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#### <u>Abstract</u>

Nowadays, organizations have HR-practices aimed at retaining their best employees. Organizations use rewards in order to reach that goal. Sometimes organizations reward their employees more than what they can deliver in terms of production and services. A consequence of this may be adverse health effects and loss of motivation for work. This research therefore uses the Effort-Reward Imbalance (ERI) theory for describing such an overcommitment approach. The golden cage is such an overcommitment from the organization to the employee. The golden cage is created as a combination of 3 HR-practices; high job security, high income, but lack of promotion opportunities. An empirical study of 245 employees and 47 business units found support for this golden cage concept. Overall, the golden cage also caused an increase in employees' job strain. At business unit level, HRM Continuance Commitment practices had a positive relationship with the number of golden cage employees in that business unit.

Key words: golden cage, job strain, motivation for work, overcommitment, effort-reward imbalance

#### **Introduction**

Organizations have become aware of the fact that employees are an important source of competitive advantage (Ruona & Gibson, 2004). In order to retain employees, it is important for organizations to distinguish from other competitors with attractive rewards and a good working environment. In this way the employees feel appreciated by the organization and are satisfied with their work.

At first sight, high rewards can lead to satisfied and motivated workers with more commitment, but what happens if the organizations use overcompensation for their employees? Compensation is considered overcompensation when the organization rewards their employees more than what they are actually worth.

According to the "HRM – Performance process model" from Wright & Nishii (2004) it may be possible that the intended goals of the organizations with these rewards, may not lead to the expected result; mainly because employees may experience the rewards differently than intended. If employees are highly rewarded and have a feeling of high job security, this may not be a problem at first sight. The problem may arise when employees are not able to advance their career in their jobs. In that case a possible outcome is employees experiencing this overcompensation as a 'golden cage' (Schabracq, Winnubst & Cooper, 1996), due to reward practices that tie these employees to the organization from which they cannot easily part.

This golden cage, consisting of high incomes, high job security offered and career stagnation, can result in the 'golden cage-syndrome' for the employees. The golden cage-syndrome refers to the fact that employees experience high rewards and consequently feel 'stuck' in the organization (career stagnation), because the costs to leave the organizations are higher than the possible earnings in another organization (Schabracq, et al., 1996). Employees may like to put more effort in the organization in order to find a balance between effort and reward, but they simply cannot because of the lack of promotion opportunities. They are not able to reach their effort 'level,' where they have the feeling that they are worth their high rewards. This combination of high incomes, high job security and career stagnation are part of the golden cage (Schabracq, et al., 1996). This golden cage has the expectation to negatively affect the wellbeing of the employees; their mental and physical health and their motivation for work (Schabracq, et al., 1996). Where the golden cage is considered to negatively affect the employees' wellbeing, the golden collar is considered to have a positive effect on employees' wellbeing. Golden collar employees are used in this research as a comparison to

research these expected effects. Golden collar employees are the same as golden cage employees, with one exception, they do have promotion possibilities and their careers have not stagnated yet.

It is important to distinguish the golden cage from the golden cage-syndrome<sup>1</sup>; the golden cage refers to the HR practices an organization uses to reward their employees and the golden cage-syndrome indicates the feelings and thoughts of the employees caused by this golden cage (Schabracq, et al., 1996).

The golden cage and its syndrome are relevant for organizations since it may have made their employees 'stuck' on positions in organizations. The internal labour market cannot solve this problem. This may have consequences for the flexibility of the organization to react on changes in the environment. Subsequently, this lack of fast and adequate reacting can affect performance.

For a clearer vision of the golden cage (-syndrome), this research has explored this blurry field, aiming to firstly unravel the consequences of the golden cage for the employees, secondly to find out what the characteristics of golden cage employees are and lastly where these employees can be found.

In order to research the golden cage (-syndrome) and its possible effect on the employees' health, the Effort-Reward Imbalance (ERI) theory was used (Bosma, Peter, Siegrist & Marmot, 1998; Siegrist, 1996, 1997, 2000, 2006; Siegrist et al., 2004). This theory is suitable, since the golden cage also represents an imbalance between efforts and rewards. The golden cage can be seen as a higher amount of rewards from the organization, compared to the amount of effort from their employees. This imbalance is related to the overcompensation side of the ERI theory. The other side is the undercompensation, which represents high employees' efforts in exchange for low rewards.

A lot of research has been done on the undercompensation side of the ERI (for example: Siegrist 1996, 1997; Bosma, et al., 1998; Siegrist, et al., 2004; Siegrist, Wahrendorf, von dem Knesebeck, Jűrges & Bőrsch-Supan, 2006). The effects of undercompensation were feelings of negative emotions such as not being appreciated by the organization (Siegrist et al, 2004), feelings of unfairness (Siegrist et al, 2004), stressful feelings (Siegrist, 1996, 1997), feelings of threat, anger and depression or demoralization (Siegrist, 1996, 1997). Bosma, et al. (1998) even found evidence for an association between undercompensation and increased risks for heart diseases.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Golden cage and syndrome are further used as one general concept for the employees.

Little research has been done on the overcompensation side though (Tsui, et al., 1997; Schabracq et al., 1996). This research will therefore add scientifically relevantvalue to the already existing ERI literature and further explore the overcompensation aspect from ERI. The goal of this research is to explore and understand the effects of the golden cage on employees' motivation for work and job strain, to define the characteristics of these golden cage employees, and to investigate which HR practices were responsible for these golden cage feelings. This leads to the following research question:

# What kind of employees have the consequences of the golden cage set up by the organization and where in the organization can these employees be found?

This research question is dived in three questions;

- What are the consequences of the golden cage for the employees?
- Who are these golden cage employees?
- Where do these golden cage employees work?

The first two questions are answered by comparing data at employee level from the golden cage group with the golden collar group.

To answer the third question, data at business unit level was used, to look for business characteristics which cause these golden cage feelings for employees.

The golden cage-syndrome is used for measuring the effects of the golden cage which can be expected on employees' motivation for work and job strain.

To answer the research question, the constructs will be further explored and the hypothesis will be formulated in the theory.

The research model:



#### 2. Theoretical framework and hypotheses

#### 2.1 Golden cage-syndrome

Before setting out the theory about the effect of the golden cage on job strain & motivation for work, what is the 'golden cage-syndrome' exactly? Schabracq, et al. (1996, p. 281) defined the golden cage-syndrome as;

"When these employees have made some advancement in their department, resulting in a relatively high income, the effects of the concentration of experience process are even more enhanced. As it becomes impossible to earn the same amount of money elsewhere<sup>2</sup>, their mobility is further reduced, a phenomenon called the golden cage-syndrome."

This 'concentration of experience' refers to the fact that employees have become one with their jobs. Their jobs are part of themselves and the employees are part of their jobs, from which they do not part easily. The consequence is that employees tend to hold on to the same jobs as long as possible (high tenure), with the result that their knowledge, skills and attitude only develops within the limits of those particular jobs. These employees are valuable for the organization, because they have all the know-how and skills to perform optimally in that particular job.

However, there are negative consequences of this process. Career advancing opportunities for these employees with 'concentration of experience' tend to diminish. They are stuck and are less likely to develop their careers further. Next to this lack of vertical rise, they cannot move horizontal to other departments either, because of their limited skills and experience. Employees end up stuck in their jobs, which are no longer challenging. This can result in job strain and loss of motivation for work, due to the fact that these employees cannot develop themselves more in that particular job (Schabracq, et al., 1996).

#### 2.1.1 Effort Reward Imbalance

As noted earlier, the golden cage-syndrome can be seen as overcompensation by the organization for their employees. On the other side is the undercompensation, where employees are less rewarded for their efforts. Both over- and undercompensation can have

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> With 'elsewhere' are other organizations meant.

effects on employee wellbeing (Siegrist 1996, 1997; Bosma, et al., 1998; Siegrist, et al., 2004; Siegrist, Wahrendorf, von dem Knesebeck, Jűrges & Bőrsch-Supan, 2006; Tsui, et al., 1997) There are several theoretical models (e.g. Job Demands Resources Model; Bakker, Demerouti & Verbeke, 2004) which predict the unhealthy effects of work for the employees. But because in this research an imbalance is central, the used model in this research is the Effort-Reward Imbalance (ERI). (Siegrist 1996, 1997; Bosma, et al., 1998; Siegrist, et al., 2004, 2006)

#### 2.1.2 Undercompensation

The main focus of the undercompensation side is on the reciprocity of exchange in occupational life where high effort in combination with low reward is considered to be stressful for the employee (Siegrist, 1996, 1997: Bosma, et al. 1998). The ERI model assumes that effort at work is spent as part of a contract based on the norm of social reciprocity where rewards are provided in terms of money, esteem, and career opportunities including job security (Siegrist, 1996, 1997, 2004, 2006; Bosma et al., 1998). When there is a lack of reciprocity in terms of high 'costs' and low 'gains' for the employees there is a big chance for negative emotions (e.g. strain) (Siegrist et al., 2004).

High effort is divided in *extrinsic* and *intrinsic* effort. Extrinsic effort resembles work pressure; demands of the job placed on the employee. The intrinsic effort resembles personal coping pattern (e.g., high need for control) and it resembles the motivations of the employee in a demanding situation (Siegrist, 1996).

The reward source, where a low status control and inadequate payment and/or lack of esteem and approval in association with high effort can result in distressing experiences (Siegrist, 1996). For example feelings of threat, anger and depression or demoralization.

Thus, low reward and high effort can result in low status control, lack of promotion prospects and job insecurity. (Siegrist 1996; 1997) See figure 2.2.1 for the Effort-Reward Imbalance model.



(demands, obligations) (critical coping; e.g. need for control) (esteem, status control)

Considering this, why is it supposed that there is an ERI? Why isn't there a balance? Many explanations can be given here; Siegrist, et al. (2004) mentions the following; a contract often fails to be fully specified and to provide a symmetric exchange where complete equivalence exists between requested and given rewards. On the other hand employees themselves may accept such contracts for strategic reasons in order to have a better chance for career promotions on the labour market later. This are called non-symmetric contracts and can frequently be found in a global economy that is characterized by job insecurity, forced occupational mobility, short-term contracts and increased wage competition (Siegrist, et al., 2004).

Negative effects of the undercompensation ERI (high costs, low gains) affect mainly the health of the employees (Siegrist, 2006). Some effects were; feelings of negative emotions such as not being appreciated by the organization (Siegrist, et al., 2004), feelings of unfairness (Siegrist, et al., 2004), stressful feelings (Siegrist, 1996, 1997), feelings of threat, anger and depression or demoralization (Siegrist, 1996, 1997). Bosma, et al. (1998) even found evidence that those employees were associated with more subsequent risks of heart disease.

#### 2.1.3 Overcompensation

At first sight, overcompensation seems costly to organizations, because of the higher rewards associated with it. So why would an organization choose to overcompensate its employees? Pfeffer & Sutton (2006) have three important implications why an organization rewards their employees more than what they attribute in terms of productivity.

1. To *motivate* employees for their work, because they get high rewards, they will work harder in order to be worth the overcompensation. However, according to Tsui, et al (1997) the overcompensation might fail the intended goal of motivation, because employees tend to rationalize this overpayment.

2. To *retain* the employees, By offering these rewards, "the organization expects in return contributions from employees, including dependable participation on both short-term and long-term basis." (Tsui, et al. p. 1095) Hence, those employees are considered to be the least likely to leave the organizations, because they have made a 'good deal.' This is part of the golden cage-syndrome, where employees get the feeling they cannot leave the organization, because the cost of leaving are higher compared to the costs of staying. This may cause job strain (Schabracq, et al. 1996).

3. To inspire *commitment* from the employees to their organization. This goal is related to the goal of retaining employees. Employees are expected to be more committed to their

organizations, when the organization commits to a long-term relationship with them. Tsui, et al (1997) further conclude that the overinvestment (comparable to overcompensation) approach (among other three approaches) was associated with higher levels of performance of the organization and more favourable attitudes from their employees. They address some drawbacks though: employees were sceptic about this overcompensation. They were less committed to their organizations as expected. Employees were also less dependable than expected in terms of continuation of employment. This might be the result of a feeling of 'too good to be true,' which indicates the effect was unlikely to last (Tsui, et al., 1997: p. 1115).

Summarizing, the golden cage-syndrome can be seen as the overcommitment from the organizations with good HR-Practices aimed at retaining the employees; it is about the continuance commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1996). What happens in these organizations is that golden cage employees do not feel rewarded for all their efforts and adaptations for a higher level job. The internal labour market in the organization does not offer a solution anymore. These golden cage employees "may see themselves as trapped in their present jobs, experiencing themselves as victims of over-specialization or other plateauing effects (Glass ceiling)" (Schabracq, et al, 1996, p. 262). This golden cage syndrome has some consequences for the employees and will be discussed in the next paragraph.

#### 2.2 What effect does the combination of HR practices have on employees?

The golden cage-syndrome is the key research topic in paragraph 2.1. According to Schabracq, et al. (1996) this syndrome is a reaction of the employees on the golden cage set up by the organization. Employees may interpret this golden cage differently than intended by the organization. The golden cage can result in two possible effects for these employees; more job strain and less motivation for work, because of the imbalance between effort and rewards. To test for these effects this research compares golden cage employees to golden collar employees. Golden collar employees can be characterized as highly talented employees with career opportunities, who are valuable to the organization (Sadler, 1994; Howieson, 2003). This paragraph explains the three components of the golden cage and its effects on both employees. The following part of the theory will describe who may experience the golden cage effect the most and where these golden cage employees work.

The following figure gives an overview of the golden cage/collar (-syndrome) and its possible effects on the employee. 'Golden,' 'Security' and 'Door' are used as metaphors to strengthen

the meaning of the golden cage-syndrome. 'Golden' is referred to the high income employees earn. 'Security' is used because of the high job security and 'Door' because of promotion opportunities for the employees. This door is open to the golden collar employees, but closed to golden cage employees. By comparing the golden cage employees with the golden collar group, it was possible to research the effects on motivation for work and job strain.



Figure 2. "The golden cage & collar and its effects on employees

#### 2.2.1 High income

Income is used among other rewards as a tool to motivate, attract, and retain employees for their work (Li-Ping Tang, 2007). In the case when employees have a high income and they can fulfil their basic needs of living, the goal of motivating employees with more rewards may diminish though (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2006). Tsui, et al. (1997) adds that employees tend to rationalize their increase of financial rewards; they think they just deserve the increase in wages and believe they do not need to behave differently. This way, the intended goal of the reward is not reached. According to Epstein & Ward (2006) it is possible that employees, who are offered low rewards, perform better than employees who receive good financial rewards in order to increase their rewards. This is because they already have reached the level of satisfaction with their salary and can fulfil their basic needs, so they do not necessarily need more salary.

Groot & Van den Brink (1999) and Pfeffer & Sutton (2006) refer to the fact that relative wages are sometimes more important than absolute wages. To satisfy employees you do not need to pay them more, but the increase of salary has to be the same for all employees. Small differences in wages among employees, who are performing the same job, can lead to

negative effects on motivations, attitudes toward the organization and even intentions to leave the organization. In short, financial rewards can lose their effect, when employees are already earning enough money or when the increase in salary is not fair in the eyes of the employees. This unfairness in the eyes of the employees may even lead to an increase in employees' job strain and a decrease in their motivation for work. This is because the observed unfairness implies that the organization regards these employees less worthy than the employees who receive higher rewards. According to Tsui, et al. (1997), this effect may even be bigger, when employees earn 'high incomes.' High incomes are wages which are more than the 'normal' wage for that particular job or work. Employees earning these incomes can already fulfil their basic needs, so the comparison part becomes more important.

Setting out this component of the golden cage, organizations providing a high income can cause feelings of job strain and may have less motivated employees, because these employees already fulfil their basic needs. More financial rewards in *combination* with the other components of the golden cage may have that effect.

In order to be competitive, employers offer bonuses and high salaries to retain employees in the face of other job offers (Wonacott, 2002). Employees facing these high incomes can be found in the golden collar group, where they do have possibilities to grow. For this group, there is no expected negative effect from high income.

#### 2.2.2 High job security

According to Schabracq, et al. (1996) most of the employees tend to become one with their jobs. They do everything to perform their job the best way possible and they hold on to the same job as long as possible. The organization rewards the employees in order to keep the employee on that particular job, the goal being for these employees to become professionals on their particular part in the organization. These employees encounter many rewards that results in high job security. These employees, facing a high job security, who have made some advancement in their departments, resulting in a relatively high income, are 'stuck' in their position inside the organization. They know they cannot leave the organization easily because of the good position they have acquired in the organizations, which is why they feel they cannot leave the organization (Schabracq, et al., 1996). The main point here is that the overall feeling of high job security looks appealing at first sight, but it may be less appealing later. According to Schabracq, et al. (1996) the reason for this is organizations have made the employees grown old in jobs that do not appeal to them anymore, these employees may

encounter feelings of 'stuckness' because of the high job security and less attractive wages and work conditions at organizations.

This aspect of the golden cage, where organizations provide high job security, can cause feelings of strain and can lead to less motivated employees, because most of the time these employees have reached a position in the organizations where they are 'stuck.' They can lose their motivation and perceive more job strain, because they cannot develop further, or move to another position; they are kept there by the organization, by offering high job security.

On the other hand, as is the case with the golden collar group, a high job security offered by the organization resembles some kind of appreciation for the employees. For the golden collar group, the high job security component is irrelevant, because they can move to more appealing jobs inside the organization.

## 2.2.3 Career Stagnation<sup>3</sup>

According to Schabracq et al. (1996) employees who have become seniors in their work are supposed to have acquired an established position in the organization. Because of the fact that organizations are nowadays flatter, the number of higher management jobs has decreased, and more employees are competing for these management jobs, is resulted in less promotion opportunities (Schabracq et al., 1996). Employees may have the feeling of being stagnated and not being appreciated/rewarded because of the lack of promotion opportunities. The emphasis on self-actualization of the employees and meaningful activities in the employees' jobs may in this way interfere with performing less meaningful tasks that do not have promotion opportunities for further development anymore. At the same time, it may be possible that the organizations and the jobs may change in the near future and this fact will demand more adaptations from the employees (Schabracq et al., 1996). To conclude, the expectation is that, due to the lack of promotion opportunities in *combination* with high incomes and high job security, employees in the golden cage may encounter more feelings of job strain and be less motivated for work.

On the other hand, the golden collar group do face promotion possibilities. Gold collar employees are facing training possibilities, which furthers their career and make it possible for a continuing professional development (Howieson, 2003). This main difference may have consequences for the employees' job strain and motivation for work. In combination with a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Career stagnation is the same as lack of promotion opportunities

high income and high job security, promotion opportunities is expected to have a positive effect on motivation for work and a negative effect on job strain.

#### 2.2.4 The golden cage and its effects on health & motivation

The main point of this research regarding the golden cage is that organizations, with the use of particular HR practices, made the employees grown old in their functions, where there careers are stagnated, and these jobs do not ask much effort from their employees. Due to the *combination* of lack of promotion opportunities, a high job security and a high income, they 'cannot' move to more appealing jobs (Schabracq et al., 1996). Schabracq, et al. (1996) also refer to the notion of non-transferable pension rights and pension schemes that make the amount of ultimate payment dependent on the salary earned, and the problem of feeling stuck in the organizations gets stronger. This may have consequences for these golden cage employees.

One consequence of this golden cage is more job strain for the employees. According to Sprigg, Jackson & Parker (2000) & Daniels (2006) job strain can be seen as an output variable, because work design & job characteristics have an influence on employee wellbeing such as job strain, which is next to job satisfaction an important component of employee well being. Job strain is measured in this research, but what are measurable components of job strain? There are several results from job strain but according to Karasek (1979) 1 important result due to the fact that employees cannot handle the indicators of job strain is exhaustion .Karasek (1979) formulates exhaustion as "responses of tiredness in the morning and complete exhaustion in the evening" (p.292). Due to this exhaustion employees can be tired from work and they need recovery time to get the desired energy level again. The authors Bakker, et al. (2004) refer also to work-related fatigue as one of the important indicators of strain, therefore job strain is measured with work-related fatigue.

According to Schabracq, et al. (1996) another outcome of the golden cage is the decrease of employees' motivation for work. According to Houkes, et al. (2003) motivation for work is an outcome of primarily work content variables such as task characteristics. Motivation for work can be seen as employees' happiness and the feeling of wanting to perform well in the job.

In sum, the golden cage employees are expected to have negative effects (more job strain and less motivation for work) in comparison to the golden collar employees Therefore our hypotheses<sup>4</sup> are formulated as followed;

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> All the hypotheses at employee level in this research are in comparison to the golden collar group.

#### H1a: The golden cage group has less work motivation.

H1b: The golden cage group has more job strain.

#### 2.3 Who experience the golden cage effect the most?

This paragraph looks at some characteristics of the employees from the golden cage and collar group. What characteristics of employees are responsible for the difference between the two groups? The following characteristics are being researched.

#### 2.3.1 Gender

Gender is the first characteristic that may have an influence. Several authors (Siegrist, et al., 2004; Niedhammer, et al., 2004; Li, Yang & Cho, 2006) find results concerning gender and some kind of overcommitment from the organization. There was no clear overall conclusion that men or women reacted different on overcommitment from the organization. However, results did indicate that employees with some kind of overcommitment showed negative consequences for their health, and therefore the hypothesis is formed as followed;

H2a: Males and females in the golden cage score less on motivation for work & higher on job strain.

#### 2.3.2 Age

According to research from Siegrist et al. (2004) there was the tendency that employees between 45-54 years have generally the highest score on overcommitment. They found a u-shaped distribution among the scores on overcommitment. Peter et al. (2008) distinguished between bigger groups and found the strongest strain factors, due to overcommitment in the age group 30-55 years. Schabracq, et al. (1996, p.257) refer to the middle ages group as employees with mid-career problems and in short has to do with the transition from junior status to senior status. Thus, the expectation is that the golden cage group suffers more from overcommitment from the organization and this effect is the strongest for the employees of middle age. Therefore our next hypothesis is formed as followed;

H2b: Golden cage employees of middle age had the lowest score on motivation for work and the highest on job strain.

#### 2.3.3 Education

A high score on overcommitment was found by employees with a high education (Siegrist, et al., 2004). Lau (2008) refers also to the fact that high overcommitment scores were found by higher educated employees. Peter et al. (2008) found results indicating, that a high education was connected with critical effort-reward ratio values, indicating that higher educated employees had more negative consequences than lower educated employees. Because of these results the expectation is that the golden cage group consists of higher educated employees, than the golden collar group;

Overall is the expectation that the golden cage has negative effects for all educational levels. Therefore our next hypothesis is formed as followed;

H2c: The highest educated employees in the golden cage had the lowest score on motivation for work and the highest score on job strain.

#### 2.3.4 Tenure

Tenure is a specific characteristic which has a link with the golden cage. Schabracq et al. (1996) refers that a golden cage employee is supposed to have acquired a reasonable high position in the organization, over the time (high tenure). According to research from Lowe (2003) tenure is found to have a small negative effect on the perception of the employees on work environment, which is perceived as less healthy. Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner & Schaufeli (2000) found that tenure had a positive relationship with exhaustion; one of the components of strain. Siegrist (2004) mentions that tenure had a positive relationship with adverse health effects. Therefore our next hypothesis is formed as followed;

H3a: Golden cage employees with the highest tenure scored the lowest on motivation for work and the highest on job strain.

#### 2.3.5 Experienced workload

The job strain model from Karasek (1979) indicates that high job demands results in more job strain. Job demands can be seen as part of experienced workload, where a high experienced workload has negative consequences for mental health. Van Yperen & Janssen (2002) add to this that work load causes fatigue and need for recovery after work. Karasek (1979) even mentions the major principles of Frederick Taylor in his article, which refer that a high overall experienced workload, not only lead to mental strain, but also can have a demoralization

effect on the employees; they can lose their motivation for work. Keep in mind, that in this research experienced workload is used and not the amount of workload. Employees can have the same workload, but experience it different. For the golden cage employees the contradictory may be the case, if they experience low workload, they may find their work no more interesting and challenging (Schabracq et al., 1996), therefore our next hypothesis is formulated as followed;

H3b: Golden cage employees with the lowest experienced workload have the lowest score on motivation for work and the highest score on job strain.

#### 2.4 Where do the golden cage employees work?

This paragraph looks at some business unit characteristics causing these golden cage feelings at employees. Business units with what kind of characteristics are responsible for golden cage employees? Continuance commitment HRM practices and sector characteristics are being researched.

#### 2.4.1 Continuance Commitment HRM

As explained in the first paragraphs from chapter 2, the golden cage resembles some kind of continuance commitment HR practices to the employees. According to Allen & Meyer (1996, p. 253) continuance commitment refers to 'commitment based on the employee's recognition of the costs associated with leaving the organization. Employees with strong continuance commitment remain with the organization because they 'have to do so.' By building this 'cage' around the employees, the organization uses a bundle of HR practices, which has the aim of committing the employee to the organization. Bowen & Ostroff (2004, p. 204) define the aim of certain combinations of HR practices; 'to send signals to employees that allow them to understand the desired and appropriate responses and form a collective sense of what is expected.'' According to the literature from chapter 1, employees facing this golden cage, are expected to score high on this combination of HR practices. They are expected to have a feeling of continuous commitment to the organization; as a result they may not leave the organization, while that may be the best solution. Our hypothesis is therefore formulated as followed;

H4a: The higher the Continuance Commitment HRM practices, the more the business unit is characterized by a higher percentage of golden cage employees.

According to paragraph 2.2.4 golden cage employees score low on motivation and high on job strain. The expectation is that they can be found at business units with high Continuance Commitment HRM practices, and that the employees in these business units will have the golden cage expected results (lower on motivation for work and higher on job strain). The hypothesis is therefore formulated as followed;

H4b In comparison to a low score on Continuance Commitment HRM practices, a high score on Continuance Commitment HRM practices, results in more job strain and lower motivation for work.

#### 2.4.2 Sector-specific characteristics

There are two kinds of HRM models; hard and soft. 'Hard' is based on the premises of 'utilitarian instrumentalism' and a 'soft model' is grounded in 'developmental humanism' (Legge, 1995, p. 66). Boyne, Jenkins & Poole (1999) refers that private sector is characterized by a harder model approach and the public sector is characterized by a softer model approach. They also mention that organizations in the public sector have a more 'paternalistic' (p.408) style of management, which means protecting and promoting the well being of the workforce. Therefore organizations in the public sector are supposed to have good HR practices aimed at the well being of the employees and offer good rewards for the continuance of their employees. Therefore our hypothesis is formulated as followed:

H5a: In comparison to the private sector, the (semi)public sector consists of more business units with a high percentage of golden cage employees.

According to paragraph 2.2.4 golden cage employees are expected to score low on motivation for work and high on job strain. The expectation is that they can be found at business units in (semi-) public sectors and as a result of that these business unit in the (semi-) public sector will have the golden cage expected results (lower on motivation for work and higher on job strain). The hypothesis is therefore formulated as followed;

H5b; In comparison to a business unit in the private sector, a business unit in the (semi-) public sector scores higher on job strain and lower on motivation for work.

#### 3 Method

#### 3.1 Sample and procedure

The data analysed were part of a larger data set from Dorenbosch (forthcoming), collected between May 2006 and February 2007. The data consisted of a heterogeneous set of a total of 12 small, middle and large-sized Dutch organizations in 5 different sectors<sup>5</sup>. Through contact persons in each of the 12 organizations, line managers and internal HR advisors were asked to participate in structured interviews. This resulted in a working sample of 53 business work units for which a total of 51 First-Line Management's (FLM's) and 25 HR advisors provided 100% matched ratings for all of the participating business work units, that resulted in the data on business unit level.

The data on employee level was gathered by a distribution of 1795 questionnaires. The response rate was 43%, thus 772 questionnaires were filled in by employees (49.6% were female and mean age 40.9 years (sd. =10.5))

For this research, 245 cases out of the 772 cases available selected which fulfilled the requirements (scores on the three scales) set up for this research (Mean age of these cases were 41,4 years, sd. 11,0 years, 54,3 % were female and 22,0 % worked part time <22 hours ). 36,8 % of the females were working part time and only 4,5 % of the males were working part time.

These 245 cases were divided in the golden cage group (N= 116) who had a high score on the scales high income & job security and career stagnation. These employees were selected under the condition that the scores on all three independent variables were above the median.<sup>6</sup> To illustrate, a member of the golden cage group, has three above the median scores on job security (median= 3), high income (median= 3) and stagnation (median= 3,33). The golden collar group consisted of employees who had a high score on high income & job security, but a low score on stagnation (N= 129). The main difference between these groups is that employees in the golden collar group do have promotion opportunities, where golden cage employees have not.

At business unit level, 47 business work units were selected. 6 Business units were not suitable because employees in these units did not have scores on the scales job security and career stagnation and therefore do not take part in this research.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> See appendix 8.1, for total overview of the collected sample from Dorenbosch (forthcoming)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Since, there is no theoretically driven argument for justifying, the median was determined empirically.

#### 3.2 Measures

#### 3.2.1 Golden cage and golden collar group

The following independent variables were used by constructing the 2 groups;

*High income* was measured with the effort-reward bargain scale, which consisted of 2 items. Respondents had answer possibilities on a 5 point Likert scale, with a neutral point. This scale was originally part of the VBBA questionnaire (Van Veldhoven & Meijman, 1994). The 2 items were; "In this organization, good wages are being paid" and "I can manage my life with this pay." (Cronbach's alpha .88)

*Job security* was measured with the job security scale, which was constructed out of the reverse coded (future) job insecurity scale. The job security scale consisted of 3 items. Answer possibilities were on a 5 points Likert scale, with a neutral point. This scale was originally part of the VBBA questionnaire (Van Veldhoven & Meijman, 1994). An example was: "I need more security of the fact that I still have work over a year." (Cronbach's alpha .93)

*Career stagnation* was measured with the scale stagnation, which was constructed out of the reverse coded career possibilities scale, which was part of the VBBA questionnaire (Van Veldhoven & Meijman, 1994). Thus, a high score on this scale represented low career possibilities. The scale stagnation consisted of 3 items. And the answering scale consisted of a 5-points Likert scale with a neutral point. An example of an item which was reverse coded was: "My job offers possibilities for promotion." (Cronbach's alpha .86)

#### 3.2.2 Psychological Characteristics

*Strain* was measured with the scale work related fatigue and consisted of the shortened 6-item version of the need for recovery scale developed and validated by Van Veldhoven & Broersen (2003) in Dorenbosch (forthcoming). The answering scale asked the respondent to rate the frequency of showing symptoms indicating that he/she did not fully recover from the effects of sustained effort during the working day in 4 points (always, often, sometimes, never). A Sample of an item was "I find it difficult to concentrate in my free time after work." (Cronbach's alpha .78)

*Motivation* was measured with the scale willingness to invest energy, which consisted of 4 reversed coded items, which were originally part of the task resistance scale retrieved from the VBBA questionnaire (Van Veldhoven & Meijman, 1994). The answering scale asked the respondent to rate the strength in how far they agree with the item (1 = 'strongly agree', 5

='strongly disagree'). A sample of an item was "I do my job because I have to, and that's all there is to it." (Cronbach's alpha .80)

#### 3.2.3 Demographic Characteristics

The characteristics Age, Gender and Education were measured with the corresponding items.

#### 3.2.4 Work Characteristics

*Experienced workload* was measured with the use of the scale pace and amount of work and consisted of 6 items. The items were taken from the validated Dutch Questionnaire on the Experience and Evaluation of Work (VBBA; Van Veldhoven & Meijman, in Dorenbosch, forthcoming) and reflect the Job Content Questionnaire (JCQ) quantitative workload questions (Karasek, in Dorenbosch, forthcoming). Employees could answer on a four-point scale (1=never; 4=always). An example of an item was: "Do you have problems with the workload?" (Cronbach's alpha .85)

*Tenure* was measured with the corresponding item.

#### 3.2.5 Continuance Commitment HRM

2 HR practices scales were selected, which together formed this Continuance Commitment HRM practices-scale. These were the work-life balance scale and attractive wages/fringe benefits. These 2 scales are considered to comply the most with continuance commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1996) Data for this specific scale was gathered by structured interviews with FLM's and HR advisors at business unit level.

The work-life balance scale refers to the provision of work arrangements to achieve a better balance between employees' professional and private lives, irrespective of their marital or parental status (White et al., 2003). As an HR practice it emphasizes the organization's provision of possibilities for the combination of the employee's personal work and private/family life in order to offset or balance the adverse effects/incompatibility of the job outside work (Osterman, 1995). Batt & Valcour (2003) describe three components of the organization's support to work-family balance, but which also link to work-life balance support: (1) employee access to dependent care policies (e.g., child care support), (2) employee access to benefits relating to the flexible use of work time and (3) supervisor support for the actual use of practices. These three elements will link to the employee experience of work-life balance support. The work-life balance scale consisted of three questions. Answer possibilities were on a five point scale. An example of a question was: "To

what extent are work-life arrangements actively used by employees in this department?" (Cronbach's alpha .70)

*Attractive wages/fringe benefits* refer to the degree to which offered wages are initially above market or, in the case of fringe benefits, positively differentiate from those agreed upon in collective bargaining agreements. On both accounts, employees are offered more than formally would be appropriate/necessary. Additionally, as above market wages/benefits can attract productive employees, retaining them requires room for managers to negotiate when good employees threaten to leave the organization. To the degree that organizational pay policies reflect an active approach to the attraction and retention of employees in the labour market, employees will experience a good effort-reward bargain.

*Attractive wages/fringe benefits* were measured with the wages & benefits scale, which consisted of 6 questions. Answer possibilities were on a five point scale. An example of a question was: "To what extent is their room to negotiate start salaries when qualified job applicants are not satisfied with their first offer?" (Cronbach's alpha .73)

#### 3.2.6 Sector-specific characteristics

The *(semi-)public sector* consisted of business units working in Government, Medical/Care or Education. The *private sector* consisted of business units working in Services or Industry.

#### 3.3 Statistical procedure

First some pre-analyses on employee level were performed;

A correlation matrix showed the strengths and direction of the linear relationship among the variables.

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was used to find out how well the conceptual model was able to predict the outcomes on motivation for work and job strain in terms of explained variance. Further it showed each unique contribution of the used characteristics to the total explained variance on the 2 dependent variables.

#### 3.3.1 Golden cage & collar group

By using the median<sup>7</sup> of the 3 scales Job Security, High Income and Career Stagnation both groups were formed. The golden cage group consisted of 116 employees. To illustrate, a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Since, there is no theoretically driven argument for justifying, the median was determined empirically.

member of the golden cage group, has three above the median scores on Job Security (median= 3), High Income (median= 3) and Career Stagnation (median= 3,33).

The golden collar group consisted of employees who scored above the median on High Income & Job Security, but beneath the median on Career Stagnation (N=129).

#### 3.3.2 Psychological Characteristics

These 2 groups were compared on the dependent variables strain and motivation with the use of independent-samples t-test to find different significant results. Further, this technique compares the values on some continuous variable for these 2 groups.

Data at employee level was used.

#### 3.3.3 Demographic & Work Characteristics

The effects of all characteristics on the psychological characteristics were researched with One-Way ANOVA's. This technique was used because it tells whether there were significant differences in the mean scores on the dependent variables across the groups (Pallant, 2005; p. 216). For example, the age group young was selected and we made the distinction in golden cage or golden collar and looked with the help of One-Way ANOVA if the outcomes on job strain and motivation for work of these groups were significantly different. Not significantly different characteristics between the two groups had the same effect for both groups, but significantly different characteristics between the two groups had different effects for each group.

Data at employee level was used.

#### 3.3.4 Continuance Commitment HRM Practices & Sector-specific Characteristics

This part of the research was at business unit level. Therefore, there was a need to create 3 kinds of business units (business units with respectively a low, a medium or a high number of golden cage employees). This was done by calculating the percentage of golden cage employees in the business unit. Based on this percentage, the first, second and third percentile was calculated and based on these percentiles the 3 groups were made (Low = 0% -5.75 %; Medium = 5.76 % - 24.99%; High = 25% - 100%).

After creating these 3 groups, the total score on Continuance Commitment HRM (work life balance & above market wages) practices was calculated. These continuous scores were made categorical. This was done by using the median, where a score above the median (respectively, 6.31) was given 1 and beneath the median 0. In this way the scores were divided in groups with high (1) or low (0) Continuance Commitment HRM practices.

The sector in which a business unit belonged to was already given, where the distinction was made between (semi-) public and (private) sector.

Significantly differences in the constitution of these two groups were measured by using the chi-square tests.

The effects of all Continuance Commitment HRM practices & Sector-specific characteristics were researched with the use of One-Way ANOVA's for each type of golden cage business unit, independently. Not just the golden cage employees and their scores on motivation for work and job strain were taken into account, but all the employees in that particular business unit were taken into account.

#### **<u>4 Results</u>**

Results are given below; first the results of pre analyses are given by the correlation matrix and the multiple regression analysis. The second section gives the results of the One-Way ANOVA's for each characteristic separately.

#### 4.1 Correlation matrix and regression analysis

A correlation matrix showed the relationship between the 5 independent variables and the 2 dependent variables.

	Mean	SD	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. Gender	1.46	.50	1						
2. Age	41.38	11.04	.044	1					
3. Education	3.90	1.38	.038	225**	1				
4. Tenure	11.30	9.78	.031	.607**	241**	1			
5. Experienced Workload	1.94	.48	031	.075	.063	.010	1		
6. Motivation for Work	3.88	.74	.040	.306**	.011	.152*	.055	1	
7. Job Strain	1.79	.46	.010	.132*	.017	.081	.444**	093	1
***a <0,001 **a <0.0	1	*a <0.0	5	#a <0.1	0				

Table 4.1.1 Correlations (N= 245)

This correlation matrix shows the relationships among the 5 characteristics and the dependent variables motivation for work and job strain, which was investigated using Person product-moment correlation coefficient. There was a strong positive relationship between age and tenure (r .607). A medium positive relationship was between experienced workload and job strain (r. 444). Negative small relationships were between education and age (r -.225) and education and tenure (r. -.241).

Regression analyses showed that our conceptual model explained **19.0%** of the variance in motivation for work and **21.3%** of the variance in job strain (see table 4.1.2.).

	Motivation	for Work	Job Strain	
<u>Variable</u>	<u>R<sup>2</sup></u>	R <sup>2</sup> Change	<u>R<sup>2</sup></u>	<u>R<sup>2</sup> Change</u>
Gender	.002	.002	.000	.000
Age	.094	.093***	.017	.017*
Education	.097	.003	.017	.000
Tenure	.098	.001	.017	.000
Workload	.099	.001	.208	.190***
Golden Cage/Collar	.190	.091***	.213	.005
***a <0.001 **a <	:0.01 *	a < 0.05	#a < 0.10	

Table 4.1.2 Hierarchical multiple regression (N= 245)

If an employee is a golden cage or a golden collar employee had a significant (p. .000) unique contribution of 9.1% of the total explained variance in motivation for work. It did not show a significant (p. .222) unique contribution to the total explained variance in job strain. Age had a significant (p. .000) unique contribution of age to motivation for work. Age was responsible for 9.3% of the total explained variance in motivation for work. It also showed a significant (p. .040) unique contribution to job strain. Age was responsible for 1.7% of the total explained variance in job strain.

At last, experienced workload was responsible for 19.0% of the total explained variance in job strain.

#### 4.2 Feelings of golden cage employees in comparison to golden collar employees

As stated in the method section, 2 independent sample t-tests were performed to test the psychological consequences of the golden cage in comparison to the golden collar. Table 4.2 gives an overview of the mean scores on the dependent variables and if this difference is significant different.

Table 4.2	Mean scores and	significant	difference

	Golden Cage	Golden Collar
	(N-116)	(N-120)
	(11–110)	(11-12)
Motivation	3.68***	4.07
<b>S</b> 4	1.92	1 75
Strain	1.82	1.75
***a <0,001	**a <0.01	*a <0.05

Results in table 4.2 show that golden cage employees score significantly (p. .000) lower on motivation, than golden collar employees. There is no significant difference (p. 257) in the scores on strain. Therefore, hypothesis 1a, which states, *"The golden cage group has less work motivation"* is fully supported. However, hypothesis 1b, which states, *"The golden cage group has more job strain"* is fully rejected.

#### 4.3 Characteristics of both groups and their influence on Golden Cage feelings

ANOVA' S were used for the comparison of the golden cage with the golden collar employees on specific characteristics.

#### 4.3.1 Gender

In order to test hypothesis 2a, One-Way ANOVA tests were performed for each category of gender and the results are given in table 4.3.1.

	Motivation		Strain	
<u>Gender</u>	<u>Golden Cage</u>	<u>Golden Collar</u>	<u>Golden Cage</u>	<u>Golden Collar</u>
Men (N=112)	3.69**	4.06	1.88	1.74
Women (N=133)	3.68***	4.08	1.79	1.77
***a <0,0	01 **a <0.0	1 *a <0.05	#a <0.1	0

Table 4.3.1Results of One-Way ANOVA tests.

These results showed that there are significant differences in the scores of male (p. .009) and female (p. .001) employees on motivation for work. There were no significant differences on strain (p. .142 & p. .829). Therefore, hypothesis 2a, which states, "*Males and females in the golden cage score less on motivation for work & higher on job strain*" is partly rejected.

#### 4.3.2 Age

One-Way ANOVA tests were performed to research the probability that there was a significant effect for a specific age group and if this score on motivation or strain is significant different for the golden cage or the golden collar. Results are given in table 4.3.2.

	Motivation		Strain	
Age	<u>Golden Cage</u>	<u>Golden Collar</u>	<u>Golden Cage</u>	<u>Golden Collar</u>
Young(<35) (N=71)	3.19*	3.79	1.64	1.77
Middle(35-50)	3.80**	4.16	1.89*	1.71
(N=112) Old(>50) (N=62)	3.87**	4.31	1.85	1.82
***a <0.001	**a <0.01	*a <0.05	#a <0.10	

Table 4.3.2Results of One-Way ANOVA tests.

As can be seen in table 4.3.2 there were significant differences among the three stages of age. In comparison to the golden collar group, employees in the golden cage scored in all stages of age significantly (respectively p. .002, p. .005 & p. .005) lower on motivation for work. Although, there wasn't an overall significant difference among golden cage and golden collar on job strain, there is a significant difference (p. .034) for the employees of middle age. The employees of middle age in the golden cage scored significantly higher on job strain, than employees of middle age in the golden collar.

Therefore, hypothesis 2b, which states, "Golden cage employees of middle age had the lowest score on motivation for work and the highest on job strain" is partly rejected.

#### 4.3.3 Educational Background

One-Way ANOVA tests were performed to research the effect of educational backgrounds for both groups on motivation for work and job strain and the results are given in table 4.3.3.

Tuble liele	Reputes of O		10000	
	Motivation		Strain	
<u>Educational</u> Background	<u>Golden Cage</u>	<u>Golden Collar</u>	<u>Golden Cage</u>	<u>Golden Collar</u>
Middle (N=80)	3.66*	4.00	1.82	1.76
Vocational (N=149)	3.76**	4.10	1.84	1.76
Academic (N=16)	3.07*	4.06	1.73	1.65
***a < 0.001	**a <0.01	*a <0.05	#a < 0.10	

Table 4.3.3Results of One-Way ANOVA tests.

As can be seen in the table 4.3.3 educational background has significant effects (respectively p. .035, p. .003 & p. .020) for all stages of educational background. Employees in the golden

cage score significant lower, than employees in the golden collar. There is no significant difference in job strain. Therefore, hypothesis 2c, which states, "*The highest educated employees in the golden cage had the lowest score on motivation for work and the highest score on job strain.*" is partly rejected.

#### 4.3.4 Tenure

In order to test hypothesis 3a, One-Way ANOVA tests were performed and the results are given in table 4.3.4.

	Motivation		Strain	
<u>Tenure</u>	<u>Golden Cage</u>	<u>Golden Collar</u>	<u>Golden Cage</u>	<u>Golden Collar</u>
$\leq 4$ years (N=73)	3.42*	3.89	1.72	1.66
(N=73) 4-8 years (N=60)	3.63*	4.02	1.69	1.76
(N=53)	3.92#	4.25	1.93	1.97
$\geq 18$ years (N=59)	3.73*	4.30	1.91*	1.65
***a <0.00	1 **a <0.01	*a <0.05	#a <0.10	

Table 4.3.4Results of One-Way ANOVA tests.

As can be seen in table 4.3.4 there were significant differences among the 4 stages of tenure. In comparison to the golden collar group, employees in the golden cage scored in all stages of tenure significantly (respectively p. .013, p. .048, p. .058 & p. .003) lower on motivation. Although, there wasn't an overall significant difference among golden cage and golden collar on job strain, there is a significant difference (p. .036) for employees with the highest tenure. The employees with the highest tenure in the golden cage scored significantly higher on job strain, than employees with the highest tenure in the golden collar.

Therefore, hypothesis 3a, which states, "Golden cage employees with the highest tenure scored the lowest on motivation for work and the highest on job strain" is partly rejected.

#### 4.3.5 Experienced Workload

In order to test hypothesis 3d, One-Way ANOVA tests were performed and the results are given in table 4.3.5.

	Motivation		Strain	
<u>Workload</u>	<u>Golden Cage</u>	<u>Golden Collar</u>	<u>Golden Cage</u>	<u>Golden Collar</u>
Low (N=93)	3.63*	3.99	1.70#	1.56
Middle (N=85)	3.71**	4.14	1.78	1.71
High (N=67)	3.72#	4.06	2.00	2.16
***a <0.001	**a <0.01	*a < 0.05	#a <0.10	

Table 4.3.5Results of One-Way ANOVA tests.

As can be seen in the table 4.3.5 there were significant effects (respectively p. .019, p. .008 & p. .055) of workload. Employees in the golden cage with one of the three workloads score lower on motivation for work, than those employees in the golden collar. There was one significant effect (p. .091) of workload on motivation. Employees with low workload in the golden cage had more job strain, in comparison to employees with low workload in the golden collar. Therefore, hypothesis 3b, which states, "Golden cage employees with the lowest experienced workload have the lowest score on motivation for work and the highest score on job strain." is partly rejected.

#### 4.4 Continuance Commitment HRM

Table 4.4.1 Descriptives, distributions and big. If one chi-square te	Table	4.4.1	<b>Descriptives</b>	, distributions an	d Sig. fi	om chi-squa	re tes
-----------------------------------------------------------------------	-------	-------	---------------------	--------------------	-----------	-------------	--------

	Percentage Golden Cage in BU	Low (n= 15)	Medium (n= 19)	High (n= 13)	Significant?
Continuance Commitment HRM					.001
Low		12(80.0%)	10(52.6%)	1(7.7%)	
High		3(20.0%)	9(47.4%)	12(92.3%)	

Table 4.4.1 shows, that there is a significant (p. .001) difference in the distribution of the golden cage business units among the stages of Continuance Commitment HRM. 92.3 % of business units with a high percentage of golden cage employees have a high score on Continuance Commitment HRM, while 80 % of business units with a low percentage of golden cage employees have a low score on Continuance Commitment HRM. Therefore, hypothesis 4a, which states, "*The higher the Continuance Commitment HRM practices, the* 

more the business unit is characterized by a higher percentage of golden cage employees" is fully supported.

In order to test if the scores on motivation for work and job strain differ significantly between the stages of Continuance Commitment HRM practices and among the percentage of golden cage employees in business units (H4b), several ANOVA tests were performed. From each business unit, all employees were taken into account, not only the golden cage or collar employees. Results are shown in table 4.4.2.

	Moti	ivation	Strain		
<u>Continuance Commitment</u> <u>HRM</u>	Low	<u>High</u>	Low	<u>High</u>	
Percentage Golden Cage in BU					
Low (n=15)	3.56	3.86#	1.94	1.77	
Medium (n=19)	3.67	3.92**	1.80	1.87	
High (n=13)	4.34	3.90*	2.02	1.85	

Table4.4.2Results of One-Way ANOVA tests.

\*\*\*a <0,001 \*\*a <0.01 \*a <0.05 #a <0.10

As can be seen in table 4.4.2 only the score in business units with a high number of golden cage employees came up with the hypothesis. Therefore, hypothesis 4b which states; "In comparison to a low score on Continuance Commitment HRM practices, a high score on Continuance Commitment HRM practices, results in more job strain and lower motivation for work" is rejected.

#### 4.5 Sector-specific characteristics

	Percentage Golden Cage in BU	Low (n=15)	Medium (n= 19)	High (n=13)	Significant?
Sector					.109
Private		8(44.4%)	8(44.4%)	2(11.1%)	
(semi-) public		7(24.1%)	11(37.9%)	11(37.9%)	

 Table
 4.5.1
 Descriptives, distributions and Sig. from chi-square test

Table 4.5.1 shows no significant (p. .109) difference in the distribution of the golden cage business units between the private and (semi-) public sector. Therefore, hypothesis 5a, which states, "In comparison to the private sector, the (semi)public sector consists of more business units with a high percentage of golden cage employees" is fully rejected.

In order to test if the scores on motivation for work and job strain differ significantly between the sector private and (semi-)public and among the percentage of golden cage employees in business units (H5b), several ANOVA tests were performed. From each business unit, all employees were taken into account, not only the golden cage or collar employees. Results are shown in table 4.5.2.

	Mo	tivation	Strain		
Sector	<u>Private</u>	(semi-) Public	<b>Private</b>	(semi-) Public	
Percentage Golden Cage in BU					
Low (n=15)	3.33	4.08***	1.92	1.92	
Medium (n=19)	3.59	3.95***	1.91	1.77*	
High (n=13)	3.72	3.96#	2.09	1.82*	

Table4.5.2Results of One-Way ANOVA tests.

\*\*\*a <0,001 \*\*a <0.01 \*a <0.05 #a <0.10

As can be seen in table 4.5.2 there were several significations. Only for business units characterized by a low percentage of golden cage employees, was no significant difference for strain. Therefore, hypothesis 5b which states; "In comparison to a business unit in the private sector, a business unit in the (semi-)public sector scores higher on job strain and lower on motivation for work" is rejected.

#### 5 Conclusion

This research has tried to answer the following research question and its sub-questions

What kind of employees have the consequences of the golden cage set up by the organization and where in the organization can these employees be found?

- What are the consequences of the golden cage for the employees?
- Who are these golden cage employees?
- Where do these golden cage employees work?

The first question looked at the effects of the golden cage on employees' motivation for work and employees' job strain. This was done by comparison with the golden collar group. The second question looked at 5 characteristics that influenced these golden cage feelings, also in comparison to the golden collar group. The third question looked at the characteristics at business unit level, which were responsible for causing these feelings.

#### 5.1 What are the consequences of the golden cage for the employees?

The comparison was made between the golden cage employees and the golden collar employee. There was an overall effect for the motivation for work. Golden cage employees showed a significant lower score on motivation for work. This research did not found an overall effect for employees' strain. But this do not imply, that there is not a, so called 'golden cage effect.' Further our conceptual model explained **19.0%** of the variance in motivation for work and **21.3%** of the variance in job strain.

In the next paragraph, each characteristic independently is described, and some characteristics showed not only a significant difference for employees' motivation for work, but also a significant result on job strain.

#### 5.2 Who are these golden cage employees?

There was an expectation about the characteristics from these golden cage employees. Some were confirmed, and some results showed the other way around as was expected.

One confirmation was that employees in the golden cage of middle age were less motivated for work *and* showed a significant higher score on job strain. This research named this a typical golden cage effect, because for the other age groups, there was no significant effect for job strain. This phase in their working life may be critical for those employees. Schabracq et al. (1996, p. 257) refer to this as a typical mid-career problem and can be defined as "a set of difficulties that some employees are confronted with in their careers between the age of thirty and fifty." The mid-career problem is a part of the so-called midlife crisis. Both problems are overlapping each other and the problems are associated with the transition from junior to senior status (Schabracq et al, 1996). Age had a unique contribution of age to motivation for work. Age was responsible for 9.3% of the total explained variance in motivation for work. Age also has a unique contribution of 1.7 % in job strain.

Another typical golden cage effect was found at employees with the highest tenure. This result was in line with the expectations; a high tenure results in less motivation for work *and* more job strain for the golden cage employees. An explanation is that these employees are facing more barriers to leave the job, then employees with a lower tenure (Schabracq, et al, 1996).

Golden cage employees with low experienced workload also showed the golden cage effect; less motivation for work and more job strain. This was contrary to our expectation; it was expected that employees with high workload, would have the golden cage results. One explanation for this gives Schabracq et al. (1996), who argue that these employees may find their work not challenging anymore, but stay in their jobs, because they have the feeling they cannot leave the organizations.

Workload itself had a unique contribution of 19.0% in job strain and was therefore almost completely responsible for the total explained variance in job strain (21.3%).

This research also added value to the ERI theory. The golden cage can be seen as high rewards, while employees cannot put their efforts in the work, which causes an imbalance. Overall, these employees have less motivation for work. For some specific characteristics (age between 35-50, tenure of >18 years; low workload) these employees perceived even more job strain.

#### 5.3 Where do these golden cage employees work?

As was expected, business units with a high number of HR practices aimed at improving commitment from the employees were found to have a high number of golden cage employees. This means that the golden cage can be set up by business units.

Business units with a high number of golden cage employees and a high score on Continuance Commitment HR practices are overall lower motivated, than the same business units with a low score on Continuance Commitment HRM. This indicates that the number of HR practices aimed at improving employees' commitment has an influence on the motivation for work. This can be seen as a golden cage effect on business unit level.

Against the expectation, employees in business units in the (semi-) public sector score higher on motivation and lower on strain in comparison to business units operating in the private sector (except for strain at the lowest level of number of golden cage employees in the business unit).

Overall, some interesting results were found, but some expected results appeared not to occur. The following chapter will discuss the findings from this research and attempts to give some alternative explanations for the rejected hypotheses.

#### 6 Discussion

The aim of this research was to explore the golden cage and its consequences for the employees. Some important characteristics were taken into account. Further, this research looked at important determinants at business unit level, which were responsible for these golden cage feelings. This research also has an overall view of the context of the golden cage employees. This and some other important (surprising) results needed some discussion.

#### 6.1 Discussion

There was no overall difference found for strain, resulting from the golden cage. An explanation for this may be that strain is more a consequence of job demands, instead of the golden cage symptoms (Karasek, 1979; Bakker, et al 2004). Golden cage employees may find their work not interesting and challenging anymore, but this may not mean that the demands are too high. In the eyes of these employees, their work may be not difficult, but easy to do. This may not cause strain, but did result in lower motivation for work. Bakker, et al. (2004) support this assumption; they found strong support that high job demands caused exhaustion symptoms, where strain is one of them. One of the predictors was the amount of experienced workload that caused job strain. This result was also found in this research were high experienced workload by both golden cage and collar employees caused the most job strain.

Though, it did not supported the expectation that high experienced workload was a predictor of low motivation for work, on the contrary it supported the fact that high experienced workload caused higher motivation overall. According to Karasek (1979) employees may found a high experienced workload challenging and show more enthusiasm, under the condition that they get responsibility for the task. Employees are given the chance to show their ideas and perform the task as they want to. In this way these employees are motivated for the task. This can be an explanation that a high experienced workload does not necessary leads to a negative effect on employees' motivation, but can have a positive effect.

Although it was not a typical golden cage effect, it is worth mentioning the expected age effect. It appeared that younger employees scored significantly lower on motivation for work, than older employees. This is in line with the results from Bakker et al. (2000), where was found that burn out was observed more often among young employees, than among employees aged of 30-40 years. We argue that this may be the consequence of life phase, and/or characteristics of the work (e.g. less challenging work for younger employees) that has to be done.

In much research of Siegrist (1997; 2004) evidence was found that educational background has an effect on how employees react to overcommitment from the organization. Therefore our expectation was that higher educated employees in the golden cage group, showed the lowest score on motivation for work and the highest score on job strain. But the results did not support this expectation. One possible explanation comes from Mc Adams & Bryant (1987); educational background itself may not have that expected effect, but more the combination of all personal characteristics combined. For example, an older employee, with high tenure and a high education may be found earlier in the golden cage. Yet this was not researched, but only educational background independently.

There was a surprising significant result, concerning tenure in the golden cage; employees with tenure between 8-18 years scored the highest on motivation for work & highest on job strain in the golden cage, than employees with the other tenures. As noted earlier it is not about tenure itself, but the kind of work employees have to perform has an important role (Karasek, 1979). It may be that employees with the tenure 8-18 years receive more challenging, interesting and demanding work, than the remaining employees, which explains the difference in motivation & job strain inside the golden cage.

In addition, this research looked at the overall context and scores of the golden cage employees in the different organizations and there are some important remarks.<sup>8</sup> The highest percentage of golden cage employees can be found in the services sector at policy research organizations (32.6 %). Organizations in the government sector showed the oldest average age of golden cage employees (respectively 48 and 52 years) and also the highest tenures (respectively 25.6 and 21 years). Whereas organizations in the industry sector showed the lowest motivation score (2.58) and the highest job strain score (2.08).

Concerning the results at business unit level, the expectation was that business units in the (semi-) public sector were characterized by a higher percentage of golden cage employees, in comparison to business units in the private sector, but his expectation was rejected. But the rejection was not strong (p. .109). Table 4.4.1 showed the tendency as was expected, where 37.9 % of the business units in the (semi-)public sector scored high on golden cage employees, versus the 11.1 % in the private sector. Therefore, this rejection may be a consequence of the statistical processing technique chosen and the small dataset (47 cases).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> See appendix 8.2, for the table with the overall context of the golden cage employees and their scores of all type of organizations.

#### 6.2 Limitations and directions for future research

While doing this research, some limitations were found.

Secondary analysis was performed on a fixed dataset from Dorenbosch (forthcoming). Therefore this research was slightly limited to this dataset and was not able to include more measures, while sometimes that may improve this research. For example, it was not possible to ask employees if they have the feeling that they cannot leave the organization, because of the costs associated with it. This may have important implications for this research, because now it can only be expected that employees have the feeling, but it would better if it could have been proven.

This research also supposes that job strain and motivation for work are a consequence of the golden cage and its components, but because this is a cross-sectional design, is not possible to prove causal effect. A longitudinal design is therefore recommended.

Some remarks about the golden cage (-syndrome), which is rather an individual psychological concept, are needed to be made;

- Due to the success of the negotiations for good fringe benefits of the employee himself, he may have gotten these high rewards and a high job security. Therefore, he may have shaped this position himself, where he cannot move further in his job. Does this means that he is a 'victim' of the golden cage?
- The golden cage concept implies an individual approach, but employees are sometimes part of a collective agreement. When they are part of a good collective agreement, they cannot change this individually and organizations can sometimes not change these working conditions due to this collective agreement. The institutionalism theory (Hall & Taylor, 1996, p. 938) reminds to this. Organizations are sometimes bounded by institutions, such as "formal or informal procedures, routines, norms and conventions embedded in the organizational structure of the polity or political economy." Thus, the supposed golden cage effect is not something that an organization or employee can solve by itself.
- Is it not the other way around? Are these high rewards not used as a compensation for the fact that these employees cannot move further in the organization?
- Are the jobs the problem, instead of the employees? The golden cage is about the feelings of employees, but maybe the problem is with a particular job? Compensation may be used therefore as a solution to this job-related problem.

As can be seen, remarks can be given for the golden cage concept and are important to keep in mind, while using the golden cage concept.

Tenure was measured, which may not be appropriate. It measures the total time an employee is working in the organization. It does not measure the time the employee works in the same function, while this is more accurate for the golden cage concept. Future research should therefore aim at using a more function related measure of tenure.

High income was a critical scale for this research. It measured if employees received a high income. This scale was limited by the number of items; only 2 items were present. This made the conclusion about the high income of the employees weaker. Some more items with a broader concept of high income would be better for further research.

This research depended much on the choice for the used methods for statistical procedures. By creating the golden cage and golden collar group based on the scales career stagnation, job security and high income, the medians were used. This was done, because there was not a method available that was secure and well established from earlier research. So, there was a need for coming up with a method that was appropriate and that was the use of the median. However, the use of the medians is not the most secure method, while a small difference for this line can result in other outcomes concerning the number of employees in the 2 groups, which in this research may have led to other conclusions about the golden cage.

At business unit level, the division in three kinds of business units with a number of golden cage employees is also arbitrary. This division was made by the total number of business units in 3 equal parts based on the number of golden cage employees (respectively 0.0% - 33.33%; 33.33% - 67.67%; 67.67% - 100.0%). Also a small difference in these lines can have different outcomes for this research.

The same limitations came forward while measuring the Continuance Commitment HRM, which consisted of 2 scales. Medians were used here also, where above the medium was referred as high and beneath as low.

A limitation at business unit level was the number of cases. While on the one hand there was strong evidence for the number of business units with a high number of golden cage employees, which can be found in business unit with a high score on Continuance Commitment HRM in comparison to business units with a low score (respectively 12 cases versus 1). On the other hand this 1 case is responsible for the outcome on motivation for work and job strain of business units with a high number of golden cage employees and a low score on Continuance Commitment HRM in general, which may be an 'outliner.' Therefore a recommendation for further research may be to broaden this number of cases.

#### 6.3 Strengths and practical implications

Despite of the limitations, this research has fulfilled its goal: to gain insights in the golden cage (syndrome) effect and what business unit characteristics are responsible for causing this phenomenon. Evidence showed that a golden cage employee can be described as an employee of middle age, who is working for a long time within the same organization and experiences low workload. This employee can be found in business units which have a high number of HR practices aimed at improving the (continuance) commitment of the employees. This results in lower motivation for work and higher job strain.

According to ERI theory, the golden cage (syndrome) can be seen as an imbalance between the rewards from the organization and the efforts from the employee. While many research found evidence to the negative side of the ERI (low rewards, high effort), this research found evidence to the positive side of the ERI (high rewards, low effort).

Based on these premises of a golden cage employee and a golden cage business unit, organizations can adjust their HR-program on these outcomes. For example, organizations can have other HR-solutions for the specific group of employees from middle age. The same counts for those employees with a high tenure, and low experienced workload.

One important practical implication comes from Karasek (1979), which advices that job strain can be declined and motivation for work can be improved by increasing decision latitude, independently of changes in work load demands. If, as would be expected, workload is related to organizational output levels, these levels could remain the same if employees get more responsibility and freedom to fulfil the task. Changes in the administrative structure would have to be made which improve the employees' ability to make significant decisions about his task structure, increase his influence on organizational decisions, and allow him discretion over the use of his existing and potential skills.

There is also the possibility, that different age groups or groups with different tenures may appreciate rewards different. While financial rewards may be important for younger employees, older employees may find financial rewards less important. Organizations should find out what other rewards these employees may appreciate more. In this way, the organization keeps the valuable employees and these employees may be more motivated and may perceive less job strain.

In sum, it is not only about rewarding the employees, but regulation of work is also important. This work may be regulated and rewarded differently for specific groups of employees with different characteristics. In conclusion, the typical golden cage employee can be described as followed:

The typical golden cage employee is between 35-50 years, has tenure of 18 years or more and is experiencing low workload. As a result this employee has less motivation for work and perceives more job strain.

This golden cage employee is working in a business unit which is characterized as:

The typical golden cage business unit has a high number of HR practices aimed at improving the (continuance) commitment of the employees resulting in lower motivation for work. Further, a typical golden cage business unit in the private sector scores lower on motivation and higher on job strain, in comparison to a golden cage business unit in the (semi-)public sector.

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## 8 Appendices

## 8.1 Overview of the respondents

Sample structure, # raters, # matched line-HR rating, survey response (Dorenbosch, forthcoming)

Sector	Organization	# Work Units	# HR Raters	# Line Raters	# Matched Ratings	# Distributed Surveys	Surveys (% response)
Services	Security Services	3	1	3	3	226	53 (24%)
	IT Consultancy	1	1	1	1	31	20 (65%)
	Policy Research	2	2	1	2	63	43 (68%)
	Financial / Bank	6	6	6	6	111	101 (91%)
Industry	Technical Support	2	1	2	2	72	18 (25%)
	Repair Services	7	1	7	7	278	102 (37%)
	Construction	4	1	4	4	123	55 (45%)
	Quality Control	1	1	1	1	40	30 (75%)
Government	Customs / Control	4	1	4	4	112	63 (56%)
	Local Government	2	1	1	2	27	12 (44%)
Medical/Care	Hospital	14	6	14	14	507	207 (41%)
Education	Elementary Schools	7	3	7	7	205	68 (33%)
Total /Average		53	25	51	53 (100%)	1795	772 (43%)

8.2	Context of	golden ca	ge employ	ees and their scores
		-		

Sector	Organization	% Golden Cage of total employees	Average Age (years)	Men (%)	Tenure (years)	Motivation (score)	Job Strain (score)
Services	Security Services	1.9 %	22.0	100.0 %	3.0	4.75	1.33
	IT Consultancy	25.0 %	34.0	80.0%	5.2	3.25	1.67
	Policy Research	32.6 %	47.2	28.6%	9.6	3.90	1.77
Industry	Technical Support	11.1 %	39.4	100.0%	8.0	3.13	2.08
	Repair Services	4.9 %	27.8	20.0%	1.2	2.80	1.60
	Construction	20.0 %	35.6	72.7%	9.7	3.57	2.00
	Quality Control	10.0 %	32.7	33.3%	6.0	2.58	1.50
Government	Customs / Control	20.6 %	48.0	69.2%	25.6	3.62	1.86
	Local Government	16.7 %	52.0	50.0%	21.0	3.25	1.67
Medical/Care	Hospital	24.2 %	43.9	20.0%	15.2	3.80	1.80
Education	Elementary Schools	14.7 %	46.8	20.0%	14.3	4.08	2.05
Total /Average		17.3 %	42.7	37.1%	13.7	3.68	1.82