The Differential Effect of Management & Union Responses to Each Other on Employee Attitudes: A Scenario-Based Experimental Approach

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monopoly versus voice face (Freeman & Medoff, 1984)
  – Conflicting empirical results and black-box approach (Addison & Belfield, 2004)

key proposition: which face would prevail depends on management and union’s responses to each other
  – Subsequent empirical research has virtually ignored this proposition (Bryson, Charlwood and Forth, 2006)
Previous Research

- **Co-operative labor relations climates**
  - Positive impact on both union & org outcomes such as dual commitment (Deery, Iverson & colleagues, 1999; 2005; Katz, Kochan & colleagues, 1983; 1985)
  - Antecedents include sharing information, integrative bargaining approach, procedural justice (Deery & Iverson, 2005)
  - Employees face less role conflict in cooperative labour relations environments (Angle & Perry, 1986)

- **Union loyalty and org commitment share few common antecedents** (Barling, Wade & Fullagar, 1990)
Limitations of Previous Research

- Climate research has not been properly reconciled with CVIR model (Pohler, 2010)
- Has not examined differential effect of management and union’s responses to each other as moderating outcomes
- Difficult to assess independent effects of management and union responses in field studies (interrelated)
- Single-organization studies have little variation in measures (e.g., employee perception of climate)
- Difficult to find willing negative samples
Management’s Response

- recent dissertation research theoretically elaborates upon and empirically tests the moderating effect of management’s response on union impact
  - draws upon the appropriateness framework as applied to decision-making in social dilemmas (March, 1994; Weber, Kopelman & Messick, 2004)
    - Environmental cues, identity, rules (norms of reciprocity)
  - the union responds to signals from management about whether to engage in cooperative or competitive behaviour (Pohler, 2010)
  - theoretically develops, but does not empirically address, identity issues or rules of engagement
Research Question

How are individual attitudes toward the union and organization affected when management and/or the union engage in cooperative or competitive behaviour?
Management/Union responses to each other

Employee Perception of Industrial Relations Climate

Identity

EE Trust in Union/Union Loyalty

EE Trust in Org/Org Loyalty

Identity
Methodology

- online scenario-based experimental approach
- Four conditions (between-subjects design)
  - mgmt cooperative/union cooperative
  - mgmt cooperative/union competitive
  - mgmt competitive/union cooperative
  - mgmt competitive/union competitive
Samples

- pilot tested with University of Alberta MBA students (N=20)
- members of the Alberta Teacher’s Association (N=60)
- management students at the University of Lethbridge (N=130)
- members of the ATA report significantly higher belief in unionism (e.g., identify with the union)
Results

- Management/union responses to each other interact to explain perceptions of industrial relations climate.
- Perceptions of industrial relations climate partially mediate the relationship between management/union responses to each other and employee attitudes.
- Cooperative management (union) responses were positively related to trust in management (union) and loyalty to the organization (union).
However…..

- In the management student sample, the interaction between management/union responses to each other was only significant for attitudes toward the union AND
- In the ATA sample, the interaction between management/union responses to each other was only significant for attitudes toward the organization
Results - ATA
Conclusions

- With few exceptions (Bryson et al., 2006; Pohler, 2010), a paucity of research has explicitly examined management and union’s responses to each other.

- Industrial relations climate research does not address the differential effect of management and union’s responses to each other, or take into account identity factors.
  - e.g., cooperative climate related to increase in both loyalty to union and organization (Angle & Perry, 1986; Deery, Iverson & colleagues).
Limitations & Future Research

- Internal vs. external validity
- Collect more data for the union sample
- Slight differences in scenarios between samples
  - Realism (ATA context)
- Manipulations grounded in prior theory and research
- Eventual replication of experiment in field
- Future research should not examine union impact without concurrently examining management/union responses to each other
Questions?