Factors Influencing Trade Union Commitment in Peninsular Malaysia: Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

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Abstract. The number of people who are members of trade unions in many nations, Malaysia included, is gradually decreasing. This declining tendency has been the subject of prior research. The inability of unions to organise has contributed to their collapse in recent decades. This paper examines the factors that may be contributing to union commitment in Peninsular Malaysia. The leadership Style and Industrial Relations Climate will be used in explaining union commitment.

Keywords: Leadership Style, Industrial Relations Climate and Union Commitment.

1. Introduction

Numerous economists in the field of industrial relations have looked at the factors that contribute to the expansion and contraction of trade union membership. Unions' economic and political power are both affected by how well we grasp the elements that contribute to their growth. Variations in union membership growth have been the subject of numerous econometric models due to the widespread curiosity around this topic. Even before independence, trade unions played an important role in the Malaysian economy.

Trade unions safeguard employees on a more individual basis. The industrial relations system in Malaysia relies heavily on the participation of employers, employees, and trade unions. Unions used to be more powerful than they are now, but research shows that union membership has been declining aound the world (Maimunah Aminuddin, 2008). Trade union density refers to the proportion of workers who are union members relative to the total number of wage and salary earners in an economy. As a measure of the degree to which employees are organised and unionised, union membership was presented as a percentage of the eligible workforce. The density of trade unions indicates the extent to which one or more trade unions have permeated the labour force. A union's collective bargaining power is directly proportional to its membership density.

A lot of countries have adopted the tripartite model that Malaysia uses to address industrial relations concerns by bringing together the government, the employer, and the union. Trade unions are crucial in protecting workers' rights because they advocate for their members' interests through collective bargaining. Workers' interests would not be formally represented without trade unions. In prosperous countries like Sweden and Denmark, trade unions are widely regarded as effective at representing their members and contributing to the development of peaceful industrial relations.

The problem that this study addresses is the declining union commitment in Peninsular Malaysia. The ratio of workers represented by unions in Malaysia's labour market has historically been lower than in many other nations with stable economies. Both developed and developing nations are experiencing a fall in union

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membership. There are around 14.5 million workers in Malaysia; however, only 875,193 (6%) are union members, as reported by the Trade Union Affairs Department, and there has been a significant decline in private sector union membership as well, from 433,702 in 2009 to 359,206 in 2017 (Charles, 2017). There are a lot of ineffective unions because their membership is too small (Maimunah Aminuddin, 2008).

It is possible that more resources are being allocated to rivalries among unions and internal power conflicts. The union's bargaining position and output have both suffered as a result of these circumstances. Due to a lack of members, unions are unable to produce sufficient revenue to fund their operations. The union's ability to achieve its goal through discussions with employers would be hindered if it had low bargaining power. Given these repercussions, it is worrying that the number of people in unions continues to fall. Without a powerful union, workers have little leverage to negotiate for and safeguard their interests and well-being on a national or even a regional scale.

Collective bargaining rights include things like guaranteed employment, fair pay, benefits, and grievance procedures if you're a union member. Unions differ from the workplace in several ways, including the absence of official authority over individuals and the requirement that members exhibit a purposeful interest in the organisation. Union leaders have an obligation to inform their employees of the advantages of membership and the value of their dedication to the growth of the union (Johari & Ghazali, 2011; Tarumaraja, Omar, Halim, & Hafidz, 2015).

The Societies Act of 1955 regulates the operations of the Malaysian Trade Union Congress (MTUC), a non-profit labour organisation established in 1955. This group was the first in Malaysia to use trade unions to advocate for its members. Legislators in Malaysia look to the MTUC as the voice of the working class, and the government often seeks the union's input before making changes to labour regulations. Union organising has a significant effect on trade unions, as stated by Tarumaraja et al. (2015).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Leadership Style

The beliefs and values of a union's members frequently determine how much an event outside of the workplace affects it. The leadership styles of union officials may have some bearing on this matter. By "union leader," it means the convenors in the local workplace union, as opposed to the lay members or rank of the national union. Many studies have shown that the union leader has a significant impact on the conduct and attitude of union members (Barling, Fullagar, & Kelloway, 1992; Fullagar & Barling, 1991; Gallagher and Clark, 1989; Nicholson, Ursell, & Blyton, 1980), so it's important to pay special attention to union leadership.

First, as Barling et al. (1992) point out, becoming a union representative is considered the pinnacle of union involvement. The union leader not only plays a crucial role in union-management interactions but also in facilitating the involvement of members. Therefore, the leadership style and character significantly impact the union organisation's responsiveness to general member desires and the manner in which the mass of workers are driven to collective awareness and activism (Hyman 1979). According to research (Nicholson et al., 1980), shop stewards' social skills and their availability to members influence the level of union involvement among workers. Fosh (1993) found that fluctuations in membership involvement followed distinct patterns that were affected by the leadership style of the organisation's top officials.

Union leadership studies have focused extensively on developing typologies that aim to classify leadership behaviour. The typology developed by Batstone et al. (1977) is probably the most well-known of all of them. The typology has been criticised and redefined before (Marchington and Armstrong 1983), but its overall validity and usefulness as an analytical tool have stood the test of time.

2.1.1 Transformational Leadership

According to Fernando, Jain and Tripathy (2020), transactional leadership is a style of management in which the boss tells his or her subordinates exactly what they need to do to reach the company's objectives, and then provides them with the support they need to feel comfortable carrying it out. Leaders that use transactional leadership motivate their teams to work by exchanging access to resources and financial incentives for increased productivity. According to Zhang, Cao and Wong (2018), transactional leadership is a style of management that piques employees' curiosity about their jobs and hence boosts productivity. Effective leaders are concerned with the task's completion and the rapport they've built with their best employees in exchange for those employees' hard work (Zhang et. al, 2018). To meet the needs of his followers, a leader who practises transactional leadership should modify his approach.

Experts agree that transactional leadership is characterised by its use of rewards to motivate subordinates. Leaders who adopt this transactional approach to leadership use behavioural characteristics like providing appropriate rewards (contingent rewards) and managing as needed (management by exception) to inspire and direct their teams. The actions taken by leaders throughout implementation are what give rise to transactional leadership. Othman and Wanlabeh (2012) state that leadership has indicators that show how a leader motivates his or her followers. Motivating subordinates to do their best work requires persuading them to complete tasks on time and work together to accomplish common objectives.

Fig. 1: Transformational Leadership

Figure 1 illustrates a transformational leadership style (Bass and Avolio, 2000) that raises everyone's understanding of the group's common goals and motivates them to work together to make them a reality. By setting goals and keeping track of progress towards them, leaders and supporters of the value-based leadership method prioritise their own interests while also fulfilling legally binding responsibilities (Bass and Avolio, 2000). The degree to which a leader exhibits transactional and transformative behaviour varies widely (Bass, 1999). The kind of leadership that can actually make a difference in an organisation. According to Avolio and Yammarino (2013), transformational leaders put an emphasis on principles and emotions to fuel employees' innovation.

Leaders with the ability to inspire change within their organisations and communities are often essential. These leaders inspire their followers to work together for the greater good, rather than relying on the social interchange and mutual rewards provided by transactional leaders, where not individual gain but group progress is driving this.

According to Bass and Avolio (1993), transformational leadership occurs when a leader takes stock of an organisation's culture, formulates a new vision for it, and then alters underlying assumptions, values, and norms to ensure that workers are able to adopt new ways of thinking and acting. The capacity to influence the organisation's environment, motivation, pattern, and values rather than its individual members is a hallmark of transformational leadership.

Leaders that have the potential to radically alter an industry for the better include Amazon's Jeff Bezos and Netflix's Reed Hastings (O'Reilly & Chatman, 2020). Former IBM CEO Lou Gerstner and former Ford CEO Alan Mulally are just two examples of those who have rescued once-failing companies. Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr., and Susan B. Anthony are just a few examples of other transformational leaders who have led social movements that altered society (O'Reilly & Chatman, 2020). These leaders made an indelible mark because they not only inspired change, but also left their organisations or movements in a shape that allowed future leaders to build upon their successes (O'Reilly & Chatman, 2020). The same goes for organisations like unions.

2.1.2 Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership is defined as leadership that inspires people by appealing to their individualistic needs (Burns, 1978). Values such as honesty, responsibility, and reciprocity are applicable to exchange processes and can be included in a transactional leadership style. There are three characteristics of a transactional leader's connection with their employees, as suggested by Bass (1998).

If the employees' efforts are commensurate with the leader's expectations, the leader will describe the benefits to the workers. The leader gets something in return for the work of his or her followers. As long as the subordinates' desires are reasonable in relation to the worth of their labour, leaders will accommodate them. Bass (1985) argues that transactional leadership is characterised by two features: contingent rewards, in which the leader tells his followers what they need to do to earn rewards, and unconditional promises, in which the followers are assured that they will get what they want in exchange for their efforts. When a mistake is made, the leader takes fast action to rectify the situation.

This type of leadership, according to Dougherty and Hardy (1996), encourages creative and novel ways of thinking. In addition, it fosters the development of cutting-edge methods of doing business that are crucial to the success of any organisation in the modern era. Researchers in Malaysia have found that transactional leadership styles can have a major impact on creativity in organisations. The process innovation of SMEs is one area where transactional leaders may highlight their creativity (Md Saad & Mazzarol, 2010).

2.2.   Industrial Relation Climate

2.2.1 Management style

Blyton and Turnbull (2004) define management style as "the control and direction applied by management to employees over a period of time." The 1980s saw a drop in the prevalence of labour unions, and as a result, many businesses began exploring alternative management strategies in an effort to forge better working relationships with their staff. Bacon (2008) and Dundon and Rollinson (2011). The management style of an organisation has a significant impact on the norms and expectations that employees and managers have of one another (Emmanuel Chika & Bonaventure., 2020). Organisational decision-making style, market position, and cost-cutting priorities of upper management are all taken into account (Emmanuel et al., 2020). Managers' interactions with employees and labour unions can sway their judgement (Sheppeck & Militello, 2000; Emmanuel et al., 2020).

According to research by Emmanuel et al. (2020), a company's work environment is heavily influenced by the management style of its top executives. Top-level executives' cost-cutting preferences, competitive

standing in comparison to rivals, and organisational decision-making style are all part of the mix (Emmanuel et al., 2020). Aggressive product-market managers may likewise be hostile to workers and unions (Emmanuel et al., 2020). Employee and union relations may be reflected in a manager's decision-making style as it relates to the company's internal operations (Sheppeck & Militello, 2000).

When both management and labour unions have a larger impact and when management encourages union membership (Holland et al., 2012), representatives are more likely to have faith in management, as suggested by Bryson (2001). They think that employees will have a more positive outlook on management and make more informed decisions if they see that their bosses are willing to help a union. Both the quantity and quality of interactions between the union and management are likely to influence employees' trust in management (Bryson, 2001; Holland et al., 2012).

2.2.2 Employee Voice

Employees' voice refers to their unstructured actions and preferred methods of communicating ideas, facts, and opinions about issues at work with the goal of improving organisational performance or effecting change (Prasetyo, 2016; Harmen, Hanif & Ariyanto, 2021). Employees' ability to have their voices heard in the workplace has been shown to have a significant impact on productivity and safety (Dundon et al., 2004). Communication between workers and management allows workers to share their ideas, problems, and challenges with higher-ups (Mowbray, Wilkinson, & Herman, 2020). Human capital employees have a stake in the company and should be able to have their opinions heard just like any other stakeholder (Khan, Nazim, & Ahmad, 2021).Representative voice is one method by which workers can have their say and make changes in the workplace (Boxall & Purcell, 2011).

According to an extensive amount of research (Van Dyne and LePine, 1998; Ng and Feldman, 2012; Harmen et al., 2021), employee voice is highly valuable and can significantly increase innovation and creativity. According to Fuller et al. (2007), including employee feedback in organisational procedures helps businesses better respond to changes in the market and stay ahead of potential difficulties. Employees who feel safe raising their voices at work are more likely to feel valued (Morrison & Milliken, 2000), attached (Soane et al., 2013), committed (Jena, Bhattacharyya & Pradhan, 2017), and accountable to their employer (Liang, Farh & Farh, 2012). Both the company and the employee profit when employees are able to share their opinions and ideas (Harmen et al., 2021).
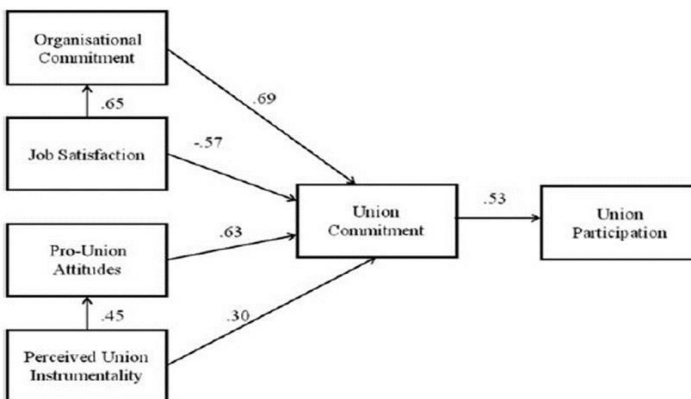
2.3.   Union Commitment

Those who are committed to their union exhibit four characteristics, as outlined by Gordon et al. (1980):
(1) loyalty to the union, (2) duty towards the union, (3) a need to invest major effort on behalf of the union, and (4) faith in the aims of the union. Union membership is driven in large part by individual circumstances and the pursuit of important personal goals (Johari & Ghazali, 2011). Several union-related elements and attributes connected to the employing organisation are shown by the study of Bamberger et al. (1999) to result in union loyalty. Union commitment is the most contentious method in union studies, say Li et al. (2019). The dedication of union members is crucial to the organisation's success (Majid et al., 2021). Union recruitment was aided by the union leader's dedication to members' interests (Trift et al., 2021).
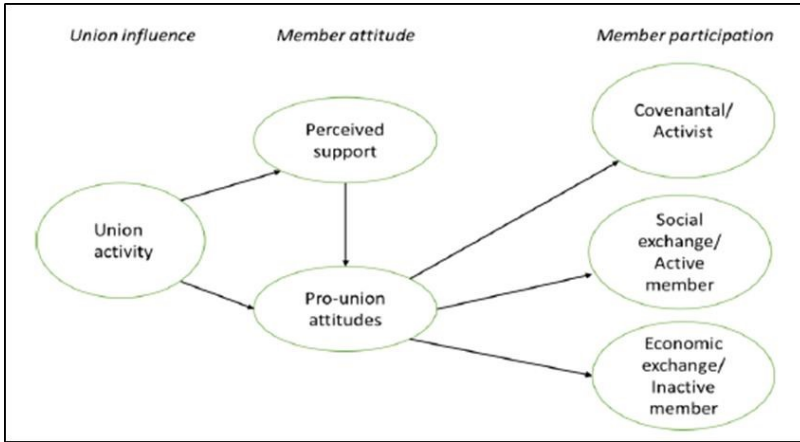
Fig. 2: Snape and Redman's Model of Union Commitment Behaviour

Snape and Redman (Fig. 2) argue that pro-union attitudes are more likely to evolve through social interchange than through economic exchange. Social exchange relationships (serving and supporting one another) have the ability to increase commitment, engagement, and action, and can foster the growth of covenantal bonds. 'Pro-union sentiments had an influence on union commitment equivalent to, if not larger than, that of union instrumentality,' Bamberger et al. (1999) wrote. Therefore, unions should seek to cultivate covenantal connections, creating support for and commitment to union action that strives to build union power resources and negotiating positions, rather than relying on a service or economic exchange to generate union activism. A pro-union mentality can be fostered through improved links between members and union leaders and active representative networks, as well as through the development of shared social values (Huxley, 2015).

Fig. 3: Bamberger et al.'s (1999) model

The Bamberger et al. (1999) model shows the evolution of union commitment through time based on union membership in Figure 3, which incorporates both pro-union and pro-union instrumentalist mindsets (Zacharewicz, Martinez-Inigo, & Kelloway, 2016). The premise that union members' dedication is merely calculative is at odds with the trade perspective (Zacharewicz, Martinez-Inigo, & Kelloway, 2016). They consider the benefits and costs of union membership and become more invested in the union if the benefits surpass the costs (Zacharewicz, Martinez-Inigo, & Kelloway, 2016).

3. Framework

The following framework in Figure 4 was developed. The framework argues that leadership and industrial relations climate may influence the union commitment
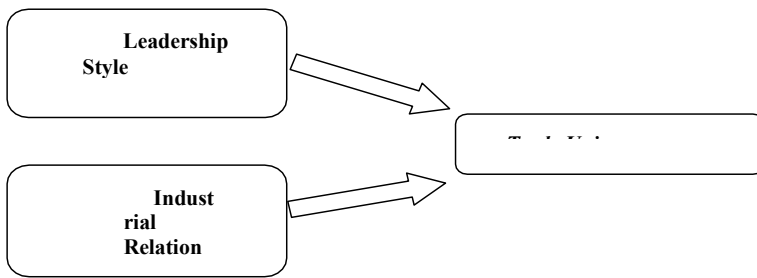

Fig. 4: Framework

The following hypothesis were developed from the framework:

(1) There is a relationship between the Leadership Style and Trade Commitment,
(2) There is a relationship between Industrial Relations Climate and Trade Union Commitment

4. Conclusion

Based on a review of relevant literature, this study reviews prospective causes of union commitment. The study concludes that changes in leadership style and current industrial relations climate are likely to be linked to union commitment. On the one hand, the literature suggests that we should view the declining union commitment as a good thing because it indicates things like more developed economies, better educated workers who can negotiate for themselves, and more equitable gender representation in the workplace. It may also imply that companies value their staff members more as a strategic asset to the company's continued success. On the other hand, we cannot afford to ignore this declining tendency. The literature has demonstrated how businesses and governments have purposefully made it nearly impossible for unions to function successfully by enacting a number of rules and regulations that make unionisation more difficult. Malaysia is a prime example of the effects of these legal restraints. These relationships are greatly hampered in their capacity and success. It's possible that unions, rather than working for their members' best interests, will be reduced to simple worker organisations. The article's framework will be helpful for providing context and directing further study. Since it is not well established whether or not the

leadership style and industrial relations climate in Malaysia will have a substantial influence on union commitment, this framework would be useful in directing future research in the nation.

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