

Technological Change, Power and Work

Call for Papers for Special Issue

British Journal of Industrial Relations

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Aim and Scope

This *British Journal of Industrial Relations* Special Issue invites contributions that apply comparative perspectives on Technological Change, Power, and Work, with a focus on Europe and North America (specifically the USA and Canada). The Special Issue is based upon two workshop sessions organized by Valeria Pulignano (KU Leuven) and Chris Tilly (UCLA) at the ILERA/LERA World Congress 26-30 June 2024.

Research in sociology and political economy from socio-economic and socio-political traditions on industrial relations and work have broadly investigated the challenges posed by technological change in workplaces, sectors, and countries alike. These topics have been the subject of great interest within the tradition of labour, industrial, and employment relations studies, especially since the work of Braverman (1974). In contrast to the dominant functionalist view, which simplifies and limits the understanding of technical development by assuming that a society's technology only advances based on its internal efficiency-driven logic (Dunlop, 1958), while also influencing the development of social structure and cultural values to make all industrial societies more similar (Kerr et al., 1973[1960]), studies in the tradition of labour process theories, industrial sociology, and political economy have widely acknowledged that 'technology is not deterministic and neutral' (Bélanger and Edwards, 2007: 717), and that industrial relations institutions can play a key role in mediating the effects of such technology. At the same time, these studies have appreciated that technology can 'offer a more or less favourable ground for job autonomy, control over work, and power' (Bélanger, 2006: 336) by demonstrating how patterns of management control, worker effort and workplace conflict are tied to the labour process (e.g., Burawoy, 1985), and how much of this control is exercised through the 'technical and the human organization of work' (Thompson, 1989: 19). In so doing, these studies have facilitated a deeper understanding of the workers' experiences of autonomy and the alienating conditions of their work (Blauner, 1964). Such perspectives, therefore, have the potential to explain how the design and implementation of a given technology is likely to shape the balance of power, coercion and legitimation used by management to govern labour in a way that reflects the social context (and the nature of the employment relationship) in which technologies are embedded.

The role of technology is especially topical in our current time of digital transformation that is (re)shaping the traditional way work is organized, the employment relationship is governed, and labour is monitored within (and across) different workplaces, industries, and countries. These changes will doubtless produce new ways of working that in turn potentially reconfigure existing 'occupations' by fostering the emergence of new 'digital talents', the regulation and governance of which will be informed both by old and new ideas of power and work.

We invite contributions that explore both the theoretical and empirical aspects of different and emerging technologies that are currently transforming workplaces, including both traditional technological tools

like automation and new ones like digitalization, robotization and AI, with particular attention to the technologies affecting frontline workers. Our main focus is on understanding how these technologies are socially integrated within particular sectors and workplaces. We need to consider the power dynamics that drive how work is reorganized and assess their effects on labour, such as work intensification, industrial democracy, and workers' autonomy and discretion in the workplace. Power is a central interest, and we welcome articles that explore the power of employers, forms of individual and collective resistance and influence by workers and trade unions to negotiate technological change, and interventions by states at both national and supra-national levels. We welcome articles that explore the opportunities and resources available for organised labour to mobilise in countering some of the more deleterious effects of technological change. We also welcome analyses that seek to understand the ways race, gender, immigration status and other demographic and identity attributes affect experiences of, and responses to, the use of these emerging technologies. Accordingly, the Special Issue invites contributions that limit attention to frontline workers in Europe, the USA, and Canada in order to facilitate comparison of these changes across jobs that are at least somewhat similar and economies with relatively similar levels of wealth but very distinct sets of institutions. To further facilitate comparison, we are specifically seeking theoretically driven, empirically rich and policy relevant articles.

We are especially interested in rich empirical contributions that carefully study the processes and dynamics underpinning the social embeddedness of new and old technologies within (and across) contemporary workplaces and sectors. This can involve examining the ideational perspectives and viewpoints. IR literature has widely illustrated how ideas can function as instruments to mobilize and garner public support for the less privileged individuals or groups without established institutional authority (Frege, 2005; Hauptmeier and Heery, 2014; Morgan and Hauptmeier, 2021). We are also interested in theoretical contributions that enable us to advance toward a coherent framework of how and when power dynamics around work matter for identified outcomes around technology at work.

Brief outline of process

Interested contributors will first submit a long abstract (max. 1,000 words, excluding references). The abstract should clearly outline the research question(s) or purpose of the proposed paper, as well as how the paper advances the study of technological change, power, and work in the field of employment and industrial relations. Include a brief description of the empirical analysis used and/or an illustration of the theoretical model to be developed. The deadline for submitting the long abstract is the end of **July 2024**.

Long abstracts should be sent *via email* to the Guest Editor (peter.turnbull@bristol.ac.uk). The Guest Editor will evaluate the abstracts and invite full papers from a subset of authors. The deadline for submission of full papers will be **28 February 2025**. All full papers will undergo double-blind review. Based on the blind reviews and editors' choice, a subset of invited papers will be selected for the Special Issue.

Abstracts are due by 31 July 2024.

Complete papers will be due by 28 February 2025.

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