How Happy are Dutch teachers?

A Brief Report on a Quantitative Diary Study

ABSTRACT

The central aim of this study was to investigate happiness, motivation, and work demands in everyday working life of Dutch secondary school teachers using a diary methodology. We conducted a diary study among 245 teachers. Throughout five working days, teachers reported two work-related activities they spent most time in. They also reported their happiness levels during each of those activities. In addition, they reported how demanding each activity was, as well as their motivation for pursuing the particular activities. The results demonstrate the importance of self-concordant motivation for teacher well-being. Moreover, our findings reveal that activities associated with highest happiness are not necessarily associated with lowest demands.

1 Introduction

Numerous findings reveal a positive relationship between happiness and workplace success. Happy people tend to be more satisfied with their jobs and perform better; they are also more engaged in their work, show less burnout, and they are less likely to quit their jobs than their unhappy peers (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008). However, teachers' happiness at work has not been as commonly studied as have negative reactions and job stress.

Therefore, using self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), the aim of this study was to investigate happiness, motivation and work demands in everyday work life of Dutch secondary school teachers. In order to find out during which activities teachers enjoy most happiness, we assessed state happiness levels during various work activities using a diary methodology.

Moreover, since previous research recognized the importance of work motivation among teacher (Houkes, Janssen, de Jonge, & Nijhuis, 2001), we also assessed the types of work motivation. More specifically, we focused on the self-concordant work motivation, which refers to pursuing the work activities with intrinsic motivation rather than with a sense of pleasing someone else, to get some kind of reward, or to avoid punishment (Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001). Thus, self-concordant work motivation represents teachers' actual interests and their values. In contrast, non self-concordant work-related activities are the ones that are pursued for an external reward, or with a sense of "having to," "should do" etc., as the person does not really enjoy realizing them. Research has shown that self-concordance is associated with concurrent subjective well-being and also predicts longitudinal increases in well-being (Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001).

Finally, we also examine which aspects of work are considered the most demanding among Dutch teachers. Recent research within the Job Demands-Resources model (Bakker, Demerouti, & Euwema, 2005) shows that job demands may turn into stressors in situations that require

high effort to sustain high performance level. That, in turn, evokes negative outcomes, such as burnout (Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006). Examples are a high work pressure, and emotionally demanding interactions with pupils (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). However, to the best of our knowledge, previous studies did not examine job demands on a within-person and day-to-day level within the context of specific work-related activities among teachers. In the current study, we refer to daily work activities as intentional behavioral practices in which teachers engage in during their daily work life.

2 Methods

Participants

The sample in this study is a convenience sample of Dutch secondary school teachers. Of the 245 teachers who joined the study and filled out the Happiness diary at least once, 174 filled it out at least two times, 133 three times, 108 four times, and 106 filled it out five times or more often. The sample consisted of 35.5% men and 64.5% women. Participants' age ranged from 22 to 69 years, with a mean age of 45.27 (SD = 11.57). Most of the teachers were employed at MAVO, HAVO and/or VWO schools (58.1%); followed by VMBO schools (12.5%), Gymnasium (11.0%), and PRO or LWOO schools (5.9%). A small percentage of teachers did not answer the question on the type of school they worked in (12.5%).

3 Procedure

The data was collected in 2010. Teachers were contacted via e-mail; the e-mail included a short description of the study and a link to the online questionnaire named "The Happiness diary" (in Dutch: "Geluksdagboek"). Teachers who joined the study filled out the Happiness diary every evening for five working days. All of the participants received reminders via email to fill out the diary. Participation in this research was conducted on a voluntary basis, and respondents were ensured anonymity. After filling out the diary five times, participants were automatically entered in a lottery. At the end of the data collection, five teachers were randomly selected and received € 100,- each.

The Happiness diary is a structured diary internet application designed specifically for this study and based on the 'Day Reconstruction Method' (DRM; Kahneman et al., 2004). In this diary, teachers reported two work-related activities in which they spent most of their time during the preceding day, as well as the approximate duration for each of the listed activities. Thereafter, teachers rated their happiness during each of the reported activities, using a one-item graphical scale (Abdel-Khalek, 2006). On the following screen, they rated each activity on four items representing a motivational continuum based on the self-concordance model (Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001). Furthermore, on the next screen, teachers rated how demanding each of the listed activities was for them.

4 Measures

Daily work activities

The teachers filled in two work-related activities in which they spent most of their time during the preceding day. They were able to choose from a list of various teacher-specific daily work activities: administrative activities (N = 163), commuting (N = 64), lessons (N = 532), preparing for lessons (N = 164), preparing and correcting tests and exams (N = 196), meeting with parents (N = 12), meeting with colleagues (N = 122), meeting with supervisors (N = 38), counseling pupils (N = 77), work-related training or studying

(N = 55), and excursions (N = 19). Teachers could also add other types of activities that were later categorized in one of the categories mentioned above.

participants were presented four different types of reasons for engagement in the activity: external, introjected, identified and internal motivation

Daily work-related happiness

Teachers reported how happy they felt during each of the two work-related activities they listed, using a one-item graphical scale with responses ranging from 1 *(not happy at all)* to 10 *(very happy)*. Daily work-related happiness scores represent an average score of those measures obtained throughout five days.

Daily work self-concordance

For each activity, participants were presented four different types of reasons for engagement in the activity: external, introjected, identified, and internal motivation. Participants rated the extent to which they were engaged in each activity for each of the four presented types of reasons, using Likert-type items with a response scale ranging from 1 *(not at all for this reason)* to 10 *(completely for this reason)*. External and introjected motivations are classified as non self-concordant and potentially problematic, while identified and intrinsic motivations are classified as self-concordant and more beneficial to subjective well-being (Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, & Ryan, 2000). Item wordings for the four motivation dimensions were:
a) External: *"I did it only because the situation demanded it, and/or in order to get something (for example money, reward)";*
b) Introjected: *"I would feel bad about myself if I did not do this activity.";*
c) Identified: *"I did it because I thought it was an important and valuable thing to do"; and*
d) Intrinsic: *"I did it because I really wanted to do it."* (Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001). Self-concordant work motivation presents an average score for identified and intrinsic motivation obtained throughout five days.

Daily job demands

Teachers were asked to rate the demanding nature of both work-related activities they listed as spending most time on during their preceding work day, using a Likert-type item with a response scale ranging from 1 (not demanding at all) to 10 (extremely demanding). Daily job demand scores represent average scores of those measures obtained throughout five days.

5 Results and Discussion

First, we present descriptive information. Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations of the investigated variables. In general, it can be seen that Dutch secondary school teachers are not particularly happy or unhappy during work (M = 6.67). That is in good agreement with recent findings within the Dutch Happiness Monitor project, which shows that happiness at work is rated 6.7 on average.

Next, graphical representation of our data in Figure 1 reveals that teachers feel most happy when they are counseling pupils and going on excursions, whereas they feel least happy when doing admi-

TABLE 5.1 **Descriptive statistics for the variables included in the study, N = 1**

Variable	M (SD)	Range
Daily happiness at work	6.67 (1.62)	1-10
Daily job demands	5.74 (2.41)	1-10
Daily SC motivation	6.86 (1.98)	1-10

nistrative activities and correcting exams. Furthermore, the figure also presents teachers' self-concordant and non self-concordant motivation for different types of work-related daily activities. It shows that teachers counsel pupils and perform lessons mostly with self-concordant motivation. That is, they do it with a sense of their own choice rather than with a sense of doing things to please someone else, to get some kind of reward, or avoid punishment. In contrast, commuting, engaging in administrative activities, and preparing and correcting tests and exams are mostly pursed for non self-concordant reasons. Not surprisingly, the latter activities are mostly engaged in to fulfill work obligations and/or because the teachers would feel bad about themselves if they would not carry out the activities. Finally, Figure 1 illustrates the perceived levels of demands for the various activities reported by secondary school teachers. As can be seen, teachers find work-related training; preparing and correcting test and exams, and meeting with supervisors and parents the most demanding work-related activities.

Overall, our study demonstrates the importance of self-concordant motivation for well-being in the workplace. More specifically, our findings show that the happiest activities are not necessarily the least demanding. Moreover, it appears that the happiest activities are those that are pursued with intrinsic motivation. In that way, intrinsic motivation might represent a buffer against burnout in case of high demands. In other words, activities that are highly demanding might still

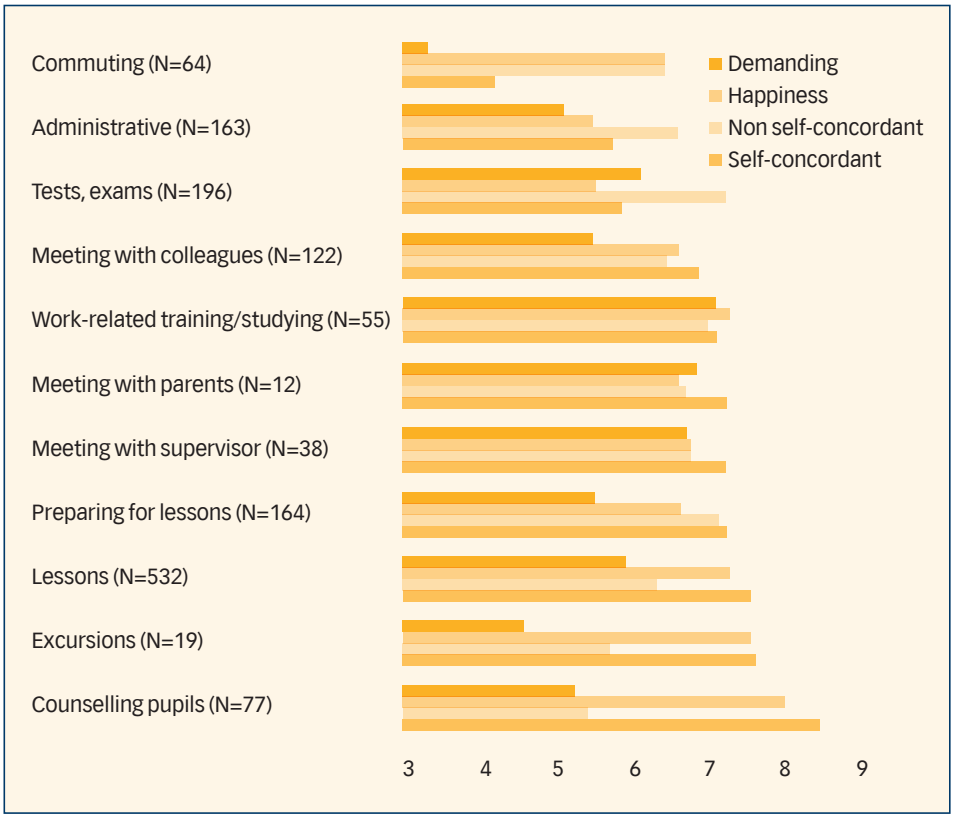


Figure 5.1 **The perceived levels of Demands, Happiness, Self-concordance and Non Self-concordance during teachers' work-related activities (averaged over five days)**

be fulfilling and related to high happiness because they are pursed out of self-concordant reasons. In contrast, activities that are both non self-concordant and highly demanding are associated with lower levels of happiness (such as preparing and correcting exams).

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