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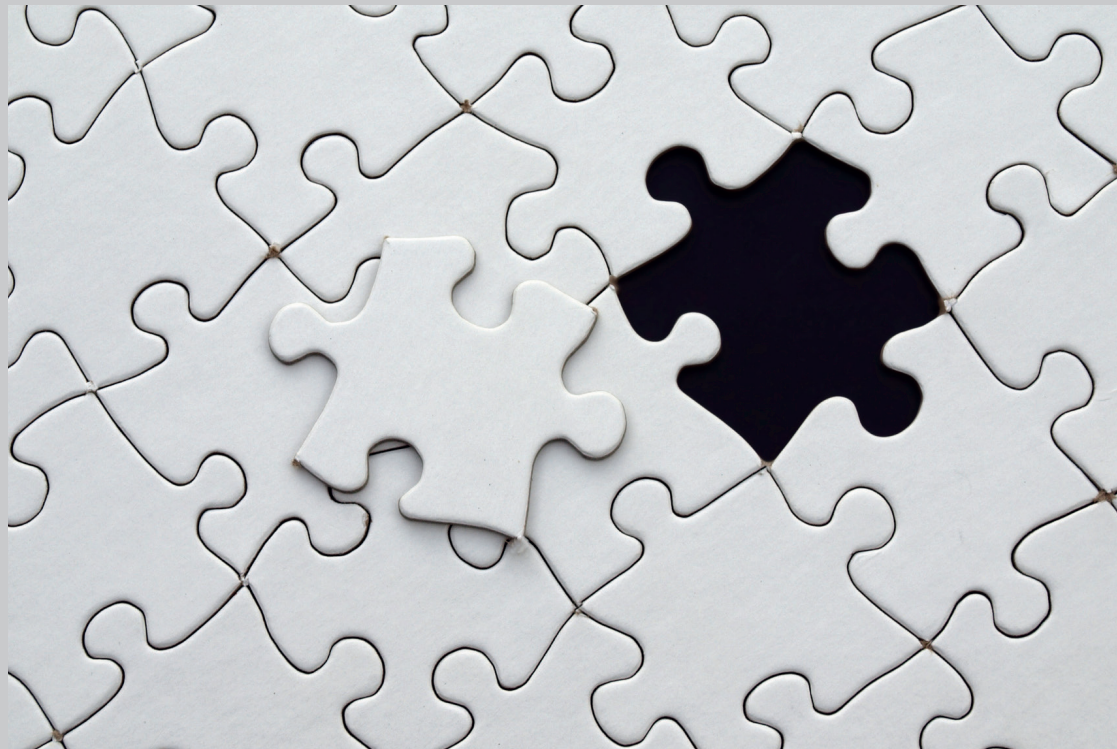
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Swiss HR-Barometer 2024

Focus
Sense and nonsense at work

Executive Summary

Published by Gudela Grote and Bruno Staffelbach



Executive Summary

Latest issue

This year's edition of the Swiss HR Barometer analyses the working climate in Switzerland for the thirteenth time, with a focus on «sense and nonsense at work». With the increasing use of artificial intelligence (AI) in the work context, the question of meaning in work is becoming more important. AI technologies have the potential to automate many tasks and fundamentally change the way people work. This raises important questions: Which tasks do we want to outsource to artificial intelligence in the future, and which do we want to do ourselves? On the one hand, we need to decide which activities can be automated in order to increase productivity and free us from monotonous or dangerous tasks. On the other hand, it is important to ensure that meaning is retained in work so that a job continues to be perceived as fulfilling and meaningful. The Swiss HR Barometer 2024 examines how meaningful and meaningless work is perceived from the perspective of employees.

Random sampling

The sample on which the survey is based was drawn from the Swiss Federal Statistical Office's sample register. The survey was conducted between March and June 2024. Respondents were free to choose between an online version and a paper version of the questionnaire. A total of 2032 responses from employees in the German-, French- and Italian-speaking regions of Switzerland were analysed.

Focus: importance of work

For employees in Switzerland, work is generally very important in their lives. Only 3% of respondents state that work is somewhat or completely unimportant in their lives. In addition to the absolute importance of work, this year's survey also revealed how important work (employment) is in comparison to other areas of life. On average family is the most important to respondents at 36%. This is followed by work at 31% and leisure time at 25%. Charitable activities (4%) and religion and spirituality (3%) are seen as less important by respondents. Work becomes more important with increasing age, while leisure time is particularly important in younger age groups (16 to 35 years). For 36 to 45-year-olds, family moves to the centre of importance. Compared to the 2014 survey, both family and leisure time have become more important in 2024.

Why employees work was assessed via the work orientations. The statement that people work because of social embeddedness was met with the greatest approval, followed by earning an income (financial security). 41% work primarily to achieve career goals. 28% see their work as a calling and a further 9% work primarily to keep busy.

Focus: meaningfulness at work

Many employees in Switzerland feel that their work is important and valuable. Almost half (47%) say that their work is somewhat or completely me-

aningful, and for more than a third (36%) this is at least partially true. Around three quarters (74%) of employees have a good sense of what makes their work meaningful. Opinions are divided when it comes to how helpful their own work is in understanding the world around them: Around a third of employees each feel that it is either (somewhat or not at all) helpful (29%), at least partially helpful (35%) or (somewhat or completely) helpful (36%). As meaningfulness is linked to motivation and work performance, among other things, employers should (continue to) ensure that work is meaningful for employees through work design measures.

A positive picture emerges with regard to thriving at work among employees in Switzerland: almost three quarters (71%) of respondents are completely or partially thriving at 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.

Focus:
lack of meaning at work

Although perceived boredom at work has increased slightly compared to 10 years ago, overall, it is not often present in the everyday working lives of employees in Switzerland.

Around half of employees (51%) also feel at least partially alienated from their work, with just under a quarter (24%) stating that they are somewhat or completely alienated. Work is perceived by employees as a burden; they are disillusioned and distanced from their job and their working environment. There is a need for action on the part of employers.

Focus:
**factors influencing the
experience of meaningfulness**

If work is highly valued in the lives of employees, this leads to an increased feeling of meaningfulness at work, a greater sense of coherence and a sense of being absorbed in their work (thriving). If work has a low priority in the life of the employee and the work incentive is of a financial nature, this tends to lead to alienation and boredom at work.

If work is organised in such a way that employees experience a high variety of tasks and the completion of their tasks is meaningful for the lives of other people, the perceived meaningfulness of their own work also increases. If employees receive feedback from their work about the degree to which they have achieved their goals and have autonomy in carrying out their tasks, this promotes a sense of coherence, can participate in decision-making and have good relationships with colleagues and superiors, they are more likely to be absorbed in their work. A lack of meaning in work - alienation and boredom - can also be counteracted with HR practices. Autonomy, participation, a fulfilled psychological contract and good interpersonal relationships help to combat alienation. Boredom can be minimised through high task variety, a high degree of meaningfulness of the work for other employees and good exchange relationships.

Focus:
**effects of meaningfulness or the
lack of it at work on work**

Individual factors that reflect the experience of sense and nonsense in turn have an effect on other work attitudes and behavioural intentions. The perceived meaningfulness of work, a sense of coherence and thriving at work

attitudes and behavioural intentions

reduce job insecurity and intentions to quit, increase job and career satisfaction and strengthen commitment. If the work is perceived as coherent and the employees are absorbed in their work (thriving), the employees' perception of stress also decreases. The opposite pattern is seen when employees feel alienated or bored at work. This leads to more stress, greater job insecurity, lower job and career satisfaction, less commitment and higher turnover intentions.

Trend: career orientation

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As in previous years, most employees are still categorised as having a traditional career orientation. While the frequency of the traditional promotion-orientated career orientation has hardly changed, the trend in career orientations shows an increase in the frequency of the traditional loyalty-orientated career orientation. At 45%, this career orientation remains the most common among employees in 2024 and the trend is thus moving towards stability and financial security in professional life. For this career type, companies can focus their career planning on long-term retention in the company. This can be achieved, for example, by promoting horizontal (specialist) careers that enables employees to develop into experts.

Trend: human resource management

Once again, this year, employees in Switzerland rate the way their work is designed (task variety, task identity, task significance, feedback, autonomy) positively overall. However, the values for autonomy and task variety are slightly lower this year than in the previous survey.

As in previous years, there is still a clear need for action in performance management and employee development: even in 2024, less than half (44%) of employees in Switzerland receive regular feedback on their performance. There is a positive trend in terms of personnel development: the average number of professional development days has risen significantly again for the first time. In terms of the content of further training, technical skills and other content are increasingly being offered in addition to professional and social skills. However, still less than half of employees (42%) receive career development programmes from their employer.

Leadership as the relationship between employees and superiors were rated as slightly worse than in the last survey in 2022, but remain at a relatively high level. The assessment of opportunities for participation is at the same level as the last survey. There is therefore still a need for action in this area. In the area of remuneration, there is a slight increase in fringe benefits compared to previous years.

Trend: psychological contract

The analysis of the psychological contract focuses on examining the mutual expectations and offers on the part of employers and employees. Compared to previous years, a tendency towards stagnation can be observed in employee expectations and employer offers in 2024, which also reflects the current labour market situation. Employers' offers are almost unchanged compared to 2020, while the majority of employees' expectations remain at a stable level or are even declining slightly. One exception is the expectation of fair

compensation, where there is a sustained upward trend. A transparent definition of the compensation process can help employers to reduce unrealistic salary expectations and strengthen the feeling of fairness among employees.

Trend:
job insecurity and
employability

The job attitudes of employees in Switzerland also showed some stabilisation in 2024. Subjectively perceived job insecurity remains at a low level in almost all sectors. 68% of employees currently see no reason to worry about losing their job in the near future. Labour market readiness has been rated as relatively high for two consecutive surveys in a row. This indicates that both employees and employers have recognised the great importance of employability.

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Trend:
job satisfaction, commit-
ment, intention to quit,
sickness absences

Job satisfaction in Switzerland remains at a relatively high level. However, the trend analysis reveals that job satisfaction has been on a downward trend since 2022. A more detailed analysis of the data also shows a further decline in stabilised satisfaction. Despite the decline, the group of employees in Switzerland with stabilised satisfaction still accounts for the largest share. Compared to 2024, however, an increase in the resigned satisfaction type can be observed. As a result, there is an increase in employees who accept an actually unsatisfactory work situation. The proportion of employees who are committed to positive change in the company has fallen. In addition, there has been a slight decrease in employees' attachment to their employers and a slight increase in intentions to resign. Furthermore, there has been an increase in the number of subjectively reported sick days.

Conclusions

Companies in Switzerland can count on a motivated and loyal workforce. However, they should not take this for granted, but should continuously support it with work design and management measures, also in view of changing needs and living conditions. An interesting detail here is that in an age comparison, gainful employment is the most important and leisure time the least important for 56-65 year olds. Instead of seeing older employees as unwilling and unmotivated to learn, this group should be given far more attention and support, also in view of demographic change.

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