ADVANCES IN INDUSTRIAL AND LABOR RELATIONS, 2017: SHIFTS IN WORKPLACE VOICE, JUSTICE, NEGOTIATION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN CONTEMPORARY WORKPLACES
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

David Lewin and Paul J. Gollan

Volume 24 of Advances in Industrial and Labor Relations (AILR) contains eight chapters highlighting important aspects of the employment relationship. In particular, the chapters deal with such themes as shifts in workplace voice, justice, negotiation, and conflict resolution in contemporary workplaces. Consistent with previous AILR volumes, the chapters in Volume 24 reflect a variety of quantitative and qualitative research methods, including case studies, survey, interviews, historiography, theory building, and longitudinal and cross-sectional research designs and analysis. These chapters also reflect a global perspective on workplace issues. The specific topics of these chapters include social construction of workarounds, workplace dispute resolution, employee involvement (EI) at Delta Air Lines, voice and empowerment practice in an Australian manufacturing company, democracy and union militancy and revitalization, adapting union administrative practices to new realities, pro-social and self-interest motivations for unionism and implications for unions as institutions, and high performance work systems and union impacts on employee turnover intention in China.

In the chapter titled “The Social Construction of Workarounds,” Benjamin B. Dunford and Mathew B. Perrigino analyze workarounds, which they define as informal modifications to rules and procedures that individuals engage into navigate around process blocks in order to make their jobs easier. Although this behavior creates temporary solutions to process blocks, it also
undermines organizations by reducing efficiency and increasing costs. Based on two exploratory studies they conducted, the authors argue that workarounds are a socially constructed, multilevel phenomenon, meaning that they are influenced by others (e.g., coworkers), result in the shaping of workaround climates, and can also emerge within teams and workgroups. They conclude that workarounds are shaped by a variety of social influences, and that both conceptually and empirically workarounds are related to informal training and troubleshooting behaviors.

The chapter titled “Workplace Dispute Resolution: What Guidance Does Existing Research Provide?” by Jonathan Hamberger explores different approaches to workplace dispute resolution in the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK), and other English-speaking countries. In particular, the chapter provides an overview of the practical implications of these different approaches. Hamberger argues that while dispute resolution procedures can contribute to efficiency, equity, and voice, there can be negative consequences for employees who make use of formal workplace dispute resolution procedures, a finding that squares closely with extant research. Hamberger also observes that it is desirable for workplace disputes to be resolved quickly and informally. However, this approach places considerable weight on the skills of line managers, and there is evidence of a tendency among line managers to replace pragmatic approaches to conflict resolution with rigid adherence to process and procedure. While this behavior is partly due to a lack of skills, it is often compounded by inadequate support from senior management. Hence, the chapter concludes that it is important for organizations to have formal workplace dispute resolution procedures and that they should focus on providing appropriate training to and broader support of line managers. Further, says Hamberger, because line managers have primary responsibility for workplace dispute resolution, organizations must carefully select such managers and, in doing so, place main emphasis on people management rather than technical skills.

In the chapter titled “Great in Theory But Tough in Practice: Insights on Sustaining Advanced Employee Involvement at Delta Air Lines,” Bruce E. Kaufman draws upon interview data to provide a case study of the strategic-level EI program at this high-performing company. Delta’s approach to EI is one of the most comprehensive of its type, including a representational structure for nonunion workers that extends from the shop floor to the board room. Kaufman’s chapter focuses in particular on the Delta Board Council (DBC), a group of five peer-selected employees that has a nonvoting seat on the board of directors and that participates in a wide range of strategic decisions. While this type of employee representation was popular
in the United States up until the 1930s, it is now quite rare. Kaufman provides a thorough analysis of the purpose, structure, and accomplishments of the DBC, primarily using deep interviews with a founding DBC member. He concludes the chapter by identifying “lessons learned” and “do’s and don’ts” for managers regarding EI.

In the chapter titled “Voice as Empowerment Practice: The Case of an Australian Manufacturing Company,” Hector Viveros, Senia Kalfa, and Paul J. Gollan examine voice as an empowerment practice in the company. This case study uses a qualitative approach to analyze employee voice and specific types of empowerment from a structural perspective. This approach features a series of interviews conducted among staff from several levels of the company. The interviews revealed a variety of voice mechanisms that are well known, clearly identified, and broadly utilized, and which therefore provide the bases for empowerment. The authors’ research indicates that despite their differences, these various voice arrangements are all geared toward increasing organizational performance. Going further, the authors conclude that the incorporation of nonunion employee representation (NER) as an alternative voice arrangement in this company would result in a focus beyond performance. In particular, NER would likely promote proactive employee behavior or, in other words, a collaborative workplace environment resulting in benefits to employees and management alike – one that would therefore also contribute to increased organizational performance.

In the chapter titled “Democracy, Militancy, and Union Revitalization, the DeMReV Model of Union Renewal: A Sustainable, Strategic Model Expanding on the Voss and Sherman Model,” Jerry A. Carbo, Steven J. Hasse, and M. Blake Hargrove advocate an approach toward developing a strategic model of union reform that may help to revitalize the labor movement. The model charts a path of democracy and militancy to overcome union oligarchy and thereby build stronger unions and a stronger labor movement. The authors postulate that democratic and militant strategies are key to successful reform efforts. While union leaders tend to oppose this type of approach, reformers must overcome such opposition in order to succeed in their reforming efforts. For this practical purpose, the authors’ model offers strategies and tactics to labor activists for revitalizing their unions and the labor movement more broadly. These strategies and tactics can be initiated by rank-and-file reformers as well as progressive union leaders, but this in turn is dependent upon union members’ desire for and union leaders’ willingness to provide shared decision making.

In the chapter titled “Adapting Union Administrative Practices to New Realities: Results of a Twenty-Year Longitudinal Study,” Paul Whitehead,
Paul F. Clark, and Lois S. Gray report the results of a 20-year longitudinal study that examines the manner in which American unions have adapted their internal administrative practices in response to the significant external challenges they face. The chapter is based on a 2010 survey that asked USA-based national and international unions to provide data concerning their internal administrative practices. The results were compared with findings from similar surveys conducted in 1990 and 2000. The findings indicate a steady increase in unions’ adoption of more formal human resource management policies, expanded hiring, budget and strategic planning practices, and deeper efforts to evaluate planned activities over the 20-year period studied. In addition, the findings suggest that unions are increasingly hiring professional staff from a broader applicant pool because they require new employees to have more advanced education and training. The chapter highlights the growing recognition by unions that their internal administrative practices must respond to new challenges in order for unions to make the best use of their limited resources in potentially achieving union renewal.

In the chapter titled “Pro-Social and Self-Interest Motivations for Unionism and Implications for Unions as Institutions,” Jack Fiorito, Irene Padavic, and Zachary A. Russell focus on the question of why workers support unions. Using Ajzen’s Theory of Planned Behavior, the authors conduct a selective review of literature and evidence on union voting, joining, and participation. They use this review to analyze the extent to which union voting, joining, and participation stem from individuals’ self-interest as distinct from pro-social considerations. In addition, the chapter examines the influence of others’ views (i.e., subjective norms) and worker perceptions on achieving desired behaviors (i.e., perceived control and self-efficacy). The authors’ find support for the notion that workers are concerned not with member self-interest (“just us”) alone or pro-social considerations (“justice”) alone but, rather, with both factors. Therefore, say Fiorito, Padavic, and Russell, unions are neither narrow self-interested institutions nor purely pro-social movements but, instead, “a little bit of both.” The chapter concludes by considering implications of this study for union theory, practice, and future research on multiple motivations for union joining.

The final chapter in the volume, titled “Can HPWS and Unions Work Together to Reduce Employee Turnover Intention in Foreign MNCs in China?,” by Ying Chen, Yun-Kyoung Kim, Zhiqiang Liu, Guofeng Wang, and Guozhen Zhao, systematically explores relationships among individual perceptions of high performance work systems (HPWS), union instrumentality, and employees’ turnover intention through the lens of social exchange theory and signaling theory. The research is based on a multilevel, multisource
sample of more than 1,300 employees in 37 multinational corporation (MNCs) based in China. The results indicate that union instrumentality is not directly related to turnover intention. Rather, the post hoc mediation analysis shows that union instrumentality is indirectly and negatively related to turnover intention through affective organizational commitment. Consistent with the authors’ hypothesis, the results also show that union instrumentality serves as an important contingent factor in the relationship between HPWS and employee turnover intention. Importantly, the relationship between HPWS and turnover intention becomes positive when employee union instrumentality is low. These findings extend and enhance previous research by considering both the main effects of union instrumentality on turnover intention and the effects of union instrumentality as a contingent factor on the relationship between perceptions of HPWS and turnover intentions. On balance, the authors’ findings demonstrate the importance of union instrumentality for directly and indirectly reducing turnover intention. Finally, when unions do not improve workers’ well-being and the quality of the workplace, workers’ perceptions of HPWS will be positively correlated with turnover intention.

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