A growing body of research suggests that social capital plays an important role in organizational behavior. Social capital is broadly defined as networks between actors which facilitate trust, mutual cooperation, and collective benefit to participants on both the individual and group level. While labor unions would appear to be an obvious source of social capital, the relationships between unions and the effects of social capital are unclear. Social capital may help employees to form unions, or the presence of a union may add to a firm’s stock of social capital. Social capital might influence cultural values that enhance or inhibit union density, such as an employer’s willingness to oppose unionization. The latter point has particular relevance to union membership trends over the past three decades. While some countries, such as the US, experienced rapid and sharp drops in density, other nations have maintained stable institutional arrangements between labor and management. Explanations concerning the role and nature of labor organizations are important for the implementation of collective bargaining policies at the national level. Without convincing justification for policy initiatives, public support for unions may be marginal.

In the US, for example, most treatments of falling levels of union density focus on employer antiuminionism as the cause of decline because survey research shows that most American workers have favorable preferences about representation and would organize if they
were able to do so. The conclusion follows that managerial opposition, often in violation of legal rules, frustrates workers’ desires for collective action and an impressive stream of research substantiates that claim. Conversely, other industrial relations experts claim that union decline is a global phenomenon arising from economic competition between nations. The differing perspectives have implications for public policy choices in a number of contexts. Proposed legislation in the United States Congress aims to make union organizing easier and to promote successful collective bargaining outcomes. Critics of the legislation, however, argue that the law would lead to higher levels of unemployment and lower levels of firm efficiency. Similar issues arise in discussions of global competitiveness and social welfare.

This track will examine the linkages between labor organization and social capital from local, national and comparative perspectives. We welcome both empirical and qualitative studies across a range of academic disciplines, including economics, law, labor relations, sociology, and international business. The major focus is on whether, and to what extent, unions contribute to the formation, development, and transmission of social capital in workplaces. From a critical approach, we propose that communitarianism and social capital are an alternative to the market conception of how economic organizations fit into the broader political economy. Our argument is that profit, efficiency, and agency theories of self-maximization are insufficient as an approach to corporate regulation and governance. Rather, economic activity should also aim toward the goals of equity, social uplift, justice, and individual happiness. Social capital is an essential component of our perspective.

This stream will address such topics as the following:

- measuring social capital at work
- unions as social institutions
impacts of employment legislation on social capital
• effects of unions on workplace justice
• effects of unions on income inequality
• unions and happiness
• cross-national comparisons of unions and social capital
• the formation of workplace social capital
• theoretical frameworks for explaining and understanding workplace social capital

Our suggested topics are intended to be illustrative and not exhaustive. Below is a short bibliography of references that provide further background about the stream.

Submission Instructions: Abstracts (maximum 1000 words, A4 paper, single spaced, 12 point font) should be submitted to Ray.Hogler@business.colostate.edu

by 30th November 2010.

List of Selected Reference Works


