

## Trade Unions: Promoting or Withholding Solutions in Management–Union Conflicts? Analysis of Employee and Manager Perceptions

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### Abstract

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This paper examines employee and manager perceptions of the trade union within their organization as either promoting or withholding solutions in employee management conflicts. The primary research questions asked the following: Are there differences in employee and manager comprehension of trade union behavior in union–management conflict? Are these differences expressed on the level of gender between men and women? Are certain handling patterns considered as promoting or withholding solutions? How does the chosen pattern affect general job satisfaction of workers? 158 employees and managers, both men and women from three public sector organizations asked to answer questionnaires based on trade-union handling styles in times of union-management conflict, added questions about union ability to promote or withhold solution and employee job satisfaction. Findings show significant correlations between handling styles and employee and manager perception of the union as promoting or withholding solutions in conflict situations. Some handling styles were viewed as more solution-promoting (compromising, collaborative, and competitive) with others regarded as more solution-withholding (e.g., avoiding and obliging). Additional findings indicate that men diagnosed the dominant handling style as competitive, while women diagnosed it as one of avoidance. In addition, men were more likely than women to perceive unions as promoting conflict-solutions. Nonetheless, both men and women agreed that a more competitive union can promote solutions better than a union characterized by conflict-avoidance. This research contributes managers and employees by offering tools to examine their dealing with conflict effectiveness.

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**Keywords:** Conflict, trade unions, conflict handling styles, organizational relationship.

### 1. Background:

#### 1.1 Trade unions: Fertile ground for conflicts

For the salaried employee, trade unions represent one of the more comprehensive organizations of work life. They constitute, perhaps, the largest secular voluntary organization of modern society (Margalit, 1994; 17). The right to unionize acknowledged in U.N treaties from 1948 and by international employment organizations is a result of worker struggles, of employees in a constantly inferior position compared to their employers (Saporta, 2007; 8).

The trade union emphasizes vertical organizational differences (that is, between management and employees) and supplies mechanisms to solve these differences. Employees join trade union for a variety of reasons, based on different sources of conflict (Daft, 1999; 451). First, "psychological distance" pushes employees who feel insufficiently involved in their organization, and unfulfilled in their needs. The trade union serves as their "mouthpiece" and provides them a clear collective identity. |

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Power and status also factor in as reasons: At the bottom of the organizational hierarchy, employees can experience social alienation, powerlessness and a sense of exclusion from decisions that affect them (such as in matters of salaries, benefits etc.). Therefore, standing together as a union can be empowering and reduces the employee-management gap. Samuel (2005) states that employee unionization changes the ongoing bargaining over salaries and working conditions from a fight involving individuals to a well-organized struggle led by professional groups. Yet another reason concerns differences between manager and employee values and ideology. Research has shown that employees believe in the importance of seniority, the right to strike, and the trade union's status. Managers, on the other hand, tend to value the importance of entrepreneurship, the right to work during a strike (i.e. strike-breaking), management rights, and the use of quotas to measure production (Wolters, 1982). Lastly, employees tend to view trade unions as resource-rich: They join for benefits, improvement in work conditions, and assistance with financial benefits.

The extent to which the trade union is perceived as a burden or asset depends significantly on management response. Freeman and Medoff (1984) indicate two main approaches: the Monopoly Face and the Collective Voice (Also known as "The Institutional Response Face"). According to Monopoly Face, union work rules have adverse effects on productivity and on lack of employment in the organized sector. Union wage affects make recruiting new employees prohibitive. In addition, managers frequently complain about inflexible operations and work disruptions due to unions. Social critics paint unions as socially unresponsive, elitist, and non-democratic (Freeman and Medoff, 1984). According to Lewin (2005), unions achieve higher, above market, collectively bargained pay and benefit rates for their members. Yet unionism is also negatively associated with organizational research, development expenditures, capital investment, profitability, and market value. Thus, union organizations are incentivized to reduce employment of union workers, shift work to nonunion workers, lower labor costs in regions and nations, substitute capital and technology for union labor, and even exit their particular business or industry. All of the above trends have grown stronger in light of the rapid increases in global competition, deregulation, and technological change in recent years.

On the other hand, according to Collective Voice theory, unions have beneficial economic and political effects and the ability to induce better management practices and higher productivity. Unions can increase skill development and retention, provide information about what occurs on the shop floor, and improve moral and pressure management to be more operationally efficient. In parallel, less union resignations results in higher selectivity during recruiting and greater investment in training. As a result, the labor forces isomer stable, professional, and efficient, reducing organizational expenses (Freeman and Medoff, 1984). In addition, trade unions protect employees from the brunt of certain management decisions while enabling the voicing of employee opinions, both in the context of the work place and the external political field. Trade unions are an important interest group in the political arena that is largely controlled by capitalists. Promoting issues such as full employment, wage and quality of life, and security in the work place, unions constitute an integral part of the modern democratic experiment, bringing democratic practices to the workplace (Saporta, 2007;11).

Collective bargaining (in contrast to personal bargaining) with the employer is essential for voicing employee opinions as many aspects of industrial relations are related to the "common good" (e.g., lighting, heating, production rates, pension, etc.) and competitive markets will not otherwise supply these goods. In addition, employees might be afraid that publicly expressing opinions and preferences might result in termination, and therefore the trade union can be an important defender of free speech (Freeman and Medoff, 1984; 169).

### *1.2 Trade unionism in Israel*

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the first struggles to establish trade unions in Israel occurred, before the modern State of Israel was announced (1948). At first, political parties were in charge of the professional wealth of their members, until the Histadrut labor federation was founded in 1920 and served as a labor federation (at different work places) for employees in various fields of employment. In addition, the Histadrut played an important part in the establishment of a working class in Israel by settling the country, absorbing new immigrants, building factories, and supplying welfare services.

The fact that Histadrut served both trade union and employer generated much criticism over the years (Margalit, 1994). In 1934, the National Histadrut labor federation was founded by the Revisionist Zionism movement. After the establishment of the Jewish state, industrial relations was based on corporate European models arranging the working market and other social aspects on joint trilateral negotiation between employer, worker, and the state (Mundlak, 2004). The power of the Histadrut enabled a thorough negotiation of worker rights, and was influential in the design of Israel's social policy (Mundlak, 2004).

Since the 1980's, the status of the Histadrut and trade unions has deteriorated due to various reasons: Culture and value shifts in Israeli society (i.e., from a collective society to a more individualistic one), technological changes which altered the professional and social structure of employee-management relations, neoliberal government policy determined to stop rising inflation by any and all means (i.e., through cutting public budgets and increasing the unemployment rate), and internal problems affecting the Histadrut itself (i.e., problematic functioning and a bad reputation) (Cohen and others, 2000; 27).

Nonetheless, in recent years some changes have occurred in the world of Israeli unionization. For instance, a new general labor federation, "Koach la Ovdim," was founded in 2008 in order to help workers in all sectors to establish trade unions. In addition, the Israeli parliament approved a new amendment obligating employers to meet with new trade unions initiatives to discuss employee terms and rights.

### *1.3 The Organizing approach versus the Partnership approach*

Two dominant approaches exist vis-à-vis management-trade union relation strategies: Organizing and Partnership. Organizing originated in the United States in the 1980's and has influenced labor movement in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Britain (Heery, 2002). One of its salient characteristics is change in union priorities, so that investment in recruitment becomes the primary objective of union activity and takes priority over the "servicing" of existing members. Organizing denotes employee empowerment, promoting activism, strengthening the trade union, and encouraging employees to resolve their own problems without recourse to external representation. A set of "organizing techniques" are defined, such as mapping the targeted workforce to identify potential members and activists, using representative "organizing committees" to enlist campaign workers, reliance on "actions" to foreground the union as a visible focus, direct person-to-person recruitment strategies, and the identification of "levers" in the media and in the wider community that can be used to pressure resistant employers (Bronfenbrenner, 1998).

The basic idea at the heart of the Organizing model is that trade unions should work closely with their members in order to identify common workplace needs and problems. Once identified, the union has to build collective support, and then fight for those needs by all means. The final goal is to secure collective bargaining rights, and if those already exist, uses them more efficiently. The specific means deployed can be as varied as employee and management recruiting campaigns, organized protests, and alliance-making with external organizations useful to assist in the struggle with management (Heery and Simms, 2010). Even though collective bargaining is a central pillar of Organizing, it allows for different strategies and frameworks to co-exist as well. In this way, Organizing campaigns are usually "open" to new alliances and connections with external groups, for example, in the community or among customers. Although Organizing promotes a vision of a renewed trade union movement with a strong and partially independent representational system, research indicates that campaign leaders have usually elected to stop using the Organizing strategy if they were able to expand the collective bargaining and involve new groups of employees (Simms, 2005 in: Simms, 2010). Therefore, even though the Organizing approach serves as an important alternative to that of Partnership (to be discussed below), there are few indications in the past decades of trade unions that were confident enough to act in this way, except in efforts to ensure and enlarge collective bargaining in the workplace (Simms, 2010).

For its part, Partnership developed in the 1990's in England. The main idea of this approach is the potential of mutual gain for both management and trade union evolving from a relationship of agreement (Lucio and Stuart, 2005). Accordingly, achieving mutual goals such as fairness and competitiveness (Tuc, 1999 in Lucio and Stuart, 2004; 410) is possible only if both sides give up their traditional one-sided agendas characterized by conflict. If a new agenda is adopted based on mutually agreed professional interests, industrial relations will blossom in a climate of cooperation, mutual trust, and mutual gains (Guest and Peccei, 1998, 2001; Kochan and Osterman, 1994; Leisink, 1993).

Many studies indicate that management-trade union cooperation is a result of organizational change initiatives. Management's need for change produces cooperation that brings trade unions to assist them in introducing new practices and reforms into the workplace (Martinez and Stuart, 2004) or to legitimize changes that have already occurred (Bacon and Storey, 2000).

Oxenbridge and Brown's research (2002) points to the reasons why managements want to partner with trade unions: Financial difficulties, achieving governmental auctions (as accepted in England), organizational change, and implementing new methods for service improvement. In their research, trade union representatives were all in favor of partnering with the employer, implemented effective changes together in cooperating with management, and compelled management to encourage employees to join the trade union. In addition, cooperation assists in achieving better salaries and conditions that motivate increase in union membership. From the trade union's perspective, Partnership can be seen either as a "lifeline" that can make unions relevant again (Ackers and Payne, 1998) or as cooperative agreements weakening trade unions and leading them to concession in bargaining, narrowing the agenda, and establishing new consulting committees that weaken the collective bargaining (Martinez and Stuart, 2004; Kelly, 1998).

Management-employee cooperation can be accomplished in different ways: Distributing of betterments instead of permanent raises, employee bonuses according to organization performance (as in the case of Volkswagen). Management-employee committees are another option designated to increase employee involvement through connecting professional knowledge to productivity improvement, and serves as a cooperative model for management-trade union relations. A third option is "employment security" or trade unions allowing members to change positions as long as new positions are available and only if the organization achieves projected benchmarks of success (the concept is one of "mutual destiny" for all) (Daft, 1999:452). Much research (such as Martinez, Stuart, Tomlinson and Perret, 2010) claims that a full merger between management and employee interests is near. The aspiration for successful partnership can develop in a climate of mutual respect enabling compromise in times of bargaining. Thus, effective collective bargaining over work conditions will become possible.

However, Partnership critics claim that despite the positive connection between cooperation principles, employee positions and behavior, productivity and profitability, the model is biased towards employers. Guest and Peccei (2001) found that despite the forecast for high levels of trust in organizations with a cooperative strategy, levels of direct employee participation were generally low. In other words, management trust in employees remained rather low even in supportive environments. In addition, the model is characterized by lack of balance: While issues such as employee contributions are highly emphasized, others such as welfare, rights, and representation do not receive as much attention. Nevertheless, Guest and Peccei (2001) indicate that partnerships with high levels of trust based on direct and comprehensive participation in decision making and representative involvement tend to lead to the best outcomes for all parties: management, employees, and trade unions.

Another critical argument against the partnership model is that of its effect on trade union legitimacy, since partnership initiatives are implemented in order to reduce employee aggression as well as decrease the ranks joining the trade union (Baugher, 2007). According to Lucio and Stuart (2004:421) rationales and internal politics are underplayed and "management and union representatives make choices based on a set of calculations which often appear opaque and far from strategic." In other words, while partnerships appear to offer some type of "long term engagement" (including deepening management-labor relationships and expanding employee influence), in reality "the politics of partnership have a complexity that may not be beneficial for trade unions and their members." Therefore, the future of "partnership" depends on underlying motives of each party and the broad political and financial contexts informing the particular engagement.

#### *1.4 How does trade union membership affect job satisfaction?*

Job satisfaction is a pleasurable or emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job experiences (Lock, 1976; 1300). It depends on employee expectations, needs (both physical and emotional), and values. Work characteristics potentially leading to job satisfaction include those related to mental challenges such as autonomy, complexity, responsibility, a chance to use personal skills, and to opportunity to learn new ones. Nonetheless, if the mental challenge is too formidable it might result in dissatisfaction.

In addition to challenge and accomplishment components, personal interest and recognition play central job satisfaction roles. According to Lock (1976), the weighted equation of job satisfaction is the inadequacy between "to what extent does the work fulfill a valuable aspect" and "how much of this aspect does the employee want or expect."

Value (by importance) attributed by the employee to different aspects affects total weight, and, therefore, a high job satisfaction can evolve from objective improvements, reduction of expectations, or rearrangement of values in such a way that less satisfying aspects become less important while more satisfying aspects become more important. Hammer and Avgar's (2005) research points to employee job satisfaction being high if quality of work increases, and, as a result, so too will quality of management-employee relations. According to research, these conditions can be realized by adopting the partnership approach, mentioned earlier, in management-trade union relations that enable employees to participate in making decisions related to their jobs.

Many research studies show a negative connection between trade union membership and employee job satisfaction, such that employee union members are less satisfied with their jobs (for example: Borjas, 1979; Kochan and Helfman, 1981; Bender and Sloane, 1998). The reason for this negative correlation, according to Clark (1996), is concealed by the fact that the union's mandate is to confront less satisfying workplace issues. Therefore, trade unions by definition attract more dissatisfied employees.

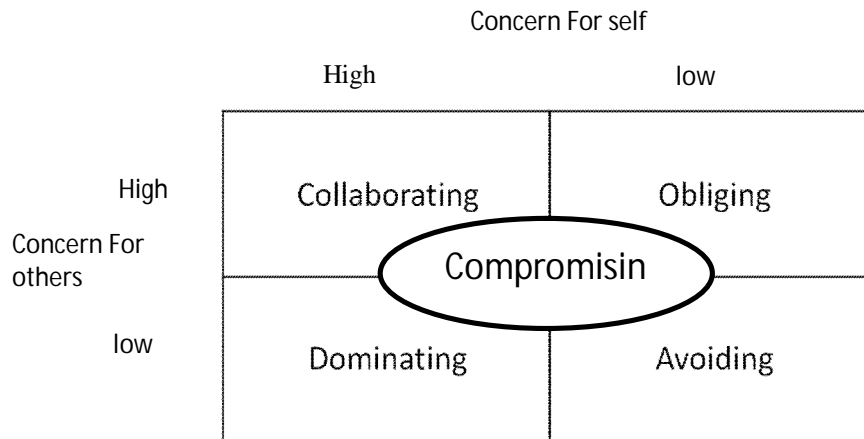
However, other research indicates no connection whatsoever between job satisfaction and union membership. For example, Renaud (2002) examined the level of job satisfaction of both union member and non-union employees, and found no connection between these two variables. According to Renaud (2002), previous research failed to pay attention to differences in work conditions of unionized and non-unionized organizations. As Freeman and Medoff (1984) suggest, workspace of unionized organizations tends to be poorer, a factor that can lead to negative correlation between union membership and job satisfaction. Employees enjoying more pleasant workspace, freedom of choice, and chance for promotion or professional development will be more satisfied with their jobs. Research findings show that when the "work conditions" variable is constant, there is no statistical difference between unionized and non-unionized employees. In other words, it is not union membership itself that affects job satisfaction among unionized employees, rather it is poor working conditions (Renaud, 2002;146). Likewise, Gordon and Denisi (1995) found that when unionized and non-unionized employees enjoy the same work conditions, union membership did not affect job satisfaction. According to research findings, trade unions do not encourage job dissatisfaction. Instead, we see the opposite conclusion: They work to improve member job satisfaction.

### *1.5 Styles of handling interpersonal conflict*

Different models in the field of conflict handling style strategies have been introduced over the years. The conceptualization in Rahim organizational Conflict Inventory- II (Roch-II, Rahim, 1983) - the model used in the current research is similar to that of Blake and Mouton (1964) and Thomas (1976). The model includes two basic dimensions: concern for self and concern for others. The first explains the degree to which a person attempts to satisfy his concerns, while the second explains the degree to which a person wants to satisfy the concerns of others (Rahim and Bonoma, 1979). A combination of the two dimensions results in five specific styles of handling interpersonal conflict (Rahim, Antonio and Psenicka 2001; 195-196). These can be described as follows:

1. Dominating: A handling style characterized by high levels of concern for self and low levels of concern for others. This style has been identified with a win-lose orientation or with forcing behavior to win one's position.
2. Obliging: A handling style characterized by low concern for self and high concern for others. This style is associated with attempting to play down differences while emphasizing commonalities to satisfy concerns of the other party.
3. Avoiding: A handling style characterized by low concern both for self and for others. This style has been associated with withdrawal, buck-passing, or sidestepping situations.
4. Integrating/Collaborating: A handling style characterized by high levels of concern both for self and for others. This style involves openness, exchange of information, and examination of differences to reach an effective solution acceptable to both parties. It is associated with problem solving, which may lead to creative solutions.
5. Compromising: A handling style characterized by medium levels of concern both for self and for others. This style involves give and take whereby both parties give up something to make a mutually acceptable decision.

**Figure 1: The Rahim's organizational Conflict Inventory- II (Roch-II, Rahim, 1983)**



The Roch- II (Rahim, 1983) is a 35 item questionnaire that measures respondents handling styles in times of conflict. It was designed on the basis of lengthy and repeated feedback from subjects and factor analysis of various sets of items, with each item cast on a five point Likart scale (a higher value represented greater use of a conflict style).

**2. Methodology**

The subjects involved in the study comprised 158 employees and managers, both men and women from three public sector organizations. Participating in the survey was approved and coordinated both with the human resource departments and with the trade unions representing workers from these organizations. Participants were asked to answer a three part survey: The first part included questions based on trade-union handling styles in times of union-management conflict derived from Rahim's (1983) model; the second part included questions about union ability to promote or withhold solutions; and the third part inquired into employee job satisfaction. The respondents manually answered the questionnaire.

The primary research questions asked the following: Are there differences in the ways employees and managers as well as men and women comprehend the way trade unions deal with union-management conflict? Are certain handling styles considered as promoting or withholding solutions? How do particular styles affect general job satisfaction of employees?

The secondary research questions were concerned with demographic effects: How do age, seniority, and level of education impact respondent perception of the trade union's dominant handling style, and its ability to promote or withhold solutions, in trade union-management conflict?

The independent variable was perception of "trade union handling style in times of trade union-management conflict." This variable contains five numeric values: 1. competitive, 2.cooperating, 3.compromising, 4.obliging, and5.avoiding. The independent variable was examined by Rahim's (1983) questionnaire that was translated into Hebrew by Ben Ari, Shamir, and Finer (2002) and was made compatible to researching trade unions by the author. The respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement regarding 32 statements that examined their dominant handling style. For example, one statement claimed that" the trade union will make an effort so that management will be satisfied as well."

The first dependent variable was "perceptions of employees and management of the trade union as a solution promoter or withholder." This variable contains two values: solution promoter or solution withholder. It was gauged by three statements that respondents had to grade on a 1-5 scale. For example, one question asked, "how much has the trade union helped you (or can help you) with confronting management in different situations?"Another dependent variable was that of "general job satisfaction."It was assessed by a single question at the end of the survey, and by grading level of job satisfaction on a 1-5 scale.

**3. Findings**

*3.1 Differences between the subject groups*

The first research questions asked about possible differences based on gender or status in worker perception of the trade union's dominant handling style(graded out of five) in times of conflict with the management, in perceptions of the trade union as a solution promoter or withholder, and of worker job satisfaction. The MANOVA 2x2 (status X gender) analysis indicates significant differences between men and women  $F(5, 150)=4.74, p < 0.01, \text{Eta}^2=0.13$ . However, significant differences were not found between workers and managers  $F(5,150)= 1.67, p > 0.05$ . In addition, insignificant interaction between genders based on status was found:  $F(5,150)=.23, p > 0.05$ .

**Table 1: Averages and standard deviations of men and women at the perception of the 5 conflict- handling styles**

Eta2	F(1,154)	gender				measures
		men		women		
		SD	M	SD	M	
0.03	4.88*	0.86972	3.2936	0.73085	2.8617	avoiding
0.03	4.84*	0.71487	3.3041	0.61870	3.3693	competitive
0.01	1.03	0.87516	3.3728	0.69732	3.0000	obliging
0.00	0.41	0.59835	3.7741	0.54183	3.5772	collaborating
0.01	1.92	0.68545	3.5135	0.50924	3.6323	compromising

$P < .05^*$

The averages and standard deviations of both male and female perceptions of the five conflict handling styles are indicated in table1, in addition to the variance analyses of gender by each measure (i.e., handling style). Table 1 indicates significant differences for only "avoiding" and "competitive" styles. The averages indicate that women found the trade union's style more avoiding than men, while men considered it more competitive than women. A MANOVA 2X2 analysis of the variables "solution promoter-withholder" and "general job satisfaction" indicates a significant difference between men and women  $F(2,149)=5.34, p < .01, \text{Eta}^2=.07$ . However, no difference was found between workers and managers  $F(2,149)= 2.86, p > 0.05$ . In addition, a correlation of gender by status was not found  $F(2,149)= 1.20, p > 0.05$ . The averages and standard deviations of subject perception of the trade union as promoting or withholding solutions and general job satisfaction are indicated in table 2.

**Table 2: Averages and standard deviations of men and women perceptions of the trade union as promoting or withholding solutions and of job satisfaction**

Eta2	F(1, 150)	Gender				measures
		Men		women		
		SD	M	SD	M	
0.06	8.82**	1.04	3.07	0.87	3.51	promoting
0.00	0.09	0.89	4.15	0.88	4.23	withholding

$P < .01^{**}$

The variance analysis executed for each measure indicated a significant difference only for the trade union as a solution promoter or withholder. Averages show that men, more than women, believe, that the trade union promotes solutions.

*3.2 Correlations between conflict handling styles, employees' perceptions of the trade union as promoting or withholding solutions and general job satisfaction*

In order to find a connection between perceptions of conflict handling styles, trade union as solution promoter or withholder, and of general job satisfaction, a Pearson correlation was calculated separately for the general sample, for men and women, and for workers and managers. Fisher's Z test was calculated as well, in order to find sub-group correlations.

**Table 3: Pearson correlations between conflict handling styles, perceptions of the trade union as a solution promoter/ withholder and general job satisfaction**

compromising	Collaborating	obliging	dominating	avoiding	
.529**	.387**	-.433**	.375**	-.401**	Promoter- withholder
.324***	.368***	.080	-.016	.135	Job satisfaction

\*\* $p < .01$  \*\*\* $p < .001$

Table 3 indicates significant correlations between all conflict handling-styles and worker perceptions of the trade union as solution promoter or withholder. While negative correlations were found between the "avoiding" and "obliging" handling styles and the variable "solutions promoter-withholder, "positive correlations were evident between styles of compromising, collaborating, and dominating as well as the "solutions promoter-withholder "variable. Therefore, the more participant's identified the trade union as compromising, collaborating, or dominating (and less as avoiding or obliging), the more they related to it as a solution promoter. Significant correlations were also detected between "collaborating" and "compromising "styles as well as the "job satisfaction" variable. Thus, the more workers found the trade union to be collaborating and compromising, the higher their rate of job satisfaction. Separate correlations for gender and status showed small differences and were insignificant in the Fischer Ztest.

While a correlation test between the five handling styles, job satisfaction, and the "promoting-withholding solutions "variable showed no significant differences by status (worker-manager), some differences by gender were evident: The correlation between "avoiding" style and "promoting-withholding "variable for men was=  $-.24, p < .05$ , and was expressed for women as  $r = -.52, p < .00$ . The correlation between the "competitive" style and the "promoting-withholding" variable resulted in  $r = .21, p < .05$  among men and  $r = .59, p < .001$  among women. Fischer Z test analysis found differences according to gender between "avoiding" style and "promoting-withholding solutions" ( $Z = 2.01, p < .05$ ), as well as between "competitive" style and "promoting-withholding solutions." In other words, the more the trade union was found to be competitive (and less avoiding) the more it was considered as a solution promoter, both by men and women. These correlations were manifested higher with women.

Demographic characteristic such as age, education, and seniority were examined as well. Pearson's correlation was calculated in order to find optional connections with research variables. A few significant correlations were found linking demographic characteristics and the five handling styles, but not between "promoting-withholding solutions" and "job satisfaction."

Table 4 indicates a significant correlation between "age" and the handling styles "avoiding" and "competitive." Whereas the correlation with "avoiding" showed up as positive, the correlation with "competitive" turned out to be negative. That is to say, older employees viewed the trade union as more predisposed to avoiding - and less to competitive - strategies. A negative correlation was found between seniority and the "competitive" style, meaning thetas employees' age, the less likely they are to regard the trade union as competitive. Lastly, significant and negative correlations linked "education" and the handling styles of "avoiding" and "collaborating," such that employees with more education viewed the trade union as less avoiding and less collaborating.

In addition, the correlation between "promoting-withholding solutions "and "job satisfaction" was found to be positive and significant such that  $r = .33, p < .01$ . Therefore, workers who identified the trade union more as a solution promoter scored higher in their job satisfaction. While insignificant differences were found between men and women in the abovementioned correlation, a comparison between employees and managers provided a different picture: a high, positive, and significant correlation characterized workers  $r = .50, p < .01$ , whereas a low and negative correlation was found among managers  $r = -.01, p > .05$ . In other words, the more workers regarded their trade union as a solution promoter, the higher their expressed job satisfaction. This correlation, however, was not in evidence among managers.



**Table 4: Pearson correlations for age, seniority, education and conflict handling styles**

	Avoiding	competitive	obliging	collaborating	compromising
Age	.26**	-.35***	.05	.00	.00
Seniority	.04	-.18*	-.15	-.06	-.06
Education	-.22**	-.03	-.06	-.18*	-.11

\* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$  \*\*\* $p < .001$

### 3.3 Contribution of the covariance of the dependent variables: Stepwise regression.

Two hierarchic regression analyses were performed in this study: The first to explain the variance of union perception as promoting or withholding solutions (52% contribution). The second tested general job satisfaction, and resulted in a contribution of 29%.

**Table 5: Explanation of variance of Union perception as promoting/withholding by independent variables: hierarchic stepwise regression**

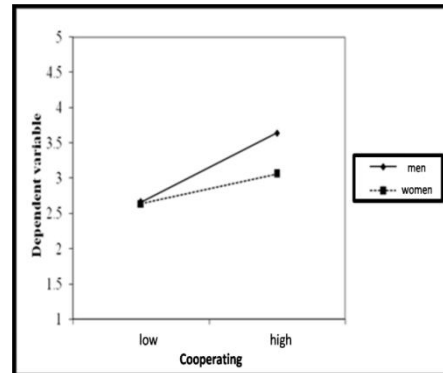
R2Δ	R2	BETA	SE	B		Step no'
0.06**	0.06**		0.304	3.680	constant	
		-0.262**	0.159	-0.514	gender	
		0.110	0.163	0.221	status	
			0.602	1.343	constant	2
***0.44	0.50***	-0.165*	0.129	-0.323	gender	
		-0.07	0.125	-0.14	status	
		-0.110	0.096	-0.128	avoiding	
		0.161*	0.097	0.232	competitive	
		-0.287***	0.098	-0.345	obliging	
		0.342***	0.153	0.567	collaborating	
		0.188*	0.151	0.305	compromising	
0.02*	0.52***		0.600	1.116	constant	3
		-0.151*	0.128	-0.296	gender	
		-0.012	0.123	-0.024	status	
		0.085	0.095	-0.099	avoiding	
		0.186	0.097	0.269	competitive	
		-0.306*	0.097	-0.368	obliging	
		0.350	0.151	0.579	collaborating	
		0.195*	0.149	0.318	compromising	
		-0.140*	0.055	-0.130	collaborating x gender	

\* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$  \*\*\* $p < .001$

Predictor variables were entered in three steps (see table 5): First, personal characteristics (gender and status) correlated to "satisfaction" and "promoting or withholding" solution were inserted. The weight of the contribution to the co-variance was 6%. Only gender was found significant as mentioned in table 2. Men were more likely than women to associate trade union activity with promoting solutions. Second, the five patterns of coping with conflict were entered. These contributed 44% to the co-variance with exception of the "avoiding" pattern. The third step included the interaction of gender and status with various conflict-coping patterns.

These interactions allowed observations of the relationship between indices of dealing with conflict and the "perception of the union as a promoter or withholder" dependent variable contingent on gender and/or status. A significant contribution was found only in gender vs. pattern of "cooperation" as shown in figure II. The more the trade union was perceived as cooperative, the more it was perceived as a promoter.

**Figure II: Interaction between gender and "cooperation" pattern**



The second hierarchic regression analysis assessed the contribution of independent variables to the job satisfaction. It was executed in four steps: the first two steps paralleled those of the previous analysis, the third step included perception of the trade union as a "promoter or withholder," and the last step included interactions of variables with perception of the trade union as a promoter or withholder (see table 6). No significant results were registered while inserting status and gender in the first step. However, in the second step significant findings were found while including patterns of dealing with conflicts. The more the trade union was perceived as cooperative, the higher the level of work satisfaction. The third step showed that perception of the union as a promoter or withholder contributes 6% to the co-variance explanation. Sobel analysis (mediation) findings indicated significant mediation between these variables ( $Z= 2.33, p<.05$ ). Therefore, we can assume that greater identification of the trade union as "cooperative" results in its perception as a solution promoter and accompanied with such perception is increased job satisfaction. The fourth step included an explanation of the contribution of interactions to the co-variance of job satisfaction. Only the interaction of status with "promoting-withholding" had a significant contribution of 5%. While no correlation between "promoting-withholding" and job satisfaction among managers was found, among workers a positive correlation was discerned.

**Table 6: Explanation of variance of job satisfaction by hierarchic regression**

R2 Δ	R2	BETA	SE	B		Step no
0.01	0.01		0.294	4.477	Constant	1
		-0.028	0.156	-0.051	Gender	
		-0.066	0.158	-0.123	Status	
17***	18***		0.731	1.839	Constant	2
		-0.095	0.158	-0.175	Gender	
		-0.063	0.151	-0.117	Status	
		0.179	0.116	0.194	Avoiding	
		0.009	0.119	0.012	competitive	
		-0.044	0.118	-0.049	Obliging	
		0.271*	0.185	0.418	collaborating	
		0.149	0.183	0.224	compromising	
0.06**	0.24***		0.719	1.410	Constant	3
		-0.044	0.156	-0.081	Gender	
		-0.061	0.146	-0.113	Status	
		0.219*	0.113	0.237	Avoiding	
		-0.41	0.116	-0.055	Competitive	
		0.056	0.119	0.62	obliging	
		0.158	0.186	0.243	Collaborating	
		0.078	0.180	0.118	compromising	
		0.342***	0.095	0.316	Promoting- withholding	
0.05**	0.29***		0.698	1.400	Constant	4
		-0.036	0.151	-0.65	gender	
		-0.058	0.142	-0.109	status	
		0.235*	0.110	0.255	Avoiding	
		-0.034	0.113	-0.045	Competitive	
		0.014	0.116	0.015	Obliging	
		0.147	0.181	0.227	Collaborating	
		0.104	0.175	0.157	Compromising	
		0.326***	0.093	0.302	Promoting- withholding	
		0.225**	0.062	0.195	Promoting- withholding x status	

\* $p < 0.05$  \*\* $p < 0.01$  \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

#### 4. Discussion & conclusion

This paper has presented an analysis of employee and manager perceptions of trade unions as either promoting or withholding solutions in labor conflicts, while diagnosing the trade union's approach to conflict resolution as characterized by a dominant handling style. Rahim's questionnaire (1983) was modified so that "trade union" was substituted for "individual test-subject" in the diagnosis of personal handling style. Thus, employees and managers were asked to diagnose the trade union's dominant handling style in times of conflict with the management. The second section of the questionnaire focused on which characterization of the trade union was more accurate: Was the trade union more likely to engage in promoting or withholding solutions? In this way, the dominant handling styles identified in the first section were now "tagged" as either promoting or withholding solutions. In addition, employee and manager job satisfaction were tested, as well as the interaction of job satisfaction, conflict handling styles, and perception of the trade union as a solution promoter or withholder.

Of primary research interest were questions concerning relationships between variables: Perception of conflict handling style, perceived role of the trade union as solution promoter or withholder, and job satisfaction were especially noteworthy. In addition, questions targeted key variables such as gender differences between men and women and status differences between employees and managers. The modification of Rahim's questionnaire to the "trade unions arena" complemented by examination of handling styles as promoting or withholding solutions and job satisfaction evaluation may serve as a package of new research tool for organizations in Israel and in global contexts.

A valuable theoretical layer may therefore be added to industrial relations and conflict resolution disciplines. The first research question was: "In what way does employee perception of the trade union as a solution promoter or withholder is affected by the (perception of) dominant handling style of the trade union in times of conflict?" The results show, significantly, handling styles perceived as solution promoters (from highest to lowest) were compromising, collaborative, and competitive, while styles designated as solution withholders were those of obliging and avoiding.

According to the literature review, these findings correlate with "partnership strategy" (Lucio and Stuart, 2005; Kocham and Osterman, 1994; Leisink, 1993) and "organizing strategy" (Bronfenbrenner, 1998; Heery, 2002), two central approaches in the field of management-trade union relationship analysis. The "partnership strategy" model emphasizes reciprocity in trade union-management negotiation. Therefore, the most desirable handling styles according to "partnership strategy" would be collaborative and compromising, as both require negotiation and collaboration on the part of management and trade union. Our research findings indicate that respondents evaluated "compromising" as the most solution-promoting handling style, even more so than a "collaborative" style. This is rather surprising since, allegedly, a collaborative handling style enables "win-win solutions" which "expand the cake" and offer added value to all participants. A compromising handling style, on the other hand, allows participants to win, but also lose, some of the cake, and therefore is considered less desirable.

A possible explanation could be one of common organizational culture characterized by intra-organization interfaces, in which employees are compelled to negotiate directly with each other on a regular basis (for example, internally, between different departmental units), and find that compromising is the shortest and easiest way to solve problems. This trend might be even more meaningful, since the research data was elicited from public sector organizations, where sacrificing potential profit for the sake of satisfying the wants of others (that is, compromising) is viewed as more legitimate as compared to the private sector. (In the public sector, it is common to announce 10% cutbacks for all offices or departments in times of crisis, while in the private sector it is common to solve conflicts by an effective organizational strategy according to the conditions of the organizational environment and projected future trends. For example: reduction or cancellation of one unit while expanding another unit).

The competitive handling style was graded as no. 3 in promoting solutions, and correlates with Organization strategy. According to Organization strategy, management-trade union relationships constitute an appropriate and vital arena in the struggle for collective bargaining. This bargaining is essential for employees, in order to protect their interests from the management that tends to aspire to harm or degrade employee rights and benefits in the name of "market demands." The handling styles of "obliging" and "avoiding" were found to be solution withholders, both characterized by minimal concern for self-needs (Rahim, 1983).

The obliging style is minimally concerned with self-needs but very concerned about the needs of others, while the avoiding style is minimally concerned with the needs of self and others. A trade union perceived as either obliging or avoiding probably suffers from a reputation for being too passive in promoting its own interests (i.e., those of its members). One can easily imagine how passivity is considered a negative quality, considering the reasons for establishing trade unions in the first place: to serve employees, deliver their message to management, and improve working conditions and income.

Research questions which dealt with variation in employee and manager perception of trade union handling styles, and their perception of the trade union as a solution promoter or withholder, yielded significant differences. That is to say, there was considerable uniformity in how employees and managers diagnosed the trade union's handling style, and its tendency to be a solution promoter or withholder. This is a rather surprising finding due to the fact that, generally, the trade union is perceived as biased in favoring of employees (Mash, 2000).

One would expect that if employees diagnosed the union as a solution promoter, managers would conversely diagnose it as a solution withholder and vice versa. Positive and significant correlations were found between job satisfaction and "collaborating" and "compromising" handling styles. That is, employees who perceived the trade union as more collaborating and compromising (two handling styles necessitating dialogue and cooperation) were more satisfied with their workplace. This finding is consistent with the principles of partnership strategy (Lucio and Stuart, 2005; Kochan and Osterman, 1994; Leisink, 1993), based on dialogue and reciprocity between employees and management as pathways to maximize production and job satisfaction.

As mentioned, only small and insignificant differences were found between managers and employees and between men and women in response to the question, "Which handling styles affect general job satisfaction?" However, a correlation check between employee perception of the trade union as a solution promoter and job satisfaction shows significant differences: A high, positive, and significant correlation was found among employees  $r=.50$ ,  $p<.01$ , while a low and negative correlation was found among managers  $r=-.01$ ,  $p>.05$ . Therefore, employees who related to the trade union more as a solution promoter scored higher in job satisfaction while manager's did not. This finding might confirm the traditional definition and roles of the trade union, as described in the literature review. Nonetheless, this data point underscores how important the union is for employees, as opposed to managers, and how relevant trade unions are for employees, even in times of low popularity and the rise of more integrative programs that correlate with the "partnership approach."

Some significant differences were found between men and women in their diagnosis of trade-union handling style and in their evaluation of the trade union as a solution promoter or withholder. Women viewed the trade union as more avoiding than men, while men found it to be more competitive than women (table 1). In addition, some differences were discerned in the connection between the "avoiding" and "competitive" styles and the "promoting-withholding solutions" variable. The correlation between "avoiding" and "promoting-withholding solutions" among men was  $r=-.24$ ,  $p<.05$  and among women  $r=-.52$ ,  $p<.001$ . The correlation between "competitive" and "promoting-withholding" among men was  $r=.59$ ,  $p<.001$  and among women  $r=.21$ ,  $p<.05$ .

Fischer Z test analysis for the significance of gender-based difference between the "avoiding" style and the "promoting withholding" variable resulted in  $Z=2.01$ ,  $p<.05$ . The same test between "competitive" style and "promoting-withholding" variable yielded  $Z=2.77$ ,  $p<.001$ . That is, the more the trade union was considered competitive and less avoiding, the more it was perceived as a solution promoter - both for men and women, although correlations among the latter were higher. In addition, men, more than women, thought that the trade union was able to promote solutions. This finding could be attributable to different male and female behavior patterns in times of conflict, as suggested by Thomas and Thomas (2008). They found that in times of conflict men more frequently rely on the competitive handling style, while women tend to use compromising, avoiding, and obliging styles.

These outcomes have been confirmed as consistent ion different organization levels and derived from possible combination of factors such as personality, socialization to "gender roles," and enforcement of such roles in the workplace. Of course, it is possible that subjects transfer their own handling style while evaluating that of the trade union. In other words, men attributed masculine competitiveness tithe trade union, while women did the same with avoidance. Similarly, findings indicates that men view the trade union as more capable of promoting solutions between employees and management corresponds with familiar social ideals such as self-ability, which tend to register higher among men and are also linked to "gender roles "imparted through socialization and to the enforcement of such roles in the workplace.

This explanation might shed some light on the finding that both men and women believed that the more the trade union is perceived as less avoiding and more competitive, the more it is evaluated as a solution promoter. In other words, despite differences between male and female handling styles in times of conflict, both genders valued a more "masculine" approach (i.e., competitive style) ashore effective in achieving trade union goals.

The secondary set of research questions examined the effects of subject demographic characteristics. Significant correlation was discerned between the ages and "avoiding" style, while subject age and "competitive" style experienced negative correlation. Thus, the older the employee, the more likely they are to view the trade union as avoiding and as less competitive. A possible explanations here again based on the assumption of transference. Older employees tend to regard the union as more avoiding and less competitive because they themselves tend to be more avoiding and less competitive.

These findings correlate, to some extent, with the research conclusions of Lewin's (2005) who found that older and more experienced employees tend to use the "avoiding" handling style in times of conflict. According to Lewin (2005), in conjunction with the option of participating in trade union activity (i.e., subscribing to a more assertive handling style) or quitting (i.e., subscribing to an obliging style), employees can also choose to not respond to unfair employer treatment. This "avoiding" handling style is far more common among experienced and older employees, who are less likely to protest in comparison to their younger counterparts because they believe that not every inappropriate employer behavior should provoke resignation or protest. Lastly, no connections were found between the demographic variables, "promoting-withholding solutions" and job satisfaction.

It should be noted that this research was conducted during an eventful era of trade union activity and industrial relations in Israel, starting with the strike of doctors and social workers in the spring of 2011 and the subsequent strikes of train workers along with a general state strike in the name of "identification with the temporary workers" in the winter of 2012. These research findings indicate a mixed trend: On the one hand, no significant gaps were found between employee and manager perceptions of the trade union's dominant handling style in times of conflict and by the question whether the union is considered as a solution promoter or withholder. On the other hand, the findings clearly show that employee job satisfaction was highly affected by the trade union's ability to promote solutions, while manager job satisfaction was not affected at all by this ability. Therefore, the union should still be considered a very central and meaningful organization.

These research findings should add another layer to recent trends in the Israeli labor market. The two last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were characterized by a steep decline in trade union status and by the strengthening of liberal capitalism and massive privatization. However, the first decade of the new millennium witnessed the founding of new trade unions, even in industries with no tradition of unionization, such as security guard unionization and the unionization of "Ha'aretz" newspaper employees (Svirsky, 2009; 95).

Nonetheless, in 2007 a new labor federation, "koahlaovdin" ("Power to the employees") was established, in order to encourage and assist employees with the establishment of trade unions in all sectors. Initiatives for unionization in the field of high tech (identified as the "complete opposite" of the "unionized world") following the 2008 financial crisis, in addition to the social protest in the summer of 2011, might be the first indicators of a new era in Israeli industrial relations marked by trade union empowerment. It is reasonable to assume that due to ongoing technological change and spread of the capitalistic system over the last decades, a new and better suited trade union model will develop - a model that will reflect the needs and aspirations of 21<sup>st</sup> century employees and employers.

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