



**UNION PARTICIPATION AND THE WORK FIT-
JOB SATISFACTION-NEXUS:
A STUDY OF THE CHICAGO TEACHERS UNION**

**Robert Bruno
Justin Wiegand**

**School of Labor and
Employment Relations**

Project for Middle Class Renewal

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Authors' Bio

Robert A. Bruno is Director of the Labor Education Program and Project for Middle Class Renewal and a Professor of Labor and Employment Relations in the School of Labor and Employment Relations at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. He is also the author of three books; *Steelworker Alley: How Class Works In Youngstown* (1999), *Reforming the Chicago Teamsters: The Story of Local 705* (2003), *Justified by Work: The Meaning of Faith in Chicago's Working-Class Churches* (2008) and co-author of *A Fight to Save the Soul of Public Education: The Chicago Teachers Strike* (forthcoming).

Justin Wiegand is an instructor and Human Resources and Industrial Relations Ph.D. candidate at the University of Illinois' School of Labor and Employment Relations. His research centers on person-environment fit and vocational interests with applications to measurement, selection, and labor.

Executive Summary

The exit-voice tradeoff has helped scholars explain lower job satisfaction among union workers compared to nonunion workers since. Scholarship has further extended the exit-voice tradeoff to within-union samples by examining job satisfaction's relationship to union participation instead of between union and nonunion workers.

Traditional understanding of how the exit-voice tradeoff operated was that, as union workers become less satisfied with their employment conditions they reach out to their union to activate a strong "voice" mechanism. In doing so union workers raise their level of union participation. In this view, union participation is more likely for those dissatisfied with their jobs. But how exactly does the exit-voice tradeoff apply to moderately or highly-satisfied union members? Are they participating in the union or is low job satisfaction a pre-requisite for union activism?

This report, *Union Participation and the Work Fit-Job Satisfaction-Nexus: A Study of the Chicago Teachers Union* identifies the presence of a missing moderator that provides insight into the job satisfaction-union participation relationship. We suggest that the concept of "person-work (PW) fit" determines the applicability of exit-voice tradeoff within unionized workforces. PW fit is operationalized as the similarity of a worker's vocational interests to the general interest profile of his or her work group.

Our case study consisted of teachers, clinicians, and paraprofessionals, who are all members of the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU). The CTU provided a sample of professional workers who are likely to have a high PW fit, but are experiencing changing workplace conditions. How does the exit-voice tradeoff apply to educational employees who express close work-fit alignment and are not strongly dissatisfied with their jobs? In addition, what is the effect of that application on union member participation?

Findings

- As expected, CTU teachers and paraprofessional expressed a PW fit with the tasks they perform at school.
- Despite experiencing unfavorable workplace changes, 68% of respondents reported being "satisfied" about their job.
- But a large majority of CTU members expressed strong dissatisfaction about their employer.
- Contrarily, feelings about their union and the labor movement were very positive.
- Additionally, commitment to the union was high.
- A large majority of union members displayed an extensive degree of union involvement.

We suggest that the felt need to protect a job that is personally meaningful has inspired CTU members to become stronger, active union members. They are in effect using their union, not to preserve the best available job open to them, but to bridge the distance between the teaching profession's aspiration and reality.

Introduction

The exit-voice tradeoff has helped scholars explain lower job satisfaction among union workers compared to nonunion workers since Borjas (1979) and Freeman (1980). Scholarship has further extended the exit-voice tradeoff to within-union samples by examining job satisfaction's relationship to union participation instead of between union and nonunion workers (e.g., Iverson and Currivan, 2003). This novel adoption of exit-voice tradeoff focused on the degree to which workers actually use voice mechanisms afforded by their unions by measuring individual differences in participation.

Traditional understanding of how the exit-voice tradeoff operated was that, as union workers become less satisfied with their employment conditions they reach out to their union to activate a strong "voice" mechanism. In doing so union workers raise their level of union participation. In this view, union participation is more likely for those dissatisfied with their jobs. But how exactly does the exit-voice tradeoff apply to moderately or highly satisfied union members? Are they participating in the union or is low job satisfaction a pre-requisite for union activism?

This report based on a study with members of the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) identifies the presence of a missing moderator that provides insight into the job satisfaction-union participation relationship. We suggest that the concept of "person-work (PW) fit" determines the applicability of exit-voice tradeoff within unionized workforces. PW fit is operationalized as the similarity of a worker's vocational interests to the general interest profile of his or her work group (e.g., teachers or paraprofessionals in a given organization).

Our case study of teachers, clinicians, and paraprofessionals, who are all members of the (CTU) provided a sample of professional workers who are likely to have a high PW fit, but are experiencing changing workplace conditions. How does the exit-voice tradeoff apply to these educational employees who express close work-fit alignment and are not strongly dissatisfied with their jobs? In addition, what is the effect of that application on union member participation?

Rather than examining fit as an antecedent to job satisfaction (e.g., Holland, 1997; Spokane, Meir, & Catalano, 2000; Tsabari, Tziner, & Meir, 2005), we suggest fit forms a boundary condition for the negative relationship between job satisfaction and union participation that characterizes the exit-voice tradeoff among union members. When evaluating job satisfaction, fit is frequently conceptualized as a relationship between needs and supplies, describing the degree to which a job or occupation meets a workers' needs, desires, or preferences (Edwards, 1991; Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2011).

To understand how PW fit moderates the job satisfaction-union participation relationship, consider the experience of workers high and low on each. Individuals with high fit, but low job satisfaction are relatively likely to participate in their union. High fit suggests they have similar interests to their colleagues and are likely to find their work engaging and interesting, but low satisfaction indicates there are likely working conditions and stressors they want to see change. They are likely to see union participation as a necessary means to promote change to move their interesting, albeit unsatisfying, work

toward a place of satisfaction. Participating in their union affords them voice to achieve this end while their high fit buffers the appeal of exit.

Individuals with high fit and high job satisfaction are also relatively likely to participate in their union. High fit suggests they have similar interests to their colleagues and are likely to find their work engaging and interesting. Furthermore, high satisfaction indicates agreeable working conditions. Due to high fit with their work group and enjoyment of the work itself, participation with their fellow union members follows. Solidarity can form naturally as their union provides a mechanism for investing in their work and their work group. Exit is not a likely threat for these individuals.

Taken together, union participation for high fit individuals should remain relatively high regardless of the union members' job satisfaction. Similarity to their work group promotes solidarity and buffers against the appeal of exit. As such, the negative relationship between job satisfaction and union participation characterizing the exit-voice tradeoff within union samples may not apply. Individuals either invest in their union to promote change, or participate as a natural extension of solidarity with others similarly situated. Union participation (voice) benefits members in both cases, but because fit effectively reduces the viability of exit regardless of job satisfaction, the traditional conceptualization of the exit-voice tradeoff fails to adequately describe the experience of these workers.

Individuals with low fit and low job satisfaction are likely to leave their employer unless they can change their work or working conditions. Participating in their union provides them the voice alternative to exit the rather grim circumstance they find themselves in—work that does not engage them and working conditions that are not agreeable. The reality of both poor fit and dissatisfaction suggests that individuals who do not exit their firm will be especially motivated to participate in their union to promote desired change. The exit-voice tradeoff describes low fit, low job satisfaction individuals perfectly. Neither fit, nor satisfaction compels them to stay in their job, so if they do, union participation (voice) becomes especially important to them.

Individuals with low fit, but high job satisfaction are less likely to participate in their union than of their colleagues. High job satisfaction suggests they are generally satisfied with their working conditions, but their low work group fit suggests a relative disconnect from their peers' interests and the general interests characterizing their work. Although they might desire more interesting work, the reality that their job satisfaction remains high suggests these workers see little need for change. Combined with lower engagement with their work and work group, there is less motivation to participate in their union. Solidarity may be difficult for these misfits to establish. Thus, the exit-voice tradeoff does not describe these individuals in so much as they feel less of a need to exit their firm or express voice.

Taken together, the exit-voice tradeoff describes low fit individuals who are not satisfied with their work and are thus likely to either leave their firm or participate in their union. The participation of the low fit workers with low job satisfaction who remain with their employers should thus be high. On the other hand, union participation from low fit workers with high job satisfaction should be low. As such, the exit-voice tradeoff,

conceptualized by a negative relationship between job satisfaction and union participation, is most descriptive of individuals with low job satisfaction and low work group fit.

Methodology

Respondent Demographics

In June of 2015, 974 teachers, 88 clinicians, and 49 paraprofessionals, all members of CTU, working within the Chicago Public Schools completed an online questionnaire. The average age of survey participants was 43.7 years old and over three-quarters (77%) of surveyed members were female. Slightly more than two-thirds (65%) of respondents were white with African-American (15%), Latino (12%) and Asian (3%) members representing the biggest blocs of minority participants. The average time that participants were employed with CPS was 12.7 years, which corresponded with the time they have been CTU members. On average, members had been in their current position for a little less than a decade (9.5 years). Respondents were highly educated with 78% having a Master's degree and another 2% possessing a doctorate. The sample of respondents was very representative of the actual bargaining unit.

Personal Interests

Workers' personal interests were measured using the Department of Labor's public domain Occupational Information Network (O*NET) Interest Profiler Short Form (Rounds, Su, Lewis, and Rivkin, 2010). The form is a 60-item measure with ten items corresponding to six interests often referred to by their acronym RIASEC (Realistic-Investigative-Artistic-Social-Enterprising-Conventional; Holland 1959, 1997). Descriptions of each construct appear in the Appendix.

Respondents were asked to decide the degree to which they would like or dislike doing a type of work regardless of whether they had education or training to do the work, how it was related to their current job, or how much money they would make doing the work. Responses ranged from 1 (dislike very much) to 7 (like very much) with a neutral 4 (neither like nor dislike). As examples, "lay brick or tile" represents a Realistic item and "perform rehabilitation therapy" was a Social item. We then formed scales by taking the mean of all responses for a given interest.

Workgroup Interests

The Chicago Teachers Union sample entailed kindergarten to twelfth grade teachers, including special education. Clinicians included counselors, social workers, physical and occupational therapists, and speech pathologists. Technicians, assistants, clerks, and secretarial staff made up the paraprofessionals group. Occupational interest profiles were formed from the mean RIASEC scores of all respondents within a given occupational group. As in previous studies of interest fit, occupational interest profiles for each individual were formed from the mean of all RIASEC scores except the individual's own so as not to inflate the subsequent evaluation of fit (e.g., Su, 2012). Following

occupation-specific interest profiles underlying our occupational groups from O*NET (Peterson, Mumford, Borman, Jeanneret, and Fleishman, 1999), we expected teachers, clinicians, and paraprofessionals to all be high on Social interest. Social interest was indeed highest in all of these groups and exhibited the smallest variability (i.e., S.D.) across individuals in the group.

Job Satisfaction and Employer Commitment Measures

To measure overall job satisfaction we developed, alongside Brayfield and Rothe's (1951) standard model, 14 scale items that captured the concerns and vernacular of union members. These items were reviewed and refined from feedback with union members and labor studies faculty before being administered. We also included 13 items about worker commitment to the employer. Respondents were then asked to evaluate their agreement with items (sample item: "Since starting my job, I have less time to do the job I was hired to do") using a seven-point scale (1 = "Strongly Disagree", 7 = "Strongly Agree") with a neutral midpoint (4 = "Neither Agree nor Disagree") about their job and employer.

Union Commitment and Participation

Scholars differ on the dimensionality of union participation. Some use a single factor (Anderson 1979) and others suggest multidimensional models (McShane, 1986; Monnot et al., 2011; Parks, Gallagher, and Fullagar 1995). Existing scales of general (McShane 1986) and militant union participation (Martin 1986) use a mix of Likert, dichotomous, and open-ended numeric items (e.g., "number of union meetings attended"). Instead of combining existing measures and items with mixed scaling, we reviewed the existing scales and again drew on the experience of labor studies faculty to inform the creation of a Likert-rated scale of overall union participation.

Nine items comprise our scale. Two items (marked with asterisks) were taken directly from Martin's (1986) Militancy scale. Our scale covers general participation in union activities and service along with militant actions, both legal and those involving acts of civil disobedience or illegal work stoppages. Respondents were asked to evaluate their agreement with four items (e.g., "I would never engage in violence during a strike"; reverse-coded) using a seven-point scale (1 = "Strongly Disagree", 7 = "Strongly Agree") with a neutral midpoint (4 = "Neither Agree nor Disagree") and their participation relative to other employees in their union with five items (e.g., "I help with union organizing efforts"), also using a seven-point scale (1 = "Extremely Below Average", 7 = "Extremely Above Average") with a neutral midpoint (4 = "An Average Amount").

Respondents were also asked to evaluate their agreement with 14 statements about their thoughts on their level of commitment to the CTU and eight statements focused more generically about organized labor. Once again a seven-point Likert Scale (1 = "Strongly Disagree", 7 = "Strongly Agree") was used to capture responses.

Findings

As expected, teachers, technicians and paraprofessional expressed a PW fit with the tasks they perform at school.¹

CTU members showed a pronounced interest in work activities that conformed to Investigative, Artistic, and Social interests. These acts featured close personal interactions or required creative acts of symbolic expression or fulfilled a social purpose. For example, on a seven point scale from 1 (lowest) to 7 (highest), tasks like “do volunteer work at a non-profit organization (6.0),” “help people with personal or emotional problems (5.79),” “give career guidance to people (5.78),” “teach children how to play sports (5.71),” “teach a high school class (5.71),” “help to “conduct a group therapy session (5.3),” “write books or plays (5.3),” “teach sign language to people with hearing disabilities (5.28),” “teach an exercise routine (5.25),” and “investigate the cause of a fire (4.7),” were on average among the most “liked” work activities.

On the other hand, tasks that were descriptive of Realistic, Enterprising, and Conventional interests were less well liked. These activities were more mechanical, required less interpersonal interaction and had more concrete observable outcomes. For instance “drive a truck to deliver packages to offices and homes (2.92),” “repair and install locks (2.99),” “set up and operate machines to make products (3.08),” “lay brick or tile (3.11),” “buy and sell stocks and bonds (3.12),” “load computer software into a large computer network (3.17),” “assemble electronic parts (3.28),” “stamp, sort, and distribute mail for an organization (3.35),” “repair household appliances (3.41),” “sell merchandise at a department store (3.56),” and “build kitchen cabinets (3.59)” were the most “disliked” activities.

Job Satisfaction

Not surprisingly, given the personal work-environment fit, on average, respondents reported being “enthusiastic” (5.47) about and finding “real enjoyment” (5.34) in their work, and disagreeing that their job was “unpleasant” (2.94). However, a majority of them also said that “since being hired” their employer had made their job “more stressful” (5.18). One contributor to that stress was a sense that teacher’s had less time to do their jobs. A majority agreed, “since starting my job, I have less time to do the job I was hired to do” (5.18). Added stress would partially explain why a majority also agreed that while they wanted to “keep doing this job” they were “unhappy with the changes that” the employer has implemented (5.23). As a result, less than half of the respondents were confident that they would “want to do this job for a long time” given the way that the job is “changing” (3.33). Despite experiencing unfavorable workplace changes, 68% of respondents reported being “satisfied” about their job (Table 1).

¹ A file of mean scores for all activities is available upon request.

**Table. 1 Options Which Best Describe How You Feel About Your Job
(1= Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strong Agree)**

Items	MEAN
I am enthusiastic about my work.	5.47
I feel fairly well satisfied with my present job.	4.84
Each day of work seems like it will never end.	3.56
I find real enjoyment in my work.	5.34
I consider my job rather unpleasant.	2.94
Since being hired, my employer has made my job more stressful.	5.18
Since starting my job, I have less time to do the job I was hired to do.	5.24
My employer demonstrates a lot of trust in me.	4.23
I do not feel that my employer shows a lot of respect for me.	4.16
My job allows and encourages me to be creative and innovative.	4.33
Since being hired, my employer had made it easier for me to do my job	2.91
I have become more fearful of maintaining my job.	4.81
Given the way that my job is changing, I am confident that I will want to do this job for a long time.	3.33
While I want to keep doing this job, I am unhappy with the changes that my employer has implemented.	5.23

Views on Employer

The negative views union members held about how the job was changing were mirrored by how union school personnel perceived their employer (Table 2). On every measure, which asked respondents to choose an option which best described how they felt about their employer, a majority of CTU members expressed dissatisfaction. For example, a majority of teachers did not feel a “strong sense of belonging to my employing organization” (4.41), nor did they feel “emotionally attached” to the employer (4.37). And while affection for the work remained high, less than half of participants agreed that as the employer, CPS had a “great deal of personal meaning for me” (3.59).

Table 2. Option Which Best Describes My Employing Organization
(1= Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strong Agree)

ITEM	MEAN
I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to my employing organization.	4.41
I do not feel "emotionally attached" to my employing organization.	4.37
My employing organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me.	3.59
I do not feel like "part of the family" at my employing organization.	4.50
I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this employer.	3.51
I enjoy discussing my employer with people outside it.	3.87
I really feel as if my employing organization's problems are my own.	3.45
I think I could easily become as attached to another employer as I am to this one.	4.95

Negative perceptions of the employer were strongly reinforced by participant responses to a set of questions that explored the alignment of the individual's values with the perceived values of the employer. On three measures ("The things that I value in life are very similar to the things that my employing organization values," "My personal values match my employing organization's values and culture," and "My employing organization's values and culture provide a good fit with the things that I value in life") a majority of workers disagreed with the statements. The mean score hovered around 3.0 (Table 3) and the overall employer commitment score was only 3.63.

Table 3. The Relationship Between Your Values and What You Perceive Your Employing

ITEM	MEAN
The things that I value in life are very similar to the things that my employing organization values.	3.00
My personal values match my employing organization's values and culture.	2.98
My employing organization's values and culture provide a good fit with the things that I value in life.	3.06

Views on CTU and Unions

Contrary to the negative attitudes workers expressed toward their employer, their feelings about their union and the labor movement were very positive. With only one exception, the average mean union commitment response was above 5.0 on every item (Table 4). On some statements, like “there's a lot to be gained by joining the union,” “deciding to join the union was a smart move on my part,” “based on what I know now, and what I believe I can expect in the future, I plan to be a member of the union for the rest of the time I work for this employer,” “the record of the union is a good example of what dedicated people can get done,” and “I feel a sense of pride in being a part of the union,” average responses fell between “agree” and “strongly agree.”

Table 4. Your Thoughts Toward CTU (1= Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strong Agree)	
ITEM	MEAN
I talk up the union to my friends as a great organization to belong to.	5.24
There's a lot to be gained by joining the union.	5.87
Deciding to join the union was a smart move on my part.	5.93
Based on what I know now, and what I believe I can expect in the future, I plan to be a member of the union for the rest of the time I work for this employer.	6.40
The record of the union is a good example of what dedicated people can get done.	5.81
I feel a sense of pride in being a part of the union.	5.85
I am willing to put in a great deal of time to make the union successful.	5.15
If asked, I would run for elected office in the union.	3.82
If asked, I would serve on a committee for the union.	4.64
Every member must be willing to take the time and risk of filing a grievance.	5.49
It is the duty of every member to keep his/her ears open for information that might be useful to the union.	5.65
It is every member's responsibility to see that the other members "live up to" the collective agreement.	5.02
It is every member's duty to support or help another worker use the grievance procedure.	5.58

A key indicator of union commitment is a member’s personal willingness to get involved in union activity. One of the most common complaints of union leaders is that too few members are willing to contribute volunteer time to strengthen the union. But more than half of CTU members are “willing to put in a great deal of time to make the union successful” (5.15). The overall mean union commitment score is a robust 5.51. CTU members also expressed extremely high generic pro-union attitudes (6.21, Table 5). When asked if “People would be just as well off if there were no unions in this country,” only 30 participants agreed with the statement compared with 715 who disagreed. Over

two-thirds (65%), “strongly disagreed.” CTU member strong pro-union feelings are contrary to studies that have suggested that professional or “white-collar” workers are less likely to attach to a union on the basis of ideology or general pro-union attitudes (Roberts et al. 1972; Strauss 1964; Tapia 2013).

ITEM	MEAN
Unions are a positive force in this country.	6.13
If I had to choose, I probably would not be a member of a labor union.	2.15
I am glad that labor unions exist.	6.40
People would be just as well off if there were no unions in this country.	1.65
Unions are an embarrassment to our society.	1.53
I am proud of the labor movement in this country.	6.03
Most people are better off without labor unions.	1.72
Employees are considerably better off when they belong to a labor union.	6.01

Union Participation

While commitment to the union was extremely high, did deteriorating working conditions for a job that fit well with teachers’ personal inventory correlate with high individual union participation? Estimates of union member participation from different occupational sectors have ranged from 2% to 45% (Fiorito, Padavic and DeOrtentiis 2015). Anecdotally union leaders claim that typically no more than 5% of members are “activist.” On 21 measures however respondents displayed an extensive degree of union involvement. Over six in ten (62%), “attended a union sponsored rally,” 84% “completed a union questionnaire,” 36% “participated in a union educational program,” 26% “performed volunteer work for the union,” and a quarter had “been a member of a local union committee.” Survey participants attended, on average, one-third of the union meetings and an extraordinary 89% “read the latest issue of the union newsletter/paper.”

A strong indicator of rank-and-file involvement is the turnout level in a contested union election. Contemporary research on the actual level of membership voting in union governance elections is very sparse. However, a 2005 case study found that turnout was only 28% (Martin and Sherman 2005) and anecdotally the average vote in union elections is typically well below 50%. In the spring of 2013 CTU held a union election in which the incumbent leadership was elected to a second term of office. Contrary to common

practice, actual membership turnout in the election was approximately 62% and an even larger proportion (85%) of study respondents “voted in [the] latest union election.”²

Contract ratification is another important form of union member participation. Similar to union elections, on average, only a minority of union members usually votes on their union contracts. However in 2012 CTU members waged a 7-day school strike. Interest in the contract’s content was very high and subsequently 90% of members voted on the deal. While somewhat below the actual turnout, a very robust 79% of survey respondents “voted in [the] latest contract ratification.” And union members’ proclivity to vote extended beyond the CTU officer contest and contract ratification. In 2015 the union endorsed a challenger to the incumbent Chicago mayor, Rahm Emanuel’s bid for re-election. Union member alignment with their union’s political endorsements has been the subject of extensive research (Bruno 2000; Delaney, Masters and Schwochau 1990; Patton and Marrone 1980). Consistently, rank-and-file support for the union endorsed candidate has been around 60% and as importantly, union leadership endorsements have increased union member support for candidates. Again, CTU respondents displayed very high levels of political alignment. Better than three-quarters (77%) of them, “voted in the latest civic election for the endorsed union candidate” (Table 6).³

² The 62% figure is based on a union membership of around 28,000 and the official union vote totals. A successor election was held in the spring of 2016, after the time period in which data for this study was collected. The leadership was re-elected by acclamation.

³ During the mayor’s race there were also city aldermanic seats in which CTU made endorsements.

Table 6. Participation in CTU	
ITEM	PERCENT YES
Been a delegate at a national union convention.	4.0%
Been a member of a local union committee.	24.5%
Been a candidate in a local union election.	8.6%
Been an elected official in the union.	6.4%
Held any other appointed union position.	9.1%
Attended a union sponsored rally.	62.1%
Participated in a union educational program.	35.5%
Completed a union questionnaire.	84.7%
Performed volunteer work for the union.	25.6%
Read the latest issue of the union newsletter/paper.	88.6%
Voted in the latest civic election for the endorsed union candidate.	76.7%
Voted in latest contract ratification.	79.2%
Voted in latest union election.	85.1%
Voted in latest strike vote.	81.4%
Walked a picket line to support my union, which was on strike.	81.6%

In addition to participation in routine union activities, respondents were asked about their involvement in more militant actions like casting a vote to strike, walking a picket line, or filling a grievance. Once again, participation levels were extremely high. More than eight out of ten “voted in [the] latest strike vote,” and “walked a picket line to support my union, which was on strike.” Another indicator of union support is the likelihood that a union member would cross a picket line. According to the surveyed members, 95% have never crossed a picket line. CTU member opinions about engaging in more risky forms of resistance drew a sharp line against violent behavior. Large majorities stated that they “would never engage in violence during a strike,” and that “picket line violence would not be justified, even if the [employer] uses outside employees to break a strike.”

However, the prohibition was against violence and not against breaking the law. When examining only the number of participants who chose either a “agree” or “disagree” response, CTU member willingness to act illegally in defense of a strike was high.⁴ Two-thirds (66%) of respondents said they “would be willing to participate in an act of nonviolent civil disobedience in support of fellow workers, even if it meant that I could be

⁴ We exclude the neutral “Neither Agree nor Disagree” option responses.

arrested.”⁵ But would members be willing to nonviolently break the law if the strike itself was illegal? Most “under no circumstances would ... support a work stoppage that was potentially illegal,” but one-third (33%) would act in defiance to the law (Table 7).

Table 7. Participation in More Militant Action (1= Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strong Agree)	
ITEM	MEAN
I would never engage in violence during a strike.	6.54
Picket line violence would not be justified, even if the organization uses outside employees to break a strike.	6.38
I would be willing to participate in an act of nonviolent civil disobedience in support of fellow workers, even if it meant that I could be arrested.	4.52
Under no circumstances would I support a work stoppage that was potentially illegal.	4.70

Discussion

Although this study cannot determine causation, there is a strong correspondence with high teacher PW fit, moderate job satisfaction, and high levels of union commitment and participation. Indeed, the Chicago Teachers Union represents skilled, well-educated individuals who want to work in the public schools and have a good personal fit with the activities demanded in a school environment. In short, they get significant intrinsic value out of the work that they do. But that feeling of working for a larger social purpose does not mean they are satisfied with their actual working conditions. In fact, school classroom employees and support staff has grown more dissatisfied with their work. Changes mandated by the Chicago Public Schools have widened an “aspirational gap” between a teacher’s desire to be in the classroom and the satisfaction that comes from the work.

The combination of a workforce that feels a strong affinity for teaching and growing disenchantment with changing workplace conditions has produced a powerful stimulant to union activism. Just as workers who labor as a way to earn a living in emotionally unfulfilling and badly mismatched jobs, CPS teachers and staff have seized on the power of unionization to raise a very militant opposition to the employer.

CTU members are not simply threatening an “exit” from their jobs or using their collective “voice” to make a personally poorly aligned job more tolerable. This report suggests that the workers’ psychological and occupational comfort with teaching and counseling is moderating, under deteriorating workplace conditions, a high level of union

⁵ Examples of nonviolent resistance include refusing to vacate a property or blocking a public egress.

loyalty and willingness to act in defense of their profession.⁶ In other words, teacher and staff “voice” has been elevated as a mechanism to protect the education profession.

While not measured here, rank-and-file union member militancy is likely also related to the effectiveness of past mobilizing efforts of the CTU leadership. Research has also demonstrated that union performance on contractual bread-and-butter issues and on “how the union handles its relations with its members were positive predictors of union commitment” (Fiorito et al. 1988; Jarley et al. 1990). Hence, members with positive exchange relationships with their union and positive evaluations of their work situation develop stronger relational ties to their union. But unsatisfying working conditions and strategic leadership actions alone is not sufficient to explain the robust levels of union commitment and participation revealed by union members. We suggest that the felt need to protect a job that is personally meaningful has inspired union members to become stronger, *active* union members. They are in effect using their union, not to preserve the best available job open to them, but to bridge the distance between the teaching profession’s aspiration and reality.

⁶ While our study is not longitudinal and does not measure actual changes in working conditions, public reporting, teacher surveys, numerous independent scholarship and the CTU have extensively chronicled public school teachers’ perceptions that the education profession has become more hostile to practitioners.

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