

Study 'Trust Works'

Explanation of project design and research questions

1. What does the Wageningen experiment investigate and what is the underlying vision?

Over a two-year period and with the help of people on social security, Wageningen Municipality will investigate what the effect is of placing trust in the recipients and applying less rigid rules with respect to social security. The current approach to social security is strongly focussed on rules and monitoring compliance with these. Wageningen Municipality's vision is that a positive approach based on trusting people, tailored solutions and motivating people on social security works better than the current approach. With the changed approach, people on social security are likely to find a job or participate in society within a shorter time. Furthermore, we believe that a positive approach contributes to well-being and health, in short: people who depend on social security feel more comfortable about this.

We will consider the study 'Trust Works' to have been successful if:

- More people find work and no longer depend on social security;
- More people find part-time work and therefore become less dependent on social security;
- More people do voluntary work and are thus more active in society;
- The well-being, motivation and health of people who depend on social welfare increases.

Research question and assumptions for the study 'Trust Works'

The key question of the study 'Trust Works' is which approach works best to help people participate:

- a. positive financial stimuli, room for people to take initiative, and a demand-driven tailored assistance or
- b. the existing practice as stated in the current Dutch Participation Act?

In the Netherlands, little research has been done into the effect of financial stimuli and different types of reward on the motivation and behaviour of people on social security. Little is also known at present about the behavioural effects if there are less requirements, people can take the lead in finding work, people receive demand-driven assistance and if people on social security are given more trust. In the Netherlands, there is also lack knowledge about the relationship between the approach chosen and the quality and sustainability of leaving the social security system.

In the Wageningen project, the core concept is that a positive approach should be able to lead to better results than an approach based on monitoring and sanctions. Key aspects of this approach are:

- good personal contact with a supportive approach,
- putting trust in people,
- rewarding a person's own initiative,
- facilitating (by means of a demand-driven tailored assistance),
- reducing or letting go of the emphasis on obligations in the social security system.

We expect that an approach with positive stimuli will have a favourable influence on the search behaviour, in the person's willingness to accept work, and on the extent to which people can provide for their own needs through work. We also expect that this will lead to greater social participation of people on social security. And we expect that this approach will lead to a greater degree of well-being, motivation and health of people on social security.

The theoretical foundation for this approach can be found in behavioural economics and sociopsychological motivation theories. The experiment builds further upon theoretical policy and behavioural insights with respect to needs and life objectives, trust, self-reliance and self-determination, intrinsic motivation, freedom of choice, welfare and stress.

The results from behavioural economics research reveal that people tend to act according to the principles of reciprocity. When trust is put in people, for example when an employer provides job security or invests in education and training, then people are more inclined to do something in return in the form of a greater effort, motivation and performance. Yet it can also simply be the case that a more positive and friendly attitude towards people causes them to be more inclined to show cooperative behaviour than if they are approached from a more hostile or distrustful attitude. A positive approach is therefore rewarded with a positive response, whereas a negative approach elicits resistance. Freedom of choice also plays an important role in the study. Facilitating people combined with giving them more control means that people who depend on social security receive greater autonomy over their own lives. This has a positive effect on their self-confidence and results in a greater sense of well-being.

From the perspective of sociopsychological motivation theories, approaches that focus on intrinsic motivation, which creates opportunities for a person's own initiative, are also considered to be more effective than extrinsic approaches. In fact, extrinsic stimuli can undermine the intrinsic motivation. For example, monitoring and sanctions can reduce a person's motivation to look for the work that they would like to do. Research has revealed that if people are intrinsically motivated to look for work, then the intensity of reintegration efforts is higher. Furthermore, placing more trust in people on social security increases their feeling of self-efficacy or self-reliance, which in turn translates into more effective searching behaviour and a greater chance of sustainably leaving the social security system for work.

Removing mental strain can also be an important facilitating factor for reintegration. If a person experiences a severe mental strain, due to health problems for example, then it could be that he or she has less mental capacity for other activities such as finding work. Limited financial means, for example due to debts, can also lead to an overloading of a person's cognitive functions, which can result in a lower mental capacity remaining for other activities. Conversely, a lower mental strain due to a good supervision and support can improve the well-being and health of people as they experience less stress. This can subsequently lead to a more efficient searching behaviour and a more successful reintegration. Furthermore, reducing the monitoring, work obligations and reintegration obligations can reduce the mental strain and thus facilitate reintegration. Research has revealed that people can experience strict monitoring of their efforts to find work as highly stressful.

2. How will the experiment be carried out?

The study 'Trust Works' will be carried out with four different groups. These groups will each have their own rule of play:

1. The group 'Earning pays':
In this group, the participants will be left with more when earning extra.
2. The group 'Assume responsibility':
In this group, the participants will determine how they look for work or voluntary work. Participants in this group will no longer be obliged to apply for jobs or to participate in reintegration activities organised by the municipality.
3. The group 'Extra guidance':
Participants in this group will receive more time and more guidance. Not only during interviews, but also where necessary through practical help and advice outside of the town hall. Client managers will have more time for this group.
4. The 'control group':

For this group, the rules will remain the same. A control group is necessary to allow for a good comparison of the results from the study.

We will investigate which approach leads to the best outcome using data research and questionnaires.

The project has been set up in such a way that nobody will be worse off. The support that is currently made available will also remain available to everybody. Participants will keep their benefit until they no longer depend on social security.

3. Why have these specific methods been chosen?

By investigating three approaches, we can investigate what works best. In doing so, we will make maximum use of the possibilities that are provided by the Dutch government in the regulation for these experiments: opportunity to make one's own choices, an approach with more intensive assistance, and the room to earn additional income.

The group of people on social security in Wageningen is not that large, approximately 850 people in total. About 400 people will voluntarily take part in the study, which is half of the people on social security.

We have chosen to change a single variable for each group, so that the results can be properly studied. The scientific research for 'Trust Works' will be carried out by Tilburg University.

4. Which message does Wageningen hope to convey about this study in two years' time?

We hope that a different approach towards social security will help more people to find work, more people to work part-time, and more people to be active in society. And we also find it important that the well-being, motivation and health of people on social security increases. If the positive approach in this experiment leads to that then, even if the number of people finding work remains the same, this project will be deemed a success as far as we are concerned.

5. Where can I find additional information about the project?

Additional information (in Dutch) about the research can be found at www.wageningen.nl/vertrouwenwerkt.

Further contact details:

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