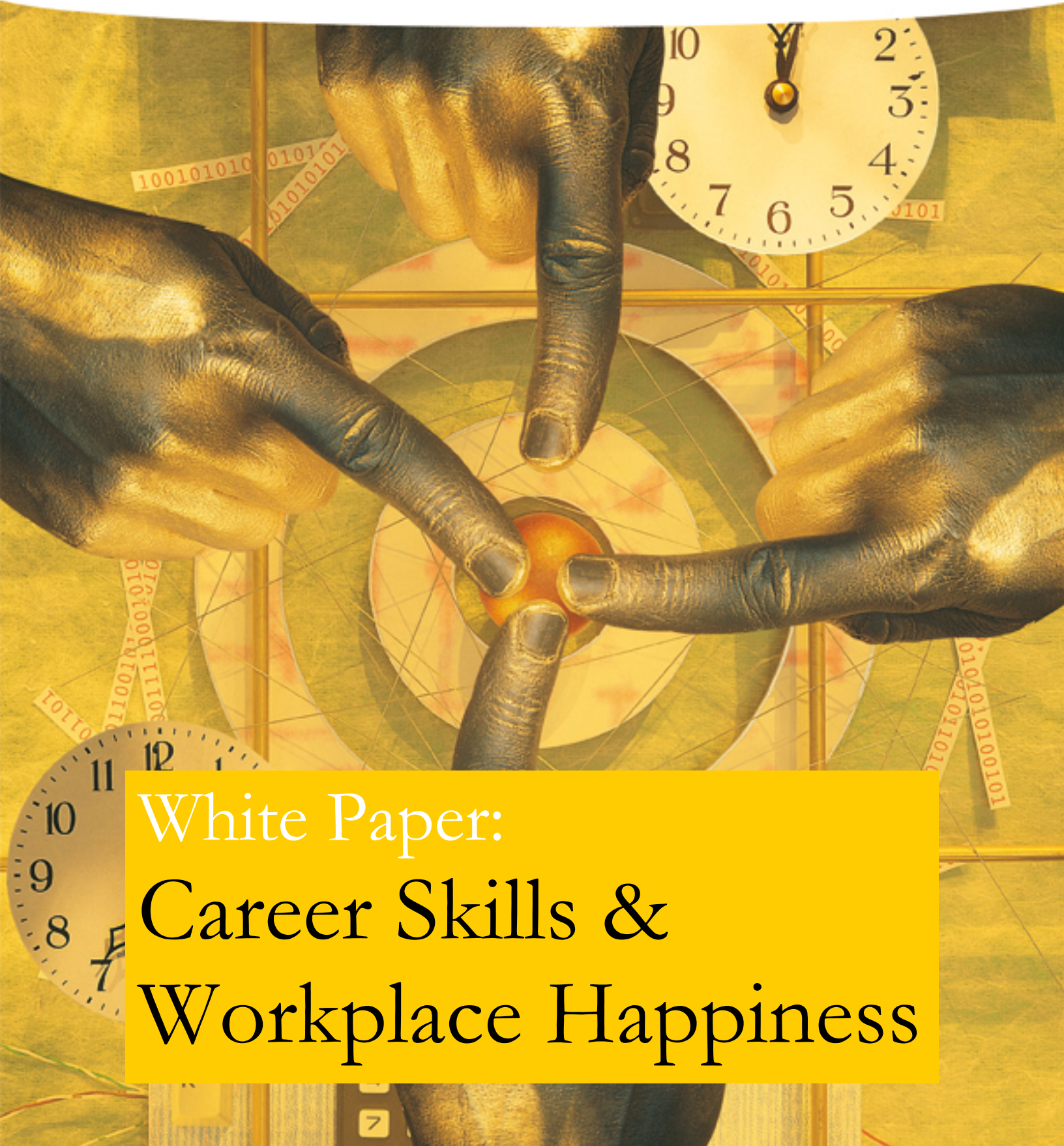




MIND TOOLS
Essential skills for an excellent career



White Paper:
**Career Skills &
Workplace Happiness**

White Paper:

Career Skills & Workplace Happiness

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Abstract/Summary:

Career Skills & Workplace Happiness

- This white paper describes an international survey of 10,310 people in 131 countries (including 3423 in the US, 1290 in the UK, and 1082 in India), looking at the relationship between people's skills levels and a number of factors, including workplace happiness.
- Happiness is important because it strongly affects employee performance, and because it affects organizations' ability to retain staff. This is vital, given a projected 19% decline in the number of people between 35 and 44 in the US and UK workforces within the next 5 years.
- The survey studied the association between people's assessments of their own skills in 10 major career skills areas, and their happiness at work.
- Respondents were in a wide range of organizational positions, were equally balanced in gender, and were mainly in the 30-59 age range. This reflects a broad sample of experienced business people.
- Key survey findings are that:
 - 66.3% of people who were happy in their job were confident in their stress management skills. Only 42.4% of people who were not happy are similarly confident. This is a difference of 23.9%.
 - There was an average confidence difference of 11.6% between people who are happy at work and those who are unhappy, across nine other skills areas (time management, team management, leadership, communication, team-working, decision-making, problem-solving, project management and change management).
- What this means is that **people with good stress management skills are very much more likely to be happy at work.**
- It also means that **people with good career skills are much more likely to be happy at work than those with weaker skills.**
- Managers should strongly consider training their staff in stress management and other career skills if they want to improve workplace happiness.
- Free skill-building resources in these areas are available at MindTools.com.

White Paper: Career Skills & Workplace Happiness

Introduction

Why Workplace Happiness?

Workplace happiness really matters.

On a human level, we all want to be happy in our work. And many of us want those around us to be happy as well.

However workplace happiness isn't just a feel-good thing – it really matters in hard, financial terms.

On a simple level, workplace happiness is a key factor in motivation, and therefore in productivity. It's hard to get much dynamism and enthusiasm from someone who's unhappy. By contrast, well-led, happy people are often exceptionally productive performers. This alone is a key reason to do all you can to keep your people happy.

However, workplace happiness is even more important in retaining key people within an organization. Clearly, there are direct costs of losing good people, such as the cost of recruitment advertising, and the payment of fees to recruitment agents. However, there can be even more significant costs arising from the lost opportunities, lost productivity and lost competitiveness that come with not having the right people in place when they're needed.

Forthcoming demographic shifts will exacerbate this, as the U.S. baby boom generation starts to retire. According to Forbes magazine, the number of people in the U.S. in the 35 - 44 year old age bracket will diminish by 19% within the next 5 years. This is likely to be true elsewhere:

“The number of workers aged 35 to 44 is expected to decline by 27% in Germany, 19% in the U.K. and 9% in Italy. In Japan, that age group is expected to shrink by 10%, and by 8% in China.”

*Scott Reves, “An Aging Workforce’s Effect on U.S. Employers”,
Forbes Magazine, 29 September 2005.*

If retaining good employees is tough already, it's going to get much tougher in the future. Ensuring that workers are happy in the workplace has become ever more important!

So Why Are Skills Important?

This survey explores the relationship between people's career skills and their happiness.

After all, we can conjecture that if people are skilled at performing well, managing problems at work and “getting on” with other people, you might expect them to be happier than less skilled people.

This survey and white paper test this conjecture, and explore whether some skills are more important than others in helping people to be happy at work.

Method

The survey was conducted in April 2008, collecting 10,310 responses from 175,000 subscribers to the Mind Tools email-based newsletter. Responses were collected using the SurveyMonkey online survey tool. The survey is therefore drawn from people motivated enough to visit Mind Tools, and engage with its career improvement message. Given that Mind Tools is published in English, the respondents all speak English as a first or second language.

Among other questions, the survey asked participants to rate their confidence in their own skills, across different skills areas. It then asked them to rate themselves across a number of success and happiness dimensions.

Demographics

The survey started by collecting information on the demographic characteristics of survey respondents. This allows a view to be taken on how representative respondents are of the overall population of people in the workplace, as well as on their levels of experience.

Self-Assessment of Skill Levels

Next, in the first of the skill-related question sets, participants were asked to rate their agreement with the statement “I am confident that I am effective in the following skills areas”, on a scale running “Strongly Disagree”, “Disagree”, “Neither Agree nor Disagree”, “Agree”, and “Strongly Agree”.

This was applied to each of the skills areas below:

- Time Management.
- Stress Management.
- Team Management Skills.
- Leadership Skills.
- Communication Skills.
- Interpersonal/Team-Working Skills.
- Decision-Making.
- Problem-Solving.
- Project Management.
- Change Management.

These skill groups were identified as a result of organizing more than 350 individual career skills into related affinity groups.

Assessment of Satisfaction Measures

Using the same scale, participants were asked to rate themselves on a number of satisfaction measures including “I am happy in my job”, “I feel good about my employer”, “I feel highly motivated in my work”, “I feel well-managed”, “My career is going well” and “My performance is rated highly by my boss and/or peers”.

This analysis looks at the measure “I am happy in my job”. It contrasts the skill levels of people who selected “Strongly Disagree” and “Disagree”, and compares these with the skill levels of people who selected “Agree” or “Strongly Agree”. In short, it compares the skills of people who are not happy at work with people who are happy.

Results

Characteristics of the Survey Sample

The first set of results looks at the demographics of the people who answered the survey.

The survey collected results from 10,310 people from 139 countries, including:

- United States of America – 3,423
- United Kingdom – 1,290
- India – 1,082
- Australia – 606 people
- Canada – 478

Respondents came from all organizational levels, including 42.1% in managerial and executive positions:

Figure 1: Respondents' Organizational Positions


3. What is your position within your organization? (Please choose the closest description.)			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Not Employed		2.0%	203
Retired		0.1%	13
Employee		23.8%	2433
Professional		23.9%	2445
Self-Employed		8.2%	840
Manager		30.1%	3084
Executive		8.4%	858
Chief Executive		3.6%	366
		<i>answered question</i>	10241
		<i>skipped question</i>	69

Figure 2: Respondents' Age Profile

The majority of respondents were in the 30 – 59 age range, meaning that these results reflect the views of businesspeople with strong experience of the workplace.

6. What age range are you in?			Response Percent	Response Count
Under 20			0.8%	84
20-29			15.4%	1573
30-39			26.8%	2745
40-49			29.4%	3011
50-59			21.8%	2233
60-69			5.2%	530
70+			0.6%	62
			answered question	10237
			skipped question	73

Figure 3: Respondents' Gender

The sex of survey respondents was equally balanced.

7. What is your gender?			Response Percent	Response Count
Male			48.4%	4961
Female			50.5%	5175
Prefer not to disclose			1.1%	112
			answered question	10247
			skipped question	63

Skills Level Analysis

Figure 4 below shows the skills differences between people who report being happy at work and being unhappy at work.

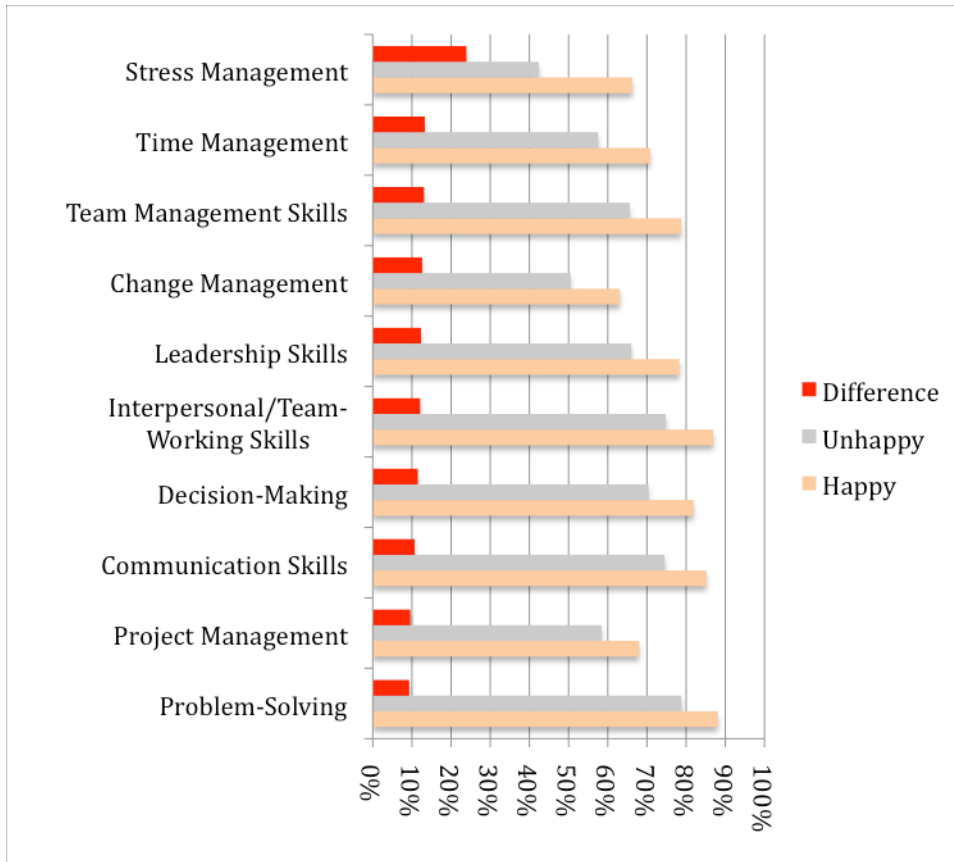
- Column 1 of the table shows the different skills areas.
- Column 2 shows the percentage of people who were **happy** in their job, who reported that they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “I am confident that I am effective in the following skills areas”.
- Column 3 shows the percentage of people who were **not happy** in their job, who reported that they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “I am confident that I am effective in the following skills areas”.
- Column 4 shows the difference in confidence between people who were happy, and people who weren’t happy.
- Figures exclude 1527 people who answered “Neither Agree Nor Disagree” to the question, and 1728 who started the survey, but abandoned it prior to answering the “I am Happy In My Job” question.

Figure 4: Skills Differences

	I am Happy In My Job		Difference
	Agree or Strongly Agree	Disagree or Strongly Disagree	
Number of People	5878	1177	
Skills Area:			
Stress Management	66.3%	42.4%	23.9%
Time Management	70.8%	57.5%	13.3%
Team Management Skills	78.7%	65.6%	13.1%
Change Management	63.1%	50.5%	12.6%
Leadership Skills	78.3%	66.0%	12.3%
Interpersonal/Team-Working Skills	86.9%	74.8%	12.1%
Decision-Making	81.9%	70.4%	11.5%
Communication Skills	85.2%	74.5%	10.7%
Project Management	68.0%	58.4%	9.6%
Problem-Solving	88.1%	78.8%	9.3%

These differences are shown visually in figure 5, on the next page.

Figure 5: Skills Differences Between Different Skills Areas



The horizontal axis shows people's confidence that they're effective in a skills area.

This shows that people who are happy at work are very much more confident (a 23.9% difference) in the effectiveness of their **stress management skills**, compared with people who are not happy at work.

It also shows an average of an 11.6% difference in nine other career skills, comparing people who are happy at work, and those who are not happy.

These results are stable when compared across different countries and cultures around the English-speaking world. See Appendix B for an analysis comparing the five largest English-speaking countries.

Conclusions

The survey was conducted among a particularly large sample of experienced business people worldwide. This means that there can be a high level of confidence in the survey results.

People who are confident in their stress management skills are very much more likely to be happy than those who are less confident in these skills.

Given that stress reflects people's feelings of being out of control in the workplace, it makes sense that people who are able to win back control – those with good stress management skills – are happier at work.

People who are confident in their general career skills are also happier. Again this makes sense, in that people who are able to work effectively, and harmoniously with others, are much more likely to be happy, compared with those who don't have such strong career skills.

While the survey does not *prove a causal link* between training in these skills and workplace happiness, this survey demonstrates a very strong *association* between happiness, and high levels of confidence in stress management and career skills. There is a strong likelihood that by improving these skills, people will be happier in the workplace.

What this means is that if managers want to improve happiness, motivation and staff retention in the workplace, they should strongly consider improving employee skills levels in stress management in particular, and in other career skills in general.

Useful Links

The MindTools.com site has hundreds of free skill-building resources that help people build their skills in these areas.

For in-depth **stress management** training, visit: <http://www.mindtools.com/smpage.html>.

Managers can develop team members' career skills and more in Mind Tools' Career Excellence Club. For more information on this for corporate use, visit <http://www.mindtools.com/rs/CXCCorp>. And to find out more for your own use, visit <http://www.mindtools.com/rs/CXC>.

Appendix A – Survey Data

Unhappy People

Question: I Am Happy In My Job

Answer: Disagree or Strongly Disagree

This table shows self-ranked skill levels for the 1177 people who Disagreed or Strongly Disagreed with the statement “I am happy in my job”. These results are summarized in figure 4 of this report.

1. I am confident that I am effective in the following skills areas:						
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Response Count
Time Management	5.3% (62)	20.5% (240)	16.7% (196)	42.3% (496)	15.2% (178)	1172
Stress Management	6.5% (76)	29.4% (344)	21.8% (255)	34.7% (407)	7.7% (90)	1172
Team Management Skills	2.9% (34)	12.7% (148)	18.9% (220)	49.8% (581)	15.8% (184)	1167
Leadership Skills	3.0% (35)	11.7% (137)	19.2% (224)	50.3% (587)	15.7% (183)	1166
Communication Skills	2.4% (28)	8.7% (102)	14.4% (168)	49.8% (582)	24.7% (289)	1169
Interpersonal/Team-Working Skills	2.0% (24)	7.5% (88)	15.7% (184)	51.4% (603)	23.4% (274)	1173
Decision-Making	2.7% (32)	9.8% (114)	17.1% (200)	51.5% (602)	18.9% (221)	1169
Problem-Solving	1.7% (20)	6.5% (76)	13.0% (152)	51.4% (602)	27.4% (321)	1171
Project Management	3.5% (41)	13.7% (160)	24.4% (284)	43.8% (511)	14.6% (170)	1166
Change Management	3.6% (42)	15.4% (179)	30.5% (354)	39.8% (463)	10.7% (124)	1162
<i>answered question</i>						1177
<i>skipped question</i>						4

Neutral People

Question: I Am Happy In My Job

Answer: Neither Agree nor Disagree

This table shows self-ranked skill levels for the 1527 survey respondents who Neither Agreed nor Disagreed with the statement “I am happy in my job”. These results not included in figure 4, but are shown here for completeness.

1. I am confident that I am effective in the following skills areas:						
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Response Count
Time Management	2.2% (34)	16.8% (256)	21.7% (330)	46.2% (702)	13.1% (199)	1521
Stress Management	3.1% (47)	20.3% (309)	28.6% (434)	40.3% (612)	7.8% (118)	1520
Team Management Skills	1.3% (19)	7.0% (106)	21.6% (326)	55.7% (841)	14.4% (217)	1509
Leadership Skills	1.1% (17)	7.7% (117)	24.1% (366)	52.5% (799)	14.6% (222)	1521
Communication Skills	0.8% (12)	5.6% (85)	16.4% (249)	53.6% (815)	23.6% (359)	1520
Interpersonal/Team-Working Skills	0.7% (11)	3.9% (60)	14.5% (220)	59.5% (904)	21.3% (324)	1519
Decision-Making	1.1% (16)	6.0% (91)	20.4% (309)	56.0% (849)	16.6% (251)	1516
Problem-Solving	0.6% (9)	3.8% (57)	14.2% (216)	55.6% (845)	25.8% (392)	1519
Project Management	1.5% (23)	10.0% (152)	28.4% (431)	46.2% (702)	13.8% (210)	1518
Change Management	1.3% (20)	11.7% (176)	34.2% (517)	42.2% (637)	10.6% (160)	1510
					<i>answered question</i>	1527
					<i>skipped question</i>	2

Happy People

Question: I Am Happy In My Job

Answer: Agree or Strongly Agree

This table shows self-ranked skill levels for the 5878 survey respondents who Agreed or Strongly Agreed with the statement “I am happy in my job”. These results are summarized in figure 4, and are contrasted with results for people who Disagreed or Strongly Disagreed.

1. I am confident that I am effective in the following skills areas:						
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Response Count
Time Management	1.9% (110)	13.9% (814)	13.4% (788)	51.8% (3036)	19.0% (1114)	5862
Stress Management	1.6% (91)	12.8% (747)	19.4% (1136)	52.7% (3084)	13.6% (795)	5853
Team Management Skills	0.6% (34)	5.7% (333)	15.1% (883)	56.5% (3304)	22.2% (1297)	5851
Leadership Skills	0.9% (51)	6.1% (355)	14.8% (867)	54.8% (3207)	23.5% (1374)	5854
Communication Skills	0.7% (43)	3.6% (210)	10.5% (613)	52.7% (3085)	32.5% (1902)	5853
Interpersonal/Team-Working Skills	0.5% (27)	3.3% (193)	9.4% (551)	55.0% (3219)	31.9% (1865)	5855
Decision-Making	0.5% (28)	4.4% (258)	13.3% (779)	57.3% (3354)	24.6% (1438)	5857
Problem-Solving	0.3% (18)	2.6% (151)	9.0% (525)	55.6% (3252)	32.5% (1901)	5847
Project Management	1.1% (65)	8.9% (519)	22.0% (1289)	49.1% (2871)	18.9% (1102)	5846
Change Management	1.3% (73)	9.0% (523)	26.6% (1552)	46.5% (2716)	16.6% (971)	5835
					<i>answered question</i>	5878
					<i>skipped question</i>	5

Appendix B – Stability of Results by Country/Culture

This table shows the stability of these results across the five largest countries surveyed.

Of particular interest are the results for India, where time management is almost as important in workplace happiness as stress management. There is also a broader difference in confidence in skills between people happy and unhappy at work than in other countries.

Skills Area	Australia	Canada	India	UK	US	General
Stress Management	33.1%	27.5%	29.2%	17.1%	27.5%	23.9%
Time Management	12.1%	7.7%	27.5%	7.3%	9.3%	13.3%
Team Management	14.7%	15.0%	12.9%	8.9%	13.7%	13.1%
Change Management	20.9%	6.7%	20.0%	4.6%	11.5%	12.6%
Leadership Skills	5.3%	11.2%	15.9%	7.3%	10.9%	12.3%
Team-Working Skills	13.9%	10.7%	14.0%	8.3%	9.9%	12.1%
Decision-Making	17.3%	10.2%	19.7%	6.7%	8.7%	11.5%
Communication Skills	13.6%	13.6%	16.3%	8.2%	4.3%	10.7%
Project Management	8.7%	2.4%	22.2%	4.2%	10.4%	9.6%
Problem-Solving	10.0%	4.7%	15.8%	5.8%	6.6%	9.3%