

Building an organising culture: some Australian experiences

CRIMT International colloquium on union renewal

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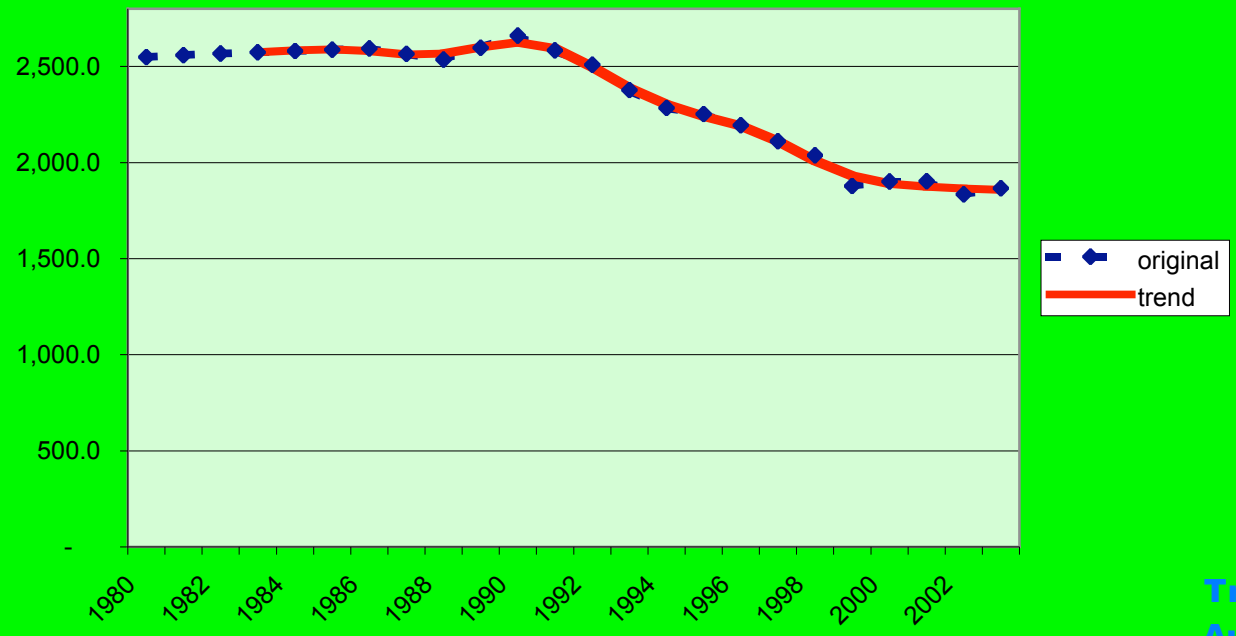
Griffith University

- **Australian context**

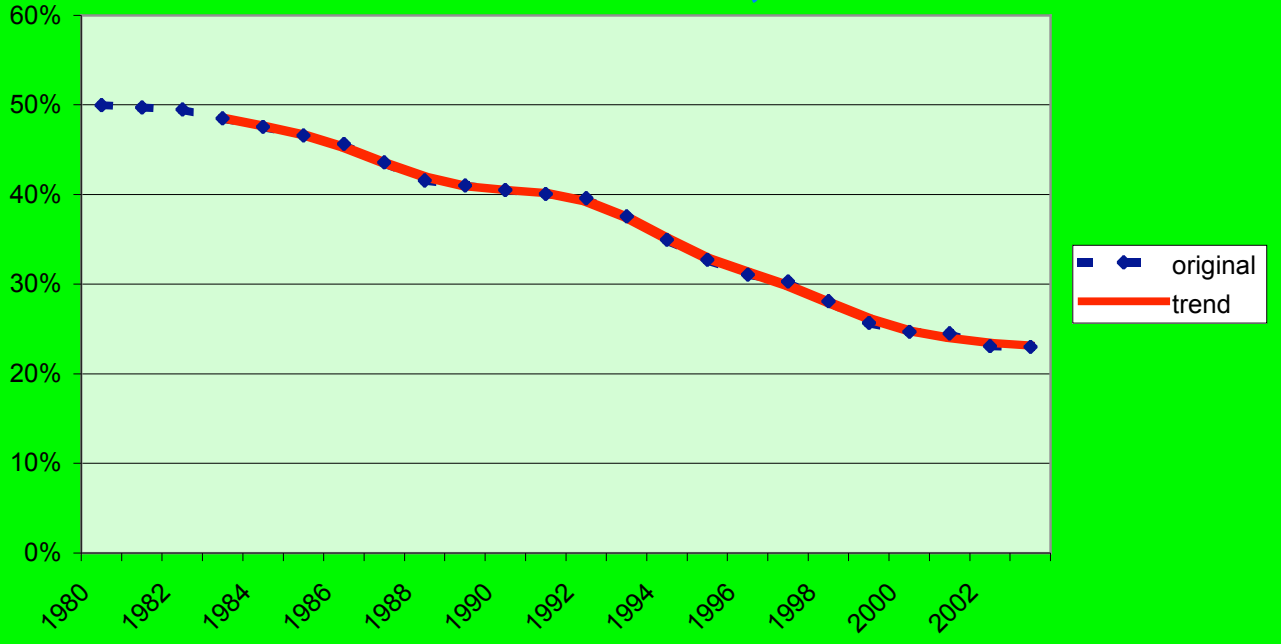
Key points

- **Building a successful organising culture requires many things, including:**
 - **confident workplace representatives**
 - **training of organisers and workplace representatives**
 - **a focus beyond recruitment**
 - **resources to organising**
 - **community and activist links**
 - **the right organisers**
 - **a democratic union**
 - **competent, visionary leadership and effective administration**

Trend union membership,
Australia, 1980-2003



Trend union density,
Australia, 1980-2003



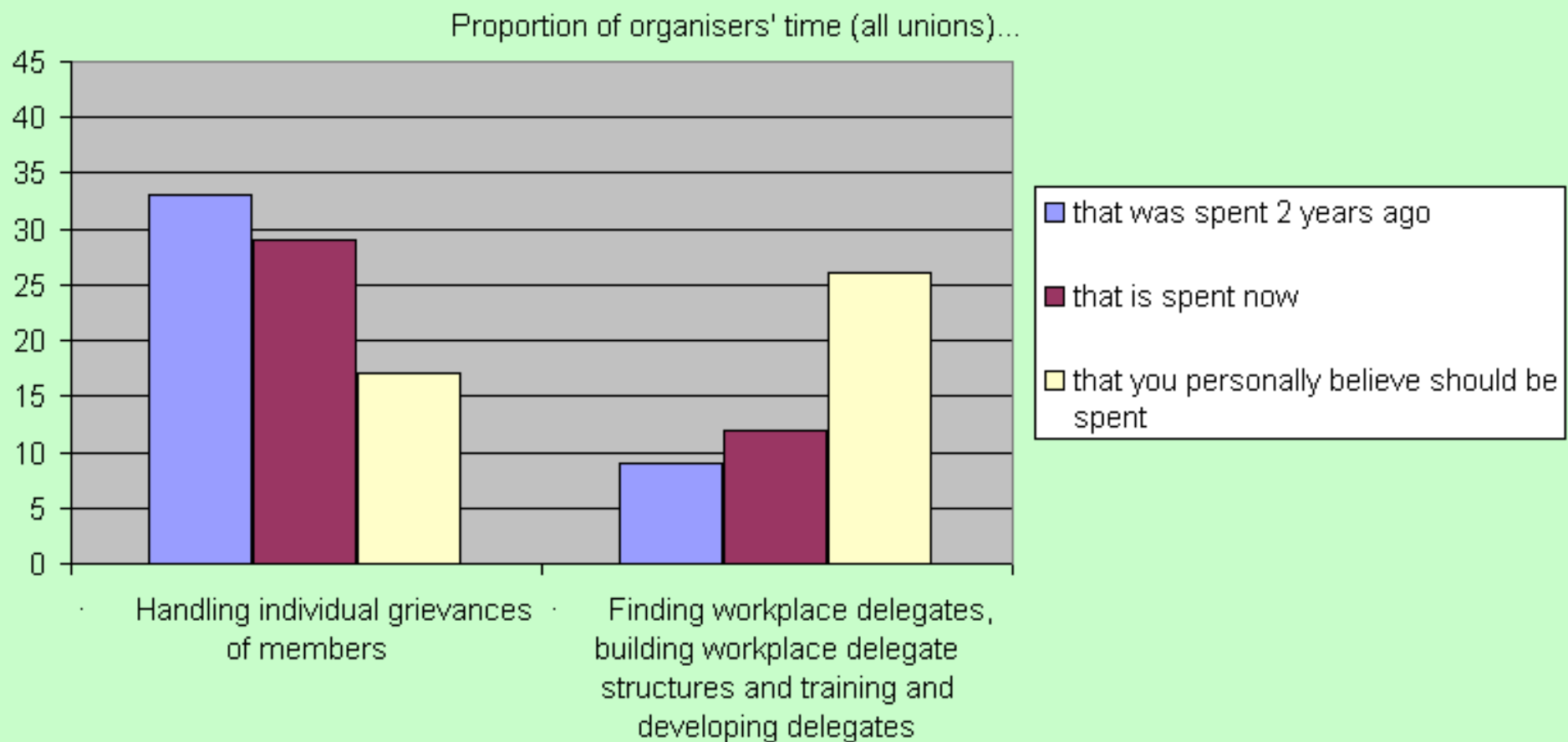
**Training, confidence and
focusing beyond
recruitment**

- **Building confidence of delegates (workplace representatives) is critical. Training and education are a powerful influence on confidence.**
- **Successful recruitment depends on more than having the confidence to walk up to a new employee and asking them to join, it depends on confidence in undertaking a broader set of 'organising' behaviours.**
 - **Contact between delegates and organisers is strongly related to commitment and hence activism**
- **Enhance organiser-delegate links, including follow-up to training, and general support for delegates**

Resources to organising

- **Some progress towards a reorientation of organisers' work towards an organising 'model', but with many limitations.**
- **Redirection of resources to date has been only partial**
 - **organisers still dealing with grievances**
 - **few resources are devoted to 'growth' in non-union areas**
 - **need for more focused effort to redirect resources**
 - **use of specialist organisers and separate 'member services centres' so organisers don't deal with individual grievances**

Organisers are still spending too much time on grievances and not enough on delegate development and training



Community Links

- **Amongst delegates, community activists are better networked, more campaign-focused, perceive fewer barriers, have higher efficacy and have broader orientations than other members.**
- **Amongst organisers, those with student or community activist backgrounds have fewer difficulties than their peers in several areas (such as identifying activists and image problems), and appear slightly more oriented to organising issues.**
 - **Unions need to look beyond replicating “their own”.**
- **Organisers in unions with visible community coalitions report more positive perceptions on a range of issues concerning organising, democracy, impediments to their work and their own satisfaction and expected tenure.**
- **Unions who worked with community or women’s groups in campaigning seem more likely to have improvements in membership and finances.**

The right organisers

- **Organisers are satisfied with their job**
 - **they say they are overworked, but being overworked does not make them want to leave**
- **Where organisers expected to leave it was because they were frustrated with a difficult job that lacked effective support.**
- **Young organisers feel less support from the union and colleagues**
 - **Young organisers (aged under 30) were more likely to**
 - **report the support they got from other officials in the union as a problem; and**
 - **rank the effectiveness of support they received as not very effective.**
- **Unions run the risk of losing a key group of organisers if they feel burnt out & frustrated**

**The crucial significance of
union democracy in growing
membership, delegates and
activism**

- **Unions with increasing member influence are experiencing greater growth in joining, unionisation**
- **Organisers in unions with growing member influence are also more likely to report increasing**
 - **delegate density**
 - **activism**
- **Delegates in unions with growing member influence are also more likely to report increasing union success rate on workplace issues**
- **Delegates in unions with high delegate influence are more likely to report increasing**
 - **unionisation**
 - **activism**

Importance of union leadership

- **Importance of union leadership –significant influence on the ease/difficulty of the organiser's job and the likelihood they will leave.**
- **Leaders provide vision and allocate resources**
- **On average, organisers see leaders as helping them**
- **Much more will be expected of them, however. Challenges include:**
 - **Adverse environments**
 - **Cultural tensions**
 - **inertia**
 - **internal power vs communication**
 - **consultation vs driving change**
 - **gender**
 - **Structural tensions**
 - **Resource tensions**
 - **Managerial tensions**

Conclusion

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