

The role of the employer in the return to work process of sicklisted workers in the Netherlands



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Outline

Deeper understanding of the role of the employer in the RTW process:

- Dutch return to work system
- Different types of support
- Characteristics of employer support
- Take home message

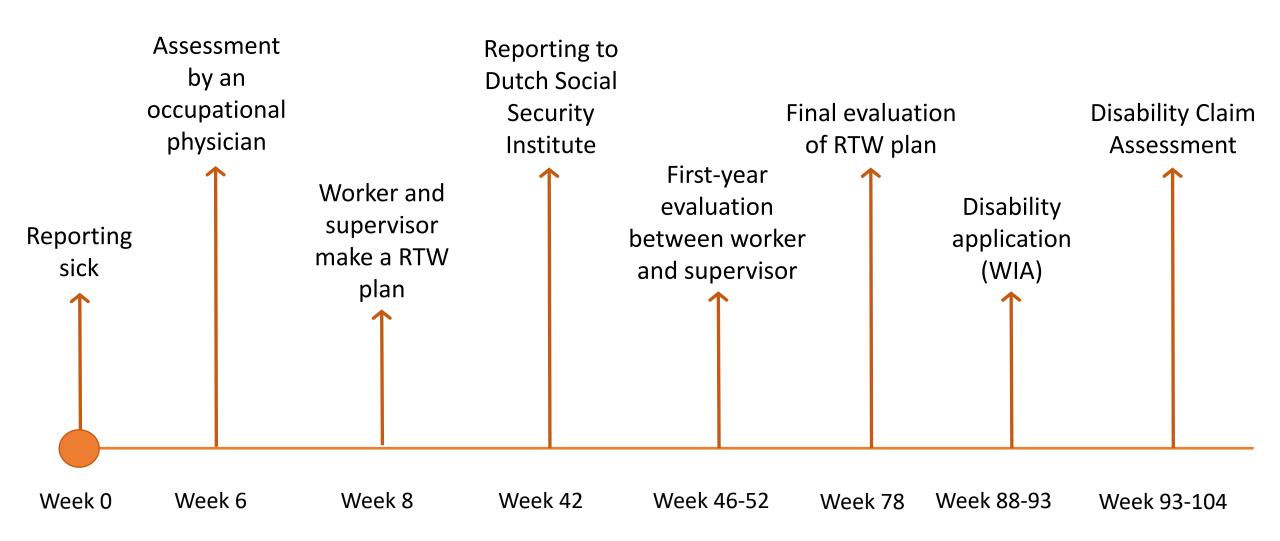
Return to Work system in the Netherlands

The Dutch Return to work system

The Gatekeeper Improvement Act (In Dutch: "Wet Verbetering Poortwachter", 2002)

- RTW process takes two years
- shared responsibility to put effort into RTW process:
 - employers obliged to continue wage payment of workers
 - scheme of actions which has to be taken by the worker and employer
 - guided by occupational health care organisation
- sanction when insufficient efforts have been made

The Gatekeeper activities in a nutshell



Impact of Gatekeeper Improvement Act

- the number of workers on long-term sick leave claiming work disability dramatically reduced enormously (100.000 p/y => 60.000 p/y)
- (financial) motivation for the employer to make sure that the employee does everything possible to get back to work
- large differences between employers were found

Employer support return-to-work process

Literature study

Interview study with employers

Interview study with workers

Survey study



Joke Jansen, PhD student

Types of employer support in RTW process

Types of employer support

Instrumental support

- Formal work accommodations
- Informal support system

Emotional support

- Encouragement
- Empathy
- Understanding

Informational support

- Laws and regulations
- Availability of interventions

1. Instrumental - formal support

Provision of work accommodations:

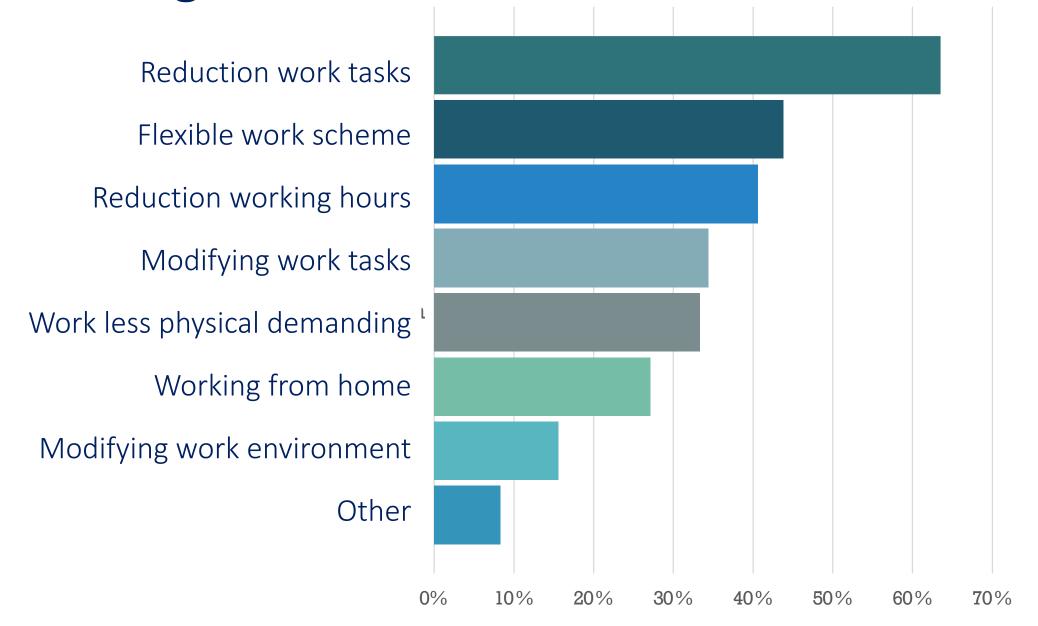
- Reduction working hours
- Changing work tasks
- Ergonomic equipment
- Working from home
- Flexible workscheme
- Modified work tasks
- Adaptation work environment

Barriers to provide formal work accommodations

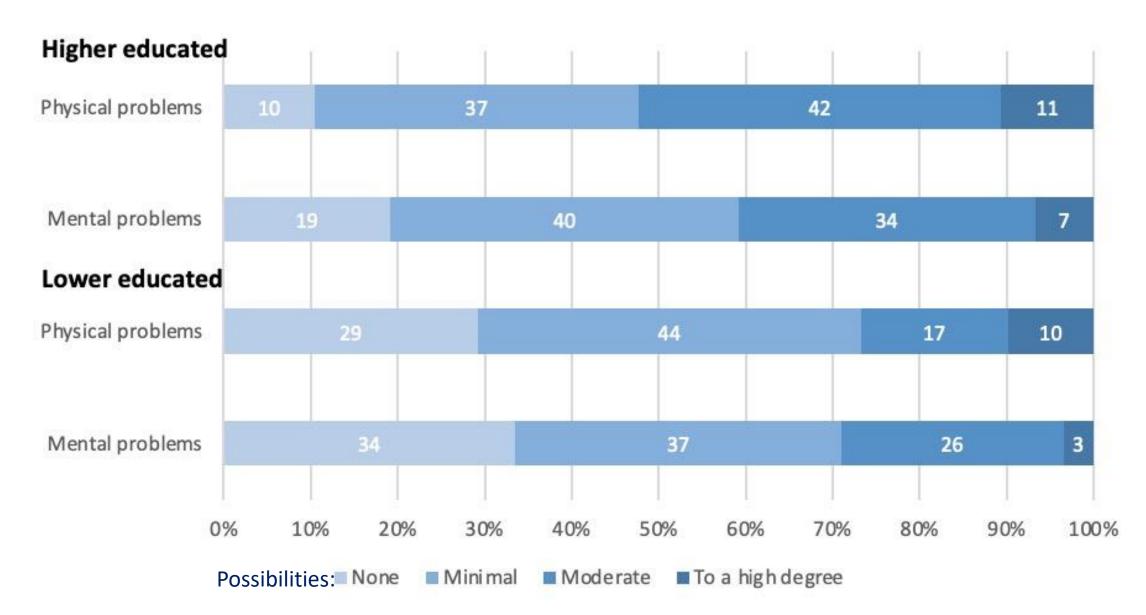
- Time and effort (financial costs, reduced productivity)
- Availability of job functions within organisation
- Type of work tasks whether it is possible to create new function

"...whereas in an office you can still easily just work 3.5 hours. In a production line we work in blocks until breaktime. I can easily call in an agency worker for half a day, for example, but I can't call in an agency worker for just 1.5 hours a day."

Implementing work accommodation after COVID-19



Provision of work accommodations



Employer characteristics – organisational level

More opportunities to provide work accommodations:

- large organisations
- public sector
- % higher-educated workers

Potential:

- availability of job functions within organisation
- type of work tasks whether it is possible to create new function
- financial investments

Informal support

= forms of helpfulness and assistance people freely give to each other (i.e. support from colleagues, line-managers, supervisors)

Quote: "Look, if more people are doing the same job, then you can arrange with colleagues to take over for each other when one is sick. And if that doesn't give any problems, then you get very nice cases." [case-manager, health care].

Quote: "in itself that's not bad for a while, but if that continues, then in my experience you end up in a negative spiral. Because then you're going to overburden the healthy people, and they'll drop out." [supervisor, industry]."

2. Emotional support

= encouragement of workers in the RTW process, by showing empathy and understanding and taking the other seriously

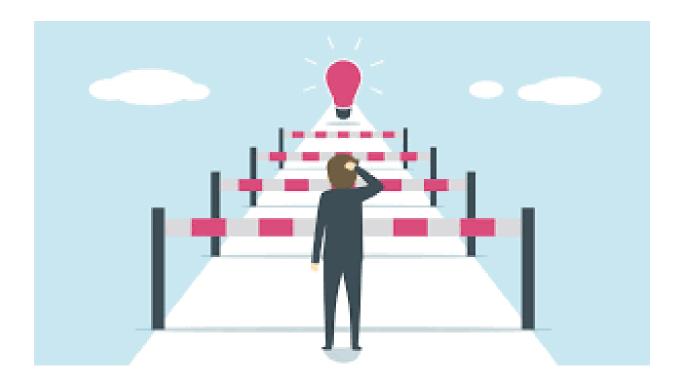
- Help to adapt better to their new situation.
- Change the focus from the pressure of RTW to the recovery that is needed
- Being protective, setting boundaries

HR manager: "thinking with them and being much more encouraging and positive, works better than putting them on the spot and being critical."

Worker: "Yes, he had regular talks with me, of course, about how it was going. He often also said that you mustn't go beyond your limits, because then you won't be able to do anything any more" => protective role

Informational support

= to inform workers of the rules and legislations related to the RTW process



Social Insurance Literacy





Christian Ståhl, professor of sociology

"Social insurance literay is the extent to which individuals can **obtain**, **understand** and **act on** information in a social insurance system, related to the **comprehensibility of the** information provided by the **system**"

Dutch survey study

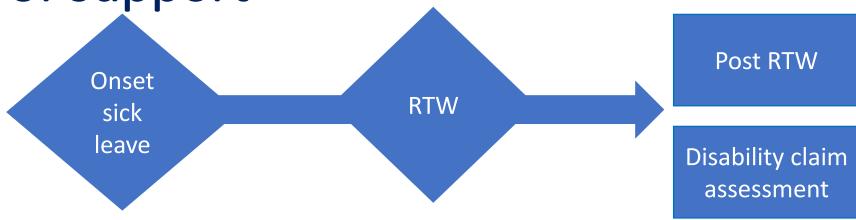
- 35% with limited social insurance literacy
- Lacking abilities to obtain, understand and act upon information.

Recommendations

- simplify written information and use more visual strategies
- Train supervisors and others involved in strategies that are effective, such as providing easy information, checking understanding and including the social network.

Characteristics of employer support

1. Timing of support



Instrumental support

formal: in all phases; informal: in first phase

Emotional support:

In all phases, change of focus: getting grip on situation -> understanding needs -> staying engaged

Informational support:

during (post)RTW phase, change of focus: RTW activities to be undertaken -> information about claim assessment

2. Interaction worker - employer

Supervisor characteristics
accessible
empathy and understanding
protective
creative in finding solutions

Good collaboration:

(in)formal contact open communication trusting relationships mutual responsibilities Worker characteristics self control flexibility

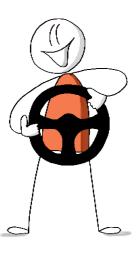
Organisational characteristics supportive culture flexibility: tailormade approaches (in)formal networks

Ideal worksetting



Workers' self control in RTW

- limited knowledge on RTW legislation and own responsibilities
- struggling to prepare and have conversations with professionals
- inability to see own possibilities
- limited support from home and work environment

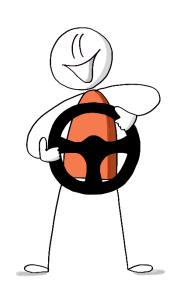


Supervisors' supportive role in RTW



- Not aware about their responsibilities in RTW process
- Limited knowledge on RTW legislation
- Supervisors see limited possibilities for work accommodations
- Ineffective conversations with sick-listed worker

Strengthening workers' self-direction and supervisors' support in the return-to-work process: *integrated approach*







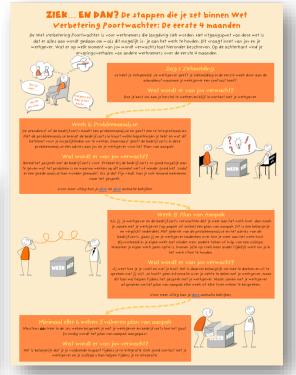
Bibi de Mul PhD student

Strengthening workers' self-direction

- Two additional consultations with professional
- Access to toolkit and movies

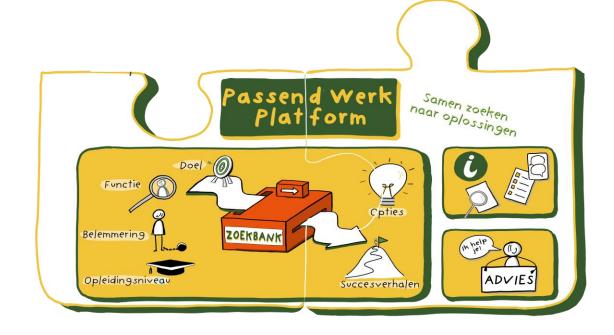


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Strengthening supervisors' support

- Web-based platform
 - Best practices on work accommodations
 - Examples of potential task modifications
 - Examples of potential other suitable work
 - Practical knowledge of the RTW process



Consultation of trained RTW advisor

Take home message

- Three types of employer support: instrumental, emotional and informational
- Type and intensity of employer support may vary during the RTW phases
- Differences in supportive role associated with characteristics of worker, supervisor and organisation
- Optimizing RTW strategies is mutual responsibility and asks for integrated approach

Thank you for your attention

Takk fyrir athyglina

Dank voor uw aandacht