Special issue call for papers from Employee Relations

Employee Relations Special Issue: Employment Relations, Migration and Geographical Mobility

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This special issue aims to provide a forum to discuss intersections between employment relations, migration and geographical mobility. Globalisation has a multidimensional impact on employment relations (Lansbury et al., 2003). Distinct changes in the relative power of capital and labour, work regulations within and outside countries and regions, have brought new interactions between different stakeholders with some authors (see Kalleberg, 2009) arguing that precarity and job insecurity are central elements of the globalised employment relationship.

The interconnectedness, multiplicity and hybridisation of social life at spatial and organisational levels attributed to globalisation (Amin, 1997: 129) are directly related to the increasingly changing nature of the employment relationship where contradictory dynamics emerge. On the one hand, the metaphor of the ‘borderless world’ would seem to suggest that workers benefit from the opportunities available everywhere and anywhere and all workers have to do is migrate towards those opportunities. On the other hand, realities of inequalities, mobility restrictions, and deskilling are reported as central to migrant workers’ experiences, where complex dynamics intersect inter alia language, ethnicity, immigration policies and cultural assimilation (Peixoto, 2001; Raghuram & Kotman, 2004; Kofman & Raghuram, 2006).

Within this discussion, migration and geographical mobility have emerged as important elements that intersect with the new forms of employment and work formally and informally articulated. Interaction between labour and market could suggest that workers have leveraged power over these dynamics. However, context-specific constraints on employment relations raise issues about the ways in which migration is regulated and the underlying assumptions about migrant workers. So amid the alleged ‘triumph of capitalism […] over national and local autonomy and identity’ (Amin, 1997: 123), a salient and contradictory feature of these dynamics is the strict way in which nationality and citizenship are defined in order to delimit and enforce immigration policies (Cohen, 2006) and how they impact migrant labour and inter-regional geographical mobility.

A central element of the relationship between employment relations, migration and geographical mobility are the assumptions made about workers. For example, migrants often cannot escape stereotypes of ‘precarious workers’ and as a consequence experience imposed employment relations that generate patterns of inequality and abuse (see Anderson, 2010). For instance, discussions about the new migrant division of labour (May et al., 2007) find support in the overrepresentation of migrant workers in dangerous industries and in hazardous and low-skilled jobs, occupations and tasks (Datta et al., 2007; Benach et al., 2010).

On the other hand, workers with specific patterns of geographical mobility and groups with limited mobility, such as couples and large families (see Green & Canny, 2004; Nivalainen, 2004) can also experience similar circumstances. The idea of location-specific capital (see DaVanzo, 1981) is central to geographical mobility, where it is assumed that workers move from declining areas to areas that provide more opportunities for employment (Amin, 2005). This could make them more vulnerable to oppressive employment relationships. However, although some literature (Robson 2009) suggests that structural organisational change is significantly influenced by regional variation limited research (Martin et al. 1994, 1996; McGrath-Champ 2002) has been undertaken with regard to the impact of geographical location on the employment relationship. Undoubtedly, changes in the structure of the global economy have seen a shift from traditional manufacturing to services (Romero, 2009), where the economic base has seen a transformation of working practices due to shifts in dominance of the working population from blue collar to white collar. Nevertheless, these changes have not carried by a corresponding migration of workers and whilst this in itself has changed the nature of the employment relationship, the impact of these changes has not been evenly distributed throughout the different regions (Robson, 2009). As a result, the way people are managed has changed and could be linked to how certain regional locations influenced the employment relationship through their pre-existing cultural traits which dominate the workplace relationship.

The Special Issue aims to showcase fresh discussion that explores the intersections between employment relations, migration and geographical mobility. We welcome empirical, conceptual and theoretical contributions. Some areas of particular interest for the special issue are detailed below. However, this list is not exhaustive and editors encourage contributions within the broader theme of the Special Issue.

- Experiences of migrant labour
- Deskilling of migrant workers
- Precarity/Precariousness of migrant worker
- Inequalities of skilled migrant workers
- Surveillance and control of migrant labour
- Immigration and employment rights
- Experiences of geographical (inter and intra-regional mobility)
- Impact of geographical mobility on career progression
- Impact of kinship networks on the employment relationship

The deadline for submissions is 31st December 2011: the editors of the Special Issue welcome discussion of initial ideas for articles via e-mail.

References


