Special issue of Labour & Industry

Call for papers

Informality, gender and work

Symposium: RMIT University 12 October, 2017

There is growing recognition that informal work is a feature of contemporary economic growth and the global economy. Informalisation of employment, rendering workers without legal or social protections, is a trend in both developed and developing countries. In developed countries, informal work is expanding with atypical and non-standard work such as own-account self-employment emerging in many formal sectors. In most regions of the developing world, informal employment continues to account for over half of all non-agricultural employment and most new jobs are in informal employment.

Informal work describes work that is performed outside of the scope of regulation (ILO 2002). The intersection of gender and informality is significant, with a high concentration of women in informal work and with women tending to be concentrated in the more economically vulnerable and insecure forms of informal employment. The concept of informality and the lens of ‘informalisation’ are also significant for feminist theorising on economic life through linking unpaid domestic labour and its conditions with formal market activities (Fudge, 2012; Peterson, 2013).

Informal work presents challenges for industrial relations and for disciplinary approaches to work and labour relations. However, literature on informality is growing in influence within employment relations scholarship due to its ability to help explain contemporary developments in work and the labour market. A resurgence of interest in informal work is generating new thinking on the concept and traditional binary notions of separate ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ activities have given way to more nuanced understandings, including a focus on ‘processes of informalisation’ (Fudge, 2012), and on the neoliberal economic, social and political influences that devalorise work to redefine it as non-work and workers as non-workers (Krinsky & Simonet, 2012). Importantly, feminist approaches to work include social production to highlight structural disadvantage, racialized and gendered intersections and global divisions of labour that compromise women economically and replicate gender disadvantage (Peterson, 2013).

The ILO (2014) Decent Work agenda states its intention is to formalise the informal. This is a key discourse in addressing informal employment and decent work deficits. The debate around how re-formalisation can be achieved remains linked to how informality and its causes are conceptualised. Additionally, how informality may vary across types of enterprises and supply chain levels (Treblecock, 2006; Barrientos, 2011) is an important consideration, not only for informal workers situated in the most marginalised circumstances, but for capacity for workers to establish solidarity and for union capacity to mobilise workers collectively.

References
This special issue seeks to build on and advance a growing set of debates on gender and processes of informalisation in work and employment.

Contributions to this special issue will examine this overarching question: What are the key features of and contributors to informalisation, and what circumstances are necessary to formalise the informal?

We call for proposals from established academics, early career researchers and doctoral students that engage in issues related to gender, informality and informalisation of work and employment from an interdisciplinary perspective. We encourage empirical contributions, theoretically informed case studies and policy analyses that contribute to a growing body of scholarship that engages with the key issues outlined in this call for papers.

We invite papers to consider the following questions in relation to informality, gender and work:

**Theoretical developments:** Do traditional theoretical approaches to informality and informalisation offer adequate explanations of the forces driving the growth in informal employment? How can we theorise gender and informalisation in ways that challenge existing gender disadvantage? What challenges does informal employment present to conventional theories of work, the workplace and the labour process?

**Institutional responses:** What strategies have unions and civil society organisations developed to organise informal workers? Do contemporary forms of informal work require new approaches to organising? Is formalisation of informal employment feasible or is there a need for different or more radical policy approaches beyond the existing capitalist framework?

**International comparisons:** What are the similarities or differences that characterise informal employment in developed and developing economies? In what ways does informal employment impact on worker rights, protection and representation?

**Impacts of different supply chain dynamics on informalisation:** How does the interaction of gender and informal work in supply chains and other processes impact on...
workers? What key elements of informal employment in supply chains impact on the capacity of workers to seek collective strategies for justice and redress?

Process

ABSTRACTS of up to 800 words should be submitted by 30 June 2017. The organisers will advise authors if their abstract has been accepted by 28 July 2017. Those who are successful will be expected to submit their full paper to the symposium facilitators by 22 September 2017 to be distributed to other participants for discussion in a symposium on 12 October 2017 at RMIT University in Melbourne.

Following the October symposium papers can be submitted for consideration for publication in a special issue of Labour and Industry in 2018. The closing date for full paper submissions to Labour & Industry is 10 November 2017.

Important dates:
- 30 June, 2017 Deadline for submission of abstracts (up to 800 words).
- 28 July, 2017 Notification to authors of abstract acceptance.
- 22 September 2017 Submission of full papers to special issue editors for distribution to other symposium participants.
- 12 October 2017 – Symposium at RMIT University, Melbourne.
- 10 November 2017 Submission of papers to special issue editors for peer review.
- Labour & Industry Special Issue published mid 2018.

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