

Beyond intrinsic values: the role of presentation in idea selection

**The selection of ideas for new businesses
during start-up weekends**

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Abstract

This article aims to identify the factors that influence the evaluation of an idea beyond its intrinsic values, especially those that relate to the presentation of the idea. With reference to a review of research conducted in the fields of psycho-sociology and psychology and using a qualitative comparative approach, the analysis of 57 pitches of entrepreneurial ideas during two start-up weekends shows that ideas receive the highest evaluation when they are judged to be the best in terms of novelty, feasibility, and relevance. However, our results also show that mastery by ideators of the basics of pitch presentation—especially clear enunciation—is also a necessary condition for acceptance of the idea by the audience. The paper seeks to contribute to the literature by identifying the most favorable configurations for a positive evaluation of an entrepreneurial idea in this type of innovation contest.

Keywords: *idea selection, idea evaluation, creativity, creative idea, pitch*

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INTRODUCTION

Most of the time, the objective of a creative session is to generate as many ideas as possible. The principle behind this assumption is that the more ideas are generated, the more likely they are to include ones that are strong and of high quality. It is then up to the organization or the entrepreneur to select and exploit the best ideas. However, the evaluation of an idea depends not only on its intrinsic value (novelty, feasibility, relevance, and specificity) (Dean *et al.*, 2006), but also on the context in which it is conducted and on the characteristics of those who present the idea. Some research highlights the gender effect of the ideator or ideators (Gupta and Turban, 2012; Parmentier, Le Loarne-Lemaire and Belkhouja, 2017), the way an idea is presented (Chiaburu, Peng and Van Dyne, 2015; Shuye Lu *et al.*, 2019), and the experience of the ideator (Gupta and Turban, 2012) on idea evaluation. This implies that no creative idea is independent of its originator and that the way it is presented can affect its evaluation. To date, no research has explored the action of combining the intrinsic qualities of an idea and the way it is presented. This article aims to fill this gap and to understand how evaluators combine the intrinsic qualities of an idea with the qualities of its presentation and decide on the holistic value of an idea. More precisely, the paper focuses on the relative influence on that evaluation of the intrinsic qualities of creative ideas as the conjunction between novelty, feasibility, and relevance, and structure, and of the presentation of ideas in terms of its dynamism and the physical appearance of the ideator.

Based on the analysis—conducted according to the Fuzzy Set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) method—of 57 pitches of entrepreneurial ideas during two start-up weekends, we show that the ideas that receive the highest evaluation are those that are judged to be the best creative ideas, but also that mastery of the basics of pitch presentation has an impact on idea evaluation. During startup weekends, a pitch is a 1-minute oral presentation that is been done to all participants. In fact, in such a situation, the dramaturgy of the ideator, and their ability to make an outstanding presentation of their idea, thanks to good enunciation and a strong “stage presence”, seem to have an impact on the selection of that idea by the audience. The paper seeks to contribute to the literature by identifying the most favorable configurations for a positive evaluation of an entrepreneurial idea in this type of innovation competition context.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The creative process: general considerations

Creativity is an activity whereby an individual or a small group of individuals produce new, appropriate, useful, and feasible ideas (Amabile, 1988). Its objective is to find innovative solutions by mobilizing the imagination to rethink the existing system (Ford, 1996). In terms of the creative process, an idea can be considered as the result of an intention to act that leads to a statement integrating a new knowledge network and sometimes involving new networks of knowledge brokers (Parmentier and Le Loarne-Lemaire, 2018). On its journey, the idea often emerges in organizational interstices (Cohendet and Simon, 2007), becomes part of multiple collaborative networks (Perry-Smith and Mannucci, 2017), and creates new links between people and knowledge. The form of this idea, however, is closely linked to the context in which it emerges (Amabile, 1996). It will take the form of a “pitch” in entrepreneurship, a “high concept” in the film industry, or a “breakthrough” in video games, and it will be more solution-oriented in industry.

The place of idea evaluation within the creative process

Various research acknowledges that idea evaluation is part of the creative process but also reveals ambivalent results. According to some, idea evaluation takes place several times during the creative process (Harvey and Kou, 2013; Lubart, 2001); for others, idea evaluation refers to one specific phase of the creative process (Amabile, 1988; Wallas, 1926). Nevertheless, in both cases, it is a key activity that contributes to the outcome of the creative process.

The attention and amount of resources that are dedicated to the phase of idea evaluation strongly influence the transformation of employee creativity into achievable ideas (Van Dijk and Van Den Ende, 2002). Creativity techniques may generate many ideas, but it is important to be able to recognize good ones. Therefore, in the creative process, the evaluation of ideas is as important as their generation. However, this part of the creative process remains underexplored in the literature on creativity (Girotra, Terwiesch and Ulrich, 2010). Depending on its form and the context of dissemination, it may be difficult to assess the quality and value of an idea. For example, during creativity sessions, participants find it hard to identify the best ideas (Putman and Paulus, 2009) and do not systematically select the best intrinsic ideas for the organization (Girotra, Terwiesch and Ulrich, 2010).

General criteria for selecting ideas

Beyond the debate on its place within the creative process, the definition of idea evaluation as a phase has been established. Idea evaluation refers to a cognitive process that involves assessing the potential consequences of developing an idea according to explicit or implicit evaluation standards (Loneragan, Scott and Mumford, 2004).

A literature review of 90 articles that describe evaluation methods in research laboratories during creative processes reveals that the criteria for evaluating creative ideas can be grouped into four categories: novelty, feasibility, relevance, and specificity (Dean et al., 2006). The novelty of an idea can be assessed from its degree of originality and “paradigm relatedness”—that is, to some extent, the degree to which the idea is disruptive. When participants are instructed to choose the most creative ideas rather than the best ones, it is the most novel that are selected (Rietzschel, Nijstad and Stroebe, 2010). Feasibility can be appraised from an idea’s social acceptability and potential for effective technical implementation. The relevance of an idea can be judged from its applicability to a problem and its effectiveness in solving that problem (Ford, 1996). An idea’s specificity can be determined from its explicitness and the completeness of its description.

Relevant criteria are dependent on the context of creative sessions and the strategic objectives of the organization (Cooper, 2006). However, when experts intuitively evaluate ideas, they subconsciously use the criteria of originality, user value, and capacity to get prototyped and mass produced (Magnusson, Netz and Wästlund, 2014). Originality, feasibility, and relevance are thus the most used explicit and implicit measures in creative sessions (Dean et al., 2006; Magnusson, Netz and Wästlund, 2014). Nevertheless, participants in a creative session have a strong tendency to choose feasible and desirable ideas to the detriment of originality (Rietzschel, Nijstad and Stroebe, 2010). One explanation could be that the audience needs to trust the associated technology to adopt the idea (Hengstler, Enkel and Duelli, 2016). In a similar vein, recent research also shows that considerations of novelty and usefulness are highly subjective in the sense that these qualifications are applied by the audience depending on its familiarity with similar ideas that exist in a common network (Deichmann et al., 2020). Moreover, there is no consistent link between the completeness of the idea as presented and the evaluation of its quality,

suggesting that the evaluation of ideas is not a rational decision based entirely on the information provided and on specific evaluation criteria (Sukhov, 2018). Where ideas are presented to independent evaluators, other criteria related to the way in which the ideas are presented could strongly influence their evaluation.

Presentation criteria for selecting ideas

Popular books or articles on management, although not always based on scientific and established results, propose other characteristics that the ideator needs to possess in order for their creative idea to be adopted by the organization. The author of the bestseller *Pitch Anything* (Klaff, 2011) claims that the assessment of an idea as a good one, based on the previously mentioned characteristics, is not a sufficient criterion for its selection. The way the ideator introduces the idea and the fluency of its presentation also matter. The author insists that the ideator must induce a positive emotion in those judging the idea. In such an attempt, the phrasing of the message is a priority: the idea must be presented in a clear manner and be easy to understand, details must be avoided, and the message must be positive.

As evaluation is part of a cognitive process (Loneragan, Scott and Mumford, 2004) explicitly resulting from an observation and opinion on the value of an idea, it is likely that it mobilizes not only formal criteria such as novelty, feasibility, relevance, and specificity, but also informal and unconscious criteria related to the ideator and the way the idea is presented. For example, gender bias can influence idea evaluation: some female leaders who are perceived to have egotistical characteristics are considered less effective by their subordinates than male leaders who demonstrate the same traits (De Hoogh, Den Hartog and Nevicka, 2015).

Other characteristics of the ideators may also influence idea selection: the more the ideators, as individuals or teams, are recognized by the idea evaluators as having experience in the domain, the more their ideas will be accepted (Foo, 2010). The way the idea is presented (in a constructive versus critical manner) also affects its assessment. Thus, the evaluation of the idea is influenced by the degree of dogmatism of the evaluator (Chiaburu, Peng and Van Dyne, 2015). A study conducted in Hollywood shows that evaluators use a set of physical and behavioral cues to match each pitcher to archetypes of scriptwriters. Each of these archetypes reflects for them specific levels of creativity that ultimately strongly influence their evaluation of the pitcher (Elsbach and Kramer, 2003). In another context, during an oral pitch to business angels at a UK investor forum, presentational factors (relating to the entrepreneurs' style of delivery) had a strong influence on the overall score of the entrepreneurs (Clark, 2008). These two examples highlight that, beyond the idea itself, the way the idea is presented has a strong impact on its final evaluation. So, in terms of behavior, the literature on communication psychosociology points out the importance of presence in the process of evaluating ideas.

Presence refers to the role of the body while communicating (Trevarthen, 1993). It concerns not only the structure of the body—big or small—but also body movement, and how these elements are perceived by those receiving the message. Even if we are referring to a totally different context here, we could also argue that the structure of the body and its movement during the pitch—what we call stage presence—could affect the judgement of idea evaluators and, therefore, their selection process. Moreover, the pitcher's tone of voice may have an effect on social perceptions. For example, an experimental study shows that listeners perceive people with lower-pitched voices as more trustworthy and attractive (O'Connor and Barclay, 2018). Thus, during a pitch, the way in which the voice is used to express an idea could have consequences for its evaluation. The appropriate use

of the voice (emphasis, tone, and cadence) is also highlighted as good practice for making a successful entrepreneurial pitch (Klaff, 2011).

To conclude, the management sciences literature on how ideas are selected is generally limited to the evaluation of ideas in terms of their intrinsic qualities. The management literature for entrepreneurs and other literature from the fields of psycho-sociology and psychology provide more insight into the evaluation process and claim that other criteria play a role: not only the characteristics of the ideator, but also the fluency of the message they deliver. Therefore, the evaluation of ideas is still a black box that needs to be opened to better understand the process of evaluation. The ambition of this present research is to explore the black box of evaluation and to identify the informal and unconscious criteria relating to the ideator and how the idea is presented.

QCA-BASED RESEARCH DESIGN

We used Fuzzy Set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) to address our research question with data collection at two start-up weekend events.

Data collection

In order to identify the conditions that lead to an idea being adopted by a team or an organization, we focused on the specific case of start-up weekends. Such a process got inspired to Hackathons (Kienzler and Fontanesi, 2017), which consist of voluntary gatherings of a number of individuals, who work collectively during a short period to reach a specific objective. A start-up weekend brings together potential entrepreneurs whose aim is to create businesses. Ahead of the event, participants completed a 54-hour training program to learn how to create a company, with mentors, investors, co-founders, and sponsors to help them get started. At the beginning of the event, each participant has one minute to pitch their business idea in front of a large audience. After the pitching session, the audience that includes participants and persons who did not pitch votes for their preferred proposals. They each have €6,000 in virtual currency: a €3,000 note, a €2,000 note, and a €1,000 note that they can distribute over one or more projects. The projects that raise the most money are put forward to continue their development during the rest of the weekend, and teams are formed to work on the selected projects. At the end of the event, each project is pitched again in front of a jury composed of entrepreneurs, investors, sponsors, and coaches. The top three projects receive an amount of real money to be used to start a business. Start-up weekends throughout the world use the same process, with a pitching session in front of the audience at the beginning, a 48-hour development session, and finally a second pitching session in front of a jury.

We focused on this specific ideation process not only because it is widely diffused in the pedagogy on Entrepreneurship and Innovation Management (Calco and Veeck, 2015) and has aroused growing interest among young adults all over the world (Nager, Nelsen and Nouyrigat, 2011), but also because the logic of selecting ideas based on pitching to an audience has become a general practice of entrepreneurship (Balachandra et al., 2019). At the same time, however, this logic remains under-investigated (Parmentier, Le Loarne-Lemaire and Belkhouja, 2017; Silveira, Santino and Olivense, 2017).

We collected data during two start-up weekends, in Grenoble and Chambéry (France), in November 2018 and February 2019, respectively. The Grenoble start-up weekend brought together 89 participants with 37 initial pitches, from which 15 were selected. The Chambéry event involved 48 participants with 22 initial pitches, from which 8 were selected. All the pitches were recorded on video (except for the seventh Chambéry pitch,

which was subject to technical problems and was consequently removed from our empirical material) and the soundtrack transcribed. The overwhelming majority of pitches and exchanges were conducted in French. Therefore, we did not include pitches that were conducted in English in order to preserve the consistency of the sample. Our final sample is composed of 57 pitches.

Justification of the QCA approach

QCA is a research method that enables the identification of conditions and configurations that are necessary and sufficient for an outcome of interest to occur (Ragin, 1987; Schneider and Wagemann, 2012). It is an established set theoretical method that uses Boolean algebra and is case-oriented (Fiss, 2007; Schneider and Wagemann, 2012). The main assumption in QCA studies is equifinality, which “allows from different, mutually non-exclusive sufficient conditions, or paths, to the outcome” (Schneider and Wagemann, 2012, p. 326). In other words, different conditions or configurations can lead to the same outcome. Following previous work, especially in the field of creativity (Sukhov, 2018; Valaei, Rezaei and Ismail, 2017), fsQCA appears to be a method adapted to the study of antecedents that act on the generation and evaluation of ideas.

We used a configurational approach to understand how evaluators combine the intrinsic qualities of an idea with the qualities of its presentation and decide on the holistic value of an idea. Based on case comparison, QCA is used in order to determine the sufficient configurations for the outcome of interest (e.g. McKnight and Zietsma, 2018). In our case, QCA was used to find the sufficient configurations of conditions that provide a high pitch evaluation by an audience of potential entrepreneurs.

In order to address our research question, we used an fsQCA variant to examine set relations between five conditions (creative idea, structure, enunciation, presence, and physical appearance) and one outcome (positive pitch evaluation). Data analysis was carried out on the software “Rstudio” version 1.1.463 with R packages, “QCA” version 3.6 (Dusa et al., 2019) and “Set Method” version 2.5 (Oana et al., 2020).

Conditions and outcome calibration

From the pitch evaluation scores and the researchers’ coding, we calibrated conditions using direct method calibration for the fuzzy set. For each of the conditions, a membership score was assigned that ranged from fully in the set (0.95) to fully out of the set (0.05). The crossover point (0.50) indicates maximum ambiguity, i.e. the tipping point between whether a case is “in” or “out.” According to the dichotomous conceptualization of physical appearance, we calibrate this condition in crisp set. The outcome calibration is based on participants’ votes. The conditions calibration are based on academic literature focusing on entrepreneurship and psychology.

Outcome. The output is based on the amount of virtual money earned by each pitch. In order to compare cases from both events consistently (since the amount of virtual money that could be obtained at these two events was different), we transposed the amount of virtual money to a score between 0 and 100. For cases to be scored 100, they must earn the maximum amount possible, which was €33,000 in Grenoble, and €39,000 in Chambéry. Raw scores of the other cases were calculated on the same logic based on maximum amount possible of each event. To calibrate the outcome, we used the direct calibration method (Ragin, 2008). We set the crossover point at 34 (which is to €11,220 in Grenoble, and €13,260 in Chambéry), this threshold corresponds to the level of pitch selection in both weekend start-ups. With these thresholds, the sample is composed of 23

out of 57 in the set of high pitch evaluations, 34 cases out of the set, and none on the crossover point.

Conditions. Each condition criterion was carefully described in order to standardize the coding. We double-blind coded all pitches according to the conditions as novelty, feasibility, relevance, structure, enunciation, presence, and physical appearance. We coded the intrinsic conditions from the transcript of the pitch text and the presentation conditions from the video of the pitch. Then the coding of each condition for each case was compared in order to assign a consistent score across the sample. Where the coding differed, a discussion on the gap ensued to reach a common assessment. In the event of disagreement, a third researcher assessed the condition in order to offer additional advice. For the entire evaluation of conditions, the Cohen's kappa coefficient is 0.734.

Novelty, feasibility, and relevance: We first calibrated these three sub-conditions on the 1 to 5 scale for novelty and feasibility and a 1 to 10 scale for relevance. Relevance is the sum of the usefulness of the idea and its positive social and environmental impact, which were captured using two 1–5 scales. We then constructed the condition “creative idea” as the conjunction between the sub-conditions novelty, feasibility, and relevance. A creative idea is defined as an idea that is at the same time new, feasible, and relevant (Amabile, 1988). We calibrated the condition “creative idea,” according to Morgan's law and the minimum rule (Morgan and Winship, 2007), as the minimum score of the three sub-conditions, using the direct calibration method (Ragin, 2008). We set the crossover point at 2.9 for novelty and feasibility and 5.9 for relevance, the maximum at 5 for novelty and feasibility and 10 for relevance, and the minimum at 0 for novelty, feasibility, and relevance. With these thresholds, the sample is composed of 11 out of the 57 cases in the set of creative idea, 46 cases out of the set, and none at the crossover point.

Structure: In the context of pitch, specificity corresponds to the appropriate structuring of the pitch. Based on the management literature for entrepreneurs (Klaff, 2011), we identified five criteria for a structured pitch in terms of its explicitness and exhaustiveness: explanation of the problem or need, explanation of the solution, explanation of the target, the use of a story to illustrate the need or the solution, and the stated project title. To attribute a score in the condition structure, we gave 1 point for every item validated by the case at hand. So to have the maximum score a case must meet all five criteria. We set the crossover point at 2.5. With these thresholds, the sample is composed of 36 out of the 57 cases in the set of structure, 21 cases out of the set, and 0 at the crossover point.

Enunciation: This condition is also based on the management literature for entrepreneurs (Klaff, 2011) and is composed of five criteria: absence of the use of written notes, fluency of speech, a low level of hesitation or blockage in the flow of speech (fewer than 7 hesitations), correct use of grammar, and respect for the time allocated. To attribute a score in the condition enunciation, we gave 1 point for each item validated by the case at hand. So to have the maximum score a case must meet all five criteria. We set the crossover point at 2.5. With these thresholds, the sample is composed of 48 out of the 57 cases in the set of enunciation, 9 cases out of the set, and 0 at the crossover point.

Presence: Presence is the impression that a person gives in terms of their character and manner. We identified four sub-criteria based on the psycho-sociology and management literature: varied and accentuated use of the voice, propensity to smile, use of arm movement and space to highlight salient elements of the speech, and interaction with the audience in the form of a question requiring an answer. To attribute a score in the condition presence, we gave 1 point for each item validated by the case at hand. So to

have the maximum score a case must meet all four criteria. We set the crossover point at 1.9. With these thresholds, the sample is composed of 35 out of the 57 cases in the set of presence, 22 cases out of the set, and 0 at the crossover point.

Physical appearance: This is the only condition calibrated in crispy set. Physical appearance is the deviation of the pitcher's physical appearance from the majority of the audience at the start-up weekend. Whenever there was a difference in body shape in term of weight (corpulence), geographical origin, or age in relation to the majority of participants, we set this condition to fully out (0). In our case, the audience was mainly students and young workers. We considered that there was an age gap with the audience when people appeared to be over 40 years old. In order to assess the impact of the body shape of the ideators and the gap that might exist between their body shape and the "average" body shape of members of the audience, we based our approach on the Somatotype of Sheldon (Roeckelein, 1998). In our case, the audience was mainly composed of ectomorphic and mesomorphic somatotypes. Corpulent individuals, with an endomorphic somatotype, were considered to have a gap with the public and so were consider fully out of the set. Finally, to estimate the geographical origin gap, all those who did not have a native French accent or a racial type not widely present in the room were considered to have a gap with the audience and were calibrated fully out of the set.

Table 1. Fuzzy set membership calibration

Outcome	Calibration thresholds
Evaluation by participants	Minimum 0, maximum 100, crossover point 34
Condition	Calibration thresholds
Creative idea: a creative idea is new, feasible, and relevant	Using minimum rule regarding the conjunction of novelty, feasibility, and relevance
Novelty: its degree of originality and its paradigm-relatedness	Minimum 1, maximum 5, crossover point 2.9
Feasibility: its social acceptability and its technical implementability	Minimum 1, maximum 5, crossover point 2.9
Relevance: its effectiveness in solving a problem of everyday life (scale of 5) and the social and environmental objective of the project (scale of 5)	Minimum 1, maximum 10, crossover point 5.9
Structure: need/problem, solution, story, and project title	Minimum 1, maximum 5, crossover point 2.5
Enunciation: no written notes, speech fluency, low level of hesitation or blockage, good grammar, and time discipline	Minimum 1, maximum 5, crossover point 2.5
Presence: vocal inflexion, propensity to smile, use of body, interaction with audience	Minimum 1, maximum 4, crossover point 1.9 To be calibrated fully out of the set (0), the pitch presenter must have at least one

Physical appearance: age range (above majority), body shape (gap with the majority), and geographical origin (not originating in the country in which the start-up weekend takes place) difference in terms of age range, body shape, or geographic origin from the audience.

Data analysis

After calibrating all cases with all the conditions, we conducted a test to determine whether one or a combination of conditions were necessary for a high or a low evaluation (Ragin, 2000). Tables 2 and 3 present the results of the analysis of the necessary conditions with positive/negative conditions and positive/negative outcomes, respectively.

Table 2. Analysis of the necessary conditions with positive conditions and positive outcomes

Conditions tested	Consistency	Coverage
Creative idea	0.475	0.823
Structure	0.811	0.619
Enunciation	0.930	0.550
Presence	0.688	0.601
Physical appearance	0.551	0.411

Table 3. Analysis of the necessary conditions with negative conditions and negative outcomes

Conditions tested	Consistency	Coverage
Creative idea	0.922	0.698
Structure	0.620	0.812
Enunciation	0.420	0.887
Presence	0.652	0.733
Physical appearance	0.400	0.539

Next, we constructed a truth table, which sums up all the 32 (2^5) possible combinations of our five conditions. The truth table is a tool to identify sufficient configurations (conjunctions of conditions) for the outcome to occur. To set up a truth table, the researcher must first define the row inclusion threshold. There are two possible techniques for doing this: one option is to set it at the minimum acceptable value, which is 0.75; the other—a more relevant technique in our context—is to identify a major gap between inclusion rows (Schneider and Wagemann, 2012). We used the second method to define the inclusion threshold. In our analysis, the gap was identified between rows 3 (0.853) and 6 (0.819), so we set the inclusion threshold at 0.82. The next thing to set is the Proportional Reduction in Inconsistency (PRI), which should be lower than 0.5 (Schneider and Wagemann, 2012). So if a configuration has an inclusion score of more than 0.82 but a PRI score of less than 0.5, this configuration cannot be considered as a sufficient configuration. Finally, the researcher must verify whether the necessary

condition is present in sufficient configuration. Having done all this, we minimize the truth table in order to obtain the solutions.

We used the conservative solution to find the optimal configurations with a positive outcome. We used the most parsimonious solution to find the optimal configurations with a negative outcome in order to limit the high variability of the results due to the large number of cases in this situation (low pitch evaluation).

We observed 21 configurations out of the 32 possible configurations with 5 conditions. These are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Truth table (21 configurations)

Config.	Conditions					Output value*	No. of cases	cases
	A	B	C	D	E			
21	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	Humus
31	1	1	1	1	0	1	3	Phoenix, Solal, La Coulisse
32	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	Safe Hear, Demeure, Willo
30	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	AFD Wat
29	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	Les Pierres
7	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	Café All Around
22	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	Conseil Elus
23	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	Tech Po
1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	CRMI, Gaiac
3	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	Habitus
6	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	Agriplan
5	0	0	1	0	0	0	3	Bougez Plus, Ubyks, Schuss
10	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	Eureka
13	0	1	1	0	0	0	3	Agence Web, Randoski, Hogo
2	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	Gasto, Pariez sur vous
4	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	Time to learn, Toy
9	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	Prêt à lire
14	0	1	1	0	1	0	5	BAO, Sens, Mobilier C, Conciergerie, PixAI, Lokki, Smart Travel, Chanclas, Hero Bot, Bye-bye Fisc, Simon, Ecolove, Impact, Escape Gift, Annophila, Formation E
16	0	1	1	1	1	0	11	Home Stylist, Adé, Tably Power, Improjecteur, Sauv Me, Refuel, Prollix
15	0	1	1	1	0	0	7	VR School, U Trip, Immo Etud, My Radio, Together, Talentueux
8	0	0	1	1	1	0	6	

A: Creative idea; B: Structure; C: Enunciation; D: Presence; E: Physical appearance

* Sufficiency inclusion score greater than 0.82

RESULTS

The fsQCA can generate three solutions: the complex one, the intermediate one with directional expectations and the most parsimonious one (Schneider and Wagemann, 2012). In this study, we chose the intermediate solution (see table 5). Indeed, according to the framework, assumptions or directional expectations can be formed for all conditions, physical appearance excepted. The presence of the creative idea, structure, enunciation, as well as the conditions that relates to presence should lead to the occurrence of the outcome. In a similar vein, their absence should lead to the negation of the outcome.

The first phase of the QCA analysis addresses the necessary conditions. The consistency threshold of 0.92 and coverage threshold of 0.5 are adopted to select configurations associated with the outcome and the outcome's negation. Our analysis reveals one necessary positive condition for a high evaluation of the pitch: enunciation (see Table 2) and one necessary negative condition for a low evaluation of the pitch: creative idea (Table 3).

The second phase of the QCA analysis addresses sufficient conditions. We find two configurations of sufficient conditions that lead to a good pitch evaluation (see Table 5).

Table 5. Sufficient conditions for a high evaluation of pitches by participants*

Conditions	Configurations	
	1	2
Creative idea	●	●
Structure	●	○
Enunciation	●	●
Presence	●	○
Physical appearance**		○
Consistency	0.870	0.931
Raw coverage	0.378	0.150
Number of cases	6	1
	Phoenix Solal La Coulisse Safe Hear Demeure Willo	Humus

Notes: Solid circles (●) indicate the presence of a condition, and blank circles (○) indicate the absence of a condition. A dash indicates that the condition has no influence on the outcome.

* A "high evaluation" refers to the top 34% of pitches in terms of the scores received.

** The absence of physical appearance condition indicates that the pitcher has a physical gap from the majority of the audience.

Configuration 1 shows six pitchers who proposed a creative idea, with a well structured pitch and mastery of enunciation and stage presence. However, in this case, physical appearance had no influence on the outcome.

Configuration 2 shows one pitcher who proposed a creative idea with a mastery of enunciation. They did not articulate a well structured idea, had no presence on the stage, and were physically different from most other participants.

In contrast, we find two configurations of sufficient conditions that lead to a low pitch evaluation (see Table 6).

Table 6. Sufficient conditions for a low evaluation of pitches by participants*

Conditions	Configurations	
	1	2
Creative idea	○	-
Structure	-	○
Enunciation	-	●
Presence	-	-
Physical appearance**	●	-
Consistency	0.722	0.567
Raw coverage	0.874	0.556
Cases	25	9

Notes: **Configuration 1** : Gasto, Pariez sur vous, Time to learn, Toy, VR School, U Trip, Immo Etud, My Radio, Together, Talentueux, BAO, Sens, Mobilier C, Conciergerie, PixAI, Lokki, Smart Travel, Chanclas, Hero Bot, By by Fisc, Simon, Ecolove, Impact, Escape Gift, Annophila, Formation E

Configuration 2 : Bougez Plus, Ubyks, Schuss, VR School, U Trip, Immo Etudiant, My Radio, Together, Talentueux

Black circles (●) indicate the presence of a condition, and blank circles (○) indicate its absence. A dash indicates that the condition has no influence on the outcome.

*A "low evaluation" refers to the 66% lowest pitches in terms of scores received.

** The presence of physical appearance condition indicates that the pitcher has no physical gap from the majority of the audience.

Not surprisingly, Configuration 1 shows that the absence of a good creative idea is not compensated by the absence of physical differences from most of the other participants. The structure, enunciation, and presence conditions have no influence on the outcome. Whether these conditions are positive or negative will not change the negative outcome. In the end, the absence of a creative idea will not be compensated by a good structure and presentation of the pitch in the case where these conditions would be present.

In Configuration 2, despite good enunciation, the absence of structure leads to a low evaluation. Creative idea, presence, and physical appearance have no influence on the outcome. In the end, the absence of structure will not be compensated by a creative idea, good stage presence, or the absence of physical differences from most of the other participants in the case where these conditions would be positive.

DISCUSSION

We propose to discuss our results on two main levels, focusing on how creative ideas are adopted by an organization or small group of individuals. The first level of discussion, and perhaps the more “classical,” is concerned with the quality of the idea per se: are its intrinsic qualities enough for it to be adopted? The second level of discussion relates to the potential for generalization of our findings.

A creative idea is not enough

Our findings reveal that proposing an idea whose content is new, feasible, and relevant is necessary for it to be selected by an audience, but not sufficient by itself. The quality of the pitch and the appearance of the pitcher also matter—especially their capacity to present the idea clearly and their presence on stage. In that sense, our results are consistent with those of Shuye et al. (2019), who state that the ideator has to influence the audience by developing tactics (for instance, using rational arguments or inspirational appeals). In the case we studied, where the pitch is short (1 minute maximum length), pitchers or ideators use very little idea enactment. However, they develop influence tactics: Their discourse contains all the requested components, especially structure; they express their idea with clear enunciation; and they establish presence with appropriate body gestures and vocal intonation. Such findings go further than those of Clarke et al. (2019), who highlighted the crucial role of non-verbal communication during idea pitches in selling those ideas to investors. Here, based on the context of simulated investments, we specify the nature of such non-verbal communication and show that, besides the role of the pitcher, interactions between the level of creativity of an idea, the construction of the discourse, and the stage presence of the ideator are crucial for the idea to be adopted by the audience.

Our results, especially the second configuration, highlight that physical difference with the majority of the audience might compensate for the absence of good structure of the pitch and of stage presence. Our current data set does not allow us to establish any proven explanation but we can interpret this finding through the prism of memorization: The audience is invited to invest in three ideas after the presentation of all of them. While video recording the pitch presentations and the audience, we noted that the audience did not take notes during the presentations. Moreover, most of them were listening to pitches while waiting for their own turn to pitch and so may not have been fully concentrating on the pitch they were hearing. We can assume that any physical difference between the pitcher and the majority of members of the audience might help them to remember a pitch they want to invest in.

Generalization of results

The second level of discussion relates to the potential for generalization of our results. Our analysis refers to start-up weekends, an exploration of business opportunities. The ideas presented relate to business opportunities and members of the audience are both pitchers themselves and evaluators who invest virtual money in the ideas they consider “best.” In the research field of organizational creativity, results that claim to be generalizable often come from simulated situations and experiments (Perry-Smith and Mannucci, 2017). We argue that start-up weekends are not real experiments since some participants are there not only for “fun” and to learn, but also to test their business ideas (Nager, Nelsen and Nouyrigat, 2011). So, considering that start-up weekends are “real” ideation processes, we argue that such processes are similar to other evaluation processes that involve a large community of assessors. Indeed, Mollick (2013) reveals that entrepreneurial ideas are evaluated in a similar way by the “traditional” method of

selection by Venture Capitalists (VC) or through the crowdfunding process, except that the practice of crowdfunding does not consider characteristics of the entrepreneurs that are crucial in the selection process by a jury such as VCs (Balachandra et al., 2019).

We therefore argue that our findings could be generalized to any idea selection process conducted by a wide audience that gathers together potential stakeholders such as investors or pitchers. However, it is also possible that our findings are not generalizable to any idea selection process, especially those that are conducted by a jury. Like the crowdfunding process, start-up weekends are a “democratic” process in the sense that each participant is a volunteer and invests whatever they want in the idea(s) they select. Such a group of evaluators is quite different from a jury who have been given more voice into the idea selection process and that involves different mechanism, especially those of familiarity and trust (Lamont, 2009).

Contribution, limitations, and further research

Since, to our knowledge, very little is known about the criteria that determine the adoption of any creative idea, we argue that our work contributes to a better understanding of the phenomenon. Of course, this study suffers from many limitations and therefore demonstrates the need for further research. The first limitation concerns our sample, in which 48 cases out of the 57 have the condition “enunciation” present, representing 84.21% of our sample, and only 11 out of the 57 cases had an idea defined as a “creative idea,” which represents 19.3% of our sample. These values are just at the acceptable boundaries.

Second, in our work, the rating level that determines a creative idea is quite low, since an idea is considered new and feasible with a score of 3 or more out of 5 (crossover point at 2.9) or useful with a score of 6 or more out of 10 (crossover point at 5.9). Researchers should also analyze the impact of the presentation conditions in cases where ideas are very creative (with a score of 4 or more out of 5). Moreover, we were not able to integrate many criteria to measure the perception of how the ideator conforms to the norm, and we would like to have considered their clothing and education compared with the “average” clothing or education of the group who were invited to evaluate their idea.

However, this study sheds light on idea evaluation by identifying the configurations of intrinsic evaluation conditions and conditions of presentation that lead to a positive evaluation. Moreover, a creative idea gets a good evaluation during start-up weekends when pitchers structure their discourse well and specify the market need, the potential consumer target, and the problem to which the idea provides a solution, when they speak in a fluid manner, without the use of notes, and, last but not least, when they have good stage presence.

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