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WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP: CHALLENGES AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE

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INTRODUCTION

The involvement of women in entrepreneurship needs to be supplemented with support from a spouse, family, friends, and entrepreneurial support systems. Women who decided to conduct entrepreneurial activities should have a strong spirit to face challenges so that they can achieve entrepreneurial success. These challenges sometimes lead to a good work–life balance.

Challenges are also referred to as obstacles, barriers, conflicts, and problems faced by women entrepreneurs in every economic sector. Ilhaamie, Siti Arni, Rosmawani, and Hassan Al-Banna (2014) reported that the most prevalent type of challenges faced by Muslim women entrepreneurs in Malaysian small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are lack of finance, low demand, and location issues.

Meanwhile, work–life balance is the state of equilibrium where a person puts equal emphasis on the demands of one’s profession and one’s personal life. While the struggle is real for some women entrepreneurs, some women entrepreneurs are able to set their priorities and boundaries, thus leading to satisfactory work–life balance.

CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

Today, women are making substantial advancements in various fields, including entrepreneurship. More than ever, gender equality is being talked about and discussed but many things are yet to be clearly defined. In addition to the issue of gender equality, women entrepreneurs are facing various rising issues in every aspect, especially concerning their choices and society expectations.

A study conducted by Alam, Senik, and Jani (2012) found that women in transition economies tend to suffer from traditional perceptions about women’s roles in society which have persisted to the present days. For instance, many women’s career still depends on the decision of their spouse instead of their own decision. If the absence of mutual understanding and with little support, if any, women might face a work–life imbalance in their quest to achieve entrepreneurial success. Hence, it can be inferred that family conflicts are one of the challenges that women entrepreneurs have to face.

Given the prevailing challenges confronting women entrepreneurs, it is not surprising that they are still struggling to survive in the business environment. Increased women participation in entrepreneurship creates challenges for them to balance work and family obligations in their entrepreneurship journey while formulating strategies to sustain amidst global competition. Family support is crucial in assisting women entrepreneurs to handle their stress and health

issues (Verma, Chaturvedi, & Arora, 2019). Discovering the challenges and understanding them is key towards empowering women in the business sphere. Women should be encouraged to start their own business with moral and financial support from their family members, providing the necessary nudge at the beginning of their entrepreneurial journey.

WORK–LIFE BALANCE

Various factors, including work–life balance, can influence the decision to become a woman entrepreneur. Kalliath and Brough (2008) identified six common conceptualisations of work–life balance definitions. They further defined work–life balance as an individual’s perception that work and non-work activities are compatible and promote growth based on that individual’s present life priorities (see Table 1)

Table 1: Women entrepreneurs work life balance

(1) multiple roles
(2) equity across multiple roles
(3) satisfaction between multiple roles
(4) fulfillment of role salience between multiple roles
(5) a relationship between conflict and facilitation
(6) perceived control between multiple roles

The six conceptualisations of the definition of work–life balance are:

(1) Multiple roles

Everyone has multiple life roles, including those posed by family demands or personal demands (non-work) that may interfere with their work, which might impair the individual’s health and work performance.

(2) Equity across multiple roles

Work–life balance is the level to which an individual is involved in and equally satisfied with both their work and family roles.

(3) Satisfaction between multiple roles

Campbell (2000) looked at individual satisfaction based on the ‘work/family border theory’ and defined the elements of work–life balance as comprising satisfaction and proper functioning both at work and at home, with minimal role conflict. This theory explains why conflicts occur and offers a framework that encourages individuals to achieve a better balance between work and family.

(4) Fulfilment of role salience between multiple roles

Achieving individual satisfaction requires acknowledging that individuals place different levels of importance or salience on their various roles.

(5) A relationship between conflict and facilitation

Conflict and facilitation are the main psychological constructs that compose work–life balance. According to Grzywacz and Bass (2003), balance refers to the combination of measures consisting of subtracting work–family conflict and family–work conflict from work–family facilitation and family–work facilitation, respectively.

(6) Perceived control between multiple roles

Work–life balance may be perceived as the extent to which an individual perceives themselves to have power over the demands of their multiple roles.

Role overload, child care issues, health status, time management issues, and inadequate proper social support have substantial influence over the work–life balance of women entrepreneurs (Mathew & Panchanatham, 2011). It is challenging for women entrepreneurs to achieve a well-balanced life. They may be torn between the attention required of them by young or elderly family members and the focus demanded by their ongoing projects. These conflicting demands impair their ability to prioritise their responsibilities. Thus, their mental, physical, and financial positions need to be in a commendable condition. Work–life balance will lead to a satisfactory quality of life for everyone, including their dependants, close family members, as associates. Thus, it has been suggested that working or running a business from home allows women some flexibility that will enable them to achieve work–family balance (Walker, Wang, & Redmond, 2008).

CONCLUSION

Women entrepreneurs face numerous challenges in managing company cash flows, balancing competing priorities, and working beyond the regular office hours, among others. They have somehow learnt to set priorities and boundaries between work and other tasks such as exercise, sleep, and family activities, which have allowed them to minimise stress and meet their needs. Despite the daily challenges confronting them, the future remains encouraging to these women entrepreneurs. For one, women entrepreneurs seem to be strong and capable of achieving success. It is recommended that further research looks into women entrepreneurs' support systems, family dependence, and the different views of single and married women on entrepreneurs' work–life balance in the initial and growth stage of the business. Hopefully, the findings of these studies will provide some insight to the policymakers in the establishment of a system that provides support to women entrepreneurs.

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