

Sub-theme for EGOS 2017, 33rd EGOS Colloquium, Copenhagen Business School (CBS)
Organization studies and industrial relations: Overlapping concerns and new possibilities

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Today's relationship between organization studies and industrial relations research is marked by a strange absence of dialogue. In contrast to earlier periods (Child et al., 1973; Maurice et al., 1980; Streeck, 1981) and in spite of a common theoretical heritage (e.g. Jackson & Müllenborn, 2012), much of the present theorizing in organization studies ignores or obscures the fact that the bulk of organizational activity is undertaken by employees working under formal contracts of employment; hence, labour and employment relations are an important area for theorizing organizations (e.g. Vidal, Adler & Delbridge, 2015). Yet insights from industrial relations research are largely absent from organization studies, and vice versa. In the aftermath of the 2008/2009 crisis, organization scholars have realized anew that organizational practices influence and produce inequality between workers within firms as well as within society, and are themselves affected by societal inequalities (Lawrence et al. 2013; Gray & Kish-Gephart, 2013; Stainback et al., 2010). However, there remains an almost complete neglect of the idea that labour's voice through unions, collective bargaining, and workplace representation is a mechanism for reducing inequality that has been undermined by recent trends in corporate strategizing and restructuring.

Equally disturbing, in the field of industrial relations, organization studies' contributions to understanding organizations and organizing are rarely taken into account explicitly, despite considerable interest in related themes such as organizing the unorganized (e.g. Heery, 2009), changes in the organizational forms of unions and employers (e.g. Behrens & Pekarek, 2012), and how industrial relations shape and are shaped by corporate restructuring (e.g. Helfen & Fichter, 2013). *It is our contention that both fields of study are ill-served by this absence of mutual engagement and dialogue.*

The subtheme aims to break this silence by reviving the interdisciplinary exchange between the fields of organization studies and industrial relations. By exploring common theoretical ground as well as divergent insights, we invite contributions that reveal how industrial relations helps in understanding how organizations operate in practice, and to uncover how organisation theory assists in resolving puzzles in contemporary industrial relations. Such a dialogue promises insights in at least three important ways:

(1) Institutions: In as much as organizations are embedded in a wider field of social relations and shaped by the pluralistic context of competition, conflict, coalitions, and creativity among diverse ideas and interests, the question arises over who has a say in negotiating the goals, rules and values of organizations apart from top managers and shareholders. Although the workers' voice within organizations and beyond is rooted in the welfare traditions of "coordinated market capitalism" transforming class struggle into rationalized conflict resolution (e.g. Frege & Godard, 2014), the institutions of industrial relations have seen a considerable decline in much of Western Europe and elsewhere (e.g. Tapia et al., 2015). Paradoxically, this development coincides with organizations' increased efforts to involve workers in their responses to societal demands such as diversity, CSR and sustainability as well as ensuring profitable operations (e.g. Williams et al., 2011). This triggers further questions about the future of institutionalized collective labour relations in a comparative perspective: *What are*

today's cognitive, normative and regulatory as well as economic underpinnings of labour relations in organizations and beyond? How do processes of institutionalization and deinstitutionalization unfold across multiple levels? Why and how do some institutions show institutional resilience while others erode? Are there any functional equivalents to collective labour relations (e.g. direct forms of worker participation, diversity management, consumer activism)?

(2) Actors: These institutional tensions pinpoint a host of research questions regarding the actors involved in employment relations today. On the one hand, unions and employers' meta-organizations (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005) have lost much of their grip on intermediating work-related issues. In a changing business environment, employers often seek to revert back to earlier forms of corporate unilateralism, install new dividing lines between workers and escape collective industrial relations. For its part, organized labour faces the challenge of effectively representing a (shrinking) core workforce while reintegrating workers toiling under precarious and non-standard arrangements (Marchington et al., 2005; Weil, 2014). On the other hand, a vibrant debate is unfolding over the way various forms of institutional entrepreneurship contribute to the development of viable labour relations and support the ongoing quest for 'decent' work (Gahan & Pekarek, 2013; Greer & Hauptmeier, 2008). *Specific questions include: How can unions and other meta-organizations' attempts at revitalizing (e.g. organizing), organizational change (e.g. mergers), collaboration and competition (e.g. union networks, rival unionism) draw on insights from organization theory? Do other organizations like civil society organizations, professional associations or intermediary organizations (e.g. private employment agencies) replace or supplement collective labour relations?*

(3) Practices: Examining how managers, workers, unions, associations, state agencies and the courts engage with and shape organizations, the labour process, and the (collective) regulation of work entails delving deeply into social practice (Vaara & Whittington, 2012). This includes the critical examination of how various categories of work – from low paying jobs to professional and self-employed labour – are socially constructed (e.g. Spicer & Böhm, 2007), how their integration and jurisdiction in the labour process is justified and sanctioned (e.g. Delbridge, 2007; Håkansson & Isidorsson, 2012), as well as how meso-level negotiation shapes working conditions (e.g. Helfen, 2015). In particular, not much is known about those management practices that institutionalize substitutes for worker representation in organizations and how this affects organizations as employers. *Specific questions include: To what extent do collective labour relations depend on more permanent work organization designs and labour processes? Which tensions and contradictions arise in organizations and labour relations through networked forms of value creation and fluid organizational forms? How do identities and work cultures shape labour relations and organizations simultaneously? How does management reflexively enact labour relations?*

Based on the above, we invite **short papers that aim to deepen our understanding of the connections between industrial and employment relations and organizations and vice versa**. In particular, we are interested in both empirical and conceptual papers addressing various levels of analysis that engage with comparative institutional examination, various forms of institutional work, and the enactment of labour processes and work organizations as well the management of meta-organizations. To the same extent, we are curious about contributions from areas such as social movement theory, CSR, Marxist organization studies, the sociology of the professions, micropolitics in transnational corporations, labour law and diversity management.

For further details visit

http://www.egosnet.org/2017_copenhagen/

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