



Work happiness among teachers: A day reconstruction study on the role of self-concordance[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Self-concordant work motivation arises from one's authentic choices, personal values, and interests. In the present study, we investigated whether self-concordant motivation may fluctuate from one work-related task to the next. On the basis of self-determination theory, we hypothesized that momentary self-concordance buffers the negative impact of momentary work demands on momentary happiness. We developed a modified version of the day reconstruction method to investigate self-concordance, work demands, and happiness during specific work-related tasks on a within-person and within-day level. In total, 132 teachers completed a daily diary on three consecutive work days as well as a background questionnaire. The daily diary resulted in 792 reported work activities and activity-related work demands, self-concordance, and happiness scores. Multilevel analysis showed that—for most work activities—state self-concordant motivation buffered the negative association of work demands with happiness. These findings add to the literature on motivation and well-being by showing that the levels of self-concordance and happiness experienced by employees vary significantly on a within-day level and show a predictable pattern. We discuss theoretical and practical implications of the findings to increase employees' well-being.

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1. Introduction

Previous studies have shown positive associations between happiness and various indicators of workplace success. Compared with their less happy peers, happy people tend to earn more money, show superior task performance, and help their colleagues more often (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). In the context of teaching, research has shown that teachers' happiness is predictive of student happiness, and student happiness is predictive of school performance (Bakker, 2005). For example, in their longitudinal study, Duckworth, Quinn, and Seligman (2009) showed that teachers' positivity, namely, grit and life satisfaction predicted pupils' academic achievement. Sutton and Wheatley (2003) argued that the teachers' expression of positive emotions might affect pupils' motivation. Turner et al. (2002) showed that teachers' humor was more likely to be present in low avoidance and high mastery classrooms and absent in high avoidance and low mastery classrooms. In their review of over 180 papers, Jennings and Greenberg (2009) noticed the importance of teachers' socio-emotional competences and well-being in developing and maintaining supportive classroom climate and teacher–student relationships. However, the authors also emphasized that more research is needed in order to examine how teachers' motivation and well-being can potentially present the start of an upward spiral that enhances high quality teaching and, in turn, fosters high levels of students' motivation, well-being, and their academic achievement.

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Unfortunately, teachers often encounter high job demands, such as substantial work overload, time pressure (Chan, 1998), pupils' misbehavior, and intense emotional interactions with pupils (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Turk, Meeks, & Turk, 1982). There are also other factors outside the classroom, such as unsupportive colleagues and uncooperative parents (Lasky, 2000), which can result in feelings of anger or frustration (Bullough, Knowles, & Crow, 1991; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003).

These high work demands constitute a risk factor for teachers' well-being by contributing exhaustion, stress, cynical attitudes, and lower job satisfaction (Borg & Riding, 1991; Brackett, Palomera, Mojsa-Kaja, Reyes, & Salovey, 2010; Guglielmi & Tatrow, 1998; Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006). For instance, previous research revealed that lack of reciprocity in teachers' relationships with pupils predicts burnout (Taris, Van Horn, Schaufeli, & Schreurs, 2004). Similarly, Burke, Greenglass, and Schwarzer (1996) showed that pupils' disruptive behavior had significant relations with teachers' burnout one year later, and that burnout served as a mediator between the job demands and emotional and physical health.

Nevertheless, many teachers still feel satisfied and happy while working (Bakker, Hakanen, Demerouti, & Xanthopoulou, 2007; Borg & Riding, 1991; Grayson & Alvarez, 2008; Hakanen et al., 2006; Jacobsson, Pousette, & Thylefors, 2001). Teachers experience positive emotions when their pupils are responsive and make progress (Hargreaves, 1998, 2000), when they manage to finish their work tasks, and when they can get support from their colleagues (Hatch, 1993; Lasky, 2000). Consequently, we need more insight into the fine-grained relations between high work demands, available resources, and work-related well-being outcomes such as happiness.

Building upon the research within the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model (Bakker, Demerouti, de Boer, & Schaufeli, 2003; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001) and self-determination theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000), we propose that teachers' work motivation is a personal resource that facilitates coping with high work demands. Specifically, previous studies have shown that motivation can influence the way people perceive and approach various work tasks (Lazarus, 1993). Also, studies showed that motivation can influence the effort and persistence invested in the task, as well as the emotions felt during the involvement in the task (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Judge, Bono, Erez, & Locke, 2005; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999; Sheldon, Kasser, Smith, & Share, 2002). In that way, work motivation could be seen as a buffering factor that protects teachers from the unfavorable effects of high job demands and helps them maintain happiness with their work context.

Bearing in mind that teachers have different motivation and levels of happiness during different work activities on different working days (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2002; Ilies, Schwind, & Heller, 2007; Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, & Ryan, 2000), in this paper, we specifically focused on within-person fluctuations in teachers' motivation, happiness, and work demands. Previous research has demonstrated substantial associations between variations in state happiness and the immediate context and specifics of time use (Krueger & Schkade, 2008; Reis et al., 2000; Stone et al., 2006). For instance, previous studies showed that changing work activities contributes to changes in employees' affective states on a within-day level (Ashkanasy & Ashton-James, 2006; Ilies et al., 2007; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). However, previous studies did not address the extent to which variations in teachers' affective states at work are dependent on variations in their motivational states, and we need a better understanding on how momentary motivational states impact affective experiences during work activities among teachers. Therefore, the central goal of the present study was to examine the interrelations between secondary school teachers' momentary motivation, perceived demands, and momentary happiness during the execution of work activities on a within-person and a within-day level. We examined these within-person motivation–demand fluctuations and interaction effects on happiness beyond the baseline happiness during the previous day as well as beyond the baseline of trait work demands and trait self-concordance.

In doing so, we also statistically controlled for several relevant variables in order to address the possibility that additional factors other than the proposed predictors might have had impact on our outcome variable. Specifically, we controlled for age and health as relevant sociodemographic factors for happiness. Previous research indicated significant positive relation between happiness and health, and suggested age shows curvilinear relations with happiness (e.g., Pressman & Cohen, 2005; Veenhoven, 2008). Moreover, we also controlled for job resources, because they have consistently been positively related to indicators of work-related well-being such as happiness at work and work engagement (e.g., Bakker & Bal, 2010; Demerouti & Bakker, 2011; Fernet, Austin, Trépanier, & Dussault, 2012; Hakanen et al., 2006; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Finally, we controlled for the fulfillment of the basic psychological needs (autonomy, relatedness and competence), because previous research has shown that basic psychological needs fulfillment supports autonomous motivation, and fosters positive psychological, developmental, and behavioral outcomes (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Because diary methodology is highly suitable for examining the interrelations between motivation, demands, and happiness among teachers on a within-person level (Ohly, Sonnentag, Niessen, & Zapf, 2010; Sonnentag & Ilies, 2011), we employed a modified version of the Day Reconstruction Method (DRM; Kahneman, Krueger, Schkade, Schwarz, & Stone, 2004) in this study. The DRM is a diary method in which the participants reconstruct what they did and how they felt during their daily activities in the evening of the same day. Previous research suggests episodic assessments such as DRM generally reduce retrospective biases (Dockray et al., 2010; Kahneman & Krueger, 2006; Miron-Shatz, Stone, & Kahneman, 2009; Oerlemans, Bakker, & Veenhoven, 2011; Stone et al., 2006).

Happiness reports obtained via the DRM show similar patterns compared to happiness reports obtained in real-time, such as those using the Experience Sampling Method (ESM), an assessment method that asks participants to answer questions about their momentary experiences in real time (e.g., emotions felt) at specific times (e.g., several times a day; Dockray et al., 2010; Hektner, Schmidt, & Csikszentmihalyi, 2006; Kahneman et al., 2004; Napa Scollon, Prieto, & Diener, 2009). For instance, a study by Kahneman et al. (2004) of 909 employed women documented a close congruence between the DRM and reports obtained using the ESM (Napa Scollon et al., 2009). Similarly, Dockray et al. (2010) showed that correlations between momentary happiness scores obtained with the DRM and ESM range from .70 to .90. Altogether, the DRM design enabled us to analyze the role of

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