



## Research article

# Abilities and skills as factors explaining the differences in women entrepreneurship



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## ABSTRACT

This study takes part of the project *Women and entrepreneurship from a competence perspective* and aims to investigate the role of skills and abilities in explaining the women entrepreneurship. In this sense, it works on the idea that women entrepreneurs have specific competences, understood as the sum of skills and abilities, that characterize and determine the type of female entrepreneurship (typology, sector, size, innovation, creativity). Methodologically, it worked from a qualitative approach, supported by conducting semi-structured interviews of men and women from different socio-economic and business profiles. From an inductive and interpretive discursive analysis, it can be concluded that businessmen and businesswomen agree to grant several skills and abilities to women entrepreneurs, although there are significant differences between the perceptions of women and men, subsisting some gender stereotypes in defining the profile of women entrepreneurs.

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## Habilidades y destrezas como factores que explican las diferencias en la capacidad empresarial de las mujeres

## RESUMEN

Este trabajo se enmarca dentro del proyecto de I+D+i *Mujer y capacidad empresarial desde una perspectiva competencial* y tiene como objetivo examinar el papel que desempeñan las habilidades y destrezas que poseen las mujeres a la hora de explicar la capacidad empresarial de éstas. En este sentido, se trabaja sobre la idea de que las mujeres emprendedoras cuentan con unas competencias específicas, entendidas como la suma de habilidades y destrezas, que caracterizan y determinan el tipo de capacidad empresarial femenina (tipología, sector, dimensiones, innovación y creatividad). A nivel metodológico se trabajó a partir

## Palabras clave:

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de un enfoque cualitativo apoyado en la realización de entrevistas semiestructuradas a hombres y mujeres de diferentes perfiles tanto socioeconómicos como empresariales. A partir de un análisis discursivo de carácter inductivo e interpretativo se puede concluir que el empresariado coincide en otorgarles un buen número de habilidades y destrezas a las mujeres emprendedoras si bien existen diferencias significativas entre las percepciones de las mujeres y las de los varones ya que todavía subsisten algunos estereotipos de género a la hora de definir el perfil de las empresarias.

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## Introduction

According to the theory of economic development of Schumpeter (1942), economic development rests on the capacity for innovation of entrepreneurs in creating new businesses. In this way, the entrepreneur has grown in importance since he or she reveals as an innovator, organizer and as an agent that enables economic growth. Thus, entrepreneurship is an activity that is seen as favourable for economic growth through job creation, innovation and wealth (GEM, 2014).

The figure of businessman or the entrepreneur has been traditionally associated with the male, due in part because the attributes that are associated with this activity are understood to be strictly male. What might collaborate, as recognized in the GEM Report (2012), to entrepreneurial activity in Spain is more suitable for men than women.

According to that report on Spain, there are no significant differences in the profile of women and men entrepreneurs because of age (around 38 years) and a family nucleus of belonging (3 members). However, the differences are observed with regard to the level of studies – higher in women; income – higher in men; sector of the activity – women in consumption and men in technological activities; and the geographical origin – the entrepreneurship of foreign origin is higher among women. Other notable distinguishing features are, first, less optimism by the women regarding growth prospects of the company and, secondly, the motivation to undertake appears linked to the need factor to a greater extent in women than in men.

The previous contextualization allows us to minimally outline the current state of entrepreneurship in our country and its distinctions when we introduce the gender variable, but beyond that general approach, this paper aims to make an approach to female entrepreneurship from a competence perspective and specifically it tries to know, through the discourse of entrepreneurs, if consensus exists when a series of specific skills and abilities that could contribute or hinder the development of this entrepreneurial activity by women is established.

In this regard, it is clear that the task of undertaking requires general skills – and some specific – that must be acquired and developed for this task to be successful (Alda-Varas, Villardoñ-Gallego, & Elexpuru-Albizuri, 2012). In this sense, the ANECA (2007) considers the existence of five general competence groups that should be considered when demanded by the labour market: those related to the knowledge, critical thinking, time management, organization and communication.

On the development of skills on the part of the entrepreneurs, these skills are also put into practice and manifest as a series of knowledge, like skills for adaptation and flexibility and skills for proactivity and negotiation – favouring the qualification of people and the successful development of their entrepreneurial activity (Olaz, 2011).

But just as men and women learn and behave differentially, perhaps the entrepreneurial activities are undertaken under different patterns. And although the uses and business procedures seem built in a neutral way, there is a strong masculinization of entrepreneurial activity, so that the experiences and results of women entrepreneurs still are analyzed in comparison with the male norm and, by deferring it, they are generally understood as deficient (Jiménez & Díaz, 2011). Therefore, as Pineda (2014) points out, it is necessary to study the entrepreneurial initiative of women and men attending the gender structure of entrepreneurship, since otherwise they would be studied by neutral and universal entrepreneurs patterns that reflect only practices and proper male ideals in entrepreneurial action.

Catering to this demand of specific analysis for gender implies agreeing that the concept of entrepreneurship is socially and culturally constructed, so that, like other aspects that make social action, they should be analyzed from the reproduction of practices learned through a differential socialization process by gender. The theory of differential socialization (Giddens, 2010) states that women internalize values, norms and codes other than the man in the process of socialization transmitted behaviour patterns and differential expectations for children, which could lead to uneven development of skills, such as perseverance, prudence or empathy attributed more to women, or the security and independence attributes generally of masculine cut. In this process, the development of skills could also be differential, refining some skills above others in terms of gender. Together, these abilities and skills learned and developed differentially might influence (positively or negatively) the undertaken action, moderating unevenly in women and men.

There is interest, therefore, to know what skills and abilities are commonly attributed to women entrepreneurs from the point of view of the women themselves exercising their corporate responsibilities, and from the point of view of men entrepreneurs. To do this, the discourses of a number of businessmen and businesswomen with different socio-demographic and occupational profiles have been analyzed, which allows to go in depth, both in competence characteristics subjectively considered treasured for women

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