



How to cite this article:

Bari, A., & Arshad, D. (2019). Disentangling The Significant Of Improvisational Behavior On Women Entrepreneurs' Business Success. *Journal of Technology and Operations Management*, 14(1), 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.32890/jtom.14.1.1>

## **DISENTANGLING THE SIGNIFICANT OF IMPROVISATIONAL BEHAVIOR ON WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS' BUSINESS SUCCESS**

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**Received:** 10/12/2018   **Revised:** 25/01/2019   **Accepted:** 01/04/2019   **Published:** 27/06/2019

### **ABSTRACT**

Previous research indicates that improvisation as deliberate extemporaneous composition and execution of novel action is an important matter for any business to be successful. The present article seeks to advance the theoretical knowledge on the influence of improvisation behavior on business success, particularly among women entrepreneur by reviewing and synthesizing available research into a conceptual framework that the relationship of the selected variables. Based on the arguments in this article, a proposition was developed to refine our understanding of the relationship between improvisation and business success. Finally, theoretical and practical implication were discussed.

**Keywords:** Improvisation behavior, business success and women entrepreneur

### **INTRODUCTION**

The developing worldwide movement for gender equality has focused in recent years on the participation of women at the pinnacle of organizations (Klettner, Clarke, & Boersma, 2016). According to Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) (2015) on women entrepreneurs' special report 2015, women play a major role in driving the world economy making up to 40% of the global workforce. The recent Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) found 126 million women starting or running businesses, and 98 million operating established (over three and a half years) businesses (Entrepreneur India, 2016). Women entrepreneurship is acknowledged as the main contributor of employment and sustainable economic development as it has a significant effect on reducing poverty and inequality, and on improving the overall well-being of children (Al-Mamun et al., 2015). According to Syed Zamberi (2011), "Women entrepreneurs are women

who can play a significant role in fostering economic and social development, particularly in the small business sector.”. The participation of women entrepreneurs have been rapidly increased over the last few decades and studies have reported a positive contribution to the world economy (Al Mamun & Ekpe, 2016). Women business owners continue to display extraordinary economic prowess worldwide, with every 1 in 11 women (8.9 per cent) involved in entrepreneurship across the globe, revealed the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM).

However, SMEs also are now exposed to a dynamic business economic change and high competition. For example, the use of social media is powerful tools in terms of market penetration and product promotion. However, most of SMEs especially women-owned are lack of knowledge regarding the undisputed importance of ICT in the current business environment (SME Corp, 2017). Many of SMEs are still unfamiliar with operating a computer, and would not take this risk as an opportunity to enhance their competitive edge.

Therefore, SMEs need to refigure their strategic orientation in the form of improvisational behavior in order to benefit from the rapid change and to gain and maintain competitive advantage (Rosli et al., 2015). Previous study identified improvisation action an important factor of organizational performance (Arshad, Razalli, Julienti, Ahmad, & Mahmood, 2015). As an entrepreneur, SMEs owner has to be aware of the advantages and opportunities regarding the benefits of improvisation. For example, previously, SMEs have only go for traditional way of advertising product and services such as TV and radio station, magazines and newspaper which is costly. However, the current scenario in the world shows that internet usage especially for market penetration is rising. Therefore, women entrepreneur has to be more creative and spontaneously improvise to be more competitive in this business environment. On the other hand, lack of improvisational behavior could not foresee the potential opportunities to explore.

Business which struggling to continuously adapt and survive in today's rapidly changing environment are turning to an emerging technique known as improvisation (Hatinah, Rosli, & Nik Nor Hasimah, 2015). According to Rosli and Hatinah (2016), the study on the relationship between improvisation and performance is inconsistent. In addition, Rosli and Hatinah (2016) reiterates that there is still paucity of study on the relationship between improvisation and performance as whole. Consequently, the relationship between entrepreneur improvisation behavior and performance of women owned SMEs is still lacking.

This paper tries to fill the gap by proposing a framework focusing on the influence of improvisational behavior on women entrepreneur business success that is still negligible particularly in the chosen context. According to the RBV theory, improvisation is also considered as an organizational process and often an integral part of strategic decision making (Baker, Miner, & Eesley, 2003); knowledge (McKnight & Bontis, 2002); and capabilities (Cunha, Clegg, & Kamoche, 2012) and is therefore a unique intangible resources that leads to a competitive advantage of a firm or business (Barney, 1991). Therefore, this paper contends that improvisational behavior will significantly influence women entrepreneurs' business success.

## **Improvisational Behavior**

Improvisation is a form of intuition that guides the action in a spontaneous way and is something done and produced on the spur of the moment rather than through a deliberate process of thought and evaluation (Moorman & Miner, 1998). Improvisation is the deliberate extemporaneous composition and execution of novel action (Hmielski, 2013). This means, a person can improvise his/her actions at any given time (Hmielski, 2013). Spontaneity represents one of the most evident and important aspects of improvisation (Moorman & Miner, 1998a). Moorman and Miner (1998a) described spontaneity as the convergence of composition and execution in time. Spontaneous response describes the ability to respond to some form of stimuli in a seemingly automatic, unanticipated, and nonconscious manner (Vera & Crossan, 2004). The development of spontaneous actions and support of spontaneous and experimental cultures also leads to serendipitous opportunities, or the accidental discovery of something valuable, a capability that has often been mistaken for luck or chance (Cunha et al., 2012).

Additionally, improvisation is an action-oriented behavior led under uncertain circumstances, time pressure, and task demands (Duxbury, 2014). Improvisation behavior can cope with the rapid changes in environmental demands because it provides firms with flexibility and capabilities (Hmieleski, Corbett, & Baron, 2013). Thus, business which do not have 'time' to plan may find improvisation useful as a strategy (Baker & Nelson, 2005). Improvisation is also seen as a new paradigm for organization's strategic choice and strategic performance construct (Hmieleski et al., 2013).

## **Business Success**

The term business success is generally used as the term for a small business success in a certain period of time. Business success is defined as how well an organization or business achieve its goals and objective (Moha Asri & Ferdous, 2015). In addition, business success also denotes to include an entire business or even to control unanticipated state of affairs element within a stated parameter, where the financial and non-financial items can be the parameter (Moha Asri & Ferdous, 2015).

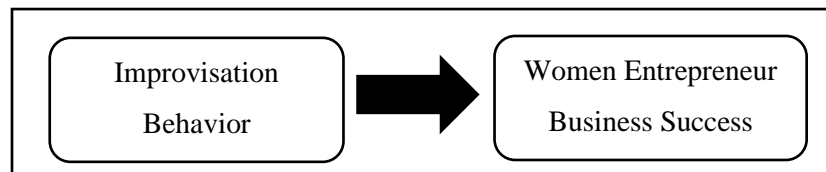
According to Zinger et al. (2001) and Rhodes and Butler (2004), the business success of entrepreneurs has been measured in two factors that is financial and non-financial measures. Masuo et al. (2001) stated that business success is measured by financial revenue, profits, return on assets, employees and rates; and non-financial measures include personal fulfillment, customer satisfaction and individual development. According to Venkatraman and Ramanujam (1986), financial performance is underpinned by the indicators of sales turnover, sales growth, profitability, and sales margins and so on; this is specified as financial business success. On the other hand, Ahmad Wilson and Kummerow (2011) suggested a variety of non-financial performance indicators for small business success comprise of customer satisfaction, customer retention, owner's self-satisfaction, firm's image and reputation, employees' satisfaction, good workplace relations, and owner lifestyle and social responsibility. These existing studies provide sufficient evidence that financial and non-financial performances of small business are considered measurements of entrepreneurship business success.

## Improvisational Behavior and Business Success

Business which struggling to continuously adapt and survive in today's rapidly changing environment are turning to an emerging technique known as improvisation (Hughes, Hodgkisson, Arshad, Hughes & Hodgkisson & Leone, 2017, Hodgkisson, Hughes & Arshad, 2016; Hatinah et al., 2015). Previous study indicates the improvisation is a key form of entrepreneurial behavior (Hmieleski et al., 2013). The reason for such behavior may stem from the presentation of a problem, lack of an appropriate heuristic or alternative solution that can be applied to a problem, or simply as an impulse to try something new in the moment (Vera & Crossan, 2005).

Notably, Baker, Miner and Eesley (2003) point out that improvisational behavior can be used to evaluate how current resources can be applied to either meet pre-existing goals (i.e., causation) or as an attempt to discover what outcomes are possible (i.e., effectuation).

According to Rosli and Hatinah (2016), the study on the relationship between improvisation and performance is inconsistent. For example, there are numerous studies identify that improvisation has significant relationship towards firm performance (Arshad, Razalli, Julienti, Ahmad, & Mahmood, 2015; Hatinah et al., 2015; Rosli & Hatinah, 2016; Rosli, Hatinah, & Nik Nor Hasimah, 2015); and corporate entrepreneurship (Ibrahim, Mahmood, & Shukri, 2016). In addition, previous studies on improvisation are more examine on the improvisation action in organization, organization activities and practice and strategy but lacking on investigating the improvisational behavior of the leader/ entrepreneur; especially in the context of women entrepreneur. Therefore there is a need to empirically investigate the significant importance of improvisational behavior of an entrepreneur on business success.



**Figure 1.** *Proposed Conceptual Framework*

**Proposition 1:** Improvisational behavior has a positive significant relationship on women entrepreneur business success

## Implication for Future Research

The conceptual framework presented in this article may serve as a platform for future empirical study on improvisation behavior as the factor of business success especially in the context of women entrepreneur. This article has developed proposition on how women entrepreneur improved their business through spontaneous improvisation which in turns influence the development of their business to penetrate the market and achieve its goals successfully. An avenue for future research could then be addressed and develop the operationalization of the constructs in the framework and empirically test the proposition to empirically confirm or reject

the theoretical assumption in this paper. In assessing business success, research could, for example measure the construct similar to previous study (e.g. Rahman, Amran, Ahmad & Taghizadeh, 2015). Moreover, researcher could furthermore measure improvisation behavior based on the 7-item scale proposed by Vera and Crossan (2005) since the scale has been used by numerous research on improvisation, thus it will ensure the high levels of comparability with the previous studies. Another avenue for future study could be to investigate the influence of improvisation behavior towards business success in both individual and organizational level to validate the level of improvisation within the organization. Moreover, improvisation influence on business success can also be investigate in a new venture and small firms as well as large firms to know whose business success is more benefited from improvisation behavior.

Finally, the study on the influence of improvisation towards women-owned SMEs in Malaysia is still lacking. Therefore, future study could investigate the level of improvisation among women-owned SMEs in Malaysia and to what extent does it influence women entrepreneur business success.

### **Implication for Practice**

This paper may finally provide implication practically. The review of the literature suggests that the improvisational behavior by the entrepreneur is important. Hence, business success could influence from improvisational behavior of the entrepreneur. Embedment of improvisation behavior among women entrepreneurs could capitalize the rapid changes taking place within their industry to fuel growth for their firms. Moreover, for the women to further improvise their business, policy makers and ministries should formulate better policies or support programs aimed at assisting women entrepreneur to gain better access to global markets, technology and finance as well as to improve their management capabilities especially the women entrepreneur.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

This paper has reviewed the previous studies into a conceptual framework to help enhance the existing knowledge on the relationship between improvisation and business success. The role of improvisation as a predictor of business success is highlighted as it helps entrepreneurs improve their business from uncertain and ambiguous environments. The conceptual framework provides a theoretical platform from which to further explore improvisation behavior particularly among women entrepreneur.

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