



Universität
Zürich UZH

ETH

Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich
Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich

Swiss HR-Barometer 2012

Misconduct and
courage

Executive Summary

English



Executive Summary

1. As in previous years, the Swiss Human Relations Barometer (HR Barometer), now in its seventh edition, has investigated working relationships, working conditions, workplace behaviour and attitudes to work among employees in Switzerland. With the focus area of misconduct and courage at work, this year's study also offers insights into two sensitive issues.

2

2. The underlying sample for this year's survey is based on the sample register of the Swiss Federal Statistical Office. The survey was conducted between June and August 2012, whereby respondents could choose between an online version and a written one (mixed-mode approach). The responses of around 1,483 employees from the German, French and Italian speaking regions of Switzerland were analysed in this year's survey.

3. Around half of the respondents admitted to engaging in minor misconduct at least once during the past year. Most frequently, they fantasise and daydream too much, take an additional or prolonged break, or make little effort during their work.

4. A total of 4 % of the respondents admitted to engaging in serious misconduct at work. One in four respondents stated that they have discussed confidential company information with an unauthorised person at least once within the past year, one in eight have stalled their work at least once in order to record overtime, and one in fifty respondents have forged at least one receipt within the past year in order to receive more money.

5. With regard to misconduct at work, investing in a culture of trust is beneficial on two fronts. On the one hand, employees who have a lot of trust in their employer engage in misconduct much less frequently. On the other hand, a culture of trust contributes towards employees being able to discuss problem areas openly. This in turn appears to act as a buffer for potential misconduct: according to the results, employees who are able to address problems openly at work are much less likely to engage in misconduct.

6. As a whole, the large majority of employees in Switzerland can discuss problems easily with their superior. However, detailed analysis shows that employees find it comparatively harder to discuss other people's lack of skills, concerns about corporate policy, or abuse and harassment with the employer. Employees find it most difficult to broach the subject

of wage problems and wage inequality. They mainly keep quiet to avoid jeopardising their working relationships with others or, from a resigned perspective, because they feel that addressing any problems would be pointless.

7. Grievances at work are primarily addressed by employable and competent employees. Employees who feel weaker within their roles are less courageous when it comes to approaching the employer with concerns and misgivings. Special consideration should also be afforded to employees with poor physical or mental health, as they are more likely to keep quiet about problems. If job uncertainty is rife within the workplace, caution is also advised, because anxious employees prefer to conceal their grievances.
8. The employer can influence whether employees report problems or not: for example, having a say in company decisions increases the likelihood of grievances being reported within the company. A good employee-manager relationship and fundamental trust in the employer also make it more likely that problems will be addressed. Wage systems play a key role as well: in particular, variable wage components that are directly linked to personal performance cause employees to keep quiet, as they fear their own wage could be adversely affected.
9. In Switzerland, traditional career orientations, which emphasise long-term service and promotion within a company, remain common. Almost 50 % of the respondents have traditional promotion-oriented career expectations, whereas 14 % have traditional security-oriented expectations. However, this year's trend also shows a slight decrease in the security-oriented perspective (the figure last year stood at 17 %). At the same time, the independent career orientation, which emphasises the autonomous development of skills and more frequent changes of employer, has increased (21 % in comparison to 18 % last year). The alternative career orientation, which attaches less importance to the career than to other areas of life, has also increased slightly (16 % in comparison to 14 %).
10. The increase in the independent and alternative career orientations suggests that some employees are daring to pursue a different orientation despite – or indeed because of – persistent and escalating job uncertainty. This is also reflected in the observed increase in intended resignations. The data offers no insight into why this development is occurring now and not in earlier years, when, to some extent, the experienced uncertainty was even accompanied by a decrease in independence-oriented career expectations and an increase in security-oriented ones.

11. On average, more than half the employees stated that different components of work design, such as task variety and autonomy, are completely in place or more in place than not. However, 15 % of the respondents specified that they hardly receive any feedback about their work. Furthermore, 15 % considered task identity and work importance to be low.

12. The average number of employee training days per year has again increased, which highlights the key importance of personnel development for a company. However, the content of the training shows that emphasis is being placed on expertise in particular. Efforts to step up the promotion of social skills still appear to be pending. 4

13. The psychological contract is showing a negative development trend: the discrepancy between employee expectations and the employer's ability to match these expectations has become even wider since the last survey. In particular, employers offered less this year in the areas of adequate remuneration and internal development opportunities.

14. The results relating to trust in the employer have not changed in comparison to the last HR Barometer survey. Whereas the large majority of employees trust their employer, one fifth of the respondents have doubts about their employer's trustworthiness. The importance of a trusting working relationship is particularly evident in this year's results for misconduct and courage.

15. Whereas the number of employees experiencing job uncertainty has risen to just over 20 %, employability has stagnated at a medium level. The increase in job uncertainty does not appear to be compensated by higher employability. Multidimensional job uncertainty has also risen. Whereas the concern about increasing workloads has remained high, fear of wage cuts, restructuring within departments, and job cuts has risen in particular.

16. Employee satisfaction with their work and career remains stable at a high level, which is particularly surprising with regard to career satisfaction as 30 % of the respondents are not exposed to any career planning measures whatsoever and, furthermore, career discussions are only held with 28 % of the respondents. In addition, a clear increase was recorded in employees who have resigned themselves to being satisfied, i.e. have lowered their job expectations in order to feel satisfied with their work.

17. With our focus area of misconduct and courage, we have addressed a virulent issue. In the best case scenario, the courage to address problems causes company-internal standards for correct and incorrect con-

duct to be assessed and corrected, and employees are also specifically emboldened to show such courage. In light of all the objective uncertainties in the job situation, it is especially important to develop and maintain a working relationship in which employees feel secure enough to speak up.

© 2012
University of Zurich (UZH)

Editors:
Gudela Grote
Bruno Staffelbach

Authors:
Anja Feierabend
Cécile Tschopp
Alexandra Arnold
Wiebke Doden
Manuela Morf
Gudela Grote
Bruno Staffelbach

www.hr-barometer.uzh.ch
www.hr-barometer.ethz.ch