Trade unions and the work-family balance
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5 DIGGING DEEPER: NEGOTIATORS’ VIEWS

In Chapter 3, it was concluded that factors influencing trade union behaviour with respect to work-family issues could not be deduced satisfactorily from collective labour agreements, since these agreements are also affected by the input of the employer. In Chapter 4, trade union bargaining agendas were researched instead. Four conclusions were drawn in this chapter: the share of women covered by a CLA and the extent to which work-family provisions have been included in the preceding collective agreement affects trade unions’ work-family agenda for the new CLA (2); the exact role of the union’s central recommendations is yet unclear (3); to some extent, the specific trade union within which the bargaining agenda is drawn up determines the content of the agenda (4). These conclusions, while shedding some light on agenda setting processes within trade unions, also generate new questions. For each of the four themes, I will summarise the conclusions and pose the new questions.

MEMBERS VERSUS NON-MEMBERS

As in Chapter 3, the first analysis in Chapter 4 was run by using the share of female employees covered by the CLA as an independent variable, but without significant results. The original assumption that a larger demand for work-family provisions results in a larger supply of these provisions, or at least trade unions’ effort to supply, is either incorrect or too simplistic. The lack of correlation can be understood by realising that although a large share of female employees likely increases the demand for female-friendly provisions, it also increases the costs for the employer, who, as one party at the bargaining table, might therefore be less inclined to accept unions’ proposals for fuller-fledged and more expensive work-family provisions. Still, it seems likely that unions tune their agendas to the preferences of employees, or at least those that are union members, since unions are expected to maximise their members’ utility (Ulph and Ulph 1990). This implies that we should find a relationship between the share of women covered by the CLA and work-family items on the union’s agenda.56 The results from Chapter 4 do not confirm this, however, so the question arises how trade unions, and in

56 Data on female union membership at CLA level was unfortunately not available at the time of this research.
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particular the union negotiators, are affected by the preferences of their members. Another interesting issue concerns the extent to which and the way negotiators distinguish between members’ and non-members’ preferences when drawing up their agenda. If unions are seen as political organisations, serving the needs of heterogeneous members and potential members alike (Booth 1984, Booth 1995b, Naylor and Cripps 1993), then issues benefiting both members and non-members should have a place on the agenda (Lowe and Rastin 2000).

THE PRECEDING CLA

The amount of work-family provisions in the preceding collective agreement is negatively correlated with the importance attached to work-family issues on the bargaining agenda. If a CLA has well worked-out work-family arrangements, then there is little need for trade unions to put the item foremost on their agenda; equally, if the work-family arrangements in a CLA leave much to wish for, the item will take a prominent place on the union’s agenda. From this result, it was concluded in Chapter 4 that trade unions have an ideal package of work-family provisions in mind, and that they strive for a situation in which this package is included in each collective agreement they bargain over, irrespective of the exact distribution and preferences of employees covered. The fact that there are a number of CLAs that have precise work-family scores far above average may be due more to the employer than to the union. The question is whether these conclusions are justified. Is it indeed trade unions’ policy – at least the policy of FNV – to create satisfactory work-family conditions in all CLAs they bargain over? And although this objective seems unconnected with preferences of covered employees, can we be sure that this is indeed the case? What is trade unions’ negotiators’ perspective on these issues? The expectation is that negotiators will continue bargaining over specific work-family arrangements when they feel that these arrangements have not yet been implemented in the CLA to their full satisfaction.

CENTRAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The central recommendations that the FNV trade union association issues forth each year, called the ’FNV Arbeidsvoorwaardennota’, are assumed to provide its negotiators with input for their bargaining agendas. This is what Traxler (1994) called direct coordination. Quantitative analysis on 278 bargaining agendas does
not confirm this assumption, however; at least, not with respect to work-family issues. An explanation for this unexpected finding could be the fact that the variable ‘The importance of the work-family issue in central recommendations’ has little variation: either 1 (for bargaining agendas which were drawn up in the years 2002 and 2003) or 2 (for bargaining agendas which were drawn up in the year 2001). This was the main reason to exclude central recommendations from the analysis in Chapter 4. Still, common sense dictates that recommendations at central union level are likely to be used as guidelines for negotiators at decentralised levels, when establishing their bargaining agendas. Perhaps negotiators do not follow these guidelines to the letter or in all respects, but it seems implausible that central recommendations should have no influence on decentralised agenda setting. Thus, the question is whether and how FNV negotiators let FNV central recommendations steer their agenda setting processes. Does variation exist in how negotiators deal with this, and what do they do when recommendations conflict with their own ideas about agenda setting?

**Communities of practice**

The T-tests for difference between means, performed in Chapter 4, showed that in several instances, there were significant differences between the mean values of work-family agenda scores of distinct industry groups. For instance, in the FNV industry group Trade, an average work-family agenda score of 7.07 was measured, which is significantly more than the score for the industry group Transport (2.55; α = 0.017). Subsequent linear regression showed that four of the five industry groups had an impact on the dependent variable: in Shipping, Manufacturing, Services and Transport, agendas tended to have low work-family agenda scores compared to the reference category. It was concluded that the specific market sector in which a union negotiator operates has an influence on the importance attached to work-family issues, at least if we take their bargaining agenda as evidence. There may be sector specific targets negotiators pursue, and negotiators may be influenced by colleagues who work in the same sector, as far as the importance of work-family provisions is concerned. This form of trend following is also known to exist among employers, who look to innovative, trend setting companies when deciding on new labour policy courses to follow. Visser (2004), for instance, refers to the process of trend-setting and trend-following behaviour in wage bargaining, where implicit coordination and some form of in-
formation exchange could lead to countries or branches of industry copying one another's policy with regard to wage setting. Trade union negotiators may work as a catalyst in this process, by pointing out to employers they bargain with that these employers cannot stay behind when other companies in the same branch of industry have already adopted certain provisions in their collective labour agreements. The following questions now bubble up: does this form of idea sharing or copying indeed exist among trade union negotiators? Do they look at their colleagues' agendas to find inspiration for their own bargaining agenda, and does colleagues' opinion about work-family issues matter to them in such a way that it influences their own agenda?

**FILLING IN THE BLANKS**

In this section, the questions that have arisen from the research results in Chapter 4 are listed concisely.

1. *The share of women covered by the CLA*
   - To what extent do employee preferences affect negotiators’ agenda setting?
   - Do negotiators distinguish between members’ and non-members’ preferences when creating the bargaining agenda?

2. *The preceding CLA*
   - Over the years, do bargaining objectives stay on the agenda until they have been accomplished to the negotiator’s satisfaction?
   - Is it FNV’s policy to create satisfactory work-family conditions in all CLAs they bargain over?
   - To what extent is this policy related to preferences of covered employees?

3. *FNV’s central recommendations*
   - Do FNV central recommendations affect FNV negotiators’ agendas, and if so, how?
   - Does variation exist in how negotiators are affected?
   - What do negotiators do when recommendations conflict with their own ideas about agenda setting?
4. Colleagues

- Does idea sharing or copying exist among trade union negotiators?
- Do negotiators look at their colleagues’ agendas to find inspiration for their own bargaining agenda?
- Does colleagues’ opinion about work-family issues matter to them in such a way that it influences their own agenda?

The figure below depicts the theoretical model as first formulated in Chapter 4. The factors supposedly affecting the trade union negotiators’ bargaining agendas are numbered in the same order as the numbered list above: ‘Employees’ symbolises the influence of union members and non-members on the agenda; ‘WFb in CLA0’ stands for the influence of the level of the work-family balance (WFb) in the CLA preceding the bargaining agenda; ‘central recommendations’ symbolises the impact of central FNV policy on decentralised agendas; and ‘communities of practice’ refers to the hypothesis that fellow negotiators interact, learn from one another and copy ideas and agenda items. Note that there are no longer plus and minus signs next to the arrows, because the research results from Chapter 4 indicate that for three of the four factors, the relationship with the agenda cannot be confirmed (1), cannot be explained (3) or can only partially be found (4).

Figure 5.1. The theoretical model of factors related to the bargaining agenda.

The apparent underlying complexity of the model makes it difficult, if not impossible, to discover the processes that affect trade unions’ agenda setting. Part of the problem may lie in the fact that the CLA and bargaining agenda samples are so diverse. They cover all branches of industry, and the hypothesised effects of
the model may become less visible if negotiators in one branch of industry operate differently than those in another. For instance, if negotiators and employers in education attach more value to work-family provisions than negotiators and employers in the financial sector, then taking these branches of industry together in one analysis will blur the effect of the share of women on work-family provisions. In Chapter 4, I controlled for this by adding FNV industry group as an independent variable, which provided some indications for sector specific differences. Lastly, the exact manner in which trade union negotiators deal with the FNV’s central policy guidelines, preferences and needs of members and non-members alike, and attitudes of colleagues, cannot be distilled from just the quantitative data that the DUCADAM dataset provides. This is why interviews are necessary.

5.1 DATA AND METHODS

The selection of the DUCADAM dataset that consists of CLAs from 2001, 2002 and 2003 (the ‘CLA sample’, as used in Chapter 3), includes 217 distinct FNV negotiators, 60 of whom are female. In Chapter 4, a further selection was made, consisting of all available bargaining agendas related to the CLAs from these years. In this selection, the ‘bargaining agenda sample’, 98 FNV negotiators can be distinguished, 25 of whom are female. Eight interviewees were selected from this group of 98 negotiators, to form the ‘interviewee sample’.

The interviewee sample was selected on the basis seven criteria. The most important reason to prefer a systematically drawn sample to a randomly drawn sample is a preference for maximum variation with respect to important research variables. Especially in an interview setting with fewer interviewees than might be statistically representative, this preference was considered important. The selection criteria, ranked from most to least important, are the following.

1. A large trade union size in terms of collective agreements bargained over;
2. Several negotiators from a few trade unions rather than one from each;
3. Both public sector and private sector negotiators should be present;

57 This example does not necessarily reflect reality, but is only given for the sake of the argument.
58 Each CLA can be linked to one FNV negotiator who bargained over this CLA; each FNV negotiator can be linked to one or more CLAs he or she has bargained over.
4. Negotiators having bargained over a collective agreement more recently than others should be selected sooner;
5. Respondents bargaining over collective agreements covering both high and low shares of female employees should be selected;
6. Idem in terms of high and low precise work-family scores;\textsuperscript{59}
7. Negotiators having bargained over the preceding CLA should be selected before negotiators not having done so.

The first two selection criteria are related to the negotiator’s specific trade union: the negotiator sample needed to be representative with respect to the bargaining agenda sample, as described in Table 4.6. Furthermore, it seemed better to select more than one negotiator from only a few trade unions, rather than one negotiator from each union; this way, it would result in more detailed pictures of several trade unions, rather than only one story per trade union. Thus, the three best-represented trade unions were chosen. These three trade unions are the AOb (General Teachers Union) and the AbvaKabo FNV, both public sector unions, and FNV Bondgenoten for the private sector. In Appendix 5.1, a complete list of all FNV affiliated trade unions that bargain over CLAs is given. From this list, it becomes apparent that the three aforementioned trade unions are among the four largest FNV trade unions in the Netherlands.

In the sample of 278 bargaining agendas, exactly one negotiator represented the AOb. Therefore, no further selection criteria could be applied, and this negotiator was invited to talk about the research issues of Chapter 5.

In the selection of AbvaKabo agendas, five negotiators were present. These were ordered according to the recentness of their latest bargaining agenda. The criterion of recentness is used because negotiators are assumed to remember recent history better than earlier events, which implies that they would be more able to remember the backgrounds and motivations surrounding setting up the agenda. The three most recent were then checked with respect to the fifth criterion. Since they had bargained over collective agreements covering both high and low shares of female employees, they were entered into the interviewee sample.

\textsuperscript{59} Negotiators working for the FNVZ, a union for sea-faring employees and therefore obviously not much involved in work-family issues, were excluded from the sample on purpose.
To be able to select from the 83 distinct FNV Bondgenoten negotiators represented in the collection of 278 bargaining agendas, the agendas that were made by these FNV Bondgenoten negotiators were divided into four categories, as shown in Table 5.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Share of female employees covered by the CLA</th>
<th>Precise work-family score in the current CLA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High (&gt;50%)</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 (3)</td>
<td>3 (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low (&lt;20%)</td>
<td>5 (6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1. Number of FNV negotiators (and their bargaining agendas) in the bargaining agenda sample, categorised by share of female employees and WFb-score in the CLA. A high WFb-score means ≥ 30 pts and a low score is ≤ 10 pts.

The two dimensions of the table are the share of female employees covered by the CLA (which is the main independent variable), and the precise work-family score in the current CLA (which is the dependent variable in the first empirical chapter, Chapter 3). The share of female employees is divided into two categories: high (more than 50 per cent) and low (less than 20 per cent). These boundaries are chosen based on the distribution of the share of female employees over the existing CLAs. The precise work-family score is also divided into two categories: high (30 points or more) and low (10 points or fewer). Theoretically, a CLA can have the precise work-family score of 100, but since the highest score in the sample is 53, and only 37 of the 278 CLAs have a score of at least 30, the boundary of 30 is chosen for the ‘high’ category. One FNV negotiator was picked from each category, based on the criterion of recentness of their bargaining agenda.

When contacted and asked to participate in this research project, all trade union negotiators turned out to be willing to cooperate. In Table 5.2, details of the eight interviewees are given. The interviewee number in the first column will be used in the rest of this chapter to make clear which negotiator has given certain statements. The second column lists the trade union they work for, followed by their gender, the CLAs they have bargained over during the years 2001, 2002 and 2003, and the branch or branches of industry the CLAs can be situated in. The
names of the exact CLAs can be found in Appendix 5.2. The next column shows the duration of the latest CLA they had bargained over\(^6^0\). The column ‘Preceding CLA’ indicates whether the interviewee has bargained over the CLA preceding the most recent one (as mentioned in the column ‘Most recent CLA’). This is relevant information when considering the influence of the preceding CLA on the current agenda because, if a negotiator has had a specific work-family arrangement as an item on their previous agenda, he or she may be more motivated to continue bargaining over the item during the than if it had been another negotiator previously bargaining over the item.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee number</th>
<th>Trade union</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Share of female employees</th>
<th>Most recent CLA</th>
<th>Preceding CLA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>ABVAKABO</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Cross-sector</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>ABVAKABO</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Welfare</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>2003-2003</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>ABVAKABO</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Energy and Water</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>AOb</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Bondgenoten</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>2003-2005</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Bondgenoten</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Chemical sector</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Bondgenoten</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Trade, Chemical sector</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Bondgenoten</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Chemical sector</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{60}\) I.e. their latest CLA in or before 2003. This year is chosen because the CLA sample and the bargaining agenda sample are at most only as recent as 2003.

\(^{61}\) This interviewee recently retired from working as a negotiator, although he is still active as a consultant.
I first contacted the FNV negotiators between February 13th and 22nd 2006. The interviews took place from February 17th until March 14th 2006, at the workplace of each negotiator. The interviews, which were held by myself, were digitally recorded on a voice recorder and lasted between 1 and 2 hours each. They were semi-structured interviews; the questions were closely based on the hypotheses from Chapters 3 and especially 4. In Appendix 5.3, the list of questions can be seen (in Dutch). The recordings were subsequently summarised in an interview protocol and put to paper, resulting in eight documents of three to five pages, or approximately 1400 to 2600 words. These were then sent to the interviewees for comments; no disagreements with its contents were conveyed.

For each of the four independent variables, or themes, all relevant information was filtered from the eight interviews, after which these data were used to obtain answers to the research questions. Obviously, if interviewees have different points of view on an issue, these are discussed in detail. It may follow from this that one cannot draw clear and unambiguous conclusions with respect to the research hypotheses. Negotiators’ quotes are included in the text throughout the ‘Results’ section when applicable, in order to illustrate the points made in the respective sections. Each section also includes a box of quotes that the researcher deemed most interesting or striking with respect to the appropriate theme.

As mentioned before, the interviewed negotiators work for three different FNV trade unions: AOb, the teacher’s union; AbvaKabo, the union for public organisations; and FNV Bondgenoten, the union for organisations in manufacturing, trade, ICT, services, transport, farming and metal. The negotiator for the AOb has bargained over collective agreements for teachers in primary, secondary, tertiary and adult education, while the three negotiators from AbvaKabo have experience in the welfare sector, the quite diverse sector of social employment and the energy sector (see also Table 5.2). The negotiators from FNV Bondgenoten have bargained over CLAs in the chemical sector, manufacturing, transport, and trade. Without exception, the interviewees have a long history of working for the union, ranging from 19 to 32 years. This is relevant for at least the hypothesis about social networks, communities of practice and organisational learning or copying of ideas, since it can be assumed that negotiators with a long history of union work have had many opportunities to be well integrated into the organisation, have many social contacts, and therefore know whether and in what way communities of practice may exist.
5.2 Results

Members versus non-members

Do the interests of union members conflict with those of non-members? Are preferences of union members different from those of non-members? This is a relevant issue, since provisions in CLAs are valid both for union members and non-members. If these conflicts and differences exist within the group of employees that is covered by one collective labour agreement, how do negotiators tackle this problem? If they indeed perceive it as a problem, do they look at their members’ needs first, or do they try to keep all employees happy? How do they deal with these issues?

The two most significant differences between members and non-members are age and gender. Union members are on average older employees (45 years of age) and they are men. As Negotiator 6 (male, in his 40s, FNV Bondgenoten) put it: “that greying mass”. This is not the primary target group for work-family arrangements, because it is customarily parents between 25 and 40 years of age who have childcare responsibilities, and then usually women. It may be apparent that preferences of union members are typically wage, pensions and working time schemes, while those of the younger (and female) non-members are wage and childcare provisions.

When union negotiators put work-family items on their bargaining agenda, they derive much of their inspiration from the needs in the sector. All eight interviewees confirm that specific preferences in the organisation or the branch of industry they bargain for influence his or her agenda formation. Negotiator 2 (male, in his 50s, Abvakabo) put it like this: “And I am a bit of an autonomous anarchist who takes pleasure in what others have thought up for me and my sector [i.e. centralised union policies], but subsequently likes to talk with the people in the sector about which elements we can use” (italics added). This fits with Ulph and Ulph’s (1990) statement about unions trying to maximise their members’ utility, in the sense that negotiators respond to specific preferences of actual members they talk to, rather than generalised preferences in the FNV Arbeidsvoorwaardennota. Negotiator 5 (female, FNV Bondgenoten) underlines the fact that the employees
she bargains for, such as touring car drivers and ship personnel, are away from home for extended periods of time, and therefore not interested in provisions for combining work and family life. These people are usually men who are mainly interested in their job and the exciting challenge of working in an uncommon type of surrounding; once their girlfriend of wife bears a child, they often say farewell to this life. The specific characteristics of the branch of industry this negotiator works in strongly determine her agenda.

Negotiators contact their rank and file in the sector typically through lay official groups, consisting of union members working in an organisation and representing all union members who work in the same organisation. Lay officials are employees who voluntarily serve as an intermediary between the organisation (in case of an enterprise CLA) and union negotiators. Through them, employee preferences reach the negotiator. Individual contact with union members takes place during voting processes on agendas and bargaining outcomes, during member meetings and when members contact the union’s complaints service. However, all interviewees confirm that direct communication with members is sparse, especially if members are covered by a sector CLA: “I’ll tell you honestly: the number of people reflecting [on bargaining agendas] is often very small, and almost always concerns the same people. You could almost phone them personally afterwards. […] There are lay officials that play a role, but the bottom line is that it’s the negotiator who determines the bargaining agenda.” (Negotiator 7, male, in his 40s, FNV Bondgenoten). This conflicts with Freeman and Medoff’s (1984) statement that unions can be seen as vehicles for collective expression of concerns and desires, since the influence of members on the union’s agenda seems to be smaller in practice than in theory.

Trade unions are supposed to represent the interests of their members – that is the very nature of the concept of a member organisation. However, trade unions are also supposed to be responsible for bargaining for satisfactory working conditions for people in employment at large, whether they are union members or not. Consider an organisation where half of the employees are of an age that childcare responsibilities are an issue, and the other half is above forty years of age. Since the average union member is typically a middle-aged man (FNV Marketing & Communicatie 2005), it is very well conceivable that most of the older employees in the mentioned organisation are member of the union, while most of the
Digging deeper: negotiators’ views

younger employees are not. Union negotiators are now placed before a dilemma: should they make work-family provisions an issue when bargaining with the employer of this organisation, and thus serve the interests of the non-members, or should they listen to their members and concentrate on other benefits like work schedules and early retirement plans? This is a dilemma that most, but not all of the interviewees feel keenly. They see it as their responsibility to provide good labour agreements for all employees, irrespective of trade union affiliation. Obviously, there is a (voluntary) catch here: bargaining for non-members may push them into joining the union as a member. "It would be good to try and meet with employees who are not a member of the union into the CLA process, and tell them to speak up, preferably as a member," says Negotiator 3 (male, in his 50s, Abvakabo). This implies that unions do have an incentive to invest in non-members’ interests, contrary to what Teulings and Hartog (1998) have stated. Negotiator 3 stresses the fact that, although involving non-members in matters of bargaining agenda setting is something to strive for, voting on the outcome of negotiations should solely be the privilege of members. His attitude on this subject is closely connected to the issue of the representative trade union, because enticing non-members to become a union member may restore or increase the union’s bargaining power.

- "[We represent our members], but as a matter of fact, we are also the group of all employees in the education sector, and we try to represent this broadly." (Male, in his 50s, AOb).
- "It would be good to try and meet with employees who are not a member of the union into the CLA process, and tell them to speak up, preferably as a member." (Male, in his 50, Abvakabo)
- "I’ll tell you honestly: the number of people reflecting [on bargaining agendas] is often very small, and almost always concerns the same people. You could almost phone them personally afterwards." (Male, in his 40s, FNV Bondgenoten)

Box 5.1. Negotiators’ quotes about members and non-members.

Negotiator 4 (male, in his 50s, AOb) has quite a strong opinion about representing non-members when bargaining over work-family issues, which adequately summarises the union’s point of view on the aforementioned dilemma. He feels there should be a ‘balance of generations’, which implies that although union
members tend to be the older employees, there has to be enough profit in labour terms and conditions for younger employees. “And if they [the union members] do not agree,” he says, “then I no longer feel like doing this job and they can just vote me out, because I think this balance is important. We are not only a trade union, but also an occupational group, and we expect employees to be professional and emancipated, so we are sort of a mediator. [We represent our members], but as a matter of fact, we are also the group of all employees in the education sector, and we try to represent this broadly.” He hastens to add that there is a slight condition attached to the union’s paternalistic attitude: it only works if members can be convinced of the wisdom of including work-family provisions in the CLA, because ultimately, the members decide on the outcome.

In Chapter 2, three models of member-union relationship were described. Let’s hold them against the light of these results. The economic exchange model of Bamberger et al. (1999), in which unions are characterised solely as service providers to self-interested members, does not do justice to reality, since unions are obviously providing a broader service than to members alone; by bargaining for non-members, who are usually younger employees than union members, unions also look to the future of both the labour market and the unions themselves. Bacharach et al. (2001) use a model of solidarity, in which emphasis is placed on social obligations between members and unions. This seems to be nearer the truth, although solidarity must be seen in a wider perspective than just between unions and their member – non-members play an important role too. In the model of covenantal relationship, devised by Snape and Redman (2004), employees become members of a union because of intrinsic motivation to help the union and fellow employees. It is this view that best explains the manner in which negotiators deal with the dilemma of serving members versus serving non-members, because it centralises the concept of a healthy labour market by providing for all employees, and not just union members.

Summarising this section, it appears that members can formally exert influence over the trade union’s bargaining agendas through feedback mechanisms. That said, the actual establishment of the agendas and defining the agenda items seem to be not so much related to what members or employees want, but what union policy makers and board members, and especially the union negotiators perceive as useful for the sector or the company. Negotiators communicate with
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their lay officials, and through them they get to know what is useful and wanted. Direct influence of members on the contents of the agenda comes only after the agenda items have been formulated, and even then the influence is marginal, though decisive.

THE PRECEDING CLA

Is it FNV’s policy to create satisfactory work-family conditions in all CLAs they bargain over? Over the years, do bargaining objectives stay on the agenda until they have been accomplished to the negotiator’s satisfaction? To what extent is this policy related to preferences of covered employees? The eight interviewees have each commented on these issues.

Four negotiators confirm Chapter 4’s conclusion that achieving a minimum level of work-family provisions in all CLAs is one of FNV’s objectives, irrespective of the current employee. The other four neither confirm nor counter it. Once more referring to the ‘balance of generations’ quoted by Negotiator 4 (male, in his 50s, AOb) earlier in this section, the objective of bringing about a specific minimum level of work-family provisions in all CLAs, even though union members may disagree, can be important enough to risk losing one’s job. Negotiator 2 (male, in his 50s, Abvakabo) says that the objectives of the Abvakabo sometimes go even further than those of the FNV Federation where the combination of work and care is concerned.

Achieving the intended ideal level of work-family provisions in the CLA takes time, says negotiator 1 (female, in her 50s, Abvakabo); often, four to five years of bargaining are needed. First, a limited arrangement is agreed upon, after which it is improved each time. This explains why issues keep appearing on negotiators’ agendas each time. Of the eight interviewees, six state that bargaining topics that have not satisfactorily been negotiated during the bargaining sessions of one year will return on next year’s agenda, until the ideal, as declared by the union, has been achieved. Negotiator 3 (male, in his 50s) illustrates this point as follows: “Year after year, I’ve included the increase of paid parental leave in my agendas, because if I cannot achieve a goal during one set of bargaining rounds... there are always new opportunities in new rounds, that’s what I always say.”
Issues around introducing and improving work-family provisions in CLAs are usually resolved faster with leading, trend-setting companies, whose owners can afford them more easily than other companies. Therefore, negotiators often aim to make collective agreements with these trend-setting companies in the sector first, after which they can use their success story during negotiations with smaller companies – ‘Look, that leading company has adopted this arrangement, and you should not stay behind’. This confirms Visser’s (2004) theory about the existence of company trend-setting and trend-following behaviour through implicit coordination and information exchange. According to negotiator 7 (male, in his 40s, FNV Bondgenoten), an additional advantage of having previously made an agreement with a trendsetter is the fact that negotiators can now offer practical examples of these arrangements when bargaining with smaller companies, thus making it easier to convince employers of the rationale of making the agreement.

Negotiator 6 (male, in his 40s, FNV Bondgenoten) summarises the procedure as follows. "I put the item on the agenda of all twelve CLAs I negotiate, and in the end it becomes clear that in two cases I have been successful. The year after, I visit the other companies and tell them I’ve made deals with their neighbours, so by the end of the second year, I’ve struck a bargain with eight companies, and after three years, all twelve have agreed on the issue." Negotiator 8 (male, in his 60s, FNV Bondgenoten – retired) corroborates this strategy, but emphasizes the importance of clear legislation and existing norms concerning the work-family provisions. Only if there is sufficient clarity, trend following companies may indeed agree to include the provisions in their CLA.

> “It is AbvaKabo policy to organise work-family provisions well, even more stringent than the Arbeidsvoorwaardennota, and that affects the contents of the bargaining agendas more strongly than the apparent needs of our rank and file.” (Male, in his 50s, AbvaKabo)

> “Year after year, I’ve included the increase of paid parental leave in my agendas, because if I cannot achieve a goal during one set of bargaining rounds… there are always new opportunities in new rounds, that’s what I always say.” (Male, in his 50s, AbvaKabo)

Box 5.2. Negotiators’ quotes about the preceding CLA.
Continuous developments in law and jurisdiction occasionally require trade unions to adjust their labour conditions policies. Two interviewees distinctly make this point. The aforementioned developments can affect union agenda setting in two ways. If new legislation is introduced that regulates a specific issue, there is little point anymore in unions keeping the issue on their agenda. For instance, in 2001, the Work and Care Act was introduced, which granted employees the right to 13 weeks (in case of a fulltime job) of unpaid parental leave. This made unions’ aim to integrate parental leave schemes into CLAs goal obsolete. However, the Act allows for exceptions, disadvantageous to employees, in CLAs. For example, if the employee works abroad or has not been with the company for at least a given number of years, the right to parental leave can be invoked. This gives unions new bargaining objectives, like insisting that the right should hold for all employees, or that employees should be (partially) paid during their leave. Similarly, changes in legislation can interfere with union agenda setting if they force unions to take up new agenda items, even though existing items also demand attention. As negotiator 7 (male, in his 40s, FNV Bondgenoten) verifies, this puts pressure on negotiators to start bargaining over new issues before old ones have been fully worked out. One of the implications is that the ‘old’ issues return on next year’s agenda. Negotiator 3 (male, in his 50s, Abvakabo) feels this pressure too, although he sometimes resists it in favour of bargaining over the items that are on his current agenda. He justifies this by pointing at preferences of members, who want their negotiator to continue trying to realise the exiting agenda items, and to “give it another try if necessary”.

Summarising this section, there are clear indications that achieving a specific minimum level of work-family provisions in each CLA is part of FNV’s labour policy. Sometimes it is the members or lay officials that persuade their negotiator to put pressure on the employer to include more extensive work-family provisions in the CLA; more often, it the negotiators themselves who take the initiative to attain a better work-family balance for employees. Therefore, work-family items stay on their agenda until they are accomplished, unless new legislation renders the items superfluous or necessitates a different formulation. The realisation of work-family provisions usually takes some time with employers of trend-following companies, because they wait to see what the leading companies in the sector do.
CENTRAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The central recommendations that the FNV Federation sets each year in September, the ‘FNV Arbeidsvoorwaardennota’, can be seen as guidelines for negotiators to make their own, decentralised bargaining agenda. In this section, several accounts are given of how FNV negotiators tune their own agendas to the central policy.

Obviously, the arrows of influence between central and decentralised policy making are pointed in both directions: central guidelines steering decentralised bargaining agendas, and union members, lay officials and negotiators giving input to central policies. Union members transmit their preferences through lay officials, who talk to union negotiators, and some (but not all) negotiators brief this information to the policy makers of the union. The direct influence of negotiators on the contents of the union’s central labour policy is restricted, however, and it is usually the policy makers and the board who decide on the union’s policies. “It’s not really democratic”, negotiator 6 (male, in his 40s, FNV Bondgenoten) admits. He is a member of a CLA coordination group, and the members of this group “are allowed to say something” during the creation of the Arbeidsvoorwaardennota.

Six negotiators confirm literally that the FNV Arbeidsvoorwaardennota is the starting point when establishing their bargaining agenda, while two assert they use the Nota when drawing up their agendas, albeit not as stringently as the other six. This is in line with Van den Toren’s (1996, 2001) and Van Houten’s (2004) research conclusions that central recommendations carry a long way down. However, all eight negotiators agree that it is the specific situation in the sector or the company, with employees’ needs and preferences, that comes second if not first. “The Arbeidsvoorwaardennota, that is the start of the thinking process. It is usually still a concept version, and it governs our in-house discussion: within the boundaries of the Nota, we fill in our own ideas and conceptions. This results in a labour conditions letter, which serves as a guideline for us negotiators. Then I take this letter to my lay official groups and ask them, ‘Guys, what are we going to write down in our proposal letter?’ ” says negotiator 3 (male, in his 50s, Abvakabo). Another Abvakabo interviewee (nr. 2, also male and in his 50s) underscores the fact that the Arbeidsvoorwaardennota serves as only a rough guideline. He states that the content of the Nota is compared to the sector
specific needs, and continues to say that "those Arbeidsvoorwaardennota’s are, luckily, rather conceptual. This means you will always find something in it you can use." Negotiator 8 (male, in his 60s, FNV Bondgenoten – retired) confirms this, by saying that "one has a reasonably large freedom in determining one’s agenda. There is coordination concerning CLAs, obviously, but this coordination is mostly directed to the fact that items from central recommendations are included in bargaining agendas, and not to bargaining results."

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**Box 5.3. Negotiators’ quotes about central recommendations.**

Negotiator 1 (female, in her 50s, Abvakabo) also describes the FNV Arbeidsvoorwaardennota as the core document from which her own bargaining agendas are deduced. "The items on the agenda must fit within the boundaries of the Arbeidsvoorwaardennota." This strict condition can be problematic, however, since "every so often it causes frictions with respect to what is good for a certain branch of industry." Considering that work-family provisions were one of the major issues on the FNV Arbeidsvoorwaardennota of 2001, she illustrates this by explaining that the employees covered by the CLA she bargains over are predominantly men above 40 years of age with physical and/or mental disabilities. This makes it hard to defend agenda items like childcare and parental leave, usually a more interesting issue for younger employees. In this case, negotiator 1 tries to translate the leave arrangements mentioned in the FNV Arbeidsvoorwaardennota (maternal leave, parental leave) to different kinds of leave, more
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suited to the needs of the employees in her sector (e.g. special occasions leave). The consequence is that issues like parental leave, even though they are included in her bargaining agenda, are the first items to be traded off during negotiations.

This story is quite similar to the one told by negotiator 5 (female, FNV Bondgenoten). Bargaining mainly over CLAs in the transport sector, she explains that employees are often away from home for extended periods of time, effectively eliminating the need for work-family arrangements. For example, a crew-member working on a ship that travels for weeks on end cannot suddenly take up childcare leave – he has to be on the ship to fulfil his role in a close-knit team. The team would have serious problems otherwise. This is recognised by employer and trade union alike. Since the average age of employees this negotiator is bargaining for is 52, childcare leave is not much of an issue. Not having included these issues in her agendas, she has had to defend herself more than once vis-à-vis the union board that had demanded work-family items on the decentralised agendas. However, considering the specific situation of her branch of industry, she has always been successful in convincing the board of her motives.

The FNV Arbeidsvoorwaardennota is less rigid and binding now, in 2006, than five years ago, says negotiator 7 (male, in his 40s, FNV Bondgenoten). The central wage claim is the only aspect of the Nota that is kept a strict eye on nowadays. "Look," he illustrates, "this Arbeidsvoorwaardennota, well, each and every colleague will claim to follow it precisely, but I will tell you honestly that the Nota is far from leading for my proposal letters." He explains that this is caused by the fact that negotiators often have more than enough existing issues to deal with. However, he does feel that work-family issues ought to be taken care of in CLAs, to benefit not only employees but also the employer, since not including work-family arrangements in spite of employees’ wishes "will only cause rustling and buzzing [in the organisation]."

Remarkably, the causal relationship between the guidelines of the central recommendations at FNV federation level and the contents of decentralised bargaining agendas sometimes works the other way around. The Advakabo, being the public sector FNV union, is often more progressive than other trade unions when it comes to labour terms and conditions, for instance with respect to paid parental
leave. In this case, Abvakabo work-family policies served as a source of inspiration for the FNV Arbeidsvoorwaardennota instead of vice versa.

To summarise this section, the FNV Arbeidsvoorwaardennota is always the starting point for union negotiators, followed very closely, and occasionally even overtaken by member preferences on work-family issues. Sometimes negotiators need to creatively translate the Arbeidsvoorwaardennota to fit their own ideas, and now and then the guidelines of the Nota are ignored, so that in the end, the bargaining agenda is formulated in such a way that it serves the employees of the sector or company best.

The Netherlands are a corporatist country (Hartog et al. 2002). In corporatist countries, we should see ‘soft’ rather than ‘hard’ bargaining, and coordination institutions tend to streamline collective bargaining, which results in greater levels of agreement between parties (Hopmann 1974, 1995). Although this may be true at the conceptual level, down on the shop floor we see that coordination only works as far as the specific preferences of employees in the sector allow. Central recommendations at union federation level give negotiators a framework that they can fill in according to how they and their lay officials interpret the sector’s needs.

**Colleagues**

To determine whether and how union negotiators can be influenced by one another, we first need to take a look at their opportunity structure. FNV negotiators meet with one another both formally and informally. The frequency of the formal gatherings depends on the specific trade union: on average, negotiators working for FNV Bondgenoten gather once a month (which is too infrequent, according to Negotiator 7), Abvakabo negotiators meet twice or three times per month, and AOb negotiators have one meeting a week. There are different types of meetings, depending on the objectives. During policy meetings, the contents of the FNV Arbeidsvoorwaardennota is discussed and translated to fit the labour policy of the specific trade unions. Team meetings or regional meetings, having a more practical nature, are meant for informative talk about what has been achieved so far during negotiations, about negotiators’ bargaining tactics, and about possible or
actual obstacles encountered during the bargaining process. Informal meetings usually take place in the corridors or in negotiators' offices. This can happen intentionally, when colleagues need to coordinate an action or when they need to talk about issues they are currently dealing with, or unintentionally, when they accidentally run into one another, for instance, the coffee machine. Aside from physically meeting one another, there are several other forms of communication like email and telephone, which negotiators use to contact and thus possibly influence one another.

Most interviewees indicate that they have a lot of informal contact with colleagues. Proximity is an obvious cause for this, as Negotiator 4 (male, in his 50s, AOb) states: "I often have informal discussions with colleagues, since both guys have their office right next door." He is also Coordinator Labour Conditions, and in this capacity has a responsibility to act as chairman of meetings and the person for fellow negotiators to talk to, the consequence of which is that he has even more contact with colleagues. The same is true for Negotiator 6 (male, in his 40s, FNV Bondgenoten), who explains that he is regional coordinator in the southwestern part of the Netherlands. This requires him to be regularly present in the office, to be available to other negotiators who might want to discuss policy or bargaining issues with him. Conversely, a colleague of Negotiator 6 visits the office only once a week on average, due to the large distance between his home and the employers he bargains with on the one hand and the office on the other. Obviously, this colleague has less face-to-face contact with colleagues in the office than Negotiator 6, and might therefore be less likely to be influenced by them. Negotiator 1 (female, in her 50s, Abvakabo) and Negotiator 8 (male, in his 60s, FNV Bondgenoten – retired) have a different opinion on the frequency of informal contact than the other interviewees. Negotiator 1 says that there is not much informal discussion about work, agendas and negotiations. She feels this is due to the union’s organisational culture: "it is still a macho world, and you don’t talk about your successes. That way, it is safe, and easy." There is coordination and information exchange only within the organisational segment (the public market sector) – necessarily, since negotiators within one segment sometimes need to replace one another. She continues to give an account of an attempt to set up voluntarily talk groups within her organisational segment, two years ago, in which colleagues would have the opportunity to talk about difficult situations and problems they encounter when dealing with employers. Although the concept
has been copied in the other organisational segments, the turnout is meagre, since it turned out that union negotiators find it difficult to talk about their own problems. She thinks this is inherent in the type of person that feels attracted to this kind of job. Negotiator 8 agrees with her. "The job of a union negotiator is a difficult one, because you are always under pressure to achieve, and you always find yourself in a vulnerable situation. Therefore, you won’t be quick to walk over to a colleague and say, ‘hey, I have these and those problems, and I can’t seem to fix them. How do you handle that?’ This kind of behaviour does not fit in the culture of trade unions."

Thus, it appears that there are different opinions about the extent to which the job of a negotiator is a companionable one, and about the willingness to open up to and learn from one another. The question remains to what extent idea sharing or copying exists among trade union negotiators, and if negotiators look at their colleagues’ agendas to find inspiration for their own bargaining agenda. Copying of ideas does indeed exist, according to two interviewees, both in terms of ideas for the agenda and ideas for bargaining tactics. To start with the second type, negotiators often use colleagues’ bargaining results as leverage in their own bargaining rounds, so says Negotiator 6 (male, in his 40s, FNV Bondgenoten). For instance, if one negotiator has worked out a parental leave scheme with an employer, then fellow negotiators can use that scheme to present to the employer they are bargaining with, considering that it is easier for an employer to grasp the implications of including a certain work-family provision in the CLA if the characteristics of the scheme are clear. "It is important that this kind of information [the characteristics of the scheme, and possibly the response of the employer] is exchanged as soon as possible”, says Negotiator 6. "This is an especially effective tactic if colleagues work in the same office. Communication between colleagues in different regions is generally less frequent and up-to-date, if it exists at all.” Greer also asserted that physicians are more likely to adopt new techniques or interventions if they can rely on their own experience or colleagues’ recommendations (Greer 1988). This tactic closely resembles the strategy mentioned in the section about the preceding CLA: to use one’s bargaining success with one trend-setting company to persuade employers of trend-following companies to include an already worked-out work-family arrangement in their CLA. Negotiator 3 (male, in his 50s, Abvakabo) agrees with Negotiator 6 by stressing the importance of shared knowledge. He gives an example of a negotiator running into a problem
and suggesting that it be put on the general agenda, because he suspects that other negotiators will soon come across the same problem in their bargaining activities. This way, all negotiators can profit from solutions to bargaining problems.

Box 5.4. Negotiators’ quotes about colleagues.

- "If a colleague has solid arguments to make his point, I am quite willing to accede." (Male, in his 50s, AOb)
- "Yes, of course! With all due respect, I think a union negotiator doesn’t do his job if he doesn’t look around, being alert to agreements made elsewhere. He should not have the pretence that he must think it all up himself." (Male, in his 40s, FNV Bondgenoten)
- "It is important that this kind of information [the characteristics of the scheme, and possibly the response of the employer] is exchanged as soon as possible." (Male, in his 40s, FNV Bondgenoten)

Copying of ideas for bargaining agendas seems to be common within the FNV too, although not all negotiators agree on this. Negotiator 2 (male, in his 50s, Abvakabo) believes that colleagues influence one another when they discuss items for the bargaining agendas; for instance, the topic of compensation for unpaid parental leave was discussed between many negotiators, some of who thought this the responsibility of the employer while others considered it the government’s responsibility. In order to achieve the desirable situation in which all negotiators had the same opinion on the issue, some of them had to be convinced by the others to change their point of view. When comparing this situation to the theory about copying normative behaviour of the actors in one’s reference group, as described by Hedström, Kolm and Åberg (2003), it seems that FNV trade union negotiators do not copy ideas or bargaining strategies just because colleagues use them. The ideas need to be grounded with arguments before negotiators are willing to accept them. The best time to influence colleagues, argues Negotiator 4 (male, in his 50s, AOb), is when the new AOb labour policy is drawn up. "That is when our policy is composed, and we decide what is important for the next bargaining period. If a colleague has solid arguments to make his point, I am quite willing to accede", he says. Negotiator 7 (male, in his 40s, FNV Bondgenoten) heartily confirms that he copies ideas from colleagues. "Of course! With all due respect, I think a union negotiator doesn’t do his job if he doesn’t look around, being alert to agreements made elsewhere. He should not have the pretence that he must think it all up himself. On the contrary, I believe it [efficient labour con-
ditions formation] wouldn’t even function that way. I think that my proposal letters, and those of others… that one watches the others, and that one thinks, ‘hey, that looks good, I’ll use that too.’” He adds that ideas still need to be translated to fit one’s own specific circumstances. On a side note, he also adds that where idea copying is concerned, he views his fellow negotiators from the CNV and De Unie trade unions more as colleagues than he does his colleagues within the FNV. Negotiator 3 (male, in his 50s, Abvakabo) also admits to being influenced by colleagues. He asks them to inform him about issues they encounter in companies whose employees they bargain for, and on that basis makes decisions on what to put in his own agenda. ”So in that sense, we are quite tuned to each other.” Only Negotiator 1 (female, in her 50s, Abvakabo) feels differently about this issue. In line with her earlier comment on the small amount of inter-negotiator communication within her trade union, she emphasises that she does not let colleagues’ remarks influence her bargaining process. Once her bargaining agenda has been drawn up, she sticks with it, she says, although she does take the time to respond to these colleagues.

Summarising, the mixed and sometimes ambiguous results in Chapter 4 about negotiators’ colleagues influencing each other’s bargaining agendas are reflected by the qualitative data. Most negotiators are willing to copy their colleagues’ ideas if they are backed up with arguments, and they are eager to copy bargaining tactics if they turn out to be effective. This corresponds with the research results of Greer (1988), who asserted that professionals are more likely to adopt new techniques if they can rely on colleagues’ experiences and recommendations. It is more difficult to square with the different form of copying behaviour that Hedström, Kolm and Åberg (2003) describe, because trade union negotiators do not seem to feel a normative pressure to conform to colleagues’ ideas unless these ideas are well grounded. Obviously, for a negotiator to admit that he or she is copying ideas solely because these ideas are reflecting the norm might damage his or her credibility as a strong and independent actor, which is something to be avoided. For this reason if for nothing else, the remark several negotiators make about well-grounded arguments behind new ideas is fitting.

As already described in Section 2.3, Greco and Eisenberg (1993) distinguish six different types of persuasion, of which FNV negotiators use only two to influence their colleagues. Persuasion by education: by exchanging information on best
practices and agenda items, and accompanying this with argumentation, negotiators may feel inclined to copy their colleagues’ bargaining tactics or parts of their agendas. In the case of negotiators copying one another’s bargaining tactics, however, we cannot speak of a conscious attempt to actively influence colleagues. Negotiators also use persuasion by feedback on colleagues’ practice through commenting on problems encountered by colleagues during their bargaining rounds, and giving them feedback on how to improve their tactics. Once more, however, this is influencing rather than active persuasion. Trade union negotiators do not use the other four persuasion techniques – participation of colleagues to bring about change, setting up administrative rules, giving financial incentives or claiming financial penalties. This can be understood by realising that education and feedback are the only two mechanisms of the six that can effectively be used amongst equals, while only superiors can apply the other four.

Still, horizontal coordination between colleagues is infrequent, and bargaining remains a task to be performed alone. As a consequence, the individual characteristics and opinions of negotiators sometimes play a role in their agenda-setting processes. “I suspect that the rigor with which negotiators defend certain items at the bargaining table certainly depends on the negotiator him– or herself”, asserts Negotiator 2 (male, in his 50s, Abvakabo). Being an older employee himself, he sometimes becomes aware of the fact that he attaches more value to job retention for older employees than for younger ones. Not only during negotiations, but also when setting up his bargaining agenda. Negotiator 8 (male, in his 60s, FNV Bondgenoten – retired) also believes that this bias exists, voicing his expectation that the increase in female negotiators over the past decade boosts the attention for the work-family balance during collective bargaining. This result is an interesting finding, because it contradicts empirical results in earlier chapters. In Chapters 3 and 4, hypotheses were formulated about the trade union negotiator’s gender affecting, respectively, bargaining outcomes and agenda items with respect to work-family issues. Although these hypotheses could not be confirmed with quantitative empirical data, the qualitative findings in the current chapter suggest that convictions about the influence of negotiators’ characteristics on bargaining processes do exist among negotiators.
5.3 Conclusions

Some of the posed hypotheses and tentative conclusions from the previous two empirical chapters are confirmed by the responses of the negotiators, while others are not. However, it may be prudent to regard the outcomes of Chapter 5 with a bit of reserve, since the interviewee sample consists of only eight negotiators working for three different FNV trade unions. The CLA sample of Chapter 3 contains 217 distinct FNV negotiators, while the agenda sample of Chapter 4 contains 98 distinct FNV negotiators. Although a sample of eight might be considered quite small, whether this is indeed the case should depend on the amount of variation between the subjects with respect to the relevant criteria. As discussed in Section 5.1, this was regarded to be the case. Furthermore, although the interviewer has aimed to remain critical, there is always the possibility that the interviewees, be it wittingly or unwittingly, have sometimes given social preferable answers rather than the exact truth.

This having been said, the theoretical model has survived the input of the qualitative data reasonably unscathed, meaning that the assumed relationships in the model have been confirmed by the data, although they must be redefined a bit. In Figure 5.2, the model is graphically depicted once more, with the addition of three dotted lines.

Figure 5.2. The theoretical model of factors related to the bargaining agenda.

The assumption that a larger share of female employees results in more attention being paid to work-family issues on the negotiator’s agenda, if other factors are
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held constant, was based on the assumption that the negotiator is informed correctly about the needs and preferences among the covered employees, and draws up the agenda accordingly. However, among the covered employees, non-union members have no formal influence on the negotiator’s bargaining agenda, and union members have only indirect influence. In order for union members to influence the agenda, member meetings are organised during which members negotiators can express their ideas, preferences and opinions. Still, member involvement with union agenda setting is marginal, and members who do visit member meetings are usually older men who may not have work-family issues as their prime interest. Thus, it appears as if the influence of CLA covered employees, both members and non-members, on the trade union bargaining agenda is rather limited, which explains the lack of correlation between the share of women covered by the CLA and the importance of the work-family issue on the agenda.

This is connected closely with the following. It is one of FNV’s policies to realise a certain basic level of work-family provisions in all CLAs, irrespective of the preferences of the current employees covered by the CLA, and irrespective of members’ preferences. The reason behind this policy is that labour terms and conditions should proactively be created, so that by the time the older employees retire and new, younger employees have to be recruited, the necessary provisions are already there. Obviously, union members have the right to vote against a bargaining result if they do not like it. For instance, if the work-family bargaining results, which are interesting for typical non-members, have been achieved at the cost of improved protection measures for older employees, which are interesting for typical union members. In practice, negotiators therefore confront their rank and file and try to convince them of the wisdom of including these work-family provisions, in view of the needs of future employees.

The FNV Federation’s central recommendations are the starting point for negotiators: they define the framework within which negotiators have freedom to set up their bargaining agenda, formulating agenda items according to their lay officials’ and their own perception of what provisions are needed for employees. There is some variation as to how strictly negotiators follow the guidelines, however. Some will make sure to include all items of the Arbeidsvoorwaardennota in their agenda, placing items they deem less important for employees they bargain for lower on the agenda, to be given up at the bargaining table as soon as something
else can be traded off. Others will only put items on the agenda that they think are needed in the sector or company, which sometimes results in them having to defend their agenda to the union board.

Finally, colleagues are also a source of influence on negotiators’ agendas. If a colleague has convincing arguments about why placing a certain item on the agenda is necessary, negotiators are quite willing to comply. And if a colleague has a well worked-out work-family provision proposal on his agenda, negotiators may very well want to use this for their own bargaining agenda, because it saves them the trouble of working out something of their own. This is especially attractive if a proposed provision has proved to convince an employer at the bargaining table. Not only do negotiators copy agenda items, they also use their colleagues’ bargaining tactics if they have turned out to work successfully.

The four factors of the theoretical model all exert their individual influence on negotiators’ agendas. As it turned out, they are, to some extent, interrelated as well. The FNV’s central recommendations are based on the supposed needs and preferences of employees, so in this respect, employees affect the contents of the FNV Arbeidsvoorwaardennota, albeit very indirectly. Negotiators themselves have moderate opportunities to influence the Arbeidsvoorwaardennota too; they can make suggestions and proposals. Usually, however, it is the FNV’s policy makers and board members who draw up the Nota. Finally, the extent to which work-family provisions are included in the CLA chronologically preceding the negotiator’s agenda may affect employees’ preferences. For instance, if there are ample work-family provisions in the CLA, the wish for more or better provisions will be modest, all other influences held constant.

This chapter has been a logical continuation of the previous chapter, in the sense that it tried to answer the questions that were raised at the end of Chapter 4. In the next chapter, the additional value of the qualitative data is scrutinized, as well as how these data have altered the theoretical model as described in Chapters 3 and 4.