

Joy at Work

Part of an A.T. Kearney series on joy in the workplace

Joy can be a powerful force. But what factors lead to joy, and how successful is the business world in cultivating joy in the workplace? To find the answers, A.T. Kearney sponsored a global survey.



Executive Summary

Joy can be a powerful force for business success. In any endeavor, success sparks joy, then joy fuels even greater success, in a virtuous cycle. Further, the shared experience of joy connects people as powerfully as any other human experience.

To help business leaders understand the opportunities and obstacles they may encounter when working to tap the practical power of joy, A.T. Kearney sponsored a global survey of 503 people (including more than 150 C-suite executives) working in companies with more than \$2 billion in revenues. The survey explored:

- Whether people expect to experience joy at work
- How often they do, in fact, experience joy
- Which factors correlate with the experience of joy at work

Finding: There is a “joy gap” in the business world. People overwhelmingly expect to experience meaningful moments of joy at work. Yet fewer than half say they actually feel high levels of joy in their workplace. This “joy gap” is most pronounced in companies more than 10 years old.

Finding: Shared impact and higher purpose matter most. Correlation analysis suggests that employees who believe their “company makes a positive societal contribution” and who feel “personally committed to achieving the company’s vision and strategy” experience the most joy at work.

Finding: Team dynamics are also important. Survey respondents who feel more joy on the job also more frequently report having the kinds of in-team experiences that visibly yield joy during team athletic competitions.

Finding: The work experiences most strongly correlated with joy are also those holding the greatest room for improvement.

This report is the first in a series of articles exploring **joy in the workplace**.

Future articles will consider why the joy gap identified in our research matters to companies, and how leaders might address it.

Joy and Success

The practical power of joy is clearly visible in the sports world. When a team performs at its awe-inspiring best, every player—indeed the entire arena—experiences a brimming ecstasy that lifts the team even further. Success sparks joy. Joy fuels further success. Everyone is caught up in the moment.

Joy can also be a powerful force for business success. Why? Two reasons. People universally relish the experience of joy, which makes it intrinsically motivational. And shared joy connects people as powerfully as any other human experience, uniting them in inspired and cohesive efforts to meet great challenges and realize unprecedented achievements.

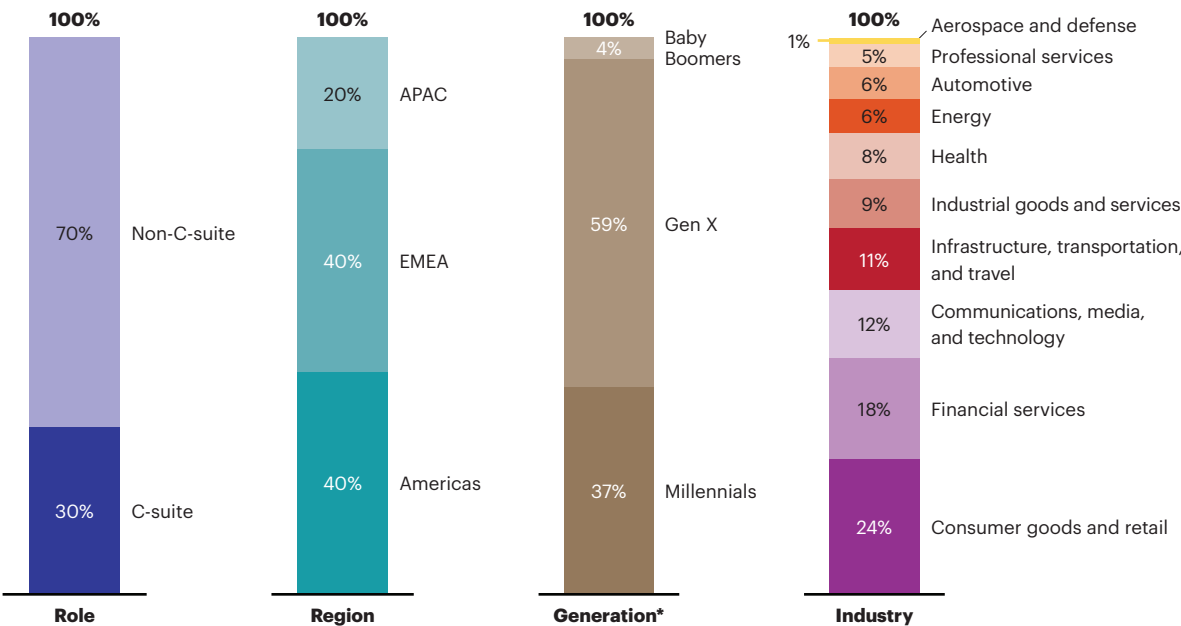
To gain insights into joy at work, A.T. Kearney conducted a global survey that explored people’s workplace experiences across the Americas, Europe, the Middle East and Africa, and Asia Pacific. The sample included more than 500 executives and employees of various ages in companies with more than \$2 billion in revenues, in a range of industries (see figure 1).

Success sparks joy.
Joy fuels further
success.



Figure 1
The joy survey included workers from various roles, regions, generations, and industries

Joy survey results demographic mix



Note: Numbers may not resolve due to rounding.
*Based on Pew Research Center’s definition of generational cohorts
Source: A.T. Kearney analysis

Joy Drivers

What leads to joy at work?

We first asked respondents to report how much joy they experience in the workplace. We then asked them to rate how much each of a series of statements reflects their own experience at work, so we could gauge which variables most notably correlate with feeling joy at work. In correlation analysis, a correlation coefficient of 1 means the two measured variables always occur together (perfect positive correlation), while -1 means they never do. For this study, any correlation measure of 0.40 or above was considered a significant degree of positive correlation (see figure 2).

Figure 2
Those who believe they are doing meaningful work are likely to feel joy on the job

Total sample

Ranking	Joy driver	Correlation to joy variable
1	Feels committed to achieving company’s vision and strategy for the future	0.65
2	Believes that the company makes a positive societal contribution	0.63
3	Understands the company’s vision and strategy for the future	0.58
4	Celebrates shared success within the team	0.49
5	Feels strong bonds within the team	0.47
6	Feels that their talents are being utilized effectively within the team	0.46
7	Colleagues acknowledge others’ contributions to team success	0.45

Note: >0.40 is a significant correlation.
Source: A.T. Kearney analysis

As shown in the chart above, a range of factors correlate with the experience of joy at work. Above all, joy on the job stems from believing one’s work is truly meaningful. Employees who feel “personally committed to achieving the company’s vision and strategy” and who believe their “company makes a positive societal contribution” experience the most joy at work.

Several team experiences also correlated with joy at a statistically significant level, most notably “Celebrating shared success within the team” and “Feeling strong bonds within the team.”

Further, the factors most closely correlating with joy at work were largely consistent across organizational levels and generations (see figure 3 on page 4).

The lesson? Crafting business cultures that more consistently engender such experiences can create a much stronger sense of personal interconnection, shared purpose, and heartfelt pride across the organization.

Figure 3

The factors leading to joy at work were largely consistent across organizational levels and generations

C-suite executives

Ranking	Joy driver	Correlation to joy variable
1	Feels committed to achieving company’s vision and strategy for the future	0.70
2	Believes that the company makes a positive societal contribution	0.64
3	Believes their role is crucial to the success of the team	0.58
4	Feels strong bonds within the team	0.58
5	Knows how their role contributes to business success	0.56
6	Celebrates shared success within the team	0.56

Employees

Ranking	Joy driver	Correlation to joy variable
1	Believes that the company makes a positive societal contribution	0.64
2	Feels committed to achieving company’s vision and strategy for the future	0.63
3	Understands the company’s vision and strategy for the future	0.60
4	Celebrates shared success within the team	0.46
5	Feels strong bonds within the team	0.43
6	Colleagues acknowledge others’ contributions to team success	0.43
7	Feels that their talents are being utilized effectively within the team	0.42

Millennials

Ranking	Joy driver	Correlation to joy variable
1	Believes that the company makes a positive societal contribution	0.70
2	Feels committed to achieving company’s vision and strategy for the future	0.66
3	Understands the company’s vision and strategy for the future	0.61
4	Colleagues acknowledge others’ contributions to team success	0.52
5	Feels strong bonds within the team	0.51
6	Feels that their talents are being utilized effectively within the team	0.50
7	Understands their role and the role of others in the team	0.49
8	Celebrates shared success within the team	0.48

Gen X

Ranking	Joy driver	Correlation to joy variable
1	Feels committed to achieving company’s vision and strategy for the future	0.64
2	Understands the company’s vision and strategy for the future	0.59
3	Believes that the company makes a positive societal contribution	0.58
4	Celebrates shared success within the team	0.45
5	Feels strong bonds within the team	0.40

Note: >0.40 is a significant correlation.
Source: A.T. Kearney analysis

The Joy Gap

There is much work to be done, however, as the survey also points to a pronounced “joy gap” at work. Nearly 90 percent of respondents said they expect to experience a substantial degree of joy at work, yet only 37 percent report this as their actual experience (see figure 4).

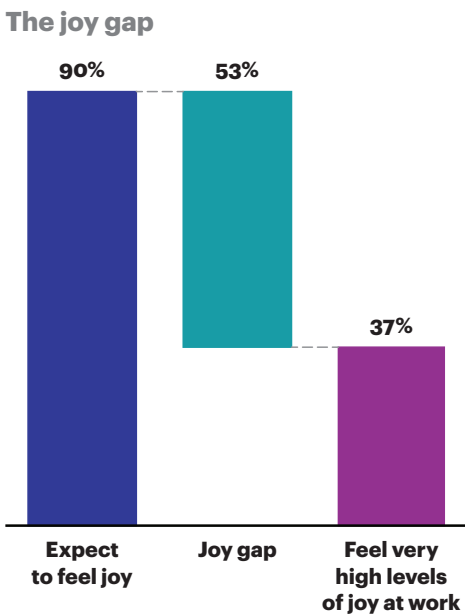
This joy gap is not confined to any particular generational cohort. For Gen X and Millennials (the vast majority in our sample), the joy gap registered at 57 percent and 44 percent respectively.

Company age also appears to shape how much joy people experience at work, as participants from companies less than 10 years old (just over one-tenth of the total sample) reported substantially higher levels of joy than did people from older companies (see figure 5). This suggests that to reap more of the practical benefits of joy, legacy companies must be particularly diligent in cultivating the joy drivers identified above.

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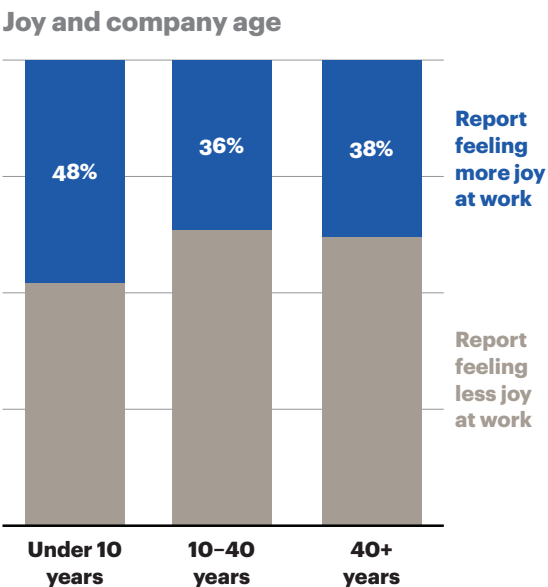


Figure 4
Respondents indicated a substantial “joy gap” in their workplace experiences



Source: A.T. Kearney analysis

Figure 5
Respondents from companies less than 10 years old reported higher levels of joy



Source: A.T. Kearney analysis

Joy Opportunity

A further comparative analysis suggests that the factors most strongly correlated with joy (noted above) may also offer the most room for improvement. Figure 6 compares how people who reported feeling lower versus higher levels of joy at work responded to the question “To what extent do the following characteristics reflect your current experiences in the workplace?” for each joy driver, using a 1 to 10 scale.

Opportunities exist for companies to focus their efforts to cultivate joy at work.



Figure 6
The factors that correlate most with joy also offer the most room for improvement

Total sample

Ranking	Joy driver	Correlation to joy variable	Lower joy (1–8)	Higher joy (9–10)	Difference
1	Feels committed to achieving company’s vision and strategy for the future	0.65	7.5	9.1	+1.6
2	Believes that the company makes a positive societal contribution	0.63	7.3	8.9	+1.6
3	Understands the company’s vision and strategy for the future	0.58	7.6	8.9	+1.4
4	Celebrates shared success within the team	0.49	7.3	8.6	+1.3
5	Feels strong bonds within the team	0.47	7.4	8.6	+1.2
6	Feels that their talents are being utilized effectively within the team	0.46	7.3	8.5	+1.2
7	Colleagues acknowledge others’ contributions to team success	0.45	7.2	8.5	+1.3

Notes: >0.40 is a significant correlation. Numbers may not resolve due to rounding.
Source: A.T. Kearney analysis

The differences were largest in the areas most closely correlated with joy, pointing to opportunities for companies to focus their efforts to cultivate joy at work to the greatest practical effect.

And as before, this pattern largely held true across organizational levels and generational cohorts (see figure 7 on page 7).

Figure 7
Joy opportunities are consistent across organizational levels and generations

C-suite executives

Ranking	Joy driver	Correlation to joy variable	Lower joy (1–8)	Higher joy (9–10)	Difference
1	Feels committed to achieving company's vision and strategy for the future	0.70	7.5	9.2	+1.7
2	Believes that the company makes a positive societal contribution	0.64	7.7	8.8	+1.2
3	Believes their role is crucial to the success of the team	0.58	7.5	8.8	+1.4
4	Feels strong bonds within the team	0.58	7.4	8.6	+1.3
5	Knows how their role contributes to business success	0.56	7.4	8.6	+1.3
6	Celebrates shared success within the team	0.56	7.3	8.5	+1.2

Employees

Ranking	Joy driver	Correlation to joy variable	Lower joy (1–8)	Higher joy (9–10)	Difference
1	Believes that the company makes a positive societal contribution	0.64	7.1	8.9	+1.8
2	Feels committed to achieving company’s vision and strategy for the future	0.63	7.5	9.1	+1.5
3	Understands the company’s vision and strategy for the future	0.60	7.5	8.9	+1.4
4	Celebrates shared success within the team	0.46	7.3	8.7	+1.4
5	Feels strong bonds within the team	0.43	7.5	8.6	+1.2
6	Colleagues acknowledge others’ contributions to team success	0.43	7.2	8.6	+1.4
7	Feels that their talents are being utilized effectively within the team	0.42	7.3	8.5	+1.2

Millennials

Ranking	Joy driver	Correlation to joy variable	Lower joy (1–8)	Higher joy (9–10)	Difference
1	Believes that the company makes a positive societal contribution	0.70	7.3	9.1	+1.8
2	Feels committed to achieving company’s vision and strategy for the future	0.66	7.5	9.2	+1.6
3	Understands the company’s vision and strategy for the future	0.61	7.6	9.1	+1.5
4	Colleagues acknowledge others’ contributions to team success	0.52	7.0	8.6	+1.5
5	Feels strong bonds within the team	0.51	7.3	8.7	+1.4
6	Feels that their talents are being utilized effectively within the team	0.50	7.2	8.5	+1.3
7	Understands their role and the role of others in the team	0.49	7.3	8.8	+1.5
8	Celebrates shared success within the team	0.48	7.4	8.5	+1.1

Gen X

Ranking	Joy driver	Correlation to joy variable	Lower joy (1–8)	Higher joy (9–10)	Difference
1	Feels committed to achieving company’s vision and strategy for the future	0.64	7.5	9.0	+1.5
2	Understands the company’s vision and strategy for the future	0.59	7.5	8.8	+1.3
3	Believes that the company makes a positive societal contribution	0.58	7.3	8.6	+1.3
4	Celebrates shared success within the team	0.45	7.3	8.7	+1.4
5	Feels strong bonds within the team	0.40	7.6	8.6	+1.0

Notes: >0.40 is a significant correlation. Numbers may not resolve due to rounding.
Source: A.T. Kearney analysis

Conclusion

In sum, our survey found remarkable consistency in how people experience joy at work, and surfaced a wealth of highly actionable opportunities for companies to cultivate joy.

Business leaders tend to think a great deal about success, but rarely about joy. Chances are, few are even aware of the joy gap in their organization and the resulting lack of interpersonal connection and team aspiration. Companies that prioritize joy in the workplace will be better positioned to apply the full power of their human potential to improving business performance.

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Future articles will consider why the joy gap identified in our research matters to companies, and how leaders might address it.



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