Chapter 12
Women in Industrial Relations: Overcoming Gender Biases

Leire Gartzia, Alejandro Amillano, and Josune Baniandrés

Although the promotion of equality is central to the mainstream field of industrial relations, employment relationships and human resource policies continue to be designed according to the male breadwinner ideal. In this chapter, we examine from a gender perspective some of the antecedents and implications of this phenomenon. We review evidence that many conditions of employment such as wages, job security, or access to power positions have particular negative effects for female employees. At the same time, we underscore the many economic and cultural transformations occurred in the labor market, society and work configurations, which bring new opportunities for women's advancement in employment conditions. In relation to this, we identify strategies that might help women overcome current obstacles and gender biases, and highlight the role of (and benefits for) IR agents in such transformation toward gender equality.

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In modern democratic societies, work is not merely an economic activity with material payments but a fully human experience with psychological and social rewards. In this environment, industrial relations (IR) are increasingly more complex and require a growing entitlement of male and female employees to receive fair treatment and opportunities and to have input into decisions that affect their daily lives

L. Gartzia (✉) • J. Baniandrés
Deusto Business School, Bilbao, Spain
e-mail: leire.gartzia@deusto.es; josune.baniandres@deusto.es

A. Amillano
Faculty of Psychology and Education, University of Deusto, Bilbao, Spain
e-mail: alejandro.amillano@deusto.es

(Budd 2004; Befort and Budd 2007). Building trust and constructive conflict management among employers and employees is also essential in this new context in order to enhance the effective use of work resources and increase competitiveness and economic development (Elgoibar et al. 2012; García et al. 2015).

In this chapter we map theoretical and empirical perspectives that address how these challenges are not gender neutral. It is argued that the promotion of equality should be central to the mainstream field of employment relations and human resource policies. Several key factors are highlighted, which drive this challenge. On the one hand, data is presented about the many transformations that have occurred in the environment in which organizations operate, which have stimulated a vibrant interest in addressing not only inequalities at work but also how those inequalities are related to employee-employer relations and ultimately affect performance (Desvaux and Devillard 2008; International Labor Organization (ILO) 2012). On the other hand, we review evidence showing that there are still many conditions of employment with particular negative effects for female employees. These inequalities are argued to be inconsistent with the many transformations that have occurred in the labor market regarding gender roles, which have created new workplace configurations in which women can bring new opportunities for organizational development. To address these challenges, we first review some of the antecedents and implications of IR systems from a gender perspective and then identify strategies that might help IR agents –namely, policy makers, organizations, unions, and female workers themselves- not only to promote gender equality but also to see gender as a valuable tool to develop more effective IR systems.

Changes and Challenges in the Field of Industrial Relations

In recent decades, organizations have gone through many transformations that have modified the nature of IR. These changes include globalization and the growing expansion of markets, which have driven notorious variations in the way organizations operate and are interconnected around the world (Kelly 1998; Kochan 2008). As the global economy expanded, the emergent weight of service-based economies has also amplified the relevance of relational knowledge as a key feature that characterizes current work value (Fletcher 1995; Kochan 2008).

These changes have modified employment configurations within organizations and challenge traditional IR policies. Business leaders and human resource managers need to find, more than ever, ways of attracting, retaining and motivating talented employees trough appropriate employment relations (Beechler and Woodward 2009). As such, companies from a variety of sectors require innovative alternatives to the traditional IR systems, which are still anchored in outdated, simplistic ideas of work and the conflicting nature of employee-employer relations in organizations (Kochan 2008).

Relevant to the current focus on IR and equality, a particularly important characteristic of current employment systems is the greater involvement of employees in decision making (Budd 2004). In modern organizations, work is undertaken by highly educated, smart male and female employees who have sophisticated

technological, emotional and relational skills. These employees not only seek to self-realize at work but also to be treated fairly and be entitled to have opportunities to make decisions in aspects that affect their daily lives (Robbins and Judge 2014).

One of the most basic mechanisms through which organizations can build appropriate employment relationships in current IR systems is by promoting *efficiency, equity,* and *voice* (Budd 2004) (See also Jordaan and Cillie, Chap. 9 in this volume). Efficiency refers to the effective use of scarce resources and constitutes an important objective of IR because of its implications for competitiveness, economic development, jobs and economic prosperity. Because markets are competitive, organizations need to focus on organizational efficiency in order to be sustainable and attractive for male and female employees.

Contemporary employment relations also require voice, defined as the ability to have meaningful employee input into decisions, and includes both individual and collective forms (Budd 2004). Finally, equity entails fairness in the distribution of economic rewards (such as equality in wages and benefits), the administration of employment policies (such as nondiscriminatory selection and promotion processes), and the provision of employee security (such as safety standards and unemployment insurance). These characteristics are central in current employment relationships and the mainstream modern IR theory (Budd 2004).

Industrial Relations from a Gender Perspective

Whereas the notions of voice and equality constitute nuclear elements in IR theory and practice, employment relations remain unfair for women. For instance, there is a disproportionately greater occupation of temporary, part-time and forms of precarious work conditions by women compared to men (Bradley and Healey 2008; Plantenga and Remery 2006). Far from being corrected, these inequalities are even amplified in contemporary IR systems, in which a substantial number of part-time and temporary jobs are mainly occupied by women (Bradley and Healey 2008; Plantenga and Remery 2006). According to Eurostat recent data, 32.4% of female employees aged 15–64 working in the European Union in 2013 were on part-time jobs, against the 8.7% of men (Eurostat 2015b). Similarly, according to the last available US labor force data by the Bureau of Labor Statistics more than 60% of part-time workers of 16 or more years old are women (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2015).

Another important obstacle that women face in modern IR systems is their prevailing lower salaries compared to those of men, with a noteworthy concentration of women in low-paid and low-skilled jobs (Bradley and Healey 2008; Plantenga and Remery 2006). According to available data from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in its 2015 employment database (OECD 2015), the average gender wage gap was 15.5% in 2013 for full-time employees, calculated as the difference between male and female median wages and divided by males' median wages. Available data from the European Union also show that the gender pay gap calculated as the difference between the average gross hourly earnings

of male and female paid employees as a percentage of average gross hourly earnings of male paid employees was 16,4 % in 2013 (Eurostat 2015a).

Compared to men, women also bear the brunt of the incompatibility between work practices and familiar responsibilities more intensely (Liff 2003), given the prevailing association between domestic functions and the female gender role. The most recent available data from the OECD based on time-use surveys show that men spend in average 324 min per day in paid work, whereas women spend 211 min. In the case of unpaid work, women spend 275 min per day, while men only spend 141 min (OECD 2015). These differences are also reflected in maternity and paternity leave policies, which are designed in a way that they reinforce women's greater assumption of domestic roles. According to the OECD family database, women have on average 47, 9 weeks of paid leave after childbirth, while men only have 8,9.

The stereotypically masculine definition of workplaces and the incompatibility between work and family life in contemporary organizations also impede the promotion of more egalitarian proportions of men and women in leadership and decision making positions (European Commission 2012). The fields in which women are underrepresented are varied, including not only leadership roles but also participation in relevant IR positions such as trade unions or collective and centralized bargaining processes (Carley 2009; Wajcman 2000). One of the most relevant reasons for women's underrepresentation in decision making roles is the so-called "think manager, think male" stereotype (Schein 1973), according to which leader roles are associated more with the male than the female gender role. The meta-analysis developed by Koenig et al. (2011) showed consistent evidence that such masculine view of leadership remains. Indeed, women representation in IR forums, decision-making groups and leadership positions has only slowly increased in recent decades (European Commission 2012).

The preponderance of masculine features and male dominance is also present in collective bargaining and traditional IR processes, which often have a male typical worker as a reference (Wajcman 2000). In particular, the field of IR has been traditionally built over the notion of "a white, able-bodied, heterosexual man with a wife and family" as a typical worker (Liff 2003, p. 420). Such implicit assumptions and biases about employment maintain inequalities between male and female employees. As a consequence, IR ideals are based on stereotypically masculine values and procedures (Wajcman 2000). Similarly, there is an underrepresentation of women in collective bargaining and employment relations (Bradley and Healey 2008; Carley 2009).

As Forrest (1993) pointed out, the clear missing point in the IR literature is the analysis of gender relations as power relations in which the traditional power inequality in favour of men and stereotypically masculine features is evidenced. The review of the IR literature that we performed supports this observation. From the 17 edited general IR textbooks initially reviewed for the current chapter, dating from 1982 to 2015, only two of them presented at least one chapter specifically dedicated to gender or diversity including gender issues (i.e., Liff 2003). The other fifteen books only provided secondary allusions in some chapters (i.e., Kelly 1998).

Such omission of female-related issues is critical for IR theory, which is aimed at analysing power relations in which inequalities are evidenced.

Taken together, previous research suggests that, compared to men, women encounter more obstacles in reaching justice and equality in IR systems. These particular barriers that women face in IR systems are inconsistent with the many socioeconomic changes that have taken place in recent decades and the steadily growing incorporation of women to paid work. As Bradley and Healey (2008) pointed out, the social and economic changes since 1950s and the incorporation of women into the paid-workforce have indeed created a feminisation of the workforce. In the European Union, the participation of women in paid work has shown a steady increase during recent years.

The gender employment gap, defined as "the difference in the employment rate between men and women" had fallen from 30 % in 1980, to 16.7 % in 2000 (Pissarides et al. 2003). This gap, however, was incremented in more than 12 percentage points in average in the case of women with two or more children (Pissarides et al. 2003). Nowadays, share of female employment in total employment, namely the percentage of female employees with respect to the total number of employees, oscillates between 38,5 % and 49,3 % among 14 OECD countries according to the most recent ILOSTAT database (ILO 2015b).

These changes in the sex composition of the workforce seem to require redesigning organizational policies and practice (Liff 2003). Similarly, the beliefs and assumptions about gender roles embedded into current IR structures and practices need to be analysed so that the female worker ideal is also representative of employment relations and women constitute representative IR agents. The concentration of women in low-paid jobs, the barriers for women advancement to decision making positions and their underrepresentation in employment relations and bargaining impede such transformations. So, how can these obstacles be overcome?

The Paths to Gender Equality in IR Systems

In the following pages, we present arguments that the obstacles women face in IR can only be overcome when gender equality is promoted simultaneously by all the relevant IR agents, namely, organizations, unions, policy makers, and (female) workers themselves. Only when these forces work together, IR systems are likely to promote gender equality in employment relationships. To present our arguments, we draw from Budd's (2004) conceptualization of three of the most relevant IR theoretical approaches (i.e., *pluralist, critical,* and *unitarist*), which may serve to better understand the connections and interdependencies between IR agents in the promotion of gender equality. The *pluralist* model recognises a set of competing interests among employers and employees derived from power differences in favour of employers, which underscore the difficulties to reach agreements between employees and employers (Budd 2004). The *critical* model approach draws from

feminism and sociological theories such as marxism and underscores the inherent conflictive nature of employment relations on the unequal power relations present in the society. In the opposite side, the *unitarist* model to IR assumes that employers and employees share similar objectives and thus their interests are consistent with each other (Budd 2008). The latter viewpoint advocates fair treatment of employees to enhance organizational welfare and is adopted by most organizational behaviour and human resource researchers and practitioners. It basically assumes that increasing the participation and autonomy of the employees would ideally serve to reduce the current conflictive connotation of employment relationships.

The viewpoints behind these theoretical perspectives influence the conceptualization of the relationships between employees (both in their individual and collective forms) and decisions makers in organizations, which is relevant in our analysis of IR systems from a gender perspective. A general interpretation of the foundations of the pluralist and critical models suggest that, in current IR, the interests of women in organizations (i.e., the underrepresented, discriminated group) would be conceived to compete with the interests of the organization. Such perspective would lead to a positive view of the role of external agents (i.e., unions and/or policy makers) in defining actions and policies aimed at promoting gender-equality in organizations. As such, a key challenge for gender equality in IR would be to increase the extent to which external agents can generate changes in organizations toward a fairer treatment of female employees.

In the opposite side, the foundations of the unitarist model suggest that a key challenge to promote gender equality in IR would be to increase the extent to which organizational managers and human resource practitioners are able to see the advantages of having a representative number of contented, trustful and participative women at work. In other words, if organizations are able to increase the extent to which female employees are entitled to have input into decisions that affect their professional and personal lives, they are likely to produce more effective workplaces; female employees are only likely to be fully effective when given fair treatment and voice.

From an integrative viewpoint, the promotion of gender equality in IR involves the approaches adopted in the pluralist, critical and unitarist models. Accordingly, the functions of all IR agents, namely policy makers, organizations and (female) employees in their individual and collective forms, should be interdependent and complementary in the promotion of gender equality. Furthermore, IR agents would require mutual trust and cooperation. Such integrative approach might serve to further recognize how IR structures depend on each other and need to unify their actions to eliminate gender barriers and to avoid perpetuating female discrimination. Importantly, such approach might also serve to underscore the effects of gender discrimination on efficiency, thereby placing gender equality more at the center of IR in the practice. In the following pages, we look at the specific role of each IR agent, as well as the specific ways in which they can contribute to their own development through the promotion of gender equality.

The Role of Policy Makers

One of the most evident ways in which gender equality can be promoted in IR relations is by establishing minimum standards by law (e.g., maximum gender wage gaps, maximum/minimum number of male/female managers, protections against discriminatory policies, or work-family balance standards). Because laws and regulations developed by states and public institutions have a direct effect on economic and social life (see Gartzia and Lopez-Zafra 2014, 2016, for the example of Spain), standards imposed by law are likely to have notorious effects on female employees' voice, equality and effectiveness. For instance, the European Commission has repeatedly implemented quota laws and regulations to have a minimum 40 % of women in relevant parliamentary positions, as well as in boards of listed European companies.

Although women are still in a numerical minority in relevant organizational positions, these quotas have resulted in remarkable increases of women in management positions (European Commission 2012), which may subsequently improve women's position and influence in organizations. In relation to proportion of women in institutions such as trade unions, results can also be promising and calls have been made to extend the use of quotas to unions and social dialogue arenas (Briskin and Muller 2011). Legislations about quotas in such areas might increase the representation of women in collective bargaining, in which women are clearly underrepresented (Kirton and Healey 2008; Carley 2009). Yet, these actions should be implemented with caution. First, the presence and participation of women in unions should not be limited to situations in which the issues raised are of particular concern to women (Lim et al. 2002). Second, gender awareness training programs should accompany the implementation of quota policies, given the "stigma of incompetence" that is often attributed to women when affirmative action policies take place (Heilman, Block and Lucas 1992).

The European Union has defined legislative guidelines and priorities concerning these and other gender-related concerns, such as the reduction of the gender pay gap, support of work-life balance, and the decrease of gender stereotypes at work (i.e., Briskin and Muller 2011). These legislations are important because, according for instance to the first report of the European Commission on IR, the gender pay gap "tends to be greater in the absence of a minimum wage and of centralized wage setting" (Dell'Aringa 2001, p. 149). Policies also offer useful frameworks to include actions at different levels, including availability and dissemination of information, development of the infrastructure with respect to equal pay, more integrated systems of wage setting and legal measures enforcing equal pay (Plantenga and Remery 2006).

Other central field of action for policy makers regarding gender equality is the conciliation between family and work. Consistent with concerns in this area, the growing interdependence between the family and work spheres has led to the development of specific policies that serve to manage work-life balance concerns and to promote a better combination of the different roles that people play in their lives (Kochan 2008). Gregory and Milner (2009) found that such work-life balance policies are strongly related to policies about equal opportunities in the workplace.

Gender mainstreaming (i.e., the process through which a gender perspective is transversally incorporated to policy-making) is also a particularly relevant strategy to engender changes towards equality in the medium and long term through action in different areas (European Commission 2007).

In summary, gender-related legislations can provide a legal framework that favours the emergence of equality in organizations (Bradley and Healey 2008; Briskin and Muller 2011). As such, policy makers constitute relevant IR social partners. Although in recent years international policies have contemplated gender and equality as basic principles of IR, this is not always transferred to practice (Bradley and Healey 2008; Kirton and Greene 2005). Policies are still to a great degree designed for the male breadwinner worker (Kochan 2008), and most IR policies still perpetuate separation of work and family life and the traditional association of women with domestic roles, as for instance giving priority to maternity over paternity leave policies (Torres et al. 2008). Because policy makers have the responsibility of building more participative and democratic IR systems, they ought to find more innovative and ground-breaking legal frameworks that favour equality in organizations.

The Role of (and Benefits for) Organizations

Consistent with the powerful effects that policies and legislations can produce on IR, the promotion of gender equality in organizations is often linked to gender equality legal requirements. This is related to the fact that gender is often conceived as a corporate social responsibility concern and, as such, it is defined primarily in response to social, legal and ethical expectations (Carroll 1979). As Briskin and Muller (2011) pointed out, "some collective agreements simply repeat legal provisions and do not go beyond statutory requirements" (p.9). Given the tensions between the legal, ethical and economic responsibilities (Agle et al. 1999), restraining gender-related action to legal and ethical motivators can be deleterious for organizations.

To challenge this limiting viewpoint, organizations might benefit from conceiving gender as a strategic issue related to competitiveness, rather than *only* a social justice issue. Indeed, the positive effects that gender equality can bring to organizations in terms of enhanced effectiveness are diverse. In current workplaces in which social responsibility and justice are central in IR, the participation of women in relevant organizational positions can have an effect on firms' reputation (Bear et al. 2010). In many countries, for instance, the proportion of women in management is associated with the companies' likelihood to be included in lists of "ethical" companies (Bernardi et al. 2009) or to be viewed as an example of corporate citizenship (Larkin et al. 2012). In relation to this, there is also evidence that clients are sensible to the diversity policy, initiatives and situation of organizations (Braithwaite 2010). As such, gender discrimination can create bad publicity and damage the reputation of many companies (Catalyst 2010).

Previous research has offered a convincing depiction that gender equality can also bring added value to organizations by generating more competitive workplaces. The so-called "female advantage" perspective (see Eagly et al. 2014 for a review)

suggests that women adopt to a greater extent than men leadership styles that are effective, thereby suggesting that women and stereotypically feminine characteristics are a valuable resource for organizations associated with superior corporate performance (Desvaux and Devillard 2008). The greater likeability of female leaders to develop democratic leadership styles and behaviors of individualized consideration (Eagly and Johnson 1990; Van Emmerik et al. 2010) make women a potentially value-added resource in current IR systems.

This purported relationship between the female gender role and leadership effectiveness has stimulated interest among practitioners and managers, who have made gender an increasingly valued variable for personnel hiring and training. The attention given to this topic has been influenced by the growing relevance of the relational and communal aspects of leadership in the management literature (Avolio et al. 2009). Factors such as participative decision making (Dirks and Ferrin 2002) or organizational justice (Korsgaard et al. 1995) are significant predictors of the degree of trust that workers have in their managers and co-workers. Note that trust is a key concept in IR research and comprises "the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another" (Rousseau et al. 1998, p. 395). In this context in which cooperation and a sense of mutual trust and interdependence is central for organizational effectiveness, organizations need employees and IR agents who are able to display interpersonally oriented and cooperative behaviors and enhance employees' sense of community and belongingness (De Cremer and van Knippenberg 2002). Because these variables are associated more with femininity-linked than with masculinity-linked roles (Eagly et al. 1995; Gartzia and van Engen 2012; Gartzia and van Knippenberg 2015), the representation of women in decision making positions is, in principle, a valuable resource for organizations, even in situations of crisis (e.g., Gartzia, Ryan, Balluerka and Aritzeta 2012).

There are also other ways in which gender equality can be beneficial for the promotion of more effective IR systems. Gender-related concerns such as achieving a balance between one's personal and professional lives has become a relevant topic for organizations following feminist requirements, but it is associated with relevant work outcomes such as job satisfaction and individual performance (Amstad, Meier, Fasel, Elfering, and Semmer 2011). Whereas this challenge is particularly relevant for female workers given their greater assumption of domestic roles (OECD 2015), the relevance of overcoming incompatible role pressures from the work and family domains is also detrimental to male employees' responses. As such, the development of policies that serve to better conciliate family and work life demands such as teleworking, child-care facilities or broader actions aimed at reducing the burden of domestic tasks constitutes a central challenge in the current IR context (Kochan 2008).

Finally, the benefits that gender equality can bring to organizations are not only linked to women's potential ability to promote more effective relations in IR systems or instrumental objectives such as gaining firm reputation, but also to gender equality *per se*. Adams' (1965) equity theory established that people work more effectively in situations of equity, given that perceived unfairness in the distribution of economic rewards or the administration of employment policies (such as nondiscriminatory hiring) reduces motivation (see Carrell and Dittrich 1978 for a review, see also Gosset 2011). When people perceive inequity in the distribution of

resources, motivation is diminished (Austin and Walster 1974), which ultimately influences employees' performance (Pritchard et al. 1972). Consistent with this approach, coping with gender-related forms of discrimination such as the gender pay gap has been highlighted as one of the most important IR work areas in organizations (Dell'Aringa 2001), due to the inherent effects that such inequality generates among workers.

The Role of (and Benefits for) Workers Representatives

The function of collective bargaining and trade unions is factually essential to promote more effective and egalitarian IR systems. Because efficiency requires cooperative IR relations based on cooperation and mutual trust (Budd 2004), trade unions and other worker representatives in collective bargaining have the particular challenge of generating a more cooperative partnership among policy makers, organizations, and employees. In particular, there is a growing need to build new structures and dynamics that warrant the voice of the growingly diverse workforce beyond the traditional relations between labor unions and organizations, finding new forms of collective bargaining and more participative production systems (Edwards 2003).

In order to promote efficiency, equity, and voice, new employment configurations also require relationships based on trust and cooperative conflict management among IR agents (Kelly 1998). In the IR and collective bargaining literature, trust is increasingly believed to improve employment relations among employees, their representatives, organizations and decision makers by generating a more cooperative partnership (Elgoibar et al. 2011; European Commission 2013). Indeed, there is accumulated evidence supporting the relationship between trust and cooperative behaviour (Dirks and Ferrin 2001) and between trust and cooperative employment relations (Kim and Kim 2012). A recent meta-analysis by Balliet and Van Lange (2013) showed that this relationship is even stronger when there is a larger conflict of interest, suggesting that trust is even more relevant "in situations in which preferences tend to conflict rather than align" (Balliet and Van Lange 2013, p. 1106).

The notion of "social dialogue" is also relevant here (see ILO 2015a). This concept refers to "all types of negotiation, consultation or simply exchange of information between, or among, representatives of governments, employers and workers, on issues of common interest relating to economic and social policy" (ILO 2015a). Social dialogue is conceived to be a key process in building trust-based and cooperative employment relationships (García et al. 2015), and thereby to achieve efficiency, equity, and voice. For instance, a recent study showed that a perception of trust in the IR climate was related to more cooperative behaviour and the achievement of better agreements between employee representatives and people in management roles (García et al. 2015). Trust has also been related to lower levels of labor disputes and the active utilization of labor-management committees (Kim and Kim 2012).

The challenge of building trust-based employment relations and more participative and democratic IR systems is ultimately related to IR agents' ability to display communal orientations, namely to enhance a sense of community and to focus on social relationships (Abele and Wojciszke 2007). Due to the traditional distribution of men and women into different social roles, these features are more consistent with the female than the male gender role (Eagly 1987; Gartzia and van Knippenberg 2015; Sidanius and Pratto 2001). Compared to men, women tend to emphasize to a greater extent the relational and communal aspects of behaviour that are required for cooperative orientations (Wildschut et al. 2003). Women also tend to frame their environment as a system of more cooperative relations than men and thus less frequently engage in competitive interactions (Sidanius and Pratto 2001).

Regarding trust maintenance and reparation, women's general concern about relationships has proven to facilitate the maintenance and restoration of trust following a trust violation or recurrent untrustworthy actions (Haselhuhna et al. 2015). Furthermore, women have shown to be more effective than men facilitating a not imposed agreement between disputants as a mediator third party (Benharda et al. 2010). Although these findings have not been consistently replicated (e.g., Balliet et al. 2011; Elgoibar et al. 2014), they overall suggest that women are potentially relevant IR agents to transform employment relationships towards a more cooperative and trust-based social partnership.

Confirming this viewpoint, there is evidence that at least in relation to the inclusión of gender issues in the agenda, female representation has significant (positive) effects (Waddington 2011). Similarly, the presence of women in representative positions in trade unions seems to be positively related to the success of initiatives aimed at promoting relevant IR gender-related topics such as work-life balance (Gregory and Milner 2009). Therefore, the promotion of gender equality might be helpful in developing more effective IR systems. In other words, trade unions may want to conceive gender equality not only as a key goal in their actions, but also as a relevant instrument to build more effective relations in broader fields of employment.

Opportunities for Women in Current IR Systems

One of the most straightforward conclusions drawn from the evidence presented so far is that the prevalence of gender discrimination and inequality in IR systems should be regarded not only as a women's issue, but rather as a problem that also policy makers, organizations and unions face if they want to enhance their own functioning. Because IR is inherently linked to a wide range of topics that are gendered in nature, gender should become an integral part of IR theory and practice (Wajcman 2000). The revision of IR systems to better meet current challenges entails the suppression of gender-biased mechanisms that maintain power inequalities and the prevalence of masculine behaviours and ideals at work (Kirton and Greene 2005; Wajcman 2000).

Although organizations generally remain male-dominated scenarios where women face particularly restraining barriers such as wage gaps, difficulties to balance work and family responsibilities or the *glass ceiling*, the good news is that modern organizations are unreservedly forced to integrate gender in their functioning. Civil rights legislation around the world has pushed and will continue pushing organizations to cover new female employees and to endorse equitable managerial opportunities to increase women's access to managerial careers. Acknowledging the relevance of gender in IR, gender-related issues are also on the agendas of intergovernmental institutions generating encouraging outcomes that flourish as new equality policies (Briskin and Muller 2011), and gender concerns are also growingly more relevant in IR policies (ILO 2012).

Although IR remains a male-dominated area, in recent decades women have also increased their presence in parliamentary positions and public institutions where legislations are made (Briskin and Muller 2011), as well as in leadership roles that were traditionally occupied by men in organizations (Millward et al. 2000). This greater presence of women in decision making positions has been accompanied by a greater value of stereotypically feminine characteristics in organizations and the de-masculinization of the leadership ideal (Eagly et al. 2014; Koenig et al. 2011). In this context in which routes to gender equality are more promising than some decades ago, female employees should be optimistic about their functions and potential achievements in IR systems. Nonetheless, women should likewise be aware of the particular drawbacks they face due to the prevailing sexism present in most societies, which permeate IR systems. In these circumstances, female employees should take an active role, even in the most favourable conditions in which the implication of organizations, decision makers and trade unions is high.

Previous research has offered a number of strategies that women can put into practice to improve their status and position in IR systems, including their involvement in trade unions and other representation groups (Briskin and Muller 2011). The participation of women in trade union committees designed specifically for women has also been highlighted as a useful strategy to promote gender equality in organizations (Parker and Foley 2010), as well as to address specific gender-related issues such as part-time or temporary job conditions (Broadbent 2007). Because role models are also relevant in providing motivation and a vision for one's own behaviour (Latu et al. 2013), paying attention to successful female referents can also be a useful strategy to neutralize the negative effect that gender norms and sexism can have on women's expectations (Streets and Major 2014).

An additional issue is whether women should act in a "feminine" or "masculine" way in their repertoire of work behaviours. Because women face a "double bind" that prevents them from being either too stereotypically feminine or stereotypically masculine (Eagly et al. 1992), female employees are likely to be better off in IR when they integrate both functions in line with an androgynous style. For instance, the use of self-promotion strategies such as speaking proudly about one's achievements and making internal rather than external attributions for such achievements has proven to increase women's visibility in organizations (Metz and Kulik 2014). Yet, because underscoring own merit violates the feminine gender role, women

should find it helpful to accompany these behaviors with other female-typed, communal orientations in order to reduce prejudice against them.

These strategies can be particularly useful in selection, promotion, or compensation processes, in which stereotyped views of people are more likely to occur and to have negative consequences for women. According to Streets and Major (2014) one way in which female employees can overcome this setback is by emphasizing the expression of individuating information such as one's career history and other objective data that might serve to counterbalance the use of stereotypes as a detrimental source of information.

All in all, the most important challenge for women in modern IR systems is to generate new configurations of employment conditions in which women's concerns and expectations are central in the worker ideal. The increasing presence of women in organizations and the transformations in modern employment configurations toward relations based on trust and cooperative conflict management can accompany these transformations by challenging traditional IR policies. New forms of social dialogue based on mutual trust are also gaining growing relevance in the IR field and these requirements are in principle more in line with the feminine roles. As such, the promotion of gender equality constitutes a powerful means to provide a voice for workers that is adjusted to the challenges that new work conditions pose, as well as a means to go beyond the traditional collective bargaining relationship.

Gender equality and IR effectiveness play a reciprocal relationship in which one needs the other and whereby policy-making processes also have an important role. The challenge that IR agents thus face is to integrate the benefits of gender equality in IR theory and action. As long as the barriers for women advancement and representation persist in organizations, employment relations are unlikely to provide efficiency, equity, and voice, and organizations are unlikely to fully use their employees' potential.

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