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**Organized Labor in the Software Industry: Beneficial or Disastrous?**

The question is simple: should software engineers join unions?

Unions would argue an unequivocal “yes”. They claim that the lack of unions forces employees into sweatshop conditions, working 80-hour weeks and denying them benefits on a potentially illegal basis. They argue that, without the enhanced bargaining position provided by organized labor, conditions are likely to worsen. They also make the positive case for greater job security, more competitive compensation plans, increased employer participation in retirement plans, and a set of rules benefiting employees who wish to maintain a healthy work/life balance.

Employers, naturally, argue the opposite. They point to corporate plans, some newly established, to provide flexible working hours and remote commute alternatives to employees who need them. They mention the potential risk of decreased organizational agility as the corporation assumes the burden of a pension plan or a negotiated set of standards for employee termination. They also mention the potential downside to employee compensation, some of whom may strike it rich when their stock options increase in value. Mostly, they argue that the industry has unique characteristics that make unions not only distasteful, but undesirable.

There is some evidence backing this assertion: software, by and large, requires a highly educated and skilled workforce, and the industry has historically demonstrated a labor demand that cannot be easily met, even at the global scale. Although outsourcing and offshoring is periodically rumored to be a panacea for the industry (and the nail in the coffin for employee rights), these solutions carry with them an associated cost, and, frequently, the quality of the work products matches the reduced bill rate. The current state of this employer/employee relationship argues against unionization, since the market appears to be doing an effective job of providing, on the whole, a large number of job opportunities that do not carry with them the onerous restrictions of the gaming software industry.

Much, of course, depends on the macroeconomic climate. It is significantly easier to argue against unionization when market pressures naturally provide similar benefits as union negotiations. One must also take into consideration the overall attitude of upper-level management within the industry. If these executives show themselves unsuccessful at self-policing, that is, adjusting work conditions and corporate culture to accommodate the requests of a potentially organized labor force, then unionization is not only inevitable but desirable. If, however, software corporations demonstrate responsiveness in accommodating employee needs, the downside of unionization probably outweighs the benefits. In short, much depends on how well an industry renowned for its flexibility in responding to market opportunities demonstrates agility in responding to its employees.