

Women at work in Brazil

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Riassunto: *Il lavoro delle donne è sempre stato questione di dibattito, perché è storicamente diseguale rispetto alla controparte maschile. Questa disuguaglianza è più ampia nei paesi in via di sviluppo, dove il forte divario sociale comprende: reddito, istruzione, opportunità sociali, razza e origine etnica, tra gli altri. Parlare delle donne brasiliane è parlare di un mondo altamente diversificato e per ottenere un quadro complessivo, la discussione deve includere la questione razziale insieme ad altre forme di diversità. Questo articolo esamina l'evoluzione del lavoro femminile in Brasile utilizzando dei dati secondari per capire il ruolo delle donne sul mercato del lavoro. L'articolo privilegia una prospettiva manageriale che si concentra sull'uso delle competenze delle risorse umane nelle organizzazioni. Al fine di giustificare la nostra discussione forniamo esempi di buone pratiche nelle imprese brasiliane.*

Abstract: *Women's labour has always been matter of debates because it is historically unequal if compared to male counterpart. This inequality is wider in developing countries, where the strong social gap includes: income, schooling, social opportunities, race and ethnic background, among others. Brazilian women make a highly diversified world and in order to obtain a fair overall picture, the discussion has to include the racial question along with other forms of diversity. This paper examines the evolution of female labour in Brazil using secondary data to see the perspective role of women on the job market. It privileges a managerial perspective that focuses on the use of the skills of the human resources at organisations. In order to justify our discussion we provide examples of best practices in Brazilian companies.*

Keywords: *Gender, Women's Labour, Equal Opportunities, Human Resources Management.*

Introduction

Women's labour has always been matter of debates and protests, because it is historically unequal if compared to the male counterpart, especially in wages and recognition. Starting from the consideration that women have been on the labour market for long time, beginning from the two World Wars, the discussion continues to be relevant and contemporary.

Nowadays, even considering many progresses made in this field, female labour is still subject to inequalities, this explains why there are institutions such as wide the Gender Inequality Index of the United Nations still monitoring women's labour world.

This inequality is wider in developing countries, because of strong social gaps, including: income, schooling, opportunities, race and ethnic background among others. However, this gap is also found in developed countries that constantly strive to find a gender balance on the labour market and in the institutions that represent society.

Despite its policies of income redistribution implemented in the last decade, Brazil continues to be an unequal country. A significant number of women work as cleaners and maids for families and companies. These women often support large families, live in the outskirts of cities and have to commute every day for a job that does not support a living. The ones employed in agriculture inland, suffer in precarious life and work environments. Urban women, in the large Brazilian state capitals, begin to resemble their counterparts in the developed countries, in terms of taste and access to information. They study more than men and assume increasingly more prestigious positions on the job place.

Brazilian women make a highly diversified world. To obtain a fair overall picture, the discussion has to include the racial question along with other forms of diversity. For the first time in its history Brazil has a woman President, Dilma Rousseff presently in her second mandate, however, the country occupies only the 79th position in the Gender Inequality Index (2014). A woman in such a relevant social position required a long journey. But, even in this case, all critics addressed to her are actually intended to her predecessor (Luis Ignacio Lula da Silva), member of the same party and her political mentor. Much public opinion, supported by a part of the media, suggests that she does not have a personal opinion and that she needs a man to take decisions. In other instances, her supporters tend to picture the President as a mother and a giver, sustained by the welfare schemes and government handouts, such as the Bolsa Familia (Family support scheme). The legitimisation that belonged to personalities such as Ms Thatcher and Merkel is a long way to come.

This paper examines the evolution of female labour in Brazil using secondary data: research and data banks from Brazilian statistical institutions. Reading through this evolution will lead us to analyse the perspective role of women on the job market. This will privilege a managerial per-

spective that focuses on the use of the skills of the human resources of an organisation. In order to justify our discussion we provide examples of best practices in Brazilian companies in the last section of the paper.

Women and work: some figures

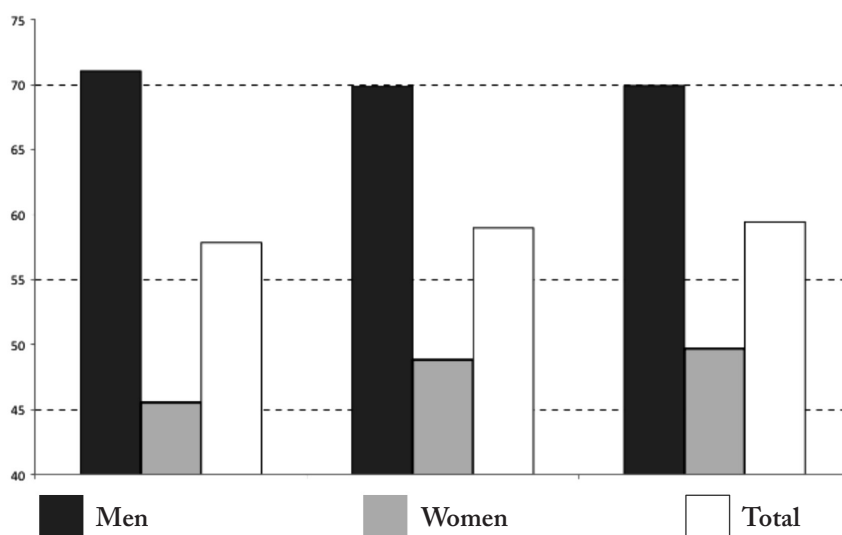
The increased and increasing participation of women in the Brazilian labour market is attributed to industrialisation and the social changes that it brought with it. Urban concentration reduced the birth rate, while divorce, feminist movements, among other elements, caused the changes that gradually took women on the job market. In recent years, income redistribution policies had a role in the repositioning of women on the labour market.

Brazil has just over 200 million inhabitants. According to *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística* (IBGE), in 2014 women made up 53% of the Brazilian population, over 50% of them participate of the economically active population (EAP). Graphic 1 below shows the evolution of employment by gender situation in previous years. At the beginning of the present decade, EAP was formed by workers with an average schooling of 6.3 years for men, while women had an average of 7.3.

This trend was recorded by studies on the increase of women's participation to the labour market by IBGE (2010), which pointedly showed an increase from 50% to 55%. The same studies showed a decrease in the wage gap between men and women, as well as job progress and wage treatment for the same position. In 2010, female wages corresponded to 68% of the male ones.

In 2009, the population in working age in Brazil (PIA) was 160 million, of this total just under 60% was part of the EAP. At that time, 86, 7 million were employed and 8.6 million unemployed. These data increased by 1.4% in PIA and 2.2% in the EAP, compared to the previous year, 2008. Figure 1 below shows how the feminine work has been crucial to the aforementioned variations. We note that the participation rate increased almost exclusively due to the feminine participation in the EAP, which went from 48.8% in 2008 to 49.7% in 2009, while the male participation remained stable. The increased of women participation to the labour market is confirmed by data that show an increase of 1.6 percentage points, between 2001 and 2009, while men's participation decreased by 1.2. (IPEA, 2010).

Graphic 1. Participation by gender – 2001, 2008 and 2009 (%).



Source: PNAD/IBGE

Another characteristic is that female work concentrates on some activities, such as teacher, hairdresser, nurse and others that are said to be “for women”. In these fields, women reach up to 80% of the workforce. As already mentioned, along with the concentration on certain jobs, women study more than men, however, they choose areas that have lower salaries. Therefore, they are employed in positions with lower remunerations.

A high concentration Brazilian women are also employed in paid domestic labour. In this case there is a majority of black and mixed race women, they have low education and the lowest wages on the market. In addition to this, most of the contracts are informal: 61% of the informal workers are women. Often, these women sustain a family, this typology of workers counted approximately 22 millions of female workers in 2010.

This picture brings another dilemma associated to female labour: the necessary time split between work and children care. The expression “*dupla jornada*” (double day) referred to women means that they come back home from work and still need to look after house and family. Nowadays, women face increased competition on the labour market and need to postpone marriage and maternity. Many of them sustain that they need to be more competitive than men to guarantee a spot in the sun within their companies.

Data show that in single child families women are the providers in 24% of the cases; in childless families they provide in 23% of the cases. They have such responsibilities in 87% of the single parent families with children. In the poorest communities, where most of the house maids and low paid workers come from, women who remain at home take care of the children of their neighbouring house maids, while they are at work. Thus, they create a sort of informal kindergartens, receiving small amount of money from their employed counterparts. In the same contexts, state schools often extend the schooling hours to look after the kids of mothers who are away for most of the day, keeping them away from unwanted contacts with drug dealers and other bad influences. However, and not infrequently, older children take care of the younger ones, with all the problems that may derive from a lax, and inexperienced, form of control. Some maternity rights are relatively recent in Brazil dating back to the Federal Constitution of 1988, which for example instituted a longer maternity leave.

Many public policies to raise and create income were implemented in recent years, this happened especially after the beginning of the 2000s; they favour especially women who sustain families. Apart from this, domestic labour adopted the same Labour Laws as any other job, which include rights that previously were not guaranteed; among them are the Christmas bonus, severance pay, and retirement contributions.

Labour and discrimination

Global Compact is a United Nations program to engage companies to align their operations to the principles of the human rights, labour rights, environment, anti-corruption, and other ethical actions to contribute to a better society. A good definition of discrimination in employment is available to support its ten principals: "Discrimination in employment and occupation means treating people differently or less favourably because of characteristics that are not related to their merit or the inherent requirements of the job. In national law, these characteristics commonly include: race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction, social origin, age, disability, HIV/AIDS status, trade union membership, and sexual orientation"¹.

These characteristics may lead to a direct or indirect discrimination. In the former case, discrimination is promoted by laws, norms and practices that prevent people from obtaining equal positions on the workplace. Nowadays, after

much restriction and ideological patrolling against discrimination, this kind of discrimination still exists, but it has been much inhibited especially in western societies. In the later, indirect discrimination is subtler, and can happen through apparently neutral laws and norms. Discrimination has also cultural roots, which make it look more or less natural in some societies.

From the labour market view, firms should restrain discrimination because it could cause disruptive situation on the workplace. Firms have no interest in conflicts due to discrimination, on one hand, because they can cause unnecessary tensions and losses to business, on the other hand, they can lead to loss talents, or worse, prevent the company from employing competent workers on reasons purely based upon prejudice. In short, discrimination degrades teamwork and damages the image and an overall performance of a company.

Considering all the battles over the years, and since it persists, one question becomes unavoidable: is women discrimination rooted in society? The overall working condition of women labour improved, however, lower wages, possibilities of career, and fewer chances of growth still persist. We will examine now some activities related to Human Resources Management (HRM) that may be strategically implemented to fight against women discrimination.

HRM and the discrimination of women

Studies about HRM try to establish links between Human Resource's practices and policies with the performance of the companies (PAAUWE, 2004, 2009; PAAUWE AND BOSELIE, 2005; LEGGE, 2005; GUEST *et al.*, 2003). Demonstrating the links among these variables makes a complex debate, consequently, in the last decades, HRM is gaining in strategic relevance in the companies. HRM proposals differ from the traditional vision of Human Resources, they focus in involvement on the job, flexibility and quality of the workforce. It results in lower rotation and absenteeism, causing a better performance for the company overall (GUEST, 1997).

We start from HRM and performance enhancing possibilities to discuss the inclusion of diversities within the organisations, specifically the women's. Therefore, we choose some strategic HR practices that can promote women insertion on the workplace and eliminate discrimination. These are activities that relate to HRM within the organisations: recruitment and selection, remuneration, maternity leave, job assignments and prospects, training and development, performance assessment and advancement, safety and health,

among others. Since this article deals with the development, and increase of wages, of female employment, we will focus on some of the processes that are intrinsically responsible for work progression.

Recruitment and selection

It is essential to keep clear and fair criteria of employment such as qualifications, competence and experience needed for the job place. Companies that have clear descriptions of roles and necessary requisitions for admission, show higher success in recruitment and selection, as well as in keeping good employees for longer.

The choice of personnel in the organisation has a strategic role, since the right personnel through its competences add value to the work and final product. Companies that have workers who share the same goals have better working environments, financial results and more competitiveness. Choosing the right personnel is a key element in the next definitions. Selection means choice but not discrimination. Higher variety in the available workforce increases the chances to find people that subscribe and contribute to the company's performance.

For example, some organisations discriminate female workers, especially in their reproductive years as they foresee a possible maternity leave with its associated costs. Another linked reason is that women take care of their children and therefore they are more likely to miss days of work. These variably deep beliefs often impede the company to employ some excellent workers.

Surely, selection and recruitment cannot be considered as isolated processes within HRM, since, as we will see they need to be associated to other functions to guarantee full working satisfaction. The company should offer some valid elements to capture and keep people; these are elements that stimulate workers to stay in the company. The selection of personnel is not a one way only track, since workers choose the company too; it is a good practice to give them reasons for it.

Remuneration

Remuneration, is often treated in a very confidential manner, almost a taboo, in the organisation, this may be linked to strategic reasons or privacy. This, in association with wage inequality, is in itself a good reason for the company not to reveal its workers' remuneration. Remuneration is the main

retribution for human efforts at work, and, despite all discussions that this affirmation may raise, it is a strong motivational tool. Remuneration forms changed with the time and are linked with strategic needs. They are increasingly associated with the ideas of incentive and performance.

Women are historically paid less than men for the same job, HRM in the organisations is essential to fight discrimination. Transparency and fair trade are essential for the employees, so that they feel respected and remunerated for their efforts on the workplace. This can be reached through defined and accessible systems of remuneration; and also, through programmes that award the merit, in detriment to favouritisms for specific groups.

Training and development

Training and development is probably HRM's activity with richest opportunities for inclusion and to fight discrimination at work. As we shall see in the following examples, training programs in organisations may favor workers learning a profession, upgrading the one they have and, consequently, raising their social status. For women with no professional preparation, who perform household chores or learned in practice, the possibility of participating in a program of qualification means a significant change in social status and salary.

From the perspective of organisations and the crescent complexity of market and work, lifelong learning is desirable as a way to keep workers up to date and committed to quality. To achieve these goals we can count on training programs, i.e. learning and improving skills and operational skills; or development programs, with more comprehensive results focused on functional progress to assume more technical or management positions involving work on creativity, broad concepts of business, leadership, self management carrier, and others.

The strategic management of HRM in organisations should aim at aligning individual competencies with organisational ones. For this, it is necessary to survey: 1) the personal characteristics that determine higher performances in the organisation; 2) the competences required by the company to improve its business in the medium and long term; 3) ways of linking these individual characteristics with organisational needs, targeting high performance at work.

In this way, women can climb more challenging positions in organisa-

tions; however, they need a favorable environment for equal opportunities. This process needs the encouragement of continuous training and development of key competences development, both personal and organisational. To do so, companies can promote actions such as: indicate women to managerial positions and decision-making positions; encourage women to participate in training programs and preparation for career opportunities at different levels; establish hiring and upgrading goals while maintaining a view to gender equality; and more.

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Performance assessment and advancement

This HRM activity provides feedback to all the above listed activities. It is the engine of growth of people in organisations because through performance evaluation can be proposed and reviewing hiring policies, compensation, training and development, promotions, among others. It is important that the performance evaluation is carried out in an environment of diversity, with clear criteria and with the firm intention of stimulating the growth of people in organisations. Encouraging and supporting the growth promoting greater involvement with work and foster a good environment in organisations.

Best Practices in organisation

The discussion on activities and possibilities to enhance the role of the woman in the companies, cannot be effective without examining examples of concrete implementation of these ideas. In this section we examine three projects to widen the participation of women on the labour market.

The building company²

The World Bank invited leaders of corporations from different sectors to the project WINvest (“Investing in Women”). A big Brazilian construction company adhered to the project through a programme of competence development, which increased the percentage of women in the working teams. The programme was named “*Acreditar*” (Believe), which was started in 2008 to recruit and train personnel for a large hydroelectric plant. Its goal was to provide the necessary qualification to inexperienced workers to work on construction sites. After this successful initial experience, the project was replicated in 28 other projects, in 12 Brazilian regions. In 2009, “*Acreditar*” was extended in other works of the company abroad.

The project was not initially thought exclusively for women’s training, it was conceived to be more inclusive, as much as possible. The training was offered as means to improve the local workforce so that the company could have from a wider choice of contracting skilled personnel. The company was surprised in counting that women were a tenth of the

participants of the training. This resulted in a higher than usual number of women employed on the construction site. Among them, there were some filled places usually considered “feminine”, like cooking and cleaning, however, the majority was employed for different technical duties in the construction of the hydroelectric station. The company, and the region of implementation, benefitted from the upgrade of the local workforce.

During the early years, the construction needed 18 thousand workers who came from many regions of Brazil. One initial survey showed that the region of the site could provide only 30% of the workforce needed. There was a lack of qualified workers in a region of 435,000 inhabitants with 25,000 unemployed. At the same time, the population showed great interest to participate to this great project. This coincided with the birth of “*Acreditar*”, which had the goal of employing 70% of the workers locally.

The training programme had two modes: basic and technical. The accomplishment of the technical mode qualified to work on the site, while not all duties needed the completion of the two modes, for them the basic course and training on the job were sufficient. Training properly started eight months before the possible employment of the workers. Therefore, even considering that not all trainees were contracted, they received a training course that could qualify them for other jobs in other work places.

Women became more than 10% of the workers on the site, while, in similar cases, they do not exceed 3 or 5%. Despite this, women’s activities included the use of heavy tools, driving trucks, soldering, masonry and other technical duties. Since these women previously did activities such like maids, hairdressers, saleswomen, waitresses, their earnings and perspectives were upgraded, wages passed from an average R\$ 800 to R\$ 2900 (plus social security).

Construction site’s supervisors related other less perceivable benefits coming from women work, like improvements in the job environment, women persistence in finding new solutions to problems and the involvement in the challenges coming from a new job. There are examples where 70% of the building team of a turbine were women, managed by women, who accomplished the task using 35% less time than teams composed mostly by men. Managers prefer to see these results not as a competition between genders, but as the result of diversity on the job place, which seems to increase productivity.

*Industry*³

The above examples come from a collection of cases realised by an institute of social responsibility that operates throughout Brazil. The institute promotes ethical actions in the companies and is responsible, among many other things, for a big annual survey about social actions in organisations. This survey is used by companies as benchmarking, for these types of social responsibility initiatives. We chose some examples among the many related about the theme of women appreciation at work.

In relation to the base of actions of companies social responsibility, and the promotion of equality between men and women on the workplace by the same institute, we found: opportunities equality; census of gender equality; equality among workers within the company; health insurance, welfare violence prevention; among other ones that involve the contact between public and private to ensure better standards of living to women and their families.

An excellent example is given by a cosmetics company present nationwide. The company promotes an image of appreciation of diversity, and also its products are customised for different races and ethnicity. Given the characteristics of the product, women are the majority of the workers, 65% employees and 60% of the management. Medical assistance is directed to this public, it includes nutritional orientation, alternative medicine, like acupuncture and homeopathy, psychotherapy, treatment of varicose veins and more. There is also a special programme to orientate future mothers about pregnancy, through meetings with support groups.

The company runs an educational foundation that offers child education to the employees' children under seven. This keeps mothers and children near each other in this delicate phase of children's growth. After this age parents can still count on the company's support for children education through a reimbursement on school expenditures. There are also initiatives to stimulate and reward women who stand out on the job.

A chemical industry developed a programme of employment of segments of minority groups and this social action was successful. Women have priority for job place disputed by a woman and a man who have equal qualifications, especially if they are black. will be given to the woman. 61% of the 270 employees are women, the goal is to reach 65% in the near future. This company also privileges female health, pregnancy support and children care. Furthermore, it has a programme that extends maternity leave and assists little children care.

Alternative forms of work: a co-working example

Many women postpone birth giving to pursue a career, when they finally have a child they look for alternative solutions to conciliate the two commitments. One solution could be co-working, that is, sharing office spaces, hiring it by the hours.

Co-working formula is not new, what is new is the opportunity for these women professionals to have room to look after their children. The kids can go to work with their mothers, on the workplace they will find supervisors, spaces to play, recreation and coexistence with other kids. Mothers, on the other hand, can stay near their children, yet far enough to be able to concentrate on their duties, otherwise difficult to happens in the home office.

The company structures have working collective rooms, meeting rooms for the clients, internet connection, and also kids playroom, languages courses, dance and other activities. The result is a community with much personal identification and chances of professional exchanges, where the sharing of kids caretaking. This identification could initially be conflictive, a temporary change of the professional course to promote the family. It is evident that this is one of the alternatives for women who occupy higher positions in the labour market and who can afford this kind of alternative.

Conclusion

This is a text that tackles the subject of women labour in Brazilian organisations from a general overview, it sheds light on some evidence about the inclusion of women in the labor market while proposing fresh actions, or reviewing them through the HRM theory. HR processes in organisations are important elements to foster proper exploitation of workers, as well as create a bridge between personal and organisational skills. Some examples of good practice in organisations were used to illustrate efforts to create a fertile environment for its employee's performance, and, at the same time, grow economically. Organisations that invest in feminine work have achieved good results, and have contributed to reduce the historically gap existing between feminine and masculine work, and have helped to reduce gender discrimination at work.

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Notes

¹ Consultado em <https://www.unglobalcompact.org/what-is-gc/mission/principles/principle-6>, em 10/06/2015.

² Case study obtained from World Bank Group (2010).

³ Case studies and information obtained from Ethos (2004).

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