

# **Human Resource Strategy for Labor Unions: Oxymoron, Chimera or Contributor to Revival**

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## **Abstract**

**While the need for revival strategies for the labor movement has stimulated much discussion and research, little or no attention has been paid to the role of HR strategies for unions. This paper addresses the question, “What are appropriate HR strategies for labor unions in this time of crisis?” Research for this paper is largely inductive, qualitative and action research consisting of interviewing as well as some surveying and extensive literature review. Preliminary findings, pending research on broader samples of the labor movement and more prolonged review of emerging union HR strategies, suggest that unions are in great need of more effective HR strategies with a systems approach. Unions generally, by their own accounts, are lacking in the area of staff accountability and development; union officials generally resist embracing their management responsibilities; training for managers within unions is rare; and internal union politics play a significant complicating role in all aspects of HR within unions.**

## **Introduction**

As the percentage of the U.S. workforce in unions declines and labor’s power is challenged, scholars, labor educators, organizers and others have been writing about and proposing strategies for revival and the need for change. Their analysis and recommendations often include the need for transformational leaders with vision. Little, however, has been written about the Human Resource (HR) strategies and the supervisory and management skills union officials need in order to carry out whatever plans and programs they decide to pursue.

If “union management” is an oxymoron, as John Dunlop (1990) famously said, then union HR strategies have been an elusive fantasy until relatively recently. While many unions have HR departments, they generally focus on old style personnel functions and there is little or no thought to how the HR function needs to be aligned with the overall strategy of the union.

In many unions the notion that they need an HR strategy or even that there is such a thing is unknown or shunned. However, some unions are seeking new ways to manage staff as they develop strategies to respond to the crisis in the labor movement.

In the last decade or two the field of HR in the corporate world has increasingly shifted from a narrow definition and role within organizations to a strategic role, “concerned with the contributions that human resource strategies make to organizational effectiveness, and the ways in which these contributions are achieved” (Dyer, Shafer 2003).

Perhaps the primary goal of a sound HR strategy is to ensure that the organization “has (a) the right types of people, (b) in the right places at the right times, (c) doing the right things right” (Collins, Erickson, Allen 2005). As obvious and logical as this sounds, achieving it in any organization is not simple or formulaic.

Further, “it is impossible to understand the nature of HR strategy without taking both intra-organizational politics and environmental/institutional contingencies into account” (Bamberger, Meshoulam 2000).

Doing that account-taking for unions reveals special challenges because of aspects of their culture and traditions, such as only hiring from within, basing hiring decisions on political factors and a reluctance to discipline or remove staff once they are hired. Union officers and staff directors responsible for managing others largely eschew the label, as well as the role, of supervisor.

While the problem of “reluctant managers” is one found in all organizations, it is particularly acute and ubiquitous within unions. In corporations, “reluctant managers are simply afraid of the responsibility of supervising people” (Randal 1993) but in unions, it is a much more visceral issue involving ideology, self image, and culture.

To intensify the challenge even more, unions are in crisis and “trying conditions require systems capable of continuously remaining one step ahead of actual or potential problems, errors, and surprises; systems that are continually and concurrently diligent, facile, fluid, and generative.” (Erickson, Dyer 2004)

How can unions develop and implement such HR strategies? Can they do it quickly while simultaneously responding to perhaps their biggest crisis since the 1920’s? This paper will address some of the factors which will help answer those questions.

HR strategies within unions will be examined in this paper as a system with specific attention on performance management but also on recruitment and selection, orientation and training, compensation and rewards, and development of supervisors and managers. For each aspect of the system the unique challenges presented when implementing them within unions will be identified and explored.

This paper will review attitudes about HR Strategy held among union leaders and staff directors as well as cultural, structural and other obstacles to unions practicing better HR techniques and strategies. In particular, it will explore the phenomenon of managers and supervisors within unions who, when asked to describe “management” in one or two words, offer only negatives.

The paper will identify and evaluate newer and more innovative union efforts at developing HR strategies (both espoused and emergent). It will analyze the role of training in introducing HR strategies to union leaders and helping them overcome an aversion to being managers. An evaluation of the newer efforts and the effect of training will be elucidated in three case studies.

Finally, the paper will identify likely future developments in HR policies within unions and areas for further study.

## HR Practices in Unions

The most comprehensive research on management practices within national unions in the United States, conducted by Paul Clark, Lois Gray and Paul Whitehead, shows an increasing presence of HR departments (Gray, Clarke, Whitehead year). Clark et al., in a 2010 survey, found that:

unions were most likely to have a written policy for headquarters and field staff in five areas: sexual harassment, discipline and discharge, ethics, equal opportunity/affirmative action, and hiring. One explanation for the relatively high rate at which unions have adopted policies in these areas, as opposed to those areas where policies have not been as readily adopted, is that these areas are regulated, to one degree or another, by law. (Clark, Gray, Whitehead 2011 )

This is supported by the focus of an AFL-CIO Lawyers' Coordinating Committee Conference in 1999 on "The Union as Employer." Not surprisingly (for a conference of lawyers) the topics were driven by defensive concerns (legal liability) and included "The Right to Demand Loyalty," "Union Employers in the Electronic Workplace," and "Employees Missing in Action."

By contrast, Clark et al found that "in the 2010 iteration of the survey, union respondents were least likely to have written rules on promotion (44%), performance appraisal (41%), and salary review (38%). Of the ten topics listed, it (performance appraisal) is the only one not showing a clear increase in adoption between 1990 and 2010."

The absence of salary review policies is almost assuredly a reflection of long-held union positions against pay schemes other than uniform raises for their members as well as the presence of staff unions with contracts that spell out how and when raises are granted, with little or no discretion by the management of the employing union. The low incidence of promotion

policies may have a variety of explanations, from the paucity of promotional opportunities to union leaders' desire to protect their discretion to promote for internal political reasons.

The factors contributing to the low level of attention unions pay to performance appraisal will be addressed in more detail later in this paper. However, regardless of the reasons, when unions neglect performance management it greatly hinders their ability to adapt to the enormous challenges facing the labor movement.

Research conducted by Cornell University ILR summer fellows in 2010, under the supervision of Professor Gray and the author, found similar results from large local and statewide unions mostly in New York as were found in the national survey conducted by Clark et al. As did Clark, et al, the summer researchers found that when unions said they had HR policies they often were referring to contracts with staff unions. Many of those interviewed indicated that they applied similar or identical policies to their unrepresented staff as those contained in their collective bargaining agreements with staff unions (Bass, Bores, Christian 2010)?

Interviewers asked about performance management, responses were varied and revealing. While most said they were satisfied with their efforts to hold staff accountable, this was followed by, "an elaboration indicating that it was not as bad as it could be, but it could most likely be better?" suggesting that perhaps they were not as satisfied as they first indicated. When asked about their level of satisfaction with the performance of their staff those who were most candid admitted that while most of the staff's performance ranged between excellent & merely adequate, there were some whose performance was unsatisfactory but little was being done to correct it. (Bass, Bores, Christian 2010)

When asked to provide more detail about how they held staff accountable it became clear that most of those interviewed relied primarily on evaluations conducted when staff were about

to complete their probationary periods. Beyond that, evaluations were haphazard and inconsistently conducted . (Bass, Bores, Christian 2010) As will be covered in greater detail later in this paper, the whole question of staff performance management is highly charged with ambivalence and avoidance.

The general lack of effective means of staff accountability, combined with the common failure to provide training, exposes a glaring problem in union management practices. . The mounting pressure on unions to find solutions to the complex challenges they face would seemingly motivate them to find better ways to develop highly-skilled staff, set performance expectations, and hold staff accountable. While there are notable efforts to do just that, most unions seem mired in more mundane and routine HR practices.

The HR policies unions employ are determined the extent to which the union is future and strategy focused as opposed to influenced by internal union politics. Figure 1 describes the influencing factors.

The left two quadrants show contrasting drivers of policy. The top left quadrant, “Need for Motivated and Constantly Developing and Accountable Staff,” is responsive to the challenges referred to above. The bottom left quadrant “Legal or Contract Compliance and Need to Manage “Personnel Functions” Efficiently and Fairly,” is largely defensive, involving compliance with laws as discussed by Clark, et al or devoted to the consistent and objective maintenance of basic operations such as seeing that new hiring, benefits and compensation administration, etc. .

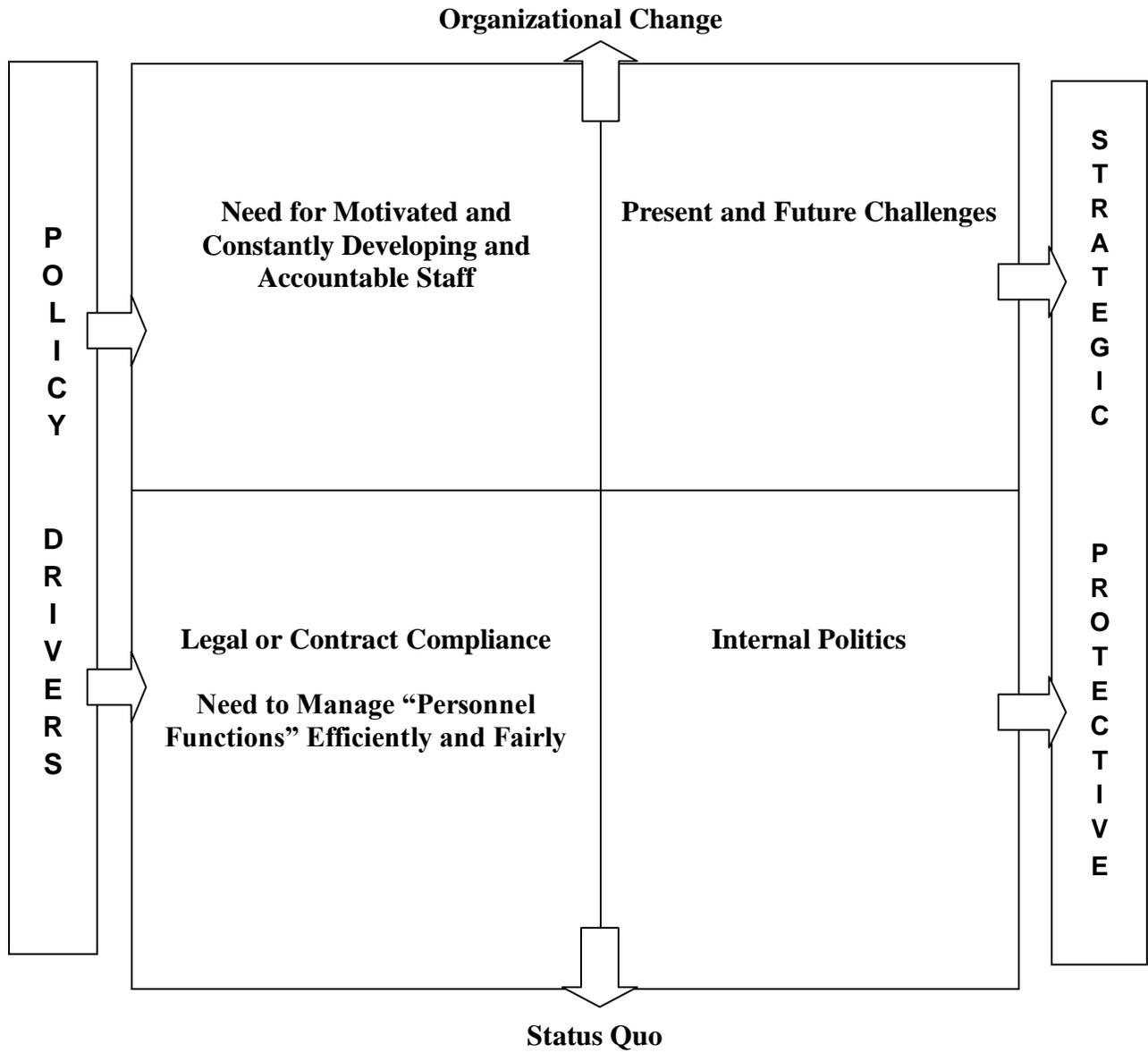
The right two quadrants, strategy and politics, often operate at cross purposes. Since strategies involve change the political balance within a union may be threatened. There is evidence, which will be discussed later in this paper, that those unions most focused on the top

two quadrants-- staff motivation, development and accountability and strategic planning are most likely to be growing and adapting to environmental changes. Those unions which are largely engaged in the bottom two quadrants, legal compliance/personnel functions and internal politics are likely to find it increasingly difficult to adapt to those same changes in the environment.

Following the streams in Figure 1, unions in the top two quadrants are most likely to be using HR strategies resulting in changes. Those more firmly in the bottom two quadrants are more likely to employ protective HR policies to remain in the status quo.

**While more unions are paying increased attention to HR within their organizations the majority are focused on practices and policies designed to maintain routine functions like hiring and providing and explaining benefits as well as measures to protect the union from liability. There are signs that unions are starting to take a more systematic and strategic approach to HR but it is too early to determine the results of those efforts or if it is a trend that will expand in the future.**

Figure 1



## **HR within unions as a system**

Unions are more likely to find themselves in the lower left quadrant of Figure 1 if they view HR, especially performance management, as a number of discrete functions rather than as a system.

At the Cornell ILR workshop, “Supervising and Managing with Labor’s Values”, participants are presented with a graphic demonstrating performance management as a system which is shown in Figure 2. Several of the union leaders who attended the workshop found this graphic and the concept of each aspect of their HR practices interacting with the others as particularly helpful.

When unions ask the Cornell ILR Extension Labor programs for assistance with staff performance management they usually start by asking for good examples of forms to be used for performance appraisal meetings. As discussed in the performance management section of this paper, the reliance on “the form” rather than other factors is problematic in itself. On a broader level the primary focus on the appraisal form indicates a lack of understanding of how the various aspects of an organization’s HR policies interact with or often counteract each other.

For example, the author has provided training and consulting services to many unions who tell their staff to spend increasing amounts of their time identifying and developing rank and file leaders as opposed to handling grievances. They often provide training which emphasizes that staff should resist the temptation to perform many of the functions of the union themselves and instead find and prepare members to assume these roles. However, what they measure and

what gets recognition are things like gathering cards from members which authorize political donations to the union, filling busses for rallies, or turning out members for meetings.

Those who meet their targets for those quantifiable goals are given positive recognition at staff meetings while those who do not are characterized as letting the union down or worse. The problem with this is that staff who put into practice what they learn in training and follow the union's stated goal of developing leaders may not produce the cards or bodies initially because they are spending time working through others. Staff who are good at producing "numbers" may spend their time dealing directly with members themselves rather than developing others to do it. This very common situation in unions illustrates the lack of alignment of the goal setting, training and rewards aspects of the performance management system.

In the area of recruitment and selection it is common that unions primarily look for dedication to the cause of unionism and previous experience to the exclusion of many other factors. Factors such as emotional intelligence, experience outside the labor movement, whether the candidate is a good fit for the team and job and the ability to grow and develop into more responsible jobs with the union often are less valued, according to the Director of Talent Management for Union C in the "case studies" section of this paper.

The previous HR Director's (as the position was previously titled) focused on developing an improved performance appraisal form. In contrast, the new Talent Manager at Union C did a comprehensive analysis of all the HR functions of the union, including recruiting and hiring, which led to significant changes. The systems approach is demonstrated clearly by the revised HR strategy for Union C described in "the case study" section of this paper.

In another example of systems thinking regarding hiring, the chief of staff of union A (also discussed later in this paper) observed that as a result of taking a systems approach to hiring, “We also look for organizational fit in hiring so we hire people complementary to the rest of us.”

Both Union A and Union B found the Cornell workshop, Supervising and Managing with Labor’s Values, helpful in getting managerial staff to understand HR practices as a system and to consider how a change in one aspect of the system affects all the others.

Unfortunately, this is often not the way unions use training and education. One veteran labor educator refers to an all too frequent application of education within unions as “drive-by training.” By this she means that unions will request a workshop or conference to address a perceived problem but devote a alarmingly insufficient time for the training. According to her union leaders who request the “drive-by training” often do so to show they are doing something about a problem or to placate staff. Another explanation she offers is that the leaders are too busy and/or uninformed to understand that training alone is not enough to address many of the problems they hope to resolve.

A university-based expert on sexual harassment who consults with unions and management and provides them with training said, *“All too often I get the call from an organization after there is an incident and they are worried about being sued. Sometimes unions incorporate harassment prevention training into their leadership, staff or steward training before there are problems and that’s great but not enough unions do that.”*

Other labor educators interviews for this paper reported that few unions use training as part of a strategy. When given the opportunity, the educators advise unions to make a yearly plan for training that complements the upcoming major activities of the union such as contract

negotiations, legislative programs and organizing. While some unions understand and follow the advice, many do not because they cannot or will not devote the time and resources or because they are too mired in their day-to-day crisis to think that far ahead.

The labor educators also report that, like the example above where unions teach staff to build leaders but reward those who get their numbers, aspects of the union's culture can undermine attempts to bring about change through training. In one union surveyed the union decided to put emphasis on holding staff accountable and devoted a great deal of resources to training their supervisors and managers. However, the efforts stalled when it became clear that a major obstacle to greater accountability was the practice of staff who are being counseled for their performance to go to someone with more authority in the union to get their immediate supervisor to "back off." Here the goal of the union, and the training to support it, was subverted by the structure and culture of the union.

Another common example of how the lack of systems-thinking undermines union efforts to achieve its goals is highlighted by the "walk-the-talk" phrase in the center of Figure 2. Labor educators have found that when conducting training on a range of topics that involve making changes in how staff perform their job internal union politics are a major impediment. Staff in the training, according to one educator often say, "why should I trust that these changes are important and will not threaten my security if those above me are not setting an example."

In seeking better ways to hold staff accountable some unions use quantitative measures such as the number of worksites visited. Union representatives who must report these metrics revealed to our interviewer that low performing staff can easily thwart the intent of this attempt since there is no qualitative component. One of those interviewed summed up the situation, *"Some of the poor performers have been reps so long they know how to get over."*

As a result union leaders were able to track the number of work site visits but had no way of knowing whether anything valuable was accomplished. Resentful over additional reporting requirements designed for their low-performing co-worker, the high-performing staff felt mistrusted and disrespected and became less motivated and more cynical.

As demonstrated by the three case studies in this paper when unions take a holistic, systems oriented strategic approach to their HR function they get positive results.

**In most cases unions establish HR policies and practices without significant awareness of how they interact and without a system approach. It is encouraging, however, that those union officials who attend training where the systems approach is presented find it compelling. While they may not have been thinking in those terms prior to the training, they can readily see how their current practices have been functioning and identify where it needs adjustment. As demonstrated by the three case studies in the this paper, when unions take a holistic, systems-oriented strategic approach to their HR function they get positive results.**

Figure 2



Chart created by Sally Alvarez and Legna Cabrera of Cornell University School of Industrial Relations. All rights reserved 2012.

## Reluctant managers -- from Labor Activist to Supervisor

**The reluctance of union officials to embrace their roles as supervisors and managers is a serious impediment to more effective management of union staff.**

Many union officials with responsibility to supervise and manage staff feel that being a unionist and a manager at the same time is a contradiction. At the beginning of the first day of the Cornell workshop, “Supervising and Managing with Labor’s Values,” participants are instructed, “When I say a word please remember the first things that come to your mind -- the word is *management*.” Nearly all the union leaders in the workshops have overwhelmingly negative reactions ranging from “evil,” “enemy,” to “ass holes” and more unprintable responses. In further discussion participants express how uncomfortable they are being supervisors and managers and the accusation of “acting just like management” can be a powerful indictment.

A union official who has worked for several unions summed it up succinctly, “*Management is a dirty word.*”

In a confidential on-line survey sent to past participants of the workshop remarked, “*I remember the struggle I was going through between the reality of being a new supervisor in a unionized world in which "supervisors" are deemed to be the enemy.*”

In interviews conducted during the summer of 2010, labor officials articulated the same aversion to being management expressed by the workshop participants. A former union official who now works as a labor educator said, “*They are used to fighting bosses, so when it’s their turn to be a boss they want to be a good boss but they may not necessarily know how and they*

*have some reservations about whether it's possible to be a good boss. The last thing they want to be is the people they are fighting”*

In a study of British unions conducted by Michael Dempsey and Chris Brewster, titled *On Leaving the Nunnery: Management in Trade Unions*, 56 officials from four major British unions were interviewed. The goal of the study was to “understand the extent to which senior trade union officials accept managerial roles.” They created questions with the aim “to establish whether those officials were managers, if they truly accepted that role, their approach to people management, and how trade union managers were developed.” The authors concluded, among other things, that trade union managers are hesitant about managing conduct or performance. For one of the four unions interviewed they concluded, “A residual view that the union’s task is defending workers and that makes it awkward, sometimes to the point of embarrassment, to be on the other side of the fence.”

A leader in a large union interviewed by the Cornell summer fellows offered, *“We spend the day fighting with management and sympathize with and defend members, so it’s uncomfortable to take on the role of those we oppose.”* “I don’t think union leaders are comfortable in the management role at all, reported another official with experience working for a number of unions.

While the above quotes capture the predominant sentiment heard in the interviews it was not universal and there are indications that things are changing. A consultant with union experience who now helps union managers accept their role noticed that, *“For years I’ve said, ‘I know you don’t want to be bosses because we fight the boss but unless you own your boss role you can’t do it well.’”* In the past, the participants laughed nervously in recognition. The consultant says things are different in

some unions. *“Now with unions that hire from the outside who don’t come through the ranks they are very comfortable being bosses and look at me funny when I say it.”*

Some union managers feel less discomfort because they were hired from the outside, in other unions the difference is attributable to the tone set by the leadership. The chief of staff of a large union that hires from both inside and outside said, *“We do a pretty good job of hiring and managing our directors.”* At another large union with similar hiring practices the chief of staff indicated, *“I make it clear in the interview process that being an efficient manager is something that the members expect and deserve from you and if you are not ready to do that this isn’t the job for you.”* Some of the managers who reported to that chief of staff added that not only was he clear about what was expected, but he also set a good example by being a good manager and being proud of it.

The president of another union was confident that, *“in general our managers are very comfortable giving assignments and holding people accountable.”*

Still, even in unions where the managers accept their role there is acknowledgement that the transition is not always easy. One union official assigned by the president to pay attention to the HR and labor relations of the union said, *“at the senior level [of management within the union] they are very comfortable, but as we go down to lower level supervisors the comfort level tends to be less.”*

One of the interviewees summed up the feeling of many of those interviewed, *“There is a built in bias not to be a boss. At best, managers in unions are uncomfortable, at worst, they just don’t deal with being a boss.”*

Parallel to the discomfort many union managers feel about fulfilling their supervisory role is the high comfort level they have when performing other functions of their job. Once they

are promoted former union representatives or organizers often view their management and supervisory duties as “extra” work that pulls them away from the more comfortable and familiar parts of their job such as bargaining, campaigning, arbitrations and working with the members

A major study of British union officials in 1994 by John Kelly and Edmund Heery found that, “...many senior officers do not view the deliberate management of their subordinates as a priority. Instead, many conceive of their position as that of a senior representative, responsible for more important negotiations, servicing key lay committees and presenting the political and public faces of the union to outside agencies.”

Diane Watson, in *Managers of Discontent – Trade Union Officers and Industrial Relations Managers* (1988), compared the lives of British union officers to their counterparts - industrial managers. Union officials reported spending their time on four main activities: negotiating, office work, meetings, and recruitment and/or helping members with individual problems. Hiring, firing and other HR tasks were not mentioned.

This may not be surprising considering that unionists are elevated to supervisory jobs for reasons other than their ability to manage. According to one of those interviewed during the summer of 2010, “*Not much priority is placed on being a good manager. The qualities to move up don't necessarily include being a competent manager. If people thought about it they would say it is important. But charisma and strength are valued more.*”

“*People move into management by being good at what they were doing before they got promoted, not because they want to be management or had training for it*”, remarked another of those interviewed by the Cornell summer fellows.

In her study, Watson found that some union officials were trying to give their union's administration a “more professional” feel, but were fighting resistance from those who did not

want to change their union's traditional way of working. They had some success, with officials being more accountable and being required to document more. Watson lists a number of obstacles to union officials becoming effective managers, including union politics, internal resistance to change, time allocation and aversion to acting like management, lack of training, and lack of professionalization or documentation.

The interviews with the supervisors and managers from the large union where there was evidence that they were comfortable with their roles following staff reorganization showed that the discomfort with being management within a union could be overcome. One of those interviewed observed, *"It doesn't bother me to be a manager. At some point something happens and you make a decision either to do what is required to be management or to go back to a non-management job."*

Past supervisory experience, having a good example to learn from and getting reinforcement from the top of the organization for managing were responsible for three of those interviewed being comfortable with their roles. One of those interviewed said, *"I don't see a contradiction between being a manager and working for a union because I worked for someone who demonstrated how it can be done well. He operated with his staff in ways that were consistent with the stands he takes for the union's members."* *"The chief of staff is very clear that my job is to be a manager. Those managers with problems are the ones who have trouble getting past personal feelings – you can't let them get in the way of work decisions"* reported another of those interviewed.

The third interviewee said, *"I had worked as a supervisor in other jobs where at first I was unhappy about how my former co-workers treated me when I got promoted. However, eventually they respected me as a supervisor and accepted that I was doing what needed to be*

*done and the relationships get built back up. Now day to day I'm not conflicted about being a manager."*

The chief of staff from that union who earned an MBA before starting in his first union representative job is proud that, *"I enjoy hiring and mentoring staff and seeing them move up. Lots of people said I'm their best boss. I like to think I'm supportive and listen."*

As mentioned in one of the quotes above, this chief of staff is very clear with the union's supervisors and managers that they are expected to accept and carry out their responsibilities. He puts particular emphasis on this because he feels, *"The major challenge for the labor movement is competence, but union culture doesn't value management."*

Comments from others from that union verify that the supervisors and managers there take their roles seriously. One said, *"With staff I inherited who shouldn't be there, I try to help them overcome their weakness but if they can't I move them out."*

Others quotes illustrate that union's staff have accepted their role as managers. *"When I was a non-supervisor I vowed that if I ever became a supervisor there were some things I would never do and I stuck with that. For example, when one member of a team screws up I talk to that person. I don't bawl everyone out or lecture them on what they should not do."*

*"Managing is ok if you have a good staff. I like to have an open door policy and take care of things right away. I don't micro-manage."*

*"I worked in a non-union company as a supervisor and was expected to grind people, which I didn't like. In the union I'm comfortable being a manager because here you have a moral obligation to be more open and respectful. I get good performance from my staff by respecting them--showing how they can have fun doing their job. I also instill in my staff that being on a team means being accountable to each other and valuing cooperation."*

Even in this local where management is valued some of the supervisors have ambivalent feelings as indicated by these comments: *“I had to fire someone and it hurt me to have to put them out of a job, but on the other hand they were not performing which is a disservice to the members.”*

*“One person on my staff thinks I’m a complete sell out.”*

*“Most people the union disciplines deserve it, but in this economy it’s brutal putting anyone on the street. It cost me sleep to let people go even though they deserved it.”*

*“Many of the managers for the union are uncomfortable taking discipline and try to pass it off to someone else.”*

*“It’s difficult to learn to gauge staff’s strengths, fit assignments to the strengths, find opportunities for staff to take on more responsibilities, and dealing with someone who’s failing but doesn’t see it and to instill the spirit of the struggle.”*

*“I’d like to think that advancing the interests of our members is not in conflict with treating the union’s staff well.”*

In summing up the importance of “owning” the management role, one manager from a union reflected, *“I think if I thought of myself as a manager from the beginning I would have made fewer mistakes.”*

**The discomfort with being supervisors and managers by union officials is pervasive within unions, although not universal. By acknowledging and discussing their aversion to playing management roles, union officials can begin to become better managers. The reluctance to manage is lowest in unions where top management is clear about the roles expected from union staff prior to getting promoted to a supervisory or management position. Union staff who served as supervisors in jobs prior to working for their union are**

**more likely to have resolved their feelings about being management. At least one professional who works extensively training managers within unions reports that increasingly the conflict over being a manager is muted.**

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| <b>Performance management and accountability within unions</b> |
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**Performance management and accountability hardly exist in many unions and where it is practiced it is often inconsistent and ineffective.**

When asked if they were satisfied with their union's way of holding staff accountable the majority of those interviewed answered this question in the affirmative. However, upon further inquiry a less positive picture emerged.

One of the union officials who has worked for multiple unions said, *"I don't think the evaluation systems and accountability systems are very strong in unions and accountability is the part of supervising that union people have the most problem with. Unions have high tolerance for people who are not doing what they are supposed to."*

After confirming that everything said was confidential, one official shared that because of politics, *"There are people here who are grossly incompetent and there is no culture to do anything about mediocre performance. There are some high performers, but overall I'm not very satisfied with the performance of the staff."*

Another union official confided, *"We have some staff who are basically good people but based on their work there is some question of why are they here."*

A representative of one union explained, *"The reluctance to set standards and deal with union staff who don't do a good job is from sympathy for workers who get treated poorly by*

*management.*” Another representative said that because of that reluctance, “*We say you have to be an idiot to lose this job.*”

A staff director of his union confided, “*We strive very hard to remember we are a business but to act like a union and that’s a very difficult line to toe.*” Another union director added, “*Internal management issues are a crucial part of success of an organization and we don’t do very well at it, and I think others don’t either.*”

According to the HR director of a large union, one result of tolerating poor performance is that some union leaders and managers eventually explode and demonstrate the worst behaviors of the worst bosses when pushed over the boiling point. The HR director reports that then they get angry and demand that the staff person be fired or disciplined without any documentation for offenses that are not serious enough to warrant such harsh penalties.

Mediocre staff are too frequently tolerated, in the opinion of many of those interviewed, and they have seen Union leaders discipline staff through informal means which induce staff to quit or retire. One union leader reported that for every staff person hired there is a resignation letter on file to be used whenever the leader feels it is time for that staff person to move on.

If informal efforts to get rid of a poor performer fail, the union may keep the person on staff but in a role where they are isolated from the political life of the union or, in the words of one union staff person, “*where they can do the least harm.*”

Levy and Williams relay relevant findings by Villanova, Bernardin, Dahmus and Sims (1993), “They reported that individuals who were higher on this scale (Performance Appraisal Discomfort Scale (PADS)) were also more likely to give elevated ratings because they didn’t want to deal with the discomfort and conflict that often comes with delivering negative feedback.” In other words, if a supervisor or manager is uncomfortable in the role of appraiser

(as indicated by the PADS) she or he is unlikely to give critical or corrective feedback, but instead give the impression to the person being appraised that everything was going well.

Audia and Locke offer support for the idea that supervisors in general shy away from or are ineffective at holding employees accountable, “Research has shown that when people give negative feedback, evaluators regularly transmit ambiguous messages...in order to make them more acceptable to the recipient.”

Lisa A Steelman and Kelly A Rutkowski in their article **Moderators of Employee Reactions to Negative Feedback** also make an obvious-sounding assertion that, “There is a substantial amount of literature suggesting that unfavorable feedback evokes dissatisfaction and denial in feedback recipients.”

Stelman and Rutkowski address supervisors’ reluctance to give negative feedback in the same article, “Providing negative feedback to others about their performance is a task very few supervisors enjoy. Supervisors have been shown to avoid, delay, and distort negative feedback.”

In **Benefiting from Negative Feedback**, Pino G. Audia and Edwin A. Locke explain that most employees cannot benefit from negative feedback since they do not actually receive much of it. They explain, “Most people do not want it [negative feedback] because it threatens their self-esteem and sense of competence. People do not want to give it because they know how painful it is to get it and because they have learned through unpleasant experiences that giving negative feedback to others leads to anger and conflict and often to worse subsequent performance by the recipient...”

If supervisors and managers generally are reluctant to give corrective feedback it is particularly true of managers within unions who consider being compared to a boss as a cutting insult. Many union supervisors and managers have such a high level of discomfort with being in

the “boss” role that it is not surprising that all too often union staff who are widely seen as deficient never get held accountable.

Several of the leaders interviewed agreed with the following statement from one experienced union official, *“Because it [a union] is a democratic organization those being supervised can use politics to influence those who supervise them. It’s hard to set standards for people when they have access to the politics of the union.”* Another interviewee put it more bluntly, *“Union staff tend to excel based on loyalty rather than job skill.”*

A manager from a large union reported that, *“I busted a staffer who was sleeping around and falsifying records, so he organized members to picket the union office.”*

The front-line supervisors of one of the unions participating in a Cornell workshop reported that they were severely hampered in keeping staff accountable because when they tried to do it, the person they supervise would do an “end run” to someone with more authority in the union to get the supervisor to back off.

One union official explained how politics affect staff performance in another way, *“There is a culture within the labor movement that rewards loyalty more than anything else. A lot of people in the labor movement are there because they helped those who got elected, not necessarily because of their skill or experience.”*

In explaining why many managers in unions are not very good at keeping staff accountable, one union official said, *“People replicate the structures of corporate America and the culture of the workplace where they came out of.”*

While many organizations are more advanced, the most common tool for accountability is still the annual or semiannual performance evaluation.

Of the unions interviewed most have yearly evaluations or, in the words of several of those interviewed, they are “supposed” to have them annually. Only a few reported providing staff with continuous feedback, while one admitted giving feedback only “when someone does something wrong.”

The literature overwhelmingly criticizes yearly evaluations as ineffective, especially as compared to a more on-going system of feedback. Herbert H. Meyer, in his article, **A Solution to the Performance Appraisal Feedback Enigma**, referring to “literally thousands of articles” about performance appraisals said, “Most of these articles generally applaud the virtues of the performance appraisal and feedback process, lament their lack of success, then present suggested solutions to the program.”

Levy and Williams cite a number of studies pointing to a common perception that politics play a significant role in performance appraisals which undermines their legitimacy. Within a political system like a union such yearly “report card” appraisals are not likely to be effective since officers must get reelected to keep their jobs and even a poorly-performing staff member can usually sway enough voters to affect the outcome of elections.

Some representatives are elected or have the right to run against the elected leadership, which gives them leverage to get their way and avoid being managed. On the other hand, hardworking and dedicated staff might find themselves hampered by nervous elected leaders who do not want them doing anything that might jeopardize the leader’s position. If a staff person does what he/she thinks is right but it causes them to run afoul of the union’s politics they may find themselves in trouble despite doing a good job for the members. The President of a staff union representing those working for a large union in New York State indicated that one of

the primary reasons the staff organized is to “insulate ourselves from the politics so we can do our jobs for members without regard for who has political connections or not.”

As an alternative to standard annual appraisals, Levy and Williams a “feedback culture” where giving and getting constructive feedback is accepted and valued. While they acknowledge that the research on this subject is not complete, they seem to expect that additional research will verify that the absence of a feedback culture negatively affects an organization’s performance management efforts. While some unions are certainly striving to create positive feedback cultures, the atmosphere within many unions is mostly unfriendly to giving or receiving feedback due to the political nature of unions. A highly charged political environment is ripe for either not talking about setbacks and failures or for “blaming” to become the dominant method for dealing with bad news, rather than constructive efforts to learn and do better in the future.

Much of the literature claims that the context for the appraisal is more determinative of results than techniques used by evaluators or the design of appraisal tools. The focus on context, including the receptivity to feedback and attitudes about the legitimacy of the appraisal system, are especially relevant for unions since the very notion of performance appraisal makes some union representatives and organizers defensive and supervisors within unions uncomfortable.

Perhaps no one understands the vulnerabilities of performance appraisal systems better than full-time union representatives who regularly challenge them and defend those who feel unfairly evaluated. The advice union representatives give to members is, say as little as possible, don’t admit any wrong doing (at least initially) and let the representative do most of the talking. If those same representatives are being appraised by their union supervisor or manager and they follow their own advice then the resulting appraisal meeting is unlikely to be productive.

At least 10 union experts, each with experience working for several unions, were asked if they agreed that “union reps and organizers are difficult to manage because they question and challenge authority and are skilled at resisting being supervised.”

Most of those interviewed laughed at the question before giving serious answers such as, “there are certainly individuals like that but more often it’s used as an excuse not to supervise.” “I wouldn’t paint with broad brush but I’ve been in situations where it’s true” and “It happens a lot.”

Meyer in the same article quoted above framed the setting for performance appraisals as “parent-child.” He supports the notion that to a union representative dedicated to equalizing the power between workers and management, the very concept of performance appraisals would give rise to resistance. Meyer says, “Performance appraisals conducted in the traditional manner is highly authoritarian. When a manager sits down with an employee for an appraisal, there is no doubt about who is the ‘boss’ and who is the subordinate or dependent role. It is a *parent-child* type of exchange.”

**The Social Context of Performance Appraisal: A Review and Framework for the Future** by Paul E. Levy and Jane R. Williams gave a particularly valuable explanation and review of the over 300 articles on the issues involved with context for performance appraisals. Their approach supports a focus on the issues of “rater” and “ratee” attitudes and reactions as opposed to the technology (forms used, etc.) and methodology (how the meeting is conducted, etc.) of rating systems.

When managers who are uncomfortable giving feedback, especially critical or corrective feedback meet once a year to discuss a flawed evaluation tool within a flawed procedure with union staff who are experienced at defending members the result is very often dysfunctional.

A description of these dysfunctional meetings based on interviewing both union representatives and managers within unions appears below. When the union staff person is in defensive mode the following behaviors are likely to be exhibited:

1. Questioning the legitimacy of the evaluation process and the motives and qualifications of the supervisor giving feedback. This may include asserting that the supervisor does not have enough information or experience to accurately evaluate the representative's or organizer's work as well as accusing the supervisor of "being just like the bosses we fight" or "we wouldn't let a supervisor treat one of our members like you are treating me."
2. Focusing the discussion of alleged unsatisfactory results on external factors, of which there are many, which affect the outcome of union work.
3. Being very careful about what she or he says and asking questions with the intent of "poking holes" in the supervisor's evaluation. The representatives or organizers may also try to provoke behavior from the supervisor which, when later retold with the help of written notes or a witness, provide a good defense against any action taken as a result of a negative evaluation.

Reluctant supervisors with responsibility for evaluating are usually much better at challenging evaluations than giving them and are likely to do it clumsily or tentatively. Their behavior at the meeting often includes:

1. Holding back corrective or negative feedback. Because they are aware that even excellent union representatives and organizers can sometimes fail to get desired outcomes due to

factors beyond their control, supervisors try to be understanding. They consciously avoid “acting like a boss” and are tentative and unclear if they give any negative feedback.

2. Faced with accusations from representatives and organizers of being too much like “management,” supervisors may feel such discomfort that they shift to giving positive feedback or react in anger and counter with their own accusations that the representative or organizer is trying to cover up his or her own inadequacies.
3. Supervisors who decide that the union representative or organizer will not heed corrective feedback or who lack the skill to counsel employees effectively may do exactly what they are being accused of—act like the management the union opposes on behalf of their members. In those cases they use the performance appraisal or feedback session to create a paper trail that can be used in the future to justify any adverse action taken against the union representative or organizer. When the supervisor is in this mode and the union representative is in defensive mode, the appraisal meeting becomes like a game of chess with both sides choosing their words carefully and trying to out-maneuver the other into saying something that can later be used to uphold or challenge any future disciplinary action.

**Many unions have an extremely high tolerance for low performance, especially from staff who are politically loyal to the elected officers. Besides the role internal politics play, this dynamic is largely explained by the reluctance of union officials to manage, their preference for doing other aspects of their jobs, and a culture within unions that frowns on “acting like management.” In the absence of positive means to help staff improve their performance unions commonly use informal methods to encourage unwanted staff to leave**

**or if that fails, find places where ineffective staff can do the least harm. As a result high performing staff must do more work which lowers their morale.**

**Clearly, for unions to have successful HR strategies for staff development and accountability, they need to practice better alternatives than have been the norm. With the enormous pressures facing the labor movement, unions are quickly coming to the conclusion that they cannot continue to maintain staff who are not performing. As a result, there is a great deal of interest in finding better ways to keep staff accountable. In many cases these efforts are primitive and center on simply revising performance appraisal forms and practices. However, a growing number of unions are taking a more comprehensive and progressive approach to increasing staff accountability.**

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| <b>Encouraging signs</b> |
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While accountability was clearly identified as a serious problem in many unions there are signs of change and improvement.

Some unions described their efforts to increase staff accountability. One chief of staff said, *“Accountability is hardwired into our organization,”* and went on to explain in detail how this was part of an ambitious strategic plan that includes working with a consultant who, *“is helping us develop our own model of talent management”*

That union’s practices include, *“Staff involved in planning the work, working the plan and evaluating the results,”* *“a formal evaluation system focused on individuals’ development”* *“defined objectives with a measure to them so we can evaluate by numbers combined with a culture of debriefings as qualitative tool.”*

This staff chief went on to say, *“We believe it is key for us to remember that accountability has to be part of a value system which has to be shared by workers so they keep each other accountable rather than accountable to a manager which sets up a dynamic we don’t like.”* This was followed by a response to a question about what else the union needed, *“The thing I’m interested in is how to evaluate talent in a way that is inspirational, we try to invent ways to recognize staff but I think we aren’t always as creative as we could be. We want to improve staff’s long term satisfaction and retention, because it’s so tough to work for a union now.”*

A professional in dispute resolution with a wide exposure to many unions indicated that *“Some of the best personnel development is in the largest public sector unions.”*

A labor lawyer representing union clients said, *“Unions are going through great lengths to re-organize and re-structure more people are trying to ‘clean house’ and renewing training initiatives and other ways to and improve performance.”*

The person assigned to HR type functions in her union made the point that few other unions of a similar size had anyone with those duties and indicated that, *“it’s an indication of the vision of the president of our union that he saw fit to put such emphasis on making sure the staff were treated well and held accountable.”*

A union official with experience working for a number of unions feels strongly that, *“labor unions need a different vision of relationships between managers and supervisors and union staff and employees that ought to be a different model than corporate America”*

Additional information on best practices is provided in the case study section of this paper.

**The most progressive efforts to achieve effective staff development and accountability measures take a systems approach. This includes focusing on recruiting and hiring practices to make sure the right people are brought into the organization. Orientation and training must be aligned with the goals and strategies of the union. Managers must embrace their role to see their job as helping staff succeed rather than merely monitoring their performance. Unions must be consistent with their values and provide staff with a significant role in developing the measures and systems used to evaluate performance. There are examples of these practices, but they are in early stages of development and it is too soon to examine results. Tracking progress of these efforts is an extremely important area for further study.**

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| <b>Training to develop better supervisors and managers within unions</b> |
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**Unions are only recently recognizing the value of training managers and supervisors to do their jobs more effectively. In part this is consistent with the generally low reliance on training at all levels within unions who traditionally have relied on a “sink or swim” culture. As more unions seek training for their managers the need for such training customized for unions will increase. Past experience shows training in management skills that is too “corporate” is not effective for union officials.**

An experienced union official who has worked for several unions said, *“People are not born knowing how to be good managers and the labor movement has placed little emphasis on getting good managers and training them.”*

Another union official interviewed stated, *“They [managers in unions] don’t want to be identified as a boss and they only have crappy models of management to learn from, so it’s true that unions can be some of the worst bosses”*

In offering an explanation for why managers in unions do not get training, an interviewee commented, *“Generally there’s not a lot of training in the labor movement for the jobs people do anyway; generally speaking it’s a craft you learn by doing, and that’s the culture.”* Another union veteran said, *“Most unions don’t train their managers and if they do training they are mostly concerned with liability.”*

Tom Nesbit in **Educating Our Own: Training for Union Staff and Officials**, studied training within unions in Canada and found that while there was a great deal of training for stewards and activists, unions expected their newly appointed full-time staff to be able to fully perform their job when hired. He also found that many elected officials don’t expect any additional training because, in the words of one regional union official, *“You’d be admitting you don’t know something. You’ve run for this tough job in the union and why would you think you could do it if you didn’t know everything?”*

The former union official who does consulting indicated that in some unions it is rare to find a manager who has previous supervisory experience, *“but it varies and depends on the union, some of the public sector unions may have some managers with management experience since those unions can represent supervisors.”*

Another official with experience with a number of unions observed that, *“Officers have no formal training and that’s why they do not set expectations and hold staff accountable. Some managers don’t know how to hold accountable, or know how but are reluctant to act like a boss.”*

## The Cornell ILR Workshop “Supervising and Managing with Labor’s Values”

The Labor Programs of the Cornell ILR Extension Division developed the workshop “**Supervising and Managing with Labor’s Values**” in 2007 after observing that unions were sending their managers to programs the ILR Extension Division offered to corporations and other employers. The union officials who attended requested a more “union” version with cases and situations similar to those they face and an appreciation of union culture and values.

A meeting of the Labor Programs Labor Advisory Council agreed with the need and a subcommittee was formed to work with ILR staff, including the author.

The workshop that was developed was designed to meet the following objectives:

- Help participants examine and adjust their feelings about managing
- Define managing with labor’s values
- Understand performance management as a system
- Increase awareness of how one’s actions affect results
- Increase emotional intelligence – empathy, feedback
- Understand behavioral styles related to managing
- Understand Situational Leadership
- Help participants apply all of the above and to build accountability

A needs assessment in the form of a survey to be completed by each participant prior to the workshop was performed to determine their experience, attitudes and expectations for the training (see appendix B).

The agenda for the workshop appears in appendix C

The workshop includes four days of training. Two days initially and then another two days following a break of several weeks during which participants complete assignments. The agenda for the four days is divided into eight half-day sections.

The first section includes introductions, a discussion of what it means to supervise and manage within a union, how the participants feel about playing that role, why being a good manager is important and honorable, and an overview of what it means to supervise and manage with labor's values. There is also a presentation by my colleague at Cornell, Sally Alvarez and discussion of the graphic (Figure 2) illustrating the various aspects of a performance management system.

The afternoon of the first day includes a presentation by consultant and former AFL-CIO North East Regional Director, Joe Alvarez which is devoted to emotional intelligence and draws from Steven Covey's, **7 Habits of Highly Effective People**. A major focus is helping participants understand the role they play in the results they get. One of the tools to achieve this is a graphic of a person sitting down being observed by a large third eye, (see Appendix G). In evaluations immediately after, and up to two years after, the workshop participants often cite the "eye" and its focus on self-awareness as the part of the workshop that made the biggest impression and was the most useful. This section also covers the concepts of working from one's sphere of influence, appreciative inquiry, empathy, and how to receive feedback to understand how to give feedback.

Prior to the workshop participants fill out an extensive behavioral survey and each receives at the workshop a detailed behavioral profile. On the morning of the second the participants engage in a number of exercises to help them understand their "DiSC" behavioral styles. "DISC" is a four-quadrant behavioral model based on the work of William Moulton

Marston to examine the behavior of individuals in their environment or within a specific situation. It focuses on the styles and preferences of such behavior. Through structured interactions and discussion led by Rodney Brown, on the staff of the Local 1199/League of Voluntary Hospitals Training and Education Fund, participants see how their behavioral styles interact with other styles and apply that knowledge to how they supervise and manage.

In the afternoon of the second day in the session that I teach, participants fill out a questionnaire that gives feedback on their management styles using the well-known Situational Leadership framework developed by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard. Participants learn that there is no single "best" style of leadership. Effective leadership is task-relevant and the most successful leaders are those who adapt their leadership style to the level of development of the individual or group they are attempting to lead or manage. Participants then analyze case studies with descriptions of hypothetical union representatives at various stages of development and behavioral styles. Working in small groups, participants analyze the case study and determine what the staff described need from their supervisor using the Situational Leadership and DiSC categories. Then participants role-play a meeting with the hypothetical staff in the cases to demonstrate how as a supervisor, they would interact with them to address the issues raised in the cases. Following the role-play the whole group evaluates what worked and what did not and draws the appropriate lessons.

At the end of the second day participants are given assignments to complete before their return for the third and fourth days, which are usually several weeks after days one and two. The assignments are in Appendix D.

Upon returning from the several week hiatus, on the third day of the workshop, participants review what they learned from doing their assignments. Following that, two tools for

accountability are introduced; work plans and Gantt Charts. I lead the sessions on days three and four with a number of other presenters who have assisted at different times.

The afternoon of the third day the participants hear a presentation, engage in exercises and discuss the importance of trust between a supervisor and someone being supervised to building real accountability both with individuals and within teams.

On the morning and into the afternoon of the fourth day the participants work with updated versions of the case studies they used on day two. In the new versions six months have passed and the hypothetical staff have been following a work plan developed jointly with their supervisors. The case includes information on the outcome of the plan, details of the relationship between the staff and supervisor, and other information to make the situation as realistic as possible. As they did on day two, participants meet in small groups to analyze the cases and plan how they would handle a meeting with each staff person in the cases to discuss their progress on carrying out their plan. Based on the work of the small groups, one member of the group role-plays the supervisor and an instructor role plays the staff person. The role play is evaluated and lessons are noted.

The rest of the afternoon of the fourth day is spent with participants meeting in small groups in a problem-solving mode to address real situations they face as supervisors and managers. This is followed by discussion of what each participant wants to take back to the job, and tips for following through.

Following workshop offering participants filled out evaluations. When asked was most valuable, typical comments (roughly in order of how frequently they were mentioned) include:

- “The eye on yourself” (one person who attended with a number of her colleagues distributed large rubber eyes available during Halloween to her co-workers to stick on their computers to remind them to be self-aware)

- “Hearing from people in similar situations from other unions”
- “The behavioral styles”
- “The scenarios and how to handle different situations based on different individuals”
- “The influence of the performance management system”
- “Discussion of how to establish accountability”
- “Trust and teamwork”

During November and December 2010 participants from three previous public workshops were interviewed and surveyed electronically. Most of those who responded indicated that they were using what they learned from the workshop. Typical comments about what was especially useful include:

*“I have an understanding of my managerial style and use my style in coordination with my team members’ skill sets more effectively. I no longer mico-manage.”*

*“I have mapped my team as to their DiSC styles and have adjusted my approaches when dealing with the diverse members of the team.”*

*“I have utilized the work plan and Gantt charts quite a bit.”*

*“I met with each staff member and asked them to evaluate me and the way I supervise the department and, once they realized they wouldn't hurt my feelings, they gave some wonderful suggestions for improving communication and distribution of work among the staff. Some of them also told me of projects they would like to work on which helps me with promoting staff development.”*

*“Not sure of what specific things I have ‘used.’ More likely, the thoughts I had during and right after program became integrated into my thinking as situations arose and decisions had to be made.”*

*“I’m using the real tools I came away with. I tailor my management approach to the specific needs of the staff I’m supervising and I accept and use feedback from them.”*

*“I used appreciative inquiry approach to help resolve a dispute between two staff in my department.”*

*“Going to the workshop made me more aware of how I act and do and the effect it has on other people. I try to be more conscious of that and act accordingly.”*

*“I remember the micro-equities section saying don’t pick up the phone when someone is in your office. When I heard that I realized that someone who comes in my office regularly was visibly frustrated by it so I stopped doing it.”*

*“A take away is the big eyeball photo. Based on that I try to be more self reflective and not just speak from emotion.”*

*“From DiSC I got an increased understanding of how different people act differently and adjusting to get better results. Different people need different things from me.”*

Of those who responded to the electronic survey 75% said they were either somewhat or significantly more comfortable being a supervisor/manager.

While there was evidence that the workshop had lasting effects on individuals, in contrast, when asked, “Have you seen any changes in how YOUR UNION supervises and manages staff as a result of you and your colleagues attending the workshop?” the results were mixed. Typical of those responses are:

*“I saw some immediate changes, then gradually, supervisors reverted to the way they were before the workshop. It's like everything else, if you don't work at it, you will have minimal chance to succeed.”*

*“I wish I had had colleagues there, but no, I have been unable to effect any changes here.”*

*“Not yet, but still using the materials and attitudes are changing -- but slowly.”*

*“Not as an organization - only within our department.”*

*“We have incorporated many of the pieces of the class into our Business Managers' Leadership Academy, as well as our Leadership III class.”*

Typical responses to the question, “What challenges have you faced as a supervisor/manager since attending the (four day) workshop? How well did the workshop prepare you to handle those challenges?” include:

*“What haven't I faced? I have dialed back significantly on my default style of 'selling,' telling and directing. It has definitely yielded results.”*

*“I try very hard to be extremely clear about what I want staff to do, and use timeline and benchmarks so that we are all on the same page. I also try harder to match skills to assignments.”*

*“I have been part of new organizing teams were I wasn't necessarily the "lead". As a result I have had to utilize many skills I learned during this workshop to influence decisions that were made.”*

*“It's been a very disrupted time here - mainly I've been focused on keeping it together while it went crazy around me.”*

*“Handling some follow-up failures and accountability issues. The workshop did help me to be more objective and direct.”*

The survey responders offered only a few significant suggestions for changing the workshop, including:

*“In the extent you do it again, working on real case studies would be helpful--perhaps developed by the group, either from our listening to the participants or gathering of info in advance and then polishing the cases.”*

*“I would reduce the time between the two sessions.”*

*“This workshop should not be taken with your immediate supervisor”*

*“I think a lot of information was covered but a topic like team building could be an all day class so maybe cut back on topics and spend more time on the others.”*

The additional training participants suggested include:

*“Trust building in a difficult environment”*

*“Additional work on coaching.”*

*“Working with staff strengths to improve performance.”*

*“How to deal with personality issues between other supervisors and staff.”*

*“Personal development assessment and applications.”*

*“In depth one or two day program on communicating with staff (how to run effective meetings, keeping everyone informed, how to keep staff upbeat, excited about work, etc.).”*

*“Bargaining with internal unions.”*

*“Help people see their role in their results in a non-confrontational role. If there was something that would speak to me now it would be some really hard work on who we are individually, then some practical role playing.”*

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| <b>Case studies – Union A, Union B, Union C</b> |
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## **Union A**

The chief of staff of Union A and six other supervisors from the union attended the first public workshop, Supervising and Managing with Labor’s Values. They also sent additional supervisors to one of the three public workshops that followed within the subsequent two years.

The first public workshop came at the right time for Union A because, as part of their strategic planning, they concluded that they needed to improve their staff management skills. They were looking for a common framework and vocabulary to use as a group to fit the management of staff into their overall plan. The chief of staff felt that, *“The workshop served as a useful introduction to ideas and ways of thinking about staff management that helped us start a discussion in our own union to do a better job.”*

At the workshop they worked as a group for most of the exercises but also mixed with other participants. They reported high satisfaction with the workshop and indicated that they met their primary goal of getting the common framework and vocabulary. Almost two years after the first public workshop interviews with the chief of staff and other supervisors at Union A revealed that the training had a lasting impact.

The chief of staff reported that as a result of attending the workshop they were successful in: *“Introducing people to and discussing the concept that supervision is an art in itself and there was knowledge and experience to be acquired as well as start a conversation on supervision using a common language.”*

The chief stated further, *“With some supervisors the mantle of being a supervisor sits well and others it’s still itchy. The common language, set of tools and definition of the role helps them understand what’s expected of them One supervisor left on good terms because as a result of the training she understood what was expected of a supervisor and she realized that her heart wasn’t into what her brain told her she had to do as a supervisor.”*

A supervisor from Union A added, *“The training helped front-line sups acclimate to their role.”* All of those interviewed agreed that, *“We are dealing with more situations than in the*

*past – we've been supervising Fewer problems migrate to the Executive Director because supervisors are handling them."*

One of the tools introduced at the workshop which Union A has adopted is individual work plans for staff. Supervisors use the work plans as the basis of discussion with staff both for accountability and for developmental purposes. Because of the emphasis on development and the acceptance by supervisors that their job is to help staff succeed, the staff at Union A have been open to using the work plans. Accountability has increased because, as one supervisor said, *"We are emboldened to do our job and hold staff accountable because our members deserve good staff. In the past we tolerated poor performers longer."*

When asked how they think the staff perceive what supervisors have been doing since the workshop, a supervisor replied, *"Our staff may say we are more consciously and not accidentally supervising in ways that have changed the organization."* When the supervisors at Union A address poor performance of a staff member they feel they have given that person every opportunity to improve, and they can document the problems. However, a supervisor acknowledged that while, *"the staff union steward can see that we have the documentation but others in the unit only know a fellow union member got disciplined. We are working on how to talk about it better so staff understand what we are doing. It is still a work in progress on having staff see and understand that we are supervising with labor's values."*

Among the parts of the training Union A is using is situational leadership, which the union has decided to make part of their standard practice for supervising. Now, when a supervisor and the chief of staff discuss a staff person's performance they talk about what that person needs and whether they are getting it from the supervisor. One supervisor observed that, *"analyzing the level of development of staff and how they move through the situational*

*leadership continuum has been very useful for new and younger supervisors.” A supervisor at Union A, in talking about situational leadership, said, “It gives us the ability to identify what’s happening with a staff person and provides a context to address it.”*

At Union A supervisors use another framework for analyzing what they need to do to be more effective supervisors. As part of the workshop all participants filled out the DiSC behavioral survey and got back a behavioral profile. One supervisor commented that, *“DiSC made some folks think – they saw that the profile pegged them. The workshop helped them learn how to compensate and adjust their style to be more effective. We have conversations about behavioral styles now.”*

Showing the importance of self-awareness in supervising and managing is a major component of the workshop which is symbolized by a graphic of a person with a large third eye looking back at himself. At Union A, *“The third eye is part of our vocabulary.”*

Union A has also begun looking more closely at their performance management system. At the workshop they received a chart of the various parts of a performance management system which they have posted in the office as an indication of how seriously they take it. The chief of staff said, *“one thing I took away from the workshop was the system – I had it in my mind but the workshop reinforced it.”*

As a result of the system approach, Union A has, *“Looked more at our hiring practices. When hiring and selecting staff we are very clear what we want to achieve”*. While in the past, hiring decisions were made primarily on the basis of the experience of applicants, *recently “We had two choices to hire, a more experienced person and a new graduate. We hired the new grad for attitude.”*

Another part of the system Union A is looking at is how to measure success, so they are redoing job descriptions and evaluative tools of what is to be expected over a weekly and monthly basis. Once they come up with some answers and proposals, the management of Union A plans to *“go through labor - management process with the staff union to get everyone on board.”* The management also, *“plans on talking to the staff union more about other aspects of their performance management system.”*

The management at Union A see themselves as, *“driving the organization forward, holding staff accountable and thinking about their development. Our organization is moving in a different direction and we are pushing staff to understand. We were thinking about it before the workshop but it helped us sharpen our thinking.”* Viewing their efforts at supervising and managing as part of a larger strategic focus for the union seems to be one of the reasons they have had success in implementing what they gained from attending the workshop.

The supervisors at Union A also reported that they found the workshop valuable because, *“It was helpful to see that other unions are more screwed up than us. At least we have a direction and our staff know about it.”* They also found that the workshop *“illuminated for folks that we were doing a number of good things already.”*

When asked if the supervisors at Union A found the assignment to interview two of the staff who report to them and ask what they do that helps them succeed, the chief of staff said, *I’m not sure most did the assignment, but it might be good to do it now.”*

As for additional training on supervision and management that Union A might find helpful, the reply was, *“Additional training for the supervisor of supervisors and a refresher just for us to evaluate what we have been doing since the workshop.”*

## **Union B**

The leadership of Union B requested a customized version of *Supervising and Managing with Labor's Values* for a variety of reasons. The top officer felt that there was not enough accountability of staff. Some of the other officers felt that they and other supervisors were being asked to be managers but they had little experience or training to prepare them to do so. The managers at Union B were receptive to the training because they have a culture of striving to always perform at the highest level possible, incorporating new ideas and valuing education.

Union B wanted most of the topics covered in the public workshop but also to allot extra time for work sessions where the participants could plan how they would implement what was learned and discuss any organizational changes they deemed necessary to do so.

From the beginning of the training there was a detectable frustration among the participants over the lack of time to supervise and their concern that there would not be follow through on plans developed in their sessions.

The time issue was caused by the union's involvement in several important campaigns while being short-staffed. As a result, managers often had to do the work of staff positions vacated due to high turnover.

The follow-through fears were based on past experiences of seeing good plans and programs launched but later fizzling out as the union became distracted by one crisis or another.

The emotional intelligence session was less well-received by those from Union B than participants in the public workshops or customized versions for other unions. This may have

been because many of the participants were already familiar with the concepts and as a group they tended to be self-reflective.

In contrast, Union B found the DiSC behavioral styles and situational leadership enlightening and beneficial. As has been common with other the attendees found that the behavioral profiles provided to them were surprisingly accurate and the exercises showing how different behavioral styles interact very useful.

The discussion of their reluctance to be supervisors hit home for most of the participants from Union B. For many in the room this was the first time they had actually admitted to themselves that they were uncomfortable being supervisors and managers. They cited the reasons discussed earlier in this paper, such as considering “management” a dirty word, finding it hard to make the transition from “fighting the boss to being one,” and a desire to maintain a peer-like relationship with those they supervised. Acknowledging their own reluctance and hearing that not only did their colleagues feel the same way but that the aversion to being managers was very common in unions was comforting and helpful to many in the session. Further discussion of how members are not well-served when staff lacked coaching and development opportunities, or not held accountable for their work, helped the participants develop a determination to accept their roles with more conviction.

What was most eye-opening and useful to Union B was the concept of performance management as a system. They spent considerably more time on this session than was usual in the public or customized workshops for other groups.

As small groups analyzed the various parts of their performance management system they were struck with how they were able to trace most of their inability to be more effective to root causes. In particular, the high turnover and resulting short-staffing was identified as the key

problem preventing them from devoting time to better supervision and management. Other observations included seeing a conflict between their spoken emphasis on recruiting leaders and building stronger chapters within the union and the near constant crisis which pulled staff away from those pursuits. This, too, was seen as related to the short-staffing resulting from turnover.

In analyzing the staff turnover in Union B they found that nearly all of it was the result of staff leaving to attend graduate school, relocating because a spouse got a new job, or for other family reasons, but not because of any organizational problems. Upon more discussion they also recognized that some promising recent hires left soon after starting because they were not given sufficient orientation and coaching from supervisors. Once again, they traced this to the staff shortage and the high level of crisis within the organization because of attacks on the union from employers. They determined that until they could have a full complement of staff, something that they rarely were able to achieve, they would never be able to provide the level of supervision and support to their staff that they knew was needed.

Having concluded that the key to improvement of their supervision and management was filling vacant staff positions, shortly following the training Union B put more resources into recruitment. This meant one manager who was assigned to work on recruitment and hiring would devote more time to it. Union B also hired a new “headhunter” to assist them in finding staff.

They also discussed looking at ways they may have been able to predict who, from those they hired, were more likely to move on relatively soon after hire. At the session they did not go very deeply into this analysis but they did conclude that if they were going to hire candidates who indicated a desire to eventually go to law school or pursue some other careers they should not hire many of them at the same time.

It is still too early to determine how well Union B will implement the changes they want to make and how lasting they will be. However, new staff were hired and a survey of participants a few months after the training revealed they were using what they learned in the workshop.

On the staffing issue the surveys revealed the following comments:

*“The staff numbers that we said we need to free up more people without turf to supervise just happened a week ago, which made for a full turf assignment and attempting to start supervising others at the same time.”*

*“With Staff shortages so extreme, I don’t believe we have implemented the changes. It looks like implementation will occur at the New Year.”*

On supervisory techniques the following comments come from the survey:

*“I am more conscious about giving and accepting feedback.”*

*“I’ve worked on earning trust and buy-in techniques. Most staff (I think) trust me and I motivate them.”*

*“I have sat down more directly with people I am supervising and set goals for the week and achievable priorities. I need more time to properly supervise them, though.”*

On the reluctance to be managers one person observed:

*“I see subtle changes, e.g. our leadership appears to be more comfortable supervising.”*

## **Union C**

No one from Union C attended the Cornell workshop on managing with labor’s values, but the author attended a three-day training for the managers of Union C that was designed by the union’s new Talent Manager with the assistance of consultants. In addition, the author interviewed 10 managers of Union C.

Union C had recently hired a new Director, whose title was changed from HR Director to Talent Manager, who was charged with making significant strategic changes to Union C's HR practices. The author extensively interviewed the Talent Manager several times before, during and after the training. In addition, the author exchanged emails and spoke on the telephone with the Talent Manager and others to track HR-related changes implemented by Union C.

The previous HR Director of Union C had been mostly focused on creating a new evaluation tool for staff performance appraisals. The officers and staff director of the union were seeking a more systematic and comprehensive approach to their HR functions and hired a new Director with the experience and outlook that coincided with the results Union C wanted.

Prior to the training the new Talent Manager did an analysis of the HR system of Union C. Among the findings were that Union C had unacceptably high staff turnover and many of the managers in the union were unable or unwilling to do their job with the competence and conviction the union needed. The training for the management staff was a combination of training, an explanation of the union's expectations of them and a presentation of the HR plan for the union and the roles the managers were to play in it.

The training was extremely well-planned with time allotted for each manager to meet with the Talent Manager or one of the consultants to discuss his/her individual roles and goals for the future. The training made liberal use of videos and films to make specific points including a video showing a dispute between rock and roll legends Chuck Berry and Keith Richards over the settings on Berry's amp. This highly entertaining and funny video was used to demonstrate communication and dispute resolution skills.

An Academy Award winning full length movie, *Twelve O'Clock High*, was shown to demonstrate a number of management techniques but primarily to show the managers in the

training that being an effective manager was different from being merely an advocate for their staff. The movie shows a new air commander who takes over from one who was beloved by his men but under whose command the bomber pilot unit suffered heavy casualties and low morale. As the new commander tries to whip the unit into shape by instituting harsh new rules the audience is led to side with the former commander. Gradually, the new commander's methods result in successfully completing more bombing missions while losing fewer planes and crew. The men who hated him at first came to respect the new commander and understand that his motives and actions were in their best interests even if they did not think so initially.

The new Talent Manager of Union C chose this film because of a perception that too many managers in Union C were hampered in getting results because they had too high a desire to be liked by those they supervised. The participants in the training were greatly affected by the film and the discussion that followed its showing. The Talent Manager continued the discussion until the managers in the room understood that their job was to carry out the union's mission with integrity even if doing so might make them unpopular. In the weeks and months following the training the Talent Manager reported seeing the desired changes in how the managers did their jobs.

One of the new roles of the managers at Union C is recruiting and hiring staff. The Talent Manager said, *"I've drilled into people that hiring is most important and they should spend 20 – 30% of their time recruiting and hiring staff."* The managers are supposed to be always looking for talented staff even if they have no vacancies and they are instructed to anticipate future staffing needs. The Talent Manager explained that, *"I'm big on having managers going to college career fairs and I involve managers in interviewing job applicants."*

The Talent Manager outlined their hiring priorities, *“In hiring supervisors we only hire people who want to supervise. For all staff we look for smart people with good attitudes who can think strategically so they can progress within the organization. We are big on hiring people with college degrees and no experience so we can train them ourselves.”*

*“We don’t want to hire people who bring others down with their attitude or who can only do the job they are hired for or who come with rigid work habits and styles that don’t fit how we want them to work,”* the Talent Manager stated emphatically. The Talent Manager explained that the new emphasis on more careful hiring was designed to reduce turnover.

In follow up interviews the Talent Manager reported that Union C has, *“drastically cut turnover. I showed the officers of the union the cost of turnover and that by reducing it we can hire more people.”* Part of the way Union C has reduced turnover is by investing in training for staff. The Talent Manager convinced the union’s officers that the reduction in turnover would more than pay for a substantial training budget for the managers as well as the staff they supervise.

*“I have tried to standardize training to help each staff person to be able to progress into more responsible jobs,”* the Talent Manager explained. *“As part of giving staff a good orientation to the union and to help them see the total operation we have new field staff rotate through the headquarters jobs before going into the field.”*

The managers of Union C individually attend leadership training provided by highly regarded and often expensive outside providers. In the training there are participants from all types of organizations including businesses. The program includes a great deal of individual attention, self analysis, and feedback from the trainers. Much of the training includes intensive

problem-solving in small groups. Participants leave with a plan for how they are going to approach their job henceforth.

When questioned about sending union managers to training with those from companies the Talent Manager stated that the union felt that it was beneficial to have them get a wider and fresher perspective than they would get in union-only training. According to the Talent Manager all the Union C managers who have attended this training report that it was extremely useful and even life-changing.

Another way Union C attempts to reduce turnover is through their compensation policies. The Talent Manager said, *“Our philosophy is to pay close to top of scale for comparable jobs at similar sized unions, and in some cases to other organizations too.”*

The changes in Union C are perhaps the most bold of the three unions reviewed in this paper. Although some progress has been documented, such as the reduced turnover, it is still too early to evaluate the results from all the actions, programs, and policies employed by Union C. The Talent Manager says the union is starting to establish additional bench marks and metrics to track progress.

As with all unions, politics play a role in Union C’s ability to implement and carry out programs. The Talent Manager of Union C acknowledges that, *“politics can be a barrier. Running for re-election makes incumbents cautious.”*

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

**While more unions are paying increased attention to HR within their organizations, the majority are focused on practices and policies designed to maintain routine functions like hiring and providing and explaining benefits as well as measures to protect the union from liability from law suits. There are signs that unions are starting to take a more systematic and strategic approach to HR but it is too early to determine the results of those efforts or if it is a trend which will expand in the future.**

**In most cases, unions establish HR policies and practices without significant awareness of how they interact and without a systems approach. It is encouraging, however that those union officials who attend training where the systems approach is presented find it compelling. While they may not have been thinking in those terms prior to the training, they can readily see how their own systems have been functioning and determine where it needs adjustment. As demonstrated by the three case studies in this paper when unions take a holistic, systems-oriented strategic approach to their HR function they get positive results.**

**The reluctance of union officials to embrace their roles as supervisors and managers is a serious impediment to more effective management of union staff.**

**The discomfort with being supervisors and managers by union officials is pervasive within unions, although not universal. By acknowledging and discussing their aversion to play management roles union officials can begin to become better managers. Unions where the reluctance to manage is lowest are those where top management is clear about the roles expected from union staff prior to getting promoted to a supervisory or management position. Union staff who served as supervisors in jobs prior to working for their union are more likely to have resolved their feelings about being management. At least one**

**professional who works extensively training managers within unions reports that increasingly the conflict over being a manager is muted.**

**Performance management and accountability hardly exist in many unions and where it is practiced it is often inconsistent and ineffective.**

**Many unions have an extremely high tolerance for low performance, especially from staff who are politically loyal to the elected officers. Besides the role internal politics play, this dynamic is largely explained by the reluctance of union officials to manage, their preference for doing other aspects of their jobs, and a culture within unions that frowns on “acting like management”. In the absence of positive means to help staff improve their performance unions commonly use informal methods to encourage unwanted staff to leave and, if that fails, find places for where ineffective staff can do the least harm. As a result, high-performing staff must do more work, which lowers their morale.**

**Clearly for unions to have successful HR strategies regarding staff development and accountability they need to practice better alternatives than have been the norm. With the enormous pressures facing the labor movement unions are quickly coming to the conclusion that they cannot continue to maintain staff who are not performing. As a result, there is a great deal of interest in finding better ways to keep staff accountable. In many cases these efforts are primitive and center on simply revising performance appraisal forms and practices. However, a growing number of unions are taking a more comprehensive and progressive approach to increasing staff accountability.**

**The most progressive efforts to develop effective staff development and accountability measures take a systems approach. This includes focusing on recruiting and hiring practices to make sure the right people are brought into the organization.**

**Orientation and training must be aligned with the goals and strategies of the union. Managers must embrace their role and see their job as helping staff succeed rather than merely monitoring their performance. Unions must be consistent with their values and provide staff with a significant role in developing the measures and systems used to evaluate performance. There are examples of these practices but they are in early stages of development and it is too soon to examine the results. Tracking progress of these efforts is an extremely important area for further study.**

**Unions are only recently recognizing the value of training managers and supervisors to do their jobs more effectively. In part this is consistent with the generally low reliance on training at all levels within unions who traditionally have relied on a “sink or swim” culture. As more unions seek training for their managers the need for such training customized for unions will increase. Past experience shows training in management skills that is too “corporate” is often not effective for union officials.**

**Unions which want to improve their overall HR functioning should consider the following recommendations:**

- Recognize that HR is more than processing new hires, benefit packages and other “personnel” actions. It is much bigger than bargaining contracts with staff unions and responding to grievances or protecting the organization from being sued. The union’s HR practices should form a strategy that pro-actively contributes to the successful operation of the union.**
- View HR functions as a system where each aspect affects the others. When trying to understand a problem the union has with any aspect of its HR functions, for example, staff turnover, analyze the entire system before making decisions on what changes are needed.**

**When attempting to make changes in one area, accountability for example, consider how all the**

**other parts of the system affect accountability and how new efforts on accountability will be helped or hindered by the rest of the system.**

- **Once the union has goals and a strategy to reach those goals, develop an HR strategy that is aligned with the union's overall strategy.**
- **Consider how the internal politics of the union will affect the union's ability to implement the HR strategy and make changes and adaptations as appropriate.**
- **A union's HR strategy should be consistent with the values for which unions stand. Act in ways the union demands that employers of the union's members act.**
- **Supervisors and managers must accept and embrace their roles. In this regard they should seek to be respected, not necessarily to be popular.**
- **View the job of supervisors and managers as helping staff to succeed, not point out their faults.**
- **Most union activists are not experienced or trained in how to supervise and manage so they will need training and support. To create change in a union's HR strategy a critical mass of managers and supervisors need to be trained together or in the same programs so they have a common vocabulary and frame of reference for making HR related decisions.**
- **Training is not effective unless it can be implemented. Supervisors and managers will benefit from making time to meet free from other pressures to discuss HR situations and then engage in problem-solving as a group by applying methods and approaches they learned in training. Regular meetings like this are likely to produce positive results.**
- **Continually evaluate and revise the union's HR strategy and functions.**

|                                |
|--------------------------------|
| <b>Areas for further study</b> |
|--------------------------------|

Areas for further study fall into two categories: practical research of immediate use by unions and academic research.

The practical research to be pursued by those seeking to assist unions in developing HR strategies includes:

- Follow up research on the three case studies in this paper to determine the longer range implications of the actions taken by those unions. In particular it would be important to interview the staff and the staff unions in those unions to get their perspectives on the HR strategies and functions used.
- Additional and more intensive case studies of unions developing HR strategies, especially in the areas of accountability and staff development.
- More data from unions outside those surveyed (other regions, industries, sizes, etc.)
- Cataloguing HR best practices applicable to unions.
- Comprehensive review of training programs unions are using or could use to train their managers.

Topics for additional academic research include:

- Deeper analysis of HR strategies that “fit” with labor movement’s strategies for revival.
- Deeper exploration of research on HR strategies for non-profit organizations to determine applicability to labor unions.
- Approaches to making changes in HR strategies and functions within the internal politics of labor unions.

# Appendix

## A. Notes on the methodology of the study

In producing this paper a combination of research methods were used most of which were inductive.

The paper made use of on a very comprehensive literature review.

Much of the paper is based on qualitative research gathered primarily by interviews and some electronic surveying. The interviews provided information from a variety of sources on the various topics included in the paper and a more intensive review of three case studies.

The experiences of the author in designing and conducting training for union officials in management and supervision which formed the basis of one section of this paper was essentially action research. Anonymous written evaluations from participants of the training were used extensively. However, much of the author's observations and conclusions were not significantly reviewed and verified by objective sources.

Rather than a scientific examination of the subject this paper should be considered an exploration of a topic about which there is limited knowledge. The findings of the paper are meant to stimulate self-examination by unions and further academic inquiry.

This research is based on an unscientific sample of unions and "experts" who were interviewed or surveyed. Most of the unions interviewed are New York State based and while there were some unions in other parts of the Northeast and West

Coast included, the findings cannot be safely applied to other regions or the entire country without more research. The surveyed unions were large, from 15,000 to over 200,000 members and included mostly public and service sector unions. Therefore, conclusions in the paper do not necessarily apply to smaller unions and those in other industries.

An attempt to gather information from all unions in the US with memberships over 5000 was made through an electronic survey but a very low return rate made any findings from this effort of limited value.

The research for this paper included extensive interviewing of over 50 union officials, several electronic surveys reaching over 125 individuals, needs assessments before, and evaluations, after the eight times the Cornell workshop “Supervising and Managing with Union Values” was conducted, and literature review.

More than half of the interviews, some surveying and a significant amount of literature review were performed by three summer fellows from Cornell ILR working under the supervision of Professor Lois Gray and the author. The interviews were conducted in person or on the telephone. The interviews by the author for the case studies were conducted in person except for one completed via telephone.

The unions interviewed by the fellows were mostly larger local unions in the state of New York in the public and service sectors. Only one was from the building trades and none were in the manufacturing sector. The vast majority of the locals interviewed reported growth in the last 10-12 years and the majority had staff unions representing those employed by the union. After the initial requests for interviews from New York State based unions produced fewer responses than desired, a number of unions

outside of New York were added, also in the public and service sectors. In addition, a number of labor “experts” who had worked for or with a number of unions were interviewed about their observations on how unions manage their HR function. They were asked different questions than those interviewed about their own unions.

Additional information about those interviewed by the summer fellows includes:

- They were elected officers and Staff Directors
- Most hire at least some staff from outside their membership
- They showed an eagerness to participate and interest in findings
- They had a high level of agreement that HR policies within unions was the right issue at the right time
- The interviews provoked thinking and reflecting on their practices and an awareness of the need for greater effort
- There was a great deal of candor but also some who felt a need to only present the positive

While the identities of the unions in the case studies are confidential, aspects of those unions include:

- One union has over 75,000 members working in the public sector.
- One has over 25,000 members who work in service jobs in both the private and public sectors
- One has over 15,000 members who are professionals in both the private and public sectors
- All of the unions have multiple offices where staff are based.

## B. Pre Workshop Assessment

### Supervising and Managing with Labor's Values

1. Name \_\_\_\_\_
2. Union \_\_\_\_\_
3. Your position \_\_\_\_\_
4. Number of years with the union \_\_\_\_\_ Years in your current position \_\_\_\_\_
5. Number of people who report to you \_\_\_\_\_
6. What are their jobs? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Are they unionized? \_\_\_\_\_
  
8. Are you supervising a group with disconnected responsibilities, or are you supervising a team that works together?
  
9. What are the three top challenges you face in your job as a manager/supervisor?
  
10. What is your "philosophy of supervision"? *(In other words, what is the main guiding principle you use in trying to manage the people who report to you?)*
  
11. Describe what kind of performance management system exists in your organization... *(e.g. formal hiring procedures, job descriptions, goal setting, performance reviews, formal evaluations, new employee orientation, employee handbook, written rules of behavior, progressive discipline, etc.)*
  
12. If there are serious infractions of the union's rules by an employee, how is discipline handled?
  
13. As preparation for discussions in the workshop please remember your best "boss" and your worst "boss." List the behaviors of each that made them the best or the worst.
  
14. Also as preparation for discussion in the workshop, list the behaviors your union demands of the people who manage and supervise the members of your union. (e.g. progressive discipline, showing respect, etc. Give as much detail as possible and use examples if possible)
  
15. What do you need to get out of this workshop for you to consider it a success?

## **C. Agenda for Supervising and Managing with Labor's Values**

Prior to the workshop participants will be asked to fill out a short written questionnaire on their union and supervisory/management background, management styles, etc.

Participants will also be asked to take the DiSC behavioral survey on-line prior to the workshop.

### Day one

- Introductions
- Why union people don't like to manage
- What is unique about managing within a union
- What is managing with labor's values
- Understanding performance management as a system
- Emotional Intelligence
  - Find your self in the results you are getting
  - Understand your sphere of influence vs. your sphere of interest
  - Managing relationships
  - Empathy
  - Appreciative approach
  - Giving and getting feedback
- Fill out LEAD questionnaire – leadership style self assessment

### Day two

- Situational Leadership\* - Matching your style to specific people and situations
  - What is your default management style?
  - What is the level of development of those you manage?
  - Practice matching management style to needs and situations
- Understanding your behavioral styles (DiSC)\*\* and how they affect your ability to manage
  - What are your primary behavior styles
  - How your styles interact with other styles
  - How to use knowledge of behavioral styles to improve communication, cooperation
- Integrating leadership style with behavioral styles for better management/supervision
- Assignment - to be completed by day three

## Day three

- Discussion of main concepts from days one and two and how participants have applied them to their work
- Share outcomes of assignment (interviews, journal, etc)
- Charting your team using situational leadership categories
- Set goals for your team, yourself and one member of your team (three types of goals: work goals, process goals, learning goals)
- Keys to building accountability
  - Work plans
  - Trust
- Building unity
  - Micro-inequities\*\*\*
  - Inter-personal skills and building teamwork

## Day four

- How to apply key behaviors for successfully building accountability
  - Developing a work plan with someone you supervise – role play
  - Evaluating progress in carrying out a work plan – role play
- Group problem-solving on actual situations you face
- Evaluation and next steps

**\*Situational Leadership** - a situational leader can adopt different leadership styles depending on the situation. The right leadership style depends very much on the person being led - the follower. The leader's style should be driven by the competence and commitment of the follower.

**\*\*DiSC** is a behavioral model to examine the behavior of individuals in their environment or within a specific situation. It focuses on the styles and preferences of such behavior.

**\*\*\*Micro-inequities** are small events, covert, often unintentional, frequently unrecognized by the perpetrator that constitute subtle discrimination.

D. Assignments to be completed before you return for days three and four of the workshop

You have 3 assignments to complete and bring with you to the next 2-day session.

1. Interview at least 2 individuals asking the following questions:
  - a) What do I do as a supervisor that helps you to be successful in your job?
  - b) What could I do differently as your supervisor that would help you to be more successful in your job?
  
2. Review the worksheet on trust and take notice of things you do that build trust (deposits) and things you do that decrease trust (withdrawals).
  
3. Review the worksheet on performance management system and determine what you can do from your sphere of influence to make positive changes to your union's system.

## E. Trust worksheet for assignment

**Think of everything you do as either building trust (making a deposit) or decreasing trust (making a withdrawal)**

| <b>Behaviors that build trust<br/>“deposits”</b> | <b>Examples<br/>of<br/>deposits</b> | <b>Examples<br/>of<br/>withdrawals</b> | <b>Opposite behaviors<br/>“withdrawals”</b>                  |
|--|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| 1. Talk Straight                                 |                                     |  | Lie, spin, double talk                                       |
| 2. Demonstrate Respect                           |                                     |  | Ignore, insult, take for a fool                              |
| 3. Create Transparency                           |                                     |  | Withhold info, decide without informing or explaining        |
| 4. Right Wrongs                                  |                                     |  | Don't admit or repair mistakes, cover up mistakes            |
| 5. Show Loyalty                                  |                                     |  | Sell others out, take credit for yourself                    |
| 6. Deliver Results                               |                                     |  | Don't get things done right, make it look like you did       |
| 7. Get Better                                    |                                     |  | Don't develop, try to do things the same old ways            |
| 8. Confront Reality                              |                                     |  | Bury head in sand, skirt the real issues                     |
| 9. Clarify Expectations                          |                                     |  | Create vague and conflicting expectations                    |
| 10. Practice Accountability                      |                                     |  | Don't take responsibility, don't hold others accountable     |
| 11. Listen First                                 |                                     |  | Speak first, pretend to listen, listen without understanding |
| 12. Keep Commitments                             |                                     |  | Violate promises or don't make any commitments               |
| 13. Extend Trust                                 |                                     |  | Withhold trust, fake trust and then “snoopervise”.           |

**Adapted from the Speed of Trust by Stephen M. R. Covey with Rebecca R. Merrill**

## **F. Worksheet on performance management system**

*Read over the following elements of a high-functioning performance management system, and then rate the elements of your own union's system on the next page.*

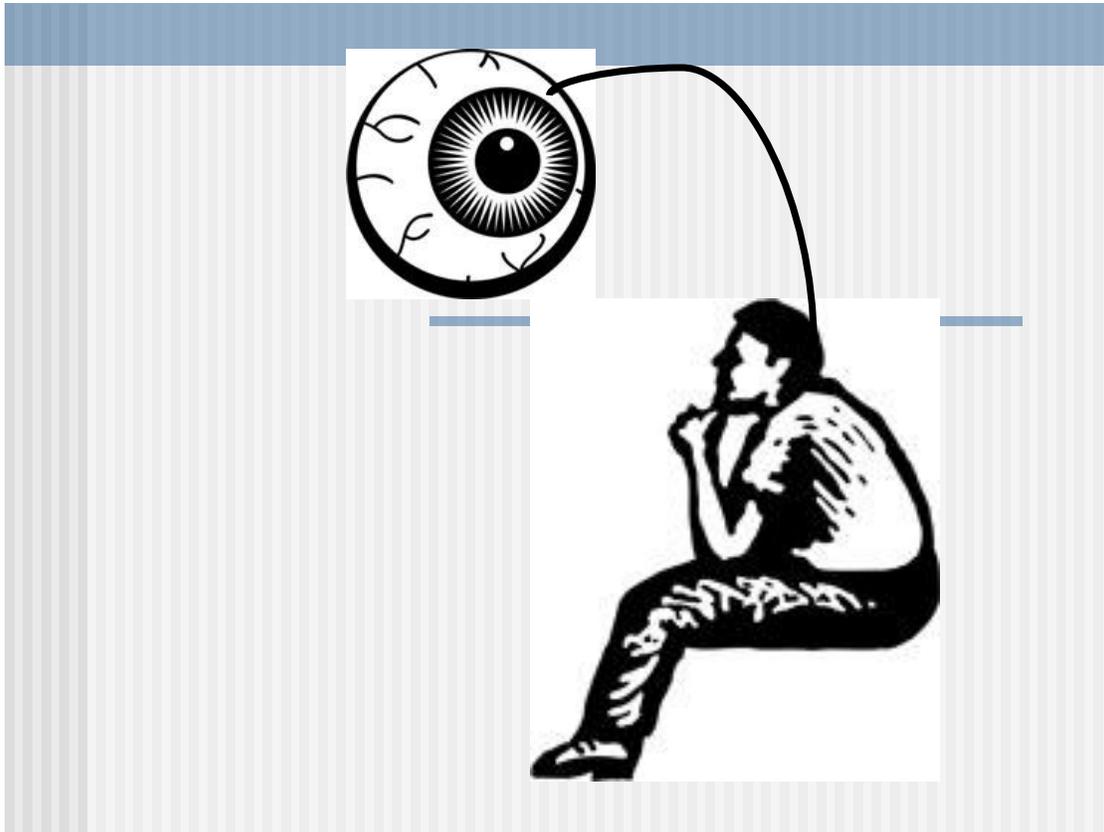
1. The union has clear organizational goals, a defined strategy, and a long term approach to success.
2. The union has a coherent structure that deploys assets in ways aligned with the organization's mission and strategy.
3. Within that structure the union has appropriate job descriptions where responsibility aligns with authority, and accountability for satisfactory performance is clear.
4. The union has a recruitment process that ensures you have the right people in the job, or people who have the potential to be cultivated into top performers.
5. The union has an orientation process ensuring that new hires start out with clear expectations and are given the support they need to succeed.
6. The union has a system of mentoring, coaching, and regular feedback, both positive and corrective that is personally affirmative, and that corresponds to the expectations set up for the job.
7. The union has a method of dealing with problem performance that places the choices with the employee, rather than with the manager, and where performance standards are framed by the goals, mission and strategies of the organization, not by the preferences of managers or the internal politics of the organization.
8. The union has a way for employees to learn and grow in their jobs, and to advance in the organization.
9. The union has a process of internal dispute resolution that is seen as fair, humane, and where outcomes are framed by the goals, mission and strategies of the organization.
10. The union has a system of recognition for achievement for both individuals and teams.
11. The union's leadership is engaged in, and involves the whole union in, a process of constant assessment; evaluation and planning focused on results and framed by the goals, mission and strategies of the organization. This step would feed back into the first step of constantly refining the organization's goals and strategies.

## Assessing your Union's Performance Management System

*On a scale of 0-5, with 5 meaning the element is fully developed and functional as described above, and 0 meaning the element does not exist, rate your union's performance management system:*

| <i>ELEMENT</i>                | <i>Rating</i> | <i>Don't know</i> | <i>How much control do you have over this element?</i> | <i>What would it take to develop this element in a positive direction?</i> |
|-------------------------------|---------------|-------------------|--|--|
| 1. Union goals and strategies |               |                   |  |  |
| 2. Structure                  |               |                   |  |  |
| 3. Job descriptions           |               |                   |  |  |
| 4. Recruitment                |               |                   |  |  |
| 5. Orientation                |               |                   |  |  |
| 6. Feedback                   |               |                   |  |  |
| 7. Problem-solving            |               |                   |  |  |
| 8. Advancement                |               |                   |  |  |
| 9. Dispute resolution         |               |                   |  |  |
| 10. Recognition               |               |                   |  |  |
| 11. Leadership learning       |               |                   |  |  |

## G. Third eye graphic



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