

EQUALIS



Report

The Changing Business Landscape

**Attracting and retaining
young employees**

April 2026

This analysis was prepared as part of the project “The Next-Generation Workplace: Bridging Business and Young Talent.”

The analysis was conducted by the EQUALIS Think Tank from May 2024 to January 2025. This English translation was published in April 2026.

We would like to thank the Danish Industry Foundation for its support of this analysis.

EQUALIS :INDUSTRIENS FOND

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1. Introduction

The shortage of qualified labor is currently one of the greatest growth barriers for Danish companies (Confederation of Danish Industry, 2023). This barrier is expected to increase in the future, as population projections show a decline in the workforce. In 2025, the population group between 18 and 45 years of age thus accounts for 34 pct. of the Danish population. This group is expected to shrink by two percentage points to 32 pct. in 2040 (Statistics Denmark, 2024). If a company is to stand strong in the competition for talent, it is therefore essential to address how younger employees can be attracted and retained within the individual company's workplace.

The debate regarding the needs and desires young people have for a future working life naturally carries significant weight. Social sustainability and a clear focus on diversity and inclusion in the workplace are often mentioned as important expectations that young people have of their (future) employees.

However, companies lack knowledge about what this means in practice. There is therefore a need to concretize the general ideas and expectations for companies' work with diversity and inclusion, so that young people become familiar with the scope of possibilities for having their expectations met in the labor market, and companies have the opportunity to act upon this. This analysis contributes to exactly that.

To create a knowledge base for the work on diversity and inclusion, we have involved young people and the business community and their perspectives on desires, challenges, and potentials for the next generation's workplace.

This analysis initially focuses on the role that diversity and inclusion play in attracting and retaining young people in the workplace. Subsequently, the analysis examines how diversity and inclusion are expressed in practice within the inclusive workplace.

Enjoy the read.

2. Method

The analysis is based on quantitative and qualitative data collected among young people and managers. The collection and processing are briefly described below. A detailed description of the methodological and analytical approach to the analysis can be found in the methodological appendix to the analysis.

To establish an initial knowledge base regarding young people and the labor market, a series of expert interviews were initially conducted.

The data collection for the analysis consisted of a questionnaire survey and a subsequent interview study. The questionnaire survey was sent to two groups: 1) young people (aged 18-35), either students or employees in the private sector, and 2) managers with personnel responsibility in the private sector. In total, 1,002 managers and 2,001 young people responded to the questionnaires.

Finally, 12 interviews were conducted with young people aged 18-35 who, at the time of the interview, were either students, job seekers, or in full-time employment. Additionally, seven interviews were held with managers with personnel responsibility in the private sector.

A youth panel, recruited through the youth organization SAGA, has continuously contributed to the data collection for the analysis. The youth panel consisted of 17 young people aged 19-33. Likewise, the project has been followed by an advisory group consisting of representatives from the Confederation of Danish Industry and the Danish Chamber of Commerce.

Definition of social sustainability, diversity, and inclusion

Work on **social sustainability** involves creating workplaces that promote health, well-being, diversity, recruitment, development, and retention while simultaneously minimizing the risk of poor well-being, stress, and sickness absence (Dansk Standard, 2024).

Diversity describes who we are and is the difference that can most often be measured (Muhr & Luthra, 2024).

Inclusion is about appreciating and actively making use of differences and similarities and is what we practice on a daily basis (Muhr & Luthra, 2024).

3. Conclusion

Diversity and inclusion play a central role in the development of the workplaces of the future. Overall, this analysis finds that both young people in the labor market and people managers see the value of an inclusive work culture that provides space for diversity across the workforce, supports innovation, and allows everyone to realize their talent in the labor market.

Strengthening diversity and inclusion requires a strategic approach where values are translated into concrete initiatives and a workplace culture that supports equal opportunities. Young people highlight the social environment, psychological safety, and authentic managership as crucial factors for inclusion and well-being, while flexibility, freedom with responsibility, and clear frameworks contribute to the motivation and ownership of young people.

At the same time, the analysis shows that young people worry about starting at the workplace, especially at the very beginning of their working lives, and may need support and guidance from companies during this process. Young people also experience the language used by older colleagues as a barrier to an inclusive work culture.

If companies are to retain and attract young employees, it is crucial to create an environment where young people feel safe, valued, and motivated. This requires a targeted effort where inclusion is integrated into both strategy and daily practice.

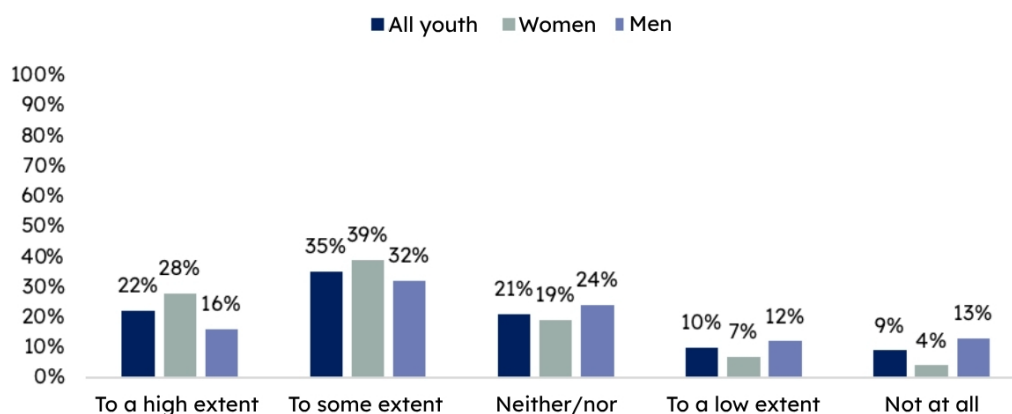
4. What role do diversity and inclusion play in attracting and retaining young people in workplaces?

Initially, the chapter explores how diversity and inclusion are understood by young people and managers, and what significance these concepts have in a workplace. Next, we take a closer look at the experiences of young people and managers regarding who is responsible for driving and promoting the work on diversity and inclusion.

4.1. How do young people and managers understand diversity and inclusion in the workplace?

57 pct. of the young people surveyed in the questionnaire indicate that it is important to them to a high or some degree that the company they work for works with diversity and inclusion in its own work environment. Young women (67 pct.) hold this conviction to a higher degree than young men (48 pct.).

Figure 4.1.1 The importance for young people's choice of workplace that a company works with diversity and inclusion in the internal work environment



Note: Figure 4.1.1 illustrates the distribution of responses to the question: 'To what extent is it important for your choice of workplace that the workplace works actively with inclusion and diversity internally in the daily work environment?' in proportions, based on responses from 2,001 young people between the ages of 18 and 35 who are either students or employees in the private sector. The response option 'Don't know' is not shown in the figure.

Diving into the analysis's interview material, it is elaborated how young people and managers understand these concepts and why they are perceived as important. Among the interviewees, two dimensions of the work with diversity and inclusion are particularly highlighted: the implementation of diversity and inclusion as **values** in a workplace and as **initiatives** that translate these values into practice.

Diversity and inclusion as part of a company's value-based foundation can be expressed in a company's overall strategy for being an attractive workplace.

"Diversity is, after all, one of the elements we have that is also one of our core values [...] and inclusion is actually written in as one of the five items on our people agenda."

(Manager)

In addition to this, managers highlight in interviews why it – also on a business level – makes sense to implement diversity and inclusion in the company's value-based foundation and the resulting strategy: diversity and inclusion among employees creates added value for the customers. This is due to a perception that a diverse workforce ensures a wide range of competencies and experiences, thereby contributing to effective task resolution. As an example, several managers describe working to get more women into management positions to ensure that as many talents and competencies as possible are brought into play.

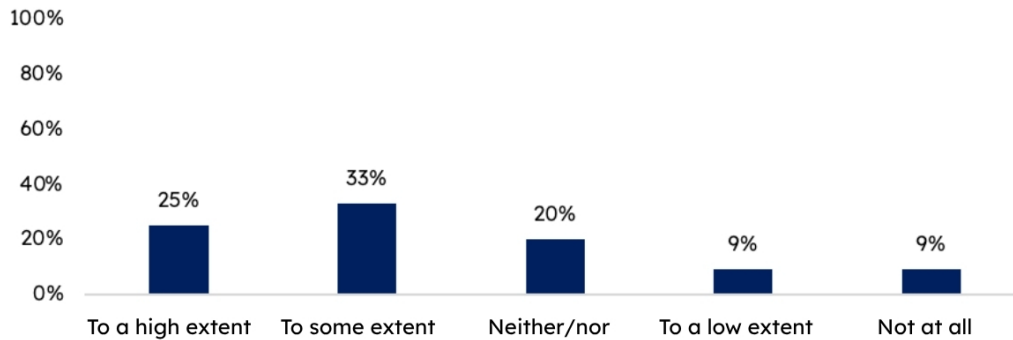
"I believe that in order for us as a team to have the best competencies and create the best package for our customers, we must also be able to embrace diversity, and we must have a very diverse organization. We have many different challenges that require many different things. And I definitely believe that if we are to bring the best out of our talents, it simply requires a high degree of diversity within everything the word diversity can encompass."

(Manager)

Diversity and inclusion are thus not only important for young people at the beginning of their working lives, but also essential for companies in terms of attracting the workforce they are looking for. That this is a focus area among companies is also reflected in the survey. Here, 49 pct. of the surveyed managers state that diversity and inclusion are, to a great or some extent, part of their company's business strategy.

When we look closer at the specific work with diversity and inclusion, the survey shows that 58 pct. of the surveyed managers state that their company, either to a great or some extent, works actively with diversity and inclusion in their own workplace.

Figure 4.1.2 Managers' indication of the extent to which work with diversity and inclusion is part of the company's internal culture



Note: Figure 4.1.2 illustrates the distribution of responses to the question 'To what extent do you feel that attention to inclusion and diversity is a central element of the company's internal culture?' in proportions based on responses from 1,002 managers with personnel responsibility employed in the private sector. The response option "don't know" does not appear in the figure.

Managers and young people highlight in interviews how diversity and inclusion are practically expressed as concrete initiatives. An example of such an initiative is the establishment of networks across employee groups that meet and discuss diversity and inclusion measures that the company can further develop.

We have several different gender inclusion networks. And there are various working groups within the networks. So there is a working group that deals with equal pay, and then there is another group looking at quotas, both for employees and managers. And there is a group looking at facilities. They have ensured that we have a nursing room and ensured that there are prayer rooms for minorities.

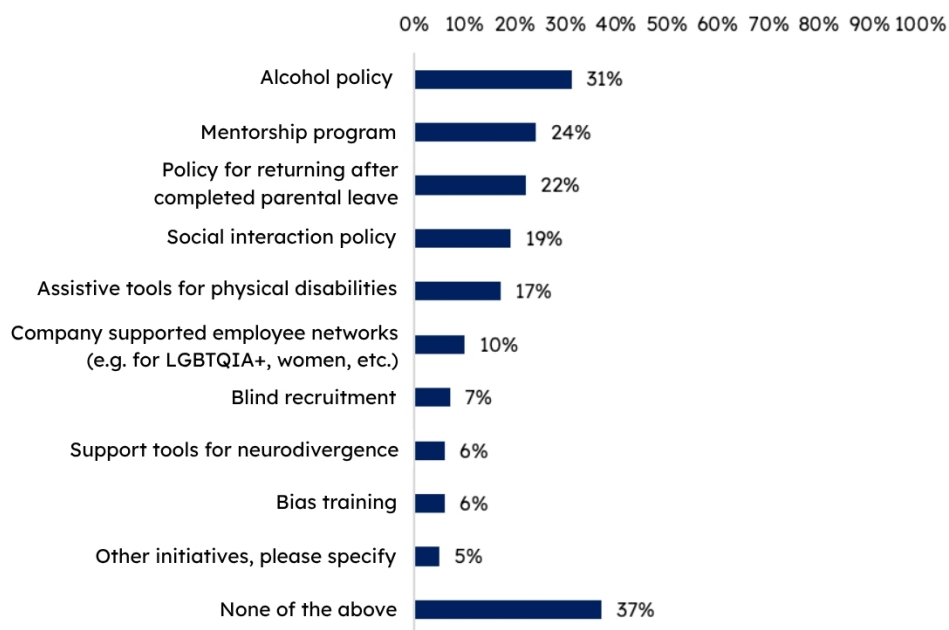
(Young person, employed)

In interviews, young people express having had different experiences with companies' work on diversity and inclusion in the form of concrete initiatives. Some say they experience that companies generally work with diversity and inclusion, and that this work has continuously received more attention. Others

are more skeptical because they feel there is not always consistency between the focus on diversity and inclusion communicated externally and the companies' actual work in the area, as stated in, for example, their annual reports.

The survey shows that there are companies that do not work with concrete initiatives. Based on a range of options, managers have been asked to indicate which initiatives, if any, are maintained in their organization to promote diversity and inclusion. Here, 37 pct. of the managers state that their companies do not work with initiatives to promote diversity and inclusion.

Figure 4.1.3 Managers indication of initiatives maintained by their workplace to promote diversity and inclusion



Note: Figure 4.1.3 illustrates the distribution of responses to the question 'Which of the following initiatives are maintained at your workplace with the aim of promoting inclusion and diversity?' in percentages based on responses from 1,002 HR managers.

Among the companies that have initiatives to promote diversity and inclusion in the workplace, the most frequently used, according to the surveyed managers, are 1) alcohol policies (31 pct.), 2) mentoring schemes (24 pct.), and 3) policies for returning after parental leave (22 pct.).

Alcohol policies can, for example, involve a company having frameworks for whether and in which contexts employee events may involve the consumption of alcohol. This is done to avoid the risk of excluding individuals who, for example for health or religious reasons, do not drink alcohol. Mentoring schemes can be an initiative to promote career development and opportunities

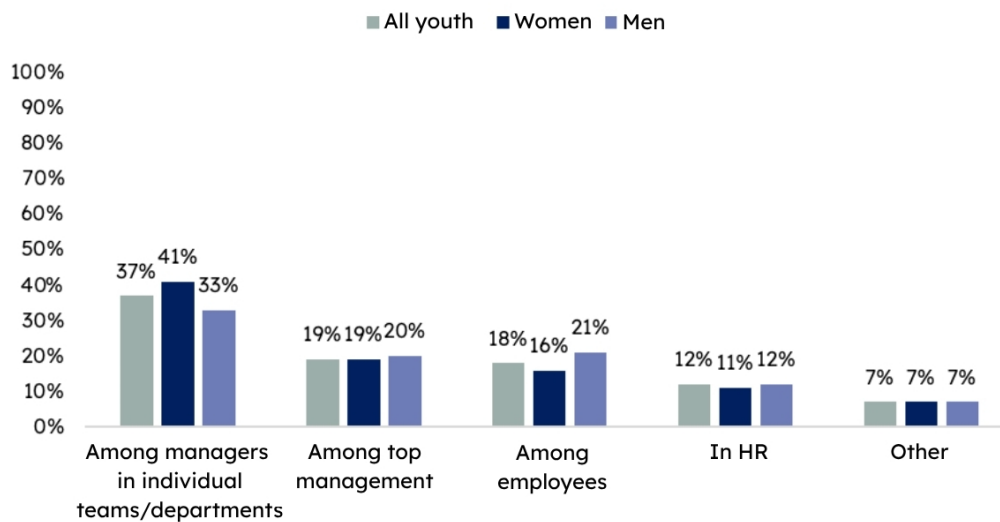
for younger employees, for example to ensure greater inclusion of women in management or other areas where one or more employee groups are underrepresented.

The analysis shows that there is a common understanding among young people and managers of diversity and inclusion as important – both as values and as concrete initiatives. Young people experience both seeing companies act on this understanding and seeing a lack of action. Precisely the difference between companies’ communication and action in relation to diversity and inclusion can have an impact on how young people act in the labor market. This point is elaborated further in the following chapter.

4.2 Who is responsible for ensuring diversity and inclusion in the workplace?

In the survey, both young people and managers were asked where they believe the responsibility for ensuring diversity and inclusion in a company should be placed.

Figure 4.2.1 Young people’s preferences for the placement of responsibility for diversity and inclusion in a workplace, broken down by men and women



Note: Figure 4.2.1 illustrates the distribution of responses to the question 'Where in the company do you believe the responsibility for ensuring inclusion and diversity in the workplace should primarily lie?' in proportions based on responses from 2,001 young people between 18 and 35 years old, who are either students or employees in the private sector. The response option "don't know" is not shown in the figure. The respondents consist of 1,083 women and 912 men. It was also possible to indicate "other gender identity", but the number of respondents is not high enough for further analysis. There is a statistically significant difference in the proportion of men and women who believe that the responsibility for diversity and inclusion should lie with employees and with managers in individual teams/departments, respectively.

Young people in the survey indicate that the responsibility should be placed with managers in individual teams or departments (37 pct.) or with top management (19 pct.).

We find differences across genders. Significantly more women (41 pct.) than men (33 pct.) believe that the responsibility for diversity and inclusion should primarily lie with managers in individual teams or departments. At the same time, significantly more men (21 pct.) than women (16 pct.) believe that the responsibility for diversity and inclusion should lie among the company's employees.

A perspective on this gender difference is highlighted in the qualitative material. Here, some young people emphasize that as a woman or a minority in the workplace, one is both more exposed to perceived discriminatory or exclusionary behavior and, therefore, may find it difficult to speak out against this behavior. Management responsibility ensures that it is not up to individual employees to have to speak out against perceived discriminatory behavior or be responsible for driving the inclusion and diversity agenda forward.

In interviews, young people elaborate that they experience the immediate manager as having a significant influence on social sustainability, diversity, and an inclusive workplace environment. They see their manager as the person who largely sets the framework for their daily lives and who, through this, influences the experience of well-being and equal opportunities for development. For example, it is the immediate manager who, through the facilitation of team meetings and collaboration within the team, guarantees that a space is created where everyone is included.

"When we have team meetings, she [the manager, ed.] is really good at establishing a structure so that things don't get messy. She is good at facilitating; she is observant and a good listener. You can feel that she is genuinely interested and translates input in a constructive way. And then she runs something where, in an initial round, we take turns checking in, and where you can speak for a maximum of two minutes. So there, she creates a format where everyone gets to speak and is allowed to take up an equal amount of space."

(Young person, employed)

Managers state that the responsibility for the work on diversity and inclusion in their companies is placed with managers in individual teams or departments (34 pct.) and among employees (21 pct.). At the same time, 32 pct. of the surveyed managers state that the responsibility for the work is anchored in top management.

In interviews, managers with personnel responsibility highlight their responsibility for inclusion and well-being in the workplace. They wish to lead by example and see it as part of their job to create social sustainability in the teams and departments they are responsible for.

"I think you are a good manager when you are inclusive, and you listen. As a manager, I have a vision of where we want to go, but I am very open to how we get there. Here, I believe we have a huge strength in working together and having different opinions on things, because that is how I believe you find the best solutions. I expect all my managers to create a space that provides psychological safety."

(Manager)

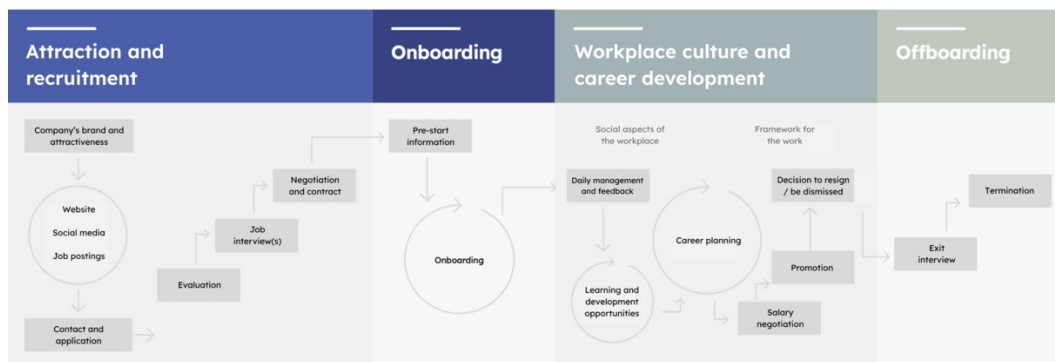
The analysis thus indicates that managers and young people largely share the perception that diversity and inclusion are a management responsibility. In particular, both groups point to the manager of individual teams or departments as the person who can and should drive this agenda forward. This is linked to a perception that the immediate manager plays a major role in employees' daily lives and therefore has a significant opportunity to exert influence there. At the same time, interviews show that successful efforts to create diverse and inclusive workplaces depend heavily on strategic prioritization by senior management. It is thus emphasized that it is essential that work on diversity and inclusion does not become dependent on either the individual manager or employee.

5. The inclusive workplace: Diversity and inclusion in practice

In this chapter, we delve into the concrete implementation of diversity and inclusion efforts from the perspective of managers and young people.

In practice, diversity and inclusion are expressed both through initiatives that directly address diversity, inclusion, and equal opportunities, and indirectly by creating and supporting safe, inclusive workplaces. Workplaces where there are genuine opportunities for all employees to thrive and develop, regardless of their experience and seniority in the labor market.

The chapter's sections focus on specific phases of an employee journey to illustrate how diversity, inclusion, and social sustainability are expressed in the process from attraction and recruitment to onboarding, workplace culture, and finally career development. Within this framework, we take a closer look at how various points of attention and concrete initiatives can support diverse and inclusive workplaces and thereby strengthen companies' opportunities to attract and retain younger employees.



5.1 Attraction and recruitment

The recruitment phase is perceived differently by young people and managers. On one hand, students and newly graduated interviewees describe experiencing pressure to find a job as quickly as possible after completing their studies, and several young people either assume or worry that the path to the first one will be difficult. On the other hand, managers state that it can be difficult to recruit the right workforce – that it can be particularly challenging to attract younger employees. In this part of the employee journey, it can therefore be particularly

relevant for companies to become aware of young people's experiences and preconceptions of the process toward a job.

Diversity and inclusion are important in young people's choice of workplace

Young people in the analysis describe the importance of diversity and inclusion for the choice of workplace. Several young people describe it as an expectation they have for their future employer – that diversity and inclusion is an area they work with and 'have a handle on'.

"I think it is important that the place I work relates to diversity, inclusion, and plurality. Because it is an important value. It is not 'nice to', it is 'need to'. You [as a company] are simply obligated to do so."

(Young person, employed)

Similarly, some young people express that the absence of a focus on diversity and inclusion in a workplace can act as a deterrent for them when choosing a workplace. Young people who are already employed also describe how the absence of the company's work with diversity and inclusion could make them consider changing jobs. The experience of absence can, for example, stem from a company having a poor reputation in the area or explicitly choosing not to support the agenda. Thus, companies' work with diversity and inclusion is not just an attraction factor – the lack thereof can also deter young people from applying for a job in a company.

"If there is something where the workplace has drawn negative attention [regarding diversity and inclusion], if there are problems with it or complaints about it, then it is completely unacceptable."

(Young person, student)

At the same time, the analysis shows that the importance of working with diversity and inclusion in the workplace depends on the young person's starting point.

For some of the young people who are not yet in the labor market, thoughts about being offered their first job are tied to a concern about, and an expectation that, this will be challenging. This is partly due to the fact that the

exchange of information and stories between friends and on social media can contribute to creating increased pressure and concerns regarding the process of getting a job. Here, young people can be exposed to peers who appear to be building careers where everything is running smoothly, or conversely, hear stories from recent graduates who have struggled to find work and have been unemployed for long periods.

"I spend a lot of time on LinkedIn, and day in and day out you see young people saying that they have been looking for a job for six months now and keep getting rejected. I work with recruitment, and we also get an insane number of applicants. So, I am afraid that it won't be that easy to get in, even if you have work experience. It is definitely something I am worried about."

(Young person, employed)

This concern influences these young people's perception that it can be difficult to make demands or have high expectations of a company. One interviewee describes that while it is important to her that a future workplace works with diversity and inclusion, she also expects to have to weigh this desire against the possibility of getting a job at all.

"I also think that you can have a lot of dreams about joining a company where you can align with the company's values and have flexibility, but I think that when you're in the situation, you probably have to compromise on some of that, at least in your first and maybe even your second job. Because it can be so difficult [to get a job]."

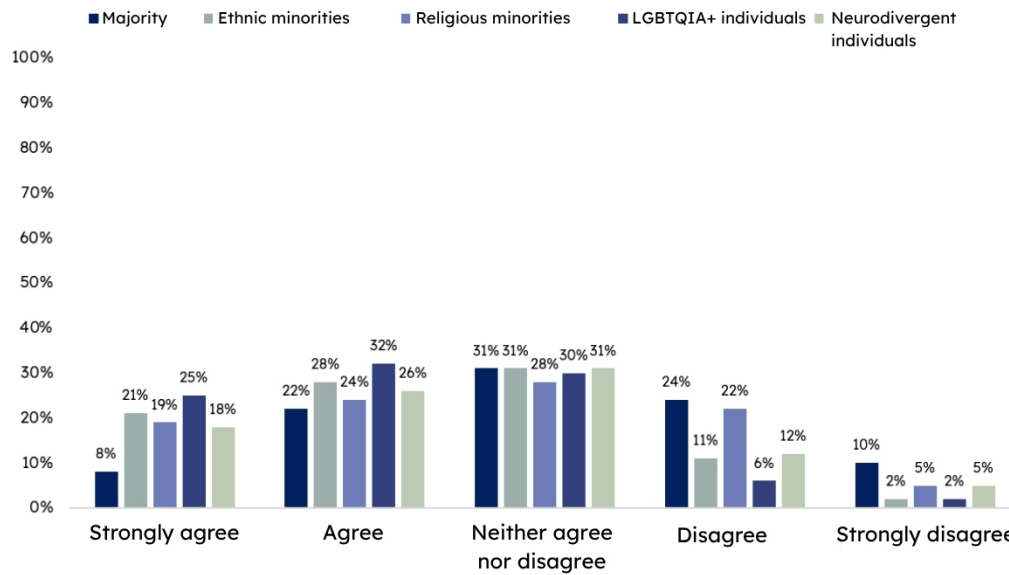
(Young person, student)

Young people with a minority background reflect on what it means to be in a workplace and what opportunities there are to "fit in" – also across geographical locations¹. The survey among young people shows that there is a significant difference in expectations between young people who do not state that they have a minority background (here referred to as the 'majority group') and young people with a minority background, respectively, regarding the

¹ In this study, we refer to minority background based on a broad understanding of various dimensions of diversity. Minority background thus covers young people with a minority ethnic background, neurodivergent individuals, religious minorities, and LGBTQIA+ people.

significance of the workplace's geographical location for their experience of being able to be themselves at their workplace. This correlation persists when controlling for which region the respondents live in.

Figure 5.1.1 Expectations among young people regarding the extent to which they will find it easier to be themselves in a workplace in larger cities than in smaller towns



Note: Figure 5.1.1 illustrates the distribution of responses to the statement 'I expect that it is easier for me to be myself at a workplace in one of the larger cities than in smaller cities', based on responses from 2,001 young people between the ages of 18 and 35 who are either students or employees in the private sector. The respondents consist of 1,481 respondents in the majority category, 166 respondents who identify as ethnic minorities, 86 who identify as religious minorities, 154 LGBTQIA+ individuals, and 168 who identify as neurodivergent. Respondents who selected the categories 'person with a physical disability', 'Do not wish to answer', or 'Other' are not included in the figure. The response option 'Don't know' is also not included in the figure.

Among the majority group, 8 pct. state that they strongly agree that they will find it easier to be themselves at a workplace in the larger cities rather than a smaller city. Among the minority groups, the proportion that strongly agrees with the same expectation is significantly higher: 25 pct. among young people who identify as LGBTQIA+ individuals, 21 pct. among young people with an ethnic minority background, 18 pct. among young people who identify as neurodivergent, and 19 pct. among young people with a religious minority background, respectively.

The survey thus shows that young people with a minority background, in particular, have an expectation that it will be easier for them to be themselves at a workplace in larger cities rather than smaller cities.

Before and during a recruitment process, it can therefore be relevant for companies to keep the expectations and concerns of young people in mind. Companies can, for instance, make it explicit in their branding and job advertisements that and how they specifically work with diversity and inclusion, and that recent graduates are relevant candidates for the position. At the same time, companies can clarify how the recruitment process is structured and what they expect from both their applicants and new employees during recruitment, onboarding, and further into the employment period.

Greater transparency can create a sense of security and motivation for young applicants during the recruitment process, thereby positively influencing a company's ability to attract younger employees.

Young people dream of making a difference

When young people in the interview survey for the analysis talk about what is important to them in their future working lives, a large proportion of them mention the opportunity to make a difference. Here, young people highlight a wide range of ways in which they wish to make a difference in their future working lives. Making a difference can thus range from specific areas of work – such as working with equality or sustainability – to contributing to the company's progress or having a positive impact on the workplace community and the working environment.

Young people express a desire to feel that their work makes a direct difference in their daily lives. Many young people highlight that they want to see meaning in their work tasks, and that a task appears more meaningful when the young person has a good understanding of the task's significance in a broader context. This highlights the individual employee's value to the workplace.

"It is important to me to feel that I am contributing to something. That you aren't just doing a project that gets put in some drawer somewhere. But that it is something that is used in the company and helps the company. Whether it's in terms of making more money, creating growth, or making people happier. It doesn't really matter that much. But that it contributes to something good, and that you aren't just doing something to pass the time."

(Young person, student)

In the interviews, managers emphasize that they find that for many young people, it is about having their work efforts contextualized so they better understand the bigger picture they are contributing to. Several managers state that they have a particular focus on clear communication with their younger

employees so that they understand the meaning and purpose of the tasks they perform.

I actually find that young people still have a need for and a desire to work. I think they really want to, if they are told why and what it provides. The desire is there, and development and ambition are there. But I think they constantly need to know, 'what comes out of this?'

(Manager)

In a recruitment process, companies can therefore benefit from having a specific focus on the formulation and communication of potential work tasks and areas – and what role it is possible to play in the company or in the professional field. Both in the given position and in the company in general. In this connection, it is central that there is alignment between the actual opportunities in the position and the opportunities the young people are presented with when they are hired by a company, and that there is an ongoing dialogue between the employee and the manager about this.

5.2 Onboarding

In the effort to make young people feel welcome and included in the workplace, the onboarding process is an important sequence that many young people have thoughts about, not least when they are on the threshold of the labor market. This is elaborated upon in the following section.

Young people worry about their own competencies and reception in the workplace

For several students in the analysis, their primary thoughts about their first full-time job are characterized by reflections on whether they will be able to meet employers' demands and expectations. This concern is expressed, among other ways, as doubt about whether the subjects they have been taught during their education are relevant to the issues and tasks of a future workplace.

"I think the biggest [concern] is whether you can figure out the work you have to do [...] You learn some very theoretical things, and we learn so many mathematical models and

things like that, which you don't really use when you enter the labor market."

(Young person, student)

The connection, or lack thereof, between what young people have learned and the issues they encounter in the labor market is also highlighted by young people who are currently employed. This involves, for instance, young people experiencing doubt after starting a new job about whether they are capable of handling their tasks and meeting the workplace's expectations. Similarly, concerns may arise if they are given new tasks at the workplace or move to a different area. At the same time, some young people describe an experience where the new ideas and methods they have proposed as new employees at their workplace have not been taken up.

Including young people in the workplace therefore involves an awareness that young people's concerns about their own abilities are not only linked to the transition from education to their first job. Uncertainty can continue to surface throughout the first years in the labor market when young people face new or unknown types of tasks – and if younger employees do not feel that what they have to offer is well received.

Regarding the onboarding process, young people are not only concerned about their own abilities – many also reflect on whether companies have good structures for, and are properly equipped to, receive a newly graduated employee. For example, an interviewee describes her own experience starting at a company where she felt largely left to her own devices. This placed high demands on her self-management skills, which may be a competency that young people in the labor market have not necessarily had the opportunity to develop.

Concerns regarding their own abilities and their reception in the labor market may point to a general need for support that companies can be mindful of when welcoming young employees. This could, for example, be through a particularly present manager who helps the young people gain a clear understanding of the requirements being set and how they can best utilize and develop their competencies to meet them.

Managers perceive young employees as skilled and in need of special attention during the initial period

Managers in the analysis largely recognize the picture of young people's concerns about whether their own abilities and competencies are sufficient. The managers emphasize that they do not expect their younger employees to be able to do everything when they walk through the door on the first day. The managers perceive their young employees as individuals who possess both the abilities and ambitions to perform satisfactorily in the workplace. Furthermore,

the managers emphasize that a large part of the content of the first job is precisely the learning and development one undergoes there – and that both the workplace and the employee share responsibility for this.

“They are capable of much more in terms of what we are looking for. Of course, there is also a lot they cannot do. But neither could the rest of us when we entered the labor market. And I believe that creating an awareness, also among themselves, of what they can and cannot do [is helpful]. I mean, it’s okay that there are things you cannot do when you have your first full-time job.”

(Manager)

The managers in the analysis generally express a high degree of understanding and awareness regarding the concerns that can arise when starting at a new workplace. Managers in the analysis particularly find that they must be mindful of the knowledge gap that can exist between an established company or workforce and new employees coming in from the outside. In this regard, the managers emphasize the importance of maintaining an extra focus on supporting new employees and being aware of the everyday elements that a company might take for granted.

“We find that it is more difficult to come in ‘off the street’, so to speak, as a recent or near-recent graduate and plug in. We find it harder to handle that in a good way. It is not impossible, but it simply requires something different from us. Because there is so much tacit knowledge that you only truly learn once you have had hands-on experience with it.”

(Manager)

Thus, the analysis points to several areas of focus, such as young people’s doubts about their own competencies and their ability to fit into a workplace, which are essential to incorporate into an onboarding process. In this context, it may, for example, be relevant to highlight the competencies that the new hire can acquire and develop as an employee but does not necessarily need to possess beforehand.

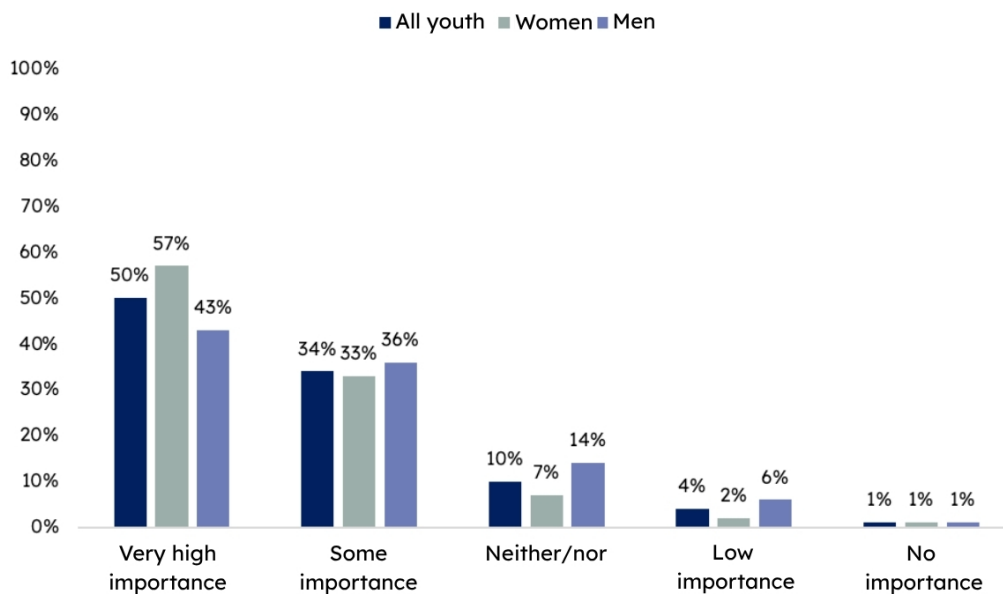
5.3 Workplace culture

In this section, we delve into what young people perceive as a good workplace culture, how managers work with and perceive this, and how companies can establish the best foundation for all employees to thrive and be included in the workplace.

Young people highlight the social environment as a motivating factor

The analysis shows that the aspects of the workplace concerning the working environment and interaction between colleagues are of great importance to young people's motivation. This is expressed, among other things, by the fact that 84 pct. of the young people surveyed in the questionnaire respond that the social environment has either a very great or some significance for their motivation at the workplace. Data indicates that this applies to a higher degree to women (90 pct.) than to men (79 pct.).

Figure 5.3.1 The significance of the social environment at the workplace for young people's motivation, broken down by women and men



Note: Figure 5.3.1 illustrates the distribution of responses to the question 'What significance does the following have for your motivation to go to work: The social environment', in proportions based on responses from 2001 young people between 18 and 35 years old, who are either students or employees in the private sector. The response option "don't know" does not appear in the figure. The respondents consist of 1083 women and 912 men. It was also possible to indicate "other gender identity", but the number of respondents is not high enough for further analysis.

In interviews, young people describe how close relationships with colleagues create a secure framework for work and motivate them to contribute to an even greater extent. This creates a sense of cohesion and a feeling of belonging in

the workplace. In extension of this, several highlight the social environment at the workplace and the commitment to colleagues as more important than the consideration of performing for one's manager.

"I am there because of my colleagues. Not because of the company. I like the feeling that we are together and that we depend on each other. So, we make sure that we thrive, but at the same time deliver a good result, so that everyone feels valued."

(Young person, employed)

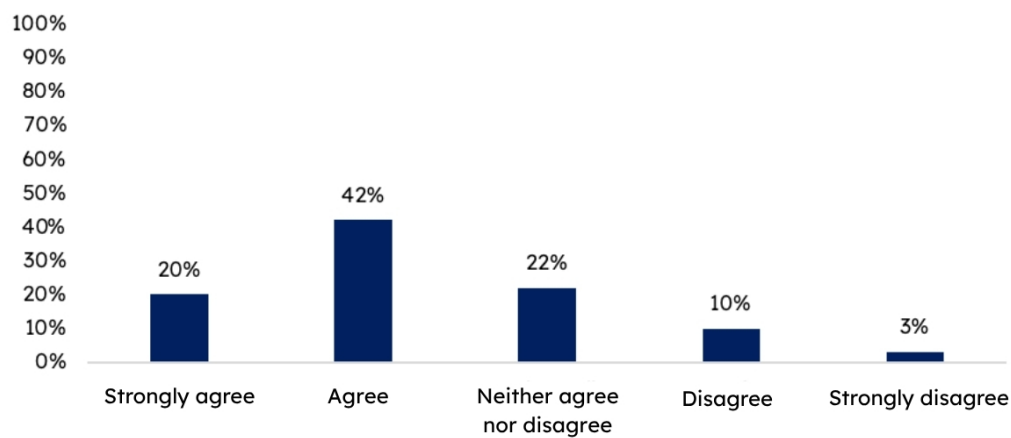
Several young people emphasize that although professional fields and specific work tasks are essential for their motivation, this does not stand alone. The content of the work is interwoven with social interactions and communities in the workplace. In this way, young people highlight that motivation at work is highly dependent on the sense of community and belonging in the workplace and among colleagues.

Young people seek psychological safety and authentic managership in the workplace

Managers play a significant role when it comes to facilitating and anchoring social sustainability and an inclusive work environment in the workplace. In this connection, several interviewees, both young people and managers, point to the importance of psychological safety and the manager's role in establishing this.

The importance of psychological safety is highlighted in the analysis, which shows that 62 pct. of the surveyed managers state that they agree or strongly agree that young employees exhibit greater vulnerability in the workplace than their older colleagues.

Figure 5.3.2 Managers' perception of whether young people exhibit greater vulnerability compared to older colleagues



Note: Figure 5.3.2 illustrates the distribution of responses to the question 'How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Young employees exhibit vulnerability in the workplace than their older colleagues in proportions based on responses from 1,002 managers with personnel responsibility employed in the private sector. The response option 'Don't know' is not shown in the figure.

That younger employees exhibit greater vulnerability in the workplace is also evident from interviews with both young people and managers. Here, young people point out the importance of being able to engage in dialogue with their managers and share how factors in their private lives can influence their well-being at work – and vice versa.

In this connection, several young people mention that they want an understanding from the workplace for "the whole person." This stands in contrast to a conception of employees that some young people feel can be prevalent, where emotions are suppressed in the workplace because it appears unprofessional. In this context, young people describe "vulnerability" as the ability and willingness to share personal challenges – and not as an expression of weakness or something that belongs exclusively to their private lives.

At the same time, young people are calling for managers and colleagues to also be able to show a degree of vulnerability. In this context, vulnerability and openness are viewed as a tool that contributes to mutual understanding during the workday and to a work environment where colleagues can be honest with each other. In other words, vulnerability and openness are, for many young people, an important component in the effort to create an inclusive workplace.

"We are all human beings who go to work, so that sharp division between being at work and being a person, and the idea that those two things are not connected, is a very outdated mindset to me. I want my managers to also be able

to say, 'Phew, I'm so busy today, I'm feeling a bit pressured'. Because then I have an understanding of; 'Okay, that's why you're snapping, or why you're being a bit hard on me.'

(Young person, job seeker)

Several managers in the interviews conducted for the analysis view the vulnerability of young people as two-sided. On the one hand, it can give rise to challenges and push the boundaries of what they previously considered professional and "normal" in the workplace. This speaks to another finding from the survey, where 47 pct. of the surveyed managers state that young people challenge them in their managership role to a greater extent than older employees. One of the things perceived as challenging is the managers experience of having to share more of themselves and being able to initiate dialogues about more personal topics than they have been used to in the past.

On the other hand, managers also see great potential in the new needs that younger employees have. In interviews, managers explain how increased attention to this topic can contribute to a culture where doubt, mistakes, and difficulties can be articulated, which has not necessarily been normalized in the workplace previously. An increased focus on "vulnerability", which young employees bring with them, can therefore contribute positively to the workplace and the social environment.

"I think it is extremely inspiring, and I also believe that it is one of the things that ensures such high psychological safety in the team - that they share so much of their private lives. I don't know how much of it is generational, but I have had to learn to share myself as a person at work. It is only something that has really picked up since I became part of the management for this team, because they wanted it. And I really think it adds a lot."

(Manager)

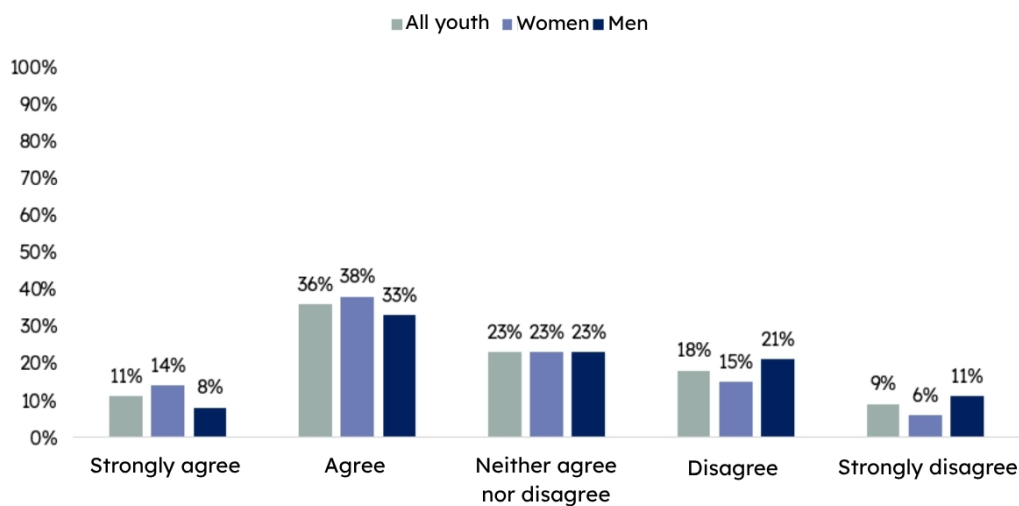
If companies wish to create a good framework and a socially sustainable work environment for young employees, it is therefore highly relevant to put the work environment and culture under the microscope. Here, close collegial relationships that engage employees and make them feel seen can be particularly highlighted, as well as the manager-employee relationship, where open managership with an eye for the potential of vulnerability can create psychological safety.

Language use is considered by young people as a challenge to a good workplace culture

Looking at what may constitute a barrier to a good social and professional environment in the workplace, and thus reduce the motivation of young people, the analysis points to challenges regarding the tone of communication. In this context, several young people highlight that they experience a generation gap between young and old in the form of differences in language use.

This experience is reflected in the survey among young people, where 52 pct. of women and 41 pct. of men state that they either agree or strongly agree that the language use of older colleagues causes discomfort and/or conflict. While significantly more women than men strongly agree with this, significantly more men (32 pct.) than women (21 pct.) state that they disagree or strongly disagree with the statement.

Figure 5.3.3 Older colleagues' language use causes discomfort and/or conflict



Note: Figure 5.2.3 illustrates the distribution of responses to the question 'How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?: Older colleagues' language use can cause discomfort or conflict in professional contexts in proportions based on responses from 2,001 young people between the ages of 18 and 35 who are either students or employed in the private sector. The respondents consist of 1,083 women and 912 men. It was possible to indicate "other gender identity," but the number of respondents is not high enough for further analysis and therefore does not appear in the figure. The response option "don't know" does not appear in the figure.

In the analysis's interviews, several young people describe that they particularly experience disagreements regarding acceptable language use in the workplace when people outside the workplace are mentioned, and when the conversation concerns value-based issues – including diversity and inclusion. Here, humor is highlighted as a central dividing line, for example, when older colleagues

perceive a given statement or word as humorous, while younger colleagues find it offensive and unacceptable.

“I came back after I had been on vacation and asked if anything new had happened. Then they were like, ‘We thought we had gotten a new cleaning lady because there was this little Asian person walking around down here, but then we damn well found out it was just a colleague’. To which I then said, ‘You just don’t say that.’”

(Young person, employed)

In interviews, young people highlight, among other things, concerns about social or professional consequences of speaking out against language use they are uncomfortable with. The fear of drawing negative attention to themselves holds some young people back from pointing out the discomfort or conflict they experience regarding older colleagues’ language use.

“Sometimes I feel like I have to prove something. I have to prove that I can make funny jokes, that I have a sense of humor, and that I’ll laugh along with 55-year-old Karsten when he says something. I don’t actually want to do that. I don’t want to laugh with 55-year-old Karsten if he says something racist, just so he doesn’t hold a grudge against me and go: ‘Wow, you’re really sensitive.’”

(Young person, student)

Managers interviewed for the analysis recognize that younger and older colleagues can have different perceptions of what constitutes acceptable language. Several managers state that this is a clear focus within their companies. At the same time, they observe a cultural shift occurring in the companies, breaking away from previous traditions regarding acceptable language.

“Regarding the tone, I think it used to be quite harsh. We’ve also had a performance culture where things moved a bit fast. I also believe that’s one of the things that has changed culturally. But we are constantly on a bit of a journey [...] We

have taken a huge step, but we are not satisfied with where we are."

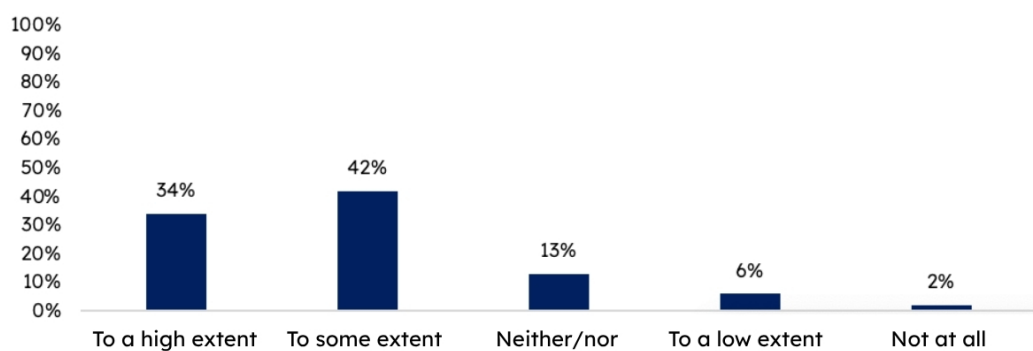
(Manager)

At the same time, managers highlight that there is an increasing awareness of how silent managers and colleagues contribute to legitimizing a harsh tone. A challenge for this work is that older colleagues, in several cases, are not aware that their use of language is perceived negatively by younger colleagues. Therefore, companies have an important bridge-building task regarding language use in the workplace if they wish to create optimal conditions for ensuring a socially sustainable work environment where all employees feel safe.

Flexible frameworks are perceived by young people as an element of an inclusive workplace

In addition to the social environment, the framework and structure of the work also play a central role in creating an inclusive workplace culture. Here, several young people particularly highlight flexibility as a significant parameter of having an inclusive work environment. The analysis shows that 76 pct. of the young people surveyed, to a high or some degree, perceive flexibility as an element of having an inclusive workplace.

Figure 5.3.4 Young people's perception of flexibility as part of being an inclusive workplace



Note: Figure 5.3.4 illustrates the distribution of responses to the question 'To what extent do you perceive flexibility in the workplace as part of being an inclusive workplace? Flexibility can, for example, be the possibility of working from home, leave, periods with fewer/more hours, etc.' in proportions based on responses from 2,001 young people between 18 and 35 years old, who are either students or employees in the private sector. The response option "don't know" is not shown in the figure.

Young people's desire for flexibility is recognized among the managers in the analysis, where 70 pct. state that young employees demand flexibility in their working lives.

In interviews, several young people talk about how flexibility can be crucial for them to achieve a work-life balance – and thus for them to feel included and accommodated in the workplace.

"I found out fairly quickly that flexibility is important. Everyone probably says that, but flexibility is something I would find difficult to compromise on, because it's just so important to be allowed to go home a little earlier or work from home and have a daily life that works. I think that would be the most important requirement for me."

(Young person, employed)

In continuation of this, many young people find that there is a strong link between flexibility and efficiency. In interviews, these young people express that flexibility makes it possible for them to have a say in their own working hours and thus ensure optimal individual working conditions. Young people view flexibility as a tool that allows them to be ambitious and contribute in the workplace without compromising their mental health or the activities and obligations of their private lives.

The need for flexibility becomes particularly pronounced in relation to starting a family and the subsequent family life. Several young people who work full-time while having young children report that it can be difficult to balance work and private life if they do not have the opportunity to work flexibly. In this context, flexibility is often mentioned as the ability to leave early and potentially work later in the evening, allowing one to pick up their child and spend time with them in the intervening period.

"Flexibility is incredibly important, especially right now when I am at a stage in my life where I have a young child and a partner who also has a busy work life."

(Young person, employed)

At the same time, several of the young people who do not (yet) have children mention how they expect flexibility will become necessary for them later in life when they want to start a family. Even though they are not currently in a situation where they experience a need to, for example, be able to leave early, it is already a consideration they are making.

Flexibility is thus perceived by young people as an essential component in the effort to create an inclusive workplace that both appeals to potential employees and creates good conditions for current staff. Not least across different life stages, where the need for flexibility may be more or less pronounced.

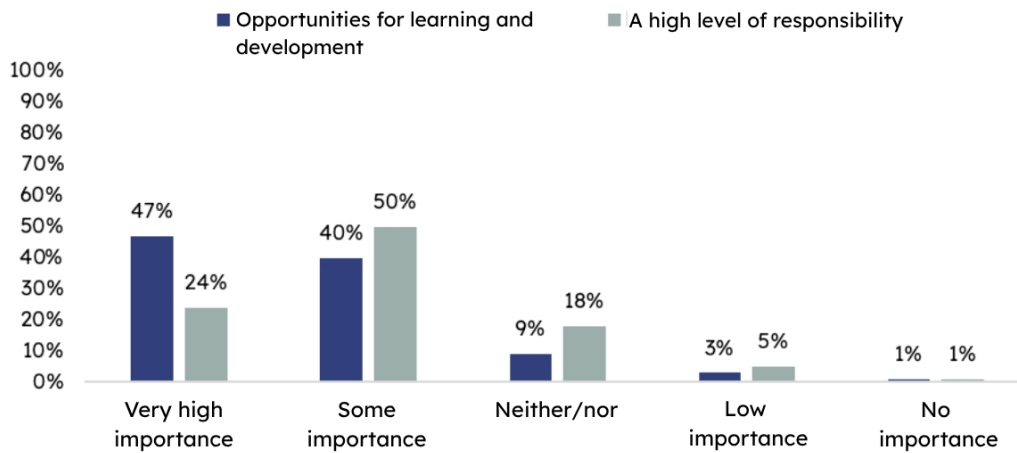
5.4 Career development

The final section of the analysis delves into how companies can create a good framework for the continued development of younger employees. An important parameter for the well-being of young people and their desire to stay at a workplace is that they can see the value of the tasks they perform and have a clear idea of what their next step is – and that equal opportunities are created for everyone to develop within the workplace.

Young people are motivated by responsibility that creates ownership and development

Career development is a major motivating factor for young people in the workplace. 87 pct. of the young people surveyed in the questionnaire respond that it is of great or some importance to their motivation that opportunities for development and learning exist in the workplace.

Figure 5.4.1 Young people’s perception of the importance of responsibility and learning and development opportunities, respectively



Note: Figure 5.4.1 illustrates the distribution of responses to the questions 'How important is the following for your motivation to go to work: Opportunities for learning and development' and 'How important is the following for your motivation to go to work: A high degree of responsibility' in proportions based on responses from 2,001 young people between 18 and 35 years old, who are either students or employees in the private sector. The response option "Don't know" is not shown in the figure.

In interviews, young people describe that development and learning for them are about both the daily process at the workplace and the more long-term opportunities and career paths they have as employees in a company. It is therefore important for them to experience clarity regarding career development opportunities, as well as to experience professional challenge and learning in the tasks they are assigned.

"What is most important to me is the opportunity to develop in one's position. I don't think I could stay in a company for more than a few years if there wasn't an opportunity for progression in one way or another. So, either doing something more difficult, or getting more responsibility, or something similar."

(Young person, student)

Development and learning are linked to being allowed to test oneself in various types of tasks and having responsibility delegated. 74 pct. of young people state in the survey that the opportunity to gain responsibility in their position is of very great or some importance to their motivation in the workplace. The desire for responsibility is linked by several young people to the feeling of ownership over a task. Here, young people find it particularly motivating when a manager or colleagues show trust that they can solve tasks on their own or using their own methods. At the same time, it is here, when they must stand on their own two feet, that many young people experience development taking place.

"I think I feel most motivated when I am given independent responsibility. To feel that the company or one's managers believe in you enough to pass the ball. That is probably where I learn the most."

(Young person, employed)

This is also highlighted by managers in the analysis, who recognize both young people's desire for responsibility and the development opportunities this can bring. For example, one manager talks about how they in the company have received good feedback on their way of assigning responsibility to new employees. Here, a high degree of responsibility is given within clear frameworks from the start, in combination with ongoing follow-up.

“If, for example, as a younger employee you come in and want increasing responsibility, then this is where it happens. Even those who haven’t done it before will be assigned a great deal of responsibility in terms of having a significant voice and having a major impact on the interdisciplinary team. And then everything is at different levels, because everyone develops together, and you develop even faster when you haven’t done it before. But we don’t have this approach where you come in, get this small isolated junior position, and then once you’ve shown you can handle it, we add more to it. It’s full responsibility, and then we evaluate, of course, based on what can reasonably be expected.”

(Manager)

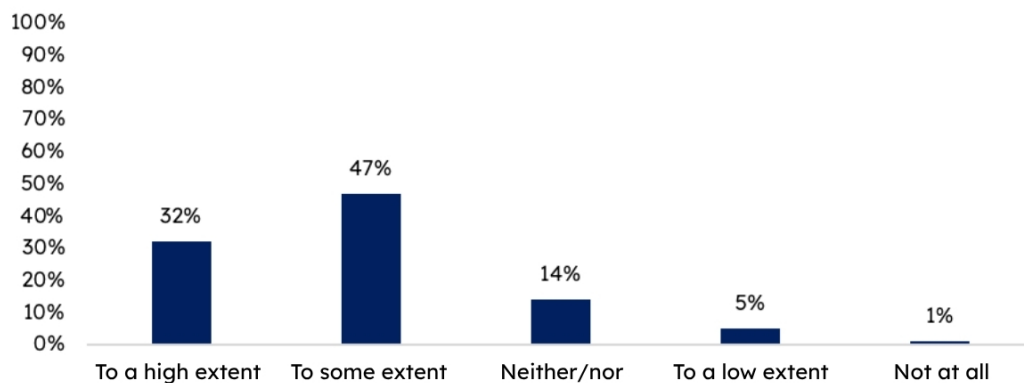
Young people ask for clear frameworks for the tasks they are assigned

Many young people highlight in interviews that, as newcomers to a workplace, they thrive best with responsibility and tasks in general when they are provided within clear and fixed frameworks. This can help alleviate doubt about their mandate, as well as where they can seek help if it becomes necessary.

“I want to know exactly what I need to do and what my framework is. And within that framework, I want to have a lot of responsibility. But if it’s something like; ‘yes, well you have this, you’re the project manager for it, and then we’ll see’, then I can’t stand it at all.”

(Young person, student)

Figure 5.4.2 The extent to which young people think it is important that their managers set clear frameworks and direction for their work



Note: Figure 5.4.2 illustrates the distribution of responses to the question 'How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? It is important to me that my manager sets clear frameworks and direction for the work I am expected to perform' in percentages based on responses from 2,001 young people between 18 and 35 years old, who are either students or employed in the private sector. The response option "Don't know" is not shown in the figure.

Clarity and fixed frameworks create a sense of security in the tasks assigned to young employees and are an important component of including new employees in the best possible way. This is supported by the survey among young people, where 79 pct. of respondents indicate that clarity and fixed frameworks are important to them in a workplace to a high or some degree.

Furthermore, the survey shows that respondents who categorize themselves as neurodivergent experience, to a higher degree than the remaining respondents, that it is important for managers to set clear frameworks and direction for their work. Among this group, a total of 85 pct. indicate that this is important.

Thus, clear frameworks can not only be an important source of motivating young people in the workplace daily and in the long term, but also a tool for including all employees and increasing social sustainability for a broader group of employees.

In this way, the analysis strongly highlights the importance of development and learning for young people. Here, it is important both to look at the more long-term opportunities and to create clarity and transparency regarding the next step and career development. Similarly, development and learning are relevant in daily life, where they can be integrated into the way the young employee is assigned tasks and responsibilities. However, it is crucial here to consider how responsibility is distributed and to ensure clear frameworks to create safety and inclusion in the workplace.

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