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Managing Job Commitment of Young Professionals in Germany's Green Industry

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## **Managing Job Commitment of young Professionals in Germany's green Industry**

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### **1. Introduction, Knowledge, Objectives**

Due to the demographic change to a higher rate of elderly people, skills shortage is expected in Germany. Especially vocational fields that have a rather unprofitable image in the German society are concerned (Eberhard et al., 2009). Green industries like horticulture and landscape construction are affected in particular because of hard working conditions including fluctuating working hours and physical strain (Bitsch, 1996). The number of apprentices in horticultural vocations has been declining since the last ten years (BMELV, 2011). Further on, the number of vocational school and technical college students, who are supposed to be the future executives, is too low. It will not be sufficient in the future to meet the requirements of the job market (Kerstjens, 2009).

Employees' commitment is a key factor for companies to be competitive and successful in the future (Matzler and Renzl, 2007). Therefore, the aim of this study was to analyse job commitment drivers of young professionals in green industry companies and to establish a personnel management information system to improve working conditions effectively and increase the industry's attractiveness.

### **2. Material and Methods**

During the past decades social and market research methodology generated a broad variety of approaches to explore satisfaction and commitment (Herzberg, 1959; Martilla and James, 1977). Dual importance mapping is a state-of-the-art-method to analyse satisfaction and commitment drivers. It includes respondent-stated and statistically-derived attribute importance (Brandt and Scharioth, 1998). The related grid consists of two axes named explicit and implicit importance. Explicit importance contains the means of requested importance. The implicit importance can result from correlation coefficients (Oliver, 1997). Thereby, a third analytical dimension is added for a comprehensive management-oriented application. It reflects the respondents' satisfaction with the attributes' performance.

A study was set up by means of dual importance mapping. Data collection was carried out in a paper & pencil study among 446 vocational school and technical college students in Germany. Students had at least one year work experience in a horticultural company.

The questionnaire covered the student's job conditions at their current or last work place. Questions asked for the importance and satisfaction of 32 different aspects that correspond with job quality and conditions on a 5-point scale (1: not important / satisfied at all; 5: very important / satisfied). The aspect that are ranged into the constructs *workplace conditions*, *work activities*, *colleagues / team*, *career*, *remuneration* and *superior / head*,

are displayed in table 1. In addition, an overall commitment index was surveyed. The sample was weighted to adjust its composition to the population with respect to education level and horticultural sub-sector.

Table 1. Constructs and related items explaining job commitment

Construct	Nº	Item	Average satisfaction	Pearson correlation coefficient***
Workplace conditions	W1	Cleanliness and order	4.16	0.328
	W2	Suitable work and staffrooms	3.80	0.269
	W3	Availability of work equipment	4.64	0.473
	W4	Provision of work clothes	4.12	0.367
	W5	Good organisation of working time	4.23	0.371
	W6	Adequate stress level	4.00	0.515
Work activities	A7	Well organised work processes	4.55	0.557
	A8	Diversified activities	4.42	0.485
	A9	Sense of work is discernible	4.50	0.568
	A10	Enabling new tasks	4.14	0.494
	A11	Enabling work on own responsibility	4.40	0.361
	A12	Work to rejoice in	4.39	0.632
Colleagues / Team	T13	Team work	4.41	0.488
	T14	Bond of trust between colleagues	4.44	0.437
	T15	Mutual support	4.55	0.458
	T16	Respectful treatment	4.64	0.421
	T17	Efficient flow of information	4.32	0.508
	T18	Events organised by company	3.73	0.358
Career	C19	Career opportunities within company	4.11	0.557
	C20	Offers of training courses	4.10	0.471
	C21	Professional success	4.28	0.633
	C22	Work-life-balance	4.11	0.444
	C23	Enabling contribution of new ideas	4.09	0.583
Remuneration	R24	Adequate remuneration	4.44	0.361
	R25	Secure income	4.68	0.441
	R26	Special payments	4.10	0.306
Superior / Head	S27	Superior shows trust	4.47	0.586
	S28	Recognition of own person	4.44	0.594
	S29	Feedback about work performance	4.19	0.565
	S30	Support by superior	4.25	0.603
	S31	Correct instructions	4.34	0.555
	S32	Goal-oriented problem handling	4.28	0.613

\*\*\* Annotation: All correlations are significant on a 0.01 level

### 3. Results

The explicit importance of the dual importance grid is measured on its abscissa and the implicit importance (correlation of each attribute with the overall commitment) on its ordinate (figure 1). The grid classification into the four fields '**Motivators**', '**Opportunities**', '**Necessities**' and '**Possible savings**' occurs according to the positioning of the median

curves (abscissa = 4.30, ordinate = 0.49). The third analytical dimension established in the grid shows the relative performance of the 32 aspects. Each item was classified into one of three categories: items with a satisfaction above-average form the upper third, average satisfying aspects belong to the middle third, and aspects with below average satisfaction make up the bottom third (figure 1).

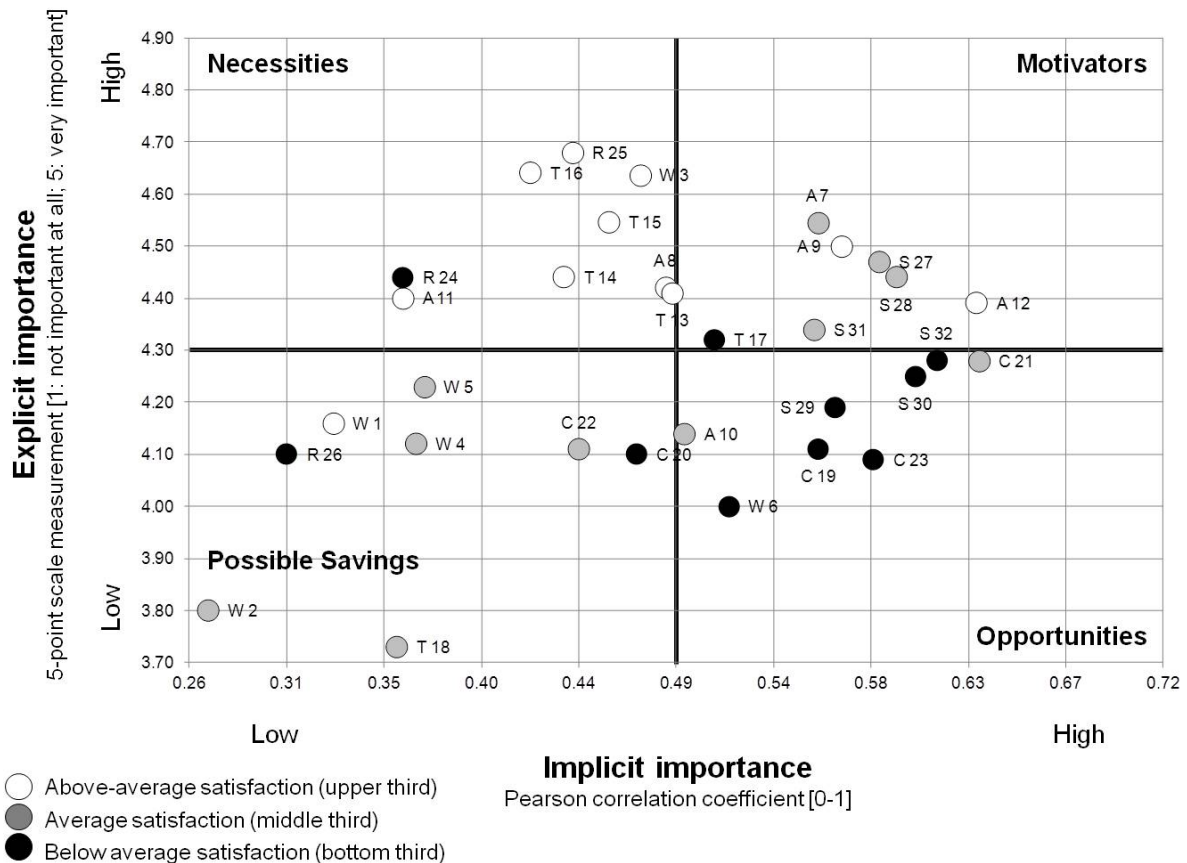


Fig. 1: Dual importance mapping of job commitment drivers

The four grid fields can be interpreted as follows: **Motivators** are most important and have a high correlation with overall satisfaction. Therefore, they have the highest influence on commitment. Attributes of the quadrant **Opportunities** have a high driver impact as well, because employees can be positively surprised due to the fact that they ascribe only little importance to them. This can be a starting point for effective improvements, because average or over-average satisfaction could be aimed with these items. The attributes in the **Necessities** quadrant have only a low influence on overall satisfaction, but employees are aware of them. Thus, the employer must keep an eye on them. **Possible Savings** are less important and have the lowest influence on overall satisfaction. One should not focus on these attributes independent from the level of satisfaction. Moreover, it has to be reflected whether cost cuttings are an option or not.

Out of these assumptions the correct order to interpret the results is to start with the quadrants **Motivators** and **Necessities** because these attributes have the highest explicit importance and can be seen as the drivers of commitment. Additionally the black symbols

represent under average satisfaction with specific items and therefore have to be improved at first. Subsequently, the examination of the grey symbols follows because the satisfaction with these attributes can still be improved. In a next step, melioration of attributes in the **Opportunities** field offers chances to surprise employees as they do not explicitly focus on them. However, these aspects have high impact on commitment, and improvement may sustainably increase commitment. At last, one has to attend the quadrant **Possible Savings**, in that the interpretation order arises respectively analogous to the colouring of the items.

The attribute *Efficient flow of information* (T17) should be improved first as it is positioned in the **Motivators** field and the employee's satisfaction is only below average. Many elements in the **Motivators** field can predominantly be found within the constructs *work activities* and *superior / head*, at which especially satisfaction with the latter attributes is on average level only and can be improved. Examples are the aspects *Superior shows trust* (S27), *Recognition of own person* (S28) and *Correct instructions* (S31). Prerequisites, that are noticeable in the quadrant **Necessities**, can be attached to the construct *colleagues/team* for the most part. Respondents evaluate the performance of these attributes entirely above average. However, the attribute *Adequate remuneration* (R24) generates only below average satisfaction. Within the **Opportunities** quadrant, employees are satisfied on average or below average level with many attributes assigned to the construct *career* and *superior / head*. Examples are *Career opportunities within company* (C19), *Professional success* (C21) and *Enabling contribution* (C23). At last, the attributes' performance within the quadrant **Possible Savings** is on (below) average level e.g. for *Provision of work clothes* (W4) and *Good organisation of working time* (W5).

In summary, the leadership behaviour of the superior / head has to be improved, but simultaneously the necessities meet demands above average.

#### 4. Discussion

Job commitment research has been conducted repeatedly in the horticultural sector (e.g. Bitsch, 1996; Bitsch, 2007), and main implications of earlier studies are similar to this study. Bitsch (1996) has already pointed out the lack of interest of young people on horticultural avocations. Especially working conditions and remuneration were named as reasons (Bitsch, 1996). Bitsch (1996) suggested to improve the image of the horticultural vocational field in society and to strengthen the appreciation of apprentices, the participation in decision making and an advanced training within their enterprises. These results are also reflected in the present study.

However, earlier studies mainly used qualitative or basic quantitative methodology, while this study applied a new analytical approach. Dual importance mapping is an appropriate tool within management-oriented employee commitment research. The advantages of this method are the visual mapping of key drivers and the easy readout of the results.

A main point of critique of the dual importance grid is the placement of the gridlines which relies on subjective decision without any statistical method (Martilla and James, 1997; Matzler et al., 2001; Oliver, 1997). In this case, the positions of the gridlines were chosen according to the median curves. Thereby, equal numbers of attributes were located on both sides of the gridlines and relatively strong and weak topics become apparent.

*Adequate remuneration* (R24) generates a comparable low satisfaction and is positioned in the **Necessities** quadrant. In general, necessities aspects should be kept on a satisfying

level. In this case, improvement would require enormous financial effort. However, according to the author's experience from many job commitment projects in the service industry, this aspect shows similar characteristics and performance in many cases, even in the well-paid banking sector.

Improvement of many aspects in the **Opportunities** field is primarily not cost-intensive. It is rather needed to change career management and leadership behaviour of superiors in a company. Giving feedback about work performance, giving support by superior and goal-oriented problem handling bears major potential to increase job commitment. Further on, enabling contribution of new ideas is not only an opportunity to raise commitment, but also to profit from employees' creativity and dedication.

## 5. Conclusions

The introduced method of dual importance mapping is an adequate tool to give an overview about the status quo in horticultural enterprises and to identify drivers of commitment as a possibility to stay competitive on the employment market. In a further step, the identified drivers can be translated into practical options for action by management.

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