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WITH THEIR UNION**

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DETERMINANTS OF MEMBERS' SATISFACTION WITH THEIR UNION

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This paper examines the level of satisfaction with their union expressed by members of a large Australian union. The role of a number of attitudinal, environmental and behavioural factors are explored, including some not previously examined in studies of union satisfaction. Some findings of previous research are confirmed, while evidence was found for the hypothesised influence of previously unexplored variables. The major determinant of union satisfaction found in this study was specific instrumentality, that is, the extent to which members perceived the union to be effective in achieving favourable outcomes for them.

INTRODUCTION

Union density has declined significantly over the last 15 to 20 years in most developed economies. In Australia, about half the workforce was unionised in 1982; by 1995 this ratio had declined to less than one-third. Unions have failed both to recruit sufficient new entrants into the movement, and to stem the flow of those leaving unions. This paper focuses on the latter aspect of deunionisation, by examining membership levels of satisfaction with their union, a factor identified by previous research as a key attitudinal variable influencing the decision to maintain membership in a union (Griffin and Svensen, 1996).

The many, varied and sometimes inconsistent labels attached to attitudinal constructs examined in previous union satisfaction research have the potential to

cause confusion and imprecision. This problem will be attacked here by hypothesising two attitudinal constructs related to union satisfaction: instrumentality (the degree to which a union or unions in general are perceived to be effective in improving the lot of their members) and affectivity (the degree to which a member shares the values of, and feels part of, a union or the union movement in general). The theoretical justification for employing these two dimensions is provided by Sverke and Kuruville (1995) and Sverke and Sjoberg (1995), who argue that pro-union behavioural intentions and union participation are best explained by the two attitudinal constructs, value rationality-based commitment, and instrumental rationality-based commitment. Newton and Shore (1992) and Shore and Newton (1995) also employ a two-dimensional model which distinguishes between cognitive and affective components of union commitment. Instrumentality is a cognitively-based construct usually linked to a simple utility-maximising model of behaviour. Affectivity is a more emotionally-based construct and is therefore not adequately explained by utility theory, and a social learning theoretical approach is generally implied, with the influence of others seen as the main determinant of feelings towards unions (Barling, Kelloway and Bremermann, 1991; Newton and Shore, 1992).

A further distinction is needed to eliminate potential confusion between constructs which deal with attitudes to a specific union (specific instrumentality and specific affectivity) and those attitudes which relate to attitudes about unions in general (general instrumentality and general affectivity) (Deshpande and Fiorito, 1989; Deshpande and Viswesvaran, 1994). Most of the attitudinal variables employed as independent variables in union satisfaction research can be assigned unequivocally to one of the four categories of specific and general instrumentality and affectivity, with the exception of behaviourally-based variables like union participation, and perceptions of member-union relations. The latter variable is usually treated as instrumental, but there is little theoretical or empirical justification for doing so, and it will therefore be treated as a separate category.

Of the attitudinal aspects of unionisation, union satisfaction has received the least research attention. Glick, Mirvis and Harder (1977) examined bivariate relationships between union satisfaction and a range of variables among a sample of 185 engineers. They found that the level of union satisfaction was correlated with general and specific union instrumentality, perceptions of member-union relations, overall job satisfaction and quality of union leadership. No relationships were found with general affectivity or willingness to participate in union activities, while no strong relationships were found with a range of socio-demographic characteristics.

In regression analyses of a large sample of Swedish union members and a smaller sample of US union members, Jarley, Kuruvilla and Casteel (1990) also found that perceptions of member-union relations had a strong relationship with union satisfaction. Fiorito, Gallagher and Fukami (1988), in a regression study of 228 union members from various industries, found support for the relationship between union satisfaction and specific instrumentality (bread and butter issues, but not quality of work life) and member-union relations. Socio-demographic variables and general instrumentality were found to be non-significant, while general affectivity was significant only at the .10 level. In contrast with the findings of Glick, *et. al*, (1977) a significant relationship was found between union satisfaction and union participation; no relationship was found with job satisfaction, except for an association at the .10 significance level with items related to working conditions. Leicht (1989), on the other hand, in a regression analysis of 2280 employees of 52 firms covered by 15 unions, found a relationship between union satisfaction and extrinsic job satisfaction (i.e. satisfaction with pay and conditions), but no relationship with intrinsic job satisfaction (i.e. satisfaction with the non-material rewards of the job). Chacko (1985) found a negative relationship between union satisfaction and participation, while Kolchin and Hyclak (1984) found no relationship between these variables. Finally, Kuruvilla, Gallagher, and Wetzel (1993), in regression analyses of large Swedish and Canadian samples, found relationships between union satisfaction and general instrumentality, extrinsic job satisfaction, intrinsic job satisfaction (the

relationship was weaker than for intrinsic job satisfaction) and co-workers' views about unions, but not with friends' views, union participation, or general affectivity.

To summarise the previous findings, perceptions of member-union relations, specific instrumentality and extrinsic job satisfaction have been found to relate consistently to union satisfaction. There is little evidence of a strong relationship between union satisfaction and intrinsic job satisfaction or general union affectivity. Anomalous findings have been recorded in the case of general instrumentality and union participation. Only one study has examined social influences, and this study did not examine the possible influence of family or employers.

One of the advantages of using the general-specific and instrumentality-affectivity dimensions is that it reveals that specific union affectivity has not received any attention as an independent variable in studies of union satisfaction (although 'union commitment' has been analysed as a dependent variable in some of the studies). Furthermore, only a very limited range of social variables has been examined in previous union satisfaction research. If co-workers' views can influence union satisfaction, as found by Kuruvilla, Gallagher, and Wetzel (1993), it follows that the role of other possible agents, like family and supervisors, should be examined.

Finally, very little emphasis has been given to the possible influence of attitudes relating to the working environment on union satisfaction. An Australian study by Deery, Iverson, and Erwin (1994) found that employee perceptions of a cooperative workplace industrial relations climate were associated with higher employee commitment to the company but lower commitment to the union. Coupled with empirical evidence of a strong relationship between union commitment and union satisfaction (Kuruvilla, Gallagher and Wetzel, 1993), these results suggest that the industrial relations climate in the workplace may be related to overall union satisfaction. Angle and Perry (1986) found that the

relationship between industrial relations climate and union commitment was not monotonic, and that union commitment levels were very similar in companies with very good and very poor industrial relations climates. Certainly, the majority of Deery, Iverson, and Erwin's subjects appeared to rate the industrial relations climate at their workplace as poor (mean = 2.86 on a five-point scale) and there is a possibility that the results of that study are not generalisable to workplaces with more cooperative industrial relations climates. As the present study surveys employees from many workplaces, it will be possible to test for the presence of a hypothesised interaction between industrial relations climate and union satisfaction.

METHOD

Subjects

The study formed part of a wider survey of members of a large amalgamated union with members in a range of blue and white-collar occupations in the public and private sectors conducted by the first author in 1994. Survey instruments were sent randomly to 6757 members, and 2646 useable forms were returned, a response rate of over 39 per cent. The sample consisted of 1111 females and 1535 males; 1004 were public sector blue-collar workers, 1046 were public sector white-collar workers, and 596 were private sector workers. The majority of respondents were born in Australia (82 per cent), supported the Australian Labor Party (50 per cent), were aged between 30 and 50 years (63 per cent), worked in a capital city (59 per cent), were full-time (87 per cent) and permanent (96 per cent) employees, had been union members for no ten years or less (62 per cent), and never or only occasionally attended union meetings (71 per cent).

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable employed was a single item rating overall satisfaction with the union measured on a five-point Likert-type scale.

Independent Variables

Fifteen variables were selected based on the theoretical and empirical considerations previously outlined. These were:

1. General Instrumentality (3 items related to the instrumentality of unions in general).
2. Specific Instrumentality (3 items related to the instrumentality of the specific union).
3. General Affectivity (3 items related to the affectivity towards unions in general).
4. Specific Affectivity (3 items related to the affectivity towards the specific union)
5. Member-union Relations (one item asking respondents whether they would approach a union representative for help in the event of them having a work-related problem).
6. Union Participation (one item asking respondents to describe their level of involvement in the union).
7. Intrinsic Job Satisfaction (one item asking respondents to rate their agreement with the statement 'When I finish work I generally feel that I've achieved something').
8. Global Job Satisfaction (one item proxy for extrinsic job satisfaction).
- 9 — 12. Family, Co-workers', Friends', and Immediate Boss' views of their union membership (one item each, 'How do the following groups view your membership?').
13. Workplace Atmosphere (an item asking the extent to which it was supportive of union membership).
14. Industrial relations Climate (one item asking respondents how well they got on with employer on industrial relations issues).

15. Union Satisfaction x Industrial Relations Climate, a measure of the interaction between union satisfaction and industrial relations climate, computed by calculating the product of the deviations from the mean of each variable. This method eliminates any possibility of multicollinearity (Cronbach, 1987; Jaccard, Turrisi and Wan, 1990).

Each item was measured on a five-point Likert-type scale. The construct validity of the multiple-item scales was supported by principal-axis factor analyses, which confirmed that each variable was unidimensional and distinct from the others. Alpha reliability coefficients for the scales were satisfactory (.78 and above).

Procedure

Standard diagnostic tests were performed to ensure that none of the variables violated assumptions of normality, linearity, singularity, homoscedasticity and multicollinearity (Tabachnick and Fidell, 1989). No violations of assumptions were detected. Forced-entry multiple linear regression was then conducted on overall level of satisfaction with the union employing all independent variables described.

RESULTS

The results of the regression analysis are set out in Table 1. The model significantly predicted union satisfaction, and the predictor variables accounted for 40 per cent of the variance in the dependent variable.

Table 1. Regression Analysis Results for Union Satisfaction

Variable	Unstandardised Regression Coefficient (standard error)	Standardised Regression Coefficient	t-value	p
General Instrumentality	-.035 (.010)	-.085	-3.346	.0008
Specific Instrumentality	.190 (.009)	.522	20.658	.0000
General Affectivity	-.011 (.009)	-.029	-1.206	.2280
Specific Affectivity	.036 (.010)	.088	3.752	.0002
Member-union Relations	.095 (.015)	.116	6.362	.0000
Union Participation	.044 (.020)	.038	2.145	.032
Intrinsic Job Satisfaction	.016 (.020)	.063	0.817	.414
Global Job Satisfaction	.062 (.021)	.064	2.986	.0029
Family's Views	.049 (.023)	.044	2.162	.0307
Fellow workers' Views	.016 (.024)	.014	0.689	.4907
Friends' Views	-.015 (.025)	-.012	-0.610	.5421
Boss' Views	.029 (.019)	.028	1.516	.1296
Workplace Atmosphere	.074 (.020)	.069	3.662	.0000
IR Climate	.082 (.016)	.095	5.110	.0000
IRCxUsat Interaction	-.049 (.015)	-.055	-3.333	.0009

Summary Statistics

R ²	.399
Adjusted R ²	.395
F (14, 2276)	100.848
Signif of F	.0000
Durbin-Watson	1.934

Consistent with previous research, perceptions of member-union relations, specific instrumentality and extrinsic job satisfaction were found to be related to union satisfaction, while no relationship was found in the case of either intrinsic job satisfaction or general union affectivity. The finding of a positive relationship between satisfaction and union participation was not consistent with two of three previous studies, but the relationship was not strong and may be attributed to the large sample size.

Support was found for the finding of Kuruvilla, Gallagher and Wetzel (1993) of no relationship between satisfaction and friends' views, but, unlike that study, we found no relationship with co-workers' views. The views of immediate family was significant at the .05 level, but there was no relationship with immediate bosses' views.

Both workplace atmosphere and industrial relations climate were associated significantly and positively with union satisfaction. There was a negative relationship between general instrumentality and union satisfaction that was not predicted by previous theoretical or empirical unionisation literature. Specific affectivity was also found to be positively associated with satisfaction, although the relationship was not as strong as for specific instrumentality. As expected, the interaction between Industrial Relations Climate and Union Satisfaction was significant. The relationship was only moderate and the cell means did not show marked deviation from monotonicity. However, subjects who rated Industrial Relations Climate as 'good' or 'excellent' were much less likely to rate satisfaction as 'unsure', and interaction was noticeable at the extreme levels of satisfaction (Table 2).

Table 2. Satisfaction by Industrial Relations Climate Interaction

IR Climate	Union Satisfaction (mean)	Proportion who were:	
		Very Dissatisfied (per cent)	Very satisfied (per cent)
Poor	3.18	6.9	7.8
Not Good	3.29	1.9	5.6
Reasonable	3.44	2.5	5.1
Good	3.65	1.9	7.2
Excellent	3.56	11.4	12.8

Specific instrumentality was by far the most highly significant predictor of satisfaction. The next most significant predictors were Member-union Relations and Industrial Relations Climate.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The research design employed in this study assumes a direct relationship between the dependent variables and the independent variables and it is possible that indirect relationships exist which could be tested, for example, by covariance structure models. The specification of such models, however, is considered unwarranted in the light of the present state of theoretical development (Brannick, 1995; Breckler, 1990; Williams, 1995). The study also exhibits the usual limitations inherent in a cross-sectional study of members of one union: that is, causation cannot be inferred, and that generalisation is risky. Notwithstanding these limitations, findings of theoretical and practical interest deserving of further attention have been obtained.

Theoretically, the most interesting findings were the positive and highly significant relationship between union satisfaction and industrial relations climate, the significant effect of the interaction between industrial relations climate and union satisfaction, and the finding of a negative relationship between union satisfaction and general union instrumentality. The first relationship would appear to run counter to the finding of Deery, Iverson and Erwin (1994) that union commitment is associated negatively with perceptions of harmonious industrial relations climate, given that union commitment and union satisfaction are usually positively correlated. Our finding is supported indirectly by Peetz (1996) in a study of 35 Sydney workplaces, who reported that the majority of employees expressed a preference for a cooperative (but not acquiescent) relationship between union and employer. It would appear from the significant interaction effect that workplace industrial relations climate moderates the relationship between climate and feelings towards unions and that such environmental influences need to be taken into account in future research of this type.

The finding of a negative relationship between general union instrumentality and union satisfaction can be explained in terms of either cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) or expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964). A person who enters the union holding a belief that unions in general are instrumental may experience cognitive dissonance if the performance of their union does not measure up to their expectations, and this would be expected to result in lower satisfaction. Alternatively, a person may find that the instrumental performance of their union exceeds the expectation derived from their beliefs about general instrumentality, and this would be expected to increase satisfaction.

The level of union participation was found to be only moderately related to union satisfaction in this study. Union members in Australia and elsewhere display generally low levels of participation in union activities (Griffin and Benson, 1987), and this would tend to reduce the magnitude of any relationship. In addition, the relationship between the two variables is not a simple one (Chacko, 1985). A proportion of people who participate in union activities may do so because they

are not satisfied with some aspect of the union's operations. It should not be concluded, then, that encouraging union participation will be an ineffective means of increasing union satisfaction.

Apart from a weak relationship with the views of immediate family, no support was found for the effect of the opinions of significant others on union satisfaction. It may well be the case, however, that social influences have more indirect effects.

At a practical level, the results suggest that the most effective single way unions can maintain and increase the satisfaction of members is to increase the perception of members that the union is effective in advancing their interests. The results also indicate the need to establish and maintain good relations between union officials and members and that union satisfaction is enhanced in a co-operative industrial relations climate.

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