Relations industrielles
Industrial Relations

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Volume 48, Number 1, 1993

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/050832ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7202/050832ar

See table of contents

Publisher(s)

Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval

ISSN

0034-379X (print)
1703-8138 (digital)

Cite this article

Wells, D. (1993). Are Strong Unions Compatible with the New Model of Human Resource Management ? *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, *48*(1), 56–85. https://doi.org/10.7202/050832ar

Article abstract

It is widely argued that recent Human Resource Management (HRM) innovations are compatible with, indeed require, strong unions. This paper examines several cases which, it has been argued, illustrate the compatibility of strong unions and HRM reforms. The author concludes that, on the contrary, each case illustrates the incompatibility of HRM and strong unions and explains why this is so.

Are Strong Unions Compatible with the New Model of Human Resource Management?

Donald Wells

It is widely argued that recent Human Resource Management (HRM) innovations are compatible with, indeed require, strong unions. This paper examines several cases which, it has been argued, illustrate the compatibility of strong unions and HRM reforms. The author concludes that, on the contrary, each case illustrates the incompatibility of HRM and strong unions and explains why this is so.

In North America, corporate responses to increasing international competitiveness appear to centre less on wage concessions and technological change than on organizational change involving greater cooperation between workers and managers. Human resource management (HRM) reforms are intended to enhance managerial initiative by replacing rigidities in contractual relations between unions and management with more flexible and cooperative arrangements entailing greater commitment by employees to management goals. These reforms are often referred to as Team Concept, Employee Involvement, and most frequently, Quality of Working Life or QWL. More advanced innovations are frequently referred to as the Socio-Technical Systems (STS) approach. HRM changes include job expansion (job rotation, enlargement, and enrichment), skill enhancement (multi-skilling), worker participation in workplace decision-making, production based on self-organized, self-supervised work teams, rigorous screening of new hires, group problem-solving, gain-sharing and profit-sharing, improved communications between

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** The author is grateful to Ruth Frager and Carl Cuneo for advice and to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for funding.

workers and managers, more collaborative styles of supervision, and a wide range of mechanisms for ongoing consultation between labour and management over issues related to work.[1] In any particular workplace, only some of these changes may be implemented and they may be diffused through only part of the organization. However, HRM packages typically contain at least two kinds of reforms: greater functional flexibility in the allocation of labour (e.g. broader job definitions) and concerted attempts to develop employee understanding of, and allegiance to, management's productivity goals (for example, through management dissemination to workers of ongoing comparisons with the quality of competitors' products and services). These reforms entail a loosening of previous limits on the prerogatives of management, whether such rights are codified in collective agreements or established on the basis of an informal 'common law' of workplace practices.

Reminiscent of early exponents of scientific management, HRM advocates typically argue that these reforms can convert "win-lose" or "zero-sum" adversarial relations between labour and management into "mutual gains": while employers gain increased productivity, workers gain better, more secure jobs as well as 'industrial democracy' where they have a big role in decisions about work issues. In a recent study, Mansell claims STS's "explicit ideal" is the "most democratic workplace possible" (1987: 12). Built around "semi-autonomous" work teams with "responsibility for a natural, whole unit of work," STS gives the workers "considerable autonomy in planning, integrating, executing, and monitoring ... interdependent tasks within their work unit."

> As semi-autonomous groups mature, they also take on some of the support functions (e.g. maintenance, financial control, personnel, etc.) required for the functioning of their unit. Most workers... do not have separate job... classifications. Ideally, all workers in the group are multi-skilled and can perform all the tasks within the work unit. (Mansell 1987: 13)

Since HRM innovations are based on the unitarist assumption that there is no intrinsic conflict of interest between capital and labour, a deduction is that if unions are predicated on adversarial relations with management, they are therefore not compatible with HRM. This is contradicted, however, by evidence that HRM is widespread in unionized settings (Ichniowski 1989; Kumar 1991). Kumar (1991) argues that the increase in "'working together' union-management initiatives" in Canada means that Canadian employers "may not see the need for undermining the role of unions to achieve their goals." Nor, we are told, does this imply that "working together" applies where unions are, or become, weak.

1 For an assessment of differences between HRM and 'personnel management,' see Legge (1990) and Storey (1990).

While 'traditional' unionists contend HRM coopts workers and union leaders and undermines union autonomy and solidarity (Canadian Paperworkers Union 1990; Canadian Auto Workers 1989; Katz 1989; Parker and Slaughter 1988; Rinehart 1986; Wells 1987) many industrial relations specialists argue that effective HRM requires strong, independent unions. One argument is that by providing greater equality between labour and management, strong unions can keep "win-win" rewards coming to labour (e.g. Verma and McKersie 1987; Verma 1989; Beer and Spector 1985; Ephlin 1988). Another is that because more autonomous unions have the legitimacy and ability to voice worker concerns, they can "assure the permanency of participation" HRM requires (Lawler and Mohrman 1987). Kochan, Katz and McKersie conclude that major changes can take place "only in cases where unions are strong and relatively secure to begin with," and contend that firms without strong unions are "unlikely to develop or sustain this full form of worker participation" (1986: 176-7). Similarly, Kochan and Cutcher-Gershenfeld conclude that the most successful greenfield sites are not non-union but rather involve "workers and union leaders in early stages of the design and planning processes" (1989:37). Cohen-Rosenthal and Burton argue that strong unions are needed to make HRM work effectively.

> a program with both the union and management pulling equally [as in a rowboat] is a more effective program since it draws on the strengths and resources of both parties. It has a clearer sense of direction and usually can accomplish tasks quicker. (1987: 163)

In a recent study of HRM, Rankin advocates a "new paradigm" in which labour is a "resource to be developed" instead of a "commodity to be exploited" (1990:29-30). He claims that the union's role in managing relations among "individuals, teams, and the workplace as a whole" at a Shell chemical plant helps to explain the plant's high productivity. By making "collective issues visible," the union helps "maintain worker involvement in a 'high commitment' organization" (1990:154). Finally, Mansell also argues that strong, independent unions are necessary in the context of STS for "optimising workplace democracy," because

> workers who have no independent power base and no neutral means of due process (central to job security) are probably significantly inhibited with respect to the risk taking and openness required for optimal social support and on-going learning. ... a strong union may be necessary in order for workers to develop and articulate coherent collective positions on important organizational issues. (1987:13-14)

Thus, in contrast to those who would argue that HRM is only compatible with weak unions or the absence of unions, or that it exists where union avoidance is not an option, there is a large body of industrial relations opinion which asserts that strong, autonomous unions are not only compatible with these innovations but even necessary to their successful development. It is fortunate that one of these industrial relations specialists, Mansell, has also identified several firms which have implemented what she calls STS in unionized settings in Canada. These are Shell, Eldorado Resources, Inco Metals, Xerox, Dominion Stores and Willet Foods. They provide an excellent opportunity to answer the following question: Are strong, autonomous unions compatible with HRM innovations or are such reforms more consistent with either union avoidance or weak dependent unionism? As will be seen, the strength and autonomy of the union can be examined in those moments and in regard to those issues where there are conflicts over goals between the union and management. (Of course, only some goals entail union-management conflict.) Unions are deemed weaker and more dependent to the degree that they lack the ability successfully to pursue chosen objectives which contradict those of management.

Based on interviews with managers, workers and union leaders, as well as secondary sources, this essay assesses these examples cited by Mansell, with the exception of Inco Metals, where, apparently, STS was never introduced.

UNION AVOIDANCE AT SHELL AND ELDORADO RESOURCES

I would not want anybody to believe that this is an alternative to the adversary system.

— Cliff Pilkey, former President of the Ontario Federation of Labour (Quality of Work Life Centre 1980:4)

According to Mansell, the STS approaches used at the Shell chemical plant in Sarnia, Ontario and the Eldorado Resources uranium refinery in Port Hope, Ontario are examples of union compatibility with these reforms. However, it turns out that the union and the company abandoned one of them and that both were used as prototypes for non-union sites elsewhere.

Shell

I can't see how people can say that QWL weakens a union.

— National Representative, Energy and Chemical Workers Union (Quality of Work Life Centre 1984)

The Shell chemical plant in Sarnia, Ontario is widely deemed the stellar case of successful STS design in a union setting in Canada and the U.S. (Heckscher 1988; Newton 1986; Rankin 1990) A $200 million plant using continuous process technology to make isopropyl alcohol and polypropylene, it employs about 130 workers represented by the Energy and Chemical Workers Union (ECWU).

Before inviting the ECWU to participate, Shell drafted a *Plant Philosophy Statement* to "guide the design and ongoing operation" of the plant. Management felt that a major potential obstacle to success in the project was "the presence of a union in the neighboring refinery." While it may be true that Shell "never intended to seek a union-free plant," as the management consultant who helped to set up the project claims (Halpern 1984: 37), the ECWU's "strong legal position to insist on covering both plants," influenced this intention (Roberts 1990: 243).

After deciding the parameters, Shell asked the ECWU to help set up the plant. The ECWU members in the adjacent refinery, who were potential employees of the new plant, rejected the offer by a vote of 112 to 3. Nevertheless, ECWU leaders accepted after Shell agreed to voluntary union recognition and compulsory dues collection at the new plant — concessions oil companies normally reject "out of hand" (Roberts 1990:243). Shell then hired consultants to work out the design details. A manager who was union president at the refinery recalls that he had a passive role as union leader:

> I had no idea. It was completely new to me. I was learning as we were guided along by the consultant group. Really, I just sat in on the sessions. The consultant was steering us.

The main theme, he reports, was that both sides should "forget union and forget management and work together to solve problems." The union leaders helped the teams hire new recruits and helped set up "problem-solving groups" in the teams to deal with issues such as "absenteeism and poor performance rather than using the grievance procedure," he explains.

Prior to helping management hire the workers, ECWU leaders agreed to shorten the collective agreement (from 70 to 7 pages) according to "the principle of minimal critical specification" (Rankin 1990:106). "Flexibility based on trust" would replace "inflexible strict legal interpretation of carefully documented contractual relations,"(Rankin 1990:70) including the grievance procedure (Halpern 1984:51). Instead they agreed to a *Good Works Practices Handbook* of labour relations norms which could change by mutual agreement on a daily basis without having to wait for collective bargaining (Rankin 1990:83).

The basic production units in the plant are teams of 18-20 process operators and a separate team of skilled trades workers. Added to production tasks, process operators have responsibility for "assigning work, technical training, authorizing overtime, and scheduling vacations" (Rankin 1990:70). They do not have any specific job classifications and their wages vary depending on the number of jobs they learn ("pay for knowledge"). They are monitored by a labour-management Team Norm Review Board.

Before setting up the teams, management chose a supervisor, called a "coordinator," "facilitator," or a "resource person" for each team. Despite the change of title, this person "represents the interest of management in relation to the team" (Rankin 1990: 70), acting as "site manager" (Halpern 1982). Aided by senior managers, the coordinators recruited 108 of 2600 job applicants when the plant opened (Halpern 1984:54). Later, Shell exercised what Rankin calls its "formal power" by unilaterally adding a second coordinator to each team. Rankin states that exercise of such power is exceptional and that management's restraint in not exercising this power more frequently makes it more likely that union and management will "develop the shared values so crucial to handling adaptive issues" (1990:92-3).

However infrequent its use, Shell's "formal power" clearly contradicts any claim to a balance of power between Shell and the ECWU. Moreover, while he claims the ECWU stewards have a "major role in managing the boundary between the old and new paradigms," Rankin does not explain what this means (1990:139-40). The ex-union leader who assisted in setting up the program disagrees: "if the system is working [the steward] should have a very inactive role. He just becomes part of the problem-solving group on the team." And Rankin, himself, provides evidence for the withering away of the stewards' role by quoting Shell workers who had previously worked in union settings:

> The steward is not used as in other plants; people prefer to deal with issues on their own or through the team. In a traditional plant, if a member has a problem, the steward knows; here, he may or may not. (1990:138)

As Rankin notes, the program is "designed to allow and encourage individuals and teams to handle issues that in traditional plants would be handled by an official union spokesperson" (1990:139). With most worker grievances dealt with at the team level, in the ambit of the "coordinators," the stewards play little role as stewards. Among other functions, teams handle discipline problems, including the recommendation of disciplinary suspension (Schneider 1985:20).

As another measure of declining union strength, it is noteworthy that while member participation in the union was higher early on in the program, participation later diminished: contact between the union and the members takes place mainly within the teams (Mears 1986:24). From Rankin's own evidence it appears the teams have replaced the union. By the late 1980s, the chief steward reports, the project had "started to drift badly" and the union "felt it was on shaky ground, with no way to protect people." A strike threat led to Shell agreeing to make parts of the *Good Works Practices Handbook* and *Plant Philosophy Statement* arbitrable (Roberts 1990:245).

Rankin argues that Sarnia "suggests that unions can successfully adapt to at least the socio-technical version of new forms of work organization" (1990:149). Later, however, he cautions that "a single case is not sufficient to generalize the study findings," and notes the small workforce, its homogeneity in terms of language, age, education and ethnicity, and the bias involved in selecting the workers as limitations on one's ability to generalize from his findings (1990:152-3). He concludes the Shell workers may be "an elite group of workers who are not representative of the general population" (1990:153). [It has been argued more generally (Lowe and Oliver 1991:449) that more sophisticated HRM policies tend to occur where production processes require high levels of employee discretion.] To this persuasive argument I would add that the case is also exceptional because Shell has been able to avoid laying off permanent workers by subcontracting maintenance workers who are laid off after peak maintenance periods.

Finally, one other point is either ignored or minimized in the literature extolling the virtues of Shell-Sarnia as a model of advanced HRM practices in a union setting: managers used the labour relations model developed at Sarnia to create a *non-union* greenfield site, the Scotford Complex, near Edmonton, Alberta. (Hecksher, p. 140, notes that the new plant was "designed on the same principles" as Shell-Sarnia, but neglects to mention its non-union status.) The "Organizational Effectiveness Coordinator" there, who was a process operator at Sarnia, says the two programs are "basically the same" but that the "rate of progress in Edmonton is faster than at Sarnia" — and that the program works better without a union, contradicting Rankin's contention that the "enhanced organizational effectiveness" and "plant performance" of the same HRM model at Sarnia are perhaps related to the union's role (1990:154). Rankin cites a consultant's report which finds Scotford to be "more advanced from a socio-technical design perspective than Sarnia, yet the workforce is more than able to adjust" (1990:153) — despite the absence of a union.

Ironically, Rankin also argues that it is the union's vision at Shell-Sarnia that can make it more effective at organizing the unorganized.

> ... successful organizing drives will depend on the union's ability to define as central its formative role in enhancing the positive aspects of new forms of work organization as well as its traditional role of defending workers against incompetent or unjust management. (1990:150)

Yet the ECWU has tried to organize the Scotford complex several times and failed. The last time there was a union drive at the site, about three years ago, the ECWU judged that it was too weak to ask for a certification vote.

An organizer cites several reasons: the anti-union climate in the area, high wage rates relative to prevailing rates around the plant ("the best money they've made in their lives"), and a "fear of the boss" at a time of layoffs. Another reason is HRM. The organizer points to other examples of such HRM models in use in the oil industry in Alberta: "These programs are designed to stay union-free." He thinks that the control management has over the teams is important to understanding management's ability to keep the union out.

> Part of the psychology that builds up [in the teams] is that the individualism of the workers disappears. They make team decisions on things. So you may have a number of people who want the union [but] they feel the peer pressure against the union. ... What happened was the debate within the teams centred more on the logic of 'why do we need the union? Is there something wrong on our team?' These discussions would be made by team leaders or foremen. 'Is there some change we should provide to make the change the union would provide?'

He thinks the other key reason the union has been unable to organise the complex is that Shell has avoided laying off the process workers through a dual labour market policy in which the maintenance workers are subcontracted and laid off in periods of downturn in the industry.

Overall, Shell managers have learned more from the Sarnia project about keeping unions out than the ECWU has learned about getting unions into such plants. It was more circumstance than choice that led Shell to work with the ECWU at Sarnia, claims the Organizational Effectiveness Coordinator. The circumstances in Edmonton were different.

> The reason [Shell] had a union at Sarnia was because the refinery [next door] was already unionized, whereas here we were totally greenfield so there was no door open for the union.

Having developed the HRM model with the cooperation of the union at Sarnia, Shell is now using the same HRM model to replace the union. The Organizational Effectiveness Coordinator at the Edmonton plant explains Shell has "a system in place that allows the people to get their issues dealt with." The "communications representatives" in the plant "act like shop stewards." If the "CR" is unable to resolve a problem, it is taken to the "Scotford Employee Committee" consisting of representatives from each shift who meet monthly with management to deal with workplace issues. Recently, the Employee Committee disciplined a worker who was a "poor performer who didn't meet the standard requirements of the job." The Coordinator reports that "the individual is now gone from the organization" and that "his peers ... were instrumental in his leaving."

Thus, far from demonstrating the compatibility of these work reforms with strong unions, as Rankin, Mansell, and others claim, the Shell-Sarnia model is now a successful management strategy of union avoidance.

Eldorado

I think [QWL] makes us stronger, because we involve more people.

— former Vice-President, USWA Local at Eldorado, Port Hope (Quality of Work Life Centre 1984)

The Eldorado uranium refinery at Port Hope, Ontario, is a second case where what was supposedly a model of compatibility between unions and HRM has proven to be the opposite: Eldorado set up a "union free" uranium refinery at Blind River, Ontario, based on the same Port Hope model that Mansell considers "most impressive" because it was "implemented within the framework of an existing collective agreement" (1987:16). The Steelworkers (USWA), who represent the Port Hope workers, cooperated with management in setting up a model of HRM that was then used to avoid unionization. A USWA staff member calls this "the straw that broke the camel's back" in terms of the union's willingness to cooperate with Eldorado in these programs. Today, the program at Port Hope no longer exists.

The Port Hope workers were already organized into the USWA when Eldorado proposed setting up a new plant within the existing complex. Eldorado managers had visited Shell-Sarnia in search of a viable program. In the early 1980s the USWA helped Eldorado to set up a $110 million greenfield plant which became the core of the HRM innovations at the Port Hope complex.

A former local union executive board member recalls that the union "got into it because we didn't know a whole lot about it," but that "everything sounded good." Management got rid of the punch clocks (a practice often used as a token of management's trust in the workers which signifies the removal of an important symbolic difference between hourly and salaried workers and the transfer of supervisory functions to workers).[2] Workers were divided into teams and the supervisors became "coordinators," as at Shell-Sarnia. Instead of grievance meetings, management and union leaders held "liaison meetings." There was only one class of operator, and each was expected to learn several skills for which he or she would be paid. The program "created the highest wage class that we ever had," says the manager. While there was no job enrichment, there was "job enlargement and job rotation," "more job variety," and "to some degree, more responsibility in decision-making," another manager reports.

2 A manager of a non-union STS Canadian General Electric plant in Bromont, Québec, states that there "are no time clocks in the plant, but a worker knows that if he is late, he is letting his team down." Team members "are the first to take a shot at the latecomer." (Globe and Mail, 1985. *Report on Business Magazine*. Oct. 64.) It is typical in such programs that remaining team members do the job of the absent worker.

Initially, according to a local union leader, workers were enthusiastic about the program, but as economic conditions in the industry deteriorated, many grew increasingly frustrated. They complained that Eldorado did not keep its promise to provide training. A local union leader reports that while an extra team was set up so that workers could learn new jobs, they "ended up mopping floors and cleaning spills," and the crew was eventually discontinued by management. From management's point of view, the pay-for-knowledge system underlying the training was a failure. Workers did not learn all the expected skills, yet Eldorado paid the workers at rates based on their having acquired the skills.

Workers also complained that management did not abide by an unwritten promise not to punish workers unless they were proven guilty. According to a local union leader, this promise was made to reverse the traditional guilty-until-proven-innocent-grievance and arbitration procedure whereby management may fire or suspend workers without pay until an arbitrator finds in favour of the worker or until management agrees to rescind the penalty. "First suspension we had," the local leader recalls, "they suspended the guy without pay." Management's failure to live up to its promise was a reflection of the inability of the upper level managers to control front-line supervisors who "couldn't handle the concept of suspending somebody with pay," he contends. Most significantly, financial pressures caused Eldorado to "downsize" the Port Hope workforce. The workers then went out on a two-week "wildcat" strike, reports a manager. They criticized union leaders for having become involved in the program, says a former local leader who was himself criticized. "We used to go away to these QWL seminars and everybody thought we were having a big party," he explains. Another former local leader says the members "saw us sitting in with management all the time. They lost faith in the local leadership," and solidarity declined. "Back in '78 we were militant," he says. "Now you can't lead [the members] across the road." Because the union did not fight, "we became this passive human being."

At about the same time, Eldorado replaced the entire team of managers with new managers who terminated the program. Later, the Eldorado complex was taken over by new managers who "cut everything to the bone," says a former Eldorado manager. Out of an original workforce of about 600, there are now about 200.

However, Eldorado's Blind River program has had more staying power. The USWA worked closely with a management team to set up the new facility along the lines of the Port Hope model, on the assumption the USWA would represent the Blind River workers. It was a big surprise to them when the Blind River workers rejected union certification. A manager reports that this was not "a pre-planned thing," and that the workers thought Eldorado was "in bed with the Steelworkers.'' He thinks that one reason they rejected the USWA was because so many of them had lost jobs in unionized workplaces and had lost faith in the ability of unions to protect jobs.

> In the QWL system, they were protected. The needs of the employee were looked after, a type of protection that people liked better than the union. ... They felt the program in Blind River was a substitute for a union.

USWA leaders have additional explanations. While a manager who helped set up the Blind River facility claims he ''didn't hire with the intention to avoid pro-union workers,'' this is disputed. A USWA official contends ''Steel had a deal'' that Eldorado would hire unemployed workers from another USWA site but that very few were hired ''because they were union.'' A manager who hired the workers at Blind River says ''we made sure we wouldn't hire those who wouldn't fit with a QWL style.''

Although Blind River was modeled on the Port Hope facility, the absence of a union made the former more successful, says an Eldorado manager.

> We had a much better chance of setting up the QWL program at the Blind River plant because there was no union. ... This couldn't have worked with the union in the same way: I could not start going to employee groups. I'd have to go to the union.

To replace the union, management installed an Organization Design Team (ODT) made up of 20 to 25 hourly-rated workers, from each shift and various groups in the facility, ''who act like stewards'' by taking the concerns of the crews and departments to management and by processing grievances according to the company grievance procedure, says a Steelworker organizer who failed to organize Blind River. He argues that managers legitimate the ''ODT reps'' by initially demanding much harsher punishment than they actually want so that these representatives can succeed in the eyes of the workers by bargaining for lesser penalties. He argues that this is why many workers conclude there is no need for a union. A Blind River manager says the Organizational Design Team ''looked at job progressions, training issues, all the employee relations policies.'' The team canvassed employee attitudes and brought the findings to an Employee-Management Committee, although management ''always had the right to make final decisions.'' Eldorado did not forgo other management rights: half the Blind River workers have been laid off.

In sum, then, Eldorado proves not to have been an example of a ''win-win'' relationship. The Port Hope workers had to strike to rid themselves of the program and they rejected the union leaders who sponsored it for being too close to management. The company used the Port Hope program to avoid unionization at Blind River, showing that the union had helped Eldorado create an alternative to its own existence. Mansell's contention that this represents win-win labour-management collaboration cannot be supported.

WEAK UNIONISM AT XEROX, DOMINION STORES AND WILLET FOODS

Other cases Mansell cites of STS in unionized workplaces are Xerox, Dominion Stores, and Willet Foods. Because Dominion and Willet have been closely associated, they will be assessed as one example. In contrast to Mansell, all of these cases turn out to be examples not of strong unions but rather of weak unions, some of which verge on company unions.

Xerox

Xerox has three plants in Canada: a manufacturing plant, a distribution and refurbishing plant, and a distribution centre. Most of the workers in these facilities do semi-skilled assembly jobs and are represented by the ACTWU (Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union).

Xerox introduced Leadership Through Quality (LTQ) programs throughout its operations in 1983 while it conducted massive layoffs throughout the company to help "regain its competitive position" (Kochan, Katz, and McKersie 1986:15) All three plants in Canada have a flat organizational hierarchy with few management layers. Teams of 10-20 production workers meet weekly, sometimes daily, to talk about production issues. At monthly "Union-Management Forums," union leaders sit interspersed with plant managers to discuss production goals. The union representatives "offer thanks" and "give positive reinforcement" to the managers in order "to show them it's working," reports a local union leader. Managers and union leaders also have supper together every two or three months "just to rap" and enjoy a "morale-boosting evening," he says.

One of the most critical features of LTQ is the training the company provides. This training, which the union supports, is an attempt to shape the workers' attitudes to management as well as to provide job skills. Each worker gets four days' training in "interpersonal skills and quality principles and how you look at your job," a manager explains. Xerox also provides additional training to selected workers. At a three-day "Cost of Quality Program," workers learn about corporate investments in quality improvements. In other programs, workers learn statistical process control.[3] Some workers become "Quality Specialists," which entails learning not only statistical process control

[3] Workers use these methods to search out causes of production defects. For a concise introduction, see Mathews (1989: 81-2).

techniques but also how to "make sure the team is working in a disciplined fashion and following the [LTQ] model," says an industrial relations manager. Such a worker acts as a "process guide" or "meeting facilitator" at labour-management meetings so that the workers and managers are "interfacing effectively," he explains. According to a union official, the programs centre on "the concept of problem-solving and consensus" and inculcate "the attitude not to always be in an adversarial situation — that's the subtle message." The workers learn that "satisfaction of the customer is the number one goal."

The main goal of problem-solving, says a manager, is "cost reduction," and a union leader provides the following example: problem-solving helps workers "see how other work stations can speed up production." A manager says that Xerox has "never been able to say to any work group that as a result of your [problem-solving] work, you won't be made redundant."

ACTWU has a "special relation" to the company, explains a union representative. In the late 1940s, the founder of Xerox voluntarily recognized ACTWU in Canada and the U.S. because he wanted "cooperative and highly professional relationships between the union and the company." ACTWU was "voluntarily recognized on the basis of card checks or uncontested representations in each new facility" (Kochan, Katz, and Mower 1984: 14-15). One study terms the relationship between Xerox and the ACTWU at several plants in New York state "highly cooperative,"(Kochan, Katz, and McKersie 1986: 163) but neglects to mention that union cooperation came in the wake of Xerox's threat to invest in the U.S. South. Nor does the study mention that after developing this cooperative relationship Xerox enforced layoffs and contract concessions (Verma 1991: 48).

Added to this history are ongoing inducements for workers to remain cooperative. One is the suggestion program: "People have got quite a few thousand dollars for good ideas," says one union official. Part of the cost savings generated by the suggestions is returned to workers either individually or as a group. A more powerful inducement to cooperation is a system whereby each plant bids against other Xerox plants (and ACTWU locals) for jobs. As part of an attempt to use Japanese just-in-time principles, Xerox has cut back on outside suppliers. Workers in the various plants then compete with each other to do jobs that were previously done by outside suppliers, a company spokesperson explains.

It is in this context that the LTQ program helps workers in "meeting the competition head to head," as one union leader puts it. Management provides the union and the workers with a steady supply of information about the quality and reliability of the plant's competitors,[4] which becomes the basis of the bidding wars between ACTWU locals. Bidding is based on "quality, cost and delivery schedule," the union leader continues. "It's also [based] on labour relations. For example, whether we will work Saturdays to make delivery." It was on this basis that one of the Canadian plants recently succeeded in a bid for jobs against a "fair size" Xerox plant in Mexico. The union leader estimates that 30 to 40 jobs were saved at his plant. "The focus I take is ... to create jobs, the same as the plant manager." This can mean agreeing to lower wages. Another union leader explains:

> In the interest of containing costs, the company is looking for reasonableness in wage costs and as a result in more jobs. The wage schedule is set from 1 to 14 [wage rates] but if you're doing a re-manufacturing [repair] you can set the wage classifications for new projects.

In these instances, the union agrees to lower wages.

Competitive bidding for jobs can also be enhanced by using part-time workers. "It's a 'what if' cycle," says a union leader. "If they can sell more machines, they might need extra workers for a 3 or 4 week cycle." Recently, the union agreed to extend the duration that temporary workers could be hired from 5 to 10 months. This provides Xerox with more flexibility in its hiring practices and reinforces a dual labour market inside each plant: jobs of fulltime workers are protected by a buffer of temporary workers. This helps to reduce the conflict inherent in workers making labour-saving suggestions that can undermine their own job security. The union leader illustrates this advantage by noting that at one point Xerox laid off 43 temporary workers but since they were not fulltime workers "nobody got hurt."

Whereas fulltime workers average more than $15 an hour plus fringe benefits, temporary workers average $10 an hour with no benefits. Union leaders above the local level worked out "all the details" in an "under-the-table dialogue" with management, reports a union official. After this arrangement had been made, the local union executive board was approached, and later the members. "A lot of times you calm the waters ... then you go to the members," says the union official. The union got "something good for the fulltime members. The temporary workers don't have [full contract] rights. The union made a deal for the benefit of the [fulltime] membership."

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4 "Information is shared with workers when we're talking about competitiveness," reports a senior Xerox executive. Xerox also compiles information comparing productivity with the operations of non-competitors. For example, detailed comparisons were made between Xerox warehouses and distribution at L.L. Bean in Maine. These data were used to set performance targets for warehouses at Xerox. The procedure is called "competitive benchmarking." See R. Hayes *et al.* (1988: 156-60).

Until recently, ACTWU has been only indirectly involved in hiring at the Canadian plants. A union leader at one plant says he advises management to "hire the appropriate person, and if you want to do a cut, do it in the first ninety days" (i.e. during the probationary period). Soon, however, ACTWU will be taking a more active role in the hiring at one plant which is expected to expand its workforce at a considerable rate. A union official (who will likely serve on the union-management hiring committee) supports Xerox's need to "hire people who are okay attitude-wise."

> You don't need some biker macho guy. They want people who will be hard-working and fair and fit into the mould. This will be better for me as a union rep. I don't want to deal with people who don't care about their jobs.

This same union representative feels management has often been too lax in discipline cases.

> They've brought back people from firing that they shouldn't have. You find out that this guy should have been turfed months ago. [Speaking to management:] Why didn't you fire him? Sometimes people take this [not firing the worker] as a weakness.

Similarly, a local union leader complains that "certain classes of people, the way they were brought up, they expect the union to do something" when they have a grievance. Usually he does not take a "strict interpretation" of the contract. (Xerox contracts with the ACTWU in Canada are only about 15 pages long, so there is not much contract language to be strict about in the first place.)

> I don't want to play a hardball game. I would let union infractions [i.e. infractions of the collective agreement] go without pursuing it. Because [management] could come back to you. If you piss someone off, they'll do it to you.

He feels his compliant attitude to managemet is in the members' interest: "If you're a real hardnoser, they will play hardnose too. The members will lose."

According to the Employee Relations Manager, Xerox does not favour a "legalistic approach." Thus, the first two steps in the grievance procedure are "informal dialogues" between workers and supervisors. Union representation during these dialogues is "optional." A union leader says that "more of the problems come from the shop floor" than from management because "people forget the process. They forget to dialogue." He feels "hated" by the members "who seem to be ungrateful."

In one case, union members complained that management gave preferred jobs to younger workers with less seniority. The union leader "dialogued" with the supervisor and learned that "younger workers [were] willing to move and older workers [were] more set in their ways." He explained this to the older workers but they were "downright pissed off" and began a slowdown. He threatened them with "corrective action," and said he would "make a judgment that [was] right no matter if it [was] in the union's favour or management's favour." He sees himself as a "go-between between management and the workers" and says he is "working with both sides." An ACTWU business agent feels that servicing Xerox is "a breath of fresh air" because there is less need to explain to the workers that "this is what the company's doing and here's why."

All the evidence from these Xerox plants suggests that the union has become, in many respects, an extension of the personnel department. This is not explained by any big improvement in the nature of the jobs at these plants: most are manual, low skilled, assembly jobs that one union leader terms "boring and repetitive work." He says that "besides the added responsibility," the LTQ program is "not an improvement." Contrary to Mansell's notion of "semi-autonomous work teams" doing "natural, whole units of work" under the protection of a "strong union," ACTWU's collaboration with Xerox has more to do with the fears of unskilled workers in a weak labour market who are represented by a weak union. Xerox has been able to gain union support for attitudinal restructuring that begins with training, develops through cost-cutting problem-solving, and is reinforced by a system that allies the workers, the local union, and plant management in a competition for jobs against workers, union and management in other Xerox plants. The alliance is reinforced, as well, by the way non-union temporaries are made to bear the job losses due to cost-cutting. Finally, it is reinforced by the career ladders of local union leaders, many of whom end up with low-level management jobs.

While it is true, as the Employee Relations Manager states, that Xerox's relation to the union is "more of a partnership," it is an unequal partnership with Xerox having "ultimate executive authority" (Cooke 1990: 146). ACTWU's business agent admits these HRM innovations do not require a union: "It looks as if the union is instrumental in getting the [LTQ] program. It's [management's] brainchild but the union has to agree to it."

Once again, Mansell's claim that such reforms are compatible with strong unions is not sustained by a case she herself cites.

Dominion Stores and Willet Foods

The following section assesses the nature of unionism at five sites where Dominion Stores and Willet Foods introduced HRM innovations in the late 1970s and the 1980s. Since these sites are characterized by differences with respect to location, union, and employer, as well as whether or not they are greenfield sites or brownfield sites, Table 1 provides a summary.

TABLE 1

HMR Programs at Dominion Stores and Willet Foods

Location	*Type of Facility*	*Union*	*Employer*
Winnipeg	warehouse (greenfield)	UFCW	Dominion
Ottawa	warehouse (greenfield)	RWDSU	Willet
Kitchener	warehouse (greenfield)	RWDSU	Willet
Sarnia	store (brownfield)	USWA	Dominion
Windsor	store (brownfield)	USWA	Dominion

Two, in Windsor and Sarnia, Ontario, are retail stores that were in existence before the HRM programs were introduced, i.e. "brownfield" sites. Two other sites, at Winnipeg and Ottawa, are "greenfield" warehouses that management created specifically for the HRM programs. The final site, a Kitchener warehouse, is considered a "partial greenfield" site. Three sites (the two stores and a warehouse) were initiated by Dominion Stores. The other two warehouses were set up by Willet Foods, a firm that had close links with Dominion Stores. All five sites were unionized: the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) represented the Winnipeg warehouse, the United Steelworkers (USWA) represented the stores, and the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU) represented the Ottawa and Kitchener warehouses.

The HRM programs at the three warehouses were variations of the same model. The Winnipeg warehouse was set up first, the Ottawa warehouse was modeled on Winnipeg, and Kitchener was then modeled on the Ottawa facility. HRM at these warehouses stemmed from Dominion's original concern about poor labour-management relations at its West Mall operations in Toronto in the 1970's. Managers identified the following key causes of low productivity: high absenteeism rates, numerous union grievances, resistance in the form of walkouts, sitdowns and work-to-rule, a high incidence of employee drug abuse, and arson. Bad labour relations at the West Mall culminated in a major strike in 1978.

It was in this context that Dominion assigned four managers to set up an HRM pilot project. After extensive "brainstorming" with a consultant, the managers designed the program, including pay scales, job descriptions, recruitment procedures and layout of the warehouse. They then picked "the union that would be best for us," one explained. Although they preferred not to work with a union, this was not "a reality:" since all the other Dominion facilities were unionized, the union would be able to "blackmail us into it" (i.e. compel Dominion to grant the union bargaining rights over the warehouse workers by making it a bargaining issue in the unionized locations), one manager notes.

Dominion approached the UFCW in Winnipeg, where the union was considered "very cooperative." While a senior UFCW leader observes that labour-management relations at the Dominion stores in Winnipeg were only "average," there was a "relatively good relationship at the higher levels" of management and union. UFCW leaders gained union representation rights for the new warehouse before the workers had been hired. When the UFCW "got caught up in the enthusiasm," a senior UFCW leader "came on board," says one of the managers. He was "open-minded. We used him. He became part of the team," and took a two-week, live-in HRM course with the management team at a luxurious hotel.

Since the parameters of the program had been designed by the managers before they approached the UFCW, the main role the union played was "at the final end," in "all the wrap-ups," including the "voluntary" collective agreement, recalls a manager. A UFCW leader says the agreement was negotiated in "about 8 hours" and was 15 pages in length "at most." Management reports that "the contract only covered pay and shift premiums." Parts of it were "very vague," a union leader says. Seniority applied only to layoffs, not to vacation times or job assignments. Anything not dealt with in the agreement was worked out between workers and managers. These deals were then written down in a *Book of Norms*, a document one worker referred to as "our second Bible." The *Book of Norms* gave management great flexibility in changing the labour process without waiting for the next collective agreement. (As noted earlier, a similar document at Shell-Sarnia provided management with similar flexibility.)

One of the main roles the UFCW leader played on the management team was to help recruit the workforce. Considering the low-skilled, repetitive, manual nature of the jobs, it was a very selective recruitment process. Several hundred applied for the 30 jobs. Recruitment consisted of two tests, then two interviews, followed by a final decision by a committee of union officials and managers. The UFCW was directly involved in all aspects of this process.

The first test, the "FIRO-B Test," was the same test used by fire departments to recruit firefighters and by the U.S. Navy to select submarine crews because "people had to work and live in close proximity," says a manager. A second test, which involved applicants describing their personal traits, was previously given to applicants for managerial positions. A manager says that the goal was to exclude "rebels." The ideal "profile" was a "non-aggressive kind of guy, but not passive, who liked to work with others." A UFCW official says the goal was to "weed out people who would cause aggravation." A worker who went through this hiring process says the goal was "to find out: Do you take direction well?"

Managers provided the new hires with two weeks' training and told them "a lot about productivity costs," says a manager. To help them cooperate with each other and their supervisors, they also learned "negotiating skills." They learned that "the key element" of the HRM program was that "everything is negotiable." As in the previous case studies, the union did not play an active role in this training and orientation.

Management divided the workers into teams. The supervisors told the teams what jobs had to be done and the teams assigned the jobs to the team members. When Dominion discovered that some workers dominated the teams, managers intervened to "change the rules." Job rotation for all team members was made easier by the absence of job classifications, a condition the union agreed to before the warehouse opened. Each worker took 3 months to learn each of 4 job "modules" and received 50 cents more an hour for each module learned.

Team members frequently met their supervisors in a Team Committee to discuss work issues. Decisions of Team Committees could be overruled by a Steering Committee consisting of equal numbers of more senior union leaders and managers. Also above the Team Committees was a Union-Management Committee consisting of union stewards and several managers. Meetings of the Union-Management Committee took place monthly or quarterly and managers "would tell us the productivity numbers," a former steward says. There were also periodic meetings between the provincial union director, together with some union business agents, and the Vice President of Dominion Stores. "Like, we met every six months," a union official recalls, "to have a drink and shoot the breeze and if anybody had any ideas to make it better."

This was not the full extent of the union's role in the HRM program. "We involved the union in all the discipline cases," a Dominion manager says. "If they wanted to take a run at the guy before we did, we told them 'go ahead!'" As a result, "we never had a grievance because the union was involved in discipline all the way." A former steward at the Winnipeg warehouse explains:

> If a worker didn't fit in, and if the union and company combined could not get this individual to do his job, the union would be very supportive of going through some type of disciplinary action. Say [there is] an incident where a guy is constantly late. The union would say: 'You've been late. We're not even going to support you.' I wouldn't have to go through a lot of problems in getting rid of an individual because the union realized this individual was bringing down the team and the team was the most important thing.

The teams also took part in disciplining their members. A manager reports that "if a worker was not pulling his share of the workload, it was the responsibility of the team to find out why they weren't doing what was expected." This meant that the team or representatives of the team would speak to the worker. A manager:

> There was tension by workers against workers who were not pulling their own weight. Peer pressure in the group was very important. [Team members] are tougher on [fellow workers] than management is.

In one case a worker "had a heart attack and got easier work. The team got disgruntled because he got easier work," recalled the manager.

The team was the first stage in the disciplinary process and the union served as a back-up. As a result, reports a steward, "there was very little discipline that had to take place by management because most of it had already been done by their peers." In the four years the program was in existence in the warehouse, the union did not file a single grievance.

This kind of unionism helped Dominion solve its productivity problem. Success inspired emulation: a second warehouse, modeled on the same HRM program was set up in Ottawa. This project was a Willet warehouse which supplied Dominion Stores. The consultant who "brainstormed" with Dominion managers to set up the Winnipeg site was put in charge. As at Winnipeg, management designed the program before approaching the union. As at Winnipeg, the union agreed to a contract on money issues which was only a few pages long and "didn't really say anything," a manager reports. Most labour-management issues were dealt with in the *Book of Norms*.

A union official helped implement the program. According to a manager, the official "really felt a part of it. He started to live it and believe it." He "would have made a good manager. He didn't have that streak in him that said management was wrong and workers were right." The official says he selected recruits who "could work with others well, who could work without supervision, and take the initiative in doing it." A manager says he wanted workers who would be "followers," rather than "aggressive types who wanted to be leaders all the time." For warehouse jobs, "yout want people who can handle repetition, not rocket scientists."

Workers took a "much harder approach" to discipline than did management. "They'd say 'fire him!'" says a manager. The union official who helped set up the Ottawa program, reports that it turned into "team pressure."

> The [team] coordinator would say 'you guys in Team A are not up to par this week and I'd hate to lose this programme [as a result].' So the guys would bust their butts. Then they would meet other workers [from other teams] and [the other workers] would say 'we were told the same thing.' [The coordinators] would be putting one team against the other.

Managers also used the *Book of Norms* to pressure the workers into doing more work, he explains. For example, according to the *Book of Norms*, workers were entitled to leave for bereavement and occasions such as marriages and births. However, since there was no language about replacing the worker on leave, "the rest of the team would have to do his work." As economic pressures mounted, managers also backtracked in areas such as job rotation: they found it more productive to keep workers on one job, he reports.

In the early 1980s, managers set up a third warehouse in Kitchener, Ontario, modeled directly on the Ottawa HRM program. Initially, the relationship between management and the union was "like a husband and wife situation," says a worker. The contract was about ten pages long. There were no punch clocks and workers had unlimited sick days. However, seniority rights were limited. The union helped design the lunchroom and shift schedules, and it also helped select a "young, agile workforce" that was the "cream of the crop," says a union official. About 1000 applied for 30 jobs and many were "less pro-union" when they were first hired, a worker reports. This same worker, who was a union steward at the time, remembers arguing with a union official.

> 'Why does the union have to negotiate a Christmas bonus for us?' It seemed so ridiculous. We [the workers] were pro-company. Every time the union interfered, like the bonus, I would say 'Don't bother us.'

Later, however, both the union and workers complained that managers made too many unilateral decisions. They circumvented the Union-Management Committee, decided that only some jobs would be rotated, and allocated shifts and vacations without reference to seniority. In 1987 there was a strike over "who decides," a worker reports, and after that the relationship between Willet's and the workers changed. Workers "realized after that that there was a wall," says a worker. The *Book of Norms* was discontinued. RWDSU leaders "did not see where the union and employees should discipline other employees," says a manager, and by this time, management "was at war with RWDSU all the time," says another. Dominion tried unsuccessfully to decertify the union and then reverted to more standard labour relations practices. Although there is still some job rotation, and the union stewards belong to the Union-Management Committee, little is left of the original HRM program. Since getting rid of it, "we haven't had anybody asking RWDSU to bring QWL back," says a union leader.

For a variety of reasons, including corporate and market instability, the HRM programs exist at none of the three sites today. The program at the Winnipeg warehouse lasted about 4 years and the duration of HRM at the other two warehouses was even shorter. Managers shut down two of the sites unilaterally.

Managers who set up these HRM programs say they would have worked better without a union. "At Winnipeg we probably would have made it better without a union,'' says one. ''If everything was peachy keen, why the hell would you need a union?'' He argues that unions ''create trouble'' so that they can have a role. ''It's virtually impossible to have a QWL site that has been long-term union and have QWL.'' Another manager states that if HRM ''works well, you don't need a union.'' Even in contract bargaining, the necessity of the union was not clear. At Winnipeg, a manager reports, the union made a wage demand that was too *low*.

> Management came back with an offer that was more than the union had asked for. When we did that, the union didn't know how to react ... The union didn't know how to face the membership because they hadn't done a damn thing to get the money.

In none of these cases was the union strong. In all three, the union performed management functions. Thus, none of these cases supports Mansell's view that such programs are compatible with strong unions.

Dominion also introduced HRM at two stores in Sarnia and Windsor, Ontario, organized by the Steelworkers. The reason, says a manager, is that ''sales were down.'' According to the union official who worked with Dominion management set up the program, the union and the workers became ''fully engaged in quality teams'' at both stores. However, only ''a few months after the program began,'' he reports, management

> trimmed out all the positions that through the brainstorming process had been identified as needing reorganization. In other words, the 'cooperative' work that we had done at the middle level and at the local level in the shops had the result of identifying targets. [Managers] used the information which had been given to them, generated in trust from our members. (Martin 1991)

Dominion laid off the workers and closed both of the stores soon afterwards.

CONCLUSION

It is impossible, of course, to generate definitive conclusions about the links betwen union strength and HRM from case studies of this kind. Research in this area is not yet so advanced that we can know how representative such cases are of the broader universe of unions and HRM innovations. Although the case studies here are more substantial than many where definitive conclusions have been asserted, each of these case studies merits study in greater depth. Nevertheless, these cases should serve as a warning to those who have been eager to recommend such HRM innovations to the labour movement. It is remarkable that it is precisely the cases used in Mansell's study to support the thesis that such programs are compatible with strong unions which, it turns out, support exactly the opposite thesis. Management at Inco, one of the firms Mansell cites, denies having instituted such reforms. Shell and Eldorado turned out to be examples of union-avoidance. Most of the cases did not survive beyond a few years. In the cases where unions reverted to an adversarial role in defense of their members, HRM reforms were discontinued. And, in some instances, management support for the reforms may have weakened in the absence of anticipated productivity improvements, as others too have concluded (Katz et al. 1987; Kelley and Harrison 1991). These programs continue at only two firms. One is a Shell plant where the vulnerability of the labour process gives the workers an extraordinary degree of control. Management has also been able to afford a level of job security for most workers that is extraordinary. Aside from this highly unusual case, the only other instance of continuing union-management cooperation in the context of HRM practices is Xerox. There the union verges on company unionism.

In summary, the empirical evidence leads to precisely the opposite conclusion that Mansell's study would have us make. These findings are all the more startling because of the biases in favour of reporting positive examples. Research in this area is often written by those, such as management consultants who set up these programs, who have a vested interest in disseminating favourable results. One analyst notes that "successful experiences tend to find their way into the literature. While failures may be instructive, too, they tend not to be documented with the same enthusiasm" (Newton 1986: 79). When it is realized that 'successful experiences,' such as those cited by Mansell, are chosen from among a very large number of potential choices, one may surmise that failures must be numerous indeed.

In addition to the evidence provided in the foregoing, the compatibility of strong unionism with HRM can also be assessed in terms of the logic of the key assumption on which the case for compatibility is built, namely that there is no inherent conflict at work between labour and capital. This assumption is merely postulated. It lies at the core of the argument that labour and management have the same interest in productivity and that a new 'paradigm' of more cooperative labour-management relations can be developed around management's goal of competitiveness. No doubt workers have an interest in the competitiveness of the firms for which they work but they also have interests that are not those of management in areas such as wage and benefit levels, duration and intensity of work, and the degree to which they control the labour process. As we have seen, in cases such as Xerox, where wage reductions are the price of competitiveness and job security, and where workers are expected to discipline each other for failure to meet production standards, HRM innovations resulted in "win-win" solutions, the costs of which were borne almost entirely by the workers. Even then, the solutions were beneficial only to some workers, i.e. those whose job bids were successful in the context of competitive bidding between plants and union locals. Many temporary workers also do not benefit from these solutions because they remain a cheap and expendable peripheral workforce with the consent of the union.

Nor do these case studies support the contention that such reforms can help to eliminate the basis of the conflict between labour and management by providing workers with fundamental, as opposed to marginal, improvements in their jobs. There is no evidence that job dissatisfaction does not endure, and this is the case in even the most advanced forms of work restructuring. Consider the case of the Volvo plant at Kalmar, Sweden, which exemplifies one of the most ambitious attempts ever undertaken to overcome job dissatisfaction in a manufacturing setting. Surveys conclude that a majority of the Kalmar workers do, indeed, rate their jobs highly, yet at the same time most feel that their jobs leave them with too little control over their work and not enough opportunity for personal growth (Parker and Slaughter 1988: 13). Even in this case, where reforms have delivered significant job improvements, a widespread sense of job dissatisfaction reflects enduring conflict between labour and management.

More fundamentally, under HRM programs the power hierarchy between labour and management in the workplace (not to mention in society, polity and economy more generally) remains. True, some of the trappings of hierarchy have been discarded: there are now "coordinators" instead of supervisors, punch clocks have been set aside in favour of peer pressure, and there is an air of equality in workers and managers using the same dining rooms, toilets and parking spaces. However, none of the cases of HRM assessed here led to any real democratization of the workplace in the sense of any genuine gain in worker or union power. Worker participation in each case reinforced management power. At least for some of the advocates of HRM, no secret is made of this. Consider the highly regarded book, *The Critical Path to Corporate Renewal.* Under the subheading "Loss of Discipline," Beer *et al.* write:

> When managers become so focussed on throwing out the 'old' ways of managing, they can confuse participation with democracy and self-management with laissez-faire management. They forget that the critical path calls for a balance between top-down authority and bottom-up autonomy. They simply lose sight of their essential role in setting clear direction, defining the task, and holding individuals and teams accountable for results. (1990: 97)

"Consensus decision-making" and "dialoguing" are about the compromises workers make with managers regarding their interests in job security, job descriptions, disciplinary regulations, the hours of work, hiring practices, safety issues, training, etc. On the other hand, issues which more directly affect employer prerogatives such as managers' salary levels and bonuses, shareholders' dividend payments, overall profit levels, investment strategies, etc. are excluded from the "dialogue."

HRM is not about increasing workers' power and union power but about decreasing it in the name of the very competitiveness that is supposed to define the common goal motivating labour-management cooperation. Market forces which condition concerns about competitiveness reinforce management power and diminish workers' power in the workplace by increasing the workers' fear of management power. This is because competitiveness is also about the options that firms have to relocate jobs to areas where labour is cheaper, work more intensive (Tomaney 1990), worker rights not enforced or legislated, etc. There is an irony, then, at the core of the argument about this supposed compatibility of strong unions and HRM: it is being made when the power imbalance between labour and capital in both Canada and the U.S. is greater than any time since the 1930s.

Fundamental conflicts of class interest remain. The major difference is that unions are much weaker, a point made by Cooke. Based on extensive research, he concludes that "in the majority of cases, unions have little choice but to cooperate, because even traditional adversarial relations of the past are no longer available to them" (1990: 154).

Despite the greater power of the labour movement in Canada relative to unions in the U.S., especially as reflected in diverging union densities, the subordination of labour to management is becoming greater on both sides of the border. The case studies of HRM discussed here suggest that the subordination of labour is reinforced, especially where unions have helped firms to set up greenfield sites. Weak unions and the absence of unions are compatible with HRM. Where such workplaces are unionised, it is not clear what independent role there is for the union to play. As these case studies indicate, in cases where HRM has been implemented in a unionised workplace, managers can use HRM to reinforce union weakness by expanding collaboration between managers and workers in ways that are not mediated by unions. The overall means is to substitute a form of group pluralism for union solidarity. The dangers to union strength include:

1) The substitution of management-controlled teams for the formal and informal solidarity of groups and networks of workers across the workplace.
2) The substitution of management-trained team coordinators for union stewards and informal leaders (Herzenberg et al. 1988).
3) The substitution of formal and informal conflict resolution mechanisms for the grievance and arbitration procedure found in the collective agreement, thus displacing the union's grievance function.

4) The establishment of lines of communication between management and workers (e.g. team meetings, information sessions on company performance relative to competitors, etc.) that circumvent union communication channels.
5) A policy of paying wage and fringe benefits that are equal to or better than those in comparable workplaces, thus undermining the union's wage-bargaining role.
6) Individual and group reward systems (e.g. pay for suggestions) that undercut the union's emphasis on collective bargaining for collective rewards.
7) The cooptation of union leaders onto joint labour-management committees, etc. which take union leaders away from day-to-day communication with, and mobilization of, their members. There is a danger that union members will see union leaders as a part of management and that unions will lose their legitimacy in the eyes of union members.
8) The division of workers into core and peripheral workforces (as in Japan) where the job security and multiple skills of the core workers depend on the job insecurity, low pay and lack of skills of part-time and temporary workers.[5]
9) An ideology of competitiveness pitting "our" firm or workplace against competing "teams" of managers and workers soon becomes an ideology of cooperation between labour and management within the same workplace or firm which, because the cooperation is based on the subordination of workers' particular interests to those of management (now defined as "our" collective interest), leaves the union with little or no role that would justify dues payment by union members.

The challenge for workers and unions in this situation is to create options that go beyond either of the two alternatives: the collaborationist HRM alternative or a return to militancy on the basis of the Taylorism and job control on which modern industrial unionism has been built. Both Taylorism and HRM are strategies of management control that have, in the main, been imposed my management; accepting either of these alternatives is to forgo creating a labour strategy. A third direction is to enhance worker control over the labour process through building more autonomous organizations, both formal and informal, in the workplace to contest control over the changing labour process. Although a detailed discussion of this direction is beyond the purpose of this paper, it would require a challenge to the management's rights clause in areas such as

[5] Verma notes that HRM "does not necessarily imply lifetime employment or contractual guarantees against layoffs." Instead, HRM may enhance the job security of "certain groups of workers (say, those with more than 'x' years of seniority). Workers can also be assured that the company will reduce subcontracting before any layoffs occur" (1991:11-12). That is, job security in the context of HRM implies a multi-tiered workforce.

the design and implementation of new technology, the design of the workplace, the skill content of jobs, training, the planning of production, etc. — in other words, it would centre on a labour strategy to fulfill the promises of the HRM reforms we have been discussing. The trick is to encroach on management's rights without at the same time undermining union autonomy and strength by identifying the employer's profitability as the overriding union goal. At a time when such collaboration with management's goals through HRM reforms is becoming a precondition for even the most minimal job security, this means treading a very fine line. In some cases, unions may be strong enough to oppose HRM through a more or less traditional adversarial bargaining relationship. In other cases, however, unions may be able to participate in labour-management committees if union members are mobilized so that the collective objectives of the union remain clear and so that representatives on the labour-management committees are accountable to their own worker constituencies (Banks and Metzgar 1989). It is becoming increasingly clear that either of these union strategies requires a much stronger set of linkages between locals of the same union and between unions in the same industry, including transnational linkages, if it is to be at all effective against whipsawing and disinvestment. A stronger unionism will need to be more deeply embedded in the lives of union members in the workplace and more broadly coordinated across space: an organizational analogue to HRM in the modern, often multinational, firm.

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Les syndicats forts sont-ils compatibles avec les nouveaux modèles de gestion des ressources humaines ?

Les tenants des nouvelles approches de gestion des ressources humaines telles les concepts d'équipe, l'implication des employés, la qualité de vie au travail et les

systèmes socio-techniques prétendent souvent que ces innovations vont de pair, voire exigent, la présence d'un syndicat fort. L'ouvrage de Mansell, intitulé *Workplace Innovations in Canada,* identifie un certain nombre d'entreprises, dont Shell, Eldorado Resources, Xerox, Dominion Stores et Willet Foods, où ces approches ont été considérées comme étant compatibles avec la présence d'un syndicat fort. À partir surtout d'entrevues effectuées auprès de dirigeants syndicaux et patronaux, cette étude a été réalisée dans dix de ces entreprises afin de vérifier cette compatibilité.

L'étude révèle que ce sont précisément les cas présentés comme des illustrations de compatibilité entre syndicats forts et innovations de gestion qui ont démontré une incompatibilité. Ainsi, dans deux des dix cas, les modèles de gestion des ressources humaines implantés ont par la suite servi ailleurs comme stratégie d'évitement du syndicat. Dans tous les établissements où les syndicats sont devenus plus militants, la direction a suspendu l'application des mesures de gestion et, actuellement, ces innovations de gestion ne sont présentes que dans deux des dix entreprises étudiées. Cependant, dans l'une d'elle, le syndicat s'affaiblit et dans l'autre, il est pratiquement devenu un prolongement du service du personnel.

Bien qu'il ne soit pas possible de tirer des conclusions définitives à partir d'un nombre de cas restreint, le fait que ces cas étaient supposés être les meilleures illustrations de compatibilité entre syndicats forts et nouveaux modes de gestion rend sceptique. De plus, l'argument en faveur de la compatibilité s'appuie sur la présomption qu'il n'existe pas de conflit d'intérêts inhérent entre le capital et le travail. Les travailleurs dépendent clairement des employeurs pour leur emploi, leur salaire, leurs avantages sociaux, etc., mais ils ont aussi des intérêts qui s'opposent à ceux des employeurs, notamment au sujet du niveau des salaires, de la durée du travail et du contrôle sur le processus de production.

Les relations de pouvoir dans un contexte d'innovation sont caractérisées par la répartition, pour la prise de décision, entre les matières auxquelles les travailleurs et leur syndicat participent et celles où ils ne participent pas. La prise de décision conjointe — syndicat, travailleurs, gestionnaires — porte principalement sur des sujets touchant les intérêts des travailleurs (mesures disciplinaires, sécurité d'emploi, descriptions de tâches, salaires, durée du travail, etc.). Par contre, on ne retrouve aucune prise de décision conjointe sur des matières relevant des prérogatives de la direction telles les salaires et les bonus accordés au personnel d'encadrement, les dividendes versés aux actionnaires, le niveau des profits et les stratégies d'investissement.

En conclusion, loin de démontrer une compatibilité entre un syndicat fort et des innovations en gestion des ressources humaines, les études de cas tendent plutôt à démontrer que ces nouvelles approches sont plus viables dans des entreprises où le syndicat est faible ou inexistant.