Mini Review

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Labor outsourcing in Colombia

Abstract

This communication aimed to reflect on the socioeconomic impact of labor outsourcing in Colombia. To this end, a qualitative study was conducted, supported by a literature review on the topic, in which the author briefly presents their objective opinions regarding labor outsourcing. The conclusion is that this employment system, very common in Colombia, represents a source of income for families and for the national treasury.

Keywords: labor outsourcing, Colombia, business, human talent

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Introduction

Business organizations are holistic systems comprised of structural elements such as organizational philosophy (mission, vision), formal authority, chain of command or hierarchy, corporate policy (goals, objectives, strategic plans, administrative procedures), and the technology employed in the production processes, goods, and services offered to their clients, supported by the human resources working within the organization.

Depending on the established techno structure, organizational complexity, and the operations carried out by companies, they often rely on services offered by other companies, known as contractors and/or cooperatives. These entities possess the necessary tools to perform specific functions that some corporations cannot. This process of hiring external personnel is called “labor outsourcing,” which, according to Haidar,[1] is a socio-economic phenomenon of global importance, especially in Latin America. Since the 1960s, transnational corporations have increased this system of collective employment through smaller companies.

From this perspective, the objective of this essay was to analyze labor outsourcing as a substantial element of the Latin American social economy, with special emphasis on the Colombian context.

Methodology

The methodology used for this document was exhaustive documentary research, which consisted of reviewing bibliographic material on the subject of study to analyze the selected content.[2] This involved selecting scientific articles indexed in various electronic repositories, postgraduate theses, and institutional documents that provided a broad overview of the topic, allowing the researcher’s ideas and perceptions to be compared with those of other key authors.[3]

Development

According to Cruz et al.,[4] labor outsourcing consists of transferring certain responsibilities to other companies for the operational development of the economic activity of the contracting entity. Among the reasons large corporations outsource, we can mention: 1) vertical corporate centralization, which makes it difficult for them to make autonomous decisions, as is the case with transnational oil, electricity, and related industries, which depend on orders issued by the national executive branch and/or the ministry to which they are attached; 2) it facilitates the rapid execution of secondary activities, allowing the organization to concentrate on its primary operations. This leads to a temporary and, in some cases, gradual increase in the workforce, making the optimization of available resources more efficient over time and, in many cases, reducing significant costs that can be invested in other secondary functions; 3) it allows for the hiring of skilled labor, which would cost the company a great deal of money if it trained its existing staff to perform these functions.

I consider that the aforementioned points allow for a certain decentralization of any nation’s productive apparatus. This translates into more sources of employment and significantly important opportunities for developing countries like Colombia. In this regard, Law 1429 of 2010, enacted in the country, requires outsourced companies to treat their personnel the same as permanent employees of public and private companies. Many companies used this strategy to reduce severance costs and did not guarantee full access to job security, thus being viewed negatively by citizens and most researchers in this area. Conversely, other authors consider it a flexible and innovative economic strategy that raises the quality and efficiency of companies relevant to the national economy, provided that temporary workers are not harmed.

Therefore, the aforementioned Law can be considered a crucial step forward in terms of justice and family dignity, because it establishes a legal framework of socio-economic significance. Furthermore, it allows the Ministry of Labor to monitor and control the operations of outsourcing agencies for the benefit of their workers.[5] This allows me to understand that the association of outsourced companies forms a vast socio-productive network that favors the division of labor and skilled and unskilled workers, which in a way enables new sources of employment for vulnerable or at-risk families.

The literature presents two sides to the coin regarding job outsourcing. However, it is crucial to recognize its influence on Colombian society in combating mass unemployment. Consequently, establishing flexible regulatory laws that align with the country’s social and economic realities will allow this productive system to continue, while also addressing the urgent need for structural transformations in labor relations. This transformation must guarantee workers’ right to dignified work, recognizing their basic needs such as food, housing, and healthcare. This issue is critical in Colombia, as statistics reveal a clear bias on the part of the State towards the agencies that control the outsourcing sector, rather than towards its employees. The National Survey of Labor Relations[6] published in its official document that of the 106 complaints registered, only four were resolved to the satisfaction of the affected parties. This reinforces the negative view held by many social actors regarding outsourcing.

However, assertive and proactive participation in favor of compliance with existing reforms will increase confidence in outsourcing as a social action mechanism that promotes dignified labor market integration, with fair jobs that foster family well-being.

Conclusion

I consider it necessary to recognize this type of employment for our current working society, as part of a dynamic and expanding system that stimulates an active and decentralized workforce, which contributes substantially to the economic, educational and social progress of our nation, as a fundamental pillar of the individual and collective labor rights of the workers included in this model.

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Conflicts of interest

The author declares that there is no conflicts of interest.

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