

Employment and Women in the 21st century in Europe: From Household economy to SME economy (Small and Medium enterprises) –MUPYME Project

O3. Study and analysis of the profesional skills of business women, applicable to housewives – Lorca (Murcia, Spain).

GENERAL INFORMATION

1. The four business women interviewed belong to a small community where there are not many working opportunities, since the area does not have the sufficient business activity in order to generate the required quantity and quality of employment. Therefore, many women consider the possibility of working on their own. These four women were selected to represent different personal and educational circumstances, so they are a representative sample of the different sorts of women that can be found in the region.
2. Two of them hold university degrees, another one has the qualification of Bachillerato (Spanish high school), and the last one simply holds an ESO certificate (secondary education in Spain).
3. Only one of them has previous experience in the field she currently works. The other three have learned on their own as their activities progressed.
4. None of them had previous business management training.
5. They are between 35 and 50 years old, so they still have a long career before them.
6. Their family circumstances are diverse. Two of them are married with children; another one is not married and does not have children, but she lives with her partner; the last one is a widow and has three children.
7. All of them are very confident and independent female entrepreneurs. However, they do report that they were strongly supported by their families when they started their business projects.
8. Their motivations for entrepreneurship are of different nature: some take over the family business, some other did not succeed in pursuing other careers and felt really frustrated, others found their way through self-employment after

working for the public sector or other companies, since self-employment allows them to be free to make their own decisions regarding both their families and their careers.

CONSTITUTION OF THE BUSINESS

The constitution of the business has not been extremely hard for these women, since they were supported: mainly by their families, but also by the different administrations regarding information and funding for start-ups, which are concessions aimed especially for female entrepreneurs.

The four of them are very resourceful and have a high level of self-esteem. Therefore, they faced the difficulties at the first stage with enthusiasm and strength.

Their partners in some instances, and their families in others (siblings, parents) have supported them unconditionally and they have contributed in many aspects such as doing restructuring works, painting, decor, advertising, etc.

The main problems were a consequence of lack of training and knowledge regarding business management and accounting. However, they acknowledge that the skills acquired by means of activities they performed within the household have been useful so as to overcome difficulties and implement those techniques in a business context.

Another difficulty they had to overcome was the incredible amount of bureaucratic paperwork that is inherent to the business constitution process and applying for funding concessions for entrepreneurship. Moreover, considering the current financial crisis, bank funding and guarantees are very difficult to achieve. It is important to highlight that the public administration in the region tries to provide support to entrepreneurs at the first stage of their business activities by helping them to design the business plan, project feasibility and specific services regarding information and business aid.

BUSINESS CONSOLIDATION

Business consolidation has been possible because of both distinctive and shared features among our entrepreneurs:

- Customized service.
- Distinctive and exclusive products.
- Specialization.
- Quality as a prerequisite.
- Consistent improvement and permanent innovation and training.
- Taking risks.
- ICT implementation.
- Controlled growth.
- Leverage on all the resources available.
- Family support and contribution.
- Balance between work and family
- Permanent adaptation and recycling
- Stress Management and psychological stability.
- Overcoming failure.
- Equipment and establishment upgrading.
- Job creation (in two of the cases).

THE BUSINESS IN THE FUTURE

There is always a smile on our entrepreneurs' faces when we ask them about their future as businesswomen. Some of them are cautious and say they will try to secure what they have already achieved. Some other even dream about seeing their businesses evolve to become a franchise outside the region. But each and every of them see a future in their business activities. In other words, none of them is thinking about quitting their business projects.

Moreover, all of them believe their future success depends on increasing the presence of technology and CITs in their businesses so as to gain access to new markets that are now possible because of the Internet.

For them, the key to continuity and future growth consists on keeping track of innovations, new trends, specialization, improving quality and constant training.

BUSINESS WOMEN

All the businesswomen in our study feel proud about their decision to start a business: regardless the difficulties and bad times they have not lost their enthusiasm and strive to keep on growing and evolving in their careers.

Leaving the household has made them feel confident and boosted their economic and emotional independence levels.

The link between the activities performed at home and those of an enterprise shows a high degree of similarity. The skills required to run a successful business are often the same they acquired as housewives, and vice versa, those learned in a business context can be implemented in the household.

SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE ACQUIRED AT HOME THAT COULD BE IMPLEMENTED IN BUSINESS

Upon consideration, all the participants reported that many of the usual tasks in their businesses required the skills they already had thanks to their work at home, but they had never really thought about it before.

The following are some of them:

- Taking risks
- Conflict-resolution
- Empathy skills
- Adequate time management
- Decision-making
- Resources management
- Assets management
- Accounting management
- Team coordination and governance and flexibility

- Motivation skills
- Social relationships

PERSONAL SKILLS REQUIRED TO BUILD A SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS

The following list includes some suggestions made by our participants regarding the keys for business success:

- Perseverance
- Courage
- Enthusiasm
- Determination
- Training
- Boldness
- Commitment
- Strength
- Confidence
- Resourcefulness
- Determination
- Curiosity
- Knowledge

FINDINGS

This study has brought to life something that was there in an implicit way before, but that had not been taken yet into consideration: the close relationship that exists between housewives' skills and those of women involved in business activities.

Housewives usually present a rather low self-esteem, especially in peripheral rural areas such as ours. Making them see that they do have a set of skills with a great potential that could enable them to become successful entrepreneurs with the support of well-designed training plans.

Additionally, our experience has shown that, in areas with low levels of employment, women constituting microenterprises –that usually employ no more than three

workers– are making it possible for families to have a reasonable income, which contributes to the permanence of the population in rural areas.

Entrepreneurs also acknowledge that there are a few hurdles on the way towards the development of their businesses, such as lack of IT and communication training, management and accounting training and training regarding innovation.

Any rural development policy should take into account women’s potential as drivers of economic and social development. Therefore, specific support programmes for female entrepreneurship should be developed, as well as funding for the constitution of enterprises and basic management training, such as administration, marketing, accounting and ICTs.

As a conclusion we would like to highlight the need to develop Gender Programmes that fight against discrimination and gender-based violence in order to promote equality and recognition for women. Our purpose is building an inclusive society in which men and women will be equal.