THE REVITALIZATION OF THE CWA: INTEGRATING COLLECTIVE BARGAINING, POLITICAL ACTION, AND ORGANIZING

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This case study of the Communications Workers of America (CWA) demonstrates the value of resource dependence and contingency organizational theories—two branches of organization theory, which has most commonly been used to interpret firm behavior—for analyzing union revitalization. Consistent with predictions of those theories, the CWA responded to a changed environment by abandoning strategies that no longer achieved organizational objectives, but retaining and bolstering strategies that continued to be effective. Furthermore, like the organizations analyzed in Jeffrey Pfeffer and Gerald Salancik's classic exposition of resource dependency theory, in the face of heightened environmental complexity and uncertainty the CWA used political action, growth strategies, and inter-organizational linkages to gain advantage. The CWA conformed to another prediction of contingency theory by using an integration strategy—specifically, by making simultaneous and interactive use of activities in collective bargaining, politics, and organizing—to spur innovation and respond to environmental complexity and uncertainty.

Research on the revitalization of the American labor movement has focused almost exclusively on union organizing efforts (see Bronfenbrenner et al. 1998; Nissen 1999; Turner, Katz, and Hurd 2001). While this literature provides much interesting analysis of the factors that influence representation elections and particular organizing drives, it has not examined how recent organizing campaigns relate to other revitalization initiatives under way within the American labor movement. Similarly, research that has assessed revitalization steps taken by unions in activities other than organizing (for example, Bronfenbrenner and Juravich [2000] analyzed corporate campaigns) has paid little attention to how the various revitalization activities interact with one another.[1] Consequently,

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[1]Bronfenbrenner and others (Bronfenbrenner et al. 1998) have urged unions to engage in the very sort

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research has thus far failed to provide a comprehensive examination of the strategies unions are using to revitalize themselves and how, if at all, union activities in one sphere of influence, such as organizing, interact with activities in other spheres, such as collective bargaining and political action.

This paper contributes to the literature by examining the ways collective bargaining, political action, and organizing strategies interact to achieve union revitalization. We draw on resource dependence and contingency theories to explain why the success of union revitalization depends on the adoption of new strategies and structures in response to changes in the external environment. Our treatment of unions as organizations allows us to incorporate insights from organization theory into industrial relations theory. At the same time, we hope to enrich the research in organization theory, which has focused primarily on firms or public bureaucracies, by providing empirical evidence from union organizations.

Insights of Organization Theory

The basic claim of contingency and resource dependence theories is that organizations develop strategies that fit the environmental conditions they face in order to advance their goals. Contingency theory predicts that organizations will adapt their internal organizational structure to fit the external environment (Lawrence and Lorsch 1969; Donaldson 2001). In their classic statement of resource dependence, Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) further theorized that organizations are dependent on the resources of external organizations for their survival and therefore develop strategies and structures to lessen their dependence and improve their power and leverage vis-à-vis those organizations. As the environment changes, organizations adapt their strategies to fit the new conditions. This suggests the following hypothesis, which we refer to as the *adaptation thesis:*

Hypothesis 1 (adaptation): As their environment changes, unions will abandon strategies and structures that no longer fit, but will retain and bolster strategies that remain suitable.

Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) also specified the strategies that organizations need to pursue in the face of environmental complexity and uncertainty. These include political action, growth strategies, diversification strategies, and inter-organizational linkages, all of which help to reduce resource dependence, enhance bargaining power, and advance organizational goals. In the context of private sector firms, resource dependence refers to firms' dependence on suppliers, customers, government regulators, and other external agents. Growth strategies include expanding the volume of business and market share; diversification includes adopting different business strategies or expanding business activity across different product markets; and inter-organizational linkages include mergers, strategic alliances, or closer relations with suppliers or customers.

While Pfeffer and Salancik and other organizational researchers have primarily used resource dependence to analyze firm strategies, it is reasonable to expect unions to use comparable strategies to manage environmental complexity and uncertainty. Unions depend on the firms they have organized to engage with them in negotiating wages and benefits for their members; and they seek to enhance their bargaining power vis-à-vis the firm. For unions, political action strategies may include internal political mobilization of members as well as externally oriented political activities in electoral, regulatory, and legislative arenas. Growth strategies involve a focus on organizing new members rather than focusing exclusively on existing members. Inter-organizational strategies may include mergers with other unions, or alliances with

of integration of collective bargaining, organizing, and political action analyzed in this paper. The fact that there has been so little research examining union integration may reflect the failure of most unions, until recently, to heed this call.

other union, community, or consumer organizations. This line of argument suggests the following hypothesis, which we refer to as the *diversification thesis:*

Hypothesis 2 (diversification): In response to increased environmental complexity and uncertainty, unions will use political action, growth strategies, diversification strategies, and inter-organizational linkages to reduce resource dependence and enhance bargaining power.

A third dimension of organizational strategy concerns the extent of specialization and integration of activities across organizational units. Lawrence and Lorsch (1969:8) noted that "as organizations deal with their environment, they become segmented into units, each of which has as its own major task the problem of dealing with a part of the conditions outside the firm." Where the environment becomes complex and uncertain, Lawrence and Lorsch observed that organizations turn to "integration" and "integrating mechanisms" (pp. 11, 103). Thompson (1967) similarly argued that changes in task and technology lead to greater "reciprocal interdependence" across the various subunits of organizations. These predictions lead to the following thesis, which we refer to as the *integration thesis:*

Hypothesis 3 (integration): As the environment becomes more complex and uncertain, unions will develop integrating mechanisms to achieve organizational objectives.

A fourth dimension of organizational strategy is the degree of centralization or decentralization of decision-making authority. Pfeffer and Salanick finished their analysis of resource dependence with a prediction that "uncertainty will result in greater efforts at coordination which requires the concentration of power and decision discretion" (1978:285). This implies that organizations with greater concentration of power will have better outcomes. While this prediction is at odds with recent trends in business organization, including the decentralization of operational units and supply chain management, it is consistent with recent trends in the consolidation and centralization of corporate ownership structures. This suggests the following thesis, which we refer to as the *centralization thesis:*

Hypothesis 4 (centralization): In the context of heightened uncertainty, unions with greater concentration of power and decision-making will have better outcomes than those with less concentration of power and decision-making.

Taking the Communications Workers of America as a test case for these four hypotheses, we investigate whether changes in the CWA's strategies and structure conform to the predictions of resource dependence and contingency theories. Our case study of CWA revitalization makes use of extensive field research in the industry; union contracts and archival sources; aggregate data from government sources, including the Current Population Survey (CPS 2001) and the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB); and our 1998 survey of a nationally representative sample of 636 telecommunications services establishments drawn from the Dun and Bradstreet establishment listing.

In the next section, we begin by examining how the CWA's environmental context changed. As Pfeffer and Salancik (1978:1) noted, "To understand the behavior of an organization you must understand the context of that behavior—that is, the ecology of the organization. Organizations are inescapably bound up with the conditions of their environment." In particular, we examine to what extent and in what ways environmental complexity and uncertainty increased and, in the process, undermined the CWA's traditional sources of bargaining power. With a clear picture of the nature of environmental change, we go on in the succeeding section to examine ways in which the CWA is modifying and integrating its collective bargaining, political, and organizing strategies to regain bargaining leverage. We next use a comparative analysis of two organizational subunits of the CWA—one at Verizon and one at SBC Communications—to assess more fully the integration and centralization theses.

We focus on bargaining power because it is the key determinant of the CWA's (and

other unions') effectiveness. The industrial relations literature has long debated whether unions possess a clear objective and whether pursuit of that objective entails maximizing behavior (Ross 1948; Dunlop 194; Atherton 1973). From this debate and subsequent research we conclude that unions have two interrelated objectives—maintaining, if not increasing, membership and bargaining power. Membership is desired in part for its own sake, as one of any union's objectives is to extend benefits to existing and potentially expanding membership. Union membership is also valuable because it helps support bargaining leverage by, for example, increasing a union's strike leverage or political influence. Bargaining power is critical because it shapes the degree to which a union can achieve improvements in working conditions or other objectives (Katz and Kochan 1999:87–89).

Environmental Challenges Confronting the CWA

The CWA has faced serious challenges over the past two decades as a result of product market deregulation and technological change, both of which contributed to, and to some extent were heightened by, the 1983 court-ordered divestiture of AT&T, which broke up the Bell system. This fundamental restructuring undermined the union's power, in terms of both membership levels and bargaining leverage. It also dramatically increased the environmental complexity and uncertainty facing the union.

In terms of union membership and bargaining leverage, prior to the break-up of the Bell system, the union represented a stable base of 650,000 employees at AT&T and other telephone companies. Post-divestiture, union density among all employees in the telecommunications industry fell from 56% in 1983 to 24% in 2001 (CPS 2001). Union density fell because nonunion companies entered the industry and because the Bell companies downsized the traditional core union work force and set up non-union subsidiaries for their growth businesses (for example, wireless, information services, and data communications). The Bell companies also redefined some technical and professional jobs as managerial and excluded from collective bargaining, which meant that the decline among union-eligible workers was somewhat less. Among union-eligible network technicians, union rates fell from 82% in 1983 to about 57% in 2001, while among customer service and sales workers, the drop was from 66% to 26% (CPS 2001).

This absolute decline in membership levels was accompanied by a redefinition of the scope of the industry—from telecommunications services to the converging information services industry, which covers content providers, such as printing and publishing, electronic publishing, data information services, radio, broadcast, and entertainment. These businesses include a wide range of technical and professional occupations, such as radio broadcasters, journalists, computer programmers, and software specialists. Thus, given these changes, union presence in the larger information services industry is particularly small, and the union took on the challenge to transform itself from a telephone union to the "union of the information age" (Bahr 1998).

The CWA also lost bargaining leverage and faced a more complex and uncertain environment because the break-up of the Bell system destroyed the centralized system of collective bargaining and stable union-management relationships that existed at the national level; it forced a decentralization in the bargaining structure. Also, deregulation led to ongoing corporate restructuring and downsizing, so that the union faced a parade of new managers at the bargaining table and in line positions. This created greater complexity and uncertainty in the bargaining process and in the implementation of negotiated agreements (Keefe and Batt 2002).

Moreover, the cost advantages of new entrants (such as MCI and Sprint) led AT&T and the former Bell affiliates to focus on cost-cutting, which made contract gains much more difficult to achieve and out-

comes more uncertain. With a history of predictable and paternalistic (and arms-length) labor relations in the old Bell system, the CWA needed to learn how to mobilize a membership accustomed to relatively easy contract victories (Keefe and Batt 1997).

In the 1990s, the union confronted increasing organizational complexity and uncertainty due to corporate mergers, as well as the increased power and resources of merged global entities. Seven Regional Bell Operating Companies (RBOCs) became four after Pacific Bell, Ameritech, and Southwestern Bell merged to form SBC, and NYNEX, Bell Atlantic, and the non-Bell GTE merged to formed Verizon. Moreover, non-union companies that in the 1980s were small new entrants in the industry became global behemoths, such as WorldCom, which grew through a continuous process of merger and acquisition (of MCI, among other companies) (Keefe 1998).

Union Capability in Collective Bargaining, Politics, and Organizing

To respond to this environment of heightened uncertainty and reduced bargaining power, the union reassessed its strategies in three arenas: collective bargaining, political action, and organizing. In this section we analyze how the union broadened and deepened its activities in each of these areas, as well as developed new capabilities, consistent with the adaptation and diversification theses. We also show how the CWA developed the capacity to link or coordinate its activities across these areas, consistent with the integration thesis.

Collective Bargaining: Structure and Content

One of the CWA's key collective bargaining victories in the post–World War II period was to gain a centralized collective bargaining structure that matched the organizational structure of the national telephone industry. In doing so, the union adapted to changes that had occurred in the product market environment, and this adaptation improved its bargaining leverage. The CWA had been founded in 1947 as the successor to the National Federation of Telephone Workers (a loose federation of local unions) in order to achieve national bargaining with AT&T. By the late 1950s, the union and AT&T informally agreed on a two-tier system. At the national level, strong pattern bargaining promoted stability in labor relations and helped standardize wages, benefits, and employment security across the system. At the local level, the union bargained with each of the 22 local telephone companies over workplace issues such as overtime policy, schedules, grievances, health and safety issues, and absence pay.

In 1974, this informal pattern of national bargaining was replaced by formal centralized bargaining. This formal structure produced Bell system–wide agreements on wages, benefits, and employment security and facilitated internal mobility across the AT&T subsidiaries. As a result, a telephone technician received the same wage increases whether he or she worked for AT&T or a local Bell company in New York, California, or anywhere in the country. Between 1974 and 1983, the CWA and AT&T negotiated four national contracts that greatly improved the standard of living of Bell system employees and compressed the wage structure by increasing the relative wages of the lower-paid traditionally female jobs (Keefe and Boroff 1994).

Post-1984, consistent with our adaptation thesis, the CWA sought to continue centralized bargaining and thereby preserve a strategy that had worked well in the past; but it found it had to modify the two-tiered bargaining structure to fit the new corporate environment. Most of the Bell companies used the event of divestiture to demand a return to bargaining at the local level—a fragmented structure that would undermine union power. The CWA countered by pushing for two-tiered bargaining at the enterprise (RBOC or AT&T) and local operating company level—a solution that minimized the union's loss of bargaining power. All the

RBOCs eventually accepted two-tiered collective bargaining. In addition, despite the decentralization of bargaining to the enterprise level, the union continued to negotiate wages and benefits that formed a national pattern.

The CWA also negotiated similar labor adjustment programs, including retraining, pension enhancements, and early retirement buyouts. The union did so by strengthening relationships among union leaders and coordinating bargaining agendas across companies. The national pattern continued with few exceptions through the 1990s (Keefe and Boroff 1994; Keefe and Batt 2002). The union's successful adaptation to new conditions is also evident in national CPS wage data, which show that between 1983 and 1998, real union wage levels were maintained, but real non-union wage levels plummeted in the highly competitive markets of the deregulated era (Batt and Strauser 1998).

In the more complex and uncertain environment, the union's strategies were also consistent with the diversification thesis. To ward off contract concessions, particularly in health insurance, the CWA had to transform itself from a business union that made gains through union-management cooperation in a regulated environment to a politically oriented union that mobilized its members to fight concessions in a tough deregulated era. The union developed new capabilities for internal political action at work—mobilizing members for contract fights. Member mobilization relies on grassroots organizing and member-to-member communication at work. The aim is to involve union members in actively representing their collective interest. Mobilization tactics include petitions, one-on-one postcard messages, work-to-rule campaigns, wearing common colors (for example, red on Thursdays) or arm bands, expressing solidarity through coordinated workplace stand-ups, picket lines, electronic picket lines, and strikes. Mobilization also includes inter-organizational linkages with community and consumer organizations to support union demands, as well as external political action in the form of public rallies and campaigns of letter-writing to state and local political officials.

Union Institutional Security

Another traditional source of union power is the negotiation of institutional security through collective bargaining. Here again, the union sought to retain a traditional power lever as the environment changed. To do so, the CWA adopted a growth strategy and turned to political action in the regulatory arena to assist that strategy, as the diversification thesis predicts. We also find that in the new complex and uncertain environment, to retain institutional security the CWA developed a new strategy and capability—the linking of collective bargaining, organizing, and political activities to achieve its goals—consistent with the integration thesis.

Pre-divestiture, the CWA had gained institutional security by negotiating agency shop rules, which required all employees covered by a contract to pay union dues, in AT&T national contracts in 1971 and 1974. With divestiture, however, union institutional security was threatened in a new way as anti-union companies entered the industry and as the former Bell affiliates set up non-union subsidiaries. The union responded by establishing a growth strategy of "wall-to-wall" representation in the Bell companies—a strategy of organizing all union-eligible employees, including those in the non-union subsidiaries. The adoption of this growth strategy in the face of environmental change supports the diversification hypothesis.

To gain wall-to-wall recognition, the CWA developed an integrated strategy that linked organizing, collective bargaining, and political activities. The CWA first won institutional security clauses in the 1990s. These clauses modify the basic representation election processes embodied in the NLRA. They include company neutrality (the company's pledge not to campaign against a union drive), expedited elections or a card check (union recognition without an NLRB election once union representation cards are signed by 50% plus one of the bargaining

Table 1. Collectively Bargained Organizing Rights: Neutrality, Expedited Elections, and Card Check.

Company	*Neutrality*	*Expedited NLRB Consent Elections*	*Card Check*	*Exceptions*
AT&T	X	X		3rd party can order card check
BellSouth	X	X		
Cingular Wireless (owned by SBC and BellSouth)	X		X	
Lucent	X	X		Wholly owned subsidiaries
Qwest (formerly US West)				Accretion of 150 employees & successorship
SBC (includes Ameritech, PacBell, SNET, SWB)	X		X	
Verizon-East	X		X	(in former Bell Atlantic & NYNEX)
Verizon-West	X	X		Card check in existing areas
Verizon Wireless-East	X		X	(Area-Bell Atlantic Mobile and former Ameritech Properties) Language currently in arbitration

Source: CWA.

unit employees, or by some higher specified percentage) to determine majority status, organizer access to the workplace, and the arbitration of organizing disputes. A full listing of institutional security clauses is provided in Table 1.

The union gained these contract clauses, designed to facilitate organizing, by diversifying its repertoire of political activities in the regulatory arena and linking them to contract goals. The companies agreed to these clauses because they were seeking state-level legislation to replace rate and entry legislation with "incentive" regulation. This would make it feasible for the companies to abolish their state-based organizations and operate as regional and national enterprises. The companies needed to convince state politicians that existing regulations were limiting new competition and deployment of the information super-highway. The CWA agreed to support these regulatory changes in exchange for explicit guarantees of union and job security. By the mid-1990s, the companies also needed union political and regulatory support for their corporate merger activities. This provided another basis for agreements involving links between collective bargaining, politics, and organizing.

In this way, consistent with our diversification and integration theses, the CWA managed the new environment by making greater use of political activities and linking those activities to collective bargaining and organizing objectives. As a result of combining neutrality and card check agreements with grassroots organizing, the CWA gained new members in telecommunications services, as indicated in Table 2. Between 1998 and 2002, for example, the union organized over 12,000 workers at Cingular Wireless (as discussed more fully below in the SBC case), firmly establishing the union presence in the rapidly growing wireless telephone industry, which now employs over 150,000 workers. Moreover, the organizing wins included almost 5,000 workers in southern right-to-work states where few unions have had success. The union also negotiated some reductions in outsourcing and agreements to bring technical work back into existing bargaining

Table 2. Private Sector Major Membership Gains for the CWA, 1985–2000.

Year	*Source of New Members*	*Approx. Membership*
Organizing under Neutrality, Expedited Elections, and Card Check Agreements, and Accretions[a]		
1986–present	AT&T—Traditional	5,000
1996–present	AT&T—Broadband, Wireless, & Local Service	4,500
1992–present	BellSouth	500
1996–present	Cingluar Wireless (SBC, Ameritech, PacTel, SNET)	12,000
1992	Qwest (formerly US West)	1,800
1992	Verizon Wireline-East	3,000
1994	Verizon Wireless-East	50
1986–present	SBC Wireline (Southwest, Pacific Telesis, Ameritech)	2,200
2000	Valor Communications–GTE Spinoff	400
Subtotal		**29,450**
NLRB-Supervised Elections		
1985–97	New members gained through NLRB-supervised representation elections (in the telecommunications sector)	**6,104**
Railway Labor Act Election Win		
1999	US Airways customer service representatives	**10,000**
Union Mergers		
1982–85	Telephone independent unions in New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware	40,000
1987	International Typographical Union	25,000
1993	National Association of Broadcast Employees & Technicians	9,000
1994	The Newspaper Guild	31,000
1998	Southern New England Telephone Workers Union	6,500
1998	Independent Alliance of Publishing Employers (employees at Dow Jones)	2,500
2000	International Union of Electrical Workers	113,000
Subtotal		**227,000**

Sources: Keefe and Boroff (1994); National Labor Relations Board, CWA News; www.cwa-union.org.

[a]Accretion arises when an employer opens or acquires a new facility, creates a new business unit, or initiates a new job title. The NLRA provides that if there is interchange between existing bargaining unit employees and the new entity, geographic proximity, integration of operations, common management of labor relations, similarity of working conditions, and centralized administration, then the NLRB may order the entity accreted into the existing bargaining unit without a representation election. Alternatively, the parties may voluntarily agree to accrete units meeting these criteria by inserting an accretion clause into their collective bargaining agreement.

units at telecommunications firms. By contrast, where the CWA has undertaken grassroots organizing without neutrality agreements under the National Labor Relations Act, it has had very limited success (notice that the number of new union members gained through NLRB-supervised elections reported in Table 2 is only 6,104).

It is also noteworthy that the union met with little organizing success until the companies began needing support in the regulatory arena. From the early 1990s on, the telecommunications companies needed the union's support for legislative and regulatory action while the CWA needed employer concessions dealing with the organizing process to increase union membership. The union responded by creating a reciprocal interdependence across its previously specialized subunits responsible for collective bargaining, political action, and organizing. Thus, in keeping with the predictions of resource dependence and contingency theories, through the development of diversified strategies and a new linking mechanism (the coordination of collective bar-

gaining, organizing, and political activities) the CWA countered heightened environmental complexity and uncertainty.

Political Action: Legislative and Regulatory Initiatives

Like other unions, the CWA has a history of political engagement at the local, state, and federal levels in supporting a pro-labor legislative agenda. Facing environmental flux and uncertainty, the CWA broadened and deepened its political strategies. The deepening of the CWA's political action is consistent with the adaptation and diversification theses. Moreover, a key aspect of how the union did so, namely, through linkages to collective bargaining and organizing, supports the integration thesis.

The CWA has long promoted its political and regulatory objectives through public relations and legislative lobbying and through the creation of internal subunits, such as the Committee on Political Education, to encourage member participation and funding of progressive issue campaigns (CWA 1953, 1960). The CWA also has encouraged union members to vote in favor of particular issues or (mostly Democratic) candidates. Like other unions, in recent years the union's political actions have intensified and often have been coordinated with the more aggressive political agenda pursued at the AFL-CIO after John Sweeney was elected president of the federation in 1995.

State Regulatory Involvement

In the pre-divestiture period, state regulators heavily influenced the structure and operation of the Bell system. State Public Service Commissions (PSCs), for example, approved rate increases and governed rate of return regulations for the 22 local telephone companies in the AT&T system. The PSCs insisted on high service standards for customers, high productivity growth that permitted stable or declining real service charges for business and residential customers, and high safety standards for the public. The CWA played an active role at the state level, for example, as a lobbyist before the PSCs for telephone company requests for rate increases made necessary by inflation. The union and company interests coincided: higher nominal rates translated into continued corporate investment and growth, employment security and higher wages and benefits for union members, and union institutional security.

This historical link between state telephone company prosperity and unionized employment and institutional security was supported by three conditions. First, the CWA (and the IBEW) had nearly complete representation of the union-eligible employees at these companies (Batt and Keefe 1997). Second, because of the cost-plus type of regulations that existed at the state level, the state telephone companies had little incentive to pursue a labor-cost–cutting strategy in order to expand profits. If profits were to increase, given the nature of cost-plus regulations, the companies could not keep those higher profits. In this regulatory framework wages were viewed as a fair and reasonable cost. Third, the commissions focused their attention on universal affordable service made possible by inflation-adjusted rate reductions for customers. Rate reductions were achieved through labor productivity growth (in excess of 6% annually), which was accomplished by continual technological innovation enabled by a stable and well-trained labor force (Keefe and Boroff 1994).

These conditions changed in the post-divestiture environment because states began replacing cost-plus regulations with incentive-based regulations (indexed price caps and service regulations) that allowed the RBOCs to retain the higher profits they might earn from cost reductions. In the deregulated environment, the RBOCs sought to improve profit margins by reducing labor costs and by appealing to Wall Street as leaner enterprises that were shedding their bureaucratic ways.

Nevertheless, the RBOCs still needed the union's political support in state legislatures and at the PSCs. In this new environment, the CWA changed its approach to regulatory activity, and began to use its

political support strategically to make gains at the bargaining table. As detailed later in the Verizon and SBC cases, the union began opposing rate hikes and filing complaints with the PSCs over service quality and other issues—not only to improve member welfare, but to assist in organizing campaigns as well. This provides another illustration of how the CWA began to use political action to increase its bargaining leverage.

National Legislative and Regulatory Activities

Similarly, the CWA tied its political support at the federal level to union goals in the post-divestiture period. Historically, the union supported the Bell system before the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and the U.S. Congress. For example, in the 1970s and 1980s, the union supported AT&T's efforts to maintain the integrity of the Bell system and lobbied long and unsuccessfully to convince Congress to amend the 1934 Communications Act to protect the Bell system (Temin 1987).

After divestiture, however, the companies could not automatically count on CWA support. Rather, the union decided which companies to support based on what union members would gain in return. In fact, the CWA has generally supported the RBOCs over the long distance carriers for two reasons: the overwhelming majority of CWA members work in the RBOCs, and the long distance carriers (including AT&T) have pursued more aggressive anti-union strategies.

The debate over deregulation of local service markets is a case in point. The 1996 Telecommunications Act set the terms under which long distance carriers can enter local telephone markets and vice-versa. When Congress was debating the Act, the CWA lobbied heavily for a version of the law that privileged the RBOCs over the long distance carriers, and this version prevailed. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has jurisdiction over administration of the Act, and the Department of Justice (DOJ) largely determines which corporate mergers will proceed and under what conditions. The CWA has monitored and intervened in ongoing administrative decisions issued by the FCC and DOJ and has engaged in other informal lobbying efforts. For example, the CWA argued that the FCC and DOJ should allow mergers among the RBOCs in order to enable these merged partners to compete against the other large global corporations that had emerged in the information services sector, such as Sprint, WorldCom-MCI, AT&T, and various foreign-based international carriers, while it opposed the mergers of WorldCom with MCI and of Sprint with WorldCom (CWA 1999).

Organizing

The CWA's traditional organizing strategy was to build an industrial union of telephone workers. To do so, it grew by affiliating (that is, merging) with independent telephone employee associations and negotiating agency shop rules, as indicated above. However, because the industry was characterized by continuous technology change, job positions regularly were being destroyed and others created, thus requiring ongoing attention to internal organizing to maintain membership levels (Beirne 1959). In addition, much of the telecommunications work force was located in southern and western right-to-work states. In the post–World War II period, the union adapted to this environment by instructing every local to establish an organizing committee. Union brochures, for example, provided guidance on how to undertake "internal organizing" in the open shop environment of the Bell system as well as "external" organizing of independent telephone companies (CWA 1965, 1966). As a result, the union built and maintained membership levels and affiliated with the majority of independent unions in the Bell system. Yet, in this period, except for negotiating the inclusion of agency shop provisions in the contracts, the CWA's organizing activities were carried out in a manner largely separate from the union's collective bargaining or political actions. This sepa-

ration evaporated in the post-divestiture era.

Two primary changes in the post-divestiture period made organizing more difficult and more important: the loss of union members through downsizing and the growth of anti-union companies and non-union subsidiaries in Bell companies in traditional union occupations; and the collapse of industry boundaries, which led to an expansion of the scope of the industry to include a wider range of transmission (cable TV, wireless, Internet) and content providers (on-line publishing, data and information services). The union represented a declining proportion of the traditional core industry and only a small fraction of the larger information services industry. The CWA responded in ways that are consistent with the adaptation, diversification, and integration theses.

First, faced with a declining presence in the industry, the union adopted a growth strategy. CWA leaders believe that there are substantial economies of scale in member representation, and that the union must have at least one million members to reach its full potential. To organize new members in the Bell companies, as discussed above and in the Verizon and SBC cases, the union diversified and integrated its activities through wall-to-wall organizing campaigns, member mobilization, negotiated neutrality and card check provisions, political action in the regulatory arena, and mergers with previously independent telephone employee associations.

The CWA also is using lessons learned in internal member mobilization to organize among similar occupational groups in companies in other industries. For example, drawing on its experience representing customer service and sales workers, the CWA is seeking to establish itself as the union for customer service professionals.

The CWA has used member-to-member organizing drives to create horizontal linkages among workers across companies. A good example is the union's 1997 campaign that organized 10,000 US Airways customer service and sales agents across the country. In this campaign the CWA took advantage of its dispersed geographic work force as well as a national network of activists in service and sales centers. That network, originally created to coordinate contract bargaining and mobilization strategies among CWA members, became a vehicle for new member organizing. The union hired 25 full-time member organizers and activated its network of CWA service and sales workers wherever there was a US Airways airport terminal or reservation center. The CWA is able to do so because it has negotiated release time for union-related work in its collective bargaining agreements. The union also compensates members for any lost work time. The union has used similar grassroots mobilization and public relations campaigns to organize the employee associations at IBM (Alliance@IBM.com) and Microsoft (WashTech@CWA-union.org).

To respond to the expanded scope of the information services industry, the CWA now refers to itself as the union of the information economy (Bahr 1998). Toward earning this title, the union has pursued a strategy of "vertical organizing" comparable to the vertical integration strategies being pursued by information services firms. As telecommunications companies have undertaken mergers among transmission and content providers in media and arts industries, the CWA has affiliated with other unions representing these workers, including the Newspaper Guild, the International Typographical Union, the National Association of Broadcast and Entertainment Technicians (NABET), and the independent association representing Dow Jones reporters. These union strategies conform to Pfeffer and Salancik's (1967:114) observation—and the diversification thesis prediction—that organizations use both horizontal and vertical inter-organizational linkages to reduce resource dependence.

In sum, the CWA has drawn on its traditional repertoires in collective bargaining, politics, and organizing to advance member welfare, but has also retrofitted its strategies to fit the new deregulated environment, lending support to the adaptation thesis. The union used political action,

growth strategies, and inter-organizational linkages to enhance its leverage and counteract environmental complexity, uncertainty, and power reductions, consistent with the diversification thesis. Furthermore, in the post-divestiture era, the loss of bargaining power led the union to develop an explicit and sophisticated integration strategy involving interconnected collective bargaining, political action, and organizing, supporting the integration thesis.

Integrating Collective Bargaining, Politics, and Organizing at Verizon and SBC

Verizon was formed by the merger of the former Bell Atlantic and NYNEX in 1997, and their merger with GTE in 2000. SBC was formed by the merger of Southwestern Bell, Pacific Bell, Ameritech, and Southern New England Telephone. Faced with these huge new corporate entities, the CWA's integration strategy linking collective bargaining, organizing, and political action became a particularly potent tool for union power, as demonstrated in the Verizon and SBC cases below. The cases also provide support for the centralization thesis: where the union used inter-organizational linkages to achieve centralized power, it was more successful in achieving its goals. Inter-organizational links included coordinated activity among different regional districts of the CWA, between the CWA and other unions, and in the formation of strategic partnerships between the union and management.

Verizon

In the post-divestiture period, the tenor of union-management relations at the former NYNEX, BellAtlantic, and GTE organizations within Verizon oscillated between intense conflict and cooperation at all levels of the labor-management relationship. Conflicts were driven in part by the fact that, as at other former RBOCs, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, union membership declined due to the factors discussed above, including non-union employment growth in new subsidiaries and the reclassification of former bargaining unit work into managerial job classifications. Yet, a more cooperative tenor emerged periodically during spells when the corporation grew. Throughout, the CWA has used an integration strategy to expand its bargaining leverage.

To trace this evolution, we start with the important conflict that occurred at NYNEX in 1989, for in this conflict the CWA developed a full-fledged integration strategy that served as a model for future union actions. The key issue in the 17-week-long 1989 strike was a demand by NYNEX for significant health care concessions, including member co-payment. The CWA adamantly opposed those demands and used inter-organizational strategies, member mobilization, and political and regulatory pressures to strengthen its bargaining leverage. A critical precondition to success was an unprecedented coalition between the CWA and the IBEW (representing most of the New England telephone workers), which increased coordination between the CWA and IBEW and increased the unions' bargaining power. Together the unions designed an effective internal mobilization campaign, which included petitions, workplace coordinated stand-ups, the wearing of common colors and armbands, public rallies, community activities, picket lines, and a strike.

In the regulatory arena, the CWA diverged from its prior support for NYNEX before the New York State PSC. As in other states prior to divestiture, the CWA had regularly supported the rate increases and other requests made by NYNEX to the New York State PSC. The union believed that if the PSC delayed or lowered rate increases, union members would suffer from resulting reductions in resources and employment opportunities at NYNEX. The CWA's attitude changed dramatically in 1989 in the midst of the strike the union was carrying out against NYNEX.

During the 1989 strike, on a separate front, NYNEX had proposed to the PSC that it be allowed to raise rates and that the earnings limitation provided under previ-

ous regulation be replaced by incentive-type regulations. The union's research staff calculated that without those regulatory changes, NYNEX could hold out for 2.5 months in the strike before suffering severe economic losses. However, if the PSC were to grant the company's rate increase request, the union calculated that NYNEX would earn an additional $300 million in revenue and would be able to hold out against a strike much longer.[2]

The CWA regional leadership used these calculations to convince local union leaders to support an aggressive campaign opposing NYNEX's proposals before the PSC. The local leadership agreed, and an opposition campaign was launched involving citizen signatures, ads in newspapers, and filings before the New York State PSC. The District staff of the CWA had long wanted to become more active in state regulatory issues and oppose NYNEX's requests before the PSC. Yet, they had hesitated to do so given the difficulties they faced in convincing local union leaders that this was a good way to use union financial resources and that it served union member' interests to end the union's traditional support of NYNEX's requests to the PSC.

Thus, in the midst of the 1989 strike, the CWA forged a link between two activity spheres, collective bargaining and political action, for two reasons. First, the union aggressively resisted the requests NYNEX made to the PSC in order to strengthen its strike leverage at a moment when it was searching for ways to counteract the company's ability to sustain service during the strike. The union needed additional power levers to counter the company's deployment of supervisors to the front lines and the intensive use of technology that allowed the company to postpone infrastructure maintenance.

Second, the collective bargaining–regulatory linkage was needed for intra-organizational reasons. The state-level union staff needed to show local union leaders that there were direct gains to be made in collective bargaining, in this case during a strike, to acquire those leaders' support for regulatory activities. In its opposition to NYNEX's proposals, the CWA joined forces with a variety of citizen action groups and a number of county and city governments that also opposed NYNEX's request for a rate increase and other regulatory changes. This political coalition continued in the aftermath of the strike when the CWA lobbied the PSC to oppose an agreement NYNEX had negotiated with the PSC to shift to incentive-based rate regulation and effectively remove the profit limitations that had existed under the previous regulatory regime.

The CWA's opposition to NYNEX's proposals after the strike also was linked to the union's efforts to convince NYNEX to reinstate the 91 union activists involved in the 1989 strike that NYNEX was then threatening to terminate. Here again the state-level staff of the CWA used a concrete collective bargaining issue (in this case, striker reinstatement) to help convince skeptical local union leaders that the union's state-level regulatory activities were worthwhile.

The final decisive element in the union's victorious campaign was the direct intervention in the dispute of the Governor of New York, Mario Cuomo, with whom the CWA had a good relationship. In personal conversations with the CEO of NYNEX, William Ferguson, Cuomo insisted that the strike be settled. The combination of pressures ultimately caused NYNEX to concede. In the end, the 1989 NYNEX strike was settled without the introduction of medical co-payments.

The power of coordinated bargaining involving the CWA and the IBEW coupled with political action paid off in the seventeen-week strike in 1989. By contrast, in 1971, the CWA had been defeated in a seven-month strike in New York that lacked political, regulatory, and member mobilization.

Another example of strategic linkages across activity spheres appears in the events surrounding the merger between NYNEX and Bell Atlantic. The CWA agreed to

[2]Interview with CWA Region 1 official, April 27, 1999.

support the merger in filings it made to the New York PSC and the federal DOJ and FCC. In a formal Memorandum of Agreement with the CWA in 1998, Bell Atlantic agreed to several conditions: guarantees of no layoffs or downgrades, no contracting out of certain types of work, limited future movements of work or business operations, and other guarantees that work would be performed by CWA-represented employees (CWA 1998a). Here the CWA used the threat of its potential opposition to the merger to make substantial organizing and collective bargaining gains.

Further linkages were established between the CWA's political activities and its collective bargaining during 1998 bargaining with Bell Atlantic after the company's merger with NYNEX had been completed. One of the key issues in 1998 Bell Atlantic bargaining concerned the implementation of the early retirement-pension enhancement offer included in the 1994 NYNEX-CWA labor agreement. By April 15, 1998, in Bell Atlantic's northern region the two sides had hammered out an agreement, but the union was unwilling to sign that agreement until an agreement was reached in bargaining in Bell Atlantic's southern region. Bargaining in Bell Atlantic's southern region, however, stalled on three key issues: subcontracting, forced overtime, and organizing rights. Eventually a two-day strike followed, and this in turn precipitated the intervention of Bell Atlantic's CEO, Ivan Siedenberg. Siedenberg quickly accepted union-demanded provisions on subcontracting, neutrality, and card check, under the condition that the new contract provisions were not extended to Bell Atlantic Mobile. The basic framework was that the Bell Atlantic—CWA relationship was to be standardized around the terms of the relationship that had developed at NYNEX. A key to this resolution was the CWA's agreement to support Bell Atlantic's new proposed merger with GTE to form Verizon.

SBC Communications

Unlike the highly combative and unstable bargaining relationship at Verizon, the CWA developed a sustained partnership at SBC, with the help of centralized bargaining. As SBC merged with other telecommunications companies, the union built inter-organizational linkages and coordinated its strategies across District 6 (Southwestern Bell), District 9 (Pacific Bell), District 5 (Ameritech), and District 3 (BellSouth). The CWA also affiliated with the previously independent employee association at Southern New England Telephone (SNET) after SBC acquired SNET in 1998.

Then, under the leadership of District 6 of the CWA, the union used inter-organizational linkages to forge a strategic partnership with SBC. The CWA District 6 has negotiated increasingly expansive neutrality and card check procedures with SBC, and SBC in turn has gained the union's political support before state and federal regulators for its merger and acquisition activities both in the United States and abroad. Under these expansive procedures the CWA has made substantial headway in organizing and signing contracts for over 12,000 workers at Cingular Wireless, a joint venture of SBC and BellSouth, and the nation's second largest wireless provider after Verizon Wireless.

The SBC-CWA partnership emerged as a result of a concerted union effort that began in 1992. While the CWA had long supported SBC (then Southwestern Bell) before state legislatures and PSCs, in 1992, when the union tried to organize workers in the company's wireless subsidiary, Southwestern Bell Mobile Systems, it confronted anti-union campaigns. The union then explained to SBC management that it would not continue to provide political support for the company's regulatory agenda or engage in cooperative labor relations in the company's traditional wireline business while SBC was tenaciously fighting unionization in its new subsidiaries, particularly in its wireless subsidiary.

During the next five years, the CWA in District 6 undertook a sustained public and member mobilization campaign to organize SBC Wireless. Internally, the union had to educate members about the strate-

gic importance of organizing the growing wireless business and to gain their participation in organizing campaigns. Externally, the union conducted demonstrations, filed board charges, and bargained hard over its participation in SBC legislative and regulatory affairs. The CWA was willing to assist the company in the regulatory arena as long as the union was making progress organizing the company's wireless subsidiary. In 1993, for example, SBC was pressing for state legislation that would regulate providers who were trying to access the SBC infrastructure and require them to build a certain amount of the infrastructure in every state served by SBC. CWA helped SBC pass the legislation in Kansas in exchange for an agreement on union job growth in the state (CWA 1997).

Later, with the passage of the 1996 Telecommunications Act, SBC asked the CWA to support its efforts in five states to regulate competitors' access to local service. In 1997, it also sought CWA support for its merger with PacTel. A breakthrough came when, after talks with CWA leaders in District 6 and District 9 (representing PacTel), SBC announced the formation of two new subsidiaries and gave the CWA recognition at both. The union then negotiated a card check agreement for the other SBC subsidiaries. Subsequently a similar agreement was extended to all U.S. subsidiaries of SBC, even those operating outside the footprints (that is, traditional geographic boundaries) of SBC's various regional companies. In exchange, the CWA agreed to support the company in various regulatory, legislative, and political forums (CWA 1998b). Similarly, in 2001 bargaining, the CWA made progress at the bargaining table in the core contract at SBC contingent on the signing of collective bargaining agreements in the Cingular Wireless subsidiaries that recently had been organized. Later that year, CWA District 6 coordinated with CWA District 3 in the nine-state BellSouth region to negotiate a card check and neutrality agreement for 10,000 additional workers in Cingular Wireless who are located in the BellSouth region (Keefe and Batt 2002).

The CWA also has provided assistance to SBC's international expansion efforts. In the late 1990s, for example, the CWA provided critical support for SBC's bid to participate in the South African telephone industry. After gaining representation election card check provisions, and other favorable agreements that would help the union's organizing efforts at SBC in the United States, the president of the CWA, Morty Bahr, supported SBC's efforts to gain entry to South Africa's telephone market (Bahr 1998). In sum, the success of CWA's growth strategy at SBC has been contingent on the centralization of collective bargaining and on the effective integration of collective bargaining, politics, and organizing.

Conclusions

Our case study shows that divestiture and deregulation undermined the CWA's traditional institutional security and bargaining power and created a much more complex and uncertain environment in the telecommunications industry. Faced with ongoing corporate restructuring and ownership changes, the union abandoned strategies that no longer fit with the environment, but continued and enhanced those that did, consistent with the adaptation thesis and the basic premises of resource dependence and contingency theories.

The fact that the CWA turned to increased political action, growth, and interorganizational linkages to deal with heightened environmental complexity and uncertainty is also consistent with Pfeffer and Salancik's model of resource dependence. The union intensified and broadened political action at both state and federal levels. It pursued growth strategies through wall-to-wall organizing within the former Bell affiliates, member-to-member organizing across companies, and mergers with other unions to form a greater presence in the information services industry. To create more coordinated and centralized bargaining structures, the CWA also used inter-organizational linkages with other unions and strategic partnerships with the management of the firms the union bar-

gains with. This lends support to the diversification thesis.

To enhance bargaining leverage (and reduce resource dependence), one of the key ways the CWA is altering its organizational structure is through an integration strategy that involves the simultaneous and *interactive* use of activities in the domains of collective bargaining, politics, and organizing. For example, it is through novel language won in collective bargaining agreements with the RBOCs that the CWA is gaining card check recognition and employer neutrality in representation elections, key parts of the union's organizing initiative. Similarly, internal political mobilization and external political action have been central to union contract victories. A key factor motivating activity integration was the fact that the telecommunications companies needed the union's support for legislative and regulatory action while the CWA needed employer concessions dealing with the organizing process to increase union membership.

This activity integration is consistent with Lawrence and Lorsch's (1969:11) prediction that "integrating mechanisms" will emerge in organizations that face environmental complexity and uncertainty, the integration thesis. In this case the CWA's shift to activity integration enhanced the union's bargaining leverage in an environment involving extensive corporate and industry restructuring.

Our case analyses reveal that activity integration worked particularly well for the CWA at SBC, where the union developed the capability to centrally influence labor relations across the corporation. At Verizon, in contrast, the persistent influence of diverse labor relations approaches at the three "pre-merger" companies limited the extent to which the CWA could centrally coordinate activities or achieve a strategic partnership with the company, and this produced less successful activity integration for the CWA. These events support the centralization thesis, validating the claim of Pfeffer and Salancik regarding the virtues of centralization in the face of environmental complexity and uncertainty.

The organization theory literature provides extensive analysis of how organizations alter internal structures, task definitions, and career paths to fit environmental contingencies. Burns and Stalker (1961), for example, argued that organizations facing more uncertain and unstable environments are advantaged by "organic" internal structures in contrast to the "mechanistic" structures that work best in stable environments. Our research did not examine task definitions and organizational design within the CWA and, as a result, cannot tell if the union is adopting a more organic internal structure, as organizational contingency theory would predict. Thus, while we find activity integration at the CWA, it is unclear to what extent (if any) activity integration is leading to changes in the union's internal structure and in the tasks and career paths of union staff and officers. We see this as a task for future research on the revitalization under way at the CWA and other unions.

We have studied only one union and thus cannot know if our findings generalize to other unions. Extending the examination to an array of unions is another task for future research. Still, we believe that our analysis of CWA revitalization shows the value of organization theory as a framework for analyzing unions and union revitalization.

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