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978-0-521-51456-9 - The Evolution of the Modern Workplace

Edited by William Brown, Alex Bryson, John Forth and Keith Whitfield

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### Advance praise for *The Evolution of the Modern Workplace*

‘At the 150th anniversary of the publication of *The Origin of Species*, it is an opportune time to ask how and why, in coping with the environmental changes of markets and legal constraints, British employment relations as a species has been transformed in the past quarter century. William Brown and his colleagues have provided a globally relevant and truly insightful picture based on WIRS/WERS.’

TAKESHI INAGAMI, Emeritus Professor at the University of Tokyo and President of the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training (JILPT)

‘A pioneering and unprecedented, empirically based and encompassing work by leading scholars and well-known experts on basic changes at the workplace and the fundamental shifts of employment relations in Britain. An absolute must for everybody interested in understanding the extraordinary transformation processes and their far-reaching consequences over the quarter century spanning the Thatcher/Major/Blair years.’

BERNDT KELLER, Professor of Employment Relations, University of Konstanz

‘*The Evolution of the Modern Workplace* makes excellent use of Britain’s workplace surveys to capture the profound changes that have occurred in employment relations since the turbulent 1980s. This will be the standard comparative reference for assessing changes in employment relations yet to come. It is especially timely and valuable, given the likely impacts the global financial crisis will have on employment institutions and outcomes in the years ahead.’

THOMAS A. KOCHAN, Co-Director, MIT Institute of Work and Employment Research

‘This book provides the most comprehensive analysis of the major changes which have occurred in the British workplace over the past twenty-five years and the implications for work and employment relations in the future. It brings together renowned scholars who have shaped the study of the British workplace and is required reading for all who are interested in this important subject.’

RUSSELL LANSBURY, Professor of Work and Organisational Studies, University of Sydney, and President, International Industrial Relations Association

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‘Workplaces and work have both changed radically in the past three decades. Professor Brown and his colleagues brilliantly chronicle the alterations using successive Workplace Employment Relations Surveys. These include the retreat from collective bargaining, voice, high involvement HRM, contingent pay, upheaval in the public sector and legal regulation. This is the definitive work on the twenty-first-century workplace.’

DAVID METCALF, Professor of Industrial Relations, London  
School of Economics

‘This book sets the international benchmark for studies of the changing workplace. Drawing on a unique data set spanning three decades of workplace surveys, an elite research team interrogates the sources of continuity and change in the study of work and employment in the United Kingdom. This masterful blend of longitudinal data analysis, accessible prose and deep understanding of key human resources, employment law and industrial relations issues generates critical policy and practitioner insights and sets the research agenda for years to come.’

GREGOR MURRAY, Professor and CRIMT Director, University of  
Montreal

‘This is a compelling read. Anyone who works in the field of employment relations, whether as an academic, HR specialist, trade unionist or student will find it a marvelous reference source. It is a comprehensive account of the changes that have coursed their way through the workplace in the recent years and points to several potential changes to come. The chapters bring to light the importance of the Workplace Employment Relations Survey – no mean feat! It’s an excellent addition to the study of employment relations.’

ED SWEENEY, Chair of Acas

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## The Evolution of the Modern Workplace

The last twenty-five years have seen the world of work transformed in Britain. Manufacturing and nationalised industries contracted and private services expanded. Employment became more diverse. Trade union membership collapsed. Collective bargaining disappeared from much of the private sector, as did strikes. This was accompanied by the rise of human resource management and new employment practices. The law, once largely absent, increasingly became a dominant influence. The experience of work has become more pressured. *The Evolution of the Modern Workplace* provides an authoritative account and analysis of these changes and their consequences. Its main source is the five Workplace Employment Relations Surveys (WERS) that were conducted at roughly five-year intervals between 1980 and 2004. Drawing on this unique source of data, a team of internationally renowned scholars show how the world of the workplace has changed, and why it has changed, for both workers and employers.

**WILLIAM BROWN** is the Master of Darwin College and Professor of Industrial Relations at the University of Cambridge. He was previously Director of the Industrial Relations Research Unit of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) at the University of Warwick. He was a foundation member of the Low Pay Commission, which fixes the United Kingdom's National Minimum Wage. He is a member of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas) Panel of Arbitrators, and was an independent member of the Acas Council. In 2002 he was awarded a CBE for services to employment relations.

**ALEX BRYSON** is a senior research fellow at the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR). He is a visiting research fellow at the London School of Economics' Centre for Economic Performance and has been an editor of the *British Journal of Industrial Relations* since 2004.

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Alex Bryson

John Forth

Keith Whitfield



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## Preface

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The genesis of this project was in a series of conversations between the four investigators around the theme that the advent of the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS 2004) would allow the construction of a data set that covered one of the most interesting periods in British industrial and economic history – that starting with the election of the first Thatcher government and ending at the beginning of the third term of the Blair Labour government. Moreover, the fourth survey's timing coincided closely with the change of government from Conservative to Labour, and a significant change in approach to matters in the employment and economic areas, thereby offering something of a natural experiment relating to the impact of this change. The main idea that came out of these conversations was to build on the pioneering work undertaken by members of the research team for the fourth WERS and published under the title *All Change at Work?* Two members of that team (Alex Bryson and John Forth) decided to link up with two researchers with long track records of working with WIRS/WERS and beyond (William Brown and Keith Whitfield) to extend the analysis in two main directions – first, to extend the series to incorporate the 2004 data, and to involve a wider range of researchers in the analysis of the data set so developed. Fortunately, the Economic and Social Research Council agreed to fund the study, and most of the researchers whom the team identified as potential co-authors agreed to take part and undertook their tasks with alacrity.

The product of this collective effort is presented in this book. It offers an evidence-led set of analyses of how, where and why employment relations have changed at the British workplace in the quarter century spanning the Thatcher/Major/Blair years – a period of considerable change in the area. Such an analysis is unprecedented. There can be no equivalent subject area that has been the subject of such an intensive scrutiny over such a long period of time, and certainly not one that has involved as much fundamental change as workplace employment relations in the last quarter century. However, it should be borne in mind that such a study



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has never been the purpose of the sponsors of the WIRS/WERS series. Their intention has always been to produce strong pictures of workplace IR/ER patterns at a point in time with, at most, a comparison with one other survey for a limited area of investigation. Moreover, survey data, no matter how well conceived and collected, can never tell the whole story of what is going on in any particular area, and is especially limited in terms of addressing the ‘why’ questions. Nonetheless, the WIRS/WERS sponsors have not only been especially astute in developing an extremely penetrating survey instrument, but have also been aware of their obligation to history, by keeping in place a number of questions that are closely comparable across a number of surveys and, in some cases, all five. Therefore, any failure to tell a strong and compelling story of this fascinating period is highly likely to be the responsibility of the project team, rather than the materials with which they were working.

We would like to express our grateful acknowledgements to a range of people and organisations that have helped us turn our interesting idea into the reality that is this book. First and foremost are the WIRS/WERS sponsors (various government departments, but currently the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR); the Advisory, Arbitration and Conciliation Service (Acas); the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), and Policy Studies Institute (PSI), for showing the sustained commitment to produce such a powerful data set. ESRC is also to be warmly thanked for providing the funding for the project (grant number RES-000-23-1603).

We are grateful to the National Centre for Social Research for providing access to the British Social Attitudes Survey, to Marco Ercolani for providing data on annual rates of absenteeism from the Labour Force Survey, the Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Essex as the originators of the British Household Panel Survey data, the Office for National Statistics as the originators of the Labour Force Survey, and the Economic and Social Data Service as the distributors of both data sets. We are also grateful to John Kelly and Citizens Advice for providing data on numbers of employment-related problems raised by visitors to Citizens Advice Bureaux; to the Centre for Longitudinal Studies, Institute of Education, for providing the data for Figure 10.1; and to Andy Charlwood for providing statistics on union membership density from the 1983 British Social Attitudes Survey.

Thanks are also due to Paul Marginson, David Nash, Andrew Oswald and Mike Terry, who have provided comments that have significantly improved the quality of the work that is reported herein. A major debt of gratitude is owed to Katy Huxley, who has provided tireless support to the project team, and has brought a degree of organisation to the project that

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has allowed the rest of us to concentrate on what we enjoy doing most – data analysis and writing. Our advisory board members Neil Millward and Mike Emmott have made important and insightful comments at all stages of the project, and have had a strong impact on the directions that we have taken. Phil Good of Cambridge University Press has been an excellent editor with whom to work.

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## Abbreviations

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<b>Acas</b>	Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service
<b>BERR</b>	Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform
<b>BSAS</b>	British Social Attitudes Survey
<b>CAB</b>	Citizens Advice Bureau
<b>CAPI</b>	computer assisted personal interviewing
<b>CBI</b>	Confederation of British Industry
<b>CEHR</b>	Commission for Equality and Human Rights
<b>CIPD</b>	Chartered Institute of Personnel Development
<b>CLIRS</b>	Company Level Industrial Relations Survey
<b>CPBR</b>	collective payment by results
<b>CRE</b>	Commission for Racial Equality
<b>CSO</b>	Central Statistical Office
<b>DCLG</b>	Department of Communities and Local Government
<b>DE</b>	Department of Employment
<b>DRC</b>	Disability Rights Commission
<b>DTI</b>	Department of Trade and Industry
<b>EC</b>	European Community
<b>EOC</b>	Equal Opportunities Commission
<b>ESO</b>	employee share-ownership
<b>ESRC</b>	Economic and Social Research Council
<b>ET</b>	employment tribunal
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EUKLEMS</b>	European Union Kapital Labour Energy Materials and Services
<b>FDI</b>	foreign direct investment
<b>HIM</b>	high involvement management
<b>HPWS</b>	high performance work systems
<b>HRM</b>	human resource management
<b>IDBR</b>	Inter Departmental Business Registers
<b>IPBR</b>	individual payment by results
<b>ISSP</b>	International Social Survey Programme

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## List of abbreviations

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<b>IWP</b>	Institute of Work Psychology
<b>JCC</b>	joint consultative committee
<b>LFS</b>	Labour Force Surveys
<b>MNC</b>	multinational companies
<b>NHS</b>	National Health Service
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>OLS</b>	Ordinary Least Squares
<b>ONS</b>	Office for National Statistics
<b>OPCS</b>	Office for Population Censuses and Surveys
<b>PBR</b>	payment by results
<b>PRP</b>	profit-related payments
<b>PSI</b>	Policy Studies Institute
<b>SETA</b>	Survey of Employment Tribunal Applications
<b>SIC</b>	Standard Industrial Classification
<b>TUC</b>	Trades Union Congress
<b>TUPE</b>	Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations
<b>UCC</b>	ultimate controlling company
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>WERS</b>	Workplace Employment Relations Survey
<b>WES</b>	Women and Employment Survey
<b>WIRS</b>	Workplace Industrial Relations Survey