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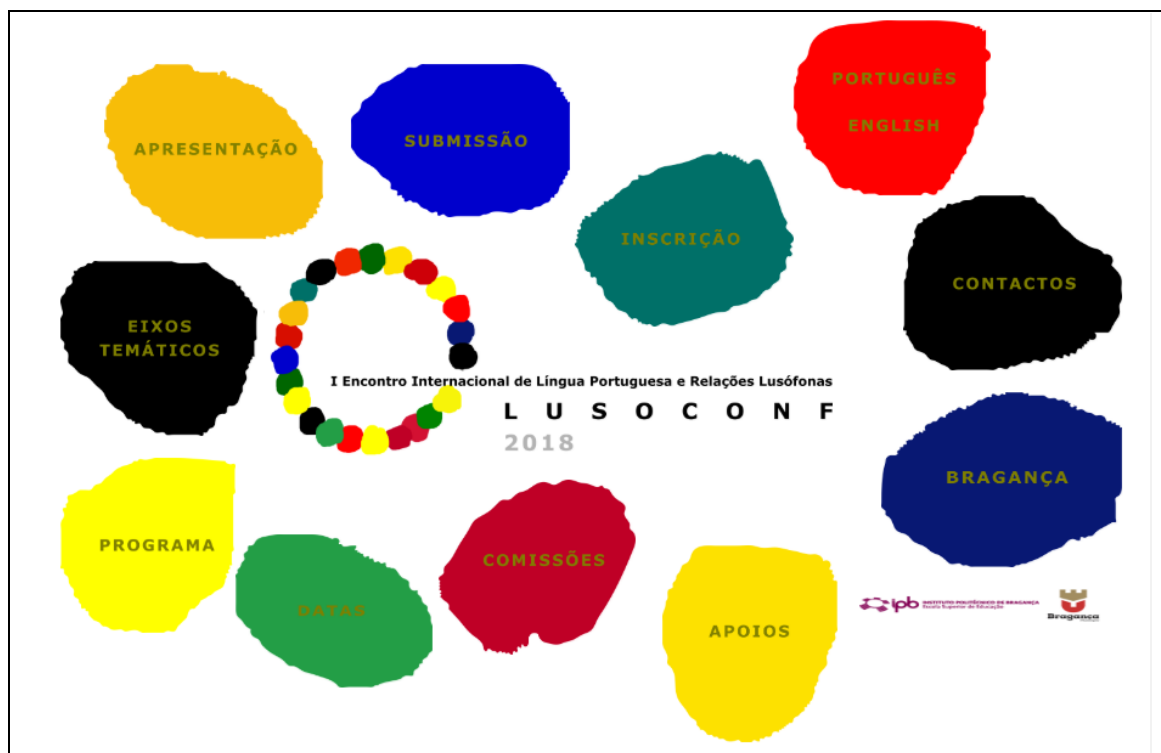
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Female leadership in a markedly male sector: an exploratory study applied to the granite transformation sector

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Abstract

Even though the participation levels of women in the paid labour market is similar to men, as well as female education levels, essentially in the higher levels of education, such acquisitions are not yet accompanied by equality in leadership and access to certain management and headship positions in a large group of Portuguese companies. It is also a reality that the Portuguese business network is composed mostly of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), many of which have a family structure, composed by the couple and, in some cases, also by their sons and daughters, when they are old enough to access the labour work. Accordingly, in this research work, the focal objective is to understand the main advantages and difficulties regarding leadership (assumed by women) of two companies in the industrial sector, specifically in stone (granite) transformation. To reach the proposed objective, a research is carried out with a mixed character. That is, in a first phase of quantitative and descriptive character, under which we intend to analyse the outlook of the industrial sector regarding the leadership according to gender. Secondly, a qualitative analysis is conducted, in which we try to understand how two women, who lead two companies in the abovementioned area, develop their work, with which constraints and challenges they face, in a markedly masculine area. Accordingly, in the first phase of the research a statistical analysis using secondary data is performed, and in the second phase, once it is a qualitative research, with the main objective of understanding the reality, we used the structured interview, directed to two women who occupy the central position in two companies of the northern region of Portugal. Regarding the first part of the investigation, it is concluded that inequality still exists in Portuguese labour market, regarding gender, not only in access to leadership positions but also in access to certain professions and in certain sectors of activity.

Keywords: leadership, management, Portuguese SMEs, inequality, gender.