

The Changing Nature of Employee and Labor-Management Relationships

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Abstract

This article reviews work and employment research, paying particular attention to theory and applications by scholars in organizational psychology and organizational behavior (OP/OB) and employment or industrial relations (ER), with the objective of better understanding employee and labor-management relationships. Our animating premise is that juxtaposing these two research traditions provides a stronger basis for analyzing these relationships today. OP/OB offer micro- and meso-level focuses, whereas ER focuses on organizations, collective actors, and labor markets, with an emphasis on historical context. We hope this review motivates efforts to think about and build new social and psychological contracts that are attuned to the evolving dynamics present in the economy, workforce, and society. To this end, we look to the future and propose ways of deepening, broadening, and accelerating the pace of research that might lead to useful changes in practices, institutions, and public policies.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the 1980s, significant social and economic changes have produced equally significant consequences for employee and labor-management relationships. A dominant theme in work and employment scholarship concerns one such consequence: the breakdown or transformation in the social contract that implicitly governed work and employment relationships and helped to balance worker and employer interests from roughly the end of World War II through the 1970s. We subsequently use the term “breakdown” in our review because it describes the disappearance of the parallel improvements in productivity, wages, and working conditions prior to the 1980s, a pattern that has not yet reemerged. Several forces, including technological change, the globalization of production and labor markets, the emergence of new financial models of the firm, the decline of unions and other labor market institutions, and the pursuit of flexibility through new organizational forms, contributed to this breakdown. These same forces also transformed the psychological contract, a parallel concept in organizational scholarship that similarly emphasizes the mutual obligations of individuals and employers. A defining challenge for contemporary researchers is hence to better understand employee and labor-management relationships in search of ways to build new social and psychological contracts better suited to today’s economy, workforce, and society.

To help meet this challenge, we review recent work and employment research, drawing specific attention to evidence on these issues from scholars in organizational psychology and organizational behavior (OP/OB) and employment or industrial relations (ER). Organizational studies provide a micro- and meso-level focus when examining employee and labor-management relationships. Scholarship in this tradition illuminates how individual workers and supervisors relate to each other and how individuals come to see themselves in relation to workplace groups. ER scholarship, by contrast, tends to look at organizations, labor markets, and institutions, taking a decidedly more historical approach to illuminate how collective actors—namely, labor and management—engage with each other to shape the rules and expectations of work.

In this review, we emphasize changes felt predominantly by US workers and employers. However, we include a global perspective by drawing on non-US sources and by calling attention to globalization and global relationships. We put the social contract and psychological contracts at the center of this effort, using them to form a bridge between OP/OB and ER. After juxtaposing these literatures, we look to the future and propose ways of deepening, broadening, and accelerating the pace of research that might lead to changes in practices, institutions, and public policies for building new social and psychological contracts better attuned to the current and future economy and workforce.

Social and Psychological Contracts at Work

When analyzing the changing nature of work, ER researchers often use the metaphor of a social contract at work to describe the mutual expectations and obligations that workers, employers, and their communities and societies have for work and employment relationships (Kochan 2000). Historically, the post–World War II social contract has often been illustrated by the tandem movements in productivity and compensation, a relationship that broke down in the 1980s (see **Figure 1**). This change, and the accompanying changes in workplace practices, unions and collective bargaining, public policies, and the relative power of labor and management, led ER scholars to argue that a fundamental breakdown in the postwar social contract had occurred (Kochan & Dyer 2017, Kochan et al. 1993, Walton et al. 1994).

OP/OB researchers often rely on a parallel concept, the psychological contract, to capture more micro-level changes in the employment relationship. By the psychological contract, they

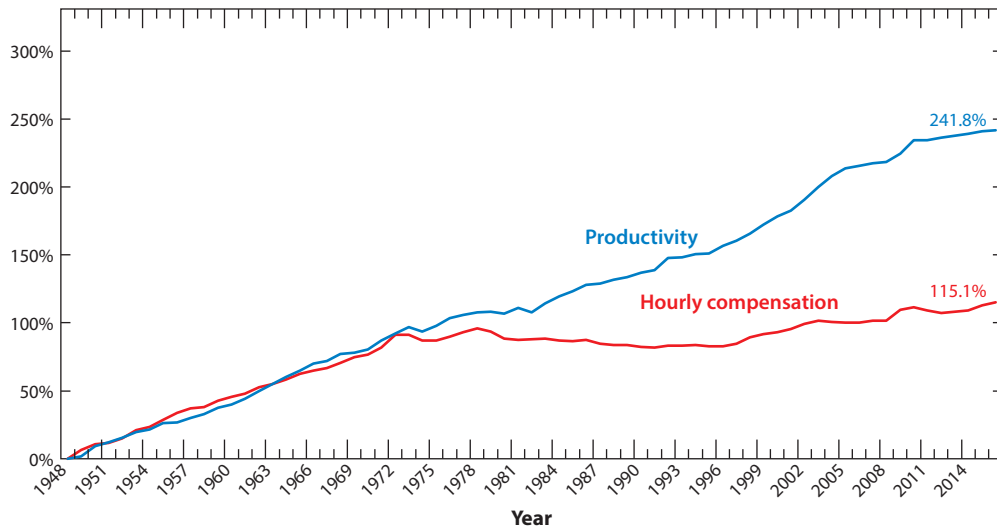


Figure 1

The social contract, pre- and post-1980: The nearly 40-year gap in wages-productivity growth. Source: Economic Policy Institute analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics and Bureau of Economic Analysis; <https://www.epi.org/productivity-pay-gap/>. Used with permission of the Economic Policy Institute.

mean the obligations that individuals believe exist between them and the organizations in which they work (Morrison & Robinson 1997, Rousseau et al. 2018). Such obligations may concern short-term transactional exchanges that are economic in nature as well as long-term relational exchanges characterized by trust and commitment (Shore & Tetrick 1994).

The psychological contract depends on an organization's agents, strategy, and environment (Shore & Tetrick 1994). Consequently, a growing number of organizational scholars are concerned with the psychological contract as it manifests in work arrangements, such as the temporary and contingent ones that diverge from the standard, full-time employment ones assumed in the past. These scholars emphasize changes in the features of the psychological contract, including their scope and durability, and what they mean for social-psychological outcomes like organizational commitment and individual role conflict (Parks et al. 1998). A key concept that helps us understand how a changing environment affects work relationships is "breach" of the psychological contract, or an organization's perceived failure to fulfill its obligations to its members. Individuals tend to identify breaches in terms of fairness and justice and to respond with voice and exit (Morrison & Robinson 1997, Turnley & Feldman 1999).

Taken together, it is clear that ER and OP/OB scholars are each concerned with similar ideas—namely, the nature of work and employment relationships as they relate to actors' goals and obligations; the importance of fairness; and the processes through which actors respond to the other party's failures to uphold their end of the exchange. However, differences are also apparent—particularly ER scholars' emphasis on institutions and OP/OB scholars' predominant focus on the experience of the individual worker. Furthermore, unlike those focusing on the social contract, those focusing on the psychological contract do not explicitly argue or test whether contemporary outcomes reflect a fundamental breakdown from past patterns. **Figure 2** below summarizes the key differences between the two contracts.



Figure 2

Differences between social and psychological contracts.

FORCES DRIVING CHANGE IN SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACTS

Globalization of Product and Labor Markets

The past few decades are characterized by a significant global expansion in production and labor markets. This entails the declining importance of national boundaries for undertaking economic transactions; improved communication and connectivity due to new technologies; and tougher competition associated with deregulation, privatization and liberalization (Mills 2008). As a result, firms have grown beyond national borders to take advantage of more diverse and often cheaper capital and labor markets.

Global-scale production implies that work and employment relationships are no longer governed solely at domestic sites of production but rather by the varied suppliers, customers, and logistics providers that make up the supply chain (Gereffi 1999, Hartley & Thompson 2007, Locke 2013, Wright & Kaine 2015). Work and employment relationships are therefore subject to the interests of multiple private actors, states, and regulators.

Skill-Biased Technological Change

New technologies have played an important role not only in facilitating the preceding developments but also in providing new means of conducting and arranging work. They enable new managerial practices and the allocation of work tasks among disparate sources of labor (Cascio & Montealegre 2016) while also changing the nature of the job itself, creating sectors such as Internet freelancing or eLancing (Aguinis & Lawal 2013).

An important outcome of these technologically induced changes is rising demand for new or different sets of skills (Autor et al. 2003). A particular concern is that so-called skill-biased technology change can have unequal consequences for workers by raising the demand for high-skilled workers and displacing lower- and middle-skilled workers who face intensified competition for jobs (Card & DiNardo 2002).

Demographic Shifts

The changing demographic composition of the labor force requires an updated understanding of who populates the workplace and the kind of relationships they might have there. In the United States, the employment-to-population ratio for women aged 15 and above increased from 20% in the late nineteenth century to 60% in the early twenty-first century (Olivetti & Petrongolo 2016). The labor force has also become more diverse in terms of race/ethnicity and immigration.

The share of foreign-born workers, for instance, nearly tripled from 1970 to the 2000s (Kalleberg 2011), and stood at nearly 17% in 2016 (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2016).

This shift brings new identities, values, and interests into work and employment relationships. For ER theory in particular, the standard conception of the workforce comprising primarily male, Caucasian breadwinners who labor in an economic realm separate from that of their social and family lives no longer holds (Piore 2011). Instead, for some, social identities defined by sex, race, ethnicity, age, and sexual orientation, as opposed to economic and work concerns, may be the basis of for goals pursued through work and employment relationships (Piore & Safford 2006).

Financialization of the Firm

Many analysts have noted the growing influence of finance on firms. Financialization, as it has come to be called, reorients firm goals and strategies by separating ownership and management structures. Rooted in the 1980s policy shift toward deregulation and the attraction of foreign capital (Krippner 2012), financialization is observed in the dispersion of firm ownership structures via investment funds, such as private equity, and the linking of management incentives to stock option schemes (Useem 1993).

Financialization realigns firm interests at the expense of interests of other stakeholders, such as employees, suppliers, and local communities, by prioritizing shareowners', investors', and their agents' (e.g., finance professionals) interests in firm decision-making and management practices (Cobb 2016, Weil 2014).

New Work Arrangements and Fissurization

Amid these changes, work and employment relationships are now situated in a wide array of organizational forms, extending from the bureaucratic firm of the past to the “fissured” forms that characterize many organizations today (Weil 2014). Franchising, subcontracting, third-party management, and outsourcing exemplify the latter type of arrangements, whereas the use of third-party suppliers of labor and of contingent work arrangements, such as temporary employees, independent contractors, or part-time employees, serve as additional organizational strategies to achieve flexibility. A 2015 survey estimated that approximately 15% of workers in the United States were part of some alternative work arrangement, up from 10% a decade ago (Katz & Krueger 2016). Labor market intermediaries, such as recruiters and staffing agencies, also play a larger role in matching workers with employers in this environment, and new technologies may facilitate their appearance, as in the case of Monster.com or Task Rabbit. Together, there is a growing set of actors who shape the terms and conditions of work and employment relationships and who extend beyond the boundaries of the traditional firm (Rho 2018).

Several outcomes follow from the rise of new organizational forms. Increasingly, work and employment relationships are separated from primary organizations and relocated to more competitive secondary markets, resulting in the displacement of workers from actual sites of production and decision making (Boltanski & Chiapello 2006). In some circumstances, relationships have become more temporary and insecure (Osterman & Burton 2005). Managers' roles are in flux as well: The growing distance of managerial decision making from the work site, the increased power of outside financial interests, and the fragmented managerial structures found in fissured work settings reflect a loss of discretion among middle managers who oversee the daily undertaking of work. These circumstances stand in stark contrast to those that dominated prior ER theory, which conceived of work as undertaken in a single place by identifiable employees, supervisors, and managers and in accordance with established rules and norms (Dunlop 1958, Piore & Doeringer 1985).

Decline in Unions

The above forces have been identified as reasons for the decline of a key element of employee and labor-management relationships: unions (Ackers 2015). Unions and collective bargaining played important roles in helping to build and maintain the postwar social contract and helped integrate the working class into democratic society (Ibsen & Tapia 2017). Union membership among all employees in the United States declined from approximately 20.1% in 1983 to 10.7% in 2017, and from 16.8% to 6.5% over the same period among private sector employees (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2018). The decline of unions contributes to the weakening of a force holding work and employment relationships together.

Government Policies

Historically, the state served as an essential actor at work. It set the terms of labor and other contractual law, enacted regulations and oversaw their enforcement, established a safety net and minimum levels of labor standards, and provided mechanisms for dispute settlement and worker representation (Edwards 2009). These functions were at the heart of New Deal labor and employment policy at the federal level and helped to build and maintain the social contract at work (Kochan 2013, Osterman & Shulman 2011).

These roles and functions of the state, however, took a sharp turn during the 1980s and the decades following, notably through government-sanctioned anti-unionism, deregulation of many industries, and weakened capacity to set labor standards and enforce existing labor regulations. Longstanding political gridlock at the federal level has perpetuated these changes, further eroding the state's power in setting terms of the employment relationship and rendering much-needed updates to labor law out of reach (Kochan 2013). As a result, many of the institutions ungirding the social contract have withered. **Figure 3** describes the forces driving change in social and psychological contracts.

CONSEQUENCES FOR SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACTS

Social and Psychological Underpinnings of Organizational Processes

As work and employment relationships become increasingly dispersed by forces such as globalization and technological change, work processes become embedded in more complex and

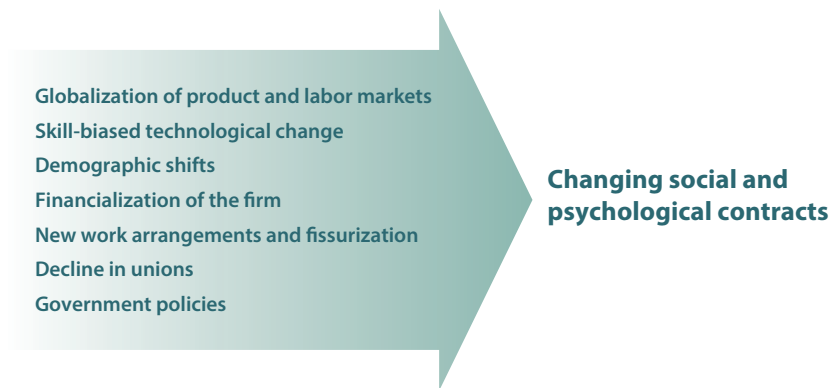


Figure 3

Forces driving change in social and psychological contracts.

multifaceted social systems (Grant & Parker 2009). Consequently, the cognitive and relational processes that enable the performance of work are situated in new and evolving contexts. Here, we explore the implications of these cognitive and relational changes for commitment and trust, conflict and cooperation, and the coordination of work.

Commitment and trust. OP/OB and ER researchers approach the study of commitment and trust differently. Although OP/OB scholars have long recognized that the two operate at multiple levels (Fulmer & Gelfand 2012, Rousseau et al. 1998), research to date largely focuses on commitment and trust at interpersonal, group, and internal organizational levels (Dirks & Ferrin 2001, Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller 2012, Lewicki et al. 2006, Mayer et al. 1995, Meyer et al. 2004). For example, many empirical evaluations focus on the character-based attributes of employees and supervisors as major explanatory variables in establishing trust (Ferrin & Dirks 2002). Less research has examined how commitment and trust is embedded in and influenced by institutions and cultural transformations at the societal level. ER scholars, however, suggest that other variables associated with context and the employment relationship, such as organizational form, employment status, and workers' social identity, will be integral to explaining trust and commitment.

Within both groups, there is debate over the relationship between trust and the changing nature of work. Some scholars argue that a cultural shift interacts with the forces noted above to heighten individualistic beliefs, leading workers to internalize the idea that they are "free agents" with little commitment to the organizations that employ them (Barley & Kunda 2005, Boltanski & Chiapello 2006, Heckscher 1996, Meyer 1995, Newman 1999, Pugh 2015, Smith 2002, Vallas & Hill 2012). In contrast, another group of scholars suggests that trust and worker commitment are determined by employers' strategic choices and are affected by compensation systems, the degree of job security, and unionization (Appelbaum et al. 2000, Batt 2002, Wartzman 2017). They argue that if commitment and loyalty have declined it is because of the reduced commitment employers have made to their workers. However, a high-trust and -commitment equilibrium can be maintained when workers are offered security for employment, good wage and training opportunities, and a high level of control at work. In support of this claim, research tracing variations in strategies pursued by airlines found that, among older firms that cut labor costs under competitive pressure, none were able to improve performance without rebuilding workforce trust and commitment, and without reorienting adversarial labor-management relations to that of a partnership (Bamber et al. 2009, Gittell et al. 2004). These studies suggest that a cultural shift in the environment will not bring the end of trust and commitment in the organization. Rather, trust and commitment can be achieved if firms upgrade the quality of the jobs they offer. What are the determinants of firms' strategic choice of high-road practices? What are the barriers to the diffusion of these policies? We come back to these questions in the following sections.

Conflict. Although conflict receives much attention in OP/OB and ER, these concepts can be said to lie at the heart of the latter (Chamberlain 1963). Historically, ER scholarship has assumed there to be an inherent conflict of economic interests between workers and employers that coexists with shared goals (Barbash 1964). As such, ER scholars have typically examined how overt conflicts arise and are resolved by studying collective bargaining and strike activity, both of which are today on the decline.

However, given the causal forces of change, ER scholars increasingly recognize that the assumption reflected in such an understanding of conflict—that it is a bilateral phenomenon between two collective actors—is too narrow in scope. Conflict is situated in more varied employment arrangements and characterized by a growing number of actors spanning organizations and countries (Riordan & Kowalski 2018). By many accounts, these changes represent the emergence of an

employment regime distinct from that which characterized the postwar period. A predominant feature of this regime is that conflict has become more individualized (Currie & Teague 2016). As a result, the means for addressing conflict are less collective in nature, with single employees addressing their problems through means that include going to a supervisor (Kochan et al. 2018b), taking a grievance to court (Lichtenstein 2002), or using other forms of dispute resolution that reside outside collectively bargained procedures (Walker & Hamilton 2011).

Importantly, although conflict today may be more individualized, it is also more oriented around individually based demands and goals even when it is addressed collectively (Piore & Safford 2006). In addition to shared economic interests, workers' goals and demands are increasingly recognized to stem from noneconomic motivations such as identities, values, emotions, and other cognitive and psychogenic sources (Budd et al. 2017).

Whereas this stance represents a new direction for ER theory, these concepts are well-established in OP/OB theory. For instance, individuals are theorized to come to perceive and define conflict through goals derived from both interests and identities (Sluss & Ashforth 2007). Both are plural in nature: Identities may be derived from social categories such as race or gender just as much as they may be from roles and relationships at work (Crane & Ruebottom 2011, Sluss & Ashforth 2007). Interests and identities thus compete with one another and vary in salience, making an individual's commitment to any given one potentially fleeting. They also lead to different thresholds for and courses of action to address conflict when it arises (Rowley & Moldoveanu 2003, Wolfe & Putler 2002).

Relaxing the presumption of bilateralism and economic interests as the core bases for conflict makes sense when we observe contemporary approaches to negotiating conflict, such as those that take place in more dispersed settings. For example, in the 1990s subcontracted janitorial workers throughout the city of Los Angeles, rallying under demands framed around the rights of immigrants and women, successfully negotiated a collective bargaining agreement in what is a very fragmented, low-wage setting (Erickson et al. 2002). At the same time, this example calls attention to two key elements of ER theory—power and institutions—that have yet to be incorporated into social and cognitive theories of conflict. How do the aforementioned causal forces of change and the resulting shift in the balance of power transform microprocesses of stakeholding and conflict resolution in organizations? How does this inform the institutions that shape both the social and psychological contracts that are of concern in ER and OP/OB? These are questions that we return to in our discussion of a future research agenda.

Coordination and cooperation. In ER scholarship, research on employee participation in workplace efforts to improve productivity and quality led to what came to be known as high-performance work systems (HPWS) (Appelbaum et al. 2011, Cutcher-Gershenfeld 1991, Gittell 2003, Huselid 1995, Ichniowski et al. 1997, MacDuffie 1995, Osterman 1994, Ton 2014, Young et al. 1996). The central argument of this body of work is that separate components of human resource practices, such as selection, training, performance management, work design, and employee engagement, fit together in a bundle of interrelated features, which in turn are associated with gains in productivity and performance that mutually benefit workers and firms.

Others suggest that the conduit through which these bundles are coordinated is a relational, not technical, process in which elements such as trust, cooperation, and commitment underlie the interactions and relationships that bind such functions together. This idea is captured in the concept of relational coordination, which is defined as a “mutually reinforcing web of communication and relationships carried out for the purpose of task integration” (Gittell et al. 2010, p. 491; see also Gittell 2002). Communicating and relating across functions and roles, in other words, leads to effective coordination and high performance (Gittell et al. 2010). At the same time, relational

coordination generates benefits not only for organizations in terms of efficiency and productivity but also for individuals, including job satisfaction, proactive work behaviors, and reduced burnout (Gittell & Logan 2018).

The causal forces of change raise several theoretical and empirical issues for the relational processes of coordination, and, importantly, for whether HPWS principles can be incorporated into varied work arrangements. In outsourced or externalized work arrangements, roles become renegotiated and redefined. This holds true for both employees in lead firms and those in contracted-out positions. Lead firm-employees, for example, may become responsible for socialization and supervision of contracted workers. In some cases, this may be perceived as a burden, and when paired with the negative status often attributed to nonstandard workers, it can strain peer relationships as well as those with management (Broschak & Davis-Blake 2006, Cavanaugh & Noel 1999, Davis-Blake et al. 2003). Outsourcing has also been found to induce role ambiguity and conflict among individuals. Managers, for instance, face uncertainty with regard to their roles and grapple with competing demands placed on their position when portions of their department are contracted out (Hodari et al. 2014). Still other new forms of dispersed work, such as technology-mediated gig work, pose an entirely different set of considerations concerning the social-psychological processes through which work is coordinated. The extent to which the insights of relational coordination can be brought into such settings is an issue to be explored.

Organizational Strategies and Practices

If the psychological contract reflects organizational strategies (Morrison & Robinson 1997), the norms and rules governing work reflect the social contract. We can hence observe both contracts by analyzing organizational strategies and practices, such as labor-management relations, human resource management, and the use of arrangements that disperse work.

Labor-management relations. Debates over whether or how labor-management relations have changed dominated research in the 1980s after initial signs that the postwar social contract was breaking down (Chelius & Dworkin 1990, Kochan et al. 1993). The central question in this debate was whether developments such as shrinking wage increases, stronger managerial opposition to unions, and expanded worker participation in informal quality improvement processes represented a permanent shift in power and practices or a temporary adjustment to changing economic conditions. Kochan et al. (1993) argued that these changes would persist and, moreover, that without changes in national labor policies the biggest outcome would be a continued decline of union power and membership and a prolonged period of reduced wage growth for both union and nonunion employees. That prediction has largely borne out. Union membership in the private sector declined, average wages for nonsupervisory workers followed a long period of stagnation, and efforts to update labor law in both 1994 and 2008 failed.

Studies on HPWS represented a paradigm-like change in ER's attempt to understand workplace practices that were emerging in some but not all firms within and across industries in the 1980s (Osterman 1994). Although strong empirical support for the gains to be realized from such systems was found in most studies on the topic (see Cappelli & Neumark 2001 for an exception), researchers were puzzled as to why these practices were slow to diffuse across firms. The primary theoretical explanation for limited diffusion that has emerged is a two-equilibrium argument, characterized by "high-road-low-road" competitive strategies (see **Figure 4**). Firms that value quality, innovation, and organizational agility are more likely to adopt HPWS; firms that focus on competing via low prices will adopt workplace practices that minimize wages and control workers with more top-down managerial practices (Kochan & Dyer 2017, Osterman 2018). Because firms

		Profits	
		Low	High
Quality of work	High	Uncompetitive	High-road: good for shareholders and employees
	Low	Outsourced or out of business	Low-road: good for shareholders, bad for employees

Figure 4

Two-equilibria model of high-road and low-road firms.

in the same industries can be competitive following either strategy, the two equilibria outcomes continue to prevail (Rahmandad & Ton 2018). Although the hypothesis is that it is possible to achieve high levels of financial/organizational performance with either competitive strategy, high-road strategies are predicted to be better able to produce both good financial performance and good employment outcomes for the workforce. A key debate in this body of research remains: What factors influence the choice between these two competing strategies? We return to this issue in the final section of this review, because we see this strategic choice as critical to the future of this body of research and its contribution to the economy and society.

A closely related body of research gained momentum in the post-1980 period: the study of changes from arms-length to partnership models of union-management relations. A significant and highly visible number of labor-management partnerships were formed as part of the transformations in work and employment relationships in the 1980s and 1990s (Kochan et al. 2009, Rubinstein & Kochan 2001). The central hypothesis underlying this body of research is that working in partnership produces higher organizational performance than traditional arms-length union management relations and higher performance than low-road strategies in nonunion firms (Black & Lynch 2001). However, because partnerships depend on firms having a strong union in place, many of these have not been sustained as unions have declined. This in turn has generated a growing body of research regarding the future of unions and other forms of worker voice and representation.

Worker voice and representation. In recent years, a large body of OP/OB research has envisioned worker voice as a means to elicit “positive” actions or “organizational citizenship” behaviors to improve individual, group, or organizational outcomes. These, in turn, potentially enhance commitment, engagement, trust, and job satisfaction among actors (Bashshur & Oc 2015, Klaas et al. 2012, Marchington 2008, Morrison 2011, Organ 2018). ER scholars, however, see voice as a mix of individual and collective efforts to improve organizational processes and performance with efforts to assert worker interests that are in conflict with employers or other parties. Collective voice is most commonly exercised through collective bargaining, in which trade unions negotiate the terms of employment with employers.

Given the decline in union membership, questions arise concerning whether or not the workforce still desires or expects to have a say at work, whether there is still an interest in being represented by a union, and whether the various new channels for worker voice that have emerged meet workers’ expectations. To address these questions, Kochan et al. (2018b) surveyed a national representative sample of US workers and found large voice gaps (the difference between expected

say and actual say) across a range of worker concerns. Gaps are largest on compensation and benefit issues. For example, although more than 90% of workers said they ought to have at least “some say” on compensation and benefits, most believe they currently have little or no say. Large gaps may explain workers’ increasing interest in joining unions: Almost half of nonunion workers expressed interest in becoming a member, which is up from less than a third in the 1990s (Freeman & Rogers 1999). At the same time, these data suggest some workers prefer to use internal options provided by employers, while others prefer independent options provided by unions or worker advocates independent of employers. This is a particularly important point, given that it suggests the value of developing and making available multi-option systems of voice and/or representation in contrast to both labor law and prevailing practice (Lipsky 2015, Rowe 1987).

Human resource management. The forces driving changes in employment outcomes also change the nature of human resource management research and practice. This field of study has historically been rooted in OP/OB theory and methods (Guest & Conway 2002). Over time it has taken on a more strategic orientation, seeking to assess the relationships between business/competitive strategies and HR strategies and practices (Dyer & Schwab 1982, Guest 2017). In turn, this evolution has produced and/or reflected a shift in the practices and roles within the firm, moving from a functional-oriented role (i.e., studies of selection, performance management, compensation, training and development, etc.) to one focused on gaining influence in matching the firm’s HR practices to its competitive strategies (Schuler & Jackson 1987). A key hypothesis underlying this shift in emphasis is that a strategic human resource approach will strengthen the power and influence of the top-level Chief Human Resource Officer in executive decision making.

More recently, human resource analytics has emerged as a central topic in light of the explosion of digitally recorded data on human resource flows into organizations and throughout their internal labor markets (Cascio & Boudreau 2011). The growth of contingent labor and the number and importance of external labor market intermediaries involved in recruitment and selection (i.e., onboarding) is an additional area of interest (Rho 2018). However, little is known about the effects of the externalization of these functions on either the role of human resource professionals within firms or on firm and employee outcomes. Given the rising importance of this phenomenon, it is likely to be a topic of expanding research.

Societal Effects

These changes have important consequences at the highest level of analysis: society. Because individuals and organizations are embedded in society, impacts are felt “all the way down.” Here, we identify two of the most important consequences.

Growing income inequality. A large body of research documents trends toward greater inequality in the past 30 years using numerous measures. To start, labor’s share of income is on the decline globally (Karabarbounis & Neiman 2014), and most industrialized countries are experiencing a growing gap between top income earners and the rest since the 1980s (OECD 2015). This trajectory is especially pronounced in English-speaking countries (Alvaredo et al. 2013). In the United States, the top 1% of income earners captured roughly half of national income growth in the past two decades (Piketty & Saez 2003; updated in 2015). The outsized rise in top incomes coincides with growing concern over the demise of the US middle class, who face sluggish income growth (Gould 2018) and eroding job prospects (Beaudry et al. 2016).

Figure 1 mentioned briefly above shows perhaps the most vivid illustration of this consequence. From the end of World War II to approximately 1980, real compensation and labor productivity

moved in tandem; after 1980, productivity continued to grow while compensation flattened out. Kochan et al. (1993) documented that the changes in outcomes under collective bargaining systematically overpredicted post-1980 wage outcomes by an average of 1.35% (Kochan & Riordan 2016). In other words, traditional union means of securing wage increases and equality across industries lost a great deal of their power after 1980. Recent research (Western & Rosenfeld 2011) demonstrates that these lower wage bargaining outcomes have persisted and account for between 20% and 30% of the rise in wage inequality.

The effects of growing inequality are also observed within and among organizations. CEO pay has risen rapidly in the United States compared to historical growth rates (Frydman & Jenter 2010), and there is evidence that other countries are converging on similarly elevated levels of executive pay (Fernandes et al. 2013). Considered alongside the sluggish income gains of lower wage earners, the large gains in executive compensation point to heightened levels of within-firm pay dispersion. By one measure, US CEOs took home more than 270 times the average workers' compensation, a ratio that has increased over the past decade (Mishel & Schieder 2017). Inequality is also shown to temper firm performance (Connelly et al. 2016) and increase firm exit (Kacperczyk & Balachandran 2018, Mas 2017).

Such increases in income inequality are likely to affect key individual non-compensation outcomes within organizations, including employee performance, turnover, and attitudes. Whether these outcomes are positively or negatively impacted depends in large part on whether workers see earnings gaps as legitimate (Shaw 2014). Recent research has shown that inequality can reduce worker effort (Breza et al. 2018) and decrease worker satisfaction (Card et al. 2012, Clark & D'Ambrosio 2015).

In addition, dispersion in wage and compensation structures has differential consequences for people at different points in the wage structure. Economists (Kaplan & Rauh 2013), technology specialists (Brynjolfsson & McAfee 2014), and OP/OB researchers (Aguinis & O'Boyle 2014) all note that returns to "superstars" have increased over this time period and will likely continue to do so in the future as advances in communications technologies and growth in firm size increase the global demand for star performers. A cautionary note is found in some of this research as well: Star performer productivity does not readily transfer across organizations, suggesting that some of the productivity attributed to stars may be generated jointly by stars and those supporting them in specific organizational contexts (Bidwell 2011, Groysberg 2010).

Arguments that inequality affects societal outcomes have been amassing as well. High levels of income inequality are associated with slower economic growth (Cynamon & Fazzari 2016), and there is evidence that they are negatively related to health outcomes (Pickett & Wilkinson 2015) and happiness (Oishi et al. 2011). Translating the macro implications into micro ones, an emerging body of research points to the effects that financial precarity can have on job performance (Meuris & Leana 2017).

From the ER perspective, the growth in inequality challenges a key objective of the employment relationship: equity, or the fair distribution of rewards within organizations (Budd 2004). The changes reviewed so far suggest a breakdown in norms of equity and are one of the major reasons it is crucial to work toward building a new social contract. Efforts to understand how workers and employers can work against this trend are in need of continued scholarly attention.

The OP/OB literature is less attuned to how these large distributional changes affect the experience and conduct of work. However, redefined norms of equity directly concern the psychological contract, namely, as individuals assess whether the contract has been breached by elevated levels of inequity. One piece of evidence of this connection is that employees perceive their wages to be more fair when local unemployment rates rise or when the wages of outside job options decline (Verhoogen et al. 2007). In short, employees lower expectations when they face unfavorable

conditions. More work exploring the link between the psychological contract and growing dispersion within organizations serves as a fruitful area of research.

Global impacts. Although this review has focused primarily on the effects of the breakdown in the social contract in the United States, the forces that produced it have created consequences for global relationships as well. A major area of concern is the growth of global supply chains.

Key to maintenance of subcontracting and outsourcing at a global level are healthy relationships. A large body of literature addresses the effects of efforts to monitor and control labor standards in supply chains through some mix of codes of conduct, audits, various forms of voice and worker-management relations, and multistakeholder institutions (Amengual & Chirot 2016, Bartley 2007, Distelhorst et al. 2017, Locke 2013, Locke et al. 2009). The general consensus emerging out of these studies is that further progress requires strengthening local institutions representing workers and the host country's labor laws and enforcement mechanisms (Coslovsky et al. 2011, Locke 2013, Piore & Schrank 2008); broader use of long-term, collaborative, and high-trust contracting relationships (Locke et al. 2007); high-road or high-performance work systems (Distelhorst et al. 2017); and better integration of product sourcing decisions with enforcement considerations (Distelhorst et al. 2018). Others have suggested that Western corporations' efforts to regulate working conditions in global settings often meet strong resistance because they require changes in practices that contradict local cultural norms (Piore 2002) and in doing so jeopardize some workers' primary goal of securing an income (Gaetano & Jacka 2004). Further examination of these cultural differences by micro-level researchers would help to deepen understanding of these issues. **Figure 5** below describes these consequences for social and psychological contracts.

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

A Call for Multilevel, Action-Based Research

One goal of this review is to motivate ER and OP/OB scholars to work toward identifying a new social contract/psychological contract that is better attuned to the twenty-first century economy and workforce by drawing on and contributing to research that uses both macro and micro concepts, theories, methods, and perspectives. We also hope to encourage the use of new ways to teach and communicate the results of research on these topics in a timely fashion to individuals and groups that have the most at stake: the workforce of the future and the leaders of institutions that will shape the future of work. Indeed, we believe that modern technologies and the demand

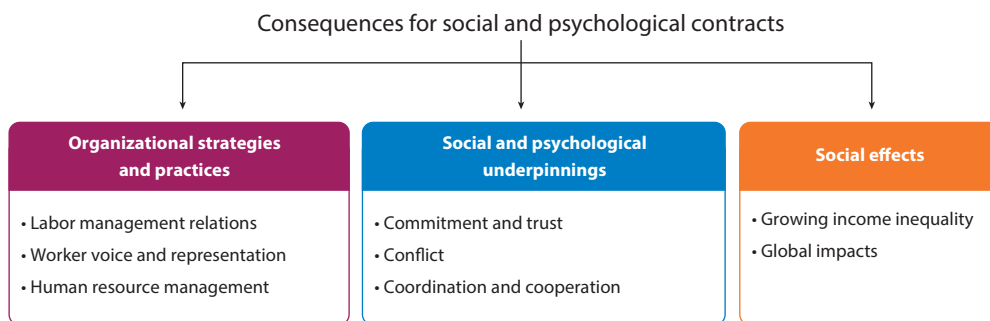


Figure 5

Consequences for social and psychological contracts.

for research evidence is closing the time gaps between research-publication-teaching-application-impact in the social sciences. Thus, in this final section we propose ways to use these two research traditions in more integrated ways to advance research and to communicate what we learn and teach in ways that accelerate the pace of progress toward a new social/psychological contract (see **Figure 6**).

How can technology be used to augment and improve work? One of the most widely debated topics of the moment concerns whether digital technologies will eliminate more jobs than they will create and whether the effects will be to exacerbate or reduce inequality and social divisions (Autor 2015, Brynjolfsson & McAfee 2014, Frey & Osborne 2017, Manyika et al. 2017, Smith & Anderson 2014).

ER and OP/OB researchers could contribute to these debates by helping to shift them from overly deterministic predictions about the future impacts of technology on job destruction and creation to analyses of how technological change can be influenced and shaped by human, organizational, institutional, and public policy decisions and interventions. Kochan & Dyer (2017), for example, argue that shifting from the typical sequential process where technological innovations are designed first and workforce issues are addressed later in the implementation stage to a more integrated technology and work design process would produce higher returns on investment and better workforce outcomes. Efforts in this direction were underway in Scandinavia in the 1970s and 1980s (Sandberg 1992), but they were focused on production work in unionized settings and did not make inroads into the United States. Together, ER and OP/OB scholars could envision ways to develop digital technologies that improve on the key outcomes discussed above, such as trust and commitment. They could also examine ways to better meet the increased demand for technical/analytical and social skills (Deming 2017) and how to increase the take-up of training and education opportunities offered by firms and external institutions needed to maintain and/or upgrade skills throughout one's career. Linking technology and organizational systems such as these may be one of the biggest intellectual challenges and opportunities facing our field in the years ahead.

Improving global employment conditions. Contemporary debates over globalization raise similar opportunities to contribute to building a better social/psychological contract. Can the consensus of research findings summarized above be realized? Further progress upgrading employment standards in global supply chains will require better coordinated actions among multiple firms, labor market institutions, and governments, and insights from ER and OP/OB can facilitate this coordination.

As noted above, much current research is devoted to assessing the institutions that can address the transnational challenges facing global supply chains, particularly in the realm of compliance with production and labor. Many of these policies and resulting studies take Western norms and standards as the baseline. Future research can link institutional responses initiated in the West, such as the Alliance and Accord in the wake of the Rana Plaza factory collapse in Bangladesh (Donaghey & Reinecke 2018, Reinecke & Ansari 2016, Wright & Kaine 2015), to local cultures. This approach would address the limits of the mostly organizational- and institutional-level research carried out on these issues. So too would research that examines how to build sustainable worker organizations and/or joint worker-management programs that monitor and improve workplace conditions in ways that complement and enforce corporate codes of conduct. Such research should examine how these efforts fit with culture and institutions in countries that possess large human resource bases and are being chosen as grounds for global production processes.



Figure 6

Directions for future research.

Has financialization run its course? The recognition that financialization and its focus on shareholder value has been a major cause of increased income inequality and stagnant wages has heightened the debate over the appropriate goals of firms: Are they simply instruments for maximizing shareholder value, or do they have duties and responsibilities for balancing the interests of multiple stakeholders, including employees (Mitchell et al. 2016)? Answering this question means articulating, in part, how new financial models of firms and ownership structures come to shape the psychological contract and, more broadly, the extent to which mutual obligations are shared by various actors at work. For instance, ER scholars argue that the separation of firm ownership and management transforms human resource management systems, reorienting the decisions of firms' leadership in regard to its workforce (Appelbaum & Batt 2014). How are these changes interpreted and understood by individuals? To what extent are such changes connected to perceptions of insecurity, norms of equity, and ideas of fairness, which we know are central components of both the psychological and social contract? Questions such as these are critical for ER and OP/OB scholarship, as insights may yield further questions pertaining to related topics like worker voice.

Additionally, the growth of new organizational forms and practices, including benefit corporations, cooperatives, and employee stock ownership plans, offers a rich mix of alternatives for researchers to assess and theorize (see Rousseau & Shperling 2003 for a step in this direction). The growth in a variety of social investment funds seeking to support firms that have good environmental and employment practices does as well. Research that assesses whether these alternative organizational forms, practices, and firms pursuing socially responsible practices perform as promised—to produce competitive financial returns and good social outcomes—is still in the early stages. Moving forward by obtaining better data on organizational practices and their effects requires exactly the integrated meso-level research and careful measurement ER and OP/OB researchers can bring to bear.

Diffusing high-road strategies. One of the most perplexing tasks facing those studying high-road or high-performance work systems is identifying barriers to diffusion and how they might be overcome. There are several reasons why managers may be hesitant to adopt such systems. First, it remains unclear which components and practices are critical to support good jobs (Rahmandad & Ton 2018). Some studies highlight the importance of standardizing process, cross-training, and operating with slack as integral to a good jobs strategy (Ton 2014), whereas others emphasize the importance of human resource development (Becker et al. 1998), high involvement (Guthrie 2001), or high investment (Lepak et al. 2007). Second, the underlying mechanisms through which HPWS leads to better performance remain unclear. Few studies have tried to look inside the “black box” that mediates the effects of HPWS and performance (Boselie et al. 2005). What is inside the “black box” might be workers' perceptions of job security and fairness of firm practices; workers' skills, attitudes, and motivations; the climate of the employment relationship; or as suggested above, the quality of the relationships among coworkers who need to coordinate their efforts. Third, HPWS efficacy depends on internal and external organizational contexts (Becker & Gerhart 1996, Huselid 1995, Pfeffer 1994). For example, Pohler & Luchak's (2014) study emphasizes trade unions' influence on HPWS outcomes. They find that high-involvement work practices and unions act as complements in organizations by providing both individual and collective voice mechanisms that potentially benefit organization performance. Looking ahead, investigating the diffusion of HPWS requires a more nuanced understanding of which components are critical for firm performance and employee well-being, what mechanisms moderate the effects between HPWS and workplace outcomes, and what internal and external factors may explain their limited adoption.

Public policies that neither reward high-road firms nor penalize low-road firms for employment practices may also serve as barriers to diffusion of HPWS (Distelhorst & McGahan 2018, Kochan & Dyer 2017, Osterman 2018). Research that examines compliance with employment standards and the consequences of variations in government enforcement efforts in both domestic and global settings would help advance understanding of how government policies influence adoption of these practices.

More micro-level research on how workers fare under HPWS practices and how different demographic groups experience and respond to the changes in work processes associated with them would also be useful. Advocates of HPWS assume workers are highly committed and motivated to be engaged in workplace improvement efforts. Whether this assumption fits all workers in all types of employment settings has yet to be carefully tested.

How can relationships across fissured boundaries be improved? Changes in work arrangements that distance workers from their coworkers and organizations pose significant challenges for sustaining participation and commitment and also create the potential for conflicts with coordination and roles that require further study. Much of the OP/OB research on fissured arrangements focuses on those among lead firm-employees and is limited to temporary or contracting arrangements (Davis-Blake & Broschak 2009). This leaves room to examine perceptions of power, identity, roles, and other relational elements of the psychological contract among workers and managers on the other side of fissured arrangements. How, for example, does franchising change the discretion managers have over work decisions, and what are its subsequent effects on manager-employee relations? How are both worker and manager roles redefined?

At the same time, emerging technologies have the potential to coordinate workers on an unprecedented scale (Heckscher & McCarthy 2014), bridging boundaries created by fissuring and providing alternate means of distributing and sharing resources. New communications channels and platforms, like Internet forums, social media networks, and mobile applications, thus present a burgeoning area for ER and OP/OB scholars to study. Examples of particular technologies developed to overcome the gaps of fissuring include Turkopticon, which allows participants in Amazon's mTurk online marketplace to share information; SherpaShare, which allows ridesharing drivers to chat with one another; and the Freelancers Union, a virtual organization that advocates for independent contractors and provides portable benefits. One study has already shown that Turkopticon induced significant change in wage levels as well as employer behavior (Benson et al. 2017). There remains ample opportunity for researchers to investigate how these technologies affect workers' relationship with their coworkers and employer.

How can worker voice be rebuilt? Although the consequences of the decline in worker voice are now well documented, the question of how to rebuild voice in ways that fit with the contemporary economy and workforce figures sharply in debates. One school of thought favors revitalization of unions (Ibsen & Tapia 2017, Milkman 2013); another argues that new avenues of voice are needed that are both independent of employers and not limited to collective bargaining (Rolf 2016). Still others in the OP/OB tradition emphasize voice mechanisms that advance organizational performance (Fiorito 2001, Foulkes 1980, Guest 1987, Kim et al. 2010, Machin & Wood 2005).

This is a healthy debate, but it would benefit greatly from additional research grounded in what workers want and an assessment of the mechanisms that have the greatest potential to rebuild worker bargaining power, grow to a scale large enough to have an impact on national economic and political outcomes, and be sustainable (Rolf 2016). OP/OB research on worker identities and bases for mobilization and collective action, ER research evaluating and tracing the successes/failures of the numerous new forms of worker voice that are emerging (Avins et al.

2018), and other scholarship involving comparative research on labor revitalization efforts (Ibsen & Tapia 2017) are all important contributions toward this effort. Cross-level research that draws on ER and OP/OB research methods and theories would be particularly valuable in advancing this area of research. How much trust do workers have in the voice options available to them? How effective are different options? Can blended models of worker voice that incorporate evidence from the OP/OB-based organizational citizenship research with those grounded in the ER collective voice options fit together in a multi-option system (Rowe 1987)? This topic is a natural arena for better integration of OP/OB and ER research.

Accelerating the Pace: Putting Research to Work in Teaching and Practice

The traditional academic research model is under pressure to make behavioral science research more readily and widely available and to put it to use by those most in need of good evidence for guiding policies (Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking 2017) and practice (Rousseau 2006). Responding to these pressures requires that we do not disseminate research findings prematurely before they have been subjected to appropriate peer review and evaluation. How might we meet this demand while maintaining research standards? And how might we get the findings from our research communicated to the audiences who need them the most and who can put them to work? We end with several examples and ideas.

One way is to engage with the growing number of groups and institutions that are creating study groups or other initiatives aimed at understanding and perhaps influencing the future of work. Examples include AFL-CIO (<https://aflcio.org/resolutions/resolution-5-commission-future-work-and-unions>), International Labour Organization (<http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/future-of-work/lang-en/index.htm>), Massachusetts Institute of Technology (<https://workofthefuture.mit.edu/>), World Economic Forum (<https://www.weforum.org/system-initiatives/shaping-the-future-of-production>), Rework America (<https://www.markle.org/rework-america/>). ER and OP/OB researchers could make valuable contributions to these forums and in doing so find ready-made outlets for disseminating their findings.

A second option might be to take advantage of new journals, such as *Sociological Science* or *Behavioral Science & Policy*, and new professional associations, such as the Behavioral Science & Policy Association, that provide venues for groups of researchers to summarize what evidence from years of research they have to offer policy makers and other decision makers. Clearly, practitioner-oriented journals targeted to management audiences have been available for many years and are effective outlets for reaching business leaders. Many of these now offer online versions that publish short, focused, and research-based commentaries on topics of current interest to their readers.

Several social media options, such as *The Conversation*, that specialize in publishing short, research-based blogs and commentaries present a third option. These offer good opportunities to both summarize and communicate key findings and implications of research while providing citations to longer and more technical research papers and reports.

Another opportunity is to make use of online courses for reaching audiences beyond the students we teach on campus. We do this in our MITx online course, *Shaping the Future of Work*. We have used this platform to crowdsource ideas for building a new social contract (Kochan et al. 2018a). The Additional Resources section below provides links to the videos produced for this course that relate to the topics covered here.

A final suggestion is to create networks of young scholars that allow those in our PhD programs and early stage faculty to interact at earlier stages of their careers with consumers and users of research. Two such networks were created in recent years by the Sloan Foundation to bring together researchers studying human resource practices that promote industry competitiveness

(The HR Network) and another composed of scholars focused on work and family issues. Both fostered research among network members and helped young scholars working on these issues share experiences, data, and tools. Perhaps it is time to create a similar young scholars network focused on the future of work and the future of the social/psychological contract.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The research reviewed here merely samples the huge ER and OP/OB literatures devoted to understanding contemporary and evolving employee and labor-management practices and their effects. Rather than attempting to be exhaustive, our intent is to motivate more uses of work in both fields to have more substantial impacts on the future of work and on the development of a new social/psychological contract that better fits the current economy and workforce and that creates outcomes that benefit greater numbers of workers, organizations, communities, and societies. Indeed, we see this as the distinctive challenge and responsibility of researchers in our fields at this particular juncture in history.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Many of the issues discussed in this review are covered in videos produced for our MITx online course, Shaping the Future of Work. Interested readers can find these videos via MIT's Institute for Work & Employment Research's website (<http://iwer.mit.edu/speak-up-for-work/videos-shaping-future-work-course/>) or by registering for the course (<http://iwer.mit.edu/speak-up-for-work/videos-shaping-future-work-course/>).

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