

# Concept paper on the Leadership capabilities to grow female owned enterprises in the clothing sector post COVI-19 pandemic period. Achieving gender equity through business growth

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this concept paper is to develop a conceptual framework that will guide a study to explore female business leadership capabilities that may lead to resilience and growth of female owned enterprises in periods of pandemics like the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper draws the leadership capabilities from the existing leadership models and scholarly work on the leadership in challenging business environments. The paper noted that there are five main critical business leadership capabilities namely business management, strategic management, human resource management, innovation and technology. This means that empirical research may be constituted to examine the status of the leadership capabilities in female business leaders and determine the capabilities that may be relevant in the current challenging business environment.

**Key words:** Leadership capabilities, cognitive capabilities, strategic capabilities, human resource management capabilities, business management capabilities.

## I. INTRODUCTION

According to D'Auria and De Smet (2020), leaders are essential to the success of any organization because they manage the company, establish goals, direct operations, and create the company's vision. Leaders have the ability to influence and motivate followers to dedicate their efforts to the business, resulting in success and profit. Consequently, the survival and expansion of businesses depend on their leaders. Leadership talents are regarded as the most significant features of leaders since they are the capacities for carrying out tasks, transforming knowledge into leaders' actions, and exhibiting leadership experience while putting knowledge into practice to accomplish desired objectives. Consequently, leadership qualities are regarded as of the utmost importance because they increase the profitability and competitiveness of organizations. Tony (2020). Due to their significance, leadership qualities have long been regarded as crucial to the success of businesses. Therefore, it is essential to consider the business leadership skills that can increase the productivity of an organization. Strong leaders who can inspire employees, co-workers, and other stakeholders to work diligently for the organization are essential for the survival and expansion of a

business. Leadership skills are among the characteristics associated with leaders that are regarded as being the most significant because they are the capacities for performing tasks, transforming knowledge into leaders' actions, and exhibiting the leadership's expertise when applying the knowledge acquired in practices to achieve desired performance.

The demand for gender parity can be achieved and strengthened through the targeted development of relevant business leadership skills in female business owners. The COVID-19 pandemic threatens to erase some of the minimal achievements in gender equality and women's rights made over the years, the UN Secretary-General said in April 2020, asking with governments to prioritize women and girls in their recovery efforts (Abrar 2021). (Abrar 2021). Not only are women leaders the group most affected by the pandemic, but they are also essential to community recovery (UN 2020). This means that developing appropriate leadership skills was necessary to help female-led businesses recover, compete, and build resilience in the wake of COVID-19's effects. Thus, this study focused on the fundamental attributes of female business executives that could assist women-owned businesses develop and compete.

Female entrepreneurs in poor countries confront additional obstacles due to the nature of their work. When compared to their male colleagues, women entrepreneurs face more obstacles that make the business environment less favourable. Gender roles at home, a lack of formal education or career preparation, and limited financial resources are just a few of the obstacles women face. The COVID-19 pandemic further widened the gender equity by affecting more women owned enterprises than male owned enterprises.

Traditionally, cultural and social factors, limited access to education, limited access to funding and work life and family balance were challenges affecting the growth and success of women entrepreneurs in the clothing manufacturing sector. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic therefore added on

to the existing basket of constraints that female entrepreneurs in the clothing manufacturing sector were facing. In view of this it is therefore critical to explore the business leadership capabilities that may help female entrepreneurs in the clothing manufacturing sector to revive their battered enterprises, stimulate growth and sustainability.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are numerous definitions of leadership (Yukl, 2013). According to House et al., leadership is the process of influencing others to comprehend and agree on what must be done and how to do it, as well as the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to achieve shared goals (1999). Additionally, leadership is the capacity to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute to the organization's effectiveness and success (Yukl, 2013). Most definitions of leadership include an influence process, which makes it difficult to develop a single definition that is both broad enough to encompass all of these meanings and precise enough to serve as an operationalization of the variable (Karmel, 1978).

The significance of leadership-related issues has garnered considerable scholarly interest. Based on the nature of the research, leadership capabilities-related studies can be divided into two categories. The first group consists of exploratory studies aimed at identifying crucial leadership characteristics required to increase business success and growth (Bondarenko, Diugowanets, and Kurie 2021; Da'as, 2017).

According to Budur and Poturak (2020, Morales, Martinez, Gómez, López, and Torres-Argüelles 2019), leadership is the ability to persuade, inspire, and empower others to contribute to the organization's effectiveness and success. According to Poturak, Meki, Hadiyahmetovi, and Budur, it is the process of getting others to understand and agree on what needs to be done and how to do it, as well as facilitating both individual and group efforts to achieve shared goals (2020). It is extremely difficult to develop a single definition of leadership that is both broad enough to encompass these diverse meanings and specific enough to serve as an operationalization of the variable. The majority of leadership definitions involve an influence process. Leadership is the capacity to influence and direct followers or other members of an organization.

### 2.1 Business leadership capabilities

According to Zaim, Demir, and Budur (2021) and Teece (2012), capabilities refer primarily to the skills and resources a business can use to grow and outperform its competitors. They are also the resources at the threshold level. In order to successfully compete on the market, a company must possess certain resources and skills. They are categorized as threshold resources, or those required to meet the bare minimum of client needs, and threshold capabilities, which are essential for meeting client needs and ensuring the success of the firm's strategies (Bondarenko Diugowanets & Kurie 2021, Bogodistov and Wohlgemuth 2017). Competencies are the

procedures and tasks that a business employs to utilize its resources effectively.

Leadership skills are a vague and challenging concept. Physical dexterity, mental acuity, and proficiency are examples of abilities. (Bondarenko et al 2020). In addition to the capacity to perform a specific task, the term "capabilities" suggests an ascending dimension of skill (Bondarenko et al 2020). Possessing capabilities is defined as the capacity to perform a task competently. These capabilities may be broadly specified at one level of abstraction or precisely described at a lower level of abstraction (Ree, Ellis and Wiig 2021, Zaim, Demir & Budur 2021). In this study, "leadership capabilities" refers to a person's capacity to carry out a leadership function and promote the organization's growth and profitability through efficient performance of a task.

The Strataplex model by Mumford et al. (2007) proposes that leadership may be characterized in terms of four general capabilities: cognitive, technological, business, and strategic. This model is based on previous conceptualizations of the requirements for leadership capabilities.

#### 2.1.1 Cognitive capabilities

According to Zehir and Narckara (2016) and Teece (2012), cognitive abilities are the cornerstone of leadership skill requirements and are linked to fundamental cognitive capacities, such as gathering, processing, disseminating, and learning, and are required for a substantial portion of the activities in which leaders are engaged. Cognitive abilities include the ability to coordinate one's actions with those of others, arbitrate differences in employee perspectives and form relationships based on mutual satisfaction, and persuade others to more effectively achieve corporate objectives. Cognitive talents also entail social perceptiveness, which permits knowledge of other people's reactions and comprehension of why others react as they do (Southwick, Martini, Charney and Southwick 2017). Cognitive abilities may explain why some top managers have stronger abilities to predict, interpret, and adjust to the needs of a changing environment than others (Helfat & Peteraf, 2015). Additionally, cognitive competency has been highlighted as a crucial factor determining how firms make strategic adjustments and adapt to a changing environment (Cao et al., 2020). Increasing numbers of scholars believe that an entrepreneur's cognitive aptitude is crucial for effective decision-making and enhanced organization performance, particularly in dynamic conditions (Bajwa et al., 2017). According to Ireland et al. (2003), effective decision-making in dynamic situations requires a cognitive capabilities attitude, which is characterized by the ability to quickly absorb environmental changes and act accordingly, even in uncertain circumstances. Entrepreneurs must be highly cognitive to successfully traverse the entrepreneurial process and make judgments under conditions of uncertainty (Bajwa et al., 2017).

*Hypothesis*

*The development of cognitive business skills may boost the competitiveness of female CEOs' companies.*

*2.1.2 Business management capabilities*

Business management capabilities encompass the administration of material resources, operations analysis, human resources, and financial resources. Management capability refers to the skills and knowledge a manager possesses in regard to the functional areas of operational/production, human resources, finance, marketing, and information systems. According to Parnel (2011), managerial skills and organizational success are positively correlated. Therefore, planning is one aspect of business management capability that enables managers to illustrate some strategic actions based on alternatives in accordance with the company's environment at the outset of the business (Daft, 2013). Organizing is another aspect of business management that entails defining the company's resources and authorities and determining how they should be distributed among the responsible departments and employees based on the company's objectives (Robbins & Coulter, 2007; Sherwani, 2014). In addition, management competence involves motivating organizational personnel to achieve their objectives and go above and beyond their assigned duties. In addition, leading management functions fall under this category (Demir et al., 2021; Poturak et al, 2020). Last but not least, controlling is a business management capability that entails a company's evaluation process based on unit goals to assess their position in relation to defined performances and demand-related regulations (Celik and Yildiz, 2017; Certo, 2000; Robbins, 2007). In addition to these useful management capability dimensions, researchers investigated a few additional competencies to enhance managers' influence on organizational success. These include communication (Top et al., 2020), teamwork and understanding (Morgeson & DeRue, 2006), trust in teammates (Budur, 2018), and time management (Demir and Bulut, 2019). (Hackworth, 2008). (Hackworth, 2008).

*Hypothesis*

*The development of relevant business management capabilities by female leaders may lead to competitiveness of their enterprises*

*2.1.3 Strategic capabilities*

High conceptual abilities known as strategic capabilities are required to take a systems viewpoint in order to comprehend complexity and handle ambiguity in organizational contexts. These include the capacities for visioning, perceiving systems, identifying major causes and their downstream effects, identifying problems, appraising solutions, and objectively evaluating outcomes (Giniuniene and Jurksiene 2015). (Giniuniene and Jurksiene 2015).

*Hypothesis*

*The development of relevant business strategic capabilities by female leaders may lead to competitiveness of their enterprises*

*2.1.4 Technological capabilities*

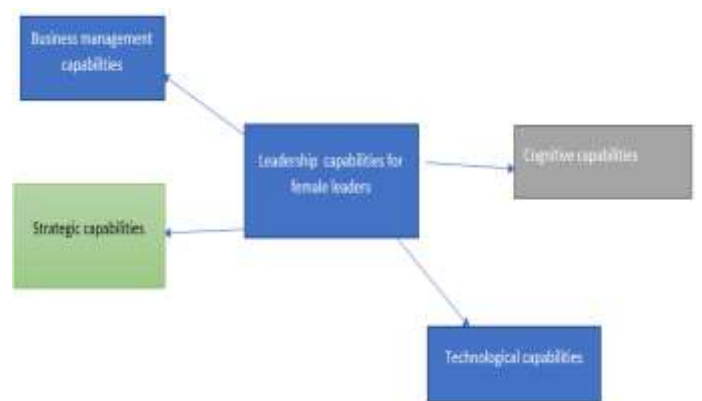
Technology is one of the most astounding developments of the twenty-first century. In truth, all sectors recognize the need and necessity of incorporating software that not only increases organizational efficiency, but also improves employees' utilization of new technologies. Businesses are aware that strengthening their technological resources, particularly their personnel's skills, can help them acquire a competitive advantage.

Executives in charge of technological capacities can build processes and procedures that enable businesses to share solutions to organizational difficulties, produce and use prototypes, and incorporate and absorb external information about specific technologies. Therefore, organizations led by business executives with technology skills will be more productive and competitive. According to previous research, TC can promote agility by expediting decision-making, facilitating communication, and enabling rapid responses to changing circumstances. Nonetheless, a number of studies have demonstrated that technical resources can be inconvenient and can occasionally hinder organizational agility. Information systems' generally static physical and technological artifacts also play a role in this. Creating the digital platform that allows organizations agility requires technology.

*Hypothesis*

*The development of relevant technology capabilities by female leaders may leads to competitiveness of their enterprises*

III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



IV. METHODOLOGY

The study was guided by the positivist research philosophy. A survey data collection method was used. A structured questionnaire was used and translated into the language that female entrepreneurs in the clothing manufacturing sector

could understand. A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed.

V. FINDINGS

5.1 Correlation results

Correlation between business leadership capabilities and business competitiveness in the clothing sector is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Correlation results

Business leadership capabilities	Correlation coefficient value
Cognitive business skills	0.86
Business management capabilities	0.66
Business strategic capabilities	0.78
Technology capabilities	0.76

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 –tailed)

Table 1 shows that the Cognitive business skills is very strongly and positively correlated to competitiveness of females led clothing manufacturing enterprises (correlation coefficient value of 0.86). This may imply that increased development of Cognitive business skills is critical to boost the competitiveness of female clothing manufacturing enterprises. This also indicates that business leaders with well-developed cognitive capabilities are to anticipate, interpret, and respond to the demands of an evolving environment in a more competitive way which in turn will make their companies more competitive.

The correlation results in Table 1 shows that business strategic capabilities have a very strong and positive correlation with the competitiveness of female led clothing manufacturing companies used in this study (correlation value of 0.78). This implies that the development of strong strategic capabilities by female business leaders is critical in making them competitive and sustainable. Ability to show intellectual honesty, accountability, and self-awareness are key strategic capabilities that may make female led clothing manufacturing enterprises competitive. This implies that female leaders who are able to design a go-to-market strategy, execute a strategic plan, design the organization to optimize the strategic plan and ability to think how business challenges and decisions in one area may impact others will be able to make their clothing enterprises competitive in the current business environment.

Table 1 shows that the correlation between technology capabilities and competitiveness of female owned clothing enterprises is very strong and positive (correlation coefficient of 0.76). This implies that development of technological capabilities by female business leaders in the clothing sector will leads to competitiveness. This shows that female leaders in the clothing sector who are able to develop excellence in the field, awareness of the business and technological environment, and the ability to optimize speed, quality, and resources will make their enterprises competitive. Technological capabilities entails being able to empower and

inspires people to take upon the most compelling business opportunities using the best of technology. This leads to competitiveness of the entire company.

The correlation between business management capabilities and competitiveness of female led clothing enterprises is strong and positive (correlation coefficient of 0.66). This implies that female leaders who are able to execute the key managerial duties and obligations will enhance the competitiveness of their enterprises. Thus managerial capabilities such planning, organizing, leading, motivation, and controlling will ensure competitiveness of the female led clothing enterprises.

In summary, the correlation Table 1 shows possible association between four business leadership capabilities and competitiveness of female led clothing enterprises operating in the current business environment. These initial relationships are further analysed through regression analysis in the next section

Regression analysis results

Regression analysis examined the relationship between business leadership capabilities required by female business leaders in the clothing sector. The results presented in this section test the hypotheses linking the business leadership capabilities and competitiveness of female led clothing enterprises.

5.2 Hypotheses

H1.1 The development of cognitive business capabilities may boost the competitiveness of female leaders in the clothing sector.

H1.2 The development of relevant business management capabilities by female leaders in the clothing sector may lead to competitiveness of their enterprises

H1.3 The development of relevant business strategic capabilities by female leaders in the clothing sector may lead to competitiveness of their enterprises

H1.4 The development of relevant technology capabilities by female leaders in the clothing sector may leads to competitiveness of their enterprises

Summary of regression output

Table 2 Regression model summary

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Std. Error of the Estimate	P
1	0.86	0.85	0.85	0.112	0

(a) Predictors: (Constant), cognitive capabilities, business management capabilities, strategic management capabilities and technological capabilities

R<sup>2</sup>-square (coefficient of determination) indicated in Table 2 is used to evaluate model fit. According to table 2, about 85%

of the changes in competitiveness of the female led clothing enterprises could be attributed to the effects of the four proposed business leadership capabilities. This shows that the business leadership capabilities are indeed critical to the competitiveness of the female led clothing enterprises.

Table 3 Regression coefficients

Model-1	Unstandardized Coefficients		Sig	VIF
	B	Std. Error		
(Constant)	3.606	0.218	0.000	
<b>Cognitive business capabilities</b>	3.398	0.035	0.000	1.023
<b>Strategic business capabilities</b>	2.230	0.027	0.000	0.998
<b>Business management capabilities</b>	0.039	0.030	0.000	1.221
<b>Technological capabilities</b>	2.06	0.037	0.000	1.110

(a) Dependent Variable: Competitiveness

Using the responses from the structured questionnaire, multicollinearity was tested among the four business leadership capabilities and the competitiveness of female led clothing enterprises. The VIF was used to test for the possibilities of Multicollinearity. According to the table 3, the VIF value of the four business leadership capabilities is around 1 which shows that there was no correlation among the independent variables. This means that each business leadership capability had an independent effect on the competitiveness of the female led clothing enterprises and this implies that the results are more reliable.

### 5.3 Regression analysis

Four hypotheses were tested in this study and the results are presented in table 3.

According to the result in the table 3, the  $r$ -value=0.000 which is  $< 0.005$  for the relationship between **cognitive business capabilities and competitiveness of female owned business enterprises in the clothing sector**. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted which states that **cognitive business capabilities have a significant positive influence on the competitiveness of female owned business enterprises in the clothing sector**. This result implies that developing cognitive capabilities in female business leaders in the clothing sector will lead to competitiveness and sustenance of the enterprises.

Based on the table 3, it can be shown that the  $r$ -value=0.000 which is  $< 0.005$  for the relationship between **strategic business capabilities and competitiveness of female owned business enterprises in the clothing sector**. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted which states that **strategic business capabilities have a significant positive influence on the competitiveness of female owned business enterprises in the clothing sector**. This result implies that developing strategic capabilities such as strategy development, strategic implementation and strategy evaluation in female business leaders in the clothing

sector will lead to competitiveness and sustenance of the enterprises.

Table 3 on the regression summary shows that the  $r$ -value=0.000 which is  $< 0.005$  for the relationship between **business management capabilities and competitiveness of female owned business enterprises in the clothing sector**. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted which states that **business management capabilities have a significant positive influence on the competitiveness of female owned business enterprises in the clothing sector**. This result implies that developing business management capabilities such as planning, controlling and organising in female business leaders in the clothing sector will lead to competitiveness and sustenance of the enterprises.

The results in the table 3 shows that the  $r$ -value=0.000 which is  $< 0.005$  for the relationship between **technological capabilities and competitiveness of female owned business enterprises in the clothing sector**. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted which states that **technological capabilities have a significant positive influence on the competitiveness of female owned business enterprises in the clothing sector**. This result implies that developing technological capabilities in female business leaders in the clothing sector will lead to competitiveness and sustenance of the enterprises.

## VI. DISCUSSION

The main objective of this study was to establish the nature and scope of business leadership capabilities that may have a greater influence on the competitiveness of the female led business enterprises in the clothing manufacturing sector following the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. More importantly, the paper sought to determine the most effective business leadership capability that may restore the competitiveness of the female owned enterprises in the clothing manufacturing sector.

This study showed that the most important business leadership capabilities for female leaders in the clothing sector were the cognitive business capabilities. The study showed that the development of the cognitive capabilities will enhance the competitiveness of the female led business enterprises in the current business environment. This finding support views proposed by Cao et al., (2020), who indicated cognitive capabilities help business leaders to make strategic changes and adapt to dynamic environments efficiently thereby leading to competitiveness of the enterprises.

According to the findings of this study strategic capabilities can positively lead to the competitiveness of the female owned enterprises. This finding supports views raised by Helfat & Peteraf, (2015) who argued that strategic capabilities involve the capacity to perform dynamic managerial capabilities for sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring, change in organizations. This leads to the development of heterogeneity

of capabilities that may contribute to differential performance of organizations under conditions of change.

Technological capabilities emerged as one of the critical capabilities required by female led in the clothing manufacturing sector to enhance the competitiveness of their enterprises following the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. This finding supports views raised by Kane, C. Gerald, Doug Palmer, Anh N. Philips, David Kiron, and Natasha Buckley (2015) who indicated that the impact of technology on leadership is substantial and the benefits are many. They argued that that business leaders that utilize the right technology at the right time and in the right way ways will achieve success in their business environment. They further showed that the application of technology should improve human involvement rather than outrightly replace it. It should result in improved outcomes in terms of decision-making and people management. These attributes leads to competitiveness.

This study noted that the development of the business management strategies will enhance the competitiveness of the female led business enterprises operating in the clothing manufacturing sector. These findings make an addition to the views raised by Altun (2017), Serin (2018) and Yildiz (2017) who indicated that business management capabilities allow business leaders to make use of as variety of tools such as planning, organizing, leading, motivation, and controlling to make their companies successful and competitive. Scholars noted that these functions of management help business leaders to organize and follow their responsibilities appropriately leading to success.

#### *Conclusions and recommendations*

This paper concluded that to enhance the effectiveness of female business leaders' ability to achieve competitiveness, there is need to develop four critical business leadership capabilities in the form of cognitive, strategic, business management and technology. This shows that nay training manuals for female business leaders in the clothing manufacturing sector must be based on the four capabilities pillars. It is recommended that effective female business leaders need to be developed on the basis of the four capabilities pillars.

#### *Theoretical contribution of the paper*

The paper has contributed to literature on female business leadership domain by showing the four business leadership capabilities pillars required to build effective female leaders.

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