

Press release

Swiss HR Barometer 2024

The importance of work increases with age

25. September 2024

The thirteenth edition of the Swiss HR Barometer focusses on the topic of 'Sense and nonsense at work'. The majority of the 2032 respondents in Switzerland feel that their work is important and meaningful, with this becoming increasingly important from the age of 55. However, almost half feel alienated to some extent, and the perceived boredom has increased slightly compared to 10 years ago.

With the spread of artificial intelligence (AI) in the work context, the question of the sense and non-sense of work is becoming increasingly relevant. AI technologies have the potential to automate many tasks and fundamentally change the way we work. On the one hand, new technologies can increase productivity and free people from monotonous or dangerous tasks; on the other hand, it is important to preserve the meaning of work for people. The Swiss HR Barometer 2024 analyses the meaning and nonsense of work from the employees' perspective.

The importance of work

For employees in Switzerland, work is generally very important in life. A comparison of the importance of the various areas of life shows that the areas of 'gainful employment' and 'family and leisure' are the most important for working people in Switzerland, with an average of almost 30% each. With increasing age, the importance of gainful employment increases (from 28% to 36%) and that of leisure time decreases (from 31% to 22%). Family is generally the most important area of life, especially for middle-aged respondents. Compared to 2014, the importance of family has remained almost the same, while the importance of gainful employment has decreased and that of leisure time has increased to a similar extent (on average by around 4-5%). These results indicate that there is indeed a general tendency to attach less importance to gainful employment and more importance to leisure time. An interesting detail, however, is that in an age comparison, gainful employment is the most important and leisure time the least important for 56 to 65-year-olds. Instead of dismissing older employees as unwilling to learn and unmotivated, this group should be given much more attention and support, also in view of demographic change.

Meaningfulness and alienation

Almost half of employees (47%) see their work as meaningful, for more than a third this is at least partially true (36%). In particular, many have a good sense of what makes their work meaningful. It is also pleasing to see that almost three quarters (71%) of respondents are absorbed in their work and therefore feel that they can develop further and are energised and vital at work. The majority of employees also feel that their work is coherent overall, i.e. consistent and comprehensible.

However, 51% also report that they feel at least partially alienated from their work. Just under a quarter of these (24%) even feel often or always alienated from their own work. Work is perceived by employees as a burden; they are disillusioned and distanced from their work and their working environment. Employers need to take action here. In 2024, almost a quarter of employees were also bored at work at least sometimes, compared to just 12% ten years ago.

More satisfaction thanks to meaningfulness

If work has a high priority in the lives of employees, this leads to a greater sense of meaningfulness at work, a greater sense of coherence and a sense of thriving at work. If work has a low status in the employee's life and the work incentive is primarily of a financial nature, this tends to lead to alienation and boredom at work.

The perceived importance of work, the feeling of coherence and being absorbed in the work reduce job insecurity and intentions to quit, increase job and career satisfaction and strengthen the bond with the employer. If work is perceived as coherent and employees are absorbed in their work, the perception of stress also decreases. The opposite pattern is seen when employees feel alienated or bored at work.

Trend towards stagnation

According to the trend analyses, employers can continue to build on a positive overall mood among employees. Many work attitudes have been relatively stable since measurements began in 2006, apart from minor deviations. Work organisation is rated positively overall. Job satisfaction and commitment remain high. Only the intention to resign has fallen slightly. The mutual expectations and offers of employees and employers (so-called psychological contract) tend to stagnate. Employers' offers are perceived by employees as almost unchanged compared to 2022. The majority of employees' expectations remain stable or are even slightly lower.

Despite the current employment-friendly labour market, almost half of employees (45%) are interested in a traditional security-oriented career in the company. In recent years, this figure has always been less than 40%. This increased need for security could be linked to the many social and political uncertainties. This requires a careful balance between stability and necessary changes in companies in order to prevent the high security-orientation of employees from leading to an unhealthy insistence on the status quo.

Good job design with diverse, holistic and meaningful tasks, autonomy and opportunities for participation as well as a positive management relationship are core components of entrepreneurial measures that strengthen employees' employability and promote motivation and satisfaction.

Swiss HR-Barometer

The Swiss HR Barometer measures how employees in Switzerland experience their work situation. Amongst the topics surveyed are: mutual expectations and obligations of employees and employers as a component of the employment relationship (psychological contract); HR management practices such as work design and personnel development; job satisfaction; employability; and career orientation. The study is published on a regular basis by Gudela Grote, professor of Work and Organisational Psychology at the ETH Zurich, and Bruno Staffelbach, Head of the Centre for Human Resource Management at the University of Lucerne, in cooperation with the University of Zurich. The HR Barometer 2022 is based on a survey of 2088 employees selected from the sample register kept by the Federal Statistical Office. The focal topic of the latest issue is “Sense and nonsense at work”. The survey took place in the German-, French- and Italian-speaking regions of Switzerland between March and June 2024.

The HR Barometer 2024 was published with the support of the Swiss National Science Foundation (Funding instrument ‘Research infrastructures’, project number 198051).

The report can be downloaded at: www.hrbarometer.ch →

Bibliographical references

Gudela Grote und Bruno Staffelbach (Hrsg.): Swiss HR-Barometer 2024: Sense and nonsense at work. Universities of Lucerne, Zurich and ETH Zurich. ISBN 978-3-033-10799-1

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