

Organising Methods and Member Recruitment in Irish Trade Unions

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¹ The authors wish to thank the referee for their helpful comments.

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Abstract

Purpose

This paper explores the recruiting and organising methods used by Irish full-time union officials to recruit new members in the private sector of the economy.

Design/methodology/approach

The analysis is based on a survey of full-time union officials in eight Irish trade unions.

Findings

Results indicate that the use of organising techniques by officials had no significant impact on changes in membership numbers but did have a significant and positive impact on reported changes in new members. However, the variance explained was extremely modest.

Research limitations and implications

A potential limitation is that we assess the organising model solely from the perspective of full-time union officials. An area for future research would be to capture the attitudes and experiences of local activists involved in organising.

Practical implications

The demands of the organising approach require great commitment in terms of time and financial resources for unions. Yet the returns from this investment may be slight as we found only a relatively weak relationship between the number of organising methods used and changes in membership numbers and the recruitment of new members.

Originality/value of paper

To date there has been little systematic study of either the recruitment methods used by Irish trade unions or the relative success of different approaches. Based on a survey of Irish full-time union officials this paper attempts to address this lacuna.

Key words: Union recruitment, organising methods, private sector

Paper type Research paper

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Introduction

Union recruitment and organising has been high on trade union agendas across developed countries as unions seek to reverse the decline in unionisation. Like trade unions in Britain, Australia and the US, Irish unions have been forced to examine their operations and future in the context of declining union density. Between 1980 and 2007, union density in the Irish labour force dropped from approximately 61 percent to 31 percent (Gunnigle et al., 2002; CSO, 2008). While unionisation has remained generally stable and high in the public sector, it has dropped significantly in the private sector. Private sector unionisation is estimated to have fallen to as low as 20 percent (Sheehan, 2008). This significant decline in unionisation has occurred despite a benign political context compared to that in Britain, Australia and the US. Irish trade unions influenced economic and social policy decision making through a series of centralised agreements with employers and Government between 1987 and 2008. It has been suggested that the centralisation of bargaining neutralises employer opposition and has a positive impact on union density and growth (Visser, 2002; see also Corneo, 1995). However, these outcomes have not been evident in the Irish case (D'Art and Turner, 2005). For Irish trade unions the outcomes traditionally associated with strong corporatist regimes such as increased union availability and improved workplace access, have not materialized (D'Art and Turner, 2005 and forthcoming). Despite two decades of social partnership the unions failed to gain any improvement in the legal environment for union recognition in the face of increasing opposition from employers.

The steep decline in private sector unionisation levels has prompted many trade unions to focus on intensive recruitment campaigns targeted at certain groups (cf. Snape, 1994). For example SIPTU, the largest Irish union, has attempted to recruit from specific groups such as young people, women, atypical workers, workers in multinationals, migrant workers and industries which are considered 'ripe' for union drives (Dobbins, 2003, 2004; Higgins, 1999). To date there has been little systematic study of either the recruitment methods used by Irish trade unions or the relative success of different approaches. Based on a survey of Irish full-time union officials

and the methods used to recruit new members this paper attempts to address this lacuna.

Union Recruitment and Organising

Union recruitment activity has been identified as a key factor in the rise and fall of union membership and density (Heery et al., 2000b; Metcalf, 1991; Kelly, 1990). Union decline has prompted a shift in the views of unions on issues of recruitment. Beaumont and Harris (1990) note that unions traditionally believed that union membership growth and decline was dependant on economic and political factors (see also Undy et al., 1981). This view was reflected in the work of union officials. Research indicated that most of union officials' time was taken up with negotiation, administration and servicing of members rather than recruitment (Clegg *et al*, 1961; Beaumont and Harris, 1990; Brown and Lawson, 1973; Robertson and Sams, 1976). More recently, explanations that focus on the inadequacies of union recruitment policies have been advanced to account for the decline in union membership such as limited investment in organizing (Voos, 1984), an unwillingness to attempt organising beyond traditional groups of workers (Beaumont and Harris, 1990; McLoughlin and Gourlay, 1994: 41) and the use of ineffective or poorly developed union recruitment techniques (Kelly and Heery, 1994; Bronfenbrenner, 1997; Bronfenbrenner and Juravich, 1998; Waddington and Kerr, 1999; Waddington and Whitston, 1997). The renewed emphasis on union renewal through recruitment is generally focused on attempts to make it more strategic and high profile rather than non-specialist, reactive, decentralised and low profile (Beaumont and Harris, 1990). The emergence of an increasingly strategic approach to the recruitment of new members has been subsumed into a more encompassing generic organising model of union recruitment that seeks to increase membership through workplace activism.

The Organising Model: Theory and Practice

The organising model has been defined as an approach that aims to organise workers so that they are 'empowered' to define and pursue their own interests through the medium of collective organisation (Heery et al, 2000a:38). The term organising model is essentially a descriptive or heuristic device rather than a model or theory with explanatory or predictive qualities. Indeed, literature on organising has failed to develop a definition of it and it is difficult to 'pin down' a definitive set of measures

of the organising model. Discussions on the organising model have centred on the practices it encompasses and the outcomes it is supposed to produce. It is an encompassing label used to describe a an extensive range of union practices ranging from direct recruitment methods to political and community activism (see Appendix 1 for a list of organising practices as identified in literature). The outcomes of using these practices are argued to be an increase in new members and increased activism amongst members so that they handle disputes thereby reducing reliance on paid union staff (Dundon et al., 1999; Oxenbridge, 1997; Fiorito, 2004). In theory, the increased involvement of lay representatives and shop stewards facilitates a more efficient use of union resources and increases democracy within the union (de Turberville, 2004).

The organising model is contrasted, usually favourably, to the more passive servicing model of recruitment. A service model of trade unionism is one where the function of the union is to deliver collective and individual services to members provided by the formal organisation and its hierarchy of officers (Heery et al., 2000a:38). Thus, under the servicing model, the responsibility for union resources, strategies and interests, handling grievances and recruitment rests primarily with union officials (Fletcher and Hurd, 1998; Carter and Cooper, 2002). Critics of service unionism argue that it is disempowering for union members because union tactics such as legal cases can be remote from members' workplaces (cf. Crosby, 2002). Alternatively, it could be argued that the threat and outcomes of individual legal cases can be used by unions to encourage collective action (McCammon, 2001; Colling, 2006). Thus servicing and organising are not necessarily mutually exclusive (see Fiorito, 2004).

Despite the advocacy of organizing methods of building activism from the grass-roots up to ensure long-term membership stability, the uptake and successfulness of the model to date has not been extensive (Oxenbridge, 1997:26). There have been a small number of publicised campaigns in the US based on the organising model (cf. Hurd, 1993; Waldinger et al., 1998). According to Bronfenbrenner and Hickey (2004:17), these high profile organising victories have been concentrated in a few unions and industries, "while the majority of unions in the US continue to experience organizing losses and declining membership". In a survey of union officials in Britain, Fiorito

(2004) found that roughly half of the sample indicated that their unions were adopting the organising model. From their research, Heery et al (2000b) concluded that British unions were selective in the use of the organising model practices and that there was no major organizing union dedicated mainly to the extension of union organization.

Various reasons have been advanced for the relatively low uptake and poor adoption of the organising approach. Firstly, the organising approach requires significant investment yet not all unions ascribing to organising have provided the necessary resources (Voos, 1984; Snape, 1995; Bronfenbrenner and Hickey, 2004; Carter and Cooper, 2002). Indeed, the increased workload associated with implementing an organising approach without the concomitant resources has been a source of frustration for union officers (Heery et al., 2003b; Fiorito, 2004; Carter and Cooper, 2002). Secondly, a number of studies have pointed to the influential role of union leaders in the adoption and success of union renewal strategies (Fiorito, 2004; Oxenbridge, 1997; Voss and Sherman, 2000; Kelly, 1998; Carter and Cooper, 2002; Griffin and Moors, 2004). While insufficient resources may signal a lack of commitment to organising, conversely an overenthusiastic leadership is not a guarantee of success. Union leaders, who impose a top-down approach to organising without the necessary buy-in from union officials, militates against the democratization that is supposed to be an output of organising and can result in the failure of the organising approach (Carter and Cooper, 2002; de Turberville, 2004).

Thirdly, scepticism or even opposition to the organising approach can be related to union officials' belief in the servicing model. While the intention of union leadership may be to move away from servicing to organising, advising and representing individual members still remains a significant part of a union official's job (Colling, 2006; Heery, 2006; Higgins, 2008; Snape, 1994). For example, Carter and Cooper (2002) noted that officials surveyed in the Manufacturing, Science and Finance Union (MSF) in Britain were unhappy with the characterization of servicing as valueless and organising as 'good' and also with the belief of key national officials that it was possible to change practice overnight. The overwhelming conclusion of officers from the MSF study was that organising was simply an addition to existing practice, rather than an attempt to transform it. Thus, union officials' own commitment to organising

can be influenced by their belief in organising, the process in which union leadership introduce the approach and the resource provision attached to it.

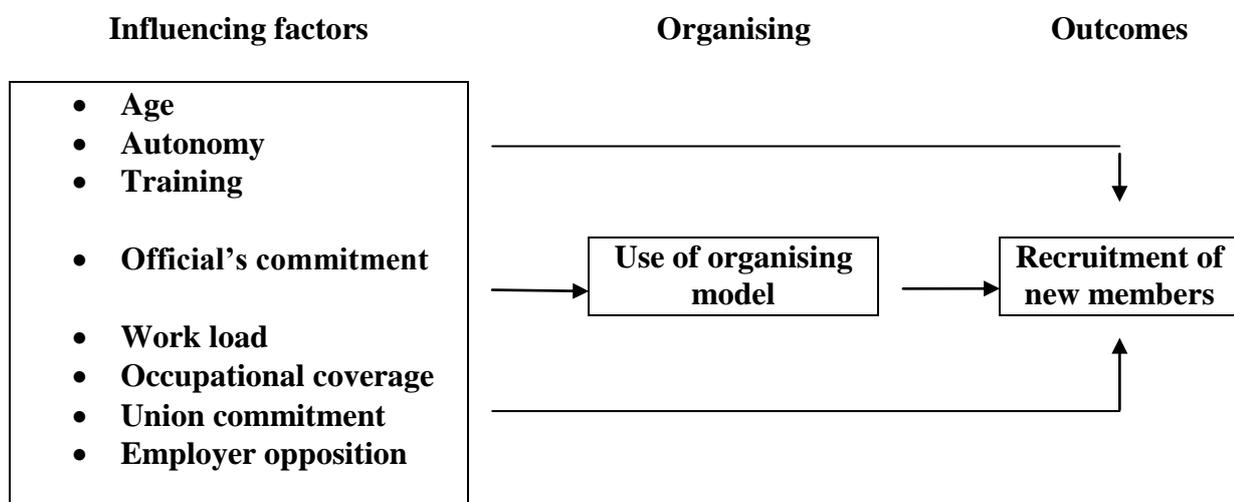
Methodology

These criticisms aside there is some limited evidence that the organising model enhances the recruitment of new union members (e.g. Badigannavar and Kelly, 2005; Erickson et al, 2002). This paper explores the recruiting and organising methods used by full-time union officials in the private sector. A postal survey of officials was carried out in eight Irish trade unions. The unions were selected on the basis that their membership was either wholly or partly drawn from the private sector. Upon request from the authors, all of the unions selected granted full access for the study. According to the information supplied by these unions, approximately 226,362 of their members are employed in the private sector. This represents up to 90 per cent of private sector union members. Consequently, the officials surveyed can be taken as broadly representing private sector union members. A total of 195 union officials were surveyed and 82 completed questionnaires returned. This represents a response rate of 42 per cent. Based on the literature and studies of the organising model we suggest a basic model (figure 1) in which outcomes such as increased recruitment (Dundon et al, 1997; Oxenbridge, 1997) are a function of different organising methods and techniques (Heery et al, 2000a; Carter and Cooper, 2002; Oxenbridge 2000) that are in turn influenced by a number of factors such as necessary resources (Bronfenbrenner and Hickey, 2004; Heery et al, 2003b), support of union leaders (Kelly, 1998; Fiorito, 2004) and union officer commitment (Colling, 2006; Heery, 2006).

Based on this survey we first test whether the greater use of organising methods is associated with organising and recruitment success (Fig I). Secondly, we test the various factors that influence union officers' choice of recruitment methods. As noted above union officers with a heavy workload and scarce resources are less likely to favour the organising model. A central influence on the choice of tactics will be the extent to which their union is committed to recruiting and organising new members. It is also likely that a union officer's personal commitment to recruiting will affect the choice of organising methods. Other factors in the Irish context influencing organising

are likely to be the difficulties of union recognition and employer opposition. During the 1990s there was a sharp rise in the number of union recognition recommendations from the Labour Court and the number and intensity of strikes related to union recognition. In those cases where the Labour Court recommended recognition of the trade union, few of the companies involved acted on the recommendations (Gunnigle et al, 2002). Employer opposition to trade unions also appears to have increased during the period of social partnership with union officials reporting an increase in the use of coercive tactics by employers (McMahon, 2001; D'Art and Turner, 2005 and 2006). Employer opposition raises the costs and difficulties of recruiting new members. Unless adequate resources are provided, union officers may prefer to avoid involvement with recalcitrant employers. Similarly union officers are more likely to favour recruiting in traditionally unionised sectors such as manufacturing. Thus, we include work load, personal commitment to recruitment, union commitment to recruitment, employer opposition and the sector covered by the union officer. It may also be the case that the above factors have a direct influence on recruitment outcomes. In addition it might be expected that younger union officers, less socialised into the service model than older officers, will be more likely to adopt the organising model of union recruitment. A potential limitation in testing the organising model is that we assess the model through one narrow perspective – that of full-time union officials.

Fig. I Factors Influencing Officials' Uptake of the Organising Model and Success of the Organising Model



Description of measures

As the organising approach is central to the research questions here it is essential to grasp something of its content. Based on the list in Appendix 1, we identified two dimensions of organising and the measures of these dimensions are outlined in table 1 with means and standard deviation. The first dimension is oriented toward building organisational and members' capacity to engage in union activity. Organising capacity is composed of five items ranging from encouraging members to be active, supporting and training lay representatives, building collective organisation and setting up an organising committee. The second dimension of organising is designed to build the recruitment capacity of the union through member and lay-activism. Recruitment capacity is composed of seven items to include encouraging recruitment by lay activists, person-to-person recruitment and use of community organisations (Table 1). Mean scores for both dimensions are relatively high. Organising capacity has a mean of 12.1 from a possible range 5 to 15 and recruitment capacity has a mean of 19.2 and a range of 7 to 28. Both dimensions are combined to provide an overall measure for organising. Although the alphas for both measures are relatively low (organising capacity=0.54 and recruitment capacity=0.43) our construction of these measures reflects the main themes in the organising the literature. These measures are best viewed as a heuristic device that comes closest in a descriptive sense to measuring the organising activities as outlined in the literature. The two dependent variables measure the change in union membership and recruitment of new members over the past three years amongst the workers that the union official covers. A change in union membership is essentially a measure of turnover – people who leave and join the union and is a net figure of change over a three year period. In contrast the second measure is a narrower measure and refers only to changes in 'new' members. The two measures are used to get a sense of trends in overall membership levels and to differentiate between new members and other members.

Four of the control measures – union-provided training, autonomy, official's commitment to recruitment and the union commitment to recruitment - are composite measures constructed from items in the survey.

Table I: Description of measures

Controls	Description	Mean	Std. Dev.
Age	Scored: 1=Under 20; 2=21-25; 3=26-30; 4=31-40; 5=41-50; 6=51-60; 7=60+	5.1	0.83
Gender	Scored: Female=1; Male=0	0.19	/
Training (Alpha=0.67)	Composed of 2 items: Has your union provided training in 1. Recruitment techniques; 2. Organising techniques/model. Scored 1=yes; 0=no. Composite range 0 to 2.	1.1	0.87
Autonomy (Alpha=0.7)	Composed of 3 items: How much autonomy do you believe you have with regard to the following activities: 1.Deciding which workers to recruit; 2.Choosing recruitment methods; 3.Selecting targets for recognition. Item scored 0=none; 1=some; 2=moderate; 3= a great deal. Composite range 0 to 9.	8.1	1.5
Experience of employer opposition	Starting with the most 4 recent case you were involved in, did the employer oppose recognition. Scored 0=No cases opposed; 1=25% cases opposed; 2=33% cases opposed; 4=50% cases opposed; 5=66% cases opposed; 7=75% cases opposed; 8=all cases opposed. Mean based on a 0 (no opposition) to 1 (all opposed) score.	0.71	/
Commitment to recruitment (Alpha=0.62)	Composed of 3 items: How would you characterise your own commitment to pursuing the following objectives: 1.Recruiting new members; 2.Building workplace organisation. 3. Seeking new recognition agreements. Items scored 1=weak; 2=moderate; 3=strong. Composite range 0 to 9.	8.4	1.02
Work load	How many union members do you currently have direct responsibility for? Scored: 1=100-1000; 2=1001-2500; 3=2501-5000; 4=5001+.	5.6	1.5
Union commitment to recruitment (Alpha=0.71)	Composed of 3 items: How strong do you believe is the commitment of your union to pursuing the following objectives: 1.Recruiting new members; 3. Strengthening workplace organisation; 2. Seeking new recognition agreements. Items scored 1=weak; 2=moderate; 3=strong. Composite range 0 to 9.	8.0	1.3
Main occupational coverage	Scored: 1=Managers and administrators; 2=Professional workers; 3=Associate professional & technical workers; 4=Clerical and secretarial; 5=Craft and related; 6=Personal and protective service workers; 7=Sales workers; 8=Plant and machine operatives.	5.9	2.1
Measures of the organising model			
Organising capacity (Alpha=0.54)	Composed of 5 items: 1.Encouraging members to become active; 2.Advising and supporting lay reps; 3.Training lay representatives; 4.Building collective organisation amongst members; 5. Setting up an 'organising committee' within targeted workplaces (q10). Scored: 1=not part of job;2=some part of job;3=very/most important part of job. Composite range 5 to 15.	12.1	1.7
Recruitment capacity (Alpha=0.43)	Composed of 7 items: 1. Identifying sites for union recruitment (q3); 2.Encouraging recruitment by lay activists (q3); 3. Person-to-person recruitment at the workplace; 4. Link up with community organisations; 5. Corporate campaigning (eg contacting shareholders to encourage recognition); 6. Direct recruitment by activists at other workplaces.7. Rating of potential members in terms of likelihood of joining the union (mapping). Scored 1=not used; 2=used rarely'3=used occasionally; 4=used frequently. Composite range 7 to 28.	19.2	2.8
Organising model (Alpha=0.4)	Composed of 2 items: organising capacity and recruitment capacity	31.2	3.7
Dependent measures			
Membership numbers	Over the past three years has union membership amongst the workers for whom you have responsibility changed: scored 1=Decreased by 10% or more2=Decreased by less than 10% 3=Stable level of membership; 4=Increased by less than 10%; 5=Increased by 10% or more.	2.2	1.2
New members	Over the past three years has recruitment of new members amongst the workers for whom you have responsibility changed: scored 1=Decreased by 10% or more2=Decreased by less than 10% 3=Stable level of membership; 4=Increased by less than 10%; 5=Increased by 10% or more.	1.9	0.8

Results

The majority of respondents were male (80%) with an average age of 45. This indicates a considerable life experience in trade unions and industrial relations. Indeed, over the past five years the average number of cases in which officials were involved in attempts to secure union recognition from an employer was approximately seven. The main occupational groups represented by the officials are operatives (36% coverage), sales (16%), craft (14%) and clerical workers (14%) concentrated in the manufacturing and retail sectors. Approximately two thirds of the officials had a direct responsibility for 1000 to 5000 union members.

With regard to employer opposition, union officials reported a high level of opposition in union recognition campaigns they were involved in. Thirty five percent of officials reported that the employer opposed recognition in every campaign, 32 percent of officials indicated opposition in three quarters of all campaigns and only eight percent experienced no employer opposition in recognition campaigns. Even less variability is evident in three other independent measures: autonomy, individual commitment to recruitment and the union's commitment to recruitment. All three exhibit low levels of variance with mean averages of eight or above from a possible range of 0 to 9. Thus these measures are likely at best to be weak predictors of an organising approach. The majority of union officials reported an increase in both union membership generally and specifically new members. Thirty seven percent of officials indicated an increase of more than 10 percent in new members while 38 percent reported an increase of less than 10 percent. However, only 1 percent of officials believed that the recruitment of new members had decreased. This result is not surprising. Although union density in Ireland declined dramatically after 1990, union membership numbers actually increased by about 17 percent due to an increase in the size of the employed labour force (Roche and Ashmore, 2000).

Multivariate analysis

Based on the model outlined above we first explore the factors that determine the use of an organising approach. The dependent measures are organising capacity, recruitment capacity and the organising model combining the two measures. As table II indicates, the regression equations are not statistically robust and are only

significant at the 10 percent level (F score). Indeed, significance at the ten percent level was only achieved by reducing the number of control variables in the equations. Furthermore, the variance explained in the dependent measures is relatively low at between six and eight percent (adjusted r^2). These qualifications aside occupational coverage is significantly (at the 10% level) associated with organising capacity (equation 1) though not with recruitment capacity or the full organising model. This indicates that the greater use of organising methods is more likely where union officials cover members in higher level occupations. The commitment of the official to recruitment is strongly and significantly associated with increased use of recruitment capacity methods and the combined organising model (equations 2 and 3). Thus the higher the commitment level of officials the more likely they are to use recruitment capacity methods and the overall organising methods. Essentially this is the only robust association that can be drawn for table II.

Table II: Factors influencing use of organising practices

(Dependent variable: Organising. Ordinary least squares regression, method: enter+ used. Standardised coefficients reported).

	1	2	3
	Organising capacity	Recruit capacity	Organising model
Controls			
Age	-0.07	0.09	0.03
Own commitment	0.14	0.38***	0.36***
Members covered	0.05	-0.09	-0.04
Occupational coverage	-0.2*	0.12	0.0
Adjusted r^2	0.06	0.08	0.06
F score	2.1*	2.4*	2.0*
N	67	62	61

Ns =not significant

* P<0.1 ** P<0.05 ***P<0.01

In table III the dependent measures are changes in membership numbers and in new members are these are regressed on the controls and the measures of the organising model. Equations 1 and 2 include only the four controls: commitment to recruitment, membership coverage, occupational coverage and employer opposition. Equation 2 fails to reach significance and can be discounted. However equation 1 is statistically robust and explains 21 percent of the variance in the change in membership numbers. Commitment, employer opposition and, to a lesser extent, occupational coverage are significantly associated with change in membership numbers. There is a consistent

relationship between a respondent's commitment to recruitment and positive changes in membership numbers (equations 1, 3 and 5). The extent of employer opposition experienced by officials is also consistently significant across these three equations. Paradoxically it appears that officials who report higher levels of employer opposition are more likely to report an increase in membership numbers. It may be the case that officials who recruit aggressively are more likely to experience employer opposition compared to officials with a more passive approach. Hence, higher levels of employer opposition experienced by officials may indicate greater organising and recruitment activity. The measures of the organising model are entered in equations 3 and 5. All three measures fail to reach significance. Indeed, these measures actually reduce the level of variance in the change in membership numbers explained compared to equation 1. Consequently, it can be concluded that the use of organising techniques or methods (as measured here) by the officials surveyed has no significant impact on changes in membership numbers.

By contrast, the inclusion of the organising measures in equations 4 and 6 to explain change in new members considerably improves the statistical significance of the regressions and the variance explained in the dependent variable. Somewhat surprisingly the greater the size of the membership covered by an official, the more likely they are to report an increase in new members. A possible explanation for this relationship maybe that greater member coverage is correlated with firm size as large firms are easier to service and recruitment of new members is also easier. In equation 4 the extent of recruitment capacity methods is significant (albeit at the 10% level) though not organising capacity. However, the combination of both measures is strongly significant in equation 6. A greater use of the organising model by officials appears to have a significant positive impact on reported changes in new members. While this finding tends to confirm that the increased use of the organising model is associated with greater recruitment success some qualification is required. The level of variance accounted for in the change in new members is only 17 percent in equation 6. Indeed, if the controls are omitted then the organising model explains only 7 percent of the variance in the dependent measure. Thus the association between the use of organising methods and recruitment of new members can hardly be considered decisive.

Table III: Factors influencing changes in membership numbers

(Dependent variable: Change in union membership. Ordinary least squares regression, method: enter+ used. Standardised coefficients reported).

	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Change in Membership numbers	Change in new Members	Change in Membership numbers	Change in new Members	Change in Membership numbers	Change in new Members
Controls						
Own commitment	0.33***	0.06	0.25*	-0.09	0.27**	-0.09
Members covered	0.06	-0.01	0.13	0.3**	0.11	0.3**
Occupation cover	-0.21*	0.1	-0.22	-0.08	-0.16	-0.09
Employer opposed	0.26**	0.06	0.26**	0.17	0.28**	0.17
Organise						
Organise capacity			-0.07	0.18		
Recruit capacity			0.23	0.26*		
Organising model					0.15	0.35***
Adjusted r²	0.21	0.0	0.2	0.15	0.19	0.17
F score	5.1***	0.8 (ns)	3.2***	2.5**	3.5***	3.1**
N	61	61	53	53	53	53

Ns =not significant

* P<0.1 ** P<0.05 ***P<0.01

Discussion and Conclusion

Based on a survey of union officials this paper tested the relationship between various factors such as commitment to recruitment, employer opposition, membership/occupational coverage and union officers' choice of recruitment methods. Secondly, we test whether the use of an organising approach is associated with organising success as measured by changes in levels of membership and newly acquired members. In the former case we found only a weak relationship between the commitment level of officials and the use of organising methods. In the latter case the use of organising techniques by the officials surveyed had no significant impact on changes in membership numbers. However the greater use of the organising model by officials had a significant and positive impact on reported changes in new members. Yet the variance explained by the use of the organising approach was extremely modest. Indeed, the results here give relatively scant support to the advocates of the organising approach to union recruitment. It may of course be the case that the specified model and measurements used here fail to provide an adequate test of the effectiveness of the organising model. This tends to be a perennial problem with survey based research and its inability to capture the rich texture of everyday social processes. Clearly our data and methodology reflect the general weaknesses of this approach. In addition, as our findings are based on the experiences of full-time union

officials, an area for future research would be to capture the attitudes and experiences of local activists of putting the organising model into practice.

Using the interpretations of union officials, the theoretical weakness of the organising model is apparent. In practise union organising and servicing activities are likely to overlap, contributing to the difficulty in defining the boundaries of the organising model. In addition, some of the practices included in table 1 could be categorised as traditional recruitment such as planned organising campaigns and paid lead organisers. Thus during a 'recruitment' campaign it may be difficult to distinguish where traditional recruitment ends and organising begins because the organising model fails to indicate how the organising process works and '...fails to show any clear path from internal mobilization to external organizing' (Fletcher and Hurd, 1998:44).

As our review of the literature suggests the organising model as a construct lacks definitional and conceptual rigour. In the absence of such rigour it is difficult to develop appropriate empirical measures of the dimensions that constitute the organising model (Gorz, 2005). There are also questions regarding the ambiguousness of the objectives of the organising model (de Turberville, 2004). Many of its advocates emphasise that the organising model's primary objective is not to recruit members but to foster activism and organising (cf. Carter, 2000; Heery et al., 2000a). Recruiting members then becomes an indirect outcome of organising. In unionised workplaces it may be that organising will lead to the recruitment of new members. However in firms where no union is established recruitment of union members would appear to be a necessary first step to create the conditions for an organising drive. In practice the organising model amounts to a collection of tactics and techniques defined more by their extent and intensityⁱ than any qualitative difference from the long activist tradition in Irish and British trade unionism (Newsinger, 2003; Heery and Kelly, 1990). Yet activism such as participating in union affairs, canvassing for new members and commitment to the principles of trade unionism has always been confined to a critical minority of union members, in particular lay and full-time union officers and shop stewards (Flood et al, 1996; D'Art and Turner, 2002; Heery and Kelly, 1990). Full-time union officials are generally appointed after many years of shop floor activism and tend to be highly committed trade unionists.

The demands of the organising approach require great commitment in terms of time, enormous energy and the confrontation of often hostile employers. Unless substantial extra resources are available, it is unlikely that union officials would be able to sustain the 'permanent' activism required by the organising model. Organising campaigns are also costly and there is a limit to the scarce resources of trade unions. Clearly there are also political avenues to increasing the membership and density of trade unions as well as organising campaigns by individual trade unions. Historical trends in union membership numbers and density across the developed industrial societies reflect in the main political and institutional developments rather than the extent or intensity of workplace activism and organising (see also Western, 1997). For example the high union density levels in countries such as Sweden and Denmark derive from political conditions that created a relatively benign institutional environment supportive of union membership and collective bargaining. Nevertheless employer hostility and weak institutional support from the state would appear to make renewed attention on organising and recruiting workers an imperative for Irish trade unions.

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Appendix I
Literature Review: Practices Associated with the Organising Model

Practice	Heery et al 2000a	Heery et al 2003b	Carter & Cooper 2002	Oxenbridge 2000 & 1997	Findlay & McKinlay 2003	Cooper 2001	Bronfenhener & Hickey 2004
Planned organising campaigns	X	X			X	X	
Paid lead organisers	X	X		X	X	X	
Activists through organising committee	X	X	X	X	X		X
Mapping techniques	X				X		
Identifying issues/grievances	X						
Actions	X		X	X			
One to one recruitment	X		X	X	X		
Like recruits like	X						
Publicising concessions from employer	X						
Identification of levers, allies, pressure points	X						
Involvement of political, community, consumer groups	X	X					
Encourage workplace reps to recruit	X	X					
Demonstrations, petitions	X						
Identify membership targets	X						
Alter profile of union officers		X					
Management techniques			X			X	
Splitting org & ser functions			X			X	
Campaigns focused on justice, fairness			X	X			
Leadership commitment			X				
Union recognition							
Home visits	X			X			X
Union education programmes				X		X	
Informal small group meetings				X			
Adequate staff/finance							X
Strategic targeting							X
Person to person							X
Benchmarks							X
Escalating pressure tactics							X

ⁱ Bronfenbrenner for example claims that organizing win rates go up “no matter how hostile employer opposition” when union tactics are higher in number, more comprehensive and multi-pronged (Dobbins

and Sheehan, 2008). This surely amounts to the obvious: the greater the union power wielded the more likely a union victory!