

Careers of women entrepreneurs in light of a sustainable career perspective

Laís Viera Trevisan

Pesquisadora da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (Brasil)

laisvtrevisan@gmail.com

Patrícia Böck Bandeira

Pesquisadora da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (Brasil)

patriciakbandeira@gmail.com

Eliane Alves da Silva

Professora da Universidade Estadual do Mato Grosso (Brasil)

elianealvesil@yahoo.com.br

Angela Beatriz Busato Scheffer

Professora da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (Brasil)

angela.scheffer@ufrgs.br

Abstract

This article analyzes how the careers of women entrepreneurs are built from the theoretical lens of the Sustainable Career. Qualitative and interpretive research was conducted using the life story method with two women entrepreneurs who developed sustainable enterprises. The study identified in the narratives the emergence of influential factors in their careers, such as disorienting dilemmas, motherhood, rejection of corporate models, the search for quality of life and self-fulfillment, as well as long daily working hours and difficulties in reconciling their professional activities with their other roles. Sustainability appears as a central element, whether in relation to their careers, as in their enterprises, which differ from other individualistic ways of entering the world of work, considering that they value and act in favor of collective well-being.

Keywords

Women's careers; Female entrepreneurship; Sustainable Career

Carreiras de mulheres empreendedoras à luz de uma perspectiva de carreira sustentável

Resumo

Este artigo analisa como as carreiras das mulheres empreendedoras são construídas a partir da lente teórica da Carreira Sustentável. Foi realizada pesquisa qualitativa e interpretativa utilizando o método história de vida com duas mulheres empreendedoras que desenvolveram empreendimentos sustentáveis. O estudo identificou nas narrativas o surgimento de fatores influentes em suas carreiras, como dilemas desorientadores, maternidade, rejeição de modelos corporativos, busca por qualidade de vida e autorrealização, além de longas jornadas diárias de trabalho e dificuldades em conciliar suas carreiras, atividades profissionais com suas outras funções. A sustentabilidade aparece como elemento central, seja em relação às suas carreiras, como em seus empreendimentos, que se diferenciam de outras formas individualistas de inserção no mundo do trabalho, considerando que valorizam e atuam em prol do bem-estar coletivo.

Palavras-Chave

Carreiras femininas; Empreendedorismo feminino; Carreira Sustentável

Carreras de mujeres emprendedoras a la luz de una perspectiva de carrera sostenible

Resumen

Este artículo analiza cómo se construyen las carreras de las mujeres emprendedoras desde el lente teórico de la Carrera Sostenible. Se realizó una investigación cualitativa e interpretativa mediante el método de historia de vida con dos mujeres emprendedoras que desarrollaron emprendimientos sostenibles. El estudio identificó en las narrativas el surgimiento de factores influyentes en sus carreras, como dilemas desorientadores, maternidad, rechazo a los modelos corporativos, búsqueda de calidad de vida y autorrealización, además de largas jornadas laborales y dificultades para conciliar sus carreras, actividades profesionales con sus otras funciones. La sustentabilidad aparece como un elemento central, ya sea en relación a sus carreras o en sus emprendimientos, que se diferencian de otras formas individualistas de inserción en el mundo del trabajo, considerando que valoran y actúan a favor del bienestar colectivo.

Palabras clave

Carreras femeninas; Emprendimiento femenino; Carrera Sostenible

Dados para Contato | Contact Details | Detalles de Contacto: Eliane Alves da Silva - Universidade Estadual do Mato Grosso. Av. Rio Arinos, 1 - Juara, MT, 78575-000, Brasil. **URL:** <https://unemat.br/>.

Recebido em | Received in | Recibido en: 28/10/2022 - **Aprovado em | Approved in | Aprobado en:** 11/03/2024

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.23925/recape.v14i2.59779>

INTRODUÇÃO

Entrepreneurial activities have been predominantly conducted and led by men (Osmani, 2021). Additionally, carried out largely by male academics (Tartari & Salter, 2015), scientific research in the field of entrepreneurship mostly investigates the activities of their peers, to the detriment of women entrepreneurs (Yoopetch, 2021). In this way, the concept of entrepreneur has been constituted in light of male perception and traits, neglecting the construction of a career and meanings attributed to this profession by women (Ladge et al., 2019). This context signals a social construction of patterns of masculinity or femininity that lead to unequal divisions of access to work, discrimination and stereotypes.

Such evidence is not surprising, given that women are still socially responsible for caring for their children, supporting elderly parents and carrying out household chores, leading them to follow discontinuous, interrupted, or even “alternative” careers, such as part-time jobs, -period or outside traditional employment structures, often in precarious conditions (Fraga & Rocha-De-Oliveira, 2020). Professionals still face the so-called “glass ceiling” in organizations—a metaphor that describes the symbolic barrier that makes it difficult for women to rise to top executive positions in companies (Clenger & Singh, 2013). Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified these challenges, as women were more likely to be fired or furloughed during this time (McKinsey & Company, 2020).

However, there is a recent movement toward a paradigm shift (Osmani, 2021), with a significant increase in enterprises around the world led by women (Bosma et al., 2020). Although the need for survival is highlighted among the reasons why women engage in entrepreneurial activities – called “pushed” entrepreneurship (Amit & Muller, 1995), more recently, the literature has pointed out other reasons, such as the identification of opportunities, the search for independence (Yadav and Unni, 2016), flexibility and the ability to combine work with other activities (Manolova et al., 2012) – defined as “pulled” entrepreneurship (Amit & Muller, 1995). Entrepreneurship, therefore, emerges as an alternative to traditional career models (Rey-Martí et al., 2015). Even so, it is questioned whether such an alternative effectively allows for the promised conciliation between women’s personal, family and professional lives or if it is a new name for old paradigms, sources of exploitation and exhaustion under the guise of the “self-entrepreneur”.

Regarding the social impacts of entrepreneurial activity, in general, it has been approached as an essential tool to cooperate with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) signed in the 2030 Agenda by the United Nations signatories, such as the eradication of poverty (SDG1), eradication of hunger (SDG 2), decent work and economic growth (SDG8) and reduction of social inequality (SDG10) (Bosma et al., 2020). In the case of female entrepreneurship, it adds to the fact that it contributes to gender equality (SDG 5), highlighting its potential as a catalyst for promoting the growth and development of the nation (Ramadani et al., 2017).

Thus, it is relevant to understand how women perceive entrepreneurship as a professional activity and how this career is constituted over time. In this aspect, the theoretical perspective of sustainable career (Van der Heijden & De Vos, 2015), in light of its dimensions of time, social space, agency and meaning, can contribute to the discussion of the meaning attributed to the life and work experiences of these women. women and the influence of multiple contexts and different actors in their professional trajectories. Thus, the present study seeks to analyze how the careers of women entrepreneurs are built from the perspective of the sustainable career. It is understood that such a look allows an understanding of gender crossings and other variables in personal, family and social contexts to understand the experiences of women's careers. In addition, understanding the meanings attributed to their life and work experiences also allows for a reflection on the forms of female participation in the labor market, with its numerous challenges. As Fraga & Rocha-De-Oliveira (2020) point out, contemporary female careers can be described as "diffuse labyrinths", marking the trajectories of women in successive advances and setbacks and periods of growth and decline.

1. WOMEN'S CAREERS AND FEMALE ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The concept of career has an interdisciplinary and historical constitution, which comprises people, groups, organizations and society, evidencing a dynamic interaction between the subject and the world that surrounds him, because "the career is seen as a result, not only of the individual, but from historical and organizational contexts" (Grandjean, 1981, p. 1057).

Faced with the historical marking of the sexual division, we socially establish patterns of masculinity or femininity, which carry with them characteristics and attitudes as belonging to men or women (Fraga et al., 2019). Discrimination at work and the stereotypes associated with sexual division affect the way women perceive themselves professionally and project their career ambitions (Liñán et al., 2020).

Gupta et al. (2005) note that women suffer from a triple burden: an unfavorable work environment, disproportionate household responsibilities, and a deficit in social capital. These three elements are interrelated and contribute to gender stratification. Arora and Kumari (2021) highlight that women are more likely to take a career break than men because of the responsibility of taking care of children. In this way, motherhood can often affect the way women are seen at work and in society. Such obstacles to female insertion, permanence and professional exercise in the labor market tend to result in shorter working time and less accumulated experience and lead to clear

differences between the sexes in relation to salary, opportunities and career possibilities (Fraga & Rocha -De-Oliveira, 2020).

Regarding the entrepreneurial career, among the main barriers to women for this professional choice, the literature has highlighted social stigma, gender inequalities, lack of information, available opportunities, resources, support and financing, fear of risk, digital exclusion or lack of basic digital skills, challenges associated with motherhood, and social norms, among others (Wu et al., 2019). When looking at Africa, the Middle East and the Far East, women entrepreneurs face even more sociocultural barriers than their Western counterparts (Kamberidou, 2020).

Differences in motivations for women and men to start new businesses have also been addressed by academia. Research shows that, for example, economic motives for continuing the family tradition and generating wealth are more important to men, while women are more motivated to start a new business because they want to make a difference in the world or because finding a job is difficult. (Bosma et al., 2020). Women also seem to choose this career due to the desire to have a better quality of life (Sehgal & Khandelwal, 2020), better well-being, more flexibility and balance between work and personal life (Khandelwal & Sehgal, 2018) and greater control over working hours (Agarwal & Lenka, 2015). In addition to internal factors, family encouragement and institutional support also contribute to women starting their own businesses (Banu & Baral, 2021).

Thus, women engage in entrepreneurship for a variety of reasons, categorized as “pull” or “push” factors (Amit & Muller, 1995). “Pull” (or opportunity-based) entrepreneurs enter business and entrepreneurial activity because of the attractiveness of the business idea and its personal implications. While “pushed” (or need-based) entrepreneurs are those who are pushed into entrepreneurship for reasons such as the need for higher income, to overcome the scarcity of job opportunities, dissatisfaction in the current job, working conditions such as “glass ceiling”, lack of recognition in previous jobs and need for flexible hours to combine family and work responsibilities (Jafari-Sadeghi, 2020).

2. THE SUSTAINABLE CAREER PERSPECTIVE

Career sustainability emerges as an offshoot of the discussion on sustainability and the perspective of longevity, in which we seek to understand the influence of multiple contexts that influence professional trajectories and the way in which changes over time impact careers, in this case the careers of women entrepreneurs. Fraga et al. (2019) state that not only the objective aspects of the career (such as status and positions) but also the subjective aspects (referring to interpretations arising from individual and collective interactions) are possibly experienced differently due to

gender. It is therefore necessary to delve into such a subjective perspective of the career, taking into account the contextual influences throughout the career development of women entrepreneurs.

A Sustainable Career can be defined as “the sequence of an individual’s different career experiences, reflected through a variety of patterns of continuity over time, crossing various social spaces and characterized by individual agency, thus giving meaning to the individual” (Van der Heijden & De Vos, 2015, p. 7). From this definition, four central elements result: time, social space, agency and meaning.

The “time” dimension concerns the professional movement over the years in interaction with its context. In other words, it is necessary to understand careers as a temporally and historically situated phenomenon, considering the various events that lead to structural changes at work and consequent impacts on their individual trajectories (Van der Heijden & De Vos, 2015).

The “social space” aspect takes on the influence of context: careers reflect the relationships between people, organizations or institutions and how these relationships fluctuate over time. It includes employment arrangements, work environments, and nonwork factors such as home, family, motherhood, friends, and leisure (Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014; Lee et al., 2011).

The “agency” element considers the professional as the main element responsible for conducting her career, influencing and being influenced by the social spaces or contexts that permeate her. Thus, agency can be defined as a person’s ability to mobilize the necessary resources and take steps for career development to face environmental constraints and achieve their goals (Lam & De Campos, 2014).

Finally, the “meaning” factor refers to the particularities of each professional with regard to the subjective criteria of success. It therefore recognizes that career sustainability is geared not only toward skill development but also toward making sense of career activities and events (Van der Heijden & De Vos, 2015).

From this perspective, a sustainable career has four main characteristics: 1) it is integrated into a satisfying personal and family life, which adjusts to career and life values and an individual’s preferences and affinities; 2) it provides a sense of security and employability sufficient to meet the individual’s economic and well-being needs; 3) it allows flexibility and possibilities in career choices to meet individual needs and interests that may change over time; and 4) it offers regular opportunities for renewing specific and generic knowledge and skills, combating the obsolescence of skills and thereby protecting sustainable employability (Newman, 2011; Chin et al., 2021). Such characteristics are of paramount importance in the female professional trajectory, strongly impacted (and interrupted) by issues associated with motherhood, discrimination and other challenges associated with their gender (Bandeira et al., 2020).

It is important to recognize that building a meaningful career involves tensions, conflicts and ambiguities for the individual, especially for women (Baruch & Vardi, 2016). In light of these observations, the sustainable career perspective requires an understanding of the ways in which women deal with these aspects as they build alignment between their career and the professional, personal and family demands in their lives (Bandeira et al., 2020).

3. METHOD

3.1. Research design

The present study uses a qualitative and interpretive approach based on the analysis of the life stories of two women entrepreneurs. Interpretive research generates detailed reports that fit into the study of careers and facilitate analyses of the “relationship between careers and the social contexts in which they are embedded” (Cohen et al., 2004, p. 407). The life history method allows the personal, historical, social, institutional and/or political contextualization of narratives (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995), serving to understand the sustainability of careers in their dimensions of time, space, agency and meaning (Van der Heijden & De Vos, 2015).

There are two ways to conduct studies that use the life history method. The first, called long stories, provides a detailed analysis of the individual’s trajectory since childhood, based on a series of interviews complemented with other sources of information, such as diaries, letters and photographs (Ferrazza & Antonello, 2017; Godoy, 2018). The second form, more frequent in studies in Administration, consists of the so-called short stories: focused on only relevant aspects of the lives of the subjects that the researcher intends to investigate, obtained through in-depth interviews (Ferrazza & Antonello, 2017; Godoy, 2018). For the present study, the modality of short stories is used, focusing on the career trajectory of the interviewees.

A common feature in research involving the life history method is that, due to its complexity, they include a small number of participants, sometimes involving only one interviewee (Fors & Lennerfors, 2019), given that it is not intended to observe a statistical representativeness or recurrence of phenomena but rather the richness of the interviewees’ reports (Mallimaci & Béliveau, 2006). A single life story, therefore, can reveal behaviors, techniques, values and ideologies, important aspects of your society and your group (Ferrazza & Antonello, 2017).

3.2. Data Collection

For data collection, in-depth interviews were conducted with two women who developed sustainable enterprises. The selection of the participants in this study occurred because they work in different sectors, are in different stages of life, career and entrepreneurship (one at the beginning of the enterprise and another more than two decades ago) and due to the relevance of their work in their areas of activity, being indicated by researchers in the field of entrepreneurship. It is noteworthy that the entrepreneurs were consulted about how they would like to be called in this article and were then named Bianca and Nelsa.

The meetings for data collection took place between November 2021 and March 2022 via online videoconferencing through the Google Meet application, initially being held to collect the narratives and, later, to clarify doubts and complement their reports.

Interviewee 1, Bianca, is an accountant who is 31 years old, has two children, is married, works in the controllership sector of a large company and has a business to sell ecological diapers. Interviewee 2, Nelsa, is 58 years old, has two children, is married and is the CEO of a sustainable fashion cooperative. It should be noted that the free and informed consent of the participants was obtained, and the ethical procedures necessary for the proper conduct of all stages of the research were taken.

Regarding the conduction of the interviews, only one triggering question was used to guide the entrepreneurs' narratives: "Tell me about your life story and your professional trajectory", allowing them to talk freely about their lives (Closs & Antonello, 2011; Ferrazza & Antonello, 2017; Godoy, 2018; Spindola & Santos, 2003). As necessary, some additional questioning and subsequent contact were carried out to resolve points that raised doubts. After completing the interviews and their respective transcripts, data analysis was performed, seeking a complete understanding of the stories, even if not told in a linear way.

3.3. Data analysis

For data analysis, narrative analysis was chosen (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995). This type of analysis has been less used in business and entrepreneurship research (Hamilton, 2014). However, the exploration of narratives is very promising, as it allows a detailed examination of how subjects understand and give meaning to their careers (Poldner et al., 2017). In this way, the narratives contribute to the constitution of the social reality of entrepreneurs and represent "the hypotheses

about how the world can be and how the future can look and act” (Gartner, 2007, p. 614). To support this stage of the research, the narratives were analyzed using Atlas.ti software (version 8.4).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

First, the life stories of the entrepreneurs are presented in light of the dimensions of the sustainable career – time, social space, agency and meaning. Afterwards, reflections are made about their careers based on the characteristics of the sustainable career.

4.1. Analysis of Bianca and Nelsa’s life stories in light of the dimensions of the Sustainable Career

4.1.1. Time

In this first topic, we seek to present the life and career paths of female entrepreneurs, enabling the understanding of the main elements involved in their different contexts.

Bianca, only eight years old, helped her parents, farmers in the interior of Rio Grande do Sul, to sell their products at agricultural fairs. In high school, due to the difficulty of financial support from her family, she reconciled her studies with work. This situation remained during the completion of his higher course in accounting sciences. The course was chosen because of the belief in the need for training in an area that was easy to employ.

During his training, he studied at night and worked in an accounting office by day. Close to graduating and dissatisfied with the work environment she went through, described as “toxic and competitive”, she got a job at a large company in the region. She has been working in this organization for eight years, and for two and a half years, she has combined her work schedule with her business, taking care of her two children and household chores.

When she had her first child, Bianca used disposable diapers with him and found the amount spent on this product very expensive. One day, while taking out the garbage, he dropped a diaper on the floor in a puddle of water. Then, he observed that in contact with the water, it “swelled excessively”. This puzzled her and led her into a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 1978) or shock (Van der Heijden et al., 2020). According to Akkermans et al. (2018, p. 4), a career shock is a turmoil, an “extraordinary event, which is, at least to some degree, caused by factors beyond the

individual's control and which triggers a deliberate process of thinking about the career", that may have positive and/or negative effects on career sustainability. According to Mezirow (1978), a dilemma must generate pressure and anxiety to effect a change of perspective and frames of reference, and this transformation requires that we become critically aware of the cultural and psychological assumptions that structure our history.

Returning home, Bianca researched the composition of diapers on the internet and verified the amount of substances that constitute them. Additionally, he found that the decomposition time of a common disposable diaper is 250 years and that a child, on average, from birth to weaning generates a ton of waste. This shocked her deeply: "It is a lot for a child, it is a choice they do not even have the power to make, it is a burden they carry."

From there, she began to pay attention to the subject, read reports, attended interviews and observed an alternative: ecological diapers, which allowed their reuse and thus reduced the environmental impact. Together with her husband, Bianca decided that when they had their second child, they would use this type of diaper. When the time came and they were preparing the trousseau, Bianca asked her friends who wanted to give her a gift to do so with ecological diapers. However, her friends began to question her about this type of diaper, its feasibility, benefits, and where to buy it. Then, she realized that people were unaware of the product and a gap in its offering. So she and her husband thought that eco-friendly diapers would be a good deal and started looking for suppliers.

At the end of 2019, Bianca started her sales, going to the houses of friends and acquaintances to show the product and ask questions. Here, you can see the importance of the network of relationships for the success of your venture, especially in this initial phase. In January 2020, the company was founded, with the website and social networks being created, which expanded the scope and sales to several states in Brazil. In this regard, according to Kamberidou (2020), technological advances and the availability and increasing use of online platforms are allowing women to become involved in digital entrepreneurship and start a home business.

Currently, while still depending on the salary she receives at the company as a salaried employee, she combines entrepreneurship with work and family care. The dedication to Bianca's multiple roles in life becomes evident, corroborating Rey-Martí et al. (2015) about one of the main characteristics of the female career. However, Bianca also mentions that she is preparing for a career transition scheduled for the end of 2022 to act only on her venture and have more time to take care of her children. In this regard, Bianca states

[...] I end up taking it (entrepreneurship) outside of my working hours, sometimes the routine ends up being slightly rushed. The children, the boys, end up sleeping early, but after they sleep, I usually work there, producing content for social networks, improving the site.

This desire to have more flexibility and balance between work and personal life is recurrent in studies on female entrepreneurship motivations (Banu & Baral, 2021), unlike the factors that influence the male entrepreneurial attitude (Liñán et al., 2020).

The second interviewee, Nelsa, is also the daughter of small farmers in the interior of Rio Grande do Sul. He lived with his parents and six siblings until he was 13 years old. After that, due to the family's financial conditions, he had to look for work in the city. He worked in family homes, clothing factories, food factories and in a basic health unit, always in general service positions. In addition, she participated, for a few years, in the Catholic Youth Worker Movement. During this period, she moved to São Paulo and worked in the coordination of the Movement, where she also met her husband and got married.

After that, she and her partner moved to Ceará to strengthen the movement in the region, which also led to her work in two garment factories. Later, returning to Rio Grande do Sul, he worked in a food factory for five years "until he began to experience a different process". During this period, he experienced a disorienting dilemma in his career:

A lady who worked with me in the same section was honored for completing twenty-five years at the factory. I watched her receive an award [...] I thought: "Oh my God, twenty-five years old and she has not seen her children grow up, she has not seen her grandchildren grow up, she has not met her neighbors". [...] And I did not know my neighbors at the time either, you know? Sometimes, in our patio, like that, the grass grew a lot, we did not even notice it, you know? Because life was work.

This speech highlights the importance of relationships for the decision-making of the female career, which is considered more relational than the male career (Bandeira et al, 2020). Throughout her career, Nelsa was actively involved in the union struggle. She had two children, and as soon as the period of maternity stability had passed, she was fired from the company. In this regard, Arora and Kumari (2021) highlight that, often, the experience of motherhood seems to negatively affect the work of women, being penalized in their careers for caring for their children, while men are not.

From this career break, Nelsa began to sew at home. She didn't know how to do the craft, so she trained with pieces from family members until she learned: "I remember like this, the first piece I made was a pair of pants, a pair of sweatpants for my son, and I would walk around the house, I would cry, you know? Because I had done the entire play." Nelsa reports having felt a lot of dissatisfaction during this period because she thought, "Gee, but I want to be with other people, I do not want to work alone". During this period, she became involved with the participatory budgeting process in the city of Porto Alegre/RS, and in conversation with two other seamstresses nearby, the idea of sewing for a large hospital in the region came up, which was in an open bidding process. When dealing with the hospital director to offer the services, they knew that they would have to constitute at least a group of 20 people, organized in an association or cooperative format, so that

they could provide the activity. She and her colleagues managed to gather the necessary number of seamstresses and formed the first cooperative of the group, composed only of women – which remains to this day. The idea of the cooperative was to offer an economic activity to women without work opportunities, reinforcing the high social impact of the enterprise since its creation.

In the beginning, the workers did not have the space to consolidate the cooperative; they met in the community chapel, and most of the work was carried out in the homes of the associates. Through much mobilization, they conquered a place donated by the city hall and other advances over time. They established relationships with associations and cooperatives from different Brazilian regions, working with the fashion industry in a collective and sustainable way throughout its chain, from planting cotton through agroecology to discarding scraps to create dolls. and subsequent donation to needy children. In addition, they became concerned with the organization's local impact, offering professional courses to the community, setting up community banks, distributing masks during the COVID-19 pandemic, among other actions.

The social space dimension, presented below, carries out a more in-depth analysis of the historical and contextual elements highlighted in the entrepreneurs' narratives.

4.1.2. Social Space

In the life stories of Bianca and Nelsa, the influence of the economic, family and business context on their professional trajectories can be observed. The fact that their families did not have the financial means to support them during their studies made her work from an early age and seek professions of easy employability. In Bianca's narrative, this influence is still observed today, when she decides to remain in the company until her enterprise generates a profit greater than the salary received as a salaried employee. There is, therefore, a cautious behavior, as women consider the risk of their actions more than men (Croson & Gneezy 2009).

These reflections, associated with motherhood and the information on the amount of disposable diapers that a child uses, led to Bianca's career shock and to the identification of a market opportunity. Therefore, with the support of her husband, she looked for suppliers and consultants who could help set up the company. In this regard, Banu and Baral (2021) highlight that women entrepreneurs rely heavily on family support and seek support and training from mentors to grow their businesses.

In Nelsa's career, in addition to the economic, family and business contexts, two other factors that had an influence on her career were her participation in the Catholic Worker Youth Movement and in the participatory budgeting process in the city of Porto Alegre/RS. In the Movement, she worked

with the “see-judge-act” method, which helped her “analyze reality, understand why people live this reality and try to change it”. For Nelsa, this involvement with religion and the Movement revealed to her a perception of exploitation in the world of work: “Actually, we hoped that the day would pass quickly, so that we could get home, and that the week would pass quickly. and let the month pass quickly, to arrive at the end of the month and receive”.

4.1.3. Agency

In Bianca’s story, it can be seen that the identification of the opportunity to commercialize ecological diapers was directly associated with motherhood and sustainable values. In this aspect, Tang et al. (2012) highlight that opportunity discovery focuses on perceiving links between seemingly unrelated events. Neill et al. (2015) demonstrated that women entrepreneurs who believe in their ability to recognize market opportunities have greater attitudes to engage in the creation of new ventures. Furthermore, the ability to assess the consequences of ideas that add value and the effect of entrepreneurial action on the target community, the market, society and the environment is one of the essential competencies of a sustainable entrepreneur (Piwowar-Sulej et al., 2021).

In Nelsa’s narrative, it is observed that the dismissal of the company in which she worked led her to the opening of the enterprise. Initially, entrepreneurship took place out of necessity, given that Nelsa had no other job option. However, after some time, there was an identification of an opportunity to produce for a large hospital in the region and a search for social and financial resources to get the contract, considering his intention to work in society and not as an autonomous.

The agency can also be seen in Bianca’s story regarding her career transition:

I’m already preparing to make a career transition. Our revenue is increasing every month, so I’m already making some reservations to make this career transition. I hope I can do it because it ends up being very busy, well, the routine. I cannot dedicate as much time as I would like to my business. [...] One of the intentions is to make this transition so that I can have better quality time with my children, have a calmer routine. [...] Therefore, what I long for is to have this quieter time, to do my thing, to do what I like, to have my own choices, you know, business, in short, life.

The importance given to flexibility and balance between professional and personal life for Bianca’s career decision is observed here, which is in line with previous research on influential factors in female entrepreneurship (Banu & Baral, 2021; Agarwal & Lenka, 2021; Agarwal & Lenka, 2021). 2015; Khandelwal & Sehgal, 2018). Considering career sustainability, McDonald and Hite (2018) list professional transition as one of the main challenges, as individuals must reconcile investment in their current job with preparation for their future employability and career development. This scenario is possibly worsened in relation to women, as it includes the time dedicated to caring

for family members and household chores, which is significantly higher than that dedicated by men (Xiu & Gunderson, 2021). In this logic, the importance of resilience is highlighted (Mishra & McDonald, 2017), an essential attribute for global sustainability and sustainable careers (McDonald & Hite, 2018).

4.1.4. Direction

Regarding the meaning dimension, the search for career coherence with their life values was evidenced in the life stories of the entrepreneurs. After experiencing a shock in her career, Nelsa began to question herself:

How can we, like that, spend our whole lives hoping that life will pass? No job satisfaction, right? [...] It always bothered me a lot [...] of people selling our lives that way. I always thought that I would not have any salary to compensate for that, even though I always earn little. However, so, I thought there had to be something that would accomplish more as a person, you know, that, regardless of whether you work as a maid or with a business, that you liked it, that you felt that you were producing something.

From this perspective, it is highlighted that quality of life, alignment of values, self-fulfillment and well-being are important factors in the construction of these women's careers.

Nelsa also reports this feeling:

I am a deeply fulfilled person, you have no idea, well, how happy I am to be where I am. Working every day in the cooperative together with these women, I think we are our family, you know? We create the products, we are making products that we see people wearing, that people are proud of [...] That is what I imagine ahead, you know? Being able to inspire others to emerge.

These attitudes of empathy toward others are also evident in Nelsa's career, whose central concern is the well-being of the community in which she is inserted:

Here, it was a territory that was very disputed by drug traffickers, so I needed to make a counterpart, not directly confronting them, but seeking harmonization in the territory. In addition, we created a community bank [...] we have courses for the community of caregivers for elderly individuals, manicure, knitting, crochet, sewing, computer science, so that people can meet again after the pandemic and to generate income for people.

In addition, your venture helps new companies that are starting up: "This is very important, it is very cool for us to be a gateway for people to be able to have this partnership, start their brand".

Here, entrepreneurship is no longer an engine of economic growth to be an engine of social change (Alkhaled & Berglund, 2018). In this regard, just as sustainability encourages a mindset that values the greater good, a sustainable career perspective considers the needs and interests of others, that is, collective well-being (McDonald & Hite, 2018).

4.2. Reflections on the careers of Bianca and Nelsa in light of the characteristics of the Sustainable Career and the implications of being a woman in this context of life and work

After analyzing the life stories of Bianca and Nelsa, it is necessary to discuss the relationships observed between their careers and the main characteristics of a sustainable career, namely, 1) integration into a satisfactory personal and family life, which adjusts to an individual's career and life values and preferences and affinities; 2) sufficient sense of security and employability to meet the individual's economic and well-being needs; 3) flexibility and possibilities in career choices to meet individual needs and interests that may change over time; and 4) regular opportunities for renewing specific and generic knowledge and skills.

From the analysis of the narratives, it appears that throughout their trajectories, Bianca and Nelsa had difficulties in reconciling their professional activities with their other roles, such as mothers and wives. In Nelsa's case, motherhood led to her dismissal from the company where she worked, "pushing" her toward entrepreneurship. Bianca currently suffers a significant burden when reconciling work in an organization, her enterprise and family care, with practically no time left for leisure and other activities. Today, it can be said that Nelsa integrates her professional activities with a satisfying personal and family life. However, for Bianca, this is still an expectation for the future.

It is also observed, in the narratives of the interviewees, that employability has always been an important factor in their lives, given the economic context of their families. In this sense, they have been exercising some profession since they were young and have already worked in different organizations. It is evident in their trajectories that before starting their own enterprise, their activities did not provide a sufficient sense of security and employability. The "toxic environments" that Bianca went through did not cause her well-being and did not allow her long-term career projections. In the same way, Nelsa, when working in operational-level positions and being fired after maternity leave, found in entrepreneurship an alternative to continue her career. Currently, Bianca and Nelsa's ventures seem to provide them with well-being and self-fulfillment. In Nelsa's case, the company also meets her economic needs, which is not yet seen in Bianca's career.

Regarding the characteristic “flexibility and possibilities in career choices”, which seeks to adapt career and life values to an individual’s preferences and affinities - a fundamental aspect in female careers (Khandelwal & Sehgal, 2018) - it appears that throughout the trajectory of Bianca and Nelsa, they encountered several challenges and barriers, mainly due to financial need and, therefore, without being able to make many choices regarding their careers. The exception is in the case of Bianca’s project, which began after identifying a market opportunity. However, she had the technical support of her husband.

In her current activities, there is greater flexibility in Nelsa’s career, who reports being extremely happy and fulfilled with her company and looking to expand her business. Bianca, in the process of transitioning to entrepreneurship, somehow has flexibility due to the possibility of opting for this career. However, this journey does not follow a smooth path, as business growth comes with some costs, with implications for health and well-being (Stephan, 2018).

Finally, in relation to the characteristic “knowledge renewal opportunities”, McDonald and Hite (2018) highlight that individual proactivity and organizational and societal policies complement each other in supporting sustainable careers and providing opportunities for renewal and continuous learning. for career longevity. In Bianca’s life, there was the opportunity to train in a higher education course and the possibility of having a mentor in setting up her business, who helped her to boost sales through digital marketing tools. Nelsa, on the other hand, learned to sew on her own due to the need for work. After starting activities as an entrepreneur, she began to have opportunities to develop and improve her skills. This is particularly important given the challenges associated with women’s careers.

Finally, in the life and work experiences of these two women, although quite different, there is a common struggle for a professional activity that provides them with quality of life, well-being (individual and collective), meaning, self-fulfillment, possibilities of reconciling work and family/ personal life, adequacy of values, among other characteristics. Nelsa and Bianca look for a possibility in sustainable entrepreneurship. On the one hand, it can represent the opportunity - often illusory - of having flexibility and a better organization of the binomial life and work, or even being an alternative to unemployment or the pressures of formal work. On the other hand, the path to be followed in this career does not seem to be simple and unimpeded. The need for long daily working hours is evident, considering that behind each piece of clothing or diaper sold, there is a woman who is divided into so many others so as not to miss the care of her children and family and the products to her customers. However, the differential in their trajectories and careers is that both perceive meaning, purpose and sustainability in their undertakings, which differentiates them from other individualistic modes of insertion in the world of work, since they value collective well-being and contribute to the creation of a more just, egalitarian and sustainable society and planet.

CONCLUSIONS

This study sought to analyze how the careers of women entrepreneurs are built from the perspective of the Sustainable Career. In this way, through qualitative and interpretive research and the life story method, we discussed the crossings of gender and other variables in the personal, family and social contexts of two women entrepreneurs who developed sustainable ventures. Therefore, the influence of multiple contexts and different actors on their professional trajectories and the way in which changes impact their careers was observed. The life stories of these women allowed an in-depth analysis of the experiences and meanings of female entrepreneurship from the perspective of those who experience it, and their stories possibly portray the reality of many female entrepreneurs spread across the country, expressing the joys, pains, challenges and overcoming challenges faced by these women. women.

Through the analysis of common issues, concerns and concerns of female entrepreneurs, the research allows for a reflection on the possibility of developing political and organizational strategies to promote female entrepreneurial careers and the promotion of gender equality in the organizational context. To do so, it is necessary to transcend the traditional and conventional notion of social constructions involved in the conceptions of work and *business as usual*, breaking with the sociocultural heritage of thinking and acting and moving from isolated case experiences to a collective consciousness. The study also guides a way of thinking about a new education in schools and universities that reflects on gender issues and the configurations of the world of work in favor of a more critical and conscious society.

The present study does not seek to exhaust the theme; in contrast, it is intended to encourage debate. Given the complexity of the method, it was not possible to expand the range of ways in which female entrepreneurship can develop, which is one of the main limitations of the study. Therefore, as a suggestion for future research, it is recommended to investigate the careers of women entrepreneurs who have opted for different business models, have different educational backgrounds and family backgrounds, or have enterprises with different characteristics, such as number of employees, region scope, and area of operation. Furthermore, it is suggested to expand the understanding of factors intrinsic to female entrepreneurship from the perspective of other career models and methods and/or techniques of analysis to explore the topic from other points of view.

REFERENCES

- Agarwal, S., & Lenka, U. (2015). Study on work-life balance of women entrepreneurs – review and research agenda. *Industrial and Commercial Training*, 47(7), 356–362. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ICT-01-2015-0006>
- Akkermans, J., Seibert, S. E., & Mol, S. T. (2018). Tales of the unexpected: Integrating career shocks in the contemporary careers literature. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 44, 1-10.
- Alkhaled, S., & Berglund, K. (2018). 'And now I'm free': Women's empowerment and emancipation through entrepreneurship in Saudi Arabia and Sweden. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development*, 30(7–8), 877–900. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08985626.2018.1500645>
- Amit, R., & Muller, E. (1995). "Push" and "Pull" Entrepreneurship. *Journal of Small Business & Entrepreneurship*, 12(4), 64–80. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08276331.1995.10600505>
- Arora, S., & Kumari, N. (2021). The Future of Work: Career Reentry Programs for Women in the Workforce. *Organization Development Journal*, 21-33.
- Bandeira, P. B., Amorim, M. V., & Oliveira, M. Z. de. (2020). Empreendedorismo Feminino: Estudo comparativo entre homens e mulheres sobre motivações para empreender. *Revista Psicologia: Organizações e Trabalho*, 20(3), 1105-1113. <https://doi.org/10.17652/rpot/2020.3.19694>
- Banu, J., & Baral, R. (2021). Career choice, growth and well-being of women entrepreneurs' community: Insights on driving factors in India. *Journal of Enterprising Communities: People and Places in the Global Economy*, 1750-6204. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEC-12-2020-0206>
- Baruch, Y., & Vardi, Y. (2016). A Fresh Look at the Dark Side of Contemporary Careers: Toward a Realistic Discourse: The Dark Side of Contemporary Careers. *British Journal of Management*, 27(2), 355–372. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.12107>
- Bosma, N., Hill, S., Ionescu-Somers, A., Kelley, D., Levie, J., & Tarnawa, A. (2020). Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2019/2020 Global Report. Recuperado de: www.gemconsortium.org/latest-global-reports/1882.
- Chin, T., Jawahar, I. M., & Li, G. (2021). Development and Validation of a Career Sustainability Scale. *Journal of Career Development*, 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894845321993234>
- Closs, L. Q., & Antonello, C. S. (2011). O uso da história de vida para compreender processos de aprendizagem gerencial. *Revista de Administração Mackenzie*, 12(4), 31, 44-74.

Cohen, L., Duberley, J., & Mallon, M. (2004). Social constructionism in the study of career: Accessing the parts that other approaches cannot reach. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 64(3), 407–422. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2003.12.007>

Croson, R., & Gneezy, U. (2009). Gender Differences in Preferences. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 47(2), 448–474. <https://doi.org/10.1257/jel.47.2.448>

De Vos, A., & Van der Heijden, B. I. J. M. (2017). Current thinking on contemporary careers: the key roles of sustainable HRM and sustainability of careers. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 28, 41–50.

Denzin, N. K. (1989). *Interpretive biography*. Newbury Park: Sage.

Ferrazza, D. S.; & Antonello, C. S. (2017). Método de História de Vida: Contribuições para a Compreensão de Processos de Aprendizagem nas Organizações. *Revista Gestão Organizacional*, 15(1), 22-36.

Fors, P., & Lennerfors, T. T. (2019). The Individual-Care Nexus: A Theory of Entrepreneurial Care for Sustainable Entrepreneurship. *Sustainability*, 11(18), 4904. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11184904>

Fraga, A. M., & Rocha-De-Oliveira, S. (2020). Mobilidades no labirinto: Tensionando as fronteiras nas carreiras de mulheres. *Cadernos EBAPE.BR*, 18(spe), 757–769. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1679-395120190141>

Fraga, A. M., Gemelli, C. E., & Rocha-de-Oliveira, S. (2019). Cenário das publicações científicas em carreira e gênero. *Revista Pensamento Contemporâneo em Administração*, 13(3), 158. <https://doi.org/10.12712/rpca.v13i3.27973>

Gartner, W. B. (2007). Entrepreneurial Narrative and a Science of the Imagination. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 22(5), 613–627.

Godoy, A. S. (2018). Reflexão a respeito das contribuições e limites da história de vida na pesquisa em Administração. *Administração: Ensino e Pesquisa*, 19(1), 161–175. <https://doi.org/10.13058/raep.2018.v19n1.954>

Grandjean, B. D. (1981). History and career in a bureaucratic labor market. *American Journal of Sociology*, 86(5), 1057–1092.

Greenhaus, J. H., & Kossek, E. E. (2014). The contemporary career: A work–home perspective. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 1(1), 361–388.

Gupta, N., Kemelgor, C., Fuchs, S., & Etzkowitz, H. (2005). Triple burden on women in science. A cross-cultural analysis. *Current Science*, *89*(8), 1382-1386.

Hamilton, E. (2014). Entrepreneurial Narrative Identity and Gender: A Double Epistemological Shift. *Journal of Small Business Management*, *52*(4), 703–712.

Hatch, J. A., & Wisniewski, R. (1995). Life history and narrative: questions, issues and exemplary works. In: Hatch, J.; Wisniewski, R. (Ed.). *Life history and narrative*. London: Routledge Falmer, 113-135.

Jafari-Sadeghi, V. (2020). The motivational factors of business venturing: Opportunity versus necessity? A gendered perspective on European countries. *Journal of Business Research*, *113*, 279–289. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.09.058>

Kamberidou, I. (2020). “Distinguished” women entrepreneurs in the digital economy and the multitasking whirlpool. *Journal of Innovation and Entrepreneurship*, *9*(1), 3. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13731-020-0114-y>

Khandelwal, P., & Sehgal, A. (2018). Exploring work-family interface for Indian women entrepreneurs. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, *33*(3), 203–216. <https://doi.org/10.1108/GM-04-2016-0075>

Ladge, J., Eddleston, K. A., & Sugiyama, K. (2019). Am I an entrepreneur? How imposter fears hinder women entrepreneurs’ business growth. *Business Horizons*, *62*(5), 615–624. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2019.05.001>

Lam, A., & de Campos, A. (2014). ‘Content to be sad’ or ‘runaway apprentice’? The psychological contract and career agency of young scientists in the entrepreneurial university. *Human Relations*, *68*(5), 811–841.

Lee, M. D., Kossek, E. E., Hall, D. T., & Litrico, J. B. (2011). Entangled strands: A process perspective on the evolution of careers in the context of personal, family, work, and community life. *Human Relations*, *64*(12), 1531–1553. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726711424622>

Liñán, F., Jaén, I., & Martín, D. (2022). Does entrepreneurship fit her? Women entrepreneurs, gender-role orientation, and entrepreneurial culture. *Small Business Economics*, *58*(2), 1051–1071. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-020-00433-w>

Mallimaci F., Béliveau V. G. (2006). Historias de Vida y Metodos Biograficos. In: Gialdino, I. V. (2006). *Estrategias de Investigación cualitativa*. Barcelona, Gedisa.

Manolova, T. S., Brush, C. G., Edelman, L. F., & Shaver, K. G. (2012). One size does not fit all: Entrepreneurial expectancies and growth intentions of US women and men nascent entrepreneurs. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development*, 24(1–2), 7–27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08985626.2012.637344>

McDonald, K. S., & Hite L. M. (2018). Conceptualizing and creating sustainable careers. *Human Resource Development Review*, 17(4), 349-372.

McKinsey & Company. (2020). *Women in the Workplace*. Recuperado de: https://wiw-report.s3.amazonaws.com/Women_in_the_Workplace_2020.pdf

Mezirow, J. (1978). Perspective Transformation. *Adult Education*, 28(2), 100–110.

Mishra, P., & McDonald, K. (2017). Career resilience: An integrated review of the empirical literature. *Human Resource Development Review*, 16(3), 207–234.

Neill, S., Metcalf, L., & York, J. L. (2015). Seeing What Others Miss: A Study of Women Entrepreneurs in High-Growth Startups. *Entrepreneurship Research Journal*, 5(4). <https://doi.org/10.1515/erj-2014-0009>

Newman, K. L. (2011). Sustainable careers. *Organizational Dynamics*, 40(2), 136–143. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2011.01.008>

Osmani, M., El-Haddadeh, R., Hindi, N. M., & Weerakkody, V. (2021). The influence of creativity on the entrepreneurial intention of university female graduates: An SEM approach. *Industry and Higher Education*, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09504222211061231>

Piowar-Sulej, K., Krzywonos, M., & Kwil, I. (2021). Environmental entrepreneurship e Bibliometric and content analysis of the subject literature based on H-Core. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 295, 1-25.

Poldner, K., Shrivastava, P., & Branzei, O. (2017). Embodied Multi-Discursivity: An Aesthetic Process Approach to Sustainable Entrepreneurship. *Business & Society*, 56(2), 214–252. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0007650315576149>

Ramadani, V., Dana, L.-P., Sadiku-Dushi, N., Ratten, V., & Welsh, D. H. B. (2017). Decision-Making Challenges of Women Entrepreneurship in Family Business Succession Process. *Journal of Enterprising Culture*, 25(04), 411–439. <https://doi.org/10.1142/S0218495817500157>

- Rey-Martí, A., Tur Porcar, A., & Mas-Tur, A. (2015). Linking female entrepreneurs' motivation to business survival. *Journal of Business Research*, 68(4), 810–814. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2014.11.033>
- Santos, F. J., Roomi, M. A., & Liñán, F. (2016). About Gender Differences and the Social Environment in the Development of Entrepreneurial Intentions. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 54(1), 49–66. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jsbm.12129>
- Sehgal, A., & Khandelwal, P. (2020). Work–family interface of women entrepreneurs: Evidence from India. *South Asian Journal of Business Studies*, 9(3), 411–428. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SAJBS-11-2019-0213>
- Spindola, T., & Santos, R. da S. (2003). Trabalhando com a história de vida: Percalços de uma pesquisa(dora?). *Revista da Escola de Enfermagem da USP*, 37(2), 119–126. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0080-62342003000200014>
- Tang, J., Kacmar, K. M. (Micki), & Busenitz, L. (2012). Entrepreneurial alertness in the pursuit of new opportunities. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 27(1), 77–94. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2010.07.001>
- Tartari, V., & Salter, A. (2015). The engagement gap: *Research Policy*, 44(6), 1176–1191. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2015.01.014>
- Van der Heijden, B. I. J. M., & De Vos, A. (2015). Sustainable careers: introductory chapter. In Van der Heijden, B. I. J. M., & De Vos, A. *Handbook of Research on Sustainable Careers*. Cheltenham, UK / Northampton, USA: Edward Elgar Publishing, Inc.
- Van der Heijden, B., De Vos, A., Akkermans, J., Spurk, D., Semeijn, J., van der Velde, M., & Fugate, M. (2020). Sustainable careers across the lifespan: Moving the field forward. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 117, 1-9.
- Wu, J., Li, Y., & Zhang, D. (2019). Identifying women's entrepreneurial barriers and empowering female entrepreneurship worldwide: A fuzzy-set QCA approach. *International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal*, 15(3), 905–928. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11365-019-00570-z>
- Xiu, L., & Gunderson, M. (2021). Does an Entrepreneurial Career Pay for Women in China? *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 59(1), 167–190. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjir.12520>
- Yadav, V., & Unni, J. (2016). Women entrepreneurship: Research review and future directions. *Journal of Global Entrepreneurship Research*, 6(1), 12. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40497-016-0055-x>

Yoopetch, C. (2021). Women empowerment, attitude toward risk-taking and entrepreneurial intention in the hospitality industry. *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 15(1), 59–76. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCTHR-01-2020-0016>