



4-30-2016

Performing a Thematic Analysis: An Exploratory Study about Managers' Perceptions on Gender Equality

Carlos Costa

University of Aveiro, ccosta@ua.pt

Zélia Breda

University of Aveiro, zelia@ua.pt

Isabel Pinho

University of Aveiro, isabelpinho@ua.pt

Fiona Bakas

University of Aveiro, fiona.bakas@ua.pt

Marília Durão

University of Aveiro, marilia.durao@ua.pt

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Recommended APA Citation

Costa, C., Breda, Z., Pinho, I., Bakas, F., & Durão, M. (2016). Performing a Thematic Analysis: An Exploratory Study about Managers' Perceptions on Gender Equality. *The Qualitative Report*, 21(13), 34-47. Retrieved from <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol21/iss13/4>

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to present results from an exploratory study that aims to investigate why gender role alterations in leadership positions is slow. The tourism managers' perceptions of gender equality, within the workplace, were obtained resorting to focus groups. We chose thematic analysis to identify themes and patterns. This thematic analysis enables a methodological systematization of data. Data were coded using webQDA, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software that speeds up the team process of analysis. The systematization of information helped overcome the difficulties to synthesize the various interpretations; thus it was possible to generate more ideas and reduce researcher bias. The main outcome of the study was the development of an analytic framework where diverse components fit together by combining and cataloguing six main themes and their sub-themes. This framework is not only an analysis tool but also provides support to develop robust quantitative instruments and facilitate future meta-inference drawn from all data sources of a research project. We defend that mixed methods research is useful for finding credible answers to research questions on complex social phenomena. Discussion about qualitative vs quantitative dichotomy is sometimes irrelevant, because what matters is maximizing the process of research. Exploring the practicalities of using a qualitative methodology as a team of researchers, we contribute to theory development on human resources capitalization.

Keywords

Thematic Analysis, Qualitative Research, Gender, Tourism, Barriers, Facilitators, Conceptual Framework Development, WebQDA Software

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Acknowledgements

This research was supported in part by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT), as well as by the co-financing of the European Union through the National Strategic Reference Framework (QREN), European Regional Development Fund (FEDER), and COMPETE (Operational Program for Competitiveness Factors).

Performing a Thematic Analysis: An Exploratory Study about Managers' Perceptions on Gender Equality

Carlos Costa, Zélia Breda, Isabel Pinho, Fiona Bakas, and Marília Durão
University of Aveiro, Aveiro, Portugal

The purpose of this paper is to present results from an exploratory study that aims to investigate why gender role alterations in leadership positions is slow. The tourism managers' perceptions of gender equality, within the workplace, were obtained resorting to focus groups. We chose thematic analysis to identify themes and patterns. This thematic analysis enables a methodological systematization of data. Data were coded using webQDA, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software that speeds up the team process of analysis. The systematization of information helped overcome the difficulties to synthesize the various interpretations; thus it was possible to generate more ideas and reduce researcher bias. The main outcome of the study was the development of an analytic framework where diverse components fit together by combining and cataloguing six main themes and their sub-themes. This framework is not only an analysis tool but also provides support to develop robust quantitative instruments and facilitate future meta-inference drawn from all data sources of a research project. We defend that mixed methods research is useful for finding credible answers to research questions on complex social phenomena. Discussion about qualitative vs quantitative dichotomy is sometimes irrelevant, because what matters is maximizing the process of research. Exploring the practicalities of using a qualitative methodology as a team of researchers, we contribute to theory development on human resources capitalization. Keywords: Thematic Analysis, Qualitative Research, Gender, Tourism, Barriers, Facilitators, Conceptual Framework Development, WebQDA Software

This work is part of a wider research project¹ that investigates how tourism companies and organizations deal with gender equality and evaluate the potential played by networks and internationalization to promote forms of gender equality and to introduce innovative forms of economic growth (innovation, internationalization and networks). Traditionally, most of the studies that link tourism and gender are mainly focused on poverty reduction and gender differences themes. Those ideas that underlie the development of those studies have a paternalistic character by proposing "helping women" instead of identifying explicit and implicit causes and mechanisms. Analysis of results was organized into thematic categories in light of the technique of content analysis. We collected qualitative data from a social sharing space, promoted by workshops, with 80 participants from private entities and public organizations related to tourism. In this paper we focus on the support role of the software webQDA in the coding and analysis of data obtained from seven focus groups. Additionally, we notice how the proper use of this software can help organize teamwork, not only in the consistent distribution of tasks, but also on the integration of various interpretations. Coding in research groups is an interactive process that needs clear questions, clear decisions and open

¹ "Does gender equality have a say in the boost of innovative forms of economic growth? Reviving the economy through networks and internationalisation in the tourism sector" (PTDC/CS-SOC/ 119524/2010) (<http://www.gen derintourism.com>).

minds to capture ideas, not forgetting minimizing bias in research. After this introduction, we follow with a brief theoretical background. The second section is related to methodology and in the third we present some results. The fourth section is about building a new conceptual model. The paper ends with some conclusions and contributions.

Theoretical Background

The problem, that is, the starting point for this research is the fact that qualified human resources are underutilized. The main research question that guided this study was: how to capitalize on qualified human resources in the tourism sector? Women are underrepresented at all levels of management and do not (easily) reach top-management positions, evidencing the labor market failure to fully and effectively make use of the available human capital (Costa et al., 2014). Although women constitute the majority of the skilled workforce in the tourism sector, strong gender inequalities prevail, hindering their professional development, and thus restricting the development of the economic potential of the sector (Costa *et al.*, 2014). In fact, we cannot forget that:

- 1) tourism-related activities and the processes involved in tourism development are constructed out of gendered societies;
- 2) gender relations both inform, and are informed, by the practices of all societies; and,
- 3) tourism identification as an industry is based on the economic, political or social power relations between nations or groups of people that represent an extension of the politics of gender relations (Ferguson, 2011; Kinnaird & Hall, 1994).

Methodology

Our starting point is that reality is subjective and that there are multiple perspectives of thought (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Through focus groups we bring together different perspectives of participants from various sectors of activity directly or indirectly linked to tourism. Focus groups are both an informal conversational interview and an observational technique (Morgan & Spanish, 1984; Puchta & Potter, 2004). The present study was carried out to explore perceptions of participants of seven workshops, with the following objectives:

- To collect information concerning the regional specificities of the tourism industry and tourism employment, from the perspective of the key stakeholders in each region, comparing scenarios and visions about gender issues;
- To find out how the tourism industry varies regionally and how gender issues assume different dimensions according to the structure of the tourism industry;
- To raise tourism leaders' awareness of the importance and benefits of promoting gender equality in their companies and organizations.

A step-by-step description of the research process is provided in Figure 1.

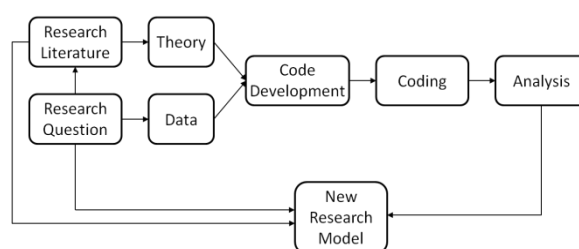


Figure 1. Research design process

Code development is an integration process, because codes can be collected in advance from theory concepts (theory-powered) or emerge from the data (data-powered). Building a

codebook for a team project is also an integration challenge, because we need to deal with multiple interpretations; by sharing and discussing it is possible to reach consensus. During coding and analysis steps new questions and new perspectives can emerge; a new research model can be created as a result of making connections between categories, by questioning data from different perspectives, by looking at inconsistencies between diverse coders as a form of energy to develop new ideas. We break data, we look for patterns, we search for similarities and singularities and we want to understand.

Qualitative data analysis is mainly inductive in nature, which leads to themes “grounded in the data, and not given a priori” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The most used methodology to inductively analyze qualitative data is Grounded Theory (Heath & Cowley, 2004; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Qualitative data analysis can also use a deductive logic, by looking at data, search for categories and relationships among such categories, develop typologies and assumptions, starting from initial categories and then modifying and integrating results. In practice, qualitative data analysis has an iterative nature; as Ian Dey (2003, pp. 287) says: “It is more realistic to imagine qualitative data analysis as a series of spirals as we loop back and forth through various phases within the broader progress of the analysis.”

Data Collection

Focus groups took place in each of the seven Portuguese NUTS² (level II) – Norte (North), Centro (Centre), Alentejo, Algarve, Lisboa (Lisbon) – and also Madeira and Açores (Azores), with the following objectives:

- To collect information concerning the regional specificities of the tourism industry and tourism employment, from the perspective of the key stakeholders in each region, comparing scenarios and visions about gender issues;
- To find out how the tourism industry varies regionally and how gender issues assume different dimensions according to the structure of the tourism industry;
- To disseminate the project at the regional level;
- To raise tourism leaders’ awareness of the importance and benefits of promoting gender equality in their companies and organizations;
- To initiate the foundations of a national network of researchers interested in gender issues in Portugal.

To support data collection, a protocol was built, which included 27 predetermined open-ended questions, divided into 4 main topics: 1) Perceptions on the role women play in the labor market/tourism sector and major constraints; 2) Recruitment and selection of human resources; 3) Relationship with (and between) co-workers/employees; and 4) Strategies and actions to promote gender equality. This questions guide was sent to all invited participants a week before the date of the focus groups; due to the sensitiveness of the topic, this approach sought to enlighten the participants about the type of questions that our study would like to answer, giving them time to reflect on the matter and get prepared for the discussion. The participants were selected according to their representativeness, job creation capacity, level of connectivity with other agents (within the regional tourism network) and/or their role in the definition and implementation of regional and local policies for the tourism sector. A total of 80 participants in all seven workshops presented a balanced distribution: North (male 54.5%; female 45.5%), Centre (male 33.3%; female 66.7%), Lisbon (male 63.6%; female 36.4%), Algarve (male 55.6%; female 44.4%), Alentejo (male 66.7%; female 33.3%), Madeira (male 35.7%; female

² NUTS: Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics/statistical regions of Europe.

64.3%) and Azores (male 64.3%; female 35.7%). The focus groups took place within 5 months, between November 2013 and March 2014. Participants were top managers of different entities, belonged to companies (51%) and to support structure tourism economy organizations (49%). Regional key stakeholders, in positions of leadership within their company or organizations, both from the public (organizations) and private (companies) tourism sector, were invited to participate in the focus groups. Hence, leaders from the following areas were invited:

- Leading tourism companies (from all the main subsectors of activity: accommodation, restaurants, transport services, travel agencies, cultural services, recreational and leisure services);
- Regional tourism bodies;
- Commissions for the coordination of regional development³;
- Regional directorates for culture;
- Regional departments from the Nature and Forests Conservation Institute (ICNF);
- Trade/business associations;
- Academia.

The participants were selected according to their representativeness, job creation capacity, level of connectivity with other agents (within the regional tourism network) and/or their role in the definition and implementation of regional and local policies for the tourism sector. As we can observe in Figure 2 all tourism activities are represented.

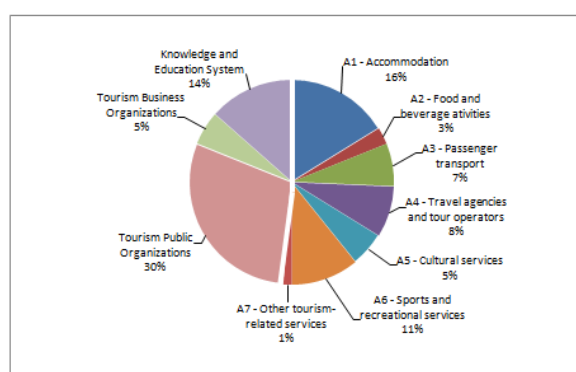


Figure 2. Focus Group Sample

The classification for the tourism characteristic activities/industries adopted in this study was based on international standards for *tourism* statistics as proposed by the United Nations and other international organizations, such as the Tourism Satellite Account: Methodological Framework (TSA:RMF, 2010). We considered seven main sectors (Accommodation; Food and beverage; Passenger transport; Travel agencies; Cultural services; Sports and recreational services and other tourism-related services). We added 3 more categories related to other stakeholders (support structure tourism economy organizations), such as Public Tourism Organizations, Business Tourism Organizations and Knowledge and Education System.

³ Decentralised organization with financial and administrative autonomy which is responsible for the implementation of policies related to the environment, regional and urban planning, and regional development, and for the technical support to local authorities and associations, within the respective NUT II.

Data Coding

All participants' opinions were recorded in short-hand and then translated into English. Transcripts totaled 171 pages which constitute the corpus of analysis. Those transcripts were entered in webQDA, with a common and anonymous format. We also gathered 26 pages of notes, taken by moderators. The first step was reading the transcripts to have a global view of data. We read them in detail, in order to understand the content and its details, exploring additional participants' narrative responses. Project members participated in the building of the system of categories in an interactive way, to ensure that the results portrayed a recognizable quality. Creating codes needs a balance between rigor, logic and creativity, in order to build a frugal and operational system of categories. Codes are "tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, pp. 56). We applied a coding process, starting with the development of categories. In general, this process, based on Strauss and Corbin (1998), involves progressive coding techniques: open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Table 1).

Table 1. Coding techniques

Type	
Open coding	Refers to the process of generating initial concepts from data. Concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions discovered.
Axial coding	Through axial coding, categories and their related subcategories and concepts were refined to form more precise explanations.
Selective coding	Selective coding is used to integrate and refine categories to form a larger theoretical scheme.

Source: Strauss and Corbin (1998)

We identified and defined categories; each of those categories has a label (short phrase) and description of meaning; to illustrate those meanings and perspectives some examples of text coded are given. Next we developed a hierarchical category system where links or relationships between categories and subcategories indicate a subordinate order. Over time, resulting from an interactive process between project members, a consensual nodes hierarchy evolved; as we can see in Table 2, we identified 23 subcategories grouped in 7 categories.

Table 2. Categories hierarchy

1. Gender and labor	2. Human resources	3. Relationships	4. Gender Equality	5. Growth	6. External factors	7. Entrepreneur- ship
1.1 Management style 1.2 Vertical 1.3 Career 1.4 Decisions 1.5 Pay gap 1.6 Horizontal 1.7 Working conditions 1.8 Work-family	2.1 Criteria 2.2 Job Adverts 2.3 GenManage	3.1 Leaders 3.2 Employees 3.3 LeadEmps 3.4 Conflict	4.1 External 4.2 Measures 4.3 Awareness	5.1 Innovation 5.2 Internationalization 5.3 Networks	6.1 Cultural factors 6.2 Sector 6.3 Education	7. Entrepreneurship

Data were first subjected to the processes of open and axial coding in order to develop a series of categories, sub-categories, and main categories. Next, data sets were subjected to selective coding in order to produce the final theoretical integration. Coding is a spiral process, from open coding (where we explore ideas and meaning embedded in data) to identification of connections between codes. We also developed a code structure for coding participants (descriptors) and documents files (classification).

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is mainly inductive in nature. We used this inductive approach to condense wide and varied text data, to link with research objectives and develop a model to improve theory. Thus, data analysis was guided by both the study objectives (deductive) and multiple readings and interpretations of the raw data (inductive). Analysis of focus groups data can be conducted in various ways, depending on the goals of the researcher. We can analyze our data with quantitative and/or descriptive lenses; insights from all those results can be integrated to develop conceptual models.

Thematic analysis is a method of identifying and reporting patterns. We can use an a priori themes based on theory or generate emergent themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Identifying recurring messages and unifying situations is the basis of thematic analysis; first we break narrative data to produce categories, next we look for patterns across all data, understand the phenomena and compare it in different settings.

Results: Thematic Analysis and Descriptive Statistics

Having provided an overview of the focus groups participants' main characteristics, in terms of what parts of the tourism industry they represent (e.g. private or public organizations), what sectors their operations are found in and what gender they are, content analysis of the data generated within the seven regional focus groups is presented. Themes emerging from the data analysis are categorized into six main groups:

- The role gender plays in the labor market with the tourism sector.
- Recruitment and selection of human resources.
- Relationship with and between co-workers/employees.
- The role of gender in organizational strategies.
- Strategies and actions to promote gender equality.
- Entrepreneurship.

These six resulting themes, its subcategories, description and significant statement examples are resumed in Table 3.

Table 3. Description of Emerging Themes

THEME	DESCRIPTION	
Gender and labor	The role of gender in leadership	
<i>Subcategories</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Significant Statement Examples</i>
Management style	Relationship of gender to management style and process	“When it comes to effective negotiation, the execution of business, there are some problems with women. I don’t know to what extent, but there is a certain... lack of confidence.” (P52 female participant, Alentejo, p.12)
Vertical	Vertical segregation according to gender	“there are a lot of women [leaders], but the decision making and the most important positions are always given to men” (P55, male participant, Alentejo, p.10)
Career	Influences of gender in career development (mobility)	“Some women don’t pursue or are not selected for management positions because they show unavailability” (P54, male participant, Alentejo, p.7)
Decisions	Gender and decision-making at managerial level	“they [women] have another level of emotionality when managing relations, when trying to get consensus” (P58, male, Alentejo, p.23)

Pay gap	Relationship of gender to pay	“It’s a cultural issue because there are people who will not accept that women earn more than men” (P57, male, Alentejo, p.23)
Horizontal	Occupations or positions typically regarded as male or female ones	“...when people see men behind a desk as a travel consultant they think it is strange” (P54, male, Alentejo, p.8)
Work conditions	How people experience their work according to gender, e.g. work schedules	“My company exists because I could not accept any work schedule; I was father and mother at the same time. I was fortunate to be able to combine my work and my family [after creating the company; entrepreneurship by necessity].” (P7, Lisbon, male)
Work-family	Work-family balance (gender influencing the balance)	“They [female directors and sales workers] can manage very well this question [work-family balance] and don’t start ‘beating their chests’ because they have children in school, because they have grandmothers or housemaids to pick them up.” (P54, male, Alentejo, p.7)

THEME	DESCRIPTION
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Human resources	The role of gender in recruitment and selection of human resources
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<i>Subcategories</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Significant Statement Examples</i>
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Criteria	Most valued criteria when selecting human resources (employee level)	“when recruiting, I’ve had situations when I interviewed young candidates and noticed that they have the desired skills, but they lack one thing, and it has nothing to do with sex: schedule flexibility.” (P54, male, Alentejo, p.8)
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Job Adverts	Direct or indirect discrimination in job advertisements	“we wanted to say in the job announcement that we were looking specifically for a female manager. I was not authorized to do so, as it would be considered gender discrimination” (P50, female, Alentejo, p.2)
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GenManage	Advantages and disadvantages to recruiting women or men in managerial positions (leadership level)	“I don’t think women are more innovative or creative than men, they might be more multitasking. Although this (multitasking) is often an advantage, when we are talking about strategic components, this can lead to lack of focus.” (P75, female, Norte)
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THEME	DESCRIPTION
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Relationships	How gender influences horizontal and vertical relationships within the workplace
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<i>Subcategories</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Significant Statement Examples</i>
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RelEmps	Relationships between men and women in the workplace	“I prefer to work with men than women. And women also say this. Because the man is less confrontational and in tourism we are working together in the same place for 14 hours and we want peace” (P55, male, Alentejo, p.10)
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Conflict	How conflict situations are influenced by the leader’s gender	For me it has to do with the fact that a woman can better manage the bickering between them [men] (P18, female, Centro)
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THEME	DESCRIPTION
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Gender equality	Company strategies to promote gender equality at organizational level
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<i>Subcategories</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Significant Statement Examples</i>
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External	External bodies role in promoting gender equality in organizations	“This [having ways of reconciling work and family lives] was in the private sector and the State forced them to increase benefits for
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		women, because when I had my first daughter I just got 3 months of maternity leave, I was given no right to come in later or leave early; but with my 2nd son I had these benefits, although I was also in a job position that allowed me to work from home” (P19, female, Centro)
Measures	Measures taken by the company to promote gender equality within its organization (e.g. kindergarten, flexible work schedules, etc.)	The business group “Nabeiro” has a wider social responsibility policy, they have a nursery/day-care center. (P58, male, Alentejo, p.19)
Awareness	Awareness of gender equality issues within the organization	“It’s impossible for me to have someone in the agency that comes to me and says for example: now I’m leaving because I have to take my son from school. If they have that kind of attitude they’re not suitable to work in tourism or in any other area.” (P54, male, Alentejo, p.7)

THEME	DESCRIPTION	
Growth	Company growth strategies that promote gender equality, (e.g. including women in internationalization strategies, encouraging women to be innovative, etc.)	
<i>Subcategories</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Significant Statement Examples</i>
Innovation	The role of men and women in innovation (e.g. are women encouraged to be innovative?)	“In terms of innovation, I think that all of us [men and women] have ideas, but regarding the persistence level, women are more persistent. The need to overcome obstacles also becomes easier for women as they need to prove what they can do although they are women.” (P19, female, Centro)
Internationalization	Representativeness of women and men in internationalization processes	“Trade exhibitions also involve business meetings which are considered ‘male-territory’, so the woman is just a beautiful woman in a nice dress who just happens to appear there” (P55, male, Alentejo, p.11)
Networks	The role of gender in networking – does gender play a role on how easy it is to network for business purposes? (Includes both formal and informal networking)	“There are some occasional situations when it is time to make a deal or to go out at night to fulfil a business... because business is also made up of personal and social situations” (P52, female, Alentejo, p.12)

THEME	DESCRIPTION	
External factors	External factors that influence gender roles within organizations	
<i>Subcategories</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Significant Statement Examples</i>
Cultural factors	Culture and tradition as explanation of gender differences. Gender as culture. Gender naturalness. Typical things men/women do. What gender equality is.	“This is also a cultural issue; the husband at home does not accept very well that the woman goes out at 3 am to have a drink with 2 male directors/colleagues” (P55, male, Alentejo, p.12)
Sector	The relationship of gender to the tourism sector and occupation and hence to the development of the region (e.g. rural tourism, cultural, etc.)	“Maybe those who choose spa tourism are mostly women and those who choose adventure tourism and hunting are men. But there have been some changes [in these choice stereotypes]” (P58, male, Alentejo, p.25)
Education	To what extent are educational tourism institutions perpetuating gender roles? How does education	“If there is discrimination in this sector [travel agencies], it is the fact that there are few men. It has to do with the training

	contribute to perceptions on gender equality.	we had in Tourism Schools.” (P55, male, Alentejo, p.9)
THEME	DESCRIPTION	
Entrepreneurship	Opinions about gender and entrepreneurship	“Women in Alentejo are much more entrepreneurial than men. There are studies that prove this cultural tradition. Traditionally women used to receive their husbands wage and had to manage it; so the men don’t even know how much they have.” (P58, male, Alentejo, p.14)

Next, exploring data using visual presentations of the themes that emerge from data analysis opens avenues to link research questions and literature. As shown in Figure 3 the most cited categories are: Gender and Labor (40.3%), External factors (22.2%) and Gender Equality (11.7%). When we look only at subcategories we can see that Cultural factors is the most cited, with 13.9%, followed by Work-family (9.4%), Horizontal (9.3%), Vertical (7.4%), Criteria (6.4%) and Management style (5.0%); those six subcategories totalized 51.3% of all occurrences. The other 19 subcategories total 48.7%.

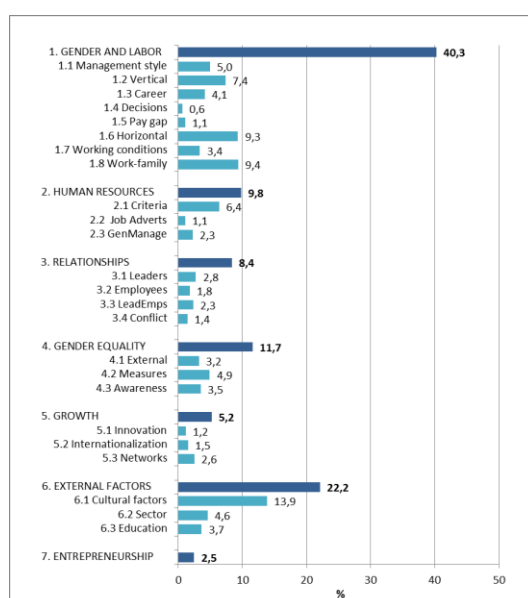


Figure 3. Categories and subcategories (relative frequency)

Now we can observe the most cited categories by male vs female (Figure 4). We can see that there are some differences. As to categories, men invoke more External factors (13.1%) than the women (9.0%). As to subcategories, the greater difference between men and women is Work-family, with 6.7% for men and 12.4% for women.

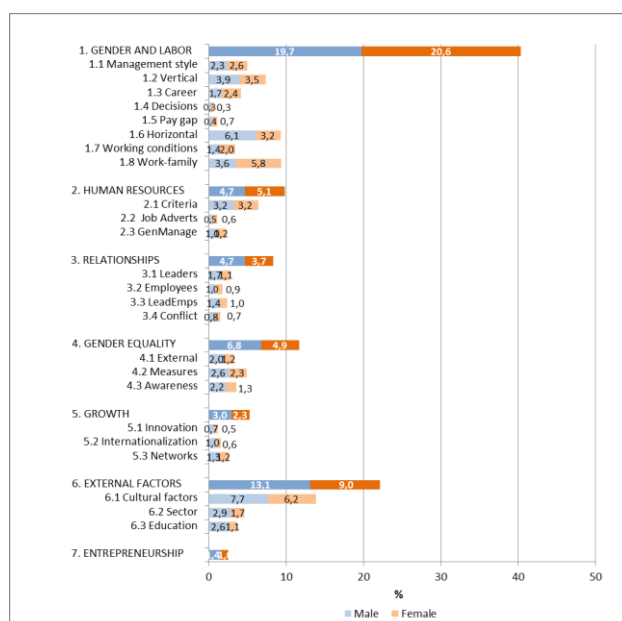


Figure 4. Categories and subcategories - Male/Female (relative frequency)

Toward a New Conceptual Model

Rethinking about reasons why we study these issues it is possible to invoke some:

- 1) more unequal societies tend to have less sustainable economic growth (Gründler & Scheuermeyer, 2014; Neves & Silva, 2014);
- 2) this unbalance situation is generating many social problems like waste of human capital and an indignant society;
- 3) despite increasing from 4% in 2003 to 9% in 2013, the proportion of women on the boards of directors in Portugal, there is still a huge imbalance between women and men in these positions (CITE, 2015).

By coding and re-reading transcripts with new ways of looking at data, some concepts and connections emerge. For the design of the model structure, we can begin with a core category – factors – as a core focus with two categories: barriers and facilitators. We can consider that these factors are located at three levels: contextual (macro), organizational (meso) and individual (micro). Note that all those factors have a transversal impact at all those levels.

This study sought to conceptualize the phenomenon of gender issues as significant predictors of operational performance. Traditional gender research approaches focus on seeking differences between the characteristics of men and women. The demand of the differences is the discourse background that seeks to justify gaps on work position and pay. In the past, women had no academic certificates and degrees which justified the lack of access to top jobs (World, 2012).

Currently, for the same qualifications, it seems that meritocracy is a criterion rarely used, since people with the same skills are undervalued, particularly when there are preconceptions and myths about some characteristic, such as gender; thus, women with the same skills can be undervalued. It seems that decisions on human capital are not based on data and reflection, but on invisible or unclear factors. Our premise is that there are invisible barriers and sources of discrimination that affect women's professional lives (Costa et al., 2015). Taken a hybrid positive approach (Pinho et al., 2012) we propose a holistic model about barriers and facilitators on gender role alterations in leadership position. Our proposal components are:

- Themes for Barriers:
 - We need to identify gender barriers to take action;
 - Remove barriers to recruitment, retention and carrier progression;
 - Remove stereotypes issues in decision making processes.
- Themes for Facilitators:
 - We need to identify gender facilitators to take action;
 - Implement criteria based on merit and skills;
 - Implement family friendly policies (mobility, flexibility);
 - Implement results-oriented rewards.

Conclusion and Contributions

This study puts forth several contributions that orbit the theoretical, methodological, organizational performance, research management projects and software engineering. This study opens up a new window for conceptualizing the phenomenon of gender equality, identifying barriers to overcome and implementing strategies with that goal. From a macro stand point, we are in accordance with “implementing effective anti-discrimination policies, alongside other policies that address the underlying causes of these wage gaps, [...] a concrete way to progress toward greater social justice and fewer inequalities” (ILO, 2015, p. v). Theory plays a critical role in the creation of codes, but the process of integration of categories into a theoretical framework can also improve the understanding of the phenomenon. Research may mean to search from different points of view, not only of the participants but also of the researchers involved. Searching for themes, in qualitative data analysis, gives rise to a deep understanding of phenomena by means of the identification of its dominant features or characteristics.

Our methodological strategy was explorative in nature. The big challenge was the deconstruction of several perceptions of diverse focus groups’ participants from diverse geographical locations and also the integration of different perspectives of the researchers of the project team. The support of software was crucial to plan, do, and check all the operational team tasks; a clear understanding of the categories can be seen as an output of the interaction of the research team. In a broader sense, this strategy will also facilitate the integration of results of this qualitative study with the quantitative one; this project is based on mixed methods that seek to improve the validity of findings. We can talk about practical research innovation at individual and collaborative levels. For researchers, using this software facilitates the organization, retrieval and interpretation of data, not only at an individual level but also at the level of the team work of this research project. Regular team meetings to build a codebook make methods transparent and give a common sense of meaning. We need to check consistency with coding comparisons but also be open to creativity. Those tasks do appeal to characteristics linked to maturity and open mindedness of researchers. At an organizational level, some insights are developed in other projects outputs (Costa et al., 2015; Costa et al., 2014). But the main idea is related to managers that should design and manage their teams by: (1), taking into account human resource diversity as a rich input; (2) improving talent management with objective recruitment criteria based on merit; (3) overcome the stereotypes and myths about gender issues; (4) looking and apply best practices identified in academic studies to build intelligent organizations.

Using a user-friendly software like webQDA gave us an online work platform with tools that support project management in a collaborative way. A strategic research design is needed to effectively use this software (Neri de Souza et al., 2013; Redlich-Amirav & Higginbottom, 2014). In an exploratory project, the design is crucial to give structure to an evolutionary process and the analysis is inductive and iterative. Using software is a learning

process; it is useful to begin using the software as a repository of all research materials in order to facilitate teamwork. Clear decisions should be taken that make sense to all researchers in the team; those decisions can be taken before handling software tools but also during analytical process tasks, such as developing a coding structure, coding, recoding and querying. Organizing data is basic to asking questions, compare and explore project data.

It is also possible to collect some insights for software engineering development focused on user-centered design. Social aspects should be taken into account in software process improvement by observing their users, identifying barriers, acceptance and even the appropriation of the use of these tools (Dittrich et al., 2008; Neri de Souza et al., 2012; Pinho et al., 2014; Rego et al., 2009; Salovaara & Tamminen, 2009). Our study also brings innovation by testing this user-friendly software that allows working online, collaboratively, with minimal learning time, and use; this software has proven to be a powerful tool to support the management of research projects.

Note that this exploratory study is part of a wider research project. The next project phase is the quantitative data collection and analysis. Mixed methods research, used in this project, is the best way to answer the project questions, because mixed methods provide stronger inferences and facilitate the integration of divergent views.

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Author Note

Carlos Costa is a Full Professor, Head of the Department of Economics, Management and Industrial Engineering of the University of Aveiro and Editor of the *Journal of Tourism & Development*. He holds a PhD and MSc on Tourism Management (University of Surrey, UK), and a BSc on Urban and Regional Planning (University of Aveiro, Portugal). Carlos is the leader of the PhD Tourism Program of the University of Aveiro and is also the head of the Tourism Research Centre of the University of Aveiro (included in GOVCOPP). Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to Carlos Costa at ccosta@ua.pt.

Zélia Breda holds a PhD in Tourism, an MA in Chinese Studies (Business and International Relations) and a BSc in Tourism Management and Planning from the University of Aveiro (Portugal), where she is an Assistant Professor, at the Department of Economics, Management and Industrial Engineering. She is also a member of the Research Unit “Governance, Competitiveness and Public Policies.” Correspondence regarding this article can also be addressed directly to Zélia Breda at zelia@ua.pt.

Isabel Pinho holds a PhD in Management, an MA in Information Management and an MA in Public Management from the University of Aveiro (Portugal). She also holds a Post-Doc in Higher Education from UFRGS (Brazil) and is a member of LASA – Latin American

Studies Association. Correspondence regarding this article can also be addressed directly to Isabel Pinho at isabelpinho@ua.pt.

Fiona Bakas is a Research Fellow at the University of Aveiro and holds a PhD in Tourism from Otago University, NZ, using feminist economics to examine the relationship between gender roles and tourism entrepreneurship in Greece. Correspondence regarding this article can also be addressed directly to Fiona Bakas at Fiona.bakas@ua.pt.

Marília Durão is a Research Assistant at the University of Aveiro. She holds an MA in Tourism Planning and Management from the University of Aveiro, where she is a PhD student in the Tourism Doctoral Program. Correspondence regarding this article can also be addressed directly to Marília Durão at marilia.durao@ua.pt.

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Acknowledgements

This research was supported in part by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT), as well as by the co-financing of the European Union through the National Strategic Reference Framework (QREN), European Regional Development Fund (FEDER), and COMPETE (Operational Program for Competitiveness Factors).

Article Citation

Costa, C., Breda, Z., Pinho, I., Bakas, F., & Durão, M. (2016). Performing a thematic analysis: An exploratory study about managers' perceptions on gender equality. *The Qualitative Report*, 21(13/Special Issue), 34-47. Retrieved from Retrieved from <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol21/iss13/4>
