

# Using E-Mails in Studying the Graduate Employee Organization

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## Abstract

*The study investigated the Graduate Employee Organization (GEO) in its political image, and in the process, the grounded theory was used. The participants involved in the study were GEO members who were also graduate students. Digital E-mail correspondence took the bulk of the data, which was later analysed with interviews in order to gain a better understating of the union, given that politics is inevitable in organizational life. There has always been issues of vested interest, conflicts and struggle for power in addition to a number of visible political activities on campus. The literature reviewed enhanced the impression of the political frame as a lens in describing the organization. International students have appreciated the fact that there are no constraints for participating in union matters since the union is a complex organ with students coming from more than 25 different nations, speaking different languages and with diverse cultural backgrounds. Additionally, collegial feelings among GEO members have been enhanced. There are a few GEO members who are working around the clock to ensure that the GEO appeals to the outside world. The study developed six categories of the life of the organization. One of them is the bargaining process, which is the lifeblood of the union as pointed out in the data. The GEO leadership and the stewards work towards creating a viable trade union at the University with the motto "Excellence within your reach." It is to be noted that E-mails and other digital forms of communication have largely replaced letters and memos. Finally, despite its good work, the article has identified some challenges that might need to be addressed in subsequent studies, to make the organization even better.*

**Keywords:** Teacher organization, political lens, post-graduate university employee

## Introduction

The attempt by graduate students to unionize went through a struggle, perhaps more of a political struggle than an academic one. Nelson (1997) also noted that in Yale University there was stiff opposition faced by graduate students in organizing for their union. In 1976, the Graduate Student Employees Union filed a petition at the Massachusetts Labour Relations Commission (MLRC) for the desire to have a union. It was not until 1979, three years later, that MLRC turned down their petition, claiming that they were students, and hence ineligible for unionization. This was clear testimony that the graduate student employees were denied recognition as public employees. In the year 2002, this same reason was used, this time by the University of Massachusetts, Amherst to refuse undergraduate Resident Assistants to form a union of their own; and in the same year, MLRC admitted that the undergraduates could form a union. These are the ramifications of the political metaphor in learning how organizations operate under certain circumstances. Schimidman (1979) writing on unions in post-industrial society said that unions are essentially political organizations. It has further been emphasized by Sachs (2013) when discussing about unbundled unions with politics without collective bargaining.

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The time was on the side of the graduate students, and in Fall 1987, Graduate Student Senate (GSS) revived the drive for unionization. The senate found out that work could be done best through a committee. Working through committees has been supported by Dopppler and Lauterburg (2001), Lieberman (1997), Schimidman (1979), and Spring (1993). An autonomous group that became known as the Graduate Employee Organization (GEO) was given the task of coordinating the unionization process. It was not until Fall 1988, that the GEO began to organize graduate employees by staging a number of actions and demonstrations, and including relevant literature in order to gain support for unionization. By 1989, over 50% of eligible employees had signed a 'union' card and agreed to contribute \$1 a week to the campaign. This was no small achievement given the energy involved (Bascia, 1994). Escobar et al. comments:

*Critical views of democracy and academic profession predominate. There are discussions about the degree of authoritarianism of university trade unions, the complacency of a conformist culture among university professors, and lack of a truly democratic discussion about the role of the university in the process of change... (Escobar et al., 1994, p.23).*

In November 1990, graduate employees voted in favour of unionization and to have the GEO represent them in contract negotiations with the UMass-Amherst Administration. The first contract took effect after a ten-day strike in November 1991. During the strike, the GEO won arbitration, a waiver of 79% of individual and family health insurance, and an agreement from the Administration to fund eight graduate employees to work for the GEO. The organization had its second contract in 1993, which expired in June 1996.

Each graduate employee belongs to a department. Each department needs a graduate student who is a member of the union to act as a liaison person between the union and the graduate students, to be referred to as employees or workers. In a trade union movement, the union representatives have different names. At the University of Massachusetts Amherst, they are called stewards; while in other places, they are called unit representatives of workers. Yet in other unions, they are referred as union organizers at their places of work. Schwartz (1999) writes that the method for choosing stewards is set out in the local union bylaws. In many unions, stewards are elected and in others, are appointed by the union President, executive board or the business agent.

Additionally, the ability of the President to select his or her own administration is an integral part of ensuring a union administration's responsiveness to the mandate of the union. By its very nature, a steward's job may require confrontation (Schwartz, 1999); sometimes this can be done in a calm, straightforward manner, through 'quiet diplomacy'. But on certain occasions the steward may feel compelled to raise his or her voice, to argue forcefully, or to emphasize the union's position on other vigorous ways. Good stewards/stewardesses establish good rapport with their peers as well as the management. The research studied the non-involvement of the stewards at the department/programme level in the formulation of union policies and how stewards developed the big picture of the GEO. The basis of a union is solidarity, common identity and mutual commitment. It all involved the rigour of the political metaphor of an organization. The following is a quotation from the GEO membership brochure:

*The GEO is a powerful and progressive voice for graduate students on campus and our strengths come from your involvement.... You can serve*

*as a departmental steward, keeping your colleagues informed and organizing them to participate in union activities, such as rallies, marches and letter-writing campaigns. You can also become involved by helping with grievances, collective bargaining, running for office, or by serving on a committee (GEO Brochure, UMass, 2000).*

## **Background**

The basis of a union is solidarity, a common identity and mutual commitment Nelson (1997). The interests of the union lie in persuading members to believe that they are receiving excellent service for their dues; their interest lies in getting the facts, as noted by Lierberman (1997). The union steward has the big role of providing the information needed. Rothman (1974), using the work of other voluntary associations plays a key role in transmitting community attitudes to individual community residents. These stewards will be taken as key informants, as referred to by Rossman and Rallis (1998). Such people in any group are more informed about the culture and history of their department. The study sought to find out whether the GEO stewards are the key actors of the organizations. In this study these stewards have been referred to as organizers, a view also shared by Nelson (1997).

Juravich and Bronfenbrenner (1999) quoted a former local organizer who said, “We were militant, very militant, but not radical, ... What we wanted was to be treated fairly”. Any union policy in force or in the process of being made by the GEO membership has some bearing on the graduate employees in terms of the fairness harnessed above. Better union policies can raise the status of the graduate student as outlined in the GEO Agreement of 2000. The formulation of policies and their implementation have a better rate of success if the stewards are involved from the beginning of policy formulation.

As in line with the GEO, organized teachers largely concentrated on securing personal benefits and improved working conditions (Alkin, 1992). The picture that emerges from the research is that unions are primarily concerned with members’ welfare and not with matters of policy. This is the gap in the research which has been the focus of the study. Most current researches have focused on effects of unions on teachers’ work, and on school governance and less on policy. Also research has established that unions have not been initiators of new policies (Fuhrman et al., 1988). With the above narration, the statement of the problem is mentioned in the following section.

## **The problem, purpose and significance of the study**

The purpose of the study was to describe the roles of organizing stewards in the GEO. The method of inquiry for the study was the interpretive narrative in order to give a comprehensive description of steward activities. The significance of the study is based on the fact that it will provide heuristic insight that will contribute to general knowledge and enhance the understanding of how union stewards/organizers are unionized. This study will shed light on the roles of stewards/organizers at the departmental level. The GEO are engaged in bargaining for a new contract for Continuing Education Instructors. The organizers will be in a better position to participate in organizing the process. The study will enable the student body as well as the university as a whole to make better use of the stewards/organizers in making university life bearable to graduate students. International students will appreciate that there are no constraints for participating in union organizing, and collegial feelings among the GEO membership might be enhanced to a higher level as hitherto.

## Research questions

These questions are meant to be feasible, clear, significant and ethical in the eye of the researcher as emphasized by Rossman and Rallis (1998), and Glesne and Peshkin (1992). Addressing the issue on a more practical level, Fontana and Frey (2000) had the following quotation, which will shed some light on questions. “Asking questions and getting answers is a much harder task than it may seem at first. The spoken or written word has always a residue of ambiguity, no matter how carefully we report or code the answers.”.

Bearing in mind all the precautions on the nature of the research questions, and having gone through the theoretical description of the topic and the review of literature, the following two research questions guided the study.

- i) How are stewards organized? This question has been broken into the following sub-questions: In what ways do the stewards keep their colleagues informed? How are meetings organized at the departmental level where stewards are the organizers? How are the stewards perceived by their colleagues? What kind of support is expected from the GEO office to the stewards?
- ii) How are steward activities balanced with graduate academic work? This question comprised the following sub-questions: What is the experience of the stewards in union organization? How do you feel being called a steward or a union representative or an organizer? How are stewards involved in the formulation of GEO policies? What are the problems being faced by stewards in implementing their work?

## Study delimitation/limitations

According to Creswell (1994) delimitations deal with how the study has been narrowed in scope. This study focused on the way the GEO can be described through the political activities of the union. The focus was looking at the areas of conflict and vested interests in scrambling for scarce resources. It also looked at the powers that the union holds as far as being able to lobby and coerce the University to negotiate and benefit from gains which could not be achieved by other unions. This study focused only on the political life of the union.

As for the study limitations, although the union has a lot in common with a teachers union, it has served as a pilot study for mounting a bigger project for studying teacher unions. The study could have taken longer if time was adequate, to do more interviews and more documentary analysis. The data could have revealed more about the union if the study had looked at the financial life of the union, which was not the intention of this study.

## Related literature

As mentioned in the introduction and background, there has been incidents of vested interests, power, conflict and political activities appearing sparingly in the text. All these connote the value of the political image of the organization. By describing the organization using the political lens, a lot can be learned as it has been noted by Morgan (1997), that politics is an inevitable aspect of organizational life. The literature reviewed has further enhanced the impression of the political frame in narrating the organization as discussed in the following sections.

### **GEO as an organization**

The GEO is an entity and therefore subject to organizational studies. Clegg Hardy and Nord (1996) have the premise that organizations are empirical objects. The GEO is seen as an organization with loose and porous boundaries within the university. A theoretical imagination leads one to believe that there is a fragmented organization and management structure both within and impinging upon the university and other institutions. This argument is supported by Bush (1995) who writes that “management is a continuous process through which members of an organization seek to coordinate their activities and utilize their resources in order to fulfill the various tasks of the organization as efficiently as possible.” It is in this light that the union cannot be described using Max Weber bureaucracy or machine management or the Taylor scientific management as supported by Calas (1999) who by quoting others, she has argued that deconstructing the organization is an excellent approach in organization studies. This meta-narrative would enable the researcher to give a thorough description of the union.

### **Development of GEO as a union seeking bargaining rights**

The graduate student employees first attempted to conceive the idea of a union in 1976 so that it could negotiate for better services to its members. That attempt ended in 1979 with a ruling by the Massachusetts Labor Relations Commission (MLRC) that graduate employees were metaphorically students and therefore denied recognition as public employees with the right to unionization. The GEO never gave up. In 1979, the GEO used its strength of numbers to force recognition from the University. At the same time the GEO took cover under the United Auto Workers (UAW) union to strengthen its muscle. In 1989, the GEO organized a strike on budget cuts and the strike got the support of more members joining the union. The concept of budget as a symbol of responsibility is well noted by Czarniawska (1997) where budgeting is a game of status maintenance, in which one side is for growth and the other side is for cuts. The GEO has always been against cuts.

### **The GEO is a dynamic and a complex organization**

The GEO is one of many parts of the university as Bush has noted through the use of others; there is the suggestion that:

*Within the university, there exists several subcultures each seeking to promote and maintain its values. ... the university requires that one deals with the web of conflicts and tensions which exist as several subcultures try to protect their way of life (Bush, 1995 p. 132).*

It is in line with this quote that the best way to study the union was the use of the narrative approach. The GEO has a diverse membership, with graduate employees in more than eighty departments across the campus. It is thus a complex species of its kind with students coming from more than 25 different nations, speaking different languages and with diverse cultures. This kind of scenario creates a dynamic turbulent environment as it has been noted by Morgan (1997) that some species survive better than others. Noting the work of Mintzberg as highlighted by Bolman and Deal (1997), the GEO cannot be identified as a machine bureaucracy, nor the divisionalized form, nor the simple structure but as the one of adhocacy. Whenever the graduate employee is doing work, the union benefits the student. It is imaginary in the sense that when the student is working, he or she does not see the GEO as having played a part in creating the conducive environment. It is when the student gets a work related problem, that the GEO becomes

real; when the student is being victimized, that is when the GEO comes to the surface in his or her brain seeking welfare support.

### **The challenges of the union**

The organizational reality of the GEO is difficult to comprehend. The GEO members are de-facto members of the Graduate Student Senate (GSS) and yet the GEO is more vocal and has more visibility on the campus. These two bodies have different functions but all have almost the same members with the GSS having even members who do not pay dues to the union. The GSS is like a governing body for all graduate students. No one can say that the GSS has power over the GEO but there is interconnectedness in the way these bodies work.

### **The shortfall of the political lens**

Morgan (1997) argues that there is no current theory for everything. This is further augmented that organizations are many things at once, as organizations are complex, multifaceted and paradoxical. Any metaphor can be used to make us see the organization better and also can be used to blind and block us in seeing the organization. The following questions might be posed, “How do we handle the elite and gate keepers who follow the concept of subordination where they block new theories to replace old theories?” Why is it that employers will always oppose legitimate workers to form trade unions? What kind of pleasure do they get, even spending public finances to fight unions? The following is just to show the feeling of others on a similar matter.

*We find the idea of a hierarchy in organizational science, coupled with the notion of a system of elites from the “best” schools, to be offensive. ...would be to protect their positions by denying the existence of evidence that challenges their views and by undermining the credibility of those whom they cannot control (Hauge, 2000, p. 168).*

### **Design and methodology**

The study has sought to remedy some of the conceptual and methodological problems noted above and the research method was found to be the interpretative narrative approach. The advantage of this method is that the researcher gave a thorough description of what took place in the organizing of stewards, a phenomenon noted by Marshall and Rossman (1989). The disadvantage of this method is that the researcher had to conduct an in-depth interview, an elite interview, an observation session, and did documentary analysis.

### **The description of the conceptual framework**

Participant observation provided the opportunity of acquiring the status of a ‘trusted person’ and this person is the participant observer. By being part of a social setting, one learns first hand the actions of others corresponding to their words; sees the patterns of behaviors; experiences the expected and the unexpected and develops quality of trust that first hand the actions of others corresponding to their words; sees the patterns of behaviors; experiences the expected and the unexpected and develops quality of trust that

motivates them to tell what otherwise, they might not have said. The arrow in the schema indicates the position of the participant observer in the observational methods.

Using the schema in Figure 1, the participant observer is ranked low on the behaviour to be used in the research and also the degree to which the researcher structured the study are low.

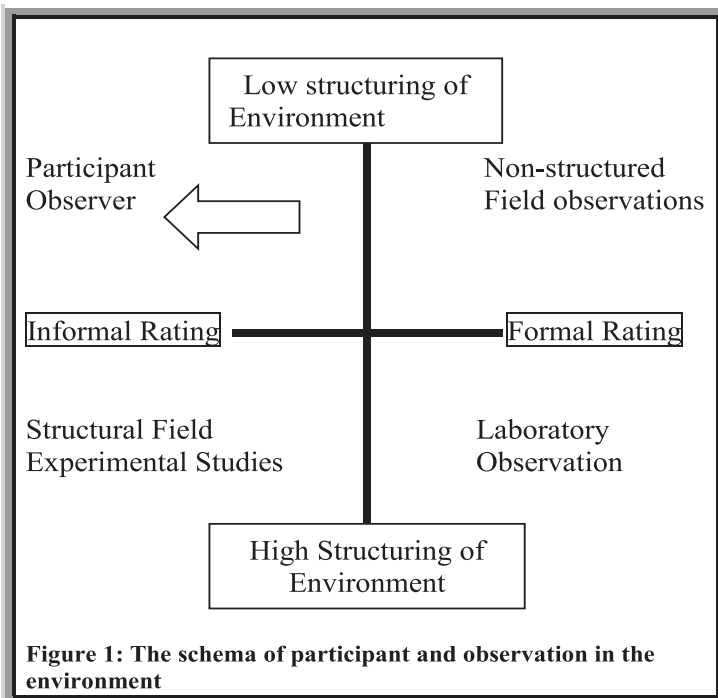
Using this method, the researcher was fully involved in the day-to-day functions of the union since he was a Graduate Student who had the privilege to attend in all the activities of the union. Before conducting the study, he met the union leadership for the permission to conduct the study. The following were the observed activities.

The frequency of meetings, how the meetings were conducted, how the minutes were distributed, who wrote

the minutes, the time taken to circulate the minutes of the last meeting and how the minutes were stored both in hard and electronic copies. He participated fully in picketing, hockey games, football, participated in pubs, sharing meals in the Bluewall and in the cafeteria and many other events where the stewards were involved. In addition, he developed the following guiding questions for the study.

How are stewards organized? The question was broken further as follows: In what ways do the stewards keep their colleagues informed? Do they make use of the e-mail facilities? Are they involved in informal gatherings? How often do they correspond to each other? Are there some members who are cut off from the communication of stewards' discussions? How are meetings for stewards organized at the 80 departments of the University of Massachusetts? How do the stewards balance their academic work and their role as stewards? What is the experience of stewards in organizing union work? How are the stewards involved in the formulation of the union? What are the problems being faced by the stewards in their daily activities?

In addition to the observation, interviews were conducted for some specific questions where the data from the observation did not give adequate clues of what was being studied. The data from the e-mail correspondences formed the main bulk of the data. These questions and others, which were framed in the course of the study guided the researcher as a participant observer to conduct the study. In the study, the researcher was part of the community of the graduate body. The limitation was that he might have had



his own bias and perspective, which might have prejudiced the study. However, he always tried as much as possible to remain objective.

### **Description of the population of interest**

The population was purposively selected, and collection of data was done as follows:

- i) The elite interview was conducted to the organizer of stewards' meetings
- ii) The interviewing was conducted to two stewards
- iii) Observation was done in the stewards' meetings, and in the general membership meetings.
- iv) The main source of data was via documentary analysis through e-mail correspondence and interactions
- v) The top leadership of the union was consulted directly and informally from time to time as the research was in progress.

### **The strengths and weaknesses of the design**

Both interviews enabled the researcher to write the narrative part of what existed in organizing the union. In order to avoid any bias, this activity was done at the end of data collection through e-mails. The greatest advantage was that the elite interviewee enabled the researcher to reshape the "common sense" about union organizing as noted by Michelle et al. (2000). The in-depth interview was done to two of the most active stewards for a limited time of thirty minutes each. The advantage was that it was possible to determine why these stewards were so active in the union organization. The disadvantage was that the researcher did not get the picture of those who were not active. The observation technique was done during stewards' meetings. The advantage of the method was that it was possible to get the tips of union organization, which were called "icebergs<sup>2</sup>". By noting the icebergs, it was possible to make inferences of what was hidden beneath the sea of the steward organization.

### **Data gathering procedure**

As noted above, each instrument has been described with its strengths and its weakness. The three instruments were chosen so that in case one failed, the other one would give adequate data. Also the three instruments - elite interview and the in-depth interview, the documentary analysis of e-mails, and the observation instruments - were analysed against each other in order to synthesize the data for rich analysis. The documentary analysis took data from the e-mails that was being communicated to the general public. The observation had the purpose of finding out the reality of the political process in action, in terms of negotiating for vested interests as well as the scramble for scarce resources.

### **Data analysis approach**

There were three stages in the processing of data. First, there was description of the data for each question, the second stage was the analysis part, and the third part was interpretation. In all the three areas, the focus was how the political paradigm could be used to describe the union and what theory could come out in using the grounded theory to recount the union. The three phases of description, analysis and interpretations were actually mentally overlapping, but for the researcher, it was easier to document the process and create a visual analogy in describing the organization. Pseudonyms were used

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<sup>2</sup> An iceberg is a term coined that behaves like an indicator that tells the story that there is something to dig for by looking for more information. As the English idiom claims, someone is smelling a rat for something that looks fishy or something that there is some hidden message. It was the responsibility of the researcher to find the larger part, which was hidden, under the sea of steward organizing.

instead of names of the participants in writing the research study so as to maintain the ethical aspect. Unanticipated material that came from the study was highlighted.

### **Trustworthiness and ethical considerations**

The researcher explained in detail the aim of the study and that it was of use to the community. Each one was allowed to participate and also allowed to withdraw from the research. The study was conducted with sensitivity to politics and setting (Rossman & Rollis, 1998). The consented form was developed so that the research was done in an accepted professional manner at the university. Christian (2000) argues that in value-free social science, codes of ethics for professional and academic associations are the conventional format for moral principles. As stated earlier, about informed consent, the researcher also did not fall under the trap of deception. Indeed, privacy and confidentiality were maintained. Finally on this matter, accuracy of data was given maximum attention. All fabrications, fraudulent materials, omissions and contrivances, which are both nonscientific and unethical, were avoided completely in the study in order to consider the study as being moral.

### **Findings and discussion**

This part of study starts with the organizing for each question, narrating the untold story. The second stage is on observation, followed by coding of the data and the third part will be the interpretation pertaining to the grounded theory of the data with a rich visual presentation.

Having collected the data, the task of piecing together an account of events embraced by the research problem was done as noted by Cohen and Manion (1985). This process demanded imagination and resourcefulness. The analysis was guided by the paradigm of narrative interpretative, which is naturalistic (Lincoln (1985) and as a way humans experience the world (Merriam, 1998). Every utterance and every noise were taken as data. Patton (1990) added that to observe that elephants have no wings was indeed data.

The analysis was developed as the way engineers build a tarmac road and reach the end with a full-macadamized road. The researcher's focus was to discover something as data was mingled with primary and secondary information. The presentation of qualitative data and the narrative interpretation were meant for enlightenment use, and for crystallizing the GEO values and for transforming structures and practices for the better (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). As qualitative research is quintessentially interactive, the data is being presented in the manner it has been collected, bearing in mind the researcher's own epistemological assumptions and without flirting with perspectives.

### **Findings from organizing and observation**

The questions were grouped into two thematic issues; the first one was on organizing and the second one was based on how graduate students balance their academic work and academic labour on union stewardship. The questions on the theme of organizing were as follows: i) In what ways do the stewards keep their colleagues informed? ii) How are meetings organized at the departmental level where the steward is the convener? iii) How are stewards perceived by their colleagues? iv) What was the experience as an organizer? These questions are elaborated in the sections that follow.

### ***In what ways do the stewards keep their colleagues informed?***

The stewards kept their members informed through several ways. The e-mail was the major means of communication, followed by departmental meetings, rallies, picketing, informal discussions among the members, assembly of stewards' meetings and the entire GEO membership. Of late however, there has been an over use of the e-mail. The following quote is evidence of how members feel about the e-mail forum.

*I'm extremely uncomfortable with making anybody feel like they have to give a blow by blow description of an upsetting event over a list-serve. I understand and agree that there are serious charges with serious consequences, but I feel we can let democracy take its course without email-testimony. When anybody files a complaint about being harassed, they need to know that they will be protected from unwarranted scrutiny. Many situations do call for airing of evidence, but not in this forum<sup>3</sup>, please.*

### ***Meetings***

In one of the meetings for the entire membership, which the researcher attended as an observer, there was a disagreement and the meeting ended prematurely. After a few days one steward wrote the following to the rest of the stewards.

*One idea we had was about having a more structured format for discussion ... at the next membership meeting, to avoid the chaos and acrimony that engulfed the last one. Something like two minutes per speaker, with no responses; speakers in an order determined by lot; secret ballots; etc. I'm not sure how such departure from our normal rules would be put into effect - I suppose the membership would have to vote on it (written by one steward).*

After the meeting which ended prematurely, a lot of e-mails circulated across the campus, while some expressed their anger on paper. The debate by e-mail was intense and the language was hard. One e-mail was written as follows: "Your e-mail is a wonderfully written message, well-articulated and the impact is more strength for the GEO. It was a blessing in disguise that what happened took place at the early stages of the bargaining process instead of taking place at the last stages."

### ***Observation***

Before doing the actual observation the researcher had prepared ten items for observation. However, due to pressure of time, only a few items were be dealt with, namely e-mail correspondence with stewards, membership meetings and other union activities that were operational during the research time. It was found that e-mails and other digital forms of communication had largely replaced letters and memos, thus substantiating the keen use of e-mails. These were the focus areas for observation. It was participant observation as noted by Patton (1990) which is an omnibus field strategy. It simultaneously combines document analysis, interviewing of respondents and informant, direct participation and observation and introspection. It enabled the researcher to make sense of what was heard and seen as reflected by Rossman and Rallis (1998) for more tacit knowledge or deeper understanding.

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<sup>3</sup> In this case, the forum is the e-mail where there had been accusations on matters related the use of some language that had not been favorable to the viewers of union e-mails.

## What is your experience as a union organizer?



**Figure 2: The GEO continuum in steward organizing as viewed by author.**

The feeling was that the organization was somewhere in the middle of the continuum as shown in Figure 2. Getting information from the main office of the administration has been very interesting for stewards. For example the following narration came from a graduate employee.

*... trustees have kept tuition and fees the same or lower each year for the last six years, seeking to ensure more residents can afford to attend UMass. ... raising student costs is currently politically unpopular and impossible to achieve right now. But within in another year or two I believe it will happen. Nevertheless... keep pressing the state for increased funding, and to continue searching for sources of outside revenue... think about how to accommodate more than \$20 million likely to disappear from academic and administrative budgets over the next 10 years, and approximately 500 faculty retiring over that period. You must keep the pressure on, unpopular though it is that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts needs to invest, not to make up for the fairly substantial funding that they have been pulling for the last six or seven years, but to make up for the cumulative effects of historic deficits at the university for 28 years. There is a serious shift going on at this university. There is ... no time to lose.*

There could be some grumbling; however, certain basic information is needed for keeping members abreast of what is happening. This is a gray area for further research. Bolman and Deal (1997) noted that organizations are complex, ambiguous, surprising and deceptive. The GEO seems to have all these characteristics as an organization.

### Findings towards the Grounded Theory

To underscore the distinction between analysis and interpretation, it may be helpful to distinguish between key terms and word pairs. The term “analysis” has included such terms as cautious, controlled, structured, formal, bounded, scientific, systematic, logic-deductive, grounded, methodological, objective, particularistic, carefully documented, reductionist, impassive. The other term “interpretation” is associated with words like freewheeling, casual, unbounded, aesthetically satisfying, inductive, subjective, generative, systemic and impassioned (Walcot, 1994). After having gone through the massive single words identified, the phrases, the properties and their dimensions, and having tallied the words that are similar or identical, plus the task of finding their relationships they could be organized into the following six broad categories: involvement, bargaining, chaos, frustration, abuse and positive change. These categories are elaborated in the sections that follow.

### ***Involvement***

Under involvement there are three gadgets, which are programmes, plan and dialogue. The involvement of stewards as a category is related to three properties namely programmes, GEO plans and dialogue. The programmes need facilities to conduct research in the departments where GEO members are employed. In doing their work, they are doing research and the belief is that the University is investing in order to rip off large profits by employing students who are paid less compared the real professionals. These activities are being organized and supervised in the academic departments. These departments need support to recruit and bring some degree of homogeneity in the programmes. These departments write administrative letters to students informing them of being awarded with assistant ships. These students can be foreign, taking MA/PhD or other flexible programmes.

The plan as noted from the data, did indicate a number of issues. The GEO members wanted evidence of a plan of action to be executed and updated; members refer to these as pocket updates. They wanted to see a schedule of meetings and union activities planned on a daily basis; they also would like to see the events for the whole year or semester planned in good time. They wanted rallies and functions to strengthen the union.

Dialogue is normally the political life of the union. Issues of diversity, forum and bad politics are mentioned in the data. Open minds, democracy are values in the union. Voice of members, participation and a clear line of communication were valued. The current university budget cuts forced the union to hold a dialogue on what to do. The question as to whether, the GEO is radical or revolutionary are issues that could be discussed during union dialogues. Feelings of colligability also feature in the process of dialoguing.

### ***Bargaining***

In the category of bargaining, there are three axial elements: funding, process and timing. These three elements depend on each other. Wrong timing of events, lack of funding, and lack of processing of important issues tend to develop the third, fourth and fifth categories. As Hughes et al. (1973) noted, collective negotiation is a new force that has been emerging in American colleges and university campuses and they do claim that it wields an impact upon everyone involved in higher education. The strength of the union depends on good contract, good leadership and enforcement of bylaws and abiding by the constitution.

### ***Chaos***

Under chaos, we there are the axial branches of conflict, confusion and departure from normal rules. There have been also personal attacks, crazy membership, grievance breakdown, messing up of issues, and disconnected membership. Despite all these, the GEO still stood strong. On the one hand chaos can be positive, while on the other hand, chaos can be destructive.

### ***Frustration***

Under this category, we have three tenets: negligence, cancellations and university shift. There was a group of people who used e-mails, endermine others and to develop what one of the e-mails baptized as 'second hand allegations'. Attached to the allegations, there was a mention of financial malpractices in the late era of the union. Leadership cancelled meetings, which led to a lot of frustrations. These cancellations made the leadership at some point unpopular as findings indicated. Despite all these frustrations

and bureaucracy, the GEO has survived (Hallinan, 2000, p. 65). The consensus theory is able to explain how social systems operate in a state of equilibrium and how such systems respond to challenges and come to a stable state.

### ***Abuse***

Abuse has been characterized by harassment, investigation allegations and participant withdrawal. This was notable in one of the membership meetings where a lady had not been addressed properly, and that incident made other people avoid membership meetings that were held thereafter. It has been difficult to describe the nature of the abuse, whether it was personal or general.

### ***Positive change***

The study has been found that there is positive change. In one incident, the interviewee said, “organize“. Under this category, we have four sub-themes, namely, solidarity, elections goals, and organize, as seen in Figure 3.

Under solidarity, the GEO has to organize itself as a trade union, as noted by Chakraborty and Bhattacharya (2001). There are roles to be played and respect has to be accorded to defend the rights of the graduate student employees, as workers. Lipset and Galenson (1960) have remarked that the internal organization and operation of most labor unions closely resemble one-party states than they do democratic organizations with legitimate and organized opposition and turnover in office. This pattern is so common in the labour movement; and in dealing with local unions, there has to be an administrative system with defined patterns of responsibility and authority. Issues of authority are handled differently by excellent captains (Weick, 2001). The researcher’s personal experience is that there are three elements in good governance in trade unionism. These are i) asking important questions at the right time, to the right people, and in the right place; ii) financial and well-audited reports that are all beyond reasonable doubt authentic; and iii) proper and timely elections conducted at the appropriate time within the constitution.

The GEO goals though known to the leadership, need to be known as well to the membership. The message that ‘united we stand’ and the goals of professional discipline need to be injected in the union. Traditionally, the fundamental purpose of trade unions is to promote and protect the interests of their members (Armstrong, 2001). Nelson (1997, p. xi) writing on “Will teach for food: Academic labour in crisis” argued that in a university, something even more sinister happens. Out of the 2,500 members, only about 100 graduate employee students attended meetings, although any decision arrived at, affected all those who attended the meeting and those who did not come to the meeting.

### **Suggestions for further study**

Having done the research and seen the gaps, another study could be conducted to respond to the question, “How are the issues of representation and form implicated in sustaining power relations behind the theories and our institutions?” This questions could be a catalyst for carrying out the study which would describe the GEO using the political metaphor.

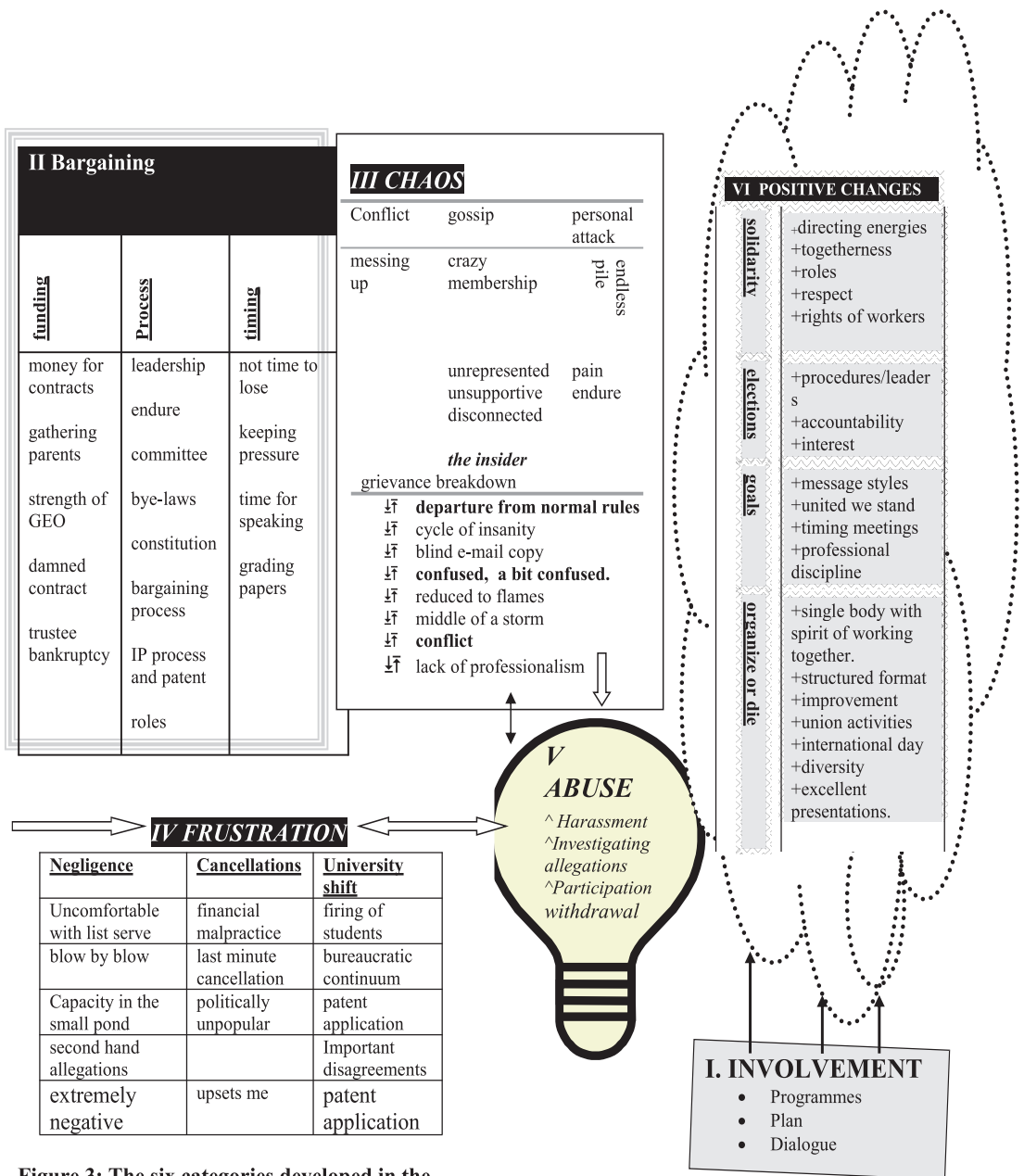


Figure 3: The six categories developed in the analysis

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The study was undertaken at a time when there were a lot of GEO activities. There were a number of rallies, demonstrations, distribution of flyer and many other GEO activities. This is an indicator that GEO is quite alive. A lot needs to be done for each department to have regular and well-coordinated meetings by the stewards. Out of 80 departments, only a handful of stewards have been elected; So there is a need to have stewards for all the departments. The author believes that the future of the GEO lies on the stewards and good future leaders for the GEO will come from them. The study was able to find out that the GEO has done a great job through the few stewards who are committed to the course of the union. There are a few GEO members who are working around the clock to make the GEO the way it appears to the outside world. The GEO has a network that enables it to help other students like undergraduates in forming a union of their own.

A graduate employ organization can relate to higher education institutions in several ways to foster collaboration and create mutually beneficial relationships. The organization can establish internship programs in collaboration with higher education institutions to students by providing practical work experience and exposure to the industry. The organization can conduct recruitment drives on campuses to identify and hire talented graduates. This could involve participating in career fairs, organizing company presentations, or conducting interviews and assessments on campus. It can also share industry insights, provide practical knowledge, and offer career guidance to students, bridging the gap between academia and industry, ensuring that students are equipped with relevant skills and knowledge. The organization can establish connections with alumni from higher education institutions by hosting networking events, mentoring programs, or alumni panels.

Overall, by actively engaging with higher education institutions, a graduate employ organization can establish strong relationships, enhance their employer brand, access top talent, and contribute to the development of a skilled workforce. Additionally, these interactions can help the organization build relationships with potential future employees and can showcase their opportunities in providing information about job openings, and recruit talented individuals. It is, therefore, important for the graduate employ organization to establish open lines of communication with higher education institutions and maintain an ongoing partnership.

Consciousness is the interface between the world outside of us and the world inside of us. As those with the privilege to lead this union, we need to plan a way to bring these workers together. Plan, plan, plan - and then do, do, do!!! ...I might suggest, on a positive note, that we will not be able to diversify our union until those who have been given the responsibility to lead and care for the union take charge and organize. Until and unless we reach out systematically to our membership and find ways for them to become involved, our union will continue to feel gagged. One steward commented that as long as people walk into our office and walk out feeling neglected, togetherness will be impossible, and this can be achieved through conscious practice. The following four recommendations would help ensure a health union.

- i) There is a dire necessity to have a deliberate balance of male and female stewards as organizers in the departments.
- ii) Graduate students need to feel that the union exists for them and that there must be social gatherings that build familiarity and cohesiveness in the running of the union.
- iii) The use of e-mail in correspondence is ideal; however, the e-mails must use acceptable language to cement the warm relationships of solidarity among the GEO trade union movement.
- iv) The union needs to have a well-accepted format for conducting membership meetings as well as known norms and rules to be followed by everybody in the union for good organizing before the meetings.

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