Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

1. Define the current status and strategic power of the American Labor movement.
2. Explain how the blue collar and white collar movements have been different when it comes to organizing.
5. Summarize the reasons why employers view unionization in a negative light.
6. Describe why the public sector unionization continues to grow.

Written Lecture

At some point in our lives, we will all be touched by the relationship between organized labor and management; whether we are in a collective bargaining unit, part of the management group, have a relative involved with collective bargaining, or are affected by a strike that may occur. In this unit, we will read about how management views organized labor, how organized labor views management, where organized labor has been and where they are going, and why they have staying power.

From the beginning of organized labor, management has had a difficult relationship with the unions. They feel that the unions are run autocratically, that they do not want to work with management, and that they are out for themselves and not the well-being of the business as a whole. From the management’s perspective, business is about creating a balance between income, expenses, and growth. Sometimes, when unions become involved, they begin to demand more than what the businesses can provide, and still stay profitable enough to grow. There are some unions who go the extra mile to learn about the business and the balance that is necessary to continue to stay in business.

Interestingly, unions have similar views of management, such as not having the well-being of the employees in mind when making decisions. They believe that a company makes its decisions based on profits and not what is best for employees. Unions believe they are needed to level the playing field and give a voice to those employees who cannot speak for themselves.

Over the recent past, employers have begun looking at the employer-employee relationship differently. They have started working with the employees to educate them on business practices, financials, and other pertinent information. They hope that by getting the employees educated and more involved in the business, they will understand why they make the decisions they do. For all the progress that management has made, unions are continuing to stay strong.
Within organized labor, there are two distinct sectors: public and private. The public sector has the highest percentage of unions overall, which includes federal, state, and local governments. The private sector has the highest unionization rate amongst the blue-collar workers, and the lowest rate amongst the white-collar workers. The labor movement has focused on the blue-collar workers, even though the white-collar workers have exceeded them and continue to widen the gap. This has caused the labor movement to be concerned and to look at their strategies.

What has caused the white-collar workers to avoid unions? White collar workers tend to be more on the administrative, sales, or management side, and have not felt that they needed to be unionized. They feel more empowered and are more connected to the different levels of management. Unlike the blue collar positions, these positions tend to have fewer injuries, and the potential for a severe injury is unlikely. Job security has not been an issue. Many times they are paid higher wages, and in some cases managers cannot join unions.

What has changed? With the increase in costs like health insurance, employees are looking to get what they can from their employers. They are beginning to look at organizing over wages and benefits. Also, long term job security has been put at risk with the economic instability.

What can the labor movement do? In the past, the labor leadership has chosen to look the other way when it comes to the white-collar workers. However, with the upswing in these jobs, the new leadership has to be able to overcome that position and work on ways to reduce the resistance of white-collar workers joining the unions. To do this, they have begun to increase their organizing efforts substantially. This should allow their current unions to remain strong while trying to increase their strength in the white-collar population.

So, why do workers join unions? The textbook will dive in to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs with part of the reasoning. We all have needs, and the unions seem to be able to convince workers that they care about their needs, (physiological, safety, and social), more so than the employers do. Employees believe that having a union will help them with job security, as union contracts have language that employers can only terminate an employee for cause. This is not the case for an employer without a union. Some employees like that they have union representatives that will talk for them when it comes to any conflicts.

Why do managers resist unions? Several reasons are addressed including management discretion, decision-making authority, and overall negative views of how unions interfere with the employer-employee relationship. Managers do not understand why employees need to have anyone speak for them. They believe with all the regulations that protect employees, unions should not be necessary.

To help deter union organizing, or to decertify a current union, employers have started using labor relations consultants. In the past, employers have gotten themselves in trouble trying to stop an organizing attempt because they did not seek legal guidance. Now, employers are seeking out that knowledge and legal guidance. With the creations of these consultants, employers have more options than they have had, or thought they had in the past.

While the private sector unions are struggling, the public sector seems to be progressing at a positive pace. What has helped this? Legal developments have allowed protections that public labor movements did not have in the past. The private sector unions had the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), created in 1934, to protect them while the public sector did not. This changed in 1979 with the creation of the Federal Labor Relations Authority (FLRA). There were...
substantial changes that occurred which allowed the labor movement to gain momentum in the public sector. These are discussed in more detail within the textbook.

Should the public sector have the right to strike? This is a question that continues to be debated. Some think that since their wages are paid by taxes, they should not under any circumstances be allowed to strike. Others are worried that because they hold important positions such as fire fighters, police officers, and teachers, they hold too much power to be able to strike fairly. Employees feel they should be able to strike for fair wages and benefits. Others feel that they are paid fairly when all the benefits and pensions are added in to the equation. Another issue with this sector being able to strike is where the cost of covering a strike will come from. The public sector gets its funds from taxes and is unable to just raise their prices or demand for their vendors to lower their costs. So should this sector be allowed to strike if they feel they are being unfairly treated? This may be the most interesting and debatable question so far.

Over the next eight weeks, you will be gaining important information regarding unions. It will start with a historical background and move through the legal framework. Next, you will learn about the structures of unions, their government, and how they operate. Then you will get to study about the bargaining aspect, the grievance process, and the wage, institutional, and administrative issues. No matter what your prior knowledge of unions is, keep an open mind in order to see both sides of labor relations.

**Learning Activities (Non-Graded)**

**Unit Quiz**

Click here to access a PDF of the Unit I Quiz.

**Article Review**

For this activity, choose a peer-reviewed/scholarly article to review. Search for an article related to topics in Chapter 1, “Organized Labor and the Management Community.” Use the databases within the CSU Online Library or another source that contains peer-reviewed/scholarly articles. The purpose of this activity is for you to practice reviewing articles that contribute to the industry. The authors of these articles are researchers and professionals that have shared or experimented with ideas that demonstrate potential to improve the industry. As a professional in the industry, it is in your best interest to review the literature and trends within it. Doing so provides you with the opportunity to read about what has been successful and how. Plus, it allows you to analyze the ideas that were unsuccessful, how you can improve them, or at least avoid repeating the mistakes of others. Use these skills to contribute to research papers and other scholarly writing in the future.

As you read the article, consider the following questions: How could the topic of this article apply to your personal or professional life? How could it apply to an organization you have observed?

Use these guidelines to select an article:

- Is in reliable sources/journals
- Related to topics in Chapter 1, “Organized Labor and the Management Community”
- At least ten pages
Use these guidelines to prepare your article review:

- At least two pages
- Identify the main topic/question
- Who is the author’s intended audience?
- Summarize the article for page one
- Think critically about the article and how it applies to this course for page two

Format your article review using APA Style. Use your own words and include citations for other articles as needed to avoid plagiarism. This is a non-graded activity, so you do not have to submit it.