



UK WORKPLACE HAPPINESS REPORT 2026

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Our sponsors

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pluxee

We bring to life sustainable and personalised employee experiences, at work and beyond. We help companies attract and retain talent through Employee Benefits and Engagement solutions. Operating in 28 countries, we've been creating lasting impact for people businesses, and the planet for nearly 50 years.

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We are dedicated to organising the world's information and making it universally accessible and useful. From our beginnings in a garage to our current role as a leader in AI, we focus on the user to solve complex challenges. We aim to build technology that empowers everyone, everywhere, to achieve more.

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OnsiteHub helps distributed companies come together in the best European locations. We're big fans of remote work but also know how important those IRL high-fives and impromptu laughs are for any company culture. Let us help you facilitate team bonding and deliver an unforgettable experience for your team.

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KindHive helps businesses grow through the relationships that matter most. Our Human-First Growth Loop translates research on the human behaviours that drive trust and performance into a practical blueprint for growth. Turning radical kindness into your sustainable growth strategy.

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Introduction from Gemma Shambler

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*Gemma Shambler, Chief of Staff,
The Happiness Index.*

As I write this from our HQ in London it has been 184 days since we launched The Global Workplace Happiness Report on the 26th of March.

Since then, the response has been extraordinary.

The report has been read in over 100 countries, helping give a voice to tens of thousands of employees across the globe. We have lost count of how many companies have reached out to discuss implementing the learning in their own culture. It is now a delight to present the UK-specific data, grounded right here in the country where The Happiness Index was founded.

As Dr Rochelle Haynes notes in her spotlight contribution for The Global Workplace Happiness Report,

"In plain terms, better teamwork supports better feelings about work, which unlock the focus and courage that innovation requires. Leaders must handle team design as a product in its own right if they want to embed psychological safety into every interaction. These investments, new norms, and daily habits can lift happiness and performance together and provide a clear bridge towards a more engaged and innovative work environment"

As Chief of Staff at The Happiness Index I firmly believe that as an organisation we have to practice what we preach. We are not perfect and we don't get things right all the time but we do strive to create an environment where our employees can be happy, engaged and perform.

Having contributed to this report, I am also an active reader, looking for practical insights to apply directly within our own UK business.

I hope you enjoy reading and I encourage you to reach out and let me know your thoughts.

I would now like to hand over to our partner, Johnny, for his thoughts on the next page.

**Gemma Shambler | Chief of Staff,
The Happiness Index**

A note from our strategic partner, Pluxee

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Jonathan Attia, CEO, Pluxee UK

UK employers are operating in one of the most complex people environments in recent memory.

Economic uncertainty, skills shortages, changing workforce expectations and the rapid adoption of new technologies are creating new pressures for organisations of every size. At the same time, leaders are being asked to improve productivity, strengthen retention and deliver sustainable growth while ensuring employees remain engaged, motivated and healthy at work.

This report explores some of the contradictions shaping today's workplace. Case in point: UK employees are more likely than the global average to recommend their employer (+8 eNPS versus +1 globally), yet they are significantly less likely to say they plan to stay (62% versus 72%). Why?

Against this backdrop, understanding what drives happiness and engagement is no longer simply an HR priority. It is a business imperative.

With more than 24,000 UK employee responses contributing over 552,000 data points, the findings provide a unique perspective on the relationship between employee experience and organisational performance, helping employers better understand the factors that influence productivity, advocacy, retention and long-term success.

The research is underpinned by a validated neuroscience-based methodology developed over more than a decade. Using a 29-question framework, it measures both happiness and engagement across multiple dimensions of workplace experience, providing a holistic picture of organisational culture and performance.

Every market has its own nuances, and this UK-focused report explores the findings through the lens of today's UK workplace.

One of the most important conclusions is that organisations often invest heavily in areas that have the least impact on how employees actually feel. While operational factors remain important, the research consistently shows that belonging, recognition, purpose and inspiration have a far stronger relationship with happiness, engagement and advocacy.

For leaders, this presents an important challenge. Support programmes across money, health and employee experience remain essential, but their value is not determined by their availability alone. The organisations achieving the strongest outcomes are those that connect practical support to the deeper drivers of workplace happiness, helping employees feel valued, recognised and supported in the moments that matter.

The question is no longer whether support exists, but whether employees genuinely experience its value.

At Pluxee UK, we see this first-hand. The organisations delivering the strongest outcomes are not necessarily those offering the most initiatives or benefits. They are the organisations that create meaningful, accessible and relevant experiences that support employees in their day-to-day lives.

This report explores what these findings mean for UK employers and where leaders have the greatest opportunity to drive impact. More importantly, it highlights the relationship between workplace happiness and the outcomes that every organisation strives to achieve: stronger retention, greater productivity, increased advocacy, and a more resilient workforce.

Workplace happiness is not simply about creating better employee experiences. It's about creating better-performing organisations.

In an increasingly competitive environment, the organisations that understand the connection between people, performance and culture will be best positioned to succeed.

Jonathan Attia | CEO, Pluxee UK

Executive summary

The Happiness Index

The UK Workplace Happiness Report is a sub-segment of The Global Workplace Happiness Report.

Now we'll delve into the cultural health of the UK's organisations by comparing the latest data to our global benchmark. This section provides a comprehensive analysis of the survey results. You will find a detailed look at the quantitative scores, including how the UK's employees rate Happiness and Engagement across various neuroscience themes and brain systems.

Furthermore, we will present qualitative insights from employee comments, offering a deeper understanding of the sentiments behind the numbers. Finally, our key driver analysis identifies the most influential factors impacting employee happiness and engagement, providing a clear roadmap for organisations aiming to improve their cultural health.

Executive summary

Study population: 24,129 UK employees provided responses to The Happiness Index survey which provided the data for this study.

How people responded: A link to The Happiness Index survey was placed within the Pluxee Employee Benefits App, marketing emails and customers from both Pluxee and The Happiness Index.

"People are fed up with the kind of work organisation that uses fear as a motive, and they increasingly understand that workplace happiness is one of the best sources of productivity and organisational performance."

Prof Lord Richard Layard

Key findings

The UK Workplace Paradox: High engagement, high flight risk

- While UK organisations outperform global benchmarks in headline happiness (7.7 vs 7.3) and employee advocacy (+8 eNPS vs +1 globally), beneath the surface lies a critical retention leak. Only 62% of UK employees plan to stay with their current employer, compared to 72% internationally.
- **The primary driver:** Belonging emerged as the single most powerful statistical driver of workplace happiness (0.81 correlation), engagement (0.80), and retention (0.64). Yet, the UK suffers an 8.5% deficit in Belonging compared to global benchmarks (6.5 vs 7.1).
- **The cultural shield:** UK employees report exceptional peer-to-peer relationships (8.3) and energetic connections (8.4), using strong team dynamics to buffer against institutional friction.
- **The operational friction:** Severe drops in cross-departmental collaboration (-14.3%) and feedback frequency (-10.9%) create systemic drag, driving early-career and mid-tenure talent towards the exit.
- **The retention overdraft:** UK businesses are successfully attracting and delighting talent on the surface, but failing to build the structural belonging and feedback loops required to retain them.

Purpose and design of The Happiness Index survey



The Happiness Index survey is a diagnostic tool within The Happiness Index platform.

The purpose of The Happiness Index survey is to enable organisations to understand the cultural health of their organisation.

It has been designed to be quick to complete with a total of 29 questions. The questions are based on neuroscience, with:

- 12 questions focused on Happiness.
- 12 questions on Engagement.
- 1 question on Overall Happiness.
- 1 Employee Net Promoter Score question.
- 1 Productivity question
- 1 Intention to stay question
- 1 Pay and Benefits question

The Happiness Index survey gathers quantitative and qualitative responses.

Once an organisation has taken the survey and diagnosed areas which may require following up, there is a series of follow up surveys which can provide greater insight. For example, if the survey identified an issue with the neuroscience theme of Safety the organisation could take the Safety follow up survey to gain greater insight.

It's important to note our survey is about understanding an organisation's cultural health and not about chasing high scores.

A neuroscience approach

The Happiness Index

At The Happiness Index we use a neuroscience approach and wanted to take a moment to share some of the common questions we are asked on the topic ...

What is neuroscience?

Neuroscience looks at the structures, reactions and brain patterns of all humans.

Why is it important?

It provides insight into what drives human behaviour.

What is happiness?

Happiness is emotional and feeling. It speaks to the heart and provides us with energy.

What is engagement?

Engagement is purpose and clarity. It speaks to the brain and provides us with direction.

Why is measuring Happiness and Engagement important?

Organisations need to be measuring both Happiness and Engagement to get an holistic picture of their cultural health. Organisations can't get a full view of their culture by measuring just Happiness or just Engagement, you need to measure both.

What are brain systems?

The human brain contains multiple parts which are all designed for a specific role. Within our neuroscience model we use these brain systems to understand human behaviour. Here's a helpful guide on the brain systems:

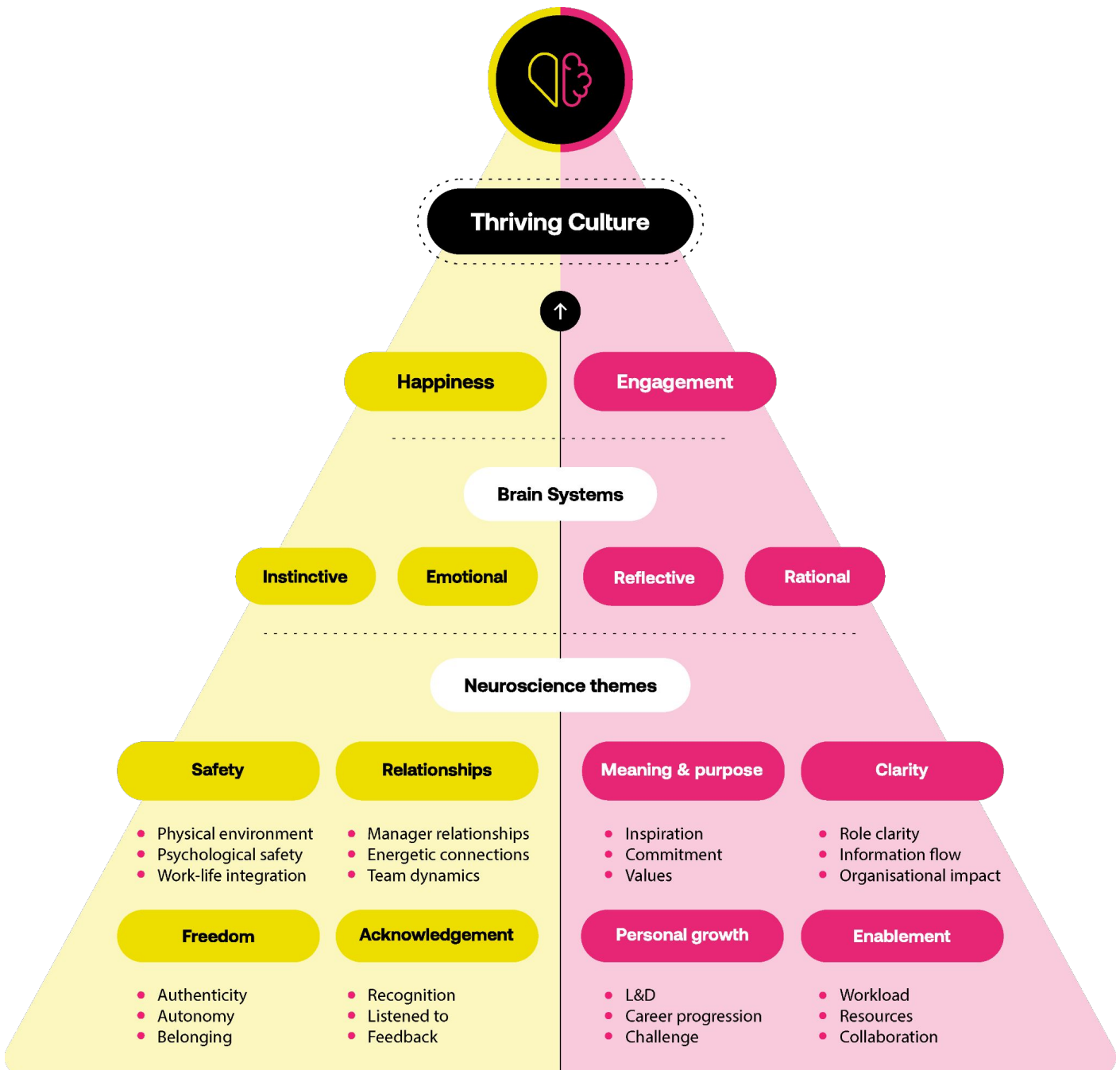
Brain system	Function	Workplace focus
Basal system (Instinctive)	Drives survival and safety instincts	Feeling safe, free from threat
Limbic system (Emotional)	Governs emotions and relationships	Connection, recognition, belonging
Neo-cortex (Rational)	Enables logic, learning, and execution	Clarity, enablement, getting things done
Prefrontal cortex (Reflective)	Integrates thought, emotion, and purpose	Growth, meaning, self-fulfilment

What are Neuroscience themes?

Neuroscience themes help us to translate neuroscientific language into more organisational friendly language. For example, it may be difficult for people to recognise the instinctive dynamics of their organisation and therefore they may find language such as *Safety* and *Freedom* more relatable.

The neuroscience model

In our neuroscience model 2 brain systems are assigned to both Happiness and Engagement (4 in total). These brain systems then have 2 associated neuroscience themes (8 in total). The 8 themes relate back to either Engagement or Happiness. Both are essential in driving a thriving culture. Here's a picture to help you visualise how this pieces together:



About The Happiness Index And the Author

The Happiness Index

About The Happiness Index

We're The Happiness Index and we help organisations turn culture into performance through data, technology, and expertise.

Culture isn't a soft issue. It's measurable. It's tangible. And when you get it right, it drives performance and revenue. We know this because we've surveyed millions of employees globally, creating tens of millions of cultural data points across 170 countries.

The pattern is unmistakable: there's a direct, quantifiable link between culture and performance.

Our three core offerings help you convert culture into business performance:



Global benchmark: Want a custom global workplace happiness report

[Compare against global dataset →](#)



Engagement platform: Curious how your people think, feel, and behave?

[Start measuring →](#)



Culture consultancy: Unsure what's driving impact or where to focus?

[Convert culture into performance →](#)

About the author of The Global Workplace Happiness Report



I'm Stefan Tornquist, a researcher, writer, and advisor based in Brooklyn, New York.

As a co-founder of Executive Summary RSI, I work with clients, from startups to Fortune 500 companies, to turn complex data, research, and ideas into clear narratives and guidance.

My work has often focused on the intersection of business and human experience. Over the years, I've examined how culture and leadership translate into employee behaviour, customer experience, and organisational resilience. I don't view happiness as a soft or abstract concept, but as an input that directly affects productivity, innovation, and growth.

This phase of my career began in the first internet boom as a co-founder of technology startup Bluestreak, which was acquired by dentsu. From there I gravitated towards analysis and thought leadership. I ran Econsultancy's research business in the US for many years before shifting to oversight of its learning product development.

In previous lives, I worked in restaurants and human services, tested children for the military, ran a newspaper, taught political science at the University of Rhode Island and was a paid, if mediocre, Shakespearean actor.

AI Usage Statement

The Happiness Index logo, featuring the text "The Happiness Index" in a sans-serif font, with a small orange dot above the "i" in "Happiness". The logo is enclosed in a white circular border.

AI was very useful to this project. The technology allowed us to work with 1.9 million data points and 90,000 text comments with a speed and flexibility that wouldn't have been possible otherwise.

All data shared with the LLMs was anonymous and specifically excluded from training the models outside of the project.

We worked to achieve a fair and balanced approach by employing neutral prompting techniques. To ensure accuracy, prompts were run multiple times, often across multiple AI platforms, allowing us to cross check the results.

We started drafting the usage statement below before it occurred to us that the AIs would have a clearest inventory of how they were used. The prompt for Claude was: "Based on our work together on the GWHR project and subfolders, write an AI Usage statement, using the Taylor and Francis article for guidance."

This report was created with the help of AI, specifically Anthropic's Claude Opus 4.6 and Google's Gemini 3.0. We mention this because transparency matters, and because the subject of this report demands it. A study about how organisations treat people should be honest about how it was made.

AI made the work faster, broader in scope, and more consistent in its treatment of a large and complex dataset. It did not make editorial decisions, choose what to emphasise, or determine the report's arguments. Those choices – including the decision to be open about this – are human ones.

AI tools were used to query the underlying datasets, identify and interrogate patterns across demographic and firmographic lenses, translate and categorise qualitative responses, and stress-test interpretive claims against the data.

Additionally, many visuals throughout this report were co-created with AI.

Acknowledgements



The Happiness Index would like to thank the academics, experts, and partners who have contributed to this report.



David van Adelesberg is Co-Founder and CEO of [Irrational Capital](#).



Dr. Carrie Goucher has transformed meeting culture in 150+ companies. She has a PhD from the University of Cambridge and is the founder of [FewerFasterBolder](#).



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About this study



The data

The following insight is based on a random sample of over 24,000 employees from organisations based in the UK. A link to The Happiness Index survey was placed within the Pluxee Employee Benefits App, marketing emails and customers from both Pluxee and The Happiness Index. The survey was open from 1st February 2025 to 31st January 2026. For the purposes of this study we have used a mixture of mean averages and percentage favourable as the quantitative measurements.

As with any study of data your personal experiences or knowledge may be different and that's fine. We're simply replaying back the data we have captured from employees based in the UK.

Mean average

We use mean averages within our platform which means we add together all of a survey's responses and then divide this by the number of responses to give an average score.

Percentage favourable

At The Happiness Index we use the concept of Percentage Favourable. It allows us to quantify the percentage of scores which we deem to be a favourable (positive) score. Within this study we've defined a favourable score as being scores of 9 and 10. This aligns with the Employee Net Promoter Score methodology where scores of 9 and 10 are seen as Promoters.

Key driver analysis

One of the key insights we use within The Happiness Index platform is 'Key Driver Analysis'. We use a correlation analysis to understand and identify where there may be relationships between questions within a survey.

Global benchmark

Our Global benchmark is a point of reference to provide context to a country's results. Within this whitepaper it is looking at the aggregated scores from The Happiness Index survey from our Global Workplace Happiness Report.

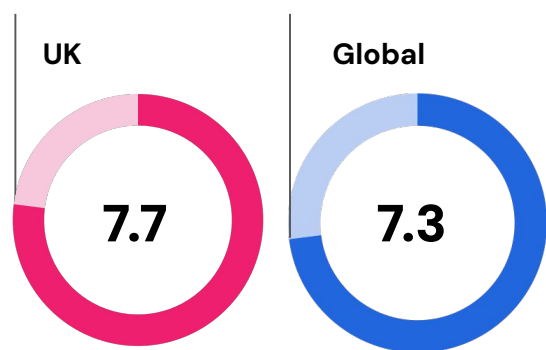
Headline results

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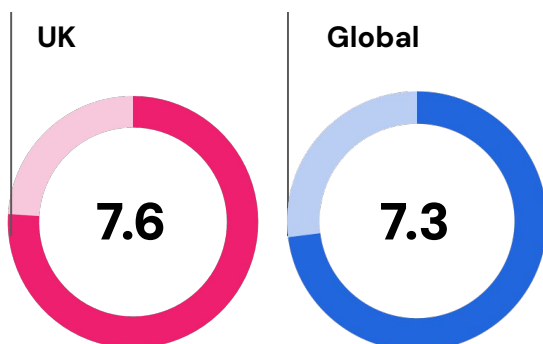
Study population

The following analysis is based on 24,129 responses to The Happiness Index survey, meaning the total number of questions answered was over 552,000. Given the large sample size, the overall findings carry a high degree of statistical confidence. With a 'Confidence level' (how confident you can be in the results) of 99% with a 1% 'Confidence interval' (margin of error) across the sampled population, this study provides valuable and robust insights into workplace happiness across UK organisations.

Happiness score



Overall score

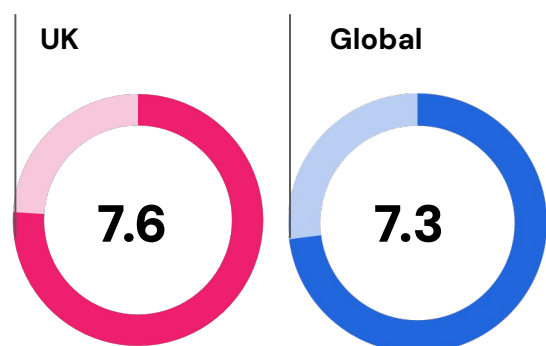


The UK overall Happiness Index score stands at 7.6, outperforming the global average of 7.3. This represents a 4.1% increase above the global baseline.

This data indicates that individuals in the UK report a slightly higher level of employee experience compared to the average international respondent.

The data shows the UK's happiness score of 7.7 outpaces the global average of 7.3 by 5.5%. This is driven by strong scores for the Emotional brain system (up 6.8%) and the Instinctive brain system (up 2.7%), indicating UK organisations are providing employees with a strong emotional foundation to their employee experience.

Engagement score

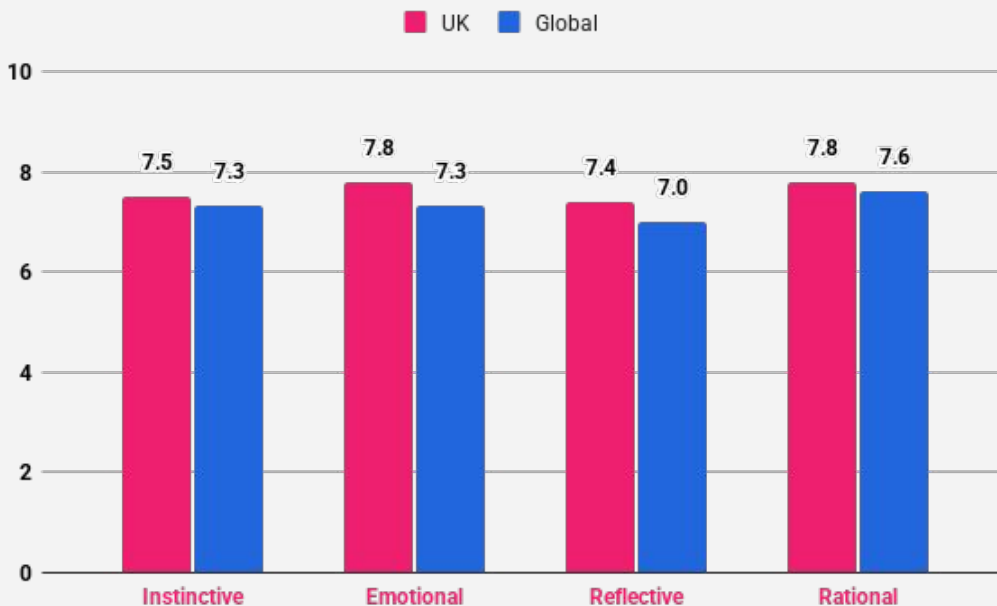


The UK's engagement score of 7.6 is 4.1% higher than the global average of 7.3. This is due to both the Reflective and Rational scores being up, 5.7% and 2.6% respectively.

Brain systems

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UK vs Global



The UK outperforms global benchmarks across all four brain systems. The Instinctive score is slightly up at 7.5 versus 7.3, influenced positively by Freedom scoring higher in the UK compared to globally.

Within the Emotional brain system, the UK leads significantly with a score of 7.8 versus 7.3, largely due to higher Relationship scores (up 7.8%).

Reflective scores are also up (7.4 vs 7.0), driven by superior results in personal growth and meaning and purpose.

Finally, the Rational brain system is also up (7.8 vs 7.6) based on stronger UK scores for employee clarity and workplace enablement.

UK ranking vs Global ranking

Brain system	UK	Global
Rational	1	1
Emotional	1	2
Instinctive	3	2
Reflective	4	3

Although the UK scores are higher the scoring pattern is similar. UK employees have ranked the brain systems in a similar order to the global benchmark.

Neuroscience themes

The Happiness Index

UK vs Global



Across every neuroscience theme the UK outperforms the global benchmarks. Safety is up slightly (1.4%), as strong work-life integration scores are offset by flat levels of Trust. Freedom is stronger in the UK due to higher levels of autonomy (up 2.7%) and authenticity (up 5.4%).

Relationships is up 7.8%, due to UK employees experiencing better energetic connections (up 9.1%) and team dynamics (up 6.4%). However, Acknowledgement (7.0 vs 6.8) is only up 2.9%, and is being held back by low feedback scores.

Personal Growth was higher in the UK (7.2 vs 6.8) due to superior career progression and learning opportunities. Meaning and Purpose was also higher thanks to higher commitment levels and inspiration.

Finally, Clarity is up due to better role requirement understanding (up 4.9%), while Enablement was up 2.6% to 7.8 due to stronger workload management.

UK ranking vs Global ranking

Neuroscience themes	UK	Global
Relationships	1	1
Clarity	2	3
Enablement	3	2
Freedom	4	4
Meaning and Purpose	4	6
Safety	5	5
Personal Growth	6	7
Acknowledgement	7	7

Both rank Relationships first and Acknowledgement last. While Clarity is higher in the UK (second vs third) and Enablement is lower (third vs second), Meaning and Purpose shows the greatest difference, ranking fourth compared to sixth globally.

Question analysis

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Happiness

	UK	Global	Variation
How satisfied are you with the physical environment you work in? (Instinctive)	7.6	7.5	1.3%
How much do you trust your organisation? (Instinctive)	7.3	7.3	0.0%
How satisfied are you with the balance between your work and home life? (Instinctive)	7.5	7.1	5.6%
How free do you feel to be your true self at work? (Instinctive)	7.8	7.4	5.4%
How satisfied are you with the level of freedom you have in your role? (Instinctive)	7.7	7.5	2.7%
How much do you feel you belong at this organisation? (Instinctive)	6.5	7.1	-8.5%
How satisfied are you with the relationship you have with your line manager? (Emotional)	8.1	7.6	6.6%
To what extent do your interactions with colleagues boost your own energy and motivation at work? (Emotional)	8.4	7.7	9.1%
How much do you enjoy working with your team? (Emotional)	8.3	7.8	6.4%
How much do you feel valued as an individual? (Emotional)	7.2	7.0	2.9%
How much do you feel your opinions are listened to? (Emotional)	6.9	6.8	1.5%
How often do you receive feedback on your work? (Emotional)	5.7	6.4	-10.9%

Engagement

How satisfied are you with the amount of learning opportunities on offer? (Reflective)	7.3	6.9	5.8%
How satisfied are you with the opportunity to progress your career here? (Reflective)	6.9	6.5	6.2%
How satisfied are you with the amount of challenge in your role? (Reflective)	7.5	7.1	5.6%
How inspired are you by your organisation? (Reflective)	6.9	6.7	3.0%
How committed are you to helping the organisation succeed? (Reflective)	8.4	7.8	7.7%
How aligned are the values of the organisation with your own personal values? (Reflective)	6.8	6.9	-1.4%
How clear are you on the requirements of your job? (Rational)	8.5	8.1	4.9%
How well does your organisation keep you informed? (Rational)	7.4	7.1	4.2%
How clear is the link between your role and the success of the organisation? (Rational)	7.8	7.6	2.6%
How able are you to manage your workload? (Rational)	8.0	7.8	2.6%
To what extent do you have access to the resources you need to support you in your role? (Rational)	7.6	7.5	1.3%
How effective do you feel collaboration is in your organisation? (Rational)	6.0	7.0	-14.3%

- Across the majority of questions the UK outperforms the global average.
- With the UK excelling in peer to peer relationships, with a 9.1% difference in energetic connections and strong team dynamics (up 6.4%).
- However, there are some substantial deficits with the most notable being collaboration (down 14.3%) and feedback frequency down 10.9%.

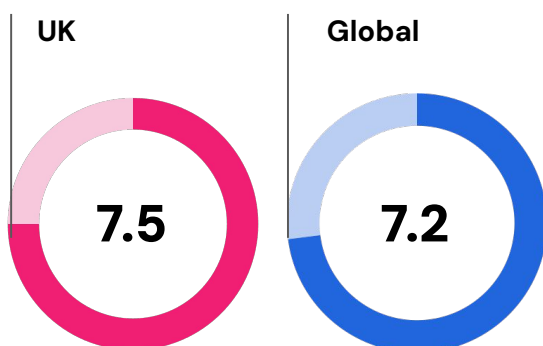
Output questions

What is an output question?

At The Happiness Index we use a concept called 'Output questions'. These questions measure the output of other questions to determine how happy or engaged an employee is.

Happiness output question

For the happiness output question we use 'Overall, how happy are you at work and please tell us why?' This allows us to get a headline happiness measurement and run Key Driver Analysis, but more on that later.

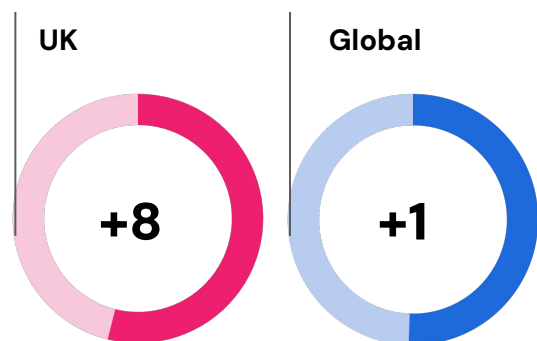


The UK's higher employee happiness is primarily driven by strong peer relationships, with colleague interactions boosting energetic connections by 9.1% over global benchmarks. Also, higher scores in work-life integration (up 5.6%) and a greater sense of autonomy (up 5.4%) help cultivate a more supportive and flexible working environment.

Engagement output question

For the engagement output question we use the Employee Net Promoter Score (eNPS) question as a pseudo measurement of employee engagement. The wording for this question is 'How likely are you to recommend working here to a friend or relative?'.

For those of you unfamiliar with eNPS, it is a single question where the scores are grouped into 3 groupings, Detractors, Passives and Promoters. The number of Detractors, Passives and Promoters is converted into a percentage. The percentage of Detractors is then taken away from the percentage of Promoters. The lowest possible eNPS is -100 and the highest is 100.



	UK	Global
Detractors (0-6)	31%	37%
Passives (7-8)	30%	25%
Promoters (9-10)	39%	38%

The UK's higher eNPS is driven by strong organisational commitment (up 7.7%) and robust personal growth opportunities (up 5.9%). These combined with superior line manager relationships, significantly reduce workplace detractors (31% vs 37%).

"As a workplace happiness community we need to help leaders in the future move from gut-based to evidence-based decision-making."

Jan-Emmanuel De Neve, Professor of Economics and Behavioural Science, University of Oxford

Intention to stay output question

Measuring "intention to stay" is a powerful predictor of employee turnover. It acts as an early warning system for disengagement, allowing organisations to intervene before talent leaves. This metric helps to avoid the substantial costs associated with recruitment, retraining, and lost productivity.

Within our survey we classify an employee's intention to stay depending on how they score. Below is a brief guide:

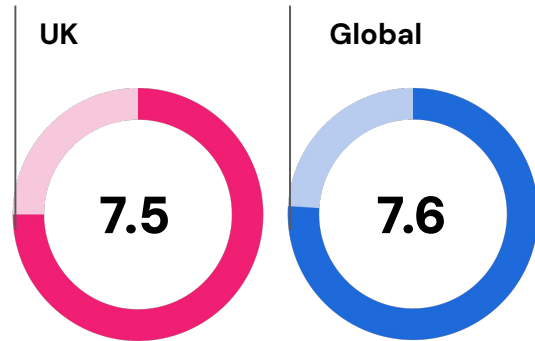
Score	Outcome
1 – 4	Likely to leave in the next 12 months
5 – 6	Passive
7 – 10	Likely to stay in the next 12 months

	UK	Global
Likely to leave	22%	14%
Passive	16%	14%
Likely to stay	62%	72%

The UK's lower intention to stay is primarily driven by deficits in workplace belonging (down 8.5%) and feedback frequency (down 10.9%). Coupled with a 14.3% shortfall in organisational collaboration. These missing foundational factors disrupt employee connection to companies, directly causing higher turnover risks compared to global benchmark averages.

Productivity output question

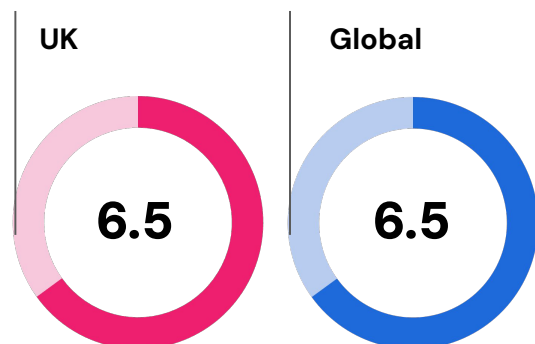
Productivity directly links employee engagement to organisational success. It helps identify operational barriers, like poor resources or workflows, that hinder performance. Understanding self-reported productivity allows leaders to provide targeted support, ensuring a motivated workforce translates into tangible performance. Within our survey the productivity question is: "How productive do you feel your immediate team is?".



The drop in collaboration (-14.3%) and a lack of consistent feedback (-10.9%) directly impact task execution and efficiency. When combined with a lower sense of workplace belonging (-8.5%), these communication and connection deficits create systemic friction that marginally drags down the overall UK workforce productivity.

Pay and benefits output question

Asking about pay and benefits is crucial for understanding employee satisfaction and financial well-being. It helps organisations gauge their market competitiveness and ensures perceptions of fairness. Since compensation is a fundamental driver of attraction and retention, these insights allow leaders to tailor reward strategies that motivate talent and reduce turnover. Within our survey the pay and benefits question is: "How fairly rewarded are you for the work that you do (e.g. pay, benefits and incentives)?".



While UK employees experience strong intrinsic rewards like workplace freedom (+5.4%) and great relationships, the transactional elements such as pay and benefits are the same as the global average.

Key driver analysis

The Happiness Index

What is key driver analysis?

Key driver analysis is a statistical method used to identify the factors that have the most significant impact on a particular outcome. In the context of an employee engagement and happiness survey, it helps identify which aspects of the workplace contribute most strongly to employee engagement and happiness.

By understanding these key drivers, organisations can prioritise initiatives and resources towards areas that will generate the greatest improvement in employee engagement and happiness. For example, if the analysis reveals that Communication is the strongest driver of engagement and happiness, the organisation might implement a more robust communication programme. Essentially, key driver analysis provides actionable insights, allowing organisations to make data-driven decisions to improve the employee experience.

Key driver analysis – Happiness

Area	Score
Belonging	0.81
Recognition	0.76
Listened to	0.74

The above table identifies belonging (0.81), recognition (0.76), and being listened to (0.74) as the key drivers of happiness. To effectively boost overall workplace happiness, UK organisations should focus on prioritising these three critical areas to foster deep workplace connection, acknowledge individual achievements, and actively encourage open employee communication channels.

Key driver analysis – Engagement

Area	Score
Belonging	0.80
Inspiration	0.74
Trust	0.70

The key drivers of employee engagement are belonging (0.80), inspiration (0.74), and trust (0.70). Currently, these drivers score poorly or moderately in the UK, especially belonging which has a large deficit when compared to the global average. To boost eNPS, UK organisations must actively focus on these areas to build stronger connection, transparency, and shared purpose.

Key driver analysis – Intention to stay

Area	Score
Belonging	0.64
Trust	0.60
Inspiration	0.60

The key drivers of retention are belonging (0.64), trust (0.60), and inspiration (0.60). In the UK, these essential drivers score poorly, in particular belonging, which is 8.5% lower than the global benchmark. To boost employee retention, UK organisations must focus on these priority areas to build deeper connection, transparency, and motivation.

Key driver analysis – Productivity

Area	Score
Team dynamics	0.60
Collaboration	0.50
Energetic connections	0.50

Productivity in the UK is driven by team dynamics (0.60), collaboration (0.50), and energetic connections (0.50). While team dynamics and energetic connections currently score very well in the UK, collaboration scores poorly. To boost productivity, UK organisations should focus on these three areas to resolve core collaboration roadblocks.

“When staff feel truly valued and respected by their managers, they are happier, and have higher job satisfaction, with better outcomes for them and for their workplace.”

Dr Shannon Hirst, Research Lead, OnePlusOne

European comparison

The Happiness Index

Countries included

The European benchmark serves as a representative baseline for performance. To ensure statistical validity and reliability, the benchmark is exclusively composed of nations that provided a sufficient volume of responses to meet the necessary data threshold. These countries include Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Turkey, and the UK.

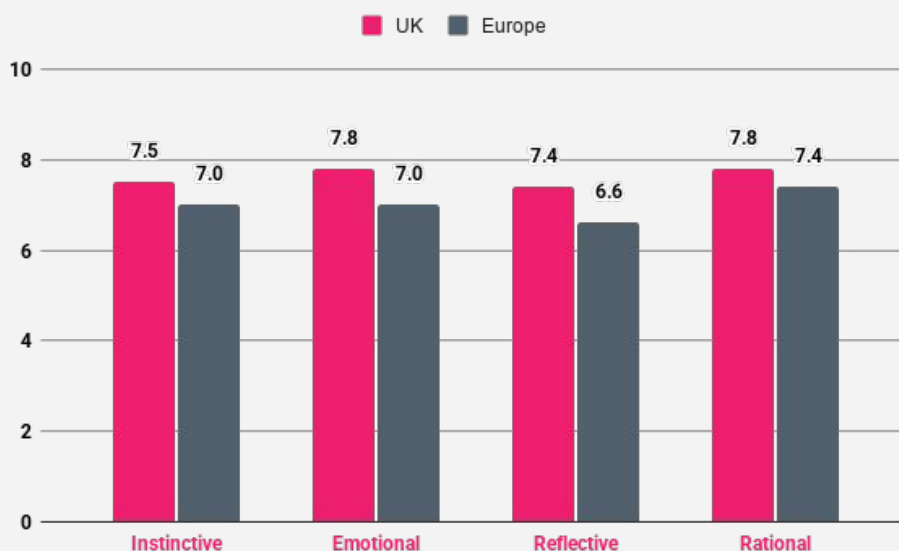
Headline comparison

For the happiness output question we use 'Overall, how happy are you at work and please tell us why?' This allows us to get a headline happiness measurement and run Key Driver Analysis, but more on that later.

Area	UK	Europe	% Variation
Overall score	7.6	7.0	8.6%
Happiness	7.7	7.0	10.0%
Engagement	7.6	6.9	10.1%

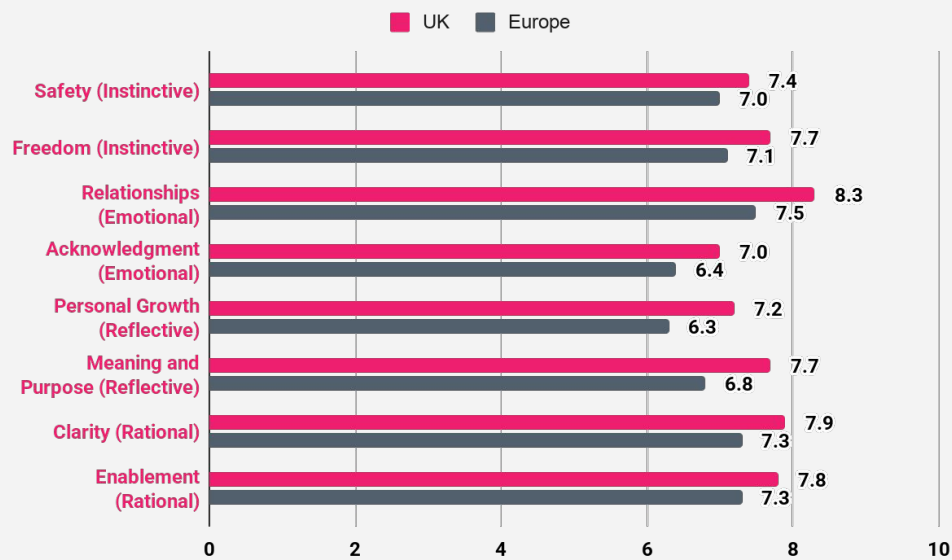
The UK consistently outperforms the European average across all key metrics. The UK's overall score is 8.6% higher at 7.6 compared to Europe's 7.0. The most significant key differences are in happiness, which is 10.0% higher, and engagement, which is 10.1%. These scores indicate employees based in the UK have a more positive employee experience than their European counterparts.

Brain systems comparison



The UK outscores Europe across all four brain systems. The most substantial differences are in the Reflective system (7.4 vs 6.6) and the Emotional system (7.8 vs 7.0), highlighting stronger meaning and purpose, personal growth, and relationships. Meanwhile, the Rational system shows the narrowest performance gap, however it still outperforms Europe by 5.4% (7.8 vs 7.4).

Neuroscience comparison



The UK outperforms the European benchmark across all neuroscience themes. Most notably in Personal Growth and Meaning and Purpose.

When it comes to Personal Growth, factors such as Learning and Development, Career Progression and Role Challenge all score significantly higher than the European score.

Strong scores for factors such as Inspiration, Commitment and Values led to the UK being ahead of the European benchmark for Meaning and Purpose.

Question comparison

Happiness	UK	Europe	Variation
How satisfied are you with the physical environment you work in? (Instinctive)	7.6	7.2	5.6%
How much do you trust your organisation? (Instinctive)	7.3	6.9	5.8%
How satisfied are you with the balance between your work and home life? (Instinctive)	7.5	6.8	10.3%
How free do you feel to be your true self at work? (Instinctive)	7.8	7.1	9.9%
How satisfied are you with the level of freedom you have in your role? (Instinctive)	7.7	7.2	6.9%
How much do you feel you belong at this organisation? (Instinctive)	6.5	6.5	0.0%
How satisfied are you with the relationship you have with your line manager? (Emotional)	8.1	7.3	11.0%
To what extent do your interactions with colleagues boost your own energy and motivation at work? (Emotional)	8.4	7.5	12.0%
How much do you enjoy working with your team? (Emotional)	8.3	7.5	10.7%
How much do you feel valued as an individual? (Emotional)	7.2	6.5	10.8%
How much do you feel your opinions are listened to? (Emotional)	6.9	6.4	7.8%
How often do you receive feedback on your work? (Emotional)	5.7	5.8	-1.7%
Engagement			
How satisfied are you with the amount of learning opportunities on offer? (Reflective)	7.3	6.4	14.1%
How satisfied are you with the opportunity to progress your career here? (Reflective)	6.9	5.9	16.9%
How satisfied are you with the amount of challenge in your role? (Reflective)	7.5	6.6	13.6%
How inspired are you by your organisation? (Reflective)	6.9	6.2	11.3%
How committed are you to helping the organisation succeed? (Reflective)	8.4	7.6	10.5%
How aligned are the values of the organisation with your own personal values? (Reflective)	6.8	6.2	9.7%
How clear are you on the requirements of your job? (Rational)	8.5	8.0	6.3%
How well does your organisation keep you informed? (Rational)	7.4	6.8	8.8%
How clear is the link between your role and the success of the organisation? (Rational)	7.8	7.3	6.8%
How able are you to manage your workload? (Rational)	8.0	7.8	2.6%
To what extent do you have access to the resources you need to support you in your role? (Rational)	7.6	7.3	4.1%
How effective do you feel collaboration is in your organisation? (Rational)	6.0	6.6	-9.1%
Output questions			
How productive do you feel your immediate team is?	7.5	7.2	4.0%
How fairly rewarded are you for the work that you do (e.g. pay, benefits and incentives)?	6.5	5.9	10.2%
Intention to stay – Leave	22%	19%	Up 3
Intention to stay – Passive	16%	15%	Up 1
Intentions to stay – Stay	62%	66%	Down 4

- The UK generally outperforms Europe, especially in career progression (+16.9%) and energetic connections (+12.0%).
- However, significant deficits remain: the UK lags in collaboration (down 9.1%) and regular feedback frequency (down 1.7%)
- Resulting in employee intention to stay scoring four percentage points below the European average of 66%.

Filter comparison

The Happiness Index

What is a filter comparison?

A filter comparison allows you to compare the results of your chosen filters against each other in one place.

For the filter comparisons below, we will focus on filter attributes with more than 50 respondents as any less than this and the group size is too small to take any real meaning.

Age

	Score	Responses
18 and under	7.8	280
19 – 29	7.5	2,097
30 – 39	7.6	1,269
40 – 49	7.6	949
50 – 59	7.5	802
60+	7.6	501
Prefer not to say	7.6	2,423

The youngest cohort, age eighteen and under, reports the highest score of 7.8, likely driven by strong career progression and learning opportunities. Conversely, the groups aged nineteen to twenty nine and fifty to fifty nine dip to 7.5, potentially reflecting frustration with flat pay, feedback deficits, or poor organisational collaboration.

Gender

	Score	Responses
Female	7.6	3,981
Male	7.5	4,504
Other	N/A	N/A
Prefer not to say	N/A	N/A

Females score slightly higher than males (7.6 versus 7.5), despite a lower sample size. This marginal lead likely reflects the UK's exceptional performance in interpersonal relationships and positive peer dynamics. These strong connections tend to resonate particularly well with female employees.

Seniority

	Score	Responses
Executive Leadership	8.4	52
Strategic Management	7.7	533
Operational Management	7.6	2,899
Professional / Specialised contributors	6.8	206
Entry Level	6.0	62
Other	6.0	188
Prefer not to say	N/A	N/A

Executive leaders score highest at 8.4, enjoying high autonomy and strategic clarity. Conversely, entry level employees score lowest at 6.0. This sharp deficit likely reflects their vulnerability to the UK's low feedback frequency and weaker collaboration, which are critical for early career integration, personal belonging, and direct workplace support.

Tenure

	Score	Responses
0–2 years	7.6	4,969
2–5 years	7.5	3,626
5–10 years	7.3	1,102
10+ years	7.5	1,178
Prefer not to say	6.8	77

New hires, (0–2 years), score highest at 7.6, leveraging the UK's strong career progression and learning opportunities. Conversely, mid tenure employees (5–10 years), drop to 7.3, potentially experiencing the frustrating effects of low feedback frequency, weak collaboration, and stagnating personal growth over a longer time. Interestingly, score pick up again for those in the 10+ years group as these employees grow to accept their employee experience.

Company size

	Score	Responses
10 and under	N/A	N/A
11–50	6.9	88
51–250	7.5	942
251–1000	7.5	7,801
1000+	7.7	14,683
Prefer not to say	N/A	N/A

Large, complex organisations with one thousand plus employees score highest at 7.7, benefiting from structured learning and clear career progression pathways. Small businesses with eleven to fifty employees score lowest at 6.9, likely struggling with the UK's noted feedback deficits, limited career development opportunities, and fewer available resources.

Work style

	Score	Responses
Office	6.5	189
Hybrid	7.0	320
Remote	7.2	84
Field Based	6.1	83
Other	5.4	106
Prefer not to say	N/A	N/A

Remote workers score the highest at 7.2, leveraging the UK's strong preference for workplace freedom, personal autonomy, and overall work life integration. Conversely, office and field based employees score lower, as structured setups limit personal flexibility and further amplify the impact of the UK's collaboration and belonging deficits.

“Intentional offices deliver purposeful environments that your team wants to use because they genuinely support the work and culture that drives the business forward.”

Paul Dutnall, CEO of Work.Life

Translating demographic data into action

By analysing demographic trends across seniority, tenure, and work styles, three distinct workforce archetypes emerge that require targeted intervention:

Flight risk (5–10 years | Score: 7.3)

- **Diagnosis:** Experiencing career glass ceilings, stagnant feedback loops, and declining personal growth after initial onboarding momentum wears off.
- **Impact:** Drives the UK's overall retention deficit.

Vulnerable early career (Entry-level | Score: 6.0)

- **Diagnosis:** Hit hardest by the UK's feedback deficit (–10.9%) and weak collaboration (–14.3%).
- **Impact:** Struggling with cultural integration, role clarity, and long-term organisational belonging.

Executive authenticity gap (Execs: 8.4 vs Entry-level: 6.0)

- **Diagnosis:** Strategic leadership experiences high autonomy and clarity, masking the shop-floor reality of understaffing, rigid software, and communication silos.
- **Impact:** Erodes trust when corporate values do not match daily operational realities.

Comment analysis: Safety

The
Happiness
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Summary

By analysing the Safety comments the workforce presents a polarised view of the UK employee experience between highly positive interpersonal dynamics and negative structural pain points. On the positive side, employees widely celebrate strong relationships, supportive line management, and the flexibility offered by hybrid or remote working.

However, these positives are tempered by complaints of poor facilities, e.g. uncomfortable temperature controls and dilapidated buildings, and unmanageable workloads that lead to burnout.

Demographic trends suggest that while large hospitality and food-service firms foster excellent team bonds, they suffer from rota unpredictability. Addressing these structural and operational challenges is vital for retaining talent and sustaining the positive social aspects of the workplace culture.

Areas for celebration

Strong team dynamics

A primary source of happiness and safety in the workplace is the high quality of relationships and supportive co-workers. This is prominent in larger organisations (1,000+ employees), particularly in the Hospitality and, Food and Beverage.

"Great place to work, I have great relationships with other staff members and enjoy supporting all of the individuals, it's a fun place to work..."

Flexibility via hybrid and remote work styles

Work-life integration is highly praised when employees have access to hybrid or remote working structures, which allows them to balance family, personal goals, and commute-free schedules. This appears frequently within the Technology, Legal, and Consulting sectors, and is greatly appreciated by female staff managing childcare or family responsibilities.

"I very much value the ability to work from home and ability to work around family commitments (school runs etc) and am happy to give my best work..."

Areas for improvement

Poor physical environments and inadequate facilities

Employees highlighted physical safety hazards, non-ergonomic desks, lack of space, broken heating/air conditioning, and dilapidated buildings that cause discomfort or physical harm. This was predominant among office-based and manufacturing workers, particularly in the Legal and Education sectors.

"The physical environment I work in is very poor. The building itself is very cold. The heating system is very bad, putting us staff at very high risk. Some staff comes to work with extra blankets due to the cold."

Excessive workloads, extended hours, and burnout

Unmanageable caseloads, long manual shifts, and pressure to stay late or work unpaid overtime severely disrupt work-life balance and mental health. This is often seen in the Education, Healthcare, and Hospitality sectors.

"Overworked. Caseloads are unmanageable. Pressure is horrendous. Workload completely unrealistic."

Comment analysis: Freedom

The
Happiness
Index

Summary

The comments on the theme of Freedom in the UK show a contrast between highly supportive local teams and rigid organisational frameworks. Many employees celebrate the autonomy allowed by agile, remote, or hybrid work styles, which foster a high-trust environment where individuals can work at their own pace. Psychological safety is also highly praised, particularly when welcoming peer groups allow employees to express their true selves without judgment.

However, themes such as micromanagement, particularly in professional and corporate services, severely limits autonomy. Rigid workflows and standardised procedures, are seen as significant barriers to creative freedom.

Areas for celebration

Autonomy in role execution and trust from management

Employees deeply appreciate being trusted to manage their own workloads, diaries, and tasks without overbearing supervision, reflecting a high level of professional respect. This is strong in the Consulting, Legal, and Accounting sectors, particularly among Remote/Hybrid workers and senior managers who have established tenure (2–5+ years).

"I like the agile working nature of the role that i can plan my diary... completely comfortable to be myself and that i am valued."

High psychological safety leading to authenticity

A major win is the ability of employees to bring their "true selves" to work without fear of judgment, fostering highly inclusive and welcoming team environments. This was particularly valued by female employees, younger/newer cohorts (0–2 years).

"I've worked at the company for a long time so feel comfortable showing up as my authentic self. Most colleagues are lovely and don't judge me for my differences."

Areas for improvement

Micromanagement and limited decision making power

A severe pain point is over-regulation, bureaucratic approval processes, and micromanagement by senior or mid-level managers, which strips experienced staff of professional agency. This is seen in the Consulting, Legal, and Technology sectors, particularly among professional/specialist contributors and newer employees (0–2 years tenure).

"I feel micromanaged at times and i'm not often given the space to think, and demonstrate my own Leadership style, i don't feel like i'm trusted to do a good job"

Rigid procedural and systemic constraints

Inflexible software workflows, standardised specifications, and top-down procedural changes (e.g., set menus or strict head-office rules) restrict individual initiative and creativity. Frequently noted in the Food & Beverage and Retail sectors (due to rigid menus and operational specifications) and Social Care (where rules are often imposed without local team consultation).

"the freedom is seldom allowed due to the minds of longer serving members of staff making up what the residents can do so you can't try new things as you are shut down entirely."

Comment analysis: Relationships

The Happiness Index

Summary

In the UK relationships consists of highly cohesive teams where employees strongly celebrate a supportive "work family" culture. Immediate peers, line managers, and local teams are heavily praised for offering deep camaraderie, emotional safety nets, and robust day-to-day collaboration, which serve as the primary drivers of retention and workplace happiness.

However, these positive bonds are threatened by significant structural deficits. Employees frequently report toxic departmental divides (such as front-of-house versus back-of-house or office versus field-based staff), which lead to professional isolation. Trust in leadership is heavily compromised by micromanagement, rigid top-down policies, and a perceived lack of empathy from senior executives.

Areas for celebration

Strong team camaraderie and "Work family" culture

A key driver of workplace satisfaction is the presence of tightly knit, welcoming, and deeply supportive team environments where co-workers treat each other like family. This sentiment is highly prominent in large enterprises (1,000+ employees), particularly within the Hospitality, Retail, and Food and Beverage sectors, where daily face-to-face team execution is essential.

"I am very happy with the team i work with. We are all like family."

Deep appreciation for supportive line managers

While executive-level trust may be low, employees frequently praise their immediate managers and supervisors for showing genuine empathy, guiding them through challenges, and actively protecting their work-life balance. This is highly visible among operational managers and senior specialists in mid-to-large organisations.

"I would give my manager an 11 if i could. I feel valued and respected."

Areas for improvement

Departmental silos and structural divides

Many organisations suffer from relationship friction between different departments, such as head offices being detached from site operations, or front-of-house clashing with back-of-house teams. This leads to isolation and resentment. We saw this in a number of comments from large organisations (1,000+) and in the Hospitality, Food & Beverage, and Finance sectors.

"The relationship is fractured between the Events Planning Team and the Managers of the Operations Team. The rapport we have is very negative and very difficult to deal with at times."

Toxic culture and workplace cliques

Workplace cliques, backstabbing, exclusion of out-groups, and instances of bullying or unchecked harassment severely damage employee mental health and increase turnover. There were pockets of this behaviour amongst Food and Beverage, Manufacturing, and social care sectors, which is affecting both entry-level (0–2 years) and mid-tenure (5–10 years) employees.

"The physical environment I work in has massively gone downhill. The atmosphere is verging on toxic, the manager does nothing but moan all day and puts their problems onto the office staff."

Comment analysis: Acknowledgement

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Happiness
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Summary

The qualitative feedback regarding acknowledgement highlights a distinct separation between highly positive daily team interactions and a disconnect with senior leadership. Employees frequently celebrate the strong daily support, recognition, and verbal praise they receive from immediate managers and close-knit peers, noting that it acts as a primary motivator and protective shield against stress.

However, these localised successes are heavily offset by a "negativity bias" in broader corporate feedback loops, where employees feel they only hear from management when things go wrong. Formal 1-to-1 appraisal processes are widely criticised as impersonal tick-box exercises that fail to drive real career progression. Demographic trends indicate that while large enterprises (1,000+) often have structured recognition frameworks, they simultaneously struggle with feelings of the working relationship being transactional.

Areas for celebration

Consistent verbal appreciation and recognition by direct managers

Employees express significant gratitude for immediate managers and team leaders who deliver regular, genuine praise and make them feel personally respected and valued. This is seen among operational staff (support workers, coordinators) in mid-to-large organisations, particularly in the social care and Healthcare sectors.

"My manager is really nice and appreciative anytime I offer help... And it makes me feel appreciated and wanting to excel in every area of my career".

Open and supportive peer feedback loops

Feedback shared within smaller, tight-knit teams is highly constructive, empathetic, and delivered in a collaborative manner that avoids the feeling of harsh criticism. Frequently reported by newly onboarded cohorts (0–2 years tenure) and those working in specialised, smaller team structures like Media, Healthcare, and Consulting.

"I think giving and receiving feedback is something we struggle with as a department. I think in my smaller team, as we have deep connections, it feels much easier to give feedback in a way that is perceived as helpful..."

Areas for improvement

Disconnect and "Just a number" mentality from senior leadership

Frontline employees experience a severe lack of recognition and empathy from executive leadership, feeling viewed as expendable statistical "heads" rather than appreciated individuals. This was strongly represented in large businesses (1,000+ employees), primarily in the Manufacturing, Retail, and Food and Beverage sectors.

"Everything is done via Italy now and we're purely seen as numbers not people"

Ineffective formal appraisal systems

Standard 1-to-1 meetings and annual reviews are widely criticised for being rigid, transactional, tick-box exercises that do not lead to actual career progression or meaningful dialogue. This was often seen amongst remote workers and larger corporate workforces.

"Feedback once a year is hardly encouraging is it!?"

Comment analysis: Personal Growth

The
Happiness
Index

Summary

The comments based on personal growth reveal there is positive on-the-job skill acquisition where employees highly value practical, hands-on learning experiences, supportive mentorship, and stimulating daily challenges that build personal confidence. Large enterprises are particularly praised for offering clear career trajectories.

However, rigid organisational hierarchies can create career "glass ceilings," especially in professional services and smaller organisations. Furthermore, many employees report that their primary workplace "challenges" are negative operational issues, such as understaffing, systemic administrative burdens, and clunky software, rather than pathways for career development. Lastly, a widespread lack of dedicated study time and restricted training budgets forces many staff members to pursue personal development in their own unpaid time, causing burnout.

Areas for celebration

Rich on-the-job learning

Employees value and celebrate the robust practical on-the-job training, technical mentorship, and self-learning platforms (e.g. LinkedIn Learning) that allow them to acquire useful skills. This was more commonly seen among newer tenure groups (0–2 years) and junior positions (Specialists, Assistants, Apprentices).

"I've really enjoyed the amount of learning and hands-on experience I've had in this role, it's pushed me in the best way."

Clear pathways in larger organisations

For high-performing employees, clear career development paths and targeted promotions are noted as highly successful and visible milestones. Again this was seen in larger organisations.

"I have come from an entry role to manager in my journey. Never seen more opportunity for growth and investment in people than we do here."

Areas for improvement

Career "Glass ceilings"

A prominent complaint is the lack of progression pathways: employees feel stuck with no room for promotions unless a senior colleague leaves, leading to professional stagnation. This was highly concentrated in the Legal and Consulting sectors.

"During my last 1:1, my manager made it clear that there are no opportunities for professional growth in my current role. It appears that progression is limited, with my manager occupying the most senior position within our area."

Lack of dedicated study time and training budgets

Employees complain about the lack of dedicated time or financial budgets for professional courses, often having to study in their own unpaid time or face rejections for training requests. Very prominent among part-time workers, social care support staff, and mid-tenure employees (2–5 or 5–10 years).

"We are offered learning but don't have the time to do it"

Comment analysis: Meaning and Purpose

The
Happiness
Index

Summary

UK employees show a profound dedication to their daily roles, particularly when they can directly support patients, clients, or charity missions. Many celebrate a strong alignment between their personal values and their company's core purpose, finding inspiration in collaborative team cultures and empathetic local managers.

However, we have seen a disconnect between written corporate values and the daily operational reality. Staff frequently criticise executive leadership for prioritising commercial metrics, KPIs, and restructures over workforce well-being. This commercial focus, paired with understaffing, makes it incredibly difficult for passionate staff to deliver the standard of service they are personally committed to, resulting in exhaustion, frustration, and a diminished sense of shared purpose.

Areas for celebration

Deep commitment for customer care

A primary source of pride and fulfilment is the direct, positive impact employees make on the lives of patients, clients, or service users, which is highly motivating. This was strongly visible in the social support, Education, and Healthcare sectors. It was mostly reported by female, long-tenured employees (5–10+ years).

"Right from my corporate induction I knew I liked the ethos of the company and could tell how passionate everyone working for it was... I love how individuals living within our living facilities are included within the running of the organisation..."

Inspirational team connections

Supportive peer environments and empathetic managers inspire employees to give 100% of their effort and find meaning in their daily work. Highly prominent in Food and Beverage, Hospitality, and Social Care sectors among newer employees (0–2 years) and mid-tenure (2–5 years).

"My manager is a very inspirational lady who always goes out of her to assist the team. This attitude inspires me so much that I am totally committed to help the organisation grow."

Areas for improvement

Disconnect between written values and leadership actions

A primary source of frustration is the hypocrisy felt when an organisation's written "core values" do not align with how executive leadership behaves or treats its workforce in practice. There were comments on this topic from the Healthcare, Technology, and Retail sectors, particularly among long-tenured staff (10+ years).

"My values align with the written values of the company. The written values of the company do not align with the way the company and those at the top act"

Prioritising profit over employee well-being

A heavy focus on corporate cost-cutting, strict labour hours budgets, and KPIs leaves employees feeling overworked, undervalued, and physically depleted. This was mainly felt by employees of large organisations.

"Too much focus is being put on cutting labour, to the point where the only salaried Manager ends up covering extra shifts... salary effectively drops below minimum wage."

Comment analysis: Clarity

The
Happiness
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Summary

The Clarity comments show a clear distinction between highly effective local communication and opaque corporate structures. Employees widely celebrate having a very clear, autonomous understanding of their daily job requirements. They also express a strong, proud connection between their individual efforts and the ultimate success of their organisation, particularly in public-facing or social support roles.

However, these achievements are hindered by operational challenges. Frontline staff express frustration over a major disconnect with senior leadership, noting that strategic decisions are often hidden or poorly communicated. Furthermore, a trend of "information overload" across disjointed digital platforms (such as email, Slack, Teams and WhatsApp) causes employees to miss vital details.

Areas for celebration

Individual clarity on role requirements

Across almost all sectors and seniorities, employees report having a highly clear, practical, and well-defined understanding of their daily duties and operational requirements. This is consistently high across both new hires (0–2 years tenure) and highly established long-tenure (10+ years) employees.

"I'm very clear on the requirements of my job and what is expected of me."

Clear sense of personal impact on organisational success

Frontline employees in public-facing, care-focused, and financial support roles see a direct, meaningful link between their individual daily efforts and the ultimate success and viability of the business. This was seen strongly in the specialists, accountants, and support workers in small-to-medium-sized organisations.

"...the link between Support Worker and the success of the organisation is clear. Without support workers the organisation simply would not function..."

Areas for improvement

Opaque strategic communication

A major complaint is that broader strategic directions, roadmaps, and structural decisions from executive boards are hidden, poorly timed, or non-existent, leaving staff feeling out of the loop and untrusting. This is seen mostly in larger organisations.

"not a clue what is happening within the company, don't even know who the MD is of our department"

Information overload and multiple digital channels

Rather than under-communicating, some sectors suffer from an overwhelming volume of emails and fragmented communication platforms (Slack, Email, Teams, WhatsApp), causing employees to miss critical details. Often seen in larger educational, accounting, and professional consulting organisations.

"Communication is over-communicated on the internet and email- it could be more effective with a better strategy... too much daily communication so one does [not] open all the emails..."

Comment analysis: Enablement

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Summary

The Enablement comments highlight a strong appreciation for localised support amidst systemic challenges. Employees widely celebrate supportive local line managers and immediate co-workers who help manage workloads and collaborate effectively. Flexible, remote, and hybrid working styles are also praised for helping employees maintain a healthy work-life balance.

However, these localised successes are compromised by operational pain points. Employees frequently report unmanageable workloads caused by understaffing, leading to extreme exhaustion and burnout. Furthermore, a lack of resources acts as a persistent barrier to daily productivity.

Areas for celebration

Highly supportive line management

Frontline and operational employees express deep gratitude for immediate managers and team leaders who actively help them prioritise workloads, support their personal well-being, and step in during critical shortages. This was seen in shift-based and manual operational environments (support workers, drivers, packers) in large and mid-sized organisations.

"My manager is always on hand to help out... and we support each other with the low / high moments with our lives and our work place."

Colleague collaboration

Daily team connections and a "work family" dynamic are celebrated as essential pillars that enable staff to handle peak operational demands through collaboration. This was consistently high across larger customer-facing or manual operations (Hospitality, Manufacturing, and Food and Beverage), where strong team cohesiveness directly drives daily execution.

"I have a wonderful team and a great manager and feel we all work well together and try our best to support each other."

Areas for improvement

Severe understaffing, unsustainable workloads, and burnout

Chronic understaffing, forced overtime, and unmanageable daily workloads leave employees feeling physically and mentally exhausted, directly undermining their ability to perform. We saw this mainly from shift workers in high-pressure sectors, particularly in the Hospitality, Food and Beverage, and Healthcare industries.

"I work alone in my section quite often, and it is impossibly hard. The number of guests in my section often exceeds 100 people, [I physically cannot work at this pace]. Why should I alone do the work of two people?"

Sub-standard resources

Daily operations are heavily blocked by outdated or broken machinery, non-ergonomic setups, poor climate control, and slow software systems, which create high non-system hours and frustration. This has been seen across Manufacturing/warehousing and office-based professional services (Consulting, Accounting), particularly affecting those in large-scale environments.

"Our systems need a lot of improvement. Not being paperless is the biggest one... Laptops are slow with staff complaining of IT issues pretty much everyday."

Considerations

Strategic action plan: Plugging the retention gap

To close the 10% retention gap between the UK and global benchmarks, leaders must pivot from transactional HR initiatives to systemic structural changes. The recommendations below address the drivers of retention, productivity, and workforce belonging:

Prioritise belonging to protect retention:

Focus on non-transactional check-ins, peer-led networks, and inclusive onboarding to fix the core statistical driver of talent loss.

Remove collaboration roadblocks:

Replace rigid hierarchies with cross-functional pods and streamline fragmented communication channels to recover lost productivity.

Bridge the authenticity gap:

Align board-level statements with shop-floor reality by auditing staffing budgets, updating outdated tools, and operationalising company values.

Rebalance feedback loops:

Move from annual compliance appraisals to frequent, growth-oriented coaching conversations.

This deficit directly compromises retention, contributing to the fact that only 62% of UK employees plan to stay with their employers over the next 12 months, compared to 72% globally.

How to deliver it? Organisations should focus on cultivating psychological safety by implementing peer-led employee resource groups (ERGs), structured onboarding "buddy" systems, and regular, non-transactional check-ins where employees are treated as valued individuals rather than mere transactional resources.

Living the organisation's values

What is it? Aligning the organisation's values with the daily "lived experience" of employees to rebuild trust.

Why has it been chosen? Qualitative comment analysis shows an "authenticity gap" where corporate missions and values promoted in the boardroom fail to manifest on the ground. Frontline staff frequently report that cost-cutting exercises and unmanageable workloads directly contradict stated values, severely damaging trust.

How to deliver it? Organisations must move values from the boardroom throughout the organisation. This involves linking management KPIs to cultural metrics, ensuring fair distribution of workloads, and delivering on basic promises like timely benefits and resource provision.

Addressing the "Belonging" deficit

What is it? Prioritising initiatives that actively foster a deep sense of personal workplace connection and individual belonging.

Why has it been chosen? Within the Key Driver Analysis, Belonging emerged as the single most influential driver of employee happiness (0.81 correlation), engagement (0.80), and intention to stay (0.64). Despite its critical importance, Belonging is a major weakness for UK organisations, scoring just 6.5 (representing an 8.5% deficit compared to the global average of 7.1).

Removing collaborative roadblocks

What is it? Eliminating silos and streamlining operational workflows to improve team enablement.

Why has it been chosen? While team dynamics (0.60) and energetic connections (0.50) are key drivers of productivity, the UK's performance in Collaboration is much lower than the global average (6.0 vs 7.0). Qualitative feedback also indicates that top-down bureaucratic hurdles and communication silos create friction and reduce productivity.

Considerations

How to deliver it? Move away from rigid, hierarchical structures by adopting cross-functional "squads" or "pods" to complete complex tasks. Streamline technology by consolidating fragmented comms channels (e.g., reducing reliance on WhatsApp groups, chaotic intranets, or rigid workflows) and establishing clear, supportive inter-departmental SLAs to reduce operational friction.

Rebalancing the feedback loop

What is it? Shifting from compliance-driven, once-a-year appraisals to frequent, balanced, and growth-focused feedback loops.

Why has it been chosen? Feedback Frequency is a significant pain point in the UK, scoring 10.9% lower than the global average (5.7 vs 6.4). Qualitative comments reveal a "negativity bias," where employees report only hearing from management when something goes wrong or to fulfill an administrative, tick-box HR requirement. This punitive culture of silence directly harms motivation, leaving employees feeling unappreciated and disengaged.

How to deliver it? Train managers to actively transition from transactional supervisors to supportive coaches. Organisations could implement simple, peer-to-peer recognition programmes and regular, informal 1-2-1s that focus on highlighting successes and encouraging open communication.

"To bridge the UK's retention gap, leaders need to actually live the values they put on their office walls and preach in meetings."

"Real productivity, efficiency and creativity don't come from a top-down mandate. They grow out of a workplace where people genuinely feel they belong and have room to grow."

"That brings us to the biggest challenge companies face today, and it's the exact question we're helping our clients at The Happiness Index answer: 'What kind of culture do you need to thrive in an AI-enabled world?'"

Matt Phelan, Co-Founder, The Happiness Index

Summary and How We Can Help

The Happiness Index



Tony Latter, Co-Founder and Co-CEO of The Happiness Index.

Looking across the findings of our UK Workplace Happiness Report 2026, there's a powerful story of a national workforce that consistently outperforms global benchmarks. On paper, the headline figures are strong: the UK leads international averages across The Happiness Index score (7.6 vs 7.3), Overall Happiness (7.7 vs 7.3), and Engagement (7.6 vs 7.3). These scores culminate in a higher than average Employee Net Promoter Score of +8, demonstrating that UK organisations are succeeding in providing employees with a solid cultural baseline.

However, as we look beneath these headlines, an authenticity gap becomes clear. There is a divide where strategic corporate visions fail to translate into the lived experiences of employees. While the UK's strong peer-to-peer relationships (8.3) and energetic connections (8.4) act as buffers against the daily workplace stresses, they are constantly being undermined by operational challenges.

What strikes me most in the data is our national underperformance in Belonging. The UK scores just 6.5, an 8.5% deficit compared to global benchmarks. Frequency of feedback is another area that is concerning, falling 10.9% below global averages to a score of 5.7.

These missing foundational elements directly erode employee commitment and have resulted in only 62% of UK employees reporting that they plan to stay with their current employer over the next 12 months, compared to 72% globally.

The demographic breakdowns further highlight where leadership attention is needed most. We see that entry-level staff (6.0) and small businesses (6.9) suffer most acutely from collaboration and feedback deficits. Similarly, there is a distinct dip among mid-tenure employees with 5 to 10 years of service, showing me that employee enablement demands continuous, long-term support rather than a one-time onboarding effort.

To remain competitive and bridge this trust gap, my clear takeaway for UK business leaders is we must actively transition from transactional management to human-centric leadership. We must prioritise Belonging above all else, as our data proves it is the single most influential statistical driver of happiness, engagement, and retention.

By dismantling departmental silos, rebalancing feedback loops to eliminate negativity bias, and ensuring corporate values are genuinely lived, I believe employers can transform transactional job roles into inspired, highly productive, and long-term careers. The opportunity before us to secure both workforce well-being and commercial success is clear, but it requires us to build a far deeper, emotional connection with our people.

**Tony Latter | Co-Founder and Co-CEO,
The Happiness Index**

How we can help

Is your workplace culture driving business growth?

Senior leaders spend a fortune trying to improve their workplaces. But connecting that effort to actual results is incredibly hard. If you're experiencing any of these, you aren't alone.

- **Your best people walk out the door**
 - Avoidable attrition drains budget and expertise.
- **Teams lose their drive**
 - Poor manager effectiveness stifles productivity and growth.
- **Productivity and innovation stall**
 - Hidden cultural friction kills creativity and momentum.
- **No insight into your culture**
 - No data means no direction. Just guesswork.
- **People-related barriers to growth**
 - Scaling is impossible without the right cultural foundation.

We change that for you.

The Happiness Index combines three things no other software platform or consultancy can access:

1. **A neuroscience methodology** that measures how your people actually think and feel.
2. **250 million+ proprietary data points** into workplace engagement and happiness.
3. Global benchmarking insights from **The Global Workplace Happiness Report**.

The result? You see how culture drives financial performance, why some teams fly and others stall, and exactly where to invest in your people.

[Speak with an expert consultant today →](#)

Appendix 1: The UK Workplace Happiness Survey Questionnaire

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The UK Workplace Happiness Report is a sub-segment of The Global Workplace Happiness Report.

We therefore asked the same firmographic questions and used the same questionnaire as the The Global Workplace Happiness Report.

Firmographic questions

- Country
- Age
- Gender
- Tenure at company
- Work style (remote, hybrid, office, field)
- Seniority
- Job role/function
- Company size

Research questions (continued on next page)

	Question	Neuroscience themes	Anchor points
1	How satisfied are you with the physical environment you work in?	Safety	Very unsatisfied – Very satisfied
2	How much do you trust your organisation?	Safety	Never – Always
3	How satisfied are you with the balance between your work and home life?	Safety	Very unsatisfied – Very satisfied
4	How free do you feel to be your true self at work?	Freedom	Not at all – Entirely
5	How satisfied are you with the level of freedom you have in your role?	Freedom	Very unsatisfied – Very satisfied
6	How much do you feel you belong at this organisation?	Freedom	Not at all – Completely
7	How satisfied are you with the relationship you have with your line manager?	Relationships	Very unsatisfied – Very satisfied
8	To what extent do your interactions with colleagues boost your own energy and motivation at work?	Relationships	Not at all – Always
9	How much do you enjoy working with your team?	Relationships	Never – Always
10	How much do you feel valued as an individual?	Acknowledgement	Never – Always
11	How much do you feel your opinions are listened to?	Acknowledgement	Never – Always
12	How often do you receive feedback on your work?	Acknowledgement	Never – Always

	Question	Neuroscience themes	Anchor points
13	How satisfied are you with the amount of learning opportunities on offer?	Personal Growth	Very unsatisfied – Very satisfied
14	How satisfied are you with the opportunity to progress your career here?	Personal Growth	Very unsatisfied – Very satisfied
15	How satisfied are you with the amount of challenge in your role?	Personal Growth	Very unsatisfied – Very satisfied
16	How inspired are you by your organisation?	Meaning and Purpose	Not at all – Entirely
17	How committed are you to helping the organisation succeed?	Meaning and Purpose	Very uninspired – Very inspired
18	How aligned are the values of the organisation with your own personal values?	Meaning and Purpose	Not at all – 100% committed
19	How clear are you on the requirements of your job?	Clarity	Very unclear – Very clear
20	How well does your organisation keep you informed?	Clarity	Not at all – Always
21	How clear is the link between your role and the success of the organisation?	Clarity	Very unclear – Very clear
22	How able are you to manage your workload?	Enablement	Not at all – Always
23	To what extent do you have access to the resources you need to support you in your role?	Enablement	Never – Always
24	How effective do you feel collaboration is in your organisation?	Enablement	Very ineffective – Very effective
25	Overall, how happy are you at work and please tell us why?	Output	Very unhappy – Very happy
26	How likely are you to recommend working here to a friend or relative?	Output	Very unlikely – Very likely
27	How likely are you to be working here in 12 months time?	Output	Very unlikely – Very likely
28	How productive do you feel your immediate team is?	Output	Very unproductive – Very productive
29	How fairly rewarded are you for the work that you do (e.g. pay, benefits and incentives)?	Output	Very unfairly – Very fairly

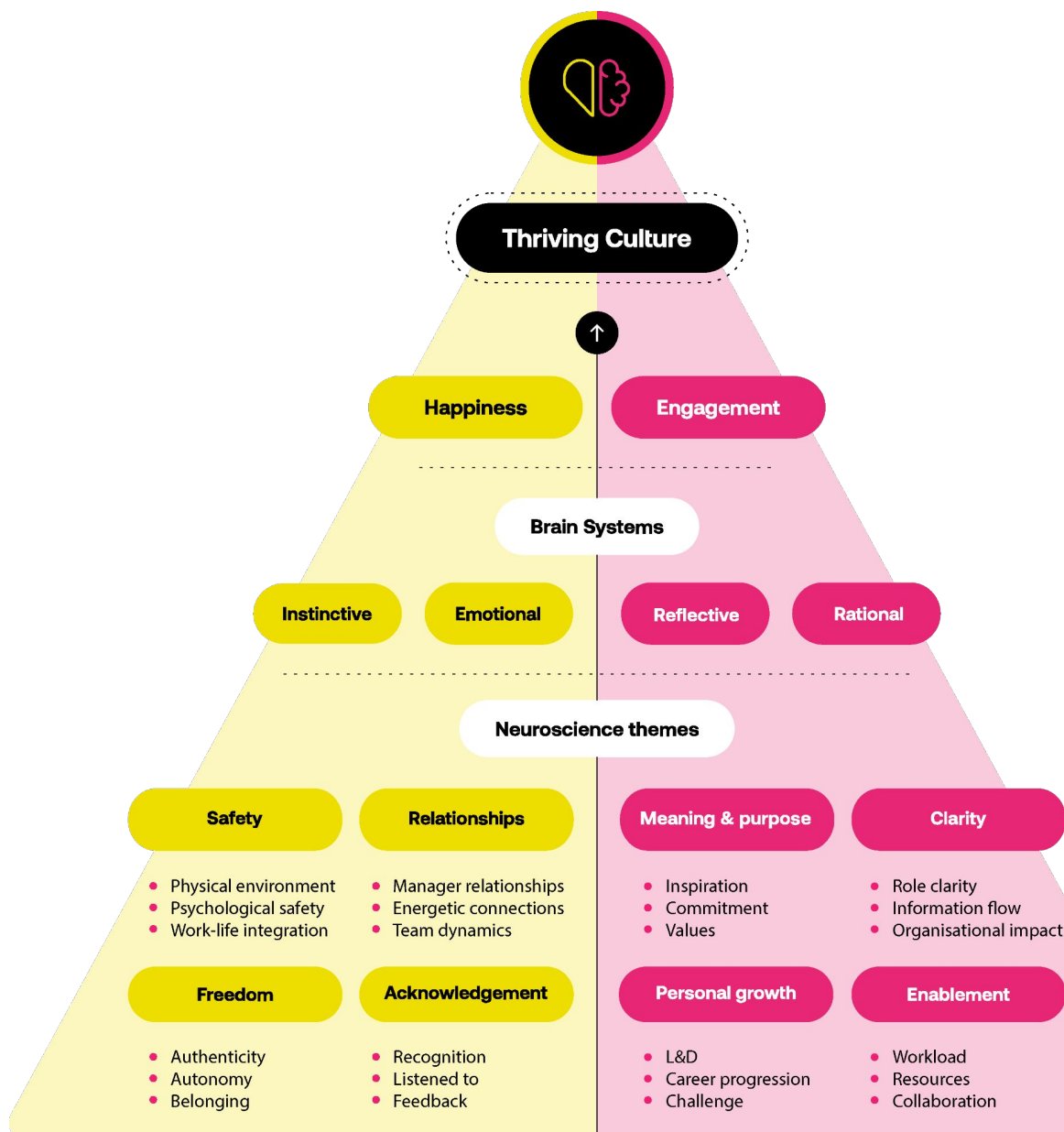
Appendix 2: Methodology of The Neuroscientific Framework

Brain system theory

Neuroscience is the study of the brain and the nervous system. Neuroscience understands that the brain and body are intricately connected; emotions affect our physical health, and our physical environment shapes how we feel. The Happiness Index explores this relationship in the workplace, looking at how emotional factors such as culture, safety, and meaning influence workplace wellbeing and performance.

The Happiness Index questionnaire is based on a model that organises human behaviour around four key brain systems, each linked to fundamental workplace needs. Together, these systems explain the biological basis of motivation, collaboration, and engagement.

At its core, the methodology aims to give people the “freedom to be human.” By aligning organisational systems with how the brain naturally functions, this approach helps workplaces become more empathetic, productive, and sustainable.



Happiness – How employees feel

- **Characteristics:** Fast, emotional, intuitive, and involuntary.
- **When these needs are met,** employees feel safe, valued, and connected.
- **Comprised of two systems,** the Instinctive and Emotional.

Instinctive system

The drivers of the Instinctive system are Safety and Freedom.

The instinctive system is concerned primarily with two needs, commonly referred to as “survive and thrive.” Our genetic programming gives us the basic instructions we need to survive. We are constantly on the lookout for any threat which jeopardises this. This is essential to the longevity of the human species but has a downside in an organisational context. People in “survival mode” cannot give their best as the brain remains focused primarily on addressing ongoing threats.

The consequence is that it operates at a suboptimal level. To perform at our best we need to feel safe. This allows energy to be available for more constructive, collaborative, and creative activities. So, understanding people’s sense of safety is paramount. If they do not feel safe, what is the source of that threat? The survey questions concentrate on the Physical Environment, Trust and Work–Life Balance.

But our instincts are not just concerned with survival. We also have a genetic need to thrive and to extend our boundaries of influence. The human species is innately curious and exploratory, and this sits at the heart of our evolutionary momentum. To give our best we need the Freedom to be ourselves and explore our environments. This is captured with questions around Authenticity, Autonomy, and Belonging.

Emotional system

The drivers of the Emotional system are Relationships and Acknowledgement.

The emotional system enables us to cooperate as social groups. Its primary role is to create bonding between us. Relationships therefore sit at the heart of our emotional needs.

In life, we are hugely impacted by those we care most about. In organisations, we have a deep-rooted need to experience fulfilling relationships with those we spend most time with. This includes those with our colleagues, our line managers, and the teams we want to feel part of. In parallel, the need for acknowledgement sits deep within us. In our early years, emotional cues and acknowledgement shape our direction and experience and this continues throughout life.

We need feedback from others to understand ourselves and to sustain our journey. This Acknowledgement is not just explicit, it includes the realm of subconsciously driven interactive behaviours which can challenge or endorse us, excite or depress us. Accordingly, questions focus on Recognition, Listening, and Feedback.

Engagement – How employees think

- **Characteristics:** Slow, reflective, deliberate, and logical.
- **When these needs are met,** employees are motivated, clear on their goals, and enabled to perform.
- **Comprised of two systems,** the Rational and Reflective.

Rational system

The drivers of the Rational system are Clarity and Enablement.

Human capacity for rational thought is far more advanced than any other living species, and this is reflected in the size and sophistication of the human cortex. Rational thought is concerned with interpretation and execution, ultimately, with getting things done. Its role is essentially practical. We have the capacity for action at a more basic instinctive level, but this is where we establish the rules of execution for the complex capabilities we learn through life.

We need to be clear about all sorts of relevant factors if we are to be able to take appropriate and effective action. The neural pathways we create in our brains are our rules of engagement.

To perform at our best we need clarity on matters like what is expected of us, what outcomes we are expected to achieve, what authority we have, who we are expected to engage with, what information we have access to, and so on. We therefore focus our questions on Requirements, Information Flow, and Organisational Impact.

We then need to have the means to get the job done. While Clarity focuses on the what, Enablement focuses on the how, hence the survey's questions on Workload, Resources, and Collaboration opportunities.

Reflective system

The drivers of the Reflective system are Personal Growth and Meaning and Purpose.

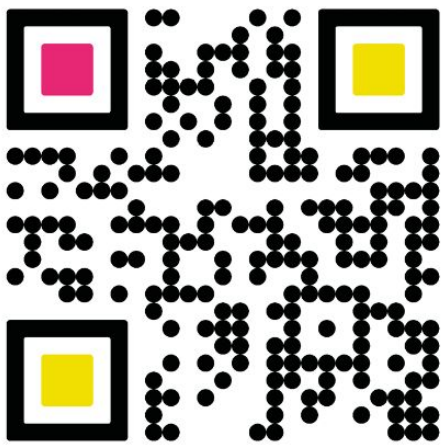
The prefrontal cortex is the region of the brain where we can bring together instinctive, emotional, and rational intelligence to create our sense of wholeness and self. Here we can be imaginative and think of the bigger picture. It is the world of our conscious aspirations, our hopes and dreams of self-fulfilment.

To tap into this potential, organisations need to be able to offer opportunities for personal growth and to provide meaning and purpose.

In terms of Personal Growth, people in organisations need to feel they are learning and developing. The work they do needs to stretch and energise them, and the organisation needs to offer opportunities for career development and progression.

Moreover, people want to feel inspired by their work. They seek Meaningful activity with a clear and fulfilling Purpose. Therefore, the survey focuses on Inspiration, Commitment, and Values.

Add your data to the 2027 survey



<https://thehappinessindex.com/take-the-survey/>

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