Member attitudes towards the process of selecting
organisers in a Victorian trade union.

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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; and, any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged.

_____________________________________
Paul Fallon

Date
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The writing of this thesis commenced in one century and finished in another. Singer Tom Waits claims in his song Blind Love that ‘if you get far enough away then you are on your way back home’ and that is how I feel. It’s just that the home has changed and so have the people.

When I started this thesis I was still working as a union organiser and had questions in my head about the legitimacy of performing such crucial a role when not directly elected by those represented. I, like the debates surrounding union structure, have since moved on other things. Whether the debates should have moved on is for others to answer.

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ABSTRACT

The continued role of Australian trade unions has never been more precarious. Federal Government attempts to relegate trade unions as mere historical artefacts have witnessed an equally strong campaign for survival by the union movement. One of the ways that it is doing that is by the now-dominant emphasis on union organising. This thesis looks at these developments and investigates the efficacy of current organiser selection processes for this aim.

Trade union organisers are full-time union officials who perform a variety of functions, which can include the recruitment of new delegates and members and the representation of current members in workplace disputes. Organisers are also involved in workplace agreement negotiations with a sometimes-immediate effect on the conditions of work for their members. While they represent only a part of union structure and activity, their visibility and interaction with members at the workplace has led many in the trade union movement to recognise their role as being pivotal to trade union renewal.

In 1994, this recognition culminated in the ACTU’s development of the ‘organising works’ program, which recruited a diverse group of mostly young, tertiary-educated men and women, in the hope of rejuvenating the union movement and arresting the then heavy decline in trade union membership. There are many positive aspects to this development; however, what is not clear is how members of trade unions perceive these new, appointed, rather than elected, organisers. In a union movement where the majority of organisers have come from, and in most blue-collar unions, been elected by, the membership, the appointment of ‘outsiders’ seems antithetical to the purpose of the initiative. This thesis hopes to provide some insights into this question.
As the ACTU project might suggest, recent research supports the contention that recruitment of trade union organisers is increasingly occurring ‘outside’ of traditional processes (such as election by the membership). This development has naturally fed into the age-old question of both purpose and function of the trade union. Should a trade union be democratic? If so, does the appointment of organisers outside the movement affect internal democracy? Moreover, does a reduction in internal democracy inevitably mean that members perceive this change in negative terms? And ultimately, does it affect the union’s ability to recruit new members, that is, is it actually harming the union movement and alienating the more ‘solid’ membership? For some commentators the outcome is clear: the change in the selection process of organisers inevitably leads to a decline in the personal and political representativeness of union organisers to the members that they represent; and as a consequence, we witness a decline in union democracy. This research aims first, to identify the characteristics of trade union organisers, and second, to ascertain the attitudes and perceptions of union members towards both the organisers and their selection process.

In order to limit the scope of the research and at the same time provide a reliable study into the characteristics, and perceptions, of organisers, this study employs a mixed-methodology case-study approach applying sequential quantitative and qualitative data. The trade union chosen for this study is the Victorian state branch of the Australian Services Union (ASU) (Private Sector Branch). Opinions of the union membership to branch organiser characteristics are analysed through survey responses, interviews, and contextualised with existing literature. Evidence gathered during this research points to a complex interplay of perception and reality. While many members automatically respond to the need for democracy in unions (in relation to organisers), in-depth questioning of this response provides a very different picture.
While this investigation revealed a (perhaps not unsurprising) preference among trade union members that their officials be elected; it also revealed an unexpected dimension, that is, that these members knew very little about the processes of their union.

The main finding of the study is that while members indicate a clear preference for the election of organisers over their appointment, when asked about the factors associated with organiser effectiveness, the results suggest a willingness to accept appointment of organisers over their election. Moreover, the analysis found that members’ willingness to participate in union affairs was most closely associated with the nature of their interaction with organisers and other union officials, rather than their preferences over the appointment of organisers. These findings suggest that unions need to consider the factors associated with organiser effectiveness and be willing to educate members and organisers about the role and what part in can productively play in the revitalisation process.
‘Are organisers the vital link’?

Introduction

Over the last three decades, Australian unions have experienced a general membership decline, a phenomenon that has occurred across the industrialised world. Declining membership levels have resulted in a general decrease in the overall power and effectiveness of trade unions. This decline has given rise to perceptions of trade unions as having a limited ability to exert influence over politics and society. In addition, trade unions face a battle against perceptions that they are a legacy of a past—and no longer relevant—labour market. Not surprisingly, a great deal of attention has been paid to identifying the contributing factors associated with this decline. Such research has pointed to both cyclical and structural impediments to union growth. In the 1970s and 1980s, cyclical factors, such as rising unemployment, inflationary pressures, and consequent perceptions of unions being too powerful, tended to dominate explanations of trade union decline. More recently, however, researchers have looked to internal structural characteristics in their attempts to broaden our understanding of this decline. This research has demonstrated that a range of structural factors have also been important, particularly those that affect the capacity of unions to serve member interests in the workplace and to recruit and retain membership. The first section of this chapter examines this literature, highlighting the
central role of the ‘union organiser’; and looks at the concerns raised by some commentators who have suggested that—given the importance of the organising role—a transition from elected to appointed organisers will prove detrimental to the union movement. The second part of this chapter reviews the research aims, questions, process, and rationale employed in this study, introduces the methodology used, and provides a chapter outline of this thesis.

**The role of trade union organisers**

Research focussing on the internal structural characteristics of trade unions has identified the critical role played by the union organiser, the identifiable ‘face’ of the union, for the rank-and-file. It is a role that has traditionally—in both Australia and Great Britain—centred on the servicing and representation of union members; the organisation and recruitment of new members; and the representation and promotion of the policies of the union (Heery & Kelly 1994, Watson 1988). The centrality of this role has been described by Callus as:

> The vital link in the chain, which joins the membership and the national leadership. It is their activities which arguably critically influence whether or not a union effectively combines vitality with efficient organisation (Callus 1986, p.414).

Given the union organiser’s position as ‘the vital link’, it is surprising that comparatively few studies have concentrated on the union organiser. Those studies that have examined this role have suggested that the organiser’s position as the nexus
between the ‘membership and the national [or state] leadership’ rests on their ability to engage the membership. Because of the importance of the organiser being able to relate to the membership, the process of selection, whether by appointment or election, is arguably important for the successful outcome of this engagement.

While (relatively) little historical data exists about the selection process, or the personal characteristics, of organisers in Australia, a number of institutional histories of trade unions in Australia (Hagan 1983, Gollan 1972, Davis 1974) provide support for Bramble’s (1995) argument that most people who performed the job of organiser followed a predictable path to office. Eligible (predominantly male) union members, after completing a ‘lay apprenticeship’ of several years in voluntary positions, gaining negotiation and public speaking skills as well as knowledge of the union’s constitution, rules, and administrative procedures, are then nominated for election to the position of organiser (Callus 1986).

Despite a considerable variation in electoral procedures, within blue-collar unions in Australia direct election of organisers by the membership has been the common method of choosing union organisers (Coolican and Frenkel 1984). On the other hand, many white-collar unions have historically appointed their organisers (Cupper 1983), predominantly from within the union’s membership. The result of both these selection processes and particularly direct election, was that organisers were fairly representative of the political, demographic and social characteristics of the membership (Callus 1986, Cupper 1983, Dufty 1980).
Bramble (1995) identified changes to the trade union organiser selection process in Australian unions emerging in the early 1990s, and, as a consequence, the characteristics of trade union organisers across Australia. His study indicated that direct election of organisers by the membership was becoming less frequent and the appointment by the leadership, often chosen from outside of the membership, was becoming increasingly common. As a result, Bramble (1995) argued that ‘a new breed’ of organiser—one with increasingly different characteristics to the membership of particular unions, in terms of education, age and experience—was emerging. The resulting impact of this, according to Bramble (1995), would be a decline in the personal and political representativeness of union organisers to the members that they represent; and as a consequence, a decline in union democracy. The inference of this suggests that these transitions would undermine organisers’ ability to engage with the membership.

There have been relatively few studies of trade union organisers since the Webb’s (1911[1894]) first documented the emergence of trade unions in England during the early 1700s. Internationally, four major studies relate directly to trade union organisers (Clegg, Killick & Adams (1961), Boraston, Clegg and Rimmer (1975), Watson (1988) and, most recently, by Heery and Kelly (1997)). Interest in the relationship between officials and the ‘rank-and-file’ peaked after the Donovan Commission’s finding of the ‘existence of two systems of British industrial relations’—one external and associated with union officials; the other internal to the workplace and associated with shop-stewards (Hyman 1989).
There have only been two major studies completed of Australian trade union organisers. Callus’ study of the employment characteristics of full-time union officials in New South Wales found that organisers continued to be elected via the ‘traditional path’, i.e., from the ranks of the membership after serving a lengthy time as members and delegates. Callus did, however, identify the emergence of a new type of full-time official who was appointed by the union leadership and performed professional roles in the union, such as a legal or Occupational Health and Safety Officer.

These appointed officials were predominantly university-educated, of a younger age, with little or no previous experience in the union movement; they were employed because of their specific expertise in areas such as Occupational Health and Safety, Industrial law and research. Callus (1986) argued that this ‘new breed’ remained segmented in ‘expert positions’ with little chance for promotion to leadership positions or influence on union decision making processes.

By 1995, Bramble argued that this segmentation between the tertiary-educated appointed younger officials and organisers, identified by Callus (1986), was beginning to erode. Changes to union electoral procedures meant that a new generation of union organisers was increasingly being appointed, often from outside the union, instead of the traditional method of direct election. Consequently, the behaviour and characteristics of the organisers were quickly changing (Bramble 1995).

In place of the traditional type of organisers, there were increasing numbers of highly educated, well-paid organisers with little or no experience in the industries they
represented. The result, according to Bramble (1995) was impacting on union democracy particularly in terms of the right of members to choose their organising staff, with an increasing alienation between trade union leaders and the rank-and-file membership. His assumptions echoed a long-standing debate among scholars as to the negative oligarchic tendencies of trade union officials (many of whom apply Michel’s ([1915] 1962) ‘iron law of oligarchy’; see also Crouch 1982; Davis 1987).

Bramble (1995) acknowledged the limited relevant data available relating to Australian organisers and justified his assertions of the changing process of organisers by utilising figures obtained from Trade Union Training Authority (TUTA) reports (1979 and 1994). While Davis’ study Democracy in Australian Unions (1987) examines this concept, little attention has focussed on how trade union members view the selection processes of organisers.

The role of the organiser within Australian trade unionisms has changed dramatically since Bramble’s observations. Cooper and Patmore (2002) outline the changes made by the trade union movement in their attempts to arrest membership decline. At the time that Bramble (1995) was writing, Australian unions embraced a ‘servicing model’ in which members were ‘passive consumers of individual union services and benefits, who were little involved in the decision making or determining the strategic direction of unions’ (Griffin & Moors 2004, Howard 1977).

Since the early 1990s, as a response to the drastic decline in trade union members, Australian trade unions have adapted North American union organising strategies that contrast with the previous approach and have a dramatic influence on the role of the
organiser in union activities. The ‘organising model’ was created in Australia by the peak body of the union movement, the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU). The ACTU subsequently encouraged member-unions to adopt this approach, which has at its centre a belief that unions will attract more members by abandoning the older approach of servicing members to fostering workplace activism. The encouragement of this workplace activism goes hand-in-hand with attempts by the labour movement to reach out and engage with the broader community in order to remove community prejudice about the role of trade unions; and to grow membership numbers and influence.

The impact of the change in strategy for the union movement on the role of the organiser was dramatic. Previously, in the servicing model, the organiser acted as an ‘expert problem solver’ or ‘industrial specialist’. In the ‘organising model’ the role of the organiser became even more crucial in its fostering of increased membership and participation in Australian workplaces. As such, the organising model is a panacea against the servicing approach (Cooper 2000). As Cooper and Patmore have noted:

the servicing approach was identified as an active contributor to the malaise of unionism in the late twentieth century ... Within the servicing model, union tactics are held to be bureaucratic, remote from members, and legalistic in nature (2002).

The purpose of this thesis is, therefore, to contribute to this literature and to explore the changing profile of union organisers, specifically in relation to ‘rank-and-file’ perceptions of organisers, vis a vis the method of organisers’ selection. If, within the
servicing model, members saw organisers as being ‘remote’, have their perceptions changed in response to these changes?

**Research aims, questions, and methodology**

This study aims to investigate the impact of the selection process of organisers on members’ opinions of organisers’ performance and accountability. In doing so, it examines the attitudes and perceptions of union members towards the differing selection processes of organisers, the characteristics of organisers (including gender, age, experience and education), and their possible impact on union democracy.

In order to achieve these aims a brief overview of the history of the selection process of organisers within Australian trade unions will be provided. This description is followed by a summary of the various theoretical debates surrounding union democracy, with particular emphasis on those that discuss differing selection processes (appointment or election) of trade union officials.

In this investigation a number of research questions were developed, they are:

1. Do members prefer one method of selection of organisers to the other (i.e., appointed or elected)?
2. Do members perceive that the characteristics of union organisers are likely to affect their effectiveness in the role?
3. To what extent do members’ attitudes about the selection process influence their willingness to participate in union affairs?

Chapter Two reviews the relevant literature related to the research questions. The literature review included both historical and contemporary political and industrial
relations research related to unions, union organiser selection processes and union democracy. Union membership, participation and the impact of the selection process of organisers in Australia are also explored. The literature serves the dual purpose of assisting to clarify the research questions and attempting to answer them.

Chapter Three addresses the methodology. The research was carried out in the Victorian Private Sector Branch of the ASU after careful consideration was given to its suitability for the aims of the research. The union provided an opportunity to gain an insight into the understanding of the member’s attitudes to the selection process of organisers and other factors relating to the research questions.

The research design employed a mixed - method approach, specifically a sequential explanatory strategy to explore fully the research questions. A sequential exploratory strategy involves the collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data. The two methods are integrated during the interpretation phase of the study (Creswell 2002).

Chapter Four presents the findings from the survey in tabulated form and themes from interviews. Chapter Five provides an analysis, comparison and discussion of the results of both phases presented in Chapter Four including analysis and comparison of both phases. Chapter Six presents the outcomes of the research. This chapter provides a discussion of the contributions of the research, recommendations for future research and the limitations involved in the research.
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

Chapter One provided an introduction to the debates surrounding the impact of the different selection processes of trade union organisers. It was observed that there has been limited research undertaken which examines the role of union organisers - a role that is considered as a crucial link between the leadership of the union and the membership (Callus 1986). Of primary concern within the existing literature was the impact of the selection process on organiser’s capacity to adequately represent members. This common concern has given rise to competing views. On the one hand, some researchers have contended that elected organisers are more likely to be accountable to the members that they represent—due to their need for support in being re-elected. On the other hand, it has been claimed that appointed organisers with the appropriate training and skills are more likely to perform the demanding role far more effectively than elected organisers.

The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of research into, and debates on, the efficacy of differing selection processes of union organisers. This overview will also address broader questions of union organisation and union democracy will be
addressed. The chapter commences with a focus on the key theoretical debates surrounding union organisation and its impact on union members.

The next part of the chapter will review the research completed internationally, specifically England, on the selection process of union organisers. The previous chapter identified that empirical research completed on this subject, both in Australia and internationally, is limited. The relevance of research on union organisers in England—through which an exploration of the broader questions of union organisation and corresponding key debates is made—is due to the influence of English law on Australian industrial relations laws pertaining to trade unions, and to a degree, the similarity in union organisational structures in trade unions.

Following examination of the international research, the focus shifts to research completed on union organisers in Australia. The examination of the Australian literature will include an analysis of the debates surrounding the differing processes of selection; including both its impact on organisers’ capacity to perform their role and, as identified by Bramble (1995), the changing characteristics of organisers.

**Union organisation and union democracy.**

The previous chapter referred to Webb’s (Webb and Webb (1911[1894])) famous study of unions, which traced the evolution of union organisation from its earliest rudimentary structures, involving participatory democracy, into the contemporary union structures that currently exist both in Great Britain and Australia.
Although acknowledging the possible danger of abuse of power that can occur with
the creation of permanent officials, the Webb’s (1911[1894]) believed that the modern
union organisation would be able to continue to be representative of the members’
goals and aspirations, provided democratic mechanisms, predominantly via election at
regular intervals, existed.

A pessimistic view

Writing at the same time as the Webbs (1911[1894]), Michel ([1915] 1962) was more
pessimistic about the ability of organisations to remain representative and democratic.
Michel ([1915] 1962) agreed with the Webb’s (1911[1894]) that as organisational
structures grew it became impossible for political organisations to continue the ‘direct
democracy’ structures that had previously existed; enabling full participation by the
members.

Michel ([1915] 1962) argued that over a period of time it was inevitable that power is
transferred from the ‘rank and file’ to the ‘expert leadership’. The result of the shift of
power was the creation of an oligarchy. In his oft quoted contention, Michel ([1915]
1962) stated ‘it is organisation which gives birth to the dominion of the elected over
the electors of the mandatories over the mandators of the delegates over the

Leaders within political organisations, particularly unions, were able to build and
maintain power over the rank and file membership through a number of ways. For
Michel ([1915] 1962) this inevitable power over the membership was insuperable. For
Michel ([1915] 1962) the key to this lay in the possession of ‘resources’; he argued:
The leaders possess many resources which give them an almost insurmountable advantage over members who try to change policies. Among their assets can be counted (a) superior knowledge, e.g. they are privy to much information which can be used to secure assent for their programme; (b) control over the formal means of communication with the membership ... and (c) skill in the art of politics. (Michel ([1915] 1962), p.16).

Michel ([1915] 1962) also believed that the privilege of ‘office’ enjoyed by union leaders tended to contribute to their conservativeness when representing their members. Increased power and monetary gains would lead to an erosion of solidarity with the members whom ‘they purported to represent’. For Michel ([1915] 1962), this was an inevitable separation through which ‘leaders lose all true sense of solidarity with the class from which they have sprung’ (Michel ([1915] 1962), p.92).

Unlike previous analyses of the oligarchic tendencies of union leaders (Marx and Engels, Lenin), Michel ([1915] 1962) identified the emergence of the ‘institutional needs’ of large organisations acting as major determinants of policy. As these needs become greater they overtake the initial object of the organisation. With great acuity, Michel ([1915] 1962) argued:

The doctrines are, whenever requisite, attenuated and deformed in accordance with the external needs of the organisation. Organisation becomes the vital essence ... more and more its aversion to all aggressive action ... Thus from a means, organisation becomes an end. (Michel ([1915] 1962), p.353).
Michel’s ([1915] 1962) influence on later studies of union organisation, and particularly on the topic of this research—selection processes—was profound. Within Australia, as will be discussed later in the chapter, the basis of the most contentious major research completed on union organiser selection process—that done by Bramble (1995)—relies greatly on the concept of oligarchic tendencies of trade union leaders. An extension of which is seen in decision-making that favours appointment of union organisers over the traditional method of selection. Within this ideological framework this can be seen as a mechanism for ‘controlling’ the membership they represent and entrenching their power.

Although Michel’ ([1915] 1962) analysis of the development of union organisation has since received a great deal of support, there has also been wide-spread criticism: primarily due to its characterisation of uni-dimensional power within the structures of trade unions. For Michel’s’ critics ([1915] 1962), many unions have structures that provide for some degree of internal control by the membership of the organisation. This tradition continues, most notably through the works of Hyman (1979).

*The more positive view*

Arguably the most famous re-examination of Michel ([1915] 1962) has come from the study of union democracy completed in the late 1950s by Lipset, Coleman and Trow (1956). Lipset, Coleman and Trow (1956) attempted to study an American union where an oligarchy didn’t exist within its internal structures. They sought to discover ‘... the conditions which make democracy within private governments such as trade unions possible.’ (Lipset, Coleman and Trow 1956, p.413).
Based on their examination of the International Typographical Union, (ITU), in which ‘two or more political parties have offered a complete slate of candidates for all offices since the union had been formed’, Lipset, et al(1956) argued that while they had not disproved Michel’s ([1915] 1962) theory, they had ‘demonstrated that where an effective and organised opposition does exist, it does so only because the incumbent administration does not hold a monopoly over the resources of politics.’ (Lipset, Coleman and Trow 1956, p.413).

Lipset, et al’s (1956) theory of the necessity of opposition, in order to maintain democratic structures within unions, has since received limited supported, predominantly from Edelstein and Warner (1976). Edelstein and Warner (1976) studied American trade unions and analysed the closeness of elections between 1949 and 1966 to determine the democratic nature of the internal structures. Closeness of elections, according to Edelstein and Warner (1976), are seen as most likely when:

(1) competition is among candidates of equal status power and reputation;
(2) an electorate is formally subdivided into potential supporters ...;
(3) voting systems ameliorate, rather than exaggerate, any inequalities deriving from structure. (Edelstein and Warner 1976, p.63)

In examining similar processes in British trade unions, Martin (1984) argued that democracy exists where there are ‘limitations’ on a union executive’s ability to prevent opposition. Those limitations included:
The political; culture, government attitudes and behaviour, the pattern of membership distribution, the industrial setting, the economic environment, technology and the rate of technical change, the source of union bargaining power, membership characteristics, membership beliefs, opposition expertise and resources, leadership beliefs and union structure (Martin 1984, p.62).

Other studies have also supported the conclusion that the power of union leaders can be limited under certain circumstances. Flanders (1968) for example, argued that a union’s constitution can provide the mechanism to keep union officials in line with the will of the membership. Similarly Clegg (1970) found that ‘organs of popular control exist and are used’ (Clegg 1970, p.344). He also found that union leaders are subject to many checks and balances to their power. These included:

- factions which operate in many unions,
- the elements of autonomy allocated to official committees at different levels of union government,
- the (often unofficial) power of shop floor organisations,
- and the influence which can be wielded collectively by junior full time officials (Clegg 1970, p.80-1).

A different view

Allen (1953) argued a different perspective on union democracy. He contended that trade union organisations should not be defined in the same terms as state democracies because ‘unions exist to achieve economic ends, not provide members with an exercise in government’ (Allen 1954, p.13). Foreshadowing the increasingly common study of trade union elections as a measure of democracy, Allen argued that the basic premise was flawed. His observations centred on the democracy as practice:
[A]bove all democracy means participation ... those people who imagine that they can exercise their democratic rights by occasionally casting a secret vote are deluding themselves. It is the very opposite of democracy - which is government by the people for the people not government of the people by the few (Allen 1954, p.24).

Later studies, such as Hughes (1968) supported the view that the main priority for union members is efficiency and effectiveness, rather than democracy. From this perspective we can see the argument made by the Webbs (1911[1894]) of the trade union as a ‘vehicle for efficiency’.

**The selection of union organisers - international perspectives.**

As the above discussion demonstrates there is a long-standing debate over the advantages and disadvantages of election versus appointment of organisers. As noted above, this argument can be traced to the work of the Webbs in the early 20th century who argued in favour of the appointment of officials over election due to its enabling of efficiency: appointment would enable union leaders to make use of professional expertise, which in turn would increase their effectiveness as bargaining agents.

This debate has been sporadically replayed since the end of the nineteenth century. This can be seen today, where during the past decade, the necessity of change in the union movement has again brought to the fore issues around union democracy. Once
again, these debates have reflected those pessimistic and optimistic traditions, which have shaped more general debates over union democracy (Heery and Kelly 1997).

Within the more optimistic tradition, a number of researchers have favoured the appointment of officials over election by the general membership. This view has rested on a number of arguments, the most important concerning expertise and the extent of influence on union policy. Like the Webb’s (1911[1894]), a number of researchers have claimed that appointment of officials provide unions with expertise that would otherwise be unavailable (Heery and Kelly 1997).

Other writers have further contended that appointed officials may have limited capacity to influence union policy. For instance, in his study of English union officials and industrial relations managers, Watson (1988) argued that the separation of legislative and executive union structures, by appointment over election meant that organisers could carry out policy without undue influence over the (elected) union leaders. Evidence for this was anecdotally expressed by one of the organisers quoted in Watson’s study. He stated (although there is an interesting sting in the tail) that ‘[a]ppointed people cannot dominate – they can’t dictate. Providing the members are active, the members can control the union’ (Watson 1988, p.4).

In contrast to this view, the traditional Marxist analysis of trade union power developed by Marx, Engels, and Trotsky has supported the use of election over appointment (Hyman 1975). Similar to Michel’s ([1915] 1962) analysis of union leaders, Marxist interpretations relate to the bureaucratisation of union officials. As Heery and Kelly (1997) note, the:
conservatism of officers and their unresponsiveness to members has been related to several features of their employment relationship: appointment, rather than election to office, relatively generous salaries and benefits, considerably in excess of those of their members, and training and socialization in the norms of ‘good industrial relations practice’ (Heery and Kelly 1997, p.53).

Watson’s (1988) study also found evidence of similar sentiments among some organisers in Britain. An elected union official in Watson’s study articulated a belief shared by many other elected organisers:

There’s nothing to be said for appointment. I’m totally against it. People should come from the industry and be elected. 70 per cent of the members had the confidence to vote me in. Someone could be a brilliant administrator and have letters after their name. But getting down to the nitty gritty of knowing what you are talking about – oh no (Watson 1988, p.70).

The literature has differed on the assertion that appointed organisers are more likely to be ‘conservative’ than elected organisers in their performance of their duties. A number of studies have suggested that elected officers can also exhibit conservative behaviour in their role due to the process of being elected. Undy and Martin (1984) and Heery and Kelly (1997) found evidence that elected organisers modified their behaviour for fear of a backlash at election time. In a study of English trade unions Undy and Martin (1984) established that ‘elected organisers were less likely to allow members to vote on collective agreements through a membership ballot than their
colleagues in the appointing Transport and General Workers Union (T&GWU)’.
Similarly, Heery and Kelly (1997) found elected organisers felt pressure to ‘tout for favours’, to court people, to restrict information, for fear that it would go against them at election time.

The issue of transparency in elections is also of value. Watson (1988) found that although elected to the position of organiser, many were given a ‘trial’ before the election to test for ‘suitability, and if successful were then given support in the election. According to an elected organiser in Watson’s study '[i]n democratic terms, anyone can run for the job. It’s advertised and put out in branches but the fact they’ve someone in training means effectively that they get the job…’ (Watson 1988, p.75).

Lastly, questions over the ‘conservatism’ or otherwise of officials need to be considered in context to the membership. Heery and Kelly (1997) found that highly educated officers, mainly appointed officials from white-collar unions were much more likely to describe their politics as left wing. As they suggest:

Those with a broader, more explicitly ‘ideological’ commitment to the labour movement will pursue a broader and more ambitious set of goals in negotiations and will aspire to use the power of the union movement to assist relatively disadvantaged groups, such as the low paid or ethnic minorities (Heery and Kelly 1997, p.59).
Research completed in Australia.

In Australia, at the same time as the Webb’s (1911[1894]) wrote their famous study, the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Act 1904 was enacted. ‘The Act’, a response to the great strikes of the 1890s, gave unions, once registered by the newly created Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Court, legitimacy in the labour relationship, unprecedented in the Western world. The effect of the Act was immediate. Union membership and power grew rapidly, leading Justice Higgins (1922), to comment almost two decades after the passage of the Act that ‘the system of arbitration adapted by the act is based on unionism. Indeed without unions it is hard to see how it could be worked’ (Higgins 1922, p.15).

Legitimacy came with a price. The Act placed constraints on union organisation, and required of unions a responsibility to be representatively democratic for the workers who joined them. Among the main objects of the Act, were the aims:

(e) To encourage the organisation of representative bodies of employers and employees and their organisation under this Act.

(f) To encourage the democratic control of organisations so registered and the full participation of members of such an organisation in the affairs of the organisation.

(Conciliation and Arbitration Act (Cwlth) 1904)

To ensure that unions complied with the Act and did not behave in a manner contrary to its aims, the threat of deregistration existed if it was deemed that a trade union
acted in ‘any way tyrannical or oppressive’ (*Conciliation and Arbitration Act (Cwlth) 1904*, s.60). The *Conciliation and Arbitration Act (1904)*—and subsequent Acts—maintained for the next 100 years a highly regulated industrial relations system that, through many amendments, regulated the conduct of union elections, length of office and behaviour in taking industrial action, by risk of penalty, including cancellation of registration and criminal sanctions.

The newly created legislation and subsequent amendments, as will be explained later in the chapter, had little impact on the selection processes of organisers in Australia. The Act did however significantly restrict the role and, as a consequence, the behaviour of union organisers in their representation of interests in maintaining and maximising conditions of employment for their members.

While specific data on the number of appointed organisers since the inception of the Act do not exist; through a variety of sources, including institutional histories, and union records, we do know that historically most blue-collar unions such as the building and manufacturing unions did predominantly elect their organisers, although methods of election differed from union to union (Coolican and Frenkel 1984). White-collar unions, particularly those in the areas of administration or ‘clerical’ services, traditionally appointed organisers. However the fundamental differences between the two processes remained blurred, as most white-collar organisers, whether elected or appointed, hailed from within the industry that the union represented and had many years of experience as lay officials (Cupper 1983).
Callus’ survey of NSW trade unions in 1984 was one of the first studies focussing explicitly on the selection process of organisers in Australia. He argued that the majority of trade union organisers were recruited through an internal labour market that required extensive participation in union affairs, such as being a shop steward, prior to being elected, or in the case of white-collar unions, appointed. Although there were some young, tertiary educated graduates being appointed to white-collar unions they were the exception rather than the norm (Callus 1986, p.419 -20).

Callus (1986) claimed that two largely non-competing and independent segments existed in the full time official labour market of trade unions. He argued:

The first, the ‘traditional’ segment, operates as an internal labour market recruiting primarily from among the membership, selecting on the basis of involvement in union affairs and providing limited career opportunities and relatively little mobility. The second, the salaried ‘experts’ is far more open with respect to entry, more dependent on formal labour qualifications, and requires simply a broad commitment to the Labour movement (Callus 1986, p.424).

Almost a decade after Callus’ (1986) study, Bramble (1995) contended that the segmentation detected between the experts and the traditional positions, such as organisers, was eroding. This process, he argued, would have negative consequences for the political and personal representativeness of Australian trade unions (Bramble 1995).
Changes in the characteristics of Australian organisers.

Bramble (1995) claimed that as a result of the increase in appointment rather than the traditional method of election, the ‘new breed’ of organisers in Australia was becoming less representative of the personal characteristics of the members that they represented. Organisers, Bramble (1995) argued, were more likely to have ‘superior educational qualifications, only moderate work experience, higher rates of pay and access to lucrative career opportunities’ (Bramble 1995, p.417). The most recent study by Pocock, Peetz and Houghton (2007), a survey of organisers in 13 Australian unions both supported and contradicted some of Bramble’s (1995) assertions, as will be discussed shortly.

The difficulty in establishing changes to characteristics in Australian organisers is that little relevant data exists prior to the early 1980s. However Callus (1986) claimed that Australian organisers were similar to Bauman’s (1960) description of English trade union officials in the 1950s.

Bauman (1960) claimed:

Almost all the union leaders have been recruited from working class families. Almost every one of them has done manual work. Hardly any of them have much education. In practice virtually all of them have reached their high position in the unions and in society by climbing step by step up the successive rungs of the officials trade union hierarchy (Bauman 1960, cited in Callus 1986, p.415).
Johnson’s (1971) study of fifty two union organisers in Western Australia in the early 1970s supported the applicability of Bauman’s thesis in Australia. Johnson (1971) found that the majority of organisers and officials in Perth unions interviewed were male, over forty years of age (most 46–50 years of age) and elected to the position. The majority of officials had left school between the ages of fifteen to sixteen years of age and had been in the position for more than five years.

Less than ten years later, Dufty (1980) also conducted research in Western Australia, involving sixty-three of Perth’s estimated eighty full time officials. Dufty’s (1980) research identified the demographic characteristics of union organisers. He found that organisers still needed significant union experience prior to obtaining their role, with about a third of those involved in his research having ‘ten to twenty years (experience) in the union before becoming full time officials’ (Dufty 1980, p.175).

Dufty (1980) was able to identify changes in the characteristics of organisers in the decade since Johnson’s study in 1971. Changes included an increase in officials that were younger, greater levels of education (especially tertiary) and a rise in those officials recruited from ‘white-collar rather than skilled worker occupations’ (Dufty 1980, p.173). He also identified an increase in the proportion of officials aged thirty years and under, and a decrease of those in the forty-one to fifty age group (Dufty 1980, p.174).

Cupper’s (1983) study of white-collar unions in NSW found that within the unions, which predominantly appointed organisers from within their membership, the characteristics contrasted with those generally found amongst blue-collar organisers,
with a likelihood of the white-collar organiser being university educated, less work experienced and younger. Cupper (1983) described the average full time industrial officer as likely to be:

between 35 and 40 years of age. He is likely to have entered a tertiary institution, devoted five years of his life to full time paid employment in the union movement. Prior to becoming a full time official he would have served organised labour in a capacity (Cupper 1983, p.182).

Since the 1980s, due to the growing recognition of the increasing diversity of union members, there have been attempts to change the characteristics of organisers so as to more accurately reflect membership composition. As a consequence, ACTU and individual union initiatives have been implemented aimed at redressing the lack of representation, particularly of women and organisers from non-English speaking backgrounds. Further changes have occurred in the education levels of organisers and the length of experience in the position.

**Gender**

It has been well documented that the number of women trade union members has risen dramatically since the 1970s; however, the number of women in organising and union leadership positions remains low (Nightingale 1991, Pocock 1992, Pocock 1995). In 1983, women held only 12.4 per cent of full time official positions in Australian trade unions (Cupper 1983, p.415). By 1991, the number of women had increased slightly, with women making up 20 per cent of officials aged between 25–40 years (Bramble 1995).
Research has established that the gender of union members has a strong influence on their likely participation in union activities and tendency to nominate for union positions such as organisers. Nolan’s (1984) study of female members of the Tasmanian Public Service Association found they were less likely to have an interest in participating in the internal political system for a variety of reasons including the structure of meetings and their dominance by male members.

Griffin and Benson’s (1989) study of the Victorian branch of the Municipal Officers Association found female participants were less likely to be encouraged by the union leadership to participate in internal union activities than males. More recently, Pocock’s (1995) study of six Australian unions identified a number of factors preventing women’s involvement in union activities. These included a lack of encouragement from the union, job related factors and societal factors. Despite these obstacles, recent evidence points to a gradual improvement in representation of women in organising positions (ACTU 2002, Griffin & Moors 2003).

**Ethnicity**

Despite a dramatic increase in union members of non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB)—from Europe from the 1950s and Asia from the mid to late 1970s—the number of NESB union organisers working in Australian unions has traditionally been low. Research completed in the state of Victoria by Bertone and Griffin (1992) confirmed a lack of representativeness for members from NESB backgrounds. They found that only 10 per cent of organisers identified as from non-Anglo backgrounds. Evidence suggests that although there has been an increase in the representation of
NESB officials, the gap remains ‘very wide’ (Pocock 1995, Bramble 1995). Most recently Pocock, Peetz and Houghton (2007) found in their study that eighty per cent of organisers surveyed were born in Australia with only 3 per cent born overseas.

**Education**

The greatest shift in the characteristics of Australian organisers has been in the education levels, age and as a consequence, experience, of those performing the role. Traditionally in Australia, education qualifications have been of little importance in obtaining a position as an organiser (Callus 1986).

Johnson’s (1971) study found that few union organisers possessed educational qualifications beyond year ten. However, only a decade later, Dufty (1980) noted a marked rise in the level of organiser’s education. Since the mid-1990s, this process has accelerated. While the percentage of the Australian workforce possessing tertiary qualifications has also grown quite rapidly it has been at a lesser rate less than amongst organisers. Figures from the ACTU’s ‘Organising Works’ program, a program which places trainees into unions as appointed organisers, indicates that 46.8 per cent of organisers on the program between the years 1994–1998 held tertiary qualifications (Bramble 2001); a factor confirmed in later research (Griffin & Moors 2002). Most recently the increasing education qualifications of organisers has been given support by Pocock et al (2007) who identified in their study that 52 per cent of organisers surveyed had a degree or post graduate qualifications.
Another dramatic change in the characteristics of organisers, according to Bramble (1995) has been the change in age range and levels of work experience. As previously described, the path to becoming a trade union organiser in Australia has traditionally meant many years (between ten and twenty) experience in the industry, as well as ‘on the job’ union training, as a delegate or other honorary position, prior to obtaining the position.

Indicative of the changing age of union organisers in Australia, Johnston’s (1970) sample of West Australian officials showed that 46 per cent of organisers were between the ages of 41–50 years; and Davis’ (1977) study of six trade unions, identified the average age of officials to be 42 years old.

Dufty’s (1980) replication of the Johnson study seven years later, however, found only 33 per cent were in the same age group. The age group of ‘under 30’ was four times the size found ten years earlier, having increased from 4 per cent to 16 per cent. By 1983, the average age was 30 years and continuing to decline (Cupper 1983). Although recent figures are not available relating to the age of union organisers in Australia, with the continued increase in both appointment and the ‘Organising Works’ program, Bramble (1995, 2001) contends that the trend is continuing. Most recent research however tends to contradict the assertion of an ageing organiser workforce. Pocock, Peetz and Houghton found in their 2007 study that the median age of those surveyed was 43 years, with most organisers, 33 per cent, between the ages of 45 – 54 followed by 29 per cent under the age of 35 years, although due to the self
selecting nature of the survey caution must be taken in extrapolating this to the wider organiser population (Pocock et al 2007, p 156).

The impact of the changing characteristics of Australian organisers

The previous section demonstrated that despite limited research conducted, there is evidence with which we can track changes in the characteristics of organisers. What is less available is evidence with which we can measure how these changes in characteristics have impacted organiser’s capacity to represent members. Due to the paucity of information and the relatively short period of time since the identification of changes in organisers’ characteristics, the impact of such changes on union members’ opinions of their organisers also remains unclear.

As earlier stated, there is evidence that in the last ten years the appointment process has been utilised, and justified, as a mechanism to redress the lack of representation of female and NESB members (Pocock 1995, Griffin and Moors 2002). Bramble has criticised the use of appointment in attempting to better address representation of members. Firstly, Bramble contends that ‘it presumes that making appointments are more enlightened than the rank and file membership when considering prospective officials from non-traditional backgrounds’ (Bramble 1995, p.419). Secondly, appointment of female officials does not necessarily mean a representation on class basis; and thirdly, appointment, even if it is addressing under representation ‘reinforces in the members the alienation from their union leadership’ (Bramble 1995, p.419).
The impact of organiser’s characteristics on members

Apart from the need for organisers to have experience in the industry which they represent, research in Australia has differed in its evaluation of members’ attitudes to differing characteristics of organisers. In a now dated survey, Johnson (1970) found 62 per cent of the members surveyed believed that only those workers who have worked in the industry should become union officials and that no outsider should occupy union positions. Experience was found to be of greater necessity in industries where expertise and knowledge of the work performed was important, for example, in building construction or the telecommunications industries.

Johnson’s study however, also found contradictory views. While most members believed experience on the job to be far more important than having educational qualifications, others criticised their representatives’ lack of education. As expressed by one hospital employee: ‘I mean no offence but some don’t have the education, going by their manner and their attitude. But is it necessary for them to be educated anyway? As long as they know the industry well enough that counts in my book’ (Johnson 1970, p.22).

Callus (1986) also found that organisers who were currently performing the role believed that it was necessary for organisers to have experience in the industry that they represented. Callus (1986) found that ‘80 per cent of "traditional" full time officials believed it was essential that officials work on the job before taking office’ (Callus 1986, p.423).
In identifying the changes of educational qualifications of organisers and other union officials, Dufty (1980) claimed that the impact on union members could be contradictory. The increase in education would mean that organisers would be better prepared to bargain against employers—a group that had previously benefited from better education, which sometimes translated into better negotiating skills. The ‘negative consequence of the change ... [was] the development of some degree of alienation of the rank and file from the better educated union official.’ (Dufty 1980, p.174). However, as Dufty goes on to suggest, in a crisis, and ‘given the high degree of pragmatism in Australian unions, a union official who is successful in achieving what the members want will be forgiven for almost anything, including a tertiary education’ (Dufty 1980, p.175).

**Political representativeness**

The literature review failed to locate any completed research identifying the reasons for the trend towards organisers being appointed in Australia. One possible explanation for the change in preference of selection of organisers, from election to appointment, is a reflection of the embracement of the original beliefs identified by the Webb’s (1911[1894]). That is, that appointed organisers, due to their training and education, perform the role more effectively (efficiently) than elected organisers, with minimal impact on the democratic structures of unions.

Another reason for the change in the process of selection of organisers, one that dominates Bramble’s (1995) arguments, the continued attempts by union leaders in Australian trade unions to obtain power and control over union membership. For
Bramble (1995), this alteration of selection processes is suggestive of a centralisation of power—aided by limiting democratic processes, such as elections.

Bramble (1995) claimed, that ‘the tendency for appointment of many hundreds of unelected organisers (in the Australian union movement) is clearly inimical to rank and file control of unionism.’ (Bramble 1995, p.418) The extension of this argument is that, by taking away union member’s right to choose their organiser, leads organisers are led to rely on support from the leadership—i.e., those that provided employment—rather than from the membership. Such support, according to Bramble (1995) resulted in organisers being ‘not subject to the same degree of accountability to the membership at large’ and as such would change the behaviour of the organisers to the members and the members’ perception of the union.

Bramble’s (1995) thesis does however have its critics. Previous research in Australia—as well as in Great Britain—suggests that election of organisers has major drawbacks. Much of this criticism has centred on the political requirements, or political backing, by those seeking to be elected to the position of organiser.

Critics argue that the seemingly ‘democratic’ process of election is, in practice, more complicated. Coolican and Frenkel’s (1984) examination of two of the ‘largest and most militant’ unions in Australia between the period 1976 to 1982 the Building Workers Industrial Union (BWIU) and the Amalgamated Metals, Foundry and Shipwrights Union (AMFSU), identified that organisers in Australian blue-collar unions were often given a trial or ‘test period’ for acceptability prior to being chosen,
and supported, to stand for election. Endorsement for nomination was only given to those deemed suitable by the leadership.

Candidates for organisers in positions in the BWIU were carefully and systematically selected. The branch president explained that: it’s our policy always to use temporary organisers: we put on less organisers than we need ... the time as a temporary organiser is a good training for a full time position. Those who want to be an organiser can be tested. It’s a training ground for the future leadership and sometimes for (state) executive positions. (Coolican & Frenkel 1984, p.152)

This narrowing of democratic process was similarly identified by Callus (1986), who found that ‘the process of election is a political one and the candidates inevitably need some form of endorsement. Our survey indicated that 65 per cent of elected organisers need some form of endorsement’ (Callus 1986, p.419).

While endorsement to election figures are difficult to gauge, institutional and anecdotal evidence suggests this to be important, and widespread, particularly amongst unions affiliated to the Australian Labor Party. Recent evidence points to a long-term decline in the number of positions contested, and number of members’ nominating for candidature of these positions, in unions. In Victoria during 2006/07, as Table 2.1 overleaf demonstrates, only a small minority of elections within union organisations were contested.
Table 2.1 Candidates for union election in Victoria- 2006/07 AEC Report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positions</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Candidates for contested offices (industrial)</td>
<td>431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidates for uncontested offices (industrial)</td>
<td>1,734</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2165</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Union Elections

As with the decline in union members nominating for union positions (including organiser positions) the percentage of union members voting in recent years has seen a similar dramatic decline.

Table 2.2. Ballots sent to union members (2006/07). AEC Report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ballot papers issued</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ballot papers issued (industrial)</td>
<td>234,338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballot papers returned (industrial)</td>
<td>82,079</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Figures from the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) annual report (2006/07: see table 2.2 above), demonstrate that the majority of union members in Australia do not participate in union elections. Out of a total of 234,338 ballot papers sent to union members in Victoria during elections in 2006/07 less than one-third or 82,079 papers, were returned.
Research is yet to establish if the increased appointment of organisers and the lack of ‘real’ choice in elections have led to a decrease in participation; however, it must be noted that voting in union elections in Australia has been in decline for a number of years (Deery, Plowman, Walsh & Brown 2002).

**Conservatism of appointed organisers**

Bramble (1995) argued that the emergence of the ‘new generation’s of ‘professional’ highly-educated and appointed organisers may have also been accompanied by a tendency towards greater conservatism or managerial unionism (Heery & Kelly, 1994) in the way in which they perform their work. The contention that an organiser who is appointed would act in a manner more ‘conservative’ than an elected organiser is difficult to measure due to the generally solitary nature of the work that they perform (Heery & Kelly 1997).

Knowledge about the daily activities of Australian organisers is limited (Peetz & Pocock 2007) and, as a result, it is difficult to establish how the selection process might impact on the way in which they carry out their work. As already established, both internationally and in Australia, organisers who are elected to the position are also subject to constraints—particularly around election time. This point, however, alerts us to the complicated nature of, and ideological assumptions inherent in, the use of the term ‘conservatism’ as it relates to union representation.

In Australia, the role of the organiser has been—to a large degree— influenced by the relevant legislation that has provided ‘right of entry’ into workplaces in order to carry out ‘union business’. Right of entry provisions have been undermined by first, the
Workplace Relations Amendment (Right of Entry) Bill 2004, which limited entry for organisers entering workplaces (after 24 hours notice) for the purpose of investigating a suspected breach of the Act, an award or certified agreement, or they want to speak to, or recruit employees. Subsequent legislation, The Workplace Relations Amendment (Work Choices) Act 2005, introduced in 2006, has further circumscribed these rights.

One of the few studies completed on the activities of union organisers, that done by Coolican and Frenkel (1984), identified that organisers predominantly concentrate on the ‘bread and butter’ issues of industrial relations. That is, the organisers focus on material conditions of employment, rather than encouraging participation in union activities and union issues. The same study established that among building and metal industry unions, increases in wages and improved conditions were deemed of highest priority for organisers’ work, while ‘raising workers consciousness’ and ‘effective leadership’ remained of secondary concern.

More recently, Pocock and Peetz (2007) found that individual grievances of members took up the most of organisers time (30 per cent) followed by visiting unionised workplaces for other purposes, talking to union members (14 per cent) and negotiating with management, finding workplace delegates and building workplace structures (all 12 per cent). Pocock et al (2007) also found ‘some hints’ that those recruited from outside of the union movement with experience in other fields – such as community or student activists – were better at identifying workplace activists than their union experienced only counterparts.
Bramble’s (1995) assertion that an appointed organiser would be less likely to prioritise as important the participation of members due to a lack of accountability (i.e., not having to rely on their vote during election time) is contentious. Previous research conducted has established that, even when positions are elected, trade union members—in Britain and Australia—participate only infrequently in union activities.

Although it has been claimed that participation is many faceted and covers both formal and informal participation (Fosh 1993); the two yardsticks of the union movement in Australia, in most discussions of participation, have traditionally been ballot-participation and attendance at general meetings (Evatt Foundation 1995).

According to Griffin and Benson (1989), in their study of the gender differences in union participation in a white-collar union in Australia, union related factors are relatively more important barriers to participation than personal/social factors, which in turn, were ranked relatively higher than job related barriers. They argue that a proportion of the membership does not want to participate because they perceive a lack of power in changing the union and that one’s individual vote would not influence outcome.

The following section provides an analysis of the role of the organiser in fostering participation amongst union members that they represent. The first part looks at attendance at union meetings and the second part looks at members’ satisfaction with their organisers.
**Union meetings**

The general union meeting has traditionally been the method through which unions, and union organisers, get feedback and encourage discussion on issues ranging from workplace bargaining to union policy. Bramble (1995) claims the general meeting is necessary as a mechanism for gaining support and feedback on activities such as current strategies and campaigns.

However, the meeting as a mechanism for decision-making, and indicator of democratic practice in the workplace, has been criticised by others. The *Evatt Foundation- A Blueprint for Trade Union Activism* (1995) report claims, and it is worth repeating here, that:

> Just as the issue of ballot participation needs rethinking so too does the role of the general meeting. Participation rates and meeting attendance have traditionally gone together. However, the validity of general meetings as participatory and democratic forums must be reviewed. Their role as a forum for member input and culture building has been severely diminished. Many unions cite the ongoing difficulties of obtaining quorums and keeping sustained attendance at such regular forums (Evatt Foundation 1995 p.59).

Australian union members have perceived union meetings as an important means of participation. Johnson found that to engender better communication, members of various unions asked their leaders to call meetings more often, both on and off the job, and also demanded that notice of meetings should be given well in advance.
including detailed agendum: with a claim that ‘a general meeting should be called at least every month and people should be fined if they don’t attend’ (Johnson 1970).

Others, both in Australia and internationally, believe the need for meetings to be less important. They have argued that greater participation often occurs when members are dissatisfied with the union. Low rates of participation may indicate a degree of satisfaction with the union; and therefore, estimates of union democracy that are based on the extent of members’ involvement may be mistaken, since members may be indicating their support for union policies by their non-attendance (Davis 1977, Hemingway, 1978).

Beyond the AWIRS study compiled over ten years ago there is little data that can shed light on aggregate attendance at union-meetings. As Table 2.3 below reveals, the AWIRS (1995) data did, however, reveal that more than half of Australian union members only attended a union meeting once every six months or less.

**Table 2.3 Attendance at meetings (AWIRS)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of meetings</th>
<th>workplaces (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At least once a month</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once a quarter</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least once every six months</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irregularly</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source The AWIRS Project Team, 1990, *The Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey (AWIRS): objectives and methodology*, Department of Industrial Relations. Canberra.)
The reasons for those meetings were:

**Table 2.4 Reasons for meetings (AWIRS)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>workplaces (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regular meeting</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To discuss a workplace matter—<em>in response to a management proposal</em></td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To discuss a workplace material—<em>raised by members of the union</em></td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A visit by a union official</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reason</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source The AWIRS Project Team, *1990, The Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey (AWIRS): objectives and methodology*, Department of Industrial Relations. Dept. of Industrial Relations, Canberra.)

Unfortunately, more recent evidence is not available on the frequency of meetings held in workplaces in Australia since the AWIRS study. Further research would need to be completed comparing the frequency of meetings in unions that appoint organisers and unions that elect organisers.

In Australia, Johnson (1970) found that members’ attitudes towards their respective organisers was mixed. Though 28 per cent of members had never met their officials, 60 per cent thought quite well of them, others referred to them as ‘bludging officials’. The levels of satisfaction in Johnson’s study ranged from 63 per cent (Water Supply Union) and 65 per cent (Miscellaneous Workers Union) to high levels of satisfaction of 82 per cent (Passenger Transport Union).

Peetz’s (1998) survey of employers in metropolitan Sydney establishments (SEMSE), found members were much less satisfied than they were twenty years earlier. In 73 per cent of Peetz’s (1998) study, which involved questions relating to satisfaction
with union hierarchy, only 32 per cent of the union members questioned responded that they were satisfied with their union officials and leaders; another 37 per cent were neutral (neither); and 35 per cent were dissatisfied.

Savery and Souter’s (1991) examination of community attitudes towards union leaders—completed over three and five-year intervals in Perth, Western Australia—concluded that very few participants in their research were satisfied with union officials. Of those surveyed, 24 per cent believed union leaders’ performance to be poor; 30 per cent believed it to be very poor.

A 1995 research study conducted on behalf of the NSW Trades and Labour Council (now Unions NSW), by Newspoll found that 53 per cent of trade union members (38 per cent of men and 52 per cent of women) believed that unions at their workplace did a poor job of keeping in contact with them (previous members 61 per cent and never members 59 per cent); whilst Peetzs’ SEMSE (1998) study (overleaf) established that union members were far more satisfied with their direct workplace delegates (shop stewards) than either their full time officials (organisers, Union Secretary) or ACTU.

Table 2.5 Satisfaction with union delegates, officials and leaders and the ACTU.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Employees</th>
<th>Union members</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Delegates</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Officials</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and leaders</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACTU</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Peetz 1998, p.44)
Chapter summary

This chapter provided an overview of literature on the topic of trade union organisers and their selection process, both in Australia and internationally. The Webbs (1911[1894]) have been credited with writing the first in depth study of trade unions. Since then, there has been much written of trade union democracy internationally, though less so in Australia. Although these studies have provided a background of, and some insights into, the effects of union organisation and debates on its impact on membership, there exists little specific research available on the selection process of union organisers, prior to the work of Callus (1986) and Bramble (1995).

Callus (1986) found that Australian union organisers were predominantly elected by the membership, with a few white-collar unions appointing but from within the union. Almost a decade later Bramble (1995) found union leaders increasingly using the method of appointment. He contended that the increasing use of appointment has impacted on democracy within trade unions and participation by the membership. Specifically there are two major consequences of the changes: a decline in political and personal representation.

Bramble (1995) argued that appointed officials would differ from those elected by the membership in their political representation. Despite these criticisms, studies of union democracy raise equally problematic issues of representativeness when officials are elected. Secondly, it has been argued that the ‘new breed’ of organisers have different personal characteristics to their predecessors. New organisers, both elected and appointed, have differing characteristics that in many ways are not reflective of the
membership—and by implication altering the ability of organisers to empathise with those they represent. In many other ways however the ‘new breed’ is more reflective of the personal characteristics of the membership, particularly factors such as gender and ethnicity. Aside from generalisations and assumptions, studies into this changing phenomenon tend to focus solely on the characteristics of union officials, without asking the members of trade unions how they view these changes.

The literature review identified a gap in our knowledge of the changing selection processes and their possible impact on member perception. To date, there has been no specific research completed on Australian trade unionists’ preference for either elected or appointed officials; or any possible impacts this may have on union members’ decision to participate in union elections; general union activities (predominantly controlled by union organiser or nomination for positions. The aim of this thesis then, is to ask of union members how they perceive these changes; whether the members consider it important for the organiser to have experience in the industry they represent; and whether personal characteristics of organisers, such as gender, ethnicity, age and education, is important.

The next chapter puts forward the methodology employed in this study, to ask these questions, in order to gain a greater understanding of the implications of the selection processes of union organisers in Australia.
CHAPTER THREE

Methods

Introduction

The objective of this research was to investigate the opinions of members of a Victorian trade union on the selection processes of organisers. In order to achieve this objective the research design employed a sequential explanatory strategy. According to Creswell (2003) unlike other mixed method strategies, the primary focus of the sequential explanatory strategy is to explore a phenomenon. The strategy utilised both quantitative and qualitative data gathering techniques. The research was broken into two separate phases.

The first phase, the quantitative stage, involved the use of a short survey with twenty-three questions administered to members of a trade union in order to measure their responses to aspects of the organiser selection process and their own reasons for joining and participating (or not participating) in their particular union. The survey questions were informed by the literature reviewed in the previous chapter. The second phase, the qualitative stage, involved interviews with a small sample selected from those who had participated in the quantitative survey in order to explore, in more depth, themes that had emerged from the first phase. The results of the interviews were then analysed and compared with the results of the first phase of data collection.
The combination of qualitative and quantitative data enabled understanding of the impact of the selection process of organisers on trade union members.

The following section develops the rationale of the two-staged sequential explanatory strategy involving phase one: the survey; and phase two: in-depth interviews. It provides an explanation of the research design, including the sample; phases of the research; instruments used; data collection processes; methods of analysis, and the limitations inherent in the research.

**Context**

This research was conducted in the late 1990s and focused on the attitudes of members of a state branch of a federally registered trade union. A year before the study, the union had gone through an election for all elected executive positions from the Secretary, President to the Branch Executive. Although in that election the incumbent another faction of the Australian Labor Party did not challenge officials, (the union was aligned with the Socialist Left faction of the ALP), in previous elections over two decades elections had been challenged and elections had often involved extensive materials being sent to union members by different factions canvassing support.

The study was also carried out three years after the election of a new conservative Liberal/National Party Federal Government. The ‘Howard Government’ introduced conservative industrial relations policies that aimed to limit the right of unions in the workplace. The implications of these policies, as well as the change in government
may have impacted on the responses of union members either favourably or unfavourably towards their current union.

**The rationale for the methodology used**

Conflict about which methodology is the best choice for a researcher is as old as the methodologies themselves. Within the field of industrial relations, however, that conflict has been less apparent (Kelly 1999). Unlike many other disciplines, it has been said of industrial relations that there are virtually no laws and remarkably few unquestioned assumptions. According to Kelly (1999), what is generally accepted as good research is not dependant on applications of particular ‘theories’, specific techniques or kinds of propositions, but rather more diffuse criteria. For the researcher this is both ‘a great gateway and a menace. The choices are immense, the dangers of making the wrong choices are considerable’ (Kelly 1999, p.2).

Traditionally in research in Australian industrial relations research there has been a classic divide between qualitative and quantitative techniques, with qualitative techniques dominating, although there is no reason that research designs should not incorporate both (Kelly 1999). In recent years, mixed methods research, a process which first emerged in the field of psychology (Campbell & Fiske 1959), has been expanding (Cresswell 2002). The current research embraced mixed method research as a strategy for two important reasons. Firstly, utilising both qualitative and quantitative methods overcomes the weaknesses inherent in each method; and secondly, it was decided that, given the research questions being asked that required both a broad snapshot and personal opinion, it was the most appropriate method to use. After careful consideration of the different types of mixed methods available to
the researcher it was decided the sequential explanatory strategy was the most suitable.

The sequential explanatory strategy, displayed in Figure 3.1 below, is characterised by the collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data after which ‘the two methods are integrated during the interpretation phase of the study’ (Cresswell 2002, p.79). The benefits of this type of strategy are the straightforward design, it is easy to implement, to describe and to report. There are, however, disadvantages to the strategy, including the time involved in collecting the data (Cresswell 2002).

**Figure 3.1 The sequential explanatory strategy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantitative</th>
<th>Qualitative</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td>Data collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>Data analysis</td>
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</table>

The first phase of the strategy involved quantitative data. The research employed questionnaires to obtain the information necessary for the second phase (qualitative). The use of questionnaires to gather information, or social ‘facts’, about a particular set of propositions or questions is well established in Industrial Relations research in Australia (AWIRS 1995).

Questionnaires have both advantages and disadvantages. The main advantage of the use of questionnaires is that they are less expensive than other methods, producing quick results as well as offering less opportunity for bias or errors caused by the
attitudes of the interviewer (Sarantakos 1999). The second advantage is mailed questionnaires are easier to implement than other types of questionnaires. Apart from the cost of envelopes and stamps, no other resources are necessary unlike other methods, which might require telephones, computers, recording devices, venues and transportation. The third advantage, and the most important, is that mailed questionnaires can provide greater anonymity (Bourque 1995). The survey utilised closed questions to gain an understanding of the participants’ opinions on issues related to the selection process of organisers, their changing characteristics and participation within unions. Closed, pre-coded questions have the advantage of easy administration as well as allowing quantification.

Questionnaires do have disadvantages too. They can be ‘deficient in capturing the effect of context on activity or uncovering the workings of the processes they describe, although by uncovering patterns they may point to areas needing more detailed exploration’ (Kelly 1999, p.57). It has also been argued that there is a high degree of self-selection in surveys, leading to a comparatively low response or return rate—commonly lower than other forms of research (Bourque 1995). Finally, De Vaus (1985) believes that surveys are too statistical and reduce answers to ‘incomprehensible numbers’ (De Vaus 1985). These limitations were addressed in the second phase of the research through the use of open ended questions which provided the participants the opportunity to elaborate on their answers.

The questionnaire used in the first phase proved to be a ‘sign post’ for the second (interview) phase. The semi-structured interviews were developed from the themes and results derived, from the analysis of the survey. Morgan (1993) argues that it is
extremely valuable to conduct interviews after the survey results have already been analysed ‘with an aim to corroborate findings or explore in a greater depth the relationships suggested by quantitative analysis’ (Morgan 1993, p.121)

Interviews vary along a continuum, ranging from structured to unstructured. The interviews undertaken in this study were designed to be semi-structured, a choice that has both beneficial and unfavourable effects. These effects are described by Bogdan and Bilken (1982) who argue that choice of interview type need not be of great concern:

[S]ome people debate which approach is more effective, the structured or the unstructured. With semi structured interviews you are confident of getting comparable data across the subjects, but you lose the opportunity to understand how the subjects themselves structure the topic at hand ... from our perspective you do not have to choose sides. You choose a particular type to employ depending on your research goal (Bogdan & Bilken 1982, p.83).

The union chosen for the study

The setting for this research was the Victorian state branch of the Australian Services Union (ASU) (Private Sector Branch). The ASU is a federally registered trade union with the Australian Industrial Relations Commission as required under the Workplace Relations Act 1996. The union is also an affiliate of both the Australian Council of Trade Unions and the state organisation, the Victorian Trades Hall Council. The union gave permission for its name to be used in the study.
**The organisers**

Similar to most unions in the white-collar sector, the ASU has traditionally chosen its organisers by the appointment process; although, according to an informal interview with the current President, they are predominantly selected from within the membership when possible. In February 2003, the union employed eight branch organisers, the majority of whom were women of varying age and ethnicity.

**The membership**

The union has historically been eligible to represent clerical workers across a number of industries including administration workers in local government, white-collar private sector industries including call centres, electricity, water, rail and the social and community sector. In December 2001, the branch had almost 8,000 members. The number of members changes daily as new members are both added and deleted as they leave their employment. According to the President of the Clerical division of the state branch of the ASU the members of the union were predominantly female white-collar workers (about 70 per cent) with a diverse range of ages and ethnicity.

**The sample**

A simple random sample of two-hundred members was selected from the union membership database after permission was given by the union leadership. Random samples have two advantages. Firstly, a random sample helps to control for researcher(s) bias; and secondly, it enables researchers to ‘state numerically the degree of confidence we have in inferring to the population’ (Labovitz 1988, p.49).
The decision to choose two-hundred members embraces a view that ‘if the population is homogenous with respect to the study object, a small sample may suffice’ (Sarantakos 1998, p.158). As previously stated, the participants were chosen from the union membership database. This was achieved by selecting every fortieth member. After obtaining two-hundred members from the database the list was then checked to make sure that the members were still financial members as required by the union regulations. If it was deemed that a potential participant chosen for the research was no longer financial, had changed address, or could not be contacted for any reason, then the next person on the membership list was chosen.

**Stage one of the research**

The questionnaire used in the first phase of the research comprised twenty-three questions. It was designed after exploring themes, techniques and questions emerging from the literature review and embraced the notion that ‘one should include as many questions as necessary and as few as possible.’ (Sarantakos 1999, p.228).

The questions were designed to answer the research questions by determining participants’ opinions on the selection process of organisers in general, and within the participants’ union, in particular. Many of the questions were developed from the contentions made by Bramble (1995) in his study of trade union officials. The questions developed from Bramble’s (1995) research included: questions on the need for organisers to have experience in the industry they represent; the need for organisers to possess university qualifications; and the perceived ‘democratic’ nature of the process of appointment.
The questions attempted to ascertain the participants’ knowledge of the current selection process within their union, the impact of the process on ‘democracy’, and beliefs of what process would facilitate the most suitable candidates. Questions also related to the subjects’ perceptions of the impact of the selection process on participation (the questionnaire is included as Appendix 3). The final section of the questionnaire measured the participants’ opinions as to the importance of certain factors on organisers’ performance; these included age, gender, ethnicity, education and experience.

The final part of the survey gathered data about the participants’ gender, age, education, employment status, occupation, length of time with current employer, workplace size, country of birth, delegate duties undertaken and period of union membership. Similar demographics have been used in many studies (Crockett & Hall 1987; Christie & Miller 1989;).

Measurement of the responses involved the usage of Likert scales. Likert scales were chosen as appropriate as they are a frequently used method of quantifying responses in questionnaires (Sarantakos 1999). The scales involved scoring from 1–5, with 1 being maximum agreement, and 5 being minimal agreement. Other questions related to demographic factors, categories relating to age, sex, education and union membership, required a ‘yes’, ‘no’, ‘don’t know’ or ‘neither’ format.
Pre-testing the survey (Pilot Study)

A pilot of the survey was completed prior to the main survey being sent out. This was done in an attempt to identify and eliminate, or modify, any potential problems that could in any way affect the information gained from the participants in the main questionnaire. The survey was given to ten members chosen, at random, from the union database. The pilot survey aimed to confirm the relevance of the questions in answering the research question and to identify any concepts or words that needed modification. The pilot test also attempted to assess the suitability of the layout of the survey and the clarity of the instructions provided; as well as the effectiveness of the coding of questions and the computer package used.

On conclusion of the pilot test being completed a number of issues were identified that needed to be addressed prior to embarking on the next step, the mail out of the survey to the 200 participants. The main issues that required changes were various definitions including ‘organiser’, ‘delegate’, the survey format, and the re-numbering of questions. A second ‘pilot’ of the survey, involving five further participants chosen from the union membership database, established that no further adjustments were necessary.

Administration of the questionnaire proceeded through a number of stages. A covering letter from the researcher was sent to the potential participants explaining the nature and reason for the survey and encouraging participants to complete and fill in the document and return it to the researcher (see Appendix 1). Ethics clearance was received from the RMIT Business Human Research Ethics Sub-Committee for the mail out of the survey to commence.
The researcher’s letter explained in simple language the purpose of the study and gave an assurance of anonymity and confidentiality of any information provided. The participants were requested to complete the survey and return it in a pre-paid addressed envelope provided. The letter also provided participants with Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) contact details as per ethical requirements. It was estimated that the survey would take about thirty-minutes to complete (see Appendix 3).

The surveys were sent out on December 11, 12, 13 and 14, 2001 by mail from a registered Australian Post office in Carlton, Victoria. The participants were then contacted by a telephone call to their home encouraging them to complete the survey. The telephone call, approved by RMIT ethics committee explained the content of the survey and length of time it would take to complete.

Participants were given two-weeks from the date of postage to return the completed questionnaires. At the completion of that period the data was then collated in preparation for analysis. A response rate of 40 per cent was achieved at the end of the two-week period. The raw data was prepared for analysis. This process involved defining the variables, coding the data and entering the data into the relevant statistical computer package (SPSS. 10). The variables were defined in SPSS according to the SPSS guidelines and then coded.

Coding is a process through which statements and answers can be translated into numbers. Coding provides the researcher ‘easy reduction of the data, analysis, storage
and dissemination of the data’. Coding of the data must include categories that are ‘accurate, uni-dimensional, mutually exclusive and exhaustive and it can be performed either before the data is collected or after the data is collected’ (Sarantakos 1998, p.331). An example of the process of coding utilised in the research is as follows. Question 15 asked: *have you ever nominated/applied for one of the following positions*. This question was coded in the following manner

Delegate 1,  Organiser 2,  Secretary 3,  Union Council 4,  Union executive 5.

For questions that were open ended such as Question 16: *why have you not stood for a position ...* the responses were (post) coded and value labels developed.

On completion of the raw data being coded and entered into an SPSS file it was then possible to create descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics provide information about the distribution, variability, and central tendency of a variable. Frequencies to responses were then established in order to answer the research questions. Once frequencies were completed the next stage involved establishing whether certain factors impacted on the opinions of the participants.

This was possible using bivariate analysis, a procedure which indicates the strength of the relationship between two categorical variables: ‘two variables are said to be associated or related when the distribution of values on one variable differs of the other’ (Alreck Settle 1995, p.286). Bivariate analysis of the variables in the research was presented by means of cross tabulation. De Vaus (2002) claims cross tabulations are a way of displaying data so that it is possible to readily detect association between
variables. The results were displayed as tables with both actual numbers and percentages to enable easy understanding and interpretation of the strengths of relationships.

Upon completion of the above statistical processes it was then possible to analyse and interpret the data. This included an initial analysis of the socio demographic variables such as age, gender and education. This becomes important, as Da Vaus (2002) has pointed out, as it can help to ‘reveal certain biases in the sample which may help account for patterns observed later on’ (De Vaus 2002, p.168).

The initial analysis was followed by identification of the responses related to the research questions. Then a simple analysis was made of relationships to the main variables surrounding the selection process. This was possible by firstly establishing a general relationship between two variables identified by the percentages on the table produced by cross tabulation followed by explaining the relationship in plain English. The next stage involved clarification of the relationships including accounting for unexpected relationships. The results of the survey were then summarised. Firstly the results, then relationships identified between two variables, followed by unexplained relationships and finally the overall themes that emerged.

The final stage of the quantitative analysis was statistical analysis involving the non parametric measure of correlation utilising Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient. Spearman’s rank correlation is performed when there are two measurement variables and one ”hidden” nominal variable. This is achieved by converting each variable to
ranks. Once the two variables are converted to ranks, a correlation analysis is conducted (McDonald 2008).

The analysis was performed utilising SPSS which provided the correlation coefficient, the significance and the number of cases (N). According to Argyrous (2000) the correlation coefficient is a number between +1 and -1. This number describes the magnitude and direction of the association between two variables. The magnitude is the strength of the correlation. The closer the correlation is to either +1 or -1, the stronger the correlation. If the correlation is 0 or very close to 0, there is no association between the two variables. The direction of the correlation indicates how the two variables are related. If the correlation is positive, the two variables have a positive relationship (as one increases, the other also increases). If the correlation is negative, the two variables have a negative relationship (as one increases, the other decreases).

Examining this total process enabled a clearer order of information requiring in-depth follow up via the second phase (interviews).

**Stage two of the research**

The second phase involved qualitative data collection using interviews in order to explore in further depth the themes developed from the survey that required greater investigation. Those themes included such aspects as:

- Knowledge of the role of the organiser and skills needed to perform it;
• The lack of knowledge of the current process of selection of organisers;
• The impact of the process of appointment on ‘democracy’;
• Who performs the role better, an elected or appointed organiser.

The interviews were conducted with participants, chosen after completion of quota sampling, from those who had participated in the first stage of the research. The basic goal of quota sampling is the selection of a sample that is a replica of the population that the researcher wishes to generalise (Judd 1991). For the purpose of this research project the researcher was interested in members with a variety of differing socio-demographic and experience characteristics. These included gender, age, education and years of membership that would reflect the overall population of ASU members. All participants were required to sign a consent form that specified confidentiality and security of information.

The participants were contacted by phone and a place to meet was arranged for the interview when requested, although most preferred the interview to be conducted by telephone. It was determined that the participants, rather than the researcher, would nominate the most appropriate meeting place for the interview, in order to provide an environment in which the participants felt comfortable. The average duration of the interviews was thirty minutes. The interviews were audio taped in order to obtain accuracy of conversations, though it is noted that it can impact on responses given and discussion (Marshall 1999).

The interview questions were formulated by attempting to confirm, and explore further, the results of the first stage of the research. In the first part of the research the
participants had demonstrated little knowledge of the selection process of organisers within their union, a factor that may have had an impact on perceptions on the role. The interviews attempted to explore the levels of knowledge that participants have, in general, to the process of selection of organisers.

The questions (see Appendix 6) also probed the issues surrounding the selection process and attempted to understand what the members thought about the differing processes; as well as trying to understand why so many responded ‘don’t know’ to many important questions relating to democracy and election in the survey. Prior to the interviews a ‘trial’ test of the suitability of the questions was performed on four members.

The interviews followed Minichiello’s (1995) process involving the warm up stage, the confrontation stage, and the relaxation stage. The warm up stage involved a very broad discussion of the job of union organiser, knowledge of the organiser duties, how the organiser fitted into the union organisational structure and the participant’s previous experience with organisers. The confrontation stage involved direct probing of the participant’s opinions regarding the selection process. This process is also known as ‘funnelling’. The relaxation stage returned to less ‘contentious’ questions relating to union history and participation in the workforce.

**Data analysis**

Data analysis involves bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data. It is messy, ambiguous, time consuming, creative, and a fascinating process. It does not proceed in a linear fashion; it is not neat. Marshall (1999) claims qualitative
analysis is a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data.

Data analysis for the qualitative phase included five stages: ‘organisation of the data, generating categories, themes and patterns; testing the emergent hypotheses against the data; searching for alternative explanations of the data; and writing the report’ (Marshall 1999).

Organisation of the data involved reading through the transcripts several times in order to become familiar with it, making notes about points of interest and generally ‘cleaning it up’ (Pearsol 1985). The next stage concerned categorising the data, similar to those created in the first quantitative-stage of the research design. When it was found necessary new categories were created, in order to establish any emerging patterns or themes. The categories were structured to answer the research questions in greater detail than was provided in the first phase. An example of this process is illustrated in figure 2 below:

**Category**–Organiser should be elected to positions.

**Comments supporting** statement  
*Participants’ comments and reasons from interviews that provide support for election of organiser*

**Comments against** the statement  
*Participants’ comments and reasons from interviews that support appointment*

**General** comments  
*Participant’s comments from interviews related to the research questions.*

*Figure 2. Creating categories to analyse the data.*
By utilising categories developed from the first stage, elaboration and comparison of responses between the two phases was made easier. There are, however, limitations to creating categories that must be noted. The categorising of data whilst useful may produce categories so broad or bland that they may be of limited use. Secondly, participant responses may address more than one topic at a time making categories impossible (Mason 1996).

**Comparison of both stages**

The next step compared the results of the qualitative analysis with the quantitative analysis in order to support or dispute the findings of the first stage and to explore the similarities. This is not an easy task. As Maanen (1983) argues:

> it is a delicate exercise to decide whether or not results have converged. In theory, a multiple confirmation of findings may appear routine. If there is convergence it presumably is apparent. In practice, though, there are few guidelines for systematically ordering eclectic data in order to determine cognisance or validity (Maanen 1983, p.143).

The findings presented in the next chapter demonstrate that the second part of the research, in part, complemented the first stage. The survey questionnaire, while providing a brief overview of a participant’s opinions, was insufficient in itself to adequately answer the research questions. The second stage provided both a confirmation of the results in the first phase and provided further data for potential future research.
Validity

Sarantakos (1998) claims that validity is one of the basic principles of social research. Validity means ‘the ability to produce findings that are in agreement with theoretical or conceptual values: in other words to produce accurate results and to measure what is supposed to be measured’ (Sarantakos 1998, p.78). The following describes the steps that were taken to ensure validity in the current research.

Phase one of the research

The quantitative phase involved theoretical validation. Theoretical validation is employed when empirical confirmation of validity is difficult or not available (Sarantakos 1998). There are several types of theoretical validation including face, content, and construct validity. The quantitative phase employed both face validity and content validity.

Face validity is considered the simplest and consequently the weakest method for determining validity. The process involves the researcher ‘comparing the conceptual definition and the operational definition, if the measure looks like it measures what it is designed to measure, it is deemed valid by the researcher’ (Hessler 1992, p.64).

The quantitative phase also employed content validity. A measure is supposed to have validity if it covers all possible aspects of the research topic. The survey employed in the research identified the main arguments relating to organisers and utilised these to help in the construction of the questionnaire.
Phase two of the research.

The current research embraced Sandelowski’s (1986) claim to the worth of qualitative analysis as a reflection of personal experience. Sandelowski argued that:

> a qualitative study is credible when it presents such faithful descriptions or interpretations of a human experience that people having that experience would immediately recognise it from those descriptions or interpretations as their own (Sandelowski 1986, p.30).

In order to make the qualitative phase of the current research valid Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) criteria of trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability were adapted. Trustworthiness and credibility of the research were attained by having regular meetings with people who were not involved in the research. These meetings formed a part of ‘peer debriefing’ and helped to clarify issues, and to identify any problems that may have occurred. Further strategies aimed at enhancing trustworthiness involved ‘prolonged engagement’.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1994) prolonged engagement involves the investment of sufficient time to become familiar with the culture/setting/case under study, build trust and test for misinformation or misinterpretation. The current research occurred over a period of five years. Immersion in the subject material was also possible through the researcher’s employment in the trade union movement. This enabled a greater understanding of aspects of unions, and perceptions of union members, which aided the successful completion of the research.
Dependability in the research was attained through a process of auditing (audit trail). The audit trail included the raw data, including collection and recording. This included data reduction and reconstruction of data (the development of categories and themes); process notes and information about the development of the surveys and interviews used (Flick 1998).

Transferability—or generalisability—is the ability to transfer the findings about a particular sample to the population from which the sample was drawn; or when applying the findings about the population of interest to a second population believed to be similar to the first (Marshall 1995). This is difficult to accomplish in qualitative research; a point noted by Marshall (1995): ‘the generalisation of qualitative findings to other populations, settings … is seen by traditional canons as a weakness in the approach’ (Marshall 1995, p.144).

The final criterion was confirmability. Confirmability refers to the traditional concept of objectivity. Due to my previous work experience in the Victorian union movement (including as an organiser, industrial officer and WorkCover advocate), the study had to be structured, and possibilities of bias considered, in the researching of the chosen topic. Having previous experience in the area helped to understand and empathise with the participants; however, strategies had to be developed to prevent unintended bias. Those strategies included having other readers (supervisors and others) reading the methods chosen and results, constant checking for instant negatives; and importantly, adapting, where possible, questions developed by other researchers, to assist in quality data being produced.
Ethical Considerations

Permission was provided by RMIT Ethics Committee to conduct both phases of the study. Written permission was also obtained from the union involved to conduct a random sample of their membership and to approach existing union members to participate in the research. The research was conducted in a manner that ensured participants’ anonymity at all stages. A covering letter was sent to all participants explaining this and outlining security measures taken to protect their identity. All information, both surveys and tapes of interviews, was stored in a secure place at the researcher’s home in a locked filing cabinet.

All of the participants were given a ‘Plain Language Statement’ explaining the nature of the study and their right to cease participation at any stage of the research. The plain language statement also explained to the participants that if requested, they would be provided with the results of the research at a later date.

Limitations of the research

All research involves limitations and this research is no exception. Firstly, the pilot survey demonstrated that many trade union members have little knowledge of the titles given to various positions within the union. This meant that definitions of what an organiser was had to be included in the survey (Organiser – refers to the person who is a full time paid official in your union, not the delegate within your workplace). Unfortunately some participants may have not read the definition. Many participants also did not know the difference between an organiser and a delegate or between a
delegate and a shop steward (shop steward is the traditional name given to workplace representatives). This had the effect of limiting the understanding of participants’ attitudes to the election of organisers and their performance within the union.

Secondly, the use of interviews in order to gain data has limitations, such as the ‘interviewer factor’ and the possible researcher bias (Sarantakos 1999) associated with it. It also offers less anonymity than other methods. However, the research design attempted to minimise limitations by using pre-tests, pilot surveys, pilot interviews, as well as ‘expert advice’.

Other limitations of the research included the sample size in the first stage of the research. Due to the small size of the sample used inference of the whole population was not possible. The size of the sample also limited the ability for advanced correlation analysis. Finally another limitation was due to the changes in the Australian privacy laws, which make re-creation/replication of the study difficult to achieve.

**Chapter summary**

This chapter has described the methodology that was employed in order to gain the information necessary to answer the research questions and sub-questions. Both quantitative (questionnaires) and qualitative (interviews) techniques were used as part of a sequential explanatory strategy. The benefits of this type of strategy are its straightforward design, easy implementation, and relatively quick access to information for description and analysis. The chapter described the rationale for using this type of strategy and provided an overview of the samples, procedures, measures,
and analysis used to investigate the impact of the differing selection processes of organisers in Australia on trade union members. The next chapter describes the key findings from this process.
CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Introduction

The primary aim of this thesis was to investigate the attitudes of union members to the changing selection process of trade union organisers in Australian unions. Chapter Two investigated and reviewed previous research completed on the topic of trade union organisers in Australia and the issues surrounding the differing selection processes. The literature review established that there had previously been little focus given to the subject of trade union organiser selection process in Australia. The two major studies completed by Callus (1986) and Bramble (1995) differed in their conclusions. A common theme identified in the literature review was that the appointment of organisers could prove detrimental to the participation of union members. This, it is argued, is due to an appointed organiser’s lack of accountability to the members that, had they been directly elected, they have traditionally been required to provide. The literature review also identified arguments relating to the perceived conservative behaviour of union organisers in the manner that they perform the role.

The review of the literature provided the basis for specifying more detailed questions addressed in this thesis. Three questions in particular have provided the focus for the study:
1. Do members prefer one method of selection of organisers to the other (i.e., appointed or elected)?

2. Do members perceive that the characteristics of union organisers are likely to affect their effectiveness in the role?

3. To what extent do members attitudes about the selection process influence their willingness to participate in union affairs?

The first question aimed to determine whether the union members involved in the study as participants preferred any particular method of selection of organisers over other methods and, if so, what were the main reasons for this preference. This question explored a number of issues related to the changing process of selection, such as, the impact on union democracy and the accountability of union organisers, issues identified in the literature review. The second question attempted to investigate the participants’ opinions of organisers’ various characteristics and to gain an understanding of the effects, if any, on their opinions of organisers, overall. The final question attempted to understand factors, which may encourage or inhibit members’ participation in union affairs, position-nomination, and voting.

The research methodology for the study described in Chapter Three. In order to investigate these questions, evidence was gathered using a quantitative survey and qualitative interviews of union members in a single union organisation, the Australian Services Union (Victorian Private Sector Branch). The surveys and interviews were designed to gain an understanding of research participants’ opinions about the differing processes of selection of organisers; in the participants own union and in trade unions more generally. The research further aimed to gain an understanding of whether characteristics of the organisers, such as age, education, gender, experience, and ethnicity, played a role on these member perceptions. Finally, the research sought
to establish the impact of the selection process of organisers on participants’ participation within their unions.

The aim of this chapter is to describe the key findings from the analysis of both the survey and interview data. The first part of the chapter presents the results of the first phase of the research, the quantitative research. Information gathered during this stage included: demographics of the participants, reasons for joining their current union, questions about their current organiser and questions relating to the selection process. The second part of the chapter presents the results of the qualitative phase, in which ten members chosen from the first sample were interviewed.

The chapter proceeds in the following sections. The next section describes the characteristics of the respondents. Following that the respondents’ reasons for joining their current union, attitudes to characteristics of organisers, knowledge of current selection process of organisers within their union and satisfaction with current union organiser are presented. The next part presents results of questions related to aspects of participation including current and future participation as well as the results of correlation analysis. The second part of the chapter presents the results of the qualitative research.

**Phase One: Results of the Quantitative Analysis**

**The Characteristics of Survey Respondents**

The first section of the survey was designed to gather information about the participants’ personal characteristics including gender, age, length of union membership (union tenure), employment status and education. Table 4.1 summarises these characteristics of survey respondents.
Unfortunately, it was not possible to ascertain whether the sample was representative of the union’s total membership. In Chapter 3 it was noted that the union did not collect information about the demographic characteristics of their membership. Informal discussions with the union’s secretary, suggested that the final sample was broadly representative of the wider union population (Interview with Martin Foley Former Secretary ASU –Private Sector Branch 23 August 2001).

Table 4.1 overleaf reveals that the majority of the participants were women, aged between 40 to 60 years, had limited education (Year 11-12), were employed full time and had been members of the union for a long period of time (10 years or more).
Table 4.1: Characteristics of Sample Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member characteristic</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>41.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>57.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 years and older</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 – 60 years old</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>40.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50 yrs old</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>35.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 – 40 years</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 – 30 years</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University education</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed Year 12</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>42.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed Year 11 or less</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>42.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employment Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>70.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part Time</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Union tenure</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 years or more</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>92.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 – 9 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 – 5 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 – 1 year</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=77
The proportion of women in the sample, however, stands in contrast to women’s participation in unions more generally. It has been well documented previously that in the Australian context, women are less likely to be trade union members than men (Pocock, 1995, 1997; ABS 2004). This has been attributed to a variety of reasons including working in workplaces difficult to organise. In this study, women accounted for the majority of participants. The large amount of women in the ASU and the current research may have had an influence in their responses to the research questions as previous research has found that women in white collar unions in Australia attach priority to different workplace issues (Benson & Griffin 1988).

It has also been established that, in the Australian context, white collar unions typically directly appointed, rather than elected. This is one feature that has traditionally distinguished white collar union practices from blue collar unions (Cupper 1983, Callus 1985). Due to the lack of research completed on the topic it is not known how the current selection process of organisers in the union studied would impact on or influence the opinions of the membership, or the participants in the current study.

A large majority of the participants had only completed year 12 or less (85.8 per cent) of formal schooling, reflecting the levels of education within the occupation of administration assistant, the area of coverage by the ASU. Another factor that may have influenced the results of the research was the size of the workplaces in which the participants in the second phase worked. The survey did not ask participants the size of their current workplace. However, during the qualitative stage of the interviews (Phase 2) it was found that nearly all of the participants, eight, worked at large workplaces (that is, with 100 employees or more), a factor that must be acknowledged.
as it may have influenced opinions to both the union and the organiser process. The size of the workplaces of the participants may also have influenced the union’s activities and resources in attempting to provide service and representation to the membership. This may have resulted in greater frequency of visits by the union organiser to the workplaces of participants.

Members Attitudes and Perceptions About Their Union

The following section summarises the responses to questions designed to measure participants’ attitudes and perceptions relating to a number of related issues including:

(i) Reasons for joining the union;

(ii) Views on the likely effects of the characteristics (including education, experience, gender, age and ethnicity) of organisers on the effectiveness of organisers;

(iii) Knowledge of current process of selecting organisers within the union and preferred method of selection of organisers; and

(iv) The level of satisfaction with the union organiser.

Joining the union

The survey asks members to indicate their reasons for belonging to the union. This question asked participants to indicate whether any one or more reasons from a list of ten statements was a significant reason in their decision to join the union. These items were categorised into three factors, which capture more general motivations for joining:

(i) normative reasons – the member was required or coerced to join;
(ii) ideological reasons – the member had a personal belief in the union and unions generally; and

(iii) instrumental reasons – the member felt that the union could deliver to individual members.

Responses to this question are summarised in Table 4.2 overleaf. The main responses given for joining their current union were instrumental with ‘because the union protects my rights’ (64.9 per cent) followed by the union would help ‘in dealing with any problems with my employer’ (50.6 per cent) the most frequent responses. ‘I believe all employees should belong to a union’ (32.5 per cent), an ‘ideological’ factor, was the second most frequent reason after instrumental reasons for joining the union. However another “ideological factor”, “Because I wanted to get involved in the union organisation” had the lowest response (3.9 per cent). Normative factors, such as “closed shop” (6.5 per cent) and “expected to join” (20.8 per cent) were the least likely reasons for the participants joining.
Table 4.2 Reasons for joining union.\(^1\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Response Rate (percent)(^2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Normative</td>
<td>No say, I work in a closed shop.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normative</td>
<td>Because my employer expected me to join.</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological</td>
<td>I believe I should be in a union.</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological</td>
<td>Because I believe all employees should belong to a union.</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological</td>
<td>Because I wanted to get involved in the union organisation.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental</td>
<td>To obtain the services provided.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>26.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental</td>
<td>Because the union best represents my interests.</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental</td>
<td>Because the union protects my rights.</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>64.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental</td>
<td>Unions deliver improved wages and conditions.</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>35.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental</td>
<td>The union would help in dealing with any problems with my employer.</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>50.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: \(n=77\)

1. Respondents were asked to indicate ‘What is the most important reason why you joined your current union?’ They were allowed to indicate more than one item.

2. Percentages do not add to 100 as respondents can indicate more than one item.

The potential impact of the demographics and employment characteristics of members on motivations for joining were examined using a test of statistical differences (chi-squared). There were a number of significant differences in motivations for men and women joining the union. Women were significantly more likely than men to indicate that they joined because “The union represents my interests” \(\chi^2=7.249, \text{ df}=1, p<0.1\), and because of an “employer expectation to join” \(\chi^2=5.288, \text{ df}=1, p<0.05\). In contrast, men were more likely to join because “the union delivers wages and conditions” \(\chi^2=8.013, \text{ df}=1, p<0.01\) “I believe all employees should belong” \(\chi^2=7.835, \text{ df}=1 \ p<0.05\).
Older members were found to be significantly more likely to report that they joined because of a belief in unions ($\chi^2=7.835$, df=3, p<0.05). The motivation for joining did not differ, however, between groups on the basis of educational attainment, perhaps reflecting the fact that there were not large differences in education within the group of respondents.

Employment status proved to have an influence on participants’ reasons for joining unions with those who reported being casual or part-time employees significantly more likely to report that the prime motivation for joining was a belief in unions an ‘ideological factor’, compared with members in full-time employment ($\chi^2=8.607$, df=4, p<0.1). Casual workers were also more likely to indicate that they joined to protect their rights, compared with members in part-time and full-time employment ($\chi^2=4.738$, df=2, p<0.1). Individuals with longer union tenure were significantly more likely to report that they joined because of a belief in unions ($\chi^2=31.481$, df=12, p<0.01).

The results were significant because they found that certain demographics had a strong influence on the reasons for joining the current union investigated. For example men, part time, casual and those who were older were more likely to have joined for ideological reasons which in turn may have had a strong influence on their (the participants) beliefs in the selection processes of organisers. For example those who joined for ideological reasons may have stronger beliefs of the need for a union to be democratic in its structures than those who joined the current union for instrumental reasons who perceive the need less important than being able to improve conditions.
**Characteristics of Trade Union Organisers and Organiser capacity.**

Participants were also asked to indicate whether they thought the capacities of organisers would be dependent on the organiser’s own personal attributes. The attributes examined included age, gender, education, ethnicity and experience.

**Organiser Experience and Perceived Effectiveness**

*Table 4.3 Organisers should have experience in the industry they represent?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>47.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>49.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree nor Disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>77</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3 above shows that experience proved to be the most important of all of the categories related to organisers’ characteristics. In total 97.5 per cent of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that it was necessary, with only 2.6 per cent uncommitted. None of the participants believed that experience was not necessary to perform the role, a factor explored in greater detail in the second phase.

Overall, the participants were more likely to indicate ‘neither agree nor disagree’ to the question of the need for organisers to have tertiary education (44.1 per cent), followed by those that disagreed (37.6 per cent) with 5.1 per cent strongly disagreeing. Only 10.3 per cent agreed with the statement that tertiary education is important for organisers to have obtained, with another 2.6 per cent responding with ‘strongly agree.’
Those indicating that organisers should be elected overall disagreed that organisers should be tertiary educated. Of those participants who said an elected organiser would do a better job within their union, 37.2 per cent disagreed with the statement that organisers needed a tertiary education, compared to 10.8 per cent who agreed. Those who said an appointed organiser would do a better job were divided with 33.6 per cent disagreeing and another 8.2 per cent strongly disagreeing, compared to 33.4 per cent of those who agreed. We can therefore conclude that union members perceive the need for organisers to have experience in the industry that they represent as extremely important.

*Organisers Education and Perceived Effectiveness*

**Table 4.4 Organisers should be university educated.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree nor Disagree</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>37.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>77</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, as indicated in Table 4.4 above the participants were more likely to indicate ‘neither’ to the question of the need for organisers to have tertiary education (44.1 per cent), followed by those that disagreed (37.6 per cent) with 5.1 per cent strongly disagreeing. Only 10.3 per cent agreed with the statement that tertiary education is important for organisers to possess with another 2.6 per cent ‘strongly agreeing’. Those indicating that organisers should be elected overall disagreed that organisers should be tertiary educated. Of those participants who said an elected organiser would do a better job within their union, 37.3 per cent disagreed with the statement that
organisers needed a tertiary education, compared to 10.2 per cent who agreed. Those who said an appointed organiser would do a better job were divided with 33.5 per cent disagreeing and another 8.1 per cent strongly disagreeing, compared to 33.2 per cent of whom agreed. Thus we can conclude that education provide not as important for organisers to perform their role as the need for experience.

**Women Organisers and Perceived Effectiveness**

**Table 4.5 More women should be appointed as organisers.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>31.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree nor Disagree</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>55.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>77</td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.5 above demonstrates that overall the participants agreed that women should be appointed as organisers with 31.1 per cent agreeing, 5.1 per cent strongly agreeing, and only 7.7 per cent disagreeing. While there was support for more women in these positions, the majority of participants had no preference for either. Those who neither ‘agreed’ nor ‘disagreed’ with the statement recorded a high percentage with 55.8 per cent.

Cross tabulation of the results with the gender of the participants found that women were more likely than men to agree that more women should be appointed as organisers (40.2 per cent compared to 31.6 per cent); while men were more likely to indicate neither (62.0 per cent compared to 50.5 per cent). Further cross tabulation
established that those participants who had disagreed that appointment has an impact on democracy were more likely to support the appointment of women to organising positions (40.6 per cent). Those who agreed that appointment influenced democracy had the highest percentage disagreeing to appointment of more women (12.8 per cent). We can conclude that although most of the participants did not consider the gender of the organiser important they were willing to accept the appointment process as a means of addressing the imbalance of women in organising roles.

Age and Perceived Effectiveness.

Table 4.6 Older organisers perform the job better than younger organisers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree nor Disagree</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>36.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>40.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.6 above shows that the majority of the participants indicated that they disagreed with the contention that older organisers perform the role better than younger organisers (40.2 per cent compared with 22.0 per cent), however, as with gender, many of the participants responded ‘neither’ (36.3 per cent).

Cross tabulation of the response to this item found that gender had little impact on the opinions of older organisers performance, although women were more likely to agree that older organisers do the job better than men (25.5 per cent and 15.6 per cent respectively). Men were more likely to say ‘neither’ (43.2 per cent to 31.8 per cent), and women were more likely to ‘disagree’ – 43.3 per cent compared with 37.6 per
cent of men. We can therefore conclude that the unlike the need for organisers to have experience, age did not prove to be an important influence in the organisers ability to perform the role.

**Ethnicity and Perceived Effectiveness.**

**Table 4.7 More people from NESB should be appointed as organisers.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>28.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree nor Disagree</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>48.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>77</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, as indicated in Table 4.7 above, the participants were more likely to agree (28.5 per cent) that NESB people should be appointed as organisers than disagree (19.4 per cent). Just under half (48.0 per cent) remained uncommitted by indicating ‘neither’. Those who strongly agreed that appointment influences democracy were divided on whether to appoint more NESB organisers (33.0 per cent agreed and 33.0 per cent disagreed). Those who disagreed about the impact of appointed organisers were also divided with 31.6 per cent agreeing and 31.4 per cent disagreeing. We can conclude that the ethnicity of the organiser had little influence on members attitudes however similar to gender the responses indicate an acceptance of the appointment practice if it is used to address an imbalance in the number of organisers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

**Members’ Attitudes Towards Their Own Organiser.**

The survey included two questions aimed to measure members’ knowledge of the selection process of organisers within the union, and their view about the most
appropriate manner that organisers should be selected (appointed or elected), and whether they thought the method of selection would impact on organisers’ performance.

Knowledge of Current Selection Processes.

Like most white collar unions, organisers within the ASU Victorian Private Sector branch were, at the time the study was conducted, all appointed to the role. In order to assess the extent to which members were aware of the selection process, participants were asked if their current organisers were elected or appointed. Responses to this question are summarised in Table 4.8 below. The majority of participants responded ‘don’t know’ (38.9 per cent). Only a small percentage of the participants (22.0 per cent) indicated correctly compared to (37.6 per cent) participants who indicated wrongly that their organisers were elected.

Table 4.8 Is your current organiser elected or appointed?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elected</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>37.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appointed</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>38.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>77</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Members Preferences Over the Selection Process

The participants were asked whether they preferred organisers to be appointed or elected to their position. Responses are summarised in Table 4.9 overleaf. Participants overwhelmingly indicated the preference for trade union organisers to be elected to their positions. Table 4.9 demonstrates the majority of participants (77.8 per
cent) agreeing. In contrast, only 16.8 per cent disagreed that organisers should be elected. Only a small percentage (5.1 per cent) indicated neither.

Table 4.9  Trade union organisers should be elected to their positions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item and Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>57.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree nor Disagree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cross tabulation of the results established that participants who had taken part in organised union activities in the previous year were more likely to believe that organisers should be elected to the position. Those who had participated in strike action (80.6 per cent) had the highest percentage followed by ‘spoken to another member’ (77.5 per cent) and ‘voted in a union election’ (74.1 per cent) agreed the most. Those who were currently performing, or had performed, the role of delegate were least likely to agree with the statement (42.3 per cent) and (40.3 per cent) agreeing.

Further cross tabulation of the results found participants who indicated their current organiser was elected were more likely to agree that organisers should be elected (100 per cent). In contrast, participants who had correctly indicated that the organiser is appointed were more likely to be divided over the issue with 41 per cent ‘agreeing’ and 41 per cent ‘disagreeing’. Of those who did not know if their current organiser was appointed 77.8 per cent ‘agreed’ with the election of organisers and 20.0 per cent ‘disagreed’.
The previous question sought to identify the participants’ preference for one method of selection over the other. A second question assessed which method the participants believed would facilitate the selection of the best candidate for the position. Responses are summarised in Table 4.10 below. In response to the question ‘Within your union who would do a better job, an elected or appointed organiser?’ the majority of participants (46.7 per cent) indicated that they ‘don’t know’ who would perform the role better. More participants believed that an elected organiser would perform the role better (37.6 per cent) than those participants who believed an appointed organiser (15.5 per cent) would do a better job.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item and Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elected</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>37.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appointed</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>46.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>77</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cross tabulation of the results with previous questions established a relationship between participants who indicated that their current organiser was elected also thought that an elected organiser would do a better job within their union (72.8 per cent); and those who believed their organiser was appointed also believed that an appointed organiser would do a better job (47.3 per cent). Participants who ‘didn’t know’ if their organiser was elected or appointed were more likely to indicate that they ‘didn’t know’ (66.0 per cent) who would do a better job.

**Democracy and the appointment process**

The participants’ attitudes to the impact of organiser selection processes on their perceptions of union democracy were also investigated. For this purpose, the survey
included an item to determine the extent to which members believed appointment of
organisers was undemocratic. These responses are summarised in Table 4.11 below.

Responses to the question ‘The appointment of organisers is undemocratic’, show that
almost half of the participants agreed that the appointment of organisers influences
union democracy (45.3 per cent in total) compared to only 29.7 per cent (in total) who
disagreed with the statement. Almost a quarter (24.6 per cent) of the participants
neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement.

**Table 4.11 The appointment of organisers is undemocratic.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item and Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>41.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree nor Disagree</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>77</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cross tabulation with previous questions established that participants who agreed that
organisers should be elected to their position also agreed that appointment of
organisers was undemocratic (55.4 per cent); while those who disagreed that
organisers should be elected were far more likely to disagree (84.3 per cent overall).
Those who indicated neither preference for election nor appointment were more likely
to disagree with the impact on democracy (75.6 per cent).

Of those participants who had indicated that an elected organiser would do a better
job in their own union, more than half (62.5 per cent) ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’
that appointment is bad for union democracy. Of those who said an appointed
organiser would do a better job in their union, 75.4 per cent ‘disagreed’ or ‘strongly
disagreed’ that the appointment is bad for democracy. Of those who ‘didn’t know’
which would be the better selection process in their union more agreed that appointment is bad for democracy (44.0 per cent) compared to (27.8 per cent) disagreeing.

Not surprisingly, participants who had been a delegate or were currently acting in that capacity were also significantly more likely to disagree with the statement that appointment of organisers was undemocratic. While around two thirds of those who had been a delegate either disagreed (57.4 per cent) or strongly disagreed (5.0 per cent), around 20 per cent either agreed (17.3 per cent) or strongly agreed (2.6 per cent) with the statement.

Those participants who thought that their current organiser was elected were also more likely to agree that appointment was bad for union democracy – 48.3 per cent compared to 24.6 per cent. Those who thought that their organiser was appointed were far more likely to disagree with the statement (47.6 per cent) compared to those who agreed with the statement (29.4 per cent). Those who did not know if their current organiser was appointed or elected were more likely to agree that the appointment has an impact on democracy (42.3 per cent) than those who disagreed (30.6 per cent).

The overall result of questions relating to union democracy is consistent with previous question responses. Those who believe organisers are elected also believe that elected organisers do a better job and believe that appointment influences union democracy. Those participants, who indicated that their organiser was appointed, or responded ‘don’t know’, were far less likely to believe that appointment is bad for democracy.
**Members’ Satisfaction with Organiser Performance.**

The survey also assessed the extent to which members were satisfied with the performance of their organisers. This was assessed using a single item to which members were asked to indicate the extent to which they were satisfied with how their organiser performed their job. Responses to this item are summarised in table 4.12 below.

Table 4.12 indicated that most members were satisfied with the way their current organiser performed their job. The majority response was either satisfied (53.2 per cent) or very satisfied (18.1 per cent). Only a small number of respondents (11.6 per cent) were dissatisfied with the organiser. Cross tabulation established that men (82.6 per cent) were more likely to be satisfied with their organisers than women (59.4 per cent). Age also proved important with those older members more likely to be satisfied with their organiser with those aged 60+ the highest (83.4 per cent) whilst those aged between 31 – 40 years (50.0 per cent) had the lowest percentage.

**Table 4.12 How satisfied are you with how your organiser performs his/her job?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item and Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>53.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsatisfied</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Unsatisfied</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>77</td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Member Participation in the Union

This section reports on survey questions intended to assess different forms of member participation in the union. Further analysis is undertaken and reported in the extent to which attitudes about organisers influenced willingness to participate.

The survey included a series of questions to ascertain whether members had participated in different types of union activities over the preceding 12 month period. Participation extended from passive forms of participation (such as reading the union journal), to highly active forms of participation (participating in a strike action).

Responses to these items are reported in Table 4.13 below.

4.13 Participants participation in union activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Response Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read a union journal.</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruited another union member.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended a union meeting.</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spoken at a union meeting.</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spoken to the union secretary.</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spoken to management about a union issue.</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in strike action.</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raised a grievance with a union delegate.</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spoken to another member about a workplace issue.</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voted in a union election.</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spoken to an organiser about a workplace issue.</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
N=77
1. In the last year have you personally participated in any of the following activities?
2. Responses add to more than 100.0 per cent as respondents could indicate more than one participation activity.

All of the participants in the survey had participated in at least one of the listed activities. The highest response rate was having ‘read union journals’ (47), followed by ‘attended a union meeting’ (46). The lowest response rate was ‘recruited another union member’ (8), followed by ‘spoken at a union meeting’ (13).
There were a number of important differences in propensity to participate in the union in various ways. Compared with women, men were significantly more likely to report that they had spoken to another member about a union issue ($\chi^2=3.006$, df=1, $p<0.1$), spoken to an organiser about a workplace issue ($\chi^2=2.733$, df=1, $p<0.1$), or nominated as a workplace union delegate ($\chi^2=10.44$, df=1, $p<0.1$). Women, however, were significantly more likely to have voted in a union election than men ($\chi^2=3.795$, df=1, $p<0.05$), and were more likely to have spoken at a union meeting ($\chi^2=3.422$, df=1, $p<0.1$).

Compared with older members, younger members were significantly less likely to report they had read the union journal ($\chi^2=6.602$, df=3, $p<0.1$), or nominated as an organiser ($\chi^2=6.234$, df=3, $p<0.1$). Less educated members were significantly more likely to report they had attended a union meeting ($\chi^2=5.895$, df=2, $p<0.05$), or engaged in a strike action ($\chi^2=5.073$, df=2, $p<0.1$).

Casual employees were significantly less likely to report they had attended a union meeting ($\chi^2=8.477$, df=2, $p<0.01$) or engage in a strike action ($\chi^2=4.623$, df=2, $p<0.1$), or spoken to the union secretary ($\chi^2=5.17$, df=2, $p<0.1$). Interestingly, longer serving union members were no more likely to engage in any level of participation compared with individuals who had been members for a shorter period of time.

Members were also asked whether they had ever stood for an official union position. Not surprisingly, the majority had not nominated for any office (see Table 4.14 overleaf). Of the 29.5 per cent of respondents that indicated they had, the majority had stood for delegate (24.6 per cent) followed by union council (2.5 per cent).
Table 4.14 Nomination for Union Office.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delegate</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organiser</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union council</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union executive</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>71.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>78</td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 77
1. Have you ever nominated/applied for one of the following positions within your union?
2. Responses add to more than 100.0 percent as respondents could indicate nominating for more than one position.

**The Impact of Selection Process on the propensity to Participate**

This section of the survey measured participants’ attitudes to the selection process of organisers and their likelihood of increased participation, nomination for union positions and voting intentions if the organiser in their union was elected. The process of appointing organisers by the leadership, rather than membership has been criticised (Bramble 1995) because of its assumed correlation with decreases in membership participation. Participants in the current research were asked to consider the impact of the selection process on their own participation in activities including general participation, nomination for union positions and voting.
Table 4.15 Impact of Selection Process on Participation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assuming your current organiser is appointed. If the organiser was elected would you be more likely to:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate more in union activities?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>53.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>38.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nominate more for an elected office in my union?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>71.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>More likely to vote in union elections?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>40.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.15 above indicated that only a small percentage of the participants (7.7 per cent) believed they would participate more in union activities if their organiser was elected. The majority (53.2 per cent) indicated that it would make no difference to their current levels of participation. The remaining 38.9 per cent of respondents did not know if a change in the selection process would increase their participation. Cross tabulation with the participants’ gender established that men were more likely to indicate an increased level of participation than women (12.4 per cent to 4.6 per cent);
women were more likely to indicate ‘don’t know’ more than men (45.3 per cent to 28.7 per cent).

Overall, participants were less likely to believe that a change in selection process would increase their willingness to nominate for union positions (only 3.8 per cent indicated that it would). A large majority, 71.4 per cent, indicated that they would not be more likely to nominate for a position, while 24.6 per cent ‘didn’t know’.

Respondents indicated that selection process would have greatest impact on their voting intentions. When asked if their organiser was elected would they be more likely to vote, a third of the participants (35.0 per cent) said that they would be more likely to vote while (40.2 per cent) indicated they would not. Almost a quarter of the participants said ‘don’t know’ (24.6 per cent).

Cross tabulation of the participants’ gender and the question of ‘voting’ established that gender had an impact on the nature of these responses. 43.6 per cent of men stated that they were ‘more likely’ to vote if the organiser was elected, compared with 29.8 per cent of women who stated that they would be ‘more likely’ to vote. Twenty-one per cent of men and 27.2 per cent of women indicated ‘don’t know’ whether changes in selection processes would alter their voting behaviour.

Preferences and the Type of Participation

This issue was explored further by examining the relationship between preferences over the selection process reported earlier, and actual participation in the union over the course of the last twelve months. Individuals who felt organisers should be elected were significantly more likely to report reading the union journal ($\chi^2 = 7.005$, df=3, $p<0.1$), or attended a union meeting ($\chi^2 = 8.263$, df=3, $p<0.05$). However, they
were also less likely to have spoken to an organiser about a workplace issue \( (\chi^2=12.709, \, df=3, \, p<0.01) \) or nominate as a workplace union delegate \( (\chi^2=13.851, \, df=3, \, p<0.01) \), compared with individuals who reported that they preferred organisers to be appointed.

Members who felt organisers should have experience in the industry they represent were also significantly more likely to have spoken to other union members about union issues \( (\chi^2=4.778, \, df=2, \, p<0.1) \), and were more likely to have nominated as a workplace delegate \( (\chi^2=5.233, \, df=2, \, p<0.1) \).

Members who reported that organisers should be university educated were significantly less likely to nominate as an organiser, compared with members who disagreed with this statement \( (\chi^2=29.492, \, df=4, \, p<0.01) \). Individuals who felt older organisers performed better were significantly less likely to have recruited another member to the union \( (\chi^2=10.122, \, df=3, \, p<0.05) \) or to have spoken to the union secretary \( (\chi^2=7.626, \, df=3, \, p<0.05) \), or nominated as an organiser themselves \( (\chi^2=60.0, \, df=3, \, p<0.01) \).

Members who felt the appointment of organisers was undemocratic were significantly more likely to have spoken to management about a union issue \( (\chi^2=7.366, \, df=4, \, p<0.1) \), or spoken to the union secretary \( (\chi^2=7.614, \, df=4, \, p<0.1) \). They were also significantly less likely to voted in a union election \( (\chi^2=8.219, \, df=4, \, p<0.1) \), spoken to an organiser about a workplace issue \( (\chi^2=13.853, \, df=4, \, p<0.01) \), recruited another union member \( (\chi^2=13.572, \, df=4, \, p<0.01) \), nominated as a workplace delegate \( (\chi^2=13.653, \, df=4, \, p<0.01) \) or organiser \( (\chi^2=59.0, \, df=4, \, p<0.01) \).

For most forms of participation, an individual’s level of satisfaction with their organiser did not have a significant impact on their participation in the union.
However, members who report higher levels of satisfaction were significantly more likely to attend union meetings ($\chi^2=5.998$, df=3, p<0.1).

**Correlation Analysis**

The previous sections provided simple response rates and the results of cross tabulations where relationships were identified as significant. Tests of statistical differences were performed on participants reasons for joining their current union and participation within the union (see table 4.17 on page 156).

This section extends the statistical analysis by examining partial correlations between each of the main variables. More sophisticated analysis in the form of regression analysis was not undertaken because of a small sample size. Table 4.17 provides correlations between each of the variables including statistically significant correlations.

It can be seen that a number of factors were significant. Firstly, correlation analysis established that there was no relationship between demographic and other factors and attitudes to the selection process of organisers.

The analysis did however establish factors which were important such as those participants who had been members of the union for an extended period of time were more likely to indicate that they preferred organisers to be elected (.318, p < .1). Correlation analysis also established that those participants who were full time workers were more likely to believe that elected organisers do a better job (.318, p< .1) as were those participants who had been members of the union for a long time (.279, p < .1).
Finally the analysis also established that those members who reported being satisfied with their current organiser were more likely to support the concept of organisers being appointed instead of elected (.271, p < .1).

**Phase two – qualitative analysis**

After the first phase (survey) was completed and analysed, qualitative interviews were undertaken to explore the themes that emerged from the survey. The number of interviews was determined by data saturation. In total, ten ASU members were interviewed.

**Interview participants**

The technique used to choose the participants involved quota sampling. For the purpose of this research project, the researcher was interested in replicating the characteristics of participants in the first phase of the research. The participants in the second phase were predominantly female (eight of the ten), were aged from thirty to fifty years, and had been in the union for a reasonable length of time (between five to twenty years), only one (P7) of the interviewees was acting in the position of delegate.

The interviews took place during January 2003 and were conducted as both phone and face-to-face interviews. The age, gender and years as member of the ASU of those who participated in the interviews are shown in Table 4.16, overleaf.
Table 4.16 Interview participants’ characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years as member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50–55</td>
<td>12 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>35–40</td>
<td>8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40+</td>
<td>18 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10 years +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40–50</td>
<td>14 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>24 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P9</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P10</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>1 month</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interviews commenced with a brief discussion about the company the participants worked for, current work duties, length of time in the union and other union involvement, and general industrial relations issues. Discussion of the ‘bread and butter’ issues, such as wages and conditions of employment, was done to gain the confidence of the interviewee prior to raising questions of direct relevance to the research.

The current organiser

Each participant’s knowledge of who their current organiser was, how they were selected, and the role that they played in the organisation was established. Due to the high frequency of ‘don’t know’ responses in the first part of the research, relating to
the selection process, these questions were designed to explore the actual level of participants’ knowledge, if any.

The majority of the participants recognised their organiser by face, and the role that he or she performed within the union organisation, although only two participants correctly named their current organiser. Only two of the ten did not know their organiser or had not met them.

A reason for the high level of recognition of the current organiser, established during the interviews, was that most participants interviewed came from large companies (500 or more employees) where high priority is given by the union to servicing of members. The other reason for the high level of recognition of current organisers by the participants was that the organisers had performed the role of representing those companies for a reasonable period, of between five to ten years.

**The role of the organiser**

The first phase of the research had a high degree of ‘don’t know’ responses to questions relating to organisers and their selection process. Questions formulated for the interviews attempted to gain an understanding of the participants’ knowledge of the role of organisers and skills needed to successfully perform the role. The participants had high expectations of the role undertaken by the organiser and the characteristics and skills of the person needed to perform in the role.

The participants expected commitment to the union cause, good communication skills, emotional resilience, a high level of education and responsiveness to the needs of members. The following quotes highlight the expectations of the participants’ perceptions:
The organiser must have an ability to communicate clearly, a commitment to the trade union principles of representation in the workplace, advocacy skills, a sense of accountability to the people they work for as well, an organiser today needs various skills in terms of being able to read awards, quasi legal training not necessarily to the extent of a degree whatever but an ability to read through agreements, negotiate (P8).

Others claimed:

Like any public position you’ve got to be able to talk to people communicate well you’ve got to be able to solve problems, know the legislation that affects them and I think being able to have the time to dedicate to the role. That is very important in itself… the time management. The person who is able to do it (the role of organiser) has to be available and that is very demanding in itself (P7).

I think you have to have compassion for the people, an understanding of their rights (P1).

They have to know what they’re talking about, they have to be even tempered, tolerant, I think that they have to look at all aspects of it… broad minded (P5).

[S]omeone who is a leader, someone who has got good interpersonal skills, someone that can communicate, I think educational qualifications is very important (P2).
Knowledge motivation, enthusiasm, good communication skills, someone who is a bit of an idealist (P3).

I can only speak knowing (current organisers name) and he’s been in the ASU for a long time … whenever we ask anything of him he always comes back with an answer and I think that’s very important for members (P4).

**Current organiser elected or appointed?**

Questions pertaining to the selection process of organisers within the participants own union resulted in most of the participants indicating that they did not know how their current organiser obtained their position. On further prompting, nine of the ten participants indicated that they believed that the organiser had been elected to the position although most were not certain about this; indicative of this are comments such as:

I think he was elected…yeah he was elected (P9).

Elected obviously I remember the elections and saw his name on the paper (P7).

I presume he was elected by members (P2).

Only one participant indicated that they thought the organiser was appointed, claiming

I gathered they were hired sought out like a political helper would be they’ve worked in the field, been shop steward and come up through the ranks (P8).

Further questioning of the participants revealed that they had little knowledge of the debates surrounding the process. The reasons given, when probed, for the lack of
knowledge included comments such as ‘I’ve given little thought to it’ (P3) and ‘I really wouldn’t know’ (p6) or ‘I leave that to the leadership’ (P10).

**Election vs. appointment**

Overall, the majority of participants responded more favourably to the election of organisers than appointment, due in large measure to the perceived democratic nature of the former. As interviews progressed, participants acknowledged some of the benefits related to the appointment process including increased professionalism of those performing the role.

**Election**

Most of those interviewed (nine) favoured the election of organisers as the best selection process. Election was seen to be ‘fair’ and ‘democratic’ and allowed the members to have ‘a say’. As stated by one interviewee: ‘It’s all democratic isn’t it, everyone has a say. I don’t know enough about it but … its just democracy really, the say of the people’ (P1).

Other participants supported this theme with comments such as:

> Well I think everyone should have a say it should be open and above board and its just that a lot of people don’t do their research and so they just pick a number out of a hat ... that’s the only problem with it but I still feel that’s our democratic society and it should probably be an election (P5).

> I think it’s important that the members have their say about their union. Not just some bloke choosing them (organisers) for us (P9).
Elected, because you can know who you are getting if you vote for somebody (P6).

It’s like government you really have to be voting for people (P4).

Participants who supported election believed the process provided what one participant referred to as ‘a sense of accountability’ (P4), whereby members have an opportunity to replace those organisers who are not performing the job suitably. Another participant claimed that ‘ideally election would be good you can get rid of people if they are not reacting and active in your workplace’ (P10).

Further questioning of the participants, however, resulted in many of those who supported election also acknowledging weaknesses embedded in the process. For many participants, the main concern associated with the election of organisers was that the candidates would be unknown to the members prior to the election being held, the organisers would, therefore, be part of a ‘political team’.

They claimed:

I am not sure because I don’t even know who the organiser is so unless you know the candidate it’s irrelevant whether you vote for someone you don’t know or whether someone else appoints someone you don’t know (P1).

I would only be voting for a name. Unless it was like council elections where people send you material giving you an idea of their background and that would help you to make an informed choice (P9).
You can make your face familiar just prior to the election to get yourself in (P2).

You are voting for someone you don’t know; you just know them as a name (P3).

One interviewee, discussing the political nature of elections, stated:

The whole notion of just putting a lot of money into a campaign, putting a lot of sheets out … if you have enough money you can promote yourself and not necessarily be active but you can just promote your face and you end up getting people to vote for you regardless of what you have done (P7).

Another concern raised was the quality of candidates standing for election. One interviewee questioned the efficacy of this, stating:

It’s very hard to say for other people but I would say elections that I have come across before usually don’t have … the people who are capable of doing the job and doing it very well may not be overly forthcoming at an election situation and you know therefore I don’t think the role of organiser is necessarily the type that would be best suited by an election (P6).

The participants also believed that the process of election could also cause the organiser who is up for election to act in a manner that could be detrimental to the members they represent. One person interviewed, (a current delegate of the ASU), claimed:
If you are elected you are worried about who is going to elect you and try and seem to be doing the right thing, at the right time even though it may not be. If you’re appointed you can get the achievable goals that are set initially done whereas that may not be done under a politically elected system (P8).

Appointment

Although only one participant initially supported organisers being appointed, other participants, when further questioned, acknowledged the benefits of appointment already identified in the previous chapter, namely ‘making use of expertise’. This emerges when participants were asked what they felt the job of an organiser entailed. One participant stated:

An organiser is somebody who is like a field officer; they go out and are fulfilling a role to try to boost membership to try to sort out the problems that are there in the workplace. Now I don’t see that as them playing a political role they’re strictly doing an organisational role and I don’t see that has a place in the elections there’s no political agenda as being picked anyway for a job (P7).

Others supported the benefit of appointment because of its ability to pick people on merit:

They [the leaders of the union] would know the person a lot better than the members. In a corporate business like [Company name] I don’t know that each and every one of us would really know the person, their skills and how good an organiser he was (P1).
The people who are appointing the candidates are aware of the strengths, weaknesses whatever of the people they are appointing (P3).

The benefits of appointment is that person should get the job on their merits and the work they have done ... the people that would be giving the appointment would know the depths of that person’s credibility (P10).

According to one interviewee the benefit of the security of employment for the organisers via the appointment process also influenced the manner in which the organiser can perform his/her job:

Taking from the fact that they’re more confident in their role and their superiors, they know what their superiors are requiring and what their direction is, and they don’t have to worry whether they are going to step on somebody’s toes (P8).

Another participant believed that appointment, as a selection process for organisers was acceptable as long as they had come from within the union membership and had experience. They claimed ‘if it was someone who had a lot of previous experience then that’s ok, that would be beneficial’ (P2).

Despite this apparent shift in perceptions of the merits of appointment, doubt remained. Interview participants criticised the appointment of organisers by the union leadership. Most participants agreed that the lack of ‘democracy’ in the process was
of greatest concern and the possibility of ‘favouritism’ occurring. Those who believed that appointment affected democracy commented:

You would have to say it does affect democracy in the fact that they haven’t been voted in … yes you would have to (P9).

Yes there would be … there are a lot of political appointments in trade unions as well so therefore there would be political appointments … it would mean that it wasn’t fair, it wasn’t done on a fair thing, that there are other people who could be better for the job (P2).

With appointments you are setting a political precedence so you know the person who is doing the appointing can push a political point or barrow of ideas that’s one thing against it (P7).

It’s all political isn’t it … if they wanted a particular person there and everyone didn’t know enough about him (P1).

Others were concerned that appointment may mean lead to nepotism; one interviewee was concerned that ‘you may not have responsible leadership and therefore appointments can be just based on friendships’ (P2), a sentiment echoed by another interviewee who said of the process ‘jobs for mates if they do. I don’t know if I would benefit or not if the union elected [via appointment] who they want to’ (P6).
Finally, one participant claimed that the process itself was irrelevant to the performance of the organiser claiming ‘I think either can perform the job so long as you have got leadership that makes them … ideally it all depends on the leadership, so in terms of the organiser if they do a good job it really wouldn’t matter if they were appointed or elected’ (P8).

**Participation**

The participants were asked if the selection process affects their participation within union activities. Most indicated that they would not be more likely to participate in union activities or nominate for positions if the organiser in their union was elected. The reasons given included:

No… it makes no difference to me—I don’t get involved too busy (P3).

I really am not that interested … as I said before (P6).

It wouldn’t change much really would it? I mean it’s not that important (P4).

I am really too old to get involved at this stage (P1).

The participants did, however, believe that they would be more likely to vote in elections if the organiser was elected instead of appointed, a factor established in the survey. Their responses were:

Yes ... I know [the organiser’s name] and would definitively vote for him (P7).
Yes, definitely ... you know them so it’s different than just some name on a paper (P2).

For sure ... it means a lot more doesn’t it. Makes them work harder for your vote (P1).

We have a lot of trouble [in our workplace] in trying to do things but they [the members] would be willing to elect the person (P10).

In both phases of the research participants indicated that they would be likely to vote for the organisers if they were elected instead of appointed. This may have significant implications on union participation in Australia if demonstrated in future research and will be discussed further depth in the next chapter.

**The Characteristics of organisers**

The next section of phase two discusses the participant’s attitudes to the characteristics of union organisers and its relevance to them performing the role. The characteristics discussed in this section were the same as measured in the first phase and included experience, age, gender, ethnicity, and education.

**Experience**

The participants in the interviews strongly believed that organisers within their union should have been members of a union before becoming organisers, preferably, though not necessarily, with the same union. The comments included:
Definitely, it would be a great advantage if they did because they would have inside information and know what was going on around them, than someone who was off the street (P4).

I think that any worker has a general ability to understand what a worker goes through, however, it assists if they’ve got experience in the industry to understand what the issues are in that industry (P9).

Yes, because they know the problems that occur, arise in this field and can hopefully fix them (P6).

How would they know what we wanted if they weren’t from the industry (P3).

Definitely, then they could understand what we are thinking, what we are after and know the bosses (P2).

A few of those who participated in the research, however, disagreed with the need for industry-specific experience, comments along these lines included:

There are so many different industries now I don’t think, that is totally important. People who are correct for the role will be able to see what’s needed and able to understand the needs of the particular industry that they are going to become an organiser for (P3).
It’s ok for the union executive to say we want this person to be an organiser because they are capable of fulfilling a role and being able to say ok they’re going to be wanting them in this area and for that person to quickly pick it up understand the basics of the people who are the union members. The role that they are doing is many and varied and being able to be aware how the different legislation affects them (P8).

They should have had some sort of … union experience in some other union that’s ok. If they don’t, I would have to say … if they are not a member … it’s not good (P2).

**Gender**

The gender of the organiser proved to be of little relevance to the, mostly female, participants who claimed it was not an issue that would affect an organiser’s ability to perform the role. They said:

Doesn’t matter to me. Unless of course it was a male representing female I suppose because of his age. If he was older he may tend to be more old fashioned and not fully tuned into current thinking (P3).

I really believe the best person for the job (P2).

I don’t think that matters. If they’re all going in the same direction that’s the most important [thing] (P4).
Only one of the participants believed that the gender of the organisers was important claiming:

Yes … I think that a woman would understand issues affecting other women better. Some men are a bit chauvinist and don’t really care … you know … they wouldn’t know about things like childcare and … other things like that we have to put up with (P10).

**Age**

Age also proved of little relevance on the responses in both phases of the research. Most of the participants claimed that it was not important. The questions elicited comments such as, ‘you can’t generalise’ (P3) or ‘age doesn’t really come into it if they’ve been elected by everyone … I don’t think age comes into it’ (P4). While age was of little import, its associate, experience, did come into play. Some participants believed it was important for younger organisers to have experience as workers, members, and in honorary positions in the union, before performing the job:

I think the person should have a few years under the belt because I think to be able to relate to people in all walks of life, different genders, personalities … the person who has a few years under the belt will be seen as the person who probably has more understanding of the needs of the members (P8).

Experience comes with age new people have to learn also. So probably if you are very very young you need to be with someone for sometime before you can go out on your own. I think that’s important (P5).
Not somebody that’s just come out of college, no, somebody that is not too young ... somebody that’s just come out of school? No, I wouldn’t put them in a position like it (P4).

One participant, however, felt that it was not age, in particular, that determined the effectiveness of an organiser, but rather length of time in the job. The interviewee questioned the ability of those who had performed the job of organiser for a long period—given the stresses of the job:

I don’t think so. What is important is sometimes over a period of time. It depends on how long they have been an organiser for I think they’ve got a timeframe where they end up being really tired and less productive over a long period of time … just observations of some people the job gets too much and maybe they need time out and then come back in again but I don’t think time matters (P10).

**Education**

Similar to age, the need for organises to have tertiary education qualifications was perceived to be of little importance by the participants, although it would not prove detrimental to the performance of the organisers. Comments such as:

Well, I suppose if they were or a lawyer or something like that … then they would know a lot more wouldn’t they … I mean they could help on the legal stuff such as warnings or being given the flick (dismissed) (P1).
Not unless it was specifically training in how to be an organiser, it doesn’t matter; I mean how would it help? (P5).

Why would they want to go out there and do university education and then become an organiser when they could do something else? (P9).

Only one of the participants believed it was important for the organiser to have some type of university education related to industrial relations. The participant, a delegate claimed:

Definitely, it is a complicated job with lots of legal knowledge needed to do it properly, knowing how the Australian laws operate in the workplace, when the boss is wrong, how to negotiate agreements, it’s bloody hard enough anyway ... I think it would help to no end (P7).

The purpose of the interviews was to explore in greater depth the results of the first phase of the research. A total of ten participants were interviewed until data saturation occurred. Most participants had little knowledge of the current selection process within their union, because, as expressed by one, they were ‘not really interested’.

Most of the participants favoured election of organisers over appointment. The reasons for the support of the process of election were that it was considered democratic with everyone having a say and would provide for a more transparent process than appointment. There was a belief among participants that appointment
could lead to favouritism with political appointments or friends being given the position over those best able to perform the role.

The interviews established that the participants did not believe the characteristics of organisers to be important in the manner in which they performed their role; however, they did embrace appointment of women as a means of getting greater female representation in the position, and strongly favoured experience. The interviews also established that if the organiser was elected instead of appointed it would have little impact on their participation in union activities apart from voting intentions.

**Conclusion**

This chapter presented the findings of both phases of the research. The first phase of the research involved a survey sent to two-hundred union members chosen at random, from the ASU Victorian branch membership database. A total of 77 participants responded to the survey. The majority of the participants were female, had a Year 11 or 12 education, worked full time, and most had been in the union for more than ten years. The participants’ main involvement in union activities in the previous year included reading the union journal and attending union meetings.

The majority of participants were satisfied with their current organiser, although nearly all had little knowledge of how they (current organiser) were selected for the position. More of the participants (45.3 per cent) believed that appointment was bad for union democracy, and that an elected organiser could better perform the role (37.6 per cent). However, a high percentage (46.7 per cent) indicated that they ‘don’t know’.
The participants in the survey indicated that they were not likely to participate more in union activities or nominate for union office if their organiser was elected; however, they did indicate that they were more likely to vote in union elections.

They believed that the characteristics of the organisers were not important with no significant factors emerging from questions relating to age, education, gender, ethnicity. The important factor identified was the need for organisers to have experience in the industry that they represented with more than 97.4 per cent either agreeing or strongly agreeing, that this was needed.

The second phase, the interviews, allowed the researcher to explore the themes that emerged from the first phase. The participants for the interviews were chosen from the first sample. The questions in the interviews attempted to establish why most participants did not know the current selection process of organisers in their union. Most of the participants indicated that the main reason was a lack of interest.

The interviews also provided greater understanding of those reasons underpinning participants’ preferences for election over appointment of organisers. Most participants believed it was more democratic, fairer and transparent. Participants did, however, identify problems with the process including organisers only working hard during election periods.

Appointment had little support from the participants because they believed that favouritism could occur, with the result that friends would be appointed to positions
irrespective of merit. The only participant supporting the appointment process—who also happened to be the only participant holding a delegate position—believed that appointment was preferable because it made use of those with expertise who could perform the role better.

The participants in the interview did not believe that election of organisers would mean an increase in their own participation or would further induce them to nominate for union positions. In what is a possible contradiction, and one that raises the importance of education of members in union affairs, participants believed that, with the exception of experience, the characteristics of the organiser were not of great importance preferring that the ‘best person for the job’ be given it.

The next chapter discusses these findings and suggests how trade unions might better equip themselves and elicit greater support from their members in current campaign for survival.
CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion.

Introduction

Chapter One identified the primary aim of the research, the exploration of members’ attitudes and preferences towards the selection of organisers and its relationship to their willingness to participate in the union. The literature review presented in Chapter Two identified three inter-related questions important to understanding this issue:

1. Do members prefer one method of selection of organisers to the other (i.e., appointment or election)?

2. Do members perceive that the characteristics of union organisers are likely to affect their effectiveness in the role?

3. To what extent do members’ attitudes about the selection process influence their willingness to participate in union affairs?

It will be recalled from Chapter Three that the research design used to explore these questions involved the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data from a sample of members of the Private Sector Division of the Victorian branch of the ASU. Chapter Four reported on the results of the empirical study. That chapter first presented the findings of the analysis of the survey data, including demographics of the participants, reasons for joining their current union, questions about their current
organiser and questions relating to the selection process. Chapter Four also presented the results of the qualitative phase, in which ten members chosen from the first sample were interviewed.

The main purpose of this chapter is to provide a discussion of the results and draw a number of conclusions about the findings. The main finding of this study is that, while members indicate a clear preference for the election of organisers over their appointment, when asked about the factors associated with organiser effectiveness, the results suggest a willingness to accept appointment of organisers. Moreover, the analysis found that members’ willingness to participate in union affairs was most closely associated with the nature of their interaction with organisers and other union officials, rather than their preferences over the appointment of organisers. These findings suggest that unions need to consider the factors associated with organiser effectiveness and be willing to educate members and organisers about the role and what part it can productively play in the revitalisation process.

The remainder of this chapter comprises five sections. Section 5.2 recaps the key findings presented in Chapter. Then, Sections 5.3 to 5.5 addresses each of the three core questions of this study. Section 5.6 involves a discussion and Section 5.7 draws the conclusions to this study.

**Key findings**

From the results presented in Chapter Four a number of key findings were identified. These findings provide the starting point for the discussion presented in subsequent sections. The first key finding was that the participants had little knowledge of how their current organiser was selected for the position. This was clear from the data presented in Chapter Four. Although all organisers in the union were appointed, 37.6
per cent of survey respondents indicated they thought their organiser was elected. In
the qualitative phase this was explored further with most of the participants assuming
that their organiser had been elected with two stating that they had voted for them.

Members who responded to the survey were also overwhelmingly in favour of having
organisers elected rather than appointed. Members both in relation to their own union
and unions consistently held this view in general. For members, election of organisers
was seen as a critical element in maintaining union democracy. The few participants
who supported the appointment process believed it provided union leaders the
opportunity to utilise trained professionals better skilled to perform the role.

Notwithstanding this general view, the majority of members also felt that the
characteristics of organisers were not likely to affect their ability to do their job.
There was considerable support for the utilisation of the appointment process to
redress gender, ethnicity and other under-representation within the union hierarchy.
This was particularly so with the appointment of women.

Finally the research established that the selection process of organisers had little
impact on the propensity of members to participate in various ways in the union. The
only impact identified was that there was a belief that they would be more likely to
vote in union elections if their organiser was elected. However, the propensity to
participate was found to be significantly associated with whether members had
previous contact with an organiser.

**Do members prefer organisers to be elected or appointed?**

Since the first major study of trade unions was completed by the Webbs (1911[1894]),
there has been a great deal of debate about trade union organisation and the ability or
inability of unions to be able to provide effective and representative leadership. In their study of English unionism, the Webbs (1911[1894]) noted the emergence of the full time paid organiser position within unions. In their view, the role of the full-time paid organiser was to carry out the policy of the union leadership and executive with appointment of professional officers, freed from the burden of election, providing greater effectiveness to the membership.

Since the Webbs (1911[1894]), the attention given to the role and selection process of organisers has been limited. Perhaps the most influential study has been Michel ([1915] 1962), who claimed that regardless of electoral processes within unions, union leadership had tendencies to create oligarchies by concentrating power in the hands of an elite few (the leadership), rendering the process of selection of officials irrelevant. Michel’s ([1915] 1962) ‘iron law of oligarchy’ has two major assertions. Firstly, over a period of time organisations develop oligarchic leadership whilst retaining superficial democratic processes. Secondly, goals and tactics are transformed in a conservative direction as leaders become concerned with organisational survival (Jenkin 1977).

Within the Australian context, there has traditionally been little attention on, or debate about, the role of union organisers. However, since the early 1980s with declining union membership and the retreat of compulsory arbitration, greater attention has been paid to this issue. The three major studies on union organisers undertaken over the last thirty years differed in their conclusions on selection processes.

Cupper (1983) established that many white collar unions in Australia traditionally appointed their organiser, but found that candidates had come from within the industry and had years of experience as lay officials and were fairly representative of
the political, demographic and social characteristics of the membership that they represented. As a result they were considered acceptable to their membership.

Callus (1986) identified an emerging new class of union officials were being appointed. However these appointments were limited to ‘expert’ positions. Callus contended that Australian union organisers had traditionally, and continued to, obtain their positions as organisers in a predictable manner. Typically, organisers were found to be elected after many years of service in honorary positions such as shop steward (delegate). Callus (1986) also claimed that organisers continued to be representative of the membership that they represented because of the many years in the industry. Those same officials possessed limited education, and after obtaining the position of organiser had limited opportunities for advancement within the union hierarchy.

A decade later, in the most recent study of union organisers, Bramble (1995) identified a ‘new breed’ of organisers emerging within Australian unions. Organisers were increasingly being appointed to the position over the traditional method of election, with two major consequences. Bramble (1995) argued that appointment of organisers was ‘limiting the play of democracy’ as well as impacting on organisers behaviour, contributing to their ‘conservativeness’ due to a reliance on the patronage of leadership for the continuation of their employment. The result, he believed, was a decline in participation of the members.

The current research produced a variety of answers to whether members preferred their organiser to be appointed or elected. The first phase, the quantitative phase, found support for Bramble’s (1995) assertions that union organisation’s required structures and processes to be perceived by members as being democratic. In the second phase however, in which participants were provided the opportunity to explore
the issues and benefits surrounding the differing selection processes, greater support was found for the appointment process.

In the first phase of the research, the survey, the participants support for the direct election method over appointment of organisers was demonstrated through the response to the statement ‘Trade union organisers should be elected to the position’. A large proportion of the participants (77.8 per cent) supported the statement that with only a small minority disagreeing with the statement (16.8 per cent). Only a small proportion (5.1 per cent) responded ‘neither disagree or agree’.

Also in the first phase of the research responses to the statement ‘The appointment of organisers is undemocratic’ indicated that the majority of participants agreed that appointment does impact on union democracy. Almost half of the participants (45.3 per cent) indicated that appointment does impact on union democracy compared to (29.7 per cent) who disagreed. Almost a quarter of the participants (24.6 per cent) indicated that they were uncommitted to the statement and indicated ‘neither’, a factor that may have influenced the later phase in which the embracement of appointment occurred.

The second phase, the interviews, provided greater understanding of why the participants supported the election process. Election was perceived by the participants to be the ‘fairest’ most transparent method for choosing organisers, democratic and less possibility of favouritism occurring. The majority of the participants in the interviews, when asked why election was preferred stated ‘it’s democratic’ and ‘I feel it’s our democratic right and it should be an election’. Further prompting resulted in reasons such as elections gives the members the right ‘to have a say’ or ‘an input’ into
the decision. The direct election process was perceived to be the more transparent of the two processes with all candidates having an equal chance of being elected.

The participants support for election was demonstrated in their overwhelming preference of organisers needing to have experience in the industry prior to obtaining the position. In the first phase almost one hundred per cent of the participants (97.5 per cent) indicated that an organiser should have experience in the industry that they organise. The reasons for such widespread support were elaborated on in the second phase. All of the participants believed it was extremely important that organisers have experience in the industry they represent in order to understand the issues affecting the members and to be able to effectively represent them.

*Perceived problems with election processes*

Although the participants in general supported the need for organisers to be elected to their position they did also acknowledge that the process of election had weaknesses. The participants claimed that union organisers could modify their behaviour prior to an election in order to be successfully re-elected. Possible behaviour modification included the organiser working harder for an extended period of time and making more visits to companies to persuade members prior to an election. The participants’ claim that union organisers could modify their behaviour prior to an election in order to be successfully re-elected has been identified in previous research in Australia and internationally (Coolican & Frenkel 1984, Heery & Kelly 1997, Undy & Martin 1984).

The participants also acknowledged the possible problems within the electoral process of organisers and candidate recognition. For a variety of reasons including lack of awareness of union activists and union activities occurring from one workplace to the
other and the lack of various materials published on a frequent basis detailing potential organisers’ activities, members’ awareness of candidates’ participation in unions prior to election, or their previous experience in activities, recognition is limited. This made it very difficult for potential organiser candidates with a ‘low’ level of exposure to other union members and, or resources to fund a marketing campaign, to be elected.

Another perceived fault or weakness of election by the participants in the interviews was the need for candidates to be supported and aligned with a political party or faction in order to obtain the position. Two participants in the interviews believed that by being part of a ‘ticket’ of a group of similar interests, for example within the same faction of the ALP, a candidate would maximise chances of success. This was articulated by statements such as ‘the person running for the position…who is part of a faction and has the right backing…you know… supported by a faction with lots of money and resources .. is almost guaranteed to get up (be successful).’. The need for endorsement of a political grouping, and as a consequence, use of human and financial resources is a factor identified in previous research in Australia (Callus 1986, Coolican & Frenkel 1984).

The final weakness that participants in the second phase perceived of the process of election of organisers was the ability of potential candidates who had no previous experience in union activism to be successfully elected as an organiser simply by, as stated by one participant ‘getting their face known just before an election’ through the use of superior resources and effective political slogans.
Appointment

In comparison to the direct election process, the appointment process was given only small support by the participants in the first phase (14.5 per cent). Although as previously discussed, the process gained further support during the interviews. The interview participants claimed that the position is generally an ‘organisational role’ as distinct from a political role, and that appointment provides organisers the best opportunity to concentrate on the role without the constraints of election. This was further articulated by a participant who indicated that appointment was the most meritocratic method of finding the right person to perform the job because union leaders can take qualifications and skills into account prior to appointment.

The first phase of the research failed to clearly establish participants’ attitudes to the question of effectiveness of organisers and the selection process. The question in the first phase ‘Within your union who would do a better job, an elected or appointed organiser?’ the majority of participants (43.9 per cent) indicated that they ‘don’t know’ who would perform the role better, with only 38.6 per cent of participants believing that an elected organiser would perform the role better than appointed organiser.

When interviewed about the appointment process of organisers and effectiveness in the role the majority of participants conceded that an appointed organiser who possessed such skills already described in the first part of the chapter that were needed, would be more likely to perform better as summarised by one participants “Well they… who had the training and all the knowledge would definitely be able to know the legal stuff and how to deal with the bosses much better than someone straight from the company.. so yeah an appointed one..”
The justification for appointment of organisers on the basis of utilising professionals best able to implement union policy has existed since the Webbs (1911[1894]). In the last ten years the ACTU has also argued that the survival of the union movement and achievement of union goals can only occur with organisers that are trained in the role and more personally reflective of the membership that the organisers represent.

Although the size of the sample was too small to make predictions about the strength of the relationships between variables, simple cross tabulation of response to items relating to those participants who had performed the role or were currently performing the role of delegate found high levels of support for appointment and disagreement on the impact of the process on union democracy.

Indicative of this was the one delegate interviewed in the second phase who interestingly was emphatic in support for the appointment of organisers. The delegate claimed that election does not necessarily attract the most appropriate person for the position. Moreover the quasi legal nature of the role required ‘a great deal of skill’ and consequently, they argued, it would be preferable to have a person trained for the role and appointed by the leadership. Other participants interviewed in the second phase also highlighted some of the perceived positive attributes of the appointment process over election. The participants’ acknowledgement of the benefits of the appointment process, after initial rejection of it in favour of the election process, indicated that perhaps if appointment of organisers is to be approved by members as a selection process greater information may need to be provided for its justification. This factor is discussed later in the chapter.

The need for affirmative action presented the only factor of appointment that was supported by the majority of the participants in both stages of the research, and
provides support for calls to address the gender imbalances within Australian unions in previous research on the topic (Pocock 1995, 1997). The majority of participants in the current study found the appointment of organisers acceptable when the process was used by leaders to promote women to the position to create greater equality in the number of women performing the role. In the first phase (31.1 per cent) of the participants agreed that ‘more women should be appointed as organiser’ with only (7.7 per cent) disagreeing. The majority however were uncommitted and responded ‘neither’ (55.8 per cent). The large number of participants uncommitted needed to be explored in the second phase.

In the second phase eight of the ten participants indicated that the practice of appointment of women to the position of organiser to increase the numbers was acceptable as summarised by one participants “Well that’s ok you know… to raise numbers, get more women involved as leaders…to balance it up a bit.”. Only two participants in the survey (both women) believed that affirmative action policies by utilising appointment were not acceptable, claiming that the process should be meritocratic and the ‘best person for the job’ should get it.

As stated earlier in the chapter, there was overwhelming support for organisers to have experience in the industry that they represent members (Johnson 1970, Callus 1986, Bramble 1995, Watson 1988, Heery & Kelly 1997). Those participants in the second phase who reluctantly acknowledged appointment, deemed it acceptable only if the potential appointed organiser was given the position from within the membership, and had worked in the industry where they would represent members. This view was summarised by a participants who claimed “Well I suppose if they have been in the industry and know the issues it’s ok, but not from outside.”
Only one participant in the second phase of the research, the same person who performed the role of delegate, believed appointment from outside of the organisation with no experience in the industry they represent was acceptable. Justification for the support of outside appointments according to the participants was based on the extensive skills needed by organisers to perform the role to an accepted level as well as the similarity of issues such as pay and disputes from one industry to another.

The greatest opposition to the appointment process of organisers by the participants in the second phase was that it was less transparent and consequently had the potential for greater abuse by the leadership. Most of the participants interviewed believed that favouritism through appointment was very possible with ‘mates’ or political appointments being made, a factor Bramble (1995) argued in his 1995 research. The result of such appointments according to the participants was that the organisers are less accountable to the members and more accountable to the leadership, summed up by one participant “Well they know who they’re answerable to… and it isn’t us (the members) is it.”

The issue of accountability, or responsiveness, to members however, previously identified in the literature review, as an important factor linked to member satisfaction proved to be of little importance in the first phase of the research. Although more of the survey participants in the first phase believed that an elected organiser (37.6 per cent) would perform the role better than an appointed organiser (15.5 per cent) when responding to the question ‘Within your union who would do a better job, an elected or appointed organiser?’ a large proportion indicated that they were uncommitted to the statement and answered ‘don’t know’ (46.7 per cent).
In the second phase the participants were less divided on the issue of who would perform the role better. Six of the ten participants interviewed believed that an elected organiser would perform the role better because they would have needed support prior to election and thus would have had to ‘prove’ themselves prior to the election. Three of the participants, after initially supporting election as the preferred process, believed that the person chosen through the appointment process would be more likely to have the skills and training necessary to perform the role, even though they supported the election of organisers.

**Do the characteristics of trade union organisers matter to the membership that they represent?**

The literature review addressed Bramble’s arguments that there had, been over an extended period, particularly in the 1990s, a change in the demographic and other characteristics of Australian trade union organisers. Although difficult to establish because of the limited data available, Bramble (1995) claimed that organisers were increasingly likely to be better educated, younger, or to have little or no experience in the industries that they represented membership in.

Bramble’s (1995) assertions of the changing characteristics were not new. Earlier studies by Dufty (1980) and Davis (1977) identified the rise in the number of young union officials, increased their likelihood to possess tertiary qualifications with limited experience. Whilst Bramble (1995) claimed that the changes were due to the increasing use of appointment of organisers by union leaders, another major reason for the changes was the adaption of a policy by the ACTU to have greater representation of women and organisers from NESB backgrounds in official positions to better reflect the characteristics of the membership.
There is a significant body of research examining the poor representation of women and members from a NESB within Australian unions (Nightingale 1991, Pocock 1995, Griffin & Bertone 1992). What is not known is how those differences in the characteristics of organisers impact on members’ (and non members) decision to join unions and decisions to participate in union activities. For the peak body of the union movement, the ACTU, appointing women, and officials from non English speaking background has provided the union movement the ability to address the, to a large degree accurate, perception that organisers were blue collar Anglo males. For Bramble (1995), however, the problem of appointment to address those inequities in representation in itself leads to limits of internal democracy obstructing the ability of women and other activists from underrepresented backgrounds attaining the positions. The process is contributing to conservative behaviour from those appointed organisers and impacting on participation (dealt with later in the chapter).

The current research found that the characteristics of organisers, apart from the need for experience, as members of the union, and in some type of honorary role such as delegate, were not important influences on participants’ perceptions of their ability to perform the role.

The research identified that there has been an increase of union organisers with tertiary education qualifications into the union movement in the last thirty years. Surprisingly education in the current research proved to be of little importance to the participants. The need for organisers to possess tertiary education qualifications in the current research proved to be inconclusive. In the first phase most participants disagreed (42.7 per cent) that organisers should be university educated. Only (12.9 per cent) agreed whilst most were uncommitted responding ‘neither’ (44.1 per cent).
The second phase confirmed the lack of importance that participants gave to the need for tertiary qualification with only two of the participants interviewed stating that it was essential to the organiser performing the role in an effective manner, acknowledging the difficulty of the role and the benefit of possessing a legal or industrial relations qualification. Other participants questioned why someone who had studied at university would want to choose to become a union organiser when they could pursue some other occupation.

The gender of the organisers proved to be unimportant to the participants with most (55.8 per cent) neither agreeing or disagreeing that more women should be appointed. However far more agreed or strongly agreed that women should be appointed (36.2 per cent) than those who disagreed (7.7 per cent). In the second phase only two of the participants interviewed (both women) believed that it was important for women organisers to represent women because of the issues affecting women in the workplace such as child minding and sexual harassment. The participants believed that most of the issues dealt with by organisers were non gender specific and as such gender had little impact in the manner in which they performed the role.

Similar to attitudes on the gender of organisers, the majority of research participants neither agreed nor disagreed that more organisers should be appointed from NESB backgrounds (48.0 per cent). Of the rest a small majority agreed or strongly agreed that more NESB organisers should be appointed (31.0 per cent) compared to those who disagreed or strongly disagreed (20.6 per cent). Reasons for low commitment to the appointment of organisers from NESB backgrounds in the interviews included the fact that participants believed that it was of little relevance for them personally or in their industry. Most assumed that nearly all workers would be able to speak English
and communication would not be a problem. The research was unable to establish the percentage of participants (or from the population) from non English speaking backgrounds and as such few conclusions can be drawn from the results.

Attitudes to the age of the organiser proved surprising. Analysis of the results found that the majority of participants (40.2 per cent) disagreed that older organisers perform the job better than younger organisers with only (22.0 per cent) agreeing with the statement. A high proportion of participants said ‘neither’ (36.3 per cent). Questions in the second phase investigated the relevance of age and its impact on union organisers. The majority of the participants believed that the age of the organiser had little impact in the manner in which they performed the role. Three of the participants responded that although age wasn’t a factor in the performance of the role they were concerned that younger organisers would have not had much experience in the workforce as a whole, or in honorary positions in the union. Two of the participants had concerns about the ability of older organisers to be able to communicate with women and empathise with their issues, whilst two other participants questioned the ability to perform such a stressful occupation for a long period of time.

The research found little conclusive evidence that the characteristics of the organiser had any impact on the members’ perceptions of effectiveness. The most surprising aspect of the findings was that the majority of the participants’ belief that the gender of the organiser is not important in their performance of the role, contradicting research completed on the topic (Pocock, 1995, 1997, Benson & Griffin 1988). Secondly although Bramble (1995) claims that age and as a result experience impact
on union members perceptions of democracy in unions, the current research found little support for such a contention.

**Does the selection process of organisers impact on participation of trade union members?**

The literature review identified that although research exists on participation by trade union members, it only became an area of study in Australian industrial relations in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Lansbury & Westcott 1992). Thus little attention has been given to the differing selection processes and their impact on union members’ participation in union activities, nomination for union positions and voting in union elections. Benson (1988) provides the most in depth study of organisers’ behaviour within Australian workplaces, however for the most part focuses on shop stewards and their relationships rather than any analysis of how the organiser was chosen for the position. Internationally Watson (1988) and Heery and Kelly (1997) found that organisers who were educated and appointed were more likely than their elected counterparts to have ‘left wing’ ideals resulting in a greater degree of inclusiveness of the members in decision making impacting on their workplace conditions and general union issues.

Bramble (1995) claimed that the appointment of organisers and other officials in Australian unions was limiting the play of democracy and, in consequence, participation by union members. Organisers forced to rely on leadership for continued employment as well as having few characteristics similar to their members or empathy from experience in the industry were becoming increasingly conservative. The result was, according to Bramble (1995), less input from the membership and less
participation in internal union activities both in the workplace and union generally. Bramble’s (1995) assertions are difficult to measure.

Regardless of selection process of organisers there is sufficient evidence available (ABS data, Peetz 1998) to suggest that participation in Australian trade unions has declined significantly over the last twenty years. Indicative of this has been the record low number of days lost to strike action since the peak of 1975 (ABS 6321.0). More than a decade ago Pocock (1995) found that less than 14 per cent of members in her study had spoken to an organiser and only 12 per cent had attended meetings outside the workplace, similar to the largest study completed on Australian industrial relations activity a few years earlier, the AWIRS (1995) study.

The literature review also established through AEC records that the number of candidates for office as well as the number of union members voting in union elections has declined steadily over the last ten years. It is not known why this decline has occurred. One assumption is that the ALP inter - faction rivalry present from the 1950s onwards, as well as with the Communist and Socialist Parties has now receded, with challenges or ‘tickets’ funded by those factions occurring less frequently.

These challenges, well documented by labour historians, particularly in blue collar unions, but also of note in the current union studied in which the ‘left’ of the ALP succeeded in defeating the right wing in a bitter dispute in the early 1980s are no longer as commonplace, although they still occur (most notably in the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union Victorian branch at the turn of this century). This only partially explains the lack of candidates for office with the most likely reason a lack of financial resources by candidates not ‘backed’ by the ALP party machine unable to seriously challenge for office in these ‘modern big businesses’ (Evatt Foundation
1995). Such is the difficulty in establishing any clear or in depth understanding of levels of participation within Australian trade unions that some (Evatt Foundation 1995) believe that the two traditional yardsticks of participation (attending union meetings and voting in union elections) are outdated and new more relevant measures of participation need to be created.

Whilst far greater attention needs to be given to the questions posed by Bramble (1995) in order to fully establish the impact of the organiser processes on membership participation, the results of the current research have found that impact on participation of the participants in the research was minimal in relation to participation in union activities and nominating for union positions. The only consequence of any note was that the selection process may well have implications on the voting behaviour of participants. The current research, contrary to Bramble’s (1995) contention, found minimal evidence to support a relationship between the growing trend of appointment and a impact on nominating for union positions or participation in union activities.

Respondents to the question ‘Assuming your current organiser is appointed, if the organiser was elected would you be more likely to participate more in union activities’ indicated that they wouldn’t be more likely to participate more (53.2 per cent) compared to only 7.7 per cent of participants who responded that they would be likely to participate more. A large percentage of participants (38.9 per cent) indicated that they ‘didn’t know’ if they would or not.

To the proposition ‘Nominate for an elected office in my union?’ in the first phase a large majority of the participants (71.4 per cent) indicated that they would not be
more likely to nominate for a position. Only a small number 3.8 per cent indicated ‘yes’ and 24.6 per cent ‘didn’t know’.

The in depth interviews provided the opportunity to investigate the reasons why participants would not participate more in union activities or nominate for union office, as well as why such a large number responded ‘don't know’. The participants believed that the selection process was of little relevance to union members’ involvement in union activities, with the predominant reason for the majority of the interview participants lack of interest in participating in union activities being they were ‘too busy’ or they ‘weren’t interested’. None of the participants indicated the organiser’s behaviour as a reason for lack of willingness to participate.

The participants also indicated strongly in the second phase that they would be unlikely to nominate more for positions if the organiser was elected instead of appointed. The reasons given by the interview participants were similar to those in the previous question relating to participating in union activities. The majority of participants responded that was that they had little interest or time to devote to such activities, weren’t interested or were too old.

None of the interview participants believed that the different process of selection would change the frequency of union members nominating for positions. The participants believed that if members were interested in getting involved and nominating for positions there were few obstacles to doing so.

Interestingly, in the first phase of the research cross tabulation of those who had held the position of delegate, although small, indicated that they would not be more likely to nominate for the position if it was elected over appointed. This was confirmed in the second phase by the one participant, currently a delegate who strongly supported
the appointment over election of organisers believing ‘I think you have more
opportunity to state your case and for many I think that having got go through election
is too daunting and threatening…you know all the name slinging and lies’.

The one aspect of participation that the selection process clearly impacted on in the
research was on the likelihood of participants to vote if the organiser was elected
instead of appointed. In the first phase the question ‘would be more likely to vote in
union elections if the process of selection of organiser was by election’ more than a
third of the participants (35.0 per cent) indicated that they would be more likely to
vote whilst another 24.6 per cent indicated that they ‘didn’t know’, and a further 40.2
per cent indicated that they wouldn't be more likely to vote.

In the second phase, questions were constructed to explore further the possibility of
participants’ likelihood to vote in elections if the organiser was elected instead of
appointed. The majority of the participants (nine of the ten) indicated that they would
be more likely to vote because they knew the current organiser and were satisfied
with their performance and it meant that the organiser would have to work harder to
satisfy the membership. Only one of the participants believed it would make little
difference claiming that because they had no information about candidates or had not
met them they would not know who would be most appropriate to vote for.

As stated earlier the results proved inconclusive about the impact on the selection
process of organisers on various forms of membership participation. Overall it can be
assumed that prima facie there is little to support Bramble’s (1995) contention that the
continued appointment of organisers is going to have a detrimental impact on union
member participation levels. The problem is many-faceted and requires an
acknowledgement of the impact on the broader union structures, aims and strategies
as well as the impact of factors such as casualisation of workers, the legislation that existed for much of the last decade as well as a declining union membership.

One area of concern in the results, that may provide support for Bramble’s (1995) contentions is the high degree of ‘neither’ responses to the questions. Whilst the interviews were able to further probe participants’ attitudes, questions of impact remain.

The number of women participants, may well have influenced the results. Previous research has established that women are both less likely to hold the position of organiser or to nominate for them, or participate in union activities, for reasons previously discussed (Nolan 1985, Griffin & Benson 1989, Pocock 1995)

The results of this section were also interesting due to the large number of participants who were, or had previously held the role of delegate within the union. Previously established by Callus (1985) the role of delegate has historically been the path used to obtaining a position as an organiser in Australian unions. If Bramble’s (1995) contention is to be supported it would be assumed that many of the participants would have supported the need for election of organisers as a means to obtaining the position over appointment.

The participants’ indication that they would be more likely to vote in union elections contradicts evidence from the AEC (Annual Report 2007) of voting trends in Australian unions in the last twenty years, which shows a decline in voting of union members in both unions that appoint organisers and unions that elect organisers.
Discussion

One of the most influential studies of social movements of the twentieth century, Michel’s ([1915] 1962) *Political Parties*, has often been embraced by industrial relations researchers internationally for its description of the transformation of organisations over a period a time. Chapter Two identified that Michel’s ([1915] 1962) thesis has since gained a great deal of support internationally in the US (Schmidt 1973), in Great Britain (Hyman 1989). In Australia however few studies have been undertaken in relation to the oligarchic tendencies of trade unions. This was particularly so in the early years when, as a result of federal legislation in 1904, union structures and activities were both defined and regulated by federal governments to a level unprecedented in the western world.

Over the last thirty years, as a result of two significant events, the Prices and Incomes Accord and, then during the amalgamation processes of the early 1990s, greater attention was given to union organisation, particularly in the context of declining membership and participation. This was in the past reflected in changes in ACTU policy, which in the mid 1990s embarked on an ambitious program aimed at rejuvenating the union movement to raise membership levels and participation in union activities by union members.

The ACTU, supported by its affiliates committed to redress the perceived faults of the method in which union organising was approached and delivered to workplaces across the country (ACTU 1999, 2003, Cooper 2004). In effect changing from a ‘servicing model’ to an ‘organising model’ approach. The ‘servicing’ model of
unionism involved an emphasis on organisers playing an ‘expert’ role towards their members, solving problems and selling the union product (Heery & Kelly 1997). The model was considered the primary cause of the movement’s failure by to attract and retain union members (Cooper & Patmore 2002, Cooper 2003).

Bramble (1995) claimed that the servicing model, due to an increasingly complex industrial environment required the appointment of a range of professional specialists in a variety of areas (health and safety, recruitment etc) and, utilising the ACTU Union Directory, demonstrated an influx of new officials to the movement, many of which were young professional and with little experience in the industry that their union represented. Bramble’s (1995) arguments were not new. Dufty (1980) had in the early 1980s identified changes to the officials in western Australian trade unions, and Callus, whose study influenced Bramble (1995) also had identified a new breed of professionals entering the movement, the impact however differing to Bramble (1995).

‘Revitalisation’ and the role of the workplace delegates.

The servicing model was not the only reason for an increase in the number of new officials. The response by the Australian trade union movement to the crisis of declining membership, the introduction of the ‘organising model’, also led to an increase in outsiders to the movement. The model, based on the US strategy of ‘revitalisation’ had an enormous impact on the selection processes and characteristics of union organisers.
The process in the US, described as ‘revitalisation’ has proved an enormous influence on Australian strategy although Voss and Sherman (2000) argue that what actually constitutes ‘revitalisation’ is a challenge because definitions used by scholars and activists are often vague, limited, or prescriptive (Voss & Sherman 2000, p. 315). They claim it essentially involves breaking away from servicing members to organising the unorganised using ‘unconventional disruptive tactics in organising campaigns’. Voss and Sherman’s (2000) study found that for unions to transform from being bureaucratic and conservative organisations requires three necessary conditions, namely political crisis within the local union, an influx of outsiders and centralised pressure from the international unions.

Within Australia, attempts to ‘revitalise’ the union movement and arrest the decline of union membership has taken on similar characteristics. The Australian version, according to Cooper and Patmore (2003) involves restructuring member-officer relations to ensure that members were active participants in unions. Thus the essential role of the official according to the model was to ‘empower’ workplace activists and build a culture of collective identity among work groups.

How widespread the ‘revitalisation’ of Australian unions is, like their US counterparts, remains debatable however an important dimension of the union revitalisation in the US context has been the priority placed on the recruitment of ‘outsiders’ into the movement, trained to implement the ‘organising model’. This has also been evident in the Australian context. The ‘Organising Works’ strategy, now over a decade old, involves training (through the ACTU Organising Centre) of predominantly young, tertiary educated men and women, on the skills needed to
foster workplace activism. Figures indicate that most of those trainees then go on to become organisers, appointed by the union leadership (Griffin, Small & Svensen 2003).

The current study provided an interesting insight into the attitudes of trade union members towards their organiser and the selection process. The literature review did not identify a similar study undertaken in Australia. The research identified a number of key findings, described earlier in the chapter including a preference for election over appointment, although when provided the opportunity to explore the issues greater sympathy is given to the appointment process. The participants also believed that the characteristics of organisers did not impact on their ability to perform their role, although the utilisation of the appointment as process to redress gender, ethnicity and other under representation was acceptable, particularly so with the appointment of women. Finally the research established that the selection process of organisers had little impact on the propensity of members to participate in various ways in the union.

The results indicate, though not conclusively, that given the current direction of the Australian union movement, the process of appointing those best capable of performing the role of organiser is to a degree an acceptable practice. It must be qualified though that, based on the findings of the current research, if the process of appointment is chosen by union leadership then it needs to be communicated in a more effective method than currently exists. That is, better education of the current strategies of organising and the ‘organising model’ to the membership. There currently exists limited evidence from previous Australian research that Australian
union members have an understanding of the aims of the ACTU’s and individual unions’ strategy of ‘revitalisation’.

Alternatively there are those critics who argue that the revitalisation, or focus on implementing a ‘organising model’ focused on workplace participation is ultimately limited by the minimal restructuring of union structures at a state and federal level. That is, participation is limited for activists to within their workplaces, with little real opportunity to have an impact on leadership and leadership positions.

The outstanding issue that remains unanswered from the current research is the issue of whether organisers’ experience in the industry that they represent is an important determinant of organiser effectiveness. Almost every participant in the research strongly agreed with the need for organisers to have experience in the industry that they represent because, as explained in the second phase (the interviews) it (experience) helped the organisers to understand the issues that they, the workers, believed were important as being able to have empathy with their working relationship.

Voss and Sherman (2000) address this issue claiming that those from outside of the union movement with experience in community groups provide new skills and strategies. It will be recalled that Pocock, Peetz and Houghton’s (2007) Australian study found that there were as they termed ‘some hints’ that outsiders are more successful in performing some aspects of the role of organiser, specifically identifying workplace activists. There is however little evidence apart from that study to support the contention. Perhaps the answer comes from Dufty’s (1980) study more
than three decades ago of the changing characteristics of officials in West Australian unions. Dufty (1980) noted that ‘given the high degree of pragmatism in Australian unions, a union official who is successful in achieving what the members want will be forgiven for almost anything’.

This chapter has presented a summary and discussion of the findings from the previous chapter. It reveals a number of key findings that help to contribute to a better understanding of how the selection process impacts on trade union members attitudes. The chapter also discusses the findings and their relationship to the current body of knowledge related to trade union organisers both in Australia and internationally. The next chapter provides the conclusions of the research, the limitations and areas for further research.
CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

Introduction

The research for this thesis was conducted in order to gain an understanding of the impact of the differing selection processes of Australian trade union organisers on trade union members’ beliefs. This chapter describes the conclusions that can be drawn from this research, the limitations and contributions of the research, the implications of the research and recommendations for future research and recommendations for practitioners.

The research questions were.

1. Do members prefer one method of selection of organisers to the other (i.e., appointed or elected)?

2. Do members perceive that the characteristics of union organisers are likely to affect their effectiveness in the role?

3. To what extent do members’ attitudes about the selection process influence their willingness to participate in union affairs?
The results of the current research established that most union members have a lack of knowledge regarding the selection process of union organisers in Australia in general and specifically within their own union. The research found that the election of organisers was the preferred method of selection although appointment of the organisers was possible, provided education of the membership about the process and justification for its usage would be acceptable. The reasons for the support for election of organisers by the participants chosen for the research were, as Bramble (1995) contended, the belief that appointment of organisers is impacting on union democracy.

Participants in the research believed that by directly voting for their organisers there is a greater sense of participation in the process, leading to a greater accountability of the organiser (Heery & Kelly 1994; Watson 1988; Bramble 1995). In contrast, appointment of organisers impacts on union democracy because it removes the right of the members to ‘have a say’. The participants believed that if union leaders are given the opportunity to appoint, favouritism and political appointments can occur.

The participants initially demonstrated little support for the appointment process, however after probing questions were used in the interviews during the second phase, the participants acknowledged the benefits of union leaders appointing organisers. The major benefits of appointment, according to the participants, were similar to those first identified by the Webbs (1911[1894]) in the first ever study of unions over one hundred years ago, namely appointment makes use of expertise. The participants in the research also supported the appointment process as a mechanism of increasing female representation in union organisers positions.
The research also established that the participants believed that experience in the industry that the organiser represents, was extremely important for them to be able to perform the role effectively. This perceived need of organisers to have experience in the industry that they represent has many implications for the union studied and Australian unions in general as the Australian workforce changes jobs at a greater frequency than previous generations.

Finally, the research established that other characteristics of organisers proved to be less important to the participants. Characteristics such as gender, ethnicity or education proved inconclusive in relation to the complex debate of specific demographic representation within organisation hierarchy.

The implications of the research and contributions to the body of knowledge on the topic

The current research has made a variety of contributions to the body of knowledge on trade union organiser selection processes. Firstly and most important, the research has contributed to the small body of knowledge on trade union organisers and trade union organisation in Australia, particularly at such a critical a time in the movement’s history when membership is at a critically low level and the union movement is attempting to transform itself into a far more responsive organisation.

Whilst a great deal has been written about union democracy over the last one hundred years, both in Australia and internationally, little was known about union organisers and the attitudes of union members to the role. This lack of knowledge was partly
because of the relative stability previously provided by the unique industrial relations system that Australia has maintained since its introduction in 1904. With a declining membership and relevance within the workplace relationship trade unions are placing greater focus on the impact of the differing processes of selection of organisers.

For the union involved in the study, the research provides the union leadership with greater understanding of current members opinions on the selection process of organisers within their union, reasons for joining the union and reasons for the level of participation in organised union activities. The research provides the union with feedback on participants’ knowledge about the selection processes of organisers within their union and levels of satisfaction with their current organiser. The current research did not establish clearly the reasons for the lack of knowledge, however the union may wish to revise its current practices of information of union policy and procedures for union members as the current practices may lead to a continued low level of participation.

The research also provided the union with an understanding of the opinions of members to the selection process of organisers. The research participants did not support the current policy of appointment over election of organisers and importantly members would vote in union elections if given the opportunity. The research contributed feedback to the union’s knowledge of attitudes to current affirmative action policies aimed at redressing the lack of representation of women in union leadership positions. For the members who have requested the outcomes of the research be sent to them, the knowledge gained from the research will give them a
greater understanding of their fellow union members’ opinions on current organizational practices and their similarity or differences.

The research will also give the ACTU feedback on the decision to initiate the ‘Unions@Work’ and ‘Organizing Works’ strategies, which embrace the appointment of organisers as a means of halting the decline in union membership and creating greater workplace unionism. The current research found that the participants, although embracing the need for skilled organisers, believed that experience in the industry and as delegates or other honorary roles were of greater importance in performing the role. Finally the research will provide Victorian Trades Hall Council, who has assisted through the use of some facilities, the ability to assess the organisational effectiveness of one of its affiliates.

**Limitations**

A number of limitations associated with the research must be acknowledged. In the first stage of the research the sample size was quite small, and if larger appropriate statistical methods could have been used to analyse relationships between variables, and enabled assumptions be made of the wider union population. Another limitation in both the first and second stages of the research was the lack of participants who had either just joined the union or were between the ages of eighteen to thirty. This meant that a greater understanding of those who are currently the least likely to belong to unions was not possible.

The survey first phase limitation was its short length (23 questions) providing only a brief understanding of the issues related to the changing process of organisers and its
impact on participation. Further questions would have broadened our understanding of the research questions.

**Recommendations of research**

The research has contributed to the little literature that exists on the selection process of organisers in Australia. The topic however needs a great deal more research in order to gain a greater understanding of the issue. Further studies involving the selection process of organisers in Australia may involve exploring in greater depth than the current research was able to topics such as:

- Union members’ understanding of selection and decision-making processes within Australian trade unions,

- Accurate figures of how many union officials currently perform the role of organiser in Australia and how many are appointed or elected.

- The Australian union organisers’ opinions of the differing selection processes.

- Non-union members’ opinions.

- Current union members’ levels of participation.

**Concluding Remarks**

The role of the trade union organiser has been given limited attention in Australian industrial relations research. As a consequence little has been known about the union employees who perform the role and its impact on the union members. The role of union organisers however is becoming increasingly complex and demanding as the industrial relations system changes from a centralised system, involving the
Australian Industrial Relations Commission, to one in which is increasingly focusing on the workplace

As a result of these changes the role of organiser will, at least in the short term, become increasingly crucial to the survival of Australian union membership that is in decline, and to the eroding power base of union leaders. The increased focus on the role of the organiser, often the union’s face for most workers, may well impact on the decision of workers to join or not join unions and participate in union activities, which are essential for union. It is for this reason that the need to study and understand the implications of the selection process of organisers and the role that it plays in being the ‘link’ between the union organisation and the members will become even more important to both unionists and researchers in Australia.
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**Australian Commonwealth Acts**

Workplace Relations Act 1996 (Cth).

Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Act 1904

Workplace Relations Amendment (Right of Entry) Bill 2004
Appendix 1.

PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT FOR SURVEY

Dear

You are invited to participate in my research on the topic Appointment v Election - The Process of Selecting Organisers in the Victorian Trade Union Movement. This research is being undertaken for the award Master of Business (Research) in the School of Management, RMIT Business.

The objective of the research is to develop an understanding of how attitudes and beliefs about the election and appointment of union officers affects workers’ decisions to join and participate in trade unions.

You are invited to respond to a questionnaire that will take between five to ten minutes to complete, and return it in the reply paid envelope that will be attached to the questionnaire. Your participation is purely voluntary and you may withdraw yourself and any data that you have provided at any stage. All information will be treated as confidential and your identity will not be revealed. All data will be secured and access to it will be restricted in accordance with RMIT regulations on access and storage.

It is expected that the research may be published in relevant conference proceedings or professional journals. If this is the case, full confidentiality and anonymity is guaranteed.

If you need further clarification or have any queries please contact me (telephone 0408 587 279), or my supervisor Ms Jacqueline Adie, Senior Lecturer, Industrial Relations & Human Resource Management Unit, School of Management, RMIT Business (telephone: 03 9925 5972) or Professor Robert Brooks, Associate Dean, Research, RMIT Business (telephone: 03 9925 5593).

Yours faithfully

Paul Fallon
Master of Business (Research) Candidate
School of Management
RMIT Business
Appendix 2.

PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT FOR INTERVIEWS

Dear………………………………………………………………

**Project Title:** Appointment versus Election: The process of selecting organisers in the Victorian Trade Union Movement.
**Researcher:** Paul Fallon (BA, Grad Dip of Industrial Relations)

You are being invited to participate in a research project that aims to explore the impact of the selection process of trade union organisers on trade union members attitudes and participation within Australian trade unions. As a member of the Australian Services Union you are being asked to participate in order to assist us to gain an understanding of the selection process within your union. Paul Fallon who is a Masters Degree student from the School of Management at RMIT is undertaking the research.

You are being asked to take part in an interview. The interview will take up to one hour. During the interview you will be asked questions relating to your knowledge of the current organiser selection process, organisers characteristics and questions relating to your participation in the union.

The interview will be audio taped and transcribed. You will be provided with a copy of the tape and/or transcript if you wish to have these. During the interview, you may ask for the tape to be turned off at any time, or for material to be wiped at the end of the interview. After receiving the tape and/or the transcript, you may request that some or all of the material you have provided be removed or changed.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and this will be respected at all times. The project may be of no direct benefit to you and you may at any time choose to withdraw from the project. Your anonymity will be ensured in the production of any published material related to the study.

**Further Information**

If you would like to discuss this research at any time, you can contact Paul Fallon or Bernadette Hosking (research supervisor) on 99255922, or Professor Robert Brooks (Chair, RMIT Business Ethics Sub-Committee) on 99255594.
APPENDIX 3

THE SELECTION PROCESS OF TRADE UNION ORGANISERS

Organiser - refers to the person who is a full time paid official in your union, not the delegate within your workplace.

Personal information
(Please tick one box only.)

1. Gender ☐ Male ☐ Female

2. Age ☐ 20 – 30 yrs ☐ 31 – 40 ☐ 41 – 50 ☐ 51 – 60 ☐ 60+

3. Education ☐ Year 11 or Less ☐ Year 12 ☐ University Qualifications

4. Occupation (Please print) __________________

5. Employment status ☐ Full time ☐ Part time ☐ Casual

6. Length of union membership (in current workplace) _______ Years

7. What is the most important reason you joined your current union?
(Please tick one or more boxes.)

☐ I believe I should be in a union.
☐ To obtain the services provided.
☐ Because the union best represents my interests.
☐ Because the union protects my rights.
☐ Unions deliver improved wages and conditions.
☐ The union would help in dealing with any problems with my employer.
☐ No say, I work in a closed shop.
☐ Because I believe all employees should belong to a union.
☐ Because my employer expected me to join.
☐ Because I wanted to get involved in the union organisation.

Other reasons for joining the union........................................................................................................................................

8. In the last year have you personally participated in any of the following activities?
(Please tick one or more boxes.)

☐ Read a union journal.
☐ Recruited another union member.
☐ Attended a union meeting.
☐ Spoken at a union meeting.
☐ Spoken to the union secretary.
☐ Spoken to management about a union issue.
☐ Participated in strike action.
☐ Raised a grievance with a union delegate.
☐ Spoken to another union member about a workplace issue.
Voted in a union election.
Spoken to an organiser about a workplace issue.

Other...........................................................................................................................................................................

9. Have you ever nominated/applied for one of the following positions within your union?

☐ Delegate                ☐ Organiser                ☐ Secretary             ☐ Union council

10. If you have not stood/applied for a position what is the main reason why?
........................................................................................................

Within your union

In questions 11 to 23 please tick one box only for each of the following statements.

11. Is your current organiser elected or appointed?
☐ Elected                ☐ Appointed              ☐ Don’t know

12. Within your union would an elected or appointed organiser be better at performing the duties associated with organising?
☐ Elected                ☐ Appointed              ☐ Don’t know

13. How satisfied are you with how your organiser does or performs his/her job?

☐ Very Satisfied ☐ Satisfied ☐ Neither ☐ Unsatisfied

Assuming your current organiser is appointed. If the organiser was elected would you be more likely to:

14. Participate more in union activities.
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don’t Know

15. Nominate for an elected office in my union.
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don’t Know

16. More likely to vote in general elections.
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don’t Know

The selection process and organiser characteristics.

Questions 17 to 23 please tick one box only for each of the following statements

Strongly Agree (Str/Agree)         Agree     Neither     Disagree     Strongly Disagree (Str/Disagree)

17. Organisers should have experience in the industry they represent.
☐ Str/Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither ☐ Disagree

18. Organisers should be university
☐ Str/Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither ☐ Disagree
educated.

19. More women should be appointed as organisers.

   [ ] Strongly Agree  [ ] Agree  [ ] Neither  [ ] Disagree  [ ] Strongly Disagree

20. More from non English backgrounds should be appointed as organisers.

   [ ] Strongly Agree  [ ] Agree  [ ] Neither  [ ] Disagree  [ ] Strongly Disagree

21. Older organisers perform the job better than younger organisers.

   [ ] Strongly Agree  [ ] Agree  [ ] Neither  [ ] Disagree  [ ] Strongly Disagree

22. Trade union organisers should be elected to their positions.

   [ ] Strongly Agree  [ ] Agree  [ ] Neither  [ ] Disagree  [ ] Strongly Disagree

23. The appointment of organisers is undemocratic.

   [ ] Strongly Agree  [ ] Agree  [ ] Neither  [ ] Disagree  [ ] Strongly Disagree

Thank you for giving your time to participate in this research. Could you please place this survey in pre paid and addressed envelope provided and mail as soon as possible. For further information please contact Paul Fallon on 0408 587 279