

Ideas in Employment Relations Research

Call for Papers for Special Issue

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Aim and Scope

This *Industrial Relations* special issue invites contributions that apply ideational perspectives to employment relations (ER) studies. Research in political science, sociology and economics increasingly rely on normative and cognitive meaning structures to explain social phenomena. ER research – albeit with some notable exceptions (e.g. Hauptmeier and Heery, 2014; Frege, 2005) – has largely shied away from engaging with these perspectives. And yet, there is good reason to place ideational approaches more centrally in ER. With the typical explanatory factors – markets, technology, and institutions – increasingly in flux, actors of ER are more than ever trying to make sense of their environment and their positions in it. These developments, in turn, warrant new theoretical lenses on actors’ interests, agency and power relations (Schmidt, 2008; Carstensen and Schmidt, 2016). Given the significant changes and shortcomings of traditional accounts, the special issue offers a forum for discussing ways in which ER scholars can draw on perspectives that emphasize the role of ideas. Such perspectives have the potential to explain how actors not only make sense of their changing environment, but also how they are able to persuade others to take collective action on the basis of their ideas in ways that ultimately produce outcomes (Schmidt, 2000; Frege, 2005; Ibsen, 2015; Budd and Bhav, 2008; McLaughlin and Wright, 2018; Doellgast et al., 2018).

The role of ideas is especially topical in times of tectonic societal transformation that shake the traditional ER-institutions. First, the post-WWII ‘social contract’ (Kochan and Dyer, 2017) between capital and labor has come undone, tilting power relationships towards capital and leading to new organizational and contractual arrangements. The deregulatory consequences of economic liberalization are well documented (Baccaro and Howell, 2017), begging the question of whose ideas about work will become dominant for its regulation in the wake of the ER problems created by neo-liberalism. Second, technological changes linked to Artificial Intelligence (AI), the platform economy or Manufacturing 4.0 speed up changes to the workplace and new skill demands can have potential disruptive effects on institutions of collective bargaining and statutory regulation. These changes will produce new types of work, the

regulation of which will be informed by both new and old ideas about work. Third, social identities based on culture, gender and ethnicity have come to the fore, sometimes overshadowing the role of economic class. This change begs the question of the bases for worker solidarity in the future labor market and how distinct identities can be merged to a collective through active framing and identity-work (Greer and Hauptmeier, 2012).

We invite contributions that employ ideational perspectives to study a broad range of ER phenomena. Recently, ideas have figured in comparative employment relations research to explain liberalization and individualization of the employment relationship (e.g. McLaughlin and Wright, 2018). Frege (2005) pointed out that ideas of industrial democracy might explain deep-seated national differences in worker voice. Thus, ideas are used to explain variation in institutional change and deregulation of ER. Hauptmeier (2012) suggest that actor ideologies at the firm level shape the construction of national institutions of ER. Accordingly, changes in ideology lead to institutional change. In a similar vein, research has shown that a key source of belief change among managers is business school education based on agency theory and approaches wholly focused on shareholder maximization (Fourcade and Khurana, 2013). Research on unions and collective bargaining has shown that worker preferences are increasingly based on social identity from gender, ethnicity, and culture rather than economic classes and occupational groups (Piore and Safford, 2006, Doellgast et al., 2018). Some ER scholars have argued for an intersectional approach to worker identity to capture how social identities are multiple and interact in new ways (e.g. Alberti et al., 2013).

Despite these advances, there have been no attempts to coalesce ideational studies around a unified research agenda, let alone a unified conceptual framework. This special issue proposes to solidify ideational perspectives in ER-scholarship around a number of key issues. First, in keeping with ideational approaches in political economy, we emphasize the fruitfulness of ER-scholarship focused on how ideas have causal effects on actors' interpretation of situations and thus on their agency, be it at the workplace or national level. This often (although not necessarily) entails a focus on power, i.e. how ideas can both be used as weapons in distributive struggles but also how ideas are a constraint on agency. Second, there is scope for ER scholarship to study how managerial practices and labor acquiescence or resistance are informed by ideas about work and employment across different settings (see Budd and Bhawe, 2008). Third, there is potential for ER scholarship to investigate the normative and cognitive underpinnings of institutional change, i.e. the ideational logics underpinning new institutions. Ideational perspectives can be especially useful for analyzing the power of the 'powerless', i.e. when ideas become the weapon of the weak by mobilizing public support for actors without institutionalized forms of power. Finally, we note that ER-scholarship could benefit from more focus on the discursive processes of interaction, that is, the ways in which managers and/or labor use ideas in discourse not just to impose or institutionalize their ideas, but also to persuade one another of the cognitive and/or normative value of their ideas to reach consensual agreements or mobilize resistance.

Accordingly, the special issue invites contributions on the following non-exhaustive and non-prioritized list of topics:

- Identity-work and framing of new forms of collective action by workers and trade unions
- The role of identity and intersectionality in trade union revitalization and social movement unionism
- The persuasive role of ideas in discursive interactions between labor and management in collective bargaining or industrial action
- The role of ideas and identity in human resource management practices such as selection, compensation and performance management
- Cross-national comparison of the role of ideas in explaining institutional change/stability/origin in ER systems
- The role of ideas in adapting ER to technological change, e.g. AI, platform economy and Manufacturing 4.0
- The role of ideas in reforming labor law to new contractual arrangements

We are especially interested in thorough empirical contributions that carefully study how ideas matter for identified outcomes and theoretical contributions that enable us to advance toward a coherent framework of how and when ideas matter for ER actors, processes and outcomes.

Brief outline of process

Interested contributors will first submit a long abstract (max. 1,000 words). The abstract should clearly outline the research question or purpose of the proposed paper, as well as how the paper advances the study of ideational perspectives in the field of ER. Include a brief description of the empirical analysis used and/or an illustration of the theoretical model to be developed. Deadline for submitting the long abstract is *January 15, 2020*.

Long abstracts should be sent *via email* to one or all of the guest editors. Guest editors will then choose a subset of abstracts and invite full papers from authors. The deadline for submission of full papers will be *July 15, 2020*. All full papers will undergo double-blind review by two reviewers and there is no guarantee that invited papers will be accepted for publication. Based on the blind reviews and editors' choice, a subset of invited papers will be selected for the special issue. Publication of the special issue is scheduled for *second half of 2021*.

Questions or any other communication about the purpose and process of the special issue should be directed to the guest editors via email. However, we will not provide editorial assistance for long abstracts.

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