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Trade union joining: perceptions from call centre employees

Bernadine Y. Cantrick-Brooks

University of Wollongong

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Trade Union Joining: Perceptions from Call Centre Employees

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the
requirement for the award of the degree

Master of Industrial Relations – Research

from

University of Wollongong

by

Bernadine Yvonne Marie Cantrick-Brooks

B.Com (Mgmt), Grad. Cert. in Bus. (HRM)

School of Management and Marketing

2005

CERTIFICATION

I, Bernadine Yvonne Marie Cantrick-Brooks, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Master of Industrial Relations – Research, in the School of Management and Marketing, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

This research has resulted in subsequent conference papers and journal publications as listed below:

“An exploratory study of perceptions of Australian trade unions by call centre staff using Means End Chain Analysis”, 2nd Call Centre Research Conference, Monash University, August 2004

Cantrick-Brooks, B. (2004), ‘Perceptions of Australian Trade Unions by Call Centre Staff: An Exploratory Study Using Means End Chain Analysis’, *International Employment Relations Review*, vol. 10, no. 2, pp133-152.

Hannif, Z., Mathews, P., and Cantrick-Brooks, B., "Call Centres: Where to next?" Australian and New Zealand Academy of Management, Canberra, December, 2005.

Cantrick-Brooks, B., Mathews, P., and Hannif, Z., (2005), *Call Centres: Where to next?* ESC Working Paper No 2005/12, University of Newcastle.

Shareia, B.F., Parasuraman, B. & Cantrick-Brooks, B. (2005) Qualitative Case Study Research in Africa and Asia: Challenges and Prospects, Proceedings of the 3rd International Qualitative Research Convention 2005,(IQRC2005) (CD publication), 21 – 23rd August, 2005 in Johor Bahru, Malaysia.

Bernadine Yvonne Marie Cantrick-Brooks
24 March 2005

Abstract

Declining trade union density in Australia and overseas has been an issue of concern to the trade union movement and some industrial relations researchers. Many reasons have been proposed for this decline at both the macro and micro level, including changes in the structure of the economic base in Australia from manufacturing to services, and an increasingly hostile environment for unions. These issues are explored in a broad survey of the literature on declining union density.

Drawing on the author's experience in the call centre industry, the thesis uses a marketing research technique to investigate perceptions about unions held by call centre employees. Recruiting members in call centres has proved challenging due to factors such as geographical location of some call centres, anti-union management and a high level of non standard employment in call centres and an increasing tendency to individualism.

Viewing the problem from a consumer behaviour perspective, the first issue was to find out what perceptions are held about unions by call centre staff and the second, how do these perceptions influence the union joining decision?

Primary research using marketing research tools, Laddering and Means End Chain Analysis, provide a qualitative perspective on the decision making process and the perceptions of unions which underlie the union joining decision. Laddering is the interview technique associated with Means End Chain Analysis. It was developed to

elicit the data needed to be analysed using Means End Chain and develop the Hierarchical Value Map.

The Hierarchical Value Map indicated the links between the perceived attributes of unions: *Powerful, Resources, Troublemaker, Costly* and *Outmoded* and how these were linked to perceived consequences through to the goals or values held by the respondents of: *Security, Social Value/Self Esteem, Achievement* and *Belonging*.

Factors which were found to affect perceptions were first, whether the respondent was viewing the union joining decision from a collective or individualist perspective, and second, whether they were taking an instrumental, ideological or normative approach to union joining.

The use of cross discipline research methods offers further potential for research into trade union density.

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List of Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACA	Australian Communications Association
ACD	Automatic Call Distribution
ACIRRT	Australian Centre for Industrial Relations Research and Training
ACTU	Australian Council of Trade Unions
ASU	Australian Services Union
AWA	Australian Workplace Awards
CCR	Call Centre Research
CEPU	Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union
CPSU	Community and Public Sector Union
CSR	Customer Service Representative
CTI	Computer and Telephony Integration
FSU	Finance Sector Union
HR	Human Resources
HREA	Health and Research Employees Association
HRM	Human Resources Management
HVM	Hierarchical value Map
ILO	International Labour Organisation
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
MEAA	Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance
MECA	Means End Chain Analysis
NSW ADB	New South Wales Anti-discrimination Board
NUW	National Union of Workers
OHS	Occupational Health and Safety
SLA	Service Level Agreement
URCOT	Union Research Centre on Organisation and Technology