

The \$7.8t global problem: Why creating a happier workplace is worth it

A happy workplace has become ever more important considering the disruptions to and questioning of the traditional models over the past three years - and solving it will add trillions to the global economy. Linda Trim, Director at Giant Leap, one of SA's largest workplace design consultancies sats: "Creating a happy workplace is an intentional effort, not a throwaway buzzword."



Source: [Freepik](#)

Trim noted that being happy at work isn't just a win for employees; it's also a win for employers. Research from Oxford University has found a causal link between happy workers and a 13% increase in productivity.

"On the flip side, unhappiness at work costs the world \$7.8t in lost productivity, equal to 11% of global GDP according to Gallup's State of the Global Workplace 2023 report."

After trending upwards, work engagement has hit its lowest in a decade with younger workers and women — the most unhappy people at work.

“Social media trends like #quietquitting and #actyourwage have reached over a billion views

“Our health and happiness at work is the driving force in our decision to take, stay at, or leave a job.”

What should companies do?

Step 1: Reimagine flexibility

A 2023 International Labor Organization report found that greater flexibility — from staggered start times to shift-sharing, to remote working options — leads to greater productivity and improved work-life balance.

A global survey of 28,000 full-time employees by Cisco found that 82% said that the ability to work from anywhere has made them happier.

“The job market has changed and workers appreciate choice and flexibility more than employers realise,” said Trim. “While salary is still top-of-mind for workers, it’s not the only thing that matters anymore.”

The work-from-home revolution may be popular but if that trend continues, we could wind up creating a two-tier workforce in which people work from home in lower-paid, dead-end roles while those coming into the office get higher-paid, management-track positions,” cautioned Trim.

Step 2: Rebuild belonging

The average worker spends nearly 82,000 hours at work during their lifetime so it’s safe to say that time needs to have plenty of positive social interaction for it to be considered happy.

“Organisations who score high on the Community Index — where employees feel like they belong and contribute to shared goals in meaningful ways — have a 62% increase in employee-estimated tenure at their current workplaces,” Trim said,

To encourage behaviours of a happier culture, we all need to communicate when we’re engaging in free time and self-care — like getting fresh air or taking some creative thinking space; shared goals foster collaboration, which is good for bolstering friendships.

Employees are three times more likely to experience well-being if they work in a fun environment.

For example, Visa holds an ice cream social every third Wednesday of each month. Airbnb believes that travel is a great way to have fun, as is evidenced by one of their beloved perks: a \$2,000 (R38 000) annual travel stipend for employees to stay in any one of their Airbnb's worldwide.

Step 3: Restore purpose

“Finally, we need purpose at work to keep us motivated — whether that purpose is earning a paycheck to support our families or a values-based connection to the organisation’s mission, “ says Trim.

“Happiness at work has to come from a deeper, more intrinsic connection to why we’re there. A culture of autonomy, belonging, and purpose comes from a shared vision, and right now, it’s fair to say that many companies and their employees are simply not seeing eye-to-eye

“But we can change that. Start by asking your employees: “What is one thing I can do for you to make next week easier?” advises Trim.

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