



Participant's Report

Health and Safety Representative Study

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October 2013

Executive Summary

Research shows that worker health and safety representatives make significant improvements to health and safety at work, but changes in the economy make it more difficult for them. To help address this problem, LOARC¹, a collaboration of worker representatives, OHS practitioners and university researchers, conducted a survey to identify the skills, conditions, experience and time spent by worker representatives which make them successful. These findings will be used to develop a guide for worker representatives identifying the support and resources needed to address the challenges they face.

A survey of 888 worker health and safety representatives (788 union and 100 non-union) was completed and 51 follow-up interviews were done with individual worker representatives. The main findings are as follows:

- 1) Worker representatives varied significantly in the amount of the time spent on health and safety representation, both paid and unpaid time.
- 2) Worker representatives varied significantly in the distribution of time spent on different activities. Some representatives reported that meetings, inspections and reports occupied most of their time. However, most reported a more equitable distribution of time which included engaging with managers and workers outside the joint health and safety committee, doing research, and doing training and education. Some also tended to spend much more time on interacting with workers and managers and doing research than meetings and inspections.
- 3) Worker representatives who distributed their time across a broader number of activities and those who spent more time on engaging workers and managers, reported significantly more attempts to make changes in their workplaces overall and in terms of a range of specific types of changes, both **complex** (major new ventilation system) and **traditional** (housekeeping²). These representatives, which we refer to as *knowledge activists* because

¹ Labour OHCOW Academic Research Collaboration www.loarc.org. OHCOW stands for Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers, a network of clinics across Ontario www.ohcow.on.ca.

² Housekeeping refers to practices which keep the workplace clean and orderly, free of obstructions.

of their greater involvement in research and education, also reported significantly more positive impact overall and greater success in some specific change efforts.

- 4) The two areas where representatives were most likely to report attempting changes and success were housekeeping and personal protection equipment (PPE). The two least likely areas of reported attempts and success were air quality and workload.
- 5) **Unionized representatives spent significantly larger proportion of their time than non-unionized representatives interacting with managers and organizing support from workers. While non-union representatives reported more success in a direct general question, union representatives had greater impact with reference to efforts to change specific conditions.**
- 6) Several factors were examined as possible explanations for the different overall levels of success by representatives. The significant factors to overall success by worker representatives were the amount of experience on the joint health and safety committee, the amount of paid time allotted to representation activities, being the worker co-chair of the joint committee, the amount of time training workers, and the level of management commitment to health and safety.

For a more detailed report on the study and the findings, please read on.

Introduction: Objectives, Methods and Characteristic of the Sample

Using both on-line and hard copy formats, we received a total of 1192 completed survey questionnaires, of which eight hundred and eighty-eight were identified as current **worker** health and safety representatives. Fifty-one of these eight hundred and eighty-eight survey participants were subsequently recruited for in-depth interviews based on their reported levels of success in achieving changes in health and safety conditions. This report is based on analyses of both the survey and the interview data.

The survey was successful in getting responses from a wide range of different industry sectors and occupations, crossing both blue collar and white collar and private and public sector. The large majority of the responses were from unionized representatives (88%) but a sufficient number (N=100) of non-union representatives allowed comparison of their responses. The survey sample was varied in terms of firm size ranging from ten to 3000 workers. There was a range of employment seniority and periods of time in the representative or co-chair positions ó from six months to 30 years, with the most common being around 7-8 years. The gender distribution was well split between 57% male representatives and 42% female.

The study was aimed at addressing four main questions:

- 1) Can worker representatives be distinguished by the kinds of activities that they engage in, the kinds of changes that they attempt, and the success of those attempts?
- 2) Do these differences reflect distinct orientations to the role and practice of worker representation?
- 3) What are some key factors which help to explain the different patterns of representation practices?
- 4) What do representatives themselves see as important contributions to their impact in the workplace?

What follows is a detailed summary of the findings which address each question.

1) Can worker representatives be distinguished by the kinds of activities that they engage in, the kinds of changes that they attempt, and the success of those attempts?

Using the survey data, three relatively distinct groups of representatives were identified based on differences in the proportion of time that they spent on ten different activities: attending joint committee meetings, preparing for meetings, doing inspections, writing and reading reports, addressing specific worker complaints or problems, dealing or interacting with managers/supervisors on specific issues, getting training and education, providing training or education to workers, doing independent research or information searches, and building and organizing worker support for health and safety. The three groups differed in the amount of total time that they spent on health and safety representation overall and, most importantly, on the relative amount of time that they spent on each activity. Group 1, representing 27% of the sample, spent less time overall than the other two groups and, proportionately, more of their time on doing inspections, writing reports, and preparing for joint committee meetings as compared to the other two groups. Group 2, representing 18% of the total number of representatives surveyed, was similar to Group 1 in the sense that they too spent proportionately much of their time preparing for meetings but, where they differ from Group 1 (and Group 3) most noticeably, is the greater amount of time they spend proportionately in meetings and in getting training or education for themselves while, at the same time, relatively little time spent doing inspections and reports. Group 3, which represents the largest proportion of the representatives in the survey (55%), was much more distinctive and uniform than the other two groups, spending proportionately much less time on meetings, preparations for meetings, and inspections, and much more time proportionately on addressing worker complaints, interacting with managers outside of meetings, doing independent research, and organizing and building worker support. As one interviewed Group 3 worker representative responded,

I think the bottom line is you need to talk to the worker. You get the training and you see what the Act requires and you know what's involved in inspections and what to look for and so on. You [have to] talk to people who are working at the location so if that's your permanent location you go and visit people in their workspace and use your training and eyes to and nose and whatever else it takes, ears, to give a heads up and say, oh you know I noticed this is happening

over here are you having difficulty this, are you aware this is probably not acceptable under the Occupational Health and Safety Act it's like doing an inspection but it's just like going to visit somebody there (#0157)³.

Another said,

So just in the last month and a half or so they've sort of tried to resolve that. I went to some of the supervisors directly and said 'you know we really should be doing this' and they said 'no no no, we're doing the minimum and that's it.' So I did try to approach them individually, some of the ones who are more receptive' (#0162).

However, it is important to note that while Group 3 distributed their time differently than the other groups, they also spent more time overall in their role as representatives and, in that sense, spent more absolute time on virtually all the activities than representatives in the other groups, with the sole exception being inspections which was still a little lower than Group 1 in terms of actual time spent.

Group 3 was more likely to intervene in all twelve of the areas that we assessed which included **traditional** issues such as housekeeping and PPE as well as **more complex** issues such as work process and engineering changes, changes to staffing and workload, air quality, and product substitution. What seems distinctive about the Group 3 representatives is their recognition of the need to go beyond housekeeping and PPE as the major areas of activity and change. Health issues are often seen as important as safety issues, as indicated by this interview quote:

They (management) are very, very good at deflecting your focus off of workplace exposures, so that's where I'm kind of coming back full circle to say you know what if we could work with less exposure then we would have less disease. My company is very, very focused on personal protective equipment and we're telling them it's the wrong avenue you have to get it at where it's coming from. Don't just wrap me in bubble wrap and say go to work. That's not fair to the individual and then you run into levels of how effective the personal protective equipment is (#1081750)

Representatives in Groups 1 and 2 were more likely to attempt a **smaller range** of changes, with well over half to two thirds of the representatives in both groups reporting that they had never

³ In order to protect the confidentiality of each interviewee, each individual is identified by number only.

made any attempts to address air quality or workload issues in their workplaces. In contrast, for example, 60% of the Group 3 representatives made attempts to intervene on air quality concerns.

The groups differed significantly in their reported impact. Group 3 representatives were more likely to report higher levels of success in the attempts they made on seven different types of issues, **traditional ones** such as housekeeping and PPE replacement and more **complex ones** such as machinery replacement, process changes, workload, training, and product or chemical substitution. Although group 1 and 2 were very similar in their impact, group 1 was significantly less likely to have any impact on workload issues than group 2 representatives.

2) Do these differences reflect distinct orientations to the role and practice of worker representation?

To address this question, we make use of both the survey and the interview data.

Although time considerations meant that we were limited in the number of questions we could ask in the survey, we did get some basic information about the workplace (*firm size, industry, unionization, job security, perceived management responsiveness to health and safety, perceived health and safety conditions*) and the worker representatives and joint committees (*length of representatives employment and length of tenure as a representative and/or co-chair, size of committee, amount of paid representation time, whether elected or appointed, gender*). This information allowed us to examine whether the three forms of representation are related to any of these factors. The analysis shows that as compared to the other two groups, Group 3 representatives are significantly more likely to be elected to their position, have been with their employer longer, and tend to be more concerned about employment security than representatives in the other groups. They are more likely to be co-chairs than just representatives, and are more likely to be longer serving representatives or co-chairs than the representatives in the other two groups. Group 3 have more paid time to perform their duties, while also tending to spend more unpaid time on health and safety. Group 2 representatives are less likely to have a joint committee and, where there is a joint committee, they are more likely to be in smaller committees with fewer management and worker representatives. They also tend to be less experienced with 65% reporting less than 3 years experience as a representative.

There are no significant differences in terms of unionization or firm size but Group 1 was more concentrated in education and health care, while manufacturing were relatively more concentrated in Group 3. There were no significant gender difference between the groups ó that is, women and men were not significantly concentrated in any one group.

While Group 3 representatives tended to report having more overall impact on improving both health and safety issues as representatives, they also tended to evaluate the current level of health and safety in their workplaces less positively than the other two groups. There is some evidence that the Group 3 representatives were using different criteria or standards when assessing their current conditions, which suggests that their activity levels and ultimately their impacts were driven in part by a different sense not only what they wanted to achieve, but also by what they believed was achievable.

A further analysis of the survey data suggests that four key factors combine to predict better outcomes in terms of reported representative impacts on working conditions. The strongest predictor is the amount of experience that the representatives and co-chairs have.

Representatives get better at what they do over time likely due to a combination of accumulated experience, relationship-building, skill and knowledge, with the latter two covering not only basic technical and legal knowledge but also social and political insights and skills which can be critical in helping representatives to work out issues with workers, supervisors and managers. It is also evident from the accounts of many Group 3 representatives that persistence is a key hallmark, suggesting it often takes a long term approach to develop a reputation, to develop trust and to melt even the hardest management hearts. Here is one example,

Yeah. Now we do, okay. It took a long time for us to get there but we did. We just kept going, we never gave up and we kept on pushing and pushing. For example we never used to have at our shift meetings any safety information being brought up. The whole thing what we're trying to say is everyday safety should be on your mind, and finally got them convinced that this would work, and it does work. You just have to be going around with them all the time, making them think about it. Safety is an issue safety we have to deal with (#1077380)

A key question that we need to consider for further research is what contributes to whether representatives stay long enough in their position to develop their skills and knowledge and what is the role of various support and training in helping representatives to develop.

The second key predictor is the amount of time that representatives spend in training and educating other workers and representatives. This may speak to the higher level of commitment that some representatives have to education or it may reflect the learning that these representatives gain through their efforts to educate other workers. This point was raised several times from representatives in the interviews. Here is one example from an exchange between a worker representative (WR) and the interviewer (I).

WR: Take as much training as you can. (I: Okay) Because I mean even though I'm an instructor for the worker's health and safety centre and I do a lot of training for our union through them. I'm still learning. I've been on health and safety 8 years now.

I: Okay, so always be willing to learn more?

WR. Yes (#0086).

A third key factor predicting better impacts was the amount of paid time that representatives had to devote to health and safety. Representatives were able to achieve more when they had more time to dedicate to health and safety. This was reflected clearly in a number of interviews where time was raised as a critical issue either enabling or constraining their capacities to affect change. Here are some examples from our interviews.

I: Are there any things that you think would be helpful to make your job easier or more effective?

WR: More paid time to work on joint health and safety business.

I: And if you had that more paid time what would you do with it?

WR: I would do more reading of things relevant to my industry, that's the first thing I would do. I'm presented with article that are pertinent to the mining industry, I've got one on my desk right now I would love to read it I can't find the time to do it.

I: And I guess that means you don't have much time to actually do research either?

R: No, no. Next to none! Also, we scramble just to keep the file cabinet current. Make sure the last minutes are printed put up on the five bulletin boards around the building and have copies put in the filing cabinet, scrambling to get that done. I would like more time. I would personally like a full day a month for joint health and safety (#0313).

However, this factor may reflect more than just the amount of time itself. The availability of more paid time results from possible influences, including the strength of the collective bargaining agreement and the quality of the labour-management relationship around health and safety. While we have no clear data on the collective agreement issue, the fourth significant predictor of success does speak to the question of the employer's commitment to health and safety. Representatives are significantly less likely to report a positive impact on conditions if they also see management as uncooperative and uncommitted to health and safety. What this statistical relationship does not tell us is whether the management commitment was a function of the representatives' efforts or something that came from the employer end.

Accounts from our interviews suggest that both influences are often operative, frequently in different proportions. It is clear from representatives' accounts that some employers and managers come in with particular attitudes from the outset which make it easier or harder on the representatives, while other accounts suggest a process of relationship and reputation building in which the representative alters the way in which the employer or managers respond to health and safety. As these two worker representatives describe,

I find we've recently had a change in our human resource department. I find it very interesting our new director of human resources has a very thorough knowledge of health and safety and her background is very intense in health and safety and she believes strongly you can tell how strongly she believes in about health and welfare of the staff. And there are some who in the HR department that are not as receptive to the ideas that she has and actually I find that management currently in our human resource department are actually somewhat conflicted. For instance I recently brought up in our joint health and safety meeting about stress, how I felt that stress was absolutely a health and safety issue especially in the works that we do. And that basically they the director said that they were absolutely believing that stress was a health and safety issue, but yet another HR member of health and safety said it was not at all a health and safety issue (#1109768).

WR: Oh big time. Because you know like it's like sugar and vinegar. It's like if you're good with these guys to work with them a little bit they'll sometimes back you up on issues and kind of help you and because I've seen it the other way. If you treat these guys the wrong way, like otherwise get on their case or whatever, it's not a good sight (#1077380).

Many representatives report that management orientation is often out of their control, subject to sudden shifts as different employers take over and managers are rotated in and out.

The financial and employment contexts are critical to whether employer and management attitudes and commitments remain as solid as they once were and whether representatives are able to wield the same influence through persuasion and evidence, particularly as situations shift or change where the employer begins to report more and more cost and competitive pressures or, where the labour market moves decidedly to the employer's advantage. This happens in slightly different ways in public and private sector workplaces, but the thrust is very similar in as much as employers become less and less willing to incur even the most minimal costs for health and safety. ??Public or Private sector example??

I. Are there times when management concern about cost savings conflicts with worker health and safety in your workplace? Like are they concerned about what it would cost to make the workplace safer? And does that become a barrier or to what extent is it a barrier?

WR: Of course, in this day and age you'd be silly to say anything else. No, it's definitely a barrier (#103404).

3) What are some key factors which help to explain the different patterns of representation practices?

When we started this research, we had a model based on previous research done by one of our team members in 2006 which differentiated types of worker representation⁴. In that research, which was grounded in a relatively small number of interviews with worker representatives in auto part plants (N=36), three types of representation were identified. One was called 'knowledge activism' because the representatives actively and consciously collected and used scientific, legal and experience based knowledge to persuade and pressure employers to address not only **traditional** issues such as housekeeping or personal protection equipment but also, **complex** ones such as ventilation systems, engineering and work process changes. The second type of representation was called 'political activism' because the representative approached the role somewhat like the traditional adversarial steward model, where the central task was seen as aggressively advocating on the workers' behalf in response to complaints. More often than not, this was done outside the joint committee but also, in contrast to the knowledge activist, without

⁴ Alan Hall, et al, 'Making a Difference: Knowledge Activism and Worker Representation in Joint OHS Committees,' 2006 61:3 *Industrial Relations* 408

the reliance on knowledge and research to make the case. The representatives' power to affect change tended to revolve around their ability to mobilize the workers. The third type of representation was characterized as 'technical-legal' representation where the central emphasis of the representative was to insure that the letter of the law and regulations were obeyed, using the joint committee and inspection reports as the sole or core means through which internal responsibility was exercised. These representatives relied on the law, regulations, procedures and policies as their central tools in achieving change. While we recognized that in reality most representatives were somewhere in between these three ideal types, a key objective in this study was to determine whether the same basic types were evident using a much larger sample of representatives across a variety of different workplaces. We wanted to do this because our previous research suggested that these three approaches had different impacts, with the knowledge activist having the greatest and widest impact.

Although the three groups identified in this study do not perfectly match the three types that we had in mind, there are some important consistencies which serve to reinforce our original argument that representatives can be distinguished by their practices and orientation. Group 3 is largely consistent with what we called 'knowledge activism' in as much as these representatives distribute more of their time outside of committee meetings organizing and interacting with workers around health and safety issues and doing research in order to make the best possible arguments when they interact with managers in either context. In many ways, our data suggests that it is not the focus on any one area of activity that distinguished knowledge activist representatives but rather the balance or distribution across a range of activities. Knowledge activists don't dismiss the importance of committee meetings, inspections or reports, and have a keen appreciation of the importance of policies, procedures and regulations, but they do not confine their efforts to these activities, nor do they limit their interventions to the narrow technical or legal definitions of safety and health. Knowledge forms the core of how these representatives achieve changes but what is also distinctive is the range of types of knowledge that representatives express and use in their intervention activities— a knowledge of procedures and policies, knowledge of the law, knowledge of the workplace and work processes, scientific, medical and engineering knowledge and, knowledge of the social and political dynamics of the workplace. As one worker representative described it:

You come armed in essence when you're dealing with management so that you have the answers. If you don't have the answers, the other thing is saying 'you know what, I need to go away and research this for ten minutes I'll come back.' Don't try and fly by the seat of your pants, because that's where you dig yourself a big hole and then, you look foolish with the MOL or with management. The big thing is if you know the policies you can discuss the policies or why we need to do what we do, and how we need to do it a certain way. The other is to persevere. It is thankless because staff aren't sometimes going to like the answer, sometimes management isn't going like the answer or the response. A lot of it is social skills, and education. It's great to go on the courses and learn some of the stuff, but the other thing is sharing that knowledge and teaching your peers as you go along (#0082)

It is this latter insight which is particularly distinctive in Group 3 because knowing how to deal with people and the politics of the work situation are particularly important in helping these representatives to be more effective. The same worker representative continued:

It's how you ask and how you sell it. Sometimes I tell people the biggest thing is don't go to management with your problem. Go to management with a concern and then a possible solution. If you have the answer, most people will take the path of least resistance. Or you thought this is what I want the end result to be, so I'm coming up with a solution or a possible solution to the problem. So it's not just a bitch with a problem! I mean you need to understand what, if you're dealing with our management you need to understand your policies, but you need to understand where they're coming from, and what they need. Sometimes it's not them saying no. There is a structure that they have to work within! they have bosses (#0082).

Other worker representatives told us:

Dealing with people is important. And how you deal with workers, that's really important as well because it doesn't take long for people to turn on you if it looks like you're sounding like a management person or something of that nature. You got to keep your feet on the ground. Don't get yourself above them. I find that as long as I keep my head thinking I'm still a worker I'm fine (#1077380).

and

Well there's like when you say you're giving a person an option, right. Is the colour of this apple red or green? Usually your first suggestion is going to be their first answer. Alright, so there is a bit psychological but it's you more or less bring them through the process to let them finish and complete the idea. And when they complete the idea they believe it's theirs. So you don't go at it

directly you kind of sprinkle a couple of seeds here and there and go around a little bit, not directly at it, and let them come up with their own conclusion. Would not be a bad topic to teach is how to (do this), because the worker reps usually don't get that type of training (#1081750).

Knowledge activism is also based on the representative's ability to collect and use hazard-related knowledge and information in purposeful or strategic ways. This is where research comes into play, in as much as knowledge activists are more likely to independently seek information which they can use to make their case to management, the ministry of labour and even workers. A worker representative recommended:

Get your facts right. It's important that when you want to get something done like a change or something of that nature. You got to do a little research and the computers are great, and you got to be able to make a presentation to management about why you want these changes, what the law say what the regulations say and all that kind of stuff. I learned that a long time ago as an instructor through the Workers Health and Safety Center⁵ and you got to be able to prepare yourself and have the facts right. And usually you don't get it all the time, but if the laws backing it up there's not much they can say about it, and that's what I rely on (#1077380).

It is also distinctive how hard Group 3 representatives work to try to find solutions to problems, with the attitude that extremely complex issues have to be addressed even if there are no simple solutions. Here is an example given by one Group 3 representative.

WR: Well yeah, because I mean we're like you, you can see where we're using blocker pads that the public doesn't really care for but, it's one of those things that we're using to protect our workers. I mean they're still getting hurt, so we don't know what another avenue is.

I: It's about finding that solution, right? I think what's interesting is that you don't see that as something that's impossible to change, you just don't know how to change it, is that correct? Okay, 'cause that's my next question actually, are there things that you just think are impossible to change so you don't touch them, you don't consider going after them?

WR: We keep try working at it, but see I'm a machinist by trade, so, like in a machine shop, okay there you guard it this way. I can, I can see a way to put a guard on, to make it safer, but how to deal with an autistic child to protect

⁵ The Workers Health and Safety Centre is a health and safety training centre in Ontario. www.whsc.on.ca

themselves from themselves and protect our workers. I'm at my wits end on this kind of stuff. (#0086)

Although accounts from representatives in all three groups describe some employers and managers reacting quite aggressively when representative try to press their concerns, including threats of firing and others reprisal actions, knowledge activists are more likely to persist in challenging management. Our evidence suggests that this is at least partly because they feel that their knowledge, their union and co-worker support protects them. Here is how it was described to us.

WR: You get accused of threatening the manager. I just tell him I'm not threatening you. I'm telling you what the consequences are if you continue to do this. Well you're threatening me, no I'm not. That will get documented that I was threatening a foreman. Right, so if you get enough of those and somebody gets a bugaboo in their ear and they go aha let's see what we got here. So you got to kind of pick and choose your battles too.

I: Do you think even your job could be at risk?

WR: Oh yeah that's how they got the other guy above me.

I: Really?

WR. I've been warned that I was on the same path.

I: So how have you avoided it to this point?

WR. Make sure you don't step out of line. Make sure everything's covered off. You're making sure you don't give them any opening to say you did this wrong and now we got you. (1081750).

How do the other two groups that we identified from the survey data fit into our framework? Neither group fits the Political Activist profile that we were expecting from our previous research. While some of our interviews suggest aspects of the political activist, none of the interviewed representatives relied principally on collective worker support to push issues and, in the final analysis, were more properly classified as knowledge activists. It is difficult to know from the current data why this profile was not evident in this study. It is worth noting that the political activist was the smallest group in the previous research (Hall et al. 2006). Moreover, many of the representatives in this group were no longer representatives in a follow-up that was done one year later. It may be that direct confrontation based on worker mobilization is simply

too difficult to manage, especially given the increased insecurity of employment that most workers are experiencing.

If we look exclusively at the survey data in this study, the representatives from Group 1 and Group 2 seem to exhibit different elements of what we were calling a technical-legal form of representation. Group 1 spends proportionately much more of their time on inspections and related to that, on writing reports, while Group 2 spends proportionately much more of their time in committee meetings. What these two groups most clearly share is that they are nowhere close to the knowledge activist Group 3 in terms of the amount of proportional and absolute time that they devote to research, interacting with managers outside committee meetings, organizing and interacting with workers. In other words, representatives from both groups are tending to rely on committees and inspections as their principle means through which they fulfil their role as representatives. Here is an example from our interviews.

Being on a committee, a joint committee or whatever, is probably the biggest thing, where you would want to spend most of your time doing what you need to do to ensure that the rules are followed, that if there's things going on in the workplace that are not up to snuff you have the opportunity to talk about and make sure they get done (#0252).

Some of the differences around time spent on inspections vs. meetings between Groups 1 and 2 may relate to the fact that more of the Group 1 representatives are co-chairs with more years of experience than the representatives in Group 2, since our findings suggest that experienced co-chairs tend to spend more time in inspections than less experienced representatives. What is also interesting is that Group 2 representatives are more likely to spend more time on research and on interacting with workers than Group 1 representatives. While not close to the activity levels of most knowledge activists, there is still this tendency.

Given that the Group 1 representatives are more established, we argue that Group 1 more clearly reflects a technical-legal orientation to representation, while Group 2 appears to be mixed, perhaps in part because they tend to be newer at representation and are less likely to be co-chairs but, also because some of these representatives exhibit characteristics and practices which fit somewhere between technical-legal representation and knowledge activism.

Many of the representatives in Group 2 are relative newcomers to the role may also help to explain why Group 2 devote more time to their own personal health and safety education and training since more of them are just getting their basic level I and II training. The greater tendency of representatives in Group 2 to report spending more time on research may also simply reflect their lack of experience and their efforts to get up to speed. A key question in terms of their future development is whether they continue to see education and research as an ongoing requirement for their role as representatives, something that distinguishes the knowledge activists who see training, research and education as an ongoing requirement regardless of how long they have been a representative.

It is quite possible then that some of the Group 2 representatives may eventually join the ranks of Group 1 over time and become in a sense full-fledged technically-oriented representatives by becoming permanently immersed in the inspection and report writing aspects of the role. Alternatively, it could mean that at least some of the Group 2 representatives are possible knowledge activists in training and, with more experience, education and support, will adopt a conscious and strategic use of knowledge as a permanent aspect of their approach. However, since some Group 2 representatives are not inexperienced or new to their role, another possible interpretation is that at least some of these representatives reflect what is essentially a middle road between technical representation and knowledge activism.

Our examination of the interviews with Group 2 representatives supports this notion that there is substantial variation within Group 2. Some of the representatives are relatively new and are just developing their orientation and practices. For example, one representative notes that he has only been a representative for two years but sees the need to become more active as he gains confidence and a stronger position on the joint committee. However, it is not just inexperience that is shaping his activity level, it is also his employment context. One of the challenges he has is that his health and safety committee is made up of several different unions and, as the junior person on the committee, it is difficult to assert himself. He is also limited by his current employment position which is temporary and by the group of contract staff that he represents. What may be key to his future development is that he clearly sees the representative position in political rather than technical terms and, is aware of the importance of knowledge in being able

to achieve changes but, feels constrained by both his position on the committee and by his employment situation.

Another Group 2 representative is similar with only one year as a representative and co-chair. He is spending most of his time on the joint committee which is almost entirely new, including the management but, he clearly sees the need to be more proactive with workers and in doing research, in part because of recent training he received from the Workers' Health and Safety Centre.

I: Was it the Workers Health and Safety Center that did level two for you I guess?

WR: Yes, they came to the mine, but yeah it was Workplace Health and Safety Center out of [name of city].

I: Okay great and what was your sense of the training?

WR: It was excellent. There was a whole whack of, actually we did it in four and half days, a whack of information over a short period of time. We had a meeting on the last day of it. A real sense of direction for us there. Gave us a real sense there's so much more we can be doing and be proactive (#0192).

In this representative's case, a key constraint on his activity level was that his workplace was not unionized which meant less protection for paid representation time and less protection in general for him and workers. Still, reflecting an emerging knowledge activist orientation, he believed that with the more strategic use of information, he could have a greater impact.

WR. Well yeah I have as far as the committee, the last place I worked at I was an alternate so I worked a little bit on the committee but as you know with unionized places you negotiate things into your joint health and safety committee. So yeah there's a bit of a difference there. I know they have a lot more clout the unionized atmosphere than they do in non, so I

I: So in your sense that difference in clout, how does that affect you? What does it mean for you in terms of what you can do?

WR: I yeah I think so, yeah for sure for sure.

I: Does that mean you're a little more cautious in terms of whether (R: absolutely) or how fast you can push things?

WR: Well that's well put. I find I tread lightly in certain issues there and certain things. I wouldn't say tread lightly but maneuver slightly different (#0192).

As he reported this is included an emerging effort to build a relationship with the ministry of labour, OHCOW occupational health clinic and the workers.

Other representatives in Group 2 reflect what may be a more permanent approach that they've developed over time, one which fits somewhere in between the technical and knowledge activist approach. One of these representatives, similar to the knowledge activists, reports that he spends more time interacting with workers and managers in an ongoing informal way and in meeting with his management counterpart (in lieu of committee meetings) but, unlike knowledge activists, very little time on research insisting that he is able to deal with most things that come up with little or no resistance from management. The employment situation may have been an important factor in as much as this was a small workplace with only ten workers. In this context, most of the issues were what he called minor ones. Significantly, he characterized his relationship with management in very positive terms in explaining his relative lack of activity in inspections and research.

I: Well, it just sounds to me like you do most of your job by building rapport with workers? Is that.

WR: Yes I do. I told you it's only a small group. There's only like 10 of us there right? So that makes a big difference. If I was in a factory of a hundred or 200 people, now you're running into major problems because, you got 200 people coming to you with different kinds of problems. (laughs) I've been doing this, for what? Five years now. So I guess I've got five more to go before I retire (laughs). That's about it really. Everything is going pretty good I must say.

As another Group 2 representative put it when asked whether he has a strategy for presenting issues to management:

WR: We don't need a strategy. When we do our inspections we come up with a recommendation and we send an inspection form to the supervisors involved in the areas we inspected with the recommendation and say, this is the hazard we found here's what we recommend what you do about it, please respond. And they have twenty-one days to respond and this is all legislated in the Occupation Health and Safety Act. (#0133)

The perception of a very cooperative management can be quite critical in explaining the kinds of activities and the overall amount of time that representatives spend on their representation. From their perspective, they don't need to do research or strategize because things are going extremely

well without any conflict. Indeed, some are quite puzzled by the question that they should have to strategize in political terms.

I: Could you give me a more specific idea how you go about the process of preparing and presenting a case for change. You say that generally speaking everybody's on the same page so it's not a big concern and problem for you, but are there certain things you think though are pretty essential in order to at least fulfill the requirements or expectations of the committee in terms of a legitimate claim or concern.

WR: When I talk about consensus it's on within the committee, there's four of us on the committee, and there's *never* any discord, I would use that word, within the members of the committee because the four of us have different experiences and knowledge and expertise. If there's a situation in the lab then we all understand that that one member that is the lab technician would know more than I would about it and if she says I think that we need to recommend this and here's why, well chances are I'm going to say yeah that makes sense to me you know what you're talking about let's recommend that.

I: Right. Do you have pre meetings with other worker reps before you meet with management?

WR: No, I'm not quite sure what you're looking for or what you think we do but we only normally have the one meeting a month and that's with the committee.

I: Well some worker representative as a matter of course meet to discuss issues among the workers and then come up with sort of a common presentation. Now obviously that tends to be in a workplace where it may be a bit more challenging to get management to buy into what you're saying.

WR: Yeah, we don't have that challenge. Management's bought into health and safety already (# 0133)

Whether things are as positive and as smooth as this representative thinks is an important question, but we also have to recognize again that management's approach to health and safety is likely a significant factor in shaping the practices of representatives and their overall activity levels. Certainly, knowledge activists are less likely to perceive their management in this very positive way. Some will express the view that management is responsive and often cooperative and, they will make clear distinctions between better and worse safety management but, they tend to see their practices and their strategies as making vital contributions to change and, often, as shaping management's continued responsiveness. In other words, the knowledge activists tend

to understand that power and interests are always at play in health and safety practice in a workplace, even when management is relatively committed to health and safety. Here is how one Group 3 representative put it,

You have to follow the money, because the power is usually where the money is, so. (I: indeed) it's not always at the table that is there with you. So if it you find out, usually I'd like to find out is how much jack the people I'm dealing with have and if there is somebody in the room that has a lot of clout I will certainly seek them and try to give everything to them and find out who they have to get the answers for and anything I can do to make those answers come to him a little quicker, I'd help them with it. But it's following where the money goes after that I think is the key (#1126879).

The results from the interviews have also forced us to think a little differently about why representatives in Group 1 and 2 may take a more limited formal approach to their representation. Our theory when we began this research was that these representatives would tend to see their role in less political terms. As long as the employer was abiding by the basic requirements of the law in terms of procedures for committees and inspections and, was correcting at least some of the basic housekeeping or maintenance problems revealed in inspections, the question of power and the perceived need to strategize about the politics of change would not arise. Some representatives in Group 1 and 2 tend to reflect this tendency and so we expected based on the previous Hall et al. (2006) study that they would be satisfied as long as the basic housekeeping matters and personal protective equipment were maintained. However, our interview data in this study suggests that even when employers are following the strict letter of the law in terms of committees and inspections, representatives in Group 1 and 2 can still be quite aware of the limitations of these formal processes and quite critical of the employer's actual commitment to health and safety. Here is one example from an exchange with a Group1 representative,

WR: I don't personally don't feel that way. I don't think they [management] do. There might be some who will but on majority I feel like they, they don't really care. Or perceive they don't, I'm not saying they don't care but it's perceived that way.

I: So it's not a big priority for them?

WR: Yeah.

I: Are they actually hostile when health and safety is raised?

WR: No, not hostile, no.

I: Are they resistant to efforts to try to improve things?

WR: They'dl just sweet talk around it.

I: And do they delay, do you feel that they intentionally delay or try to limit the process as much as they can - you know give lots of excuses, that kind of thing?

WR: Yeah. (#1079353)

Many of the interviewed representatives in Groups 1 and 2 were very aware of their lack of power. In the final analysis, then, what really distinguished representatives in Group 1 and at least some in Group 2 from the Group 3 knowledge activist representatives is that the former two groups had no strategy for how to overcome their sense of powerlessness. In one context described below, which was non-union, it was quite clear that the representative and his fellow representatives were fearful of the potential employment consequences if he pushed health and safety issues, even a critical one such as the discovery of asbestos.

We're kind of struggling with what we should do with it [asbestos in a building], where we should go with it, should we bring it to management and tell them this is an issue we need it rectified? It's one of those things where you know you want to bring it up [but] we'dl worry what happens when we bring it up. I mean what's going to happen to the person who brings it up you know. That's one of the problems we're having is, with the way things are and obviously money being tight everywhere that could be a major issue that could cost a lot of money to fix and it's like do we you know want to rattle that chain (#0408).

In other cases, it was the worker representatives' lack of understanding about how to overcome management delay tactics and lip service to health and safety. These representatives realized that their inspection and committee activities were often ineffective but they were unable to figure out how to move things forward. It is impossible to know with our data whether the strategic use of knowledge and information would have made the difference in these particular work contexts.

We cannot talk about “types” of representation in the absence of an understanding of the work and employment setting in which the representatives are operating.

There are important distinctions to make between what different representatives think they should be doing, what they feel they can do given the limitations of their workplace and employment situation, and what, in the final analysis, they actually do to address particular issues and circumstances. At the same time, the results as a whole suggest that more effective representation practices are not confined to certain kinds of workplaces or employment contexts. Knowledge activists can be found in small and large workplaces, union and non-union workplaces, a range of industries such manufacturing, mining, construction, healthcare and education, construction and offices, in workplaces with cooperative and uncooperative managers, and in secure and insecure employment situations. There are different challenges in these various contexts, as well as some differences in impact, but certain effective common practices and orientations can emerge across the broad spectrum of work situations. The evidence suggests that worker representatives develop these orientations, skills, knowledge and practices over time and experience, and at least as expressed by several knowledge activists, through effective formal education and training programs such as those offered by the Workers Health and Safety Centre and technical expertise from OHCOW occupational health clinics.

4) What do representatives themselves see as important contributions to their impact in the workplace?

When we asked in interviews what representatives saw as impeding their capacities to achieve changes, representatives pointed to a number of factors:

- Management Resistance or Lip Service to health and safety
- Cost and the use of cost to deny changes
- Corporate Bureaucracy and the Delays in Decision-Making
- Lack of knowledgeable managers
- Lack of Clear Regulations or policies
- Weak Ministry Enforcement
- Lack of a union or weak union support
- Lack of Paid Time
- Access to more education relevant to political and social skills

When we asked what representatives advice they would give to new representatives, the following advice was offered most frequently:

Be Vigilant

“Don’t get too upset about sometimes things may take a month or twoö

öStick to your guns, you know if it’s something that’s legitimate don’t let them get away with it

“Just listen and listen and watch and be very careful. Be careful about being on time, be careful about you know how long you’re at lunch all those kind of things.”

“Be patient and don’t give up on things just you know be persistent and patient for sure”

” Just continue to be as diligent as you possibly can. You know that’s basically all I would say”

Speak Up

öDon’t be afraid to stand up for what you feel is right. Standing up looks like backing a worker who’s feeling as though they’re losing their mind because their supervisor ignores their situation. Standing up means not being afraid to voice your concerns in a meeting full of people. It means being willing to put yourself out there, to do research to contact the Ministry of Labour. Yeah it’s scary but you know what it’s also empowering because as a worker you have that right.”

“Stop being afraid you know. Like we all need our jobs but like we also need to speak up for yourself, for your coworkers, for your, you know your neighbors, whoever it is, not just to sit back and accept injustice basically, I just think people have to stop being like that, you know.”

“Don’t be afraid to open your mouth. You’ll never be ridiculed because you bring up a concern”

Acquire Knowledge

öYou have to get people to buy into it and why they need to do it and explain it. So therefore you need to educate yourself.ö

öKnowing how to teach people and explain things to people ‘cause a lot of it is a sell job.”

“Take as much training as you can”

“I think researching is one of the best things, and to document, to know what you’re talking about. And to not be afraid to speak up. I think that’s the main thing, I think if more people would speak up about any issue in life then things would be you know changed more quickly.”

“Make sure you gain as much knowledge as you can, don’t take it personal, continue to learn the more you know the more you realize you don’t know.”

“Gobble up every bit of training you can possibly get so that you’re familiar with the different types of hazards and what to look for.”

“The more you can do for courses or then you know that do you have a voice and you do have the rights and you just have to go after them.”

“I’ve researched stuff, talked to other people from other institutions networking is important too of course”

“With health and safety stuff I’ve find that it will get to somebody’s desk and it will get to the bottom of a very large pile in a hurry. But if you’re vigilant with them and you’re calling and you’re saying I sent that report two weeks ago or ten days ago or whatever the case may be, have you got a response prepared? Or where are we going with it? It’s that kind of pressure that will likely get results for you.”

Be on the Workers’ Side

öKnows the people’s namesö

“I think the bottom line is you need to talk to the worker.”

öYou’re here for the protection of the workers, you’re here to communicate their concerns, you’re here to make decisions or discuss the concerns,”

“It’s not kumbaya, kumbaya we’re not sitting at the table all holding hands”

“Health and safety’s all about the worker.”

“Talk to as many people as you can to find out what the rights are of the employees”

öThe other thing is as a rep it’s listen, listen to the workers listen to what they have to say.”

“I. How do you see your role as a worker rep?”

R. It is to protect the worker and educate the worker”

Know the Green Book

“You know the rules and regulationsö

öMake sure you know your green book inside out. You need to know what your legislative rights are because you can’t count on your company to afford those to you.”

Be Self-Confident

“Trust your instincts. If it doesn’t feel right it probably isn’t.”

Be Passionate

“It really is you know inspiring people to think about you know how rewarding it is to actually do something that is going to protect the other members in your school, you know in your job place”

“It’s hard to keep emotions out of it. And in my past it has always been emotional first and now I immediately turn off emotion and turn on you know, I look at it as how an inspector would look at it.”

“A lot of people become health and safety reps either because they see a need or something just happens and they’ve had enough and they want to deal with it.”

“If you feel that you’re being supported and that you know what someone’s behind me holding me up in order for me to get through this, it makes them a little more willing to stand up and go, whoa that’s not right.”

Conclusions

The main idea behind this research project was that if we can begin to identify and understand different forms of worker representation which are linked to different kinds and levels of impact on conditions, we are then in a better position to recognize and recommend important education and training principles as well as to identify other needs and resources. The findings from this study suggest that a knowledge-based form of activism has considerable potential to help representatives affect change across a range of workplace health and safety issues, even in contexts where management is less than cooperative and responsive. The evidence also points to the value of worker centered training and education in helping representatives to develop both the orientation and the skills needed to be an effective knowledge activist. Direct recommendations from representatives indicate more can be done to strengthen education on the political and social aspects of representation. Our next task then is to develop a Discussion Guide on Knowledge Activism which provides more details and recommendations for representation and education. This will be forthcoming in the next several months. A draft will

be circulated to the people who participated in the study seeking representative input and then a final Guide will be produced and distributed as widely as possible.