

## Relations industrielles Industrial Relations



*Research Handbook of Comparative Employment Relations*,  
edited by Michael Barry and Adrian Wilkinson, Cheltenham:  
Edward Elgar, 2011, 470 pp., ISBN: 978-1-84720-889-7.

Raymond Markey

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réflexions sur le changement organisationnel et les façons de le conduire. Par ses exemples simples et l'exposé de diverses façons de s'y prendre pour faire changer les choses et utiliser concrètement les techniques de créativité, le livre de Carrier et Gélinas crée un espace pour rapprocher les sociologues parfois abscons des managers aux panégyriques gratuits.

Cela étant dit, nous ne pouvons terminer cette recension sans parler des deux principales faiblesses de cet ouvrage. Tout d'abord, il convient de souligner ce qui pourrait apparaître aux yeux de certains comme un manque de cohérence dans la structure proposée par les auteures. Pourquoi, par exemple, avoir attendu au huitième chapitre pour nous présenter les distinctions fondamentales entre créativité et innovation? Il nous semble que cette question aurait dû être introduite dès les premiers paragraphes de l'ouvrage et non vers sa fin. Ensuite, il nous semble important de mentionner que bien que plusieurs des idées présentées par les auteures soient tout à fait valables, le niveau de profondeur de la réflexion et des discussions n'est pas celui auquel certains spécialistes et lecteurs très critiques pourraient s'attendre. En ce sens, bien que cet ouvrage puisse plaire à un vaste public composé de gestionnaires en exercice ou en formation de deuxième cycle, il risque de laisser sur leur faim les doctorants et les chercheurs en la matière.

**François Bernard Malo**  
Université Laval

### **Research Handbook of Comparative Employment Relations**

edited by Michael Barry and Adrian Wilkinson, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2011, 470 pp., ISBN: 978-1-84720-889-7.

Comparative employment relations texts usually struggle to find an appropriate balance between comparative analysis and providing sufficient detail on individual

countries as a basis for comparison. One of two approaches to these issues has generally been adopted. The first, characterized by Bean (1985), has been to select key themes (collective bargaining, trade unions, etc.) as a comparative lens. The second, characterized by Bamber, Lansbury and Wailles (2010) provides a number of country-based studies that cover the main actors and processes in each country. Neither approach is ideal. The thematic focus is constrained by the choice of themes, and the lack of background detail on individual countries hinders a full understanding of their contribution to particular themes. Country-based studies offer detail with little comparative analysis as a rule. They are also constrained by the choice of countries, which is usually focused upon developed countries that are the inspiration for most industrial relations theory.

Both main approaches also share two further fundamental constraints. First, the unit of comparison, insofar as it occurs, is the nation state. This assumes that regulation and processes are mainly determined at this level. However, global forces and institutions have increasingly shaped the nature of employment relations. Other levels of comparison are also important within a global context, notably at industry or regional level. Second, industrial relations texts as a whole focus on the employment relationship, which is usually taken as definitional for the discipline. However, as these texts begin to take account of developing countries it is necessary to broaden the focus to their large 'informal' sectors.

Barry and Wilkinson's *Research Handbook* is a welcome approach to the comparative text that overcomes many of the constraints of others. First, it includes a large section with four chapters on different theoretical perspectives that offer the key frames of reference for comparative approaches:

- institutional and neo-institutional theories that have dominated the discipline,

including the focus of the convergence/divergence and varieties of capitalism debates;

- a political economy perspective focusing on the inter-relations between market forces, institutions and actors' strategic choices to explain the shift in power from unions to corporations, especially multi-national corporations, and economically from the North and West to the South and East;
- legal origins theory focusing on regulatory and legal frameworks as the major set of explanatory variables in comparative analysis; and
- cross-cultural studies utilizing cultural interfaces and dynamics as explanatory approaches in comparative analysis.

Second, the book offers ten paired country comparisons. Although some of these countries are more similar than others, they are mainly based on a most similar approach in terms of institutions, political economy, legal origins and culture. The pairs include: Chile/Argentina, China/India, UK/Ireland, Japan/Korea, Belgium/Netherlands, Australia/New Zealand, South Africa/Mozambique, France/Germany, and the oil-rich Gulf countries. Finally, the book has chapters on the role of MNEs, the regulatory role of internal labour standards and corporate codes, and the impact of neo-liberalism on corporatist approaches in the two less similar cases of Italy and Ireland.

The book succeeds in its aim of being comprehensive, and the chapters on theoretical frameworks and global patterns of employment relations partially overcome the traditional focus on nation states. The countries covered are key players in the global economy and/or very good representations of different regional approaches. The variety of different pairings also provides some illustration of the different theoretical frames of reference. Most are based on most similar institutions, although these are often associated with shared legal systems

and culture. Nevertheless, in some cases the pairings provide strong arguments against an institutionalist approach, notably the chapter on Australia and New Zealand by Wailes. China and India, which share rapid recent economic development, otherwise obviously provide huge contrasts based on legal systems, institutions and cultures and it is interesting to work out their impact on similar economic processes. Mozambique and South Africa also provide interesting contrasts in legal systems, institutions and cultures, in part based on contrasting colonial heritages.

It would be good to see a couple of chapters on regional and industry comparisons in a book of this kind. However, it is already a very extensive collection, and this may be at the cost of other chapters. The density of the collection makes it most appropriate as a postgraduate text. The editors, authors and publishers are to be congratulated in producing such a comprehensive and innovative text, with very consistent quality in the contributions.

**Raymond Markey**  
Macquarie University

### **Globalization and Precarious Forms of Production and Employment: Challenges for Workers and Unions**

edited by Carole Thornley, Steve Jefferys and Beatrice Appay, Cheltenham, UK; Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar, 2010, 272 pp., ISBN: 978-1-84844-593-2.

In an introduction which is much too short to provide even a modicum of coherence to an eclectic collection of chapters, the editors argue that “[w]hilst economic globalization has been a tendency throughout the era of capitalist organization, the increases in its speed and spread in the last few decades, aided by forms of new technology and global deregulation, have made research in this area ever more pressing. Production has nearly everywhere become a movable feast. It can be switched off