Union networks
What they are,
what they do,
what helps &
hurts: a
preliminary
analysis

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Background

- showed that:
  - power; but
  - unions were rated poorly by delegates in providing support for networking; and
  - union networks for delegates were not very well understood
Methods

• focus groups (approx 60 delegates) in 4 unions
• survey of 268 union delegates from 14 unions
  – provisional findings: data collection still under way
Survey sample characteristics

- programs, July-October 2012
- composition of sample:
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  -
  -
  • 68% female, 31% male, 1% unstated
- median age 42 years
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  -
- all 6 Australian states, plus NT
  -
  -
What are networks of support?
In focus groups

- Delegates describe networking as
  - talking to co-workers, other delegates within their own union and the organiser.
  - information gathering, being ‘in the know’ or keeping up to date with union activities.

- Many unaware of networking as a separate concept
  - with the exception delegates of one union, which had been heavily involved in a campaign that involved outside groups
Which of these statements comes closest to describing your situation as a delegate? (N=261)

- I am involved in several networks that help me do my job as delegate
  - 6%
- I do my job as a delegate pretty much by myself
  - 27%
- I have a limited amount of involvement from time to time with other people who support me
  - 27%
- I am part of a network of people that help me do my job as delegate
  - 40%
Which of these statements comes closest to describing your situation as a delegate? (N=261)
formal versus informal networks
In focus groups:

• Networks were largely informal and somewhat accidental
How would you best describe that network? (N=160)

- a formal structure with a name that meets as a whole regularly (three or more times per year) - 29%
- an informal network that does not meet as a whole, though individuals may meet 25%
- a formal structure with a name that meets as a whole occasionally - 13%
- an informal network that meets as a whole at times - 33%
Realised value of networks (agree/disagree) ➔ index of network value

Through my union network we have been able to boost the influence that members have within the union

- Strongly agree: 11
- Agree: 30
- Neither agree nor disagree: 38
- No answer: 10
- Disagree: 9
- Strongly disagree: 3

The network is a way by which the union office has made more effective use of delegates or activists

- Strongly agree: 15
- Agree: 38
- Neither agree nor disagree: 26
- No answer: 13
- Disagree: 6
- Strongly disagree: 1

Through my union network I am able to find out about people with whom I otherwise would have little or no contact

- Strongly agree: 23
- Agree: 42
- Neither agree nor disagree: 20
- No answer: 10
- Disagree: 4
- Strongly disagree: 1

Through my union network I am able to make use of information from people with whom I otherwise would have little or no contact

- Strongly agree: 25
- Agree: 44
- Neither agree nor disagree: 17
- No answer: 10
- Disagree: 3
- Strongly disagree: 1

I am a link between people who otherwise would not have much to do with each other

- Strongly agree: 13
- Agree: 38
- Neither agree nor disagree: 33
- No answer: 9
- Disagree: 6
- Strongly disagree: 1

I have participated in a network around a specific campaign organised by the union office.

- Strongly agree: 18
- Agree: 29
- Neither agree nor disagree: 21
- No answer: 17
- Disagree: 9
- Strongly disagree: 6
In focus groups: Delegates identified their networks as crucial to their ability to resolve issues or build union strength in the workplace.
In focus groups:

• Some delegates expressed a desire to have more formalised networking opportunities within the union to share information with others delegates within the union, particularly within their industry.
What *barriers* do delegates see, and how do they overcome them?
How much are each of the following an impediment or a help to your having or being part of an effective union network?
## Coefficients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>15.585</td>
<td>1.040</td>
<td>14.989</td>
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<td>(d) Attitudes amongst members—impediment or a help</td>
<td>.494</td>
<td>.237</td>
<td>.142</td>
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<td>(g) How many opportunities I have to meet other delegates—impediment or a help</td>
<td>.685</td>
<td>.250</td>
<td>.193</td>
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<td>(k) My level of confidence in developing networks—impediment or a help</td>
<td>.568</td>
<td>.286</td>
<td>.149</td>
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<td>Have you had this at all?—(g) Being given opportunities to meet activists from other organisations</td>
<td>1.325</td>
<td>.584</td>
<td>.159</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Have you had this at all?—(e) Being shown by my organiser how to develop networks</td>
<td>1.523</td>
<td>.578</td>
<td>.187</td>
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</table>

a. Dependent Variable: Index network strength 2 (6 items [23b–g], continuous)

## Model Summary

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<th>Model</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R Square</th>
<th>Adjusted R Square</th>
<th>Std. Error of the Estimate</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>.496&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.246</td>
<td>.226</td>
<td>3.58729</td>
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</table>

<sup>a</sup> Significant at the 0.05 level.
Have you (been) trained on how to develop networks of support?

- No
  - Low network value: 19%
  - Medium: 37%
  - High network value: 44%
- Yes
  - Low network value: 48%
  - Medium: 32%
  - High network value: 20%
Have you (been) shown by organiser how to develop networks?

- **No**:
  - Low network value: 21%
  - Medium: 37%
  - High network value: 42%

- **Yes**:
  - Low network value: 16%
  - Medium: 32%
  - High network value: 52%
My level of confidence in developing networks—impediment or a help
How many opportunities I have to meet other delegates—impediment or a help
Have you (been) given opportunities to meet activists from other organisations?

- No: 38% (low network value)
- Yes: 53% (high network value)
- Yes: 28% (medium network value)
Conclusions

• Networks enhance delegates' power – more valuable networks enhanced power by more

• A slight majority of (trained) delegates don’t see themselves as part of a network, though many have some support.

• Networks take a variety of forms, a minority are formalised

• Conflicting information on roles of delegates & organisers in formation of networks
  – organisers appear to initiate them less often than delegates
Conclusions

• Organisers the most commonly helpful person for delegates
• Demand for greater help for delegates from several sources inside and outside workplace
• Time, shifts & bosses seen by delegates as major barriers to networking
  – but major effects on networking arise from
    • organiser mentoring, confidence
    • opportunities to meet with other delegates, activists including from outside
• Union investment in networking skills and opportunities likely to help build collective capacity and power