al., 2021).

6.2. Managerial Implications

For incubator leaders and programme managers, the framework suggests four practical recommendations. First, position AI as a strategic investment in the creative capability of

resident startups rather than a mere cost-control instrument; treat platforms for market intelligence, ideation support, and knowledge sharing as core infrastructure. Second, equip mentors with AI-driven decision-support tools that strengthen, and do not replace, their relational and experiential judgment. Third, create AI-mediated knowledge exchange systems that proactively connect startups facing comparable challenges. Fourth, deploy AI-based resource analytics to inform allocation decisions, thereby improving both efficiency and fairness in service delivery.

6.3. Limitations

As a conceptual paper, the model requires empirical testing. The results of AI integration are likely to differ across incubators depending on digital maturity, infrastructure, regulatory constraints, and cultural orientations toward technology. The framework presumes ethical and transparent deployment; risks related to algorithmic bias, data privacy breaches, and mentor deskilling call for robust governance. MIT Sloan (2025) also notes that AI enhances creativity mainly when users possess strong metacognitive awareness, a condition that cannot be taken for granted across all incubatee groups. Finally, the rapid evolution of generative AI necessitates ongoing refinement of the theoretical propositions.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that Artificial Intelligence, and generative AI in particular, is not simply another technological upgrade for business incubators; it is a capability with transformative effects that reshapes the underlying conditions of organisational creativity. By strengthening the creative climate, reinforcing leadership for creativity, accelerating knowledge processes, and optimising resource allocation, AI systematically expands the incubator's ability to generate, develop, and implement innovative ideas.

Through these four AI-enabled pathways, organisational creativity operates as the central mediating mechanism that links AI integration to enhanced incubator performance. The seven hypotheses derived from this framework set out a clear agenda for future empirical research, with specific relevance to emerging ecosystems such as Morocco's.

Core contributions of this study. The paper offers three main advances. First, it refreshes foundational theories of organizational creativity that were formulated before contemporary AI (Amabile, 1988; Woodman et al., 1993; Ford, 1996). By aligning current generative AI capabilities with the existing taxonomy of creative levers, it adapts these theories to the digital era. Second, it develops incubator management research by recasting incubators as AI-enabled

innovation ecosystems, shifting the analytical lens from exclusively human mechanisms to the digital infrastructure that now shapes incubation quality. Third, it clarifies how AI influences outcomes by identifying organizational creativity as the key mediating mechanism, thereby extending recent work on generative AI and innovation management (Mariani & Dwivedi, 2024).

Limitations and open questions. As a conceptual contribution, the model still requires empirical testing. The effects of AI adoption are likely to vary widely across incubators, depending on digital maturity, available infrastructure, regulatory conditions, and cultural attitudes toward technology. The framework also assumes ethical and transparent AI use; in practice, risks such as algorithmic bias, data privacy violations, and the potential deskilling of mentors demand strong governance mechanisms that lie beyond the scope of this paper. Moreover, MIT Sloan (2025) indicates that AI tends to enhance creativity chiefly among users with strong metacognitive awareness, a condition that cannot be assumed across all incubatee populations. Given the rapid evolution of generative AI, the specific capabilities outlined here may change, which calls for continuous theoretical refinement. Future research should therefore prioritize longitudinal, mixed-method designs (Brown et al., 2024) to capture both the process dynamics of AI integration and its performance effects across different incubator models and cultural settings. Comparative analyses that contrast emerging economies such as Morocco with more mature innovation ecosystems would be particularly valuable.

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