



## Analysis the Role Conflict of Trade Union Chairman and Its Types

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### Abstract

With the development of the market economy, the trade union work has become increasingly complex. As a special group, trade union chairman plays multiple roles. On the one hand, the trade union chairman should safeguard the rights and interests of enterprise employees, on the other hand, as the workers of the enterprise, they have to create benefits for the enterprise, this kind of dual role trigger a trade union chairman role conflict. In this paper, through reviewing the relevant literature, from the personal angle of the trade union chairman, trade union chairman of role conflict from three dimensions divided responsibility, time, interests. Through the division of the three dimension classifying trade union chairman of role conflict, and explain the causes of different types of role conflict and the corresponding countermeasures and suggestions, so as to eliminate the role of the trade union chairman conflict, give full play to the role of the trade union chairman.

**Keywords:** Union; Trade Union Chairman; Role Conflict.

### 1. Introduction

Along with the development of the market economic system, Chinese labor conflicts is increasingly severe. National Bureau of Statistic<sup>[1]</sup> relevant figures showed that labor conflicts events up to 534 millions from 2003 to 2012. Owing to the chairman of labor union play multiple roles cannot embodies the role of workers' representatives (union president) in industrial dispute, they sank into role conflict<sup>[2,3,4]</sup>. Union president is a special mass organization, the complicated and changeable works need they have flexible handling ability. According to the relevant data results of the investigation, a kind of symbiosis exists in many businesses——part-time union president, on the one hand they are the chairman of trade union, but on the other they are workers of enterprise (administration staff or relevant department head). For instance, in November, 2003, more than 1000 workers at NOKIA Dongguan Branch plant went on strike, claiming the unilateral adjust internal regulations after enterprises merging and acquisition. The union organization of enterprise avoid problems all the time in the whole event, for one important reason is that union president is also the vice chairman of company who in charge of personnel administration<sup>[5]</sup>. This case appears union president handle both roles obviously. As chairman of the union, they should represent the interests of the employees and protect the legal rights and interests of the employees, but as business managers, they should work for the rights of company so as to maximize the benefits of enterprise and maintain normal order. When a collision occurs between two roles, the union president will into deep water.

This article attempts to analyze above-mentioned problem from the individual angle of union president, and we constructed a basic framework of three dimensions of duty, time and interests to categorize the role conflict confronting them. We present the type of role conflicts, explain the cause of role conflicts in detail, and adopt what kind of coping strategies. This research can enrich the types of role conflicts of union chairman, and then give some recommendations and instructions for union president to perform functions.

## 2. The role conflict of union president caused by 'part-time' phenomenon

Due to there are many 'part-time' union presidents phenomenon existence, the role conflict of presidents have given rise to people's attention. Xiaogang Liu and Qinglei Zhang (2010)<sup>[6]</sup> research about part-time situation of union chairman shows that 79.5% of union president surveyed are part-timers, which direct union president accounted for 47%, the grass-roots union president accounted for 90% which have 5.5% also are head of the personnel department. Jian Qiao<sup>[7]</sup> study found that there are 78.9% of union president in part-time position in enterprises and institutions, which administrative posts accounted for 19.2%. Besides, according to the study of Guangzhou provincial federation found that full-time chairman of the trade union only 324 members, by contrast, part-time chairman up to 24965 members, nearly about 98.7% union president is part-time (Xiaozhong Ye, 2006)<sup>[8]</sup>.

Based on previous large studies have shown that phenomenon of part-time union president is commonly existed, which tends to result in dual role of union chairman, they should protect the legal rights of the employees and are also need to seek economic interests for the enterprise. The chairman of trade union who is a character with double identity will surely fall into role conflict.

Essentially, it is no doubt what role union president should play and what duty they should perform in labor relations, but if they also work for employers and benefit from their post, in that way, union president fall into role conflict is unavoidable. For one thing, union president is to shoulder the duty of the business which enterprise or employer appointed, it is taken for granted that they should be responsible to the owners, service to enterprises and finish works mission carefully. Therefore, this post and role orientation around the center of enterprises' economical interests. For another, for workers, the primary responsibility of president includes encourages and organizes all the staff assist administration to complete projects, enhance trade union organization construction, organize job training, help employees cope with life pressure, protect the legal interests of workers and so on. The role of union president implies that offer service to employees, to be a spokesman of employees' rights. The president acts must be reflect employees' demand and maintain employees' benefit. If the direction of superiors is beneficial to the employees, there would be less role conflict between enterprise representatives and union president. By contrast, if there are gaps between requirement of superiors and employees, or mutual conflict and contradiction, union president must be in an embarrassing situation at this point.

## 3. The role conflict of union president and its types

### 3.1 Basic concepts

The term 'role' derives primarily from the field of drama. It is advanced by Mead to describe behavior of an actor on stage in 1934. Since then the concept have been extensively used in sociology and psychology. The role is one's status and standard behavior in his daily life and work. In the realistic society, each role is not alone and they also interrelate with each other. It is impossible for us to only have one social role, conversely, we are living in a large collective but playing numerous social roles (Hangsheng Zhen, 1994)<sup>[9]</sup>. By 'role conflict' we mean a person who need be performing multiple roles in life or work, these roles would bring about conflicts and contradictions between each other in terms of expectations, and cannot be coordinated so left the person in a quandary (Zefang Dong, 2010)<sup>[10]</sup>. Union president, like all other social beings, may playing dual roles. President is a spokesman for employees' interests also a staff who should stand for the interests of enterprise. Obviously, expectations of both roles produce mutual contradiction and conflict, chairman who is in dual roles will be in press statements. Bulei Cheng (2010)<sup>[11]</sup> defined role conflict as union president is employed as a company worker who get benefit from employer and is also a union worker. Due to the inherent conflict of interest between employer and employee, the enterprise and its employees are in the relationship of confrontation, union president cannot balancing duties. The role conflict of unions president of Chinese enterprise and its categories show in Figure 1.

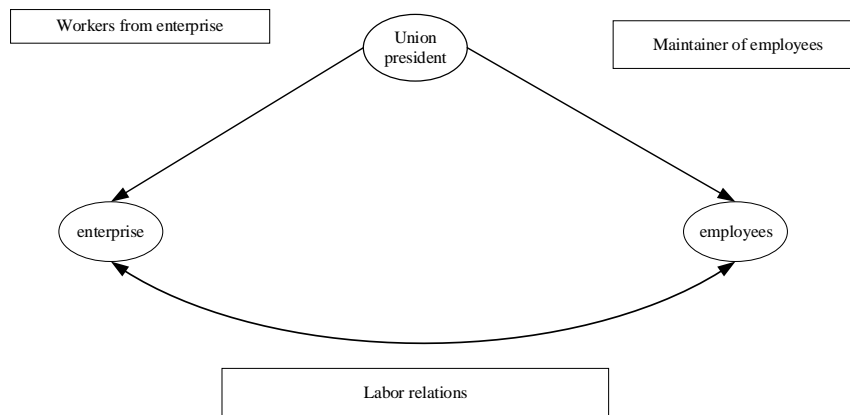


Figure 1.the double role of union president and its role conflict

### 3.2 The categories of the role conflict about union president

Because the union president play ‘double identity’, he play different roles in different places at different times, and show different behavior characteristics. ‘Double Identity’ of union president is depends on nature of their work, which revealed complexity and difficulty as well as considerable role conflict to the chairman of union. The chairman of union has intra-role conflict and inter-role conflict. Inter-role conflict mean union president play a social role and its effect on the conflict of its own. This role is subjected to multilingual expectations simultaneously and difficult to agree to each other, which will produce contradictory mental pressure, for instance, union president would fall into conflict when his role transition from the old role to the new role. Intra-role conflict was caused by union president take on multiple roles simultaneously. In the real word, president not only be responsible for union organization, such as higher wages, vacations, welfare and son on for workers, but also serves the nest interested of business. But the both roles cannot be inconsistent under normal conditions and there will inevitably cause inter-role conflict. Compare to the intra-role conflict, inter-role conflict is more prominent and will add more pressure to union president, so this paper mainly discusses inter-role conflict of union president. As ‘double identity’ of chairman is mainly reflected in three aspects, including different responsibilities, time conflict and interest conflict, the following will introduce and explain each type one by one( Figure 2).

#### 3.2.1. The inter-role conflict based on responsibilities

As mentioned above, union president play double role, they are the chairman of trade union also employees of company, but duties of both identities are different. Role ambiguity comes into being when the role difference happened, thus causing role conflict. According to the standard of the Constitution of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, the main duties of union president shall to take charge of the daily routine integrally, give a true picture of employees’ suggestions and requirements, enthusiastic in service for employees’ legal rights, have a democratic work-style and put under the supervision of the masses. By comparison, the main duties of corporate workers(more for managers) should enter a contract with the workers as representatives of the corporation, investigate and reward staffs, have effective payment management for workers, punish and dismiss the workers broken the rules of company, make labor dispute mediation and action arbitraria, training workers and so on.

Now that the different responsibilities of double identities of union president will lead to role conflict, why is there still the part-time phenomenon? We are analyzes above problems from two perspectives:

On the one hand, from the role location to view the person is a union official and also an employee of enterprise, the two role share common ground in job duties. They have the same work object, and their employment objective are related to labor relation and coordination. Consequently, there is a misconception caused by role location that the two roles can be hosted by the same subject, resulting in the double identities of union president.

On the other hand, from the development of our current economic system to view that various interests are not differentiation in planned economy, the state can cover labor relations within the enterprise by arranging interests of company and employee. Although trade unions are organizations of mass government, the management system of company is integrated of Party, government and union. Hence, the primary task of unions is keep economic development for an extended period, be well in production, life and education, mobilize employees cooperate with enterprise simultaneously. And these just lead the trade union has no unique duties and cannot carry out its role of a

spokesman who fight for employees. That is to say the union do its jobs attach to enterprise administration and play a role of manager to a certain degree.

As an employee whose job is endowed by the asset owner, forming the principle-agent relationship. He must be responsible for corporate interests, implement the arrangement from superior and complete various tasks carefully. The starting point of the work is manage and oversee workers, to modify human resources adequately and explore potential of labors, so the target and the interest demands will be realized (Xiaojun Xu & Ke Li, 2005)<sup>[12]</sup>. But as an union president, his role is endowed by employees, which can forming the principle-agent relationship with workers. He must be responsible for employees' rights. The starting point of the work is speak and fight for employees, reflect the demands of employees, so the interest demands of workers will be realized. The role conflict will decrease when the orders are just right for the expectations of staff, however, the role conflict will become increasingly prominent when the orders from superior and the demands of employees are different. Weizheng Chen (2016)<sup>[13]</sup> points that union official who also serve as an executive will fall into role conflict as a result of contradictory duties. When one role responsibility is different from the other leading to contradictory role conflict, which the paper defines it inter-role conflict based on responsibilities.

### **3.2.2. The inter-role conflict based on time**

When the union president undertake the double identities, it is not only there might be different responsibilities between both role,, but also will might occur conflict in works. It is a practical problem that the union president is facing to demands and expectations of employees while the orders from superior are promised. Once union president finished company works and ignore the demands of employees, or satisfy the expectations and ignore works from superior, then the union president will out of his league inevitably and fall into role conflict.

In the survey about part-time union president we found that time conflict is one of the basic reasons that part-time president and his own work are contradictory each other, and the figure of time conflict jumped to about 48.9%; at the same time, in a survey about whether to support the part-time union president we found that 11.2% said they against part-time president because of the time is not be allowed(Xiaogang Liu, Qinglei Zhang, 2010)<sup>[6]</sup>. Kexin Zhen (2014)<sup>[14]</sup> found in the investigation about the working conditions of grass-root union president that there is a limit to the president's time and energy. There are 91% investigators reflect that the time spent on trade union matters is decreasing because the busy production work and livelihood management. What's more, Weizheng Chen (2016)<sup>[13]</sup> said in the interview that the mostly questions is time conflict existing between trade union works and business works. Interviewees also stressed they usually spent more time in enterprise instead of trade union.

Through summarize the results of previous studies, we found that the time conflict will exists when the union president also an employee of enterprise. The work of union president is 'part-time', so they will give consideration to union matters after finishing their own works of company. Thus it may be known, the work hours of union president will be limited. For example, Wal-Mart, the biggest multinational corporations on the planet, whose union president work time is strictly limited by the staff management system, which makes union president cannot do his works independently, let alone safeguard rights and interests of employees<sup>[15]</sup>. Not only that, same union presidents in grass-roots trade unions not only responsible for production and management of enterprise but also responsible for management of workers' living areas. So except for their own work in company, the time spent on union works will be relatively reduced. The union president would become overwhelmed even if they only a short time to handle and plan jobs of trade union. When the time devoted to one role hampered the other role to enforce rights and fulfill obligations leading to contradictory role conflict, which the paper defines it inter-role conflict based on time.

### **3.2.3. The inter-role conflict based on interests**

The union president choose what role he play is in a sequence of difference when facing role conflict. Though president may be well qualified for the job of trade union chairman because of his knowledge, capacity and values, the salary, position and promotion will be more affected. If union president also serve as enterprise position, such as administrative post whose power and influence better than the trade union chairman, the status and sense of belonging will be more attractive accordingly. Consequently, when union president fall into role conflict, the end result is often make a choice, namely, choosing one means abandoning the other. At this point, union president usually abandon chairman role from the angle of individual benefit.

In an investigation about part-time union president we found that there are 1.7% expressed the chairman of union is a low position, 1.7% said they are burdened with great work pressure, 1.5% considered the work is very easy to make superior unhappy, another 0.5% felt gloomy about the future (Xiaogang Liu & Qinglei Zhang, 2010)<sup>[6]</sup>. Bulei Chen (2006)<sup>[11]</sup> said if the union president also have a post in enterprise and profit from this position, role conflict is unavoidable. Pingrong Xiao (2010)<sup>[16]</sup> research found, in order to protect his own interests, most union president choose to remain silent even to sue employees at law when employees' interests are infringed. Thus it can be seen, the union president often choose to be on enterprise side when facing this kind of inter-role conflict. The main reason is that the dependency relations between union president and enterprise. There are labor relations between union president and company, businesses give him a promotion or raise, social status depends on economic status, and this leads to the attached position of union president virtually. Trade Union Law stipulates the grass root union funds mainly come from enterprise who submit 2% of gross wages to trade union, which has contributed to the trade unions at the enterprises level are always dependent on enterprises in labor relations and it is difficult for unions to achieve the game balances of labor relations. Most union presidents established the working relationship with the Corps and enterprises determined salaries, so union presidents have scruples about fighting for employees' right which lead to presidents get closer to enterprises and away from employees. In brief, our union presidents lack inherent movie force to safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of worker masses. Owing to excessively depend on enterprises in personnel and economically, union presidents their own lack of independence, they cannot to safeguard employees' interests fully regardless of their own interests when labor disputes occurred, conversely, quite a few presidents choose on enterprises' side in order to the promotion in the future. When the person can benefit from one role but cannot carry out obligations of the other role leading to contradictory role conflict, which the paper defines it inter-role conflict based on interests.

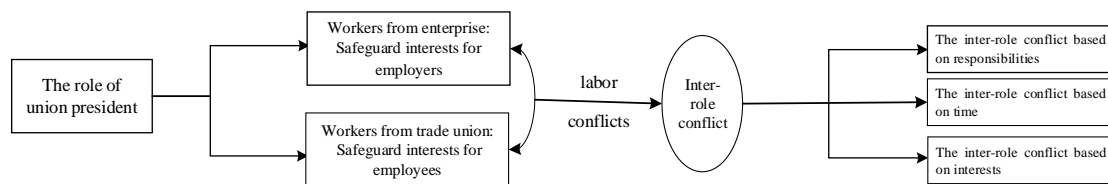


Figure 2.inter-role conflict of union president

#### 4. Application strategy about role conflict of union president

##### 4.1 The inter-role conflict based on responsibilities—clearing the ‘double’ roles of union president

The union president fall into inter-role conflict based on responsibilities because the duties of both roles are ambiguity. We must clear respective responsibilities of both roles if we want to solve the inter-role conflict due to duty confusion. Different roles have different responsibility and specification, so we must distinct basic duties and conduct codes between union president and business manager. From the labor relationship aspect we have to know the duty of business manager is management and control, to strike the best possible transaction for enterprise which probably hurt employees' interests; and the duty of union president is service and maintenance, the president, ‘the family’ of employees, would safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of worker masses. On the face of it, the responsibilities of both roles are different, even contradictory with each other, so they have strictly abide by their rules and accomplish their duties.

On the condition of Market Economy, the interest of both sides of labor and capital is contrary, each seek for their own benefits, and there are conflict of interests between them. Enterprise pursue interests maximize and employee pursue income maximize, so there is a big interest diversification and differentiation between both roles. The union president cannot on behalf of the employees and enterprise, therefore, domestic laws shall clearly regulate the position of trade union, strengthen functions about safeguard employees' rights to avoid role conflict.

##### 4.2 The inter-role conflict based on time—promoting the reform of professionalizing union president

Union president unavoidably fall into time conflict when serving as an employee of enterprise, the forces in front of president either ignore their own works of company for on behalf of employees or ignore the duties of union

president for finish tasks from superior. To solve this problem, the most important thing is return to the role of trade union chairman and offer relatively independent time and space. Most union president are appointed by superior or produced by enterprise in our country, they are union president also serve as enterprise, which causing work time conflict unavoidable. The professionalization of trade union chairman is recruiting by socialization forms, which has specialized training and professional operation. The professionalization of trade union will help strengthen independence of union president and more autonomous to carry out the work of safeguard employees' rights.

The professionalization of trade union chairman is an important exploratory practice which trade union can adjust to socialism market economics system and promote the reform and development of the leadership system of the trade unions. Currently, there some places are attempting to push the professionalization of trade union chairman in China and free the union president from role conflict, such behavior is helpful to solve time conflict cause of 'double roles' of union president. Different places have different approaches, but they do similar kinds of work which core is make union president independent of enterprise and not chose from company, but the trade union employ experienced employees from social scope and recommend to the enterprise.

#### **4.3 The inter-role conflict based on interests——ensuring economic independence of the union presidents' right defending process**

The 'double roles' of union president lead to role conflict which is a kind of dual agency. 'Dual agency' is also called bilateral agency, which is an illegal and irregular behavior. Union president is the representative of employees also the agent of enterprise in labor relations, which is a typical subject of 'dual agency'. When a principal paid salary and can restrain agent necessarily, which will cause the agent cannot carry out obligations for the other principal. The salary of union president is come from enterprise and the funds of trade union is also come from enterprise, so the trade union or union president is largely limited to the enterprise from perspective of the two methods. To this end, it's must be to get rid of union funds or president's wages from enterprise to ensure economic independence of the union presidents' right defending process.

For one thing, the wages source of union president should be reformed. For example, local finance pay for union president, local union pay for union president and so on. So the trade union is completely independent of enterprise administration to work legally. The chairman of trade union is authoritative in company, so there is no question of activists be infringed<sup>[17]</sup>. There should not exist jurisdictional relationship between union president and enterprise, employers have no right to handle union president (including dissolve a labor contract). For another, the funds of trade union need to develop autonomous system and not limited by enterprise. Only economic independence can trade union have an independent tendency and ability, so that they can express employees' demands. 'In the case of our country socialist market economy and the accession to the World Trade Organization, the practice of enterprises pay the trade union funds prescribed by laws is not in accord with international practices and international labor convention.'<sup>[18]</sup> The funds of trade union ought to be thoroughly reformed. The funds of trade union should mainly come from the support of union member, maintain autonomy of members financially and the enterprise can't interfere with finance of union so that trade union can shake itself out of the company.

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