TRANSFORMING CONTACTS INTO RESOURCES: WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS BUILDING, MAINTAINING, AND UTILISING SOCIAL CAPITAL (SUMMARY)

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SUMMARY

TRANSFORMING CONTACTS INTO RESOURCES: WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS BUILDING, MAINTAINING, AND UTILISING SOCIAL CAPITAL

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Principal Topic

Among the myriad of factors contributing to the development of women-owned businesses, the issue of social capital has received attention from scholars and researchers such as Brush et al. (2004); Carter et al. (2001); and Ibarra (1998). The literature strongly argues that women do not have equal access to social capital, in comparison to their male counterparts, as either they are excluded, or may exclude themselves, from the social networks which are one of the most significant components of successful resource and power acquisition (Timberlake, 2005; Brush et al., 2004).

Method

We designed a questionnaire to point out the main topics and possible relationships between categories related to: (a) business background; (b) relationships, contacts, and networks; (c) trust, values, and norms, and (d) recommendations. In addition, a map of relationships was designed to organise the information provided by the women in relation to the diverse contacts and networks accessed and the types of resources exchanged within these relationships. The interviews were conducted with fifty women entrepreneurs on a one-to-one basis. The categories used in performing content analysis were: use of social capital; building social capital, and maintaining social capital.

Results and Implications

The study explains how women participate in networks and groups, establish and maintain their contacts; and also highlights their norms of behaviour based on trust and obligation through which they successfully transform their contacts into useful resources, contributing to the growth and development of their businesses. It confirms that the use of networks and interpersonal relationships by women business owners help them to gain access to information, advice, and ideas, as well as financial and human resources. The availability of these resources and informal assistance generated through their social capital, act as a catalyst in developing and growing their businesses. As the study contributes to a greater understanding of the ways in which women can build and maintain their contacts through networks and individual efforts, one of the implications of the research could be a clearer picture of social inclusion for the government or other business development agencies especially to cater for the needs of women entrepreneurs.

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