



# SEEK's Workplace Happiness Index 2024

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What makes Australian workers happy —  
and how employers can build a happier,  
more productive workplace.



# About SEEK

A leader in online employment marketplaces, SEEK has been helping people live more fulfilling and productive working lives and helping organisations succeed for more than 25 years.

Founded and headquartered in Melbourne, Australia, SEEK has grown into a multinational technology company with more than 3,300 employees and is listed on the Australian Securities Exchange.

SEEK's presence spans Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Additionally, SEEK has minority investments in employment marketplaces in China, South Korea and Bangladesh.

In 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024, SEEK was recognised as one of Australia's Top Ten Places to Work in Technology in the AFR BOSS Best Places to Work awards.

# About this report

The SEEK Workplace Happiness Index provides a comprehensive look at the happiness levels of Australian and New Zealand workers. It delves into key research findings, highlighting the factors that contribute to happiness in and out of the workplace and offering practical tips for improving happiness in employees.

This research was conducted by market research agency Nature on behalf of SEEK, between April and June 2024 via an online survey. Responses were gathered from more than 2,000 individuals currently in the workforce (either employed or looking for work), aged 18 to 64, and living in Australia or New Zealand. To ensure accuracy, the data are weighted to be nationally representative of the labour force for each country, based on age, gender, location, and income.

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# Introduction

How would you describe the ‘perfect’ team? Happy, productive, loyal, and motivated to go above and beyond? While that’s nowhere near an exhaustive list of attributes, it comes close to describing any employer’s ideal workforce.

Employee happiness is central to almost any metric of workplace success. Happy team members are more engaged in their work and more productive. They’re less likely to look for a new job, saving on recruitment costs. They’re more motivated to go above and beyond the responsibilities of their role, which drives better outcomes for the organisation.

This report aims to equip employers with the information and tools they need to address and increase employee happiness. By sharing data that comes straight from Australian workers, we hope to empower leaders to improve workplace happiness for the benefit of individuals and of entire organisations.





# The state of workplace happiness in 2024

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To gauge the levels of happiness in Australian workplaces, our survey asked respondents how happy they are in their jobs and how happy they are with different elements of their work life. The results provide a broad view of workplace happiness and its key drivers overall, across different industries, income levels, locations and age groups.



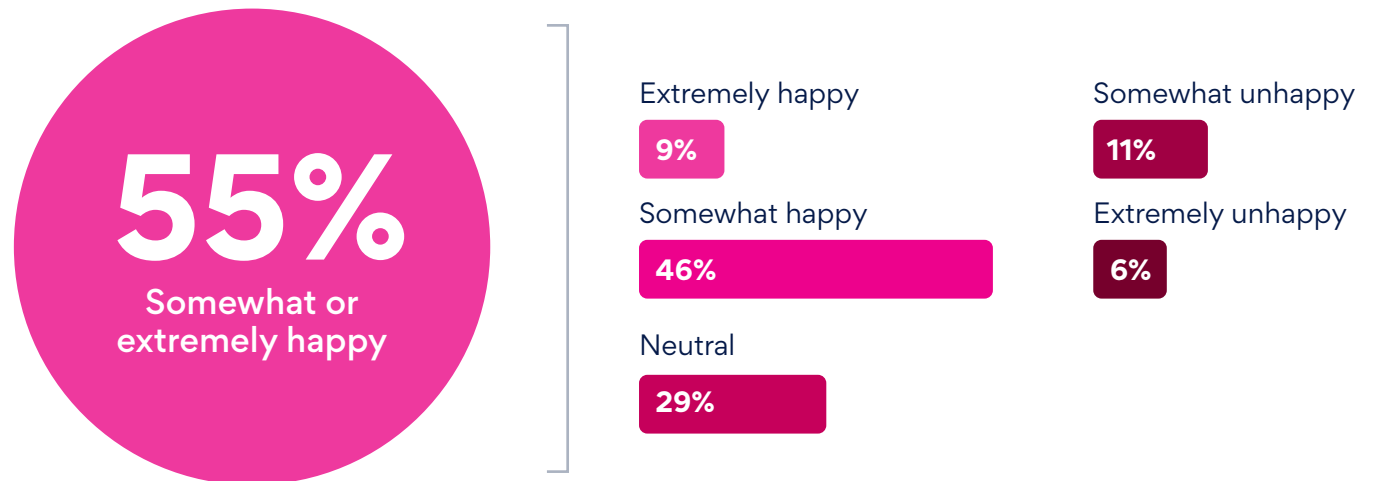
## KEY FINDING 1:

# Only 55% of Australians are currently happy in their jobs

We asked respondents “How happy are you at work, generally?” to which 55% responded they are somewhat or extremely happy. With almost half of the workforce at best feeling neutral in their jobs and at worst feeling extremely unhappy, there is a lot of room for improvement.

What this means for employers is that there is plenty of opportunity to increase their employees’ feelings of happiness – and increase all the positive outcomes, such as productivity, loyalty and motivation, associated with happier teams.

## Overall workplace happiness



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Thinking back over your working life so far, what advice would you give your younger self to be happier at work?

## KEY FINDING 2:

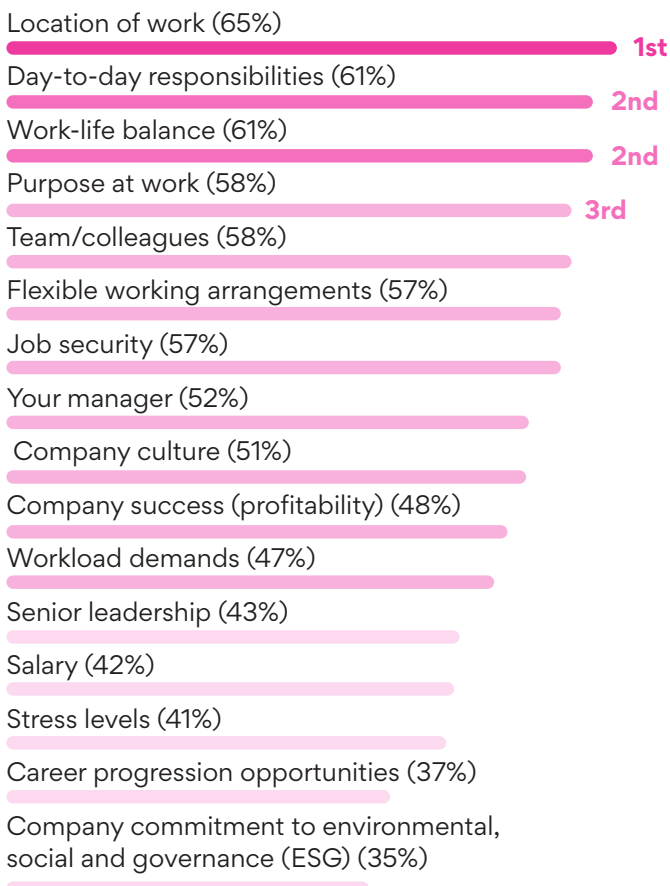
# Workers are most happy with the location of their work, their daily duties and their work-life balance

Following the first question, we asked “Specifically, how happy are you with the following elements of your working life?”

Most people are happy with the location of their workplace, their daily duties, and their work-life balance. At the bottom of the list are stress levels, career progression and their organisation’s commitment to ESG (environmental, social and governance initiatives).

What we might take from this is that people are happiest with the aspects of work they can control. Location of work and daily responsibilities would have been considered when first accepting the job. In contrast, employees have little to no control over organisational aspects like career progression and ESG – things that employers do have control over and can potentially leverage to improve workplace happiness.

## What workers are happiest and least happy with at work





## KEY FINDING 3:

# The main drivers of happiness at work are purpose at work, manager, and day-to-day responsibilities

While you may expect salary to be a main driver of workplace happiness, our research shows that isn't the case. Instead, the most impactful aspects on workplace happiness are purpose at work. The top three drivers all speak to individual needs.

Purpose is derived from work that has personal meaning. Managers are in control of the work: they delegate, oversee, and evaluate the work. Daily responsibilities relate to the individual's contributions to that work.

## Purpose is the #1 driver of happiness at work

### Drivers of happiness



# The Why, Who and What

We can distill the top three drivers of employee happiness into the Why, Who and What of work.



## TAKEAWAYS

- Just over half (55%) of Australians currently feel happy at work
- Workers are generally most happy about work location (65%), their day-to-day duties (61%), and work-life balance (61%).
- The top three drivers of happiness in the workplace equate to the why, who and what of work.



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Find something you enjoy doing, the money isn't as important.

# The happiest workers

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Happiness is not equal across the spectrum of Australian workers. Our report shows significant variances in levels of happiness between income brackets, industries and locations. To break down the specific drivers of happiness and how they shift across these demographics, the following findings group the data by salary, sector and state.



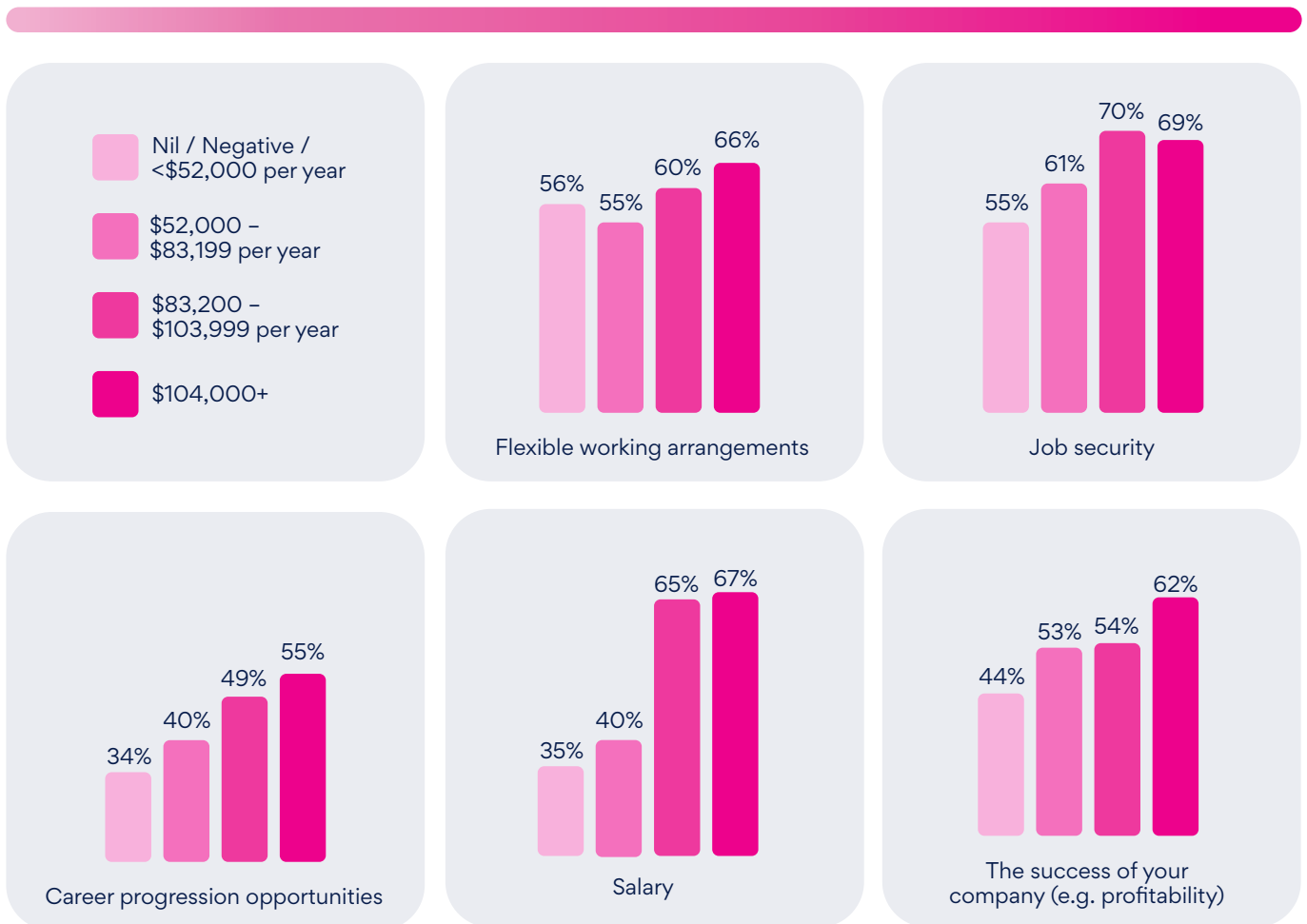
## KEY FINDING 4:

# Higher-income earners are not significantly happier at work overall, despite being happier with many aspects of work

Our survey shows that higher-income Australians are significantly happier with many elements of their work. For example, 55% of those earning more than \$104,000 report being happy with their career progression opportunities compared

with only 34% of those earning \$52,000 or less. This tells us that those in the lower income brackets feel they don't have as much opportunity for career advancement. Although, as their incomes rise, so do their chances for progression.

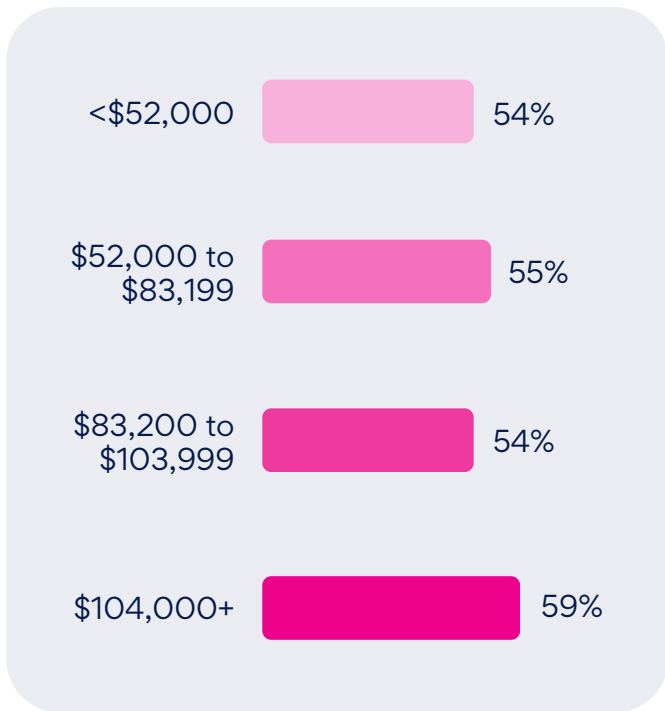
## Happiness with elements of work (by income bracket)



However, what's interesting is when grouped by income, there is only marginal difference in overall workplace happiness between the brackets. This is supported by data showing that salary ranks at #9 on the list of key drivers of happiness.

From this we can assume that salary is not a strong driver of workplace happiness. Employers should therefore not only rely on increased salaries or bonuses to retain or motivate their teams.

## Overall workplace happiness (by income bracket)



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**Chase job satisfaction and not just a larger salary.**



## KEY FINDING 5:

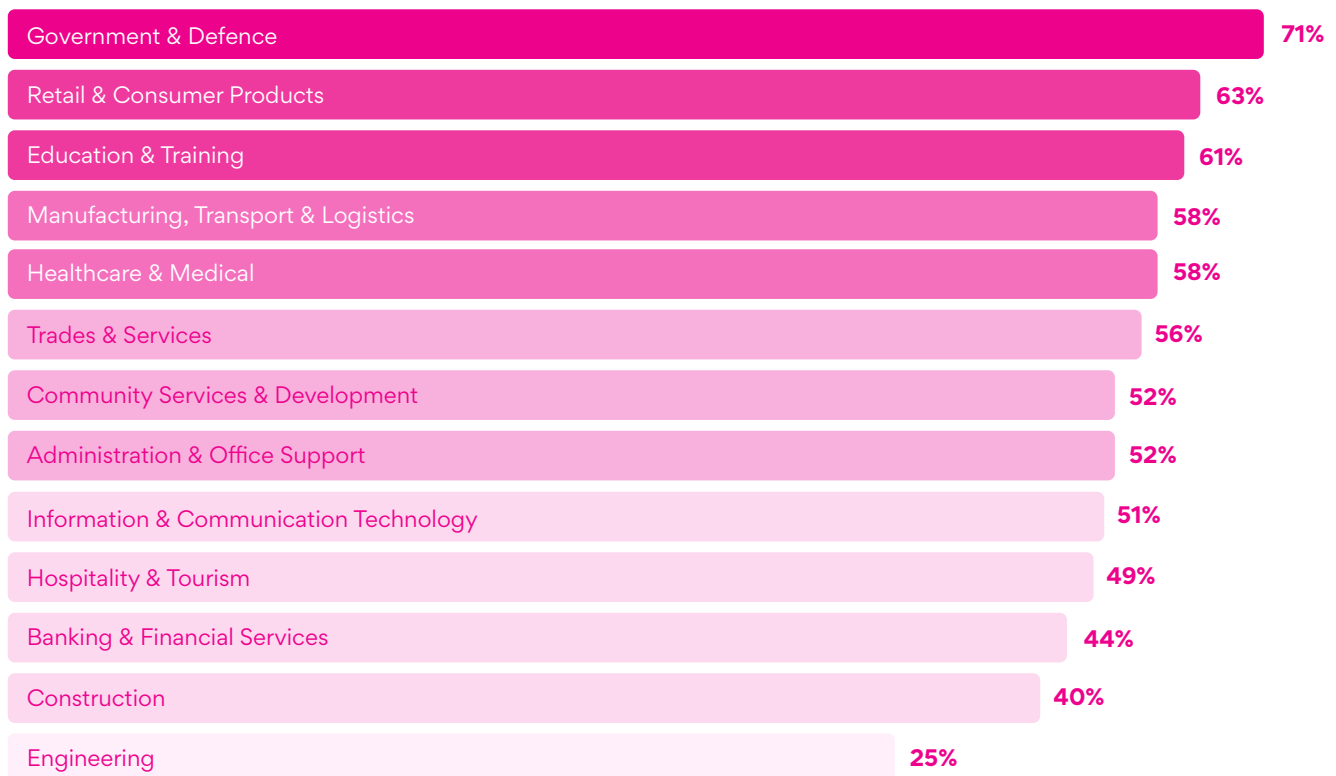
# Government workers are by far the happiest at work, while engineering workers are the least happy

Certain sectors are generally happier than others. When sorted by industry, government and defence workers reported overall happiness at work at a rate of 71%. Retail and consumer products employees were the next happiest group, followed by workers in the education and training sectors.

Employers in banking and finance, construction and engineering may find opportunities to increase worker happiness by addressing the top happiness drivers for their employees, based on demographic. (See page 20.)

## Overall workplace happiness (by industry)

\*Note: Several industries hidden due to small sample size (n<30)



## KEY FINDING 6:

# South Australians are the happiest at work

Our report also shows some variance between the states of Australia when it comes to worker happiness. Employees in South Australia are the happiest, with 67% of respondents in that state reporting general happiness at work. Employees in Western Australia are the unhappiest, with less than half of respondents saying they're happy at their jobs.

This shows us that employers in the least happy states have more opportunity to improve workplace happiness – potentially by addressing the main happiness drivers of purpose, managers, and daily responsibilities. (See page 26 for suggested action points.)

## Overall workplace happiness (by state)



### TAKEAWAYS

- Salary is not a strong driver of workplace happiness.
- The happiest employees work in government and defence, and retail, whilst the unhappiest workers are in engineering and construction.
- South Australians report more workplace happiness than Australians living in other states.

# The happiness effect

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SEEK's Workplace Happiness Index reveals a strong correlation between workplace happiness and happiness in everyday life.

Two-thirds of Australians report being happy outside of work – but there's more to the story. The research shows that the happier Australians are at work, the happier they are at home. This relationship underscores the importance of workplace happiness to overall happiness.





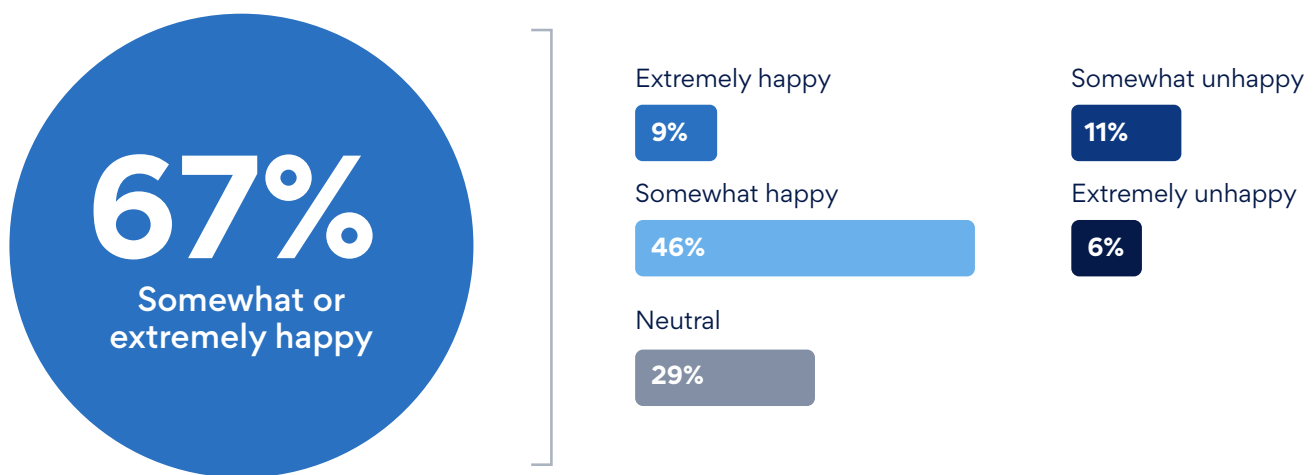
## The happier Australians are at work, the happier they are outside of work, too.

While 55% of Australians report being happy at work, a significantly greater number of Australians report feeling happy outside of work, at 67%. Furthermore, from that 55% of people who reported feeling happy at work, the vast majority

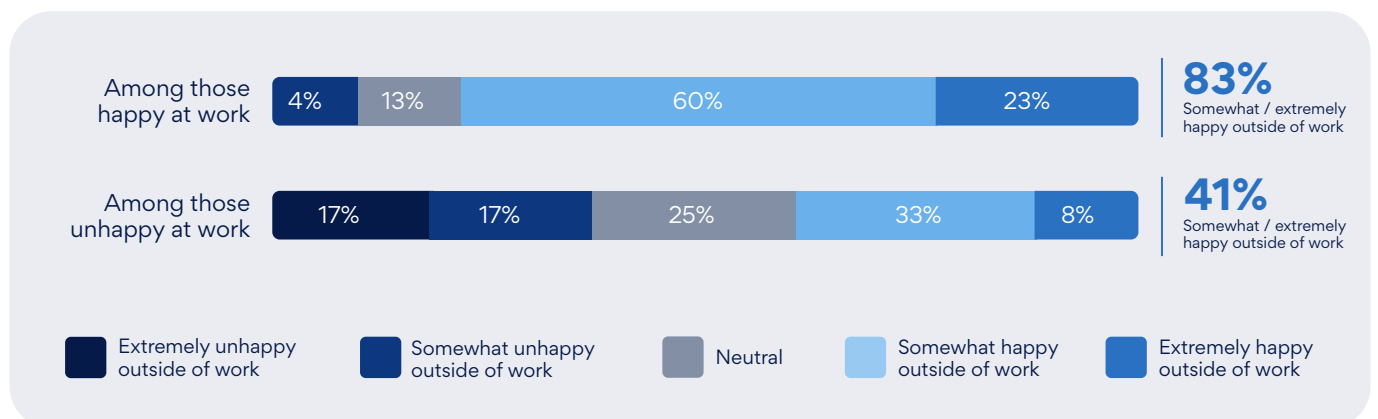
are also happy outside of work. When we look at the group of people who said they are unhappy at work, only 41% report feeling happy at home.

Our research doesn't show if there is any causation, but it is safe to assume that for most people, happiness at work plays a role in general happiness.

## Overall out of work happiness



## Happiness outside of work (by level of happiness at work)



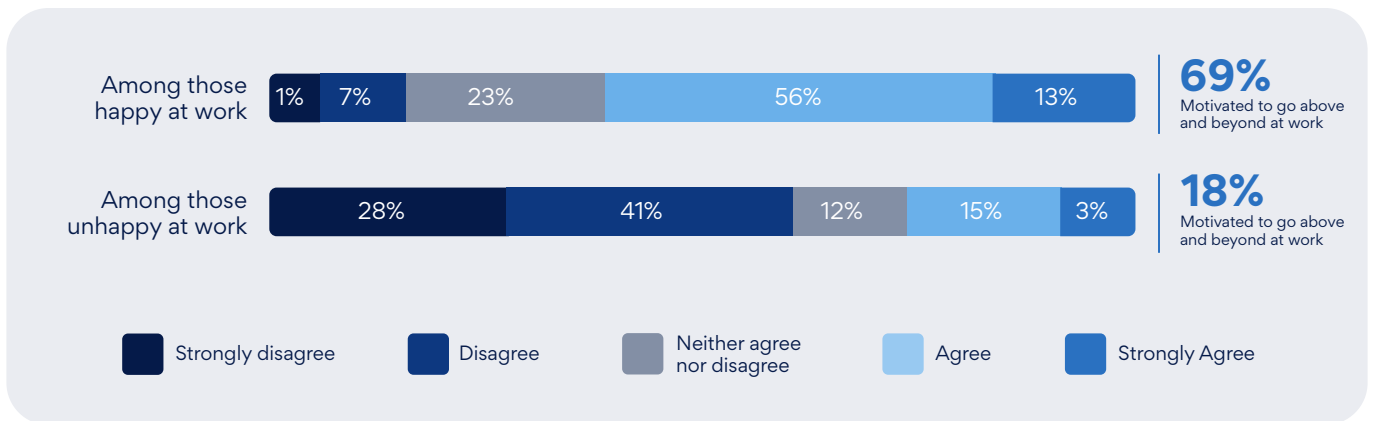
## KEY FINDING 7:

# Happy employees are motivated to go above and beyond at work

It makes sense that people who are happier at work are more likely to exceed the expectations of their roles. Our survey confirms that among the people who are happy in their jobs, more than two-thirds are motivated to go above and beyond at work.

This finding is consistent with the theory that engaged employees are more productive. But going ‘above and beyond’ is not just about productivity, it can also mean mentoring and supporting teammates, filling in for absentees, training new joiners and taking initiative.

## Motivation to go above and beyond at work (by level of happiness at work)



“Pursue a career that aligns with your values and you enjoy the most.”

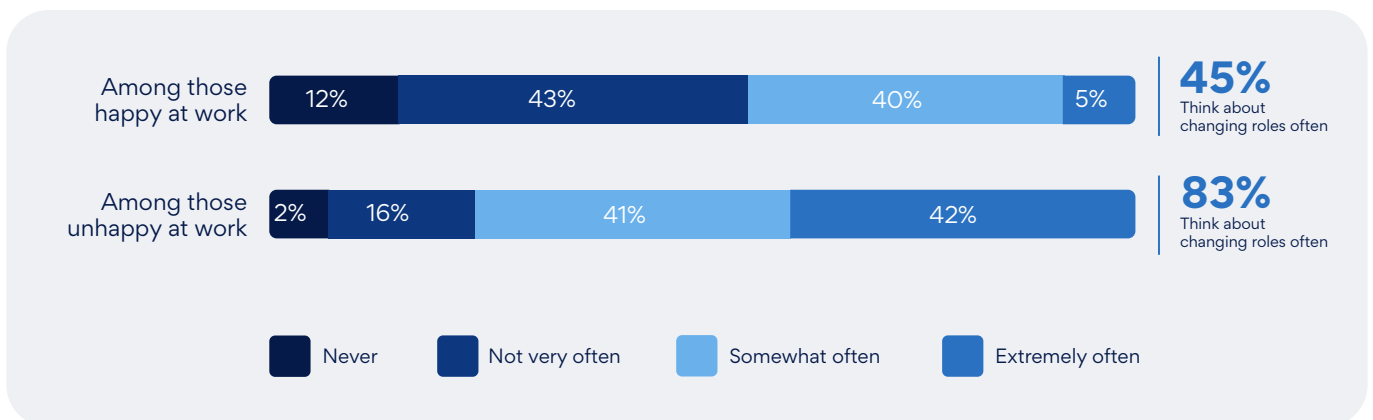
## KEY FINDING 8:

# Happy employees are less likely to search for a new job

Within the group of employees who are happy at work, less than half said they often think about changing roles, while the vast majority of those who aren't happy at work often thought about looking for a new job.

It costs up to 200%\* of an employee's wage to replace them, so it's worthwhile for employers to reduce staff turnover by increasing workplace happiness. Then there are the effects of staff turnover unrelated to recruitment costs, like low team morale and high stress due to increased workloads.

## Likelihood of searching for a new job (by level of happiness at work)



## TAKEAWAYS

- The happier Australians are at work, the happier they are at home too.
- Happy employees are more likely to be more productive.
- Happy employees stay longer, reducing the cost of hiring to the organisation.

\* Source: Gallup Employee retention and attraction study, May 2024

# Happiness across the generations

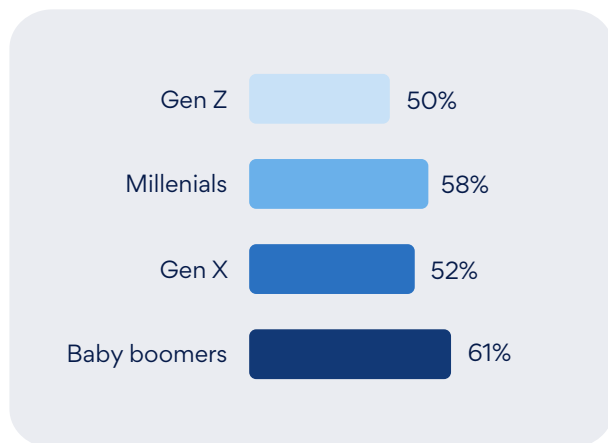
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Understanding how different generations experience happiness at work is essential for creating a supportive and productive workplace for people of all ages and at all stages of their careers.

Our survey shows that overall, Gen Z is the least happy at work, with only half reporting happiness with their jobs. Baby boomers were the happiest generation at work.



## Overall happiness at work by generation



### Drivers of happiness change across ages and career stages

Each age and life stage brings unique priorities and challenges that shape overall workplace and out-of-work happiness. This section delves into the drivers of happiness for each generational group, examining how factors such as stress, work-life balance, managerial relationships and career progression opportunities impact employee happiness.

“

**Don't stress over what you can't control.**

## Live well to work well

Justine Alter, registered organisational psychologist and co-founder and managing director of Transitioning Well, believes there's a strong connection between living well and working well.

“Many working Australians are struggling with financial uncertainty, and many of us are still grappling with the constantly changing way we work, so it's unsurprising to see only 55% of people are happy at work,” she says.

“We need to acknowledge this intersection, as it's just as important to support workers to live well, as much as it is to support them to work well. From an individual point of view, we know that happiness can be a protective mental health factor, and can lead to a longer, healthier life. At an organisational level, there are numerous studies to suggest that happier workers are more productive, highlighting its importance.”



# Happiness drivers for Gen Z (1997–2012)

Compared to older generations, Gen Z workers are significantly less happy with their purpose at work – the top driver of happiness at work overall – than other age groups. More than half consider their day-to-day responsibilities important to happiness, their third-highest driver overall.



## Most important drivers of happiness for Gen Z:

- Day-to-day responsibilities
- Senior leadership
- Team/colleagues
- Work-life balance
- Career progression opportunities

As Gen Z are still early in their careers, their dissatisfaction with their daily duties may be a result of having less autonomy and control over what they are tasked with on a day-to-day basis. As they are still learning and less experienced, they may not yet have responsibilities that play to their strengths or values. Senior leadership and their colleagues are also drivers of happiness, which shows Gen Z generally place high importance on their workplace relationships.

“

**Take it easy on yourself - it takes time to learn.**

## What Gen Z are currently happiest to least happy with:



# Happiness drivers for millennials (1981–1996)

On average, millennials are happier than their Gen X and Gen Z colleagues, with 58% reporting overall happiness at work. They're happiest with job security and work flexibility, but generally unhappy with their organisation's ESG commitments.



## Most important drivers of happiness for millennials:

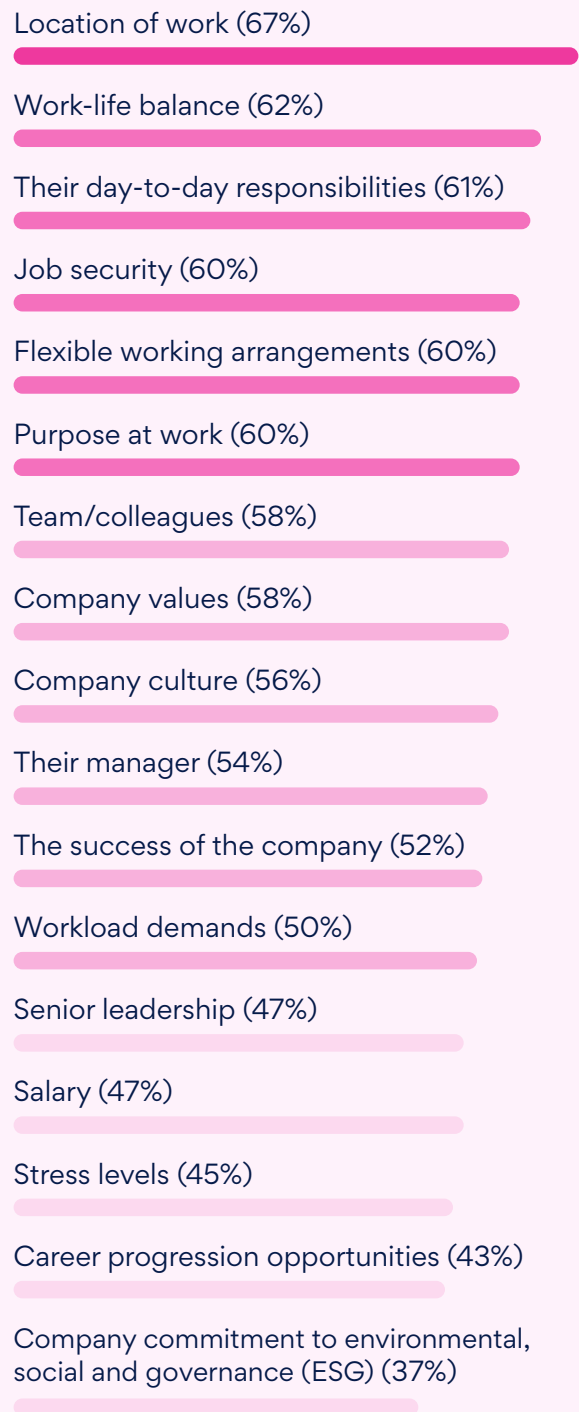
- Stress levels
- Workload demands
- Day to day responsibilities
- Company culture
- Senior leadership

Overall happiness for millennials may be linked to having more autonomy and experience. At this stage of life, typically many have families with young children, and therefore value a convenient work location and flexible working arrangements. As you can expect for a demographic with busy home lives, things that most affect millennial happiness are stress levels, workload, and day-to-day responsibilities.

“

**Have a strong work life balance. Work for a company who values you and your work life balance.**

## What millennials are currently happiest to least happy with at work:



# Happiness drivers for Gen X (1965–1980)

Generally at a more senior stage in their careers, just over half of Gen X workers report that they are happy in their jobs. Work-life balance, purpose at work and their managers are the top three things that strongly impact their happiness. They're most unhappy about senior leadership.



## Most important drivers of happiness for Gen X:

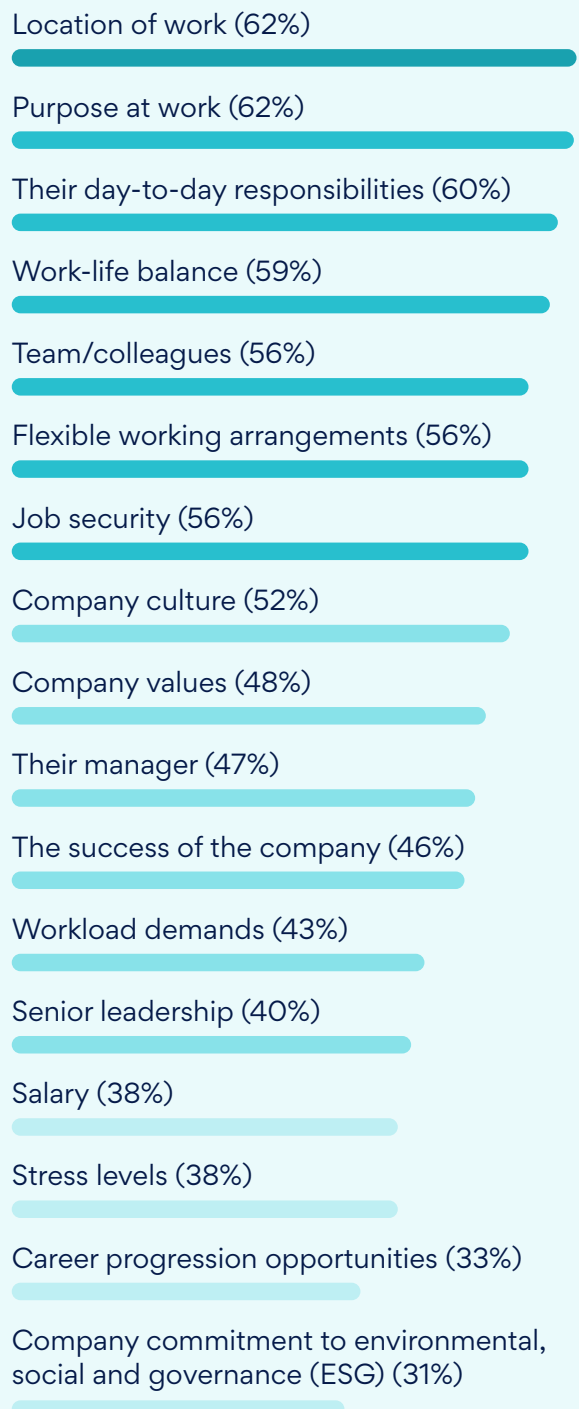
- Their manager
- Purpose at work
- Work-life balance
- Company culture
- Senior leadership

With higher levels of seniority and experience, more Gen X respondents feel happy with their purpose and day-to-day responsibilities. However, fewer report happiness with their salary, stress levels, and career progression opportunities, which may be related to reaching a career plateau. Like all other generations, Gen X also feels unhappy with their company's commitment to ESG practices.

“

**Believe in yourself and your abilities more.**

## What Gen X are currently happiest to least happy with at work:





# Happiness drivers for baby boomers (1946-1964)

Baby boomers are the happiest generation at work, with most people in this demographic reporting happiness. More than three-quarters of baby boomers are happy with the location of their work, with a similar proportion happy with their responsibilities and their work-life balance, especially compared to the younger generations. Company values and stress levels are important drivers for them.



## Most important drivers of happiness for baby boomers:

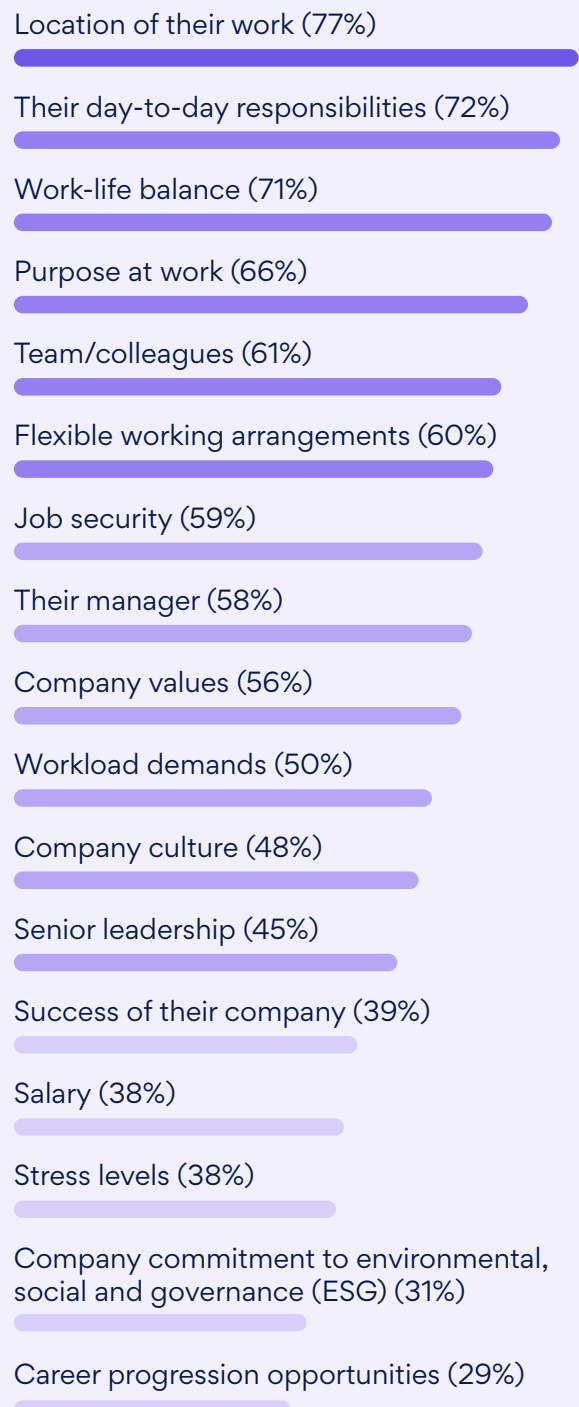
- Purpose at work
- Stress levels
- Company values
- Their manager
- Company culture

Typically representing senior-level workers, baby boomers theoretically have the most experience and confidence and have reached a level where they're happy with their daily duties. Overall, their happiness seems more connected to their organisation's values, success and ESG than other generations. They may be seeking more meaning from their jobs, therefore purpose at work is important to their happiness. However, at more senior levels, they may not have many career progression opportunities.

“

**Find a job that makes you happy and you feel a sense of purpose**

## What baby boomers are currently happiest to least happy with at work:



# What this means for leaders

Happiness at work benefits everyone. It translates to a productive and loyal workforce, reduced staff turnover and employees who feel motivated to go above and beyond. Happy employees foster positivity in the workplace and help build a supportive culture, creating a positive feedback loop.

Based on the findings of SEEK's Workplace Happiness Index, here is a summary of practical actions leaders can take to help improve employee happiness.

## 1. Create a sense of purpose

Leaders can lean into one of the most important drivers of happiness: a sense of purpose. Justine Alter suggests communicating to employees how their day-to-day responsibilities align with the broader mission and values of the organisation, and helping employees understand how their work contributes to the business.

### ACTION POINTS

- **Align employees with your mission and vision.** Draw a clear connection between employees' roles and the organisation's objectives.
  - **Connect employees to their own vision and values.** Consider offering opportunities for people to engage in projects that resonate with their personal values and foster professional growth.
  - **Make sure employees see how their contributions help the business.** Draw a clear connection between an employee's role and the company's success.
  - **Match roles with individuals' skill sets and passions.** Roles and responsibilities that play to people's strengths are often more engaging.
  - **Re-evaluate your ESG initiatives.** McKinsey reports that strong ESG propositions can create value for organisations, and ESG commitments are often a reflection of an organisation's values and purpose. Stronger ESG initiatives may positively affect employees' happiness at work.
- **Reflect on and define your organisation's mission and values.** To give employees a purpose, you first need to define your organisational purpose.



## 2. Build trust through good management

The second-most important driver of happiness is management. People want to work with a manager who is supportive and invested in their growth, so they feel valued and empowered to excel.

Team and colleagues also rank highly when it comes to happiness in the workplace, underscoring the importance of a supportive and friendly organisational culture. As Justine explains, “Culture is more than a list of values posted in the break room.” She urges leaders to prioritise modelling the organisation’s values and behaviours, promoting diversity and inclusivity, encouraging work-life balance, recognising contributions, and fostering collaboration and teamwork.

### ACTION POINTS

- **Hold regular meetings and 1:1 sessions.** Provide a safe space where employees can openly discuss concerns and share feedback.
- **Understand your own management style and what your team responds best to.** Justine recommends having transparent conversations about workers’ individual management preferences and expectations, ensuring a clear understanding of working styles. “When we understand each other’s working styles, we build stronger teams”, says Justine.
- **Develop a supportive team culture.** If you want to create a happy workplace, culture needs to be on your radar.
- **Model your organisation’s values and behaviours.** Culture comes from the top, so it’s essential that managers model the type of behaviours they wish to see in their people.

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**Manage stress effectively.  
Find meaning in your work.  
Embrace positivity. Celebrate  
successes. Take ownership of  
your happiness.**

## 3. Listen to generational needs

Aimee Hutton, Head of Customer Insights and Strategy at SEEK, suggests paying attention to what’s important to workers of different age groups. “For Gen Z, daily responsibilities are the top priority, while Gen Y places stress management at the forefront. Gen X views their manager as the key driver of happiness, whereas baby boomers prioritise having a sense of purpose in their work”, says Aimee.

### ACTION POINTS

- **Understand potential generational differences.** The first step is looking at the different priorities, motivations and stressors of your workers. By understanding these generational differences, you can address their varied needs.
- **Tailor workplace practices to your employees.** Are your team members mostly junior workers or do you manage a mix of seniors and entry-level staff? Consider your employees’ career stages to create a more supportive and engaging environment for employees across the spectrum.
- Leaders can consider capitalising on the high satisfaction levels of mid-level employees by pairing them with juniors to provide training or mentorship programs.

### Evergreen happiness maintenance

Creating happy and engaged workforce takes ongoing effort. To help maintain workplace happiness, leaders should schedule regular audits at their organisations. These can be done through:

- Anonymous ‘pulse’ surveys
- Yearly 360-degree reviews
- Regular 1:1 check-ins
- Looking at absentee rates
- Calculate your Employee Net Promoter Score

This study was led by SEEK's Customer Insights team.

We are the voice of our customers.

We diligently listen to their experiences and expectations, delving deep into the underlying reasons behind their feedback.

By understanding what our customers truly need and want, as well as pinpointing their pain points, we actively influence business decisions and drive change.

Our unwavering dedication to understanding and advocating for our customers empowers us to make a meaningful impact.

## LEARN MORE

Reach out to Nicola Laver, SEEK Workplace Success Manager for more information, if you're interested in a Workplace Happiness Index industry deep dive or training for people leaders.

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