

# Revitalizing Social Dialogue in India: A Four-Factor Framework

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*Social dialogue, over the years, witnessed a fall with a decline in the power and interaction among the stakeholders causing a loss of reformative initiatives. This study examines the fall and revitalization of social dialogue in the Indian context. The article traces the history of social dialogue in India and suggests a four-factor model that focuses on revitalization within the larger framework of IR climate. Future research directions have been provided.*

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## Introduction

In ancient Greece, the concept of democracy emerged, allowing citizens to participate in decision-making processes through public assemblies and debates. Similarly, in ancient Rome, the Senate served as a forum for deliberation and consultation among political leaders. Ancient civilizations such as Mesopotamia and Egypt had legal codes and judicial systems that facilitated dispute resolution through arbitration and mediation. While the dynamics of social dialogue in the ancient world differed from contemporary industrial relations, the principles of communication, negotiation, and collaboration were fundamental to shaping social order and governance structures. These examples offer valuable insights into the evolution of human societies and the enduring importance of dialogue and consensus-building in collective decision-making processes across cultures and epochs.

Post the Industrial Revolution, workshops gave rise to factories and assembly lines, it became imperative to create mechanisms through which decision-

making becomes more egalitarian and conflicts are amicably resolved. Trade union membership is declining across the world (Hyman, 2015), and the social and economic changes limit the extent of union influence (Koukiadaki et al., 2016). One system must be replaced by another or significant changes must be introduced to make the existing system apt for handling new expectations.

Social dialogue shall differ significantly among nations owing to their relation to national legislations, historical contingencies and societal cultures of industrial relations (Hyman, 2015).

The position and functioning of social dialogue in organizations are closely related to the broader context of industrial relations at the national level (Pender et al., 2018). India due to its multicultural and multilingual population, is a complex case where the effectiveness of social dialogue is contingent on a number of factors. As per the International Labor Organization, the revitalization of social dialogue is one of the important agendas on board. This study shall conceptualize and present the factors that need to be addressed to revitalize the social dialogue.

### **Social Dialogue**

Social dialogue, according to the International Labor Organization (ILO), refers to “all types of negotiation, consultation, or simply exchange of information between or among representatives of governments, employers, and workers, on issues of common interest relating to

economic and social policy” (ILO, 2022). It encompasses a wide range of interactions, including collective bargaining, tripartite consultations, and other forms of dialogue to address employment and labor-related issues. The ILO estimates that global unemployment will reach the staggering figure of 207 million people in 2022, compared with 186 million in 2019 (ILO, 2022). Such Mechanisms of social dialogue aim to contribute to the “formulation and adoption of social, economic and labor policies, and be applied to any decision-making that affects the workplace or the interests of employers and workers” (ILO 2018a). Though there are several formal tripartite or bipartite procedures, there is a parallel fall in the adaptation of forms of social dialogue that produce binding commitments, such as collective bargaining and processes that lead to the conclusion of social pacts (Baccaro & Galindo, 2018). Social dialogue holds an important place in Industrial Relations because it targets as its outcome social justice. It is a holistic perspective encompassing all stakeholders from the individual worker to the society. It provides a means of preserving basic human dignity and the unhindered freedom of expression. Social dialogue provides a forum for employees to communicate their concerns, interests, and objectives related to problems affecting their jobs and general state of affairs. By aggressively advocating better pay, work-

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ing conditions, and social protection policies with companies and governments, workers can help their rights and interests to be realised. In labor relations, the idea of social dialogue consists of three important components: the building of an effective communication system, the improvement of mutual trust, and the show of a readiness to balance interests and practise constructive discourse and compromise (Pankova et al., 2019). Good labor market control depends on social dialogue to make sure laws and rules fit the needs and issues of every participant. By involving governments, businesses, and employees in decision-making processes, social dialogue helps inclusive and sustainable labour market policies—which support decent employment for all—to develop. Pfingsten and Wagener (2003) claim that fair measurements-based social sacrifices made by negotiations can be found in negotiating solutions. Within labor relations, these concessions help to build mutual trust and compromise. In both social and professional environments, the avoidance and resolution of conflicts depend much on social communication. By using a venue for constructive debate and negotiation, stakeholders can resolve conflicts, grievances, and differences by peaceful and mutually acceptable means, therefore promoting social stability and harmony. In the public and private sectors alike, social discussion helps to raise production, efficiency, and competitiveness. Through collaboration and consensus-building, stakeholders can identify and implement policies, practices, and reforms that enhance the quality of work and the competitiveness of enterprises.

Examining the disadvantages, some obstacles need to be addressed. Social conversation can occasionally result in a protracted decision-making procedure, especially when there are several parties with conflicting interests involved. This can impede prompt action on urgent matters. Sen (2006) argues that social discussion can be biased in favor of the powerful and prominent, resulting in the exclusion of less privileged groups. The lack of equitable participation impairs the credibility and efficiency of social dialogue activities. Powerful entities, such as companies or political leaders, may sometimes manipulate social discussion systems to further their own goals. This phenomenon can result in the manipulation of results in support of those particular objectives, as seen by experts such as Dahl (1957). Rasche and Gilbert (2012) emphasize the potential for tokenistic involvement in corporate social responsibility programs when marginalized stakeholders are involved just to provide legitimacy to choices that have already been taken by influential individuals. The proliferation of social variety can result in the establishment of politics centered upon identity and the division of public debate. Within some circumstances, social discourse has the potential to be ineffective in reconciling differing ideologies and may instead exacerbate divisions within society (Fukuyama, 2018).

### **Challenges to Social Dialogue in the Age of Globalization**

As previously said, social conversation emerged within a specific social and

political context where there was a need for an overarching idea that involved a cooperative effort from all parties involved. The swift progression of globalization has altered the dynamics of social debate in several ways, posing challenges to its significance. It is not to imply that social conversation as a technique has become ineffective. Institutionalizing cross-border social discussion in organizations outside the ILO and the EU, such as Hornung-Draus (2020) suggests, can enhance the quality and acceptance of social policies. The primary problem lay in the genesis of the European Social model, which included social discourse and served as a model for adoption, even by non-European entities. The European social model encompasses several notable characteristics, including 1) heightened minimum standards for working conditions; 2) comprehensive and enduring social protection systems; 3) inclusive labor markets; 4) robust and effective social dialogue; 5) public services and services that cater to general needs; and 6) initiatives promoting social inclusion and cohesion (Vaughan-Whitehead, 2015). The paradigm functioned effectively as long as there remained uniformity in workers and processes. However, the advent of globalization revealed the gradual breakdown of this model. Hence, the ILO emphasizes in the new booklet on social dialogue that it is crucial to adapt social dialogue to the national context to guarantee local ownership of the process.

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The greater the distance from the national condition, the more estranged the workers will get from it. Inevitably, the cooperative connection among the government, employees, employers, and society will disintegrate. Within Europe, there are identifiable characteristics of social debate. In southern Europe, the legislative method is dominant. If collective agreements are present, they are often enforced by legal means, including penal law, which distinguishes them from Scandinavian countries as well as the UK and Germany.

The second obstacle that social conversation encounters arises as a result of the first. It relates to the movement of workers. Cross-border mobility results in the blending of cultures, opinions, and perspectives. Globalization has enabled the amalgamation of economies, resulting in heightened labor mobility and migration. This phenomenon has led to the establishment of multicultural communities and has played a role in enriching social discourse by integrating.

Viewpoints from many cultural heritages (Castles & Miller, 2009) there is a contrasting perspective that challenges the notion that this merger is a harmonious one without any disparities in power. Globalization has enabled the dissemination of Western cultural norms and values on a global scale, frequently to the detriment of local cultures and traditions. The process of cultural homogeneity weakens social discourse by eradicating cultural variety and reducing the influence of marginalized populations. Cultural scholar Homi Bhabha claims that “hy-

bridization”—the mixing of cultures—results from globalization. This has resulted in dominant cultural narratives controlling indigenous voices, therefore making it difficult for many points of view to be recognised in social debates. The International Labor Organization (ILO) acknowledges that the many cultural and language backgrounds of workers provide challenges to social dialogue processes. The International Labor Organization (ILO) from 2007 provides the source of this data. Globalization has allowed a third challenge: it has generated economic inequalities both inside and across nations while simultaneously allowing a movement of capital, goods, and services across boundaries.

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Joseph Stiglitz in his book “Globalization and Its Discontents” (2002), contends that the advantages of globalization have not been equitably shared, leading to an increasing disparity between the affluent elite and the remainder of society. Economic inequality hampers social conversation by establishing power disparities that restrict the ability of marginalized groups to express their opinions and be adequately represented. The shifting power dynamics have frequently favored multinational businesses over labor unions and other civil society organizations. The power imbalance can

weaken the efficacy of social conversation since companies possess the means and clout to circumvent or manipulate conventional negotiating procedures. Corporations are leveraging globalization to benefit themselves and encouraging unwavering dedication. The workers have a feeling of apprehension that the employer may choose to relocate jobs to nations with weaker labor regulations and pay if the workers generate any discomfort for the business. The competition to reduce labor rights and safeguards impede social debate by diminishing the negotiating strength of workers and sabotaging collective bargaining procedures.

### **Variations in Social Dialogue Worldwide**

Social conversation systems have naturally evolved in many cultures and communities according to their own unique circumstances. Although the exact count of countries following the ILO guidelines for social development is unknown, it is clear that social debate exists in many official and unofficial spheres all around. The attempts at more general societal dialogues were fruitful. Establishing social discourse inside the European Union (EU) was much aided by the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, sometimes known as the Treaty on the European Union (TEU). It presented significant policies meant to promote cooperation among governments at both national and supranational levels, trade unions, and businesses (Hornung-Draus, 2020). Established institutional arrangements that allow regular interaction among companies, labor unions, and governments de-

fine the social dialogue in Europe most usually. Through its tripartite institutions—the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and the European Social Dialogue Committees—the European Union (EU) has a significant impact in promoting social discourse. Globally, these groups help to coordinate policies and collective bargaining (Bercusson, 2012). On the other hand, social debate in Asia is not as official and varies greatly between countries. China and India have fewer organized and informal channels of communication than Japan and South Korea, even though both countries have well-established customs of social cooperation and group bargaining (Chan & Ngai, 2019). Effective social discourse is hampered in many Asian countries by the absence of robust institutional systems and legal protections for workers' rights (Lee, 2007). Though it lacks a centralized framework of social cooperation like the European Union, the United States does have many mechanisms in place for corporate, labor, government, and communication negotiations. The National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) of 1935 provided the legal structure for collective bargaining and unionization, granting workers the entitlement to form and negotiate collectively. However, in contrast to Europe, where social conversation often involves government, employers, and unions, the United States predominantly engages in bipartite social dialogue, which centers on discussions between labor unions and companies. In general, the national dynamics have a crucial role in shaping the approach to social interaction.

### **Death of Social Dialogue in India**

Historically, worker participation in managerial decision-making in India can be traced to its origin in 1918 when the first such experiments on collective worker participation were undertaken in the Tata Iron and Steel Company (TISCO) in the event of major labor unrest (Badigannavar, 2017). Social Dialogue was missing from the picture back then. This was not due to a lack of information or data on labor status. Labor Statistics in India came into being with the first census in 1872. This census gave not only the count of the number of persons but also the number of gainfully employed. The issue was that social dialogue relied on mechanisms that help interactions and shared understanding to amicably resolve conflicts with an intent to protect worker rights and consequently maintain industrial peace. The role of political affiliations to labor unions was a great cause in promoting social dialogue. The involvement of freedom fighters associated the labor movement with nationalistic passions, therefore driving the attention of the British Government to this arena. In 1925, Subhash Chandra Bose became the president of the Tata Worker's Union (TWU) and led one of the biggest strikes in the pre-independence era. The agitation grew to the point that Mahatma Gandhi decided to visit the Jamshedpur plant to pacify the workers. This naturally drove the narrative across the nation through mass media publications and broadcasts and provided the union with the required legitimacy to deliberate with the management.

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The most common form that social dialogue evolved into was collective bargaining. By negotiating on a collective as opposed to individual basis, workers could agree on a “common rule” with employers that provided a “floor”, or minimum level, of working conditions in a particular factory, trade, industry or region (Webb & Webb, 1902). The Philadelphia Declaration by the International Labor Organization (ILO) of 1944, emphasized the fact that labor is not a commodity. This statement clarifies that the right of expression is mandated and that the will of labor in deciding their conditions cannot be compromised. In India, around the same time, the Industrialists gathered together to create the Bombay Plan. The Bombay Plan called for labor reforms and the introduction of welfare measures to improve working conditions and enhance the well-being of workers (Bhatia, 2005). It also addressed the formation of bodies to carry out this social dialogue. The Bombay Plan indirectly fueled the formation of labor unions and collective bargaining efforts among workers (Chandra, 2002). The implementation of the Bombay Plan in India brought about a notable transformation in the dynamics of labor relations, transitioning from conventional paternalistic approaches to more formalized structures of industrial relations (Chandra, 2002).

Under colonial India, labor relations were characterized by exploitative policies with little respect for workers’ rights or well-being (Nair & Ghosh, 2018). Using discussions with stakeholders, the government seeks opinions and suggestions on suggested changes to labor laws, therefore guaranteeing that the welfare and concerns of companies and employees are appropriately taken into account (Nair & Ghosh, 2018). Kuruvilla and Venkataratnam (1996) claim that social discourse was conspicuously lacking in pre-Independence India. This was primarily because the colonial authorities developed employment regulations of their own free will without significantly consulting workers or their representatives. As Pandian (2019) points out, workers often organize unofficial unions or organizations to address problems and start conversations with their management. Still, official channels of social communication were limited, and colonial officials often disregarded the defense of workers’ rights. India adopted a socialist approach to economic development after earning its freedom, giving government participation top priority and worker rights protection (Srivastava, 2012). The recently established government set tripartite institutions such as the Indian Labor Conference and the Standing Labor Committee (Srivastava, 2012) to encourage social discourse and cooperation among the government, companies, and workers’ representatives. Srivastava (2012) claims that social conversation is now a vital venue for discussing industrial relations policies, legislation, and labor regulations. For many of the stakeholders, this has fostered more consen-

sus-building and cooperation. Though with an increased emphasis on adaptation and competitiveness following worldwide patterns, the relevance of tripartite meetings in shaping labor policies and regulations remained constant (Nair & Ghosh, 2018). Social dialogue has played a crucial role in molding the course of Indian labor relations and promoting the interests of both workers and employers, from its colonial origins to present-day advancements.

Though strides were made post-Independence, scenarios changed after the 1991 economic reforms. Economic reforms in the 1990s led to shifts in industrial relations, with increased emphasis on market-oriented policies and reduced government intervention (Sinha, 2011). Privatization, liberalization, and globalization processes contributed to the weakening of trade unions and collective bargaining power, impacting the effectiveness of social dialogue mechanisms (Hirway, 2010). The rising pressure of the competitive market provided an incentive for companies to increase productivity. The focus had shifted and employers started tactics to minimize resistance to hire and fire. The unwanted workforce was being sought let off through means such as Voluntary Retirement Schemes (VRS). VRS schemes were introduced by the Indian government and various private sector companies as a means to address workforce restructuring, cost reduction, and organizational efficiency. Interestingly, voluntary was only in the name without any resemblance to reality. Unions across India tried to oppose the VRS schemes without much success. Eventually, a large

number of employees were seen off. VRS schemes have led to a decline in union power by reducing the size and influence of traditional labor unions (Ghosheh, 2016). Additionally, VRS often targets older and more experienced workers who are more likely to be union members, further eroding union strength and solidarity (Kumar & Tripathi, 2015). These workers were repositories of tacit knowledge and were also familiar with the negotiation tactics employed by the management. Hence, they enriched the very process of social dialogue. This major issue in all this was that collective bargaining as an instrument lost its significance and individualized contracts gained ground in Indian employment relations. By offering financial incentives directly to employees, VRS bypasses traditional union negotiations and allows management greater flexibility in implementing workforce reductions and cost-saving measures. The prevalence of VRS schemes has posed challenges for union organizing efforts, as employees may be less inclined to join unions or participate in collective action when offered lucrative exit packages (Kumar & Tripathi, 2015).

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Another fact is the rising demographic dividend for India. India was on track to become a nation of young people effectively meaning that a new labor force was flowing at an unprecedented rate in to the market. Static structural change in India

during the 1990s positively impacted labor productivity growth, as workers moved to sectors with higher labor productivity levels (Erumban et al., 2019). This meant that the bargaining power of workers decreased as unemployment increased and a fall in real wages occurred. Before liberalization in 1991, India had complex labor regulations that strengthened union power and increased job security in the formal economy at the cost of employment (Zagha, 1998). The stringent regulatory frameworks in India have often been blamed for the stunted growth of the secondary sector in India and the over-reliance on the tertiary sector for pushing economic growth. It is interesting to note that typically manufacturing (belonging to the secondary sector) has been the domain of union power. In the service sector, unions have been for the most part absent or at max powerless. The decline of union power which led to the missing social dialogue in India, was further accentuated by the fact the IT sector which now employed the largest number of employees was completely out of sync with social dialogue mechanisms. Examining the case of Australia, Peetz (1990) concluded that changes in industry composition of employment, average establishment size, and the declining propensity for employees to unionize are factors contributing to the decline of union membership.

### **Theoretical Underpinnings of Social Dialogue**

Social dialogue has been studied in the light of theories ranging from sociological - trying to explore the macro

aspect to psychological- the micro aspect of the process. As the focus of the article is on revitalizing the social dialogue process, the discussion shall center around the theories that can be linked to the process improvement part. That can be termed the backbone of the discussion on social dialogue, is the Labor Process Theory of Bavermann (1974). Labor Process Theory (LPT) has been a crucial resource in the sociology of work, particularly in the UK, providing resilience and innovation to adapt to globalized capitalism and its changing context (Thompson & Smith, 2009). LPT argues that the motive behind capitalist production techniques is the necessity to maximize profit using labor process control and manipulation. This sometimes entails the deliberate deskilling of employees using task fragmentation and administrative control systems. LPT emphasizes, important to the process of social conversation, the natural tensions and power struggles present in the workplace. LPT clarifies the roots of conflict and negotiation between employers and employees by examining how control is used and opposed inside the labor process. LPT further underlines the need for worker agency and group efforts in confronting management power and via means of collective bargaining, works councils, or participatory decision-making procedures, therefore furthering their interests via social dialogue channels. In this sense, Labor Process Theory offers an understanding of the structural limitations and possibilities influencing social interaction in industrial relations.

Established by sociologist Jürgen Habermas in 1984, the Communicative Action Theory emphasizes the need for communication in forming social reality and provides insightful analysis of the complex dynamics of social interaction. Social discourse is the communicative effort meant to reach mutual understanding and agreement. Habermas separates instrumental from communicative rationality; the latter is the ultimate aim of social discourse. This means giving open, inclusive, logical communication the top priority. According to Habermas, communicative activity is the reciprocal exchange of speech activities among people who actively engage in conversation with the express goal of reaching mutual understanding. The author outlines four fundamental validity claims in communicative action: truth, rightness, truthfulness, and sincerity. These assertions function as standards for assessing the authenticity of communicative processes and results. Social conversation is a mechanism where several players with divergent interests and viewpoints engage in negotiation and cooperation. If the four validity claims are satisfied, it guarantees a more favorable result for the social dialogue process. Communicative Action Theory, under the framework of industrial relations, elucidates the dynamics of social dialogue by emphasizing the significance of comprehensive and logical communication in resolving conflicts and achieving consensus among employers, employees, and other relevant parties.

The above theoretical lens, though laying the foundation for explaining the process of 'dialogue', must be comple-

mented by other theories to explain the complex nature of stakeholder motivations involved in this. Social Identity theory posited by Tajfel and Turner in 1972, states that in an intergroup context, social categorization "creates and defines an individual's own place in society" (Tajfel, 1972:293). Social categorization happens through the creation of prototypes. "Prototypes are typically not checklists of attributes but, rather, fuzzy sets that capture the context-dependent features of group membership, often in the form of representations of exemplary members (actual group members who best embody the group) or ideal types (an abstraction of group features)" (Hogg & Terry, 2000). The implication of this creation of prototypes is immense. The instituting of such prototypes gives rise to leadership as per Hogg and Terry. The higher the identification of an individual with the prototype, the more chances are to acquire leadership. Leadership in the unions, employers and even the state is not aloof from this. This theory thus can explain the nature of actors by looking closely at the viewpoints, assumptions and biases of the stakeholders involved. This has practical implications in a manner that it can give managers exact insights into why social dialogue suffers when similar kinds of leaders emerge on all fronts namely workers, employers and the state.

### **Revitalization of Social Dialogue**

The question arises if the fact of declining social dialogue and the subsequent revitalization attempts are not new, then why India is a special case? The context

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of social dialogue varies. Starting with union composition and union interaction with its own members are fraught with challenges and barriers of caste, creed and religion. It is for this reason that the power dynamics even in bringing cooperation within themselves is difficult. The spillover of biases against ethnicity and regionalism is rampant. It is not uncommon to come across a union or leader who wishes to halt the negotiations with the management if the management representative is of a different ethnicity or region. Naturally, the process of social dialogue itself suffers. Secondly, India being a collectivist culture, the social dialogue has a distinct scope to blossom but at the same time, the fact that the era of license raj saw the overbearing union-management equation, makes employers apprehensive towards the same. The economic philosophy post-1991 also shifted from Nehruvian socialism to market capitalism. Thirdly, feminization of the workforce has happened at a very rapid pace but at the same time, the participation of females in union has not seen a significant improvement. Women unions have increased in number but it still implies that there is a lack of inclusivity in traditional dialogue mechanisms.

The first feature of the revitalized social dialogue focuses on the width of the agenda associated with social dialogue (Prins et al., 2020). The focus here is to understand whether the discussion has

moved away from the traditional topics of interest or not. In yesteryears, the discussion was centered on employment conditions including wage, incentives and performance issues which have evolved to incorporate the issues of equality, diversity, well-being and sustainability to name a few. Indian labor historiography is shifting towards a more complex understanding of class, community, and working-class politics, while also addressing gendered identities and redefining formal/informal labor (Joshi, 2008). In India, the revitalization efforts should target moving the discussion to the newer realm but the biggest challenge glaring in the face has been the regulatory legal framework concerning labor. The 144 labor laws in India for years have a huge part to play in making the complete social dialogue revolve around wages, incentives and working conditions. The provisions of the various acts over time did not undergo significant change to incorporate provisions for the very basics of equality. The government too over the years thought it best to not indulge in reshaping the discourse. It was only in 2019, that the Government of India tried to club all the labor laws in a series of 4 codes and address some of the long-standing issues within the legal framework. The new Labor Codes in India will impact employee relations, requiring amicable solutions through social dialogue between management and trade unions (Mehrotra, 2023). It also opened up the scope for dialogue over new issues such as gig workers, and platform workers and redefined the concept of family among others.

The next feature of revitalization is changing the process itself (Prins et al., 2020). In their study, Prins and colleagues (2020) argued that social dialogue is considered to be a “slow, complex, over-structured, conservative, or excessively formal character.” In the Indian context, it is not so much about the process but rather whether the process itself has been born out of consensus. Garcia and colleagues (2015), wanted to ensure transparency in the process and initiatives to increase the sharing of information at a nascent stage, with scope for regular consultation (formal and informal). What we argue here is that the perception of transparency of the process itself is based on whether it is being agreed upon to be so. The person, place, timelines and compositions can influence the perception of transparency. Transparency is a three-dimensional construct consisting of perceived information disclosure, clarity, and accuracy, and can predict perceptions of the source’s trustworthiness (Schnackenberg et al., 2020). Therefore, for revitalization to happen, the deeper problem to be addressed is the lack of trust in the process of the concerned parties due to the years of inactivity and mutual suspicion that has been built.

The third feature that needs to be of consideration is the nature of the relationship fostered between the workers, employers and government. The quality of the relationship will determine the sustainability of the dialogue. The ideal union-management relationship involves a combination of cooperative, adversarial, and neutral factors, leading to a “constructive” approach (Huszczko & Hoyer,

1994). An extremely transactional relationship means that the parties indulge in a give-and-take relationship which might work extremely well when the traditional topics of wage and incentives are concerned but would not amount to the desired outcome when topics such as well-being and diversity are considered. It is important that a relationship built on mutual trust and concern for cause is present. The worker’s commitment towards the organization is built on the perception of goodwill of an employer who works in the interest of the larger good. To give an example, Tata Steel is one such organization that has built sustainable relationships among workers, management, government and even the local population whose lives are being positively affected. Positioning itself as a socially conscious organization, Tata Steel has successfully facilitated enriching social dialogue addressing concerns of diversity, sustainability and other green issues. The Tata Group’s unique philosophy integrates social responsibility and corporate functioning, leading to innovative initiatives in various industries for society and the local community (Shah, 2014). Interestingly, the success can also be attributed to the fact that such organizations do so by moving out of the legal framework.

The fourth feature to be looked at is the function of the union. Researchers claim that unions have traditionally been too narrow in their focus. Trade unions have limited themselves to the protection of workers’ rights and ensuring good working conditions. Unions have significant non-wage effects, influencing mod-

ern industrial life by providing workers with a voice at the workplace and in the political arena, beyond just raising wages (Freeman & Medoff, 1979). The perception in society over the years has been built that unions are synonymous with protests, strikes and go-slow, which has resulted in the loss of legitimacy and support of civil society. Socio-economic background and media influence the formation of attitudes towards trade unions, with media playing a key role in disseminating news and information about union affairs (Davis, 1979). The point to be proved by them remains that they are an important vehicle of social change and can meaningfully contribute to society. The diversification of the union's function and outlook is required. Trade unionism has been used as an industrial regulator, social emancipator, party instrument, moral force, and state instrument in various political systems (Martin, 1990). In India, the revitalization of unions is happening through co-operative movements where unions are diversifying themselves to become a socially responsible body. This shall help in bringing the social dialogue to the forefront. Co-operatives and trade unions are the oldest organizations of democratic participation, and their future relevance is crucial for addressing environmental degradation and globalization dominated by financial capital (Széll, 2018).

### **The Frame of IR Climate**

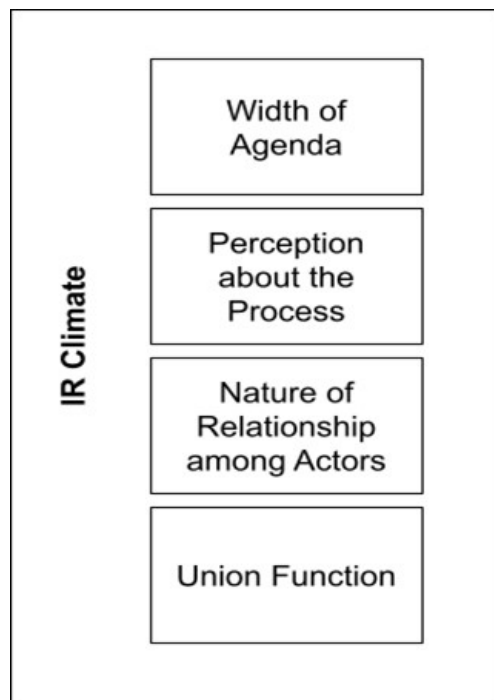
According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), the IR climate can be defined as “the prevailing atmosphere or tone of relationships between employ-

ers and workers or their representatives in the workplace, or between employers' or workers' organizations, and the general quality of the institutional environment for labor-management relations” (ILO, 2014). This includes factors such as the level of trust, communication, and cooperation between labor and management, as well as the prevalence of conflicts and disputes (Kochan & Osterman, 1994). This includes labor laws, collective bargaining agreements, and government policies related to employment, wages, working conditions, and dispute resolution mechanisms (Hyman, 2001). The broader socio-economic context, including factors such as unemployment rates, income inequality, and economic stability, also influences the IR climate. At the same time, it must not be perceived as something that is external to the organization. Dastmalchian et al. (1989) describe it also as a characteristic atmosphere in the organization, as perceived by ‘organizational members’.

As the definition makes it evident the IR climate is the sum total of all micro and macro-level variables. Therefore, the social dialogue takes place among players within this setting. It is therefore the larger framework where all the forces interact and produce the outcome. Interactions produce power imbalances between actors. Power imbalances, whether structural or situational, can affect the ability of workers to voice their concerns, negotiate fair terms of employment, and participate in decision-making processes (Edwards, 2003). A more holistic study of IR climate would consider organizational structures, practices, pro-

cesses and outcomes that influence, and are influenced by, everyday union–management and employee–management interactions at the workplace, because union-management relations are only one dimension of climate (Pyman et al., 2010). Hence the interwoven nature of the construct makes it imperative to consider in our conceptualization of revitalization.

**Fig. 1 The Social Dialogue Revitalization Framework**



### Way Ahead

Revitalizing social dialogue in India is imperative for fostering inclusive growth, enhancing labor relations, and addressing emerging challenges in the evolving socio-economic landscape. Future research directions in this domain

should focus on several key areas to deepen our understanding and inform policy and practice effectively. Firstly, scholars can explore the impact of recent socio-economic reforms, such as labor law amendments and digitalization, on the dynamics of social dialogue and labor relations in India. Understanding how these changes affect the bargaining power of workers, the role of trade unions, and the effectiveness of tripartite consultations is crucial for guiding policy interventions. Furthermore, it is essential to examine how the dynamics and effects of social communication are affected by non-traditional and unofficial work models including the gig economy. The studies carried out in this field could shed light on the challenges faced by casual workers trying to get social support and engage in group bargaining. Furthermore, the investigation of fresh approaches meant to promote social communication at the local level—community-oriented forums and participatory decision-making processes—may help us to better understand inclusive and participatory approaches in labor governance. Finally, longitudinal studies tracking the evolution of social communication over a long period and across several sectors can provide insightful analysis of the factors influencing successful conversation campaigns and the conditions fostering long-term cooperation among stakeholders. By addressing these research gaps, scholars can contribute to the development of evidence-based strategies for revitalizing social dialogue and promoting inclusive and sustainable development in India’s labor market.

## Conclusion

The research on social dialogue in India is missing owing often to the fact that the research and practice gap is immense. The recent labor codes have addressed the issues and could be a first step towards relaxing the structural constraints. The presented model tries to bring some structure to the narrative of social dialogue. It is now required that empirical research should support this model. The Indian scene is unique due to many sociological considerations and therefore the nuances of caste, creed and cultural context significantly affect the outcome of the social dialogue process.

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