The Founders Lab
Predict and Boost Startup Top Team Success: Will Your Team Succeed or Fail?

Project Overview: Design and Develop a Startup Top-Management Tool.
This project focuses on designing and developing a specialized tool for Karlijn Koek (https://www.linkedin.com/in/karlijnkoek/), a Clinical Psychologist and Team Dynamics Coach with expertise in Conflict Mediation, who works with startup founders in an tech. accelerator program (currently active in Belgium, The Netherlands and Italy).

The tool will support Karlijn by providing insights into interpersonal relationships and personal/leadership challenges founders face. It will replace the current Excel-based system, enabling Karlijn to make data-driven decisions and offer personalized coaching support to top management teams.

Moreover, by analyzing this data across the accelerator's expanding portfolio of currently over 340 startups, Karlijn can generate actionable insights and share them with entrepreneurs through blogs or reports. For example:
  ➢ Connection Types: Which types of founder relationships (e.g., ex-colleagues, classmates, cofounder matchmaking events) are most common, and which are associated with greater startup success?
  ➢ Leadership Challenges: What are the recurring leadership themes founders face and frequently discuss during coaching sessions?
  ➢ Personality Profiles: Based on Insights Discovery data, what are the average personality profiles of CEOs and CTOs (e.g., dominant colors like Red for action-oriented leaders, Blue for detail-focused individuals)?
  ➢ Average Share Distribution: What is the typical equity split among founders? Are there trends that correlate fair or balanced equity splits with long-term team stability?
  ➢ Commitment Levels: What are the average levels of time commitment from founders during the accelerator phase? How does this correlate with team performance and startup success?

Why This Project Matters?!
Startups face challenges beyond their business models—managing internal dynamics is just as critical. Founders work under immense pressure, making strong team collaboration vital for resolving conflicts constructively.

This tool will provide Karlijn with real-time insights to proactively address personal leadership and interpersonal challenges, ensuring startup leadership teams are equipped for sustainable, long-term success.

Moreover, by analyzing trends across the accelerator's expanding portfolio, the tool will empower entrepreneurs worldwide with actionable benchmarks, including common leadership challenges, equity distribution patterns, personality profiles, and commitment trends linked to successful teams.

Your contribution will directly impact the future of entrepreneurship, giving you the unique opportunity to design innovative technology that empowers the next generation of startup founders.
Key Top-Team Management Features: (1) Selection Tool & (2) Program Phase

1. Selection Tool

There are three selection rounds per year in Belgium and two in the Netherlands. Entrepreneurs apply online and submit documents. In each selection round, around 20 Tech startups are selected to give a live pitch of their product to the investment fund. After the pitch, each founding team, which must consist of at least two entrepreneurs, must attend a 30-minute interview with Karlijn, where team dynamics and individual coachability are evaluated. Based on the pitch and interview, 6 to 10 startups are selected for the program in each round.

Track and score Team Dynamics, Individual Coachability, and other key data, such as:

➤ Connection Between Founders: Analyze the nature of the relationship between the founding team members to better understand potential dynamics and collaboration challenges. Examples include:
  o Friends: Founders with long-standing friendships may have strong personal trust but might also face challenges in installing professional trust, setting professional boundaries or making tough decisions.
  o University-linked: Founders who met in a university setting may share a strong intellectual connection, but could face challenges in transitioning from academic to business environments. The dynamic between a professor and a student can shape communication and decision-making, with the professor often assuming a mentorship or leadership role that might influence their business interactions. On the other hand, former classmates typically have an equal footing, but their overlapping skill sets can lead to difficulties in role division, potentially hindering the team's ability to cover the diverse tasks needed for startup success.
  o Ex-colleagues: Teams that previously worked together may have a good understanding of each other's working styles.
  o New Business Partners: Founders who only recently met (e.g., through a co-founder matchmaking event) may lack established trust and communication patterns, which could lead to initial friction or a slower pace in building rapport.
➤ Skillset: It's important to assess whether their skill sets are complementary or too aligned. If the founders have overlapping skills, this could lead to a lack of balance in the team, as essential areas like operations, marketing, and sales might be neglected in favor of areas they are all most comfortable with. On the other hand, if their skill sets are complementary, it can enhance their ability to cover a broad range of business needs and provide a well-rounded team.
➤ Share Distribution: Evaluate the fairness and balance of equity splits within the founding team. Unbalanced distributions may indicate potential conflicts or dissatisfaction down the line.
➤ Salary/Compensation: Track whether the founders have any salary or compensation from the startup at the time of selection. In many cases, some founders may only fully commit to the startup once they start drawing a salary. This is a critical factor, as it signals the level of dedication and commitment from the founders.
➤ Personal Commitment: Assess the commitment levels of the team members. For example, how many hours per week are founders dedicating to the startup? Is there a balance between work and personal life? Are the founders ready to endure long-term commitments despite challenges? What's their personal runway?
  o For the selection process, it's essential that at least one founder is fully committed to working on the startup 100% once the accelerator invests. This ensures that

the team has a dedicated and focused leader to drive the business forward, especially during the early and critical stages of growth.

➢ Ambition and Vision: Understand the long-term vision and goals of the founders, both individually and as a team. Are they aligned on the company's growth, mission, and success?

➢ Challenges and Risk Tolerance: Identify any personal or professional challenges the founders are facing (e.g., burnout, health issues, or personal conflicts) and evaluate how they manage and overcome these.

2. Program Phase Features

Founder & Team Profiles: Create a user-friendly interface to manage detailed profiles of startup teams and individual founders, including their backgrounds, roles, interpersonal dynamics, and current challenges.

Session Notes: Develop a system for logging and tracking notes from individual and team coaching sessions, enabling the coach to monitor progress and revisit key points during follow-up meetings. --> Analytics Dashboards: Provide visualizations to identify trends and insights, such as the initial connections between founders (e.g., did they start the company as love partners, ex-colleagues, or meet at a cofounder matchmaking event?), individual leadership challenges or cofounder conflict theme's, and long-term success patterns. For instance:

➢ Individual Challenges:
   o Include features for documenting and tracking personal challenges faced by individual founders, supporting the coach's role as a psychologist.
   o Trend Analysis: Enable analysis of personal challenges, such as identifying the most common types of issues startup founders want to discuss during coaching sessions.
   o Leadership Track Integration: If a founder participates in our leadership track, create notes to monitor progress and areas for improvement.

➢ Conflict Tracking Tools:
   o Provide tools for documenting and tracking conflicts between founders, assisting the coach in her role as a mediator.
   o Trend Analysis: Enable analysis of conflict patterns, such as the most common types of issues and how they're resolved over time.

➢ Integrating Insights Discovery into the Team Dynamics Tool Insights Discovery is a psychometric tool grounded in Carl Jung's psychology, using a four-color model (Red, Blue, Yellow, Green) to help individuals understand their personality styles, strengths, and the unique value they bring to a team. Research shows that teams with diverse personality profiles tend to perform better on complex tasks than homogeneous teams. By integrating Insights Discovery, this tool offers deeper insights into how individual personalities shape team dynamics and influence startup success. Founders can participate in an Insights Discovery workshop with Karlijn to improve communication, enhance collaboration, and align their strengths for better teamwork.
   o Personality Profiles: Allow Karlijn to input individual founders' Insights Discovery scores (e.g., Fiery Red: 3.16, Cool Blue: 2.80). Store these profiles for easy access and comparison.
   o Trend Analysis of Team Composition: Analyze the distribution of color energies within and between teams to identify diversity and patterns. - Trend Analysis on Role Alignment: Examine how individual scores align with specific roles (e.g., CEO vs. CTO).

Why You Should Work on This Project?
This project blends cutting-edge technology with the human side of innovation, offering IT and design students the chance to build a tool that directly impacts the growth of startups in the real world.

IT Students will gain hands-on experience in building robust backend systems, developing advanced analytics features, and ensuring secure, scalable data management. Design Students will have the opportunity to create an intuitive, visually engaging interface, balancing functionality and user experience tailored for professional users in the startup ecosystem. As you work on this project, you'll be tackling real challenges faced by startup founders—issues such as burnout, communication breakdowns, and team conflicts.

The tool you develop will support the mental well-being and success of startup founders, improving not just their business outcomes but also the relationships and personal growth of the teams. By the end of this project, you will have developed a tool that combines design, psychology, and technology—directly contributing to the next generation of innovative startups. Will your tool be the one that empowers the next big tech company?

Join us and make a lasting impact!