

Antecedents of union member retention in Right-to-Work environments

Right-to-Work environments

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Abstract

Purpose – States with Right-to-Work (RTW) law coverage have increased since 2012, with union membership decreasing. In such states, employees in union-represented positions cannot be required to be union members and/or pay dues, even though the union must still legally represent them. While union member retention in RTW states provides new challenges for unions, it has not been extensively studied. The purpose of this paper is to extend the literature by testing a model of intent to remain a union member in an RTW context using union loyalty as a mediator.

Design/methodology/approach – The model is based on how different types of exchanges shape intentions to remain a union member. To test the hypotheses, a sample of 475 members was used where an RTW law was about to be implemented in a Midwestern American state.

Findings – Union loyalty mediated the relationships between social and ideological exchanges with the union and employee intent to remain a union member and similarly mediated the organization–employee exchanges. Economic exchanges with the union were not a significant predictor in the full model.

Research limitations/implications – This study extends the employment-relations literature by helping us better understand member intent triggered by RTW laws. Insights are provided for both unions and organizations to better manage their relationships with employees.

Originality/value – This study advanced the employee-relations literature by providing a more holistic theoretically based understanding of how unions may retain members by using multiple forms of exchange, often studied separately in previous literature of member–union relationships.

Keywords Unions, Exchange theory, Member quitting, Right-to-Work, Union loyalty

Paper type Research paper