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Planting seeds for social dialogue: An institutional work perspective

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Abstract:

The paper seeks to understand how social dialogue can emerge in an anti-union context. Building from an institutional work perspective, we investigate how Dole in Costa Rica went from resisting to accepting social dialogue with two pineapple unions. The findings show that social dialogue is the result of a combination of convening, enabling, empowering and monitoring work involving a triadic relationship between supplier, international buyer and unions. Four stages were identified during which actors learned to collaborate and power relations were transformed. The paper highlights the importance of the dynamic nature of the triadic relationship in influencing social dialogue in a global value chain where production is located in an anti-union environment. The findings provide unique evidence on the role of the international buyer in supporting social dialogue as convener, facilitator, mediator and advisor.

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Key words: *Trade unions, institutional work, social dialogue, global value chains, third party*

1. Introduction

Social dialogue, a formal labour institution for bargaining working conditions, is one of the core labour standards. The right to organise and collective bargaining, enshrined in ILO conventions 87 and 98, form the basis to open doors for social dialogue (ILO, 2003). Concerns regarding the implementation of these rights have been raised in global value chains (GVCs), where multinationals are increasingly committed to take their responsibility for working conditions through the adoption of private regulatory standards (Mena and Suddaby, 2016; Ruwanpura, 2015). However, in a rapidly globalizing trade environment, where footloose buyers source globally, trade

unions are often weakly empowered to challenge working conditions (Alford et al., 2017; Egels-Zanden and Merk, 2014; Barrientos and Smith, 2007; Riisgaard and Hammer, 2011).

Previous studies on labour relations in GVCs have focused on the development of International Framework Agreements (Riisgaard, 2005; Helfen and Sydow, 2013), the impact of private codes of conduct (Anner, 2012; Barrientos and Smith, 2007; Egels-Zanden and Merk, 2014) or the alliances with international unions and NGOs (Egels-Zandén and Hyllman, 2006; Zajac, 2017). While these studies take a global governance approach and focus on the macro-level actors (certification bodies, international NGOs, brands) to evaluate the outcomes of initiatives for decent work in value chains, less is known on local struggles in the field, especially when it involves micro-interactions between local unions and management (Wells, 2009).

This study aims at understanding how social dialogue can emerge in an anti-union context. We draw on the case of a Norwegian importer that buys pineapples and bananas from the multinational Dole Food Company, Inc. (Dole) in Costa Rica. In response to allegations against Dole concerning its anti-union practices in 2006, a long process of change started to unfold and slowly opened the doors to social dialogue. We use institutional work as a lens (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) to investigate the micro-practices at work enabling social dialogue to take place. The article is organised around two research questions: 1) What types of institutional work did actors develop to enable social dialogue? and 2) How did it change the relationship between actors over time?

If most studies on social dialogue have focused on dyadic forms of interactions, we show that triadic relationships help bringing change. In our case, the international buyer played an instrumental role to enhance social dialogue between the multinational supplier and trade unions. These actors developed four types of institutional work to enable social dialogue—convening, empowering, enabling and monitoring—and dialogue evolved over four phases— embryonic, birth, nurturing and autonomous. Social dialogue developed through a slow and continuous process as

interactions shifted from one stage to another implying a change in regularity in the interaction, power relationships between the actors and the buyers' role in the relationship.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Social dialogue in global value chains

Social dialogue is understood as a fundamental mean to improve working conditions (ILO, 2003). Violations of rights to organise have been widely reported in countries where rule of law fails to protect unions (Anner, 2017). Since labour relations are integrated in a global value chain perspective, studies emphasized the role of brands, consumers and private certification standards. In the absence of strong government enforcement, private certification standards can contribute to promote trade union rights in certified companies. However, the impact of private standards to do so is limited by weak supplier's incentives, insufficient audits and alternative worker's organisations (Barrientos and Smith, 2007; Anner, 2017; Egels-Zandén and Merk, 2014). Alternatively, unions form alliances with international NGOs and target Western companies through consumer campaigns (den Hond et al., 2010). The way these tactics trigger a boomerang effect on suppliers has been well documented, but we lack evidence of local social dialogue processes that emerged in the aftermath of these campaigns.

It is unclear which role different actors may play, and how unions try to exercise power to influence social dialogue. Traditional sources of power originate from the position of unions in GVCs enabling disruption of production with a strike (*structural power*) and the ability to organize workers in unions (*associational power*) (Webster, 2015). Other sources of power are rooted in alliances with NGOs and external support for unions using social movement tactics (*societal power*) (Zajak, 2017). Bartley and Egels-Zanden (2016) identified a repertoire of union leverage strategies such as calling retailers to support negotiations with local management, using the threat

of contacting the retailer if no local solution is found, and using retailer support to build local organizational capacity. Webster (2015) highlighted *institutional power*, that aims at making associational power sustainable for unions by using private complaint channels, going to court, bargaining in institutionalized forms of social dialogue. International buyers have, as a third party, the potential to induce the different forms of power, and to create change towards social dialogue and more collaboration (Arenas et al., 2013). However, we lack evidence on how international buyers can do so, and can “work” to engage and drive social dialogue.

2.2 An institutional work lens

The institutional work perspective focusses on the role actors play in influencing institutions and institutional change (Hempel et al., 2017). Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) identified three main forms of institutional work by which actors put effort in maintaining, disrupting or creating institutions. First, *maintenance work* refers to creating rules (enabling), enforcement and monitoring of compliance (policing), creation of coercive barriers (detering) and embedding in daily practices (routinizing). Second, *creation work* consists of activities to gain support (advocacy), provide knowledge needed for a new institution (educating), change normative associations, construct networks, theorize and, establish rules and boundaries of membership (defining). Third, *disruption work* relates to actions directed to undermine or attack the current institution. This typology forms the base of many studies that have further enriched it.

All actors in the GVCs may use different of these forms of institutional work to push for change. For example, Mena and Suddaby (2016) show how outsiders “worked” to shift conflict to collaboration in the case of FLA (Fair Labor Association) standard adoption. Yet, in GVC literature outsiders are often international unions or NGOs pushing for change. Less is known on how international buyers, given their influential position, could promote social dialogue. Hence, in this

paper, we use the institutional work lens to examine how actors, in a triadic relationship (local unions, management and international buyer), employ different micro-practices over time to enable institutional change and enhance social dialogue.

3. Research context and methods

3.1 Research context

Unions in Costa Rica

Costa Rica became world's leading exporter of fresh pineapple in the last two decades (Vagneron et al., 2009). This expansion attracted many Nicaraguan migrants to seize job opportunities. Although for many workers pineapple is the only source of income (Voorend et al., 2013), few workers have a permanent contract with the plantation. The weak enforcement of the labour laws and competitive pressures contributed to an increasing number of flexible contracts, a common trend of labour casualization (Alford et al., 2017).

Workers' level of protection through labour unions is limited. Low unionisation rates in the private sector (less than 1% of all private sector workers) are partly explained by the existence of solidarity associations to which a large share of workers belongs to (OECD, 2017). These "solidaristas" are alternative worker organisations, for which membership is partly paid by the employers. The benefits are more tangible (e.g. saving and credit schemes), rather than the protection of labour rights. Within a solidarista, a "permanent committee" consisting of three elected worker representatives may address complaints to employers and settle so-called direct agreements (Mosley, 2008). These solidarity associations have replaced trade unions in the banana and pineapple sector (Riisgaard, 2005).

The socio-political environment has not been conducive to trade unions either exemplified by weak state enforcement, slow judicial procedures, unfavourable legal provisions, and little political will

for a far-reaching labour reform (Acuña, 2009; OECD, 2017). A large defamation campaign against unions fed the growing negative reputation and resistance to trade unions in Costa Rica (Acuña, 2009). The Labour Code (art. 56) stipulates that unions are allowed to initiate the process to obtain a Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) when at least one third of the total workers is requesting it, however, unionisation rates are far below 33% of the workers. This explains why so few collective bargaining agreements are signed compared to direct agreements, which do not serve to negotiate working conditions (OECD, 2017).

Empirical setting

Our study analyses a unique process of social dialogue that stands out in the anti-union context of the pineapple sector in Costa Rica. A Norwegian fruits and vegetables importer, Bama Gruppen, started to actively support social dialogue between workers and their employers on banana and later pineapple plantations held by Standard Fruit Company Costa Rica, which is a branch of Dole. Dole is the second largest exporter of pineapple and banana in Costa Rica employing 8300 workers in its locally owned production sites (Comex, 2016). Bama has a strong position, as it is one of the three biggest customers of Dole in Europe, buying many products from Dole worldwide.

In 2006, the civil society organisation EUROBAN (the European Banana and Agro Industrial Product Action Network) targeted European buyers of Dole bananas in a consumer campaign. Their report “Dole behind the smokescreen” described violations of trade union rights and poor working conditions (EUROBAN, 2006). The campaign escalated in Norway where Bama appointed a new CSR manager with expertise in social dialogue. As a result of the actions taken by Bama and its Norwegian partners (development cooperation NORAD, trade union federation LO, federation of commercial and service enterprises VIRKE), some seeds for dialogue were planted in the Dole-owned banana plantations and later pollinated to two of its pineapple

plantations in La Virgen and Boca Arenal of the Huetar Norte region (Figure 1). At the Dole-La Virgen plantation, the union SITAGAH had 25 members of the 400 workers (6%), while in the Dole-Boca Arenal plantation the union SINTRAPIFRUT (now SINTRASTAFCOR) had 80 members of the 600 workers (13%) as of January 2016.

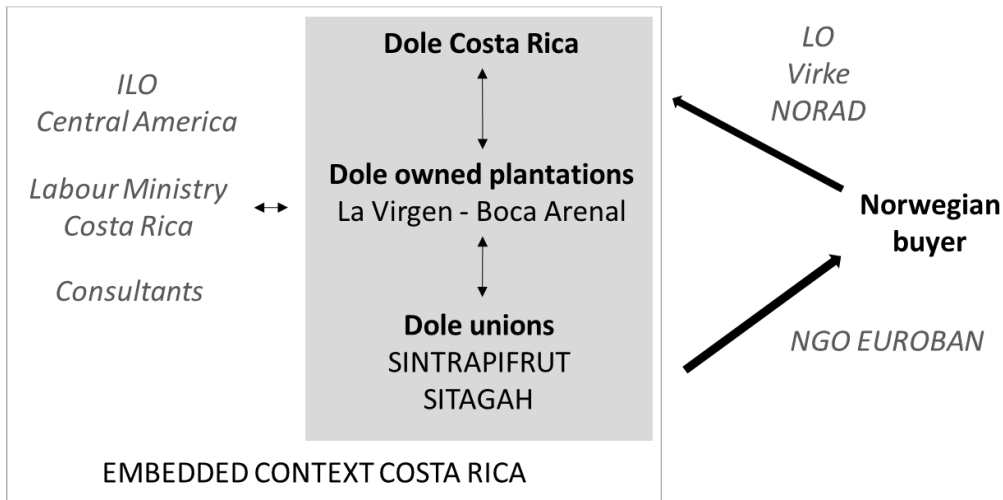


Figure 1. Empirical setting of involved actors in the social dialogue process

Over time, the unions in both pineapple plantations grew in membership even if they keep on complaining about anti-union practices (such as unjustified dismissals and verbal harassment) and difficulties to grow in member size. By the end of our data collection, none of the plantation unions managed to reach a CBA, which is perceived as the ultimate goal of social dialogue. Despite these problems, advances towards worker empowerment were made in the ten years that followed the EUROBAN campaign which is the time frame of our analysis.

3.2 Data collection

Data was collected during three collection rounds in 2015-2016 in the Huetar Norte region, the border area with Nicaragua where the largest recent pineapple expansion took place. During the

first exploratory data collection round in May 2015 a total of 29 stakeholders (including union representatives, producer representatives, government representatives of the ministry of agriculture, labour and trade) were interviewed and three plantations were visited to get a better understanding of the labour conditions in the pineapple sector.

The second data collection round (January-June 2016) consisted of 385 face-to-face surveys with workers across pineapple plantations to investigate the perception of their working conditions. This included a sample of 65 workers of the Dole plantations. Additionally, four focus groups (each 5-8 participants) were conducted with the four unions in the region. The focus groups aimed at identifying the different union trajectories, and discussing their weaknesses and strengths. Although data from round two are not detailed in this study, they deepened our understanding of the local context and identified the unique case of social dialogue at Dole.

Round three of the data collection (November 2016) focussed on the selected case. We interviewed representatives from the three actors involved: unions (SITAGAH and SINTRASTAFCOR), supplier (Dole) and international buyer (Bama). The respondents included the HR manager of Dole Costa Rica, the CSR manager of Bama, three local trade union representatives of SITAGAH and SINTRASTAFCOR, a Norwegian trade union representative, two labour ministry officials, and three local trade union consultants. These semi-structured interviews were conducted by the lead author in Spanish in Costa Rica and in English via skype with the Norwegian actors. Each respondent was first asked to spontaneously tell the history of social dialogue by highlighting the major events in a timeline. The interview questions focused on the actions, motives and outcomes of social dialogue, the different stakeholder's attitudes towards social dialogue and the perceived internal and external challenges. The interview data largely relied on the respondents' memories and were complemented and validated with 22 secondary sources (communication statements, campaign reports of NGOs,, company CSR reports).

3.3 Data analysis

Data was abductively analysed by navigating back and forth between the empirical data and literature. The institutional work lens matched well with the data to create an explanation for the social dialogue process that resulted from actions taken by the three actors.

The data analysis was organised in three steps. Step one involved a detailed reading of the collected material to develop a case story and timeline (Langley, 1999) (see Appendix). These chronologically organised events were then decomposed in different phases using a temporal bracketing strategy (Langley, 1999). The regularity of interaction was used to identify the phases. Four phases were distinguished by the irregular and regular interactions between the actors (Dole/union, union/Bama, Bama/Dole). We distinguish (1) a phase of embryonic dialogue during which dialogue was inexistent, (2) one of birth of dialogue, (3) infancy phase with nurturing of dialogue and (4) adolescence phase where dialogue became more independent.

Step two is inspired by Gioia (2012). The first order codes were informant-centric and related to the micro-activities as formulated by the actors. These micro-activities were generalised into second order categories. The third order overarching theoretical themes consisted of the forms of institutional work (Figure 2).

First order	Second order	Third order
Quotes activities	Bringing parties around table	Convening work
Quotes activities	Creating trust between parties	
Quotes activities	Bringing in expertise	
Quotes activities	Bridging communication between unions and management	
Quotes activities	Establishing communication channels to share information	
Quotes activities	Mobilizing workers to join unions	
Quotes activities	Involving outsiders to provide resources and advice	Empowering work
Quotes activities	Educating dialogue parties	
Quotes activities	Promoting union acceptance	
Quotes activities	Making buying conditional upon respecting social dialogue	Enabling work
Quotes activities	Defining clear regulations to formalize relations	
Quotes activities	Recognizing trade union rights	
Quotes activities	Extending formal agreement	
Quotes activities	Routinizing dialogue for discussing and solving labour issues	
Quotes activities	Requesting information	
Quotes activities	Directly controlling compliance	
Quotes activities	Preventing and reconciling conflict	
Quotes activities	Giving advice	

Figure 2. Coding scheme with first, second and third order codes

Step three connects a dynamic understanding of the change in interactions (from step 1) to the types of institutional work we identified (from step 2). For each of the four phases in dialogue, we analyse the union’s use of power sources (associational, structural, societal, and institutional (Zajac, 2017; Webster, 2015)) and the role of the buyer as third party (Arenas et al., 2013), which are then related to the types of institutional work.

4. Results

4.1 Forms of institutional work underpinning social dialogue

We identified four types of institutional work with distinct micro-activities that were needed to enable social dialogue between the unions and Dole in Costa Rica.

Convening work

We define *convening work* as actions that aim to connect parties and create space in which they can develop new practices of social dialogue (Table 1). Before 2006, the relationship between the unions and Dole was conflictual. Unions were not recognized as a dialogue partner. As a result, they were not invited to meet with management and discuss labour issues. The unions complained about anti-union practices which were picked up by the above-mentioned EUROBAN. The relationship between the unions and Dole started to change in 2006 in response to the EUROBAN campaign which targeted Dole for not respecting worker's rights. Bama was directly impacted by the campaign as Dole was one of its most important suppliers of bananas and pineapple. In reaction to the campaign, Bama appointed a CSR manager, with years of experience in labour relations as ILO official in Central-America. His mission was to use his expertise and knowledge to advance and deal with the social dialogue problems in the Costa Rican plantations (1.1). It helped him to bring the different parties around the table and initiate a dialogue (1.2).

To initiate the communication between the unions and management, which was obviously not running smoothly, the CSR manager performed a bridging role and attempted to build trust and to erode prejudices from different sides (1.3). Unions first called Bama's CSR manager to share grievances, who directly pushed Dole to take appropriate measures (1.4).

Table 1. Qualitative data for convening work (extracts from the interviews with are exemplary)

<p>“The CSR manager has been a key player, and obviously the pressure of Bama as a company, to enable social dialogue.” (Trade union consultant A)</p>	<p>1.1 BRINGING IN EXPERTISE</p>
<p>“They managed to bring together the plantation managers and supervisors to sit together with trade union representatives, what they did not want to do before.” (Trade union consultant A) “The first four years nothing happened between Dole and the union if I was not here. Only when I came was the meeting. Otherwise there was nothing, the dialogue was going each time I came.” (CSR manager Bama)</p>	<p>1.2 BRINGING PARTIES AROUND THE DIALOGUE TABLE</p>
<p>“It is all very much based on trust, to create trust, and show that you keep your word and be regular. [...] We advise both parties so they need to trust me.” (CSR manager Bama)</p>	<p>1.3 CREATING TRUST BETWEEN PARTIES</p>
<p>“With the least little thing the union representative wrote a letter and asked us [Norwegian union] to write to the ILO and the Costa Rican government, it was very irritating for Dole when they haven’t had an opportunity to talk about the situation and try to resolve it locally.” (Norwegian trade union representative)</p>	<p>1.4 BRIDGING COMMUNICATION BETWEEN UNIONS AND MANAGEMENT</p>
<p>“Social dialogue requires that even the managerial levels at the plantation are involved, the human resources office at the plantations are in continuous conversation. [...] In every plantation there is a person in charge of human resources to inspect the labour issues when there is a request or complaint, and to design an action plan.” (Dole HR manager) “The positive thing of dialogue is that it created communication channels and mechanisms to reach an agreement which would otherwise have been through court. [...] a union can invoke this dialogue table. The company is willing to sit together, listen and attempts to solve what is within their reach.” (Dole HR manager)</p>	<p>1.5 ESTABLISHING COMMUNICATION CHANNELS AT ALL LEVELS</p>
<p>“They don’t mobilize workers in the company, they do it house by house in the communities because there is the supervisor impeding it at the plantation, they do it in the community by creating a good image for the union.” (Trade union consultant B) “The unions have to work more actively to organize the workers, because they are not as strong as they could be. Their main emphasis should be organizing more workers. [...] they had to organize meetings outside working hours, on Sundays, in the evening.” (Norwegian trade union representative)</p>	<p>1.6 MOBILIZING WORKERS TO JOIN UNION</p>
<p>“A year ago they took the decision to merge with the plantation union to support the workers in the plantation against the misbehaviour and antiunion practices they experienced. We [union] in logistics do have a collective agreement and through this agreement we are able to move and the company is respecting the plantation union more because of the merge with us.” (Trade union representative C)</p>	<p>1.7 FORMING ALLIANCES BETWEEN UNIONS</p>

New communication channels had to be established crossing different levels within Dole in order to create space for social dialogue (1.5). For example, Dole invited local plantation leaders to explain the new obligations to accept trade unions. Each plantation was required to have an HR office dealing with grievances and providing a direct communication link with workers and unions.

Because unionisation rates remained low and workers were not aware of their rights to join a union, the unions adjusted their mobilization strategies to get more workers organised in the communities through informative weekend events and personal visits (1.6). A sectoral union federation FENTRAG was formed to connect the fragmented agricultural unions and jointly developed organisational strategies to increase their bargaining power. As a result, the stronger Dole logistics union SINTRASTAFCOR in the harbour merged with the weaker pineapple plantation union SINTRAPIFRUT (1.7).

These seven subcategories of convening work illustrated the kind of micro-practices actors engaged in to connect the actors and to create space to develop social dialogue. These micro-practices did not all start at the same point in time, but have built on each other as will be discussed in the second part of the findings.

Empowering work

Empowering work refers to practices that aimed at building capacity (Table 2). A number of external actors were involved in the process. The Norwegian trade union (LO) and employers' organisation (VIRKE) provided resources and gave advice to both parties. This involvement of outsiders facilitated the discussions and strengthened the negotiation skills in joint meetings and seminars. ILO and the Labour Ministry of Costa Rica provided support, attended seminars and gave talks. The Labour Ministry also intervened as formal mediator to reconcile labour conflicts. Local external consultants, with experience in social dialogue and long-lasting relations with the unions, assisted the unions in developing union strategies, training their members and improving negotiation skills (2.1).

Table 2. Qualitative data for empowering work

<p>“LO and Virke visited Costa Rica once a year and participated in first joint seminars and then there were seminars with each partner: the Virke representative could talk to the employers and I [trade unionist] could talk to the workers and we would come back together and have joint seminars about how the situation actually was and what could be done to improve it.” (Norwegian trade union representative)</p>	<p>2.1 INVOLVING OUTSIDERS TO PROVIDE RESOURCES AND ADVICE</p>
<p>“Bama has helped us to give capacity training, Dole gives us permission to have an unpaid day off. This is how we have benefitted: explaining to workers how management can undermine us, raising awareness about their rights and duties as a worker.” (Trade union representative C)</p> <p>“The second important problem is the capacity building of union members, they are not sufficiently trained about how to behave in meetings, how to monitor agreements, how to be punctual. It is very difficult to have meetings.” (Dole HR manager)</p> <p>“All the funding allocated by the Norwegian government is used for the trade union training programs and Dole is financing their own training activities and seminars.” (CSR manager Bama)</p>	<p>2.2 CAPACITATING DIALOGUE PARTIES</p>
<p>“After Bama we could reach the workers in the field, before we had no contact, now they give us the chance to visit the workers in the field. Dole is supporting us now because before we could not go to the field.” (Trade union representative C)</p> <p>“We presented the union to all workers and they went to visit all the plantations during a full week with the trade union secretary, handing out information brochures to become a member of the union. For a company, this is almost outrageous, but it resulted from the pressure of Bama.” (Trade union consultant B)</p>	<p>2.3 PROMOTING ACCEPTANCE OF UNIONS</p>

The Norwegian trade union and development cooperation organised trainings for union members on how to strengthen collective organisation, recruitment strategies, leadership skills, and negotiation tactics. Dole independently organised trainings for supervisors about respect for trade union rights and social dialogue (2.2). As actors were getting more used to those new relationships, joint activities were organised at the plantations to promote and increase visibility of the unions (2.3). Dole permitted unpaid leave for workers interested to attend union meetings, unions invited the Dole HR manager to activities and both parties held joint informative visits to plantations.

The three forms of practices underpinning empowering work served to raise awareness on benefits of social dialogue, trained actors on their mutual obligations, provided them with new skills and made workers more confident to claim their rights and foster collaboration. Empowering work is a continuous task. It was initiated at one point in time by outsiders but further developed as the actors learned to collaborate and became capable of negotiating in social dialogue.

Enabling work

To enable social dialogue a range of activities were introduced to create rules and routinize the procedures which we define as *enabling work* (Table 3). Bama required its suppliers to respect social dialogue and made buying conditional on it (3.1). As major loyal buyer of Dole, Bama had the authority to demand respect for trade union rights, and the threat of exclusion provided incentives to collaborate. Instead of sanctioning, Bama followed a supportive approach to enable social dialogue by using their moral power, patience and loyalty. In 2007, the newly established relations between unions and management were formalized in a framework agreement stipulating the rules for respecting trade union rights (3.2). Dole recognized the trade unions as equal dialogue partner and provided the unions with access to the plantations (3.3). The procedures for social dialogue were further determined in a new framework agreement in 2012 which was extended to the unions of the pineapple plantations (3.4). The practical operationalization of social dialogue was routinized in regular joint meetings between unions and management, where they could discuss labour issues, prevent conflict and find solutions. Yearly seminars were organised in the presence of Norwegian actors to evaluate progress (3.5).

Enabling work consisted of five micro-practices which helped building social dialogue to become a legitimate activity. The formalisation of social dialogue in a framework agreement and the routinized dialogue mechanisms were fundamental steps to enable dialogue. Without these formal rules and procedures, enforcing dialogue would have been impossible.

Table 3. Qualitative data for enabling work

<p>“The topic of social dialogue has been an obligatory aspect from the perspective of Bama. To show people how to maintain peaceful relations in the company and discuss issues in order to prevent conflicts.” (Trade union consultant B)</p> <p>“The only requirement we put to all our suppliers is to respect the rights workers have to form a trade union if they want to. That is how it also started in Costa Rica because they initially did not respect that right.” (CSR manager Bama)</p>	<p>3.1 MAKING BUYING CONDITIONAL UPON RESPECTING TRADE UNION RIGHTS</p>
<p>“I believe it [the signing of the agreement] is thanks to the support and accompaniment of Bama. I do not think it would have been possible to create this kind of dynamic if they were alone.” (Dole HR manager)</p> <p>“It is not legally binding, it does not give them any rights, it is not a collective agreement. [...] It is a good base and then start to work on the next phase which is organizing workers and starting to negotiate a collective agreement.” (CSR manager Bama)</p>	<p>3.2 DEFINING REGULATIONS TO FORMALIZE LABOUR RELATIONS</p>
<p>“A crucial step was getting them to realize what the ILO core conventions were about and what obligations they had.” (Norwegian trade union representative)</p> <p>“There are some workers who belong to a union, they will be around and enter freely. Dole guarantees to put freedom of association into practice, they do not have to fear dismissals.” (Dole HR manager)</p>	<p>3.3 RECOGNIZING TRADE UNION RIGHTS</p>
<p>“In 2012 they revised some of the commitments of the agreement. They extended the document and included 12 additional articles: 7 deal with the internal relation, one with capacity, other with suppliers, environment, the implementation scope and communication mechanisms and follow-up of the agreement. One about the complaint mechanism and on what principles we base ourselves to make decisions.” (Dole HR manager)</p> <p>“It was also easier for us to ask them to include the pineapple workers because we were also buying pineapples. That is part of the game. If we had not been buying pineapples from Dole, it would have been more difficult for us to push them to also include the unions.” (CSR manager Bama)</p>	<p>3.4 EXTENDING FORMAL AGREEMENT</p>
<p>“Every three months we meet and evaluate the procedures. Once a year we evaluate the dialogue progress. We communicate to the union what has not been working for us for these reasons and the unions respond by saying what has not been working for them.” (Dole HR manager)</p> <p>“The last two years unions haven’t reported problems to enter the farms or meet the workers. Dole has even gone to meetings together, the HR manager is meeting unions now two or three times a week.” (Bama CSR manager)</p>	<p>3.5 ROUTINIZING DIALOGUE PROCEDURES FOR DISCUSSING LABOUR ISSUES</p>

Monitoring work

Monitoring work refers to activities ensuring compliance with new practices in social dialogue (Table 4). In the aftermath of the EUROBAN campaign, Bama wanted to check conditions in the field. The CEO and newly appointed CSR manager went to Costa Rica requesting information on labour relations and current practices (4.1). The CSR manager had to systematise follow-up mechanisms to keep track of compliance with trade union rights and social dialogue (4.2). The CSR manager attended various meetings in Costa Rica and intervened to prevent and reconcile

conflicts (4.3). Bama calmed Dole’s anti-union tactics and requested Dole not to obstruct union organisation. However, Bama’s active involvement weakened over time to an advisor role as dialogue between the parties was being more consolidated and routinized (4.4).

Table 4. Qualitative data for monitoring work

<p>“After this criticism we [Bama] went into Costa Rica to meet with Dole, to find out what was going on; because in an interview with trade unionists in Costa Rica they were complaining a lot about Dole and saying that they were preventing them from forming trade unions.” (Bama CSR manager)</p> <p>“He [CEO Bama] went actually on his own into Costa Rica to find out what actually was going on in the way workers were treated.” (Norwegian trade union representative)</p>	<p>4.1 REQUESTING INFORMATION</p>
<p>“That was when I was hired to start systematizing. [...] We don’t ask them to show us a certificate, we prefer to have this direct dialogue.” (Bama CSR manager)</p> <p>“Bama does not require certification standards, they prefer to directly verify conditions with the workers here. [...] Four times a year Bama verifies social and environmental issues.” (Dole HR manager)</p>	<p>4.2 DIRECTLY CONTROLLING COMPLIANCE</p>
<p>“Bama has helped to calm down anti-union practices. Dole is one of the largest buyers and they had to cradle them in their arms, so the arrival of Bama in the pineapple plantations has helped a little.” (Trade union representative C)</p> <p>“Bama’s CSR manager called the Dole HR manager and said he had to reinstate the dismissed worker. Thus, the CSR manager starts to negotiate, as if he was a conciliator.” (Trade union consultant A)</p>	<p>4.3 PREVENTING AND RECONCILIATING CONFLICT</p>
<p>“I am just an advisor, I don’t want them to call me too much directly, I need to be neutral in the middle. [...] The thing Bama wants to do is just to facilitate, we are not pushing the workers in a trade union. We are not pushing Dole to go out and talk for the trade union. We just say to Dole don’t intervene, don’t block it.” (Bama CSR manager)</p> <p>“The CSR manager of Bama says that you cannot sustain dialogue externally, it has to come from within the workers.” (Trade union consultant A)</p>	<p>4.4 GIVING ADVICE</p>

4.2 Dynamic understanding of interactions

The previously defined forms of institutional work and their micro-activities did not all start simultaneously. To answer our second research question, we add a time dimension to the analysis, and line up the institutional works and the way they contributed in changing the relationship between the actors (Union/Dole, Dole/Bama, Union/Bama) over time (Figure 3). The four interaction phases -- (1) embryonic dialogue, (2) the birth of dialogue, (3) nurturing dialogue and (4) autonomous dialogue -- are the unit of analysis. Institutional works pushed the interaction between the actors from one phase to the other.

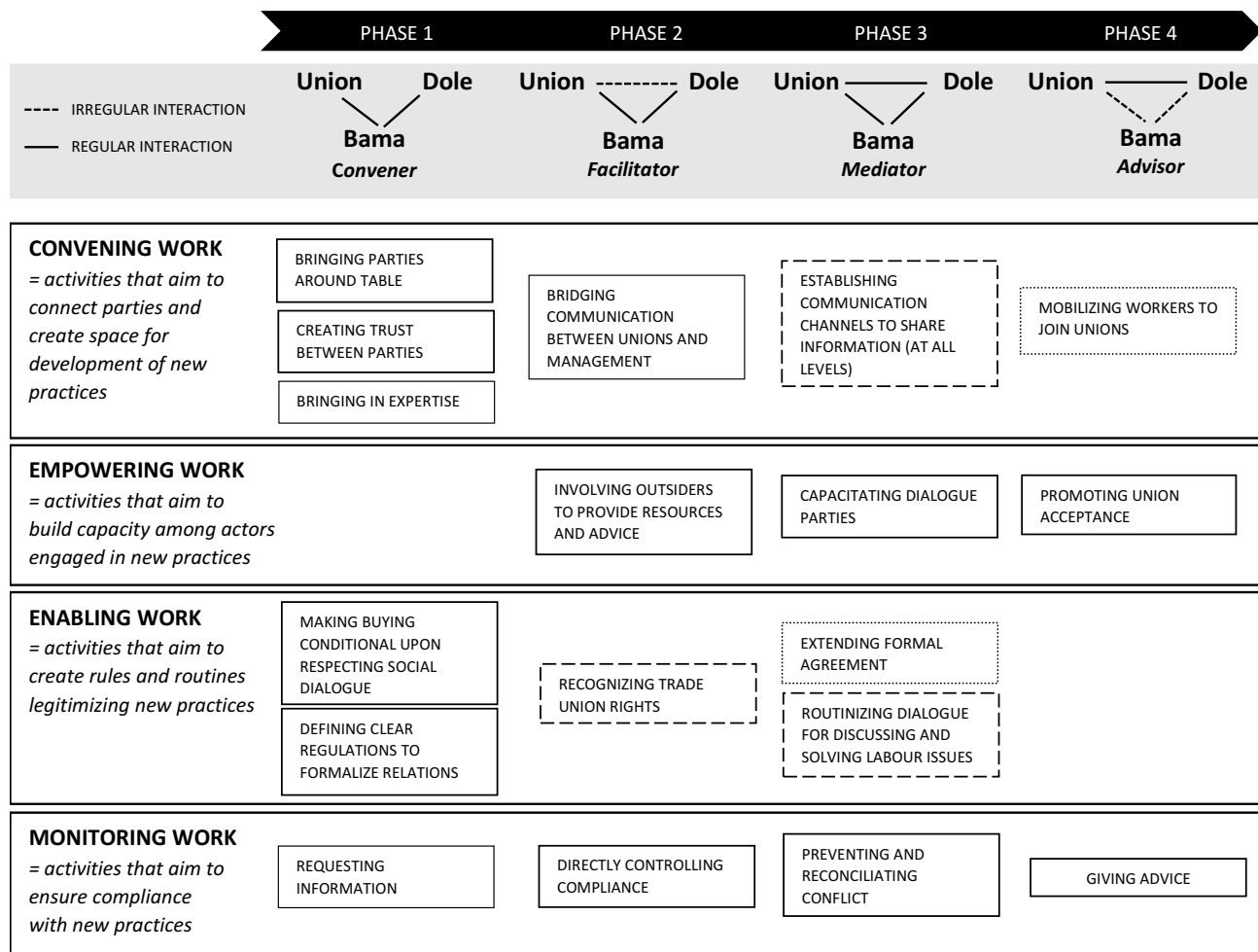


Figure 3. Dynamic configuration of interactions and institutional works of Bama (solid), Dole (dash), unions (dots)

Phase one: embryonic dialogue

At first, Dole and the unions had a confrontational relationship. Dole avoided social dialogue and did not recognize the unions as negotiation partners. The structural and associational power of the unions was heavily constrained by the anti-union context. That these violations were denounced in the EUROBAN campaign, allowed unions to use societal power. As Bama got involved, the dyadic relation between the unions and Dole transformed to a triadic structure of interaction. Bama requested information on the current dialogue practices between Dole and the unions (monitoring

work), which seemed to be irregular and almost absent. Bama initiated its *convener role* and started to build the relationship between the actors. The CSR manager tried to create trust between the parties (convening work) and Bama used its position to make buying conditional upon respecting social dialogue, for which the rules were formalized in a symbolic framework agreement (enabling work). This also constituted a new source of institutional power for the unions. At that time, the dialogue was in its early stages of development as an unborn embryo.

Phase two: the birth of dialogue

The institutional works deployed in phase one led to a dialogue table, marking the shift to a second interaction phase. However, the interaction between Dole and the unions was rare because both parties refused to sit around the table. Bama involved outsiders, the Norwegian union and enterprise federation, to provide resources and advice to both parties engaged in social dialogue (empowering work). This involvement of societal actors consolidated unions' new source of societal power and build legitimacy and awareness in the local society. Dole had to formally accept the unions as dialogue partners and provided unions access to the plantations (enabling work). Bama kept hands-on control of the social dialogue progress and systematized follow-up mechanisms in yearly joint meetings (monitoring work). These advancements strengthened the unions' new institutional source of power by enforcing the commitments made in the agreement to respect trade union rights. The conflictual relation was slowly transforming. The direction of interaction was mainly indirect through bridging communication with Bama, who exercised a *facilitator role* as they passed on union grievances to Dole and pushed the parties to the dialogue table. The unions realized that they could benefit from the buyer's influence and indirectly leveraged on the position of the buyer to strengthen their own bargaining power. However, unions reported that supervisors and plantation

leaders did not respect the new social dialogue commitments and discriminated against their members.

“The relations between the local plantation leaders and the leadership at Dole is not always what we think, the plantations leaders can say one thing and do something else and the leadership in Dole never finds out.” (Norwegian trade union representative)

They refer to this inconsistency between what Dole committed to respect and the anti-union practices as Dole’s “double discourse”. The internal, less visible resistance against social dialogue demonstrated that Dole held the reins in the labour relation while the unions, despite having access to new sources of societal and institutional power, still had to deal with power imbalances to pressure Dole.

Phase three: nurturing dialogue

In phase three, the development of dialogue was further encouraged. Bama’s role was reconciliatory in tempering the resistant strategies of Dole. Bama intervened as a *mediator* to prevent escalation of conflicts and attempted to solve problems (monitoring work). The unions requested the extension of the framework agreement and Dole routinized dialogue procedures into the daily practices to discuss labour issues with unions (enabling work). Dole established communication channels to share information at all management levels and plantations (convening work). Capacity trainings were organised for unions and supervisors separately with the support of external consultants (empowering work). This exemplifies how the unions used the new institutional power source into their own benefit. As a result, the interaction transformed to a direct, regular relation between Dole and the unions.

Phase four: autonomous dialogue

In phase four, dialogue started to take place independently from Bama. Bama’s active involvement reduced to an *advisor role* when the two other actors requested it (monitoring work). Dole and the unions engaged in promotional activities to raise awareness about trade union rights on the plantations (empowering work). The unions’ mobilization strategies were adjusted to convince more workers to join a union. Indeed, the unionisation rate was still insufficient to legally qualify for a CBA at the plantations. Strengthening union organisation was important, because the new institutional power could not compensate for the weak associational power. Unions faced representativeness issues as illustrated by the survey data of workers’ perception about unions and other worker’s organisations (Table 5). While the 65 surveyed Dole workers were all aware of the existence of a permanent committee, only half of them had heard of the union. The reasons workers gave not to be affiliated clearly illustrate the negative perception attached to union membership.

Table 5. Descriptive data of worker’s perception about worker’s organisations at Dole

Survey questions	Frequency
Are you aware of a union at the plantation (yes = 1)	53%
Are you aware of a permanent committee at the plantation? (yes = 1)	100%
Are you member of the solidarismo association? (yes = 1)	55%
Does the company permit workers to join a union without negative consequences (yes = 1)	46%
Are you member of a union (yes = 1)	12%
<u>Reasons for being a member:</u> protection, not being fired, more money, no reason, help with problems, knowledge labour rights, important, friends	
<u>Reasons for not being a member:</u> fear, negative consequences, does not like unions, not the same ideas, no need, no problems, no opportunity to join, not invited, no interest, not a permanent workers	
Would you like to join a union (yes = 1)	20%
<u>Reason for being interested:</u> help, benefits for workers, better wellbeing, protection, prevents abuses, defends workers, wage increase	
<u>Reason for not being interested:</u> no results, no help, bad, lies, problematic, does not like conflict, strikes, fear problems, negative consequences, no knowledge, no need, no interest	

Unions formed a sectoral federation and the powerful logistic union merged with the plantation union (convening work). The plantation union could leverage on the logistic union structural power and credibly threaten Dole with a strike if dialogue could not bring a solution. As a result, Dole gave in to the union demands and the strike was suspended. Dole continued to hamper social dialogue by resisting negotiation of a CBA with the plantation union. Unions complained about members being deliberately laid off because of production motives, which impeded union growth.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Findings revealed four forms of institutional work underpinning the emergence of social dialogue: convening (connect parties and create space to develop new practices), empowering (build capacity), enabling (create rules and routinize procedures), monitoring (ensure compliance to new practices). These were lined up over time, which showed how it influenced interactions to evolve along the four phases - embryonic, birth, nurturing and autonomous dialogue. The regularity in interaction and power relationships between the three parties shifted. Unions could leverage on the position of the buyer and make use of societal power. The framework agreement with the buyer created a new source of institutional power. The merge with the stronger logistics union also strengthened their structural power by credibly threatening with a strike. However, these new sources were not sufficient to compensate for the lack of associational power and Dole's resistance to union growth.

The buyer emerged as key player to enable social dialogue to take place. Its role changed throughout the different phases. It had a *convening role* at first, bringing the parties together; then a *facilitating role* by inviting external support actors and bridging communication between union and management. Its role evolved into a *mediator* reconciling conflict and maintaining peace. Finally, the buyer reduced his active involvement in dialogue and exercised an *advisor* role.

Our results contribute to prior studies on institutional work and social dialogue in at least three respects. First, the findings illustrated the tiresome process of social dialogue. Social dialogue has been successful in that it created communication channels for discussion of labour issues. Still, continuous effort is needed to maintain collaborative relations and negotiate a collective agreement, which is perceived as the measure of successful social dialogue. The results showed how the collaborations were built step by step and slowly transformed the process of social dialogue. In line with previous studies (Slager et al. 2012, Helfen and Sydow, 2013, Zietsma and Lawrence, 2010), our results show that it should be understood as a never-ending process combining institutional works that reoccur in cycles and built on each other with feedback loops. The interactions between the international supplier and unions changed from confrontational and irregular relationship to a more frequent and direct communication, which is similar to those described by Mena and Suddaby (2016).

This slow process coincides with Zietsma and Lawrence's argument (2010, p. 212) that collaboration can be enabled through the creation of "safe spaces for actors to experiment and develop new ways of working together". The non-linearity in our dialogue process was also found in Zajac (2017, p. 1015) who argued "emerging union power is not a linear, one-way process and that unintended consequences such as new factions among trade unions, dependencies on allies, or rising repression from management and the state, set limits to union development". However, social dialogue remained fragile due to the resistance work of Dole and the low unionisation rates. The success of the creation of a dialogue table needs to be nuanced as the Norwegian trade union representative concluded: "To change things, an attitude that has existed for so many years will take time to change [...] It goes two steps forward, one step back, two steps to the side, it is really difficult to manage."

Second, we investigated a triadic rather than a dyadic relationship, in which the role of a third party, as introduced for civil society organisations by Arenas et al. (2013), is extended to the buyer who subsequently performed a convener, facilitator, mediator and advisor role. Role modification was also encountered in Mena and Suddaby (2006), where the FLA shifted from a controller to a facilitator for improving working conditions and helping firms in this process. However, the roles identified in this study can also be applicable to other third parties who engage in institutional work. This corroborates the findings of Slager et al. (2012) who show that third parties, such as NGOs, can strengthen the expertise needed to legitimize and monitor new standards. The role of outsiders was also a necessary condition in Zietsma and Lawrence (2010), because environmental organisations disrupted the established practices while the forest companies, the insiders, resisted. The role of the buyer was also key in the union leverage strategies discussed in Bartley and Egels-Zanden (2016). We provided additional empirical evidence on leverage strategies by demonstrating how unions successfully used new societal and institutional power sources through the buyer, and even strengthened structural power through the merge with the powerful logistic union. The potential role of the buyer thus contributes to studies on union trajectories and social dialogue in GVCs (Zajac, 2017; Selwyn, 2011; Ruwanpura, 2015).

Third, we contribute to the institutional work literature. We enrich the repertoire of relational institutional work by providing new empirical evidence of micro-activities. Convening and capacitating were subcategories of what Slager et al. (2012) called engaging work, but we separated these two forms because they have distinct objectives. Convening work was extended with new activities: bridging communication between union and management, establishing communication channels at all levels and mobilising workers to join a union. The practice of bringing in expertise was not yet defined in Helfen and Sydow (2013). Empowering work was used as new umbrella term for activities related to capacity building, promoting union acceptance, involving outsiders to

provide resources and advice. Mena and Suddaby (2006) also identified capacity building and the need of involvement of external stakeholders in their case study. We further elaborated on what Mena and Suddaby (2006) called policing work by distinguishing between monitoring and enabling work. We add the following activities of monitoring work to their practices of enforcement, reporting and remediation: preventing and reconciling conflict, giving advice, directly controlling compliance and requesting information. Enabling work consisted of activities related to the creation of rules (Helfen and Sydow, 2013), but was broadened with conditional buying, extension of formal agreements and the routinizing of practices. This routinisation of social dialogue shared similarities with the joint assessment visits, reporting procedures, joint initiatives to negotiate implementation, yearly joint follow-up meetings, complaint handling as discussed in Helfen and Sydow (2013).

We acknowledge the limitations of this paper, mainly that it builds on a single case study using data from respondents' memories captured in interviews. Because we were not involved right from the start, a longitudinal analysis with participatory observations of negotiations between unions and managers was not possible. Despite difficulties in getting access to the field and management, we managed to include the perspectives of all three actors which provided us with a unique set of heterogeneous data. Further research could focus on actual negotiations and outcomes to deepen insights in discourses. The applicability of the identified forms of institutional work and potential role of the buyer could be tested in comparative contexts of other GVCs and social dialogue development, other institutions and actors, and same types of work in other settings of institutional change.

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APPENDIX: Visual map of events

