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## Mismatching of persons and jobs in the Netherlands: consequences for the returns to mobility

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article answers three questions. To what extent do Dutch workers voluntarily change employers or positions within the firm, do objective and subjectively experienced job characteristics influence voluntary mobility, and does voluntary mobility result in changes in these job characteristics? Analyses show that voluntary mobility occurs quite often. Objective job characteristics do not predict the odds of voluntary mobility. The subjective evaluation of aspects of the job, such as for instance the job in general, the income, the job content and colleagues, and workload, however, do. The stronger this mismatch of persons and jobs, the more likely one is to be voluntarily mobile. Panel analyses furthermore show that this voluntary mobility improves objective job characteristics such as income and status, and reduces an unfavourable evaluation of the person–job fit. Clearly, an unfavourably experienced person–job fit pushes workers out of their jobs, and on average this step brings positive returns.

### **KEY WORDS**

intragenerational mobility / job characteristics / mismatches / mobility / panel analyses / returns to mobility

## Introduction

Returns to work play an important role in the lives of people, not merely as they generate income and status, but also because of the content of the work, the opportunities of personal development, and contacts with colleagues (Kalleberg, 1977). The satisfaction one is able to 'produce' at work is associated with general happiness (Rose, 2005a), which implies that job satisfaction spills over to other life domains and oppositely that stress at the workplace negatively influences life outside the walls of the firm. For society in general a high level of satisfaction could also be profitable. Among satisfied workers, higher productivity levels are found than among dissatisfied employees (Judge et al., 2001). A tighter fit between personal preferences about the job and actually attained job characteristics could, therefore, result in a higher general productivity level. Furthermore it might be assumed that a higher individual and general level of job satisfaction reduces work related illness and disability.

During their labour market careers, employees thus strive for an optimal combination of work related returns and are assumed to be at their place when there is a high level of correspondence between characteristics that one wishes to achieve in a job, and actual aspects of the labour market position that one currently occupies. Scholars of labour psychology call this case a strong 'person-job fit' (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Since employees in modern Western economies strive for as high as possible a level of job satisfaction, scholars often assume that unfavourable objective characteristics, such as a low income or a low status, and a subjectively experienced person-job mismatch, result in searching for a different job and that, if one is granted the opportunity, one will actually change positions voluntarily (Keith and McWilliams, 1997; Sørensen, 1975). Put differently, unfavourable objective and subjectively evaluated job characteristics serve as push-factors.

There are, however, not many studies in which longitudinal data are utilized to assess this causal relationship between an employee's unfavourable objective and subjectively evaluated job characteristics at one time, and the odds of voluntary mobility at a later moment in the person's labour market career. One goal of this article is to study this causal relationship. For that purpose the years 1986 to 2002 are used of the Labour Supply Panel (Dutch Organization for Strategic Labour Market Research). This panel information enables examination of, firstly, the extent to which the odds of internal and external voluntary mobility are higher for employees who score low on the objective job characteristics of income and socio-economic status. Second, it enables examination of the influence of a negatively evaluated person-job fit in terms of the job in general, the income, the match between personal capabilities and the content of the job,<sup>1</sup> the number of working hours, the content and colleagues, irregular working hours, workload, physically heavy work, autonomy, and indications of burnout. These influences are estimated simultaneously. As

many economists stress the importance of financial considerations in mobility decisions, while sociologists point at non-financial issues, an additional consequence therefore is that the analysis is able to show the importance of non-financial job characteristics when financial ones are accounted for, and vice versa.<sup>2</sup>

Also sporadic is the research that subsequently, with the use of longitudinal designs, assesses to what extent this mobility yields profit. When such research exists it mostly looks at small selections of outcome variables. Many economic and sociological studies for instance pay attention to typical extrinsic job characteristics such as income and status (see for instance Blossfeld, 1986; Dwyer, 2004; Keith and McWilliams, 1997; Mincer, 1974; Sørensen, 1975). It has been proven, however, that intrinsic work values, such as consorting with colleagues and the job's content, are also important aspects of the job, and that the decision to change labour market positions is also inspired by the wish to improve upon them. Other researchers do look at differences between people in the appreciation of extrinsic and intrinsic job characteristics, but subsequently leave the question of the returns to mobility aside (Tolbert and Moen, 1998). Using a Nordic panel, Kalleberg and Mastekaase's (2001) research establishing that dissatisfaction with several aspects of the job (pay, security, content) diminishes after voluntary mobility, is a notable exception.

This article aims to establish more insight into the relationship between job characteristics and voluntary mobility, and the impact of mobility on changes in these job characteristics. Three research questions are formulated. The first one is descriptive: to what extent did Dutch employees voluntarily change employers (external mobility) or positions within the firm (internal mobility) between 1986 and 2002? This question verifies the substance of the issue at stake. Even if returns to mobility are high, if voluntary mobility is a scarce phenomenon in the economic landscape, it does not mean much from a societal perspective. The second question is: to what extent do the objective job characteristics income and status, and the subjectively evaluated person–job fit have an impact on voluntary external and internal mobility? The final question is: to what extent do voluntary external and internal mobility result in an improvement of objective job characteristics and a less negatively evaluated person–job fit?

### **Determinants of voluntary mobility: objective and subjectively evaluated job characteristics**

Mobility research distinguishes several types of determinants, among them individual characteristics (supply side), job characteristics (demand side), and institutional characteristics (labour market characteristics, national context). Neoclassical economists are mostly concerned with the importance of individual characteristics, while sociologists and institutionally oriented economists also assess the impact of structural characteristics of labour markets. In some studies the factors mentioned are studied simultaneously (see for instance

Blossfeld, 1986; DiPrete et al., 1997). Furthermore, labour psychologists often concentrate on the impact that the match between the preferences of the employee and the actual content has on a diverse range of attitudes and behaviours (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). This article primarily focuses on the impact of a selection of objective and subjectively evaluated job characteristics, while the analyses takes account of the other types of determinants.

This research, considers income and status as two objective determinants of mobility, because when the returns to mobility are studied, these job characteristics will be used to assess the extent to which voluntary mobility actually leads to objective progress. It is useful to determine whether a low score on both job characteristics results in voluntary mobility. A priori the answer to this question is not unequivocal. On the one hand people strive to get as much as possible out of their work (Keith and McWilliams, 1997; Sørensen, 1975), so that employees who have a low income or socio-economic status might have much to gain. Status and income would then negatively affect voluntary mobility. On the other hand it could be maintained that the employees who occupy these positions on average are not sufficiently equipped for upward mobility. Their lack of employability then results in an insignificant, or even positive relationship between income and status on the one hand, and voluntary mobility at the other. There is ample evidence that a lack of human capital hinders social mobility (see Becker, 1964; Blau and Duncan, 1967; Blossfeld, 1986; Mincer, 1974; Shavit and Blossfeld, 1993).

Scholars of labour psychology assume that the resemblance between work preferences and actual job characteristics indicates the extent to which an employee is 'at his or her place'. The better this subjectively evaluated person-job fit (it is the employee who evaluates the characteristics of the job and his or her personal preferences), the stronger they feel, for instance, committed to the organization, the more they are satisfied with their job in general, and the less they are inclined to quit the job and start searching for another (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Contrarily, a disappointing person-job fit results in general dissatisfaction, the wish to leave, and eventually, if one is able to localize and secure a well-fitting alternative, in voluntary mobility. It might therefore be expected that the less satisfied employees are with specific aspects of their job (such as the wage, working hours, autonomy, content and colleagues, workload, etcetera; for the complete list see Table 4), the more likely they are to voluntarily change employers or positions within the firm.

## **Common causes of voluntary mobility and job characteristics**

To arrive at unbiased influences of objective and subjectively evaluated job characteristics on voluntary mobility, it is important to take account as far as possible of characteristics of persons, jobs, and labour markets, which may serve as common causes of both job characteristics and voluntary mobility. Obviously, regarding individual characteristics, the more human capital an

employee possesses (education, courses, experience/age) the more opportunities there are to be successful (Becker, 1964; Mincer, 1974) and thus the more attractive are the positions they occupy. At the same time human capital indicators are powerful predictors of voluntary mobility and career progress (Blossfeld, 1986; Mincer, 1974; Shavit and Blossfeld, 1993; Wolbers, 2000). Most probably there are also gender differences. Not only do female employees earn less, become unemployed more often and work in lower status jobs than male employees, they also have fewer opportunities for promotion and are less often voluntarily mobile (Anker, 1997; Blackburn et al., 1993; Gesthuizen, 2004). The composition of the household might also influence mobility opportunities. Having a partner and children might for instance increase regional commitment and therefore restrain the scope of one's labour market (Felmlee, 1982; Rosenfeld, 1992). It might be particularly this regional restriction that blocks the road to more attractive jobs.

Considering common causes at the demand side of the labour market, it might be assumed firstly that employees with temporary contracts are often forced to change position, and in part do so voluntarily because they anticipate departure on short notice. At the same time temporary jobs might have less attractive characteristics than permanent positions (Scherer, 2004; Steijn et al., 2006). Second, internal labour markets prevail in large companies, while employees of small firms must rely on external labour markets (Althausen and Kalleberg, 1990; Baron and Bielby, 1984). If within large companies there are better opportunities to secure attractive positions, firm size influences both voluntary mobility and objective and subjectively evaluated job characteristics. Third, industries are also known to have an impact on dominant career trajectories (see for instance Stinchcombe, 1979). Additionally some industries provide more high-level jobs than others, so that both job characteristics and mobility opportunities differ between industries. Fourth, the relationship between job characteristics and voluntary mobility needs to be corrected for biasing influences of the economy in general. Under unfavourable economic circumstances (high unemployment, low economic growth) there are fewer opportunities for voluntary position changes. Since general mobility opportunities are low and vacancies are scarce, employees are probably less likely to find that one perfectly fitting job, which results in a higher probability of unfavourable job characteristics under adverse economic circumstances.

## Returns to voluntary mobility

A general proposition might be that in their labour market careers, employees strive for as high as possible intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. Voluntary mobility is a way to achieve this (Sørensen, 1975). Workers often anticipate improvement and change employers or positions within firms if the actual or perceived probability of improvement is high (Keith and McWilliams, 1997). Voluntary mobility is, it is assumed mostly goal oriented: employees initiate internal and

external changes because employees can thereby secure a higher wage, more favourable working hours, nicer colleagues, a more challenging content, and so forth. For Norway, Kalleberg and Mastekaasa (2001) investigated whether between 1989 and 1993 the subjective evaluation of the salary, job security, enjoyment, and job content improved more for voluntary 'movers' than for 'stayers'. At both measurement moments people were thus asked to evaluate their situation, and a part of the group proved to have changed positions between 1989 and 1993. The returns to voluntary mobility were unmistakable. In this study we also employ such a design for the Netherlands. However, we use nine measurement moments (nine waves, 1986–2002) and also more job characteristics (see Table 4 in the results section). We thus expect that the increase between two points in time in objective job characteristics (status, income) is stronger for voluntarily mobile employees than for immobile workers, as is the decrease in an unfavourably evaluated person–job fit.

## Data

The research questions are answered by making use of the Labour Supply Panel 1986–2002 of the Dutch Organization of Strategic Labour Market Research (OSA) (see Fouarge et al., 2006). Each wave of this bi-annual panel contains information about objective job characteristics (income, socio-economic status) and the way in which employees evaluate (aspects of) their jobs. Therefore it is possible to determine changes in these job characteristics. Also, in each wave the respondent was asked to describe the labour market career of the past two years, so that mobility between two waves becomes visible. Per wave, 4000 active or inactive members of the labour population are interviewed. In between waves the panel loses more or less one third of the respondents. Including new panel members who together form a representative reflection of the population in that year repairs this attrition.<sup>3</sup> In all, combining two successive waves each time delivers sufficient respondents to perform panel analyses and a sample that is representative for the time of interview. On average 1500 respondents remain per combination of two waves if people who are selected were working at both times, and if account is made for missing values.

The reason why this selection of years is used (there is also a 1985 wave) in the first place is that only after 1988 it is possible to distinguish internal from external mobility. Since causes and consequences of mobility might differ between both types, it is important to look at them separately. Since we extract determinants of mobility from the wave before, 1986 is the first year we need. Information from Time T (education, job characteristics, industry, etcetera) is coupled with information from Time T+1, in which it is determined in a retrospective manner whether the respondent was mobile in the past two years. This is how the panel structure that is used throughout this article is built up.

Only part analysis will be performed on the combination of the waves 2000 and 2002, for the reason that in these years there was an extensive list of

questions pertaining to the subjective evaluation of many aspects of the job. This offers a unique opportunity to record influences of, and career changes in several interesting job characteristics. The description of the measurements will clearly point out which job characteristics are available for the complete time span, and which ones only for 2000–2002.

## Measuring instruments

Voluntary mobility is separated into an *external* and an *internal* component. Externally mobile employees have changed employers, internally mobile employees changed positions within the firm. To end up with all voluntary moves, all involuntary – employer initiated – mobility is eliminated from the dataset: changes as a result of reorganization or closing (part of) the firm, ending temporary contracts, (the threat of) lay-off for other reasons, and the incidence of illness or disability.

Two variables indicate objective job characteristics, which both are available for the complete time span of 1986 until 2002. This is *log hourly wage*, which is calculated by dividing monthly income by the number of hours worked per month, after which is performed a log transformation. *Socio-economic status* (Ganzeboom et al., 1992) is a rank order of occupational groups on the basis of their average income and education level. Through a linear transformation the original scale of 10 to 90 has been brought back to 0 to 1.

The job characteristics that can be delineated as ‘subjectively evaluated person–job fit’ operationalized in such a way that a higher score points at, it is assumed, a worse match between job preferences and actual job characteristics. This situation would be the case if employees say that they are dissatisfied, experience certain aspects as aggravating, or by any other means characterize a job characteristic negatively. Four are available for the entire time span. Two are: ‘how dissatisfied are you with your *job in general*’ and ‘with your *income*’. Possible answers were very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied and very dissatisfied. A third pertains to *dissatisfaction with the match* between capabilities and the job content. Respondents could evaluate this match as good, reasonable, moderate and bad. The questionnaires also include the actual and preferred working hours per week. If they do not coincide, it is assumed that the respondent is *dissatisfied with the working hours*.

A selection of variables is only available for 2000 and 2002. Given the large number of indicators of job characteristics, we decided to use factor analysis to reduce them to a more manageable set. The solution can be found in Table 1, which presents the names of the six dimensions, as well as the wording and scaling of each separate item that satisfied the demand of an appropriate factor solution (sufficiently high communality, loadings of at least |0.40| and no double loadings).

As is clear the final solution,<sup>4</sup> which includes the items in such a way that a high score indicates a less well subjectively evaluated person–job fit, delivers six

**Table 1** Dimensions of work; the subjectively evaluated person-job fit<sup>a</sup>, factor analysis, varimax rotation<sup>b</sup>, 2000, R<sup>2</sup> = 42.9%

	H <sup>2</sup>	content and colleagues	working hours	workload	heavy work	autonomy	burnout complaints
feeling of appreciation by management	0.66	0.80					
enough support management	0.66	0.80					
pleasant atmosphere	0.39	0.56					
job with nice content	0.29	0.44					
enough career perspectives	0.20	0.42					
working on Sunday aggravating?	0.55		0.72				
working on Saturday aggravating?	0.51		0.70				
irregular working hours aggravating?	0.44		0.63				
work-shift aggravating?	0.37		0.55				
I work under high time pressure	0.61			0.77			
I have the feeling that I have not enough time	0.49			0.68			
Mentally heavy work aggravating?	0.21			0.41			
working with dangerous substances aggravating?	0.34				0.56		
smell at work aggravating?	0.33				0.54		
dangerous circumstances aggravating?	0.31				0.53		
physically heavy work aggravating?	0.25				0.44		
decide myself how to do my work	0.60					0.73	
decide my work pace myself	0.48					0.64	
burned out through work	0.56						0.61
tired when getting up and facing new work day	0.33						0.52
eigenvalue		3.84	2.35	1.86	1.40	1.32	1.02

Source: OSA-Labour Supply Panel 2000–2002  
a: All 'aggravation items' are dichotomous, with the highest value (1) meaning that the respondents experiences the situation in the job and finds it aggravating. All other items are measured on a five-point scale with the lowest score (1) meaning 'completely agree' and the highest (5) 'completely disagree'.  
b: The rotation required 5 iterations to converge.

factors with an eigenvalue higher than 1. Factor scores were computed for these dimensions, of which the minimal and maximal scores can be found in Tables 3 and 4 in the result section. The first dimension is the *appreciation of content and colleagues*. Strikingly, aspects of jobs such as career perspectives, working atmosphere, and appreciation by the management, which in our view should be important independent factors, load together on this one dimension. Apparently employees pass judgment by mutually evaluating these topics. This finding contradicts the classical analysis of Kalleberg (1977), who, generally, did find separate dimensions. Here, this dimension of appreciation of content and colleagues is the most important one, explaining 16.5 percent of the total variance. *Irregular working hours* is the second dimension, which includes working at the weekend, shift-work, and irregular hours. The items that indicate *workload* are time pressure and mentally aggravating work. *Physically aggravating work* also clearly shows up as an independent factor, as does *autonomy*. And the items, 'I feel burned out as a result of my work', and 'I feel tired when I get up and there is another working day ahead' indicate *burnout complaints*.

The description of the control variables included in the analyses can be found in the first column of Table 2 (results section). This column documents exactly which variables there are, which categories they have, and in the case of continuous measurements, what the minimal and maximal values are.

## Method

The central analyses of this research are founded on two steps. First the causal relationship is determined between on the one hand objective job characteristics and subjectively evaluated person–job fit, and on the other voluntary mobility versus immobility. Since voluntary mobility is considered in total as well as broken down into external and internal mobility, both logistic and multinomial logistic regression models are estimated. To be sure that the causal order between determinants and mobility is undisputed, the determinants are distilled always from wave Time T, and mobility from wave Time T+1. The unemployment percentage and percentage economic growth are based on year totals of the year prior to the measurement of mobility. Since some job characteristics are available for the entire time span of 1986–2002, while others only for 2000–2002, the odds of voluntary mobility versus immobility for these periods are analysed separately.

Each time a respondent is present in two subsequent waves, he or she is included in the dataset. The result is that the same persons can return more than ones, which means that there is no independence among the units. Standard errors are thus underestimated, which is overcome by correcting them for this dependence using the cluster option within STATA.

Two models are estimated each time. The first one contains all common causes, and all measurements of objective and subjectively evaluated job characteristics, except dissatisfaction with the job in general. This variable is

included in the second step. The reason is that general dissatisfaction might be considered as a variable in which the respective employee has weighted all positive and negative characteristics against each other, to come to a concluding judgment. Simultaneously including this indicator with the more specific job characteristics would disguise the influence of the last mentioned indicators.

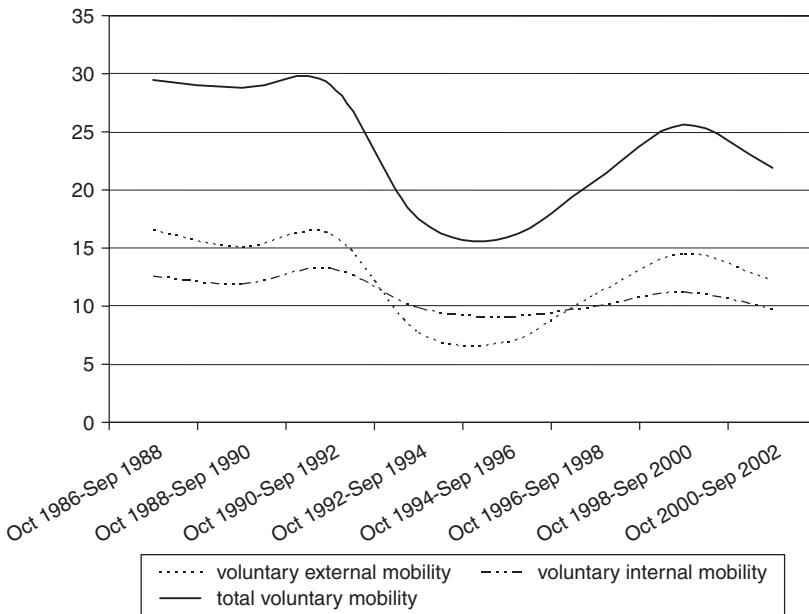
Some of the respondents are more mobile than others in the time span of two years between two subsequent waves. These respondents are excluded from the analyses. Obviously, for these employees it is not possible to directly relate the changes in job characteristics to the mobility event. If job characteristics were documented after each career change, those employees could have been included who are more mobile. For that matter, only 4 percent of all respondents comply with this picture.

The second step of the central analyses focuses on the returns to mobility. For all job characteristics mentioned, there is information in two waves. If a job characteristic at Time T+1 as the dependent variable is considered, while including the same variable at Time T at the independent side of the equation and subsequently look at the influence of voluntary mobility, the mobility coefficient then expresses the change in the job characteristic as a consequence of this change in labour market positions, compared to employees who, in the same time span, were immobile (Allison, 1990; Kalleberg and Mastekaasa, 2001; Kessler and Greenberg, 1981). It is important that the mobility event happened between Time T and Time T+1. The retrospective design of the mobility module means that this is the case. Dependent upon the measurement level of the job characteristic linear, logistic or ordered logistic regression techniques are used. We again correct for clustered units of analysis the estimations in which the job characteristics are used that are available from 1986 until 2002.

## Results

There is a large group of employees that within the two years between two times of measurement voluntarily changes employers or positions within the firm (Figure 1). Between 1986 and 1992 the percentage was more or less 30, after which it declined to 15 in the mid-1990s. After that it started to increase again but without reaching the height found at the end of the 1980s. Around the year 2000, a quarter of the labour force (self-employed excluded) was internally or externally mobile. It is clear that in economically prosperous times (end of the 1980s, and 2000–2002) voluntary mobility is much more widespread than under adverse economic conditions (around 1993–4).

In most years the amount of external mobility is higher than the amount of internal mobility. This was not the case when in the beginning of the 1990s unemployment rates went up and economic growth down. This points to the influence of the business cycle on voluntary external mobility rates. The influence of the unemployment percentage and the percentage economic growth in Table 2 confirms this. The higher the unemployment rate, the lower the odds



**Figure 1** Voluntary mobility in the Netherlands 1986–2002.

Source: OSA-Labour Supply Panel 1986–2002

of a voluntary change of employers versus immobility; the more economic growth, the higher the odds (see also Gesthuizen and Dagevos, 2005).

When all is considered, voluntary mobility is widespread in the Netherlands. If the degree of external mobility is compared with the level in other Western countries, it even shows that the Dutch labour market is quite dynamic (Gesthuizen and Dagevos, 2005). Therefore the questions arise: to what extent objective and subjectively evaluated job characteristics add to the prediction of the phenomenon, and to what extent actual voluntary changes result in higher scores on objective job characteristics, and a less unfavourable evaluation of the person–job fit.

Tables 2 and 3 present the results that pertain to the impact of job characteristics on voluntary mobility, after taking account of the other determinants of mobility that at the same time also cause job characteristics to vary.<sup>5</sup> Socio-economic status and log hourly income at Time T do not affect any type of voluntary mobility between Time T and Time T+1. The job characteristics that indicate the subjectively experienced person–job fit, however, do. The more dissatisfied an employee is with the wage, the match between capabilities and job content, and the working hours, the higher the odds is of voluntary external mobility versus immobility. Dissatisfaction with the working hours also increases the odds of voluntary internal mobility versus immobility. The two other measures

**Table 2** Voluntary mobility (Time T+1) regressed on objective and subjectively evaluated job characteristics (Time T), after taking account of common causes (Time T), 1986–2002, logistic and multinomial logistic regression

	voluntary mobility vs immobility		voluntary external mobility vs immobility		voluntary internal mobility vs immobility	
	model 1	model 2	model 1	model 2	model 1	model 2
objective job characteristics						
socio-economic status (0–1)	–0.23	–0.19	–0.32	–0.26	–0.16	–0.14
log hourly wage (–2.36–7.96)	–0.03	–0.02	–0.15+	–0.14+	0.10	0.11
subjectively evaluated person-job fit						
job dissatisfaction (1 – 4)		0.27**		0.41**		0.11*
wage dissatisfaction (1 – 4)	0.08*	0.04	0.10*	0.04	0.05	0.04
match dissatisfaction (1 – 4)	0.09**	0.06*	0.13**	0.09*	0.05	0.03
working hours dissatisfaction (0/1)	0.27**	0.25**	0.26**	0.23**	0.28**	0.27**
age (ref. = 16–24)						
25–34	–0.34**	–0.35**	–0.44**	–0.45**	–0.09	–0.10
35–44	–0.59**	–0.61**	–0.74**	–0.77**	–0.31+	–0.32+
45–54	–1.14**	–1.17**	–1.32**	–1.37**	–0.83**	–0.84**
55–65	–1.08**	–1.10**	–1.42**	–1.45**	–0.64**	–0.65**
gender*children (ref. = male no children)						
male with children until age 12	–0.12	–0.10	–0.20+	–0.17	–0.06	–0.05
male with children 13+	–0.32**	–0.31**	–0.47**	–0.45**	–0.23	–0.22
female no children	0.15+	0.15+	0.11	0.11	0.20	0.21+
female with children until age 12	0.06	0.07	0.05	0.07	0.04	0.06
female with children 13+	0.09	0.13	0.05	0.12	0.13	0.15
marital status (ref. = married, cohabiting)						
divorced	0.26+	0.22	0.35+	0.28	0.16	0.15
single, widowed	–0.23**	–0.23**	–0.22+	–0.22*	–0.27*	–0.26*

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

	voluntary mobility vs immobility		voluntary external mobility vs immobility		voluntary internal mobility vs immobility	
	model 1	model 2	model 1	model 2	model 1	model 2
<i>education level (ref. = primary education)</i>						
lower secondary education	0.17	0.18	0.09	0.10	0.25	0.25
higher secondary education	0.32**	0.31**	0.19	0.18	0.44**	0.44*
vocational college	0.51**	0.51**	0.32+	0.30+	0.68**	0.68**
university	0.55**	0.54**	0.55*	0.53*	0.55**	0.55*
<i>courses (ref. = no)</i>						
paid by employer	0.07	0.07	-0.04	-0.04	0.15+	0.16*
self paid	0.16	0.17	0.22	0.22	0.09	0.10
self paid and employer paid	0.55**	0.55**	0.59*	0.57*	0.52*	0.52*
<i>contract (ref. = permanent)</i>						
temporary	0.52**	0.53**	0.81**	0.81**	-0.05	-0.05
other	0.26	0.21	0.40	0.32	-0.01	0.00
<i>firm size (ref. = 500 +)</i>						
1-9	-0.15	-0.13	0.20	0.22+	-0.61**	-0.60**
10-19	0.02	0.02	0.25*	0.25*	-0.21	-0.20
20-99	-0.16*	-0.16*	0.03	0.03	-0.32**	-0.32**
100-499	-0.06	-0.07	-0.07	-0.07	-0.05	-0.05
<i>industry (ref. = small trade and service)</i>						
traditional primary industry	-0.62+	-0.57+	-0.70*	-0.63	-0.64	-0.62
classical capitalistic industry	-0.10	-0.13	-0.39*	-0.45**	0.24	0.24
skilled industry	-0.07	-0.08	-0.2**	-0.29*	0.22	0.21

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

	voluntary mobility vs immobility		voluntary external mobility vs immobility		voluntary internal mobility vs immobility	
	model 1	model 2	model 1	model 2	model 1	model 2
large bureaucratic industry	-0.07	-0.08	-0.42**	-0.43**	0.29*	0.29*
professional services	-0.15+	-0.14+	-0.23*	-0.21*	0.02	0.02
bureaucratic services	0.05	0.05	-0.31*	-0.31**	0.42**	0.41**
missing	0.12	0.12	-0.05	-0.04	0.37*	0.37*
percentage unemployment (2.0–7.9)	-0.06**	-0.05**	-0.12**	-0.12**	0.01	0.01
percentage economic growth (1.3–4.7)	0.07**	0.07**	0.09**	0.09**	0.05+	0.05+
intercept	-0.97**	-1.34**	-0.98**	-1.54**	-2.60**	-2.76**
number of observations	9616	9616	9616	9616	9616	9616
log likelihood	-4867	-4835	-6239	-6194	-6239	-6194

Source: OSA-Labour Supply Panel 1986–2002.

+  $p < 0.10$

\*  $p < 0.05$

\*\*  $p < 0.01$

of a subjectively evaluated person–job fit do not relate to voluntary internal mobility (Table 2, models 1).

General dissatisfaction with the job proves to be a strong predictor of both voluntary internal and external mobility versus immobility (Table 2, models 2). Furthermore, adding this variable often results in large reductions in the effects of the other more specific types of subjectively experienced job characteristics. Dissatisfaction with income now even reaches insignificance. These findings indicate that general dissatisfaction with the job indeed captures the lack of appreciation for more specific aspects of the job. Job dissatisfaction thus is a strong predictor, but in content relatively uninformative.

With regard to the six dimensions, table 3 shows that the more unfavourable the person–job fit in terms of content and colleagues, the higher the odds of both voluntary internal and external mobility versus immobility. Also, if an employee evaluates the workload negatively, the odds of voluntary mobility versus immobility increase, but this time only within the firm. Experiencing aggravation from much physical force also determines voluntary mobility, but in this case counter-intuitively. An explanation for its negative impact could be that employees who perform this kind of heavy work (perceive they) have little opportunity to move to jobs in which less physical strength is needed. Put differently, they might be dependent on working in specific occupations, which all have more or less the same negative characteristics. Why take the trouble if the result would be equally dissatisfying?

General job dissatisfaction (models 2) increases the odds of voluntary external mobility, and in particular the influence of a negative evaluation of colleagues and content diminishes after including this factor. For predicting voluntary internal mobility, general job satisfaction proves to be of no significance. Employees who are really dissatisfied with several aspects of the job at the same time, apparently see few opportunities to find a solution for the problems internally.

In all, there are clear indications that an unfavourable evaluation of the person–job fit causes voluntary mobility. Several dimensions prove to be push-factors, about which voluntarily mobile employees expect that they will be more positive in their new job or position in the firm. The extent to which this is actually the case can be estimated from the findings presented in Table 4. To what extent is there a rise in objective job characteristics, and a decline in the negative evaluation of the person–job fit, when people voluntarily change employers or positions within the firm?

Voluntary external as well as voluntary internal mobility causes an increase in the objective measurements of job characteristics. Employees who were externally mobile have a one percent higher increase in socio-economic status than immobile employees. Voluntary changers of positions within the firm experience an increase in their status and income of even three percent more than people who stayed in their original job. The objective returns to voluntary mobility are unmistakable.

What about the returns in terms of subjectively evaluated job characteristics? After both internal and external voluntary mobility, the evaluation of the

**Table 3** Voluntary mobility (Time T+1) regressed on subjectively evaluated job characteristics (Time T), after taking account of common causes (Time T; coefficients not shown), 1986–2002, logistic and multinomial logistic regression

	voluntary mobility vs immobility		voluntary external mobility vs immobility		voluntary internal mobility vs immobility	
	model 1	model 2	model 1	model 2	model 1	model 2
subjectively evaluated person-job fit						
job dissatisfaction (1–4)		0.39**		0.50**		0.25
content and colleagues (–1.43–3.36)	0.19**	0.03	0.17+	–0.03	0.21*	0.12
working hours (–0.84–3.93)	0.03	0.02	–0.03	–0.05	0.09	0.08
workload (–1.90–2.03)	0.22*	0.24**	0.10	0.10	0.37**	0.36**
physically heavy work (–1.07–3.41)	–0.22**	–0.21**	–0.24+	–0.26*	–0.21+	–0.22+
autonomy (–1.57–2.38)	0.05	0.05	–0.01	–0.02	0.14	0.14
burnout-complaints (–1.63–3.16)	0.11	0.01	0.21+	0.09	–0.03	–0.09
Intercept	1.00	0.34	0.89	0.04	–0.69	–1.11
Number of observations	1580	1580	1580	1580	1580	1580
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	10.2 %	11.2 %	12.2 %	13.1 %	12.2 %	13.1 %

Source: OSA-Labour Supply Panel 2000 and 2002.  
+  $p < 0.10$   
\*  $p < 0.05$   
\*\*  $p < 0.01$

**Table 4** Returns to voluntary internal and external mobility versus immobility regarding changes in job characteristics, 1986–2002 and 2000–2002, several regression techniques<sup>a</sup>

	voluntary external	voluntary internal
<i>objective job characteristics (Time T+I)</i>		
log hourly wage (0–1) <sup>b</sup>	–0.01	0.03*
socio-economic status (–2.36–7.96) <sup>b</sup>	0.01*	0.03**
<i>Subjectively evaluated person-job fit (Time T+I)</i>		
job dissatisfaction (1 – 4) <sup>c</sup>	–1.04**	–0.48**
wage dissatisfaction (1 – 4) <sup>c</sup>	–0.31**	–0.20*
match dissatisfaction (1 – 4) <sup>c</sup>	–0.03	0.06
working hours dissatisfaction (0/1) <sup>d</sup>	–0.14	–0.14
content and colleagues (–1.43–3.36) <sup>b</sup>	–0.26**	–0.17*
working hours (–0.84–3.93) <sup>b</sup>	–0.01	–0.01
workload (–1.90–2.03) <sup>b</sup>	–0.11+	0.04
physically heavy work (–1.07–3.41) <sup>b</sup>	–0.14*	0.03
autonomy (–1.57–2.38) <sup>b</sup>	0.07	–0.08
burnout complaints (–1.63–3.16) <sup>b</sup>	–0.17**	–0.10

Source: OSA-Labour Supply Panel 1986, 1988, 1990, 1992, 1994, 1996, 1998, 2000–2002.

a: the models are corrected for common causes at Time T.

b: linear regression

c: ordered logistic regression

d: logistic regression

+  $p < 0.10$

\*  $p < 0.05$

\*\*  $p < 0.01$

job in general becomes less unfavourable: job dissatisfaction decreases considerably. In both cases dissatisfaction with income also decreases and the evaluation of colleagues and content is less unfavourable than before. Moreover, a voluntary external change diminishes workload and aggravation from physically heavy work, and burnout complaints also decrease. The returns in terms of the evaluation of one's person–job fit are, all in all, considerable.

Some results need some more attention, however. The first is the finding that voluntary external mobility does not result in a higher objective income but does diminish wage dissatisfaction. If it is assumed that an employee evaluates the amount of the wage with the tasks that have to be performed in the job, the evaluation of the wage can become more favourable after a voluntary move even if the employee does not earn a penny more or a penny less: this would be so if the tasks in the new job are more in accordance with the wage. The more experienced employees become within the firm, the more employers use them for different tasks. These shifts in tasks and responsibility are not always accompanied with a higher financial contribution. The reason why there is objective progress after voluntary changes within the firm could then

be that these changes are often official internal promotions, which combine heavier duties with a corresponding higher wage.

The finding with regard to the returns to voluntary external moves shows that they do decrease the aggravation experienced from physically heavy work. This finding is notable in the light of the earlier finding that employees who experience such aggravation actually are less often mobile than those workers who do not face problems regarding heavy work. It seems to be the case that members of this group perceive their chances to be lower than they are in reality.

Finally, workload diminishes markedly by finding a different employer, while those employees who experience a heavy workload are often internally mobile. This discrepancy in findings can arise because employees who experience a heavy workload and who do mentally heavy work often occupy the most challenging positions. In these cases workload is not a negative characteristic, but just 'part of the job'. The higher odds of voluntary internal mobility possibly indicates the higher likelihood that the people in challenging jobs, and who work hard at them, also receive opportunities to rise in the firm's hierarchy. That they, as a consequence, still experience the same amount of workload after such promotions is not strange at all. Apparently there is also another group that tries to escape workload by changing employers. The results show that this strategy is sound.

## Conclusions

This article aimed to assess the extent to which Dutch employees voluntarily change positions, the extent to which a low score on objective and subjectively evaluated job characteristics invokes voluntary mobility, and the returns this voluntary mobility brings in terms of status, income and subjectively experienced person-job fit, by making use of nine waves of longitudinal information, pertaining to the time span of 1986 to 2002.

The analyses show that the phenomenon of voluntary mobility is widespread among Dutch employees, particularly in times of low unemployment rates and high economic growth. Labour psychologists suggest that the expectation that a poor match between job preferences and actual job characteristics causes employees to start thinking of finding another place in the labour market that better satisfies their wishes. Taking account of a diverse range of common causes of voluntary mobility and job characteristics, it was found that not objective job characteristics such as income and status, but subjective factors such as dissatisfaction with the wage, the working hours, and a poor match between capabilities and job content increased the likelihood of voluntary mobility. This was also the case for an unfavourably evaluated person-job fit with regard to content and colleagues, and workload. General job dissatisfaction in most cases was the most powerful predictor of voluntary mobility. The results show that satisfaction with one's income is merely one factor

among many others which cause workers to leave their current job for another. This finding implies that understanding mobility goes beyond the question whether one is satisfied with one's wage. Altogether, these findings corroborate the proposition that unfavourable subjectively evaluated job characteristics, whether they are intrinsic or extrinsic, are important push-factors to quit the current job, with the expectation of getting a job that satisfies one's needs to a greater extent.

This expectation proves not to be unfounded. Returns to voluntary mobility were found both in terms of objective status and income, and in terms of indicators of subjectively evaluated 'person-job fit'. Voluntary changes of employer result in higher wages, mobility within the firm in higher wages and status. Voluntary external mobility causes a decrease in dissatisfaction with the wage, with colleagues and job content, and lowers the workload experienced, the aggravation of physically heavy work and burnout complaints. Changing place within the firm also reduces income dissatisfaction and the unfavourable evaluation of colleagues and content. Both voluntary external and internal mobility therefore have a strong reducing impact on general job dissatisfaction. The article has thus extended understanding about returns to mobility to a wider range of job characteristics, including the subjective evaluation of an individual's person-job fit. These returns to voluntary mobility indicate that position changes contribute not only directly to a joyful life on the work floor but probably also indirectly to the functioning of the economy in general.

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## Notes

- 1 Other research uses a more objective measurement of skill balance and shows that a surplus of the worker's own skills over skills demanded by the work done, sharply increases general job dissatisfaction (see for instance Rose, 2005b). As the data do not provide objective measurements of workers' and job skills, there is a need to rely on the worker's subjective evaluation of this skill balance.
- 2 Here, we leave aside the – nevertheless interesting – question to what extent there are dissatisfied workers who nevertheless do not search for another job and eventually change positions at the labour market, and who those 'dissatis-

fied stayers' (see Kalleberg and Mastekaasa, 2001) are in the Netherlands. This question was answered in the research report that is the basis of the present article, and found that particularly older workers, lower educated workers and workers who have children, stay in their jobs even if they feel dissatisfied about it (Gesthuizen and Dagevos, 2005).

- 3 It is unclear to what extent this attrition is selective regarding voluntary mobility. If particularly mobile employees leave the panel, this would result in an underestimation of the relationship between job characteristics and mobility, and possibly also in an underestimation of the returns to mobility.
- 4 The following items were deleted from the analyses: dissatisfaction with the working hours, dissatisfaction with the type of contract, 'is conveyor belt work aggravating?', and 'is working with people aggravating?' The factor solution of the year 2002 is almost identical to the solution of 2000.
- 5 We refrain from discussing the results that pertain to these control variables.

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