

**REPORT ON THE OPENING AND CLOSING SESSIONS OF 24orMORE
International conference of the Task Force Part-Time Plus on increasing female labour
participation in the Netherlands
Warehouse De Zwijger, Amsterdam – November 5-6, 2009**

Thursday November 5

When the delegates, 125 in total, arrived at Warehouse De Zwijger in Amsterdam's former docklands on Thursday November 5, considerable preparatory work had already been done. At a dinner attended by CEOs, academics and other decision makers the previous night, questions on five themes had been distilled from the conversation at each of the tables. The themes were *Time for Change, Yes We Can!, Help!, Labour Participation in Times of Recession* and *Can You Feel a Brand-new Day?*. The conference set out to find answers to the questions.

Pia Dijkstra, a high-profile Dutch media personality who has chaired the Task Force Part-Time Plus since it started work in April 2008, presided over the conference. She welcomed the participants to the first day, which was devoted to the exchange of new insights, knowledge and information. Dijkstra briefly explained the purpose of the conference: to place the labour participation of women in the Netherlands in international and academic perspective and find ways to increase it. After assuring the audience that the debate would present both theoretical and practical viewpoints, she observed that people tend to look at only one aspect of the issue, e.g. childcare.

There is, Dijkstra said, a structural lack of working capacity in the Netherlands. Promising to look at the position of women in past, present and future, she asserted that in the Netherlands women's emancipation has stagnated. She then introduced five PhD students from universities around the country who had undertaken to discuss the questions relating to the five themes with the delegates, digest the input received and formulate answers. At the previous night's dinner, each of the students had had discussions with one or two CEOs about employment-related angles on their theme.

Five themes, five speakers

Mariska van der Horst (Utrecht University) said she wanted to find out how change can be brought about that will make women's career choices more flexible and lead to improvements for both men and women. **Bart Loog** (Maastricht University) intended to find out how enough flexibility can be created now to ensure that enough women will be available to work in the future, when the recession is over. Dijkstra asked him to narrow his focus in the execution of this task. The next PhD student, **Anja-Kristin Abendroth**, juxtaposed the price women have to pay for working and the value they gain from doing so. She hoped to pick up suggestions from researchers and perhaps find different solutions for different segments of the working population.

Positive news came from **Serena Does** (Leiden University) who, thanks to the CEOs at her table, had already found some answers on Wednesday night. She saw a need to think outside of the box in the efforts made to increase social flexibility. **Saskia de Munnik** (Gelderland Province), the fifth delegate with a special task, had also gained some insights from her contact with the CEO allocated to her. She stated her intention to find out which core values can attract women to the workforce and keep them there.

Ellen Galinsky: keynote speaker from the US

State Secretary Jetta Klijnsma, who had agreed to formally open the conference, had been delayed by heavy traffic. Dijkstra therefore decided to rearrange the programme and give the floor to **Ellen Galinsky**, chair and co-founder of the Families and Work Institute (FWI) in New York and the author of more than 40 books and reports. One of seven delegates who had come to Amsterdam from the USA, Galinsky and her not-for-profit institute take a broad view, beyond the American labour force. In a short space of time, she ran through a wealth of research results. "But we are not just a think tank," she insisted, "we're also an action tank." The institute also instigates community change experiments and organizes the Sloan Awards for Business Excellence in Workplace Flexibility.

The first study Galinsky mentioned was the *National Study of the Changing Workforce*, a project started in 1977 by the US Department of Labor. The most comprehensive nationally representative study on the American workforce, it was continued in 1992 by FWI, which publishes updates every five years. Galinsky went on to discuss some of FWI's other programmes, among them the *National Study of Employers* and a study on talent development. Work, she said, has to work on three levels: for the

employer, the employed and the community. In the FWI study *When Work Works*, this subject is explored further.

Next, Galinsky made some bold statements that were food for further discussion. “The career ladder should disappear with the industrial age,” she asserted. Calling the traditional division between regular jobs and alternative work an anachronism, she added four words that were echoed by many of the other speakers: “We need more flexibility.” Of course the themes addressed by FWI have to take account of the demographics of the society it studies. Galinsky informed that the USA is an ageing culture, and that recent figures show the number of women in the workforce to be almost equal to the number of men. The current recession affects male workers more: 10.3% of men have lost their jobs, while for women the figure is 7.8%. More men are working reduced hours than previously, but since the majority of them indicated they were doing so by choice, the crisis is not wholly to blame for this. The study also showed that US women are more highly educated than men. Galinsky expects this trend to continue: “But the glass ceiling is still there.”

A nationally representative FWI study for which 35,000 men and women were interviewed by telephone, led to some surprising conclusions. For the first time, women – both with and without children – and men were shown not to differ significantly in their desire for more responsibility. Financially, a larger number of women in double income couples now contribute more than their partners. Men’s views on which roles are appropriate have fallen into line with those of women, and men’s behaviour within their families is changing too. Unlike the baby boomers, who were very work-centric, the men of this generation spend quite some time with their families. It must be good news that according to research data from 2008 today’s men are more inclined to take responsibility for childcare than they were in 1992. The women’s views, though, do not support this conclusion. The burden of responsibility weighs more heavily on them.

While women insist they do more jobs around the house than before, men don’t necessarily see it that way. “Perception is reality,” Galinsky observed. A complicating factor, she explained, is that men tend to give socially desirable answers. So when they indicate that their problems have increased – as they did in these findings – this is very significant. The over-50s participating in the study, which included four generations, had nearly doubled.

Three-quarters of all respondents felt they don’t have enough time to spend with their children. At 61%, the total number of kids feeling the same is rather lower. Elder care – defined as physical care for a person aged over 65 – was another aspect included in the study. One in every two people who were questioned expects to have elder care responsibility in the next five years, with men just as likely as women to undertake this task. For women, the number of hours spent on elder care has increased.

Galinsky showed a dazzling number of graphs and statistics, collected and digested by the Families and Work Institute. A recently published study, addressing the state of health in the American workforce, presented findings by earnings and gender. It showed that the health of US employees is declining, with only 28% reporting that they are in excellent health. The results include the effects of exercise, smoking, stress and depression. Given the ageing population, the decline in overall health levels is not surprising, but this does not explain why the results for men show a stronger downward trend than those for women.

For the purpose of the conference, the report’s emphasis on the importance of an effective workplace was significant. Galinsky: “If you’re not treated well by your employer, having more time for your family will not help. We are increasingly looking at energy levels rather than time.” She said that a healthy challenge and having a say in your own work help create an effective workplace, which translates into better work outcomes. She concluded her presentation by stressing the importance to positive work results of a good work-life fit. In the US, this aspect drew a lot of media attention.

Claartje Vinkenburg: Dutch myths and facts

The next speaker was **Claartje Vinkenburg**. An associate professor of organizational behaviour and development at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam, she had undertaken to examine the myths and facts prevailing in the Netherlands about the work, private lives and ambitions of both men and women. Vinkenburg has done extensive research on gender, parenting and career patterns. She told her audience that, like in the US, the workforce in the Netherlands is ageing. Compared to men, women tend to have smaller jobs, which typically fall into a lower income bracket. While 70% of

women in the Netherlands are employed (for at least one hour a week), they only work 25-hour weeks on average. Just 57% of all working women are employed for more than 12 hours a week.

The income of the typical Dutch household is derived from 1.5 jobs. A majority of men also work part-time, but they tend to have larger jobs than women. Anyone deviating from the norm has some explaining to do, Vinkenburg said, because the one-and-a-half-job norm is strongly anchored in society. As a result of this situation, few women are economically independent. The government sees this situation as undesirable, which is why it has created the Task Force.

Traditionally, it is assumed that Dutch women are not professionally ambitious – or that their ambition evaporated around the time they got married and had children. Vinkenburg studied statistics which were published as part of the European Values Study, a decade before the Task Force's own report on gender-related ambition appeared in 2009. At the time, men said that for them income was the most important reason to work. For women, the human aspect and security were important considerations. Figures for different types of employment contract proved that women in full-time employment were more ambitious than their male counterparts. Vinkenburg suggested that the high ambition level shown for men with part-time jobs might indicate that they were studying as well.

Moving on to the time parents spend on their children and other care tasks, Vinkenburg said that 7 hours a week is the average for men and 15 hours for women. "People usually agree that these tasks should be shared equally," she added. "One of the reasons why this doesn't happen in practice, is that men often fear negative consequences if they start working less."

On the importance of an effective workplace, Vinkenburg picked up on the trends identified by Galinsky. She stressed the importance for a smooth operation of support from team leaders and colleagues. For parents whose children are sick, for example, it is vital that they can count on their colleagues. But the burden of responsibility should not always be piled on team members with fewer care tasks.

Placing a question mark at the end of the conference title, *24 or More?*, Vinkenburg's answer is a resounding "yes". She again stressed that, to achieve this, there must be support in the workplace, and said she believes that the current norm in Dutch society can be changed. She sees higher ambition levels as a consequence, not a cause, of working more. Her final conclusion was that supply creates demand: "You have to tempt women to work more hours."

Jetta Klijnsma: past, present and future

During Vinkenburg's presentation, **Jetta Klijnsma**, State Secretary at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, had been ushered into the auditorium. After a short introduction by Pia Dijkstra, Klijnsma took the audience on a trip down memory lane, to the days when Dutch women were automatically dismissed from their jobs when they got married. Fast-forwarding to the future, she wondered whether today's children, when they look back in years to come, will not find it very strange that so many women used to work in small part-time jobs. Klijnsma had high hopes, she said, of a fruitful exchange of ideas during the conference, which she called "a magical mystery tour".

With few exceptions, Dutch organizations currently enable their employees to work part-time. This has led to a situation where jobs of two or three days have become the norm. But is this what women want? Klijnsma asked, quoting Sigmund Freud. She listed a number of reasons why women should work more: small jobs limit their career prospects; they are not financially independent; the population of the Netherlands is ageing; and international competition is growing. She also touched on a subject already broached by one of the PhD students: "If we think there is no need to work more in a recession, we are deluding ourselves. We must be prepared for the future." Klijnsma thinks that, despite their responsibilities at home, women want to work more, but first some obstacles have to be removed. She stressed the need for flexibility and the role research can play in finding out what works and what doesn't. "None of us are wizards. We don't have all the answers."

Klijnsma is in no doubt that women have the ambition and talent to contribute more – what is needed, is a culture change in society as a whole. She thanked the Task Force for organizing the conference and expressed an interest in "the dishes you will serve us in the next two days". She ended her talk by saying that she hopes that, when today's girls have grown up, they will find it normal to work full-time."

Ronald Plasterk: video message

A video message from Dutch Education Minister **Ronald Plasterk** was next on the agenda. He repeated many of Klijnsma's arguments for persuading women to work more, adding that the current situation places a great burden on the social services department. The fact that one in three marriages ends in divorce adds to the number of single parents, who, if they have no other income, receive 90% of the legal minimum wage.

Plasterk argued for both parents in a family to work a four-day week. "But should the government try to influence this? I say yes!" He expected to announce the results of a government study on this subject by the end of November, and wished the conference every success.

Parallel sessions

Before the coffee break, Pia Dijkstra explained that the rest of the morning would be devoted to five parallel sessions that would address the conference theme from different perspectives. Each session could draw on a number of research reports, some of whose authors were present in the flesh. Dijkstra invited the moderators of each session to explain their objectives. This also gave them an opportunity to persuade more delegates to join their group.

Saskia Keuzenkamp announced that her group would tackle labour participation, preferences and strategies in different countries. In order to learn from other countries and cultures, she had studied data from as far afield as Australia, India and Ukraine. The next speaker, **Bas van 't Wout**, referred to "a conspiracy that stops women from working". His session would relate the state of the economy to careers and behaviour, using the format of a debating programme on Dutch TV. **Ellen Galinsky**, the third moderator to step forward, kept it short: "It's about the impact of education and policy. Everyone should come to our session!" **Linda Rigters** was next. She said she intended to home in on childcare as it relates to labour participation. The last speaker, **Désirée van Gorp**, boldly announced that she and her fellow Task Force member Martijn de Wildt offered the best option. She promised to show a film and share brand-new research results, including data on dual earning models from Norway.

At this point everyone was ready for a break, a chat and a coffee. The participants in the parallel sessions were invited to collect their tickets during this interval.

Friday November 6

The second day of the conference homed in on the steps that need to be taken to increase women's participation in the labour market. In the morning, the address by American keynote speaker Ellen Kossek was followed by a panel discussion with HR experts. After the coffee break, the programme was similar to Thursday's: five parallel sessions, each with its own moderator.

Kathelijne Buitenweg: next step for working women and men

After lunch, the time had come to distil ideas and possible solutions from the discussions earlier in the day. Pia Dijkstra asked three moderators, each focused on a group vital to advancing the issue, to present their findings, with herself in the role of interviewer. **Kathelijne Buitenweg**, former Member of the European Parliament, took working women – and their men – as her subject. Men and women should feel equally empowered, she said, and both genders should be able to work flexible hours. If this can be arranged, there will be a win-win situation that will benefit business as well. She suggested that an organization should be created to which both individuals and employers can turn for advice. This organization should be supported by the government and be able to draw on data gained from experiments.

Buitenweg's next subject was 'the kitchen table', a term used at the conference as shorthand for interaction between the two partners in a relationship. After establishing that both partners should have individual freedom and equal power, she said they should first ask themselves what kind of life they want to have. She saw a possible role for the national childcare centre (Consultatiebureau) in making fathers aware that, if they work too much, they will pay the price by missing part of their children's development. Mothers should be aware that their own work-life pattern will have a tremendous impact on their children.

To Dijkstra's question how women should be empowered, Buitenweg replied that they will only feel comfortable about increasing their working hours if the quality of day-care centres in the Netherlands improves – children should benefit from the time they spend there. To achieve this, women must learn

to formulate what they want. Buitenweg also sees a role for employers in raising the awareness of prospective fathers. "Fathers who continue to work full-time should know they have a choice."

Bas van 't Wout: next step for employers

The next steps as they relate to employers were discussed by **Bas van 't Wout**, who works for communication consultancy Maes Okhuijsen. He kicked off his speech by saying that an employee's work-life fit should be part of his or her personal development plan. To ensure that this is taken seriously, there should be regular compliance talks with employers. According to Van 't Wout, this scenario will only work if there is an awareness and willingness to accept change throughout an organization, also at the lower levels. Role models within the leadership of how this might work would be a great help. "Companies should start working with scenarios, perhaps offer financial benefits, maybe even start a task force," he suggested. "The pressure for change should be broad-based and come from society as a whole." Dijkstra saw a practical obstacle to his idea of presenting role models in a TV soap series: "The government cannot sponsor such programmes."

Désirée van Gorp: next step for policy makers

The group headed by Task Force member **Désirée van Gorp** focussed on next steps for policy makers. After thanking the delegates from Norway and India for sharing their insights, she said it was necessary to make bigger jobs for women the norm. But how can this be achieved? Like Van 't Wout, Van Gorp mentioned financial incentives. An integrated approach should be taken involving parental leave and 7-to-5 schools where children can stay all day, and all this should be anchored by a consistent dialogue with the social partners (trade unions and employers or their representatives). Van Gorp also saw a role for the Netherlands Social and Economic Council (SER) and the Netherlands Centre for Social Innovation. Even if governments come and go, continuity of policy development and knowledge exchange has to be assured. These points were enthusiastically endorsed by one of the delegates: "We can't stop now; the Task Force has to continue!"

Pia Dijkstra: conclusions

"We made some of the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle fit, and even found some new pieces for it at this conference," observed **Pia Dijkstra** in her concluding address. She listed some ideas that might stimulate change, like more female anchors and talk show hosts on TV. There is still a de facto wage gap between men and women, she said; a member of the audience put the amount by which women are lagging behind men at 6%. Of the many questions which are yet to be answered, Dijkstra mentioned a few: "How can we start dialogues? How can we reintegrate older women into the workforce? And what can we learn from same-sex couples?"

Some of the answers may lie in better communication between employers and employees. Perhaps 'best practices' can be distributed to business leaders, and perhaps society can play a facilitating role on the way to a more flexible workforce. The goal is to arrive at a situation where more work for women comes to be seen as a beckoning perspective rather than a problem.

Moving on to the main conclusions of the conference, Dijkstra said that the work done by the Task Force so far has shown that debating the issue and making suggestions does not result in real change. "Real progress can only be made if the measures to improve the status quo are mandatory, not voluntary. So when we report to the government at the end of March, this is what we will recommend." She went on to stress the importance of marketing the message, of keeping it in the media. All available evidence-based knowledge will be used, and more data will be collected. Dijkstra repeated how important flexibility is for all parties concerned. The measures, she said, will be strongly felt at the kitchen table: "The solution for each individual couple may vary, but there should be a net profit in terms of the number of hours worked."

Marc Lammers: Olympic example

The final presentation was given by a surprise guest: the Dutch women's national hockey coach **Marc Lammers**. At last year's Olympic Games in China, the team won the gold medal under his guidance. Together, they proved that a strong focus coupled with total commitment to a cause can yield the ultimate prize. Lammers, who has written several books about his highly individual approach to coaching, showed himself to be an entertaining and inspirational speaker.

He kicked off by stating that, in order to improve, you have to train hard – the hockey team trained nine times a week and had just two weeks a year off – and to believe that your team is the most beautiful in

the world. While visiting the Dutch troops in Iraq in search of inspiration, Lammers discovered that he could use Google Earth to spy on the training routines of his competitors, which helped him to get ahead of them and stay there. He stimulated communication within his team, asking them to formulate the values and goals they shared. Reversing the original Olympic thought, the players decided that winning was more important than participating. The values they came up with were commitment, focus, being fit and – to Lammers' surprise – looking good, so that they could be proud of themselves. Once they had agreed on these values, social control was established that ensured they also lived by them.

Interspersing his lecture with high-energy video footage of Olympic hockey matches, Lammers made a number of points that could be of value in other spheres of society. He pointed out that men focus too much on results, while women pay more attention to the process. As a coach, it makes sense for him to take the latter approach: "Coaches have 100% control over the process, but whether you win or lose a match is out of your hands." He is a firm believer in the power of innovation. In the lead-up to the Olympics, his video glasses (for instant replays) and use of GPS technology (to measure sprints) attracted media attention.

Statistics, Lammers found, are also an essential aid to improvement. He even managed to turn seemingly unfavourable conditions, like the oppressive heat and high humidity in China, to his team's advantage, e.g. by intelligently using ice baths. "In bad times, it's easier to beat the competition," he insisted. "That's when you can show your quality."

Inevitably, the constant process of fine-tuning, changing and innovating created resistance among the team. One of the ways Lammers kept them in check was by ensuring that they talked *with* each other rather than *about* each other. Communication also played an important role in outsmarting the competition. "By studying statistics about communication, I discovered the importance of asking open questions. This taught the players to think for themselves and make their own plans, and it gave them confidence. They didn't need me any more." It was the players' own idea to unsettle their Chinese opponents by constantly changing their game plan. This tactic ate into the confidence of the Chinese team – they just didn't know how to respond.

Another tactic that helped get the Dutch team to the Olympic final, which they won by two goals to nil, was Lammers' focus on his players' strengths rather than their weaknesses: "It's your strength that gives you confidence. Winners have a plan; losers have an excuse. The plan makes you see possibilities and be proactive."

Lammers oozed energy and positivism, a mood that rubbed off on the audience. When he ended his presentation, everyone was in a winning mood. "We want to be winners too," Pia Dijkstra said in her closing words. After thanking everyone for their contributions, she invited them for an informal gathering in the foyer.