



Swiss Human Relations Barometer Spring Newsletter 2017

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Editorial

In the Swiss HR Barometer, job satisfaction is measured using five types, which differ with regard to individual reactions to the (non-) alignment of expectations and reality. The first article in this newsletter presents analyses relating to these job satisfaction types, which are thought-provoking to worrying: 30% of workers in Switzerland are resigned satisfied, in other words they have compensated for the non-alignment of expectations and reality by lowering their expectations. The number of resigned satisfied workers has increased steadily in recent years. Resigned satisfied workers can be found in all sectors, across all educational levels, ages and genders. A fulfilled psychological contract, partici-

pation opportunities, autonomy and regular feedback can promote a constructive approach to dealing with discrepancies between expectation and reality.

The organisation of human resource management activities, which could, for example, support such measures, is the topic of the second article. The decentralisation of HR management activities to line managers is generally received positively, but proves negative where job insecurity exists. In uncertain times, workers tend to be dissatisfied and are more likely to intend to leave the company if the responsibility for activities such as remuneration, development or redundancies lies with line managers.

The Swiss HR Barometer is a joint project run by the University of Zurich, ETH Zurich and University of Lucerne. It is funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation and it has been gathering information on how workers in Switzerland experience their work situation since 2006. Using a representative, differentiated survey of workers in Switzerland conducted at regular intervals, fundamental aspects of organisational psychology are assessed to inform human resource policy making.

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We would be delighted if this newsletter could contribute to an appropriate organisation of HR management activities and to a constructive approach to dealing with unfulfilled employee expectations.

Gudela Grote & Bruno Staffelbach, editors

Satisfied but resigned – a look at the job satisfaction of Swiss employees

Job satisfaction is of central importance, both for workers and for the companies they work in. Satisfied workers suffer from burnout less often (Faragher, Cass, & Cooper, 2005) and stay in the same employment relationship for longer (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000). In addition, companies with more satisfied employees display higher productivity and profitability (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002). The job satisfaction of workers should therefore be an objective of every HR management department.

The analyses of the HR Barometer 2016 showed that employees in Switzerland generally experience a high degree of job satisfaction (Grote & Staffelbach, 2016). 79% of employees say they are quite satisfied or even completely satisfied with their work overall. The question arises, however, of whether the reason for this high satisfaction figure lies in a complete fulfilment of the

workers' expectations. According to the Zurich job satisfaction model (Bruggemann, Groskurth & Ulich, 1975), a distinction can be made between five different types of job satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) (Table 1). These stem from a comparison of the target situation and the actual situation for workers. The model shows that job satisfaction is not necessarily the result of a satisfactory comparison. People with resigned satisfaction react to an unsatisfactory comparison of the target and actual situation by lowering their own requirements.

According to the HR Barometer 2016, 30% of workers are only resigned satisfied. They have resigned themselves to the status quo as they do not believe they have better alternatives. Among the high number of workers who say they are satisfied with their work overall, there is therefore a large percentage of people who are only resigned satisfied. The surveys by the HR Barometer in recent years also indicate a clear rise in the number of these resigned satisfied workers (Figure 1). But who are these workers who have lowered their requirement level with regard to their work in this way?

Who is lowering their requirement level with regard to their own work?

To find out which workers tend to be resigned satisfied, the effect of demographic variables (gender, education) and the effect of situational variables (position, employment duration, company size, sector) was investigated using logistic regression analyses.

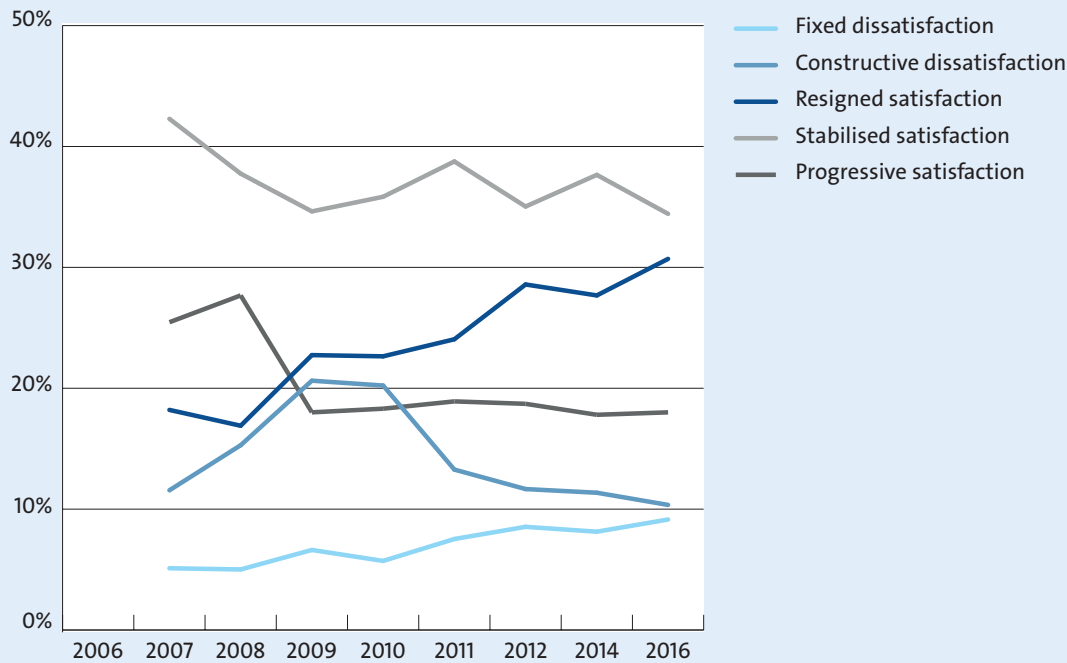
The analyses show a similar distribution of types of job (dis)satisfaction among men and women. It there-

Table 1 The various forms of job (dis)satisfaction

	Progressive satisfaction	Stabilised satisfaction	Resigned satisfaction	Constructive dissatisfaction	Fixed dissatisfaction
Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target = actual • Raising of the requirement level • Growing requirements because workers view these as completely fulfilled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target = actual • Keeping the requirement level the same • Desire for everything to stay as it is 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target > actual • Lowering of the requirement level • Resignation with the status quo 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target > actual • Keeping the requirement level the same, with attempts to solve the problem • Are dissatisfied, but know what has to change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target > actual • Keeping the requirement level the same, without attempts to solve the problem • Perceive the situation as hopeless and frustrating
Percentage of workers	17%	34%	30%	10%	9%

Figure 1

Trend in the distribution of the various types of job (dis)satisfaction



fore does not appear as though women, for instance, more often lower their requirements with regard to their own work as they believe they have no better alternatives.

A higher educational level cannot protect against an unsatisfactory target/actual comparison. The analyses show that the various types of job (dis)satisfaction are similarly prevalent among workers who have basic professional training as their highest education as among those workers who have a university degree. Detailed analyses indicate that, among workers who have a doctorate or even postdoctoral qualification, the percentage of resigned satisfied workers is even higher than among other workers. It is possible that people with a very high level of educational attainment place such high requirements on their work that these are inevitably unfulfilled and lowered, or changes have to be demanded.

The analyses show that workers with a resigned attitude can be found in all positions. Resigned satisfaction is, however, more prevalent among employees without a managerial position (Figure 2). The percentage of resigned workers is particularly high among trainees in basic professional training. 41% of these respondents report that they have lowered their requirements. Quite possibly, workers at the beginning of their careers do not believe they have good alternatives, or they do not feel able to demand changes due to their entry-level position in the company. Employees with a managerial role are more likely to be progressive satisfied. The fact

that almost one in four employees with a managerial role is only resigned satisfied shows that it is not only at the beginning of careers that employees lower their requirement level.

Workers who have worked in the company for longer are more likely to be resigned satisfied. Resigned satisfied employees are also found more often in larger companies. One in three employees in a company with more than 250 employees say they are resigned satisfied, while it is only one in four in smaller companies. Resigned satisfied employees are found in all sectors. They are found least often in the field of transport and communications (23%) and most often in hospitality (38%).

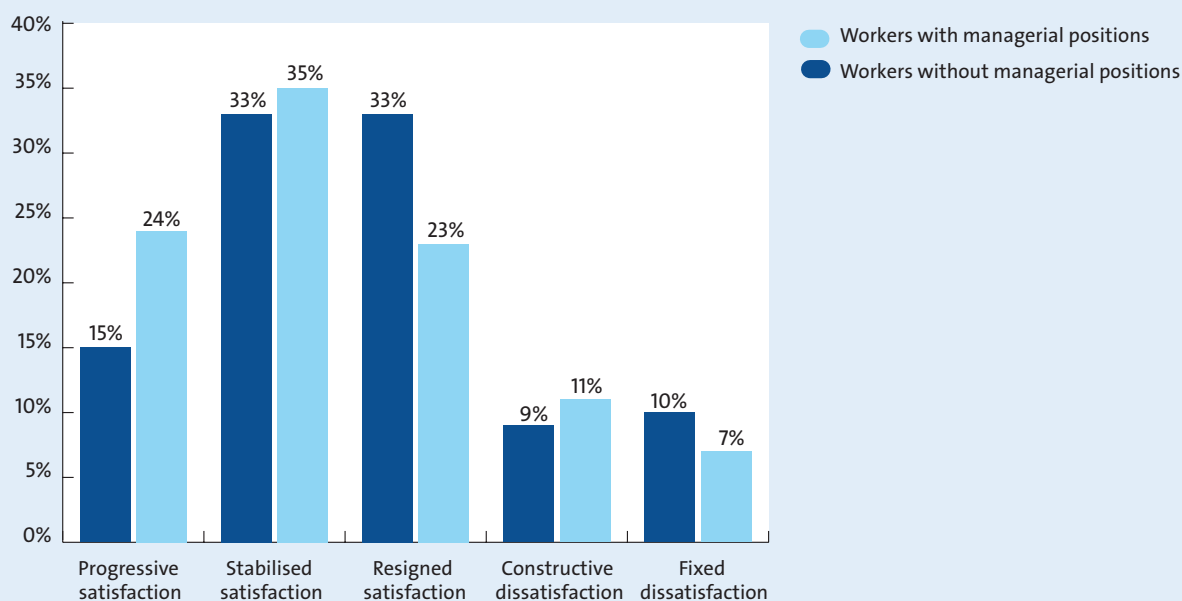
How can resigned job satisfaction be counteracted?

To address this question, regression analyses were applied. The analyses show that the fulfilment of the psychological contract between employer and employee plays a central role. This is logical, as resigned job satisfaction arises from an unsatisfactory target/actual comparison. Consequently, to prevent resigned attitudes among employees, the continuous management of the workers' expectations and the employer's offers is important.

Workers who take part in decision making and can make suggestions for improvement relating to their work are less likely to sink into a resigned state. They do not have to resign themselves to the status quo as they are able to help shape this themselves. Workers who re-

Figure 2

Types of job (dis)satisfaction depending on managerial role



ceive regular feedback from their supervisors are less likely to be resigned satisfied. Such talks may offer workers the opportunity to address any discrepancies early on and to demand changes.

Conclusion

Resigned job satisfaction is widespread in Switzerland and seeing a constant upward trend. Resigned satisfied workers can be found in all sectors, educational levels, ages and genders. A fulfilled psychological contract, participation opportunities, freedom to act and regular feedback can help to improve the situation.

Julia Humm

Centralised HRM in uncertain times?

HRM decentralisation refers to the increased involvement of line managers in human resource management (HRM) activities, such as recruitment, remuneration, development or redundancies (Brewster, Brookes, & Gollan, 2015). While line managers have always been involved in managing personnel, the shifting of the activities of the central HR department towards line managers is a growing trend. As direct supervisors generally understand the needs of their employees better and can react more appropriately to these, companies hope to achieve a more effective management of human resour-

ces by decentralising HRM.

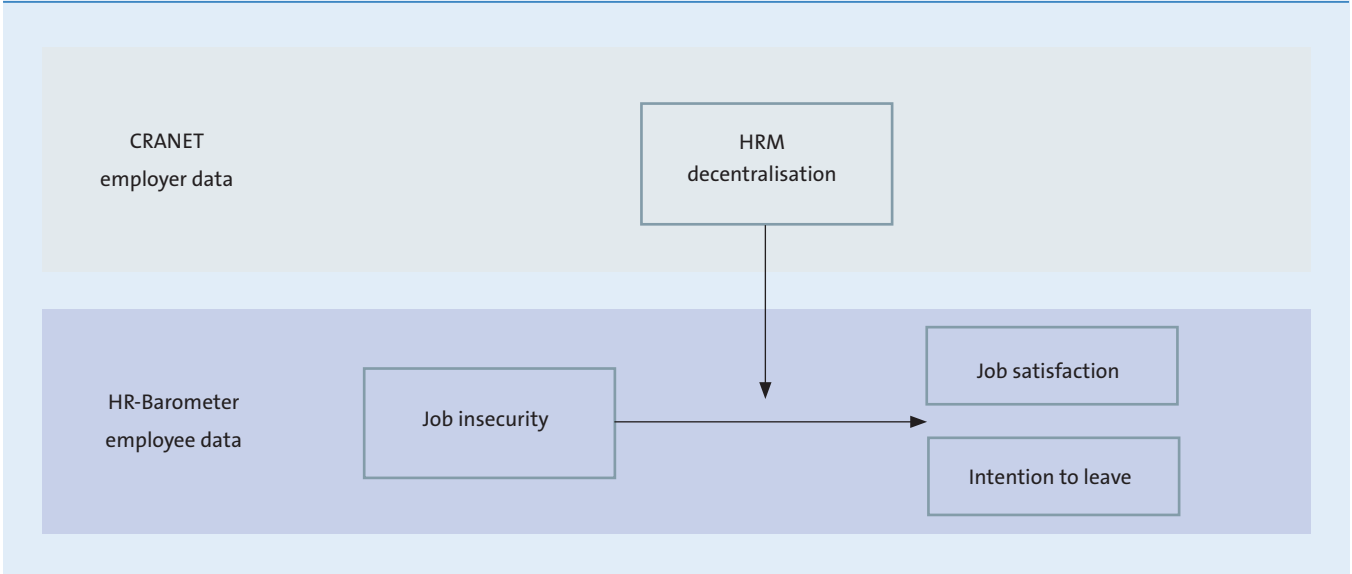
Before now, however, there has been little research into the effects that decentralisation of HRM has on workers, particularly in uncertain times. In the fast-paced economic world of today, restructuring, mergers and takeovers are part of everyday life in many companies (Sverke & Hellgren, 2002). Lots of workers are therefore repeatedly confronted with the fear of losing their jobs. Academic studies prove that a subjectively felt job insecurity both reduces the job satisfaction of employees and increases the likelihood of them leaving (Cheng & Chan, 2007). This study investigated whether or not these reactions differ depending on the degree to which HRM is decentralised in a company (see Figure 1).

Method and approach

To answer this question, employee data from the Swiss HR Barometer 2014 was linked to data from the Swiss Employer Survey by the Cranfield Network on International Human Resource Management (CRANET) of 2014. The CRANET employer survey collects objective information relating to the organisation and HR policies of companies in more than 30 countries in a four-year cycle. The HR Barometer data from a total of 108 employees from 40 companies could be linked to the associated company information on decentralisation of HRM from the CRANET survey. In the HR Barometer research, job insecurity, job satisfaction, intention to leave and various control variables (e.g. employee age and gender) were recorded. In the CRANET survey, the degree of HRM decentralisation was measured by HR ma-

Figure 3

Decentralisation of HRM



nagers assessing the extent to which the primary responsibility for activities such as personnel remuneration, recruitment and development lies with the HR department or with line managers in their companies.

Results

The data analysis shows that a decentralisation of HRM has a significant influence on how workers react to job insecurity. Where there is a high degree of decentralisation of HRM in a company, job insecurity has a negative impact on the job satisfaction of workers. But where

HRM decentralisation is low, there is no corresponding effect (see Figure 2). A similar result, albeit less strongly pronounced, is evident with regard to intention to leave (see Figure 3): if HRM is strongly decentralised in a company, job insecurity increases employees' intention to leave. If, on the other hand, HR decisions are made centrally (low HRM decentralisation), job insecurity does not have any effect on workers' intention to leave.

Figure 4

Job satisfaction depending on job insecurity and HRM decentralisation

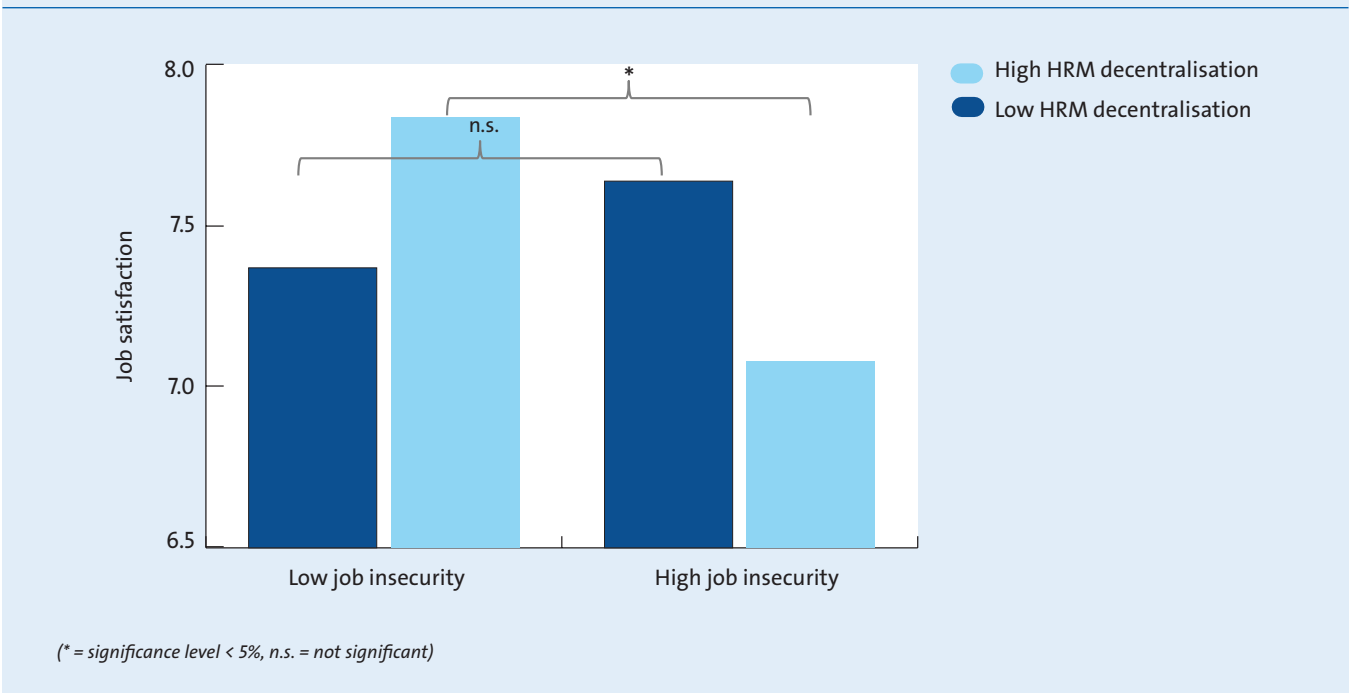
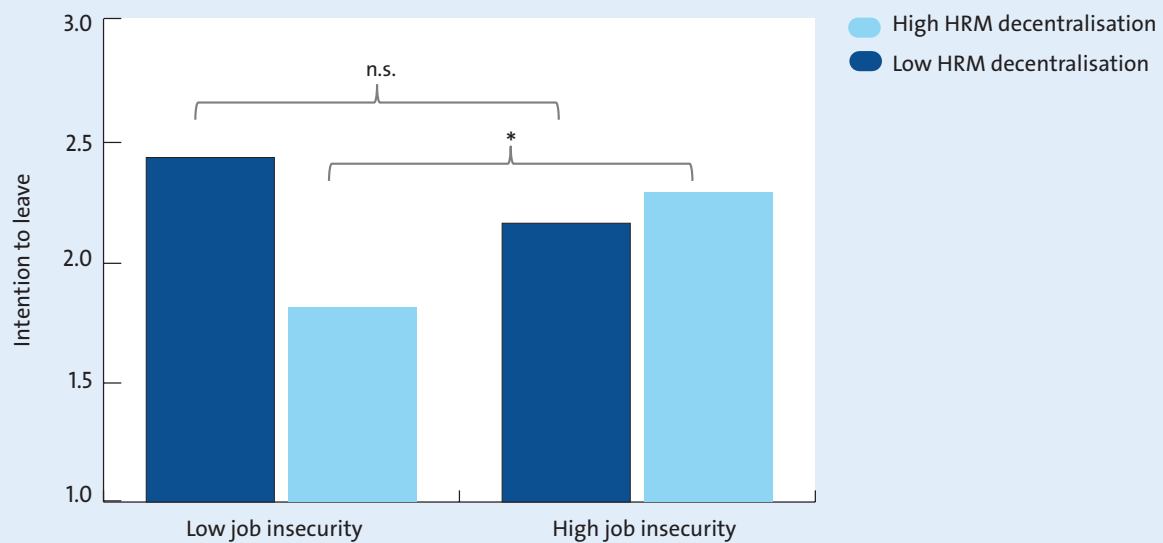


Figure 5

Intention to leave depending on job insecurity and HRM decentralisation



(* = significance level < 5%, n.s. = not significant)

Conclusion

In summary, the study shows that high job insecurity has a negative impact on workers if the company places the majority of HR responsibility with line managers. As a result, in uncertain times employees tend to be dissatisfied and more likely to intend to leave if HRM is organised decentrally within the company. These findings can be explained by other studies, which show that too much decentralisation of HR responsibilities leads to a lack of consistency and standardisation (Kulik & Bainbridge, 2006). In uncertain times especially, a lack of HR coherence within the company can result in feelings of unfairness and therefore heighten the negative reactions of workers. In addition, trust in a centrally organised top management appears to be very important where there is job insecurity (Jiang & Probst, 2016). If HR responsibility is largely decentralised, however, the presumed positive effect of trust in top management diminishes. Based on the research results, a more centralised

management of HR responsibilities is recommended in uncertain times, to avoid the negative effect of job insecurity on work attitudes and behavioural intentions. HR decisions, such as a reduction of jobs, represent a particular challenge for line managers in turbulent times. If such decisions are made centrally, however, these may be seen as fairer and may be better accepted. In stable times, on the other hand, decentrally organised HRM appears more advantageous: workers are more satisfied and do not have such a strong intention to leave if line managers make HR decisions locally.

Anja Feierabend & Anna Sender

Source:

Feierabend, A., & Sender, A. When less is more: the role of line managers' HR involvement in the effects of job insecurity. (Working paper)

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News

- The Swiss National Science Foundation has approved the funding for the infrastructure project Swiss HR Barometer for a further four years (2017 – 2020).
- Co-editor Prof. Dr. Bruno Staffelbach became the president of the University of Lucerne on 1 August 2016. The Swiss HR Barometer is therefore now a joint project run by the ETH Zurich, the University of Zurich and the University of Lucerne.
- In August 2016, Dr. Wiebke Doden presented a study on the topic «How the Labor Market Situation Affects Employees' Trust in Organizations and Themselves» to the conference of the Academy of Management in Anaheim (USA), based on international data from the HR Barometer 2014.
- On 24 August 2016, Prof. Gudela Grote presented results from the Swiss HR Barometer under the title «Job crafting: Does work become healthier and better if we shape it ourselves?» to the National Convention for Operational Health Management in Zurich. To accompany the lecture, an interview with Prof. Gudela Grote was published in the journal HR Today.
- On 28 September 2016, Prof. Gudela Grote presented the results from the Swiss HR Barometer under the title «Challenges caused by virtualization and increasing flexibility of work» at the Swisslife Claims Day in Zurich.
- On 6 October 2016, Prof. Gudela Grote reported results from the Swiss HR Barometer under the title «Conditions of work in the age of globalisation and digitalisation» to the Zurich convention «Fairness in the working world», organised by the Reformed Church of the Canton of Zurich.
- Under the title «Companies should take the concerns of employees seriously», an interview with Prof. Gudela Grote about the results of the Swiss HR Barometer 2016 was published in the daily paper of the City of Zurich, Tagblatt, on 9 November 2016.
- On 15 November 2016, Prof. Bruno Staffelbach and Prof. Gudela Grote presented the results of the Swiss HR Barometer 2016 to an evening forum of the Zurich Society for HR Management.
- An interview with Prof. Bruno Staffelbach and Prof. Gudela Grote about the Swiss HR Barometer 2016 was published in the December 2016 edition of the journal HR Today.
- In the February 2017 edition of the journal Personal-Schweiz from publisher WEKA Verlag, an expert interview with Prof. Bruno Staffelbach was published on the topic of HR Barometer: «Strong continuity and stability».

- Laura Schärer joined the Swiss HR Barometer team as a project assistant in March 2017. She is a PhD student in the Centre for Human Resource Management at the University of Lucerne. We are delighted to welcome Laura Schärer!

Publishing notes

The newsletter of the Swiss Human Relations Barometer is published twice in 2017. It provides information on current research projects based on the data of the HR Barometer. You can subscribe to the newsletter free of charge or download it from the website www.hr-barometer.uzh.ch / www.hr-barometer.ethz.ch.

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