


A person's hands are shown from the bottom, holding a large, glowing paper lantern. The lantern is illuminated from within, casting a warm yellow light. The background is a clear blue sky. The person's arms and hands are silhouetted against the light of the lantern and the sky.

BRINGING BACK THE SPARK IN EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

BCG BRIGHTHOUSE STUDY - SEPTEMBER 2023



About BCG BrightHouse

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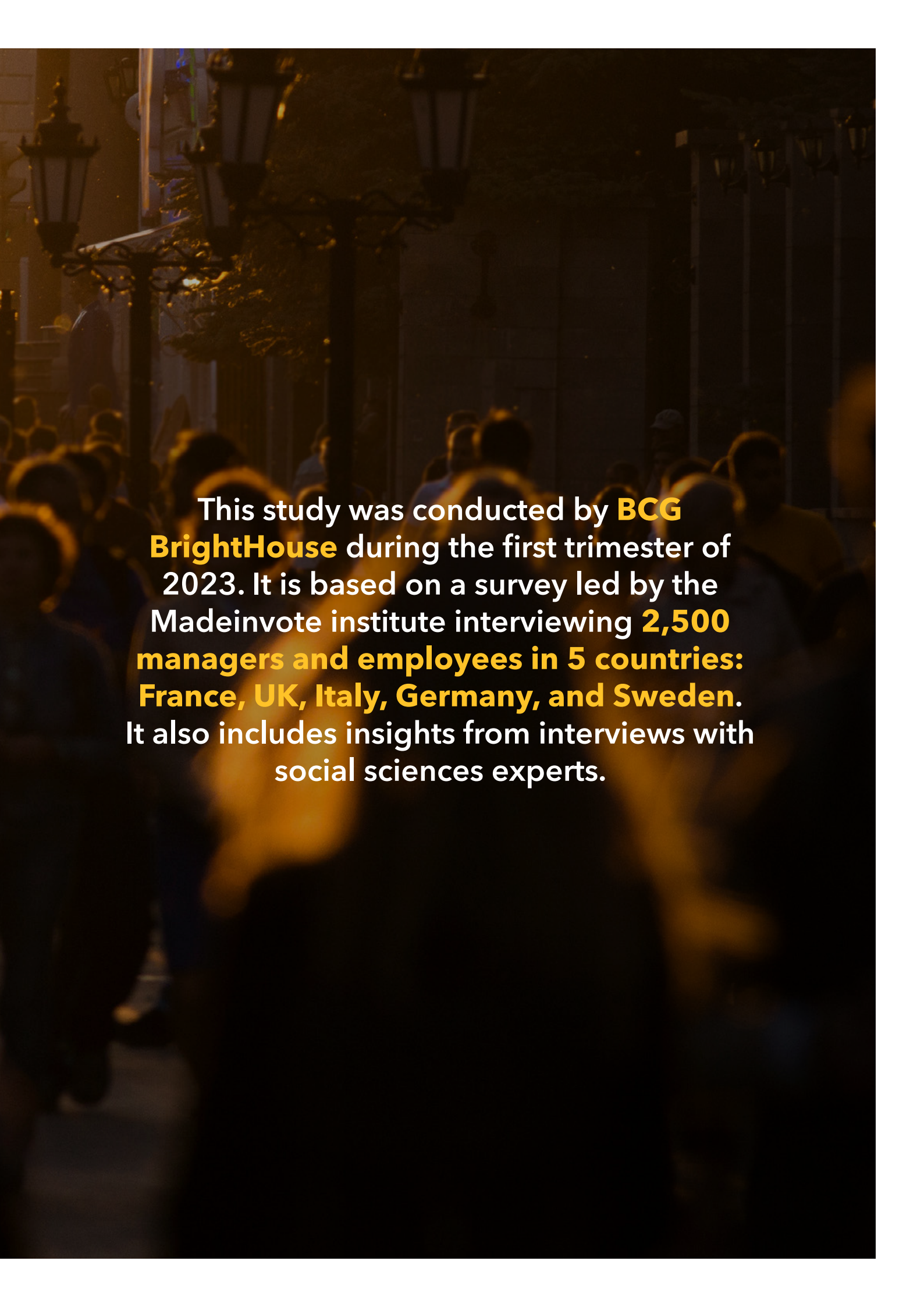
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This study was conducted by **BCG BrightHouse** during the first trimester of 2023. It is based on a survey led by the Madeinvote institute interviewing **2,500 managers and employees in 5 countries: France, UK, Italy, Germany, and Sweden.** It also includes insights from interviews with social sciences experts.

Acknowledgements

Madeinvote

We would like to thank the Madeinvote institute for gathering the voices and thoughts of 2,500 respondents via social media.

We would also like to thank our Social Sciences experts for agreeing to speak with us, for shedding light on our survey results, and sharing ideas of ways to strengthen employee engagement.

Julia de Funès, French philosopher

Julia de Funès is a writer and lecturer at large companies. She is convinced of the importance of teaching Philosophy to combat certain mechanisms she considers absurd in the corporate world. Julia de Funès is the author of *Socrate au pays des process* or of *La comédie (in) humaine*, subtitled: "Comment les entreprises font fuir les meilleurs."



Agustín Fuentes, Professor in Anthropology at Princeton University and National Geographic explorer

Prof. Agustín Fuentes is an anthropologist whose research focuses on the biosocial. His work delves into the entanglement of biological systems with the social and cultural lives of humans, our related ancestors, and a few of the other animals with whom humanity shares close relations. His current projects include exploring cooperation, creativity, and belief in human evolution, multispecies anthropologies and evolutionary theory. He is the author of *The Creative Spark*, *Why We Believe*, and *Race, Monogamy*, and *Other Lies They Told You*.



Malene Rydahl, Writer, Keynote Speaker and Executive Coach

Malene Rydahl specializes in well-being and performance in companies inspired by the Danish leadership model. She is a Senior Advisor at Boston Consulting Group (BCG). She also gives lectures at Sciences Po Paris, and at business schools HEC Paris and INSEAD. Malene is the author of *Happy as a Dane*, *The illusions of happiness*.



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AT A GLANCE

Note: The figures below represent an aggregate of answers from Germany, Italy, France, the UK, and Sweden.

While **recent trends** (quiet quitting, increasing absenteeism, difficulty of returning to the office post-COVID-19 crisis, etc.) **might lead people to believe that employee engagement is fading away in Western societies**, employees we interviewed in five European countries (Germany, France, Italy, the UK, and Sweden) expressed that, rather than the ties between employees and work, it's **the ties between employees and their organizations that are loosening**.

In fact, **employees today are proud of and committed to their work rather than proud and committed to the company they work for**: while 92% of respondents say they are concerned about delivering quality work and 77% consider that their day-to-day work contributes positively to society, only **61% of respondents declare themselves to be proud of the company they work for**.

People are still proud of their work, but it's losing a degree of significance in our lives. Almost a third of respondents (31%) would prefer to allocate 10% of their work time to personal projects rather than to allocate it to corporate projects.

This indicates a **unanimous paradigm shift in terms of "why" and "how" people want to work**.

We asked respondents to project themselves into their ideal company and found that if they were to commit to a company, it would not be on a "quantitative" aspect but rather on a "qualitative" one: **only 28% of respondents would be prepared to devote more time to working at their ideal company, whereas 48% would be prepared to take on more responsibility or to play a greater managerial role.**

It seems, this additional engagement in this ideal company would be possible **only if certain conditions were met:**

The **1st condition** is that the company be a **"place of socialization,"** guaranteeing a **fair work/life balance**.

84% of respondents think good atmosphere and well-being at work are of the utmost importance.
93% of them identify their absence as potential grounds for resignation.

71% of respondents believe having good relations with superiors and colleagues to be very important, and 85% of them consider its absence to be a criterion for resignation.

81% of respondents consider work/life balance extremely important, and 87% of them would resign if it were not respected.



As Julia de Funès puts it, *"Today it is quality of life that takes over career planning (...) with a focus on the quest of fulfilment in the present moment."*

Julia de Funès, French Philosopher

The 2nd condition is to have **caring and empathetic management, that involves employees in decision-making processes.**

Leadership behaviors that respondents value the most are *"leading with care and empathy"* (for 25% of them) and *"taking employees' point of view into account when making decisions"* (for 20% of them). Not highly valued by respondents are *"providing clear directives to team members"* (only 9% of respondents value this) and *"managing in a structured and organized way"* (8% of responses).



For Malene Rydahl, behind this expectation is *"a paradigm shift at work: employees want to be valued more for who they are than for what they do."*

Malene Rydahl, Writer, Keynote Speaker, and Executive Coach

The 3rd condition is **dependent on the ways of working.** Autonomy and flexibility in their work is *"one of the keys to re-engaging employees,"* according to Julia de Funès.

On a day-to-day basis, **36% of respondents would prefer to "work alone to have more flexibility and autonomy in their work,"** and **35% of people would rather work "always with the same group to strengthen the sense of belonging to the company and social relations."**

The 4th condition for people to reengage with their company is its **virtue** across three dimensions

For **42% of respondents,** the attention the company pays to its employees is decisive.

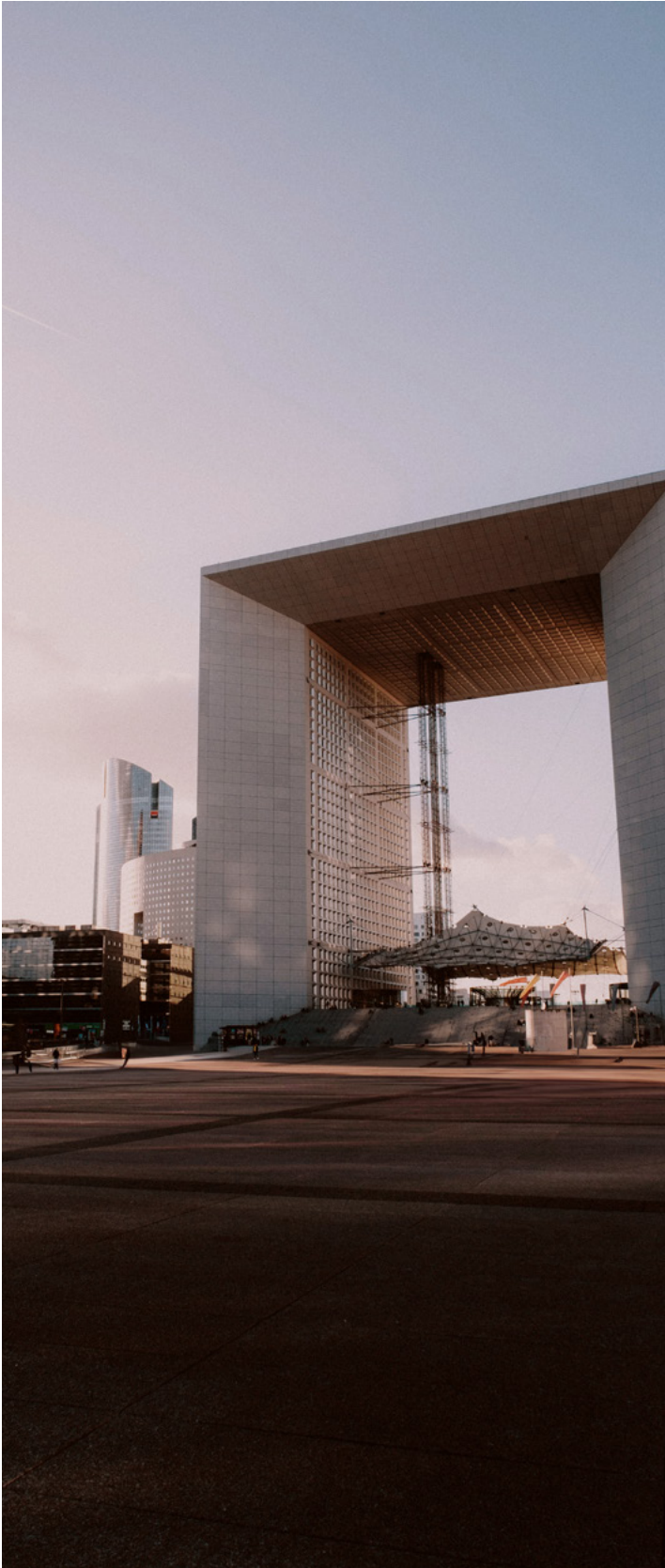
For **33%,** it's the company's brand image and excellent reputation.

For **31%** it's the company's purpose.

On this last dimension, 42% of respondents say they would be willing to cut their salary by between 5% and 20% to work for a company that has a strong sense of purpose.

Overall, even though responses coming from different countries converge, it seems employees in the Northern countries (*i.e., Sweden, and the UK*) stand out as being the most committed, proud of the company they work for, positive, and attentive to social and environmental issues. Malene Rydahl explains this geographical difference by the fact that *"the conception of work in these countries is marked by a strong sense of responsibility. Working means taking part in a collective project. Work is a source of fulfilment in that it benefits the community, which culturally takes precedence over the individual."*

INTRODUCTION



Today, a large part of the world seems to be turning the page on the COVID-19 pandemic but the distance from work that this crisis has induced or accelerated is still visible in a number of countries.

According to the latest Gallup¹ study from 2022, **only 2 out of 10 employees in the world report being engaged in their work. And from a Microsoft² report, 43% of employees are considering changing jobs in the short term.** “Quiet quitting” has become more prevalent in English speaking countries in recent years, especially in English-speaking countries. This phenomenon along with the emergence of employee engagement roles indicate a general fatigue. Clearly, there is a growing discontent between companies and employees.

In today’s economic and geo-political context, companies are starting to speak more of purposeful transformations, and in this climate, we ask: **How do we bring back the spark in employee engagement?**

To answer these concerns, we surveyed 2,500 employees in France, Germany, Italy, the UK, and Sweden. Additionally, we conducted research on these topics and engaged three international Social Sciences experts.

¹ State of the Global Workplace 2022 Report, Gallup

² Microsoft’s 2022 Word Trend Index

A blacksmith is shown in the process of forging a metal rod. The rod is held in a vice on an anvil. A hammer is striking the rod, creating a bright, glowing point of contact. A large shower of sparks is flying out from the point of impact, illuminating the scene. The background is dark, making the sparks and the glowing metal stand out.

Part 1

**The tumultuous relationship
between people and work**

1. Work: between constraint and opportunity

Humans have had a complex and nuanced relationship with work throughout history. From primitive societies until the Roman Empire, work was seen as a necessity. Often a synonym for effort, work was a means of providing for the community, usually arduous, and sometimes even devalued.

In the Middle Ages, Saint Thomas Aquinas developed the idea that human labor was like God's work in creation and that labor was a source of income and a means of subsistence.

From the 18th century until the beginning of the 19th century, work started to be placed at the very foundation of society. Adam Smith considered work as a "means of production." In his view, all economic value created was traceable back to human labor. Karl Marx argued that work was a way in which humans could transform nature to meet their needs and develop their creativity and skills in ways to distinguish themselves from animals. The position of individuals in society began to be largely determined by their relationship to the means of production which was invariably tied to their work.

A new step was reached at the beginning of the 19th century. The German philosopher Hegel argued that work was an essential part of human life and played a crucial role in shaping both individuals and societies. He saw work as a way for individuals to develop a sense of self-worth and to contribute to the well-being of their communities. Later, the concept that work played an essential role in shaping social relations and individual's identities was extended by the sociologist Emile Durkheim. Durkheim also believed that in modern industrial societies, work had become a dominant force in people's lives, and the relationships workers had with their bosses was subordinate. This is why he highlighted the need to improve workers' rights.

During the 20th century, work continued to become more central in society. The Austrian-born social psychologist Marie Jahoda³

argued that work provides not only economic benefits but also psychological benefits, such as a sense of purpose, social interaction, and self-esteem. She believed that unemployment could lead to negative psychological consequences, such as a loss of identity, social isolation, and feelings of worthlessness.

However, despite these historical developments, the 1980s were a decade of significant change in the world of work. Transformations such as mass unemployment, the reduction of working hours, the development of paid leave, and technological revolutions shifted the service economy while having a profound impact on the labor market and economy. These shifts still shape the way we work and live today. But work does seem to be losing its centrality in the modern day climate. Case in point, in 1990, 60% of French people thought that work had a very important place in their lives, whereas today only 24% of French people do (according to a study conducted by the Jean Jaurès Foundation⁴).

"Today, work is no longer considered as an end, but rather as a means to earn money, to fulfil oneself. Work cannot be a moral value because moral values have no price, whereas work does have a market value. This does not mean that work is not essential but its place in society is changing. This is even more the case since the Covid-19 pandemic."

Julia de Funès,
French philosopher



In this context, our study attempts to shed light on employees view on their work today, the company they work for, and what drives employee engagement.

³ Study *Les Chômeurs de Marienthal* (1931)

⁴ Study Fondation Jean Jaurès, « Le rapport au travail post-Covid, Télétravail, management, reconnaissance, santé... : les nouvelles tendances », February 2023

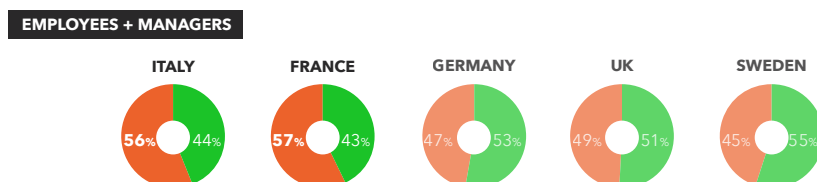
2. Employees' expectations towards work are not completely met but employees feel engaged in their work.

First insight: there are mixed views on the ability of leadership to understand and consider employees' needs.

51% of respondents think leadership doesn't consider their needs.

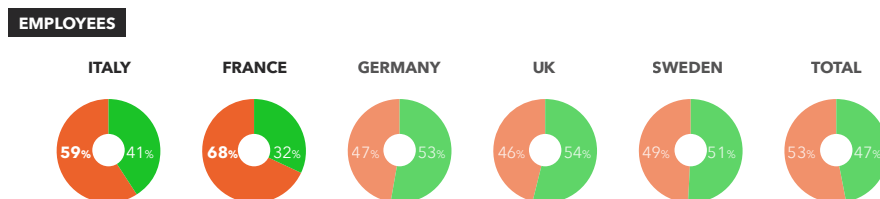
This is particularly the case in France and in Italy where respectively 57% and 56% of respondents share that opinion.

In your current job, would you say that your leadership seeks to understand and take into account your needs?



This level of dissatisfaction is more pronounced among employees in general (vs. managers), and even more prevalent in France and in Italy.

In your current job, would you say that your leadership seeks to understand and take into account your needs?

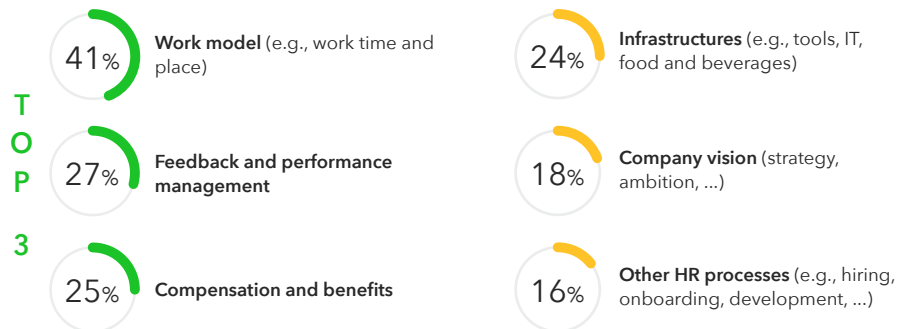


Legend: Agree Not agree

Second insight: This may be exacerbated by today's inflationary environment, respondents have high expectations in terms of compensation.

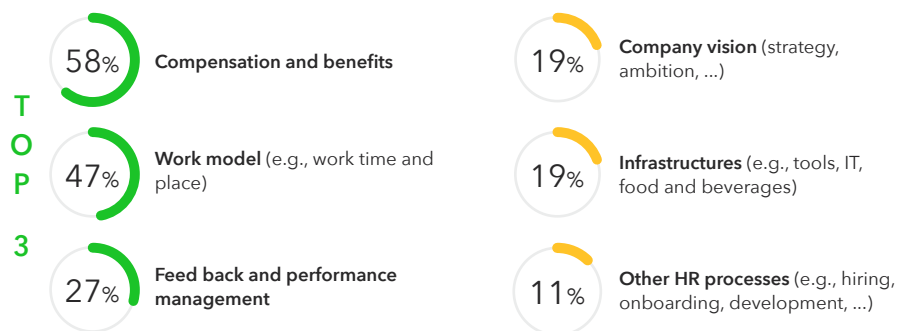
In their current company, 41% of respondents think their individual needs are mostly considered in the work model of their organization, performance management comes in second, and compensation comes in third. But if you ask respondents to project themselves in their ideal company, individual needs would be even more considered in compensation and benefits.

In your current job, would you say that your needs as an individual are considered in...? (% is the % of respondents)



In their ideal company, 58% of respondents want their needs to be considered in compensation and benefits. The next priorities for employees is their work model and feedback & performance management.

In your ideal company, your needs as an individual are considered in...? (% is the % of respondents)



Third insight: Respondents consider that their work contributes positively to society. But the sense of pride in their organization is more complicated.

92% of respondents consider that they are committed to doing high quality work in their current job.

77% of respondents consider their work is useful and contributes positively to society. This is even more pronounced in Sweden (86%)

But a smaller proportion of respondents feel proud of the company they work for.

61% of respondents are proud of telling people about the company they work for.

The sense of pride in their organization is highest in Sweden (70% of Swedish people feel proud of the company they work for) and in managers (66%). The lowest sense of pride in their organization is found in Italian employees (51%).

Overall, the respondents we interviewed have high expectations of the companies they work for, feel committed to delivering high quality work but don't always feel leadership considers their needs. With the understanding of respondents' current situation, our study invited them to share the characteristic attributes that their ideal company would have.



Part 2

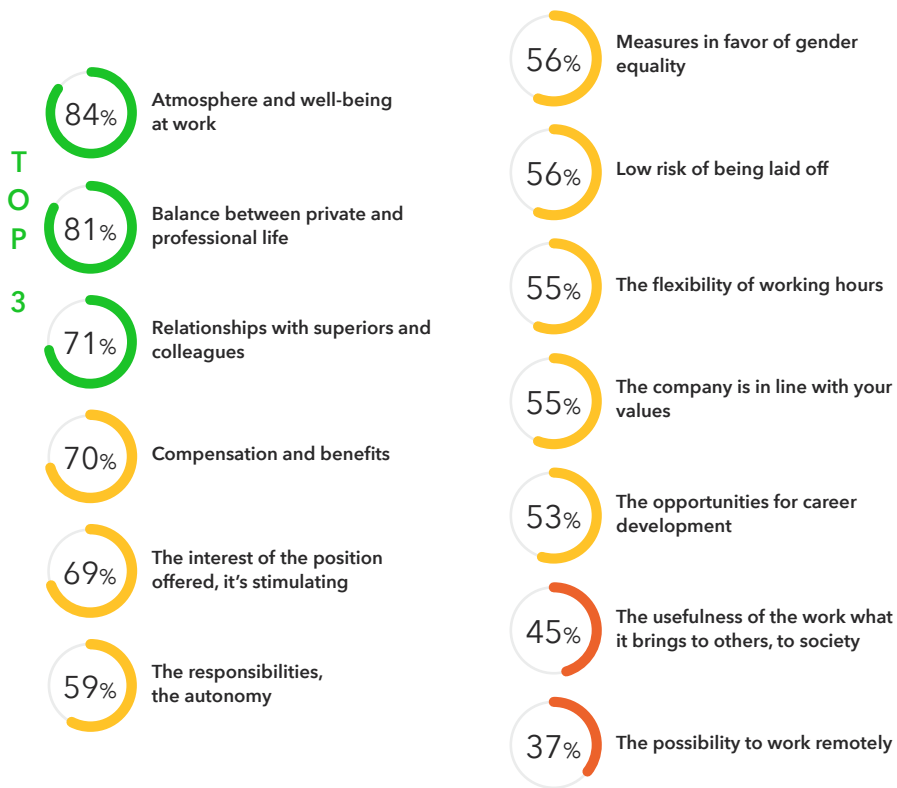
Portrait of the ideal company

1. The ideal company should be a place for socialization, focused on people, and engaged in community.

First insight: the quality of colleague relationships, work-life balance, and overall well-being must be the three pillars of the ideal company.

As shown in the figures below, these three criteria are most important for respondents. They're far ahead of remote working options, the usefulness of tasks performed and career development opportunities.

How important are the following criteria for you in your ideal company? (% of respondents who have chosen very important or quite important)



Lack of well-being at work, a healthy work-life balance and quality in relationships with superiors and colleagues are the top 3 reasons respondents would resign from a job.

In your ideal company, to what extent might the following reasons lead you to resign? (% of respondents have chosen certainly or probably)



For Malene Rydahl, these results corroborate a "desire for well-being." According to her, "50% of our well-being depends on our genetic inheritance and 10% on external circumstances, these two factors are beyond our control. The only leverage we have on our well-being lies in the remaining 40%, which has to do with our attitude and behavior towards others," and that includes the professional sphere.

Malene Rydahl,
Writer, Keynote Speaker
and Executive Coach



In the same vein, Julia de Funès believes that today "quality of life takes precedence over career planning. The uncertainty of recent years (Covid crisis, war in Ukraine, climate anxiety) has made it particularly difficult to predict the future and the trend has been accentuated. People are focusing on finding fulfilment in the present moment."



Agustín Fuentes explains that at the very essence of work are expectations in terms of social relations: "We human beings are made to collaborate, and work embodies this collaboration. While work is taking on new forms today, with the emergence of digital tools and digital communities, we must not forget that work, in its 'physicality', still structures a large part of our social life."

Agustín Fuentes,
Professeur à l'université de Princeton
et explorateur National Geographic



Second insight: An ideal company would be recognized for its commitment to employees, positive reputation, and its purpose.

When asked to imagine what the headline would say if their ideal company were to make the cover of the Times, **42% of respondents said the headline would be about employee care.** Then came positive reputation (33%), purpose/contribution to society (33%) and company culture (25%).

These all come ahead of economic performance, industry leadership and quality of the management team.

Now imagine that your company made the headline on the cover of the newspapers. Would you like it because it takes a leading role through its ... ? (% is % respondents)



For respondents under 25 years old, **purpose** was the first topic they would like to see in the headlines for an ideal company.

Respondents under 25 y.o



Moreover, a company with Purpose is reported as important in the United Kingdom, Sweden, Germany, and France.

Now imagine that your company made the headline on the cover of the newspapers. Would you like it because it takes a leading role through its ... ?

ITALY

1. Employee-friendly programs
2. Positive reputation
3. Innovation

FRANCE

1. Employee-friendly programs
2. Purpose
3. Company Culture

GERMANY

1. Employee-friendly programs
2. Positive reputation
3. Purpose

UK

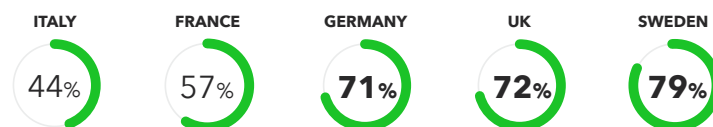
1. Purpose
2. Positive reputation
3. Environmental impact

SWEDEN

1. Positive reputation
2. Purpose
3. Environmental impact

This is consistent with the levels of awareness of the subject in these different countries, as indicated in the following question:

To what extent do you agree with the following sentence? "My company has clearly defined a purpose" (% of agree)



The concept of "purpose" is most popular in Sweden, the UK, and Germany.

Malene Rydahl defends that fundamental cultural differences explain the greater sensitivity of the Nordic countries, and Sweden in particular to this topic: *"The conception of work in these countries is marked by a strong sense of responsibility. Working means taking part in a collective project. Work is a source of personal fulfilment in that it benefits society which culturally takes precedence over the individual."*

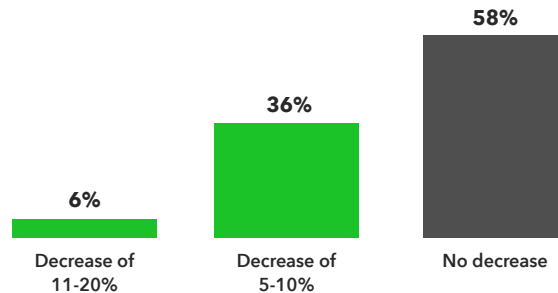


Agustín Fuentes also stresses the importance of the cultural factor in understanding the differences in the relationships to work that exists between countries. He says in *"debates about work often focus on technical aspects, forgetting that it is people who do the work and these people live in cultural realities which affect their perceptions, minds and lives. This absolutely needs to be taken into consideration."*



Despite these differences in sensitivity to purpose 42% of respondents express that they would be prepared to reduce their level of remuneration to join a company with a purpose in which they strongly believe.

What salary decrease would you be willing to accept to work for a company that has a purpose in which you strongly believe in?



Managers would be more willing to reduce their salary vs employees (49% vs 35%).

Similarly, in countries with higher purchasing power respondents would be more likely to take a pay cut to work for a company with a purpose in which they strongly believe (in Sweden, 61% of respondents would do so).

Julia de Funès further explains that there is a dichotomy between the financial investment that respondents are ready to make to work for a socially responsible company versus the lack of individual commitment to ESG issues. This is seen as *"disempowerment: the individual expects the enterprise to take on a large part of social commitment through its purpose. Why is this? Because the affiliation of the individual with this committed company will allow them to benefit from a certain "narcissistic enhancement," while not having to personally bear the burden of this responsibility."*



Third insight: Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is not yet a clear priority for respondents in their ideal company.

22% of respondents do not know how their ideal company could contribute to diversity, equity, and inclusion. This is even more the case in Germany where the figure is 39%. Moreover, 32% of respondents call for more communication and training initiatives to raise awareness of the issue.

How would your ideal company contribute to diversity, equity, and inclusion? (% is % of respondents having chosen this answer)



Again, 44% of respondents expect their ideal company to contribute to DEI by refining organizational processes and aligning them to diverse employee needs.

And for 32% of respondents, a clear vision and strategy must be defined to drive DEI initiatives.

2. In their ideal company, employees' commitment would be "qualitative" rather than "quantitative," relying on autonomy, flexibility, and personal fulfillment

First insight: respondents would be ready to take on more responsibilities, invest themselves more whole heartedly in their teams, but would be reluctant to devote more time to their ideal company.

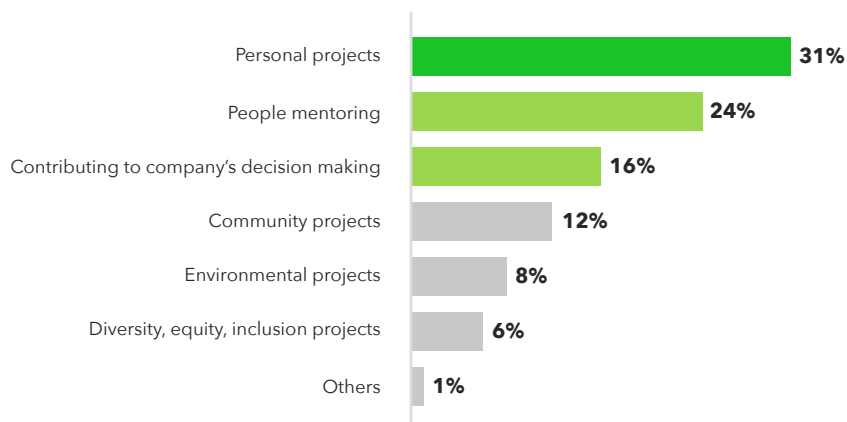
In concrete terms, if you were to join your ideal company, would you be likely to...? (% is % of respondents having chosen this answer)



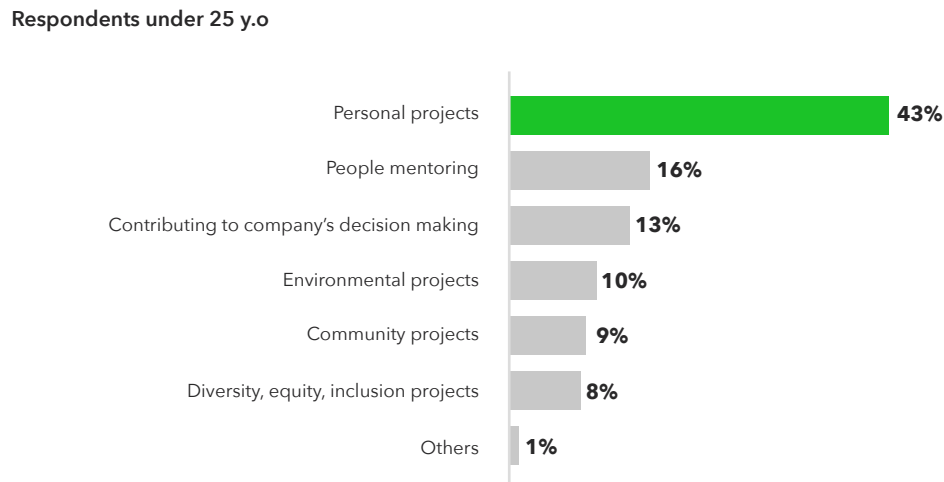
Second insight: the ideal company should, on the contrary, allow more time to be devoted to personal projects.

In fact, if they had been given the opportunity to devote 10% of their work time to activities of their choice, almost a third of respondents (31%) would reserve this time for personal projects. Next in the list, are activities within their company, either mentoring colleagues for nearly a quarter of them (24%), or contributing decision-making processes (16%).

If you were able to allocate 10% of your weekly work time to special projects, you would most likely invest it into...? (% is % of respondents having chosen this answer)



The use of this time for personal purposes is even more evident among those under 25:



This is aligned with the previously mentioned idea of the loss of centrality of work in our lives, a trend that the COVID crisis has accelerated.

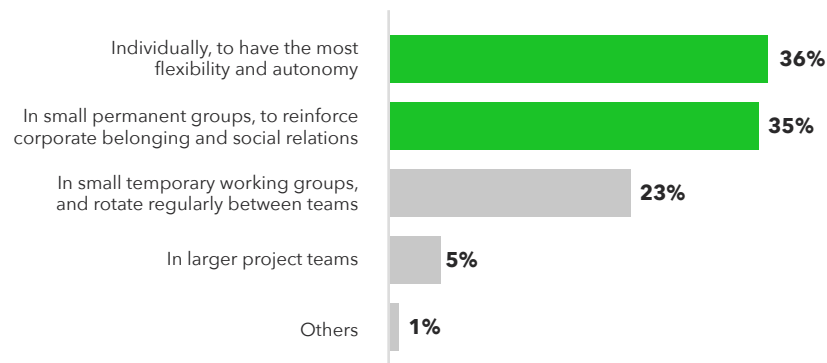
Moreover, Julia de Funès underlines the fact that *"the younger generations have desacralized the relationship to work which is seen as a means and no longer an end in itself."*



Third insight : in the ideal company, work would be conducted individually or in small teams, in the interest of flexibility and autonomy.

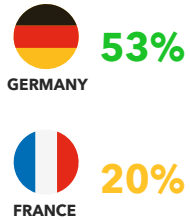
36% of respondents would work individually on their tasks if they were given the choice. 35% would choose to work within small teams, made up of a permanent group of individuals, to reinforce their sense of belonging to the company and their social relations. Only 5% of respondent would opt for larger projects teams.

In your ideal company, how would you work on your tasks? (% is % of respondents having chosen this answer)



However, the differences in magnitude between countries on the desire to work individually should be noted. In particular, they are significantly greater in Germany than in France.

Individual work preference



Autonomy is one of the keys to employee re-engagement. In fact, for Julia de Funès *"it refers to moving away from a very normative and procedural logic which is a sign of an old model of paternalistic management and suffers from a certain disenchantment today" to "entering into a logic of empowerment of employees that will allow them to progress in the organization."*



3. The management style and value-sharing would be disrupted in the ideal company.

First insight : leaders in the ideal company would be recognized for their empathy, benevolence towards employees, as well as their ability to involve them in decision-making.

A quarter of respondents expect their line managers to lead with kindness and empathy in their ideal company. In second place, a fifth would like them to take their point of view into account when making decisions.

These priorities outpace the desire for line managers to support their teams in the achievement of (business) objectives or to give clear directives and supervise in a structured and organized way.

In your ideal company, which leadership behaviour would you celebrate the most? (% is % of respondents having chosen this answer)



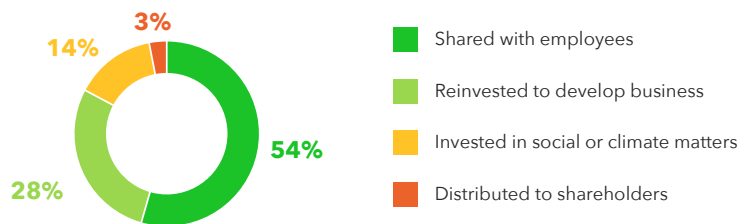
Malene Rydahl sees in the expression of these expectations towards the emotional qualities of managers *"an essential key to engaging employees, a means of making them want to do something."* Empathy, in particular, since it is necessary to *"create and maintain psychological security allowing the development of trusting relationships within the organization."* Although she agrees that *"the recognition of these emotional qualities is relatively new in management practices"*, a paradigm shift is at work: *"employees want to be valued more for who they are and less for what they do."*



Second insight : The ideal company would favor a value-sharing model that would further benefit its employees and its growth.

More than half of respondents (54%) would like earnings to first be shared among employees. 28% believe they should be reinvested in the company as a priority so that it can continue to develop. Among the remaining respondents, 14% believe that earnings should primarily be invested in climate action or in the social impact field, and only 3% want to see them redistributed to shareholders.

In your ideal company what would be the priority way to redistribute profits? (% is % of respondents having chosen this answer)



This proportion is higher among respondents under 25 years of age, since more than one in five (21% vs. 14%) favor investing profits in favor an environmental or social cause.

CONCLUSION

Quiet quitting, increased absenteeism, the difficult post-COVID return to the office, the creation of new employee engagement leadership positions... while some of these recent trends could reveal a lack of engagement at work in Europe, the survey participants from five countries on the European continent gave us a different vision of the changes underway.

This different vision shows a weakening of the link between employees and their company, but also of a paradigm shift in the "Why" and "How" of work.

In fact, even though the respondents say they are proud and committed to their work - rather than to their company, from now on, work is no longer an end unto itself for them, but a means to be able to accomplish personal projects.

Despite this observation, respondents say they are ready to invest themselves more strongly, not in a "quantitative" way - in terms of time spent in the organization, but rather in a "qualitative" way - by taking on more responsibilities, developing leadership skills...

Nevertheless, this renewed commitment can only be made under certain conditions that would be met by the "ideal company," as described by the respondents:

- the quality of the working atmosphere, interpersonal relations, sources of well-being, and a balance between professional and private life.
- benevolent and empathetic management, that involves employees in decision-making, and knows how to focus not only on "doing" but also on "being" in their way of managing and evaluating teams.
- autonomy and flexibility in the company's ways of working.
- the attention paid to employees, a strong societal and environmental commitment, and an excellent reputation.

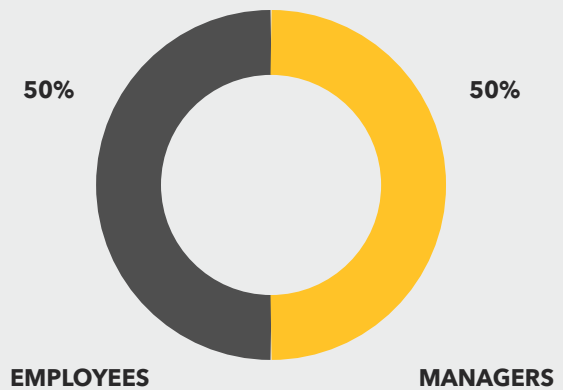
These are the terms of the equation that could, according to the respondents, rekindle "the flame of engagement."



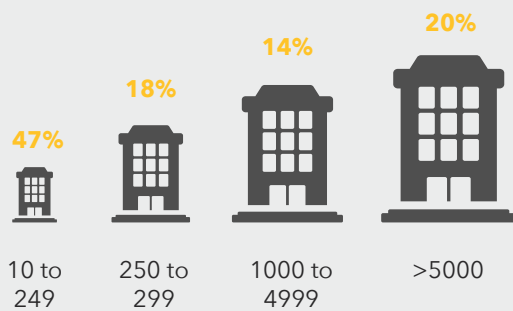
DETAILED RESULTS OF MADEINVOTE SURVEY

Profile of respondents

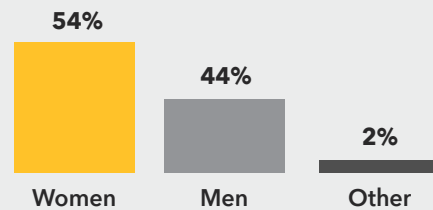
What is your role?



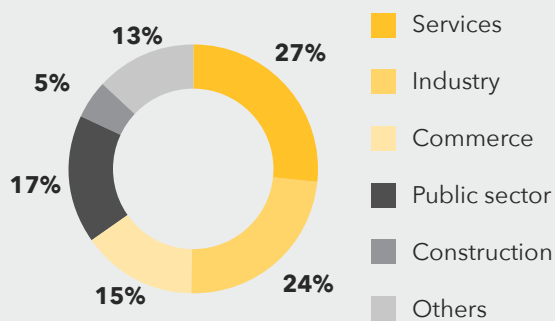
Do you work in a company that employs...? (in number of employees)



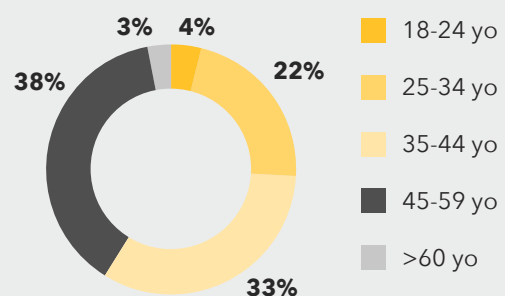
Gender



Sector of activity

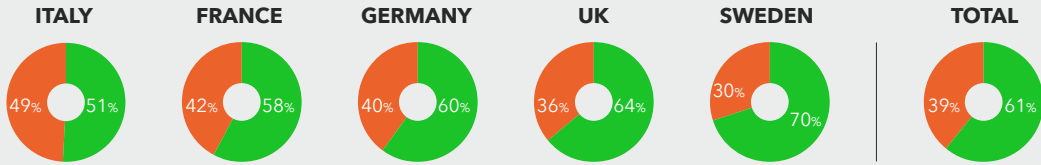


Age

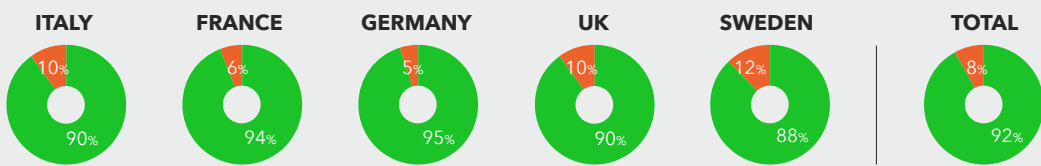


3. To what extent do you agree with the following sentences?

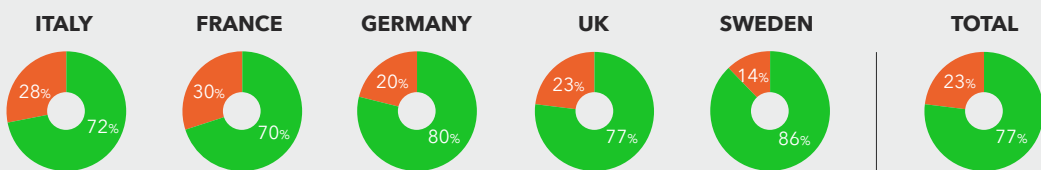
"I feel a sense of pride when telling others about my job"



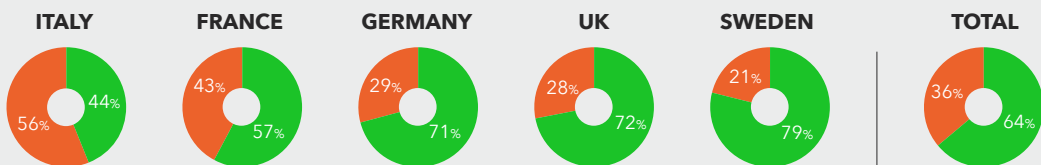
"In my current job today, I am committed to doing high quality work"



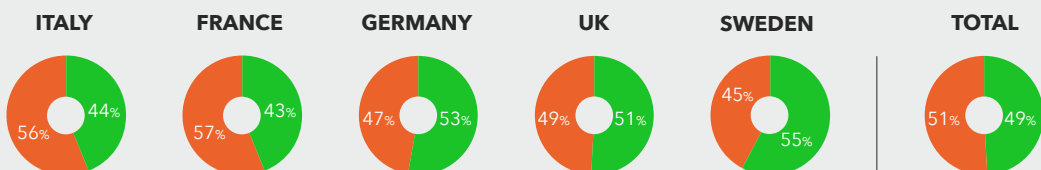
"I consider that my work is useful and contributes to society"



"My company has clearly defined a purpose/its contribution to society beyond what it makes or sells"



4. In your current job, would you say that your leadership seeks to understand and take into account your needs?

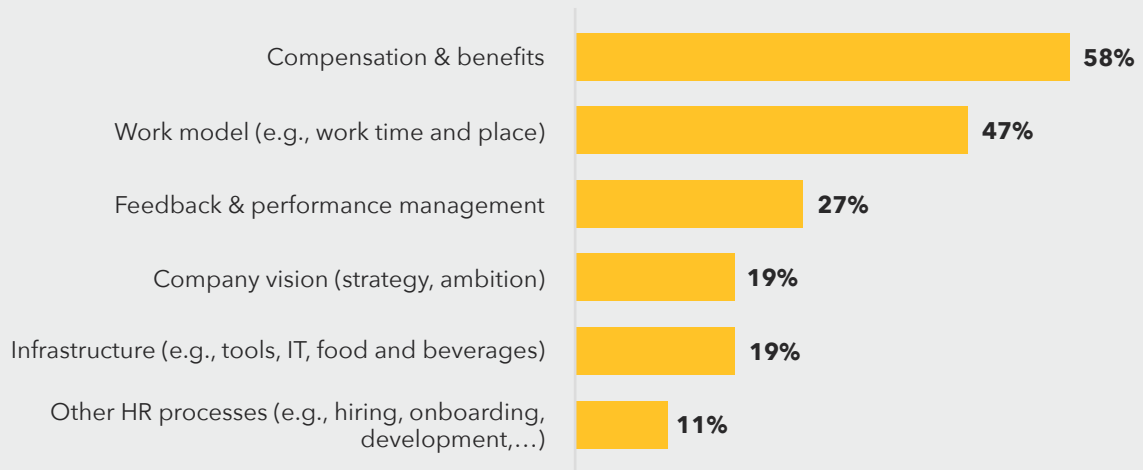


Legend: ■ Agree ■ Not agree

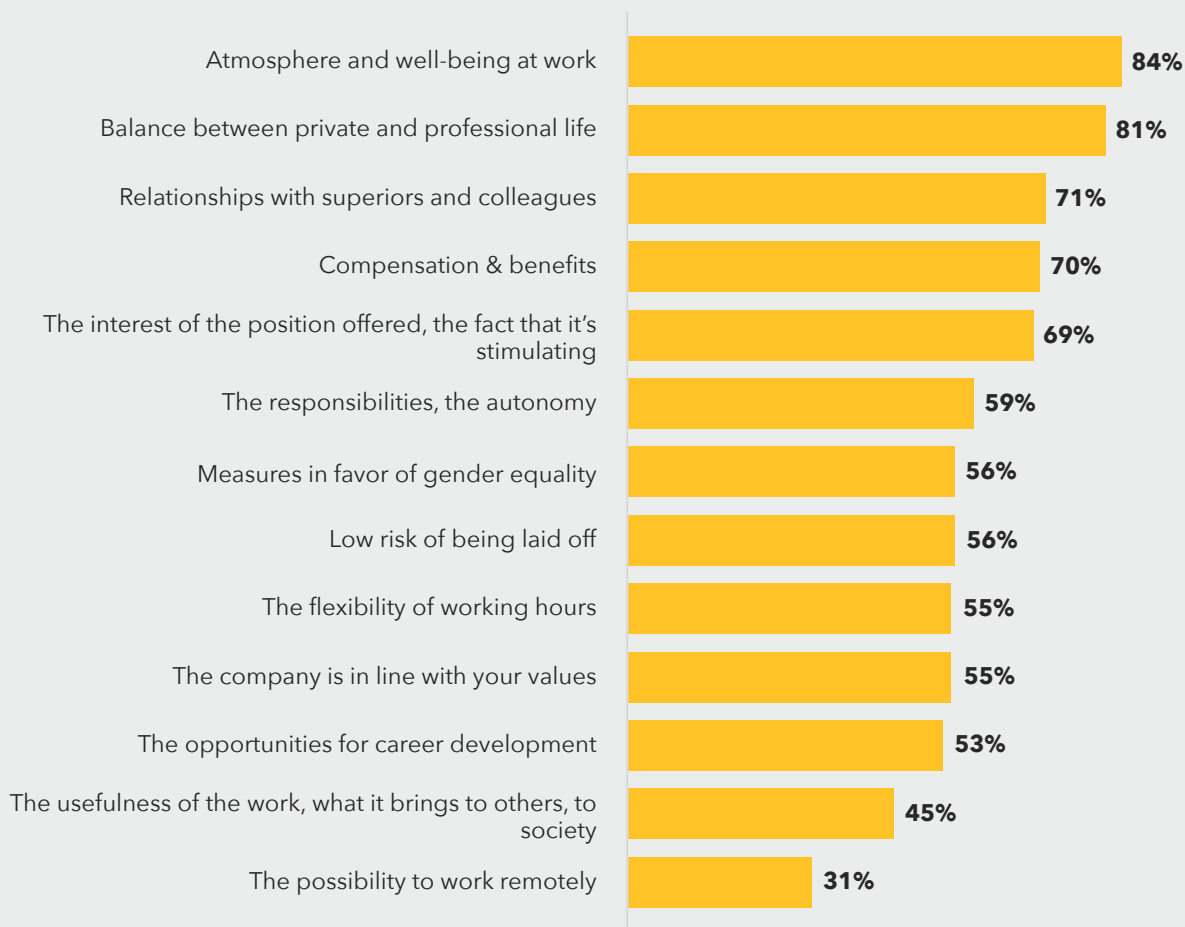
5. In your current job, would you say that your needs as an individual are considered in...? *(multiple answers, % of respondents having chosen this answer)*



6. In your ideal company, your needs as an individual would be considered in...? *(multiple answers, % of respondents having chosen this answer)*



7. How important are the following criteria for you in your ideal company? *(multiple answers, % of respondents for who this answer is very important)*



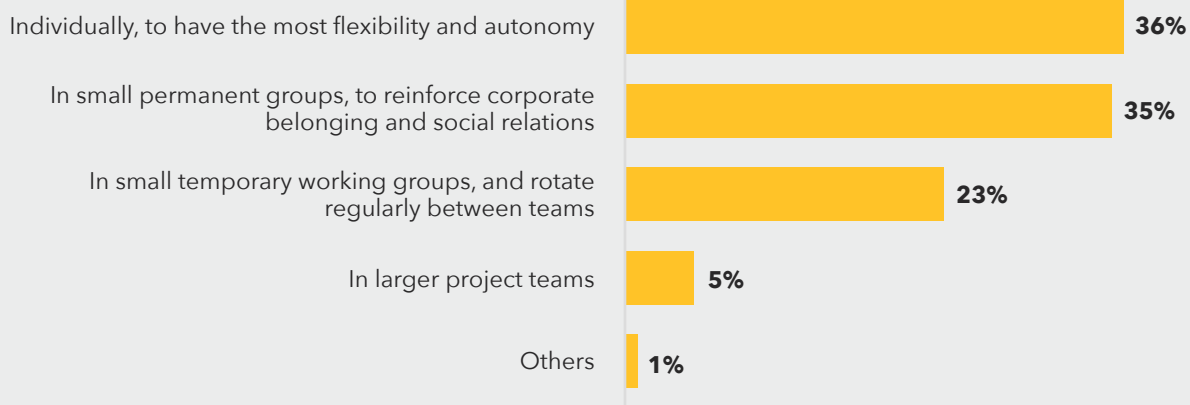
8. Now imagine that your company made the headline on the cover of the newspapers. Would you like it to be because it takes a leading role through its...? (several answers, % of respondents having chosen this answer)



9. Furthermore, how would your ideal company contribute to diversity, equity, and inclusion? (several answers, % of respondents having chosen this answer)



10. In your ideal company, how would you work on your tasks? (single answer)



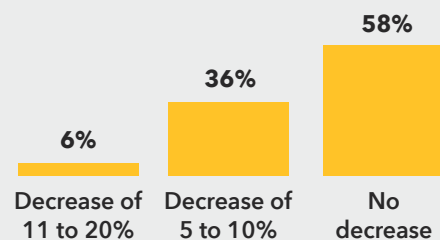
11. If you were able to allocate 10% of your weekly work time to special projects, you would most likely invest it into...? (single answer)



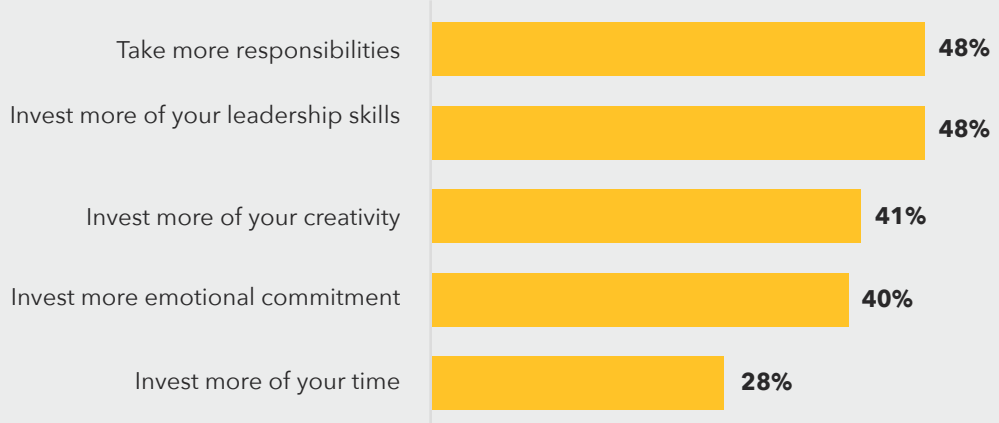
12. In your ideal company, which leadership behaviour would you celebrate the most? *(single answer)*



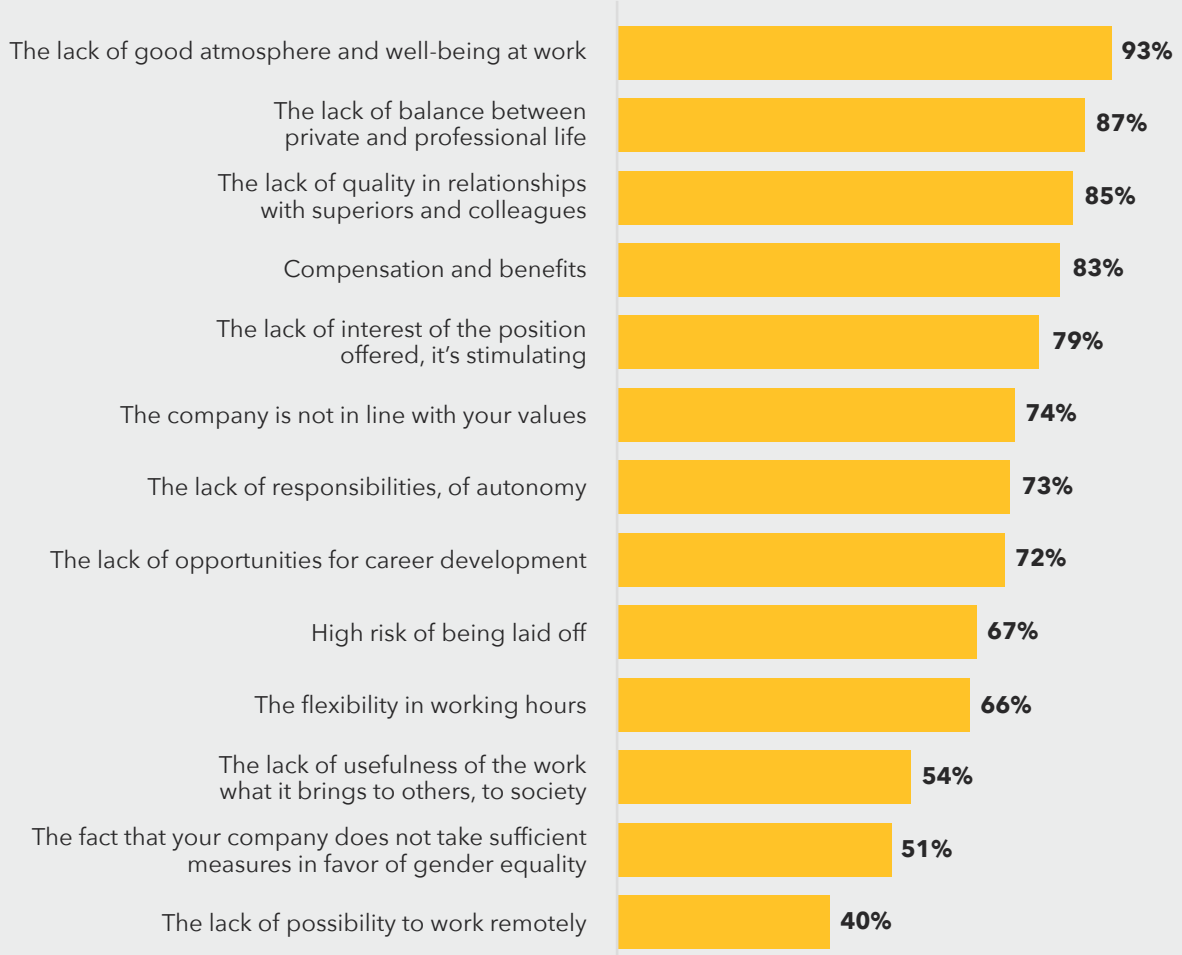
13. What salary decrease would you be willing to accept to work for a company that has a purpose in which you strongly believe? *(single answer)*



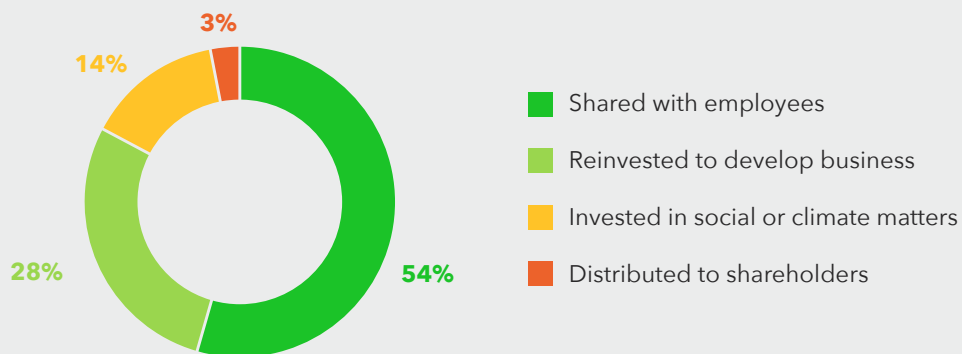
14. In concrete terms, if you were to join your ideal company, would you be likely to...? *(single answer)*



15. In your ideal company, to what extent might the following reasons lead you to resign? (*% of respondents have chosen certainly or probably*)



16. In your ideal company what would be the priority way to redistribute profits? (*single answer*)





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