

## **ENTREPRENEUR'S PERSONALITY TRAITS ON DEVELOPING EMPLOYEE COMMITMENT: A CASE OF WOMEN-LED SMALL BUSINESS IN ZIMBABWE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study examined the impact of personality traits on employee commitment through the use of the Five-factor model in Gweru metropolitan, Zimbabwe. The Five-factor model was treated as a multi-dimensional construct which was used as independent variable. Initially a structured questionnaire was conveniently administered to respondents in Gweru metropolitan, and later a semi-structured interview was purposively used as a follow-up instrument to some selected respondents. Results show three personality traits that are predictive to employee commitment. The study therefore concluded that not all personality traits in the Five-factor model are significant in building employee commitment. Furthermore the findings could be used to understand those personality traits that assist in developing employee commitment in small business operations especially in a unique depressed economic environment such as Zimbabwe.

**Keywords:** Personality traits, small businesses, employee commitment

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Small business sector plays an immense role in contributing towards a country's socio-economic development, therefore it is paramount that assistance is provided to this sector. There has been demonstrated literature on the contribution of the small business sector to any country's economy (Afande, 2015; Chivasa, 2014; Ezekiel, Omotayo, & Olaleke, 2018; Syed, Muzaffar, & Minaa, 2017). Therefore most of the literature on women entrepreneurship is more outward focused, where emphasis is on general disadvantages faced by women entrepreneurs, and these include *inter-alia* challenges in accessing markets for their products or services, barriers in accessing start-up capital, societal discrimination of women-led enterprises (Hisrich & Peters, 2012; Lincoln, 2012; Witbooi & Ukpere, 2011).

However, support to the small business sector shouldn't be limited to financial resources as is the norm in most developing countries. There is also need to psychologically introspect some of the traits embedded in people owning and operating business ventures in this sector. An accurate understanding of their personality traits will help them to effectively operate their business ventures profitably especially through inculcating processes such as employee commitment.

Despite the support that is channelled into this sector, extant literature also has demonstrated high failure rate that is experienced by small businesses especially during start-up phase (Ahmad, Rani, & Kassim, 2010; Fatoki, 2014; Majama & Magang, 2017; Marobela, Mebratu-Beyene, & Shunda, 2016; Mudavanhu, Bindu, Chigusiwa, & Muchabaiwa, 2011). Therefore an accurate understanding of those personality traits within an entrepreneur, that help in building employee commitment might contribute towards mitigating against the high mortality rate. There are a number of models that are used to interrogate personality traits such as locus of control (Rotter, 1990) and theory of achievement (McClelland, 1961). However the most common model in interrogating personality is the Big Five factor model which broadly defines composition of an individual's personality in five dimensions (Barrick, Mount, & Strauss, 1993; Costa & McCrae, 1992). These personality traits vary according to their dominance within an individual and hence make up one's personality (Ariani, 2013; Ettis & Kefi, 2016; Judge & Bono, 2000).

### **1.1 Statement of the Research Problem**

There has been minimal effort to introspect some psychological attributes that are inherent to these women entrepreneurs that might help them to grow their businesses. Not much literature is available that attempt to answer the comprehensive aspects of personality in an attempt to explain growth or failure amongst small businesses (Johnson, 1990). Furthermore there isn't much existing literature that relate to a developing country which is grossly experiencing economic challenges such as Zimbabwe. The study therefore sought to address the lacuna in literature which appreciates those personality traits that help to effectively embrace employee commitment amongst women entrepreneurs in an effort to grow their business ventures.

### **1.2 Objective of the study**

The objective of this study was to identify those entrepreneur's personality traits, as described by The Big Five factor model, that help in building employee commitment amongst employees in women-led small business, with the sole purpose of achieving growth within an enterprise.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

SME's in Zimbabwe employ approximately 5.7 million people (2.8 million business owners and 2.9 million employees), representing 73% of the total workforce of 7.8 million (Mangudya, 2017). This is also confirmed by Nyamwanza (2013) who claims that in Zimbabwe, SME's

employ more than 60% of the country's workforce and contribute 50% of the country's domestic product. Nyamwanza (2013) goes further to quote from Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (Zimstat, 2012) that the economically active population, aged from fifteen years and above was estimated to be 5.4 million, of which 84% were considered to be in the informal employment. SMEs have provided first jobs to most of these people within this age category.

However despite this vital role, small businesses are experiencing high mortality rates (Mboko, Smith-Hunter, & Andrea, 2009; Moyo & Mandizwidza-Moyo, 2017). This high mortality rate is somehow triggered by the global economic downturn which seem to have defied professional recommendations from internationally reputable economic bodies leading to both corporate and small businesses closures (Ezekiel *et al.*, 2018), thus increasing unemployment rates. In Zimbabwe, 60% of SMEs fail in their first year of establishment, 25% fail within the first three years, and the remaining 15% are likely to survive (Mudavanhu *et al.*, 2011). Based on this computation, it can be concluded that eventually 85% of the SMEs are going to fail. This bleak short life cycle of SMEs is not only peculiar to the Zimbabwean context, but prevails in other countries such as South Africa where failure rate is pegged at between 70% to 80% (Ligthem, 2011), and Botswana at 80% (Tentime & Pansiri, 2006). Considering the huge economic and social contribution of SMEs to the country, it is therefore appropriate to understand this high mortality rate and suggest solutions that are necessary to curtail it.

One of the ways that may assist in understanding high mortality rates amongst small businesses are the personality traits of the owners. Personality traits can be conceptualised as inherently co-determined psycho-physiological structures which create as well as regulate a person's way of doing things, thus traits are the causes of mental and behavioural processes (Brandstätter, 2010). The personality traits are categorised into two sets i.e. the broad and general personality traits and specific personality (Rauch & Frese, 2007). The broad and general personality traits are made up of the following traits, openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (Goldberg, 1993). The specific personality traits are composed of need for achievement, risk-taking, innovativeness, autonomy, locus of control, and self-efficacy. This study looks at broad and general personality traits as informed by The Big five factor model. The Big Five factor model is an instrument that is widely used to test for personality and prediction in areas such as industrial-organisational psychology targeting job performance (Barrick *et al.*, 1993). Besides other models that look at personality traits such as Need for Achievement, Locus of control, and Risk taking propensity, the Big Five factor model has been seen as a more compelling approach to measure the impact of personality on entrepreneurial success (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Digman, 1990). Furthermore, its use is seen as a promising research area for linking personality characteristics and entrepreneurship activities (Antoncic, 2009). The model can also be used to explain individual differences in entrepreneurial

behaviours beyond business ownership or start up intention. These include opportunity recognition, opportunity exploitation, innovation, and value creation (Leutner, Ahmetoglu, Akhtar, & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2014). Literature on Big Five Factor model has shown that these five personality dimensions are not easily affected by events but manifest on an individual especially when she makes a decision on a problem affecting the enterprise (Wilfling, Cantner, & Silberreisen, 2011). It is the basis of this study that seek to analyse if any or all the dimensions of the model can be used by entrepreneurs to establish and cultivate employee commitment so as to achieve high productivity within an enterprise.

The openness trait is associated with intellectual curiosity, imagination, and the proactive seeking and appreciation of experience (Antonicic, 2009; Brandstätter, 2010; McCrae & John, 1992). In openness, there is a tendency of having an active imagination, preference for variety, aesthetic sensitivity, intellectual curiosity, and independent judgment and being attentive to inner feelings, flexibility, autonomous, and unconventional (Ariani, 2013; Rothman & Coetzer, 2003). These attributes are important to the entrepreneur because they need to seize an opportunity to develop products that are going to grow the business (Nordvik & Brovold, 1998; Zhao, Seibert, & Lumpkin, 2010). Conscientiousness refers to a person's degree of organisation, persistence, self-control, hard work, active planning and performing of tasks, and motivation to accomplish goals (Barrick *et al.*, 1993; Zhao *et al.*, 2010). Conscientious people are dominated by characteristics such as being purposeful, responsible, reliable, ambitious, determined, and achievement-oriented (Liang, Chang, & Hsu, 2013). Extraversion is a personality trait that includes characteristics such as assertiveness, dominance, activeness, talkativeness, gregariousness, ambitiousness, and (Ariani, 2013; Barrick *et al.*, 1993). They are cheerful, and highly optimistic, and like to easily interact with people and large groups, seeking excitement and stimulation (Liang *et al.*, 2013). It is usually related to social leadership (McCrae, 2004). It therefore, stands that such people with high extraversion will work well in groups rather than on individualised tasks. Entrepreneurs are, in most cases, extraverted than managers (Zhao *et al.*, 2010). They are more active, find it easy to mobilise people in order to create a social network and to get involved in the hazard (Costa & McCrae, 1992). The fact that small businesses do not have a large workforce means that the owners easily interact with the few people that will be in the organisation, thus, improving them on the extraversion trait.

Agreeableness is an interpersonal dimension corresponding to traits such as altruism, trust, modesty, and gentleness (Brandstätter, 2010; McCrae & John, 1992). It characterises someone who is cooperative, trusting, forgiving, tolerant, courteous and soft hearted (Barrick *et al.*, 1993). People with these traits will not fend well as entrepreneurs as in most cases are driven by compromises, influence from other people than their own conscious. Empirical research confirms the negative association between agreeableness and the odds of being an entrepreneur

thus entrepreneurs scored lower than managers on agreeableness (Zhao *et al.*, 2010). Neuroticism is the tendency of experiencing negative emotional states, such as anxiety, depression, fear, sadness, hostility, anger, guilt, disgust, vulnerability (Major, Turner, & Fletcher, 2006; Rothman & Coetzer, 2003). Such kinds of people are mostly not likely to start up any business because of their restraining characteristics. Entrepreneurship is a long stressful process that requires patience, perseverance, tenacity, and intrinsic motivation (Afzalur, 1996; Boyd & Gumpert, 1983; Shaver, 1995). Entrepreneurs are usually described as highly confident people with strong beliefs in their ability to control outcomes in their environment (Chen, Greene, & Crick, 1998; Simon, Houghton, & Aquino, 2000).

Many organisations, operating in both private and public sectors, have realised that the quality of employees is the backbone that can help them achieve their desired goals (Andrew, 2017; Hunjra, Ali, Chani, Khan, & Rehman, 2010). Success of an enterprise is dependent on creating and maintaining a competitive advantage, which in turn is dependent on committed employees (Akintayo, 2010; Tolera, 2018). Studies have revealed that employee commitment is directly related with an enterprise's turnover (Andrew, 2017; Dost & Ahmed, 2011). Employee commitment has also been realised that it is able to reduce some of the negatives trends, such as lateness, absenteeism and turnover which have an effect on the productivity growth of an enterprise (Irefin & Mechanic, 2014). Committed employees tend to stay much longer in one organisation (Dost & Ahmed, 2011) due to the a bond that will be created between them leading to high organisational performance (Andrew, 2017; Tolera, 2018). Employee commitment is not only reflected when employees religiously come to work as expected and do their routine jobs, but it is critically shown when employees start to think like entrepreneurs and also accomplish their tasks as a team (Tolera, 2018).

To achieve employee commitment, there is need for organisations to understand that individual employees do have their own requirements and personal wishes which ultimately result in a positive or negative attitude towards the organisation (Andrew, 2017), therefore there is need for managers within the organisation to appreciate these differences and expectations from individual employees. The fulfilment of human hierarchical need is a discipline that has been concluded to be important especially in relation to satisfaction and motivation (Yukthamarani, Mamun, Saufi, & Zainol, 2013). A close scrutiny of these needs will also assist in aligning individuals to the tasks that need to be accomplished within an enterprise.

## **2.1 Hypotheses**

The literature that has been explored above have revealed that most attributes that make up the openness personality dimension are associated to entrepreneurs. These include *inter-alia* insightfulness, pro-activeness, seeking and appreciation of experience. These traits can be ideal

to derive affection from followers through referent power (Smit, Botha, & Vrba, 2016), and thus can be ideal to cultivate employee commitment among the workers within an enterprise. Given the issues explored in the literature review and the above revelations, we therefore propose the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1: Openness trait will have positive and significant effect on employee commitment*

As has been discussed above that conscientiousness trait is mainly aligned with persistence, self-control, hard work, active planning and performing of tasks, and motivation to accomplish goals. Such traits are synonymous with an entrepreneur (Antoncic, 2009) and also bearers of these traits are might be conscious that employee commitment might be a panacea for growth in their enterprises. It is therefore in line with this assertion that the following hypothesis is proposed:

*Hypothesis 2: Conscientiousness trait will have positive and significant effect on employee commitment*

A number of authors (Ariani, 2013; Barrick *et al.*, 1993; Zhao *et al.*, 2010) concur that extraversion personality traits are common among entrepreneurs. Traits such as self-reliant, powerful, determined, rational, aggressive, and competitive, are related to entrepreneurs (Antoncic, 2009) and such people usually find it easy to lead and form social networks (Costa & McCrae, 1992). The ability to lead and form social networks can be important for creation of employee commitment within an enterprise. It is therefore in line with this assertion that the following hypothesis is proposed:

*Hypothesis 3: Extraversion trait will have positive and significant effect on employee commitment*

The agreeableness trait is usually associated with trust, modest, altruism, and gentleness and thus can inhibit a person to make bold decisions which is unusual to an entrepreneur (Barrick *et al.*, 1993; Ettis & Kefi, 2016). On the basis of these traits in this study, it is assumed that these traits are ideal towards growing employee commitment among the employees in an enterprise, therefore the following hypothesis can be proposed:

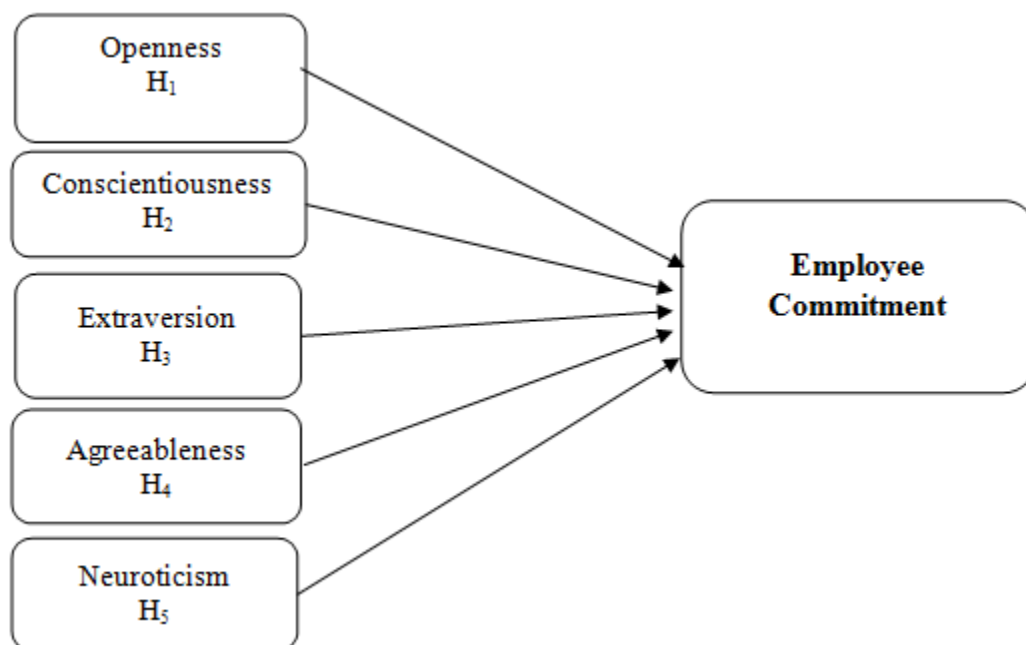
*Hypothesis 4: Agreeableness trait will have positive and significant effect on employee commitment*

Neuroticism trait is characterised by anxious behaviour, depression, frustration, and nervous among others (Barrick *et al.*, 1993; Ettis & Kefi, 2016; Zhao *et al.*, 2010). Therefore people with such traits are unlikely to open up businesses as this is tangential to the rigors that are faced by entrepreneurs in starting and running their businesses (Afzalur, 1996; Brandstätter, 2010; Zhao *et*

al., 2010). Anxiousness, depression, and nervousness are traits that cannot help in developing employee commitment, thus, in this study, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*Hypothesis 5: Neuroticism trait will not have a positive and significant effect on employee commitment*

As the hypotheses have been articulated above, a model which depicts personality traits that drive employee commitment within an enterprise is diagrammatically presented in Figure 1 below.



**Figure 1: The Conceptual framework**

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Data collection and sample

The data collection in this study initially started with a survey instrument that was administered to both registered and unregistered women-led enterprises operating in Gweru metropolitan. Five hundred questionnaires were issued out using a convenience and later snowballing methods. A total of 370 women entrepreneurs successfully completed and returned the questionnaire giving a response rate of 74%. Based on the statistics from (Zimstats, 2014), and using the generalised scientific guidelines for sample size decisions developed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), this was deemed as a minimum acceptable sample size for this study. This was followed by semi-structured interviews with 20 women entrepreneurs, chosen from the initial 370 respondents.

These twenty respondents were from five different industry sectors and were chosen using purposive sampling method. The semi-structured interviews were intended to gain a deeper understanding of their operations and management processes within their enterprises, operating in diverse industry sectors. Responses from both the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were analysed using frequency tables, simple percentage method, mean, median and the mode for demographic variables, however the research hypotheses were tested using the Pearson Correlation Coefficient to test for strength, direction, and statistical significance of the variables.

### **3.2 Measures**

To measure entrepreneurial traits, the study initially used the NEO-Five-Factor personality inventory (NEO- FFI) (Digman, 1990; McCrae & John, 1992) to pool together scale items that can suit this study. Further, fifteen questions were drawn from the original Big Five Inventory's (BFI) 44 questions as postulated by (Goldberg, 1993). These questions were further modified to suit this study. These questions constituted the measurement for personal traits concept. Respondents were asked to indicate how far they agreed or disagreed with a particular statement about them, on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. A Likert scale, which was initially developed by Rensis Likert, is commonly used for summated rating scale (Kothari, 2008). The fifteen scale items measuring the five concepts of the BFI were put to a statistical test for their consistency and validity (Sekaran, 2010), and these scale items achieved a Cronbach's value of 0.8, above the accepted parameters of 0.50, proving that the instrument was appropriate (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010; Mohsen, Tavakol, Reg, & Dennick, 2011).

### **3.3 Reliability and validity**

A reliability test was conducted in SPSS to check the reliability of the scale items in the questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha is the most common measure of internal consistency or reliability (Sekaran, 2010). It is most commonly used when you have multiple Likert questions in a survey or questionnaire that forms a scale, and you wish to determine if the scale is reliable. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient normally ranges between 0 and 1. The closer Cronbach's alpha coefficient is to 1.0, the greater the internal consistency of the items in the scale. It has been recommended that 0.7 should be the cut off (Nunally, 1978; Sekaran, 2010). The reliability of the scale items for this study achieved a Cronbach alpha value that was above 0.7 hence proving to be reliable for this study. Validity of the data collection instruments were tested by piloting both the questionnaire as well as the semi-structured interview with a selected sample who were easily accessible to the researchers. Necessary adjustments on the data collection instruments were thus made after the pilot test.



**3.4 Results**

Multiple linear regression analysis using the Enter method was performed to assess whether personality traits: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism exerted any statistical significance on the dependent variable employee commitment. As shown in Table 1 below, Hypothesis 1 proposed a positive and significant effect of openness trait on employee commitment. The coefficient is negative and not significant ( $S\beta = -0.03$ ;  $t = -0.44$ ;  $p = 0.66$ ). Therefore this finding is not in support of Hypothesis 1. Hypothesis 2 proposed that conscientiousness trait will have a positive and significant effect on employee commitment. The coefficient is positive and significant ( $S\beta = 0.19$ ;  $t = 2.33$ ;  $p = 0.02$ ). Therefore this finding is in support of Hypothesis 2. Hypothesis 3 proposed that extraversion will have a positive and significant effect on employee commitment. The coefficient is positive and significant ( $S\beta = 0.31$ ;  $t = 4.41$ ;  $p = 0.00$ ). Therefore this finding is in support of Hypothesis 3. Hypothesis 4 proposed that agreeableness will have a positive and significant effect on employee commitment. The coefficient is negative and is not significant ( $S\beta = -0.09$ ;  $t = -0.93$ ;  $p = 0.35$ ). Therefore this finding is not in support of Hypothesis 4. Hypothesis 5 proposed that neuroticism will not have a positive and significant effect on employee commitment. The coefficient is negative and is not significant ( $S\beta = -0.16$ ;  $t = -1.38$ ;  $p = 0.17$ ). Therefore this finding is in support of Hypothesis 5. Consequently, out of the five personality traits that make up the BFI, three (agreeableness, openness, and neuroticism) have been found not to be positive and significant to employee commitment, while the remaining two (extraversion and conscientiousness) have been found to be positive and significant to employee commitment.

**Table 1: Results of the Multiple Regression Analysis**

**Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.508	.293		8.555	.000
1					
Mean of Traits Openness	-.026	.061	-.029	-.435	.663
Mean for Conscientiousness	.212	.091	.185	2.325	.021
Mean of Traits Extraversion	.275	.062	.309	4.408	.000
Mean for Agreeableness	-.096	.103	-.085	-.932	.352
Mean for Neuroticism	-.192	.139	-.163	-1.377	.169

a. Dependent Variable: Mean of Growth Employee commitment

#### **4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The main objective of this study is to investigate the effects of the entrepreneur's personality traits, based on the BFI, on building employee commitment in women-led small business, in order to achieve growth within an enterprise. The findings reveal that the Big Five Factor model is an important instrument that can be utilised in determining personality traits of women entrepreneurs in developing employee commitment within an enterprise. After empirically testing the model, derived from the personality traits, results revealed that women-entrepreneurs in this study, as hypothesised, regarded two personality traits (extraversion and conscientiousness) to be appropriate in creating employee commitment as a way of growing an enterprise. This indicates that employee commitment is seen to be more effective to enterprise growth to those women-entrepreneurs who are assertive, talkative, gregarious, and ambitious: typical characteristics that define extraversion trait. Characteristics for conscientiousness include hard worker, persistent, and reliable. These results are similar to those of Barrick and Mount (2005) who also found extraversion to be related to job success. Furthermore, results for the neuroticism trait revealed a negative impact, as hypothesised in this study. This meant that only those women-entrepreneurs who exhibit characteristics (opposite to neuroticism), such as positive emotional states, cheerful, uninhibited, and welcoming are more inclined to regard employee commitment as ideal in growing an enterprise. Therefore this means that extraverted, conscientious, and non-neurotic women-entrepreneurs are more likely to embrace employee commitment as a way of growing their enterprises.

Apart from the three traits mentioned above (extraversion, conscientiousness, and neuroticism), the other two personality traits (agreeableness and openness) were not positive and significant to employee commitment as perceived. Results on openness are in divergent to those of extant literature which claim that openness is related to business growth (Farrington, 2012; Nadkarni & Herrmann, 2010; Thal & Bedingfield, 2010). However other researchers have found no relationship between openness and success of small business (Barrick *et al.*, 1993) thus concurring with the results of this study. Furthermore the results show that agreeableness trait has no effect on employee commitment, ultimately leading to growth of an enterprise. The results concur with those of (Barrick & Mount, 2005; Farrington, 2012; Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002; Thal & Bedingfield, 2010).

The study presents great implications in terms of how the Big Five Factor model can be used in relation to employee commitment so as to grow an enterprise. It gives statistical evidence, in the study of entrepreneurial psychology, related to how the model can be applied to interpret or predict individual characteristics that can be used in employee commitment. A great deal of extant literature has demonstrated the importance of matching individual characteristics with other elements for the sole purpose of growing an enterprise (Andrew, 2017; Antoncic, 2009;

Brandstätter, 2010; Ettis & Kefi, 2016; Farrington, 2012). Therefore, this study contributes towards the body of knowledge in terms of how the model can be utilised in tandem with employee commitment to grow an enterprise. By understanding the psychological aspects related to small business operators by entrepreneurship policy makers, this study partially contributes towards improving on the rate of survival of small businesses as it has been documented that there is high mortality rate in this sector (Mudavanhu *et al.*, 2011). This can be done through inoculation of appropriate entrepreneurial prowess by using a practical syllabus at different stages in the educational system to all those who might have chosen the entrepreneurial route. In addition, the study reveals psychological patterns of entrepreneurs who are operating in an economic volatile environment such as Zimbabwe. As it has been demonstrated above that most literature are outwards focused, this study is inward focused. The results of this interrogate the psychological state of the entrepreneur. Therefore the results might assist policy makers in shaping appropriate policies that can assist women entrepreneurs to understand their psychological behaviour so as to adopt and embrace appropriate processes such as employee commitment that might help in growing their enterprises. This might be done through workshops conducted through parent ministry such as Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises.

However the study has some limitations in that since the study only focused on women entrepreneurs, in one particular area of the country, therefore this is difficult to generalise the findings to all the entrepreneurs in the country. Other models that tend to explain psychological aspects of an individual such as locus of control and Need for Achievement can be used in tandem with the Big Five Factor model to enhance better understanding. The BFF is not the only model that can be used to explain personality traits (Nadkarni & Herrmann, 2010). The study uses employee commitment as a contributor towards enterprise growth, however there are many other elements that contribute towards enterprise growth such as demographic profile of the respondents (education and experience) and the general business environment. Therefore there is need to consider some of these elements in determining the success of an enterprise. In conclusion, this study explains the psychological characteristics that are necessary to an individual to create the employee commitment so as to enhance enterprise growth in the small business sector.

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