UNION EDUCATION –
TEN LESSONS FROM THE
RESEARCH AND PRACTICAL
IMPLICATIONS

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Employee Representation in the New World of Work
Université Laval
16-18 June 2010
Data Sources

- AWIRS95 main survey
  - primarily the 1138 senior delegates from largest union (union delegate survey)

- Representation and Organising Research Project (RORP)
  - ARC-funded project (Peetz and Pocock 2000-2004)
  - survey of 2506 delegates from 8 unions
  - focus groups with 60 delegates from same 8 unions (Delegates are Diamonds)
  - survey of 379 organisers from 13 unions

- FSU delegate surveys 2000, 2001

- Survey of Union A, 2009
Proposition 1. Union education is more important than tenure for delegates in building activism.

Proposition 2. Training boosts delegates’ confidence, which is the critical pathway to boosting activism and union success.
Proposition 1. Union education is more important than tenure for delegates in building activism.

Proposition 2. Training boosts delegates’ confidence, which is the critical pathway to boosting activism and union success.

Source: RORP delegate survey
**Proposition 1.** Union education is more *important* than tenure for delegates in building *activism*.

**Proposition 2.** Training boosts delegates’ confidence, which is the critical pathway to boosting activism and union success.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AWIRS95 Activism</th>
<th>RORP Activism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Breadth of activism</td>
<td>Depth of activism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>2.783*** (8.06)</td>
<td>0.913*** (3.93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure (per 5 years)</td>
<td>0.394*** (4.48)</td>
<td>0.101 (1.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training (per issue)</td>
<td>0.251*** (4.67)</td>
<td>0.162*** (3.99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills/Confidence (per index unit)</td>
<td>1.737*** (7.33)</td>
<td>0.660*** (4.60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.215</td>
<td>0.087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1081</td>
<td>1081</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: AWIRS95 union delegate questionnaire and RORP delegate survey
Proposition 3. **Quality matters: better quality training leads to higher confidence and activism.**

Source: RORP delegate survey
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Source: RORP delegate survey
Proposition 4. It’s not just reverse causality: while delegates who are inclined towards activism are more likely to seek training, the training they receive will have an independent effect in boosting delegate confidence and activism.

- If the results were driven by reverse causality (ie activists are only more likely to be trained because they were more likely to want to take training) then
  - training effectiveness & timing would have no independent effect on confidence, activism, etc (cf proposition 3)
  - ‘community activists’ may be more likely to want to be trained, but training would not affect their activism or local union power
- In fact, ‘community activists’ are more likely to be trained but they are only more active in the union if they have been trained.

*‘community activist’ = holds an activist position outside the workplace and union, eg in a social group or community association*

Source: RORP delegate survey
**Proposition 5.** Delegate activism will be influenced by both the **breadth** of training (the quantity) and the specific **type** of training. In particular, training in a broad range of skills associated with building member power (such as training in campaigning and developing networks) will do more over the long run to build membership growth and success than training in recruitment alone.
Proposition 6. Training policy needs to recognise that delegates have different personalities and capabilities, and not all delegates are suited to becoming successful recruiters. Training within a workplace needs to encompass enough delegates or activists to enable specialisation where necessary in tasks such as recruitment amongst trained delegates or activists.

• ‘One delegate was really good at recruiting so she did the recruiting stuff as well as the ancillary stuff, but her role was just basically recruiting...If somebody has got a natural ability to do something, well you would be crazy if you didn’t foster that, assuming they’re happy to do it of course.’ (‘Fred’)

• ‘Anything I do for the union I’m doing it in my time, and I’m more than happy to do it, but...quite frankly, I just don’t have time to recruit. I see my role very much so as supporting the staff members and union members.’ (‘Anna’)

• ‘But we do have one rep who really likes sidling up to people and say, ‘What about joining’, or whatever. And she likes to do that, fair enough, I leave it to her. She’s got her hit list and she moves down them.’ (‘Margie’)

Source: Delegates are Diamonds focus groups
Proposition 7. There is little point in formal training of delegates if there is not follow-up to their training. Post-training contact with organisers is strongly related to confidence, involvement and commitment and hence activism and success.
**Proposition 7.** There is little point in formal training of delegates if there is not follow-up to their training. Post-training contact with organisers is strongly related to confidence, involvement and commitment and hence activism and success.
Proposition 8. Formal training is important, but at least as important is the informal training that happens when organisers train delegates ‘on the job’. Organiser mentoring of delegates is critical for activism and power.
Proposition 9. Training means delegates do more things and more difficult things. But training and follow-up also makes them more satisfied with being a delegate.

- Trained delegates were more likely to say
  - range of tasks had widened (48% v 32%)
  - role had become more difficult (33% v 26%)

- …but also more likely to
  - be more satisfied than 2 years before (33% v 26%)
  - agree they enjoyed being a delegate (73% v 51%)
  - believe they could really make a difference (73% v 56%)

Source: RORP delegate survey
Proposition 10.  Effective union training is closely related to effective union democracy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training in...</th>
<th>INDIRECT</th>
<th>DIRECT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Delegates have a lot of influence in this union</td>
<td>In an enterprise bargaining campaign, members here have a lot of say in determining the content of the claim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enterprise bargaining</td>
<td>0.193***</td>
<td>0.198***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing networks</td>
<td>0.161***</td>
<td>0.157***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaigning skills</td>
<td>0.188***</td>
<td>0.144***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting activism</td>
<td>0.189***</td>
<td>0.124***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment techniques</td>
<td>0.170***</td>
<td>0.121***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td>0.180***</td>
<td>0.111***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grievance resolution</td>
<td>0.177***</td>
<td>0.111***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational health</td>
<td>0.141***</td>
<td>0.095***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introductory</td>
<td>0.169***</td>
<td>0.090***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing meetings</td>
<td>0.154***</td>
<td>0.087***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plus...</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any delegate training?</td>
<td>0.195***</td>
<td>0.120***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall training usefulness rating</td>
<td>0.159***</td>
<td>0.140***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective at making training available</td>
<td>0.236***</td>
<td>0.233***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: RORP delegate survey
Conclusions

The importance and nature of formal education and training.

1. Union education is more important than tenure for delegates in building activism;
2. Training boosts delegates’ confidence, which is the critical pathway to boosting activism and union success;
3. Quality matters
4. Not simply the effects of reverse causality
5. Delegate activism will be influenced by both the breadth (quantity) and the type of training – esp broad range of skills associated with building member power

Integration of education

6. Not all delegates are suited to becoming successful recruiters
7. Little point in formal training of delegates if there is not follow-up
8. At least as important is the informal training that happens when organisers train delegates ‘on the job’. Organiser mentoring of delegates is critical for activism and power.

Relationship between training and meaning

9. Education and training mean delegates do more things and more difficult things, makes delegates more satisfied, gives them greater efficacy
10. Union education and training is closely related to effective union democracy. Training and meaning go together.