



Networked Coordination of Industrial Relations

# Understanding collective bargaining coordination: a network relational approach.

## The case of Ireland



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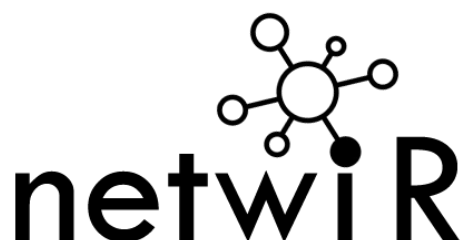
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# 1. INTRODUCTION TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING IN IRELAND

## 1.1. Overview of Collective Bargaining in Ireland

The predominant level of collective bargaining in Ireland since 2009 is company-level with a highly decentralised, local firm-level structure. There is little or no formal coordination in collective bargaining in Ireland since the economic crisis. As we discuss though, a pattern has emerged in which a loose informal coordination has followed from strategic targeting and pattern-setting in sectors where unions have greater relative strength. Where trade unions are strong, and strategically organised, there is coordination. Where they are not, there is none.

Trade union density in Ireland has been falling over recent decades and in the private sector it is typically estimated at 20% (OECD, 2017, Walsh 2015, 2016). Labour relations have improved significantly since the turbulent days of the 1980s but the end of national-level social partnership and move to a decentralised structure, the instability of the economic crash, and the moves to restore pay and benefits following economic recovery have resulted in a few high-profile strikes in retail and transport in recent times. Despite this, there is little appetite for or likelihood of a return to centralised bargaining in the medium-term future (Maccarrone et al 2019). Rather the preference is for a move toward more social dialogue, rather than more formal bargaining.

## 1.2. Recent Trends: From National-Level Bargaining to Firm-Level 'Pattern Bargaining'

The critical shift in collective bargaining in Ireland in recent years has been the dissolution of the national-level bargaining structures that had prevailed during the period of widespread, unprecedented economic growth during the Celtic Tiger. The collapse of National Social Partnership and its centralized wage bargaining system in Ireland following the crisis of the late 2000s has led to the emergence of a system of firm level bargaining across the private sector. Whilst public sector wage bargaining remains highly centralised, all pay negotiations in the private sector take place at the firm level.

This shift to firm-level negotiations and the associated decline in the collective bargaining role and influence of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) and IBEC (Irish Business and Employers Confederation) has significant implications for the networks underlying wage negotiations and industrial relations in the Irish context. The move to local firm-level bargaining post-crisis has meant that in the Irish context, the degree and scope of coordination in wage bargaining is dependent on the relative strength of trade unions in the particular sector and current pay norms in company-level negotiations. This closely corresponds with the expectations of power resource theory in liberal market economies (Baccaro and Howell 2017; Doellgast et al 2018; Culpepper and Regan 2014).

From 1987 to 2009, collective bargaining in Ireland was structured around a series of national agreements (National Social Partnership Agreements), initially between the trade unions under the umbrella of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), the employers' association IBEC, the government and farming organisations. This was latterly expanded to

include a variety of civil society bodies and voluntary organisations and its remit extended beyond negotiations over pay to include social dialogue and agreements around fiscal, social, economic and industrial policy (Regan 2012, 2017, Roche 2007).

However, the tripartite national level structures came under significant strain following the onset of the economic crisis in the late 2000s. In the public sector, union and organisational capacity was such that following an initial round of pay cuts, agreements were struck between unions and government on pay reductions and changes in productivity and working practices. In the private sector, national level bargaining could not be sustained and through 2010, negotiations between IBEC and ICTU provided a protocol for the process of a rapid decentralisation of collective bargaining. Since the end of Social Partnership then, pay in the private sector has been set primarily at firm-level, either through negotiations in unionised companies or through unilateralism where unions are not present (Hickland and Dundon 2016).

Initially, negotiations focused on concession bargaining as unions sought to negotiate to moderate proposed pay reductions and to avoid substantial job losses. As the economy began to recover in the period between 2011 and 2013, a system sometimes called 'pattern bargaining' (Roche and Gormley, 2017) began to emerge across the firm-level negotiations in which SIPTU and specifically its manufacturing division, developed a strategy of seeking a broadly similar pay increase target in each set of negotiations so as to establish a pay norm. This strategy involved the identification of a viable pay rise goal of two per cent based on a consideration of the European Central Bank's inflation target and cross-national trends in comparable industries, and the strategic targeting of highly profitable market-leading firms in the multinational-dominated, pharmaceutical and medical devices sectors that had been relatively unaffected by the crash.

A senior SIPTU official deeply involved in the development of this strategy identified the pay norms in the German chemicals industry and broader German economy as key to the goal-setting. This corresponds with the findings of other major work on the genesis of the two per cent pay norm (Roche & Gormley, 2017a). The initial agreements averaged out at two per cent with a focus on pay deals of a somewhat longer duration often of two to three years but as long as five years in certain cases. The strategy here focused on pay and employment stability with deals often referred to as 'pay and stability' agreements. This emphasis on stability was a key component of both internal SIPTU strategy but it was also attractive to unionised multinational employers in a decentralised context as it provided for extended periods of relatively secure industrial peace and consistent targets for delivery.

As the economy recovered after the crisis, the strategy moved to the extension of the pay agreements and two per cent norm beyond the initially targeted firms in pharmaceuticals and medical devices to a variety of export-oriented sectors. As the number of deals increased, the two per cent goal became a norm for negotiated agreements between unions and employers beyond those led by SIPTU negotiators. It ultimately came to constitute the standard for pay rises in non-unionised companies (Roche and Gormley 2017b). The two per cent norm was reinforced and rubberstamped by its use as a key point of reference by the conciliatory Workplace Relations Commission (WRC), and in particular it formed the basis for Labour Court conflict resolution recommendations. In many ways, the success of the strategy and the extent of the uptake of the norm is underlined by the fact that less than one-fifth of pay deals were referred to the WRC or Labour Court in the years following the establishment of the norm. In more recent years as economic growth has been consistently robust, agreements across firms have moved closer to an average of two-and-a-half per cent or higher in certain sectors.

## 2. STATE OF THE ART

In the Irish industrial relations literature, there is little scholarship to this point examining in substantive detail the role of informal networks in wage negotiations and collective bargaining. The research on the changes in the collective bargaining structure in Ireland since the economic crisis tend to illustrate the initial shifts from national to firm-level bargaining that predominantly took the form of concession bargaining through to approximately 2011 (Roche & Teague, 2015; Roche, Teague & Coughlan, 2015). As economic recovery began to take root, the literature, drawing on quantitative and qualitative evidence, identifies the emergence of a form of bargaining broadly conceptualised as a form of ‘pattern bargaining’ based on the strategic targeting of highly profitable multinational firms in the Pharmaceuticals and Medical Devices sector. This is led by SIPTU’s Manufacturing division in order to establish a trend for pay rises that could then be extended across export-oriented sectors, and latterly the broader economy (Roche and Gormley, 2017a; Roche and Gormley 2017b).

The literature indicates that the two per cent pay target that emerged as the average outcome across the agreements from 2011 onwards was essentially the product of first, a combination of union strength in the relevant sectors to establish the trend and second, a small cohesive network of key actors within SIPTU. In turn, the two per cent target was considered to be affordable by firms including those beyond the highly profitable export-oriented sectors (Roche and Gormley, 2017a, p.250). The interview evidence from this project with senior union officials, HR managers within major firms subject to strategic targeting, and senior collective bargaining consultants familiar with employer wage negotiations strategy tend to confirm the importance of this *tight network of individuals within the strongest union* in establishing this strategy, and ultimately the pay trend. But it also highlights the critical importance of informal links and personal relationships between union officials, HR managers in major ‘pattern-setting’ firms, and employer representative bodies and/or consultancies in the development and implementation of this strategy broadly characterised as ‘pattern bargaining.’

From this project’s extensive interviews with union officials, employers, consultants, members of representative bodies, and industrial relations journalists a clear consensus view emerges that informal networks and personal relationships between key actors within the trade union movement and between unions and employers are key to understanding wage bargaining in the Irish context. These relationships and informal networks are the product of engagement through Ireland’s major industrial relations conflict resolution institutions including the Workplace Relations Commission (previously the Labour Relations Commission) and the Labour Court as well as through the traditional umbrella organisations of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) and IBEC, the employer’s association.

This is augmented by conferences such as those run by the unions, the Industrial Relations News national conference, and human resource representative bodies such as Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). These patterns of informal engagement developed in some cases during the period of social partnership but have persisted and arguably grown in their substantive importance since the move to company-level bargaining in recent years.

Despite the very consistent identification of the critical role of these patterns of informal relations by those interviewees deeply familiar with the realities of collective bargaining in Ireland, this has not been addressed in depth in the scholarly literature on industrial relations in Ireland. This project collates and triangulates between quantitative survey evidence and particularly extensive, wide-ranging qualitative interview materials from a variety of key actors to provide detailed empirical demonstration and corroboration of this widely-held view among industrial relations practitioners in Ireland.

In this way, it provides one of the first direct studies of the importance of informal networks in the Irish context, and in particular, it highlights the importance of intra-union networks, led by a very small number of individuals. The core theoretical takeaway is that we consider the type of “pattern bargaining” that other scholars have identified in Ireland as a function of the power resources of trade unions. Where unions are strong in Ireland, collective bargaining coordination occurs. Where they are weak, it does not. The importance of interpersonal relations and social networks are an important empirical observation of what underpins this coordination.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

Traditionally, significant strands of the industrial relations literature has focused upon the development of quantitative institutional indicators to examine the mechanisms sustaining collective bargaining coordination as well as the extent and form of wage coordination (e.g. Kenworthy, 2001; Visser, 2019). Over time, these indicators have extended to include classification of company-level bargaining of the form that predominates in the Irish context, so as to illustrate the development of bargaining beyond multi-employer bargaining. However, despite the quality of these aggregate indicators, they tend to suffer from a tendency to focus on coordination at the structural level and the vertical aspect of coordination. In particular, these structural indicators fail to capture the behavioural, relational, and ultimately, informal nature of collective bargaining and wage coordination.

In particular, the predominant company-level composition of wage bargaining in Ireland since 2009, and the strategy to achieve wage coordination developed by SIPTU and often characterised as ‘pattern bargaining’ that has since developed, is fundamentally built upon informal networks and personal relationships. Specifically, union power resources, intra-union cohesive networks, and informal relations between union officials, firm HR managers, and industrial relations consultants and reporters tend to drive wage coordination strategy in the sectors in which coordination is present in Ireland. These networks, relations and behavioural dynamics that underpin variation in collective bargaining coordination across major sectors in the Irish economy cannot be captured using the aggregated institutionalist indicators commonly employed in the cross-national industrial relations literature. To address some of these limitations, this project deploys quantitative survey data and social network analysis indicators alongside the use of qualitative semi-structured interviews and triangulation with secondary materials to investigate the presence, structure, and impact of networks, informality, and relations within Irish industrial relations and collective bargaining.

The first component of our empirical strategy are the surveys distributed to key actors in the two major sectors of interest, namely the pharmaceuticals sector and the large grocery retail sector.

Following initial exploratory research on the potential members of networks in the two sectors and given the decentralised nature of wage bargaining in Ireland, we identified a number of key actors within the major unions in each sector, particularly SIPTU officials in the Pharmaceuticals Sector and Mandate officials in the Retail Sector, as well as Human Resource Managers within the largest companies in each of the two sectors. In addition, we also identified those with potential linkages to each of the two sectors within the employer representative bodies.

From this, we constructed four versions of the online survey adapted to the Irish context. These four surveys focused on unions in each sector and in the case of employers was adapted to address specific firm-level negotiation and network experiences given the structure of the system. These surveys were disseminated through email links via the SurveyMonkey online survey platform with individualised messages, details on confidentiality and consent, and an explanation of the nature and purpose of the cross-national project. There were consistent reminders and follow-ups with the individuals identified as potential members of the networks from the exploratory analysis but there has been significant variation in the responsiveness of identified actors across the two sectors and between unions and employers.

The second component of the analysis is a series of semi-structured interviews with union officials, employer organisation representatives, firm HR managers, consultants specialising in industrial relations advice for employers, and key additional actors in particular from Industrial Relations News (IRN), a subscription media service providing extensive coverage of industrial relations developments and pay agreements in the Irish context. These interviews covered a number of key themes focusing on assessments of changes in the collective bargaining structure over time, organisational goals in the previous pay rounds, internal strategy development, the most influential actors and events for wage coordination in the relevant sector, and assessments of the character and shape of the network of wage bargaining in the sector(s) overall. While these themes were consistent across all interviews, relevant additional discussions emerged throughout. Interviews typically lasted for approximately one hour.

The implementation of the survey in the Irish context has been challenging particularly due to the individualised firm-level structure of collective bargaining in Ireland as well as other key (and related factors) such as the unwillingness of employers to cooperate, the conflictual nature of union-employer relations in the Retail sector in particular and the lack of organisational capacity of unions in some cases. This resulted in low response rates and a significant lack of cooperation from employers in both sectors and from unions and employers in the Retail sector.

The variation in the effective implementation of the online survey demonstrates key features of the Irish industrial relations context. The highest response rate and most significant degree of cooperation comes from unions, specifically SIPTU, in the Pharmaceuticals sector which corresponds very clearly with expectations. SIPTU is the strongest union in either of the two sectors under consideration in the Irish context with the most significant organisational capacity and the most extensive unionisation, while the Pharmaceutical sector organisation operating within the broader Manufacturing division is a particular cohesive and effectively organised actor. This is critical to its capability to develop and implement bargaining strategy and to provide a degree of pay coordination throughout the Pharmaceutical sector. This substantive capacity and SIPTU's power resources mean that it is able to deal consistently and effectively with employers such that



the coordinated pattern bargaining that has emerged is primarily a product of the union's strength and strategy specifically.

This capacity and effectiveness not only facilitates coordinated wage negotiations but is also critical to explaining the incentives, willingness, and ability to cooperate with the online survey. To the extent that a network of actors produces wage bargaining in Ireland's Pharmaceutical sector, this network is essentially made up of union and specifically SIPTU actors. These relevant SIPTU actors were the most systematic in their engagement with the survey and their communication. The cooperation of SIPTU with the study is in fact, we contend, a theoretically relevant observation in that it demonstrates, in line with theoretical frameworks emphasising the resources of unions as a key explanatory factor in accounting for effective wage coordination, that the development and implementation of pay bargaining strategy and the incentive and capacity to communicate this require resources, cohesion, and centralisation. Across both unions and employers in our two sectors of interest, SIPTU and its Pharmaceutical sector organisation stand out in this regard.

In the Retail sector, the lack of organisational capacity and resources among the key unions especially Mandate has resulted in an absence of coordinated strategy in pay bargaining and engagement with employers. These limited resources and the lack of effective organisation have resulted in little in the way of substantive networked relations and similarly help explain the limited responsiveness to the online survey and engagement with the project more broadly. The unions have generally poor and somewhat conflictual relations with employers and rely to a significant extent on social movement and campaigning tactics rather than the type of cohesive, centrally-devised wage strategy and implementation as in the case of SIPTU in Pharmaceuticals above. It is therefore difficult to mobilise responsiveness and to identify the operation of any coherent network and coordination between actors.

There have been very significant challenges in generating engagement with and response to the online survey among employers in both sectors. This is the product of a number of factors. Our interview findings corroborate other scholarship on Irish industrial relations that contends that IBEC, the employers' association, having been a major player during Social Partnership is now largely disengaged and rarely involved in negotiations and collective bargaining issues.

This has removed a major point of entry with respect to research engagement with Irish employers but also corresponds with a major fragmentation and breakdown in inter-employer coordination since the move to company-level bargaining. The lack of coordination traditionally in Ireland with an institutional framework that is liberal, market-led in orientation combined with the collapse of the national-level structures in place until 2009 has resulted in a deeply atomised structure and little in the way of networked relations. Closely related, the move to the negotiation of agreements at firm-level has resulted in a very significant reluctance to participate due to questions of commercial sensitivity and the effective absence of any clear network of actors as negotiations centre on bilateral union-employer negotiations at the individual firm or indeed plant-level where workers are unionised and unilateral employer decisions in non-unionised firms. There is little or no organisation between employers in either sector. This has implications for gatekeeping in terms of survey participation. In the Pharmaceutical sector, the primary access challenge relates to commercial privacy. The issues are compounded in the Grocery Retail sector as there is limited unionisation and indeed non-recognition of unions in certain major firms and employer-union relations have become particularly strained and conflictual.

The difficulties in the implementation of the online survey in the Irish case require consideration of the broader applicability of the appropriateness and adequacy of applying an online survey specifically and network analysis more broadly to institutional contexts in which firm-level bargaining predominates. Pay coordination in the Irish context is dependent on the power resources and associated capacity to develop and deploy pay strategies by trade unions as in this context, there is very little organisation and coordination among employers.

As such, the networks that facilitate pay bargaining are in the Irish case intra-union networks. In our two sectors of interest, the SIPTU Manufacturing division and its Pharmaceutical committee provide this strategy and resultant coordination in pay bargaining outcomes. Therefore, our analysis of the key actors in the network is focused on a small set of union officials. Engaging employers in the Pharmaceutical sector has been extremely challenging as there is little in the way of a meaningful network here. In the Retail sector, there is far less institutional capacity within the trade unions to organise and mobilise to produce effective pay bargaining strategy and coordinated outcomes as the unions are fragmented and in key cases have far fewer power resources. Employers in Retail in many cases have conflictual relations with the unions and are often based primarily in the United Kingdom, limiting the scope for organisation and inter-employer communication further. Absent union coordination, there is little if any coordination to speak of. Fundamentally, there is a deeply fragmented and atomised structure to negotiations in the sector and therefore the viability and appropriateness of the methodology are limited.

Finally, the Irish context illustrates the challenges in applying a network analysis to examine coordination due to specific contextual patterns of 'coordinating messaging' that the method struggles to capture. In the Irish firm-level bargaining structure, we identify a pattern of the use of 'information as coordination' in which Industrial Relations News (IRN), a media outlet, publishes accounts of ongoing negotiations and pay agreements struck across sectors. These publications are used by employers and unions to learn about patterns in their sector and the established pay norms with evidence that the stronger unions i.e. SIPTU in Pharmaceuticals with the capacity to strategize and communicate pay goals can seek to send signals through IRN publications of agreement details that are then internalised by HR managers in firms in the sector ahead of potential subsequent negotiations. In turn, these patterns as reported by IRN are also drawn upon by the conflict resolution bodies in the conciliation and recommendations concerning pay disputes. Despite the importance of this 'information as coordination' dynamic in the firm-level bargaining system in Ireland, IRN and its role is difficult for the methodology to effectively capture. Broadly then, critical consideration must be given to the capacity of network analysis to capture the realities of collective bargaining in Ireland due to the structure of bargaining, the lack of employer organisation, the challenges of access, and the difficulties in capturing country-specific dynamics such as media 'information as coordination.'

## 4. SECTORAL ANALYSIS

### 4.1. Pharmaceuticals

#### 4.1.1. Socio-economic situation of the sector

The pharmaceutical sector is of very substantial importance to the Irish economy. The sector is the main driver of goods exports across the entire economy with the broader pharmaceuticals and medical device sector making up over sixty per cent of total goods exports. The country is now the seventh largest exporter of pharmaceutical and medical device products in the world. The sector in Ireland is dominated by the large multinational firms with all ten of the world's largest pharmaceutical companies operating in Ireland and fourteen of the top fifteen multinationals having established a presence in the jurisdiction. These market-leading firms include Pfizer, Novartis, MSD, Baxter, Allergan, GSK, Teva, Perrigo, Alexion and Roche. There are seventy-five firms in total in Ireland with ninety plants in full manufacturing operation around the country with twenty-two further sites under construction as of 2019.

As a key export-oriented sector built on highly-skilled manufacturing labour, the sector and the export growth it generates was critical in Ireland's recovery from the economic crisis, as the sector remained globally stable and highly profitable given the low elasticity of demand for its products. This export growth and profitability was associated first with stability and resilience in employment in the manufacturing sector, which was key to providing some support from domestic consumption during the crisis. And second, the sector's ability to sustain wage growth in the early stages of economic recovery provided scope for the strategic targeting for the establishment of a national pattern of pay increases discussed below.

While employment in the pharmaceuticals and medical devices sector is substantial, it does not match its contribution to Ireland's exports. According to data from the Central Bank, from 2018, approximately 44,000 people were employed in basic pharmaceutical manufacturing and the preparation of pharmaceutical products (Central Bank of Ireland, 2019). The BioPharmaChem division of the Irish employer's association puts the figure for those directly employed in the sector at approximately 26,000 with a sizeable contingent employed indirectly providing services to the sector (BioPharmaChem Ireland, 2019). This corresponds to approximately two per cent of total employment as compared to pharmaceuticals exports share which consistently makes up over half of total goods exports and has peaked at over sixty per cent in recent years.

Importantly, employment in the pharmaceuticals sector is strongly regionally concentrated around specific clusters with long-standing hotspots in Cork and Dublin but also growing clusters in the South-Eastern region around Waterford and in the West of Ireland, concentrated on Galway, Mayo, and Sligo. This stands in contrast to employment in other major multinational export-oriented services employers that tend to be strongly concentrated in Dublin and the surrounding region.

The Pharmaceutical sector blends particularly high-end research and development and relatively highly-skilled manufacturing along with some more basic factory floor manufacturing positions in the larger established plants. Workers in the sector tend to be highly educated with over sixty-five per cent of those employed holding third level qualifications compared to a national average of approximately one in four

(BioPharmaChem Ireland, 2019). A quarter of all PhD holders in Ireland working in industry are also employed in the sector. In line with this, salaries in the sector are typically above the national average with significantly higher salaries for engineers in the multinational firms and interviews with HR managers in prominent Pharmaceutical companies in Ireland indicate that the demand for labour and the extent of competition regionally in Ireland has produced strong increment-based incentives for employees to remain with a firm for a longer period. The sector has therefore typically been associated with secure, long-term and pensionable employment and given the strong growth in the sector, there have been significant productivity and associated pay increases in recent times with relatively limited industrial conflict even during the economic crisis and the recovery period as pressures for pay rises grew.

#### **4.1.2. Collective Bargaining in the Pharmaceuticals Sector in Ireland**

The pharmaceutical sector in Ireland is heavily unionised marking it out as somewhat unusual for an FDI-led, export-oriented sector in Ireland dominated by foreign multinationals. The Services Industrial and Professional Trade Union (SIPTU) and its pharmaceutical and manufacturing division representatives have been key in the organisation of bargaining strategy and negotiations in the sector and have constituted the key force behind the coordination strategy that has emerged since the move to localised individual, firm-level (and indeed plant-level) bargaining since the end of Social Partnership. SIPTU is, by some distance, the major representative of workers in the Pharmaceutical and Medical Devices sector which generates approx. 60% of Ireland's manufacturing exports. As outlined above, the Pharmaceutical Sector Committee led by Alan O'Leary alongside Manufacturing Division Chair Gerry McCormack developed and implemented a coordinated strategy to target individual high-profile, 'market leading' pharmaceutical firms with a 2% pay goal as part of an approach that ultimately sought to extend this norm across sectors over time as Ireland moved into economic recovery.

Given the dominance of multinational firms within the sector, the broad economy-wide shift to firm-level bargaining and the lack of incentives or structures for employer coordination, the SIPTU Pharmaceutical Sector Committee was the key source of coordination for the establishment of a 2% norm across the sector and the eventual extension of this pattern to other sectors. Agreements have been negotiated at firm-level since the end of national-level wage bargaining with a focus on longer agreements often framed as 'pay and stability agreements' typically of two years but sometimes as long as five years.

Since the collapse of Social Partnership, IBEC as the employer's association has had little or no role in negotiations in the sector with individual firms (predominantly the US multinationals) conducting negotiations directly with SIPTU. In identifying the network underpinning wage coordination in the sector, the primary focus is therefore on the union officials and industrial organizers that make up the sector committee. The survey responses and resultant data for the Pharmaceutical sector correspond with this pattern as the key actors who are responsible for the original coordination of the wage negotiation strategy for the sector are the members of this committee and these are the respondents in the survey data collected. The key events are similarly the meetings of the sector committee and perhaps more precisely meetings of an even smaller subset of actors within SIPTU. The relatively high level of cooperation and participation in the study by SIPTU is reflective of

the observation that SIPTU is the strongest union playing the most significant role in generating coordination across unions and employers in both sectors.

The absence of coordination on the employers' side has very clear implications for survey responsiveness for these firms. As employers do not rely upon or utilise IBEC as part of their industrial relations strategy, each firm operates as an atomised unit negotiating directly with the unions with no inter-employer coordination. Individual firms operating outside of any coordinating structures are very reluctant to provide responses that relate to a company-specific negotiation between the HR managers within these firms and the union given, first, concerns about commercial sensitivities and second, the lack of any framework (e.g. IBEC) that may provide access and expectations regarding research of this kind. The lack of survey responses for employers are therefore reflective of the structure and pattern of firm-level collective bargaining now in evidence in Ireland where coordination, data collection, and strategy linking actors together within a network takes place within trade unions where these unions have sufficient power resources. In this way, the low response rate is itself a theoretically relevant observation in that it illustrates the structure of coordination as it occurs in the sector. This pattern has been confirmed through a variety of in-depth qualitative interviews with union officials, representatives from and former members of IBEC, and individual HR managers.

Coordination in the pharmaceutical sector is a product of union coordination, primarily located within the relevant SIPTU division. A core element of this strategy is a process we term as 'information as coordination' conducted through the publication of the outcomes of pay negotiations through Industrial Relations News (IRN). As individual firms lack coordinating structures in the localised firm-level system, the establishment of a pattern across the sector required SIPTU and the leading actors to transfer information regarding pay agreement outcomes that approximated the 2% norm. This was then internalised and considered by individual HR managers in these firms as new rounds of wage negotiations approached.

The key vehicle for this information as communication process is IRN, an independent subscription weekly magazine publication providing coverage of industrial relations issues. Qualitative interview evidence from a range of union officials, expert observers and HR managers confirms the role of IRN as a resource for identifying patterns in the particular sector for HR managers but also SIPTU's strategy of providing details of pay agreements and the 2% pay norm strategy to IRN so as to use it as a conduit for dissemination.

'Information as coordination' is critical in the Irish context and the use of IRN as a means of disseminating information (for the union) and a means of identifying expectations and patterns in other firms (for employers) is of substantial explanatory utility in accounting for how coordination happens when traditional network relations and coordination events are absent as they are on the employers' side in this sector in Ireland. This information has similarly been used by the Workplace Relations Commission and Labour Court to identify the norm within the sector when making recommendations. The final stage in the implementation of the strategy as identified was for the WRC and Labour Court to endorse the 2% norm based on the analysis of wage agreements information published by IRN. The role of IRN is captured clearly in the qualitative interviews but the nature of 'information as coordination' makes it extremely challenging to examine effectively through survey responses.

### 4.1.3. Network Analysis of CB in Pharmaceuticals: Survey results

Table 1 below presents an overview of the identified potential respondents and actual response rates for the Pharmaceutical sector in Ireland. While the absolute number of participants may appear low in a comparative sense, this matches clearly the qualitative interview evidence regarding the key actors in coordination processes in the Irish Pharma sector and provides an effective overview of the reality of the network.

*Table 1: Pharmaceutical Sector Respondents Identified and Survey Response Rate in Ireland*

Sector	Exploratory Network Size (actors in survey questions based on exploratory interviews)	Survey Respondents	Survey Response Rate
Pharma	10	9	90%

We see that the response rate for this sector is very high and the vast majority of individuals identified from the exploratory interviews and secondary research, focusing on the structure of the network and the development of a purposive sample, did in fact participate in the survey. The respondent pool is heavily tilted towards the participation of those on the union side with seven of the nine respondents coming from within SIPTU, the union primarily representing workers in the Pharmaceutical sector, and with two additional respondents either from HR operations or familiar with employer practice in industrial relations in the Pharmaceutical sector. This matches closely the qualitative interview evidence indicating that SIPTU provide cohesion and organisation within the firm-level bargaining structure in the Pharmaceutical sector and the low employer participation rate illustrates the commercial sensitivity and fragmentation of employers within this structure. The primary role of the union officials in the sample is overwhelmingly technical and the sample is predominantly male (7 men, 2 women) in line with the patterns identified in both the preliminary and substantive qualitative interviews.

The majority of individuals have been working in wage-setting in the sector for more than five years and each individual (with one exception) has been working for their current organisation for five years or more including in most cases some experience in working in wage-setting in other sectors. This is further evidence of the primacy of SIPTU respondents in our sample, the substantial experience of SIPTU's negotiators, and that union's particularly important role given its capacity to lead effective coordination in this sector and others.

We now consider patterns of interaction in the Pharmaceutical sector in Ireland. Table 2 illustrates, first, the average number of key events attended by our sample respondents, and second, the percentage of events attended as compared with the maximum number of events attended for any actor in the network. Actors typically attend between 6 and 7 key events and this is largely uniform across our sample. In turn, Table 3 demonstrates that formal meetings, both bilateral and multilateral, are the most common forms of meetings for Irish respondents. There are however major caveats here. First, while it is clear that the major actors responsible for organising coordination in Pharmaceuticals in Ireland did respond (i.e. SIPTU organisers in the main), the formal meetings they identify

as events do not necessarily capture the informal mechanics of coordination in Ireland in particular the use of Industrial Relations News as a form of ‘information as coordination.’ This mechanism does not involve meetings (even of an informal nature) but instead produces coordination by alerting and informing employers and specifically HR managers in major firms of deals elsewhere in the sector and the wage norms and targets that now characterise agreements in the sector. Second, interview evidence similarly indicates there are already typically clear expectations of the likely parameters of negotiations and a potential agreement at the point at which formal meetings take place between unions and employers. Finally, many of the key meetings with respect to wage bargaining in this sector typically take place within SIPTU as the union provides, through its strategy and resources, much of the organisation and cohesion in wage negotiations across the sector in how it deals with individual firms.

*Table 2: Average Absolute Number and Percentage of Events attended*

Sector	Absolute number of events attended	Relative number of events attended
Pharma	6.78	85%

*Table 3: Predominant form of interaction in Irish Pharmaceutical Sector*

Informal Bilateral Meetings	Formal Bilateral Meetings	Informal Multilateral Meetings	Formal Multilateral Meetings
2.5	4	1.88	3

Table 4 identifies the importance of the economic and/or sector context as the major challenge to coordination in the Pharmaceutical sector underlining the role of broader institutional factors in conditioning the scope for effective coordination and, taken alongside interview evidence, illustrating the particular challenges posed by bargaining within liberal market structures. Respondents also identify challenges posed by a lack of trust and power differences between the unions and employers but these are not necessarily considered on average to be major impediments. Importantly despite the structure of firm-level bargaining, respondents do not tend to identify fragmentation as a major challenge. This is due to the strong degree of organisation, capacity, and cohesion within SIPTU as the major union in the sector that serves as by far the primary representative body for Pharmaceutical workers and through its internal structure and strategy provides a form of wage bargaining coordination itself even though employers are fragmented and do not display coordination among themselves.

*Table 4: Main Challenges to Coordination (1-5 scale, higher values indicate greater challenges)*

Sector	Lack of Trust	Power differences	Fragmentation in the representation of workers or firms	Economic and/or sectoral context
Pharma	3.44	3.22	2.56	4.22

The survey evidence indicates a significant role for pattern setters in the Pharmaceutical sector. The majority of respondents identify the presence of pattern setting firms in the sector and responses along with interview data indicate that these pattern setters are the major multinational firms. In line with the pay target strategy developed and implemented by SIPTU based on their evaluation of ability to pay and the capacity of high-profile deals with market-leading firms to establish a pattern, respondents identify Pfizer, GSK, MSD, Bristol Myers, Leo Pharma and Teva as critical pattern setters. This set of firms matches closely those targeted early by SIPTU to establish pay and stability agreements around the two per cent target and through establishing expectations based on these deals and their publicization in Industrial Relations News, this became the pattern across the sector.

*Table 5: Respondents' Views on Pattern Setters for Wage-Setting in Pharmaceuticals*

Sector	Response	Number of Responses
Pharma	No	3
	Yes	6
	Total	9

*Table 6: Top Pattern-Setting Firms in Pharmaceuticals*

Firm	Number of Responses Identifying Firm
Pfizer	6
GSK	5
Bristol Myers	4
Leo Pharma	4
MSD	4
Novartis	3
Teva	2
Allergan	2
Baxter	1

### **1-Mode Networks based on frequencies of contact (contact networks)**

Next, we consider the networks themselves. Table 7 outlines the broad descriptive of the contact network established from the survey responses while Table 8 identifies the major players and their influence within the network. Table 9 lays out the density, centralisation and strength of ties within the network. Finally, Figure 1 illustrates the network visually.

The data and visualisation illustrates very clearly the patterns identified in extensive qualitative interviews conducted with those within the sector and those familiar with it. The key actors are within the major union SIPTU and these actors have the strongest links to one another. These actors operate at distinct levels within the union from the deputy General Secretary to the head of the Manufacturing division through to sectoral organiser for Pharmaceuticals specifically and from this to individual officials conducting wage bargaining meetings at firm-level. The links are particularly strong between the current and



former leading officials at Manufacturing Division and Pharmaceutical sectoral level and this makes up the core of the network. Industrial organisers operating at firm-level do not have the same extent of frequency of contacts and connections as exemplified by Actor A in Column B of Figure 1. Respondents identify three actors as the most influential and these three individuals are the current and former head of the Manufacturing division and the current Pharmaceutical sector lead organiser. These are the individuals responsible for the development and implementation of the two per cent pay norm strategy that SIPTU instituted across the sector and subsequently more broadly following the establishment of the pattern at market-leading firms in Pharmaceuticals. These actors have remained critical to the continuation of this bargaining strategy (with higher targets) led by SIPTU that has provided for effective coordination in a context where firm-level bargaining and fragmentation of employers and their representation have been the norm.

*Table 7: General descriptive statistics for the Pharmaceutical contact network*

Sector	Network Size	Number of links (weighted by contact frequency)	Average number of ties with other actor actros (unweighted. any frequency)	Average number of ties with other actors (unweighted, only links>5)
Pharma	6	15	5	2.7

*Table 8: Key actors in the Pharmaceutical sector network*

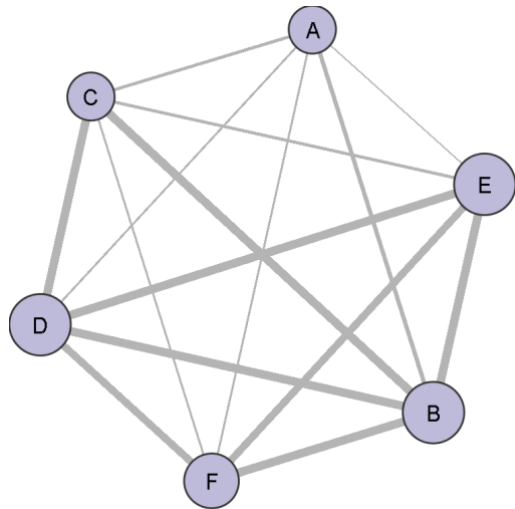
Sector	Actors with top degree (weighted)	Actors with top betweenness (weighted)	Actors with top closeness (unweighted)	Most influential actors (perceived influence)
Pharma	B, D, E	all	all	B, D, E

*Table 9: Density, Centralisation, and Tie Strength in Irish Pharmaceuticals*

Sector	Density	Degree Centralisation	Weighted Degree Variance	Average tie strength (total)	Average tie strength (within employers)	Average tie strength (within unions)	Average tie strength (between employers and unions)
Pharma	1	0	2.329	5.27	-	5.27	-

Figure 1: Ireland Pharmaceutical Contact Network

Column A:  
all frequencies of contact are included



Column B: links  $\leq 5$  have been removed for better visual interpretation (scale from 0=never to 8= very frequently)

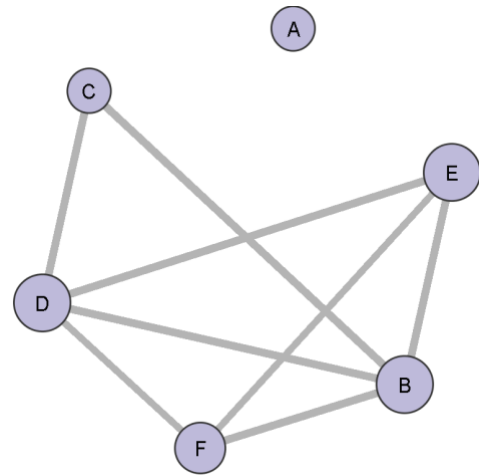
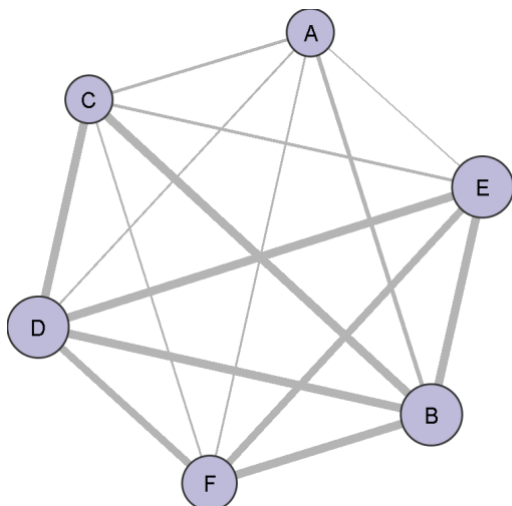


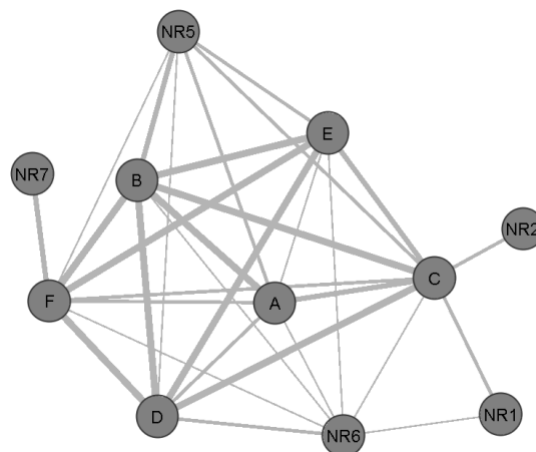
Figure 2 illustrates the contact network with non-respondents included (Column B) alongside the primary contact network as above (Column A). Considering this network, we identify two additional elements of interest. First, we see that there are additional linkages between sectoral and divisional organisers and industrial officials on the ground conducting negotiations and deals within the firms even though not all of these firm-level negotiators (e.g. NR1, NR2, NR5) responded to the survey. This underlines that the network of coordination in Pharmaceuticals in Ireland is conducted through contact and communication between higher levels of the union organisational pyramid within SIPTU with firm-level negotiators implementing this strategy in each firm to first establish and then reinforce the norm. Second, we see certain contacts and links between SIPTU officials and employers' representative groups such as BioPharmaChem Ireland or consultants representing employers in negotiations such as Stratis (NR6, NR7). In particular, there are clear links between the current and former heads of the SIPTU Manufacturing Division Chairs and these individuals and certain contacts between organisers operating at firm-level and representatives from these groups. These linkages are though typically weaker and less dense than those between the core group organising and implementing strategy within SIPTU. This in turn corresponds with interview evidence indicating an occasional role only for these employer representatives and consultants given SIPTU's main role in conducting negotiations and successfully implementing strategy with individual employers themselves. Furthermore, the non-responses themselves illustrate the limited engagement of employers and their representative bodies with the survey that provides some indication of their broader disengagement and the lack of avenues for access within the contemporary bargaining structure in Ireland.

Figure 2: Ireland Pharmaceutical Contact Network with Non-Respondents

Column A: Contact Network



Column B: Network including non-respondents



#### Co-attendance networks (based on 2-Mode data)

Finally, we consider 2-Mode data combining survey responses and contact networks for both actors and events. The findings in Table 10 and Figures 2 and 3 tend to confirm those above. The top event attendees and those engaged in the most extensive communication through meetings and events are the key influential actors from SIPTU leading Manufacturing Divisional and Pharmaceutical Sectoral organising from the 1-mode data above. We see the prominence and extensive ties to the Lead Sectoral Organiser in particular in Figure 2 as the key actor responsible for mobilising and coordinating SIPTU's pay bargaining strategy but we also clearly see the role for the former and current Manufacturing Division chairs that played a very significant role in devising the strategy originally and of course, in extending the pay norm when established more broadly across other sectors within Manufacturing. Again, this corresponds very closely with evidence from extensive qualitative interviews conducted with these individuals and others in the sector.

Table 10: General descriptive statistics for the co-attendance networks

Sector	Network Size	Number of links (weighted by contact frequency)	Top event attendees	Actors with top degree (weighted)	Actors with top betweenness (weighted)	Actors with top closeness (unweighted)	Most influential actors
Pharma	9	36	E, B, D, C	B, C, E	-	all	B, D, E

Figure 3: Ireland Pharmaceutical Co-attendance networks from affiliation data (complete view, weighted data)

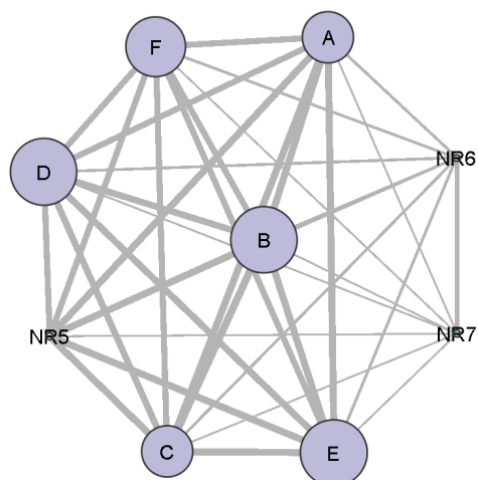
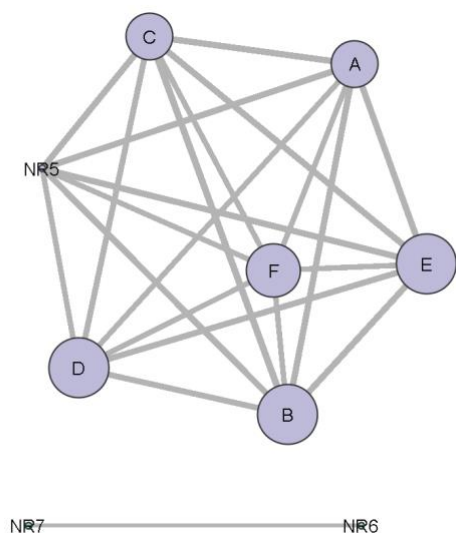


Figure 4: Ireland Pharmaceutical Co-attendance networks from affiliation data (reduced view, simplified & binary data)



## 4.2. Large Grocery Retail

### 4.2.1. Socio-economic situation of the sector

The grocery retail sector is one of Ireland's largest private sector employers and a major contributor to the domestic economy. The retail sector as a whole employs two hundred and eighty five thousand workers with forty-two thousand businesses operating across the country making up approximately fourteen per cent of employment and is a particularly important source of employment outside of the greater Dublin area (Retail Ireland, 2019). Data for the supermarket sector specifically suggests it is worth nine billion euro and best estimates indicate that the five largest supermarket retailers employ approximately seventy-three thousand staff. These five dominant firms include two major Irish-based

firms, Dunnes Stores and Musgraves with the latter operating its larger outlets under the SuperValu brand, and three international companies in Tesco (UK), Lidl and Aldi (both Germany). Dunnes, SuperValu, and Tesco are the three largest firms with each holding approximately one-fifth of the customer base and Lidl and Aldi constituting around twelve per cent each.

Workers in the sector are typically employed on limited contracts and hourly rates through agreements at firm-level based on engagement between employers and unions. In other cases, however including the two large German discount retailers, there is very limited membership and substantial issues with respect to union recognition. Despite this, these two firms have both committed independently to paying the living wage in recent years potentially as part of a strategy of pre-emptive action to counter unionisation and mobilisation drives within their companies. In Dunnes Stores, there have also been significant clashes between Mandate, the primary union representing workers in the sector, and the employer regarding engagement with the union. Given the lower skill profile and the lower levels of pay, there is both a lower level of average education attainment among workers and substantial employee turnover within companies in the sector as compared to Pharmaceuticals as above.

In contrast to the Pharmaceutical sector discussed above, there has also been significant industrial action and conflictual relations between unions and employers in Grocery Retail over recent years. In particular, there have been significant episodes of high-profile strike action at both Dunnes Stores and Tesco Ireland with consequences for union-employer relations subsequently as Dunnes have consistently resisted attempts at union engagement and Tesco have moved away from effective engagement over time. This has resulted in very substantial challenges in developing meaningful dialogue between the key actors. Coupled with the fragmented firm-level structure of collective bargaining in the sector and limited union capacity, this has restricted severely the scope for either formal or informal coordination within the sector.

#### **4.2.2. Collective Bargaining in the Large Grocery Retail Sector in Ireland**

The Irish Grocery Retail sector has similarly been characterised by localised firm-level bargaining since the collapse of the National Wage Agreements framework. However, in sharp contrast to the Pharmaceuticals sector, the capacity to develop and implement a pay strategy by the trade unions in the Grocery Retail sector has been very limited due to an absence of sufficient power resources. The largest representative union in the sector, MANDATE, has lacked the resources to implement a coordinated strategy either independently or alongside the other unions operating in the sector. As evidenced in interview materials, the collapse of Social Partnership severely undermined the unions with significant growth in anti-union sentiment on the employers' side and conflictual relations between Mandate and other unions and the major employers. The limited resources available to unions are compounded by the non-recognition of union representation in pay negotiations by a number of the large firms in the sector.

The structural weakness of Mandate has resulted into the union operating largely as a campaigning force wherein strategy tends towards a reliance on publicity campaigns rather than an ability to design and implement targets as in the Pharmaceutical case. The union also has poor relationships with employers resulting in the need to rely on these publicity drives and a significant series of industrial disputes. The network in the Grocery Retail sector is made up of a small number of organisers with divisional meetings

particularly within Mandate and to a limited extent ICTU Private Sector Committee meetings functioning as key events. The weakness of the unions and the fragmented nature of the sector has clear implications for survey responses. The lack of the effective capacity to coordinate among unions, the lack of Mandate resources, and the conflictual relations with individual firms has resulted in very low survey uptake on the union side. This empirically observed pattern of low response is again theoretically relevant as it reflects the broader weakness and lack of organisation of weak unions within the sector in Ireland.

On the employers' side in Grocery Retail, there is a similar absence of organisation. As evidenced in interview materials, there is little or no coordination among employers with many of these being UK-based firms that conduct negotiations entirely independently with the unions in certain cases or without substantive union input at all in other firms. There is a similar absence of a role for IBEC in the sector as in Pharmaceuticals but in the case of Grocery Retail, this gap is not filled by the unions. As the sector is characterised by entirely firm-specific agreements, highly conflictual relations, the irrelevance of the employers' association and the absence of traditional coordination, the challenges in achieving access and response to the survey reflect the absence of a clear network of coordination. The firm-level structure again sharply limits the incentive and willingness of individuals within firms to participate.

The limited coordination that occurs in the Grocery Retail sector in Ireland largely corresponds with the 'information as coordination' theorisation in which information dissemination regarding the outcomes of pay negotiation rounds and indeed industrial relations disputes takes place through Industrial Relations News. However, the signals and information generated through IRN publications have a more limited impact and uptake in the Grocery Retail sector. The sectoral pattern does though further underline the importance of the 'information as coordination' mechanism. The media signalling mechanism is the major, albeit narrow, means by which the limited coordination that does exist takes place and this is captured in a range of qualitative interview evidence. The broader absence of effective coordination on both the unions' and employers' side is itself demonstrated in the very low levels of cooperation and participation by both sets of actors in the survey study due to the fragmented, conflictual and atomised nature of the network in this sector.

#### 4.2.3. Network Analysis of CB in Large Grocery Retail: Survey Results

Survey responses were, for the reasons outlined previously, very limited in the Retail sector. This is indicative of the fragmentation of employers, the limited capacity of unions, and the conflictual relations that characterise the sector. Table 11 illustrates that of the thirteen potential respondents identified from exploratory interviews and initial research, only one individual responded to the survey. This illustrates the underlying structural issues that characterise the sector which has a similar fragmented structure among employers to the Pharmaceutical sector but does not have a union with the strength and organising capacity of SIPTU to offset this.

*Table 11: Retail Sector Respondents Identified and Survey Response Rate in Ireland*

Sector	Exploratory Network Size (actors in survey questions based on exploratory interviews)	Survey Respondents	Survey Response Rate
Retail	13	1	8%

While this low level of engagement inhibits substantive network analysis, the individual respondent identifies as a leading national negotiator in the Retail sector with extensive experience and provides certain useful overview of the sector in the associated responses. Table 12 illustrates the variety of significant challenges to coordination in Retail indicating that the economic and/or sectoral context presents the most significant challenge corresponding with the conflictual nature of industrial relations observed in the sector, the lack of engagement with unions by employers and the absence of effective organising. Further to this, the respondent identifies major challenges represented by fragmentation in representation that distinguishes the sector very clearly from Pharmaceuticals as the unions do not have the capacity to provide effective coordination through their internal cohesion and resources. There are also similarly challenges identified due to asymmetric power and a lack of trust between actors. This clearly matches the qualitative interview evidence collected and the pattern of relations observed.

*Table 12: Main Challenges to Coordination (1-5 scale, higher values indicate greater challenges)*

Sector	Lack of Trust	Power differences	Fragmentation in the representation of workers or firms	Economic and/or sectoral context
Retail	4	4	4	5

The respondent also identifies key pattern setting firms in Retail and these correspond, for the most part, with major Retail companies identified above. It is important to note here that the respondent identifies Tesco and Dunnes Stores specifically, and these are firms that have been engaged in major disputes with workers and unions in recent times. The identification of these firms as pattern-setters illustrates the importance of these disputes and ultimately any potential deals that follow with these market-leading firms in establishing the dynamics across the sector. This tends to explain the substantially more conflictual relations of wage bargaining that have characterised the Retail sector and the difficulty in establishing coordination given union fragmentation and the resistance of major leading firms to engage.

*Table 13: Top Pattern-Setting Firms in Retail*

Firm	Number of Responses Identifying Firm
Dunnes	1
Marks and Spencer	1
Musgraves	1
Tesco	1
Penneys	1

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Having examined the structure and extent of the networks underlying collective bargaining in Ireland across the Pharmaceutical and Large Grocery Retail Sectors through the analysis of survey data and extensive interview materials, a clear picture emerges. The primary takeaway is that it is where unions have significant power resources and the capacity to coordinate and implement wage bargaining strategy that coordination emerges in the Irish localised firm-level bargaining context. Table 14 illustrates the pattern of relations and coordination across unions and employers in the two sectors. Coordination comes from the union-side in the Irish context and this is conditioned by union strength and the capacity to provide coordination. Therefore, union-led coordination exists in the Pharmaceuticals sector where there is a strong primary union, but does not follow in Grocery Retail where the key unions are weak and there is fragmentation. Employers operate independently and do not demonstrate intra-employer coordination in either sector. Successful wage bargaining negotiations and stable union-employer relations are observed in the Pharmaceuticals sector and not in Retail despite the similar individualised firm-level bargaining framework. The key explanatory factor here is the differential capacity of unions to coordinate between the two sectors.

*Table 14: Coordination Capacity in the Irish Pharmaceutical and Grocery Retail Sectors for Unions and Employers*

	Pharmaceuticals	Grocery Retail
<b>Unions</b>	strong power resources; substantial union density; single leading union; centralization of control within SIPTU; organizing potential; strong coordination within small group of actors; effective capacity to implement strategy	very limited power resources; limited union density; fragmentation of union representation; campaigning union rather than effective negotiating force; reliance on public campaigns; non-recognition of unions in some firms; lack of capacity to lead coordination; lack of capacity to implement strategy
<b>Employers</b>	Large highly profitable US multinationals; firm-level negotiations; strong independence; lack of role for employers' association; little informal collaboration; significant use of Industrial Relations news for 'information as coordination'; individual firms have largely cooperative relations with unions	Large Irish and UK-based firms; firm-level negotiations; strong competition between firms; lack of role for employer's association; little to no collaboration; some limited use of Industrial Relations News for 'information as coordination'; conflictual relations with unions; non-recognition in certain cases



The success of the SIPTU strategy of targeting the large, highly-profitable pharmaceutical sector multinationals to establish an early pay norm target and pattern of longer, sustained agreements was built on its internal cohesion and capacity. Within-union coordination and centralisation among a small network of actors to devise and implement this strategy helped overcome the lack of coordination at sectoral level and in particular the otherwise strong impediments to coordination presented by the lack of collaboration among employers, their strong sense of independence, and the limited industrial relations role for the overarching employers' organisation. The union was also through its informal links with individual HR managers and latterly Industrial Relations News to establish and publicise this newly developed pay bargaining pattern. In comparison, the limited power resources of Mandate, lower density, and absence of centralisation on the union side in Grocery Retail significantly impeded the development and realisation of such a strategy which, when combined with similarly individualised employers that tend not to communicate with each other or through the employers' association vis-à-vis collective bargaining, has led to an absence of any network underpinning coordination in the sector. The limited power resources of the unions similarly undercut the establishment of stable informal relations with HR managers within the major employers which has likely been both a cause and consequence of the quite significant conflict in the sector in recent years.

Our interviews also clearly establish the significant and distinctive role of Industrial Relations News in providing 'information as coordination' in the Irish context. In the Pharmaceuticals sector and likely exemplifying broader patterns, IRN was key in the dissemination of information regarding the pattern of pay increases SIPTU had established through engagement with the highly profitable multinational firms and interview evidence with HR management in key firms and consultants familiar with the sector illustrate how this information was factored in before upcoming negotiations as regards expectations by employers. IRN's publications and collated data on recent pay agreements was also a key avenue for SIPTU to establish the growing coalescence around the two per cent norm across other sectors over time with individual employers again clearly engaging with this material as it was circulated. Absent institutional structures, strong umbrella representative organisations as regards industrial relations and in a context of fragmentation, information of this sort is a key means of establishing coordination.

From a methodological perspective, we identify both advantages and pitfalls as regards the application of social network analysis to industrial relations and collective bargaining based on an in-depth examination of the Irish context. There are clear theoretical and indeed empirical contributions to be made by considering coordination through a network perspective stressing the role of informal relations between actors. We see clearly from our interviews in the Irish context how relationships between key officials in SIPTU provided for the development of an alternative union-led coordination strategy in the context of a move to firm-level bargaining while relations between union officials and both Pharmaceutical firm HR managers and IRN journalists was important in establishing and conveying the expectations and norms for forthcoming negotiations. This focus on informality provides a clear analytic advantage over traditional structural indicators and better accounts for the reality of interactions especially in Ireland where informal relationships are a core element of many forms of negotiation.

There are however particular challenges to implementing a social network approach across divergent institutional contexts. In contrast to certain European cases where sectoral agreements are more common, the individual firm-level bargaining structure in Ireland strongly inhibited participation from firms in our survey as they are resistant to material

that may be perceived to impinge upon commercial sensitivities and perhaps more importantly, coordination and inter-firm engagement is severely limited. This coupled with the limited role for the employers' association presented major access and participation challenges. Qualitative interview evidence has therefore been particularly important in tapping these dynamics and in a manner that the survey approach could only partially achieve.

In turn, the absence of a network beyond that operating within the unions in the Pharmaceuticals sector severely affects the ability to capture relations through a network analysis. The fragmented employer structures in each sector and especially the low union capacity and conflictual relations between weaker unions and fragmented employers in Grocery Retail are readily apparent in interview evidence but are challenging to establish using this methodology given the absence of a meaningful network and the associated lack of participation in the survey. Finally, the critical role of Industrial Relations News that has emerged through our qualitative analysis is very challenging to incorporate as it does not form a clear part of a 'network' as conceived but clearly provides a distinctive form of coordination through information in the Irish context. As a central media actor, it provides an important signalling device.

While we therefore identify the scope for substantive contributions to the literature on industrial relations and wage coordination through the use of network analysis, consideration must be given to the applicability to more atomised firm-level bargaining structures in liberal market economies such as Ireland where more qualitative methods may still have distinct advantages for observing and analysing informal relations.

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