

The influence of gratitude on the self-reported individual performance of professional football players

Author: Ennio van der Gouw
University of Twente
P.O. Box 217, 7500AE Enschede
The Netherlands

ABSTRACT,

This paper explores the feeling of gratitude. Gratitude is a very important emotion in individual's lives. However, there has not been a lot of research on this subject. Gratitude plays a role in individuals' personal life, but also in their career. This research focuses on gratitude on an individual and event level. This paper researches if gratitude has an influence on individual performances. Literature shows that gratitude has multiple positive consequences; increase in well-being and social support, and it serves as a coping mechanism. Gratitude some antecedents which are in the form of appreciation programs, contact with beneficiaries, and developmental feedback. By interviewing individuals that work in a selected organization, it brings light on the feeling of gratitude and if it does have an influence on individual performances. The data shows that gratitude does have an influence on individual performances. Stronger feelings of gratitude result in better performances.

Graduation Committee members:

Dr. M.L. Ehrenhard

Dr. M. De Visser

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1. INTRODUCTION

What do Olympic winners do when they get their golden medal and have to give a speech? Most of the winners thank all the people that have played a part in their lives and career. It is about showing gratitude towards people that have helped you in the past and are still helping you. By doing this, these high-performing individuals acknowledge the importance of feelings and emotions such as gratitude. Emotions play a big role in sports, but not only sports. Every day individuals have to deal with positive and negative emotions. Because of this, organizations should also encourage individuals (their employees) to learn how to deal with these emotions in such a way to use it as a strength.

Emotion is an important component of total human functioning and critically important for understanding many core phenomena in virtually every major subdiscipline of psychology (Davidson, 1992, p. 245-268). One emotion in particular, gratitude, appears to be one of the neglected virtues in psychology. It is an emotion that is paid very little attention to in the social sciences. Like most words, gratitude does not have one clear definition, depending on the context. In order to accurately analyze this definition, it is imperative to establish what an emotion exactly means.

Rosenberg suggests that there is a structured hierarchy of the common forms of affective experience (1998, p. 249-250). She differentiates between three terminologies: moods, affective traits and emotions. According to her, these terminologies can be structured according to specificity, temporal stability, pervasiveness in consciousness, and effects on other psychological systems. At the top of the hierarchy Rosenberg places affective traits, which she defines as “stable predispositions toward certain types of emotional responding that set the threshold for the occurrence of particular emotional states” (Rosenberg, 1998, p. 249). Placed under affective traits in this hierarchy, she places moods. Her definition of moods is “affective states that occupy an intermediate terrain between the affective traits and emotions” (Rosenberg, 1998, p. 250).

Emotions are defined by her as “acute, intense, and typically brief psychophysiological changes that result from a response to a meaningful situation in one’s environment” (p. 250) and she states that it is subordinate to both affective traits and moods. These must be placed at the bottom of the pyramid according to Rosenberg. The structure of this hierarchy is displayed in Figure 1.

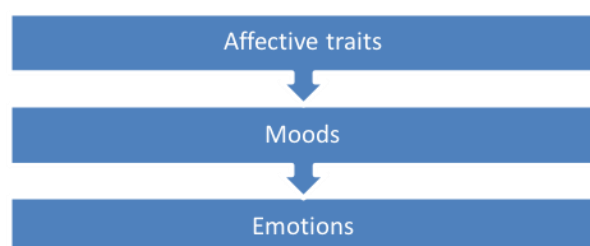


Figure 1. Hierarchy of the Common Forms

Surprisingly, gratitude is an emotion that has not been researched a lot. The central research question that this article asks is:

Does gratitude have an influence on individual performances?

This research aims to provide an insight into effects of gratitude on performances on an individual level. The research can be of academic relevance for any further research on emotions influencing individual performance. It can be added to the list of very few researches that have been done on this specific academic field and thus be a useful addition.

Moreover, this research can be of great value for the business sector. Managers, directors, leaders, etcetera, can decide for themselves whether gratitude is an aspect they think is worth paying attention to. Managers learn what factors effect gratitude and how gratitude can help improve individual performances. By researching the collected data and drawing conclusions by applying theories to practice, this can help managers implement factors in order to improve the level of gratitude within their team. In the end, improving individual performances of employees would benefit all involved.

The first part of this paper consists out the theoretical framework. In this chapter, earlier research about gratitude is studied. This chapter about literature is followed by the methodology. This chapter explains how this research is conducted. In chapter 4. the findings are presented and analyzed which is followed by a chapter with conclusions. In the final part of this paper limitations of this research are mentioned.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To understand the importance of gratitude, it is important to know what gratitude is.

2.1 Defining Gratitude

Gratitude, like other affects, conceivably could exist as an affective trait, a mood, or an emotion. But what is gratitude?

Some researchers define gratitude as a recognition of the value of a benefit or that one has received a valuable benefit from others (Lambert, Graham, & Fincham, 2009, p. 1193-207). In this sense, gratitude is conceptualized as a moral virtue, an attitude, an emotion, a habit, a personality trait, and a coping response. Other researchers define gratitude as a generalized tendency to recognize and respond with grateful emotion to the roles of other people’s benevolence in the positive experiences and outcomes that one obtains (McCullough, Tsang, & Emmons, 2002, p. 112). Emmons and Crumpler (2000) also state that gratitude is an emotional state and an attitude toward life. This seems to be in line with the conclusion of multiple researchers. Gratitude can also be seen as a source of human strength in enhancing one’s personal and relational well-being (Emmons, & Crumpler, 2000).

Several researchers have shown that gratitude typically has an uplifting emotional contribution (Lazarus, & Lazarus, 1994; Mayer, Salovey, Gomberg-Kaufman, & Blainey, 1991; Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1991). From this perspective gratitude can be defined as a positive emotion. “Positive emotions are those that have pleasant affective valence, as in contrast with negative emotions, which are uncomfortable or painful for the subject” (Roberts, 2004, p. 7). Gratitude is on the side of happiness and well-being according to our intuition (Roberts, 2004, p. 1). However, Aristotle had different thoughts opposed to this opinion. The assumption that gratitude usually feels good did not impress him. He believed a grateful attitude has a demeaning connotation: “It puts its subject in glad acceptance of the debtor position - not a position noble natures gladly accept” (see Aristotle, trans. 1980, bk 4, chap. 3). He was not the only philosopher in his time with this perspective. Epicurus (trans. 1987a, 1987b) regarded gratitude as a vice because it is a disposition of neediness and comprises susceptibility to fear.

However, more recent researchers state that gratitude does in fact contribute to human well-being. A differentiation in gratitude can be made between episodes of emotions and traits of character (Roberts, 2004, p. 2). The episodes of emotions are defined as short-term dispositions and the trait of character as a long-term

disposition. This seems to complement Rosenberg's analysis of affective traits, moods and emotions. If you have gratitude in a long-term disposition, "you are formed, as a person, in such a way that you are prone, over a fairly long stretch of your life, to episodes of gratitude on certain kinds of occasions or when contemplating certain situations" (Roberts, 2004, p. 2).

Other researchers use a broader definition of gratitude: "Gratitude is the appreciation of what is valuable and meaningful to oneself and represents a general state of thankfulness and/or appreciation" (Sansone, & Sansone, 2010, p. 18-22). This definition is broad in a way that it allows for a more inclusive meaning instead of only being thankful when receiving something from someone. Sansone mentions examples like being thankful for experiences, such as being alive and coming into contact with nature.

Research has shown that a grateful individual typically has four characteristics:

- Grateful individuals do not feel deprived in life and should feel a sense of abundance.
- Grateful individuals are appreciative of the contribution of others to their well-being.
- Grateful individuals are characterized by the tendency to appreciate simple pleasures ("those pleasures in life that are readily available to most people").
- Grateful individuals acknowledge the importance of experiencing and expressing gratitude (Watkins, Woodward, Stone, & Kolts, 2003, p. 432).

A more recent research created a different model of gratitude, which is called 'the multilevel model of gratitude in organizations' (Fehr, Fulmer, & Miller, 2017, p. 362). This model conceptualizes gratitude at three different levels:

- An episodic emotion at the event level.
- A persistent tendency to feel grateful at the individual level.
- A shared sense of gratitude at the organizational level.

The organizational level will not be further explained and studied since it is not relevant to this research as this study focuses solely on the individual and event level.

The first level, known as the event level (or episodic gratitude) can be defined as "a feeling of appreciation in response to an experience that is beneficial to, but not attributable to, the self" (Emmons, & McCullough, 2004). The most common form of gratitude is when people receive a tangible or intangible benefit from another person (McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larson, 2001). An example of this could be a university student getting help from a professor outside of lecture hours. Another example is a football player staying longer on the pitch after a training session and one of the coaches or other players stay with him to help him. Gratitude at the event level can differ very much in its frequency and intensity. Let us take a football match as an example. Imagine this scenario: it is the World Cup final and it is 1-0 in your favor. The opposing team gets a penalty in the last minute, but the goalkeeper saves it. This event might trigger high-intensity feelings of gratitude. Now imagine a friendly match. The opposing team shoots the ball from a distance and the goalkeeper makes a good save. This event might trigger feelings of gratitude; however, the intensity will be much lower. The consequences of gratitude can be influenced by the frequency and intensity of these experiences.

In this model, another dimension of gratitude is the one from the individual level. Fehr et al., (2017) argue that gratitude appears in the form of persistent gratitude at this level. They define it as "a stable tendency to feel grateful within a particular context"

(Fehr, Fulmer, & Miller, 2017, p. 363). The perspective of persistent gratitude is grounded in the multilevel emotion literature. Instead of looking at the emotion literature on an individual level, the focus is more on a broader notion of a schema. Schemas are "mental structures that function as heuristics, directing attention and regulating action" (Fehr, Fulmer, & Miller, 2017, p. 363). Schemas alone are still a very broad subject. To connect the concept to gratitude, we need to expand our knowledge about schemas. Emotion schemas are "emotion-cognition interactions/structures that generate feeling-thought experiences and behavioral tendencies that range from momentary processes to trait-like phenomena" (Izard, 2009, p. 3). Emotion schemas need further research to be able to connect schemas with the feeling of gratitude.

Network theories of emotion state that emotion schemas develop linearly through replayed combinations of stimulants and emotions (Fehr, Fulmer, & Miller, 2017, p. 363). For example, a football player who has a coach who makes negative comments every time, will get an emotion schema based on fear at the football club. This emotion schema of fear is the result of a compounding product of repeated anxiety-provoking episodes.

Persistent gratitude supposedly develops in an organization when an employee experiences frequent and intense episodic gratitude within the organization. When persistent gratitude has developed, it works in multiple interrelated manners. First, individuals that evolve persistent gratitude have distinct appraisal tendencies contributing to relevant interpretations of the behavior of other people (Wood, Maltby, Gillett, Linley, & Joseph, 2008, p. 282). Therefore, they presumably could become more attentive to gratitude-inducing stimulants in their organizations (Compton, 2003). For example, if a young, talented player feels grateful, he might act on tips or comments from the captain of the team, while an ungrateful player would not. Second, individuals are better equipped to remember past gratitude inducing experiences and use them to portray their environments (DeCoster & Claypool, 2004). For example, a young player might recall the actions of the captain, the coach, or other leaders in the team during a difficult time for the club/organization. Third, individuals are seemingly more prone to interpreting various events in a grateful manner instead of negative perspective. (Wilkowski, Robinson, Gordon, & Troop-Gordon, 2007). For example, when a football player helps clean up the field from cones and a teammate takes some cones to help you, it is more likely to be seen as a helpful act instead of seeing it as an act to steal attention away from you. In these cases, persistent gratitude can wield effects on individuals that can be relatively long-lasting. This influences the way employees react to various situations and circumstances.

2.2 Consequences of Gratitude

Grateful people experience positive emotions and heightened well-being because of various reasons. "Seeing oneself as the beneficiary of other people's generosity may lead one to feel affirmed, esteemed, and valued, which may boost self-esteem and perceived social support" (McCullough, Tsang, & Emmons, 2002, p. 113). A high level of appreciation for the good things in one's life may prevent grateful people in taking benefits for granted. A consequence is that those individuals are less likely to complain about their current situation and be positive about their situation. This helps in sustaining happiness and subjective well-being in the long-term. As mentioned, studies have shown that gratitude can improve well-being. For instance, those who are grateful, and forgiving are more likely to have a greater well-being in adulthood than those who are not (Hill, & Allemand, 2011). Researchers (Watkins, Woodward, Stone, & Kolts, 2003, p. 448) discovered that individuals who scored higher on the grateful personality trait were more satisfied with their lives and

were experiencing more positive emotions. Gratitude exercises (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005) and journals (Emmons, & McCullough, 2003, p. 386) can also improve well-being. Studies suggest that there is a causal relationship between gratitude and well-being.

Gratitude boosts happiness by enhancing a number of benefits in an individual's life (Watkins, 2004), one of those benefits being social support (Sarason and Sarason, 2009; Myers, 2000). People that show feelings of gratitude towards others may get social support, which facilitates long-term well-being. In conclusion, well-being is related to the quality of an individual's social contacts and relationships.

Being grateful can help benefit individuals in tough times (Watkins 2004). Gratitude in this sense serves as an effective coping mechanism. But why is this the case? Coping strategies arbitrate the connection between gratitude and life satisfaction. In other words, gratitude can help someone cope with stressful events in their life. This, in turn, increases that person's well-being in the long-term (Wood, Joseph, & Linley, 2007, p. 1090-91). Earlier studies add on to this by suggesting that gratitude broadens the scope of cognition and empowers flexible thinking (Fredrickson, 2004). This complements other research that argues that gratitude is effective in enhancing well-being because it builds psychological and social resources (Emmons and McCullough, 2003, p. 388).

2.3 Antecedents of Gratitude

Researchers state that antecedents of gratitude are multifaceted (Fehr, Fulmer, & Miller, 2017, p. 365). Whilst looking at human resource literature and gratitude literature, they identify three initiatives that are likely to help grow feelings of gratitude:

- Appreciation programs;
- Contact with beneficiaries;
- Developmental feedback.

Although they focus on the organizational-level antecedents of gratitude, these initiatives can also be implemented on an individual level. The goal of these initiatives is to stimulate enhancing the feeling of gratitude.

2.3.1 Appreciation Programs

Appreciation programs are the result of a problem that consists of beneficiaries that do not have or take the time to express their gratitude towards benefactors. This might be a consequence of fast-paced and performance-driven work environments, such as the professional sports world. Benefactors tend to develop a negative attitude when their beneficiaries do not show them any gratitude. They can feel overlooked, ignored or maybe not even relevant. Researchers conceptualize formal appreciation programs as "occasions in which organizations have planned and institutionalized opportunities to endow individuals with expressions of positive affirmation" (Roberts, Spreitzer, Heap, & Quinn, 2005, p. 718). Fehr et al. (2017, p. 366) explain two different perspectives of appreciation programs. If you look at the recipient's perspective, it is stated that these programs show individuals within an organization that they are not taken for granted and that they are being valued. The third-party perspective shows the individuals in an organization that their coworkers play a role in their own, but also the organization's, success. It intensifies the interpersonal relationships between coworkers (Fehr, Fulmer, & Miller, 2017, p. 366).

2.3.2 Contact with Beneficiaries

Research has shown that people not only feel gratitude when receiving help, but also when they have the opportunity to help others (Fehr, Fulmer, & Miller, 2017, p. 366). The same research argues that gratitude can be inculcated by pointing out

connections, between the link of individuals actions and the benefits they produce, through beneficiary contact programs. Beneficiary contact makes characteristics like kindness, benevolence, and helpfulness more accessible (Dutton, Roberts, & Bednar, 2010, p. 217). An individual's feelings of gratitude is directly impacted by beneficiary contact. People tend to feel more satisfied in their work when they have opportunities to help others (Grant, Dutton, & Rosso, 2008, p. 899).

2.3.3 Developmental Feedback

Individuals also develop feelings of gratitude for the personal growth and skills they increase during their work (Oldham, Hackman, & Pearce, 1976, p. 396). When individuals do not get any feedback on their job, they are left clueless and oblivious of their development. This results in feelings of anxiety, unclear perspective of progress, and bad relationships with their managers (Fehr, Fulmer, & Miller, 2017, p. 367). These issues are easily solved by giving developmental feedback to individuals. Developmental feedback is defined as an "extent to which supervisors provide their employees with helpful or valuable information that enables the employees to learn, develop, and make improvements on the job" (Zhou, 2003, p. 415). The feedback is future-oriented to see where they go next and increase an individual's intrinsic motivation to realize this future. It helps them to have an insight in their progress. It is stated that developmental feedback is positively associated with an individual's gratitude. In conclusion, developmental feedback provides several positive consequences: it signals the individuals that others in the organizations care about their professional and personal well-being, and it leads to more awareness of the benefits for their personal growth that come with the job and the organization (Fehr, Fulmer, & Miller, 2017, p. 367).

2.4 Contingencies of Gratitude

The model of Fehr et al. (2017) explains several contingencies of gratitude of which two will be outlined and explained.

2.4.1 Humility

In the organizational literature, humility is defined as a "relatively stable trait that is grounded in a self-view that something greater than the self exists" (Ou et al. 2014, p. 37). The antecedents mentioned earlier give individuals the chance to develop feelings of gratitude. However, there is also a chance to develop feelings of excessive pride. Individuals can become overly confident and proud about their share in the organization's achievements. This results in a decreasing connection with coworkers. Humility "connotes (a) a manifested willingness to view oneself accurately, (b) a displayed appreciation of others' strengths and contributions, and (c) teachability" (Owens, Johnson, & Mitchell, 2013, p. 1518). If an individual achieves a goal as a result of hard work, pride is the feeling that is most likely to develop (Fehr, Fulmer & Miller, 2017, p. 369). Imagine a young talented football player that has been working hard to play for the first team of a professional football club his whole life. The moment the player makes his debut for the first team, it is more likely that he experiences feelings of pride and accomplishment than gratitude. Owens et al. (2013, p. 1518) state that humility makes sure that an individual recognizes and values the knowledge and assistance he gets from other people. It is a crucial feeling to temper feelings of pride. Humility reduces overconfidence and makes the individual realize he cannot achieve his successes without forces beyond himself.

2.4.2 Rumination

Rumination is generally defined as "repetitive thinking about negative personal concerns and/or about the implications, causes, and meanings of a negative mood" (Whitmer & Gotlib, 2013, p. 1036). When you think about 'rumination', you tend to think

about negative emotions. However, rumination can be about positive emotions as well. Positive rumination is defined as “the tendency to respond to the positive state with recurrent thoughts of one’s positive emotional state and positive self-qualities” (Gilbert, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Gruber, 2013, p. 736). Feldman, Joormann, & Johnson (2008, p. 740) state that positive rumination is beneficial for an individual’s positive emotions. They say that it results in a higher level of self-esteem and decreases the levels of depression. “It is an internal, cognitive process that involves consciously thinking about a positive emotion after it occurs involving such terms as reminiscing and basking”. On the other hand, longer term negative moods and symptoms of depression are a result of not being able to ruminate positively. (Fehr, Fulmer, & Miller, 2017, p. 370).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Literature

This research builds upon existing academic literature on emotions and more specifically the emotion of gratitude. The main aim of this research is to investigate whether the emotion of gratitude can have an influence on the performances of an individual, more specifically in the professional sports world.

In the previous chapter the theoretical framework for this research is mentioned and explained. This is necessary to have a deeper understanding and baseline on this topic. The literature is used to analyze the findings and results out of the data that is retrieved and to draw conclusions from this.

3.2 Interviews

In order to be able to answer this research question, new data needs to be gathered. This data will be gathered by conducting interviews. The Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954; Butterfield, Borgen, Amundson, & Maglio, 2005) is used to gather information. This technique is very useful for this research because it can “be thought of as a flexible set of principles which must be modified and adapted to meet the specific situation (concerning gratitude) at hand” (Flanagan, 1954, p. 9). The Critical Incident Technique is a method for collecting important facts concerning behavior in defined situations. (Flanagan, 1954, p. 1). This technique “consists of a set of procedures for collecting direct observations of human behavior in such a way as to facilitate their potential usefulness in solving practical problems and developing broad psychological principles” (Flanagan, 1954, p. 1). In this case, it will be implemented in such a way to gather information about the individual’s perception of gratitude. The Critical Incident Technique is used in an interview format with the participants. This consists out of a first interview where the participant will be asked about his view on gratitude. Several aspects outlined by the multilevel model of gratitude in organizations are included in the interviews: Appreciation programs, humility, rumination and well-being are included in the interviews.

The interviews will be conducted within the first team of FC Twente. The reason that it is conducted within a football team is because these individuals are always under pressure to perform at a high level. Mental aspects such as gratitude play an important role in performances, especially in sports. It is very interesting to conduct this research in this environment because of the role that performances play in this world. Due to my personal situation, I have unique access to the people within this team. The sample size of this research is eight. The gender of the respondents is male. The range of age is 19-34 years-old, with an outlier of 62 years-old staff. This outlier is a staff member of the team and a former football player. The level of education ranges from no education (only finished high-school) up to a university degree.

3.3 Coding

The data collected with the help of the Critical Incident Technique were transcribed and coded in order to be able to compare and analyze the data retrieved. The inductive content analytic coding strategy was used as the coding strategy (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2012). The four earlier mentioned characteristics that measure gratitude are taken as the aggregate dimensions (Watkins, Woodward, Stone, & Kolts, 2003, p. 432). The second step was to identify the second-order codes. This is done by analyzing the retrieved data and looking for concepts. The last step of coding is to show some original data in the interviews; illustrating the first and second order codes by some quotes out of the interviews. This coding strategy is used to show a clear insight of the data from the interviews.

4. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Organization introduction

The organization that took part in the interviews is Football Club (FC) Twente. This organization is a professional football club with commercial purposes. The organization is active in the highest league in Holland, named the Eredivisie. For the purpose of this research, high-performance individuals were needed for the interviews. High-performance individuals, in this case professional football players, are under a lot of pressure most of the time which make them the suitable participants for this research. As mentioned in the literature, emotions play an important part in performances. This is why football players are the eligible individuals to interview. The access to the players and coaches was easy to get because of my personal position within this team.

4.2 Interview questions

The questions in the interviews are based on existing academic literature. As mentioned in the methodology, the Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954) is used with the interviews. This technique is very flexible which results in interviews that are not all exactly the same. However, to have a little bit of a structure, a number of questions are set in advance:

4.2.1 *Can you tell me something you are grateful for from this day?*

This first question is to let the respondent think about gratitude. You can compare it with a warming-up for a football match. Let the respondent get into the subject of gratitude. Another reason that this question was included is to let the participant think about that day and most likely have feelings of gratitude towards things that is perceived as ‘normal’ although it might not be. The answers of the different respondents to this question are very similar. The respondents are grateful for being able to provide good quality at their job. Most of the respondents also realize that they do something they really enjoy, which is football. They are grateful for being able to do football for a living. Nevertheless, the thing that players mention the most with regards to gratitude, is health. Their own health, but also health of family members and other people close to them are mentioned frequently.

4.2.2 *Can you tell me about an event in your career when you felt grateful?*

This question asks the respondents about an important event in their career. It is not a surprise that people have multiple events in their career when they feel grateful. This question is about the event where they felt most grateful, more than other events. The respondent needs to bring up a memory about what is an important moment in the respondent’s career. This question can be explained from the event level of gratitude from the multilevel model of gratitude (Fehr, Fulmer, & Miller, 2017). There were

some similarities between the answers which can be explained by age and job experience. Four of the respondents stated that their professional debut in an official match is the event that they felt most grateful. These respondents are all relatively young and inexperienced compared to the other respondents. The other respondents are older and thus have more job experience. These older respondents experienced more events after their professional debut in their career, which makes it more likely to experience more important events. The other answers consist of winning a championship, being fit after a long-term injury, and the call-up and debut for a national team. In conclusion: with more experience, come more events.

4.2.3 What emotions/feelings did you experience during this event? (Follow-up question)

This question asks about the other emotions that come up while feeling gratitude. All the respondents felt multiple emotions/feelings during the event they mentioned. Similarities are emotions/feelings of happiness and pride. Several respondents also mentioned that they felt nervous. However, they mention it as a positive emotion. Two respondents give quite different answers which can be explained by the different nature of the event they mentioned compared to the rest. One of them states that he felt invincible and confident because of his achievement. His feelings of gratitude were followed by confidence, which resulted in a feeling of 'invincibility'. The other respondent answered that he felt relieved. He was grateful for being fit again after a long-term injury, but this feeling was combined with the feeling of relieve. In conclusion, gratitude brings up many other positive emotions.

4.2.4 What does gratitude mean to you?

While researching the definition of gratitude, you come across many different definitions. This question asks the respondent what gratitude means to them. Everybody has their own perspective and, thus, can gratitude mean something different for me than for someone else. It is very interesting to see how each respondent gives a different meaning. One states that gratitude is in the simple things in life. Contradictory, another respondent states that is has to do with everything in his life. With his possessions, but also with the events happening to him. He finds gratitude more in the spiritual/intangible world, while someone else finds it more in tangible things. Another states that it is a matter of confidence if you feel grateful. While one states that gratitude has to do with saying 'thank you', another states that is has to do with all the things in your life that you are not really thinking about, but still have and see it as normal. Just like in the literature of earlier research, there is no single definition of gratitude. Even though there is no single definition, we can conclude that gratitude has a positive attitude.

4.2.5 Do you think gratitude is linked to experiences with other people?

At first, this question was not included in this interview. However, during the first interview, the respondent linked gratitude to others around him. He mentioned an example of him walking in the woods and not having any feelings of gratitude. On the counterpart, he mentioned him walking in the woods together with his girlfriend. In this scenario, he did experience feelings of gratitude. The following interviews, this question was included to see if this is a common thing. Analysing the answers of the eight respondents shows us that the level of education plays a role. The respondents that have a lower level of education state that they need other people to feel gratitude. The respondents with a higher level of education state that other people definitely play a role, however, only partly. They state

that it is a mix of the interaction with people that they are grateful for, and more abstract things in life, such as nature.

4.2.6 What feelings/emotions do you feel when someone shows gratitude towards you?

This question asks the respondent about gratitude from other people. It is formulated with an example that goes like this: imagine an individual that you personally know. You did something for him/her and that person tells you how grateful he/she is. All the respondents mentioned that this gives them a happy feeling. It gives them a feeling of satisfaction, and the feeling that what you did for that person is being valued. One respondent states that he gains respect for the person that shows gratitude. He says it creates a bond. Although all the respondents experience positive emotions/feelings when someone shows them gratitude, one of the respondents stuck out because he stated that these moments, are for him, the best moments. He enjoys getting positive feedback. Additionally, he states that is also enhances his own feeling of gratitude. In conclusion, whenever a person shows feelings of gratitude towards another, the other person will experience multiple positive emotions.

4.2.7 Does gratitude have an influence on the way you look at people?

This question asks about the perspective of the respondents on other individuals. It questions whether people have different feelings towards people that are grateful and towards people that are not. All of the respondents answered that gratitude does influence the way they look at people. Most of them shared the same example. They compare two different individuals. The first, being a person that helps them. This creates a feeling of gratitude towards that person. The second, being a person who is not helpful, who is selfish, and who is ungrateful. One respondent answers that he does not have feelings of empathy towards the second kind of people. The respondents also share a scenario where someone else is unwilling to help you, which results in feelings of ungratefulness towards that person. Additionally, they mention that they would not be willing to help that person anymore in the future. In conclusion, gratitude does have an influence on the way an individual looks at other people.

4.2.8 Have you experienced a moment when you experienced feelings of gratitude to such a high level that it resulted in a humble feeling?

This question is about the humility contingency in relation to gratitude (Fehr, Fulmer, & Miller, 2017). The purpose of this question is to find out whether people experience feelings of humility while they experience gratitude at the same time. The question asks about a very personal experience thus, all answers are different. Regardless, there is an exception for two respondents. They both answered that they feel gratitude and humility whenever social media and the press is very praising about them. These respondents say that they feel grateful for being appreciated and hearing positive things about themselves, but at the same time they feel humble. The reason why they feel like this is different between the two respondents. One of them states that he does not like it when people praise him very much when he is around. He gets humble and shy and does not know how to behave. The other respondent has a different reason. He states that in the sports world, opinions can change very quickly. One moment you are the best, and another moment, when you make some mistakes, you are the worst. He states that staying humble makes sure that he stays down to earth and not get carried away.

4.2.9 What things do you ruminate about?

Once again, this question is about a contingency. This time it involves the contingency of rumination (Fehr, Fulmer, & Miller, 2017). As earlier mentioned, rumination does not necessarily involve negative feelings/emotions. It can be positive too. However, the answers given by the respondents were all about negative feelings, like worrying. The answers were, once again, very similar. The respondents mention worrying about injuries, their career and health. Injuries are mentioned because it could influence their career in a negative way or even end it. Something that stands out is that everybody is mostly worried about health of other people. They do mention their own health as well, however, the actual worrying part is about health of people close to them.

4.2.10 What do you do to stop ruminating?

This question is developed during the interview when the answers gave a clear image of the respondents only seeing ruminating as a negative thing. As ruminating emerged into worrying during the interview, the question can also be asked as: *What do you do to stop worrying?*

A few respondents mention that they try to solve the problem what they are worrying about. If that is not possible, they try accepting it and moving on, and think about positive things instead. A different answer is to write down your thoughts. Writing it down is a way of letting go for one of the respondents. The same applies for talking their worries with someone else, or even crying in an extreme situation. One respondent stands out with his answer. He says that he does not mind worrying and does in fact see it as a good thing. He thinks that if he does not worry about anything, he develops some kind of resignation or he thinks he will start slacking in his mindset.

4.2.11 Have you tried to replace ruminating with the feeling of gratitude?

This question is asked to see if the respondents have ever tried to replace the feelings of (negative) rumination (or worrying) with the positive feeling of gratitude. The respondent who answered that he does not mind worrying, has never tried this. This is not a surprising answer as he does not experience worry as a negative emotion. He says that if he is worrying about something, it keeps him busy and focused on that problem. All the other respondents have tried replacing the negative feelings with gratitude. One of them states that it is a natural process for him and he does not have to focus on it. This respondent states that thinking about something makes it bigger. So, if you think about positive things, it will influence the person in a positive manner and vice versa. A few of the respondents mention that they do it regularly and that it makes them happier. They compare their own situation with others who are in a way worse situation. This is a reality check for them and makes them more grateful for the things that are good in their life. Something that stands out is that several respondents mention that the feeling of gratitude does not last long-term. They try to replace their feeling of ruminating/worrying with feelings of gratitude. However, the positive feelings fade away if the problem is not fixed.

4.2.12 Does gratitude have an influence on your well-being?

This question seeks to find an answer to the consequence of gratitude. The consequence addressed in this question is well-being. All of the respondents think that gratitude has a positive effect on the well-being of an individual. They all mention the state of mind. If you feel grateful, your mind is positive-minded. You automatically will feel better. One respondent experiences more confidence when feeling grateful, and others feel happier.

One of them states that when he feels grateful, he seeks happiness in the simple pleasures of life.

4.2.13 What influence does gratitude have on you as an individual?

This question seeks to find an answer to what gratitude does with a person. The respondents answered that gratitude is very important for them. Gratitude makes them a positive person, it makes them want to help others, and it makes them happier about their situation in life. Interestingly, one of the answers is that gratitude helps an individual to get over a negative event. This is in line with the literature that states that gratitude can serve as a coping strategy (Wood, Joseph, & Linley, 2007, p. 1090-91). Only one of the respondents says that it does not have an influence on him. He does not spend a lot of time thinking about it or focusing on it.

4.2.14 How do you enter a state of gratitude?

This question asks about how a person is entering a state of gratitude. In other words, what needs to happen for an individual to feel grateful? The answers of the respondents are diverse. One respondent answers that you first need to know who you are and what you want. If you know this, all kinds of things can help you enter a state of gratitude. Another respondent states that it is something you can consciously summon. While one respondent enters a state of gratitude while having good conversations, another enters it through the experience of joy or an achievement.

4.2.15 Does gratitude have an influence on your individual performances? Rate it on a scale from 1-10.

This is the last question that is needed to answer the research question of this research. Every respondent answered that gratitude does have an influence on their performance. They are all unified in the opinion that the feeling of gratitude makes them feel good and positive. The consequence of this is that they feel more confident, which in turn results in more creativity and less stress. Some of the respondents even argue that they can give 110% instead of 100% physically on the pitch. Another thing they all agree on is that if you feel grateful, it is easier to process and get over setbacks. All the respondents rate the influence of gratitude on individual performances on a scale from 1-10. The ratings are displayed in Table 1.

R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8
8	6	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5	8	7.5

Table 1. Ratings of the eight respondents

Calculating the mean of the ratings is: $(8 + 6 + 7.5 + 7.5 + 7.5 + 7.5 + 8 + 7.5)/8 = 7.4$

The average rating is 7.4.

The range of the given ratings is 6-8. Compared to the other ratings, a six is relatively low. The respondent stated that he thinks gratitude can play a big role in performances. This statement is a bit contradictory with the rating of six. The reason that he does not give a higher rating is that he is a very critical minded person. Besides, he states that gratitude is not the only emotion that plays a role, thus, he rates it 'only' at a six.

4.2.16 Could appreciation programs help develop feelings of gratitude?

At first, the plan was to let the respondents participate in a program conducted via an app. The respondents would have been required to answer a few questions about gratitude every day. Before the program, the respondents would have to tell about their view on gratitude. After finishing the program, which would

have taken a set period of time, the respondents would have been asked the same again and they would tell about their view on gratitude. Unfortunately, this program was not possible to conduct with these respondents.

The question is about an earlier mentioned antecedent. When asking this question, the initial plan of the program with the app was explained. The respondents were asked if they think a program like that would help develop feelings of gratitude. All the respondents state that such a program would help. This would help according to them because it helps people realize what things you can be grateful for. The respondents state it helps in taking a moment and thinking about the past. It also makes you think of people that are in a far worse situation than you are, which will give you the feeling of gratitude. However, the respondents state that two things need to be considered if it will work. They say that it will not make a difference for people who are already focusing on gratitude. On the other hand, it will make

a big difference for people that are unaware of their feeling gratitude or are in general ungrateful. A different aspect that needs to be considered is the level of skill of use of technology. People that are not good in dealing with technology are less likely to follow a program that is initiated via an app. There is another barrier. Young individuals tend to dislike programs which require discipline or that is mandatory, like such an app.

4.3 Coding Scheme

As mentioned before, the inductive content analytic coding strategy was used as the coding strategy (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2012). The coding scheme can be seen in Table 2. This coding scheme consists out of aggregate dimensions, second-order codes and some quotes. The aggregate dimensions are retrieved out of the research from Watkins et al. (2003). The second-order codes are retrieved out of the data from the interviews.

Quotes	Second-order	Aggregate dimension
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "I am always happy and grateful for the things I do have in my life. I try to never look at the things I do not have." - "Sometimes when I feel frustrated or sad, I think about people that are having way bigger problems like people in poor countries. It helps me to realize that I should be happy, and it also makes me humble." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Comparing to others - Humility - Positive minded 	1. No feeling of deprivation in life and a sense of abundance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "I gain respect for others if they trigger my feeling of gratitude." - "If I recognize the feeling of gratitude towards someone, I value that person a lot. It also gives me satisfaction when I can help someone else and give them the same feelings of gratitude." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Happiness - Respect - Valued - Satisfaction 	2. Appreciative of the contribution of other to their well-being
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "I feel very grateful that I can do my job and enjoy it at the same time." - "I feel grateful for being healthy being able to buy all the things I need such as food." - "I think that if you feel grateful, you will look more at the small things in your life which can make you happy." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ability to work - Enjoying life - Being able to provide for themselves 	3. The tendency to appreciate simple pleasures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Conversations about life always make me realize what a beautiful life I am living and that I should feel grateful." - "I think that expressing gratitude, or even thinking about it, can help people make more conscious about the good things in their life." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Awareness - Consciousness 	4. Acknowledge the importance of experiencing and expressing gratitude

Table 2. Coding Scheme

4.3.1 Sense of abundance

The number one aggregate dimension is 'no feeling of deprivation in life and a sense of abundance'. In the data from the interviews this was further explained by the second-order codes 'comparing to others; humility; and positive minded'. In the interviews, the respondents state that when they feel like they are having problems or when they feel frustrated or sad, they compare their own situation with others. They will compare themselves with people that are in a worse situation which results in them experiencing feelings of humility. Another thing that came out of this code is that the respondents always try to stay positive minded. Instead of looking at the things they do not have, they tend to look at the things they do have. This results in a sense of abundance.

4.3.2 Contribution of others

The second aggregate dimension is 'appreciative of the contribution of others to their well-being'. By analyzing the data from the interviews, the second-order codes turn out to be: happiness; respect; valued; and satisfaction. In the interviews, the respondents state that they feel happy when they can help to let others feel gratitude, but also when someone else can trigger

this emotion for them. They state that they gain respect for people that give them feelings of gratitude. Another aspect that is mentioned by all the respondents is that they like to give others the feeling of gratitude. It triggers feelings of satisfaction and makes them feel valued.

4.3.3 Simple pleasures

The third aggregate dimension is 'the tendency to appreciate simple pleasures'. The second-order codes for this aggregate dimension turn out to be: ability to work; enjoying life; and being able to provide for themselves. In the interviews, the respondents express that they are really grateful for being able to do their job. This does not come without the fact that their job is the reason they can provide for themselves. They also state that they are grateful for being able to enjoy their job, but also more generally, life. One of the respondents states that if you feel grateful, you will look more at the small things (simple pleasures) in life, which can make you happier.

4.3.4 Expressing gratitude

The last aggregate dimension is 'acknowledging the importance of experiencing and expressing gratitude. The second-order codes turn out to be: awareness; and consciousness. In the

interviews, one of the respondents states that conversations about life makes him aware of the fact that he has a beautiful life. He really expresses his gratitude towards others and believes it makes him a happier person.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The main aim of this research was to find whether or not gratitude has an influence on individual performances. Firstly, we can conclude that gratitude does in fact have an influence on individual performances. The data shows that with a higher level of gratitude, performances are better than with a lower level of gratitude. Individuals with feelings of gratitude experience multiple other positive emotions which enable them to perform better. In conclusion, positivity results in better performances compared to negativity. Secondly, we can conclude that gratitude also works as a coping mechanism, which is in line with earlier studies. Thirdly, we can conclude that rumination does not have a positive side to it. Studies have shown that people can ruminate in a positive way. This study contradicts those studies. The respondents state that rumination is not considered anything close to positive in their perspective. It has a negative load to it. Lastly, we can conclude that appreciation programs do help individuals develop feelings of gratitude, which is also in line with earlier studies. However, before initiating these programs, two things need to be considered: the level of skill of use of technology and the target audience. These appreciation programs are most likely to evolve in technology such as an app. People who do not have any skill with this kind of technology will not make use of these programs. The target audience is also important. An appreciation program requires discipline and consistency. Not all people possess these skills.

5.1 Limitations and future research

This research comes with some limitations. First of all, emotions are, and will always be, a very difficult thing to measure. It is very difficult to find out the difference in outcome of a specific scenario between an individual with feelings of gratitude and without feelings of gratitude. This is because it is impossible to create the exact same scenario twice with the same individual. Secondly, the limited number of respondents resulted in a relatively small data set which severely limits the reliability of the results. It is important for future research to have a larger sample size. Thirdly, this research is limited to one organization. Different organizations might have different views on this subject which might influence their employees' view as well. I recommend future research to include multiple organizations. Another limitation is that this research is conducted within the sport of football. Other sports might have different perspectives on gratitude. Lastly, sports deviates from regular educational jobs. This means that gratitude might have a different influence on individuals in the sports sector and on individuals in the, for example, business sector.

5.2 Recommendations

I would recommend individuals, but also organizations, to have more focus on gratitude. Individuals have to think about the things they do have in life, instead of thinking about the things they do not have and be grateful for this. They should spend more time thinking about memories which they are grateful for, but also not forget to think about the simple pleasures in life. As this research shows, it brings multiple benefits for an individual, which in turn is beneficiary for organizations. This is why I recommend individuals to participate in appreciation programs.

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