

Towards a social ecology of sustainable employability: a study among Dutch employees

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Project team

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- Project funded by ZonMW



Content

- Background
- What is sustainable employability?
- Aims of the project
- Methods
- Results
- Discussion: me or my boss?

Sustainable employability (SE) is

- About labour participation
- Top priority for employers and governments
- Popular term for many interventions in the field
- Not very well defined yet
- Missing the employee's perspective

Blanks in SE research and discussions

- How to operationalise and measure SE?
- Participation in SE interventions is low, effects relatively unknown
- Employee's perspective?
- Differences between subgroups of employees?

Defining sustainable employability (Van der Klink et al., 2010)

Employees throughout their careers will have feasible opportunities and conditions to function in their current job and in all future jobs with the maintenance of their health and well-being. This implies a work context which enables them to do so, as well as the motivation and attitude to take advantage of these opportunities.





Measurement of SE

- Unclarity about definition and operationalisation of SE
- Implies a prediction of the future
- Many proxies exist
- Hardly any validated instruments, besides
 - Capability (Abma & Van der Klink, 2015)
 - Vitality scan (Brouwers et al., 2015)

Improving vitality and SE (interventions)

- Behavioral change
- Improving lifestyle
- Coping with stress, working conditions
- Adjusting the workplace

- Participation?
- Effectiveness?
- Type of interventions?

Employees' perspective?

- Employers and policy makers interfere with the employees' health and SE by focusing on working conditions and individual lifestyle
- All employees are considered a(t) risk
- But:
 - How far can/should the employer go?
 - Who is responsible?
 - Whose interests are at stake?
 - How voluntary is voluntary?
- Differences between employee subgroups?

Research questions

- What meanings of SE exist in the societal and scientific debate and how do employees give meaning to SE?
- How can SE be measured?
- How effective is the SE intervention "Vitality@XXX"?
- How do organizations try to increase their employees' sustainable employability and how do employees perceive these efforts?
- How does the meaning of sustainable employability differ for sex, socio-economic status and lifestage?

Method

- Quantitative study (rq 2, 3, 5)
 - Online survey (measures SE, health, vitality, lifestyle, work)
 - Principal component, comparative and regression analyses
- Qualitative study (rq 1, 4, 5)
 - In-depth interviews
 - Purposive sample
 - Interviews were taperecorded and transcribed
 - Transcripts were analyzed thematically

Sample quantitative study

Demographics	Control	Intervention	p-value
Men, %	97.3	83.0	0.028
Age, years, M (SD)	51.2 (9.8)	49.3 (9.4)	0.304
Education, %			
<HBO	89.2	64.9	0.005
≥HBO	10.8	35.1	
Marital state, %			
Married	83.8	73.4	0.119
Cohabiting	5.8	14.9	
Divorced	0.0	6.4	
Single	10.8	5.3	

Sample qualitative study

Age	n	Sex	n	Education	n
20-30	2	Men	12	Low	2
30-40	6	Women	11	Middle	7
40-50	5			High	14
50+	9				

Four organizations

- Industrial organization
- ICT organization
- Department of a health faculty
- Cleaning agency



Employees' perceptions about SE (rq1)

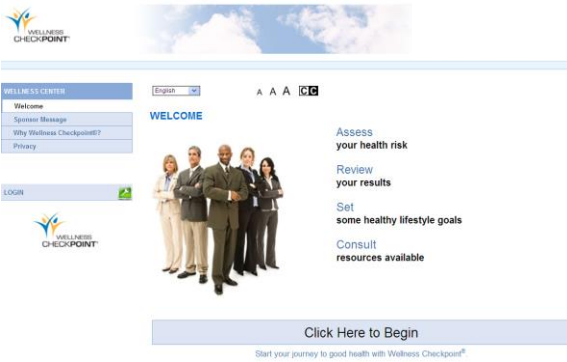
(Sub)schaal (range)	# items	M	SD	α
1. Meaning of sustainable employability				
1a. Being fit and doing something significant (1-5)	5	4.21	.45	.81
1b. Being able to keep my job (1-5)	4	4.19	.53	.72
2. Who is responsible for factors which contribute to sustainable employability (employer - employee)				
2a. Work organisation (1-5)	8	2.66	.47	.84
2b. Lifestyle (1-5)	3	4.21	.60	.87
2c. Work life balance (1-5)	3	3.12	.71	.50
2d. Adjust work to employee possibilities (1-5)	4	2.68	.52	.78
Separate item responsibility sustainable employability				
Who is responsible for increasing the general sustainable employability of employees (1-5)	1	3.01	.27	--

Measuring SE: MISE (Maastricht Instrument for measuring Sustainable Employability) (rq2)

(Sub)schaal (range)	# items	M	SD	α
1. SE of the employee him/herself				
1a. Productivity (1-5)	6	3.98	.45	.78
1b. Health problems (1-5)	3	2.11	.61	.53
2. Factors contributing to SE of the employee				
2a. Work organisation (1-5)	8	2.78	.88	.91
2b. Lifestyle (1-5)	3	3.18	.90	.87
2c. Work life balance (1-5)	3	2.81	.98	.78
2d. Work can be adjusted to employee possibilities (1-5)	4	2.84	.86	.78

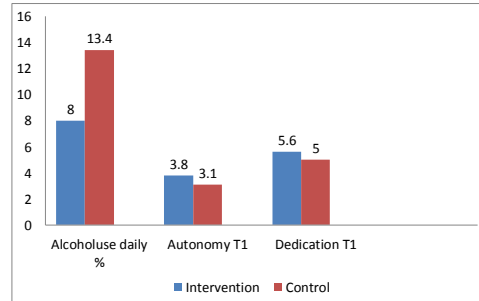
Vitality@XXX (rq3)

- Iterative, cyclic
- Medical examination
- Online assessment (health, lifestyle, work)
- Tailor made advice
- Consult with vitalitycoach
- Referral to specific intervention
- Workplace adjustment
- Follow up



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Effectiveness of Vitality@XXX (rq3)



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Effectiveness of Vitality@XXX

Moderately effective

- Less alcohol consumption, healthier nutrition, more exercise, more dedication (dimension of engagement, more autonomy, and higher sense of competence
- No effects on health, vitality and sustainable employability

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Process evaluation Vitality@XXX

- Attention employer is appreciated
- Participation lower than anticipated
- Iteration did not take place, limited contact with vitality coaches
- Employee perspective ignored

=> qualitative study into employee perspective on sustainable employability

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Meaning of sustainable employability (rq1)

The (physical) load of working

"Those people who arrange things for us, those pen pushers, they just cannot see that that the ones who really have to work, that they cannot continue working that long."

Lifestyle and health complaints

"Yes, and I have seen it several times, there are some heavier people in the factory, people who smoke. They simply cannot do certain tasks and those tasks are passed on to the more vital people. And then they become overloaded."

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Meaning of sustainable employability cont. (rq1)

- Balance between private life and employability
- Partner support
- The meaning of work

- Having fun

"I like it, I come to my work with a smile on my face. If I have to come to work in a bad mood, I will stay at home."

- Other priorities in life

- Work as a way to give meaning to life

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Meaning of sustainable employability cont. (rq1)

- Career and career development
 - Worries about possibilities for sustainable career development in own organization
 - Change profession?
 - Depends on life stage

How do organizations increase sustainable employability and how do employees perceive this (rq4)

1. Encouraging (focusing on human resource management)
 - Developing new skills
 - Responsibility for development?
 - Lack of steering and feedback

"And what I think is very important, and what is completely missing in our department is the lack of recognition. Or the lack of assessment and feedback."

How do organizations increase sustainable employability and how do employees perceive this cont. (rq4)

2. Caring (focusing on health)
 - Prevention of health complaints
 - Encouraging healthy lifestyle

"Well yes, when I sit across someone who is really fat, but never sick... Yes, I don't think I have the right to address this person, saying "Shall we discuss your eating habits?"."

- Involvement

How do organizations increase sustainable employability and how do employees perceive this cont. (rq4)

3. Laissez-faire (focusing on offering autonomy)
 - Being able to decide about your work yourself
 - Independence and freedom

"And now I notice that the way I have arranged my work, as well as the content of my work, that gives me so much energy, I could go on day and night."

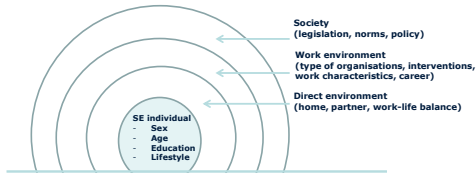
How does the meaning of sustainable employability differ for subgroups? (rq5)

- Hardly, but
- Older employees noticed more difficulties in their sustainable employability
- Lower need for development among lower educated
- Worries among ICT workers about the speed of development which is necessary: will they be able to keep up?

Conclusion and discussion

- Different meanings and different stories
- Sustainable employability is a shared responsibility, but different opinions about the extent to which it should be shared
- Lifestyle of colleagues can be an issue
- Having fun is very important
- Three types of organizations when it comes to increasing sustainable employability

A social ecology of sustainable employability



Discussion: sustainable employability

- Still a contested concept
- Three measurement instruments that add to each other
- Three types of organizational approaches to SE
- Shared responsibility
- Moderate to low effectiveness of "traditional" interventions

Future research and practical implications

- Include more subgroups (people with chronic diseases, low educated)
- SE is a joint effort, include employees as early as possible
- Change the style of thinking into a more pragmatic style: start a dialogue, co-create, give voice

