Does Gender Matter? Leadership Styles of Women Entrepreneurs in Penang

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the leadership styles of women entrepreneurs in Penang, Malaysia. Entrepreneurship is a key driver of economic growth and social development and is promoted by many countries. Various government programmes, departments and agencies promote entrepreneurship, including those that are specifically dedicated towards women entrepreneurs. Women entrepreneurs have made notable and commendable strides, but failure rates remain high despite considerable assistance, support and resources. Current studies suggest that gender influences entrepreneurial success as gender bias and discrimination persist and percolates into women entrepreneurs' business leadership and management. Leadership style is identified as a significant factor of entrepreneurial performance that determines its success or failure. Current literature on leadership styles suggests significant differences between women and men. Men prefer the autocratic, transactional and laisser-faire leadership styles. Women prefer democratic and transformational leadership styles. This research explores the factor of gender and leadership styles of successful women entrepreneurs. A qualitative case study research methodology is adopted. Pilot interviews were conducted on two (2) women entrepreneurs while semi-structured interviews were conducted on eight (8) women entrepreneurs of diverse backgrounds in terms of ethnicity, education background, age, type of business and duration of business during the actual study. The interview results are thematically analysed. Nine (9) emergent themes were discovered. Further analysis consolidated the emergent themes into two (2) meta-themes. A fresh finding arose about the role of gender in entrepreneurial leadership. In light of this fresh finding, recommendations are made to advance scholarship on entrepreneurship development.

Keywords: Gender, Women, Entrepreneurship, Leadership style, Case study

INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship is a driver of sustained economic growth (Kefela, 2012). Entrepreneurship promotes diversity in products and services, incentivizes innovation and provides employment opportunities. Entrepreneurship is defined as an activity that involves the discovery, evaluation, and exploitation of business opportunities; and an entrepreneur is an individual who undertakes considerable risks to start a business enterprise (Neumeyer et al., 2019). Entrepreneurship is challenging, and failures are common particularly in the early stages (Malecki, 2018). Many countries actively encourage and support entrepreneurship for its many economic and social benefits (Rao et al., 2017; Smith, 2010). In Malaysia, entrepreneurship is supported via various government agencies such as Small, Medium Enterprise Corporation (SME Corp) Malaysia, People's Trust Council or *Majlis Amanah Rakyat* (MARA), *Institut Keusahawanan Negara* (INSKEN), *Perbadanan Usahawan Nasional Berhad (*PUNB), Centre for Entrepreneur Development and Research (CEDAR) and Malaysian Global Innovation & Creativity Centre (MaGIC). These agencies provide business support, consultation, training and financing (Ridzwan et al., 2017). Additionally, various entrepreneurship programs are incorporated into national development plans such as the New Economic Policy (1971-1990), National Development Policy (1990-2000), National Vision Policy (2001-2010), and the New Economic Model (2011- 2020) (Bahari et al., 2017).

In Malaysia as in many other countries, there are initiatives to encourage entrepreneurship among traditionally marginalised segments of society such as women. Government agencies such as *Inkubator Keusahawanan Wanita* (I-KeuNITA) and non-government organizations such as WomenBizSense, specifically assist women in

entrepreneurship. These efforts appear to be bearing fruit as women entrepreneurs in Malaysia have increased by 114% for the past two decades (Lebowitz, 2018). There are currently 1.18 million enterprises led by women registered with the Companies Commission of Malaysia (CCM) in 2016 (Mohamad & Bakar, 2017).

Granted that notable strides have been made, failure rates are still high, and among the factors cited for these failures include leadership and gender (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Miles & Morrison, 2020; Mohamad & Bakar, 2017). The effect of gender on entrepreneurial success is mixed, with some results suggesting women fare worse than men, while others indicate that gender is not a major factor. This mixed result is attributed to the presence of other factors influencing entrepreneurial success such as the type of industry, economic conditions, availability of capital, social condition, and others (Johnson & Storey, 1993; Watson, 2003). Stripping away other influencing factors in entrepreneurial success, it appears that women are at best faring on par, and likely faring worse than men. Given the persistent high failure rates despite considerable resources devoted towards women entrepreneurs, further research is needed to better understand this phenomenon. As such, this research attempts to fill some of the gaps in knowledge by focussing specifically on the leadership styles of women entrepreneurs.

BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Leadership is a crucial component of successful entrepreneurship (Franco & Matos, 2015; Miles & Morrison, 2020; Sandybayev, 2019). Leadership is the art of influencing others to strive willingly and enthusiastically towards the achievement of group goals (Jogulu, 2010; Kocherbaeva et al., 2019). Leaders traditionally have a huge impact on the performance of an organization, and it is found that leadership styles employed by the leaders vastly impact the success of the business (Aziz et al., 2013). This is because great leaders can communicate the organization's future goals to their people effectively and influence them to work towards one direction. An entrepreneur is by default also the leader of his or her enterprise. Various leadership styles can affect the efficiency, performance, and productivity of the organization such as democratic, transformational, transactional, autocratic, and laissez-faire (Sfantou et al., 2017).

Generally, there are five categories of leadership; (1) democratic style, which encourages open communication and allows employees' equal participation in the process of problem-solving and decision making (Al-Khajeh, 2018); (2) transformational style, which motivates followers to go beyond their self-interest for the benefit of the organization (Noruzy et al., 2013); (3) transactional style, where followers are motivated by constantly rewarding followers (Okyere, 2017); (4) autocratic style, which retains the highest authority in the leader in decision-making and does not solicit employee feedback or inputs (Longe, 2014); and (5) laisser-faire style, which exhibits a general lack of involvement during critical junctures (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001).

Men and women are generally different in terms of personality traits, cultural roles and social expectations. Men are usually associated with 'masculine' notions of independence, assertiveness, aggression and control; while women are associated with 'feminine' notions of attachment, cooperation, passivity, and interpersonal connection (Burger, 2014; Macionis, 2014). These differences are rooted in biology. Men, being more muscular have had better success in hunting and fishing, thus they have been the main food providers since ancient times in hunting-gathering communities. Women were assumed to be naturally better with childcare since most can breastfeed and this continued to form their main role. Other associated roles followed that were compatible with childcare such as food preparation, cooking and housework. Although modern times have lessened these traditional differences in personality, gender role and social expectations, men are still primarily seen as the provider of resources (money, food, shelter, etc.) while women are primarily seen as the nurturer (Burger, 2014; Macionis, 2014).

Given the differences between men and women, their leadership styles are also expected to differ. Current researches have indeed shown differences in leadership skills and styles (Hejase et al., 2013; Latu et al., 2013). Men are shown to gravitate towards the autocratic, transactional and laisser-faire leadership styles (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Hejase et al., 2013; Kumasey et. al., 2014); while women gravitate towards the democratic and transformational leadership styles (Chakraborty & Serra, 2019; Silva & Mendes, 2017).

Another difference between the two gender is, women encounter more challenges than men in leadership due to traditional cultural roles and social expectations, gender bias and gender discrimination (Sia et al., 2015; World Bank, 2012). Gender bias occurs in the negative preconception of women leaders as lacking aspiration, having weak personality traits, lacking supporters and followers, and being less competent (Hejase et al., 2013; Henry et al., 2015). Gender discrimination occurs when decisions are based on an individual's gender, rather than on qualifications or job performance (Gutek et al., 1996; Ngo et al., 2002).

Women often have to balance their roles as business leaders with the traditional gender roles as perceived by society. A women's identity as a leader and entrepreneur is co-constituted and located in "repertoires of historically and culturally situated narrative" (Henry et al., 2015). The socialization process, particularly in conservative Asian countries like India, moulds women into gendered behavioural patterns, personality characteristics and work roles considered appropriate by the society (Bhargava, 2009). In other words, there appears to be a discriminatory environment for women in leadership and society that compounds their challenges.

The impact of leadership styles, mediated by gender, on entrepreneurial success is significant (Al-Khaled & Fenn, 2020; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Mohamad & Bakar, 2017). Women entrepreneurs have achieved significant gains, and are the fastest-growing category in the context of entrepreneurship worldwide. There are now approximately 252 million women around the world who are entrepreneurs and another 153 million women are operating established businesses (Kelley et al., 2017). However, this relatively recent growth of women entrepreneurs belies the reality that they do face a myriad of challenges in leadership and entrepreneurship (Lebowitz, 2018; Mohamad & Bakar, 2017). The competitiveness and growth of businesses led by women seem to lag behind that of men (Hassan et al., 2014), and the failure rate of women entrepreneurs, particularly from the *Bumiputera* community in Malaysia, is higher than that of men (Isa et al., 2019; Safaruddin & Zainuddin, 2019).

Among the factors cited for the entrepreneurial failure of women are their attitude, motivation, and competencies (Henry et al., 2015; Yusoff et al., 2018; Zainon et al., 2020). These are factors that revolve around leadership. Leadership, mediated by gender, appears to be a crucial deciding factor in entrepreneurial success and failure. There is considerable literature on leadership and women entrepreneurship per se as shown, but research combining both these topics in the context of a non-Western society in a developing economy like Malaysia is scarce. Hence, this current case study research-based in the state of Penang in Malaysia is timely and envisaged to help fill the gap in knowledge leadership styles of women entrepreneurs.

METHOD

This research investigates the leadership styles of women entrepreneurs, which is essentially an intangible qualitative phenomenon, as opposed to a tangible physical phenomenon that can be quantitatively weighed and measured. As such, a qualitative research paradigm is deemed most suitable and this research employs case study methodology (Denscombe, 2007; Yin, 2009). The case study methodology is considered the most appropriate for this study as it is "An empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon (e.g., a "case"), set within its real-world context – especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin, 2009). The phenomenon of leadership styles of women entrepreneurs meets these requirements.

The principal data-gathering instrument for this case study is semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews enable exploration of the leadership style of women entrepreneurs without predefining them for deeper and more comprehensive findings. This is a cross-sectional study with fieldwork conducted from September to November 2020.

The research field site was in the state of Penang, Malaysia. Penang is the fourth largest state economy in Malaysia (behind Selangor, Johor and Sarawak) with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of RM92,631 million (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021). The bulk of Penang's GDP comprises tertiary sectors like services (50.1%) and manufacturing (43.1%) (Penang Institute, 2020). As such, Penang is deemed a suitable research field site because the state is a major business and economic cluster, as well as home to numerous local entrepreneurs

The female interviewees in this research were selected for diversity and fulfilment of specific conditions with regard to their businesses. Proportional representation of every economic sub-sector, although strived for, is not made a specific condition. Proportional representation is ideal but beyond the scope of this current research which is exploratory in nature. The criterion of minimum business operation of at least two years is derived from statistics that show a high business failure rate of approximately 30% occurring in the first two years of operation before tapering off in subsequent years (Bryant, 2020). Therefore, businesses that operate for more than two years can be considered relatively successful. Consequently, a total of eight (8) interviewees were selected based on the following criterion; 1) diversity in terms of ethnicity, education background and age, 2) diversity in terms of type and duration of their businesses, 3) continuous operation of their businesses for at least two years, and 4) employ at least 5 staff (and thus have to exercise considerable leadership to manage their staff).

The interview questions start with basic information about the interviewees, followed by questions regarding their leadership styles and entrepreneurial experience. Standardized questions were employed followed by individualized in-depth questions dependent on the interviewees' responses. Prior to the full fieldwork, two (2)

pilot interviews were conducted to fine-tune the interview questions. The actual interviews for this research were conducted either face-to-face or via video-conferencing and lasted from forty-five (45) minutes to one and a half (1.5) hours. The interviews were conducted in English and recorded with the consent of the interviewees.

A sample of some of the standardized interview questions includes the following; 1) What influenced your decision to become a business owner? 2) What are the challenges you faced as a women entrepreneur? 3) What do leaders mean to you? 4) What role do you feel a leader plays in promoting successful business operations? 5) What are the ways you use to influence and motivate your employees? Can you share some examples? 6) How would you describe your relationship with your employees? 7) How do you interact and maintain your relationship with your employees? 8) Why do you choose this approach to influence and motivate your employees?

The two pilot interviews conducted helped to reveal the flow of the interviews and how the interviewees responded to the questions. It was observed that the interviewees appear to be more relaxed and candid with a female interviewer and hence subsequent interviews were all conducted by the second author, who is female. However, both authors, a male and a female, were engaged in the analysis of the interview results for a balanced assessment and to minimize personal opinions and biases. The pilot interviews also highlighted some gaps in the questions that were remedied to ensure the questions were able to comprehensively address the research objectives.

The interview recordings were then transcribed and subjected to the thematic analysis framework as articulated by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis is selected for its accessibility, flexibility and applicability. Thematic analysis provides a systematic method to identify, analyse and report patterns within data; and also supports advanced inter-disciplinary research (Creswell, 2007; Scharp & Sanders, 2018). A typical thematic analysis framework consists of familiarising with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The appropriate number of interviewees for qualitative case study research is subject to some debate. For qualitative case study research, the objective is to reach theoretical saturation whereby additional respondents will not provide additional theoretical findings. This is unlike quantitative research in which its objective is to seek statistically sound representation for the findings to have predictive capabilities.

Depending on the context, methodology and subject matter, the appropriate number of interviewees or respondents in qualitative research can range from one to one hundred (Baker & Edwards, 2012). In this research, ten interviews (two pilot and eight interviews) were conducted taking into consideration physical feasibility, time availability and cost considerations. Undoubtedly, having more resources for a bigger pool of interviewees will be better. However, the incremental gains are subject to diminishing returns making the benefits of a big pool of interviewees or respondents minimal in qualitative research.

RESULTS

Data from the interviews were collected, transcribed and analysed accordingly. Table 1 below depicts the interviewees' background while Table 2 below tabulates the emergent themes from the thematic analysis and the number of respondents who are aligned ("agree"), not aligned ('disagree') or neutral towards the respective emergent themes.

Table 1: Background of Interviewees

Interviewee	Age	Ethnicity	Highest Education Background	Period of employment (Years)	Business Type	Number employee reporting	Years of Operation
A	25-30	Chinese	Masters (Business Administration)	2	Service Firm (Manpower Supplier)	7	2.8
B	41-50	Chinese	SPM	20	Flowers and Gifts	5	16
C	Above 60	Malay	Diploma (Business Administration)	20	Education (Kindergarten)	18	10
D	31-40	Chinese	Certificate	10	Optical Shops	5	12
E	41-50	Chinese	Bachelors Degree (Early Childhood Education)	2	Education (Kindergarten)	50	14
F	31-40	Indian	Bachelors Degree (Business Administration) Certificate (Aesthetic)	3	Aesthetic (Facial and Spa Outlets)	6	18
G	41-50	Chinese	Doctorate (Mass Communication)	3	Diamonds Outlet	12	20
H	41-50	Chinese	Bachelors Degree (Information and Technology)	0	Real Estate Agency	80	7

Table 2: Summary of Emergent Themes

No.	Theme	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
1	Women leaders are visionary	6	2	-
2	Women leaders are empathetic	4	4	-
3	Leadership style is crucial for business success	8	-	-
4	Leaders represent an inspirational role model	8	-	-
5	Importance of strong organizational commitment	5	3	-
6	Women leaders reward followers	4	4	-
7	Women leaders maintain people-oriented relationships	5	3	-
8	Women leaders maintain task-oriented relationships	3	5	-
9	Women leaders develop others	8	-	-

Theme 1 – Women leaders are visionary

Six (6) interviewees described themselves as risk-takers, hard-working, and have a strong eagerness to learn. They agree with the statement "you reap what you sow" and that positive personality traits are essential business success factors. They consider strong leaders as those that have great vision and aspire to be one. They describe 'great vision' as the ability to predict market trends, and the conviction to act accordingly to these predictions.

> *Although you have everything such as knowledge, skills, and a good personality, you will not be able to start up and sustain in a position, especially as a business leader. One should have a clear vision and be passionate about achieving it. To me, as an effective leader, you should be able to continuously work hard towards the vision or goal and lead by showing good examples to your followers. (Interviewee B)*

> *I see a leader as someone capable of envisioning the desired outcome or goals. Once you can visualize what you want, you can effortlessly bring impact onto others and ensure every one works together towards achieving that specific goal. A leader is a person who is crystal clear of what he wants and is willing to work hard towards achieving the objectives. (Interviewee D)*

Theme 2 – Women leaders are empathetic

On top of the characteristic of women leaders as visionary as outlined in the preceding Theme 1, women leaders are also characterized as empathetic by four (4) interviewees. Interviewees describe empathy as the ability to

sense others' emotions, the ability to put oneself in another's shoes, the ability to understand beyond someone's apparent surface behaviour and taking an interest in others' concerns.

> *I perceive a leader as a person with a positive personality and the ability to understand their followers well. A leader should be mindful that a leader does not bear without followers. Therefore, understanding your followers, providing the opportunity to share and learn, and concurrently being able to stand on your point confidently makes an effective and successful leader. (Interviewee A)*

> *If you ask me, leaders are individuals who are strong and empathetic. Before leading someone towards a goal, a leader should have adequate knowledge in a particular area. A leader will eventually fail when he or she has less empathy towards others. A leader should be able to put himself or herself in other shoes for successful and loyal followership. (Interviewee C)*

Theme 3 - Leadership style is crucial for business success
All eight (8) interviewees have the understanding that leadership style is a tactic undertaken to achieve targeted results or output through others such as the employees. They explained that being responsible and hard-working is not adequate for the success of a business. Business success requires efficient employees to complete their tasks accordingly with minimal or zero supervision. Therefore, it is crucial to use the appropriate leadership style to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of employees.

> *I think the leadership style is a way used by a leader to encourage the employees. Influencing and encouraging people is the most difficult task for anyone as people come with different beliefs, backgrounds, attitudes, and mindsets. Thus, bringing together different people to work for one goal is particularly challenging. Hence, leaders require a customized strategy to do so. That is leadership style. (Interviewee B)*

> *Leadership style can be a tactic or an approach that a leader does to communicate the business goals that have been set. Without communicating what the leader plans it is difficult to motivate the employees to achieve the business objectives. (Interviewee D)*

Theme 4 – Leaders represent an inspirational role model
All eight (8) respondents stated that being a role model is the best method to influence and motivate employees. Employees tend to have greater respect for leaders who are role models and will emulate them. Inspiring others to follow is a form of transformational leadership. Transformational leadership style focuses on employees' well-being, skill development, self-esteem and innovativeness.

> *Before I expect my employees to listen and follow me, I first ensure that I am doing the right thing. I build my personality over time to show up myself as a strong and capable leader. For instance, I expect my employees to be hard-working. Therefore, even after sixteen years of running my business I never fail to come to my shop almost every day. This has motivated my employees and they see me as a role model and aim to work as hard as me. (Interviewee B)*

> *I have shown great commitment towards my work, the kids in our centres, and the parents who are our customers. Despite being the co-founder, I engage in all things that are happening in all our learning centres. I give no compromises when it comes to my job and my work quality. Our coaches that are around me get inspired and motivated by my attitude towards the centres. In short, I inspire them through purpose and power. Thus, they work equally hard and produce top-notch service to the kids in our centres. (Interviewee E)*

Theme 5 – Importance of strong organizational commitment
Five (5) interviewees emphasized the importance of creating strong organizational commitment among their employees. They invest considerable time and effort to implant a sense of commitment and responsibility towards the firm within their employees. A common technique used to instill strong organizational commitment is to empower employees and thereby motivate them with a certain degree of autonomy and responsibility. Creating

strong organizational commitment through employee empowerment and motivation is a characteristic of a democratic leadership style.

> *My staffs and teachers are exceptionally passionate, talented, and always willing to learn. Although not all hands are from an educational industry background, they share the same passion for educating and enriching children's life. In this situation, I am very blessed as a leader to have been surrounded by the same mindset of people. Therefore, I am required to put in little effort in motivating them to work better. However, I grasped that empowering them motivates and influences them to do even better. As I mentioned earlier, I do have great empathy for my employees which also has created strong followership where little effort to motivate them is adequate. I am a fortunate leader I would say. (Interviewee C)*

> *At present everything around us is ever-changing. I will not succeed if I do business the way I used to do ten years back. I realized now my brand is not about only me, it is about my team as well. I want continuous teamwork in my organization. To achieve that, I empower all my employees to showcase their talent, skills, and acquired knowledge. I feel they feel highly motivated when they are given a certain level of responsibility and empowerment. Of course, not maximum freedom is given but direction with my guidance will be provided. While allowing them to discover something new and mind-blowing I surely will not allow anything that will affect my brand reputation and business. Yes, empowering employees truly motivates them to do better. (Interviewee G)*

Theme 6 – Women leaders reward followers
Four (4) interviewees emphasized that they use rewards as a technique to motivate employees. The rewards are both tangible such as performance appraisals, monetary rewards and gifts; and intangible such as motivation and coaching. This emphasis on rewarding employees or followers aligns with the transactional leadership style.

> *I believe that rewards motivate us to do anything beyond our capability most of the time. Therefore, I also apply the same concept here at my shop. My staffs here are all passionate and young people. When they produce good work, I praised them and give them more opportunities to try. Sometimes I also treat them to small meals. For those who are slower and struggling, I advise them to express more interest in learning and try to provide beautiful and creative outcomes to enjoy rewards equally. (Interviewee B)*

> *In my industry itself, rewards are the most appealing component that attracts anyone to be a part of it. Our industry is all about people who are fighters and survivors. Therefore, I use the power of rewards to motivate and influence them. Any employee achieving their sales target and working beyond, besides usual commissions I provide additional rewards such as to to overseas trips, vouchers to purchase diamonds, electrical appliances, and more money depending on on the situation. For those who are doing less better than others, I explain to them what reward is awaiting them by working hard and striving to achieve a certain number of sales in a month. Eventually, they get motivated and start to work harder. (Interviewee H)*

Theme 7 - Women leaders maintain people-oriented relationships
Five (5) interviewees actively strive for close and friendly relationships with their employees. However, they are also quick to state that a certain level of boundaries or limitations is crucial to ensure things are always under control. They allocate due consideration for their employees' professional development, personal needs, motivation, welfare, job satisfaction and work-life balance. They expounded that this approach promotes a positive working relationship that ultimately helps their business.

> *As a leader of my organization, I aim to build a good and strong relationship with my employees. I am a person who believes leadership works well with great followership. I demonstrate understanding, sharing, care, teamwork, and transparency to get the same in return. Hence, we work together towards one (1) goal by respecting each other's values, presence, and capability. With kind and respectful employees, there is no need to have a boundary between us or a strict employer-employee relationship. We are all grown-ups who can maintain a good relationship. (Interviewee A)*

> *I aim to have a good relationship with all my staff. I see them all as one brand and*
> *one family. Hence, I give them adequate freedom to expose and share their feelings,*
> *but I set a limit between me and them. I always put myself in their shoes before*
> *taking any major decisions in the center. We go out for lunch and discuss many things,*
> *but I do not allow them to cross the boundaries. (Interviewee C)*

Theme 8 – Women leaders maintain task-oriented relationships

Three (3) interviewees maintain a task-oriented relationship with their employees. They are direct in their communications, focus on work-related topics, not interested to develop close relationships and maintain a social distance from their employees. They explained that many tasks or jobs do not require much collaboration with employees and hence it is unnecessary to have strong bonding relationships.

> *I focus a lot on work, sales, and customer service. At present, I am working on*
> *advertising my business through digital marketing. I am always working hard*
> *and busy building up my business even after sixteen (16) years in this business.*
> *Thus, I do not spend much time with my staff chatting or sharing things out of work.*
> *Most of our time together we talk about enhancing our business, promoting, and*
> *establishing uniqueness in our designs in the process of achieving our business goals.*
> *I rarely talk about friends or family and check on their families. (Interviewee B)*

> *I am a very precise person. I am not keen to have a very friendly relationship*
> *with my employees. Therefore, I would describe my relationship with them as*
> *particularly very related to their task, job scope, and performance. My goal*
> *is to attain my business goals accordingly. Thus, I am always there to provide*
> *teaching and help them in their work-related things but do not have a close*
> *and friendly relationship with them. (Interviewee H)*

Theme 9 – Women leaders develop others

All eight (8) interviewees strive to develop their employees in terms of competitiveness, personal improvement, professional behaviour and appropriate attitude. They claim that under their leadership, employees become more enthusiastic, motivated and committed to the organization. They use annual appraisals as a platform to acknowledge staff contributions and provide coaching and noted that their employees appear to be happier and more satisfied compared to when they first joined their organizations.

> *I think that rather than making my staff work for me, I have motivated them to work*
> *for the organization which provides a living to all of us. With stronger organizational*
> *commitment they follow my instructions and work for shared goals. Their commitment,*
> *job performance, and responsibility towards their daily task have improved tremendously.*
> *With that, it is easy to face any challenges along the way in running my business. (Interviewee A)*

> *Throughout these years I have seen great changes within my employees' mindset and*
> *attitudes. Imparting our organizational goals, values, and significance of our service*
> *to future generations has led to a stronger bond between my employees and the organization.*
> *Therefore, trustworthy, and loyal employees are produced. This helps to easily motivate our*
> *employees to work towards one organizational goal. Subsequently, as a team, we are attracting*
> *more customers to engage with us. (Interviewee E)*

The nine (9) emergent themes are further analysed and consolidated via Alfred Schutz's (1954) concept of *typifications*. *Typifications* involve deconstructing the emergent themes into their fundamental components, and from these fundamental components seek patterns or commonalities, which are then reconstructed and reconstituted into *typologies*. *Typologies* customarily refer to specific individuals. In this research, 'meta-theme' is deemed a more appropriate term as it describes the convergence and composition of several emergent themes. These meta-themes provide a clearer and more holistic understanding of the phenomenon researched and serve as a useful guide for formulating practical and actionable public policy recommendations. Two (2) meta-themes emerged as follows:

Table 3: Summary of Meta-Themes

No.	Emergent theme	Meta-Theme
1	1, 2, 4, 5, 9	Women leaders emphasize organic growth
2	3, 6, 7, 8	Women's leadership styles do not significantly differ from men's

Meta-Theme 1 – Women leaders emphasize organic growth
Meta-Theme 1 is derived from the following themes; 1) Theme 1 - Women leaders are visionary 2) Theme 2 - Women leaders are empathetic, 3) Theme 4 - Leadership represents an inspirational role model, 4) Theme 5 - Importance of strong organizational commitments, and 5) Theme 9 - Women leaders develop others. Women leaders are visionary, and their vision involves organically growing their organizations and the employees with them. As they consider their current employees integral to their growth vision, they develop their employees and present themselves as inspirational role models. In return, they expect strong organisational commitment from their employees. None of them expressed plans to grow their organizations through non-organic means such as partnerships, franchising, acquisitions and mergers.

Meta-Theme 2 – Women's leadership styles do not significantly differ from men's
Meta-Theme 2 is derived from these four themes; 1) Theme 3 – Leadership style is crucial for business success 2) Theme 6 – Women leaders reward followers 3) Theme 7 – Women leaders maintain people-oriented relationships, and 4) Theme 8 – Women leaders maintain task-oriented relationships. Women are vividly aware of the importance of leadership styles toward business success. They are not confined to a particular leadership style and display a wide variety similar to men's leadership styles. Democratic, autocratic, transactional and transformational leadership styles are all evident and vigorously practiced.

DISCUSSION

Organic growth is defined as growth based on internally developing, expanding and maximising the resources within a business (McKelvie et al., 2006). Previous studies have indicated that women's leadership of businesses is affected by cultural and social norms (Mitra, 2002). Women leaders' emphasis on organic growth in their businesses and their general concern and consideration towards their employees are aligned with classical sociological frameworks of traditional gender roles and 'feminine' notions (Burger, 2014; Macionis, 2014). In family units, women traditionally assume caring and nurturing roles. Similarly, women may consider business organizations as an extended or surrogate family unit, especially those that they started or "gave birth" to. As such, assuming a paternalistic caring and nurturing role towards their businesses and employees appear to be a natural alignment. There are no plans expressed to grow their businesses through partnerships, franchising, acquisitions and mergers; just as families are not normally 'grown' in this manner. Rather, families are customarily grown organically through the mutual development of all family members. In the case of those who are classified as Meta-Theme 1, these women leaders emphasize organic growth. Although it offers additional correlations between and insights into women's roles in family units and business organizations, this is anticipated and not considered surprising.

Women leaders who are categorised under Meta-Theme 2, their leadership styles do not significantly differ from men's. On the other hand, this is considered a fresh finding that comes with significant implications. Numerous studies have depicted and elaborated on differences in leadership styles based on gender. Men apparently veer towards autocratic, transactional and laisser-faire leadership styles; while women fall towards democratic and transformational leadership styles (Chakraborty & Serra, 2019; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Hejase et al., 2013; Kumasey et al., 2014; Latu et al., 2013; Silva & Mendes, 2017). This research reveals otherwise, women adopt a wide variety of leadership styles and were not easily stereotyped. Supposedly 'male' autocratic and transactional leadership styles emerged from a relatively small pool of women entrepreneurs. A significant proportion of three (3) out of eight (8) interviewees are autocratic or transactional leaders. Although these findings do not reflect absolute similarity in men's and women's leadership styles; it does strongly indicate that differences are less pronounced than previous studies have suggested. This might indicate that gender may not matter when it comes to the leadership styles of women entrepreneurs.

The occurrence of both Meta-Theme 1 (women leaders who emphasize organic growth), and Meta-Theme 2 (women's leadership styles that do not significantly differ from men's concurrently) suggests the ongoing existence of differences in men and women entrepreneurs' leadership styles. Generally, women leaders emphasize more organic growth of their businesses and the development of their employees. However, these differences become muted, subtle and immaterial when it comes to the leadership styles of men and women entrepreneurs. It

logically follows then that gender is not a major influencer of leadership styles among entrepreneurs. Other factors such as personality traits, nature of business, cultural and social norms, economic circumstances, and even religious values are postulated to potentially wield more influence; and hence, future scholarship on leadership styles should examine these areas.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In conclusion, women entrepreneurs emphasize organic growth in the businesses, and women entrepreneurs' leadership styles are similar to men's. In the context of the leadership styles of entrepreneurs, gender does not matter. This research on leadership styles of women entrepreneurs has yielded nine (9) emergent themes that were subsequently typified into two (2) meta-themes. Meta-Theme 1 (women leaders who emphasize organic growth) concurs with and consolidates extant literature on gender differences in personality, behaviour and roles. Meta-Theme 2 (women's leadership styles do not significantly differ from men's) is a fresh finding showing that gender is not a significant factor or influencer when it comes to the leadership styles of entrepreneurs.

In light of these findings, it is recommended that current literature on the purported differences in leadership styles of men and women entrepreneurs needs to be re-evaluated. Additionally, this research has shown that gender is not a material or deciding factor in determining the leadership styles of women entrepreneurs. As such, future scholarship on leadership styles and entrepreneurship development should go beyond gender.

DECLARATION STATEMENT

The lead author affirms that this manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study being reported; that no important aspects of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned (and, if relevant, registered) have been explained.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest in this study.

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