

# Employees' Motivation to Invest in their Sustainable Employment:

## A Case Study of an Industrial Service Provider

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### **Abstract**

Demographic changes, such as the ageing of society and the decline of the birth rate, are gradually leading to the loss of valuable knowledge and experience in the Dutch Labour market. This necessitates an explicit focus on workers' sustainable employment so that they can add value to the organisation throughout their career. This study looks into the way in

which the workers' motivation might affect their investments into their own sustainable employment. It was conducted in a major industrial service provider, Sitech Services. The conclusion is that intrinsic motivation plays an important role in both younger and older employees, and that the younger workers undertake more action in order to give physical form to their sustainable employment than their older colleagues.

**Keywords:** Motivation, Sustainable Employment, Age

## 1. Introduction

Workers in the Netherlands will have to work until an increasingly advanced age due to demographic changes, such as the ageing of society and the decline of the birth rate as well as changed legislation (Van Dam, Van Vuuren, and Kemps, 2016). The recently concluded coalition agreement (Rutte and Samson, 2012) has increased the pensionable age to 67 years by 2021. This political choice was made within the framework of cutbacks as a consequence of the rising life expectancy, but also reflects a plea for workers' own responsibility (Zinsmeister, 2012). This political choice aside, the rising age of society will have negative consequences for the valuable knowledge and experience in the labour market. There will simply not be enough youth to convey this knowledge to. This will lead to a scarcity of specific knowledge in the near future. The lack of substitute employees will be a major issue in certain industries, especially those that depend on technically trained workers.

These industries will have to focus on sustainable employment in order to allow their workers to continue to productively add value to the organisation (Stoffers and Van der Heijden, 2014; Op den Camp and Wilthagen, 2014). Sustainable employment consists of three aspects: employability, workability and vitality (Van Vuuren, Caniëls, and Semeijn, 2011). Sustainable employment means that, throughout their working life, employees continually have the feasible possibilities and conditions to (continue to) perform their current and future work whilst retaining their health and well-being (Van der Klink, 2010; Van der Klink et al., 2016). This 2 implies a work context that enables them to do so as well as the attitude and motivation necessary to realistically utilise these possibilities (Van de Ven et al., 2014).

This case study was conducted at Sitech Services, a major industrial service provider in the Netherlands located in a chemical industrial estate, housing a great many companies - from young start-ups to multinationals in the chemical industry. It is one of the largest locations for the chemical industry in the Netherlands. Part of the estate is the campus where the research activities take place and collaboratives come to fruition, each partner contributing from their specialised roles (knowledge and business and other boosters of the knowledge economy) with the aim of "expanding the campus in order for it to become the key Euregional and international location for companies, educational institutes and research organisations in ChemMaterials" (Wagemans and Przybylski, 2011).

Sitech Services has 733 employees, 674 of whom are male (almost 92%) and 59 are female (8%). Almost 50% of the total workforce have worked there for over 20 years. A relatively large number of their employees have reached the age of 46 or older. The average age is 47,

whilst 46% are 51 or older. The shrinking labour market for technically trained personnel, the rapid technological developments, and the current age structure within the organisation all demand a widely supported policy as regards to sustainable employment. Without sustainably employable workers the organisation will have no viable future.

Employers and employees are jointly responsible for the sustainable employment of the workers in their current and future positions within or outside the organisation (De Lange and Van der Heijden, 2013; Foppen, 2013; Stoffers, 2014). For employers this duty follows from the importance to acquire and hold on to talent, whereas the employees should be able to continue to develop themselves and, as so, remain appealing in the labour market (LED, 2014). When it comes to sustainable employment, it is important for the employer to not only provide a work context that allows the employees to become actively involved in their own sustainable employment (Foppen and Stoffers, 2014), but also for their employees to have the motivation to take advantage of the possibilities provided (Van der Klink, 2010).

Sustainable employment has been high on Sitech Services' agenda since 2010. The organisation is striving towards a well-considered policy with adequate execution. If goals are set for sustainable employment at all levels in the organisation and policy actively focuses on their fulfilment, sustainable employment will take a strategically and operationally relevant position within the organisation.

## **2. Sustainable Employment**

Central to this article is the definition by Van der Klink (2010) regarding sustainable employment, as this wide approach to the concept coincides with Sitech Services' HR policy (Sitech Services, 2009). Van der Klink's above-mentioned definition implies a work context that equips employees with the capabilities to develop this, as well as laying the groundwork for the motivation to grasp the available opportunities. This definition places the responsibility for sustainable employment with the employer, with an active role for the organisation (Schaufeli, 2011).

## **3. Motivation and Age**

Motivation is an important factor in the path towards sustainable employment. While it is difficult to obtain a widely accepted definition of 'motivation' in general, it can be said that an individual who is motivated has been moved to do something (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

Employees' goals and motives change with age (De Lange and Van der Heijden, 2013). Research by Kooij (2011) reveals that motives related to challenging work, climbing the career ladder, working with people, acknowledgement, and salary gradually decline. It is in fact the motives related to an interesting work content and the use of skills, the performing of useful tasks, autonomy, the helping of others, and creativity that increase with age (Pinder, 2008). This boils down to an increase of the importance of intrinsic motives and gradually less emphasis on growth and extrinsic motives.

According to Deci and Ryan (1985), an individual is intrinsically motivated if they take action because they consider it to be appealing and pleasurable. When an individual is

extrinsically motivated, they will act because a tangible value comes attached. All workers value intrinsic, social, and security related job characteristics such as useful work and interesting positions (Foppen, 2013; Kanfer and Ackerman, 2004).

In order to be able to develop knowledge and competences it is important for people to believe in their own possibilities (Bossink, 2011). Bandura (1977) propounds that behaviour is largely determined by people's expectations in respect to that behaviour. This is referred to as self-efficacy, or a person's conviction of their own abilities (Bossink, 2011). Self-efficacy is thereby also the employees' conviction that they will be able to successfully complete their developmental activities. The stronger this belief, the stronger the motivation for development (Hazelzet, Paagman, and El Marini, 2008).

For an optimal development people require the motivation to invest in themselves. This motivation, according to Bandura (1977), arises from people's determination to achieve goals. People with a high self-efficacy think more positive, have more motivation, and have greater preference for new challenges. The higher the workers' self-efficacy, the more they focus on their own employment (Nauta, 2008). It has also been found that the older worker feels generally less supported and therefore takes less career enhancing initiatives.

The research in this case study addressed the ways in which workers' intrinsic and extrinsic motivations may influence their investments in their own sustainable employment. A distinction was made between younger and older workers. Given the age structure within Sitech Services, with mostly older workers, it was expected that their extrinsic motivation would have less effect on the degree to which they invested in their own sustainable employment.

The following research question was formulated:

*"In what way does the motivation of both the younger and the older employees influence the degree to which they invest in their own sustainable employment?"*

The research question was investigated by way of 5 hypotheses which are also reflected in the conceptual model.

*Hypothesis 1: The higher their age, the more workers invest in their own sustainable employment from intrinsic motivation.*

*Hypothesis 2: The lower their age, the more workers invest in their own sustainable employment from extrinsic motivation.*

*Hypothesis 3: The lower their age, the more workers invest in their own sustainable employment.*

*Hypothesis 4: Intrinsic motivation has a positive influence on the degree to which workers invest in their own sustainable employment.*

*Hypothesis 5: Extrinsic motivation has less influence on the degree to which workers invest in their own sustainable employment.*

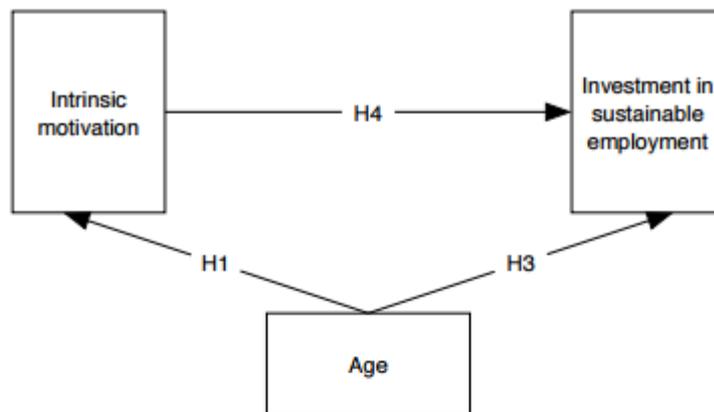


Figure 1. Conceptual Model for the Hypotheses 1, 3 and 4

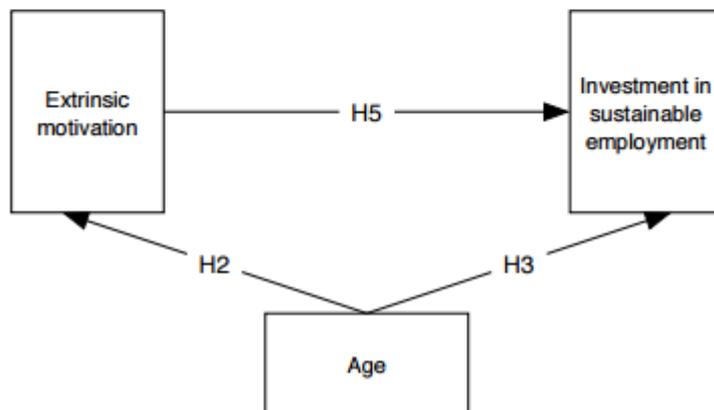


Figure 2. Conceptual Model for the Hypotheses 2, 3 and 5

#### 4. Methodology

The study, which was conducted at Sitech Services, was deductive. Hypotheses were formulated on the basis of a literature review and tested in the subsequent investigation.

A survey was chosen as the research strategy, as this is a controllable and well organised tool for data collection. Feasibility in terms of time and financial means also played a role in this choice. The questionnaire used in this study was sent to all of the Sitech Services staff members. It was drafted and distributed in collaboration with Qidos HR Consultancy. It was a cross-sectional study (Saunders, 2011). As regards the ethical aspects of the study, privacy was taken into account when the research population was approached, but more so when the outcomes were processed, analysed, and reported.

The questionnaire was based on 2 theories on sustainable employment: the DIX - the Sustainable Employment Index developed by the TNO Dutch Organisation for Applied Research in the Natural Sciences and the Kroon op het Werk business network towards sustainable employment (2010) - and Dollevoet's DISC model (2012). The DIX maps out the worker's employment and 'valuable' aspects. It measures the employment factors of health & energy, professional knowledge & skills, motivation & dedication, the (current and future)

performance, and the balance between work and private life (Ybema, Vos, and Geuskens, 2013). Dollevoet's (2012) DISC model is based on a model developed by Marston in 1928. This model makes a distinction between 4 main domains of sustainable employment, namely health and vitality (worker's perspective), culture and leadership (employer's perspective), flexibility (worker), and mobility (employer). This study used a structured questionnaire. In order to enhance the study's reliability, the DIX and DISC models were used as the theoretical basis for the questionnaire. In the analyses, 3 age cohorts were created: up to 30, 31 to 45, and 46 and older.

As for its generalisability it can be said that this study was generalisable over similar organisations in the industrial sector. After all, Sitech Services is a shining example of the industrial sector's major traditional organisations with a relatively high age structure.

#### *4.1. Research Population*

A total of 415 (57%) workers completed the questionnaire, 87% of whom were male, and 13% female. Furthermore, 66% of the respondents were 46 or older, 28% was 31 to 45, and 6% was 30 or younger. Where their highest completed education was concerned, 7% of the respondents completed secondary or primary school, 36% held a vocational secondary school diploma, 43% achieved a professional bachelor's degree, and 14% held a master's degree. In terms of their employment contract, 38% of the respondents had worked for the organisation less than 5 years, 17% had worked there for 5 to 15 years, and 45% had been in employment there for over 15 years.

### **5. Results and Discussion**

The outcomes of this study are presented below.

*Hypothesis 1: The higher their age, the more workers invest in their own sustainable employment from intrinsic motivation.*

The results reveal that mainly the younger workers invest in their own sustainable employment from intrinsic motivation. For instance, 92% of the workers of 30 years or younger undertake action since they believe it to be important to continue to develop themselves; this applies to 65% for the workers aged 46 or older. The table below shows the differences.

			<b>I am going to undertake these actions since I feel it is important to continue to develop myself</b>		
			<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>30 years or younger</b>	Number	23	2	25
		% of age group	92%	8%	100%
		% of total	6.3%	0.5%	6.8%
	<b>31 to 45 years</b>	Number	87	15	102
		% of age group	85.3%	14.7%	100%
		% of total	23.8%	4.1%	27.9%
	<b>46 years or older</b>	Number	156	83	239
		% of age group	65.3%	34.7%	100%
		% of total	42.6%	22.7%	65.3%
<b>Total</b>		Number	266	100	366
		% of age group	72.7%	27.3%	100%
		% of total	72.7%	27.3%	100%

In the positive answers to the question 'I am going to undertake these actions because I like to', the middle group stands out, whereas the motivation 'to enhance my job security' is confirmed mainly by the older workers. The younger employee is primarily focused on development and staying up-to-date in their professional area. The results reveal that mainly the younger workers invest in their own sustainable employment more from intrinsic motivation. Therefore, the first hypothesis is rejected. An initial possible explanation is that fewer young workers completed the questionnaire. Another clarification might be from the perspective of job security. The number of jobs has been declining since the start of the economic crunch, and the same goes for the industrial sector (Op den Camp and Wiltthagen, 2014). Given this situation it is understandable that the older workers scored higher on job security and lower on the other intrinsic motives.

A third explanation might be found in the fact that higher educated young workers are accustomed to continuous learning and developing. Younger workers are more flexible than their older counterparts and are more willing to take courses (Van der Houwen and Moonen, 2014).

*Hypothesis 2: The lower their age, the more workers invest in their own sustainable employment from extrinsic motivation.*

The extrinsic motivation was examined through questions about the respondents' motives behind their actions. These questions focused on whether their line manager encouraged these actions because the changes in their jobs demanded them, or because they expected their staff

to do so. Younger workers scored lower on the two latter motives (because the job demanded it and because it was expected) than their older colleagues. Younger staff also scored low on the motivation of their line manager's encouragement. It is noticeable that the older respondents scored even lower. See also the table below.

			<b>I am going to undertake these actions because my line manager encourages it</b>		
			<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>30 years or younger</b>	Number	3	22	25
		% of age group	12%	88%	100%
		% of total	0.8%	6%	6.8%
	<b>31 to 45 years</b>	Number	14	88	102
		% of age group	13.7%	86.3%	100%
		% of total	3.8%	24%	27.9%
	<b>46 years or older</b>	Number	7	232	239
		% of age group	2.9%	97.1%	100%
		% of total	1.9%	63.4%	65.3%
<b>Total</b>		Number	24	342	366
		% of age group	6.6%	93.4%	100%
		% of total	6.6%	93.4%	100%

On the basis of the outcomes above it can be concluded that it is not true that the younger Sitech services staff invest in their sustainable employment from extrinsic motivation more than their older counterparts. The hypothesis is, therefore, rejected. Again, a possible reasoning might be found in the fact that the number of young respondents was smaller. The educational level of the Sitech services staff might also explain it. Sitech services employs a great many highly educated workers (58% hold a bachelor's or master's degree). The highly educated are driven by intrinsic motives more than low educated people (Dorenbosch, 2014).

*Hypothesis 3: The lower their age, the more workers invest in their own sustainable employment.*

This hypothesis was investigated through questions about: concluding development-related agreements, designing a career path, performing a career scan, talking with a career coach in order to enhance the sustainable employment, discussing development-related possibilities with the line manager, taking a course for the current or a future position, training as regards to vitality, and searching for information about sustainable employment.

Younger workers scored higher for almost all of these actions than their older colleagues, albeit that only a few employees overall indicated an interest in the career scan or the involvement of a career coach.

The study also looked into the question as to whether the employees were planning to quit investing in their own sustainable employment. The outcomes showed that the older staff scored higher in this respect than their younger counterparts. Therefore, the hypothesis is approved.

*Hypothesis 4: Intrinsic motivation has a positive influence on the degree to which workers invest in their own sustainable employment.*

The motives for employees to invest in their own sustainable employment can be subdivided into intrinsic and extrinsic factors. The intrinsic factors are: 1) to enhance my job security, 2) to increase my chances of another position, 3) to stay up-to-date in my professional area, 4) because it is important to develop, and 5) because I like it.

<b>Motivation for future activity</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>	<b>Percentage of the total population (%)</b>
To enhance my job security	174	16	50
To increase my chances of another position	172	15	50
Because I think it's important to stay up-to-date in my professional area	187	17	54
Because I think it's important to continue to develop myself	266	24	77
Because I like it	151	13	44
Because my line manager encourages me to do so	24	2	7
Because changes in my work demand me to do so	108	10	31
Because I am expected to	44	4	13

The questions were to be answered with a yes or a no and were, therefore, measured at the nominal level. The table shows that the workers were primarily intrinsically motivated to invest in their own sustainable employment. This is also confirmed by the first hypothesis for which it was shown that all the employees acted from intrinsic motivation. Therefore, the hypothesis is accepted.

*Hypothesis 5: Extrinsic motivation has less influence on the degree to which workers invest in their own sustainable employment.*

The extrinsic factors for employees to invest in their own sustainable employment are: 1) because the line manager encourages them to do so, 2) because changes in the work demands them to do so, or 3) because they are expected to do so. Table 3 and the previous hypothesis reveal that the employees mainly act from intrinsic motivation and, to a lesser degree, from extrinsic motivation. As in the testing of the preceding hypothesis, the questions were answered with a 9 yes or a no and were, therefore, assessed at the nominal level. This

hypothesis is also accepted.

An explanation for the acceptance of this and the previous hypothesis could be that, as said, Sitech Services employs a larger amount of higher educated people who, far more than those with a lower education, undertake action from intrinsic motivation (Dorenbosch, 2014).

## **6. Conclusion and Recommendations for Further Research**

Both the younger and the older staff members at Sitech Services invest in their own sustainable employment as a consequence of intrinsic motivation. The scores do not reveal any significant differences between the age categories. It does become apparent, however, that the younger workers improve upon their sustainable employment from intrinsic motivation more so than their older colleagues. The literature shows that there are differences; intrinsic motivation increases with age (De Lange and Van der Heijden, 2013; Kooij e.a., 2011; Foppen, 2013). The results from this study do, therefore, not correspond to the literature. The experience in practice is that younger workers have more ambitions, or certain goals that they want to achieve, and can muster more energy to devote themselves to their fulfilment (Maurer, 2001). They demonstrate self-leadership, self-information, and self-empowerment. Older workers, on the other hand, more often have a substantial self-image, so that they are aware of their good qualities and weaknesses.

Furthermore, minor differences can be found between the age categories when it comes to the Sitech services staff's active involvement in their sustainable employment from extrinsic motivation. Here, the older workers are more likely to undertake action from extrinsic motivation than the younger cohort. It was also found that the younger Sitech services staff invest in their sustainable employment to a higher degree. They undertake more actions to this end than their older colleagues. Experience in practice teaches that the younger workers aspire to achieve more goals and demonstrate entrepreneurial behaviour towards the realisation of career possibilities (see also Bertolino, Truxillo, Fraccaroli, 2011).

These conclusions provide an answer to the research question: "In what way does the motivation of both the younger and the older employees influence the degree to which they invest in their own sustainable employment?" with due observation to the limitations of this study. The motivation of the Sitech services staff has a positive impact on the extent to which they invest in their own sustainable employment. Both the younger and the older Sitech services workers undertake actions from intrinsic motivation, despite the fact that the first do so the most.

As mentioned, the study involved a number of limitations. For instance, the survey that was designed in collaboration with Qidos HR Consultancy used a structured questionnaire. A segment of the questions were derived from existing lists or models. The study rendered copious amounts of data and could be said to be multifaceted. Furthermore, the format of the questions could have elicited socially desirable answers. Finally, the study provided a (cross-sectional) snapshot.

Follow-up research in the form of longitudinal research into the factors influencing sustainable employment with a specific focus on the role of intrinsic motivation is

recommended. It might also be worthwhile to investigate as to whether 10 competences like self-leadership, self-information, and self-empowerment (Staes, 2011), which occur more in younger employees, have a positive influence on their investments in their own sustainable employment.

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