



UNIVERSITY OF MEDIA, ARTS AND COMMUNICATION (UniMAC)

INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM

GENDER AND LEADERSHIP IN PUBLIC RELATIONS: EXPLORING  
FEMALE LEADERSHIP STYLES IN PR PRACTICE AND THEIR RIPPLE  
EFFECTS ON ORGANISATIONAL SUCCESS

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BY

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## DECLARATION BY STUDENT – DISSERTATION

I hereby declare that this research is a result of my own original research and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or any other higher education institute. I further declare that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Anita Akua Akuffo

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Student

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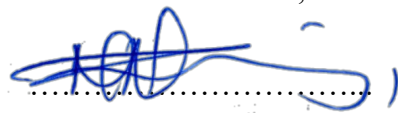
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## CERTIFICATION BY SUPERVISOR

This Dissertation/Thesis has been prepared and presented under my supervision according to the guidelines for supervision and formatting of Dissertation/Thesis laid down by the University of Media, Arts and Communication, UniMAC.

Dr Noel Nutsugah



8/12/2025

Supervisor

Signature

Date

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this study to the Almighty God, whose divine direction and blessings have guided my path and provided me with the strength to continue in this scholarly endeavour.

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## ABSTRACT

The study explored female leadership styles in PR practice and their ripple effects on organisational success, using the qualitative research approach to understand the lived experiences of these female PR leaders in various organisations in Accra, Ghana, through the lens of the Gendered Theory of Organisations. Leveraging the purposive sampling strategy, the study interviewed six female PR leaders from government institutions, private, and PR agencies to gather in-depth and diverse perspectives from the study participants to contribute new insights to the literature. The study revealed that female PR leaders draw on participatory, relational, and supportive leadership styles characterised by empathy, inclusivity, emotional intelligence, and team nurturing. These leadership styles contribute to improving organisational success by fostering team empowerment, creativity, organisational results, and ethical conduct. The study also identified existing masculine norms, biases, and stereotypes that affect women PR leaders in their experience. The study concludes that while female PR leaders are leveraging their participatory and relational approaches to contribute to organisational success, they also advocate for the destabilisation of traditional masculine norms that hinder women's growth. The study was limited by its smaller sample size and focus on only female PR leaders in Accra, Ghana. As such, it recommends future research to expand the scope across different regions in Ghana to unearth new findings in the literature.

**Keywords:** Public relations, female leadership, gendered organisations, leadership styles, organisational success, Ghana

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# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.0 Chapter introduction**

This chapter introduces the study and provides background information about the research topic. It also discusses the main problem addressed by the research, the research aims and objectives, the research questions that the study intends to address, the significance of the research, and the overall scope of the research.

### **1.1 Background**

The presence of women in the public relations (PR) and communication landscape has long captured scholarly interest. Women started to attract the attention of PR academics in the mid-1980s (Topić et al., 2019). One of the earliest and most dominant inquiries into gender in PR appeared with the Velvet Ghetto study in 1986. The study argued that women see themselves as technical staff, thus expecting to get paid less than men (Cline et al., 1986). This breakthrough research gave rise to all other inquiries in the field, unearthing mass systemic issues, including gender pay gaps, stereotypical expectations surrounding leadership, and a widespread belief that leadership is a masculine trait (Tench et al., 2017). The literature indeed highlights various studies in this area; however, there is still a need for some improvement in women's representation, as issues with a pay gap, glass ceiling, and mentoring persist (Dubrowski et al., 2019; CIPR, 2018a; 2017; Place and Vardeman Winter, 2018).

Since the Velvet Ghetto study, both theoretical and empirical research have continued to reflect the presence of women in communication roles (Aldoory and Toth, 2002; Dubrowski et al., 2019; Topić, 2021a). However, this wavelength has not necessarily translated into equity. Women today indeed occupy a great portion of the PR workforce, but they usually remain in

lower-tier roles with limited access to executive positions. The literature reveals that despite comprising nearly 70–75% of the PR profession, women hold only 20–30% of top leadership roles (Place and Vardeman-Winter, 2018; Shah, 2015). It is then clear how these numbers validate the proverbial glass ceiling concept, which echoes how women's rising is frequently restricted (Meng and Neill, 2021b; Topić and Tench, 2020).

Efforts to curtail these inequalities have gained momentum in recent years, particularly with growing calls for inclusion and diversity, still most studies show that women in the PR industry face constant barriers and challenges (Polic and Holy, 2021; Triantafillidou and Yannas, 2021). The studies have shown that recruitment may no longer be gendered; nevertheless, factors linked to salary barriers generate favouritism for men and limited promotions (Aldoory and Toth, 2021). Consequently, being successful in the public relations profession is still a challenge for women as reflected in the actual pay gap, the limited leadership advancement opportunities, and the ongoing battle to be involved, heard, valued and respected in decision making (Meng & Neill, 2021).

Beyond organisational barriers, women in PR also face personal and cultural challenges that add to their professional struggles. Findings presented in Meng and Neill's (2022a) paper provided solid evidence that women in PR continually face the challenges of work–family conflict. This is because traditional gender roles continue to place the burden of domestic responsibilities, such as child care, elder care, and household chores, on women, which logically implies that women usually have less time to devote to their work and career development (Meng & Neill, 2022a). Because of these demands, women are often required to select between personal responsibilities and professional development, which serves as a drawback to their leadership paths.

Mentorship was also identified as a key factor in empowering and encouraging women in leadership participation through mentor–mentee interaction and communication (Meng & Neill, 2022a). The literature clearly showed that organisations must establish in-house support and policies to help female professionals overcome the challenges they face, and most importantly, a focus on the implementation of these mentorship programmes (Meng & Neill, 2022a). It is therefore obvious to note that effective mentorship not only empowers women but also provides them with the networks and support systems needed to advance in their careers.

In the global context, gender equality is seen as a fundamental human right and a driver of sustainable development, and this is evident in the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Advancing gender equality is ranked as the fifth of the 17 core Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Gender equality and women's empowerment, 2015) (Meng & Neill, 2021). It therefore makes sense to say that collective action is a crucial factor in addressing these persistent gender disparities across all professional sectors, including public relations.

Well, amid these barriers, women leaders are increasingly recognised for the distinct value they bring to organisations. According to the 2021 Women in the Workplace report by LeanIn.Org and McKinsey & Company, women in senior roles are more likely than men to support team members emotionally and advocate for manageable workloads (Corbett, 2021). These traits echo a leadership style hinged on empathy, inclusivity, and relational intelligence.

These insights, from both empirical studies about women in PR, make a compelling case for focused research into female leadership in PR, in contexts like Ghana.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Women make up approximately 70–75% of the PR workforce, yet they hold only 20–30% of senior leadership positions. This inequality has persisted for decades, despite the field's

increasing feminisation (Place & Vardeman-Winter, 2018; Shah, 2015). This gap highlights a critical issue. The literature has documented various studies in this field from women's experiences to empowerment, ethical leadership, and coping strategies (Meng & Neill, 2021; Meng & Neill, 2022a; Meng & Neill, 2022b; Li et al., 2022). However, there is a huge void of studies examining specific female leadership styles and the ripple effect on organisational performance.

The literature on women's leadership in PR predominantly relies on quantitative methodologies. While these methods are valuable for generalising the findings, they provide limited insight into the varied lived experiences that shape leadership practices. Apart from qualitative inquiries by Kati Tusinski Berg and Miller (2023), which investigated how female PR leaders promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives through employee empowerment, and Zeler et al. (2022), whose study in Spain shed light on the personal costs and styles of leadership, most of the literature relies heavily on quantitative methodologies. As such, this methodological imbalance births the need for in-depth qualitative research that unearths the processes, meanings, and contextual factors influencing female leadership in public relations.

Moreover, most research on gender and leadership in PR has focused on Western democracies; primarily the United States, Canada, Greece, and Indonesia (Clayton et al., 2021; Triantafillidou & Yannas, 2021; Kriyantono et al., 2022). This as a result underrepresent African contexts, particularly Ghana. For instance, Zeler et al. (2022) explored leadership styles among women in Spain's communication management sector, a study similar to the current study, but the cultural and organisational context did not favour democracies like Ghana, as they remain largely unexamined. Consequently, we do not have a sufficiently clear context understanding of how Ghanaian women in PR navigate leadership roles and how their leadership styles contribute to organisational success.

These voids, as a result, gave rise to the current study, which aims to address these interconnected gaps: empirical, methodological, and contextual, by devising qualitative methodologies to explore the leadership styles of female PR professionals/practitioners in Ghana and how these styles impact organisational outcomes.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

1. To explore the leadership styles adopted by female PR professionals and how they perceive and enact leadership in their organisational contexts.
2. To examine how female PR leadership styles impact team performance, communication outcomes, and broader organisational goals.
3. To identify and analyse the cultural, institutional, and gender-related factors that influence or constrain the leadership practices of women in the PR industry.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

1. What are the lived experiences and perceived leadership styles of female PR professionals within organisations in Ghana?
2. In what ways do these female leadership styles influence organisational success?
3. What contextual factors shape or challenge the leadership experiences of female PR professionals in Ghana?

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This study aims to make several contributions to the field of PR and female PR leadership. First, it addresses the gap in the existing literature by empirically examining the leadership experiences of women in PR roles in Ghana. Despite women being the majority in the field, their leadership styles and influence on organisational outcomes have not been thoroughly studied (Meng & Neill, 2021; Triantafillidou & Yannas, 2021). Conducting this study will

provide a clearer understanding of gender leadership styles and its impacts in organisational settings.

Theoretically, the findings will also help refine leadership frameworks in PR by incorporating gender-specific dynamics in the literature will challenge the chiefly male-centric paradigms that have historically shaped the profession (Topić, 2021b). According to the literature, female PR leaders exhibit unique strengths in areas such as collaborative communication (Corbett, 2021). This study could help validate these arguments in the context of Ghana and highlight the need for gender-inclusive leadership models that emphasise these qualities.

Practically, the study will be beneficial for PR agencies, HR departments, and policy developers aiming to promote gender equity. It can inform decisions related to recruitment, leadership training, and mentorship programs designed to support women in senior communication roles. Considering the scarcity of data in Ghana, this study can contribute to the development of informed policies and workplace cultures that recognise and value the unique contributions of female leaders (Meng & Neill, 2022a).

## **1.6 Scope of the Study**

The present study focuses on gender and leadership in the PR industry in Ghana, with a specific attention to the leadership styles adopted by female PR professionals and how these styles influence organisational success. A qualitative research approach was deployed with the help of semi-structured, in-depth interviews with selected female PR professionals who occupy or have occupied leadership roles before, based in Accra. This approach allows the study to gather in-depth personal experiences, leadership approaches, and perceptions of the challenges and outcomes associated with female leadership in PR practice. The study targets women working in PR roles across public, private, and non-profit sectors, allowing for an assortment of perspectives on how female leadership manifests within different organisational settings. The

study does not attempt to compare experiences across countries or to statistically measure leadership effectiveness but instead seeks to understand the varied realities of female leadership within Ghana's PR industry.

### **1.7 Organisation of the Study**

This study is organised into five chapters. Chapter One provides the general background of the study, outlines the problem statement, research objectives, research questions, significance of the study, scope of the study, and organisation of the entire work. Chapter Two presents a review of relevant literature, covering theoretical frameworks, key concepts, and empirical studies related to gender, leadership, and public relations. It also helps identify knowledge gaps that the current study aims to fill. Chapter Three maps out the methodology deployed in the study, including the research design, sampling techniques, data collection procedures, and analysis approach. Chapter Four presents the findings from the interviews conducted and interprets them in line with the research questions. Ultimately, Chapter Five concludes the study by summarising the main findings and offering recommendations for practice, policy, and further research.

### **1.8 Chapter Summary**

This chapter serves as the inductor aspect of the study and establishes its relevance by providing a background on gender representation and leadership in the PR industry. It explains why examining female leadership styles and their organisational impacts is necessary within the Ghanaian context. The chapter also outlines the research problem, objectives, and questions, and highlights the significance and scope of the study. Finally, it explains how the study is structured across five chapters.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter focuses on reviewing existing literature by scholars on Gender and Leadership in Public Relations and related topics to help identify existing gaps that the study seeks to address. As Marchi and McEvoy (2016) noted, a literature review involves a thorough digest of prior studies on a given topic, as well as a critical analysis of research articles, books, and other sources relevant to a particular research area.

#### **2.1 Inclusive Leadership**

Inclusive leadership within the PR field is now recognised as an essential approach that promotes equitable and ethical workplace environments. Researchers like Chrobot-Mason and Roberson (2021) propose a Model of Inclusive Leadership that identifies three central components: antecedent conditions, leader behaviours, and organisational outcomes. In their study, they mentioned that inclusive leadership is not accidental but influenced by internal organisational policies and structures that can either support or deter its implementation. Their model speaks to the need for the implementation of institutional frameworks to cushion inclusivity in organisational settings and how it is enacted by leaders.

In the PR field, ethical leadership is a core aspect of inclusive leadership, as Meng and Neill (2022b) argue that leaders should not only exemplify ethical behaviours but also ask for feedback from employees to measure their effectiveness as moral managers. As such, this practice involves reviewing ethical standards, conducting self-assessments, and addressing leadership gaps through planned policies (Meng and Neill, 2022b). These efforts contribute to a more inclusive organisational culture when transparency and accountability are promoted.



As such, leaders who fail to meet expected ethical standards may end up supporting exclusionary practices in organisations.

It is also worth noting that structural inequalities persist in the PR industry, which depicts the limitations in inclusive leadership practices. Despite women comprising 70% of the PR workforce, they embody only 30% of leadership at the CEO level, and a gender pay gap remains evident (Shah, 2017). Now, these inequalities suggest that inclusive leadership must go beyond ethical modelling and policy review to address systemic barriers that hinders women's progression into executive roles (Shah, 2017). Therefore, promoting genuine inclusivity in PR leadership necessitates a blend of ethical leadership, open organisational policies, and a commitment to equity in career advancement.

## **2.2 Gender Dynamics in PR Leadership**

In the literature about gender dynamics in PR leadership, researchers like Topic et al. (2020) argued that decades of academic literature confirm how workplace discrimination remains a key factor stopping women from advancing to top positions. They argued challenges such as the glass ceiling, gender-based pay disparities, and stereotypical expectations surrounding women's roles both at work and at home (Topic et al., 2020). These challenges often limit women's capacity to invest in their careers on the same level as their male colleagues (Edwards and Rothbard, 2000; Parasuraman and Greenhaus, 2002; ten Brummelhuis and van der Lippe, 2010).

Limited access to mentorship and formal training, further contributes to the gender gap in leadership roles. Arguments by Powell and Graves (2003) buttress this view, noting that women often lack access to both formal job training and mentorship, placing them at a disadvantage in organisational development. These findings were reinforced by the findings of Tench and Topic's (2017) study, about how, though the PR industry has a lot of female

presence, fewer opportunities are still presented to them in terms of professional development. The literature, however, shows that there have been deliberate steps toward improving representation and raising awareness on the quota of gender diversity in leadership at the board level for women (Hamplova et al., 2022)

Exploring the leadership styles also echoes a wide range of gender leadership styles in the literature. Most of the studies conducted in the US and Europe acknowledged that female leaders are mostly associated with inclusive and democratic styles, while male leadership tends to align with hierarchical and authoritarian models (Aldoory, 2005; Hopkins and O'Neil, 2015). In contrast, Place and Vardeman-Winter (2018) posited that there is no substantial difference in leadership ability between men and women, but rather a lack of clear strategies to support women into leadership positions. Similarly, Tench et al. (2017a) in their study also found no substantial communication style differences across genders, challenging the claims of earlier studies that women naturally adopt more relational approaches. Interestingly, recent studies by Kriyantono et al. (2022) and Kati Tusinski Berg and Miller (2023) defeat these notions by arguing that female practitioners and/or leaders lead with humanity, emotional intelligence, and outperform their male counterparts in managerial roles, when it comes to implementing two-way communication.

### **2.3 Gender and Leadership in the Workplace**

Gender and leadership in the workplace were yet another interesting concept that popped up in the literature as because the issue of gender inequality in leadership remains a big challenge in the workplace, in the context of the PR profession (Meng and Neill, 2021b; Topic and Tench, 2020). The literature indicates a broader pattern of workplace discrimination, where individuals are treated unequally based on gender or sexual orientation (Equal Rights Advocate, 2022).

Regardless of these structural barriers, women in senior roles still demonstrate impact in leadership roles. Williams (2016) noted that companies with women in leadership or on boards tend to foster stronger commitments to sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR). Women when in senior roles are twice as likely to their male equals to actively engage in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives within their respective organisations (“Women in the Workplace,” 2022). These findings suggest that women not only influence strategic outcomes but also shape workplace cultures that promote inclusive practices.

In terms of leadership capabilities, some researchers argue that women possess qualities that give them an advantage in leadership roles. Esser et al. (2018) highlight traits such as authenticity, adaptability, power orientation, perseverance, and balanced personality as more projecting among female leaders. In line with this, Offermann and Foley (2020) also observed that women generally exhibit better attitudes and leadership skills.

The literature also revealed that women often deploy a mixed leadership style that blends both direct and empathetic approaches. According to Zeler et al. (2022), women in leadership tend to use clear and transparent communication, normally associated with masculine styles, while also integrating empathetic and relational approaches typical of feminine communication. This combination of traits allows women to respond well to various professional situations and stakeholder needs, buttressing their value in leadership positions (Zeler et al., 2022).

## **2.4 Contextual Factors that Affect Women in PR Practice**

The challenges facing women in PR leadership and practice are not new, as studies conducted in the 1980s highlighted issues such as occupational segregation, covert discrimination, and pay inequities. Researchers during that era, predominantly in the US, brought attention to what was referred to as the "pink ghetto", a term used to define women being hired into roles with little real power or opportunity for advancement (Cline et al., 1986; Topic et al., 2020). These

studies were the genesis of structural and cultural factors that kept women from progressing in their careers.

Building on this foundation, Grunig, Toth and Childers Hon (2000) called for the integration of feminist values into PR practice, suggesting that such values could lead to more ethical and effective outcomes. They recommended expanding the scope of studies to include not only gender but also race, class, and sexuality. The outcome of these arguments informed studies advocating for a more diverse workforce within the PR profession (Childers Hon and Brunner, 2000; Pompper, 2004), highlighting the need to address the factors that shape women's leadership experiences.

The organisational environment today plays a vital role in determining the leadership experiences of women in PR. Tench et al. (2017b, p. 78) noted that, "Leadership directly or indirectly determines structures, culture, power distribution and communication at different levels of the organisation". Leadership research has progressed from focusing solely on individual traits to more holistic models that consider behaviours, situational contexts, and group dynamics (Tench et al., 2017a). Within this development, empathy has been identified as a key characteristic of effective leadership, as it enables leaders to connect better with others and respond to emotional and interpersonal cues (Zerfass et al., 2022; Dolamore, 2021).

Women, despite possessing such qualities, often face hindrances in attaining managerial roles. These hindrances are mostly influenced by socio-cultural norms that undervalue female leadership, labelling them as less effective compared to men (Topic, 2020). This issue is thus intensified by structural limitations within organisations, such as sexism, discrimination, pay disparities, and the glass ceiling (Sealy & Singh, 2010). Also, the lack of accessible mentoring and training programs for women seeking leadership roles contributes to their advancement (Dubrowski et al., 2019; Tench & Topic, 2017).

Efforts to support female leadership must therefore include initiatives that not only remove barriers but also recognise and support the distinct leadership styles of women. According to Zeler et al. (2022), it is necessary to understand the varied contexts in which women operate, promote visibility of their experiences, and guide organisations to create routes for internal advancement. These steps are particularly important in the PR and communication industries, which often advocate for diversity and inclusion (Zeler et al., 2022).

## **2.5 Female Leadership Styles and Organisational Success**

The literature on the relationship between female leadership styles and organisational success revealed how female leaders are redefining leadership by embedding empathy, ethics of care, and purpose-driven PR into their styles (Kati Tusinski Berg and Miller, 2023). According to Kati Tusinski Berg and Miller (2023), female leaders in PR are demonstrating an approach to leadership that embraces empathy and a strong commitment to values such as DEI. These female leaders see themselves as agents of change, as they deploy ethical and humanist approaches to influence both organisational dynamics and broader societal transformation.

A key theme that dominates the literature is the “ethic of care”, which highlights the focus on others’ needs, trust-building, and a commitment to mutual respect and community welfare. This leadership perspective aligns with the central principles of PR, on relationship building and ethical communication (Fraustino & Kennedy, 2018; Held, 2005). Female leaders operationalise these values through empathetic leadership, which helps promote inclusiveness in the working environment and empowers internal publics (Formentin & Bortree, 2018; Place, 2021). This style also reflects a transformational leadership style as it is characterised by compassion, patience, courage, and transparency, ultimately challenging hierarchical or patriarchal models of leadership (Jin, 2010; Aldoory & Toth, 2004).

The arguments by Kati Tusinski Berg and Miller (2023) also added that female leaders intentionally lead with humanity, emphasising purposeful communication, emotional intelligence, and vulnerability, because these female leaders are not just receptive to internal organisational needs but also respond to external social and political forces. In doing so, they change the leadership narrative from authoritative to a more collaborative and empathic one. And this makes many suggest that empathy should be adopted as a core business strategy (Kati Tusinski Berg and Miller, 2023). Now, the current leadership paradigm challenges the long-held patriarchal principles in the PR profession, as researchers like Kriyantono et al. (2022) argue that when female practitioners are allowed to lead, they usually outperform their male colleagues in managerial roles, because they implement the two-way communication model in PR better.

## **2.6 Empirical Framework**

Berg and Miller (2023) investigated how female leaders in PR advance DEI initiatives to empower employees and form broader societal discourse. They used a grounded theory approach to analyse narratives from honourees of PRWeek's Women of Distinction over three years following their lived experiences. Their findings revealed four key themes: empathetic leadership and meaningful connections; reimagining workplace structures and cultures; strong commitment to and celebration of DEI; and support for purpose-driven organisations. These findings are in line with the arguments of Meng and Neill (2022b), as both studies speak to the emphasis on ethical and value-driven leadership as essential to women in PR practice. This study also aligns with the present study as they both focus on gender and leadership in PR and their qualitative approach. However, there are differences in population, as the current study focuses on female PR professionals/practitioners across different roles in Ghana, rather than award honourees in a U.S.-based context. While Berg and Miller's (2023) study contributes some good findings to the literature, its limitation lies in the elite status of its participants,

which may not reflect the broader experiences of women in the profession. My study addresses this gap by studying a diverse range of women in PR leadership styles and outcomes, in order to offer a more context-specific understanding in Ghana. In doing so, it contributes new knowledge to communication, leadership, and gender studies in the literature.

Meng and Neill (2022a) also examined gender equity in PR leadership, deploying the coping theory, accentuating the role of mentoring and support in managing work-family conflicts. With the help of the quantitative approach, the study surveyed 512 full-time female PR and communication professionals in the United States. The findings of the study revealed that women, particularly those aged 31–40, often readjusted their family responsibilities following work demands and relied on coping strategies to accomplish these responsibilities. Mentoring was identified as a key support tool that helped junior female professionals handle workplace challenges and maintain a work-life balance. These findings validate their very own study, Meng and Neill (2021), which highlights the importance of organisational support structures, such as diversity climates and mentoring, in enabling female development and resilience in PR. The study provided good findings for my present study; however, it was also geographically limited to the U.S., with the authors even calling for comparative research in other cultural contexts. In comparison, the present study focuses on leadership styles and their outcome on organisational success in Ghana. This is because cultural and organisational barriers sometimes differ in context. While both studies examine the role of females in PR practice, the current study adds new knowledge as it does not just focus on gender equity but female leadership styles and outcomes.

Meng and Neill (2022b) again explored how ethical leadership shapes the influence of female PR professionals, drawing on the social learning theory to study how leaders' ethical behaviour informs and motivates followers. They utilised a quantitative approach again and relied on a national online survey administered through Qualtrics among female PR professionals in the

United States to collect data. The study results indicated that most female professionals feel confident in providing ethical counselling, and also noted that ethical behaviour among senior leaders strengthens their ethical practice. The study also revealed that female PR professionals must adopt diverse strategies to build and exercise influence as ethical leaders. However, the exclusion of women of colour, the recruitment of only full-time female professionals with 5+ experience, and the limited U.S.-only approach raises concerns about how applicable the findings may be in setting democracies and contexts. Again, it differs from the current study as it focuses on ethical leadership and individual influence on young female PR professionals. It thus undoubtedly provides solid findings on gender leadership in PR practice; however, it does not address how different female leadership styles affect broader organisational success. This is the gap my study seeks to fill by offering findings on leadership style variations among women in PR and how these styles influence organisational outcomes.

Zeler et al. (2022) studied the role of women in the communication management sector in Spain, concentrating on their lived experiences and perceptions of leadership. The paper deployed a qualitative methodology, with the researchers conducting in-depth interviews with 22 women in senior roles in companies and agencies, and also included female communication directors and employees under both male and female leaders. Thematic analysis of the interviews showed that women adopt mixed communication and leadership styles in their PR praxis. A key finding in this study was the high level of self-reliance among female communication managers, which creates challenges in achieving a healthy work-life balance and also hinders the creation of effective leadership role models. Zeler et al's (2022) although provided a foundation for my study; however, their study placed emphasis on personal costs and challenges and was also limited to the Spanish communication sector. Alternatively, my study focuses more directly on how female leadership styles influence organisational outcomes within the public relations industry. Zeler et al's (2022) paper contributes findings on the



internal pressure female leaders face in balancing healthy work-life, but it does not address the broader ripple effects of their leadership on organisational success. The current study extends the discussion by unearthing female leaders' perspectives on leadership styles and the ripple effects on organisational outcomes.

Li et al. (2022) also contributed to the literature on women in the PR workforce by investigating how strategic internal communication, predominantly transparent communication, supports female employees in coping with workplace gender discrimination. Their study used a quantitative approach and surveyed 402 full-time female employees working in large organisations in the United States, and also utilised a structural equation modelling (SEM) to test the theoretical model. The results of the study indicated that transparent communication increases female employees' sense of empowerment, which, in turn, promotes both solution-oriented coping behaviours. The study recommended that organisations should devise clear information-sharing strategies and empowerment policies. These findings also align with Meng and Neill's (2022a) study, as they both recognise coping strategies as key tools for female professionals dealing with work-life balance and inequality. The findings here provide a good foundation in the literature, but compared with my study, Li et al. (2022) centred on communication as a tool for coping with discrimination, and my study examines the leadership styles adopted by women in PR and how this influences overall organisational success. Their study contributes to understanding the internal influence of communication on individual empowerment, whereas mine extends the discourse by studying the organisational impact of female leadership styles to enrich the literature with new knowledge in the communication, gender, and leadership research.

Kriyantono et al. (2022) in their study also explored gender ability in Indonesian government public relations (GPR), to understand how male and female practitioners implement the two-way communication models in a democratic setting. The study surveyed 102 PR practitioners

across government institutions. The findings showed that although both genders used two-way communication, female practitioners, specifically those with formal communication training, exhibited greater managerial competencies than their male counterparts. The study challenged patriarchal norms in PR and pushed for improvement in female leadership in GPR. While both studies focus on gender issues within the PR field, Kriyantono et al.'s (2022) study addresses gender competency in communication implementation within a government framework; the current study, however, examines how female leadership styles shape organisational success through in-depth interviews with female leaders in Ghana's PR practice landscape. My study aims to contribute knowledge about leadership influence rather than participation or competency. In comparison to previous studies, Kriyantono et al. (2022) and Zeler et al.'s (2022) study both note gender inequalities in leadership, but confirm that women often exhibit stronger communication competencies and self-reliance in their roles as compared to their male counterparts.

Meng and Neill (2021), in their quest to understand the relationship between inclusive leadership and women's perceived empowerment and career advancement in the PR industry, conducted an inquiry in the United States with data gathered from an all-female panel over four weeks in July 2019. The study's Findings revealed that inclusive leadership practices positively influenced women's sense of empowerment and career development, and encouraged the importance of diversity policies and participatory leadership in promoting equity at the workplace. However, the study encountered some limitations, including the self-reported nature of data, potential cynicism bias, and the exclusion of experiences from women in marginalised or underrepresented groups. In contrast to my study, this investigation focuses on women's perceptions of empowerment and inclusion rather than leadership styles and organisational performance outcomes. Their study was also heavy on quantifying women's perceived empowerment, career growth and inclusive leadership, while the current study, on

the other hand, offers a qualitative perspective on how specific leadership styles deployed by women shape organisational culture and success. The findings of Meng and Neill (2021) and Li et al. (2022) both emphasise the importance of empowerment and inclusive workplace practices in enhancing women's confidence and work in PR settings. This emphasises the need for women's empowerment in organisational settings for better outcomes.

## **2.7 Theoretical Foundation**

Swanson (2013) defines a theoretical framework as a structure that supports a theory that describes and explains a research study. The "Theory of Gendered Organisations" underpinned the current study to provide a structured method to understand, explain, and predict the findings of the current study.

### **2.7.1 Theory of Gendered Organisations**

The study adopted the Theory of Gendered Organisations, developed by Joan Acker in 1990, that challenges the assumption that organisations are inherently gender-neutral. Acker posits that organisational structures are not gender neutral but are rather deeply rooted in gendered assumptions and practices that perpetuate inequalities. Acker argues that organisational structures, processes, and ideologies privilege masculinity while marginalising femininity, which in turn shapes power dynamics, labour divisions, and leadership opportunities. According to Acker, the dominant model of the "universal worker" is inherently male, disembodied from actual physical and social realities like caregiving, sexuality, or reproductive realities often associated with women.

The theory fundamentally argues that "an organisation, or any other analytic unit, is gendered means that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female,

masculine and feminine". Gender is not an external factor added to processes but an integral part of them.

The theory identifies five interrelated processes through which gender is embedded in organisational life:

1. **Gendered divisions of labour and power**, such as hierarchical assignments and task segregation (e.g., women in supportive roles, men in leadership). Acker argues that men and women are often assigned different kinds of work, and men are more likely to occupy positions of power.
2. **Construction of symbols and images** speaks to the fact that organisations create symbols and images that reinforce gender divisions (e.g., the image of a top manager is usually one of "successful, strong masculinity". Also, includes language, dress, and organisational metaphors.
3. **Interactions between individuals**; these are the everyday interpersonal interactions that reinforce gender roles and dominance, as in how people speak to one another, interrupt each other, express authority, or defer to others.
4. **Identity formation**. Organisational roles shape gender identities (e.g., women adapting to masculine norms). Women adjust their behaviour, dress, speech, and ambitions based on what is considered acceptable or to meet organisational expectations.
5. **Gendered logic of organisational structures**. This is the most foundational process, and it refers to how "jobs" and "positions" are conceptualised and defined, often in favour of men. Some of these include: can travel or relocate anytime, available 24/7, and so on.

Acker's theory has been used in gender and organisation studies to examine issues of pay equity, workplace discrimination, gendered leadership, and organisational culture. The theory

has influenced feminist organisational studies, especially in analysing how masculinity is embedded in organisational ideals and how women must “act like men” to succeed.

### **2.7.2 Relevance of the Theory to the Study**

The theory is thus highly relevant to the current study as it provides a framework to help examine why women may be underrepresented in leadership roles, as it argues that organisational structures themselves are not neutral but are primarily formed by gendered assumptions and male-centric standards of the "ideal worker". This explains how leadership positions in PR might be defined in terms of masculine traits, making it harder for women to be perceived as fitting these roles, regardless of their distinct skills.

In terms of the "ripple effects on organisational success", the theory can be used to understand how female leadership, working in or against a “gendered organisational logic”, influences organisational outcomes such as diversity, inclusion, decision-making processes, and other success metrics, as suggested in previous research.

### **2.8 Chapter Summary**

This chapter focuses on identifying research gaps in previous studies to avoid replication of research that other researchers have already conducted. It provides detailed insight into the topic under study, develops a fresh perspective, and further broadens the topic to contribute to knowledge in academia.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Chapter Introduction**

This chapter maps out the study's methodology deployed by the researcher. It outlines the research paradigm, philosophical assumptions, research approach, design, sampling strategy, data collection techniques, data analysis methods, and ethical considerations that guided the study process.

#### **3.1 Research Paradigm**

The study is grounded on the interpretivist paradigm, which focuses on understanding the subjective experiences and interpretations that individuals associate with reality or the world around them (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). Interpretivism is suitable for the study since the aim is to examine how female PR leaders perceive and interpret their leadership styles and contributions to organisational success in the long run within their respective environments. The paradigm is particularly ideal for the study as it prioritises the subjective perspectives of the study participants, noting that reality is socially constructed and individually interpreted, and this aligns with the study's focus on gathering data from female PR leaders on how they construct and interpret gender dynamics and leadership within the PR landscape in Ghana.

#### **3.2 Philosophical Assumptions**

The interpretivist paradigm is strengthened by specific philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality and knowledge. Ontologically, the study adopts a relativist view, which states that there is no single, objective reality. Rather, multiple realities exist, and they are shaped by the social, cultural, and professional contexts of the participants (Nguyen, 2019). This suits the current study as participants may hold different perspectives and justifications for their

leadership styles and interpretation of organisational success based on their experiences. Epistemologically, the study holds a subjectivist view, arguing that knowledge is co-constructed through the interaction between the researcher and the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The researcher, as such, engaged with the study participants to comprehend their lived experiences, meanings, and interpretations attached to their leadership experiences instead of searching for a universal truth about effective leadership.

### **3.3 Research Approach**

This study leveraged the qualitative research approach. A qualitative research approach concentrates more on understanding phenomena from the perspective of the participants involved (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Rather than depending on numerical data, qualitative studies are usually centred on exploring how people interpret and make sense of their experiences, behaviours, and the world around them. This approach mostly uses methods such as interviews, focus groups, and observations to collect in-depth, descriptive data. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), qualitative research allows the researcher to study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people associate with them. The depth of qualitative data usually enables researchers to unearth complex, contextual findings that quantitative methods may overlook.

This approach is particularly effective when the research question aims to explore the “how” or “why” behind certain behaviours, interactions, or phenomena. Qualitative research emphasises the in-depth understanding of specific contexts and cases, and is especially suitable in fields like human behaviour, cultural norms, and social courses (Creswell, 2016). Because qualitative methods allow researchers to interact closely with participants, the method helps offer a holistic view of the issues under study.

A qualitative research approach is therefore suitable for this study because it seeks to explore the leadership styles of women in PR and the impact of these styles on organisational success. Understanding the experiences, challenges, and strategies of women leaders in PR roles necessitates a deep and contextual examination of their perspectives and work environments, and to achieve this means interacting directly with women in their natural settings (agencies, corporate communications departments, and government organisations), and this allows for a detailed and varied understanding of how gender influences leadership and professional dynamics in the field of PR.

### **3.4 Research Design**

Akhtar et al. (2016) define research design as a master plan for collecting, measuring, and analysing data. Following the nature and aim of the current study, the researcher employed a phenomenological research design. Phenomenological research focuses on uncovering human experiences related to a specific phenomenon, as expressed by study participants. This approach primarily centres on understanding the "lived experiences", and the process typically involves in-depth engagement with a small group of subjects to identify patterns and meaningful relationships (Moustakas, 1994). It usually looks at "what" they experienced and "how" they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994).

A phenomenological research design is therefore suitable for this study because it focuses on understanding the lived experiences of women in PR leadership roles. This approach allows the researcher to explore both what these women experience in their leadership journeys and how they perceive their influence on organisational outcomes. Through this lens, the study will be able to discover the strategies, values, and challenges that define female leadership in PR practice, Ghana. The design will also enable an in-depth understanding of the impact of gendered experiences on professional practice and organisational dynamics.



### **3.5 Data Collection Techniques**

This study employed interviews as the data collection technique. According to Yin (2014), the data collection approaches used in qualitative research include interviews, participant observations, and relevant documents. Following Yin's (2014) assertion, primary data were gathered from the sampled study participants through in-depth face-to-face and virtual interviews. According to Ary et al. (2010), an interview is one of the most common and central methods for gathering qualitative data, as it helps obtain information from individuals about their thoughts, opinions, and feelings about a situation in their own words.

This study specifically adopts interviews for a deep exploration of the participants' personal experiences, leadership styles, and perceptions of their impact on organisational success. Since the study focuses on subjective interpretations and professional experiences, interviews offer the flexibility needed to examine complex ideas, clarify responses, and explore leadership viewpoints in depth. The in-depth, face-to-face and virtual interviews provide a direct, interactive platform for understanding how women in PR leadership roles pilot challenges, define success, and influence organisational culture.

### **3.6 Sampling Strategy**

The study adopted a nonprobability sampling method, specifically purposive sampling, to select participants relevant to the study's objectives. According to Summer (2008), a sampling strategy refers to the methods adopted for selecting a subset of participants from a larger group and using the subgroup as the basis for interpreting the entire group. The purposive sample type was deployed because the study needed participants who occupy or have occupied leadership roles in PR practice across different organisational settings.

Participants were selected from government institutions, private companies, and PR agencies based in Accra, Ghana. This diversity of organisational contexts ensures that the study captures a wide range of experiences and perspectives on female leadership within the PR profession.

### **3.7 Sample Size**

According to Summer (2008), sample size refers to the number of participants or observations included in a study. As such, the sample size for this study included six women who currently hold or have held leadership positions in PR roles across various types of organisations in Accra, Ghana. This includes participants from PR agencies, corporate organisations, and government institutions. This size is fitting for phenomenological studies, which focus on depth rather than breadth, and is adequate to uncover common themes and patterns in participants' lived experiences.

### **3.8 Data Analysis**

Johnson (2022) defines data analysis as a process of cleaning, transforming, and modelling data to determine useful information for business decision-making. Because of the qualitative nature of the topic, the study used thematic analysis techniques in analysing the data. Braun et al. (2015) define thematic analysis as the method for systematically identifying, organising, and presenting insight into patterns of meaning across a dataset. In thematic analysis, the researcher, after transcription, codes the data to identify the recurring codes or themes that run through the dataset.

In this study, the interviews conducted were recorded and later transcribed into text. This enabled the researcher to code and analyse the transcripts for emerging themes related to leadership styles, organisational success, and gender issues. Leveraging thematic analysis allowed for the development of an in-depth understanding of how female leadership manifests in PR practice and the ripple effects it has on organisational outcomes.

### **3.9 Ethical Considerations**

There are standard research ethical codes that are prearranged by the institution (The University of Media, Arts, and Communication -Institute of Journalism) and for students to follow when conducting any form of research. The researcher strictly adhered to these ethical considerations in collecting and analysing data. Ethics is a collection of moral guidelines of conduct that govern actions when making decisions by a person or a community (Agwor & Osho, 2017; Ezigbo, 2009). Among the research ethics given by the institution are seeking the consent of the research participants, anonymity, and confidentiality.

As part of fulfilling these research ethics, the study participants were reminded of their right to agree or decline to participate in the interviews, even after preliminary consent was obtained during the interview preparation. With anonymity, the identities of the study's participants were masked by the use of pseudonyms. And with confidentiality, the information acquired from the participants was only made available to the researcher and was not disclosed outside the study context.

### **3.10 Validity and Reliability**

According to Creswell (2009), validity in qualitative research is an approach used to determine if the findings are accurate from the perspective of the researcher, participants, or readers interpreting the results. As such, Creswell (2009) classifies eight strategies for confirming validity in qualitative studies: triangulation of data sources, member checking, rich/thick description to convey findings, clarifying biases, negative case analysis, prolonged engagement in the field, peer review and debriefing, and external audits. In this study, member checking and thick descriptions were adopted to validate the research findings. For member checking, the researcher confirmed with the participants using the transcripts and other notes taken during the interview sessions to confirm that their views were accurately captured. This ensured that the participants' perspectives were fully reflected in the final analysis.

For reliability, Selltiz et al. (1976) define it as the consistency, stability, and repeatability of participants' responses and the researcher's ability to accurately collect and record information. To ensure reliability in this study, field notes and recording devices were used during interviews. Taking detailed field notes and using recording devices helped capture key points during the sessions, which were crucial for accurate transcription and analysis. These methods ensured that the participants' contributions were genuinely represented, supporting the trustworthiness of the research.

### **3.11 Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the research methodology adopted for the study. The qualitative approach used a phenomenological design to capture the perceptions of female PR leaders in Accra, Ghana. In-depth interviews, tied with thematic analysis, helped to achieve an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The chapter also delineated the ethical considerations and the steps used to ensure the trustworthiness and authenticity of the research findings.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS, AND DISCUSSION**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter of the paper presents a detailed analysis and interpretation of the research findings based on the data gathered by the researcher. It provides results from the interviews conducted with the participants on perspectives and submissions on Gender and Leadership in Public Relations: Exploring Female Leadership Styles in PR Practice and their Ripple Effects on Organisational Success. Just as highlighted in the study's title, the primary goal of this study was to explore the lived experiences of women in PR leadership roles, their unique leadership styles, and how these styles in turn bolster organisational growth. To achieve this aim, three research questions were strategised to effectively help address the broader research problem. Interviews were conducted with six (6) participants who currently hold or have held leadership positions in PR roles across various types of organisations in Accra, Ghana, including PR agencies, corporate organisations, and government institutions. Since participant anonymity and confidentiality are crucial in research investigations (Creswell, 2013), interviewees were represented with pseudonyms instead of their real names to emphasise the principle of anonymity. The pseudonyms used were: P1 (Participant 1), P2 (Participant 2), till P3 (Participant 3)

The study was guided by the following research questions;

1. What are the lived experiences and perceived leadership styles of female PR professionals within organisations in Ghana?
2. In what ways do these female leadership styles influence organisational success?

### 3. What contextual factors shape or challenge the leadership experiences of female PR professionals in Ghana?

To cohesively present the study findings or provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied, the researcher highlights an overview of the themes that were generated from the interviews conducted with the study participants. To sum this, nine (9) themes were generated from all the research questions, which include: “Pathways into PR and Perceived Leadership Styles”, “Unique Female Leadership Qualities”, “Gender Influence on Leadership Approach”, “Enhanced Team Productivity and Performance”, “Contributions to Organisational Growth”, “Upholding Ethical Standards and Inclusivity”, “Persistent Masculine Norms vs. Competence Leadership”, “Gender Bias and Leadership Stereotypes”, and “Demand for Organisational Support for Women”.

#### **4.1 RQ1: What are the lived experiences and perceived leadership styles of female PR professionals within organisations in Ghana?**

The first research question aimed to explore the lived experiences and unique leadership styles deployed by women in their field of work in the PR industry. And as such, the analysis unravelled diverse professional trajectories into female leadership experiences and their perceived styles in leadership. Three themes were developed for the first research question: “Pathways into PR and Perceived Leadership Styles”, “Unique Female Leadership Qualities”, and “Gender Influence on Leadership Approach”.

##### **4.1.1 Pathways into PR and Perceived Leadership Styles**

For the researcher, understanding how or what triggered participants into their roles in PR was foundational to the current study to further understand their motivations and passions that led them on this journey. As such, several participants noted that their entry into PR was often traced back to their prior experiences in communications, journalism, marketing, and related

fields, and wasn't planned. For some participants, it was organic as their current roles in PR were driven by their pre-existing passion for communication and storytelling. P3 noted her unanticipated entry into her current role, stating;

“I didn't plan it. I started as a journalist. I worked for a Media outlet for about six years, and then I had the opportunity through a friend who called me and said; These people are looking for somebody, public relations and communications, and somebody with marketing. They want somebody who has passion, who can engage very well, who can build relationships, and who can also sell. I went for the interview, and I got it.” And this was due to my inherent traits like “passion, two hard work, that you can't take away from me, three golden relationships.”

Other participants also explained how intentional they were about venturing into PR, connecting to personal desires. P5 and P6 particularly noted this as they state;

“P5: My path into public relations was shaped by a deep interest in how information influences public perception and policy. I started out in roles that required me to bridge the gap between technical research and public understanding, which naturally led me into strategic communication.”

P6: I started in communications because I've always enjoyed connecting people to information and telling impactful stories. Over time, my work in corporate communications and brand positioning opened doors for bigger responsibilities.

Regarding the self-perceived leadership styles, participants articulated leadership styles that portrayed inclusivity, support, and engagement rather than authoritarianism. P2 defined her approach as “transformational with a touch of participative leadership. I believe in inspiring my team with a shared vision, empowering them to take ownership of their work, and creating a space where everyone feels their contribution is valued.” Similarly, P1 described her

approach as “hands-on” as she noted, “I like to listen. I like to involve my team as much as possible in the decision-making process. “

P3 conceptualises her leadership style metaphorically as a maternal kind of noting.

“I see it more as a mothering person, as a mothering leader... So, I nurture, I discipline, I am firm, I am open, and all that. “

#### **4.1.2 Unique Female Leadership Qualities**

The participants identified distinctive skills and strengths that fortify their leadership, and this was often linked to emotional and relational competencies. Participants identified empathy, intuition, emotional intelligence, and mentorship as key qualities that enhance how they connect with team members and external stakeholders. These skills and strengths were often linked to their identities as women. P2 particularly stated that;

“Empathy, intuition, and emotional intelligence are key strengths I bring to my role. These help me connect deeply with both my team and our stakeholders.” Similarly, P5 corroborated this, noting that;

“Women often lead with empathy, intuition, and a naturally collaborative approach. I bring these qualities to my role, along with a strong sense of discipline and attention to detail.”

P3 also spotlighted mentorship and nurturing as key strengths women bring into their role as leaders, akin to the mothering concept. She explained that;

“I’m calling it a mothering kind of leadership, because a mother will always be there for their children. A good mother also knows when to discipline their children...I’m more of one who loves to mentor people.”



#### 4.1.3 Gender Influence on Leadership Approach

Participants were also asked whether their gender influences their leadership approach, and they highlighted varied perspectives but predominantly acknowledged that certain traits in women often shape their leadership approach, and also asserted personality as a driver. P1 noted this tension as she stated;

“I don't think my leadership style is influenced by my gender. I think it's more influenced by my personality. She conceded that “but I mean, there are certain things that, because I'm a woman, I guess come naturally more to me. I think there are certain soft skills that maybe would make me more approachable or more understanding or more nurturing because I'm a lady.”

In contrast, other participants stated that gender influences how they lead or engage with their team members, stakeholders and organisational structures. P2 emphasised this view;

“As a woman, I naturally lead with empathy and inclusivity. I'm more attuned to diverse perspectives and tend to emphasise collaboration over competition.” P5 similarly agreed as she noted.

“To some extent, my gender has influenced my leadership by strengthening my awareness of inclusion, fairness, and the importance of creating supportive work environments.”

One interesting finding that was also noted in this theme is the perceptual dimension of gender. P4 noted that bolstered P1's assertion to some extent, as these traits exist regardless of a woman or a man, yet added that her presence as a woman brings some aura and attraction, influencing how she is received. She noted;

“But notwithstanding, I will say that, yes, my gender has influenced it one way or the other. When I walk into the room, at least if I've not spoken, is it that my hair or my necklace will attract them to listen? So, the ability to get people ready to listen.”

#### **4.2 RQ2: In what ways do these female leadership styles influence organisational success?**

The second research question explored the ripple effect of female leadership style on organisational success. The analysis indeed demonstrated some level of belief among the participants that their participatory and supportive leadership styles have some positive organisational outcomes. For this research question, three themes were also developed to answer the research question, and they are: “Enhanced Team Productivity and Performance”, “Contributions to Organisational Growth”, and “Upholding Ethical Standards and Inclusivity”.

##### **4.2.1 Enhanced Team Productivity and Performance**

It is evident that employees are indeed the heart and/or engine of any organisation. and as such, the researcher thought it wise to explore how these female leadership styles impact team performances in their various organisations and agencies. The participants overwhelmingly pointed out and linked their leadership styles, which prioritise openness, collaboration, empowerment, and mutual respect, to increase team confidence, motivation, and willingness to take initiatives. Participants mentioned that when employees are trusted, supported, and involved in decision-making, their performance improves. P1 explicitly noted the point of creating a safe environment as she explained.

“With the kind of leader I am, I do know that people are not afraid to make mistakes around me because I've always championed the fact that we learn from our mistakes and we grow from our mistakes. My team knows I have their back and we work as a

team as opposed to you're the boss and we are the subordinates. So I think my leadership style has definitely made them more productive.”

Similarly, P2 corroborated this sentiment, adding that empowerment and open communication lead to better employee performance. She stated that;

“By empowering my team and encouraging open communication, I’ve noticed higher levels of creativity and ownership. People perform better when they feel trusted and respected and that directly reflects in the quality of our campaigns, stakeholder relationships, and brand perception.”

Other participants also bolstered the confidence and creativity of female leadership. P3 argued that when confidence is boosted, it allows for productive debates. She explained that “I would say it has helped. One, I've seen my leadership style build confidence in my team members, extreme confidence. I make sure that we have tough conversations, we have meetings, and we argue, and I think it should be like that, and they insist it should be like that. And so, it helps build a level of quality because of that kind of banter.”

#### **4.2.2 Contributions to Organisational Growth**

The researcher further explored the broader organisational growth aspect of female leadership. The participants noted how their leadership styles aid in the broader organisational achievements, emphasising common PR strategies like planning, stakeholder engagement, and relationship building. P1 highlighted her organised and calm demeanour, sustained agency success as she states;

“I'm organised to a fault. I don't like surprises. So, I like planning well. And I think that helps with a lot of ensuring that things are done and done the right way. I also have a way of managing crisis; I have a way of being calm in the middle of a storm. I don't panic easily. So, whenever there's a crisis, I'm able to calm down and organize my team,

organize clients, irrespective of how upset they are or irrespective of how senior they are in the organization.”

The participants also highlighted practical outcomes such as improved campaign performance and visibility. P2 asserted this, stating that;

“My approach has helped strengthen my organisation’s stakeholder engagement strategy. For instance, during one of our campaigns, I encouraged a cross-departmental collaboration that resulted in innovative content and a 25% increase in engagement across our digital platforms. That success came from creating a culture of shared ownership rather than a top-down directive.”

#### **4.2.3 Upholding Ethical Standards and Inclusivity**

The final theme explored under this research question was centred around efforts deployed by participants to nature inclusive, ethical, and transparent communication among their teams and other stakeholders. It was seen that participants actively integrate principles of ethics, inclusivity, and transparency in their daily leadership styles to strengthen internal alignment and reinforce professional standards in their praxis. P2 openly stated that;

“Transparency and ethics are at the core of our communications at Shell. I ensure that my team adheres to factual, open stakeholder dialogue and responsible media engagement.”

This was further expounded on by P1, who explained that;

“I think I'd like to say that I'm a feminist, because I strongly believe that when women are given a chance to lead, there's a lot of success, and women give it their all when they take up opportunities. So, I'm always advocating for at least the ladies in our

organization to take up responsibilities. And I always advocate for honesty and truth in doing our work.”

Participants also reinforced the importance of ethical practices because their organisation deals with sensitive research data. P5 noted how she challenged her team to maintain professional integrity as she notes;

“Internally, I encourage my team to challenge assumptions, verify information thoroughly, and maintain high standards of professional integrity. Externally, I ensure that our communications uphold the values of openness and public trust, which is key to our success as a team.” Similarly, P6 corroborated this, adding the need for fact-based communication, fairness, and integrity.

“I insist on fact-based communication and fairness. Internally, I encourage my team to speak up, challenge ideas, and uphold integrity in all our messaging.”

#### **4.3 RQ3: What contextual factors shape or challenge the leadership experiences of female PR professionals in Ghana?**

The final research question looked at the cultural, organisational, and industry factors that both challenge and enable the leadership experiences of female leaders. Participants acknowledge progress in the women in leadership space while noting some persistent norms and biases that should be addressed. Five themes were developed for this research question: “Persistent Masculine Norms vs. Competence Leadership”, “Gender Bias and Leadership Stereotypes”, and “Demand for Organisational Support for Women”.

##### **4.3.1 Persistent Masculine Norms vs. Competence Leadership**

Participants noted that there still exist a few social-cultural values that shape perceptions of female leadership, and by extension, the legitimacy of women leaders in PR. They highlighted

a general transition away from traditional limitations, yet acknowledged that leadership in Ghana is still associated with masculinity, leading to barriers and biases for female leaders. P1 bolstered this assertion, noting that;

“We've definitely come a long way. There are more opportunities given to women. Organizations are trying to do more inclusive, not just so that they can fulfill a market of having women, but also to give these opportunities to more women. However, we do have cultural and traditional ways, and Ghana, for one, is a very male-centred country, like most of Africa. And therefore, there tend to be more opportunities given to men, with the mindset that men will not break to have family time.”

P3, supporting this view, explained that women are indeed allowed to lead, so long as they can prove they are capable of doing the work. She noted that her organisation, in particular, has many women in top-level roles, emphasizing it as a matter of competence rather than gender. She stated;

“In my organisation, we have about four women COOs. At the functional level, the chief legal, chief communication, chief compliance, and then group head human capital and group head supply chain are all women. We have the chief finance officer as a woman. We believe that women will do better in these spaces. I mean, it's not like we go out there looking for them, but if a woman applies and she qualifies, we run with that.” The participant also added that “But I think that in all fairness, yes, women are seen as the weaker sex, so people might want to overshadow them or outclass them and get people they think are stronger and tougher.”

Participants also referenced professional bodies like Women in PR that help prevent some of these cultural and organisational drawbacks in female leadership by creating platforms that mentor emerging leaders, coaching, and countering stereotypes. P1 explained: As P1 noted,

“women in PR are helping grow the future of women professionals in the PR industry. So, you have students who have joined Women in PR, successful women who have been doing PR for a long time. And they have been helped.... They assigned mentors to some of these ladies who need hand-holding, who need to be driven as they grow their careers.”

#### **4.3.2. Gender Bias and Leadership Stereotypes**

This theme explored the biases and stereotypes women face in their roles as leaders. All the participants highlighted a subtle but consistent form of biases and stereotypes. P1 noted a common assumption of male colleagues being seen as the superiors anytime a guest visits during meetings;

My managers are all men. So any time somebody enters the room when they're having a meeting, they would not assume that I am the boss of that team. So they would often think one of the gentlemen is the one who's in charge.

P5 and P6 similarly noted how they have been underestimated in their roles, stating that;

“P5: As a leader, I have faced subtle biases, being underestimated, having my expertise questioned, and sometimes having to prove myself more than my male counterparts. In such cases, I rely on my professionalism and consistency. Delivering results and communicating clearly have been of great help.”

“P6: Occasionally being underestimated. I have consistently handled it by staying professional, confident, and letting my results speak for themselves.”

Also, P2 recalled how assertiveness has been misconstrued several times as aggressiveness, as she states, “I sometimes noticed that my assertiveness was misinterpreted as aggressiveness, a common stereotype for women leaders. I handled it by focusing on results and consistency. Over time, my performance spoke louder than perceptions.”

#### **4.3.3. Demand for Organisational Support for Women**

When asked about support mechanisms organisations could deploy to better support female leaders' growth, participants highlighted organisational policies that aid development, visibility, and resource equity as critical factors. Participants stressed that leadership opportunities for women are not evenly distributed. P1 argued;

“Organisations need to come up with ways in which women can be mentored and coached by women who have participated in their careers...Organizations need to be more intentional about celebrating the achievements of women, not in a way that makes it look like we don't appreciate men. But I feel women have this sort of need to be celebrated, and then creating opportunities where women who have achieved or grown so much in their careers, can come and inspire the living of their organisation.”

P2 and P5 advocated for leadership development programs tailored for women and flexible work policies to help women in their work lives.

“P2: Organisations should invest more in mentorship and leadership development programs tailored for women. Flexible work policies and equal access to strategic decision-making spaces also make a big difference. Most importantly, fostering a culture that celebrates diverse leadership styles will encourage more women to step forward.”

P5 corroborated this assertion, stating;

“Organizations need to offer leadership training tailored to women, promote work environments that value work-life balance, and promptly address bias in promotion. These are vital for the growth of women leaders.”



#### **4.4 Discussion of Findings**

The findings of the first research question explored how female leaders described their entry into the PR field and perceived leadership styles. The findings showed that the participants entered the profession through various pathways, mostly influenced by prior exposure to communication-related roles and their passion for the profession, coupled with storytelling. The leadership styles predominantly deployed by these female PR leaders were more participative and relational leadership styles often involving empathy, inclusivity, and nurturing of teams. These findings are in line with the findings of Kriyantono et al. (2020), who argued that female practitioners in PR often exhibit greater managerial competencies than their male counterparts, supporting the current study's claims that female PR leaders naturally integrate participatory and inclusive leadership approaches. The emphasis of empathy, emotional intelligence, and nurturing traits in the current study also corresponds with studies by Berg and Miller (2023) and Meng and Neil (2021), who highlighted empathy, inclusivity, and emotional intelligence as key approaches utilised by women. However, an interesting finding noted by the current study was that these traits demonstrated by women are not inherent. Some participants argued that these traits were more personality-related and not inherent female leadership styles. While some participants noted that their leadership was personality-driven, they universally acknowledged that their approaches included nurturing and relational (soft skills), which are often labelled as feminine traits. This finding, therefore, highlights a tension with the theory of Gendered Organisation, which argues that women adjust their behaviour to suit masculine norms as a way to be considered acceptable or to meet organisational expectations. It is then obvious to say that the idea of a "universal worker" is mostly characterised by masculine traits and is diminishing in this modern era of women in leadership, not entirely, but to some extent. The findings further destabilise the tenet of the theory that speaks to "Gendered divisions of labour and power", such as hierarchical

assignments and task segregation (e.g., women in supportive roles, men in leadership). Women obviously occupy leadership positions as compared to men now.

The study findings also provide strong evidence on how female leadership style contributes to organisational and team growth by specifically enhancing team empowerment, creativity, organisational results, and ethical conduct. It was evident in the participant responses that their relational and supportive aura towards their teams/staff fosters a higher level of creativity and team results, bolstering the broader organisational success. These findings are directly consistent with Li et al.'s (2022) study, which argued that transparent communication increases female employees' sense of empowerment. The findings also validate Meng and Neill's (2021) study, which found that inclusive leadership practices positively influence women's sense of empowerment and career development. The findings also highlighted participants' commitment to "honesty and truth" and "transparency and ethics" in all communications, supporting the findings noted by Meng and Neill (2022b) that most female professionals feel confident in providing ethical counselling. The demonstrated success of women and their relational and empowerment approaches in leadership obviously challenges the argument of the Theory of Gendered Organisations, which states that organisational roles shape gender identities (e.g., women adapting to masculine norms). This assertion is destabilised as the responses from the participants demonstrate how women are leveraging their supportive traits to even nature team productivity to achieve organisational outcomes through nurturing and collaborative approaches.

Finally, the analysis of the contextual factors that affect women in leadership revealed that, despite the positive change that acknowledges the competencies of women, opportunities to occupy leadership roles, some cultural norms, stereotypes, and structural practices continue to shape women's experiences in some organisations. Participants noted that Ghana remains a "male-centred country" and highlighted biases and stereotypes like male subordinates

symbolically being presumed as superiors, being underestimated, double scrutiny, and having their assertiveness framed as aggressiveness. These were unique findings identified from the study as they didn't directly relate to what previous studies identified. The findings also had participants advocating for developmental support from organisations like leadership training, mentorship programs, and flexible work policies to support women leaders. These findings mirror the arguments by Zeler et al. (2022), who noted that mentoring was a key support tool that helped junior female professionals handle workplace challenges and maintain a work-life balance. Seeing male subordinates symbolically presumed as superiors validates the Theory of Gendered Organisations' position on men as the "universal worker" concept. Also, the misinterpretation of women's assertiveness as aggressiveness, requiring them to adjust, also reinforced the assumption of the TGO that states that women are expected to adjust their behaviour, dress, speech, and ambitions based on what is considered acceptable or to meet organisational expectations.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents a summary of the key findings, conclusions, limitations, and recommendations that emerged from this study. The chapter first outlines a concise summary of the main empirical findings and then the conclusion directly answers the research questions.

#### **5.1 Summary of Key Findings**

The study found that female PR leaders' entry into the profession was mostly influenced by prior exposure to communication, journalism, and a passion for storytelling. Certain leadership styles were also acknowledged as deployed predominantly by women, and described as participative and relational, often involving empathy, inclusivity, emotional intelligence, and team nurturing. While these leadership styles were primarily attributed to women, it was also noted that these traits are not inherent.

The study findings further noted that these participative and relational leadership styles contribute positively to organisational outcomes by enhancing team empowerment, creativity, organisational results, and ethical conduct. The approach by female PR leaders was seen as one that fosters inclusive, ethical, and transparent communication among their teams and other stakeholders, which in turn contributes to successful campaigns and boosts organisational performance.

Finally, the study also found some contextual factors affecting women's leadership experiences. Despite the positive trend and opportunities for women in PR leadership, there still exist cultural and organisational norms and biases/and stereotypes. Ghana and other African countries were still perceived as “male-centred country”. Some challenges highlighted

by the study participants included male subordinates being presumed as superiors even when they are not, women being underestimated, facing double scrutiny, and having their assertiveness misrepresented as aggressiveness. participants also advocated for the need for organisational support systems to include, like leadership training, mentorship programs, and flexible work policies.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

The study concludes that female PR leadership styles in PR often hinge more on participatory and relational approaches characterised by empathy, inclusivity, emotional intelligence, and team nurturing. Their entry into PR leadership roles was influenced by a passion for communication and stemmed from previous related roles. These leadership styles, while predominantly deployed by women, are not limited to them. The study also added that female PR leadership promotes organisational success by fostering team empowerment, creativity, organisational results, and ethical conduct. The transparent, honest, and supportive nature of female PR leaders towards team members further contributes to successful campaigns and boosts organisational performance. The study finally argued that despite the progress in female leadership representation in various organisations, there still exist masculine norms, biases, and stereotypes, leading to women leaders often being subjected to tight scrutiny, underestimation, and misinterpretation of assertiveness as aggressiveness. To help curb these hurdles, there is therefore a need for organisational support for women through mentorship programs and flexible organisational policies to defeat the idea of a “universal worker” as noted in the Gendered Theory of Organisations.

### **5.3 Limitations of the study**

Whilst the study provided some good findings in the women in PR leadership literature, it was subject to limitations that should be acknowledged for the purposes of the findings and to guide future research direction. Below are some of the limitations encountered by the researcher:

**Scope and generalisability** – while the adoption of the qualitative approach coupled with a smaller sample aided in the depth of the study, it is, however, important to note that the findings were only limited to a specific context-Accra, and cohort, and as such may not apply to certain populations of female PR leaders in Ghana.

**Use of self-reported data** – The study's reliance on only the interviews to capture the participants' perspectives on the subject matter is also a methodological drawback, as it has the potential of breeding biases where participants consciously or unconsciously present their experiences in different ways, ultimately affecting the validity of the study findings.

**Single-Theory Lens limitation** – Grounding the study solely on the Theory of Gendered Organisations also limited the comparison of the study findings that may have enriched the interpretation of the findings, even though the current theory directly relates very well to the study.

### **5.4 Recommendations**

#### **For Organisations**

- Organisations should adopt flexible work policies, anti-discriminatory procedures, and promotion criteria that give equal opportunities to both men and women without discrimination. The focus here should lean more towards competence and not the idea of masculine norms.
- Organisations should establish mentorship and leadership development programs for female PR leaders that strengthen confidence, assertiveness, and leadership

competencies to help destabilise the idea of gendered divisions of labour and power, where women are in supportive roles and men are in leadership.

### **For Future Research**

- Future research should expand the scope of the study to include other regions – rural and cities/metropolitan areas, to identify and compare the findings to fill the gap in the literature and further support policy formulation guidelines.
- Future studies should also deploy mixed methods approaches, thus quantitative and qualitative methods, to be able to run inferential analysis to identify the correlations and relationships that exist between female PR leadership and organisational and team performance and/or growth.
- Future studies should also consider including male colleagues, supervisors, and management of the various organisations in their study to avoid limiting the findings capturing a one-sided perspective, to better understand and validate how female leadership styles support organisational growth.

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## **APPENDIX**

### **Interview Information and Guide**

#### **Interview Information**

**Topic:** “Gender and Leadership in Public Relations: Exploring Female Leadership Styles in PR Practice and Their Ripple Effects on Organisational Success.”

This research aims to understand the experiences of female leaders in PR, the types of leadership styles they adopt, how their leadership influences their organisations, and the contextual factors that enable or hinder their leadership journey in Ghana.

Your responses will remain confidential, and your identity will be anonymised in all reports or publications arising from this research. Your insights will be valuable in advancing academic and professional understanding of gender and leadership in PR.

#### **Section 1 (RQ1): Lived Experiences and Perceived Leadership Styles of Female PR Professionals**

1. Can you briefly tell me about your journey into the PR profession and how you assumed a leadership role?
2. How would you describe your leadership style in your current role?
3. What unique skills or strengths do you bring to your leadership role as a woman?
4. Do you believe your gender influences your approach to leadership, if at all?

#### **Section 2 (RQ2): Impact of Female Leadership Styles on Organisational Success**

1. How does your leadership style affect your team's productivity or performance?
2. How do you believe your leadership style contributes to the overall success of your organisation? Please provide concrete examples.



3. Can you share any examples where your leadership directly contributed to the success of a PR campaign, project, or organisational goal?
4. In what ways does your leadership contribute to inclusive, ethical, or transparent PR practices?

### **Section 3 (RQ3): Contextual Factors that Shape or Challenge Female Leadership in PR**

1. What social, cultural, or organisational norms do you believe affect women's leadership in PR in Ghana?
2. Can you share some challenges (bias or stereotypes) you have faced specifically because you are a woman in a leadership position, and how you handled them?
3. What do you think organisations can do better to support the growth of female leaders in PR?
4. Do you think the Ghanaian PR industry supports or presents challenges for women aspiring to or holding leadership positions?

Please be assured that this research is **STRICTLY** for academic purposes. I will also be glad to share the finished product with you should you need a copy.

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