
OPINION COMMUNICATION EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT EMPLOYEE WELLBEING PAY STRATEGY HAPPINESS AT WORK THEMED WEEK DECEMBER 2018

Katrina Philippou: What is the key to increasing workplace happiness?

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Most forward-thinking employers have begun to recognise happiness at work as a key piece of the productivity puzzle; it is a factor that cannot be ignored, with research conducted by **Warwick University** finding that **happy employees** are 12% more **productive**.

Personal Group runs a UK employee happiness survey each year, which paints a picture of the workplace happiness levels in the UK. The most recent results, published in March 2018, revealed that 54% of front-line employees are rarely or almost never keen to get to

work in the morning. Those aged between 18 and 29 were found to be the unhappiest age group, with more than half being either rarely or almost never **happy at work**, a 32% increase from 2017.

A continuing trend shows that the self-employed are the happiest workers, with almost 90% happy at least some of the time, which lies in the same ballpark as the 2017 survey results.

Interestingly, even with **gender pay gap** reporting tending to fall in favour of men, happiness at work was shown to be more common among female staff. Put simply, men are much less happy in the workplace than their female counterparts, in spite of the fact they tend to earn more.

While 77% of PAYE female employees are happy at work at least some of the time, this figure drops to 66% for their male counterparts. This means that one in three men are either rarely or never happy at work. The case is similar when looking at the wider workforce, including the self-employed and contractors, where 45% of female workers stated that they are happy most of the time at work, versus only 38% of male workers.

These figures shine some light on the current state of happiness within the UK workforce, but the question of why this is the case has yet to be definitively answered.

The 2018 workplace happiness report, published by One4All Rewards in January 2018, revealed that the happiest workers are employed within the marketing, **communications** and advertising industries, scoring a happiness rating of 8.13 out of 10. However, the sector in which respondents were employed was only the third most important factor affecting their happiness, so we should not all quit our jobs for a fulfilling career in marketing just yet.

Unsurprisingly, the survey also revealed that an employee's **base pay** plays the most important role in their happiness, with 38% of those surveyed citing this as a key reason. However, other crucial factors came to light, such as good co-worker relationships and the nature of the work, which came in second and third, respectively.

Interestingly, end-of-year **financial bonuses** were one of the lowest rated factors for improving happiness, with only 13% citing this as a key reason for **workplace happiness**. This seems to support the data collected by Personal Group surrounding the differences between happiness among men and women, versus the difference in pay. It seems that money really cannot buy happiness, after all.

A good relationship with management was also found to be important, alongside flexible working, the office environment, annual leave and workload.

Ultimately, **workplace happiness** cannot be distilled down to one specific cause. There are many variables that contribute, which makes a one-size-fits-all solution impossible.

If increased workplace happiness is the goal, employers must focus on the overall **employee experience**. The great thing about doing this is the positive knock-on impact it will have on retention, attraction and **productivity**.