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A Union Representative's Perspective of Declining Union Membership

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Union membership has declined 24.2 percent since 1945. Declining union membership leads to economic losses for labor unions. The problem is relevant to scholars and the labor movement, requiring a deeper understanding of union membership decline. In this qualitative study, experiences with declining union membership are explored with union representatives in Los Angeles County. The conceptual framework uses three models: the utility of union membership, human motivation, and collective bargaining to identify relevant elements of union membership decisions. Twenty face-to-face interviews were conducted with participants who had a minimum of 3 years experience as a full-time union representative. The data were coded, and themes developed using the modified van Kaam method and NVivo 10 software. Three primary emergent themes resulted: (a) globalism is the primarily perceived cause of declining union membership, (b) unions should be more effective in collective bargaining, and (c) communication with union members must increase. The results from this study could be used to improve internal union communication, increase operational efficiency, and develop leadership training. The implications for positive social change include new insights to support labor union leaders in efforts to identify relevant needs, increase membership, retain jobs, and improve the economic health of their members.

Keywords: Unions, Collective Bargaining, Union Membership, Union Study, Union Decline, Trade Unions

JEL: J08, J51, J52, M54

Union membership has been in decline since 1945 (Burns, 2010). Contributing factors to this phenomenon include polarization, market decline, technology and globalization. In 2011, anti-union legislation originated in the state of Wisconsin and other republican-controlled statehouses. In 2010, 820 new bills restricted or eliminated the collective bargaining rights of public workers (Hogler and Henle, 2011). The union's abilities to gain political support through membership voting are imperative. The focus of this study was on how labor union representatives located in Los

Angeles County have experienced the declining union membership phenomenon. The study includes both public and private sector labor union representatives from transportation, trade unions, retail, public safety, postal, hospitality, clerical, city services, entertainment and agriculture. The participants were purposely selected to represent the diversity of unions in Los Angeles County.

Union membership declined substantially after the signing of the National Labor Relations Act in 1935. In 1954, union membership then peaked at 34 percent and has since decreased over the past 4 decades (Sharma, 2012). In 2012, union

membership reached the lowest percentage in the post Second World War Era. Union membership rates decreased from 2.8 percent to 11.3 percent of the workforce (Magdoff and Foster, 2013). Globalization has had a negative effect on collective bargaining power. Conservatives view collective bargaining as a rival to economic freedom. Union membership has dropped from 36 percent to less than 8 percent, while imports in relation to gross domestic product increased from 6 percent to 23 percent (Griswold, 2010).

Scholars have classified unions as contributors to social movement. Unions have played a major role in establishing legislation regarding child-labor laws, minimum wage levels, and employee overtime regulations. The National Labor Relations Act of 1935 (NLRA) provided the U.S. worker with the right to organize, strike, and bargain collectively through the protection of labor unions. Union workers have a 25 percent increased probability of health insurance and an employer-sponsored retirement plan compared to the general population (Schmitt *et al.*, 2008).

The decline in union membership is present in both industrialized and developing countries. In 2010, union membership in the United States decreased by 610,000 workers to 11.9 percent, down from 12.3 percent in the year prior (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). It is unlikely that declining union membership will change in the near future due to inadequate organization efforts. The general business problem is that there are economic losses to labor unions and the reduction of union representation in the workplace is problematic. The National Labor

Relations Act of 1935 started the public protection of labor unions. U.S. unions, however, are associated with reduced worker turnover, higher wage distribution, increased fringe benefits, dismissal standards, workers' compensation, collective negotiation, and grievance procedures. The specific business problem investigated in this study was the economic losses experienced by unions because of declining union membership in Los Angeles County, CA.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore how union representatives' experience declining union membership. The population we interviewed was comprised of union representatives of a Los Angeles County labor group. The participants were persons that work for the union and thus represent the members of the union. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques resulted in my selection of 20 participants from various industries for personal interviews. The social constructivist worldview aided in the understanding of the phenomenon.

The central research question for this study was: How are union representatives experiencing declining union membership in Los Angeles County?

A social-constructivist worldview helped me identify common themes that emerged from the interviews. Social Constructivism uses the subjective meanings of the participant's experiences to identify the complexity of views. Qualitative research seeks to understand and rely on the participant's experience of the

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phenomenon. We used overarching and open-ended questions to reflect the project's purpose in specific terms. Marshall and Rossman (2011) categorized research questions into four types: exploratory, explanatory, descriptive, and emancipatory.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars have debated the impact of demographics on union membership in past research. Rosenfeld and Kleykamp (2009) found that the minority Hispanic population joins unions

group's capacity for collective bargaining action with respect to the revitalization. However, Burgoon *et al.* (2010) discussed the transition of unions taking an anti-immigrant stance to recruiting immigrant workers. The researchers found immigration has no significance to union membership levels.

In his research, Robinson (2011) discussed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and how it provided unions in the United States with the opportunity to unionize immigrant

Author	Major Findings
Rosenfeld and Kleykamp (2009)	Minority Hispanic population joins unions at higher rates than other demographic groups.
Zullo (2012)	The duration of residence and citizenship are the primary deterrents of Hispanics joining a union.
Burgoon, Fine, Jacoby, and Tichenor (2010)	The researchers found immigration has no significance to union membership levels.
Robinson (2011)	Unionized immigrant workers can help declining union membership.
Medina (2011)	Service Employees International Union (SEIU) lost over 2,000 workers due to I-9 Audits.
Moon (2012)	Entertainment Unions are exclusively white and adversarial towards minorities and immigrants.
Duff (2009)	Unauthorized workers threatening the erosion of immigrant labor rights.
Cummings (2009)	Illegal sweatshops in Los Angeles undermined the integrity of labor laws.
Leymon (2011)	Social conservatism and the exclusion of women and minorities before 1960 reduced the labor movement strength.
Rosenfeld and Kleykamp (2009)	Immigrants undermines solidarity, promotes competition between workers, and lowers unionization rates.
Rachieff (2012)	Public employees' rights to collective bargaining were seen as a threat to individual states ability to balance their budget.
Judis (2011)	The Republican Party was systematically attacking collective bargaining and public-sector unions.
McCartin (2011)	There was no correlation between state-budget deficits and unionized public workers.
Leymon (2011)	There is a 60.1% probability of a union member voting Democratic in an election
Judis (2011)	The Republican Party's is attempting to prevent union contributions to the Democratic Party.
Lewis and Luce (2012)	Unions should spend 50% of their election campaign funds on social movements.
Dreier (2011)	Suggest unions focus on workplace organizing, grassroots community alliances, and the political arena.
Estey (2011)	Advocates the inclusion of faith-based organizations to support revitalization efforts.
Burns (2010)	The threat of a strike enables unions to bargain for better working conditions.
Martin and Dixon (2010)	Unions must evaluate all of the peripheral issues before making a decision to strike.

Table 1: Major Findings of Studies within the Literature Review

at higher rates than other demographic groups. The duration of residence and citizenship are the primary deterrents of Hispanics joining a union (Zullo, 2012). The researcher emphasized that organized labor cannot depend on any single

workers to combat declining union membership, wages, and share of national income. Ironically, Medina (2011) found that the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) lost over 2,000 workers in Minnesota, Illinois, and California due to

expanded I-9 audits by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Moon (2012) discussed the historical adversarial role that unions representing the entertainment industry took to prevent immigrants in the industry. Entertainment unions are exclusively white, and African American entertainers tend to form their own unions for the protection of their rights. Duff (2009) discussed the paradox involved in representing undocumented workers for remedy under the NLRA. Unlawful immigrant conduct, witness credibility, and the discharge of union-represented, unauthorized workers threatening the erosion of immigrant labor rights (Duff, 2009). The applicability of the NLRA is questionable when individuals undermine the witnesses' integrity by their illegal status. Cummings (2009) illustrated how the economic power of illegal sweatshops in Los Angeles undermined the integrity of labor laws with contract labor agreements between employers and the union.

Leymon (2011) cited social inclusiveness as a major effect on union membership. Social conservatism and the exclusion of women and minorities before 1960 reduced the potential membership and strength of the labor movement. Furthermore, seniority clauses in union contracts kept African Americans in undesirable positions before and after the Civil Rights Act. Affirmative Action lawsuits motivated union officials to ensure equal access for everyone. Leymon (2011) also posited that individuals frequently overlook women as potential union members even though they were more likely to certify a union. In contrast, Rosenfeld and Kleykamp (2009) showed that any influx of immigrants into a

country undermines solidarity, promotes competition between workers, and lowers unionization rates. Rosenfeld and Kleykamp (2009) also demonstrated that immigrant workers seek refuge from discrimination at lower rates because they compare U.S. work conditions to those in their countries of origin. Barrett *et al.* (2013) found that immigrant training programs fail because immigrants do not take advantage of the training. Leymon (2011) emphasized that white men remain the largest group comprising union demographics. The proportional increase of women and non-white men in unions was a significant demographic change.

Rachieff (2012) explored how Republican victories in the 2010 elections have sparked a new round of attacks on labor unions? The researcher found the public employees' rights to collective bargaining were seen as a threat to individual states, and their ability to balance state budget. *Collective bargaining* is a voluntary process of agreement between employers and union workers in regards to wages, benefits, and conflict resolution in the workplace (Liebman, 2008: 9).

Anti-union attacks have prompted labor unions to become active in their resurgence efforts. Rachieff (2012) also focused on how statistics show that a right-to-work state have a negative effect on employee wages, employer-sponsored health insurance, and pension plans. We choose to include this research in this discussion because states aspiring for identification as right-to-work states affect the demographics of unions.

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Judis (2011) concluded that the Republican Party was systematically attacking collective bargaining and public sector unions in an effort to cut wages and benefits. McCartin (2011) found the Republican-controlled U.S. House of Representatives, in an effort to undermine unions' power, was stifling aid to states seeking to balance their budgets by reducing the collective bargaining rights of public sector unions. Public sector unions organize election campaigns for officials who, in return, voted for union wage and benefit increases despite significant shortfalls in state budgets (Carrigan, 2011). On average, a unionized state employee makes \$30,000 more per year than does a private sector employee (McCartin, 2011). Moreover, there is a 60.1 percent probability of a union member voting Democratic in an election (Leymon, 2011). Judis (2011) consequently emphasized the Republican Party's effort to prevent union contributions to the Democratic Party, thereby seeking to change the political landscape of the country (Lofaso, 2011). States having a majority of their public employees unionized were predominantly Democratic in representation. Ironically, McCartin (2011) found that there was no correlation between state budget deficits and unionized public workers.

Lewis and Luce (2012) examined the common interests of the labor movement and the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement. Labor and OWS were involved from the beginning of the OWS movement. Labor, the researchers suggested, should work with community partners, unorganized and unemployed workers, and students to create a new agenda that includes

social issues. The current message of labor is risk-averse. Unions would be successful in electing Democrats if they spent 50 percent of their election-campaign budgets on supporting social movements like OWS (Lewis and Luce, 2012). Friedman (2009) suggested that unions focus on societal empowerment and the socio-economic democracy as a strategy of revitalization. Dreier (2011) suggested that unions focus on workplace organizing, grassroots community alliances, and the political arena. Whereas, Estey (2011) advocated the inclusion of faith-based organizations to support revitalization efforts.

Burns (2010) focused on the economic power of the strike as a key weapon in collective bargaining. The researcher revealed how the essence of collective bargaining is rooted in the ability of unions to impose economic sanctions on employers through the strike. The threat of a strike enables unions to bargain for better working conditions and secure employment, but unions must confront illegitimate restrictions in resisting the forces of global capitalism (Burns, 2010). In contrast, Martin and Dixon (2010) concluded that unions must evaluate all of the peripheral issues before making a decision to strike. The researcher determined globalism and corporate resistance to be major deterrents to strike activity.

Conceptual Framework

Using the study's conceptual framework, we integrated three models: Jones and McKenna (1994) on the utility of union membership, Maslow (1943) on human motivation, and Webb (1891) on collective bargaining to design the

interview questions. The conceptual framework is used to identify all that is relevant to union membership decisions. Jones and McKenna's (1994) was the overarching framework for this research. We used the additional concepts of human motivation and collective bargaining in this triangulated conceptual framework. Therefore, our approach was synergistic. Using the triangular design originally helped us to incorporate core issues that potentially impact decisions about union membership. The conceptual framework was used to develop the interview questions. The conceptual framework helps to identify what is relevant to union membership decisions. We used the conceptual framework to capture what is relevant to the shared meaning of the phenomenon and used the information to define the scope of the interview questions. Potential union members consider cost versus the benefits of collective bargaining. The individual needs of the potential union member are the primary motivation for considering collective bargaining to satisfy each need. The collective bargaining agreement is used to ensure the potential union member's needs are met. This conceptual framework represents the bounded rationality in regards to the decision making process of potential union members.

METHODOLOGY

We required the participants in this study to have a minimum of 3 years' experience as a representative of a union organization located within a 100-mile radius of the metropolitan Los Angeles area. The participants were required to

have a minimum of 2 years of experience working directly with union employees in the workplace. The participants were located through Google search engine, metropolitan union websites, and personal rapport with union gatekeepers. We visited websites of unions physically located in Los Angeles County to identify potential participants. We included no more than three participants from the same industry to reflect the larger population. Purposive and snowball sampling ensured participants had the required experience for the study (Marshall and Rossman, 2011). We purposely selected the participants to consider the variety of unions located in Los Angeles County, and from a variety of vocational backgrounds to represent the larger population.

We chose the qualitative phenomenological design to understand how union representatives have experienced the phenomenon of declining union membership in Southern California. In qualitative inquiry the interview questions are considered to be the research instrument (see Appendix-I). We included Jones and McKenna (1994) on utility of union membership, Webb (1891) on collective bargaining, and Maslow (1943) on human motivation in the conceptual framework of this study. James (2011) found a conceptual triangulation provides unique insight into the complex phenomenon. In support, Crump and Logan (2008) argued a conceptual triangulation provides a robust platform for ensuring the systematic collection and analysis of data. Denzin (2009) argued the value of using a conceptual triangulation to capture all that is relevant and necessary to the shared meaning

within the phenomenon. The hermeneutic phenomenologist seeks to grasp how an experience influences the choices of participants (Flood, 2010).

RESULTS

The data analysis of answers to the open-ended interview questions revealed 11 major categories. Table 2 illustrates these categories. The participants in the study clearly reflected a total of 10 industries, as illustrated in Figure 1.

The study involved three public sector unions: Postal, Public Safety and City Services. Private sector unions included: Clerical, Trade Unions, Hospitality, Entertainment, Agriculture, Retail, and Transportation Industries, as illustrated in Figure 2. There were 18 males and 2 females who participated in this qualitative study. The female participants represented 10 percent of the total participants. As represented in Figure 3 and Figure 4, females represent both the public and private sectors.

Theme	Categorical Node	Percentage of Participants
Appointed Representation	Contract Involvement	70%
Political Organizations	External Organizational Effect	65%
Quality of Communication	Communication	55%
Employee Needs	Participation Influence	45%
Quality of Meetings	Union Participation	35%
Complaints	Quality of Relationship	35%
Management Opposition	Description of Unions	30%
Labor Conditions	Effectiveness of Unions	30%
Representation of Members	Effectiveness of Unions	30%
Wage and Benefits	Effectiveness of Unions	30%
Influences Membership	Labor Law Effect	30%
Reagan vs. PATCO	Significant Event	30%
Outsourcing/Offshoring	Perceived Cause	25%

Table 2: Emerging Themes with Percentage of Categorical Response

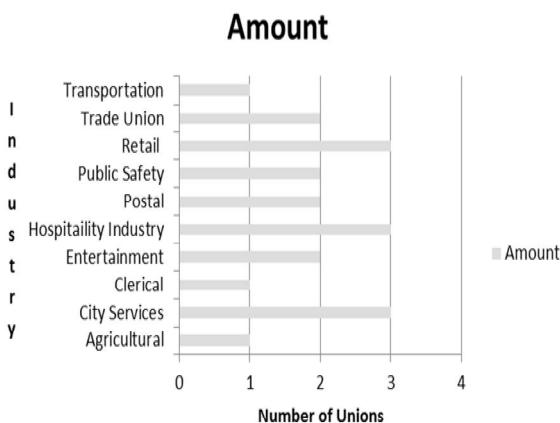


Figure 1: Industries Represented in the Study.

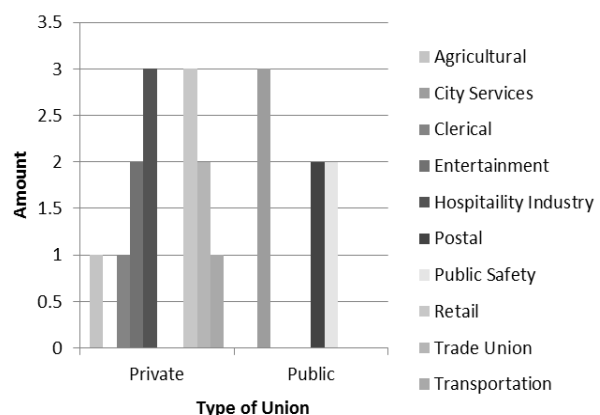


Figure 2: Public and Private Unions Categorized by Industry.

Theme 1: Appointed representation in collective bargaining. The primary theme that emerged was

recent economic woes. Unions are really fighting to keep both employers and union members

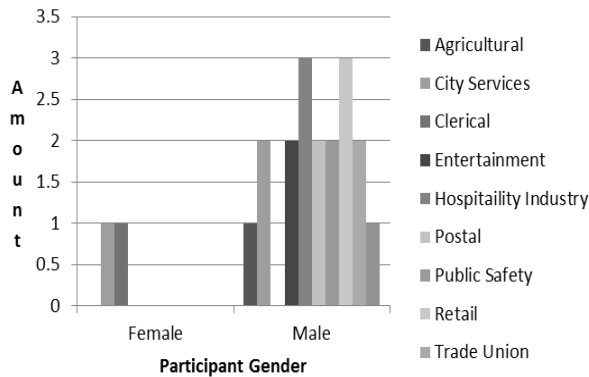


Figure 3: Union Industry Categorized by Sex of the Participant

the need to appointment representatives to collectively bargain on behalf of union members.

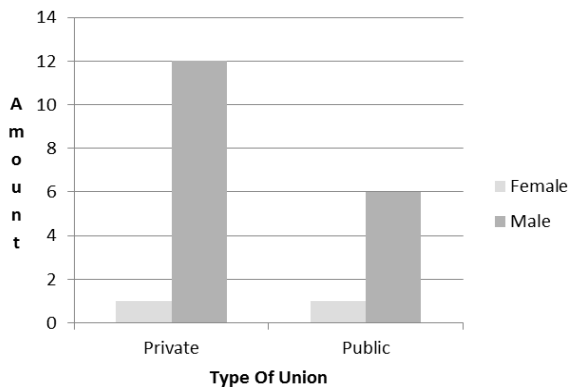


Figure 4: Public and Private Union Participants Categorized by Sex of Participants

This theme emerged from the category of contract involvement. Seventy percent of the participants said union members did not participate in negotiating the contract. The unique voice of union representatives is detectable in their responses. Participant R6 said, “The leadership negotiates based on personal objectives. Leadership wants to win the contract at all cost to help the union’s position”. Participant R16 said, “Contract negotiation has really been affected by the

Emerging Themes From Interviews

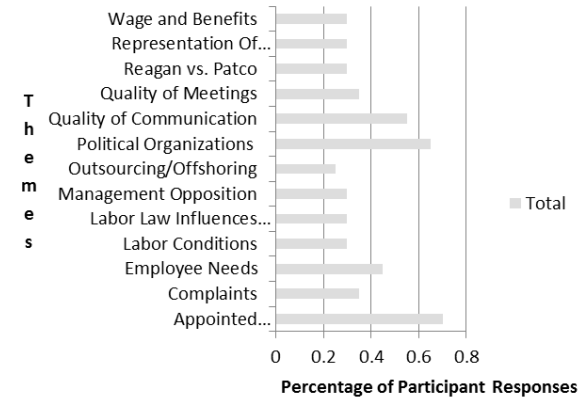


Figure 5: Emerging Themes from Interviews

satisfied”. Participant R19 added, “They elect union representatives to bargain on their behalf. They ratify the contract by popular vote”. Fifty percent of the participants also said the employees were involved in contract discussions, but not directly involved in negotiations with the employer.

Theme 2: External political, organizational effect.

Participants in this study identified political organizations as having an impact on union membership. This theme emerged from the external organizational effect category. Sixty-five percent of the participants suggested political organizations affect union membership. Participant R1 said, “We have a lot of oppositions from conservative forces who are anti-immigrant”. Participant R19 said, “Only the companies which control labor laws and public perception have impact. Political organizations have both positive and negative impact”. Participant R20 revealed the essence

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of union frustration through their response, “ Union membership affected by political organizations supported by corporations. The labor laws during the republican controlled White House designed to stifle unionism” .

Theme 3: Quality of communication. In the category of communication, the quality of communication emerged as the primary theme. Fifty-five percent of the participants viewed the quality of communication as a contributing factor to union membership. The majority of the participants agreed that communication is necessary. The responses varied. Participant R19 said, “ We need to improve. We have been distracted with political issues. We have been focused on survival” . Participant R12 said, “ Communication is also less than adequate” . Participant R9 apologetically said, “ It is a work in progress. We have upgraded our communications effort. We utilize graphics to promote readership” .

Theme 4: Employee needs influence participation. In the category of participation influence, employee needs emerged through 45 percent of the participants. *Esteem needs* are the desire for self-respect and the esteem of others based on real capacity and achievement; the desire for confidence, strength, independence, and freedom in the world; recognition, attention, or appreciation from others; feelings of self-confidence, worth, strength, capability, and adequacy of being useful and necessary in the world are present when the need is satisfied (Maslow, 1943: 370). *Love needs* are the need for belonging to a group with meaningful interpersonal relationships; a deficiency in the

satisfaction of these needs is common (Maslow, 1943: 370). *Physiological needs* are the need for air, food, shelter, and clothing; satisfied prior to psychological or growth needs (Weinberg, 2011: 16). *Safety needs* are the need for security, lack of threats, stability, peace, and security; physiological needs are satisfied (Maslow, 1943: 370).

Interestingly, 40 percent of the participants also perceived threats as influential. Participant R18 said, “ The ability to satisfy needs is important to union members. Union members concerned with salary and benefits. The cost of health care is a major concern” . Almost identical to the previous statement, participant R19 eloquently stated, “ Union employees focus on their own needs. They look unions to satisfy their needs; Participation based on the expectation of satisfied needs” . In support, participant R6 said, “ If there is a perceived need to organize against a common issue then people will participate” .

Theme 5: Union members often complain. Union representatives described their relationship with union members as one filled with complaints from the membership. Thirty-five percent of the participants described their members as self-centered. Participant R20 said, “ The past three years have been rough. We had to negotiate some tough contracts. The membership is not very pleased with some of the outcomes due to the economy” . Participant R2 said, “ The union members complain often. The union members complain against other union members” . Interestingly, participant R13 said, “ Union members have a lot of complaints. Union

members do not support the union until there is a problem” .

Theme 6: Quality meetings. The quality of meetings emerged with 35 percent of the union participation category. The leadership of the union plays a significant role in regards to the quality of the meetings. Participant R3 said, “ Any lack of participation is due to the leadership. Strong leadership unions have strong membership participation” . Participant R6 said, “ There is not enough leadership across the general population” . Participant R4 said, “ Union members do not take on leadership roles like they did in the past” . In addition, participant R3 also said, “ It depends on the union. The union the researcher represents has strong participation, stewardship. We have interactive meetings and receive letters from the president every month” .

Theme 7: Unions are effective in collective bargaining. The respondents perceived unions to be equally effective in representing union workers, negotiating wage/benefits, and improving labor conditions. The participants responded equally with 30 percent in each node. Participant R2 said, “ We have a strong health and safety committee. Management and unions work well together. We sit at the table and talk about the problems. We provide management with suggestions to solve problems” . Participant R16 said, “ We have an open door policy to address the members’ needs. We fight to keep our members employed. We settle workplace disputes as soon as possible” . Participant R15 said, “ We negotiate the best contract we can within the current economic conditions. We focus

on salary and benefits. We save employees from termination in spite of their work record” .

Theme 8: Management opposition describes declining union membership. When asked to describe declining union membership, 30 percent of the participants associated declining union membership with management opposition to unions in the workplace. Twenty-five percent of the participants focused on political issues and 20 percent focused on the economy. Participant R14 said, “ Most employers do not want unions in the workplace because they demand a lot. Companies simply just can’ t afford it. Unions cost the companies too much. Companies are not making profits due to the collective bargaining agreement” . Participant R3 said, “ Management opposition to unionization is strong” . Participant R6 said, “ If it is perceived to jeopardize employment; people are very reluctant to join or participate” .

Theme 9: Reagan vs. PATCO is a significant event in union history. We asked participants what they considered the most significant event in labor history. Thirty percent of the participants said that President Ronald Reagan firing of the air traffic controllers was a significant event contributing to the decline of union membership. The Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO) represented these union members. Fifteen percent of the participants identified the Los Angeles City Budget Crisis of 2010 as a significant event. Ten percent of the participants identified the defeat of the Employee Freedom Choice Act as a significant event. Five percent of the participants recognized the Taft–Hartley Act as a significant event.

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Theme 10: Labor law influences union membership. Thirty percent of the participants in this study identified labor law to be influential on union membership. Participant R16 said, “ Union membership participation increases when labor law threatens their employment conditions. Union members seek refuge in the union’ s ‘ ability to fight for them” . Participant R19 said, “ Union members have a good knowledge of what labor law provides for them. We assure them protection under our representation. The culture of an organization determines the necessity of union protection” . “ Labor law helps the union resolve issues. Unfair labor practices influences employees to become union members” (R9). “ The union member seeks protection under the union contract. Union members consider the union to be a form of insurance to be used when needed” (R15).

Theme 11: Outsourcing/Offshoring significant to declining union membership. The theme identifying a cause of declining union membership emerged by a narrow margin. Twenty-five percent of the participants recognized outsourcing and offshoring of work by companies’ leaders as a significant cause of declining union membership. Participant R15 said, “ Outsourcing is a major offensive used to decrease union membership” . “ Outsourcing and offshoring are major contributors” (R18).

Twenty percent of the participants recognized the public perception of unions. Participant R6 said the following:

“ There is no perceived value. People buy things which have value. Unions do not know how to market themselves. Unions need to highlight

what membership means to the union member. They need to translate the features and the benefits of union membership” .

Participant R19 said, “ We have never been accepted by the public as a necessary organization. We have always gotten negative publicity. We need to improve our image in regards to public perception” .

Fifteen percent of the participants recognized (a) union strategy, (b) technological advances, (c) political opposition, and (d) labor laws as significant to membership decline. Participant R14 said, “ There is no cohesiveness within the union. The union is not strong anymore” . Participant R11 said, “ Technology has changed the type of work available” . Participant R15 said, “ Technological advances and changes in the business model have decreased manufacturing labor needs” . Participant R17 said, “ The Republican Party and the Tea Party are launching an assault on unions” .

DISCUSSION

We examined the emerging themes in this qualitative phenomenological study through the conceptual framework. The concepts of (a) utility, (b) need, and (c) collective bargaining illustrate the bounded rationality of potential union members. We found the conceptual framework in this study useful to interpret the data. The emerging themes validated the use of this conceptual framework. Maslow (1943) articulated the way needs motivate people. The participants in this study recognized that the needs of a union member are instrumental to membership support. Past researchers have listed threats to security as

significant to the decline. Unions enforce labor laws to protect workers. Union members view the enforcement of labor laws as influential to membership decisions. Ugah and Arua (2011) also found that union members motivated to engage in activities perceived to meet their needs.

The perceived benefits of union membership are prominent. Union representatives reported that the effectiveness of the union influenced their members. Unions are effective in (a) bargaining for salary and benefits, (b) representing the members in labor disputes, and (c) improving labor conditions. We found union members consider healthcare to be a valuable benefit. Collective bargaining includes the aforementioned employee wage, benefits, and labor conditions. These findings are consistent with Clark (2012), who associated unions with the (a) reduction of worker turnover, (b) higher wage distribution, (c) increased fringe benefits, (d) dismissal standards, (e) workers' compensation, (f) collective negotiation, and (g) grievance procedures. The union member evaluates the utility of the union through cost versus benefit analysis (Jones and McKenna, 1994).

The collective bargaining agreement determines whether the cost of the union is less than the benefits. Therefore, the concept of collective bargaining is included in the conceptual framework. Union representatives in this study found the union to be very effective in collectively bargaining for the members. We also found that the members complained frequently. In support, Powdthavee (2011) found that unhappy

employees were more likely to join a union and participate in its activities. Ironically, this study also found the collective bargaining agreement was affected by the economy. Unions are involved in negative collective bargaining to prevent layoffs. Stepan-Norris and Southworth (2010) illustrated the *deal making* environment of collective bargaining in their study.

The emerging theme of appointed representation is consistent with information found in the literature review of this study. Data from this study reflected that members are unsatisfied with the leadership of their unions. Participation is found to be less than 15 percent. Representatives suggest that the negotiating teams have been attempting to satisfy both the union members and management of the business. Jarley *et al.* (1997) found the appointed representation method of collective bargaining to be ineffective. The researchers suggested that unions increase employee involvement in contract negotiations and decision making. Some scholars have claimed that unions are both a democracy and an organizational bureaucracy (Jarley *et al.*, 1997). Union participation during contract negotiations must involve employee voices to ensure businesses' addresses their concerns (Estlund, 2012).

The culture of labor unions must be changed to revitalize the labor movement. The political and bureaucratic culture of labor unions is counterproductive to establishing a healthy organizational culture. The internal operations within unions must develop two-way communications. The union member is

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dissatisfied with the leadership and limited interaction in contract negotiations. The union member has limited input regarding the overall strategy of the union. Unions require members to pay dues to an organization with no control of major strategic decisions. Labor unions develop control of a workplace from a bottom-up initiative; but manage the labor union members from a top-down initiative.

The external influence of political organizations on union membership also emerged as a theme in this study. These findings were consistent with those of the authors detailed in the literature review of this study. Hogler and Henle (2011) discussed the results of political, ideological, and conservative forces like the Tea Party on unionism. In support, Judis (2011) consequently emphasized the Republican Party's effort to prevent union contributions to the Democratic Party, thereby seeking to change the political landscape of the country.

Political organizations throughout history have negatively affected unions in the United States (Hogler and Henle, 2011). In this study, the participants frequently mentioned political issues and their effects on union membership. Unions operate internally as a political group vulnerable to outside politics. The analysis of the data that emerged from this study led to the observation of minimal emphasis on the use of membership feedback. A shift is needed to refocus unions toward organizing and satisfying members' needs. Unions are focusing on political rivalry while neglecting to nurture their relationship with union members. Conflicting internal interests

reduce the union leaders' ability to unite union members. Dreier (2011) supported the need to focus on internal matters.

A union serves as formal fundraising source for national charities through payroll deductions and food donations at the local level. Union members are emotionally involved with local and national nonprofit organizations. Unions' leadership must tap into their ability to support nonprofit organizations and build brand awareness. Union membership revitalization begins with redesigning the democratic infrastructure and improving the corporate culture (Meardi, 2011).

The union representatives described the quality of communication with union members as less than adequate. Communication is vital to the facilitation of strategic initiatives, operational efficiency, and a healthy corporate culture. Meardi (2011) also suggests union officials to use a cultural, sociological communication plan to satisfy union members' needs. In support, Siebert (2011) suggests that unions use the workplace to educate workers and create harmony among employers. Researchers view workplace education as an essential element to the revitalization of union membership.

Unions must improve both their internal and external communication. The internal dialogue must facilitate the strategic initiatives of the employee union. The intellectual capital of the union member should increase the efficiency of the union's internal functions. Benson and Brown (2010) found increased internal discussion with union members as useful to operational

efficiency. Transparency is needed to reduce the image of unions as being corrupt organizations funneling payments to organized crime (Greene–May, 2011).

The females in this study revealed a significant ability to focus on both internal and external issues. There were two females in this study: Participant R4 and Participant R17. These participants represented both public and private sectors. Each participant agreed union leaders need to improve internal communications. Participant R4 said, “Communication is limited. There is not a great forum to communicate. We primarily communicate by emails. We have information on the website”. Participant R17 said, “The communication needs to be improved. It is not enough”. When asked what influences membership, Participant R4 focused on internal operational efficiency. Participant R4 said, “The biggest impact is proper representation of union members. The effectiveness of addressing union membership interests increase participation. Participation increases when the effectiveness of the union increases”. Participant R17 focused primarily on external matters. Participant R17 said, “Union members are interested in contract negotiation and labor issues. Community service opportunities get a good response from union members. Union members are active in holiday toy drives, fundraising and feeding the homeless population”. Powdthavee (2011) found that women are significantly more committed to unions than men because they identify with union goals and values. The data in this study support Powdthavee’s (2011) findings.

A comparison of industries revealed significant conflict among members, specifically those in trade unions. Union representatives revealed a racial divide among union members in trade unions. African Americans have expressed discrimination concerns in regards to (a) union inclusion, (b) job assignments, and (c) filtered information. Participant 13 said, “African Americans feel neglected and insignificant. Trade unions make it difficult for African Americans to become members. Trade unions practice racism when assigning projects to the members”. Abel (2011), and Rosenfeld and Kleykamp’s (2012) research supports this statement. Moreno (2010) provided information on the use of racism to control the supply and demand of labor. There is a need to teach the members about racially motivated systemic problems. The eradication of racial discrimination in the union culture must occur to ensure equal opportunity for all workers.

The data in this study revealed the most significant event in labor history was the firing of air traffic controllers by President Ronald Reagan on August 5, 1981. Twenty-five percent of the participants identified this to be a significant event in labor history. Fifteen percent of the participants identified the Los Angeles city budget crisis of 2010 to be a significant event. Ten percent of the participants identified the defeated Freedom Choice Act to be a significant event. Thirty percent of the participants recognized President Reagan’s firing of the air traffic controllers as significant to declining union membership. Participant R12 said, “Ronald Reagan’s attack was designed to

attack unions” . Participant R13 said, “ Ronald Reagan started the decline of unions with the attack on PATCO” . Participant R1 said, “ Reagan weakened PATCO signaling to employers it’ s OK to violate the social contract and attack workers” . Thirty percent of the participants identified globalism as the basis for declining union membership. Interestingly, 20 percent of the participants identified a negative perception of unions to be the cause of declining union membership. Fifteen percent of the participants identified the points of (a) a new strategy, (b) technological advances, (c) labor laws, and (d) political opposition as significant to declining union membership. Ten percent of the participants recognized budget cuts and employer opposition. Participants identified the points of (a) immigration, (b) jobs, and (c) internal conflict as having a minimal impact on membership; therefore, the findings produced from this study vary from the results of immigration’ s impact found in Rosenfeld and Kleykamp (2009). Figure 6 provides the related categorical percentages.

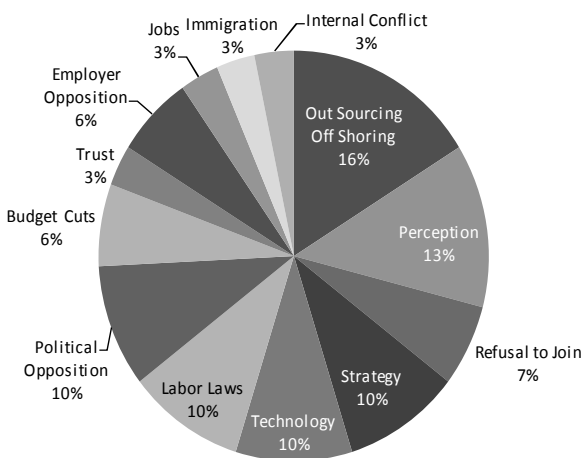


Figure 6: Perceived Causes of Declining Union Memberships

IMPLICATIONS

We have explored the principal perceptions of union representatives on contributory factors in regards to declining union membership. All of the recognized themes provide insight into how union leaders can address the phenomenon. The existence of unions benefits the economy and society at large. Any increase in union membership could affect positive social change (a) economically, (b) politically, and (c) socially. The decline in union membership negatively affects the middle class and undermines equality values. Union members have been associated with increase in voting and charitable donations.

Union membership significantly affects social change. Unions are the quintessential civil society organizations, with a scope of influence extending beyond the workplace citation. Unions affect society as a whole because they make essential contributions to (a) creating, (b) maintaining, and (c) rebuilding democratic societies. Unions have been influential in creating democracy in (a) voting, (b) education, (c) housing, and (d) urban renewal.

We have identified areas where the union could improve the experience of being a union member. Internal communication and participation could be increased by the use of social media, smartphone applications, and webinars. Contract involvement must become transparent and inclusive. Unions must take an aggressive approach to increase brand loyalty through the use of technology. Increasing union membership could lead to (a) larger middle class, (b) increased numbers of registered voters,

(c) increased charitable donations, and (d) a more efficient democracy.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The information provided was limited to the diversity of Los Angeles unions in regard to gender, ethnicity, and industry. We assumed that the organizational culture of the unions had an insignificant impact on the study's scope. The participants were located in Southern California. This study was limited to unions located in Los Angeles County. The demographics of the participants and geographic location may have had a significant influence on the results of this study. The population of other geographic regions could provide additional insight into how unions experience declining union membership.

The results of this study indicate the need to develop internal communication, provide a feedback loop, and build strategic alliances. The recommendations for action are as follows:

- Leadership training is needed for all union representatives to increase emotional intelligence, relational intelligence, and social intelligence.
- Union leaders should provide greater transparency to members during the collective bargaining process.
- Union membership participation in the collective bargaining process must include direct involvement.
- Union leaders should increase efforts to build strategic alliances with local and socially responsive organizations, increase brand recognition and brand loyalty, emotionally engage their members, and build political

coalitions that are prominent to political candidates.

- Union leaders should seek to educate the public on the benefits of collective bargaining.
- Union leaders should use web applications and other technologies aggressively to inform and engage union members in two-way communications with their representatives.
- Union leaders must use customer relations management to build a valued relationship with members. The principles of customer service should become a practical application adding value to union membership.
- Union leaders must make workplace organizing a priority over political fundraising. The needs of the union member supersede any political agenda.

The results of this study can be used to assess the organizational efficiency of a union. Each category listed in Table 2 is important to the operational efficiency (Benson and Brown, 2010). It is important to keep the union members satisfied as customers. Union leaders have placed a priority on political issues. There is an erosion of core values that historically made unions attractive to union members. Union leaders should pay close attention to these results and disseminate the information in their conferences and training manuals.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

We have identified union representatives' perceptions of key factors leading to the decline of union membership through this study. Further inquiry is needed to investigate the phenomenon on a state and national level. We recommend

other researchers to conduct the study in various individual industries to compare emerging themes.

We also recommend conducting a quantitative analysis for analyzing key correlates of decisions for union membership based upon a Likert scale using the categorical themes in this study as scale options. The proposed study has the potential to identify statistical significance and relationships among variables associated with declining union membership.

We recommend using a mixed method approach with a Likert scale and open-ended questions as part of a survey. Researchers may distribute the survey to both union members and union representatives. The proposed quantitative study may be helpful for discovering variances in responses and thereby perceptions of the same questions among union leaders, members, and leaders of organizations with whom they negotiate.

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Interview Questions

The following research questions were used in the exploration, explanation, description, and identification of factors significant to the decline in union membership used these questions to focus on concerns significant to union membership.

1. How would you describe declining union membership?
2. Describe union employee participation within the union?
3. Describe the effectiveness of your union in the workplace?
4. How would you describe your communication with union members?
5. What influences membership participation?
6. How are union members involved in contract negotiation?
7. How would you describe your relationship with union members?
8. What is the cause of the decline in union membership?
9. How is union membership affected by outside organizations?
10. What effect do labor laws have on union membership?
11. What additional information would you like to add that was not asked?

Follow-Up Questions

1. How are you affected by this experience?
2. What changes do you associate with declining union membership?
3. What significant events stand out?
4. What remaining thoughts would you like to share?