Postmodern Maritime Human Resources Management – Amending the Maritime Labor Convention with Gender Requirements

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Abstract: Postmodernism changes in the organizational behavior contribute to improving maritime sector, strongly affected by gender bias. In this paper is presented a study on the effects of intergovernmental external requirements, namely the Maritime Labor Convention (MLC), on human resource practices. The paper contains arguments for updating legal instruments and norms on maritime labor, with postmodern gender requirements. There are identified concrete steps needed for amending MLC with requirements necessary for improving the work of seafarer women.

The results of the study are useful to establish further effective strategies on recruitment, retention of seafarers and on providing equal career opportunities for women seafarers. Beside a strategy for career attraction and development for women seafarers, updating MLC normative with gender requirements represent also an effective solution for women empowerment.

Keywords: *women seafarers; labor; ILO; IMO; shipping; maritime transport.*

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1. Introduction

Compared to onshore human resources management, maritime human resources management has several particularities, occurred mainly by the particular working environment. Seafarers work in long voyages of several months, away from their family, friends and social communities. They work day and night in the same enclosed and definite space - the ship. In most of the cases, during long voyages medium age ships cannot provide any internet or phone communication facilities. In such situations ships are perceived as total institutions by the one that live within. These are the cases when seafarers have no mean of communication with the onshore society and they feel isolated, especially if they work in multinational crews with further language and cultural barriers. Such particular conditions of seafarers' societal separation decrease the interest and the motivation for maritime labor and especially the interest and motivation of women for a seafaring career on board ship. Young generations, Millennials and Generation X of both genders prefer to work on shore, integrated within postmodernism social communities and familiar environment. In such conditions is manifested an acute decrease of maritime workforce.

A change in modern maritime human resources management is timely necessary, as in the next 10 years the world merchant fleet is expected to grow, together with the demand for seafarers. According to BIMCO and ICS Manpower Report (2015), the global demand for seafarers in 2015 was estimated at 1,545,000 seafarers, with the industry requiring approximately 790,500 officers and 754,500 ratings. In such conditions, Maritime Education and Training (MET) institutions have an important role in providing officers, as the current supply-demand situation reveals a shortage of 16,500 officers. The report also indicates the anticipated trend of an overall shortage in the supply of officers occurs despite improved recruitment and training levels and reductions in officer wastage rates over the past five years.

There were made previous IMO and United Nation's initiatives in promoting women to join the shipping sector, through *the United Nations Decade for Women* (1976-1985) and *IMO Women in Development Programme* implemented starting with 1989.

However, modernism male-centred workplace culture and stereotypes from the maritime sector continues to influence in postmodernism the women's choice to join or leave the sector. Though

there are encouraging signs that the number of women in maritime professions is increasing, yet shipping remains a male-dominated industry.

2. Literature review on postmodernism, maritime human resources management and gender

The new approach of this paper is to specify the particularities of postmodern human resources within the process of modernization, taking into account that postmodernism and transmodernism are often perceived as forms of the modern society. Such particularities are further discussed considering stringent societal needs, in particular for the maritime sector, as the gender bias.

Modernism and postmodernism are two critical perspectives in organisational and human resource management studies. Several theory specialists in postmodernism perceive postmodern organization as a process (Cooper & Burrell, 1988, Hardt & Negri, 2000; Hassard & Parker, 1993) or as a phenomenon (Boje, Gephart, & Thatchenkery, 1996; Boje & Dennehey, 1999; Clegg, 1990; Nguyen, 2010). Some authors have discussed on postmodernism transformations in advanced capitalism under globalization impact: social factories, immaterial labor, creative industries and cultural work: “globalization, information and communication technologies, changing modes of political and economic governance have produced an apparently novel situation in which increasing numbers of workers in affluent societies are engaged in insecure, casualised or irregular labor (Gill & Pratt, 2008). Whilst capitalist labor has always been characterized by intermittency for lower paid and lower skilled workers the recent departure is the addition of well paid and high status workers into this group of ‘precarious workers’.” There is a debate of whether human resources management (HRM) is a modernism project or a postmodernism discourse (Legge, 2004). Modernism traditions of personnel (human as machine) leave room for postmodernism view of HRM, where human is perceived as individual, even though some specialist have indicated since the early 1960’s a symbiosis between human and computer (Licklider, 1960). Hardy and Palmer (1999) analyze educational management through the ambiguities and paradoxes of four postmodern themes: “the notion of complicated identities; the “death” of the individual as expert; “disciplinary” powers which constrain individual actions; and the postmodern organization as a combination of dream and nightmare”. Green (2008) has explored postmodernism leadership theory within the public sector.

In Table 1 is represented a comparison between postmodernism and modernism organizations, in particular maritime companies, with the observation that postmodern organizations are heterogeneous, in constant change and in a dynamic adaption to societal and economic change. Hence, would be an error to classify an organization as being completely postmodern, solely based on the overarching organizational criteria exposed below. It is not excluded the fact that some organizations can acquire success while still embracing modernism patterns, while others might be pending between hybrid values. In this regard, when mixing modern and postmodern values in the same organization, incongruent values might be generated (Malphurs, 2004).

Table 1. Organisational differences in modernism and postmodernism maritime companies

Nr. crt.	Organisational criterion	Modernism	Postmodernism
1	Conceptual theory	Rationalism	New forms and practices adapted to societal change
2	Patterns of thinking and operation	Fordism, Taylorism, McDonaldisation	New patterns focusing on human and intellectual capital
3	Hierarchies	Hierarchical controls	Shared power
4	Power in the workplace	Man as machine, with minimum initiative options and freedom	Egalitarian, power games, office politics, management “gurus”
5	Attitude towards change	Minimized change and creativity	Constant change leads either to creativity occasions, either to uncertainty, insecurity and instability
6	Socio-political ideology	Centralized orders	Consumerism, ambiguity and contradiction
7	Organisational policies	Uniformity	Diversity(gender, age,ethnicity, culture)
8	Work	Inflexible	Flexible and fluidic

	environment		
9	Age generation	Baby Boomers	Millennials and Generation X
10	Mentality	Autocratic	Democratic
11	Leadership style	Bureaucratic	Transformational (coaching)
12	Type of capital	Tangibles	Intangibles and Social capital
13	Organisational infrastructures	Stable	Complex, emotional and chaotic
14	Markets addressed	Mass markets	Niche markets

Before and during modernism, the role and position of female seafarers on board ship was perceived as unreliable and less necessary in the maritime business. Postmodernism seems to bring change in this regard.

Concerning maritime gender bias in late modernism, according to an estimation released by the International Maritime Organisation and dated from 1992, only 1–2% of the world's 1.25 m seafarers are women, serving on some 87,000 ships (IMO, 1992). This means between 12500 and 25000 seafarer women were estimated to work in seafaring. This data forms the basis of a 1999 working paper commissioned by the International Labor Office and conducted by academics from the Seafarers' International Research Centre at Cardiff University (Zhao, 1999). In the cruise line sector, women seafarers were estimated to be 17-18% of the workforce. A number of 94% of women were employed on passenger ships (with 68% on ferries and 26% on cruise ships) and only 6% were employed on cargo vessels (i.e., container ships, oil tankers, etc.) Regarding jobs, there are women shipmasters and chief engineers, as well as other officers. Though, generally, women are working as hotel staff on passenger ships. Of this latter group, 51.2% of women at sea come from OECD countries, 23.6% from Eastern Europe, 9.8% from Latin America and Africa, 13.7% from the Far East, and 1.7% from south Asia and the Middle East. This is the only global statistics on women seafarers up to now and there is a clear need for more recent global data on the topic.

The International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) estimates its female seafaring membership to be 23,000 worldwide corresponding to approximately 1% of its seafarer membership.

Stannard et al. (2015) made an accurate analysis on 595 women seafarers' health and welfare survey. The analysis represents a collaborative study from the International Maritime Health Association, International Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network, International Transport Workers' Federation and the Seafarers Hospital Society. In the study were identified several reasons of loss of attraction of women on seafarer careers. For example, one of such reasons would be the lack of sanitary facilities for women on board ships. Nearly 40% of the respondents in the study said they do not have access to a sanitary bin on board; 53% of officers reported not having access to a sanitary bin compared to only 23% of ratings. In the cruise sector, nearly 85% of participants indicated having access to a sanitary bin on board, whilst the figure for those working on ferries was slightly lower at 63%. Out of the 38 respondents (10% of the total respondents) who left a comment, 5 said they did not want sanitary bins on board or that it was not an issue, 13 felt strongly that there should be a solution in place for the disposal of sanitary items, 19 did not express an opinion but left information about the situation on their ship and 2 felt that sanitary protection should be provided on board as well as a confidential disposal method. Just over 17% of respondents in the main survey said that sexual harassment is an issue for them. Joint and back pain, stress, depression, anxiety and headache seem to be the most common symptoms reported by women seafarers and 55% felt that they are related to their work. 48% stated that they have problems with seeking medical care and offer suggestions to improve this. This study underlines arguments for the need to update legal instruments in order to create a work friendly postmodernism environment for seafarer women.

Mitroussi and Notteboom (2015) consider that prejudices, rigid attitudes, military-like structures in academies and aboard and discrimination have traditionally kept women largely away of the seafaring sector while Giziakis, Miliaraki, and Lema (2009) have concluded that institutional barriers have also existed at the national level, at least in the case of Greece.

Thomas (2004) suggested there is strong evidence that, in postmodernism, maritime gender stereotypes continue to exist in the male-dominated workplace, with women being denied promotion on the basis of their gender alone. Kitada (2013) concluded that women face gender related challenges when working in male-dominated environments as shipping while an industry that carries the very most of the world's goods is needing the best of workers, specialists and leaders irrespective of gender (Kitada, Williams, & Froholdt, 2015).

3. Research Methods

In this paper is presented one analysis made on the effects of intergovernmental external requirements on modern human resource management practices coming. Following are published some of the premises of updating Maritime Labor Convention with gender requirements.

Methods used for this study were the following: one focus group meeting on the topic with 11 international researchers from Maritime Education and Training (MET) institutions; visits, one email interview of an ILO legal specialist and one visit with 5 daily observations during the most recent Special Tripartite Committee working meeting at ILO on amending MLC (2016).

The literature review was used for the study on updating MLC (2016) with gender requirements for identifying essential requirements and actions needed for women seafarer work and awareness. Other important input was collected from the published works of maritime NGOs and maritime institutions, for example ISWAN (2019).

One multicultural and multinational focus group working meeting was held in May 2018 at Constanta Maritime University. The topic of the focus group was connected to external effects on modern management of maritime human resources needed to assure gender equality in the maritime sector, as presented next. A number of 11 international researchers have participated at the focus group meeting, having various interconnected areas of expertise related to seafaring, management of human resources, maritime law, gender, multiculturalism, maritime education and training, leadership. The researchers were from the following countries: Romania, Canada, Ghana, Spain, Philippines (2 researchers from different institutions of maritime education), South Korea, UK, Norway (online participation), Vietnam (online participation) and Netherlands (online participation) (Dragomir, 2018).

4. Results

The research results are structured on the following categories: results necessary to improve, at international institutional level, multicultural macro-policies related to gender and results necessary for further development of postmodernism maritime gender research .

The conclusion of the multicultural and multinational focus group working meeting was the fact that in every country there are local factors and different cultures that influence promotion of seafarers' careers and the participation of female seafarers to the maritime industry.

National employment practices are correlated with the number of females that are working in the shipping industries. Gender policies are linked to the socio-economic status of the countries. There are country correlations between employment practice of female seafarers, social development and the number of females. There were suggested several directions of the study on external requirements, connected to other topics of the postmodernism maritime gender research.

In order to attract newcomers to the seafaring careers and for taking care of the safety of those seafarers that are already employed in the shipping business, the International Labor Organization (headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland) has established international normative instruments ensuring work by sea in proper conditions. Maritime Labor Convention (MLC, 2016) is such intergovernmental instruments, taking care of decent and safe labor conditions needed by seafarer workers worldwide. Intergovernmental instruments are essential to provide homogenous normal conditions of work for the particular sector of water transport, for all countries that are party to the agreement.

MLC (2016) is a coherent instrument embodying standards of existing international maritime labor Conventions and Recommendations, as well as the fundamental rights and principles found in other international labor conventions related to abolition of forced labor, freedom of association, the right to organize and collective bargaining, equal remuneration, discrimination (employment and occupation), minimum work age and child labor. The Regulations and the MLC Code are organized into general areas relate to: minimum requirements for seafarers to work on a ship; Conditions of employment; Accommodation, recreational facilities, food and catering; Health protection, medical care, welfare and social security protection; Compliance and enforcement.

Following are cited the conditions and legal steps that must be passed for updating MLC (2016) with gender requirements needed by women seafarers, as communicated by on the topic. To the question “How can be amended the Maritime Labor Convention with gender requirements needed by seafarer women?” an ILO legal specialist replied:

“An amendment to the Convention was approved by the International Labor Conference on June 2016 on harassment and bullying on board ship. The amendment is aimed at protecting both men and women but certainly, once it enters into force in January 2019, it will represent an important step forward in the protection of women.

Please note that amendments to the Code of the MLC, 2006 must follow the procedure established in its Article XV. No amendment on gender issues has been presented and therefore the STC could not adopt any such amendment at its up-coming session.

An amendment to the Code may be *proposed to the Director-General of the International Labour Office* by the government of any Member of the Organization or by the group of Shipowner representatives or *the group of Seafarer representatives* who have been appointed to the Committee referred to in Article XIII. An amendment proposed by a government must have been proposed by, or be supported by, at least five governments of Members that have ratified the Convention or by the group of Shipowner or Seafarer representatives referred to in this paragraph.”

Therefore, in order to present an amendment on gender issues to the Special Tripartite Committee dealing with MLC (2016) amendments, a first step is to raise discussions on this topic with delegates of the different groups: seafarers, shipowners and Government. Such discussion can be made during the STC meetings, or individually. The input and contribution from women in seafaring groups and networks is needed to develop a strategy of lobby and discussion.

Maritime Labor Convention is in a constant process of updating in accordance with the new trends and situations that occurs in the maritime sector. The process of update is made, mostly, through amendments discussed and agreed within Tripartite Special Technical Meetings by the Member States parties to the agreement.

The methodology of MLC amendment is described in the Maritime Labor Convention, Article XV paragraph 2-13 related to amending MLC (2016).

A third research method used in the study were the observations, discussions and interviews made by the author during the participation of the author to the third meeting of the Special Tripartite Committee established by the Governing Body in accordance with Article XIII of the Maritime Labor Convention, 2006 which took place at the ILO in Geneva between 23 to 27 April 2018.

The observations were done during 5 days of the STC event, where delegates of the different groups (seafarers, shipowners and Government) discussed and voted on different subjects related to MLC amendments. Discussions and interviews were made with 46 delegates from each group, as well as with ILO employees.

Suitability to a maritime career has to do with individual knowledge, abilities and experience than with gender or nationality. A very good example was mentioned by one of the guests at the STC event in Geneva who reminded of one woman captain from India, Radhika Menon, Master of the oil tanker Sampurna Swarajya. She was awarded 2016 International Maritime Organisation (IMO) Award for Exceptional Bravery at Sea by the IMO Council. She proved great determination and courage in leading the difficult rescue operation of seven fishermen from a sinking fishing boat in the tumultuous seas of Bay of Bengal in June 2015.

In order to motivate more females like Radhika to pursue a seafaring career and to develop their leadership abilities, a framework of interconnected effective actions must be delivered by the shipping sector stakeholders: MET institutions, shipping companies, authorities, NGOs and community.

Based on the results of the discussions at the STC event, the researcher concluded that the MLC should be updated with the following gender requirements, in order to provide fair and equal chances in the process of sea careers promotion and attraction of women seafarers:

- a. Gender customized work protection equipment on board vessel for seafarer women;
- b. Gendered separate spaces for toilets and showers on board vessel;
- c. Sanitary bins on board vessel for disposal of feminine hygiene products;
- d. Feminine hygiene products should be sold in bonded stores on board ship and in ports;
- e. Private and hygienic disposal method for feminine sanitary products on board vessel;
- f. Paid maternal or paternal leave, specifying exactly whether the leave should be paid by governments, by employers or by both entities.
- g. Company policies on Gender discrimination should be implemented by employers.

From the discussions with ILO employees, it was concluded that in the 2018-2019 work biennium, the ILO, following decisions taken by the Governing Body which themselves followed recommendations of the Sectoral Policies Department advisory bodies (consisting of representatives of Governments, Employer and Workers and, in the case of shipping, the ICS and ITF) organize in February 2019 a Sectoral Meeting on the recruitment and retention of seafarers and the promotion of opportunities for women seafarers. This action represents a first step in women seafarers awareness and empowerment.

The observations also concluded that lobby and diplomatic strategies are needed for developing discussions between ILO advisory bodies, governments, employer and workers, on the topic 'gender in shipping', which might be a sensitive topic or which can be considered taboo for delegates of some countries.

Research discussion

One of the conclusions of study is the fact that, as the shipping industry continues to grow, sustainability will be dependent on more women entering the maritime professions. Male-centred workplace culture and stereotypes influences women's choice to join or leave the shipping sector. Though there are encouraging signs that the number of women in maritime professions is increasing, yet shipping remains a male-dominated industry.

Further directions of research

The results of the study can be generalized in a more complex approach by establishing a framework for gathering updated further needed statistical data, according to MLC (2016) Guideline B1.4 point 1 paragraph e) on recruitment and placement, related to Standard A1.4 paragraph 1 on public seafarer recruitment and placement service operated by a Member State, in connection with Regulation 1.4 - Recruitment and placement: "competent authorities from member states should consider maintaining an arrangement for the collection and analysis of all relevant information on the maritime labour market, including the current and prospective supply of seafarers that work as crew classified by age, sex, rank and qualifications, and the industry's requirements, the collection of data on age or sex being admissible only for statistical purposes or if used in the framework of a programme to prevent discrimination based on age or sex". Results of the research are useful for policy makers in the process of developing and updating necessary legal instruments that make impact in women seafarers equal opportunities of empowerment.

Conclusions

The problem of gender equality in the maritime field represents a challenge for obtaining human progress, economic development, respect, multiculturalism awareness and recognition of human rights. In a specific area like the maritime one, gender issues are often considered taboo subjects.

In this paper were presented effective solutions to enlarge the employment pool of multicultural seafaring with female seafarers. This is possible by establishing strategies of motivation targeting more female to

choose a career by sea. In this regard, Maritime Labor Convention (MLC), a normative intergovernmental instrument issued by the International Labor Organization, plays a strategic role in the process of sea careers promotion and attraction of women seafarers.

External requirements for shipping companies and their management of maritime human resources come not only from the International Labor Organization, through amendments to labor conventions, but from multiple sides:

- From the United Nations, through social campaigns, conferences or scholarships
- From the International Maritime Organization, by amendments to maritime convention
- Governmental actions, through national regulations, financial support etc.)
- NGOs actions, e.g. through campaigns of awareness and women seafarer empowerment) IMO through various programs of empowering seafarer women and from ILO through the amendments to Maritime Labor Convention;
- Diverse stakeholders: partners, investors, clients, employees, university, community etc.

The current study is focusing on the external ILO requirements on maritime labor designated for ship owners.

In this paper was presented a study on the effects of intergovernmental external requirements, namely the Maritime Labor Convention (MLC), on modern human resource management practices. There were identified concrete steps needed for amending MLC with requirements necessary for seafarer women work, awareness and empowerment.

By sharing different multicultural perspective and ambitious goals, the research is substantial original because it approaches subjects as postmodernism and female seafarers, gender equality and cultural awareness in maritime education and training. The methods to deliver such research are various and are comprised in online questionnaires and e-mail interviews to several target groups, visits, observations and discussions with diverse maritime stakeholders.

Another original approach is the research presented in this paper, on identifying concrete and effective steps and solutions for the possible updating of Maritime Labour Convention with gender requirements needed urgently by women seafarers. So far, related to gender, the Convention contains only limited paragraphs dedicated for establishing minimum

working conditions for female seafarers. The initiative of updating MLC with requirements of gender policies, if (when) considered, will really make a difference in the shipping sector and will improve very much the condition of seafarer women. There is no research in this domain so far.

The results presented in this paper are useful for establishing effective intergovernmental strategies on recruitment and retention of seafarers and on the promotion of opportunities for women seafarers.

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