

Using Inter-Organizational Networks to Foster Workers' Sustainable Employability

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Using inter-organisational networks to foster workers' sustainable employability: an examination of participation in network activities and the role of relational factors

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Abstract

Rising labour shortages, a greying workforce and skill obsolescence are challenges encountered by many organisations (SEO, 2019; van Dam et al., 2017). To overcome these challenges, organisations are increasingly joining inter-organisational networks to foster sustainable employability and job mobility for their workers (Bakker et al., 2018). Inter-organisational networks reflect groups of formally independent organisations who voluntarily collaborate to address shared human capital issues across organisations. To address these issues, they co-create activities (e.g. workshops, career days, matching tables) for workers of member organisations. These activities target job matching, personal development and career development.

Although inter-organisational networks are increasingly popular, to date, research on the success of these networks in contributing to a more circular and sustainable labour market is scarce (Raab & Kenis, 2009; Koster, 2021). Activities which foster sustainable employability, have been widely studied within organisations (Veth et al., 2019; Pak et al. 2019; Pak et al. 2021; Ybema et al., 2017), but not in the context of inter-organisational networks. Therefore, the current study focuses on the role of shared HRM activities and its impact on indicators of workers' sustainable employability (i.e. perceived employability, vitality and work ability). This paper considers the notion of basic need satisfaction and relies on the Self Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and Career Self Determination Theory (Chen, 2017) to theoretically underpin this relationship.

Additionally, this study also considers the role of relational factors to better understand the conditions that amplify or attenuate the relationship between shared HRM activities and workers' sustainable employability. Specifically, this study investigates the trust that employees have in their new ties with network actors (e.g.

coordinator, professionals) and the quality of the exchange relationship between themselves and their direct supervisor at the parent organization (LMX). The Social Exchange Theory provides a solid foundation help explain these relationships (Blau, 1964).

To explore this topic, a mixed methods study is being conducted. A quantitative approach (questionnaires) is used to establish associations between the related variables. This approach is supplemented with qualitative data (interviews) to gain a deeper understanding as to why these associations emerge. In total, 12 inter-organisational networks are represented, all located in the Netherlands. The target sample consists of workers who have participated in at least one shared network activity offered by a network. To recruit participants convenience and purposive sampling techniques were used. Eight participants who completed the questionnaire and who had provided the researchers with their contact information, were invited for an interview. These participants were purposively selected to ensure adequate representation of the networks and types of network activities. To analyze the quantitative data, PLS-SEM was conducted. To analyze the qualitative data, the interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and thematic analysis was used to generate themes.

A preliminary quantitative analysis suggests that network activities that focus on personal and career development may foster employees' work ability. Although it has not yet been tested, we expect that network trust and LMX positively moderate this relationship. The preliminary qualitative analysis appears to be aligned with the preliminary quantitative findings.

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