

# Work survey 2009

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## Executive summary

The objective of this survey was to take a reading of how people are feeling about their working lives in the current economic climate. In particular we were interested in understanding a bit more about the opinions of people working in middle management or equivalent leadership positions. We emailed the target population with a link to a short web survey and collected a total of 204 responses.

We asked people to rate their feelings in four areas:

- happiness
- job security
- optimism about the organisation's future and
- confidence in their management's ability to lead the organisation

We also asked if their management had communicated any kind of plan for addressing the challenges ahead and to what degree they felt they understood this plan.

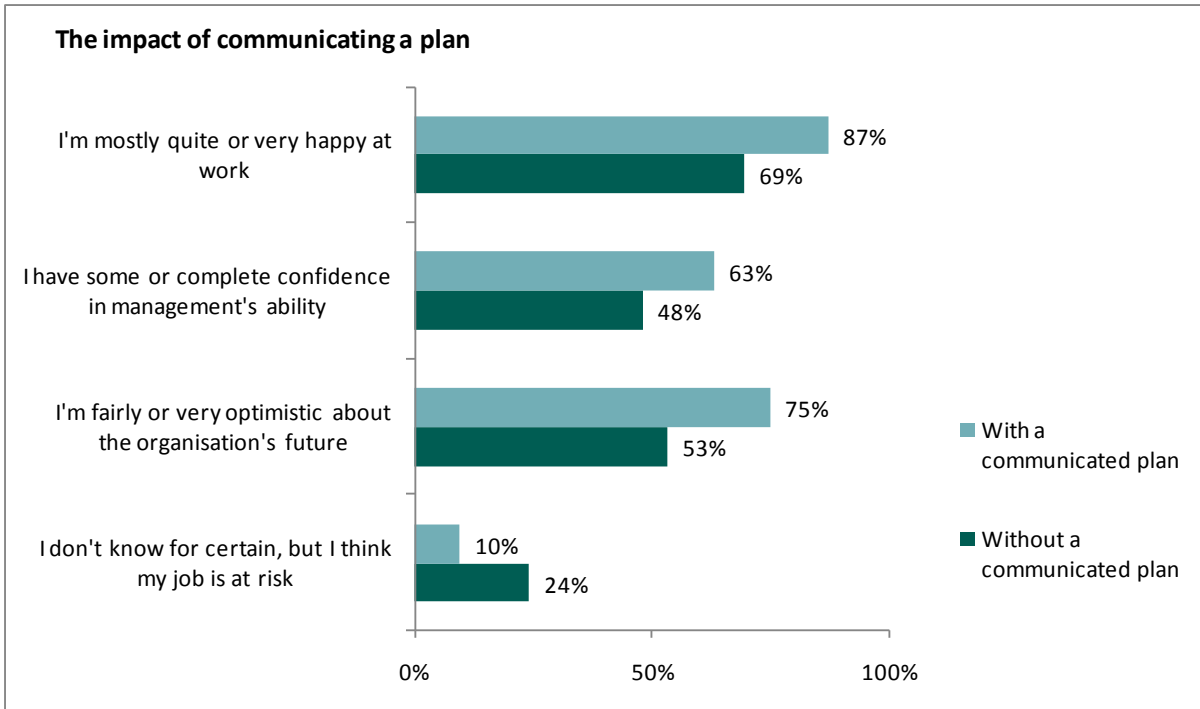
We are heartened to see the majority of respondents describing themselves as generally happy at work: 55% of people say they are mostly quite happy at work, while 25% say they are very happy most of the time. Happiness is also infectious – people who feel happy describe their colleagues as feeling the same.

All this happiness, in a time of uncertain job security. Just under half our respondents think their job is safe, just under a quarter think their job is at risk and a similar proportion say they really don't know what the future holds. Less than 1 in 5 say they have any kind of certainty on this front.

We think these results highlight the resilience and optimism of most managers. They also illustrate how people have become accustomed to lower levels of job security. The 'job for life' has been replaced by the 'portfolio career.' In place of job security, people increasingly expect their employers to offer opportunities to develop their employability in preparation for their next role.

So by making sure this group are properly involved and engaged with the priorities of the business, employers can exploit this reserve of energy and keep their side of the employability bargain. We found that two-thirds of our respondents had been told about some kind of plan to address the challenges of the economic downturn by their leaders. Of these people, a similar proportion said they understood most, if not all, of the plan. This is encouraging evidence that organisations are involving their managers in putting the wheels on their strategy – and that managers are ready to listen and act.

That still leaves a third of managers unaware of what senior leaders are planning to do in response to the economic downturn. And the results suggest that not communicating a plan has a negative impact on happiness, job security, confidence in management and in particular optimism about the future of the organisation. So the key message here is it's good to talk.



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**A note on accuracy**

Based on this sample size, the estimated margin of error for these results is plus or minus 7 percentage points. This means that if we had been able to survey everyone in the target population, the results would vary by a range of ±7 percentage points around the figures given here.

Where this means the results for the general population might be too close to call, we've said so.

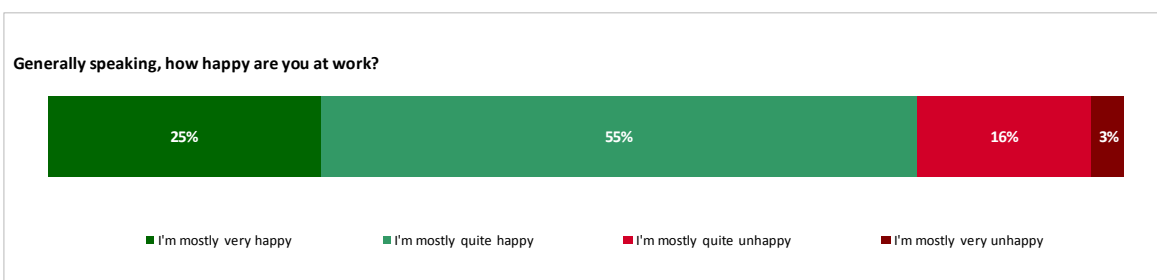
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## All-respondent headlines

### Happiness

Happiness is subjective, it comes and goes and can be influenced by a range of factors. We recognise this. But we also believe that asking someone in general terms how happy they are (most of the time) at work provides a useful indication of how people are experiencing work on a day to day basis.

- 80% of respondents say they are mostly quite or very happy at work



This is an encouraging result. This indicates that, generally speaking, people are getting something out of work which makes them feel good.

More than just earning money, we believe that happiness at work is related to having the freedom to be yourself at work; feeling that your contribution is valuable and valued and a sense of control through having a say in important decisions that affect you or what you do.

### Colleagues' happiness

How are your colleagues feeling? Probably the same as you are:

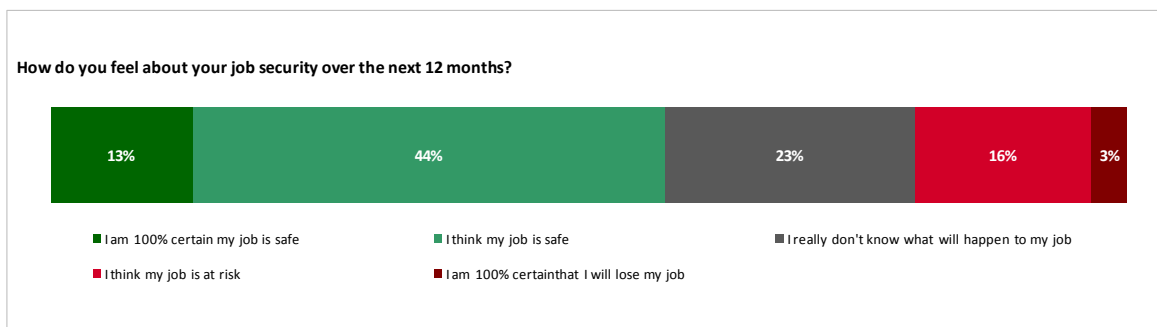
- 86% of those that said they were mostly happy at work described their colleagues as feeling the same.
- Among the minority that said they felt mostly unhappy at work, 71% said their colleagues felt the same.

### Job security over the next 12 months

This result should be considered in the context of two things: First, there has been a steady decline in peoples' expectations of job security – they expect to move around as part of a 'portfolio career'. Second, through the media everyone is aware of the recession and its impact on jobs.

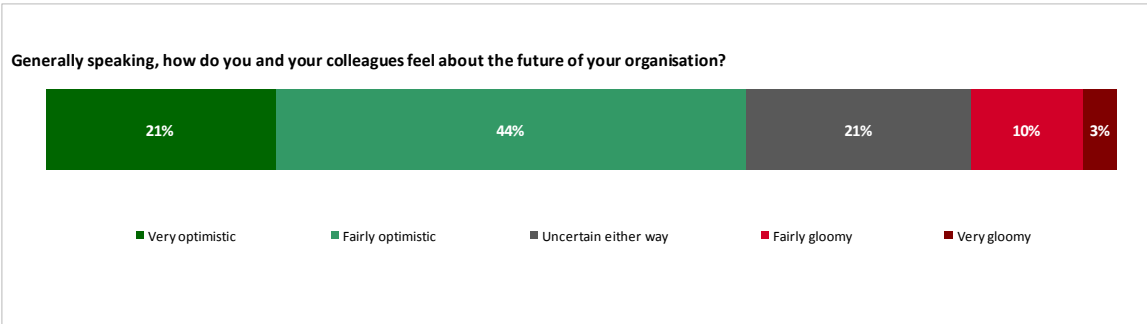
So unsurprisingly, only 16% of respondents were certain about the future of their current position and nearly a quarter of people said they didn't know. Of those that were left, a sense of optimism prevails, with 44% thinking their job is safe for the next 12 months.

Given the ±7% margin of error, the gap between thinking your job is safe and thinking your job is at risk may be narrower.



### Optimism about the organisation's future

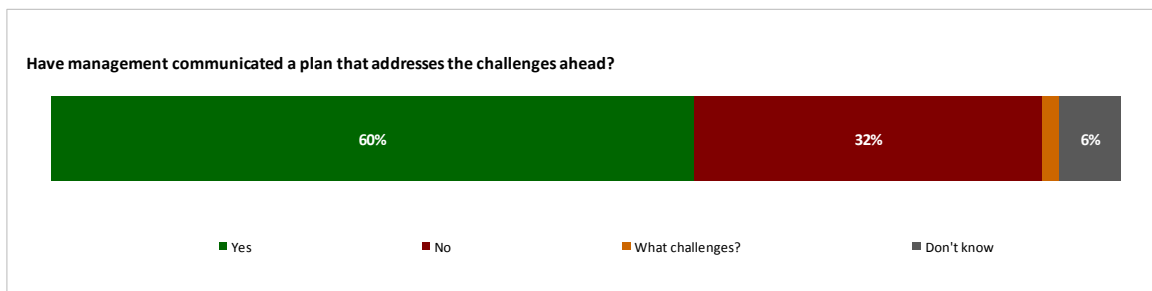
- When asked how they felt about the future of their organisation over the next 12 months, 65% of people said they were either fairly or very optimistic.



### Communicating a plan

- Two-thirds of respondents say that management have communicated a plan to address the challenges ahead.

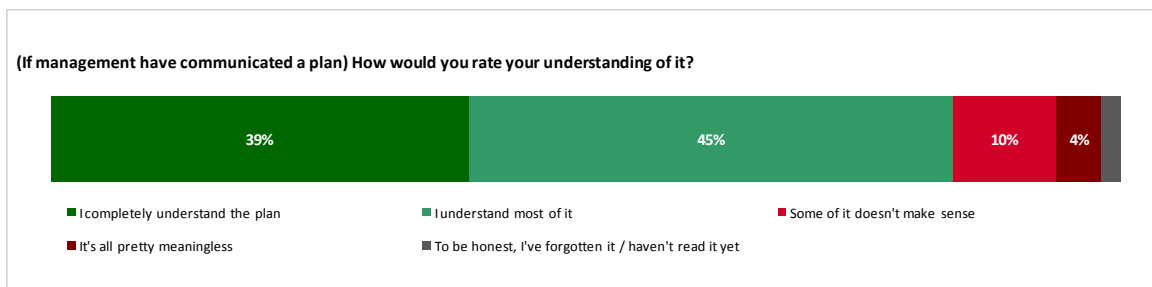
This is reassuring to see. But it still leaves a third of respondents who haven't heard (or can't remember hearing) what leaders propose to do. We take a more detailed look at the impact of having a plan further below.



### Understanding of the plan

- 84% of respondents understood at least most, if not all the plan.

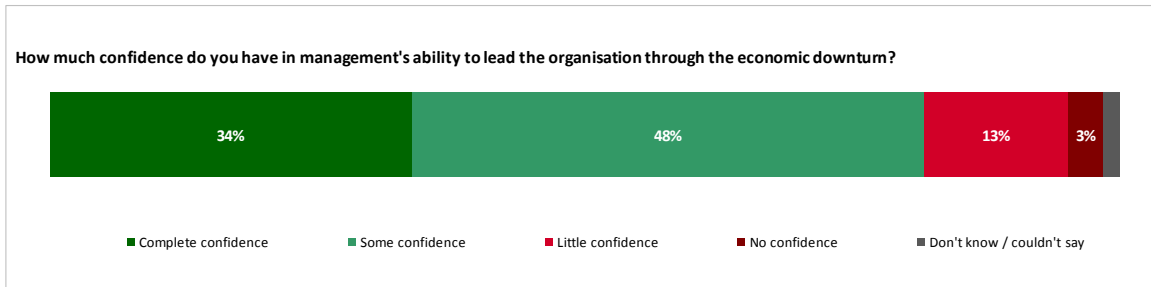
We would expect this, given that the target population are middle management or have equivalent leadership roles in the business. This also shows that this group are receptive to such information. And of course it suggests that most plans are being communicated effectively.



### Confidence in management

Respondents have confidence in their management’s ability to lead the organisation through the economic downturn.

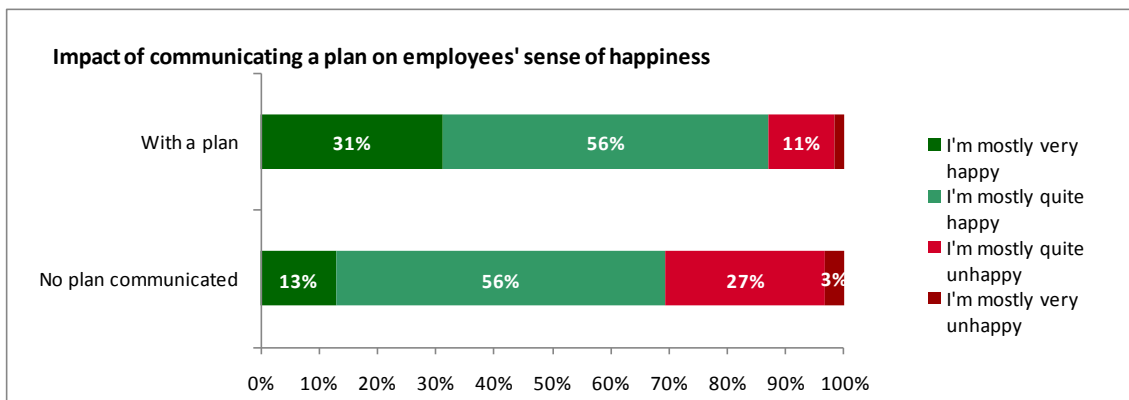
- 82% of all respondents say they have some or complete confidence in management’s ability to lead the organisation through the economic downturn.



### The impact of communicating a plan...

#### ...on happiness:

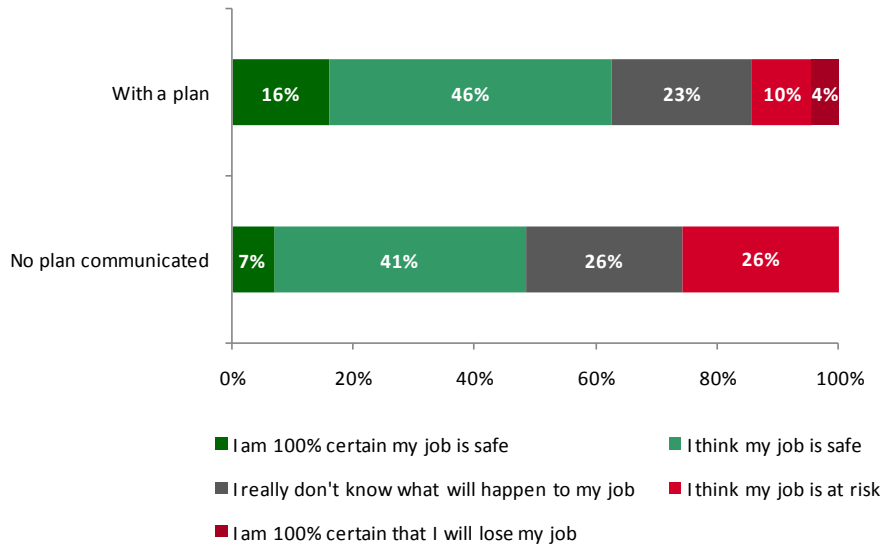
- The proportion of people who say they are unhappy at work more than doubles in organisations where management haven’t communicated a plan.



#### ...on job security:

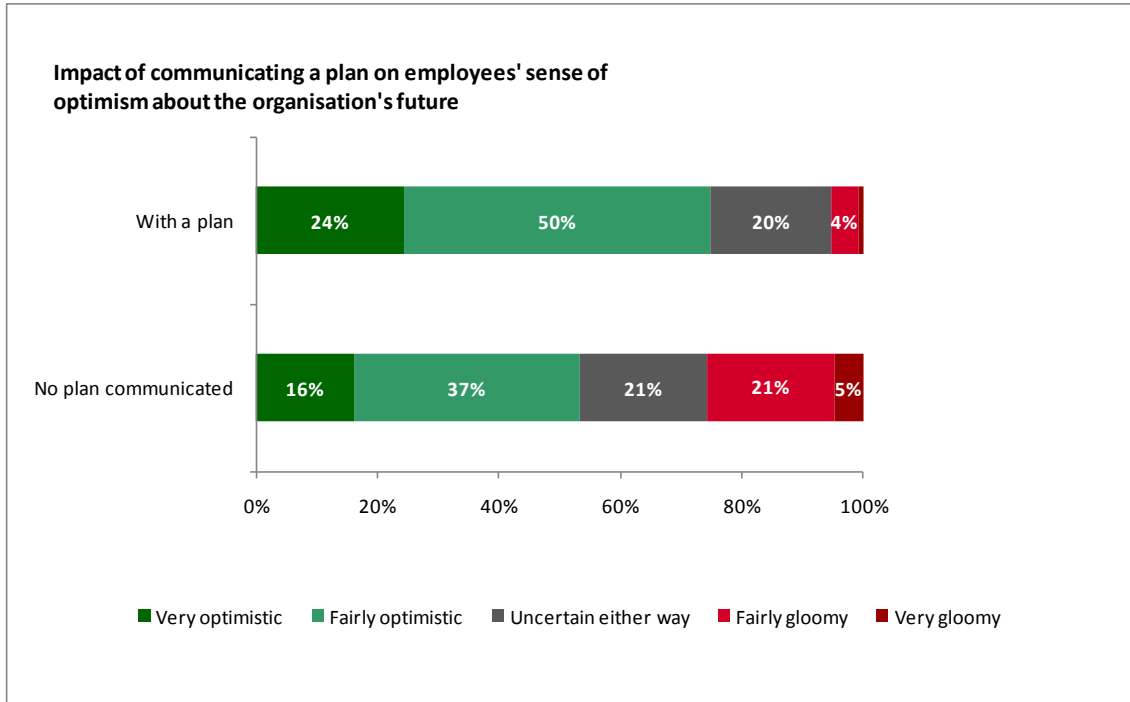
- The proportion of individuals who have a sense of certainty over the future of their jobs in the next 12 months is over 3 times greater in organisations with a communicated plan.

**Impact of communicating a plan on employees' sense of job security**



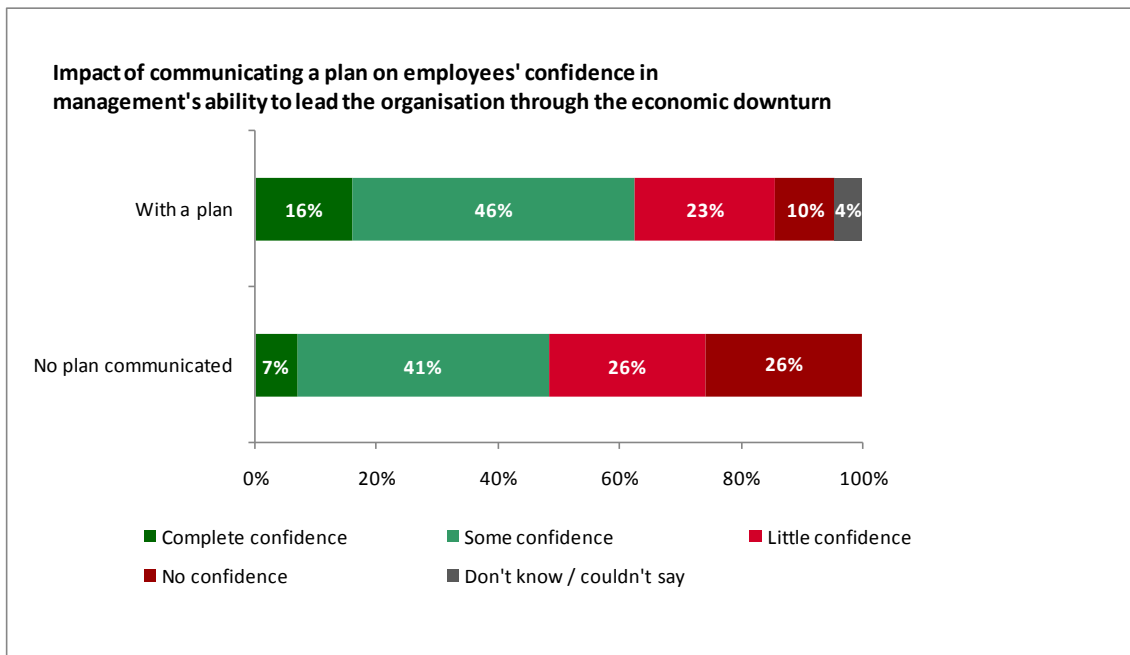
**...on optimism:**

- With a plan communicated, almost three-quarters of people feel some sense of optimism about the future of their organisation.
- Without a plan, the proportion of people who feel gloomy about the organisation’s future increases to 26%.



**...on confidence in your leaders' abilities:**

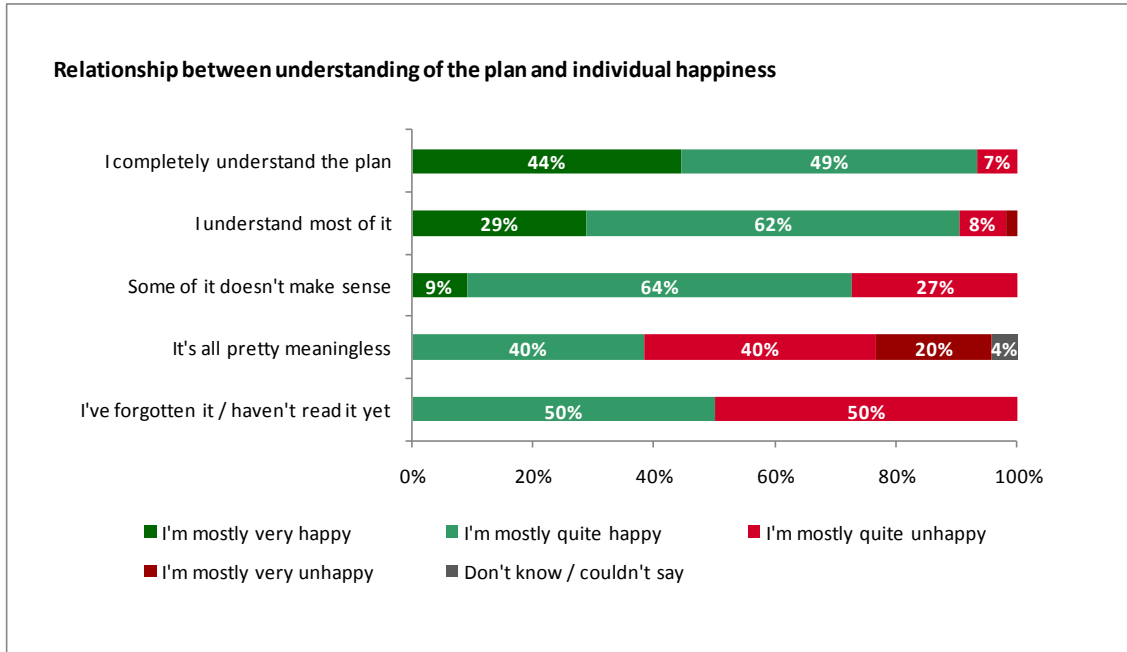
- The proportion of people who have little or no confidence in the ability of management is almost 3 times greater in organisations without a communicated plan.



## Understanding the plan

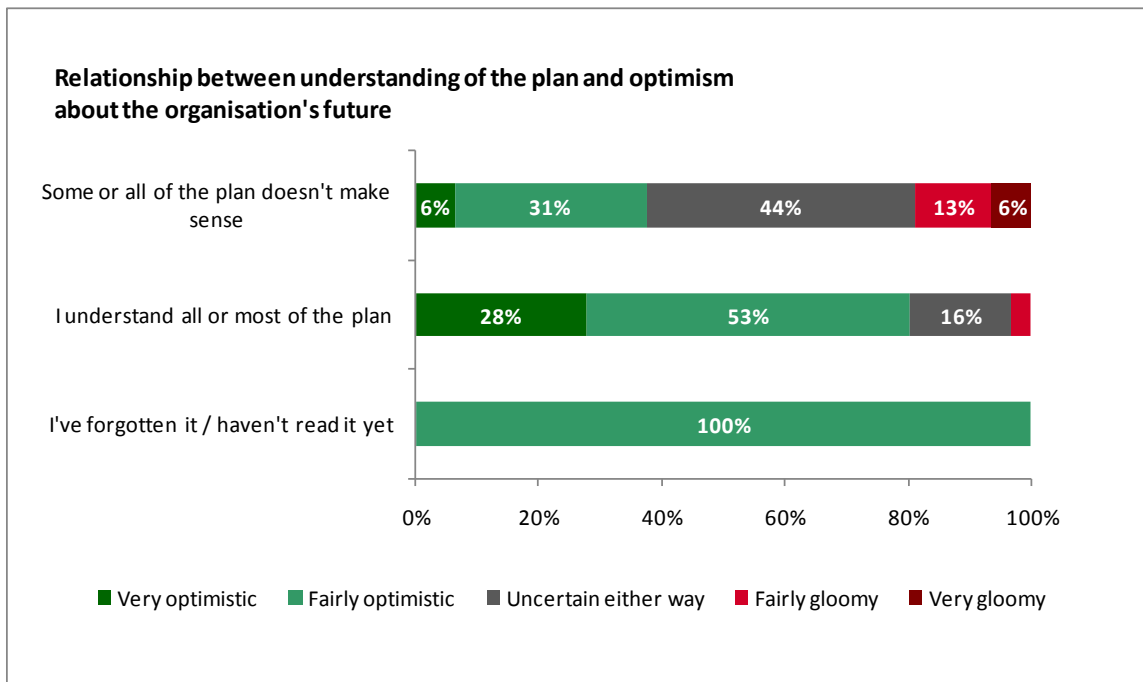
### Relationship with happiness:

The survey reveals a potential relationship between employees' understanding of the plan and their happiness at work. This may be because happier employees are more receptive to hearing about plans (and therefore likely to give attention to, and understand it). Or it could suggest that people who have an understanding of management's plans are generally happier at work (because they understand the reasons behind decisions being made).



### Relationship with optimism:

- 80% of people who understand the plan are optimistic about the future of the organisation. This drops to 38% for people who don't understand it.





**Relationship with confidence in leaders:**

From these results, it appears that the default is to have at least some confidence in the ability of your leaders. If what leaders are saying makes little sense, then that confidence starts to evaporate.

