Sustainable employment and occupational profile

Keeping people in employment until retirement age is a hot topic in the Netherlands, as it is across the rest of the European Union. A series of Dutch studies shows that workers in some sectors are more likely to be able and willing to work until retirement age and others less so, such as craft and manufacturing workers, construction workers and machine operators, transport workers and some in healthcare. People in supervisory roles are most likely to be happy to continue to work.

Introduction

The Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research (TNO) has been looking at the issue of 'sustainable employability' – keeping people in employment until retirement age. This is a topic that has become increasingly important in the Netherlands, as it is across the rest of the EU because of Europe's ageing population. Boosting the employment rate of older workers is also one of the cornerstones of the Europe 2020 strategy.

TNO, on behalf of the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, has developed a model to monitor sustainable employability (NL1202029I). Using the model and several large scale data sources, including employer and employee data and other national statistics, it has conducted a study of the workforce of the Netherlands (Wevers et al, 2010, Kraan et al, 2014).

The model shares similarities with the methodological basis of a 2012 Eurofound study called Sustainable work and the ageing workforce.

Willingness and ability to work longer

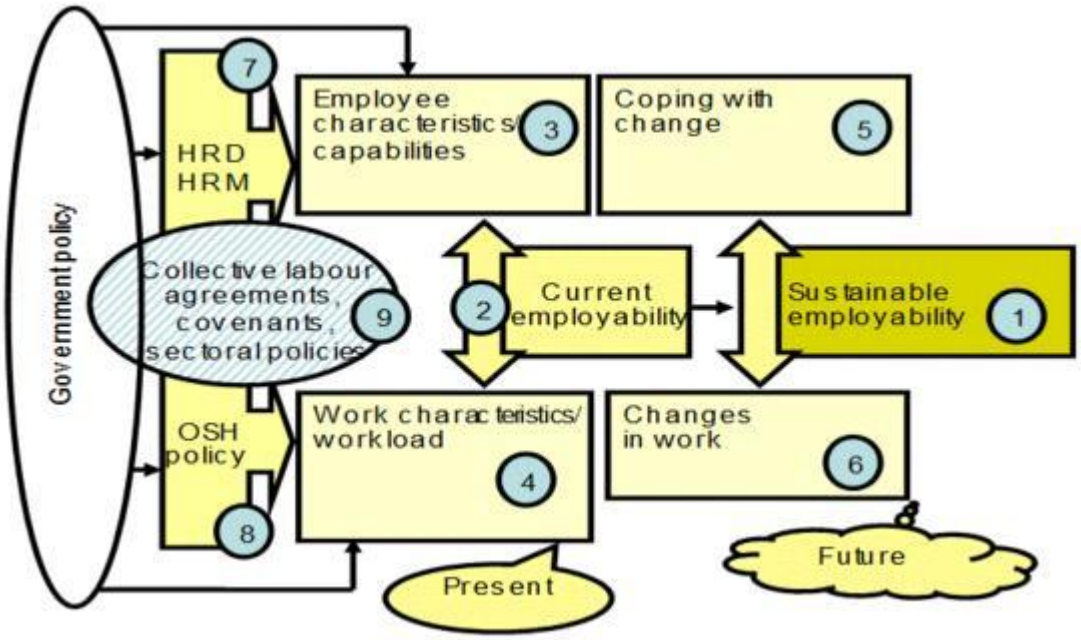
Key indicators in the TNO model of sustainable employability are two measures of outcome –willingness to work until an advanced age and perceived ability to work until an advanced age.

Willingness associates most strongly with the 'determinant' indicators for work characteristics of 'presence of task autonomy and social support', 'ability to meet physical and psychological work demands' and 'self-reported health'.

Ability to work until a more advanced age is even more strongly associated with these indicators. It is also associated with a person's perceived ability to find another job, work–life balance, psychosocial workload and with physical work load.

The model aims to provide occupational risk profiles of outcomes as well as their causal predictors (Figure 1). This should, in turn, identify the most significant causal factors so that interventions to improve employment sustainability can target them.

Figure 1: Sustainable employability model



Source: TNO

Study methodology

The basis for the occupational risk profiles is an employee database from the large scale Netherlands Working Conditions Survey 2012 (NWCS). The survey covers approximately 12,000 employees aged 45 years or older. It identifies ten main occupational groups, and a total of 44 sub-groups (Koppes et al, 2013).

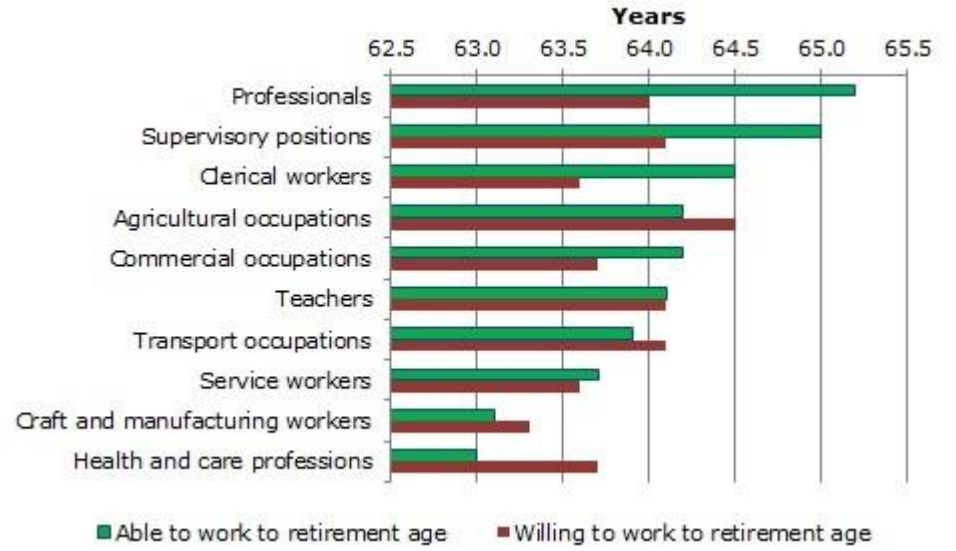
A selection was made of occupations at high risk of a low sustainable employability using the key outcome indicators – being willing and being able to work until retirement age. Next, sustainable employability profiles were created for some specific high risk occupations.

In these analyses, the indicator scores of each group were tested against the rest, and the mean differences per indicator were visualised by sustainable employability profiles. These differences were expressed in percentage points.

Key findings

First of all, occupational groups were rated (ISCO one-digit level) on the ability to work until an advanced age and then compared to workers' willingness to do so.

Figure 2: Comparing ability and willingness to work to an advanced age, by occupational group



Source: NWCS 2012 (TNO / Statistics Netherlands).

Figure 2 shows there is large variance in the perceived ability to work until an advanced age. The variance in willingness to work appears to be much lower.

The data also show workers in some occupational groups want to work longer but are not able to do so. These include health and care professions, craft and manufacturing workers, transport workers and those in agricultural occupations.

In other occupational groups such as professionals, supervisors, clerical workers and commercial occupations, the reverse is true.

This analysis shows that intervention may be most effective among occupational groups where the ability to work limits the working life of individuals, rather than in occupations where willingness to work longer appears to restrict the actual intention or ambition to working longer.

Focus on sub-levels

Looking more closely at the predictors of either ability or willingness to work until retirement age, the profiles shed some more light on the issue.

Average scores on perceived ability to work until retirement age are lowest in the craft and manufacturing occupations. In this group, the determinant indicator – heavy physical workload – has a particularly unfavourable rating.

Focusing on sub-occupational groups, there are unfavourable scores – on both willingness and perceived ability, and on several determinants – for a number of workers (Figures 3 and 4). These include plumbers, fitters, welders, sheet-metal workers and construction workers, masons, carpenters and other construction workers and machine operators, mechanics, instrument makers and similar occupations.

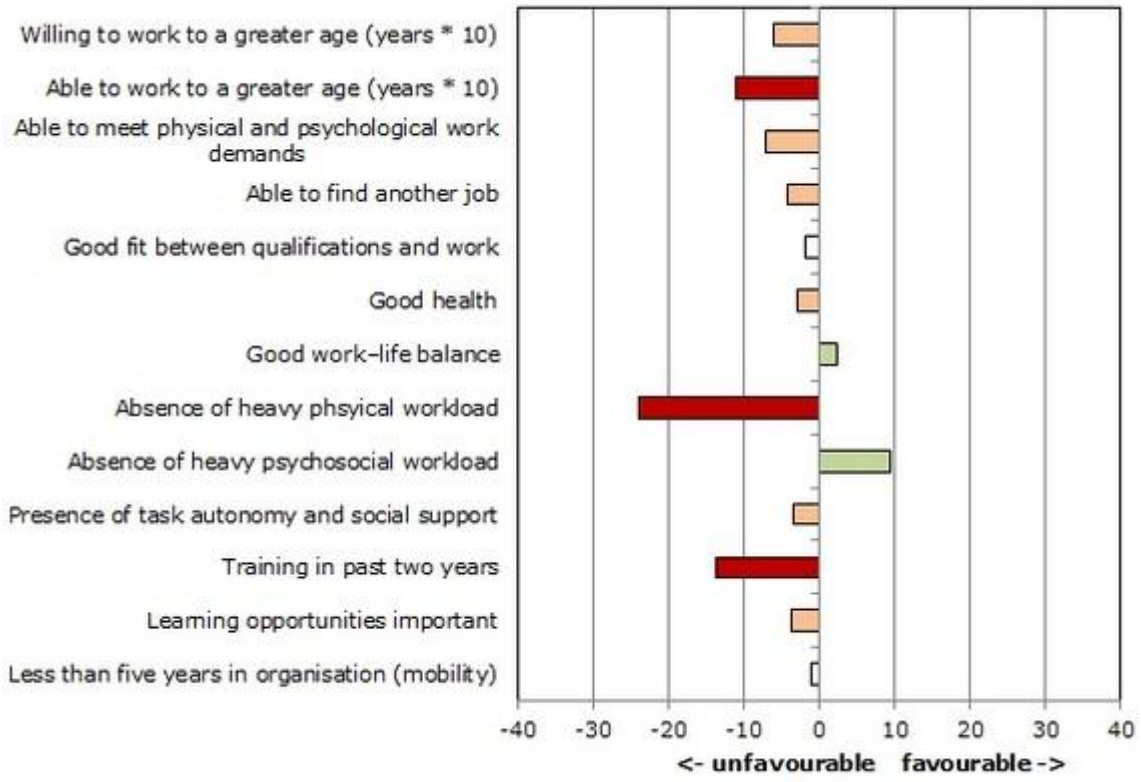
Among transport occupations, there are unfavourable ratings for the sub-occupational group of loaders, unloaders, packers, groundworkers and crane machinists.

The pattern is the same in the sub-occupational group of cooks, waiters and buffet attendants. A similar pattern can be detected in the health and care professions in general, and in particular among nurses, and elderly caregivers, children's nurses and home helps.

Police personnel, firefighters, guards and similar occupations score unfavourably on both outcome measures.

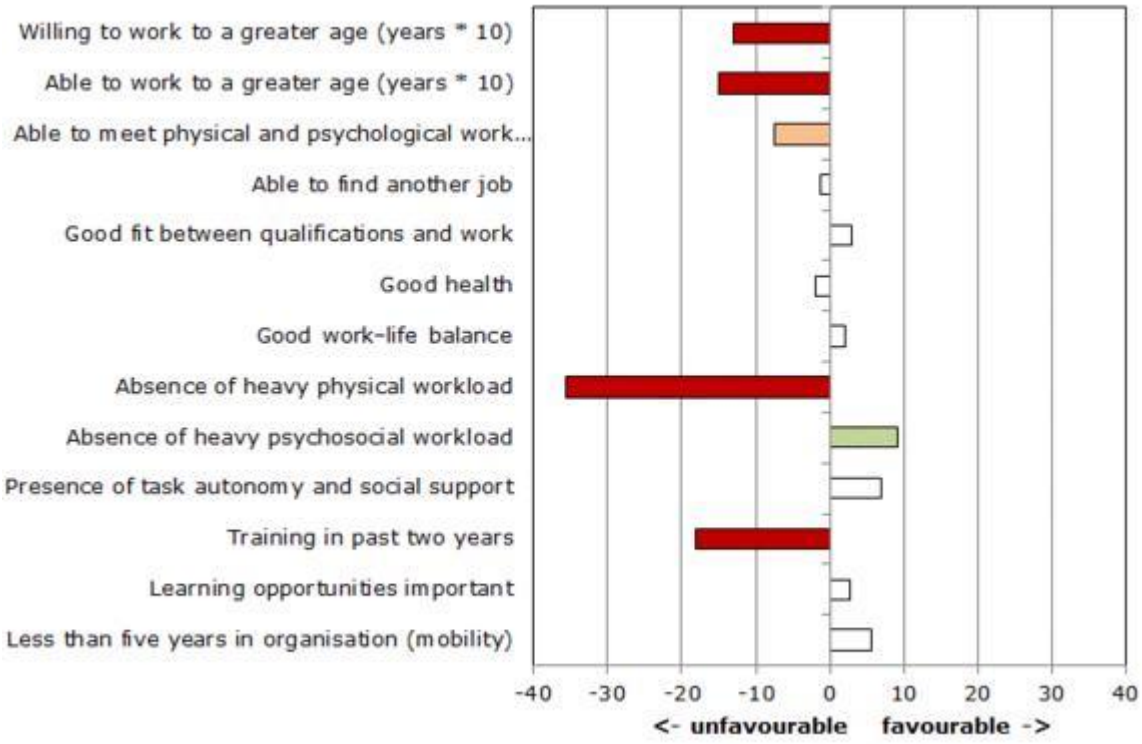
Supervisory jobs, meanwhile, score most favourably both on the outcome measures and on the determinants.

Figure 3: Sustainable employability profile of craft and manufacturing workers aged 45 and over



Source: NWCS 2012 (TNO / Statistics Netherlands).

Figure 4: Sustainable employability profile of sub-occupational group of plumbers, fitters, welders, sheet-metal workers and construction workers aged 45 and over



Source: NWCS 2012 (TNO / Statistics Netherlands).

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