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THE EFFECT OF PARTICIPATION IN A COLLECTIVE BARGAINING SIMULATION ON THE EXPECTATIONS AND ATTITUDES OF UNION AND MANAGEMENT REPRESENTATIVES

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to describe and analyze the effects of participation in a collective bargaining simulation on the attitudes of union and management representatives. This paper uses attitude data collected from 16 management representatives and 40 local union officers participating in a collective bargaining simulation exercise conducted by the author.

INTRODUCTION

The importance of participant attitudes in determining negotiating behaviors has been documented in the collective bargaining literature for several years. Indeed, Walton and McKersie identify the process of attitude change or "attitudinal restructuring" as the major stimuli to compromising behaviors in bargaining.¹ In the Walton and McKersie model, the participants' attitudes and beliefs towards each other determine the entire spirit of the collective bargaining relationship; a relationship that in many cases transcends the bargaining table and extends right down to the shop floor.²

While the importance of attitudes and beliefs in the bargaining process has been identified and discussed in past research, the process of attitude change during the bargaining experience and its resultant effect on outcomes has not been nearly as well documented. This does not mean to imply that such research has not been conducted, however; as early as 1962 Ann Douglas in her pioneering work Industrial Peacemaking employed linguistic analysis to make inferences about attitude change in bargaining.³ In more recent research, retrospective studies have been conducted asking representatives of labor and management to identify critical incidents of attitude change in recently concluded bargaining experiences.⁴ Finally, some laboratory experiments have been conducted using college students in simulated bargaining experiences which have attempted to identify the process of attitude reformulation during the

course of bargaining interactions.⁵

All of the research mentioned in this brief review can be criticized on one or more dimensions. The work of Douglas, for example, documents very nicely the change in communications patterns and content during negotiations conducted in the presence of a mediator. The Douglas research unfortunately begins only at mediation and does nothing to measure attitudes and communication patterns in the negotiations that preceded the intervention of the mediator. The retrospective studies can be fairly criticized in that they do not measure attitude change during negotiations but only at the beginning and at the conclusion of negotiations. Finally, the laboratory studies may be criticized in that the attitudes and behaviors of the sample population (college sophomores enrolled in introductory psychology courses) may not be representative of the attitudes and behaviors of the typical union or corporate representative.

The ideal research design would be to monitor actual labor-management negotiations and to collect attitudinal data from the parties at the beginning of negotiations and at the conclusion of each and every bargaining session. As might be expected, however, such *carte blanche* access to the participants in actual negotiations is seldom extended to the researcher. A close approximation to actual access to negotiations, however, can be accomplished through the use of a simulated bargaining exercise conducted under conditions similar to those actually encountered in bargaining. Furthermore, the generalizability of the results obtained through such research can be enhanced if the simulation participants are actual union and management representatives.

THE PRESENT STUDY

Data necessary to conduct this study were obtained from participants in two adult education classes conducted by the author. The first group was comprised of sixteen management representatives participating in an Ohio Management Training Institute seminar in collective bargaining. The second group was comprised of 40 local union officers participating in a Franklin County Labor Federation course in contract negotiations. Each group was given a revised version of Kornhauser's Union-Management Attitudinal Scale to assess pre-negotiation attitudes towards both labor and management. Each group was then randomly assigned into four person teams and were exposed to eight hours of negotiations using Sandver and Blain's TEACHNEG: A Collective Bargaining Simulation in Public Education (Grid Publishing Co., Columbus, Ohio, 1980).⁶

¹ See Richard E. Walton and Robert B. McKersie, A Behavioral Theory of Labor Negotiations, McGraw Hill Book Co., New York, 1965, Chapter 6.

² See for example James Kuhn, Bargaining in the Grievance Settlement, Columbia University Press, New York, 1961, for a more complete discussion of the continuous nature of the bargaining relationship at the shop floor level.

³ Ann Douglas, Industrial Peacemaking, Columbia University Press, New York, 1962.

⁴ See for example Walter Blake, Kenneth Hammond, and G. Dale Meyer, 'Application of Judgment Theory and Interactive Computer Graphics Technology to Labor Management Negotiations: An Example,' Industrial Relations Research Association Proceedings, 1972, p. 193-201 or Richard Peterson and Lane Tracy, 'Testing a Behavioral Theory Model of Labor Negotiations,' Industrial Relations, Vol. 16, No. 1, (February 1977) p. 35-50.

⁵ See for example Ian Morley and Geoffrey Stephenson, The Social Psychology of Bargaining, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1977.

⁶ For a discussion of the use of this particular bargaining simulation, see Marcus H. Sandver and Harry Blaine, 'TEACHNEG: The Development and Implementation of a Real World Collective Bargaining Simulation,' Labor Studies Journal, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Fall 1980) p. 106-114.

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One of the first objectives in analyzing the questionnaire data was to identify similarities and differences in the demographics and background characteristics of the two groups. As the data in Table 1 indicate, there were some differences to be noted in comparing the results obtained between the two groups. For example, the students in the management training sessions tended to be older, better educated and slightly better paid than were the union officials. One especially interesting bit of information was that the students in the labor sessions were twice as likely as students in the management sessions to have a parent who was a member of a labor union.

TABLE 1
Background Data for Labor and Management Representatives

	<u>Management</u>	<u>Labor</u>
Age (yrs.)	42	37
Sex	37.5% female 63.5% male	23% female 77% male
Education (yrs.)	15.5	12.1
Income	\$18,500	\$17,500
Parents belonged to union	25%	50%
Parents worked as supervisors or managers	37.5%	40%

It should be noted that most of the students in the management sessions were relatively new to their positions as managers and had little or no actual collective bargaining experience. The students in the sessions conducted for the labor representatives were generally more experienced in collective bargaining; most of the students had participated in at least one actual negotiation, some had participated in three or four negotiations. Most of the union leaders were from unions having an industrial structure and which negotiated local labor agreements. None of the labor officials were fulltime union officers; all worked at full time jobs and conducted union business on a "lost time" basis or in their spare time.

The attitude questionnaire was devised by the author but was inspired by Kornhauser's writings on attitude formation during the bargaining process.⁷ In particular, the questionnaire was designed to measure four dimensions of attitudes towards unions and management. One series of ten questions were designed to measure "anti-union" feelings. The statements comprising the anti-union scale made statements about unions causing inflation, portrayed unions as undemocratic and corrupt, blamed unions for the decline in U.S. productivity since World War II and so forth.

The second ten-item scale in the 40 question attitude survey attempted to measure the students' "pro-employer" feelings. The statements in this scale asserted that the employer can generally be trusted to look out for the best interests of the work group, that higher profits are the only source of higher wages and that the open door policy was the fairest and most equitable method to deal with employee grievances. The other seven items in the pro-employer scale were of a similar

nature.

The third scale on the attitude questionnaire attempted to measure the participants' feelings of "pro-unionism." The ten items in the pro-unionism scale stressed the positive social and political activities of unions. In addition, the statements in this scale emphasized the democratic nature of most unions and stressed that unions do not cause inflation but only protect their members from it as much as possible.

The final scale attempted to measure the "anti-employer" feelings of the participants. The statements comprising this scale portrayed supervisors as incompetent and unconcerned about the feelings of their subordinates and generally portrayed employers as anti-employee.

The forty items in the final questionnaire were selected from over 80 statements originally compiled. The final list of statements was chosen after a content sort exercise in which three colleagues sorted the original 80 statements into "pro-union", "pro-employer", "anti-employer" and "anti-union" categories. Any statement not receiving unanimous agreement was rejected from inclusion in the final questionnaire. All questionnaire responses were recorded on a five-item strongly agree-strongly disagree scale. The attitude data were collected before and after the eight hour negotiation exercise which was preceded by eight hours of lecture and discussion on labor relations and collective bargaining.

RESULTS

The first objective from the attitude measurement exercise was simply to identify the base line attitudes of management and labor representatives on the four scales discussed above. The results from this analysis are given in Table 2 below.

TABLE 2
Baseline Attitudes of Union and Management Representatives

<u>Attitude Scale</u>	<u>Management</u>	<u>Labor</u>
Anti-union	3.24	4.05
Pro-employer	3.01	3.47
Pro-union	2.85	2.18
Anti-employer	3.10	2.70

In interpreting the scores above it should be pointed out that a high score (above 3) means that the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statements; a low score indicates agreement or strong agreement with the statements in the scale. As might be expected, the union representatives tended to disagree more strongly than their management counterparts with statements containing anti-union content although both groups scored above 3 on this attitude scale. On the pro-employer scale the union officers scored higher (indicating more disagreement) than did the management representatives, but again both groups were above the middle score of three on this scale as well. On the pro-union scale the union leaders had a quite low score of 2.18 indicating almost universal agreement with the pro-union content of these statements; on the other hand,

⁷ See Arthur Kornhauser, "Human Motivations Underlying Industrial Conflict," in Arthur Kornhauser, Robert Dubin and Arthur H. Ross, Industrial Conflict, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1954, p. 62-85.

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the managers generally were higher on this scale (2.85) but still scored below three, indicating weak support for the pro-union statements. On the anti-employer scale, the union and management attitudes were on different sides of the midpoint; managers tended to generally disagree with the anti-employer statements, the union representatives tended to agree (albeit weakly) with the anti-employer statements.

The next step in the data analysis was to compare the attitudes of the labor and management representatives on each of the four attitude scales before and after the simulation exercise. In addition, the responses are reported in Table 3 based on the assignment of students to labor or management bargaining teams. Thus, in Table 3 management-management refers to the attitude scores of managers assigned to a management negotiating team, management-labor refers to managers who were assigned to a labor negotiating team in the simulation exercise.

TABLE 3

Attitudes of Labor and Management
Representatives Before and After
Collective Bargaining Exercise

	<u>Before</u>	<u>After</u>
<u>Anti-Union</u>		
Management-Management	3.12	3.20
Management-Labor	3.31	3.31
Labor-Management	4.00	4.06
Labor-Labor	4.15	3.98
<u>Pro-Employer</u>		
Management-Management	2.82	2.84
Management-Labor	3.14	3.18
Labor-Management	3.50	3.47
Labor-Labor	3.42	3.49
<u>Pro-Union</u>		
Management-Management	2.92	3.23*
Management-Labor	2.78	2.66
Labor-Management	2.38	2.21
Labor-Labor	2.06	2.00
<u>Anti-Employer</u>		
Management-Management	3.34	3.07
Management-Labor	3.08	2.90
Labor-Management	2.88	2.73
Labor-Labor	2.54	2.66

*t-test for difference in means significant at .10 level or greater.

The data in Table 3 show a number of interesting results. For example, in the anti-union attitude scale little movement was noted in attitudes as a result of participating in the collective bargaining exercise. The scores for managers assigned to labor negotiating teams was higher than for those assigned to management negotiating teams at least partly due to an "identification effect"; the pre-test questionnaire was administered after team assignments were announced.

On the pro-employer scale, again, little attitude change is noted for any group. As with the anti-union attitudes, the

managers assigned to the union negotiating teams may score higher (more disagreement) on pro- employer statements as a result of being assigned to a union team before the pre-test attitude survey was administered.

On the pro-union attitude scale a significant movement in attitudes was demonstrated by the management representatives assigned to management negotiating roles. In this instance managers' attitudes favoring unions showed a sharp and significant reversal as a result of participating in the bargaining exercise. Contrastingly, management representatives negotiating on a union team in the simulation showed movement in the more pro-union direction as a result of participating in the simulation. In both cases for the union representatives participating in the simulation exercise strengthened their pro-union sentiments.

Finally, both management groups showed less disagreement with anti-employer statements as a result of participating in the simulation exercise. Interestingly, the scores for the managers assigned to the union negotiating team fell below three, indicating some agreement with the anti-employer statements in the attitude survey, although this change was not statistically significant. Finally, the union officers assigned to management roles showed a movement towards even greater agreement with the anti-employer statements as a result of participating in the exercise while the union leaders assigned to union roles showed a slight movement away from agreement on the anti-employer scale.

DISCUSSION

The results from the data presented in this paper lead to a number of tentative conclusions, but such conclusions must be interpreted with some caution due to the small sample sizes involved and also due to the exploratory nature of this study. The purpose of this paper was to a dialogue on the subject of attitude change and formulation as a result of participating in a collective bargaining simulation--not to give the last word on the subject.

The results from the data in Table 3 do suggest that participant attitudes may change as a result of participating in a collective bargaining simulation. In particular, attitudes regarding one's own party in negotiations can be strengthened when one is allowed to play a role reinforcing this affiliation. The only significant movement observed in attitudes was for managers who took on the role of management negotiators in the simulation. In this case, pro-union attitudes of managers were significantly changed (and diminished) as a result of participation in the exercise.

It is interesting to note that with a few exceptions the attitudes of managers tended to be more volatile and likely to change than did the attitudes of the union representatives. The reasons for this may trace back to family history or to the reinforcement of attitudes among peers, which has been found in past research among union leaders to be particularly strong.

The final result of this study is that in no case did the attitudes of union or management officials change drastically or come to approximate the attitudes of the opposing group as a result of participating in the bargaining exercise. Attitude change, when it did take place, tended to be small and probably short term.

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