Power and voice in the new economy

As the shape of work and employment relationships continue to change, WEI researchers have addressed important issues not only about what we mean by good-quality work, but also what are the dimensions affecting the future of work relationships. Evidence charts a distinct shift in the balance of power towards employers and away from workers (Dundon et al., 2017a). However, we also show there are pockets of resilience and innovation among workers and their unions, in public and privatised sectors (see box 1). Workers in the gig-economy face insecurity and zero hours, yet have also managed to develop union representation from the ground up (Dundon et al., 2017a). NGOs and other agencies external to the employment relationship are influencing managers and organisational policies around equalities, such as Age UK relating to older workers and Stonewall promoting LGBT employee rights (Dundon et al., 2017a). In some organisations efforts may be made to use social dialogue can to address inequalities (Grimshaw et al., 2017). However, power and influence remain contestable spaces and where employees have a diminished capacity to influence the decisions affecting their working lives, the result can mean stress, uncertainty and growing precariousness for workers (Dundon et al. 2017b).
Industrial Relations Journal

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Inclusive Growth Analysis Unit

Greater Manchester.

businesses and suggests what else might be done. The research draws on a second report looks at the different mechanisms and activities which engage inclusive growth for businesses. Taking the case of Greater Manchester, the frameworks relate to inclusive growth and might provide ways to define responsible business. The first report considers how existing Environmental reports published by the Inclusive Growth Analysis Unit (IGAU) on the topic of to encourage behaviour that supports inclusive growth. With this aim in means that any genuine model of inclusive growth needs to engage businesses Business activity is central to economic growth and wealth creation. This

Introduction

Key points

■ Responsible business activity is central to achieving inclusive growth, so engaging with businesses must be at the heart of inclusive growth strategies.

■ Existing Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) frameworks are useful but need to be developed to reflect inclusive growth objectives.

■ Greater attention must also be given to how Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) can be supported to contribute to inclusive growth.

■ There are many activities to support firms on different aspects of inclusive growth but they need to be better coordinated (see Box 2).

The changing governance of employment relations

Changes in the form of capitalism in terms of its reach and complexity present major challenges to the agenda of equality and fairness at work. There is a need to create new ways of ensuring that labour standards at work are complied with and enforced. WEI researchers have made the case that the reach of the state and systems of regulation linked to such labour standards are being stretched (Martinez Lucio and MacKenzie, 2017; Rodriguez et al., 2017) and that traditional and nationally-based systems are being isolated and limited in terms of their regulatory scope (Alford and Phillips, 2018). Furthermore, there is a growing concern over interest in the de-regulation of collective bargaining and trade union rights that are further undermining the way social and economic actors can raise employment standards (Koukiadaki et al., 2016). However, there are various discussions and developments that point to new ethical and socially responsible approaches to issues of business behaviour (Rafferty and Jelly, 2018) as well as new approaches to organisational accounting and transparency (McPhail and Ferguson, 2016). To what extent these are robust and capable of ensuring some degree of worker rights at work is a matter of debate. Some argue that much may depend on the extent to which international agreements between workers and employers, or international labour standards, continue to develop and shape the political space of labour rights more generally and set a series of minimum standards (Whittall et al., 2017); although much also depends on the ability of workers and organisations on the ground to link into these international developments and enact in them their local struggles for good working conditions (see Box 2).
New ways of organising and regulating

The role of trade unions has been challenged by various developments related to the greater fragmentation and change within the labour market. The emergence of more precarious and vulnerable work has forced trade unions to engage in a more innovative and inclusive manner (Martinez Lucio et al., 2017). Research by WEI has found that the organising and representation of non-regular workers has taken the form of many strategies from focusing on the needs of such workers and developing new forms of representation although how effective these may be is a matter for discussion (Marino, 2015; Keizer, 2018).

The space of training and development has been used to link trade unions into the needs of migrant workers in various contexts, allowing for labour market access and the establishment of an awareness of worker rights, in some cases. In addition, various campaigns based on creating support networks and alliances between trade unions and broader social organisations are becoming more common. Many of these initiatives depend on the national context; this includes not only the role of the state, the political position of trade unions and the nature of national employment regulation and welfare systems (Marino et al., 2017) but may also extend to how languages and traditions of solidarity - and class politics - have been framed historically and underpinned the way trade unions view and support vulnerable or migrant workers (Connolly et al., 2017).

What is more, the international dimension of the economy and the role of alliances and interventions by various actors are becoming key to this dimension of organising and action (Alford et al., 2017).

Box 2. The role of Transnational Collective Agreements

WEI researchers have been engaged in various studies of the emergence of Transnational Collective Agreements including as part of a European project EURACTA2. These agreements attempt to establish a series of minimum standards on issues related to the conduct of industrial relations and employment conditions within multinational corporations that have developed them. They constitute a global dimension of management-union relations which tries to use the internal decision-making spaces of the firm as a basis for establishing common approaches to activities such as outsourcing or the use of employment agencies. However, they can be tokenistic on occasions or unable to influence employment standards along complex supply chains. They may also depend on whether local trade union organisations are aware of these agreements and how they use them as a resource in their local activism and negotiations (Mustchin and Martinez Lucio, 2017).

Work and Equalities Institute

Identifying and promoting the conditions for more inclusive and fair work and employment arrangements

New thinking on how to address the challenges posed by changes in work, employment and inequalities is urgently needed. Inequalities – from health and education to poverty and exclusion - are influenced by labour market factors, but employment conditions are also shaped by patterns of inequality. The Institute brings together two internationally-recognised Alliance Manchester Business School research centres (European Work and Employment Research Centre and Fairness at Work Research Centre) with expertise across human resource management, industrial relations, labour economics, organisational psychology, employment law, technology, organisation studies, sociology and social statistics.

Our research is being used in knowledge exchange, dialogue and debate with key stakeholders and policy makers, and makes informed contributions to policy formation and practice. To achieve this, the Institute draws on input from an advisory board of policy makers and practitioners with local, national and international expertise. The Institute’s research ranges from the local to the global, and builds on the already strong connections with national and international policy bodies. Our approach to research includes the use of international institutional and comparative analysis, organisational case studies and qualitative interviews, and surveys and quantitative data analysis.

Our work is central to the debate on inequality in society

The team has a track record, built over more than twenty five years, of informing the evidence-base and policy agenda of the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the United Nations’ International Labour Organisation, as well as national organisations such as the Equality and Human Rights Commission, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development and the Trades Union Congress. They have also helped launch many doctoral students and early career researchers onto successful careers as academics, researchers and policy makers in various sectors and countries.

WEI has an active PhD community of over 20 students

Our research students are working on a range of issues concerned with the changing nature of regulation and work including: new forms of worker voice and conflict in the gig economy, migrant networks and the emergence of independent worker networks, regulation and HRM in SMEs, union revitalisation in South America, CSR and labour standards in West Africa, precarious work and women’s employment, technostress and well-being, the impact of automation on women’s work in the retail sector, the experience and/or the regulation of precarious employment, UK pension reforms, bystander behaviour in workplace bullying, and women stepping away from high level careers, to name but a few. The group of students actively present at conferences and organise a range of seminars and research networks within the institute. They build on long traditions of work on labour market segmentation and inequalities, comparative employment research, regulation and representation issues in employment relations, human resource management, stress and well-being and technology and work organisation. There are a number of AMBS scholarships available each year to support new PhD students as well as studentships from the ESRC’s North West Doctoral College.