



## Swiss Human Relations Barometer Spring Newsletter 2021

# Job attitudes in terms of space and time

Theories describe and explain the world. Psychological theories describe and explain the experience and behaviour of people in the context of (gainful) employment. How far do these theories go and how accurately do they illustrate reality? To answer these questions, an empirical assessment is needed. This is where the Swiss HR Barometer comes in. The newsletter validates the answers in terms of space (between urban and rural areas) and time (before and during the coronavirus crisis).

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### Editorial

Has the pandemic affected job satisfaction? The answer to this question forms the content of the first article. An analysis of the HR Barometer data 2012-20 shows that, in general, job satisfaction has remained the same, but «stabilised satisfaction» has become stronger among those who are satisfied. At first glance, this statement is positive. However, the following views point to potential risks.

«City air gives you freedom». In the Middle Ages, cities grew as they became a refuge for serfs. Even today, more and more people are living in cities. Do employees in urban areas behave differently to those in the countryside? Are any differences evident in respect of their job attitudes? This is what the second article is about.

The Swiss HR Barometer is a joint project run by ETH Zurich and the universities of Lucerne and Zurich. The project is funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation and has been gathering data since 2006 on how employees in Switzerland experience their work situation. A representative, differentiated survey of employees in Switzerland conducted at regular intervals is used

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to establish basic organisational/psychological principles for human resources policy – relevant for urban and rural areas both before and during the coronavirus crisis. We are pleased if we have been able to make a contribution to this with this newsletter.

*Gudela Grote & Bruno Staffelbach, editors*

## Is job satisfaction remaining high despite the pandemic?

The question of whether people are happy with their job depends on many different factors, in particular financial and social developments. These can be triggered by external shocks. That was the case in spring 2020 when the coronavirus pandemic presented particular challenges to society, businesses and individuals. Social distancing and working from home have changed the way many people work together with their colleagues day to day, which raises the question of how this will affect their job satisfaction.

The data from the Swiss HR Barometer allows employees' job satisfaction in Switzerland to be compared over recent years. By using representative data from 2012 to 2020, the following article shows how satisfied employees in Switzerland currently are at work and how levels of job satisfaction changed over this period.

### Job satisfaction in general

Job satisfaction in general refers to the attitude of employees towards their work. These attitudes are based

on both rational and emotional considerations, convictions and reactions. The results of the survey show that most employees in Switzerland are quite satisfied or even very satisfied with their work and that this changed little between 2012 and 2020 (see Figure 1). It is striking that the proportion of employees who were quite or very dissatisfied fell in 2020. It may be that many employees are lowering their expectations because they are just happy to still be in work in the current, challenging financial situation. Overall, job satisfaction is comparable with life satisfaction, which is measured by the Federal Statistical Office. They found that 38% of the Swiss population are very satisfied with life. This puts Switzerland way above the European average.

### Types of job satisfaction

Job satisfaction as a one-dimensional measurement is often criticised in the research literature. For this reason, further analyses use the job satisfaction model according to Bruggemann, Groskurth and Ulich (1975), which divides job satisfaction into different types and explains how they came about. This is illustrated in Figure 2.

According to this model, people compare their desired state (target) with the employment situation they actually find themselves in (actual). Five different types of satisfaction or dissatisfaction arise, depending on whether the level of expectation rises, stays the same or falls.

If you consider these types of job satisfaction among employees in Switzerland over the period, the following picture becomes clear: In the last few years, stabilised satisfaction has taken the lion's share. In 2020, the share

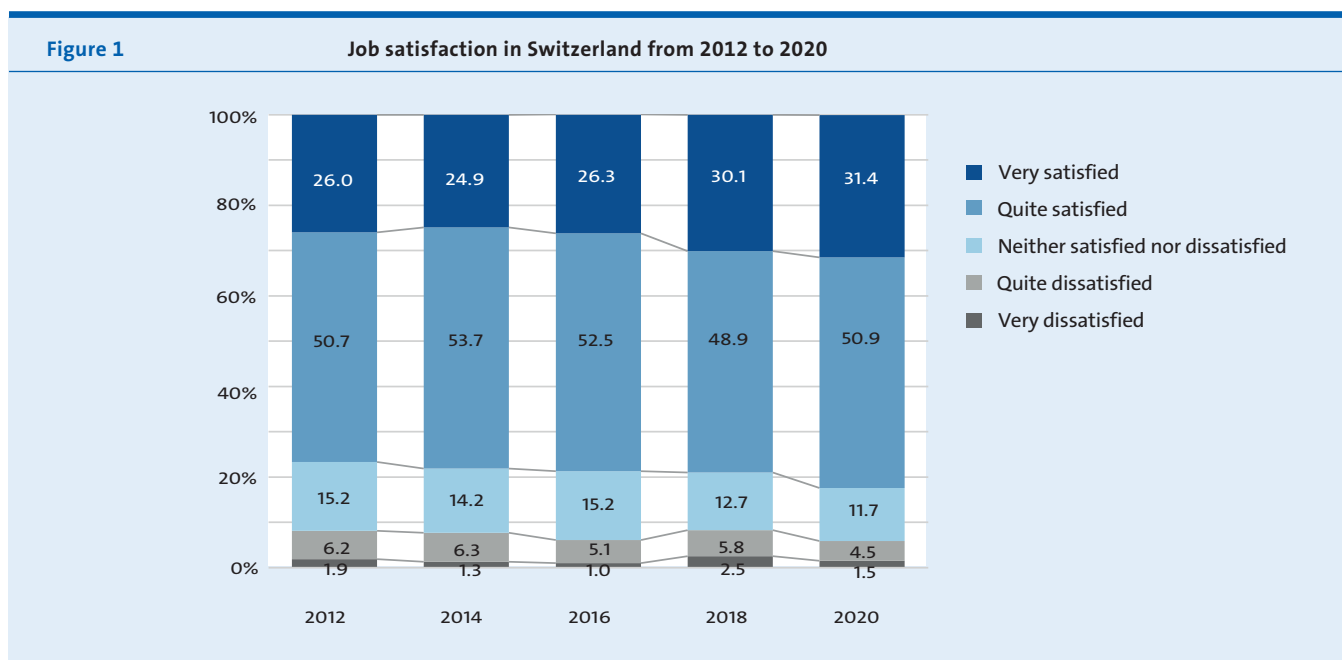
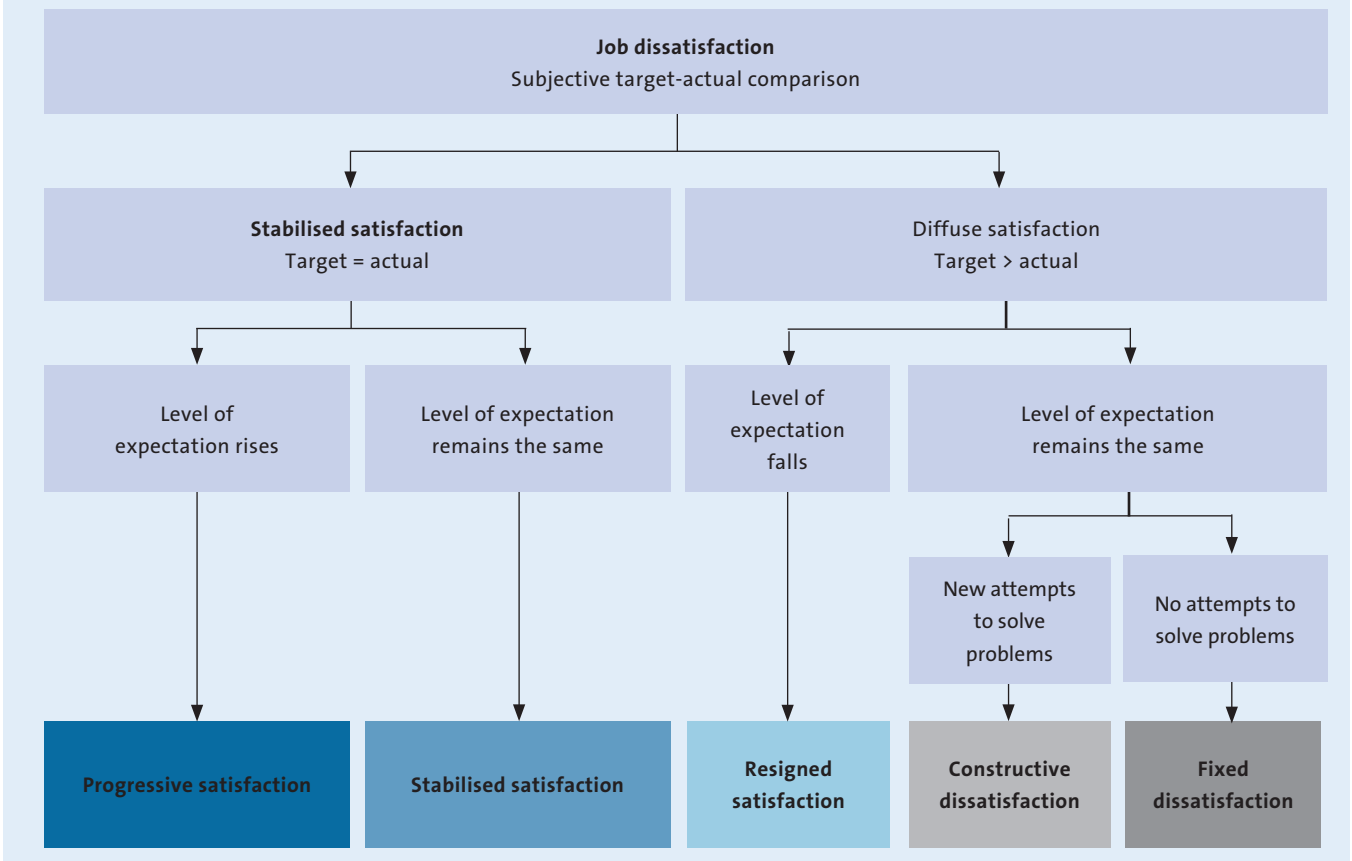


Figure 2

Types of job satisfaction according to Bruggemann, Groskurth and Ulich (1975)



taken by this type of satisfaction, where the target-actual comparison is positive and the employee’s level of expectation stays the same, rose again and now stands at almost 40%. However, the share taken by progressive, constructive and fixed (dis)satisfaction fell slightly in 2020, while the share taken by resigned satisfaction remained constant (see Figure 3).

The various types of satisfaction also differ in certain job attitudes. The following comparison is based on the Swiss HR Barometer data for 2020 and presented in Figure 4. In particular, those reporting stabilised and progressive satisfaction show a high level of commitment and little turnover intention. These two types are com-

Figure 3

Changes in the types of job satisfaction in Switzerland over time

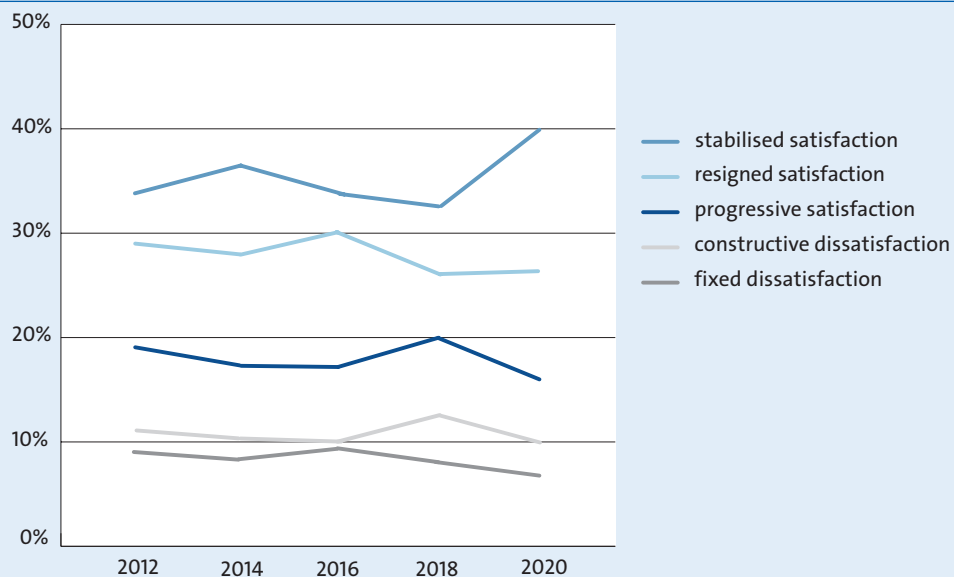
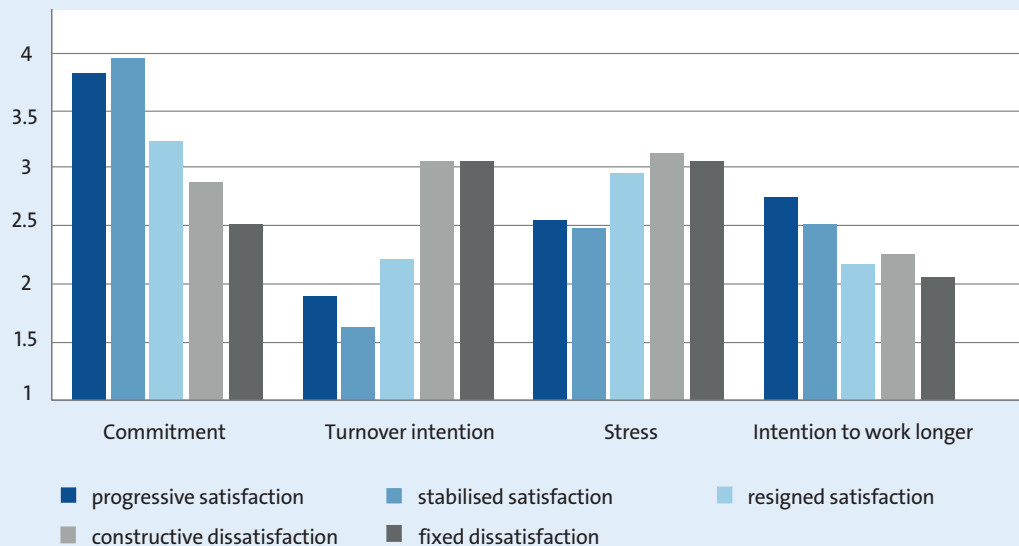


Figure 4

Job attitudes and level of stress according to type of job satisfaction



paratively less stressed and on average have more of an intention to work beyond the retirement age. In contrast to this, the opposite is apparent in the case of the types of dissatisfaction: On average, employees reporting constructive or fixed dissatisfaction are less committed to their employer, are more stressed and have a higher turnover intention.

### Conclusion and outlook

An analysis of the Swiss HR Barometer data from 2012 to 2020 shows that the majority of employees in Switzerland are satisfied with their job and that this has not changed, even at the onset of the coronavirus crisis in early 2020. A differentiated analysis of the types of job satisfaction corroborates these results in that the stabilised type of job satisfaction in particular increased significantly compared with previous years. In summary, these results for employers are pleasing, as satisfied employees feel a stronger connection to the company, have a lower turnover intention and are more prepared to work beyond retirement age. One explanation for the share of those reporting stabilised satisfaction increasing at the beginning of the coronavirus crisis despite working conditions often being made more difficult as a result of the outbreak of the pandemic could be that employees lowered their aspirations or expectations and began to value their job more. However, studies such as the one conducted by the ETH on the work situation during the coronavirus crisis show that the more difficult working conditions may lead to increasing emotional exhaustion and social isolation. So, the longer the pandemic persists, the greater the risk that job satisfaction and mental health will suffer. It is therefore impor-

tant that employers and superiors increasingly address the needs of employees and shape the working environment in such a way as to make it as pleasant as possible, precisely at such a time of crisis.

*Laura Schärner, Julian Pfrombeck & Anja Feierabend*

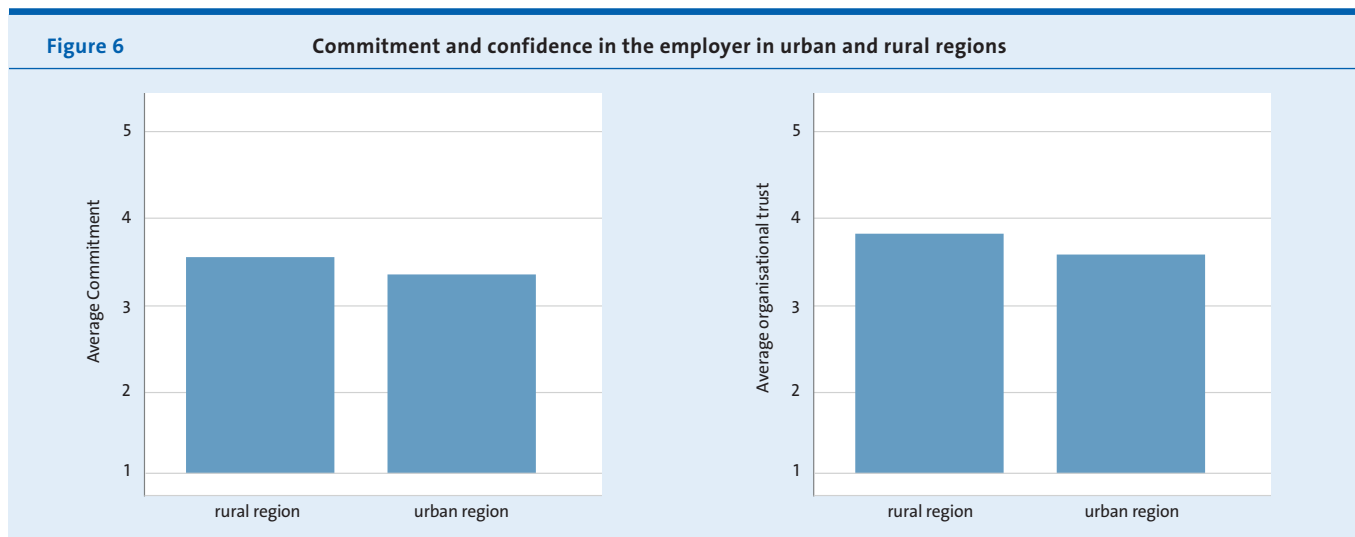
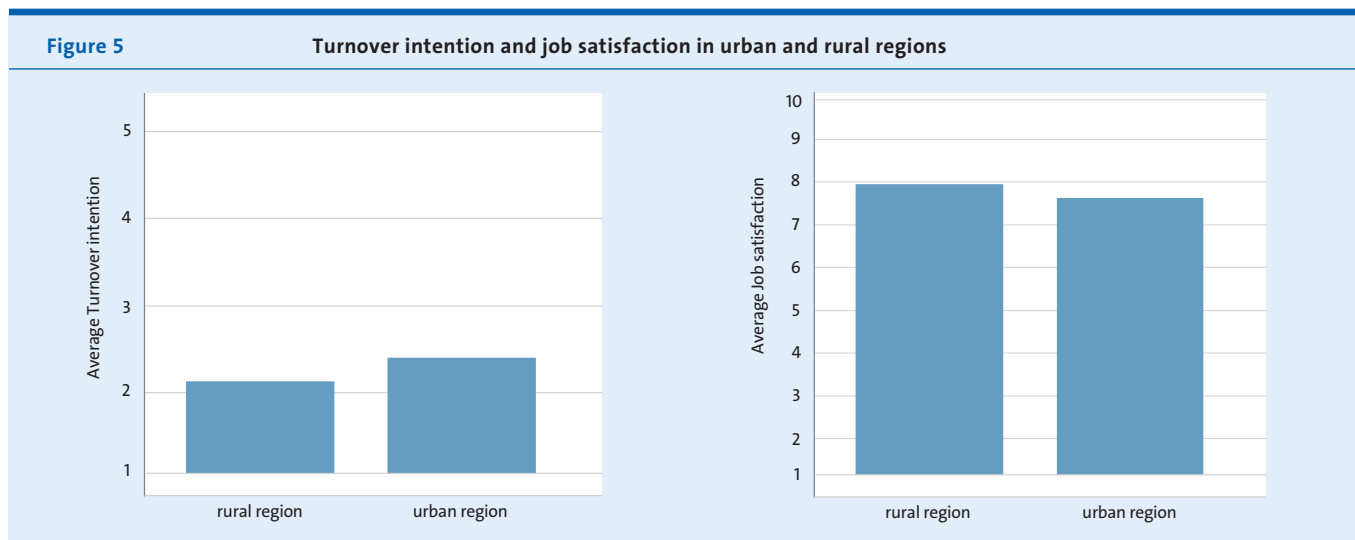
Source: Feierabend, A., Pfrombeck, J. & Schärner, L. (2021). Gute Zeiten, schlechte Zeiten: Arbeitszufriedenheit von Arbeitnehmenden in der Schweiz von 2012 bis 2020. Personal Schweiz.

# Employees in the countryside are more loyal to their employer

According to the Swiss Federal Statistical Office (FSO, 2017), almost 40% of the entire population live in the five largest conurbations in Switzerland alone (Zurich, Geneva, Basel, Bern and Lausanne). City dwellers are often thought to have different values to people who live in the countryside, as well as different ideas about and attitudes to life. In some cases, this is apparent in political attitudes and orientations. But there are also structural differences. For example, there are often fewer employers in rural regions. At the same time, urban areas have a higher average unemployment rate, as an analysis of the period 1992-2006 found (Flückiger, Kempeneers, Deutsch, Silber & Bazan, 2007). All these different factors can shape employees' job attitudes.

This article investigates the extent to which the job attitudes of employees in Swiss urban areas differ from

those of employees in rural regions. To this end, data from the Swiss HR Barometer in 2016 was used and people were divided into two groups based on their place of residence – one for rural regions and the other for urban regions – in accordance with the classification by the Swiss Federal Statistical Office (FSO, 2012). The classification was based on various criteria, such as population density. Thus, 540 employees were allocated to the urban population and 823 to the rural population. The following four job attitudes were looked at more closely: employees' job satisfaction, commitment and turnover intention, as well as their confidence in their employer. Job satisfaction is taken to mean the attitude of employees to their work based on rational and emotional considerations and reactions. Commitment describes the attachment that employees have to the company they work for, while turnover intention defines the extent to which employees plan to switch employer. Turnover intention is heavily influenced by job satisfaction and the job market. Confidence in the employer describes the



extent to which employees believe in the company and its management.

A comparison of job satisfaction between Swiss urban areas and Swiss countryside shows that there is no statistically relevant difference between these regions. On a scale of 1 to 10, the average job satisfaction in the countryside stands at 7.59, while the average figure for urban areas is 7.41 (see Figure 5). This means that employees in the countryside are no more satisfied in general than those in urban areas. In the case of commitment, however, differences emerge between the two groups. Employees in rural regions show greater commitment than those in urban regions. On a scale of 1 to 5, the average commitment among employees in the countryside stands at 3.56, while the average figure for urban areas is 3.38 (see Figure 6). This difference is statistically significant. The picture is similar in the case of confidence in the employer. The average figure in the countryside for confidence in the employer stands at 3.91, while in urban regions it is 3.80 (on a scale of 1 to 5; see Figure 6). Both job attitudes are therefore more marked in rural regions. However, the most marked difference between urban areas and countryside is in turnover intention. The average turnover intention in urban areas stands at 2.31 and in the countryside at 2.09 (likewise on a scale of 1 to 5; see Figure 5), meaning that the average turnover intention in urban areas is approximately 10% higher than in the countryside.

### Discussion

The results as a whole show that, on average, employees in the countryside are more committed, have more confidence in their employer and have a lower turnover intention. To summarise, then, you could say that employees in the countryside are more loyal to their employer. In the case of average job satisfaction, however, there is no difference between employees in the city and the countryside.

One reason for the differences in commitment, confidence in the employer and turnover intention could be that the number of different employers is often smaller in more rural regions, which means there are fewer alternative employers to switch to. In addition, traditional career paths could be more spread out in the countryside and be responsible for these differences.

There is a noticeable high variance in the four job attitudes that were studied (see Figures). This means that even within the urban and rural populations there are large differences. The variance is very heavily marked in turnover intention in particular. This suggests that other factors also influence turnover intention, such as the working environment in the respective company.

The data basis for this study comes from 2016. It is possible that the differences have changed over time. In recent years, more and more people have moved to urban areas. However, the coronavirus pandemic has reversed this trend in a short space of time, with the result that an exodus from urban regions can be observed (Raiffeisen, 2020; Bracher, 2020). It is not yet clear how this trend will affect differences in job attitudes between urban areas and the countryside. Future Swiss HR Barometer studies may be able to provide the answer.

*Christoph Gubser & Julian Pfrombeck*

Source: Masterarbeit von Christoph Gubser mit den Titel «A closer look at the Swiss Human-Relations-Barometer: Work attitudes in Swiss Cantons and how they are related to the regional macroeconomics environment (Januar 2020).»

## Literature

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## News

- Julian Pfrombeck, Dr. Wiebke Doden, Prof. Dr. Gudela Grote and Dr. Anja Feierabend published the article «A Study of Organizational Cynicism and How It Is Affected by Social Exchange Relationships at Work» in the Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology in 2020. (<https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12306>)
- Dr. Anna Sender, Dr. Manuela Morf and Dr. Anja Feierabend published the article «Aiming to Leave and Aiming to Harm: The Role of Turnover Intentions and Job Opportunities for Minor and Serious Deviance» in the Journal of Business and Psychology in 2020. (<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-020-09685-5>)
- Dr. Anja Feierabend and Julian Pfrombeck published the article «Digitalisierung und Generationenmanagement» in the journal Personal Schweiz in November 2020 ([www.hrbarometer.ch](http://www.hrbarometer.ch))
- Dr. Anja Feierabend published the article «Wie Personalförderung die Loyalität erhöht» in the Swiss church newspaper SKZ in 2020 ([www.hrbarometer.ch](http://www.hrbarometer.ch))
- Laura Schärner and Dr. Lea Rutishauser presented their paper «Why young employees want to leave their organization. Comparing two cohorts using a psychological contract perspective» at the 35th EI-ASM conference in Porto, Portugal.
- In the panel discussion at the Swiss GAAP FER event held by KPMG in October 2020, Dr. Anja Feierabend reported on findings resulting from Covid-19 for human resources management based on the Swiss HR Barometer data in 2020.
- In 2020, a total of six undergraduates at the University of Lucerne based their semester thesis on the HR Barometer data.
- On 14 February 2021, «Sonntagsblick» (a Swiss Sunday newspaper), referred to Swiss HR Barometer figures when reporting on the importance of training and further education in a pandemic.

## Publishing notes

The newsletter of the Swiss Human Relations Barometer is published twice in 2019. It provides information on current research projects based on the data of the HR Barometer. You can subscribe to the newsletter free of charge or download it from the website [www.hrbarometer.ch](http://www.hrbarometer.ch).

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