

TRADE UNION STRATEGIES FOR PREVENTING WORKLOAD AND STRESS IN THE NETHERLANDS

FNV Vakcentrale, The Netherlands Federation of FNV trade Unions (1.2 million members) in industry, the food sector, agriculture, transport, retail, the private services sector, Building and construction industry etc etc.

Wim van Veelen: Policy advisor of health and safety

Main task: making Unions policy strategies, negotiate with employers on National level in the Social Economic Council (SER)

MY PRESENTATION

1. Labour relations in the Netherlands
2. Short theoretical description of stress
3. Some history: how the dutch unions succeeded in the years 1998 – 2005 putting stress at a number 1 priority on the social agenda
4. The Quick Scan Stress
5. Evaluation

PSYCHOSOCIAL RISKS AND THE ROLE OF THE UNIONS : NETHERLANDS

A short story of the Netherlands

- ✗ 7 million workers
- ✗ Federation of Dutch Unions FNV, biggest union, 1.3 million members
- ✗ some 450.000 companies/organizations
- ✗ Biggest risks at work: msd's and psychosocial risks
- ✗ 1/3 of all work-related diseases has to do with psychosocial risks
- ✗ Also, 1/3 of sick leave is caused by psychosocial risks at work
- ✗ A lot of windmills and yes, some wooden shoes
- ✗ A right-left cabinet (!) is about to be born: a pearl Cabinet

ALL IS WELL IN THE NETHERLANDS...

- Around 35.000 workers yearly 'catch' an occupational disease
- Yearly 230.000 heavy accidents at work
- Around 3.000 workers p/y will die prematurely because of exposure of bad working conditions
- Psycho-social risks is the biggest risk



THE PUBLIC DOMAIN: (LEGAL FRAMEWORK) DUTCH WORKING CONDITIONS ACT AND DECREE ON PSYCHOSOCIAL RISKS: ART. 3: THE MAIN TARGETS TO BE REACHED

- ✖ c. where this can reasonably be required, the design of the workstations, the working methods, tools, and the actual work required shall be adapted to employees' individual characteristics;
- ✖ d. monotonous work and work that needs to be carried out at a particular speed shall be avoided, where this can reasonably be required, and if not, shall be limited;
- ✖ The employer shall operate a policy aimed at preventing employment-related psychosocial pressure, or limiting it if prevention is not possible, as part of the general working conditions policy.
- ✖ Working Conditions Decree: Section 4. Psycho-social workload
- ✖ Article 2.15. Measures to prevent or restrict the psycho-social workload
- ✖ 1. If employees are or can be exposed to a psycho-social workload, the risks with regard to the psychosocial workload must be assessed in connection with the risk assessment and evaluation meant in Article 5 of the Act, and, with due observance of the latest technological and scientific insights,
- ✖ measures be determined and implemented in the plan of action meant in Article 5 of the Act in order to prevent the psycho-social workload or – if this is not possible – to restrict this.
- ✖ 2. Where there is a danger of being exposed to psycho-social workload, information and instructions should be given to employees who carry out such work about the risks of psycho-social workload as well as about the measures aimed at preventing or restricting this load.

PRIVATE DOMAIN

In the private domain, employers and employees agree on ways of working that allow for the targets to be achieved. At sector or central level, this may take place on the basis of agreement between the social partners. Ways of working thus established may be

- ✘ recorded in a Working Conditions Catalogue, which contains descriptions of methods recognized by employers and employees, and from which a choice can be made in order to meet the prescribed targets.
- ✘ we have some 250 sectors. In all these sectors ' Working Conditions Catalogues' are made by the social partners. In these catalogues the best ways in attacking the major sector-problems are written down. Ways that comply with the obligations in our Health and Safety act. Companies now can choose the most suitable solution and ' translate' this in their Risk-assessment
- ✘ Of course there are also arrangements in Collective Agreements/Bargainings (see later on)

QUALITY OF WORK IN THE NETHERLANDS

- ✖ Biggest density of computers, IT in Europe
- ✖ Flexibility
- ✖ High level of productivity, one of the highest in EU

SOCIAL QUESTIONS

- Work becomes more intensive (see your I-phone, I-pads mail)
- New production techniques, less ‘ hand-labour’
- New formats in the organizations
- Working at home: no sharp division in work time – private time
- More and more a ‘ service’- economy,
- Intensive contacts with others in work
- Constant reorganizations and fusions
- Less work security
- ✗ increase of (unofficial and unpaid) overtime

PROBLEMS OF STRESS AND WORKLOAD

- ✗ Workers working at high speed: highest increase in Europe (Dublin foundation)
- ✗ Disability claimants (1 million of claimants at the end of 20th century)
- ✗ 1/3 has psychological complaints
- ✗ Total costs: 2,2 billions euro a year
- ✗ 30 to 40 % of workers in the Netherlands struggles with high level of work-pressure
- ✗ 10 % of worker visit the family-doctor for this problem
- ✗ 30% of long-term sickness-leave and incapacity for work is caused by high-work-pressure
- ✗ When workers are asked for the biggest problem in work, high work-pressure is top of the list
- ✗ Problems for employers: absence of work, shortage of employee at unexpected moments, loss of production, loss of quality and risks of image-damage

THEORY ABOUT STRESS

- ✗ Workload-stress = workers don't have enough time or exert strength to accomplish the tasks within the available time
- ✗ A situation of stress will lead to strain
- ✗ Reduced performance, irritations between colleagues, fatigue and security problems
- ✗ Workload stress can cause stress, just like an ill partner at home, or a bad marriage
- ✗ Stress causes all kinds of complaints
- ✗ It is difficult for employers to 'cure' stressors outside the workplace; he / she can create conditions in trying to solve the problem
- ✗ Best is to focus on the stressors in work: attacking work-pressure, conflicts, aggression, bullying etc.

CONSEQUENCES

- ✘ If a situation of stress and strain is structural, this can lead to severe health problems: burn out, a situation of mental exhaustion
- ✘ Control options can reduce these consequences
- ✘ Control: possibilities to intervene in the work situation

WHAT ARE THE ORIGINS FOR WORKRELATED-STRESS?

Complicated and divers:

- ✗ poor leadership
- ✗ education level of the employee
- ✗ planning and the work organization
- ✗ temporary personnel
- ✗ insufficient tools
- ✗ continuous rationalization of the working process

NEED FOR A (TRADE UNION) INSTRUMENT

*I can't influence
work path*

*I feel exhausted
every evening*

*I have
mental complaints*

*I don't
take fancy in
my job*



NEED FOR A (TRADE UNION) INSTRUMENT (2)

It is subjective

The problems are due to private circumstances

It is only imagination

It is not measurable



UNION STRATEGY

Unions have to tackle two arguments:

- ✗ problems are real and not imagination
- ✗ problems are originated in the work situation

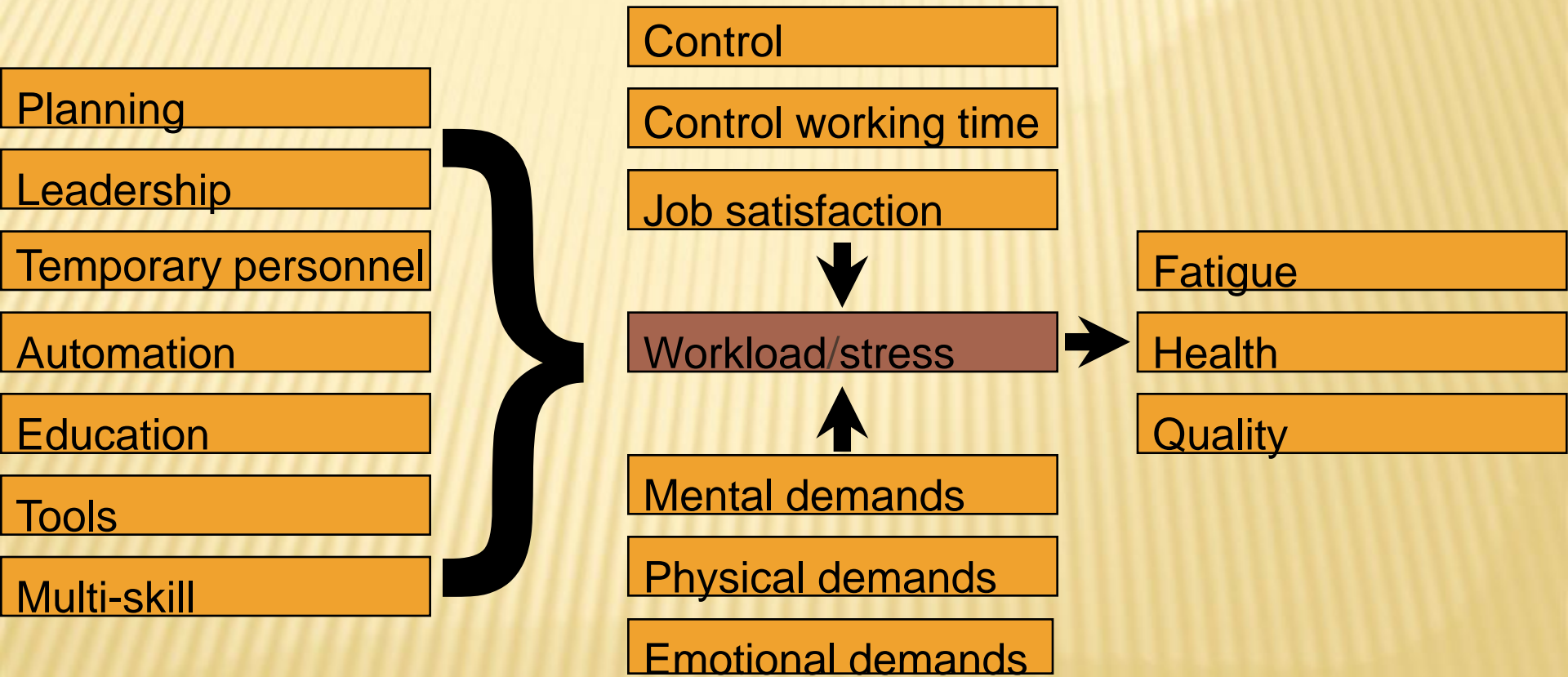
Invention of the '*Quick Scan Stress*'



THE QUICK SCAN STRESS

- ✗ Research instrument for trade unionists and works councils
- ✗ Three steps:
 1. Questionnaire to be distributed among the workers
 2. The answers have to be filled in on the computer program
 3. A push on the button and the scientific report is ready
- ✗ Costs software and booklet: 100 euro

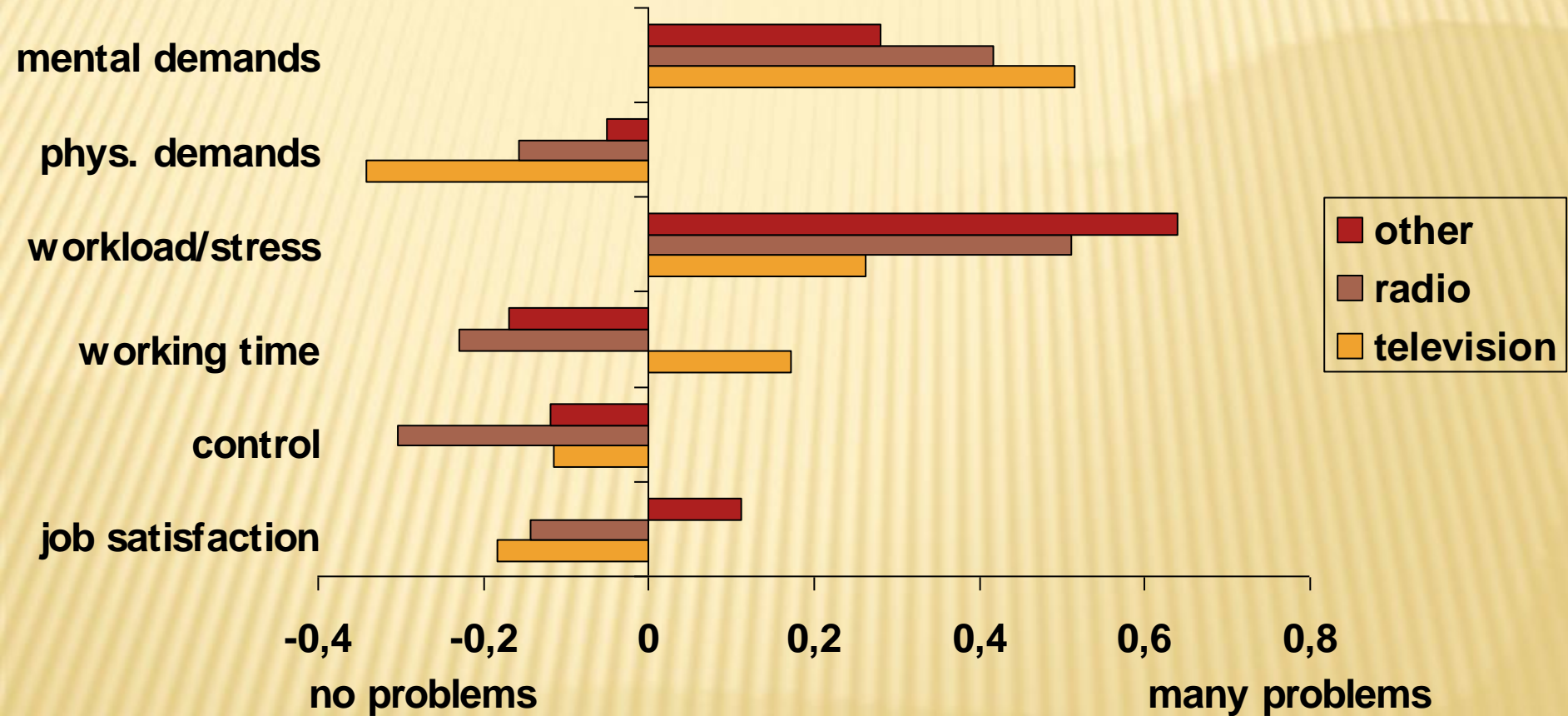
THE THEORETICAL MODEL



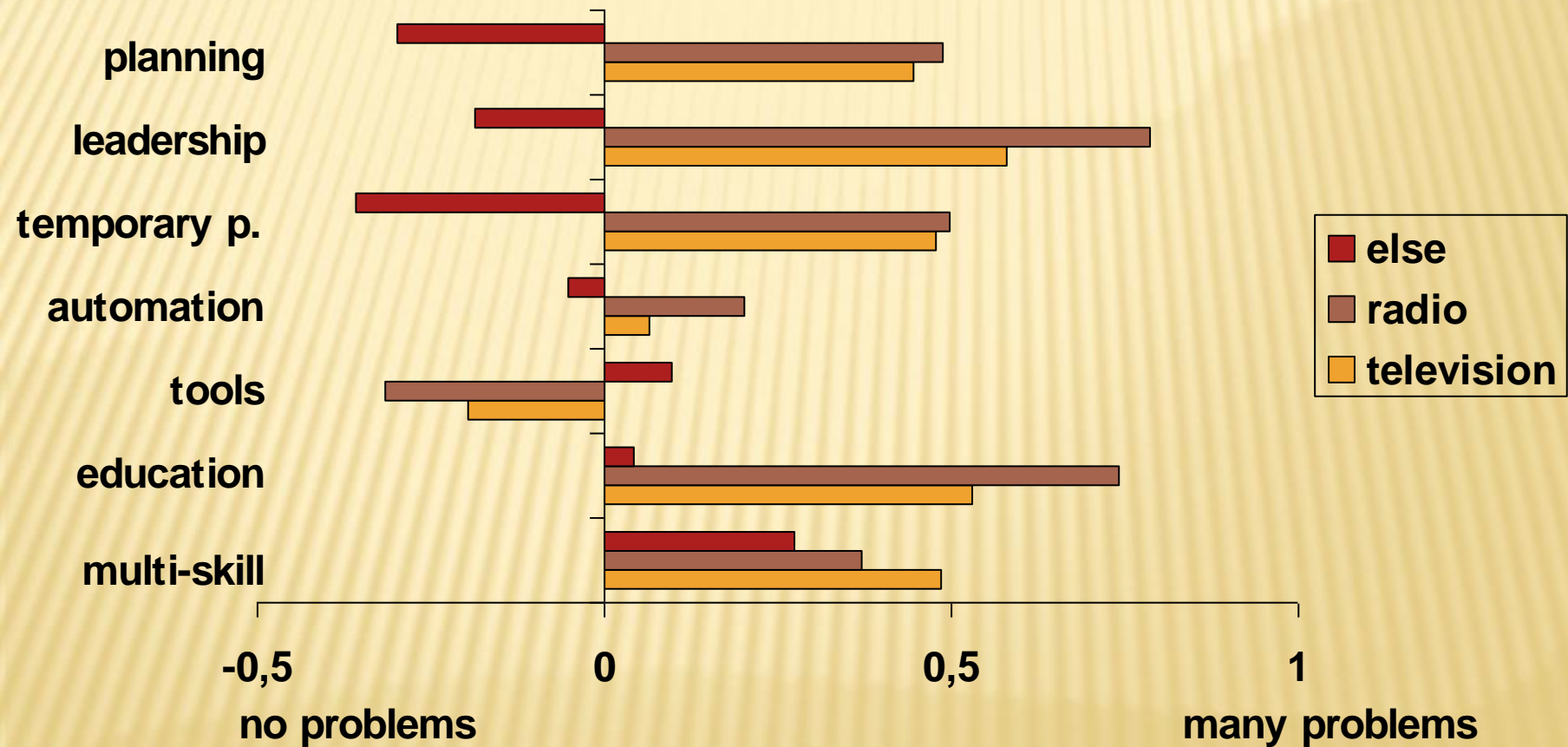
THE QUESTIONNAIRE

- ✗ 94 questions
- ✗ More questions on one subject
- ✗ Example scale *Control on work*
 - + Do you have much to say in what happens in your workplace?
 - + Can you determine the timing of your work activities?
 - + Can you influence your job planning?
 - + Do you have a say in decisions that have an impact on your job?
- ✗ Scale construction
- ✗ Compare with reference group

GRAPHICAL PRESENTATION



ORIGINS OF WORKLOAD/STRESS



EVALUATION

- ✗ The Quick Scan Stress important to raise awareness
- ✗ Two important advantages:
 - + *Easy*
 - + *Scientifically based*
- ✗ It is easier to tackle the problem of stress in companies
- ✗ Many copies have been sold (also by employers)
- ✗ Amount of time
- ✗ A general impression
- ✗ After collecting information action is needed
- ✗ Implementation of measures

(UNION) PROBLEMS FOR TAKING ACTION

- ✗ Objectify the ‘ subjective’ feeling of stress
- ✗ Creating ‘ tailor-made’ solutions
- ✗ Putting the subject on the agenda at sector-level and company level
 - ✗ > Stress and work-pressure are measurable
 - ✗ > questionnaire-research is a start for making the problem visible. Recognition is the first step in taking action.
 - ✗ > At this moment there is no (legal) OEL or norm for a maximum acceptable level of work-pressure; questionnaires will give indicators with a predictive value for ‘ burn-out’ and sickness

SPEAKING ABOUT SUCCESS...

- ✘ Are Dutch unions successful in their strategy? Yes and no. Yes in putting it on the agenda's, yes in demanding all kinds of actions concerning research, questionnaires in Catalogues, and in Collective agreements. But no if it comes to real changes that lead to less work-pressure, visible and measurable at the workplace. Unions need the help of company-doctors, Labour Inspectorate and concrete legal targets/ norms that are enforceable. More learning time for Workers Councils is needed
- ✘ Legal obligations are too vague: art. 2 Working Conditions Act: “the employer shall operate a policy aimed at preventing employment-related psychosocial pressure, or limit it if prevention is not possible, as part of the general working conditions policy”. What is this worth for an average worker??
- ✘ The focus on long-term problems is difficult; every day life demands constant focusing on different problems

SPEAKING ABOUT SUCCESS...

- ✖ In the Netherlands we have some 950 collective agreements (FNV related)
- ✖ In 150 CA's there is something said about 'psychosocial risks-work related stress
- ✖ In half of the cases its an agreement on 'doing research'
- ✖ In the other half it's about 'training', 'how to deal with stress', 'doing a health-scan'. 'introducing a health management system'.
- ✖ So, the final conclusion is that after a 'fast-start' in the nineties last century, now the Unions are stuck in the mud.
- ✖ Employers succeeded in focusing the attention on the individual worker's health: prevent obesities! eat enough fruit! Do you exercise! So now less attention is given to organizational problems at work. MDS's are caused by the worker at home, stress is caused by private problems
- ✖ Nothings changed really.....

WHAT IS NEEDED?

- ✗ Putting work-related stress on the agenda again
- ✗ Unions and Employers Federations must make agreements not only for doing research, but also agreements on introducing direct measures depending on the outcomes of studies done
- ✗ After implementation of measures, a second measurement/research must be done, to know if the problems have been diminished
- ✗ Agreements on sanctions when work related stress is too high: extra rest, compensation hours-days
- ✗ Unions should demand clear and realistic norms: maximum amount of square meters per hour in de cleaning sector, maximum amount of hours in front of the classroom. More then 4 clients at the pay-desk, means an extra pay-desk to be opened.
- ✗ Labour Inspectorates must do more : checking the existence of a good and complete Risk-Assessment in companies
- ✗ Ask the employer to show their plan of action
- ✗ Preventive services and occupational doctors can do much more: their level of knowledge is insufficient

LET'S DO THE FNV (VERY) QUICKSCAN WORKLOAD ! AND SEE THE RESULTS..(WWW.SNELTESTWERKDRUK.NL)

- ✖ Excessive workload is often a matter of structurally too much work and too little time. And therefore hurry-hurry-hurry. Structurally high pressure leads to greater fatigue, and thus more need to rest (need for recovery).
- ✖ The FNV Quick Test pressure gives an idea of the workload in your work situation and, if necessary, personal advice. Good luck in completing this test!

- ✖ Enter the following questions anonymously in and view the result.
- ✖
- ✖ always often sometimes never

- ✖ Got too much work to do?
- ✖ You must work extra hard to get something off?
- ✖ Should you hurry?
- ✖ You have to deal with a disadvantage in your work?
- ✖ Do you have problems with the pace of work?
- ✖ Do you have problems with the workload?

- ✖ I find it hard to relax at the end of a working day.
- ✖ At the end of a working day I am really.
- ✖ My job makes me at the end of a workday feel quite exhausted.
- ✖ It takes me hard for me to concentrate in my free time after work.
- ✖ I can muster little interest in other people, when I myself am just come home.
- ✖ When I come home they need me here alone