Report

Sara Lee Campaign

The Integrated Organizing Approach as a Tool in the Fight for Workers Rights:

A Case Study

by Carolina Martínez and the Enlace Team

May 2012

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Acknowledgements

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Institute for Transnational Social Change

The institute for Transnational Social Change (ITSC) is a collaborative project between the UCLA Labor Center and the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Unidad Iztapalapa (UAM-I) Graduate Labor Studies. ITSC serves as a hub for cross-border collaboration among key worker-led organizations (independent unions, worker centers, NGOs, and academics) in Mexico and the United States. Our main goals are to address the needs of a low-wage workforce that is often hard to reach, like migrant workers, women in the garment industry, farm workers, miners and other workers who are subject to the complexities of industries dominated by highly mobile transnational corporations. ITSC’s activities aim to advance opportunities for cross-border collaboration and increase access to organizations that promote leadership development, conduct health and safety trainings, and build organizational capacity. ITSC is spearheaded by Gaspar Rivera-Salgado and coordinated by Veronica Wilson at the UCLA Labor Center, together with Fernando Herrera, Sergio Sánchez, Leticia Hernández, and Alejandra Zacapa at UAM-I. This project is made possible in part by the generous support of the Ford Foundation and General Service Foundation.

ITSC web page is:
http://www.labor.ucla.edu/programs1/itsc.html

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Index

2 Introduction

4 The Context
4 Coahuila
5 Sara Lee
5 Claims
6 Achievements of the Workers

7 Integrated Organizing Approach Methodology
7 Testimonies of Sara Lee Workers
8 Introduction to Integrated Organizing Approach

10 Internal Plan
10 SEDEPAC-Workers Center
11 Workers Rights
11 Training Tools
12 Capacity-Building Strategies

15 Strategy
15 Training and Partnerships
16 Data Collection
16 What are the Ambitions of the Company?
16 Value-Added Processes

18 External Plan
18 Company Image
19 Synchronized Actions

21 Conclusion
22 Enlace Institute
23 Endnotes
Introduction

The Integrated Organizing Approach (IOA) is an organizing method for low-wage workers engaged in struggles against multinational corporations. Implementation of this method has been a critical tool for organizing low-wage workers in unregulated industries, building alliances and relationships among community organizations nationally and internationally, and strengthening and enhancing campaigns. The case presented in this study demonstrates how the IOA can be a substantial asset for an organization in the design and execution of successful campaign strategies.

This report outlines the context in which labor violations occurred, describes maquiladora (foreign-owned manufacturing plant) workers’ claims against the Sara Lee Corporation, and explains how the IOA emerged from a need to organize at the local level in the face of a multinational employer. The case study underscores various components of the Integrated Organizing Approach at a time when the maquila industry in Mexico was in decline, highlights organizing tools and points to how the IOA could be applied to other cases, and shows that the IOA can have an impact beyond addressing immediate claims for better working conditions.

In sum, organizing with the IOA resulted in workers who learned about their labor rights and strengthened ties at the national and international levels among organizations fighting to defend low-wage workers. To give an idea of organizers’ role in the case, below is a brief history of two key organizations in the struggle, Enlace and Servicio, Desarrollo, y Paz A.C (SEDEPAC).

Enlace

In 1996 and 1997, Peter Cervantes-Gautschi traveled throughout Mexico and the United States interviewing leaders in the low-wage worker struggle. He included both countries because many low-wage workers in the United States were Mexican immigrants, and workers in Mexico are employed in the production of US-based transnational corporations. From the interviews, Cervantes-Gautschi recognized common challenges in organizing against multinational corporations, primarily that it requires continuous recruitment and training to build a strong and democratic leadership, effective strategic planning, and mechanisms that develop organizational identity while incorporating new people and energy.
In 1998, seventeen community groups joined together to found Enlace, based in the United States and focused on cross-border programs. By the year 2000, Enlace had twenty member organizations, representing a base of three hundred thousand workers on both sides of the border. Enlace aims to increase organizations’ ability to plan strategically by training leaders in member and ally organizations. Those leaders can then be resources to their own groups and to the social and economic justice movement. Enlace’s educational program, the Enlace Institute, helps low-wage worker organizations develop leadership teams and build capacity to continuously improve their work.

Servicio, Desarrollo, y Paz A.C. (SEDEPAC)

SEDEPAC, founded in 1983 in Mexico, led the struggle against Sara Lee. SEDEPAC is a worker center that advances social and environmental initiatives to improve the well-being of all communities. SEDEPAC works with various community organizations to build their organizing capacity, strengthen civil society, and promote justice and democratic change. Among other activities, SEDEPAC researches workplace conditions, documents abuses, and leads workshops against sexual harassment and discrimination. A main goal of SEDEPAC is to promote workers’ rights in Mexican maquiladoras.
The Context

In 2001, Sara Lee Corporation was prepared to close plants in Mexico and cut more than eight thousand jobs. However, due to the struggle of their workers, Sara Lee plants stayed open in Mexico four years longer than planned. Not only did workers save their own jobs in this case, but also the experience resulted in a solid workers’ rights organization and workers with leadership skills who continue to defend their rights.

To clearly understand the achievements of the Sara Lee workers and the Integrated Organizing Approach as an organizing tool, it is essential to consider the practice of company closures in Mexico in the last twenty years, the culture of Sara Lee, and Sara Lee’s business plans.

COAHUILA

Since the forties, the State of Coahuila has played an important role in the national economy of Mexico. Coahuila’s economy was based on the production of coal and steel for roughly four decades. From the 1980s on, the focus shifted to manufacturing exports due to the political elite’s interests and federal government support for opening markets.

In the 1990s, manufacturing in maquiladoras still generated many jobs in Coahuila. Between 2000 and 2003, the state lost about eight thousand jobs. However, the maquila still represented a high percentage of total employment in the state. According to the 2003 Economic Census, maquilas comprised 50 percent of manufacturing employment in the state.

Maquila job concentration varied from city to city. For example, in Aculia, maquilas comprised over 90 percent of employment, and in Piedras Negras, over 80 percent, while in Torreon, little more than 40 percent were employed in maquilas.
In 1999, the Sara Lee Corporation employed about 140,000 workers in Mexico. Sara Lee’s business strategy was based on trademarks, thirty-two of which were megabrands that each sold more than $100 million annually. These brands included Kiwi (shoe polish), Hillshire Farms (cold meats), Hanes (underwear and sportswear), L’Eggs (stockings) and Wonderbra. The corporation was divided into five groups: Foods of Sara Lee, Branded Apparel of Sara Lee, Sara Lee Food Service, Sara Lee Tea and Coffee, and Sara Lee Products for Body Care and the Home. It had six plants located in the state of Coahuila in Allende, Frontera, Sabinas, San Pedro, MocoIva, and Nueva Rosita, and one in the state of Nuevo Leon in Ciudad Guadalupe. In 1998, the corporation employed over sixty-five hundred workers in Coahuila alone.

Mexico like Sara Lee began to move their manufacturing to countries in Asia in search of more competitive production conditions.8 Maquiladora closures were carried out, in some cases, using illegal tactics to avoid compensating workers.9 For example, employers would clear out all machinery at night and disappear to avoid paying workers their legally required benefits.10 Companies also delayed compensating workers until years after closing a facility, which allowed them to retain much of the money owed to workers. When they finally paid workers, they did so without interest or considering devaluation of the peso.11

Mexican law stipulates that a worker must receive compensation for forty-five days of salary per year of service, up to a maximum of forty-two months. Companies used tactics such as reducing production to less than 50 percent for four or five weeks to reduce workers’ salaries, thereby decreasing the base salary that determined how much the company had to pay their laid-off employees.

For example, if a worker who worked for the company for 10 years earned 60 pesos per day, he or she would be entitled to compensation of 27,000 pesos (45 days X 60 pesos = 2,700; 10 years X 2,700 = 27,000 pesos). However, if the company reduced the salary to 40 pesos per day, the total compensation would be only 18,000 pesos (45 days X 40 pesos = 1,800 pesos; 10 years X 1,800 pesos = 18,000).

### Claims

In 2000, a group of workers at the Sara Lee plant in Coahuila began to organize to demand a living wage. They asked for the support of SEDEPAC, which simultaneously began a formal relationship with Enlace. Working together, the plant workers, Enlace, and SEDEPAC were able to restore labor rights at Sara Lee. Workers “joined the struggle not to harm the company, but to have decent jobs.”12 Organizers and workers began to reach both long- and short-term goals, and workers’ demands evolved from basic wage protections to freedoms already protected by Mexico’s labor laws. By the end of the campaign, workers demanded:

1. impartiality on the part of the Sara Lee Corporation to allow workers in Mexico to join unions freely;
2. that Sarah Lee rehire 249 dismissed workers;
3. and 100 percent payment of compensation to 1,200 workers.

The third demand included vacation pay and compensation based on full salaries, not on the reduced pay due to cuts the company made strategically as the date of the plant closure approached.

The following table summarizes both some of the ways in which Sara Lee committed labor rights violations and the workers’ achievements in their fight to keep their living-wage jobs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRODUCT</th>
<th>BILLIONS OF DOLLARS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sara Lee food (meat)</td>
<td>$4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bread</td>
<td>$1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee and tea</td>
<td>$2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Products for home and body (insecticides, shoe care, skin lotions, and air fresheners)</td>
<td>$2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing (Bali, Hanes Her Way, Just My Size, Playtex, Wonderbra)</td>
<td>$7.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Between 2000 and 2003, 534 maquiladoras closed in the state of Coahuila, in part because large companies based in

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[1] Sara Lee Brands Enlace Artistic Creation ©Enlace

[2] In the 1990s, Sara Lee Corporation was among the top companies in the Chicago business community, the company’s home base. Sara Lee employed more than 139,000 people worldwide, had 278 processing plants in 40 countries, and 32 brands. Sara Lee had an average profit of about 14 percent each year.


[4] Integrated Organizing Approach as a Tool
Sara Lee’s Labor Violations in Mexico and Workers’ Achievements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEXICAN FEDERAL LABOR LAW</th>
<th>SARA LEE ACTIONS</th>
<th>WORKERS’ STRUGGLES AND ACHIEVEMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Articles 84 and 87:</strong></td>
<td>The company generally did not pay bonuses, and on the rare occasions it did, payments were postponed until early the following year.</td>
<td>The workers formed a committee of 25 people to train themselves about the provisions of the Federal Labor Law regarding bonuses and created an action plan to engage in negotiations with the company. The workers committee circulated a petition asking for the bonuses according to the Federal Labor Law. More than 400 workers signed the petition. In December 2001, the company paid the bonuses for the first time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every company is required to give its employees an annual bonus at the end of the year equivalent to at least 15 days’ wages.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Article 117:</strong></td>
<td>The company did not always report its profits and often underreported the amount. Sara Lee also did not post the annual profit statement, taking advantage of workers’ ignorance of the law.</td>
<td>The workers committee and SEDEPAC used flyers, meetings, and trainings to inform and organize workers. Members formed a committee to negotiate with the manager of the plant. Lastly, they pressured the Secretary of Labor and the Office of Conciliation and Arbitration, demanding that Sara Lee make information about annual profits available to the public. In May 2002, thanks to this pressure, Sara Lee distributed profits to workers as required by law.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The employer must file an annual income report and provide it to workers or post it in a place visible to workers.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The company must also deliver profit-sharing payments to the workers every year based on its annual profit, no later than May 15 of each year.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Articles 123-III, 134-IV, and 135-III:</strong></td>
<td>Sara Lee gave workers materials and tools at the time they were hired. When the tools were in poor condition, workers were responsible for paying for replacements.</td>
<td>Workers succeeded in getting the company to pay for replacement of tools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The employer must provide workers with the tools, instruments, and materials necessary for the job. These should be of good quality, be in good condition, and be repaired as needed.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Articles 132-XVI, 134-II, 310, 337-II, 423-III and 511:</strong></td>
<td>The company did not comply with health and safety regulations in the workplace. It did not report accidents or provide accident or injury reports to workers, which precluded workers’ access to care in government health centers affiliated with the Mexican Social Security Institute (IMSS).</td>
<td>SEDEPAC trained workers leaders on how to make an emergency plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The employer must comply with health and safety regulations to prevent accidents and disease in the workplace. Workplaces must have first-aid kits, and all accidents must be reported to the authorities.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Articles 170, 132-XXVII, and 165:</strong></td>
<td>The company fired pregnant women or increased their expected production so they would quit from exertion, thereby losing their health insurance. Several women lost their babies due to dangers they were exposed to at work.</td>
<td>The committee succeeded in stopping the layoffs of pregnant women. The company agreed to provide protection and give them permission to attend doctor appointments during pregnancy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The employer must provide protection to pregnant workers.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Article 3:</strong></td>
<td>Sara Lee did not hire workers older than 37 and did not permit men to work in activities requiring the use of sewing machines.</td>
<td>When these complaints were made public, the company agreed to hire older workers and to hire men to work in production.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employers are prohibited from discriminating against workers based on age or sex.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Article 354, 357 and 358:</strong></td>
<td>The company imposed a corrupt union on its workers. The workers had no knowledge of the union and were never provided a copy of the labor contract.</td>
<td>The workers made a formal complaint to the corporation and the labor authorities about the imposed union’s violation of workers’ collective rights. Eventually, Sara Lee agreed to union neutrality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees are allowed freedom of association. Employers cannot intervene in workers’ trade unions and must maintain impartiality on the matter.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Article 133, Fr. IX:</strong></td>
<td>The company had a list of workers who participated in mobilization. Some workers were fired and found it difficult to find other jobs.</td>
<td>More than 250 worker leaders were rehired at Monclova Internacional, the new plant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employers are prohibited from using “blacklists” to exclude workers from job opportunities.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“When you realize you have rights and that your life can change, you no longer let someone mistreat you. A worker who knows his health should be respected is a worker who protects himself.”

6 Integrated Organizing Approach as a Tool
Sara Lee was considered a global leader in the movement for a “union-free environment.” In October 2004 after four years of struggle, Enlace, SEDEPAC, and workers at the Sara Lee plant secured an agreement on freedom of association and harassment. Sara Lee’s commitment to labor neutrality was the first among corporations with maquiladoras in Mexico.

This collective campaign brought global attention to Sara Lee’s exploitation of maquila workers at the Frontera, Coahuila manufacturing plant, causing the site to close. Nonetheless, the plant workers achieved many of their goals as Sara Lee committed to:

- rehire 10 of the most recognized leaders from the Frontera plant;
- rehire 249 workers at the manufacturing plant in Monclova, based on their seniority at the Frontera plant;
- and pay fair compensation to all former Frontera plant employees.

How do local organized workers with limited resources deal with a powerful multinational corporation?

Large, powerful corporations also have vulnerabilities that small organizations can target and use to apply pressure. Small organizations can also maintain a level of unpredictability that is nearly impossible for a big, diversified company to plan for and counteract. The organizing process developed to confront Sara Lee’s abuses has been used to shape other social and economic justice struggles.

The study of this organizing process is based on campaign archives and interviews with some of the organizers, workers, and allies who participated in the struggle.

“More than a year later, Leonor Castillo is still a very angry woman. She sits at the kitchen table of her two-room cinderblock house and talks in a gentle voice that mutes the rage about her six years at the plant: the sudden reorganization of the production system with the result that everyone seemed to be working just as hard and maybe even harder but taking home less pay; the day she was running a 102-degree fever and they would not give her a pass to go home; those awful two months she was pregnant and kept asking for a change of assignment from the operation that required her to toss bundles of clothing over her shoulder from a sitting position. Sorry, she was told, there was no lighter work in the factory of more than a thousand workers engaged in a dozen different operations”.

“When I miscarried, the doctors asked if I lifted anything heavy,” she says. “They had to do a cesarean to clean me out,” Leonor, who is 32 and childless, adds softly.14
Mari
“I realized there was a lot of abuse, most of all against women. What encouraged me to get into this struggle was seeing many colleagues crying because they could not meet their production goals and were mistreated. I saw a coworker crying when her relative died and she was not allowed to attend the funeral. I felt very helpless. That day I went to the union delegates and asked them why they let her work under those conditions. I was very angry to see that instead of defending the rights of workers, the union was defending the company.”

Integrated Organizing Approach

To put pressure on a company with so much power, it was necessary to develop a highly organized process. Enlace developed an organizing strategy along with a training methodology, the Integrated Organizing Approach, throughout the Sara Lee campaign to help workers fight abuses. The IOA is made up of three elements:

1. Internal Plan:

   Strengthen the organization from the inside through leadership trainings to restructure the organization and prepare its members to take up the fight against transnational corporations;

2. Strategy:

   Research the company’s future work plans and develop mechanisms to interrupt them;

3. External plan:

   Develop synchronized actions with allies located at key international locations.

These three IOA elements should be developed and used in a synchronized manner.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Internal Plan: Purposeful Organization</th>
<th>External Plan: “Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee”</th>
<th>Strategy: Intersect powerbroker’s future plans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Description | • Train leadership team  
• Develop structure  
• Continually improve through evaluation  
• Upgrade communication internally and externally | • Develop campaign structure and governance.  
• Develop internal communications  
• Recruit allies  
• Synchronize direct actions, escalate pressure  
• Establish intermediary for negotiations. | • Identify powerbroker(s)  
• Research a corporation or target’s future plans to identify points of vulnerability |
| Team Frameworks | Strategic Direction  
Organizing Cycle  
Evaluation Star  
Four Sages  
Proactive Plan  
Arrow through the Apple  
Levels of Energy  
Rap  
Levels of Fear | Strategic Direction  
Organizing Cycle  
Evaluation Star  
Four Sages  
Proactive Plan  
Arrow through the Apple  
Rap  
Power Analysis | Strategic Direction  
Organizing Cycle  
Evaluation Star  
Power Analysis  
Business Plan Steps  
Proactive Plan  
Arrow through the Apple  
Levels of Influence/Fear |
| Goals | Develop effective strategy team  
Create mutual accountability culture  
Foster mutual support culture  
Make efficient use of energy  
Develop leadership  
Inspire and recognize allies  
Restructure strategy team  
Train to develop strategy and to negotiate  
Worker leadership decides policy | Recruit allies for actions  
Maintain discipline governance  
Maintain message discipline  
Foster better internal communications  
Target appropriate media  
Keep strategy concept flexible  
Recruit intermediaries  
Establish functional precision | Identify powerbroker(s)  
Identify points of vulnerability  
Design actions to intersect future plans and impact points of vulnerability  
Maintain element of surprise  
Analyze effect of actions  
Redesign actions  
Gather inside intelligence |
| Outcomes | We do exactly what we say. | Everyone wants to be with us. | We prove everything we say. |
Internal Plan

The internal plan component of the IOA strengthens an organization by enabling coordination between the base and the leaders. After an organization examines its own structure and trains a team of leaders, the next step is to identify changes that are crucial to implementing a strategy. This section illustrates SEDEPAC’s important role in the Sara Lee campaign, how the workers’ committee was organized, how SEDEPAC supported leadership building through labor rights workshops and the use of tools like the Rap, the Evaluation Star framework, clear communication, music, and security.

All the organizing tools Enlace shared changed local practices. Ana from SEDEPAC explains that before working with Enlace, they organized in a different way:

“Here we used to organize too quickly. Little by little with Enlace’s trainings we began to take our time organizing. We needed to make a plan and have an organizational structure. The Organizing Cycle allows us to evaluate what we have, what we need to do, identify allies, and how we can organize and determine assignments in place of an impulsive action. Before the trainings, we would do an action and the media would not report on it. The Organizing Cycle helped us be more organized and request the media to report on the action.”

SEDEPAC Worker Center

According to the Sara Lee workers, SEDEPAC played an important part in their struggle. The organization trained them to know and defend their labor rights. SEDEPAC provided continuous support in the organizing process, and staff was available for workers to call during actions if a question or doubt arose. As a physical space, the center served as a meeting place for workers to organize and express themselves freely. Workers met weekly to report injustices at work, let off steam, and develop actions. The center also facilitated mutual support.

SEDEPAC Team May 2001
Worker Rights

Worker leaders participated in meetings and facilitated know-your-rights trainings and workshops for other workers. These meetings gave workers critical tools for their fight, generated a sense of solidarity, and helped them understand that they share common experiences with other workers. For Alma, the workshops on workers’ rights motivated her to participate in the campaign. She had both experienced and witnessed many of the abuses at the plant, and “got involved little by little to learn to defend myself.”

The know-your-rights workshop encouraged participation for many other workers as well. Gloria Tello, a member of SEDEPAC during the campaign, explained that “training with concrete and conceptual tools, where the workers gained deep understanding of their rights and federal labor law, were vital to the campaign.” Once workers knew their rights, they recognized when those rights were being violated, like when they failed to receive the correct pay or their year-end bonus. This awareness facilitated short-term organizing and at the same time, paved the way for long-term organizing in the future.

Organizing Tools

Organizing Tool: Evaluation Star

Teams use the Evaluation Star to analyze and evaluate their work, highlighting areas to focus on when developing future plans. The Star measures the leaders’ depth and growth in organizing the base by looking at the quality of operations, internal coordination, strategy, and effectiveness of the group’s work. It is a simple process to learn and use.

Suggested uses:

- Analyze an organization’s readiness for launching a campaign; evaluate progress or assess the effectiveness of a completed campaign.
- Evaluate the internal structure of an organization and how well that structure facilitates the mission and goals of the organization.
- Evaluate a single event or action.
- Evaluate an organization’s programs.

Organizations use the Evaluation Star organizing tool to reflect after each action and to make the necessary changes in their future plans. At the beginning of the fight against Sara Lee, the campaign leaders used the Evaluation Star to focus on demanding Sara Lee pay end of the year bonuses. Cervantes-Gautschi explains the results of that evaluation following each step:

**Evaluation Star Applications:**

1. Organizing:
   - Were new people added to the campaign in the organizing process? Yes, more workers participated. Who did we lose?
   - The workers who presented the petition demanding bonuses were fired.

2. Functional:
   - What did we say we were going to do?
   - Collect signatures to demand year-end bonuses.
   - What actually happened?
   - Signatures were collected and the petition turned in.

3. Capacity:
   - How many people were we counting on?
   - Some workers and a few allies.

4. Coordination:
   - How was our time management, communication, and clarity of responsibilities? In the majority, everything was very well coordinated.

5. Planning Effectiveness
   - Do we believe in our strategy?
   - There was an issue with the strategy; enough workers signed the petition, but that didn’t pressure the company.
“At the end of the evaluation, the workers realized they needed national and international support. They had to prove to the company they had a larger base of support. As a result of the evaluation, the need for a public rally attended by more than a thousand people emerged. The workers had never organized such a large action, and they had to recruit people who would recruit others at the same time.”

The workers needed to learn the Rap.

Organizing Tool: The Rap

The Rap is a structured conversation to engage people. It is used to convince people in an organization to make a stronger commitment and engage new people in the struggle or organizing activities. The legendary Fred Ross developed the Rap and taught it to many organizers, including those who created the United Farm Workers (UFW) in the United States.

In 2000, when workers asked for SEDEPAC’s support to organize their campaign for fair treatment, about 104,000 people worked for Sara Lee in the state of Coahuila. At that time, Enlace decided to work with SEDEPAC and joined the campaign against Sara Lee. In February of the same year, Enlace provided the workers with the Rap training. One of the first times the Rap was used was after the workers decided to have a rally that would engage more than a thousand people. In order to reach their objective, the workers followed the steps of the Rap. Below, Cervantes-Gautschi recalls how the tool was used:

Rap Application

1. Information:
Tell a person that workers only want to exercise their right to come to the conclusion that the situation is unacceptable.

2. Feelings:
Ask a person what they think of the situation. A worker thinks if they sign the petition, they’ll be fired, but the organizer continues to assure the worker that he or she is fighting for his or her rights.

3. Hope:
Assure the person that something can be done, that things can improve, and that now they know how to organize, plan, and win.

4. Action:
If several people participate in the action, media might attend, which makes it easier to pressure a company. If a thousand people participate, media will come. This is why it is important for you to participate, be at the action, and help.

5. Concrete Commitment:
The organizer asks if you can join the march and if you can bring three more people.

“More than a thousand people attended the march, and they had good local and international media coverage. This protest showed future allies that it was important to join in the struggle, and that was how international support from feminist organizations and unions grew.

It became clear that due to the lack of privacy at the manufacturing plant, it was easier to talk to workers in their homes rather than at the workplace. Organizers developed a system of safe houses where maquila workers could meet and plan their struggle. This system worked well for workers who lived in urban neighborhoods but was less effective in rural areas. The Rap was adapted for the commute to the plant for people traveling from the countryside. Busses became organizing spaces, so much so that workers were able to win better salaries for the bus drivers as well.”

In November 2000, SEDEPAC and Enlace—which was made up of various organizations such as Factor X, and the FAT (Authentic Worker Front) from Mexico as well as Acorn (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, SEIU (Service Employees International Union), and WOC (Workers Organizing Committee) from the United State—gathered in Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila for a retreat. During that week, the group conducted house visits to assess needs and recruit more people. The gathering not only generated guidelines for the campaign but also strengthened the workgroup. For example, Reina, one of the leaders from Acuña, assumed responsibility for the process and used the retreat as an opportunity to build leadership skills, which motivated the rest of the group to continue the struggle.

Capacity-Building Strategies

Cross-border Trainings

In mid-2000, a worker from SEDEPAC, Jessica Ponce, was selected to travel to San Francisco to be trained on how to do research by an expert on the topic. The exchange of skills was part of the continuous training that took place between Mexican and US worker organizers.
The worker leaders also participated in meetings and trainings with other groups of workers. The meetings not only strengthened their skills for the campaign but also expanded their vision. Alma, one of the leaders, explains that in those meetings she realized “there were other workers fighting for their rights just like me.” Pati, another worker, explains: “We used to say we were the only ones fighting, but when we shared our own experiences during the meetings with other workers, we realized the working conditions affected our kidneys and lungs, while in other places, working conditions affected their hands and eyes. We realized it was a global issue.”

Worker Committee

Inside the company, workers were able to organize more effectively by establishing a worker committee. The committee was a way to divide people into groups of workers where each person had a role, such as maintaining effective communication. Pati recounts, “We made a map of the company, and a worker leader was responsible for seven groups of twelve people each. Each leader was responsible for organizing their group.” The worker committee allowed them to collect signatures in a more discrete manner, communicate with the workers on the commuter buses, and make decisions quickly. Worker leaders also conducted talks on labor rights and visited pregnant workers.

Communication

As part of the struggle, it was determined that the campaign’s communication strategy had to be clearer, stronger, and more efficient than Sara Lee’s internal communications. In 2002, two before the final agreement with Sara Lee years, communication among the workers and with allies at the global level had become faster, more concrete, and more efficient than that of the company’s management.

• The team was trained on the importance of clear communication between workers.
• A filing system was set up.
• Workers were trained to keep their ears open. For example, the workers paid extra attention when foreigners visited the company in order to anticipate the company’s future plans.
• The workers mapped the factory, dividing it into sections and groups of workers.
• Leaders responsible for communicating with each area coordinated the workers’ groups.

Conflict Resolution

As on any team, there were internal conflicts in the campaign. The conflicts were not limited to those caused by difference of opinion; there were also workers who decided to work for the company-run union.

Consequently, mechanisms to avoid conflicts were established, and each group leader was trained on how to manage conflicts. These conflict resolution frameworks required consensus and mutual responsibility, and all the participants made a commitment to the plan’s success.

Technology

SEDEPAC workers were provided the equipment and training necessary to use the Internet, to access information, and to facilitate communication at the national and international levels. The Internet had a very important role in the campaign. Workers were able to communicate with organizers in Mexico, the United States, and the rest of the world in a timely and cost-effective manner. For example, in December of 2000, workers were able to stop the closure of a Sara Lee plant in Mexico in the middle of the winter holiday season. The campaign was in direct communication with information sources in the United State who at the same time were in communication with allies in Canada who were able to apply pressure and stop the branch’s closure. Voice-over IP software like Skype fostered campaign coordination among different cities around the world.

Our Voices Will Rise For Justice CD

In November of 2000, after organizer Betty Robles and Lolo Rivas from the band Jornaleros del Norte visited Los Angeles for a campaign fund-raising event, they decided to record a compact disc. Their compact disc “Our Voices Will Rise for Justice” was used to educate and inspire the workers. For example the song “Las Hormiguitas” (“The Little Ants”) narrates a story of how the ants organize themselves, which served to raise consciousness among workers and their families. According to Betty Robles, “The music calls the workers. People pay attention to the music because of the melody, and then they listen to the message; it is a way to educate. It is a way to get people’s attention, and it works as a great fund-raiser. It had a dual purpose.”

CD Cover

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13 Integrated Organizing Approach as a Tool
Workers' Personal Safety

Safety in a labor struggle is not just about safety on the job; labor struggles can become life threatening. SEDEPAC workers developed their own security plan. Between the neighbors of SEDEPAC staff and the workers in the campaign, they established ways to take care of the leaders when they left the plant and returned to their homes. SEDEPAC organized meetings at workers’ homes rather than the campaign office where they could easily be identified. Holding meetings in the company’s buses that transported the workers also helped protect workers from outside threats.

The problem with Garcia represented a moment of crisis but also an opportunity for growth. The campaign was strengthened when they had to confront the consequences of having a spy. Once Garcia was identified, he began to discredit the campaign. For example, he authored the newspaper article below in Torreon’s La Opinión titled “They seek ways to take jobs to the US: CTM complains of presence of undercover foreign informants that discourage investments.”26 For the campaign, it was a chance to strengthen the relationship with attorney Arturo Alcalde, who had been an ally and provided further legal support in which he “designed a strategy to neutralize this type of espionage.”26

Opinión Torreón February 2003

Unfortunately, not all went as planned. In 2002 the campaign experienced a security crisis. Two years prior, Raúl Conrado García Jazmín, a bilingual attorney from Mexico City offered to volunteer for the campaign. Regrettably, Garcia was an informant for Sara Lee. He disrupted the group dynamic by creating distrust, particularly between SEDEPAC and its allied organizations. In September 2002, Ana, a SEDEPAC organizer with computer training (part of the Internal Plan), noticed something strange on Garcia’s computer screen. When she saw the computer window open, she found e-mail proof that Garcia was intentionally sabotaging the campaign.

One of the international allies was asked what campaign strategy he observed as most effective. “One of the most important factors in the campaign was the time dedicated to the training while identifying potential leaders at the same time. The trainings were very beneficial for the struggle, and they gave the campaign strength.”27 The team’s capacity to struggle transcends the needs of the immediate campaign; the tools they received continue to be an asset for all participants, including those who now work at other places and on other campaigns.
**Strategy**

The Integrated Organizing Approach includes a system of making informed decisions for the campaign’s success. Strategic work includes conducting complex research about the target or corporation’s future plans. This strategy identifies future priorities and weaknesses of the corporation’s suppliers, consumers, clients, distributors, investors, competitors, regulators, and political and opinion leaders. Findings from the research help deduce the direction and goals of the corporation so that workers’ rights organizations can develop strategies and actions that have a future impact. Gathering information about a corporation is a massive research effort that requires the help of the organization’s members and allies located where the corporation operates or plans to operate. For example, Enlace and allies like Jeff Fiedler from FAST (Food and Allied Service Trades Department AFL-CIO), Kim Jackson from the Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union (UNITE HERE), and international labor conditions monitoring group Worker Rights Consortium assisted SEDEPAC with research about Sara Lee’s shareholders, corporate structure, and business plan.

Gloria Tello, one of SEDEPAC’s founders, explained during an interview that the women who are now part of SEDEPAC’s solid team came to participate in the organization with a lot of heart and desire to improve the working conditions of maquiladora workers. Nonetheless, a campaign requires a structure and strategy based on solid information to develop a realistic plan that can meet its objectives. SEDEPAC’s team learned how to conduct research, the importance of knowing the company’s future plans, and tools such as obstructing a company’s value-added processes, explained below.

**Training and Partnerships**

The campaign’s success depended on workers’ developing the appropriate campaign organizing tools and skills. Launched in May 2000, the fair wage campaign included continuous training and research to maintain an effective strategy. Jessica Ponce, one of SEDEPAC’s workers, took on the responsibility of conducting research. She went to San Francisco for a weekend to be trained by Kim Jackson of UNITE HERE. At the time, Jackson was UNITE HERE’s researcher and the hotel workers’ campaign research director. Around the same time, Roxanne Auer, researcher for the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE), traveled to Monclova to train SEDEPAC workers on research, teamwork, and developing an action plan.

“[The group of workers] knew they were missing information and had to identify allies in the United States [where Sara Lee headquarters were located]. When Enlace provided us with training, we realized that we couldn’t create an action plan without having precise information about whom we were fighting against. At SEDEPAC, it was very easy for us to organize a campaign. But Enlace told us to conduct research first.”

For Kim Jackson, the experience was a very accessible and effective way to participate in the campaign:

“As a single mother with a full-time job, I was most likely to say no to a request for help. If you ask me to do a long project, I can’t do that, but if you tell me that you need just two days to complete the assignment, then it is something I can do. It is a great model for the campaign to have access to more resources. Peter [Cervantes-Gautsch] is like a bridge that avoids reinventing the wheel and allows the campaign to have a lot more resources.”
Data Collection

The cross-border organizing retreat in Acuña in November 2000 brought together organizations from the United States and Mexico. Participating organizations included SEDEPAC, Factor X, el Frente Auténtico del Trabajo (FAT) from México, and the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), International Service Employees Union (SEIU) and the Workers Organizing Committee (WOC) from the United States. The retreat was an opportunity to conduct trainings, build internal capacity for the campaign, and gather information about workers through surveys and home visits, which helped further develop the campaign strategy. During this research and evaluation phase, the group realized that Ciudad Acuña was not the appropriate place for the campaign. With the information they gathered, organizers outlined a strategy, established priorities, and relocated the campaign to Ciudad Frontera, where they opened SEDEPAC’s offices. There were two company maquilas in Ciudad Frontera, one in Monclova and the other in Frontera. Frontera’s plant was one of the biggest in the state, which employed a significant number of workers and did business around the clock.

What are the company’s ambitions?

In the research process, organizers discovered that Sara Lee’s power structure included two executives who made company decisions. One executive controlled the current business plan, and the other was in charge of the company’s future work plans. The executive responsible for the business plan took three times longer to sign a contract with workers than the executive in charge of future business plans. As a result, the campaign had to shift their strategy. Cervantes-Gautschi explains, “The idea is to know how to disrupt the company’s future plans to create pressure. Company policies and practices that are not yet implemented are areas of vulnerability.”

Value-Added Processes

A company uses common value-added processes to implement key elements of their future plans. The campaign’s objective is to disrupt one of the processes, creating pressure on management to negotiate a resolution to the labor conflict. The worker campaign successfully focused on the company’s future supply chain management. The table below illustrates the nine most common value-added processes that corporations use to implement their business plans.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMMON CORPORATE VALUE-ADDED PROCESSES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Data Integrity</td>
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<td>Quality Improvement</td>
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Sara Lee’s Supply Chain Value-Added Process

This diagram represents Sara Lee’s supply chain management value-added process. As the diagram illustrates, products are manufactured and then shipped through the distribution system, with in-between areas that are vulnerable. In the last segment of the chain, the area between sector-based distribution and the consumer was Sara Lee’s largest area of vulnerability.

The campaign observed that Sara Lee had a conflict with Walmart over distribution of products in Mexico. Walmart planned to monopolize all distribution of products in Mexico. Sara Lee was originally focused on sector-based distribution, or distribution by product line (for example, one for coffee, one for underwear). The company wanted to move to cross-sector distribution to compete with Walmart by acquiring control of 30 percent of all product distribution in Mexico.
The diagram shows Sara Lee’s original sector-based distribution system and the cross-sector distribution system the company hoped to implement. The worker campaign targeted this attempted change and convinced Sara Lee that the campaign partners could keep Sara Lee from accomplishing this goal in Mexico. Consequently, Sara Lee was motivated to negotiate a deal with the maquila workers.
External Plan

The external plan is a system of developing national and international collaborations with ally groups that are strategically located. We identified key groups around the the world needed to support the strategy; SEDEPAC and Enlace then made plants to recruit them as new allies. These connections generated a substantial advantage for a low-wage workers’ rights campaign against a multinational corporation. The external plan was so effective, that it became the target of the company informant Raúl Conrado García Jazmín. Betty Robles explained that Raúl did not want to destroy the movement. Rather, “he wanted to destroy international solidarity among the groups because solidarity is the power of the workers.”

To develop the external plan, community-based worker centers provide direct communication by connecting activists and organizations at the international level. Although both unions and worker centers are important, there are times when the campaign must act quickly at the international level. Informal alliances through worker centers and immigrant worker organizations are strategically crucial. In the campaign against Sara Lee, the geographic scope of ACORN and other members of Enlace were instrumental in last-minute synchronized actions at various US locations.

Interviews with various allies highlighted common campaign features. The allies were mostly contacted by Enlace and were part of a previously established network. Most had worked or currently work for a union in the United States. Most actions requested of international allies were specific and short term.

The Company’s Image

Concern about company image was a window of opportunity to pressure Sara Lee to change its labor model. Enlace identified key allies in Chicago (Sara Lee headquarters) that could pressure the company by publicizing their abuses of workers in Mexico. Those involved in this effort were students and employees at the University of Chicago, SLAP (Student Labor Action Project), students at Northwestern University, labor groups, Sara Lee shareholders, and others.

In 2000, Sara Lee was the largest producer of women’s products in the world. Sara Lee Company not only took pride in its women’s products but also established a foundation supporting nonprofits that offered social services to women. Sara Lee’s marketing strategy worked to convince consumers that by buying Sara Lee products, consumers would also support women in need and working-class women. But company labor practices, with the reality of workers’ conditions in Sara Lee sweatshops in Coahuila, contradicted that message.

This contradiction presented an opportunity for the campaign. In 2002, Joe Fahey, an Enlace member from Teamsters Local 921, communicated with one of the feminist organizations that received funds from Sara Lee’s foundation. This organization called on Sara Lee executives to stop the mistreatment of women who worked for Sara Lee. This message was able to counter the bad image of the struggle that Sara Lee’s informant was creating in Coahuila; however, it failed to capture the attention of the media, but in 2004, organizations like Jobs With Justice, USAS (United Students Against Sweatshops), and SLAP were able to push the mainstream media to cover public demonstrations that exposed worker abuses in Coahuila and hence the contradictions in Sara Lee’s image and labor practices.
This publicity, together with other actions, forced the company to negotiate with the workers through Scott Nova of Worker Rights Consortium, who served as intermediary between Enlace and Sara Lee.

Letters to Sara Lee executives questioning their ethics also became a source of pressure. For example, Richard Raymond, a graduate of the School of Business Administration at Harvard, sent a letter to the company’s top management. In his letter, Raymond explained that when he started the Shoe Patch Company (in Palo Alto California, which he sold to Sara Lee), he received support from foundations and independent investors who were committed to strong principles of social responsibility. This letter together with others informed the company that its actions were having a profound effect on its image.

At the same time, Sara Lee shareholders expressed their concern about the mistreatment of workers in Coahuila and the affect it might have on their investment in the company. The campaign’s network of allies was able to contact Mike Musuraca, treasurer of the New York City Employee Retirement System (NYCERS) a substantial investor in Sara Lee. Musuraca’s participation in the campaign encouraged the business community to participate in a process that also benefitted investors. Musuraca explained in an interview, “We focused on expressing that we felt Sara Lee was compromising itself by treating workers this way. Affecting the company’s reputation put our investments at risk and we wanted Sara Lee to fix this problem. I never expressed to Sara Lee that I was fighting for worker rights. I was fighting to protect and maintain the value of what we had invested in the company.”

Synchronized Actions

On January 23, 2004, the last internationally synchronized action forced Sara Lee to the negotiating table. At the same time that workers made their demands on local management in Frontera, Coahuila, SEDEPAC and its allies held a press conference in Mexico City, allies in New York made the same demands at a meeting with important shareholders, and allies in Chicago pressured the executive board of the university where Sara Lee’s general director was a board member. In addition, allies in Paris and Mumbai put pressure on key distributors.

Organizing Tool:
Synchronized actions to disrupt the strategic objective plan

Enlace’s international network connects local organizations with global resources to put pressure on a transnational corporation. Synchronized actions that endanger the future business plans create fear in corporations and pressure it to respond to the people. All the components of the IOA contribute to determining the where, when, how, and why to stage synchronized actions to make them strategic and effective.
In order for the Integrated Organizing Approach to function, all the components—strategy, internal plan, and external plan—have to work in concert and be flexible enough to accommodate change. A crucial turning point in the campaign occurred when international actions helped organizers identify how to threaten the future plans of Sara Lee. This synchronized action surprised not only Sara Lee but also organizers who expected the company to react strongly to actions in other places like India. In reality, it was the press conference in Mexico City that had the greatest impact. The press conference shed light on the company’s plans, and it was at that moment that the campaign discovered that Sara Lee planned to transform their plants into warehouse distribution centers to compete with Wal-Mart. The action in Mexico City was the moment Sara Lee felt most threatened, forcing them to come to the negotiating table to discuss benefits for workers in Coahuila.
The organizing methodology used in the campaign against Sara Lee, defined by Enlace as the Integrated Organizing Approach, was fundamental in the advancement of maquila workers’ rights in Mexico in 2004, resulting in:

- neutrality for Sara Lee workers in attempt to unionize;
- restitution for 249 workers who were laid off;
- and 100 percent back wages for 1,200 workers and former workers. This included vacation payout and total back wages.

Although the company closed its plant in Ciudad Frontera, what remained was a dynamic network of workers, organizers, and allies with a great deal of experience in defending labor rights. After ten years of work, SEDEPAC established a physical space and formed a team of organizers to support workers in maquiladoras. Gloria Tello explains, “It was a very strong formative stage, an immense learning experience to grow and learn as a team.” Today SEDEPAC recognizes that strategic plans are accomplished with training, research, and constant evaluation.

Workers learned to protect and demand their rights. Jessica Ponce elaborates, “We established a precedent that workers can win. We won social and personal recognition for each worker. At first each worker not only saw their personal problems at home, but also injustices at work. Now they take care of their health, their families, and also their work.”

In addition to teaching workers about their rights and how to organize to protect them, the campaign developed and strengthened alliances among organizations that struggle for diverse causes. Cervantes-Gautschi explains, “Mobilizing a more diverse set of organizations strengthens the campaign. Because in order to continue forward with more success you have to target the future plans of a company and threaten to disrupt progress wherever the company has operations and in whatever sectors the company has an impact. An organization should be open to the idea of developing strong alliances with people and organizations in any cultural space or industry in the world necessary to impact the global corporation’s future strategy. [In the campaign against Sara Lee,] a burden was lifted once workers knew there was international support. Before, they felt very insecure. With international allies, workers felt more confident and could begin to organize more proactively.”

Betty Robles explains that organizers in Mexico currently face a difficult labor situation: “There are many people out of work and a very large number of injured or disabled workers, who until now have not been able to access guaranteed medical care. Therefore, we have decided we must keep fighting, so that the workers have a voice in decisions about how long a company stays in our region, not just the companies.” Workers gained organizing skills, a worker center, and leaders who know about labor rights and who are dedicated to organizing new plants. Currently, SEDEPAC is seeking a dialogue with the government to guarantee that companies that establish operations in Mexico are not doing so on a short-term or temporary basis because short-term operations allow companies to exploit workers and move on with little to no accountability.

The process of organizing using the Integrated Organizing Approach in the Sara Lee campaign shows that strategies for collaboration and coordination among groups, both nationally and internationally, are key to achieving the desired outcomes. Attorney Arturo Alcalde summarized the campaign’s lessons as follows: “I’ve learned that you need to design a common strategy for all organizations, including foundations, unions, NGOs and concerned individuals to share common objectives. I am convinced that there is an urgent need to pressure the Mexican government to change practices that render workers powerless and unable to defend their rights.”
The Enlace Institute’s purpose is to advance the field of strategic organizational development and to develop peer trainers within Enlace member organizations and close allies who can become resources to their own groups as well as to the social and economic justice movement overall. The Institute assists organizations of low-wage workers to develop disciplined, mutually accountable teams who continually improve the work of the organizations for their constituencies. The Enlace Institute helps them develop the expertise to make continual internal improvements, evaluate their work and plan effective campaigns that empower the working poor in the face of plant closures, hostile legislative and ballot initiatives, raids by ICE, vigilante-style violence against immigrants, diminished access to human services and abusive employers.

The Enlace Institute provides trainings in Enlace’s frameworks. These are collaborative brainstorming processes that are useful for virtually all work groups in base-building organizations, including top staff leadership teams, strategy groups, organizing teams, boards of directors, and teams that include volunteers, unless otherwise noted. A few can be used by an individual. Enlace Director Peter Cervantes-Gautschi first developed the frameworks in the 1980s. They have been built upon and improved over the past 15 years by Enlace trainers and participants from more than 150 organizations.

For more information about the Peer Training Program and other opportunities at the Enlace Institute, please contact info@enlaceintl.org.
Endnotes


6. Economic Census data was analyzed by the Center of Socio-Economic Research of the Autonomous University of Coahuila.

7. Ibid., p. 70.


16. For definitions of Enlace’s Team Frameworks, see http://enlaceintl.org/institute/enlace-frameworks/frameworks-for-high-performance-organizations/150/.


22. Alma.


24. Pati.


32. Betty Robles.


35. Gloria Tello.

36. Jessica.

37. Peter Cervantes-Gautschi.

38. Betty Robles.

39. Arturo Alcalde.