

# Happiness — The Catalyst for Good Design

Milliken™

Flooring manufacturer **Milliken** and **The Happiness Index**, an organisation that analyses the cultural health of organisations, have collaborated on a report to establish whether good design in a workplace can make people happy and if so, how? The report is based on qualitative and quantitive data from architects and designers' responses, underpinned by content from an expert industry panel.

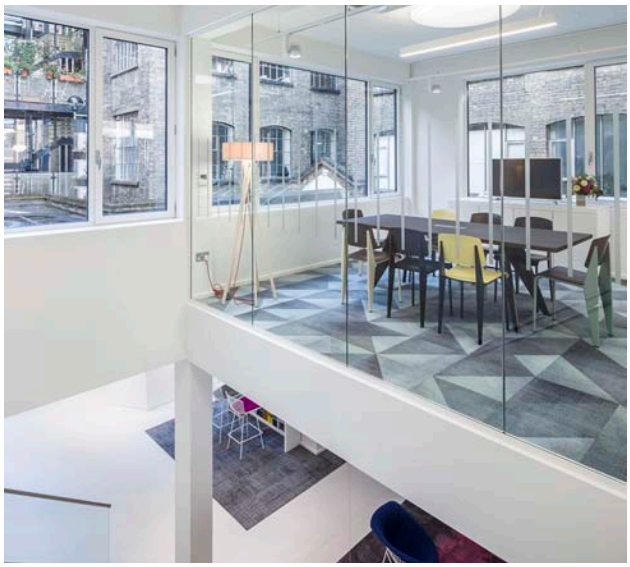
# Milliken

Milliken has a rich history of creating a range of beautiful and considered floor coverings from its award-winning design studios and manufacturing facilities in Wigan, UK. It is one of the world's most responsible manufacturers, a commitment encompassed in all stages of the product life cycle, from material sourcing and manufacturing practices to end-of-life management. It was named one of the World's Most Ethical Companies by The Ethisphere Institute for the thirteenth year running in 2019. Well-being is also at the core of Milliken's design ethos: creating flooring with superior acoustic performance and exceptional underfoot comfort.

Architects and designers select Milliken products for their ability to deliver performance, health and wellness benefits through design, logistical and technical attributes. With a 50% increase in noise absorption and a 24% reduction in muscle strain underfoot, compared to hardback carpet, Milliken's cushion-backed carpet tiles have performance benefits that enhance well-being. Milliken offers clients the advice and support services of its team of in-house Well-accredited professionals. As well as offering guidance on all aspects of workplace well-being, this team can offer direction on selecting the floor-covering that will provide the maximum contribution to well-being. In addition, Milliken is a founder member of the Well Living Lab, a collaborative research initiative dedicated to studying the impacts of the indoor environment on human health and well-being.

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WELL LIVING LAB










**Milliken Showrooms**
— London, UK / Paris, France

# The Happiness Index

Having identified a gap in the market in the way organisations are set up, pinpointing that a lot of them are fundamentally broken, The Happiness Index aims to provide employee engagement surveys and solutions to help organisations to identify issues, retain top talent and create a happier, healthier workplace. It has developed a 'human-first' approach to help us understand how important it is to listen to people in real-time. Its philosophy is that there should be freedom to be human, no matter how daunting the task may seem. Every single one of an organisation's people has the right to have their voice heard and as everyone's different, not everyone wants to provide feedback in the same way.

The Happiness Index is 100% privately owned, with offices in New York, London & Shanghai and global partnerships as far afield as Dublin, Chile and beyond. Its clients range from the English Cricket Board (ECB) to RBS to Jägermeister. The Happiness Index's own people include organisational psychologists, developers, product designers and business experts, who all share a belief that by listening, understanding and actioning feedback, organisations of all kinds can create a better work culture.




The Happiness Index's Happiness Booth



**About the author**

## Helen Parton

Helen Parton is an architecture and interiors journalist with over 15 years experience, who specialises in writing about how design can make people happier and more productive at work. She edited workplace design magazine OnOffice for three years from 2015-2018, garnering the title multiple award nominations in national journalism awards. Prior to that, in 2011, she co-authored a book by Thames and Hudson called Total Office Design. She is currently a freelance editorial consultant, writing for titles such as Blueprint, OnOffice and Property Week.

# Summary of methodology




Milliken Showroom, London, UK during Clerkenwell Design Week 2019

**Milliken and The Happiness Index joined forces to collect opinions from architects and designers using a 'Happiness Booth' at Milliken's Berry Street showroom during the three days of Clerkenwell Design Week in May 2019. There visitors were interviewed about their opinions on the impact design has on happiness.**

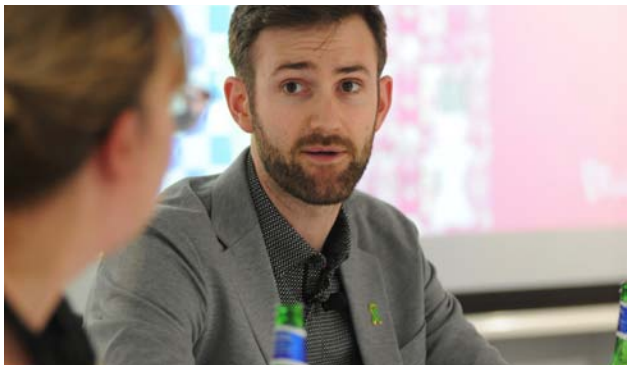
**A total of 60 respondents were asked the following questions:**

1. **How can design make people happy?**
2. **What can designers do to encourage collaboration & team building through design?**
3. **What's been the best design innovation you've seen around happiness & wellbeing?**

Video responses were gathered on respondents' sentiments and the feedback was collated, AI transcribed, analysed and segmented back into the Happiness Index' platform. Then a detailed picture of whether workplace design really can affect happiness or if it's just a nicety emerged.

# Panel discussion







**Alongside this initiative, a panel discussion was held, also during Clerkenwell Design Week, featuring a range of thought-leaders, with whom Milliken has forged strong relationships, a key part of its well-being in the workplace initiative.**

Architect **Ben Channon** works at Assael Architecture on a variety of residential projects, at planning and construction stages. He is the founder of the Architects' Mental Wellbeing Forum, author of 'Happy by Design: A Guide to Architecture and Mental Wellbeing' and Associate at Assael Architecture.

**Kate Cook** has been leading the wellness revolution for several years; she is a Harley Street nutritionist, international speaker and seven times author. In January 2019, she gave a talk at Milliken's Clerkenwell showroom on 'eating for vibrant energy'. Cook has helped a number of leading institutions including The Bank of England, Skanska and ConocoPhilips.

**Neil Shah** is the founder and Director or the Stress Management Society and best-selling author. He regularly appears on television and radio interviews and is now the BBC's featured expert on stress, appearing on BBC Breakfast, BBC Five Live and others. In November 2018, Milliken invited him to run an 'excelling under pressure' workshop designed to help architects and designers tackle stress related challenges.

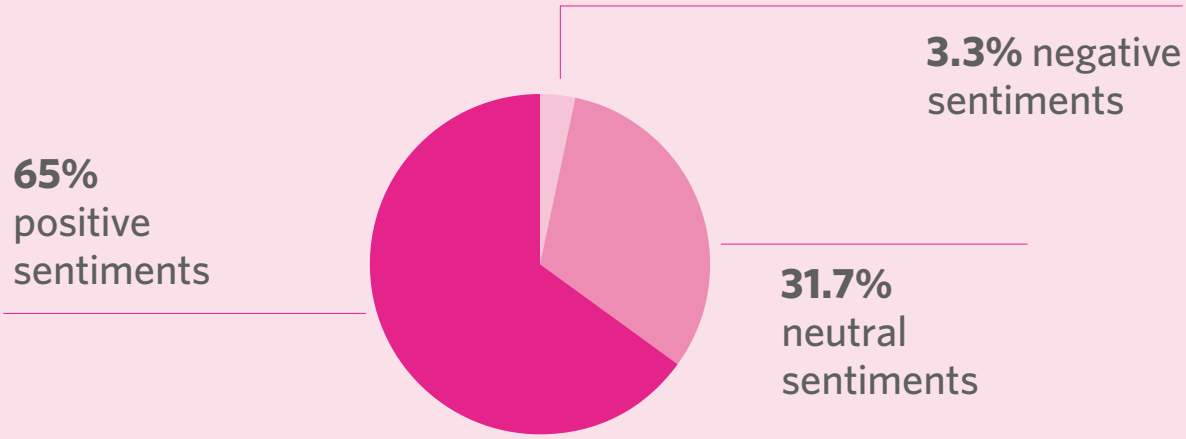
**Tim Stoller** is an investor and advisor to the 'The Happiness Index', an organisation which works with clients to effectively measure, understand and improve sentiment via feedback from employees. Tim has worked with clients of all shapes, sizes, sectors and locations to help them understand the impact people have on their businessperformance.

Top image—**Chasing Happiness Panel Debate during Clerkenwell Design Week 2019.** Left to right—**Helen Parton, Ben Channon, Kate Cook, Neil Shah, Tim Stoller.**
Bottom Left—**Ben Channon**
Bottom Right—**Neil Shah, Tim Stoller**

## Results

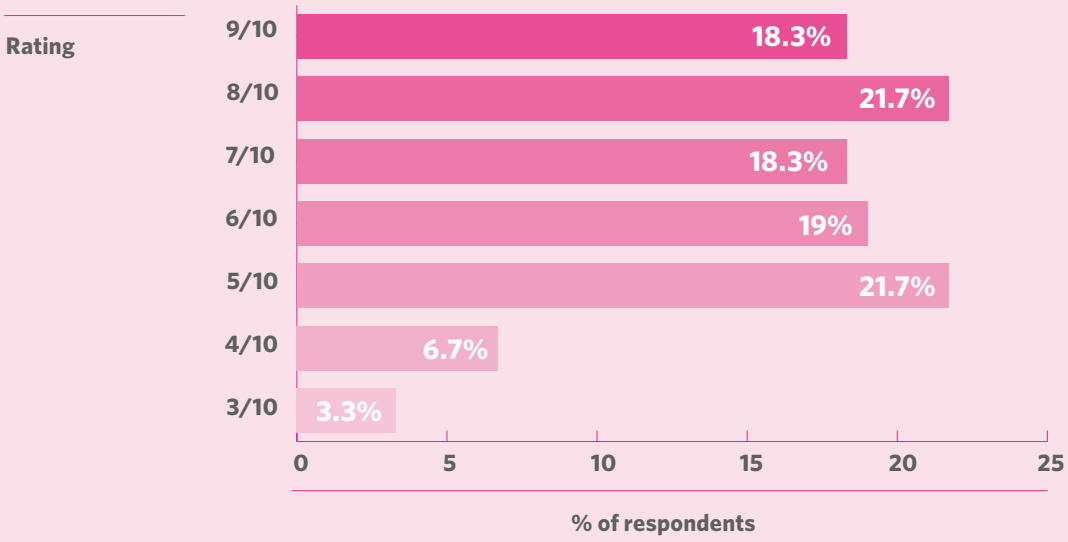
# From the Happiness Booth

## Overall Sentiments




## Overall happiness rating

(1 being unhappy to 10 being couldn't be happier)



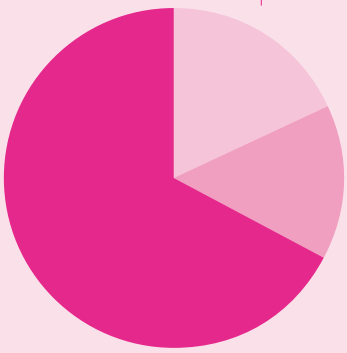

## There is an overall average of 7.1/10

Results

# Chasing Happiness panel discussion results

## Why is everyone talking about happiness at the moment?

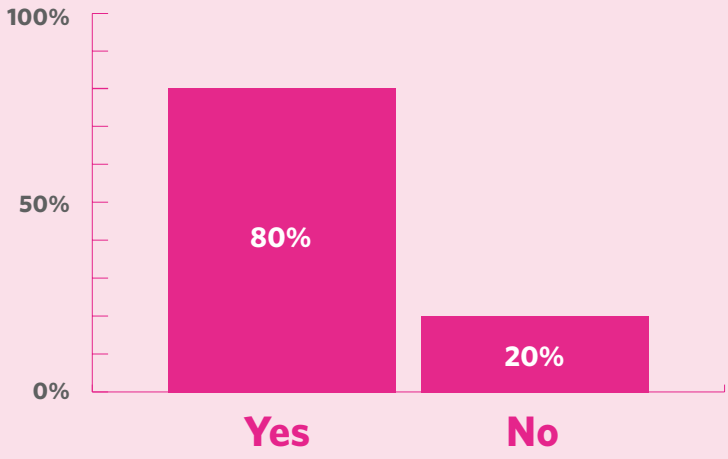
**16%** thought another unspecified reason



**60%** of the audience responded that it was due to greater awareness of mental health

**13%** thought it was to down to increasing workplace productivity

## Can design be the catalyst for happiness?



## Results

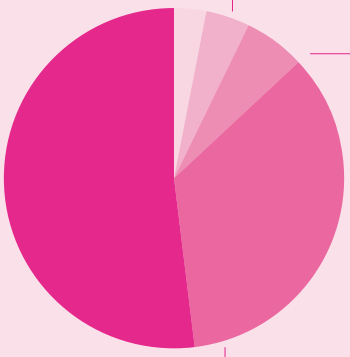
# Chasing Happiness panel discussion results

### What are the most significant contributory factors to happiness in the workplace?

**3%** of the audience stated the physical environment

**4%** responded with another, unspecified reason

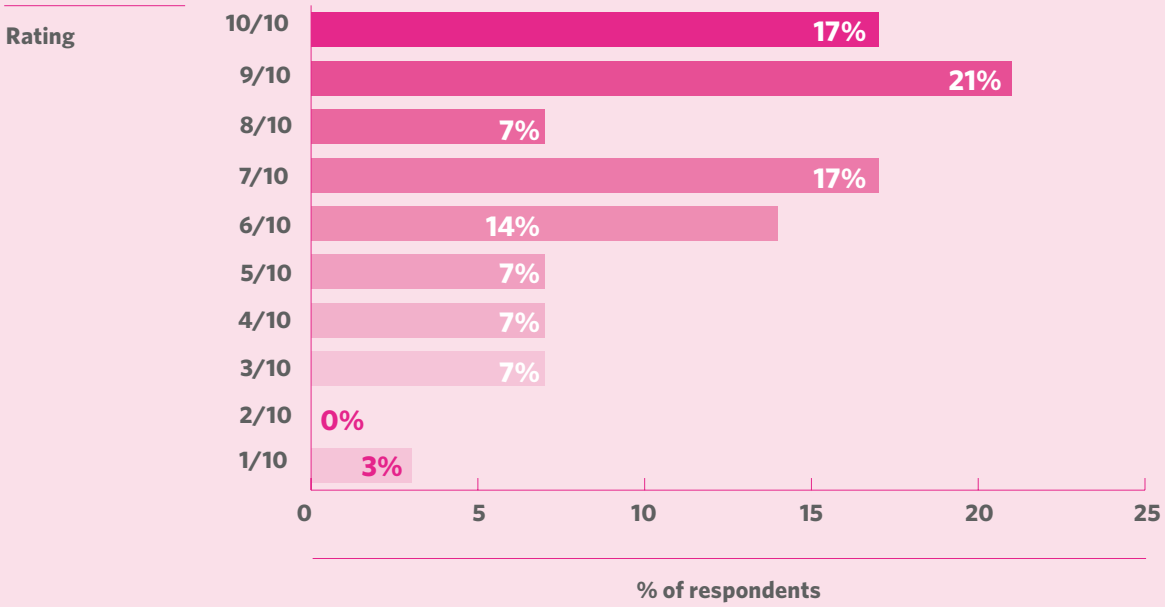
**6%** non-design elements such as introducing mental health first aiders, healthy eating, yoga and meditation



**52%** of the audience stated job satisfaction

**35%** said their colleagues

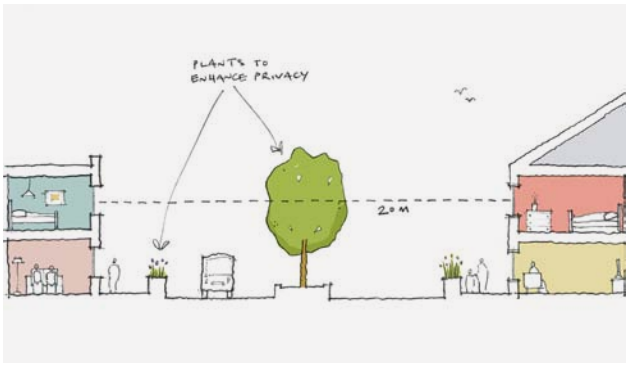
### How happy do you consider yourself to be at work, from 1 to 10
(1 being unhappy to 10 being couldn't be happier)

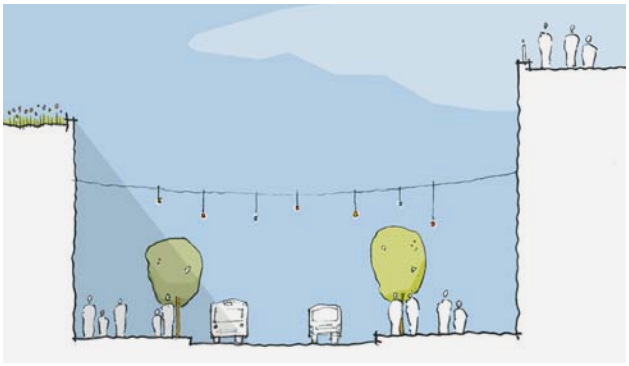


## Discussion Points

# Recognition of mental health in the workplace



When everyone from the Duke of Sussex to actress and celebrity activist Jameela Jamil have been raising awareness of mental health, it's no surprise that this has translated to greater recognition among the architecture and design community too. The Slido results from the panel discussion showed 60% of the audience saying they thought it was a catalyst for talking about happiness. One Happiness Booth respondent said, "Whether it's in work or out of work, it's good that there are conversations now around mental health. In terms of design, I've already mentioned quiet spaces for time out and reflection; [also acoustics and lighting]," while another added, "Design should help and support people's mental health, happier people make a better life so we need to make people happy." Chasing Happiness panellist Ben Channon described his own experience, "I didn't think much about happiness and mental health at all and then I had anxiety and it was a difficult time for me for a few years. But I came out the other side of it thankfully. I started to question how mental health is linked up with architecture." That prompted Channon to write Happy by Design: A Guide to Architecture and Mental Wellbeing, which looks at ways in which buildings, spaces and cities affect our moods, revealing how architecture and design can make us happy and support mental health and also how poor design can have the opposite effect. In the architecture profession itself, the statistics are pretty shocking with one in three architecture students now having problems with their mental health. In an attempt to try and improve architecture mental health within the profession, Channon set up the Architects' Mental Wellbeing Forum.

**"I didn't think much about mental health at all, but then had some anxiety problems in my mid-twenties which led to a difficult couple of years"**

**Ben Channon / illustrations from Happy by Design**

## Discussion Points

# Flexibility of space







Respondents from the Happiness Booth mentioned a variety of different worksettings as a way good design could engender happiness. As one person explained, "There's a lot of open plan office spaces, some people really thrive in being together and some people really prefer to work alone and be silent. I think sometimes in the workplace we're not always sympathetic to the different individual traits that everybody has." By looking at spaces and how people react in certain situations, the respondent added, could really led to a happier workforce. As one self-confessed introvert explained, "I don't like noise around me in the office so I disappear and I would plug into headphones so I would be able to concentrate on doing my work. The other thing is I prefer to work from home because I know I won't be interrupted by people having noisy telephone conversations right opposite me." There were multiple mentions of break out spaces providing that all-important change of scenery from one's desk and the opportunity to collaborate, while panellist Neil Shah says that one way design and technology could help is through the use of a lighting solution app that gradually changes throughout the day according to people's needs, "It maximises the individual's experience of pleasure and minimises the pain."

**"I think sometimes in the workplace we're not always sympathetic to the different individual traits that everybody has"**

Top image — **Sberbank HQ, Moscow, Russia, Colour Compositions Collection**
Bottom Left — **Sberbank HQ, Moscow, Russia, Artistic Liberties Collection**
Bottom Right — **Deloitte, London, UK Clerkenwell Collection - WELL Accredited Project**

## Discussion Points

# Nutrition and exercise





Food and drink was another area that could complement the achievement of happiness. Examples ranged from one respondent's desire for 'cold beers and steak' to panellist Kate Cook's more science-based spin on matters, "Happiness is a biochemistry effect," she says, "It's the difference between serotonin and dopamine. The trouble is in this society that we've got fast food, which is dopamine trigger and dopamine is your addictive hormone. Serotonin is your happiness hormone and you've got 1% of it your head. The rest is produced in your gut." By keeping your gut healthy, she reasons, you have a better chance at chasing happiness. Keeping fit can help too whether that's a full work out or simply a lunchtime stroll. Psychology Today magazine points out, "We know that intense exercise can bring about short-term euphoria, reduction of anxiety, and increases in pain threshold." Says one booth respondent "If you have the opportunity to do some kind of sport activities during your working life be it fitness studio, sport activity, or something after work, it makes you feel happier and more able to go back to work with more energy." Yoga proved a popular choice for some, respondents with one reporting,

**"We know that intense exercise can bring about short-term euphoria, reduction of anxiety, and increases in pain threshold."**

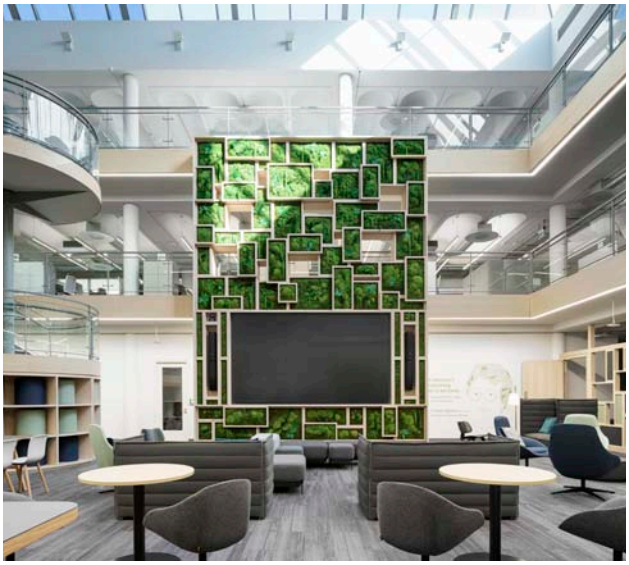
"Yoga in the workplace improves my working life. Being given an opportunity to move and breathe and calm my busy mind particularly in work hours when I don't actually have that much time to do it before and after work has been amazing and definitely makes me feel valued by the company." But Neil Shah strikes a note of caution, "Not everybody likes to do yoga, you can't have a one-size fits all solution. Look at the return engagement, rather than return on investment: how we improve in our engagement of the people. We're not doing well-being to them or for them, we're doing this together."

**Urva Soni, Customer Experience Manager, Milliken and experienced yoga instructor**

## Discussion Points

# Connection to nature







Whether it's planting or green walls; access to natural light through floor-to-ceiling windows or just being able to open a window, there are plenty of ways to connect to nature, which gives a positive feeling in a workplace. As one respondent said, "Design can make people happy by bringing the outside in, creating a workspace that encourages people to look around them and be good natured." This was backed up by another respondent's plea for "buildings that are colourful and cheerful, that have texture, maybe smells from flowers and herbs, that could really help." Panellist Ben Channon pointed out that although we all behave differently in an office to some extent, there is some commonality, "We all love natural materials. There are some amazing studies out there showing that if you put people in a room with a lot of manmade materials and then put them in a room with natural materials, you actually see the heart rates slowing of those in the room with the natural materials: they just have an impact on us as humans." Biophilic design, where patterns, colours and textures that are found in nature are replicated in some way in the built environment can also have an impact. Says one respondent, "You can create an environment with natural colours that remind people of nature or even of their home environment. If you want someone to be calmer than normal then maybe choose a green or orange colour."

**"Design can make people happy by bringing the outside in, creating a workspace that encourages people to look around them and be good natured."**

Left — **Tracing Landscapes, Field Study**
Top right — **The New Relic, Dublin featuring carpet collection Colour Compositions**
Bottom right — **Comfortable Concrete 2.0**

## Discussion Points

# Organisation culture



Designing for happiness cannot take place without cultural buy-in says panellist Tim Stoller, "Your physical environment massively contributes to that sense of happiness but you can have the most incredible offices yet if you don't have the right people and the right culture, it's a waste of time." He adds that a strategic plan that is owned by the top level of management is essential, "It's about 'how am I going to start helping my people feel better and make my organisation better at the same time'. With that in mind, you can create things that are going to have a positive impact." When it comes to who looks after the fit-out Neil Shah argues that designing for happiness shouldn't just be down to facilities management, "HR, health and safety, learning and development, employee benefits and facilities should all be sitting in a room asking 'what do you want from this?" He explains that when it comes to happiness there are four pillars, "Have you got the right people with the skills, confidence, tools and resources to do their job. Do you have a culture that marries up with how you see yourselves as an organisation? Then there's wellness which itself also has four pillars: mental, physical, emotional and social/spiritual. When I say spiritual, we're not talking about religion it's the reason that people turn up to work, not because of how much they get paid but because they believe in what the company does."

**"Design can make people happy by bringing the outside in, creating a workspace that encourages people to look around them and be good natured."**

**Sberbank, Moscow featuring carpet collection Artistic Liberties**

# Conclusions



On one hand the data from the Happiness Booth points to a direct correlation between happiness and design as Happiness Index chief storyteller Joe Wedgwood explains, "It's amazing to see that the majority of responses were overwhelmingly positive, with 8/10 respondents saying there's a direct link." Matthew Phelan, the Happiness Index's co-founder adds, "The insight in this report is consistent with the majority of industries we study and highlights the need for greater understanding of human behaviour within design."
But among audience members of the Chasing Happiness panel there was some conflicting evidence with just 3% citing the physical environment as the most significant contributory factors to happiness in the workplace, with job satisfaction and relationships with colleagues occupying the top two spots.

Perhaps this can be explained by employees subliminally feeling happier in a well-designed workspace without realising it's the physical environment that's helping them. Would they value their colleagues as highly if there weren't places to interact socially and professionally and would job satisfaction be quite as high if there weren't a plethora of places to brainstorm and collaborate or alternatively sit quietly and get the job done?

The Happiness Booth's data also revealed that workers value workplace relationships and also wellness initiatives so clearly enlightened employers would be wise to look at what they and their suppliers can do to promote wellness at work. "Clearly our respondents value more than just a paycheque which is great to see!" says Joe Wedgwood. Physical needs such as eating healthy food and doing exercise are only one part of making a positive change to people's happiness, with mental health coming significantly to the fore, both the respondents and the expert panel agreed. It's likely that designers will increasingly be asked to incorporate this into workplace projects with quiet spaces or meditation rooms, as well as measures to promote physical health.

**"The results we see here are the start of a growing trend we see across the globe. The key to creating a thriving work culture is to design and build human centric workplaces"**

Image kindly supplied by The Happiness Index

# Conclusions



Greening the office intersects with this too as bringing the outside in or having access to the outdoors was felt to promote a great feeling of well-being in the office by Happiness Booth respondents. Clearly roof terraces, green walls and plants in the office are here to stay and biophilic design is a trend that designers will continue to employ. Given the overall result suggested respondents, who came largely from architecture and design, were on the higher scale of happiness in their jobs - 7.1/10 being the average figure, how does this compare to happiness at work in other sectors Tim Stoller, strategy director at The Happiness Index says, "There are so many things that influence happiness at work from environmental factors, to how much people enjoy what they do, how much they trust the people they work, how their work life fits with the rest of their life and the extent to which they feel their work has a 'higher purpose.' Firstly those working within the design sector are more driven by purpose than financial remuneration – they're doing something they love and therefore are much more likely to be happy at work. Secondly those working in the design sector will most likely have a greater level of awareness of space and design which will impact positively on their happiness at work. And finally there are probably a lot more 'creatives' and 'entrepreneurs' in this sector (than in say the financial or retail sectors). These people are much more likely to have a stronger sense of empowerment which in turn helps them to feel more satisfied and happy at work."

The look and feel of the physical workplace, whether that's access to natural light and fresh air or a variety of worksettings cannot in isolation make employees happy but rather needs to dovetail with buy-in from management. Leading by example is essential to cultivating a culture of wellness within an organisation so the senior leadership team should be seen to be using workspaces away from their desks or participating in health and fitness initiatives to ensure the message cascades down through the organisational layers. Everyone needs to feel they make a positive difference to company culture. But as Neil Shah points out, the attitude of the individual can be just as crucial too, "Happiness is a state not a trait. People have a choice to be happy based on what's going on outside themselves, you are totally responsible for whether you feel happy or not."

Matthew Phelan sums this up neatly by adding, "Happiness is no longer seen as a fluffy metric and is now being baked into everything from design through to artificial intelligence. The results we see here are the start of a growing trend we see across the globe. The key to creating a thriving work culture is to design and build human centric workplaces"

**Image: WELL - Designed for a Happy Workplace**

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