Using Paired Comparisons to Measure Reciprocity

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From ethnographic observations and interviews, the author discovered that the concept of obligation was important in structuring power relationships in Chicago union locals. This was pivotal because relationships of reciprocity underlie the politics of union locals and resistance to some programs from the international organization. Here, the author discusses how he used paired comparisons to test ethnographically derived hypotheses about the salience of concepts of reciprocity and obligation to move beyond qualitative ethnographic intuition to measure cultural concepts and test hypotheses. In conclusion, he suggests that such approaches and methods can enlighten our understanding of reciprocity.

Keywords: paired comparisons; ethnographic method; obligation; unions; organized labor; politics; reciprocity

My objective in this article is to show the utility of paired comparisons for understanding concepts of obligation because feelings of obligation confer power on the people to whom they are owed. Given the interest in reciprocity in our understandings of social and political organization, this article illustrates a simple method for operationalizing and testing the concept in various ethnographic contexts.

ETHNOGRAPHIC SETTING

In connection with new initiatives, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) commissioned a four-year study of its members and leaders. In
1995, the study concluded that members prefer resources to go to getting them better contracts, wages, benefits, and job protection. This is called the servicing model of unions, as it focuses on the services unions provide their members. Leaders want to organize unorganized workers and to elect labor-friendly politicians. This is called the organizing model because it emphasizes both internal and external organizing over servicing. The two models of union behavior are at odds, as each requires different uses of the same scarce resources such as money for salaries. Shall it be spent for representatives to provide services to existing members or for organizers to enlist new members? Shall funds be spent on litigation such as arbitration and lawsuits (servicing) or on political campaigns and contributions (organizing)?

SEIU developed a plan to shift resources from servicing into organizing. The president of SEIU Local 73 in Chicago supported a study of that local to ascertain how to make the international study relevant to the local. Suzan Erem, Local 73’s director of communications, and I collaborated to design and carry out a project centered on ethnography: participant observation, interviewing, and surveys (Durrenberger 1997; Durrenberger and Erem 1997a, 1997b, 1999a, 1999b; Erem and Durrenberger 1997, 2000). Participant observation formed the basis of our analysis of the politics of the local (Durrenberger and Erem 1999a; Erem and Durrenberger 2000). In addition, to test various hypotheses that participant observation suggested, I developed surveys from what I learned in interviews and by observation, tested them in various contexts such as membership meetings, and modified them in light of that experience. A number of the instruments I used employed triads and paired comparisons in their usual application of understanding systems of classification and whether and how people scale things according to various criteria. I have reported the results of these in the literature cited above.

THE POLITICS OF “BASE”

A union local is a territorial branch of a larger national or international organization chartered to negotiate, enforce, and service contracts on behalf of the members of an area. Stewards are representatives of the members at a work site who deal with immediate problems such as minor disputes with management. Union representatives, or reps, are employees of the local who serve at the pleasure of the president and act as paralegals to back up stewards, negotiate contracts, and arbitrate the cases that the local supports.

Members elect union presidents (Waldinger et al. 1998). Union presidents hire and fire their staff such as reps and depend on them to deliver the votes to
keep them in office. Control of blocks of votes guarantees access to and influence on any person who depends on votes for their office—a local president or aspiring president (Fletcher and Hurd 1998).

If stewards and reps work well together on behalf of members, they cultivate feelings of mutual respect and loyalty. Especially through grievance handling, reps can foster the idea that they are personally responsible for the job security and well-being of members at their sites and that the members are obliged to the rep, obligations the rep can call on for votes or other support. The more loyal units a rep has, the greater the number of votes he or she can control and the larger his or her “base.” The larger a rep’s base, the more power he or she has and the more likely he or she is to achieve a position as an officer.

Paradoxically, becoming an officer detracts time and attention from the units that make up the base. If the officer has to assign those units to another rep, he or she has to take some other measures to ensure the continuing loyalty of stewards, chief stewards, and members to himself or herself as well as to ensure the loyalty of the rep that takes over his or her responsibilities with the units of the base.

The president can manipulate reps via the internal politics of promotions, priorities, assignments to units, and differential budgeting, which can threaten to shrink or promise to expand a rep’s base.

The president can make demands on reps based on these obligations, but control of their base makes the president dependent on reps for blocks of votes when there are elections. The source of power for reps is their base, based on the obligation of members and stewards to reciprocate obligations—to repay debts—especially by voting “right.” Reps have to cultivate their base with continual personal relationships. This erodes when the rep becomes an officer in the local and has to operate at one remove from the source of her or his power. At that point, the interoffice politics of personalism become more salient than they may be to reps who are not officers. Thus, officers, most of whom continue to act as reps for major units of the local, if for no other reason than to continue their cultivation of a strong base, are jealous of anything that might affect their relations with “their” stewards and members or the president (Durrenberger and Erem 1999a; Erem and Durrenberger 2000).

The security of reps is tied to their base of loyal stewards who can deliver blocks of votes for whomever the rep names at election time, not to their abilities to teach or mentor. The votes depend on relationships of reciprocity based on feelings of obligation. To implement the program of the organizing model required the cooperation of the reps to recruit and train stewards to
replace the functions reps had been performing in the servicing model. The international’s program was threatening to the local’s staff—reps—because it promised to radically change the terms of the politics of the local. The new program transfers the reps’ duties to stewards and threatened the reps’ base of political support among stewards by changing the relationships of obligation.

The new organizing model the international is promoting reverses the polarity of obligation: The rep is obliged to the stewards for keeping their work sites in order in the organizing model. In the organizing model, real power is based in the worksite and how successfully stewards organize the members for concerted action, not on the personal relationship a rep develops with a human resources manager. Reps become less relevant to union officers as officers look to stewards to turn out the vote for them at election time.

In its reversal of the polarity of obligation, the international’s program threatened the central assumptions and practices of the politics as usual at the locals (Durrenberger and Erem 1999a). In the servicing model, reps need to maintain relations with stewards and members. Reps can convert these relationships into negotiating power and the strength to service the unit between contracts. This requires that reps develop long-term personal relationships on which they can base trust and credibility with often-skeptical members and stewards.

It was relatively late in the study of Local 73 that obligation, reciprocity, and the power based on them came to my attention as a salient dimension of the politics of the local, too late for me to incorporate it into the study in a meaningful way. By doing the study (using participant observation) I learned about the internal politics of the local, something I could never have hoped to do had the politics been a focal point of the study—something that could not have been so clear if I had simply relied on my interviews with staff for data about internal politics (Durrenberger and Erem 1999a; Erem and Durrenberger 2000). From that analysis, I developed ideas about reciprocity and power that I could work into testable hypotheses with another local. Once I had gained some experience with SEIU Local 1 and had enlisted cooperation for a staff and steward survey, I had to find a way to operationalize these concepts of obligation and power.

OBLIGATION AND POWER

When people say, “You owe me big time,” or “I owe you,” it is not an idle comment but a meaningful statement of obligation. One test of reciprocity and the strength of feelings of obligation between different locals is atten-
dance at rallies. A local will turn out its whole staff for another’s rally if the obligation is strong. The appearance of the staff indicates the strength of obligation and creates a debt to call the next time the local that sent its staff needs help (Erem and Durrenberger 2000).

The local’s rally planners consult their lists of phone numbers and organizations to call. They discuss in detail who owes them what and what they would owe the other group if they came. At these rallies, I often met people from other locals I had worked with or from organizations I had come to know. Sometimes the people I was working with were on the receiving end of the calls. They would moan and complain about having to go to another rally, but then they would think about whether the inviting group had supported them, and to what extent, and to what extent they should respond. Should they ignore the request, send one person, or turn out everyone they could? It was here that I saw most clearly the logic of reciprocity in action.

In the servicing model, stewards owe reps for their access to management at the job site, winning grievances, having access to knowledge and resources, and for the bonuses and perks. Reps have to ensure that stewards owe them because reciprocity based on those obligations is the reps’ base. Because of these multifaceted debts that accrue through the rep-steward relationship, reps can rely on stewards to turn out the vote and to back up the rep when it is necessary.

**PAIRED COMPARISONS**

In my previous work with Local 73, I had found that people were unable to rank a list of items from most to least, according to any criterion. The question depends on the sometimes fallacious assumption that people can or do rank elements of the lists according to some scale. Paired comparisons do not assume ordering but reveal them if people do rank the items.

Paired comparisons present respondents with a list of items in all combinations of two. For instance, if we wanted to know about the size rankings of elephants, goats, and mice, we could make a paired comparison test with all combinations of the three and ask which of each pair is larger. People would probably select elephant twice (in the pairs elephant-goat and elephant-mouse), goat once (in the pair goat-mouse), and mouse never. Each selected response gets one point, and the alternative gets none. The number of times an item is selected is its rank order. This would make a ranking of elephant (2), goat (1), mouse (0) (Weller and Romney 1988).
We can tabulate the results as a matrix to show how an individual thinks about relative size of these animals. This would show that we did not allow any category to be compared with itself—so there are 0s in each cell such as elephant-elephant. Our respondent thinks that elephants are larger than goats and that elephants are larger than mice, so we enter 1 in the elephant-goat cell and in the elephant-mouse cell. The respondent thinks goats are not larger than elephants, so the goat-elephant cell shows a 0, but this person thinks that goats are larger than mice, so the goat-mouse cell shows 1. Our informant thinks that mice are not bigger than elephants or goats, so the mouse-elephant and mouse-goat cell are both 0. If we sum the elephant score, it is 2; goat is 1, and mouse is 0. The matrix is called a “dominance matrix” because it shows whether and to what extent one category dominates or scores higher than others on the criterion about which we are asking. Matrix 1 illustrates this example.

**MATRIX 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Elephant</th>
<th>Goat</th>
<th>Mouse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elephant</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goat</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mouse</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If we do the same exercise with a hundred people and they all agree, when we aggregate all of the individual dominance matrices, we would develop an aggregate dominance matrix. In the aggregate matrix, 100s would replace the 1s, and the 0s would still be 0s. But suppose we have one dissenter, one person who is hallucinating, or one person who does not understand the terms the same way everyone else does. Many of us have such a colleague in our departments. Then we might have an aggregate dominance matrix like Matrix 2.

**MATRIX 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Elephant</th>
<th>Goat</th>
<th>Mouse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elephant</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goat</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mouse</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notice that the diagonal that descends from the upper left to the lower right is all of the comparisons of categories with themselves, hence, all 0s by definition of the task. That is, these are not possible choices. Notice also that
all of the diagonals from lower left to upper right sum to 100. Thus, goat-elephant plus elephant-goat = 100, the size of the sample. Likewise, mouse-elephant and elephant-mouse = 100 and mouse-goat plus goat-mouse = 100. Here, there is substantial but not perfect agreement on the relative size of these creatures.

There are many methods for testing for difference and agreement. Here, I do not want to distract from the basic method of paired comparisons by introducing such tests. Examination of the matrices will reveal more or less agreement. If two diagonal cells that should sum to the number of respondents have about equal numbers in them, clearly there is no agreement. Where agreement starts is another matter and might be quite arbitrary, but it is generally considered to be when some substantial portion of the responses is in one of the two possible cells. To avoid distraction from the central topic of this exercise, I will simply show the aggregate matrices.

We require, however, some less intuitive and more precise means of deciding between “more” and “fewer.” The binomial test assesses the probability \( p \) that a given distribution of responses between the two possibilities is different from the 50-50 distribution that would occur by chance. For this exercise, I suggest that \( p \) of .10 or less indicates significant difference. I shall report values of \( p \) only for those relationships that are significant.

I was testing whether there were concepts of obligation and whether they would be consistently ranked. My objective was to design an empirical test of the ethnographic observation that the organizing model from the international would threaten reps by establishing conditions that would shift notions of obligation in such a way as to threaten to destroy the relationships on which they relied for their base. I developed three scenarios that cover a range of typical member-steward-rep relationships.

In the first, a steward loses a grievance at the first and second steps—representing the member in meetings with the supervisor and the manager—and calls the rep. At the third step, the grievance is won. The use of the passive voice is intentional. It does not attribute the victory to the rep, the steward, the member, or management, all of which are plausible: The rep may have presented the case persuasively, the steward may have prepared an unassailable case, the member may have collected all the information and found witnesses, or management may have been inattentive, stupid, or wrong. Sometimes winning or losing entails all of these or their inverses.

In the second scenario, the steward wins without the rep. In the third scenario, the rep and stewards negotiate a good contract for the members at the work site. In the questionnaire format, I introduced the three questions with an example of borrowing money:
WHO OWES WHO?

When someone does you a favor, you owe him or her. When you owe someone, you pay him or her back. Here we are trying to see who owes who in the union. First, an example.

Richard borrows $100 from Mary.
Circle the one who OWES. EITHER Mary owes Richard OR Richard owes Mary. If Mary owes Richard, circle Mary; if Richard owes Mary, circle Richard. If they owe each other, circle the one who owes most.

Richard Mary

Now please think about your work in the union and how things usually work with your stewards and members and decide who owes who. These are either-or questions. Please circle one thing on each line.

Then, for each scenario, I listed all two-way combinations of steward, member, and rep as in the example about elephants, goats, and mice. I used ANTHROPAC (Borgatti 1996) to construct and score the questionnaires and to aggregate the results.

Some union members with whom I worked through these questions individually commented that the paired comparison questions were “either-or.” They also complained that “everything seems just like everything else. It just repeats the same thing.” I appropriated these insights to explain the procedure in the stewards’ survey and introduced the paired comparison questions with this comment:

Some of the next questions are either-or. There are two things on each line. In the either-or questions, please circle one thing on each line.

They seem like they repeat a lot or are all the same, but each one is different. Please do not skip any questions.

FINDINGS

At the time of the study in 1998, Local 1 was composed of three divisions: public sector (employees of municipalities and government agencies such as firemen, school clerical workers, water treatment districts, and public works departments), building services (janitors, doormen), and industrial and allied (workers for school bus firms who contract for routes, factory workers). The staff in the sample included reps, organizers, and officers.1

The picture for stewards is complex because they are such a highly varied group. There are structural differences in the roles of stewards in negotiating and enforcing contracts in the three divisions. In building services, a bargaining team negotiates a master contract for all work sites with an association of building owners and managers. In the public sector, negotiating teams of
stewards at each work site may debate and discuss the fine points of a pending contract long before the negotiations begin and be intimately involved with its evolution and negotiation. Union representatives negotiate individual contracts with industrial units. The function of stewards at job sites is also different in the three divisions. In building services, there are many buildings with only a small janitorial staff, so the union rep does much of the detailed grievance handling that might be done by stewards at work sites with more members in other sectors. This heightened service role for reps extends to other buildings with larger membership. In industrial and public sector work sites, in contrast, there may be many members in one place with one or a few stewards.

The ethnic makeup of the sectors differs as well. Poles and other Eastern Europeans are heavily represented in the building services sector and identify themselves as such rather than as white as opposed to black or other categories. The survey was translated into Polish and Spanish for speakers of those languages. Thus, the categories I report for ethnicity are Hispanic, Polish, black (the term that respondents used more frequently than African American or other alternatives), and white. Because of these differences in the functions of stewards and the makeup of the three sectors, I separated the respondents by sector.

I was given time at the annual stewards meeting of SEUI Local 1 to distribute a survey form to all who attended. The instrument was quite long, consisting of some seventy-one questions on eight pages and was available in three languages: English, Polish, and Spanish. Members specified which version they wanted. The survey was administered at a time set aside for it in the program when all the people at the meeting were sitting at tables in a single hall. One hundred forty-eight stewards returned the survey instrument; of them, 41% completed the section on obligation that is the focus of this article.

Table 1 shows the number and gender and ethnic distribution of the stewards represented in this sample according to sector along with their mean ages, years worked, and years of being a steward.

Table 1 suggests that the gender, age, and experience of members in the three sectors are comparable but that experience as a steward is more variable. The percentages for ethnic makeup do not total to 100% because some respondents did not indicate their ethnicity.

Staff members—reps, organizers, and office staff—are hired by the local and work at the pleasure of the president. Because the staff works for the local, they are in legal and structural position distinct from stewards (Durrenberger and Erem 1999a, 1999b). Table 2 reports the age, gender, tenure, sector, and function of the staff sample. About a quarter (24%) of the staff did not answer the question about obligation. Some of the staff objected
to the assumption that unions are built on relations of obligation. Written comments included “This is our job, no one owes anybody” and “No one ‘owes’ anyone in a union.” Of these, only one was a rep. This suggests that while organizers and officers recognize the importance of not relying on relationships of mutual obligation and power, it is much less problematic to reps who are involved in such relationships in their daily work.

The aggregate dominance matrix for the seventeen staff members who answered the question about the first scenario, in which a steward calls a rep to take a grievance, shows that most staff members think the member owes the steward, and there is little agreement about whether the steward owes the rep or whether the member owes the rep, as matrix 3 shows. For matrix 3, the binomial test indicates that for the member-steward (M-S) relationship, \( p = .025 \), but it is not significant for the other two.

### MATRIX 3
Staff: Scenario 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Member</th>
<th>Steward</th>
<th>Rep</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Member</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steward</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rep</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the second scenario, however, where the steward wins without the rep’s involvement, matrix 4 shows that most of the staff agrees that the member owes the steward \( (p = .05) \), and even more agree that the rep owes the steward.
This is the critical point in the reversal of obligation and hence power relationships of stewards and reps that the organizing model entails. There is no agreement about whether the member owes the rep \((p > .10)\).

MATRiX 4
Staff: Scenario 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Member</th>
<th>Steward</th>
<th>Rep</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Member</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steward</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rep</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is the nexus of this exercise—reps do feel that they owe those stewards who win grievances without intervention of the reps. Thus, the more grievances and other such service matters that stewards take on for themselves, the less power reps have, according to the cultural logic of obligation and reciprocity. The transfer of service functions from reps to stewards thus entails a feeling of loss of power for reps.

In the third scenario about obligations incurred by negotiating a good contract, matrix 5 shows that staff members did not agree about reps owing members or members owing reps, but there is some sentiment that members owe stewards \((63\%); however, \(p = .22\), so the relationship is not significant. There

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>32(^a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>68(^b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functions of staff in the sample</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rep</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizer</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sector of staff in the sample</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public sector</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building services</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{a}\) Mean age = 39.8 years; mean years in the labor movement = 10.6.

\(^{b}\) Mean age = 38.6 years; mean years in the labor movement = 11.4.
is a stronger notion (69%) that reps owe stewards ($p = .1050$). Accepting a significance level of .10 or lower would rule this relationship out. I think the resolution is not to make what must be an arbitrary judgment one way or the other and admit that the relationship is ambiguous. This procedure has the virtue of accurately reflecting the ethnography of an ambiguous but evolving relationship and calls our attention to it for future work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member</th>
<th>Steward</th>
<th>Rep</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Member</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steward</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rep</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The important point is that in the eyes of the reps, stewards gain power with increased responsibility for grievance handling, and reps “lose control” of their base.

Given that reps feel threatened by the change from the servicing to the organizing model, what do stewards think? Because of the differences among stewards that I discussed earlier, I shall break their responses down by sector.

Matrix 6 shows that in scenario 1, though there is not perfect agreement: 60% of the twenty industrial stewards who answered the question see the member as owing the rep (but $p = .25$), and 70% also see the steward as owing the rep ($p = .06$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member</th>
<th>Steward</th>
<th>Rep</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Member</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steward</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rep</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As matrix 7 shows, there is stronger agreement in scenario 2, in which the steward wins the case without assistance. Here, industrial stewards see the member as owing the steward ($p = .05$) and the member as owing the rep ($p = .05$) and the steward as owing the rep ($p = .05$). This is the reverse of the reps’ view, in which reps see themselves as owing the stewards.
In scenario 3, as matrix 8 indicates, the obligations entailed in negotiating a good contract, industrial stewards see members as owing stewards \((p = .01)\) and members as owing reps \((p = .03)\) and stewards as owing reps \((p = .03)\) in the classical pattern of the servicing model.

Matrix 9 indicates that 66\% of the eighteen building services stewards who answered the question in scenario 12 think the rep owes the member, a reversal of the usual logic, but since \(p = .12\), the relationship is not significant. There is little agreement on the other relationships, and neither is significant.

Building services stewards do not agree on scenario 2, as matrix 10 shows, and there are no significant relationships. Notice that one person did not answer the question about whether the rep owes the steward or the steward owes the rep because the sum of the two cells is 17. If the sum of the two cells is less than the number of respondents, it means that some people did not answer that part of the question.
In the third scenario, in which the negotiating team negotiates a good contract, matrix 11 suggests that 68% of the building services respondents think that the member owes the steward, and 64% think the member owes the rep, but there is little agreement about whether stewards owe reps or reps owe stewards, and there are no significant relationships.

Among public sector stewards, there is strong agreement that in scenario 1, the member owes the rep (75%) ($p = .01$) and the steward owes the rep ($p = .005$), but no agreement about whether the member owes the steward, as matrix 12 shows.

On the critical scenario 2, public sector stewards strongly agree that the member owes the steward (77%, $p = .004$) and that the member owes the rep (88%, $p = .001$). However, as matrix 13 indicates, there is no agreement about whether the steward owes the rep or the rep owes the steward.
Matrix 14 shows strong agreement in scenario 3 that public sector stewards think that members owe stewards \( (p = .001) \) and reps \( (p = .05) \) and that stewards owe reps \( (p = .004) \) for negotiating good contracts.

Table 3 presents these data in a different form. In the cells, the “>” means “owes.” “M” means “member,” “S” means “steward,” and “R” means “rep.” “R > S,” then, would mean “rep owes steward.” The columns are the three scenarios further divided by the three relationships (M-S, M-R, R-S) to make nine columns. “X” means there was no agreement among respondents and no significant relationship by the binomial test. Each line of the diagram represents the findings for each sample—staff, industrial sector stewards, building services stewards, and public sector stewards. The one “?” in the cell for staff...
in scenario 3 represents the ambiguous statistically borderline ($p = .105$) opinion that when negotiations result in good contracts, reps owe stewards.

Table 3 shows that if a rep and steward together win a grievance for a member, the staff think the member owes the steward, but none of the stewards agree. It also shows that if a steward wins a grievance for a member alone with no help from the rep, the staff and all but the building services stewards think that the member owes the steward. It further indicates that for negotiating good contracts, the staff is not in agreement: Industrial and public sector but not building services stewards think that members owe stewards.

In no case do the staff members think members owe reps. However, industrial and public sector stewards think that in scenarios 2 and 3 members owe reps. Building services stewards do not agree.

Table 3 illustrates the pivotal point of the article: that staff and building services stewards see no obligation between reps and stewards if a rep wins a grievance with a steward, but industrial and public sector stewards think that stewards are obliged to the rep. It also suggests that while building services and public sector stewards do not agree on obligation if a steward wins a grievance without help from a rep, the industrial stewards think the steward owes the rep, while the staff thinks the rep owes the steward. Public sector stewards agree with industrial stewards that the steward owes the rep for negotiating good contracts while the staff leans toward the idea that reps owe stewards but do not entirely unambiguously agree.

The most relevant observation is that reps, in fact, see shifts in obligation and power coming with the replacement of the servicing model with the organizing model and thus feel threatened. They have little to gain by the shift and much to lose.

CONCLUSIONS

The evidence of the questions about obligation suggests that reps do feel that they lose power and base with the shifts the international is promoting. Industrial stewards do not agree and see a classic pattern of obligation that lies behind the politics of base. Public sector stewards largely agree with the industrial stewards. The differences among stewards are attributable to the different structural relations that pertain in the different sectors. This, in addition to confirming ethnographic conclusions about the relationships of obligation and power, tends to lend weight to previous conclusions that work site structures are important determinants of cultural variables among members (Durrenberger 1997; Durrenberger and Erem 1999b).
This exercise extends the use of paired comparisons beyond the realm of testing whether people scale objects according to some criterion to a test of a central variable in anthropological thinking, obligation, and reciprocity. Using such empirical methods might do much to disambiguate discussions of concepts and practices of reciprocity that have characterized our discipline since its inception.

NOTE

1. The sample of staff is nearly complete—almost all the staff of the local in question. For this, group sampling is not an issue. The 148 stewards of the sample are those who came to the annual stewards meeting and completed a survey instrument. Only 41% of the stewards completed the section on obligation that is the focus of this article. Thus, the 148 stewards are not a random sample of the stewards of the local, and those 41% who completed this part of the survey are not a random sample of those who attended the meeting. I do not know what sources of bias may be in this two-tier self-selection process. However, the selection of stewards at the meeting is beneficial, as these are the most motivated and active of the stewards, the ones most involved in the programs of the local, and it is just those stewards who are of most interest here. Rather than making any elaborate claim about the purity of this sample, it is best to recognize its limitations, to suggest that the findings are consistent with other evidence, to indicate the impossibility of getting any better sample, and to use these results as a foundation for further thinking and observation and perhaps more adequate statistical tests.

REFERENCES


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