

Happy employees? Aim for a 9+!

The Dutch benchmark for happiness at work

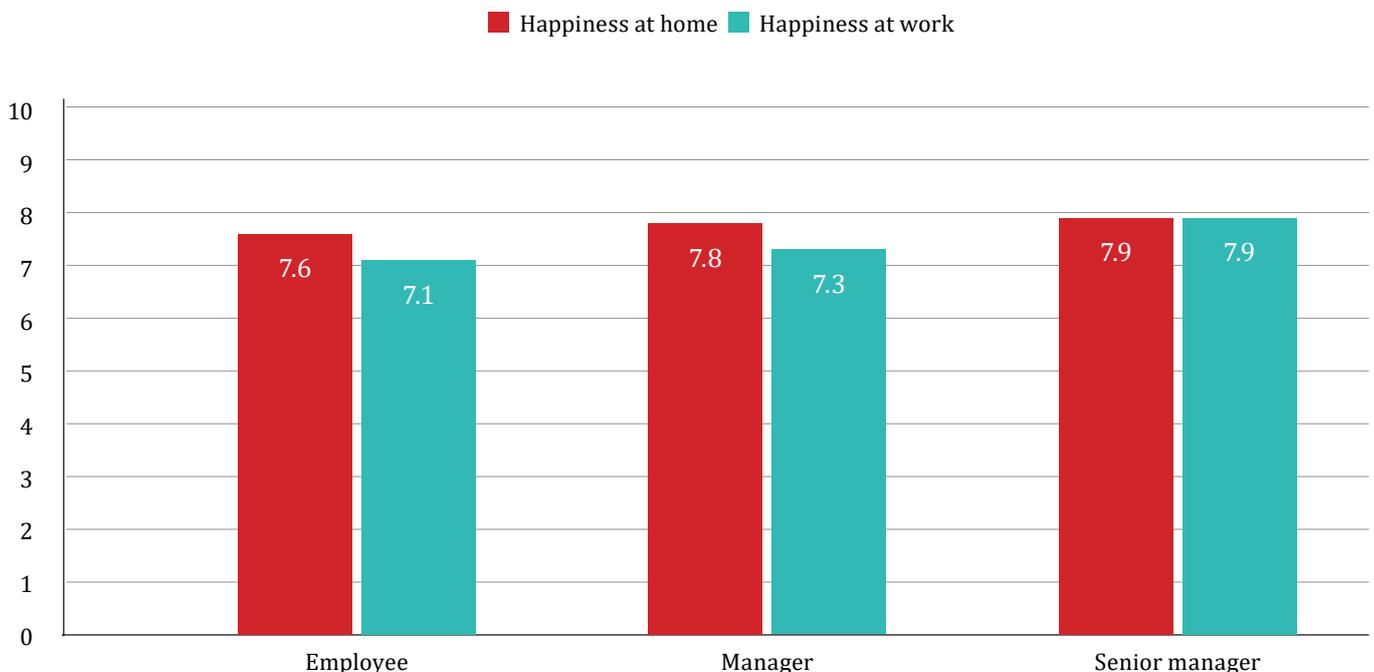
Scientific evidence shows that being happy at work has all kinds of benefits: happy employees are better at collaborating, are more productive, healthy and creative and are less prone to stress than their less fortunate colleagues. Focusing on happiness at work, therefore, is the right thing to do.

Together with research partner Steda, the HappinessBureau has been studying happiness at work for years. Early 2018, we created a benchmark for happiness at work in The Netherlands, based on a survey involving over 1,800 Dutch employees.

We measure happiness at work looking at two sides of the same coin: how the employee experiences his own job and how he values the organization. Both are responsible for happiness at work. For the former, we use our P3F-questionnaire, with which we map personal well-being using three components: Purpose, Flow and Fun&Friendship. These are based on Martin Seligman’s scientific work on positive psychology. For the impression of the organization, we use a questionnaire based on our own HEART-model, which consists of five themes: Happy culture, Energizing workplaces, Agile leadership and organization, Redesign the employee journey and Technology that works for you.

Happiness at work: the scores

One of the most striking outcomes of our benchmark study, was the difference between experiencing happiness at home and at work. Employees and managers feel happier at home, while senior managers feel equally happy at home and at work.



What causes this difference between senior managers and others? The answer might vary between organizations, but nevertheless our study shows how senior managers experience their work and organization differently.

Senior managers vs employees

Top 5 differences in scores (% 'agree')

1.	I can decide the way I work	+ 30%
2.	My values are aligned with the organization's values	+ 19%
3.	The organization enables me to achieve results	+ 19%
4.	I have enough opportunities to learn new things	+ 16%
5.	We focus more on solutions rather than on problems	+ 15%

Senior managers experience more autonomy, a better value match, more support from the organization to produce results and more chances to learn. Also, the top management feels that the organization is busy finding solutions rather than sticking to problems.

The well-being gap between senior managers and the workforce is a potential threat to the company's growth and development. But before you start strategizing how to transmit senior managers' positive attitudes to the employees, you should ask yourself: how high are we going to raise the bar? What is the norm for happiness in our organization? In order to answer those questions, you need to look at the employee Net Promoter Score (eNPS).

Recommending the organization: eNPS

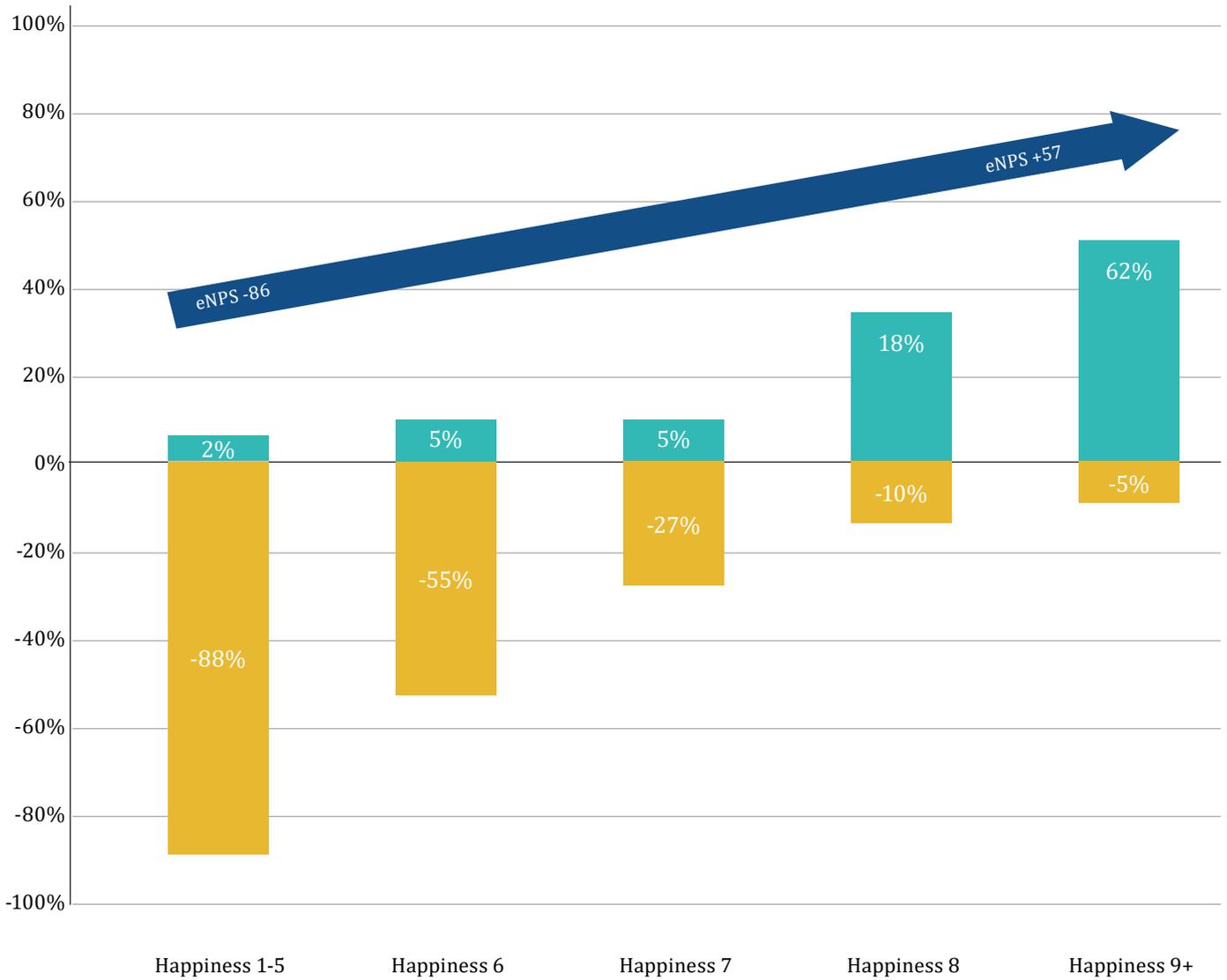
The extent to which employees recommend the organization as an employer, indicates the organization's recruiting power – an index in strategic recruitment. The eNPS is a way to measure recruitment power and is based on one question: 'On a scale from 0 to 10, how likely is it that you recommend this company as a place to work?' The outcome determines whether an employee is a Detractor (score 0-6), a Passive (score 7-8) or a Promoter (score 9-10). The eNPS is the percentage of Promoters minus the percentage of Detractors.

Our benchmark shows that the overall percentage of Promoters in all sectors in the Netherlands is 18. The Detractors constitute 28 percent. Consequently, the eNPS in the Netherlands is -10 – which is in line with the European average.

The degree to which employees recommend their employer, is strongly linked to their happiness at work. The next illustration shows the correlation. Of the employees who score their happiness with a 5 or lower, 88 percent are Distractors, and close to none are Promoters. From a happiness score of 8, the intention of recommending increases. Employees who score 9 or higher on happiness, are the ones having an actual positive impact on the eNPS. In the Dutch benchmark, the eNPS varies from -86 (happiness score of 5 and lower) to +57 (happiness score of 9 or higher).

eNPS groups

■ Detractors (negative) ■ Promoters (positive)

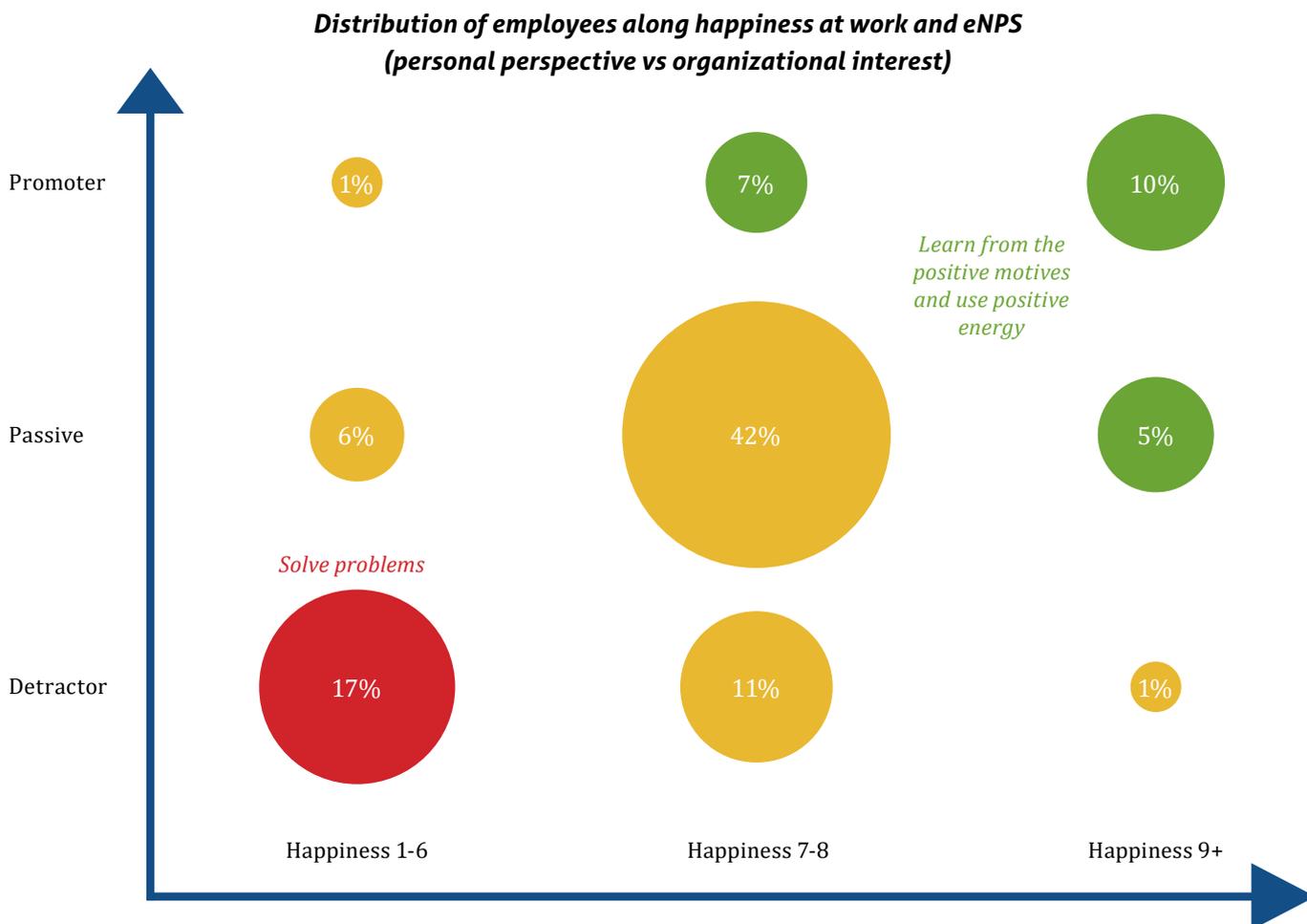


A high eNPS is important, because it addresses the outer world – where the war for talent is getting worse every day. A high eNPS correlates with happiness in the company and therefore with the organizational distinctiveness. Measuring both happiness and eNPS, even though they correlate, has the advantage of monitoring both the individual perspective (happiness at work) as well as the organizational interest (recommendation). The combination is a useful framework for HR and management.

Our advice: raise the bar high and go for the 9+. How? By choosing a customized approach.

Culture bearers

In the figure below, all respondents of the Dutch benchmark have been distributed into nine categories, according to their happiness score (3 groups) and their willingness to recommend their employer (3 groups), with happiness along the horizontal axis and eNPS along the vertical axis.



The goal is to have as many employees as possible in the green zones, and as little as possible in the red zones. Both these groups are the culture bearers of your organization – in a positive and negative sense.

Solve the problems

Clearly unhappy employees who wouldn't recommend their employer (the respondents in the red circle) can potentially develop into a strong negative force within the company: critics who have mentally 'dropped out' and feel unheard or lost. Our benchmark shows that a lack of attention from management is an important negative incentive for this group. Also, wrong or badly understood KPI's and demotivating performance assessment can be problematic. Whatever the problems are, solving them requires a specific approach and energy. What to do, depends on the situation – therefore, the first step is listening to them.

In our benchmark study, the 'red group' disagreed most strongly with the following statements:

Top 5 negative incentives for the criticsasters (red group)

- The performance assessment system encourages me to constantly improve myself
- My manager creates a motivating work environment
- My workplace stimulates my vitality
- My manager is my coach and mentor
- The management is inspiring, accessible and communicative

Strengthen what's right

The other side of the matrix above, needs a different kind of energy. The respondents in the green circles are your ambassadors. They are happy at work, have fun and can be their true selves at work. You want to learn from their positive incentives to know what's right in the company and why. Also, make sure employees have social interactions, during which everybody can pick up some of that positive energy.

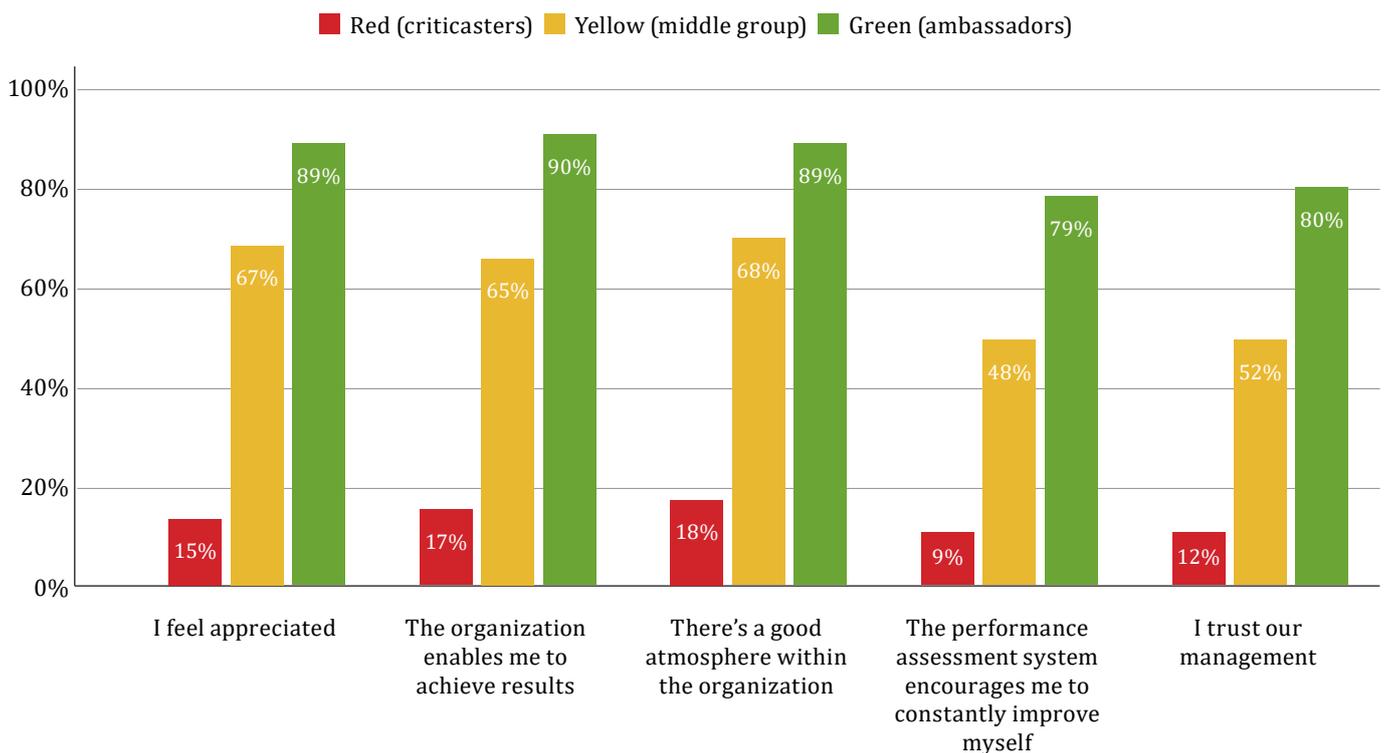
The 'green group' most strongly agrees with the following statements:

Top 5 positive incentives for the ambassadors (green group)

- I have fun at work
- I can be my true, authentic self at work
- My colleagues and I have good relationships
- My contribution to the organization is meaningful
- I felt at home soon after I started working here

In our third analysis, we looked at the statements on which criticsasters and ambassadors disagreed the most. The five statements below underline once again the gap in perception between the two groups.

Statements with the biggest difference in scores between criticsasters and ambassadors



Improvement

In every organization, there are positive culture bearers, negative culture bearers and a middle group. As an HR manager, you will have to decide on a strategy for each of them. For criticasters, only talking about the 'higher goals' isn't going to be enough to motivate them. You will have to (help them) fix their problems at work. And as for the ambassadors: it's okay to ask them about their 'why' and if they would like to be more involved in the organization.

Our Dutch benchmark will help you with good general insights, but eventually you will have to analyze the specific situation for your organization. From there, you can start to improve.