

Analysis of the Unionization of Academic Advisors

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Professional/administrative personnel at colleges and universities must address not only the challenges of a changing student population but also their own personal and professional needs. The relatively small number in this "middle-management" group (e.g., academic advisors, career counselors, admissions counselors) has been a hindrance to its collective strength in obtaining economic, career, and professional goals. The professional/administrative staff at Youngstown State University pursued an innovative course, unionization, in an attempt to achieve these desired goals. The question examined is whether unionization produced the outcomes these professionals had envisioned it would.

During the last decade, the strongly unionized work force in the Youngstown, Ohio, area experienced numerous management/labor problems. Widespread closings of local steel mills, massive layoffs at the nearby General Motors plant, and the re-opening of once unionized grocery stores with nonunion employees are a few examples of the difficulties experienced by the local work force (Stocks & Liu, 1986). It appeared that the notion of unionized labor forces was about to become outmoded in this geographical area.

Within this rather bleak economic environment, however, two unions experienced relative success, namely the faculty and civil service unions at Youngstown State University (YSU). In April 1974, the faculty union was established and affiliated with the Ohio Education Association/National Education Association, and the classified civil service staff (hourly employees) unionized in 1977. The continual success of these two unions in obtaining high percentage salary increases for their members became a growing budget concern for the university administration. As a result, the administration began looking for a vehicle to control and cap salaries of the only nonunionized group on campus—the professional/administrative staff. A consulting firm was contracted by the university to design a job/salary classification system for all administrative personnel. The resulting document created fifteen salary ranges for every ad-

ministrative position on the campus and provided a classification scheme analogous to systems established for faculty and hourly staff.

The fear of declining enrollments brought threats of budget cuts to the university community. As a result, job security became a growing concern for many in the professional/administrative ranks. Within this background of uncertain economic times, the professional/administrative staff voted in favor of unionization in May 1986.

The authors contend that the dilemma faced by the professional/administrative staff at YSU is not restricted to that university alone. The notion of occupational and economic insecurity at institutions of higher learning was reinforced by findings of the 1987 NACADA Task Force Report *Advising as a Profession*, which states that "full-time advisors are legitimately concerned about opportunities to expand and deepen their expertise and grow professionally" (p. 1). The same concern was expressed by Wes Habley (1986) when he stated that one of our challenges is:

to defend the value of advising during a predicted period of decline and retrenchment. This indeed may be our greatest challenge. . . . What is really required to meet the challenge of decline and retrenchment is creative leadership—leadership which forges agreements and understandings where none seem to exist. (p. 7)

The professional/administrative staff at YSU looked toward unionization for this creative leadership.

Unionization of the professional/administrative staff at YSU did not evolve easily, and the problem was compounded by the fact that few examples existed from which a model could be patterned. Initially, the problems of identifying the membership and developing a collective bargaining agreement had to be addressed. An extensive review of the literature found numerous collective bargaining agreements for university faculty and clerical staff nationwide but not for this middle management level of administrative personnel. Research did, however, indi-

cate that unions have been successful in achieving bargaining rights on some 70% of the campuses where formal organizing campaigns have been initiated and that unions appeared to be more firmly established at public rather than at private institutions (Hurd & Woodhead, 1987). In addition, surveys commissioned by the American Federation of Teachers and others reveal that teachers at all levels, including college faculty, value collective bargaining and union contracts for achieving economic and social benefits as well as positional security written into enforceable contracts (Loewenthal & Nielsen, 1977). With such positive and encouraging data, the professional/administrative staff at YSU strongly believed that it was time for their unionization to become a reality.

Two research questions are analyzed in this study: What job-related factors are important to professional/administrative staff, and how satisfied are the members of the bargaining unit with the collective bargaining agreement as it addresses these factors? The research methodology examines the unionization process as an innovative strategy to meet the professional needs of academic advisors and related professionals.

Research Methodology

Participants

The entire population of the bargaining unit (110 members) was included in the survey. Sixty-one questionnaires were returned and serve as the data base for the analysis. For computational purposes, the data results were divided into two major classifications: Group 1 (academic advisors and counselors) and Group 2 (all other professional/administrative staff). Of the returned questionnaires, 24 respondents were academic advisors/counselors, while the remaining 37 respondents were from Group 2, which included job titles such as: librarian; computer analyst; coordinators for student activities, continuing education, laboratory/tutorial services, and the graphics center; sports information director; assistant athletic coach; athletic trainer; editor of the news service; and producer/announcer associated with the university-sponsored radio station.

For purposes of this research, attention will be focused on Group 1, the academic advisors and counselors. The sample size of 24 from the population of 30 advisors/counselors employed

on campus represents a participation rate of 80% from this group.

Questionnaire

Since the topic of the unionization of professional/administrative workers is relatively new, the authors developed and pretested an eighteen item questionnaire. It was determined that, while the resulting eighteen statements were not exhaustive, the questions represented a broad spectrum of issues pertinent to a collective bargaining agreement for professional personnel and, in particular, academic advisors and counselors. Table 1 provides a list of the attitudinal statements on which the respondents used a four-point Likert scale comprised of extremely important (4), important (3), unimportant (2), and extremely unimportant (1) to indicate each variable's importance.

Survey respondents were also asked to indicate how satisfied they were with the union's performance as it addressed these previously determined "important" issues. For example, it would be known not only how important a grievance procedure was but also the degree of satisfaction obtained from the grievance provisions contained in the contract. Data pertaining to satisfaction/dissatisfaction were obtained from the identical set of eighteen statements using a four-point Likert scale comprised of extremely satisfied (4), satisfied (3), dissatisfied (2), and extremely dissatisfied (1).

Two factors considered in the evaluation of a survey instrument are reliability and validity. Reliability deals with the consistency of the measurement instrument after repeated uses, while validity focuses on whether the instrument measures the desired variables (Thomas, 1986). The reliability coefficient, which assumes a value between zero and one, provides a lower boundary to the reliability of a measurement device. Guttman split-half reliability coefficients were calculated for each stage of the questioning procedure (Importance, Satisfaction, and Satisfaction-Importance Quotient) with results of .82, .88, and .79 respectively. These results tend to reinforce the notion of the reliability of the survey instrument (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, 1979).

Rationale of the Analysis

Important inferences can be drawn pertaining to a particular issue if both the degree of im-

portance and the degree of satisfaction are known. One method of data analysis would be to calculate the statistical significance of the difference between the importance attached to a particular variable and the resulting satisfaction associated with that variable. The authors propose a unique procedure of data analysis, namely, the construction of Satisfaction-Importance Quotients (SIQs).

$$\frac{\text{Satisfaction}}{\text{Importance}} = \text{SIQ}$$

SIQ, the ratio of the amount of satisfaction associated with a particular variable relative to the importance of the variable, may assume one of three possible results. For example, the SIQ might exceed the numerical value of one. When the numerator of the ratio exceeds the denominator, the implication is that the union negotiating activities were highly approved by the unit members. If the SIQ equals one (unity), the degree of importance and degree of satisfaction coincide. It is concluded that the union had ad-

ressed that particular issue in an acceptable manner. A final possibility is that the SIQ is less than one. The resulting conclusion is that union performance in that particular area was unsatisfactory.

Many interesting inferences can be drawn from an analysis of the SIQ. For example, if the degree of importance for a particular variable is 1.5 and the corresponding degree of satisfaction is 3.5, the SIQ would equal 2.33, which exceeds unity. A conclusion that could be drawn from this example is that the union is doing a very good job of satisfying an unimportant need. One might infer that the union negotiating team has the possibility of a concession in this particular area in exchange for benefits in some other area.

Analysis of the Data

Demographic Characteristics

Table 2 provides a summary of the demographic characteristics of the advisors included

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Importance, Satisfaction and Satisfaction-Importance Quotient of Unionization Effect at Youngstown State University

Variable	Importance		Satisfaction		Quotient	
	mean	s.d.	mean	s.d.	mean	s.d.
1. Congenial work relationship	3.60	.50	2.85	.67	.79	.21
2. Defined work policy	3.40	.50	3.00	.46	.88	.16
3. Compensation for evening work	3.05	.61	2.70	.66	.88	.24
4. Treatment as a professional	3.45	.83	2.70	.73	.78	.39
5. Policy against sexual harrassment and discrimination	3.25	.72	2.25	.79	.69	.40
6. Realistic salary increases	3.65	.59	1.80	.95	.49	.37
7. Salary range for job	3.44	.51	1.90	.85	.53	.29
8. Fringe benefits	3.40	.50	2.85	.59	.83	.23
9. Policy on job security	3.45	.61	2.60	.75	.75	.30
10. Defined grievance procedure	3.30	.66	2.85	.49	.86	.22
11. Opportunity for professional development	3.70	.47	2.50	.83	.67	.20
12. Defined retrenchment policy	3.05	.69	2.80	.62	.91	.35
13. Job advancement opportunities	3.65	.49	2.20	.77	.60	.24
14. Merit pay available	3.50	.51	1.80	.70	.51	.24
15. Nonmonetary recognition for outstanding performance	3.25	.55	1.90	.55	.88	.22
16. Monetary award for outstanding performance	3.20	.62	2.70	.66	.84	.31
17. Compensation for capped salaries	3.50	.61	2.20	.83	.62	.35
18. Evaluation of job performance	3.00	.65	2.35	.93	.78	.35
Summary statistics	3.38	.58	2.44	.71	.73	.28

in the survey. The typical advisor at YSU is a 37-year-old female holding a masters degree with approximately seven years of advising-related experience.

Importance Results

The first stage of the data analysis was to determine the degree of importance for each of the 18 variables included in the model. Table 1 provides the mean scores for how important each variable is to the advisors. Those variables deemed most important were V11 (3.70, oppor-

tunities for professional development), V6 (3.65, realistic annual salary increases), V13 (3.65, a congenial work relationship with the boss), and V7 (3.55, the salary range for the job classification). It would appear that advisors want to be viewed as professionals and to receive appropriate financial compensation.

Variables with the lowest average degrees of importance to the advisors were V3 (3.05, compensation for evening/weekend work), V12 (3.05, well-defined retrenchment policies based on seniority), and V18 (3.00, annual evaluation of job performance). Although these variables

Table 2
Demographic Profile of Twenty-four Advisor Respondents

1. Gender:	30% Male	70% Female
2. Average age:	37.2 years	range of 24 through 50 years
3. Average annual salary:	\$23,100 based on a twelve-month contract with 22 days vacation per year.	
4. Average length of employment at YSU:	7.3 years	range of 1 through 20 years
5. Average length of employment in current position:	5 years	range of 1 through 20 years
6. Education of advisors:	35% Bachelors, 40% Masters, 25% Doctorate	
7. Number of job advancements at YSU:	62% zero advancement, 20% one advancement, 18% two advancements	
8. Are you the only income earner in your family?	40% yes	60% no
9. Are you the primary income-earner in your family?	60% yes	40% no
10. Prior to unionization at YSU you had a positive attitude toward the collective bargaining procedure?	65% yes	35% no
11. Since unionization at YSU you have had a positive attitude toward the collective bargaining procedure?	50% yes	50% no
12. My unionization experience has provided an incentive for me to terminate my employment at YSU:	40% yes	60% no
13. Race:	80% white	20% nonwhite
14. Marital status:	35% single	65% married

in a comparative sense received the lowest degrees of importance, it should be noted that the ratings are still above 3.0; therefore, it appears that all eighteen issues are somewhat important to the advisors.

Satisfaction Results

The second stage of the analysis determined how satisfied the advisors were with the union contract as it addressed the same issues. Table 1 shows the degree of satisfaction associated with each issue. The highest degrees of satisfaction were found for variables V2 (3.00, clearly defined work-related policies), V1 (2.85, a congenial work relationship with the boss), V8 (2.85, fringe benefits, excluding salaries), and V10 (2.85, a well-defined grievance procedure).

Those areas with relatively low satisfaction results were V6 (1.80, realistic annual salary increases), V7 (1.90, the salary range for the job classification), and V15 (1.90, nonmonetary recognition for outstanding performance).

While each of the 18 variables had an average importance score in excess of 3.00, only 1 of the satisfaction variables, V2 (3.00, clearly defined work-related policies), was in the higher satisfaction range. Survey respondents were relatively dissatisfied with the union's performance in virtually all areas.

Satisfaction-Importance Quotient Results

The final stage of the data analysis entailed the comparison of the degree of satisfaction obtained from a particular issue relative to its degree of importance, resulting in the SIQ. Table 1 shows the arithmetic mean SIQs of the advisors for all variables. The general conclusion obtained from the average SIQs would be that, since the average SIQ is less than unity for each variable, the unionized advisors might now be wondering whether unionization had in fact been the best avenue to achieve their professional and economic goals.

There were some issues, however, where the mean SIQs were nearly equal to unity, suggesting satisfactory union performance in those areas. Those variables having the highest mean quotients, and thereby a relatively high degree of satisfaction, were V12 (.91, well-defined retrenchment policies based on seniority), V2 (.88, clearly defined work-related policies), V3 (.88, compensation for evening/weekend work), and V10 (.86, a well-defined grievance procedure).

In comparison, those variables receiving the lowest SIQ scores, thus indicating the relatively lowest degree of satisfaction, were V6 (.46, realistic annual salary increases), V14 (.51, the absence of merit pay for outstanding service), and V7 (.53, the salary range for the job classification).

From these results, it appears that unionization has somewhat satisfactorily addressed the group's concerns about work load, job security, and retrenchment. The group's greatest displeasure with unionization is its failure to satisfy their economic needs (initial salaries, salary increases, and merit pay).

Conclusions

We believe that the future of academic advising depends on the ability of advisors to grow through increased opportunities for professional development. Competitive salaries must be offered to attract qualified candidates to the advising profession, and in addition, suitable monetary and nonmonetary recognition must be provided if experienced advisors are to be retained.

It is important that college/university administrators realize the value of advising, particularly during times of retrenchment and enrollment decline, so that quality advisors feel secure in their jobs and remain in the profession. Attrition of advisors to more economically rewarding fields with more job security would be harmful to the advising profession, as well as to advisees.

In conclusion, it appears that unionization at YSU has adequately addressed the job security needs of the advisors by the establishment of a grievance procedure and retrenchment policies. In addition, with the defining of the work load requirements, advisors are not bogged down with additional "nonadvisory" responsibilities and are compensated both for hours worked over a 40-hour week and for evening/weekend duties. The union contract fell short, however, concerning the issues of annual salary increases, merit pay, and opportunities for professional development. These areas of discontent apparently need to be addressed in future contract negotiations.

The overall union experience of the advisors/counselors at YSU has yielded both positive and negative results. It appears that in the initial collective bargaining agreement economic considerations were sacrificed for job security — an important commodity, particularly during times

of budget constraints and declining enrollment. Although the ultimate success of unionization for academic advisors/counselors has yet to be fully determined, the avenue of collective bargaining remains a viable alternative as advisors continue to seek appropriate economic and noneconomic compensation.

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