

Older workers more motivated in their work

I.L.D. Houtman, TNO Work and Employment, 14 May 2004

<http://www.eurofound.eu.int/ewco/2004/05/NL0405NU04.htm>

The TNO Work Situation Survey 2002 shows that, although older workers in the Netherlands report more health problems than their younger colleagues, they are seen to be more motivated and absorbed in their work. In the light of the predicted shrinking of the labour market in the future, it will become increasingly important to facilitate older employees to stay on in work rather than encouraging them to retire early.

Many older people leave work before they reach the age of 60, in some cases even at 55 years. The Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) recently published [statistics](#) (in Dutch) showing that, among men in the Netherlands in 2001, 71% of 55-year olds, 38% of 60-year olds and only 7% of 65-year olds were working. The prognosis is that the European (and Dutch) workforce will [decrease](#) (in Dutch) from 2010 due to the ageing of the population and declining fertility rates.

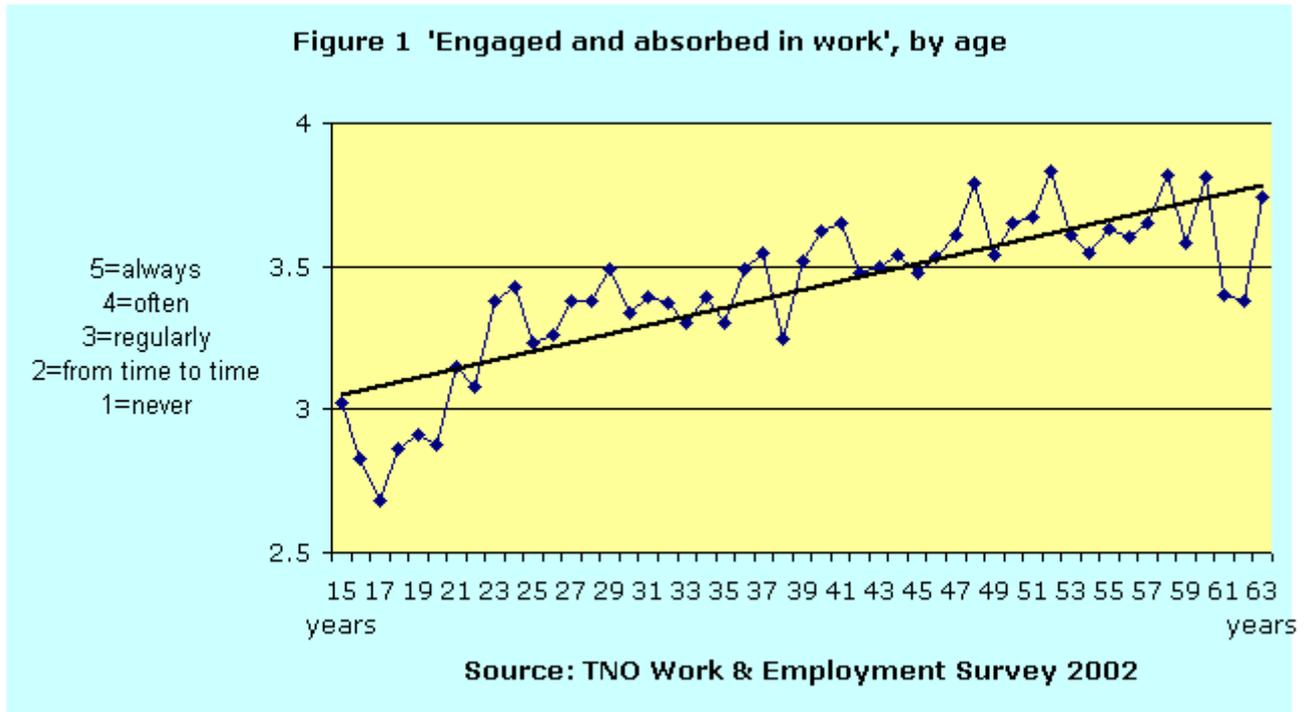
The Dutch Government, in line with other European governments and the European Commission, is trying to encourage workers to stay at work at least until their 65th year. In 2001, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment set up a temporary taskforce on older people and employment, whose mission was to identify and communicate ways of keeping older workers in the labour force for a longer period of time.

Some examples of measures taken are: restricting access to early retirement schemes; reintroducing the requirement to seek work when over 57 years; and removing the obligation on employers to pay disability insurance for employees older than 55, a threshold which is further lowered to 50 years when recruiting new personnel.

Higher motivation levels

The [TNO Work Situation Survey 2002](#) reveals that, as may be expected, older workers report more health problems and suffer more from chronic illnesses than their younger colleagues. However, the survey also finds that older workers attribute more importance to work, and are more motivated and absorbed in their work than their younger colleagues (Figure 1). Motivation was seen to increase as workers grow older; this holds good for both working men and women.

Furthermore, as employees grow older, their satisfaction with the work situation increases slightly until the age of about 45-50 years, after which it stabilises.

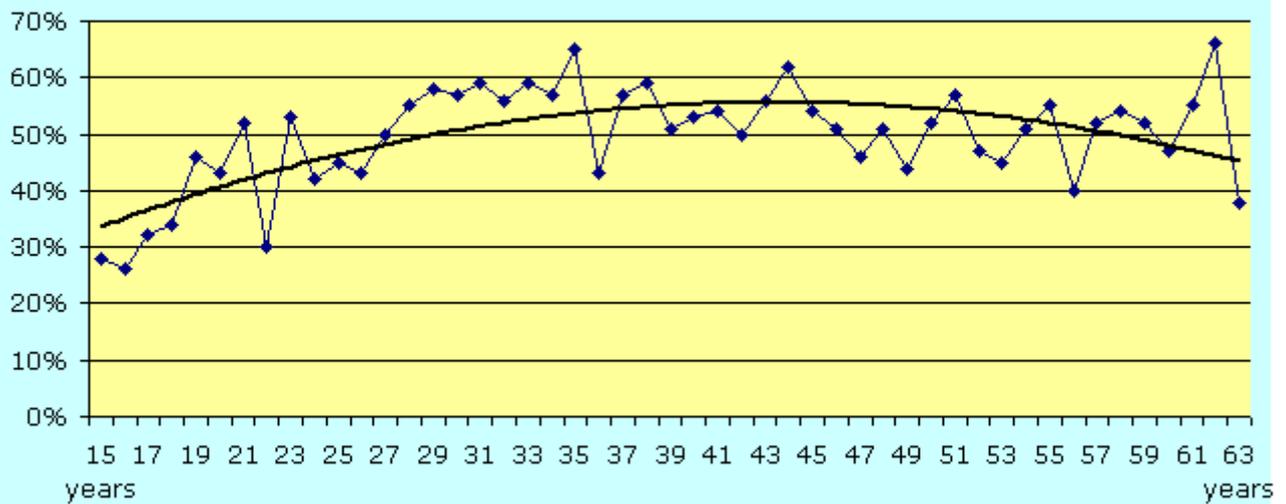


Better employability

Older workers may be satisfied with, engaged in and absorbed by their work, but how useful are they for their employers? This element is difficult to measure. In the TNO Work Situation Survey, employees were asked whether they judged their own 'usability'- a term for 'employability'- as 'better', 'at the same level' or 'at a lower level' than their fellow workers.

Figure 2 shows that younger employees believe that their employability is lower than that of other employees. This may be due to the fact that younger employees are still in the process of learning. The highest level of self-reported employability is seen around the age of 45 years. As people grow older, the self-reported degree of employability decreases slightly but remains at a relatively high level.

Figure 2 % of employees judging their own 'usability' as being better than that of their colleagues, by age



Source: TNO Work & Employment Survey 2002

Increased productivity

Many studies have been carried out with respect to the physical and psychological capabilities of older workers. However, little is known about the attitudes of older workers towards their work and what factors influence these. Two age-related aspects may play a role in the high scores of older workers on work motivation. Firstly, as they become more experienced, employees are often promoted into better and more motivating positions. Secondly, it may be assumed that less motivated workers will leave the world of work as they grow older.

Workers who are motivated and satisfied with their job tend to work hard and are productive. It is therefore important for European economies to invest in the employment of older employees who want to work.

CBS data show that the sectors in which older workers are employed most often are: education, governmental agencies, banking, transport and communication, and health care.