

Models of Union Participation: A Summary of Literature

Rashmi Maini

Present study unravels how and why people join trade unions and also what hinders them to participate in unions activities. It throws light on the various types of union participation levels. Further, it formulates different types of participants (active and passive). The paper focuses on four union participation models. First explains role of organizational characteristics, personal characteristic and perceptual variables to predict trade union participation. Second unveils the reservation to join a union. Third is based on 'organization support theory' and 'union support theory'. Fourth is known as segmented model as it separates five types of union members, namely reluctant members, card career, selective activists, apolitical stalwarts and ideological activists.

Rashmi Maini is Assistant Professor, Jaipuria Institute of Management, Indirapuram, Ghaziabad.
E-mail: rashmimaini@gmail.com

Introduction

Union participation is defined in different ways by several authors. According to Metochi (2002), "Union participation refers to involvement in collective actions". It is the involvement in union related activities that are closely connected with the effective functioning of the union (Meshane, 1986). "Union participation activities are classified as either formal activities (attending meetings, voting in election, filing a grievance and serving as an officer) or informal activities (sharing union related issues with friends, readings journals)" (Fullagar & Barling, 1991). Both formal and informal activities contribute to union participation (Fullagar et al., 1995). Participation is nothing but involvement in union related activities which enhances the effectiveness of union (Bolton et al., 2007; Gani, 1996). Heshizer and Lund (1997) explained informal activities as those which requires minimal role expectations. According to Sverke & Kuruvilla (1995), "union participation is involvement in all the activities that are related to union functioning / work".

Union density is declining continuously in the developing countries in general and

in India in particular, the question of why some people are members of trade unions and some are not, has attracted considerable attention in the past years. Different people join trade unions for different reasons. Waddington (1977) pointed out the two main categories for joining trade unions as “individual benefits” and “collective reasons”. Collective reasons comprise mutual support, improved pay, healthy working conditions, peer group pressure and belief in unionization. Individual benefits include training and education, industrial benefits and professional services. As trade unions are known for protecting the interest of workers, individuals join unions in order to fulfill their demands and fight for their rights (Bolton et al., 2007). Trade unions are known as advocates of human rights, individuals join unions in order to get benefits in the form of good working conditions, equal remuneration and health and safety (Parkes & Razavi, 2004).

“Union related activities are also clubbed in to two categories, active and passive. Active participation is related with more difficult and formal part of union linked work whereas passive is more of informal or which requires minimal role expectations like reading journals and discussing issues with friends.” (Sharma, 1987).

“Union participation is also defined in terms of behavioral involvement of union members in collective action (Tannenbaum, 1965, Tannenbaum & Kahn, 1958). Union participation reflects on the membership and member’s needs to influence decision in the union (Glick

et al., 1977).” Behavioral studies on participation of union members fall into two categories, first the structural beliefs and second the perception, attitude and beliefs (Strauss, 1977). Structural factors may be less important than individual factors in explaining members’ participation in union activities because the desire to participate in union is a personal one and is affected by personal and social factors rather than by structural dimensions.

Forms & Types of Participation

Most forms of individual “union” related behavior can be categorized as participation. According to Klandermans (1986), there are various ways in which “forms of participation” are identified. It is defined in terms of formality or frequency of participatory acts (Mcshane, 1986). Gallgher et al., (1989) identified three forms of participation, namely administrative activities (serving as an officer or running office), intermittent activities (voting, attending meetings and speaking at union meetings) and supportive activities (passive or non-time-consuming activities). Klandermans (1992) observed that employees participate in at least one form of the participation.

Participation has been gauged in different ways by researchers ranging from “passive participation”, example- reading union journals, voting in forums, to “active participation”, example - attending union meetings, holding union office, filing grievances through unions and reading or finding out about the content of the collective bargaining agreement in

effect (McShane & 1986; Anderson, 1979; Glick et. al, 1977).

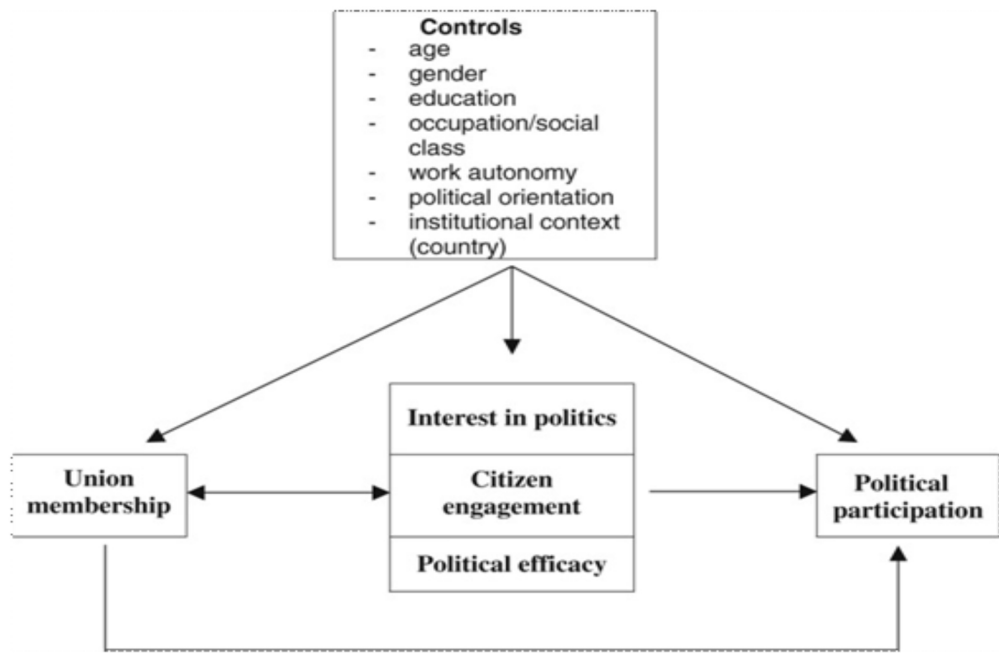
Seth (1969) divided the workers in to four categories. 1) highly participative members, 2) moderately participative members, 3) marginally participative members, and 4) non-participative members. Out of items proposed by the present researcher, highly participative members are those who responded positively on all the items, moderately participative members are those who responded positively on at least four to six items, and marginally participative members are the ones who responded positively one to three items and non-participative members are the ones who do not participate in any of the activities of union.

A Model of Membership

Membership participation in union activities is a complex phenomenon as there are numerous forms of participation and a number of variables that may impact different forms of participation. A model of membership participation in trade union activities by Sharma (1987) described “organizational characteristic variables, personal characteristic variables, and perceptual variables”. While

While organizational characteristic variables may affect personal characteristics and perceptions about the union, there may also be cross-influences among personal characteristics and perceptual variables.

Fig. 1 Union Participation Model by Sharma (1987)



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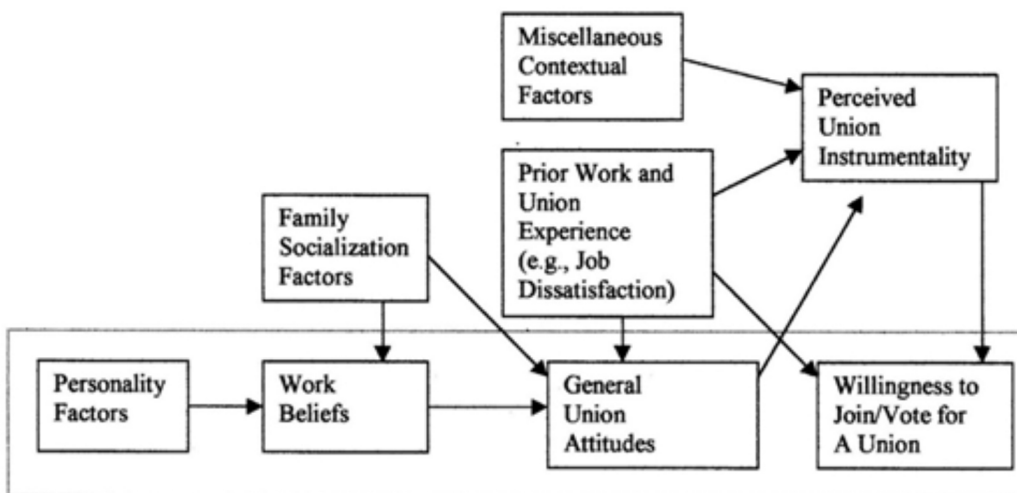
Fig. 1 depicts the nature of this relationship together with illustrations of forms of participation and their determinants.

An Attitudinal Model of Union

This model unravels the reasons for the unwillingness of joining the Union. The reservation to join a union can be attributed to both union and non-union

related attitudes. Authors present a distinct difference between the two literatures (Barling, Fullagar, & Kelloway, 1992; Desphande & Fiorito 1989). General union attitudes tend to be measured with items referring simply to “unions” with no greater degree of specificity (McShane, 1986). The statement: “Unions are a positive force in this country” represents a typical assessment i.e. union instrumentality is a much narrower construct (Desphande & Fiorito, 1989). Union instrumentality refers to the extent to which a specific union is perceived as instrumental in resolving dissatisfaction or in leading to valued outcomes (Barling et al,1992).

Fig. 2 Fundamental Attitudinal Model of Union joining or Voting Intention by Houghton (2000)



Models Based on Union Participation Theory, Organization Support Theory & Union Support Theory

According to organization support theory, employing organization helps

and support their employees and this feeling of support reciprocates in the form of organizational commitment by its employees (Tetrick et al., 2007). The notion of organizational support has been extended to the exchange relationship between the union and its mem-

Fig. 3 Model Based on Organization Support Theory by Tetrick et al (2007)



Fig. 4 Model Based on Union Participation Theory by Tetrick et al (2007)



bers (Wayne et al., 1997). In the same way members feel committed to the union if they get support from their unions.

According to union participation theory, Tetrick et al; (2007) mentioned a fundamental difference in the relationship between individual and their unions compared to that between employees and employers. Employers give remuneration to employees whereas employees give fee to union to ensure good working conditions and health and safety. “Instrumentality” and “Support” both represent the social rights of members which are expected in the social contract between the union and members.

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A Segmented Model of Participation

This model uses a segmented criteria to explore and define union participation. According to this model, there are five types of union members, namely reluctant members, card career, selective activists, apolitical stalwarts and ideological activists. “Reluctant members” are those members “who would not like to be union members because of their own wish rather they just want to be a member due to pressure from outside forces”. Card careers” are those members “who don’t mind to be a member of union however they do not have interest in union activities”. “Selective Activists” are “those members who are involved in union activities, are more active on special issues”. “Apolitical stalwarts” are loyal and active members, however they are not interested in social aspects of the labor movement”. “Ideological Activists” are active members and see their involvement in union as an extension of political ideological belief”. This model does not treat union members as homogeneous group rather than create categories for

different types of union members as mentioned above.

Union participation models presented different views and perspectives for how and why people join trade unions. They also threw light on various types of participation levels. Further they contributed to different types of participants as well. Models of union participation is a foundation for any theoretical framework to be built.

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