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Union Commitment and Participation

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Umbrella Summary

Union Commitment and Participation

A Summary of Workforce Research Evidence Relevant to the Child Welfare Field

What are union commitment and participation?

Union commitment refers to the extent to which employees are dedicated to their union (Cooper-Hakim & Viswesvaran, 2005; Gordon, Philpot, Burt, Thompson, & Spiller, 1980). Union participation is active involvement in the union such as attending meetings, serving on committees, holding office, campaigning, voting, assisting with contracts and negotiations, managing union funds, and filing grievances (Anderson, 1979). Many researchers consider union participation as part of union commitment (e.g., Gordon et al., 1980). Others have speculated that union participation is a consequence of union commitment (e.g., Parks, Gallagher, & Fullagar, 1995). Additional ways to conceptualize union participation include:

- ▷ Participation as a single, global concept (e.g., Anderson, 1979).
- ▷ Participation as areas of activities (e.g., administration participation, meeting attendance, and voting) that need to be considered separately (e.g., McShane, 1986; Parks et al., 1995).
- ▷ Participation as militant versus non-militant participation (Monnot, Wagner, & Beehr, 2001).

Militant participation is “any action on the part of union members to withhold work activity, such as a strike or slowdown” (Monnot et al., 2011, p. 1127). This type of participation may be harmful to the organization and require people to prioritize the good of the union over the good of the organization. Non-militant participation, however, is “any form of prounion action that does not directly interfere with the operations of the business, such as voting in union elections, reading union literature, or even running for office as an official” (Monnot et al., 2011, p. 1128). These are not damaging actions and allow for employees to be equally committed to the organization and the union.

Researchers have used many versions of union commitment and participation scales. For example, Union Loyalty (i.e., commitment) is measured with items such as “I feel a sense of pride being part of this union” and “The record of this union is a good example of what dedicated people can get done” (Gordon et al., 1980). Willingness to Work (i.e., participation) includes items such as “If asked, I would serve on a committee” and “I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected of a member in order to make the union successful” (Gordon et al., 1980).

Why are union commitment and participation important?

Union commitment and participation are important because they are associated with job attitudes (Monnot et al., 2011). More specifically, union commitment is modestly associated with job satisfaction and moderately associated with organizational commitment; employees who express commitment to the union are more likely to also express job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Overall, union participation is not related to job satisfaction or organizational commitment. Militant union participation, however, is modestly related to organizational commitment; employees who engage in militant union participation are less likely to express commitment to their organization.

What contributes to union commitment and participation?

Meta-analytic research on union commitment and participation thus far has focused on assessing factors that are merely associated with it, not on what factors cause union commitment or participation. Nonetheless, two factors may contribute to union commitment and participation: pro-union attitudes and instrumentality perceptions. Pro-union attitudes refer to individuals' perception that unions are good, and instrumentality perceptions refer to individuals' beliefs that unions do good. That is, pro-union attitudes are general positive attitudes toward the union and unions in general; instrumentality perceptions are the belief in "the union helping to achieve something for the members" (Monnot et al., 2011, p. 1129). Both pro-union attitudes and instrumentality are strongly related to union commitment and moderately related to union participation (both militant and non-militant). Employees who feel generally positive about the union and believe the union is helpful are more likely to express commitment to the union and participate in union activities.

QIC-WD Takeaways

- ▶ Union commitment is modestly associated with job satisfaction and moderately associated with organizational commitment.
- ▶ Overall union participation is not related to job satisfaction or organizational commitment.
- ▶ Militant union participation is modestly related to organizational commitment, such that employees who engage in militant union participation have lower organizational commitment.
- ▶ Union commitment and participation are higher among those who feel unions are good and useful.
- ▶ Research is needed to better understand what causes union commitment.
- ▶ Practitioners or researchers that would like to assess union commitment should consider the measure developed by Gordon et al. (1980).

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