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From the labyrinth to the river: Experiences of female academic leaders in Vietnamese higher education

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DISTINCTIVE BY DESIGN

BUSINESS, GOVERNMENT AND LAW

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Acknowledgment of Country

*I wish to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land I am here, the
Ngunnawal people.*

*I wish to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they
make to the life of this city and this region.*

*I would also like to acknowledge and welcome other Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander people who may be attending today's event.*

Gender distribution in higher education leadership in Vietnam (Tran & Nguyen, 2020)

Position	Total	Male		Female	
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
President/Rector	171	158	92.4	13	7.6
Vice President/Vice Rector	417	356	85.4	61	14.6
Dean/Head (Academic Faculty/Department; Functional Office; Center)					
<i>In which:</i>	1949	1517	77.8	432	22.2
Dean (Academic Faculty/Department)	1092	823	75.4	269	24.6
Vice Dean/Vice Head (Academic Faculty/Department, Functional Office, Center)					
<i>In which:</i>	2510	1618	64.5	892	35.5
Vice Dean (Academic Faculty/Department)	1596	1002	62.8	594	37.2
Total	5047	3649	72.3	1398	27.7

- Leadership conceptualization
- Three assumptions of leadership studies

Functionalist

Efficiency and effectiveness of leadership

Interpretive

Shared meaning of leadership

Critical

The darkside of leadership

(Alvesson & Spicer, 2012)

Literature review

Leadership in Higher Education

- Contested meanings
- Types of leadership



(Juntrasook, 2014)

Literature review



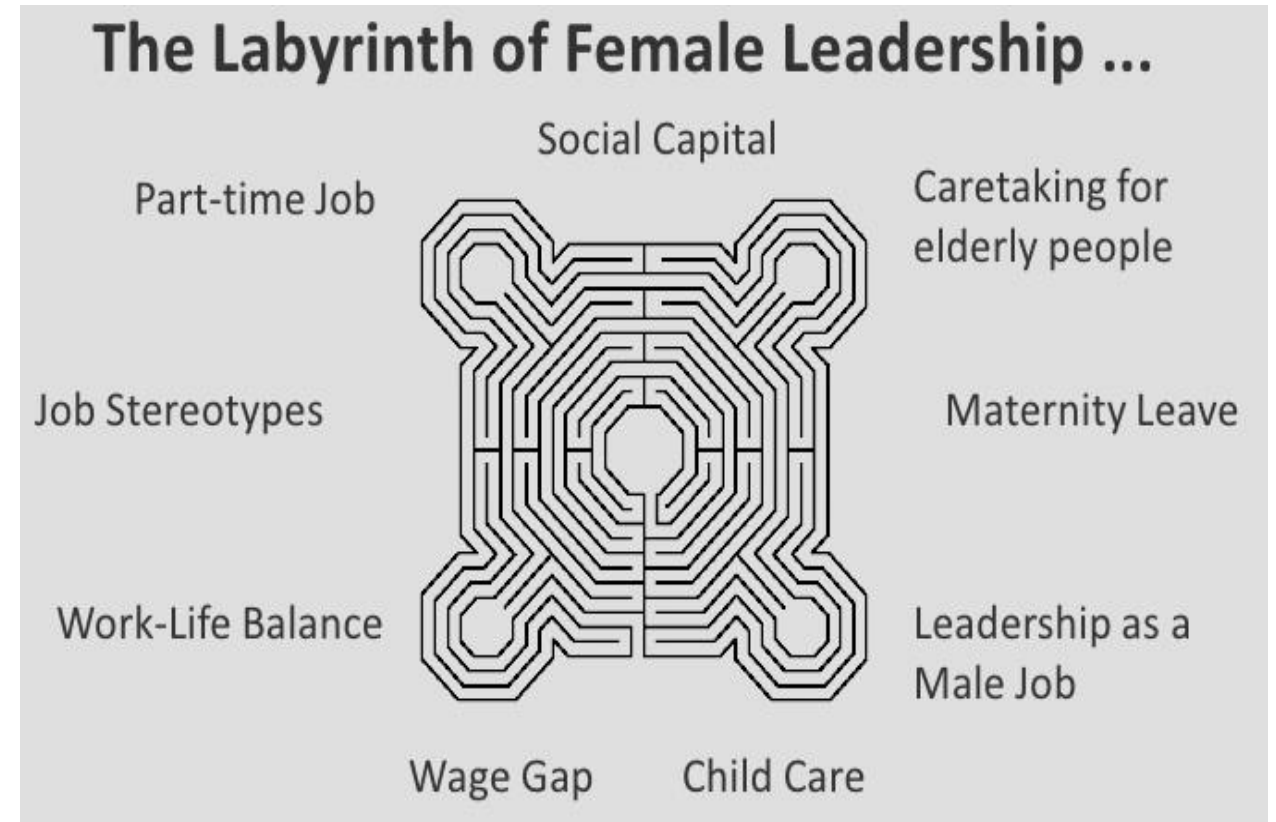
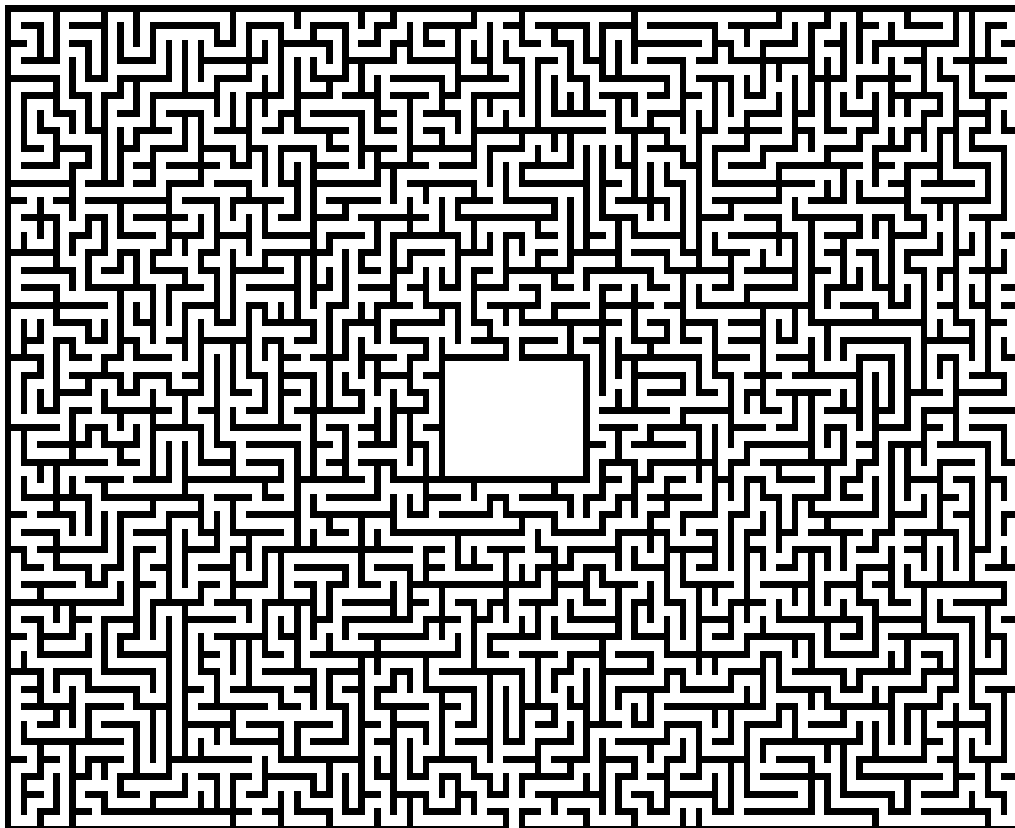
Sticky steps



Literature review

Leadership labyrinth and its components

- Narrow entry, many twists and turns
- Reach the destination



(Eagly & Carli, 2007)

Background to Vietnamese context

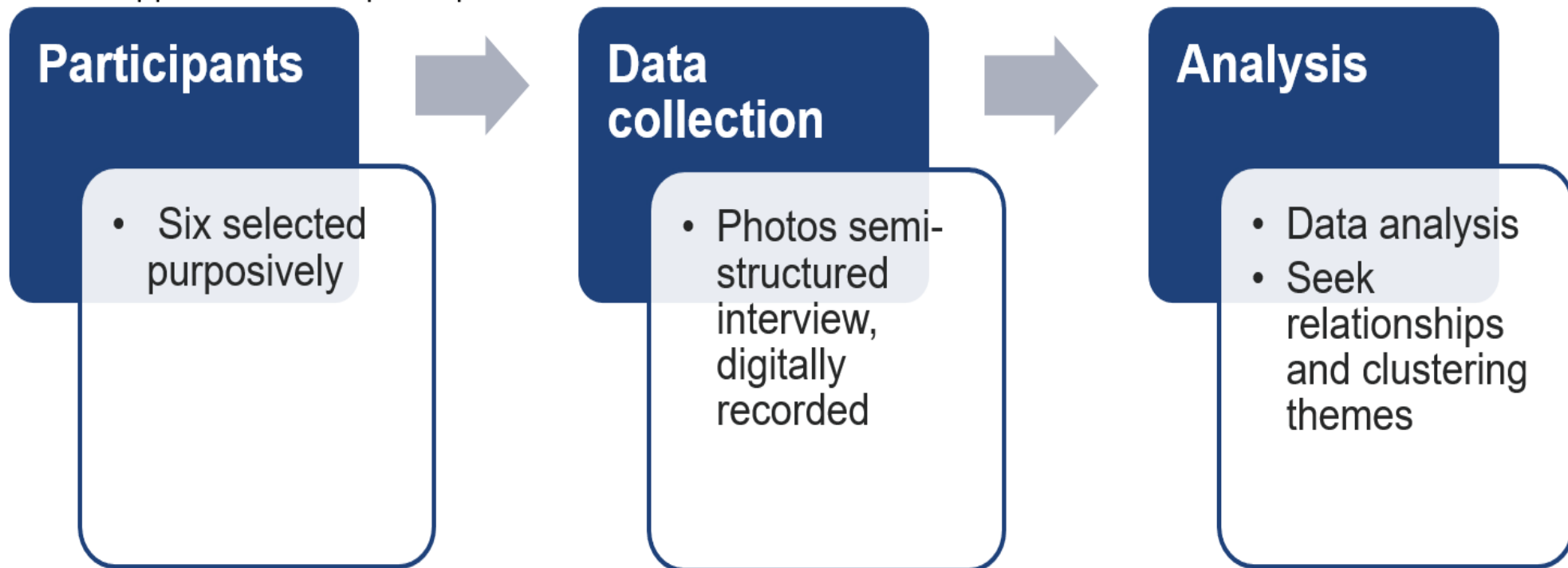
- Patriarchy
- Confucianism “Three Obediences”, “Four Virtues”
- “Woman of two goods”: Excellent at work, Resourceful at home
- Cement ceiling: 77 jobs cannot be done by women, retiring age 55 years and 8 months (2022)
- Intellectual women to leadership “Long journey, heavy burden”
(Bao Han, 2017)



- **Qualitative approach:** interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)
- **IPA:** detailed examination of personal lived experience, the meaning of experience to participants and how participants make sense of that experience (Smith et al, 2009, Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Phenomenology	Hermeneutics	<u>Idiography</u>
The study of conscious lived experience in detail and depth. The aim is to get as close to understanding as possible.	The study of interpretation, is concerned with how things appeared and let things speak for themselves.	Specific focus on how a particular experience has been understood from a particular perspective in a particular context.

- The innermost deliberation of the 'lived experiences' of research participants
- An approach that is 'participant-oriented'



- The use of photos within an interviewing setting
- Beyond words

Semi-structured interview

Flexibility & ability to gather rich data (Hugh-Jones & Gibson, 2012)

Opportunity for insights into the psychological & social world of participants (Smith & Osborn, 2007)

Photo elicitation

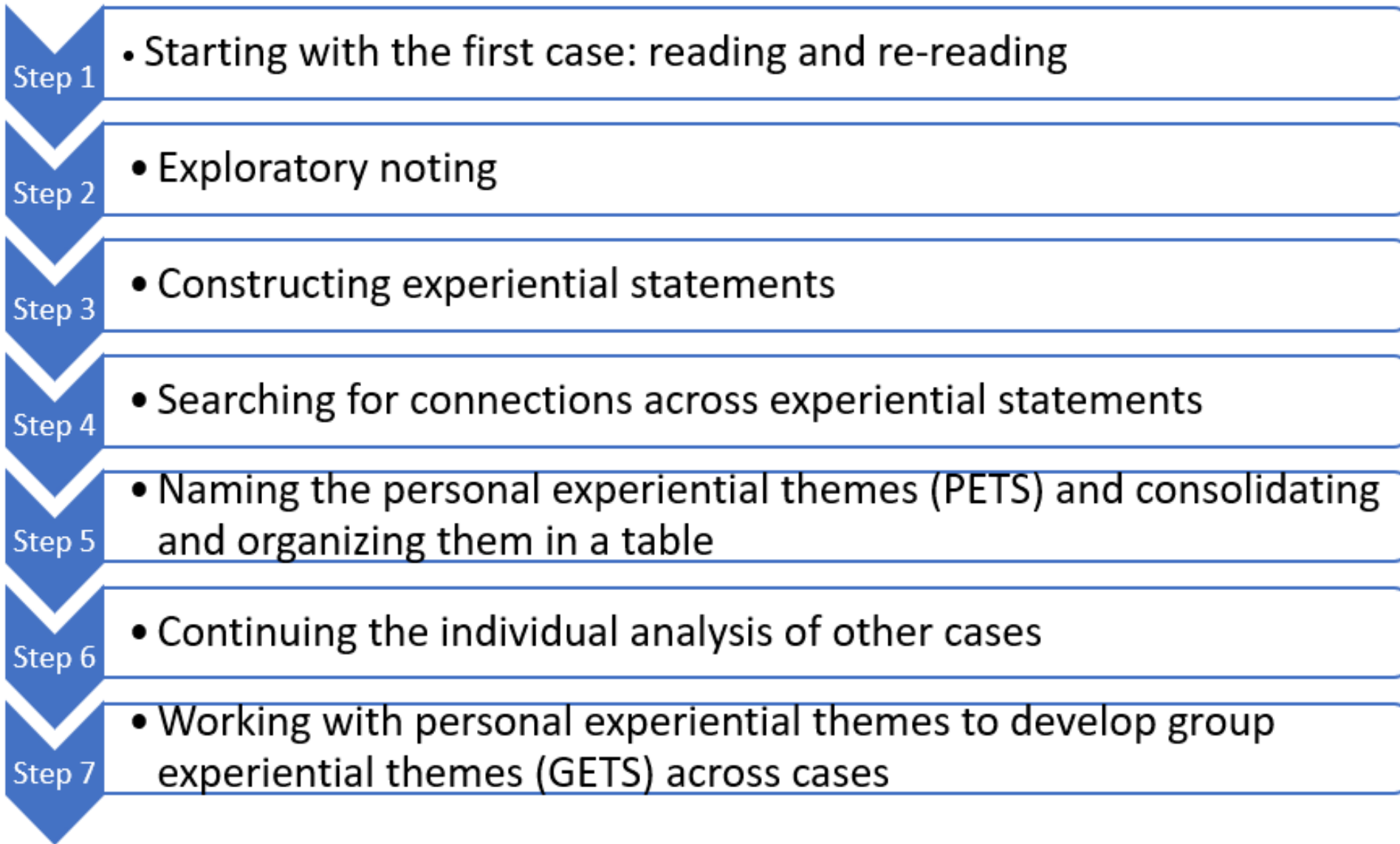
Participant-driven photographs promote dialogue and introduce new dimensions to the research (Bates et al, 2017)

Photos are used as a stimulus to elicit richer accounts of the phenomena under study (Frith & Harcourt, 2007)

Examples of photos brought by participants



Process of Data Analysis



From experiential statements to PETs

Ms. Road: As leaders they have more opportunities for overseas training than staff	194	Ms. Road: But Germany is a powerful water (country) and she could lead such a country so I think she must have superpower	112
Ms. Tree: I couldn't think of anything, I just wanted to let go (let it drift)	237	Ms. Rose: For example, I could solve the problem by these channels	163
Ms. Math: Fortunately, after many years struggling to paddle at university, our counselling have had credit and experience	124	Ms. Rose: One enormous raft is about documents/reports/contracts and my information management skills which are fast and reliable	202-203
Ms. Rose: Learning from different places helped me visualise work rafts better, at different levels (layers) of work that I have to do	308	Ms. Rose: We weren't pushed to the ISI flow yet	68
Ms. Road: If their expertise is not deep enough (they only have Master or PhD) they at least need to understand the importance of professional development	321	Ms. Rose: We'd check whether the information is correct, we'd filter (strainer) the information and handle it as fast as possible.	162
Ms. Road: I thought of her because Germany was a rather a traditional water (country) in comparison with other Western waters (countries)	107	Ms. Rose: In all that cases, a woman in leadership position could harmonise all these water pressures	514
Ms. Rose: Visited all cities and provinces in Vietnam and overseas (outwater countries)	419	Ms. Road: Minus or add one person cannot make things wetter (not a great impact)	227
Ms. Paper: Aunt Thanh was the one who gave birth to the department (from water)	15	Ms. Rose: In all that cases (conflict), a woman in leadership position could harmonise different waters	514
Ms. Rose: If it's calm, gentle, peaceful, we'll follow that flow	69	Ms. Paper: For example I can use my power to that make decision but I'm in two minds, undecided (slight ripples) because they have to work with each other	305
Ms. Mountain: If the water is not smooth, it's between women and women	104	Ms. Tree: That year was a stormy year, full of big waves and wind	655-656
Ms. Rose: There were business partners at first but after retiring and returned to their water they still keep contact and exchange mails (networking)	422-423	Ms. Rose: Our university stated three rafts: training, research and community service in developmental strategy	289-290
Ms. Rose: We have to follow these channels, staff knows that I follow these channels will response to me and automatically transfer information to me.	159	Ms. Paper: Foreign water countries, especially Africa	227
It depends on the quality of the journal for the money prize, for example VND 3 millions for inwater (domestic) ones and VND 20 millions for outwater (international) ones	16	Ms. Math: After we finished PhD we had many work invitation but we couldn't see the water to see whether it was clear or muddy, shallow or deep.	136
		Ms. Math: There were times when I just wanted to let it drift (not to finish her PhD thesis)	1021

From PETs to GETs

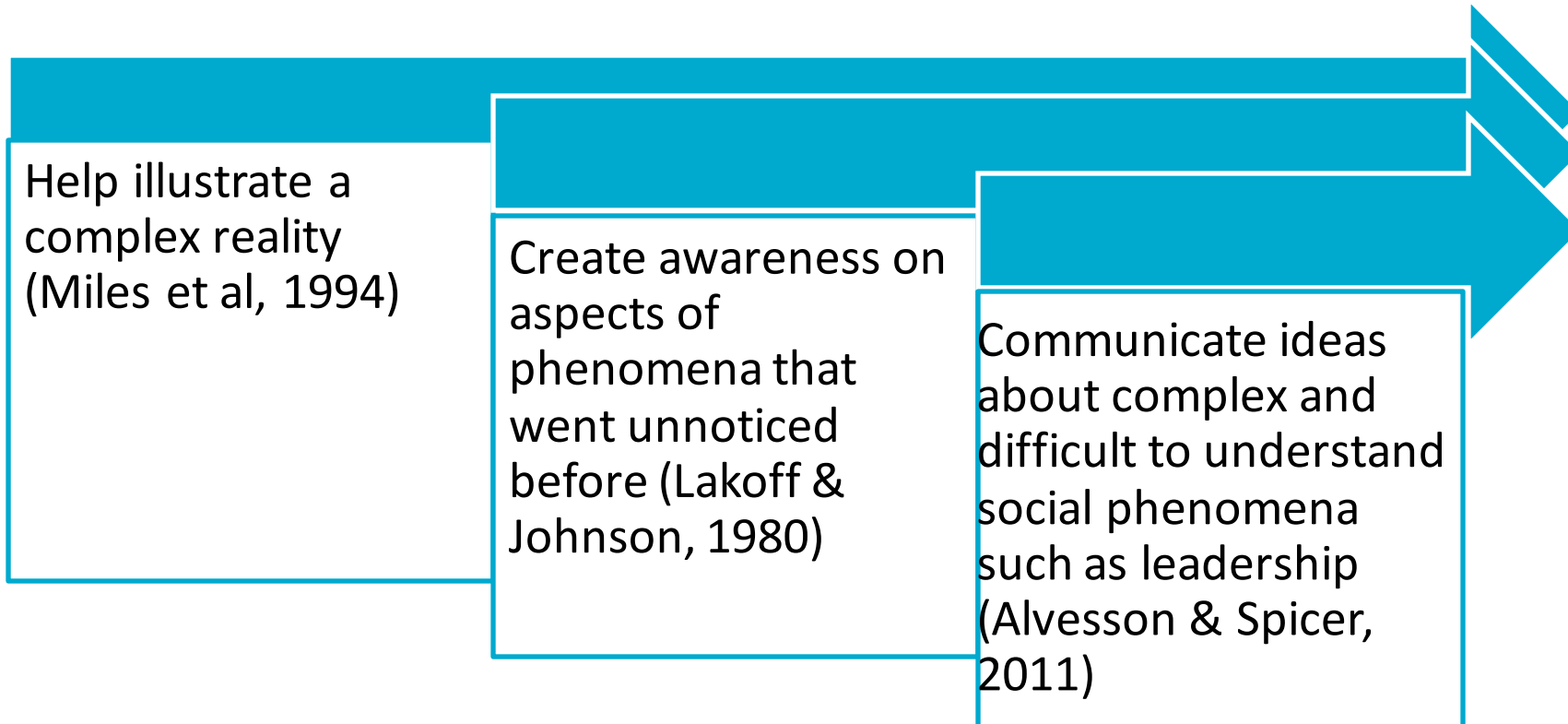
Ms. Rose: There were business partners at first but after retiring and returned to their water they still keep contact and exchange mails (networking)	422-423
Ms. Math: They rafted up to create difficulties for me	434-435
Ms. Rose: It's like I was wading in a stream or a river then suddenly I was washed to the big ocean	61-61
Ms. Paper: If Aunt Thanh were our leader. We'd have less difficulties, we wouldn't have to swim by ourselves	329
Ms. Paper: On a beautiful day, I suddenly became the head of the department, I had to swim swim swim	421
Ms. Paper: I wasn't show how to do things, I had to swim on my own and asked other colleagues of how to do it	271
Ms. Mountain: There are (male) Drs. Professors if they are not competent with foreign language, I think they are in a village pond.	242
Ms. Paper: We were one foot wet, the other foot is dry, we didn't know what to do yet	19
Ms. Math: They (male bosses) were agreeable like running water, they pushed me up	996
Ms. Tree: I understood at that moment that a wave was coming	411
Ms. Math: We were like the smallest fish in the river	492
Ms. Paper: Our university has a good training practice of throwing (us) to reality (water) and forced to learn how to swim and swim by ourselves, so I found it difficult but at the same time we can grow much quicker	52-53

Table of Group Experiential Themes

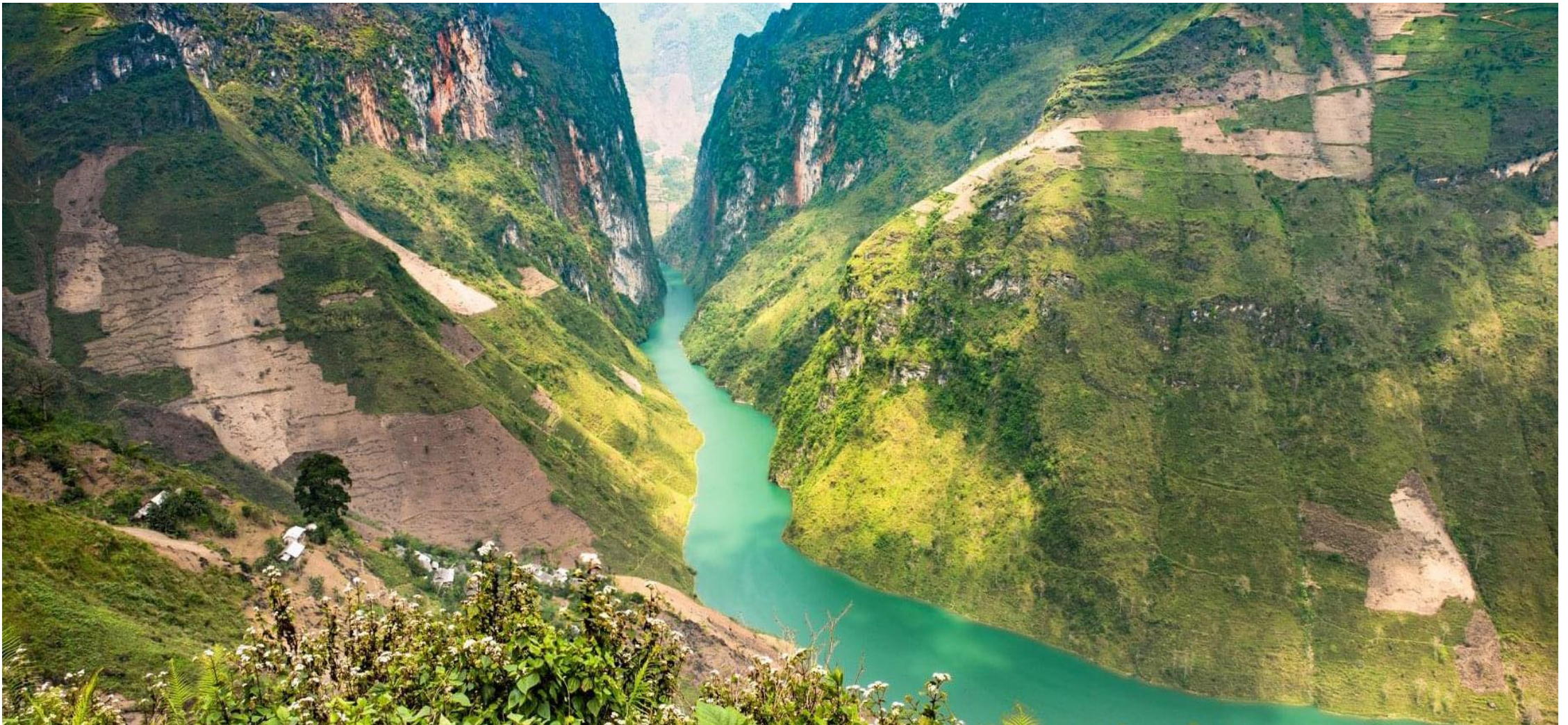


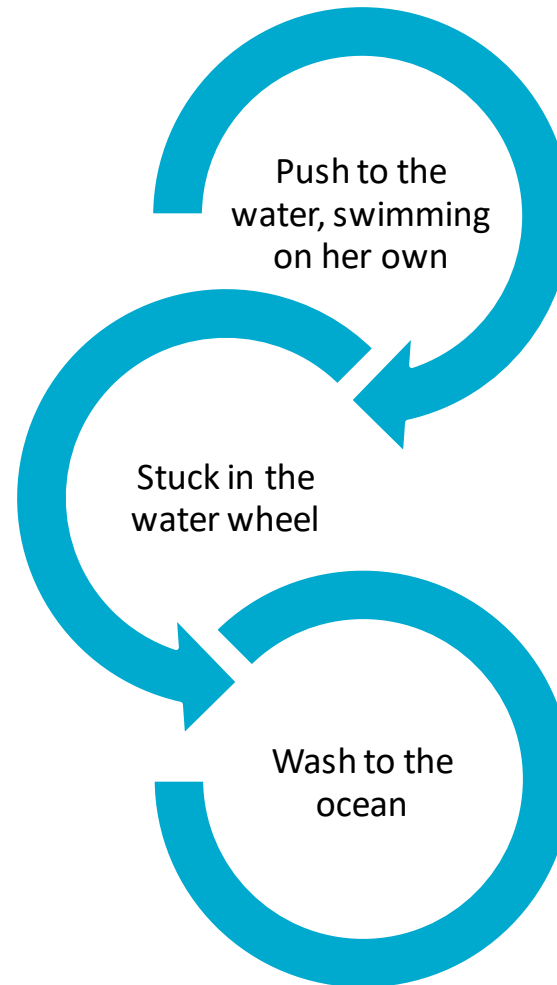
Navigating the river	Line
Group Experiential Theme 1: Being thrown/washed/lifted to new water Unexpected Promotion to Leadership	
Ms. Paper: On a beautiful day, I suddenly became the head of the department, I had to swim swim swim	421
Ms. Rose: It's like I was wading in a stream or a river then suddenly I was washed to the big ocean	61-61
Ms. Math: They (male bosses) were agreeable like running water, they pushed me up	996

Metaphors

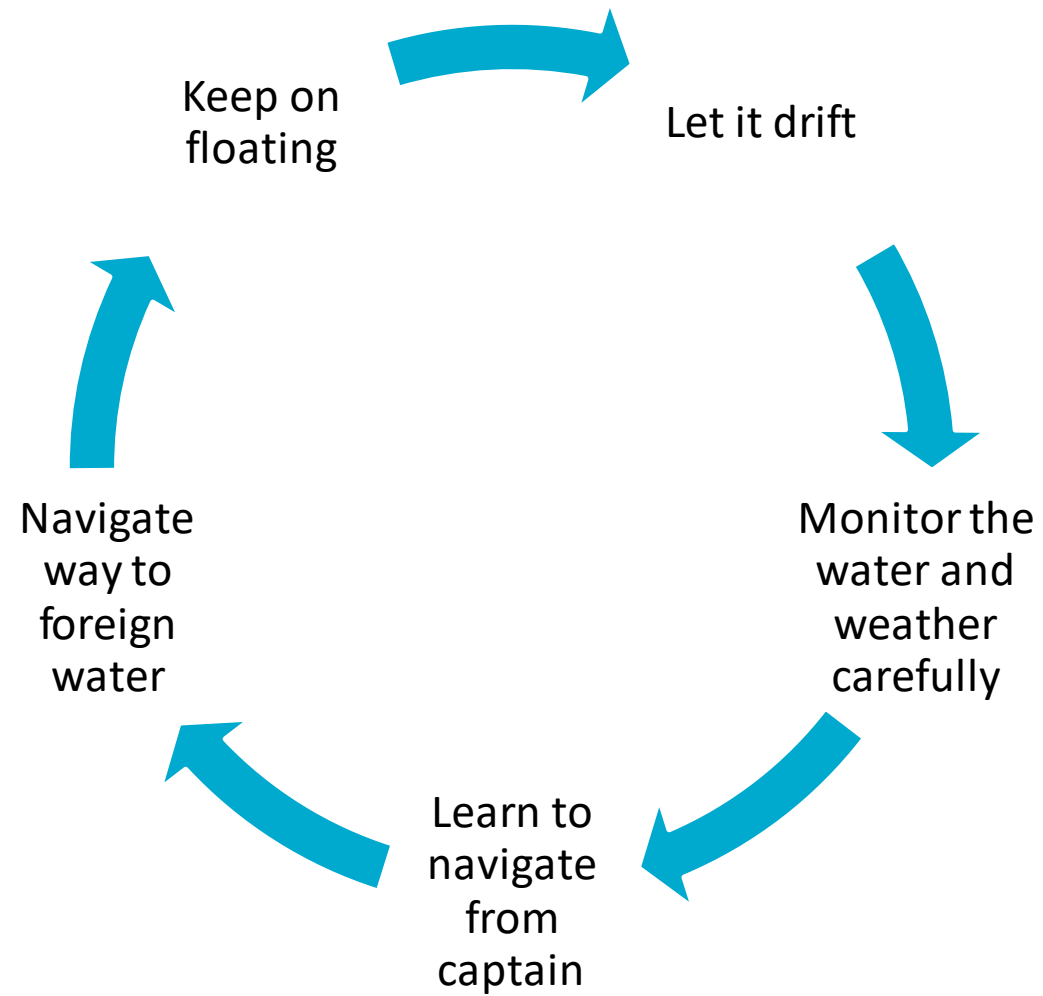


Findings: Vietnamese female academic career is in the river

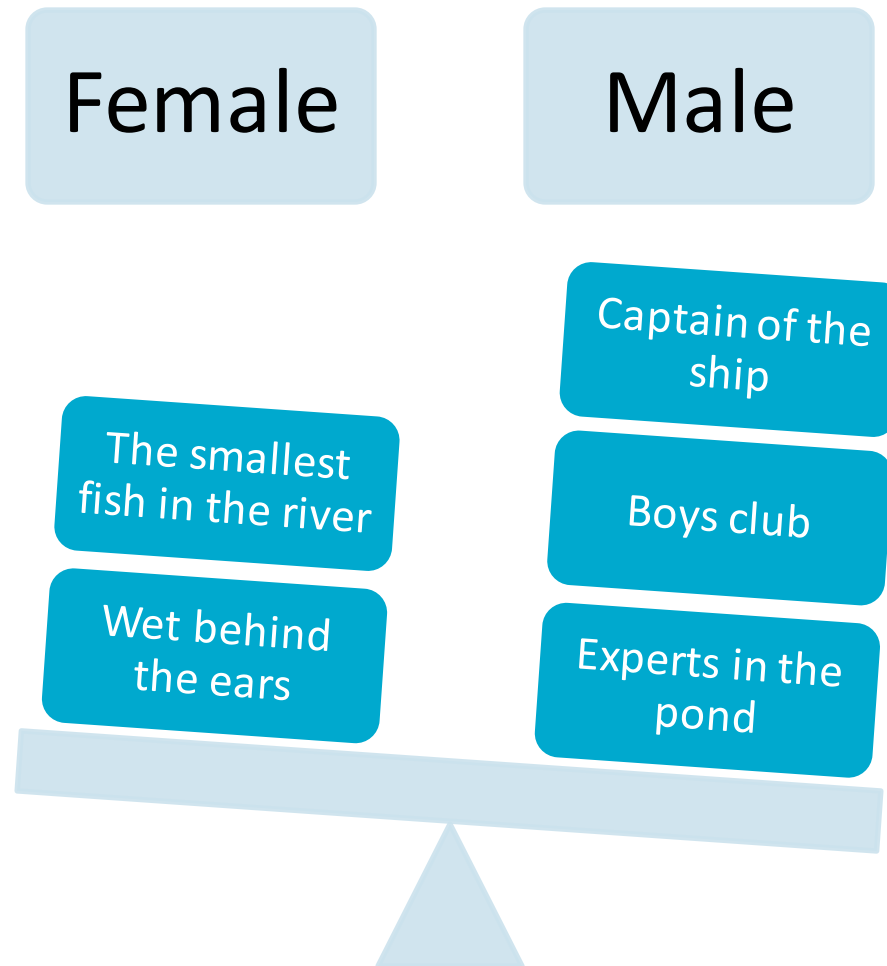




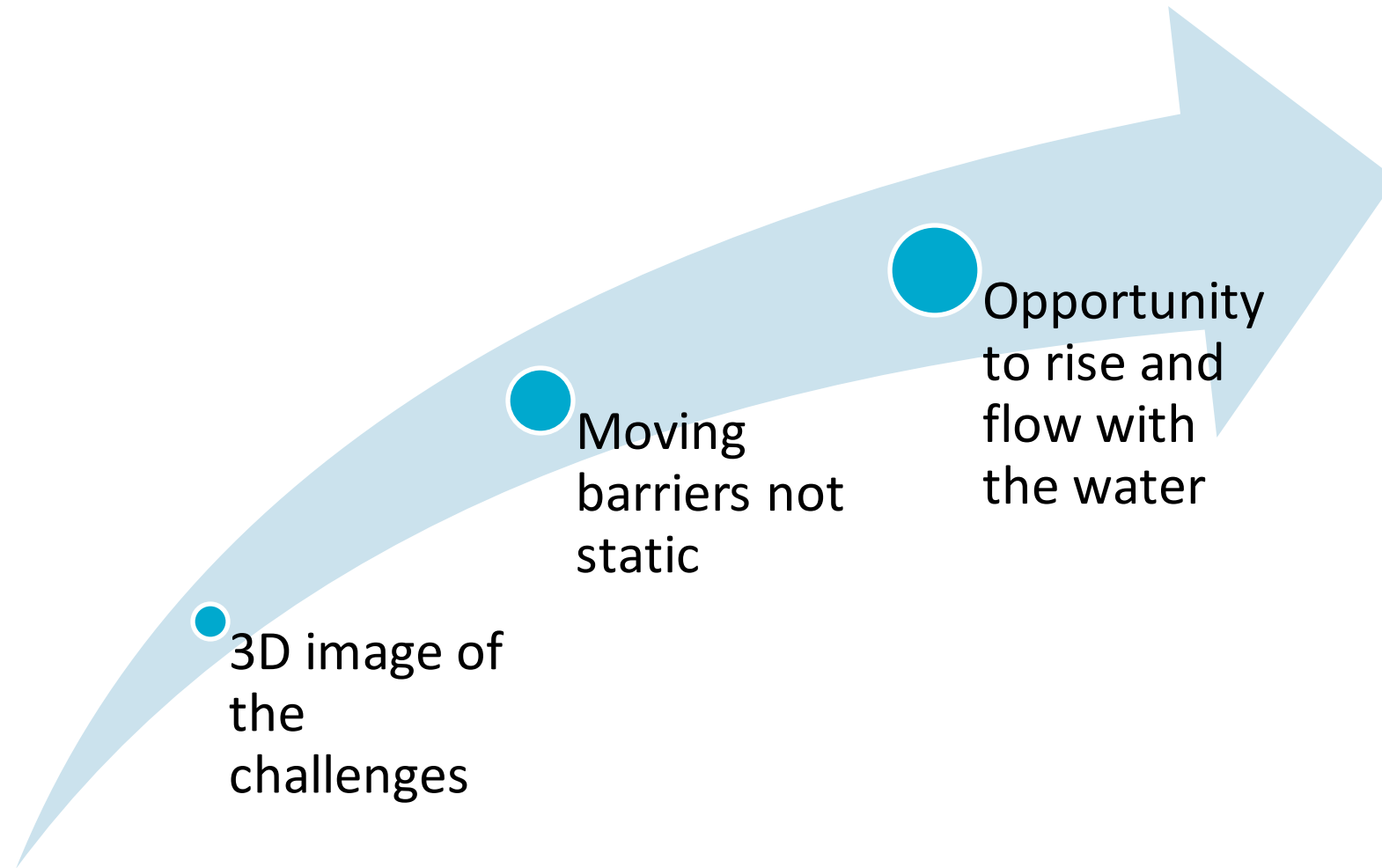
How female academics navigate the river




How women see themselves in the university



The river is a better metaphor for female academic leaders' journey



Contribution

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- 1 The first study about navigation of female academic leaders in Vietnamese contemporary context.
 - 2 Conceptual metaphor can shed light to how Vietnamese women frame and understand their lived experiences.
 - 3 Provide cultural perspectives of female academic leaders in Vietnam that add to feminist social theory.
 - 4 Reflect Western theories in the light of Asian context.
 - 5 Contribute to the body of knowledge on gender, leadership, and culture.

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Thank you very much

Your comments, questions, and feedback are greatly appreciated !

