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Teachers' organisational behaviour in public and private funded schools

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to compare teachers' organisational behaviour in publicly- and privately-funded schools in the Dutch Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector.

Design/methodology/approach – A percentage of all middle managers in publicly and privately funded schools (72 per cent and 43 per cent respectively) distributed self-report questionnaires to their teachers measuring teachers' attitudes, sense of identification and perception of the school climate. The sample consisted of 705 teachers in publicly funded schools and 25 teachers in privately funded schools. Data were analysed through multilevel analysis accounting for the dependency of teachers working within the same teaching unit.

Findings – The analyses show that teachers in publicly funded schools report a less curriculum-oriented attitude, a lower sense of identification, and perceive a less supportive school climate than teachers in privately funded schools. Funding did not have an effect on the extent to which teachers have a student-oriented attitude. In addition, the analyses show significant effects of teacher characteristics, the disciplinary sector, and affiliation characteristics on teachers' organisational behaviour.

Research limitations/implications – The paper clearly indicates differences in teachers' organisational behaviour in publicly and privately funded schools. Contrary to common beliefs, the institutional context hardly influences the extent to which teachers have a student-oriented attitude.

Originality/value – The paper contributes to insights in behavioural aspects of the fading boundary between the public and private sector.

Keywords Vocational training, Work identity, Public education, Private education, Organizational behaviour, The Netherlands

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Many studies assume that the organisational behaviour of employees in public sector and private sector organisations differs (Bozeman and Bretschneider, 1994; Le Grand, 2003; Boyne and Walker, 2004; Goulet and Frank, 2002). Jacobs (1992) has explained the cause of the divergent behaviour patterns as being based on divergent values and morals in the public and private sectors, which are visible in the aims, orientations and values prevailing in public and private organisations. Private education is a term often used in contrast to public sector education (Eurydice, 2001), although private education covers a range of very different situations[1] (e.g. Levin and Belfield, 2003; Dijkstra *et al.*, 2001; Onderwijsraad, 2005). In a study of public and private schools in the USA, Rufo-Lignos and Richards (2003) found that the boundary between the public and the private sectors is blurred and that clear differences between public and private schools



are lacking. Bottery (2005) describes an invasion of private sector beliefs and practices in education in the Western world. The Dutch vocational education and training (VET) sector has experienced a blurring of the boundaries between publicly funded schools and privately funded schools as the Dutch government adopted a more entrepreneurial approach to management (Min. OCW, 1999; Kalma, 2002; WRR, 2004; Honingh, 2006). These developments resulted in an increase in the number of organisations that is neither purely public nor purely private, but hybrid (In 't Veld, 1997; Noordegraaf, 2004; Brandsen *et al.*, 2005; Honingh, 2006). Since 1996 privately and publicly funded schools in the Dutch VET sector are embedded in the same legal framework (*Staatsblad*, 1995). Since then private providers of vocational education are allowed – and can be licensed – to offer the same diploma as publicly funded schools, which is a novelty in Dutch educational policy. This research aims to address the issue whether the organisational behaviour of teachers in the Dutch VET sector has converged as a result of the market-oriented reforms in the education. To answer this question, we have investigated the organisational behaviour of teachers in publicly funded and privately funded schools in the Dutch VET sector. The main research question was to what extent different funding arrangements affect the organisational behaviour of teachers. A secondary question was to investigate to what extent teacher characteristics and appointment characteristics account for differences in the organisational behaviour of the teachers.

Theoretical background

Recently, there has been an increasing amount on the professional identity of teachers, their views and beliefs about education, and their identification with their profession (e.g. van Dick and Wagner, 2002; Denessen, 1999; Verloop, 2003). Knowledge has been generated about the organisational behaviour of teachers in public schools, but the same cannot be said of teachers in privately funded schools. We still know little about the organisational behaviour of teachers in privately funded schools. Consequently, determining the extent to which teachers in publicly and privately funded schools behave similarly was not possible. In this study we therefore examine teachers' attitudes to education, their sense of identification, and their perception of the school climate in publicly and privately funded schools in the Dutch VET sector, in order to get a better understanding of their organisational behaviour.

Attitudes

As a consequence of market-oriented reforms in education, expectations of teachers have shifted in the direction of market thinking. Dempster *et al.* (2001) have described how achievement-oriented thinking in education is associated with the introduction of market mechanisms in schooling. When the emphasis of educational policy is on the economic function of education, teachers notice that they increasingly have to reckon with the demands of industry, funding based on qualifications and management protocols. Policy documents by the Dutch Ministry of Education (e.g. Min. OCW, 1999; 2004), state that teachers in the VET sector should develop themselves into entrepreneurial professionals. It's questionable whether entrepreneurship and professionalism can that easily be combined. There is a risk that professional autonomy will decrease as the demands of the market (customers) increase. Freidson (2001) argued that for professionals a necessary degree of autonomy is precisely what

ensures the regulation of their own practice. As a consequence of a lack of professional freedom, their work can be devalued to mere operational tasks (van Veen, 2005). Lack of consensus about matters relating to the content of education and the lack of professional scope experienced by teachers, could lead to conflict and tension in the school organisation.

A considerable amount of research has recently been carried out recently into the views and beliefs of teachers and their perceptions of recent educational reforms in The Netherlands (e.g. Denessen, 1999; Kelchtermans, 2005; Butt and Lance, 2005). van Veen *et al.* (2001) found that congruity between the teachers' outlook and the educational reforms is important to the successful implementation of the reforms in schools. In addition, Kelchtermans (2005) observed that reforms in education could produce intense positive and negative emotions in teachers. The intensity of teachers' reactions can be explained by a high degree of involvement in their work. Many teachers feel that teaching and contributing to the development of young people is their vocation. Rosenholtz and Simpson (1990) report that teaching and guiding pupils are the aspects that give teachers satisfaction.

To gain insight into the attitudes and beliefs of teachers, our study assessed teachers' curriculum-oriented attitudes and a student-oriented attitude. Denessen (1999) described this dichotomy as the most common division of views about the purpose of education. Under these two different purposes lies the ancient debate about the vocational function of education versus education aimed at fostering independence and responsibility (van der Kley and Felling, 1989). The vocational, curriculum-oriented approach is functional and fits into the more economic approach to education, whereas the student-oriented approach emphasises the personal development of individual pupils or students and prepares them to participate in society.

Identification

There is a long tradition of research into employees' affective involvement in the organisation as a predictor of behaviour. Various researchers have found evidence for the fact that employees with a strong affective involvement are generally more satisfied, better motivated and more productive (Matthieu and Zajac, 1990). Meyer and Allen (1991) distinguish affective, continuance and normative commitment. Of these three components, affective organisational commitment, that is, the extent to which people experience a sense of identification and involvement with an organisation, appears to be most closely related to various work aspects (Allen and Meyer, 1996). The more a person identifies with an organisation or department, the more his or her behaviour will be determined and influenced by that organisation or department (Knippenberg and Van Schie, 2000). In this study we distinguish four types of identification; identification with one's career, with one's profession, with the organisation as a whole, and identification with the department. Ellemers *et al.* (1998) stated that employees who attach greater value to their own career will be far more focused on their own position in the organisation. On the contrary, employees who identify strongly with their own department display the most pro social behaviour and will focus strongly on group performance and the achievements of the department (Ellemers *et al.*, 1998). In a study of different foci of identification, Knippenberg and Van Schie (2000) found that identification with the work group is stronger than

identification with the organisation as a whole. Knippenberg and Van Schie (2000) also found strong correlations between work group identification and job satisfaction, turnover intentions, job involvement and job motivation. Furthermore, Goulet and Frank (2002) compared employees in public, non-profit and for-profit organisations, and found that private sector employees were the most committed to their organisations. To understand the organisational behaviour of teachers in publicly and privately funded schools it is therefore important to be aware of the nature of teachers' identification with and within schools.

School climate

Various researchers concluded that the concept is important and meaningful for understanding the employees' organisational behaviour (Kallestad *et al.*, 1998). Flynn and Tannenbaum (1993) stated that focussing on the organisational aspects of the climate would be helpful to get a better understanding of differences and similarities in the behaviour of employees in public and private schools. School climate can be defined and conceptualised in many ways (compare Griffith, 1999; Kallestad *et al.*, 1998). The conceptualisation of school climate that we use in this study is narrow and focuses on teachers' interactions with colleagues and middle managers, the managerial support they perceive, and their participation in decision making. Ingersoll (1996) has stated that cohesion and cooperation of teachers and managers in schools should not be seen as organisational conditions, but as outcomes[2]. Measuring the extent to which teachers perceive support and are involved in each-others' work sheds light on the quality of the school as well as on teachers' organisational behaviour. To get a better understanding of the organisational behaviour of teachers, we think that the following aspects of school climate are important: teachers' involvement with colleagues, the support teachers receive from middle managers, and the extent to which teachers participate in decision-making processes.

Concerning the up-scaling operations that have taken place in senior secondary vocational education in The Netherlands, it is important to understand the extent to which teachers are involved in each-others' work. As publicly and privately funded schools differ in the manner and extent of contact between teachers, it is important to measure to what extent teachers are involved with each other.

A second important aspect of school climate is how much support teachers receive from management. Perceived organisational support is the extent to which employees feel that the organisation values their contribution and considers their wellbeing to be important (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986). By treating employees fairly, allowing them to contribute ideas and giving them support, employees get the feeling that they are making a difference.

Finally, we measured teachers' participation in decision making. Participation of teachers in decision making is relevant as it may affect the educational quality and the relationships within schools. Teachers who are involved in decision making in the school perform better (Ingersoll, 1996). In addition, participating in decision making also contributes to the development of relationships within the organisation and reduces the risk of tension. This risk especially reduced when teachers are given enough scope to contribute ideas and make decisions about educational content, the selection of students, whether students stay or transfer, about the socialisation of students, and student behaviour (Ingersoll, 1996). Ingersoll focused on the importance

of good communication and support in schools as indicators of school quality. From this perspective, we measured and compared teachers' perception of the school in publicly and privately funded schools.

Method

Sample

There are 22,300 fulltime teaching jobs in the vocational education sector in The Netherlands fulfilled by 30,000 teachers, many of them are working part time (Min. OCW, 2006). As we are interested in the organisational behaviour of teachers that provide education in the fields of economics and administration, catering and tourism, and health and social care in senior secondary schools, we contacted all 130 middle managers in publicly funded schools and all 54 managers in privately funded schools in the Dutch VET sector that are responsible for education in these three fields. A number of 94 managers in publicly funded schools (72 per cent) and 23 managers in privately funded schools (43 per cent) agreed to ask 13 of their teachers to complete our teacher questionnaire. Via the middle managers we contacted 1,459 teachers between April and June 2005. As the numbers of teachers in privately funded schools are generally much smaller than in publicly funded schools, the resulting sample of teachers consists of two groups of unequal size: 705 teachers from 35 publicly funded schools and 25 teachers from eight privately funded schools[3].

Organisational behaviour variables

In our conceptual framework we distinguished three aspects of the organisational behaviour of teachers: attitudes, identification and school climate. As the aspect attitude covers a student-oriented attitude and a curriculum-oriented attitude, we had four distinctive concepts to measure. The four concepts; student-orientation, curriculum orientation, identification and school climate, were measured with a questionnaire especially designed for this study. This questionnaire was based on existing questionnaires, all items in the questionnaire have four-point response scales. The questionnaire consisted of 15 subscales with Cronbach's alphas ranging from 0.70 to 0.88.

The student-orientation scale consists of five subscales: education in citizenship, students' progress, participative teaching methods, practice-oriented teaching, and consideration for the private circumstances of students, 24 items in total, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.91. The items were presented to the respondents in the form of propositions and the respondents were asked to indicate to what extent the item described their own behaviour.

The second scale to measure attitudes to education was the curriculum-orientation scale, which comprised three subscales: completion of the course, focus on achievement and results, and systematic approach to teaching, 12 items in total, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.84. These items were also presented in the form of propositions. The respondents were asked to indicate to what extent the described behaviour corresponded to their own behaviour.

The items in the two scales measuring teachers' attitudes to education were based on the inventory designed by Denessen (1999). Some of the items were adapted to make the inventory applicable for measurement in the VET sector.

The identification scale measured four forms of identification: career-oriented identification, identification with a team, identification with the organisation and identification with the profession, 18 items in total with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85. To measure the teachers' identification, we used the questionnaire devised by Ellemers *et al.* (1998) and van Dick and Wagner (2002). We also adapted the items of this questionnaire to suit our purposes. The respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed with the propositions in the questionnaire.

The fourth scale, school climate, comprised the subscales: teachers' commitment to their colleagues, perceived support from management and teachers' participation in decision-making, 11 items in total with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.91. The items to measure school climate were taken from Karsten *et al.* (2005) and from Dusschooten-de Maat (2004). The respondents were asked to what extent the situation described in the questionnaire corresponds to the situation in their department.

The allocation of the 15 sub-scales to the four scales: student-oriented attitude, curriculum-oriented attitude, identification, and school climate was based on substantive considerations. Principal components analysis of sub-scale scores confirmed the existence of four main dimensions (explaining 64 per cent of the variance), and the pattern of factor loadings (after oblimin rotation) corresponded with the classification described above.

Explanatory variables

Besides the effects of state funding, we investigated the effects of teacher characteristics and appointment characteristics. In the analysis we take personal characteristics of teachers, such as age, gender, and years in service into account. Furthermore we control for the effects of the disciplinary sector, appointment characteristics and time spending of teachers. Therefore, we investigate whether having a freelance contract, the number of hours a teacher spends on teaching per week, the number of hours a teacher works at home and the number of hours a teacher spends on general organisational tasks within the organisations affects the organisational behaviour of teachers.

Analyses

The effects of state funding and other predictor variables on teachers' organisational behaviour were investigated through multilevel regression analysis. In this way it was possible to account for dependencies in data that came from teachers working in the same disciplinary units of publicly funded schools. In privately funded schools, either the teachers did not operate in disciplinary units, or the disciplinary units were much smaller, so it was not possible to distinguish variance between disciplinary units from variance between teachers within disciplinary units. We therefore applied a multilevel model with a random intercept with three types of variance: publicly funded school disciplinary unit variance, publicly funded schoolteacher variance within units, and privately funded schoolteacher variance (see Roberts and Roberts, 2005 for explanation of such models).

For each of the four outcome variables we first fitted a multilevel regression model with a random intercept and fixed regression coefficient for all possible predictor variables. In a step-by-step procedure we then omitted predictors with non-significant regression coefficients one by one. However, the funding variable was always retained in the model, as this was the predictor of primary interest. The level of significance was set at 5 per cent.

Results

Of the 1,459 questionnaires distributed, 765 were completed and returned: a response rate of 52 per cent. At 54 per cent, the response rate of teachers in publicly funded schools was considerably higher than the 29 per cent response rate of teachers in privately funded schools. A number of 730 teachers were included in the final analyses: 705 teachers from publicly funded schools and 25 teachers from privately funded schools. In total 35 teachers were not included in the analyses: 16 teachers were teaching in other disciplinary sectors, four teachers were mainly providing contract teaching, six teachers wanted to remain anonymous so it was not possible to extract which disciplinary unit they were working in, and nine teachers had left large sections of the questionnaire unanswered (more than 20 per cent of the items). Teachers who missed just a few items were retained for data analysis after handling missing values through application of the expectation-maximisation (EM) algorithm to the subscales (SPSS, 2001).

Of the respondents, 21.5 per cent taught catering and tourism, 42.3 per cent worked in the field of health and social care, and 36.2 per cent taught economics and administration. Of the sample, 50.1 per cent was female. The average age of the teachers was 47.7 years ($SD = 8.4$) and at the time the questionnaire was administered they had an average length of service at their current schools of 13.8 years ($SD = 9.1$). On average teachers held an appointment of 74 per cent of a full-time equivalent, generally they were teaching one to five hours at the lower level[4], and six to ten hours at the higher level. On average the teachers work ten hours per week at home. The teachers' contracts included six to ten hours to be spent on general organisational duties in the school, teachers in privately funded schools spent slightly less time on such duties. Teachers in privately funded schools spend more time in other paid employment. Most of them have another job for ten hours-per-week.

Multilevel regression analyses showed that state funding has negative effects on all of the four outcome variables, although the effect on the student-oriented attitude was not significant. Table I gives the effects of state funding versus private funding and all other explanatory variables on each of the four outcome variables.

From Table I it appears, first, that state funding did not have a significant effect on the extent to what teachers have a student-oriented attitude to education. Female teachers, teachers in the health and social care and catering and tourism sectors (compared with those teaching in the economics and administration sector), teachers working more hours at home, and teachers spending more time on general organisational duties in the school have a significant stronger student-oriented attitude.

Second, Table I shows that state funding has a significant negative effect on the extent to which a teacher is curriculum-oriented. Furthermore, older teachers and those appointed to work a higher FTE percentage were significant more curriculum-oriented, teachers teaching economics and administration also had a stronger curriculum approach than those teaching in the health and social care sector.

Third, the table shows that state funding has a negative effect on the identification of teachers (although not significant at the 5 per cent level). Teachers working more hours per week, teachers spending more hours on general organisational matters, female teachers, younger teachers and teachers having a freelance contract perceive a stronger sense of identification.

	Student – oriented		Curriculum – oriented		Identification		Climate	
	Effect	S.E.	Effect	S.E.	Effect	S.E.	Effect	S.E.
<i>Fixed effects</i>								
State funding	0.201	0.247	0.416	0.283	0.022	0.264	0.058	0.299
Disciplinary sector								
horeca (vs) administration	0.342	0.105	0.002					
care(vs) administration	0.687	0.094	0.000	-0.267	0.080	0.000	0.460	0.083
Years in service								
Female versus male	0.373	0.083	0.000			0.311	0.082	0.078
Age								
Full-time equivalent	0.116	0.048	0.016	0.06	0.036	-0.165	0.036	0.035
Permanent contract				0.106	0.046	0.116	0.048	0.010
Teaching time						-0.626	0.274	
Teaching at lower level								
Teaching at higher level	0.113	0.035	0.002					0.002
Hrs worked at home/week	0.123	0.043	0.004			0.116	0.044	0.042
Time spent on gen. duties								
Time spent on another job								0.000
<i>Random effects</i>								
Public school units	0.015	0.019	0.422	0.000	0.000	0.013	0.019	0.018
Public school teacher	0.918	0.052	0.000	1.10	0.054	0.953	0.054	0.050
Private school teacher	1.332	0.377	0.000	1.860	0.523	1.032	0.292	0.591

Notes: $n = 730$; Effect = Regression coefficient, Variance = variance components, S.E. = standard error, p = probability associated with Wald tests of regression coefficients and likelihood ratio tests of variance components. Continuous scores have been standardised. Categorical variables have been binary coded

Table I.
Effects of state funding, teacher characteristics and position characteristics on the four outcome variables

Fourth, teachers in privately funded school were significantly more positive about the climate in their schools than their colleagues in the publicly funded schools. Furthermore, male teachers, teachers teaching health and social care (reference group economics and administration), and teachers spending more time on general organisational duties in the school have a more positive perception of the organisational climate. Teachers who spend a greater proportion of their time teaching at the higher level have more negative views regarding school climate.

Notice that in the final model, the public school disciplinary unit variance was not significant for any of the outcome variables. Apparently, the selected predictor variables explain most of the disciplinary unit variance.

Conclusions and discussion

We found that state funding had a negative effect on the extent to which teachers have a curriculum-oriented attitude, the extent to which they identify themselves with the school, the team, their profession, career, and perception of the school climate. One striking finding of this study was that there was little difference between teachers in publicly and privately funded schools in the extent to which they have a student-oriented attitude. A student-oriented attitude concerns the students' functioning, students' progress, students' private circumstances, and citizenship education. It seems to be closely tied in with what teachers see as the essence of their work. The minimal differences between teachers in publicly funded and privately funded schools seem to indicate that the image that the teachers themselves had about their professional identity was stable enough not to be affected by the context in which they were working. Another finding was the strong effect of gender on a student-oriented attitude. The effect of gender paralleled the effect of the sector in which the teacher was working to some extent: more male teachers were working in economic and administrative education, the branch with the least student-oriented attitude; and more female teachers were working in health and social care education, the branch with the strongest student-oriented attitude. Separate inclusion of gender and disciplinary sector had stronger effects. Teacher characteristics and the disciplinary sectors seemed to make a difference here, while funding appeared to have hardly any influence on their attitudes in this area.

The second attitude to education that we measured was the curriculum attitude. Here, we found that there was a significant difference between teachers in privately and publicly funded schools. Teachers working in privately funded schools consider themselves as having made an agreement to educate the students and to guide them along a marked-out path towards a qualification. This approach is different from the approach followed by teachers in publicly funded schools. The findings of this study show that the two attitudes to education can co-exist to a certain extent. A curriculum-oriented attitude does therefore not rule out thought being given to the students and vice versa. Still, the analyses make clear that there were differences between the attitudes of teachers in publicly and privately funded schools.

The results of our measurements of identification by teachers confirmed the findings of Goulet and Frank (2002). Teachers in privately funded schools in the vocational sector identified with their schools more than their colleagues working in publicly funded schools. These findings point in the same direction as our results for school climate. The effect of state funding was negative. We expect these findings to be

connected with the unease that many teachers feel about the education reforms. Many teachers complain about high workloads, an increase in administrative tasks, having less contact with pupils, and a lack of support from management. Until now, such complaints have only been reported from teachers working in publicly funded schools. These teachers seem to be affected by the drive for more efficient management in schools and are dissatisfied with their position. From these responses of teachers, we conclude that teachers do not see the blurring boundaries between the public sector and the private sector as a positive development.

Considering the differences that we found in attitudes, identification, and school climate between teachers, we should note that it is not clear whether our results may have been affected by uneven sampling characteristics. Our sample consisted of 705 teachers from 35 publicly funded schools and 25 teachers from eight privately funded schools. Still, the particular multilevel regression model that we used to test teacher differences does take such design effects into account. The multilevel regression analyses show that funding does have a substantial significant effect on some aspects of teachers' organisational behaviour. Still, it is difficult to decide whether it is state funding or personal characteristics that underlies differences between teachers in publicly and privately funded schools. It is debatable whether teachers choose a school because it has a certain climate that suits their person or whether the organisation influences the teachers' behaviour. This question about the cause of existing differences in the organisational behaviour of teachers is not yet answered. Nevertheless, we have clearly established that differences do exist in the organisational behaviour of teachers in publicly funded schools and privately funded schools for vocational education and training in The Netherlands.

Notes

1. According to the most common definition, any form of education founded by and fully organised by individuals or non-governmental bodies (associations under private law) is considered to fall within the private sector. Within the private sector one can distinguish between private education in the strict sense and grant-aided private education. Whereas private education in the strict sense is entirely financed by persons or non-governmental bodies, grant aided private education receives funding from public authorities (Eurydice, 2001).
2. Ingersoll states that the outcomes of education; socialisation and sorting are based on interaction. She therefore argues that interaction, cohesion and support within schools are achievements in itself instead of conditions.
3. Since 1996 privately funded schools providing vocational education have been allowed – and can be licensed – to offer the same curricula as the publicly funded schools. The Central Register of Vocational Courses listed 122 schools providing privately funded courses in 2004-2005 (CREBO register). All of the 54 privately funded schools providing education in the three disciplinary branches we were interested in (catering and tourism, health and social care and economics and administration) have been contacted. The number of schools that actively provide privately funded education is smaller because some of the schools are entitled to hand out diplomas but they do not provide courses. So we found 23 privately funded schools actively providing courses in catering and tourism or in health and social care or in economics and administration. In eight of these 23 schools we found 25 teachers that were willing to participate in our study.

4. VET has four training levels. Level 1: assistant training; level 2: basic vocational training, leading to fledgling qualified tradesman; level 3: vocational training, leading to independent tradesman; and level 4: middle-management and specialist training. In this study we consider levels 1 and 2 to be the lower level and levels 3 and 4 to be the higher level.

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