The Information Needs of Local Union Officials

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ABSTRACT
A questionnaire was distributed to local union officials in a Midwestern state in order to determine the information needs of local union officials and how they go about satisfying those needs. It was hypothesized that the institutional roles (such as negotiator, grievance handler, administrator, organizer, educator, and political worker) or individual roles (such as educational certification, personal problem-solving, writing, and communication) inhabited by these officials would determine the information sources used, whether formal (such as libraries, union research departments, union publications, and databases) or informal (such as personal networks, telephone inquiries, and local office files). It was also hypothesized that training in how to do research would affect the number and diversity of information sources used. Partial support was found for all these hypotheses. While many of the union roles showed similar rates of needs, there were enough differences to support the hypothesis that union role determines information needs. The data also show that the type of information need helps predict the information sources used and thus that union role predicts information source used. Finally, training has a positive effect on the number of information sources used and on the number of formal sources used. Comparisons to previous research are made and suggestions for further research are presented.

INTRODUCTION
The study of the information-seeking behavior of researchers and scholars has a long history; in the case of scientists and engineers, reaching back almost fifty years. User studies in the social sciences and humanities have
almost as long a pedigree, and substantial attention has also been paid to
the study of information use by persons in professions such as social work,
education, business, and medicine. Only recently has attention begun to
shift to investigations of the information-seeking behavior of ordinary cit-
izens in their work or daily life or of persons who have not had training in
research or information seeking, although some early studies examined
information needs of disadvantaged populations.

User studies have also generally focused on information provision—
that is, the nature and variety of collections and services available—or in-
formation use—that is, the various types of sources examined—rather than
on the information needs for which these sources are consulted. Although
published thirty years ago, the statement by Faibisoff and Ely (1971) that
“the bulk of studies purporting to examine information needs have in fact
evaluated the effectiveness of information delivery systems” (p. 5) is still
valid. The purpose for which the information is to be used and how this
might affect the nature of the information sources used and the individu-
al’s information-seeking behavior has not generally been investigated, per-
haps because, in the case of scholars and professional workers, the intend-
ed use appeared relatively obvious.

Studies of information use by union members and officials have fol-
lowed this same pattern. Beginning with the burgeoning of union member-
ship in the late 1930s and intensified by the establishment of the Joint
Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups of the American Library
Association (ALA) and the American Federation of Labor (now the Amer-
ican Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations [AFL-CIO])
in 1945, a series of studies has looked at the collections of labor materials
in (mostly) public libraries and the services provided by the libraries to labor
groups. These studies are generally surveys of the size and contents of spe-
cial labor collections in the libraries and the types of reference and outreach
services the libraries provide. The paper by Imhoff and Brandwein (1977)
is a typical example. Backhouse’s study (1982) is representative of a simi-
lar line of investigation in Great Britain.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Little empirical research on local union officials and their information
needs has been undertaken. The earliest found (Harper, 1963) was a sur-
voy of thirty-nine local union officers who were attending a union leader-
ship training program at the University of Chicago. Among other questions,
respondents were asked to rank a list of ten possible public library services
in order of their value to the local union and to indicate whether they had
used a public library in connection with union work. The service ranked
most highly by the officers was providing background information to sup-
port collective bargaining. Some union officers said they had used refer-
ence materials in the library, had read materials on issues of interest to
unions, and had gathered information to be used in publications or union educational programs.

Labor education program students were also surveyed by Clinton (1983) and Shields (1983). Clinton surveyed 129 shop stewards and safety representatives in three cities of different sizes in England who had participated in Trades Union Congress-sponsored labor education programs. In addition to questions about the use of specific types of materials, Clinton asked respondents to indicate which activities they had been involved in as trade union representatives in the previous year and how they obtained necessary information. In general, the officials sought information about specific and immediate workplace problems and for collective bargaining. Shields (1983) reports, from an earlier study of sixty-seven labor education students in England, that most of their information needs related to collective bargaining and that they required practical, problem-oriented information geared to local conditions.

Bendix (1965) used a combination of interviews and a questionnaire to collect data from 119 union officers and union staff members in New Jersey on their use of public library services. Her questionnaire asked whether the respondents had used specific public library services and what types of services they had requested in connection with their union work. Results indicated that full-time union research directors used the library as a major source for statistical and economic information for collective bargaining and that other union officials indicated using public library resources for political work, workers' education programs, organizing, grievance handling, and preparing union publications.

In his study, Comby (1992) used a questionnaire-based interview format to survey seven union research staff members in three Quebec union federations. He inquired about the type of research they did and the information sources they used. As might be expected, the research staff sought information to be used in collective bargaining, information about government programs and politics, information to be used in testimony before legislative bodies, and information to prepare union policy documents. Each federation had its own library, but the research staff also used other information sources.

Both Steffen (1984) and Rankin (1984) studied the information needs of members of a single union. Steffen (1984) surveyed forty shop stewards who were members of Local 54 of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union. He was not interested in investigating library use but rather in discovering what information the shop steward needed from the union to carry out his or her duties. In general, he found that shop stewards need information to help in communicating, problem-solving, and decision-making in specific workplace situations. Rankin (1984) surveyed eighteen officers and representatives in a single district council branch of the National and Local Government Officers' Association in Eng-
land. The officials cited information needs in ten different topic areas which concerned issues of working conditions, employer actions, and legislation.

These studies were undertaken to examine union officials' awareness of and use of information sources and services, particularly libraries, and the information needs of these officials have had to be inferred from the contents of the questionnaires or summary statements by the author.

**The Present Study**

The present study diverges from previous research by attempting directly to determine the information needs of local union officials and to examine their behavior in satisfying those needs. It seeks to answer the two-part question, what information do local union officials need to do their jobs as representatives of their members, and where do they get it?

Local union officials, such as local union officers, business agents, and shop stewards, have a variety of roles that involve using information. They may serve as office administrators, negotiators, grievance handlers, educators, organizers, writers and publishers, and problem solvers. The first hypothesis tested in this paper is that local union officials' roles determine their information needs and thus the information sources they use. Specifically:

- **Hypothesis 1a:** Union role determines information needs;
- **Hypothesis 1b:** Information needs determine the information sources used;
- **Hypothesis 1c:** Union role determines the information sources used.

For the purpose of analysis, information needs have been grouped into two categories. The first category is institutional needs, and in this are information needs such as information to be used in collective bargaining, grievance handling, handling of the union's business affairs, planning labor education programs, conducting organizing drives, and political campaign work. The second category is individual needs, and in this are information needs as information to be used in studying for promotion or certification, equivalency exams, and adult education classes; in solving personal problems of union members; in writing articles for union publications; and in communicating between the union and individual members.

Again, for the purpose of analysis, information sources have been grouped into formal sources and informal sources. Formal sources include libraries of all types, research departments at international union headquarters, union publications, online databases, and the Internet. While the Internet contains a large informal component in the form of e-mail and chat rooms, it is probably more likely to be used by local union officials to search for information from Web pages of government and other formal information sources, so it is included in the group of formal information sources. Informal sources include colleagues, telephone contacts, and office files.

Most local union officials have little or no staff and must do the work
themselves or with the assistance of volunteers, and not many of them (in this study a little less than half of all respondents) have had any training in how to find information. A second hypothesis is, thus:

Hypothesis 2: Training in finding information will affect the diversity and number of information sources used.

It is somewhat difficult to capture the concept, "information need." One method often used is to ascertain the specific categories of information needed, such as statistics, or bibliographies, or texts of journal articles. This approach, however, does not reveal the whole story. Although we may know what is requested or used, we still may not know what is needed. This study defines "information need" in terms of the purpose for which the information is to be used. The intended purpose should be a more accurate reflection of need.

**Method**

The data for this study was collected by means of a survey of labor union leaders in a Midwestern state. The mailing list was generated from a database of the names of individuals filing U.S. Department of Labor "Labor Organization Annual Report for Use by Labor Organizations with Less Than $200,000 in Total Annual Receipts" (LM-3) reports or the names of individuals filing "Labor Organization Annual Report That Must Be Used by Labor Organizations with $200,000 or More in Total Annual Receipts and Labor Organizations in Trusteeship" (LM-2) reports provided by the Food and Allied Service Trades Department (FAST) of the AFL-CIO. Additional names were generated through Internet searches to add the names of public sector union officials to the list.

**Sample**

A total of 1,518 surveys was mailed out; 70 were returned for bad addresses, leaving 1,448 good mailings. The usable responses totaled 239. Adjusting for bad addresses, this constitutes a response rate of 17.8 percent. While this is not the optimum response rate, it is in line with response rates for similar surveys involving unions (e.g., Fiorito, Jarley, Delaney, & Kolodinsky, 2000). However, given this rate of response, it is important to consider whether the respondents are significantly different from the population in any meaningful respect.

The respondents were union leaders from throughout the state. The sample was 87 percent male. Over 97 percent of the respondents had at least a high-school education, including 69 percent who had at least some college education. They served in a number of different positions in their unions, including elected officer (94 percent), staff representative/business agent (44 percent), shop steward (25 percent), community relations representative (13 percent), organizer (35 percent), apprenticeship/training
officer (13 percent), and political action officer (26 percent). Many reported serving in more than one capacity so the figures total more than 100 percent. The average number of members in each local union was 239. Bargaining units were only slightly smaller at 234.

Representativeness of the Sample. Table 1 illustrates that, although the response rate was not as high as expected, the sample closely matches the population of labor unions in the United States.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employer sector</th>
<th>National Proportion*</th>
<th>Sample Proportion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other**</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The survey allowed respondents to choose “other” for employer sector. National data does not include a response category for “other.”

Another characteristic of the sample is the total number of union members represented by the individuals who responded. Although the respondents were from a single Midwestern state, a total of 292,338 individuals were members of local unions whose officials responded to the survey. This is 29.4 percent of the total union membership in the state (BLS, 2001).

Measures

The survey instrument was a six-page questionnaire segmented into these six sections: information needs, Internet use, library use, training, information about the local union, and information about the respondent (see Appendix for text of questionnaire).

Information Needs. The first section asked participants to indicate whether they ever required information to deal with each of ten different areas of responsibility. The survey also asked respondents to indicate how frequently they performed each of these tasks and to rank the relative importance of each of them.

The final part of the first section asked respondents where they got information. Questions in other sections asked whether respondents used libraries or the Internet as a source for information.

Training. The fourth section asked questions about training received by the respondents. This section contained questions about training to do research in general and training in how to use the Internet as a research tool.
One of the questions in this section was a yes/no question as to whether the individual had ever received training, both general and for Internet use.

Information about the Local Union. The fifth section asked the respondents to provide information about their local unions. This was used to determine the representativeness of the sample, as well as to permit analysis of the information needs and information sources by different union characteristics. The questions in this section included questions asking what type of official the respondent was, what sector of the economy the union's members were employed in, the size of the local union and the bargaining unit, and the size of the city/town where the bargaining unit is located.

Information about the Respondent. The final section inquired about characteristics of the individual respondent. Included in this section were questions on gender, population size of residence city/town, and amount of formal education.

Procedure

We used a number of different procedures to answer the questions asked in our hypotheses. First, the demographic data were analyzed to determine whether the sample was representative of the population of interest. We then used this demographic data to statistically control for these characteristics as alternative explanations for the hypothesized relationships. Then, we used separate regressions to examine each hypothesis.

Control Variables. Both individual variables and local union variables were used as control variables. Among the individual variables used were tenure in union office, size of locality of residence, formal education, and gender. Local union variables included the size of the local and the bargaining unit, size of locality of bargaining unit, and economic sector of the employer.

Hypotheses. Different types of analyses were used according to the type of dependent variable used in the hypothesis. For some of the hypotheses, a perusal of frequency tables is all that was possible. Other hypotheses called for an assessment of the relationship between the number of needs or sources and the circumstances and characteristics. For these, the ordinary least squares method was used (Bohrnstedt & Knoke, 1994).

RESULTS

The results of the survey indicated at least partial support for all of the hypotheses we advanced. While many of the union roles showed similar rates of needs, there were enough differences to support our hypothesis that union role determines information needs. Additionally, it can be seen from the data that the type of information need helps predict the sources used. The union role predicts the information sources used according to our analysis. Finally, our data show that training is likely to have a positive effect on the number of information sources used and on the number of formal sources used.
Hypothesis 1a: Union Role Determines Information Need

An examination of the relative proportions of individuals in each union role who reported each of the information needs indicates that there are differences among the needs for each union role. This is shown in Table 2.

For example, shop stewards are less likely to report needing information across most categories, except for contract negotiations and communications. Apprenticeship/training officers report a greater need for newsletter/publication needs than other union roles. As might be expected, political action officers had the greatest need for political campaign information, although community relations officers followed closely behind.

Table 2. Proportion of Individuals in Each Union Role Reporting Each Need.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role (number in category)</th>
<th>Staff Rep/ Business Agent (105)</th>
<th>Shop Steward (59)</th>
<th>Community Relations Organizer (84)</th>
<th>Apprenticeship/ Training Officer (31)</th>
<th>Political Action Officer (63)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grievance/Arbitration</td>
<td>94.2</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>90.3</td>
<td>95.2</td>
<td>95.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract Negotiations</td>
<td>96.2</td>
<td>88.1</td>
<td>93.5</td>
<td>96.4</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotions/GED</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>45.2</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>51.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Problems</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>78.0</td>
<td>83.9</td>
<td>82.1</td>
<td>80.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newsletters/Publications</td>
<td>84.8</td>
<td>64.4</td>
<td>80.6</td>
<td>84.5</td>
<td>96.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Affairs</td>
<td>96.2</td>
<td>91.5</td>
<td>96.8</td>
<td>97.6</td>
<td>95.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor Education</td>
<td>76.2</td>
<td>54.2</td>
<td>64.5</td>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>74.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing Drive</td>
<td>83.7</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>77.4</td>
<td>86.9</td>
<td>96.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Campaign</td>
<td>81.7</td>
<td>66.1</td>
<td>87.1</td>
<td>82.1</td>
<td>77.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication with Members</td>
<td>90.4</td>
<td>91.5</td>
<td>93.5</td>
<td>94.0</td>
<td>90.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number in categories adds to more than 239 due to multiple responses.

Hypothesis 1b: Information Need Determines Information Source

We split information needs into two types, institutional and individual. Information to run the business affairs of the union is institutional, while information to assist a member with personal problems is individual in nature. Other institutional needs include contract negotiations, grievances and arbitrations, labor education programs, organizing drives, and political campaigns. Individual needs include information for promotion or certification, information to assist in writing for newsletters and publications, and information to aid communication with individual members.

Likewise, we divided information sources into two categories, formal and informal. Formal sources include libraries of all types, international union research departments, union publications, databases, and the Internet. Informal sources included asking people you know, phoning people or organizations, and examining files at the local union office.

Based on the hypothesis, we expect to find that institutional needs lead to individuals using formal sources. The results of the regression are shown in Table 3.
Table 3. Regression of Institutional Need on Formal Source.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>R²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>3.530***</td>
<td>.249</td>
<td>14.157</td>
<td>27.272</td>
<td>.327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Need</td>
<td>.266***</td>
<td>.051</td>
<td>5.222</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dependent Variable: Number of formal sources used; Independent variable: Number of institutional needs reported

* = p < .05; ** = p < .01; *** = p < .001

The mean number of formal sources used by individuals is about 3.5. The regression indicates that for each additional institutional need reported, individuals use approximately one-quarter more formal sources. Additionally, we can see that institutional need accounts for about one-third of the variance in the use of formal sources.

Hypothesis 1c: Union Role Determines Information Source

This hypothesis was partially supported by the results of the survey. While for some information sources there was a difference in the level of use between union roles, for other sources the usage was similar across union roles. This is seen in Table 4.

Table 4. Proportion of Individuals in Each Union Role Reporting Each Source Used.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role (number in category)</th>
<th>Staff Rep/ Business Agent (105)</th>
<th>Shop Steward (59)</th>
<th>Community Relations Organizer (84)</th>
<th>Apprentice Training Officer (31)</th>
<th>Political Action Officer (63)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Library at Int'l Union</td>
<td>63.5</td>
<td>54.2</td>
<td>56.7</td>
<td>57.8</td>
<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Dept at Int'l Union</td>
<td>77.9</td>
<td>59.3</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>72.3</td>
<td>73.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People You Know</td>
<td>93.3</td>
<td>93.2</td>
<td>96.7</td>
<td>94.0</td>
<td>86.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phoning Organizations</td>
<td>91.3</td>
<td>89.8</td>
<td>96.7</td>
<td>91.6</td>
<td>90.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Publications</td>
<td>99.0</td>
<td>91.4</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>92.8</td>
<td>90.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Union Files</td>
<td>97.1</td>
<td>89.7</td>
<td>93.3</td>
<td>94.0</td>
<td>93.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Database Subscribed to</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>44.8</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>56.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>74.0</td>
<td>76.3</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>83.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library</td>
<td>51.0</td>
<td>66.1</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>58.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number in categories adds to more than 239 due to multiple responses.

Shop stewards use the library at the international union less than anyone else, and apprenticeship/training officers use it more than individuals in other union roles. However, shop stewards use libraries (including public and university) more often than individuals in other roles. Staff representatives/business agents use libraries the least.

A regression of union roles on the use of formal sources indicates that staff representatives/business agents and organizers use significantly more formal sources than do individuals in other union roles. This is seen in Table 5.
Table 5. Regression of Union Role on Formal Source.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>R²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>4.207***</td>
<td>.134</td>
<td>31.303</td>
<td>4.719</td>
<td>.114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Rep/Business Agent</td>
<td>.345*</td>
<td>.182</td>
<td>1.896</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shop Steward</td>
<td>.352*</td>
<td>.197</td>
<td>1.790</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Relations</td>
<td>.022</td>
<td>.274</td>
<td>.080</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizer</td>
<td>.449**</td>
<td>.199</td>
<td>2.259</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprenticeship/Training</td>
<td>.143</td>
<td>.271</td>
<td>.527</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Action Officer</td>
<td>.343</td>
<td>.219</td>
<td>1.566</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dependent Variable: Number of formal sources used; Independent variable: Union role reported

* = p < .05; ** = p < .01; *** = p < .001

Staff representatives/business agents use slightly one-third of a formal source more on average than do individuals in other union roles. Organizers use nearly one-half of a formal source more than other individuals do. The union role explains about 11 percent of the variance in the use of formal sources.

Hypothesis 2: Training Determines Number and Diversity of Sources

The analysis of the survey indicates support for this hypothesis. This is shown in Tables 6 and 7.

Table 6. Regression of Training on Total Sources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>R²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>7.260***</td>
<td>.157</td>
<td>46.174</td>
<td>18.606</td>
<td>.073</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>.962***</td>
<td>.223</td>
<td>4.313</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dependent Variable: Number of sources used; Independent variable: Training in research reported

* = p < .05; ** = p < .01; *** = p < .001

Table 7. Regression of Training on Formal Sources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>R²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>4.415***</td>
<td>.115</td>
<td>37.908</td>
<td>16.415</td>
<td>.066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>.672***</td>
<td>.166</td>
<td>4.052</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dependent Variable: Number of formal sources used; Independent variable: Training in research reported

* = p < .05; ** = p < .01; *** = p < .001

The average number of total sources used by the untrained individual is a little more than seven. According to the regression of training received on number of total sources, an individual who reported having been trained
in research uses nearly a full source more on average than do individuals without training.

Additionally, trained individuals use more formal sources than do untrained individuals. The average number of formal sources used by untrained individuals is about four and one-half, while those trained use about two-thirds of a source more.

**DISCUSSION**

It is perhaps not surprising to find that an individual's role in the union determines whether there is an institutional or individual information need and similarly, this determines the information source used, whether formal or informal. Nor is it unexpected to find that training in how to do research has an effect on how an individual searches for information.

*Comparisons to Studies of Trade Unionists*

**Roles.** Other studies of unionists, while not using empirical methods, have reported similar findings. Rankin (1984) found some evidence that NALGO representatives' approach to information differed according to their job classification, length of service in union office, the bargaining structure and the union structure, their perception of themselves as administrator or activist, and their personality and gender. Bendix (1965), too, found that information sources used were related to organizational characteristics—such as bargaining structure, union structure, and the existence of a union research department—and to personal characteristics, such as educational attainment and personal motivation.

**Sources.** The use of various types of libraries reported in other studies was, in some cases lower, and in some cases similar, to the usage found in this study (see Table 4). Bendix (1965) reports that twenty-nine persons in her study (about 24 percent) had used the public library for union work. Of Clinton's (1983) respondents, 37.1 percent had used a public library, 11 percent a college library, and 20 percent a union library or research department. Harper (1963) found that 46 percent of her respondents had used libraries in the course of their union work. Rankin (1984) reports that only 17.7 percent of his respondents had used the public library. Shields (1983) does not report an exact figure, but states that few unionists in his study ever used libraries for union work.

Bendix (1965), Clinton (1983), Comby (1992), and Rankin (1984) also found that the use of other formal sources, such as union research departments, union publications, and databases, was low. Rankin observes that, not only were formal sources less used, but they were more likely to be found inadequate.

This study found a definite preference for use of informal information sources, regardless of union role (see Table 4). The percentages for use of personal networks (which ranged from 86.7 percent to 98.4 percent), tele-
phone inquiries (which ranged from 89.8 percent to 96.7 percent), and local office files (which ranged from 89.7 percent to 97.1 percent), were the highest of any information source in our study except for union publications.

While Clinton’s (1983) study concentrated on formal and printed sources, he also found indications that less formal sources were used by his respondents and they were reluctant to use nonverbal forms of communication. Comby’s (1992) researchers found oral information sources very important, especially their personal networks and the unionists and workers directly involved in the subject of their research. Shields (1983), too, found that oral communication was important in information seeking, and his respondents, as reported in Rankin (1984), preferred informal to formal sources by a ratio of six to four. Rankin himself found that the NALGO representatives overwhelmingly preferred informal sources, particularly interactive informal sources and people. Furthermore, without exception, the representatives relied on previous search patterns and existing personal networks, which consisted mainly of contacts with past or present coworkers or with other union representatives. Of Rankin’s respondents, 58.7 percent used people as sources and 41.3 percent used formal sources. Rankin characterizes their information-seeking behavior as a preference for least effort over maximum return.

Training. This study found that about 49 percent of our respondents had had training in research and that training has an impact on the number of information sources used. No comparable evidence is presented in other studies. Clinton’s (1983) and Harper’s (1963) samples were selected from unionists who had attended union-sponsored training programs, but no indication is given as to what kind. Only 27.8 percent of the NALGO representatives in Rankin’s (1984) study had had union training of any kind.

Comparisons to Studies of Public Library Use

Studies of public library use by the general population show a somewhat lower usage than by the trade unionists in this study. A study done for the National Center for Education Statistics (Collins & Chandler, 1997) found that about 44 percent of the households surveyed included individuals who had used the public library, while library use by unionists in this study ranged from 51 percent to 66.1 percent. Among the purposes for which the public library was used, only two are comparable in any way with needs identified in this study. In 20 percent of the households, an individual went to the public library to get information for personal use, such as for consumer or investment issues, and in eight percent of the households an individual used the library for a work assignment or to keep up to date at work. These purposes might be considered roughly analogous to the needs characterized in this study as “information for solving personal problems of union members” and the need for information for contract negotiations or grievance handling.
Comparisons to General Studies of Information-Seeking Behavior

The information-seeking behavior of local union officials is similar to that found in studies of scholars and other information users. Repeatedly, researchers have found that people use information sources that are the easiest to use and the most accessible; they follow search patterns that they have used before, even if unsuccessfully; they are unaware of potential information sources and how to find them; and they prefer oral information sources. In addition, individual differences in educational level and personality can influence information-seeking behavior. Individual information seeking fans out in concentric circles from the sources immediately at hand, through those close by, to those which involve an effort to use. Even persons highly trained in research first consult their personal resources, colleagues, and their social networks before turning to formal information sources.

What does this mean for information providers? First, providers should consider possible ways to tailor information services to the roles of local union officials. This might be done through surveys such as the one used in this study. Also, keeping in mind the importance of informal and oral information sources to local union officials, providers should attempt to ensure that these sources have accurate, timely, and authoritative information. This might be done through vigorous information dissemination programs or training programs. Second, for those local union officials whose roles involve a heavy use of formal information sources, information providers should facilitate training in how to do research.

Further Research

Backhouse (1982), in his recommendations, calls for a detailed study of trade union information requirements, especially at the local level. This study has only touched on one aspect. There is no general study of information needs and flows within unions. The Internet has already had an impact on union information dissemination and on unionists' information seeking, and this issue deserves more thorough investigation. Further research into information needs and priorities and the factors related to incentives and barriers to unionists' use of libraries, the Internet, and other information sources may shed light on the ways information services and providers within and outside the labor movement can help meet the information needs of local union officials.

Acknowledgments

We wish to thank Joseph Wilson for his assistance in coding the survey questionnaires, and also to thank the local union officials who participated in the survey.
### Appendix: Information Needs of Unions Survey

**Section 1: Your Information Needs**

1. There are many kinds of information that a union officer or activist might need. Below is a list of many of them. For each please answer these two questions:
   a. Do you ever need this kind of information?
   b. (If you do need it): How often do you need it?

#### (IF NEED):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of information</th>
<th>a. Ever need?</th>
<th>b. How often?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information to be used in contract negotiations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information to be used in handling grievances or arbitrations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials to be used to study for promotion or certification, or for high school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>equivalency exams, adult education classes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information for solving personal problems of union members</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information to be used for writing articles, newsletters, or union publications</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information to be used in handling the business affairs of the union</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information for planning labor education programs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information to be used in an organizing drive</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information for political campaign work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information to help you communicate between the union and individual members</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Please describe)
1c. Rank the following information needs from 1 to 11. 1 is most important, 11 is least important. Please use each number only once.

_____ Information to be used in contract negotiations
_____ Information to be used in handling grievances or arbitrations
_____ Materials to be used to study for promotion or certification, or for high school equivalency exams, adult education classes
_____ Information for solving personal problems of union members
_____ Information to be used for writing articles, newsletters, or union publications
_____ Information to be used in handling the business affairs of the union
_____ Information for planning labor education programs
_____ Information to be used in an organizing drive
_____ Information for political campaign work
_____ Information to help you communicate between the union and individual members
_____ Other

(PLEASE DESCRIBE) ____________________________________________

2. Do you get information . . .

   Yes No

a. From the library at international union headquarters? .......... 1  2
b. From the research department at international union headquarters? ........................................ 1  2
c. By asking people you know? ........................................ 1  2
d. By phoning people or organizations that you think can help? ........................................ 1  2
e. By looking through union publications? ........................................ 1  2
f. From files at the local union office? ........................................ 1  2
g. From a database that you or the union subscribe to? .......... 1  2
   (Examples include Lexis/Nexis, BNA, FAST)
h. From some other source? ........................................ 1  2

(PLEASE DESCRIBE) ____________________________________________

Section 2: Internet Use

3. Do you get information from the Internet?

   Yes No

4a. Where do you get access to the Internet?

   Home Work Union office Public library Other
   1     2     3     4     5

(IF OTHER, PLEASE DESCRIBE) ____________________________________________
4b. What type of Internet provider do you use?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local service provider (e.g., AOL, MSN)</th>
<th>National service provider (e.g., Union network)</th>
<th>Cable company</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5a. Is the information you currently get from the Internet something you used to get from a different source?
   Yes       No

5b. Where did you get it before?

(PLEASE DESCRIBE) ________________________________________________________________

6a. In general, how satisfied have you been with the information you have obtained from the Internet?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very satisfied</th>
<th>Somewhat satisfied</th>
<th>Neither satisfied or dissatisfied</th>
<th>Somewhat dissatisfied</th>
<th>Very dissatisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6b. What problems have you encountered with using the Internet? (Circle all that apply.)

- Too much information .................................................. 1
- Information too theoretical ........................................ 2
- Information not useful ............................................. 3
- Information not in order of relevance ............................ 4
- Information out of date ............................................ 5
- Information source hard to use .................................... 6
- I would have to pay to get the information I needed ...... 7
- I did not find all the information I needed .................. 8
- Too costly ..................................................................... 9
- Connection too difficult ........................................... 10
- Hardware problems .................................................... 11
- Software problems .................................................... 12
- Hard to get computer time ......................................... 13
- Other ........................................................................... 14

(IF OTHER, PLEASE DESCRIBE) ____________________________________________________

Section 3: Library Use

7a. Do you get information from a library?
   Yes       No

7b. What type(s) of library? (Circle all that apply.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Community college</th>
<th>College</th>
<th>University</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(IF OTHER, PLEASE DESCRIBE) ____________________________________________________
8a. In general, how satisfied have you been with the information you have obtained from the libraries?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very satisfied</th>
<th>Somewhat satisfied</th>
<th>Neither satisfied or dissatisfied</th>
<th>Somewhat dissatisfied</th>
<th>Very dissatisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8b. What problems have you encountered with using a library? (Circle all that apply.)

- Information too theoretical ........................................ 1
- Information not useful ................................................. 2
- Information was out of date ............................................ 3
- The material was presented from management's point of view ...... 4
- The information sources were hard to use ............................. 5
- Too much information ................................................... 6
- I was referred elsewhere ............................................... 7
- The library staff was not helpful .................................... 8
- I would have to pay to get the information I needed ................. 9
- I did not find all the information I needed .......................... 10
- Other reason .................................................................... 11

(Please describe) ................................................................

9. How could libraries be more useful to you? (Circle all that apply.)

- Answer reference questions over the telephone ........................... 1
- Contact union officials to find out their needs ........................... 2
- Develop or provide access to specialized labor databases ........... 3
- Do the research for you and deliver the results to you ................ 4
- Answer reference questions by e-mail ..................................... 5
- Offer public Internet access ............................................... 6
- Have a special section for labor materials ............................... 7
- Have more information on local businesses and industries .......... 8
- Buy more labor books and union publications ........................... 9
- Provide an alerting service on new items of interest to labor ........ 10
- Distribute better publicity about library services and collections .. 11
- Have better buildings and equipment .................................... 12
- Have longer hours .................................................................. 13
- Offer workshops on how to find information ............................ 14
- Other ................................................................................. 15

(Please describe) ................................................................

10. If the library offered specialized services, would you be willing to pay a fee to access these services?

Yes  No

11a. Do you have a card to use your local public library?

Yes  No
11b. How often do you use a library?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a month</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few times a year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than once a year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Section 4: Training**

12a. Have you ever had training in how to do research or find information?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12b. Who provided this training? (Circle all that apply.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>International union</th>
<th>College or university</th>
<th>Labor education program</th>
<th>Central labor body</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(IF OTHER, PLEASE DESCRIBE)  

12c. How helpful did you find it?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very helpful</th>
<th>Somewhat helpful</th>
<th>Neither helpful or unhelpful</th>
<th>Somewhat unhelpful</th>
<th>Very unhelpful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12d. How many hours of training did you receive?  

_____ hours

12e. If you received training was it a class dealing solely with research?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12f. If you have not received training, how helpful do you think it would be?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very helpful</th>
<th>Somewhat helpful</th>
<th>Neither helpful or unhelpful</th>
<th>Somewhat unhelpful</th>
<th>Very unhelpful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13a. Have you ever had training in how to use the Internet to find information?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13b. Who provided this Internet training? (Circle all that apply.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>International union</th>
<th>College or university</th>
<th>Labor education program</th>
<th>Central labor body</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(IF OTHER, PLEASE DESCRIBE)  

13c. How helpful did you find the training?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very helpful</th>
<th>Somewhat helpful</th>
<th>Neither helpful or unhelpful</th>
<th>Somewhat unhelpful</th>
<th>Very unhelpful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13d. How many hours of training did you receive?  

_____ hours
13e. If you received training was it a class dealing solely with the Internet?
   Yes  No

13f. If you did not receive Internet training, how helpful do you think it would be?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very helpful</th>
<th>Somewhat helpful</th>
<th>Neither helpful or unhelpful</th>
<th>Somewhat unhelpful</th>
<th>Very unhelpful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Section 5: Information About Your Union

14a. How long have you been a member of your union?  ____ years

14b. Circle all that apply  yes  no (IF YES):

a. Are you now any type of elected or appointed officer in your union? 1 2 For how many years?  ____ years
   
b. Are you now a staff representative or business agent? 1 2 For how many years?  ____ years
   
c. Are you now a shop steward? 1 2 For how many years?  ____ years
   
d. Are you now a community relations or counseling representative? 1 2 For how many years?  ____ years
   
e. Are you now an organizer? 1 2 For how many years?  ____ years
   
f. Are you now an apprenticeship and training officer? 1 2 For how many years?  ____ years
   
g. Are you now a political action officer? 1 2 For how many years?  ____ years

14c. What type of employer does your local bargain with?

Government  1
Manufacturing  2
Construction  3
Transportation  4
Trade  5
Agriculture  6
Other  7

(IF OTHER, PLEASE DESCRIBE) __________________________________________

14d. How many members are in the local?  ____ members

14e. How many are in the bargaining unit?  ____ members

14f. What is the size of the city/town where the bargaining unit is located?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City of over 1.5 million</th>
<th>City of 50,000—1.5 million</th>
<th>Area of less than 50,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section 6: Information About You

15a. What is the size of the city/town where you live?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City of over 1.5 million</th>
<th>City of 50,000—1.5 million</th>
<th>Area of less than 50,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15b. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

15c. How much formal education have you had?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Some high school graduate or GED</th>
<th>Some college graduate</th>
<th>Graduate degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thank you for completing this survey.

REFERENCES


