

Eurasian Journal
of Humanities and
Social Sciences



Women in Sales Leadership: Moving towards Gender Diversity and Inclusion in the Sales Management Environment in Nigeria.

IGWE, Peace

Department of Marketing, University of Port Harcourt
Correspondence: peace.igwe@uniport.edu.ng

**EMEKALAM, Amaechi
Getrude**

School of Graduate of Studies

BAZIA, John Nsaneh Salo

Department of Marketing, University of Port Harcourt

IHUNWO, Oscar

School of Graduate of Studies

ABSTRACT

This paper has explored the issue of women in sales leadership with emphasis on organisational, cultural and structural impediments that prevent women from rising to the sales management roles in Nigeria. The research used a convergent mixed-methods methodology, which was a combination of a national stratified survey including about 450 sales professionals, 30 semi-structured interviews and three company case studies. The research model involved the analysis of the probability of promotion through logistic regression and the thematic analysis to test the lived experiences of the participants. Results, derived through a review of available literature and pilot data, showed that sponsorship and institutionalised human resources tracks are important factors in diminishing gender inequity in promotion. Moreover, flexible role design is demonstrated to enhance retention and promote women with caregiving duties more. The article ends by presenting policy implications and recommendations that the firm-level practices should be geared towards putting in place quantifiable and sustainable channels for women moving to sales leadership roles.

Keywords:

Nigeria, Sales Leadership, Gender Diversity, Inclusive HR, Sponsorship, Mentorship, and Promotion Gaps.

Introduction

A salesperson is a professional sales trainer that makes a sale of goods and services worthwhile by recognising the requirements of the consumer, offering the consumer the remedy of his or her commodities, and crafting his or her purchasing behaviour through ethical persuasion and relationships. In contemporary organisations, the salespersons play a trans-functional strategic position of linking firms to

their markets and transforming the organisational value propositions into customer relevant outcomes (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Johnston & Marshall, 2020). They became effective because of the intersection of interpersonal competence, in-depth product knowledge, negotiation competence, and adaptive selling strategies to increase the compatibility between organisational goals and customer satisfaction and development of long-

term relationships (Ingram et al., 2019; Churchill et al., 2020).

Besides transactional transactions, value co-creation has seen salespersons playing the central role based on consultative and solution-oriented selling approach and in which products and services are packaged as a response towards specific customer problems rather than an insular offer (Rackham & DeVinentis, 1999; Vargo & Lusch, 2008). Collaboration can also enable sales professionals to create a mutual value by listening, diagnosing needs systematically, and problem-solving to prevent customer trust, loyalty and retention and help firms to achieve their revenue and growth objectives (Anderson & Narus, 2004; Homburg, Schafer, & Schneider, 2012). Such a twofold orientation towards the service and performance makes the salesperson an important source of organisational competitiveness and long-term advantage (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Palmatier et al., 2006). Digital economy development has added another layer to the role of the salesperson to include constant learning, technological proficiency and making decisions that are guided by statistics. The proliferation of the customer relationship management systems, artificial intelligence applications, and online sale channels has radically changed the sales process and made the constant professional advancement and training in online sales the only assurance of its efficiency in the future (Moncrief, Marshall, & Rudd, 2015; Wedel and Kannan, 2016; Paschen, Wilson, and Ferreira, 2020). Hence, contemporary salespersons need to sell in more multifaceted and informational environments, and simultaneously, offer a personalised, and interpersonal form of interaction with customers.

Conceptually, selling can be imagined as an integrative process whereby a plurality of inputs can be coordinated towards production of a powerful and coherent value proposition. This perspective shows the experience factor of selling, where customer perception, feelings, and post purchase evaluation hold equal significance to the actual purchase (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Successful sales processes therefore transcend

beyond revenue generation to also include the survival of the relationship, repeat customers and terminal customer value (Rust, Zeithaml, & Lemon, 2004).

Market intelligence is also an important channel through salespersons in an organisation. Their consistent interaction with the customers provides them with the insight on the emergent needs, competitor behaviour, and product performance that can be incorporated in the strategic planning, innovation and organisational learning (Day, 1994; Jaworski and Kohli, 1993). Their role as sales professionals also leaves them as relationship managers, information brokers, and strategic contributors, which once again makes them significant to the level of decision-making and performance at the firm level.

The competencies that are required to be effective sales performers are people and technical. Soft or interpersonal skills are commonly known to be critical to success in sales, especially in relational and consultative selling (Goleman, 1998; Davis, 1983; Weitz, Sujaan, & Sujaan, 1986; Luthans, 2002; Robles, 2012). The competencies may be useful in enabling the salespersons to acquire the ability in responding to changing markets in a flexible way, how to cope with rejection in a constructive manner, and establishing trust-based relationships, which would facilitate the creation of exchange over time (Homburg & Stock, 2004; Verbeke, Dietz & Verwaal, 2011).

In the meantime, contemporary sales environments cannot be eliminated without technical or hard skills. Product knowledge, data interpretation, CRM expertise, and presentation skills are the required competences to introduce the value propositions in a credible manner, deliver evidence-based decisions, systematically develop customer relationships, and communicate the complex solutions (Boles et al., 2001; Provost and Fawcett, 2013; Payne and Frow, 2005; Denning, 2011). The two are iterative and cumulative with regard to skill development, which entails deliberate practice, systematic feedback and organisational investment in training, coaching and performance management systems to make

sure that the sales effectiveness is high (Ahearne et al., 2010; Salas et al., 2012).

Some of the positions that are the most strategically consequential within organisations include the positions of Regional Sales Manager, Head of Sales, and Country Sales Director because they are directly tasked with the mandate of generating revenues, expanding market share, and capturing the market (Zoltners, Sinha, & Lorimer, 2016). Demographic and cognitive divergences have been empirically found to enhance effectiveness of leadership in increasingly volatile and heterogeneous markets, which have been associated with increased innovation, quality of decisions and financial performance (Ely and Thomas, 2001; Catalyst, 2022; McKinsey and Company, 2023).

Despite the world becoming more gender inclusive, sales leadership is grossly underrepresented to women, with the situation being the worst recorded in the emerging economies. This is especially broad in such spheres as fast-moving consumer goods, telecommunication, financial services, and pharmaceuticals in Nigeria, where selling services are the most important activity in organisational growth and survival. Women are not yet promotees to formal handling and executive sales management despite their contribution in informal trade in the country and retail operations.

Based on the data presented by the National Bureau of Statistics, it is true that, despite women constituting almost 48 per cent of the working population in Nigeria, in reality, only 23-25 out of them appear in the workforce, either in the position of management or decision-making (NBS, 2023). The same tendencies can be established in the rest of the world, and scientists usually clarify why the female gender lacks representation in the leadership position with a group of structural reasons, inaccessibility to professional contacts and sponsorship, and the gender stereotypes, which remain popular (World Bank, 2022; UN Women, 2021). Historically, the sales leadership has been constructed as a man domain, which places emphasis on aggressiveness, quickness and aggressive bargaining, thereby overriding

the relational and team-oriented leadership approaches that have been stereotypically ascribed to women (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Empirical evidence, though, indicates that this form of relational style is also functional, in complicated and people-based sales scenarios as well as better (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003). The compounding factors also affect women in the Nigerian environment because in this context, the systems of promotion are not visible, work designs are rigid, household tasks, and strong socio-cultural demands prevent the use of leadership to advance. These barriers are also influenced by regional and cultural variations, as some regions of northern Nigeria have more rigid gender roles that do not allow women to participate in formal labour and undertake the role of a manager than some parts of the south of the country (ILO, 2022). Even though there is an upsurge in the tendency of multinational companies in Nigeria to adopt gender-based human resource practices, many local firms and small and medium-sized organisations still lack an organised diversity structure, which reinforces the existence of systemic injustices within the sales leadership representative.

It is on this backdrop that this current study sought to examine the need of women in the sales leadership of the Nigerian companies based on organisational, cultural and structural issues that hinder the advancement of women into the sales management positions within Nigeria.

Literature Review

Underrepresentation of women in the sales leadership positions remains a multifaceted process which is characterized by the nexus of individual attributes, operational processes, and the socio-cultural institutions. Gender differences in sales leadership are not a product of a single constraint; rather, it is a collection of disadvantages, which combines to push one out of the career and the promotion and recognition of leadership (Ely & Thomas, 2001; World Bank, 2022; ILO, 2022). They are especially acute in those industries where sales are intensive and the functions of leadership are directly associated with the possibility to earn revenues

and make strategic choices as well as increase the market share. Overall, in Nigeria, women are still underrepresented in terms of being promoted to a higher level sales jobs, despite the increasing number of women getting into the work force and the business environment, which can be translated into the fact that there is a need to describe the problem in a more theoretical way, without addressing the personal capabilities (NBS, 2023; Okafor & Akpan, 2021).

The theory of social role concept can provide a theoretical construct in which gender expectations can be considered in leadership. It is an idea that was initially advanced by Eagly (1987) and further developed by Role Congruity Theory by Eagly and Karau (2002), and in this view, communal attributes are attributed to women, and agentic ones (assertiveness, dominance, competitiveness) to men. Risk-taking, aggressiveness and target aggression are widely associated with leadership effectiveness in a sales leadership context, in which agentic characteristics are implicitly coded masculine, and thus the desire to become a leader is unusual to women (Koenig et al., 2011; Heilman, 2012). As it has been empirically established, such a dilemma as a loss of competence in case of incomppliance with the social norms and social punishment in case of acting agentially is a common predicament of female leaders (Catalyst, 2022; Ibarra, Ely, & Kolb, 2013).

Gender and family commitments and socialization in Nigeria make the problem of role incongruity even more effective. It has been revealed that women in sales are not necessarily invited to work with high-profile clients, work-related trips, or other informal networking events, not because they can perform poorly, but because of the ideas of decency, safety, and family obligations (Akinwale & George, 2020; Adisa et al., 2019). This alienation restricts the access of women to the strategic accounts and decision-makers which are the strategic antecedents to leadership advancement in the sales-oriented organisation (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Hoobler et al, 2018). Thus, it is in the Social Role Theory that the systemic disadvantage of women as culturally bound expectations is socialised by producing

assumptions about the self and ratings of the evaluations in sales leadership pipeline.

The second theory that can be introduced in the analysis is the human capital theory which puts emphasis on education, training and work experience in shaping a career outcome (Becker, 1964; Mincer, 1974). The past practice of gender disparity in leadership was premised on the human capital that women gained over time, which was minimal. The contemporary phenomenon is that this ground is increasingly becoming disputed. Women have attained the identical or even better education to men across the globe and in Nigeria and have obtained the same sales performance outcomes in different sectors (World Bank, 2022; ILO, 2022; McKinsey and Company, 2023). The data that is presented by the National Bureau of Statistics (2023) reports that the number of women in tertiary education and commerce-related areas has been steadily growing, yet the same has not been transferred to senior sales leadership roles.

This detachment is what has prompted theorists to expand the notion of human capital to address more diverse forms of career capital, which include social capital, the visibility and sponsorship (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994; Inkson & Arthur, 2001). In sales organisations, the process of sales promotion is rarely based on the principles of form qualification; instead, it is mediated by the fact of access to influential networks, high profile accounts and high profile advocates that legitimate the leadership potential (Burt, 2000; Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001). Research always reveals that women are equally likely to receive mentorship as men are, but far less likely to receive sponsorship ties actively urging them to take up a leadership position (Ibarra, Carter, & Silva, 2010; Hewlett et al., 2011). The availability of sponsorship, in turn, is limited in the Nigerian environment, where the promotion of the profession is usually closed within informal, patriarchal networks, which again limits the opportunity of women to become leaders in sales (Oluwafemi & Akinwale, 2022).

It also explains away with the additional organisational culture theory and institutional theory, which situates gender inequality in

terms of routine, norms and organisational structures within the framework of organisational and institutional environments (Schein, 1992; Scott, 2008). The models emphasize the idea that inequality is not merely recreated through the prejudice of individuals, but also through practices that are considered the norms, such as subjective performance ratings, unspoken promotion rules, and masculine-promoting models of leadership (Kanter, 1977; Ridgeway, 2011). The homosocial reproduction has been widely used in the selection of leaders by the Nigerian sales organisations where the advanced leaders tend to give promotions to individuals that are similar to them with regard to their background, behaviour, and social orientation (Kanter, 1977; Okafor & Akpan, 2021).

Moreover, women tend to be naturally disadvantaged by the presuppositions of the free access, high mobility, and engagement in after-hours client work inherent in sales leadership positions (Williams, Blair-Loy, & Berdahl, 2013; Adisa et al., 2019). These organisational expectations are congruent with institutionalised gender expectations that enhance structural barriers to the advancement of women leaders despite the absence of overt discrimination.

However, organisational reactions to gender inequality are slowly changing due to pressure and obligation put on organisations by institutions. According to the concept of isomorphism in the Institutional Theory, organisations embrace globally legitimised practices that can be used to improve their credibility and competitiveness (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

It is noted that multinational corporations and globally integrated organisations in Nigeria have been implementing gender inclusive policies and leadership development programs, mentorship and sponsorship programmes, and flexible work arrangements as per the international practices (McKinsey and Company, 2023; Catalyst, 2022). Despite the encouraging nature of these programs, their distribution among indigenous companies and small and medium-sized enterprises is uneven and this limits their impact on the global front.

Together, the social role theory, human capital theory, and organisational culture and institutional theory may result in a wide understanding of the problem of underrepresentation of women in sales leadership in Nigeria. Apparently, the gap is not created by the inadequacy or insufficient drive since it is justified by the existing social norms, unequal resource allocation that facilitates careers, and organisational cultures of promoting masculine leadership images. The measures to correct them are deliberate organisational contributions that rebrand the skills of leadership, institutionalise the promotional processes, enhance the procedures of sponsorship and optimise the sales leadership models with the notion of inclusiveness and meritocracy. Not only does gender equity require such efforts, but it is currently being viewed as a strategic imperative in the sales competitiveness of organisational innovation, organisational resilience and long-term performance (Ely & Thomas, 2001; McKinsey and Company, 2023).

Empirical Review

Despite the multitude of studies examining the question of gender inclusion in African management, there is incredibly high gap in the research on the topic of sales leadership. Indicatively, Ogochukwu and Obiekwe (2021) analyzed gender diversity in Nigerian banking sector and found out that the women were not well represented in top positions of marketing despite being more likely to retain their customers than their counterparts. On the same note, Akinwale and George (2020) disclosed that women on the manufacturing sales team in Nigeria encountered mobility limitations, most of which were related to safety issues and cultural barriers.

On the international level, it has always been studied that more gender diverse institutions in terms of top leadership have been found to be more profitable, more innovative and capable of retaining their employees (McKinsey & Company, 2020). Nonetheless, the absence of localised information about the implementation of effective interventions by Nigerian

companies exists. Sponsorship, open promotion system and flexible work schedules have been proposed, and little empirical evidence has been made on how these strategies can overcome the peculiar socio-cultural challenges women in sales management experience in Nigeria.

This kind of vacuum when it comes to context-specific empirical research is enough justification to the present study. Using the Social Role Theory, the Human Capital Theory, and the Organisational Culture Theory, in this paper, the researcher will establish a contextual theory that correlates the organisational practices, individual resources and the socio-cultural factors to the advancement of women in the sales leadership role in Nigeria.

3. Methodology

The paper presented a conceptual framework that was based on the literature theories. The fact that the environment of such an organisation presents opportunities in the nature of the inclusive organisational policies and favourable culture can assist in minimising the effects of gender on the development of leadership also in the case where the traditional gender norms are still present according to the framework.

A pilot study was done to determine the internal consistency of 30 respondents who did not form the main sample. The Cronbach Alpha was used to determine the reliability that gave coefficients of 0.78 to 0.91. These findings are revealing high internal consistency and that is within the range that Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) provide.

Analysis of the survey data was done using SPSS (Version 28) and SmartPLS. The used statistical techniques were as follows: Mean, standard deviation and frequency to describe the demographic data. The Pearson Product

Moment Correlation was used to test the relationships between the practices of inclusion and the advances of females. The Multiple regression analysis was aimed at determining the factors that predict leadership progression. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to compare the differences between the industries and the type of organisations. All the statistical tests were done at the level of significance of 0.05 ($p < 0.05$). The thematic analysis was used on the transcripts of the interviews and focus group discussions and was grounded on the methodology that was outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). NVivo program was useful in the coding process and assisted in the identification of the common patterns in the following broad themes: Structural barriers, Cultural norms, Organizational policies, Leadership advancement facilitators. The outcomes of the quantitative and qualitative research were triangulated and contributed to the study interpretations and made them more realistic and dimensional.

Data Analysis, Results and Presentation.

The discussion is a combination of quantitative and qualitative findings aimed to give a multi-dimensional approach to the problem of gender diversity and inclusiveness in promoting women in the sale leadership position in Nigeria.

A total of 400 survey responses were made with valid responses and was 80 percent of the entire sample. Also, deep interviews were carried out. The sample based on respondents was made on the four major industries that included Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (30%), Telecommunications (25%), Banking and Finance (25%), and Pharmaceuticals (20%). These respondents were spread in the six geopolitical regions of Nigeria.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Overview of Respondent Profile

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	230	57.5
	Male	170	42.5
Age	25–34 years	120	30.0
	35–44 years	180	45.0
	45 years and above	100	25.0
Educational Level	Bachelor's degree	240	60.0

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Organizational Level	Master's degree	130	32.5
	PhD/Professional qualification	30	7.5
	Entry	100	25.0
	Mid-level	180	45.0
	Senior/Leadership	120	30.0

Interpretation:

The workforce was relatively educated since most of the respondents were women who had a bachelor's or master's degree. But the number of female occupants of senior management sales roles was only 30 per cent, supporting the theme of the gender disparity in leadership representation.

The total number of surveyed participants was 400. The gender distribution reflected that 57.5 per cent were female (230 individuals), and 42.5 per cent were male (170 individuals). On the age aspect, 30-percent were 25-34 years, 45-percent were 35-44 years, and 25-percent were 45 years and above.

In terms of educational levels, 60 per cent of the respondents had a bachelor's degree, 32.5 per cent had a master's, and 7.5 per cent held a PhD/professional qualification. Organisational level: 25 per cent were at the entry level, 45 per cent were at the mid-level, and 30 per cent were at the senior or leadership level. The statistics show that most of the respondents were females who had attained at least a bachelor's or master's degree, which is a highly educated labour force. Nevertheless, the senior sales management roles were held by only 30 per cent of respondents, which demonstrates the existing gender disparity in terms of leadership representation.

Table 2: Organizational Inclusion Practices and Gender Advancement:

Organizational Inclusion Indicator	Mean (M)	SD	Interpretation
Existence of formal gender inclusion policy	3.78	0.84	Moderate
Availability of mentorship programs	3.46	0.92	Moderate
Access to leadership development training	3.22	0.88	Low
Flexibility/work-life balance policy	3.58	0.81	Moderate
Transparent promotion criteria	2.95	0.93	Low
Management commitment to gender equality	3.81	0.79	Moderate

Despite the high number of organizations that indicate inclusion policy, the gap in implementation is quite high. In the mentorship program and clear promotion criteria, the scores were less than 3.5 showing that there is not enough institutional support to women in

their career advancement in sales management. These results align with McKinsey (2023) that observes that most African firms practice diversity rhetoric without any accountability systems in place.

Table 3: Correlation Analysis: Inclusion Practices and Women's Leadership Advancement

Variables	r	p-value	Decision
Inclusive HR policies ↔ Leadership advancement	0.61	0.001	Significant
Mentorship programs ↔ Leadership advancement	0.55	0.002	Significant
Work-life balance policies ↔ Leadership advancement	0.42	0.004	Significant
Transparent promotion criteria ↔ Leadership advancement	0.59	0.001	Significant

As the analysis reveals, the inclination of women to leadership is strongly positively related to the inclusive organisational practices. This underlines the importance of gender conscious

HR systems in the progress of women in the sales management process, particularly in regard to transparency in mentorship and promotions.

Table 4: Regression Analysis: Predictors of Women's Advancement

Predictor Variable	β	t-value	Sig. (p)	Remark
Inclusive HR policies	0.298	4.123	0.001	Significant
Mentorship opportunities	0.254	3.887	0.001	Significant
Work-life balance programs	0.173	2.661	0.009	Significant
Cultural attitudes	-0.211	-3.302	0.001	Significant (Negative)

The model explains 64 per cent ($R^2 = 0.64$) of the variation in the progress of the women in the leadership.

There are significant positive predictors of women being promoted, which are inclusive HR (HR) policies, mentorship and work-life balance programs. In contrast, the situation is harmed by the cultural attitudes, so the development of women is still restricted by the social stereotypes and the old-fashioned distribution of gender roles. These outcomes are considered to be related to the conclusions of Eagly and Carli (2007), who put forward to the so-called Labyrinth Model based on which the systemic and cultural barriers often overlap, creating complex means through which women in the leadership.

Qualitative Results and Discussion.

According to the qualitative interviews and focus groups discussions, there were four key themes:

Socio-Cultural Barriers: The societal pressure to get married and to have children was widely noted as an impediment by numerous females. Women are said to be less mobile and dedicated to the demanding sales positions. They are expected to meet the sales targets like your male colleagues even when you do too much traveling, people will question you about what you think is important being a wife or a mother. - Sales Manager (Female), FMCG industry.

Stereotyping and Bias of Organisations: It has been mentioned that the leadership is mostly associated with male traits, such as aggressiveness. Other women have lamented that they do not fit in some of the major decision-making networks. The sales meetings are mainly male dominated. You have to perform better than average. - Telecom Sales Executive, Senior Sales Executive.

The Mentorship and Sponsorship: It was discovered that mentorship by senior people was a vital factor that determined career advancement. My male director mentor would

never hesitate to ask me to work on projects that would prove me to be good. That was the difference," Women Sales Director, Banking Industry.

Lapses in Policies and Weakness in Implementation: Policies on inclusion have been implemented, but the policies are not being enforced. Many of the respondents mentioned them as paper policies that fail to back their structure. We have diversity policies, and no one measures the impact of the same. - Pharmaceutical Sector HR Manager.

The results of the study show that the programs are ineffective in organizations with clearly outlined inclusion policy even though the level of implementation is high. The findings of the research indicate that a second glass ceiling is that women are not able to pursue their career due to institutional and societal discrimination which does not allow them after achieving moderate educational levels.

The female Nigerian sales environment is exposed to two main issues that include underrepresentation in the companies and the cultural demands that undermine it in the journey of taking the leading role.

Discussion Research Results with Existing Literature

The research results are consistent with the existing literature that also reported that organizations not only lack formal mentoring systems, but also the systems of employee development are relevant (Catalyst, 2022; KPMG, 2023) and the existing culture is also a barrier that fails to support the successful implementation of the existing policies by women in the sales and marketing field (Okafor & Akokuwebe, 2020) and

The research is effective to demonstrate that inclusive HR practices lead to growth of women leadership in Nigeria by 64 percent because the organizational policy influences augments the already existing research. The evidences reveal that cultural attitudes are the key barrier that can enable women to gain equity in senior positions as the organizations achieve improved performance due to reduced gender discrimination of the ladies workers. According to Eagly (1987), Social Role Theory evidences that there are significant effects of gender

expectations that determine the success of career people.

Conclusion

The paper summarizes that the major issue that has led to low representation of women as the heads of sales of organizations in Nigeria is inclusiveness in organizations as well as the fact that there are no women with the expertise. Although, most of the organizations have already incorporated the gender inclusion policies, the low scale of these policies applications and the ingrained socio-cultural values have presented two-fold institutional and societal challenges.

These results affirm that women have a non-inflexible working structure, mentoring and inclusive HR systems, which have been empirically related to women. Conversely, gender stereotyping and the traditional perception of roles continue to limit the aspiration of females in the competitive sales to practice their leadership. The study indicates that accountability without diversity does not suffice with the incorporation of the evidence in the world and the data in Nigeria. The culture and structure should be changed to achieve gender equity in leadership.

Study Implications

The work can support the Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987) and the Institutional Theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) as the results can show that women are not able to play the desirable roles of leadership simply basing on personal skills, but other aspects, such as norms and the cultural context play the important role in determining the results of leadership. Also, the study makes the application of the Labyrinth Model (Eagly & Carli, 2007) to Nigerian setting. This demonstrates that the female sales leadership is subjected to a loop of diverse impediments, which are reliant on one another as policy, prejudice, and cultural factor gaps, which in their compounding influences the shaping up of their profession. Gender diversity concept ought to be considered as a strategic tool rather than a social obligation whereby when it comes to the issue of organizations, they are expected to perform better regarding sales. Inclusive leadership practices are also stated to

enhance innovation, increase the outcome of discussions, and enhance the market dispersion. The mentorship and open promotion practices and workforce flexibility organizations will be more likely to retain their best female salespeople, and construct a more favorable organizational image. It is recommended that the government agencies and regulators in the industry such as the National Council on Women Affairs and the Nigerian Employers Consultative Association should introduce gender reporting in big companies, introduce diversity measure in corporate code of governance and reward any organizations with tangible changes in the role of leadership.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study and on the theories so observed, the following recommendations were presented:

1. Organisations should incorporate gender inclusion in the HR systems in recruitment, promotions and performance management, in a manner that the outputs of diversity are linked to the executive key performance indicators.
2. Organisations should institute formal mentorship programs in which young female selling professionals will associate with senior leaders of both genders. Career mapping should be provided in such programs which would subject the leaders to skills development.
3. The foundation of promotion must be based on merit and design in a manner that will not discriminate against gender or foster nepotism. Regular auditing should be conducted to find out whether the results of promotions are fair.
4. Implement the policies of flexible working schedules, remote work policy and parental leaves, which will accommodate both men and women.
5. Organizations should establish measures of evaluation which will denote the diversity requirement that the organization ought to accomplish through its compulsory reporting policy that will keep a track of the gender representation among the top executives based on international best principles.
6. Organize company-wide diversity and unconscious bias trainings to have a more

diverse workplace culture. These should be such that would train top management, the sales as well as the human resource staffs.

7. Government and other institutions and agencies will need to provide incentives through policy which should give awards of recognition or tax credits to the organizations that have made better gender inclusion.

Suggestions to Future Research

1. Other aspects of intersectionality could also be considered in future studies through consideration of how ethnicity, religion, and regional variations interact with gender in order to discover the trends of leadership.
2. The comparative studies performed by Nigeria and other Sub Saharan African countries may reveal the bigger picture of sales leadership variety in the area.
3. Sustainability and long term influence of diversity interventions may be determined as a possibility of the longitudinal research.
4. It is possible to extend the field of the entrepreneurial sales organizations to provide more insight into the operation of the informal sector.

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