

# [ You win some & you lose some ]

**A failed experiment, a rejected article: in academia such things tend to be labelled failures. As for talking about it? Not done! But in this feature, WUR co-workers do just that. Because failure can be useful. In this instalment, we hear from Koen Manusama, who quit his PhD research at the Human Nutrition and Health chair group after two and a half years.**

Text Milou van der Horst ♦ Illustration Stijn Schreven

'It was nothing to do with the project, because I enjoyed contributing to the healthcare practice. I was investigating the effect of a lifestyle intervention on fatigue after colorectal cancer. But my way of working was different to that of my colleagues. I was more long-term oriented. For me, for example, recruiting research participants was a high priority, while colleagues were more inclined to trust that we would find them and to focus on giving me feedback on spelling mistakes in my emails. In the end, tensions sometimes ran high. I tried to adapt and I followed a coaching programme. And we talked about it together, but even that was difficult. Conflict is not a bad thing in itself. It's part of life and you learn from it, but it did drain me and eventually I ran out of energy.

When you're doing a PhD, you examine yourself and go through some deep dips. But you shouldn't lose yourself along the way. I eventually lost my motivation, self-confidence and enjoyment of life. Was it worth that to me? A title was not my

priority: what I wanted most was to do research and help people. After one and a half years full of doubt, I decided to quit. That was when I didn't manage

**'I had lost my motivation, self-confidence and enjoyment of life. Was it worth that to me?'**

to write an article for which I had postponed my holiday. The decision felt – and still feels – like a relief, mostly. But a little part of me felt it to be a massive failure: I didn't finish. And I am worried about what doors I may have closed. What next?

At the moment, I am still recovering from what's happened over the past period and I'm partly working on the project and partly on creating a PhD support position. Having tasks to complete again and the removal of pressure thanks to having dropped the PhD project has made me happier.'

