

Correlates of Informal Grievance Resolution Among Fist-Line Supervisors

Thomas R. Knight

Volume 41, numéro 2, 1986

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/050204ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/050204ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval

ISSN

0034-379X (imprimé)

1703-8138 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Knight, T. R. (1986). Correlates of Informal Grievance Resolution Among Fist-Line Supervisors. *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 41(2), 281–298. <https://doi.org/10.7202/050204ar>

Résumé de l'article

Le pourcentage de règlements informels des griefs est une mesure importante de l'efficacité du processus des réclamations. Des recherches antérieures en matière de traitement des réclamations ont examiné l'influence des facteurs environnementaux et organisationnels au sujet de la présentation et du règlement des griefs. La présente étude considère l'impact que peuvent avoir sur le pourcentage des réclamations les différences concernant l'expérience et la formation des agents de maîtrise dans le processus des réclamations ainsi que l'interaction des syndicats et des gestionnaires au même point de vue auprès de ces personnes. Presqu'un quart de la variance de l'échantillon dans la proportion des réclamations réglées de façon informelle par les contremaitres est attribuable aux différences personnelles qu'on a pu observer. Un instrument d'enquête a mesuré les variables indépendantes dans trois domaines se rapportant à la surveillance : les caractéristiques des agents de maîtrise, l'interaction entre eux et les représentants syndicaux d'une part, entre eux et leurs supérieurs immédiats et les gestionnaires des ressources humaines d'autre part. Les caractéristiques personnelles comprenaient le nombre d'années d'expérience en qualité de contremaitre, le degré de formation en matière de règlement des griefs et le nombre d'arbitrages auxquels ils avaient participé. Les variables touchant les relations entre les agents de maîtrise et les syndicats consistaient dans la fréquence des consultations informelles avant que les décisions soient prises, la fréquence de la participation à des réunions des comités de réclamations, à la fréquence de la référence du contremaitre à des règlements de griefs antérieurs ainsi qu'à des décisions arbitrales au cours de la négociation des réclamations. Les aspects de l'interaction des agents de maîtrise avec le personnel de gestion comprenaient trois mesures distinctes, soit le degré de centralisation dans les prises de décision en matière de griefs, la fréquence des références du personnel de direction à des règlements antérieurs de griefs et à la consultation des décisions arbitrales en matière de surveillance. On a mesuré chacune de ces variables au moyen d'échelles de cinq points vérifiées verbalement.

La dépendante variable, soit la proportion des griefs reçus par les contremaitres qu'ils pouvaient résoudre oralement, fut mesurée au moyen d'une échelle de six points. Une question de l'enquête consistait à demander aux agents de maîtrise de dresser par ordre une sélection de sujets de griefs réels de façon à établir selon quelle fréquence ils étaient capables de résoudre les griefs de chaque catégorie. Les données de l'enquête sont tirées d'un échantillon de 181 contremaitres dans quatre industries : les services de transport par avion (les surveillants de vol), l'industrie chimique, l'industrie de l'acier, des entreprises de service public. On a fait enquête dans deux établissements distincts dans chaque industrie et le taux de retour s'établissait à 53 pour cent. L'échantillon était bien reparti entre les quatre industries.

Par conséquent, l'échantillon est représentatif tant des techniques des entreprises de service que des entreprises industrielles. Parmi les variables indépendantes, cinq comptent une signification statistique dans une analyse de régression multiple. On note que la plus forte influence positive en matière de règlement des réclamations par les agents de maîtrise réside dans la fréquence des consultations informelles avec les représentants des syndicats avant les prises de décision. Le nombre des audiences d'arbitrage suivies par un agent de maîtrise de même que la fréquence de sa référence à des règlements antérieurs de griefs présentent aussi une influence positive significative sur le taux desdits règlements. La fréquence de participation à des réunions de comités de réclamation est reliée négativement au taux de règlements et semble être une mesure défavorable à la solution des griefs. Les quatre mesures de l'interaction entre les contremaitres et les cadres sont également reliées négativement au taux de règlements des réclamations bien que seule la fréquence des réformes et des modifications par les supérieurs hiérarchiques et les autres cadres des décisions initiales soit statistiquement significative.

On a aussi découvert que les agents de maîtrise sont plus souvent en mesure de résoudre les griefs courants, comme les heures supplémentaires et les affectations de travail, que les sujets se rapportant à la discipline et à la sous-traitance qu'on traite plutôt au niveau de la direction. Ces constatations, conclut l'auteur, ont des conséquences importantes en ce qu'elles peuvent permettre de mettre l'accent sur la formation du personnel de surveillance en matière de traitement des griefs, ce qui, en retour, peut aider à hausser le taux de règlement des réclamations au premier stade.

Correlates of Informal Grievance Resolution Among First-Line Supervisors

Thomas R. Knight

This study analyzes the influence on the rate of informal grievance resolution of differences in experience and interaction with union and other management officers of a sample of first-line supervisors

Empirical research on the grievance process has been confined to a relatively small number of topics (Gordon and Miller, 1984). Chief among these topics has been the determinants of grievance filing activity. Most often, studies have examined the attitudinal and demographic correlates of grievance initiation among supervisors and grievors (Ash, 1970; Eckerman, 1948; Fleischman and Harris, 1962; Price et al., 1976; Sulkin and Pranis, 1967). Other studies have focused on broader environmental and organizational influences on grievance activity (Kuhn, 1961; Nelson, 1979; Peach and Livernash, 1974; Ronan, 1963; Sayles, 1958) or the association between grievance rates and the nature of bargaining relationships (Gandz and Whitehead, 1982; Turner and Robinson 1972). Less research has been devoted to identifying factors influencing the rate of grievance *resolution*, particularly behaviour within the grievance process itself. Studies of grievance resolution have also concentrated on the role of broader contextual factors such as production technology and union politics (Kuhn, 1961; Peach and Livernash, 1974) rather than on the experience and behaviour of grievance participants.

This shortcoming of the research literature is regrettable, given that the rate of grievance resolution has been identified as an primary measure of grievance procedure effectiveness (Knight, 1985; Kochan and Barocci, 1985; Peterson and Lewin, 1982). Achieving the earliest possible resolution of grievances and avoiding an over-reliance on arbitration are two ways of

• KNIGHT, Thomas R., Assistant Professor, Faculty of Commerce and Business Administration, The University of British Columbia

** The author is grateful to Klaus Schroeder for his excellent research assistance. Professor David McPhillips and an anonymous referee provided helpful comments on a previous draft of this article.

operationalizing this measure of grievance effectiveness. The rate of informal grievance resolution among first-line supervisors is especially important for several reasons. Obviously, as grievances that *could* have been resolved at the first-line level travel to successively higher steps in the process, time may be spent unnecessarily reviewing such cases. This may in turn impede investigation of grievances (discharges for example) requiring higher-level treatment. Moreover, as grievances rise through the steps of the process, leaving behind both the principals and key events of a dispute, important facts may be lost or blurred, possibly accompanied by a hardening of union and management positions once a grievance has been put in writing (McPherson, 1983; Thomson, 1974). Thus, the impact of differences in individual first line supervisors' experience and behaviour on the rate of informal grievance resolution is an important but little-studied aspect of the process.

This article analyzes the relationship between differences among first-line supervisors and the proportion of informal, or oral grievances resolved at the first-line level. Unlike most previous grievance process research, the unit of analysis here is the individual supervisor. In addition to the effect on grievance resolution of differences in supervisors' training and degree of experience, the ramifications of differences in the grievance process interaction between supervisors and union representatives and other management officers are examined. Empirical results on a sample of first-line supervisors reveal that a substantial portion of the variance in the informal grievance resolution rate is attributable to differences in supervisors' experience and behaviour in the grievance process.

MODEL AND HYPOTHESES

The workings of the grievance process between grievance initiation and arbitration remain something of a «black box» in the industrial relations literature (Knight, 1985). Grievance activity has been treated as an outcome measure of the performance of industrial relations practices (Katz, Kochan and Gobeille, 1983) without delving into the nature of the process itself and the determinants of grievance effectiveness. The present study draws upon a model of the grievance process developed elsewhere (Knight, 1985) and examines the influence on the informal grievance resolution rate of three dimensions of the first-line supervisor's encounter with grievance handling. The first of these dimensions is characteristics of supervisors themselves.

Supervisor Characteristics

We would expect both experience and training to have a positive influence on a first-line supervisor's rate of informal grievance resolution. It is reasonable to expect that with increasing experience supervisors will grow more comfortable with their own roles and dealings with their union counterparts, just as their knowledge of the collective agreement and previous grievance outcomes presumably grows with experience. A specific form of experience — attendance as a witness or observer at arbitration hearings — might also contribute to a supervisor's ability to resolve grievances. Through exposure to formal tendering of evidence and argument on contract interpretation, supervisors may become more proficient and persuasive in these aspects of grievance handling. On the other hand, a supervisor's relatively frequent visits to arbitration hearings simply may reflect the supervisor's *inability* to resolve grievances.

The intensity and nature of a supervisor's training in grievance handling similarly would be expected to influence the ability to resolve grievances informally (Briggs, 1982). Both the degree of initial training and the frequency of follow-up training should be positively related to supervisors' skills in grievance investigation and negotiation with union representatives, in turn increasing the rate of grievance resolution. In addition, increasing the amount of training devoted to arbitration and arbitral decision making should bolster supervisors' capacity to make grievance judgments in the same manner as attendance at actual hearings. Thus, both experience and training are expected to be positively associated with the rate of informal grievance resolution among first-line supervisors.

Supervisor-Union Interaction

Numerous aspects of the relationship between supervisors and union representatives in the grievance process could influence the grievance resolution rate. One is the degree of formality characteristic of the interaction between supervisors and union stewards. While the proportion of grievances resolved at the early steps of the grievance process itself is regarded as a measure of a grievance procedure's *overall* formality (Thomson, 1974), the frequency of consultations between supervisors and stewards before grievance decisions are made is another important indicator of the degree of formality in the process. On the one hand, supervisors could pursue a strictly formal approach to grievance handling by responding to grievances directly, perhaps in writing only, and without first exploring the problem with a steward. Such an approach would limit the in-

teraction of supervisors and stewards to roles and terms of reference formally defined by the collective agreement. On the other hand, a supervisor may routinely consult with union representatives *before* making grievance decisions. We would expect that such an informal or «clinical» (Selekman, 1945) approach to grievance handling would have a positive influence on the grievance resolution rate to the extent that it promotes a thorough understanding of grievances and confidence in the relationship between supervisors and stewards.

Another aspect of grievance interaction between supervisors and stewards that could influence the rate of grievance resolution is the regularity or routinization of the process, as measured by the frequency of grievance meetings. Where meetings are relatively routine, even as a function of a high grievance rate, supervisors could be found to have a better understanding of the collective agreement as well as greater knowledge of previous cases. Depending on the level at which meetings occur, supervisors could also benefit from the experience of superiors or peers working in other departments or locations. Relatively frequent attendance at grievance meetings could contribute further to the rate of grievance resolution by providing opportunities for supervisors and stewards to become better acquainted with each other's problems and style in dealing with grievances, improving communications between them. Alternatively, though, familiarity could breed contempt in the grievance setting at least as easily as elsewhere, and the frequency of a supervisor's attendance at grievance meetings could be merely an *inverse* measure of success in resolving grievances informally.

It would also be expected that a supervisor's use of feedback information about previous grievances would have a positive influence on grievance resolution. Systems theory posits that feedback about a system's output is essential to the system's efficiency (Katz and Kahn, 1978). Grievance output may take the form of either settlements reached by the parties themselves or of arbitration decisions. Information about previous grievance outcomes, whether contained in settlements or decisions, could provide a factual structure for analyzing the circumstances of present grievances or could prove persuasive in arguing a position on contract interpretation. Hence, it is anticipated that the frequency of a supervisor's references to previous settlements and arbitration decision sin grievance negotiations is positively associated with the rate of grievance resolution.

Supervisor — Superior/Staff Interaction

Supervisors also interact with other management officers in the course of handling grievances. Specifically, supervisors may consult with their own line superiors or with members of the industrial relations or personnel staff. The extent to which supervisors consult with superiors or staff before making grievance decisions is itself an empirical question and may depend on such other factors as a supervisor's training and experience or industrial relations staff policy. It would be reasonable to expect, though, that such consultations would be positively related to a supervisor's rate of informal grievance resolution as a function of the transference of pertinent information and advice regarding the collective agreement and the handling of a specific problem. It might also be the case, however, that as union representatives become aware of a supervisor's consistently consulting with staff members or superiors, the union representatives will seek to bypass the supervisor and negotiate grievances at a higher level (Jennings, 1974; Peach and Livernash, 1974), reducing the supervisor's rate of grievance resolution.

The consequences of supervisors' consultations with other management officers may depend upon the degree of centralization in grievance decision-making characteristic of a given system. While other researchers have treated the degree of centralization in grievance decision making as an overall structural variable (Peach and Livernash, 1974; Thomson and Murray, 1976), we are interested here in the specific behaviours of the management participants in the grievance process. One measure of this is the extent to which superiors or staff members provide advice only, as opposed to explicitly-stated grievance answers in consultations with first-line supervisors. Here again, a variety of individual and organizational factors may influence the locus of grievance decision making, but we would expect that the more centralized decision making is, the lower would be the rate of grievance resolution at the first-line level. That is, to the degree union representatives perceive that grievance decisions are actually made at a higher level and merely *delivered* by first-line supervisors, the inclination to bypass the initial stages of the process would be enhanced.

Providing supervisors with full-blown grievance decisions rather than advice upon which to base a decision could also curtail development of supervisors' capacity to make independent decisions about grievances. The frequency with which supervisors' decisions are overturned or revised at subsequent grievance steps could be particularly damaging in this regard. Though necessary at times to insure policy consistency across supervisors or departments, grievance reversals could both frustrate supervisors' efforts to exercise grievance authority *and* provide a further reason for union

representatives to carry grievances beyond the first-line level. On the whole, then, we would expect that the degree of centralization in grievance decision making would be negatively related to the rate of informal grievance resolution among first-line supervisors.

Finally, the provisions of grievance feedback by line or staff officers in consultations with first line supervisors could influence the grievance resolution rate in the same manner as supervisors' *own* use of feedback. It is expected that the more a supervisor is able to absorb and make effective use of information about previous grievance outcomes provided by line superiors and staff members, the higher will be the grievance resolution rate. This effect could be moderated, however, by differences in both the form in which feedback is provided by other management officers and the manner in which it is employed in grievance negotiations by supervisors. It might be, for example, that overly technical feedback about arbitration decisions provided by staff members contributes more fog than light to the grievance process or that a supervisor's attribution of references to previous outcomes to line or staff superiors acts as an additional incentive to union representatives to carry grievances to a higher step instead of accepting a supervisor's grievance answer.

Subject Matter of Grievances Resolved

Intertwined with these behavioural aspects of the interaction of first-line supervisors with other levels of management is the question of whether supervisors are more or less able to resolve particular substantive types of grievances. It could be simply that the rate at which specific types of grievances are resolved is a direct function of the relative frequency of their occurrence. It has been observed, however, that grievance issues often involve either routine operations decisions on the one hand, or broader policy issues on the other (Slichter, Healy and Livernash, 1960). From this perspective, we would expect to find that first-line supervisors are more frequently able to resolve grievances arising over such issues as work assignments and overtime, as compared with issues requiring greater policy consistency such as discipline (particularly discharge) and health and safety. Hence, a divergence in the frequency of occurrence and resolution of grievances falling into these two categories is expected.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Data were collected in the course of eight workplace-level case studies of the grievance process. Two case studies were conducted in each of four

private sector industries: airlines (flight attendants), chemicals, steel, and utilities. The overall sample thus incorporates both service and manufacturing components. Six different companies participated in the research, with a single employer accounting for both case studies in airlines and chemicals. All of the pertinent collective agreements require that an attempt be made to resolve grievances orally at the first step before the grievance is subsequently committed to writing.

At each location, questionnaires were distributed directly to every first-line supervisor and returned by mail¹. In addition, interviews were conducted with the industrial relations staff at each location to gather qualitative information about the grievance process. For each case study, records for the past five years were analyzed to compute grievance and arbitration rates and to determine the relative frequency of substantive grievance issues.

Survey Measures

Scaled and rank-order response formats were employed in the survey instrument. Scaled responses used five-point verbally-anchored scales, the most frequent anchors being «Never» and «Always». Where appropriate, anchors specifically relevant to a survey item were supplied. On the question of the amount of training received by a supervisor, response options ranged from «None» to «Two Days» of initial training and «None» to «Every Year» for follow-up training. The range on amount of training time devoted to arbitration was «None» to «50%». The number of arbitration hearings attended spanned «None» to «5 or More», and the frequency of attendance at grievance meetings ranged from «Monthly» to «Daily».

The dependent variable, proportion of grievances received that a supervisor is able to resolve «informally, without the grievance being put into writing», was measured on a six-point response scale having anchors ranging from «10% or Less» to «100%». This self-report measure of the grievance resolution rate was necessary because the anonymity of the survey essential to an adequate return rate precluded matching survey responses to supervisors' absolute resolution rates which are, moreover, often unavailable.

¹ The one exception to this was a steel works having over 10 000 bargaining unit employees and several hundred first-line supervisors. In that case, questionnaires were distributed to every third supervisor on shift rosters. Questionnaires were delivered on-site in packets addressed by name to the respondents. Each packet contained a questionnaire, a cover letter encouraging participation in the survey signed by the manager of industrial relations, and a postpaid envelope for returning the questionnaire.

A rank-order item asked respondents to rank seven substantive grievance types as to the relative frequency with which the supervisor is able to resolve informally grievances of each type. Grievance types included both broad policy issues and more routine operating issues, as discussed above, and could thus be compared with a ranking of the types of grievances actually filed².

Sample

Of 342 questionnaires distributed, a total of 181, or 53 percent, were returned in useable form. In all but one of the eight case studies, the return rate was above 50 percent, the exception to this having been a 37 percent return rate. Nonetheless, because of differences in the number of questionnaires distributed, industry components of the total sample are acceptably uniform in size³. Thus, the overall sample and results which follow are representative of the grievance behavior of first-line supervisors under different industrial circumstances.

RESULTS

Operational definitions and basic data pertaining to variables included in the analysis are provided in Tables 1 and 2. Independent variables are grouped under the headings of supervisor characteristics, supervisor-union interaction, and supervisor-superior/staff interaction — in keeping with the previous discussion of factors potentially influencing supervisors' grievance resolution rates.

All but three of the variables were measured by single survey items. Three measures are composed of combinations of two or three separate survey items. In each instance, combined items had intercorrelations higher than .35. Thus, TRAIN combines measures of initial and follow-up training in grievance handling and proportion of training devoted to arbitration. The latter measure was included as an indicator of the degree to which training covered procedural and substantive issues such as evidence and contract interpretation. MCON consists of measures of the frequency of supervisors' consultations with their own line superiors and staff members before grievance decisions are made. MREF is a combination of the frequency of superiors' or staff members' references to previous grievance settlements and arbitration decisions in consultations with line supervisors. While

² The survey was pilot tested on two industrial relations managers, resulting in only minor wording changes.

³ The industry components of the sample are as follows: Airlines, n = 27 (16%); Chemicals, n = 44 (24%); Steel, n = 57 (31%); Utilities, n = 53 (29%).

survey items measuring supervisors' own use of feedback in grievance negotiations are positively correlated, the magnitude of this correlation does not satisfy the criterion for combining the items and they remain separate. This treatment of the data controls for any severe multicollinearity in multiple regression analysis of the independent variables' influence on supervisors' informal grievance resolution rates.

TABLE 1
Definitions of Variables

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Definition</i>
<i>Grievance Resolution</i>	
GRES	Proportion of Grievances Resolved Orally
<i>Supervisor Characteristics</i>	
EXP	Years in Present Position
TRAIN	Amount of Grievance Handling Training
ARBS	Number of Arbitration Hearings Attended
<i>Supervisor-Union Interaction</i>	
UCON	Frequency of Consultation with Union Steward before Grievance Decisions Made
GMEET	Frequency of Attendance at Grievance Meetings
SREF	Frequency of Supervisor References to Past Settlements in Grievance Negotiations
DREF	Frequency of Supervisor References to Past Arbitration Decisions in Grievance Negotiations
<i>Supervisor-Superior/Staff Interaction</i>	
MCON	Frequency of Consultation with Line Superior or Staff before Grievance Decisions Made
LOCUS	Degree to Which Superior or Staff Provides Advice vs. Decision in Consultations
OVER	Frequency of Supervisor Grievance Decisions Being Overturned by Superior/Staff
MREF	Frequency of Superior/Staff References to Past Settlements or Arbitration Decisions in Consultations with Supervisor

TABLE 2
Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations Among Variables

Variable ^a	Mean	s.d.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. GRES	3.50	1.70											
2. EXP	8.13	6.08	.08										
3. TRAIN	2.54	1.09	-.07	-.02									
4. ARBS	2.12	1.44	.17	-.02	.14								
5. UCON	3.17	1.44	.28	-.11	-.10	-.13							
6. GMEET	1.92	0.86	-.16	-.07	.11	.28	.03						
7. SREF	2.95	1.26	.28	.12	.09	.10	.33	-.02					
8. DREF	2.75	1.18	.20	-.04	.05	-.07	.21	-.17	.27				
9. MCON	3.56	1.85	-.05	-.03	.09	-.01	.24	-.11	.21	.24			
10. LOCUS	2.71	1.28	-.01	-.04	.06	.15	.05	.12	-.02	.03	-.04		
11. OVER	2.57	1.21	-.20	.13	.00	-.07	-.07	.03	.04	-.09	.09	.04	
12. MREF	3.53	1.91	-.03	.07	.25	.03	.09	-.09	.31	.22	.32	-.15	-.04

^aSee Table 1 for variable definitions.

The regression results contained in Table 3 show that with five individual variables attaining statistical significance, nearly one-quarter of the variance in the grievance resolution rate within this sample of first-line supervisors is accounted for by individual and behavioural differences. The overall F-ratio for the regression equation is significant at the one percent level. The following is an assessment of the hypothesized influence of individual variables on the grievance resolution rate.

Supervisor Characteristics

Three characteristics of supervisors are expected to be positively associated with the proportion of grievances resolved. Both the years of experience of supervisors and the number of arbitration hearings attended by a supervisor have the predicted sign, though only the latter is statistically significant. Surprisingly, the amount of training in grievance handling received by supervisors is *negatively* associated with the grievance resolution rate, though its coefficient is quite small. Controlling for the influence of the other variables in the model, however, differences in supervisors' exposure to the arbitration process accounts for the greatest amount of variance in the rate of grievance resolution of the supervisor characteristics measured.

TABLE 3
Ols Regression Results
Dependent Variable = Proportion of Grievances Resolved Informally

<i>Variable^a</i>	<i>Coefficient^b</i>	<i>t-value</i>
<i>Supervisor Characteristics</i>		
EXP	.106	1.42
TRAIN	-.033	- .43
ARBS	.259	3.29**
<i>Supervisor-Union Interaction</i>		
UCON	.284	3.45**
GMEET	-.221	-2.84**
SREF	.183	2.19*
DREF	.125	1.59
<i>Supervisor-Superior/Staff Interaction</i>		
MCON	-.153	-1.92
LOCUS	-.030	- .41
OVER	-.153	-2.05*
MREF	-.113	-1.36
Degrees of Freedom = 149 Adjusted	$R^2 = .231$	$F = 5.07^{**}$

^a See Table 1 for variable definitions

^b Regression coefficients have been standardized.

* Significant at the .05 level.

** Significant at the .01 level in two-tailed tests.

Supervisor-Union Interaction

Three of four variables measuring aspects of supervisors' interaction with union representatives in the grievance process are significantly related to the rate of grievance resolution at the first-line level. Both a relatively informal approach in dealings with union stewards and the use of feedback about previous grievance outcomes have the predicted positive influence on grievance resolution. The degree to which supervisors consult informally with union representatives before responding to grievances has the strongest association with the proportion of grievances resolved, controlling for the influence of the other variables. Though both references to previous grievance settlements and arbitration decisions in grievance negotiations improve the rate of grievance resolution, only the former achieves statistical significance. The frequency of a supervisor's attendance at grievance meetings has a strongly negative association with the rate of grievance resolution. It would appear that the frequency of such meetings is an inverse proxy measure of the grievance resolution rate.

Supervisor-Superior/Staff Interaction

Strikingly, every measure of supervisors' interaction with other management officers in the grievance process has a negative influence on the informal grievance resolution rate, though only one is statistically significant. The more frequently a supervisor consults with line supervisors or industrial relations staff before deciding grievances, is given a decision rather than advice only, and has grievance answers revised or overturned at subsequent grievances steps, the lower is the grievance resolution rate. This is especially true for the last measure of centralization in grievance decision making. In contrast to supervisors' *own* use of feedback in grievance negotiations, the frequency of other management officers' references to previous settlements and arbitration decisions in consultations with supervisors also has a negative influence on the grievance resolution rate.

Subject Matter of Grievances Resolved

It is hypothesized that first-line supervisors more frequently are able to resolve grievances involving routine operating decisions than policy issues often requiring staff judgment. The results presented in Table 4 provide tentative support for this hypothesis. Of the seven substantive grievance issues covered, work assignments, overtime, and promotions and transfers are typically handled by first-line supervisors, while discipline, subcontracting, layoff and recall, and health and safety issues often require a greater degree of administrative consistency across work groups than is possible for a single supervisor to achieve. Hence, we expect to find the former ranking relatively high in ease of resolution and the latter relatively low. This is found to be the case for work assignment and overtime grievances on the one hand, and for discipline, subcontracting, and layoff and recall decisions on the other. Surprisingly, health and safety grievances, though ranked last in frequency of occurrence, are third most easily resolved by supervisors. Similarly, promotion and transfer grievances are somewhat less susceptible to first-line resolution than expected. The lack of a significant correlation between the rank-orders of grievance types filed and resolved by supervisors does provide, however, some overall support for the hypothesized distinction between routine and policy grievance issues.

TABLE 4

**Rank Orders of Substantive Grievance Issues
Filed and Resolved by First-Line Supervisors
(1 = Most Frequent; 7 = Least Frequent)**

<i>Issues</i>	<i>Rank Filed (Rate)^a</i>	<i>Rank Resolved (Mean)^b</i>
Discipline	1 (1.81)	4 (3.66)
Promotion & Transfer	4 (.82)	5 (4.24)
Overtime	3 (1.17)	2 (2.65)
Work Assignments	2 (1.28)	1 (2.28)
Subcontracting	6 (.23)	7 (5.77)
Layoff & Recall	5 (.36)	6 (5.55)
Health & Safety	7 (.13)	3 (3.59)
<i>Degrees of Freedom = 5</i>	<i>r = .464</i>	<i>p = .145 (Two-Tailed)</i>

^a Rate of grievances filed concerning issue per 100 employees

^b Mean ranking.

DISCUSSION

Researchers have tended previously to focus on the environmental and broad organizational correlates of grievance activity. The results of this study show that a substantial portion of the variance in the rate of informal grievance resolution among first-line supervisors is traceable to differences in individual supervisors' experience and behaviour in the grievance process itself. In addition, results presented here support the view that first line supervisors are better situated to resolve certain types of grievances than others. These findings have important implications for improving the effectiveness of supervisors' handling of grievances at the crucial initial stages of the process.

Though the impact on the rate of grievance resolution of the extent of supervisory training is equivocal within the present sample, several specific findings suggest ways of sharpening and perhaps redirecting the focus of future training efforts. The most powerful influence on grievance resolution found here is the degree to which informal consultations between supervisors and union representatives occur before grievance transactions are concluded. Contrary to traditional adversarial expectations of supervisory behavior, it appears that the greater the off-record exchange of information and perceptions about a grievance, the better are the chances resolution will be achieved. Encouraging supervisors to engage in such consultations could thus have a beneficial impact on the rate of grievance resolution.

It was also found that supervisors' use of grievance feedback, particularly information regarding previous grievance settlements, has beneficial consequences for grievance negotiations. Feedback about previous outcomes may provide a factual model for analyzing the circumstances of present grievances or may prove persuasive in resolving conflicts of contract interpretation (Knight, 1985). Nonetheless, supervisors must be sufficiently knowledgeable about previous grievance results and their implications for contract interpretation to effectively employ them in grievance negotiations. These topics could receive greater emphasis in supervisory training. Moreover, the extent of supervisors' exposure to the arbitration process is also positively associated with the rate of grievance resolution. It could be that providing supervisors with the opportunity to observe hearings and discuss the process with staff members would be a productive adjunct to grievance handling training, particularly where arbitration cases involve grievance issues most appropriately resolved at the first-line level.

It has been suggested that centralization of grievance decision making is one way in which an industrial relations staff may consolidate and enhance its power within an organization (Jennings, 1974; Myers and Turnbull, 1956). Results here suggest that to the degree centralization of decision making either renders a supervisor incapable of making appropriate independent decisions or encourages union representatives to carry grievances to higher levels, the supervisor's informal grievance resolution rate declines, corroborating the findings of McKersie and Shropshire (1962) and Thomson and Murray (1976). This result is particularly strong within the present sample as a result of reversals of supervisors' grievance decisions. While some supervisory grievance decisions inevitably must be compromised to protect policy consistency, it would seem that supporting first-line decisions once made is advisable. Results on the substantive issues resolved by supervisors suggest that such a policy should be followed especially stringently on routine operating matters.

It may also be that the negative influence on the grievance resolution rate of grievance feedback provided by other management officers is another consequence of centralization. That is, where grievance feedback is framed in overly technical terms or is only partially understood by supervisors, the information could frustrate or intimidate supervisors or undermine grievance interaction between supervisors and union representative. This implies that greater attention needs to be paid to the manner in which grievance feedback is transmitted to supervisors as well as how they are encouraged to use it. Indeed, the results of this study suggest in general that closer attention to first-line supervisors' interactions with union and other management officers in the grievance process would have a positive influence on the rate of informal grievance resolution.

REFERENCES

- ASH, Philip, «The Parties to the Grievance», *Personnel Psychology*, XXIII, Spring 1970, 13-37.
- BRIGGS, Steven, «The Steward, the Supervisor, and the Grievance Process», *Proceedings of the Thirty-Fourth Annual Meeting, Industrial Relations Research Association, Madison, WI, IRRA, 1982*, pp. 313-319.
- ECKERMAN, Arthur, «An Analysis of Grievances and Aggrieved Employees in a Machine Shop and Foundry», *Journal of Applied Psychology*, XXXII, June 1948, 255-269.
- FLEISCHMAN, Edwin A., and Edwin HARRIS, «Patterns of Leadership Behavior Related to Employee Grievances and Turnover», *Personnel Psychology*, XV, Spring 1962, 43-56.
- GANDZ, Jeffrey and J. David WHITEHEAD, «The Relationship between Industrial Relations Climate and Grievance Initiation and Resolution», *Proceedings of the Thirty-Fourth Annual Meeting, Industrial Relations Research Association, Madison, WI, IRRA, 1982*, pp. 320-328.
- GORDON, Michael E. and Sandra J. MILLER, «Grievances: A Review of Research and Practice», *Personnel Psychology*, XXXVII, Spring 1984, 117-146.
- JENNINGS, Ken, «Foremen's Views of Their Involvement with Other Management Officials in the Grievance Process», *Labor Law Journal*, XXV, May 1974, 305-316.
- , «Foremen's Views of Their Involvement with the Union Steward in the Grievance Process», *Labor Law Journal*, XXV, September 1974, 540-549.
- KATZ, Daniel and Robert L. KAHN, *The Social Psychology of Organizations 2 ed.*, New York, John Wiley and Sons, 1978.
- KATZ, Harry C., Thomas A. KOCHAN and Kenneth R. GOBEILLE, «Industrial Relations Performance, Economic Performance, and QWL Programs: an Interplant Analysis», *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, XXXVII, October 1983, 3-17.
- KNIGHT, Thomas R., «Toward a Contingency Theory of the Grievance-Arbitration System», In David B. Lipsky, ed., *Advances in Industrial and Labor Relations V.II*, Greenwich, CT, JAI Press, 1985.
- KOCHAN, Thomas A. and Thomas A. BAROCCI, *Human Resource Management and Industrial Relations*, Boston, MA, Little, Brown, 1985.
- KUHN, James W., *Bargaining in Grievance Settlement*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1961.
- MCKERSIE, Robert B. and William W. SHROPSHIRE, Jr., «Avoiding Written Grievances: A Successful Program», *Journal of Business of the University of Chicago*, XXXV, Spring 1962, 135-152.
- McPHERSON, Donald S., *Resolving Grievances: A Practical Approach*, Reston, VA, Reston Publishing Co., 1983.

- MYERS, Charles A. and John G. TURNBULL, «Line and Staff in Industrial Relations», *Harvard Business Review*, XXXIV, July-August 1956, 113-124.
- NELSON, Nels E., «Grievance Rates and Technology», *Academy of Management Journal*, XXII, December 1979, 810-815.
- PEACH, David A. and E. Robert LIVERNASH, *Grievance Initiation and Resolution: A Study in Basic Steel*, Boston, MA, Harvard University Press, 1974.
- PETERSON, Richard B. and David LEWIN, «A Model for Research and Analysis of the Grievance Process», *Proceedings of the Thirty-Fourth Annual Meeting*, Industrial Relations Research Association, Madison, WI, IRRRA, 1982, pp. 303-312.
- PRICE, John, James DEWINE, John NOWARK, Kenneth SHENKEL, and William RONAN, «Three Studies of Grievances», *Personnel Journal*, LV, January 1976, 33-37.
- RONAN, William W., «Work Group Attributes and Grievance Activity», *Journal of Applied Psychology*, XLVII, February 1963, 38-41.
- SAYLES, Leonard R., *Behavior of Industrial Work Groups*, New York, John Wiley and Sons, 1958.
- SELEKMAN, Benjamin M., «Handling Shop Grievances», *Harvard Business Review*, XXIII, Summer 1945, 469-483.
- SLICHTER, Sumner H., James J. HEALY, and E. Robert LIVERNASH, *The Impact of Collective Bargaining on Management*, Washington, D.C., The Brookings Institution, 1960.
- SULKIN, Howard A. and Robert W. PRANIS, «Comparison of Grievants with Non-Grievants in a Heavy Machinery Company», *Personnel Psychology*, XX, Summer 1967, 111-119.
- THOMSON, A.W.J., *The Grievance Procedure in the Private Sector*, Ithaca, NY, ILR Press, 1974.
- THOMSON, A.W.J. and Victor V. MURRAY, *Grievance Procedures*, London, Saxon House, 1976.
- TURNER, James T. and James W. ROBINSON, «A Pilot Study of the Validity of Grievance Settlement Rates as a Predictor of Union-Management Relationships», *Journal of Industrial Relations*, XIV, September 1972, 314-322.

Les corrélats du règlement informel des griefs par les agents de maîtrise

Le pourcentage de règlements informels des griefs est une mesure importante de l'efficacité du processus des réclamations. Des recherches antérieures en matière de traitement des réclamations ont examiné l'influence des facteurs environnementaux et organisationnels au sujet de la présentation et du règlement des griefs. La présente étude considère l'impact que peuvent avoir sur le pourcentage des réclamations les différences concernant l'expérience et la formation des agents de maîtrise dans le processus des réclamations ainsi que l'interaction des syndicats et des gestionnaires au même point de vue auprès de ces personnes. Presqu'un quart de la variance de l'échantillon dans la proportion des réclamations réglées de façon informelle par les contremaîtres est attribuable aux différences personnelles qu'on a pu observer.

Un instrument d'enquête a mesuré les variables indépendantes dans trois domaines se rapportant à la surveillance: les caractéristiques des agents de maîtrise, l'interaction entre eux et les représentants syndicaux d'une part, entre eux et leurs supérieurs immédiats et les gestionnaires des ressources humaines d'autre part. Les caractéristiques personnelles comprenaient le nombre d'années d'expérience en qualité de contremaître, le degré de formation en matière de règlement des griefs et le nombre d'arbitrages auxquels ils avaient participé. Les variables touchant les relations entre les agents de maîtrise et les syndicats consistaient dans la fréquence des consultations informelles avant que les décisions soient prises, la fréquence de la participation à des réunions des comités de réclamations, à la fréquence de la référence du contremaître à des règlements de griefs antérieurs ainsi qu'à des décisions arbitrales au cours de la négociation des réclamations. Les aspects de l'interaction des agents de maîtrise avec le personnel de gestion comprenaient trois mesures distinctes, soit le degré de centralisation dans les prises de décision en matière de griefs, la fréquence des références du personnel de direction à des règlements antérieurs de griefs et à la consultation des décisions arbitrales en matière de surveillance. On a mesuré chacune de ces variables au moyen d'échelles de cinq points vérifiées verbalement. La dépendante variable, soit la proportion des griefs reçus par les contremaîtres qu'ils pouvaient résoudre oralement, fut mesurée au moyen d'une échelle de six points. Une question de l'enquête consistait à demander aux agents de maîtrise de dresser par ordre une sélection de sujets de griefs réels de façon à établir selon quelle fréquence ils étaient capables de résoudre les griefs de chaque catégorie.

Les données de l'enquête sont tirées d'un échantillon de 181 contremaîtres dans quatre industries: les services de transport par avion (les surveillants de vol), l'industrie chimique, l'industrie de l'acier, des entreprises de service public. On a fait enquête dans deux établissements distincts dans chaque industrie et le taux de retour s'établissait à 53 pour cent. L'échantillon était bien réparti entre les quatre industries. Par conséquent, l'échantillon est représentatif tant des techniques des entreprises de service que des entreprises industrielles.

Parmi les variables indépendantes, cinq comptent une signification statistique dans une analyse de régression multiple. On note que la plus forte influence positive en matière de règlement des réclamations par les agents de maîtrise réside dans la fré-

quence des consultations informelles avec les représentants des syndicats avant les prises de décision. Le nombre des audiences d'arbitrage suivies par un agent de maîtrise de même que la fréquence de sa référence à des règlements antérieurs de griefs présentent aussi une influence positive significative sur le taux desdits règlements. La fréquence de participation à des réunions de comités de réclamation est reliée négativement au taux de règlements et semble être une mesure défavorable à la solution des griefs. Les quatre mesures de l'interaction entre les contremaîtres et les cadres sont également reliées négativement au taux de règlements des réclamations bien que seule la fréquence des réformes et des modifications par les supérieurs hiérarchiques et les autres cadres des décisions initiales soit statistiquement significative.

On a aussi découvert que les agents de maîtrise sont plus souvent en mesure de résoudre les griefs courants, comme les heures supplémentaires et les affectations de travail, que les sujets se rapportant à la discipline et à la sous-traitance qu'on traite plutôt au niveau de la direction.

Ces constatations, conclut l'auteur, ont des conséquences importantes en ce qu'elles peuvent permettre de mettre l'accent sur la formation du personnel de surveillance en matière de traitement des griefs, ce qui, en retour, peut aider à hausser le taux de règlement des réclamations au premier stade.

LA SÉCURITÉ D'EMPLOI DANS L'INDUSTRIE DE LA CONSTRUCTION AU QUÉBEC UN RÊVE IMPOSSIBLE?

par Claudine LECLERC et Jean SEXTON

Le règlement sur le placement des salariés dans l'industrie de la construction a fait couler beaucoup d'encre et a suscité de nombreuses réactions au Québec et ailleurs. Il constitue un nouveau régime de sécurité d'emploi pour les travailleurs de cette industrie particulière.

Les auteurs présentent et analysent ce quatrième régime de sécurité d'emploi et le situent par rapport aux trois régimes précédents.

275 pages, \$14.50

**EN VENTE CHEZ VOTRE LIBRAIRE OU CHEZ L'ÉDITEUR
LES PRESSES DE L'UNIVERSITÉ LAVAL
C.P. 2447, QUÉBEC, G1K 7R4**