

A Review of the BA thesis of Karolina Schönová „Women in Managerial Positions and their Negotiation of Hegemonic Work Cultures in Prague“

In her BA thesis, Karolina decided to focus on women in managerial positions in the Czech Republic. Her topic is, therefore, a traditional one since there is a long tradition of studying work and management from the gender perspective going all the way back to Kanter's seminal work "Men and Women in the Corporation" (1977). However, it is never a mistake to revisit traditional topics and look at them from a fresh perspective. Like all social institutions and relationship, corporations also change with time and so do gender relations within them. The choice of qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews seems also appropriate.

Starting with formal issues, I must mention problems with English. While it is commendable that Karolina decided to write her BA thesis in a foreign language, this should not mean that she resigns on its rules, grammar etc. The most obvious and typical problem concerns the use of articles (p. 3, first page: ~~the~~ challenges, ~~the~~ gender balance, the experiences of women, the Czech Republic, an office manager, ~~the~~ milestones, ~~the~~ obstacles), but there are also others (e.g. p. 4 "the experiences...has remained...", "within a society that exhibits concerning gender disparities will be developed") which I am not going to detail. It is also problematic when Sandra Bem is repeatedly referred to as Sandra Bern (p. 12) and Alena Krizkova as Krizikova. Suffice to say that more careful editing and check by a native speaker would have corrected most of these problems.

It is not clear to me why Karolina uses the plural "we" throughout the thesis? I suppose that she is the sole author of the thesis.

A more serious problem concerns citation format which is inconsistent. In-text citations differ for paraphrases and for direct quotes. While paraphrases include the author's surname and year of publication in brackets, quotations use footnotes (e.g. p. 7, 10). The reference list also contains inconsistencies (e.g. p. 56). Some journal titles are in italics, while others are not. Similarly, quotation marks are used inconsistently with respect to article titles in the text (e.g. p. 8). Finally, Karolina is not consistent also with respect to her key term (workplace culture vs. work culture).

Moving now to the theory chapter, I must note that some key concepts are left undefined (e.g. glass ceiling, glass elevator, gender pay gap, masculinity) or definitions are questionable. This is particularly relevant with respect to gender. Its definition attributed to Connell (2002)(p. 9) is so generic that it can be applied to many other concepts (culture, race, class etc.). Needless to say, the reference to Connell is missing from the reference list? At the defense, Karolina could offer a more useful definition of gender. In this context, I would also like to know why Karolina does not differentiate different types of segregation of labor when she discusses this concept (sub-chapter 1.8)?

When discussing the role of metaphors for understanding workplace culture, Karolina claims that “both women and men in gender-atypical positions face discrimination” (p. 8). However, subsequently, she discusses only discrimination that women face. Promotion of men to more prestigious and higher-paying roles can be hardly considered discrimination. Karolina could explain this point at the defense.

Unfortunately, titles of some sub-chapters promise more than the chapters deliver. For example, the sub-chapter 1.3 “The connection between gender, gendered institutions, socialization and workplace culture” does not help understand the connection because the discussion is too generic and vague to provide concrete examples. We do not learn how gendered institutions influence workplace culture, respectively which gendered norms, biases and inequalities are perpetuated within organizational structures and practices or how concretely workplace culture perpetuates and reinforces gender inequalities.

The sub-chapter 1.4 “Work-life balance” promises to help understand better the interplay between work and family relationships, but it also does not deliver. The reader gets a list of commonly used terms and Karolina assures him/her/them that: “The insights offered by Lockwood are crucial for my study on women managers and their experiences within work culture” (p. 14). Unfortunately, the reader does not learn anything more about the insights.

It is not clear why Karolina sometimes repeats the same points in the subsequent paragraphs (e.g. p. 19, second and third paragraph).

While the theory chapter covers a wide range of topics, I miss a proper discussion of sexual harassment. It is hard to believe that Czech female managers do not have to deal with sexual harassment in the workplace when their counterparts abroad have to. The concept is mentioned only once in passing (p. 23).

Overall, the theory chapter touches on relevant topics, but it does not demonstrate a critical reading of literature. It is accepted as it is without much effort to contrast different viewpoints, theories etc. It is also not very user-friendly that Karolina does not offer any summary of the chapter at the end. It would smooth for the reader the transition to the next chapter.

The methodology section starts with a discussion of research strategy (qualitative) and a data-collection method (semi-structured interview). However, Karolina does not spell out clearly what is a semi-structured interview, respectively how it differs from other types of research interviews. She also does not offer a list of questions which she used. This does not allow for evaluation of methodological soundness of individual questions and their overall order. Thus, the reader cannot

check if the questions do not contain technical/theoretical terms, if they are not loaded, or if their order is not leading to concrete answers.

True, Karolina discusses some questions in the sub-chapter 3.2 “Interview findings, responses and analysis”, but the reader does not know if they are all the questions and if they were asked in the presented order. Their wording also presumes a significant level of understanding of theoretical concepts (gender expectations, gender norms, cultural norms, gender equality, masculine influence, glass ceiling etc.) which is methodologically problematic.

The methodology section is again quite repetitive. For example, one can read several times that Karolina used a qualitative research approach or that semi-structured interviews allow for in-depth understanding.

Considering the qualitative approach, it is surprising that Karolina felt the need to perform probability sampling. It is even more puzzling why she combined it with purposeful sampling. Probability sampling is used when quantitative methods are employed. There is no need for it in qualitative studies because their goals are different. Apparently, Karolina does not quite understand what qualitative research is about because she also sees as a limitation restricted “generalizability of the study’s findings” (p. 54). At the defense, she can explain why this is not a relevant criterion for qualitative research. Unfortunately, Karolina also does not specify what type of probability sampling and purposeful sampling she employed or what was her sampling frame. Finally, she does not inform the reader how many communication partners were selected using each sampling method.

On pages 29 through 30, Karolina presents an extensive and very ambitious list of goals she planned to explore in the interviews. This does not at all correspond to lengths of her interview. None of the interviews took longer than 35 minutes which was extremely short for a semi-structured interview. Karolina also does not mention whether the interviews were tape recorded, whether the communication partners signed an informed consent, and what transcription norm she used.

Unfortunately, she has mistaken understanding of what an analysis of qualitative data entail. For each of her topics, she presents a list of quotes from different interviews, looks for their match with theories that were presented in the theory chapter, and usually concludes that they align with the theories. In other words, she suggests that her data confirm the theories. It is, therefore, not surprising that she comes to the same conclusions that can be found in literature.

However, a qualitative analysis should proceed differently. The researcher should let the data “speak for themselves” and tease out possible theoretical insights paying attention to inconsistencies, unexpected insights etc. This also means that the researcher does not present a list of quotes, but that

she should present an insight/hypothesis and document it by interpretation of selected quotes. The quotes do not speak for themselves. They need to be interpreted individually so that the reader can evaluate the soundness of the researcher's interpretations. To be fair, this is not the first BA thesis that suffers from these problems.

To sum up, I recommend the thesis for defense, but with the grade C (3).

Petr Pavlik

Reviewer

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