

Effectiveness of Trade Union Workplace Organisation: A Case Study of the New Zealand Post Primary Teachers' Association

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Abstract

Union effectiveness at the workplace level has been neglected in the literature. This study develops measures for evaluating union effectiveness at the workplace, or branch level in New Zealand state secondary schools. These measures take account of a hybrid employment relations structure, whereby a national industry level collective agreement in secondary public schools determines pay and conditions for the sector, but substantial flexibility operates at the school (branch) level in implementation of key clauses.

The study evaluated union effectiveness at the workplace level in eight schools. It gathered the perceptions of the three main employment relations actors at school level: branch chairs (union delegates) and principals (workplace management) through interviews, and branch members through survey. The results indicated the union's overall effectiveness at workplace level in all schools. However, there were variations in the degree of effectiveness between schools, and across different measures. Most importantly, the study confirms the importance of developing measures for union effectiveness that suit the specific context for individual unions.

Keywords

Union effectiveness, trade union organisation, workplace organisation, teachers' unionism, New Zealand employment relations

Introduction

Trade unions attract a significant degree of academic attention in contemporary industrial relations literature. Much of the attention given to trade unions relates to their declining membership density in most countries, their consequent decline in influence, and union strategies to address these problems (e.g. Frege & Kelly, 2004). Only a small part of industrial relations literature directly relates to their effectiveness, although this is implicit in strategic debates concerning declining membership. Virtually none of the literature relates to union effectiveness at a workplace level, except in terms of maintaining delegate structures.

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NB: Dr Simpkin passed away in early 2016, Prof. Ray Markey's eulogy for her was published in the NZJER 41(1). She had been an organiser for the PPTA prior to becoming a Research Associate at the Institute in 2007 and wrote a PhD entitled **Moments of Rupture. Changing the State Project for Teachers: a Regulation Approach Study in Education Industrial Relations** (Victoria University of Wellington, 2002).

This gap in the literature is surprising because union effectiveness, especially at a workplace level, is intimately related to membership density. Union effectiveness is, to a large extent, dependent upon membership density. But at the same time, union effectiveness is also likely to impact upon unions' organising ability. Effectiveness at the workplace level in particular might be expected to impact on union organising ability as well as being dependent on membership density.

Our article contributes to filling this gap with a case study of an important New Zealand professional union, the Post Primary Teachers' Association (PPTA). The central research question that this study seeks to answer is: how effective is the PPTA at the branch level of the school, particularly in relation to regulation of working conditions?

We apply measures suited for evaluating effectiveness at the workplace level for the PPTA. The union is party to a national industry level collective agreement in secondary public schools that determines pay and conditions for the sector. However, substantial flexibility in implementation of some of the industry agreement's key clauses occurs at the school (workplace) level, mediated by interaction between PPTA branches and workplace management, or school principals. The measures for effectiveness adopted to take account of this employment relations structure were:

- Workplace membership density,
- Union democracy and participation at workplace level,
- Branch members' engagement with the union more broadly,
- Regulation of working conditions, and
- Relationship between workplace representatives and management (principals).

An explanation for the measures chosen in this study follows from a review of the existing literature on union effectiveness. The second section describes the union and its industrial relations setting, particularly explaining why the workplace focus is important in the sector. Subsequently, the methodology is outlined, the results are presented and discussed, and the article concludes with more general implications.

Literature review

The literature on union effectiveness is limited and lacks agreed measures of effectiveness. The literature that exists is based on the perceptions of union leaders, officials or members, but not all of these in any one study. Broadly, this literature has adopted three main measures by which to measure effectiveness, although there are numerous subsets to these categories:

- Ability to organise new members,
- Outcomes of collective bargaining, and
- Effect on society as a whole (Clark, 2000; Clawson & Clawson, 1999; Fiorito, Jarley, & Delaney, 1993; 1995; Fitzgerald & O'Brien, 2005; Rose & Chaison, 1996).

In applying these general measures, the focus of most of this literature is at a national sectoral level, although the outcomes of collective bargaining may be at an enterprise level depending on the nature of the industrial relations system. Much of this literature also focusses relatively narrowly on the effectiveness of the organising model in arresting union decline in

the context of neo-liberal policy settings (for a review of the organising literature see Heery, 2015). Union density is a key variable in this literature, as both consequence and determinant of effectiveness.

Some other examples of national level approaches to union effectiveness are more broadly based. Burchielli (2004) developed a typology of union effectiveness based on interviews with Australian union officials at the centralised state level. The typology has three dimensions:

- *Representation* – measured by responsiveness to members, recruitment, achievement of key union goals;
- *Administration* – measured by structure and strategy, innovative practices, goal clarity, leadership, staff accountability;
- *Ideology* – social values, cohesiveness, active members, union commitment, political commitment.

However, the typology is complex, with many of these categories themselves requiring definition and measurement by a range of variables. The wide range of variables are also not easily transferred to the level of the workplace in their entirety.

Boxall and Haynes (1997) take a more focused approach, arguing that effectiveness should be evaluated by the degree to which unions meet their members' expectations regarding better pay and conditions, influence over relevant workplace decisions, and protection against arbitrary management action. Success in achieving these objectives depends on the strategic choices that unions make regarding worker and employer relations within the constraints specific to industry sectors and national industrial relations systems. This approach is based on national level research, but can be applied more readily than others to the workplace level.

Specific workplace level studies of union effectiveness are particularly rare and share the preoccupation of national level studies with falling membership density and the role of the organising model in addressing this. For example, Peetz and Pocock (2009) surveyed union delegates' perceptions of union influence and power in relation to union membership. Some of their findings could be related more broadly to union effectiveness: they found a strong association between perceptions of union democracy and union power; and support for delegates from the union office and organisers was associated with higher levels of union power at the workplace level. However, this study was not specifically focused on effectiveness, nor on what unions actually did at the workplace level.

Two important US studies of teachers' unions focus at the lower level of the union local. In the US context, teachers' union locals comprise union members from a regional grouping of schools. Typically, these union locals undertake collective bargaining. Maitland and Kerchner (1986) based their study on union leaders and 450 teachers in three California school districts. Their results indicated separate standards between union leaders and teacher members for judging union effectiveness. For union leaders, legitimacy derived from winning concessions from management as well as developing a cooperative relationship with management. Teachers, however, prioritised acceptance of the union as their representative by the school board, which, in the US context, plays a key role in management of the school.

Hammer and Wazeter (1993) employed organisational goals to develop a model of union effectiveness based on five dimensions in 511 Pennsylvanian teachers' union locals:

- Member participation,
- Union preparation for negotiations,
- Union involvement in political and civic activities,
- A union mentality, and
- Union leadership.

Their survey of union members and leaders found that all of these dimensions except involvement in political and civic activities contributed significantly to perceptions of union effectiveness. Hammer and Wazeter (1993) also emphasised that models for evaluation of union effectiveness should be tailored to specific unions to take account of organisation-specific goals and environments. This resonates with the approach of Boxall and Haynes (1997).

The measures developed for evaluating union effectiveness in this study incorporate a range of indicators from the wider literature where relevant for a workplace, rather than national level focus, but also reflect Hammer and Wazeter's (1993) emphasis on union specific measures. Hence, we do not focus on political activity, which is included in some models of union effectiveness, because this is undertaken by the union at a national level in a small democracy with a unitary system of government.

Our first measure, *membership density*, is a determinant and an outcome of effectiveness in most models in the literature regarding effectiveness. The PPTA claims over 90 per cent of New Zealand secondary teachers across all schools as members. This indicates a high level of effectiveness at a national level, especially in comparison with other unions. However, some variation in membership density occurs between different schools, which may impact on effectiveness at workplace level.

Our second measure is membership *participation*. This relates to the democratic engagement of members in the organisation. Participation and democracy were major themes in most of the literature already cited, particularly Burchielli (2004), Boxall and Haynes (1997) and Hammer and Wazeter (1993).

The third measure that we have adopted is members' *broader union engagement*. It is strongly related to democracy and participation more generally in the union. It also incorporates major themes in the literature on union effectiveness referring to participation and commitment (Burchielli, 2004) or 'union mentality' (Hammer & Wazeter, 1993).

Since focus on the workplace and collective agreements are negotiated at a national industry level in public school education in New Zealand, we have focused on *regulation of working conditions* as our fourth measure, rather than bargaining itself. This particularly aligns with the approach of Boxall and Haynes (1997). Our fifth measure, *relationship with management*, relates directly to a key indicator identified by Maitland and Kerchner (1986), but also incorporates leadership attributes and the ability to achieve union goals identified by others (Hammer & Wazeter, 1993; Burchielli, 2004).

In evaluating the relationship between workplace representatives and management, we have included an additional measure of the perception from management that does not appear elsewhere in the literature. We argue that management perceptions of effectiveness, particularly in the spheres of workplace union leadership and achievement of goals, is a critical measure. The absence of management perceptions of an interactive relationship with

union representatives has weakened existing literature that focuses entirely on union leaders and members.

Context

From the late 1980s, the New Zealand employment relations system was decentralised to become based on collective bargaining at enterprise level and individual contracts. Union membership and collective bargaining coverage declined substantially, particularly in the private sector: union membership now stands at about 18 to 19 per cent of the workforce, and collective bargaining coverage at about 17 per cent (Statistics NZ, 2016; NZ Companies Office, 2016; Rasmussen, 2010).

In the state school sector, however, a hybrid system of employment relations emerged. The Ministry of Education is responsible for negotiating the pay and conditions of employees centrally with the union party. Other employer powers over individual teachers, relating to appointments, dismissals, performance, and enforcement of the provisions of the Collective Agreements, became the responsibility of schools' Board of Trustees, with the principal defined as the Chief Executive Officer. Matters affecting the environment in which teachers work, such as curriculum, qualifications and assessment, remained with the Ministry of Education.

The PPTA covering secondary school teachers is one of two teacher unions. The union traditionally had a strong centre, but weaker branches at schools as this level of employment relations became more important in the new system. The goal from 1989 was to build a union where the centre was strong enough to negotiate centrally with the government's agent, and where branches were strong enough to interact with the local employer successfully in terms of enforcing the Secondary Teachers' Collective Agreement (STCA) and in representing the interests of employees at the school level.

This article seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of the PPTA at the branch, or school, level because of the rapid enhancement of significance in this level of employment relations in the system post 1988. The union's branch level interacts with school boards of trustees as employers, via the principal, in implementation of the agreement. The branches, therefore, are much more than mere administrative units or recruitment agents for the union, although they do not negotiate formal agreements themselves. In recent years, there has been an emphasis on negotiating provisions into the STCA that deal with individual teacher workload, and implementation and interpretation of the STCA require substantial degrees of negotiation. Consequently, there is increasing pressure on the branch to enforce the school-based provisions of the STCA. At the same time, there has been increasing awareness in the PPTA that branches may differ in their ability to carry out the union function in schools.

Research Design

We utilised a multi-method research strategy capturing and analysing perceptions of workplace union representatives, union members and workplace management (principals). Branch chairs of the union and school principals were interviewed, and teachers who were

members of the union were surveyed. This range of perceptions enabled triangulation of results to enhance validity of our observations.

Data was gathered from eight comprehensive secondary schools chosen from 72 in the greater metropolitan Auckland area. An acknowledged limitation of the research is that it may not be possible to generalise from this region to New Zealand as a whole, where many schools are based in rural or small town environments. The schools were selected on a random basis within two specifications: they were required to reflect a range on the basis of size and union membership densities, because it was considered that both these variables could impact on union branch effectiveness. In terms of size, two schools were large (> 2,000 pupils); four were medium-sized (1-2,000 pupils), and two were small (< 900 pupils).

In each of the schools chosen, the principal and branch chair of the union were approached for a semi-structured interview and cooperation with the staff survey. Both parties agreed to participate in seven schools, but the principal was unavailable due to ill-health in another. In total, seven principals or their deputies (2) and eight branch chairs were interviewed. Of the branch chairs, seven were male, and five had 20 or more years as union members. All principals or deputies were male.

The survey of teachers at the schools was designed to elicit perceptions of the effectiveness of the branch and quality of working conditions in the school. The questionnaire was posted on the SurveyMonkey internet website and sent to the PPTA branch chairs at all schools in the sample. The branch chairs then forwarded an email invitation from the researcher to branch members.

A total of 96 teachers responded to the survey in eight schools, out of a potential 553 union members, representing an overall response rate of 17 per cent. However, this varied between 8 and 40 per cent, with most schools in the lower ranges. It is not clear why there was such variation, as there was no clear pattern in the schools between the response rate, union membership and how positive the responses were about the branch. It is generally acknowledged that web-based surveys produce lower range response rates than other formats (Fan & Yan, 2010), but there is no clear-cut evidence that low response rates necessarily detract from validity of results; some research has suggested precisely the opposite (Visser, Krosnick, Marquette, & Curtin, 1996) and some that it makes little difference (Curtin, Presser, & Singer, 2000; Keeter, Kennedy, Dimock, Best, & Craighill, 2006; Choung, Locke, Schleck, & Ziegenfuss, 2013). It may be that this response introduced a bias in the results, for it is possible that the most committed unionists and the most electronically literate were more likely to respond, and we qualify our findings accordingly. On the other hand, engaged union members are also well-placed to evaluate branch effectiveness.

Low survey response rates may impact on demographic representativeness, but the respondents to our survey were broadly representative of state teachers as a whole, as shown below in Table 1. There were slightly more females, more older teachers, and somewhat more part-time and fixed-term employees in the national workforce than amongst survey respondents. However, the statistics for the national teaching workforce include primary teachers, who are more likely to be female, and Auckland region teachers are more likely to be younger than their rural counterparts. It may be also that part-time and fixed-term teachers were less likely to participate in the survey. Nevertheless, as with the national workforce, the survey respondents were predominantly female, relatively mature in age and permanent full-time employees.

Table 1. Demographic profile of survey respondents and total national state school teaching workforce (primary and secondary schools) 2016

Characteristic	Respondents %	National workforce %*
Gender:		
Male	32	28
Female	68	72
Age (years):		
<30	19	11
30-49	55	48
50+	26	41
Job status:		
Permanent	94	81
Fixed term	6	19
Full-time	96	81
Part-time	4	19

* Source: NZ Ministry of Education, 2016.

Results

Interviews

Membership density

The PPTA claims a union membership density of over 90 per cent in state secondary schools. We asked both branch chairs and principals what the approximate membership density was in their schools, and their responses were quite precise. The average membership density of 88 per cent in the schools studied is close to that claimed across the sector by the PPTA, but there was considerable variation between the schools. According to branch chairs and principals, three schools had 100 per cent membership of the unions, and four had 80-90 per cent membership. Only two schools could be considered as having low union membership density by industry standards, one at 75 per cent, and another at 60 per cent.

Relationship between principal and branch

All branch chairs interviewed had a sophisticated understanding of workplace employment relations, and that negotiation involving 'give and take' between themselves and the principal was essential to the running of the school. Their guiding questions tended to be 'What is fair to both staff and school?', 'What will work?', and 'What will people accept?'. There was also an emphasis on finding agreed local solutions to issues in legislation and national agreements. The branch chairs considered that the best principals took a similar approach.

The branch chairpersons interviewed emphasised the importance of building a harmonious, open and honest relationship with the principal, involving genuine negotiations over local issues and 'give and take'. Principals had a similar view overall, considering that the branch chair needed to be practical, able to concentrate on the issues and someone whom they could trust and be open with.

Relationships were presumably assisted because the principals had all been teachers themselves. In five schools, they were PPTA members, as were the majority of their senior management teams. In three schools, they were former PPTA activists.

The relationship between principal and branch was identified as working well by both parties in six of eight schools. Where interviewees indicated good relationships based on mutual trust and respect, they also tended to indicate positive working conditions.

Most principals appreciated that the PPTA played an important role in the school's operation. At one school with 100 per cent membership density, the principal relied on the branch chair to act as the conduit for feedback from the staff. The chair was typical of others in the sample in having a well-developed sense of site-based unionism and of his role. Both parties recalled an earlier period when workplace relations were more negative, and were anxious to avoid a recurrence through developing skills to achieve their goals without antagonism. Their relationship was the most positive of all indicated in interviews.

At another school, the deputy principal emphasised the role of the branch as a forum for building positive workplace culture through providing a process for agreement even when some had been dissatisfied with some issues. One principal stated:

I think it's important that the two share a broad understanding of what's happening in the school, the vision, what people are trying to achieve. ... The branch chairperson is a key person in communicating that to the wider staff and hopefully it removes the potential for friction.

The advantage of having a good relationship with your branch chair is that I don't mind having an open book. We can sit down and say, well, this is what's happened to the funding, this is what we're having to grapple with and try to come up with solutions together.

However, this perspective contrasted with those in two schools where relationships between principal and branch chairperson were less productive than the others; these are identified here as S1 and S2. In S1, the principal adopted a paternalist attitude. He considered that there was little role for the PPTA because he observed the Collective Agreement and looked after teachers, but he acknowledged that he needed to listen to the union. The branch chairperson, however, believed that the principal wielded managerial power to exclude the union from the running of the school. At the second school, with a less positive principal/branch chair relationship (S2), the branch chairperson considered that she needed to be assertive to be heard by the principal, but that he respected her right as spokesperson for members. In these two schools, branch chairpersons feared reprisals from the principals if they were considered too assertive. In S2, the branch chairperson considered that her predecessor's career advancement had suffered.

Key components of an effective branch. A broad consensus existed amongst branch chairpersons regarding this issue. An effective branch needed:

1. A branch leader with school knowledge and ability to discuss issues with the principal to communicate staff concerns; and
2. School management that adhered to the Collective Agreement and was open about management processes.

Effectiveness was not necessarily seen as literal application of the Collective Agreement at all times, thus confirming the 'give and take' approach.

Workload was generally seen as the greatest constraint for branch effectiveness. Branch chairs struggled with time management since they also had normal teaching duties. Individual approaches from members for advice could take up considerable amounts of time, especially in larger schools. Members also often struggled to find time to attend meetings, and a branch chairperson referred to low membership energy levels as a constraint. This resonated with the comments of one former activist principal that the union membership lacked fire compared with earlier days, partly because members were busy, but also because of more consultative management styles. One deputy principal believed that PPTA senior leadership was more important than the branch in maintaining awareness of major educational issues, because the branch tended to be focused on local matters.

The two schools with a less positive relationship between principal and branch chairperson were also not considered effective by their chairpersons. S1 had the lowest union membership of 60 per cent, which the chairperson interpreted as a weakness. He acknowledged that the Collective Agreement was adhered to, and even exceeded in some areas, such as terms of leave, but felt constrained to avoid splits between members and non-members in the staff room over operational issues. He also described an ideological climate where the union was depicted as left wing and associated with the Labour Party, whereas he considered management to be very right wing. At the second school considered ineffective (S2), the main reason related to autocratic management style. The principal practised policies of favouritism and divide and rule amongst staff, according to the branch chair.

General observation of the Collective Agreement is not contested in any of the schools studied, but some clauses require interpretation or 'best endeavours' resulting in non-adherence, misunderstanding or lack of priority. Examples are timetabling policy, class size and middle management allowances. Branch chairs often needed to be pragmatic in terms of strict enforcement of all clauses so as to protect relationships with principals when it was clear that central funding did not provide adequate resources to meet obligations under the Collective Agreement. Principals emphasised these constraints, although some principals and branch chairs acknowledged that higher levels of management – the Ministry and the school board – sometimes abdicated responsibility by claiming the other was responsible for shortfalls in resources.

Links with the wider union occurred on a number of levels. Information is received electronically and branches forward this on to an email list of branch members. Hard copies were also distributed via staff pigeonholes. The quality of material from national office was appreciated. The impression was gained, however, that unless there were local issues needing to be dealt with by the branch, the branch chair was the most knowledgeable of any branch member and a high level of overall knowledge of the national union or even interest in it was not expected.

The most immediate backup to the chair for site-based issues and enforcement of the Collective Agreement are the field officers. They deal with union representation for competence and disciplinary cases. One branch chairperson complained that members often went directly to field officers because he was seen as a 'stooge' owing to his working relationship with the principal.

Regional meetings were used for information only. Three of the schools interviewed did not send representatives to these, because of lack of time and involvement in other community activities, and the distance required to travel at night. PPTA executive members did not have a significant role in the branch. National union events were spoken of highly, particularly in terms of building solidarity and networking, even if they were not accessed often. Chairs were aware of national office, but as a background, not as directly affecting the branch on an everyday basis. Interestingly, principals, more than chairs, saw the union still primarily in its role of negotiating pay and conditions and acting politically in national lobbying over resources in schools. They saw the branch more pragmatically and less politically than the national body.

Survey

The survey sought responses relating to four of the five measures of branch effectiveness. Space prevents a school by school analysis, but significant departures from the general response are noted below.

Participation

The survey enquired of members' level of participation in branch activities. Frequency of branch meetings varied, ranging from fortnightly, to once per term, to seldom. There was also great variety in the issues discussed at branch meetings, ranging from the national level regarding education policy and negotiations for the Collective Agreement, to local issues, including implementation of the Collective Agreement regarding workload, health and safety and general school governance. Table 2 shows a high degree of attendance at branch meetings, with 84 per cent claiming they attended most of the time or always. Three quarters of respondents felt that they could speak freely and were listened to at branch meetings, as shown in Table 3, although almost a quarter felt it depended on the issue. Overall, these results indicate a substantial degree of activity at branch level, and fairly high levels of members' participation and engagement.

Table 2. Branch meetings attendance

Response	Per cent
Always	49
Most of the time	35
Half of the time	4
Occasionally	12
Never	0
Total	100

Question: Do you attend PPTA meetings at school?

Table 3. Participation in branch meetings

Question	Response per cent		
	Yes	Sometimes/ usually depends on issue	No
Do you feel you can speak freely at meetings?	74	21	5

Do you feel you are listened to when you do speak in meetings?	75	23	2
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A democratic mentality is confirmed with the results in Table 4 relating to who respondents considered constituted the PPTA branch at their school. The overwhelming majority considered that it was the branch members and/or attendees at branch meetings, although a significant number also included branch officers.

Table 4. Whom do you think of as ‘the PPTA branch’ in your school?

Option	Per cent
Branch chair	19
Branch officers	13
Attendees at branch meetings	29
All branch members	69

Multiple responses allowed.

Table 5. Appropriate level of decision-making authority for branch chair in negotiating issues with principal

Response	Per cent
Limited to solutions branch has already agreed	11
Able to discuss other solutions but needs branch endorsement before agreeing	73
Able to make agreements on behalf of branch that s/he believes are in best interests of branch members	16
Total	100

Table 5 shows a strong commitment amongst members for branch participation and democracy in members’ direction of the branch leadership; 73 per cent believed that the chair needs members’ endorsement of agreements with the principal following discussions over workplace issues.

Broader union engagement

General engagement of members with the union was evaluated in two questions in the survey. Table 6 shows a high degree of wider union participation amongst respondents, with 75 per cent having attended a local PPTA meeting and 49 per cent having sought assistance from a union field officer.

Table 6. Involvement with PPTA

Involvement type	%
Attended a PPTA employment relations course	17
Attended a PPTA ward/regional meeting	75
Attended a national PPTA event (e.g. annual conference)	15
Asked for assistance from PPTA field officer	49
Asked for assistance from PPTA national office	6

Multiple responses allowed.

Table 7 shows a very high positive response regarding the impact of the PPTA as a whole on jobs: 78 per cent considered it would make their job more difficult if the PPTA did not exist.

Table 7. If the PPTA didn't exist what difference would it make to your job as a teacher?

Response	%
More difficult	78
Less difficult	2
No difference	20
Total	100

Another potential indicator of engagement and of trust in the union is whom members would consult if they needed assistance over workplace issues. Table 8 shows responses relating to two key issues in schools: non-contact time entitlements and carer's leave. Significant variation occurred in responses for the different issues, partly reflecting different management responsibilities. In the case of not receiving their proper entitlement for non-contact time, the department head was first choice by almost half of respondents, and the timetabler was first choice for almost a quarter. The branch chair was the third choice, followed by the principal. In the case of being denied carer's leave, the branch chair was the first choice for the largest group of respondents, closely followed by the principal. This issue might be more adequately dealt with at the principal's level, whereas non-contact time is more likely to be simply a matter of timetabling.

For both issues, however, the branch chair is by far the most likely person to be approached for assistance if an approach to a supervisor (department head) or management (principal) is unsatisfactory. Overall, strong majorities of respondents would approach the union for assistance, but there was a strong trend for attempting to resolve in a non-adversarial manner by approaching supervisor or management in the first instance. In the case of carer's leave, 44 per cent of respondents would also approach PPTA field or regional officers for assistance. This all indicates a high degree of engagement with and trust in the wider union.

Table 8. Who would consult for assistance?

Agent	Re entitlement to non-contact time %		Re carer's leave %	
	1st	2nd	1 st	2 nd
Branch chair	18	48	39	42
Department head	43	12	13	1
Principal	11	22	38	13
Timetabler	22	5	2	0
Field officer	1	10	7	22
Regional officer	1	3	1	22
Other	4	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100	100

The third set of questions related to respondents' perceptions of the effectiveness of the union branch in regulating working conditions. Table 9 indicates a general assessment of branch effectiveness in representing the rights of its members. The response was quite positive, with 70 per cent assessing the branch as either very or mostly effective.

The responses regarding observation of the entitlements of the Collective Agreement at school level were consistent with those for assessment of branch effectiveness, as shown in Table 9. Again, 70 per cent considered that the agreement was observed in all or most instances.

Table 9. How effective branch is in representing rights of members to school management?

Response	Per cent
Very effective	32
Mostly effective	38
Effective some of the time	20
Mostly ineffective	9
Ineffective	1
Total	100

Table 10. Observation of Collective Agreement in school

Response	Per cent
All entitlements	25
Most entitlement	45
Some entitlements	13
Don't know	17
Total	100

Perceptions of the quality of working conditions are another indicator of the union's effectiveness in regulating working conditions at branch level, although not all conditions are subject to school level control. Almost two thirds of respondents considered conditions good to very good and only 14 per cent rated them as below average or poor, as indicated in Table 11. Table 12 shows an even stronger positive response regarding satisfaction with the safety and physical comfort of working conditions, with 88 to 92 per cent either satisfied or usually satisfied.

Table 11 Quality of working conditions

Quality	Per cent
Very good	18
Good	46
Average	22
Below average	10
Poor	4
Total	100

Table 12. Satisfaction with safety and comfort of working conditions

Response	Safety % (physical & emotional)	Physical comfort %
Yes	36	44
Usually	52	48
No	12	8
Total	100	100

A further question sought respondents' perceptions about the overall impact of the branch on running the school and their jobs, with results shown in Table 13. Almost half considered that the branch made running the school easier, although 52 per cent did not know.

Table 13. Whether the existence of the branch makes the running of the school easier or more difficult

Response	Per cent
Easier	44
More difficult	4
Don't know	52
Total	100

Relationship with school management

A fourth set of survey questions concerned relationships between branch members or officials and school management. Table 14 shows that over 80 per cent of respondents considered they were treated with respect by management. This positive response, however, did not fully translate into a perception that members were consulted over decisions impacting on their jobs, with 56 per cent considering that this was the case only sometimes or never.

Table 14: Consultation over decisions that impact on job and respect from management

Response	Consultation	Respect
Always	6	38
Most of the time	38	43
Sometimes	42	18
Never	14	1
Total	100	100

Table 15 demonstrates a generally positive series of responses regarding the branch relationship with the principal. Large majorities considered that the branch membership and branch chair had effective relationships with the principal at least usually, 76 and 81 per cent, respectively. Similarly, large majorities considered that the principal respects the branch (77 per cent) and branch chair (82 per cent) and their role at least usually. The central importance

of the branch chair is a strong theme in these responses, with 96 per cent confirming that the relationship between principal and branch chair is important at least usually.

Table 15: Branch's effective relationship with and respect from principal

Response	Effective branch relationship with principal %	Effective branch chair relationship with principal %	Principal respects branch & its role %	Principal respects branch chair & their role %	Relationship between branch chair & principal is important %
Yes	40	51	49	54	90
Usually	36	30	28	28	6
Sometimes	15	15	14	15	3
No	9	4	9	3	1
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Variations between schools

Significant departures from the general trends in survey responses occurred at three schools. At one of the schools (hereafter S3) that was identified in interviews as having an effective branch with an effective relationship with the principal, responses relating to participation, regulation of working conditions and the relationship with the principal were all consistently higher than the general trend. At those two schools identified as less effective in interviews the pattern diverged. At S1, the responses were consistently and substantially more negative than the general trend regarding participation in branch meetings, observation of the Collective Agreement, how effective the branch is, consultation, and the branch and branch chair's effective relationship with and respect from the principal. However, at S2, survey responses followed the generally positive trend. In contrast, at one other school where interviews indicated an effective branch with a positive principal/branch chair relationship, responses regarding participation and regulation of working conditions were significantly less positive than generally.

Other variables were not associated with trends in survey responses to any significant or consistent degree. Size of schools did not appear to be a factor. The school indicated as most effective by survey and interviews (S3) had the highest survey response rate (40 per cent), which may confirm a high level of branch participation by membership. However, the branch indicated by survey and interviews as least effective (S1) had the second highest response rate (21 per cent).

Discussion and analysis

Overall, the results indicated that union branches at the school level were reasonably effective and well-adapted to local employment relations, using the measures that we adopted. Most of the interviews were positive in this respect. They also confirmed a high

union *membership density*, although this did vary somewhat between schools. The survey further indicated a strong positive response from members as a whole across the other four measures.

The survey confirmed a high degree of *participation* and democratic engagement amongst members. This was evident in terms of attendance and participation at branch meetings, the fact that members mainly considered themselves rather than officers as constituting the branch, and the related fact that most respondents considered that branch chairs needed to consult with members over decision-making with workplace issues. High levels of participation are noteworthy because of the pressures of time and workload alluded to by some branch chairs.

These positive responses also carried over to our second measure of branch effectiveness, *broader union engagement*. The vast majority of branch members engaged with the PPTA at a regional level, although branch chairs at three schools indicated a lack of engagement at that level by branch members; at the remaining schools, therefore, a very high proportion of members attended regional meetings. Almost half of survey respondents had contact with field officers. Most respondents also considered that the PPTA made their job easier than if it did not exist. This was much higher than for the branch itself, which indicates strong commitment to the union as a whole.

When asked who they would consult for assistance with specific workplace issues, whilst the vast majority of survey respondents would go to their branch chair over both issues, half would also consult field or regional officers of the union regarding carer's leave. A majority would also try to resolve issues at an early stage with the appropriate level of management, particularly in the case of entitlements regarding non-contact time. This indicates a willingness to resolve such issues directly in the first instance, but also a confidence in different levels of the union, as appropriate to the issue, for support if necessary.

Survey respondents were very positive about the success of the branch and the PPTA more widely in *regulation of workplace conditions*, confirming the positive accounts in most of the interviews. Two thirds or more considered that the branch was generally effective in representing the rights of members with school management, that the Collective Agreement was observed in their school, and that the quality of working conditions was good. About 90 per cent were satisfied with the safety and comfort of their working conditions. Overall, these indicate a high degree of branch effectiveness, especially in the context of 'give and take' in interpretation of the Collective Agreement that was indicated in interviews. This meant that some variation in strict interpretation of the Collective Agreement occurred between branches, without necessarily impacting on perceptions of branch effectiveness.

The importance of the final measure for branch effectiveness, *relationship with school management* (the principal), was acknowledged as critical by all parties. Most principals and branch chairs considered that they had achieved this positive relationship. Large majorities of the members surveyed also considered that the relationship between principal and branch chair was important and that it was positive.

However, some variation in effectiveness of the branches occurred within this overall positive assessment. One branch, S1, was consistently less effective than the others, according to interview and survey data, regarding participation, regulation of working conditions and relationship with the principal. It also had the lowest membership density.

Others variations in the data were less consistent. At S2, we noted negative assessments of the relationship with the principal and general branch effectiveness by the branch chair. However, members surveyed generally indicated satisfaction with the performance of the branch and working conditions, although union membership was the second lowest (75 per cent). At one other school, interviews were more positive than members' assessment of branch effectiveness. Here, the comparatively low indications of membership participation in the survey indicate problems in this area.

At the other end of the spectrum, one school (S3) was consistently more effective than others according to interview and survey data; union membership density was also 100 per cent.

Two main determinants of branch effectiveness appeared in the data. The level of membership in the branch, our first measure, was one key determinant. Judging by all sources of data, the least effective branch overall had the lowest membership density, and the most effective had one of the highest densities. Another less effective branch according to interviews also had the second lowest membership density. The second main determinant indicated strongly by the two less effective branches was the management style of the two principals, both of whom were authoritarian and intimidatory, even if this did not necessarily translate into poor conditions or an overtly hostile attitude towards the union.

Conclusions

New Zealand state schools have developed a unique hybrid employment relations structure since 1988, whereby a Collective Agreement is negotiated by the union and Ministry of Education, but its implementation requires negotiation between union branches and principals. This study has shown that the PPTA has developed the capacity at the school level to be effective in implementing the Collective Agreement and maintaining its integrity.

However, it was found that there was a need for pragmatism and flexibility from all parties in interpretation and enforcement of clauses in the Collective Agreement in ways suited to the branch. One of the greatest areas of success demonstrated for the union was the ability of its branch chairs at schools to work constructively with principals in this process to acknowledge on-the-ground realities that underlay these variations. In most of the schools studied, the importance of this was acknowledged by branch chairs and principals, and usually they and branch members considered that a positive relationship was achieved in this regard. The success of this process also requires acknowledgement from the central union of the need for flexibility in interpretation of the Collective Agreement.

The workplace focus for this study of union effectiveness was significant, because it departs from most of the literature that focuses at the national level of unions. Central negotiation of a Collective Agreement covering all state secondary schools in New Zealand in one sense supports this traditional approach. However, the hybrid system of employment relations in New Zealand state secondary schools defines two employers – one at the central Ministry level, and the other in the school workplace where principals are the managers. This system places great emphasis on the school level for the effective implementation of the Collective Agreement. For all of these reasons, the school workplace was the most appropriate level for this study.

The measures employed for evaluating effectiveness here were adapted to suit this particular union and its specific employment relations context. This follows the approach recommended

by Hammer and Wazeter (1993) and Boxall and Haynes (1997). Nevertheless, the measures for effectiveness employed here were consistent with many of the dominant themes in the main literature on union effectiveness, particularly by encompassing membership density, outcomes of collective bargaining (in terms of local implementation), workplace participation of members, and wider union participation.

Perhaps the most substantial innovation of this study has been to include the perceptions of three different actors at the workplace level: union members, union delegates (branch chairs) and workplace managers (principals). None of the existing literature attempts this inclusiveness, concentrating usually on only one of these actors, and this has never been the workplace managers. Since the relationship between branch union representatives and school management was found to be important, it confirmed the utility of this measures. It was equally critical to include the perception of the workplace union delegates (branch chairs), who are rarely included in studies in union effectiveness, with Peetz and Pocock (2009) offering a significant exception.

However, it was the combination of the perceptions of the three sets of actors that was particularly important and provided a triangulation of data. Focusing on any one of them would have led to somewhat differently nuanced conclusions. For example, at two schools members' evaluation differed from that of branch chairs regarding branch effectiveness: members were more optimistic in one case, and in another less pessimistic, than the respective branch chairs.

The relationship between the different measures employed here is also instructive. Of all the factors associated with branch effectiveness in terms of regulating working conditions, three seemed important. The most important was the relationship between principals and branch chairs, which was also seen as critical by branch members. This highlights the importance of including this as a measure of effectiveness, and of gaining management perspectives on this issue.

Union membership density is more commonly recognised in the literature as a determinant of union effectiveness. There was support in the findings of this study for this perspective, but principally at the extreme ends: the least effective branch overall had the lowest membership density, and the most effective had one of the highest densities. However, this association was not consistent: the second weakest branch in terms of membership density did not perform poorly according to members, and two other branches with 100 per cent membership density did not perform significantly better than others. It is also possible that any causal relationship in this association occurs in the opposite direction, i.e. that effectiveness assists union membership. The outcomes here, therefore, seem more likely to confirm Rose and Chaison's (1996) perception that membership density is both cause and consequence of union effectiveness.

Participation by members in the union and opportunities for this may be a mediating variable. Members of the most effective branch indicated high levels of participation. Conversely, the least effective branch indicated lower than average levels of participation by members. Most importantly, however, this study demonstrates the importance of a range of measures of effectiveness and the interaction between them.

Finally, our study suggests the need for further research at the workplace level, focusing on the *implementation* of collective agreements. The situation that the PPTA occupies in relation to central collective bargaining with local branch negotiation of the interpretation and

implementation of the central agreement differs substantially from the role of US union branches studied in the existing literature; this is because the US locals undertake collective bargaining themselves. However, this hybrid two-tier situation is not unique. A similar system to New Zealand operates in teaching in Australian states, and in the public sector more generally at the state level in Australia. It is also similar to arrangements in Denmark and Sweden, where collective agreements are negotiated at industry level, but considerable latitude is allowed union branches in negotiating implementation (Knudsen 1995; ETUI 2014). Further studies would need to develop measures of effectiveness appropriate for the sector that include a range of perspectives from management, union leaders and union members.

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