

Entrepreneurship SBL PhD Research Topic

Title: Building Capability among Female Entrepreneurs through Customised Innovative Training

Project Proposer and Lead supervisor: **Dr Jalleh Sharafizad**

Co-supervisors: **Professor Kerry Brown** and **Associate Professor Janice Redmond**

This research aims to explore network and relational approaches to training to move beyond traditional rational planning models in entrepreneurial education. It focuses on developing an innovative customised training program tailored to the unique needs of female entrepreneurs, fostering micro and small business entrepreneurship as a viable career option. By designing and piloting a customised training program, the study seeks to support and address specific challenges faced by female entrepreneurship. Potential impacts from the study include enhancing the sustainability of female-led micro and small businesses, promoting gender equality, and creating a more inclusive environment for women in entrepreneurship.

Project Details:

Women across the globe continue to face multiple barriers in achieving economic independence especially when seeking employment or promotion within organisations. For example, women in Western Australia face the nation's biggest gender pay gap of 21.4 per cent (compared to 14.1 per cent nationally) (ABS, 2023), with women often being overlooked for leadership roles (Kamberidou, 2020; Shen & Joseph, 2021). Women also bear the burden of most of domestic and carer responsibilities (Del Boca et al., 2020). These factors gradually restrict women's participation in the economy, leading to both short- and long-term negative impacts on their life outcomes.

Entrepreneurship is one option that may help address the unique issues faced by women as it can offer a flexible and responsive option for economic independence, advance gender equality, and build a better and more equitable community (Byrne et al., 2019; Redmond et al., 2017). Entrepreneurship can also be a viable, desirable, and flexible option to join the labour force, promote social inclusion, and act as a vehicle for women to increase their economic independence, reduce poverty, provide career satisfaction, and help build communities through job creation (Suseno & Abbot, 2019). With increases in economic independence, women entrepreneurs find they can also better balance employment with family and/or carer responsibilities (Leung et al., 2020).

Entrepreneurial training programs can support women to engage in entrepreneurial activities (Bhatti et al., 2021) and enable them to more effectively and strategically build their own businesses to achieve economic independence (Manzoor et al., 2022). However, the one-size-fits-all approach, fails to address the diverse needs of female entrepreneurs. To be effective, entrepreneurial programs must tailor content to the specific needs of women, incorporate innovative teaching methods, and provide continuous support. Ongoing mentorship, networking opportunities, and resources are crucial for helping participants implement what they learn. This scaffolding infrastructure helps these businesses grow into profitable ventures, benefiting the female entrepreneurs, their families, and their communities.

Leadership as a key aspect of the entrepreneurship sector has also been shown to be uniquely capable of empowering women, and of changing the lives and welfare of all women. Entrepreneurship allows women to take leadership roles, make decisions, and have control over their business strategies. This autonomy enhances their confidence and decision-making abilities while fostering economic self-reliance. However, many entrepreneurial training programs overlook essential soft skills, such as leadership, communication, and adaptability. While technical skills are vital, these soft skills are equally crucial for the multifaceted demands of running a business. Finally, the rigid structure and schedule of many programs also pose challenges. Female entrepreneurs often juggle multiple responsibilities, and inflexible programs may exclude female entrepreneurs who cannot adhere to strict schedules.

Given the economic significance of the small business sector and the growing number of women entrepreneurs globally, along with their considerable contributions to economic progress, this project is important. The study will employ qualitative research methods to explore the impact of a

customised innovative entrepreneurial training program on growing female entrepreneurs' business capability. This research focuses on the role of entrepreneurial training in supporting women entrepreneurs to achieve economic independence through entrepreneurship. The objective is to explore alternatives to rational planning models of entrepreneurial education and develop a customized training program tailored to the specific needs of women entrepreneurs who establish or have established micro and small businesses and fostering entrepreneurship as a viable career choice. The project will evaluate the impact of the customised innovative entrepreneurial training on women's entrepreneurship and help identify which training program elements effectively link acquired knowledge and skills to positive changes implemented by female entrepreneurs.

Research Questions

The study aims to explore the following research questions to fill the current gap in understanding the type of training that best supports female entrepreneurship.

1. What are the current capabilities and gaps in female entrepreneurs' toolboxes?
2. Why do male and female entrepreneurs have different training and delivery needs?
3. How do the training and delivery needs of male and female entrepreneurs differ?
4. How can training be tailored to meet the future growth and sustainability needs of female micro and small businesses?
5. How should a customised, innovative female entrepreneurship training program be designed to enhance the capabilities of micro and small business entrepreneurs?
6. How does the delivery of a customised, innovative entrepreneurial training program impact the growth and sustainability of female entrepreneurs and their businesses?

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