



# News

26 June 2019

Investments in a Sustainable Workforce in Europe, book is out now

## 5 important findings from Sustainable Workforce research



Organisations throughout Europe want to invest in their employees. That is an important finding from European research, led by Tanja van der Lippe of Utrecht University, of which the results are now published in the book: Investments in a Sustainable Workforce in Europe. But how



Those investments in people turn out on? The book examines this in more detail.

Tanja van der Lippe, Professor of Sociology at Utrecht University, started an ERC-funded European study into how and why companies invest in valuable manpower and how these investments work out in practice. Van der Lippe is affiliated with the Future of Work hub at Utrecht University, where scholars from different disciplines conduct research into the future of work. She has recently been nominated for the Huibregtsen Prize of the KNAW for this Sustainable Workforce research project. With a growing number of women, part-timers, and people over 55 on the labour market and innovations in technology, companies see the need to help create "sustainable employability" in HR terms and a "sustainable" labour market.

### WHAT IS MEANT BY "SUSTAINABLE"?

What does Van der Lippe actually mean by "sustainable", a term originally from the "green" movement, having to do with the environment?

“*In a sustainable workforce, employees are motivated, productive and healthy.*”



Tanja van der Lippe

Professor of Sociology of Households and Employment Relations, Utrecht University

“There are three levels. In a sustainable labour market, employees are productive, motivated and healthy. The organisation in which they work



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cohesive and profitable. Countries with a sustainable labour market, have high labour participation and a thriving economy.



*Boek: Investments in a Sustainable Workforce in Europe.*

## 9 COUNTRIES, 11.000 EMPLOYEES

The multi-year Sustainable Workforce study, which was funded by an ERC grant, examined more than 11,000 employees in nine European countries. It focused on the Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, Finland, England, Bulgaria, Hungary, Portugal and Spain. Scholars conducted surveys among employees, their managers and HR employees in 259 companies.

"What this project adds to existing findings is the interaction between people and organisations," says Van der Lippe. "Much of the existing research focused purely on employees (their well-being), or the country (employment rates, economic growth rates), not on the influence of the organisations."

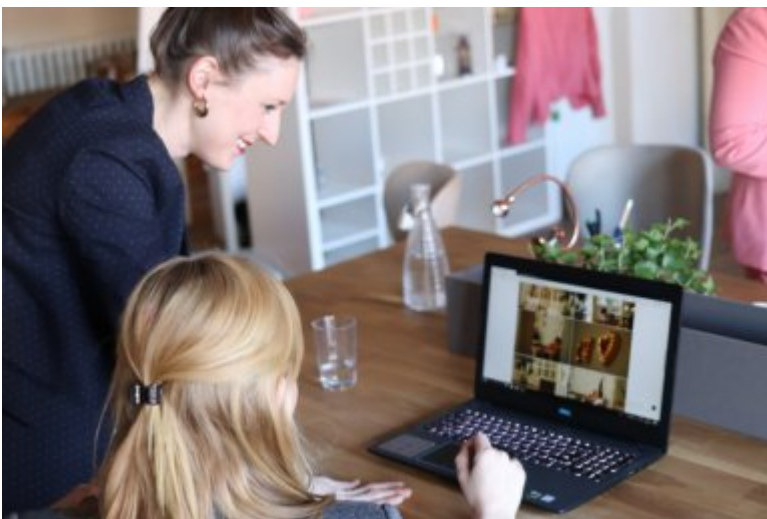
## 5 IMPORTANT FINDINGS

In the book, [Investments in a Sustainable Workforce in Europe](#) ↗ important findings from the research are shared, edited by Tanja van der Lippe and Zoltán Lippényi (University of Groningen). A few are listed here.



**1. Colleagues and managers play an important role in the choice to make use of a flexible work arrangement or an offered training.**

In the case of parental leave, for example, researchers clearly concluded that men whose manager used parental leave after becoming a father, frequently did so themselves. Company culture plays a vital role. The same was found for arrangements for working from home (teleworking). If your colleagues are doing it, if you experience support from your team, you are more likely to do some work from home, yourself. Employees who were informed by their manager about the existence of health programmes (ergonomic working conditions, healthy food, sports options) made more frequent use of them.



**2. Female managers have no measurable influence on the promotion opportunities for women.**





Under plays a smaller role in the workplace than society sometimes expects. Female employees have no greater chance of being promoted if they have a female manager. Their chances of moving up in the company are the same as when they have a male supervisor. Women do not favour women.



### **3. Temporary employees and flex workers receive less training, but report that they need it more.**

Freelancers and temporary employees make less use of training courses than employees with a permanent contract. This can make it more difficult to create a sustainable workforce, because temporary employees do report that they need more training. To their benefit: temporary workers say they experience less work pressure and have a better work-life balance than permanent employees. Possibly because they bear fewer responsibilities.



### **4. The higher your education and position in the company, the more often you use work arrangements, such as working from home or working part-time.**

Many older employees take the freedom to work at home and / or use more flexible working hours. Older employees with a physically demanding job make more frequent use of policies whereby they are



wed to work fewer hours with the same work benefits (phasing out policies).

### 5. An offered training or flexible work arrangement does not always have the intended effect.

The will to invest in employees is present in all sorts of organisations throughout Europe. But the investments do not always have a positive effect to both employer and employee. There are many considerations to be made. Flexibility in working hours has a negative effect on performance, but a positive influence on the well-being of workers. Training produces loyalty to the company and dedication to work, but does not immediately improve performance. Bringing in new technology can make people's working lives easier or create new jobs, on the other hand it may cost others their job. The effect of investments therefore, depends on the employee and the context.



The Sustainable Workforce project is given a practical follow-up. The EU finances (with a proof of concept) the creation of an online tool with its findings. Based on the research, a *Workforce Sustainability Testing Platform* (Work-STeP) is being developed together with interested companies, an online programme that helps companies to answer questions or concerns about sustainable employability. The driving force behind this is Thomas Martens, from Utrecht University. This platform is very welcome in small



medium-sized businesses, because they do not have the resources for expensive HR analytics programmes. And small and medium-sized businesses form a very large group of employers in Europe.

The book **Investments in a Sustainable Workforce in Europe** is published on 25 June.

In addition to Tanja van der Lippe and Zoltán Lippényi, many other researchers collaborated on the various chapters. Many also, who are (or where) connected to Utrecht University:

- Katia Begall
- Jannes ten Berge
- Paul Boselie
- Leonie van Breeschoten
- Vincent Buskens
- Anneke van Doorne-Huiskes
- Nikki van Gerwen
- Maarten Goos
- Jasmijn van Harten
- Margriet van Hek
- Jelle Lösbroek
- Jornt Mandemakers
- Thomas Martens
- Anne van der Put
- Joop Schippers

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[Future of Work hub, Universiteit Utrecht](#)

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