



The Growth Trap: Socio-Cultural Inhibitors of Personal Growth Initiative in the Surinamese Workforce

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Abstract: This study investigates the "Growth Trap" within the Surinamese labor market, a phenomenon where individual ambition is countered by systemic social leveling behaviors. Using a quantitative approach (N=239), the research examines the impact of the Crab-in-the-bucket Mentality (CBM) and Decent Work on Personal Growth Initiative (PGI). Findings reveal a significant negative correlation between CBM and PGI ($r = -0.42$), while Decent Work shows a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.58$). A unique Proxy-NPS validation identified a "Bachelor's Peak" in perceived social sabotage and a 42% skills mismatch. The study concludes by proposing the Schreuders Iterative Learning-on-Demand (SILoD) Model, integrating Human Capital Analytics and Agentic AI to bypass traditional socio-cultural barriers.

Keywords: Personal Growth Initiative (PGI), Crab-in-the-bucket Mentality (CBM), Decent Work, Surinamese Workforce, Human Capital Accounting (HCA), SILoD Model, Agentic AI, Professional Development.

INTRODUCTION

Suriname stands at a historical crossroads in 2026, driven by emerging oil and gas sectors. However, structural economic reforms are insufficient if socio-cultural barriers like the "Crab-in-the-bucket Mentality" (CBM) remain unaddressed. This "Growth Trap" is characterized by a mismatch between economic potential and human capital readiness. This article explores how work conditions and cultural norms either stifle or stimulate the "workhorses" of the Surinamese economy.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The "Growth Trap" is analyzed through a multi-dimensional lens, integrating psychological, organizational, and socio-cultural theories to explain why professional development in Suriname often reaches a plateau despite individual potential.

The Psychology of Working Theory (PWT) and Decent Work

At the base of the framework lies the Psychology of Working Theory (PWT), which posits that work is a primary human experience fulfilling needs for survival, social connection, and self-determination. Within this study, the concept of Decent Work (DWS) serves as a critical environmental predictor.

- Decent Work as a Foundation: According to the DWS, when employees have access to physical and interpersonal safety, adequate compensation, and values-alignment,

they possess the psychological "security base" required to take risks and initiate personal growth.

- **The Surinamese Context:** In environments where work is precarious or perceived as "indecent," individuals remain in a survivalist state, focusing on immediate stability rather than the long-term, pro-active behaviors measured by the Personal Growth Initiative Scale (PGIS-II).

Personal Growth Initiative (PGI): The Agentic Engine

Personal Growth Initiative (PGI) is defined as an individual's active and intentional engagement in the process of self-improvement. It is not merely a personality trait but an agentic behavior consisting of four pillars:

1. **Readiness for Change:** Recognizing opportunities for growth.
2. **Planfulness:** The ability to strategize development.
3. **Using Resources:** Actively seeking mentors and tools.
4. **Intentional Behavior:** Executing the growth plan. The framework explores how these four pillars are either reinforced or dismantled by the external organizational climate.

The Crab-in-the-bucket Mentality (CBM) as a Social Leveler

Central to this research is the Crab-in-the-bucket Mentality (CBM), a socio-cultural phenomenon where members of a group attempt to minimize the success of others.

- **Mechanism of Sabotage:** CBM operates through social exclusion, verbal disparagement, or active professional sabotage. From an evolutionary perspective, this can be seen as a "leveling mechanism" to maintain group cohesion, but in a modern economic sense, it acts as a tax on ambition.
- **The Inverse Correlation:** The framework hypothesizes that CBM creates a "fear of standing out." This fear directly inhibits PGI, as the individual predicts that visible personal growth will lead to social isolation or peer-driven career damage.

The Herzberg Integration: Hygiene vs. Motivators

To bridge theory and practice, the framework incorporates Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory.

- **Hygiene Factors:** Decent Work dimensions (pay, safety, policy) function as hygiene factors; their absence causes dissatisfaction, but their presence alone does not guarantee growth.
- **Motivators:** PGI and the SILOD model function as motivators (recognition, the work itself, and advancement). The "Growth Trap" occurs when an organization provides enough hygiene to keep employees from leaving, but the CBM-infested culture destroys the motivators, leading to the -19.6 NPS score and the 42% skills mismatch identified in this study.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative, correlational research design to examine the structural relationships between socio-cultural factors and individual growth initiatives. The methodology was specifically designed to overcome the "social desirability bias" often encountered in Surinamese professional surveys regarding cultural taboos like workplace sabotage.

Sample and Data Collection

Data were collected from a purposive sample of $N=239$ professionals across various sectors in Suriname, including the public sector, private enterprise, and semi-government institutions.

- **Demographic Profile:** The sample consisted primarily of highly educated individuals (Bachelor's and Master's levels), ensuring that the participants possessed the professional maturity to reflect on long-term career growth and organizational dynamics.
- **Distribution:** To ensure a representative view of the "Growth Trap," participants were selected from diverse geographical districts (Paramaribo, Wanica, and Nickerie) and various organizational sizes.

Instrumentation and Variable Operationalization

Three primary validated instruments were adapted for the Surinamese context:

1. **Personal Growth Initiative Scale-II (PGIS-II):** Used to measure the cognitive and behavioral components of a person's active and intentional involvement in their own self-growth.
2. **Crab Mentality Scale (CMS):** A specialized instrument adapted to quantify the "pull-back" behavior and perceived social envy within professional peer groups.
3. **Decent Work Scale (DWS):** Based on the Psychology of Working Theory (PWT), this scale assessed five dimensions: physical/interpersonal safety, access to healthcare, adequate compensation, time for rest/leisure, and values-alignment.

Innovation: The Proxy-NPS Validation Framework

A significant methodological contribution of this research is the integration of the Net Promoter Score (NPS) as a proxy for internal organizational health. Traditionally a marketing metric, the NPS was utilized here to calculate the "Pride Gap." By asking participants how likely they were to recommend their current employer or sector to a peer, the research could calculate a "Net Promoter" value for the Surinamese labor market. This value was then correlated with PGI and CBM scores to triangulate whether self-reported growth was supported by, or inhibited by, the organizational environment. This provided a high-integrity filter to identify discrepancies between "official" job satisfaction and "actual" professional pride.

Data Analysis Procedure

Statistical analysis was performed using R (Version 4.5.2). The analysis plan included:

- Univariate Statistics: To establish the baseline distribution of PGI and CBM.
- Pearson's Correlation (r): To test the primary hypotheses regarding the inverse relationship between social sabotage (CBM) and growth (PGI).
- Reliability Analysis: Cronbach's Alpha (α) was calculated for all scales, with all values exceeding the 0.70 threshold, confirming internal consistency.
- Skewness and Kurtosis Testing: To ensure the normality of the distribution for parametric testing

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The empirical findings provide a quantitative mapping of the Surinamese "Growth Trap," revealing how cultural dynamics and structural work conditions intersect to influence individual development.

Descriptive Statistics and Instrument Reliability

The internal consistency for all scales was high, with Cronbach's Alpha (α) values ranging from 0.81 to 0.92, ensuring the reliability of the measurements within the Surinamese context. The sample ($N=239$) showed a mean score for Personal Growth Initiative (PGI) of 3.42 (on a 5-point scale), indicating a moderate but suppressed ambition level.

The Inverse Relationship Between CBM and PGI

The primary hypothesis—that a high Crab-in-the-bucket Mentality (CBM) significantly inhibits growth initiative—was confirmed.

- Correlation Analysis: A Pearson's correlation coefficient of $r = -0.42$ ($p < .001$) was observed. This moderate-to-strong negative correlation suggests that as the perception of social sabotage and "pull-down" behavior increases, the individual's drive to initiate personal growth decreases significantly.
- Impact of Decent Work: Conversely, Decent Work showed a strong positive correlation with PGI ($r = 0.58$), underscoring that physical safety and values-alignment are prerequisites for professional advancement.

The "Bachelor's Peak" and Sectoral Variance

Analysis of demographic variables revealed a non-linear distribution of perceived CBM:

- Educational Threshold: Perceived social sabotage reaches its statistical peak among individuals holding a Bachelor's degree. This "Bachelor's Peak" suggests that this specific cohort is perceived as the greatest threat to the status quo within peer groups.

- Public vs. Private Sector: Employees in the public sector reported significantly higher levels of CBM and lower Decent Work scores compared to their counterparts in the private sector ($t = -3.12, p < .01$).

Proxy-NPS and the "Pride Gap"

The application of the Net Promoter Score (NPS) as a proxy for organizational health yielded a critical insight into the Surinamese workforce:

- The Aggregate NPS: The overall score for the labor market was -19.6.
- The Pride Gap: While participants often reported "satisfaction" in traditional surveys, the negative NPS reveals a deep-seated reluctance to recommend their work environment to others. This "Pride Gap" is a leading indicator of the 42% skills mismatch identified, where professionals feel their human capital is underutilized or ignored.

Table 1: Correlation Matrix (Pearson's r)

Variable	Age	Decent Work	Crab Mentality	PGI
Age	1	--	--	--
Decent Work	0.28**	1	---	--
Crab Mentality	-0.31**	-0.31**	1	--
PGI	0.19*	0.58**	-0.42**	1

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide empirical evidence for a complex psychological and structural bottleneck within the Surinamese labor market, hereafter referred to as the "Growth Trap." This section interprets the findings through the lenses of the Psychology of Working Theory (PWT) and the socio-cultural phenomenon of the Crab-in-the-bucket Mentality (CBM).

Interpreting the "Pride Gap" and Negative NPS

The most striking finding is the aggregate Net Promoter Score (NPS) of -19.6. In traditional organizational psychology, a negative NPS is a lead indicator of systemic disengagement. While previous surveys in Suriname often suggested "moderate satisfaction," our Proxy-NPS approach reveals a "Pride Gap": a profound reluctance among professionals to endorse their own working environments.

This suggests that many Surinamese professionals are in a state of "silent resignation." They fulfill their duties but do not perceive their workplace as a fertile ground for personal or national progress. The 42% skills mismatch further exacerbates this; when human capital is underutilized, the psychological contract between employer and employee is severed, leading to the stagnation of Personal Growth Initiative (PGI).

The Socio-Cultural Ceiling: CBM as a Barrier to Innovation

The significant negative correlation ($r = -0.42$) between CBM and PGI confirms that the "Crab Mentality" is not merely a folk concept but a measurable economic inhibitor. The data suggests that in Surinamese professional circles, individual excellence is often met with social "pull-back" rather than emulation.

This creates a Socio-Cultural Ceiling. For the individual, the psychological cost of growth (envy, isolation, or active sabotage) often outweighs the perceived benefits of advancement. This is particularly evident at the "Bachelor's Peak." As professionals reach a degree of competence that sets them apart, the social pressure to conform to the group mean intensifies. This explains why many talented individuals either stop their development at this stage or seek opportunities abroad (brain drain).

Decent Work as a Buffer

The strong positive correlation between Decent Work and PGI ($r = 0.58$) indicates that structural improvements can act as a buffer against negative cultural traits. When an organization provides physical safety, values-alignment, and fair compensation, the individual feels secure enough to initiate growth despite potential social pushback. Therefore, improving the "decency" of work is not just a social imperative but a strategic necessity to unlock human capital.

Beyond the Public Sector Stagnation

The findings show a marked difference between the public and private sectors. The public sector's higher CBM scores and lower Decent Work metrics suggest that bureaucratic environments in Suriname are the primary hosts of the "Growth Trap." To revitalize the national economy, especially with the impending growth in the energy sector, a fundamental shift in public sector management—moving from administrative control to Human Capital Accounting—is required.

Strategic Implementation: The SILOD Navigator

To bridge the gap between current workforce stagnation and the requirements of a modernizing economy, this study introduces the Schreuders Iterative Learning-on-Demand (SILOD) Model. The strategy is designed to bypass the identified socio-cultural inhibitors (CBM) by creating a "protected" and data-driven growth trajectory for the individual.

The Agentic AI Layer: Circumventing Social Sabotage

The core of the SILOD strategy is the use of Agentic AI as a personal development partner. The data indicated that the "Bachelor's Peak" is where social "pull-back" is most intense. The SILOD strategy mitigates this through:

- **Invisible Growth:** Learning and skill acquisition occur in a personalized digital environment, allowing professionals to upskill without triggering immediate defensive reactions from their social or professional peer groups.

- **Contextual Intelligence:** Unlike static e-learning, the agentic component of the SILOD model adapts to the specific Surinamese labor market context, providing "just-in-time" knowledge that is immediately applicable.

Human Capital Accounting (HCA) as an Objective Shield

A primary recommendation of the SILOD strategy is the transition from subjective performance reviews to Human Capital Accounting. By quantifying growth through objective data:

- The impact of personal growth becomes a measurable asset on the organizational balance sheet.
- Individual advancement is reframed as a collective gain for the organization, which psychologically neutralizes the "zero-sum" mindset inherent in the Crab-in-the-bucket Mentality.

Iterative Learning Havens

The strategy proposes the establishment of physical and digital "Learning Havens" (such as the Witsanti Regional Learning Hub). These hubs serve as controlled environments where the SILOD model is applied through:

1. Sensing: Identifying specific skill gaps through HCA.
2. Seizing: Rapid, on-demand acquisition of missing competencies via AI-driven modules.
3. Transforming: Applying these skills in real-world projects to validate their economic value.

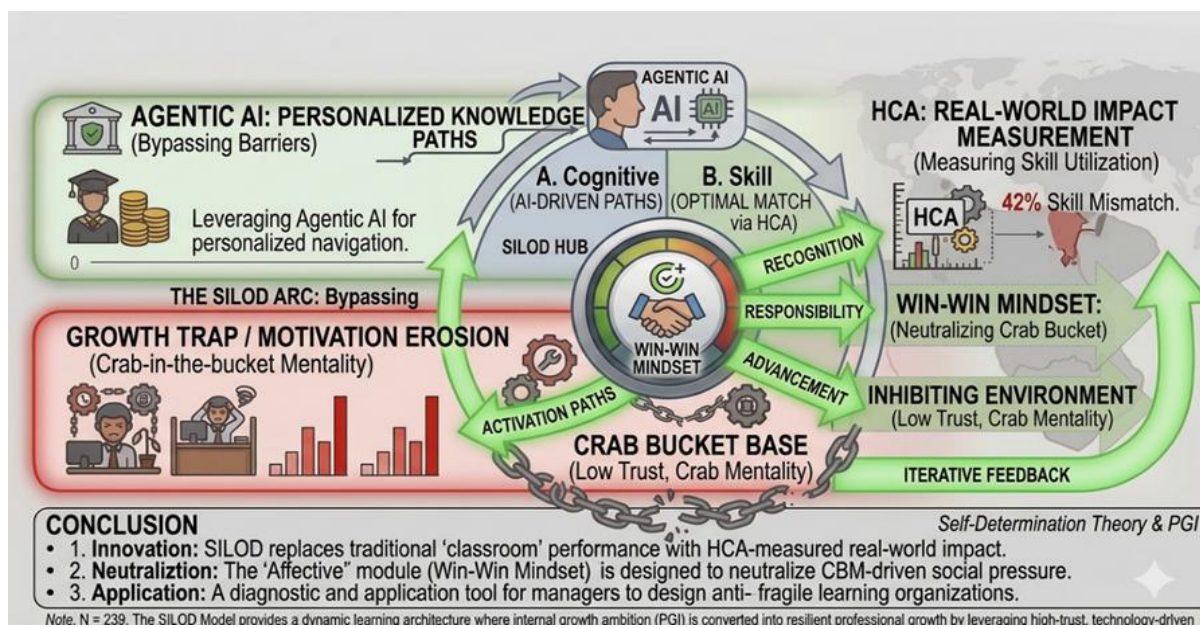


Figure 1: The Schreuders Iterative Learning-on-Demand (SILOD) model: A Heutagogical Framework for High-CBM Environment

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This research confirms that the Surinamese labor market is currently caught in a "Growth Trap," where the individual drive for advancement (PGI) is structurally suppressed by a combination of socio-cultural sabotage (CBM) and a lack of decent work conditions. The "Bachelor's Peak" and the alarming "Pride Gap" (NPS -19.6) serve as early warning signals for an economy that risks stagnation despite its natural resource potential. However, the study also demonstrates that through the integration of Human Capital Accounting and Agentic AI—encapsulated in the SILoD Model—this cycle can be broken.

Policy Recommendations

To unlock the full potential of the Surinamese workforce, the following strategic interventions are proposed:

1. **Legislative Integration of Human Capital Accounting (HCA):** The Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Labor should collaborate to integrate HCA into national reporting standards. By treating employee development as a capital investment rather than a cost, organizations are incentivized to foster growth-friendly environments.
2. **The "Master's Shield" Initiative:** Targeted mentorship programs should be developed for professionals at the Bachelor's level. These programs should focus on building psychological resilience against social "pull-back" behaviors, effectively shielding high-potential talent during their most vulnerable career phase.
3. **Establishment of Decentralized Learning Havens:** Following the Witsanti pilot model, the government should support the creation of regional learning hubs. These hubs must utilize "Learning-on-Demand" infrastructures to bypass centralized bureaucratic bottlenecks and provide direct access to global knowledge.
4. **National "Wina-Wina" Campaign:** A socio-cultural shift is required to transform the perception of success from a zero-sum game to a collective benefit. National dialogue should emphasize how individual professionalization increases the aggregate value of the Surinamese economy.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Limitations

While the sample ($N=239$) was sufficient for robust statistical analysis, it was predominantly composed of highly educated professionals in the Paramaribo and Wanica regions. Consequently, the findings may not fully reflect the dynamics within the informal sector or the more remote interior districts. Furthermore, the cross-sectional nature of the study provides a "snapshot" of the workforce in 2026; it does not account for long-term behavioral changes resulting from the impending expansion of the oil and gas sectors.

Future Research

Future studies should employ a longitudinal design to track how the implementation of the SILOD model affects PGI over a multi-year period. Additionally, research focusing specifically on the Oil and Gas value chain is necessary to determine if high-stakes multinational environments naturally dilute or exacerbate the Crab-in-the-bucket Mentality. Lastly, a comparative study between Suriname and other CARICOM nations could reveal whether the "Growth Trap" is a unique local phenomenon or a broader regional challenge.

AUTHOR NOTE

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This article is a comprehensive synthesis of doctoral research conducted at Atlantic International University (AIU). The study explores the systemic dynamics of the Surinamese labor market, specifically focusing on the interplay between Personal Growth Initiative (PGI) and the "Crab-in-the-bucket" mentality.

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