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Mapping the frontier of theory in industrial relations: the contested role of worker representation

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Abstract

The widespread decline of trade unions and the emergence of various alternative forms of worker voice and representation have posed a challenge to the field of industrial relations and generated significant rethinking of the future directions for this field of study. In this article, we examine how well industrial relations meta-theories, when combined with efforts to build middle-range theories, provide distinctive explanations and different predictions for the alternatives that have emerged to date to fill the void. We propose new directions for theory and research that expand the range of actors or institutions that shape employment relations and include social identities outside of the employment relationship as the basis for mobilizing collective actions and voice. Finally, we suggest using these theoretical arguments to test among alternatives as a means of revitalizing and reshaping industrial relations as well as carrying forward the problem-solving norms that have characterized the field since its inception.

Key words: labor market institutions, internationalization, trade unions, civil society, employee voice, corporate social responsibility

JEL classification: J5 labor–management relations, trade unions, and collective bargaining, J8 labor standards: national and international, M14 corporate culture, social responsibility

1. Introduction

In the Anglophone world, industrial relations (IR) has been studied since the beginning of the twentieth century. Often described as a multidisciplinary study of employment relations (Kaufman, 1993), IR as a field of study arose as a reaction against the perceived inadequacies

of classical economics models, on the one hand, or Marxist analyses, on the other, for studying the relations between the employer and the worker. IR has taken on a strong problem-solving orientation in response to market and government failure in labor markets. More specifically, the field has had an analytical and normative concern with extending democracy from the political to the economic sphere. In the USA, this can be seen in the early twentieth-century works of institutional economist John R. Commons and his founding of the 'Wisconsin school'. In Britain, it dates back to the works of Webb and Webb (1897) and their study of trade unions as a source for industrial democracy through mutual insurance, collective bargaining and legal enactment.

IR has historically viewed trade unions and collective bargaining as critical institutions for worker representation, giving voice to workers and balancing power in employment relationships (cf. Müller-Jentsch, 2008). The decline of unions in many advanced economies and the failure of unions and collective bargaining to grow to scale in many developing countries has created an intellectual crisis for IR scholarship. Moreover, it has created a void in practice that is at best only partially filled by the emergence of alternative forms of worker voice, advocacy and representation.

Although the emergence of alternative forms of voice is well documented, they have not necessarily been well understood theoretically. In this article, we draw on a meta-theory of IR, and several specific middle-range IR theories to assess their merits for interpreting, explaining the emergence and predicting the future of new forms of worker representation in a context of declining unionism. We use the terms 'worker representation' and 'worker voice' interchangeably, referring to any type of direct or indirect worker involvement in regulating employment relations. The new sources under scrutiny in the article are: high-performance work systems (HPWS), corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, international forms of voice and representation and civil society organizations (CSOs) that advocate for workers. Although not the only ones, these four organizational forms or entities could take on the social function of worker representation in various ways. They are four empirically salient forms that have brought about promises to fill the representation gap left by declining unionism.

Our basic argument is that existing theoretical models miss two emerging features of today's world of work. Many workers view their options and sources of power through the use of social identities shaped outside of the workplace. The parties or 'actors' shaping employment relations today go well beyond the three traditional groups that feature prominently in most IR theories—labor unions, employers and national governments. This development requires moving beyond the employment relationship and firm boundaries to accept the possibility that the workplace division of labor no longer defines the primary identities through which workers filter their views of worker representation. This also implies the need to focus more intensively on emerging coalitions of actors across the boundaries of firms or nations to understand or influence employment practices and outcomes. Consequently, we propose that the new world of work requires researchers to revise their concepts of (a) worker identities and interests, (b) collective actors and (c) agency repertoires. In line with Piore and Safford (2006), Lakhani *et al.* (2013) and Ackers (2002, p. 12), we argue that the intellectual crisis and institutional void of declining unionism could thereby serve as an opportunity for theoretical growth in the field of IR. Finally, consistent with the problem solving tradition in IR, we see the proposed line of research as critical to filling the 'the representation gap' (Towers, 1997; Freeman and Rogers, 1999) left by the union decline and weakness now present in global employment relations.

In the sections that follow, we briefly summarize a well-known meta-theory, Fox's frames of reference and several specific middle-range theories in IR. We outline how middle-range theorists and empirical researchers working within each of these frames of reference would explain the rise of alternative forms of worker voice and representation and predict their future trajectories. Finally, we suggest new directions for theory and research that challenge some of the assumptions and approaches embedded in existing models.

2. From meta-theory to the middle range

Most IR scholars agree that there will never be a single dominant general theory in the field of IR.[1] The best-known effort to develop a general theory in IR is Dunlop's *Industrial Relations Systems* (1958). While Dunlop provided a useful framework for identifying and organizing many of the key features of the field (i.e. aspects of the environment, identification of the key actors and the ideology binding them together and a focus on the rules governing employment relations), the framework has been criticized for not generating testable hypotheses, among other things. However, we propose several recent attempts of theorization—so-called middle-range theories—do offer testable propositions and hypotheses. Middle-range theories, as defined by Merton (1949), build on both meta-theories and broad theoretical frameworks to offer specific testable propositions and hypotheses that can adjudicate between the basic arguments in the broader meta-theories.

'Meta-theories' refers to the ontological and normative underpinnings of research. One of the most important meta-theoretical developments within IR, still resonating today, is Fox's 'frames of reference' (1966, 1974), according to which IR can be approached through one of three frames of reference—unitary, pluralist or radical—that differ in their perspectives on the nature of employment relations. Recently, Budd and Bhave (2008) identify a fourth frame of reference—the egoist frame—according to which the employment relation is viewed in terms of spot markets in which employers and employees are rational agents in pursuit of self-interest. Policies disturbing the supply/demand mechanism are viewed with skepticism, and institutions (if acknowledged) only have a legitimate role in reducing transaction costs. As a corollary, theories couched in this frame of reference have little if anything to say analytically about worker representation and is therefore excluded from our treatment.[2] The key elements of each frame can be seen in Table 1.

As Budd and Bhave (2008, p. 101) argue, 'frames of references are rooted in two key dimensions: the interests of the parties to the employment relationship and the degree of compatibility of these interests'. The key questions are, what are the interests of employers and employees and are these interests compatible or in conflict? Fox's frames of reference leads

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1 Another level of theory we choose not to incorporate in this article is what some refer to as a general theory, that is, one that provides an overall encompassing framework, set of concepts and explanations that encompass the full range of questions relevant in a field of study (Merton, 1949 [2004]). The best-known effort to develop a general theory in IR is Dunlop's *Industrial Relations Systems* (1958). As Dunlop's systems theory has been treated extensively in the past, we refrain from repeating this exercise here.

2 Interestingly, of course, the frame's ontological and normative underpinning, that is, individualization of workers and marketization, has been used in many studies to explain union decline and lack of representation. But this should not be confounded with the frame's analytical value for studying worker representation.

Table 1. Industrial relations and the frames of reference

	Employment relationship	Form of worker representation	Research implications
Unitary	Based on trust and harmony; managed conflict	Individual voice; employee participation	Focus on firm performance, employee satisfaction
Pluralist	Divergent interests; need for regulation to solve conflict	Institutional: trade unions, collective bargaining	Role of trade unions and of institutions such as collective bargaining to resolve conflict
Radical	Underlying structural inequality; struggle for power and control	Militant unions; extra-institutional: social movements	Macro perspective of broader forces to fight for societal change

researchers to focus on the employment relationship as the focal point for determining identities that give definition to the actors' interests and their degree of shared and conflicting interests. In line with Ackers (2002, 2014) and Piore and Safford (2006), we suggest that this may no longer be adequate given the breakdown of clear boundaries defining employer–employee relationships. The emergence of competing sources of social identities may challenge the economic assumptions underlying of most (but not all) IR theory.

While the frames of reference are too general to be full-fledged theories, middle-range theories that spell out the elements conditioning worker representation are arguably cast within these frames of reference. In other words, theories of worker representation are strongly tied to scholars' different conception of interests. This is not to argue that all IR theory can be categorized squarely within one meta-theory—indeed, we argue that theory that tries to go beyond the traditional concepts of worker identity and interests is a fruitful way forward. Nonetheless, worker representation will take on different forms and use different notions of success, depending largely on scholars' normative and ontological framework. Therefore, we cannot rule out these meta-theories when trying to understand middle-range theories. The implicit or explicit use of these three frames of reference allow us to compare the predictions of different middle-range theories about the longer term effects of union decline and the alternatives that have emerged to fill the void in worker representation.

Middle-range theories make it possible to diagnose a phenomenon, explain its processes and potentially predict outcomes (Ostrom, 1999, p. 40). The middle-range theories discussed herein were not developed solely to explain union growth or decline. However, as explicated here, they do offer clear and differentiated (therefore testable) explanations for why unions are in decline and the likely alternative trajectories that are emerging to fill the void union decline leaves in worker representation. While many other IR middle-range theories exist, we focus on those that can potentially offer predictions about union decline and new forms of worker voice.

One set of theories works primarily within the pluralist frame of reference by recognizing employment relationships are mixed mode in nature: they entail a mix of inherent and enduring conflicting and common interests and are mediated by the power, strategic choices and negotiating skills the parties bring to their interactions (Walton and McKersie, 1965; Kochan, 1980). According to the strategic choice model developed in Kochan *et al.* (1984) and Kochan *et al.* (1986), the globalization of markets and ease of technology transfer

significantly increased the power of employers to drive change by increasing their exit options (Hirschman, 1970). In the absence of changes in union strategies or government policies to rebalance power, unions would decline. New union strategies aimed at strengthening worker voice in newly emerging work systems might provide a counterbalance, but proved fragile and difficult to sustain in the absence of supportive government policies. Others suggested worker voice would be unlikely to be sustained in liberal market economies (e.g. the USA, Canada, Britain, Australia and New Zealand) because employers had more flexibility to compete on the basis of low labor costs (Hall and Soskice, 2001). Coordinated market economies provide a number of 'beneficial constraints' on managerial actions (Streeck, 1997) that do more to take away this option and thus are more likely to encourage firms to 'race to the top' by investing in skills, technology and variants in high-performance work systems (Thelen, 2001; Swenson, 2002). Thus, strategic choice models offer both clear predictions of continued union decline and a potential path for new forms of worker representation to emerge, but only if reinforced by government policies and employer strategies. Strategic choice models stress the importance of these contingencies in predicting future developments.

Edwards *et al.* (2006) and Bélanger and Edwards (2007) use a mix of pluralist and radical frames of reference in identifying the conditions shaping conflict or cooperation at the workplace level. They predict either conflict or cooperation prevails based on the concerns for workplace control of capital and labor and the long-term development of productive forces. They argue that cooperation is rare due to the often opposing concerns of capital and labor, despite their potential for cooperation. Their framework constitutes a middle-range theory that identifies the conditions generating positive and sustainable outcomes for both employers and workers, which in turn can help us understand favorable conditions for worker representation. Bélanger and Edwards (2007) posit three sets of factors: technology (machinery and equipment, software and hardware), product markets and institutions that condition the possibility of positive-sum workplace relations. Technology affects the autonomy of workers, the kinds of control exerted by management and the potential positive-sum efficiency gains. Some technologies, for example in call centers, parcel work into individual tasks with little worker autonomy and little time for interaction among workers—thus making worker representation harder. Other technologies requiring high coordination between workers provide more fertile ground for worker representation. Product market competition conditions the scope of economic transactions between employers and workers. For example, highly competitive product markets can lead to a sense of grievance among workers (see discussion of Kelly that follows) or alternatively erode the basis for worker representation due to intra-class competition over available jobs. Most forms of worker representation, however, presuppose some kind of employment stability to be sustainable. Institutions—as formalized rules—provide incentive structures that regulate the interaction between business and labor. Rules that facilitate worker representation, such as collective bargaining rights, rights to works councils and union-administered unemployment benefits (Ghent systems), help workers overcome collective action problems and might in turn provide 'beneficial constraints' for employers that learn to build their business strategies around collective bargaining and worker consultation.

A third middle-range theory is Kelly's mobilization theory in *Rethinking Industrial Relations* (1998). Couched squarely within the radical frame of reference, he argues that worker collectivism is an effective and by no means anachronistic response to injustice at work. Kelly argues that worker mobilization will most likely occur when these five elements

are present: (a) a sense of grievance or injustice, (b) which can be attributed directly to the employer; (c) an effective organization; (d) confidence that the action will be effective; and (e) leaders who frame the issues compellingly. Kelly stresses taking a historical perspective, using Kondratieff's 'long wave theory', and applies time-series data on British strikes, trade union membership and density to examine the underlying processes by which individual perception of injustice leads to worker mobilization and collective action. Drawing on social movement studies, Kelly's historical account emphasizes social processes, but while his theory integrates the micro and macro levels, the empirical analysis offered is clearly rooted within a Marxist, structuralist point of view. Organized labor as a mobilization of workers interest is at the core of Kelly's revitalization of IR but it should not be reduced to trade unions in a traditional sense. Indeed, this theory can be used to understand the role of civil society organizations as a potential source of worker mobilization.

A fourth middle-range theory, strategic HRM (SHRM), is based on a unitarist view of the employment relationship (cf. Watson, 2007). As Boxall and Macky (2009) and Wood and de Menezes (2008) note, SHRM is based on high-involvement management (HIM), which posits that a new regime of personnel management was needed on the backdrop of Taylorism (Walton, 1985; Lawler, 1986; Wood and de Menezes, 2008). HIM includes a cooperative approach based on high degree of worker autonomy and auto-management, semi-autonomous work teams and worker participation channels to improve information sharing between workers and management. The structuring factors for adoption of HIM can be based on contingency as well as a resource-based theory by which industry characteristics, skill requirements, the competitive exigencies (quality, innovation, price) as well as the firm's resources and capabilities matter toward the business strategy and create competitive advantage (Boyd *et al.*, 2012). The issue of 'vertical' fit between business strategy and HRM is cast in largely functionalist terms, that is, the business strategy determines whether high-involvement practices are conducive toward high business performance (Beer *et al.*, 1984; Boxall, 2007). In addition, SHRM scholars stress 'horizontal' fit between the various HR practices, for example, selection and remuneration that complement each other (Kepes and Delery, 2008).

Although there is essentially no reason to exclude unions from HIM practices (Kochan and Osterman, 1994), HIM in SHRM has often implied that collective agreements with job specifications, rigid wage structures and indirect participation (through union representatives instead of workers) is unwanted. As such, individual and direct involvement of workers is preferred over indirect worker representation by trade unions—and the demise of trade unions would seem to be a functional response by workers who have gained the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards from HIM on their own (cf. Marchington and Wilkinson, 2005). The decline of unions can thus be seen as occurring naturally (the rise of unions was seen as an indication of management failure).

This section shows that predictions about worker representation in IR made by different middle-range theories are often driven by the underlying assumptions cast with Fox's frames of reference. It has therefore been common to regard the theories as rather incommensurable and bracket them for particular research questions, which has the advantage of clearly defining analytical domains and facilitating knowledge accumulation (Qiu *et al.*, 2012). The disadvantage is potentially making research provincial and theoretical innovation scarce (Lewis and Grimes, 1999), a common criticism of IR. Although we find it unrealistic that one theory could falsify the other, it is unfortunate that IR scholars too seldom explore theoretical innovation by engaging in cross-frame theorization (Kaufman, 1993). For example, Bélanger and

Edwards (2007) indeed accept that conflict and cooperation are both possible and define the contingencies that structure the interests of different parties. This approach is fruitful as it crosses frames and provides clear propositions to evaluate theory. Nonetheless, as we show later, important structural changes of work and employment have not been well incorporated into middle-range theories, which would lead to different conclusions about relevant actors and their interests and identities (Ackers, 2002; Piore and Safford 2006; Lakhani *et al.*, 2013). Next we discuss how the meta-theories and the selected middle-range theories conceptualize and explain alternative forms of worker representation and their future trajectories.

3. Review of research on new sources of worker voice and representation

The decline of traditional unions or the failure of unions to grow in developing countries has led to considerable initiatives, experimentation and innovations with new forms of worker voice and representation. These, in turn, have led to debate among IR scholars over whether the new forms will move to a scale large enough to fill the union void, whether the new forms have sufficient power to be effective or whether more traditional unions will eventually reappear. It is to these alternative models that we turn now. While these emergent forms have been controversial, we next examine in what ways and how successfully IR scholars have drawn on the existing theoretical models to understand and explain these alternative developments.

3.1 High-performance work systems

The void in worker voice was both created and filled by the emergence of flexible forms of employee participation and work organization that started with terms such as job enrichment, job enlargement, quality circles, quality of work life, socio-technical systems and eventually became popularly labeled as HPWS (Boxall and Macky, 2009).

Most SHRM scholars take a unitary perspective on HPWSs and focus on internal management and organizational factors to explain firm performance. Indeed, the notion of HPWSs inherently involves attention to the relationship between performance and the organization/ management of work. The key dependent variables in these studies are labor productivity, turnover and financial performance (Becker and Huselid, 1998; Cappelli and Neumark, 2001). Huselid (1995) used longitudinal data of a national sample of firms to show how bundles of HR practices are related to enhanced performance in terms of lower employee turnover, greater productivity and greater financial firm performance. Although not as fully rooted in a unitarist perspective, a number of well-known industry-specific studies found similar results (e.g. MacDuffie, 1995; Ichniowski *et al.*, 1997). However, SHRM seems to struggle with a 'black box' problem of relating high-involvement HR with good performance theoretically—both the vertical and horizontal fit (Becker and Huselid, 2006)—and scholars are still searching to illustrate this relationship in empirical research (Purcell and Kinnie, 2007). This perspective stresses that the emergence of HPWS is due to specific employer strategies, striving to improve the organization's performance by managing people well. SHRM places workers as a key resource and source of competitive advantage (Allen and Wright, 2008). Both extrinsic and intrinsic values can be reaped from HPWS that lead to worker fulfillment, higher firm performance and therefore possible rent sharing—with no need for unions or other indirect forms of worker voice. Thus, the unitarist perspective largely predicts

continued union decline in the presence of a gradual diffusion of HPWS. Moreover, as an alternative to worker representation, Boxall and Macky (2009) argue that the effectiveness of HPWS hinges on the degree of worker involvement that spurs worker motivation. Thus, we might actually find work systems that yield high performance which remain 'lean and mean' in terms of HR practices and therefore poor alternatives to unions for worker interests. This issue seems largely neglected by most SHRM scholars.

In accordance, pluralist perspectives on HPWS adopt a broader set of dependent variables, which includes work involvement, job enrichment, and wage growth. Research on the diffusion and stability of HPWS requires examining a broader set of causal factors, including the environmental conditions stressed by Dunlop (1958) and the comparative capitalism literature (e.g. Hall and Soskice, 2001; Whitley, 2007), as well as the strategic choices of employers, unions and government policy makers. Some scholars have shown the importance of unions as potential partners in improving performance and ensuring workers share in the resulting economic gains (Rubinstein and Kochan, 2001; Kochan *et al.*, 2009). Notions of mutual gains enterprises (Kochan and Osterman, 1994) and partnership approaches (Guest and Peccei, 2001; Kristensen, 2006) show how worker representation can play a positive role in high-road employment relations where workers are involved to produce win-win solutions. Notably, Kristensen and colleagues (Kristensen, 2006; Kristensen and Lilja, 2012; Kristensen and Rocha, 2012) give accounts on HPWS in Nordic countries where shop stewards are actively involved in managing restructuring processes in partnership with management. Shop stewards have an important, positive role due to the relatively high union density, bargaining autonomy at the workplace, access to board meetings and information sharing and legal protections. Again, high performance is contingent on contextual factors, in this case the 'beneficial constraints' of Nordic IR institutions and welfare policies.

These studies regard HPWS as a combined strategy from management and labor to enhance firm performance, employee satisfaction and other material/economic interests—but in accordance with the indeterminacy of the employment contract and the inherent conflict of interests, HPWS can never be left alone to management. Thus, HPWS can serve as an opportunity for unions to make strategic choices that could turn these processes into new sources of industrial democracy and worker bargaining power under the right conditions. The framework of Bélanger and Edwards can help us here. Echoing Jacoby (1993), they argue that companies in liberal market economies like the USA or the UK are often institutionally averse to sustain HPWS. The reason for this could be that firms with short-term and cost-centered concerns—as opposed to more long-term developmental concerns—coordinate via arm's-length contracts and low-involvement hierarchies. When product markets tighten, the sustainability of HPWS is compromised due to lack of supportive institutions.

Thompson and Harley (2007) are more critical and use labor process theory to argue that the impact of HPWS on employees is highly complex. For example, while employees might be granted more discretion, they might endure higher levels of stress at the same time due to the responsibility of individual decision making. They criticize both unitary and pluralist studies of HPWS for failing to take adequate account of the broader political-economic context and the effects on employees. Along similar lines, others have argued that HPWS are an expression of the ideology of employers, are used as control mechanisms, and result largely in higher levels of worker stress. Critical assessments cast doubts on the purportedly positive effects from HPWS on wages (Handel and Gittleman, 2004), and show no unequivocal positive effects for union revitalization from labor-management partnerships (Godard, 2004; Kelly,

2004). According to Kelly (2004), for example, workers in HPWS will debilitate and demo-
bilize unions by embracing a managerial and individualistic agenda for work. Boltanski and
Chiapello's (1999) work on France shows that modern work systems were developed as an
upshot of the 1968 protest movement, which had the dual aims of increasing security of
workers (quantitative agenda) and autonomy of workers (qualitative agenda). This dual
aim was co-opted by capitalism by the development of network-based forms of management
where salaried workers (cadres) are governed by themselves rather than by joint regulation
between management and unions. This strategy promises self-realization and individual
freedom in a deregulated workplace where rigid job control unionism is absent and indeed
unwanted by workers themselves—the downside being individualization of risks.

If we look at how previous theoretical frames in IR have informed the HPWS literature,
unitary and pluralist perspectives offer sharply different predictions about the conditions
under which these systems will benefit workers. To the extent that HPWS enhance product-
ivity and other aspects of firm performance, unitary theorists would expect workers to gain
psychological and material satisfaction as well and therefore reduce or eliminate interest in and
need for unions or other independent forms of worker representation. HPWS is considered in
light of firm performance rather than as a new option for worker voice and representation.
State regulation or workplace politics are often not taken into consideration, as suggested
by Bélanger and Edwards (2007). Pluralists see some form of worker representation as neces-
sary for these 'win-win' outcomes to prevail and sustain HPWS over time (Paauwe and
Boselie, 2007; Kochan *et al.*, 2008). Unions might pursue mutual gains strategies and
HPWS—as suggested by the strategic choice literature—but not without certain institutional
prerequisites. Institutional factors would help explain why HPWS is not very widespread:
arguably, the short-term and cost-centered vision of companies (especially in an
Anglo-Saxon model) makes them structurally adverse to the implementation of HPWS.
Taking into consideration the issue of interest conflict and power (Kelly, 1998), radical scho-
lars argue that HPWS and notions of partnership in reality are far from fostering worker voice
and rather serve to debilitate worker collectives and unions. In this vein, studies employing
radical approaches are fundamentally critical of HPWS's effects due to the individualistic con-
stitution of workers through managerial discourses. Indeed, HPWS could be used as an ideo-
logical smoke-and-mirrors for restructuring and work intensification, which will likely lead to
worker resistance, protest, or other means of regaining control over labor processes.

The different predictions on HPWS reflect underlying meta-theories, but several reasons
suggest that the theories could complement each other. The SHRM literature has shown
many examples of HPWS and built models of fit between business strategies, HR bundles,
worker involvement and company performance. SHRM has, however, paradoxically not
taken contingencies serious enough when explaining the diffusion of HPWS. Edwards *et al.*
(2006) and Bélanger and Edwards (2007) show us that HPWS can lead to effective worker
representation and even worker–management cooperation under certain conditions, thus sat-
isfying SHRM meta-theory. When these conditions do not apply, power-based mobilization
view of Kelly (1998) may be more realistic about how workers can represent their interests
vis-à-vis employers. Moreover, some specific institutions for workplace relations will be
strong enough to influence technology and markets by pushing employers into a high-road
competitive strategy that simultaneously relaxes the managerial prerogative and provides
space for collective worker representation—even for unskilled workers. Kristensen and
Rocha (2012) have found this in some Scandinavian workplaces.

3.2 Corporate social responsibility

The growth of multinational corporations and global supply chains has placed growing attention on how multinationals can be held accountable for monitoring and improving labor conditions in their global suppliers (Mamic, 2004; Locke, 2013). In many developing countries, unions have not taken hold and state regulation is underdeveloped. Consequently, the absence of independent workplace institutions in these global operations has led researchers to focus on whether and how employer practices might fill this void. Thus, a literature on 'corporate social responsibility' (CSR) has emerged. The rise of CSR challenges, however, important assumptions of IR theory with regard to the actors involved. First, CSR is a form of 'private governance', often bypassing an active role for labor or the state. Indeed, business scholars see CSR as a voluntary form of regulation implemented by firms or industry groups (Vogel, 2005). Second, to analyze the effectiveness of CSR, we need to go beyond a single-firm analysis, as the employers themselves are part of a complex, integrated global network. Lakhani *et al.* (2013) have pointed out the growth of global supply chains requires a theoretical shift from a focus on single firms as the unit of analysis in assessing employer–employee relationships to a broader focus on the power and interest relationships among firms in the supply chain. In other words, due to the absence of labor or the state as an actor as well as the importance of networks rather than single firms, we need to reassess to what extent our established IR theories can explain the conditions under which CSR can be an effective tool for worker voice.

Strategic HRM scholars have stressed the potential business case for adopting progressive CSR policies and fitting them with HR practices (Becker and Huselid, 2006; Pfeffer, 2010). The key is to build congruence between well-accepted moral values that respect a wide range of stakeholders, including workers, and transmitting such values in the management of workers (Caldwell *et al.*, 2011). The issue of fit is thus broadened to include moral values, and value fit will spur greater employee motivation as workers are inspired by ethical leadership (Pinnington *et al.*, 2007). Some scholars have indeed illustrated a positive relationship between CSR and firm financial performance (for a meta-analysis, see Orlitzky *et al.*, 2003). When treated purely as a business case, however, CSR may be implemented and result in financial benefits, but will unlikely be successful as an alternative voice for workers (Kurucz *et al.*, 2008).

Radical IR theorists go a step further and predict CSR will be used as a strategic tool by the company not just to enhance their performance but to defeat trade unions, supress worker voice and bypass state regulation (Moberg, 2001; Justice, 2006). Voluntary, firm-driven CSR practices are seen as ways to control the workers (Costas and Kärreman, 2013), to legitimate the firms' reputation, purposely excluding labor as an actor as well as excluding any form of worker voice as a topic of their CSR strategy. Anner (2012), for example, demonstrates that company-influenced CSR initiatives are more focused on detecting wages and health and safety violations than freedom of association violations. By doing so, the companies are able to safeguard their legitimacy vis-à-vis activists and the media without losing control over their global supply chain. Similar to business scholars, the development of CSR is explained with emphasis on the employers' agency or strategic choice—albeit often as a result of processes of deregulation or neoliberalism—but rather than considering it a tool for better firm performance, CSR is used avoid other more institutionalized forms of worker representation.

Research has shown how CSR pioneered in the USA and the UK because of the weakness of other institutionalized forms of social solidarity, such as trade unions or protective labor law. In the UK, the rise of CSR went hand in hand with the rise of neoliberalism under the Thatcher government, excluding the trade unions entirely from both processes (Kinderman, 2012). In the USA, employers implemented principles of social responsibility within their business model to justify the absence of trade unions (Marens, 2012). Meanwhile, in more corporatist countries, CSR may be largely 'implicit' because many social responsibilities of companies are regulated by the state or governed with trade unions (Matten and Moon, 2008). More generally, these scholars use institutional theory to suggest the need to study CSR in light of its historical origins and within its broader social context (Brammer et al., 2012), rather than just adopting a voluntarist strategic lens. These scholars have explored the institutional conditions for the emergence of CSR (Bartley, 2007; Carroll, 2008), cross-national variation in how CSR programs are perceived and implemented (Doh and Guay, 2006), the likelihood of socially responsible corporate behavior occurring (Campbell, 2007) or its effects on labor standards (Elliott and Freeman, 2003; Locke et al., 2007; Locke, 2013). This institutional perspective finds its roots within pluralism, considering CSR as one of the institutions potentially striving for social solidarity without neglecting the importance of other institutions, such as trade unions, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), or the state (Bartley, 2003; Preuss et al., 2006; Compa, 2008). Building on Dunlop's systems' perspective, these scholars argue that sustained improvement in labor conditions in global supply chains requires complementary features of strong enforcement of law, independent worker representation and engagement of NGOs or other forms of independent worker representation. They also suggest that multinational firms with headquarters in coordinated market economies or other countries with stronger labor laws and or labor unions will be more willing to engage these multiple stakeholders in enforcing labor conditions in their supply chains than will firms in liberal market economies and/or with weaker labor movements. Indeed, this is exactly what occurred in the aftermath of the 2013 tragic factory collapse in Bangladesh that took 1200 lives. European companies were more willing to sign agreements to work with international unions and NGOs to strengthen enforcement of safety conditions in Bangladesh whereas US firms largely chose to go it alone (Bolle, 2014).

While the institutional context and strategic choice are necessary factors to explain the (in) effectiveness of CSR in terms of worker voice, these are not sufficient. This suggests the need to go beyond the traditional IR frameworks. In particular, building on global value chain theory (Gereffi and Sturgeon, 2005), Lakhani et al. (2013) argue that employment systems will vary across value chains. More specifically, to understand under which conditions CSR strategies will result in better working conditions, we need to understand the relationships between the supplier(s) and the multinational company (MNC) in the global value chain configuration. Global value chains affect the likelihood that pressure group strategies of trade unions or other NGOs in either the lead or local country can persuade MNCs to adopt CSR labor standards that result in better working conditions in supplier firms. In captive or hierarchical value chain configurations, much will depend on the strength of worker representation institutions and actors in the lead country, whereas in market and modular relations much will depend on the supplier country. In relational value chain configuration, the influence will be mixed.

Locke et al. (2009) refer to the institutional context as well as the specific buyer–supplier relationship to explain different models of CSR and their potential in a globalized world less dominated by traditional IR actors. Here a 'commitment-oriented' model of CSR, based on

joint problem solving between the auditor and the firm manager, the diffusion of best practices and information exchange, is more likely to generate higher levels of firm performance and better working conditions than than a 'compliance-oriented' model, based on sanctioning. In other words, CSR is likely to be more effective for worker voice in a global value chain governed or coordinated through a relational network rather than a captive network. Thus, the authors view CSR as an institution that complements rather than substitutes for unions and state regulation (Locke, 2013).

In sum, the CSR literature has shed light on some of the shortcomings of our main IR assumptions specifically with regard to the strategic choice and institutional framework in which a single firm, labor or the state are traditionally considered the main actors. Today, global value chains are key institutions, encompassing networks of firms. This embeddedness in a network emphasizes the need to dig deeper into the relationship between the suppliers and the buyers and to analyze the type of global value chain to understand the conditions under which CSR strategies might be effective as a tool for worker voice or, alternatively, a tool for supressing worker voice.

3.3 The internationalization of worker representation

Traditional IR analysis usually relied on a Dunlopian national IR system perspective by placing worker representation within a particular national institutional setting, regulating work and value creation in domestic companies. The internationalization of product markets, capital markets and indeed labor markets fundamentally challenge their relationship to national institutions. As Commons (1909) already argued in the beginning of the twentieth century, the expansion of markets creates a competitive menace threatening the existing employment and working conditions. When markets and companies internationalize, worker representation must also internationalize. For IR theory, a new challenge is to understanding how workers can be represented in transnational value chains that cut across very diverse institutional settings and include actors at different levels with different resources (Jackson *et al.*, 2013). In this section, we review two important mechanisms or institutions of international worker voice that emerged over the past two decades and attracted considerable scholarly attention in the IR field: international framework agreements (IFAs) and European works councils (EWCs).

IFAs have been regarded as important tools for providing workers a voice and negotiating with employers that operate in highly internationalized markets (Gumbrell-McCormick, 2008). These agreements represent the attempt to establish fundamental rights for workers, including the right to representation, in MNCs and, in many cases, their suppliers. In reality, there are only a few IFAs signed—about 150 (60 are of global nature and 80 are European-based)—and not all are active anymore (Glassner and Schömann, 2008; Global Unions, 2012).[3]

Few scholars have approached IFAs from a unitarist management perspective. Egels-Zandén (2009) shows that one of the reasons IFAs are signed by MNCs is to have competitive advantage. The latter is not seen in terms of productivity or growth, but in terms of keeping a positive, trustworthy relationship between the trade unions and management. In

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3   While IFA and CSR might at first glance appear to be similar, IFAs are negotiated between MNCs and global or regional union federations rather than a unilateral declaration by the firm. Therefore, they are considered a first step toward a more international form of collective bargaining.

this study, the MNC's strategic choice is thus a key variable to explain the presence of IFAs, whereby IFAs are more likely to expand in MNCs located in home countries that have strong enough union presence to make it worthwhile or necessary to retain a high-trust relationship with labor.

Meanwhile, most IFA research has been driven by an interest in transnational unionism and adopts a more pluralist perspective look at a broader set of factors that may explain whether IFAs will create space for new social dialogue, as well as a tool to forge coalitions with NGOs, other unions and social movements to organize workers around the globe (Telljohann *et al.*, 2009; Papadakis, 2011; Niforou, 2012; Helfen and Fichter, 2013). These studies often combine different factors to explain the emergence or impact of the IFAs. In examining the impact of IFAs in Latin America, Niforou (2012), for example, points toward the influence of the institutional framework such as the local laws dictating collective bargaining rights, the material structures such as the privatization processes in the telecommunications industry, as well as the agency or the strategic choices of the managers and unions as critical factors that predict under which conditions IFAs will be implemented and monitored successfully. Helfen and Fichter (2013) argue that IFAs provide an arena for transnational union networks to develop and bring together organizations—global union federations, nationally anchored unions, works councils, nonunion employee groups—that represent workers in different ways. While challenges of cross-border coordination are abundant, global union federations could play a coordinating role for the transnational union networks to develop.

Unlike CSR, IFAs have predominantly emerged in European member states that have strong, established traditions of social dialogue, such as Germany or France (Müller *et al.*, 2008; Schömann *et al.*, 2008). Both home-country and host-country institutions are important in facilitating or hindering effective IFAs. Indeed, as was the case for CSR research, we need to take into consideration a global value chain system beyond the nation-state that embeds firms into larger networks (Helfen and Fichter, 2013; Lakhani *et al.*, 2013). A more nuanced approach proposes that lead-firm institutions of the home country are especially influential in the value chains when the complexity of tasks is high and the value chain configuration is characterized by hierarchical relations between lead firm and supplier firm. This contingency would explain why some European MNCs in particular industries sign IFAs as opposed to MNCs from the Anglo-Saxon companies that prefer unilateral CSR policies. Moreover, it could also explain why some European MNCs in low task complexity, market or modular-based value chain configurations might not sign IFAs despite union-favorable institutions.

EWCs can be regarded as another institution pushing the internationalization or Europeanization of IR. In 1994, the Council of Ministers of the EU adopted the directive on EWCs, which opened the possibility of establishing the first transnational IR institution for information and consultation of worker representatives in MNCs with operations in the EU. Employers had long feared that the new institution would pose a threat to managerial decision making and thus competitiveness. Some of the first studies, however, showed that managers were modestly positive about the net effects of EWCs in regard to corporate communication and dissemination of information in a transnational forum (Wills, 1999; Nakano, 1999; Weber *et al.*, 2000; Marginson *et al.*, 2004).

EWCs pose unequal challenges for management and worker representative to coordinate transnationally. For management, coordination is in-house, but for labor the challenge cuts

across countries and across unions often with very different union identities (Whittall *et al.*, 2009; Murray *et al.*, 2010), different languages (Stirling and Tully, 2004) and different resources (Marginson *et al.*, 2004; Arrowsmith and Marginson, 2006). Indeed, radical perspectives consider EWCs as a means of controlling the workforce where local managers force concessions from workers to attract plant investments (Hancké, 2000; Pulignano, 2005; Ferner *et al.*, 2012). Thus, these researchers would predict these institutions would lead to a degradation of labor conditions. For example, Timming (2007) shows how management tries to fragment worker representation and convert the EWC into a 'business-friendly instrument' to assert control. Timming suggests that to avoid such perceptions, managers should engage in effective impression management—a kind of ideological transposition of meaning—to rebuild trust when communicating with worker representatives in EWCs. The synthesis of these seemingly incompatible strategic choices is made possible because Timming conceives EWCs as having multiple ontologies based on actors' interpretation of situations.

While other scholars are not necessarily positive about current practices, they stress the potential of EWC for worker representation (Dølvik, 1997; Lecher and Rüb, 1999; Lecher *et al.*, 2001; Marginson and Sisson, 2006). Several factors have been identified facilitating worker coordination, including information technology (Whittall *et al.*, 2009); sensitivity to language barriers (Stirling and Tully, 2004); using traditionally strong national industrial relations platforms (Marginson *et al.*, 2004); union networking activities (Turner, 1996); or high union density in some countries (Waddington, 2011). EWCs are 'a transnational industrial relations institution in the making' (Waddington, 2011) that have the potential of mutual benefits for capital and labor if the latter can overcome coordinative obstacles and if management accepts sharing control, that is, a typical pluralist claim (Flanders, 1974). This optimistic approach builds on strategic choices of unions and employers, but falls back on the institutional logic that EWCs provide an opportunity—not guarantee—for transnational worker representation (Müller and Hoffmann, 2001).

Marginson *et al.* (2004) developed a contingency approach and argue that EWCs are most effective when the business operations are (1) focused on a single business, (2) are spread equally across borders and (3) have a high degree of interdependence across borders. Moreover, if a European management structure exists, this will make the EWC more salient because the European-level management will act as a direct counterpart to the EWC. Finally, as already noted, the existence of strong IR institutions in affected countries will thus facilitate EWC effectiveness. As such, Marginson *et al.* (2004) emphasize similar factors to the ones proposed in the framework of Lakhani *et al.* (2013) and therefore also underscore how the effectiveness of EWCs is contingent on factors beyond the national institutional context. According to Keune and Marginson (2013) this calls for a multilevel governance approach that captures relationships and interdependencies between the actors at supranational, national, regional and local levels and identifies how these actors employ their resources to shape employment relations to their advantage.

In sum, the two strands of literature on IFAs and EWCs, respectively, show the limits and potentials of international forms of worker representation. Research, especially earlier studies, had a tendency to assess international representation using national standards and often argued over whether the glass was empty (radicals), half-empty (pluralists) or half-full (pluralists) depending on the frame of reference. Studies could benefit from adopting frameworks akin to Marginson *et al.* (2004) and Lakhani *et al.* (2013) that incorporate transnational value

chains and management structures as contingency factors into the analysis of international worker representation. This seems like a fruitful addition to the factors that Bélanger and Edwards (2007) identified. Moreover, some scholars also broaden studies of IFAs and EWCs toward actors other than trade unions that traditionally operate within national institutional contexts, bringing us to the fourth and final form of worker representation—civil society organizations—and how they are challenging our view of worker representation.

3.4 Civil society organizations

Nearly all of the middle-range IR theories assume that the focus for mobilization of worker interests lies within the division of labor at work. Yet the void in worker representation has led to the emergence of a variety of organizations that mobilize and seek to serve worker interests outside of the workplace. Many of these mobilize participants based on their identities as immigrants, environmental activists, gender or sexual preference or other social attributes (Piore and Safford, 2006). We call these 'civil society organizations'. These advocacy organizations have been studied as potentially new sources of both worker identity and worker representation. Studies oscillate between a pluralist and radical perspective (since all start from a view that some form of worker representation is needed, few if any reflect a unitarist perspective). For some scholars, civil society groups are considered critical in terms of revitalizing the labor movement. Others, however, have studied these groups as alternative forms of representation separate from the traditional trade unions. In both cases, scholars have examined this topic using different theoretical elements from traditional IR as well as social movement theories. The edited volume *Varieties of Unionism* (Frege and Kelly, 2004), for example, examines the repertoires of union strategies in different countries and shows that in some countries, forming coalitions with outside groups has been critical for traditional trade unions. In examining the USA, Turner (2007) argued that coalitions emerged in conjunction with (1) weak institutions that create the need to seek alliances and (2) important choices made by the labor movement (e.g. leadership change, development of activist cadres, appointment of bridge builders). Though institutions matter, many studies emphasize the strategic choice of the unions themselves, which are not just a derivative of the contextual pressures.

In addition, scholars have emphasized the importance of social movement unionism and community unionism as ways to revitalize the labor movement or form a buffer against the unleashed power of corporations (Fine, 2006; Holgate and Wills, 2007; Luce, 2007; Tattersall, 2010). The term 'social movement unionism' (SMU) was first conceptualized when describing the militant industrial unions in countries such as South Africa, Brazil and the Philippines during the 1970s and 1980s (Webster, 1988; Lambert, 1990; Seidman, 1994). Seidman's *Manufacturing Militancy* (1994), for example, is a comparative historical study, showing how, during the 1970s in both Brazil and South Africa, a militant working-class movement arose. Contrary to common expectations, during this time of authoritarian industrial rule, these labor movements did not become co-opted, demobilized or passive but in fact created a political unionism, or a 'social movement unionism', mobilizing shop-floor workers as well as the broader community. Seidman emphasized the political and economic environment as important structural changes that created an open space for the labor movements to press their demands, such as the rifts between the employers and the state and rapid economic growth followed by the 1973 oil crisis. In his study on labor transnationalism in the Brazilian auto industry, Anner (2003) shows the impact of labor ideologies on the extent and frequency of cross-border labor activities. Here the Brazilian left-oriented labor unions, given their social

movement unionism leaning, were more inclined to participate in labor transnationalism than were the conservative unions. According to Anner, 'both individual rationality and class reductionism fail to explain workers' actions. Rather, how unionists understand themselves and the world will have a strong influence on how they decide to respond to changes in the sectors they represent' (2003, p. 611). In other words, understanding union strategies require examining the underlying ideologies.

According to Fine (2005, p. 153), community unions are 'modest-sized community-based organizations of low-wage workers that, through a combination of service, advocacy, and organizing, focus on issues of work and wages.' Fine argues that community unions have had their greatest success at raising wages and improving working conditions through public policy rather than direct economic intervention in the labor market, because low-wage workers have greater political than economic power. They will often cast their claims in broader social justice and moral terms and try to capture the sympathy of more powerful political constituencies. Since most low-wage workers are unskilled and in overabundance, they cannot control the supply side of the labor market. Their individual economic power is therefore very limited. But when low-wage workers organize through community unions and unite with those who have more power, their own political power is enhanced to have a real impact on public policy. Similarly, scholars have pointed toward different sources of labor power: structural and associational. Since trade unions have lost their structural power in many cases, it has become more important to strengthen their associational power by building alliances with community groups (Wright, 2000; Silver, 2003). In other words, these studies go beyond the usual suspect variables within IR to emphasize the specific (broad, social justice) framing processes (Snow and Benford, 1988). Drawing on social movement theories thus improves how researchers evaluate these new sources of worker voice (e.g. Kelly, 1998).

In addition, recent events such as the Occupy movement in the USA, the Arab Spring, the student protest movements in Latin America and the occupations of the squares in Spain and Greece, have pointed toward the importance of social movements to challenge corporations and state decisions and hold these powers accountable for their actions (e.g. Crouch, 2011). In line with Kelly's (1998) mobilization theory an increase in mobilization efforts has occurred at the end of a boom and beginning of a bust cycle during which there was a heightened sense of injustice. In other words, the material structures, the institutional context as well as ideas and framing could be used to explain the emergence of these protests. Academic research on these events is still in its early stages, but for now we can argue—without undermining the significance of these events—that these have not evolved into sustainable institutions of worker voice and representation.

Some scholars, however, have pointed toward the potential challenges of the growing presence of civil society organizations within the realm of industrial relations. Rather than revitalizing worker representation in a trade union sense, new actors take on new roles under the framework of 'activating the welfare state' or helping build a 'Big Society.' In the UK, for example, Heery *et al.* (2010) point out how civil society organizations are becoming increasingly active in employment relations while the traditional trade unions are losing ground. Most of these 'new actors,' however, focus on advocacy and servicing rather than organizing or mobilizing workers. Heery *et al.* (2010) provide us with an institutional picture, arguing that the emergence of these organizations is due to the decline of the traditional trade unions as well as the implementation of particular policies of the UK government, promoting civil society organizationactivity within the traditional IR field. In Germany as well, civil

society organizations have been increasingly involved in labor, poverty or even security issues —previously a concern of the welfare state—and leading therefore to critical debates about their function in society (Mayer, 1994; Eick, 2011). Here, the authors point more toward the material structures as the underlying factor or the neoliberal reorganization of capitalism that has pushed NGOs toward becoming state-dependent.

In sum, many areas of work have become unconnected from the classic forms of worker representation or the traditional notion of employment relationship. Other actors, such as civil society organizations, also play a greater role in creating worker representation. The theories based on strategic choice (Kochan *et al.*, 1986), cooperation and conflict (Bélanger and Edwards, 2007), worker mobilization (Kelly, 1998) and strategic HRM (Allen and Wright, 2008) fall short here by building on identities and interests grounded in traditional notions of the employment relationship. By challenging the long-standing view that worker identities derive solely from their place in the division of labor in the workplace, studies of civil society organizations suggest a new direction for IR theory and research. If, as Piore and Safford (2006) argue, social identities may be replacing workplace identities as the locus for mobilization, IR theorists will need to look more to social movement, political mobilization, interest group politics and thus other meta-theories as starting points for generating middle=range theories for explaining and predicting the future trajectories of worker voice and representation.

What explains the success or failure of civil society organizations? How do these forms of collective representation remain sustainable over time? Here it seems necessary to deeply engage with key concepts of social movement theory as a complement to the IR theories discussed here. While some authors, most notably Kelly (1998), have incorporated social movement theory in their analysis of unions, overall there has been little advancement bringing in social movements concepts into IR scholarship (Gahan and Pekarek, 2013). Did these civil society organizations emerge successfully because they were able to accrue the resources necessary to mobilize (resource mobilization theory)? Was it an opening in the political structure that explained their rise or fall, as Seidman or Heery *et al.* argue (political opportunity structure theory)? Was it a combination of both? Can we explain the development of these organizations looking in particular at the role of frames in their mobilization processes, as Kelly or Anner argue (framing theory)? These questions suggest that to understand the mobilization processes we need to dig deeper into the social movements concepts and analyze, for example, how different framing processes occur (such as the use of master frames, frame contestation, frame alignment processes, diagnostic, prognostic or motivational framing) as well as at which level the framing occurs (individual, social movement, social action field level). Building on specific social movement theories and concepts as well as the more traditional IR factors will further our understanding under which conditions CSOs can be successful models of worker voice and represent a promising development and avenue for revitalizing IR as a field of study.

4. Discussion and conclusion

Will various efforts to fill the void left by union decline expand and be sustained or fail both in meeting workers' material needs and ensuring some form(s) of independent worker voice and representation in the employment relationship and/or society more broadly? Furthermore, do the traditional IR theories help predict conditions under which these new forms can become successful tools for worker representation?

Briefly, in terms of the meta-theories, the unitary frame of reference suggests largely that employment relations will see a steady decline in independent unions or other forms of worker representation as management becomes more skilled in carrying out its harmonizing and trust-building functions. Meanwhile, the pluralist frame of reference predicts that new institutions and practices (i.e. unions or other forms of representation) will emerge and adapt over time to maintain some reasonable or acceptable balance of power among the different interest groups present in employment relationships. Pluralists add another crucial actor to the employment relationship: the state. The role of government policy is primarily to ensure that a reasonable balance of power is maintained in employment relations and, where power is sufficiently imbalanced, to establish minimum employment standards. Finally, the radical perspective predicts both a sharp decline of unions that work within the capitalist system and ultimately also the rise of transformational worker organizations that gain significant control over workplace and production processes under a different economic system.

As noted, it is common to regard these theories as incommensurable and bracket them for particular research questions. This has the advantage of defining analytical domains clearly and facilitating knowledge accumulation through what Kuhn named 'normal science' (Qiu *et al.*, 2012). Conversely, it potentially makes research provincial and theoretical innovation scarce (Abbott, 2004). Instead of bracketing the analytical space of one theory, IR scholars could engage in so-called meta-triangulation (Lewis and Grimes, 1999) to explore the theoretical and analytical potential of various theories simultaneously. Such an approach sidesteps the ontological and normative divisions between different theories and could, for example, show the explanatory potential of different theories stressing (1) managerial domination and worker mobilization, (2) institutional constraints and resources and (3) integrative managerial strategies for worker voice, simultaneously (see Timming, 2007 for an example). Although these concepts seem incongruent and therefore paradoxical, theoretical innovations are often built on reversals of hollow truisms (Abbott, 2004, p. 125). Researchers often ignore paradoxes in worker representation—for example, that workers reject representation but accept employer domination—due to scholarly 'affiliation' to a particular frame of reference. One reason can be traced to the issue of identity and interest of workers.

By reviewing the several middle-range theories cast within Fox's frames of reference, we argue that these theories often fall short in explaining the emergence or development of the new forms of worker voice. Important structural changes of work and employment have not been incorporated into these theories. Doing so would lead to different conclusions in terms of who the relevant actors are and how we identify their interests and identities. Here the degree of institutionalization matters. For example, in certain areas we still encounter a very regulated context, based on strong trade unions, employers and collective bargaining. Here we can still rely on the traditional IR factors—such as the strategic choice of management or unions, the national institutional context, and organizational or industry characteristics— to predict the effectiveness of worker voice. However, many areas of work have become unconnected from the classic forms of IR: firms are embedded in networks forming global value chains cutting across different institutional settings, and other actors, such as civil society organizations, play a greater role in creating some sort of worker representation. Here the existing theories fall short when based exclusively on strategic choice (e.g. Kochan *et al.*, 1986), cooperation and conflict (e.g. Bélanger and Edwards, 2007), worker mobilization (e.g. Kelly, 1998) and strategic HRM (e.g. Allen and Wright, 2008).

Table 2. Dimensions of a 'traditional' and 'revised' industrial relations framework

	Actor identities and interests	Collective actors	Agency repertoires
Traditional IR	Position in capital ownership	Trade unions	Industrial action
	Position in value creation	Employer associations	Collective bargaining
	Educational background	State	Legal enactment
Revised IR	Position in capital ownership	Trade unions	Industrial action
	Position in value creation	Employer associations	Collective bargaining
	Educational background	State	Legal enactment
	Gender	Worker networks	Awareness campaigns
	Ethnicity	Civil society organizations	*Ad hoc* mobiliszation
	Race	Virtual networks between	Viral virtual shaming of
	Sexuality	multiple stakeholders	employers

Indeed, the frames of reference and related theories share one major limitation. They focus on the division of labor in employment relations as the source of workers' identities, which in turn define how they will respond to or shape institutions of worker voice and representation. We believe that the models all miss an essential feature: many workers view their options and the sources of power through the lens of social identities shaped outside of the workplace. Moving beyond the employment relationship and firm boundaries thus opens up the possibilities that the workplace division of labor no longer defines the primary identities through which workers filter their views and approaches to worker representation and voice in workplace and societal affairs. Accordingly, we propose that the new world of work requires researchers to adopt new concepts of identities/interests, collective actors and repertoires as depicted in Table 2.

As Streeck (1993) noted,[4] the interests of workers are not strictly objective but depend on the individual and collective identities which workers find to be most salient. Ackers (2002, 2014) argues for a stronger integration of the spheres of employment and family to account for new identities. Piore and Safford (2006) argue for inclusion of new axes of mobilization such as gender, ethnicity, race and sexuality. If the typical axes are no longer the only axes for mobilization of workers, IR needs to capture this. Edwards (2003) argues that we should still give priority to the workplace but integrate issues like gender, when it is directly (equal opportunity issues) or indirectly (pay systems) pertinent. This task is by no means easy. The axes intersect in numerous ways depending on context—but it is a task that researchers of worker representation should not ignore.

Second, we need theories that explain if and how these identities coalesce to become collective actors. Here Kelly's theory is important as are theories of social movement (Snow and Benford, 1988; Fligstein and McAdam, 2011). While Kelly's focus on economic cycles, ideas and framing of injustice is valid, his theory is highly economistic and therefore misses some key developments. Collective actors have changed and the concept of a union has to be expanded and/or supplemented analytically with occupational networks, civil society organization and even virtual networks of activists (Castells, 2012) in ways that expand the traditional Dunlop

4   We are grateful to the editor for bringing our attention to this work.

framework list of actors that has long dominated IR. On the other hand, we should not assume that these collective actors are effective worker representations—the latter is an empirical issue.

Third, IR vitally needs to adopt a new set of agency repertoires. Repertoires—as defined by Tilly (2006)—are claim-making routines between claimant-object pairs, for example, workers-employers. Traditionally, industrial action, collective bargaining/voice and legal enactments have been the repertoires for worker representation, but these repertoires are in need of supplements. As Tilly notes, repertoires vary over time and place and we would argue that the structural changes in labor markets together with new information technology and social media have produced new repertoires for claim-making. The study of CSR shows us how effective awareness campaigns against suppliers violating labor rights can be (e.g. Locke, 2013). Also, numerous examples of community organizing tell us how *ad hoc* mobilizations have pushed employers into providing or at least promising better terms and conditions for workers, thus forcing them to change their business strategies and potentially adopt HPWS. Moreover, *ad hoc* mobilization can transform into institutionalization at higher levels, for example, the living wage initiative in the UK (Tapia, 2013; Tapia and Turner, 2013). Also, virtual campaigns against employers are another repertoire that is suitable for a new age of social media and one that both union and nonunion organizations are tapping into when targeting MNCs. The case of effective EWCs using virtual platforms is another case in point for this new repertoire (Whittall *et al.*, 2009). As we especially show in the section on civil society organizations, these repertoires might very well be the new reality for worker representation where unions have at best coalition roles, a minor role or no role at all.

While stressing the importance of broadening the concepts of identity/interests, collective actors and their repertoires, we also want to underscore that the success of mobilization is still contingent—but not determined—by the conditions that the strategic choice framework and Bélanger and Edwards (2007) posit: namely, technology, product markets and institutions. For example, civil society organizations mobilizing against an employer to live up to CSR commitments are much more likely to succeed if product markets, technology, institutions or a combination of these factors are benign to cooperation. As Lakhani *et al.* (2013) point out, when analyzing MNCs we have to view these issues through the lens of global value chains rather than through the lens of firms embedded in national institutional contexts.

These structuring obviously impinge on the power relations of different forms of worker representation. Although we haven't addressed the issue of power explicitly, technology, markets and institutions distribute power unevenly among actors of employment relations (Moe, 2005; Ibsen, 2014) and affect the capacity for articulation of interests by new forms of worker representations. For example, call center technology that parcels workers into individual tasks with limited or no interaction with colleagues should severely limit collective representation using traditional repertoires. In the same vein, contract workers have to find alternative ways of communicating because they rarely meet physically despite sharing an employer. As a corollary, worker power is contingent on workers finding new ways of acting together when old ways mobilization of interests are unfeasible— just as workers in the past had to organize in trade unions to confront intraclass competition on wages and conditions (Commons, 1909).

While stressing these various new axes of social mobilization, we would also argue that worker representation requires some kind of institutionalization to be effective. As such, we maintain the traditional IR focus on institutions as sources of order in the world of work (see

also Ackers, 2002; Edwards, 2003). However, we need to look for new political dynamics to understand the emergence and change of these institutions (cf. Thelen, 2014). Here context-sensitive research seems most suited as similar structural changes are dealt with in diverse ways. For example, Danish unions have changed their bargaining strategies toward welfare state issues to cater for the massive influx of women workers into the labor market (Due and Madsen, 2006). Accordingly, collective agreements now include extensive rights to maternity/parental leave. Piore and Safford's analysis is similarly attuned to social mobilization around equal treatment of women workers. The difference between Denmark and the USA is, among other things, that mobilization was conditioned by different types of unionism (societal versus bread-and-butter unionism) and the institutions regulating labor markets (collective bargaining–friendly versus collective bargaining–hostile). So in Denmark, trade unions and collective bargaining became the vehicle for women's mobilization, whereas civil rights groups and legal enactment became the vehicle in the USA. This final point underscores the IR tradition for historical and comparative studies of worker representation (see Ackers, 2014). Contingency is also key when analyzing HPWS, CSR, civil society organizations and international forms of worker representation and to this end, continuous improvement of middle-range theory is especially apt.

In sum, we believe testing these alternative strategies for mobilizing and representing workers would push the frontiers of IR theory in a new direction that complements and extends the well-trodden terrain focusing on voice and representation within traditional institutional and organizational settings. It may require drawing more heavily on literatures dealing with social movements, identity formation, interest group politics and global value chain theory. Indeed, this emerging perspective might eventually constitute another meta-theory that guides development of a new generation of middle-range theories and empirical research, all of which should help revitalize and sustain the field of IR well into the future.

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