What makes organising work?
A model of the stages and facilitators of organizing.

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Abstract
This paper analyses the organising approach to unionisation. We advance a model proposing that organising occurs incrementally through a three-stage process which is facilitated by psychological/ideological, structural and experiential factors. The model is further explored using Australian interview data from 98 union officials across three unions. Rather than finding, as current literature suggests, that Australian unions are combining the philosophies of servicing and organising, we find that the unions in this study embrace the philosophy of organising, and have only attained the early stages of organising. The paper finds support for the model and findings suggest that unions may adopt more advanced stages of organising in the continued presence of certain facilitators.

Introduction
Over the last 20 years the focus for union revitalisation in advanced industrial economies has been on the organising approach. Organising has been adopted in the United States (Bronfrenbrenner, 1997; Bronfrenbrenner, Friedman, Hurd, Oswald, & Seeber, 1998), United Kingdom (Carter & Cooper, 2002) and in Australia (Cooper, 2004; Cregan, 2005; Crosby, 2005). Although there is “no single account of what constitutes the organising model” (Carter & Cooper, 2002, p. 713), this approach proposes the transformation of unions through members being “active participants rather than passive consumers” (Carter & Cooper, 2002, p. 713). Fiorito, Jarley and Delaney (1995) purport that the organising model is about the decentralisation of union power and enabling workers to “determine their own fates” (p. 633). There is a considerable body of literature suggesting that this approach can help unions to recruit and retain members (ACTU, 2003), and that it leads to greater union effectiveness and member commitment (Oxenbridge, 1997).

Organising has been described as a strong capacity-building tool (Bronfrenbrenner, Friedman, Hurd, Oswald, & Seeber, 1998; Carter & Cooper, 2002). However, it may be contingent upon a number of factors (Bronfrenbrenner, Friedman, Hurd, Oswald, & Seeber, 1998; Carter & Cooper, 2002). Yet, notable studies and unions themselves suggest that unions have not embraced organising completely. For example, it is claimed that unions engage in a mixture of organising and servicing (ACTU, 2003; Carter & Cooper, 2002; Cregan, 2005; Crosby, 2005; Heery, Simms, Simpson, Delbridge, & Salmon, 2000; Peetz, 2006). This would appear contradictory in the face of recent literature which represents organising as the answer to such problems as declining membership and neo-liberal attacks on unions by conservative employers and governments. Recent studies suggest that organising may be a panacea for the many challenges that unions face in the present conjuncture. Research on organising has focused primarily on defining organising (Bronfenbrenner, Friedman, Hurd, Oswald, & Seeber, 1998), describing the various organising activities – how to
organise (Bronfenbrenner & Juravich, 1998; Carter & Cooper, 2002; Ellem, 2004), and the outcomes of organising (e.g., recruitment and retention of new members and the development of actively engaged members) (Cregan, 2005; Crosby, 2005; Peetz, 2006). However, the general tone of this literature is almost evangelical, apparently in response to the enormity of the current crisis facing unions and the capacity for organising to reverse trends in falling membership. Moreover, there has been a singular focus on organising as a key strategy to revitalise unions.

While we take no issue with the potential benefits of organising, we suggest that organising is not yet fully understood, that it is conceptualised too narrowly as a recruitment tool, and has not been fully implemented (Jarley, 2003). Following from this, we reconceptualise organising as an incremental process, with small and modest beginnings, processes and outcomes and which later underpin larger and more sophisticated processes and outcomes. We suggest that organising be located within the broader context of union strategy. The union strategy literature posits that there are range of union activities and tactics required for unions to discharge their role as representatives of workers and mediators of the employment relationship. Since unions undertake organising in conjunction with a range of other activities, then it is plausible that certain union activities may support or inhibit organising. What are the factors that support organising? Through an analysis of the existing organising literature we identify key elements of the organising process and put forward a model of the stages and facilitators of organising. Using semi-structured interview data collected from 98 union officials across three Australian union branches we examine organising as one part of a suite of union activities within a wider union strategy. Our analysis identifies the critical facilitators enabling organising. The contribution of this paper is three fold. The paper locates organising within the broader context of union strategy; it builds on our knowledge of the organising approach by proposing and exploring a model that identifies the stages of, and facilitators that support organising; and the paper is based on an extensive and previously unpublished dataset comprising the views of Australian union officials actively engaged in the struggle of organising, reflecting on actual practice.

Union Strategy

Organising is an important contemporary union strategy with its roots in the past (Crouch, 1982; Fiorito, Jarley, & Delaney, 1993). The literature suggests that union strategy is also called union policy and union methods (Costa & Hearn, 1997; Crouch, 1982; Webb & Webb, 1965). Union strategy responds to the different environments in which unions interact, such as the workplace, industrial courts or the union office. Importantly, strategy is the simultaneous pursuit of a range of goals together, as well as the methods chosen to achieve the goals. The literature defines union strategy as “the collected and collective judgments made within a union about means and ends. [It is] those regular and characteristic ways unions attempt to achieve goals”(Gardner, 1989). Union strategy is formulated by different constituencies of the union, suggesting the role of participation and democracy in unions. Union leaders are clearly seen to play a major role in shaping strategy (Heery & Kelly, 1994; Kochan, Katz, & McKersie, 1986; Strauss, Gallagher, & Fiorito, 1991). Other stakeholders including union members, union officials, union employees and the broader environment have an impact on union strategy making:
In the end, union behaviour is the product of four broad influences that are constantly interacting upon one another: the desires of the members, the nature and abilities of the leadership, the capacities and opinions of subordinates, and the pressures of the environment” (Bok & Dunlop, 1970, p. 218).

Unions may not have complete discretion over their choice of strategy. As unions do not have equal access to the pursuit of goals, their strategies are constrained by available resources (Crouch, 1982). Over the past two decades, the Australian union movement has pursued a strategy of renewal consisting of union amalgamations (ACTU, 1995), the targeted recruitment of women and youth (ACTU, 1997), the packaging of member services (Gahan & Bell, 1999) and the reform of union organising techniques through the adoption of “Organising Works” (Gahan, 1995), which proposed the return to “grass-roots” methods, with an emphasis on collectivism and member independence (ACTU, 1995). These renewal tactics exist alongside other more traditional methods, such as bargaining and the pursuit of legislation for the protection of workers (ACTU, 1997). Overall union strategy is formulated in response to the pressure of the external environment; it is formulated through union structures and processes, and reflects the values of the union.

What is Organising?

Organising is upheld as the means to ‘rebuild union power and reverse membership decline’ (Cooper, 2004, p. 214); to build and democratise unions (Ellem, 2004, p. 77); to counter neo-liberal attacks on workers (Ellem, 2004, pp. 15-17); and to retaliate on the ‘war against unions’ (Crosby, 2005). In this sense organising is represented as having the ability to save the embattled union movement and has achieved the status of “saviour” of the contemporary union movement in Anglo-Saxon world (Carter & Cooper, 2002). Organising is a system of unionizing workers so that that they are ‘empowered to define and pursue their own interests through the medium of collective organisation’ (Heery, Simms, Simpson, Delbridge, & Salmon, 2000, p. 38). Organising requires a union building approach in which the union fosters activism, leadership and organisation amongst workers which can provide a nucleus from which recruitment and organisation building can occur (Bronfenbrenner & Juravich, 1998). Carter and Cooper (2002, p. 713) suggest that the organizing model relates to the “transformation of unions into dynamic organizations, where members … become active participants rather than passive consumers”. Moreover, through extensive training and participation, the organising seeks to encourage self-reliance in workers on the ground (Heery, Simms, Simpson, Delbridge, & Salmon, 2000).

The Common stages and Facilitators of Organising

Although there is “no single account” of organising (Carter & Cooper, 2002, p. 713), there have been many different documented cases of successful organising in the United States (Bronfenbrenner, 1997; Bronfenbrenner, Friedman, Hurd, Oswald, & Seeber, 1998), United Kingdom (Carter & Cooper, 2002) and in Australia (Cooper, 2004; Cregan, 2005; Crosby, 2005). Through the analysis of these different cases, it is possible to identify three common stages in the process of organising, including an initial, an intermediate and an advanced stage.

The initial steps reside in planning and preparing an organising campaign, obtaining relevant background information (e.g., about the firm/industry) and defining the group
to be organised (Crosby, 2005; Ellem, 2004). At this time, organisers make contact with potential members by door knocking and making house calls (Bronfenbrenner & Juravich, 1998; Ellem, 2004; Peetz, 2006). Intermediate stages include training and educating workers (Crosby, 2005) and identifying issues and grievances for developing campaigns. The training/education component consists of consciousness raising and politicising based on the analysis and interpretation of workers’ own experiences (Crosby, 2005; Ellem, 2004; Heery, Simms, Simpson, Delbridge, & Salmon, 2000) and is a crucial means of empowering workers (Bronfenbrenner & Juravich, 1998). More advanced stages of organising involve identifying and developing (training) potential new leaders at the local level, maintaining and advancing the campaign around which organising is taking place and institutionalising an organising culture (Crosby, 2005). The creation of an organising culture involves work on two levels. On one level, there is work required to motivate and manage the performance of organisers (Crosby, 2005). On the other level, the union must be able to develop structures to enable supportive relationships between groups of workers at different strategic levels, between different unions, and with external stakeholders (Jarley, 2003) (e.g., between the union and government bodies, NGO’s and community organisations). At each stage, relevant collective structures are built (Bronfenbrenner, Friedman, Hurd, Oswald, & Seeber, 1998; Ellem, 2004).

Figure 1: Stages in Organising

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early Stage</th>
<th>Intermediate Stage</th>
<th>Advanced Stage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning /making contacts (attracting potential members)</td>
<td>Training/education</td>
<td>Developing other campaigns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify leaders/organisers</td>
<td>Developing campaign</td>
<td>Managing leader/organiser performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build workplace group</td>
<td>Linking workplace groups</td>
<td>Linking workplace groups with external groups</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: derived from our cross-analysis of the literature (Bronfenbrenner, Friedman, Hurd, Oswald, & Seeber, 1998; Carter & Cooper, 2002; Crosby, 2005; Ellem, 2004; Heery, Simms, Simpson, Delbridge, & Salmon, 2000; Jarley, 2003; Peetz, 2006))

Figure 1 summarises the three different stages of organising. Although it is feasible to look at organising through a three stage process, this summary does not represent the many activities undertaken at each of the stages nor does it convey the complexity or fairly represent the enormous challenges inherent in organising that are clearly illustrated in existing accounts of organising (e.g., Ellem, 2004; Crosby, 2005 and Peetz, 2006). Alongside these simplified steps is an enormous amount of effort requiring the investment of significant financial, emotional and human resources of the union. Moreover, key studies implicate a number of factors that may facilitate the organising process.

In an early American study, Fiorito, Jarley and Delaney (1995) found that organising effectiveness was enhanced by innovation and also found that internal union democracy enhanced union success in organising. This finding may have encouraged...
unions to experiment with different tactics in organising. In their U.S. study, considered seminal to organising, Bronfenbrenner et al. (1998) identify numerous tactics and strategies to support organising. The key message of this work is that unions have to transform their local-level structures, to make them more democratic, and more member-oriented:

‘Clearly, the majority of unions continue to run very traditional campaigns that do not involve personal contact, leadership development and the internal and external pressure tactics so essential to establishing the rank and file commitment and support necessary to overcome increasingly aggressive employer campaigns’ (p. 29)

According to Bronfenbrenner et al (1998), this can be achieved by ‘the use of a rank and file intensive model for organising’ which consists of finding, developing and empowering members and developing strong and compelling leaders through formal and informal training, and experience in the field (p. 35).

In the UK, John Kelly (1998) adapted Charles Tilly’s (1978) mobilisation theory and used it to explain trends in union membership and the success of organising campaigns. Kelly explains mobilisation and organising through ‘collective action frames’ which include identifying and harnessing worker dissatisfaction and perceptions of injustice; the location of an agent to blame; development of a common social identity among workers; belief in collective success; access to a well-resourced organisation; developing effective local leaders/mobilisers, and low costs of action. These factors have been incorporated in organising approaches (Carter & Cooper, 2002; Heery, Simms, Simpson, Delbridge, & Salmon, 2000; Peetz, 2006). Kelly and Kelly (1994) argue that group cohesiveness among rank-and-file members is an important antecedent of union activism.

In Australia, studies have highlighted the importance of unions developing the administrative structures to support the development of an organising culture (URCOT, 1996) the role of financial resources and super-structures to support organising (e.g., union amalgamations) (Crosby, 2005), and union unity and collaborations (Carter & Cooper, 2002; Crosby, 2005; Ellem, 2004). Moreover, Australian case study evidence indicates that organising requires mounting ‘exhaustive campaigns’ which may be exhausting for organisers, since they require endless engagement, commitment, loyalty and devotion(Ellem, 2004). Crosby (2005) suggests that ‘the fundamental task is one of education… and hope. Building hope is the most difficult element of the process’ (p. 147). All the above studies suggest that organising is underpinned and motivated by union values which are reflected in the activities and processes of organising. These values include social justice and democracy (Ellem, 2004; Strauss, 1991), participation (Bronfenbrenner, Friedman, Hurd, Oswald, & Seeber, 1998; Ellem, 2004; Peetz, 2006), and unity, collaboration and group cohesiveness (C. Kelly & Kelly, 1994).

We contend that the literature clearly suggests that while the stages involved in organising may appear simple, the organising process is highly complex, highly challenging and resource-intensive. This is because it is uniquely adapted to each union’s circumstances and requires various and substantial resources, numerous experimental activities and several diverse factors to support it. However, we argue
that it is possible to distinguish certain fundamental commonalities among the various factors involved in the organising approach. Further, we propose that these constitute the key factors which support organising.

Moreover, we advance that the key factors which support organising are as follows. First, there are structural factors involved in organising. As suggested in the Bronfenbrenner, et al (1998) case studies, these include building groups of workers in the workplace, developing mechanisms for communication between workers in different workplaces, and developing mechanisms for communication between workers and external bodies (e.g., as in union-community collaborations) (Jarley, 2003). As indicated in Ellem’s (2004) study of the PMU, structural factors also relate to the support provided by existing unions to new ones including moral and financial support. Structural factors are synonymous with and integral to organising and are thus identified as crucial factors.

Second, there are psychological and ideological factors involved in organising. As per Kelly (1998); Ellem (2004); and Crosby (2005) the psychological factors include the motivation and commitment of organisers, the social identification of members with the union, and the development and engagement of leaders. Ideological factors are closely related to psychological factors (Prilleltensky, 2000) and include the union values expressed in the various activities of organising. These values include social justice and democracy, participation, and unity, collaboration and union cohesiveness. Union cohesiveness refers to the extent of agreement within a union branch on strategic, tactical and ideological issues. This is an important factor supporting organising because cohesiveness around specific values (e.g., social justice, democracy, participation, commitment, etc.) is a fundamental underpinning of unionism. Cohesiveness of values not only brings members together, but galvanizes members and leaders into collectively purposeful action. The psychological and ideological factors motivate and inspire organising activities (Bartram, Stanton, & Elovaris, 2008; R Burchielli, 2006; Cregan, 2005) and hence are identified as crucial to organising.

Third, there are experiential factors involved in organising. These include the specific activities of participants engaged in organising and related campaigns. As per Bronfenbrenner et al (1998), Ellem (2004) and Crosby (2005), experiential factors include door knocking, discussions between workers, participation in training courses and experimentation in organising techniques. The experiential factors are the means through which organising is achieved and are therefore crucial to organising. We submit that without these factors, there could be no organising and we put forward that these are the key factors that support organising. These are summarised in figure two.
Figure 2: Facilitators of Organising

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facilitators of Organising</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tr>
<td>Psychological / ideological factors</td>
<td>• Leadership&lt;br&gt;• Union values: social justice, democracy, participation&lt;br&gt;• Group cohesiveness&lt;br&gt;• Motivation&lt;br&gt;• Commitment&lt;br&gt;• Social identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural factors</td>
<td>• Moral / financial resources&lt;br&gt;• Building groups of workers in the workplace&lt;br&gt;• Developing mechanisms for communication between groups of workers in different workplaces&lt;br&gt;• Developing mechanisms for communication between groups of workers and external bodies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiential factors</td>
<td>• Worker training&lt;br&gt;• Worker discussions&lt;br&gt;• Worker campaigns&lt;br&gt;• Door knocking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: derived from our cross-analysis of the literature (Bronfenbrenner, Friedman, Hurd, Oswald, & Seeber, 1998; Carter & Cooper, 2002; Crosby, 2005; Ellem, 2004; Heery, Simms, Simpson, Delbridge, & Salmon, 2000; Jarley, 2003; Kelly & Kelly, 1994; Peetz, 2006)

The factors that support organising (Fig 2) are related to the different stages of organising (Fig 1), because they describe the details involved in the individual and group processes of organising and serve to elucidate the complexity involved throughout the various phases of organising. The relationship between the stages of organising and the other related and supporting factors is represented in figure three.
Figure 3: A model of the stages and facilitators of the organising approach to unionism

![Diagram showing stages and facilitators of organising]

(Source: derived from our cross-analysis of the literature (Bronfenbrenner, Friedman, Hurd, Oswald, & Seeber, 1998; Carter & Cooper, 2002; Crosby, 2005; Ellem, 2004; Heery, Simms, Simpson, Delbridge, & Salmon, 2000; Jarley, 2003; Kelly & Kelly, 1994; Peetz, 2006)

The model in fig. 3 combines figures 1 and 2. It suggests that organising progresses developmentally through three stages. The factors that support organising underpin the three stages. In other words, we propose that the different stages of organising are delivered through the activities and processes represented by the supporting factors or facilitators.

In summary, there is evidence to suggest that organising shares the key features of union strategy: organising enables unions to respond to their environments; organising encourages the development of participative structures and processes; organising reflects, indeed reproduces union values such as democracy, participation, collaboration and cohesiveness. Moreover, through our analysis of the literature we derive a two-part model which explains the organising process. The first part identifies different stages of organising; the second part proposes three key factors involved in organising. Our paper explores this model using the following questions. Is there any evidence of a three stage model of organising? Is there any evidence of the facilitators of organising?

**Methodology**

Our data consists of interviews with union officials at three union branches, who report on the extent of organising at the union and how the union organises. The interviews were based on a semi-structured interview format based on union activity. Ninety-eight interviews were conducted between 1997 and 2000. The entire staff of each of three unions was interviewed including Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, Organisers, Industrial Staff and Administrative Staff. The cases were selected on the basis of willingness to participate.
The interviews resulted in a large amount of rich data and thus the information-handling abilities of ‘NUD*IST’ were used. The use of ‘NUD*IST’ facilitated the process of “data reduction” (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This method of analysis employs classic analytic strategies such as coding, recording reflections and seeking patterns or commonalities (Kvale, 1996), leading to the elaboration of a small set of generalizations. These may then be “confronted” with existing theoretical constructs (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) on relevant concepts such as mobilisation and union strategy.

While there were 98 interviews, there were only three participating unions. Given the small number of unions in this study, it is difficult to generalise our findings to the larger body of Australian unions. This limitation notwithstanding, the interview material is valuable because it provides in-depth insights into the day-to-day work, and the internal dynamics of the unions. As there is a scarcity of data about union officials, this study makes a valuable contribution (Burchielli, 2004; Clark, Grey, & Solomon, 1996; Kelly & Heery, 1994).

**Union Background**

We have given each of the unions fictitious names based on their industry to protect their identities. We have called them Support Union, Service Union and Makers Union. All three unions had undergone various amalgamations in line with ACTU policy (ACTU, 1987, , 1995). Moreover, all of the unions in this study had suffered large member losses, largely due to union busting legislation (MacDermott, 1997), such as the Victorian Employee Relations Act, 1992 and Workplace Relations Act, 1996. Table 1 demonstrates declining union membership patterns from 1990 until 1999.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support Union</strong></td>
<td>34,503</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>27,884</td>
<td>14,244</td>
<td>17,151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Service Union</strong></td>
<td>27,018</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>11,046</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>11,669</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Makers Union</strong></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>23,626</td>
<td>19,157</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>15,125</td>
<td>12,190</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The Support Union has members from various industries including local government and clerical workers. It has developed training programs to support organising and currently has a stable membership. The Service Union has members from various industries such as hospitality and cleaning, and is characterised by the dominance of non-standard work. This union has developed training programs to support organising. The Makers Union covers workers in the manufacturing sector. This union has developed training programs to support organising but at the time of data

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1 NUD*IST stands for Non-numerical Unstructured Data; Indexing, Searching and Theorising. It is a computer package designed by QSR to aid users in handling non-numerical and unstructured data in qualitative analysis. QSR NUD*IST does this by supporting processes of indexing, searching and theorising.

* AIR data was not available in all of the same years for the three years
collection there was no agreement about the implementation of organising in the face of a diminishing manufacturing industry.

**Findings: Evidence of union organising**

The data suggests that all three unions were beginning to adopt the philosophy, tactics and activities associated with organising. However, each of the three unions indicated being at different stages in their adoption of the organising approach.

**The Service Union**

The Service Union interview data suggests that until recently this union had relied heavily on the use of systemic devices to increase union numbers and less on organising and developing member militancy.

“We had a lot of members [in the past]; we had closed shops and an easy time for the union.”

“The union's history is quite specific; while it has consistently been considered a left union, it had an entrenched management which was one where people were selected for positions of power because they had come from the Brewery membership section. We had a chronic drinking problem among officials, and while there were women in the union, the main business of the union was transacted in the pub and it was a sorry period for women. At the time, the membership was healthy because we had a closed shop culture in the pubs; there was no coherent organising or recruitment strategy.”

The use of payroll deductions and closed shops, while beneficial in maintaining union numbers, are not associated with organising and building activism. At the time of data collection, the Service Union was under new leadership, and had undergone significant organisational change and staff turnover due to factional disputes. Moreover, these disputes had had a draining effect on financial and other resources. In addition, the branch was on the verge of completing the final stages of amalgamation with two other branches of the Union. Thus, turbulence was experienced through internal change and upheaval which impacted on this union’s adoption of the organising model. Moreover, the interview data clearly suggests that this union was struggling to implement the organising approach:

“There’s the goal of servicing the membership, and not really to develop the membership. They do have training but that's just one aspect. There are no workplace campaigns or attempts to build activism by targeting workplaces over a period of time, of building or encouraging or engaging members with what the union is doing.”

“While we can state what we want to be or look like, we haven't been good at converting this to reality and really changing the organisation. … we've adopted the language of the Organising Works program, but what we do is inconsistent with that, so that how we behave is sometimes the opposite.”

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2 Service Union Interview Data; Document C11
3 Service Union Case Data, Interview with the Secretary.
4 Service Union Interviews; Document C18
5 Service Union Interviews; Document C30
“there is no encouragement to empower the members to deal with their own issues as a group. So what works out is that the union is assisting in maintaining the members dependence on the union; its accepted by the secretary that the profile of our membership is that they will never be unionists or be active. I don't know what the basis is of this understanding, although I understand that we have a high turnover in our membership.⁶

The data suggests that the financial constraints of this union are responsible for a lack of training programs to develop organisers’ use of organising techniques. The union’s Education and Training Officer suggests that while the union’s executive are aware of the principles and benefits of organising, they lack the finances to deliver the training to officials and delegates.

“What I would like to see would be to do some intense work with some organizers in specific areas….using the strategies of [the organising model] which works with the delegates and the organizer and takes a lot of pressure off the organiser. It would be slow work; it’s taking the first step before walking the mile. We need to experience success and we need to involve people in the workplace in a much greater way because the organizers just can’t do it on their own….we can’t afford to have [organizers] not coping without doing something about it, and we can’t afford to have good organizers leaving.

The Maker’s Union

At the time of data collection, The Maker’s Union was in a transitional phase in it’s amalgamation process and the data suggests that they had significant philosophical disagreement regarding the union’s overall strategy.

“We don't have the same united vision. The two unions are pulling in different ways.”⁷
“There is every type of conflict imaginable. There was a very traumatic process of amalgamation, with such different values and cultures.” ⁸

During our study the branch held various seminars based on the ACTU’s promotion of the organising framework, and it is clear that this union was at a very preliminary stage of considering how it could adopt and implement an organising approach. Union documents highlight that this branch had a strong focus on the survival of the union branch through the development of existing members and the recruitment of new members. The data also demonstrates that the union intended to develop a more active and militant membership consistent with the organising approach:

“The members are the union. We need to maintain and develop an active membership. Develop and resource membership involvement in all union activities, decision making, campaigns and structures. Reflect the diversity of the membership in the Branch and all its work. Focus on recruitment. Ensure a viable future for the Branch. Develop and implement a comprehensive recruitment strategy.”⁹

Due to membership losses based on industry changes, this union had a strong focus on recruitment:

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⁶ Service Union Interviews; Document C15
⁷ Maker’s Union Interviews: Document A6
⁸ Maker’s Union Interviews: Document A29
⁹ Maker's Union. TCFUA Strategic Planning Seminar Action Report. Melbourne.; p. 3
“Recruitment has to be one of the goals - in the last 3 to 4 months we have lost approximately 400 members because of factory closures.”

The data suggests that this union was moving towards the adoption of organising techniques but had not yet begun to implement an organising model and that this was largely due to resistance to change within the union.

“Some organisers are unwilling to change. They’re holding on to old work styles.”

“There's a lot of resistance from organisers to be trained - they don't like the idea of being told how to do their job.”

**The Support Union**

There is evidence to suggest that this union had adapted the principles of organising as a strategy for recruiting members, building capacity, building militancy and helping members become more independent of the union and more self-reliant.

“The strategy now is more basic and more about surviving and its heavily focused on recruitment and building our numbers. We’re using the principles of the organising model so that we give the members the power, the skills to help themselves. It’s more basic but it deals better with the goal of furthering the industrial and social interests of workers through participation, consultation and empowerment.”

The Support Union had a history of strong militancy among its members. Moreover, while this union had also recently completed an amalgamation, this had gone fairly smoothly and the data suggests there was considerable enthusiasm towards the amalgamation process which had increased resources for this branch without any attendant conflict:

“Regarding the amalgamation, my view is that you've got to go all the way. The cost savings can be used in servicing our members. The economic issues are important; with things being so tough we can't afford to be wasteful … The full amalgamation, with the other branch, would free up one out of two organisers for every issue dealt with at [local workplaces]. We don't have proper research staff, and we need them. I’d like to see organisers working on a geographical basis, looking after both [sectors].”

“The merging of the branch was a pretty important part of the strategy for achieving our goals; it gave us more resources; or that is the theory, anyhow, that we will free up some resources... [We have to] regroup and reorganise, refocussing on areas of strategic importance rather than focusing on what comes in the door. That’s difficult for unions, because you have to go against your first impulse; we have to get resources; things that are already out there. To me, merging the branches is the ultimate way in the short term.”

This union had begun implementing new training programs to equip organisers with the means to recruit and organise new members; it had started to develop members so

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10 Maker's Union interviews; Document A14
11 Maker's Union interviews; Document A19
12 Maker's Union interviews; Document A24
13 Support Union interviews; Document B32
14 Support Union Case Data; Interviews with the Leadership
15 Support Union Case Data; Interviews with the Leadership
that they would be independent of the union and the branch was using sophisticated
techniques focusing on membership demographics to organise new members.

“We used to just say they’re out there; go and get ‘em. Now we’re looking at the detail. Where are
they? We are looking at the different areas. We are developing an understanding of the differences
between our potential members. Whoever recruits these people has to have an understanding of the
different occupations. That’s part of the strategy.”

The Support Union had developed campaigns around current workplace change issues
that were responsive to member concerns and was experimenting with new ways of
servicing members in order to free union resources for organising. The data indicates
that the branch was beginning to develop new and flexible means of responding to
member enquiries through a call centre which would free organisers from the rigours
of responding to individual members, but still satisfy member’s needs.

“There is a…. restructure of the way we do business. We’re trying to divide our membership into
those we’ve identified as important to be collectively organised and those areas where the
individual members do not want to be organised. They want the membership, may want some
services, but don’t want us around. About 10 % of our membership consists of these people. They
join because they have problems, or anticipate them, and servicing these members uses up an
inordinate amount of our time and resources. What were trying to do is set up a unit where these
people don’t have an organiser, but there are resources they can tap into, through periodical
information, and other existing resources. For example, the ACTU hotline which is available to
unions which we could use to stay in touch with these members, or other resources. This is scary
because it challenges the notion of what unions are there for it challenges community attitudes and
organiser impulses to help individuals. But we have to try a major departure from how we have
worked until now because what we are used to doing hasn’t been working in the sense of growing
our union.”

The data provides evidence that the three unions in our study supported the organising
approach; however each of these unions had achieved different degrees in the
implementation of organising. To what extent are the factors that support organising
present in each of the three unions?

**Psychological and ideological factors supporting organising**

The model we are exploring advances that the psychological and ideological factors
are union leadership, the motivation and commitment of union members and officials,
the social identity of members and officials, and the involvement of specific union
values such as social justice, democracy, participation and group cohesiveness (unity
and collaboration).

**Union Leadership**

Union leadership is a key supporting factor of organising and effective union
functioning. Union leadership is most obviously exemplified in the positions of
Secretary and Assistant Secretary who have the authority to make decisions at the
union branch. Our data suggests that union leaders are well regarded for their long-
standing commitment to the union, their ‘hands-on’ approach and closeness to the
members, and their consultative styles of management. Overall the three unions

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16 Support Union interviews; Document B11
17 Support Union interviews; Document B7
performed differently on this variable: The Support Union had a highly respected leadership team based on an open style of management:

“The Branch is managed in a very democratic way; it is open and cooperative; whereas in other organisations you might think twice about voicing an opinion which is different from the boss’s. At the end of the day, the Secretary is the boss but she's also a good team player.”

The data also suggests that effective leadership consists of the ability to make decisions and to enforce accountability. Mechanisms of accountability are perceived both as a form of organisational support to employees and as a checking mechanism to evaluate the quality of service delivered by the organisation:

“The staff are consulted quite a lot and our executive are policing what the full-time elected officials and the staff are doing. So that the staff have more involvement and the executive have more power, so it’s like a system of accountability… I’m accountable to the members at election and to executive and to the members. Its not an isolated position, because I have so many people I can call on for support and advice.”

“If there are problems, it is known from the membership, because he's hands on and gets to hear from the members. He’ll investigate complaints and works on a satisfactory resolution; this is done in a consultative way; that's his style.”

Another key role of the leader is to formulate and communicate a vision and a strategy for the branch. At the Maker’s Union, the Secretary was well regarded for his capabilities including his vision for the union and his tolerance of diversity:

“He is a good person with strong values. What he's done with employment of specialist staff is good for the members. His views are long-sighted and strategic. Few here have the vision he has. He's open to NESB organisers here otherwise we wouldn't be here.”

In contrast, the Service Union data indicates that the leadership team was perceived to be under-performing in terms of enabling staff participation and democratic decision-making, not formalising organisational procedures, not ensuring staff accountability and performance, not making critical decisions and generally not implementing policy formulated by officials:

“Time management is poor; they don't complete things on time, meetings are cancelled; the reporting functions seem fewer than in private industry, and there seem to be few procedures in place for reporting and for other things. The job roles are also not completely clear. … there are no schedules, no clear lines of management, and no clear roles.”

“The management means well and wants to foster open communication and be more democratic. The Secretary expects people to take initiative; she's very adaptable in terms of understanding employees’ personal concerns, but she's slow in following up….. So one of the things we lack is guidance and the knowledge of what's expected of us. I don't mind being autonomous but without

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18 Support Union interviews; Document B2
19 Support Union Case Data; Interviews with the Leadership.
20 Support Union interviews; Document B10
21 Makers’ Union Interviews; Document A22,
22 Service Union Interviews; Document C19
some guidance it can lead to an attitude that anything may be acceptable or that my job is not very
important.”

“There's a systemic ignoring of things which is conducive to low morale.”

“There is no measurement of performance in here. We tried a monthly meeting of organisers for
performance standards but it wasn't followed through. A number of things are not followed
through: training sessions, group sessions; debriefing, so people become cynical and bitter because
they feel their issues are not addressed.”

In the case of the Maker’s Union the leadership was perceived to be strong on the
measures of having a vision for the union and being democratic, but was perceived to
be weak on the measures of making final decisions and discharging authority:

“The Secretary allows people to have an opinion…. The advantages are that you can take part […]
His style flows on to the membership; they can participate, so the leadership style creates a culture
that flows on.”

“He leaves thing open-ended - this is good if people are committed and have common goals, or in
an ideal world. He gives too much leeway. We all consult, but at the end of the day we've got 10
different policies. I don't know if its because he feels he can't push too hard.”

“His style is more devolved and consultative than the previous Secretary, but less clear. The
union had a culture of collectivity, with the amalgamation, there has been a result of less direction
and clarity partly because he has to juggle the different policies. [The] political factions create the
current situation (…) More decisive action would lead to a shake-up; I believe that the fight needs
to be had, and the union can move on from there.”

Clearly union leaders can support organising by articulating their vision and the
union’s strategy. Moreover, in their authority and decision making role they can make
available the necessary resources required for an organising culture.

Union Values and Cohesiveness

The key union values reflected in the data include participation, collectivism, equality
and justice. These are the overarching values that underlie the purpose of unions and
the rationale for union work, strategy and tactics including the rationale for
organising. The data indicates that all three unions carried out their work underpinned
by these values:

“The Secretary allows people to have an opinion…. The advantages are that you can take part […]
His style flows on to the membership; they can participate, so the leadership style creates a culture
that flows on.”

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and clarity partly because he has to juggle the different policies. [The] political factions create the
current situation (…) More decisive action would lead to a shake-up; I believe that the fight needs
to be had, and the union can move on from there.”

An effective union is one that operates democratically leading to give membership ownership.
It’s not possible to have purely pragmatic unions because then you just achieve efficiency (…) and
you are not empowering workers in and outside of workplaces. An effective union is able to give
concrete form to certain ideals and able to develop its membership - politicising broadly.”

23 Service Union Interviews; Document C11
24 Service Union Interviews; Document C11
25 Service Union Interviews; Document C3
26 Maker's Union Interviews; Document A25
27 Maker's Union Interviews. Document A24
28 Maker's Union Interviews. Document A17
29 Makers’ Union Interviews; Document A24
“Effectiveness is not just about numbers; it’s about members having confidence in the organisation and in themselves that the union can protect them, because they are the union. … having such a relationship to the membership where they believe they are the union, not me or the union Secretary.”

“I think that the bottom line is that both (divisions) want to look after their members; I think they are about social justice and protecting their members rights and entitlements. The members are similar in the two unions in that they are low paid, highly casualised so I think that the goals are similar; there's nothing written down as such; we don't have mission statement; you're meant to know it in your waters; unions attract people who hold those beliefs about unions.”

A second set of key union values are militancy, loyalty, commitment, and unity. These are the procedural values required to be able to achieve the overarching values of justice:

“There is a lot of hard work - most people here don't count their hours.”

“We have some top notch workplaces; excellent stewards and members because they feel tough and able to look after themselves…. In another couple of years they will be running themselves if we keep the same stewards and keep up the training and they stay there.”

“We [need to] ensure that people in [our] industries have an organised industry voice; so I want the union to survive in that particular sector. … The union provides one of the few organisational presences available to employees….. We do want to maintain sufficient numbers to continue to be that presence for the sector.”

Importantly the data indicates that these values have to be substantially shared and there has to be agreement (or cohesiveness) among staff and officials in union branches about the key role of these values in terms of supporting organising and most other strategic union initiatives.

“Without people feeling ownership and a common idea of what needs to be done, you can’t be fully effective.”

“It’s realistic to expect a range of views and behaviours. I think I am aware that I may work with some difference from others, and they can all be valid as long as we can still work together.”

“It is necessary to have a uniformity of values, principles, and policies; otherwise it creates isolation and also non-accountability.”

The data relating to the manifestation of union values clearly suggests that union organising requires expending extraordinary efforts, beyond normal working hours...
and indicates that union organisers make many personal sacrifices in order to achieve organising success:

“We…. get people who will work their backsides off, who are committed to the cause. The task is difficult and can wear people out, so they need to understand the importance of their work and have a devotion to it.”38

**Experiential factors that support organising**

According to our model, experiential factors include practical activities that are related to organising such as worker training, worker discussions, worker campaigns and locating new members via door-knocking or similar activities. The data indicates that organising success is contingent upon these various activities. For example, the Support Union was sending organisers into previously unionised regional areas to meet and organise potential members at greenfield sites. Moreover, this union reported having successful training programs to assist in new organising.

“This education process has really worked well; the boss just can’t pull the wool over their eyes…. they will be running themselves if we keep the same stewards and keep up the training.”39

This union had a history of militancy40 and grass-roots organising which involved the use of techniques such as workplace meetings and discussions with members. On the other hand, although it was acknowledged by officials at the Service and the Maker’s Unions that experiential factors were integral in supporting organising, for various reasons these unions had difficulty in resourcing these initiatives.

**Structural factors that support organising**

The structural factors in our model include unions having moral and financial resources; building groups of workers in the workplace; developing mechanisms for communication between groups of workers in different workplaces; and developing mechanisms for communication between groups of workers and external bodies.

The Service Union data demonstrates that a key structural factor that supports organising is having appropriate administrative structures. This union undertook a review of its administrative structures in order to introduce a new computerised “membership system”, to maximise existing resources in the union, especially “the contribution of administrative staff”41 at a time of an “ever more hostile”42 political and industrial climate. The restructure of administrative work at the branch was undertaken in order to “preserve and extend union organisation.”43 The recommended changes included increasing the responsibilities and skills of administrative staff, to include “the direct service of members”, as well as providing new information and

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38 Support Union interviews; Document B7
39 Support Union Interviews; Document B37
40 Support Union case data; interviews with the leadership
41 Union report 1996, p. 3
42 Union report 1996, p. 3
43 Union report 1996, p. 5
communications systems. Importantly, this change reflects a paradigm shift in ideological assumptions about union administrative workers, stating that they are ‘dedicated unionists in their own right’. The development of the administrative and technological capacities of the Branch are intended to achieve greater support for organising by freeing organisers from routine activities such as membership enquiries and allow them more time for organising:

“the purpose of organisational restructuring at the union should be to strengthen the relationship between the union and members, so that the latter identify themselves as part of a wider organisation of labour which they are prepared to defend”

At the Support Union, well functioning bureaucratic structures are crucial to support organising:

“The structures are part of the strategy; starting in the 80's there was a process to make this union responsive to member requests. So the structures, some were moribund, and attempts were made to make them function. Some have become more relevant and others were replaced, so that the union as an office could become responsive to the union membership.”

Financial resources are acknowledged as being crucial to an effective, organising union and it is accepted that union amalgamations have the potential to increase the financial resources of unions:

“The merging of the branch was a pretty important part of the strategy for achieving our goals; it gave us more resources; or that is the theory, anyhow, that we will free up some resources… [We have to] regroup and reorganise, refocussing on areas of strategic importance rather than focusing on what comes in the door. That’s difficult for unions, because you have to go against your first impulse; we have to get resources; things that are already out there. To me, merging the branches is the ultimate way in the short term.”

The data indicates that the Support Union had developed numerous militant workplace groups as well as union structures that enabled communication between workplaces. However, the Service Union had only begun to develop some isolated groups at some of its workplaces, while its other union structures such as branch committee of management and state and national structures reflected a servicing orientation. Although the Service union wanted to develop better structures to support organising, it simply did not have access to the necessary resources. At the Maker’s Union there were as yet no autonomous workplace groups and other structures reflected a servicing orientation. Progress at the Maker’s union was constrained by the effects of an unsuccessful amalgamation. Data from all three unions indicates that they were aware of the importance of having and building broader political and community alliances in order to establish community activism. These links between unions and other community groups were seen as necessary and consistent with union aims and values:

44 Union report 1996, p. 3
45 Union report 1996, p. 5
46 Support Union interviews; Document B5
47 Support Union Case Data; Interviews with the Leadership
“Another criterion is to maintain unionism ... We must work beyond the shop floor, in political arenas, in the Industry Training Boards, on Industry Boards. We need to have influence beyond the day to day - we need to have the staff to represent the union at this level - to affect the union nationally.”

“We must be able to... achieve what [we] think [our] members interests are, beyond the workplace, in broader political and social issues, and in our case, that would be things like work and family issues; women and workplace issues; security; dispute resolution procedures; equity issues.”

“At a union you have a sense of being at a political, social movement and industrial crossroads.”

**Discussion**

In this paper we advance a model of the stages and facilitators of union organising. The model is useful because it summarises findings from key studies conducted in advanced industrial economies in the Anglo-Saxon world. One of the strengths of the model is that it proposes that organising occurs through an incremental process. Therefore, this may explain the apparently limited uptake of the organising approach by unions (Crosby, 2005; Jarley, 2003) since the full application of the organising approach requires advancing through various stages. Moreover, this model suggests a conceptual link between the organising approach and community-unionism as related frameworks for unionisation. This is elaborated below. The model also captures the challenges and complexity of organising. The findings from our study provide further support for the model.

The data indicates that all three unions have a strong belief in the benefits of organising. They had all adopted the language of organising and had begun to adopt some organising behaviours, such as incorporating organising into the overall union strategy and training some union officials and union delegates (shop stewards). However, there is evidence to suggest that these three unions had achieved different degrees of organising. For example, only the Support union had training programmes based on the organising approach for delegates.

There is evidence in our study to suggest that organising does follow the three stage model as proposed (see Fig. 1). For instance, the Support Union had achieved some elements in each of the three stages of organising: they had done the planning towards an organising approach; they were contacting new members in previously unorganised sectors; they had developed and delivered training and developed organising campaigns around workplace issues and established workplace groups; they had effective organiser performance monitoring and had begun to develop appropriate organising based structures. However, the other two unions had minimal advancement in the stages of organising. The Maker’s union had been able to restructure their union administrative structures to facilitate organising, and to develop the appropriate training programmes. However, they had made no progress in developing workplace structures based on the organising approach. The Service Union had begun to employ an organising approach in recruitment at one of their key

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48 Makers’ Union Interviews; Document A27
49 Support Union Interviews; Document B17
50 Service Union Interviews; Document C10
workplaces but were largely still relying on a servicing approach. They had made no progress in terms of developing training for organisers or workplace leaders; they had not developed any workplace campaigns and had no mechanisms to monitor organiser performance. Importantly, none of the unions had developed a relationship with external groups based on an organising philosophy.

There is evidence in our study to suggest the role of facilitating factors for organising as proposed in Fig. 2. The findings relating to the organising success of the Support union provide evidence for these factors. As discussed in our findings, this union was able to organise through the presence and use of structural, experiential, psychological and ideological factors. On the other hand, at the two other unions, there was limited evidence of the use of these factors for various reasons. For instance, the Maker’s Union lacked the organisational cohesiveness and philosophical commitment to organising, due to an unsuccessful union merger. The Service union had enormous leadership problems, a recent history of draining factional conflict, and consequently lacked the financial resources to enable organising to go ahead.

Our data suggests that some Australian unions are making some progress in adopting the organising approach, and on the basis of these three limited cases, we could speculate that Australian unions have an interest in adopting the philosophy of organising, but have not yet full implemented the organising framework. These findings are important in relation to advancing the literature on organising. Currently, there is a view that Australian unions are consciously adopting a combination of servicing and organising (Crosby, 2005). However, our findings suggest that a different perspective may be feasible, i.e., that Australian unions are still using servicing because they have only implemented the early stages of organising. This is supported by the fact that, none of the unions in our study had developed community-union alliances based on an organising philosophy.

Moreover, our data suggests that there is a relationship between the stages of organising and the facilitators of organising. For example, a union requires the presence of psychological and ideological factors to begin the process of organising; i.e., it must be committed to the idea; it requires leadership to promote, inspire and progress an organising framework. Structural factors, such as financial resources and the creation of appropriate groups are required at each stage of organising. Experiential factors, such as training for organisers and workplace leaders are crucial at the early and intermediate stages. This raises a number of important questions relating to further research. Are certain factors more crucial than others in supporting the adoption of the organising framework? Might there be relationships between the factors themselves, e.g., is there a relationship between leadership and the development of appropriate organising structures?

**Conclusion**

There is currently sufficient literature on the organising approach to enable the construction of a model representing the key elements of organising. In this paper we put forward a model of the stages and facilitators of organising. In our study, we found support for the model, and found that the model could explain the currently limited adoption of organising by unions. Although this study finds that some Australian unions are engaged in limited forms of organising, we also find that if
there is a continued presence of the facilitators of organising, unions may progress to the adoption of more advanced forms of organising in the future.

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