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Happiness Works

Happiness at work in the Netherlands

February 2015

Introduction

In January 2015, a sample of Dutch workers was consulted about their happiness at work using an online survey. In order to ensure that the sample was representative of the working population, participants were selected to fulfil a set of demographic quotas. These quotas were created using data from Statistic Netherlands (or CBS; Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek), Kerngegevens Personeel Overheid en Onderwijs, and a combination of the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08) and the Standaard Beroepenclassificatie 1992 (SBC 1992). A summary of the criterion and the final number of participants in each quota are shown in the tables below.

	Total	Sample
Dutch working population	7,283,000	1,071

Gender	Number	Sample
Male	3,999,000 (55%)	586 (55%)
Female	3,284,000 (45%)	479 (45%)

Occupation*	Number	Sample
Managers, senior officials and professional occupations	2,458,000 (34%)	359 (34%)
Associated professionals and tech occupations	1,260,000 (17%)	184 (17%)
Administrative and Secretarial	732,000 (10%)	107 (10%)
Skilled trade occupations	1,280,000 (18%)	117 (11%)*
Personal service, sales and customer service	796,000 (11%)	112 (10%)*

Sector*	Number	Sample
Public	923,531 (13%)	135 (13%)
Private	6,359,469 (87%)	929 (87%)

* Post sample statistical weighting was used where sample numbers did not exactly meet the quota criteria to permit analysis of the data as representative of the Dutch working population.

Measuring happiness at work

To assess their happiness at work all participants were asked 44 questions about their experience of working in the Netherlands. The questions ranged from direct questions about their overall experience of work as well as questions about their day-to-day work, the organizations that they worked in and how their lives in general were going. In this way the key drivers of workplace happiness in the Netherlands can be identified.

By looking at people's answers it is possible to identify who the happiest and unhappiest workers are. To clarify this, respondents were split into five equal groups (representing the happiest 20% of the working population down to the unhappiest 20%).

We define a good job as one in which the respondent is in one of the top two quintile groups - i.e. the top 40% of the population. In this way it is then possible to look at which types of situation led to the highest 40% of people in good jobs (any score over 40% is above the Dutch average).

An indication of how these groups feel about their jobs is how they rate their 'satisfaction' with their jobs. All respondents were asked to rate their job satisfaction on a scale of 1-7. The average for the Netherlands is a score of 5.3 (out of 7) with most popular answer 6 (38% of respondents' answers).

The most happy quintile group (top 20%) had a mean job satisfaction of 6.4, the next 5.9, the middle 5.5, the next 4.85 and the least happy just 3.8.

Main Findings

Some of the main findings, which will be discussed in more detail in the report, were:

- Overall, Dutch employees seem to be happier at work than their British, American and Finnish counterparts.
- The most important predictors of happy workplaces are good relationships, fairness, empowerment, being challenged and feeling work is worthwhile. A good physical working environment is also very important for Dutch employees.
- Men and women do not differ in their overall happiness at work, however gender appears to affect specific factors. Women seem to enjoy better relationships, while men feel they have more control and influence.
- Workers under 35 seem significantly less happy with their jobs, than their older colleagues. This is likely to be due to the fact that people tend to get happier in general and are more selective about their jobs as they age.
- The least happy occupations are administrative, secretarial, personal service, sales and customer service.
- There were no significant differences between the private and public sector, or between companies of different sizes.

- Subjective fair pay is a greater predictor of happiness than absolute income. Although higher salaries are associated with higher scores, it is a much weaker correlation than a sense of being paid fairly.

International Comparisons

Findings show that the Dutch are significantly happier at work than other nationalities measured; the Netherlands' mean score of 5.3 in job satisfaction is significantly higher than in the UK* (where the average is 4.4) and the US (4.7), as well as in Finland (5.0).

*This data was collected in 2011 and may not reflect current ratings.

What are the most important factors for Dutch people's happiness at work?

Our global research into work experience have identified five key drivers of happiness at work:

- Creating good relationships at work
- Treating people fairly
- Empowering people to do what they do best
- Challenging employees to be their best
- Doing worthwhile work

This study of workplace experience in the Netherlands provides further evidence on the importance of these five key factors and also identifies a sixth factor specifically important for the Netherlands:

- A good physical environment at work

Examination of each of these areas provides further insight into the Dutch working population.

Good Relationships at Work

- Relationships are critical to people's happiness at work - having colleagues and a manager who you get along with and who treats you with respect is one of the cornerstones of a good job.
- Our findings show that in the Netherlands, 40.5% claim to have good friends at work, more than half get along well with their manager (54%) while many people feel respected at work (60.2%). There is room for improvement on this front; 56% of Dutch employees really like the people in their teams, while only 36.2% feel that teams work really well together within their organization.
- However, those who do have a good relationship with their manager are far more likely to be happy at work. Just 9.1% of those who did not have a good relationship with their manager were happy at work, compared to 67.8% of those who got along well with their managers. A similar pattern is shown for relationships with colleagues (43.6% with no good friends at work are happy, compared to 64.3% with good friends at work), how much they like the people in their teams (17.8% vs 60.1%), how well teams work together (27.3% vs 74.8%) and how respected they feel at work (16.5% vs 73%).

- A strong gender effect was also found for relationships at work, with women seemingly far happier with their friendships and teammates at work (this is explored later).
- Improving ‘how’ people work together is critical to happiness at work; for example, being supportive, respectful and generous to each other as well as strengthening the vital relationship between the manager/supervisor and the people they manage/supervise.
- It is also important to deal with any conflicts in a fair and transparent way so as not to let resentments or tensions linger. These “negatives” can quite quickly undermine trust and co-operation and will seriously impact both the performance and the happiness of people at work.

Treating people fairly

- It is important that people feel they are paid “fairly” – in other words given their efforts and achievements, that they feel fairly compensated – and that they have a satisfactory work life balance.
- In the Netherlands only 32% feel they are paid fairly, while 40.7% feel they have a good work/life balance.
- These factors clearly play a part in determining happiness at work, as only 33.5% of those who feel they are paid unfairly are happy at work, compared to 79.8% who are happy with their pay. Similarly, 67.3% who feel they have a good work/life balance are happy at work, compared to only 30.7% who feel that they don't.
- Interestingly, perception of income that has a stronger effect than actual income. Income was significantly correlated with happiness at work ($r=.08$, $p<0.01$) but feelings of being paid fairly for a job was a far stronger predictor of happiness ($r=.695$, $p<0.01$). However, there is no significant relationship between income and feelings of being paid fairly, meaning that whether a person feels they are being treated fairly depends on much more than how much money they bring home.
- Lots of research shows that people who don't feel fairly treated are more likely to quit a job, even if they are performing well from the organization's perspective. It may be worth talking to employees about whether they have a good enough work life balance, and if not, what the organization can do to help.

Empowering people

- Feeling in control of the important elements of a job and doing what they do best are characteristics of people reporting that they have a good job. Academics often refer to this as people's sense of autonomy and use of their strengths.

- In the Netherlands approximately 45.6% feel a good sense of control over their job, and 47.3% report that they get to apply their own strengths regularly. However, men are far more likely than women to report this (more details below).
- Workers in the Netherlands who feel a good sense of autonomy are much more likely to be happy at work (69.1% compared to 20.3% of those who don't). A similar effect can be seen for being able to use their strengths at work: 71.6% of people who feel they get to do what they do best at work are happy with their job, compared to 15.1% who don't.
- For individuals to be doing what they do best on a daily basis is very rewarding. The organizational challenge is to create an empowering environment by supporting people to be themselves at work, to use and develop their skills and competencies, as well as finding ways of placing people in roles that are a 'good fit' for them.

Challenging employees the right amount

- Contrary to many myths about happiness at work, people actually like to be challenged and to be learning new skills at work. This gives them an important sense of progress and achievement.
- In the Netherlands, 57.3% get a regular sense of accomplishment at work and 41% of people feel that they are learning new skills.
- Dutch people who have the right amount of challenge at work are much more likely to be happy overall at work – with 76.5% who feel a sense of accomplishment being happy at work, compared to just 15.7% who don't, while 69.5% of people who feel they are learning new skills at work are happy at work, compared to 29.1% who don't.
- Creating a good 'fit' between people's skills and the tasks they need to do, as well as giving them the opportunity to develop new skills - either on the job or through training - is a great way of getting the right amount of challenge for employees. Then, work will be in that 'sweet spot' between being not too straight forward (and boring) and being overwhelming (and stressful).

Doing worthwhile work

- Having work that feels worthwhile and meaningful is very important. People tend to feel happier and more fulfilled at work if they can see that their work has a positive impact on the lives of others.
- In the Netherlands, 49.9% of people find their work worthwhile, and a slightly lower number (41%) think their work has a strong positive impact on society.
- Doing worthwhile work is not only inspiring; it also has a large impact on people's happiness at work. 71% of those who feel their job is worthwhile are happy at work,

compared to 11.2% of those who don't, while 71.6% who feel their work benefits society are happy at work (compared to 24% who don't).

- Different jobs contribute differently to society. However all companies can take steps to help their employees feel that they are making a difference. Getting involved with local charities, supporting staff fundraisers and letting staff give their input on how they would like to help the 'bigger picture' can all help employees feel that they are impacting society through their job.

A good physical environment

- In the Netherlands it also clear that pleasant surroundings and a good physical environment are important drivers of people's positive experience of their work.
- Whilst 40.6% report a good physical environment, the 11.3% who rate it as poor are far less likely to be happy at work: only 23% of those unhappy with the physical environment at work are happy at work overall, compared to 75.7% who are happy with their environments.
- To give some indicator of who is the least happy with their work environments, those working in personal service, sales and customer service scored significantly lower ($p < 0.05$) than those in other job categories on ratings of their environments.

Breakdown by demographic

The following is a breakdown of percentage of Dutch people who are happy at work based on gender, age, sector and job classification. It is important to note that an individual's likelihood of being happy at work is not solely based on one of the classifications below, but rather is based on a combination of all factors.

Gender*	Number	% Happy at Work
Male	586	42%
Female	479	37.4%

*NB. This result is not considered statistically significant.

Age*	Number	% Happy at Work
18 - 24	132	39.4%
25 - 34	322	32.6%
35 - 44	232	36.6%
45 - 54	241	46.1%
55 +	138	52.2%

* Although there is no significant difference between the happiness of young people (18-24) and those older than 25, workers aged 35 or over are significantly happier than those aged 34 and under ($p < 0.01$).

* There is a similarly significant relationship showing that those aged 45 and over are significantly happier than those aged 44 and under ($p < 0.01$), while older people (aged 55 and over) are also significantly happier than those below 55 ($p < 0.05$). There is also a significant correlation between age and overall happiness at work ($r = .105$, $p < 0.01$). In other words, people tend to be happier at work the older they are, a finding that is consistent across countries.

Job role*	Number	% Happy at Work
Managers, senior officials and professional occupations	359	42.1%
Associated professionals and tech occupations	185	36.8%
Administrative and Secretarial	107	32.7%
Skilled trade occupations	186	48.4%
Personal service, sales and customer service	117	30.8%
Process, plant and machine operatives, elementary occupations	111	40.5%

* Managers, senior officials and other professional occupations score significantly higher on overall wellbeing at work than those in other occupations ($p < 0.05$).

* When grouped together, those who work in administrative, secretarial, personal service, sales and customer service occupations are significantly less happy at work than those in other occupations ($p < 0.05$).

Sector*	Number	% Happy at Work
Public Sector	135	40.7%
Private Sector	929	39.8%

* There is no significant difference in overall happiness at work between the public and private sectors.

Company Size	Number	% Happy at Work
Less than 20 employees	215	42%
20-99 employees	237	40.8%
100-999 employees	360	40.3%
1000+ employees	238	35.2%

* No significant differences were found for the effect of company size on happiness at work.

Gross Family Income*	Number	% Happy at Work
Less than 20,000 Euros	114	34.7%
20,000 to 30,000	197	37.9%
30,000 to 40,000	247	37.7%
40,000 to 50,000	181	42.2%
50,000 to 75,000	213	39.8%
75,000 or more	105	49.5%

*There was a significant correlation between family income and overall happiness at work ($r=.078$, $p<0.05$) meaning that those who earn more are generally more likely to be happy at work. The point at which this becomes significant is at around 40,000 Euros a year - those with families earning above this point are significantly happier than those earning below 40,000 ($p<0.05$).

Summary of factors

The following table summarises ten of the top drivers for happiness at work and the percentage of Dutch people whose scores are poor, OK or good. The odds ratio indicates how likely it is that workers feel happy at work given the poor, OK or good score. So for instance the 54% who feel they have a good relationship with their manager at work are 1.69 times more likely than average to feel they have a good job overall.

Top ten drivers	Measure	Poor	OK	Good
Respect	% of people	12	41.7	46.3
	Odds ratio	0.06	0.36	1.83
Relationships	% of people	5.2	38.8	56
	Odds ratio	0.05	0.40	1.50
Work/life balance	% of people	11	48.3	40.7
	Odds ratio	0.15	0.62	1.69
Fair pay	% of people	20	48	32
	Odds ratio	0.15	0.69	1.99
Sense of control	% of people	9	45.5	45.5
	Odds ratio	0.05	0.46	1.73
Use of strengths	% of people	9.5	43.2	47.3
	Odds ratio	0.03	0.35	1.79
Sense of accomplishment	% of people	10	32.7	57.3
	Odds ratio	0.26	0.37	1.92
Learn new skills	% of people	11.5	47.5	41
	Odds ratio	0.16	0.56	1.74
Benefits society	% of people	10.1	48.9	41
	Odds ratio	0.05	0.53	1.79
Worthwhile work	% of people	7.4	42.7	49.9
	Odds ratio	0	0.28	1.77

Key Differences Between Men and Women

The following table summarises some of the key differences found between men and women. While men and women generally scored similarly on factors such as work life balance and feeling that they were paid fairly, there are key differences between some answers. Generally, women seem more likely to have stronger relationships at work and to feel respected, while men feel a greater sense of control and influence at work, as well as greater prospects for career development.

Key Differences	Women scoring highly	Men scoring highly
Treated with respect	50.4% *	43% *
Good team relationships	61.2% *	51.9% *
Good friends at work	47.2% **	35% **
Development prospects	24.1% **	27.7% **
Sense of control over job	43% **	47.6% **
Ability to influence decisions	25.5% **	34.6% **

* Statistically significant ($p < 0.05$)

** Highly significant ($p < 0.01$)

This table shows the average scores (rated on a scale of 1-7) given on the top ten drivers for happiness at work. The top 40%, deemed to be the happiest at work, show much higher average scores than the bottom 60%, which we have deemed the least happy at work.

Top ten drivers	Bottom 60%	Top 40%
Sense of accomplishment	4.4	6.1
Well managed organization	4.1	5.8
Good team relationships	5.0	6.0
Autonomy at work	4.6	5.9
Respectful climate	4.5	6.1
Worthwhile work	4.7	6.2
Work-life balance	4.6	5.8
Use strengths regularly	4.6	6.1
Learn new skills	4.6	5.9
Feel fairly paid	4.0	5.7

Factors influencing happiness at work

There are three main types of influencing factors that affect happiness at work:

1. Organizational factors including:

- Management system
- Job conditions and design
- Work environment (physical and cultural)
- Social impact of the organization

2. Personal factors including:

- Health & Vitality
- Confidence and resilience
- Overall happiness
- Work-life balance

3. Daily work factors including:

- Self-expression (ability to be yourself at work)
- Sense of control (shaping your work)
- Sense of progress (learning, achievements)
- Relationships

The happiness at work survey is designed to systematically measure all of these drivers.

About Happiness Works

Happiness Works provides science-based services and online tools that instantly give organizations of any shape or size the power to change into happier and more productive workplaces.

Based on robust science

The Happiness at Work Survey is based on a model of wellbeing developed for the UK Government Office of Science's "Foresight Programme". The model recognizes that happiness and wellbeing are influenced by, and influence, multiple interconnecting factors. In a work context these factors include the organization system, the personal resources that employees bring to work as well as how well they are able to carry out their jobs and their experiences at work. It is through a better understanding of these interconnections that individuals and organizations can identify the changes that will create a happier and more productive workplace.

12 years experience in measuring wellbeing

Our 12 years experience of working with local, national and international bodies focused on creating measures of wellbeing, including Eurostat (the EU's statistics office), the UK Office of National Statistics and the OECD is distilled into the Happiness at Work Survey, bringing the latest wellbeing research methodology into the context of work and organizations.

Founded by leading figure in research into happiness and wellbeing

Happiness Works is founded by Nic Marks, a fellow of the new economics foundation and a board member of Action for Happiness. He is best known for creating the award winning Happy Planet Index the first global measure of sustainable wellbeing. Nic spoke at the prestigious TEDglobal conference in 2010 on his work and authored one the first TEDbooks called "A Happiness Manifesto".

Contact details

For more information on this report, contact:

Nic Marks

nic@happinessworks.com

Happiness at Work Survey.nl

085 – 4017614

Leonard Springerlaan 124

7425 CB Deventer

www.haws.nl

 certified distributor