

House (1981) argues that it is important to recognise the distinction between main and buffering effects of social support, and to test for such differences in empirical research. He further argues that the theoretical and practical importance of social support do not rest solely on its having one or another kind of effect. The buffering effects of support are one of the most intriguing and important properties (McLean, 1979), and important practical implications follow from knowing whether the effects of support are primarily main effects or buffering effects or both. If social support has largely main effects, that is, it acts to reduce stress and improve health, everyone would benefit from enhanced levels of social support. If, however, social support has primarily buffering effects, it will be of significant value to people experiencing moderate to high levels of stress, but of lesser value to people experiencing little or no stress (House, 1981). If the resources available for enhancing social support are limited, to the extent that the effects of social support are primarily buffering effects, efforts to enhance support should be directed primarily at high stress groups (House, 1981). McLean (1979) states that one of these high stress groups is blue collar workers as "many of the blue collar workers live lives of more stress and grimmer prospects than outsiders seem to realise or care about" (p. 3).

Sources of Social Support

Social support can be offered by a variety of sources, including family members, friends, peers, co-workers and supervisors (House, 1981). Persons outside of work, especially spouses, close friends, and relatives can be effective in buffering the impact of work stress on mental and physical health (Billings & Moos, 1982; House, 1981). Procidano and Heller (1983) found that spouses and close friends can provide an alternative source of self esteem for the individual and serve as a source of social support. Lieberman (1981) found that the spouse was the most effective source of help for psychological

problems and friends were the second most effective helpers followed by professionals and self-help groups. Relatives who helped seemed to be the least effective in mediating stress (Lieberman, 1981).

Work support is a special form of social support as it can be offered both by supervisors and co-workers (Cooper & Marshall, 1978; French & Caplan, 1982). Work support has become important because most people spend the majority of their lives at work where stressful situations arise. Because of this it is necessary to alleviate work stress (House, 1981). It is difficult, if not impossible, to ensure that most people have a supportive spouse, but it is easier to ensure that almost all employees in work organisations have access to at least one supportive person at work (House, 1981). Social support can clearly reduce both work stress and buffer the impact of stress on health (House, 1981).

Empirical research has revealed that at work social support can operate in two ways. First, it can act as a main effect by positively modifying employee responses on the job because it meets important human needs (e.g., job security and social contact with fellow workers and supervisors) (Abdel-Halim, 1982). Social support can also act as main effect in that a supervisor can be instrumental in eliminating a stressor for a subordinate (House, 1981). Second, social support has the potential to moderate the impact of job stress on employee responses by interacting in the stress-strain relationship (Abdel-Halim, 1982; Cobb, 1976).

The buffering effect of support from co-workers and supervisors is not present across all settings and outcome measures (House & French, 1980). In some occupational settings supervisors are likely to be the most effective source of social support, while co-workers are most effective in others. For example, Likert (1961) and La Rocco (1980) found that police officers get more

social support from their fellow police officers than from supervisors. Conversely, Cooper and Marshall (1978) found that supervisors are seen to give more social support to their apprentices.

Thus the stressful consequences of work can be moderated by a variety of sources of social support at work and non-work environments. Outside the workplace, friends and family operate primarily as sources of social support, whereas at work, supervisors and co-workers represent the main sources of social support (Wells, 1982). At work the organisation can also be instrumental in offering social support. Organisational support can include benefits, for example, housing loans, medical aid schemes and bursaries (Cooper & Marshall, 1978). The organisation that offers social support can be the company for which a person is employed or even the trade union to which a person belongs (House, 1981). House (1981) further suggests that the trade union may be in an even better situation to offer social support than the organisation with whom one works. House (1981) says that, given the hazards of competition between workers and the divergence in many instances between the interests of subordinates and superiors, the trade union provides another potential focus for efforts to enhance social support. Trade union shop stewards, who normally have co-operative relationships with each other and their members, are more concerned with the welfare of the workers than are supervisors or employers (McLean, 1979). Shop stewards can then replace or complement supervisors as sources of social support. As an organisation the union can promote and support efforts to change managerial practices and organisational structures in directions that facilitate social support. Thus the trade union seems ideally placed to offer social support to its members. In the next chapter this specific type of social support will be examined.

CHAPTER 3

TRADE UNIONS AS A SOURCE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

As seen in the previous chapter, social support can be offered by a variety of people (e.g., friends, peers, family, supervisors, and co-workers). In this chapter it will be argued that the trade union is ideally placed to offer social support to its members. To develop this argument, the objectives of trade unions will first be examined. Thereafter, it will be practically demonstrated how trade unions can offer social support.

Trade Union Objectives

A trade union is seen as a body of workers designed to perform functions to help the workers obtain collectively, better terms of employment and service, than they could have expected to get if each individual had to make a private bargain (Cole, 1924).

The objectives of a trade union depend upon what type of union it is (e.g., craft union), and the functions that the workers expect to be performed by their union. To understand trade union objectives, it is necessary to examine several classical theories of trade unions. Four theories appear to be particularly relevant, namely, the theories of Marx, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Perlman, and Tannenbaum. These theories have been particularly influential in the study of trade unions (Burtt, 1979; Poole, 1981), and will be discussed only in the context of the trade union's objectives.

Marx

Marx (1932) claimed that the owners of capital obtained their profits by the exploitation of labour. Consequently, economic conflict between worker and employer was inevitable. Further, Marx believed that when the accumulation of capital in the hands of a few at one extreme and the accumulation of misery for the many at the opposite pole reached a certain point, the workers would take into their own hands the reorganisation of the system for their benefit and would displace the 'exploitative' capitalist system with a socialist economy (Burtt, 1979).

Marx says that trade unions arose from the need of workers to protect themselves from the pressure of employers to reduce wages and increase output (Poole, 1981). Workers would inevitably join labour organisations, but as the struggle between unions and employers grew into a struggle between the classes, the conflict would become political as well as economic (Marx, 1932). Marx recognised that trade unions did not automatically shift their objectives from purely day-to-day practical problems to the broader political and revolutionary goals of socialism (Burtt, 1979). He felt that if the worker organisations remained only 'trade union minded', they would never be able to break out of the basic limitations of the capitalist system. Accordingly, Marx believed union members had to be 'educated' to socialist thinking and made to realise that the political objectives of the party were more important than the individual, thereby making trade unions into economic and socio-political movements (Poole, 1981).

These views were supported by followers of Marx, for example, Nikolai Lenin, who defined the Communist Party as supreme over the trade unions (Burtt, 1979). Lenin said that unions were based only on a feeling of defence against the employer, while the Party developed its objectives and feelings independently of unions (Cole, 1924). Here strikes are not seen as desirable in themselves, but only served to awaken workers to the inevitability of the

class struggle and to the recognition that revolutionary socialism is the only ultimate solution to the workers' problems (Burt, 1979).

Marx and Lenin thus developed, on the one hand, an analysis of unionism, and on the other, a program of socialist action. Trade unions were considered opportunistic and quite capable of seeing "the grand design of the whole battlefield while they engaged in little skirmishes with employers" (Burt, 1979, p. 111). Thus the objectives of trade unions, according to Marx and Lenin, included offering social support to its members in the form of protection from employers, increased wages, and better working conditions. But it should be noted that social support was secondary to that of political objectives.

The Webbs

Unlike the Marxists, who considered unions as an instrument for the conquest of political power, the Webbs (1911) stressed the role of unions as a means of extending representative democracy in the industrial system, whether it was organised under a form of capitalism or socialism. 'Collective bargaining' (a term first used by Beatrice Potter) symbolised industrial democracy, because employers and unions participated as equals in the determination of the terms and conditions of employment, thus bringing democracy to the workplace (Potter, 1891).

The Webbs claimed that two principles characterised union behaviour; the 'device of the common rule' and the 'device of the restrictions of numbers' (Webb & Webb, 1911). By standardising employment conditions for all workers in a trade, the common rule eliminated individual bargaining power between employer and workers (Poole, 1981). Restriction of numbers was practised by unions to enhance the bargaining power of the union, and the strict

apprenticeship rules and similar policies that reduced the labour supply made it possible for union members to secure a higher level of wages (Poole, 1981). The Webbs thought that such monopolistic devices would work most successfully only in skilled occupations and would become less important as unions tended to be organised in terms of particular industries (Burt, 1979).

In the formulation of their policies, the Webbs classified the different principles that unions used under different conditions (Burt, 1979). The 'doctrine of vested interests' served to restrict technological changes that might eliminate the need for certain skills or might otherwise weaken union controls over jobs. The 'doctrine of supply and demand' allowed unions to jockey for tactical advantage in the market to gain greater concessions from employers. The 'doctrine of the living wage' was another principle by which unions stressed the humanitarian idea of meeting the needs of persons in less favoured bargaining positions (Poole, 1981).

Thus the Webbs considered the ultimate goals of trade unionism to be restricted to the traditional areas of economic interests and conditions of work, but at the same time endorsed political action, social reform and a moderate democratic socialism (Burt, 1979). This meant that the trade union would 'spill over' from economic issues (e.g., wages, hours of work, health and safety) to social and political reform which would be of benefit to the workers (Poole, 1981). Thus trade unions offered social support in the form of bargaining for economic issues, namely, increased wages and the improving of working conditions.

Perlman

Perlman (1949) has probably given the most influential interpretation of the American economy (Poole, 1981). Perlman presented a general theory of the labour movement that he claimed was applicable to all unions at all times.

Perlman (1949) stated that three basic factors were relevant to the nature of the labour movement of any country: first, the ability of the capitalist group to maintain and exercise its power to rule; second, the role of the so called 'intellectuals', who were likely to be anti-capitalist in viewpoint; and third, and most important, trade unionism, which had its own characteristic objectives and policies of job control. The particular combination of these three factors in any country could explain the nature of that country's labour movement (Poole, 1981).

According to Perlman, the trade union assumed that jobs were scarce in relation to the supply of labour (Burtt, 1979). In contrast to the businessman's psychological orientation toward abundance, or 'consciousness of unlimited opportunity', the trade unions suggested that scarcity of work was the rule. Trade unions believed that workers should 'own' the 'totality of economic opportunity' and should "ration out such opportunities to members of the group in accordance with policies determined in common" (Perlman, 1949, p. 6). Trade unions laid down work rules, seniority regulations, rules on apprenticeship, and similar policies in order to give out job opportunities among members (Poole, 1981). Perlman suggested that unions were not lacking in philosophy or ideology (Burtt, 1979). On the contrary, a strong union developed a loyalty among its members as it helped the individual worker, and as it aspired "to develop in the individual a willingness to subordinate his own interests to the superior interests of the collectivity" (Perlman, 1949, p. 273).

A secondary, though important aim of trade unionism was the gradual improvement of the economic and working conditions of their members (Poole, 1981). The workers, in return for their labour, desired higher wages, shorter hours, and better working conditions. Thus social support was given to the trade union members in the bargaining of better hours of work, wages and safety conditions. Perlman believed that the union should support its members in the controlling of certain rules. These rules include the controlling of the number of workers admitted to the job, the number of hours worked and the protection of the job against technological change. For Perlman, these rules could only reflect a consciousness of scarcity by the worker in the feeling that job opportunities are limited and scarce and must therefore be protected at all costs (Poole, 1981). This desire reinforced the need for job control for by 'owning' the job the workers would control competition for jobs. Through job control, the workers had a means of bargaining with their employers (Burtt, 1979). Social support through bargaining would take the form of improving working conditions, social security, and the socio-economic status of the workers.

Tannenbaum

Frank Tannenbaum (1921) suggested that trade unionism originated as a defence reaction to the introduction of the machine and the factory system. Tannenbaum thought the impact of the machine was a disruptive force in the economic structure of society that preceded the factory system. Workers no longer participated in small workshops where they could identify with the security of belonging to a larger society. Instead, workers faced insecurities due to technological change and economic pressures (Burtt, 1979). The union thus served as an expression of the workers desire for a stable work environment and for some means of defending their psychological interests of security and union unity (Poole, 1981). Thus the trade union

was the inevitable result of structural changes in society associated with industrialisation.

Tannenbaum suggested that unions were conservative in their functions and actions. At the same time, he also said that unions throughout industry could lead to the eventual modification and replacement of the present system to some form of industrial democracy. For Tannenbaum (1921), workers joined the trade union mainly because the union gave them a sense of being part of a community which the industrial revolution took away from them, thus providing the workers with emotional support.

In later years, Tannenbaum (1951) said that trade unions reduced competition between workers and tended to change the basis of society from contract to status. He believed that pensions, seniority and other union-won rights tended to tie the workers to their jobs and to impede the free movement of labour. Tannenbaum said that unions would eventually be concerned with the financial status of their industry and, as they grew financially, the unions would begin to acquire ownership rights in that industry. Thus, trade unions would become 'real alternatives to the authoritarian state', for Tannenbaum predicted that by merging corporate and union interests, the rights and duties of all would be recognised and protected through a 'common ownership' and 'common identity' (Tannenbaum, 1951). Thus the main forms of social support offered by trade unions, according to Tannenbaum, were economic gains with improved working conditions namely, instrumental support in the form of financial and social security.

Comparison and Critique of Classical Theories

In summary, Marx saw trade unions as primarily protective organisations of the exploited workers which improved both the economic conditions (i.e.,

wages) and security (i.e., working conditions) of the workers. The Webbs saw trade unionism primarily as the manifestation of economic developments, and Perlman saw the narrow economic aims as subsidiary to certain psychological drives in accounting for unionism. Tannenbaum, like Perlman, believed that trade unionism had secondary economic aims, but Tannenbaum felt that while achieving its immediate goals, the trade union would ultimately displace the capitalist system with industrial democracy.

If one compares the main concepts of the four theories it can be seen that Marx believed that unions developed as the vehicles of change in the new socialist order, whereas the Webb's theory built their model of trade unionism out of changes in observable economic institutions (Dunlop, 1948). On the other hand, Perlman and Tannenbaum adopted a psychological approach and believed that it was the workers' view of their world and their destiny which was of central importance of their model of trade unionism (Dunlop, 1948).

Marx, the Webbs, Perlman and Tannenbaum differed not only in their approach to the theory of trade unionism, but also conceived their theories in different historical periods and in different countries (i.e., the Webbs in England, Perlman and Tannenbaum in America). Their theories may reflect the periods and countries in which they wrote, though economic and social improvement is an issue of all four theorists. Poole (1981) suggests that the workers' position has changed very little since the changes in social conditions which resulted in unionism right up to the present. Workers are still subjected to severe economic factors which lead them to unionism (McLean, 1979).

Recent research on trade unions suggest that economic factors are still an important determinant of unionisation (McLean, 1979). For example, Kochan (1980) found that dissatisfaction with the economic aspects of the job was

the strongest and most consistent predictor of propensity to unionise. Moreover, recent research on blue and white-collar workers has shown that non-economic factors are also important determinants of trade unionism (Kochan, 1980; McLean, 1979). Kochan (1979) found that almost 60-75% of union members wanted the union to exert some or a great effort in improving the quality of work aspects of their jobs. Summarising the classical theories, Marx emphasised that unions would improve the economic and social status of the workers while building a new social order; the Webbs emphasised economic aims of various kinds; while Perlman and Tannenbaum theorised on the secondary economic aims which still appear applicable to trade unionism today.

The ideologies of organised labour and the objectives of trade unions can be examined using Bendix's (1978) model. Bendix (1978) suggests that the formulation and effects flowing from the objectives of trade unions can be abstracted in a basic model. From the previous discussion on the objectives of trade unions, the general conclusion can be reached that, on the one extreme, labour is exclusively society orientated. It strives towards a type of society solely by socio-political pressure. On the other extreme, labour, in the form of trade unions, is member orientated by adopting as its major objective, that of improving the economic lot of its members. As corollaries to the respective society or member orientation of labour, the spectrum from economic to political preoccupation is opened (Bendix, 1978). Conceptually, then, trade union ideology is an interchange between four basic criteria, namely;

member versus society continuum, and
economic versus socio-political focus continuum.

The combination of the four forms a matrix (see Figure 2). It is rather the dominance of one of the four criteria in the total combination that determines the ideology, policy and objectives of a particular trade union or labour movement in its socio-economic-political environment.

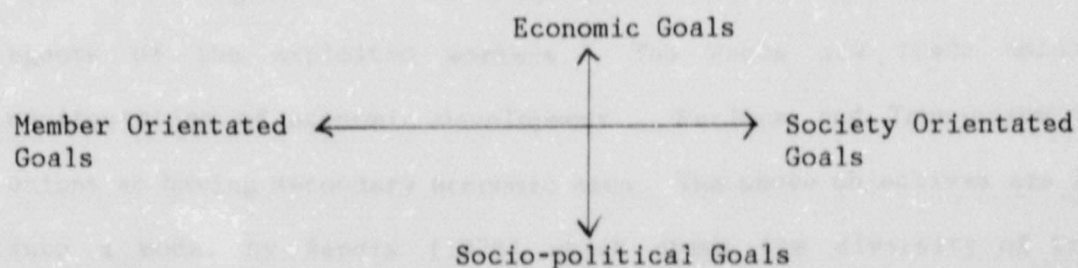


Figure 2
The Four Criteria associated with Trade Union Ideology

Bendix's (1978) model demonstrates the potential diversity of trade union objectives and can be applied to the South African scene where the economic and social conditions under which black workers are employed is particularly worsened (Webster, 1983). At this point in time, "the country is torn by widespread violence, resistance and state repression" (Poster, 1986, p. 35). The focus of the emerging unions extends beyond the workplace and economic issues to include socio-political and cultural objectives and to the formation of a working class that is committed to fighting against apartheid (Webster, 1984). For example, on the East Rand shop steward committees have been formed in the migrant worker hostels and their aim is to deal with social issues such as the sanitation of the shanty towns (Webster, 1984).

Progressive unions in South Africa are thus moving beyond the economics of the factory (Webster, 1983). The importance of these socio-political demands is that unions are not simply pushing the frontier of control forward beyond production, but to the question of reproduction of the work-force (Webster, 1983). These demands are crossing a crucial boundary in the industrial relations scene, where these demands seek to challenge inequality in the workplace.

In summary, the classical theories have provided insight into the range of trade union objectives. For example, Marx saw unions as primarily protective agents of the exploited workers. The Webbs saw trade unions as the manifestation of economic development. Perlman and Tannerbaum saw trade unions as having secondary economic aims. The above objectives are integrated into a model by Bendix (1978) which shows the diversity of trade union objectives in a matrix.

It will now be demonstrated how the diverse objectives of trade unions are related to the offering of social support with the use of a psychological model developed by Allen and Keaveny (1983). Allen and Keaveny (1983) use a valence expectancy model to explain why employees join unions and what outcomes are expected from joining the union. The valence expectancy model states that a person's actions depend on the future outcomes that are expected to follow from the action or behaviour and the value the person places on these outcomes. The theory has three major components, namely; valence, expectancy and instrumentality (Allen & Keaveny, 1983) (see Figure 3).

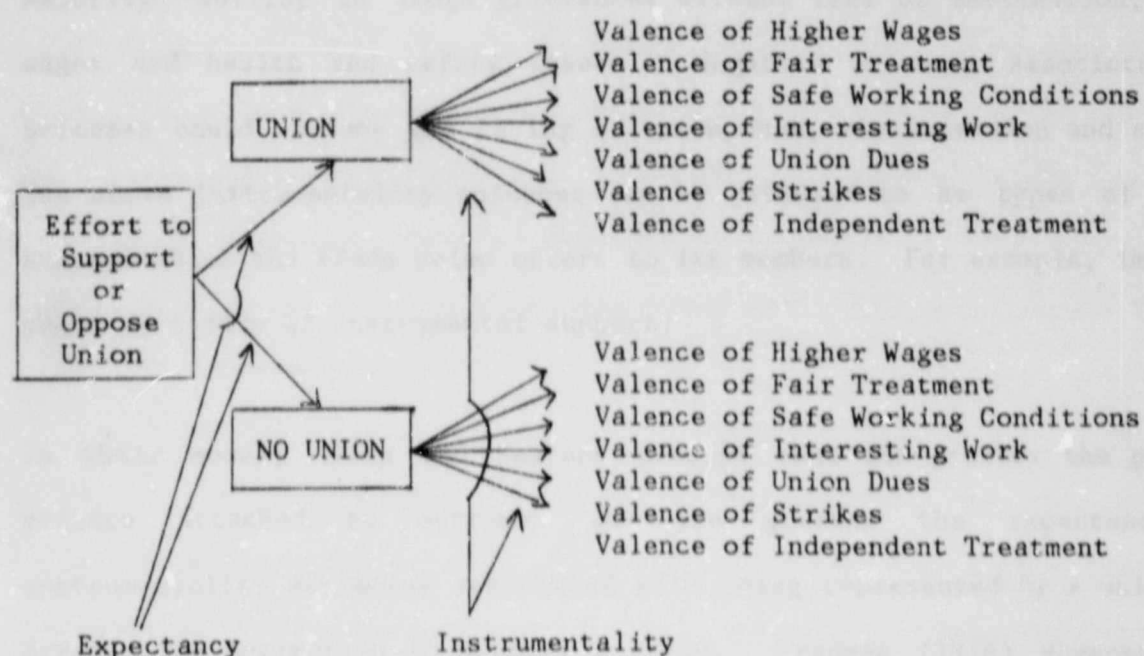


Figure 3
A Model of the Decision to Support or Oppose a Union
(from Allen & Keaveany, 1983, p. 164).

In adopting the valence expectancy theory model to correspond with an employee's decision to support or oppose a union the three components of the model take on specific meanings. For example, valence is referred to as the outcome that can follow from having a union, just as valences can be attached to outcomes that could follow from levels of job performance. Similarly, valences associated with the various outcomes can be positive, neutral or negative. Expectancy perceptions refer to an employee's estimate that changes in his or her effort will lead to changes in performance. It is assumed that expectancy perceptions are particularly significant in explaining an individual workers efforts when that person's attitude toward a union is at odds with the attitude of the majority of co-workers (Allen & Keaveny, 1983).

Instrumentality refers to the likelihood that a union will bring about positive outcomes. These outcomes can include fringe benefits, employment security, ability to lodge grievances without fear of retribution, higher wages and health and safety issues. Negative valences associated with outcomes could include the paying of union dues, victimisation and strikes. The above instrumentality outcomes can be referred to as types of social support which the trade union offers to its members. For example, improving wages is a form of instrumental support.

In their model, Allen and Keaveny predict that the greater the positive valence attached to outcomes and the greater the expectancy and instrumentality estimates associated with being represented by a union, the greater the motivation to support a union. Freeman (1976) suggests that workers are motivated to join unions because of the expected outcomes attached in the form of fringe benefits and aid. Many of the outcomes attached to

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belonging to a union are in the form of social support. For example, Kochen (1980) found that four out of five workers agreed that unions improve wages and job security for their members as well as protecting them against unfair management practices, thus offering the members instrumental support.

A model by Hirschman (1970) has been developed to explain why workers join unions. In his model Hirschman suggests that workers unionise to enable them to voice collectively dissatisfaction about the job and working conditions. Thus, by joining a union, the members will not withdraw from the organisation but rather express themselves collectively against management. More specifically, Hirschman's (1970) Exit, Voice, Loyalty (EVL) theory provides a model that may be used to hypothesise a different response to dissatisfying conditions of employment. Employees can exit (voluntarily withdraw) or they can use voice to express their dissatisfaction in the hope of altering the situation at work. According to Hirschman (1970) 'Voice' is an attempt, individually or collectively, to change, rather than escape from, an objectionable condition. Employees can express discontent directly but are more likely to use the voice approach where a collective agent such as a union exists (Freeman, 1976). The choice between exit and voice strategies depends on loyalty to the work organisation and belief in the possibility of improving the unsatisfactory work conditions. Where there is little loyalty, exit is more likely (Hirschman, 1970). Where there is loyalty to the union, the workers will perceive the union as having the ability to alter conditions of employment (Freeman, 1976).

Therefore, both VIE and EVL theories provide support for the view that the union is seen to be a source of social support insofar that workers perceive the trade union as being instrumental in alleviating the negative stressful aspects of work. Thus the trade union objectives need not be limited to the support offered in the form of wage increases and improved working conditions.

As the classical theories have outlined, they may offer different types of social support such as the psychological approach of Valence Expectancy theory (Allen & Keveany, 1983), the EVL theory (Hirschman, 1970), and the practical examples seen in South Africa.

In his definition of social support, House (1981), distinguishes four types of social support, namely, emotional, appraisal, informational and instrumental support. Using House's framework each type of social support will be discussed and empirical evidence reviewed.

Emotional Support

Emotional support is the provision of trust, empathy and love (House, 1981), and has been shown to alleviate work stress. For example, emotional support from peers and supervisors has been found to moderate the effects of role conflict and role ambiguity on satisfaction and performance (Cobb, 1976; French & Caplan, 1973). French and Caplan (1973) suggest that getting help and encouragement, namely emotional support, from fellow workers and supervisors is an effective way of alleviating the negative impact that job stress has on employee satisfaction and performance.

The trade union can also be seen as a source of emotional support for migrant workers who form some 40% of the labour market in South Africa (Sitas, 1984). Migrant workers who live in unsanitary, overcrowded hostels, and are removed from their families, experience high levels of stress (Webster, 1984). Migrants are under further stress because they have to provide financially for their families who also live in poor conditions (Webster, 1984). Sitas (1984) has suggested that these workers are keen union members because they see the union as being capable of providing them with security and support. McLean (1979) has found that trade unions are a source of emotional support for migrant workers because often the migrants have no one to turn to other

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Name of thesis The Role Of The Social Support Offered By Trade Unions As A Moderator Of The Stress-strain Relationship.
1987

PUBLISHER:

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

©2013

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