ANALYSIS

Curtain Call for Change

The SAG-AFTRA Contract, the 2023 Strike, and AI

Jacob Robert van Winkle

Marxe School of Public and International Affairs, Baruch College
2023

The Screen Actors Guild (SAG) contract defines the relationship between actors and the entertainment industry. It outlines the terms and conditions under which actors operate, ensuring their rights, benefits, and professional development. An evaluation of this contract requires a multifaceted approach, one that considers various perspectives and frames of analysis. I'll delve into the Frames of analysis - Structural, Human Resource, Political, and Symbolic - to dissect the SAG contract's impact on the union and its members. Additionally, I'll explore other theoretical concepts and provide recommendations for strengthening the contract and the union itself.

The 2023 SAG strike, from July 14 to November 9, was marked by contentious negotiations over AI use in the industry. A primary issue was the proposal by Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP) for the adoption of generative AI to recreate actors, providing studios with rights through a single payment. SAG raised concerns about this undermining actors' control and compensation. While AMPTP claimed the usage was limited to specific films, the union argued for broader protections against unrestricted AI replication. The eventual deal, reached on November 8, reflected the evolving challenges in the entertainment sector regarding AI and actors' rights (The Hill, 2023).

DIAGNOSIS

Structural Frame

The Structural Frame looks at the SAG contract to see if it's clear, works well, and matches the union's goals. It checks how clearly the contract lays out everyone's duties, including how the union, its members, movie studios, producers, and others in the industry should work together. This approach looks at how the union is organized, who makes decisions, how different jobs are

defined, and how well people work together. This frame includes looking at the hierarchy and decision-making processes within the union, and evaluating the contract's procedures in ensuring fairness (Bolman & Deal, 2017).

Human Resource Frame

This frame focuses on the union's approach to managing its human resources, and how the contract caters to the personal and professional development of its members. The Human Resource Frame includes evaluating how the contract addresses work conditions and welfare, assessing growth and development opportunities, and analyzing how the contract contributes to member satisfaction, motivation, and commitment to the union.

Political Frame

The Political Frame explores the power dynamics, both within the union and in its external interactions, especially in contract negotiations. This frame involves interest representation and conflict management within the contract, analyzing the power dynamics in the union's negotiations with industry stakeholders, and assessing how the contract positions the union in the broader industry and political landscape.

Symbolic Frame

This frame examines the cultural and symbolic aspects of the union as reflected in the contract. It includes the values, norms, and identity that the contract holds to its members and the wider community.

The Symbolic Frame assesses how the contract reflects the union's culture and values, understanding what the contract symbolizes for the profession's identity and public image, and identifying any aspects of the contract that relate to established traditions within the union or the industry.

In addition to the four frames of analysis, the SAG contract and its impact on the union and its members can benefit from theories related to leadership, organizational change, and stakeholder management, as outlined in "Managing Human Behavior in Public and Nonprofit Organizations" by Denhardt, Denhardt, and Aristigueta (2019). These theoretical perspectives can provide a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the contract's effectiveness and the union's role in advocating for its members.

Leadership Theories

The study of leadership is important to understanding how the union operates and how its leaders influence the decision-making process. By putting leadership theories into the analysis, it showcases effectiveness of leadership within the union, its impact on member satisfaction,

and its role in negotiating and implementing the SAG contract. Theories such as transformational leadership, servant leadership, and distributed leadership can highlight the leadership styles and approaches used by union leaders, their ability to inspire and motivate members, and their capacity to adapt to the evolving needs of the entertainment industry.

Organizational Change and Stakeholders

The entertainment industry is dynamic and constantly changing. Organizational change theories will help analyze how the SAG contract aligns with the union's goals, specifically how it responds to external and internal pressures. Additionally, effective stakeholder management is necessary for SAG. SAG has a wide range of stakeholders, including its members, industry producers, government agencies, and the general public. Stakeholder management can help us assess how the SAG contract addresses the variety of needs and interests of these stakeholders. This perspective can aid the union's ability to balance the interests of its members with those of other stakeholders and in crafting a contract that fosters positive relationships and collaboration within the industry.

Incorporating these additional theoretical perspectives provides a better analysis and a more holistic view of the SAG contract's impact and the union's role in advocating for its members. Using leadership, organizational change, and stakeholder management theories, we can better understand the complexities of the entertainment industry and the strategies used by the union to navigate these complexities successfully.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Structural Frame: Enhancing Organizational Efficiency and Clarity

One specific recommendation is to review and potentially restructure the union's hierarchy and communication channels to ensure efficient decision-making and member representation. Aim to achieve a 20% reduction in decision-making time and a 10% increase in member satisfaction regarding representation within a year.

Human Resource Frame: Fostering Engagement and Satisfaction

Another recommendation is to further develop programs for professional growth, such as workshops, skill-training courses, and mentorship opportunities, with the goal of increasing member participation in professional development programs by 30% within 18 months. These programs would help develop a stronger workforce within the organization's members.

Political Frame: Strengthening Negotiation and Advocacy

To better negotiate and advocate, SAG should establish a dedicated team for negotiation strategy, focusing on key industry issues such as digital media rights and job security - directly related to the ramifications of AI. The aim is to achieve at least 75% of the union's stated objectives in the 2026 round of contract negotiations through improved preparation.

Symbolic Frame: Building a Stronger Union Identity and Culture

Launch a campaign to strengthen the union's identity, focusing on its history, achievements, and role in shaping the industry. Have a 25% increase in public and member engagement with the union's campaigns and events. The campaign's progress should be assessed annually.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the SAG contract through the Structural, Human Resource, Political, and Symbolic frames provides a holistic view of its strengths and weaknesses. The Structural Frame highlights the need for clarity and efficiency in decision-making, and the Human Resource Frame highlights the importance of member satisfaction and development. The Political Frame showcases negotiation advocacy, and the Symbolic Frame calls for a stronger union identity.

The recommendations include restructuring the union's hierarchy, fostering member engagement through professional development programs, strengthening negotiation strategies, and launching a campaign to further build the union's identity and culture. These recommendations will enhance the contract's effectiveness, further the union's objectives, and ultimately benefit its members and the broader industry.

In the changing landscape of the entertainment industry, an adaptive contract is needed. By implementing these recommendations and considering additional theoretical approaches, SAG can continue to play a pivotal role in safeguarding the rights and interests of its members while shaping the future of the profession. As the industry continues to change, the SAG contract must evolve with it, reflecting the dynamic nature of the entertainment world and ensuring a future for its members.

REFERENCES

Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (2017). Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership. Jossey-Bass.

Denhardt, R. B., Denhardt, J. V., & Aristigueta, M. P. (2019). Managing Human Behavior in Public and Nonprofit Organizations. SAGE Publications.

The Hill. (2023, November 13). SAG-AFTRA releases agreement details, AI protections. Retrieved from website: https://thehill.com/policy/technology/4307400-sag-aftra-releases-agreement-details-ai-protections/