

Strikes spread within and between industrial sectors

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Strikes are contagious. So there is a chance that the security staff at Schiphol who held a strike yesterday and the further education college lecturers who are striking tomorrow will also encourage other to strike. Strikes, such as the one currently taking place in the cleaning sector, can even spread to other sectors. The risk of this is greatest between two weeks and six months after the start of the strike. The highest chance of contagiousness occurs about a month after the strike started. That is apparent from research led by NWO researcher Agnes Akkerman, which was carried out at Radboud University Nijmegen. Akkerman will present the research results on 21 May during the final conference of the NWO research programme Conflict and Security.

In commercial sectors where people change jobs more often, the chances of a [strike](#) spreading to another sector doubles. That applies, for example, to the trade and industry sectors. The same types of jobs and the visibility of the other sector for the employees form the explanation for this according to the researchers. The contagiousness of strikes also applies to companies in the same sector. The greater the number of working days lost due to a strike, the greater the chance of a strike at another company in the same sector.

Importance of information for the negotiator

In the negotiations about collective labour agreements, [trade unions](#) and employers often make use of information from previous successful and

unsuccessful negotiations and strikes. Interestingly, the outcome of such events (for example, a 3% wage increase) has no effect on the chances of a strike occurring within the company. In general, employers have access to more information than the trade union. Therefore when the two parties come to the negotiating table there is an unequal distribution in the information that can be utilised. If the trade union possesses relevant information about previous negotiations then negotiations with the employer proceed more easily. The researchers therefore advise employers to play an open hand towards the trade union with respect to the space for manoeuvre during the negotiations.

Influence of the trade union, employer and colleagues

Employees who are considering whether or not to go on strike only become open for information from the boss during the employment conflict if they trust him or her. Trust in the trade union, however, is not relevant for the use of [information](#) provided by the trade union but identifying with the union most certainly is: this increases the willingness of employees to strike. If two employees can also get along well in the private sphere then this increases the chances that they will act in the same way (joining the strike or not).

Various research methods

The researchers acquired the research results by making use of a wide range of research methods. For example, they held a social network analysis among 59 cleaners who participated in the 105-day-long strike in the cleaning sector in 2012. Also 128 negotiators and 468 trade union members were questioned via a web survey. Further 70 people took part in a negotiation game via the computer that was played almost 500 times. The strike activity of 6569 companies in Europe was analysed via interviews with managers and employees' representatives. Use was also

made of the Strikes in the Netherlands (SIN) database.

The research of Akkerman and her research team is one of the eight research projects that will be presented during the final conference of the Conflict and Security programme on 21 May in Driebergen. Politicologist Agnes Akkerman is currently working at the VU University Amsterdam.

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