

An Insight into Members' Satisfaction with their Union: A Comparative Case Study of Malaysian and American Unions

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the importance of the various facets of satisfaction with union representation in determining overall satisfaction with the union. Samples of union members from Malaysia and the USA are used in this study. Generally, overall union satisfaction is specified as a function of union members' expectation concerning union efforts and the perceived outcomes of union performance on (1) 'bread and butter' issues (such as wages and benefits), (2) quality of work issues (such as job interest and workers' voice in the employing organization), and (3) member-union relations (such as the quality of communication between union leaders and members). The results indicate that all the facets are important determinants of overall satisfaction with union representation. However, in the case of WMUPU (Malaysia) the results showed a greater emphasis on aspects like bread and butter, and member-union relations while the OPEIU(USA) findings relate more to issues on quality work life.

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini melihat kepentingan beberapa aspek kepuasan yang menyentuh hubungan antara ahli-ahli kesatuan dengan kesatuan sekerja mereka. Kajian ini menggunakan dua sampel terdiri daripada ahli-ahli dan kesatuan sekerja di Amerika Syarikat dan Malaysia. Secara umumnya, kepuasan keseluruhan merupakan fungsi antara apa yang dijangkakan dengan apa yang dirasakan oleh ahli-ahli terhadap kesatuan mereka. Antara isu yang dilihat adalah isu 'bread and butter' (seperti gaji dan faedah-faedah lain), kualiti kerja (seperti minat terhadap kerja dan suara pekerja dalam organisasi pekerjaannya) dan hubungan antara ahli dan kesatuan (seperti kualiti komunikasi yang wujud antara pemimpin-pemimpin kesatuan dengan ahli kesatuan). Hasil yang diperoleh menunjukkan kesemua isu ini penting sebagai penentu bagi kepuasan keseluruhan ahli-ahli kesatuan. Walau bagaimanapun, kesatuan WMUPU (Malaysia) menunjukkan respon yang lebih tinggi untuk isu-isu seperti 'bread and butter' dan hubungan antara ahli dan kesatuan. Manakala kesatuan sekerja OPEIU (Amerika Syarikat) memberi fokus lebih kepada isu kualiti kehidupan bekerja.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been an increased amount of behavioral research focused on unionism, notably on the motivation in joining unions and election voting behavior. There seems to be a fair amount of consensus in the literature that unions are "large instruments

for protecting and enhancing the immediate economic interests of members" (Schriesheim 1978: 548). Thomas Kochan's report on the Department of Labor's Quality of Employment Survey provides an interesting perspective on the reasons why workers join unions and labour associations. In that study, the majority of workers noted that they join or

seek to form a union when they were greatly dissatisfied with their job and economic conditions or when they desire more influence over their job conditions (Kochan, 1979). Hence, the general conclusion presented in the published literature has been that employees seek union representation primarily to obtain the needs mentioned earlier. However, very limited research had addressed union members' satisfaction with the unions that represent them. To date, only a few studies have made a serious effort to conduct a comprehensive analysis of union members' satisfaction with their representing union. Given the importance placed on the relations between business organisations and their employees, it would appear that the determinants of union satisfaction warrant similar scrutiny.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Among the extensive studies that have focused on union satisfaction is that by Fiorito et al. (1988), which looked into various facets of satisfaction with union representation including issues like 'bread and butter', quality work life and member-union relations. The results indicated that internal member-union relations and 'bread and butter' issues are much more important than quality work life issues in determining members' satisfaction with their union. Similarly, Jarley, Kuruvilla and Casteel (1990) also supported the view that member-union relations is a major determinant of overall satisfaction. Another study by Glick, Mirvis and Harder (1977) examined the correlation between six groupings of independent measures and a multi-item index of overall union satisfaction for unionised engineers within a single local union. The results showed that union satisfaction is closely linked to members' assessment of the quality of the union's relationship with its members (for example, its readiness to listen to members' concerns and provide feedback) and members' perceptions of the degree of union leadership, influence and effectiveness in dealing with management. The results also showed a positive relationship

between union satisfaction and members attitudes concerning the instrumental value of unionism in general as well as member relations within the employing organisation.

Indeed, recognition of the importance of union satisfaction is apparent. According to Keegan (1987: 51), "As we examine the gaps in the public's understanding of trade unionism and attempt to fill those gaps with convincing evidence, perhaps it is the experience of our own members, their satisfaction in membership, the benefits of unionism they see in their daily working lives, the kind of problems union have helped them manage and solve ... that will best tell the story" (Keegan 1987: 51).

METHODOLOGY

The survey method used was a self-administered interview. The data is drawn from two surveys conducted in late 1995 and early 1996. The first is a sample of 180 Malaysian union members from one of the national unions formed in Malaysia (WMUPU). The second sample consists of 140 members represented by one local union in California, USA (OPEIU). Both of these unions are located in capital cities and hence are very good sources of updated information on union members' concern.

The scope of the study covers three scales of measurement – nominal, ordinal, and internal scales. The nominal and ordinal scales focused on demographic variables while the internal scale focused on satisfaction, expectations and perceived outcomes. The type of analysis used in this study involved descriptive statistics and non-descriptive statistics.

Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following research questions:

- * Will any significant difference between expectation and perceived outcomes of union members have any relationship with regards to their overall satisfaction with their union? And if so, what are the

factors or the variables that significantly affect the members' overall satisfaction?

Hypothesis

- * Ho: Any significant difference between expectation and perceived outcomes of union members have no relationship with regards to their overall satisfaction with their union.

Definition

Union satisfaction has been based on Locke's (1976) definition of job satisfaction. According to Locke, (as quoted in Kuruvilla, Gallagher and Wetzel, 1993) job satisfaction is "a pleasurable and positive emotional state that results from the appraisal of one's job or experience, and ...a function of perceived relationship between what one wants from one's job and what one perceives it as offering". Fiorito et al. (1988) adopted Locke's definition and suggested that overall union satisfaction is a function of discrepancies between expectations and perceived outcomes. According to Fiorito et al., global union satisfaction is modelled as a function of the discrepancy between expectations (what the union should do) and perceived outcomes (what the union does do) across three specific facets. The facets can be described as 'bread and butter', 'quality work life' and 'member-union relation'. In general, expectations of union performance tend to be relatively homogeneous across members, and thus union satisfaction differences stem predominantly from variation in perceived outcomes.

Global Union Satisfaction and Facet (expectations and perceived outcomes) Measures

What do union members expect their trade union to be doing? How well are unions fulfilling these expectations? These are perhaps two

of the most critical questions for evaluating the responsiveness of trade unions to their members. Information on workers' views can be useful for tracing trends or changes in the responsiveness of any trade union movement concerned with overtime and for identifying the directions union members would like to see their organisation move in the future.

In this survey, workers were asked two sets of questions concerning their expectations of their unions and their evaluations of union performance. The first set of questions asked members to rate on a four point scale how much their unions should be putting into various areas. The second question asked how well their unions were actually doing in the same areas. The list of issues included in these questions can be grouped into three categories:

- 1) traditional 'bread and butter' issues
- 2) quality of work life issues
- 3) relations between member and union (the union's internal administration)

Below is the detailed illustration of the measures.

Global union satisfaction (USAT): "All in all, how satisfied are you with your union?"

1 = not at all satisfied;
4 = very satisfied

Expectations: "Now, let's talk about what you think your union should be doing. How much effort do you think your union should be putting into..."

1 = No effort at all;
4 = A lot of effort

Perceived outcomes: "Now, think about what your union is actually doing. How good a job does it do in ..."

1 = not all good;
4 = very good

Items for expectations and perceived outcomes			Classification
1.	Getting better wages	BNB
2.	Getting better fringe benefits'	BNB
3.	Improving job security	BNB
4.	Improving safety and health on the job.....	BNB
5.	Providing members more say with regards to jobs		QWL
6.	Providing members more say with regards to business...		QWL
7.	Making jobs more interesting		QWL
8.	Providing members more say with regards to union		RLNTS
9.	Providing members more feedback from union.....		RLNTS
10.	Handling members' grievances		RLNTS

* BNB = bread and butter; QWL = quality of work life; RLNTS = relations between member and union

Source: "Satisfaction with Union Representation" by Jack Fiorito, Daniel G. Gallagher and Cynthia V. Fukami, *Journal of Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, Vol. 41, No.2 (Jan, 1988).

RESULTS

The responses of the members of both unions are presented in Tables 1 and 2. As seen in Tables 1 and 2, both unions are concerned with traditional issues, especially wages. This implies that the unions' members placed a higher priority on 'bread and butter' issues than on other categories. Besides this, members of both union also gave attention to increasing the effectiveness of the unions' internal administration. In this respect, the members in WMUPU gave the highest rating to the need for increasing the members' influence in running the union. In contrast, the members in OPEIU were more concerned with the handling of members' grievances. However, both unions showed an increasing awareness of the issues of quality work life especially in giving members a say in how they can best carry out their tasks. Thus, while workers view their unions as representatives of their economic interest, they also look for an expansion of the domain of union activity into other areas.

In accepting or rejecting the null hypothesis, a few non-descriptive methods have been used. These include the calculation of Z-score, correlation analysis and multiple regression.

Initially, the calculation of Z-score was used and the results are reported in Table 3. In this respect, when the value of Z exceeds than 2.58 for each of the expectation and perceived outcomes issues, the null hypothesis is rejected.

From Table 4, ACCEPTING H_1 implies that some issues do carry much influence on the satisfaction level of the union members. One of the significant examples would be the traditional issues. In this context, the larger the gap between the expectation and the perceived outcomes of the members the greater would be the effect on members' overall satisfaction level.

Besides this, for each union, there is also a perceived difference between what the management has done and what the members perceived the management has done. If this scenario is prolonged, then the management of each union would have to be more sensitive to their members' needs. A greater sense of mutual understanding is critically important for both parties (members and management). This can lead to greater confidence, and participation and thus maintain the good relationship between them.

Meanwhile, ACCEPTING H_0 indicates that the members' overall satisfaction seemed

Table 1
Union members' priorities for union issues (expectation)

Issues	Mean (%)	
	(WMUPU)	(OPEIU)
Getting better wages	3.605	3.873
Getting better fringe benefits	3.514	3.726
Improving job security	3.256	3.747
Improving safety and health on the job	3.157	3.658
Providing members more say with regards to jobs	3.387	3.617
Providing members more say with regards to business	3.404	3.446
Making jobs more interesting	3.222	3.362
Providing members more say with regards to union	3.521	3.510
Providing members more feedback from union	3.434	3.738
Handling members' grievances.....	3.445	3.866

Table 2
Evaluation of union performance (perceived outcomes)

Issues	Mean (%)	
	(WMUPU)	(OPEIU)
Getting better wages	2.943	3.612
Getting better fringe benefits	2.805	3.773
Improving job security	2.554	3.753
Improving safety and health on the job	2.337	3.548
Providing members more say with regards to jobs	2.690	3.257
Providing members more say with regards to business	2.683	3.342
Making jobs more interesting	2.403	3.077
Providing members more say with regards to union	2.876	3.189
Providing members more feedback from union	2.855	3.711
Handling members' grievances.....	2.809	3.814

Table 3
Values of Z-score in terms of the expectation issues

	ACCEP Hi (Z score > 2.58) (in terms of the expectation issues)	ACCEPT Ho (Z score > 2.58) (Z score > 2.58) (in terms of the expectation issues)
	Z score	Z score
	WMUPU	OPEIU
Getting better wages	15.58	19.34
Getting better fringe benefits	11.85	16.62
Improving job security	5.26	10.23
Improving safety and health on the job	4.56	10.01
Providing members more say with regards to jobs	5.68	11.34
Providing members more say with regards to business	5.72	7.21
Making jobs more interesting	3.31	4.75
Providing members more say with regards to union	7.06	7.45
Providing members more feedback from union	6.68	9.01
Handling members' grievances.....	7.80	10.67

Table 4
Values of Z-score in terms of the perceived outcomes issues

	Z score		Z score	
	WMUPU	OPEIU	WMUPU	OPEIU
Getting better wages	12.32	15.82	-	-
Getting better fringe benefits	10.97	13.40	-	-
Improving job security	8.02	12.59	-	-
Improving safety and health on the job	7.89	6.23	-	-
Providing members more say with regards to jobs	-	3.28	2.15	-
Providing members more say with regards to business	-	-	1.03	1.07
Making jobs more interesting	3.22	-	-	1.56
Providing members more say with regards to union	3.13	-	-	2.48
Providing members more feedback from union	-	-	8.67	2.01
Handling members' grievances.....	-	-	10.1	2.21

not to be influenced, affected or disturbed by the difference between their expectation and perceived outcomes. Perhaps, what the members perceived so far tallied with what the management has done for them. In other words, the perception of each union's member with respect to some of the issues was in line with management's efforts. In this respect, the management of each union should feel satisfied with their administration. However, the unions' leaders need also to be aware of any differences that may exist between them and the members. Besides this, the administrative staff of each union needs to enhance the relationship and take corrective measures should any conflicting ideas arise.

Correlation analysis

This analysis was on "the perceived outcomes" issues and the overall satisfaction. The results are as shown in the Table 5.

The results show that some of the variables are strongly correlated to the overall satisfaction of both unions' members. The so called "traditional items" like wages and fringe benefits showed a strong relationship with the overall satisfaction of the WMUPU members. From the analysis it can be seen that these items are highly positively correlated with satisfaction. Leader-member relations also showed a strong correlation with satisfaction. In this context, the items that gave the most significant impact to the members' satisfaction include the handling of members' grievances and getting feedback from the union. The quality of work life items seemed not so critical and were given the lowest priorities.

However, the findings for the OPEIU members were quite different. Generally, the members put more emphasis on the quality of work life and the relationship between members and the union leaders. It can thus be seen that the respondents from OPEIU gave priority not only to economic items but also showed increased sensitiveness for other categories. These items are more positively correlated with

their overall satisfaction. This includes items like handling members' grievances and getting feedback from the union. The quality of work life items such as giving members a say in how they do their jobs was also found to be quite highly correlated.

In general, although the central determinant of members' ratings may still be 'bread and butter' issues, there is a changing trend among the members, especially from the OPEIU. They are more sensitive and tend to give priority to the quality of work life, an area that seemed to have gained much attention recently.

Another test used was the multiple regression analysis. This analysis was done at 95% confidence level and the values of 'Beta' and 'Sig T' are used as reference to the relationship between the issues of perceived outcome and overall satisfaction.

From Table 6, each union provides different values of Beta and Sig T. When referring to the value of Beta, it can be seen that some issues have a positive relationship with the overall satisfaction, while a few displayed a negative relationship. This indicates that certain issues like "improving job security" for both unions may not carry much effect on the members' overall satisfaction. In other words, this issue would most likely be not taken into serious consideration by the members as far as their satisfaction is concerned.

Although the value of Beta indicates the relationship between the issues and the overall satisfaction, it will be more useful and suitable to refer to the value of significant T in deciding whether to reject H_0 or vice versa.

From the WMUPU point of view, there are two issues or variables that can be used to reject H_0 ($\text{sig } T < 0.05$). These include the issue of wages (bread and butter issue) and the handling of the members' grievance (member-union relations). Each displayed the value of $\text{sig } T = 0.0134$ and $\text{sig } T = 0.0168$ respectively. This also implies that the respondents from the WMUPU gave more priority and concern to these issues than other issues. However, the OPEIU members, prefer to choose not only

Table 5
Correlation between the perceived outcomes issues and the overall satisfaction

	Pearson (r)	
	WMUPU	OPEIU
Getting better wages	0.724	0.410
Getting better fringe benefits	0.720	0.389
Improving job security	0.491	0.401
Improving safety and health on the job	0.573	0.359
Providing members more say with regards to jobs	0.680	0.569
Providing members more say with regards to business	0.665	0.502
Making jobs more interesting	0.525	0.487
Providing members more say with regards to union	0.677	0.418
Providing members more feedback from union	0.503	0.703
Handling members' grievances.....	0.542	0.715

Table 6
Multiple regression on relationship of the perceived outcomes issues with the overall satisfaction

ISSUES	BETA		SIG.T	
	WMUPU	OPEIU	WMUPU	OPEIU
Getting better wages	0.3940	0.2288	0.0135	0.0348
Getting better fringe benefits	0.1965	0.1456	0.0632	0.2012
Improving job security	0.0317	0.0235	0.7686	0.8567
Improving safety and health on the job	0.2157	0.0458	0.1149	0.7412
Providing members more say with regards to jobs	0.0799	0.4748	0.4903	0.0057
Providing members more say with regards to business	0.1052	-0.1922	0.3576	0.1202
Making jobs more interesting	0.0644	0.0097	0.5330	0.9541
Providing members more say with regards to union	0.0044	0.0929	0.9715	0.4611
Providing members more feedback from union	0.0568	0.2684	0.4962	0.0198
Handling members' grievances.....	0.0568	0.284	0.4962	0.0298

wages ('bread and butter' issue) as their priority (sig $T = 0.0348$) but also two other issues, the quality of work life and the internal administration of the union. The issue of giving the members a say in their job (sig. $T = 0.0057$) and providing feedback (0.0198) are most likely to affect the members' overall satisfaction.

DISCUSSION

Many of the results obtained within this study must be considered tentative. Still, some of the conclusions they support are plausible and intriguing. Generally, for the WMUPU, the issues of 'bread and butter' and member-union relations appeared to be significantly important. However, consciousness-raising in the quality of work life issues has occurred since then, and may assert greater importance in future studies. As for the OPEIU, the respondents placed a high priority in all the three categories under scrutiny. This implies that the union needs to focus more on all these issues, particularly the quality of work life, that has become important recently.

Some factors were given increased importance, especially the opportunity for the workers to voice their opinions on matters pertaining to their jobs and also the working organizations. In this context, the expression of ideas by workers should be considered vital, especially in the decision making process not only at the union level but also at the organisational level. In other words, the opinions from workers need to be recognised and acknowledged as they are a part of the organisation. Hence, union leaders should consider these QWL issues more seriously and improve cooperation between management and union. According to Nadler et al. (1980, in Lawler 1986), for QWL issues to be successfully implemented, there must exist commitment between top union people and top management people. In addition, effective consultation with both union and management must be exercised, so that there will be no bias or partiality toward

one or the other. Various labour-management committees must place some value on openness and trust in order for effective team building to take place.

The results of this study also clearly supported Fiorito et al.'s finding that the member-union relations is a major determinant of overall satisfaction with union representation. In general it is clear that members consider union feedback, democracy, and the delivery of union services as critical. Although the two samples come from a different region and country, one from Malaysia and the other from the United States, the similarity of the results across these two diverse samples suggests that the primary determinants of union satisfaction may transcend cultural and organizational differences.

This initial study of union satisfaction provides (although not in great depth) some novel findings concerning the importance of some critical: issues like 'bread and butter', member-union relationship, the quality of work life, the role of satisfaction and beliefs about unions in general.

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