Lecture 1: What is employee relations?
Lecture outline

- Welcome to your new MOD003059

- How to do well in this module
  - Reading
  - Case studies and discussion exercises

- The assessment
  - Essay
  - Exam
  - Case studies and group discussions

- What is Employment Relations
How to do well in this module

- READ STUFF. Particularly, make sure you read AT LEAST selected chapters for every lecture, from the ‘key’ text and also consider one or more suggested readings.
- Read suggested case study and prepare to contribute to related group discussions.
- Read and visit relevant journals and credible Websites (e.g. cipd, eurofound, acas, etc) to following ER related policy issues and developments.
- Make use of resources at your disposal, including the human resources (ME).
Module structure

- One lecture some weeks, two on other weeks
- Case study discussions start in Week 2. You will be required:
  - Read the case study
  - You will be expected and assess for your contribution to related discussions
The Assessment for this module will be in 2 parts.

- A formative assessment based on knowledge of ER skills such as negotiation and communication through case study
- The second part is a summative assessment involving a 3000 word essay evaluating theoretical debates about ER
- Written assignment which will be fine graded.
- Details of marking criteria and grading are outlined
Defining employment Relations (1)

The study of the regulation of the employment relationship between employer and employee, both collectively and individually, and the determination of both substantive and procedural issues at industrial, organisational and workplace levels.

Rose, 2008
Defining employment relations (2)

‘The study of the institutions of job regulation’

(Flanders 1965 in Edwards)

The ‘study of all aspects of job regulation – the making and administering of rules which regulate employment relationships – regardless of whether these are seen as being formal or informal, structured or unstructured’

(Bain & Clegg 1974 in Dundon & Rollinson, 2011)
Defining employment Relations (3)

‘The employment relationship is about organizing human resources in the light of the productive aims of the firm but also aims of employees. It is necessarily open-ended, uncertain, and ... a blend of inherently contradictory principles concerning control and consent’

(Edwards, 2003)
The semantics: ER or industrial relations

According to Blyton and Turnbull (2004), although ER is ‘indistinguishable from industrial relations’, it is a more ‘acceptable’ term than industrial relations as it avoids the negative connotations’.
The conceptual difficulty (1)

- The ambiguities of coexistence of antagonism and co-operation
- Reconciliation of individual and collective interests
- Dynamic economic labour markets contexts & the changing characteristics of employment itself.
Thus Rubery et al. notes:

“The notion of a clearly defined employer-employee relationship becomes difficult to uphold under conditions where the employee is working in project teams, or on site alongside employees from other organisations, where responsibilities for performance and for health and safety are not clearly defined, or involve organisations other than the employer”

(In Dundon and Rollinson, p. 5)
Therefore, Dundon and Rollinson suggest a ‘broad definition’ of ER as:

“a field of study that deals with the formal and informal relationship between an organisation and its employees. This involves the wide range of interactions and processes by which the parties to the relationship adjust to the needs, wants and expectations of each other in the employment situation” (p.5)
So, the employment relationship is the context within which intricate interactions between employees, who may be unionised, and employers are conducted, both collectively and individually.

(Kelly, 1998 cited in Rose, 2008 p.6)
The nature of the employment relationship

- ER has both collective and individual dimensions;
- It is about rules, both formal & informal, concerning individual and collective behaviours of employees and employer;
- It involves processes and, by implication, change management;
- Rules are both substantive and procedural;
- ER operates & is analysed at 4 main levels:
  - The level of the workplace
  - The level of the company or organisation
  - The level of the industry sector
  - National and international level.