# Indigenous female entrepreneurs' leadership styles and innovativeness in Tiv land, Benue State, Nigeria

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**ABSTRACT:** *Studies have revealed that men and women adopt different leadership styles in the management of business ventures. However, not much has been known about the leadership styles employed by female entrepreneurs in the management of innovation in their enterprises. Consequently, this study investigated the leadership styles, the personal and business characteristics of indigenous female entrepreneurs in Tiv land, and the challenges they encounter in the implementation of innovation. Data for the study was purposefully obtained through in-depth interview from 30 indigenous female entrepreneurs with different personal and business characteristics. It was found that the leadership style employed by the women in the implementation of innovation varied. The entrepreneur-leadership styles were categorized as the "friend", the "father", the "mother" and the "ambidextrous". The identified personal and business characteristics that influenced the adoption of the leadership styles and the rate of innovation are: age of the entrepreneur, educational level, ability to speak other languages, type of business and ownership structure. Financial constraint, resistance to change from employees and the overbearing/easily-tiring nature of the females relative to the males were the identified challenges in the implementation of innovation.*

**Keywords:** *Indigenous female entrepreneurs, Leadership styles, Innovation, Tiv land.*

## I.     INTRODUCTION

**Background of the Study**

In today's contemporary business world, business enterprises are under great pressure of highly competitive and global markets. This condition is constantly impinging on the capability of business enterprises to become innovative and differentiate themselves in the eyes of the demanding customers in order to survive (Duygulu and Ozeren, 2009). Consequent upon this, a more crucial concern of business enterprises is how to mobilize creativity among employees for the development and production of novel, socially valued products and/or services (Mumford and Gustafson, 1988, as cited in Jung et al., 2004).

**Statement of Research Problem**

The leadership styles adopted by entrepreneurs have been linked to the mobilization of creativity or innovation among employees (Damanpour, 1991; Jung et al., 2004; Zhao, 2005). De Jung and De Hartog (2007) asserted that transformational, participative and employee-oriented leaders are more likely to encourage employee innovativeness. These studies, however, did not examine the differences between male and female entrepreneurs. Such studies are considered flawed as men and women – mainly as a result of biological and socio-cultural make up – tend to adopt different leadership styles (Helgesen, 1990; Davidson and Burke, 2000). For instance, female entrepreneurs are seen by their employees as less ego-centric and less competitive than male entrepreneurs (Roffey, 2002). Further, Chow (2005) revealed that male entrepreneurs are more inclined to use coercive power whereas female entrepreneur use personal interaction.

Indigenous female entrepreneurs are vital sources of growth (Woldie and Adersua, 2004; GEM, 2010) that can power the economies of our families, local government areas, states and nation. Verheul et al. (2006) added that apart from contributing to economic growth, indigenous female entrepreneurs add diversity and choices in the business environment. Thus, given that innovation is one of the most important measures of business performance (Idris, 2009), this study examines the leadership styles employed by indigenous female entrepreneurs in the management of innovation in their enterprises.

**Objectives of the Study**

1.  To identify the types of innovation implemented in the business ventures.
2.  To identify the leadership styles employed by the indigenous entrepreneurs.
3.  To examine the influence of personal and business characteristics on the leadership styles and the rate of innovation.
4.  To identify the challenges encountered in the implementation of the innovation.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Indigenous people are people who are descent from the populations which inhabited a country, a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonization or the establishment of the present state boundaries (ILO, 1991, as cited in Briggs, 2009). These indigenous people or societies are found in every continent and are perceived as disadvantaged people. However, these people are now embracing entrepreneurship with the rest of the world (Peredo et al., 2004, as cited in Frederick and Foley, 2006). Similarly, many countries of the African continent see the development of entrepreneurship as the only way of achieving industrialization and economic development. Consequently, they are making serious efforts to ensure the development of indigenous entrepreneurship (Ottih, 2011). An indigenous female entrepreneur is a female indigene of a defined geographical area who owns or who has started and manages a business enterprise or organization within the same geographical area, while indigenous female entrepreneurship is a business venture or organization that is owned or started and managed within a defined geographical area by a female indigene or a group of female indigenes of the same geographical area (Agbim and Oriarewo, 2011).

Innovation as a concept has for a long time now, gained the attention of a number of researchers. According to De Jung (2006, as cited in Khan et al., 2009) this concept was for the first time considered by Schumpeter (1934) who recognized it by describing innovation process as creation of new brand, products, services and processes and its impact on economic development. Since then various scholars have described this concept differently. Additionally, organizational innovation is described as formation of novel, important and useful products or services in organizational environment (Woodman et al., 1993; Gumusluouglu and Llesev, 2009). Innovation is considered as a more complex process (Janssen et al., 2004). Some other researchers considered it as an activity which is intended to develop an idea, carry it out, react to it and modify it where necessary (Van de Ven, 1986, as cited in Khan et al., 2009).

Similarly, innovation is the level of novelty implemented by an entrepreneur with regards to the products, services, processes, technologies ideas, or strategies in various functions of the business which may facilitate the realization of its objectives. The degree of novelty or newness is as perceived by the individual entrepreneur (Damanpour, 1991). Based on Damanpour's definition, innovation can be classified as: (1) Product/Service- introducing new products/services, improving quality of existing products/services, repackaging existing products/services; (2) Process - adopting new production methods, using new technology in the production process and acquiring new production skill; (3) supply- using new raw materials/supplies and changing suppliers; (4) market - changing price structures, penetrating new market segments, relocating and developing new promotional strategies; and (5) Administrative - restructuring departments or functions, using flexible operating hours and adopting new communication methods.

Innovation is considered as an essential factor for a long time survival of organizations. Previous researches have figured out two key approaches; object-based: focusing on innovation itself and subject-based: focusing on the subjects like country, industry, organizations and groups, that initiate and implement innovation (Archibugi and Sirilli, 1985, as cited in Khan et al., 2009). Jones and George (2008) distinguished between two types of innovation; quantum product: the development of new, often radically different kinds of goods/services because of fundamental shifts in technology brought about by pioneering discoveries and incremental product: the gradual improvement and reinforcement to existing products that occurs over time as existing technologies are perfected.

Studies have strived to explore factors encouraging organizational innovation. These factors include leadership, a creative work environment (Amabile, 1998), job complexity and style of supervision (Oldham and Cummings, 1996), organizational culture and climate (Mumford and Gustafson, 1998, as cited in Khan et al., 2009). Researchers found leadership to be one of the most important factors affecting organizational innovation (Mumford et al., 2002; Jung, 2001; Amabile, 1998). However, the existing leadership styles are based on the perspective of male or male and female entrepreneurs. This is because the existing typologies of leadership styles (Damanpour, 1991; Zhao, 2005, 2005; De Jong and De Hartog, 2007) do not adequately explain the female perspective in innovation. More so, dimensions such as transformational versus transactional, participation and employee-orientation have not sufficiently emphasized the importance of stakeholders other than employees to women entrepreneurs (Idris, 2009).

Leadership, according to Ottih (2008) is a means of direction; ability of management to induce subordinates to work towards group goals with confidence and Keenness, while leadership styles are the approaches to leadership. Jung et al. (2004) opined that the increasing work processes and competitive business environment have created new challenges for organization, and their top managers' style of leadership has accordingly become an increasingly important determinant of organizational creativity. The top management of an organization might influence creativity and organizational innovation in a number of ways. First of all, top mangers can define and shape the work contents within which employees interacts to define goals, problems and solutions. By articulating a vision that emphases long-term over short-term business out comes (e.g., growth and value rather than quarterly profit), leaders can direct employees' individual and joint efforts towards

innovative work processes and outcomes. By creating and sustaining an organizational climate and culture that nurtures creative efforts and facilitates diffusion of learning, leaders can significantly boost organizational creativity (Jung et al., 2004). Finally, leaders can develop and maintain a system that values and rewards creative performance through compensation and other human resource related policies. When a company provides intrinsic and extrinsic rewards for efforts to acquire new skills and to experiment with creative work approaches, employees desire to engage in creative endeavours will constantly be reinforced (Jung, 2001).

## III. RESEACH METHODOLOGY

Due to the exploratory nature of the study, a qualitative method, via personal interview was considered more suitable. Personal interview according to Burns (2000): enables the researcher to obtain the respondents' subjective experiences when a life event is being narrated; it presents the respondents' perspective instead of the researcher's own view; and it gives the respondents and the researcher equal status in the dialogue. Thirty (30) indigenous female entrepreneurs were identified and interviewed. Three (3) female entrepreneurs were purposefully chosen from: each of the 10 selected businesses; different parts of Tiv land; and different personal backgrounds. This was done to provide different perspectives in female entrepreneurship. Although the sample size was small, it was considered acceptable for exploratory study (Burns, 2000; Dechant and Al-Lamky, 2004; Jamali, 2009). Also, an interpreter was employed to enhance free flow of communication in a few cases where there was language barrier, while pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the entrepreneurs.

## IV. RESULTS/FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

**Profile of Respondents**

Table 1 show that the ages of the respondents ranged from 26 to 57. A few of them had no educational qualification, while for those who had, their educational qualification ranged from primary school certificate to master degree. Seventeen (17) of them were married and had children, 4 were widows with children, 3 were single mothers, 5 were yet to marry and one was a divorcee with children. Nineteen of them were involved in service-oriented businesses, 7 were traders, one was a manufacturer and 3 were in different agricultural businesses. The ownership structure of 22 of the businesses was sole-preneurship proprietorship, 4 were family businesses and 4 were co-preneurships.

**Types of innovation**

The types of innovation adopted by the entrepreneurs are product/service, process, supply, market and administrative. According to Jones and George (2008) many new products fail when they reach the marketplace because they were designed with scant attention to customer needs. Successful product development requires inputs from customers and suppliers. This idea guided these women in the introduction of innovation in their businesses. This is evident from the responses of the following women.

**Doose stated that:**

> *Based on the demands of my customers for high quality clothes and for prompt delivery, we have contracted a new supplier for high quality materials at moderate prices. Also, we just bought new machines to facilitate and enhance our cutting, designing and sewing. Hence, we deliver all clothes at the right quality and at the agreed time.*

**Fanen stated that:**

> *Aside the usual fresh fish pepper soup; we have introduced baked fresh fish. Also, to increase our range of customers and market size, we have opened 2 other sales outlets, installed A/Cs in our restaurants and now prepare delicacies for people from the 6 geo-political zones at moderate prices. These meals are served by uniformed and neatly dressed waiters and waitresses.*

**Msendoo stated that:**

> *As a young mother who operates a beauty center, I always strike a balance between attending to my home front and the needs of my customers. To do this effectively, I attend to my customers in my shop, and sometimes their homes and/or my own house, using my phone and car to facilitate both communication and movement. We offer the latest trend services such as hair colouring and bonding using the latest styling techniques.*

**Table 1: Profile of Respondents**

| Respondent | Age (in yrs) | Educational qualification | Marital status | Type of business | Ownership structure |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 28 | O/level | Married; have children | Retail outlet | Solepreneurship |
| 2 | 33 | OND | Married; have children | Tailoring shop | Solepreneurship |
| 3. | 49 | O/level | Widow; have children | Restaurant | Family business |
| 4 | 35 | NCE | Single | Jewellery store/boutique | Solepreneurship |
| 5 | 32 | HND | Married; have children | Business center | Solepreneurship |
| 6 | 30 | HND | Married; have children | Beauty saloon | Solepreneurship |
| 7 | 44 | Primary cert. | Married; have children | Retail outlet | Solepreneurship |
| 8. | 52 | None | Married; have children | Agribusiness | Family business |
| 9 | 26 | O/level | Married; has a child | Beauty saloon | Copreneurship |
| 10 | 29 | M. Sc. | Single | Tailoring shop | Copreneurship |
| 11 | 47 | M.Ed. | Single | Daycare/ school | Family business |
| 12 | 32 | MBA | Married; have children | Confectionery/Bakery | Solepreneurship |
| 13. | 45 | Primary cert. | Married; have children | Jewellery store/boutique | Solepreneurship |
| 14 | 47 | B. Sc. | Married; have children | Event planning/interior decoration | Solepreneurship |
| 15 | 38 | B. Sc. | Widow; have children | Beauty saloon | Solepreneurship |
| 16 | 56 | None | Widow; have children | Tailoring shop | Solepreneurship |
| 17 | 57 | MBA | Divorcee; have children | Agribusiness | Solepreneurship |
| 18 | 52 | OND | Married; have children | Restaurant | Solepreneurship |
| 19 | 41 | NCE. | Married; have children | Event planning/ interior decorate | Solepreneurship |
| 20 | 43 | M. Ed. | Married; have children | Day care/school | Solepreneurship |
| 21 | 28 | B.Sc. | Single; has a child | Business center | Copreneurship |
| 22 | 29 | NCE. | Single; has a child | Business center | Solepreneurship |
| 23 | 34 | MPA. | Married; have children | Confectionery/Bakery | Solepreneurship |
| 24 | 42 | M.Sc. | Single; has a child | Confectionery/Bakery | Copreneurship |
| 25 | 40 | M.Ed. | Married; have children | Day care/schools | Solepreneurship |
| 26 | 44 | Primary cert. | Married; have children | Agribusiness | Family business |
| 27 | 57 | None | Widow; have children | Jewllery store/boutique | Solepreneurship |
| 28 | 36 | MPA | Widow; have children | Restaurant | Solepreneurship |
| 29 | 31 | HND | Single | Event planning/interior decoration | Solepreneurship |
| 30 | 33 | MBA | Single | Retail outlet | Solepreneurships |

Some of the respondents, especially those operating restaurant businesses who knew what innovation is have not introduced any new thing or changes. They believe that their customers are still comfortable with eating the Tiv traditional delicacies inside the traditional "ate".

**Leadership Styles employed by the Indigenous Entrepreneurs**

Research does suggest, however, that leadership style may vary between women and men. Women tend to be somewhat more participative as leaders than are men, involving subordinates in decision making and seeking their input. Male managers tend to be less participative than are female managers, making more decisions on their own and wanting to do things their own way. Moreover, research suggests that men tend to be harsher when they punish their subordinates than do women (The Economist, 2000).

There are at least two reasons that female managers may be more participative as leaders than are male managers. First, subordinates may try to resist the influence of female managers more than they do the influence of male managers. Some subordinates may never have reported to a woman before; some may incorrectly see a management role as being more appropriate for a man than for a woman; and some may just resist being led by a woman. To overcome this resistance and encourage subordinates' trust and respect, women managers may adopt a participative approach. Second, female managers have better interpersonal skills than male mangers. Good interpersonal skills help female managers have effective interactions with their subordinates that are crucial to a participative approach (The Economist, 2000). The responses of the indigenous female entrepreneurs in the present study have given rise to typologies of female entrepreneur – leadership styles, namely, the "friend", the "mother", the "father" and the "ambidextrous".

**The "friend" female entrepreneur – leadership style**

This leadership style reflects the relationship existing among friends in a group. This entrepreneur views herself and her employees and other stakeholders as somewhat related by certain characteristics like age, birth, marriage and educational class. Thus, they share and discuss personal and business affairs together for the good of themselves and the business. Their pay is usually dependent on the performance of the business. Innovation is borne out of brain storming, trial and error, and a general consensus. They teach each other and are usually persons of at least an average educational standing.

**Hembadoo stated that:**

> *Those working with me are my neighbour and sisters. We relate and work as friends. This relationship and our educational backgrounds have actually enhanced the performance of the business.*

**Msughshima stated that:**

> *We create styles out of the suggestions from our customers and suppliers, after several trails and errors.*

**The "mother" female entrepreneur – leadership style**

This leadership style or approach portrays what goes on in a real family setting but with respect to the implementation of innovation in the business venture. Here, the female entrepreneur sees herself as a mother and the business as an extended family. Thus, she refers to the employees and other stakeholders as brothers and sisters, and appreciates educated and intelligent employees and other stakeholders. Hence, she communicates with them freely. This explains why she encourages the employees to be innovative. Every innovation is first test run by the entrepreneur and the employees before introducing it to other stakeholders and then the actual implementation in the business. These views were expressed by the entrepreneurs thus:

**Doosuur stated that:**

> *I recognize my employees and other stakeholders as my brothers and sisters. They respect me and relate with me like their mother. They call me mummy.*

**Mimidoo stated that:**

> *The cordial relationship between me and my employees and between my business and other stakeholders enhances information flow between my employees in the form of corrections and suggestions. Also, between the business and other stakeholders in the form of my competitors' innovations.*

**The "father" female entrepreneur – leadership style**

This leadership style reflects the father's role in a real family setting. Here, the female entrepreneur views herself as a father, and the employees and other stakeholders as stubborn children (or brothers/sisters) – who respects their father more than their mother. Thus, the entrepreneurs use harsh words, unfriendly

instructions and punishment to achieve compliance from the employees. Innovation is highly formalized as the entrepreneur thinks out the idea with little or no inputs from the employees. The employees are then expected to implement such innovations based on well laid down instructions. Their incentives and pay is tied to their performance and their relationship with the entrepreneur.

**Mnena stated that:**
> *I expect my employees to be loyal to me and to do their work according to my instructions.*

**Hembafan stated that:**
> *I reward my employees based on how well they respect me, obey my instructions in the course of doing their assigned duties.*

### The "ambidextrous" female entrepreneur – leadership style

This leadership style reflects the father's and mother's role in a real family setting. Here,   the behaviour of a child or the children and the circumstance in which the behaviour was displayed determines whether it is the father's and/or mother's role that should be brought to bear as an instruction or corrective measure. The female entrepreneur sees the business as a family where the father's and mother's roles are imperative.  She believes in adopting either the father's and/or mother's leadership style depending on the employee's behaviour or the customers' needs and the circumstance at the material time.  Innovation is viewed as a dynamic means to achieving set goals and not as a technique that must be religiously applied.

**Mnguashima state that:**
> *I relate with my employees based on their loyalty to me and their performance. If they see themselves as brothers/sisters or children and relate with me like a mother, I will deal with them like a mother otherwise I will treat them as a father will treat the members of his family.*

**Doofan stated that:**
> *Our level of innovativeness is dependent on the status of our customers.  We have standard qualities, service patterns and prices but when the customers in question are government officials, politicians or wealthy persons we increase the quality and improve the service patterns so as to charge them more money.*

### The influence of personal and business characteristics

When asked about the influence of personal and business characteristics on their leadership styles and the rate of innovation, most of the female entrepreneurs highlighted age, educational level, previous work experience, ability to speak other languages, type of business and ownership structure.  These are typified by the following responses.

**Mwuese stated that:**
> *I'm just 28 years old, while my employees and other stakeholders are aged 26-36 years, as such I find it difficult to play the mother's or father's role in the management of the business.  Beside my age, my educational background has further helped me to understand the significance of relating with them as friends. Hence, this relationship has enhanced the rate at which we generate new ideas and introduce innovations in the business.*

**Sendoo stated that:**
> *My previous work experiences in the internal revenue board and in two banks within the state, and my ability to speak the 3 main Nigerian languages further helps me relate with all my business stakeholders as a mother.  Also, this has contributed to the rapid growth of my retail outlet.  Thus, I have only relied on word-of-mouth and repeat purchases as methods of promotion.*

**Mgemishima stated that;**
> *My poultry and fish farm business have brought me face-to-face with representatives of various organizations and people from different strata of the society. Everybody calls me "mama" because I relate with all my business stakeholders as a mother.  Since the business belong to me, I discuss any new idea with my 4 workers and once the idea will be beneficial to the business we quickly start implementation.*

**Challenges encountered in the implementation of innovation**

The respondents identified the challenges they encounter in the introduction and management of innovation as financial constraint, resistance to change from employees, failure on the part of the suppliers to deliver the ordered items with the agreed quality, the varying needs and taste of some customers, and the overbearing and easily-tiring nature of the female entrepreneurs. This is evident from the following responses.

**Nguavase stated that:**

> *We have not been able to renovate our shop, stock it with more goods and employ the needed two additional sales persons because of financial constraints.*

**Iveren stated that:**

> *My workers seems to avoid me and purposely delay in doing their assigned task whenever I over scold them. Sometimes I had to apologize to them because I can't do all alone. You know on like the men, we women have an easily-tiring nature.*

**Aver stated that:**

> *Each time I want to introduce a new delicacy based on customers' demand, my employees will resist the idea on the ground that it is not a popular demand.*

**Nguvarn stated that:**

> *Whenever my suppliers fail to deliver on time and/or the right quality of materials, my income falls. Hence, I feel bad and above all I find my self becoming harsh and saucy in my relationship with my stakeholders.*

**Sewuese stated that:**

> *Sometimes I'm afraid when certain categories of customers come to pick their clothes. This is because they often complain. No matter the time and skills I employ in making their dresses, I still find it difficult to wholly satisfy them.*

# V. CONCLUSION

The study reveals that most of the respondents knew what innovation is and were able to describe how they have introduced it in their businesses. These women introduced product/service, process, supply, market and administrative innovation. A few female entrepreneurs, especially owners of restaurants, who knew what innovation is, did not introduce any new thing on the ground that their customers were comfortable with the old method. However, the leadership styles employed by these women in the implementation (or introduction and management) of the varied rates of innovation differed among the women. This is consistent with the observations by previous researchers (McClelland et al., 2005; Farr-Wharton and Brunetto, 2006; Lee, 2007; Idris, 2009). The personal and business characteristics that influenced the leadership styles they adopted and the rate of innovation are: age of the entrepreneur, educational level, previous work experience, ability to speak other languages, type of business and ownership structure.

Existing typologies of leadership styles failed to take into cognizance the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs such as single motherhood, limited physical stamina and lack of capital (De Jong and De Hartog, 2007; Duygulu and Ozeren, 2009; Idris, 2009). In other words, while existing typologies may be applied to entrepreneurs in general, the female entrepreneur – leadership style typologies by the present study – the "friend", the "father", the "mother" and the "ambidextrous" recognizes the specific female characteristics which when properly harnessed will help them overcome the challenges they encounter in the implementation of innovation in their enterprises. The identified challenges are: financial constraint, resistance to change from employees, failure on the part of the suppliers to deliver the ordered items with the agreed quality and at the agreed time, varying needs and taste of some customers, and the overbearing/easily-tiring nature of female entrepreneurs.

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