

COMMENTARY

HAVE WE BUILT THE COMMITTEE?
ADVANCING LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT
IN THE U.S. LABOR MOVEMENT*Seth Newton Patel*

Organizing practice and research have shown that the recruitment and development of grassroots worker leadership is key to winning organizing, contract, and political campaigns. Despite the broad endorsement of leadership-development organizing and a collection of truly inspiring leadership development stories, when asked, worker leaders consistently report varieties of leadership underdevelopment. Drawing on the rich history of leadership-development organizing and surveys conducted with worker leaders in two different California union locals while working as an organizer, and an interview-based case study of a building services local on the east coast, I argue that conducting evaluations—regularly asking and answering the question: have we built the committee?—can improve leadership development efforts and increase critical movement measures of leadership density and leadership dignity. Rather than impose a template, worker organizations can choose from a variety of concrete evaluation opportunities, designs, and measures. Ultimately, using evaluation to advance leadership development requires that organizations make it their own.

The Ask

Desperate times—for working-class people, worker organization, and our democracy—demand a deeper bench. The recent, ostensibly leaderless uprisings across the U.S.—including the immigrant rights mobilizations of 2006, occupation of the Republic Windows and Doors factory in 2008, occupation of the Wisconsin capitol in 2011—were in part a function of dedicated grassroots leadership recruitment and development. In turn, these leaderful uprisings have surfaced new leadership. Grassroots leaders are found at the heart of most efforts to knit together working-class people for collective action and organization. But building organizations and sustaining a movement capable of winning large-scale organizing campaigns, defending hard-fought collective bargaining rights and standards, and securing the right to organize for excluded workers—all in the face of unparalleled corporate power—requires that our unions and worker

organizations redouble their commitment to a most basic building block of labor movements. It requires focused worker leadership development.

The recruitment and development of battalions of worker leaders¹—by full-time organizers and worker leaders themselves—builds our capacity to organize and mobilize on the scale necessary for workers to exercise power over the decisions that affect their working lives. Scholars confirm with systematic study what organizers painstakingly demonstrate in practice: developing grassroots leadership and building representative organizing committees is critical to organizing workers, winning campaigns, and growing movements.² Leaders with wide-ranging views on the path to greater union density and democracy agree on at least one thing: to affect substantive change, our movement must vastly expand the number of active worker leaders. Strategist Stephen Lerner, for example, observes that we must recruit “thousands of active union members working as member organizers” in dozens of smart, strategic comprehensive campaigns in key sectors of the economy.³ Similarly, union democracy activists Mike Parker and Martha Gruelle argue for continuous organization, which requires “not thousands but millions of organizers—millions of workers who tell their sisters, cousins, friends, and lovers they’d be crazy not to join a union.”⁴ Connecting these thousands or millions of worker leaders to the project of increasing density, activist Michael Eisenscher observes that “only when massive numbers of union members become personally involved in recruiting new members and organizing new units will it be possible to achieve the intensity, scope, and scale of effort and momentum required to break the trend [of declining union density].”⁵

The identification and recruitment of worker leaders onto committees to organize their coworkers is often described as the organizing or committee-building model. As a method, the model is uniquely situated; it is both a core strategy of building working-class organization and winning campaigns, and it embodies the vision that working people have power over the conditions that affect their lives. Committee building involves some combination of organizational commitment to leadership development; the one-on-one identification and involvement of worker leaders; one-on-one recruitment; leadership development and retention; and evaluation and tracking (see Figure 1). A generation of organizers—especially those organizing non-union workers to form a union—has internalized the mandate to “build the committee!”

One primer on UNITE HERE’s comparatively sophisticated model of leadership identification and recruitment is that “the organizer organizes the committee, and the committee organizes the workers.”⁶ Developed in part after multiple failed organizing campaigns at Yale University, current UNITE HERE president John Wilhelm found that, “we had to persuade people that the only way to beat the University had nothing to do with literature, and had nothing to do with issues. . . . If we were going to beat the University, we had to have a gigantic organizing committee.”⁷ Sociologist Dan Clawson gives this overview of a committee-building process led by an American Federation of Teachers organizer: quietly identify respected leaders in each shift and work area, recruit

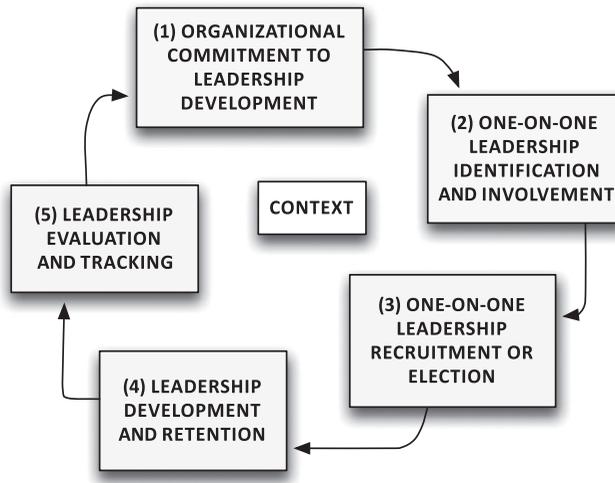


Figure 1. One Model of Leadership-Development Organizing.

leaders to the organizing committee, train the leaders to organize their coworkers, inoculate or prepare the committee for management’s anti-union campaign, build a strong majority of support for the union, take collective action to demand union recognition, and in this case, win a union certification election. “A campaign conducted in this way builds workers’ self-confidence, skills, feeling that they have a right to democratically decide about work, and sense of collective power. The workers learn the meaning of union long before the election that officially certifies the union.”⁸

Organizers must also build committees and develop the leadership of members already in the union. According to journalist and former organizer Steve Early, “patient steward recruitment and training enabled [Communications Workers of America Local 1400’s] newly organized workers to become familiar with their contracts and, with backing from the local, develop confidence in their collective ability to deal with management at the worksite level.”⁹ With many variations and differing degrees of depth, union and community-based worker organizers share similar leadership development methods. Labor/Community Strategy Center director Eric Mann argues that “the key to victory is the recruitment, training, and mentoring of a new generation of organizers.”¹⁰ Mann also recognizes the importance of a supportive and reciprocal process, as “the organizer’s job is to mentor, sustain, support, and learn from the membership.”¹¹ Ai-jen Poo, director of the National Domestic Workers Alliance, offers the important observation that, “it’s precisely the people who are considered the least ‘likely’ leaders who end up inspiring others the most. Everyday people and everyday acts of courage eventually change everything.”¹² These unlikely leaders, in turn, are often precisely the ones who inspire the very organizers credited with the leaders’ identification, recruitment, and development.

Many unions and worker organizations identify with a leadership-development model of worker organizing and representation, although they

practice the model to varying degrees and for different reasons. Most models define leadership in at least two ways: first, leadership is the organizing process of uniting workers for collective action-based campaigns to exert power over workplace decisions and conditions, and second, leadership entails developing the leadership of those who are traditionally considered the led. Each organization prioritizes different leadership development techniques among a bundle of possibilities, including but certainly not limited to recruiting or facilitating the election of a representative group of worker leaders onto committees; implementing intensive union or organizational leave programs; devising individual skill development plans for worker leaders; investing in worker leaders' political education; fostering active participation in decision making; proactively encouraging the development of people of color and women; creating additional leadership roles with higher levels of responsibility; promoting worker leaders into staff positions; and tracking worker leaders' involvement over time. Organizers accomplish these goals by developing respectful relationships that build upon workers' skills, analyses, motivations, feelings of ownership, voice, and of being supported, and through one-on-ones, committee meetings, trainings, demonstration, and support in the field. Of course, some worker leaders elect not to wait for an organizer, resolving instead to develop their leadership themselves.

Of the organizations that identify with a leadership-development model, most have both seen significant success in developing worker leadership, but also face substantial leadership underdevelopment, compromising levels of worker organization, the strength of campaigns, and ultimately, the power of the movement. On the one hand, worker leaders are the inspirational face and the grassroots organizing force on the front lines of countless campaigns. Ask any organizer and they will have worker leadership stories to share. Worker leaders from the locals featured in this study executed a work stoppage to win the right to elect their managers, united coworkers to win union recognition for temporary workers, pushed their union to wage a successful living wage campaign, developed a worker leader-to-worker leader mentorship program, and became staff organizers and directors. On the other hand, however, worker leadership remains underdeveloped when the many workers with leadership potential fail to be identified, recruited, developed, and/or retained. Many of the inspirational worker leaders mentioned previously, when asked, expressed various degrees of distress, disappointment, even demoralization because of the lack of adequate development. Concerns systematically relate to insufficient training and education, motivation, emotional support, or voice in union decision making.¹³ Not surprisingly, unions and other worker organizations struggle with many types of underdevelopment, as worker leader identification, recruitment, development, and retention each presents a complex challenge to budding and seasoned organizers alike.

While different organizations struggle with the various components of leadership development processes, most have yet to develop mechanisms that adequately evaluate and measure their efforts—an essential project for those committed to increasing worker leadership. For example, many organizations

conduct informal assessments by having organizers rate workers on union support scales (e.g., 1–5, 1–4, or 1–3 scales), debrief organizing commitments in one-on-one meetings, and evaluate actions in committee meetings. While these are critical pieces of the evaluation puzzle, such assessments fail to meaningfully capture worker leaders' activity and experience, which might otherwise provide organizations the information necessary to further develop worker leadership. In the context of our organizations' many projects, I find that implementing and evaluating comprehensive leadership development programs increases worker leadership, increases the likelihood that campaigns end in victory, and builds movements. According to trainer Bernard Moore, "If we ever stopped to understand what we are already doing right, we'd be a dangerous movement."¹⁴

Two outcomes are particularly important to measure over time—quantitative measures of the number and percentage of worker leaders by workplace and organization and qualitative measures of how worker leaders feel about their leadership experience. First, given the decisive role of worker leadership, we must measure more than union density—we must also measure and track another form of density, worker *leadership density*, or the percentage of workers in a given workplace or organization who are active leaders. Already used in a few organizations, leadership density gives us a deeper understanding of our organizations' capacity to grow their bases and wage strategic campaigns over time. Increasing leadership density is a critical ingredient of a movement capable of increasing union density. Second, organizations should assess *leadership dignity*—a set of possible measures that assesses workers' experience of being developed. Possible qualitative measures include worker leaders' feelings of confidence, ownership, support, and having a say in the decisions of their organization. Ongoing solicitation and incorporation of worker leader feedback into the organization plays a critical role in developing worker leadership. As leadership density and dignity are measured, our organizations must also assess critical stages in the leadership development process to improve such outcomes. The project of building a more powerful movement—in part by increasing the density of, and dignity felt by, worker leadership—requires systematic effort to evaluate and refine leadership-development organizing in our worker organizations. The first "ask" of inviting a worker to join an organizing committee must always be followed by a second "ask": have we built the committee? Answering this question requires that we regularly ask both the builders *and* the committee. Only then are we able to take informed action to advance our leadership-development organizing.

In this article, I begin by grounding the discussion in the living history of leadership-development organizing in the U.S. I go on to discuss the potential of participatory evaluation to bolster leadership development efforts, sharing models I myself have encountered while conducting rudimentary evaluations as an organizer in two local unions, and present an interview-based case study I conducted in an east coast building services local. All three locals share an express commitment to worker leadership development. Notably, worker leaders in each setting expanded on both their development and underdevelopment. Finally, and based on my study, I suggest multiple possible evaluation

opportunities, designs, and measures. I offer examples of measures that run the gamut of these categories of leadership density, leadership dignity, and the leadership development process. To be successful, of course—as with building the committee—organizations, organizers, and worker leaders must make leadership-development evaluation their own.

Relearning Organizing

Preoccupation with our movement's need to develop worker leadership is anything but new. Neither are observations that workers have organized and won based on the premise that rank-and-file workers must exercise collective leadership in organizing, contract, and political campaigns. Beginning with slave revolts and the early rank-and-file committees of miners and printers, organizing models designed to develop the leadership of working-class people, poor people, people of color, women, and other oppressed communities in the U.S. have been practiced for centuries.

Prominent organizers offer a few glimpses. Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey, and Nat Turner recruited coconspirators for slave revolts early in the nineteenth century. In the 1880s, Terence Powderly insisted that Knights of Labor organizers teach members to “think for themselves” and solemnly commit to defending all members for the “pooling of heartbeats and throbbing intellects.”¹⁵ At the turn of the twentieth century, Lenin developed the practice of building cadres of professional revolutionaries—among them workers—and Eugene V. Debs pleaded that workers “make up their minds” to organize with the Industrial Workers of the World and exert leadership because, as he argued, there is nothing they could not do for themselves.¹⁶ And prior to the legendary organizing campaigns of the 1930s and 1940s, war labor agencies established shop committees made up of rank-and-file workers; founding director of the Brookwood Labor College, A. J. Muste, supported the radical education of scores of worker leaders; rank-and-file Pullman porters recruited A. Philip Randolph to lead their organizing committee; Mary Harris “Mother” Jones lamented the dearth of “good fighters,” aspiring to live long enough to “develop them;” and Nikolai Bukharin advocated the “colossal overproduction of organizers.”¹⁷

Abolitionist, labor, leftist, black freedom, third world, feminist, student, global justice, and immigrant rights organizations and movements, among others, have all constructed or contributed to leadership-development organizing models. Some were actively taught and would propagate a particular model while others created or re-created models themselves. Some models employ altogether different organizing methods that do not include leadership development—organizing performed exclusively by staff or open recruitment for direct action, for example—although grassroots leadership certainly influences the organizing process and outcomes.

Detailed accounts of leadership-development organizing models' progressions are unfortunately rare. Responding to the surprising absence of studies uncovering labor organizing methods, historian Jennifer Luff and organizer Sam

Luebke argue that documenting the history of organizing techniques is critical for a labor movement that struggles to relearn how to organize in an increasingly hostile climate.¹⁸

A handful of the admirable exceptions provide windows into the rich traditions, and living history, of leadership-development organizing. These organizers emphasized what would become central tenets: leaders already exist in any workplace or community; successful organizing and action requires careful identification, recruitment, and development; and development itself means encouraging the confidence and ownership felt by these leaders through ongoing, respectful relationships.

Early communist, socialist, and other radical labor organizers placed particular emphasis on worker leadership development. Written after decades of organizing with the Industrial Workers of the World, packinghouse workers, and steelworkers, William Z. Foster's (1936) booklet, *Organizing Methods in the Steel Industry*, insists that each organizer "should be commissioned as a captain of a crew of volunteer organizers. . . . The campaign can succeed only if thousands of workers can be organized to help directly in the enrollment of members."¹⁹ Also organizing in the 1930s, Cannery and Agricultural Workers' Industrial Union organizer Pat Chambers—an inspiration for John Steinbeck's novel, *In Dubious Battle*—describes the care and humility required in leadership-development organizing:

Plant an idea and let it grow. . . . Don't come in like a great strike leader—stay in the background (the growers are smart and they know enough to get you if you become famous). Talk to people on their own level and let the ideas about what to do come from them. . . . The essence of leadership is not to portray yourself as some sort of know-it-all, but your ability to develop the people you are working with so they themselves can take the initiative and do the organizational drive. . . . You don't try to build an organization at their expense.²⁰

Reflecting on the 1933 Cotton Strike, Cannery and Agricultural Workers' Industrial Union executive secretary, Caroline Decker, observed that, "there was one thing that made this strike possible—it was the development of leadership from the ranks, from the bottom up. . . . [Chambers's] forte was to hunker down in the dust and talk to small groups of men, search out leaders, and offer quiet advice."²¹

Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) organizer, John Steuben, elaborated on worker leader identification and development: "Just as in military battles," writes Steuben,

men quiet, modest and untried come forward and become heroes, so workers in time of strike come forward and become leaders. In each local union, in each plant, are hundreds of devoted and intelligent union men and women. They are the shop stewards, board members, and numerous other active workers. They, in turn, have hundreds of friends working alongside them. Many of these workers have a great deal of native ability, and a wise strike leader knows how to bring this to the surface and make it operate for the good of the union. All that

is needed to turn such worker into leaders is confidence in them, plus training, direction, guidance, and strict supervision.²²

In addition to identifying and developing worker leaders for strikes, an early United Auto Workers (UAW) handbook, "How to Win for the Union," taught worker leaders how to develop a shop steward structure to exercise day-to-day control on the shop floor.²³ Describing this "weapon of democracy," the handbook insists that the power of organized labor is "brought to bear against management through the shop stewards and plant committeemen, who are elected representatives of the organized workers." The handbook insists that power comes from the *organization* built by worker leaders, not simply individual leaders themselves: "Without organization behind him and working with him, no steward, no committeeman, no officer can win victories from management."²⁴ Following the organizing campaigns of the 1930s and 1940s, the shop committee became the "structural base for the industrial union."²⁵ As some painted a picture of burgeoning shop-floor democracies by the 1950s, however, others witnessed significant steward underdevelopment. "You may as well forget that we have any stewards," said one local UAW president, "they're a joke."²⁶

While sharing common language and methods, organizers varied substantially on the kinds of grassroots leadership they envisioned, the nature of the development process, and the end to which leadership should be developed. On the one hand, many organizers adopted a leadership-development model solely for its strategic capacity to create powerful union organization among workers. Others also believed that leadership development was critical to a fundamental reorganization of the economy in which workers are able to exercise more power over decisions and conditions that affected their lives—for industrial democracy or socialism, for example. Some would advocate for worker leaders to have a more substantial roles in decision making than others. Some believed in the development of workers' leadership for its own sake, for oppressed people to have the opportunity to fully realize their humanity. Some organizers would prioritize skill development, while others would emphasize analytical capacities and values through popular education based on the teachings of radical educators Paulo Freire and Miles Horton.

One black freedom struggle leader, Ella Baker, would contribute a tremendous amount to a model that emphasized developing grassroots, democratic leadership for social change.²⁷ In her profound but accessible manner, she argued that "what is needed is the development of people who are interested not in being leaders as much as developing leadership among other people,"²⁸ teaching that radical social change depended upon ordinary people themselves becoming leaders, participating in organizational decision making, and taking action. Featuring Ella Baker and other grassroots organizers, historian Charles Payne provides one of the few, intimate accounts of the leadership-development organizing tradition. According to Payne, part of these organizers' legacy is "a faith that ordinary people who learn to believe in themselves are capable of

extraordinary acts, or better, of acts that seem extraordinary to us precisely because we have such an impoverished sense of the capabilities of ordinary people.”²⁹ Payne demonstrates how this underappreciated model of community organizing built the black freedom struggle. “How was it possible,” Payne asks, “within a few years, to move large numbers of . . . apolitical people . . . to a position of actively working to change the conditions of their own lives?”³⁰ A particular kind of organizing—one based on Ella Baker’s slow “spadework” of identifying, building relationships with, and respecting local, collective leadership—was the answer. In spite of the organization that emerged from this model, Payne finds a combination of initial victories and growing disillusionment pushed much of the leadership-development organizing to the side by the late 1960s. Still, this model continues to inspire new generations of organizers.

Labor, leftist, community, and student organizers would learn from these and other models to develop grassroots leadership for new social movements and a labor movement striving for revitalization. In the face of a renewed corporate offensive, the evisceration of labor law, anti-union political leadership, deregulation, neoliberal globalization, and the movement’s weakness in the face of such forces, the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) initiated a series of projects to promote organizing. Beginning in the 1980s, the AFL-CIO’s efforts—creating the Organizing Institute, for example—contributed to a new incarnation of the organizing model intended to revitalize unions. Some unions already had rich leadership development traditions to draw from; others benefited from recent, successful large-scale farm worker and public sector organizing campaigns. At different paces and to varying degrees, unions relearned how to organize. At its most basic level, this familiar model involves recruiting worker leaders onto organizing committees, which—generally led by staff organizers or representatives—mobilize members in union workplaces and organize workers in non-union workplaces. Over the last few decades, many unions have come to identify with some form of this organizing model, although only a subset of these unions implements the model in practice.

As unions were selectively implementing this organizing model, community-based worker organizations began to flourish. In part as a result of the labor movement’s inability or reticence to organize or defend excluded workers—immigrants working in contingent or precarious jobs, low-wage workers of color, and workers without legally-recognized organizing rights—worker centers and community-based worker organizations organized and developed leadership to fill the void. Such organizations often place more emphasis on leadership development through political education and participatory decision making than many unions. In contrast, given their larger memberships and different strategic orientations, unions practicing an organizing model can often recruit larger numbers of worker leaders for particular organizing, contract, workplace, and political campaigns. Of course, many organizations defy these sweeping generalizations; there is considerable variation within and between unions, as well as among community-based worker organizations.

In fact, organizations vary based on their orientation toward each stage of leadership development—identification, recruitment, development, retention, and evaluation—as well as key components of development, such as education and training, voice in decision making, motivation, and emotional support. While careful not to conflate organizations or organizing models, sociologist Ruth Milkman observes recent and significant convergence of worker center and union organizing models, particularly in Los Angeles.³¹ In addition, ongoing collaborations and cross-pollination in cities such as New York, Chicago, and the San Francisco Bay Area are increasingly facilitated by the building of national alliances such as the National Day Laborer Organizing Network and the Excluded Workers Congress (now United Workers Congress), as well as growing support from the AFL-CIO. As unions and community-based worker organizations improve and expand upon grassroots leadership development programs, it is clear that our traditions are varied and vital.

Walk Asking

If worker leadership development is critical to worker campaigns and organizations, do unions and other worker organizations systematically evaluate leadership development programs? While outside evaluations occasionally prove enlightening, do organizations build internal, ongoing evaluation capacities that are integrated into both internal and external organizing?³² And do leaders being developed throughout the organization—not just top leaders—participate meaningfully in such evaluations? Unfortunately, the answer to these questions is most often “no,” albeit for understandable reasons.

Aside from occasionally counting the number of committee leaders or stewards, many organizations fail to evaluate leadership development efforts. Particular locals, directors, or lead organizers may pay close attention to the total number of worker leaders, ratio of worker leaders to workers during particular campaigns, or occasionally facilitate discussions about leadership development in planning meetings, but few implement ongoing evaluations to better understand organizations’ successes and struggles with leadership development over time. Without systematic evaluation, we fail accurately identify and address the under-identification, under-recruitment, underdevelopment, and under-retention of worker leaders. More basically, we often lack concrete criteria that define the responsibilities of worker leaders, the process and goals of leadership development, and assess worker leaders’ feelings of confidence and ownership.

Elaborating upon possible evaluation techniques and measures might offer organizations concrete tools to improve leadership-development organizing. While the exception rather than rule, a handful of organizers and organizations have incorporated assessment techniques into their organizing for some time. In 1936, organizer William Z. Foster argued that worker leadership recruitment and development must include a

constant re-examination of the organizing methods used. Only in such a way can the necessary adjustments be made in tactics to fit the different situations. And only thus can the workers and organizers avoid defeat and pessimism and be given a feeling of confidence and sure success. It is a fatal mistake to try to apply blue-print methods of organization to an industry that presents so many and varied situations as steel. Flexibility in the work is a first essential, and to achieve this requires drastic self-criticism.³³

A contemporary evaluation principle is articulated by Zapatista leaders organizing for indigenous self-determination in Mexico; they proclaim, “we walk asking.”³⁴ Rather than viewing evaluation only as a discrete activity at the end of a protracted process, asking questions of those organizing and those being organized is a fundamental and ongoing part of the leadership identification, recruitment, and development process. According to Eric Mann, “[Labor/Community Strategy Center organizers] have a great work ethic that leads us to often skip the stage of the deepest sum-up of our work. . . . Summing up our own work is a critical part of our work. It is our work!”³⁵ While a growing community of professional evaluators has explored multiple methods for evaluating leadership development in social change organizations, such efforts cannot replace—and, when most effective, serve to enhance—the development of organizations’ and organizers’ own capacities to walk asking, or evaluate leadership development efforts while organizing.

Although not without contradictions, some of the most in-depth leadership-development evaluation efforts have been attempted within the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) International unions. While the SEIU International has at times pursued trusteeships that disenfranchise scores of its own worker leaders, it has simultaneously invested in efforts to evaluate its leadership development programs over the past two decades.³⁶ In the mid-1990s, SEIU’s education department invited Kate Bronfenbrenner and Tom Juravich to develop a systematic, longitudinal assessment and tracking system for the union’s Leadership Development Program, to provide the union with data on the program’s accomplishments, and suggest what changes could improve leadership development. According to Bronfenbrenner and Juravich,

The success of the Leadership Development Program goes hand in hand with the establishment of an effective and objective evaluation system. For only with such a system in place, can the union ensure that the Leadership Development Program will continue to develop the kind of leadership needed to carry on the work of building the union in an ever-changing, and ever more difficult social, political, and economic environment.³⁷

Discontinued after only a couple years, the potential of this assessment and tracking system was unfortunately never fully realized. By the late 1990s, SEIU’s flagship education and leadership development programs had been eliminated.³⁸

It was not until 2008 that SEIU undertook another in-depth study of worker leadership development. SEIU’s Local Union Strength Committee, supported by

the consulting firm IDEO, conducted a study of the union's worker leadership development efforts across the U.S., "the most exhaustive internal look at our locals ever carried out by our union, or perhaps any union."³⁹ The study found that member leadership and participation, leadership development, and member education and training ranked among the areas with lowest levels of satisfaction. The Committee's findings included calls to enlist members themselves to assess leadership development efforts, measure and track leadership development on an ongoing basis, develop multiple pathways for worker participation and leadership, and ensure that worker leaders have a meaningful voice in union decisions. The study also provided a critical, quantitative view of underdevelopment: it estimated that between two and three percent of its members regularly participate as leaders; the union had, however, set a goal of 10 percent participation.⁴⁰ For a union that is at once criticized for being overly centralized and praised for its organizing successes, these findings are particularly relevant.

The AFSCME International has also encouraged evaluation of its leadership development programs, focused on both senior and rank-and-file leadership. Developed following the 2004 creation of AFSCME's 21st Century Committee, programs aimed to build local affiliates' capacity to reach targets such as a ratio of one steward to every 20 bargaining unit members and 40,000 political activists for the 2008 election. AFSCME's education department has also been at the heart of developing and evaluating leadership development programs. Labor studies professors Susan Schurman and Adrienne Eaton were invited to conduct an evaluation of the pilot phase of the Major Affiliate Leadership Academy, completed in 2010. AFSCME also conducted an evaluation of its Local Union Leadership Academy, and with the support of labor studies professor Michelle Kaminski, is embarking on an in-depth study of women's leadership development within AFSCME.

As an organizer in HERE, SEIU, and AFSCME local unions, I found strong organizing programs and significant commitment to worker leadership development, but little systematic evaluation that included the perspectives of worker leaders themselves. As a result, my organizing teams and I at times failed to learn from our mistakes, replicate our successes, and, ultimately, to increase the development and retention of worker leaders. Again, a few exceptions are worthy of mention. Many locals and international organizing teams—UNITE HERE especially—incorporate ongoing leadership recruitment assessments into organizing and contract campaigns, although mostly without collecting significant worker leader input. One SEIU local underwent successive planning processes with staff and worker leaders—called *Imagine Moving our Union Ahead*—a part of which involved assessing the local's leadership development efforts and proposing concrete policies to improve such efforts. *Imagine Moving our Union Ahead* included steward recruitment goals, improvements to steward trainings, new proposals for steward mentorship, and transition plans for staff and worker leaders of newly organized units. Proactive leadership development assessment efforts do exist in some unions, although they tend not to be ongoing, systematic, or involve the participation of worker leaders across the union.

As I recruited and developed worker leadership in each of these locals, I began to experiment with rudimentary techniques to evaluate our efforts. Certainly not alone in my thinking, I felt that workers had more insight to contribute and would develop more ownership over their organization if they were asked to weigh in more—to describe their experience one-on-one and to do so in detail—in addition to the common, brief evaluation conducted by filling out a flip chart in response to prompts of “what went well” and “what could be improved.”

For example, after one successful SEIU campaign to organize temporary city workers, our team of organizers conducted structured, open-ended interviews with ten worker leaders. Among many insights, we learned how important it was to many of the organizing committee members that they were asked for their input on a regular basis and felt that their suggestions were taken seriously. “That was the best thing about [the organizing campaign],” one committee leader recalled, “[organizers] never stopped asking what we thought. I felt like it was a partnership and we were fighting for our best interests, and I felt good about my ability to change things from the committee.”⁴¹ Seeing decisions change as a result of their participation was an indicator identified by multiple committee leaders. Another leader said that the organizer “heard my concerns about the proposals and he changed them.”⁴² We also learned that while committee leaders appreciated the training they received—especially trainings on how to have one-on-one conversations with their coworkers and speak in public—they were, indelibly, hungry for more. Finally, we learned that some committee leaders were demoralized by the nature of the local’s staff transition—the organizing team was taken off the campaign after union recognition and the campaign for a first contract was added to one staff representative’s already full load of responsibilities. These and other worker leader responses shed light on how organizers and representatives could continue to develop those particular worker leaders, as well as improve leadership development in future campaigns.

A second example of a rudimentary evaluation, after a successful AFSCME Local 3299 contract fight with the University of California, I worked closely with worker leaders and a team of student interns to conduct a more extensive one-on-one, interview-based survey of thirty-eight worker leaders and activists. The survey documented worker leaders’ evaluation of: the contract campaign, worker leader structure, voice in union decisions, and the union’s contribution to racial justice and other social justice struggles. Worker leaders were most consistently united in one demand: more training and education. Specifically, they were hungry for more education about the union and its structure; better communication between staff organizers, worker leaders, and members; more recognition of worker leaders; and more recruitment or rotation of worker leaders. One worker leader commented, “We need . . . to have comments and feedback transmitted to higher staff somehow, and [we need] a way to meet the people who make the decisions. We should have trainings or social gatherings where people learn about the union structure, time once a month for

trainings.”⁴³ Another leader said, “I need to be listened to more . . . We need to do this survey thing once a month!”⁴⁴ A third said, simply, “We need more leaders and education is necessary. We need to train workers to be leaders.”⁴⁵ In a follow-up interview, a worker leader-turned-organizer, Maricruz Manzanarez, shared her studied understanding of what motivated her and other co-workers’ leadership:

The main support that the union can give is to provide education and to include us in decisions, because there has to be feedback from the workers. To involve [workers] in something and be able to change something, workers want to offer their little piece. But if we are not taken into account, it doesn’t come from us. We won’t own it. We won’t feel that we are part of it. If we are involved and if the ideas we put forward are respected—even if they aren’t used in the end, but they are heard—this is worth a lot. . . . [Workers] always say that at the least [union leaders] ask what I think, what I want.⁴⁶

One executive board member active in the survey project, Kathryn Lybarger, would take participatory evaluation a step further. She organized a worker leader committee to systematically interview dozens of top worker leaders and staff across the entire local to learn exactly what being a “member-run” union meant to them. According to Kathryn, “I was made aware of what seemed to be some pretty deep problems . . . about who’s the driver in our local.”⁴⁷ Based on her experience as a worker leader, Kathryn felt that the executive board needed a process to gather many more perspectives to improve the local’s structure. “It has really met with my experience,” Kathryn said, remembering one particular worker leader’s perspective that worker leaders are not able to ensure that the union makes decisions in their best interest “if you’re not actually involved in the working of something, if you’re not in the room when there are decisions being made.”⁴⁸ A previous committee had attempted to evaluate the union’s structure, and it had been a “horrendous” experience. Kathryn said that one worker leader who had served on both committees “was still having post-traumatic stress from [the experience], and she totally came around in this process and felt really good about it and really felt like it had been really democratic and respectful and thorough. Respectful of everybody. . . . I think I just could have given a lot more time and just done second rounds. . . . It’s one of the most satisfying things I’ve been a part of.”⁴⁹ As a result of the process, the local changed its leadership structure. Then, Kathryn was elected president of the local as a part of a reform slate. The new leadership’s initial reform efforts have included launching a membership survey to better assess workers’ priorities, needs, and union visions; developing a strategic plan that prioritizes worker leadership recruitment and development; hiring an education director to oversee the creation and implementation of worker leader training programs; requiring that workers identified as leaders get their coworkers to sign a leadership commitment form to encourage mutual support and commitment; and overhauling the membership database to enable organizers to track leadership recruitment, development, and density.

While rudimentary, our evaluations at AFSCME and SEIU locals provided broad, critical insights into our leadership development efforts, and small glimpses into what could be possible if they were part and parcel of ongoing, union-wide leadership development programs. Perhaps the greatest limitations were that the evaluations were not an ongoing practice, and were isolated to particular organizing teams, rather than local-wide efforts.

Moved by the potential of leadership-development evaluation to increase both worker leadership density and leadership dignity, I embarked upon a study on leadership development at an east coast building services local union (hereinafter, “Local”) for which I had not worked as an organizer. Local leaders told me that they had never conducted a leadership-development evaluation. I conducted twenty-eight in-depth, semi-structured interviews, in both English and Spanish, with stewards, executive board members, members who were not considered leaders, and staff. This evaluation also elicited meaningful—and at times, surprising—information about both the successes and the struggles of the Local’s leadership development efforts. While listening to the assessments of a cross-section of stewards and staff leaders, and gathering limited data on steward activity, it became clear that the Local is making substantial strides in developing worker leadership among cleaners and security officers. The Local has developed a significant number of active stewards; successfully filled staff and top leadership positions with representative, rank-and-file leaders; raised the leadership aspirations of other stewards; developed an intensive and effective union leave (or “brigade”) program; made many worker leaders feel that they have a voice in the Local’s decisions; and cultivated a strong alliance between African American and Latina/o worker leaders in support of new organizing and comprehensive immigration reform.

Angela’s story is one of many that demonstrate the successes of leadership development. After 4 years of working as a cleaner and having never seen a union representative, Angela demanded to be informed about her union and contract. She decided she never wanted other members to feel what she felt, became a steward, and even agreed to take leave to work with the union for a month. When she was asked to take a staff position for the union, Angela refused—the work was too overwhelming. After 3 years of persistent encouragement from a union leader, she agreed to take a position as a staff representative. Angela is now the Local’s assistant director. When Angela described what motivated her to become a staff representative, she said, the “staff . . . gave me a lot of encouragement: ‘you can do it. We think you’re good . . . we need you.’ They were very encouraging.”⁵⁰ Angela derived great pride in the Local’s success at developing leadership that is representative of the membership. “One of the things that we have always been proud of is that the leadership of our local . . . resembles what our membership looks like. Because our membership is immigrant workers and African American workers.”⁵¹

In addition to discussing the Local’s many major leadership development accomplishments, interviewees at all levels of the organization were likewise candid about the Local’s limitations. They suggested specific areas that they felt

could benefit from improvement. The limitations that received the most attention from stewards and staff were that the Local did not have enough stewards to adequately represent the membership and move Local campaigns; the Local had not implemented or prioritized a more comprehensive program (including the “leader of leaders” or steward mentorship programs), with development plans and follow-up for individual leaders; stewards and staff were not getting as much training and education as they needed; stewards and staff indicated a need for greater emotional support; stewards did not have a sufficient say in Local decision making; the decision to merge with a larger local eliminated—rather than expanded—worker leader positions; and worker leadership development was compromised when the Local failed to sustain efforts in between major campaigns. Finally, the leadership of worker leaders who were not targeted for staff positions, or who decided not to fill them, was less developed.

Felipe’s story potently exemplifies the struggles of leadership underdevelopment. Felipe was a small businessman in Peru, until a devastating currency devaluation, forcing him to become a painter, cleaner, and busboy in the U.S. No longer a businessman, as a worker he has found that managers “don’t learn to recognize that the worker is who feeds them. . . . We tear our souls in two to complete the work.”⁵² While Felipe did not aspire to be a steward—and actually expected his union to be corrupt—coworkers who were more senior than he was elected him so that—he surmised—they would not need to be “out in front.”⁵³ But Felipe believed in strength in numbers; he wanted to learn. According to him, if members are made to feel capable, they can participate as leaders in the union. But he had noticed that, in contrast, a number of stewards had taken a step back or decided to quit their leadership positions. While he appreciated that stewards are asked to participate in meetings, he felt that the union leadership asked for more opinions in the past than they did now and that stewards needed more training. More training would further enable more stewards to be recruited. While Felipe was excited about developing the leadership of other worker leaders, he was disheartened that he himself had not been more developed: “They just appointed me to take on another challenge: leader of a group to develop leaders,” started Felipe, who was recently chosen to chair the Local’s steward development committee. “What will I do to develop leaders if I’m not developed as a leader? Despite being a steward for several years, I’ve never become a leader.”⁵⁴ When I interviewed him, Felipe had been a steward at the Local for 8 years.

Susana’s effort to create and sustain a mentorship program is another example of underdevelopment. Having worked as an adult education teacher in Puerto Rico, Susana moved to the U.S. to be with her family and began working as a cleaner. She first became involved in the union when she decided to investigate where her union dues were going, and she realized that the union “was the cause for justice I had always been searching for;”⁵⁵ she has since been an active steward for over a decade and has become a prominent and inspiring Local leader. As an elected member of the Local’s executive board, she proposed and helped develop a steward mentorship program—as Susana saw it, “a leader

should develop other leaders. . . . Leaders aren't born, they're made."⁵⁶ This program involved more experienced worker leaders taking responsibility for mentoring the less experienced ones. During our interview, Susana lamented that, while successful, in the absence of ongoing Local leadership support, the mentorship program had ceased to operate. In addition, she observed that since a Local merger, steward trainings had become less frequent, and stewards were less involved in decision making than they had been in the past:

I have this nice memory of when we were the [former local. The President and Fernando] encouraged members to participate a lot, a lot more than now. . . . And they asked us as leaders for our opinions. . . . I think the leaders welcomed more participation and wanted the members to be more involved. . . . We pay our leaders so that they direct us, but we workers need to make the struggle. . . . I'm not saying that [the Local] does not encourage us to participate, they encourage us to participate—but it's different. We notice the difference. . . . It's more based on an executive board; they make more decisions. . . . But there are certain things for which they should ask all the members for their opinions. . . . Many other stewards that we know . . . say something's missing.⁵⁷

While disheartened, Susana saw clearly the potential benefit of greater steward development and participation. "A union that encourages participation and requests opinions is democratic. And this develops leaders and develops unity. This is unity."⁵⁸

The steward, staff, and member interviews provided a wealth of insight into interviewees' many motivations, diverse views on leadership, leadership development success stories, conditions that contribute to leadership underdevelopment, and concrete suggestions to improve upon the Local's successes. Interviewees made it clear that the Local has much to be proud of, and much to teach other unions. The interviewees also pointed to the need to create a more comprehensive leadership development program at the Local, with enhanced training, emotional support, and voice in decision-making; and the need to conduct periodic, participatory evaluations that are quantitative and qualitative, to assess and measure progress. A cross section of stewards, staff, and top leadership expressed active interest in the interview-based evaluation, appreciated being interviewed, and were attentive to the study's findings.

Worker leaders' participation in the evaluation process itself proved meaningful. Leonard's story and perspective is instructive. Leonard's mother was a steward in the building where they both worked as cleaners. He first learned about unions from the film *Hoffa* and told his mom he did not want to join. When Leonard's mother fell ill and left work, his coworkers elected him to be the new steward. He was moved that his coworkers had faith in him, became more passionate about organizing through his participation in President Obama's election, and was heartened when he had the chance to tell his mother, just before she passed away, that he had become the new steward. He observed that

A lot of times people get involved in stuff and no one really takes the time out, you know, to find out what the people think about this organization. . . . And it's

good . . . to find out what the union can do better, what they can do to help the people, the shop stewards to come up, to help the people that's not shop stewards that want to step up and get involved, you know? The more people we get involved, the better it is for everybody, for the union, for everybody.⁵⁹

Another steward, Fidel, was moved simply by the opportunity to engage in a conversation about worker leadership in the Local. Fidel was a student activist and then businessman in Guatemala, and he came to the U.S. during his country's civil war. He participated in the original union organizing campaign at his building, and he is pleased to have seen cleaners' wages more than double since the mid-1990s. Fidel agreed to serve as a steward because he disliked seeing his coworkers humiliated by the cleaning company; he has, however, kept his involvement to a minimum because he feels that the union is run without sufficient worker participation. Fidel appreciated being asked for his perspective in this study—it was the first time in 15 years that he felt like he could tell someone how he felt about his union: “It’s good, it’s intriguing . . . after [being involved in the union for] fifteen years I can share my opinion . . . to be able to express something that . . . psychologically I had guarded and well, ultimately in the end, I could do it.”⁶⁰ This study, like the evaluations I conducted as an organizer, have convinced me that thorough, ongoing internal leadership development assessments will result in substantial improvements in worker organizations' leadership development efforts, increasing leadership density and expanding worker leaders' feelings of dignity. In addition to revealing how the Local has excelled at developing leadership and how the Local can concretely improve such efforts, the study allowed me to identify and test possible indicators for future evaluations.

Evaluation Models and Measures

Rather than emulate the above leadership-development evaluations or follow a universal evaluation template, organizations should thoroughly elaborate on their own organizing models and should use that to guide the development of their evaluation program (e.g., see Figure 2). Refining and evaluating leadership-development organizing requires clarity around an organization's model, leadership development program, and the indicators it uses to measure success. In its most basic form, leadership-development evaluation means turning an organization's leadership-development model into a series of questions to be answered systematically and concretely with numbers and/or qualitative detail. Ideally, evaluation is ongoing and integrated into worker leader one-on-ones, individual leadership development plans, and the collective life of organizing and organizational committees. Asking and answering the critical question—have we built the committee?—requires that organizations choose among a variety of evaluation opportunities, designs, and measures.

First, in the context of intense organizing, contract, political, and issue campaigns, organizations must seize upon multiple opportunities to evaluate and

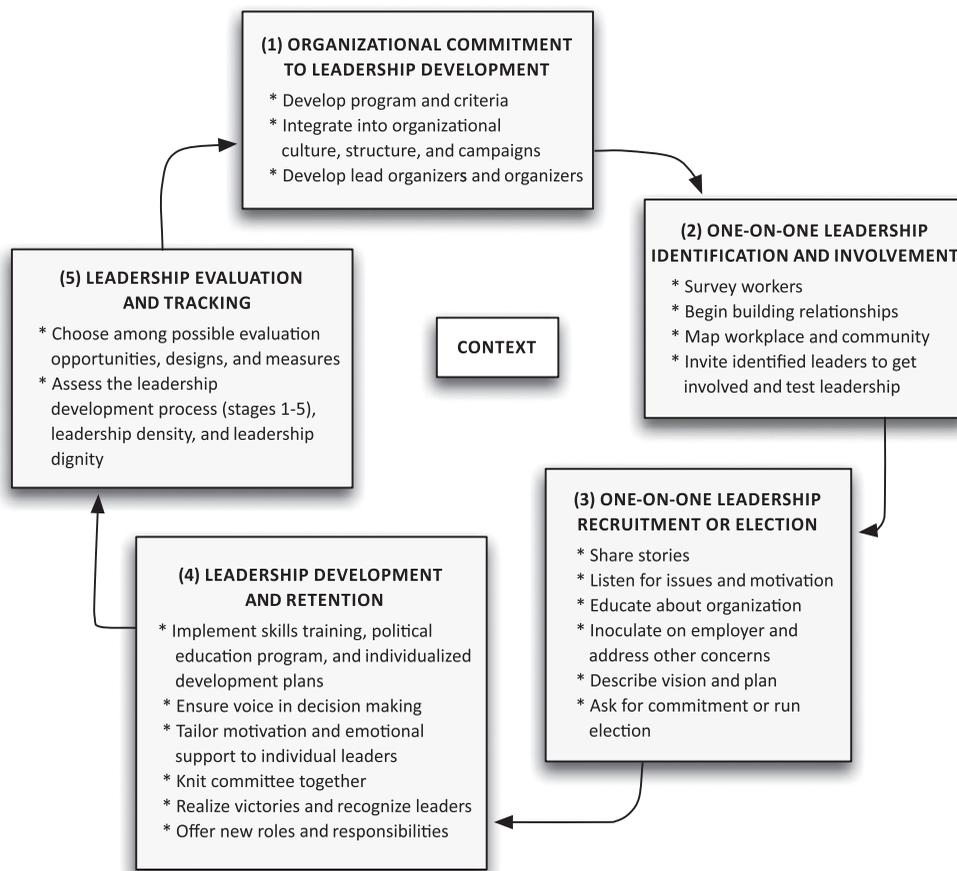


Figure 2. One Organizing Model as Evaluation Template.

track leadership development. While leadership-development evaluation can take place at just about any point in time, four opportunities that are common to many organizations include efforts to inform and assess: (1) individual worker leadership development plans—say, weekly or monthly; (2) worker leader trainings; (3) union or organizational leave programs; and (4) major organizational and campaign junctures. Longitudinal evaluations—multiple evaluations conducted at specific intervals—provide organizations with much-needed temporal points of comparison. Examples of this approach are evident in Bronfenbrenner and Juravich’s evaluation of SEIU’s leadership development program, as well as a *Mujeres Unidas y Activas*’ leadership training, in which worker leaders fill out a survey before and after participating in the training.⁶¹

Second, after identifying opportunities to evaluate leadership development efforts, organizations must choose what form the evaluations will take. Evaluations can be one-on-one or with entire committees, and it can be in the form of written or oral surveys, structured or semi-structured one-on-ones or interviews, facilitated group discussions, or a combination of these. Organizations should

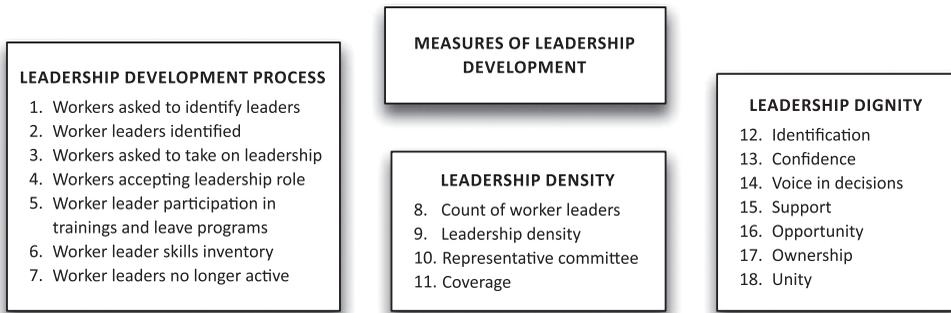


Figure 3. Examples of Measures.

strive to evaluate their development of individual leaders, their development of organizing or campaign committees of leaders, and their leadership development program as a whole. Most importantly, the form and institutional focus should be chosen based on at least two criteria: that as many worker leaders as possible feel moved to share their experiences and perspectives in some depth, and that both the evaluation process and the data gathered deepen the organization's capacity to support further development of worker leadership. Furthermore, involving worker leaders in designing the evaluation is in itself an opportunity to develop leadership.

And third, along with identifying opportunities and choosing an evaluation design, worker organizations must decide on measures. Measures provide a worker organization with concrete and meaningful standards for realizing leadership development goals that are, in turn, key to building campaigns and organization. For example, most organizers are trained to assess workers on a union support scale—where a rating of “1” is often reserved for active worker leaders—and keep a count how many worker leaders are active. Beyond these, however, there are few measures that are systematically used. Organizations can choose from a variety of possible indicators—measures that assess the leadership identification, recruitment, development, and retention process, and measures that assess leadership density and leadership dignity. Multiple measures of leadership density enable organizers to understand how broad, dense, and representative their organization is over time. Measures of leadership dignity enable organizers to understand how worker leaders experience their leadership, campaign, and organization over time. Furthermore, measures can be both quantitative and qualitative, involve worker leaders' self-assessments as well as staff organizer assessments, and, where appropriate, be recorded as part of the organization's larger database and tracking system. The following are some examples of individual measures that can be used to assess an organization's—or, even a movement's—leadership development process, leadership density, and leadership dignity (see Figure 3).

Measures of the *leadership development process* (responses generally include numerical counts, tracking, and inventories):

1. *Workers asked to identify leaders*—How many, and which, workers have been asked to identify leaders one-on-one? What criteria were used to identify them?
2. *Worker leaders identified*—How many, and which, worker leaders have been identified in one-on-one conversations? Why was each considered a leader?
3. *Workers asked to take on leadership*—How many, and which, identified workers have been asked to take on a leadership role (in one-on-one conversations or through an election)? How well were relationships built, motivations identified, and concerns addressed in these one-on-ones?
4. *Workers accepting leadership role*—How many, and which, worker leaders have agreed to take on a leadership role or position? What is the level of leadership activity of each?
5. *Worker leader participation in trainings and leave programs*—How many, and which, worker leaders attend which trainings and participate in leave programs? How many, and which, worker leaders participate in which one-on-one trainings with organizers?
6. *Worker leader skills inventory*—What skills has each worker leader developed and/or practiced, whether inside or outside the organization? Inventory includes executing tasks as an individual leader as well as collaborative skills required to exercise collective leadership.
7. *Worker leaders no longer active*—How many, and which, worker leaders are no longer active as worker leaders, and what reasons do they give for leaving?

Measures of *leadership density* (responses generally include numerical counts, percentages, and qualitative data):

1. *Count of worker leaders*—How many workers are actively participating as leaders in the organization and in particular campaigns (some organizations will have two or more kinds of worker leaders to be counted)? What criteria are used to define active worker leaders?
2. *Leadership density*—What percentage of the membership is active worker leaders (densities can be calculated for particular organizations, alliances, workplaces, markets, industries, or movements)? What percentage of the staff is from the rank and file?
3. *Representative committee*—How representative are worker leaders of the race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, and faith traditions of the membership? How is the leadership of workers of color, women workers, and queer and transgendered workers being developed? How about the anti-racist, feminist, and anti-homophobic leadership of white, male, and heterosexual workers? Also, how representative are worker leaders of the classifications, shifts, departments, and work locations of the membership?

4. *Coverage*—What percentage of workers in a given workplace or community can be actively organized in campaigns by active worker leaders?

Measures of *leadership dignity* (responses are generally qualitative—a one-on-one conversation and a series of observations—but can also involve rating on a scale, such as 1–5):

5. *Identification*—To what degree do worker leaders identify as leaders on a committee, in their organization, and in the movement? How do worker leaders account for their level of identification? How might identification be increased?
6. *Confidence*—To what degree do worker leaders feel confident (or a sense of efficacy) in their ability to execute leadership responsibilities? How do worker leaders account for their level of confidence? How might they come to feel more confident?
7. *Voice in decisions*—To what degree do worker leaders feel that they have a voice or say in organizational and campaign decisions—that they are actually able exercise leadership within the organization? Do they feel listened to? Do they feel that their input informs or alters decisions? What would make them feel like they had more of a say?
8. *Support*—To what degree do worker leaders feel emotionally, morally, or personally supported by organizers and/or other leaders? To what degree do worker leaders feel that organizers have developed relationships based on respect and trust? How do worker leaders account for the level of support? How might they feel more supported?
9. *Opportunity*—To what degree do worker leaders feel that their role as a worker leader challenges them, builds capacities that support other life goals, and/or prepares them for other positions within or outside the organization? How do worker leaders account for their perception of opportunity? How might opportunities be expanded?
10. *Ownership*—To what degree do worker leaders feel ownership over their organization and movement? How do worker leaders account for their level of ownership? How might they feel more ownership?
11. *Unity*—To what degree do worker leaders feel unified as a committee? How do they account for this level of unity? How might the committee become more unified?

While each of the previous list sheds a different light on the accomplishments and limitations of various leadership development efforts, together they are only a selection of possible measures. Bronfenbrenner and Juravich, and Marshall Ganz and his colleagues offer additional measures that are particularly attentive to collective leadership attitudes and practices.⁶² Of course, of these

many possible measures, only a select few might actually be used. Nevertheless, choosing to conduct ongoing assessments on even just a few of the measures mentioned previously can significantly enhance leadership development. For example, what if, in addition to a union support scale, worker organizations consistently assessed all identified leaders based on a *leadership scale* of 1–5 (with corresponding leadership titles rather than numbers)? A “5” might be a someone who was identified as a leader, who identifies themselves as a leader but who is not active, or who is an activist; a “4,” someone who selectively participates as a leader or performs limited leadership functions; a “3,” a leader who practices all basic leadership commitments; a “2,” someone who actively participates in leadership recruitment and development efforts and higher levels of decision making; and a “1” might be considered a leader actively building committees of leaders and leading them through campaigns. In contrast to union support scales, however, all leaders from 1 to 5 would be considered integral to the organization, and ongoing efforts would be made to develop each leader based on where they were at, where they wished to be, and how they could contribute to the organization.

Or, what if organizations regularly tracked their leadership density, set realistic goals, implemented plans to increase leadership density, and oriented campaigns around these goals? What if organizations developed systematic one-on-one conversations and/or scales to assess different measures of leadership dignity, such as the degree to which worker leaders feel ownership over their organization? As with the implementation of other numerical goals, organizations must take care not to overemphasize “the numbers;” this can cause organizations to lose sight of the original purpose of such numbers, obscure critical qualitative measures, or neglect the precarious relationships that are critical to producing such numbers in the first place. Ultimately, leadership-development measures must help organizational leaders, organizers, and worker leaders structure ongoing one-on-one and committee conversations that successfully identify, recruit, develop, and retain worker leaders, while increasing the organization’s leadership density and leadership dignity.

Let Them Make It Their Own

The grandson of a Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front leader and son of a union ambulance driver, Fernando, was recruited to be a worker leader when he was in high school and working as a cleaner. The cleaners in his building went on strike, won union recognition, and, in 1992 won a contract. When he graduated from high school in 1994, the union told Fernando that it did not have enough money to hire him as an organizer, so he joined the U.S. Navy. In 1997, he was finally hired as a staff representative; by 2006, he had become Local director. Fernando’s leadership is in part a product of dedicated, long-term development efforts, and encourages continued leadership development in others. When I asked Fernando to reflect on his own development, and

on how increasing worker leadership development would affect the movement, he said:

I think it is the ability of the leadership of the union to allow rank-and-file people to take leadership roles, allow them to make mistakes, and give them constructive feedback and not call them screw-ups when they screw up . . . then the labor movement is practicing what it preaches. You can't say, "I want to develop the rank and file to take over the union" if you don't mean it, if you just say it because it sounds good. And I think it would grow the movement much faster, it would give the labor movement a different sense of moral credibility.⁶³

While he had never considered conducting a more thorough leadership-development evaluation in the Local, the prospect interested Fernando. "That's actually an interesting idea. I'm going to read your paper now."⁶⁴ Fernando reflected further on the support that he received from his teachers and his father, after seeing his grandfather shot during the civil war in El Salvador; he also suggested that he could use more.

Fernando is not alone. Worker leaders throughout his Local, in the locals for which I have organized, and worker leaders beyond, tell us, when asked, that we have a ways to go in building the committee. This includes committees in individual workplaces, local-wide committees, committees across locals and regions, and ultimately, our movement-wide committee. When our goal remains static—to recruit *just-enough* worker leadership to win the immediate organizing drive, contract campaign, or political fight—we fail to build a movement. The "just-enough" leadership recruitment model—declining to develop, retain, or promote the very leadership that we recruit—may not be the greatest contributor to the labor movement's decline, but it might well be the most powerful factor over which worker organizations exercise direct control as we seek to rebuild a movement.

While organizations train organizers to crown every one-on-one leader recruitment conversation with an ask—the commitment, calling the question, the closer, or even the crunch—they often fail to follow up with additional asks that might further leadership development and retention. That is, after a worker leader agrees to take on a leadership role, we fail to ask worker leaders to assess their own development. Juan Alfaro, another steward turned lead organizer, argued, "You learn a lot when you listen to people who've been on the ground. . . . Sometimes it's hard for us because we think what we're doing is the best and we don't have to change. But having open minds and agreeing with change—that's what makes us stronger."⁶⁵

This article was less an attempt to answer the question—have we built the committee?—but rather sought to learn how our organizations might make more systematic use of that question to develop more leaders and more involved leaders. Fortunately, worker organizations can learn from our histories and walk asking: we can create evaluation templates by detailing our leadership-development model and program; we can conduct participatory evaluations to systematically assess our leadership density, leadership dignity, and leadership

development process; and we can improve our programs based on what we find. Building internal evaluation capacity means identifying key opportunities, creating a meaningful design, and isolating core measures. Measures of leadership dignity—such as worker leaders’ feelings of identification, confidence, voice in decision making, support, opportunity, and ownership—remain particularly underdeveloped. We can share what we find to build the leadership-development capacity of each other’s organizations. And we can organize ourselves to develop in worker leaders the feeling that building power depends on their leadership to organize others, and to themselves develop more leaders. The process of participatory evaluation at once both contributes to developing leadership while demonstrating a profound degree of leadership. Field director of the union-supported We Are Wisconsin electoral campaign, Kristin Crowell, emphasizes that grassroots leaders “want to own this. It is our responsibility to let them.”⁶⁶ Just like building the committee depends upon worker leaders making an organization and the larger movement their own, effective leadership development programs and evaluations require that an organization make them their own.

To be sure, many other critical factors beyond worker leadership development must be prioritized to build a movement, including waging comprehensive organizing campaigns in strategic economic sectors; winning organizing rights for excluded workers; building durable alliances within and outside the labor movement; stemming the tide of concerted, conservative policy attacks on unions; and formulating narratives and policy demands that meet mass appeal. It is impossible to predict how and when the patient “spadework” of grassroots leadership development will translate into the transformative changes we wish to see; however, as has been the case in recent leaderful uprisings, grassroots leadership will be at the core of future mass mobilizations, and hopefully, also at the heart of our organizations. “We have the big giant union,” Juan said, “but when we try to do something we cannot wake up the whole giant, only probably one hand or finger. We should wake up the whole monster.”⁶⁷

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Notes

1. “Worker leaders” include, but are certainly not limited to, organizing committee leaders, stewards, volunteer member organizers, negotiating team members, Member Action Team leaders, Contract Action Team leaders, steering committee leaders, executive board members, and rank-and-file members in staff and/or elected leadership positions. While the development of organizers and leaders not from the rank and file (myself included) is also critical and takes root in most of the principles I discuss in this article, I focus specifically on worker leadership development—the foundation for staff development—and where

- evaluation methods and practice are lacking. For excellent pieces addressing the development of staff leaders, see Ruth Milkman and Kim Voss, eds., *Rebuilding Labor: Organizing and Organizers in the New Union Movement* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); Daisy Rooks, "The Cowboy Mentality: Organizers and Occupational Commitment in the New Labor Movement," *Labor Studies Journal* 28, no. 3 (2003); Lynn Feekin and Marcus Widenor, "Helping New Organizers Survive and Thrive in the Field: The Essential Role of Training and Mentoring," *Labor Studies Journal* 28, no. 3 (2003); Eric Mann, *Playbook for Progressives: 16 Qualities of the Successful Organizer* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011).
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 6. Julius G. Getman, *Restoring the Power of Unions: It Takes a Movement* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 73.
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 8. Dan Clawson, *The Next Upsurge: Labor and the New Social Movements* (Ithaca: ILR Press, 2003), 12.
 9. Steve Early, *The Civil Wars in U.S. Labor: Birth of a New Workers' Movement or Death Throes of the Old?* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011), 119.
 10. Mann, *Playbook for Progressives*, 1.
 11. *Ibid.*, 2, italics in original.
 12. Mark Engler, "Ai-jen Poo: Organizing Labor—With Love," *Yes! Magazine*, November 29, 2011, <http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/the-yes-breakthrough-15/ai-jen-poo-organizing-labor-with-love>.
 13. In many respects, these findings are consistent with those of many other researchers and writers. See, for example, Linda Markowitz, *Union Activism After Successful Organizing* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2000); Katherine Sciacchitano, "Unions, Organizing, and Democracy," *Dissent* 47, no. 2 (2000): 75–81; Pamela A. Roby, "Becoming Shop Stewards: Perspectives on Gender and Race in Ten Trade Unions," *Labor Studies Journal* 20, no. 3 (1995): 65–83; Teresa Sharpe, "Union Democracy and Successful Campaigns" in *Rebuilding Labor: Organizing and Organizers in the New Union Movement*, edited by Ruth Milkman and Kim Voss (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 62–87; Laura Ariovich, *Organizing the Organized: Trade Union Renewal, Organizational Change and Worker Activism in Metropolitan America* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010); Jennifer Gordon, *Suburban Sweatshops: The Fight for Immigrant Rights* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); Bruce Nissen, "Utilizing the Membership to Organize the Unorganized" in *Organizing to Win: New Research on Union Strategies*, eds. Kate Bronfenbrenner, Sheldon Friedman, Richard W. Hurd, Rudolph A. Oswald, and Ronald L. Seeber (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 135–149.
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