

# Unveiling the Effectiveness of Unions: A Study from the Perspective of Union Members

Nor Syamaliah Ngah\*, Mahazril 'Aini Yaacob

Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Seremban, Malaysia

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## ABSTRACT

Trade unions play a significant role in protecting the rights and interests of their members through their representation in bargaining sessions. This article aims to investigate how organisational factors influence union effectiveness in the context of a developing country. Drawing Malaysia as a case study, the article employs a quantitative research method using the survey. The questionnaire was distributed online. The data is analysed using descriptive statistics and Pearson correlational and Regression analysis to examine the relationships between organisational factors and union effectiveness. The findings revealed that all the factors employed, such as union strength, union leadership, union contribution, union communication, and employer attitude, significantly influence the union's effectiveness. In addition, the regression analysis results show that union communication is the strongest predictor of the union's effectiveness. This study enriches the literature on trade unions in developing countries and is an input to unions in designing a more practical approach to obtaining membership. The study underscores the crucial role of a robust union organisation in advancing and defending workers' interests, particularly in the public and private sectors. The findings have direct implications, highlighting the potential for increased relevance of unionised establishments. This practical insight further underscores the importance of the study's findings in the real world, emphasising the direct and immediate benefits it can bring to the design and strategies of trade unions in developing countries.

**Keywords:** trade union, union strength, union leadership, union contribution, union effectiveness

## INTRODUCTION

Trade unions, the anchor of workers' rights and welfare, are a topic of significant academic interest. Understanding the intricate relationship between their roles and effectiveness is critical to comprehending their profound impact on the workforce. The study underscores active membership involvement, financial support, and unity among members in unions' ability to protect workers' rights, negotiate fair terms, and foster a balanced employer-employee relationship. The study's findings highlight the necessity for unions to effectively attract high membership, making it a crucial field research area. Your involvement and support in this research are highly valued and appreciated.

In the Malaysian context, trade unions have played a pivotal role in the Malaysian political economy. These unions negotiate with employers as economic institutions to secure higher wages, improved benefits, and better working conditions. Their influence extends to shaping the distribution of wages within companies and across industries (Schulten & Müller, 2021). On the other hand, a union's effectiveness is argued to depend much on the union's commitment, as highlighted in Majid et al. (2021).

In contrast to other nations, the trade union movement in Malaysia encountered various obstacles, including the implementation of neoliberal policies and evolving employment frameworks (Ganesan, 2016). Asia has witnessed a declining union density rate compared to Europe, West Asia, and Africa (International Labour Organisation, 2019). In Malaysia, the trade union membership only experienced a slight growth over the years. Based on the official statistics from the Department of Union Affairs (2022), there are 954,992 948,772 union members in Malaysia as of 2022. Nevertheless, the issue that must be asked is that Malaysia has over 700 trade unions; why do only a few Malaysian workers join one? The issue was also mentioned in a study among banking

employees where their union witnessed declination of the membership, which led to lesser union density (Majid et al., 2021). As such, investigating the factors influencing the union's effectiveness is imperative, leading to this research's objective.

Research on what makes unions effective has been limited (Pirozzi & Bonomi, 2021). Since much previous research on trade union effectiveness and participation in Malaysia was conducted years ago, many findings were outdated in the employment literature. Despite the evident economic, political, and social importance of unions, there remains a notable gap in understanding why their members continue to support them, particularly in contexts where union support is entirely voluntary.

The challenge for unions, both in the private and public sectors, is to convincingly encourage workers to voluntarily join and sustain their support, even as the benefits they provide may be diminished in some instances. It is, therefore, pertinent to empirically revisit the variables that influence union effectiveness. Therefore, the following objectives were developed:

1. To examine the relationship between union strength, union leadership, union contribution and support and union communication towards union effectiveness.
2. To investigate the most significant predictor of union effectiveness.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Effectiveness of Unions

The effectiveness of trade unions has long been a subject of interest and research. Researchers and scholars have conducted numerous studies to determine the importance and effectiveness of trade unions in various situations. However, there are still insufficient empirical studies concerning the effectiveness of unions. A study by Loganathan et al. (2022) argued that the status of industrial relations and trade union characteristics significantly influence trade union effectiveness. Meanwhile, Yusop et al. (2020) found that union leadership, effectiveness, and commitment influence trade union membership decisions among Malaysian civil servants.

The ability of a trade union to effectively represent its members by fulfilling their needs and interests is how Bryson and Gomez (2002) define effectiveness. Another study on bank employees assumes that members remain with and dedicate themselves to their unions because of their effectiveness in governance, organising, negotiating, and member solidarity. Loganathan et al. (2022) concentrated on the status of industrial relations and trade union features to gauge trade union efficacy. However, Bryson et al. (2005) suggested that improved employment and working circumstances were achieved through negotiation and organisational effectiveness, which involves holding people accountable.

In discussing organisational effectiveness, two broad approaches garner the most interest: the goals approach and the systems approach. The goals approach posits that an organisation's efficacy can be assessed based on the degree to which it achieves its objectives. In contrast, the systems approach defines effectiveness as the capacity of an organisation to preserve its operational integrity across different levels of organisation, including those within and between departments (Goodman & Pennings, 1979). However, according to Steers (1975), effectiveness's complexity arises from organisations' distinct functional and environmental characteristics. As a result, establishing a universal model of effectiveness that can be applied to all organisations is unattainable. From this vantage point, Hammer and Wazeter (1993) propose that when assessing the efficacy of teacher unions, it is crucial to consider not only the viewpoints of union members but also those of individuals or groups associated with the unions.

Following the viewpoint put forth by Gahan and Bell (1999), unions are membership organisations that are formed under the service paradigm. They further examined the associations between different union strategies and their ability to retain and recruit new members. Based on their research with union officials, the authors concluded that the member-based approach was more efficacious than the traditional union approach, which revolved around the notions of strikes and political engagement. The likelihood that union strategies will be successful is enhanced when they have internal democratic processes through which they legitimise themselves

and earn the support of their members (Gahan & Bell, 1999). Even though their study was found to be outdated, it was among the prominent findings in the existing industrial relations literature.

### **Union strength and union effectiveness**

Previous research has identified union strength as one of the union effectiveness predictors. Bryson (2003) defines union strength as the ability of a union to provide significant contributions and to disrupt the labour market to advance the interests of its members. This gives unions a great deal of influence in the workplace. It was proven that the union's strategic influence strengthens the industrial relations climate, as discussed by Valizade et al. (2023).

Eden et al. (2017) research revealed a connection between union strength and regular member communication. The results of their investigation demonstrated that the effectiveness of trade unions is highly influenced by the hierarchical regression used in his study. According to this study, the trade union's effectiveness was mainly attributed to its strength as a union.

Harcourt et al. (2024) demonstrate that workers' views of the effects of a union failure play a significant role in determining whether they would support or oppose a default and whether they would continue to be members or withdraw. Previous research on union membership was predominantly instrumental in determining whether union membership resulted in financial benefits for employees (Cregan, 1991). However, union membership growth cannot be solely attributed to instrumental approaches. The aura of a union at the workplace and employees' attitudes concerning union strength are the two variables most strongly associated with unionisation, as argued in Schnabel and Wagner (2007). A study by Cooper and Sureau (2008) found that the teachers' union participated in collective bargaining, providing them with more extraordinary powers and voices. It shows that their union strength has benefited them regarding the regulation of work conditions, the safeguarding and advancement of their rights, and the ability to engage in strikes. Similarly, Vo-Thanh et al. (2022) discovered that job security and the preservation of personal rights are the two primary motivations for membership union members. However, it has been suggested that unions are perceived as more effective when they have a more extensive membership base, which enables them to exert more significant influence during collective bargaining (Valizade et al., 2023).

To further strengthen the union, they predominantly rely on the financial contributions of their members. Despite facing constraints in terms of material resources and infrastructures, this reliance on member funding has endowed unions with a unique sense of independence and a distinct 'political' identity (Hartney & Finger, 2022). The financial support derived from their members has not only enabled unions to maintain their independence. However, it has also empowered them to engage in a 'political' sphere, allowing them to advocate for the interests of their members with vigour and autonomy (Barth et al., 2020). This financial autonomy has provided unions with the flexibility to pursue a repertoire of collective action for the benefit of its members. According to a survey by Debono (2019), respondents generally observe trade unions positively since they serve vital roles in Maltese society. They believed that providing members with individualised services is significantly impacted by the union's strength.

It is essential to recognise that the union's strengths from members play a pivotal role in fortifying the union and facilitating the achievement of its goals. The more robust the support from members, the stronger the union becomes, enhancing its ability to pursue and realise its objectives effectively. Therefore, the symbiotic relationship between members and the union's financial stability underscores the critical role that member contributions play in shaping the union's capacity to advocate, mobilise, and effect meaningful change. Based on the literature discussed above, the following hypothesis is formed as follows:

**H1:** There is a significant relationship between union strength and trade union effectiveness.

### **Union Leadership and Union Effectiveness**

Besides union strength, another important variable is union leadership. Responsive leadership promotes more transparent democratic processes, promoting involvement and commitment. According to findings from the

public service in Zambia, organisational strategies, leadership accountability, innovations, and administrative and democratic structuring are imperative factors that positively influence union effectiveness (Koyi et al., 2021). Similarly, Ramasamy (2015) affirms that union leadership is viewed in Malaysia as an active commitment to empowering workers to improve their living standards and safeguard their rights.

However, it was an argument that within the realm of trade unionism, confident, unscrupulous union leaders had been accused of betraying the interests of their members and compromising their positions, often due to allegations of corruption. This perceived lack of integrity has led to many trade union members losing confidence, as emphasised by Alexander-Shaw et al. (2023). The erosion of trust in union leadership has hindered their ability to effectively advocate for promoting workers' interests and welfare.

Conversely, the concept of union voice can contribute to improved employment terms, conditions of work, and job security (Veliziotis & Vernon, 2023). Effective communication between management and employees and resolving employee grievances can be facilitated through union involvement. In theory, the impact of unions on employee terms and conditions and job security hinges on the emphasis unions place on their roles as both monopolistic entities and advocates for employee voices. Some argue that the future viability of unions may depend on a greater emphasis on their voice role, which can be seen from their leaders (Heiland, 2020; Victor, 2022). From the previous arguments, the study thus hypothesised that:

**H2:** There is a significant relationship between union leadership and trade union effectiveness

### **Union contribution and support and Union effectiveness**

Union contribution and support may be linked to the effectiveness of unions in fulfilling their roles. Union contribution to protecting the members' interests indirectly impacted the union members' loyalty (Mohamed et al., 2010). However, the study was carried out long ago, requiring a re-examination of the current setting. Meanwhile, Valizade et al. (2023) suggest that proactive unions with defined objectives and practical win-win discourses can overcome external restrictions, improving the union's effectiveness.

Trade unions play a significant role in the elevation of the relative wages of routine workers, thereby demonstrating their efficacy in safeguarding the interests of their members, as elucidated by Kostøl and Svarstad (2023). This contribution is pivotal in establishing the multifaceted impact unions have on the economic well-being of routine workers, underscoring the instrumental role they play in advocating for and enhancing the financial standing of their members.

Moreover, the positive correlation between union contribution and the attainment of members' goals is particularly pronounced within the context of schoolteachers, as highlighted in the research by Wagner and Elder (2021). The relationship between trade unions and the educational sector suggests that unions' positive impact extends beyond mere wage considerations. It encompasses a broader spectrum of objectives, reflecting the unions' commitment to fostering an environment that aligns with schoolteachers' professional and personal aspirations. This multifaceted support underscores the depth of influence trade unions wield in facilitating the realisation of diverse goals among their members within specific occupational domains.

Union leadership is another critical internal factor in labour unions' internal structure. These include leadership qualities, revitalisation tactics, and union support. Strong leadership is required to navigate challenging labour contexts and relates to increased union effectiveness. Furthermore, trade union revitalisation—adapting to new labour issues such as the gig economy and artificial intelligence—has been identified as a critical step for unions to maintain their influence, as discussed in Oyelere et al. (2022).

Furthermore, prior research has identified a positive correlation between union contribution and support and members' attitudes. Members' perception of high contribution and support can influence their attitudes, subsequently impacting the union's effectiveness (Yang et al., 2023; Fang et al., 2020). In this study, the measurement of the variable of union member attitudes includes indicators of risk perception and risk tendency, drawing from the research conducted by Ye and Kulathunga (2019). However, a study by Però and Downey (2022) discussed how the union members' communication practices of self-mediation in public might strengthen their discursive power and improve their total bargaining ability in work-related conflicts. Hence, based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis was developed:



**H3:** There is a significant relationship between union contribution and support and trade union effectiveness.

**Union communication and Union effectiveness**

Apart from union strength, union leadership and strength, their effectiveness is often argued to be influenced by the union communication. Thomas (2013) posits a restructuring of the roles of union officials, emphasising specific managerial competencies such as framing and evaluating objectives, as well as conveying goal status. The shift prioritises managerial attributes like communication skills, efficiency, and organisational expertise, highlighting planning, goal setting, and performance monitoring over ideological resources. This assertion is reinforced by Thursfield and Grayley (2016), who observe an increasing demand for union officials to define objectives, regularly assess them, and communicate pertinent feedback. In a study conducted in Malaysia, the findings support the importance of communication for the union to increase its delivery effectiveness. They found that open and regular communications among union members and leaders enhance satisfaction and improve relationships (Suhaila et al., 2010). Their commitment to communicating with each other has proved to resolve many employment issues, as Majid et al. (2021) highlighted.

Scholars such as Dufour et al. (2023) argue that member solidarity increases mobilisation during strikes and other collective actions, resulting in better negotiating outcomes. Enhanced communication efforts lead to increased member participation in union activities. The authors highlight that when members feel informed and involved, they are more likely to engage actively in collective actions and support union initiatives. According to Thomas (2013), union officials' roles are transforming to concentrate on essential managerial competencies, including articulating and appraising goals and informing others of their progress. Managerial qualities like efficiency, communication abilities, and organisational knowledge, encompassing goal setting, planning, and performance monitoring, are favoured over ideological resources. This perspective gains support from Thursfield and Grayley (2016), who emphasise the growing expectation for union leaders to set objectives, assess them regularly, and offer relevant feedback. Conversely, a task-focused and delivery-centric approach proves more effective when the vertical power structure and multiple groups compete through formal elections. In such instances, timely achievement of collective bargaining outcomes, improved working conditions, and enhanced workplace benefits were pivotal in augmenting union effectiveness.

Moreover, Palomares et al. (2018) and Però and Downey (2022) propose a correlation between organisational effectiveness and effective communication. Nonetheless, Cerić and Ivić (2023) caution about the potential detrimental effects of invisible communication traits within an organisation. Palomares et al. (2018) suggest that organisations possess a variety of communication channels, including social media and the Internet, which, if used effectively, can boost organisational performance (Duncan & Walby, 2022). The arguments also apply to the union, where constant and open face-to-face or online communication with the members can foster a positive work environment. This indirectly impacted the satisfaction of the union members in sustaining their membership. Considering the discussion mentioned above, it can be inferred that:

**H4:** Union communication has a positive relationship with union effectiveness

Based on the above discussion, the research model is developed as in Figure 1.

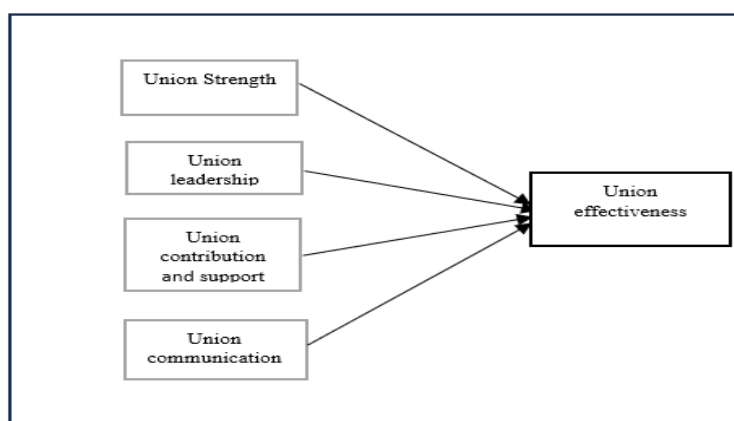


Fig. 1 Research Model (Author's work)

## METHODOLOGY

### Research design

To achieve the research objective, a survey through a questionnaire was distributed to the respondents. This descriptive study was applied to the active union members of public and private organisations. This study was conducted on 120 respondents using the formula of Tabachnick and Fidell (2013), which is  $N > 50 + 8m$ . The data was collected through simple random sampling using the lottery method, and the final survey data from 104 questionnaires was gathered from the respondents who participated using the online platform. Instruments from previous studies were modified to obtain the data required for the study. A total of 37 items were adapted from Bryson (2003), Eden et al. (2017), and Mohamed et al. (2010) were developed to measure the independent variables (union strength, union leadership, union contribution and union communication) and dependent variables (trade union's effectiveness).

The questionnaire has three parts: Part A, Part B, and Part C. Part A concerns questions related to the respondents' demographic information. Part B measures independent variables: union strength, union leadership, union contribution, and union communication. Part (C) measures trade union effectiveness. The researchers used a five-point Likert scale in parts B and C.

### Statistical analysis

The gathered questionnaires underwent data entry and cleansing utilising the SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics were employed to gauge the frequency and percentage of demographic characteristics among union members. Means and standard deviations were utilised to assess members' approval across various dimensions of union membership, leadership, contribution and support, and union effectiveness. Inferential statistics were applied to test the model and evaluate the study's hypotheses.

To ensure the questionnaire's validity and reliability, it was initially distributed to a pilot sample, and feedback was incorporated based on the collected data. Additionally, Cronbach's Alpha was employed to measure the questionnaire's reliability. The reliability results indicated that Cronbach's values exceeded 0.7, falling within the acceptable range for research of this nature (Al-Okaily, 2021; Aws et al., 2021), as depicted in Table 1. Further analysis, conducted using SPSS, was carried out to present findings that address the research questions in this study.

Table 1 Reliability Statistics

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
.956	7

## FINDINGS

### Respondents background

The respondents' profiles were analysed using descriptive analysis as depicted in Table 2. This includes age, gender, current position in a union, duration of being a union member, working sector, working industry and reasons for joining a union. Table 2 showed that the percentage of male outreach females was 52.9% (55), while the females formed 47.1% (49) of the total respondents. The dominant age group of the sample was 41 years and above, with a percentage of 61.5% (64), followed by the age group 36-40 years, with a percentage of 24% (25). There are only a small percentage (14.4%, 15) of the respondents aged below 35 years. Concerning the current position in a union, most of them are ordinary union members, with few others holding a position as a President (4.8%), Vice President (3.8%), followed by Secretary (10.6%) and Treasurer (1.9%) in their union.

When asked about their union membership, results demonstrate that most respondents have become union members for more than 10 years, representing 63.5 % (66), followed by 19.2% (20) who have become union members for more than 4 years. Only a small percentage (10.6%) of the respondents just joined the union for less than 2 years. Many respondents worked in the public sector, representing 57.7% (60), and the remaining (42.3%, 44) worked in the private sector. The results also show that the respondents of this study are from different working industries. Education is listed as the highest with 35.6% (37), followed by manufacturing, banking, and transportation. Nonetheless, plenty of them (44.2%, 46) are reported to be employed in unreported industries. The composition of the respondents in this study shows that they are qualified and able to answer the questions on their understanding of union effectiveness.

Table 2 Demographic Profile

No.	Profile	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
1	Age		
	21–25	2	1.9
	26–30	1	1.0
	31–35	12	11.5
	36–40	25	24
	41-46	28	26.9
	47 and above	36	34.6
2	Gender		
	Male	55	52.9
	Female	49	47.1
3	Current position in the union	5	4.8
	President	4	3.8
	Vice President	11	10.6
	Secretary	1	1.0
	Vice secretary	2	1.9
	Treasurer	81	77.9
	Member		
4	Duration of being a union member		
	< 2 years	11	10.6
	2 to 4 years	7	6.7
	>4 to 7 years	12	11.5
	>7 years to 10 years	8	7.7
	> 10 years	66	63.5
5	Working sector	60	57.7
	Public sector	44	42.3
	Private sector	7	6.7
	Working industry	2	1.9

6	Banking	37	35.6
	Transportation	11	10.6
	Education	1	1.0
	Manufacturing	46	44.2
	Logistic		
	Others	51	49
7	Reasons for joining a union (respondent can choose more than 1)	50	48.1
	Avoid discrimination	27	26
	Social reason	15	14.4
	Peer pressure	13	12.5
	Economic condition		
	Other reason		

(n=104)

**Objective 1:** To examine the relationship between union strength, union leadership, union contribution and support and union communication towards union effectiveness.

Table 3 Pearson Correlation Results

		Trade union effectiveness
Union strength	Pearson Correlation	.607**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0.000
	N	104
Union leadership	Pearson Correlation	.718**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0.000
	N	104
Union contribution and support	Pearson Correlation	.769**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0.000
	N	104
Union communication	Pearson Correlation	.777**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0.000
	N	104

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The Pearson correlation method determines the relationship between union leadership, union contribution and support, union communication, and employers' attitudes towards trade union effectiveness. Based on the study's results shown in Table 3, there is a significant positive relationship between union strength and trade union effectiveness ( $r=0.607$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). In other words, a union with high members and financial strength has contributed to the union's effectiveness. Hence, H1 has been accepted. Also, union leadership has a significant positive relationship with trade union effectiveness ( $r=0.718$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). The union leadership plays a crucial role in influencing the effectiveness of a labour union. Effective leadership can lead to a well-organised and powerful union that can effectively represent its members' interests and achieve their goals. The significant relationship



caused H2 to be accepted. Next, findings also show a significant positive relationship between union contribution and support and trade union effectiveness ( $r=0.769, p<0.01$ ). The support received by the union members influences their effectiveness. Therefore, H3 is accepted. Finally, the study's findings are assumed to have a strong positive relationship between communication and the union's effectiveness ( $r=0.777, p<0.01$ ). Thus, accepting H4. This result implies that frequent and good communication influences the union's effectiveness.

**Objective 2:** To investigate the most significant predictor of union effectiveness

Table 4 Regression Results

Variables	Beta ( $\beta$ )	Sig. ( $p$ )	Tolerance	VIF
Union strength	.159	.000	0.620	1.611
Union leadership	-.015	.000	0.677	1.567
Union contribution and support	.277	.000	0.840	1.175
Union communication	.442	.000		
Employers attitude	-.002	.000		
R <sup>2</sup>	.640			
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.622			
F Change	34.913			
Sig.	.000			

Based on the beta value shown in Table 4 above, union communication is the strongest predictor of union effectiveness. The adjusted R<sup>2</sup> value shows that the change in the union effectiveness coefficient can be explained by 62% of the five independent variables. Although this value is high for a social science study, it shows that there are still predictor variables that this regression model does not cover. In addition, the multicollinearity test is conducted to check whether a regression model has intercorrelation or collinearity between independent variables. Intercorrelation is the linear relationship between two or more independent variables in a regression model. If the VIF value is less than ten and the Tolerance value is more than 0.01, then there is no multicollinearity problem. In this study, the VIF and tolerance show no multicollinearity problem exists in the data. The study findings will be further discussed in the next section.

## DISCUSSIONS

The primary aim of this research is to explore the impact of union membership, leadership, contributions, support, communication within the union, and employer attitude on its overall effectiveness. The focus of the study is on union members within public organisations. Investigating union effectiveness in both sectors is crucial for gaining insights into the factors contributing to unions' success. Additionally, the study investigates various dimensions of union membership, leadership, contributions and support, communication and employer attitude, as highlighted in the existing literature. A diverse range of demographic characteristics of union members has been documented, reflecting varied perspectives on the topic under investigation. The study encompasses viewpoints from males and females, individuals with different experience levels, and varying age groups.

As the study's findings proved, trade union members emphasise the pivotal role of communication in enhancing union effectiveness. Like Majid et al. (2021), union-management must communicate and ensure that their members understand their messages clearly. Communication channels, including verbal exchanges, social media, and email, should be carefully utilised to effectively convey work instructions and requirements. These were also proposed by Duncan and Walby (2022) to enhance communication. The choice of communication modes becomes crucial in ensuring members comprehend and align with the expectations, as proven by the

study's findings, which revealed union communication as the strongest predictor of their effectiveness.

The significance of these communication modes extends beyond simple understanding; they directly influence the effectiveness of work instructions within the department. A communication breakdown could hinder the seamless execution of tasks and adherence to requirements. When the union management establishes robust communication methods, it positively impacts members' perception of the union's effectiveness. In line with the findings of Nalini et al. (2021) and Palomares et al. (2018), fostering positive and effective communication not only contributes to employee satisfaction but also serves as a mechanism to minimise worker complaints. In essence, the quality of communication channels directly shapes the members' sentiments regarding the overall effectiveness of their union. Reviews on previous research also stated that communication positively correlates with job satisfaction (Thursfield & Grayley (2016; Cake, 2020; Duncan & Walby, 2022). Thus, good communication with the management in the department could lead to the workers' job satisfaction. The same principle also applies to the union. When the union management and their leaders communicate effectively with their members, it will bring satisfaction among their union members, indirectly enhancing their union's effectiveness.

Even though the finding of this study shows that each of the independent variables is correlated with union effectiveness, it is crucial to recognise that the correlation between the other variables, such as union contribution and support, union leadership, union strength, employer attitude and union effectiveness, is not always clear-cut. In some situations, a union may enjoy robust backing from its members but encounter hurdles from external factors such as unfavourable laws or economic conditions. Conversely, a union operating in a supportive environment may grapple with issues like low member engagement or internal conflicts.

The role of effective leadership within a union is paramount. A leadership team that communicates adeptly and aligns with member interests and strategies effectively can fortify support and elevate the union's effectiveness. A trade union's strength and efficacy hinge on many factors, and the intricate interplay between membership, support, communication, leadership, and adaptability collectively shapes its overall impact and success. A trade union's effectiveness can be influenced by the level of support it receives from its members. Strong membership support typically leads to a more effective union. When members actively participate, contribute financially, and engage in union activities, the union gains the strength to negotiate better wages, benefits, and improved working conditions.

### **Implications for research and practice**

This paper contributes valuable to advancing theory regarding union effectiveness in the public and private sectors. It achieves this by formulating a comprehensive and adaptable framework rooted in a contingency perspective, accounting for the distinctive features of unions in Malaysia. The proposed framework is poised to significantly enhance future research endeavours, facilitating a critical assessment of theoretical assumptions, establishing connections with existing knowledge, and elucidating the theoretical foundations of the research. This framework addresses the 'why' and 'how' questions, offering insights into identifying theoretical generalisation limits. It explicitly outlines the key contingency variables that impact union effectiveness in the public sector, defines the metrics to be measured, and provides relevant propositions or hypotheses lacking in the existing literature. Although the findings were from a Malaysia perspective, they give insight into an international perspective with similar characteristics.

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, there is a complex and positive relationship between trade union effectiveness. A strong union becomes an influential advocate of workers' rights with solid leadership, financial assistance, unity among members, and active member involvement. A trade union's strength is its ability to represent and protect its members' interests effectively. Trade unions are vital to developing equitable labour practices, favourable terms for workers, and a more balanced and equal workplace because they create an environment of solidarity, active involvement, and unity. Decades of debate have centred on what makes an effective union because organisational aspects are essential to powerful trade unions. The importance of trade unions has increased the apparent fall in long-term, successful unionism in modern employment. The study concludes that in Malaysia's atmosphere,

structural elements significantly improve working conditions, employee well-being, and workplace harmony. Accordingly, to gain trust and successfully represent the interests of the people they represent, the study suggests that trade union leaders in the public and private sectors must endeavour to be models of integrity in all spheres of life. The research findings on union effectiveness illuminate key factors influencing trade unions, which benefit an international perspective. The findings, however, posed several limitations. The representation of limited respondents could not be generalised to the more significant population on the issues concerned. Also, future studies may incorporate the data collection using the mixed method strategy to ensure that it provides the best possible findings.

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