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# The New Resource Management in U.S. Workplaces: Is it Really New and is it Only Nonunion?

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### Article abstract

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# ***The New Resource Management in US Workplaces***

***Is it Really New and is it Only Nonunion?***

**Casey Ichniowski  
John T. Delaney  
and  
David Lewin**

*This paper uses new data on business units to document the type and extent of human resource management policies and practices currently in place in unionized and nonunion businesses in the United States.*

Over the past thirty years unionization rates in most industrialized democracies have increased, stabilized, or declined modestly whereas, in the United States, unionization has plummeted (see Juris, Thompson, and Daniels, 1985; Troy and Sheflin, 1985). This seeming American exceptionalism has fascinated industrial relations scholars. Although many factors are involved in the decline in U.S. unionism (for a review, see Fiorito and Maranto, 1987), one contributing factor may be management's implementation of "progressive" human resource management (HRM) policies and practices that make it difficult for unions to organize new members. In particular, it is often argued that management has adopted progressive HRM policies and practices that reduce employees' desire and need for unions (see, for example, Lawler and Mohrman, 1987).

This study uses new data on business units to document the type and extent of HRM policies and practices currently in place in unionized and nonunion business in the U.S. The analysis proceeds in several parts. First, we discuss the importance of HRM policies and practices in businesses generally and suggest differences that may arise between unionized and

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nonunion workplaces. Second, we describe the data and our methodology. Third, we identify the specific HRM policies and practices to be investigated and report our empirical results. Finally, we offer some observations about the possible effects of the policies and practices on industrial relations and economic outcomes.

## **UNIONISM AND HRM POLICIES AND PRACTICES**

Management devises and implements HRM policies and practices to organize the workplace and employment. Because management normally retains unilateral control over the establishment and modification of HRM policies, existing policies likely reflect management's notion of appropriate employment rules. Presumably, management attempts to fashion policies that promote a productive workforce and efficient operations.

Unions can influence HRM policies and practices by constraining management's ability to alter policies at its discretion. Through collective bargaining, unions can negotiate work rules or other policies and practices that may not be changed unilaterally by management. In addition, unions may indirectly influence a firm's HRM policies, because management may modify policies over which it retains unilateral control in order to make them consistent with policies that were established through collective bargaining.

Unions may also have other important indirect effects on HRM policies. In particular, nonunion firms may institute "progressive" HRM policies in an effort to forestall unionization among their employees (see Kochan, 1980; Kochan, McKersie, and Chalykoff, 1986; Fiorito and Maranto, 1987; Fiorito, Lowman, and Nelson, 1987). Such progressive policies are designed to reduce the distinction between employees and managers, enhance employee commitment to the firm, and promote efficiency (Lawler and Mohrman, 1987). Consequently, relative to comparable unionized workplaces, nonunion businesses following progressive HRM policies will emphasize broader and more flexible job designs, greater dissemination of information to employees, closer monitoring of employee attitudes and concerns, greater reliance on merit in making employment decisions, and higher levels of employee participation in decision making<sup>1</sup>.

Although these arguments suggest that nonunion and union workplaces should differ along several dimensions, available data have not

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<sup>1</sup> See KOCHAN, KATZ, and MCKERSIE (1986) and LAWLER and MOHRMAN (1987), who describe but do not systematically test for these and other differences between unionized and nonunion workplaces.

permitted systematic investigation of these differences. On the one hand, the workplace practices of unionized establishments are well documented by extensive data on the provisions of major collective bargaining agreements in the U.S. (see Fiorito and Hendricks, 1987)<sup>2</sup>. Further, research has closely examined management responses to collective bargaining in unionized firms (see Chamberlain, 1948; Slichter, Healy, and Livernash, 1960). On the other hand, there are no comprehensive survey data on the range of personnel policies and employment conditions in nonunion firms. Available information is primarily drawn from case studies of a small number of nonunion firms and anecdotal evidence reported in practitioner journals<sup>3</sup>. As a result, little is known about the HRM policies that nonunion firms generally follow. Similarly, there are no data on the HRM practices of comparable unionized and nonunion firms.

To fill this information gap, we designed and administered a survey of organizational HRM policies and practices to executives in charge of a large number of unionized and nonunion business units. These data document the extent to which HRM policies and practices differ across unionized and nonunion businesses. Further, the data permit us to test whether or not the conclusions drawn from case studies and anecdotes apply more broadly in the U.S. economy. To test for the existence of a new approach to HRM, especially in nonunion firms, we also examine when various personnel policies were implemented. After describing our data and methodology, we report the results of these analyses.

## DATA AND METHODOLOGY

During 1986 we designed and tested a questionnaire to identify and assess the HRM policies and practices followed by U.S. firms. This comprehensive, 29-page questionnaire requested information on personnel policies covering managers, unionized professional and technical employees, nonunion professional and technical employees, unionized clerical employees, nonunion clerical employees, unionized manufacturing and production employees, and nonunion manufacturing and production employees. Each questionnaire requested information on more than 1,000 organizational HRM policies and practices.

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<sup>2</sup> The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) collects contract data for bargaining units covering more than 1,000 workers. Those data have been extensively analyzed and have provided numerous insights into working conditions in unionized workplaces.

<sup>3</sup> FOULKES's (1980) study of 26 nonunion companies is perhaps the most intensive analysis of nonunion personnel practices. It is also among the most extensive studies because few authors have focused on more than a handful of nonunion firms. For example, KOCHAN, KATZ, and MCKERSIE (1986), who provide perhaps the most complete description of union-nonunion workplace differences, rely heavily on data from eight plants.

Using a name and address file maintained by Standard and Poor's COMPUSTAT services, we distributed the questionnaire to 7,765 executives in charge of business units of U.S. corporations. We received responses from 854 business units (an 11 percent overall response rate), though usable data were available for 495 of these business units (an overall 6.5 percent response rate). Those 495 business units comprise the core sample analyzed in this study. Analyses of data on respondents and nonrespondents indicate that the industrial distribution of our sample is generally similar to the industrial distribution of nonresponding COMPUSTAT business units (Delaney, Lewin, and Ichniowski, 1988)<sup>4</sup>. The responding business units, however, are larger and more profitable than the nonresponding business units.

Nevertheless, this sample of relatively large firms — firms that, because of their size, may be HRM policy "pattern-setters" (Dimick and Murray, 1978) — permits the broadest comparative analyses of HRM policies and practices to date. For example, the sample includes business units in most major industrial categories as well as some well known firms and some lesser known firms. It includes one of the world's largest automobile companies, high technology and low technology firms, investment and commercial banks, airline companies, utilities, retailers, and even an evangelical television network. The data provide the most comprehensive information on organizational HRM policies and practices ever assembled.

### **HOW DISTINCTIVE ARE HRM PRACTICES IN UNION AND NONUNION SETTINGS?**

In order to examine whether or not a new management philosophy has led to the development of progressive HRM policies in recent years, especially in nonunion firms, we focus on several key workplace HRM policies and practices that have commonly been attributed to the new nonunion workplace system. The study examines whether nonunion businesses, relative to unionized workplaces, have more broadly defined and flexible jobs, emphasize merit and performance more heavily in their employment decisions, measure performance more systematically, provide their employees with more information about the business, monitor their employees' attitudes and concerns more closely, or are more likely to involve employees in participative decision making programs.

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<sup>4</sup> For a detailed discussion of the survey instrument, response patterns, and a comparison of respondents and nonrespondents, see DELANEY, LEWIN, and ICHNIOWSKI (1988).

In Table 1, we address these basic issues and present data on nine HRM policies covering manufacturing and production workers. The table shows the responses of unionized and nonunion business units to questions about HRM policies covering the breadth and flexibility of job design, the relative importance of seniority and merit in key employment decisions, organizational communication and information-sharing policies, and employee participation efforts.

Union status is defined in two ways in the table. The first two columns of the table report the proportion of all business units that follow each of the nine HRM policies and practices for their unionized or nonunion operations' manufacturing and production employees. The third and fourth columns report the existence of the HRM policies and practices covering nonunion and unionized employees in business units that have both unionized and nonunion manufacturing and production employees (that is, "double-breasted" firms). The proportions in the last two columns of the table therefore measure whether the same firm treats its unionized and nonunion workers differently with respect to HRM policies and practices.

### **Job Flexibility and Breadth**

Lines 1, 2(a), and 2(b) of Table 1 report job design characteristics in nonunion and unionized workplaces. A business unit was classified as having flexible job design if it indicated that it practiced any of the following job design programs: (1) job rotation; (2) job enlargement (that is, adding tasks to a job); or (3) job enrichment (that is, allowing employees more autonomy). If the respondent answered no to each of the three questions, then the business unit was classified as not having a flexible job design policy. Columns 1a and 1b of the table indicate that 39.7 percent of nonunion business units and 25.2 percent of unionized businesses have flexible job design programs. Although flexible job designs are significantly more likely to exist in nonunion firms than in unionized firms, more than 60 percent of nonunion business units do not have flexible job design programs. Furthermore, over one-quarter of unionized business units have one or more of these job design programs.

Business units that have implemented flexible job designs should have fewer, more broadly defined job classifications than business units that have not implemented flexible job designs. Thus, if nonunion workplaces implement flexible job designs more readily than nonunion businesses, then nonunion business units should have fewer job classifications than unionized business units — especially if nonunion businesses follow job enlargement programs that add tasks to jobs.

**Table 1**  
**Selected HRM Practices in Nonunion and Unionized Workplaces**  
 (Sample sizes are in parentheses)

<i>HRM Practice</i>	<i>ALL BUSINESS UNITS</i>		<i>DOUBLE-BREASTED BUSINESS UNITS</i>	
	<i>(1a) Nonunion</i>	<i>(1b) Unionized</i>	<i>(2a) Nonunion</i>	<i>(2b) Unionized</i>
1. Flexible job design	.397*** (325)	.252 (163)	.347 (121)	.256 (121)
2a. Number of job classifications	38.8*** (221)	121.0 (105)	52.3*** ( 71)	151.4 ( 71)
2b. Job classifications per employee	.364*** (187)	.149 ( 83)	.355 ( 50)	.191 ( 50)
3. Merit-based promotions	.817*** (322)	.355 (169)	.761** (117)	.419 (117)
4. Merit-based layoffs	.618*** (288)	.119 (157)	.472*** (108)	.130 (108)
5. Performance appraisals	.831*** (319)	.451 (153)	.714*** (112)	.393 (112)
6. Grievance procedures	.540*** (326)	.988 (177)	.585*** (123)	.984 (123)
7. Attitude surveys	.401 (297)	.449 (156)	.450 (111)	.441 (111)
8. Information sharing	.567 (261)	.642 (137)	.638 ( 94)	.628 ( 94)
9. Participation-QWL initiative	.436 (296)	.493 (152)	.528 (106)	.509 (106)

Note: Data are for firms' manufacturing and production workers only.

\*\*\*Nonunion and union figures are significantly different at the one percent level using a two-tailed test.

\*\*Nonunion and union figures are significantly different at the five percent level using a two-tailed test.

Line 2(a) of Table 1 provides information on this issue<sup>5</sup>. On average, unionized businesses have three times more job classifications than nonunion businesses. To some extent, however, the magnitude of this difference occurs simply because unionized businesses tend to be larger than nonunion businesses. Indeed, the figures in line 2(b) indicate that there are actually fewer job classifications per employee in unionized firms than in nonunion firms. These contrasting findings suggest that it is premature to conclude that broad job definitions are a phenomenon of nonunion workplaces, especially since only a minority of nonunion firms have flexible job design programs.

Further, while the proportions in columns 1(a) and 1(b) of lines 1, 2(a), and 2(b) indicate differences in HRM policies across average unionized and nonunion business units, the differences reflect the effects of factors other than union status. For example, this analysis does not control for industry differences. Moreover, because unionization rates and HRM practices vary across industries, the first two columns of Table 1 may not accurately reflect HRM policy differences that are due to differences in union status.

To address this problems, the proportions reported in columns 2(a) and 2(b) of Table 1 permit comparisons of HRM practices covering unionized and nonunion manufacturing and production workers *within the same business unit*. Analysis of HRM policies in these “double-breasted” business units therefore assesses the extent to which individual firms treat their unionized and nonunion production workers differently. Consequently, this analysis controls for all “business unit specific” effects on HRM policies and practices<sup>6</sup>.

In general, the pattern of union-nonunion differences in HRM policies is similar across the total business unit and double-breasted business unit samples. With respect to flexible job design systems, however, the difference is smaller between columns 2(a) and 2(b) (9.3 percentage points) than between columns 1(a) and 1(b) (14.5 percentage points). The difference in the proportions in columns 2(a) and 2(b) is nearly significant in a two-tailed t-test ( $t = 1.54$ ). Further, according to the figures in columns 2(a) and 2(b) of line 2(a), more job classifications cover unionized employees than

5 The question was: About how many job classifications are there for each category of employees [including manufacturing and production workers separately] in your total business unit?

6 The samples used in columns 2(a) and 2(b) of Table 2 report only the responses from double-breasted business units that gave answers for both their unionized and nonunion employees. There are a small number of cases where business units with both unionized and nonunion employees gave HRM policy responses only for one of the employee groups. Because such responses are excluded, the sample sizes given in Table 1 are not identical to the sample sizes reported in various footnotes providing union-nonunion comparisons.



cover nonunion employees in the same business unit<sup>7</sup>. Again, however, there are fewer job classifications per employee in unionized businesses which, on average, have many more employees than nonunion business units (see columns 2(a) and 2(b) of line 2(b)).

### **Merit and Performance in Employment Decisions**

The HRM policies reported in lines 3 through 5 deal with the importance and measurement of employee performance in unionized and nonunion workplaces. In line 3, we report firms' responses to a survey question on the relative importance of merit and seniority in the determination of promotions<sup>8</sup>. Line 4 presents firms' responses to an identically worded question concerning layoff decision rules. Business units reporting that they made promotion or layoff decisions based on "merit alone" or "seniority only if merit is equal" are classified as following merit-based decision rules. Business units responding that these employment decisions are based on "seniority among employees who meet a minimum merit requirement" or "seniority alone" are classified as following seniority-based decision rules for promotions and layoffs.

The proportions reported in columns 1(a) and 1(b) suggest that, among all business units, nonunion business units are much more likely than unionized business units to rely on merit-based promotion and layoff decision rules (lines 3 and 4 of Table 1). For example, 81.7 percent of all nonunion respondents rely primarily on merit in making promotion decisions. Interestingly, while the proportion of unionized businesses following merit-

<sup>7</sup> Table 1 does not present HRM policy information for job design and job classifications for those business units whose manufacturing and production workers are either completely unionized or completely nonunion. Business units that have no unionized employees are more than twice as likely to have a job design program (42.6 percent versus 21.1 percent) than completely unionized business units. There are 197 completely nonunion business unit observations and 38 completely unionized business unit observations for the job design question, and the difference in proportions is significant at the five percent level using a two-tailed test. The average number of job classifications for 141 completely nonunion businesses reporting data on this question is 33.9; for 27 completely unionized businesses, the average number of job classifications is 40.7. This difference in the number of job classifications is not statistically significant. Unlike the figures reported in columns 2(a) and 2(b) of Table 1, however, these statistics pertain to different business units in different industries. Therefore, we do not place any particular interpretation on the differences in "average HRM policies and practices" across these potentially disparate settings.

<sup>8</sup> The question stated: In those cases where nonentry job vacancies are filled by internal promotions, which one of the following decision rules do you use most often for each employee group? (1) merit or performance rating alone; (2) seniority only if merit is equal; (3) seniority among employees who meet a minimum merit requirement, or; (4) seniority alone.

based promotion rules is much lower than the proportion of nonunion firms following such rules, more than one-third of the unionized respondents rely on merit for promotions. Nonunion businesses are also more likely than unionized business units to rely on merit for determining layoffs. In both unionized and nonunion businesses, however, merit-based decision rules are used less often for layoff decisions than for promotion decisions.

Differences in the use of seniority-based and merit-based decision rules for promotions and layoffs appear to be attributable to unions. That is, the same patterns, though somewhat less pronounced, appear in columns 2(a) and 2(b). Nonunion employees are significantly more likely to have their promotion and layoff decisions governed principally by merit or performance ratings than are unionized employees in the same business unit. Consistent with the findings among all business units, seniority is more important in layoff decisions than in promotion decisions within double-breasted firms<sup>9</sup>.

Although there are substantial union-nonunion differences in the use of merit and seniority for these personnel decisions, union status is not the only determinant of merit- or seniority-based HRM policies and practices. Many unionized business units follow merit-based decision rules, especially in the determination of promotions. Also, among double-breasted businesses, a majority of nonunion operations decide layoffs principally on the basis of seniority.

The finding that seniority-based layoffs are more common in unionized settings than in nonunion settings is not surprising and is consistent with the findings of Slichter, Healy, and Livernash over thirty years ago (1960, pp. 142-143). Those researchers concluded that an overriding reason for unions' insistence on seniority-based decision rules is that management's determination of "merit" is often arbitrary. The information reported on line 5 of Table 1, however, suggests that contemporary nonunion managers are at least trying to determine merit in a systematic fashion. That is, 83.1 percent of nonunion respondents reported that they have a "formal performance appraisal system". In contrast, 45.1 percent of unionized respondents — a significantly lower percentage — reported the existence of a formal system of performance appraisal for manufacturing and produc-

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<sup>9</sup> For 192 completely nonunion business units, 86.5 percent have merit-based promotions. In contrast, 21.6 percent of 37 completely unionized business units base promotions on merit. The difference in proportions is significant at the one percent level in a two-tailed test. Concerning layoffs, 71.9 percent of 167 completely nonunion business units rely on a merit-based decision rule, while 8.4 percent of 36 completely unionized business units have merit based layoffs. Again, this finding is significant ( $p < .01$ ).

tion workers. Because the pattern of performance appraisal findings is similar in double-breasted business units, it is highly likely that union status influences the implementation of formal appraisal systems<sup>10</sup>.

Importantly, some nonunion business units that follow merit-based decision rules for layoffs and promotions do not have formal performance appraisal systems. For example, of the 253 nonunion respondents who reported the use of merit-based decision rules in promotions and answered the performance appraisal question, 12.3 percent do not have formal appraisal systems. Furthermore, 7.7 percent of the nonunion respondents who base promotions on merit and have performance appraisal systems admitted that they did not use the appraisals for determining promotions.

Similarly, 12.2 percent of the nonunion respondents using merit-based layoff rules do not have formal performance appraisal systems. Perhaps even more striking, 23 percent of the nonunion business unit respondents that have both merit-based layoffs and formal performance appraisal systems admit that the appraisals are not used to determine layoff decisions. Consequently, even if it is assumed that all performance appraisal systems are accurate and fair, there is still some justification for unionists' suspicions of merit systems. While many nonunion firms have implemented a formal performance appraisal system, a nonnegligible percentage of nonunion employers make merit-based promotion and layoff decisions without relying on a formal performance appraisal system for establishing merit ratings, even in cases where a performance appraisal system is in place.

Because performance appraisal systems are not commonly included in collective bargaining agreements, there are no previously published estimates of the incidence of performance appraisals in unionized workplaces that may be used as a benchmark for comparison. Nevertheless, the facts that over 35 percent of all unionized business units base promotions of union employees on merit and over 45 percent of unionized business units have adopted formal performance appraisal systems indicate that the merit system is not solely a nonunion workplace policy and practice.

### **Communication and Information Systems**

Lines 6 through 8 of Table 1 report the incidence of HRM policies and practices covering grievance resolution procedures, attitude surveys, and in-

<sup>10</sup> For 194 completely nonunion businesses, 90.2 percent have performance appraisal systems. In contrast, 58.8 percent of completely unionized businesses have formal performance appraisal systems. This difference in proportions is significant at the one percent level.

formation sharing programs. It has been well documented that grievance procedures are a nearly universal feature of unionized workplaces (see Ichniowski and Lewin, 1988). Our results are consistent with the literature. Only 1 percent of the respondents with unionized manufacturing and production workers (2 out of 177) indicated that those employees were not covered by a formal grievance procedure. Although formal complaint resolution systems are less common in nonunion settings, over one-half of the respondents with nonunion manufacturing and production workers have a formal complaint resolution system for these employees. Similar frequencies for these procedures are found for unionized and nonunion employees in double-breasted firms. As a result, it seems clear that employee voice mechanisms would be much rarer in U.S. workplaces in the absence of unionization and collective bargaining<sup>11</sup>.

The questions underlying the statistics reported on line 6 of Table 1 allowed respondents to define whether or not their grievance or complaint procedure was "formal". A more objective definition of a formal procedure, however, may be whether or not binding arbitration by a neutral third person is the terminal step of the grievance or complaint process. When the existence of binding arbitration is used to define a formal grievance or complaint resolution procedure, the union-nonunion differences observed on line 6 become much more pronounced. Specifically, while virtually all grievance procedures covering unionized employees end in arbitration, only 39.2 percent of the complaint procedures covering nonunion employees culminate in arbitration. Among the sample of all business units, 21.2 percent of nonunion respondents have a grievance or complaint system ending in arbitration, while 94.4 percent of unionized respondents have a procedure ending in arbitration. Within double-breasted operations, 16.1 percent of nonunion operations and 93.5 percent of unionized operations have grievance procedures culminating in arbitration.

The grievance procedure results are similar to the findings for flexible job designs and the use of merit in employment decisions in that they suggest two observations. First, significant differences exist in the incidence of grievance procedures and binding arbitration across unionized and nonunion business units, and these differences persist across the unionized and nonunion operations of the same business unit or firm. Second, grievance procedures are not unique to the unionized sector. A nonnegligible minority of nonunion business units have implemented a formal complaint resolu-

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11 For 193 completely nonunion businesses, 25.3 percent had formal complaint resolution procedures. On the other hand, 95 percent of 40 completely unionized firms reported the existence of a formal grievance procedure.

tion system of some kind. Furthermore, many of these nonunion complaint resolution systems provide for binding arbitration by a neutral third-party as the terminal step of the procedure.

Results reported on lines 7 and 8 of Table 1 provide no support for the proposition that nonunion workplaces are more likely than unionized workplaces to administer attitude surveys to and share business information with their employees — that is, to practice “new management” (see Lawler and Mohrman, 1987). Because of the absence of benchmark data on the existence of these practices in unionized and nonunion firms, however, it is difficult to put our findings in perspective. Nevertheless, it is interesting that similar proportions of unionized and nonunion firms and of unionized and nonunion operations of double-breasted firms report the presence of information sharing and attitude survey programs.

### **Employee Participation Plans**

Over the past decade, considerable attention has been given to employee participation programs and QWL initiatives. Line 9 reports responses to a survey question on such plans<sup>12</sup>. Although it has generally been assumed in the literature that employee participation plans are more common in the nonunion sector than in the unionized sector (see, for example, Lawler and Mohrman, 1987), our broad-based sample of U.S. business units provides no support for such a claim. Results indicate that unionized employees are just as likely as nonunion employees to be covered by employee participation or involvement programs. Moreover, the findings are virtually identical in both the full sample of responses and in the sample of double-breasted companies.

### **Union-Nonunion Differences in HRM Policy**

In general, our results suggest that the contemporary nonunion workplace HRM system is distinct from the HRM system in similarly situated unionized workplaces only along certain limited dimensions. Differences exist for policies and practices that are commonly established through collective bargaining, such as job classifications, the use of seniority in employment decisions, and grievance procedures. But even along these

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<sup>12</sup> The question stated: Employee participation initiatives are variously referred to as Quality of Work Life, Quality Circles, Employee Involvement, and Labor-Management Participation Teams, among other things. Do you have these or other similar programs for any of your employees [including manufacturing and production workers separately]?

dimensions, the differences in flexible job design programs between union and nonunion businesses is modest, and the larger number of job classifications in unionized businesses is in part related to the larger size of unionized businesses. Although information on these HRM policies and practices has not heretofore been available for a large sample of nonunion businesses, large union-nonunion differences in such policies have commonly been assumed to exist.

Furthermore, our results provide absolutely no evidence that union-nonunion differences exist in workplace policies and practices that are not typically the subject of collective bargaining. This is contrary to conventional wisdom in this area. Indeed, and as shown here, unionized business units are just as "progressive" as nonunion business units concerning the administration of attitude surveys, the incidence of information sharing, and the incidence of employee participation programs.

### **ARE HRM PRACTICES IN NONUNION WORKPLACES NEW?**

Although our analyses call into question the existence of a pervasive or distinctive "nonunion HRM model" cross-sectional evidence for one year (1986) may be misleading. For example, the fact that unionized and nonunion firms have similar probabilities of adopting certain HRM policies and practices, such as attitude surveys, information sharing programs, and participation programs, does not eliminate the possibility that a distinctive nonunion HRM model has emerged in recent years. In particular, if nonunion firms adopted certain HRM policies and practices, such as information sharing, earlier than unionized firms, and if those policies and practices proved to be effective, then economic pressure might be placed on unionized businesses also to adopt such policies and practices.

Additional information from our HRM survey, however, provides no support for this proposition. The survey requested information on the year in which four of the HRM policies and practices presented in Table 1 were adapted — flexible job designs, performance appraisal systems, grievance or complaint systems, and employee involvement efforts. Figures 1-4 present plots showing the growth of these four policies and practices in nonunion businesses in the U.S. over time.

In order to permit comparisons, the four figures also present corresponding time plots for unionized manufacturing and production employees. It should be noted, however, that the plots for unionized employees may understate the historical extent of the particular policy in the union sector. In particular, because union status is defined by whether

or not the business unit had unionized production employees in 1986, the figures in the yearly "union" plots will also reflect the historical growth of unionization in the business units. The figures do not reflect the existence of the practices among a sample of business units that have always been unionized<sup>13</sup>.

The values for 1986 in each of the four figures match the corresponding proportions reported in Table 1. For example, in 1986, 25.2% of businesses with unionized employees had flexible job design programs and 39.7% of businesses with nonunion production workers reported having such job design programs<sup>14</sup>. Because the union plots presumably understate the growth in HRM policies in the union sector, we focus our discussion on the time plots for nonunion firms. Table 2 reports the proportion of nonunion firms with certain HRM policies and practices over time. The data in Table 2 and the nonunion time plots are similar in at least one respect for three HRM policies — job design, performance appraisals, and complaint resolution procedures. It appears that the proportion of nonunion firms with these policies roughly doubled over each of the last several decades (that is, 1950-60, 1960-70, 1970-80, and 1980-87). Furthermore, it is evident that some continually-operating HRM policies and practices have existed for over 50 years (see Jacoby, 1985).

In contrast, the spread of employee participation programs among nonunion businesses has been more recent and more sudden. Prior to 1970, such programs were virtually nonexistent. Although these programs experienced a period of steady growth during the 1970s, their prevalence has increased dramatically since 1980. Moreover, the incidence of participation

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<sup>13</sup> For example, the plot for the extent of grievance procedures among employees in union business lines does seem to lag behind the figures reported by BLS in earlier years (1944, 1950). However, the differences are at least partly attributable to the fact that BLS considers the extent of grievance procedures among existing collective bargaining agreements, while the union plot in Figure 3 reports the extent of grievance procedures among businesses that in had unionized production employees (in 1986).

<sup>14</sup> The years of adoption of the practices were not reported by some businesses. 129 nonunion businesses and 41 union businesses report having a flexible job design program. Of these, 92 nonunion businesses and 26 union businesses report the year of adoption. 265 nonunion businesses and 69 union businesses report having a performance appraisal system. Of these, 238 nonunion businesses and 47 union businesses report the year of adoption. 176 nonunion businesses and 175 union businesses report having a grievance or complaint resolution procedure. Of these, 151 nonunion businesses and 135 union businesses report the year of adoption. Finally, 129 nonunion businesses and 75 union businesses report having an employee involvement program. Of these, 117 nonunion businesses and 67 union businesses report the year of adoption. Figures 1-4 assume that nonunion and union businesses that have a particular HRM policy but that fail to report the year of adoption follow the same distribution for the year of adoption among firms that report this information.

Figure 1  
Flexible Job Design

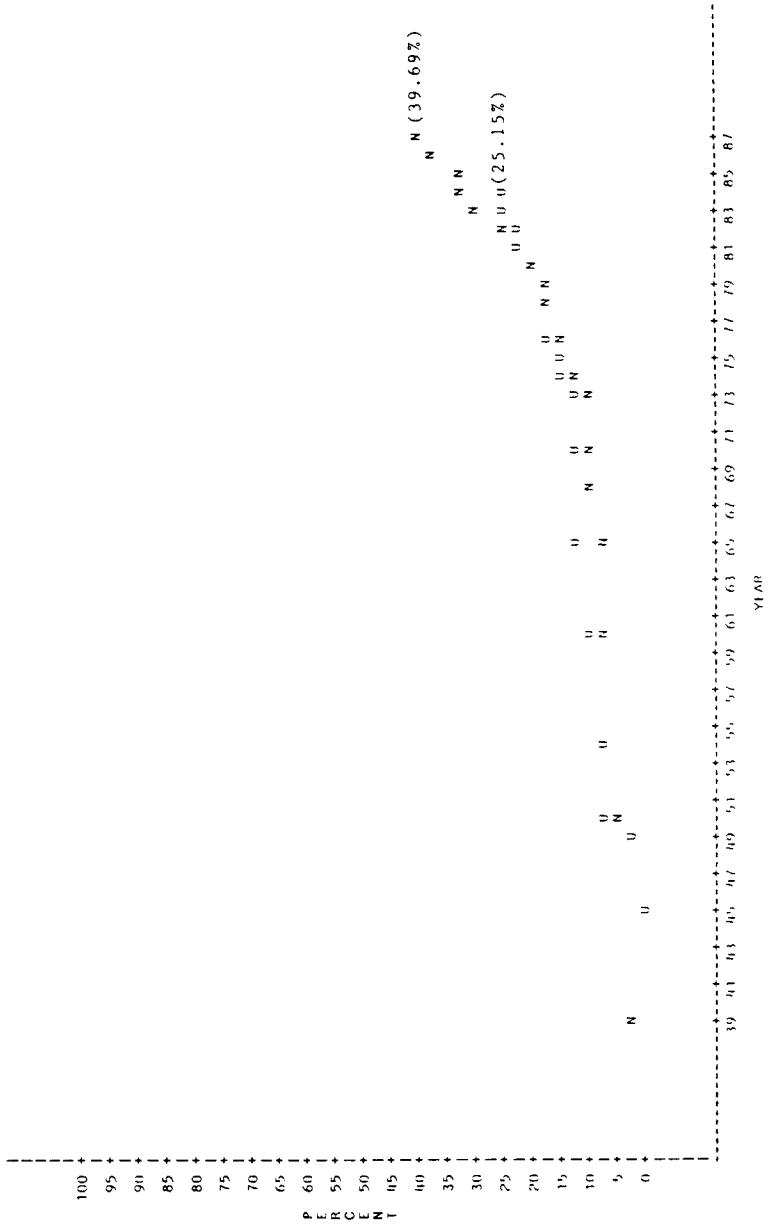




Figure 2  
Complaint Procedure

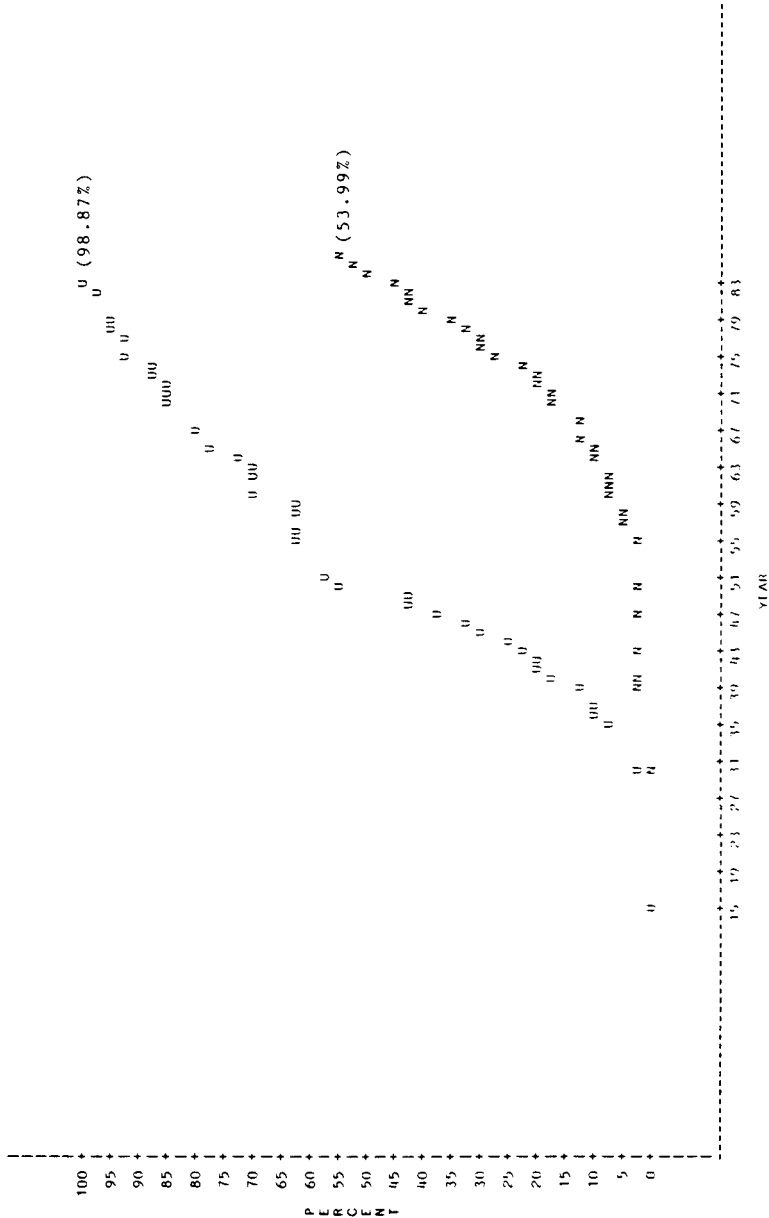


Figure 3  
Employee Involvement

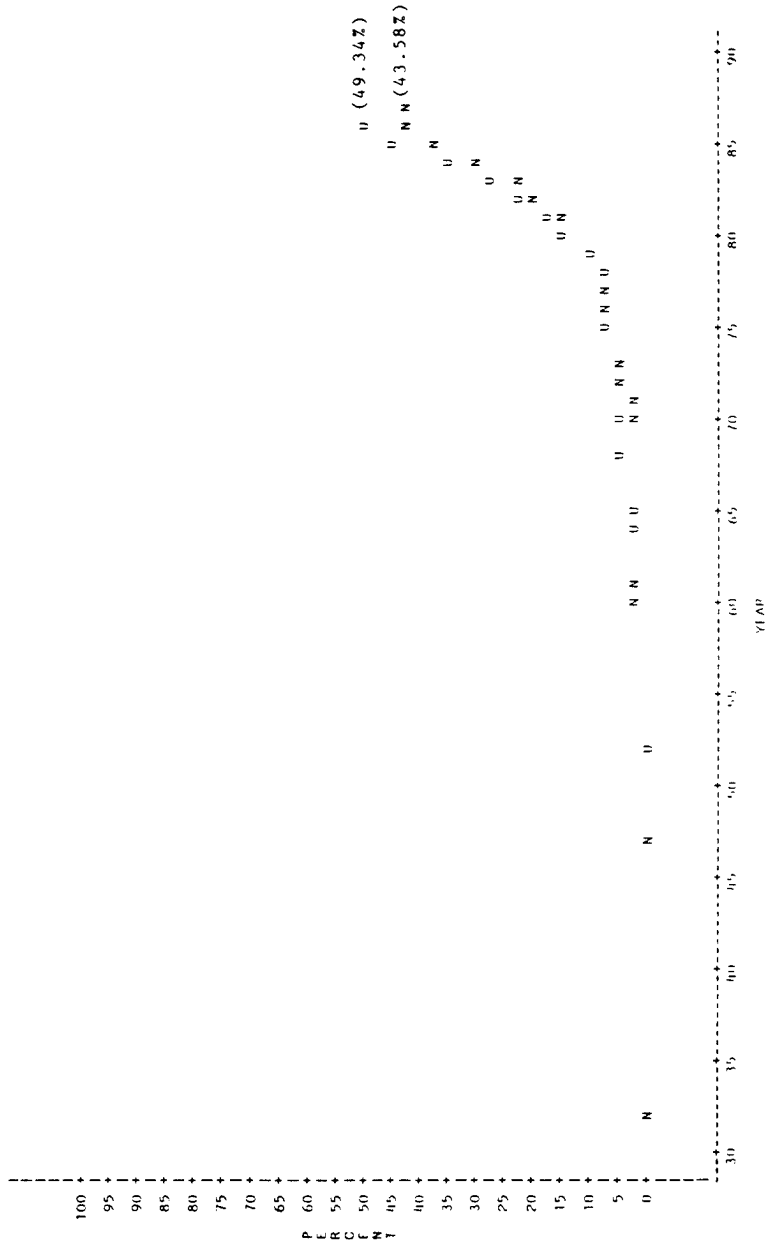
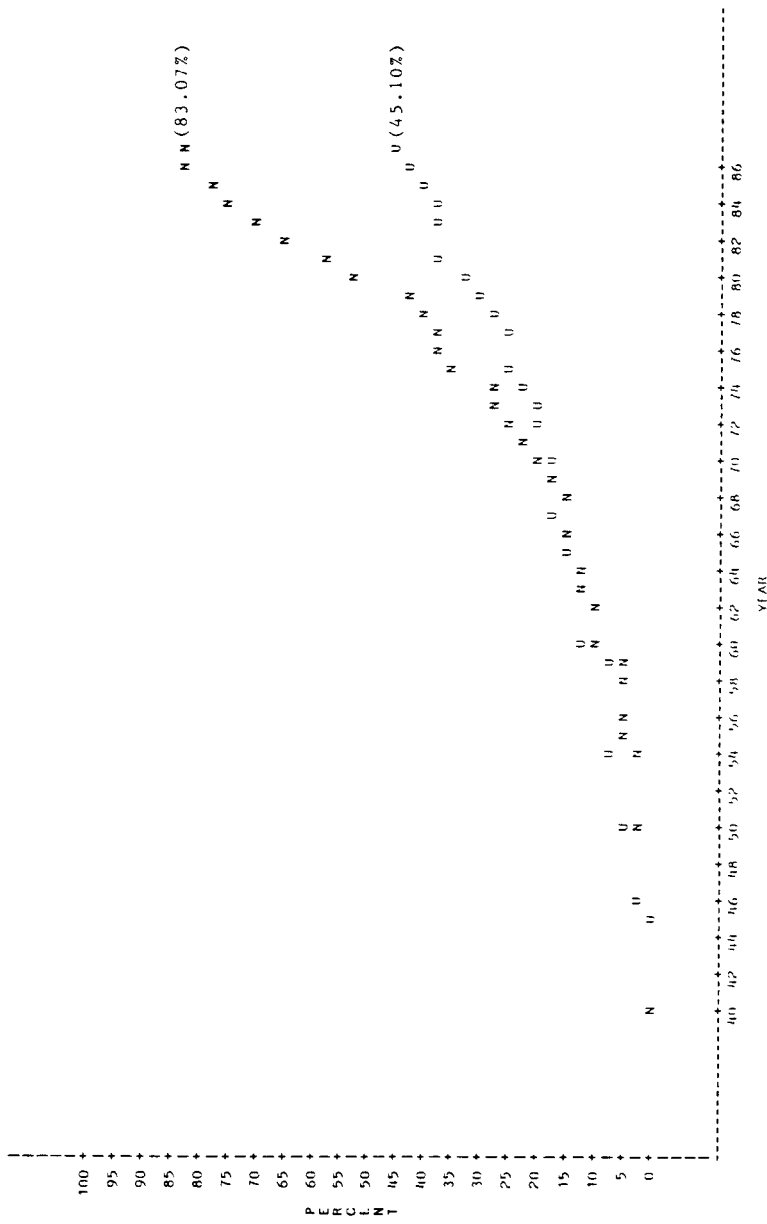


Figure 4  
Performance Appraisals



programs has increased at similar rates in both unionized and nonunion business units, suggesting that employee involvement is not solely a phenomenon of the nonunion sector.

**Table 2**  
**Proportion of Nonunion Business Units with**  
**Selected HRM Practices, by Year**

<i>Proportion of Nonunion Business Units With:</i>	<i>1950</i>	<i>1960</i>	<i>Year 1970</i>	<i>1980</i>	<i>1987</i>
1. Flexible Job Design	.060	.073	.095	.207	.392
2. Performance Appraisals	.031	.105	.209	.517	.831
3. Complaint Procedure	.032	.071	.165	.393	.539
4. Employee Involvement	.007	.015	.033	.145	.435

Note: Data are for firms' manufacturing and production workers only.

It should be noted that figures 1-4 do not necessarily indicate that unionized firms imitate the HRM model followed by "successful" nonunion firms. For example, figures 1-4 show that the union plots are not always below the nonunion plots. A more direct test of whether management is slower to implement or faces more resistance in implementing these policies in unionized firms can be made using the data on double-breasted companies. Specifically, we compare the implementation dates of HRM policies in double-breasted business units that have certain programs for both their unionized and nonunion manufacturing and production workers.

Each of the 23 double-breasted firms that supplied complete job design program information implemented flexible job design programs for their unionized and nonunion employees in the same year. Most of the 59 double-breasted businesses that report the year of adoption of a complaint or grievance procedure indicated that unionized workers were covered by such a procedure before nonunion workers were provided with a complaint

system. Interestingly, however, six of these 59 businesses had a nonunion complaint procedure before they had a formal grievance procedure for their unionized manufacturing and production workers<sup>15</sup>.

Nonunion employees were covered by a formal performance appraisal system before unionized employees were so covered in only 1 of 33 double-breasted companies that provided year-of-implementation data. Similarly, in only 1 of 46 double-breasted companies reporting data on the year of implementation of an employee involvement effort did the nonunion initiative predate the union initiative.

There is some evidence that unionized business units are less likely than nonunion business units to adopt formal performance appraisals and, to a lesser extent, flexible job design programs. Our data provide no other evidence, however, that unionized operations are somehow more resistant to progressive HRM policies than are nonunion operations. Furthermore, there is no evidence of any kind that nonunion businesses are leaders in the adoption of grievance procedures or employee involvement initiatives.

In short, many progressive HRM policies and practices are not new. They have existed in U.S. business units for almost two decades. In addition, progressive HRM policies and practices clearly are not unique to the nonunion sector. These HRM policies and practices have evolved gradually over the years. Thus, the findings do not support the assertion that a new nonunion HRM model has just recently emerged.

## SUMMARY AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The major findings of this study are that so-called "progressive" HRM policies and practices are not confined to or predominant in the nonunion sector, and that, with the exception of employee participation and involvement programs, such policies and practices have evolved gradually over time. Still, the key question that motivated our recently completed survey is whether or not HRM policies and practices affect the economic performance of business firms. This key question must be addressed in order to resolve the current debate in the industrial relations literature about the relative importance of "strategic" management decisions in the fostering of nonunion employment relationships.

In our future work, we will specifically examine whether or not firms with more "sophisticated" or "progressive" HRM policies and practices

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<sup>15</sup> It should be noted that this pattern may exist because those firms did not have unionized employees when they implemented their initial complaint system for their nonunion employees.

have superior economic performance to firms with less sophisticated HRM policies and practices. So far, we have found no major differences in the progressiveness or sophistication of HRM policy and practice across unionized and nonunion businesses along many dimensions. Certain "traditional" differences in employment practices between unionized and nonunion firms, however, persist in the 1980s. Differences in the use of merit and seniority for promotions and layoffs, the incidence of formal performance appraisal programs, the use of flexible job design programs, and the extent and type of grievance and complaint systems may be responsible for systematic differences in the economic performance of unionized and nonunion operations. Furthermore, if nonunion managers tend to implement employment practices that promote economic performance, then nonunion industrial relations strategies may be designed to develop efficient operating practices in increasingly competitive environments rather than to reduce unionization.

Because this study is also the first to have obtained systematic, large scale evidence from double-breasted as well as single-breasted businesses, a substantial portion of our future work will also focus on the effects of industrial relations and HRM policies on the economic performance of these types of businesses. A particularly appealing aspect of this research is that certain exogenous factors that are likely to influence HRM policies and practices and economic performance are, in effect, held constant when data from the double-breasted businesses are analyzed. Heretofore, the only published research on such businesses employs data from a very few plants or establishments. This weakness and limitation on the generalizability of findings will not burden the present study or extensions of it.

Finally, this paper has been limited to the data pertaining to manufacturing and production workers. Our future work, however, will go beyond this particular occupational group to encompass managerial, professional and technical, and clerical employees, and it will test for the effects of occupation-specific and occupation-wide HRM policies and practices on economic performance of U.S. businesses. Most other research has concentrated on one or another type of employee or employee group. It is important to analyze the range of industrial relations and HRM policies and practices applicable to the several occupational groups and their effects on the economic performance of the business. Otherwise, it is impossible to know whether a particular HRM policy, for example, profit-sharing, affects firm performance only when it covers managers as opposed to when it also covers professional and technical, clerical, and manufacturing and production workers.

Of course, it may be that industrial relations and HRM policies and practices individually or in combination do not have discernible effects on the economic performance of businesses. But this cannot be determined without considering both a full range of industrial relations and HRM policies and practices and a full range of occupational groups. By analyzing the data drawn from the present large-scale survey, we intend to document how industrial relations and HRM policies and practices affect business performance and to build broad-scale generalizations about these effects.

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## ***Les nouvelles pratiques de gestion des ressources humaines: un phénomène réellement 'nouveau' associé aux seules entreprises non syndiquées?***

Depuis quelques années, on parle beaucoup d'une nouvelle philosophie de gestion dans les entreprises américaines. Forcées par la concurrence accrue d'entreprises étrangères ou locales ainsi que par la déréglementation, les organisations ont choisi de changer la façon avec laquelle elles dirigent leurs employés. Afin d'obtenir de meilleures performances, la nouvelle philosophie préconise, entre autres choses, le travail en équipe, la gestion participative et moins de bureaucratie. Malgré toute l'attention apportée dans la littérature contemporaine, peu de recherches se sont intéressées à découvrir l'étendue de ce phénomène dans les entreprises.

Notre étude vise à combler cette lacune en dévoilant les résultats de la première recherche exhaustive portant sur les politiques et pratiques de gestion des ressources humaines dans les entreprises, autant syndiquées que non syndiquées, aux Etats-Unis. Contrairement aux prétentions de certains observateurs, nos résultats suggèrent qu'il est pour le moins prématuré de parler de l'existence d'un "nouveau modèle" de gestion des ressources humaines dans les entreprises non syndiquées. Au mieux, ces affirmations ne sont que partiellement fondées et dans une certaine mesure, elles sont même trompeuses. En guise d'illustration, même s'il est vrai qu'il existe des différences significatives dans la probabilité que certaines entreprises syndiquées et non syndiquées adoptent des pratiques de gestion des ressources humaines différentes, ces différences se retrouvent surtout sur des sujets couverts par la négociation collective, telles l'ancienneté lors des promotions et des mises à pied, les procédures de règlement des griefs et les définitions rigides des postes de travail et des corps d'emploi. De telles différences avaient d'ailleurs été reconnues depuis fort longtemps.

Il n'y a pas beaucoup de différence entre entreprises syndiquées et non syndiquées sur des sujets importants non inclus dans les contrats de travail tels les enquêtes d'opinions, les programmes de partage d'information ou de qualité de vie au travail. Les entreprises syndiquées sont tout autant susceptibles d'adopter de telles pratiques de gestion que les entreprises non syndiquées. De plus, les similarités et les différences observées ne dépendent pas des caractéristiques du produit ou de l'industrie.

Ensuite, les "modèles" de GRH syndiqués et non syndiqués ne s'appliquent pas nécessairement à toutes les entreprises syndiquées et non syndiquées, même dans les cas où les politiques de personnel ont été pendant longtemps différentes selon les deux types d'entreprise. Par exemple, une minorité non négligeable d'organisations syndiquées accorde une place importante au mérite dans les promotions et utilise des systèmes flexibles de description des postes de travail. D'autre part, plusieurs organisations non syndiquées accordent les promotions et effectuent les mises à pied sur la base de l'ancienneté et possèdent également des procédures de règlement des griefs pouvant même aller jusqu'à l'arbitrage exécutoire des décisions par une tierce partie. Qui plus est, il est à remarquer que les politiques "progressistes" de GRH ne sont pas aussi répandues qu'on pourrait le croire dans les entreprises non syndiquées. Ainsi, même si ces dernières sont plus susceptibles

de posséder des systèmes flexibles de description des postes de travail que les entreprises syndiquées, plus de 60% d'entre elles ne possèdent pas encore de tels programmes.

En troisième lieu, notre questionnaire contenait de l'information relative à la date d'implantation de ces différentes politiques de GRH, tels les programmes d'évaluation du rendement, les systèmes flexibles de description des emplois, les procédures de règlement des griefs et les initiatives de QVT ou de participation des employés. Cette information nous a permis de savoir jusqu'à quel point de telles politiques étaient réellement "nouvelles" dans les deux types d'entreprise. Les résultats suggèrent que, dans bien des cas, ces activités n'étaient pas particulièrement nouvelles. Même si la plupart des entreprises non syndiquées utilisant des politiques progressistes de GRH avaient implanté celles-ci après 1960, plusieurs autres l'avaient fait depuis plus longtemps. A titre d'exemple, de 15% à 20% des entreprises non syndiquées possédaient une procédure de règlement des litiges, un programme d'appréciation du rendement ou un système flexible de description des emplois avant 1960 et, dans certains cas, ces expériences remontaient jusqu'aux années 1930 et 1940.

Enfin, et contrairement aux autres politiques de GRH, les expériences de participation des employés sont, dans tous les cas, des phénomènes récents. De plus, le fait que les entreprises syndiquées soient tout autant susceptibles de posséder des programmes de qualité de vie au travail que les entreprises non syndiquées ne semble pas le résultat d'efforts déployés par celles-là pour imiter des politiques efficaces développées par celles-ci. En bref, les programmes de participation des employés ont été implantés en moyenne en 1980 et ceci autant dans les entreprises syndiquées que dans celles non syndiquées. Même dans le cas d'entreprises comprenant des usines syndiquées et d'autres non syndiquées, la date d'implantation de tels programmes a été à peu près la même dans les deux cas.

En conclusion, notre étude a permis d'évaluer plusieurs affirmations et spéculations à propos des nouvelles politiques de gestion des ressources humaines dans les entreprises syndiquées et non syndiquées. Même si les résultats révèlent des similarités et des différences intéressantes dans les politiques de GRH, ils suggèrent également d'autres conclusions. Parmi les plus significatives, signalons que généralement, les entreprises américaines, autant syndiquées que non syndiquées, ne semblent pas partager les recommandations des observateurs quant aux politiques appropriées de gestion des ressources humaines. L'entreprise moyenne dans notre échantillon utilise des politiques basées sur des principes qui l'ont guidée depuis plusieurs années. Les pratiques actuelles ne confirment pas l'existence d'un "nouveau" modèle, tant dans les milieux syndiqués que non syndiqués.

## ***Las nuevas practicas de gestion de los recursos humanos ¿ Un fenómeno realmente 'nuevo' asociado solamente a las empresas no sindicalizadas?***

Desde hace algunos años, hablamos frecuentemente de una nueva filosofía de gestión en las empresas americanas. Forzadas por la creciente competencia de empresas extranjeras o locales y por la desreglamentación, las organizaciones han escogido cambiar la manera de dirigir a sus empleados. Con la finalidad de obtener un mejor comportamiento, la nueva filosofía preconiza, entre otras cosas, el trabajo de equipo, la gestión participativa y menos burocracia. A pesar de la atención que se le ha dado en la literatura contemporanea, pocas investigaciones se han interesado en descubrir la extensión de éste fenómeno en las empresas.

Nuestro estudio tiene el objetivo de colmar esta laguna, revelando los resultados de la primera investigación exhaustiva sobre las políticas y prácticas de gestión de recursos humanos en las empresas, sean sindicalizadas o no, en los Estados Unidos. Contrariamente a las pretenciones de ciertos observadores, nuestros resultados sugieren que es prematuro hablar de la existencia de un "nuevo modelo" de gestión de recursos humanos en las empresas no sindicalizadas. Mejor dicho, estas afirmaciones son parciales y en cierta medida engañosas. A manera de ilustración, podemos decir que aunque existen diferencias significativas en la posibilidad que ciertas empresas sindicalizadas o no adopten prácticas de gestión de recursos humanos diferentes, éstas diferencias se localizan sobretodo, en aspectos cubiertos por la negociación colectiva, como la antigüedad en los ascensos o los despidos, los procedimientos de reglamentación de quejas y las definiciones rígidas de puestos de trabajo y de los empleos. Además dichas diferencias fueron reconocidas desde hace mucho tiempo.

No hay mucha diferencia entre empresas sindicalizadas y no sindicalizadas, en lo relacionado a aspectos importantes no incluidos en los contratos de trabajo, tales como encuestas de opinión, los programas de información compartida, o de calidad de vida en el trabajo. Las empresas sindicalizadas, son tan susceptibles de adoptar tales prácticas de gestión como las empresas no sindicalizadas. Además, las similitudes y las diferencias observadas, no dependen de factores tales como las características del producto o de la industria.

Así también, los "modelos" de GRH sindicalizados y no sindicalizados, no se aplican necesariamente a todas las empresas, incluso en los casos donde las políticas de personal fueron durante mucho tiempo diferentes en los dos tipos de empresa. Por ejemplo, una minoría considerable de organizaciones sindicalizadas otorgan un lugar importante al mérito en los ascensos y utiliza sistemas flexibles de descripción de los puestos de trabajo. Por otra parte, muchas organizaciones no sindicalizadas, otorgan ascensos y efectúan los despidos en base a la antigüedad, y poseen igualmente los procedimientos de reglamentación de quejas, pudiendo incluso ir hasta el arbitraje ejecutorio de las decisiones por una tercera parte. Es necesario destacar además, que las políticas "progresistas" de GRH no están tan extendidas en las empresas no sindicalizadas como pudieramos creerlo. A pesar de que éstas últimas son mas susceptibles de poseer sistemas flexibles de descripción de puestos de trabajo que las empresas sindicalizadas, más del 60% de ellas no tienen todavía tales programas.

En tercer lugar, nuestro cuestionario recabó información relativa a la fecha de implantación de estas políticas diferentes de GRH, tales como los programas de evaluación del rendimiento, los sistemas flexibles de descripción de empleos, los procedimientos de reglamentación de quejas y las iniciativas de QVT o de participación de los empleados. Esta información nos permitió saber hasta qué punto estas políticas eran realmente "nuevas" en los dos tipos de empresas. Los resultados sugieren que, en muchos casos, las actividades no eran particularmente nuevas. Incluso si la mayoría de las empresas no sindicalizadas que utilizan políticas progresistas de GRH las habían implantado después de 1960, muchas de ellas tenían un origen anterior. A título de ejemplo, 15 a 20% de las empresas no sindicalizadas poseían un procedimiento de quejas, un programa de evaluación del rendimiento o un sistema flexible de descripción de empleos anterior a 1960, y en ciertos casos, estas experiencias remontaban a los años 30s y 40s.

En fin, contrariamente a otras políticas de GRH, las experiencias de participación de los empleados son en todos los casos fenómenos recientes. Además, el hecho de que las empresas sindicalizadas sean tan susceptibles de poseer programas de calidad de vida en el trabajo como las empresas no sindicalizadas, no parece ser el resultado de esfuerzos desplegados por ellas para imitar las políticas eficaces desarrolladas por estas últimas. En breve, los programas de participación de empleados fueron implantados en promedio en 1980, y esto en empresas sindicalizadas y no sindicalizadas. Incluso en el caso de empresas que agrupaban las fábricas sindicalizadas y otras no sindicalizadas, la fecha de implantación de tales programas fue mas o menos la misma en los dos casos.

En conclusión, nuestro estudio permitió evaluar varias afirmaciones y especulaciones relativas a las nuevas políticas de gestión de los recursos humanos en las empresas sindicalizadas y no sindicalizadas. Incluso si los resultados revelan similitudes y diferencias interesantes en las políticas de GRH, estos sugieren igualmente otras conclusiones. Entre las más significativas, señalaremos que en general, las empresas americanas, tanto sindicalizadas o no, no parecen compartir las recomendaciones de los observadores en cuanto a las políticas apropiadas de gestión de recursos humanos. El promedio de empresas en nuestra muestra estadística, utiliza políticas basadas en principios que las han guiado desde hace muchos años. Las prácticas actuales, no confirman la existencia de un "nuevo" modelo en los medios sindicalizados o no sindicalizados.