THE DIFFERENTIAL IMPACT OF MANAGEMENT AND UNION RESPONSES TO EACH OTHER ON EMPLOYEE ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS

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How do management and union responses to each other in organizations affect employees? Do management and union responses to each other matter equally when employees are determining allegiance to one or the other (or both)? How might different responses on the part of management and the union affect employee propensity to trust either? When management and union respond in different ways to each other, how does this affect an employee’s desire to engage in discretionary behaviours that benefit the organization as well as be actively involved in union voice and activities? Answers to these questions have important implications for industrial relations scholars and practitioners alike.

In their seminal theory on collective voice/institutional response (CVIR), Freeman and Medoff (1984) proposed that whether union impact on organizations will be positive or negative greatly depends upon management’s response to the union, and in turn, the union’s response to management. However, empirical research has largely ignored this critical contingency (Bryson, Charlwood & Forth, 2006). There is some research that draws upon models of dual allegiance to the union and the organization (Angle & Perry, 1986), and extends the CVIR model by focusing on the impact of industrial relations climate or the quality of labour-management relations in the organization (e.g., Deery, Erwin, & Iverson, 1999; Deery & Iverson, 2005; Katz, Kochan, & Gobeille, 1983; Katz, Kochan, & Weber, 1985). However, this research does not examine differences between union and management responses to each other, or the relative impact of management and union responses to each other on employee attitudes and behaviours. Furthermore CVIR has been accused of adopting a “black-box” approach to the union-performance relationship (Addison & Belfield, 2004).

Our study delves into the black-box of CVIR by analyzing the interaction between positive and negative management and union responses to each other using an online scenario-based experiment (2x2 between-subjects design). Our sample consists of two comparison groups, chosen for their potential differences in beliefs about unionization in general. The first group consists of unionized teachers in a Canadian province, and data collection for this group will be completed by the end of February. The second group consists of individuals working full-time and taking part-time courses toward a
management degree at a nationally recognized university in Canada. Data collection for this group will be completed by the end of March. In the study, we manipulate management and union responses to each other in the scenarios, and measure resultant respondent trust in and loyalty towards both the union and management, perceptions of the overall industrial relations climate, and propensity to engage in positive discretionary behaviours that benefit the union and the organization. We expect that there will be a differential impact of management and union responses to each other on employee attitudes and behaviours, and that the relative importance of management versus union responses will be different for each of the two groups in our sample. The results of this study have important implications for both theory and practice. First, our study provides an explicit test of a main tenet in CVIR (Freeman & Medoff, 1984) that has been largely ignored to date. Second, the results will assist in probing the “black-box” of the CVIR model (Addison & Belfield, 2004). Finally, the results will suggest actions that both management and unions should take regarding their relationship with each other in order to increase positive employee and member attitudes and behaviours.

References


