

Some Remaining Challenges

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The preceding chapters have made it clear that important changes are taking place in employment relationships throughout the industrial world. Employers have experienced increasing pressures to be competitive in the global environment and have responded to them by experimenting with new management and human resources' strategies. However, the effectiveness of the strategies that have been implemented has yet to be determined, and several of the chapters have presented theoretical and empirical evidence that suggests that the strategies may have negative effects on the employees and, in the long run, organizational effectiveness.

Organized labor has not been impervious to these changes. The increasingly competitive commercial environment has heightened the determination of managements worldwide to resist unionization. The prevalence of collective bargaining has declined in many industrial democracies (Chaison & Rose, 1991). In the United States, the proportion of private-sector, nonagricultural workers who were union members dropped from 35% in the 1950s to 11.2% in 1993. The severity and perplexity of this decline is more apparent when one considers that public opinion polls continue to show that most Americans express approval of unions and the

right of workers to organize unions of their choice. E.E. Lawler and Mohrman (1987) pointed out that society should be very concerned about the weakening of organized labor, which has been an important voice for workers. The Dunlop Commission was similarly distressed by the apparent loss of an effective voice for workers, especially in its discussions of "contingent" worker-management relations and grievance arbitration in nonunion settings (Commission on the Future of Worker-Management Relations, 1994).

The purpose of this concluding chapter is to suggest how psychological research and theory can contribute to our understanding of these changes in employment relations. We focus here on three issues: who sets the research agenda; where behavioral research might usefully contribute to the effectiveness of organized labor in these changing times; and how we might usefully diversify the research methods used to study the problems confronting trade unions.

WHO SETS THE RESEARCH AGENDA?

With regard to the changing employment relationship, we must ask ourselves who sponsors and who receives the benefits of behavioral research on trade unions. In other words, why and for whom are we doing the research? In one sense, individuals do research in a particular arena because they choose to do so irrespective of its direct relevance in addressing organizational or social issues. As Hackman (1985) stated, "I strongly prefer to see a student do first-rate scholarship that has uncertain relevance for action than second-rate work that is immediately applicable to some organizational problem" (p. 127). However, regardless of the impetus for the research or its immediate applicability, Pettigrew (1985) noted, "the activity of research is clearly a social process, not merely a rationally contrived act" (p. 222). Thus, it is important that researchers remain aware of the consequences and context of their research.

Within the context of research on unions, Gordon and Nurick (1981) noted that we have to consider whether our research is conducted on behalf of unions or management. We extend this argument here to ask

whether the research we will conduct within the context of changing employment relations will serve our own academic interests, or will satisfy the needs of employers, their employees, or both. Campbell, Daft, and Hulin (1982) addressed this predicament by suggesting that significant research is most likely to occur when researchers are subjectively interested and involved in the topic and when they choose their research questions by asking their subjects, in this case employees, what the real issues are. We suggest that these two factors dictate how we should be setting our research agenda on changing employment conditions.

CHALLENGES TO ORGANIZED LABOR

These changing times have increased the salience of two issues to organized labor that were not considered in great detail in the preceding chapters: union organizing and leadership. Clearly, winning the right to represent employees must occur far more frequently than it does presently if the decline in union membership is to be reversed. At the same time, the challenge to union organizers has never been greater, given the hostility of employer campaigns to prevent certification and to provide tacit support for decertification efforts of unionized employees (J. J. Lawler, 1990).

Union leaders also have many new challenges. Increasingly, union officials are being asked to renounce traditional approaches to dealing with employment issues and instead embrace cooperative relations with management, including such programs as quality of work life or employee involvement. In helping to negotiate a meaningful role for unions in these new employment relationships, union leaders must be resourceful in helping employers deal with competitive pressures while remaining sensitive to the concerns of their union constituents about job security and justice in the workplace.

Whereas organizing has been the subject of numerous studies in the past, leadership has not received much attention from North American scholars (Barling, Fullagar, & Kelloway, 1992). It is our objective to raise questions about psychological and behavioral research on these matters.

Organizing

Psychologists seeking to apply behavioral science to the problems of organized labor have long recognized that organizing was among the most salient concerns of unions (Gordon & Nurick, 1981). Winning the support of workers to gain recognition for a union is the first step in creating union-management relations and gaining influence in the employment relationship. A great deal of research has been devoted to identifying the personal and organizational variables that are related to the willingness of workers to seek collective bargaining (Heneman & Sandver, 1983).

Despite the earlier popularity of this topic and its obvious importance to labor, organizing is, today, largely neglected by researchers. Several reasons may be cited for this current neglect. First, given the inclination of employers throughout the world to combat unionism, especially in the United States (Chaison & Rose, 1991), the goal of affecting the outcome of union organizing campaigns may be served better by legal initiatives than by additional behavioral studies. Second, research using actuarial methods of forecasting sentiment for union certification has already investigated many, if not most, salient predictors (Barling et al., 1992). Few stones appear to have been left unturned in the search for antecedents of support for unionization. Furthermore, there is substantial agreement across studies that job satisfaction and perceived union instrumentality consistently predict voting intentions and behavior in certification elections and that these two variables are central to models of the decision to join a union (e.g., Brett, 1980a; Premack & Hunter, 1988).

Research on organizing has reached a point of diminishing returns, and psychologists may have decided that the time is ripe to pursue new interests. If this is the case, it is relevant to ask what has been learned about the role of job satisfaction and perceived union instrumentality in organizing, that is, the process that *precedes* the union vote. Thus, we question whether the information collected about the unionization process by means of behavioral research has any potential application to union organizing campaigns.

Dissatisfaction with the employment relationship is the beginning of the union organizing process. Acting as individuals, most employees are

not able to change the nature of the employment relationship so that it becomes more favorable to their interests. A coalition of similarly dissatisfied workers is required as a basis for a union organizing campaign. However, evidence about the role of job satisfaction is based on research in which the individual is the unit of analysis. The link between individual dissatisfaction and the outcome of the certification election is less direct because election-level research has not used job satisfaction as a predictor variable. Nonetheless, Heneman and Sandver (1983, footnote 4) indicated that the actual vote distribution in the certification election was found to be "very similar" to self-reported votes of the individual participants. Given the similarity between the distributions for job satisfaction and self-reported vote, it would not be unreasonable to expect that the extent of job dissatisfaction among a group of workers would predict the number of votes for the union and hence the election outcome.

The second central variable in models of unionization is perceived union instrumentality. Union instrumentality is defined as the perceived impact of the union on traditional work conditions (e.g., wages, benefits, job security, promotions, hours of work, and health and safety) and non-traditional work conditions (e.g., employee productivity, treatment of employees, employee-management relations, job satisfaction, and company profitability) that define the employment relationship (Shore, Tetrick, Sinclair, & Newton, 1994). Conceptually, instrumentality perceptions vary in direction (i.e., the impact of the union may be viewed as beneficial or harmful) and strength (i.e., the degree of confidence that the union will improve or harm the conditions). The intent to vote for union representation is related to the strength of expectations that collective bargaining will result in improved working conditions. "In the end, a decision to organize a union is instrumental. Do employees involved believe they will be better off with a union or not?" (Brett, 1980b, p. 49).

The major implications of these research findings on unionization are that unions might target organizing campaigns toward workplaces where there is substantial job dissatisfaction and there is some agreement among workers about the usefulness of unions in alleviating the unpleasant working conditions. Unfortunately, union officials are unlikely to consider these

suggestions very enlightening. Indeed, organizers probably were well aware of the role of union instrumentality long before behavioral scientists discovered these phenomena. The importance of instrumentality is not lost on the present generation of union organizers, either. For example, in *Diary of an Organizer*, a conversation is described with a worker named Wendy in a suit manufacturing plant.

Wendy, meanwhile, was willing to argue with me, although she didn't trust me. Her first words were the inevitable, "I need my job, you know." Then she questioned me about what the union could do for her. That's the best sign. (Windham, 1994, p. 38-39)

Research on organizing has stopped short of resolving a number of quite fundamental questions, the answers to which would be of substantial value to unions. For example, although perceived union instrumentality clearly is the "fulcrum" of the unionization process (Barling et al., 1992), little is known about how perceptions of union instrumentality develop. Union instrumentality has been treated as an exogenous variable in all recent research on predicting the intent to vote for a union; that is, the instrumentality variable is assumed to be determined by factors outside the causal model under consideration (e.g., Brief & Rude, 1981; Montgomery, 1989). Consequently, no attempt has been made to explain the variability in union instrumentality. It is unfortunate from the standpoint of unions that psychologists appear to have concluded their studies of organizing with a widely known pronouncement about the importance of union instrumentality. Far more useful in the future, in our opinion, would be work that results in a set of recommendations about organizing tactics grounded in behavioral science that are likely to influence the development of perceptions of unions being instrumental in the attainment of a variety of valued worker goals.

In addition, we suggest that a critical question is why some individuals choose not to vote in union certification elections. Roomkin and Block (1981) have shown that the margin of victory in certification elections is often so small that the abstainers could have changed the outcome. Initial analyses (Hepburn, Loughlin, & Barling, 1994) suggest that abstainers lie

between pro-union and anti-union voters with respect to job satisfaction and union attitudes but that they also differ from both those groups with respect to how instrumental they believe their vote would be and their general interest in the election. This is an area for future research that could be central to union organizing.

In our view, psychologists should revive their interest in studying organizing. However, to do so may mean that traditional concepts and methodologies will have to be put aside in favor of less familiar epistemological approaches. In searching for a new epistemology, consider the comment of a union organizer from the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union. When asked what he considered to be the most important determinant of the success of an organizing campaign, he answered that the outcome will be determined by who gets to describe the plant first to the workers, the union or management. This reply reflects an intuitive understanding of the principle of socially constructed environments (Berger & Luckman, 1966), that is, that the reality of a situation is determined in part by our interactions with significant others.

The reality of a "union" is dependent on social constructions that are shared among a number of people and that allow for coordinated action. However, unions and union representation are social constructions that are subject to wide differences in interpretation because they are imbued with meaning as a consequence of social processes. Given this conceptual starting point, the job of the union organizer may be described as assisting individual workers to construct a social reality of work with redefined notions of power sharing and worker rights. The organizer must help instill the belief that workers are entitled to due process in the workplace and that they can challenge certain management decisions. Furthermore, there must be consensus that these entitlements may be obtained only as a result of casting one's lot with fellow workers and facing the prospect of having to sacrifice personal goals, on occasion, for the good of others. Thus, the organizer's task is an imaginative one, providing a framework to account for the stream of events and actions that occur during the organizing campaign and supplying a social context within which organizational events and experiences take on meaning. The organizer is less a de-

cision maker and more a creator of contexts in which decisions become meaningful. Organizers should recognize that they cannot control events, but they can influence the context against which events take on meaning through their use of stories, language, rituals, and symbols.

Leadership

It is no coincidence that we address the topic of leadership together with union organizing; indeed, the two topics go hand in hand. Although organizing constitutes one of the greatest challenges to present union officials, bold initiatives and inspirational leadership will be required to realize unions' organizing goals. For example, without becoming more inclusive through the effective representation of more minority and female workers, unions are unlikely to reverse the decline in membership levels in today's brutal industrial relations climate. Perhaps the goals of attaining greater inclusiveness and providing more effective representation would be more likely if, instead of being almost the exclusive province of White men, more top leadership positions were held by women and people of color, who constitute approximately 40% and 22%, respectively, of unionized workers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1992).

In terms of its salience for the problems of society as a whole, research on leadership always has been considered one of the most important undertakings of behavioral scientists (e.g., Rahim, 1981; Vroom, 1976). Literally thousands of studies of leadership were produced by social and industrial psychologists, although research by the former has decreased since the 1970s to a "quite modest" level (Meindl, 1993, p. 90). Although the popular appeal of this material is unquestioned, it may have little relevance for understanding union leadership. Indeed, it would be difficult to isolate any major leadership research within a psychological framework that has directly focused on union leaders.

However, the limited generalizability of current leadership literature is not simply a matter of its failure to study union officials directly. Rather, it is the assumptions that leadership is leader centered and that followers have unimportant roles to play in determining the behavior and organizational impact of leaders that limit the usefulness of leadership theory to

unions. These assumptions are more apparent when one considers the agenda of leadership research over the past 40 years that was aimed at improving the application of leadership in business organizations. Study began with a search for various physical and dispositional characteristics that identified good leaders and then was dominated by inquiries about particular behaviors that constituted effective and ineffective leadership.

The current convention in leadership paints a portrait of leadership in terms of a process that the leader ultimately controls:

Although mutual influence processes between leaders and followers are recognized, leadership is mostly conceptualized as something seized on, and exerted, by the leader. It is something to be performed by the leader; it is dispensed to, and used on, followers to influence and control them. (Meindl, 1993, p. 99)

This focus on the behavioral displays of leaders is consistent with the idea that they can wield considerable power. Managers, the subjects of most research on leadership, exercise control by virtue of their appointment to positions in a formal hierarchy that imbues them with legitimate power over subordinates. By contrast, union leaders have been empowered by their constituencies. Hence, union leaders are emergent leaders, and the legitimacy of their authority is derived from their election by constituents. This distinction is quite important because, if for no other reason, it offers clues as to where one is likely to find relevant literature that might provide theoretical and empirical foundations for informed study of leadership in unions.

Perhaps the research of greatest relevance to union leadership in this respect is the work of Hollander and his associates (e.g., Hollander, Fallon, & Edwards, 1977; Hollander & Julian, 1969). Appointed and emergent leaders were compared in a series of studies by examining the effects of the legitimacy of their authority. Basically, authority is a potential for action in social exchanges that occur within a social system. "Whether a leader's authority comes from appointment or election has been found to have distinct consequences for leader-follower relations" (Hollander, 1985, p. 507). These studies indicate that followers have greater personal invest-

ments in elected than appointed leaders. However, when things go wrong (i.e., the leader is perceived to lack competence or does not produce a favorable outcome), elected leaders are more susceptible to follower rejection. In negotiations experiments, elected representatives felt freer to yield on particular issues than appointed representatives, which was attributed to the elected representatives' lesser concern that taking liberties in reaching an agreement would compromise the loyalty of the group. Hollander (1985) suggested that these findings indicate that followers expect greater responsibility and success from leaders whom they elect.

Given the lack of substantial reward and coercive powers, Barling et al. (1992) pointed out that the traditional bases of influence for transactional leadership are not available to union leaders, who therefore cannot contrive effort exchanges (e.g., rewards in exchange for compliance). Consequently, influencing constituents is more reliant on transformational leadership, which is characterized by three factors:

- (1) charisma, whereby the union leader instills a sense of pride in the union and transmits the unions' mission, (2) individual consideration, which refers to the leaders' stimulation of learning experiences and individual involvement of rank-and-file members, and (3) intellectual stimulation, whereby the leader is intellectually innovative and stimulating, providing union members with new ways of looking at organizational issues. (Barling et al., 1992, p. 145)

Greater member identification with the goals of organized labor, and greater willingness to participate in voluntary union activities, presumably will be brought about by transformational leaders who cause members to behave in ways that transcend narrow self-interest.

The importance of transformational leadership is apparent in the writings of the few individuals who have investigated the effects of union leadership. Eaton (1992) linked the survival of organized labor to a stronger and more clearly articulated moral vision. Indeed, "union leadership is fundamentally moral leadership" (Eaton, 1992, p. 1). Given the aforementioned volatility of the international business environment, the viability of organized labor cannot be entirely based on economic self-interest. Rather, it is

incumbent on union leaders to disseminate the fundamental message of organized labor's commitment to social and economic justice.

Lokar (1994) introduced some intriguing ideas about transformational leadership and union structure. His "falling dominoes" thesis states that transformational leadership at higher levels of a union will cascade downward within the union to produce a sense of empowerment among stewards. Stewards, in turn, are likely to increase their extrarole behaviors (e.g., exercising more initiative and persistence in the handling of grievances and promoting member participation) to produce a sense of empowerment among the rank and file. These ideas await empirical verification and further theoretical development. For example, like many of its conceptual predecessors, Lokar's characterization of transformational leadership is leader centered and overlooks the role of followers. Consequently, the notion of leadership "cascading down" may be misplaced in a union organization. Also, Hogan, Raskin, and Fazzini (1990) pointed out that there can be a "dark side" to charismatic leadership. Charismatic leaders with strong narcissistic needs and needs for personal power can have destructive effects on the organization and their followers.

In summary, there is a great deal of research that can provide inductive and deductive bases for future empirical study of leadership in unions. Given the complexity of the subject and the vastness of the relevant literature, we have not attempted to define a research agenda. However, we do note that the processes relevant to leadership at the national and local levels might well differ and require different research questions as well as strategies. Nonetheless, we are convinced that the study of leadership in unions promises benefits not just to officials of organized labor and their followers, but to the discipline of psychology as well. Perhaps a more complete picture of leadership will be developed if its emergence is examined in the context of unions. Such a program of research would unavoidably be drawn to the role of followers by the political nature of union office and, its focus, just as inevitably, would be linked to the essence of leadership per se: "Leadership is not something a leader possesses so much as a process involving followership" (Hollander, 1993, p. 29).

CHANGING TIMES CALL FOR COMPLEX RESEARCH DESIGNS

Mitroff (1985) raised the question as to "why our old pictures of the world do not work anymore" (p. 18). In part, he suggested that we need to study the world as an organism. This suggestion implies that employment relationships can be understood only by examining all of the stakeholders within the employing organization (e.g., management, the employees and unions) as well as the larger social, political, and economic milieus in which the organizations (both the employing organization and the union) and individuals are embedded. In order to conduct research within these multiple levels of analysis, one must first understand the phenomenon. Understanding at the more basic level may require descriptive research or more sophisticated methods underlying the analysis of dynamic systems (e.g., Levine & Fitzgerald, 1992) before we can embark on research that has implications for practice.

For example, we earlier cast union organizing into the conceptual framework of socially constructed environments. This presents both new problems and opportunities for psychologists and behavioral researchers to develop more meaningful insights into the organizing process. Among the more obvious problems is the fact that the study of how we attach meaning to things, events, and people has not been a traditional area of study for industrial and organizational psychologists. Rather, the fields of interpretative sociology, the sociology of knowledge, and cognitive social psychology have focused on the processes by which humans come to share particular visions of the world and organizations within it.

Following these theoretical guidelines also recommends reliance on a variety of unfamiliar research methodologies. As opposed to the quantitative, actuarial approach used by many behavioral scientists in studying union organizing, social scientists who have conducted research on socially constructed environments have relied on qualitative methodologies. For example, in one study of union organizing derived from the social constructionist perspective, Prasad (1991) used document analysis and in-depth interviews to reconstruct the successful organizing campaign of Lo-

cal 34 of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees among clerical and technical workers at Yale University. Another qualitative approach, ethnography, entails getting to know an organization "from the native's point of view" (Schwartzman, 1993, p. 1). This may entail researchers' becoming participants in organizing campaigns as a way of deriving meaning from the events and activities.

Psychologists interested in the study of unions can expect several types of returns from their investments in new theory and methods that may guide future research along salient paths and broaden our insights into the organizing process. For example, from a vantage point on the ground, it may become more obvious how union instrumentality is developed. This information would appear to be useful to union organizers who might prepare more effective tactics for persuading workers to vote for unions. Also, behavioral scientists might embellish models of the unionization process that, as indicated above, have not thoroughly examined union instrumentality. Finally, research using the social constructionist metaphor has rarely been used to study organization creation (Prasad, 1991). Rather, biological metaphors, such as the population ecology model, have been used to examine organization building (e.g., Hanan & Freeman, 1987). Unfortunately, these organismic perspectives are not particularly informative as to what brings people together and how they identify emerging social relations as the foundation for an organization. The social construction metaphor directs one to examine the subjective meanings of actions for various members of the emerging organization, and unions would be studied as constructions and destructions of meaning.

There is a second institutional benefit to be derived from the suggested approach. The collection and analysis of data in an ethnographic study probably will require researchers to become more aware of day-to-day activities in a union. As a consequence, the psychologist is likely to gain a far more intimate and detailed understanding of unions and union leaders. In addition, union members are likely to gain a better appreciation of who psychologists are and what they try to accomplish with their science. Developing a better, more productive relationship between psychologists and unions has been a long-standing challenge (Gordon & Nurick, 1981;

Shostak, 1964). Perhaps this research approach will accomplish what conferences and research bulletins intended to build bridges between academicians and organized labor have failed to achieve in the past.

The ultimate, practical question is whether a meaningful course of action or intervention can be developed based on our research. Organizations, whether corporations or unions, are unlikely to let us intervene without some assurance that the intended consequences have value to the enterprise and are likely to occur given proper implementation of the intervention. To provide such assurance, researchers need to have the richer understanding of the environment that can be derived from qualitative research and an established working relationship with the organization. Therefore, the coupling of qualitative research with more traditional methodologies (such as creative quasi-experimental designs like that used by Catano, Cole, & Hebert, 1994) promises to advance our understanding of the challenges of changing employment relations and strategies for meeting these challenges.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this book, the focus has been on changing employment relations. Specifically, the nature and extent of changing employment relations have been examined as have some of the consequences for organizations and their members. The similarities across national boundaries are striking. Employers are reducing their commitment to individuals by providing less long-term, full-time employment. Employees are experiencing increased stress because they must work harder in the short term with less job security for the long term. At the same time, declining union representation removes protection of the workers from arbitrary actions on the part of the employer. Similarly, diversification of the workforce in many countries has made the task of satisfying workers' needs and expectations more complicated for both employers and union.

Fundamental changes have occurred in employment relations, and most of our contributors expect change to be a hallmark of organizations in the future. Some of these changes will be the result of internal processes

in the organizations themselves (e.g., new forms of union representation, mandated works councils in Europe, and the acceptance of social clauses by transnational firms that guarantee minimum workers' rights). Other changes will occur as a consequence of volatility in the economic, political, and social environments. Recognizing this, it is apparent that future research on unions should be informed by both the concepts and methods of other disciplines, such as social psychology and social cognition theory, and should recognize the insights and units of provided by other epistemologies, such as the social construction of reality. This is especially important in understanding employment relations that are changing and that are defined by multiple actors and groups with common as well as conflicting interests.

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