

# Office Genie's Workplace Happiness Report

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# An exploration of the factors affecting happiness levels in the workplace

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As both employees and employers we all strive for happiness at work; and the concept of a healthy workplace, and workforce, is at the foreground of modern business thought and practice. Nearly half (48%) of UK businesses now offer measures designed to promote wellness<sup>1</sup> and over the past five years, the term 'workplace wellbeing' has steadily grown in popularity and importance<sup>2</sup>.

A key ingredient of workplace wellbeing is happiness: when employees are happy in their place of work there is a variety of positive outcomes such as improved collaboration, higher levels of innovation and a desire to meet common goals<sup>3</sup>. Conversely, if staff members do not feel happy at work, or content with their work-life balance, it can lead to stress, low productivity levels and high absence rates<sup>4</sup>.

Job satisfaction in Britain plunged to a two-year low in 2016<sup>5</sup>; so finding solutions to reverse this and promote workplace happiness has clear benefits for businesses and individuals. We set out to discover the factors affecting happiness on a personal and professional level within the workplace, with the aim of highlighting key areas for improvement.

The report uncovers some serious causes for concern: junior staff are significantly less happy than more senior staff; mental health provisions are worryingly lacking; and women still struggle for equality in the workplace. We explore stress-inducing factors of the working day; desired wellness initiatives (especially flexible working); and the impact of the working environment as a physical location. Our findings present the primary issues at hand, thus leading to solutions for improved workplace happiness and in turn, greater success for businesses.

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# Executive summary

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This report seeks to establish the primary factors affecting happiness in the workplace. It looks at stressors impacting wellbeing; popular incentives to boost happiness; and the working environment in terms of culture and design. Our research aims to boost awareness of the key issues in the field of workplace happiness, leading to discussion and positive action.

## Methodology

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We surveyed 2,000 office workers, in full or part-time employment, from across the UK. The survey took place from September 8-15, 2016. The respondents were sourced by OnePoll: a member of the Market Research Society and compliant with its code of conduct.

OnePoll finds respondents through various channels: blog pages, social media, partner websites and online communities. It is in one of two ways participants take part: by logging into OnePoll and selecting the survey; or through an invitation from OnePoll itself.

OnePoll's recruitment method ensures the panel is representative of the national population. This is done by subjecting the potential panellists to more than 100 profiling questions. This also enables OnePoll to confidently obtain the necessary demographic; for us, this was people who currently work in an office environment.

## How to measure happiness

To determine individual happiness levels, we asked those taking part how happy they are in their place of work: they had a choice from 'Very happy', 'Quite happy', 'Neither happy nor unhappy', 'Quite unhappy', and 'Very unhappy'.

Very unhappy	1
Quite unhappy	2
Neither happy nor unhappy	3
Quite happy	4
Very happy	5

This enabled us to take a quantitative approach to workplace happiness. The number between one and five gave us a base level with which to compare and inform the results from the further 22 workplace-related questions and three segmentation questions (on gender, region and age range).

# Part I: An overview of happiness in the workplace

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So how happy are we in our place of work? The average happiness level sits at 3.63: between 'Neither happy nor unhappy' and 'Quite happy', yet leaning to the latter. Of the respondents, 17% are 'Very happy', 48% are 'Quite happy', 20% are 'Neither happy nor unhappy', 11% are 'Quite unhappy', and 4% are 'Very unhappy'.

While it is encouraging that nearly half (48%) of the workforce feels 'Quite happy' in their workplace, it is cause for concern that 35% feel either ambivalent ('Neither happy nor unhappy'), 'Quite unhappy' or 'Very unhappy'.

We also asked respondents how they typically feel before going to work on an average day; they were given the choices 'Very positive', 'Quite positive', 'Neither positive or negative', 'Quite negative', and 'Very negative'. We asked the same of after the working day.

Although the most popular choice was 'Quite positive' before and after the working day (38% and 39%, respectively), the majority, combined, do not feel positive (52% and 53%).

	Before	After
Very positive	10%	8%
Quite positive	38%	39%
Neither positive or negative	36%	36%
Quite negative	13%	13%
Very negative	3%	4%

## Age and gender

When happiness levels are isolated by gender, region, and age, the results do not markedly differ. Women are generally happier in the workplace: sitting at a happiness level of 3.66; men are slightly unhappier at 3.60. Men and women nearing retirement are the happiest (65+ year-olds average 4.50) and the second oldest category are also quite content: 55-64 year-olds average 3.77. Those who have just arrived to the world of work are also relatively happy: 18-24 year olds sit at 3.69.

Female	3.66
Male	3.60

18-24	3.69
25 - 34	3.65
35 - 44	3.61
45 - 54	3.53
55 - 64	3.77
65+	4.50

## Region

The happiest workers are in Wales, whose inhabitants have an average happiness score of 3.77. Northern Ireland is the least happy at 3.44. Within the capital, workers are the third happiest in the UK: London averages 3.68.

Wales	3.77
Yorkshire and the Humber	3.70
London	3.68
South East	3.66
East Anglia	3.62
North West	3.62
West Midlands	3.61
Scotland	3.59
South West	3.58
East Midlands	3.56
North East	3.49
Northern Ireland	3.44

Those nearing retirement aside (they are remarkably happier), the margins between happiness levels are small with age, gender, and location taken into account. When seniority is considered, however, the margins become significantly wider.

## Seniority

Junior staff	3.40
Supervisory staff	3.59
Junior management	3.61
Middle management	3.70
Senior management	3.96
Business owner	4.20

It is clear the more senior you are in a company, the happier you are. Business owners are 24% happier than junior members of staff. There appear to be a number of reasons as to why this is the case. Furthermore, despite the fact men and women sit on a similar happiness level, there are a few areas in which their workplace wants and needs vary. Differences in relation to gender and seniority will be explored in [Part II](#) and [III](#).

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## Discussion points

Happiness is most dependent on your position within a company, with business owners being happiest. What can employers do to improve the happiness of junior staff? They are always likely to be paid less; so what other factors can be influenced to make their day-to-day wellness and happiness levels improve?

## Part II: Stress, wellbeing and mental health

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When looking at possible incentives to improve happiness in the workplace, it is important to consider root causes of unhappiness. Stress in particular is a common cause and side effect of working life. According to findings from the Health and Safety Executive, 40% of all work-related illness was attributable to stress in 2014/5<sup>6</sup>.

A variety of workplace issues can induce stress. We asked respondents if any of the following cause them stress in the workplace:

I feel I am overworked	47%
I have a lack of control over my role	25%
I don't feel fulfilled	25%
I don't feel challenged	22%
A bad relationship with management	21%
A bad relationship with colleagues	16%
My working environment	16%
Workplace discrimination	8%
<i>I have never been stressed in the workplace</i>	18%

Feeling overworked is by far the greatest source of stress. Almost half of respondents selected it as the key factor affecting them when it comes to workplace stress. We found that women feel marginally more overworked than men, at 51% compared to 43%.

We also discovered women experience stress in the workplace to a greater degree than men, although not by a remarkable amount: some 21% of men do not feel stressed in the workplace as compared to 15% of women.

In terms of seniority, 46% of junior staff report feeling overworked, despite nearly a third admitting to not feeling fulfilled (32%) or challenged (29%). It becomes apparent there is a significant disparity for junior workers here: despite feeling overworked, they do not feel work is fulfilling or provides a welcome challenge.

We were also interested in how respondents judged the levels of support in their workplace for those with physical and mental health issues. We asked which of the following statements best applies to their place of work:

"There is adequate support for people with mental health/physical health issues"	30%
"There is inadequate/not enough support for people with mental health/physical health issues"	28%
"I'm not sure"	42%



More than half of employees (51%) with mental health issues believe there is inadequate support in the workplace; and twice as many people with mental health issues (26%) said they were unhappy, compared to people who said they do not suffer from such issues (13%). This perhaps explains why respondents with mental health issues place workplace wellness initiatives of higher importance than those without: a huge 45% want these measures in their workplace, compared to 28%. The mental health charity Mind state one in four people experience a mental health problem each year<sup>7</sup>, thus making up a large portion of the workforce.

The fact that, overall, the majority of respondents are uncertain whether there is enough support in place enforces the importance of the need to adopt clear policies, and have open discussions. It is encouraging to note, however, that the adoption of wellbeing strategies in Britain is rising<sup>8</sup>.

To improve workplace wellbeing, respondents voted for the introduction of wellness initiatives (30%); more open discussions about/attitude toward mental and physical health issues (27%); clearer policies on mental and physical health issues (26%); regular HR/management consultations (18%); and funding for external support (contributions toward counselling or physiotherapy costs, for example) (17%). There is also a desire to see improved disabled access, such as lifts and ramps (12%).

Regardless of health issues, gender, and seniority, it is clear an emphasis on wellbeing and an awareness of potential workplace stressors (and desire to act upon this knowledge) would be of great benefit to all members of staff.

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## Discussion points

Feeling overworked is the main source of workplace stress; but despite feeling overworked more junior members of staff do not feel fulfilled or challenged. How can we better include junior staff in the decision making processes and general culture, making them see their work as more worthwhile?

Many see wellness initiatives as a favoured option for decreasing stress; especially those employees with physical and mental health issues. What are the most cost-effective ways to implement such programmes; and what initiatives have worked elsewhere?

## Part III: Incentives and flexible working

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After looking at the causes for discontent in the workplace, it makes sense to examine incentives deemed possible to counteract such problems and boost happiness levels.

We asked, 'Which of the following do you think would improve your happiness at work?':

Pay rise	67%
Bonuses	33%
Flexible hours	33%
Shorter working week	22%
More praise	18%
Remote working	16%
More control over my workload	12%
A better working environment	12%
Regular breaks	8%
More socials and charity events	5%
None of the above	7%

We also questioned which of the following elements holds the most value:

Pay	41%
Job satisfaction	28%
Colleague relationships	17%
Career progression	9%
None/nothing	5%

Pay is clearly a driving factor when it comes to workplace happiness: 67% say a pay rise would improve their workplace happiness and 41% view pay as the most valuable element in their working life. More than half of respondents (56%) feel they deserve to earn more money for their current role and, interestingly, 39% of those surveyed feel they deserve the amount they earn - while 5% admit to feeling they earn more money than they deserve. When the gender pay gap sits at 9.4 per cent<sup>9</sup>, it is unsurprising to find women feel they deserve a higher wage marginally more than men: 57% compared to 55%.

However, we found those who place pay of highest value are the least happy at 3.46 on the happiness scale. People who value career progression most rank at 3.77; job satisfaction,

3.81; and colleague relationships, 3.92. In terms of significant divergences within what is of most value, business owners were the only level of seniority to collectively place job satisfaction above pay; while women value colleague relationships more than men (20% compared to 13%).

After pay and other monetary rewards, namely bonuses, flexible hours are of the most importance. When it comes to flexible hours, women view it as more important than their male counterparts: 36% of women say flexible hours would improve their happiness with work, whereas 29% of men state this would be the case. Remote working, however, is attributed equal significance by both men and women, at 16%.

In regard to remote working, we were particularly interested in working remotely from the home and the effect this can have on happiness levels.

We asked which of the following statements best applies to the respondent:

“I can work from home and it improves my happiness with work”	25%
“I can work from home and it lessens my happiness with work”	7%
“I can’t work from home and I think working from home would improve my happiness with work”	34%
“I can’t work from home and I think working from home would lessen my happiness with work”	12%
None/nothing	21%

Of those that can work from home, a huge 78% believe it improves their happiness. Meanwhile, a significant portion of the working population (34%) would like the ability to work from home - believing it would make them happier - yet they are denied the privilege.

Half of women (50%) cannot work from home and of this number, 74% would like to be able to. Comparatively, only 43% of men cannot work from home, but a similar number (72%) feel it would improve their happiness. Junior staff are getting the worst deal, however: 61% of junior members of the workforce cannot work from home but three quarters (75%) would like the chance, believing it would boost their happiness.

Working flexibly, both in terms of hours and location, has been found to have a variety of positive effects on individuals and businesses as a whole: the main improvements include boosted job satisfaction, productivity, and staff retention levels<sup>10</sup>.

We also wanted to analyse tendencies toward presenteeism; so asked which of the following statements had the best fit:

“When I feel ill I typically go into work anyway”	57%
“When I feel ill I typically work from home”	15%
“When I feel ill I typically take a sick day”	17%
None of the above	11%

The majority of the workforce will go into work when they are ill rather than taking a day off sick, or working from home. Working from home can be a happy medium if employees are feeling under the weather but would still like to work. Perhaps because of the restrictions on home working, 61% of women will go into work when they are ill (they are significantly more likely to than men, at 51%); and 64% of junior staff will go into the workplace when they're ill (significantly more than any other seniority level).

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## Discussion points

As well as pay, flexible hours and the ability to work from home are signposted as key areas in which staff feel they could improve their happiness while working. As well as improving happiness levels, could allowing staff to work more flexibly help raise productivity levels and boost the sense of feeling trusted in the workplace?

While gender doesn't noticeably affect overall happiness levels, factors such as a greater desire for flexible hours and higher levels of presenteeism during illness amongst women cannot be ignored. How can businesses be more open to flexible working practices, while maintaining sensible operating procedures?

# Part IV: The working environment

Workplaces function like ecosystems and the equilibrium of an office is affected, and determined, by a variety of factors. Everything from the dress code to the layout of the space was shown to make a difference to happiness levels.

We asked respondents whether the design of their workplace makes them feel ‘Comfortable’, ‘Uncomfortable’ or ‘Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable’. More than half (53%) feel ‘Comfortable’, 31% feel neither emotion, and 16% feel ‘Uncomfortable’. Those who feel comfortable registered at 4.00 on the happiness scale whereas those who feel uncomfortable sit remarkably lower at 3.01. Feeling comfortable with the design of your office boosts workplace happiness by 33%: design is the environmental factor that has the greatest impact on levels of contentment.

We found the type of space that lends itself to employee happiness is a cubicle design (3.94). The second most favourable is a traditional set up of many/several small rooms (3.76), and open-plan offices house the least happy workers (3.56). In fact, an office based in the home has the best outcome for happiness, with home workers sitting at 4.03 on the happiness scale.

Open plan	3.56
Traditional (many/several small rooms)	3.76
Cubicle	3.94
Office at home	4.03

To get a further insight into the effect of the working environment, we asked respondents about sensory factors: temperature, light, and noise. While the majority of respondents are comfortable with the three - 50% are happy with the temperature, 67% are happy with the light levels, and 59% are happy with the noise levels - many employees are discontent with the excess or deficiency of these elements.

	Too high	Too low	Neither too high nor too low
Temperature	30%	20%	50%
Lighting levels	18%	15%	67%
Noise levels	27%	14%	59%

On a more personal level, we wanted to discover how people feel about the social interaction in their workplace and the privacy levels within it. In terms of social interaction, 60% of people are happy with the levels they experience. Some, however, believe there is too little (16%) or too much (24%) social interaction. When it comes to the level of personal space employees are afforded, there is a similar result: 60% feel they have enough privacy in their place of work but a worrying 40% do not.

Another personal factor to consider is dress; as it is apparent the more relaxed a workplace is with a dress code, the happier employees are. Those who do not have a dress code enforced are the happiest, while a casual dress code results in the second happiest workers.

Casual	3.79
Business casual	3.65
Professional	3.68
We don't have a dress code	4.00

These findings demonstrate that the working environment - in terms of its design and culture - has a significant impact on happiness levels. When 12% of employees desire 'A better working environment' and 16% say this same environment causes them stress; which means it is an issue that should not be overlooked.

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## Discussion points

How comfortable an employee feels in a workplace can make up to 33% difference to how happy they are, with open plan offices and enforced formal dress codes making for the least happy workers. Can we include staff in discussions on how we manage and design our offices, rather than dictating to them?

When working from home is desired to boost happiness levels, and home offices are voted as the happiest working environments, why are companies not doing more to cater to their staff members' wishes?

# Conclusion

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Happiness levels show very clear room for improvement in the workplaces of Britain. There are some clear markers for happiness: the level of seniority you hold; whether working from home is an option; and the design of your working environment. But the range of causes for unhappiness in the workplace is balanced by a variety of possible solutions.

Our report highlights key workplace stressors needing to be tackled, and incentives worth adopting to improve wellbeing. Finding the perfect balance between fulfilment, comfort and pay is not an easy task. But research such as this increases awareness of the issues and gives employers key areas to investigate in their own workplaces.

The overriding takeaway from the report is that UK businesses have much work to do to improve their workplaces, and so the happiness of their staff. Employers need to: ensure junior staff members are treated equally and consider incentives to boost their happiness levels; locate the reasons behind the majority of staff citing 'feeling overworked' as their primary stressor; improve flexible working provisions; and be aware of the significant impact the physical working environment can have on happiness levels.

And it does not have to be an expensive operation: being inclusive, listening to and learning from staff members - trusting them, and including them in decision making processes - can go a long way to increasing happiness. After all, initiatives and incentives - solutions, more broadly - can grow from improved relationships and discussion.

Happiness is an important and much sought-after state; and when working life has such a significant impact on people's happiness levels, employers need to take note.

# References

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- <sup>1</sup>Workplace Insight, [Half of UK employers have now introduced wellbeing schemes](#)
- <sup>2</sup>Google, [Google trends “workplace wellbeing” data](#)
- <sup>3</sup>Forbes, [How to increase productivity by employee happiness](#)
- <sup>4</sup>Acas, [Flexible working and work-life balance](#)
- <sup>5</sup>The Independent, [UK workers’ job satisfaction at two-year low as employers fail to engage staff, CIPD finds](#)
- <sup>6</sup>NHS, [Beat stress at work](#)
- <sup>7</sup>Mind, [Mental health facts and statistics](#)
- <sup>8</sup>REBA, [Employee Wellbeing Research 2017: Rise in wellbeing strategies to improve engagement and culture](#)
- <sup>9</sup>The Telegraph, [International Women’s Day 2017: How big is the gender pay gap where you live?](#)
- <sup>10</sup>London Loves Business, [Business anywhere: The ultimate guide to flexible working](#)



# About

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## Office Genie

Office Genie is a UK-based office search engine uniquely designed for SMEs and freelancers. The site launched in 2009 as the UK's first national website for finding and advertising spare desk space in offices. It now offers a huge variety of office space.



## OnePoll

OnePoll delivers consumer and B2B research. It specialises in PR surveys, data visualisation and online quantitative research. OnePoll has UK, US and international panels.

