

Beyond Wages and Working Conditions: A Conceptualization of Labor Union Social Responsibility

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ABSTRACT. This article integrates theory and concepts from the business and society, business ethics, and labor relations literatures to offer a conceptualization of labor union social responsibility that includes activities geared toward three primary objectives: economic equity, workplace democracy, and social justice. Economic, workplace, and social labor union stakeholders are identified, likely issues are highlighted, and the implications of labor union social responsibility for labor union strategy are discussed. It is noted that, given the breadth of labor unions in a global work environment, labor union social responsibility also has implications for NGOs, corporations, and how corporate social responsibility is viewed going forward. This article concludes by noting that the nexus of labor relations and corporate social responsibility warrants more attention in management and labor relations literatures.

KEY WORDS: labor unions, corporate social responsibility, social responsibility

“We have first the typical assumption of all reformers in all ages ... that economic and social conditions can, by deliberate human intervention, be changed for the better.” Industrial Democracy, Sidney and Beatrice Webb – 1897

The issues currently driving the discussion about corporate social responsibility (CSR) – the proactive engagement in stakeholder issues to assure positive societal impact while enhancing corporate viability – are increasingly complex; human and workers’ rights, global supply networks, and governance (or the lack thereof), issues that also involve the governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and labor unions with whom corporations interact.

As a consequence, CSR research is expanding beyond how business firms address their responsibilities, to how those responsibilities are framed altogether. Some research employs the term *corporate citizenship* to describe the social role of business and suggests that as powerful public actors businesses have a responsibility to provide and respect basic civil, social, and political rights (Matten and Crane, 2005; Wood and Logsdon, 2001). Some other research studies suggest that global supply networks are political and economic entities that are best viewed from a political perspective (Levy, 2008; Scherer and Palazzo, 2007), or emphasize the growing role of NGOs as partners in CSR efforts (Jamali and Keshishian, 2008). Largely absent from these discussions are the labor unions, who are the vital corporate partners and important organizations in their own right.

Labor union’s reticence toward CSR begins with skepticism about the voluntary nature of CSR that circumvents the contractually binding provisions of collective bargaining. There is also general labor union’s¹ wariness about the stakeholder framework, and specific concerns about CSR programs that it tends to equate labor unions with other stakeholders. Some unionists believe stakeholder status implies a separate and subsidiary role, alongside the local community and others, rather than recognizing unions as equal partners in the business enterprise. Moreover, while CSR stresses the importance of identifying and engaging stakeholders, it emphasizes unilateral managerial decision making and rarely refers to the type of power that workers exercise through their trade unions (Justice, 2003). As a result of these misgivings, some labor unions have

concluded that CSR is simply another management system that will be used to undermine union stature and influence. They prefer a version of CSR that complements, but does not replace, legislation on economic and social rights and environmental standards and is more deferential to collective bargaining (Mather, 2006; Preuss et al., 2006).

Other labor union leaders believe unions should collaborate with organizations concerned about the social ramifications of business. They contend that CSR is an enduring part of the business landscape and failing to engage social responsibility merely plays into the hands of businesses that are trying to use CSR to forestall regulation. Engaging CSR also affords union leaders an opportunity to promote compliance with regulatory standards and respect for the role of labor unions (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, 2001). Hence, labor unions should lay claim to a role in CSR, make their viewpoints known, and take on the challenge of thwarting business attempts to supplant government regulation with CSR (FNV Mondiaal, 2004).

As the loyal opposition, and hybrid organizations that simultaneously embrace and challenge the corporate structure, labor unions are uniquely positioned to present a view of social responsibility that speaks to both benefactors and beneficiaries. More importantly, in the current business and social environment, labor unions will also be challenged regarding the social ramifications of their activities. For example, even as most Americans recognize the need for labor unions, they question union productivity and economic impact (Panagopoulos and Francia, 2008). Even so, there is no clear formulation of labor union social responsibility. While the management literature has focused on CSR, as if corporations are the only organizations with social responsibilities, labor relations research is largely devoid of discussion about labor union responsibilities to society. Labor unions, however, were early purveyors of the tenets of CSR – an equitable wage, humane working conditions, due process for workers, and concern for marginalized communities.

The objective of this article is to provide a conceptual model of social responsibility for labor unions and discuss its implications. In what follows, I will contend that labor union social responsibility (a) is derived from institutional imperatives and the social contract, (b) occurs within the context of

expected functions, day-to-day activities, (c) requires the control or influence of something of value, (d) is directed toward stakeholders, and (e) has ramifications for strategy and practice.

Foundations for labor union social responsibility

Social responsibility connotes organizations having a role in society that extends beyond laws and regulations to maintaining a level of behavior that is in concert with the prevailing social norms, values, and expectations (Sethi, 1975), and encompasses a wide range of economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic activities that society expects of powerful organizations (Carroll, 1991). Institutional and social exchange theories and deontological ethics are bases of social responsibility that have primarily been directed toward other organizations, but provide a sound rationale for labor union social responsibility as well. According to institutional theory, institutions such as government, professional groups, and interest groups jointly specify rules, procedures, and structures for organizations as a condition for granting legitimacy – the general perception that the actions of an entity are acceptable within the normative parameters of society (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; Suchman, 1995). To the extent that an organization's interactions and contributions are viewed favorably, it achieves the legitimacy – congruency between the values, norms, and expectations of society and the activities and outcomes of the organization (Ashforth and Gibbs, 1990) – that is essential to its viability and vitality (Aldrich and Fiol, 1994; Scott, 1995). Labor unions, such as other social institutions, depend on society's acceptance and must, therefore, operate in a manner that garners societal approval.

A second source of labor union social responsibility is the social contract. According to Blau (1964), an implicit social contract is established when one party provides something of benefit to another that produces a reciprocal obligation. In order to discharge this obligation, the second must furnish benefits to the first in turn. Donaldson and Dunfee (2002) refer to implicit understandings or “contracts” that bind industries, companies, and economic systems into moral and ethical communities. These social contracts are necessary because society

confers privileges on certain organizations that contribute to important societal goals. That privilege, however, must be accompanied by constraints because privilege can result in a number of troublesome social outcomes (Aldrich, 1999; Valasquez, 1996). For example, because labor unions monopolize labor, their actions can disrupt the availability of vital goods and services. Societal institutions provide the prerogative for organizations to operate in the public sphere, but to maintain legitimacy, those organizations must reciprocate with benefits for society.

The final source of labor union social responsibility is ethical obligation. Deontological ethics focuses on the actions themselves, rather than on consequences, and its tenets of moral duty and justice form the ethos of the labor movement. Samuel Gompers, first president of the American Federation of Labor, emphasizes moral standing in tandem with the teleological objective of equitable demands by stating,

Labor needs to be strong through ... the justice of its cause, and the reasonableness of its methods. It relies on moral suasion because of its conviction that its demands are generally equitable, and picketing is as necessary to the employment of moral influence as the boycott is necessary to the proper use of the moral power wielded by labor and its sympathizers (U.S. 57th Congress, 1902, p. 61).

As a consequence, institutions such as the Catholic Church and the United Nations have supported labor unions as a vehicle for improving working conditions and recognizing human potential (Paul XXIII, 1991; Thomas, 2009; United Nations, 2008). This support is based on the perceived morality of labor union appeals and the expectation that unions will continue their commitment to moral causes.

Labor union voice

Responsibility, giving account for conduct and obligations, implies that an entity is consequential in that it influences, possesses, or produces an outcome of value. For labor unions that outcome of value is *voice*. According to Hirschman (1970, p. 30), voice is “the ability to change, rather than accept or escape

from, an objectionable state of affairs,” and is often accompanied by the capacity to provide due process in the hearing of a concern, information about issues of interest, and safeguards against reprisals for unpopular views (Budd and Scoville, 2005). As a direct channel of communication between workers and employers, voice enables workers to express discontent and change the workplace relation without quitting, slowdowns, or sabotage.

It is often assumed that a union’s most important asset is its ability to improve the earnings of its members, but wages are a deficient indicator of labor union value. After voice is established through collective action, workers can employ that voice to any number of interests, including wages. The market, however, tends to constrain the union wage premium to approximately 15% such that it has been relatively stable (Hirsch and Macpherson, 2000; Wunnava and Peled, 1999) or declining (Bennett and Kaufman, 2007; Blanchflower and Bryson, 2004) over the last several decades. Thus, rather than unions having voice because of their monopoly wage power, it is the promise of voice – monopoly wage power is derived from collective bargaining – that inspires workers to form unions. In a survey of union members, Waddington and Whitston (1997) found that 72% chose *support if I had a problem at work* as a reason for joining a labor union, compared to 36% that cited *improved pay and working conditions*.² This outcome is consistent with classic labor union research (e.g., Parker, 1920; Tannenbaum, 1951) maintaining that preserving workers’ dignity is the primary motive for unionization.

If, as proposed here, the primary union activity is to articulate its members’ concerns, then the currency for labor unions is voice, not wages. Gross (2002, p. 70) states, “a full human life requires the kind of participation in the political, economic, and social life of the human community that enables people to have an influence on the decisions that affect their lives.” Of course, labor union members are the primary beneficiaries of voice, but the fundamental necessity of voice makes it valuable to other union stakeholders as well. Since voice is the currency of labor unions, labor union impact on society occurs through advocacy, the use of voice to advance its interests and objectives.

Objectives of labor union social responsibility

With the exception of egregious behavior, social responsibility usually does not require a radical departure from an organization's normal operations, but rather engaging in their roles and activities in a way that is consistent with prevailing ethical standards and societal expectations. With that in mind, a characterization of labor union social responsibility must address a central question, where do unions have societal impact? As shown in Table I, I draw from a range of perspectives on labor union roles and activities to identify three primary objectives: (a) economic equity, which is geared toward gaining equitable wages and benefits, (b) workplace democracy, which is centered on social standing at work through democratic processes and procedures (e.g., due process), and (c) social justice, which focuses on justice in the broad societal context through participation as a members of the polity.

Freeman and Medoff (1984) describe two faces of unionism, the monopoly face whereby unions employ collective bargaining to provide wage and benefit premiums to their members, and the collective voice face whereby the union establishes mechanisms for fair treatment in the workplace. These two faces of unionism coincide with the economic equity and workplace democracy objectives of social responsibility. Godard's (1997) survey of Canadian workers resulted in five union roles: (a) economic, maximizing wages and benefits; (b) workplace democratization, securing worker rights and protections; (c) integrative, providing orderly conflict resolution mechanisms; (d) social democratic, addressing broader social issues, and (e) conflict, countervailing the corporate agenda as a general advocate for workers. Godard's economic role is consistent with the economic equity objective and the workplace democratization and integrative functions are subsumed in the workplace democracy objective. The social democratic and conflict activities are entailed in the social justice objective because the social interests of workers are largely addressed by competing against businesses for favorable regulations and social legislation.

Based on the experience of European labor unions Hyman (1996) offers four union identities: (a) collective bargaining, maximizing wages and

benefits; (b) workplace governance, establishing due process mechanisms and limits to arbitrary employer authority; (c) *schools of war*, advocacy of regulatory and macroeconomic policies that effect wage rates; and (d) advocacy on quality of life issues such as the environment and consumer protection. The collective bargaining and workplace governance activities that Hyman identifies align with the economic equity and workplace democracy objectives of union social responsibility, while the schools of war and quality of life identities align with the social justice objective. Budd et al. (2004) propose that the three primary objectives for the employment relationship are efficiency, equity, and voice. Their objective of efficiency equates to the economic equity objective and the equity and voice objectives equate to the workplace democracy objective. They do not make a connection between the objectives pursued in the workplace and social conditions on the outside. Finally, the moral foundations of work presented by Kochan and Shulman (2007), efficiency, dignity, and social solidarity, align closely with the economic equity, workplace democracy, and social justice objectives, respectively.

The efforts to improve the financial standing of workers can be effective because of collective activities such as negotiations, work actions, strikes, and corporate campaigns. Workplace democracy is achieved by continually negotiating the collective bargaining agreement through the grievance and arbitration procedures. Unions contend that corporate legal rights have been extended through the International Financial Institutions (e.g., WTO, International Monetary Fund, World Bank) and trade agreements, but worker representation has not kept pace. Obviously labor unions must deliver financial benefits to their members to remain viable but, because the social and political aspirations of their stakeholders are so closely linked to their financial well-being, unions are called upon to address those aspirations as well. Social justice occurs through political means such as corporate campaigns and other activities that raise awareness, but also by bargaining on behalf of stakeholders. For example, some global union federations have reached International Framework Agreements with particular global corporations that secure workers' rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining, and prohibit forced labor, child labor, and workplace

TABLE I
Objectives of labor union social responsibility

	Freeman and Medoff (1984) – two faces of unionism	Hyman (1996) – Union identities	Godard (1997) – societal expectations of unions	Budd (2006) – objectives of the employment relationship	Kochan and Shulman (2007) – moral foundations of work
Economic advocacy	Monopoly face uses collective bargaining to provide wage and benefit premiums for union members	Representing workers in economic market functions	Economic maximizing of wages and benefits	Efficient union contracts and activities that enable financially competitive employers	Efficiency A living wage
Workplace democracy	Collective voice face advocates for fair treatment and compensates for market imperfections and externalities	Raising worker status	Workplace democracy, securing worker voice, rights, and protections Workplace integration, providing orderly conflict resolution mechanisms	Equity as evidenced by minimum and fair standards for wages and benefits and just-cause discipline and discharge Voice to increase industrial democracy, employee decision making and autonomy, free speech, and political employee activity	Dignity and personal development Diversity and equal opportunity Voice and participation Problem solving
Social justice		Schools of war in the conflict between labor and capital Achieving social justice in environment, consumer protection and community	Social democracy, addressing broader social issues, such as healthcare reform Countervailing the corporate agenda as a general advocate for workers		Solidarity/social cohesion for the common good Revised social contract integrating work, family, and community responsibilities

discrimination. Each of the objectives of labor union social responsibility exists simultaneously and any given labor union activity can embody economic, workplace, and social motives.

Stakeholders and labor union social responsibility

In developing a conceptual framework for labor union social performance, it is necessary not only to specify the nature (economic, workplace, social) of those responsibilities but also to identify the stakeholders toward whom beneficial policies and activities are directed, and to whom accountability is due. According to Rest (1986, p. 7) the foundation of ethical decision making is moral awareness, "...[having] been able to make some sort of interpretation of the particular situation in terms of what actions were possible, who (including oneself) would be affected by each course of action, and how the interested parties would regard such effects on their welfare." Applying the concept of moral awareness to labor unions at the organizational level, if labor unions are able to determine who is affected by their activities, then they have sound a basis on which to employ a deontological approach of pursuing programs that may be unrelated to union members, or a teleological approach of directing programs toward areas of mutual benefit for union members and outside stakeholders.

Figure 1 shows three basic groups of union stakeholders that align with the three objectives of social responsibility: the economic community, the workplace community, and the social community; Table II provides some ways that labor unions can respond to their concerns. The economic community includes the union locals, businesses, consumers, and public bystanders who may be affected by the outcomes of collective bargaining. Labor unions are business partners that must balance their wage demands with management concerns about efficiency and quality. For example, increased quality and productivity must accompany increased compensation to maintain current profit margins. Managers, consumers, and the public require wage demands that recognize the importance of corporate competitiveness, and responsible strike activity that does not unduly disrupt essential goods and services.

Lastly, regulatory compliance requires labor unions to be prudent stewards of their members' rights and resources and operate in a way that assures favorable legal standing.

The workplace community focuses on workplace democracy and is composed of union workers, their supervisors, and the management and union hierarchies that jointly administer the collective bargaining agreement. Union members require expeditious handling of grievances, and constraints on management authority, whereas management desires worker flexibility and problem-solving contributions. Managers generally welcome worker input; it is not unusual for workers to withhold ideas for fear that increased efficiencies will lead to reductions in force (Lawler, 2001). Labor unions interact with management to ensure that conflicts over work rules and assignments are resolved constructively and worker participation can occur without unduly compromising job security. Workplace democracy is joint administration of the workplace whereby workers have a vehicle for representation in accordance with the collective bargaining agreement. The workplace stakeholders are those that are present a physical address in the day-to-day issues in the place of employment such as joint decision making, grievances, and arbitration. Thus, the broad objective of the workplace stakeholders is effective mechanisms for conflict resolution in a workplace that is both humane and efficient.

Just as corporations cannot focus exclusively on shareholders, labor unions must reconcile the interests of union members with those of other stakeholders. Stakeholders in the social community include NGOs and civic organizations, potential union members, and the marginalized segments of society to whom labor unions have traditionally appealed. Social stakeholders are most focused on whether unions are addressing ethical obligations with regard to promoting societal well being and seeking to affect the pattern of privilege and disadvantage in society. Workplace democracy is joint administration of the workplace whereby workers have a vehicle for representation in accordance with the collective bargaining agreement. The workplace stakeholders are those that present a physical address in the day-to-day issues in the place of employment such as joint decision making, grievances, and arbitration.

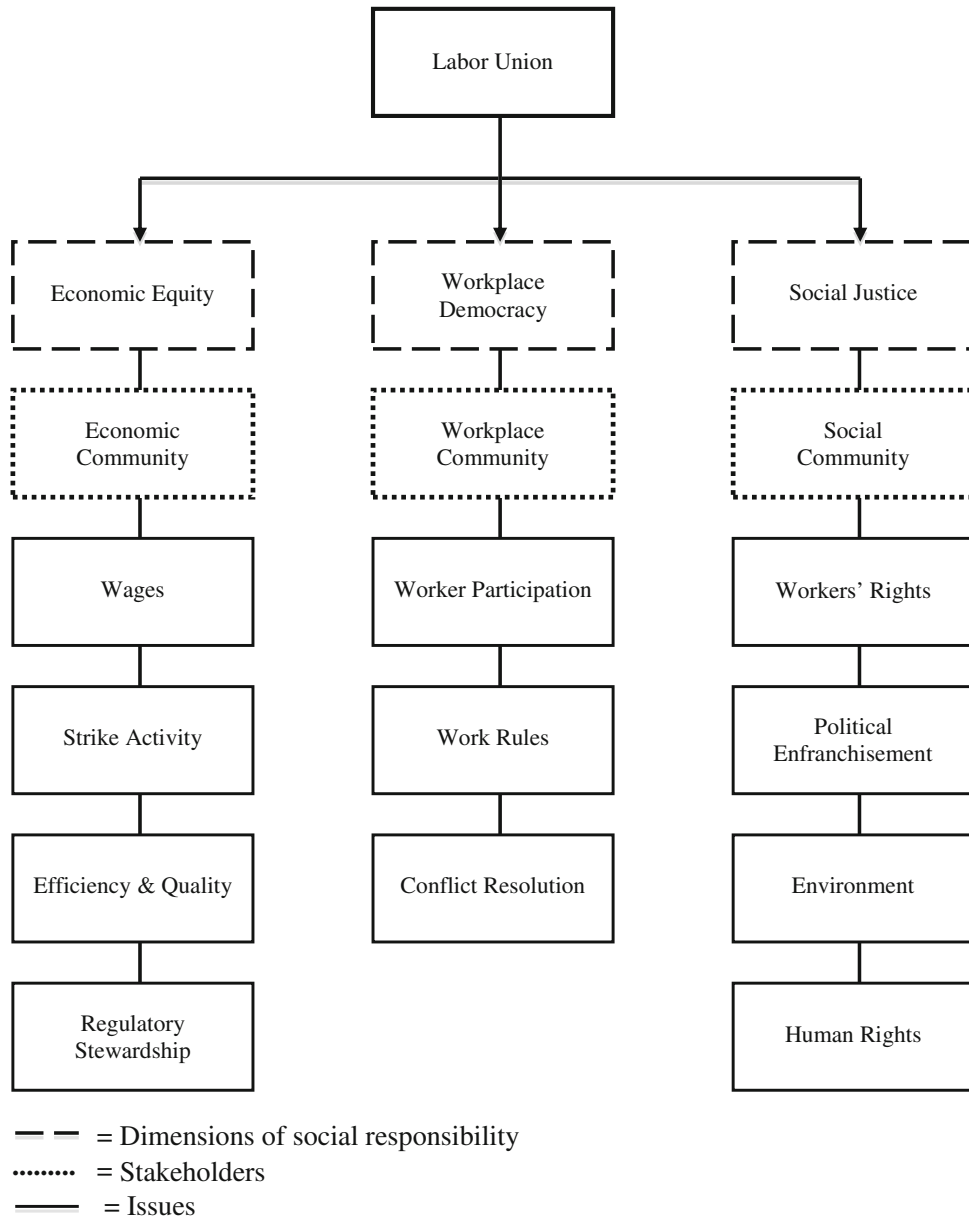


Figure 1. Labor union stakeholders and issues.

There are also issues generated by globalisation such as offshoring, environmental protection, and human and worker rights abroad. Activities may be more typical of social movements and center on political enfranchisement and mobilizing broad coalitions on behalf of favorable governmental actors and policies. As shown in Table III, various stakeholders will view labor union social responsibility

differently such that it presents threats and opportunities for labor leaders to consider. Being perceived as socially responsible can improve an organization's image (Fombrun et al., 2000) and increase member commitment (Valentine and Fleischman, 2008). Some members may, however, think that it is counter-intuitive for labor unions to address social responsibility at a time when union

TABLE II
Union responses to stakeholder issues

Economic community	Workplace community	Social community
<p>Attempt to negotiate International Framework Agreements with business firms that support workers' rights to organize – throughout corporate GSNs</p> <p>Advocate the right to collectively bargain for all workers</p> <p>Use union pension funds (particularly where trade unionists are represented on fund boards), to reward responsible businesses</p> <p>Support workers' attempts for decent wage and fair working conditions domestically and internationally</p>	<p>Promote workplaces that are safe, secure, healthy and free of harassment, intimidation, violence and discrimination</p> <p>Local plants of a global corporation, take active part in building a global union network for its workers</p> <p>Campaign/negotiate for work uniforms, equipment, and supplies that are ethically sourced</p> <p>Ensure that workers' rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining are more than a charitable concern, but center-stage for CSR</p> <p>Promote the integration of public enforcement bodies such as labor/health and safety inspectorates into CSR initiatives</p>	<p>Pursue stronger domestic and international legislation to ensure that business firms meet their social and environmental responsibilities</p> <p>Advocate for inclusion of workers' rights, into the international financial and trade institutions (WTO, IMF, and World Bank) regulatory regimes</p> <p>Encourage businesses to build CSR requirements into their public-private partnerships, supply contracts, and aid programs</p> <p>Build joint campaigns with NGOs and consumers to legal and ethical conduct and environmentally sustainable practices with workers, stakeholders and the community</p> <p>Voice opposition to discrimination in all forms including that based on race, religion, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual preference and political beliefs</p>

TABLE III
Labor union social responsibility – threats and opportunities

Stakeholder	Opportunities to pursue	Threats to avoid
Union members	Increased commitment	Withdrawal
Consumers	Support	Indifference/antipathy
Management	Accord	Increased hostility
Regulators	Favorable regulation	Unfavorable regulation
Social community	Collaboration	Opposition

strength is waning and scarce resources can be employed elsewhere. Depending on how members view this paradox, labor union social responsibility may increase member commitment or result in withdrawal because members question advocacy directed toward outside stakeholders and issues.

Consumers tend to patronize organizations whose values they share (Bhattacharya et al., 1995; Maignan and Ferrell, 2001), and social responsibility may lead

to increased support for labor unions. On the contrary, social responsibility involves risk because social issues may involve aligning with politically unpopular groups that alienate other stakeholders. Businesses are voluntarily engaging CSR and may simply add socially responsible initiatives to the list of joint labor-management programs. Some managers may, however, view labor union social involvement as an attempt to corrode management influence. To the

extent that there is management intransigence or antipathy, the ability for labor unions to embrace workplace democracy initiatives may be limited (e.g., participation in workplace innovation).

Since regulation tends to result from excesses, labor union attentiveness to regulations makes more oversight less likely. This factor is particularly relevant given the recent abuses in businesses (US mortgage crises) and NGOs (e.g., United Way). Lastly, the level of agreement and cooperation between labor unions and their partner organizations is likely to vary significantly. For example, the Industrial Wood and Allied Workers of Canada aligned with timber corporations against environmentalists in a dispute over logging in British Columbia, while the Pulp, Paper and Woodworkers of Canada has maintained a cooperative relationship with environmental organizations (Simon, 2003).

Thus, labor union social responsibility occurs to the extent that labor unions employ voice to enhance the standing of their stakeholders in areas of economic equity and efficiency, workplace rights and protections, and social justice, and reconciles the interests of their stakeholders in a manner that is consistent with ethical principles and the social contract.

Social responsibility and labor union strategy

The strategic ramifications of labor union social responsibility include not only how unions should respond to social pressures, but also the character of their long-term role in society. Labor unions may choose to anticipate the changes that stem from their activities, or they may become involved due to the emergence of social problems wherein they have a stake or can play an important role. Social responsibility is a reflection of organizational values (Waldman et al., 2006) and takes shape through an organization's strategy. Snape and Redman (2004) identify three union strategies that they term the service, organizing, and covenantal models, respectively. As shown in Table IV, these strategies differ with respect to their ethical foundations and how they address the objectives, stakeholders, and issues of social responsibility. Finally, the differences are clearly reflected in the union mission statements.

The service strategy characterizes union operations in terms of economic exchange and membership is based more on instrumental outcomes than ideological similarity (Bamberger et al., 1999; Gordon et al., 1995). Thus, the service strategy is weighted toward the economic equity objective of social responsibility and *bread and butter* unionism focused narrowly on promoting and securing the interests of union members. The primary ethic is utilitarian in that unions garner support based on exchange – the expected value to their members and society offsets the undesirable aspects of monopoly labor power. Labor unions that focus on the economic equity aspect of social responsibility are less likely to afford voice to the concerns of outside stakeholders. These characteristics make it more likely that unions employing the service strategy will react to social issues rather than initiating action or shaping developing issues. The mission statement of the Air Line Pilots Association typifies the service strategy.

The organizing strategy (Grabelsky and Hurd, 1994) emphasizes socialization of members to active involvement, and the union as a self-reliant occupational community. The primary ethic is justice in that it focuses on empowering union members to influence important outcomes with respect to workplace democracy and economic equity. Organizing strategy proponents believe that building a larger labor movement is the way to increase its strength and this viewpoint leads to a broader stakeholder focus (Bacharach et al., 2001; Frege and Kelly, 2004). Labor unions that adopt the organizing strategy will take stands on social issues that impact their interests or the interests of prospective members, particularly those that are the targets of organizing efforts. For example, union involvement with home healthcare workers in California, Oregon, and Washington (Schneider, 2005) and with the Justice for Janitors campaigns (Erickson et al., 2002) framed economic issues in the social rhetoric of justice. The mission statement of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers presented in Table II exemplifies social responsibility in the organizing strategy.

The covenantal strategy is most closely associated with the social justice objective of labor union social responsibility. Mutually shared values and acceptance of the organization's mission are critical because members are not only addressed on the basis

TABLE IV
Social implications of labor union strategy

	Service strategy	Organizing strategy	Covenantal strategy
Primary objective	Economic equity	Workplace democracy	Social justice
Primary ethic	Utilitarian	Justice	Duty
Stakeholder focus	Narrow	Narrow/broad	Broad
Issue advocacy	Narrow/reactive	Broad/proactive	Broad/proactive
Typical mission statement	The <i>Air Line Pilots Association</i> ^a : to promote and champion all aspects of aviation safety throughout all segments of the aviation community; to represent, in both specific and general respects, the collective interests of all pilots in commercial aviation; ... and to be the ultimate guardian and defender of the rights and privileges of the professional pilots who are members of the Association	The <i>International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers</i> ^b : to organize all workers in the entire electrical industry ... into local unions; to cultivate feelings of friendship among those of our industry; to assist each other in sickness or distress; to seek a higher and higher standard of living; and by legal and proper means to elevate the moral, intellectual and social conditions of our members, their families and dependents, in the interest of a higher standard of citizenship	The <i>American Federation of Teachers</i> ^c : to improve the lives of our members and their families, to give voice to their legitimate professional, economic and social aspirations, to strengthen the institutions in which we work, to improve the quality of the services we provide, to bring together all members to assist and support one another and to promote democracy, human rights and freedom in our union, in our nation and throughout the world

^a<http://www.alpa.org/Default.aspx?tabid=188>.

^b<http://www.ibew43.org/mission.html>.

^c<http://www.aft.org/about/index.htm>.

of self-interest, but on their desire to realize organizational ideals (Van Dyne et al., 1994). Unions that adopt the covenantal strategy tend toward a duty ethic in that they are more likely than other unions to take stands on issues of public concern and may support causes that are not closely related to union interests (e.g., the Teamsters & Turtles campaign). As a consequence, a covenantal approach is typical of Social Movement Unionism and aligns trade unions with outside coalitions for social and economic justice. Through its recognition of duty to outside stakeholders, social unionism proponents see unions not only as workplace vehicles for securing economic gains, but as participants in the civic and political life of their respective countries (Turner, 1992). The American Federation of Teachers mission statement not only embraces the financial and workplace objectives of the service and organizing strategies, but extends to advocate for the economic and social aspirations of those in social communities as well. The three strategies represent different emphases and views of the social role of labor unions in society, but are not mutually exclusive.

Discussion

Extending discussions of CSR and labor relations to include a conceptualization of labor union social responsibility adds a valuable and needed perspective, because of the prevalence of labor unions around the world. A few clarifications and cautions are in order. As the corporations upon which labor unions depend experiment with new approaches to CSR, labor relations research has not produced a framework with which to analyze union impact on social issues. Indeed, one of the foremost challenges faced by US labor unions is the perception that they are exceedingly self-interested. In assessing prospects of labor unions in the new millennium, Hoyt Wheeler opined “[t]o the extent that labor is perceived by policy makers and the public as just one more interest group fighting for its share of the pie to the detriment of other interest groups, not much public support is going to be forthcoming” (Wheeler, 2002, p. 97). Therefore, it is important for labor unions to have a place in the public discourse surrounding social responsibility.

It is important to emphasize that this initial conceptualization of labor union social responsibility is primarily a descriptive account of what occurs, rather than a normative call for what should occur. The descriptive orientation does not, however, diminish the normative and instrumental implications. Labor union social responsibility can be viewed from a normative perspective as a moral imperative, or from instrumental perspective as enlightened self-interest. If, for example, labor unions view social responsibility as a moral obligation, then the depth of commitment and participation are likely to be greater than if social responsibility is engaged for purely instrumental reasons. Bronfenbrenner and Juravich (1997) wed normative and instrumental considerations by arguing that an emphasis on general moral principles such as dignity, justice, and fairness will improve the success rate of organizing campaigns.

Nevertheless, I do not intend to imply that social responsibility will improve the plight of labor unions. Being more attentive to social responsibility is not likely, by itself, to reverse or even improve the current condition of the labor movement – and, insofar as it complicates the mission of labor unions, may even be counterproductive. The most plausible view is that social responsibility is one of many activities that, properly employed, can contribute to union viability. Finally, labor unions are not monolithic and are not likely to engage in similar behaviors or have similar opinions about how to advance and strengthen unionism. As a consequence, the interests of some members will conflict with those of other members and stakeholders, and social responsibility will require an appropriate means of reconciling those interests.

Implications for future research

The preceding discussion raises a number of implications for further research that can be categorized into three main areas. First, in addition to being a conceptualization of social responsibility for labor unions, this article might also be thought of as a conceptualization of social responsibility based on labor unions. Since labor unions exhibit characteristics of corporations and NGOs the labor union social responsibility framework can contribute to a

formulation of organizational responsibility and citizenship that addresses all of the key players (multi-national corporations, NGOs, unions), in a global marketplace where market and political power are frequently intertwined. In the global context where some nation-states do not provide economic equity, workplace democracy, or social justice, social responsibility requires that other organizations advocate on behalf of those prerogatives. The labor union view of social responsibility aligns with the corporate citizenship rendering of CSR whereby organizations assume a role in providing basic rights that are not provided by nation states. As such, labor unions have effectively collaborated with NGOs and governments to promote responsible social (e.g., International Labor Organization Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work) and environmental practices (e.g., UN Global Compact), and political enfranchisement (e.g., South Africa and Bolivia). Successful partnerships, such as the tripartite ILO, portend of favorable interactions with business firms on social responsibility issues as well.

A second area is viewing social responsibility through the lens of voice. Hirschman (1970) originally coined the concept of voice as an alternative to passive acceptance or exit, and although it appears extensively in the labor relations literature, it need not be limited to that context. What are the implications of applying the notion of *voice-as-currency* to different types of organizations? The stakeholder model, though it focuses on corporations, argues that those who provide capital for an entity derive a unique set of interests and moral rights and expectations based on that exchange. In essence, rather than accepting current conditions (loyalty) or choosing to do business elsewhere (exit) the stakeholders and corporations can exercise voice by negotiating the basic rights of citizenship with governments and other powerful organizations on behalf of their stakeholders. That logic also holds for private schools and their benefactors, charities and their donors, hospitals and their communities, NGOs and philanthropists, and other organizations that enlist stakeholders to provide capital. It may well be argued that the social responsibility of such organizations will depend upon the causes and objectives to which they lend their credibility.

In conclusion, I have established a broad conceptual framework for labor union social responsibility, but empirical research is required to test the potential

dimensionality of the concept and its potential to describe the activities of labor unions. A desirable next step would be to develop a valid measure that can be used in empirical studies. Researchers might, for instance, explore in more detail the extent to which labor unions are active advocates of each of the three objectives of social responsibility, as well as the antecedents and consequences of labor union social responsibility. Lastly, there is the possible interplay between socially responsible labor unions and socially responsible corporations. A number of business firms explicitly embrace CSR but there is a dearth of systematic study about what, if any, impacts this has on their relationships with organized labor. For example, would social responsibility dictate that a firm operating in the USA bargain a contract with a newly certified labor union rather than closing and relocating the facility?

Conclusion

I have proposed that labor union social responsibility is an important concept deserving of further investigation. The study of labor union social responsibility can potentially provide new avenues of research and practice in the areas of CSR and labor relations. Given the amount of discussion about CSR and the debate about the direction of the labor movement, I hope that this article stimulates interest in the nexus of these two areas.

Notes

¹ In this article, I will use “labor union” to refer to unions as organizations, and “union members” to refer to the people who are represented by labor unions, who may also be workers/employees.

² The response categories were not mutually exclusive.

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