**The relationship between teachers’ work orientations and well-being: mediating effects of work meaningfulness and occupational identification**

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Summary

Recent studies in the field of positive psychology suggest that there is connection between teachers’ well-being and the performance of their students. Since well-being of teachers is obviously important factor in their effectiveness it would be worth finding out what contributes to teachers’ well-being.

Following this line of thought, the aim of this study was to assess the relationship between teachers’ work orientations (job, career and calling orientation) and well-being (life satisfaction, flourishing and job satisfaction), with possible mediating effects of work meaningfulness and occupational identification.

The following measures were administered to 249 primary school teachers in Zagreb region: *Work-life questionnaire* (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997), *Work Meaningfulness scale* (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009), *Occupational Identification scale* (Mael & Ashforth, 1992), *Flourishing Scale – FS* (Diener, et al. 2010), *The Satisfaction with Life Scale* (Diener et al., 1985) with addition of one-item assessment of job satisfaction.

The structural equations modeling was used to analyze data. The results suggested that calling orientation was directly positively and job orientation directly negatively linked to well-being. Career orientation was not linked to well-being in any way. In addition to that, mediation analysis performed with bootstrapping method, showed that meaningfulness of work and occupational identification were significant mediators between work orientations and well-being. Relationship between calling orientation and well-being was completely mediated by afore mentioned variables, while relationship between job orientation and well-being was partially mediated by these variables.

It was concluded that calling orientation can lead to higher levels of work meaningfulness and occupational identification which in turn positively affects well-being. On the other hand, job orientation (work as a mean of financial security) leads to lower levels of work meaningfulness and occupational identification, and consequently to lower levels of well-being.

Key words: work orientations, work meaningfulness, occupational identification, well-being

**Introduction**

*I touch the future. I teach.*

Christa McAuliffe

Touching the future or touching the hell?

When asked about the sources of positive emotions in their work, teachers usually list the progress made by their students, the positive impact on students’ behavior and attitudes, recognition they get for their work, personal and professional development, good relationships with students, parents and colleagues (Golby, 1996; Hargreaves, 2000; Miljković & Rijavec, 2007). On the other hand, negative emotions are most frequently caused by bad relationships with superiors, (too) large classes, the lack of teaching materials and resources, students’ misbehaviors, disrespect by students and parents and low social status of teaching profession (Hargreaves, 2000; Lasky, 2000; Miljković & Rijavec, 2007). The field of primary education can be very demanding and teachers often experience high levels of job stress (Borg & Falzon, 1993; Brkić & Rijavec, 2011) that might negatively impact their well-being.

But why bother about teachers’ well-being at all? It is already known that certain characteristics of teachers such as skilful communication with students (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Wayne & Youngs, 2003) or teaching experience within early years of teaching (Rice, 2003) are predictors of their students’ academic achievements. New insights in the area of teacher effectiveness come from the side of the positive psychology research. For example, there is evidence that grit and life satisfaction may be significant contributors to teacher effectiveness (Briner & Dewberry, 2007; Duckworth et al., 2009). In other words, the more happy and satisfied the teachers are, the more successful are their students in terms of academic achievement. The positive relationship between happiness and success at work had already been documented (for review see Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). Happy people are more often in a good mood and tend to actively work on achieving their goals acquiring new knowledge and skills in the process. With this relationship between well-being and success in mind, it would be worth finding out what influence teachers’ well-being.

**Work orientations and well-being**

Research suggest that people tend to frame their relationship to work in three different ways (known as work orientations) that determine their experience of work and its accompanying thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (for review see Pratt i Ashforth, 2003; Wrzesniewski, 2003). Each orientation describes a different type of meaning people seek from their work and represents the interplay between the person and the job. For employees with *job orientation* work is simply a means to acquire necessary financial resources which allow them to enjoy time while not working. Work is about extrinsic rewards and is not a central part of their identity. Next is *career orientation*. For employees with *career orientation* work is important because of the rewards that come from advancement including increased pay, promotion, and status (Bellah et al., 1985). Finally, those with *calling orientations* work for the fulfillment that doing the work brings; the work is an end in itself and is intrinsically rewarding,

Research in this field revealed that people with calling orientation spend more time at work (even when this time is not compensated) and report higher job and life satisfaction than those with job or career orientation (Peterson et al., 2009; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997).

**Mediation of work orientations – well-being relations**

Despite the fact that positive relationship have been established between calling orientation and well-being, and negative between job/career orientation and well-being, research addressing the reasons for these relationships is still scarce. Interest in work orientations is growing, but our understanding of how these orientations relate to well-being is still incomplete. More recently, research has begun to examine the underlying processes that can explain the positive relationship between calling and various psychological outcomes including well-being (Duffy et al., 2012). By extending these previous studies, the present study investigated the possibility that the relationship between work orientations and well-being is mediated by work meaningfulness and occupational identification.

***Work meaningfulness***

Work meaningfulness can be defined as the amount of significance and purpose people see in their work (Rosso et al., 2010; Shamir, 1991). Workers who perceive their work as meaningful experience more often their work as a calling (Berg et al., 2009; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Although, calling and work meaningfulness are related they are theoretically distinct concepts. People can perceive their work as meaningful due to certain job characteristics (e.g., feedback, task clarity; for a review see Humphrey et al., 2007) even if they do not see it as a calling. However, studies suggest that individuals who perceive their work as a calling usually report greater life and work meaning (e.g., Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Steger et al., 2010). They are psychologically and physically healthier (Arnold et al. 2007; Treadgold 1999) and less stressed (Knoop, 1994).

***Occupational identification***

According to social identity theories, individuals hold multiple identities on the basis of various referent groups. For example, on organizational level an individual can identify him or herself with the organization as a whole or with some groups within the organization (Riketta & Van Dick, 2005; Ullrich et al., 2007). Additionally, individuals may identify with work-related groups outside organizations such as occupations or professions (Johnson et al., 2006). Research findings show that there is usually a positive connection between organizational identification and occupational identification, and occupational identification is usually stronger than organizational (Bartels et al., 2010).

According to Van Maanen and Barley (1984), occupational identification refers to the extent to which individuals define themselves in terms of the work they do and the typical characteristics of those who do that kind of work. Individuals in any occupation develop a set of beliefs about the importance of their work to society (Trice, 1993; Van Maanen & Barley, 1984) as well as the beliefs that clarify and justify that importance.

***Proposed hypothetical model***

Theoretically, calling orientation should be regarded as preceeding work meaningfulness because it brings individuals a sense of meaning and purpose in their work (Rosso et al., 2010; Wrzesniewski, 2003) thus resulting in increased work meaningfulness. In turn, perceiving one’s work as meaningful should enhance occupational identification and lead to greater well-being. Despite the limited research on mediators of the calling and well-being link, work meaningfulness and occupational identification appear to be possible factors for explaining the mechanisms through which having a calling is associated with beneficial outcomes. On the basis of these arguments following hypothesis were formulated:

**Hypothesis**

H1. Calling orientation will be directly and indirectly positively linked to teachers’ well-being.

H2. Job and career orientation will be directly and indirectly negatively linked to teachers’ well-being.

H3. Calling orientation will be positively linked to work meaningfulness.

H4. Job and career orientation will be negatively linked to work meaningfulness.

H5. Work meaningfulness will be positively linked to occupational identification.

H6. Occupational identification will be positively linked to well being.

H7. Work meaningfulness and occupation identification will mediate the relationship between work orientations and well-being.

**METHOD**

**Subjects and Procedure**

The participants were 249 elementary school teachers (grades 1st to 4th) from Zagreb area. According to years of work experience, sample comprised 25,9% teachers with up to 10 years of work experience, 25,6% from 10 to 19 years, 36,8% from 20 to 30 years, and 11,7% with more than 30 years of work experience in school.

The research was conducted during the professional meeting of primary school teachers at county level and lasted approximately 20 minutes. Participation in the study was anonymous and voluntary.

**Instruments**

In the present study, six self- report instruments were used:

***Work-life questionnaire*** (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997) is a three-item questionnaire measuring the attitude towards work as a job, career, and calling. Participants were provided with three brief scenarios describing individuals who approached work as a job, a profession, or a calling. For each scenario, they used a 1–4 scale to indicate how much they were like the person described, from 1 - not at all like me through 4 - very much like me. Here are excerpts from each scenario:

*Person A works primarily to earn enough money to support her life outside of her job. If she was financially secure, she would no longer continue with her current line of work, but would really rather do something else instead*... (job orientation).

*Person B basically enjoys her work, but does not expect to be in her current job 5 years from now. Instead, she plans to move on to a better, higher level job*... (career orientation).

*Person C’s work is one of the most important parts of her life. She is very pleased that she is in this line of work. Because what she does for a living is a vital part of who she is, it is one of the first things she tells people about herself* ... (calling orientation).

***Work Meaningfulness scale*** (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009) measures perceived meaning at work with the five-item scale (e.g., *I have a meaningful job*). Individuals respond to each item on a five-point Likert scale, from 1 - not at all through 5 - completely. Higher overall (average) score indicates greater work meaningfulness. In this study, Cronbach´s alpha coefficient of reliability was .91.

***Occupational Identification scale*** (Mael & Ashforth, 1992) measures the extent to which one defines him or herself in terms of the occupation or job he or she does. This six-item scale was slightly modified for the teaching profession (e.g., *When someone praises teaching profession, it feels like a personal compliment*). Individuals respond to each item on a five-point Likert scale, from 1 – strongly disagree through 5 – completely agree. Higher overall (average) score indicates stronger occupational identification. In this study, Cronbach´s alpha coefficient of reliability was .76.

***Flourishing Scale*** (Diener et al., 2010) measure the respondents’ perceptions of how they are flourishing in major areas such as social relationships, optimism, purpose, and self-esteem with the eight-item scale (e.g., *I actively contribute to the happiness and well-being of others*). Individuals respond to each item on a five-point Likert scale, from 1 – strongly disagree through 5 – completely agree. The scale provides a single psychological well-being score. A high average score represents a person with many psychological resources and strengths. In this study, Cronbach´s alpha coefficient of reliability was .83.

**Satisfaction with life scale** (Diener et al., 1985) measures the cognitive component of subjective well-being. Five items measure the individual’s evaluation of satisfaction with life in general (e.g., *The conditions of my life are excellent*). Individuals respond to each item on 5-point Likert scales from 1 - strongly disagree through 5 - strongly agree. Higher overall (average) score is indicative of greater life satisfaction. In this study, Cronbach´s alpha coefficient of reliability was .73.

***Global Job Satisfaction*** is single-item measure regarding respondents’ overall job satisfaction (*All and all, how satisfied would you say you are with your job?*).

**RESULTS**

**Descriptive statistics**

Descriptive statistics and inter-correlations of all measured variables are presented in Table 1.

As expected, the associations between calling orientation and both mediating variables were positive, as well as the associations between calling orientation and measures of well-being. Associations between job orientation and both mediating variables were negative, as well as the associations between job orientation and measures of well-being. Unexpectedly, associations between career orientation and both mediating variables were statistically insignificant, as well as the associations between career orientation and measures of well-being. Finally, both mediating variables also yielded positive associations with measures of well-being.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations of measures of Work Orientations (job, career, and calling), Work Meaningfulness, Occupational Identification, and measures of Well-being (flourishing, life satisfaction and job satisfaction)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Correlations | | | | | | | | |
|  | 1. | 2. | 3. | 4. | 5. | 6. | 7. | 8. | |
| 1. Job | - | .23\*\* | -.27\*\* | -.32\*\* | -.20\*\* | -.32\*\* | -.18\*\* | -.31\*\* | |
| 2. Career |  | - | -.21\*\* | -.10 | -.01 | -.09 | -.03 | -.08 | |
| 3. Calling |  |  | - | .32\*\* | .25\*\* | .34\*\* | .21\*\* | .26\*\* | |
| 4. Work Meaningfulness |  |  |  | - | .51\*\* | .62\*\* | .32\*\* | .49\*\* | |
| 5. Occupational Identification |  |  |  |  | - | .45\*\* | .27\*\* | .44\*\* | |
| 6. Flourishing |  |  |  |  |  | - | .48\*\* | .42\*\* | |
| 7. Life Satisfaction |  |  |  |  |  |  | - | .28\*\* | |
| 8. Job Satisfaction |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | - | |
|  | Descriptive Statistics | | | | | | | | |
| M | 1,35 | 2,09 | 3,45 | 4,51 | 4,18 | 4,13 | 3,59 | 4,10 | |
| SD | 0,73 | 0,90 | 0,74 | 0,54 | 0,54 | 0,47 | 0,60 | 0,59 | |
| \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). | | | | | | | | |

*Note*: only measures of work orientations (job, career and calling) were rated on scale from 1 to 4, other variables were on scale from 1 to 5.

**Structural Equations Modeling**

To verify how well the data fit the hypothesis that the relationship between work orientations and well-being may be mediated by work meaningfulness and occupational identification (Figure 1) structural equation modeling (SEM) was conducted using the IBM SPSS Amos Version 19. Well-being as latent variable was represented by the three directly observable variables: flourishing, life satisfaction and job satisfaction. Work meaningfulness and occupational identification as latent constructs were represented by individual scale items. Work orientations (job, career and calling) were included as manifest variables.

The variance-covariance matrix was analyzed using the maximum-likelihood estimation. Multiple indices of model fit were used including the Chi-Square statistic (χ²; CMIN/DF), the Comparative fit index (CFI) and the Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). The chi-square value should not be significant if there is a good model fit, while a significant chi-square indicates lack of satisfactory model fit (Kline, 1998). The relative chi-square (CMIN/DF) should be less than 3 (Kline, 1998). For CFI values greater than .90 are considered acceptable, while higher than .95 indicates good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). For RMSEA a value of .06 or less reflects good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The values obtained were χ²=42.68, p=.03; CMIN/DF=1.59; CFI=.98; RMSEA=.05. Although the highly significant chi-square measure for the model indicates a poor fit, given sample size larger than 200, it would be incorrect to conclude a poor fit based on the significance of the chi-square index only (Brown, 2006). To address this limitation, we also used CMIN/DF as chi-square value corrected for sample size which indicated good fit. Overall, the results indicated a very good fit by most indices.

The results suggested that calling orientation was directly positively linked to well-being (β=.34, *p*<.001) and job orientation directly negatively linked to well-being (β=-.32, *p*<.001). Career orientation was not directly linked to well-being (β=.04, *p*>.05).

In order to assess the significance of a mediation effect, a Monte-Carlo (bootstrapping) approximation was obtained by constructing bias-corrected percentile method (2000 samples; confidence interval of 95). Three mediation models were tested.

First model tested work meaningfulness as a mediator between work orientations (job and calling orientation) and occupational identification. Results revealed full mediation effect of work meaningfulness in the relationship between calling orientation (β=.29, *p*<.001) and occupational identification (β=.68, *p*<.001). In addition to that, full mediation effect of work meaningfulness in the relationship between job orientation (β=-.28, *p*<.001) and occupational identification (β=.68, *p*<.001) was also confirmed.

Second model tested occupational identification as mediator variable between work meaningfulness and well-being. Results revealed partial mediation effect. Model supported the positive influence of work meaningfulness on occupational identification (β=.66, *p*<.001), which was in turn positively linked to well-being (β=.53, *p*<.001). Also, work meaningfulness had direct positive influence on well- being (β=.68, *p*<.001).

Finally, third model used all variables in the equation. Mediation analysis showed that work meaningfulness and occupational identity were significant mediators between work orientations and well-being (Figure 1).

Job orientation

Career orientation

Calling orientation

Work Meaningfulness

Occupational Identification

Well-being

-.14\*

.83\*\*\*

.88\*\*\*

-.27\*\*\*

.30\*\*\*

Figure 1. Work Meaningfulness and Occupational Identification as Mediators of the

Relationship between Work Orientations and Well-being (only significant relationships are presented)

Relationship between calling orientation and well-being was completely mediated by aforementioned variables. Model supported the positive influence of calling orientation on work meaningfulness (β=.30, *p*<.001), which was positively linked to occupational identification (β=.83, *p*<.001), and in turn, also with well-being (β=.88, *p*<.001). Relationship between job orientation and well-being was partially mediated by work meaningfulness and occupational identification. Job orientation negatively influenced work meaningfulness (β=-.27, *p*<.001), which was positively linked to occupational identification (β=.83, *p*<.001), and in turn, also with well-being (β=.88, *p*<.001). On the other hand, model also suggested the statistically significant direct negative effect of job orientation on well-being (β=-.14, *p*<.05).

**Discussion**

In this study a model linking work orientations of teachers (job, career and calling orientation) with their well-being was proposed and tested.

Work orientations – job and calling orientation – were related to well-being in expected direction. Calling orientation was positively linked to well-being while there was a negative relationship between job orientation and well-being. These findings support the results of previous research with other professions showing positive relationship between calling orientation and well-being (Claes & Ruiz Quintanilla, 1994; Duffy & Sedlacek, 2010; Wrzesniewski et al.,1997) and negative relationship between job orientation and well-being (Wrzesniewski et al.,1997). Contrary to expectations, career orientation was not related to teachers’ well-being.

This study contributes further to this literature by indicating a mediating role of work meaningfulness and occupational identification in the relationship between work-orientations and well-being. Mediation analysis revealed that calling orientation has only indirect effects on well-being. Viewing one’s job as a calling increases work meaningfulness, which leads than to higher occupational identification and in turn to higher levels of well-being.

This is in line with theoretical assumptions about the positive link between a calling orientation and meaningful work (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011; Duffy et al., 2012; Rosso et al., 2010). Several authors suggested that callings are an important factor in understanding what makes work meaningful (Rosso et al., 2010; Steger & Dik, 2010; Wrzesniewski, 2003). Empirical evidence confirmed that the presence of a calling predicts meaningful work (Duffy et al., 2012; Steger & Dik, 2009). In our study work meaningfulness was a mediator between calling orientation and occupational identification. This is in line with previous work suggesting that meaningful work is associated with a series of desirable consequences for organizations, including occupational identification (Bunderson & Thompson 2009). Specifically, in our study, teachers who approach their work as a calling perceive their work as more meaningful which in turn makes them prone to identify more with a teaching profession.

In present study occupational identification is a mediator between meaningful work and well-being. Teachers who perceive their work as more meaningful identify themselves more with teaching profession, which in turn positively influence their well-being. Sivanathan et al. (2004) suggest that occupational identification by enhancing our positive self-concept may promote happiness. According to a study conducted by Van Dick and Wagner (2002), teachers who identify themselves more strongly with the occupational group teachers report more happiness.

On the other hand, job orientation has both direct and indirect effects on well-being. It seems that viewing one’s job solely as a source of financial security directly decreses teachers’ well/being. However, in addition to that direct effect, there is a mediating effect of work meaningfulness and occupational identification. Teachers who approach their job only as a means of financial benefits, perceive their work as less meaningful which prevents them to identify with teaching profession and decrease their levels of well-being. Studies relating job orientation to meaningful work are scarce but confirm negative relationship between these two constructs (Steger et al., 2012).

Our results support the theoretical model that calling orientation has positive influence on well-being because it brings a sense of meaningfulness at work and helps teachers develop occupational identification. This contributes to our understanding of how work orientations are positively related to well-being. It seems that perceiving *one’s work* as meaningful and important may lead teachers to perceive *their work* as meaningful and important and helps build occupational identification. As suggested by the findings, these factors contribute to teachers’ well-being. The opposite was true for job orientation, while career orientation was irrelevant for teachers’ well-being.

***Practical implications***

This study has several practical implications. First, calling is important to address in career counseling because of its potential influence both on individuals’ career development and on their well-being as well. From this study it is obvious that teachers with calling orientation have higher well-being than those with job or career orientation. Individuals who plan to become teachers should be aware of beneficial outcomes of calling orientation, and potential harmful effects of job orientation.

Many people who already work, including teachers, often try to find more meaning in their work. For those who wish to approach their work as a calling, strategies to help bring meaning and purpose in their work were developed by several authors (Dik et al., 2009; Thompson & Feldman, 2010).

In addition to helping clients find their calling this study suggests that it is possible to directly increase teachers’ sense of work meaningfulness and occupational identification in order to enhance well-being even of those who do not see their work as a calling. In order to increase sense of work meaningfulness a number of suggestions have been proposed. It has been shown that individuals perceive their work as more meaning full if they have rewarding interpersonal relationships with colleagues (Mohan & Uys, 2006), if they are respected and appreciated for their work contributions and if they feel useful and valuable for the organization (Olivier & Rothmann, 2007). Occupational identification could probably be enhanced by providing some status-related rewards to teachers as occupational group in order to improve their occupational prestige.

***Limitations and future directions***

This study has several limitations. The first limitation is a cross sectional design that does not allow tests of causality. In addition to that, the sample comprised only elementary school class teachers (mainly females) and it is unclear whether the findings would generalize to other teachers. Future research should include longitudinal studies with various groups of teachers.

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Rezime  
Novije studije iz oblasti pozitivne psihologije ukazuju da postoji veza između psihološkog blagostanja nastavnika i uspeha njihovih učenika. Pošto je psihološko blagostanje nastavnika očigledno važan faktor u njihovoj delotvornosti, bilo bi vredno saznati šta doprinosi tom blagostanju.  
Sledeći tu ideju, cilj ovog rada je bio da se proceni odnos između radnih usmerenja nastavnika (posao, karijera i poziv) i blagostanja (zadovoljstvo životom, psihološki procvat i zadovoljstvo poslom), sa mogućim medijacijskim efektima smislenosti posla i profesionalne identifikacije.  
Na ukupno 249 nastavnika osnovnih škola iz zagrebačkog regiona primenjeni su sledeći instrumenti: Upitnik rad - život (*Work-life questionnaire,* Vrzesnievski i sar. 1997), Skala smislenosti posla (*Work Meaningfulness scale,* Bunderson i Tompson, 2009), Skala profesionalne identifikacije (*Occupational Identification scale,* Mael i Ashforth, 1992), Skala psihološkog procvata - FS (*Flourishing Scale,* Diener i sar., 2010), Skala zadovoljstva životom (*The Satisfaction with Life Scale,* Diener i sar., 1985) te jedno pitanje za procenu zadovoljstva poslom.

Podaci su analizirani metodom strukturalnog modeliranja. Rezultati ukazuju da je usmerernje na poziv direktno pozitivno, a usmerenje na posao direktno negativno povezano sa blagostanjem. Usmerenje na karijeru nije bilo povezano sa blagostanjem na bilo koji način. Pored toga, medijacijska analiza izvedena Bootstrap metodom pokazala je da su smislenost posla i profesionalna identifikacija bili značajni posrednici između radnih usmerenja i blagostanja. Odnos između usmerenja na poziv i blagostanja je kompletno posredovan navedenim varijablima, dok je odnos između usmerenja na posao i blagostanja bio posredovan samo delimično.

Zaključeno je da usmerenje na poziv može da dovede do viših nivoa smislenosti posla i veće profesionalne identifikacije što onda zauzvrat pozitivno utiče na psihološko blagostanje. Sa druge strane, usmerenje na posao (posao kao sredstvo finansijskog obezbeđenja) dovodi do nižih nivoa smislenosti posla i profesionalne identifikacije, a samim tim i do nižih nivoa psihološkog blagostanja.

Ključne reči: radna usmerenja, smislenost posla, profesionalna identifikacija, psihološko blagostanje