



In memoriam David Marsden 1950-2021

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

In memoriam David Marsden 1950–2021

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The employment relations community lost one of its best with the passing of Professor David Marsden, who died unexpectedly on Tuesday 10 August 2021 following complications of cancer treatment. My thoughts are with his family.

David had a long and extremely productive relationship with the BJIR. A frequent author, he served as a valued editor since 2012. The breadth of his scholarship meant there were virtually no submissions he could not improve. David remained the journal's most visible link to the LSE which founded and ran the BJIR for decades. He organized conferences and special issues for the journal and was always first to volunteer when help was needed. Chief Editor, John Heywood, said 'The BJIR will miss David's calm, insight, humor, and unique willingness to help'.

David joined LSE as a Lecturer in the Department of Industrial Relations in 1980. He had a long and distinguished career at LSE, first in the Department of Industrial Relations where he was promoted to Professor, and subsequently in the Department of Management. As his wife Alice Lam has said, David 'was ultimately an LSE man and totally dedicated to his work'. This commitment shone through in his scholarship, his teaching and generous collegiality. As David's close colleague Jonathan Booth put it, 'David was not only a great colleague, but he was also a friend, mentor, and champion for junior faculty and supportive to many others – from students at all levels to professional services staff'.

David was an original and creative scholar. A talented linguist, David excelled at cross-national comparison and thought deeply about the origins and durability of institutional diversity. In his influential book, *A Theory of Employment Systems: Micro-Foundations of Societal Diversity* (1999, Oxford University Press), David developed a novel theory of how institutions shaped work organization and employment relations within firms. He continued to pursue these interests in his later work. In elegant comparative articles, such as 'Individual voice in employment relationships: A comparison under different forms of workplace representation' (*Industrial Relations: a journal of economy and society*, 52, 2013), and 'Institutions as constraints and resources: Explaining cross-national divergence in performance management' (co-authored with Virginia Doellgast

[Correction added on 22 September 2021, after first online publication: The copyright line was changed.]

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in *Human Resource Management Journal*, 29, 2019), David combined his detailed cross-national knowledge and deep theoretical grounding to develop arguments which illuminated the evolution of different employment relations institutions and practices. His trademark was to return to fundamental employment relations dilemmas such as those regarding how to motivate workers under incomplete contracts (Commons, 1924; Gibbons & Henderson, 2012; Stinchcombe, 1986) or how to negotiate the 'zone of acceptance' of managerial prerogative (Simon, 1951). Deftly synthesizing classic and contemporary literature across a variety of disciplines, David would pose and solve puzzles as to how and why these dilemmas were resolved differently in diverse national contexts.

In addition, David made significant policy contributions, authoring numerous reports and acting as an adviser to the European Commission, the International Labour Organization, the OECD, the World Bank and to various UK trade unions. He published important studies on applied topics, such as youth employment and training as well as performance-related pay, a longstanding research interest on which he published several studies in different contexts (e.g. Marsden & Richardson, 1994; Marsden & Belfield, 2010). Throughout his work, David was concerned to improve conditions for ordinary people, in the workplace and society.

A passion for research fulfilling the LSE mission of the 'betterment of society' burned in David to the end. His most recent paper, 'Patterns of organizational ownership and employee well-being in Britain' published in this issue of the BJIR (Marsden, 2021), focused on employee well-being, which David linked to the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards of work. It is fitting testimony to David's generosity that, as someone who derived so much pleasure from intrinsically rewarding work, he devoted his final months to considering how this benefit could be more broadly shared.

David published in all the major industrial relations journals and edited the BJIR, and yet also founded two journals. David was a founding editor of *Industrielle Beziehungen* (the German Journal of Industrial Relations), and, together with Alex Hicks, he founded *Socio-Economic Review* (SER), acting as editor from 2001 to 2006. Establishing journals is a rare accomplishment; these thriving journals stand as a lasting tribute to David's intellectual enthusiasm and creativity. In addition, David served as an editor of *Travail et Emploi* (a research journal published by the French Ministry of Labour) and was co-editor of the *International Public Management Journal* between 2005 and 2011. His support for interdisciplinary work was expressed by his longstanding relationship with the Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics (SASE), serving as SASE President in 2002–2003 and acting as organizer for the network on 'Labour Markets, Education, and Human Resources' over several decades, where he welcomed generations of young international scholars into SASE.

Another forum in which David's dedication to the development of young scholars found expression was the European Doctoral Network of employment relations scholars. David was a co-founder of this network and played a prominent role in facilitating its meetings. One of his former PhD students, Elisa Pannini, explained how David's role in the Network benefitted not only individual students, but also the wider profession: 'David gently pushed his PhD students to present their research at the European Doctoral Workshops, introducing us to the spirit of collegiality and helping to form long lasting friendships and connections. David generously read and gave sharp feedback to many students, in his positive, constructive way, showing us how to be good and kind citizens in Academia'. This thoughtful approach also characterized David's interaction with PhD students both as a supervisor and at conferences and seminars.

In keeping with this generous spirit, David was a dedicated teacher, who enjoyed taking students on an intellectual journey. For many years, he taught Comparative Employment Relations and later Comparative Human Resource Management, sharing his sophisticated understanding

of cross-national diversity with students. His scholarly enthusiasm inspired generations of students. For example, Professor Elke Schuessler, who was a Master's student at LSE in academic year 2000–2001, fondly remembers participating in David's Comparative Industrial Relations and Comparative HRM classes, 'We learnt about the theory of employment systems, of course, but also so much more. The fact that I actually still remember most of the contents after all these years testifies to his great ability as an intellectual and as a teacher'.

Most recently, David taught Negotiation Analysis, a labour of love which was deeply appreciated by students. David initially took over leadership of this course due to unexpected staffing challenges, but he quickly made it his own, taking great pride in its success. His co-teacher, Karin King, highlighted David's commitment to student learning noting that even after 3-h long interactive sessions, students would 'routinely follow up with David to continue the conversation informally, to stretch their thinking or clarify their knowledge or to share a new insight which they had just discovered during the applied negotiations case on that particular day. Students would frequently arrive at the next class with stories of how their learning from a prior seminar had already become valuable to them in a job interview or an internship or to discuss how something known in research functions in practice'. David was rightly proud of his successful leadership of this course, for which he received an LSE 'Excellence in Education Award' in 2018.

David was hugely appreciated by colleagues not only as a scholar, but also for his kindness, warmth and generosity. He was unfailingly considerate and thoughtful, fostering a culture of mutual respect and support. He nurtured and encouraged many young scholars. It was a privilege to work with David; he will be greatly missed.

In David, we have lost an inspiring scholar, colleague and friend, who will long be remembered at LSE, the BJIR and across the scholarly community.

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