



# Happiness at Work Survey Results for the Vitae 2012 Conference

Prepared by Happiness Works, November 2012

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Happiness Works was founded in 2012 by Nic Marks. Previously Nic founded the Centre for Well-being at the New Economics Foundation (nef). He has worked as an advisor to the UK Government Office for Science, created the influential *Happy Planet Index* and led the development of *Five Ways to Wellbeing*. Nic's TEDTalk has been viewed over 600,000 times, he has been named a *Top Ten Original Thinker* (Director Magazine 2011) and his work has been included in *Forbes' 7 Most Powerful Ideas 2011*.

The front cover of this report summarises the happiness of the survey participants. Each square represents one person who has completed the survey. Orange and red squares indicate poor and very poor scores, yellow is the national average, and green and dark green indicate good and very good scores.

## Introduction

At the Vitae Researcher Development International Conference 2012, Nic Marks talked about “Happiness research and happier researchers”. To inform the talk, attendees were invited to complete the Happiness at Work Survey, a survey designed by Nic and intended to identify areas that are impacting happiness and well-being within organisations. This report presents the case for happiness at work, summarises the key findings of the Vitae survey and makes some suggestions for future action.

## Why happiness at work is important

Whether or not employees are happy at work has fundamental consequences for an organisation. We now know that there is an important business case for happiness at work and this applies to every organisation, however big or small.

**Happier employees are more productive employees.** Study after study shows that happier employees are more engaged, more motivated, provide better customer service, play more effective roles in teams and make better leaders.<sup>1</sup>

**Happier employees are healthier employees.** Happiness and health are interconnected. Happier employees are less likely to get sick and if they do get ill, they recover more quickly. All in all, they show up to work more, are more engaged when they are at work and have more energy in life.<sup>2</sup>

**Happier employees are more loyal.** Happier employees are less likely to leave. Happier employees are therefore essential in terms of keeping retention rates high and recruitment costs low.<sup>3</sup>

**Happier employees are more innovative.** Positive emotions have been shown to create heightened levels of creativity and "big picture" focus – and these are both key to successful innovation. In addition, these higher functioning teams positively embrace new ideas and are better at implementing them.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hay Group (2010). *Giving everyone the chance to shine*.

<sup>2</sup> Keyes, C. L. M., & Haidt, J. (2003). *Flourishing*. American Psychological Association (APA).

<sup>3</sup> Corporate Leadership Council, Corporate Executive Board (2004). *Driving Performance and Retention through Employee Engagement: a quantitative analysis of effective engagement strategies*.

<sup>4</sup> Fredrickson, B. (2009). *Positivity*. Crown Archetype.

## How we measure happiness at work

Understanding human happiness has fascinated philosophers and poets for millennia but it is only in recent decades that reliable measures of people's experiences have been developed. Our survey asks participants structured questions about their happiness and experiences of life. Whilst this appears simplistic it has been shown that the measures derived by this method are very reliable. High scorers are independently rated as happy by other people and are observed smiling and laughing more frequently. Not only do they appear happier but they also tend to be healthier, friendlier, more successful and adaptable as well as more generous and altruistic.

The forty questions in the happiness at work survey have been carefully chosen for their validity and reliability. This ensures that good measures of the most important elements of happiness at work are constructed. Some of the questions in the survey have been developed especially for this tool; others have been adapted from existing sources. All of them have been influenced by the work of researchers across many different institutions and countries.

The happiness at work survey is based on a model of well-being developed by the New Economics Foundation for the UK Government Office of Science's "Foresight Programme". The dynamic model, as it has become known, recognises that happiness and well-being are fluid experiences that are influenced by, and influence, multiple interconnecting factors. In a work context these include the organisation system, the personal resources that employees bring to work as well as how well they are able to carry out their jobs and their experiences at work. It is through a better understanding of these interconnections that individuals and organisations can identify the changes that will have the most positive impact on both happiness at work and organisational performance.

When survey results are presented it is often hard to know what sort of scores are good. Is it good that 66% of people are happy with their jobs? Is this a better or worse result than only 50% being satisfied with senior management? To overcome these problems we have created a benchmark system based on nationally representative samples of 1,392 employed adults in the UK. The benchmarks for each question can be considered to be statistically accurate to within a 2% margin of error.

Answers to each question in the survey are calibrated against the benchmark data to create scores on a 0–10 scale where 0 is the worst possible score and 10 the best. A score of 5.0 represents the UK national average. The scores for related questions are combined to create scores for each of the elements of the dynamic model, and all forty scores are combined to give an overall score. A more detailed description of our methodology can be found available online<sup>5</sup>.

## The happiness at work of researcher developers

### Background

Attendees of the Vitae 2012 conference were invited to complete the survey, and there were 95 completed responses between 3–11 September. Whilst attendees have similar roles they work at different organisations. As such this sample is not representative of any one organisation or specific job role, it is only a convenience sample of those attending the

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<sup>5</sup> See <https://app.happinessatworksurvey.com/info/scores>

conference. In addition, the varying conditions in different organisations creates a 'regression to the mean' where the results tend to cluster around the UK average scores. Despite these limitations, it is still possible to identify meaningful themes from the data and these are discussed below.

### More good jobs than poor jobs

The overall Happiness at Work score for all respondents as a group is 5.3 which puts this group slightly above the UK average and shows that there is significant room for improvement. With scores at this level it is likely that staff turnover and absenteeism is higher and productivity is lower than it could be.

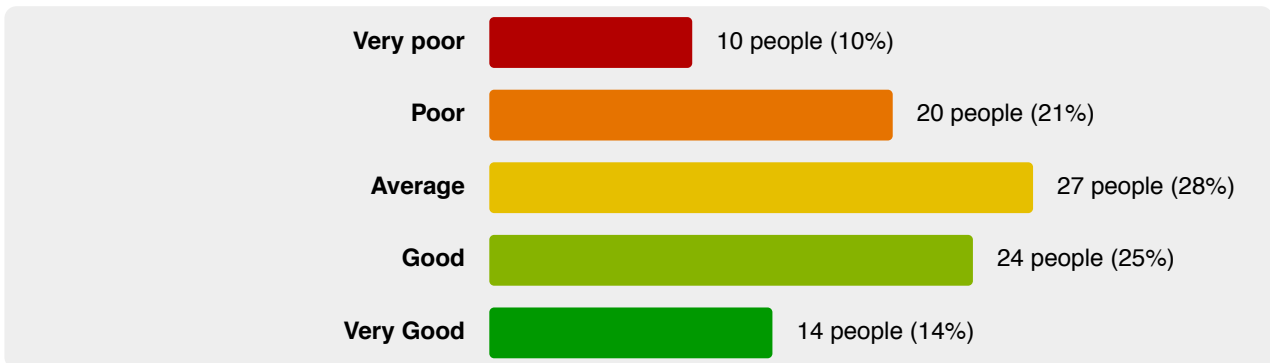


Figure 1: Breakdown of the participants' overall happiness at work scores. Each band covers approximately a fifth of the national population.

If we look at each respondent's overall scores (Fig 1) we see that more than a third have good or very good jobs, but there are also a high number of people with poor jobs. Particularly worrying is that 10% of people have very poor jobs.

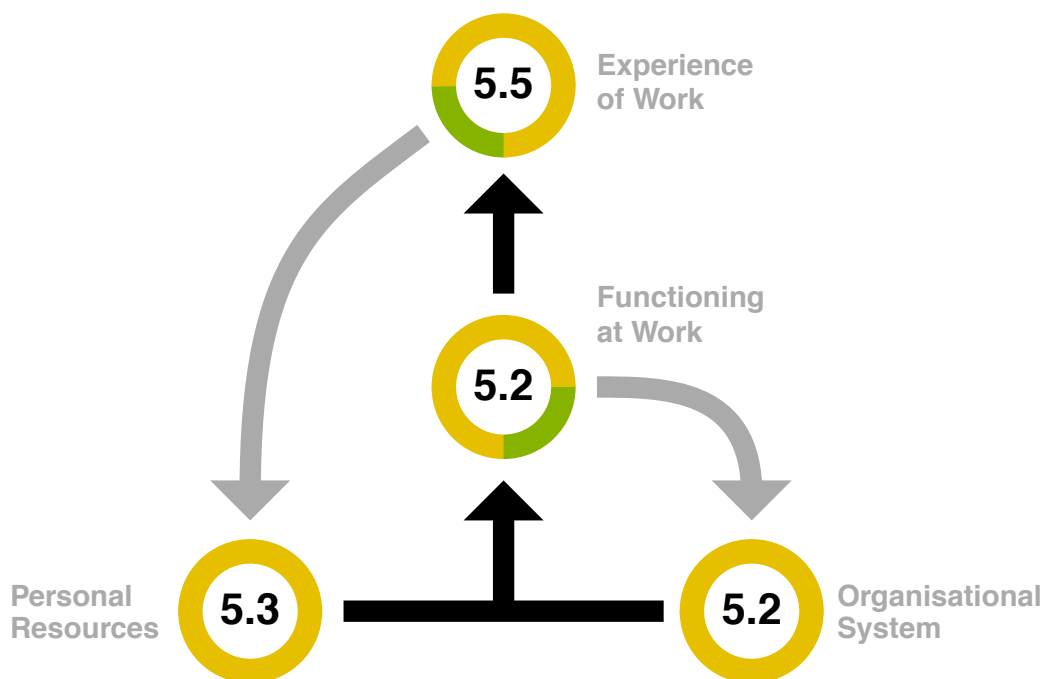


Figure 2: The dynamic model of well-being

### **The dynamic model of well-being**

People's happiness at work is not fixed or static; instead it is more fluid and moving. This view of the happiness at work survey results (Fig 2) illustrates the dynamic and interconnected nature of four key areas of happiness at work.

Reading from the top of the dynamic model downwards: People's 'experience of work' (how they feel) is influenced by how they are 'functioning at work' (what they do). This in turn is dependent on both the 'organisational system' they work in and their personal resources (who they are). Other important feedback loops in the model are illustrated by the curved arrows.

The model shows that there are no areas with notably high or low scores. This is partially caused by the 'regression to the mean' referenced above and partially because low scores are being balanced by high scores within each domain. There are two above average domains: experience of work (specifically a feeling of worthwhile work) and sense of progress. To understand the trends across the group more fully, it is necessary to delve deeper into the model and examine responses to specific questions.

### **Jobs are worthwhile and rewarding**

The best news is that people tend to find their job satisfying (6.0) and worthwhile (5.6). They don't find the work boring (6.5) and they have the opportunity to be creative (6.5).

### **A sense of progress**

Respondents report that they are able to learn new skills (6.1) and they have good career prospects (5.4). We know that a sense of progress is an important driver of happiness at work, giving a sense of achievement and also stimulating innovation.

### **Good relationship with poor management**

In general people feel they are trusted by their manager (6.3) and have a good relationship with them (5.8). However, they do not consider that their team (4.6) or their organisation (4.7) are well-managed and that they personally are not getting enough constructive feedback (4.6).

### **Stressful jobs**

The worst scoring areas are around how stressful the job is (4.4) and how achievable it is (3.1). This can be quite common in certain sectors with demanding office jobs without clear deliverable tasks but remains an area of concern. Poor management and a lack of support are likely to be key contributors to the low scores here.

### **Lack of co-operation**

Most striking is the lack of co-operation between teams (3.6) and the general level of isolation with low scores for good friends at work (4.4).

# What next? Making things better

The happiness at work survey is a great tool to systematically address the challenges that exist across the organisation. Everybody would like their working lives to be better, so happiness at work has the potential to become a shared goal.

## Questions not answers

The survey is deliberately designed to raise questions and to start conversations rather than to provide specific answers. This is especially relevant with this survey where each organisation will have its own unique circumstances. The insights the survey provides will naturally raise many questions (why is team co-operation poor, why do jobs feel unachievable?) and it is through discussion around these questions that ideas for improvement will emerge.

## Prioritising happiness

We know from the scores that people are feeling stressed and that there is already too much work to do however it will be important to create time and space for people to start these conversations. Whilst this will take up working time, in our experience people come away from these sessions feeling positive and energised and they are well worth the time.

## A team effort

The best starting point is usually at the team level. Co-workers can discuss the issues raised and start to brainstorm solutions. It may help for the entire team to take the survey and to look at their combined results to see what factors are most relevant to their particular team. Guidance on how to do this can be found in the resources section of the happiness at work survey website.

## Personal and organisational changes

New ideas will inevitably mean changes need to be made. The scores show that generally relationships with managers are good and this is likely to make changes much easier especially at team levels. But it is also within everyone's power to change their own actions and behaviours independent of team or organisational changes. These individual changes can create ripple effects of positivity throughout their colleagues with happiness at work naturally spreading. The more people who feel committed to this way of working the easier it will be for others to follow, creating a critical mass of positive personal changes.

## Conclusion

The participants feel that they are doing interesting and worthwhile work and this is a great foundation to build upon. If management and co-operation can be improved through thoughtful discussion by the employees themselves then there is the potential to create significantly happier jobs and all of the accompanying benefits.

# Appendix 1: Individual question scores

## Best scoring questions

Creativity	6.5
Boring work (absence of)	6.5
Trusted by manager	6.3
Job security	6.2
Learning new skills	6.1
Organisational pride	6.1
Satisfying job	6.0
Influence decisions	5.9
Fair pay	5.9
Relationship with manager	5.8
Good organisation to work for	5.7
Motivation	5.7
Personal health	5.7
Worthwhile job	5.6
Team relationships	5.6
Supportive relationships	5.6
Customer/client benefits	5.6
Open organisation	5.5
Societal benefits	5.5
Career prospects	5.4

## Worst scoring questions

Achievable job	3.1
Co-operation between teams	3.6
Stressful job (absence of)	4.4
Good friends at work	4.4
Constructive feedback	4.6
Team well managed	4.6
Personal resilience	4.7
Organisation well managed	4.7
Free to be self	4.8
Use strengths	4.8
Feel in control	5.0
Frustrating work (absence of)	5.2
Self confidence	5.2
Enjoy work	5.2
Energy levels	5.2
Personal happiness	5.3
Absorbing work	5.3
Work-life balance	5.3
Happiness at work	5.4
Pleasant environment	5.4