

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE  
CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

**Workshop on Human Resources Management and Training:  
Developing Capabilities for the Future**

Krakow, 7-9 September 2016

# Staff Motivation at Statistics Netherlands

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## Summary

This paper outlines the practices of how Statistics Netherlands on improving staff motivation. A model is used, containing Several HR-instruments, which are explained. The elements of the model are explained and (best) practices are outlined

Keywords: Staff motivation, Employee engagement, HRM-policy, HR-instruments.

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1 juli 2016

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## 1. Introduction

Statistics Netherlands (SN) is a centralised statistical bureau with two offices of comparable size in The Hague (in the western part of the Netherlands) and Heerlen (in the far south of the Netherlands). As a result of consecutive budget cuts, the workforce has decreased by about 30 per cent in the last ten years with no corresponding reduction in the statistical programme (from 2650 Full Time Equivalents (FTEs) in 2003 to 1850 FTE on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2013).

Statistics Netherlands has a comprehensive HRM & Training policy and associated HRM-instruments. Continuing to meet the public demand for more, better and faster statistics, the workforce will require selective recruitment, and investment in education and training. To support the management in implementing our HRM-policy, we make use of a computerized personnel information system, from which monthly HR management information is generated. The distribution of employees at Statistics Netherlands is 70% male and 30% female, approximately 70 % of the employees work part-time and around 70% of all employees have a higher education (Bsc, Msc or Phd).

As a result of consecutive budget cuts and therefore little in-flow of new personnel, Statistics Netherlands faces progressive ageing of its personnel file: about 50% of our personnel are 55 years old or older. This means that a large part of the staff will retire in the coming years and also because of budget cuts only relatively few new personnel can be recruited.

Statistics Netherlands was obliged to take measures to be able to have access to sufficient, qualitatively good and motivated employees. Improving Staff Motivation and employee engagement was and still is an important issue in order to master and manage the personnel requirement issue. In this paper an outline is described how we drafted our HR-strategy on this issue.

## 2. Staff Motivation at Statistics Netherlands

To face all challenges along the way, a strategic agenda was determined. To perform this strategic agenda, a flexible and responsive organization is needed. The employees, with their knowledge and experiences are the most important asset of the organization and thus make an essential contribution to the development and future proofing: SN wants to be an attractive employer, which makes you feel connected as an employee with the organization, its objectives and the content of the work. SN will offer a working environment where you will be challenged for the benefit of your own development and that of the organization. In view of the strategic agenda of SN and in addition to the strategic Personnel planning of the main directorates Seven HR priorities were determined.

The main purpose is to: **Improve employee engagement & staff motivation**, because we believe that improving engagement & motivation will have a positive impact on our business goals, service and quality.

In order to measure staff motivation, SN designed a short job satisfaction survey, which is conducted each year.

### 3. HR-focus points explained in more detail

#### 3.1 Employee engagement & Staff motivation

Employees who feel involved in their organization and its goals are more productive and are healthier. If they are given space to exercise their profession and to develop their talents, this feeds their enthusiasm and encourages their creativity and innovativeness. Given the focus and ambition of SN for the coming years, involvement and engagement of employees is essential for SN, alongside tougher skills as IT skills, communication techniques and professional development in general.

A small sample, performed in two brainstorming sessions with staff in both offices, recently showed that the following aspects of employees ' motivation and inspiration' is important for their own functioning: get good feedback so you can do your job better, literally give room and space to employees for improvement and to investigate new things and to be able to put this into practice.

Creating involvement and engagement, requires leadership of managers, but also personal leadership of all employees. The implementation of (personal) leadership will have a positive impact on the commitment and enthusiasm all employees. The incentives managers can use to create enthusiasm among employees are:

- Expressing vision, conviction and decisiveness (the ' plus ' of leadership);
- Setting clear goals (SMART, but also matching what employee really likes and/or challenges, ....),
- Asking and giving feedback,
- Self-reflection,
- Reward employees to show appreciation for each other (lead by example),
- No micro-management (reducing reporting urge, making working arrangements that do justice to scale level of manager/employee).

The incentives mentioned above are all intertwined in other six goals, or are provided through other initiatives in the Organization (see also figure 1):

#### Three supporting goals:

- 1) To Strengthen Leadership skills
- 2) to Position Statistics Netherlands as Attractive Employer
- 3) To Provide more Feedback & Dialogue between employees and managers  
→ *Strengthening supporting goals will - as a result - have a positive effect on Employee engagement & staff motivation*

#### Three Secondary goals:

- 4) An increase of Mobility & Development opportunities
- 5) A reduction of Absenteeism
- 6) And avoiding External Hiring  
→ *Rising Staff Motivation will- as a result - lead to an increase in internal mobility & development opportunities, reduction of Absenteeism and reduction of unnecessary external hiring*

Figure 1: The Seven Human Resources and Training Priorities in Statistics Netherlands



### 3.2 Strengthen leadership skills

Managers play an important role in increasing employee engagement and staff motivation. But management alone is not enough: it also requires business leadership, as well as team leadership as well as personal leadership.

In fact, leadership is needed in all HR- and training topics. Although both employees and managers have a responsibility, it is the manager who plays a crucial role by seeking continually to get the best out of the team and to inspire others, stimulate and facilitate to do so.

The purpose of this focus point is to further professionalise basic management skills and also developing leadership skills. Managers are encouraged and trained to show leadership in practice. This includes vision (creativity, how to set goals), persuasion (inspiration, clear, there stand, the story can bring) and determination (dare to take risks and decisions).

The ability to develop varies per individual and per competency. In general knowledge and skills are the easiest to develop. More difficult areas to develop are motivation or personality – and these two aspects are closely related to Leadership.

As a rule, behaviour change will only occur when a person feels a sense of urgency. Therefore the training process must be focussed on learning and development issues which are connected to daily practice: Experiential learning.

Statistics Netherlands uses existing training instruments as much as possible, and where necessary new training instruments are developed or purchased, or personal

coaching is used when appropriate. In these cases the Learning & Development Advisor will be involved.

Activities in order to strengthen leadership skills:

*Leadership:*

- Facilitating “management sessions’: dialogue between Director General and managers about Leadership, organisational issues, business development & dilemma’s in operational management. Short, powerful and inspiring meetings.
- Involve business leaders in the recruitment process of (future) managers  
Selecting future managers on the basis of the following leadership competences vision, persuasiveness, and decisiveness.
- Encourage desirable behaviour through role models and best practices:  
Managers are encouraged to show the desired behaviour among employees in practice (lead by example). This requires regular feedback. From 2016 onwards performance management will be carried out on this issue.

*Management skills:*

- Providing Development Labs (training / workshops) at the various HR-focus points  
Examples: promoting mobility, interview techniques.
- Offering an introduction program for new managers.

### **3.3 Provide more feedback and dialogue**

The main HR-instrument to facilitate feedback and dialogue between managers and employees is the yearly HR-dialogue-cycle (HR-cycle). The aim is to encourage managers and employees to talk to each other (more) frequently. As a starting point an important value is that employee and manager are both responsible for the proper execution of the HR-cycle (although it is clear that manager and employee have different roles).

The HR-cycle is important for the mutual agreement about the distribution of work and to clearly articulate expectations between manager and employee. These agreements are recorded in writing.

The cycle in the beginning of the year starts with contracting, then during the year one or more informal performance appraisals are held (both appreciative and corrective). Another important theme of the HR-cycle is "development and progress". This theme is implemented during the year by feedback back and forth between manager and employee and at the end of the year a formal evaluative appraisal.

At SN the evaluative appraisal proves to be a sensitive issue. Especially for employees who are not performing well. We have to change culture within the organisation that it is not about disqualification, but it is normal to receive feedback and talk about real development issues in order to improve performance.

Especially on this issue - but in fact in the whole HR-cycle - managers are developing the following conversation skills: to coach, to inspire, to encourage, to motivate and to

facilitate to achieve the desired result effectively. Important themes are talent development, innovation, production, deadlines, etc..

In practice executing the HR-cycle means:

- Articulating (challenging) working arrangements for the coming year
- Permanent dialogue and attention on evaluation, feedback and progress.
- It also means that in practice, employee and manager prepare arrangements together, talk together, focus on constructive feedback and focus on necessary and desired personal development.

Another instrument SN uses is conducting a short digital job satisfaction survey (with seven multiple choice questions). The results are anonymous, but they are analysed by sector (a cluster of teams). The results are discussed in all team- meetings and often lead to good discussions about issues and possible improvements.

Activities to strengthen feedback and dialogue:

- Implement a yearly 'HR-dialogue-cycle'.
- Conduct a job satisfaction survey yearly and discuss the results in team settings

### **3.4 Position SN in the media as an attractive employer (employer branding)**

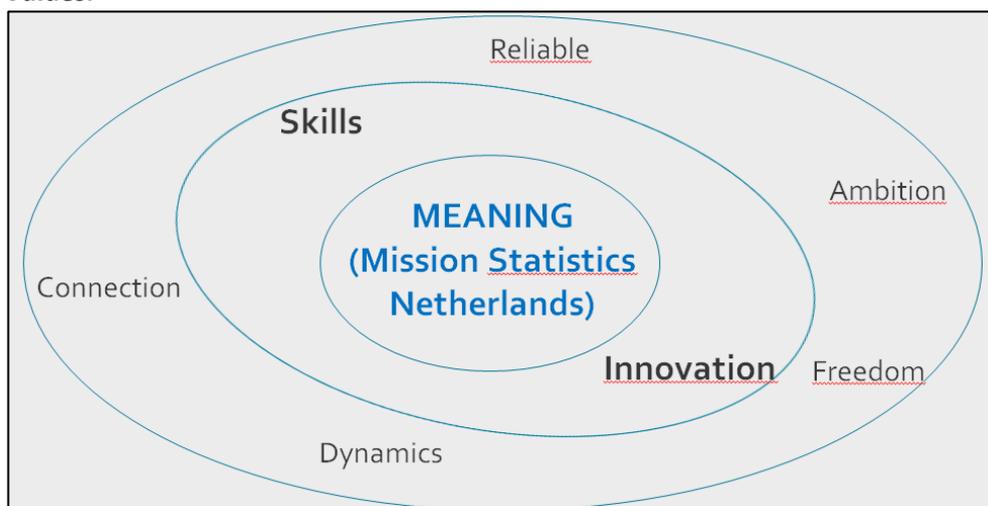
As for any organisation, SN needs a qualitatively- and quantitatively capable workforce consistent with the strategic agenda and the tasks (now and in the near future). A specific challenge for SN is the fact that in the coming five years 350 employees will retire and therefor leave SN. This means a substantial inflow of new employees is needed. Elements incorporated in this HR-focus-point are a balanced age structure, adequate recruitment and Employer Branding.

Statistics Netherlands shifted the recruitment process from reactive- to pro-active. First step was to identify our target group: students at several key universities and IT-personnel. The next step was a few years ago to start to invest in maintaining close contacts with universities and students inviting them to come to us, give presentations, and offering internships for students and started preparations for traineeships for just graduated students. The third step was to present ourselves frequently in the media as a premium employer and showing which vacancies we currently have. Finally, just recently with help of a specialised bureau we designed a whole new recruitment campaign 2016 – especially to recruit new ICT-personnel.

Example: a few key points of the current SN IT recruitment campaign:

**Mission:** 'With facts, help people and organizations to make good decisions and / or to measure their progress'

**Values:**



**Media Plan: cross-media use of resources:**

- Website: [www.werkenbijhetcbs.nl/it](http://www.werkenbijhetcbs.nl/it)
- Banner campaign on IT sites like Tweakers, Computerworld, Webwereld
- Advertorials on Google
- Vacancies on various sites
- Content sharing: regular distribution of articles (e.g. . articles of corporate app)
- Target mailing
- Spread messages on Facebook
- Linked In

**Activities in order to strengthen employer branding:**

- 'pro - cyclical' recruitment and selection of new employees in order to achieve a balanced balance in age and more diversity into account the efforts made by the management within five years , including preparation of a recruitment profile of the "new employee ".
- All Directors draft a strategic personnel plan (SPP) for the next five years. From the SPP it can be derived which functions will be replaced in the next 5 years. Based on this the pro-cyclical recruitment and selection can take place.
- The employer brand SN is elaborated ('employer branding'): SN as a strong brand !
- New policy: team secondments

**3.5 Increase Mobility and Development opportunities**

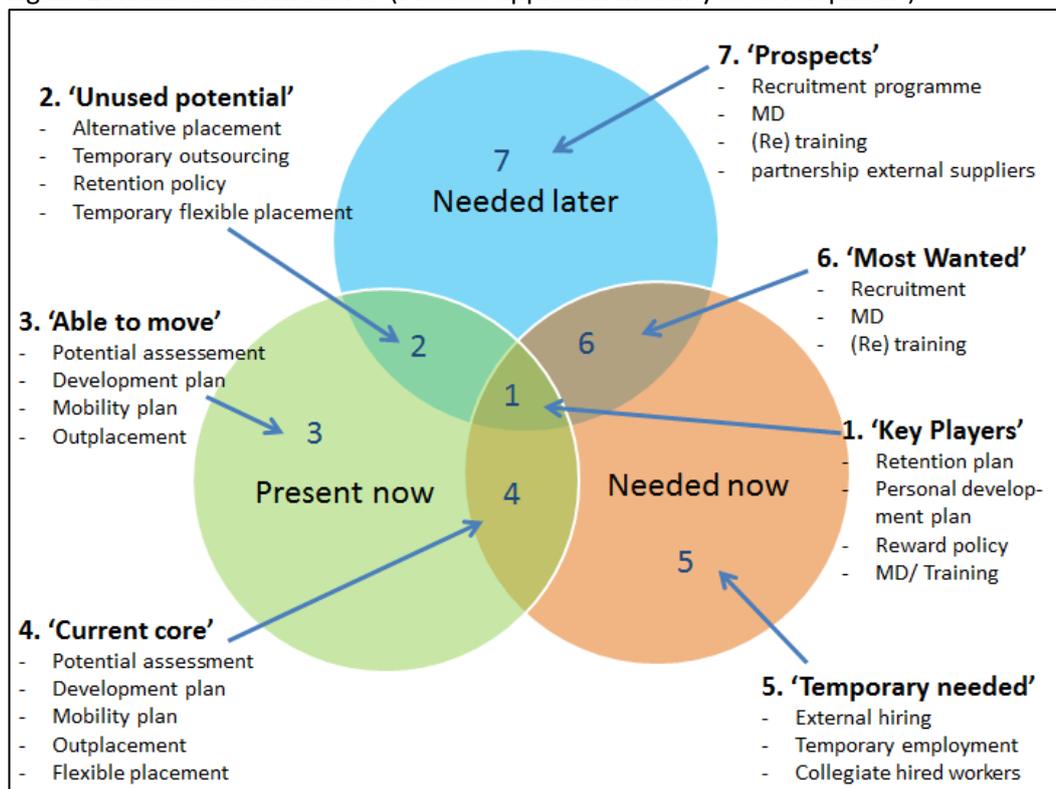
SN is developing to an organization where flexible deployment of staff is needed. Mobility and flexibility are crucial for SN to be able to continue to respond to internal and external developments which require manoeuvrability of SN and his staff. An agile organisation requires employees to continue to develop professionally and be flexible.

In this way best practices are shared rapidly and the learning capacity of SN increases. Also in this way knowledge is shared rapidly and this prevents that knowledge about specific projects is only known by one employee.

Therefore SN wants to give extra boost to the manoeuvrability of the employees. In the desired situation employees take ownership for their own professional development and thus for their long-term employability. Managers then recognize the need of their employees and encourage mobility among their staff or participation in projects outside of their own team / division / directorate. Working in projects is a way to increase flexibility.

Of course there are different target groups for different mobility development goals. This year we started a pilot on working with the Randstad 3R-model (see Figure 2) for different target groups. The 3R model (below) is a process approach to help assessing which possible steps are needed within a team in order to anticipate for short term and longer term needs – related to mobility and development opportunities.

Figure 2: Randstad 3R Model © (Process approach mobility & development)



Finally, reliable management information is crucial for managers to be able to have quantitative understanding of internal mobility. Based on these reports, problems and opportunities can be identified.

Activities in order to strengthen mobility and development opportunities:

- Deliver monthly mobility figures for managers to monitor mobility
- Establish an internal job carousel for staff who would like to change jobs within the organisation.
- Talk regularly about mobility and agility in the HR-cycle (discuss development opportunities in current job)
- Organising mobility workshops and networking lunches for managers and employees.
- Make job vacancies easily visible on the intranet through a direct button on the homepage
- Elaboration career paths and make them clear to employees

### 3.6 Reduce Absenteeism

Vital and happy employees contribute to a healthy work environment, better business results and lower absenteeism. Based on payroll figures at SN, this means that 0.1% absenteeism represents € 130,000 (based on average cost per employee)). If employees are challenged and feel valued, this contributes to a healthy work climate in which a healthy dialogue with the manager makes it easy to receive feedback and further develop skills and knowledge. Feedback is also the core of our policy related to reduce absenteeism: we call it ‘the Employee Responsibility Model’.

In this model, the focus of the manager is on what the employee can (still) contribute rather than what the employee cannot. Gradually SN is shifting from a policy on absenteeism to a policy on health and fitness. The next step for us is to not be satisfied with achieving the average absenteeism standard in the Netherlands, but to define ambitious goals for further reduction in absenteeism.

Based on analysis of the absenteeism (together with the company doctor), each team-manager determines which instruments can be deployed to reduce absenteeism. What we found is that 80% of the solution in reducing absenteeism is a mature dialogue between the manager and the absent employee. So we don't really have to develop new instruments or policies, but deploying more consistent what we already have and dare to express a firm but realistic ambition in this area.

Activities to reduce absenteeism:

- Employee Responsibility Model
- Proposal to teams who score above the default sickness % to be designated as participants in the pilot project which has been running
- HR-department provides interview training for managers and consult for conducting the right intervention at the right time to allow for more decisive and faster reintegration, including the provision of alternative employment in another division (if appropriate)
- Recording of personnel costs in the existing quarterly management reports to improve management information on absenteeism

### 3.7. Avoid unnecessary external hiring

External hiring is expensive. It is therefore important to make a conscious choice – and in this choice also consider any opportunity for employees to (temporarily) expand tasks and gain new work experience

Although reducing external hiring is not an end in itself, it is critically important to reduce the use of external hiring. SN has insight in the total cost of external consultants per month and per directorate. Moreover, in order to reduce costs, at SN we make (reduced) price agreements with large contractors who which act as preferred suppliers.

Before deciding to hire externally, we ask ourselves the following questions: Why is external hiring needed? For how long and at what rate? Is it not possible to find internal employees who can and want to carry out this work?

It may be cheaper to hire someone on a temporary basis for the duration of a project than to hire an external consultant. It is also important to analyse why external consultants are hired and in what professional field: For example it might be more attractive in the field of IT to create permanent vacancies, so you can appoint an employee. In this way crucial knowledge will remains within the organisation.

Moreover, in a number of cases, external hiring is used with good reason. One of the reasons is using a flexible external workforce in teams where a reduction of staff is planned. Another reason is teams where during the year the workload varies: during peak workloads external hiring might be an option.

The goal should be that SN has a good view on the reasons for hiring, and opportunities remain for SN-ers to gain new experiences.

Activities to avoid unnecessary external hiring:

- Each manager monitors critically the need to use external hiring and determines if knowledge and expertise is available internally.
- In the quarterly management reports external hiring is reported: The overview shows the number of external employees hired, the duration of the hiring, the costs, the level of the job and the reason why someone is hired.