

A photograph of two men sitting on a grey couch in an office environment. The man in the foreground is a middle-aged man with a beard and a shaved head, wearing a black t-shirt, smiling broadly at the camera. The man in the background is younger, with dark hair, wearing a light pink polo shirt, also smiling. The background is slightly blurred, showing office shelves and equipment.

Signature Insights

Workplace Happiness Index 2025

Purpose, job security and the happiness divide – what Kiwi workers want from their leaders in 2026



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 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 2025 via an online survey. Responses were gathered from more than 1,500 individuals currently in the employment market, aged 18 to 64, and living in 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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Foreword

Happy employees share one thing in common: they find meaning in their work. Last year's Workplace Happiness Index highlighted this connection, and our 2025 findings cement this further. Employees who find purpose in what they do are not only happier, they're also more motivated at work and less likely to leave their jobs. The benefits of investing in employee happiness and connecting them to purpose are undeniable.

This year's report also draws a connection between job satisfaction and engagement. Employees told us they feel happiest when work is interesting, their efforts are recognised, and they feel valued. In an era of advancing AI and other automation tools in the workplace, it's even more important for leaders to ensure employees feel heard and connected to purpose.

Our latest research uncovered that Gen Z in particular is struggling to find meaning in what they do. The least satisfied with purpose of any generation, they are more likely to feel burnt out, unproductive, or unseen compared to other generations. There's clearly an urgent need for leaders to rethink how they engage and support their youngest employees.

A dedicated section of this report explores what employers can do. This report aims to inspire and empower leaders to address happiness shortfalls in their organisations. By providing insights and tools, we hope to enable employers to build a more purposeful and fulfilling workplace for their people.



Rob Clark
Country Manager, New Zealand
SEEK



The state of workplace happiness in 2025

The Workplace Happiness Index asked New Zealanders how happy they are in their jobs and how satisfied they are with different aspects of working life. The results give us a broad view of workplace happiness and its key drivers, again linking happiness at work with purpose, motivation and loyalty.



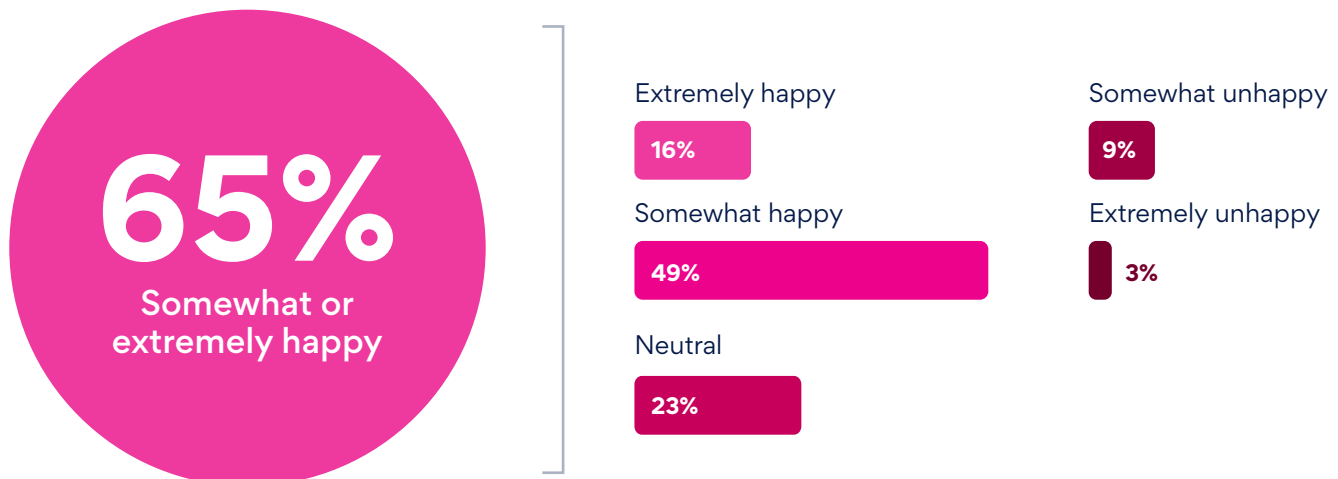
KEY FINDING 1:

Happiness in the New Zealand workplace is stable with 65% of workers happy

The 2025 survey began by asking Kiwis the question: How happy are you at work, generally? Nearly two-thirds of respondents at 65% answered somewhat or extremely happy – up from 62% last year – while at the other end of the scale, 12% reported being somewhat or extremely unhappy.

The results show that while workplace happiness in Aotearoa remains stable, a third of all workers actively dislike or feel neutral about their jobs. With unhappiness tied to low morale, low productivity and high absenteeism, leaders have compelling incentives to address worker happiness.

Overall workplace happiness



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Work is always going to be there, so make more time for yourself and wellbeing.

- Millennial,
Public sector worker

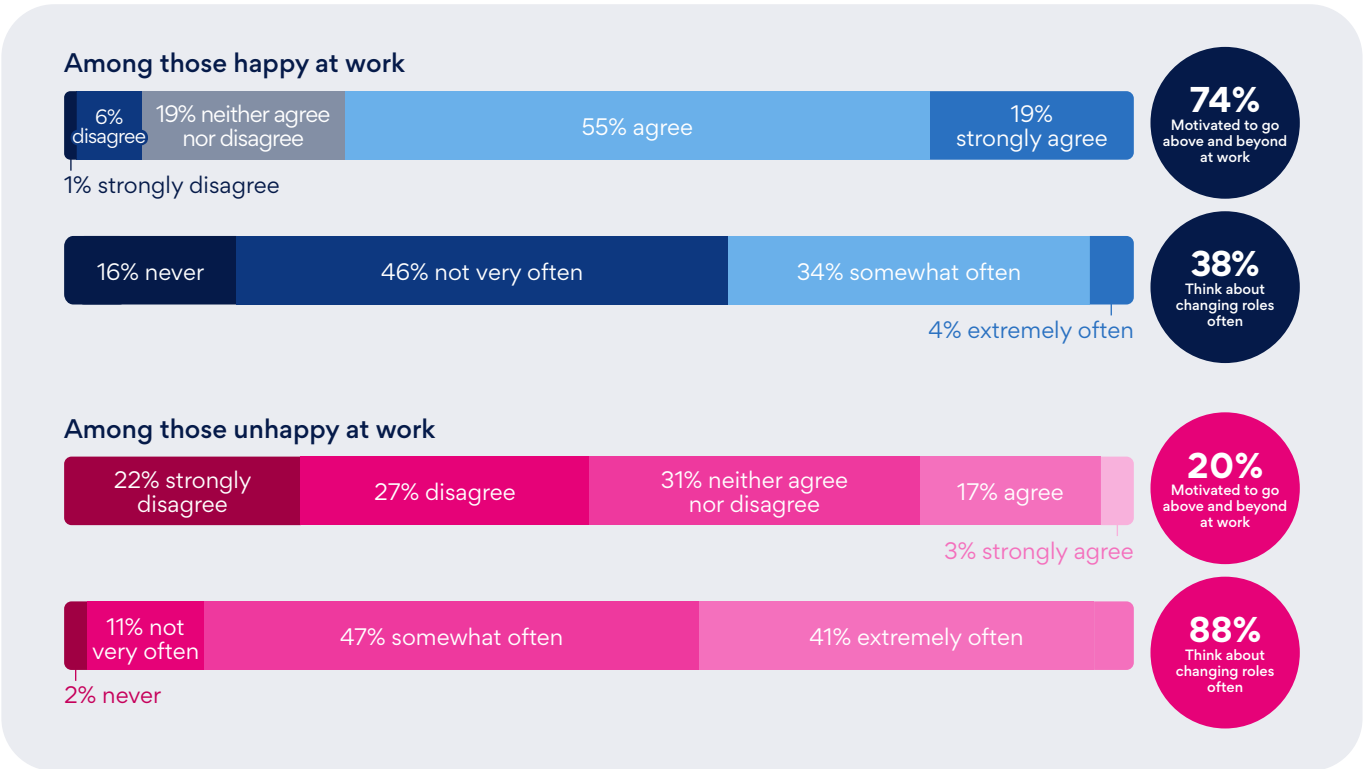
KEY FINDING 2:

Unhappy workers are twice as likely to consider changing jobs

This year, the percentage of unhappy New Zealand workers who thought about changing roles sometimes or often rose to 88% (from 84% in 2024). By comparison, only 38% of happy workers said they thought about changing roles. Motivation levels are also much higher in happy workers, with 74% saying they'd go above and beyond at work, compared to only 20% of unhappy workers.

With unhappy workers more than twice as likely as happy workers to consider switching jobs, there's an urgency for employers to address worker satisfaction if they want to retain staff. And even when unhappy workers stay in their jobs, it's still worth addressing their happiness, since it correlates so strongly with motivation.

Happiness is a key opportunity for employers to retain talent



KEY FINDING 3:

Purpose is (still) the biggest driver of workplace happiness

In 2025, Kiwis still rank purpose as the top driver of workplace happiness, relevant across all generations and most industries. This is followed by day-to-day role (second), manager (third), company culture (fourth) and senior leadership (fifth).

Salary is ranked as the 13th most important driver, a drop of nine places from 2024. This reflects attitudes revealed in SEEK’s Money Matters report,

where 68% of New Zealand workers said they'd choose work-life balance over a higher salary.

Employees are also less likely to say that increasing their salary would improve their happiness at work (58% ranked this in their top 3 vs. 68% in 2024). In fact, work-life balance, stress levels and workload demands all ranked above salary as happiness drivers.

Drivers of happiness at work



*Note: Random Forest Model used to determine drivers of happiness at work.





TAKEAWAYS

- Overall workplace happiness is stable at 65%.
- Unhappy workers are twice as likely as happy workers to think about switching jobs.
- Purpose is still the biggest driver of happiness at work, followed by day-to-day responsibilities and your manager.

“

**Love your work!
Choose a profession you
are passionate about.**

- Baby boomer,
Technology industry worker



Happiness trends

While overall happiness levels are stable, some of the drivers of workplace happiness in New Zealand have shifted, most significantly job security and leadership. This year, the research also asked workers what makes them feel happiest, revealing a workforce that is keen to be engaged – but wanting to be recognised for their efforts.



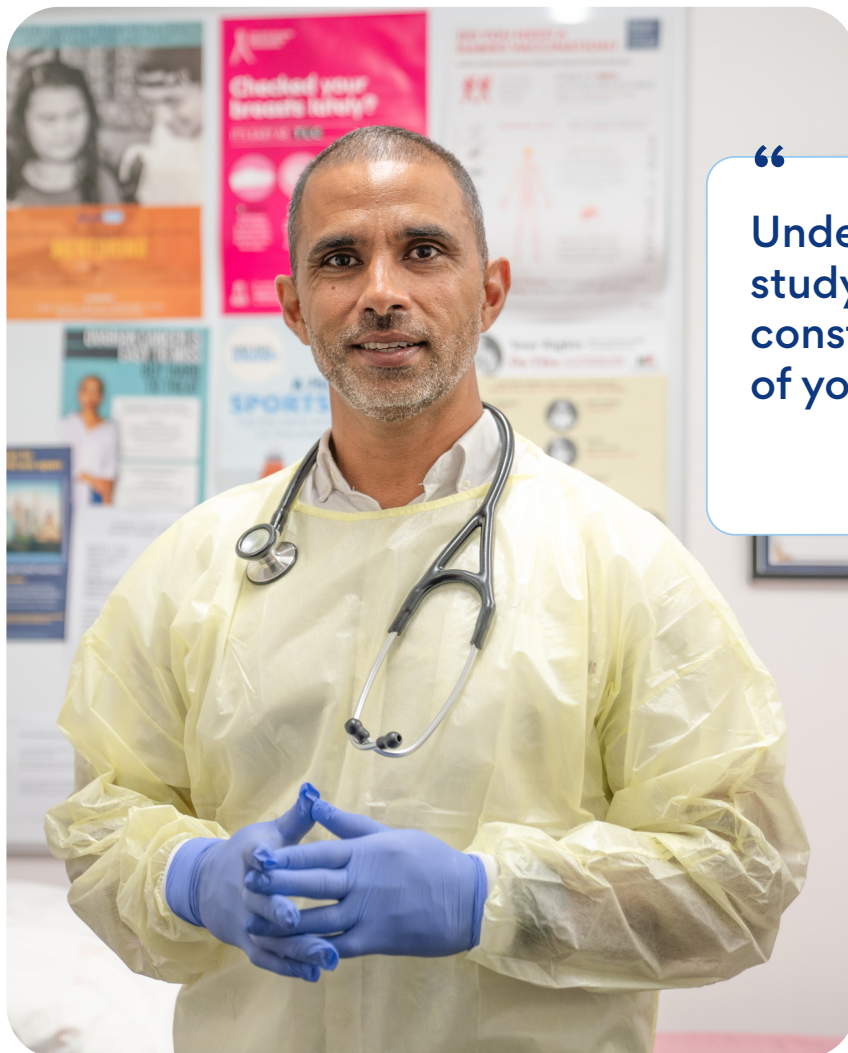
KEY FINDING 4:

Job security is increasingly important to happiness

Job security ranked higher this year as a happiness driver as New Zealanders are feeling more concerned about their job security this year: 54% are happy with job security in 2025 versus 61% in 2024. The reason for this may be found in the wider economic landscape.

High-profile corporate redundancies could be influencing how Kiwi workers think about their jobs. Other external factors like AI adoption and a challenging jobs market may be increasing feelings of uncertainty and placing more importance on job stability.

Happiness with job security has declined



“Understand your worth, study, find a niche, be kind, constructive and supportive of your colleagues.”

- Gen X,
Public sector worker

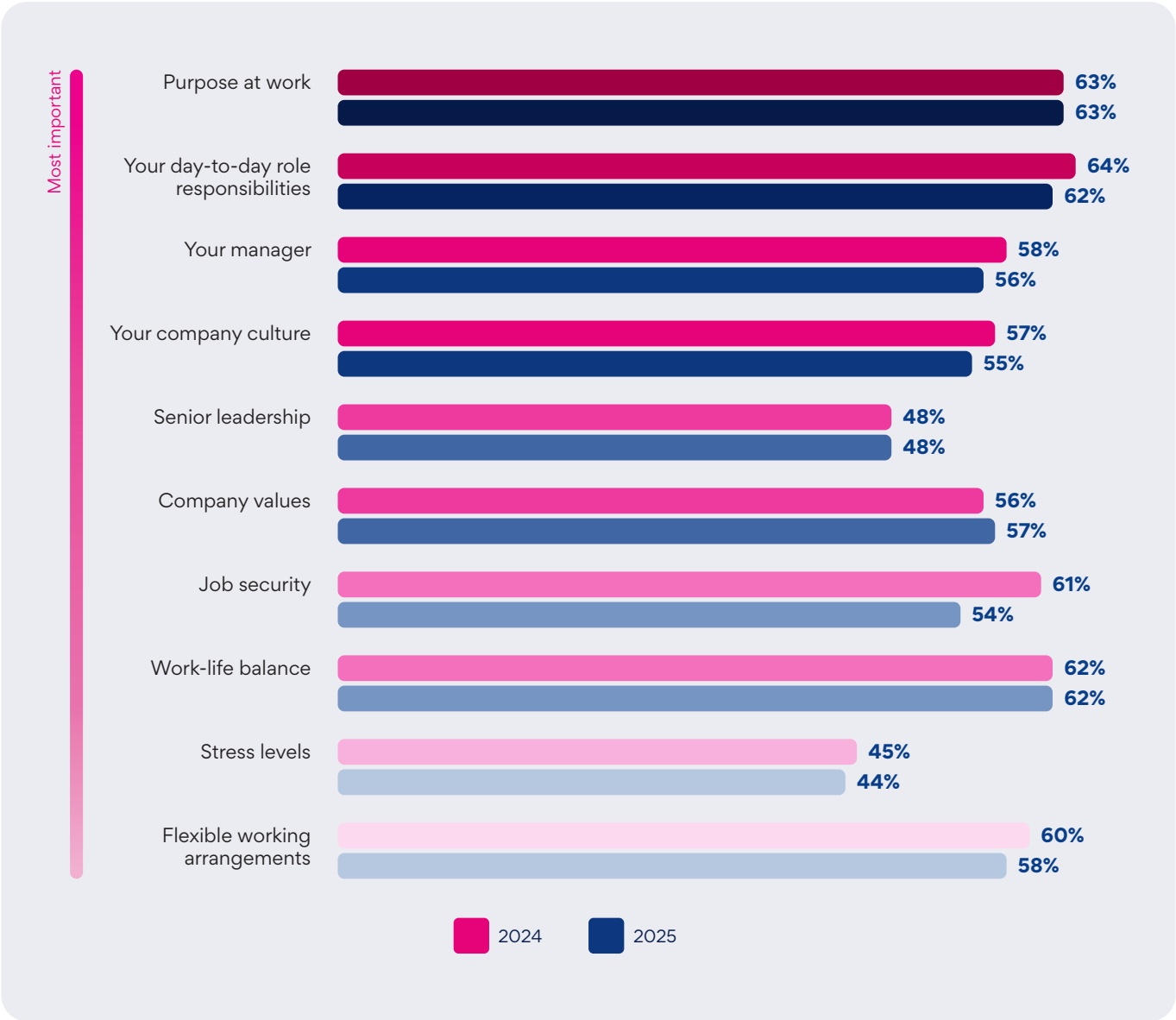
KEY FINDING 5:

Leadership has become more important to workplace happiness

"Your manager" is now the third most important driver of workplace happiness, up from ninth place in 2024. However, only 56% of workers report being happy with their manager. Similarly, senior leadership is also more influential this year, up one place to fifth most important driver.

It's likely that the rise in job security and in leadership are linked, with workers placing more focus on high-level decision-making as feelings of uncertainty in the economy and the jobs market rise. However, their satisfaction with their manager has trended slightly down from last year.

Happiness levels with each driver, and how it's changed since last year



KEY FINDING 6:

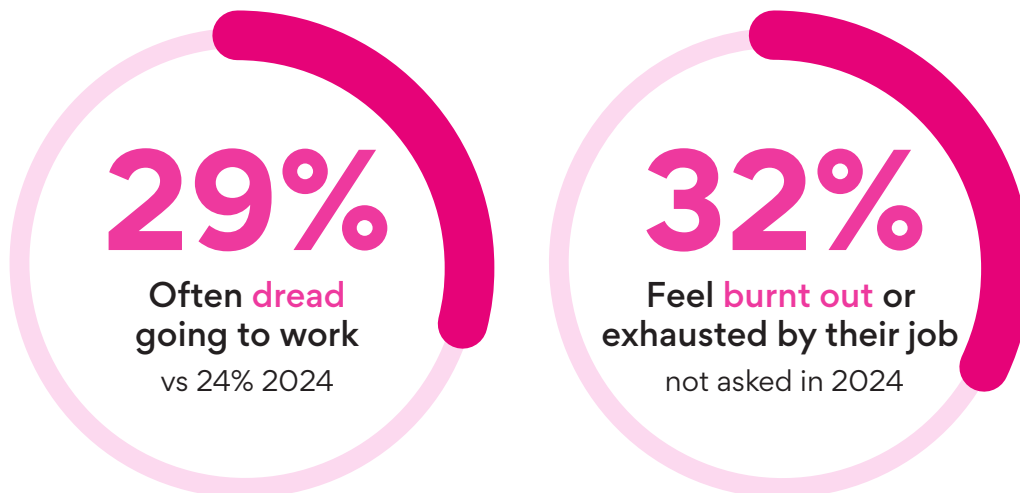
Nearly a third of Kiwi workers experience daily challenges in their jobs

To gain a deeper understanding of how New Zealanders feel about work, we asked them if they ever dread going to work or if work often exhausts them, and roughly one-third of all respondents answered yes.

Around 29% of people dread going to work and 32% feel burnt out, which signals an urgent need for workplace change. Burnout can be a symptom

of a high workload, poor work-life balance, lack of managerial support and/or toxic company culture – all aspects of work that fall within leadership's purview. Absenteeism can cost up to \$2,000 per employee and up to \$46.6 billion annually across New Zealand's economy, so it's in an organisation's best interests to protect their workers from burnout.

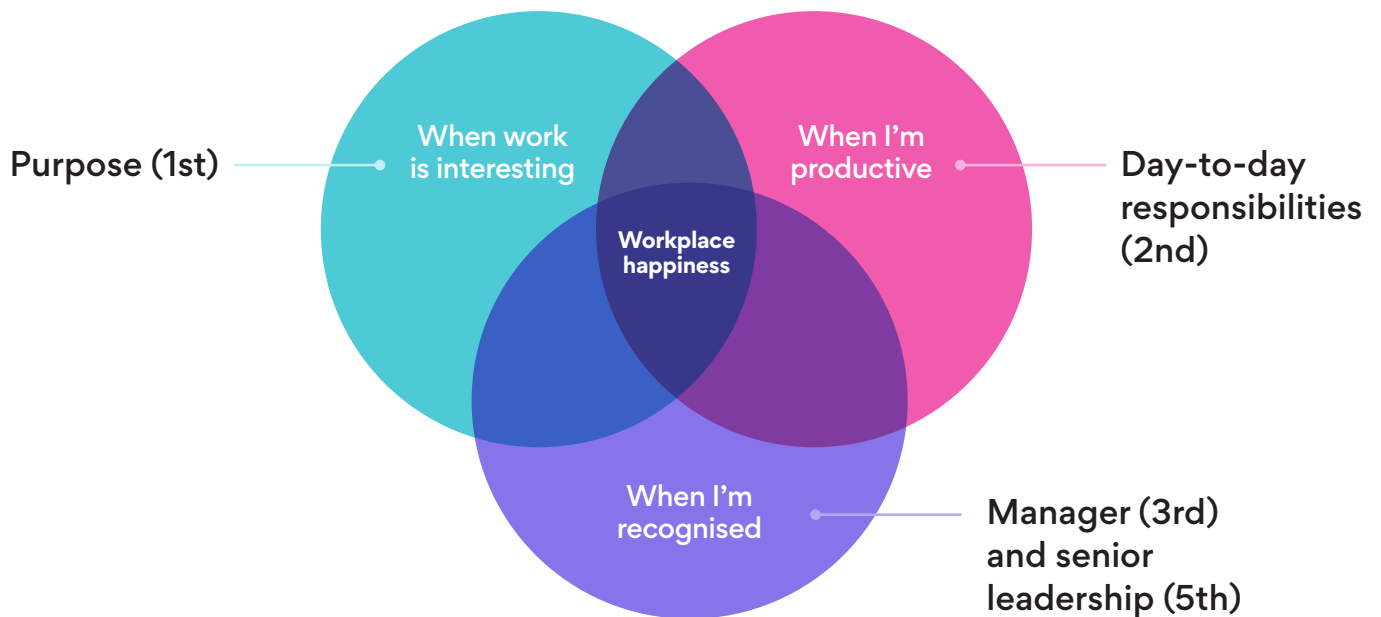
Workplace challenges



Conversely, Kiwis told us they're happiest at work when they are recognised for their efforts (35%), are being productive (34%) and find their work interesting (33%). These factors all reinforce the top three happiness drivers: purpose, day-to-day responsibilities and manager.



I'm happiest at work...



TAKEAWAYS

- Job security rose in importance as happiness driver, as satisfaction with job security fell.
- Leadership has become more integral to happiness at work.
- Nearly a third of New Zealanders experience daily challenges in their jobs, including burnout.



“

Make time to switch off from work.

- Baby boomer,
Public sector worker

The happiness gap

Workplace happiness is not evenly distributed across New Zealand. Continuing from last year, we see discrepancies in happiness between regions and generations. This year, those gaps grew wider. This section looks at the happiness gaps between groups as well as potential reasons, and solutions, for the differences.



KEY FINDING 7:

Wellbeing in the public sector grew more significantly than in any other industry this year

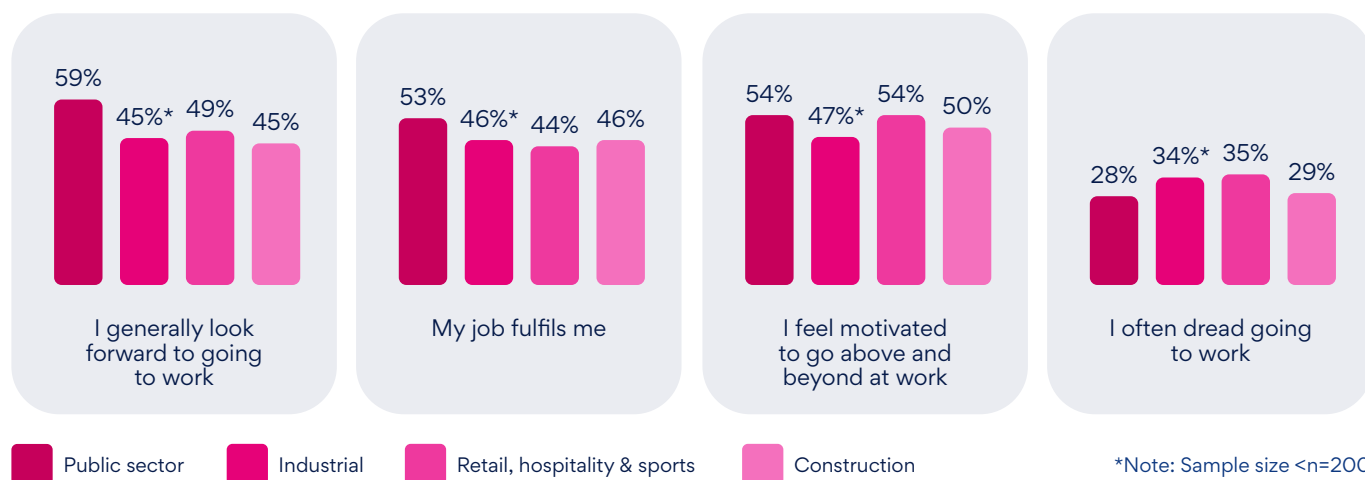
The public sector is trending up in terms of workplace happiness. While happiness was relatively consistent across New Zealand's major industries in 2025, happiness significantly improved amongst public sector employees: 5% were extremely happy in 2024 versus 15% in 2025.

A higher percentage of public sector employees also reported looking forward to going to work, feeling fulfilled by work and being motivated to go above and beyond.

Workplace happiness is similar across major industries



Public sector employees feel the most optimistic and fulfilled in their roles



It's worth noting that workplace happiness is driven by different factors across industries, affecting the types of actions employers should take. Leaders should take into consideration the specific elements of work influencing their employees.

The main drivers of happiness in each major sector

	Public sector	Industrial	Retail, hospitality, sports	Construction
#1	Day-to-day role responsibilities	Purpose at work	Workload demands	Company culture
#2	Your manager	Company values	Day-to-day role responsibilities	Flexible working arrangements

Industry groupings

Public sector	Technology	Industrial	Retail, hospitality and sports	Construction	Professional services	Admin, customer service and sales
Education & training	Information & communication technology	Manufacturing, transport & logistics	Retail & consumer products	Trades & services	Accounting	Administration & office support
Healthcare & medical	Science & technology	Farming, animals & conservation	Hospitality & tourism	Construction	Banking & financial services	Call centre & customer service
Government & defence		Resources & energy	Sport & recreation	Engineering	Consulting & strategy	Sales & business development
Community services & development				Design & architecture	Advertising, arts & media	Real estate & property
					Legal	
					Marketing & communication	
					Insurance & superannuation	
					Human resources & recruitment	

KEY FINDING 8:

Workers in Wellington are much happier than those in Auckland

A much larger proportion of workers in the Wellington area (75%) are happy at work, compared to those in the Auckland area (60%). Company culture and purpose are most important to happiness in Auckland, compared to day-to-day responsibilities and purpose in Wellington.

The gap in happiness between the two cities could be a result of public sector jobs being

concentrated in Wellington, which accounts for 30% of jobs within this sector. Auckland, meanwhile, skews slightly younger and towards industries with lower workplace happiness, however happiness there is lower across all age groups and sectors. Organisations in Auckland can focus on purpose and company culture to address shortfalls in employee satisfaction.



“

Life is about ups and downs and if you focus too much on the negative you will miss opportunities that can change your life.

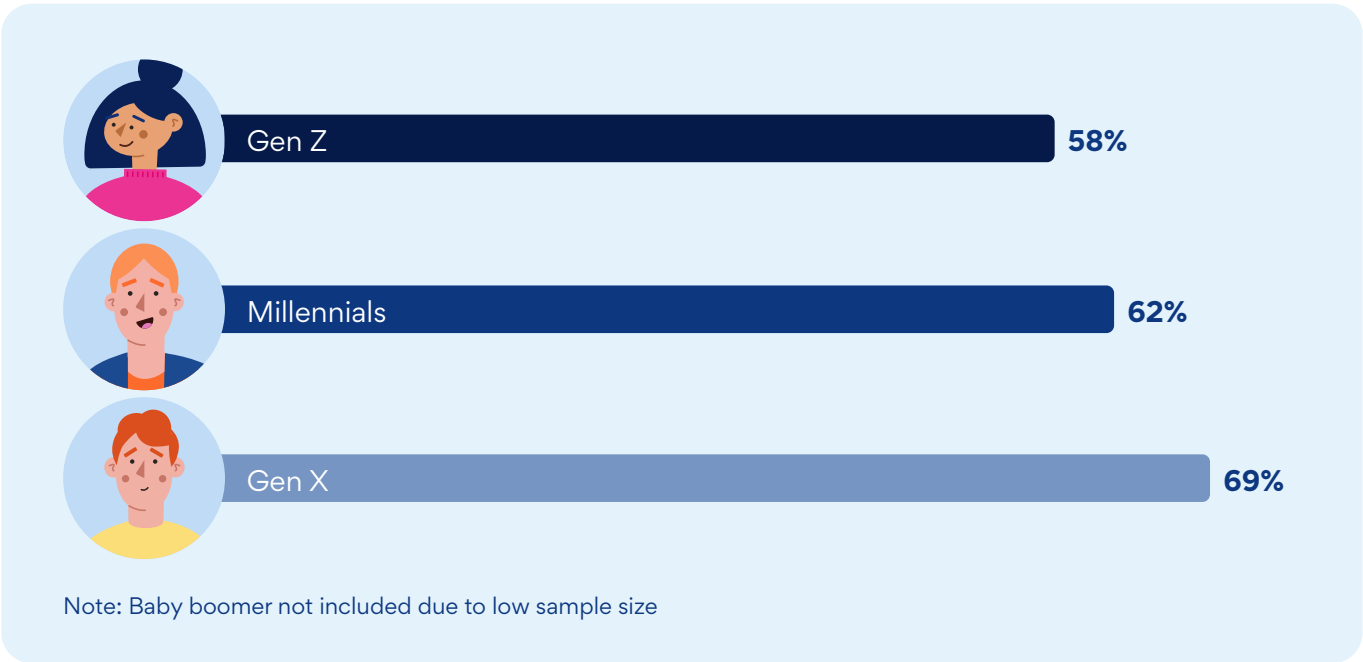
- Gen X,
Retail, hospitality and
sports industry worker

KEY FINDING 9:

Gen X are the happiest workers;
Gen Z the least happy

This year, 69% of Gen Xers reported feeling happy at work, followed by millennials at 62% and Gen Zers at 58%. Purpose proved fundamental to all generations’ workplace happiness, however specific drivers and factors changed between the groups.

Overall workplace happiness by generations



Gen Z happiness is most impacted by their manager, while most millennials value company culture and Gen X ranks day-to-day responsibilities and interesting work as essential. What’s important to employees varies by age, industry and location, so employers must adopt a nuanced approach to address the happiness of their staff.

Happiness drivers differ between the generations

	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X
#1	Your manager	Purpose at work	Day-to-day responsibilities
#2	Workload demands + purpose at work	Company culture	Purpose at work



TAKEAWAYS

- Kiwis working in the public sector are the happiest.
- Workplace happiness is highest in Wellington.
- Gen X is the happiest generation of workers in New Zealand.



“
**Know exactly what
you want and stick to
finding the best role
and fit.**

- Gen X,
Admin, customer service,
sales industry worker

Modelling happiness

Justine Alter, registered organisational psychologist and co-founder of Transitioning Well, shares insights for leaders looking to improve employee happiness.

Role modelling is important

At Transitioning Well we often say 'you can't be what you can't see' – role modelling things like work-life balance and flexibility are vital for a company's positive culture and, in turn, an individual's happiness at work.

Ask, don't assume

Don't assume you know what your employees need to manage their stress or to feel purpose at work. Ask them. And remember that each individual is going to be different. It's important to spend time with your team to understand their drivers, and then support them with that.

Foster culture

So often we hear people talk about the 'manager lottery'. What we don't want is a system where people have to rely on the luck of the draw to get the support they need. What we want is culture that filters throughout every level of an organisation.

Create a safe space

One of the most important things employers can do is create a psychologically safe environment, where all workers – regardless of career stage – feel safe and supported. This will translate to people being willing to ask for help, admit to mistakes, and be open to vulnerabilities.



Brain drain and Australian migration

In 2024, more than 47,300 New Zealanders moved to Australia, many to join the 12.9% share of Australia's migrant labour force held by Kiwis. Of all New Zealanders migrating, 39% were between 18 and 30, creating a "brain drain" as skilled and educated people leave the workforce.

There are many reasons why New Zealanders might move to Australia to work: higher salaries, more career opportunities, a lower unemployment rate, and the rising costs of living in New Zealand.

Using data from the Workplace Happiness Index survey, we can compare drivers and levels of satisfaction between the two countries. What we find is that, while overall workers are happier in New Zealand, when we look at happiness drivers for younger people, Australia-based workers report higher satisfaction. This is particularly true for job security according to our data.

Overall, New Zealanders are happier at work than Australians: NZ 64% versus AUS 56%

This is also true for Gen Z, the least happy generation: NZ 58% versus AU 56%

However, Gen Z's happiness with career progression opportunities is much higher in AU: NZ 32% versus AU 45%

And young Kiwis are also much less happy with their job security: NZ 46% versus 59% AUS

Job security also plays a larger role in Gen Z's workplace happiness in NZ: ranked #8 in NZ and #13 in AUS

Nurturing Aotearoa's future workforce

In 2025, Gen Z makes up 33% of the global workforce, a number that will only rise as baby boomers retire. And with Kiwis, many of whom are between 18 and 30, headed overseas for work opportunities, it's more important than ever to create more attractive, happier workplaces here in New Zealand.

So, while the youngest cohort of Kiwi workers reported more happiness this year, there is still room for improvement. Addressing Gen Z happiness is important not only for productivity today, but also for a happy and healthy future workforce.

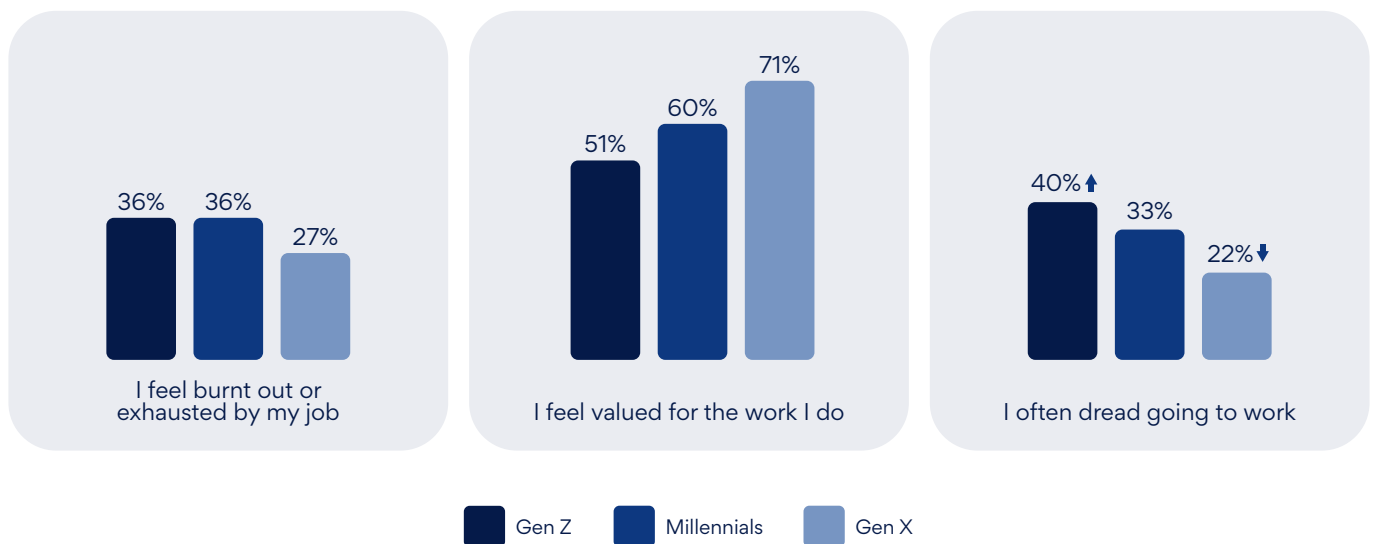


KEY FINDING 10:

Gen Z workplace happiness has improved, but they are still the least happy at work

Though happiness is trending up for Gen Z, they're still not as happy as their older colleagues. For them, the main happiness driver is their manager, though only 52% of Gen Zers said they were happy with that aspect. Job satisfaction for Gen Z seems to be closely tied to their immediate supervisor, which makes sense considering their second most important driver is workload – where only 49% were happy with that aspect.

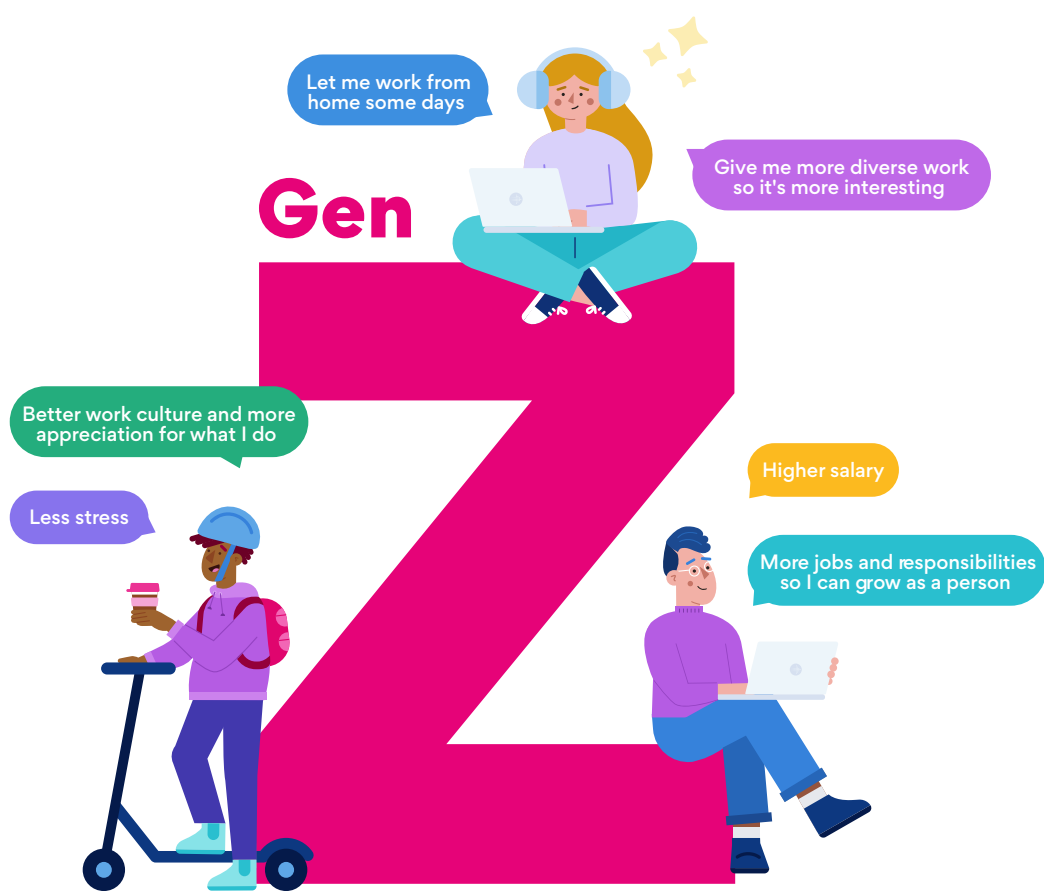
Happiness statements by generation



There's an opportunity for employers to better engage younger employees by investing carefully in managers, ensuring they have the right skills and training in place to support people at the start of their career. See the next section for specific action points for nurturing Gen Z.



What Gen Z wants



Nurturing Gen Z at work

Gen Z represents the future of New Zealand's workforce, but in 2025 they're feeling overworked and undervalued – and some are even migrating for better work opportunities. To ensure the best start to working life for Gen Zs and set them up for ongoing success and a fulfilling working life, employers can improve their happiness levels by addressing preferences and concerns specific to them.

Recommendations for Gen Z workplace happiness

Gen Z is happiest when...	Employers can
I'm recognised for my efforts (41%)	- Acknowledge the work of entry-level employees even if it is not always business critical - Provide regular encouragement
I'm being productive (35%)	- Ensure young workers have enough daily duties to keep them engaged - Enlist Gen Z to help other teams or train older colleagues
I feel listened to/valued (29%)	- Set regular 1:1s - Ask Gen Z for input in team decision-making - Appoint a Gen Z representative to be the voice of younger workers at an organisational level
Work is interesting (29%)	- Provide mentally stimulating work - Offer training and shadowing opportunities - Ask Gen Z what they find interesting and go from there



Three ways older generations can support Gen Z

Mentorships or buddy systems. These can bridge the generational divide, increase sense of purpose for older workers and give Gen Z the support and guidance they need to learn their jobs and manage their workloads.

Interesting work and complementary teamwork. Gen X and Gen Z both feel happy doing interesting work, providing an

opportunity for older and younger workers to bond over new projects or training.

Gen Z sessions and spaces. Gen Z workers want to be heard and recognised – team leaders can support this by providing regular opportunities for Gen Z to share ideas with older workers.

Advice to Gen Z from other generations



Fostering a happier workforce

Workplace happiness is linked to many positive outcomes – for workers and for employers. Based on the findings of SEEK's Workplace Happiness Index 2025, the top drivers of workplace happiness this year all fall within an employer's control. This presents an opportunity for leaders to implement changes that increase worker satisfaction and help set their organisations up for long-term success.

Following are practical recommendations addressing the top three drivers of overall workplace happiness.

1. Purpose

Purpose is the top driver of workplace happiness overall – for the second year in the row. However, not all workers feel equally connected to their job's purpose.

Here are some recommendations that can promote a stronger sense of purpose for workers.

- **Define your organisation's mission.** For employees to feel their work is meaningful, leaders first must define a clear organisational mission. Team objectives should then be connected to individual roles and responsibilities.
- **Recognise employees' contributions.** Respondents – particularly younger workers – said they feel happiest when their efforts are recognised and they are being productive. Regular 1:1s with managers, internal recognition programs and achievement awards can all help boost recognition. Companies can also implement performance-related bonuses and incentives.
- **Focus on younger workers.** Gen X workers are more likely to be connected to purpose than millennial and Gen Z workers. Leaders can provide more support for younger employees and consider a mentorship program that pairs them with a senior colleague to provide guidance and help them find meaning in their work.



2. Day-to-day responsibilities

Daily duties again is the second most important happiness driver overall – and is especially important for Gen X workers. This aspect of work is closely linked to workload demands, which is ranked number 2 for Gen Z. Also closely related are “interesting work” and “being productive”, two elements that respondents said made them feel happiest at work.

Here’s how leaders can boost employee satisfaction with day-to-day responsibilities.

- **Match the role to the skill set.** Jobs should match an individual’s skill set and interests. Leaders can provide training to upskill less experienced workers and keep senior employees challenged and engaged. Team members should have formal opportunities to provide feedback on their duties.
- **Be aware of generational differences.** Millennials generally prefer autonomy and recognition, while Gen Z are happiest when their work is recognised. Leaders should look at the generational makeup of their teams and provide more day-to-day support to those who need it while allowing more senior employees to work independently.
- **Promote work-life balance.** This year, stress seems to be limiting workplace happiness, particularly for millennials and Gen X. These generations are both likely to have busy home lives, possibly caring for children and/or aging parents. To ensure good work-life balance, leaders should ensure team members have everything they need to do their jobs efficiently, that workloads are manageable, that employees are taking breaks and sufficient leave, and that reasonable flexibility is offered.

3. Managers

This year, “your manager” rose to third place for happiness drivers (up from ninth) yet only 56% of respondents are happy with their organisation’s leaders. This heightened awareness of, and dissatisfaction with, leadership may be due to high-profile corporate redundancies and related job insecurity, rising costs of living, the widening wealth gap, and even global current affairs. Job security as a driver rose this year, up three places from 2024, reinforcing a link between a sense of stability and workplace happiness.

To improve trust in managers and leadership as a whole, organisations can:

- **Prioritise transparency.** Regular organisational updates through town halls or company-wide meetings can share the performance of the company, milestones and achievements, and any planned organisational changes. Informed employees are more likely to feel reassured and secure in their jobs.
- **Lead with integrity.** All leaders and managers should model the organisation’s values and promote a supportive workplace culture (the fourth most important happiness driver overall).
- **Build a relationship with employees.** Regular check-ins with teams, team-building activities, 1:1s, team CSR initiatives and holiday events can all help build trust in leaders and improve overall morale and connection to company values.

Happiness checklist for leaders

- ☐ I regularly check in with my employees.
- ☐ I formally recognise individual effort in my teams.
- ☐ I allow employees to do work that is meaningful to them.
- ☐ My employees are encouraged to provide feedback.
- ☐ My organisation's purpose is well defined and articulated.
- ☐ Senior leadership models my organisation's values.
- ☐ My organisation supports and mentors younger workers.
- ☐ My organisation offers reasonable flexibility to employees.



What employees want



This study is part of SEEK's Voice of the Customer program. Through our research work we listen and empathise, we synthesise and share, and we influence and act.

By distilling our candidate and hirer insights we can tell a story about what's most important to our customers, empowering us to make 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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