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## **Trade Union Effectiveness and Member Participation**

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This study examines organisational effectiveness of Korean trade unions and member participation. In this study, we focus on member participation as one of the major determinants of union organisational effectiveness.

Since the "1987 Great Workers Struggle", one of the defining characteristics of the trade union movement in Korea has been the level of member participation. Another outstanding feature of Korean trade unions has been their organisational location at the enterprises or workplaces: the firm has been the basic organisational unit of most of the unions in Korea. Trade unions developed a strong member mobilization strategy on the basis of firm level organizational foundation.

Along with the development of industrial relations institutions, the union power has been institutionalized in the workplaces and the firm, accompanied by a waning of the intensity of participative unionism. Although member mobilization strategies remained important for Korean unions, the main focus of trade union movement's shifted, from workplace-level concerns, to enhancing political and institutional power.

The new trade union project, to enhance labour's political and institutional power, is never an easy challenge for the unions, and more so in the neoliberal environment. Effective member mobilisation was still regarded as a major source of influence in promoting political and institutional change. Unions also had to resort to member mobilisation to mount a response to new workplace-level dynamics and challenges brought about high-commitment human resource management strategies and new forms of, as well as ongoing, unfair labour practices by employers.

In this study, we engage in theoretical discussion as well as empirical examination. First, we explore theoretical discussions on union effectiveness and member participation. We found union effectiveness was determined by multiple determinants, such as, firm

organisation, market strategy, industrial relations environment, and characteristics of union structure, including its size, bureaucracy, recruitment agreement, members' personal characteristics, and union internal processes. We also found members' participation was a major determinant of union effectiveness, while the depth and width of participation were subject to multiple factors, such as, ideological congruence with union, satisfaction with union performance, intensity of felt-injustice, and workplace collectivism.

In the empirical examination, we aimed to test and measure the influence of the various determinants of the union effectiveness and member participation. First, in verifying the efficacy of various determinants of union effectiveness, we used the 2003 data set of the "Workplace Employment Relations Survey" of Korea Labor Institute. This allowed us to conduct an organizational level analysis. Second, in undertaking an individual level analysis, we tested the influences of various determinants of member participation with our own data set collected from five unions.

From our theoretical survey and empirical analysis, we were able to arrive at a number of significant conclusions and implications for the Korean trade union movement, as in the following:

First, theoretical discussions confirm that member participation as a major determinant of union effectiveness.

Second, member participation is a multi-dimensional concept. In our empirical analysis, we identified two distinct types of participation, which we have termed, "institutionalised participation" and "voluntary participation". We found "institutionalised participation" to come into prominence in more institutionalised and compulsory settings, with leadership as an important facilitating factor. "Voluntary participation" is found in more discretionary settings, with members' ideological congruence with union's orientation and procedural justice realised within the union being important mediating factors. Institutionalised participation is found to be an easier type of participation than the voluntary participation.

Third, union's internal processes, such as, decision-making process, communication, internal conflict, and leadership, was found to be important factors influencing the member participation. Decision-making process, communication, and leadership stood out as more important determinants: the first two factors closely related to "voluntary participation" while the last contributes to more institutionalised type of participation.

Fourth, we examined the various functions of union factions. Union factions are important mechanisms of union socialisation, which enhance member participation. The union factions are recognised as an important leadership training institution and mediating mechanism for transforming or elevating "institutionalised participation" to voluntary and active participation.

However, the analysis also indicated that factions were one of the major factors of internal conflict in the unions. In the past, one of the most important source of internal conflicts was the employers' domination of and/or intervention in the unions' internal processes. The data used in this study reveal that this is no longer an important feature, reflecting the fact that many Korean unions have achieved a consolidated position in the firms. With this change, managing (and effective exercise of) the power the unions have secured and developing a constructive process of internal conflict management within the organisation have emerged as important challenges for the Korean unions.

Fifth, active and voluntary member participation has been identified as important resource for the unions in responding effective to the challenges of neoliberal environment. The analysis indicated that perceived-justice in internal processes and effective leadership were especially important in enhancing voluntary participation. Experience as a union official and participation in union faction were found to be important factors in member participation. It led to better understanding unions' aims and higher level of union commitment. At the same time, it contributed greatly to enhancing sensitivity to internal and procedural justice.

Sixth, in the individual level analysis, member participation was found to be positively correlated to job dissatisfaction, confrontational industrial relations environment, and adversarial industrial relations orientation of members. But in the organisational level analysis, level union activism and member participation were found to be negatively correlated to confrontational industrial relations environment and adversarial industrial relations viewpoints of members. The incongruent findings can be attributed to sampling bias of two data sets used in this study. Nonetheless, the evidences indicate clearly that participation fuelled only by confrontational environment would not be such a dominant feature of the future of the trade union movement.

Seventh and finally, in examining the findings of the current study as an extension of similar past studies, it can be concluded that the member participation for the Korean

unions is at a crossroads. Union members are no longer triggered into active participation (or activism) merely in response to workplace level confrontational environment. Unions would need to translate and transform members injustice-sensitivity, formerly invoked by workplace issues, into one that is more ideologically informed and more encompassing, capable of internalising the issues and concerns that arise from a plane broader than the confines of the firm. Ideological maturation, high quality activism on issues of social justice, ability to identify and define self-interest within a broader boundary, and effective leadership capable of mediating members and new practices would be vital sources for the revitalization of member participation of the Korean trade union movement.