



# The relation between working conditions, measures to improve working conditions and safety climate

Since research on causes of occupational accidents more and more focuses on organizations as a whole in stead of on individual employees, the concept of safety climate is increasingly gaining attention. Recent findings from the Netherlands Working Conditions Survey (NWCS) provide a closer look into the way Dutch employees experience the safety climate of the companies they work for.

## INTRODUCTION

Bad working conditions are related to a negative safety climate score. However, intuitively contradictory, the safety climate is rated relatively positive in sectors with dangerous and physically demanding working conditions. To find an explanation for this contra intuitive finding, this study looks more deeply into the way working conditions and measures to improve working conditions are related to the safety climate.

## METHODS

NWCS:

- Yearly survey on working conditions, work characteristics and health
- About 25,000 employees each year
- NWCS-data used from 2005 and 2006 (N=44.471)

dangerous and physically demanding working conditions like construction and manufacturing.

## SAFETY CLIMATE, WORKING CONDITIONS AND SAFETY MEASURES

Next to working conditions, the need to take safety measures appears to be related to the safety climate as well. When safety measures are not needed according to the employee, the safety climate is rated higher as compared to when measures are needed. The safety climate is rated even higher when working conditions are reported to be poor but according to the employee no measures are needed. Figure 3 shows an example of this effect for dangerous work, but similar figures are found for physical and emotional demands and pressure of work.

The fact that the safety climate is rated higher in sectors with dangerous work and physically demanding working conditions could be due to the fact that in these high risk sectors, safety measures are taken relatively more often as opposed to sectors associated with less obvious and less acknowledged (psychosocial) risk factors.

## CONCLUSION

Previous research has shown that the safety climate is a predictor for safety behaviour and occupational accidents within companies (e.g. Gimeno et al., 2005). In this sense, more knowledge on factors related to the safety climate of the company may give employers the opportunity to create safer workplaces. The results of the present analyses imply that taking measures to improve working conditions has a substantial positive impact on the safety climate of the company, especially when working condition are reported to be poor, and employees think that measures are needed.

## REFERENCES

Zohar, D. & Luria, G. (2005) A multilevel model of safety climate: Cross-level relationships between organization and group-level climates. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 4, 616-628.

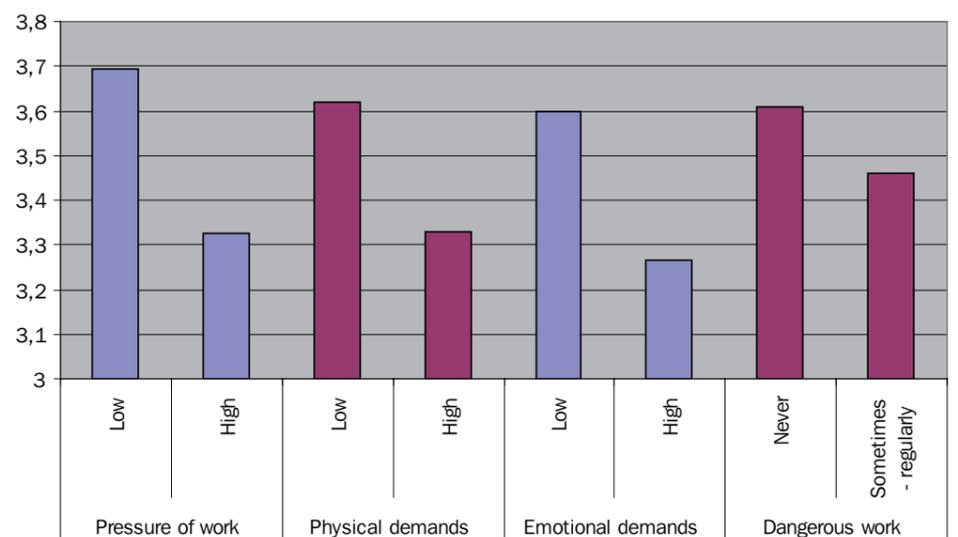


Figure 1: Safety climate by working conditions

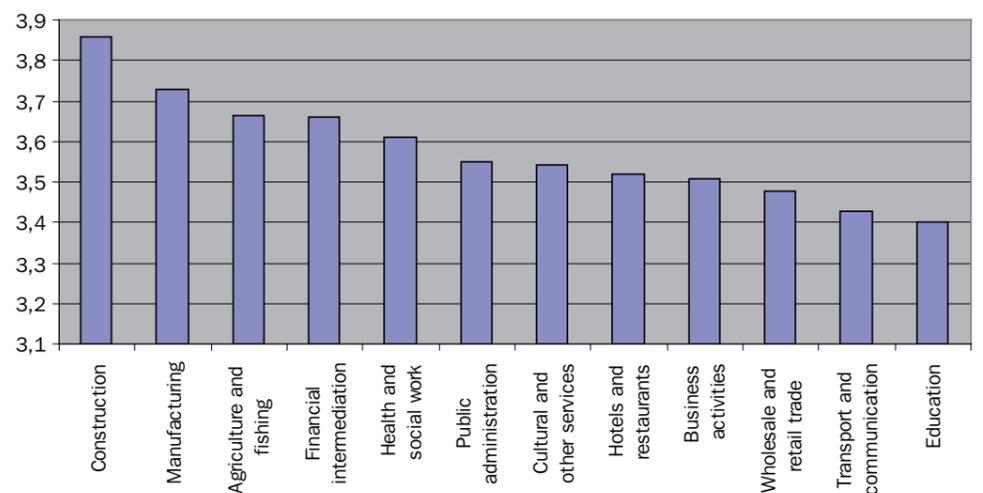


Figure 2: Safety climate by sector

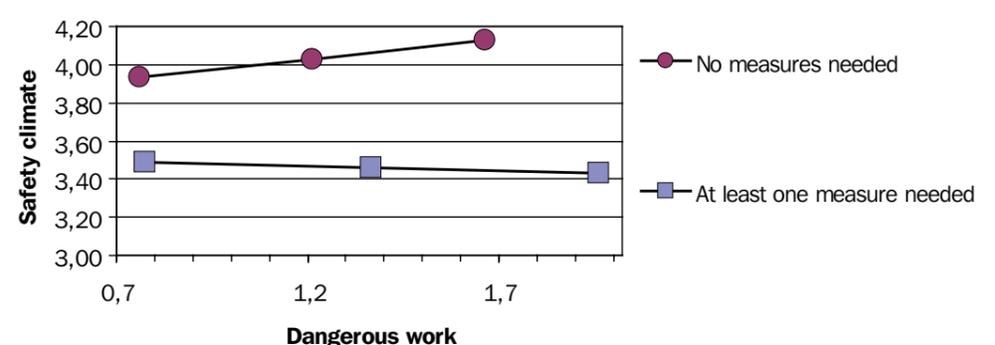


Figure 3: The effect of dangerous work and need for measures on safety climate

Safety climate was measured by 4 items based on Zohar & Luria (2005):

- At work, much attention is paid to suggestions from employees to improve safety
- At work, employees receive a lot of information about working safely
- At work, when safety issues arise they are dealt with immediately
- Working safely is encouraged at my work

## SAFETY CLIMATE AND WORKING CONDITIONS

Analyses reveal that working conditions and safety climate are strongly related. As expected, employees with unfavourable working conditions (high work pressure, dangerous work and high physical and emotional demands) rate the safety climate of their company significantly lower as compared to employees not working under these conditions (Figure 1).

## SAFETY CLIMATE BY SECTOR

There appear to be substantial differences in the safety climate score between sectors (Figure 2). Remarkably, the safety climate appears to be rated relatively high in sectors generally associated with