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# Women in Factories China: Creating Good Jobs and Building an Inclusive Economy

Stories of Impact



# About This Report

Using testimonials from participants in the Women in Factories China program, this report provides a picture of the program's qualitative impact.

This report was written by BSR's John Pabon, Shine He, Ana Chiu, and Charleen Tong. Additional guidance was provided by Lin Wang, Shirley Xue, Emilie Prattico, and Eva Dienel, as well as members of the Walmart Foundation.

The report is based on a statistical review and interviews with the individuals listed in the annexes. The authors also drew insights from more than two decades of BSR's work with business to tackle complex sustainability challenges, including those within the supply chain. The authors would like to thank the interviewees for their time. Any errors that remain are those of the authors. Please direct comments or questions to John Pabon at [jpabon@bsr.org](mailto:jpabon@bsr.org).

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## Introduction: Dynamic Growth, Unequal Distribution

China, a country with 1.3 billion people and a growing population, could potentially overtake the U.S. economy in the coming decade. Since opening up international trade in the early 1980s, China has mobilized a workforce larger than the entire population of modern-day Europe<sup>1</sup> and transitioned from a largely agrarian society to the world's second-largest economy.<sup>2</sup> In the last decade alone, China has quadrupled its per-capita gross domestic product.<sup>3</sup>

China's exponential growth is due in large part to its industrial strength—particularly from the growth of the country's vast manufacturing sector. According to the American Enterprise Institute, in 2011, China's manufacturing output increased by 23 percent, compared to a 2.8 percent increase in the United States over the same period.<sup>4</sup> Fueling this are the scores of workers in China's manufacturing facilities. Some house tens of thousands on sprawling campuses. Donning uniforms, workers become faceless numbers in a room. This socialist singularity is what many think of when they envision "the world's factory."

This tremendous economic growth has not been equally distributed. Minority populations, most notably, women, have largely been disenfranchised from this development. Even though Chairman Mao famously said women "hold up half the sky,"<sup>5</sup> the benefits for doing so are not always equally shared. This is even more pronounced when we look at women's contributions to China's workforce.

Currently, women make up 56.7 percent of China's workers.<sup>6</sup> This is the second-highest percentage in all of Asia. On average, however, they are paid 32.7 percent less than men in urban areas, and 44 percent less in rural areas.<sup>7</sup> Globally, China ranks 87th in terms of gender pay parity, according to the World Economic Forum.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> China's workforce population, according to the World Bank, was 801,790,592 as of 2013 ("Labor Force, Total," The World Bank, accessed September 2015, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.TOTL.IN>). The UN reports Europe's 2015 population to be 738 million ("World Population Prospects," The United Nations, accessed September 2015, [http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/Publications/Files/Key\\_Findings\\_WPP\\_2015.pdf](http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/Publications/Files/Key_Findings_WPP_2015.pdf)).

<sup>2</sup> "China Overview," The World Bank, accessed September 2015, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/china/overview>.

<sup>3</sup> "China GDP Per Capita," Trading Economics, accessed September 2015, <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/china/gdp-per-capita>.

<sup>4</sup> "China is Now World's No. 1 Manufacturer," American Enterprise Institute, accessed April 2015, <http://www.aei.org/publication/chart-of-the-day-china-is-now-worlds-no-1-manufacturer/>.

<sup>5</sup> "The Writings of Mao Zedong 1949-1976," Mao Zedong, accessed August 2015, <https://books.google.com/books?id=ftv7ks-EhqOC&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

<sup>6</sup> "Workplace Gender Equality in Asia: Is China Ahead?" CNBC, accessed August 2015, <http://www.cnbc.com/2014/10/30/workplace-gender-equality-in-asia-is-china-ahead.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Yang Yao, "Pay Gap Still Wide between Men and Women Despite Improvements," China Daily, March 13, 2015, accessed August 2015, [http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2015-03/13/content\\_19803414.htm](http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2015-03/13/content_19803414.htm).

<sup>8</sup> "The Gender Gap Report, 2014," The World Economic Forum, accessed August 2015, <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2014/report-highlights/>.

Managers might justify this discrimination by noting that Chinese women have a lower average level of education than men.<sup>9</sup> For rural women, the statistics are even more extreme. Those women will likely leave school before age 14,<sup>10</sup> which affects their ability to find decent work when they are of working age.

## CHINA'S WOMEN AND AN INCLUSIVE ECONOMY

As of 2014, China's migrant population stood at 273.95 million.<sup>11</sup> Many have moved to China's urban centers in search of decent work, creating mass urbanization. Estimates suggest that China's urban population will reach 69 percent by 2030,<sup>12</sup> compared to 53 percent today.<sup>13</sup> China is no longer the agrarian society it once was, and it is becoming more urban with each passing year. Every person—regardless of hometown, background, or gender—is looking to benefit from China's dynamic rise.

This idea speaks to the importance of building an inclusive economy, which is at the forefront of development scholarship today. BSR defines an inclusive economy as one in which all individuals and communities are able to participate in, benefit from, and contribute to global and local economies.<sup>14</sup> BSR has developed a framework, based on three pillars, to work with business on building an inclusive economy: good jobs that enable strong livelihoods, access to essential goods and services, and investments for prosperous local communities.

## THE WOMEN IN FACTORIES CHINA PROGRAM



Workers enjoy a light moment during a training. BSR, 2014

One of the main populations that should benefit from an inclusive economy is women, particularly women who are low-income, unskilled, or prone to social exclusion, like many of the women working in China's factories today. These women also have an enormous potential to spur positive changes in business.

According to Julia Broussard, China country manager for UN Women, "promoting female leadership in business will strengthen business performance and bring more profit." She also notes that investments in female workers' education can have dramatic results. Those going through educational programs are "more open,

<sup>9</sup> "Between the Lines: Listening to Female Factory Workers in China," BSR, accessed August 2015, [http://www.bsr.org/reports/bsr\\_female\\_factory\\_workers\\_china\\_en.pdf](http://www.bsr.org/reports/bsr_female_factory_workers_china_en.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> "China's Education Gap – A Surprising Factor in Rural Poverty," Project-Partner, accessed August 2015, <http://projectpartner.org/poverty/chinas-education-gap-a-surprising-factor-in-rural-poverty/>.

<sup>11</sup> Statistical Communiqué of the People's Republic of China on the 2014 National Economic and Social Development," National Bureau of Statistics of China, accessed September 2015, [http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/PressRelease/201502/t20150228\\_687439.html](http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/PressRelease/201502/t20150228_687439.html).

<sup>12</sup> "Cities and the New Climate Economy," The New Climate Economy, accessed August 2015, <https://files.lsecities.net/files/2014/11/LSE-Cities-2014-The-Transformative-Role-of-Global-Urban-Growth-NCE-Paper-01.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> "Urban Population (% of Total)," The World Bank, accessed September 2015, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS>.

<sup>14</sup> "Business Leadership for an Inclusive Economy," BSR, accessed August 2015, <http://www.bsr.org/en/our-insights/report-view/business-leadership-for-an-inclusive-economy-a-framework-for-collaboration>.

which will impact business strategy to become more holistic and dynamic,” empowering women to “find market risks and opportunities faster … lead[ing] a company to better prevent risks and capture opportunities.” Broussard also believes women will help increase workplace and leadership diversity, which will affect all operations.

Prior to beginning work together on the Women in Factories China program in 2013, both BSR and the Walmart Foundation had existing programs aimed at empowering women workers. By joining forces on this three-year program, BSR and the Walmart Foundation intend to provide 26,000 women in 45 factories the life and leadership skills necessary to benefit from China’s economic growth. Through a BSR-developed curriculum, women workers are given 15 hours of training on core life skills such as financial planning, personal health and wellness, and career development. The program capitalizes on women’s nearly 60 percent share of China’s workforce by encouraging peer sharing throughout a factory or workplace. This sharing widens the potential positive impacts for each business.

In its first year and a half, the Women in Factories China program has provided 22,036 men and women in 36 factories up to 15 hours of foundational training. In addition, 213 high-potential women workers in 11 factories have completed advanced training. Within the 36 participating factories, BSR has also fully equipped 64 human resources personnel to administer training independently.

While these statistics tell one side of a very important story, the participants’ individual stories fill out the more human side of the program. The stories you are about to read are gleaned from conversations with more than 50 women who have participated in the Women in Factories China Program. These stories help bring to life the first pillar of BSR’s inclusive economies framework: how providing good jobs can enable strong livelihoods.

The idea of good jobs and strong livelihoods has evolved over time. While employees still make up the cornerstone of successful organizations, their individual needs are different today than they were in the past. Today’s women workers in China are no longer satisfied to simply obtain a job; now they want to identify careers where they can learn, advance, and lead. According to a BSR survey of 1,000 Chinese women, workers born after 1990 are more concerned with career choices, gaining experience, and learning new skills.<sup>15</sup> Survey respondents ranked their top three educational needs: 24 percent expressed a desire for training on how to adapt to life in the city; 21 percent said they want training on environmental, health, and safety issues; and 16 percent said they want lessons on developing their communication skills.<sup>16</sup>

The stories that follow help define the four key components of good jobs and strong livelihoods, defined in BSR’s Inclusive Economy framework:

- » **Respect and livelihood:** Participants have talked about developing basic workplace skills, improving their standard of living, building wealth, or improving financial literacy.
- » **Well-being:** Participants have improved their physical or mental health, sense of safety, family interactions, and general well-being.
- » **Diversity:** Participants have an improved notion of gender, equality, diversity, and multiculturalism.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., “Between the Lines.”

<sup>16</sup> “Teaching China’s Supply Chain Women to Lean In,” BSR, accessed August 2015, <http://www.bsr.org/en/our-insights/blog-view/teaching-chinas-supply-chain-women-to-lean-in>.

- » **Mobility:** Participants have experienced more opportunities for career advancement, enhanced communications skills, and other career-related improvements.

The goal of this paper is to provide a synthesis of on-the-ground testimonials that represent the qualitative impact of the Women in Factories China program over its first year and a half.

## Stories of Economic Inclusion

The impact experienced from the Women in Factories China program is as varied as the participants themselves. Some begin the program with only a basic knowledge of issues related to health, finance, communications, and career. Over the course of the curriculum, however, they are empowered with information applicable to many areas of their lives.

## RESPECT AND LIVELIHOOD

The first component of BSR's "Good Jobs" pillar from our Inclusive Economy framework is to promote respect and livelihood in the workplace. This means upholding human rights and minimum standards of employment, with reliable and sufficient income to meet basic needs; improving one's standard of living; and building wealth over time.<sup>17</sup> In China, this translates into the realization of Xi Jinping's "Chinese Dream," in which China and its people realize the same prosperity and influence as other developed nations.

Fostering an environment that embraces respect and livelihood is a major part of the Women in Factories China program. In factories driven by the demand to meet orders, where each person is a singular part of a large system, the ideas of respect, individual rights, and camaraderie are often overlooked. We have found, however, that when workers are respected and treated fairly, factories benefit from increased production, lower absenteeism, and reduced turnover.

### Embracing a Team Spirit



He Hui, BSR, 2015

He Hui was one such worker who failed to understand how her role fit within the larger team. A line worker from the Cichang Footwear Factory in the Sichuan Province, she focused on her individual work and responsibilities. She was concerned with meeting production numbers at the end of her shift and didn't see or care about what those around her were doing. When her shift was complete, she could casually drop everything and go home.

This attitude is not uncommon on the factory floor, but it often results in high turnover rates because it indicates a lack of engagement among staff.

Conversely, the feeling of being part of a team—something larger than oneself—is often a catalyst

for lower staff turnover. A 2014 Gallup study found that employee engagement can reduce turnover by 25 percent in high-turnover organizations and by 65 percent in low-turnover organizations.<sup>18</sup> Annual average

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., "Business Leadership."

<sup>18</sup> "Q12 Employee Engagement," Gallup, accessed August 2015, <http://www.gallup.com/services/169328/q12-employee-engagement.aspx>.

turnover rates in China's manufacturing sector range between 10 percent and 30 percent,<sup>19</sup> indicating that engagement has the potential to influence turnover rates.

After participating in training modules on team-building and communications, He has a better understanding of how her work affects those around her. She said she now cares more about her team members and is willing to help them when they need it. She also works better with management. Her goal is no longer solely focused on meeting her own production numbers, but on helping the entire team produce and succeed. "The training has taught me that I am not just an individual," she said. "I am in a team. I am part of a chain. If the chain breaks, it affects others in the team. We need everyone to keep the work going."

### **From Fear to Confidence**

The fear of speaking in public pervades every culture. According to some estimates, as much as 75 percent of people worldwide have glossophobia, or fear of public speaking.<sup>20</sup> This is often more pronounced in China, where discomfort speaking in public stems from concern over disrupting relationships with others, part of the Confucian ideal of hierarchy.<sup>21</sup> One of our major initial hurdles implementing the Women in Factories China program was encouraging participants to voice their opinions, ask questions, and teach others. But after the program, most participants have become more vocal and participatory both inside and outside the workplace.



Chen Meixia, personal photograph, 2015

The program capitalizes on this by identifying, training, and using special participants as internal instructors. This creates an exponential impact on the number of participants the program can reach. Due to her outstanding performance during training modules, Chen Meixia's managers felt she was perfectly suited to become an internal trainer for other Women in Factories China Program participants.

Chen, a participant from the Hayco Factory in Shenzhen Province, feared public speaking and had no previous experience giving lectures. The biggest challenge for her, though, was preparation. How was she going to organize the training material, present it, answer questions from her colleagues, and manage her stress and fear of speaking, all while keeping up at work? This caused a great amount of tension for Chen, who viewed the opportunity as a punishment rather than a reward.

Through the encouragement of her factory managers, and the skills she learned during her training on effective communication and stress management, Chen took on the challenge. She found a mentor to help her through the preparation process, and she practiced presenting to smaller groups of friends and colleagues. This

<sup>19</sup> "Giving Women Workers a Reason to Stay," Jabil, accessed August 2015, <http://www.jabil.com/blog/Giving-Workers-a-Reason-to-Stay.html>.

<sup>20</sup> "Do You Suffer from Glossophobia?" Glossophobia.com, accessed August 2015, <http://www.glossophobia.com/>.

<sup>21</sup> "A Contrastive Study of Cultural Diversity of Learning Styles between China and the United States," Hong Jian, accessed September 2015, [www.ccsenet.org/journal.html](http://www.ccsenet.org/journal.html).

helped improve her presentation skills and build her confidence. By the time she presented to an actual group of trainees, Chen was able to handle her nerves and effectively train the group. Following the training, Meixia was open to receiving constructive feedback from managers on her performance. She said she knew the feedback would help her improve.

"I have achieved much from the training," she said. "I was inspired by the trainer ... [who] can explain complicated knowledge in a simple way. This is the result of her working experience and serious attitude. I should learn from her and keep making efforts to be a good trainer and share knowledge with my colleagues."

## WELL-BEING

The second piece of the good jobs pillar is well-being. Employment conditions should support and protect health and safety for all, and the factory's policies and benefits should enable individual and family health and well-being.<sup>22</sup> Within the Women in Factories China program, well-being refers to education on emotional management, occupational health and safety, reproductive and sexual health, parenting, and general well-being.



Zhang Lihui, BSR, 2015

BSR's HERproject, another high-impact program aimed at female workers, has demonstrated links between well-being and workplace engagement in China. Absenteeism due to menstruation, for example, dropped by 4 percent in participating factories where workers received education on sexual health.<sup>23</sup> After receiving training, 81 percent of participants said they were satisfied with their workplace, versus only 54 percent before the program.<sup>24</sup> As with respect and livelihood, well-being benefits both the women and the factory.

### Bridging the Generation Gap

Zhang Lihui is a line worker from the south-central Chinese province of Hunan. As is typical for most factory workers in China, Zhang made the difficult decision to leave her family for work in a larger city. When Zhang migrated, she left her young son in the care of other family members. He is one of the 61 million "left-behind children" caught up in China's vast human migration.<sup>25</sup>

When she returned home during the Chinese New Year, Zhang found it difficult to build a meaningful relationship with a son who hardly knew her. "My child isn't affectionate with me," she said. "It didn't matter whether I was there or not." She found it especially upsetting when she tried to communicate with her son. During phone calls back home, the conversation topics—about school and what her son was learning—were of little interest to the boy. In person, Zhang said she would

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., "Business Leadership."

<sup>23</sup> "HERproject China: Empowering Women Workers," BSR, accessed August 2015, <http://herproject.org/downloads/bsr-herproject-china-report-en.pdf>.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> "Left-Behind Children: Victims of Urbanization?" All-China Women's Federation, accessed September 2015, <http://www.womenofchina.cn/womenofchina/html1/opinion/1506/216-1.htm>.

see her son “exhibit all these behaviors that I [didn’t] like, so I would yell at him, which made him even more distant from me.” She expressed the pain she felt in wanting to provide for and relate to her son, but feeling like a stranger to the boy she had left behind. This affected her ability to perform work, with the stress of her situation causing frustration and unproductive outbursts between Zhang and her colleagues.

Through the Women in Factories China program, Zhang went through a training module on parent-child communication skills, where she learned how to address her son in an age-appropriate way that would spark his interest in conversing. Zhang replaced the nagging questions about school with more personal questions about her son’s friends and free-time activities. “Now every time I call him, he talks more than before,” she said. The last time she spoke with her son, Zhang said he asked her to bring home a badminton racket so they could play together.

While she used to constantly worry about her son, Zhang now feels she can talk to him in a meaningful way to build a stronger relationship. And her earlier stress about having to provide for a family she felt estranged from is now gone. This has inspired her to continue working and has increased her loyalty to both her job and the factory.

### Nutritional Education, One Grain at a Time

With the rise of urban living and proximity to fast-food restaurants, nutritional habits in China are deteriorating. More than 300 million Chinese are now considered obese, and the per capita ratio of obesity in China is now second only to the United States.<sup>26</sup> A major public policy concern is that people lack knowledge about nutrition. For example, the Chinese Ministry of Health notes that only 30.2 percent of the population is aware of hypertension as a medical condition, although 2 million new cases of diabetes are diagnosed in China each year.<sup>27</sup>

The effects of poor nutrition on workplace performance are well-known. Nutrition and health education, conversely, demonstrate a positive return for business. Studies have shown that nutritional training in the workplace can improve worker productivity by between 2 percent and 20 percent.<sup>28</sup>

Fu Hongmei participates in the Women in Factories China program from the Hairisheng Factory in Guangdong Province. Like many of her peers, she rarely



Fu Hongmei, BSR, 2015

<sup>26</sup> “Fat China: How are Policymakers Tackling Rising Obesity?” The Guardian, accessed August 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/feb/12/chinas-body-mass-time-bomb-policymakers-tackling-rising-obesity>.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> “Can Worksite Nutritional Interventions Improve Productivity and Firm Profitability?” Royal Society for Public Health, accessed September 2015, [https://www.rspah.org.uk/filemanager/root/site\\_assets/membership/members\\_area/nuffield/184.full.pdf](https://www.rspah.org.uk/filemanager/root/site_assets/membership/members_area/nuffield/184.full.pdf).

planned her eating, and she knows firsthand how nutrition can affect her health. “Every day, I blindly ate and drank, without routine in any meal,” she said. “I never ate breakfast, and I was very picky about what I ate. These habits led to stomachaches and frequent dizziness.”

These ailments also decreased Fu’s productivity and made her miss work. Through the training, however, she learned about the importance of nutritional health, particularly the role food plays in healthy living, wellness, and productivity in the workplace. The curriculum also includes training on how to prepare foods for optimal nutritional benefit. Now Fu often prepares healthy meals for herself and her family.

Since the training, Fu has noticed a dramatic improvement in many aspects of her life, most notably regarding her attitude toward work. She has increased her productivity while decreasing her sick days and time off.

Fu’s main lesson from her training demonstrates a change in her relationship with food. “It is not enough, nor necessarily healthy, to merely eat until you are full,” she said. “We also need to learn about foods’ energy content, and how its chemical composition helps to repair our tissues and regulate our physiological functions.” She added that she hopes to “maintain this new lifestyle and [is] eager to share this newfound knowledge with others.”

### **Inspired to Spread the Word**

An important aspect of the Women in Factories China program is how it organically reaches more people than just those who are trained. Participants are empowered to learn the material, internalize it, and teach others. This helps the knowledge spread beyond the trainees because participants gain the confidence to discuss the training topics with coworkers during their breaks and after work. This often leads to questions and further interest in the program.

Lin Ping, a corporate training manager at Guangdong-based Sinomax, is just one example of how the program can grow organically. Lin has trained a team of trainers who conduct the Women in Factories China program’s foundational training at Sinomax. She has also conducted Sinomax’s advanced training and is a part-time advanced trainer for BSR at other factories. She has worked for Sinomax for many years, and first started out as a line manager on the factory floor. Given this background, Lin is very good at communicating with factory workers, because she knows exactly what they are experiencing and how to relate to them.

Lin has even begun conducting community workshops, using a modified version of the program’s effective communications, foundational, and advanced training modules. Between 50 and 100 local community residents now attend these sessions, and many of the students, who are mainly older people, have never heard of communication skills, let alone taken a course on how they are used. Through her endeavors, Lin is spreading the message of the program beyond the factory walls.

## DIVERSITY

Diversity is the third aspect of the good jobs pillar. Within inclusive economies, diversity means to provide employees with different backgrounds—including ethnic, racial, religious, and gender—equal opportunities to obtain and retain employment, and to excel and advance at work.<sup>29</sup>

The Women in Factories China program addresses gender diversity by empowering women with the knowledge and skills to promote workplace parity. Through the program, we have also discovered that workers of different generations can also benefit from an improved appreciation for diversity.

Young workers are changing how they approach their career and life in the workplace. With the proliferation of social media, young professionals in China are exposed to ideas and influences their parents could never have dreamed of. The older generation of workers—those who went through China's Cultural Revolution—are largely influenced by pure socialist ideals of working hard, saving money, and raising a family. But workers born after the 1980s "have greater expectations and higher aspirations than their parents' generation," according to Han Dongfang, director of the China Labor Bulletin. "Simply getting by is no longer enough."<sup>30</sup>

This generation of workers is more independent and willing to voice opinions. They also have an average of two more years of education than older generations, and they are more aware of their rights—and more willing to stand up for them—than their elders were.<sup>31</sup> This clash of working cultures is becoming a serious issue for management. Social unrest in the workplace rose 33 percent in 2014, with 2,590 separate incidents between January and September 2015.<sup>32</sup> While these incidents are not entirely due to generational misunderstandings, factory managers can help quell these tensions by finding ways to bridge the divide between older and younger workers.

### It's Not Only Women in Factories



Zhang Chungang, BSR, 2015

The name "Women in Factories" may be slightly misleading: During the program's first year, many men also participated, gaining critical insight and learning skills that are important for every worker. One such participant was Zhang Chungang, a line leader from the Winstron Factory in Zhongshan. He was particularly interested in the staff management module and had a desire to improve turnover rates, which he had seen increase markedly since 2010. He

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., "Business Leadership."

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., "Between the Lines."

<sup>31</sup> "A Turning Point for Chinese Workers?" In These Times, accessed September 2015, <http://inthesetimes.com/article/17759/a-turning-point-for-chinese-workers>.

<sup>32</sup> "Strike Map," China Labour Bulletin, accessed August 2015, <http://strikemap.clb.org.hk/strikes/en>.

attributed this turnover to different working styles among generations.

While the management team at Zhang's factory had taken proactive measures to bridge this generational divide and ensure factory production, he wanted to improve his skills in understanding and communicating with his younger colleagues. Through the program's training, Zhang learned to adjust his management style depending on the person he was speaking to. For younger workers, he has adopted what he calls a "big brother" approach. This has helped him reduce conflict and improve understanding and production.

One unforeseen result of this toned-down stance is that Zhang's managees now look to him as a mentor on a number of issues. Many are far from home and do not have the familial support they need. Because of this, they have come to Zhang to discuss issues like sexual education. These young adults are grappling with issues like premarital sex, cohabitation, pregnancy, and abortion, and Zhang now gives training to front-line workers to educate them on safer sexual behavior.

Overall, Zhang said he feels the program has helped him "think in a more rational way." He has also received praise from his colleagues. "My supervisor thinks I am more mature in managing production, and staff think I am more reliable," he said.

### **Creating a Mentor**



Shang Xinai, another line manager from the Winstron Factory in Zhongshan, was also concerned with differences in working styles among the generations. Shang said she felt disdain toward younger workers, whom she felt did not have living pressures and were only there for fun. This affected her interactions with younger workers, and she would often dismiss them as undeserving of attention and guidance.

Following the training on staff management, however, Shang began to understand the importance of changing her communication style to meet the needs of different generations. She learned that this group of younger workers did have societal pressures, but coped with them in different ways. In an effort to better understand those workers, Shang began communicating with younger workers after their shifts, using social media platforms like WeChat. She began to understand that this younger generation needed a sense of cohesion and family, and so Shang began to host dinner parties and take staff on trips outside the factory. She now facilitates integration for new team members.

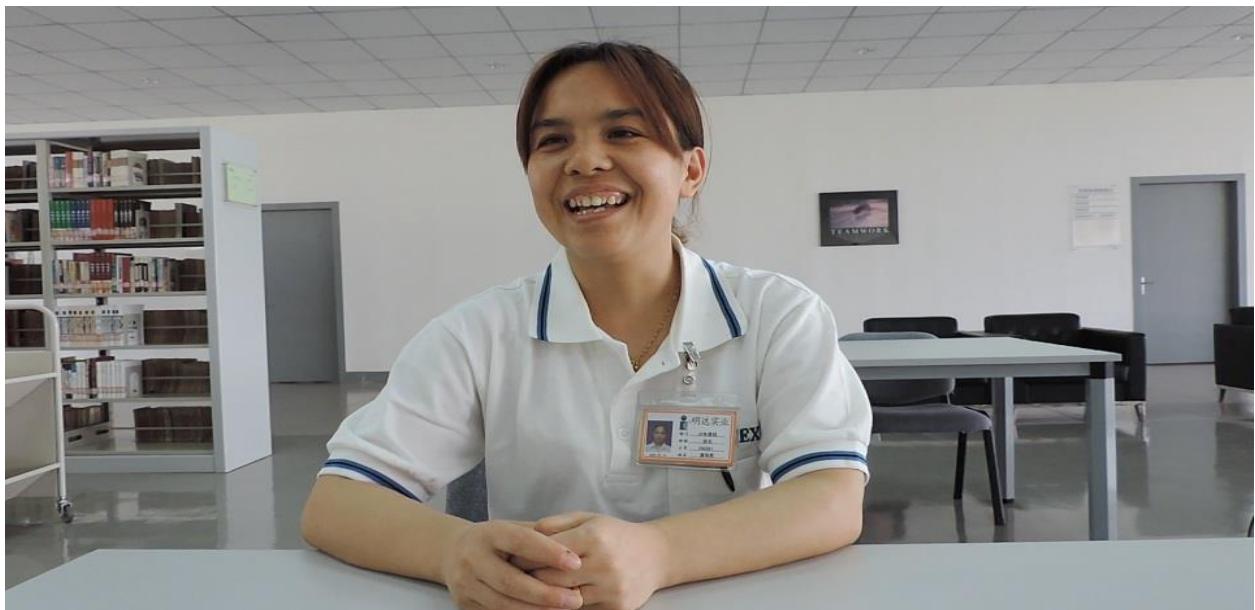
Shang Xinai, BSR, 2015

Through her deeper interactions with younger staff, Shang learned that many younger people had challenges with financial planning—a topic Shang had learned more about through the program's financial training modules. Younger workers would often complain to her about their lack of funds, and she underlined the importance of planning properly and saving money for the future. To address this gap in knowledge, Shang started teaching front-line workers the financial-planning skills necessary to put them on a more stable path. Shang said she is happy with the knowledge gained through the program, and aims to share what she has learned "to benefit more people."

## MOBILITY

The final element in the good job's pillar is mobility. Mobility ensures that employees have the opportunity to develop their skills and advance at work.<sup>33</sup> China is increasingly service-oriented and automated. Investment in automation systems jumped by 54 percent in 2014, and Guangdong Province is aiming to achieve 80 percent automation in its factories by 2020.<sup>34</sup> Mobility can also help ensure a continued livelihood for those who lose their job. A core ideal of the Women in Factories China program is helping workers develop a long-term, strategic vision for their career.

### Training the Trainer



Ms. Pang, BSR, 2015

Pang, who asked we only use her family name, is a line supervisor at Guangdong Province's Intex Factory, which takes the unique approach of allowing line supervisors to become trainers, rather than using human resources personnel. The factory's human resources department selected Pang as a Women in Factories China program trainer. She had never given a training before, so she was apprehensive about getting up in front of a group of peers.

Prior to giving the class, Pang went through BSR's train-the-trainer event, which was her first exposure to a more interactive learning environment. The Chinese education system, from primary school through workplace training, relies heavily on rote learning. According to Pang, traditionally, "the teacher talks; the students listen." BSR's format aims to be more engaging and creates a dialogue between the teacher and student.

When BSR staff went to observe the Intex Factory training, Pang had just finished giving her first class, and she said the training went extremely well. She also said that by giving the training, she learned valuable lessons about communicating with and teaching others—skills that she can use in her daily

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., "Business Leadership."

<sup>34</sup> "Industrial Robot Statistics 2014," The International Federation of Robotics, accessed June 2015, <http://www.ifr.org/industrial-robots/statistics/>.

work. "After taking [BSR's] class, I realized that there's another way to teach a class," she said. "Training can be interactive and fun."

### Facing Problems with a Smile



Zhou Xingxing (in black), BSR, 2015

Zhou Xingxing is a quality-control officer at the Cichang Footwear Factory in Sichuan Province. Her position gives her a level of authority within the factory and the ability to make demands of colleagues in the area of product quality. Zhou recalled that she felt superior to her colleagues and often treated them poorly because of her position of power over them.

Zhou had similar issues at home. She found herself easily frustrated and would lash out at her parents and others. Zhou said she knew these issues were a problem, but she found it difficult to control her behavior.

Through the Women in Factories China training on interpersonal communications, Zhou said she learned many important lessons, particularly how her outbursts could worsen a situation. This lesson helped her decide to change. "Before the training, I would accept that I couldn't change [my behavior], but the training made me realize otherwise," she said. "Knowing that causing a scene does not help the situation, I now choose to face difficult situations with a smile."

She has changed her interactions with both family and colleagues. When managing others, Zhou now focuses on how to resolve a situation rather than focusing on the problems that led to the situation. She noted that she can see and feel the improvements from her change of attitude. "Now I am more patient at home and I don't take my discontent out on those closest to me," she said. "I'm grateful that the training acted as a catalyst for my change."



Li Yinghua, BSR, 2015

### Applying Lessons to Daily Operations

The Women in Factories China program teaches skills that are applicable to everyday life, and to daily work in the factory. For the past four years, Li Yinghua has worked as a quality-control line leader for the Harishen Electronics Factory in Guangdong Province. Part of her daily responsibility is testing battery components for the electronics that the factory produces. Li noticed that there was a lot of downtime and overstaffing in her unit due to inefficient operational procedures. Typically, a team of three people would charge and test the electronic units, but as these units charged, the workers would wait around without any responsibilities or initiative to do other work.

After the Women in Factories China program training on lean production, Li began to think about how to improve her

team's efficiency. She also started to look at her own work more strategically. Instead of simply following orders, Li sought ways to improve operations. "Before, there were three people [testing and charging the electronics]," she said. "I decreased it to two people. After listening to the teacher's class, I decreased it to one person. We are continuously improving."

Li also found a high level of turnover in her department, which puts a lot of pressure on the human resources department and reduces product quality. Li noticed that miscommunications contributed to the high turnover. "Some people, they don't necessarily want to leave," she explained. "Sometimes it's just because of one word you said to them."

Through the program's assertive communications module, Li learned how to communicate effectively with her direct reports and resolve conflicts as they arose. She now sees communication as a tool to help retain workers. "Before ... I would just say, 'You do whatever I tell you to do,'" she said. "Now, I'll reason with them and say, 'You think about it. If we switched places, what would you do?'"

Li's ability to integrate lean systems thinking into her work, as well as her ability to use effective and assertive communications skills, has taken the lessons from our program beyond our initial expectations. It demonstrates that these lessons can have positive impacts on the operations of a business.

## Looking Forward: The Future of the Women in Factories China Program

These real-world stories help illustrate how women's empowerment can benefit both employees and their employers. Whether it is He Hui's increased dedication to her workplace, Fu Hongmei's improved production through better nutrition, Shang Xinai's ability to mentor colleagues, or Zhou Xingxing's conflict-resolution skills, participating factories are seeing measureable, positive results.

Over the next year, more stories like these, of tangible change, will come as the result of the Women in Factories China program, which has already directly reached 22,036 women workers and will reach a total of 26,000 workers by the end of 2016. Also, through peer and community-sharing, it's likely the program will have positive indirect impacts over the next several years.

In the next year, we are excited to expand the Women in Factories China program's advanced training curriculum, which we have already piloted in a few participating factories. This training, targeting at each factory 100 high-potential workers identified during their foundational training, will eventually reach 4,500 women workers. During the advanced training, participants will cover topics including problem analysis and decision-making, in-depth financial planning, becoming a line manager, lean production, and management.

In the next year, we also plan to expand the program's reach by using more information technology, such as an online curriculum database accessible to participating factories. We also plan to share our weekly program newsletters with participants using the WeChat social media platform. To date, this newsletter reaches more than 3,600 participants. Our hope is that as more women share information with their colleagues and friends, this technology will help the program reach those who are most in need.

Finally, we are hoping to expand our network of factories, companies, and champions involved with the Women in Factories China program. It is evident that there is a real need and desire from women, men, managers, and factories for this kind of programming, and we want to guarantee that everyone who is interested has the chance to participate. In this way, we can ensure an inclusive economy for all.

# Appendix I: Women in Factories China Program, Core Curriculum

## FOUNDATIONAL TRAINING

### **Module 1: New Arrivals**

- » New Employee Adaptability
- » Effective Communication
- » Pressure and Emotional Management

### **Module 2: Staying Healthy at Work**

- » Occupational Health and Safety
- » Reproductive Health

### **Module 3: Thinking Long Term**

- » Financial and Life-Planning
- » Career Development
- » Continuous Learning

## ADVANCED TRAINING

### **Module 1: About Women in the Factory**

### **Module 2: My Confidence**

- » Public Speaking
- » Gender Equality
- » Emotional Management
- » Problem Analysis and Judgment-Making

### **Module 3: My Life**

- » Health and Exercise
- » Female Reproductive Health
- » Parenting
- » Financial Planning

### **Module 4: My Skills**

- » Becoming a Line Manager
- » Building a Team
- » Managing the New Generation of Workers
- » Production Workshop

### **Module 5: My Learning**

- » Case Study Review

## Appendix II: Interviewees

Chen Meixia, Hayco Factory, Shenzhen Province

Fu Hongmei, Hairisheng Electronics Factory, Guangdong Province

He Hui, Cichang Footwear Factory, Sichuan Province

Li Yinghua, Harisheng Electronics Factory, Guangdong Province

Lin Ping, Sinomax Factory, Guangdong Province

Pang (she asked only her surname be used), Intex Factory, Guangdong Province

Shang Xinai, Winstron Factory, Zhongshan

Zhang Chungang, Winstron Factory, Zhongshan

Zhang Lihui, Hairisheng Electronics Factory, Hunan Province

Zhou Xingxing, Cichang Footwear Factory, Sichuan Province

## About BSR

BSR is a global nonprofit organization that works with its network of more than 250 member companies to build a just and sustainable world. From its offices in Asia, Europe, and North America, BSR develops sustainable business strategies and solutions through consulting, research, and cross-sector collaboration. Visit [www.bsr.org](http://www.bsr.org) for more information about BSR's more than 20 years of leadership in sustainability.