

Social climate at work important to workers

Published on:

02 September 2010

According to the findings of the Netherlands Working Conditions Survey 2009, social support by colleagues and supervisors, the number of conflicts and the prevalence of workplace violence strongly determine the social climate at work. All these factors appear to be important when people are applying for a job or considering staying in a job until or beyond retirement age. The survey also identified a number of sector differences in factors affecting social climate.

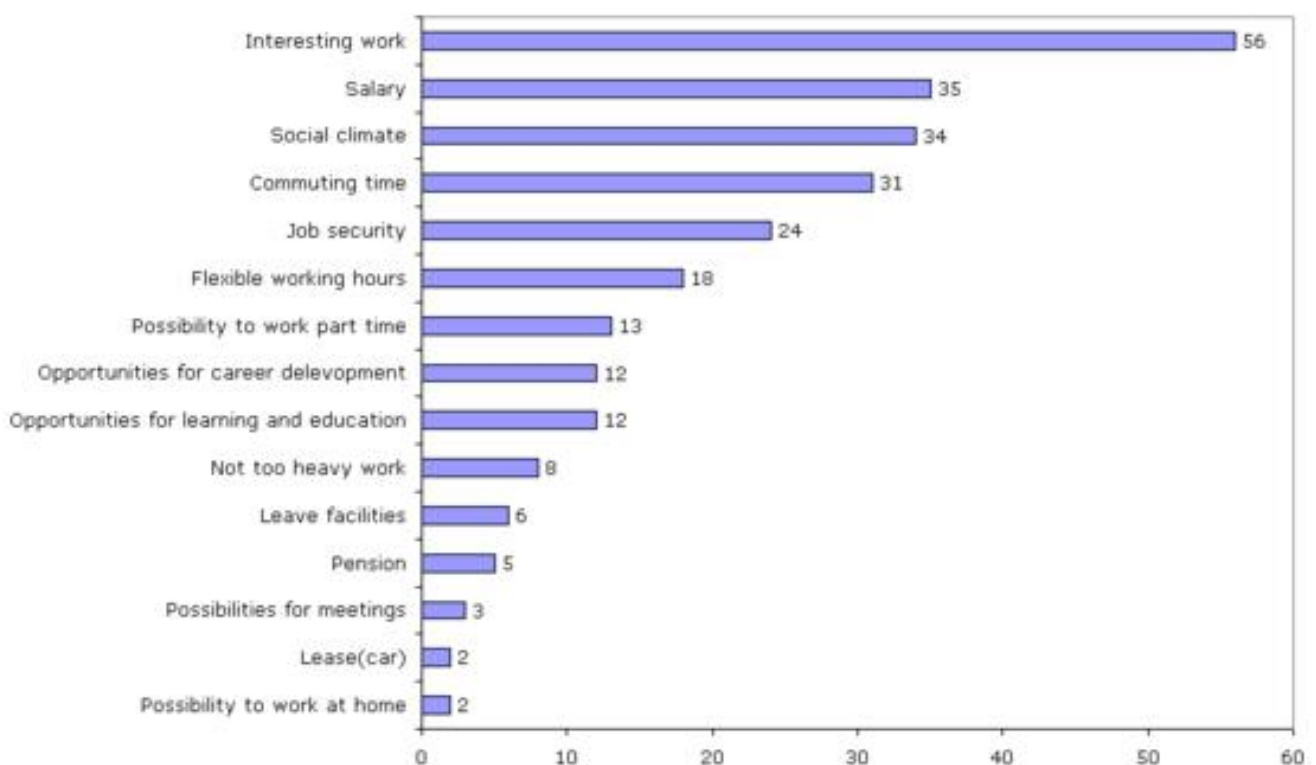
The ageing workforce means it is becoming more important in the Netherlands, as it is everywhere, to be an active member of the workforce and to stay in a job until or even beyond retirement age. The social climate in the workplace therefore is an important factor in applying for a job and the willingness to stay in a job until (and beyond) retirement age (65 years at the moment in the Netherlands).

The analyses here make use of findings of the Netherlands Working Conditions Survey (NWCS) (Nationale Enquête Arbeidsomstandigheden, NEA) for 2009. This representative annual survey of about 23,000 employees covers working conditions, work characteristics and health (Van Hooff et al, 2008).

Importance of social climate

The social climate in the workplace is highly important to employees. As in 2007, the NWCS 2009 found that the atmosphere at work was one of the most important reasons given for applying for a job, together with salary and interesting work (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Reasons for applying for a job (%)



Source: NWCS 2009

Recent research from Ybema et al (2009) also found that social climate influences the willingness and the ability of employees to work until retirement age (Table 1). Victims of unwanted behaviour from supervisors or colleagues are less willing to work until retirement age, whereas employees who receive a lot of social support from their supervisors more often say they will want to continue working until retirement age.

Table 1: Predictors for willingness and ability to work until retirement age, 2008

		Willing to work until retirement age	Able to work until retirement age
Individual characteristics	Lower age group (45–54 years)	?	?
	Lower age group (55–59 years)	–	?
	Higher age group (60–64 years)	?	?
	Men	?	–
Work factors	Physically heavy work (sometimes)	?	–
	Physically heavy work (often)	–	?
	High job demands	–	?
	High social support from supervisor	–	?
	Satisfied with flexible working schedule	–	?
	Unwanted behaviour by colleagues or supervisors	?	–
	Company does not have collective agreement	?	–
	Occupation in healthcare	–	?
	Occupation as a teacher	–	?
	Health	Burn-out complaints	?
Chronic disease that hinders work		–	?
Bad/moderate general health		–	?

Notes:

? = significantly higher chance of being willing/able to work until retirement age;

? = significantly lower chance of being willing/able to work until retirement age;

– = no significant predictor.

Source: NWCS 2009

Social support

Dutch employees receive relatively more social support from colleagues than from supervisors. About 19% of employees received little social support from their supervisors, whereas a lack of social support from colleagues was reported by only 3% of those taking part in the NWCS 2009. Of all Dutch employees, 2% reported a lack of support from supervisors as well as colleagues.

Unwanted behaviour

Unwanted behaviour in the workplace such as workplace violence, intimidation, unwanted sexual attention and bullying can be either internal (by colleagues or supervisors) or external (by a ‘third party’ such as a pupil, client, passenger or patient).

External unwanted behaviour is relatively more prevalent. In the NWCS 2009, about 19% of all Dutch employees reported being a victim of intimidation by a third party during a 12-month period, whereas intimidation by colleagues or supervisors was reported by 11%. One in 20 Dutch employees reported receiving unwanted sexual attention from a third party and 2% from colleagues or supervisors. Women are four to five times more often victims of unwanted sexual attention than men.

Conflicts in the workplace

A quarter of the Dutch employees reported a conflict with a colleague during the previous 12 months. One in five reported a conflict with a supervisor and one in 10 reported a conflict with their employer. Male employees reported more conflicts than their female counterparts.

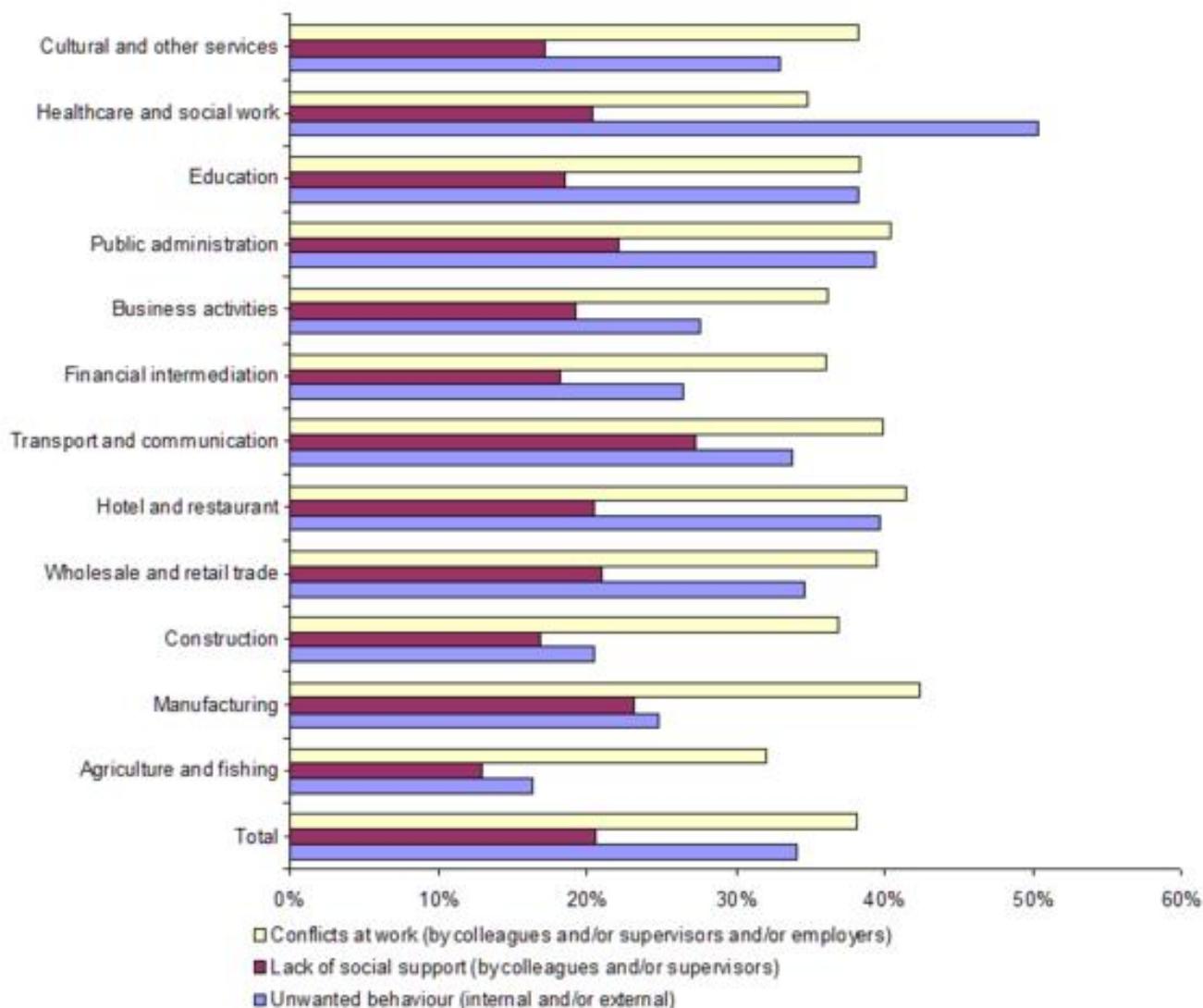
A sector perspective

The high prevalence of unwanted behaviour in the healthcare and social work sector has a negative influence on the social climate in this sector (Figure 2). The main forms of unwanted behaviour reported in the NWCS 2009 are unwanted sexual attention (15%), physical violence (22%) and intimidation (33%) by a third party.

Intimidation by a third party was also relatively often reported by employees in public administration (27%). Employees in the hotels and restaurants sector were relatively often the victim of unwanted sexual attention by colleagues or supervisors (4%). Bullying by colleagues or supervisors was reported relatively often in the education sector (13%).

The social climate in the transport and communication sector is characterised by a lack of social support from colleagues or supervisors. In the manufacturing sector, the share of employees reporting a lack of social support is also relatively high and the social climate in this sector is characterised by high prevalence of conflicts at work.

Figure 2: Social climate in different sectors



Source: NWCS 2009

References

Van Hooff, M., van den Bossche, S. and Smulders, P., The Netherlands Working Conditions Survey: Highlights 2003–2006, Hoofddorp, TNO Quality of Life (Kwaliteit van Leven), 2008, available online at http://www.tno.nl/downloads/TNO-KvL_NEA_Brochure_2007_Eng.pdf.

Ybema, J.F., Geuskens, G. and Oude Hengel, K., Oudere werknemers en langer doorwerken. Secundaire analyses van de NEA, het NEA-cohortonderzoek en de WEA, Hoofddorp, TNO Quality of Life (TNO Kwaliteit van Leven), 2009.

Maartje Bakhuis Roozeboom and Irene Houtman, TNO Work and Employment