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Leadership Strategies of Successful Women-Owned Businesses in Cameroon

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Ntoko Henry Ajieh

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

Leadership Strategies of Successful Women-Owned Businesses in Cameroon

by

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MBA, Walden University, 2015

B.Sc., University of Buea, 2002

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Specialization: Leadership

Walden University

November 2021

Abstract

Lack of leadership skills in women-led businesses can result in high business failure rates. Women business owners who do not know how to improve their leadership skills could face difficulties succeeding in business. Grounded in the transformational leadership theory, the purpose of this multiple case study was to explore strategies that women business owners in the events planning business use to improve leadership skills to succeed in business beyond 5 years. The participants included five women in the events planning business in Cameroon, Central Africa, who successfully developed strategies to improve leadership skills to succeed in business beyond 5 years. Data were collected via semistructured interviews, publicly available documents, and observations of participants' business facilities. Yin's 5-step data analysis process was used to analyze data. Three themes emerged: embracing leadership attributes, acquiring leadership capabilities, and conceptualizing the playing field. The key recommendation from this study is for women business owners to attain leadership attributes such as engagement ability, accountability, courage, and humility through mentoring, followership, experience, and training. The implications for positive social change include the potential to improve business performance, improve job creation and standard of living, reduce crime, and increase tax revenue to the local government.

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Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my wife, Comfort. You have been my strength and support system throughout these years. Thank you for standing by me day and night, listening to my academic ambitions, and sacrificing your time and energy to see me through this journey. I want to thank you and tell the world that you are the best. For my kids, Malea, Jemimah, Kidege, and Henry, your desire of your father being called Doctor Henry has finally come true. Thank you, my Love, my Angel, my Peace, and my King, for inspiring me and giving me a reason to dream and achieve. To my father, Rev. Dr. Ntoko, thank you for giving me a reason to believe in myself and work hard to get here. Your constant advice, check, and encouragement was always timely. I also dedicate this work to my late mother, Malea. Thanks to my siblings Allen, Olive, Eric, Annette, and Edege, you guys were an incredible support team, and it is my life with you that has encouraged me to know that I can do anything if I put in the required effort. Lastly, I want to dedicate this work to my late younger brother, Ntoko Christian-Luke Sone. Little brother, you dreamed of earning a Doctorate one day and becoming a Professor. That dream was cut short when you left at just 14. Since then, I dreamed for you, and I dreamed for me. Today that dream has been achieved, and I am glad I can still put a smile on your face even when you are in heaven.

Acknowledgments

I want to express my sincere appreciation to my chair, Dr. James “Jim” Glenn, who has mentored and guided me throughout this academic journey with patience, encouragement and has inspired me to believe in myself. I want to extend my gratitude and appreciation to committee members, Dr. Greg Uche and Dr. Yvonne Doll, for their insightful comments, encouragement, and positive feedback that has enabled me to accomplish this academic milestone. I appreciate all the time, the effort you have put in to review my work to this level. Your perspectives helped shape my doctoral study and made me a better person in the scholarly world. To my fellow course mates, I accomplished my doctoral studies at Walden because of your everyday discussions and insights and the enormous ideas we discussed that have improved my person as a scholar. I appreciate my dear colleagues at work who created time to discuss and contribute to my studies. Thanks to participants of my study and scholars before me. Without them, I would not have been able to accomplish this great task.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The events planning business is a revenue and employment source in local economies (Heesterman 2016). Kim and Dombrosky (2016) said the creation and management of events attracts visitors who spend money, thereby boosting economic growth. However, some women entrepreneurs fail when managing business ventures (Yang & Triana, 2017). Considering the nature of the events planning business, business leaders need a specific skill set to remain successful. According to Almahry et al. (2018), women entrepreneurial ventures fail because of a lack of leadership skills.

Background of the Problem

Chinomona and Kwame (2015) stated that women own and manage approximately 50% of businesses in sub-Saharan Africa. The female entrepreneur's role is evident in terms of productivity, job creation, and economic growth. Despite the benefits of female entrepreneurship, women entrepreneurs still face a wide variety of challenges when starting and growing their own businesses (Bharthrajan, 2014). Goswami (2019) explained that besides access to capital, women entrepreneurs faced challenges in starting and running their own business because of a lack of leadership skills. In SMEs, 7% of female leaders held leadership positions within 3 to 5 years, and only 13% of female leaders have been in leadership positions for more than 10 years (Husain & Xiao, 2016). According to Yang and Triana (2017), women-led businesses have high failure rates. Yang and Triana (2017) said reasons why women-led businesses have high failure rates include low expectations about female entrepreneurs, and lack of confidence of entrepreneurs when pursuing business ventures.

In Africa, more women participate in business, with women leadership making significant contributions to economic development (Bahiru & Mengistu, 2018). Despite the socioeconomic benefits of women entrepreneurship, Kamberidou (2020) noted women's entrepreneurship and leadership potential still remained largely untapped. In this study, my aim was to explore strategies that women business owners in the events planning business use to improve leadership skills to succeed in business beyond 5 years. The study's findings and conclusion could contribute to the enhancement of business knowledge to improve leadership skills and provide a framework for Cameroonian women entrepreneurs to conduct business successfully and sustainably.

Problem and Purpose

Women's participation in business in Africa has increased, with women leadership significantly contributing to economic development by creating higher-performing businesses (Bahiru & Mengistu, 2018). The general business problem is that some owners in the events planning business have limited leadership skills precluding them from growing their businesses and competitively positioning and branding their businesses which leads to lost market share and profitability. The specific business problem is that some women business owners in the events planning business lack strategies to improve leadership skills to succeed in business beyond 5 years.

Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that women business owners in the events planning business use to improve leadership skills to succeed in business beyond 5 years. The targeted population was five women business owners in the events planning business in Cameroon, Central Africa

who have successfully developed the strategies needed to improve leadership skills to succeed in business beyond 5 years. In this study, my findings may contribute to the improvement of the local economy, which may lead to positive social change in terms of decreasing poverty in Cameroon and helping reduce unemployment.

Population and Sampling

The target population comprised of women business owners in the events planning business in Cameroon, Central Africa. I identified participants from public lists and event planning company directories in Cameroon. Snowball sampling resulted in five participants. Data sources included semistructured interview questions and company documents provided by participants.

Nature of the Study

For this study, I considered three different research methods: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. I selected the qualitative research method for the proposed study. Using the qualitative method enabled me to explore the complexities of behaviors and processes from the viewpoint of participants regarding a contemporary phenomenon. The qualitative research method is used as an inquiry tool for collecting firsthand accounts from study participants regarding naturally occurring phenomena (Bradshaw et al., 2017). Researchers use the qualitative method to explore phenomena by using interviews to access information (Busetto et al., 2020). By contrast, using the quantitative research method enables a researcher to explain a phenomenon based on numerical data through polls, questionnaires, and surveys, which are analyzed using mathematical methods (Apuke, 2017). The quantitative research method involves

characterizing variable characteristics and relationships through a range of statistical and graphical techniques (Saunders et al., 2016). In quantitative studies, inferential statistics are appropriate to test hypotheses about variable characteristics, relationships, or group differences (Schneider, 2015); therefore, the quantitative research methodology does not apply to this research. Employing mixed methods requires combining both quantitative and qualitative methods to examine and explore a phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2016). According to Schoonenboom and Johnson (2017), researchers apply mixed methods to blend qualitative data collected from participants' natural settings with quantitative hypothesis testing to examine variable characteristics, relationships, or group differences. Since a combination of participant experiences and numerical testing was not needed to explore and examine the phenomenon under study, the mixed methodology was also not suitable for this study.

When using a qualitative research method, a researcher can use narrative, ethnography, phenomenological, and case study designs (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I selected the qualitative case study design for this study. Using a multiple case study design allows the researcher to conduct in-depth inquiries regarding a phenomenon within its real life setting by using multiple sources of data, including interviews, documents, and observations (Saunders et al., 2016; Yin, 2018). I analyzed data from multiple cases to potentially strengthen the validity of the study. The single case study design was rejected for this study. The ethnographic design was rejected as the primary focus of ethnographic studies is to study the culture and social world of people (Saunders et al., 2016). When conducting phenomenological research, a researcher seeks to

understand the personal meanings of peoples' perceptions involving experiencing phenomena to understand the essence of experiences (Bliss, 2016; Marshal & Rossman, 2016). Therefore, the phenomenological design was inappropriate because it did not allow the use of multiple sources of data to explore a targeted population. In narrative research, the researcher collects data concerning participants' personal life story experiences (Ntinda, 2019). Therefore, narrative research was rejected as a design.

Research Question

What strategies do women business owners in the events planning business use to improve leadership skills to succeed in business beyond 5 years?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies have you used to develop leadership skills to succeed in the events planning business beyond 5 years?
2. How did you apply the strategies to develop your leadership skills to succeed in your events planning business?
3. How do you use your leadership skills to grow your event planning business?
4. How did you address the key challenges of implementing the strategies to improve your leadership skills?
5. What leadership skills do you find most effective in your event planning business?
6. What additional information would you like to share regarding strategies you use to improve your leadership skills to succeed in the events planning business?

Conceptual Framework

Downton developed the transformational leadership theory which serves as the conceptual framework for this study. Downton finalized the transformational leadership theory after exploring rebel leaders and leadership styles through case studies. Burns (1978) further developed the transformational leadership theory and described it as a relationship in which leaders and followers made each other advance to a higher level of moral and motivation. Bass (1985) defined transformational leadership as the effects a leader has on followers based on vision, trust, respect, and admiration from followers.

According to Northouse (2016), transformational leaders are people with a strong set of internal values and ideals, and they motivate others to act for the greater good rather than self-interest and focus on improving the performance of followers and developing them to their full potential. Transformational leadership has emerged as the most appropriate form for the management of SMEs because transformational leaders have proven to be more courageous, passionate, and visionary (Song et al., 2016). The theory of transformational leadership applied to this research because women are inclined to exhibit transformational leadership styles.

Operational Definitions

Entrepreneurial Leadership: Leadership potential in terms of entrepreneurial spirit (Esmer & Dayi, 2018).

Events Planning: Events planning is the process of using business management and organizational skills to envision, plan, and execute social and business events (Hard, 2018). The planning process involves (a) budgeting, (b) establishing timelines, (c)

selecting and reserving the event sites, (d) selecting speakers and keynotes, and (e) arranging for equipment and facilities.

Leadership Development: Leadership development is an inherently interpersonal and long-term process involving employees' progress (Reddy & Srinivasa, 2015).

Leadership development is about expanding organizational capacity (Aldulaimi, 2018).

Transactional Leadership: Transactional leadership is defined as exchanges between leaders and followers based on rewards for efforts and output of subordinates (Shah et al., 2015). Transactional leadership involves clarifying subordinates' responsibilities, rewarding them for meeting objectives, and addressing when subordinates fall short of achieving goals (Fabio et al., 2016).

Transformational Leadership: Transformational leadership is defined as the process where leaders improve followers' morality and motivation through vision, trust, respect, and admiration (Reza, 2019). Transformational leadership involves transforming followers into moral agents, which is essential for business sustainability.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are claims that a researcher anticipates to be true (Wargo, 2015). The first assumption was that selected participants were knowledgeable about the phenomenon being investigated. The second assumption was that participants provided honest answers to interview questions and were also willing to share documents from their organizations. The third assumption was that the specific sample size resulted in data saturation.

Limitations

Limitations are the study's potential weaknesses that may influence outcomes and conclusions of research (Ross & Zaidi, 2019). The first limitation was my bias, which could lead to ambiguous results. However, I was mindful of my preconceived beliefs on the study topic and used a self-reflexive process which involved examining one's assumptions and preconceptions and how these could affect the research process. By practicing self-reflection, researchers are able to legitimize and validate research procedures without personal bias (Mortari, 2015).

Delimitations

Delimitations are boundaries set by the researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I selected a case study design. I used the snowball sampling technique. I limited the sample size to five participants.

Significance of the Study

Findings from this study may be useful to women entrepreneurs because I explored strategies that women entrepreneurs use to develop and implement leadership skills that allow them to succeed in business beyond 5 years in Cameroon. Women entrepreneurs play an important role in the growth of developing countries; therefore, expanding women's entrepreneurial capabilities through education, motivation, and business experience could help improve their businesses and increase economic growth. In 2016, 163 million women started businesses across 74 economies worldwide, which shows the impact women entrepreneurs have in terms of providing jobs for their communities, income for their families, and goods and services that bring value (Jackson,

2017). Despite these potential benefits, women entrepreneurs still face challenges in terms of starting and growing their own businesses (Bharthrajan, 2014). New knowledge from this research may increase the number of businesses that succeed beyond 5 years, thereby increasing employment and income of local communities in Cameroon.

Contribution to Business Practice

In this study, I explored strategies that women business owners use to improve leadership skills to allow them to succeed in business beyond 5 years. Entrepreneurs with the right leadership skills influence people by inspiring, developing, and motivating them and ensuring the success of businesses, which is important as business success also ensures sustainability (Olutade et al., 2015). Small business women leaders can use knowledge and information gained from this study to improve their entrepreneurial and leadership styles to become successful.

In sub-Saharan Africa, adult female business bankruptcies are high (Jackson, 2017), which justifies the relevance of studying strategies to improve leadership skills for women to succeed in business beyond 5 years. If women business owners could distinguish among strategies to improve leadership skills in business, then small businesses may perform better. Implementing improved leadership skills in women-owned businesses may also be essential to enhance skills and abilities of entrepreneurs in order to compete successfully (Chatterjee & Das, 2016). Findings and conclusions from the study may also contribute to improved business practice by enhancing women business leaders' knowledge about how improving leadership skills can provide a

framework for sub-Saharan women entrepreneurs to conduct and sustain successful businesses.

Implications for Social Change

Findings from this study could potentially promote positive social change by providing the means of achieving leadership skills that women business leaders could use to meet entrepreneurial goals and business sustainability beyond 5 years. Findings and recommendations from this study may also affect social change since the improved leadership skills of women entrepreneurs could lead to business growth, thereby transforming families and communities through job creation, improved income, and poverty alleviation.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The literature review section includes a critical analysis and review of literature to establish the foundation of the study. Databases used to access information were ProQuest, Google Scholar, Google, and Google Books. The primary search terms I used in the search were *transformational leadership*, *women entrepreneurs*, *entrepreneurial skills*, *leadership strategies*, *small business sustainability*, and *events planning industry*. Table 1 includes results of database searches.

Table 1*Details of Literature Review by Year of Publication*

	5 Years or older	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total	Percentage of Total References
Books	3	1	2				6	4.2%
Peer Reviewed Articles	15	21	36	32	19		123	86%
Web Pages	1	2	5	5	1		14	9.8%
Total	19	22	43	37	18		143	100%

Searches from various databases yielded 143 possible sources, of which 86% were peer-reviewed, while 86.7% were published between 2016 and 2020. In total, 4.2% were books while 9.8% were from web pages. The literature review begins with an introduction, information on the transformational leadership theory, and application of literature to the research question. I continued by analyzing and synthesizing the

transformational leadership theory, which is the conceptual framework of this study, and further discussing Burns' and Bass' transformational leadership concepts. Also included in this review is a discussion regarding the four components of Bass' transformational leadership. I then address transactional leadership, which is a contrasting theory. Further, I explored a range of issues relating to the application of transformational leadership to business practices and women entrepreneurship, arguments against transformational leadership, and a discussion of entrepreneurial leaders and leadership skills. The literature review concludes with a brief overview of the event planning industry and common concerns relating to women entrepreneurs.

Transformational Leadership Theory

The transformational leadership theory is the conceptual framework for this study. Downton developed the transformational leadership theory. Downton (1973) said individual charisma influenced religious leaders. A leader's power emanates from charismatic behavior and inspiration. Transformational leadership is the reciprocal process of mobilizing economic, political, and other resources with specific values involving achieving goals for both leaders and followers (Mkheimer, 2018).

Burns' Transformational Leadership Theory

Burns (1978) described transformational leadership as the process where leaders could improve followers' morality and motivation through vision, trust, respect, and admiration. According to Jovanovic and Ciric (2016), the concept of transformational leadership involves transforming followers into moral agents, which is essential for

business sustainability. Burns' concept of transformational leadership style is suitable for leaders to facilitate organizational development and change.

Transformational leaders are change agents. Transformational leaders act as change agents to facilitate organizational change, and while doing so, they improve employees' morale and provide a clear vision to drive commitment (Veronica, 2017). Transformational leaders are charismatic in terms of obtaining needed support and commitment to bring change to meet organizational goals (Northouse, 2016). Transformational leaders thrive on bringing change by focusing on employees' values and mapping out clear visions for the future to remain successful.

The transformational leadership approach enables trust between leaders and followers. Jovanovic and Ciric (2016) said transformational leadership enables leaders to tap into the full potential of others and heighten morality through trust. Transactional leaders motivate their followers by offering rewards upon goal completion. By contrast, transformational leaders influence followers by promoting organizational entrepreneurship. Organizational leadership is a contributing factor to sustain business beyond 5 years of operation.

Bass' Transformational Leadership Theory

Bass' transformational leadership concept is the conceptual framework for this study. According to Tenggi et al. (2017), transformational leadership enables business leaders to focus on creating significant changes in people and organizations' lives by redesigning perceptions and values and changing expectations and aspirations of

employees. Bass' transformational approach is a holistic approach to leadership, making it suitable to study small business survival in the Sub-Saharan Africa region.

Bass made modifications to the existing transformational leadership theory, including ways to improve the success of transformational leaders. Leaders need to demonstrate authentic and healthy leadership styles to inspire employees (Choi et al., 2016). Bass' approach to leadership could help small business entrepreneurs to develop strategies to influence staff to drive productivity, which is essential for business longevity.

Transformational leaders motivate followers to do more than expected by raising followers' levels of consciousness regarding the importance and value of idealized goals. Transformational leaders enable followers to transcend their self-interests for the organization (Msila & Netshitangani, 2017; Northouse, 2016). Transactional leadership is a process in which the relationship between leader and follower depends on the simple exchange of a certain quantity of work for a fair price (Yildiz et al., 2014). Bass (1985) described transformational leadership as an approach in which leaders focus to accomplish a vision. Small business sustainability goes beyond social exchange and is associated with contingent rewards. Therefore, the transformational approach remained an appropriate leadership lens to explore strategies to sustain small businesses beyond 5 years of operation.

Individualized consideration involves leaders treating followers separately to ensure they receive needed attention to accomplish a task. Bass' transactional leadership module is suitable for an organizational culture that does not require change. Therefore,

the transformational leadership style is suitable for women entrepreneurs because it includes organizational changes involving creativity and innovation.

Four Components of Bass' Transformational Leadership

Bass identified four components of transformational leadership. The four components are charisma, inspiration, individual support, and intellectual stimulation (Bass, 1985). Women entrepreneurs with transformational leadership styles could exhibit each of the four components in different proportions to achieve desired organizational objectives and remain sustainable.

Charisma. Charisma is a Greek word meaning divine gift. According to Mittal (2015), a prolific leader is charismatic and possesses transformational leadership styles. Charismatic leaders generate pride, loyalty, trust, and faith in terms of achieving goals (Al-Malki & Juan, 2018; Nikezic et al., 2012). Northouse (2016) said charismatic leaders are competent and they articulate their ideological goals, presume high expectations from followers, and exhibit confidence in followers' abilities to meet these expectations. According to Sanner-Stiehr and Kueny (2017), charismatic leaders interact in a manner that enables them to enforce organizational goals, develop aspirations for each person in an organization, enlist teams, exhibit a caring culture, and provide followers with developmental opportunities. Acharya et al. (2018) said charismatic behaviors enable leaders to develop innovative ideas in order for followers to dedicate work for enhance productivity, leading to long-term business survival.

Inspiration. Enthusiasm and optimism are critical characteristics of inspirational leaders in order to motivate followers. Leaders need to inspire and motivate their

followers to fulfill ambitious goals and raise confidence among their followers (Megheirkouni & Jallo, 2018). Garton (2017) said inspirational leaders use their unique strengths to motivate individuals and teams to take on bold missions and hold them accountable for results. Garton found that inspirational leaders unlock higher performance potential from followers through empowerment, not command and control. Leaders need to convey messages with precision, power, and a sense of authority.

Individual Support. Individual support means counseling and teaching, individual development, inspirations, and careful listening to followers to achieve leadership's vision. Acharya et al. (2018) said leaders need to provide individualized support to bring new innovative ideas to sustain a business. Through the concept of idealized influence, women entrepreneurs in the events planning business could build trust with their followers and develop confidence in their leaders in order to attain goals.

Intellectual Stimulation. Transformational leaders enhance motivation and drive commitment through the intellectual stimulation of followers. Intellectual stimulation requires both tacit and explicit knowledge to remain effective (Acharya et al., 2018). Choi et al. (2016) said intellectual stimulation is about transformational leaders, challenging assumptions, and soliciting ideas from followers without criticizing. Leaders capable of intellectual stimulation bring out creativeness among followers by challenging the status quo and their own beliefs (Choi et al., 2016; Northouse, 2016). Al-Malki and Juan (2018) said intellectual stimulation enables followers to broaden their outlooks regarding specific matters and see organizational issues from different perspectives. The progress of any contemporary business is unattainable without adapting the

transformational leadership model in business practice (Reza, 2019). Women entrepreneurs could foster creativity and drive innovation to achieve organizational vision through the intellectual stimulation of their followers.

Transactional Leadership as a Contrasting Theory

Leadership style can vary depending on followers' level of motivation. Burns distinguished leadership styles as transformational or transactional, based on followers' motivation. Some transactional and transformational leadership tenets are similar, making the transactional approach suitable for studying small business sustainability.

Leaders can influence followers through honesty, fairness, responsibility, and reciprocal obligation using the transactional approach. Burns (1978) said transactional leadership is an exchange between leaders and followers based on rewards for efforts and output of subordinates. According to Fabio et al. (2016), transactional leadership involves clarifying subordinates' responsibilities, rewarding them for meeting objectives, and addressing when subordinates fall short of achieving goals. Though the transactional leadership approach was suitable, I chose transformational leadership in this study because exploring small business survival requires many facets of leadership that Burns did not cover via the transactional approach.

Transformational Leadership Theory and Business Practices

Transformational leadership is about inspiration and charisma. Su et al. (2019) claimed that transformational leaders encourage followers to fulfill group interests through charisma or idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration in achieving organizational goals. Transformational

leaders provide coaching, give meaningful feedback, and create competency (Northouse, 2016; Schielz, 2018). Al-Malki and Juan (2018) stated transformational leaders are energetic, enthusiastic, and opined. Al-Malki and Juan added that transformational leaders provide clear direction and permit followers to be part of the business organization. Cetin and Kinik (2017) concluded that transformational leadership creates a business climate of shared values. Stiehr and Kueny (2017) maintained that transformational leaders strongly predict job performance, employee engagement, and organizational commitment. Transformational leaders apply business development, and sustainability approaches in a much realistic fashion than leaders practicing other forms of leadership styles (Ghasabeh & Provitera, 2017). Therefore, considering the benefit in business practices, women entrepreneurs could adapt a transformational leadership style to provide clear direction and permit followers to become part of a larger mission to attain organizational goals.

Transformational leadership entails positive approaches and exemplary behaviors to drive results within an organization. According to Al-Malki and Juan (2018), transformational leaders inspire to set followers through self-achievement motivation. Given that a business's success depends on the leadership style (Arshad et al., 2016), transformational leadership emerged as the simplified approach for small and medium-sized enterprises (Song et al., 2017). Women entrepreneurs, through transformational leadership approach, could act as facilitators in the interaction between team members and leaders to improve performances.

Application of Transformational Leadership Theory to Women Entrepreneurship

Female transformational leaders may raise followers' motivation and morale. Transformational leaders affect peoples' emotions, values, ethics, standards, and long-term goals (Northouse, 2016). After researching transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles among women, According to Msila and Netshtangani (2017), female transformational leaders enhance team orientation and collaboration. Gipson et al. (2017) argued that female transformational leaders are better at developing and motivating others because they can build relationships and collaborate with teams. In their study, Silva and Mendis (2017) found that women transformational leaders successfully communicated organizational values, vision, and mission necessary for business continuity because of their aptitude for focusing on the development and mentoring of followers. Therefore, women entrepreneurs who exhibit transformational leadership styles can develop and mentor followers because of their ability to motivate people.

Women entrepreneurs in Africa may benefit from transformational leadership skills. Female leaders' transformational leadership style is effective in contemporary society because such a method appeared to be democratic and exhibit contingent reward behaviors (Northouse, 2016). Msila and Netshitangani (2017) stated that transformational female leaders positively engage with others to influence people's livelihood. Women in Africa could lead with distinction because they bring transformation, nourishment, and energy to enable followers to commit to the organization (Msila & Netshitangani, 2017). Women display a high rate of transformational leadership because they are less likely to

advocate for themselves, make demands on their behalf, and self-promote for professional success (Gipson et al., 2017). Women's participation in business in Africa has increased significantly towards creating high-performing businesses (Bahiru & Mengistu, 2018). The transformational leadership style is essential for female leaders in Africa because the leadership approach that transforms followers stimulates new ideas, creates a vision, and encourages people to rise to the challenge to mold a prosperous future for a business.

Arguments Against Transformational Leadership Theory

Few scholars criticized the transformational leadership style. Ghasabeh and Provitera (2017) researched building a productive culture to manage organizational knowledge using a transformational leadership framework. The transformational leadership approach granted an excess of power to the leaders who incentivize leaders' narcissism and hubris. Ghasabeh and Provitera (2017) explained that leaders alone could determine both the ends and the means of a collective action to which followers commit, enabling leaders to uphold control and power. Leonard and Gourgues (2019) raised another argument against transformational leadership by suggesting that leaders lack clarity. Leonard and Gourgues argued that because transformational leaders are big picture thinkers, they could easily overlook the details needed to thrive. Understanding both the pros and cons of leadership style enable leaders to decide to what extent they could apply transformation leadership style in business practices.

The transformational leadership theory closely relates to the leader-member exchange theory. The Leader-member exchange theory enables leaders to focus on a two-

way relationship between leaders and followers (Acharya et al., 2018). In the transformational leadership approach, Acharya et al. (2018) identified an in-group and out-group relationship between a leader and followers. According to Acharya et al., in-group followers receive more prominent obligations, more rewards, and more considerations than an out-group follower, who is out of the leader's cycle and receives lesser consideration and fewer rewards. Leonard (2019) noted that transformational leaders who create a leader-member relationship with followers tend to spend more time with those in the in-group than with those in the out-group, resulting in potential factions and resentment in the team affecting the overall success of the business.

Entrepreneurial Leadership

Entrepreneurial leadership is about combining leadership and entrepreneurship. In research involving entrepreneurial leadership theoretical framework, Esmer and Dayi (2018) explained that entrepreneurial leadership is a concept that blends leadership potential with the entrepreneurial spirit. Entrepreneurial leadership is a leadership style that integrates leadership and entrepreneurship. According to Cai et al. (2019), entrepreneurial leadership involves influencing and directing members to perform at their best to achieve organizational goals, including recognizing and exploiting entrepreneurial opportunities. Entrepreneurship and leadership are two concepts that have similarities between them (Harrison et al., 2017). In recent times, entrepreneurial leadership has become a new phenomenon in business management and is a leadership skill used by entrepreneurial leaders to create new products, new processes and expand opportunities in existing businesses (Esmer and Dayi, 2018). Ranjan (2018) defined entrepreneurial

leadership as an ability to manage available resources strategically for competitive advantage. According to Leitch and Volery (2017), entrepreneurial leadership is essential for entrepreneurial ventures for-profit and not-for-profit companies. Esmer and Dayi (2018) stated that entrepreneurial leadership involves several actions to gear business towards an individual, organizational, and market levels. At a personal level, the theory is a suitable framework to foster an individual's creativity. At an organizational level, the focus of entrepreneurial leadership is about promoting and managing innovation. Therefore, women entrepreneurs need to evaluate the business landscape in an organizational context to combine transformational leadership concepts with an innovative entrepreneurial mindset to exploit resources to remain competitive.

Entrepreneurial leadership is the ability to motivate, direct, and lead.

Entrepreneurial leadership involves an alliance between leadership and entrepreneurship in achieving strategic value creation (Harrison et al., 2017). Entrepreneurial leadership is a distinctive leadership style suitable for new and small businesses rather than large business organizations (Leitch & Volery, 2017). Sousa (2018) researched entrepreneurial skill development for team leaders and found that becoming a successful entrepreneur requires technical skills and the ability to exploit opportunities in the marketplace and maximize existing capabilities and resources for sustainable competitive advantage. Sousa added that an entrepreneur needs to be a leader who can conduct business efficiently, set the company's strategic direction, and achieve established operating targets, goals, and initiatives. Entrepreneurs could not achieve their goals in isolation but rely on followers. Therefore, Esmer and Dayi (2018) argued that business leaders need

leadership and entrepreneurship skills to align business ventures with followers' potential to attain long-term business success. Embracing entrepreneurial leadership could enable women entrepreneurs to maintain their competitiveness in a dynamic and challenging environment.

Entrepreneurs develop a vision, set goals for the business venture, and motivate employees to achieve them. Entrepreneurs are leaders, and leadership is the core component of the entrepreneurial process (Leitch & Volery, 2017). Leadership and entrepreneurship share common characteristics, including the ability to motivate employees, achieve financial targets, be creative, flexible, patient, persistent, and encourage risk-taking (Harrison et al., 2017). Entrepreneurial leaders need a mindset and skillset to help them identify, develop, and exploit new business opportunities (Fabio et al., 2016). In the context of hyper-competition, Leitch and Volery (2017) argued that successful entrepreneurial leaders are those who possess the ability to adapt to emerging business environments and embrace change. Entrepreneurial leadership could play a significant role in assisting women entrepreneurs in Africa to attain business longevity in start-up ventures and mature enterprises.

Entrepreneurial leaders possess multiple attributes needed for business success. Entrepreneurial leaders are team-oriented, committed to the values that strengthen the organizational culture, motivated, charismatic, and cognitive abilities allow them to evaluate opportunities, discover and create new ventures, and grow their businesses (Ranjan, 2018). Entrepreneurial leaders take risks to achieve goals (Wibowoa & Saptano, 2018). Entrepreneurial leadership is authentic, charismatic, and transformational because

such a leadership approach allows leaders to inspire followers to realize a shared vision (Leitch & Volery, 2019). According to Felix et al. (2018), entrepreneurial leaders make a difference in the success of a business venture because such leaders take calculated risks and recognize opportunities that others overlook. Entrepreneurial leaders have the potential to grow small businesses because they can take risks and exploit business opportunities.

Strategies for Developing Leadership Skills

Entrepreneurial leadership entails having both the entrepreneurial spirit and leadership skills. Entrepreneurial leadership is about stimulating creativity and innovation within a business while maximizing resources to attain business objectives. Influential entrepreneurial leaders are an organization's significant assets (Saiyed, 2019). Influential leaders can develop and operationalize the company's vision and develop the initiatives, targets, goals, and processes to motivate others to achieve desired goals (Khoshhal & Guraya, 2016). Leadership involves the process of influencing others to accomplish shared objectives (Leitch & Volery, 2017). Entrepreneurial leaders are authentic, charismatic, and lead by developing a vision and setting goals for their business ventures. Therefore, investment in leadership development at all levels in business is a necessity.

Arguments exist among researchers whether leadership is an inherent ability or an acquired skill. In an exploratory article on the myth of born leadership, Steinhoff (2015) asserted that some leaders are naturally born; however, very little literature supports this concept. In their study on the role of genetics in leadership, Boermia et al. (2017) found that leadership had a substantial genetic basis. According to Boermia et al., genetics

contributed moderately to the personality traits of leaders. Therefore, genetics was a necessary component of leadership traits. According to Khan et al. (2016), who extensively studied the works of Carlyle on leadership in 1847, leaders were born, not made, and only those endowed with heroic potential could ever become leaders. Ghasabeh and Provitera (2017) claimed that transformational leadership aligns with the concept noted in traits theory, whose authors believe leaders are born, not made. Naturally born leaders demonstrate dramatic initiative to prioritize tasks and effectively influence others to execute the task (Steinhoff, 2015). Though argument exists between inherent abilities or learned leadership capabilities, literature findings revealed undisputed leadership benefits in attaining long-term business sustainability.

Some scholars argued that leadership is an acquired skill. Khoshhal and Guraya (2016) stated that leadership is more of an experience and expertise that leaders learn to develop over time. Jones and York asserted that leaders are not born with leadership skills; instead, leadership skills are learned behaviors and gained through on-the-job experience, coaching, mentoring, and formal skills development. Steinhoff (2015) opined that innate leadership characteristics within an individual could manifest only when developed or cultivated. Despite the argument on whether leadership is a from birth or acquired, successful organizational leadership teams spend their time and resources creating a culture whereby employees learn practical leadership skills through day-to-day interactions and coaching to remain productive, leading to business continuity.

Leadership development is a process. Aldulaimi (2018) emphasized the importance of distinguishing between leader development and leadership development.

According to Aldulaimi, leader development expands upon an individual's capacity, while leadership development is about expanding organizational capacity. Burbaugh and Kaufman (2017) stated that leadership development enhances the ability of individuals, groups, and organizations through tacit and explicit knowledge necessary for business sustainability. Therefore, leadership development is an inherently interpersonal and long-term process focusing on employees' progress.

Training could enhance leadership capabilities. Mourao (2018) contended that leadership development constitutes a broad set of training and development programs and is an essential dimension of transformational leadership. Asrar-al-Haq and Anwar (2018) posited the impact of good leadership development in business includes job satisfaction, employee motivation, organizational commitment, psychological well-being of employees, and low employee turnover. Leadership development through training is about increasing an individual's capacity to integrate within an organization's system and perform to meet organizational goals (Aldulaimi, 2018), which is essential for business continuity. Women business leaders could benefit from training and development, and benefits include job satisfaction, engagement, and career certainty.

The business operating environment is rapidly changing, and leaders need a different and broader set of skills to increase their business acumen and adaptability. The level of leadership capability could increase when organizations support leadership development (Aldulaimi, 2018). One of the leadership team's responsibilities is to initiate and manage the changes necessary to adapt to changing circumstances (Jones & York, 2016). Therefore, leaders need to develop appropriate leadership skills through ongoing

learning (Ghasabeh & Provitera, 2017; Johnson, 2018), followership (Johnson, 2018), mentorship (Irby et al., 2017; Montgomery, 2017), and networking (Burbaugh & Kaufman, 2017). Therefore, entrepreneurs could succeed in a business venture by acquiring the needed leadership development skills.

Leadership Learning

Learning through experience could improve leadership capabilities. Learning to generate new ideas and knowledge requires changing existing behaviors (Ghasabeh & Provitera, 2017). In the viewpoint of Sartori et al. (2018), lifelong learning was essential for personal and professional development. After conducting a study on lifelong learning and professional development, Carlson (2016) asserted that lifelong learning was to fundamentally rethink learning, teaching, and education to change mindsets. Carlson also believed that through lifelong learning, individuals could develop communication skills, self-directed learning skills, the ability to function as an agent of change, and the ability to share good practices and business knowledge. To develop useful leadership capabilities, managers need to acquire ongoing knowledge and competencies through adaptation, improvement, growth, and development (Johnson, 2018). Learning is a continuing process to improve efficiency in business operations to remain productive and sustainable.

Leadership learning can be formal or informal. The leadership skills development approach includes informal learning either by creating multidisciplinary teams that enrich the exchanges within groups or through leaders inspiring subordinates through experimental learning involving observations (Mourao, 2018). After researching the

significance of informal (on the job) learning, Choonara et al. (2017) found that workplace-based learning is an informal learning approach in which an individual could respond to changing circumstances in the workplace through practice. Through informal learning at the workplace, people could acquire knowledge and skills embedded in business practice (Amelia et al., 2015). According to Metwally et al. (2019), contemporary organizational leaders recognize business knowledge as essential for business success. The small business owners in the event planning business should focus on leadership development by shaping the learning culture to develop those leadership skills that will enable the sustainment of their business beyond 5 years.

Fellowship

The dynamic process of fellowship enables both the leaders and followers to influence each other. Joubert and Feldman (2017) described followership as the capability of a leader to provide content-specific and context-specific information to followers, enabling them to meet organizational purposes. According to Chhotray et al. (2018), leaders need to empower followers by involving them in decision-making. Leaders show followers how their work contributes positively to organizational processes, inform them of organizational changes, and show them the support they need to address workplace challenges. Alwazzan (2017) stated that fellowship sustains the relationship between leadership and followership. Followership could result in an individual finding a coach who dedicates the individual's strengths and corrects their weaknesses (Gipson et al., 2017). The fellowship idea is to enhance follower's skillset

necessary to improve work efficiency and productivity required for business survival and growth.

Followership is an engagement process to improve organizational success. According to Gatti et al. (2017), followership is a precondition for organizational success. Followership is complementary to leadership because followers could influence leaders through decision-making, which could improve a leader's competencies (Sotiroska et al., 2019). Blair and Bligh (2018) concluded that the quality of the relationship between followers and leaders is essential in improving team participation. Participation could enable followers to frequently demonstrate leadership skills through their willingness to voice innovative or divergent ideas. Creative ideas could result in developing new products and services or enhance the process for business longevity 5 years and beyond.

Mentorship

Mentorship is an effective method of transferring entrepreneurial knowledge, leadership skills, and attributes. Moore and Wang (2017) described mentorship as a socially based learning process between mentors and mentees. Montgomery (2017) viewed mentorship as one of the significant factors in skills development and career advancement, leading to performance improvement. Mentoring is a training program as mentorship enables professional and personal development (Irby et al., 2017). Kunaka and Moos (2019) emphasized the importance of mentorship in developing leadership skills. Through mentorship, entrepreneurs and small business owners could build leadership skills to help them grow sustainable businesses.

Mentoring can take many forms. McBride et al. (2017) noted that mentoring could be in the way of supporting, training, counseling, coaching, advising, protecting, and sponsoring. Mentorship could increase trust and loyalty, leading to positive interpersonal relationships (Irby et al., 2017). Through mentorship, individuals could cultivate practical communication skills, healthy relationships, critical thinking skills, self-sufficiency, and a deep understanding of professional identity (Irby et al., 2017). Montgomery (2017) believed that mentorship could improve people's self-efficiency, efficacy, and competency. Hund et al. (2018) identified important aspects of active mentorship, including listening, respect, excellent communication, patience, and honesty. Small business owners in the event planning business could provide appropriate mentoring to employees to enhance trust and, in return, obtain their commitment to organizational success beyond 5 years.

Networking

Networking is an action to create and manage a social network system that provides access to resources for everyone's mutual benefit. Cullen-Lester and Woehler (2016) noted that the ideal network system is open and diverse. To provide access to various learning resources, Burbaugh and Kaugman (2017) believed that networking is essential for relationship development. Hartviksen et al. (2018) concluded that learning networks resulted in a leadership capacity through harnessing a shared consciousness of purpose, understanding, trust, and respect for everyone in the network. Brown (2019) asserted that networking could result in an avenue through which people could collaborate to build new leadership skills. Turkina (2017) argued that networking fosters

business growth by generating knowledge spillovers. Therefore, networking could help leaders to acquire new knowledge over time for business growth and sustainability.

In the final analysis, developing leadership skills is a process. Investing in leadership development is essential because leaders influence others to accomplish organizational goals. Leadership abilities have a substantive genetic basis as some believe that leaders are born, not made. Born leaders are skillful at influencing others to execute tasks that could result in long-term business success and sustainability. Leadership skills are attainable through learning, followership, mentorship, coaching, and networking. In particular, small business owners remain critical in developing African economies; therefore, leadership development strategies are essential to sustain small businesses beyond 5 years.

Small Business Entrepreneurship

In the last 5 years, different scholars defined entrepreneurship in different ways. Richard Canilton first established the term entrepreneurship in 1732 to describe an individual who is willing to carry out forms of arbitrage involving the financial risk of a new venture (Almahry et al., 2018). Researchers and policymakers viewed entrepreneurship as one of the main drivers of economic growth and development (Meyer, 2018; Serea & Hamdan, 2018). Omoruyi et al. (2017) explained that entrepreneurship is an individual's ability to create or discover an opportunity and utilize the opportunity for benefits. Efstathios et al. (2018) defined entrepreneurship as the process of combining public and private resources to exploit economic, social, or cultural opportunities in an ever-changing environment to create value for business and social

communities. Other scholars defined entrepreneurship as developing new products or distribution systems for new or existing markets (Meyer, 2018). According to Ranjan (2018), entrepreneurship is an individual starting a new business, which has not been explored and remains sustainable in the long run. Considering the broad definition and applicability of entrepreneurship, women business leaders need to view entrepreneurship in their own business context and decide its applicability to remain sustainable.

Entrepreneurship is about an entrepreneur willing to take a risk. Syed et al. (2019) agreed with other authors that entrepreneurs are risk-takers, and anyone's decision to become an entrepreneur largely depends on their attitude towards risk-taking. Meyer (2018) argued that by taking calculated risks, entrepreneurs step out of their comfort zones, expand their horizons, and as a result, build their businesses. Serea and Hamdan (2018) stated that innovation and risk-taking relate to entrepreneurship. However, small business owners need to be careful while taking a risk, and calculated risk with a designed contingency plan needs to be intact for business continuity.

Innovation may require challenging the status quo, whereas risk-taking requires involvement in activities for positive outcomes. Sanchez-Garcia et al. (2018) posited that entrepreneurship is an activity that includes all kinds of ventures and is increasing worldwide. Successful entrepreneurs take risks, make strategic decisions, and remain focused on those ventures. Ranjan (2018) asserted that successful entrepreneurs bestow distinct characteristics such as intuition, desire for achievement, readiness to handle risks, and ability to survive in turbulent markets. Esmer and Dayi (2018) identified successful entrepreneurial characteristics, including self-confidence, determination, and

communication. Additional characteristics include openness to new ideas, positive thinking, flexibility, and risk-taking (Esmer & Dayi, 2018). Entrepreneurs' characters define their risk appetite and innovative capabilities necessary for business continuity.

Entrepreneurship emerged as an appropriate form for managing skills for small and medium-sized businesses. Efstathios et al. (2018) opined those creative entrepreneurs act on opportunities to grasp competitive advantage and provide the basis for innovation and business growth. Ritter and Mostert (2017) contended that innovative thinking is one of the core competencies that allow entrepreneurs to deal with opportunities and challenges in a complex and fast-changing world. One attribute of transformational leadership is entrepreneurship consisting of a robust set of internal values and ideals to motivate others to act for the greater good rather than self-interest, which could develop followers to their full potential to enhance productivity.

Entrepreneurship is the driving power behind economic growth, employment, and social welfare. Entrepreneurs contribute to poverty alleviation in sub-Saharan Africa (Omoruyi et al., 2017). Radzi et al. (2017) perceived small businesses as engines for a country's economy and opined that developing small business capacity is an excellent strategy to broaden GDP growth. Mesut (2017) postulated that entrepreneurship is an underlying force of economic development in the 20th century and remained an essential economic growth component. Doran et al. (2018) reasoned those entrepreneurs affect economic growth through innovation relating to goods, services, and processes. African women entrepreneurs could contribute to national economic growth by inspiring, developing, and motivating followers to remain productive and profitable.

In sub-Saharan Africa, small businesses are an essential component of the national economy. Small businesses account for more than 90% of all firms, and small businesses are a primary source of jobs and income (St-Pierre et al., 2015). In Cameroon, small business consists of 6 to 20 people and revenue up to \$165,000 (Molonge, 2016). Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) constitute a bulk of Cameroon enterprises. SMEs are the main engine of economic growth, representing about 36% of the country's GDP (Mbonteh, 2017). SMEs employ about 61% of the working population (Tsambou & Kamga, 2017). According to the Ministry of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, Social Economy, and Handicraft (2018), SMEs in Cameroon accounted for about 95% of the country's economy, and about 30% of the government taxes come from SMEs. In the final analysis, successful small business entrepreneurs challenge the status quo, make strategic decisions, have an intrinsic desire for achievement, and are capable of handling risk, thereby acting as a catalyst for national economic growth. Therefore, developing small business capacity is an excellent strategy to broaden a country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth.

Women Entrepreneurship

Women entrepreneurs play a significant role around the world. Li et al. (2019) stated that women entrepreneurship varies around the world. According to Yadav and Unni (2016), women entrepreneurship started rising in the early 1970s. Sucheta and Usha (2017) stated woman entrepreneurs have sought opportunities, possessed a strong vision and commercial understanding, and had an appetite to take risks. Bouzekraoui and Ferhane (2017) found that women entrepreneurs in Morocco established businesses from

the ground up. Women assumed risk, managed financials, carried out social responsibility, and participated in the enterprise's management (Bouzekraoui & Ferhane, 2017). Some female entrepreneurs own more than 50% of a business in India and employed more than 50% of female employees (Meyer, 2018). Considering the role of women entrepreneurs in the economy, enhancing their leadership capabilities will further grow small businesses.

Women become entrepreneurs because of their desire to be independent, flexible, and economically self-reliant. In 2016, 163 million women started businesses across the globe (Jackson, 2017). Kwame (2015) argued that women are involved in entrepreneurship in developing countries out of necessity and not as a norm because of the weak economy. Sadera et al. (2019) stated that women become entrepreneurs because business ownership provides them autonomy and freedom to make decisions. According to Garg and Agarwal (2017), entrepreneurship enables women to become self-sufficient, self-dependent, and create their own social identity. Chinomona and Maziriri (2015) asserted that female entrepreneurship is increasing because women started to take control of their personal and professional lives and exerted willingness to eradicate poverty and reduce unemployment. Interest in female entrepreneurship around the globe necessitates further exploration of strategies necessary for female entrepreneurs to remain sustainable in their business ventures.

In Africa, female entrepreneurship significantly played a decisive role in poverty alleviation and socio-economic development. Boateng (2018) opined those women entrepreneurs are catalysts of economic growth, and entrepreneurs contributed to positive

economic trends. According to the World Bank, women's empowerment through entrepreneurship is fundamental in achieving continued sustainable economic development (Meyer, 2018). Panda (2018) posited that entrepreneurship enables self-expression and fulfillment for women. For this reason, women entrepreneurs, especially in developing countries, created a positive impact on the overall household welfare and consumption.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the entrepreneurial landscape is a plethora of businesses started by women. Twenty-six percent of adult females engage in early entrepreneurial activity (Jackson, 2017). However, in a study conducted on the antecedents of women leadership in SMEs, Husain and Xiao (2016) found that only 7% of female leaders held leadership positions for 3 to 5 years, and only 13% of females were in leadership positions for more than ten years. According to Meyer and Mostert (2016), although African women's full potential as business owners remained unleashed, female-owned businesses were increasingly growing in the continent. Developing women's leadership skills could unleash the full potential of women entrepreneurs, which could impact the growth of women-owned businesses in the continent.

Barriers Encountered by Women Entrepreneurs

Women entrepreneurs often face constraints in their business ventures. Several researchers affirmed that barriers to women entrepreneurship include access to capital, networking, training, and work-family life balance (Bouzekraoui & Ferhane, 2017). According to Garg and Agarwal (2017), women entrepreneurs suffer financial constraints in obtaining credit from banks. Garg and Agarwal added that women entrepreneurs find

difficulties in capital expansion, finding appropriate financial resources, and collateral bank loans. Lack of collateral limits accesses to formal capital (Li. et al., 2019). Goswami (2019) noted besides access to capital, women entrepreneurs find challenges in starting and running their own business because of a lack of managerial skills, inadequate education, and family ties. Women entrepreneurs who lack such skills may too often find it challenging to provide the leadership required to develop and sustain a business beyond 5 years.

Lack of Managerial Skills. Entrepreneurship is an appropriate skill for the management of small and medium-sized businesses. Ruth (2018) contended that not every female entrepreneur has a healthy support system for starting a business. Panda (2018) found that women lacked formal business and entrepreneurial training, understanding of business practices, managerial capital, marketing skills, and hiring and retaining talent. Sadera et al. (2019) stated in a study finding that though women entrepreneurs were good in oral communication, they lacked the necessary managerial skills to promote and establish their businesses. In Sub-Saharan Africa, considering small businesses are the main engine of economic growth, empowering women to own businesses with managerial skills could further strengthen the economy through job creation.

Inadequate Education. Education is a significant contributor to business success. Women entrepreneurs lack the necessary knowledge to develop their own business because of technological challenges and localization (Amador-Ruiz & Briones-Penalver, 2017). According to Chinomona and Maziriri (2015), many women in developing

countries are illiterate, live in poor communities, and are ill-equipped financially. Women are also not familiar with the business landscape and do not know where to access resources (Iwu & Nxopo, 2015). Women could learn the necessary entrepreneurial skills and knowledge to acquire resources to run a sustainable business.

Family Ties. Many entrepreneurial women in developing countries need to balance family responsibilities with business activities. Rai (2018) researched the issues and challenges of women entrepreneurs in India. Rai claimed that women did not invest adequate time in business to fulfill their family responsibilities, which hindered their business growth. Iwa and Nxopo (2015) added that these women often worked part-time to meet family responsibilities. Meyer (2018) stated that in many cultures, women who own businesses are responsible for home tasks and parenting, restricting them from devoting needed time for business, thereby hindering business sustainability and growth. Kwame, Asare-Yeboah et al. (2018) found that most of the female entrepreneurs involved in the study noted that their family responsibilities affected their ability to spend the needed time for the business. Learning skills such as work-life balance could help women entrepreneurs in charge of the family household responsibilities.

Advantages of Women Entrepreneurship

Women entrepreneurs contribute significantly to the global economy. According to Ferri et al. (2018), women entrepreneurs play an essential role in developing countries; therefore, developing their leadership capabilities could improve work productivity and profitability. Women's participation in entrepreneurship is a compulsory subject as women play an essential role in strengthening prosperity and improving general welfare

(Li et al., 2018; Toros & Altinay, 2018). Hechavarria et al. (2018) concluded that women's entrepreneurship is the driver of economic growth through job creation and innovation. In the international arena, women entrepreneurs significantly impact poverty reduction and overall economic development (Li et al., 2019). Women entrepreneurs' success in business is imperative for overall societal well-being.

Women are change agents within the social and economic environments as they contribute significantly to economic development. Over 163 million women worldwide are involved in new entrepreneurial ventures, and women entrepreneurs act as symbolic role models or mentors, setting examples and inspiring aspiring young females to become entrepreneurs (Byrne et al., 2018). The productivity of women entrepreneurs could result in poverty alleviation through employment opportunities, business continuity, and growth.

To be successful, women entrepreneurs need some distinctive character attributes. These character attributes include self-motivation, a moderate risk propensity, self-control, pro-activity, high tolerance for stress, and self-efficiency (Toros & Altinay, 2018). Batool and Ullah (2017) stated that women should be involved in entrepreneurship for the prosperity of a nation. Chinomona and Kwame (2015) noted that women own and manage approximately 50% of businesses in sub-Saharan Africa. According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2017) report, an estimated 163 million women started new businesses in 2016, out of which 27% of the women were from sub-Saharan Africa. The role of the female entrepreneur is evident in research and development, job creation, productivity, and new business ventures. Considering women entrepreneurs contribute

towards economic growth and employment in developed, emerging, and developing economies, their business sustainability in the event planning business became the primary focus of this study.

Women's Entrepreneurial Failures

The business failure topic has been contemporary entrepreneurial research among scholars. According to Yang and Triana (2017), women-led businesses have high failure rates. Atsan (2016) stated entrepreneurial failure occurs when an entrepreneur underperforms and fails to achieve desired targets. Ene et al. (2019) warned that the intense desire to succeed may generate anxiety, causing an entrepreneur to deviate from taking risks needed for business sustainability. Almahry et al. (2018) noted women entrepreneurs fail because of a lack of technical skills, business management skills, and personal entrepreneurial skills. After researching women entrepreneurship, Yadav and Unni (2016) concluded that though women belong to half of the human resources in developing countries, women in these countries lack access to resources to start entrepreneurial ventures. As a result of these disadvantages, women-led businesses could have high failure rates. However, women entrepreneurs could learn from their failures and use past experiences to improve their preparedness for the next business opportunities.

Past business mistakes enable leaders to move towards progress. False and irrational beliefs result in misconceptions that entrepreneurship is valuable only when successful (Ene et al., 2019). Entrepreneurs could benefit from their past failures, and therefore, in entrepreneurship, failure could result in spotting and exploiting new

opportunities (Atsan, 2016). Lattacher and Wdowiak (2018) argued that entrepreneurial failure is a valuable learning experience, which could manifest in improved business practices, self-development, and a change of attitude towards risk. Therefore, entrepreneurship is embracing failure and learning from mistakes to improve their preparedness for subsequent activities.

In the final analysis, women become entrepreneurs for different reasons, including a desire to become economically independent, and business ownership provides them autonomy and freedom to make decisions. Women entrepreneurship plays a significant role in socio-economic development and poverty alleviation. Therefore, developing their leadership skills could unleash the full potential of women entrepreneurs, leading to more women-owned businesses, creating jobs, and driving economic growth.

Events Planning Industry

The International Institute of Events Management (IIEM) in 2018 defined events planning as the process of managing a project such as a meeting, convention, tradeshow, ceremonies, parties, or conventions. The planning process involves (a) budgeting, (b) establishing timelines, (c) selecting and reserving the event sites, (d) acquiring permits, and planning food. Additional activities in the planning process are (a) coordinating transportation, (b) developing themes, (c) arranging for activities, (d) selecting speakers and keynotes, and (e) arranging for equipment and facilities. Hard (2018) defined event planning as the process of using business management and organizational skills to envision, plan, and execute social and business events. Some event planners select speakers and keynotes, manage risk, and develop contingency plans.

Considering the nature of the event planning business, leaders need a specific skill set to remain successful. Events planning expert Hard (2018) stated that the fundamental skills necessary for good event planners are verbal and written communication skills, organizational time management, project management, and multitasking. Hard added that self-starter, team player, staff management, and interpersonal skills are equally important in event planning. Tow (2019) opined that event planners are notorious for multitasking because of their many talents, including creativity, adaptability, negotiation skills, and attention to detail. According to Hard, the event planner's primary responsibilities involve ensuring proper setup, managing venue-related tasks and budgets. Women entrepreneurs need to understand the complexity of their events planning business and then acquire the necessary leadership skill sets to solve problems to remain sustainable.

The event planning business has positive ramifications for local economies. Kim and Dombrosky (2016) emphasized the importance of event planning when they postulated that the creation and management of events attract visitors who spend money, thereby boosting economic growth. According to Heesterman (2016), event planning is a revenue source and employment in local economies. Event planners use local transportation systems, conference halls, and local artisans to sell goods during events. Events planners are positive social change agents because they revive the local people's cultural and social life, build community pride, provide a sense of identity, increase community participation, and enhance the image of the destination (Essays, 2018). The role of women event planners is essential in local economies as women are equally

creative and innovative compared to their male counterparts in carryout event planning activities.

In the final analysis, the events planning process involves budgeting, setting timelines, transportation, developing themes, arranging transport, organizing logistics, and arranging for equipment and facilities. Event planners possess different skills, which include organization, multitasking, creativity, and adaptability. The positive impact of the events planning a business to local economies includes; job creation, serving as positive social change agents because they promote the culture and social life of the people and enhance the image of the destination.

Transition

The objective of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that women business owners in the events planning business use to improve leadership skills to succeed in business beyond 5 years. This section stated the problem statement, discussed study methodology, design, study assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. Section 1 ends with an extensive review of the literature relating to the conceptual framework and study phenomenon. In Section 2, I focused on my approach to the study. In section 2, I detailed my role as the researcher, stated participants selection criteria, the research method and design, the population and sampling, and ethical research.

Furthermore, in section 3, I also explained the data collection, organization, and analysis process. Section 3 concluded with a discussion on reliability and validity procedures for the study. In Section 3, I presented the research findings and the themes women business owners identified as their strategies to improve leadership skills to

succeed in business beyond 5 years. This study included a discussion of the findings, implications for social change, recommendations for action, suggestions for further study, and my reflections on the research process.

Section 2: The Project

Section 2 includes the purpose statement, role of the researcher, research participants, research method and design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments, and techniques for data analysis and organization. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that women owners in the events planning business use to improve leadership skills to succeed in business beyond 5 years. Section 2 includes a justification for selecting the population and sampling methods and a discussion of the ethical research protocol. Section 2 includes a discussion on how I mitigated bias and established the study's reliability and validity.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that women business owners in the events planning business use to improve leadership skills to succeed in business beyond 5 years. The targeted population was five women owners in the events planning business in Cameroon, Central Africa who have successfully developed strategies needed to improve leadership skills to succeed in business beyond 5 years. In this study, my findings may contribute to the improvement of local economies, which may lead to positive social change in terms of decreasing poverty in Cameroon and helping reduce unemployment.

Role of the Researcher

A researcher's role is important for credible study findings. According to Yin (2019), qualitative researchers are responsible for formulating a research question to address a phenomenon, identify participants, collect credible data, reach data saturation

for reliable results, analyze data, and present the study findings. As an independent qualitative researcher, I collected data from multiple sources for the purposes of methodological triangulation in this study. The primary data source was semistructured interview questions, and the secondary data source was company documents provided by participants. By collecting and analyzing data, themes and common meanings occurred that enabled me to answer the research question. It was also my responsibility to protect the rights of participants. Therefore, in this qualitative study, I was the primary data collection instrument.

Considering my decade-long experience in small business, I explored strategies applicable in a current business context to sustain small businesses beyond 5 years. To extract rich and credible data, I identified participants who met research criteria. I did not have any previous relationships with participants or vested interests in their businesses.

A good case study researcher should strive for the highest ethical standards when doing research, and this includes avoiding plagiarism and falsification of information, being honest, avoiding deception, accepting responsibility for one's work, and gaining participants' consent to be part of research (Yin, 2019). To maintain ethical standards, I complied with the protocols of the Belmont Report. The Belmont Report contains three principles to help researchers conduct ethical research: respect, beneficence, and justice. According to Bromley et al. (2015), respect for an individual is about allowing participants to exhibit their own choices and opinions, beneficence means ethically treating participants, and justice is about providing value to participants for their

cooperation. Per the Walden Internal Review Board (IRB), I abided by the principles of Belmont Report to maintain the highest level of ethical standard.

I was mindful of personal bias during data collection and analysis. Researchers can reduce personal bias through bracketing techniques (Sorsa et al., 2015). Sutton and Austin (2015) said the bracketing technique enables researchers to be aware of preconceived assumptions about the research topic to avoid predispositions during the research process. Therefore, I applied the bracketing technique to minimize personal bias during the research. Mitigating bias could convince readers that findings are credible.

Qualitative researchers can strengthen the reliability of interviews by using an interview protocol. An interview protocol consists of standard procedures while collecting data. Marshall and Rossman (2016) said following the same interview protocol with all participants enable researchers to collect rich data to understand the study phenomenon. I used the same interview protocol with all participants to maintain consistency, avoid personal bias, and collect responses (see Appendix B).

Participants

Study credibility depends on participants' knowledge and experiences relating to the study phenomenon (Cornin, 2014). As an independent qualitative researcher, I set participant selection criteria to meet the research objective. All participants had a minimum of 5 years of experience in the events planning business, sustained their business beyond 5 years, and were female business entrepreneurs in Cameroon.

The challenge to many researchers is finding eligible participants and gaining access. My role as a researcher was to identify participants who met the study criteria and

then reach them. LinkedIn is a social media platform that allows people to list their professional and educational backgrounds, and LinkedIn Prime members are eligible to contact LinkedIn users. Therefore, I signed up for LinkedIn Prime and used its platform as one of the tools to identify and reach participants.

One study limitation was that some participants had reservations about answering interview questions. Maddox (2018) said building working relationships with participants is imperative in terms of obtaining full cooperation from them during interviews. I met with participants during preinterviews to establish trust, explain the consent form, answer their questions, and build rapport.

The researcher's role is to establish a working relationship involving trust, credibility, and friendliness with participants so they are more open and relaxed about data they are willing to provide (Saunders et al., 2016). To establish trust with each participant, I used their offices or any location of their choice. I also gained participants' trust and confidence by disclosing to them the primary purpose of the research. I gained access to participants through personal contacts, LinkedIn, and visiting the departments of small and medium-size industries to obtain a list of female events planners in Cameroon.

After conducting interviews, I transcribed recordings of each participant into a Word document and emailed transcribed interviews to each of them. After I received feedback, I applied changes as requested by participants. Then, I analyzed transcribed interviews, presented data to participants for interpretation, and provided them with a summary of findings.

Research Method and Design

Research Method

The research methodology enables researchers to explore a phenomenon in an empirical, objective, and analytical manner (Patel & Patel, 2019). For this study, I considered three different research methods: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. I used the qualitative research method to explore strategies that women owners in events planning business use to improve leadership skills to succeed in business beyond 5 years. A qualitative approach is suitable to understand a phenomenon through participants' perspectives (Barnham, 2015). To extract rich data from participants, the qualitative approach involves asking *how* and *why* questions (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Researchers use the qualitative method to explore phenomena by using interviews to access information (Busetto et al., 2020). This method was best for answering the research question because the qualitative method enables a fuller understanding of people's expressed experiences and actions.

By contrast, the quantitative method is suitable for testing hypotheses (Park & Park, 2016). The quantitative approach involves analyzing numerical data to establish relationships between variables to test hypotheses (Yin, 2017). It allows researchers to use inferential statistics to test hypotheses involving variables characteristics, relationships, and groups differences (Schneider, 2015). The quantitative method did not apply to this research because I did not formulate any hypotheses or construct statistical models. Furthermore, quantitative research involves larger samples; it is not in depth and

does not consider or emphasize personal experiences of participants and how those experiences may impact the study phenomenon (Shidur, 2017).

Mixed methods combines both qualitative and quantitative aspects of research (Arris et al., 2015). Problems may arise when interpreting conflicting results, which may take more time and resources (Molina-Azorin, 2016). The mixed research method was not suitable for this study because I did not formulate any hypotheses. The qualitative approach was suitable compared to mixed methods

Research Design

A qualitative researcher may choose narrative, ethnography, phenomenological, or case study designs (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The selected research design depends on characteristics and nature of the inquiry (Yin, 2017). A case study design is suitable when a researcher cannot manipulate the behavior of those involved in the study and participants' experiences are relevant to the study, or when there is no clear boundary between the study phenomenon and context (Ebneyamini & Moghadam, 2018; Harrison et al., 2017). Using the case study design supports in-depth inquiries into a phenomenon within its real-life setting and allows researchers to ask participants what, when, and why questions (Saunders et al., 2016; Yin, 2018). In a case study, researchers investigate a phenomenon in a specific setting (Dasgupta, 2015). Using a case study design may enable researchers to focus on phenomena under study and make further improvements to understand the study inquiry (Reddy, 2015). Therefore, I selected a multiple case study design rather than other research designs. The multiple case study design was most appropriate for exploring strategies that women owners in events planning businesses use

to improve leadership skills to succeed in business beyond 5 years. A case study design is ideal when a holistic in-depth investigation is needed to capture the phenomenon's complexity (Ebneyamini & Moghadam, 2018). I rejected the single case study design, phenomenological design, ethnographic design, and narrative design.

Researchers use a single case study design for theory building, especially if the case is particularly revelatory or when it offers an opportunity for unusual research access (Mariotto et al., 2014). The single case study design is not suitable for this study. The phenomenological research design involves researchers seeking to understand the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by those individuals (Bliss, 2016; Hickman, 2015; Neubauer et al., 2019). The phenomenological design was not appropriate for this study because I did not seek to explore the personal meanings of peoples' perceptions involving experiencing phenomena to understand the essence of experiences.

In narrative design research, researchers collect data using a storytelling format (Benson, 2014). By using the narrative research design, researchers collect data involving participants' life stories, including biographies, autobiographies, or life histories (Zurlo & Cautela, 2014). The narrative design was not appropriate for this study because the purpose of this study was not to tell stories.

Researchers use the ethnographic research design to study people's cultures and social worlds (Cincotta, 2015; Saunders et al., 2016; Yin, 2014). Ethnographers gather data via observations, interviews, and documentaries to produce detailed and comprehensive accounts of social phenomena (Morgan-Trimmer & Wood, 2016). The

ethnographic research design is not applicable for this study because the purpose of this study was not to focus on participants' cultural or social ways of life.

In this study, I did not collect data using a storytelling format in a cultural setting or try to understand a phenomenon via participants' lived experiences. I understood the phenomenon via participants' interpretations using semistructured interview questions, and therefore a case study design was appropriate for this study.

Data saturation is the point at which any additional data results in little or no new information or suggested themes (Saunders et al., 2016). Semistructured interview questions and probing followup questions enable researchers to extract rich data to ensure data saturation (Rooddehghan et al., 2015). I reached data saturation by asking articulated semistructured questions in interview settings, asking followup questions, and allocating up to 90 minutes for each interview. Shaw (2020) suggested allocating 45 to 90 minutes for a qualitative case study interview so that researchers do not feel time constraints and may continue to ask followup questions until the data saturation point. I used snowball sampling to select participants who provided information-rich data needed for this study.

Population and Sampling

The snowball sampling technique is a suitable technique for a qualitative study (Stringer, 2014). In this study, the population consisted of 5 women who have a minimum of 5 years of experience in the events planning business, have successfully sustained their events planning business beyond 5 years, and are female business entrepreneurs who started their events planning business. Women in the events planning business but who were not in leadership positions and had not successfully run their

businesses beyond 5 years were not appropriate participants for this study. Fusch and Ness (2015) noted that a researcher could identify knowledgeable participants capable of providing rich data (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Sampling

A researcher may choose the study sample from a larger population. Fusch and Ness (2015) stated that a larger sample size does not improve data saturation in a qualitative case study. Data saturation occurs when no new theme emerges in participants' responses (Hancock et al., 2016). Khan (2014) cautioned researchers to select the right sample size to minimize cost and time. Mason (2015) suggested a 5 to 20 person sample size for case study design to reach data saturation.

While conducting qualitative research, a well-prepared researcher must build a quick rapport with the participants, listen attentively and respectfully to information shared by the participants, and acknowledge the sensitive nature of the conversation during the interview (Dejonckheere & Vuaghn, 2018). Before the interview, I familiarized myself with the interview guide to avoid regular reference to the guide, which could have been a distraction and could affect the flow of the discussions. According to Jamshed (2014), semistructured interviews usually last about 30 minutes to no more than an hour. Though the interview duration depended on the questions and the participants' responses, I ensured that the interviews did not last more than an hour.

Data Saturation and Sampling

According to Yin (2017), a qualitative researcher could obtain data saturation through carefully articulated interview questions, follow-up questions, and

methodological triangulation. In this study, I reached data saturation with a sample size of 5 participants by asking semistructured interview questions, probing questions, observations, and reviewing company documents. Researchers use data saturation to verify and ensure that the additional collected data adds no new information or suggests no new themes (Saunders et al., 2016; Vasileiou et al., 2018). I used the snowball sampling technique to identify research participants to attain the requisite number of participants. Snowball sampling is a technique in which a researcher may know one or two participants but then relies on those participants to assist in locating other study participants who fulfill the qualifications defined for the targeted population (McCombes, 2019). I achieved data saturation by selecting and interviewing participants until no new relevant themes about the phenomena under investigation emerged.

Ethical Research

Informed consent is about participants acknowledging the research terms and conditions and knowing their rights as research participants. According to Robert et al. (2014), and informed consent form ensures that participants are aware of research guidelines, commit to abide by the guidelines, and know their right to withdraw from the study. I sent the consent form to participants attached to the invitation email to decide whether to participate or not. During the pre-interview, I went over the consent form, answered any participants' questions, and obtained a wet signature to ensure their consent to participate.

Obtaining informed consent is about voluntary participation without pressure or intimidation (Raj et al., 2018). The consent form (see appendix A) included a provision

that stated the participants could withdraw from the study at any time. Moreover, the consent form also stated there would be no compensation for participation; however, participants will get a 2-3 pages summary of the study findings. The Walden IRB approval number for this study is 07-13-21-0472471.

To ensure the ethical protection of the participants, I followed the three principles noted in the Belmont Report: respect for individuals, beneficence, and justice. Informed consent is an essential component of ethical research. The consent form includes confidentiality provision, which is a certificate to assure ethical protection of participants (Beskow et al., 2014). According to Wolf et al. (2015), confidentiality assurance enhances trust, resulting in cooperation from the participants. To maintain confidentiality, I did not use participants' real names or their real places of work. Using pseudonyms protects participants' identities and builds trust (Onwuegbuzie & Weinbaum, 2017). I used codes like P1 to P5 as designators for each participant. I will store data securely for 5 years to protect participants' confidentiality. After 5 years of study completion, I will delete the electronic data and shred the paper data as Blumenthal et al. (2015) recommended. A researcher should allow participants to withdraw from the study at any point, even after initially consenting to participate (Sim & Waterfield, 2019). In this study, participants could withdraw by calling or email, but none withdrew from this study.

Data Collection Instruments

In a qualitative study, a researcher is the primary data collection instrument (Yin, 2017). Barret and Twycross (2018) posited that an interview is preferred to collect data in

a qualitative study. The primary data collection instrument is semistructured interview questions (McIntosh & Morch, 2015). In this study, I used semistructured, open-ended interview questions to capture participants' responses. The reliability of the data collection instrument relied on the interview protocol. According to Sooniste et al. (2015), the interview protocol enables a researcher to maintain consistency and ensure data validity.

During the interview protocol, I discussed the consent form (see appendix A) and interview procedures. The interview protocol (see appendix B) was the same for all participants. A researcher is responsible for ensuring the reliability and validity of data collection instruments. The reliability of data collection instruments means that the study will result in similar results if repeated in the future (Yin, 2017). The well-designed interview protocol and expert review of interview questions ensured the reliability of data collection instruments (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I conducted member checking to confirm the validity of data collection instruments. The data collection instrument validity means the study is credible (Li, 2016). The member checking is about participants reviewing their interview responses to ensure their accuracy and add new information, if any (Thirusha & Neil, 2018).

Data Collection Technique

In this study, the data collection techniques I used involved methodological triangulation. Methodological triangulation is about collecting data from multiple sources so that a researcher has rich data to understand the study phenomenon (Varaki et al., 2015). The data collection techniques included collecting primary data from

semistructured interviews and secondary data from company documents provided by the participants. I abided by the interview protocol (see appendix B) and asked follow-up questions to extract rich data during the interview. While doing so, I took notes, and at the end of each interview, I collected secondary data that I requested during the preinterview. The secondary data included charts, figures, tables, and other documents that participants found relevant to the study topic.

The advantage of semistructured interviews is that the researcher is in control and can ask articulated questions deemed relevant to the study phenomenon (Dejonckere & Vaughn, 2018). The disadvantage of semistructured interviews is that participants may find probing questions embarrassing and awkward, resulting in biased responses (Oltmann, 2016). The advantage of company documents is that a researcher will get insights into the company's strategic approach to policies and issues relating to the study phenomenon (Bretschneider et al., 2017). The disadvantage of using company documents is that the researcher has no control over the usefulness of the information found in the documents provided, leading to bias (Hancock et al., 2016).

The consent form included a provision for member checking after data analysis. Member checking is the participant reviewing a researcher's interpretation of the participant's responses (Thomas, 2016). Member checking process strengthens study credibility (Birt et al., 2016). After data analysis, I met with each participant to review my interpretation of their responses, and I also requested the participants add information they deemed relevant to the study phenomenon.

Data Organization Technique

Research constitutes the magnitude of data, and having access to data with ease requires proper data organization. During the literature review, I organized data in an Excel file, separating the peer-reviewed documents by publication date and document type. The qualitative data includes observations, handwritten notes, and interview responses in audio and video recordings (Yin, 2018). The qualitative data in this study came from company documents and interviews. I scanned the company documents provided by the participants and stored them in designated files on my computer. I kept interview data in my computer audio file and later transferred the transcript to the Nvivo platform for thematic analysis. A researcher uses the Nvivo software to assist the researcher in coding and developing themes (Onwuegbuzie & Weinbaum, 2017).

According to Wolf et al. (2015), a researcher needs to maintain data confidentiality to protect participants' privacy. Walden IRB requirement is that a researcher stores the raw data securely for 5 years. I have secured electronic data in the password-protected hard drive and paper data in a locked file cabinet. After 5 years of study completion, I will delete the electronic data and shred the paper data.

Data Analysis

After collecting data, a researcher commences the data analysis process. The data analysis process requires consistency, attention to detail, and accuracy (Watkins, 2017). A data analysis technique requires a researcher to analyze the study phenomenon from the collected data to answer the central research question (Belotto, 2018). Therefore, a researcher needs to identify appropriate data analysis techniques. Yin's (2017) five-step

data analysis process involves (a) compiling data, (b) disassembling data, (c) reassembling data, (d) interpreting data, and (e) concluding. I engaged Yin's sequential process of analyzing data by analyzing all primary data collected during the semistructured interviews, company documents, observations, and from the company websites.

I imported the audio interview transcripts and scanned secondary data to the Nvivo platform during a data compiling process. Then, I coded the data. Coding is essential in the qualitative data analysis process to identify themes (Linnerberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Yin (2015) recommended disassembling the compiled data into smaller words and phrases, narrowing it down to specific topics to avoid redundancy. During the reassembling process, I grouped information in similar categories in Nvivo. A researcher puts together codes to develop main themes (Yin, 2018).

The interpretation process is manual to identify subthemes that a researcher could list under the main theme. Manual data interpretation gives a researcher an understanding of context, situations, events, and actions related to the phenomenon of interest before analyzing the data for concepts and themes (Ravindran, 2019). Methodological triangulation enhances study credibility (Mishra & Rasundram, 2017). Furthermore, I conducted a thematic analysis of study findings and compared them with recently published articles to identify similarities and variations in identified themes. The thematic analysis involves cross-examining study findings within the literature under the umbrella of the conceptual framework (Teruel et al., 2016). I reviewed recently published articles in which the authors have used similar conceptual frameworks as this study and

compared how their findings correlated to the study findings to ensure the study results were current and relevant. The last step of Yin's data analysis process involves presenting the study findings. After cross-examining the study findings with the information found in the current literature, I wrote the study findings as significant themes, which reflected strategies to sustain small events planning business beyond 5 years of operation.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Reliability of data interpretation ensures study dependability. The reliability of data interpretation depends on the subjective judgment of the researcher, decision consistency, and the quality of the data (Harvey, 2015). To ensure subjective judgment without bias during interpretation, I used bracketing techniques. I analyzed data using the same conceptual framework, which is transformational leadership theory. To ensure data quality, I verified the accuracy of interview transcripts, verified secondary data, coding process, and handwritten notes from the interview as recommended by Nandi and Platt (2017). Reliability of data interpretation will result in the same results if the study repeats under similar conditions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Validity

The validity of study findings depends on the sources used to collect data and the accuracy of the data interpretation process (Bengtsson, 2016). The three criteria to measure study validity are credibility, conformability, and transferability (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Ensuring study validity means that the researcher is taking approaches

to confirm that the findings are credible, extends data objectivity and neutrality, and the results are transferable to a broader population (Middleton, 2020).

Credibility

To ensure credibility, I conducted member checking after data interpretation. The member checking is about participants reviewing their interview responses to ensure accuracy and adding new information, if any (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Collecting data from multiple sources ensures study credibility (Mandal, 2018). I also gathered data from interviews and company documents provided by the participants.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to an interpretation of participants' responses, not the researcher's viewpoint (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To ensure confirmability, I (a) maintained a reflexive journal in regards to activities and my interests, (b) was mindful of personal bias during the interpretation, and (c) audited interpretations to confirm the finding represents' participants' responses. Confirmability is reflective of the trustworthiness of study findings (Mandal, 2018).

Transferability

Transferability refers to generalizing the study findings to the settings outside of the study population (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To ensure transferability, I explained the rationale for the study methodology and design, the characteristics of the study population, and the type of data collected. According to Mandal (2018), transferability acts as a check for external validity because a researcher provides a detailed description

of the study so that readers can make an informed decision regarding the applicability of findings to their context.

Data Saturation

Data saturation is essential for study validity (Yin, 2017). Data saturation means that the researcher has collected enough information for data analysis, and any additional information will be redundant and does not add value to the study (Hancock et al., 2016). To ensure data saturation, I (a) recruited knowledgeable participants through snowball sampling, (b) was mindful of sample size, (c) carefully articulated interview questions, (d) asked follow-up and probing questions, and (e) collected data from multiple sources.

Transition and Summary

Section 2 contains information regarding the research approach used to find answers to the central research question. Section 2 includes information about my role, participants' role, research methodology and design, population, sample size, and ethical approaches. Furthermore, Section 2 includes a data collection, data organization, and data analysis and concludes with a discussion of study reliability and validity approaches. In Section 3, I will present the study findings. Section 3 includes themes, study contributions to business practices and social change, and recommendations.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The objective of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that women business owners in the events planning business use to improve leadership skills to succeed in business beyond 5 years. Though the government of Cameroon has adopted policies to improve gender equality, many women find themselves in disadvantaged positions. About 7% of female leaders in SMEs held leadership positions for 3 to 5 years, and 13% of female leaders have been in leadership positions for more than 10 years (Husain & Xiao, 2016). Goswami (2019) said women entrepreneurs struggle in business because of a lack of leadership skills.

According to participants, business leaders experience functional and adaptive challenges. Discussing leadership capabilities to address both functional and adaptive difficulties is beyond the scope of this research. In this study, I focused on leadership strategies to address adaptive challenges. Participants noted that business owners could address functional challenges using the existing know-how approach found in literature and practices in the events industry. According to participants, adaptive challenges have no known solutions, as each problem is distinct and unique. Study findings revealed improving leadership capabilities to address adaptive challenges could extend beyond the events planning business.

Presentation of the Findings

Sources of data were semi-structured interviews and company documents provided by participants. Yin's five-step data analysis process resulted in three emerging

themes. The identified themes are a) embracing leadership attributes, b) acquiring leadership capabilities, and c) conceptualizing the playing field (see Table 2).

Table 2

Frequency of Themes

Themes	<i>N</i>	Incidence
Embracing Leadership Attributes	63	38%
Acquiring Leadership Capabilities	57	35%
Conceptualizing the Playing Field	44	27%

Theme 1: Embracing Leadership Attributes

Subthemes related to embracing leadership attributes are understanding leadership, leadership attributes, and training and education. P1 said that people are often confused between the roles of managers and leaders. P1 posited not all managers are leaders; however, all good leaders possess management skills. When asked to differentiate managers and leaders, P1 said managers follow routines using established guidelines. By contrast, in addition to following established guidelines, leaders are capable of adapting and managing unfamiliar situations to solve problems or accomplish tasks. P1 said a manager in a large department store doing routine procedures does not necessarily exhibit leadership capabilities; however, the same manager controlling chaos and saving the lives of employees and customers during a robbery is acting in a leadership capacity. Participants said that to adjust and manage unfamiliar situations,

female business leaders need skills, tools, and experiences, and these are attainable leadership attributes. P2 said leadership attributes are not limited to CEOs or executives, and anyone can exhibit them by asking questions that no one is asking during group meetings, presenting ideas, and helping others at work

All participants said people acquire leadership attributes through experiences, training, and education. According to participants, the four pillars or attributes of leadership are engagement, accountability, courage, and humility. P1 said to succeed, women business owners in the events planning business need to engage people to do their job right and excel. P3 said engagement makes subordinates or followers feel included as team players, resulting in innovation. P2 said, “We engage people by sharing information, providing needed support, and investing in the team through training, development, and advancement.” P5 said social interactions improve employee engagement at work. According to P5, company leaders have an added responsibility to support social interactions outside work. P5 presented an agenda highlighting routine outdoor dining and social activities outside of work. P5 said, “Leaders could gain trust by entering into other people’s experiences, listening, understanding, and showing empathy and care.”

Participants noted various strategies to improve employees’ engagement. P2 said better pay and job promotion improve employees’ job engagement. P2 presented the training and personnel development manual. The document revealed that employees exceeding expectations during annual performance reviews could get promoted to higher positions. P1 said leaders engage their employees through centralized access to tools,

knowledge sharing, and a digital workforce. P3 stated that leaders engage employees by making them part of decision-making. According to P3, employees' involvement can influence managerial actions and enable leaders to capture ideas and solve logistical challenges during events planning processes. P2 said, "Engagement can take many forms, and we engage employees through job enrichment, delegating authority in a project, profit sharing, and flexible work schedule."

P2, P4, and P5 said accountability is about building confidence, acting responsibly, and getting the job done. P5 stated leaders need to hold people accountable to complete tasks within an allocated time frame when assigning tasks. P4 suggested to not do tasks for followers but rather expect them to immerse themselves in the process and get it done. All participants noted having a culture of accountability. P2 said events planning constitutes different types of activities, and each of these activities requires some degree of accountability, and therefore, leaders should be vigilant. P2 said leaders need to have explicit knowledge of the business process to address individual and organizational accountability.

Courage, another leadership attribute, is about stepping out of comfort zones, taking calculated risks, embracing diversity, acting as role models, and rejecting stereotypes. According to P3, courage is about acting on convictions and principles while taking a risk. P3 said courage involves enlisting and inspiring trust. P3 said courage is intentional behavior when seeking goals. According to P3, business leaders carry out weekly training and group exercises to help employees develop courage. P3 said business

leaders take leadership roles, volunteer, and take initiatives during strategy development to demonstrate courage.

P3 said courage involves telling the truth and transparency. According to P3, employees have a voice, and leaders respect employees' voices. According to P5, in their company, leaders watch their language to reveal attitudes and emphasize solutions to rather than dwell on problems. P5 company leaders receive training regarding how to prepare emotionally and mentally to take risks. P5 said company leaders routinely bring outside consultants to train employees regarding goal setting, risk-taking, building communication skills, and strategic and contingency planning.

P3 and P4 said humility was an essential leadership attribute. According to participants, humility is about admitting mistakes and being open to criticism. Participants agreed that all leaders make mistakes. According to P3, humility is a willingness to learn from others. According to P4, humility is about sharing weaknesses and limitations with followers and listening. According to P3, company leaders receive training regarding developing humility, and this constitutes being open to surroundings, transparency, and openness. P3 said leaders need to admit mistakes.

All human beings make mistakes, but acknowledging mistakes, fixing them, and avoiding similar future mistakes shows humility. P3 suggested that leaders need to welcome criticism, give employees freedom, listen, and show respect. P2 also emphasized providing supportive work environments and tools to do the job. P2 said performance improves when people see their leaders looking out for their best interests. P2 presented a document showing company policies that require employees to participate

in weekly meetings with human resources personnel to discuss reviews of immediate supervisors. According to P2, meetings enable business leaders to evaluate supervisors' performances and understand working relationships between leaders and followers.

P4 suggested accepting ambiguity and added leaders should not be over-controlling, and they need to know when to take charge and when to let go or delegate. P5 suggested keeping journals for self-reflection. P5 said writing journals could enhance leaders' perceptions so they can learn from their actions and provide opportunities for improvement. P5 noted humility is about avoiding micro-managing people because a humble leader accepts that well-trained and skilled people are capable of doing their jobs.

Connecting Theme 1 to the Literature

Theme 1 is about learning and adapting leadership attributes. Participants noted that leaders need to apply leadership attributes to business environments and embrace change. Leitch and Volery (2017) said successful women adaptive leaders adapt to emerging business environments and embrace change. Participants stated that skills, tools, and experiences are attainable. Jones and York (2016) said leadership skills acquired through learned behaviors include on-the-job experience, coaching, mentoring, and formal skills development. Participants stated leaders with the right leadership attributes build confidence and take calculated risks, which are essential for long-term business sustainability. Serea and Hamdan (2018) said risk-taking depends on leadership attributes and suggested taking calculated risks with a designed contingency plan for business continuity. According to participants, leadership attributes enable leaders to relate to followers in order to gain trust and meet organizational objectives.

Understanding leadership and acquiring leadership attributes requires adequate training and education, which could help leaders gain followers' trust, leading to good working relationships.

Connecting Theme 1 to the Conceptual Framework

Participants defined prominent leadership attributes that were applicable to business practices: engagement, accountability, courage, and humility. Participants noted female business owners could acquire leadership attributes either through experience, training, or education. Bass (1985) said transformational leaders are charismatic, adaptive, and people-oriented. Cetin and Kinik (2017) said leaders following transformational styles create a business climate of shared values to meet organizational objectives. Creating a business climate involving shared values requires developing adequate transformational leadership skills through training and education.

Theme 2: Acquiring Leadership Capabilities

Subthemes include adaptive capabilities, avoiding stereotypes and biases, and leadership development plans. According to P3, simply possessing these qualities does not make one a leader. P3 added one needs these qualities to be a good husband or a wife or raise a teenage child, but what matters in the business arena is how one applies these qualities to solve problems.

Leaders need to ask themselves if they can complete tasks, solve problems, and meet challenges. If not, leaders need to have the capacity to understand what went wrong and what is required to rectify the wrong. P5 stated leaders need to consider three problems: one's strength related to leadership attributes, tools or media to implement

these attributes, and the nature of the problem itself. P5 said the nature of the problem or challenge determines the type of leadership attributes needed. All participants stated that hiring managers conduct thorough vetting processes to ensure applicants have required knowledge and experiences that are relevant to jobs.

According to P2, to acquire leadership capabilities, one must possess uniqueness and belongingness. P2 said, "You must possess both." P2 said adaptive leaders have pleasing personalities that intrigue followers. According to P2, to implement a leader's plan in the workplace, in the beginning, a leader needs a first follower whom they have to embrace as an equal. P2 said with first followers, leaders can attract more people to follow, and as more people join, others who are watching and observing also join the team to avoid being outcasts.

All participants noted that leadership capabilities require an adaptive mindset because adaptive challenges have no established solutions. P2 added that teams are becoming more diverse in nationalism, ethnicity, or religion, and not all operate in the same standards. P2 posited that a positive outlook from a leader embraces diversity and builds an inclusive culture where everyone operates or functions at the same standard. Therefore, according to P2, adaptive leaders do not alienate people, are open to ideas, and make people feel included. P2 presented the employee handbook, and the document revealed company culture and employees' fringe benefits, pay, vacations, and work-life balance. All participants noted work-life balance and good benefits are essential so that employees have no mental reservations and are happy at work to do their job well.

Participants stated everyone has some unconscious bias: positive, negative, accurate, or wrong. Participants noted that bias could result from stereotypes, which could distort leaders and misrepresent reality. Participants provided various strategies their company leaders deploy to minimize biases. P1 suggested critical self-reflection and pushing back personal bias, and asking others to do the same in the organization. P2 opined the need to be vocal on diversity as such action would amplify the message when done repeatedly by the leaders and others within the business.

P3 noted that leaders need to understand the root causes, forms of bias, and the frequency of occurrences in teams and organizations. P4 said that to minimize stereotypes and bias, and the leaders have embraced diversity. P4 said diversity is attainable by leaders connecting with people in small talks to get to know them well. P5 contended holding employees accountable for their judgment and empowering their willpower. P4 suggested giving others who are different a chance to be part of decision-making. P5 urged mentoring people while P3 noted partnering with champions of diversity to learn from them.

All participants discussed using a personal leadership development plan as everyone could be adaptive leaders. When asked to elaborate on becoming an adaptive leader, P2 said that business owners need to identify leaders from the present time or the past that they admire. These leaders could be from the workplace or personal life. Then P2 suggested searching the leader's attributes (engagement, accountability, courage, and humility) that one admires and try understanding how these leaders applied these attributes in their work or life. P4 stated business leaders have a leadership vision. P2 said

that business leaders need to understand the kind of leaders they want to be and do something different by embracing leadership attributes at work or in life. P2 added that business leaders need to visualize leadership vision for today and the future. P2 said that employees get a personal journal book to reflect their activities. P2 presented a copy of the journal book. The document revealed calendars, notes, famous quotes, and daily exercises to build leadership capabilities. P2 said those journals are for employees to keep, and they do not need to share with anyone.

All participants stated that business owners need feasible short-term and long-term goals. According to P2, business leaders need to familiarize themselves with a task they plan to accomplish to meet their short-term and long goals. P2 suggested writing a statement regarding the long-term goals and post it on the office wall as a constant reminder of what one plans to accomplish. P2 further suggested deciding what leaders need to do this week, next week, and a month to meet their short-term goal. P3 also stated long-term planning by determining the foundation leaders need to set this week, next three or six months to meet their long-term goal. All participants suggested to self-reflect personal biases to ensure it does not interject in their tasks. Then participants commentated to integrate four pillars of leadership: engagement, accountability, courage, and humility in daily actions.

Connecting Theme 2 to the Literature

Participants noted person-job fit is essential. Qin et al. (2018) suggested seeking an intelligent way involving human judgment to match talent qualification to the job requirement. According to the participants, female leaders could unconsciously inject

bias based on certain stereotypes and, therefore, suggested embracing critical self-reflection by maintaining personal journals. Outdated stereotypes based on social norms could be detrimental to women's career and personal life (UN Women 2019). Participants suggested maintaining a personal development plan to focus on business goals, vision, and improving performance. Following a personal development plan and seeking feedback from others could help leaders set goals, reflect on performance, and enhance career progression (Casey, 2021). Irby et al. (2017) stated training and mentoring enable individuals to cultivate practical communication skills, healthy relationships, critical thinking skills, self-sufficiency, and a deep understanding of professional identity. Participants noted developing leadership capabilities such as managing daily tasks, adapting to change, taking risks, and solving problems through training, mentorship, and fellowship.

Connecting Theme 2 to the Conceptual Framework

In theme 2, participants supported an adaptive mindset, minimizing stereotypes and biases to remain sustainable. Moreover, participants suggested building good working relations, trust, and morality. Jovanovic and Ciric (2016), who supported Burns' transformational leadership approach, believed that transformational leadership enables leaders to obtain higher-order values and heighten morality through trust. Participants noted that possessing leadership attributes and acquiring tools does not result in good leadership, but leaders manage the challenges to accomplish tasks. Therefore, participants suggested embracing an adaptive mindset to bring needed change to accomplish a task. Perreault et al. (2015) reasoned that Bass's transformational leadership

concept developed in 1985 as part of a full range of leadership theories applicable to the broader business landscape to bring organizational change. Adaptive capabilities are about addressing the unknown, which require a leader to have a broader knowledge of the business landscape and operating environment. A transformational leadership style is a full range of leadership that could help a leader adapt suitable solutions to address adaptive challenges.

Theme 3: Conceptualizing the Playing Field

The subthemes under theme 3 are adaptive challenges, past experiences, and understanding the business landscape. According to the participants, leadership fails because people do not realize the true essence of leadership. Therefore, participants described leadership from their perspective and stated that leadership is not about personal abilities, neither are the tools and instruments used in practicing leadership. P1 said, “Though these are important, leadership is meeting tough challenges to get work done.” P2 explained leadership with an example of pottery. P2 noted that a ceramist uses hands (action) and tools to build a sculpture in pottery. P2 added that action resembles experience and knowledge in a business context, and tools could be leadership attributes such as accountability, courage, engagement, and humility. According to P2, action alone does not define leadership, nor do the tools, but building sculpture. Therefore, according to p2, “Leadership is how a ceramist handles adaptive challenges to build that fine piece of sculpture.”

Participants said that the challenges that lie within the task make work difficult. In business, leaders face adaptive challenges and functional challenges. According to P5,

functional challenges rest within people of authority, and they use existing know-how processes or techniques to solve problems. P5 provided an example to differentiate between functional challenges and adaptive changes. P5 said that if the network is down in the data center, it could be a functional challenge, which leaders could fix it using existing know-how techniques. According to P5, a manager needs to know the difference between functional and adaptive challenges to be a good leader. According to P5, adaptive challenges lie within people and require a new methodology and approach to business. P5 provided an example of addressing adaptive challenges. In example, P5 said that the adaptive challenges could be when a company decides to update the entire technological infrastructure with new software and devices and assisting people to give up something they find comfortable and adjust to change.

P4 said that functional challenges could be solved through managerial expertise, whereas adaptive challenges require building capacities. P5 noted that the management team routinely carries live and virtual classes to improve technical and problem-solving skills and develop employees' adaptive mindsets. According to P4, employees receive training on influencing followers, peers, and supervisors by identifying the business challenges and developing solutions. P2 and P1 noted training in change management through human resource personnel and change experts on organizational design, organizational justice, and emotional intelligence to develop an adaptive mindset.

P4 and P5 said that many leaders fail to distinguish between functional and adaptive challenges. They apply functional solutions to adaptive challenges or vice versa. P4 recommended person-job fit with experience to manage adaptive challenges

and suggested leadership exercises, broadening the mindset through training from professional consultants to develop adaptive capabilities. P4 presents documents related to in-house training in person and through the company portal to develop employees' leadership capabilities. The documents also revealed case studies relating to challenges and solutions for the events planning business.

P1 said that the best approach to build leadership capabilities is by using ourselves as the case. Using experience as a case could enable a leader to evaluate one's strengths and weaknesses. According to P1, experience, both favorable and unfavorable, could be a good teacher. All participants noted that leaders could acquire leadership skills through practice. In P2's company, training includes leaders visiting their past experiences at work and visualizing how they could have operated differently or trying to understand how things would have turned out if they knew then what they know now. P5 recommended keeping a reflective journal to reflect on past experiences. P5 presented a copy of the journal that the company recommends to employees. P5 said each events planning business is unique because of the detailing involved. Dotting down activities and challenges could assist a business owner in planning the next event effectively.

P3 said that leaders need to have a thorough understanding of the business landscape to be effective. P3 referred to the understanding business landscape as watching the view from the balcony. When asked to elaborate, P2 said that detachment and observation from above could provide some clarity. Both P2 and P3 supported the notion of viewing the problem from above. P2 stated that many leaders fail because of their inability to diagnose a problem. A wrong diagnosis of the problem could result in

the wrong solution. P3 noted that business leaders need empowerment, network, and resources to address the problem once identified. According to P2, company leaders need to understand the competitors' strengths and weaknesses, thoroughly understand services offered, market outlook, and customers' expectations. P2 recommended business owners engage in event planning activities with the team, attend the events, and observe. P3 showed the list of similar events planning businesses in the area. P3 said the leaders built a network with other events planning business leaders to share resources and learn. P2 said understating the business landscape is essential to be a good leader. What approach worked in one event planning activity may not be as effective in different events planning activities. P2 presented a document relating to events planning activities, which revealed eight types of events planning activities that present different challenges and require distinct approaches.

Participants noted that leadership is not about personal abilities; it is about understanding the task, meeting challenges, and applying the right leadership attributes. Participants noted that the applicability of leadership attributes could vary depending on the work. Therefore, realizing what works and what does not require an adaptive mindset, understanding the business landscape, and learning from past experiences.

Connecting Theme 3 to the Literature

According to the participants, leadership meets tough challenges to get work done through an innovative mindset and embracing leadership attributes, which require challenging the status quo. Ritter and Mostert (2017) contended that innovative thinking is one of the core competencies that allow entrepreneurs to deal with opportunities and

challenges in a complex and fast-changing world. Participants stated two types of challenges leaders encounter, and those are functional and adaptive challenges.

Participants suggested solving functional challenges through existing procedures or using other known approaches. However, adaptive challenges require a new approach. Pak et al. (2020) labeled functional challenges as technical challenges that leaders could solve through existing tools, procedures, and expert advice. Functional challenges have known solutions, and in contrast, leaders need experience and a leadership development plan to acquire needed skills to address adaptive challenges that have no known solutions.

Moreover, participants' version of adaptive challenges aligns with Pak et al.'s (2020) concept. The authors noted that leaders need stakeholder collaboration and adopt new norms and beliefs to address problems with no known solutions. P2 and P3 stated watching the business landscape from above brings clarity on the nature of the problem. Sunderman et al. (2020) stated that the adaptive leadership approach includes getting to the balcony for a better view and identifying the business challenges. Participants suggest the business owners use self as the case to understand the success and failure of leadership. Khoshhal and Guraya (2016) stated that leadership is more of an experience and expertise that leaders learn to develop over time. Reflecting on past experiences could help understand one's strengths, weaknesses, and capabilities.

Connecting Theme 3 to the Conceptual Framework

According to the participants, to address adaptive challenges, female business leaders need to unlock innovative capabilities, learn from experience, and have a birds-eye view of adaptive challenges that rest in work. Leadership is only effective if a leader

can mobilize followers to pursue the leader's vision. Silva and Mendis (2017) reached an overall conclusion that women who exhibited transformational leadership styles could develop, mentor, mobilize followers because of their ability to motivate people.

Participants posited that the transformational leadership style is essential for African female leaders to address adaptive challenges because the transformational leadership approach stimulates new ideas, creates a vision, and encourages people to rise to the challenge to mold a prosperous future for a business. Su et al. (2019) claimed that the four pillars of transformational leaders that enable followers to fulfill group interests are charisma or idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration in achieving organizational goals. A leadership development plan focusing on four pillars of transformation leadership style could help leaders build adaptive capabilities and minimize stereotypes.

Applications to Professional Practice

According to Meyer and Mostert (2016), although African women's full potential as business owners remained unleashed, female-owned businesses were increasingly growing in the African continent. However, according to Sadera et al. (2019), women entrepreneurs lacked the necessary leadership skills to remain sustainable in their businesses. In a study conducted on the antecedents of women leadership in SMEs, Husain and Xiao (2016) found that only 7% of female leaders held leadership positions for 3 to 5 years, and only 13% of females were in leadership positions for more than ten years. Developing women's leadership skills could unleash the full potential of women entrepreneurs, impacting the growth of women-owned businesses in the continent.

The study findings revealed the need for leadership development among women business owners in Cameroon. The participants further suggested embracing an adaptive mindset to develop the needed knowledge and skills. Adaptation and implementation of a leadership mindset and suitable leadership approaches could enable business owners to initiate and manage the changes necessary to adapt to changing circumstances (Jones & York, 2016). The participants noted that women business owners could acquire an adaptive mindset through formal and informal training.

The identified strategies to develop leadership skills include networking, engagement, experience, and workplace learning. The benefits of leadership skills are multifold. Turkina (2017) argued that networking fosters business growth by generating knowledge spillovers. According to Chhotray et al. (2018), leaders engaging followers by involving them in decision-making could improve business productivity. Participants noted one could build leadership capabilities through previous experience. Leadership is more of an experience and expertise that leaders learn to develop (Khoshhal & Guraya, 2016). Steinhoff (2015) opined that innate leadership characteristics within an individual could manifest only when developed or cultivated over time. Harrison et al. (2019) stated that entrepreneurial leadership enables entrepreneurs to maintain their competitiveness in a dynamic and challenging environment. Business leaders could acquire an entrepreneurial mindset through experience or cultivate over time through training, education, and spillover knowledge from networking.

The strategies identified in themes could enable business owners to remain innovative, embrace change, and exploit opportunities. The leadership skills in women-

owned businesses could stimulate new ideas, improve team orientation and collaboration (Msila & Netshtangani, 2017). Adaptive mindset and skillset could help leaders identify, develop, and exploit new business opportunities (Fabio et al., 2016). In the context of hyper-competition, Leitch and Volery (2017) argued that successful entrepreneurial leaders are capable of adapting to emerging business environments and embrace change. As noted by participants, an adaptive mindset could enable women entrepreneurs to exploit opportunities and utilize resources to embrace needed change for organizational success.

Implications for Social Change

The objective of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that women business owners in the events planning business use to improve leadership skills to succeed in business beyond 5 years. Adaptation and implementation of identified leadership concepts could improve performance and productivity, leading to business continuity and growth. Profitable companies are likely to be involved in social and environmental initiatives because corporate social responsibilities have cost implications. Companies' involvement in society could enhance the quality of life and environmental prosperity (Zahra & Wright, 2015). An additional implication for social change includes business growth resulting from leadership capabilities, which could increase employment opportunities. The rise in employment opportunities could result in less crime, improved standard of living, and tax revenues going to the local government. The government could use tax revenues to improve senior housing and develop parks and recreation facilities and school systems, which are beneficial to the people.

Recommendations for Action

According to the participants, many leaders fail to understand what constitutes leadership. An experience by itself is not leadership; neither are skills and tools. Again, participants noted experience in a craft is not leadership, but the process of creating something relevant and meaningful (craft) is leadership. Therefore, my recommendation for leaders is to understand better what constitutes leadership as it pertains to their business. Upon understanding leadership capabilities, women business leaders should reflect on their past experiences and learn what they did right, what went wrong, and how they could have improved if they knew then what they know now. One can acquire experience through learning. The second recommendation is to explore leadership tools or attributes such as engagement ability, accountability, courage, and humility. If women entrepreneurs lack these leadership attributes, I recommend that they attain them through mentoring, followership, and training. Participants noted leaders could acquire both experience and leadership attributes.

Participants made a clear distinction between functional challenges and adaptive challenges. I recommend women business leaders analyze if work requires functional capabilities or adaptive capabilities to complete. Functional capabilities require using existing processes, protocols, and procedures, whereas adaptive capabilities do not have known solutions. If tasks require adaptive capabilities, the recommendation is to view the work from a broad perspective to understand the problem better. Once the problem is apparent, business owners could decide what attributes apply to the current problem and

apply them with their acquired experience. The process of systematic implementation constitutes leadership.

The study findings fill the gap in the literature as the results of this study revealed leadership concepts that apply to all businesses besides events planning. Therefore, business leaders from all industries could use the study findings for their benefit. Work varies across industries, the operating environment is different for businesses, making leadership a complex, multifaceted concept. Academic scholars could use the study findings and expand upon the concept of adaptive capabilities of leadership as the business environment continues to change due to regulatory, technology, and globalization challenges. I plan to disseminate study findings through ProQuest and peer-review journal publications.

Recommendations for Further Research

The study had few limitations: the researcher's bias due to the researcher's interest in the study phenomenon. Throughout the study, I was mindful of my preconceived beliefs on the study topic by keeping a journal. Therefore, the study outcome is free of the researcher's bias or stereotypes. The second limitation was the usefulness of participants' responses in answering the research question. During the interview, I asked follow-up questions to extract rich data. Considering intricate details and types of events planning businesses, I geared the interview questions towards leadership building. The study findings revealed a broad view on improving leadership capabilities to address adaptive challenges, whose practicality could extend beyond the events planning business.

Though the study findings have broad applicability in business outside of the events planning business, future researchers could conduct additional research with a larger sample size using leaders from different industries to extract new knowledge on leadership. Moreover, future researchers could conduct a study using the phenomenological design to capture the conscious experience of academic faculty specializing in leadership-building capabilities. The first person's perspective from academics could provide theoretical implications of leadership that business leaders could relate with their practical experiences. Discussing all capabilities of leadership is beyond the scope of this study. The study findings revealed building leadership capabilities to address adaptive challenges. Future researchers could focus on functional challenges.

Reflections

When I started my Doctorate in Business Administration studies at Walden University, my daughter told her cousin, while they were playing, that one day, the world would begin addressing her dad as Dr. Henry. She was just 4 years old, and it was in the early months of my studies. When I started my doctorate studies at Walden University, I looked at the doctoral study timeline. I felt comfortable knowing I could acquire a terminal degree in the anticipated time frame. However, once I engaged in the program, I experienced the rigor that elongated my study completion time. In many instances, I felt obtaining a doctoral was beyond my means and felt like giving up. On occasions like this, support from family members and encouragement from the academic chair helped me stay determined. I kept the momentum going, and I am glad I reached the finish line.

Similar to the study findings, completing a doctoral study at Walden University requires addressing adaptive challenges. During my time at Walden University, I have enjoyed cordial relationships with classmates and instructors, some of which will last a lifetime. As a result of the rigor in the DBA program, my outlook has changed. I can look at any business through an eye of an executive, write in a scholarly fashion, and feel comfortable bringing social change in Cameroon by empowering women entrepreneurs to excel in their role to gain societal prestige and recognition. Completing my studies at Walden is an experience of resilience that I will take with me for the rest of my life.

Conclusion

The female entrepreneur's role is evident in productivity, job creation, and economic growth. However, about 7% of female leaders in SME held leadership positions for 3 to 5 years, and only 13% of female leaders have been in leadership positions for more than ten years (Husain & Xiao, 2016). Sadera et al. (2019) stated in a study finding that women entrepreneurs lacked the necessary leadership skills to excel in their business ventures.

In this qualitative case study, I explored leadership-building strategies. Discussing leadership capabilities to address all challenges is beyond the scope of this research. The study findings revealed building leadership capabilities to address adaptive challenges. The strategies included combining experience and tools in task execution, learning from past experiences, acquiring leadership attributes, and viewing the work from the balcony to better understand challenges. The study findings revealed that leaders fail because of their inability to conceptualize the leadership concept. The participants demonstrated the

leadership concept with examples as they noted that leaders are not capable of building and applying leadership capabilities until they grasp the true essence of leadership.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Research Topic: *Leadership Strategies of Successful Women-Owned Businesses in Cameroon.*

Guidelines

1. Ensure both I and participants follow covid-19 safety protocol during interviews.
2. On the date of the actual interview, before starting the interview, I will seek permission from participants to begin the audio recording.
3. The interview will start with standard scripts, which will be the same for all participants
4. Each interview questions will consist of follow up questions.
5. Upon data saturation, I will end the interview.
6. I will assure that participants' information will be kept confidential.
7. I will then collect the company documents at the end of actual interview.
8. I will set future date and time for member checking.
9. I will close the interview with a standard script, which will be the same for all participants.

Appendix B: Invitation Letter

Hello (Potential Participant), my name is Ntoko Henry Ajieh. I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I am researching to explore *leadership strategies of successful women-owned event planning businesses in Cameroon*. I am seeking 5 volunteers to participate in this study. Upon review of your LinkedIn profile, you meet research participation eligibility criteria. The eligibility criteria include that participants a) have a minimum of 5 years of experience in event planning business, (b) have successfully sustained their event planning business beyond 5 years, and (c) are female business entrepreneurs in Cameroon who started their event planning business.

I want to invite you to participate in this research. If you are interested voluntarily, please review the attached consent form. The consent form provides information on research guidelines and your rights as a research participant. If you are interested in participating, please review the attached consent form and reply to this email with the words “I consent.”

Also, I request you to provide the date and the time that you find convenient for the interview. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Thank you for your time and consideration



Sincerely,

Ntoko Henry Ajieh

DBA Candidate Walden University

Ntoko.henryajieh@waldenu.edu

Appendix C: CITI Certification

Completion Date 28-May-2021
Expiration Date N/A
Record ID 42738888

This is to certify that:

NTOKO HENRY AJIEH


Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

Student's
(Curriculum Group)
Doctoral Student Researchers
(Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Walden University



Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w60f339ac-6569-473a-a990-2398e2f981ff-42738888