

# Promoting sustainable employability of employees in low-skilled jobs

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**IMPACT**



This dissertation yielded insights into the development, implementation, and evaluation of the organizational intervention 'Healthy HR'. The intervention aimed to promote the sustainable employability (SE) of employees in low-skilled jobs. This chapter reflects on the impact of this research on science and society.

### Scientific impact

The studies in this dissertation contributed to a more profound scientific knowledge base on promoting SE for employees in low-skilled jobs. First, based on an intensive participatory development process with researchers, employees, and managers of different organizations, a unique evidence-based organizational intervention was developed, called 'Healthy HR' (HHR) ([www.gezondhr.nl](http://www.gezondhr.nl)). The use of an adapted Intervention Mapping approach<sup>1</sup> and participatory development can be inspiring for other researchers who aim to develop organizational interventions in natural settings with practical feasibility.

Second, a unique and promising instrument was developed for measuring SE that was specifically adapted and simplified to employees in low-skilled jobs, called MAISE-Easy. This is not common in the field of occupational health and could facilitate other researchers to use this questionnaire or as inspiration to tailor their measurement instrument to their target group.

Third, the research revealed insights into the adoption and implementation processes of HHR in daily practice and unraveled the complex processes and issues surrounding the adoption and implementation of organizational interventions. Our holistic understanding is highly relevant for researchers who are involved in implementation research.

Fourth, when successfully implemented, HHR offers a unique and successful participatory approach. It revealed changes in perceived control among employees in low-skilled jobs, a key concept in relation to employee well-being, particularly in low-skilled jobs. A more prolonged process is needed to verify whether a participatory approach like HHR is effective in promoting SE and reducing health inequalities.

Finally, the studies in this dissertation utilized a wide methodology for evaluating complex interventions involving both quantitative and qualitative research methods and including different perspectives of multiple stakeholders representing all organizational layers, such as employees, supervisors, human resource (HR) managers, and members of the higher management, to be as explorative as possible to capture the overall picture. This is highly relevant for researchers involved in these interventions in an unpredictable and dynamic setting.

### *Dissemination*

The results in this dissertation touch upon multiple disciplines and could be interesting for researchers in the areas of occupational health, work and organizational psychology, public health, sociology including socioeconomic health differences, and human resources and organization management. They are particularly interesting for those who work with organizational interventions in natural and dynamic work settings. The obtained knowledge of this dissertation was therefore disseminated in various ways. All chapters in this dissertation are or will be published under open access in international journals of different disciplines to give researchers access to the findings. The findings of the studies were presented at various international conferences on Public Health, Disability Management, and Work & Organizational Psychology. Findings were also presented at seminars, workshops, or symposia for researchers as well as HR professionals and policymakers at the regional and national levels.

From an educational perspective, the findings of this dissertation also have an impact on student teaching. In the Intervention Mapping (IM) module of the Master in Health Promotion and Education at Maastricht University, a yearly lecture was given about our adapted IM approach in the work setting. Several students (from the Master in Work, Health and Career at Maastricht University) wrote their theses on topics related to the intervention HHR and the datasets obtained. One of these theses was published as an article about the development and validation of the MAISE-Easy, presented in chapter 4 of this dissertation.

### **Societal impact**

The studies in this dissertation were conducted at the organizational level, but the results have a societal impact at different levels: the micro-level (i.e., the individual), organizational level (i.e., everyone within a work organization), and the societal level (i.e., Dutch society and government). These levels are not isolated, they influence each other.

### *Individual level*

*“A piece of awareness from HHR for home, how do I eat, how do I live, what do I do, how does it affect work. Because everything feeds back to how I can function at work, so it's nice to have some awareness” (quote from interview with one of the employees).*

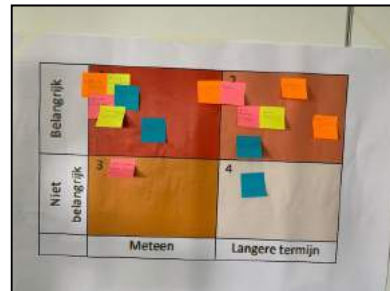
In this dissertation, the employee in a low-skilled job was the starting point and the main interest group. The MAISE-Easy in HHR was used to support employees to participate in the dialogue. The results have an impact on the individual employee and even the individual in a broader sense. They showed that employees who were actively

involved in HHR were more aware of their health and felt responsible for a healthy workplace. A sense of a collective voice and the return of the "human" factor in the conversation were noted. Although the impact on SE is still unknown, the first results are promising. Positive results were shown for improved job control, and their SE will likely improve when a participatory approach like HHR is prolonged. These positive changes can have an impact on the individual's overall well-being. This first step in awareness can help people to become more engaged about their pathway of healthy ageing, both at work and in their private lives, and think about what is valuable to them.

### Organizational level

*"There is now a real picture of what motivates these men. I think that's actually the best achievement, because I think ultimately within the organization, the thinking is very often done for people, without them (the men) really being heard and seen."*  
(Quote from interview with one of the project leaders)

The majority of the results in this dissertation derive from a collaboration with seven Dutch organizations with employees in low-skilled jobs (all in the for-profit sector). The results showed that HHR helped to start the dialogue about health and set a movement in motion within organizations. The step-by-step process offered within HHR supported the dialogue and actively involving employees in participatory work formats (see photo). This showed that following a participatory process like HHR is already having an effect. Following the steps within HHR, multiple solutions varying from quick-win solutions (e.g., new working shoes; hand trucks; end-of-the-week meeting) to long-term structural ones (e.g., appreciation; recruitment of new employees) were formulated for the chosen problems selected with the employees. Furthermore, according to the employees, improvements in working conditions such as communication (i.e., dialogue), logistics, and a safe and trustworthy work climate were more important for their SE than healthy lifestyles.



The above findings are relevant for supervisors and HR managers within other organizations, who can learn from the findings when they want to focus more on promoting SE. The HHR toolkit, including the MAISE-Easy, can be used as a starting point to initiate a dialogue with their employees in low-skilled jobs. Investing in listening, genuine dialogue, and genuine interest in employees and acting on it seriously can achieve positive change, as shown in this dissertation, and the

participatory approach of HHR can guide supervisors and managers to achieve this systematically.

Furthermore, internal organizational policy should focus more on SE and prevention, with the employee at the center, as advocated in this dissertation. Progressive work organizations which put the health and SE of employees first in their vision and actions will have more motivated and engaged employees and potentially reduce the cost from absenteeism (one day of sickness absence costs about €230-400 per day).<sup>2</sup> This also improves employee retention, which is extremely important given the current staff shortages in the labor market. A progressive view will help to create a positive image and position the organization differently in the labor market, which in turn is of interest to the individual employee. HHR is highly relevant to make organizations more independent of expensive consultancy firms that might not use the evidence-based scientific insights. HHR can stimulate them to make use of their in-company knowledge.

### *Societal level*

The findings of the dissertation can be relevant to the Dutch government, including policymakers. It advocates for a radical change towards a more progressive view on work and prevention. To combat the current and future challenges in the Dutch labor market and reduce the still persistent health inequalities, the current societal view on work is unsustainable. A new proposed sustainable infrastructure is needed that stimulates prevention among employers and employees and puts work in a different perspective, in order to have longer-term consequences for society as a whole, such as a healthier society and less pressure on pension, healthcare, and social security costs.

To conclude, this dissertation forms an important basis to understand and promote the SE of employees in low-skilled jobs in Dutch organizations. Two participating organizations have ambitions to continue with HHR and further embed it into their internal organizational processes. For the future, HHR should be improved further based on the results of this dissertation, such as reconsidering the intervention name. The consultancy efforts of the researchers in this dissertation will be used to develop education modules for HR professionals to train them about the philosophy of the intervention and how to put it into practice. It is planned to pilot these modules as part of the Work and Health Academy Maastricht. A project proposal is being submitted.

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