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SOFT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT FOR FEMALE BUSINESS START-UPS IN SAUDI ARABIA

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ABSTRACT

Owing to expanded changes in the structure of associations and vocation, ownership of soft skills ordinarily alluded as particular, non-specific or behavioral are pivotal to working proficiently in the work or business connections. The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the impact of soft skills development for women business start-ups in Saudi Arabia. The study employs a mixed method of research that is both quantitative and qualitative. A survey of 55 female entrepreneurs in Saudi Arabia was carried out. The survey was placed on survey monkey and the responses downloaded for analysis. Moreover, an interview was conducted with one-business experts in validating the research findings. Findings indicate that Saudi Arabian women entrepreneurs have low level of soft skills, although they do understand on how their behaviors affect their business performance. The impacts of soft skills were the necessity of providing women entrepreneurs in Saudi Arabia trainings. Therefore, the researcher recommend training programs for women entrepreneurs in the area of soft skills to enhance their business performance also have a study that contains teaching technology skills since today's work and business environments are depicted by technological dominance.

INTRODUCTION

Many corporations around the globe have come to a realization that in order to effectively gain a competitive advantage, they have to ensure that people understand on how to handle themselves in their work or enterprises, and how to associate with colleagues or customers. In the present perspective, it is no longer sufficient to be just a specialist in a particular field of knowledge [1]. The intense competition is a key element that can make one stand out. For businesses include sales, soft skills are an essential element for survival and growth [2]. Timmons [3] found out those customers preferred entrepreneurs who exhibited soft skills over those who did not have. A further evaluation

noted that much of the reason for improved performance was exhibition of soft skills. It was also revealed that soft skills are not only important in matters related to customers, but also they are also important for all kind of persons in any particular organization. Additionally, soft skills were among the major factor that placed people at the top of the organization hierarchy.

The World Bank [4], “Saudi Arabia is ranked 11 out of 183 economies and Singapore is the top ranked economy in the Ease of Doing Business”. This is because the government supports such endeavors. In other words, the government encourages business start-ups and provides a favorable environment for the same. In essence, Saudi Arabia is popular in promoting and supporting innovation and entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship and business start-ups enjoy a high level of support in this nation. Among the forms of support offered by the Saudi Arabian government for business start-ups includes financial assistance, education, mentoring, knowledge, and training. In fact, today’s most entrepreneurial individuals and innovators can be found in Saudi Arabia. The youth constitute more than 70% and many of them are trying to set up businesses and entrepreneurship projects. The assistance by Saudi Arabian government for entrepreneurship is in all aspects from education to financing [5].

According to Groh [6], women in Saudi Arabia are apart from having amazing ideas, and are enthusiastic in their various works. However, they lack development, and essential training in soft skills, in fact, money is not a factor for most of them. Organizations should be able to explore how women should change their equation in the society [7]. This is in term of their strengths as well as the obstacles they face. The exceptional women employed a blend of conventional masculine styles, which they had made better. Some of these styles include being authoritative, directive, leading by example alongside other feminine ones [8, 9]. These women also had an understanding of when to be inclusive, nurturing and collaborative. The surveyed men, and the less efficient women, tended to rely on masculine styles. Furthermore, the capability to endure hardship had made women to seize the slightest business opportunities as significant to be explored to survive further [10]r.

The new roles for women have carried even more accountability than traditional roles, but a lesser direct authority. According to Crawford [11], “when an individual is operating in a vast white space in the present day organization, with a few direct reports, he or she can demand and coerce and demand until the cows come home, however, no one will pay any attention” [11]. Fountain’s research established successive women leaders, and entrepreneurs were those who knew how to influence, collaborate, and gain others trust. These skills helped women to become better than men. However, the author also observed that for both women and men required effective leadership was not generic but a capability acquired and developed through training and experience. For many firms, women still do not have the same opportunities as men in developing, and practicing soft skills [11].

There are organizations that try to create such opportunities for women. For instance, IBM has over the past decade committed itself in understanding and

reducing barriers which women encounter in their enterprises or work environment. The company regularly conducts reviews in identifying particular types of development experiences which women should be provided with. The ultimate goal for such business entities is about performance and this will be achieved through acquisition of soft skills [12]. Therefore, this study evaluates the impact of soft skills development for female business start-ups in Saudi Arabia.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research tries to comprehend a given examination issue or subject from the points of view of the local populace it includes. It is particularly effective in acquiring socially particular data about the qualities, suppositions, practices, and social connections of specific populaces [13]. Quantitative research is basically about gathering numerical information to demonstrate a specific marvel, specific inquiries appear to be instantly suited to being addressed utilizing quantitative methods [14]. This study applied both qualitative and quantitative approach.

Data collection tools

For primary data, this study relied on questionnaires surveys that were filled by the respondents that were business entrepreneurs and experts in Saudi Arabia. The survey was placed on survey monkey and then downloaded for analysis. The questionnaires survey was conducted on 55 female entrepreneurs in Saudi Arabia. Also, face to face interview also conducted to obtain the validation for the result finding.

For secondary data, the secondary sources were accessed from research findings, government agencies, and other organizations that had conducted studies on the same area. Peer-reviewed journals such as Academic Search Premier and Business Source Premier were helpful in exploring the topic of the importance of the soft skills for female entrepreneurs in Saudi Arabia.

The Questionnaire

This study conducted the online survey by develop the questionnaire on survey monkey as it flexible and facilitates the capture of in-depth knowledge of the respondents and promotes respondent cooperation. Questionnaires are appropriate in data collection because they are easy to analyze, and are cost effective. The questionnaire was designed in simple language in order to be understandable among respondents.

The abbreviates of business entrepreneurs require skills used in this study are Communication skills (CS), Supervisory skills (SS), Problem solving skills (PSS), Leadership skills (LS), Conflict resolution skills (CRS), Team working skills (TWS), Flexibility (F), Creativity (C), Assertiveness and diplomacy skills (ADS), Counseling, Coaching and mentoring skills (CCMS) as well as Negotiating, and influencing skills (NIS)

The Validation Interview

This study interview a small venture development center, Dr. Faisal Abdullgader for validates the finding of this study. The results from the questionnaire were analyze and further clarified with the interviewee regarding the influence of soft skills development and enhances women businesses and business start-ups.

Data Analysis

The data collected by use of the questionnaire were thoroughly checked and edited for completeness and comprehensibility. Quantitative data were collected using closed ended questionnaires. The use of descriptive analysis was appropriate as it assisted in establishing patterns and relationships and made it easier to understand and interpret the implications of the study.

Ethical consideration

This research was considered to have no specific ethical risks and fully meet with Academic Ethical Framework. Data collection procedure was done under the condition of anonymity and this research is keen not to make some negative effects on individual respondents. Moreover, the respondents were being informed that the study was only for academic purposes and not for public disclosures. This translated that their identity will not be required while offering the information. Moreover, the respondents were free to withdraw their contributions at any time during the process.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The total number of participants in this study was 55. The results are summarized and analyzed according to the study questions. Table 1 shows the demographic data of the respondents and majority of the respondents are age between 20 to 25 years old follow by 31 to 45 years old about 38.18% and 30.91% respectively. This attributed to the fact that many of the women in this age didn't looked for jobs, and however they sat down for business enterprises. Besides that, majority of the respondents are with Bachelor's Degree holder about 54.55% and this shows the fact that many of the women finished college and started their enterprises. Also, majority of the respondents are with working experience 2 to 5 years follow by less than 2 years about 40% and 32.73%. This shows the fact that many of female entrepreneur had several years of experienced and they are running their enterprise in a sufficient way. In addition, higher percentage of participants who had boutique industries which were 21.8%, that explained that female entrepreneurs work their best in their own field which is clothing. The others industries are Abaya industry (9.1%), jewelry industry (5.5%), spa industry (5.5%), magazine industry (1.8%), food industry (7.3%), beauty industry (3.6%), party planning industry (9.1%), IT industry (1.8%), graphic design industry (9.1%), architectural industry (3.6%), real estate industry (1.8%), photography industry (7.3%) and others (12.7%).

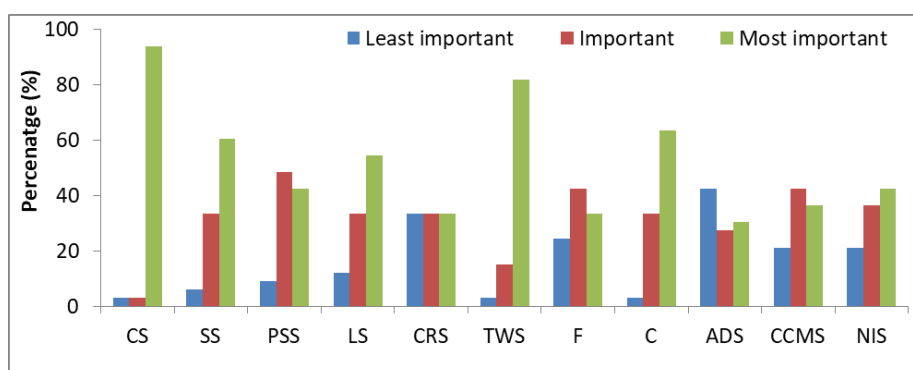
Table 1: Demographic data of the respondents

Characteristics	Categories	Count (n)	Percentage (%)
Age group (Years old)	20-25	21	38.18
	26-30	12	21.82
	31-45	17	30.91
	36-40	4	7.27
	41-45	1	1.82
Education level	Some college	10	18.18
	Bachelor's Degree	30	54.55
	Master's Degree	15	27.27
Working experience	0-2	18	32.73
	2-5	22	40.00
	5-10	11	20.00
	10-20	3	5.45
	More than 20	1	1.82

Soft Skills

Figure 1 shows the importance of the soft skills on training for start-ups. Communication skills, supervisory skills, leadership skills, teamwork skills, creativity and negotiating and influencing skills were most important skills for business start-ups training. However, problem solving skills, flexibility and counseling, coaching and mentoring skills were important on the scale of training. Finally, Assertiveness and diplomacy skills were least important skills in the business start-ups training.

Figure 2 shows the importance of the soft skills on necessary to start-up. The soft skills required to start-up were communication skills, leadership skills, team working skills and creativity. Those skills were very important for female entrepreneurs to start their business. However, supervisory skills, problem solving skills, flexibility, counseling, coaching and mentoring skills were important in a beginning of a business. Moreover, the least important skills were assertiveness and diplomacy skills and Negotiating, and influencing skills.

**Figure 1:** Importance of the soft skills on training for start-ups

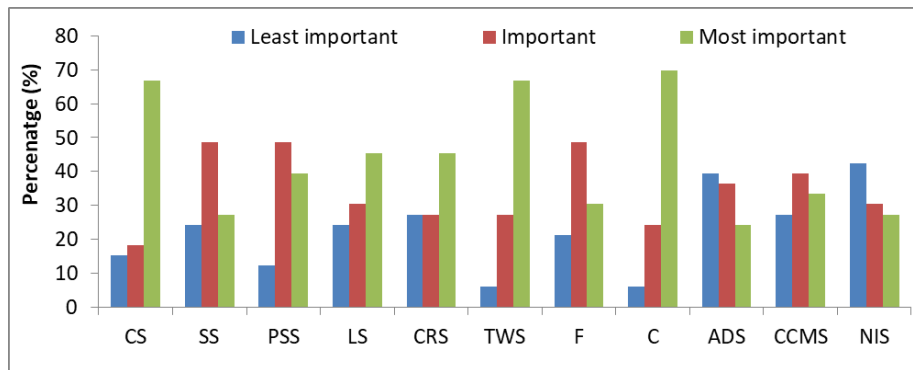


Figure 2: Importance of the soft skills on necessary to start-up

Figure 3 shows the importance of the soft skills on necessary after launch. The soft skills required after launch businesses that were very important, communication skills, leadership skills and creativity. However, supervisory skills, problem solving skills, conflict resolution skills, flexibility, assertiveness and diplomacy skills, counseling, coaching and mentoring skills also negotiating and influencing skills were important after launch a business. Figure 4 shows the importance of the soft skills on necessary managerial tools for entrepreneurs. The soft skills required as managerial tool for entrepreneurs that were very important, communication skills, problem solving skills, leadership skills, team working skills and flexibility. However, supervisory skills, conflict resolution skills, assertiveness and diplomacy skills, counseling, coaching and mentoring skills also negotiating and influencing skills were important as managerial tool for entrepreneurs.

Figure 5 demonstrated the mechanisms used to improve soft skills. Communication skills, supervisory skills, problem solving skills, leadership skills, conflict resolution skills, team working skills, flexibility, assertiveness and diplomacy skills, counseling, coaching and mentoring skills also negotiating and influencing skills could be taught through college/university. However, creativity cannot be taught and it is depend on self-study.

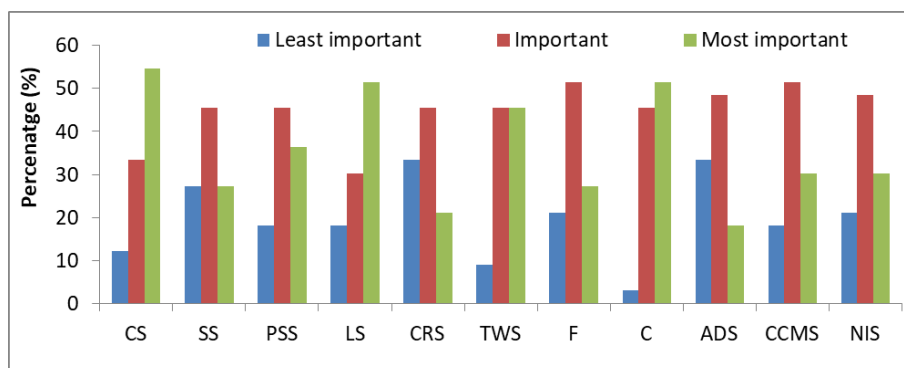


Figure 3: Importance of the soft skills on necessary after launch

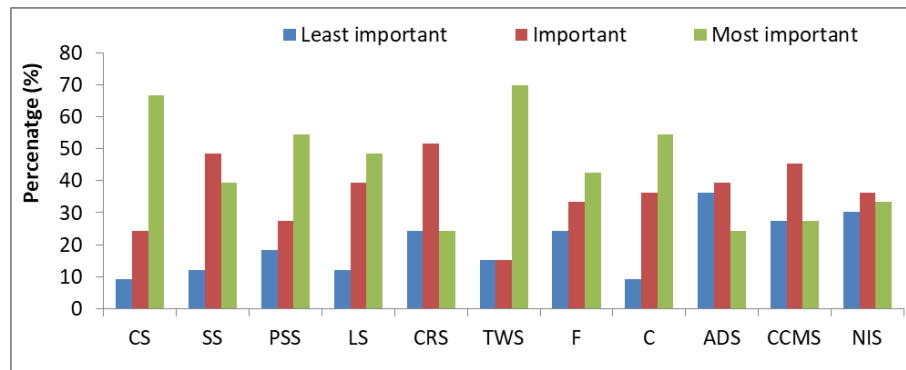


Figure 4: Importance of the soft skills on necessary managerial tools for entrepreneurs

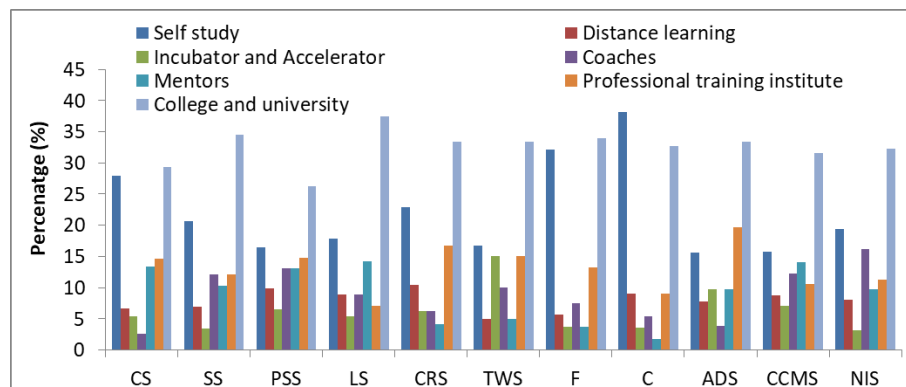


Figure 5: The mechanisms used to improve soft skills

OVERALL DISCUSSION

The first question of this study is “What are the soft skills that the female business start-ups require?”. The obtained result showed that in Saudi Arabia female entrepreneur need to learn the very important soft skills for instance: communication skills, supervisory skills, leadership skills, teamwork skills, creativity and negotiating and influencing skills. However, some of the soft skills were kind of important to learn about them like: problem solving skills, flexibility and counseling, coaching and mentoring skills. On the other hand, Assertiveness and diplomacy skills were the least important skills to learn them in a start-ups training.

The study has established the necessity of providing women entrepreneurs in Saudi Arabia training in soft skills. This is a very essential aspect for producing an able quantity of women entrepreneurs who are not only working to survive but also to grow, and contribute to their local and subsequently the global economy. Improving entrepreneurship for women will necessitate a turnaround in conventional attitudes than what the creation of jobs would do for these women. A critical assessment of the extant government, and non-government efforts suggest that provision of training, and offer of technical assistance should not be geared in merely suiting the individual needs. They are only considered as capsule inputs that focus on the vested interests of individual trainers, and regard the training as an end to itself.

The second question is, “How these soft skills can be imparted on the female startups?”. The findings showed that soft skills were best to be taught at college/university. Except creativity cannot be taught it’s a self-study, people born with it. In Saudi Arabian perspective, many women are aware on what soft skills required in a business. Because of this, many of the businesses turn out performing great or above their potential. The reason behind these phenomena is that soft skills are usually taught in college/university such as: Effat University, Dar Al-Hekma, UBT and King Abdulaziz University. Further, what female entrepreneur should not forget is that soft skills are crucial in helping them interact with their colleagues as well as their clients and it’s more important than what other people think.

These findings have established that effective business management requires a combination of multi skilling such as: communication skills, supervisory skills, leadership skills, teamwork skills, creativity and negotiating and influencing skills and many more skills. Learning is becoming more focused on equipping people for development of services, products, jobs and processes. High quality relationships are required in order to make new organizational structures effective, and that people investment lies at the core of development in high performance. Many organizations have incorporated procedures for performance management in monitoring progress, evaluation of skill development and identification of areas that require further development.

Validation Interview

The interview was conducted with an expert of small venture development center, Dr. Faisal Abdullgader to validate the research finding. He examined the outcomes of the questionnaire, because he knows these results are linked to the development of businesses. Also he agreed that female entrepreneurs need soft skills training programs. Moreover, he thought that the research is great, and it added value to the entrepreneurial system. Also, he thought if the research had all the soft skills that are needed, it would’ve helped the study more. Such as: technical skill, career skills, mathematical skills and attitude skills.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion that can be drawn from the study findings is that workers and entrepreneurs have understood what kinds of skills are required and how to learn them. They also understood on how their actions will affect their colleagues, how it affects their clients, and how it affects the ultimate business results. Innovative work systems depend on workers, and entrepreneurs taking on responsibilities for their work. Implications for the need for soft skills for entrepreneurs for effective operations are quite evident. The prerequisite for success depends on the possession of soft skills.

The government, and other interested entities should come up with conferences and programs to learn more of what are the soft skills that the female business start-ups require and how soft skills can be imparted for women entrepreneurs to enhance their business growth. Soft skills conferences and programs will be very essential for producing an able quantity of women

entrepreneurs who are not only working to survive but also to grow. Individual women entrepreneurs in Saudi Arabia should also seek ways of developing soft skills in order to boost their business growth.

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