

# Leadership Styles of Women Entrepreneurs in Startups

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## Abstract

The leadership styles of women entrepreneurs in startups have garnered increasing attention due to their unique approaches to business management, decision-making, and organizational culture. Women entrepreneurs, often navigating a predominantly male-dominated business environment, exhibit diverse leadership qualities influenced by their personal experiences, socialization, and cultural contexts. This study explores the various leadership styles that women entrepreneurs adopt in the startup ecosystem, focusing on transformational, participative, and nurturing leadership approaches. Transformational leadership, which emphasizes vision, motivation, and innovation, is commonly observed among women entrepreneurs who seek to inspire their teams and foster an environment of creativity and growth. Participative leadership, where leaders involve their teams in decision-making processes, also stands out as a key characteristic, reflecting women's collaborative and inclusive approach. Additionally, the nurturing leadership style, marked by empathy, care, and emotional intelligence, plays a significant role in building strong, supportive relationships within startups. By analysing the intersection of gender, entrepreneurial practices, and leadership theories, the research highlights how women entrepreneurs leverage their leadership styles to overcome challenges, promote inclusivity, and sustain business growth. This study contributes to the broader understanding of gender dynamics in entrepreneurship, offering valuable insights for both aspiring entrepreneurs and organizations aiming to support diverse leadership in the startup ecosystem. Ultimately, it underscores the importance of recognizing and supporting the leadership contributions of women in the entrepreneurial world.

Keywords: Leadership Styles, Startups, Business Management, Women Entrepreneur.

## Introduction:

The role of women in entrepreneurship has evolved significantly over the past few decades, with women increasingly taking on leadership roles in various industries. In the startup ecosystem, women entrepreneurs face unique challenges and opportunities, often shaped by both their gender and the dynamic nature of emerging businesses. A critical aspect of their success lies in the leadership styles they adopt to navigate the complexities of establishing and managing startups. While much of the literature on leadership has traditionally entered on male entrepreneurs, there is a growing recognition of the distinct leadership approaches that women bring to the entrepreneurial landscape.

Women entrepreneurs often employ leadership styles that are shaped by a combination of personal experiences, cultural influences, and societal expectations. These styles are typically characterized by qualities such as empathy, collaboration, emotional intelligence, and a focus on long-term vision and team empowerment. Women in startups may adopt transformational leadership to inspire innovation, participative leadership to foster inclusivity and collective decision-making, and nurturing leadership to build strong, supportive organizational cultures.

Understanding the leadership styles of women entrepreneurs is crucial, not only for appreciating their contributions to the entrepreneurial ecosystem but also for addressing the gender disparities that persist in many industries. This paper explores the various leadership approaches employed by women entrepreneurs in startups, examining how these styles impact their success and the overall growth of their businesses. Through this exploration, we aim to highlight the importance of gender-sensitive leadership in fostering diversity, creativity, and sustainable development within startups.

### Literature Review:

Alexander Ardichivili, Richard N. Cardozo, et al. (2006) conducted a study to explore Russian entrepreneurs' readiness to adopt Western HRD interventions. Structured interviews were held with 256 owners and CEOs of private Russian companies, founded after 1986 as independent start-ups or spinoffs from state-owned firms. The study covered sectors such as manufacturing, retail, wholesale trade, and services, with participants from the eight largest Russian cities representing major economic regions. The study focused on leadership styles, decision-making processes, and involvement in management and HRD interventions. Among the findings, it was noted that work design and performance management interventions were more frequently used than employee training, development, or organizational culture change interventions.

Joelle Danielle Ngo Ndjama, Johan Van Der Westhuizen (2009) examined the emerging opportunities for women entrepreneurs in startup creation, focusing on potential differences in failure rates between women-led and men-led ventures using role congruity theory. The research method involved a comprehensive literature review, analyzing factors such as women's literacy and education, flexible working hours and locations, flat organizational structures, and economic conditions. The study found that women entrepreneurs have strong potential to thrive in startup creation due to favorable economic conditions, increased literacy and education, the ability to work flexibly, and a preference for less bureaucratic structures. The implications suggest the need for greater support and resources for women entrepreneurs to seize these opportunities. Recommendations include policies and programs that promote gender equality in entrepreneurship and provide mentorship and networking opportunities for women in startup creation.

Dinesh Mani Ghimire (2024) explored the impact of culture on the entrepreneurial behavior of women, focusing on how cultural factors influence female entrepreneurship, particularly in developing countries like Nepal, where it can help reduce unemployment and drive economic growth. The research methodology involved a comprehensive review of 50 articles on women's entrepreneurship and the sociocultural factors affecting their behavior. The study found that cultural factors, such as societal norms, gender roles, and cultural values, significantly impact women's entrepreneurial intentions, risk perceptions, and business strategies. Societal expectations and gender norms can either support or hinder women's entry into entrepreneurship, affecting their confidence, risk-taking ability, and access to resources. Additionally, cultural values like collectivism and individualism influence networking patterns, collaboration, and leadership styles among women entrepreneurs.

Jaka Vadjal, Mateja Vadjal (2012) explored the role of family support, particularly from spouses, in women entrepreneurship. Traditional research has mainly focused on internal factors, business environmental barriers, and the challenges of balancing work and family life. However, the role of informal support, especially from family and spouses, has been largely neglected. The study surveyed 121 women start-ups to investigate the importance of spousal support. The results confirmed that the support of husbands is crucial, with emotional support (belief and empowerment) being highly valued. Financial contribution was also important, as most husbands had stable incomes during the start-up phase, working in other jobs rather than their own businesses. The study highlighted the significance of spouses taking on additional responsibilities, such as childcare, especially for women with children, in supporting entrepreneurial success.

Banu Ozkazanc-Pan, Susan Clark Muntean (2018) deployed a multidimensional framework focusing on individual, organizational, and societal factors to investigate gendering practices that disadvantage women entrepreneurs in the technology sector. Through qualitative fieldwork, the study examined women entrepreneurs' experiences in networking for entrepreneurial resources and the role of technology incubators and accelerators in facilitating this access. These organizations have the potential to reduce gender inequities by adopting gender-aware practices, such as increasing access to networks and resources that might otherwise be out of reach for women. However, the study found that the

organizations' "gender neutral" recruitment practices and transactional networking often replicate gender inequality rather than eliminate it. Additionally, attempts to address gender issues in technology entrepreneurship tend to reinforce societal gender norms instead of challenging them. The research provides new insights into the interconnected individual, organizational, and societal factors contributing to gender inequality in technology entrepreneurship and stimulates discussions on potential social change.

### Objectives:

- To Analyze the Impact of These Leadership Styles on Startup Success.
- To Provide Practical Insights for Aspiring Women Entrepreneurs.
- To Compare Leadership Styles Between Women and Male Entrepreneurs.
- To Understand the Barriers Faced by Women Entrepreneurs in Leadership Roles.

### Research Methodology:

This study will utilize a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the leadership styles of women entrepreneurs in startups. The research aims to gather detailed, nuanced insights into the experiences of women entrepreneurs while also identifying broader patterns through statistical analysis. The combination of these two methods ensures a holistic view of how leadership styles are shaped and the impact they have on startup success.

### Understanding Leadership Styles in Startups:

Before examining the leadership styles of women entrepreneurs, it's important to define leadership style. Leadership style refers to the combination of characteristics and behaviors an individual uses to lead a group, organization, or initiative. In the context of startups, leadership styles are shaped by the need for innovation, agility, and adaptability in a fast-paced, resource-constrained environment. Leadership styles can be broadly categorized into:

- **Autocratic leadership** – a top-down approach where the leader makes decisions alone.
- **Democratic leadership** – a collaborative approach where decisions are made by involving the team.
- **Transformational leadership** – a style focused on inspiring and motivating team members toward a shared vision.
- **Transactional leadership** – a task-focused style, focused on rewards and penalties.

### Unique Leadership Qualities of Women Entrepreneurs:

Women entrepreneurs often demonstrate leadership qualities influenced by their personal and professional experiences. Some of the unique leadership qualities of women entrepreneurs include:

- **Collaborative and Inclusive Leadership:** Women entrepreneurs often adopt a more democratic, participative leadership style. They value input from team members and encourage open communication, making decisions collectively. This fosters a sense of ownership and commitment among employees, which is essential in startups where innovation and resourcefulness are crucial.
- **Empathy and Emotional Intelligence:** Women entrepreneurs tend to show higher levels of empathy and emotional intelligence, which helps them understand and respond to the needs and emotions of their teams. This contributes to a supportive work culture where team members feel valued and motivated.
- **Visionary Leadership:** Many women entrepreneurs display transformational leadership traits. They are focused on broader missions, inspiring their teams to work toward common goals, and emphasizing innovation, creativity, and long-term impact—key in the ever-changing startup world.

- **Risk-Taking and Resilience:** Women entrepreneurs are often more resilient in the face of failure. They take calculated risks, learn from setbacks, and are more likely to pivot when necessary. Their resilience is vital in navigating the challenges of startup life.
- **Networking and Relationship-Building:** Women entrepreneurs typically emphasize networking and building relationships, both within and outside their startups. They are natural collaborators who foster strong connections that provide resources, advice, and access to opportunities.

### **Impact of Leadership styles on startup success:**

The leadership style adopted by women entrepreneurs has a direct impact on the success of their startups. For instance, transformational leadership fosters higher levels of innovation, employee satisfaction, and adaptability, which are essential in the fast-changing startup environment. On the other hand, a transactional leadership style may be effective for short-term operational efficiency but can hinder creativity in rapidly growing businesses. The ability to combine various leadership styles and adapt to changing circumstances is vital for a startup's success. Women entrepreneurs who balance transformational leadership with pragmatic decision-making are more likely to build sustainable and innovative businesses.

### **Gender and Leadership: Societal Expectations:**

Societal expectations significantly influence leadership styles. Women leaders often face pressure to be more empathetic and nurturing, which can shape their leadership choices. In contrast, male leaders are typically expected to be authoritative, assertive, and decisive. These differing societal expectations often lead women entrepreneurs to develop leadership traits that are more collaborative and emotionally intelligent, contributing to inclusive and diverse work environments.

### **Conclusion:**

Women entrepreneurs demonstrate a wide range of leadership styles, shaped by both personal and external factors. Transformational leadership, in particular, is commonly seen in successful startups. However, the ability to adapt and integrate multiple leadership styles depending on the situation is crucial for navigating the complexities of startup life. Overcoming gender biases and societal expectations is vital for allowing women entrepreneurs to fully reach their leadership potential and ensure the continued success of their businesses.

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