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## Research article

# The competencial factor like an engine venture<sup>☆</sup>



Angel Olaz Capitán<sup>a,\*</sup>, Pilar Ortiz García<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Doctor in Sociology, University of Murcia, Department of Sociology and Social Work, Faculty of Economics and Business, Campus Universitario de Espinardo, 30100, Espinardo, Murcia, Spain

<sup>b</sup> Doctor of Economics, University of Murcia, Department of Sociology and Social Work, Faculty of Economics and Business, Campus Universitario de Espinardo, 30100, Espinardo, Murcia, Spain

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to establish the connections in the triad woman, entrepreneurship and competences from a holistic perspective in order to mean what are the key competences and how they contribute to the development of entrepreneurship from a gender perspective. The concept of qualifications will be analyzed as a substrate of the competences issues for articulating an explicative model that allows its objectification.

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## El factor competencial como motor de emprendimiento

## RESUMEN

Este trabajo tiene como propósito establecer las conexiones existentes en el trinomio mujer, emprendimiento y competencias desde una perspectiva holística, en el afán por significar cuáles son las competencias clave que contribuyen al desarrollo del emprendimiento desde una perspectiva de género. Se analizará el concepto de cualificación como sustrato de los aspectos competenciales que articulan el emprendimiento para finalmente esbozar modelo explicativos que permitan su objetivación.

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### Palabras clave:

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\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [olazcapi@um.es](mailto:olazcapi@um.es) (A.O. Capitán).

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## Some preliminary questions

This work aims to study the conceptual alignment between women, entrepreneurship and competences. First, we will deal with each of these elements to establish the opportune connections and emphasize the holistic nature as a result of the existing interactions. Next, it will examine, through different schools and authors, the study of the qualification as a backdrop to the jurisdictional analysis that structures the process of entrepreneurship. Following this sequence will be studied, competences more directly associated with entrepreneurial behavior and, if possible, by gender, to finally outline different models of entrepreneurship as a pre-step presentation of conclusions.

## A first approach to the triad woman, entrepreneurship and competences

The differential nature of male and female entrepreneurship suggests the need to undertake the study of the peculiarities of entrepreneurship from a gender perspective (Ruiz, Coduras, & Camelo, 2012). The opportunity, relevance and interest of this issue is justified by the position of women regarding work, a position that acquires frequently the consideration of additional activity, which explains a greater irregularity in the career paths of women.

Female entrepreneurship contributes, on the one hand, to boost economic growth from start-ups and, secondly, to strengthen gender equality policies. The importance acquired by this activity is revealed in research on the subject, focused on analyzing the factors influencing entrepreneurship by gender and especially the reasons for the lower participation of women in this process (Kelley, Bosma, & Amoros, 2011). Moreover, the competence perspective assumes an initial contribution to the advancement of research on the subject.

Under these assumptions, from the focus of this work, three major lines of analysis are defined.

### *Business activity in women*

The characterization of business activity of women, as well as the types of companies created (innovation, growth potential, size, sector) is a necessary premise for the analysis of entrepreneurial activity. Regarding women's entrepreneurship, it manifests itself as an important source of economic growth<sup>1</sup> (Allen et al., 2007; De Bruin, Welter, & Brush, 2006; Macaulay, 2003). Moreover, the recent literature on the subject (Burke, 2007; Gisbert, Alarcón, & Gómez, 2009; Mateos, Iturrioz, & Gimeno, 2009; Peris-Ortiz, Peris, & Ribeiro, 2010) shows fewer opportunities for women to positions involving responsibility and decision making.

<sup>1</sup> In Spain, data on occupation as "professional situation" that facilitates the EPA show the high level of "salaried workers" among women (87.6% of employed women were employed in 2011, 7.6% points higher of men). Faced with this fact, contrasts the fact that only 12.3% of employed women in 2011 were self-employed, compared to 19.9% of men, this is evidence that "corporate behavior gap" between sexes is significant. Moreover, only 0.3% were directors of large or medium enterprises. In short, as we move up the degree of independence and responsibility in the post, it decreases women's participation in these occupations.

Regarding the type of company created by women, literature establishes a relationship between the characteristics of enterprises (size, sector, innovation, internationalization, funding) and the success or failure of entrepreneurial activity (Estrin & Mickiewicz, 2011; Ruiz, Camelo, & Coduras, 2012) and its impact on the visibility of women's entrepreneurship (Anna, Chyler, Jansen, & Mero, 2000; Bird & Sapp, 2004; Du Rietz & Henrekson, 2000; Orser, Riding, & Manley, 2006).

### *Female entrepreneurship*

The literature on the subject has shown that, despite institutional initiatives launched to promote women's entrepreneurship, it remains in rates lower than those of men (Kelley et al. participation, 2011).

Research suggests that female entrepreneurship is conditioned by various aspects. In the beginning, from the factors affecting the sociocultural environment (Alvarez & Urbano, 2011; Busenitz et al., 2003; Steyaert & Katz, 2004; Verheul & Thurik, 2001) to institutional issues, such as access to finance or other social networks of collaboration (Alsos, Isaksen, & Ljunggren, 2006; Carter, Shaw, Lam, & Wilson, 2007; Gatewood, Brush, Carter, Greene, & Hart, 2009; Kim, 2006; Marlow & Patton, 2005). Without forgetting the importance of these aspects, this line focuses especially in the informal factors (perception of competences and skills) relevant for female entrepreneurship. Thus, it is revealing some research on the subject (Bruni, Gherardi, & Poggio, 2004; Álvarez, Noguera, & Urbano, 2012) that establish a relationship between aspects of this nature and differential components of the entrepreneurship by gender.

### *The competition aspects*

The third element of this triad explores the relationship between perceived entrepreneurial competences of women and female entrepreneurship. In this regard, results decisive to collate competences self-assigned by women and competences that the market demands. There are several studies that include competition as a cause or origin of the performance or result of the work activity (De Haro, 2004; Olaz, 2011).

This perspective puts the accent on determine the effective and efficient performance in terms of traits, behaviors or a combination of both. Thus, competition becomes a construct that identifies behaviors related, being directly responsible for these excellent results in performance. The investigations of Langowitz and Minniti (2007) and Langowitz and Morgan (2003) show that women entrepreneurs are perceived as less valid in relation to men. These studies suggest that while men tend to be undertaken by factors related to the opportunity, funding or desire to remove a professional frustration, women do because of a precarious employment situation or difficult access to employment.

Thus, is enhanced among the men self-perception of competence to undertake, while among women it encourages self-negative perception toward such activity (Brush, 1992; Dolinsky & Caputo, 2003; Marlow, 2006).

## The qualification as latent competences to the study of matter

Before we delve into the meaning of the word competition, which will devote space in the next section, should reflect even

if it is an exploratory way what is meant by qualifications and their connection with this concept.

When, at times like this, the definition of a term is not possible to perform immediately, it is advisable to approach through successive approximations.

It happens that the qualification at work, beyond knowledge and practices applied to tasks that one performs, is an expression of the person in his relationship with others, through the daily performance at work, do not forget the weight of the social construction which it intervenes. According to [Castillo \(1996: 90\)](#) *"If the qualification is socially constructed, especially in large companies, obviously, in the systems business, made up of many small companies (and even large), scattered in a territory, and therefore (more) open to 'external' and institutional influence, this social construction will appear and be revealed, highlighted more clearly and in a transparent manner."*

This analysis does not escape the phenomenon of entrepreneurship in which, from a kaleidoscopic perspective, is contemplated the own qualifications of the person, as a result of his own intellectual background, which requires the project to be developed and institutional requirements and market.

A brief review of some conceptualizations of the concept of professional qualification, it leads us to take good note of some contributions that different authors have done in this regard – especially during the decade of the 1980s and 1990s of last century – that is where greater prominence acquired the discussion of the term.

[Petroni \(1987\)](#) equates the concept of professionalism to qualification and, according to him, is constituted by the following dimensions: job content, the physical and mental effort (launched for the development of tasks) and the culture of work, that is, the values and behaviors that accompany it. It contemplates what [Villavicencio \(1992\)](#) called cognitive dimensions (development tasks) and social (values and behaviors).

[Evans \(1982\)](#) considers that the qualification is part of the job content and this in turn the quality of work, also made up of the factors leading to: the meaning of work, the learning, the environment that is made, job security, or compensation. Moreover, extends this meaning to indicate that the content of the work are part qualification, responsibility and freedom in the supervision and control over the pace of work.

There are also a number of dimensions, such as intellectual activity or knowledge and its implementation in the development of tasks, which are essential reference to the concept of qualification, as defined by [Bessant \(1992\)](#).

Also, [Littler \(1982\)](#) considers the knowledge and characteristics of the work routines as constituent factors of the qualification.

In another order of ideas, [Sorge and Streeck \(1993\)](#) refer to the acquired knowledge or necessary to perform tasks and although differ from attitudinal and organizational factors to refer to those impacting on the qualifications, both groups are confused with each other in analysis.

Meanwhile [Coriat \(1993\)](#) refers to the knowledge of the operating modes of work as [Sabel \(1986\)](#), which describes the qualification as the ability to order a team to perform the necessary operations in other words, the complexity of working as an element that helps to describe the qualification.

However, sometimes, the qualification is reduced to the professional category. The latter perspective is usual in such authors as [Boyer \(1986\)](#), [Alaluf \(1988\)](#), and [Leborgne and Lipietz \(1988\)](#), included in the regulation approach and for whom qualification is the result of relations between capital and labor, which analyzed in terms of professional and wage hierarchies, which restricts the scope of the concept of what it could be called the "qualification recognized by the company."

There are other aspects of qualification, such as: intellectual activity technical and practical knowledge (skills), initiative, experience, independence, Functional capabilities and complexity of the work, related to the relationships between the people involved in the production process and between them and the productive teams. These reflections refer to "Know How" that allude [Barcet, Le Bas, Le Bas, Mercier, and Mercie \(1985\)](#), according to the English terminology, it refers to a set of operational capabilities deriving from its productive practice. Obviously the qualification is a matter of technical skill, but also a social problem, depending on its interpretation the different schools that have addressed their analysis. A problem that refers to the historical and cultural context that is saturated with gender conditioning as [Cockburn \(1985\)](#).

However, apart from its social roots, studying the qualification involves approaching the place where it is specific: the company, the process and the workplace. And from there, that their contents are not necessarily associated with normal certification of knowledge (the titling), and even less in social realities such as the Spanish, where there is a centrality of the company, as [Pries points out \(1988\)](#).

The work process analysis shows that workers acquire a range of skills in an informal way that allows them to deal – better than specified by labor standards – the requirements of their tasks. Of course, those skills, little tricks or specific knowledge, in short, can be acquire individually.

In any case the idea of qualification should not be dissociate of the working world. In that sense, [Castillo et al. \(2000: 40\)](#) affirm: "... the 'professional qualification' is the result of the work capacity of each worker and the knowledge of the job or profession. Understood as the sum of individual and collective skills and knowledge of the use of proprietary tools and office machines (know-how), and the assignment in the process of work (organization of work)."

In other words, the professional qualification is the "set of professional competences with employment significance that can be acquired through modular training or other types of training as well as through work experience" ([Law 5/2002 on Qualifications and of Vocational Training](#)). So in a synthetic form, it is understood that a person is qualified when in his job performance gets the expected results, with the resources and the level of quality due. Furthermore, is the end result of this ambitious project which is considered by some authors as [Roquero and Hernando \(2004\)](#) is an unfinished process.

It is, therefore, clear that if the qualification is the key resource that promotes the enhancement of the worker in the workplace, the entrepreneur is no stranger to this analysis where competences articulate and structure the process of entrepreneurship.



## Competence as the backbone of the entrepreneurship

If something should be reasonably clear in this development is that the qualification remains to be the melody of a song that, however, needs to write to music sheet or, if preferred, objectified through elements that allows a definition and a true quantification. In other words, the competences – and in a special way to entrepreneurship – are the required translation of the required qualification and self required for the development of the entrepreneurial project.

But how do you define a competition? McClelland (1973) initially defines competition as something that actually causes higher performance at work, putting its meaning and dimension to the educational approach, to put it in line with other alternative elements such as gender, ethnicity or social class to measure performance employment of the person in the organizational context.

Almost at the same time Bloom (1975) mentions that the “competency-based education” is based on the idea that all learning is essentially individual; the individual, like any system, is geared toward achieving a set of goals to accomplish and the learning process is easier when the individual knows exactly what is expected of him.

According to Boyatzis (1982) competences may include: (a) reasons (b) character traits or general predisposition to behave or react in a certain way; (c) concept of self or what you think, what you value and/or what you are interested to make; (d) knowledge or what is known about a technique, science and/or ability and (e) cognitive and behavioral capacities, whether hidden (deductive reasoning) or observable (active listening).

In addition, a set of nuances aimed at a better definition of competition that later on not go unnoticed Lawler (1994) to whom it owes its practical applicability to the business world or as the advantages of moving to a company managed by competences, involves the passage of the bureaucracy to a systemic-organizational model.

In our country (Spain), the work done by Pereda and Berrocal (2001) inspired by the ideas of Le Boterf, Vincent, and Barzucchetti (1993) describe five elements that, in his opinion, help define the nature of competition. These elements correspond to five types of knowledge: (a) knowing or knowledge possessed by the person; (b) know-how or the ability of that person to apply that knowledge; (c) knowledge to be or performing those behaviors according to the procedures of the organization; (d) wanting to do and finally; (e) be able to do or organizational features that allow the individual to have the means and resources to develop competence.

In recent times may be mentioned the studies of epistemological – methodological nature of De Haro (2004). In an attempt to classify the infinity of models makes a proposal based on the understanding of the term competence, as understood as a dependent or independent variable.

It is in this second case, being characterized as an independent variable, competence is viewed as the cause or origin of the performance or result. In turn, the causes that determine the effective and efficient performance of the workers are of several types: performance based on features, behaviors or a combination of both. Thereby it concludes by stating how

competition is a construct with which interrelated behaviors are qualified, these being directly responsible for an excellent result in job performance.

Olaz (2011) emphasizes in three great dimensions in coincidence with the entrepreneurial spirit: knowledge, skills and abilities. The first dimension is related to knowledge (regulated or unregulated) with which a person counts from a theoretical-practical perspective. This knowledge can be legitimized, either from formal education, or from informal aspects that are collected from the life situations and experiences that mark everyday life. There is a second dimension linked to the capabilities, understood as the potential associated with the natural characteristics of the individual to manage certain situations. It is important to note that, in principle, although everyone is born with these, it does not imply a uniform development in the same range of individuals, pointing to the influence of ecological and environmental aspects to explain the differences in their development. Examples of this dimension can be: the motivation for achievement, concern for order and clarity, initiative and proactivity, and personal self-control, to name a few. The third dimension, in some cases abutting with the previous it refers to certain skills not necessarily innate, not even suspected by the individual, being “discovered” by necessity of the workplace allow a better development of the person in his relationship with the environment. An example of them is: conducting meetings, conflict resolution, negotiation and business planning among others.

## The key competences in entrepreneurship

After seen on previous pages, speaking of competences is to talk about a set of qualifiers elements of different nature that give the individual, in our case, entrepreneur – in its generic concept – of “springs” which conducts their potential.

From the literature on entrepreneurship there is no an equal abundance of studies on competences. According to the study of Raičević, Ščekić, Vučurović, and Jaćimović (2007) between the competences of the male entrepreneur may be mentioned the strategic attitudes for entrepreneurship and business activity itself. Among the first, strategic attitudes it includes: readiness to show initiative, positive attitude to change and innovate and willingness to identify areas where they can demonstrate entrepreneurial competences.

If it is complex contrast studies on entrepreneurship from a competencial perspective, it is no less to count on with studies where the female gender is the central element for analysis, unless interesting exceptions where a comparison between men and women is done.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Ruiz et al. (2012: 53–55) in their analysis of entrepreneurial activity of women in Spain (2005–2011) indicate three main competence blocks (which will lead to a greater number of significant opportunities. They are: self-confidence, risk tolerance and recognition opportunities. According to the result of this work it should be noted some significant difference was appreciated, though not particularly accused among men and women, in favor of the first, as to self considered trained to undertake (self-confidence). In this direction, the percentages of women who say that fear of failure

The study of Ventura and Quero (2013) on factors explaining the intention to undertake in women, reveals other competences such as (a) assessment results; (b) self-confidence; (c) family history; (d) capital and (e) intends to take as significant competencial issues of women's entrepreneurship.

More recently the study of ASEME (2015) on the causes of the low representation of women entrepreneurs in certain sectors and segments of the business of the Community of Madrid, also reveals a very interesting set of competencies such as: (a) desire for independence; (b) assumption of risk, (c) positive and entrepreneurial spirit; (d) personal motivations related industry knowledge or knowledge of it; (e) creativity and innovativeness; (f) skills in management and administration (self-efficacy); (g) strengthened interpersonal relationships; (h) social skills and proactivity; and (i) integration in company of relatives/friends/acquaintances.

Finally, in the framework of the Women and Entrepreneurship from a Competence Perspective "(CSO2013-43667-R) and in a bid to help formalize the jurisdictional component of female entrepreneurship, the research team was inspired by the Emotional Competence Inventory<sup>3</sup> (2005).

After the timely review and adjustment of the ECI model the research team has made an adaptation model based on four major dimensions of competence (personal self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management) that support so many variables to a total of 18 as a key frame in the construction process of entrepreneurship and as an indicator – through the design of an algorithm – the degree of entrepreneurship in women and, more importantly, their relationship with the processes of training and personal development and professional.

## Conclusions and recommendations

In recent years the discourse on entrepreneurship is still a continuous and constant reference in different scenarios ranging from the ideological, political, social, economic and labor to reach the public as the main addressee and, quite possibly, much of the population that is in a state of labor helplessness.

If the qualification is the underlying element and the competences a way of trying to measure, always occurring institutional discourses. One may ask what is the latent intentionality at this type of approaches, especially when entrepreneurship by necessity rather than by chance, seems to be the interested response to an attempt to remedy the job precariousness installed at the dace of the crisis and recession

is a vital obstacle for business creation, are always higher than those registered in the case of men. These elements influence the propensity to undertake, which together with the subjective perception related to the recognition of business opportunities in the male population, found that women are much more cautious in addition to different reasons like education, family, social and even ideological questions.

<sup>3</sup> The experiences and contrasts previously made Stagg and Gunter (2002) and Burckle (2000). ECI and MBTI, Hay/McBer Research Report; Murensky (2000) and Sala (2003) confirm in different scenarios space–time measuring the adequacy of competence of this instrument.

that gravitates over a good part of the Western economies and in a way more clearly in our country.

Entrepreneurial activity seems to be therefore – at least a priori – cause or an economic revitalization engine where men and women with the resources placed at its disposal a modeled a project also a professional reading has a high vital and personal component.

There are no solidly defensible arguments to discriminate between related competences with male or female entrepreneurship, but yes, social, cultural, familiar, psycho social aspects and others who contribute to build a perverse society in which the qualifications – true DNA of the competences – mutate into stereotypes widely adopted by society as a whole.

Therefore, that apparent equality in this long distance race is not as clear as it might seem. The reason: gender differences and singularities that concur in women, "residents" in a man's world, where certain social constructions condition and in some cases determines the direction, sense and intensity of their actions.

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