

## **Area Wide Labor-Management Committees: the Public's View as a Useful Form of Integrative Bargaining**

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### **Abstract**

*The study examines the public's view of credit and blame for labor problems and the use of an area wide labor/management committee in dealing with labor conflict. A survey was administered to area citizens of one SMSA in northwest Alabama to determine what, if any, degree of blame each saw area unions, organizations, and/or workers shouldering and the impact an AWLMC, or integrative bargaining, would have in correcting these concerns. Results show the survey population did follow the assumed relationship between the placing of blame and union membership, but there was some surprise in the finding that the respondent's sex had some impact on the placing of blame. A final conclusion of the study did show that the AWLMC committee was seen as a valuable negotiating vehicle for the correction of an area's problems.*

**Key terms:** integrative bargaining, labor/management bargaining committees, labor/management cooperation, attribution model

### **I. Introduction**

It is apparent that many of the activities between management and labor unions assume an adversarial role; however, there are situations in which the position of cooperation would produce mutually advantageous outcomes. Walton and McKersie (1965) define such a situation as integrative bargaining. The concept revolves around parties defining and working toward solutions to common problems. Such a posture Schmidt and Kochan (1972) show as necessary or the parties will create blockages from goal attainment. This kind of bargaining, Fossum (1982) writes, is more appropriate in immediate and long-term problem situations.

One such generic method of cooperation, of integrative bargaining, that has received some attention was the Area Wide Labor Management Committees (AWLMC). For the United States Department of Labor (1984), this broadening of labor-management relations is a priority goal. Pursuant to this, the Bureau of Labor-Management Relations and Cooperative Programs was formed. Jointly established and managed, these AWLMCs allow both parties to identify joint issues and may even lead to joint efforts toward resolution. Kochan and Dyer (1976) suggest however that joint commitment will only be likely if both parties see early measurable progress toward goal attainment. They continue by writing that AWLMC programs will be more effective if they are insulated from the formal bargaining process. Further, there is some evidence toward creating new opportunities for worker participation in the decision-making process and improving productivity and the quality of working life.

The bottom-line of the approach is an aim toward creating an environment in which problems can be solved and an outward appearance that labor and management can cooperate for the betterment of both. Using Schmidt and Kochan (1972) terminology, the accomplishment of one party's goals may be met without blocking the accomplishment of the second party's goal. Moreover, recent research has confirmed that issues such as management control (Yan and Gray, 1994) and attitudinal structuring (Peddle, 2008) positively impact the success of negotiations. Finally, Dirk, Oettingen, and Gollwitzer (2011) recently concluded that the effectiveness of the relationship between integrative bargaining and goal attainment is based on a mutual understanding of the needs and obstacles of the other person.

One issue that then must be explained is how an AWLMC can deal with Crano and Schroder's (1967) and Streufert's (1966) prediction that attitudes formed or maintained by individuals or groups having different attitudes remain different. Streufert and Streufert (1969) explain that this can be predicted on the basis of expected differences in attitudinal dimensionality and explain the process for testing this hypothesis. Following the findings of Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood and Sherif (1961) all subjects tend to form initially favorable attitudes toward other group members when placed in a competitive group setting. Information (feedback) obtained after this attitude formation can have evaluative implications. Failure, or determining that the individual or group has failed or is incompetent or "bad", should be inconsistent with the initially established view. On the other hand, success will tend to reinforce the initial view that the group or individual is "good". When the labor environment is described as hostile and each party is publicly blaming the other party for suffering economic conditions the AWLMC might be an option.

In the instance of failure, or when an individual or group is viewed as both "good" or "bad", if an individual was using a single evaluative dimension, one would expect a shift in attitude toward a less favorable position. Lerner (1965) reached this same conclusion. In fact, failure has often led to favorable attitudes, frequently explained as "joint misery". The theory would suggest that derogating any single individual might have a tendency to have long-run implications on the evaluator. This might explain why labor unions have suffered membership setbacks in recent years.

In the instance of success, individuals should respond by attributing more causality to decisions made by their own team or themselves and by maintaining more favorable attitudes. Some individuals, because of a tendency to be more open, would not perceive success as being caused by one component of the situation. As Streufert and Streufert (1969) state, one might expect that the attribution estimates of these subjects would level off under high success, while the estimates of the remaining subjects should continue to increase. Parallel findings should be predicted for subjects toward other group members.

As Gollwitzer, Earle, and Stephan (1982) attest, people tend to attribute success to their efforts, abilities, or other dispositions, whereas they attribute failure to bad luck, task difficulty or other external variables. Moreover, Gollwitzer (2004) found this idea was validated in his study of the psychoanalytic scapegoat hypothesis. Also, Muneno and Dembo (1982), in their investigation of differences in conceptual complexity in relations to teachers, and Shaikat, Abiodullah, and Rashid (2010), in their examination of success and failure rates of graduate students, found this to be the case.

One potential problem in establishing an AWLMC may be parallel to the early writings which analyzed attributions for performance outcomes involving teaching tasks (Beckman, 1970; Johnson, Feigenbaum, and Weiby, 1964). However, the idea of asymmetrical attributions is not a new one. Hoppe (1930) observed that individuals, when performance was tied to self-worth, as is the case of both labor and management, shifted responsibility for failure away from themselves. Hoppe's findings were supported by Miller (1976) and Rosenfield and Stephen (1978).

Bradley (1978) found that there was a substantial body of literature, (Arkin, Gleason, and Johnston, 1976; Miller, 1976, Synder, Stephan, and Rosenfield, 1976; Wortman, Costanze, and Witt, 1973) that demonstrates a tendency for self-attributions in positive (success) situations and external attributions for their own negative (failure) situations. As Bradley (1978) found, by taking credit for good acts and denying blame for bad outcomes, an individual may be able to enhance or protect his self-esteem (Holmes, 1968; Erdelyi, 1974). Miller and Ross (1975), however, found little empirical support for this self-protective causal attribution. They continued by stating that for the most part, the previous findings could be tied to the non-motivational information-processing model. Specifically, they found three basic reasons for the acceptance of success responsibility and the shifting of blame responsibility: individuals expect success more than failure and are more likely to make self-ascriptions experiencing constant failure; perceived covariation between response and outcome might be apparent to an individual experiencing increasing success than those subjects experiencing constant failure; and, subjects erroneously base their judgments of the contingency between response and outcome in terms of the occurrence of the desired outcome rather than by an actual degree of contingency.

Also, Stevens and Jones (1976) used the attribution model by Kelly (1955) to research for any relationship between cognitive behavior patterns and motivational factors and outcomes. Their findings, although not a surprise, did reiterate that subjects facing success outcomes attribution the results to internal variables (i.e., ability and effort) and those subjects in failure situations attributed those factors to external variables (i.e., luck).

As the research clearly shows, before the AWLMCs can be effective the problems need to be identified; thus, the purpose of this study. This study is based in part on the three-step integrative bargaining model of Walton and McKersie (1965). Step one identifies the problem(s) and conveys information concerning the problem to interested parties. Step two has parties determine how best to reach their goals simultaneously. The third step requires the parties to create a climate of trust which will allow the comparison and evaluation of alternatives for reaching these goals.

Specifically, the present study's purpose was twofold. First, it investigated the problem areas within an area of Northwest Alabama, including a test of the causality of responsibility. Secondly, it tested the public's attitude on the appropriateness of the integrative bargaining/AWLMC approach in the correction of area problems.

## **2. Method**

### **2.1 Employee Sample**

A sample of 510 subjects was drawn from both union and non-union workers. The subjects were employed in a variety of industries within one Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area. This SMSA included two counties of Northwest Alabama (USA).

An attempt was made to ensure that a cross-reference of area citizens would be polled. This was accomplished by orienting each student volunteer on the purpose of the study and on the various requirements for participating eligibility. The lack of randomization should not present a problem since all citizens are subject to the occurrences discussed in this study.

Of the 510 respondents who began the questionnaire phase, 465 provided usable surveys. It should be noted that this is a return rate of 91.18 percent. This percentage is considerably more than is typically required for a meaningful study.

The majority (51 percent) of the respondents were females. Sixty-eight percent of the total sample has worked for their particular firm for less than five years and 73 percent at their particular job less than five years. About 21 percent of the respondents had a high school education or less, 53 percent had some college education, 17 percent had a college degree and nine percent did some postgraduate work. Over 48 percent of the respondents were between the ages of 20 and 29 with four percent being over 60 years of age or over. Finally, 82 percent of those completing the testing were not union members; however, of the union members, 61 percent had been members for less than 10 years.

### **2.2 Criteria**

In the present study, a survey of attitudes was compiled through the use of information provided by the SMSA's Area Labor/Management Committee, Inc. At this group's inception they identified what they saw as the area's greatest problems. These problems were then presented in the standard seven-point Likert scale format.

The first section of the survey asked respondents to identify which committee concerns they saw as area problems. The generalizability of such a technique has been explored in a number of investigations and the findings have shown that this functional postulate is tenable across different populations and several modes of stimulus presentations.

The second section asked survey participants to place blame in percentage form, for area situations on the area union, organization, and/or workers.

The third component of the study asked respondents to, once again through a seven-point Likert scale, attribute area concerns with the present events and attitudes. This section was used to measure the significance of several seemingly independent variables on the dependent variables, those the present study has been referring to as problems or concerns.

The final section of the survey asked participants to provide input into the effect of these problems and if a labor/management committee, especially one committed to correcting these problems, would be a benefit.

Further, several demographics were collected that may impact this decision-making process and possibly act as intervening variables, such as sex, educational level, age, length of service in the present task, length of service in the present organization, and the length of service as a union member.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 The Identification of Area Problems

As stated earlier, each respondent was asked to identify are problems. Table 1 presents in rank order these 10 problems.

**Table 1: Ten Item Attitude Scale and Average Response (N: 465)**

Item Letter	Problem	AverageScore
J	A low morale of workers in the local area.	2.65
E	Poor communication between management and laborofficials.	2.67
B	A lack of understanding by labor unions towardmanagement problems.	2.72
H	An inadequate opportunity for workers to participatein decision-making for their organization.	2.79
F	Poor communication between management and itsmembership.	2.94
A	A lack of understanding by management toward union problems.	3.03
D	A lack of understanding by labor unions toward consumer problems.	3.09
G	Poor communication between unions and its membership.	3.17
I	An inadequate opportunity for union members to participate in decision-making for their union.	3.26
C	A lack of understanding by management toward consumer problems.	3.32

Some interesting conclusions can be drawn from this list. First, paradoxically, the two most common problems that AWLMCs are forced to deal with are a correction of low community morale and a resolution toward strengthening effective communication between area organizations and labor union. As can be witnessed, the respondents saw these two concerns as this area's major problems. At this early point one could conclude a great need for a committee, especially one committed to integrative bargaining. A second conclusion, surprisingly so, is that management appears to be seen as a great force toward the adversative position of our area, however, statistically this is minimal. Research shows that historically unions have been credited with contributing more to community problems. A final conclusion is that all 10 of the stated potential problems were seen as problems by the respondents. This seems to reinforce the early writings on labor/management committees.

#### 3.2 Association between Union Membership and Area Problems

Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) was used to determine the existence of association between the participant's union membership status and his/her decision on area problems.

**Table 2: The Results of  $\chi^2$  Between Union Membership andthe View of Area Problems**

Variable (Problem)	Frequency	Results			
		DF	$\chi^2$	Cramer's V	Significance
A	465	6	12.806	.166	.046*
B	465	6	20.369	.251	.000**
D	465	6	14.697	.178	.0227*
G	465	6	14.931	.179	.020*
I	465	6	13.045	.167	.042*
J	465	6	12.907	.167	.045*

\* Considered Significant at  $p < .05$

\*\* Considered Significant at  $p < .001$

The results of possible association between these two variables are presented in Table 2. In general, for five of the problems (A, lack of understanding by management toward labor union problems; D, a lack of understanding by labor union toward consumer problems; G, poor communications between labor union and its membership; I, an inadequate opportunity for union members to participate in decision-making for their union; and, J, a low morale of workers in the SMSA area), there was an association of these variables at  $p < .05$  and for problem B (public distrust), an association at  $p < .001$ .

This overwhelming supports the idea that a respondents’ union membership directly affects a respondent’s view toward area problems, but, not in the manner one might guess. It appears union members are much more critical of the union’s role in this process (variables B, D, G, I) than management’s role (variable A). One might suggest that a rationale for this finding is that union members, having been possibly displaced, sense that the union, who had promised protection, was unable to provide this.

This might further suggest that work needs to be centered, particularly at the early stages of development toward union members and their connection with their unions. This is not to say, however, that only union members see a disassociation with their representatives. These findings also suggest that non-union workers, as a whole, see the primary cause of this area’s problems to be union matters. This, too, suggests that work needs to be directed toward changing or improving the public attitude of area labor unions. However, this finding may make integrative bargaining more challenging due to the distrust union members appear to have for their union’s ability to effectively represent their interests.

**3.3 Association between Respondent’s Sex and Area Problems**

Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) was used to determine if there existed a relationship between a respondent’s sex and his/her view of an area issue as a problem.

**Table 3: The Results of  $X^2$  Between Respondent’s Sex and the View of Area Problems**

Variable (Problem)	Frequency	Results			
		DF	$X^2$	Cramer’s V	Significance
B	465	6	24.695	.230	.000**
C	465	6	13.006	.167	.043*
D	465	6	16.093	.186	.013*
G	465	6	12.729	.165	.048*

\* Considered Significant at  $p < .05$   
 \*\* Considered Significant at  $p < .001$

As Table 3 shows, three of the problems (C, a lack of understanding by management toward consumer problems; D, a lack of understanding by labor unions toward consumer problems; and, G, poor communications between unions and its membership) were significant at the required  $p < .05$  with problem B (a lack of understanding by labor unions toward management problems) significant at  $p < .001$ . Once again, the majority of these, three of the four (B, D, and G), are negative in respect to labor unions. This conclusion might again warrant targeting information toward the improvement of labor union’s public image.

**Table 4: The Percentage of Response (Positive and Negative) for Significant  $X^2$  Area Problems by Sex**

Variable	Sex	Yes	No	AverageScore
B	Male	73.45	20.00	2.66
	Female	76.57	10.88	2.49
C	Male	58.85	30.00	3.41
	Female	65.27	24.43	3.02
D	Male	65.05	26.10	3.37
	Female	68.20	19.25	2.87
G	Male	63.71	26.11	3.07
	Female	61.51	18.83	2.97

The more interesting results, however, can be seen from Table 4. First, the figures show that females, as a group, tend to be much more critical of the local state of affairs. In each of the significant variables, female respondents’ average score was lower than participating male respondents. This implies that the concept of integrative bargaining in order to be seen as effective should possibly concentrate on the needs of females, since they, as a group, see each of the problems as more affective.

A second conclusion can be drawn by the particular distribution of scores. In two of the three variables dealing with labor unions (B and D) the female respondents’ responses were well below the males choices. This, too, implies that females are more critical of unions.

This result is strengthened when one looks at variable C (a management variable). It can be seen that the females' average score is higher than any of the other variables. Therefore, not only do labor unions have an image problem with union workers, but they seem to have one with females.

### 3.4 Frequency of Response for Responsibility

The most interesting part of this section's results is that it reemphasizes what has been discussed prior to this. As a group, the respondents overwhelmingly shifted the responsibility of these aforementioned problems squarely on the union's shoulders. In over 45 percent of the cases, unions were given at least 50 percent of the responsibility for creating the problems while management for that same level of responsibility was mentioned in only 31 percent of the cases. If this requirement was reduced to 33 percent, respondents in 62 percent of the cases gave unions the blame; however, those same respondents credited management in only 44 percent of the cases.

### 3.5 Frequency of Response for Responsibility by Union Membership Status

Table 5 shows these requests and they appear to be much like what one would expect.

**Table 5: Frequency (in percentage) of Response for Greatest Amount of Responsibility in Relationship to Union Membership**

Variable	Respondents	>50	>33	0
Union	U	17	21	14
	NU	50	63	7
Management	U	53	70	11
	NU	26	44	15
Workers	U	16	31	8
	NU	7	21	7

As one can see, union members tended to shift the blame away from the union and toward management. For example, in placing at least half of the responsibility, union members in only 17 percent of the cases said that the union was responsible, while that same group of union-member respondents said management was at least 50 percent responsible in 53 percent of the cases. This same trend can be seen by non-union workers. One would expect that non-union workers would shift responsibility on to the secondary party, in this case the union, and away from the primary party, management. The findings in fact show this. Non-union respondents credited union for at least 50 percent of the blame in 50 percent of the cases, but, management in only 26 percent.

This might appear to be contrary to the discussion prior to this; however, it is not. The process of asymmetrical attributions assumes that people tend to attribute success to their efforts, abilities or other dispositions, whereas they attribute failure to bad luck, task difficulty, or external variables. The latter is particularly true when performance, or a lack of, is tied to self-worth or public reputation. Logically this transference – or denying blame for negative outcomes – allows a person to enhance or protect his/her self-esteem.

To compound the potential theoretical controversy, clinical and motivation research suggests that in ambiguous situations (as this one is) most people would blame failure on factors outside their group, while credit for success would be taken by the group members themselves, either individually or jointly. Obviously, this phenomenon has occurred in the present study.

### 3.6 The Identification of Psychological and Economic Results of Area Problems

As stated earlier, each respondent was asked to identify some possible results of the area problems. Table 6 presents, in rank order, these eight consequences.

**Table 6: Eight Item Attitude Scale and Average Response(N: 465)**

Item Letter	Description	Average Score
D	Plant closing	2.19
E	A reluctance of new businesses to enter	2.25
H	A lack of area growth	2.31
F	High unemployment	2.32
B	Public distrust	2.75
C	Low employee productivity	2.76
G	Area inflation	2.81
A	Strikes and lockouts	2.95

The interesting finding seems to be that the order places union-controlled variables (low employee productivity and strikes) at or near the end of the list, while at the same time, assigning management-controlled variables (a reluctance for new organizations to enter and plant closings) top billing. This seems to imply that although the union caused the problems and should be blamed, management was the victim of the union’s actions instead of being either the initiator of or the partner to them. Armed with such an attitude, integrative bargaining’s success is questionable. As earlier research showed, both parties must enter this relationship equally willing to compromise and at this point there can be no victims.

Along that same vein, it is surprising that variable A (strike and lockouts) was located at the end of the priority list. One explanation could be that the respondents were implying that these concerted activities were, given this group, not caused by something management had done, but, were instead completely isolated, possibly premeditated and unprovoked, activities.

**3.7 Frequency of an Association among Psychological and Economic Results and Area Problems and Union Membership Status**

**Table 7: Average Response of Union/ Non-Union Participants on Effect of Area Problems**

Variable	Non-Union	Union	Description
A	2.79	2.67	Strikes and lockouts
B	2.65	3.24	Public distrust
C	2.62	3.41	Low productivity
D	2.11	2.53	Plant closing
E	2.18	2.57	New businesses
F	2.32	2.52	Unemployment
G	2.66	3.53	Area inflation
H	2.21	2.80	Area growth

As Table 7 shows, the only variable in which union members were more assured to have been caused by area problems or jointly caused in many cases, was strikes and lockouts. Reasons for this might include that union members understand better the cause-and-effect of engaging in concerted activities, or, that union members sense that they were “forced” to strike due to the area environment. Another ironic statistic is that for non-union respondents this variable ranked lowest, implying it was the one least likely to have been caused by this area’s problems.

A second point that should be addressed is that in the case of both union and non-union members the variable that both agree was caused most by the area’s problems was plant closing (variable D). This is a pivotal point in that it appears that both groups realize that the area plants closed because of events within the control of management and/or unions. This might imply that the committee should attempt rechanneling public thinking toward a more neutral view of concerted activities. Apparently, managements’ explanation of economic justification for plant closings was not sufficient or believable for most area residents.

**3.8 Testing for Association between Individual Variables and Corrective Measures**

**Table 8: The Results of X<sup>2</sup> Between the Placing of Responsibility for Sex and Union Membership as an Internal Variable and Corrective Questions**

Questions	Variable	Frequency	Results			
			DF	X <sup>2</sup>	Cramer’s V	STG
Can the problems in the area be corrected?	Sex	465	6	13.148	.168	.041*
	UM	465	6	8.682	.137	.192
Would a labor-management committee working toward correcting area problems be a benefit?	Sex	465	6	16.376	.188	.012*
	UM	465	6	3.178	.083	.7862
If these problems are not corrected, will the area survive?	Sex	465	6	5.408	.108	.493
	UM	465	6	8.205	.133	.224

\*Considered Significant at p < .05

Chi-square was used to determine if there was a significant relationship between a respondent's sex and union members and tactics the area could use, if needed, to correct these area problems. Table 8 presents the findings of the statistical test of this connection.

#### 4. Conclusions

In summary, as a whole, no association was found concerning union membership; however, the internal variable, sex, was seen to have a significant connection to these questions. This should not be taken to be a negative or even an alarming finding because in all cases the responses were skewed toward the top of the scale. Cumulatively the frequencies provided evidence that area residents are ready for action and see the problems within reach of the committee. A suggestion might include an active public relations surge to provide consumers proof that the committee is actively working toward the correction and prevention of economical, organizational, and societal problems.

The respondents appeared to be alert to the area's drawbacks and as a whole saw the problems as short-term problems if the society as a whole worked toward correction. The statistics point an accusative finger at the area labor unions and further, to some degree, indicated management to be a victim of union's wrath. Moreover, the participants saw a need for the partners in this controversy to work constructively toward improving a possibly economically devastating situation. An AWLMC was seen as such a viable option. Overall, integrative bargaining seen as an appropriate remedy for area problems? The research appears to say, yes.

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