

**FACULTY SATISFACTION WITH UNIONS:
THE IMPACT OF PERSONAL INSTRUMENTALITY
AND ACTIVE COMMITMENT**

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ABSTRACT

This article reports the results of a survey of unionized faculty at a midsized public university. Participants ($n = 137$) responded to a questionnaire that examined satisfaction with union services and perceived personal instrumentality, as well as the number of union activities in which the faculty member participated. The results indicated that a relationship existed between satisfaction with union-provided services, active participation in the union, and personal instrumentality. In particular, individuals who felt that they could address work-related problems themselves were more likely to have lower union service satisfaction as well as participate in fewer union activities. Implications for unions are discussed.

Contraction in the manufacturing sector has increased attention in service and public sector unionism [1]. One area of particular interest, perhaps because of the increasingly turbulent environment, has been faculty unionism in higher

*Mary Van Sell died during the initial stages of this project. This article is dedicated to her memory. The remaining authors are listed alphabetically and contributed equally to this project.

education. Historically, research on faculty unionism in higher education has investigated a variety of topics, such as voting behavior in representational elections [2], wage effects [3, 4], dual commitment [1], and satisfaction under union and nonunion conditions [5]. Many of these studies are based on the idea that unions are instrumental for the achievement of goals [6]. That is, the union itself provides the means to desired outcomes that could not be achieved individually. Through collective action and power, the union is able to make a difference in working conditions.

The literature has primarily focused on faculty groups considering union certification [1, 7]. Research has not addressed the issue of union instrumentality for faculty who have been organized for a number of years. This is a fruitful area for investigation for two reasons. First, few faculty unions are ever decertified [8], and second, compared to other public-sector employees, faculty in higher education, regardless of union membership, are to some degree individual contractors. Faculty have control over their teaching style, choose their research topics, and to some extent self-select into service assignments. Therefore, in what situations would bargaining unit faculty members believe themselves to be more instrumental than their existing union in addressing work-related problems? We hypothesize that faculty who believe that they cannot successfully address work-related problems will express significantly more positive attitudes toward their union than those faculty who do not believe they can operate successfully on their own.

This hypothesis builds on earlier certification research [2] that reports a strong relationship between positive union certification votes and perceived union instrumentality. This literature also suggest that instrumentality has more than one dimension [7]. While certification elections may include a focus on the general dimension of union instrumentality, which involves socialization and beliefs about unionism, our study focuses on the specific dimension of instrumentality or the perceived value of an established union for a particular person [7]. Previous research on faculty unionism in higher education, while examining attitudes and commitment levels, has not examined the extent to which already organized faculty believe they can resolve their own problems with their respective administrators.

We also suggest that the degree to which faculty members perceive themselves as able to address work-related problems will affect not only their attitudes toward the union but actual behaviors that support union activities. Thacker, Fields, and Barclay indicated that commitment to an organization (an attitude) can have both passive and active components [9]. They characterized passive commitment as representing loyalty to the union, while active commitment involves working for the union. The commitment of faculty to unions has been examined in a number of other papers [10, 11]. Ng claimed that the way faculty view unions will have an effect on the degree of participation in the union exhibited by the faculty [11]. Organizational viability is often dependent on active commitment. That is, member participation beyond the paying of dues is

necessary for unions to effectively carry out their missions. Individuals must volunteer to actively participate in the union. The union cannot direct or compel a member to be a grievance officer or steward.

We therefore also hypothesize that faculty who believe they have personal instrumentality will exhibit fewer active behaviors in support of the union and be less satisfied with union-provided services. These expected relationships are shown in Figure 1.

One way of addressing the issue of personal versus union instrumentality is through the framework of self-efficacy proposed by Bandura [12]. In Bandura's framework, "Perceived self-efficacy is a judgment of one's capability to accomplish a certain level of performance" [12, p. 391]. Therefore, a faculty member who has self-efficacy in a particular area would report feeling confident that s/he would be able to resolve problems related to this area. Bandura also indicates that people will avoid tasks that they believe exceed their abilities [12]. Similarly,

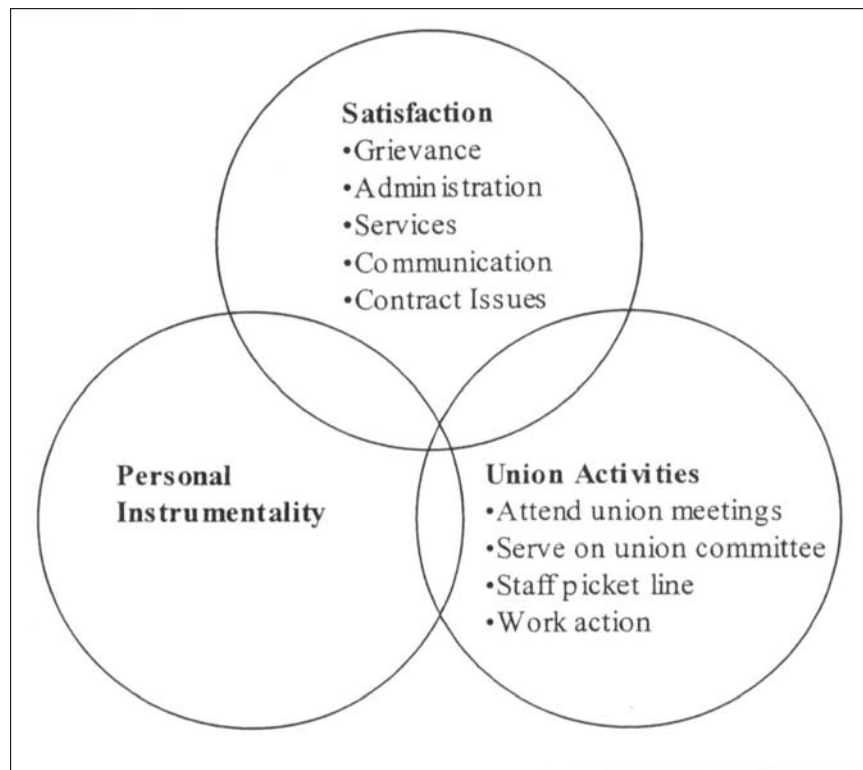


Figure 1. Personal instrumentality, satisfaction with union services, and union activities.

in our study, such an individual would report low confidence in solving a problem and would want the support of the union. This is important to consider because the faculty would have possessed collective efficacy [12] at the time of certification. This collective efficacy involves “commitment to a shared purpose” [12, p. 451]. Over time, this sense of collective efficacy could erode, and self-efficacy (personal instrumentality) could become more important for individual faculty members. Once the first contract has been negotiated and past practice established, faculty may no longer think of themselves as part of a committed group. Work problems that arise may seem to be individual problems.

Beyond the above hypotheses, this study hopes to add to the literature on faculty unionism by developing scales that measure satisfaction with dimensions of union-provided services. These scales could then be used by other unions. Villa and Blum indicated that it is in a union’s best interest to address the satisfaction of members via collective bargaining [8]. We suggest that unions should also assess member satisfaction with union-provided services. Any dimensions receiving lower scores would therefore be an area for needed service improvement on the part of the union. Lastly, improvement of service delivery could also be a way to revive the level of collective efficacy that would have been necessary for certification of the union to initially occur.

METHOD

Survey Respondents

With the support of a local union executive committee, questionnaires were mailed to the 453 members of a faculty union at a midwestern public university. One hundred and thirty-seven questionnaires were returned (30 percent response rate). The response rate is comparable to other union-based surveys [13]. There were 44 female (33.6 percent) and 87 male (66.4 percent) respondents. The mean age of all respondents was 49.3 years, with 15.3 years at the university. Most of the respondents (78.6 percent) were tenured, and from the College of Arts and Sciences (63.2 percent). A summary of the demographics of the sample is shown in Table 1.

The local had been organized in the 1970s and had negotiated a number of contracts. Shortly before the survey was distributed, the local had experienced a work-stoppage related to contract negotiations. The union is an agency shop. Most faculty are members. Generally less than 3 percent of the bargaining unit chooses agency fee status. This is in contrast to other unionized public institutions in the immediate area, in which large numbers of faculty from professional schools, such as business and engineering, choose not to join their local unions.

Measures

The survey consisted of several types of measures. Participants were asked to complete twenty-five satisfaction items. The content of these items focused on

Table 1. Demographics of the Survey Sample ($N = 137$)^a

	<i>N</i>	Percent
Academic unit		
Arts & Sciences	84	63.2%
Business Administration	15	11.3
Education	10	7.5
Engineering/Computer Science	7	5.3
Health Sciences	6	4.5
Nursing	6	4.5
Library	5	3.8
Rank		
Special lecturer	11	8.3
Assistant professor	21	15.8
Associate professor	51	38.3
Full professor	50	37.6
Tenured		
Tenured	103	78.6
Untenured	28	21.4

^aThe columns may not sum to 137 because of missing data.

satisfaction with a variety of local union services (e.g., representing faculty in grievance proceedings; returning calls and providing needed information quickly). Items were evaluated using a 5-point Likert-type scale (1—extremely dissatisfied, 5—extremely satisfied).

Participants were then asked to complete four behavior items that represent active commitment (e.g., vote to go on strike, sign up for picket duty). These items were evaluated using a Yes–No format. Activities were summed across the four items, resulting in a union activity score that ranged from 0 to 4.

To assess personal instrumentality, faculty were asked to indicate on a scale of 0 to 100 their confidence in handling five potential problem areas without the help of the union. The problem areas involved resolving a problem with discipline, working conditions, raises, benefits, and medical leaves. Lastly, demographic information on gender, age, academic unit, and tenure status was collected.

RESULTS

A factory analysis with Varimax rotation was run on the set of twenty-five satisfaction items. The items loaded onto five components with eigenvalues greater than 1.0. The resulting scales were an eight-item grievance scale

(Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient = .92), a four-item administration scale (Cronbach's alpha = .89), a five-item services scale (Cronbach's alpha = .87), a six-item communication scale (Cronbach's alpha = .83), and a two-item contract issues scale (Cronbach's alpha = .65). Using the rule of thumb that scale reliabilities should be at least .70, the alpha coefficients from all but contract issues had an appropriate level of reliability [14]. The means, standard deviations, and reliabilities of the five satisfaction scales are shown in Table 2.

Survey respondents rated their confidence in their ability to resolve five potential work-related problems on their own, without the help of the union. These ratings were relatively low; only "resolve discipline problem" had a mean over 50 percent. Survey respondents also indicated whether they had 1) attended any union meetings, 2) signed up to picket, 3) taught their class during the work action (reverse scored), and 4) served on a union committee. These four items were summed to compute a union activities score. The mean union activities score was 2.9; half the respondents had participated in three or four of the activities. The means and frequency distributions of the instrumentality ratings, and the number of union activities are shown in Table 3.

To test whether the instrumentalities are correlated with satisfaction with union services, regression analyses were calculated on each of the five satisfaction with union services scales as dependent variables, and the set of five instrumentality measures as independent variables. The five models tested were Satisfaction with Grievances = Constant + Discipline + Working Conditions + Raise + Benefits + Medical Leave; Satisfaction with Administration = Constant + Discipline + Working Conditions + Raise + Benefits + Medical Leave; Satisfaction with Services = Constant + Discipline + Working Conditions + Raise + Benefits + Medical Leave; Satisfaction with Communication = Constant + Discipline + Working Conditions + Raise + Benefits + Medical Leave; and Satisfaction with Contract Issues = Constant + Discipline + Working Conditions

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations, and Reliabilities of the Satisfaction Scales^a

Scale	Mean	Standard deviation	N	Cronbach's alpha
Grievance	3.68	0.71	136	.92
Administration	3.59	0.75	124	.89
Services	4.10	0.70	134	.87
Communication	3.56	0.64	137	.83
Contract issues	3.59	0.88	136	.65

^aScales are available on request from the second author.

Table 3. Means and Frequency Distributions for Personal Instrumentality Ratings and Union Activities

Instrumentality	Instrumentality ratings				
	Mean	0-25%	26-50%	51-75%	76-100%
Discipline	52.5	34 30%	30 27%	10 9%	39 35%
Working conditions	42.5	39 34%	47 41%	12 10%	18 16%
Raise	33.1	63 55%	23 20%	13 11%	16 14%
Benefits	34.8	58 50%	25 22%	12 10%	20 17%
Medical leave	35.7	55 48%	30 26%	12 11%	17 15%
	Mean number of activities	Attended union meeting	Signed up to picket	Did not teach classes	Served on union committee
Union activities	2.9	116 87%	83 63%	124 93%	63 46%

+ Raise + Benefits + Medical Leave. The set of Instrumentality measures was found to be significantly correlated with all of the satisfaction with union services scales except Contract Issues. The scale had poor reliability, which tends to attenuate the correlation with the instrumentality ratings. The results of the regression analyses are shown in Table 4.

As a second test of the expected relationship between instrumentality and satisfaction with union services, Pearson correlations were calculated between the five instrumentalities and the five satisfaction scales. These are found in Table 5. The correlations are generally in the predicted direction (high satisfaction and low personal instrumentality or low satisfaction and high personal instrumentality) resulting in negative correlation coefficients. Only four of the twenty-five correlations are not in the predicted direction. Two of these correlations involve the Contract Satisfaction Scale (for the Discipline and the Working Conditions Instrumentalities), which had low internal consistency. The other two correlations were between Discipline Instrumentality and both the Administrative and Services Satisfaction scales. Although thirteen of the twenty-five correlations

Table 4. Prediction of Satisfaction with Union Services from Personal Instrumentality Measures

Satisfaction	Multiple <i>R</i>	Adjusted RSQ	<i>F</i> - ratio	Prob.	<i>df</i>	Std. error	Prob.
Grievance	.33	.07	2.53*	.034	5, 104		
• Discipline						.003	.402
• Working conditions						.004	.884
• Raise						.004	.187
• Benefits						.004	.991
• Medical leave						.003	.167
Administration	.34	.07	2.53*	.034	5, 97		
• Discipline						.003	.111
• Working conditions						.004	.986
• Raise						.004	.655
• Benefits						.004	.412
• Medical leave						.004	.230
Services	.32	.06	2.43*	.040	5, 104		
• Discipline						.003	.098
• Working conditions						.004	.638
• Raise						.004	.297
• Benefits						.004	.426
• Medical leave						.003	.856
Communication	.33	.06	.50*	.035	5, 105		
• Discipline						.002	.159
• Working conditions						.004	.487
• Raise						.003	.286
• Benefits						.004	.935
• Medical leave						.003	.303
Contract issues	.27	.03	1.63	.159	5, 104		
• Discipline						.003	.597
• Working conditions						.005	.175
• Raise						.005	.038*
• Benefits						.005	.998
• Medical leave						.004	.966

*Statistically significant at .05 level.

Table 5. Pearson Correlations between Personal Instrumentalities and Satisfaction Scales

Instrumentalities	Satisfaction with union services				
	Grievance	Admin.	Services	Communication	Contract
Discipline	-0.03 (.771) <i>n</i> = 112	0.06 (.556) <i>n</i> = 104	0.03 (.735) <i>n</i> = 112	-0.02 (.878) <i>n</i> = 113	0.06 (.540) <i>n</i> = 112
Working conditions	-0.15 (.104) <i>n</i> = 115	-0.11 (.224) <i>n</i> = 107	-0.15 (.122) <i>n</i> = 115	-0.19* (.039) <i>n</i> = 116	0.01 (.923) <i>n</i> = 115
Raise	-0.28* (.002) <i>n</i> = 114	-0.23* (.019) <i>n</i> = 107	-0.26* (.005) <i>n</i> = 114	-0.27* (.004) <i>n</i> = 115	-0.16 (.087) <i>n</i> = 114
Benefits	-0.26* (.005) <i>n</i> = 114	-0.27* (.004) <i>n</i> = 107	-0.25* (.007) <i>n</i> = 114	-0.27* (.003) <i>n</i> = 115	-0.16 (.100) <i>n</i> = 114
Medical leave	0.27* (.003) <i>n</i> = 113	-0.26* (.006) <i>n</i> = 106	-0.19* (.040) <i>n</i> = 113	-0.26* (.006) <i>n</i> = 114	-0.11 (.257) <i>n</i> = 113

*Statistically significant at .05 level, pairwise deletion.

were statistically significant at the .05 level, none were significant when Bonferroni probabilities were used, correcting for the number of correlation coefficients tested.

Correlations between Personal Instrumentality and Number of Union Activities, and Union Service Satisfaction and Number of Union Activities are found in Table 6. One of the Personal Instrumentality correlations and two of the Union Service Satisfaction correlations were statistically significant, although all are in the predicted direction, negative for the Personal Instrumentality correlations, and positive for the Union Service Satisfaction correlations. When Bonferroni corrected probabilities were used, only one of the correlations were statistically significant, between Services and Union Activities.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study accomplished several goals. First, it developed several Union Service Satisfaction Scales. Four of the five scales had high enough reliability to

Table 6. Pearson Correlations of Personal Instrumentalities and Satisfaction with Union Services with Number of Union Activities

	Correlation with number of activities	Probability	<i>n</i>
Personal instrumentality			
Discipline	-.11	.259	110
Working conditions	-.21*	.027	113
Raise	-.17	.080	112
Benefits	-.11	.272	112
Medical leave	-.02	.805	111
Satisfaction with Union services			
Grievance	.16	.063	130
Administration	.19*	.042	118
Services	.24*	.006	128
Communication	.13	.145	131
Contract	.14	.109	130

*Statistically significant at .05 level, pairwise deletion.

be used in additional settings. These scales can provide established unions with a means to assess member satisfaction with union-provided services, and assist the union with planning, a very practical application.

Second, the study collected data on the perceptions of Personal Instrumentality in an established local. The results of these analyses confirmed our expectation that satisfaction with union services was related to this personal instrumentality. The multiple regression analyses found four significant results. Additional analyses, while not always statistically significant, were in the predicted directions. Therefore, it appears that individuals who are personally efficacious (possess individual instrumentality) are less satisfied with union services than those who believe they need the union's help. This suggests that unions must remain responsive and "sell" their services to their membership well after initial certification.

Although the mean instrumentality ratings were relatively low (50 percent and below), the two instrumentalities where faculty were most confident were surprisingly those that would more likely involve contract issues. These dimensions are Discipline and Working Conditions. This is a very unexpected result. One would assume that union members would want the assistance of the local in resolving discipline or working condition issues, two areas of great importance in traditional labor relations [6].

Lastly, there was some support for the hypothesis that more satisfied individuals would engage in more Union Activities. In particular, satisfaction with Union Services was significantly correlated with number of activities in which members participated. Therefore, the service dimension aspect discussed above has a very concrete outcome: active members. In addition, while only one of the correlations was statistically significant for Union Activities and Personal Instrumentality, it was once again in the predicted direction: the higher the Personal Instrumentality score, the fewer Union Activities were noted.

This study does have several limitations. The data collected was from a cross-sectional sample. In addition, the data were collected from only one local. It would be useful to extend this research to other locals as well as collecting behavioral data longitudinally within a local.

This study suggests, in the end, that unions should become more responsive to the day-to-day services they provide to members. The outcome of a more service-oriented approach could be a more active membership. In addition, the results suggest that more active communication to the membership on problem solving within the work relationship may both strengthen the union and protect the membership.

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