

Demographic Aging, Structural Labour Pressure, and Time Absorption: A Conceptual Industrial Relations Perspective

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Abstract

This conceptual paper examines how demographic aging restructures labour when life courses extend faster than labour institutions adjust. In aging societies, longer survival does not simply extend retirement; for many households, it prolongs dependence on paid work because later life cannot ordinarily be sustained through pensions or assets alone. The paper argues that this produces structural labour pressure: more workers remain economically active across time while institutions governing retirement, employment, and later-life work adapt only partially. Under these conditions, labour market change should not be understood only as a question of reskilling older workers or matching them to new technologies. It must also be understood as an industrial relations problem. The paper introduces labour persistence–time absorption (LPTA) as the core mechanism explaining why productivity gains often fail to become reduced working time. Under structural labour pressure, time-based employment and imperfect evaluation treat saved time as reusable organisational capacity rather than time to be returned to workers. Efficiency gains are therefore reabsorbed as denser work, task expansion, and stronger performance pressure. The paper reframes technological adaptation in aging societies as a question of working-time regimes, employment institutions, and collective bargaining over how labour is retained, intensified, redistributed, or partially released. The argument is illustrated through cross-national contrasts among the United States, France, and Germany.

Note: This is an accepted conference abstract record, not a full paper.