

**UNION AMALGAMATIONS:
MOTIVATION, BARRIERS,
RISKS, AND BENEFITS**

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Abstract

Union amalgamations are a complex phenomenon, and are not easily achieved. Typically declining membership and related financial difficulties, overlapping jurisdictions, lack of economies of size, the need to increase bargaining power, employer re-organisation or corporate mergers, and protection against raids from other unions are cited as motivating forces behind an amalgamation. Increased bargaining power as a marketing tool is used by union officials in promoting amalgamations. Opposition from both union officials and rank and file members, who may fear a loss of power or identity, may thwart amalgamations. That is, certain sectional interests can obstruct what may have led to positive gains for the average member. Pressure brought to bear from other unions can also prevent an amalgamation. The principal perceived benefit flowing from an amalgamation is increased union power. The potential risks associated with an amalgamation may include the loss of power of rank and file members, a sense of alienation from rank and file members, and an increase in the power of union officials.

UNION AMALGAMATIONS: MOTIVATION, BARRIERS, RISK, AND BENEFITS

INTRODUCTION

Union amalgamations are a complex institutional phenomenon - as Chaison (1986) explains, a 'merger' may unite partners of equal size and strength in combinations of mutual benefit, or bring together the weakest and strongest of unions.

Amalgamation is a response unions typically employ to cope with a declining membership. In turn, amalgamations are thought to generate economies of size, reduce costly duplication of expenditures, and increase financial and administrative resources (Williamson 1995). But amalgamations may also have negative aspects that should not be overlooked: rank and file members may experience a loss of identity, history and tradition; union leaders may fear a loss of status in the new union structure; and obviously, there is a need for all involved to adapt to the philosophy of the new union.

MOTIVATION TO AMALGAMATE

The literature outlining the reasons behind union amalgamations suggest that it is a broad, multi-faceted, and intricate process (Janus 1978; Chitayat 1979; Chaison 1986; Conant and Kaserman 1989). Chaison (1986) who has undertaken significant research into union amalgamations in North America offers six not mutually exclusive, principal reasons:

- declining membership and related financial difficulties;
- overlapping jurisdictions;
- lack of economies of size;¹
- the need to increase bargaining power;
- employer re-organisation or corporate mergers; and
- protection against raids from other unions.²

Declining membership and related financial difficulties

A decline in membership and related financial difficulties are the major causes of union amalgamations (Dewey 1971; Buchanan 1974; Janus 1978; Chaison 1986). The problems of declining membership and financial difficulty are clearly interrelated and compound each other. For example, a decline in membership, for whatever reason, will lead to a decline in revenue through union fees. As a consequence, the union may lack adequate funding to recruit new members, or to carry out effectively the tasks necessary to represent its members. Unions have several options in these circumstances. They may reduce the services they provide to members, or increase union fees - both stop-gap measures, or they may amalgamate. According to Dewey (1971), the latter option is the one most commonly favoured by unions experiencing declining membership.

Membership decline however, may not necessarily be the predominant characteristic. In an analysis of U.S. union mergers between 1900 and 1978, Chaison (1986) found that more than a third of the absorbed and amalgamating unions had actually achieved membership growth prior to the merger. Griffin (1992) suggests that the findings of Undy, Ellis, McCarthy and Holmes (1985) may provide an explanation of this somewhat contradictory situation. Undy et al. (1985) propose that merging unions initially react in response to changes that affect some aspect of size, which produces in turn, *defensive, consolidatory and aggressive* approaches. Size change influences are of two, not mutually exclusive kinds: absolute changes in membership size, and relative size developments.

¹ Economies of scale means that all inputs are increased by the same ratio or percentge. Economies of size means that the ratio or percent of change is not the same for all inputs.

² Hocking (1990) employed elements of Chaison's (1986) explanations in her study on union amalgamations

Undy et al. (1985:157-8) argue that significant and adverse absolute changes in membership size lead to *defensive* mergers that are designed to avert the problems of financial crisis or membership decline. Furthermore, they maintain that relative size developments can lead to either *consolidatory* mergers, in which two relatively strong unions in a given industry or occupation decide to pool resources for mutual advantage, or alternatively, *aggressive* mergers, in which a union expands its job territories as the basis for further growth. Willman and Cave (1994:406) coined the term *expansionist merger* to describe a type of merger where one union, to become occupationally and industrially more diverse, gains new members through a transfer of members from smaller unions.

In sum, motivation for a union to amalgamate exists not only when absolute membership is falling, but also when a union wishes to consolidate its position as the principal union in a given industry, or when a union wishes to enhance its relative position vis à vis other competitor unions.

Narrow or overlapping jurisdictions

Jurisdictional problems may also be an incentive for amalgamation (Dewey 1971; Janus 1978; Windmuller 1981; Chaison 1986; Hocking 1990; Shostak 1991; Stratton-Devine 1992). By amalgamating, unions with narrow or overlapping jurisdictions can reduce duplication of effort, and strengthen their bargaining position.

A union may be incapable of expanding for example, if it shares sections of its jurisdiction with other unions, or if it is boxed into a narrow jurisdiction (Chaison 1986). However, a large union can attract weaker unions within its industry seeking refuge from organising and financial difficulties (Shostak 1991). Freeman and Brittain (1977:178) term an amalgamation of unions in similar jurisdictions as '*commensalistic*'. They suggest that in this sort of relationship, unions amalgamate on the basis of perceived similarities that form the basis for solidarity. On the other hand, unions may amalgamate in dissimilar jurisdictions on the basis of complementary differences - as Stratton-Devine (1992) argues, in this type of arrangement, what one union lacks, the other may provide.

Lack of economies of size

Critical mass is seen as an advantage to unions - amalgamation enables the combined unions to increase their size and financial assets, improve their organising capacity, and reduce duplication of the services and functions they perform (Freeman and Brittain 1977; Chitayat 1978). Chaison (1986) argues that the inability to attain economies of size in union operations is a frequent cause of amalgamations, particularly for smaller unions. Dewey (1971), Gill and Griffin (1981) and Conant and Kaserman (1989) provide supporting explanations.

Dewey (1971) suggests that the organisational problems associated with the management of smaller unions that include such dimensions as, the increasing cost of staffing and maintaining a union's headquarters, and providing the same array of member services as larger unions, place an acute burden on small, or even medium sized, unions.

While it may well be that smaller unions are 'more in tune' with their membership and their discrete needs as argued by Fox, Howard and Pittard (1995), an alternative school of thought (Buchanan 1981; Gill and Griffin 1981; and Conant and Kaserman 1989), propose that larger unions operate on a cheaper cost ratio per member as a result of economies of size within certain areas of union operations, such as negotiation, advocacy, research and information services. An Australian perspective on this is provided by Hocking (1990). Her research into an amalgamation between the Civil Service Association of Western Australia (CSA) and the University Salaried Officers Association of Western Australia (USOA) found that the services offered by the USOA before the amalgamation were limited due to a lack of adequate finances. In contrast, the CSA owned a six storey office building, possessed a comprehensive research library, linked to Viatel, enabling access to the ACTU library, computerised membership records, and a large number of industrial staff (Hocking 1990). And, in the U.S. the small (1,000 members), Licenced Practical Nurses Association of Washington State, amalgamated with the larger Services Employees International Union

because that union had experienced local leaders, and importantly, expertise in negotiating contracts (Williamson 1995).

Rather surprisingly, little research has explored the effectiveness of union mergers on the outcomes of representative effectiveness and administrative benefits. However, two studies, one from the U.K. (Willman and Cave 1994), and one from Australia (Davis 1996 cited in Deery *et al.* 1997), have begun to fill this void. Willman and Cave (1994) argue that U.K. union mergers have often damaged representative effectiveness, and have yielded few administrative benefits. According to Willman and Cave (1994), damaged representative effectiveness on the part of merged unions results from merged unions maintaining divisional structures representing previous union affiliations. While acknowledging that such divisional structures allow members to retain an identity with both their former union and the merged union, Willman and Cave (1994) argue that these structural arrangements lead to a duplication of functions, and thus, inflate union running costs. Furthermore, Willman and Cave (1994) argue that merged unions do not always result in improvements in administrative costs per capita.³

Davis' (1996) findings were somewhat different - while he found that larger unions in Australia did have lower per capita administrative costs, the fulfilment of such economies of size had been hindered by complex new structures (Deery *et al.* 1997). In a detailed case study of three amalgamations, Davis found that two years after amalgamation the unions operated with separate funding and budgeting arrangements, separate leadership and governance structures, and two distinct sets of rules within the merged union's rulebook (Deery *et al.* 1997).

The need to increase bargaining power

Declining bargaining power can result from diminished union membership, concomitant financial difficulties, a dying industry or craft, or inter-union competition (Chaison 1986).

Chaison (1986) and Stratton-Devine (1992) argue that increased bargaining power acts as a motivational force when potential 'partners' negotiate with the same employer(s) operating in the same or related industries. U.K. (Buchanan (1981) and U.S. research (Williamson 1995), confirms this argument. Buchanan (1981) for example, found that the main motivational factor behind amalgamations between white-collar and professional groups such as nurses and teachers, was the perceived need to improve their bargaining position. Similarly, Williamson (1995) found that an important amalgamation in 1987 involving U.S. professional health care workers was motivated by the need to increase both resources and bargaining power.

Stratton-Devine (1992) found that bargaining power may increase after an amalgamation for several reasons: an amalgamated union can negotiate as a team with employers, thus gaining more leverage; and employers are unable to play one union off against another, negating the divide and conquer strategies adopted by management. Over twenty years ago, in a comment still relevant, Janus argued that large industrial unions are attractive because through them, workers have a stronger voice with 'today's industrial giants' (1978:14). The technical nature and complexity of collective bargaining, for example, require specialised expertise and research. A small union, due to its inadequate size and financial base may be unable to negotiate on an equal footing with organisations that have trained industrial relations negotiators. Indeed, the link between increased bargaining power and amalgamation has been identified by Chaison (1986) as a marketing tool used by union officials in promoting amalgamations.

Employer Re-organisation, Corporate Mergers, and Employer Diversification

Amalgamations may also be influenced by the need for unions to respond to employer re-organisation, corporate mergers, and employer diversification (Dewey 1971; Buchanan 1974; Janus 1978; Chaison 1986; Conant and Kaserman 1989; Hocking 1990; Williamson 1995).

³ Willman and Cave (1994) refer to the research of Aston (1987), Willman and Aston (1993), and Willman and Morris (1994) in support.

Concerning corporate merger activities, one line of U.S. research has found that discrete types of corporate merger activities can affect the union membership status of workers, in different ways (Peoples 1995). Peoples (1995) used a broad range of data⁴ to analyse the specific effects of *horizontal*, *vertical*, and *conglomerate* mergers⁵ on union membership status. The results of equations estimating union membership status after a company merger revealed the following. For *horizontal* and *vertical* mergers, the probability of a worker being a union member was positively correlated with merger activity (statistically significant at the 0.01 level). On the other hand, for *conglomerate* mergers, the probability of a worker being a union member was negatively correlated with merger activity (statistically significant at the 0.01 level). Peoples (1995) proffers the following explanations. *Horizontal* mergers usually occur within the jurisdiction of a single union, and thus may prevent employers diverting operations away from union plants. Concerning *vertical* mergers, Peoples (1995) argues that the production process strengthened the staying power of the union by diminishing the merged employer's ability to transfer operations to a non-union plant. However, a *conglomerate* merger (two unrelated firms) adversely affected the union status of production workers in several ways. First, conglomerates are unlikely to be covered by a single union jurisdiction. Second, union 'staying power' is weaker, as *conglomerates* do not rely on production from other acquired plants. Hence, Peoples (1995:55) contends that a *conglomerate* firm is in a strong position to reduce union coverage. Evidence from his research indicated a strong pattern of lower union membership among *production* workers as a result of *conglomerate* mergers.

While Peoples' (1995) research identifies the effects of company merger 'types' on blue-collar union membership status, there appears to be no published evidence on the similar effects on white-collar union membership status. Furthermore, it appears that researchers do not distinguish between company merger types and resultant union membership drops, and typically apportion 'corporate restructuring' membership drops to the generic term of 'company mergers' (Janus 1978; Chaison 1986). It also seems that unions themselves do not distinguish between company merger 'types', and attribute resultant amalgamations to 'corporate restructuring' (Williamson 1995).

Conant and Kaserman (1989) propose that conglomerate tendencies and employer concentration are an underlying cause of a variety of union strategies, including amalgamations. They provide several explanations in support. They argue for instance, that increased employer concentration has led to the creation of large central management bureaucracies staffed by specialists. These specialised units bring considerable tactical expertise in labour relations to the collective bargaining table. Indeed, Conant and Kaserman (1989:246) argue that in situations where a diversified employer is matched in labour relations with a number of separate unions representing separate plants, the conglomerate structure shifts collective bargaining to the employer's favour. Further support for this argument is provided by Hildebrand 1968 (cited in Chitayat 1978: 5) who points out that the conglomerate corporation can fight on interior lines against a diverse set of weak opponents, each acting independently and hence, vulnerable to divide and conquer tactics.

An Australian perspective of the impact of employer re-organisation is provided by Hocking (1990). After examining several examples of employer re-organisation in the textile and footwear industries in Australia, which led to significant job losses, Hocking (1990:23) concluded that, amalgamation for some unions was an opportunity to improve their viability and survival, which could have been at risk unless their current organisational structure was changed.

The impact of employer diversification such as where many common employers are in several unions' primary jurisdictions, can also be a motivating factor for union amalgamations (Chaison 1986). The situation facing two U.S. unions, (the Paper Workers and the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers) in the early 1980s provides an example of this situation. Faced with fifty-four common employers in the two

⁴ Peoples (1995) utilised the 1977-79 Federal Trade Commission Mergers and Acquisitions Files, the 1977 Census of Manufacturing and Mining Industries report, and Current Population Survey (CPS) files for the years 1979-85. The CPS files contain information on union membership status, and enabled Peoples to analyse membership patterns following company mergers. The number of observations in the analysis was 9667.

⁵ A horizontal merger occurs between companies that produce the same goods. A vertical merger occurs between suppliers of a product and the buyers of the product. A conglomerate merger is between completely dissimilar firms.

unions' primary jurisdictions, union officials resolved to amalgamate in order to provide a more efficient and effective service for their members (Chaison 1986). Unfortunately, Chaison (1986) does not indicate whether this particular amalgamation led to a better service provision for its members.

Protection against raids by other unions

Unions faced with declining membership may attempt to 'poach' another union's members as a strategy to redress the decline (Chaison 1986). Rivalry can emerge when several unions attempt to recruit members in the same industry, competing industry, or occupational group (Chitayat 1978; Conant and Kaserman 1989).

Chaison (1986) argues that technological change may also create a position of union rivalry, and if a union has diminished membership as a result of technological change, it may be vulnerable to raids from other unions. Spooner (1984) provides an Australian example in support. She notes that containerisation in the stevedoring industry caused a steep decline in membership of the Waterside Workers' Federation (WWF), and suggests this may be related to subsequent efforts by the WWF to enrol the Federated Clerks Union membership (Spooner 1984:137)

In short, the literature indicates that membership decline and financial hardship are symptoms of other factors: overlapping or narrow jurisdictions; a lack of economies of size; a need to increase bargaining power; and the merger, re-organisation or diversification of employer bodies. The examples provided in the literature have identified the inter-relationship between membership decline and these factors. The literature shows that the motives for amalgamations vary from case to case. Amalgamations may exhibit consolidatory or defensive characteristics, or expansionist objectives may be behind an amalgamation. Although it is often argued that amalgamated unions, due to economies of size, lead to cheaper administrative costs per capita, this may not be a 'given' due to complex union structures, which can militate against the economic effectiveness of an amalgamation.

BARRIERS TO AMALGAMATION

Unions negotiating amalgamation may meet with several barriers; some may only make the process leading to negotiations more difficult, while others may thwart the proposed amalgamation (Chaison 1986).

Three researchers (Chaison 1986, and Conant and Kaserman 1989) have developed taxonomies outlining the barriers to amalgamation. They nominate internal opposition, external opposition, and institutional differences, as possible influences. Their taxonomies can be used to form a framework to examine the barriers to amalgamation.

Internal opposition

Proponents of amalgamation within the union movement may support, in theory, the idea of amalgamation. However in practice, they might oppose such action. This internal opposition can arise from two sources: the incumbent leadership and rank and file members. Opposition from the incumbent leadership generally occurs at the early stages of negotiation (Chaison 1986). Rank and file opposition occur at a later stage when the amalgamation proposal is presented for membership approval.

Opposition from union officials can be a powerful barrier to amalgamation. If officials do not want to amalgamate, the proposal may never reach the membership for consideration. Conversely, when union officials support an amalgamation, they then go on to promote the idea to the membership. Several researchers argue that an important problem confronting amalgamation is opposition from incumbent leaders who fear the possible loss of prestige and power (Issac and Ford 1971; Chitayat 1975; Brooks and Gamm 1976 (cited in Stratton-Devine 1992:134); Chaison 1986; Conant and Kaserman 1989). Indeed, as argued by Conant and Kaserman (1989) when two or more unions amalgamate, only one of the former leaders can maintain control. If an amalgamation is to be successful, one incumbent leader must be prepared to abandon control over organisational and economic resources.

Opposition can come from incumbent officials, young or old. Older officials may resist amalgamation because of the bitterness of past rivalries. They may believe that their union's identity and history will be subsumed in the amalgamation (Chaison 1986; Conant and Kaserman 1989). Younger officials may resist amalgamation for career-based reasons, and may perceive the need to establish a record of their own in the existing union. If officials are part of a new union they may have to relinquish their position, and negotiate a new position in the amalgamated union (Chitayat 1975).

Rank and file members may also oppose an amalgamation if they perceive that it is motivated by managerial incentives, yielding benefits only to union management. Opposition to amalgamation from rank and file members can develop if they believe that their interests and identity will be compromised by amalgamation. The members of a union composed of one or more specialised crafts for example, may fear inadequate representation if amalgamation is proposed with a larger industrial union.

Another motive for rank and file opposition, identified by Chaison (1986) can arise if there is an expectation that amalgamation may lead to undesirable changes, for example, in increased strike action. Opposition from rank and file members can also occur if a proposed partner in an amalgamation has a negative public image. In the U.S., the unfavourable 'big labour' image of the American labour movement research has been identified as an issue of concern for members of smaller unions facing amalgamation with a larger union (McClendon, Kriesky, and Eaton 1995).

Examples of the ability of rank and file members to stop an amalgamation are provided by Spooner (1984) and Fox et al. (1995). Although she does not furnish any insight into their motives, Spooner (1984:102) notes the success of New South Wales shop assistants in 1976 in thwarting a proposed amalgamation between the Australian Workers' Union/Shop Assistants' and Warehouse Employees' Federation of Australia and the Building Workers' Industrial Union. And, in 1991, the Victorian branch of the Transport Workers' Union (TWU) successfully opposed a planned amalgamation with the National Union of Workers (Fox et al. 1995). The main reason behind the failure of TWU members to adopt the proposal, according to the union's Victorian secretary, Mr. Chris Kelly, was that the ACTU and the federal office of the TWU were out of touch with rank and file members ('*The Age*' 2 January 1992).

External opposition

Most opposition to amalgamation is internal to the amalgamating unions. However, opposition can also occur from other unions. Chaison (1986) argues that occasionally a union will cease amalgamation negotiations, because such negotiations conflict with the plans of another union and could jeopardise an already concluded strategic alliance. He illustrates this argument with the experience of U.S. brewery workers caught in a triangle of relationships with the Teamsters Union and the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen. Faced with simultaneous raiding campaigns and pressure to be absorbed into the Teamsters Union, the brewery workers sought to amalgamate with the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen. The Teamsters Union and the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen had previously signed a 'no-raid' agreement. The Teamsters Union opposed the amalgamation between the brewery workers and the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen. As a result the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen ceased amalgamation discussions with the brewery workers. The brewery workers eventually amalgamated with the Teamsters Union.

Institutional differences

Institutional differences are a further factor that can act as a barrier to amalgamation. Basic differences in the constitution and organisation of unions have prevented amalgamations in the U.K. (Buchanan 1974), the U.S. (Janus 1978; Chaison 1986), and in Australia (Spooner 1984). Spooner (1984) cites the example of the failure of the proposed amalgamation between the Australian Public Service Association (Fourth Division Officers) and the Australian Public Service Artisans Association - despite lengthy discussions between 1974 and 1979, this proposed amalgamation failed due to technical problems with rules and a perception of a change in political direction by one of the unions (Spooner 1984:272). Other studies (Buchanan 1974, Janus 1978, Chaison 1986), reveal a range of irreconcilable differences arising out of the constitutions and organisation of the unions (such as varying degrees of local autonomy, staff salaries, appeal systems,

financial controls, geographical location of union headquarters, composition and authority of executive boards, and the provisions of the new union's constitution), that have all mitigated against amalgamation.

In the examples provided by these writers no compromise solutions could resolve the institutional differences. However Chaison (1986) suggests that in many unsuccessful amalgamation negotiations, failure stems not from a *lack* of compromise solutions, rather from a *belief* that any compromise that could be reached would provoke strong resistance from officials and rank and file members. Clearly, to resolve institutional differences, compromise solutions must fit strategically within acceptable boundaries, and be capable of winning approval from officials and rank and file members.

AMALGAMATION RISKS

While the potential value of an amalgamation is substantial, there can also be associated risks, as Shostak (1991) explains. Shostak cautions that amalgamations can inhibit internal union democracy. Moreover, there are the dangers of what he calls 'organisational giantism' and 'bureaucratic bloat'. These concerns have received considerable attention in the U.S., leading to the following comment in a 1985 AFL-CIO report:

mergers are difficult to effectuate and if poorly conceived, can cause a union to lose that identity which helps bind the members and the organisation (Shostak 1991:285).

Shostak (1991:286) proposes five potential risks associated with amalgamations:

- a diminution of the role of individual members following the promotion of centralised structures at the expense of grass-roots empowerment;
- additional layers of hierarchy that may disempower individual members;
- a weakening in the role of union dissidents;
- by creating additional 'patronage' jobs at the union headquarters, amalgamations may increase the number of members who feel indebted to union leaders; and
- the enthronement of power hungry officials, who may use amalgamations to inflate and insulate their reign.

AMALGAMATION BENEFITS

Stratton-Devine (1992) argues that while there may be various negatives such as internal dissent or management difficulties associated with an amalgamation, there are also positive outcomes. Clearly for an amalgamation to be successful, both union officials and rank and file members must perceive and/or expect some positive net gains from the amalgamation. There is limited evidence of empirical research into the benefits flowing from amalgamation. A thorough search of the literature uncovered only two studies (Stratton-Devine 1992, and McClendon et al. 1995). Both these studies are from a U.S. perspective. It is important to recognise that there are some limitations with these studies.

The study by Stratton-Devine (1992) is limited insofar as it concentrates on *union officer perceptions* of the benefits of engaging in a merger, and does not extend to providing objective data on *union officer perceptions post merger*. The limitations associated with the second study, McClendon et al. (1995) relate to the population under review, and like Stratton-Devine's (1992) research, their study does not provide data on rank and file members perceptions *post merger*. Their respondents were from a small union facing incorporation into the structure of a large union, and therefore the degree to which their findings can be generalised to mergers between larger unions may be somewhat compromised. Notwithstanding, these studies provide some insights into the potential benefits flowing from an amalgamation.

Stratton-Devine (1992) surveyed 205 U.S. labor unions to gather information on *union officer perceptions* of the benefits of engaging in a merger. A total of 130 useable responses were obtained. Stratton-Devine used factor analysis to identify the statistical structures of the perceived union merger benefits. This technique produced five independent dimensions: power; strategic capability; status/salary (self-interest); growth; and

job security/professional expertise (self-interest). The power dimension consisted of items on strike power, bargaining power, lobbying power and financial power. The strategic capability dimension consisted of items relating to better management systems, exchange of skills, and exchange of services. The status/salary (self-interest) dimension included leader salary, leader status, and leader prestige. The growth dimension consisted of items relating to expansion into a new jurisdiction, the achievement of growth, and gains in resources. The job security/professional expertise (self-interest) dimension consisted of leader welfare, leader future role, and job effectiveness.

In an empirical study of member support for union mergers in the U.S., McClendon et al. (1995) identified six potential determinants for rank and file support for a merger: job and union satisfaction; merger effectiveness; social support; union image; campaign effects; and demographic variables. Their results indicated that the perception that a merger would result in more effective union representation was strongly related to a pro-merger vote. McClendon et al. (1995) also found that members who perceived that important fellow workers supported the merger were more likely to support such an option. Neither union image, campaign effects, demographic variables, nor job satisfaction were significantly related to merger voting intent. Dissatisfaction with the current union was not influential. Overall, the McClendon et al. (1995) study indicated the importance of enhanced union strength in members' assessments of the benefits of a merger proposal.

OVERVIEW

Spooner (1984:262) states that: 'amalgamation changes every element of a union: its structure, strategy, resources, and members.' As shown in this paper, the motivating factors behind union amalgamations, such as membership decline and financial hardship are often symptoms of other factors - overlapping jurisdictions; lack of economies of size; a need to increase bargaining power; employer re-organisation or corporate mergers; and protection against raids from other unions. There may be several potential barriers to amalgamation: internal opposition; external opposition; and institutional differences. Amalgamation is not without risk. Risks can be associated with the loss of power of rank and file members against the enhanced power of union officials. The potential benefits of a merger as *perceived by union officers* was revealed to be - organisational growth, gains in power and strategic capability, and two dimensions of union leaders' self-interest (status and salary, and job security/professional expertise). From a *rank and file perspective*, more effective union representation was strongly related to a pro-merger vote. Together these findings suggest that both union officers and rank and file members regard gains in union power as an important variable associated with a union amalgamation.

Figure 1. is an illustration of the 'amalgamation loop'.

Figure 1: Union amalgamations: A taxonomy

| | |
|--|---|
| Motivation to amalgamate | Declining membership and related financial difficulties Overlapping jurisdictions Lack of economies of size Need to increase bargaining power Industrial organisational changes Protection from raids by other unions |
| Barriers to amalgamation | Internal opposition External opposition Institutional barriers |
| Potential risks associated with amalgamation | Diminishing role of individual members Weakening role of union dissidents Enthronement of power hungry officials Additional layers of hierarchy may disempower individual members |
| Potential benefits associated with amalgamation | Organisational growth in terms of members and finances Gains in: Union power Union organising Collective bargaining Political action Strategic capability Sharing of knowledge Sharing of resources Ways of managing |

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