Industrial relations and human development: a multidisciplinary perspective on Romanian labor policy

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To cite this article:
Ghena, C. (2026). Industrial relations and human development: a multidisciplinary perspective on Romanian labor policy. Romanian Journal of Economics, 63(2), 234-247.

Abstract. ***Objective***. *This paper explores the conceptual and practical dimensions of industrial relations, with a particular focus on the Romanian context. It reconceptualizes labor not merely as an economic transaction, but as a multidimensional human, cultural, and social phenomenon that supports both individual development and organizational functioning. By examining the evolution of industrial relations and their institutional frameworks, the study discusses how labor relations may contribute to social cohesion, economic resilience, and democratic governance. The paper also identifies key challenges faced by Romanian labor institutions in the post-transition period and proposes interdisciplinary directions for improving labor dynamics and collective bargaining mechanisms.* ***Method***. *The research employs a qualitative, interdisciplinary methodology that integrates theoretical analysis with institutional and legislative review. Drawing on historical sources, legal texts (notably the Romanian Labor Code - Law 53/2003), and conceptual frameworks such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the study develops a multidimensional understanding of labor. Perspectives from labor law, sociology of work, human resource management, and negotiation theory are combined to analyze the evolution of industrial relations from their emergence in the closing decades of the nineteenth century to their contemporary form in Romania. The analysis is complemented by references to European labor standards and the influence of EU integration. The study is theoretical in nature and does not include primary empirical data.* ***Results***. *The findings indicate that labor relations in Romania continue to face structural and institutional challenges, including fragmented representation, limited bargaining coverage, and uneven enforcement of labor rights. Although legal frameworks supporting collective bargaining and social dialogue exist, their practical implementation remains inconsistent. The analysis suggests that labor may contribute to fulfilling human needs across multiple levels of development, from basic security to self-actualization, when managed holistically. The study also identifies gaps in the academic and policy discourse, particularly in the Romanian public sector, where aspects such as emotional intelligence, creativity, and team dynamics remain underexplored.* ***Originality***. *The originality of the paper lies in its human-centered and interdisciplinary reconceptualization of labor and industrial relations. By connecting labor to the capability approach, the study proposes a novel framework for understanding how work can enhance individual well-being while contributing to organizational sustainability. The paper also introduces innovative perspectives inspired by sports training methodologies and game theory, suggesting that individualized approaches to labor management could enhance performance and social cohesion. These insights are particularly relevant for Romanian public institutions, which continue to face challenges in human resource development and organizational culture. The analysis highlights the growing importance of industrial relations in addressing the challenges associated with contemporary labor markets. It emphasizes the need for closer collaboration across disciplines, improvements in institutional frameworks, and labor policies that place people at the*

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center while reflecting European principles and internationally recognized practices. By integrating conceptual perspectives with practical realities, the study offers additional insights into the role of work in fostering social progress and economic advancement, both in Romania and in a broader international context.

***Keywords**: industrial relations; labor market institutions; human resource management; organizational culture; emotional intelligence; Maslow's hierarchy of needs; work motivation.*
***JEL Classification**: J5, J8, I3, M5, K31, O15.*

1. Introduction

Work is one of the foundations of human existence and the development of societies and is also a key factor for organizational performance. Over time, the concept of work has been defined and reinterpreted according to social, economic, and technological developments, from the rudimentary forms of the primitive era to today's diversity, marked by digitization and artificial intelligence. The literature emphasizes that work cannot be reduced to a simple service exchanged for material reward, but must be understood as a conscious, creative activity essential for human survival and progress (Aceleanu, 2011a; Dumitru, 2021a).

In this context, industrial relations emerge as a distinct field of study at the intersection of economics, law, and sociology. Industrial relations encompass the network of interactions that develop among employees, employers, trade unions, and employers' associations. Through their influence on workplace dynamics and collective representation, they contribute significantly to the effective operation of labor markets and to the preservation of social stability. The historical evolution of the concept, from the first forms of professional association to its consolidation in the interwar period, highlights the importance of the institutional framework and collective bargaining in shaping labor relations (Commons, 1924; Webb & Webb 1894, Webb & Webb 1897).

This article aims to analyze the correlation between work and industrial relations, both from a theoretical and historical perspective, emphasizing their relevance for organizational performance in current conditions. By integrating contributions from the literature and contextualizing historical developments, the research aims to highlight the role of work as a primary factor of production and to outline future directions of investigation in the field of industrial relations. In line with the study's theoretical design, the analysis adopts a cautious interpretative approach, avoiding causal claims and focusing instead on conceptual linkages and institutional dynamics.

2. Literature review

Work is defined as conscious activity, oriented toward achieving goals and objectives, with both material and creative-intellectual dimensions. Aceleanu (2011b) emphasizes the fundamental role of work in the development of individuals and social communities, while Dumitru (2021b) considers it a cultural construct subject to changes in the legal and social context. From the perspective of political economy, Coșea (2020) argues that work is inseparable from economic decisions aimed at improving living conditions.

Maslow's pyramid of needs model (Maslow, 1943) provides a framework for understanding work as a universal mechanism for satisfying human needs. From the physiological level to self-realization, work is present as a tool for progress and social recognition. In this study, Maslow's model is used as a conceptual lens rather than a causal explanatory framework, acknowledging that work *may contribute* to human development under certain conditions.

The term "industrial relations" is often synonymous with "labor relations," but it emphasizes more the vertical relationships between employers and employees. The first theoretical contributions appear in Bretano (1870), followed by the works of Webb and Webb (1894, 1897), and a particular attention was given to the influence of trade unions on employment relations and to the distribution of power among labor market actors. While Commons (1924) offered one of the earliest systematic definitions of industrial relations, Gospel (2006a) examined the evolving involvement of both the state and trade unions during the interwar years. Within the European tradition, Cassel and Bage (as cited in

Elvander, 2002) focused on the significance of labor market institutions, whereas Dupuit (1911) and Levy (1911) explored the ways in which labor legislation shaped employment relations.

Contemporary literature has significantly expanded the field of analysis. Dunlop (1958) conceptualized systems of industrial relations, defining the interaction between actors, context, and rules. Kaufman (2004) synthesized the main theoretical paradigms, from neoclassical to institutionalist approaches. Blyton et al. (2008) provided a comparative analysis of industrial relations systems, emphasizing the diversity of national approaches and the institutional factors that shape employment relations across countries. Fiorito (2001) analyzed the role of unions in employee representation, and Katz (1993) described the transformations of industrial relations in the USA. Hyman (2001) studied European trade unionism, emphasizing cultural and institutional diversity. Poole (1986) compared the origins and patterns of national diversity in industrial relations. More recently, Yadav, Sinha, and Srivastava (2024) conducted a systematic review of the literature, identifying future research directions, and Zeb-obipi (2017) discussed the analytical frameworks and epistemological challenges of the field. These theoretical contributions support the view that industrial relations should be analyzed not only as legal or economic arrangements but also as social systems shaped by power dynamics, cultural norms, and organizational practices.

In Romania, regulations are structured by the Labor Code - Law 53/2003, with subsequent amendments. Statistical data on the labor market and industrial relations have been published since 1920, providing a basis for longitudinal studies. Pavelescu (2023a, 2024) analyzed the evolution of labor market institutions and their influence on industrial relations. The growing recognition of industrial relations as a distinct field of expertise is also reflected in higher education. For example, master's programs offered by the University of Bucharest (2024/2025) cover topics such as collective bargaining, labor sociology, and employment relations within the European Union, illustrating the increasing institutionalization and professional development of the discipline. These developments suggest an increasing institutional interest in strengthening labor relations, although empirical assessments remain limited.

3. Methodology

This research adopts a documentary-analytical design, with the main objective of examining the correlation between work and industrial relations from both theoretical and historical perspectives. The approach follows the tradition of conceptual and comparative studies and is suitable for exploring a complex field at the intersection of political economy, labor law, and sociology (Dunlop, 1958; Kaufman, 2004). Given the theoretical nature of the study, the analysis focuses on synthesizing existing knowledge rather than establishing causal relationships.

The bibliographic corpus includes both classical authors and contemporary contributions. Seminal works include Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (1962), Dunlop's *Industrial Relations Systems* (1958), and the studies of Commons (1924). Recent literature is represented by references books such as the one published by Blyton et al., (2008), Hyman's (2001) analyses of European trade unionism, and Poole's comparative studies (1986). Relevant Romanian contributions, such as Aceleanu (2011a), Coșea (2020), Pavelescu (2023b, 2024) and Ghena (2026a, 2026b) were integrated to capture national specifics.

To provide a clearer methodological framework, the study addresses the following research questions:

- What is the relationship between work as a human activity and the evolution of industrial relations in Romania?
- How have institutional and legislative frameworks shaped Romanian labor relations after the transition period?
- To what extent do current Romanian labor institutions support human development, as conceptualized through Maslow's hierarchy of needs?
- What gaps persist between Romanian labor practices and European labor standards?

These research questions serve as the foundation for the study's analytical objectives, which are outlined below:

- To analyze the historical evolution of industrial relations in Romania and their institutional foundations.
- To evaluate the national legislative framework governing labor relations, with emphasis on the Labor Code (Law 53/2003).
- To integrate human development theory into the analysis of labor dynamics and organizational performance.
- To identify structural challenges and propose interdisciplinary directions for improving labor relations and collective bargaining mechanisms.

The analysis was carried out in four main stages:

1. Defining concepts - identifying and comparing definitions of work and industrial relations in the economic and sociological literature (Aceleanu, 2011b; Dumitru, 2021b).
2. Examining historical evolution - contextualizing the emergence and development of industrial relations, focusing on the interwar period and the contributions of institutionalism (Webb & Webb, 1894, 1897; Commons, 1924; Gospel, 2006b).
3. Integration of the Romanian normative framework - analysis of the regulations of the Labor Code (Law 53/2003) and statistical data published since 1920.
4. Comparing international and national perspectives - highlighting the convergences and differences between European, American, and Romanian models (Hyman, 2001; Katz, 1993; Pavelescu, 2024).

The research is mainly theoretical and does not include an empirical component based on primary data collection, which is one of the main methodological limitations of the paper. Accordingly, the conclusions do not claim causal effects but instead *suggest* conceptual linkages supported by the reviewed literature**.** This limitation reduces the possibility of measuring the direct impact of labor and industrial relations on organizational performance. The study also does not address in detail sociological variables such as age, education, or standard of living, which can significantly influence the dynamics of industrial relations (Yadav, Sinha, & Srivastava, 2024).

The documentary-analytical methodology is appropriate for the research objectives, as it allows a critical synthesis of the literature and a historical and normative contextualization. The perspective adopted in this study creates a valuable basis for further investigation, particularly through comparative empirical research and interdisciplinary approaches. It also underscores the continuing significance of industrial relations as a field of inquiry with important implications for both academic debate and practical policymaking (Kaufman, 2004; Blyton et al., 2008). The operationalization of future research directions is further detailed in Table 2, ensuring that the proposed agenda is empirically testable.

4. Results and discussions

The literature suggests that work remains a key factor for survival, progress, and organizational performance, regardless of the era or school of thought (Smith, 1776; Aceleanu, 2011a; Dumitru, 2021a). It cannot be reduced to a simple economic process but must be understood as a social and cultural activity, with a direct impact on individual status and community cohesion (Dobrotă, 1998a; Coșea, 2020).

Industrial relations emerge as a complex system of interactions between employers, employees, trade unions, and the state, balancing power and ensuring labor market stability (Dunlop, 1958; Kaufman, 2004). Their historical evolution, from guilds and the first trade unions to institutionalization in the interwar period, highlights the consolidation of the normative framework and collective bargaining mechanisms (Webb & Webb, 1894, 1897; Commons, 1924).

International models—Anglo-Saxon, Nordic, and continental—differ in regulation but converge in recognizing labor as a limited resource and industrial relations as a tool of governance (Hyman, 2001; Poole, 1986; Katz, 1993; Ghena & Horhotă, 2026). In Romania, the Labor Code and dedicated academic programs indicate the professionalization of the field, but challenges persist in the public sector, such as work organization and the integration of innovation (Pavelescu, 2023b, 2024).

Currently, digitalization and artificial intelligence have reshaped forms of work, but human supervision and direction remain essential (Moldovan, 2018a; Yadav, Sinha, & Srivastava, 2024). The results indicate that organizational performance may depend on the quality of work, the stability of

industrial relations, and the ability of institutions to sustain employee motivation, according to Maslow's model (Maslow, 1943). Given the theoretical nature of the study, these observations should be interpreted as conceptual linkages rather than empirically demonstrated effects.

The analysis also supports the argument that Romanian labor relations face structural and institutional challenges, including fragmented representation, limited bargaining coverage, and uneven enforcement of labor rights. Although legal frameworks supporting collective bargaining and social dialogue exist, their practical implementation remains inconsistent. These tendencies suggest the need for stronger institutional support and more effective participatory mechanisms, particularly in public institutions.

Furthermore, the study identifies gaps in the current academic and policy discourse on industrial relations, especially in the Romanian public sector, where issues such as emotional intelligence, creativity, and team dynamics are often overlooked. These findings should be understood as theoretical insights informed by the reviewed literature and not as generalizable empirical conclusions.

5. Labor and industrial relations

5.1 Work - a determining factor for the person and the organization

As stated in the introduction, work is a determining factor for human existence, personal success, and organizational performance. According to most definitions, work is an action not directly related to the survival of the species. Most of the time, work is seen as a service provided in exchange for a reward, money, or other benefits. The forms of reward have modernized as aspects related to work have diversified (Aceleanu, 2011a).

In summary, the definition of work could include the following ideas and guidelines:

- It is the conscious activity of humans, directed toward achieving goals and objectives.
- It is an activity in which, consciously aiming to achieve the final goal, a person engages in a controlled exchange with nature to satisfy personal needs.
- It can be represented by the effort made to achieve a goal.
- It is, ultimately, represented by the material benefit obtained, the goods or services resulting from the work performed, the gain or profit.

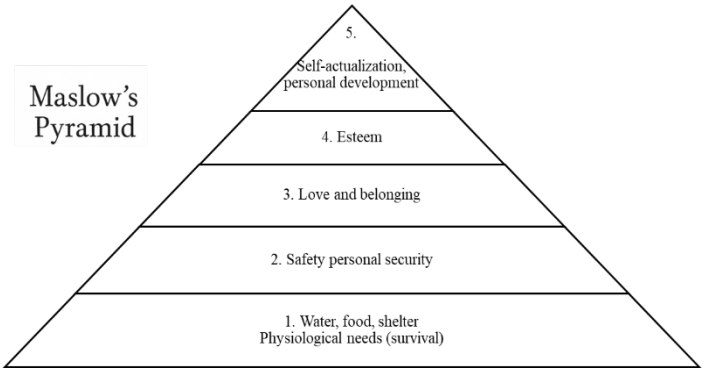
In the current era, shaped by various political, diplomatic, and technological changes, work has changed its status and forms. Digitalization, automation, and artificial intelligence have transformed work processes, requiring a more flexible and human-centered understanding of labor. Starting from a definition of work as an activity not directly and proportionally linked to human survival, we conclude that work is a form of creativity and intellectual effort. However, in contemporary societies, work may also contribute to social integration, personal development, and long-term well-being, without implying a direct causal relationship. Dumitru believes that work is a cultural construct that, at first glance, appears permanent (Dumitru, 2021b). Work is a determining factor for human existence, personal development, and organizational performance. While traditionally defined as an activity exchanged for material reward, contemporary perspectives emphasize its creative, social, and intellectual dimensions (Aceleanu, 2011a; Dumitru, 2021a). In an era increasingly shaped by digital technologies and artificial intelligence, work can no longer be viewed solely through the lens of production. Instead, it should be understood as a multifaceted process that generates economic value while also supporting individual growth and social well-being. The significance attributed to work depends not only on the level of socio-economic development but also on the extent to which workers and employers recognize and appreciate the broader contributions of labor.

Various other ideas and definitions support the fundamental nature of work for humans, as recognized by all major schools of economic thought. Whether American, British, French, etc., work is a fundamental activity for humans and societal development. Even in antiquity, Greek and Roman philosophers admitted that without work, one cannot live, and that work is a conscious activity specific to humans, performed with the medium- and long-term goal of survival and satisfying human needs. In the short term, work can solve immediate, pressing problems, not necessarily subordinate to final goals, but whose resolution determines the long-term course of the individual and the organization for which the work is performed.

From a legislative perspective, each country regulates employment relations differently. It is difficult to find identical formulas for regulating work at the national level. In Romania, the main legislative regulations in labor are provided by the Labor Code - Law 53/2003, with subsequent amendments. This law, with its amendments and additions, regulates all aspects related to work, its performance, legal relations, workplace, type of work, individual employment contracts, and so on. human development theory (Maslow, 1943) offers a conceptual framework for understanding how work may contribute to human development. Labor can play a role in meeting physiological needs, providing security, facilitating social belonging, supporting esteem, and enabling self-actualization.

While work does not directly determine human development, it may facilitate progress across these levels under certain conditions. In this study, the model is used as a conceptual framework rather than a causal explanation, acknowledging that work *may facilitate* progress across different levels of human needs under certain conditions.

Figure 1. Maslow's pyramid



Source: Author's adaptation based on Maslow's theory of human motivation (Maslow, 1943).

Dissecting Maslow's pyramid, we see that labor is essential and present in all five levels. At level 1, a person needs to meet primary physiological needs, which requires repetitive actions to ensure subsistence and survival. Once this level is satisfied, the second level brings personal safety and security, also achieved through work. Building a shelter, defending oneself, and gaining recognition are objectives achieved through diverse activities, allowing a person to move beyond this level. Maslow's model then addresses social needs and belonging, which are also achieved through varied work, enabling social belonging to groups that recognize the person's usefulness and work. After achieving social recognition, the fourth level - esteem - is reached, leading to the top of the pyramid, which involves continued work efforts and high-quality performance requiring advanced skills. This is the level of self-realization and personal development, which can include doctoral research or other intellectual work, combined with professional and personal experiences and skills. These associations are conceptual and do not imply direct causality.

The ideas above can be complemented by others of the same type, as the purpose of this research is to critically disseminate concepts from previous literature and to complete the specific bibliography of the field.

5.2. Work and political economy

Political economy, defined as the science of decisions aimed at improving living conditions (Coșea, 2020), places labor at the center of economic and social development. From Adam Smith's early definition of wealth creation (Smith, 1776) to contemporary analyses, labor remains a fundamental production factor whose quality may influence economic outcomes.

It can be argued that political economy would be difficult to conceptualize without labor as a central element. As a determining factor, labor - just as in industrial relations - can be understood as a starting point whose quality and stability matter across contexts. As early as 1776, Adam Smith defined economics as the process by which wealth is created, distributed, and consumed (Smith, 1776). From

this perspective, economics may be understood as a field concerned with how individuals generate wealth and manage it. In both the creation and management phases, the quality of labor involved appears to be important. Etymologically, the term “economy” originates from ancient Greece and represents the combination of two elements: *oikos* (household) and *nomos* (law). In contemporary usage, political economy refers to the management of collective resources and the institutional arrangements that shape economic behavior.

According to economic theory, labor is one of the three main factors of production, alongside capital and nature (Moldovan, 2018b). Labor, in combination with one or both of the other production factors, is a necessary resource for producing goods and services, and it exists in limited, exhaustible quantities. The idea that labor is an exhaustible production factor is evident when considering the human being, who, by anatomical nature, has physical limitations. In today’s context - marked by technological advancement and the rise of artificial intelligence - the landscape has changed significantly. Some studies suggest that work performed by robots or machines can exceed the technical limits of human physical capacity. However, even under these new conditions, no one has claimed that labor is an inexhaustible production factor, since technology still requires supervision and guidance from humans. It can be said that human labor is constantly evolving, being refined and adapted to new conditions, but it remains human labor nonetheless - and ultimately, it is finite. Therefore, labor cannot be considered an inexhaustible factor of production. Even in the context of technological change, labor remains finite and requires continuous adaptation and skill development.

This explains the ongoing need, regardless of era or circumstance, for labor to be of higher quality. It may also be argued that, throughout history, one important criterion of social and economic differentiation among individuals has been the quality of the labor performed. Those who were able to work longer and more effectively, improve their initial working conditions, and maintain high standards in comparison to others may have been more likely to reach the top of Maslow’s pyramid more quickly and to gain greater social, economic, and political influence within their society.

Every economic activity, regardless of its complexity, is based on a key production factor: labor. Nature and capital - the other two major categories of production factors - are enhanced and made more efficient through labor. Beyond its economic dimension, labor must also be viewed from its social perspective, since every economic activity is also a social activity (Dobrotă, 1998b).

The intersection of social and economic dimensions underscores the heightened and overwhelming importance of labor as a production factor. This statement holds true even amid the significant technological changes observed recently, as well as the structural shifts in how labor is defined today. These developments highlight the necessity and relevance of continually studying industrial relations - a component of both economic and social activity - stemming from the use of labor as a primary production factor in the modern market economy.

Historical and contemporary evidence suggests that the quality of labor may influence socio-economic differentiation and organizational outcomes, although such relationships require empirical validation.

6. Industrial relations - evolution and concept

6.1 Labor relations and industrial relations

The term “industrial relations”, in this form, has often caused confusion, leading to the mistaken belief that it refers to relationships occurring during industrial processes. In reality, the term “industrial relations” refers to - and is synonymous with - labor relations established at various levels between employer and employee, as well as between employers' associations and trade union organizations. For the purposes of this study, the concept is understood from a broad institutional perspective, in line with the dominant approaches found in international literature.

The concept of relationships encompasses a variety of meanings, reflecting different forms of interaction, connection, and interdependence among individuals and groups. On one hand, “relation”, with the plural “relations”, denotes a link, connection, or association between things, facts, ideas, processes, or their attributes. If we apply mathematical logic, a relationship signifies the connection between two or more elements. In the context of industrial relations, these elements can be considered employers and employees - the two major groups between which, inevitably, for the success of the

economic process, fair and robust industrial relations must be established and reinforced over time. The interaction between these actors forms the basis of labor governance and contributes to the stability of the economic and social system.

Although labor relations and industrial relations share a number of common features, the distinction between the two concepts continues to be acknowledged in both academic and professional settings. This is reflected in postgraduate programs offered by leading Romanian universities, where the study of employment relations is approached through complementary legal, social, and institutional perspectives. The core field of study is law, which is why the inclusion of both synonymous terms in the title may carry a different connotation compared to the economic and social perspective from which industrial relations are typically examined. This dual terminology appears to reflect the coexistence of legal, economic, and sociological perspectives within the field.

Table 1. Subjects included in the master's curriculum "Labor Law, Labor Relations and Industrial Relations"

No.	Discipline of study	No. of credits
1	Organization Management	6
2	Labor relations and the individual employment contract	9
3	Collective bargaining and administration of collective agreements	7
4	Labor conflicts. Jurisdictional systems	7
5	Ethics and academic integrity	4
6	Social Security Systems and Policies in Romanian and International Law	8
7	Labor and industrial relations in the European Union	8
8	Human Resource Management	7
9	Sociology of Work	6
10	Specialist practice	4
11	Student competitions	4
12	Civil Course	4

Source: Author's elaboration based on publicly available university data.

The duration of studies in this master’s program is one year, full-time, with students able to accumulate 60 transferable credits upon completing the subjects in the curriculum for the academic year 2024/2025. It is also specified, under the conditions set by the University of Bucharest, that 55% of the academic hours for courses and seminars are conducted online. This suggests that work, including within the department, has changed significantly in its forms and methods in the post-pandemic period. This shift toward blended learning reflects broader transformations in work and education, particularly in the post-pandemic context, where digital competencies and remote collaboration have become increasingly important.

A closer examination of the educational content associated with this field reveals a broad area of expertise that intersects substantially with industrial relations. The disciplines and thematic areas presented in Table 1 illustrate the multidisciplinary character of the field and its strong connections with employment relations, labor market institutions, and social dialogue.

The subjects listed as numbers 1 - 5 are taught in the first semester, while those numbered 6 - 10 are included in the second semester. The courses indicated in points 11 and 12 of Table 1 are optional. The master’s program concludes with the preparation and defense of a dissertation, on topics chosen jointly by the student and the scientific supervisor. Completion of this program can lead to more advanced scientific studies and research, at doctoral or post-doctoral level, in the field of labor relations and/or industrial relations.

The inclusion of both “labor relations” and “industrial relations” in the program title illustrates the coexistence of legal, economic, and sociological perspectives within the field. The curriculum covers essential topics such as collective bargaining, labor conflicts, social security systems, and European labor policies, indicating a comprehensive approach to understanding labor relations in contemporary institutional settings.

The academic content associated with this field offers a solid basis for understanding the legal, social, and organizational dimensions of employment relations. However, the extent to which such

knowledge is reflected in practice depends largely on institutional arrangements and the capacity of organizations to support modern human resource management and constructive social dialogue. It should be noted that this observation is conceptual in nature and does not represent an empirically validated finding. A set of academic disciplines with a strong impact on industrial relations can be identified, which are also highly relevant in the practice of industrial relations. From the author's perspective, the subjects that appear to have the strongest impact are labor relations and the individual labor contract, labor and industrial relations in the European Union, labor sociology, and labor conflicts. On a secondary level, disciplines such as organizational management, collective bargaining, and human resources management may also exert a significant influence on the theory and practice of industrial relations. These observations do not diminish the role and varying impact of other fields of study on industrial relations.

The author's conclusion regarding the possible distinction between the terms labor relations and industrial relations is that they are nearly synonymous, and the difference lies more in perspective and approach - like the nuances in Romanian between the terms "dezvoltare durabilă" and "dezvoltare sustenabilă". However, labor relations can be distinguished from industrial relations if we consider that labor relations may also include horizontal relationships between co-workers, not necessarily between actors in distinct categories. This interpretation should be read as a conceptual reflection shaped by the author's situated professional perspective rather than as a generalizable empirical distinction. To clarify this further, industrial relations - even when the term labor relations is used - can be interpreted as production relations or as diplomatic relations.

Industrial relations, or labor relations, generate concrete economic relationships established between people in the process of producing goods or services. In this sense, industrial relations are understood as production relations because, ultimately, whether the human factor is positioned as employer or employee, cooperation is required to achieve the final objectives of producing goods and/or services.

Industrial relations also lead to political-type relations established between states and supra-national organizations. Diplomatic relations agreed internationally, at the level of states and organizations (NATO, EU, UN, etc.), can serve as negotiation models in which both parties emerge as winners. Looking at the history of labor conflicts, it becomes clear that industrial relations follow standards similar to those used in diplomatic relations. In essence, they are negotiating relations between different actors who interact and share common resources, often pursuing common objectives.

6.2 Evolution of industrial relations

An economic and legal concept based on the relationship between employee and employer, industrial relations are also referred to as professional relations. However, due to Anglo-Saxon influence, the term is more widely known as "labor relations". Industrial relations developed into a distinct economic field of study, grounded in labor law and related international and domestic legislation. It can even be said that industrial relations and their historical evolution contributed to shaping and refining another field of practice and study: labor law.

Historically, the concept of industrial relations emerged in the literature alongside the development of economic theories and the growing importance of the institutional framework in ensuring the functionality of the labor market. These aspects became evident from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, with a peak during the interwar period. Within the scope of this research, the evolution of industrial relations will be examined only up to the interwar era, leaving room for future studies to continue this exploration.

The intellectual foundations of industrial relations can be traced back to the second half of the nineteenth century. Among the early contributions, Brentano's work published in 1870 examined the economic significance of workers' associations and their influence on productive activity. At that time, collective forms of organization were primarily represented by guilds and trade unions. During the closing years of the nineteenth century, British scholars increasingly focused on the institutional dimensions of labor markets. Within this context, Sidney and Beatrice Webb made a major contribution through studies published in 1894 and 1897, drawing attention to trade union activity and to the need for a more balanced distribution of influence between employers and workers (Pavelescu, 2023a). Their

work broadened the traditional scope of economic analysis by incorporating labor-related issues and institutional change as legitimate areas of scientific inquiry. Even prominent representatives of neoclassical economics, including Alfred Marshall and Arthur Cecil Pigou, recognized that labor market outcomes were influenced not only by market forces but also by institutional arrangements (Pavelescu, 2024).

Similar concerns emerged in other European schools of thought. Between 1890 and 1918, Swedish economists Gustav Cassel and Gösta Bagge emphasized the importance of labor market institutions in shaping economic processes (Elvander, 2002). In France, authors such as Dupuit (1911) and Levy (1911) highlighted the growing relevance of trade union activity and labor legislation for both economic development and social organization. These intellectual developments created the conditions for the emergence of industrial relations as a distinct field of analysis in the years preceding the First World War.

A more explicit conceptualization of industrial relations was subsequently developed in the United States, particularly through the work of Commons (1924). During the interwar period, the concept came to encompass a broad range of issues, including employment relations, personnel management, forms of worker representation, collective bargaining processes, and the involvement of public authorities in regulating labor markets (Gospel, 2006a). Interest in labor relations expanded considerably between the two World Wars. This trend was reinforced by the growing activity of the International Labor Organization, which encouraged comparative research and legislative reforms in numerous countries. As a result, the study of employment relations gained importance not only in advanced economies but also in countries undergoing institutional modernization, including Romania. Research conducted by F.M. Pavelescu has contributed to a better understanding of the historical circumstances that shaped the emergence and evolution of industrial relations at both national and international levels. Taken together, these developments demonstrate that industrial relations have always evolved in close connection with wider economic, social, and political transformations. In Romania, official statistical information concerning labor market developments and employment-related issues became available from 1920 onward. The existence of such data created favorable conditions for examining the links between labor market performance and the institutional characteristics of industrial relations throughout the interwar period.

7. Conclusions and future research directions

7.1 Limits of research

The present research addressed certain aspects of the correlation between work and industrial relations, viewed from the perspective of organizational performance under current conditions. However, despite the documentation and approach, the relationships between the concepts of work and industrial relations - and especially their consequences - are too complex to be captured exhaustively within this study.

The paper examined issues arising from the performance of work itself and the effects of work as a fundamental basis for industrial relations and organizational performance. The diversity inherent in work makes this field of research virtually limitless, and no research effort in this area can ever be considered fully complete.

Due to space constraints, the study only briefly touched on the theoretical dimensions of the terms “labor” and “industrial relations”. Regarding the historical development of industrial relations, references were confined strictly to the pioneering period, extending at most to the interwar era. The research did not take into account the particularities and sociological characteristics of individuals - who, after all, are the primary resource when discussing work and, by extension, industrial relations. Thus, work and industrial relations can vary and be shaped, or even reshaped, by factors such as age, origin, education, standard of living, aspirations, and the ability and willingness to engage in work.

Another limitation of the study is that it does not assess the longer-term effects of educational programs and initiatives targeting labor market participation and employment relations. Such initiatives, which are clearly very important, directly influence industrial relations and organizational performance. However, the limitations of this research did not allow such an analysis. Collecting and interpreting the

necessary data, and integrating them into a comprehensive evaluation system, would have required effort and time resources far beyond the deadline for completing the current study.

7.2. Future research directions

After examining the correlation between work and industrial relations, and considering the limitations outlined above, together with the author's contextual professional reflections derived from practice, it can be suggested that, particularly in Romanian public institutions, important challenges remain in understanding the relationship between work and organizational performance, on the one hand, and between work and industrial relations, on the other.

Some of these issues, which may be further explored through the study of the work-industrial relations relationship for the benefit of Romanian public institutions, are presented in Table 2 as proposed future research directions, operationalized through units of analysis, indicators/variables, and potential methods. These themes are intended as analytically derived avenues for further investigation rather than as exhaustive or empirically validated priorities.

Table 2. Proposed future research directions

No.	Proposed future research direction	The issues exposed	Units of analysis	Possible indicatory or variables	Potential methods
1	Current socio-economic challenges, Content of Human Resource Management, Hiring staff, Organizational culture, Collective bargaining effectiveness	The socio-economic challenges posed by the crises that have arisen, especially due to the wars in Ukraine and Israel, but also other structural changes in societies, require a different approach to this research direction. In general, public institutions do not rely on innovative ways of internal organization in terms of human resources. In Romanian public institutions, the legislation requires the organization of competitions with extensive themes and bibliographies. These competitions, in many cases, cannot necessarily select the future employee best prepared for the position they will occupy. Organizational culture is an express conditionality for work and industrial relations to be the qualitative basis of organizational performance.	Trade unions; employer associations; sectors	Bargaining coverage; negotiation frequency; dispute resolution outcomes	Document analysis; comparative sector studies; expert interviews
2	Work organization	In many situations it has been found that in Romanian public organizations, work efficiency leaves something to be desired	Public institutions	HRM practices; training systems; performance evaluation mechanisms	Organizational audits; policy analysis; semi-structured interviews
3	Team building, social dialogue and participatory mechanisms	This aspect is sometimes related to the theory of chance and not necessarily to the skills and relationships that are established between co-workers	Tripartite bodies; unions; employer associations	Participation rates; representativeness; policy influence	Stakeholder interviews; comparative institutional analysis
4	Creativity and innovation in the organization	Many Romanian public institutions remain tributary to the concepts of creativity and innovation, preferring to go for the old systems, already practiced	Organizations	Flexibility of work arrangements; innovation adoption; employee participation	Mixed-methods case studies; process tracing
5	Emotional intelligence and team dynamics	Very few Romanian public institutions, but also private ones, take into account the aspects generated by emotional intelligence	Work teams; managers	EI scores; communication quality; conflict	Behavioral observation; validated EI instruments;

No.	Proposed future research direction	The issues exposed	Units of analysis	Possible indicatory or variables	Potential methods
				management patterns	team assessments
6	Internal Public Relations, human motivation and work satisfaction	The term public relations is seen as a service intended for outside the institution, but it does not focus on internal addressing which, for example, could increase employee motivation	Individual employees	Job satisfaction; perceived autonomy; recognition; opportunities for growth	Surveys; psychometric scales; focus groups
7	Artificial intelligence, digitalization and its impact on labor relations	The use of artificial intelligence has become a constant in terms of performance, regardless of the type of organization or institution	Organizations; employees	Level of digital adoption; remote-work prevalence; digital skills; organizational adaptability	Surveys; interviews; organizational case studies

Source: Author's elaboration.

To enhance the empirical applicability of the proposed research directions, each theme can be further operationalized. The unit of analysis may include individual employees, organizations, or institutional actors. Relevant indicators could involve job satisfaction, bargaining coverage, institutional capacity, or digitalization levels. Potential methods include surveys, semi-structured interviews, document analysis, or comparative case studies. This operationalization allows the proposed agenda to be empirically testable and adaptable to different organizational contexts.

Future research directions have been operationalized in Table 2, specifying units of analysis, indicators, and potential methods. This operationalization strengthens the methodological rigor of the proposed agenda and supports the development of empirically testable studies in the field of industrial relations.

7.3. Conclusions

Work, as stated in the present research, represents a fundamental aspect of human existence and historical development. Alongside work, many other future directions for both the individual and the organization later emerged.

In the contemporary period, work has also evolved in Romania, as in Western Europe and North America, being interpreted not merely as a necessity linked to survival and subsistence, but increasingly as a component of social integration and personal development. From this perspective, it can be argued that attitudes toward work have undergone important transformations, including a gradual distancing from patterns associated with the communist period.

This redefinition of work in the collective mindset also appears to be associated with a reassessment of industrial relations and of the broader institutional arrangements derived from the performance of work. Industrial relations involve interactions among multiple stakeholders, and higher levels of job quality can encourage the development of relationships based on trust, fairness, and mutual respect between employers, employees, and their representative organizations. In this sense, industrial relations can be understood as an intermediary institutional framework between employees and employers, and between trade unions and employers' associations. Their absence would likely weaken worker engagement and reduce attention to working conditions, wages, and compensation. For this reason, industrial relations represent a fundamental component of the institutional framework that supports the functioning of a market economy.

"The progress of contemporary society and the level of economic competitiveness are closely determined by, and based on, the implementation and translation of research results into new services and products, innovative business models, and economic sectors" (Andrei et al., 2020). The continuous review and rethinking of existing business models, the reworking of established practices, and the refinement of correlations represent another springboard for success and competitiveness. Therefore,

the link between work and industrial relations must be constantly monitored and adapted, both through scientific research and through the rapid application of research results in practice.

Finally, the conclusion of this study emphasizes the need for individualization in the two-way connection between work and industrial relations, and organizational performance. From a sporting perspective, individualization, as defined by Bompa, is one of the main requirements of sports training (Bompa, 2014). Coaches must always consider the qualities and potential of the athletes they train, the specific characteristics of the sport, and the physiological and psychological traits of the athlete. Similarly, in the context of work, human resource management, industrial relations, and organizational performance, the innovation manager - a relatively new concept in the Romanian economic vocabulary - must ensure that approaches and programs implemented in the organization are individualized.

This also implies the need to apply training systems and concepts from game theory to industrial relations, as a fundamental component of producing goods and services, delivering quality work, and ensuring social welfare. Game theory, in correlation with industrial relations, represents one of the innovative future directions of research in the field.

The findings indicate that work and industrial relations are deeply interconnected, and that their interaction provides valuable insights into both economic processes and social developments. Work remains a determining factor of survival and progress, while industrial relations provide the institutional framework that regulates and supports this process. Classical literature (Smith, 1776; Dunlop, 1958; Commons, 1924) and contemporary contributions (Kaufman, 2004; Blyton et al., 2008; Hyman, 2001) converge in recognizing labor as a limited resource and industrial relations as a mechanism for balancing power among actors

International models highlight both the diversity of approaches and the convergence on the importance of labor market institutions. The Romanian context, regulated by the Labor Code and strengthened through dedicated academic programs, suggests a process of professionalization in the field, though challenges remain in areas such as work organization, organizational culture, and innovation integration (Pavelescu, 2023a, 2024). Moreover, digitalization and artificial intelligence require redefining the content of work and adapting industrial relations to new technological realities (Moldovan, 2018a; Yadav, Sinha, & Srivastava, 2024).

Several avenues remain open for future investigation. Comparative empirical studies could offer deeper insights into the effects of education on organizational performance, while analyses incorporating variables such as age, educational attainment, and standards of living may improve understanding of labor market behavior. Equally important is the examination of the changes generated by digitalization and emerging technologies in employment relations. Expanding the dialogue between industrial relations and related disciplines, including sociology and behavioral economics, may further strengthen theoretical explanations and inform more effective policy interventions.

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