

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

Work Matters:

28th Annual International Labour Process Conference

Rutgers University, USA, March, 15-17, 2010

SPECIAL INTEREST STREAM

Skills and the Global Economy

As countries around the world struggle to create and sustain jobs in light of the current economic crisis and intensified global competition, policymakers and academics are focused on understanding what jobs will exist in the global economy of the 21st Century, their quality in terms of employee satisfaction and potential for development, where they will be located, and how individuals will develop the skills needed to be competitive and perform quality work in them. The changing demand and supply of skills has been shaped by several factors. First, the emergence and tremendous growth of the Internet and other new technologies, the opening of formerly closed economies, and the evolution of new business models has enabled over a billion new individuals to participate in the global labor force. Second, the skill debates within advanced industrial countries have shifted focus from concern about loss of firm competitiveness to concern about loss of workforce competitiveness, as growing number of jobs move to lower wage locations. Third, the shift to service sector employment in the context of an aging workforce has raised the question of a 'skill quality gap' and resulted in debates over the definition of 'skill' and vocational knowledge, as qualification structures and assessment processes struggle to codify so-called 'soft', or 'generic' skills. These debates are aligned with the rise in importance of the workplace as a site for learning, leading to questions about whether work-related skills are best acquired on-the-job and the extent to which tacit forms of expertise should be given greater recognition.

While the loss of lower skill manufacturing work was an issue in the 1970s and 1980s, today the concerns extend to the offshoring of knowledge work, as high end research and development and professional work is moving rapidly to China, India and other high-skill, low-wage nations. At the same time, fundamental problems are arising in skill-creation systems, both in countries such as India, whose successful development model has been driven almost exclusively by human capital, and in many developed economies, including some of those formerly taken to be model systems. They include the role of the state, business, and unions in skill formation systems, and raise fundamental labour process questions about the valuing of skill and work.

This proposed stream would seek to bring together leader researchers from around the world to examine the current state of the workforce development system in comparative perspective, and the major changes that are required to help better prepare workers (and workplaces) for the challenges of competing in the decades ahead. Among the possible topics that could feature in the stream could be:

- Innovative new approaches to skill development
- How skill-creation systems are responding to the economic crisis
- Alternative mechanisms for financing skill development
- The impact of the global movement of knowledge work on national skill development systems

- Changing nature of skill demands: aggregate skills movements in the context of the shift to service employment; position of 'low grade' workers in the knowledge economy
- Recognition and embedding of so-called 'soft' skills and tacit knowledge – generic, employability skills, and graduate attributes -- in qualification structures and assessment mechanisms
- The role of new technologies in the creation of skills
- Labor-management approaches to skill development
- Public-private partnerships in skill development
- Role of social partners in the development of national and supra-national skill strategies
- Factors contributing to the growth of skill ecosystems
- The relationship between skills and individual and firm outcomes
- International movement of skilled labour and recognition of qualifications
- The effectiveness of different policy approaches to skill development
- Creation of career ladders and opportunities for professional development

Abstracts should be between 350-500 words in length. They should identify the issue, the method of investigation and key findings, as well as suggesting the contribution of the paper to understanding in the field.

Closing date for Abstracts: 31 October, 2009

To submit an abstract, please go to www.ilpc.org.uk

Stream Organisers:

Prof. David Finegold, Dean, School of Management and Labor Relations at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, dfinegold@smlr.rutgers.edu

Professor Helen Rainbird, Professor of Human Resource Management, Birmingham Business School, University of Birmingham, h.rainbird@bham.ac.uk

Professor Lorna Unwin, Professor of Vocational Education and Training, Institute of Education University of London University of London, L.Unwin@ioe.ac.uk

Dr Ian Hampson, School of Organisation and Management, The Australian School of Business, The University of New South Wales i.hampson@unsw.edu.au

Associate Professor Anne Junior, The Industrial Relations Research Centre, The Australian School of Business, The University of New South Wales, Australia, a.junior@unsw.edu.au

The Conference:

The Annual International Labour Process Conference is a leading conference on work and employment. It brings together academics and policy makers from the sociology of work and employment, labour studies, business and management, human resource management, industrial relations, organization studies and a range of other disciplines. Selections of conference papers are published in edited books, with twenty now published.

Please visit the conference website for details of venue etc. www.ilpc.org.uk

ILPC 2010 Conference Organizers:

Prof. Eileen Appelbaum

Prof. Adrienne Eaton

Dean David Finegold

Dr. Mary Gatta

For questions about the conference please contact: ilpc2010@ilpc.org.uk