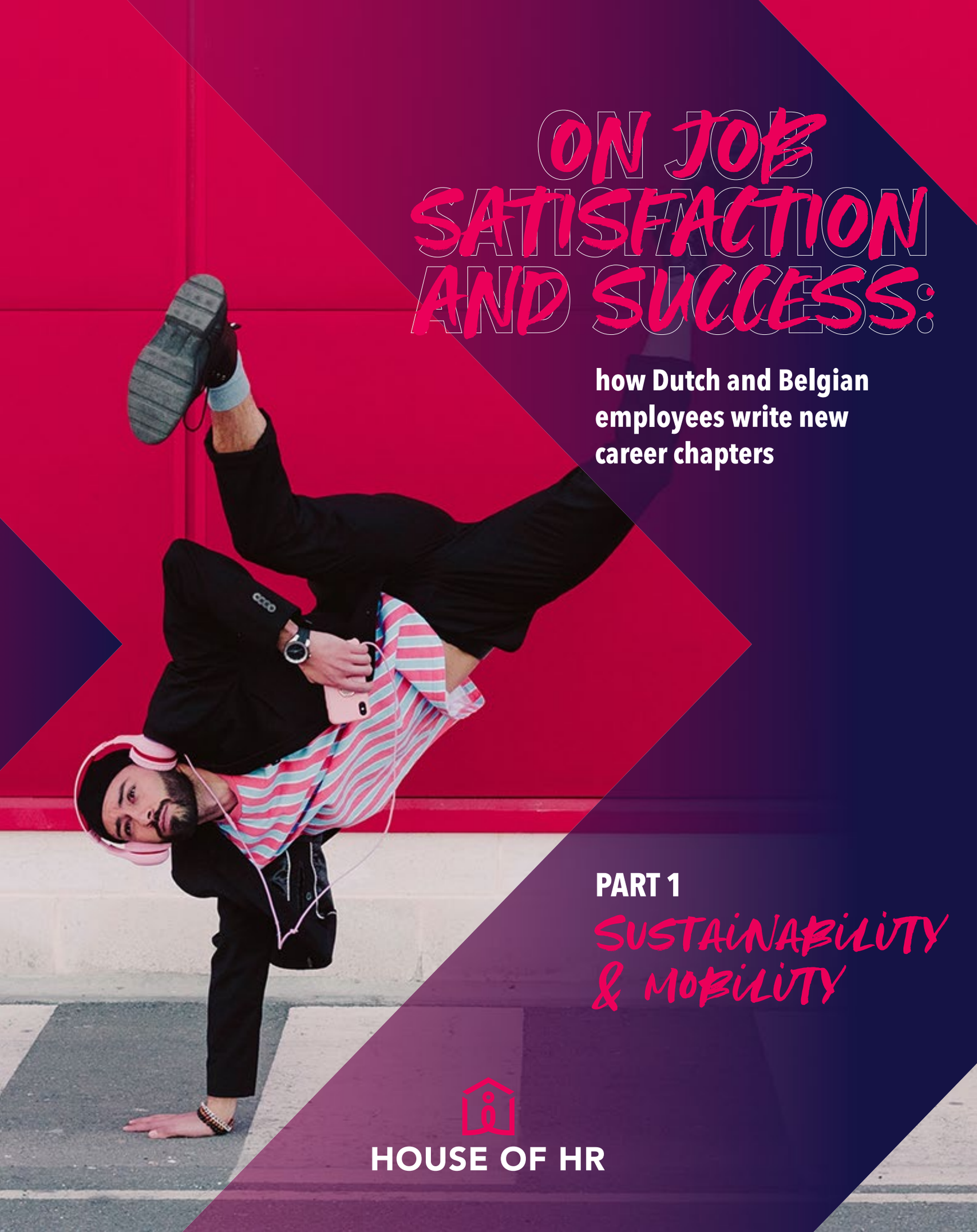

ON JOB SATISFACTION AND SUCCESS:

how Dutch and Belgian employees write new career chapters

PART 1

SUSTAINABILITY & MOBILITY

HOUSE OF HR

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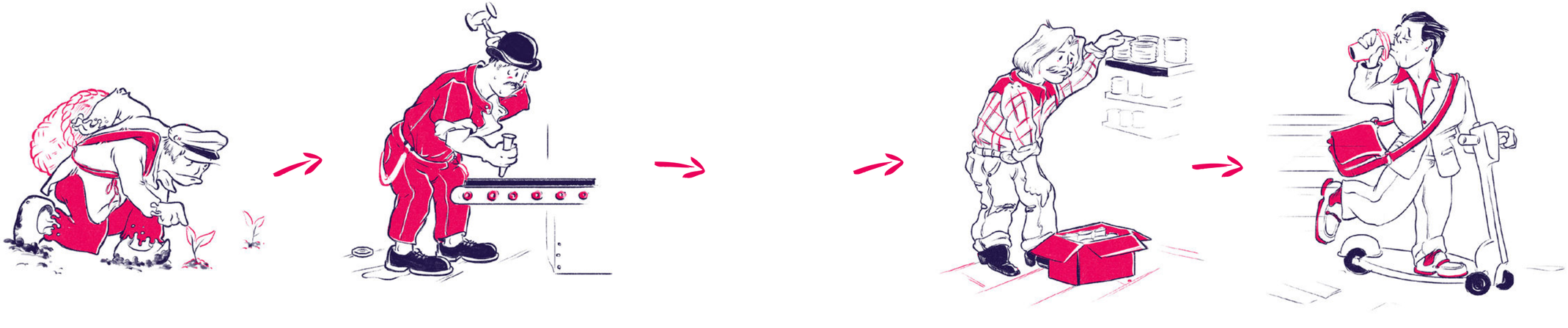
FOREWORD

OF LADDERS AND WINDING PATHS: CAREERS IN THE LAST 150 YEARS



What does your career look like?
Does it run in a straight line from college to retirement? Is it a story with a tentative introduction, wildly expanding chapters and - hopefully - a happy ending? Or something else entirely?

Just to say, the concept of 'career' means something different to everyone. Moreover, careers have not always existed, and throughout history they have gone through some major shifts and incarnations.

From seasonal work to assembly line

In the nineteenth century, most of the working population worked in agriculture. People didn't have 'a job', at least not like we have it today, but instead performed odd jobs - stuff that had to be done if they were to keep their farm running.

With urbanization and rapid technological change on the rise, work shifted from land to factories. People flocked to the cities for what gradually stood out as 'a job' - something you did for a number of hours a day and got paid for. In no time, the mild pace of the seasons was replaced by the hellish rhythm of the assembly line.

The economic boom after World War II created the middle class, suburbs and bureaucracy. It was precisely during this period that the word 'career' came into the picture. For most employees, it meant a lifelong relationship with one company: you give them thirty years of your life, they take care of you and in the end provide you with a pension - the end.

Bottom line: back in the day, careers were quite linear. Quite predictable, too. If you had to pick a symbol for a modern company, the ladder would be it: it's linear, has fixed steps, and if you climb it you go up, toward a clear goal.

Writing your own story

Since then, the concept of 'career' has shifted dramatically.

A modern career is no longer linear and predictable, but - due to changes in society and in the job market - complex and dynamic. Lifetime employment with one employer is no longer the norm, it's all about lifetime employability: people are switching jobs and employers like there's no tomorrow.

Due to the disappearance of the predictable career path, it has become more difficult for employees to make clear plans for the future. Yet it also offers opportunities. Employees can shop around more easily, for example, or change directions. A career in 2022 is no longer this rigid corporate ladder you climb, straight to the top. It's more like a winding path on which you move in all directions.

Of course, this path calls for a new approach and ditto challenges. On the one hand, people have to take more responsibility and become more flexible, so as to prepare for and adapt to the changes being thrown at them - at an ever-increasing pace. On the other hand, companies - and by extension anyone working in the field of recruitment - should respond too.

Today, one big decision you made in your early twenties doesn't decide whether you'll answer 'yes' or 'no' to the question 'do you have a successful career?'. On the contrary, careers are all about learning and trying out new things. People no longer slavishly follow the twists and turns of a fixed script, but write their own story.

For better grip, balance & inspiration
In 2021, we did extensive research into the motives, expectations and sensitivities of job seekers. With the results, published in our research paper 'Job hunting in Belgium', we wanted to arm HR departments in the crunch for talent.

Today, we dig deeper into what drives people in their professional lives. In late 2021, together with Antwerp Management School and the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, we asked more than fifteen hundred employees in Belgium and the Netherlands about their careers: there were questions about satisfaction, balance, goals, success and much more.

Their answers provided sufficient material for three research papers, each highlighting one specific aspect. The triptych 'On job satisfaction and success: how Dutch and Belgian employees write new career chapters' is a starting point for targeted advice to anyone looking for a job, or more grip and balance on that winding career path, or for anyone looking for inspiration for their career story.

In part 2, we'll take a closer look at career success and goals. Part 3 is dedicated to proactive career behavior, shocks and regrets.

But first up: sustainable careers. We paint a picture of today's many career paths and opportunities, and show how people are dynamically dealing with career change, all the while focusing on growth, workability, and employability, both in the short and the long term.

1 SUSTAINABLE CAREERS

What is a sustainable career?
A succession of career experiences - jobs and other relevant experiences - over a period of time, crossing different social spaces. Meaning: employers you have worked for, volunteering experiences, learning opportunities, etcetera.

These three factors influence a sustainable career

1. Individual ownership

As an individual, you are responsible for your own career. Since it's your hand on the wheel, you determine the direction in which you drive.
Of course you have to take into account all kinds of factors beyond your control and responsibility - see below.

2. Chance & time

No career is fixed from the start. In part, it comes about through unexpected events you cannot control. As a result, the answer to the question of whether a person's career is sustainable is always a snapshot: just because you are committed and happy in your job today, it doesn't mean that you will still be in ten weeks, months or years.

3. Context

The sustainability of someone's career depends on an awful lot of contextual factors. contextual factors: the organization where you work, the state of your industry, workplace culture, your personal life and so on. Some cause unexpected twists and turns, while others play a lasting role.

Ultimately, a sustainable career is based on the interplay between these three elements: what the individual does, how it relates to the context and how it changes over the years.

A sustainable career is no binary issue: either you have it, or you don't. On the contrary, it's a dynamic process in which three elements constantly fight for balance:

job happiness (Happy)
health (Healthy)
productivity (Productive)

For example: in order to keep your job, you have to be productive; to keep doing the work, you need to be healthy; and if you want to keep doing it, you have to stay happy.

And no, people are never one hundred percent happy, healthy and productive - at least not all the time. And they don't need to be. But the balance between job happiness, productivity and health are crucial indicators of how people experience their careers, i.e. whether they are more or less sustainable. Sometimes small events can influence how you feel about your career - think: your train to work is delayed by an hour. Some other time, it's one of those big all-encompassing things - for example: the ever advancing robotization - that determines how you feel.

Ultimately, it all comes down to the search for the right 'person-career fit': people try to create an environment that suits them over a longer period of time, and in the meantime adapt as best they can to changes.

In this first chapter, we show you the career sustainability numbers.

Exactly how sustainable are current careers in Belgium and the Netherlands? Do people consider themselves employable in a different job? How about the balance between job satisfaction, health and productivity? And how important do employees find these elements?

How satisfied are employees?

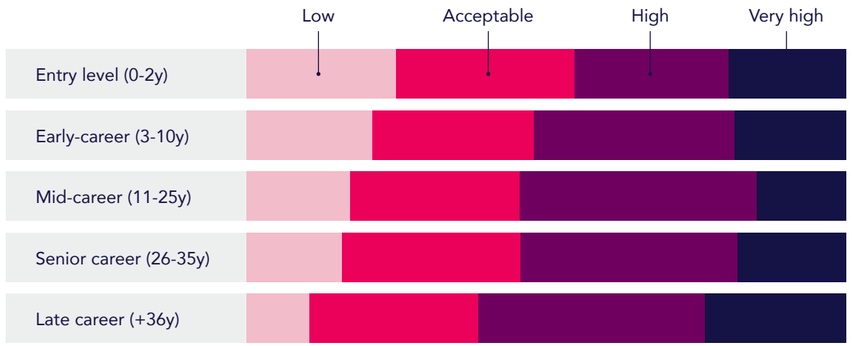
An important question, as subjective feelings of satisfaction are directly linked to various facets of work behavior, productivity and well-being.

Figure 1: GENERAL CAREER SATISFACTION (in %)

Overall, employees are quite satisfied with their careers: the average score is 7.37 out of 10. Just over half are ‘satisfied’ or even ‘very satisfied’, and just under 30% consider them ‘acceptable’. Yet almost one in five workers is not satisfied at all.

If we split up the answers according to work experience, age, function and region, remarkable differences emerge.

Figure 2: CAREER SATISFACTION BY WORK EXPERIENCE



The older the workers, the more satisfied they are with their careers.

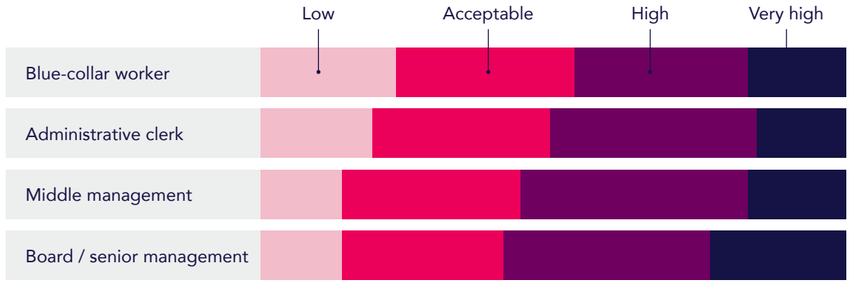
Among 18- to 25-year-old workers, 28% are not so satisfied with their careers. Among 36- to 45-year-olds, it’s 20%. Among those aged 55+, the number drops to 13%.

The same finding occurs when we take a closer look at years of work experience: the more experienced people are, the more satisfied they are with their careers.

Among starters (up to two years of work experience), almost 40% are ‘highly’ or ‘very highly’ satisfied with their careers. For those who have more than 36 years on the clock, that figure jumps to 60%.

It’s a bit surprising: previous research had not revealed this positive relationship between age and career satisfaction. Has the younger generation perhaps become more demanding? Has the coronavirus pandemic hit their satisfaction hard? Or are they simply changing jobs more often because they think the grass is greener on the other side? In any case, a fascinating topic to explore further.

Figure 3: CAREER SATISFACTION BY POSITION



Career satisfaction also depends on the position people hold. There is a clear difference between employees who hold executive positions (blue collar and executive white collar) and ‘higher’ positions (white collar, executives and management).

Blue-collar workers and executive white-collar workers are the least satisfied: 22.5% say they are less satisfied with their current career, only 48% are satisfied to a high or very high degree. Among higher positions, only 15.3% are not satisfied with their career, 58% are satisfied to a high or very high degree.

But why the difference? One explanation could be that practically skilled workers often have fewer career opportunities, and that organizations invest less in their career development. After all, they are rarely considered to be high potentials, nor are they treated as such. If there is one conclusion to be drawn here, it’s how important it is to have an inclusive career policy.

Table 1: **CAREER SATISFACTION BY REGION**

Career satisfaction (in %)

	Flanders	Wallonia	Belgium	Netherlands
Low	**18,91**	**26,18**	**22,55**	**17,52**
Acceptable	**32,39**	**25,96**	**29,57**	**28,57**
High to very high	**48,70**	**48,86**	**47,78**	**53,92**

Career satisfaction also varies from region to region. On average, employees in the Netherlands are slightly more satisfied than those in Belgium. What is remarkable is that people in Wallonia are a lot less satisfied with their careers: more than 1 in 4 employees (26.18%) indicate a low level of satisfaction. In Flanders and the Netherlands this is only 18.91% and 17.52%, respectively.

IS YOUR CAREER IN BALANCE?

Career satisfaction can be a relevant indicator of its sustainability, but it is certainly not the only one. After all, it is essential that people find a certain balance between happiness, health and productivity.
So: how are employees in Belgium and the Netherlands doing?

Just over half of the employees (55.4%) indicate that their career was in balance during the past year. For 27.76% the career was 'somewhat' balanced, 16.83% found it not balanced at all.

Obviously, employees would like a balanced career in the future, too. Interestingly, they find job satisfaction and mental health more important than productivity. 55.6% consider mental health to be very important, 45.8% think the same about job satisfaction. In contrast, only 24.8% consider productivity to be very important for the future.

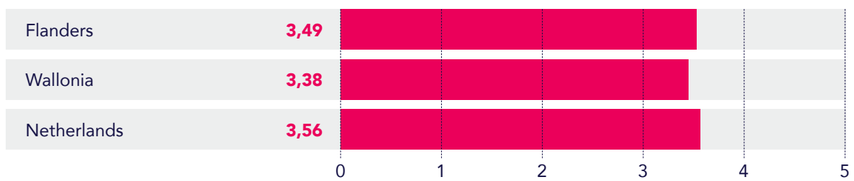
These findings are in line with current scientific research which shows that people are placing increasing importance on subjective elements of career success.

HOW HAPPY ARE EMPLOYEES?

70% of our respondents indicate that they are happy in their careers: a respectable score. And there are no significant differences in terms of gender, age, work experience or diploma.

Table 2: **JOB HAPPINESS BY REGION**

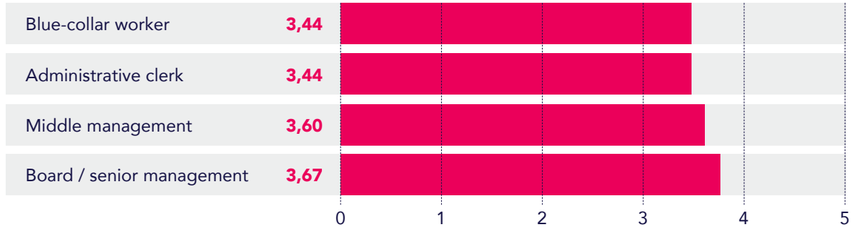
Average job happiness score (out of 5)



The only major difference is among the regions: Dutch and Flemish employees report significantly higher levels of job happiness than their Walloon counterparts.

Table 3: **WORK HAPPINESS BY FUNCTION**

Average job happiness score (out of 5)



There is also - once again - a clear difference between the various jobs: blue-collar workers and executive white-collar workers score significantly lower in terms of job satisfaction than white-collar workers, middle managers and directors.

HOW MENTALLY HEALTHY ARE EMPLOYEES?

Positions and regions clearly impact people's mental health. Here, the numbers are in line with those concerning job satisfaction: Walloon employees again score significantly lower with respect to mental health than the Flemish and Dutch. (table 4) In turn, blue-collar workers score significantly lower on mental health than other job categories. (table 5)

In addition, we see differences with regard to age and work experience. Both older and more experienced workers are more likely to report feeling mentally healthier than younger ones. (table 6 & 7)

That younger workers and starters are more likely to assign a lower score to their mental health is in line with other research. Statistics Netherlands, (CBS) concluded in a study that in their country, young workers are most often mentally fatigued by work.

Table 4: HEALTH BY REGION

Average health score (out of 5)

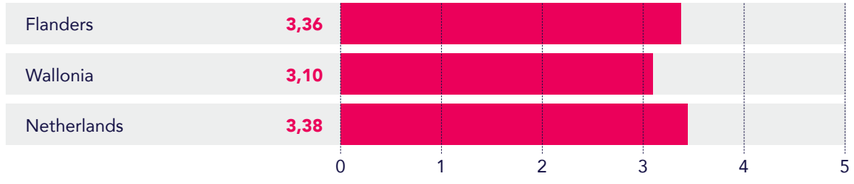


Table 5: HEALTH BY POSITION

Average health score (out of 5)

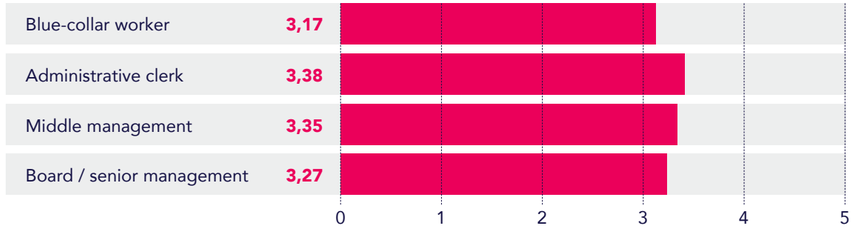


Table 6: HEALTH BY AGE CATEGORY

Average health score (out of 5)

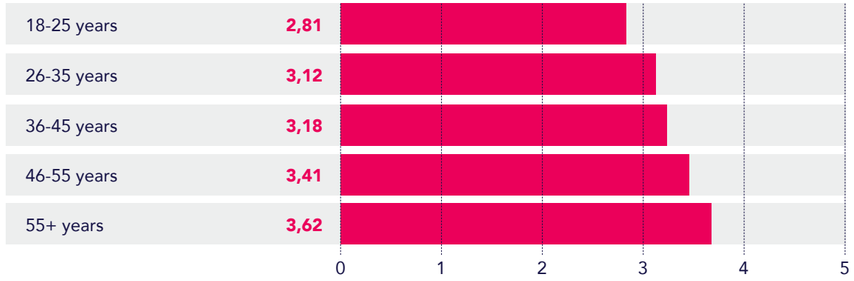
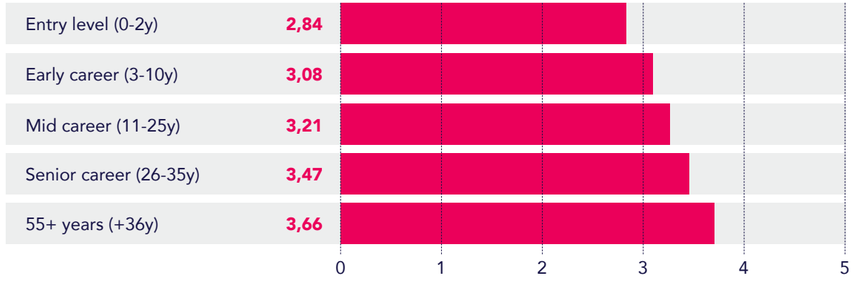


Table 7: HEALTH BY WORK EXPERIENCE

Average health score (out of 5)



HOW EMPLOYABLE ARE EMPLOYEES?

Careers, as we mentioned earlier, do not run in straight lines: they're fickle and unpredictable. Lifetime employment has given way to lifetime employability, with people jumping back and forth between jobs and employers more frequently than ever. And recent research confirms it will start happening more often in the near future: no less than 97% of employees and managers expect even more changes in the way they work over the next five years. In fact, 42% expect a strong to complete change.
If we want to keep careers sustainable, it is crucial for people to remain as employable as possible.

In this survey, we asked employees about their so-called perceived internal and external employability.

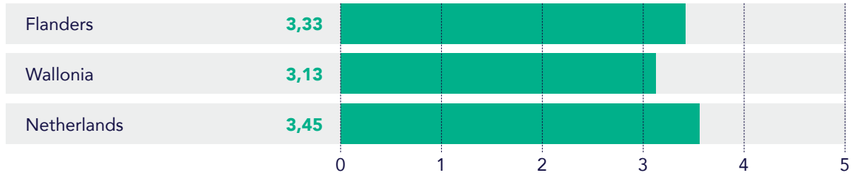
Perceived external employability:
how high do you estimate the chance of getting another job with another employer?
Perceived internal employability:
how high do you estimate the probability of doing another job with your current employer?

Again, a significant difference between Wallonia on the one hand, and Flanders and the Netherlands on the other. (table 8)
Walloon employees consider themselves less externally employable than respondents from Flanders or the Netherlands.

Even more striking are the differences in terms of age, diploma and function - both for external and internal employability.

Table 8: EXTERNAL EMPLOYABILITY BY REGION

Average external employability score (out of 5)



Age

Internal and external employability decrease with age. Employees aged 45 and over are more likely to think they are less suitable for another job, either in their current organization or elsewhere. And that conclusion is entirely in line with that of similar studies. (table 9 & 10)

Table 9: INTERNAL EMPLOYABILITY BY AGE CATEGORY

Average internal employability score (out of 5)

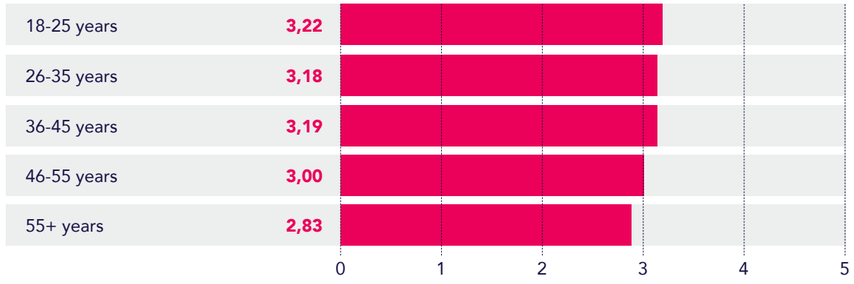
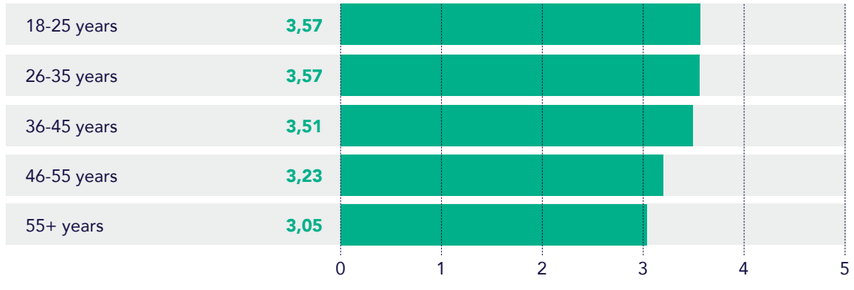


Table 10: EXTERNAL EMPLOYABILITY BY AGE CATEGORY

Average external employability score (out of 5)



Degree

The higher your degree, the more often you'll consider yourself employable, both internally and externally.

Perceived internal employability also increases significantly for employees with a master's degree or PhD, certainly in comparison to employees with a secondary school diploma at the most. (table 11)

External employability goes up, starting from the distinction between the lowest diplomas.

Respondents with a secondary school diploma feel more externally employable than those with an elementary school diploma, and so on. (table 12) Only for respondents with a bachelor's or master's degree is there no difference.

Table 11: INTERNAL EMPLOYABILITY BY EDUCATION

Average internal employability score (out of 5)

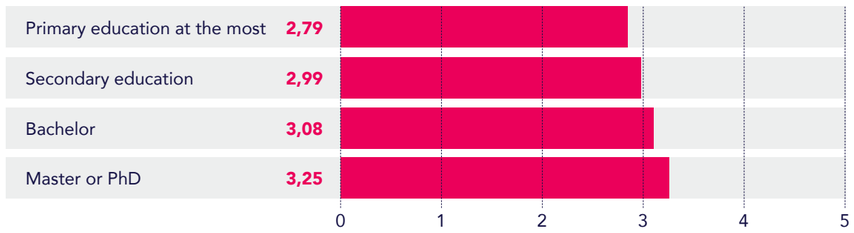
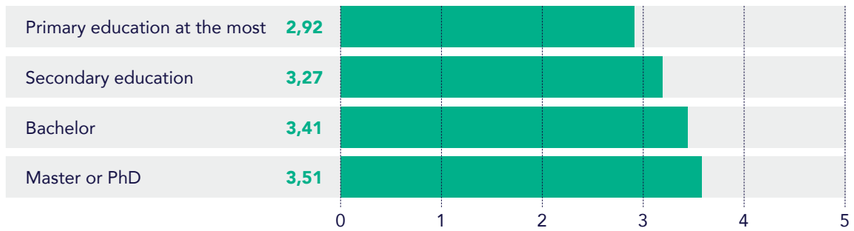


Table 12: EXTERNAL EMPLOYABILITY BY EDUCATION

Average external employability score (out of 5)



Function

Again, the higher up the job ladder, the more people feel employable, internally and externally. There is a significant difference between blue-collar and executive white-collar workers on the one hand, and middle and senior management on the other. (table 13 & 14)

Table 13: INTERNAL EMPLOYABILITY BY POSITION

Average internal employability score (out of 5)

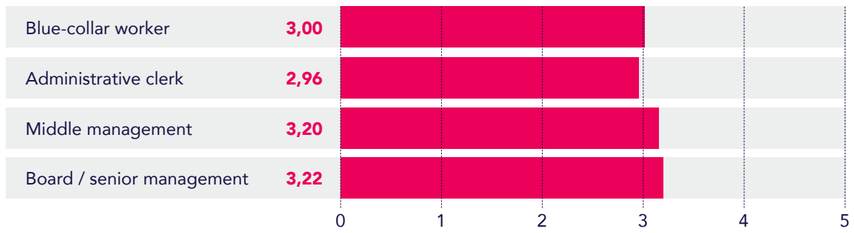


Table 14: EXTERNAL EMPLOYABILITY BY POSITIO

Average external employability score (out of 5)

RECAP: SUSTAINABLE CAREERS IN BELGIUM AND THE NETHERLANDS

Four striking conclusions about sustainable careers:

1. Technically trained people score lower everywhere

No big surprise, as it confirms previous scientific research. Employees with a lower diploma or an executive function give lower ratings regarding employability, are less satisfied with their careers and indicate being less happy and mentally healthy.

Adopting an inclusive career policy is therefore key, with sufficient opportunities for everyone - regardless of age, diploma or experience. Only then can we counteract the growing inequality on the labor market. Of course, organizations can already distinguish themselves by offering sufficient opportunities to technically trained professionals, for example with their employer branding.

2. Older workers are happier than younger ones

Employees over 45 rate their chances of changing jobs or functions lower than their younger colleagues. But there's no need to get pessimistic: in fact, they tend to be happier, mentally healthier and more satisfied with their careers.

Younger employees tend toward low scores when it comes to mental health. The corona crisis may have something to do with that, although the mental well-being of young professionals has been an issue for quite some time, especially in the Netherlands.

In order to have more sustainable career policies, we need customization: organizations and companies should focus more on the health and happiness of their younger employees, and on the employability of the older ones. And they can also keep this knowledge in mind when recruiting new people or making colleagues grow.

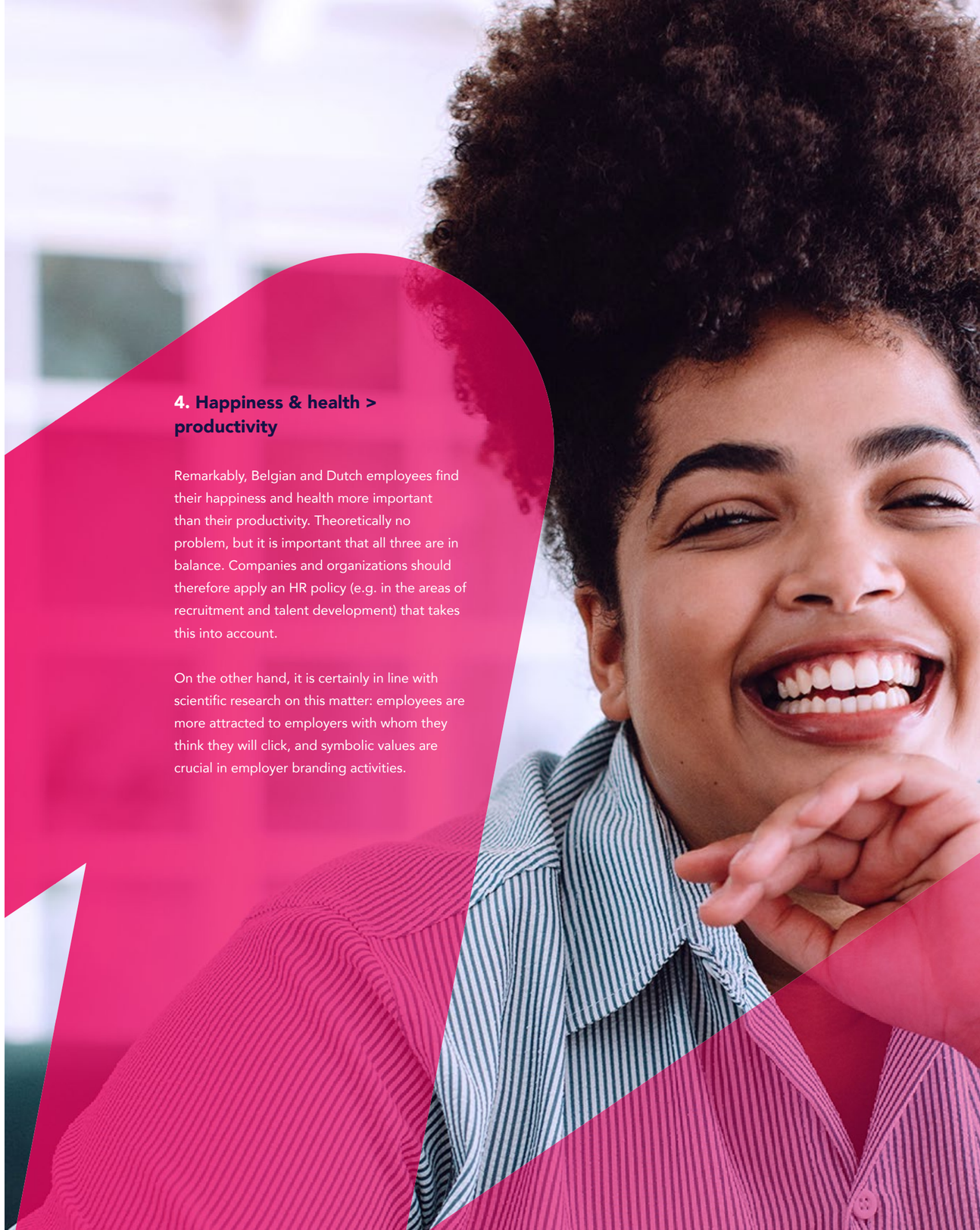
3. In Wallonia, careers are less sustainable

In Flanders and the Netherlands, sustainability indicators keep pace, but in Wallonia they are significantly lower. Explanations are far from obvious: further research is certainly needed.

4. Happiness & health > productivity

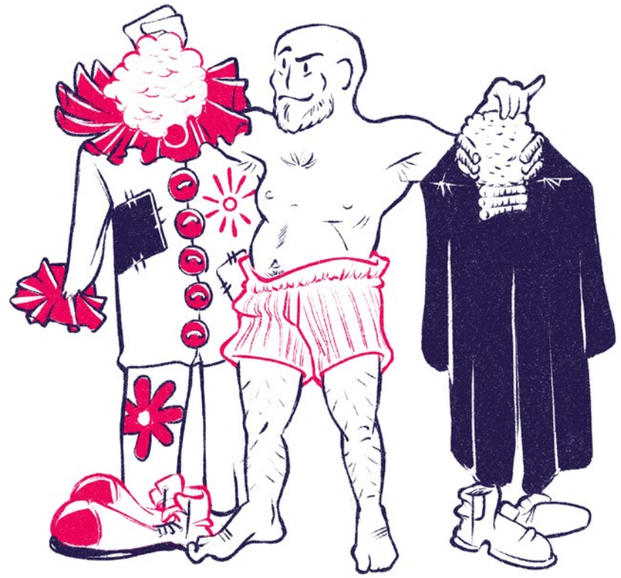
Remarkably, Belgian and Dutch employees find their happiness and health more important than their productivity. Theoretically no problem, but it is important that all three are in balance. Companies and organizations should therefore apply an HR policy (e.g. in the areas of recruitment and talent development) that takes this into account.

On the other hand, it is certainly in line with scientific research on this matter: employees are more attracted to employers with whom they think they will click, and symbolic values are crucial in employer branding activities.



2 CAREER MOBILITY

To be sustainable, careers must remain in motion. Employees need to regularly gain new experiences and develop new skills, so they get a better idea of what they like doing. It gives them new energy, or the desire to grow, and it makes them more employable in the future. On the contrary, those who do the same thing day in and day out, simply risk getting stuck.



Career mobility not only stimulates employability, but also security: those with lots of experience will find work more quickly, in the same company or elsewhere. And exactly that kind of dynamism is important for the entire labor market.

For many years, flexibility was the number one competence of the future already, but the coronavirus pandemic made us face the facts again: it is absolutely key, both to keep employees working and organizations running. The pandemic also accelerated a number of changes that were already underway for some time, like digitalization, so being able to deal with those changes as an individual will become even more important. Sustainable employability, talent development and internal mobility are among the biggest challenges.

However, if we look at the figures, career mobility remains limited. Especially in the Flemish Region: there, the average job seniority of employees between 15 and 64 years fluctuated around 11 years in the entire period between 1992 and 2020. The job mobility rate (percentage of workers who have a different job after one year) between ages 20 and 64 decreased in the same region from 6.2% in 2006 to 5% in 2020. Flemish workers prefer staying with one employer for a long time, or so it seems.

In the Netherlands, job mobility is slightly higher: according to a 2018 study of transitions in the labor market by Statistics Netherlands (CBS), 12% of workers made a switch.

And moderate mobility is also confirmed in this study. We asked employees to what extent they are mobile in their careers.

For example, did they ever switch jobs with their own employer, or did they go to work

for another? And are the trends different according to age or degree? What about regional differences? And what is the relationship between the elements of a sustainable career and job mobility?

On average, our respondents have been working for their current employer for 12.24 years. During their entire career they worked for an average of 3.7 organizations.

80% indicated that they had not changed jobs with their current employer in the past five years. 13.35% changed jobs once in their own organization, 6.52% twice or more.

Switching to another company did happen slightly more often in the past five years. (figure 4) 18.26% changed their organization just once,

8.07% changed twice or more. But the majority of employees (73.66%) just stayed where they were over the past five years.

80% and 73%: most employees still feel very strongly about stability. In theory not a major issue, were it not for the fact that the rapidly changing job market is desperate for more flexibility.

35.65% of employees had a career break of more than one month.

It is striking that women (40.85%) more often interrupt their careers than men (30.33%). And they specifically do it more often for parental leave: 45.37% stayed at home for a longer period of time or went to work less to take care of children; for men this was only 5.86%.

Male respondents with interrupted careers were more likely to cite unemployment as the reason: 51.05%, compared to 34.63% of women.

MOBILITY: REGIONAL DIFFERENCES

Career mobility also varies by region. For example, Dutch employees have changed jobs more often than Belgian employees over the past five years, both internally and externally.

24.35% of Dutch workers changed jobs within their current organization at least once in the past five years, compared to only 15.38% of Belgians. There was also more mobility to another employer: 30.94% of the Dutch employees changed employers at least once, compared to 21.7% of Belgian workers.

Differences between the two countries, as well as between the regions, are also noted in terms of career breaks.

Only 20.57% of Flemish workers have ever taken a career break longer than one month, in contrast to 41.88% of Walloon workers and 40.62% of the Dutch.

The main reason for this break also varies greatly by region.

- Flanders: parental leave **(44.83%)**
- Wallonia: illness **(46.25%)**
- Dutch: unemployment **(51.07%)**

(table 15)

This does not necessarily mean that Dutch people are fired more often: perhaps they simply make more transitions themselves, or it is an indication of a more flexible labor market culture.
More research can surely shed more light on this.

Table 15: CAREER BREAKS BY REGION

Top 3 reasons for career breaks of at least one month (in %)

Flanders		Wallonia		Netherlands	
1. Parental leave	**44,83**	1. Illness	**46,25**	1. Unemployment	**51,07**
2. Illness	**33,33**	2. Parental leave	**36,88**	2. Illness	**25,99**
3. Unemployment	**28,74**	3. Unemployment	**28,75**	3. Parental leave	**20,8**

MOBILITY: DIFFERENCES ACCORDING TO AGE, WORK EXPERIENCE, DIPLOMA AND FUNCTION

Age

The older the employees, the more they stay where they are.

Only 16.23% of employees over 46 have changed employers even once in the past five years. By comparison, more than half (54.73%) of the 18-25 year olds and 40.93% of the 26-35 year olds have done so.

Young people between 18 and 25 are also more likely to switch jobs with their current employer: 29.47% did so at least once, compared to only 16.66% of those aged 46+. (Table 16)

The fact that there are more external than internal job switches among the younger age groups indicates that starting employees are more inclined to experiment and look for new (learning) experiences.

Table 16: INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL MOBILITY BY AGE CATEGORY

Mobility by age in the last five years (in %)

	18-25 years		26-35 years		36-45 years		46-55 years		+55 years	
	intern	extern	intern	extern	intern	extern	intern	extern	intern	extern
Never	**70,53**	**45,26**	**74,56**	**59,06**	**76,37**	**71,70**	**83,33**	**83,77**	**87,82**	**84,42**
At least once	**29,47**	**54,73**	**25,44**	**40,93**	**23,63**	**28,30**	**16,66**	**16,23**	**12,18**	**26,26**

Work experience

The number of years of work experience also impacts career mobility. And again, in general, it's: the younger, the more mobile.

Almost one in two starters changed employers in the past five years: among entry level employees this was 46.88%, among early careers 44.52%.

For those with 26 years of work experience or more, the figure drops to less than one in five. Meaning: those who have been working for the same company for a long time are less inclined to find out if the grass is greener on the other side.

But when looking at internal mobility, it's a slightly different story: 'the younger, the more mobile' doesn't apply here at all. Employees in the 'early careers' (27.92%) and 'mid-careers' (22.82%) categories have indeed changed jobs within their own organization at least once in the past five years. Entry level employees, on the other hand, did not: only 19.79%. No real surprise, since those with less experience are also less inclined to try something else. (table 17)

Table 17: INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL MOBILITY BY EXPERIENCE

Mobility by work experience in the past five years (in %)

	Entry level (0-2y)		Early career (3-10y)		Mid-career (11-25y)		Senior career (26-3y)		Late career (+36y)	
	intern	extern	intern	extern	intern	extern	intern	extern	intern	extern
Never	**80,21**	**53,12**	**72,08**	**55,47**	**77,18**	**72,54**	**83,12**	**82,86**	**89,22**	**85,50**
At least once	**19,79**	**46,88**	**27,92**	**44,52**	**22,82**	**27,46**	**89,22**	**17,13**	**10,78**	**14,50**

Degree and position

Degrees and positions also influence job mobility.

Those with higher degrees are slightly more inclined to change employers. Compare: only one in four employees with an elementary education degree chose another employer in the past five years; for those with a master's or academic degree, the figure rises to 34.48%. (table 18)

Among blue-collar and white-collar workers, only a small percentage (13.94% and 14.22% respectively) changed jobs within the same company; among those in middle and higher management, at least one in three did so. (table 19)

Table 18: EXTERNAL MOBILITY BY DIPLOMA

Mobility to another organisation in the past five years (in %)

	Primary education at most	Secondary education	Bachelor	Master or PhD
Never	75,00	76,47	73,75	65,52
At least once	25,00	23,53	26,26	34,48

Table 19: INTERNAL MOBILITY BY POSITION

Mobility within the same organisation in the past five years (in %)

	Blue-collar worker	Administrative clerk	Middle management	Board / senior management
Never	86,06	85,79	70,00	66,67
At least once	13,94	14,22	30,00	33,33

THE MORE MOBILE, THE MORE SUSTAINABLE THE CAREER?

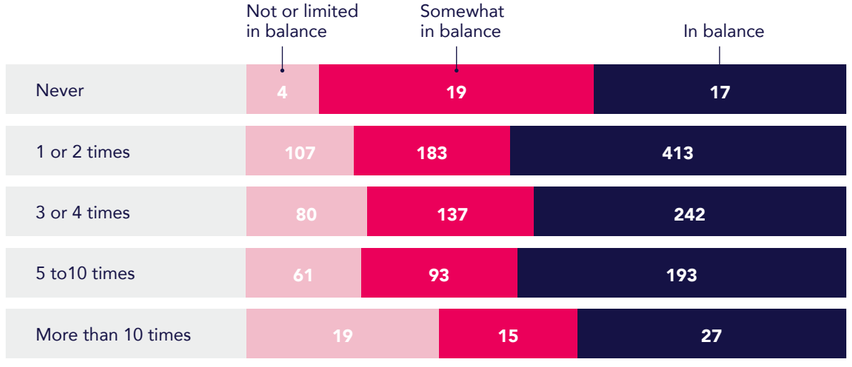
Mobility is essential for a sustainable career. But how mobile exactly? How often do you need to switch jobs to be happy, or to feel that your current employer or another organization can take you on in some position?

Balance

When we dissect the balance between job happiness, health and productivity, one fact stands out: workers who changed organizations a few times are more likely to report that their careers are balanced than those who never made the switch.

Still, it's no plea for job hopping. After all, too much mobility is not good for the balance between job satisfaction, health and productivity: those who have changed organization more than ten times are more likely to indicate that their career is not, or only slightly in balance. (figure 5)

Figure 5: CORRELATION BETWEEN MOBILITY AND CAREER BALANCE



Health

If we zoom in deeper on mental health, the same trend is noticeable.
The more employees change employers, the more their mental health increases. But again, there is the same limit of ten switches: average mental health is significantly lower when people have worked in more than ten organizations. (table 20)

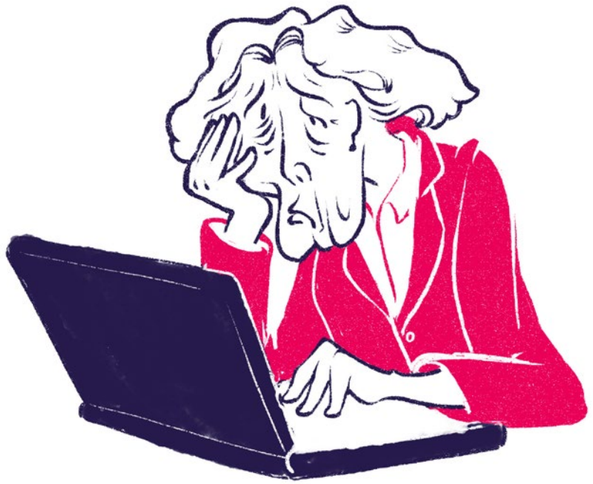
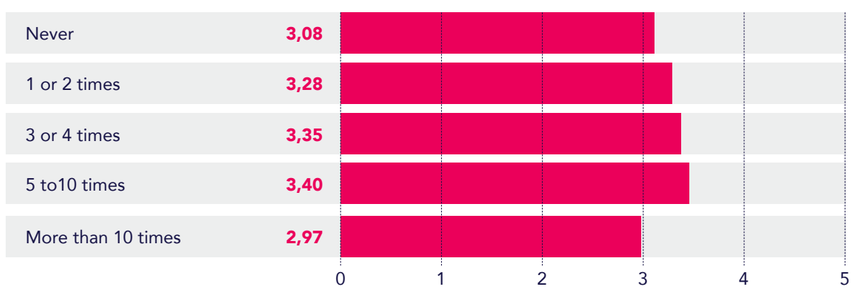


Table 20: MENTAL HEALTH AND MOBILITY

Average mental health score (out of 5)



Employability

Career mobility also affects perceived internal and external employability.

Those who changed jobs at least twice within their own organization during the past five years see more opportunities to make further changes anyway. (table 21)

Even those who change only once consider themselves more employable than those who remain where they are.

Perceived external employability also increases for employees who have changed organizations more often over the past five years. (table 22)

Table 21: INTERNAL EMPLOYABILITY AND MOBILITY

Average internal employability score (out of 5)

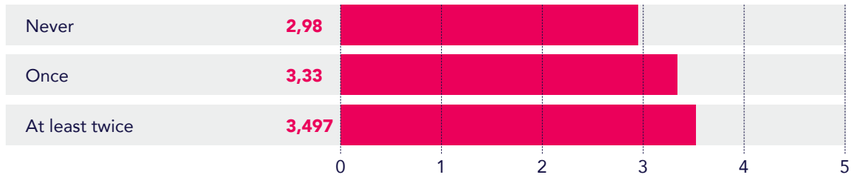
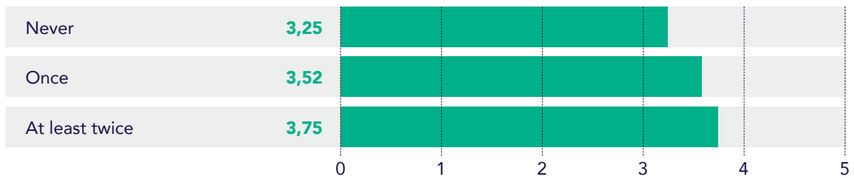


Table 22: EXTERNAL EMPLOYABILITY AND MOBILITY

Average external employability score (out of 5)



RECAP: CAREER MOBILITY IN BELGIUM AND THE NETHERLANDS

Our results on career mobility in Belgium and the Netherlands point to two main areas of interest.

1. Mobility ensures employability

As soon as people change organizations, or take up another position with their current employer, their employability increases. A career policy should therefore mainly focus on stimulating mobility, as it has a reinforcing effect on future transitions.

2. Beware of the Matthew effect

We face the risk that differences in employability (and thus in the sustainability of careers) will increase over time: employees who are already successful (i.e. more mobile and therefore more employable) will become even more so, while those who were already lagging behind will fall even further behind. An inclusive career policy with equal opportunities for all employees could counteract this so-called Matthew principle.

CONCLUSION: HOW TO ENSURE SUSTAINABLE AND MOBILE CAREERS?

Four recommendations

How do employees in Belgium and the Netherlands think about their careers in 2022? We answered that question - in general terms - in the previous pages.

To have a sustainable career, people must be able to deal dynamically with change, and they should pay attention to growth, workability and employability, both in the long and short term. It is all about a person-career-fit: people try to create an environment that suits them, and they adapt to that winding path as well as they can.

With this study, we want to support employees in writing their own career story. These are our four recommendations, for the benefit of organizations, companies and employees.

#1: Keep employees happy & healthy

To employees, their mental health and job happiness is not merely important. No, they consider these two elements even more important than their productivity. But in order to remain employable for life and to be able to look back on a sustainable career, it is essential that these three elements are in balance.

Nonetheless, if your organization wants to do employer branding, you should put plenty of effort into symbolic values such as happiness and health. Also: keep bringing the balance between happiness, health and productivity to the attention of employees and job seekers.

#2: Consciously choose for career mobility

Both internal and external mobility have a positive effect on a career's sustainability. People know by now that they have to be flexible, and that changing jobs every now and then helps them move forward, but they still don't act accordingly: the majority of employees mainly strive for stability, and thus keep doing the same job with the same employer for years on end. Changing jobs or employers too often is no option either: those who change more than ten times are more likely to experience negative consequences.

In short, employees should make conscious choices in the area of internal and external mobility and look for the balance that makes them feel good.

#3: Tailor to the younger ánd older generations

Young people have a hard time at the beginning of their career: they just left school and are trying to adapt to their new life at a rapid pace. Not only does it cause stress, it can also be a true reality shock. No wonder they score lower on mental health, and switch jobs more often, looking for happiness and stability. Organizations can certainly take advantage of this by offering customized coaching.

Things seem slightly better for the older generation: happiness, health and career satisfaction increase with age, and a sustainable career is just around the corner for most senior employees. Still, we need to keep an eye on them too, and focus on their agility and mobility, as their perception of internal and external employability is visibly declining.

If we want sustainable career policies for everyone, customization is recommended. When dealing with younger employees, organizations should mainly focus on health and happiness, with older employees on employability. Also, they should keep this in mind when recruiting new people or letting colleagues grow.

#4: Give extra attention to vulnerable job groups

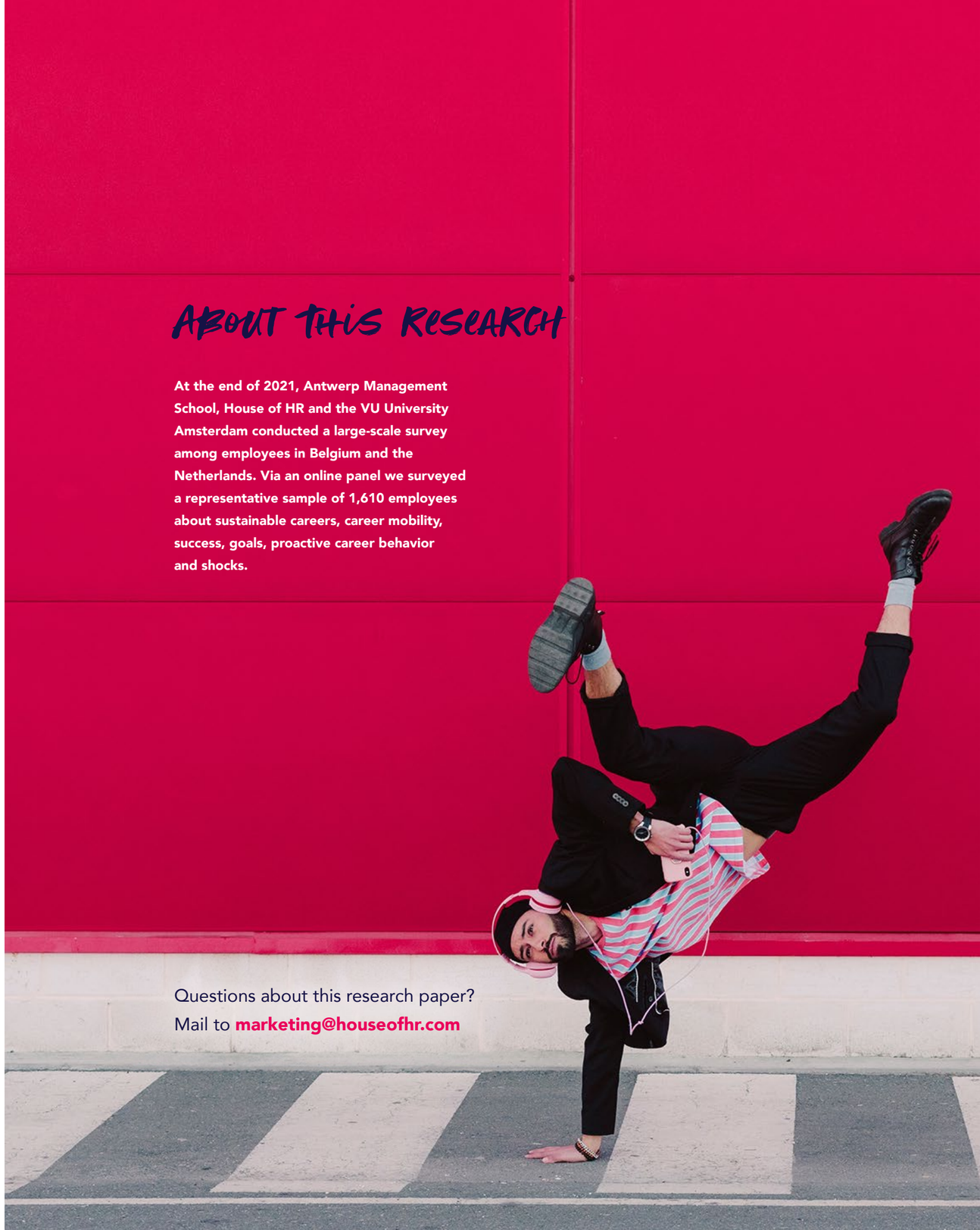
Both blue-collar and executive white-collar workers emerged as vulnerable job groups in this study. They score worse on all basic conditions for a sustainable career and they also choose new jobs less often. This is a possible source of growing inequality, as these vulnerable groups can end up in a vicious circle. If differences in employability (and therefore in the sustainability of careers) increase over time, those who were successful in the first place (i.e. more mobile and employable) will become even more so, while those who initially lagged behind will only see their arrears increase. This last specific group therefore needs some guidance, or an extra push.

An inclusive career policy with opportunities for everyone is required, so that all groups on the labor market remain sufficiently on the radar.

Want to know more about careers?
Also read parts 2 and 3 of 'On job satisfaction and success: how Dutch and Belgian employees write new career chapters'.

About this research

At the end of 2021, Antwerp Management School, House of HR and the VU University Amsterdam conducted a large-scale survey among employees in Belgium and the Netherlands. Via an online panel we surveyed a representative sample of 1,610 employees about sustainable careers, career mobility, success, goals, proactive career behavior and shocks.



Questions about this research paper?
Mail to **marketing@houseofhr.com**

"THE CAREER IS DEAD, LONG LIVE THE CAREER!"

- D.T. Hall

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