UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

Trade unions and the work-family balance
Schreuder, K.P.A.B.

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: http://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
6 IN CONCLUSION: EFFECTS ON TRADE UNION AGENDA SETTING

In this dissertation, I started out with the assumption that as a result of the increase of female labour participation of the last decennia, women’s demands would carry more weight in collective bargaining. To test this, I compared the extent to which work-family provisions have been included in each collective labour agreement to the share of female employees covered by this collective labour agreement. In the next empirical part of the research, I concentrated on trade unions’ bargaining agendas instead of collective labour agreements, in order to suppress the influence of the employer on the work-family balance in the collective labour agreement. Lastly, to fill in the blanks and explain unexpected findings, I interviewed trade union negotiators about factors affecting their agenda setting processes.

6.1 WORK-FAMILY ISSUES IN CLAs

After having researched 769 recent collective labour agreements, to determine whether there is a correlation between the share of women covered by a CLA and the extent to which work-family provisions have been included in the CLA, it appeared that such a correlation could not be found. Figure 6.1 shows a graphical representation of the research results of Chapter 3. An arrow marked by a question mark means that no significant relationship could be found, and an arrow indicated by # means that there is a significant relationship, but not as hypothesised. An explanation for the lack of correlation as mentioned above could be the fact that, although a large share of female employees likely increases the demand for female-friendly provisions, it also increases the costs for the employer. Employers have to find a balance between investing in work-family provisions to retain and attract employees, and saving on expenses that may not directly result in increased profits. Thus, since trade unions and employers both negotiate over collective labour agreements, a high share of female employees may not automatically result in a large amount of work-family provisions in the CLA.
In conclusion: effects on trade union agenda setting

That the employer plays an important role can also be concluded from another research finding. Contrary to expectations, structural wage increase turned out to be positively correlated with the level of work-family provisions in the CLA, implying that employers only agree to generous work-family provisions if they have the financial room to do so. Seemingly, this is a more important reason for social partners to include work-family provisions in the CLA than female employees’ demands.

Lastly, there is a significant difference between company and sectoral CLAs concerning the extent to which work-family provisions are included. In sectoral CLAs, more extensive work-family provisions are included than in company CLAs, possibly because the concept of CLA funds, usually set up separately to finance exit arrangements, schooling, labour policymaking and other kinds of employee provisions, is more common in sectoral CLAs.

Examining collective labour agreements to determine the role of trade unions in creating and improving work-family provisions in CLAs turns out to be an inadequate method, however, since the influence of the employer on CLA outcomes is

Figure 6.1. Empirical model of factors affecting the work-family balance in CLAs.
clearly felt. The union’s individual influence cannot be distilled very well when only looking at the CLA. The trade union’s bargaining agenda appears to be a more appropriate research object in this respect, which is, therefore, the next step in the research process. Possibly, some of the question marks in Figure 6.1 can then be removed.

### 6.2 WORK-FAMILY ISSUES IN UNIONS’ BARGAINING AGENDAS

Does the work-family issue have a more prominent place on trade union’s bargaining agendas when the relevant CLA covers a relatively large share of female employees? Research of 278 union bargaining agendas showed that, just like in the scenario where the CLA was the object of research, the existence of a relationship between the share of female employees and work-family provisions on the union’s agenda could not be found.\(^2\) Figure 6.2 depicts the model as concluded from Chapter 4. Clean arrows represent a significant correlation as hypothesised, and arrows that are marked with a ‘?’ signify unconfirmed relationships.

A factor that does appear to affect the extent to which work-family issues are included in trade unions’ bargaining agendas is the amount and the extensiveness of work-family provisions included in the collective labour agreement preceding the bargaining agenda (CLA\(_0\)). If these are high, meaning that employees enjoy generous employment conditions with respect to work-family issues, the attention being paid to the topic on the union’s agenda is low; and vice versa. This implies that unions strive towards a specific level of work-family provisions in all CLAs, irrespective of branch of industry or type of employees covered. This is called the equalising principle, which fits the trade union’s traditional policy-oriented and political approach, rather than an approach in which the rank and file come first and foremost.

---

\(^2\) Replacing the dependent variable with the share of young parents, which might be considered a more suitable category of employees in this particular research since fathers may also profit from work-family provisions, yielded no significant results either.
In conclusion: effects on trade union agenda setting

Contrary to expectations, no significant influence could be found of the union's central recommendations (the FNV Arbeidsvoorwaardennota) using quantitative analysis. While it seemed logical that trade union negotiators derive inspiration for their bargaining agendas from FNV's central recommendations, the analysis could not confirm it. It would be hasty to draw conclusions from this finding as yet, however, since this analysis was based on only three FNV Arbeidsvoorwaardennota's. In addition, it seems likely that central recommendations take time to filter down into bargaining agendas, which may disturb the directly measurable correlation between the two variables.

There are distinct clues that trade union negotiators who work in the same industry groups have similar bargaining agendas with respect to the attention being paid to the work-family balance. There may be two underlying reasons for this. As hypothesised, negotiators working in the same branch of industry may confer
with one another on a regular basis, and therefore influence each other with re-
spect to views on what should be included in bargaining agendas. Another expla-
nation involves employee needs and preferences in the branch of industry nego-
tiators work in. If all negotiators in one industry group observe a similar em-
ployee preference pattern and draw up their agenda accordingly, all bargaining
agendas in this industry group will obviously have similar content.

Yearly average wage increase, which played a prominent role in explaining the
level of work-family provisions in the collective labour agreement, has lost its
meaning in the model that explains the trade union’s bargaining agenda. This
seems quite logical when considering that sufficient financial leeway is a condition
for the employer, and not for the union negotiator, to include work-family provi-
sions in the CLA.

Chapter 4 has answered questions raised after conclusions had been drawn from
Chapter 3, but in its turn has raised new questions. It still remained puzzling
whether employees and their preferences affect the contents of bargaining agen-
das; the exact influence of central recommendations was still clouded; and the
existence of communities of practice within trade unions seemed verified, but not
quite satisfactorily. Therefore, researching the issue once more by interviewing
trade union negotiators in Chapter 5 served to shed some light on the as yet un-
explained issues. The remaining question marks in Figure 6.2 might possibly then
be removed.

6.3 WORK-FAMILY ISSUES AND UNION NEGOTIATORS

In the next phase of the research, eight FNV trade union negotiators were inter-
viewed about factors determining the extent to which work-family issues were
being included in the union’s bargaining agendas. This qualitative part to the oth-
erwise quantitatively oriented research project proved to be a useful addition, in
which previous results could be held against the light, corrected and fine-tuned.

Central FNV recommendations turned out to be leading to some extent for nego-
tiators in determining their bargaining agendas after all, as asserted by all re-
In conclusion: effects on trade union agenda setting

spondents. This seems understandable, because negotiators are obliged to conform to these recommendations; they can be called before the union’s council to defend themselves if they have deviated in one way or another. This research result is at the same time remarkable, since the quantitative analysis of Chapter 4 showed no significant effects of vertical coordination on bargaining agendas. The most likely explanation is that in the analysis of Chapter 4, there was insufficient data to be able to find significant results. With only three different CLA years with aggregated data on central recommendations and bargaining agendas, significant effects are hard to discover. Moreover, it is difficult to predict the exact time lag effect central recommendations may have on trade union bargaining agendas. Additional data would be required to predict whether and to what extent central recommendations suffer a time lag to have their effect felt, and if these lags change over the years. This lies outside the scope of this dissertation. Figure 6.3 shows the empirical model after the results obtained from the interviews have been implemented.

The second factor steering trade union negotiators’ agenda setting is the situation in the sector, and particularly the needs and preferences of employees. Negotiators gather information about this by talking to colleagues, reading articles and news bulletins, meeting with lay officials and sending out questionnaires to union members. An area of tension is clearly visible here, when on the one hand, trade unions try to improve employment conditions for employees at large, but on the other, they need to satisfy their members’ preferences. In the case of bargaining over work-family provisions, it is obvious that this is beneficial mostly to non-members, the usual union member being a man in his late forties. In Figure 6.3, the arrows between employees and members on the one hand and the trade union’s agenda on the other are marked with a '#' because the results turned out to be different from the hypotheses. There is a relationship, but one that is difficult to test empirically using data on collective agreements and bargaining agendas. The share of female employees covered by a CLA does not directly affect trade union negotiators – rather, it is the general conception that work-family provisions should be available for employees in the Netherlands.

Trade union members and their influence on union agenda setting were not specific research subjects in this dissertation. However, since they do turn out to affect the way negotiators deal with work-family agenda setting by causing areas of
tension for negotiators between member and non-member interests, they are in-
cluded in the model in Figure 6.3.

The amount of work-family provisions in the preceding CLA₀, and the extent to
which they have been satisfactorily worked out, affects the union’s bargaining
agenda. This was concluded in Chapter 4 and confirmed by the interviewed nego-
tiators. They asserted that it is indeed FNV trade union policy to achieve a specific
minimum level of work-family provisions in all collective labour agreements the
FNV bargains over, with the intention that all branches of industry are equally ac-
cessible for women and young parents. To put it slightly more adequate, the FNV
has the intention that the lack of work-family provisions in employment condi-
tions should form no barrier for employees to remain in or find new employment.

Figure 6.3. Second empirical model of factors affecting the work-family balance in
trade unions’ bargaining agendas.
In conclusion: effects on trade union agenda setting

The interviewees confirm that communities of practice, in which colleagues use formal and informal communication to exchange information and ideas, do exist within trade unions. As it turns out, there are two types of information exchange between negotiator colleagues. The first concerns information about bargaining topics, and the second concerns information about bargaining tactics. In the hypotheses of this dissertation, only the first type is mentioned. It was hypothesised that colleagues are likely to have similar bargaining agendas if they work in the same industry groups and therefore probably exchange information, views and ideas about bargaining agenda issues. While several negotiators did confirm that they were willing to copy ideas if these were well argued, the practice of copying ideas is not so common that it will result in bargaining agendas becoming more similar because of it. The fact that bargaining agendas are still similar within industry groups, at least with respect to work-family issues, should probably be credited to industry-targeted policies at the level of the individual trade unions and to negotiator responses to industry-specific needs and preferences. The second type of information exchange, sharing best practices and bargaining tactics, appears to be more common among trade union negotiators. For instance, if one negotiator has successfully bargained with an employer, having agreed to include a certain work-family provision in the CLA, fellow union negotiators are interested in copying the first negotiator’s proposals, especially if they were well worked out. This may help them in their own collective bargaining. This copying behaviour has no effect on the amount of attention being paid to work-family provisions on a colleague’s bargaining agenda, however – merely on the way proposals are worked out and phrased.

6.4 A reflection on the literature

Up to a point, the results of this dissertation are in line with OECD research results, which stated that there is a strong correlation between the share of female employees and the amount of work-family provisions available to them (OECD 2001). The OECD has reported their findings at country level, and at the country level in the Netherlands, there seems to be a causal relationship between these two variables. At CLA level, however, this dissertation offers no evidence to further support the OECD findings. Still, work-family provisions have been included and expanded in Dutch collective labour agreements, which is largely due to trade unions’ efforts. Like Visser (1999) has stated, the part-time discussion has moved
Trade Unions and the Work-Family Balance

away from the kitchen table and has been pushed towards the social partners’ bargaining table.

As Watts and MacPhail (2004) imply, women take the presence of work-family provisions into account when deliberating which branch of industry to work in. Theoretically, trade unions managing to introduce work-family provisions in most or all branches of industry could impact women’s occupational mobility, since women would then no longer be ‘restricted’ to only a few female-oriented branches of industry.

Teulings and Hartog (1998) formulated rather strongly that that unions have little incentive to invest in non-members’ interests, particularly since that could only be done at the expense of members. Ulph and Ulph (1990) emphasise that trade unions try to maximise the utility of their members. However, the results of this dissertation contradict these views. Most of the interviewees of the qualitative chapter 5 assert that non-members’ preferences do affect trade union negotiators’ bargaining agendas, not only in order to attempt to increase their member count, but also as a result of negotiators’ general sense of responsibility for the well-being of the employed population. This fits Charlesworth’s assertion that if the needs of female employees are to be recognised, their working time preferences should be part of the bargaining agenda (Charlesworth 1997). It also fits the public choice model of Booth (1984, 1995b) and Naylor and Cripps (1993), which views unions as political organisations that not only represent different member groups, but also need to take account of potential members. This squares with Snape and Redman’s concept of the covenantal relationship between trade unions and their members (Snape and Redman 2004). In this type of relationship, union members are intrinsically motivated to help both the union and their fellow employees, which grants the union large amounts of freedom to draw up bargaining agendas directed at employees at large, rather than just their members. This dissertation shows that Dutch trade union agenda setting is indeed based on a covenantal relationship with union members, and not so much on the economic exchange relationship of Bamberger et al (1999), in which members are self-interested and trade unions are only service providers.

One of the conclusions of this dissertation is that the FNV’s central recommendations direct trade union negotiators when drawing up their bargaining agendas.
In conclusion: effects on trade union agenda setting

This implies that vertical coordination is certainly present within trade unions. Van den Toren (1996, 2001) and Van Houten (2004) both researched the influence of recommendations of the Foundation of Labour, which is an advisory body consisting of representatives of employers and trade unions. Although theirs is a slightly different example of vertical coordination, this dissertation partially confirms their conclusions that central recommendations affect labour policymaking at lower levels.

Horizontal coordination in trade unions takes two forms: borrowing of ideas to include on the bargaining agenda, and copying of bargaining tactics. The second form, in which negotiators use bargaining successes of colleagues to sway an employer during their own bargaining rounds, resembles most closely the idea of efficient organisational learning in communities of practice, as formulated by Brown and Duguid (1991). After all, it is something that is not learned through official training or from books, but through communicating and sharing knowledge with colleagues.

In this dissertation, evidence was found for what Cookson and Dolan (2000) called the 'fair innings' argument, which implies that every employee covered by a collective labour agreement is entitled to a similar package of work-family provisions. This specific argument about the work-family balance originates from Cookson and Dolan’s view on the equalising principle, which says that everyone is entitled to a similarly long and healthy life. It turns out that trade unions exert effort to bargain over work-family provisions in all branches of industry and with all employers, irrespective of needs or preferences existing in a specific workplace or at a specific time point. As trade unions see it, all collective labour agreements should be essentially alike in terms of work-family provisions. This actually implies that correlations between the share of female employees covered by a CLA and the extent to which work-family provisions are included in a CLA cannot be found.

This dissertation began with the assumption that female labour participation and work-family provisions in CLAs were empirically correlated, since it seemed plausible theoretically and since both entities have increased side by side during the past decade. Trying to prove this assumption at the level of the collective labour
agreement, however, yielded no evidence. But when the trade unions’ underlying agenda setting processes were scrutinised, it appeared that the increased labour participation of women did have its effects on collective labour agreements after all. Through bottom-up communication from employees via lay officials and trade union negotiators, enlarged by media and political attention, preferences for work-family provisions in the CLA reached the trade unions’ agendas. These preferences pressed trade union policy makers to include work-family topics in their central recommendations, and as a consequence, compelled negotiators to include them in their bargaining agendas. Thus, while the correlation between female labour participation and work-family provisions in CLAs is obscured at CLA level, it is definitely present at national level.