Becoming Purple: Organizational Change at SEIU

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The Research Questions

• How did SEIU change from the beginning to end of the Stern administration?
• What enabled that change?
• What broader lessons can be learned from that change?
• What challenges emerged from that change?

1996: 1,086,735
2008: 2,003,124
Research Methods

- SEIU commissioned and funded the project
- Interviews with IU officers, IU Division Directors, other top staff
- Review of archival materials: convention reports, polling results, jurisdictional hearing files, etc.
- Review of IU data files: locals, mergers, membership, organizing, budgets
- Site visits to 7 locals (mix of geography, divisions)
  - Interviews with local leaders and staff
  - Review of local archival materials
INTERNAL ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

1. Increased resources at all levels of the union
2. Strengthened divisions for industry focus
3. Restructured local unions for industry focus and power
4. Changed leaders
5. Unified identity/branding (becoming purple)
6. Developed new models of unionism at the local level
Increased Resources

1996 budget for growth
27% of IU budget
No local requirement – average of 5%
$27.3 Million combined resources

Twelve years later

2008 budget for growth
50% of IU budget
Integrated planning includes 20% of local union budgets allocated for growth
$228.2 Million combined resources
Restructured Locals

1995 – 373 Locals
Under 1,000: 218
1,000>10,000: 127
10,000>50,000: 26
Over 50,000: 2

Twelve years later

2008 – 152 Local
Under 1,000: 50
1,000>10,000: 45
10,000>50,000: 42
Over 50,000: 15
New models of unionism at the local level

- Member Resource Centers – Call centers for member information, grievances
- Shared Service Organizations – centralized back office operations to be shared by multiple locals
- Shift resources from servicing to member engagement and mobilization
  - 2012 goals: 10% - leadership roles
  - 50% - involved in core activities
UPDATE 2012

1. Increased resources at all levels of the union
   - No new increases

2. Strengthened divisions for industry focus
   - Focus on Fight for a Fair Economy/99% work/Partnering with community orgs – more emphasis on geography, less on industry but divisions still important

3. Restructured local unions for industry focus and power
   - No new major restructuring/trusteeships. Some focus on making the big ones work.
UPDATE 2012

4. Changed leaders
   - Major focus on leadership development – staff and member leaders.
   - Investment in $ and IU staff.

5. Unified identity/branding (becoming purple)
   - less emphasis on this given partnering approach
   - IFC renamed and reconceived

6. Developed new models of unionism at the local level
   - 2010 Internal examination: Shut down Detroit MASC but continue experimentation w/ MRCs, SSOs but under more local control
STRATEGIC CHANGE

1. Breakthrough organizing campaigns
2. Focused political action
3. Building the union in the South and Southwest
4. Active stewardship of member capital
5. Global unionism for global power
6. A new labor federation
How: The change process

- The four year convention cycle for evaluation, planning, and alignment
  - Work groups and task-forces
  - Mandates and guidelines
  - Rigorous implementation and follow through
  - Clear metrics and peer accountability for success or failure
    - Systematic review of some programs
Convention Workgroups

• 1996
  - Committee on the Future (begun under Sweeney)
  - Resulted in Bold Action program

• 2000
  - President’s Committee 2000
  - Resulted in New Strength Unity program

• 2004
  - Resource Committee and others
  - Resulted in Seven Strengths program
    • Industry, National, Labor, Global, Community, Local, and Political

• 2008
  - Seven Strengths committees – Growth, Divisions, Political, Community, Global
  - 21st Century Growth Committee
    • 4 subcommittees: alternative models, global organizing, organizing technology, organizing review
LESSONS: Making change

1. Think and behave strategically
2. Create a substantive and inclusive planning and implementation process
3. Grow resources dramatically
4. Focus attention on strategic priorities from top to bottom of the union
LESSONS: Making Change

5. Drive leadership change and invest in leadership development

6. Set standards, create accountability mechanisms and publicly monitor performance

7. Institutionalize reflection and long-term thinking

8. Be willing to dismantle customs, structures, and processes that hold back change
... ARISING FROM SPECIFIC CHANGES

1. **Shifting resources to growth**
   - The assumption that locals could reduce expenditures in order to increase spending on organizing proved to be unrealistic. In fact, spending on servicing has actually increased since 1996.

2. **Managing statewide or multi-state locals**
   - Large locals are not necessarily more efficient in administration or servicing.
   - They tend to focus on their largest cities.
   - They can become islands unto themselves.
   - The concentration of power and influence in the hands of a few leaders of large locals has implications for the governance of the union.
3. Integrating organizations after mergers
   - If insufficient attention is paid to the process of merging locals it will often result in culture clashes, loss of momentum, and other problems.

4. Coordinating bargaining across locals with different interests and traditions
   - Developing coordinated bargaining in a union with no history of it creates inevitable tensions.

5. Creating adequate bench strength and handing over the reigns to a new generation
   - Many current leaders see a shortage of seasoned leaders in the pipeline, making succession a major challenge in the coming decade.
CHALLENGES

6. Asking local leaders to act as national leaders
   - While local leaders need to rise above parochialism at times, they have also been elected to defend the interests of their members. They are the voices of those members in the International union.

7. Creating strong divisions within a national union
   - How does the union create a unique identity and culture within a division without creating a disconnect from the rest of the union?

8. Maintaining trust in national bargaining when difficult compromises are needed to achieve growth
   - How can the union negotiate organizing agreements with hostile employers while not settling for too little as some have argued the union has done?
CHALLENGES ... ARISING FROM THE CHANGE PROCESS

9. Involving local leaders in the change process

- While there were many processes to involve leaders at different levels, some remained concerned that important decisions were already made by national officers.
- What happens when local leaders refuse to implement decisions made by the whole.
- The need to keep the process open so that critical perspectives, creative tension and opportunities for organizational learning are not lost.

10. Maintaining union democracy while centralizing power to win

- How can the union engage members in determining the direction of the organization and still operate at the same level as the large employers where its members work? (The union as townhall vs. the union as an army.)
The End
Membership Growth

1996: 1,086,735

Twelve years later

2008: 2,003,124
Increased Resources

1996-98 COPE
Receipts: $2,736,000
Expenditures: N/A
Member Political Organizers: 5,000

Twelve years later

2006-08 COPE
Receipts: $57,984,000
Expenditures: $93,722,000
Member Political Organizers: 55,000
### Restructured Locals

#### 1996 – Chicago
- Local 1
- Local 25
- Local 236
- Local 46
- Local 880
- Local 4
- Local 20
- Local 73

#### 2008 – Midwest Divisions
- Local 1 – Multi-state Property Services
- Healthcare IL/IN – Multi-state Healthcare
- Local 73 – Public Services IL and IN
Leadership Change

• Of the leaders of the largest 50 locals in 1996, only 2 were still running a local in 2008

• Of the 48 who left, 23 retired and 15 were trusteeed

• There were 40 trusteeships compared to 15 in previous twelve years
A Unified Identity

1996 – SEIU—Who?

• 373 Locals with 144 different names

• Nearly as many color schemes as names

• Logo changed at each convention

2008 – a recognizable brand
Leaders of the largest 10 locals
in 1996 there were 7 white males, 2 females and 2 people of color
in 2009 there were 4 white males, 5 females and 4 people of color