

Exploring Commitment Among Union Members: Perspective and Direction

Husna Johari* and Sabarani Ghazali**

Basically, unions offer the promise of a number of benefits in order to solicit members' commitment. Unions are traditionally different from commercial organizations in various aspects such as historical development, the voluntary nature of their membership and the sources of power. In this context, unions involve with the lack of formal authority over members and the need for members' voluntary participation. The union's lack of formal authority over its members is due to the differences in the nature of exchange between the workers, the union and the working organization. This difference in dynamics means that the union must convince union members of its usefulness and also emphasize the importance of members' commitment to increase the union's effectiveness. Consequently this demands separate scrutiny from that of commercial organization. The study of unions as organizations requires an awareness of the unique functions of these organizations and their nature of member attachment to their union. The dramatic changes in the surrounding environment have contributed a serious impact on the performance and effectiveness of unions. In order to regain support for unions, it is necessary and important to understand what determines union commitment. Consequently, this study focused on trade unions to identify some of the salient factors that may influence the commitment of union members from different sectors in Malaysia. This study also examined the influence of the union sector as a moderator on the relationship between the factors and union commitment. Based on the research findings, theoretical and practical implications are discussed further.

Field of Research: Human Resource Management, Industrial Relations

1. Introduction

Organizations today are facing an increasing competitive and rapidly changing environment. A voluntary organization like the union is of no exception. Generally, trade unions provide members with the benefits of collective bargaining (e.g. job security, wages, fringe benefits and access to grievance procedures). However, there are several differences between unions and the workplace, specifically the lack of formal authority over members and the need for members' voluntary participation. For instance, the worker is paid by and works for the organization. In contrast, union members pay and expect the union to work for them. This difference in dynamics means that the union must convince union members of its usefulness and also emphasize the importance of member commitment to increase the union's effectiveness. Convincing

*Dr. Husna Johari, College of Business, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Sintok, 06010, Kedah, Malaysia. Email: husna@uum.edu.my

**Sabarani Ghazali, College of law, Government and International Studies, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Sintok, 06010, Kedah, Malaysia, Email: sabarani@uum.edu.my

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members of the usefulness and of the importance of its role to members is a formidable task. It implies the understanding of the various variables that may affect union commitment and participation. Presently, the changing conditions in world markets began to transform the organization of work. New technology, recession and a much greater level of uncertainty in the global market had an impact upon the behavior of employees and industrial relations systems. Besides these factors, the greater employment for non-manual workforce, the reduction of personnel in large workplaces, new attitudes towards solidarity and individualism on the part of workers have had general implications on the aggregate pattern of unionization across countries.

These environmental changes have caused firms to reshape management strategies that emphasize on core competencies and knowledge work and to expand by contracting out parts of their business through a wide network of corporate alliances (Heckscher, 2001). Besides these strategies, management has closed unproductive capacity, de-layered rigid and unresponsive hierarchies, and has sought to adopt decentralized decision making within the firm. A critical component of management strategy has been to forge new relations with employees and their unions. By creating new and more cooperative management, it was able to generate and influence workers and union commitment towards its goals of achieving lower cost, increased productivity, and higher quality. In this respect, union fear that workers and their union involvement in workplace decision making will erode the members' commitment to and satisfaction with the union (Rubeinstein, 2001). The advent of employee involvement may cause workers to identify more closely with the management, to see the unions as increasingly irrelevant in the workplace, and to become less involved in supporting it. The end result may be the weakening of union bargaining power and ultimately the undermining of the union's very survival and growth as an institution of worker representation. Hence, in order to revive member support and loyalty for unions, there is a need to understand the very fabric of unionism, that is, union commitment. Without the members' commitment, unions may not be able to achieve their goals. As Gordon, Philpot, Burt, Thompson, and Spiller (1980: p.480) noted: "Since the ability of union locals to attain their goals is generally based on the members' loyalty, belief in the objective of organized labor, and willingness to perform service, commitment is part of the very fabric of unions". These issues are pertinent especially in the context of problems and challenges facing unions around the world. This study draws upon research on trade unions in Malaysia to identify some of the salient variables which may influence the commitment of union members. Since there are some differences with respect to the industrial relation practices between public and private sector in Malaysia (Aminuddin, 2003; Ayudurai, 1990), this study intends to explore the influence of union sector as a potential moderator. Hence, this lead to the formation of several research objectives:

- i. To determine the factors influencing union commitment;

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- ii. To examine the moderating effect of union sector on the relationship between the factors and union commitment.

2. Literature Review

Union commitment

Gordon, Philpot, Burt, Thompson, and Spiller (1980) suggested that union commitment subsumes four major constructs, which include an attitude of loyalty to the union, a feeling of responsibility to the union, a willingness to exert strong effort on behalf of the union, and a belief in the goals of unionism. Meanwhile, Sverke and Kuruvilla (1995), Sverke and Sjoberg (2001), provided a conceptualization of value and instrumental rationality-based commitment to the union. In this respect, “value rationality-based commitment to the union” reflects a sense of shared values, identity, and pride in the union. On the other hand, “instrumental rationality-based commitment to the union” is essentially based on self-interest through the satisfaction of relevant personal goals and is viewed as the extent to which the union is perceived to be effective in achieving certain valued goals. It is postulated that both value dimension and instrumental dimension can be potential sources of member commitment to the union, but the relative impact on subsequent membership behaviors of each commitment dimension may vary from country to country or setting to setting (Sverke & Kuruvilla, 1995). The clear advantage of conceptualizing commitment as being composed of these dimensions is the recognition that individuals may be bound to organizations for different reasons and their behavior may vary as a result. From literature, variables such as union socialization and union leadership reflects the value dimension, while variables like union satisfaction and perceived union instrumentality portrays the instrumental dimension of union commitment. This research model specifies antecedent factors which are relevant to the union study. These include:

Union socialization

In the literature on organizational socialization, socialization is defined as those changes caused by the organization that take place in newcomers and as “the process by which a person learns the values, norms and required behaviors which permit him to participate as a member of the organization” (Wanous & Collela, 1989). Such socialization experiences in labor unions have been shown to be consistently and positively associated with union commitment (Fuller & Hester, 1998; Gordon et al., 1980; Sverke & Sjoberg, 1994). However, Fullagar et al. (1995) has suggested that further understanding of the relationship need to be done in different populations and settings.

Union leadership

McShane and Von Glinow (2005) had defined leadership as influencing, motivating, and enabling others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organization of which they are members. In the union setting, leadership behavior reflects the ability of union leaders to promote the membership among its members with some favorable behavior that can

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positively increase the members' attitudes and participation. With respect to union setting, several studies suggested that union commitment is closely related to attitudes toward the union and toward union leaders or shop stewards (Snape et al., 2004; Catano et al., 2001). Union leadership is highly relevant to labor unions as it entails inducing organizational members to strongly identify with the values and mission of the organization (Snape et al., 2000).

Union satisfaction

Fiorito, Gallagher, and Greer (1986) suggested that union satisfaction is a function of the discrepancy between member expectations and perceptions of union performance on a number of job and union-related facets such as bread and butter issues, internal relations between leaders and rank-and-file members, and improvements in the working environment. They suggested that expectations of union performance tend to be relatively homogeneous across members, and union satisfaction differences stem from predominantly from variation in perceived outcomes. Due to the lack of empirical findings, the relationship between union satisfaction and members' commitment warrant further investigation (Snape et al., 2000).

Perceived union instrumentality

Union instrumentality refers to perceive the union as being effective in fulfilling the roles as the worker's representative (Chacko, 1985). Relevant questions are such as: What does my union do for me? Does my union have the power to influence my employer? Am I pleased with the type of action my union is taking to improve my working conditions? According to Kochan (1979), union instrumentality is conceptualized as the belief that unions are able to improve wages, benefits, working conditions, fairness, and so forth through their collective bargaining and contract administration activities. Perceived union instrumentality is one of the key predictors of union loyalty and participation (Bamberger, 1999). Hence, this variable is chosen in this study as it reflects one of the important roles run by the union in fulfilling members' expectation.

Moderator: union sector

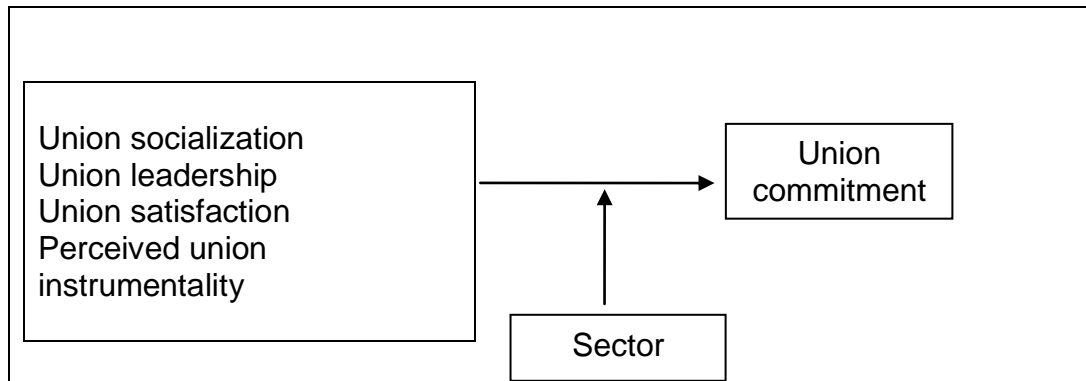
It is generally recognized that within a countrywide industrial relations system, there are variations among organizations based on a variety of environmental and internal factors. For example, industries face different competitive environments and organizations utilize varying personnel or human resource management systems. Nonetheless, the major forces that shape the tenor of labor management relations include forces like the degree of union/employer centralization, the basis for unionism, the roles played by government, and the nature of the employer. With respect to this, the public or private nature of the employer can create distinct labor relations environment. For example, in the public sector, there are restrictions, fragmented, or diffused bargaining authority given to workers with respect to terms and conditions of employment, lack of freedom on conducting strike activities, and etc. According to the Social Information Processing Theory by Salancik and Preiffer (1978), the importance of contextual variables including sector (the public or private nature of

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employment) have significantly influence on work-related attitudes that reflect important contextual impact on organizations. The theory further suggested that union commitment and union participation models would be more enhanced by viewing sector as a moderator, rather than an antecedent or outcome of specific variables.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Based on the various relationships between the variables mentioned, the model is as presented in Figure 1 below.



3. Methodology

The research design employed in this study was a survey-based design. The study period was done within a period of one year. The selected unions which are located in the northern part of West Malaysia represent clerical workers who are also the registered union members from both public and private sectors. Since the total population size for both unions is above 50000 members, (The Department of Trade Union, Malaysia) the sample size chosen in the study was 400 union members. The sample size followed the table given by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) that generalized scientific guidelines for sample size decisions. In another aspect, the population of the public sector was smaller than private sector by a ratio of 20000:30000. It was considered that 400 union members from the public sector and 600 union members from private sector were adequate to represent the total population of both sectors. The sampling technique used in this study was stratified random sampling. This approach was used to ensure equal opportunity of inclusion of union members from both unions (Kyle & Steven, 2005). Once the population has been stratified based on sector, a sample of members from each union was drawn randomly from the membership registration list obtained from each respective union.

3.1 Research Instrument

Data gathering was collected via questionnaire. The survey instrument was developed from established instruments, drawing upon previous studies dealing with union preferences and perceived benefits, and reviewed by researchers in

the related field.

3.2 Measurement of Variables

In this study, some of these measures have been adopted from various sources. In some cases, modifications to the adopted measures have been made to render them more appropriate to the context of this study. The constructs were measured by Likert-item scales which have appeared in the literature and have demonstrated reliability and validity. The scales could be seen from the table below:

Table 1: Measurement of Variables

Union commitment: Value/normative union commitment	O'Reilly and Chapman's (1986)
Union commitment: Instrumental union commitment	Heshizer and Lund (1997)
Union Socialization	Gordon et al. (1980)
Union Satisfaction	Glick, Mirvis, and Harder (1977)
Union Leadership	Conger and Kanungo (1992).
Perceived union instrumentality: job benefits and monetary benefits	DeCotiis & Lelourn (1981)

3.3 Analysis of Results

Reliability Analysis

To test the internal consistency of the measurement of instrument, a reliability analysis was conducted on the factors extracted using the recommendation from Nunnaly and Bernstein (1994). For the purpose of this study, a minimum reliability (cronbach's alpha) value of .60 was set. According to Nunnaly and Berstein (1994), coefficient alpha of value .70 is considered good, but a value exceeding .60 is acceptable. As shown, the cronbach alphas of the measure were higher than .60. Table 2 displays the alpha values of all the variables.

Table 2: Reliability Analysis

Variables	Reliability (alpha)
<u>Dependent variables</u>	
Affective attachment	.76
Instrumental attachment	.63
<u>Independent variables</u>	
Union satisfaction	.86
Union socialization	.65
Union leadership	.89
Perceived union instrumentality	.74

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Hypotheses

- H1.0: Union factors (union satisfaction; union socialization; union leadership; perceived union instrumentality) significantly influence union commitment (affective attachment and instrumental attachment)
- H1.1: Union satisfaction significantly influence affective attachment
- H1.2: Union socialization significantly influence affective attachment
- H1.3: Union leadership significantly influence affective attachment
- H1.4: Perceived union instrumentality influence affective attachment
- H1.5: Union satisfaction significantly influence instrumental attachment
- H1.6: Union socialization significantly influence instrumental attachment
- H1.7: Union leadership significantly influence instrumental attachment
- H1.8: Perceived union instrumentality significantly influence instrumental attachment
- H2.0: Union sector moderates the relationship between union factors (union satisfaction; union socialization; union leadership; perceived union instrumentality) and union commitment (affective attachment and instrumental attachment) such that the impact of the relationships are stronger for members of the public sector.

To test all the hypotheses as shown above, correlations and multiple linear regressions were used. The results are shown in Table 3, Table 4, and Table 5.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics and Correlations among the variables

No	Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	Sector	1.00									
2	Age	.52**	1.00								
3	Gender	.02	-.14**	1.00							
4	Tenure	.02	.42**	-.11*	1.00						
5	Union satisfaction	.20**	-.14*	-.04	-.05	1.00					
6	Union socialization	.28**	-.22**	-.09	-.05	.43**	1.00				
7	P'ceived union inst	.24**	-.01	.01	.03	.46**	.38**	1.00			
8	Union leadership	-.06	.13*	-.04	.01	.63**	.49**	.45**	1.00		
9	A-attachment	-.20**	.19**	-.02	.05	.47**	.29**	.26**	.38**	1.00	
10	I-attachment	.06	-.14**	.03	-.06	.42**	.39**	.26**	.20**	.37**	1.00

Note: * Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)

** Correlation is significant at the .01level (2-tailed)

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Table 4: Results of Hierarchical Regression on Affective Attachment

Variables	Beta 1	Beta 2	Beta 3	Beta 4
Control variables				
Age	.21	.15	.05	.06
Gender	.01	.03	.03	.02
Tenure	-.04	.02	.01	.02
Independent variables				
Union satisfaction		.13*	.16**	-.12
Union socialization		.06	.08	.19
Perceived union instrumentality		.08	.13*	-.19
Union leadership		.30**	.29**	.69**
Moderator				
Union sector (s)			-.23**	-.65
Moderating effect				
s x union satisfaction				.56
s x union socialization				.48
s x perceived union instrumentality				.59*
s x union leadership				-.89*
R ²	.04	.49	.51	.55
Adj. R ²	.03	.47	.49	.52
R ² Change	.04	.45	.02	.04
F value	5.07	26.54	27.01	17.52
Sig F. Change	.002**	.000**	.000**	.000

Note: *p<.05; **p<.01

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Table 5: Results of Hierarchical Regression on Instrumental Attachment

Variables	Beta 1	Beta 2	Beta 3	Beta 4
Control variables				
Age	-.14*	-.09	-.18*	-.18*
Gender	.01	.04	.05	.03
Tenure	-.01	.02	.06	.04
Independent variables				
Union satisfaction		.26**	.29**	.26
Union socialization		.23**	.25**	.16
Perceived union instrumentality		-.08	-.03	-.65**
Union leadership		.07	.06	.01
Moderator				
Union sector (s)			-.23**	-.21**
Moderating effect				
s x union satisfaction				.03
s x union socialization				.14
s x perceived union instrumentality				.86**
s x union leadership				-.01
R ²	.02	.30	.32	.39
Adj. R ²	.01	.28	.29	.35
R ² Change	.02	.28	.02	.07
F value	2.663	11.865	12.267	9.36
Sig F. Change	.05	.000**	.000**	.000**

Note: P* < .05; p** < .01

In order to answer to the hypotheses, The Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used in order to assess and understand the direction and significance of the relationships of the variables. From the table 3 above, the correlation coefficient for union satisfaction ($r = .47$), union socialization ($r = .29$), union leadership ($r = .62$) and perceived union instrumentality ($r = .26$) were positive and significantly correlated with affective attachment at $p < .01$. The results also showed that union satisfaction ($r = .42$), union socialization ($r = .39$), union leadership ($r = .37$) and perceived union instrumentality ($r = .26$) were positive and significantly correlated with instrumental attachment. The value of correlation coefficients displayed significant relationship between all the union factors and union commitment dimensions (instrumental and affective attachment). The hierarchical multiple regression (enter method) was employed to assess the relationships among the variables and to test the moderating effects of union sector as the moderator on the relationships between the dependent and independent variables. From the results of the hierarchical regression, there were significant relationship between union factors such as union satisfaction ($\beta = .13, p < .05$) and union leadership ($\beta = .30, p < .01$) and affective attachment. However for instrumental attachment, two factors were found to be significantly related to it, union satisfaction ($\beta = .26, p < .01$) and union socialization ($\beta = .23,$

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$p < .01$). In terms of the moderator, the union sector was able to show some moderating influence on both the affective attachment ($\beta = -.23$, $p < .01$) and instrumental attachment ($\beta = -.23$, $p < .01$). From Table 4 and Table 5, the R^2 and R^2 (adjusted) improved and strengthened the variance in the affective attachment $R^2 = .51$ to $.55$; R^2 (adjusted) $= .49$ to $.52$ and instrumental attachment $R^2 = .32$ to $.39$; R^2 (adjusted) $= .29$ to $.35$

4. Discussion

From the hierarchical regression analysis, it was noted that there were several factors that have significant relationships with affective attachment. The factors are union leadership and union satisfaction. It was noted that union leadership also significantly support the findings from previous research (Sverke & Sjoberg, 1994). Generally, these studies had shown that the more union representative (union stewards) respond to and discuss union issues with members, the more loyal and responsible the members will feel toward the union. In this current study, the union representatives may have established good relations and rapport through meetings, social gatherings, and sport activities conducted by each union. Members also exhibited a strong relationship between union satisfaction and affective attachment. The results support the findings from previous studies (Heshizer & Martin, 1991; Snape et al., 2004). The results may suggest that member commitment to union values (affective commitment to the union) in part reflects beliefs about the perceived effectiveness of the union in achieving valued outcomes. This study also found that union satisfaction had significant relationship with instrumental attachment. This finding is consistent with previous literature (Snape et al., 2004). This study also supports the suggestion given by Fiorito et al. (1986) that union satisfaction is a function of the discrepancy between member expectation and perceptions of union performance on a number of job and union-related facets such as bread and butter issues, internal relations between leaders and rank-and-file members, and improvements in the quality of work life. This present study also revealed that union socialization influenced instrumental attachment but not affective attachment. This finding is consistent with the findings provided by Pinar (1997) who found that union socialization had a significant impact on both of the union commitment dimensions. The findings of the present study may imply that the members may have a deeper concern with the tangible economic workplace benefits that could provide more security for the members. The result also found to some extent that sector was able to moderate the relationships between perceived union instrumentality and union leadership and affective attachment. However, union sector was only able to moderate the relationship between perceived union instrumentality and instrumental attachment. The study also found that there were some differences between the members of the public and private sector unions with respect to perceived union instrumentality. The public sector union members showed higher degree of affective attachment. In this context, most of the employment decisions are controlled and decided by the government and it appears that the economic benefits from the union may have provided support for member acceptance of

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the union values and ideas. Demonstrations of these benefits serve to help members rationalize their belief in an activity for the union. The private sector union members also responded in higher instrumental attachment for perceived union instrumentality. Generally, the private sector members are given more freedom to conduct bilateral collective bargaining with their employers. With wider access to choice and mobility, this may suggest that the members' attachment to the union would be based more on the union instrumental efforts.

5. Implication

The study has proven that union commitment can be described in terms of two dimensions; the value dimension and the instrumental dimension. These findings are consistent with the theoretical predictions by Kuruvilla and Sverke (1995), and Newton and Shore (1992). According to Newton and Shore (1992: p.285), unions "need to emphasize both ideological and instrumental issues to promote the kind of active support needed to maintain them". Hence, the research is not only parallel with but also extends previous research on union commitment. Besides this, the findings also showed some consistencies with empirical findings (Snape et al., 2004) that showed strong relationships between some of the independent variables such as union leadership, union satisfaction with two dimensions of union commitment. From another aspect, only a few moderators have been used previously including race, white-collar and blue-collar worker, perceived union instrumentality, and industrial relation climate (Salancik & Pfeifer, 1978; Fuller & Hester, 1998). However, the current findings have also proved that the union sector could also be regarded as another potential moderator. From the findings, specifically, the union sector had significantly moderated the relationships between perceived union instrumentality and union leadership. With some differences underlying the public and private sectors, the results have empirically led to some differences in the relationships between independent and union commitment factors. Practically, the findings of this study might provide some insights to the present trade unions in formulating strategies to increase the member commitment toward their unions. This is critical since trade unions are currently facing tremendous environmental challenges such as retrenchment, globalization, diversity in the workforce, rapid technological advancement, and etc. Hence, this implies that union leaders, including the national union leaders and union representatives for each union (shop stewards), should integrate efforts toward improving strategies like educating members, communicating information and programs for the members, and create good rapport with the members at the shop floor level. These efforts may increase trust, commitment, and enhance the spirit of unity among the members for the survival of the union as a voluntary organization in the future.

5.1 Limitation

This study had only focused on the clerical union members from the public and private sector union. Different results might be obtained if the study looked at union commitment from other job categories covering management and non

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management level in the sectors. The sample size was small and only based on union members from two unions in this service industry. Hence the result should not be generalized to members of other unions in other industry.

6. Conclusion

The results have provided insight to some prediction/exploratory factors that have significant effects in explaining union commitment in Malaysian unions. Findings showed that although union members came from different unions and from different sectors, they revealed a high level of commitment toward their unions. The findings revealed significant correlation between union satisfaction and union leadership with affective attachment. Union socialization and union satisfaction were significantly correlated with instrumental attachment. The findings have also proved to some extent that union sector acts as a moderator variable for some relationships. Between the sectors, the public sector portrayed higher moderate influence for affective attachment while the private sector showed a higher influence for instrumental attachment. Hence, with limited literature on the area of union commitment, the findings have to some extent contributed to the understanding of the concept of union commitment and further enhance the knowledge in this area especially in the Malaysian context. The findings may also contribute in assisting union leaders in formulating more effective strategy to secure strong commitment among union members for the benefit and survival of the unions.

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