Why do HR-professionals demote?

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INTRODUCTION

According to Rosenbaum, promotions and demotions have always been part of people’s working lives. An historical tournament mobility model was developed, which conceptualizes careers as concatenations of competitions. Each competition has winners and losers influencing the individual’s mobility towards promotion, demotion or lateral transition (Rosenbaum, 1979).

Demotion, a downward transition, is a very important instrument for career management (Hall and Isabella, 1985). Moreover, it helps putting the right person in the right place within the company (Miner and Miner, 1985), which influences career growths. Lazear and Shaw (2007) argue within the personnel economics theories that upward and downward mobility influences productivity. Despite the importance of demotion for careers, researchers indicate that demotion has received little attention (Carson and Carson, 2007, Hall and Isabella, 1985, Kohl and Stephens, 1990, More, 1962, Sargent, 2003).

A demotion follows a certain cause (in the present paper cause and reason are used as a synonym to motive). It is important for the HR-professional to make an inventory of the diverse causes of demotion to become more conscious of the motives for demotion and to be able to explain this motive to his demotee. Bies (1987) has explored the acceptance of an unfavorable decision due to a clear explanation. Social psychologists, on the basis of Bies’ research, clarify that explaining the cause can work as mitigating circumstance (Brockner et al, 1990). That is, the understanding and the acceptance of a (transition) decision will improve.

Employers are reticent to demote because of the negative effect demotion can have on employees, such as demotivation and recalcitrance (Carson and Carson, 2007, Kohl and
Stephens, 1990). However, researchers on demotion indicate that employees are inclined to accept a demotion if they know the employer’s reasons for the demotion (Isabella and Hall, 1984, Kohl and Stephens, 1990, Ng et al., 2007, Stephens and Kohl, 1989). This is in line with the social psychology theories as previously mentioned.

Careers changed dramatically over time (Adamson, Doherty and Viney, 1998, Baruch, 2004, Brousseau et al, 1996, Hall, 1996a, Powell, 2002, Sullivan, 1999, Thomas and Dunkerly, 1999). While the macro context changes, motives for career transitions change too. For example, the workforce evolved from a greening labour market (which means there is an high amount of young workers) in the sixties towards an ageing labour market (which means there is an high amount of older workers) today. As a result of this actual ageing workforce, older employees are expected to work longer. This trend influences the motives for employees to choose for certain career transitions, as some of these older workers, obliged to work longer, want to evolve to less demanding work environments (Burtless and Quinn, 2002, Rappaport, Bancroft and Okum, 2003, Remmery- et al., 2003). Among others, such a career transition is a demotion.

**Study objectives**

This paper aims to provide insights into the motives HR-professionals bring forward today for demoting their employees. Motives for demotion may relate to various stakeholders, for example an employee can choose to demote in exchange for job security (Holmes and Cartwright, 1994, Levinson, 1978). The employer (in the present paper in the role of the HR-professional) can, for example, demote for employability reasons (Arthur, Khapova and Wilderom, 2005). As the HR-professional demotes, he is a very important stakeholder in the
demotion process. Therefore, it is relevant to question HR-professionals on their demotion motives.

First this paper inventories the different motives for demotion cited in literature. In addition Belgian HR-professionals are asked through a survey under which conditions they would demote.

Motives for demotion may be influenced by the country culture in general and by the organizational culture in particular (Dries, Pepermans and De Kerpel, 2008, Hofstede et al, 1990, Wood, 2000). For example the Belgian culture towards work differs from the Japanese work culture (Takahashi, 2006). Therefore, it is relevant to restrict a study on motives for demotion to one particular country. In the present paper a Belgian study is presented.

Based on the data from this survey, the study aims to cluster HR-professionals’ motives for demotion. These motives differ according to the stakeholder, employer or employee, involved. This means, that an employer can demote because he wants to optimize his company. An employee can ask for a demotion because he wants to broaden his skills at a lower level in order to promote in the future. Each stakeholder has his own objectives to choose for a demotion. Therefore, these clusters are situated in a company’s and an employee’s context. We have to keep in mind that the survey explores the motives for demotion which the HR-professional applies. That means that in “an employee’s context” the HR-professional can demote or allow demotion to serve or protect his employee: for example when the employee asks for a demotion (self-request) or when the employee cannot cope with his work (Peter Principle).
Theoretical background

Motives for demotion

Previous studies examined the motives for demotion, which we can divide into three levels: macro, meso and micro. The macro, or society, level refers to the motives of demotion as a result of the economic climate. The meso level expresses the motives that drive companies, and in particular the employers, towards demoting their employees. The micro level represents the motives of employees for choosing demotion. Some motives for demotion are suggested by employers as well as employees and therefore they are situated on the meso as well as on the micro level. In what follows, as a result of the literature study, the motives for demotion are discussed. An overview is schematically presented in Table one.

It is more and more common to demote, especially in times of slower growth and economic downturn (Kohl and Stephens, 1990, Ng et al, 2007, Stephens and Kohl 1989). On a macro level, economic recession is an indirect motive for demotion on a meso level. The recession influences the decision making of employers regarding demotion. Employers demote their employees in an economic decline to retain the employees’ experience and knowledge in the company and to be able to promote them again when the economic situation revives (Golembiewski, 1982). This means that promotion rates fall and demotion rates rise in recession periods (Dohmen, Kriechel and Pfann, 2004).

On a meso level “optimization” of the company expressed by mergers, reduction in force and reorganizations is a major motive for demotion (Carson and Carson, 2007, Hall and Isabella, 1985, Isabella and Hall, 1984, More, 1962, Stephens and Kohl, 1989). Demotion operates as an alternative to dismissal. Employees are willing to accept this demotion motive
in exchange for job security (Groot, 1997, Hall and Isabella, 1985, Ng et al, 2007). Industry differences and organizational staffing policies can lead to a career disequilibrium, which results into job mobility as there is demotion (Ng et al, 2007).

More (1962) enumerates 11 conditions “which increase the likelihood of demotion being used” resulting from his observation of 50 companies in the United States in the 50s and 60s (More, 1962: 214). His research shines a very negative light on the application of demotion as he explains that employers expose very arbitrary behavior in using demotion to keep control on the workforce, such as extreme paternalism, where demotion is used as a punishment (More, 1962). Demotion for punishment reasons is still practiced (Anderson, Milkovich and Tsui, 1981, Carson and Carson, 2007).

On a micro level employees request themselves to demote. For example, an employee can choose to demote, as to give himself the opportunity to broaden his skills at a lower function level, in order to put a step forward (promotion) at a later stage of his career (Hall and Isabella, 1985, Stephens and Kohl, 1989). This shows that demotion is a valuable positive human resources management practice. Or the employee can request to demote for health reasons (Groot, 1997, Kohl and Stephens, 1990, Verheyen and Vermeir, 2011). A conflict with a colleague or a hierarchically superior can lead to demotion (Verheyen and Vermeir, 2011).

Ng et al. (2007) determined individual and decisional factors which can provide motives for demotion as “personality traits, career interests, values and attachment styles”, or “subjective norms, desirability of mobility and readiness for change” (2007:376-377).

Superior or poor performances are motives for respectively promotion and dismissal (Hofstede et al, 1990), but also for demotion. These motives are situated between the meso
and the micro level. Ineffective job performance, as a motive for demotion, is applied by the organization as well as by the employee (Carson and Carson, 2007, Goldner, 1965). The employer indicates that demotion is righteous when employees cannot keep their value and expertise for the company up to date (Emans, 2011). Because of the link between seniority and wage, some older employees have the feeling they have to over-perform to be worth their wage. Therefore they (as employees) choose to demote. In other words demotion is perceived as an equity instrument used by employer as well as employee to align in a greater extent wage and performance (Emans, 2011).

An overview of the examined motives for demotion on a macro, meso and micro level is shown in Table one:

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**Differences in motives according to the employee’s age**

Different generations are driven by different career values (Twenge et al, 2010, Wey Smola and Sutton, 2002). In a similar way the relation between age and career values is pointed out in previous studies on the motives for demotion. Younger employees indicate they would choose for a demotion if they could gain new experiences, give another direction to their career or gain more career options in the future. Opposite to older employees who rather choose for a demotion if it guarantees they can stay in the company, if it would give them more time for family or give them a peaceful existence (Isabella and Hall, 1984, More, 1962).

According to Schippers (1998) the reward structure is unbalanced because young employees have a higher productivity rate and earn a lower salary than the older employees who have a lower productivity rate and earn a higher salary. This situation has partly arisen from the
linkage of age with seniority. Schippers states that demotion can be a solution for this imbalance. Lowering the function of older employees and making tasks lighter in combination with a lowering in salary, may result in a better balance between the productivity rate and the salary. By an age-aware personnel policy and making the tasks lighter the career of older employees can be prolonged. The motive for demotion is not the age of the employee as such, but the salary in combination with the productivity rate (Schippers, 1998). That means that older employees are vulnerable for the imbalance between salary and productivity rate.

Research question

Careers change quickly and as a result motives for career transitions change too. The literature study reveals that employers are not intensively queried on their insights into the topic of demotion. To our knowledge, Belgian HR-professionals were never asked about their demotion motives before. The most recent study in which employers (in this study Dutch employers) were queried on the topic of demotion dates from ten years ago (Remmery et al, 2003). An actualization imposes itself. This paper’s research question therefore is: What are the current motives for demotion according to Belgian HR-professionals?

METHOD

The motives for demotion were extracted from literature. The overview of the literature served as a basis to set up an online survey. The aim of the survey is to obtain the current insights on the motives of demotion according to Belgian HR-professionals.

As stated, the motives for demotion serve certain objectives according to the stakeholder involved. There are certain objectives which have to be obtained on a company level. For
example the company has to be reorganized and demotion is a part of the right solution to this reorganization. Then reorganization is the motive to demote which serves the objective of the company. In the survey this is indicated as the employer’s context. Other motives for demotion serve the objectives of the employee, although, it is the HR-professional who decides to demote or to allow his employee to demote. In the survey this is indicated as the employee's context. These two stakeholder contexts are addressed in the questions of the survey. By clustering the HR-professionals on their motives for demotion, we expect the cluster analysis to result in different clusters of motives within the two stakeholder’s contexts.

Survey

The research focuses on HR-professionals from Belgian companies with at least 100 employees because in small companies demotion is not regularly applied (Josten & Schalk, 2010).

The survey was put online and the link was distributed through HR-services, executive search companies and HR-network organizations. During a period of four months (September until December 2012) 297 respondents logged on, 166 respondents did not answer the questionnaire completely. Most of these respondents dropped out the survey at the stage where quantitative data regarding the employees was asked, as for example the specific number of white and blue collar workers. This resulted in 131 completed questionnaires which were imported in SPSS software (IBM SPSS Statistics 20) for analysis.

The survey consists of several parts: a part focuses on the profile of the respondent and his or her company, another part gauges to the motives of demotion. This latter part of the survey consists of two questions regarding the motives to demote. One question on motives
which serve the objectives of the company and one question regarding the employee’s context.

To the first question, namely (1) [“According to you, under what conditions can a downward transition be executed tailored to the objectives of the organization?”], the HR-professional was asked to rate seven items on a five point scale ranging from “can absolutely not” to “can absolutely”.

To the second question, specifically (2) [“According to you, under what conditions can a downward transition be applied attuned to the employee?”], the respondent had to rate ten items on a five point scale ranging from “can absolutely not” to “can absolutely”.

In that way the HR-professional had to answer two questions on the motives for demotion, namely one in (1) an employer’s context and another in (2) an employee’s context.

Measures

The aim is to get insights into the motives for demotion according to HR-professionals. The literature study resulted in an inventory of motives, as presented in Table one. The motives on a macro and a meso level expressed by the employer in literature are surveyed in question one. The motives on micro level and the motives expressed in literature by employer and employee, which are between the micro and meso level, are surveyed in question two. This results in seven items in question one regarding the employer, and ten items in question two regarding the employee.

Most of the queried items are literally related to the items in the overview in Table one, some items are formulated in an alternative way to better align with the jargon of the HR-
professional. For instance the Peter Principle is not queried as such; the description “when the employee cannot cope with his work” refers to the Peter Principle.

An overview of the specific items queried in each question is presented in Table two.

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**Statistical analyses**

In examining the data in order to find homogeneous groups of HR-professionals (also referred to as “cases”) regarding the motives for demotion, a cluster analysis technique was used. There are several reasons to choose for a cluster analysis. Firstly, the two questions of the survey regarding the motives of demotion result in respectively seven and ten variables expressed by 131 cases. Cluster analysis is a data reduction tool that enables to group the cases into more manageable clusters (Burns & Burns, 2008). Moreover, the variables are measured on ordinal scale, which makes cluster analysis suitable. In addition, several researchers successfully used cluster analysis in a context of labour (Poell et al, 2006) or to organize motives into segments (Lee, Lee and Wicks, 2004, Lee et al., Lee, 2006, Vrande, Jong and Vanhaverbeke, 2009). In the present paper the cluster analyses result in clusters of HR-professionals and the characterizing motives of demotion for each of the clusters.

Since we have no prior indication of the number of clusters that is appropriate, we work in three stages: first, a hierarchical cluster analysis using Ward’s Method is carried out resulting in an indication of the appropriate number of clusters. Secondly, we rerun the hierarchical cluster analysis with the selected number of clusters. Thirdly, to verify whether the differences between the clusters are significant we apply non-parametric methods such as, a
Mann-Whitney U-test (in case of two clusters) and a Kruskal-Wallis-test (in case of three clusters) (Vrande, Jong and Vanhaverbeke, 2009: 431).

Hierarchical cluster analysis is a statistical method for clustering relatively homogeneous cases. The cluster algorithm of Ward is applied, in which an analysis of variance approach is used to evaluate the distances between clusters (Burns & Burns, 2008: 557). In order to decide if a case is member of a cluster this method calculates the total sum of squared deviations from the mean of a cluster. The case becomes a member of the cluster when it produces the smallest increase in the error sum of squares (Burns & Burns, 2008).

Because of the different perspectives (employer versus employee) for each question the cases are clustered separately. It is not necessary to standardize the 17 variables because they have the same unit of measurement, namely a five point scale.

**RESULTS**

The HR-professionals have certain characteristics; the companies they work for have characteristics too. These are taken into account in the further analysis.

**Profile of the HR-professional**

The average age of the queried HR-professional is 47 years. The youngest respondent is 26, the eldest 65 years old. Of the HR-professionals, 8.4 % is younger than 35 years, 28.4 % is between 35 and 44 years old and 63.6 % of the respondents is 45 years or older. Because of the small variance in age, namely SD 8.390, age is not taken into account as a characterization of the clusters.
The sample is nearly equally composed regarding gender: 49% of the respondents are women, 51% are men.

**Industrial sector**

The NACE-code ("NACE-Bel", 2014), was used to classify the economic activities of the companies (of which the HR-professional is a member of) into industrial sectors. However, some sectors had very small frequencies, the sectors were very divers and the amount of sectors was too large to be workable. Therefore the industries were recoded to three global sectors: services oriented, production oriented and non-profit companies. The recoded data show that 55% of the companies are services oriented (e.g. ICT-companies), 29% are production oriented (e.g. construction companies) and 16% are non-profit oriented (e.g. health care institutions).

The cluster analyses result in today’s motives for demotion according to a sample of Belgian HR-professionals. What follows is the analysis of the data of the two questions of the survey.

The analysis of the first question regarding the motives of demotion tailored to the objectives of the company was executed on 124 valid cases (n = 124). In order to determine the number of clusters, a hierarchical cluster analyses, according to Ward’s method, was carried out. Table three shows a plot of the agglomeration coefficients.

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The column “Change” explains adequately the choice for two clusters. The figure marked in bold, shows the biggest difference between two clusters and three clusters. The lowest number of clusters is chosen, namely two. If we process the cluster analysis again, having this knowledge, we can explain the characteristics of each cluster and the differences
between the two clusters (cluster one: n = 50, cluster two: n = 74). A Mann-Whitney U-test verifies whether the differences between the two clusters are significant. Each of the clusters is corresponding with specific motives for demotion tailored to the objectives of the company.

Table four presents the means of the clustering variables for each of the two clusters and the significance level of the Mann-Whitney-U-test. This test shows that the differences between the clusters for all variables are significant.

The analysis states that cluster one is predominantly characterized by “when there is reorganization”, followed by “to keep over-50s at work”, “to guarantee job security” and “when there is a reduction in force”. “When cost efficiency is pursued” and “when there is an economic downturn” score the lowest. Cluster two is predominantly characterized by “when there is a reduction in force”, followed by “when there is a reorganization” and “when there is a merger”. This cluster also has the lowest score for “when cost efficiency is pursued” and “when there is an economic downturn”.

When we compare both clusters, we see that the mean scores differ the most between the clusters for “when there is an economic downturn” and “when cost efficiency is pursued”.

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With respect to other variables, such as sector and gender, we notice the following differences between the two clusters: In cluster one the production sector stands for 35 %, the service sector for 57 % and the non-profit sector for 8 % of the cases. In cluster two the production sector stands for 25.5 %, the service sector for 53.5 % and the non-profit sector for 21 % of the cases. Cluster one consists of 59 % women and 41% men, cluster two consists of 48 % women and 52 % men.
We can conclude that the HR-professionals of the first cluster demote “when there is reorganization”, “to keep over-50s at work” and “to guarantee job security”. The cases of cluster one, compared to the cases of cluster two, occur more in production oriented companies. In cluster two HR-professionals demote “when there is a reduction in force”. The cases of cluster two, compared to cluster one, occur more in the non-profit companies. The cases in cluster one are in majority female HR-professionals and in cluster two male HR-professionals.

The analysis of the second question considering the motives of demotion tailored to the objectives of the employee was executed on 123 valid cases (n = 123). The methodology applied for question one, was repeated for question two. In Appendix the agglomeration plot, the means per cluster with the significance level of the Kruskal-Wallis-test are provided (see Table seven and eight). The agglomeration plot (Table seven) shows clearly the choice for three clusters. By rerunning the hierarchical cluster analysis for three clusters, we can see the differences between the clusters (cluster one: n = 38, cluster two: n = 72, cluster three: n = 13). A Kruskal-Wallis-test verifies whether the differences between the three clusters are significant. Each of the clusters is corresponding with specific motives for demotion attuned to the objectives of the employee. Table eight presents the means of the clustering variables for each of the three clusters.

The cluster analysis shows that cluster one is predominantly characterized by “self-request by employee”, “when the employee cannot cope with his work”, “when the employee is not productive enough”, “when the employee performs under the expected level regarding the job content”, “when the employee does not reach the expected level” and “as an alternative to dismissal”. “A conflict with a colleague” or “a hierarchically superior individual” and “long-
term illness” score rather average. Cluster two is predominantly characterized by “self-request by employee” followed by “when the employee cannot cope with his work”. “When the employee performs under the expected level regarding the job content”, “as an alternative to dismissal”, “when the employee does not reach the expected productivity level” and “when the employee is not productive enough” score rather average. The lowest scores are for “a conflict with a colleague” or “a hierarchically superior individual”. The mean scores of the third cluster are in general lower than the other clusters. This cluster is predominantly characterized by “self-request by individual”. Average scores are for “long-term illness of the employee” and “to guarantee job security”. “When the employee performs under the expected level regarding the job content” scores the lowest. Other low scores are for “a conflict with a colleague” or “a hierarchically superior individual”, “when the employee is not productive enough”, “as an alternative to dismissal” and “when the employee does not reach the expected productivity level”.

The Kruskal-Wallis-test in Table eight shows that the differences between the clusters for all variables are significant, except for the variable “self-request by employee”. The mean values of cluster one and three differ the most for “when the employee performs under the expected level regarding the job content”, this difference is the highest of all differences between the three clusters. This is followed by “when the employee does not reach the expected productivity level” and “as an alternative to dismissal”. Between cluster two and three the mean values differ the most for “when the employee performs under the expected level regarding the job content” and “when the employee does not reach the expected productivity level”. The differences in mean values between cluster one and three are very small. For the variables “to guarantee job security” and “long-term illness of the employee”
the pairwise differences in mean values, this is between cluster one and two, between cluster one and three and between cluster two and three are the smallest (< 1).

Within the clusters different sectors are present. In cluster one the production sector represents 29 %, the service sector 55.5 % and the non-profit 15.5 %, for cluster two that is respectively 31 %, 49% and 20% of the cases. In cluster three the production sector represents 23 % of the cases, the service sector 77 % and the service sector is not represented at all (0 %). In cluster one there are 64.5 % female professionals and 35.5 % male professionals. In cluster two that is respectively 45 % and 55 % and in cluster three there are 38.5 % female professionals and 61.5 % male professionals.

We can conclude that three clusters of HR-professionals can be distinguished regarding the motives for demotion attuned to the employee’s objectives. The first cluster is characterized by motives regarding the performance of the employee, such as “when the employee cannot cope with his work”, “when he is not productive enough”, “when he performs under the expected level regarding the job content” or “when he does not reach the expected productivity level”. These motives are expressed more by queried female HR-professionals. In the second cluster demotion is used as “an alternative to dismissal”. This motive occurs mostly in the non-profit and production sector. The non-profit sector has the highest score of all three clusters in the second cluster. The third cluster is characterized by motives regarding long-term illness of the employee and to guarantee job security. These motives are expressed more by queried male HR-professionals and do not occur in the non-profit sector at all. The service sector is well represented within this cluster.

It is notable that “self-request by employee” scores the highest in the three clusters. However, the differences in mean values are not significant. “Conflicts with a colleague” or
“with a hierarchically superior individual” score the lowest in mean values in the three clusters. Therefore we can conclude that conflicts on the work floor are not an issue regarding motives for demotion.

**DISCUSSION: the current motives for demotion**

The HR-professionals were queried on their insights regarding the motives of demotion. In dealing with the formulated research question, the analysis reveal that the first question results in two clusters of motives and the second question results in three clusters of motives for demotion. Moreover, the analysis reveals that some motives for demotion are less indicative and therefore they are less valuable for the results. The motives that are highly characterizing the clusters are listed in the overview in Table five. This overview gives the clusters of motives for demotion in order to attain the objectives of the employer and the employee as an answer to the paper’s research question.

Put Table five here

For the purpose of the objectives of the company (in Table five “the employer”) the HR-professional will execute a downward transition for two major reasons. On the one hand the HR-professional (of cluster one) demotes for reorganization and security reasons. That means he twists careers in order to reorganize the company, he demotes in order to keep over-50s at work and to guarantee job security to his employees. The latter is a motive for demotion for the company in the sense that the employer offers his employee the opportunity to keep a job within the company, even if it is on a lower function level. Reorganization as a motive for demotion is in line with prior research (Hall and Isabella, 1985, Isabella and Hall, 1984, More, 1962). Moreover, reorganization is also associated with economic decline (Dohmen, Kriechel and Pfann, 2004, Golembiewski, 1982, Ng et al, 2007),
which is still a current treat on the labour market (Kotz, 2009). Applying demotion to guarantee job security and to keep over-50s at work could be seen in the light of the aim of the psychological contract as a part of the linear career, which is job security (Baruch, 2004). Each generation is driven by different career values (Twenge et al, 2010, Wey Smola and Sutton, 2002). Generation X grew up with the linear career type (Dries, Pepermans and De Kerpel, 2008, Glass, 2007, Martin, 2005, Sullivan et al, 2009). The average age of the queried HR-professionals is 47 years. This age corresponds with a member of Generation X (Dries, Pepermans and De Kerpel, 2008, Glass, 2007, Martin, 2005, Sullivan et al, 2009). This could be an explanation for the choice for this motive for demotion, although the age of the queried HR-professional is not necessarily in line with the age of the employees currently present on the work floor. That means that the HR-professional could choose in line with his own age, or in line with the age of his employees. It has to be said that the careers have changed from linear to multidirectional and brought along overwhelming changes in careers and career values (Baruch, 2004, Brown, 2000). However, this is strongly downsized by Baruch, who indicates that although careers have changed, much of career theories and practices are still valid in Western societies (Baruch, 2006). Therefore, one could say that it is normal that job security is a current motive for demotion.

The linear career is also perceived as successful when pay, promotion and status are high (Arthur, Khapova and Wilderom, 2005, Arthur and Rousseau, 2001, Dries, Pepermans and De Kerpel, 2008). When today's HR-professionals demote their employees pay, promotion and status are up to discussion (Verheyen and Guerry, 2014). This can lead to demotivation of the employee. In other words today's HR-professional should seek for new factors for success in the employee's career, and new ways to motivate if he wants the employees facing demotion, belonging to Generation X, to accept their demotion. Guaranteeing job
security as a motive for demoting employees belonging to Generation Y will not guarantee success: while these employees are seeking for employability instead of job security within their psychological contract (Arthur, Khapova and Wilderom, 2005, Arthur and Rousseau, 2001).

On the other hand the HR-professional (of cluster two) demotes for optimization reasons. For example the HR-professional twists careers in order to flatten the organizational structure. Carson and Carson (2007) explain that a reduction in force is a motive for demotion in the way that the HR-professional reduces the number of employees but retains the good performers. For the latter the demotion is less embarrassing or stigmatizing as they are not failures, but on the contrary hard workers (Carson and Carson, 2007).

Next to the motives applied by HR-professionals attuned to the objectives of the company, the HR-professional also applies a downward transition attuned to the objectives of the employee (in Table five “the employee”). Here we have three clusters, each with its characteristics regarding the motives of demotion. “Self-request by employee” is a motive for demotion that is not characterizing a specific cluster. It is the most important motive in each cluster, but differences between the clusters regarding this item are not significant. It seems socially desirable that the HR-professional prefers this motive. In practice however the employee is sometimes paralyzed by the situation or is not always that self-conscious to be able to choose this motive. Moreover, some companies have a company culture where a self-request is not negotiable or some companies have no demotion policy. Kohl and Stephens specify the motive “self-request by employee” more in detail in their research (Kohl and Stephens, 1989). Self-request could be initiated by health problems, by the opportunity to broaden the employee’s skills at a lower level, or to rebalance work and life.
However, our survey does not detail the self-request as a motive. It is remarkable that self-request is much more strongly expressed in the survey than it is present in previous scientific research. An explanation could be found in the fact that when the employee requests himself to demote, the consequences of the demotion will be more positive than when the employer imposes a demotion (Verheyen and Vermeir, 2011).

The “self-request by the employee”-motive can ensure that employees who choose themselves to demote are less obstructive in cooperating in the demotion process (Carson and Carson, 2007, Kohl and Stephens, 1990). It could also lead to more space to talk about the preconditions of demotion as a lowering in salary.

Next to self-request, the first cluster focuses on poor performance. Literature refers extensively to bad performance as a motive for demotion (Anderson, Milkovich and Tsui, 1981, Goldner, 1965, Carson and Carson, 2007 and Emans, 2011). The difference in the present paper is that these motives are indicated by the employer attuned to the employee and not, as cited in some literature, indicated by the employee himself (Carson and Carson, 2007, Goldner, 1965). The second cluster focuses on alternatively dismissal as a motive for demotion. Demotion as an alternative for dismissal is a motive of the employee (Hall and Isabella, 1985, Stephens and Kohl, 1989), who is prepared to work on a lower function level if it guarantees he can keep his job. The third cluster focuses on security as “long-term illness of the employee” and “to guarantee job security” are characterizing motives for this cluster. These motives were also cited by Groot (1997) and Ng et al. (2007). In literature the difference between alternatively dismissal and guaranteeing job security is very small.
It is remarkable that “conflict with a colleague” or “with a hierarchically superior” are not present as characterizing the motives of the clusters. In contrast, these motives are strongly brought to front as motives for dismissal (Hofstede et al, 1990).

If we compare the motives for demotion found in literature (Table one) with the HR-professionals’ current motives (Table five) as a result of the survey, the clusters indicate more similarities than differences in motives for demotion. Careers changed as a result of economic crises, organizational flattening and downsizing, technological progression and globalization (Adamson, Doherty and Viney, 1998, Sargent, 2003, Sullivan, 1999, Sullivan and Baruch, 2009). Career values have also changed (Twenge et al, 2010, Wey Smola and Sutton, 2002). Despite of these changes, career theory and practice has not changed that dramatically (Baruch, 2006).

**Relating the demotion typology with the motives for demotion**

Demotion is an unambiguous concept with different meanings and several dimensions. Verheyen and Guerry (2014) set up a typology of demotion by clustering HR-professionals’ associations of demotion dimensions with demotion. Each type of demotion is characterized by specific dimensions of demotion. The HR-professionals associate demotion with a specific initiator: it is or an initiative of the employer or of the employee. They associate demotion with a change in job conditions or in job content. And the HR-professional associates demotion with a change in personal or in work-life balance (Verheyen and Guerry, 2014).

The relation between this demotion typology and the motives for demotion is presented in Table six. With this Table we want to examine whether an HR-professional who demotes for a specific motive, does so because of his association with certain dimensions of demotion.
In examining the relation between the typology of demotion and the motives for demotion we notice some remarkable figures. An HR-professional who associates demotion with the employer as initiator will predominantly demote for optimization motives. The HR-professional who associates demotion with a change in job content will predominantly demote for poor performance motives.

When an HR-professional associates demotion with a change in job content, he will demote for reorganization, security or optimization motives. An HR-professional who associates demotion with a change in work-life balance will not demote for security motives.

**Conclusion**

This survey has revealed and clustered the current motives for demotion. As a result the number of motives is reduced, which makes it immediately apparent which core motives of demotion current HR-professionals apply.

Verheyen and Guerry pointed out that it is very important when characterizing demotion to indicate the context, employer or employee, in which demotion is perceived (Verheyen and Guerry, 2014). In characterizing the motives for demotion the context also demonstrated its important role since different contexts lead to different motives for demotion.
REFERENCES


Verheyen, T. and Vermeir, B. (2011), *Remotie, een stap terug is een stap vooruit*, Kluwer, Mechelen. [Remotion, a step back is a step forward]

