

JOHN AUGUST

Extension Associate, Cornell University, ILR School

LERA Session Title: Democracy's Work: Work in a Democratic Society

Paper Title: What Can We Learn from Healthcare Improvement Theory for Innovation in Collective Bargaining?

Paper Abstract:

There is much to be learned about the what and the how of transformative thinking and action from the successful examples of demonstrable improvement in health care delivery and in population health. If collective bargaining is to be transformed into a more successful practice than what most agree has been a deteriorating experience for the past 30 years, then leaders and practitioners of collective bargaining must also confront the questions "what" and "how."

We must first look at the difference between change and transformation.

Incremental improvement or incremental targets of success are insufficient given the enormity of the problem.

Then we must look at collective bargaining as a system, part of a much greater whole including the economy (macro, micro, enterprise, and community), wealth creation and wealth distribution, and the wide range of stakeholders who are impacted by a collective bargaining process.

Among the most successful and widely studied systems of improvement in healthcare outcomes derive from Jonkoping County Sweden. There the leadership (which includes the county leaders and its trade unions, among others), defined their goals in terms of both systems outcomes and quality measures to keep them on track. System level measures include a whole population measurement of mortality, life quality, and financial outcomes. Specific benchmark measures include adverse event rates, staff turnover, access (waiting times), along with work satisfaction.

All improvement goals are based on the needs of the patient.

By looking at the systems approach to health care improvement, we will explore how the concepts of systems thinking, continuous quality improvement, patient-centeredness, and learning can be fully integrated into collective bargaining, more as interest based and as social dialogue, and applicable to many if not all sectors, inside and outside of healthcare.