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**AMSTERDAM INSTITUTE FOR  
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**BOXING AND DANCING:  
DUTCH TRADE UNION AND WORKS COUNCIL  
EXPERIENCES REVISITED**

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## ABSTRACT

This paper contains a quantitative analysis of approaches and results of 67 projects of Dutch company union groups and Works Councils to influence technological and organisational change, in three generations between 1975 and 1996. The effectiveness of problem-solving activities jointly undertaken with management ('dancing') in realizing advances in quality of working life proved to be higher than that of own activities solely undertaken by union groups and Works Councils. Yet, such activities were more effective in improving their own position *vis-à-vis* their constituency and/or *vis-à-vis* management. The scores on own activities were on average substantially higher than on joint problem-solving: even in these projects, active union groups and Works Councils mostly chose for a strong own profile, related to 'boxing' practices. This has notably been the case in manufacturing, in larger organizations and where relatively high union densities prevail.

Dit paper bevat een kwantitatieve analyse van benaderingen en resultaten van 67 projecten die door Nederlandse vakbondsgroepen en Ondernemingsraden zijn ondernomen om technologische en organisatorische veranderingen te beïnvloeden, in drie generaties van 1975 tot 1996. De effectiviteit van activiteiten gericht op het gezamenlijk met management zoeken naar oplossingen ('dansen') bleek ten aanzien van het verbeteren van de kwaliteit van de arbeid groter dan die van louter eigen activiteiten van bondsgroepen en OR'en. Daarentegen waren zulke eigen activiteiten effectiever voor het versterken van de eigen positie tegenover de achterban en/of tegenover het management. Gemiddeld kwamen de scores op eigen activiteiten hoger uit dan die op gezamenlijke probleemoplossing: zelfs in deze projecten kozen bondsgroepen en OR'en er meestal voor om zichzelf flink te profileren, een praktijk die verbonden is met 'boksen'. Dit blijkt vooral het geval te zijn geweest in de industrie, in grotere organisaties en bij een relatief hoge organisatiegraad.



## TABLE OF CONTENT

<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. DEVELOPMENTS IN DUTCH INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1. Union company representation	5
2.2. Unions and Works Councils	7
<b>3. OUR METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>4. RESULTS OF OUR ANALYSIS</b>	<b>15</b>
4.1. General overview of results	15
4.2. Analysis per industry and region	17
4.3. Analysis of generations and duration of projects	22
4.4. Analysis of company size and union density	24
<b>5. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>APPENDIX</b>	<b>37</b>





## I. INTRODUCTION

The authors have been co-operating with researchers and trade union practitioners from eight countries in a research project, focusing on trade union strategies and exploring the relationship between social partnership and union renewal in a comparative context. This 5 years' project recently resulted in a book (Huzzard *et al*, 2004). Throughout this project the terms '*boxing*' and '*dancing*' have been used as metaphors for various strategic choices and activities of actors engaged in industrial relations, denoting adversarial and co-operative modes of engagement respectively. The adversarial approach ('boxing') to joint regulation, normally associated with collective bargaining, is contrasted with approaches where employers, unions and Works Councils seek to co-operate and work together ('dancing') to find common ground for mutual gains. In the view of the 'Boxing and Dancing' (B & D) research group, 'boxing' and 'dancing' are not merely opposing strategic options, but also elements that can be used in varying combinations within strategic behaviour of actors engaged in industrial relations. Of course, these terms are not representations for new phenomena: the employment relationship has always been built around shifting patterns of conflict and co-operation. Yet, the B & D metaphor enables a better understanding in specific practices and arrangements developing in larger, from the outside stable systems. 'Boxing', for example, also takes place in social partnerships or within the Dutch 'polder model', but here boxing practices are not dominant, and 'dancing' can also be seen in adversarial industrial relation systems, but for the time being it is no dominant characteristic in for example the UK industrial relations. Elements of confrontation and zero sum strategies can be grouped under the denominator 'boxing', guaranteeing the own positions of actors to be well visible, but the search for joint problem-solving, building mutual trust and sharing mutual gains is a main characteristic of 'dancing'.

As the Dutch industrial relations are known for their dual system of workers' representation, with both unions and Works Councils, we analysed in our contributions to the 'B & D book' developments in both parts of the system, including their mutual relationship (Van Klaveren & Sprenger, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c; Sprenger & Van Klaveren, 2004b). In a contribution for the International Labour Process Conference (ILPC) 2004 in Amsterdam, we also used the conceptual framework of the B & D project for a future-oriented reflection about the strategic options open for innovative trade unions. We explored opportunities and risks of three major strategic choices: a. organise on a larger scale, by merging and concentrating, moving towards a 'unionism of scale'; b. offer specific, high quality services for different groups of individual (potential) members and for collectives like Works Councils; and c., expand the union's strategic portfolio with social partnering competencies, enabling various mixes of boxing and dancing (Sprenger & Van Klaveren, 2004a).

In the first instance we will look backward in and by this paper. We judge the conceptual framework developed in the B & D project robust and stimulating enough to apply it on a interesting phenomenon in the Dutch industrial relations landscape: the efforts of union groups and Works Councils at shop-floor and company level to influence technological and organisational change. In recent years these efforts seem to be undervalued, at least in mainstream industrial relations research. We will revisit a number of case studies in which such efforts have been described, and from these cases we will select, quantify and measure key elements.<sup>1</sup> We suppose that this exercise can be of help in deepening research on trade union renewal and innovation. The revisited case studies have in majority been carried out by ourselves or by colleagues with whom we are familiar. We have been involved in 28 out of the 67 cases selected: in 14 cases for shorter or longer periods in time as worker consultant, and in another 14 in the combined capacity of worker consultant and researcher.<sup>2</sup> This position enabled us to go back to protocols and basic materials, internal reports, minutes of meetings, etcetera. In another 10 cases we carried out interviews, mainly additional to earlier research efforts of others. For the remaining 29 cases we fully relied on written material of others.

Typical for all cases analysed here is that they are positioned at what we regard as one industrial relations level, that of the company, location (establishment) and shop-floor. A key question we try to answer in this paper is twofold:

- Is it possible to upscale and quantify the results of these experiences documented at company level to 'higher' IR levels (industry, region, national), and which are the outcomes for union practitioners and researchers from such a transformation of data (from qualitative to quantitative analyses)?

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<sup>1</sup> The authors have the ambition to strengthen the 'revisited' aspect of this exercise, and plan to contact trade union officials responsible for negotiations with the companies and institutions involved (if still existing) combined with consulting Social Annual Reports to check the actual situation. By adding this longitudinal approach, we aim at more in-depth conclusions regarding the dynamics at company level and the sustainability of the results of workers' representations. Up till now lack of time prevented the realization of this ambition. We will use the Social Annual Report Database of the Amsterdam Institute for Advanced Labour Studies (AIAS/UvA) as the information base for this extension. The authors already want to thank Anna Dragstra, student-assistant at AIAS, for her efforts to bring this database up-to-date and thus prepare the ground for our next step.

<sup>2</sup> This deserves some explanation. Early in most larger efforts to influence technological and organizational change where we were called in as worker consultants, we started --jointly with Works Council and/or union group-- to carry out research on the quality of work in order to build up 'social design criteria' (See f.e. Van Klaveren & Bouwman, 1991). Moreover, we (sometimes) much later carried out evaluation research on cases where we had acted as consultants, as is described in this paper. Although we prefer to stress the advantages of these combinations of roles, we have over the years been very much aware of the risks and potential biases that are also attached to such combinations, notably the ones connected with self-evaluation (in which 'self' stands for our institute, not for the individual consultant/researcher). We have applied a number of methods, often combined, to counteract such risks and biases: transparency by many publications, in internal and external debates, steering committees, et cetera.

- Is it possible to derive lessons from this exercise for union strategies, including guidance principles for union renewal?

In order to measure results of the activities of the Dutch worker representatives at stake, the descriptions of these cases allowed adoption of four auditing criteria: gains in joint problem solving, own activities of union groups and/or Works Councils, improvements in the position of union groups and/or Works Councils, and advances in the quality of working life (and work organisation). We will relate these results to the incidence of boxing and/or dancing practices, but also to industry, regional and company characteristics, to union density, to the duration of workers' efforts and to the subsequent generations of such projects. The cases can be divided into three generations:

- *first generation: projects starting in 1975-1982: 29 cases*, mainly derived from the dissertation of Buitelaar & Vreeman (1985, 18 cases), from Dutch contributions to Levie & Moore (1984, 4 cases) as well as from case studies by the Research Dept. of the FNV, the major Dutch trade union confederation: 4 on creating adequate jobs and 2 on restructuring in Philips Electronics (Vaas & Van Klaveren, 1986; Van Klaveren & Vaas, 1983, and other publications);
- *second generation: projects starting in 1983-1989: 21 cases* from a variety of sources: mostly (10 cases) based on an evaluation project commissioned by the FNV (reported in Van Klaveren, 1991a), 4 cases from the TAO (Technology, Labour and Organisation) research project, carried out by Van Klaveren, Buitelaar & Dankbaar (1990-1991), 4 cases from the dissertations of Boonstra (1991) and Veersma (1992), as well as 3 self-evaluated cases from the STZ consultancy practice (Van Klaveren, 1991b; Van Klaveren & Bouwman, 1991; Van Klaveren, 1997);
- *third generation: projects starting in 1990-1997: 17 cases*, of which 13 based on interviews with works councillors (Van Klaveren & Maréchal, 1996) and 4 self-evaluated cases from (partly) the STZ consultancy practice (Boonstra & Zurlohe, 1996; Van Klaveren, 2001, 2002).

The Appendix provides a full overview of the cases and the references used.

We now will first go into some crucial developments in the Dutch industrial system. They will delineate the 'origins' of the (generations of) cases we will analyse here. Second, we will elaborate about our methodology. That is rather experimental as quantifying and measuring developments in industrial relations literature is relatively uncovered ground. Yet, it does not release us from the obligation to treat methodological issues as carefully as possible, especially because quantifying and comparing subsequent generations of workers' efforts, taking place in a rapidly changing industrial relations and legislative context, bears the risks of substantial flaws and biases.



## 2. DEVELOPMENTS IN DUTCH INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

### 2.1. UNION COMPANY REPRESENTATION

As we already stated, the Dutch industrial relations system is characterized by a dual system of workers' representation. We start with the union side of the matter, concentrating on the issue of representation at company level. Just here can the Achilles heel of the Dutch union movement be found. This movement developed 'outside the factory gates'. From the early days of unionism, distributive strategies dominated and craftsmanship-based strategies remained on the margins. This partly goes back on its origins of growth –like the Dutch society as such-- along political-religious cleavages. Protestants, Catholics, socialists and liberals, all had their own 'pillars' with own political parties, mass media, and unions. The dominant streams in the union movement developed along the guidelines of Henri Polak, in 1906 co-founder of the socialist union confederation of Trade Unions (NVV): industrial unionism, strong internal discipline, based on the work of full-time paid officials. Remarkably enough, the Catholic and Protestant union movements a few years later shared these principles. After World War II, this 'pillarised' system formed the basis for neo-corporatist structures. In 1945 the Foundation of Labour (STAR) was founded, where union confederations and employers' federations still meet to discuss socio-economic developments and to propose recommendations to their affiliates. Its creation was explicitly meant to draw the class struggle to a close (De Rooy, 2001). Five years later, the government gained more power in socio-economic decision-making by the creation of the Social-Economic Council (SER). Here, trade union confederations, employers' federations and independent members appointed by the government advise about broader issues. In the 1950s and 1960s, Dutch labour relations were characterised by the dominant role of government and by top-level bargaining. The underlying corporatist arrangements were based on far-reaching trust placed in statutory provisions. The three 'recognised' union confederations, with their representation on the well-equipped dance floors SER and STAR, formed stable elements in these relations (Visser, 2000).

In 1970, union leadership was embarrassed by massive wildcat strikes in the port of Rotterdam. Partly forced by this 'shop-floor revolt', partly under pressure from the cultural and intellectual revolts of 1964-69, the Dutch union movement had to let go of its paternalistic features. It integrated leftist intellectual inputs rather smoothly (Visser & Hemerijck, 1997). Yet, the (rather subtle) move away from top-level corporatism only gave a disappointing weak impetus to a genuine

union shop-floor and company orientation. In 1964, the socialist Metal Union NVV started building a system of company union groups. In the first two decades, its activities concerning quality of work and work organisation were often subordinated to considerations of national union (wage) policies (Buitelaar & Vreeman, 1985). 1976 saw the merger of the socialist-oriented NVV confederation and the catholic NKV, which widened the opportunities for new union orientations. The training department of the Metal Union NVV's successor, the Industrial Union FNV, started pushing union company groups to undertake workers' research projects, focusing on tracing bad health and safety conditions. Union trainers and researchers perceived building up a practice of shop-floor activities on health & safety to be a major starting point for more far-reaching efforts of workers' representations to influence new technology and work organisation. Most first generation projects that we will analyse stem from this workers' research 'program' of the Industrial Union FNV.

However, four major factors frustrated a development in this direction. First and foremost, in the early 1980s a number of socio-economic developments put union power to the test: an unparalleled process of de-industrialization, rising unemployment rates (officially 11% in 1983), and a decline in disposable incomes of most workers and of citizens depending on transfer incomes. Corporatism failed to manage the crises of labour market and welfare state. In December 1979, union membership had reached a peak of over 1.7 million, a density of 40%. In the next seven years, the union movement suffered from a net loss of 260,000 members, bringing density down to 32% at the end of 1986. After that moment the membership numbers grew again, but this growth was surpassed by the more rapid growth of employment: the density rate gradually fell to 25 in 2003. Between 1985 and 1995, the FNV confederation and its affiliated unions reduced their staff levels by one-third. Their ranks of unpaid activists were even more heavily depleted (Visser, 2000; Hooiveld *et al*, 2002).

Under these conditions, deploying new, innovative union strategies proved to be quite difficult. What was more, most union leaders turned their backs to innovative efforts associated with 'dancing'. The chairman of the largest union, the Industrial Union FNV, for example characterised efforts towards a better quality of work as 'sticking plasters on a wooden leg'. Following the 'dancing leads to the bedroom' thesis, he and other union leaders warned about compromising and dissuaded their membership from involvement in organisational change. Of course, union leadership had to take the rather sad state of their company representation into consideration, but they did not even try to shift the frontiers of control inside the companies (Van Klaveren, 1991c).

A third factor frustrating active union policies to influence new technology and work organisation was that the union groups did not gain a legal position. In 1985, a bill settling their status was

withdrawn from parliament and ‘put on ice’ – where it has stayed until now. A supportive context developed for the Works Councils, but hardly or not for the union groups. In their own perception, these groups had to execute notably the boxing aspects of their activities quite carefully, as they lacked any legal protection. Facilities like time and space for shop-floor union meetings had to be laid down in collective agreements, and many union negotiators took a lukewarm attitude towards such arrangements. This can partly be explained by a fourth factor: the weak bonds that most union bargaining delegations maintained with works councillors and union groups. In the first decade of the Metals Union system of company union groups, the union board refused to include unpaid militants in the union bargaining delegations. More than ten years after this ban was lifted, in 1987, still less than half of all groups were represented (Huiskamp & Risseuw, 1988). Only in the last decade a change towards closer co-operation between union officials and Works Councils can be noted. Moreover, potential shop-floor conflicts tend to be ‘depoliticised’ as they are often transferred to HRM departments, if necessary negotiating with paid union officials as well as gambling on the complaisance of many Works Councils (Hooiveld *et al*, 2002). However, although we support this observation, it does not do full justice to the development of the position and activities of Works Councils in the Netherlands.

## 2.2. UNIONS AND WORKS COUNCILS

In the light of the militancy of the ‘factory cores’ in the 1930s, the main employers’ federations and mainstream unionism supported state-codified codetermination directly after World War II. The dual system developed. Under the 1950 Works Councils Act (WOR), workers were entitled to representation in joint councils, chaired by the employer. A 1971 law revision provided for separate meetings of worker representatives. A breakthrough came in 1979, when the WOR was revised again, providing for mandatory councils elected by and from the workers, independent from employers and endowed with powers of information, consultation and, on matters of personnel policy regulations, co-determination.

In both the Netherlands and Germany, the majority of lay union officials can be found in Works Councils. The Dutch unions have succeeded in getting members elected to the councils. Although candidature and voting are open to all workers, in elections from 1979-93 the FNV unions gained on average 40% of the votes, twice their membership share (Van Klaveren & Sprenger, 2004a). Yet, in the Dutch system mutual dependency has developed into one-way traffic, with the legal rights and activities of Works Councils as pushing forces. Visser already in 1991 correctly observed that ‘while far from being part of, or dependent upon, the larger union organization, the councils have become

the centre of worker organization in firms' (204).<sup>3</sup> We suppose that nowadays results on the workers' side in influencing organisational and technological change at company level are largely depending on activities of Works Councils.

Finally, in the mid-1980s, the lack of union influence at company level became a matter of grave concern for union leadership. Especially the advance of the 'micro-electronic revolution', with its perceived negative consequences for employment and quality of work, caused major worries. More future-oriented union leadership gradually abstained from the policies of distance towards the Works Councils. They pursued various strategies. A first strategy was to try and synchronize the roles of union representatives and Works Councils in processes of change, also by means of collective agreements. Notably the printing and publishing unions, with their tradition of relying on statutory regulation, followed this line. A second strategy included making advances to the Works Councils and starting to service them. From 1987 on, the three union confederations FNV, CNV and MHP founded Technology Support Centres, later merging with their Works Council Centres. However, evaluations proved that these centres did not play a pivotal role in bringing about coalitions between unions and Works Councils (Van Klaveren & Sprenger, 1994).

Efforts to get industry technology training programmes off the ground, combined with company pilots, met more success. In 1985-86, six FNV unions managed to run such programmes supported by government funding. These programmes became triggers for developing workers' demands concerning new technology and work organisation, as well as for co-operation between union groups and Works Councils too. With the depletion of the ranks of activists in the background, this co-operation rather quickly took the form of merging. In 25 to 30 cases, joint efforts of paid officials, union militants and works councillors grew into long-term workers' projects: efforts to influence the design of technology and organisation. In 1990 the FNV confederation commissioned research aiming at evaluating these projects, from which we derived 10 evaluations of 'second generation cases'.

Some of these projects are highly interesting from an industrial relations perspective, notably those in the Rotterdam port. In a context characterised earlier by elaborate boxing practices and the country's highest strike incidence, officers of the Transport Union FNV and the Works Councils of the four large stevedoring companies created effective dance floors. Transport Union leadership

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<sup>3</sup> However, it should be noted that unlike in Germany a sharp division with collective bargaining is maintained. In 1999 a large survey showed that a majority of the councils wanted to function rather independently from the unions, but did not have ambitions to take over their bargaining powers (Van het Kaar & Looise, 1999).



transferred responsibilities from paid officers to Works Councils, judging the latter to be better qualified as well as equipped with legal rights. Indeed, these rights of the councils to be trained, to form special committees, to meet during working hours and to hire internal and external experts jointly proved to be a first major factor in getting these projects up and running and arriving at tangible results. A second factor of some importance was the completion, in 1989, of the Working Conditions Act.<sup>4</sup> This law included the so-called 'well-being at work'-article, which obliged employers to apply minimum standards for workers' well-being. Two years later, a link with this article 3 was included in the Works Councils Act, enabling Works Councils to appeal directly to it. In a number of cases such an appeal proved to be a catalyst of workers' influence upon the design and implementation of new technology (Bouwman, 1989; Van Klaveren, 1991a, 1991b; Van Klaveren & Bouwman, 1993<sup>5</sup>).

Thus, in the course of the 1980s various kinds of worker participation in decision-making concerning work organization and technology developed widely in the Netherlands. In 1987-8, only one out of ten Dutch managers and worker representatives in a European survey reported the absence of any involvement of worker representatives in decisions concerning work organization. In this respect, the Netherlands ranked first (although if negotiation and joint decision-making on work organization issues were measured only, the country ranked fourth -- Gill *et al*, 1993). At the same time, in a national survey carried out on behalf of the FNV union confederation (Berentsen, 1988), 42% of the Works Councils involved in technological change perceived their influence as sufficient. Such results gave rise to optimistic expectations of Dutch experts on the role of Works Councils in company decision-making (cf. Looise, 1989). The evidence available before we undertook this exercise suggests that the second half of the 1980s has been the heyday of this kind of workers' influence. Four years later, in 1992, the repeated FNV survey showed that only 18% instead of 42% of all 'involved' Works Councils described their influence as sufficient. Other Dutch research also suggested that in the 1990s the number of Works Councils exerting influence on technological change grew no longer (Tijdens & Van Klaveren, 1997).

In the early 1990s, the orientation of company-oriented strategies of the Dutch union movement changed away from influencing technological change towards issues connected with the organization of work. The major unions tried to incorporate vocational training, careering, working time scheduling, equal opportunities, childcare and other aspects of the internal labour market into collective agreements. Monitoring and/or specifying agreement provisions covering these issues was

<sup>4</sup> Although it lasted, with an exemption schedule, a number of years before many industries fully fell under the jurisdiction of the law.

<sup>5</sup> Article 3 has been gradually dismantled between 2000 and 2005.

growingly left to the Works Councils, as was done also in new legislation concerning occupational health services, working times and childcare. Already in 1994, a FNV study showed that many councils found this new, additional control tasks hard going. Councillors often expressed their need for stronger union support in this respect (Reemst *et al*, 1994).

In our STZ worker consultancy practice we found many signs that Works Councils felt overburdened by the combination of old and new tasks. This burden was obviously also felt by councils generally regarded as 'strong' and 'active'. This was the main reason why, in 1996, one of the authors and a student on a STZ workplace carried out a review of the experiences of 124 'active' Works Councils – councils whose activities had reached national news media (two specialized magazines for works councillors and two national 'quality' newspapers) between 1990 and 1996. Our questionnaire was filled out by 42 respondents, of which we selected 13 for further scrutiny.<sup>6</sup> We interviewed the chairpersons and/or secretaries of these Works Councils and triangulated their statements with documents like Works Council reports and Social Annual Reports<sup>7</sup>. The interview issues were (council policies towards) organizational and technological change, own council activities and initiatives, their results, burden of work, the relationship with their constituency, the relation between Works Councils and union representatives, and future perspectives (Van Klaveren & Maréchal, 1996). These 13 cases made up the core of our 'third generation cases'. We added 4 self-evaluated cases from (partly) the STZ consultancy practice. Thus, contrary to the cases of the first and second generations our primary sources of information were no longer union officials and union groups, but Works Councils.

We do not know of any other in-depth research undertaken since the early 1990s in order to trace the vicissitudes of Dutch workers representations *vis-à-vis* technological and organizational change. From the viewpoint of the study of Dutch industrial relations, this really implies a lack. A more 'political' argument for strengthening the 'revisited' aspect of our current exercise (see footnote 1) is our observation that after 1996 the number of issues to be controlled and monitored by the Works Councils has grown further and – as both our consultancy experience and the Works Councils' magazines prove -- many councils still have serious problems in coping with these tasks.

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<sup>6</sup> These 13 were those most explicitly giving positive answers on the question at the end of our questionnaire whether one would have no objections to be interviewed.

<sup>7</sup> Social annual reports, including statistical information on the workforce, are –although there is no legal or other obligation-- being published by a majority of the larger Dutch companies and institutions.

### 3. OUR METHODOLOGY

We already stressed that our methodology is rather experimental: quantifying and measuring developments at ‘micro’ (work organization, workplace) and ‘meso’ (industry, regional) levels is relatively uncovered ground in the study of industrial relations. An inventory of mainstream Dutch and international literature in this field learns that there are few examples of quantitative research available. Industrial relations researchers seem inclined to largely qualitative approaches and often seem to neglect the advantages of quantitative data collection and statistical analysis. Exceptions to be noted in the Netherlands are statistical studies of (determinants of) growth and decline of union membership (Visser, 1990; Van den Berg, 1995) and of the incidence of strikes (Van der Velden, 2000).

We certainly recognize the advantages of qualitative industrial relations research. Recently, Grimshaw (2005) valued as potential benefits of qualitative case study research:

- theoretical, not random, sampling focuses efforts on extending or filling conceptual categories<sup>8</sup>;
- case-survey approaches facilitate the comparison of single factors;
- qualitative research provides a range of perspectives provided by talking to people in different positions;
- qualitative research may illuminate new, relevant variables and may inspire novel research questions;
- qualitative research provides a rich context for responses.

In contrast, Grimshaw mentioned as potential weaknesses:

- collection of qualitative data through case-study research and its subsequent analysis may lack an explicit chain of evidence linking findings with conclusions;
- case study researchers may be drawn to premature, or false, conclusions due to ‘information-processing biases’, resulting from an over-attention to more elite respondents, for example, or from ignoring disconfirming evidence;
- it may be difficult to distinguish whether the evidence is idiosyncratic to a particular case, or is suggestive of a more general finding;

<sup>8</sup> We did not select our cases from a theoretical point of view, but gathered them from trade union and Works Councils initiatives. Yet, this is also a non-random mechanism, enabling to concentrate on IR at company level that are characterised by proactive or ambitious union strategies.

- since much case-study research adopts a bottom-up approach, theory building may be narrow and idiosyncratic.

We are aware of the dangers and limitations in trying to upscale case study research into analyses of higher industrial relations levels. Yet, we feel encouraged to follow this road because of its relevance and potential benefits. As we already pointed out we suppose that, in order to fully exploit the richness of individual case experiences connected with higher-level analyses, a transformation into more quantitative research is needed.

The methodology we adopted was derived from various sources: partly from the B & D research project, partly from earlier work. In the evaluation project commissioned in 1990-91 by the FNV, the authors and some colleagues tested workers' projects on (1) a better quality of working life; (2) a better position of trade union group and/or Works Council in company decision-making, and (3) own activities of union group and/or Works Council, resulting in a stronger relationship with its/their constituency (Van Klaveren, 1991a).<sup>9</sup> We chose the third criterion, although we had to reformulate that since we could not always measure the relationship with the constituency. We concentrated on the autonomous visibility of own activities of the union group and/or Works Council, notably in the form of workers' research.

The eight audit criteria agreed upon in the B & D project can by and large be regarded as an extension of these yardsticks. These criteria were: (1) gains in information and consultation rights and procedures; (2) structural improvements in trade unionism; (3) gains (and scope) in joint problem solving; (4) advances in substances of collective agreements; (5) measurability of gains; (6) improvements in target setting and aspiration management; (7) preservation of union independence; (8) advances in the quality of working life and / or work organisation (Huzzard *et al*, 2004).

To be honest, these criteria show features of an international group compromise. Some criteria seem less relevant or applicable in the Dutch industrial relations context. For example, criterion (1) is not very distinctive in a highly codified context like the Dutch one. Criterion (3) can be a result of

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<sup>9</sup> In between, one of us and an AIAS colleague carried out quantitative research explaining the influence of Dutch Works Councils on new technology (Tijdens & Van Klaveren, 1997). In that analysis, we developed and applied hypotheses about the following explanatory factors: (1) differences between sectors and in firm size; (2) type and scale of technological change; (3) management styles: collaborative or participative, allowing user participation, vs. styles that do not allow user participation; (4) workers' competence: disclosure of information and own activities of Works Council; (5) external integration of workers' representation: share of unionists in Works Council, occurrence of technology agreements between employers and unions.

the activities undertaken, but may also reflect improvements in processes of joint problem solving (and thus be more an explanation of how results have been realized). Our interpretation is that it is a yardstick for common learning effects of management and workers (representatives) trying to solve longer-term problems. Criterion (4) suggests a direct relationship between company activities and advances in collective agreements. Yet, in the Netherlands this relation is complicated and hybrid as most workers are covered by industry agreements, in which industrial relations at company and shop-floor level may only interfere indirectly. In our view, (5) is more conditional for measuring results than it is a gain on its own. Criterion (6) may be a relevant long-term issue; yet, it is awfully difficult to measure. Whether (7) is a relevant issue in the Dutch industrial relations system is left for debate: this system is recognizing unions as the genuine workers' representations at national and industry levels and, as we demonstrated, does in fact the same with Works Councils at company level – meaning that the Dutch union movement up till now<sup>10</sup> is more dependent on recognition at national and industry levels than their counterparts in for example the UK. In the end, criteria 2, 3 and 8 turn out to be the most helpful for our exercise. Thus, we used four criteria.

#### BOX I Four criteria to be applied on the cases

In view of these considerations we concentrated on four criteria i.e. variables to be applied on the 67 selected cases:

- JPS = joint problem solving (criterion no. 3 from the B & D project)
- OWN = own activities union group / Works Council (criterion no. 3 from the FNV project)
- POS = better position union group / Works Council (criteria no. 2 from both the B & D and the FNV projects)
- QWL = advances in quality of working life / work organisation (criterion no. 8 from the B & D project, no. 1 from the FNV project)

We decided to use the variables JPS, OWN, POS and QWL as the basis to formulate hypotheses for our evaluation, based on the general supposition that a union group and/or a Works Council, actively engaged in efforts to influence quality of work, work organisation and/or technology at company level should be able to reach positive scores at each of the selected criteria. In order to test hypotheses derived from this general supposition we developed 5-point scales and applied these

<sup>10</sup> Continuation of the system of Mandatory Extension, which is under attack in the political arena, may be crucial here (see for a discussion Van Klaveren & Sprenger, 2004)

on these four variables for all cases.<sup>11</sup> The exact coding of the variables can be found in the box next page.

BOX 2 Coding of variables

A	joint problem solving (JPS)		
1	no joint problem solving		
2	incidental JPS	no coalition with management	
3	regular JPS	on-off coalition with management	
4	regular JPS	stable coalition with management, lasting over 1 year	
5	permanent JPS	stable coalition with management, lasting over 2 years	
B	own activities trade union group / Works Council (OWN)		
1	no own activities		
2	own activities	incidental workers' research	no policy program
3	own activities	more extensive workers' research	policy program limited to research some spearheads
4	own activities	program of workers' research	broad policy program
5	own activities	program of continuous workers' research	broad, regularly updated policy program
C	better position trade union group / Works Council (POS)		
1	no improvement in position		
2	some improvement	<i>vis-à-vis</i> constituency <b>or</b> <i>vis-à-vis</i> management	
3.1	some improvement	<i>vis-à-vis</i> constituency <b>and</b> <i>vis-à-vis</i> management	
3.2	substantial improvement	<i>vis-à-vis</i> constituency <b>or</b> <i>vis-à-vis</i> management yet uncertainty about stability of improvement	
4	substantial improvement	<i>vis-à-vis</i> constituency <b>and</b> <i>vis-à-vis</i> management yet uncertainty about stability of improvement	
5	substantial, stable improvement	<i>vis-à-vis</i> constituency <b>and</b> <i>vis-à-vis</i> management, lasting over 2 years	
D	advances in quality of working life (QWL) / work organisation (WO)		
1	no advances in QWL / WO		
2	some advances in QWL	in some physical labour conditions	
3.1	some advances in QWL / WO	in some physical labour conditions <b>and</b> in some job content/workload/work-stress-related factors	
3.2	substantial advances in QWL	in number of physical labour conditions	
4.1	substantial advances in QWL / WO	in number of physical labour conditions <b>and</b> in some job content/workload/work-stress-related factors	
4.2	substantial advances in QWL	in most physical labour conditions	
5	substantial advances in QWL WO	in most physical labour conditions <b>and</b> in most content/workload/work-stress-related factors	

Surely, an ex post analysis as carried out here is not without risks and leaves room for subjective biases. Measurement should be strengthened, for example by the use of panels of researchers and stakeholders, combined with self-evaluation of the latter, both guided by objective and robust criteria concerning variables as used here, but also concerning the duration ('start' and 'end') and other characteristics of cases. This may lead to higher levels of objective interpretation.

<sup>11</sup> For 10 cases of the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, scoring was carried out collectively by the authors and 5 members of the steering committee guiding the research commissioned by the FNV confederation (resulting in Van Klaveren, 1991a). Scores for all others were attached solely by the authors

## 4. RESULTS OF OUR ANALYSIS

### 4.1. GENERAL OVERVIEW OF RESULTS

Table I shows the frequency distribution of all 67 cases according to ranking on our 5-points scale.

We did not award '5s' at all, the highest rating possible. No case fully met our criteria for the highest rating. Totally 25 out of 67 cases got one or more '4s': one case<sup>12</sup> got 3 '4s' and 9 cases got 2 '4s'. The average scores of these 10 cases with the highest ratings awarded were high: except 2 with each one '2', they all scored only '3s' and '4s'. The average score of these 10 cases was 3.48. From these 'top-10' cases, 4 originated from the transport branch (3 Rotterdam stevedoring companies, 1 tour operator), 2 took place in chemical companies, 2 in metal producers, 1 in a bank and 1 in a public utilities company (waste treatment).

TABLE I Scores of union group / Works Council efforts to influence technological and organisational change -- frequency distribution (n=67)

	JPS		OWN		POS		QWL	
ranking	abs	%	abs	%	abs	%	abs	%
5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
4	9	13	12	18	5	7	10	15
3	23	34	39	58	34	51	26	39
2	20	30	16	24	28	42	29	43
1	15	22	0	0	0	0	2	3
TOTAL	67	100	67	100	67	100	67	100
average		2.39		2.90		2.63		2.67

The '4' ranking was most frequently deserved by 'own activities trade union group / Works Council' (OWN). In this category, no case got the lowest '1' ranking: not surprisingly, as such activities were a major criterion for case selection. Of course, it is not self-evident that 'better position trade union group / Works Council' (POS) follows from these activities. Nevertheless, also in the latter category no '1' rating showed up. This means that all union groups and/or Works Councils involved derived at least a slight advance from investing in own activities in terms of their position, be it *vis-à-vis* their constituency, *vis-à-vis* management, or both. A realistic assessment, however, cannot hide the fact

<sup>12</sup> ECT (Rotterdam container stevedoring company)

that 76% of all cases scored '4' and '3' ratings on OWN, while only 58% of all cases got the same ratings on POS (see Table 1; average scores 2.90 against 2.63). Moreover, only 5 (7%) of all cases scored a '4' on the latter criterion. It may be clear that, based on the Dutch experience, own activities of workers' representatives are by no means synonymous with strengthening their position – although in earlier Dutch research on Works Councils and new technology undertaking such activities showed up as a determining factor for gaining workers' influence (Tijdens & Van Klaveren, 1997, 482).

Although the consensual image of the Dutch industrial relations landscape may suggest otherwise, 'joint problem solving' (JPS) generally turned out to be rather difficult to achieve, with an average score of 2.39 compared with 2.90 for OWN. In 15 cases, a joint approach was totally absent (a '1' rating), and in 20 cases it was rather weak and/or only lasting for a while 9 (a '2'). From our basic information we got indications that at least half of all trade union groups and/or Works Councils involved strived for a kind of coalition with (layers of) management – so, in terms of our metaphor, wanted to create a dance floor. Obviously such intentions often did not meet with a response from the management side. It has to be admitted that 10 out of the 15 '1'-rated cases relate to first generation projects, but anyway over the years the scores on JPS remained lower than those on OWN.

However, we found quite some evidence that the effectiveness of JPS for 'advances in quality of working life / work organisation' (QWL) was higher than that of OWN. The 32 cases with '4' and '3' ratings for JPS (average 3.28) scored an average of 2.78 on POS and an average of 3.06 on QWL. The 51 cases with '4' and '3' ratings for OWN (average 3.11) scored the same average of 2.78 on POS, but a much lower average on QWL: 2.51. Upon closer scrutiny, the latter figure is mainly due to diverging scores: a high/rather high level of OWN is related to 9 cases with a '4' score on QWL, but also to 21 cases scoring a '2' on the latter item and even to 2 with '1' – against only 4 cases with '2' and none with '1' scores on QWL linked with JPS. The 9 cases with a '4' for JPS were clearly more successful on POS and QWL jointly (an average of 3.50) than the 12 cases with a '4' for OWN were (average 3.08).

Out of the 9 cases with a '4' for JPS, only one<sup>13</sup> combined this with a '4' ranking for POS. Indeed, joint efforts paid out, but mainly for the quality of work and organisation. From these 9 cases high-ranking in joint efforts, 4 had a '4' rating for QWL.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Unitcentre (Rotterdam container stevedoring company)

<sup>14</sup> BGC/Interpay (bank clearing house), ECT (Rotterdam container stevedoring company), NBBS (tour operator), Shell Moerdijk (chemical industry)



On the other hand, and this is a quite remarkable outcome, a rather high score on OWN did not prove to be a good predictor for a real improvement of the own position of union groups and/or Works Councils (POS). Only 2 out of the 12 cases with a '4' rating for OWN scored a '4' ranking for POS<sup>15</sup>. Their average score on this item was 3.17. This group of 12 cases had even 3 '4's' in the scores on QWL<sup>16</sup>, although here '2' rankings showed up as well. Consequently the group average on the latter item was, with 3.00, lower.

We still have to answer the pressing question whether joint problem solving goes hand-in-hand with own workers' representation's activities or not, and whether combined efforts may yield better results, both in terms of a stronger own position and in terms of better QWL / work organisation. We noted 2 cases with two '4' scores for JPS and OWN<sup>17</sup> as well as another 13 cases with at least a '7' on these items jointly – with a total average on the first two items of 3.57. The average score of these 15 cases on POS and QWL remained rather high: 3.40. A next phase in our research will concentrate on the mutual relationship between our four criteria.

## 4.2. ANALYSIS PER INDUSTRY AND REGION

In this paragraph, we will first go into the scores on the four variables for various industries, then for three regions, and finally for combinations of industries and regions. We have grouped the average scores by industry in Table 2A (next page). We also calculated the joint scores of each case on the four variables, ranging from a minimum of 7 points (an average 1.75) to a maximum 13 (average 3.75). From these figures, a median score of 10.55 (average 2.64) could be derived. Table 2B (next page) gives the frequency division of these scores, grouped into four categories and divided by industry as well.

<sup>15</sup> Frans Swarttouw (Rotterdam bulk stevedoring company), Howson-Algraphy (chemical industry)

<sup>16</sup> DSM Chemicals Rotterdam, ECT (Rotterdam container stevedoring company), VAM/Essent Milieu (waste treatment)

<sup>17</sup> ECT (Rotterdam container stevedoring company), Smit Ovens (metals industry)

TABLE 2A. Scores of union group / Works Council efforts to influence technological and organisational change-- averages per industry (n=67)

	JPS	OWN	POS	QWL	N
MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY					
chemicals	2.25	3.00	2.67	2.83	12
food	2.18	2.73	2.55	2.73	11
metals & electronics	2.14	3.00	2.57	2.43	14
publishing & printing, other manuf.	1.86	2.57	2.29	2.29	7
utilities	2.25	3.75	3.00	2.75	4
TOTAL MANUFACTURING	2.17	2.94	2.58	2.57	48
SERVICES					
banking & insurance	3.00	2.50	2.50	3.00	6
retail	2.00	3.00	3.00	2.00	2
transport	3.00	3.13	3.25	2.75	8
public sector	3.67	2.67	2.33	3.00	3
TOTAL SERVICES	3	2.84	2.84	2.79	19
GRAND TOTAL	2.39	2.9	2.63	2.67	67

TABLE 2B Scores of union group / Works Council efforts to influence technological and organisational change  
-- frequency division of total scores per company (n=67)

	7-8	9-10	11-12	>12	N
<b>MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY</b>					
chemicals	2	5	1	4	12
food	2	4	5	0	11
metals & electronics	6	0	6	2	14
publishing & printing, other manuf.	2	4	1	0	7
utilities	0	1	1	2	4
<b>TOTAL MANUFACTURING</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>SERVICES</b>					
banking & insurance	0	2	2	2	6
retail	0	2	0	0	2
transport	0	3	2	3	8
public sector	0	1	1	1	3
<b>TOTAL SERVICES</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>67</b>

We will analyse these two Tables jointly. In Table 2A the scores on JPS demonstrate the largest standard deviation. It does not surprise that the public sector shows the highest score here: in the Netherlands it over-all has a tradition of rather consensual industrial relations (although one has to keep in mind that it is represented here by only 3 cases). Runners-up are two service industries, banking & insurance and transport. The same type of industrial relations dominates in the first industry, but the position of the latter industry may look amazing -- especially if one takes into account the fact that 4 out of 8 transport cases stem from Rotterdam stevedoring companies. Yet, we already pointed to the rather successful union approaches towards technological and organisational change in these companies in the second half of the 1980s. After all, Table 2B shows no case in the services sector figuring at the lowest level of only 7-8 points, compared to 12 manufacturing industry cases at this level. Quite remarkable are the very low scores of publishing & printing (and other manufacturing) on all variables, also on JPS and OWN. At least a partial explanation can be found in the confidence that both paid union officers and unpaid militants in publishing and printing over the years have shown in statutory regulation of organizational and technological change (cf. Vaas & Van Klaveren, 1986; Veersma, 1992).

The scores on OWN show a more evenly spread picture than those on JPS, and that on a consistently higher level. Here, the average score of the manufacturing industry is slightly higher than

that in services. The utilities branch is clearly on the lead, followed by (from a union viewpoint) branches that were relatively well-organized in the 1970s and 1980s: transport, metals & electronics, and chemicals.<sup>18</sup> More surprising is the same score of the latter two for retail, a low unionized industry (though represented with only two cases). Transport is on top, regarding the joint averages for JPS and OWN. Looking at the basic case information, this is not astonishing. Boxing and dancing practices were cleverly combined in a number of transport cases, also outside the Rotterdam port: own activities of workers representations and joint search processes for win-win situations reinforced each other here.

We have also grouped the cases by region: the Northern and Eastern part of the Netherlands<sup>19</sup>, the Western part<sup>20</sup>, including Amsterdam, The Hague and Rotterdam, and the Southern part.<sup>21</sup> It turns out that 57% of all our cases could be found in the West, 25% in the North/East and 18% in the South.

TABLE 3. Scores of union group / Works Council efforts to influence technological and organisational change-- averages per region (n=67)

	JPS	OWN	POS	QWL	N
North/East (N/E)	2.06	3.00	2.65	2.41	17
West (W)	2.53	2.87	2.68	2.76	38
South (S)	2.42	2.83	2.42	2.75	12
TOTAL	2.39	2.90	2.63	2.67	67

Table 3 shows that the regional scores on the four variables are rather close to the national averages; in particular those for the West and the South correspond with each other. The North/East region shows more deviation. Here, the cases score higher on OWN, about average on POS, but considerably lower on JPS and QWL. As we will argue, these regional differences reveal information about boxing and dancing activities of workers representatives under specific regional and industry conditions. Table 4 shows a breakdown of the numbers of cases per industry and region.

<sup>18</sup> The unweighted average union density rates of the cases from these three branches that we calculated were: 61 (transport, 8 cases), 41 (metals & electronics, 14 cases), and 39 (chemicals, 12 cases). Moreover, the unweighted average for food was 42 (11 cases)

<sup>19</sup> The provinces Friesland, Groningen, Drente, Overijssel, Gelderland and Flevoland

<sup>20</sup> The provinces North-Holland, South-Holland and Utrecht

<sup>21</sup> The provinces Zeeland, North-Brabant and Limburg (In regular statistics, Zeeland is counted as belonging to the West of the Netherlands. Yet, in the period researched this province was integrated with North-Brabant and Limburg in nearly all unions with regional structures)

TABLE 4. Scores of union group / Works Council efforts to influence technological and organisational change-- number of cases per industry and region (n=67)

	North/East	West	South	N
chemicals	1	8	3	12
food	2	5	4	11
metals & electronics	8	5	1	14
publishing & printing, other manuf.	1	4	2	7
utilities	2	2	0	4
<b>TOTAL MANUFACTURING</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>48</b>
banking & insurance	1	5	0	6
retail	0	2	0	2
transport	2	5	1	8
public sector	0	2	1	3
<b>TOTAL SERVICES</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>67</b>

Table 4 points to a high share of manufacturing industry in the cases from both the North/East (82%) and the South (83%) compared to those from the Western region (63%). Notably the North/Eastern cases unveil an economic and regional labour market background that would have been less visible if we had only presented industry data. 8 out of 14 manufacturing cases in the North/East originated from the metals and electronics branch. Going back to our basic case information we found out that efforts from this region that were labeled ‘influencing QWL / WO’ as a matter of fact turned into acute employment protection cases, away from longer-term dancing activities towards short-term boxing. The main explanation for the low North/Eastern scores on JPS and QWL in Table 3 may be found just here. Genuine working class traditions in notably the Northern part of the country are linked with more antagonistic industrial relations. The relative high score on OWN is a reflection of more boxing-oriented strategies of unions and Works Councils in a number of cases where job security was urgently in danger<sup>22</sup>. Results from such strategies in terms of POS were moderate, but they were –not surprisingly-- straightforward low in terms of QWL.

<sup>22</sup> Over the years, this danger was definitely highest in the North/Eastern region. Based on (information gathered by Ms. Dragstra for) the AIAS Social Annual Report Database we found that 5 out of the 17 (29%) North-Eastern case locations (establishments) did not exist anymore in January 2005, against 5 out of 36 Western locations (13%) and 1 out of 12 Southern locations (8%)

### 4.3. ANALYSIS OF GENERATIONS AND DURATION OF PROJECTS

Was it possible to trace differences in scores concerning duration between cases from the three generations? What is the relation between duration and 'generation'?

Table 5 shows that the scores of the second generation cases (projects starting in 1983-89) are the highest on all four variables. The other two generations give a mixed picture if compared mutually. The first generation cases (starting in 1975-82) show higher scores on OWN and POS, but the most recent generation (1990-97) scores better on JPS and QWL.

TABLE 5. Scores of union group / Works Council efforts to influence technological and organisational change-- averages per generation (n=67)

	JPS	OWN	POS	QWL	N
First generation	1.97	3.00	2.59	2.41	29
Second generation	2.86	3.10	2.86	2.90	21
Third generation	2.53	2.59	2.53	2.89	17
TOTAL	2.39	2.90	2.63	2.67	67

The differences in scores between the first and second generations most likely reflect two clusters of important changes in the Dutch industrial relations context. The first cluster is related to new legislation: the improvement of legal Works Council rights (1979), the extension of training efforts to use these rights in the years thereafter, as well as the gradual extension and the completion of the Working Conditions Act (1989). In the aftermath of these changes, the leading principles of workers' intervention essentially changed from 'if' ('Can we change the situation?') into 'how' ('How can we bring forward change, and what can various parties contribute to this process?'). A second cluster of changes that in our view has been highly relevant is the gradual overcoming of divisions between union groups and Works Councils at company level, supported by the policies of the major unions.

Explanations for the lower scores of the third generation cases compared to those of the second generation are less obvious. A first explanation may be that the full implementation of new legislation, notably of the Working Conditions Act, took away the most urgent need for Works Council action in the field of technological and organisational change. A second argument, which we

already used, is that concerning the overburdening of active Works Councils with issues to be dealt with, often leading to difficulties in priority setting and the consequent dispersion of attention.

A third possible explanation can be found in the duration of projects. In Table 6 we present an overview of the duration of projects by generation.

TABLE 6. Scores of union group / Works Council efforts to influence technological and organisational change-- duration and generation of cases (n=67)

Generations	1	2	3	N
1-3 years	10	8	11	29
4-5 years	12	8	1	21
6-8 years	4	4	3	11
> 8 years	3	1	2	6
TOTAL	29	21	17	67
average length (yrs)	4.59	4.90	4.00	4.54

One has to keep in mind that we measured the outcomes of 14 out of the 17 third generation cases back in 1996.<sup>23</sup> As at that time 11 out of these 14 cases (79%) had only started in 1994 or 1995, they simply could not have lasted for more than three years. Maybe, if we are able to revisit these cases, the results will have to be corrected as well as the differences in outcomes per generation modified. This is quite likely because duration matters, as Table 7 clearly illustrates.

TABLE 7 Scores of union group / Works Council efforts to influence technological and organisational change -- averages per duration category (n=67)

	JPS	OWN	POS	QWL	N
1-3 years	2.10	2.66	2.38	2.52	29
4-5 years	2.29	2.86	2.67	2.62	21
6-8 years	2.91	3.27	2.91	2.72	11
> 8 years	3.33	3.50	3.17	3.50	6
TOTAL	2.39	2.90	2.63	2.67	67

Like one might have supposed, a linear relation between duration of projects and outcomes shows up. Each longer duration category turns up with higher scores on all four variables. The explanation looks nearly self-evident, but was confirmed and deepened when we returned to the detailed case information. For union groups and Works Councils, time is generally on their side if they succeed in

continuing project activities: more time is available to realize advances in QWL / WO if cases range over a longer period. Documented cases in which joint problem solving is well developed demonstrate the functioning of such mechanisms in detail. They mostly show higher levels of trust over time as well as the related enhancing of aspirations and problem-solving capacities of the key actors (cf. Boonstra, 1991; Boonstra *et al*, 1996). On the other hand there is a kind of survival of the fittest mechanism going on: cases in which JPS does not come off the ground and OWN remains at a rather low level, tend to fade away.

If we follow the regular statistical techniques and control for the duration of projects, taking out those cases lasting over 5 years, the relative positions of the generations do not change. The second generation of cases again stands the test and still scores higher than the third generation, although for JPS, OWN and POS the gap has become smaller: see Table 8 below, to be compared with Table 5.

TABLE 8. Scores of union group / Works Council efforts to influence technological and organisational change  
--averages per generation of cases, excluding cases of 6 years and longer (n=50)

	JPS	OWN	POS	QWL	N
First generation	1.53	2.71	2.38	2.24	21
Second generation	2.73	2.87	2.73	2.80	15
Third generation	2.50	2.64	2.43	2.79	14
TOTAL	2.12	2.74	2.50	2.56	50

#### 4.4. ANALYSIS OF COMPANY SIZE AND UNION DENSITY

In Table 9 we present average scores per company size category.<sup>23</sup> We sorted out three categories: companies with a workforce under 500, with 500 – 999 workers, and companies with a workforce of 1000 and more. We only found three cases in companies with less than 100 workers. The next-higher size category, with a workforce of 100 – 499, was the largest with 26 cases. For our analysis, we took these categories together in one 'less than 500' category. The medium-size category with 500-999 workers was, with 13 cases, the smallest. We counted 24 cases in the 'over 1,000' category. These included four cases of central Works Councils in companies over 5,000 workers.

<sup>23</sup> By exception we followed 2 cases until 2000, 1 case until 2002.

<sup>24</sup> As far as possible, we calculated average employment figures over those years that the projects lasted. We could trace all sizes except one.



TABLE 9 Scores of union group / Works Council efforts to influence technological and organisational change  
-- averages per company size category (n=66)

	JPS	OWN	POS	QWL	N
< 500	2.15	2.71	2.65	2.64	29
500-999	2.57	3.00	2.64	2.50	13
>= 1000	2.54	3.18	2.59	2.72	24
TOTAL	2.39	2.91	2.64	2.68	66

As could be expected, a larger company size helps in getting more own Works Council and/or union activities off the ground. Solely relying on legal provisions may be less necessary for workers' representatives if company scale goes up. However, larger size does not lead to a better position of council and/or group, and just slightly to better advances in QWL / WO.

Table 10 presents the scores on union density. The 67 cases had a median union density rate of 38.5 and an (unweighted) average density of 40.5 – comparatively high figures, taking into account the national average density of 33 over the 1975-1996 period (calculation based on Visser, 2000). We found 6 cases with a density of less than 20, 39 between 20 and 50, and 22 cases with a density of 50 and more. Within the latter group, we could trace a top league of nine cases with a density of 70 and more. Moreover, the average union density of the third generation turns out to be substantially lower than the average densities of the earlier two: 30.5, against 42.5 for the first generation and 43.5 for the second.

TABLE 10 Scores of union group / Works Council efforts to influence technological and organisational change  
-- average scores per category of union density (n=67)

	JPS	OWN	POS	QWL	N
< 20	2.50	2.83	2.50	2.50	6
20-49	2.38	2.85	2.56	2.74	39
>= 50	2.36	3.00	2.77	2.59	22
TOTAL	2.39	2.90	2.63	2.67	67

As one might have expected, the low-density category showed the highest average on JPS. Obviously, union groups and Works Councils operating from low-density (start) situations<sup>25</sup> tend to take refuge to JPS-type efforts. Contrary to this, the high-density category had the lowest average score on JPS and the highest on OWN. This result is also along the line of expectations: union

groups and Works Councils in this category tend to rely more on their own power. As could be expected too, the results of the high-density category in terms of POS were substantially better than those of the lower density categories. Yet, the results of the high-density category on QWL were disappointing, and contrary to the expected pattern. Moreover, this outcome did not convincingly correspond with our earlier finding that higher scores on JPS were related to higher scores on QWL, notably in cases of longer duration.

We suggest here two major explanations. First, notably in smaller companies a real lack of internal power resources, like a group of determined works councillors, may be at hand. In this category, Works Council may have substantial difficulties in mobilising resources in order to improve QWL, for example profiting from activities of union officers and agreements at industry level. This explanation intrudes itself because high-density cases are over-represented among the smaller companies: see Table 11<sup>26</sup>.

TABLE 11 Scores of union group / Works Council efforts to influence technological and organisational change – company size and union density of cases (n=66)

union density	< 20	20-49	>= 50	N
company size				
< 500	2	15	12	29
500 - 999	1	7	5	13
>= 1000	3	17	4	24
TOTAL	6	39	21	66

Union densities are 50 and more in 12 out of 29 ‘small company’ cases (41%), against 5 out of 13 (38%) in the medium-sized category and only 4 out of 24 (17%) in the ‘1000 and more’ size category. The results are striking if we only count the scores of this high-density group among the small companies (compare with Table 9, first row): JPS 2.42 (higher than average), OWN 2.92 (higher than average), and the POS score is 2.92, substantially higher than average; yet, QWL scores 2.58, somewhat lower than the average.

<sup>25</sup> We registered density rates in the first project year of each case.

<sup>26</sup> The standard deviation in the union density of the small companies is rather large; unless the high representation of well-organised companies, the average density in this category was just over 41.

A second explanation can, tentatively, already be derived from the last two figures: a high score on POS may –at least initially-- stand in the way of finding the combinations of dancing and boxing that are likely to be most effective for aiming at improving QWL. Indeed, the basic materials for earlier Dutch studies (like Van Klaveren, 1991a) provide indications in this direction. Not infrequently workers' representations, based on a well-organised constituency, turned out to have difficulties in finding such combinations. They tended to rely on highly procedural approaches of Works Council activities, and to stress the (formal) positions of union and Works Council delegates. From such positions, it is not easy to leave the classical mainstream of industrial relations, and to move towards combinations of boxing and dancing – building on efforts to convince both the own constituency and management that JPS has a large problem-solving potential. This second explanation may extend to companies of all sizes, but especially to the larger ones.



## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Taken together, the results of our analysis of 67 case studies show reasonable successful outcomes of the efforts of Dutch company union groups and Works Councils of three generations to influence new technology, work organization and quality of working life. The total average score on OWN was highest, that on JPS lowest. This outcome suggests that even in the rather consensual Dutch IR context active union groups and Works Councils over 2.5 decades have chosen almost naturally for a strong own profile and boxing practices. This notably seems the case in manufacturing industry, in larger organizations and if relatively high union densities prevail. At least temporarily, the persistence of such practices may have stood in the way of finding combinations of boxing and dancing effecting for improving QWL. On the other hand, we found strong indications that especially in cases of longer duration higher scores on JPS were related to higher scores on QWL. In other words, dancing and joint union/Works Council – management activities may be rather difficult to achieve, but they pay off in terms of a better quality of work and work organization. A main reservation has to be that workers' representations in smaller companies often seem to lack the power resources to bring about such results.

Moreover, our outcomes also demonstrate that relatively high ratings in terms of JPS and QWL do not clearly lead to stronger union group and/or Work Council positions (POS). This is a troublesome outcome for union policy makers and works councillors alike, asking for continued research and debate. We found evidence in quite some case reports that major impediments here are problems connected with claiming results of JPS for the workers' representatives, as well as of convincing their constituency of the effectiveness of such approaches (cf. Huzzard *et al*, 2004). Moreover, our analysis of the differences between generations of projects suggests that the problems of Dutch workers' representatives with effecting and 'selling' their JPS efforts have remained at least constant during the first half of the 1990s. The evidence cited earlier, suggesting that in the Netherlands the second half of the 1980s has been the heyday of this kind of workers' influence, was confirmed by our results. With this in mind it will be highly interesting indeed to try and trace the vicissitudes and effects of efforts up till 2005.

The variations in scores between industries are comparatively large. Again, it may be worthwhile to focus on the debate concerning JPS or worker – management partnerships, as the JPS scores show the largest standard deviation between industries. We are inclined to the view that industry characteristics definitely under the conditions of Dutch industrial relations remain very important in shaping opportunities and constraints for the kind of workers' activities at company level that we

analyzed. Especially supportive union structures can be most effective at sector level and can make the difference here. We suggest a parallel between our results and those of Rigby (1999).<sup>27</sup> Surely, positioning supportive structures at industry level may be very useful for stakeholders acting at that level – which is mainly the case for single unions in the Dutch industrial relations system. However, a too standardized positioning bears the risk of neglecting specific regional elements with potentially important effects. Common economic and employment developments may concentrate in regions, conditioning the opportunities for longer-term process-oriented activities at company level strongly. Regional labour market conditions and industrial relations traditions may be good predictors for the choice between predominantly boxing and dancing strategies – although the example of the innovative union approaches at the Rotterdam port indicates that sometimes actors involved are able to change their strategies rather quickly. Anyway, to include regional conditions can be more rewarding for some union company groups and Works Councils than concentrating fully on industry-related conditions. Against this background we emphasize the importance of analyses taking into account and confronting (information from) both sides, industry and region.

Finally, our results prove that the duration of workers' efforts matters. We found a clear relation between a longer duration of 'surviving' cases and higher scores on all four variables. Interventions of 6 years and more tend to be most effective. Our evidence suggests that the widespread viewpoint in work organization literature that fundamental organizational change, such as flattening hierarchies, introduction of team work, etcetera, takes 4 – 5 years, is a suitable object for revision and that (provided that companies do not meet too many constraints) efforts over an even longer time span may yield better results – at least on the workers' side.

We want to end this paper with some remarks concerning our research approach and the methodology used. Although rather experimental and partially even 'a jump in the dark', we judge our exercise worth the rather labour-intensive effort, both from a research perspective and from a trade union policy perspective. To start with the union perspective, we claim that an approach like ours opens up opportunities for:

- aggregating new types of information at industry level, a crucial level for most West European union movements

<sup>27</sup> Rigby (1999) explored the question whether European integration has led to convergence in industrial relations systems. Unions in five countries were chosen reflecting different industrial relations: Denmark, Italy, Spain, Germany and the UK. He found that although at the general level some degree of convergence was detectable (mainly in that management were seeking to restrict union influence and reduce labour costs), the causes and impact of these trends varied from sector to sector. Rigby concluded that the scope for unions to develop strategic responses depends on the degree that they have a supportive context – specifically, strong bargaining institutions and a focused union structure.

- getting reliable overviews of the characteristics of the interventions of union groups and Work Councils at company level, developing ‘collective memories’ enabling to get indications of the effects of supportive union structures and activities
- deriving better insight in the functioning of the unions as knowledge-based organisations and for developing instruments, structures and competencies for enlarging the effectiveness of their functioning as such
- deriving better insight in the time factor related to pro-active activities of workers’ representations, including the issue of (investments in) trust-building in worker – management partnerships

We do hope that especially in the Netherlands our approach may play a role as a trigger for a renewed policy debate about forms of union – Works Council cooperation and union activities on behalf of Works Councils.

From a research perspective, we end up with the conclusion that our exercise points to the usefulness of the instruments we used for describing, quantifying and measuring process-type interventions of workers’ representations. The four criteria adopted proved to be robust enough for case measurement and interpretation as well as comparison of case results. This means that, in conformity with the outcomes of the ‘Boxing and Dancing?’ research project, essential factors determining the interplay of dancing and boxing strategies of actors at company level can well be traced. Admittedly, our methodology still has to be refined, and more criteria and hypotheses have to be developed. Measurement efforts should be strengthened and should lead to higher levels of objective interpretation, for example by using panels of researchers and stakeholders. We are confident that, based on such further research efforts, opportunities will be revealed for a better connection between qualitative case analyses and quantitative analyses at higher levels of aggregation.





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## APPENDIX

### OVERVIEW OF 67 CASES OF DUTCH UNION GROUP AND/OR WORKS COUNCIL EFFORTS TO INFLUENCE NEW TECHNOLOGY AND WORK ORGANISATION

JPS = joint problem solving (5-points' scale)  
 OWN = own activities union group / Works Council (5-points' scale)  
 POS = better position union group / Works Council (5-points' scale)  
 QWL = advances in quality of working life / work organization (5-points' scale)

No	name company / institution	industry	period	JPS	OWN	POS	QWL	em pl.	den sity
1.	Aarque Systems <sup>i</sup>	chemicals	1982-1983	2	3	3	2	300	20
2.	Aegon Schade <sup>ii</sup>	insurance	1982-1988	2	3	2	4	1500	10
3.	Ahold Distribution Centre <sup>iii</sup>	retail	1986-1990	2	3	3	2	150	20
4.	Akzo Diosynth <sup>iv</sup>	chemicals	1994-1996	2	3	2	4	900	35
5.	Akzo Nobel Chemie <sup>v</sup>	chemicals	1995-1996	2	2	2	3	600	50
6.	Benraad Ulft <sup>vi</sup>	metals	1979-1983	1	3	2	1	250	40
7.	BankGiroCentrale / Interpay <sup>vii</sup>	bank	1992-2000	4	3	3	4	1600	20
8.	Bosch Medicentrum <sup>viii</sup>	hospital	1994-1996	3	2	2	3	2000	30
9.	Calve Delft <sup>ix</sup>	food	1979-1984	2	3	3	2	350	90
10.	Centraal Beheer <sup>x</sup>	insurance	1976-1984	3	4	3	3	2000	15
11.	Coveco Weert <sup>xi</sup>	food	1985-1989	4	3	3	4	180	50
12.	Dagblad v Noord-Limburg <sup>xii</sup>	printing	1981-1988	2	3	3	2	80	90
13.	DMV Campina Bergeijk <sup>xiii</sup>	food	1979-1983	2	3	3	4	440	25
14.	Dommelsch Bier <sup>xiv</sup>	food	1981-1991	3	2	3	3	200	50
15.	DSM Chemicals R'dam <sup>xv</sup>	chemicals	1983-1990	3	4	3	4	160	40
16.	ECT <sup>xvi</sup>	transport	1986-1996	4	4	3	4	1600	70
17.	Ekro <sup>xvii</sup>	food	1989-1990	2	3	3	3	150	30
18.	ENCI <sup>xviii</sup>	build.mat.	1981-1982	1	3	2	3	850	40
19.	Fokker Drechtsteden <sup>xix</sup>	metals	1980-1983	1	3	2	2	1300	50
20.	Fokker Special Products <sup>xx</sup>	metals	1994-1996	1	2	3	2	450	35
21.	Frans Swarttouw terminals <sup>xxi</sup>	transport	1985-1990	3	4	4	3	800	95
22.	GAB Amersfoort/Veenendaal <sup>xxii</sup>	public	1986-1988	3	3	2	3	80	20
23.	GEM / HES <sup>xxiii</sup>	transport	1986-1988	2	4	3	2	550	70
24.	HEMA-Distribution Centre <sup>xxiv</sup>	retail	1988-1990	2	3	3	2	350	15
25.	Heineken Den Bosch <sup>xxv</sup>	food	1980-1984	1	3	3	2	1200	45
26.	Heinz Elst <sup>xxvi</sup>	food	1980-1982	1	3	2	1	360	30
27.	Hercules Zwijndrecht <sup>xxvii</sup>	chemicals	1980-1982	1	3	2	2	275	50
28.	Honig Nijmegen <sup>xxviii</sup>	food	1979-1982	1	3	2	2	390	40
29.	Howson-Algraphy <sup>xxix</sup>	chemicals	1981-1990	3	4	4	3	165	50
30.	ICI Botlek <sup>xxx</sup>	chemicals	1982-1983	2	3	3	2	1800	30
31.	ING Bank <sup>xxxi</sup>	bank	1994-1996	3	2	2	3	25000	25
32.	Marvelo (Ahold Production) <sup>xxxii</sup>	food	1992-1994	3	2	2	3	150	20
33.	Melkunie-Rotterdam <sup>xxxiii</sup>	food	1983-1988	2	3	3	3	350	50
34.	M & T Chemicals <sup>xxxiv</sup>	chemicals	1980-1983	1	3	2	2	170	50
35.	NKF Delft <sup>xxxv</sup>	metals	1981-1984	3	3	3	3	1250	30
36.	NMB Bank <sup>xxxvi</sup>	bank	1982-1985	3	2	2	2	10500	15
37.	Ned. Gasunie <sup>xxxvii</sup>	energy	1994-1996	1	3	3	2	1800	40
38.	Nedstaa <sup>xxxviii</sup>	metals	1981-1983	3	3	2	3	1400	40
39.	NBBS Reizen <sup>xxxix</sup>	travel	1994-1996	4	3	3	4	600	30
40.	NS-Materieelwerkplaatsen <sup>xl</sup>	transport	1987-1990	3	3	3	2	500	40
41.	NSEM <sup>xli</sup>	electr.	1979-1983	3	3	4	3	900	45
42.	Pechiney Vlissingen <sup>xlii</sup>	metals	1980-1982	1	3	2	2	900	30

43.	Perscombinatie-Productie <sup>xliii</sup>	printing	1978-1984	3	2	2	2	550	80
44.	Philips Nijmegen <sup>xliv</sup>	electr.	1975-1979	2	4	3	3	2000	35
45.	Philips Stadskanaal <sup>xlv</sup>	electr.	1975-1979	2	4	3	2	2600	70
46.	Philips Winterswijk <sup>xlvi</sup>	electr.	1984-1990	3	3	2	3	450	35
47.	Postkantoren BV <sup>xlvii</sup>	post	1992-1996	3	4	3	3	6000	35
48.	PTT Telecom <sup>xlviii</sup>	telecom	1985-1990	2	4	3	2	4000	30
49.	Public Library A'dam(OBA) <sup>xlix</sup>	public	1985-1990	4	3	3	3	500	40
50.	Rank Xerox Zeist <sup>l</sup>	metals	1995-1996	2	2	2	2	450	5
51.	Samsom Sijthoff <sup>li</sup>	printing	1984-1987	2	2	2	2	??	70
52.	Scania Nederland <sup>lii</sup>	metals	1994-1996	3	3	3	3	2200	40
53.	Sphinx <sup>liii</sup>	ceramics	1985-1989	3	3	2	3	1600	50
54.	Shell Moerdijk Chemicals <sup>liv</sup>	chemicals	1986-1988	3	4	2	4	1000	20
55.	Shell Pernis Chem. (SNC) <sup>lv</sup>	chemicals	1979-1984	3	3	2	2	2500	20
56.	Smit Cars <sup>lvi</sup>	metals	1981-1982	1	2	2	2	60	50
57.	Smit Ovens & Gasgen. <sup>lvii</sup>	metals	1982-1984	4	4	3	3	250	65
58.	UBO <sup>lviii</sup>	rubber	1982-1983	1	3	3	2	400	20
59.	UKF Pernis <sup>lix</sup>	chemicals	1981-1984	1	3	3	3	950	60
60.	Unilever Nederland <sup>lx</sup>	food	1994-1996	3	2	2	3	9000	35
61.	Unitcentre <sup>lxi</sup>	transport	1986-1993	4	3	4	3	400	80
62.	TDF Tiofine <sup>lxii</sup>	chemicals	1987-1990	3	2	4	4	280	30
63.	VAM/Essent Milieu <sup>lxiii</sup>	energy	1990-2000	3	4	3	4	300	40
64.	Van Gend & Loos <sup>lxiv</sup>	transport	1984-1987	2	2	3	2	300	60
65.	Van Ommeren <sup>lxv</sup>	transport	1994-1996	2	2	3	2	2000	45
66.	WU Hypotheekbank <sup>lxvi</sup>	bank	1997-2002	3	3	3	2	500	10
67.	Wolters Kluwer <sup>lxvii</sup>	printing	1994-1996	1	2	2	2	3500	20
average				2.39	2.90	2.63	2.67		42

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