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# 1

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## Reassessing the employment relationship: An introduction

*Paul Blyton, Edmund Heery and Peter Turnbull*

It's 20 years since members of the Human Resource Management (HRM) section at Cardiff Business School came together to produce *Reassessing Human Resource Management* (Blyton and Turnbull, 1992). The spur for writing that volume was the evident lack of reflection on the extent to which HRM represented essentially a re-labelling exercise for Personnel Departments or signalled something more fundamental in the management of labour. By examining HRM from several different perspectives, we endeavoured to cast a critical eye on the subject and explore various tensions and contradictions that were apparent among the different elements and policy goals contained within HRM.

The book seemingly struck a chord with many readers and at different times the editors were encouraged to produce a new edition. But what became increasingly clear in the intervening period was the need for a more wide-ranging reconsideration of the employment relationship. Issues of HRM form one part of that picture, but events unfolding over the past two decades call for a broader reassessment of employment and labour management within contemporary work organizations. These events and developments have been occurring at different levels, ranging from the ubiquitous – the gathering pace of globalization and the growing influence of financial markets on the operation of firms, for example – to the more specific emergence of new business models and new forms of work in particular industry sectors, many of these a direct reflection of advances in information technology. Substantial changes

are evident too in the way that work is regulated, by governments, employers and representatives of employees, and more broadly in the thinking and discussion about the norms and standards that are appropriate in relation to people at work. The intensity of debate over phrases such as ‘decent work’, ‘ethical behaviour’, ‘social responsibility’ and ‘work–life balance’ signals some of the ways in which previous understandings about employment relationships are being subject to greater questioning and challenge.

The employment relationship lies at the heart of work organizations. The aim of this volume is to explore the ways that this relationship, the contexts within which it occurs, and more broadly the ways in which the employment relationship might be studied and thought about, have changed over the recent period and the implications of those changes. To achieve this we have kept to the model that served us well in our earlier ‘Reassessment’ volume: to draw on contributors with a range of perspectives and fields of expertise, to analyse the changes taking place, and the drivers of change, at different levels. Lying at the heart of relations between capital and labour, the employment relationship figures prominently in the fields of employment relations, HRM and industrial/organizational sociology. Members of the HRM Section at Cardiff are well placed to comment from the viewpoint of these different perspectives. Much expanded since the time of our earlier volume, the editors have been able to draw on over 20 members of the Section to cover the much broader canvas represented by the present volume.

Before giving an overview of the nature of these individual contributions, however, this introduction needs to touch briefly on two other areas. First it is important to say something more about the focus of our enquiry: the employment relationship and both its continued centrality in work organizations and its enduring contested and indeterminate nature. Second, it is worthwhile noting some of the main developments impacting upon the employment relationship, many of which are considered in more detail in individual chapters. These developments encapsulate not only changes in the broad context of work, but also the emergence of new forms and new ideas about the employment relationship and the way current discussions over work standards raise complex questions about future employment.

## What is the employment relationship?

The ‘relationship’ to which the employment relationship refers is that between employer and employee. At its heart is an exchange between the buyers and sellers of labour (Coyle-Shapiro and Conway, 2004). The terms of this

exchange are broadly defined in the contract of employment between the two central parties (Deakin and Njoya, 2008). This contract ‘is the outcome of a transaction that encompasses both the entitlements and the obligations of the employee’ (Brown et al., 2000: 616). Yet while the contract of employment represents the ‘cornerstone’ of the employment relationship (Kahn-Freund, 1954: 45) the relationship as a whole has a far more complex structure. To continue the metaphor, while a cornerstone acts as a key component of a structure, it is also the basis on which the rest of that structure is built. In the same way, while the contract of employment establishes the general terms of the exchange of labour for a reward, this ‘market exchange’ typically is an exchange of labour power (rather than a precisely defined labour output) for a wage, and thus is indeterminate in the *precise amount* of labour being purchased in the exchange. That labour power – often quantified in terms of the hours that the provider of labour must commit to the employer – requires translation into productive labour by means of a managerial process of organizing, directing and controlling.

The specific ways in which management achieves this translation of labour power into actual labour are crucial for both parties. On the one hand, the effective deployment of labour lies at the heart of competitive success; in recent years this has been exemplified in the importance attributed to securing workforce commitment to achieve high performance (Appelbaum et al., 2000). As we have discussed elsewhere (Blyton and Turnbull, 2004), management relies not only on securing worker compliance, but also on active workforce cooperation to provide discretionary labour (that is labour above a minimum requirement) to achieve high performance levels. Arguably, in sectors experiencing intensified competition (see below), the employer’s reliance on employees willingly deploying their skills, initiative and talent is even more important today than it was a generation ago. On the other hand, the managerial process is also a critical factor in employees’ overall experience of work: their access to rewarding and fulfilling jobs, being treated fairly and equitably, being involved in decision-making and having scope to use and develop their skills; or alternatively, being subject to unreasonable levels of work intensity, direction and control. These experiences hinge crucially on how management organizes its workforce and conducts the process of securing productive labour. In capitalist societies, management’s actions are underpinned by substantial power resources (and far greater power resources than labour can draw upon) to define the process of productive activity. However, management does not enjoy an unrestricted prerogative. The law, the professional standards set by bodies (such as the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development) in relation to people management, agreements with

trade unions and counter-controls applied by workers, all act to constrain managerial action. And as we discuss in the next section, this ‘governance regime’ has been undergoing significant transformation in latter years, making a reassessment of the employment relationship particularly timely.

Whilst it is true to say that the employment relationship rests on an exchange between employer and employee, it also comprises a structure of ‘rights, obligations, formal and informal social relationships’ on which the daily experience of work is shaped (McGovern et al., 2007: 12). The majority of day-to-day interactions are based on a host of unwritten rules, assumptions and expectations on both sides. It has become common practice to refer to key elements of these assumptions and expectations as part of a ‘psychological contract’, of reciprocal obligations between employees and their work organizations (Rousseau, 1995). The term itself has proven controversial: not least over whether there is sufficient ‘shared understanding’ or congruence of view between employers and employees that could be said to constitute a ‘contract’ (Morrison and Robinson, 2004). Nevertheless, this discussion further underlines the point that the formal contract of employment covers only certain dimensions of the employment relationship, and that the behaviour of both parties – together with their beliefs, expectations and understandings – constitute important elements in the overall relationship between employers and employees.

Just as the employment relationship is crucial for management in their efforts to extract profitable work from employees, it is also central in the overall lives of those employees. The terms on which that relationship is constructed – the income it provides, the duration and arrangement of working hours and the degree of job security embedded in different forms of employment contract – all importantly shape people’s ability to organize, plan and successfully fulfil their lives outside work. These features of employment – whether it provides decent pay, reasonable work hours, some degree of job security – are all indicators of the overall quality of jobs. The broader point here, however, is that paid work is much more than an effort–reward exchange. It has important implications for health, personal development, families and communities (Sisson, 2008: 6). Indeed, the nature of the employment relationship is central to how we, as individuals, are able to construct the rest of our lives, and develop and maintain our sense of meaning and identity in contemporary society.

Further, while employees establish individual contracts of employment with an employer, the experience of work for the majority of employees is as an inherently shared, cooperative and collective endeavour. Indeed, this act of working with others is what many employees commonly report as one of the

most valued aspects of their employment. Thus, in the study of work it is vital to recognize these collective and shared interests among employees; that is, to understand employees and analyse the employment relationship from a collective as well as an individual perspective.

## Changes in the context of employment relationships

So far, we have dwelt more on continuities embodied in the employment relationship (its indeterminate nature for example, its composition of formal and informal aspects and its importance for both employers and employees) than on changes occurring within work and capitalist societies more generally. The continuities are important and are sometimes lost from sight, but to answer the question of why reassess the employment relationship now, we need to acknowledge the marked extent of changes that have been taking place in recent years and their deep-seated impact on employment. These changes have been occurring at different levels and at different speeds, and many are interlinked. It is sufficient here to note some of the most prominent, for many aspects of these changes are examined in more detail in forthcoming chapters.

At the most generalized level, different writers and researchers trace many of the far-reaching developments in employment relationships back to the changing ways in which capitalist activity is being conducted. The continued growth of more globalized systems of goods and service production, together with the deepening influence of financial markets on the way that enterprises behave, can be seen to have introduced a step change in the conduct of capitalism amounting, over the past generation, to the creation of a new economic order. Several chapters in this volume consider particular aspects of these developments. However, an overarching effect of the twin forces of globalization and financialization – between them incorporating a range of developments from rapid industrialization of economies such as Brazil, Russia, India and China to spreading trade liberalization and deregulation – is an intensification of competition and an accelerated drive to maximize (short-term) returns, partly through securing lower costs and particularly, lower labour costs (Cappelli, 1999; Sennett, 2006).

One way these forces potentially impact on extant employment relationships is by the methods employers seek to obtain labour at a lower price than represented by their regular workforce. These methods include, among others, expanding non-standard forms of employment contract, and greater use of agency workers, sub-contractors and outsourcing arrangements



(Marchington et al., 2005). As a consequence, internal employees in an ever-expanding range of occupations and sectors have increasingly been subject to intensified market pressures, with standard employment contracts, stable pay and benefits, opportunities for promotion and a degree of job security giving way to more insecure and less predictable jobs, with ‘no long term’ the watchword of these new employment conditions (Sennett, 1998).

The extent and pace at which contractual relations are altering is subject to dispute on both sides of the Atlantic (Cappelli, 1999; Jacoby, 1999; McGovern et al., 2007). The picture is a varied one – significant change evident in some areas (such as the use of outsourcing and agency workers) but also the widespread persistence of long-term employment and continuing contracts (Doogan, 2001, 2009; McGovern et al., 2007). What is also clear, however, is that while some aspects of employment contracts have remained highly standardized (Brown et al., 2000) other elements have been subject to a far greater degree of differentiation, particularly in relation to work hours, in a managerial endeavour to deploy labour more flexibly (Anxo, et al., 2004; Blyton, 2008).

As noted earlier, it is evident too that one outcome of the greater emphasis on competitiveness has been an increased focus on achieving ‘high performance’ (Frost, 2008). Nowhere is this more evident than in the field of Human Resource Management and a concern with which (and in what ways) human resource (HR) measures contribute to improved performance. This focus impacts directly on employment relationships and the ways that different HR measures – from appraisals and job evaluation to teamworking and performance-related pay – shape managerial expectations of employees at work. Much discussion has taken place in recent years over whether (and to what extent) jobs have become more demanding (Green, 2006) and employer expectations inflated over what constitutes ‘a fair day’s work’. The view that expectations placed on employees are inexorably rising over time has been captured in such phrases as ‘greedy organisations’ (Coser, 1967) and more recently by what Van Dyne and Ellis term *job creep* ‘the slow and subtle expansion of employee job duties’ (2004: 181). It has also been suggested that this trend is exacerbated by ‘effort-biased technical change’ (Green, 2006: 69); that is, the increased use of e-mail, mobile phones and other devices that erode the boundaries between work and leisure and contribute to time pressure (Bittman et al., 2010).

These conditions alone – changes in the nature of capitalist activity, managerial responses to increased competition and the search for lower labour costs – would be sufficient to warrant a fundamental reconsideration of the employment relationship. But a series of other (and in important respects

related) developments give further weight to these changes. Prominent among these is the changing nature of regulation of the employment relationship, most clearly evidenced in the marked contraction of collective regulation by employers and trade unions in many countries, and the corresponding rise in unilateral regulation by employers (Brown and Nash, 2008; Kersley et al., 2006; Milner, 1995). In the UK, along with the US, several decades of union membership decline have left trade unions much weakened in their ability to protect members' interests and influence patterns of job control and work organization (Brown et al., 1998; Kolins Givan, 2007). This decline in union membership and influence has been reflected in a much reduced ability to assert the necessity for regulation by collective bargaining. A corresponding increase in (employer-sponsored) non-union channels of representation, and growth in relationships with unionized groups based on consultation rather than negotiation, further underline the important ways in which the regulation of the employment relationship has been reconstituted, particularly in liberal market economies (Howell, 2004). Added to this, the state too has amended its regulatory approach. While certain collective rights have received additional statutory support (in relation to rights to information and consultation for example), overall the state's emphasis has been to promote individual statutory rights within the employment relationship, covering issues such as protection against various kinds of discrimination and rights to information regarding different terms of the contract (Brown et al., 2000). Crucially, however, the evidence (*ibid.*: 623) points to the importance of a collective, trade union presence in ensuring these individual employment rights are upheld: compliance is significantly higher where union representation remains in place. Thus, the widespread dismantling of the collective regulation of the employment relationship not only diminishes the collective employee voice within the workplace, but also raises doubts about whether individual statutory protections will be fully upheld. The ramifications of the decline in collective employee voice, and the ability of employees collectively to resist managerial actions which they find unacceptable, resonate across many of the chapters in the present volume as authors explore the changing nature of the employment relationship in the contemporary workplace.

Two further factors also need incorporating into our claim regarding the timely nature of reassessing the employment relationship. First, the growing heterogeneity of the labour force, both in terms of the diversity of the workforce and the contractual arrangements they are employed under, raises important questions about how different individuals and groups are subject to different forms of employment relationship. The diversity of an organization's workforce at any one time (for example, in terms of gender and ethnicity

as well as the mix of regular and temporary employees, agency workers, self-employed sub-contractors, consultants and so on) means that employment relationships within single organizations will often be far more varied than hitherto. This overall diversity in the employment experience is further heightened by the growth of new sectors and occupations, many in the ‘knowledge’ sector linked to continued developments in information and communications technology.

The second factor is the growing attention being given to normative issues relating to the employment relationship (for example, Budd, 2004; Pinnington et al., 2007). With increasing frequency, writers are posing the questions: what should employment relationships look like in the twenty-first century, and in what ways are current normative standards and assumptions no longer adequate to ensure that all parties conduct themselves appropriately? Here we can witness, among other things, the increased role that ethical discussions are playing within business and business education, and the links to issues such as ‘corporate responsibility’, ‘dignity at work’, ‘justice’ and ‘fairness’. So when writers – including a number of those contributing to the present volume – are contemplating such questions as ‘what constitutes ethical behaviour at work’, what comprises a ‘decent’ job and ‘what encompasses fairness, equality and justice at work’, it is important not only to consider the nature of this normative discussion, but also to locate it within the changing nature of employment relationships more broadly.

## The structure of the book

Many of the themes and issues noted above are reflected in the chapters that follow. The eighteen chapters are grouped into four sections. Given the approach taken by a number of the contributors, the structure is of necessity a relatively broad one: several chapters could happily sit in more than one section. Nevertheless, the different sections give an indication of the various approaches that the contributors have taken in their task of reassessing important aspects of the employment relationship. In the first part, six chapters consider different perspectives that can be used to study the employment relationship. In the investigation of work and employment over the past decade, a focus on HRM has been prominent and in Chapter 2, Rick Delbridge offers a critique of the main paths that much of this HRM research has taken. The author asserts that much of that research has adopted too readily a management-derived agenda towards the workforce, leading in turn to an overly conservative approach to research agenda setting. In his critique,

the author draws both on Michael Burawoy's discussion of the public role of academics and on the research avenues being explored by those associated with Critical Management Studies. Delbridge argues the case for a more critical and theorized approach to HRM research, a greater independence from practitioner interests and less willingness to accept managerial orthodoxies regarding management–worker relations.

A key aim of management's approach to the employment relationship is to use forms of control which simultaneously secure a disciplined workforce whilst at the same time yielding committed and productive workers. This need for management to secure active workforce cooperation, rather than mere compliance makes control a critical aspect of management but at the same time, a problematic one to achieve. In Chapter 3, Mike Reed evaluates the extent to which new control regimes are replacing former structures. He portrays vertical, bureaucratized control mechanisms progressively giving way to more diverse or hybrid control systems. These combine a wide variety of factors – from target-setting and performance management, to teamworking structures, customer service priorities and professional work ethics – to generate a web of control elements. As the author elaborates, many aspects of these 'micromechanics of control' are based on inculcating employees with a particular subjective understanding of their work roles and responsibilities. In opening up this discussion of the changing nature of managerial control in the workplace, the author sheds valuable light on an aspect of the employment relationship that is not fully defined by the employment contract but requires management to translate the labour potential it has purchased into productive effort.

The legal regulation of the employment relationship is the area considered in Chapter 4 by Edmund Heery. He examines developments in the law which he argues amount to a 'progressive juridification' of the employment relationship since the 1960s. The particular focus of the chapter is how scholars have debated four issues of concern to the development of this legal role: its desirability, potential to shape the nature of employment relations, the role of different actors *vis-à-vis* the effective implementation of the law in the workplace and the law's relationship with other means of regulating the employment relationship, such as through collective bargaining. The chapter delineates the different sides of the debate in each of these aspects. In so doing the author makes important points about the relative strengths and weaknesses (or successes and failures) of the law in regulating the employment relationship, and the extent to which legal rights can take the place of institutions in decline, most notably trade unions. The growing significance of legal regulation is clearly demonstrated and this represents an important change

to the employment relationship and the terms on which labour is hired and managed.

In Chapter 5, Sukanya Sengupta and Keith Whitfield return to the recent literature on HRM and offer a critique of studies that explore links between HRM practices and organizational performance. Their chapter not only highlights the continuing methodological problems in establishing causal relationships between the two, but also points to the overly narrow way in which performance is perceived. They argue the case for a substantial broadening of the performance measure to incorporate outcomes that reflect different stakeholder interests – not only shareholders and senior management, but also employees, customers, suppliers and the broader community. The last of these, for example, would include measures relating to the organization's social and environmental responsibilities. In this way, the authors argue, a multidimensional measure of performance will yield a more accurate view of how effectively people are managed within an organization.

Issues of corporate responsibility also form part of Mike Marinetto's discussion in Chapter 6, which considers the employment relationship from the viewpoint of ethical theory. As the author notes, despite the early development of industrial relations scholarship being closely associated with the promotion of a just and ethical treatment of employees, current research approaches concerned directly with the ethics of the employment relationship are rare. Further, when discussion of ethics is included, the range of ethical perspectives drawn upon is generally narrow; for example, there is a persistent emphasis on consequentialist arguments, seen in the repeated deployment of the 'business case' to support progressive management practice. In his discussion, Marinetto explores the potential contribution of a variety of philosophical schools and, notably draws on the existentialist philosophy of Sartre and Heidegger. His purpose is to consider alternative ways of evaluating specific policies and practices in the management of labour. One outcome of this broadening of scope is seen to be a more explicit consideration of ethical issues underpinning specific aspects of the employment relationship.

In the final chapter in Part 1, Robyn Thomas and Annette Davies explore the relevance of identity research for analysing the employment relationship. One of their starting points is the way in which more turbulent economic conditions potentially undermine traditional identity 'anchors' – the established structures of working lives in terms of places and forms of work and work communities. To illustrate the value of an identity perspective, Thomas and Davies draw on a study of the changing experience of middle managers involved in social work in the UK. Their enquiry identifies the increasing pressures faced by social workers to align their professional identities more closely

with bureaucratic and managerial expectations in regard to the regulation, accountability and measurement of their work. The case highlights the scope that these employees found to resist attempts to control their work identity. More broadly, the chapter highlights further ways in which the employment relationship is a contested space, with competing discourses vying to define the roles and responsibilities of the parties involved.

Part 2 focuses on the ways in which different kinds of development are re-shaping the contexts within which employment relationships are created and maintained. In Chapter 8, Marco Hauptmeier analyses how developments in markets are impacting upon employment relations (ER). He argues that in comparison with other governance mechanisms (for example, the law and collective bargaining) the relative weight of markets in shaping ER has increased. Changes in market conditions (the liberalization of markets and increased competition, for example) are examined in terms of the changes they have triggered in the context and content of employment relations. Within firms, market-oriented ER practices such as temporal flexibility and performance-related pay are seen, in part, as the result of companies mimicking successful features of competitors that link employment practices with product market conditions. Any convergent ER tendencies within this pattern, however, are seen to be mediated by continued variation within different market segments.

In Chapter 9, Jean Jenkins and Peter Turnbull also consider the impact of changing market conditions, particularly the implications of increasing globalization for labour. Their focus is the extent to which (and conditions under which) workers can exert influence over their terms and conditions of employment, rather than be subject to a 'race to the bottom', as employers pursue lower labour cost options in different parts of the world. What their discussion illustrates is the differentiated position of labour in the face of globalization, with workers in some sectors exposed to the full forces of globalization, while others are engaged in sectors where capital is more geographically restricted and where labour thus has more scope to exercise influence. The authors draw on studies in the clothing and port transport sectors to illustrate their argument. In the former, highly mobile capital, the dominance of lead firms and the potential to draw on a largely feminized and weakly protected labour force represent especially adverse conditions for labour to develop an effective response to protect its interests. In the port transport case, in contrast, the need for capital to be located close to markets is shown to be a key factor in the ability of workers successfully to block the introduction by employers of alternative (non-union) labour.

In Chapter 10, David Nash examines links between governance structures, sources of finance and employment outcomes. From a starting point of the

Varieties of Capitalism typology, the author explores the ways that firms operate under different institutional arrangements. Sources of capital, and in particular whether those sources exert a short- or long-term influence on management behaviour, are seen to exercise various influences on labour management, ranging from forms of employment contract and training and development opportunities, to employee representation and collective bargaining structures. However, Nash cautions against seeking to ‘read off’ labour management practices from national institutional arrangements; within ‘varieties of capitalism’, firms retain a freedom to manoeuvre in deciding precisely how they will manage the workforce. Nevertheless, the argument underlines the value of understanding particular management behaviours within a broader context of financial and regulatory structures.

In the final chapter in Part 2, Hugh Willmott demonstrates the value of broadening the view of how labour markets and employment relationships are regulated. For both providers and purchasers of labour, certificates and qualifications act as indicators of competence. With the proliferation of educational establishments providing qualifications, an important differentiator in sectors such as higher education, and more specifically business schools, is whether particular courses of the institution have been accredited by one of the main accreditation bodies. Both business schools and those studying at them have an interest in securing accreditation as a badge of quality. An effect of this is to place those private accrediting bodies in positions of considerable power in the business education market. The author explores this growing influence and the suitability of placing greater regulatory powers into the hands of private organizations.

The contributions to Part 3 address substantive developments in the employment relationship. In Chapter 12, Peter Turnbull and Victoria Wass examine the acceleration of earnings inequality in the UK over the past 30 years, which has been marked by those at the top (the ‘super-rich’) doing especially well while those at the bottom of the income distribution have ‘fallen away’. The dominant economic explanation, which focuses on the demand for skilled labour, can explain the former but not the latter; nor can it fully explain the widening of income inequality within particular occupational groups. In evaluating alternative explanations, the authors explore the impact of social institutions. This broader perspective highlights the role of trade unions and collective bargaining, and the apparent willingness of UK citizens to accept employment relationships characterized by ever greater income inequality.

In Chapter 13, Paul Blyton focuses on another major concern: changes in working time arrangements and associated developments in work–life balance provision. The author traces the changing nature of regulation of working

time, and the increase in the unilateral regulation by management of many aspects of work time. One result has been a decline in standardized work time patterns in regard to both the duration and timing of work. Blyton examines this in terms of the differentiated experience of working time and access to work–life balance provisions, with those in more senior organizational positions enjoying considerable advantages in these areas compared to their lower-level counterparts. The chapter underlines the extent to which statutory regulation relating to work time and work–life balance has so far worked to the benefit of some (already advantaged) groups much more than others. The chapter reinforces the case for rehabilitating social class as a key determinant of the differentiated experience of work, a feature that it shares with other recent contributions to the analysis of the employment relationship (e.g. McGovern et al., 2007).

In Chapter 14, Deborah Foster with Laura Williams examine the ways in which equality law, policy and practice have evolved in Britain. The chapter underlines the significance of recent developments compared to past approaches, in particular the widening scope of equality law, to encompass a multiplicity of equality strands (gender, ethnicity, age, disability, sexual orientation and religion and belief) and the recognition that people potentially demonstrate multiple equality concerns that straddle two or more of these potential bases for unequal treatment. The authors give a historical account of anti-discrimination employment law, highlighting the key role of social movements and campaigns in that development. In the subsequent exploration of legal developments, the role of EU equalities policy is examined, alongside its significance in extending the grounds on which unfair discrimination in employment can be claimed. In their review of developments at workplace level, the contribution of statutory rights, collective agreements and individual litigation are explored, with the authors emphasizing the continuing contribution of trade unions to the further development of equal opportunities policies and practices within the workplace.

In the final chapter in Part 3, Edmund Heery examines aspects of employee representation within work organizations. His twin starting points are, on the one hand, a belief in the fundamental importance of workers' interests being represented at work, and on the other hand, the experience of three decades of union decline and an associated rise in other, non-union forms of employee representation. The chapter offers an overview of how scholars in the field have considered these trends, in particular: how unions should seek to reverse their decline; and whether the rise of alternative forms of representation pose a threat to, or are a potential opportunity for, trade union revitalization. Following a review and critique of the different stands of argument, the author



presents an ‘interest framework’, a set of normative principles that can be used to assess institutions of worker representation. This framework underscores the continuing importance of trade unions as representatives of worker interests, but also the ways in which this role can be supplemented through the activities of other representation channels, such as statutory systems of worker participation, employer-sponsored programmes of employee involvement and civil society organizations that campaign on particular issues, or on behalf of particular groups, within the workforce (such as carers, people with disabilities or migrants).

The final part of the book deals with issues relating to specific employment groups and work settings. In Chapter 16, Emmanuel Ogbonna considers research on front-line service workers. His starting point is that service interactions between customers and employees have been a research focus both among marketing and employment studies academics. However, as the author details, the two sets of studies have rarely acknowledged one another or the potential for collaboration and cross-fertilization. While marketing researchers have been firmly focused on customer satisfaction aspects of the service encounter, employment studies specialists have focused primarily on the employment experience of service workers, and in particular the ways that management seek to regulate and control the employees’ behaviour, and the scope that those workers have to resist these managerial efforts and thereby exert some control over their work process. In the final part of the chapter the author explores potential areas for more collaborative research on service encounters, for example through greater recognition of the significance of the customer in influencing both the work experience of the service employees and the way that they deliver the service involved.

In Chapter 17, Tim Edwards provides a critical review of the debate surrounding the growth of ‘knowledge work’ and the extent to which this is associated with fundamental economic change and a different form of employment relationship. Many previous writers have characterized knowledge workers as significantly different in their approach to work, compared with those in more traditional work roles: the knowledge work group being portrayed as placing a high value upon autonomy, interesting work and an opportunity to develop new skills, in return for which they are willing to provide high levels of commitment and performance. In practice, however, as the author demonstrates, the rhetoric surrounding the growth of knowledge work has created a view of a ‘new’ economy, new workforce and new worker–management relationship which is overstated and oversimplified. Edwards argues the case for a more careful and nuanced examination of what different forms of knowledge work exist, the different contexts in which these

are developing and the degree to which in practice they are associated with a new pattern of worker–management relations, and thus a significantly distinct employment relationship.

In the final chapter, Rachel Ashworth and Tom Entwistle examine aspects of employment in the public services in the light of several initiatives designed to reform public management practice, with the aim of securing improved performance and higher levels of control. The chapter outlines the range of reform initiatives that have been taken and considers the depth of change that the various reforms in practice represent, compared to extant practices of service provision. Their particular focus is on the extent to which this reform agenda has substantially changed the work processes that public service workers undertake. Ashworth and Entwistle are sceptical about claims that there has been a wholesale transformation of the public sector employment relationship, driven by the rise of New Public Management. Echoing some of the findings of the case reported by Thomas and Davies in Chapter 6, they show the extent to which employees are able to deflect, modify and adjust the pressure for change in their work activities. A result has been that public employment has retained many of its traditional characteristics.

Together, therefore, the chapters provide a wide-ranging examination of the issues impacting on the contemporary employment relationship. They identify too a series of questions and avenues of enquiry regarding the future development of this central aspect of work organizations. These questions and discussions also act to underline the continuing importance of the employment relationship as a focus of attention for all those concerned with the changing nature of work.

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