



unlocking potential

# Dream job or career nightmare?



A research report by OPP  
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## Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Methodology	1
3. Square pegs in round holes	2
4. The rise of the career nomad	6
5. Insight, hindsight and the drivers for change	9
6. The misguided search for global talent	14
7. Country snapshots	17
- Belgium	17
- Denmark	18
- France	19
- Netherlands	20
- Republic of Ireland	21
- UK	22
8. Tips for employees	23
9. Tips for employers	24

**career** /kuh-reer/ *–noun*

- an occupation or profession, esp. one requiring special training, followed as one's life's work
- a person's progress or general course of action through life or through a phase of life, as in some profession or undertaking
- success in a profession, occupation, etc.

*"If I had known more about myself in advance... then I would've done some things differently"* – Dutch respondent

# Introduction

We undertook this research to understand whether working life meets the aspirations of employees in some of Europe's key markets. What were people's career hopes when they were young? Is it now a case of dreams fulfilled or daily grind? Are people making the best use of their natural talents and skills? Crucially, what support are they getting at key decision points in their lives and in their work to help their ongoing development?

The results provide dramatic confirmation of the rise of the restless 'career nomad': a job for life is not only dead and buried, but multiple career changes are also becoming the norm – whatever your sex, age or nationality.

Such flexibility and opportunity is welcome, but our research also identified an underlying career malaise or dissatisfaction, which should be cause for concern.

Overwhelmingly, people feel they have not yet found their niche, are in the wrong jobs and are not tapping into their potential. With next to none pursuing the paths of young dreams, most regret their career choices and would do it differently a second time around – although some nations are better at making the most of their current situation.

The drivers are many: money, naturally, plays a significant role, as does the desire to be challenged and fulfilled in our jobs. However, it's the greater self-awareness that comes with age and experience that is the biggest driver for a desire for change.

The voyage of self-discovery is an essential part of life, but the benefit of better insight into our personal strengths and preferences at the outset of our working lives would be welcomed to shape better career decisions and give greater self-fulfilment.

Crucially, when the search for and retention of talent is supposed to be at the top of every employer's agenda, organisations seem to be doing remarkably little to help employees – and themselves – identify or develop potential. At what cost? Wasted skills mean lost productivity but equally, with a swathe of full-time employees intent on career change, European employers face a major recruitment and training bill in the future. The search for talent clearly needs to be re-focused, closer to home.

# Methodology

In April 2007, OPP commissioned Research Now! to conduct an online research survey across six European countries, with a sample of 500 people in full-time employment in each country. The research was conducted among a panel selected to be representative of the working population between 20 and 69 years, with an equal number of male and female respondents.



# Square pegs in round holes

## A sea of untapped potential?

Our research found that the idea of the 'dream job' is alive and well in the hearts and minds of employees across Europe. However, few have achieved it. At best, the result is a widespread case of 'square pegs in round holes' and, at worst, general career malaise and a sea of untapped potential:

- Nearly six in ten (58%) employees would choose a different career if they could start again.
- A further three in ten (31%) feel unfulfilled by their current role, suggesting many organisations are failing to link employees' abilities effectively with available roles, or offer fresh challenges and opportunities.
- One in three of us feel our strengths would be better suited to another career and, worryingly, one in five believe we've never had a role that has suited us.

*"I just feel that there is something else out there for me if only I could figure out what it is!"* – UK respondent

*"I feel overqualified and underused"* – French respondent

## I wanted more than this

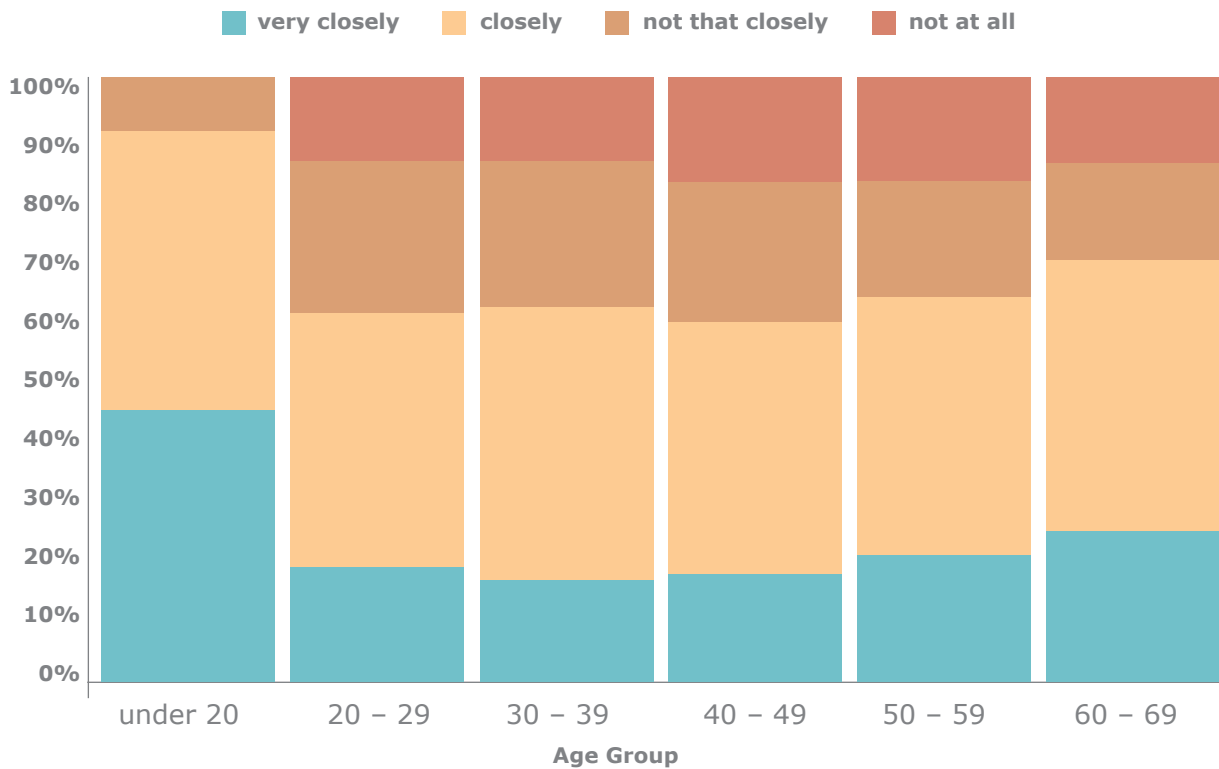
A nagging sense of disappointment seems to be the daily reality for many of Europe's workers:

- One in three European workers envies the job of someone they know.
- Despite a more recent arrival in the working world, over half (51%) of twenty-somethings already regret their career choice and would choose a different path if they could start again.
- Over a third (37%) of respondents feel their current career falls short of their aspirations, with forty-somethings feeling most let down (41%).

*"I feel I could be doing a lot more with my life"* – Irish respondent

*"There are no miracles in the world of work – just try to make as much money as possible"* – Belgian respondent

## How closely does your career match your aspirations?



Of the countries surveyed, the UK seems to be the most afflicted by career blues:

- Nearly seven in ten Brits (68%) would choose a different line of work if they could start again and 62% feel their current career falls short of their aspirations.

*"I feel as if I have reached a turning point with my career and am going nowhere and would desperately like a change"*

– UK respondent

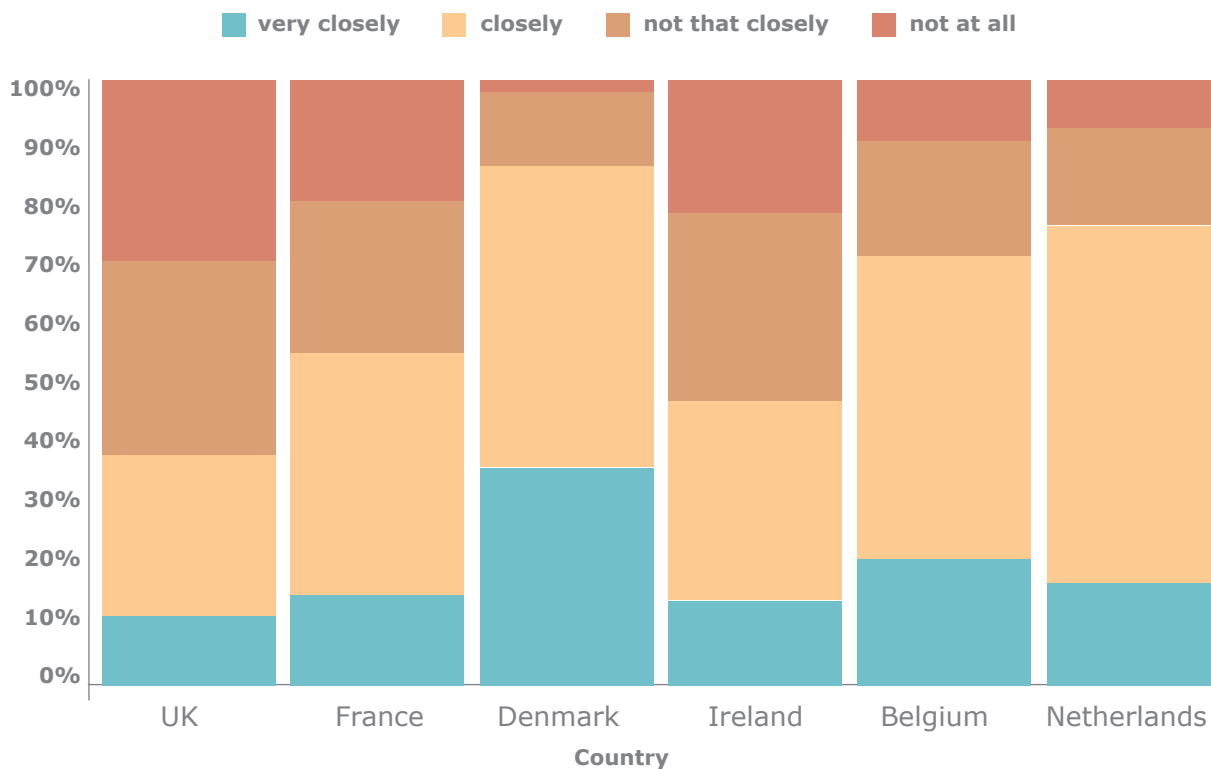
By comparison, for career satisfaction it pays to be Danish, Dutch or Belgian:

- Nearly nine out of ten (86%) workers in Denmark, over three quarters (77%) of the Dutch and seven in ten (71%) Belgians feel their current career meets expectations. Even though they might still choose a different path with the benefit of a second start, they seem more contented with their current situation.

*"I couldn't love my job more – it's exactly the right niche"*

– Danish respondent

## How closely does your career match your aspirations?



## If I could do anything...

Many of us would love to earn a living out of a hobby or passion. Sadly, just 6% of European workers – and a mere 2% of UK employees – have actually pursued their dream career.

*"With hindsight I would have done better if I had sought a career in my hobby" – Dutch respondent*

But what is the ideal and how does it change as we mature? We asked people what they wanted to be when they were younger and what their dream job would be now.

Youthful visions of being a vet, nurse or police officer are soon replaced by the appeal of wealth and status and, possibly, a desire to be free of the frustrations of working in constraining and hierarchical organisations. Interestingly, however, the altruistic role of teaching, the number one choice for the young, remains in the top three even after people enter the workforce.

## Dream job – all countries

	When you were young	Now
1	Teacher	What I'm doing now but with a promotion/more money
2	Vet	In charge! CEO/boss/running my own business
3	Nurse	Teacher
4	Police officer	In IT industry
5	Pilot	In travel industry
6	Doctor	Pilot
7	Firefighter	Shareholder/financially independent
8	Hairdresser	Working with animals
9	Flight attendant	Working with people
10	Footballer	Doctor

Priorities may change and practicalities may take over, but are people also giving up on roles that best reflect their strengths and interests as they move through their careers?

The popularity of 'being your own boss' suggests that there is strong entrepreneurial spirit across Europe. It's also reflective of people's strong desire for self-determination in their working lives, something employers might bear in mind when determining the latitude within which jobs can be performed. Equally, they would do well to take heed of the clear link between employee engagement and career satisfaction identified by our research. *See page 16.*

*"I have a steady income... On the other hand, I can't use my creativity in my current job"*

– Belgian respondent



# The rise of the career nomad

## RIP a job for life

The research is clear: the 'job for life' is a dying concept, but European workers enjoy a job market of unprecedented flexibility. Whether they are looking for greater fulfilment or simply a higher salary, they are seizing the opportunities in their search for the perfect role:

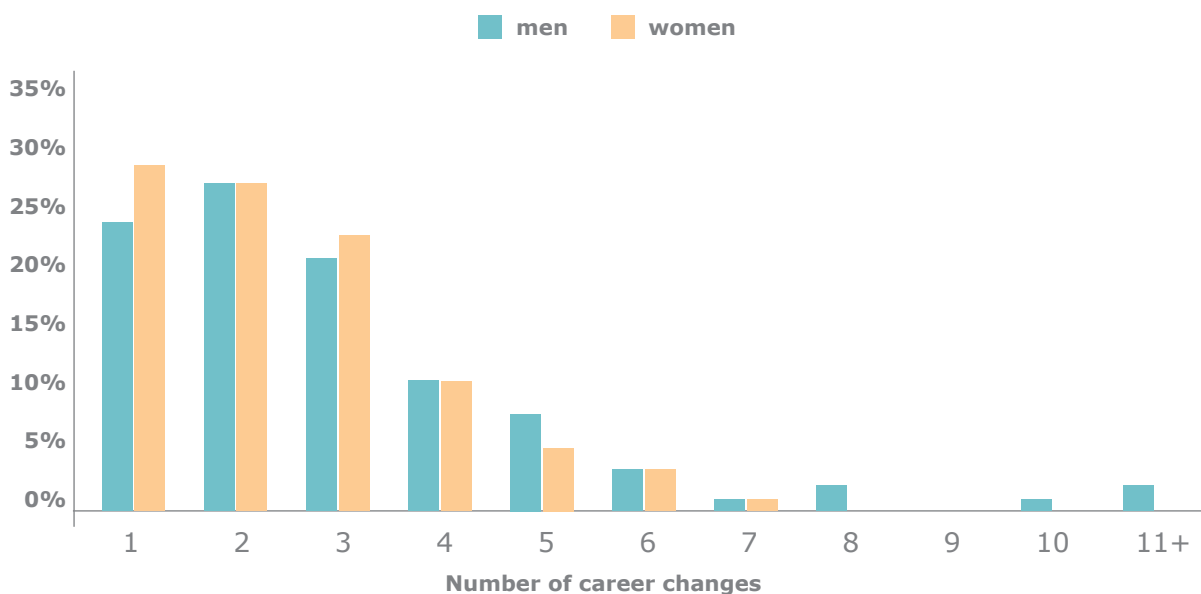
- Over half of employees (53%) have changed career twice.
- Almost as many (46%) have changed career three or more times.

*"This is profession no. 2 for me. I had a second education at a late age. It's been fantastic." - Danish respondent*

Mobility is apparently the preserve of neither one sex nor the other – women are moving between careers as much and as frequently as men. However, some age groups are chopping and changing more than others:

- Thirty- and forty-somethings are more likely than any other age group to have changed career – with men in their 30s ranking highest (61%).
- The nomadic existence seems to be starting early – nearly 50% of twenty-somethings have already changed career.

### Number of career changes - by sex



Some nations also seem more prone to re-evaluating their working life:

- 55% of French workers and 54% of Belgians have changed two or three times.
- The Danes, however, seem more focused – perhaps as a result of their greater career contentment: less than one in three has switched career.

*"I am fortunate because I have found a new horizon"*

– French respondent

These 'false starts' don't just affect employees, of course. Organisations spend huge amounts of time and money training their people for certain roles (particularly in professional services such as law and accountancy) only to lose them when they look elsewhere. Improved initial screening and retention processes, which match personalities to preferred job roles, could make all the difference.

## **An endless search?**

In addition to looking at previous job changes, we also asked employees about their plans for the future. The rise of the 'career nomad' has become apparent:

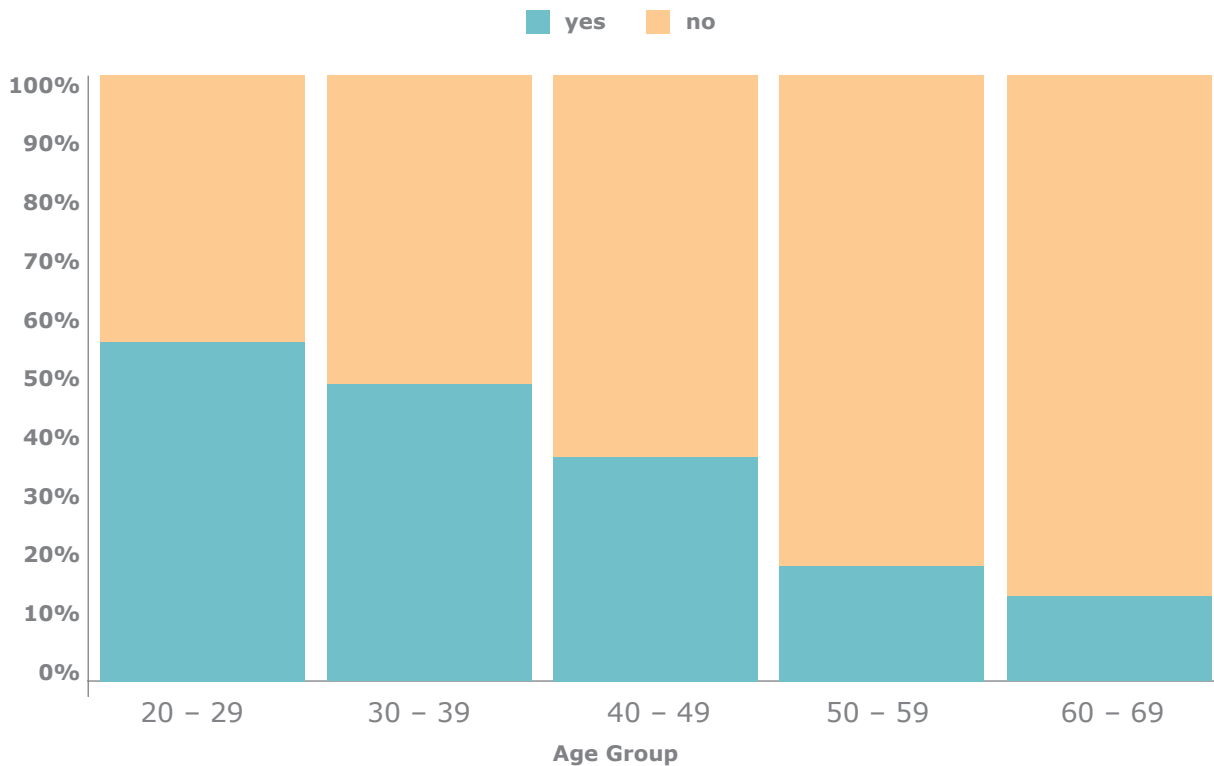
- Four out of ten (40%) of all those surveyed are intent on changing their career in the future.

And again the signs are of early restlessness:

- Over half of twenty-something workers (56%) have a job change in mind already. Given that nearly half of those in this age bracket have moved career at least once already, there is clearly an appetite for change amongst Generation Y. Accustomed to an excess of choice, they may also find it more difficult to identify their perfect job – with employers, again, facing significant potential cost.



## Those who seriously intend to change their career in future – age groups



This appetite for a fresh start seems to diminish at key life stages – even if current roles leave employees unfulfilled – but still has appeal for some in the final stages of their career:

- A lower number – one in three – of employees in their 40s is committed to a change, with their decision-making perhaps affected by the responsibilities of families and dependants.
- However, nearly one in five fifty-somethings and 15% of sixty-somethings are still looking for new challenges, with changes to retirement age and working patterns removing barriers to new employment opportunities.

*"I'm in the process of a radical change – a new profession that I hope will ultimately match my plans and dreams"*

– Danish respondent

# Insight, hindsight and drivers for change

With one in five believing that their current role doesn't enable them to make the most of their strengths, it's little surprise there is strong desire for change.

Employers need to assess employees' talents and put them to best use. However, the causes of restlessness highlighted by our results clearly show the importance of individuals being self-aware and knowing where their strengths and preferences lie.

*"It's hard to see how I can advance from my current position"*

– Irish respondent

## Self knowledge and insight

Crucially, lack of self confidence is a major stumbling block for those who compromise early on their career choices:

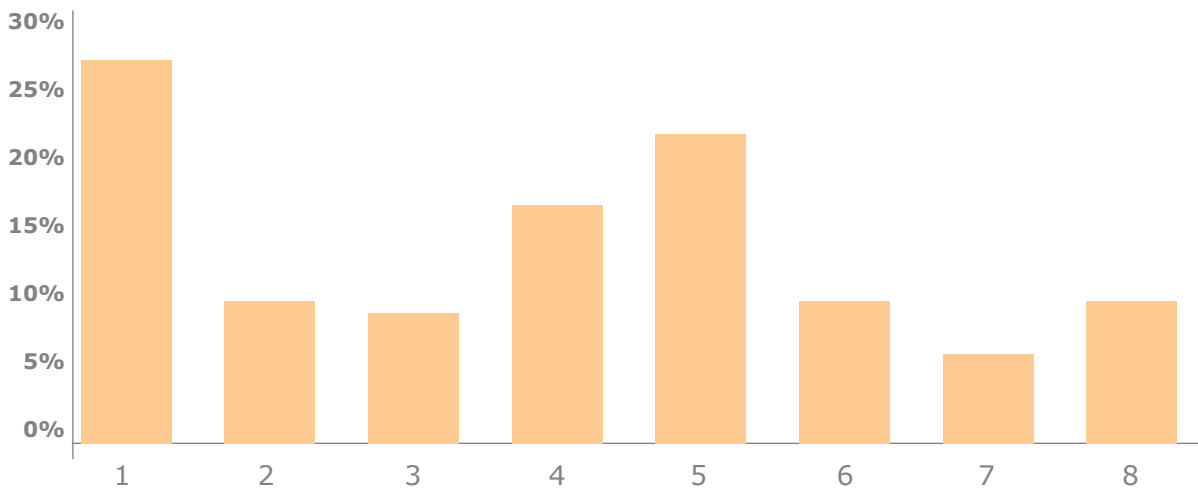
- Over a quarter of respondents were deterred from pursuing their dream career by a lack of confidence and motivation – with twenty-somethings, women (one in three vs one in four men), and UK employees affected most.

*"I've chosen the wrong paths"* – UK respondent

Advice that turns out to have been misguided and a simple lack of essential information have also shaped early career decisions, later regretted:

- One in four said that the influence of family or third parties had diverted them from their dream career.
- A lack of career guidance or advice was cited by nearly one in five – rising to one in four in France and Ireland.

## Key drivers for not pursuing dream career - all countries



- Key:
- 1 I lacked the confidence, drive or motivation
  - 2 I was put off by the cost of training/qualification
  - 3 I felt the salary/prospects were poor
  - 4 I had a lack of information or career advice
  - 5 I was pressured into another career or acted on advice from/example of family
  - 6 I researched my dream career and decided it wouldn't suit my personality/strengths
  - 7 I was unsuccessful getting a job in my chosen area
  - 8 At the time, I didn't know my dream job existed

The consequences of these early choices are far-reaching:

- Those stating a lack of confidence or drive and the influence of third parties as barriers to their dream job are now the least likely to feel their career meets their aspirations.
- A third (32%) of employees don't use their academic qualifications in their current job and over a quarter (26%) use neither academic nor vocational qualifications – although in Denmark and the Netherlands, where career satisfaction is greatest, use of vocational qualifications is highest.

There seems to be a clear need for more constructive advice and informed support or coaching at the outset of individuals' careers – perhaps even before university.

*"My career is ok but I still wonder what would have happened to me if I'd had better advice"* – UK respondent

*"I am sorry that I did not follow this career from an earlier age"*  
– Irish respondent

## A shift in focus from funds to fulfilment

Not surprisingly, money emerges as a strong driver in career decisions – but with apparently lessening appeal as maturity and experience increase:

- Over a third (36%) said that salary had been the key driver behind previous career changes. Men, and Irish and UK employees, in particular, were most likely to have been lured to new roles by a larger income.
- Cash is the number one factor in job envy – attracting 62% of those who covet a friend or colleague's job.

*"I feel my career could be better. I want to go in another direction but that direction doesn't earn a lot."*

– Belgian respondent

*"Well ... I wouldn't say my career is particularly fantastic ... but you have to eat, don't you?"* – Dutch respondent

But it's not just about the money. Lack of challenge, major life changes and the search for a better work–life balance also play a major role:

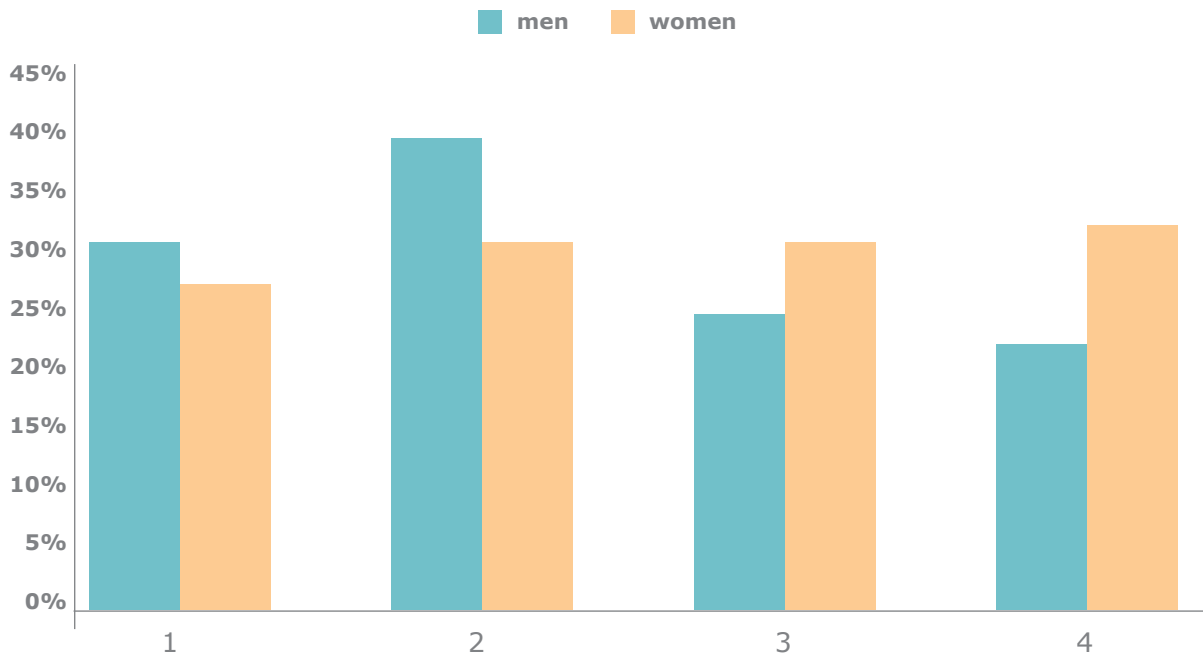
- Women's main drivers for seeking new positions were changes to their personal circumstances (32%) and, on a par with the desire to earn more (31%), the search for a greater challenge (31%).
- Job role and content (53%) and personal job satisfaction (51%) were the second and third most cited reasons for 'job envy'.

*"I work below my level but currently this suits me. I want to be available when my children come home from school and have the flexibility of being able to work from home."*

– Dutch respondent



## Drivers for previous career changes



Key: 1 I was seeking a better work/life balance  
 2 I wanted to earn more  
 3 I wasn't sufficiently challenged by what I was doing  
 4 There were changes in my personal circumstances

And, critically, personal insight rather than income underpins the desire many have to start again:

- The key driver (41%) for those who would choose a different career is that they now have a better understanding of what makes them happy or would make them successful.
- For one in three it's also a case of feeling their skills would have been better suited to another career.

## Top reasons for choosing another career if could start again

1	I understand myself better now and know what would make me happier/ more successful	41%
2	I think I would have earned more in another career	39%
3	I feel my strengths/skills would have been better suited to another career	33%
4	I do not feel fulfilled by my career	31%
5=	I think my values would have been better suited to another career	27%
5=	I am not progressing in my chosen career	27%

## The benefit of insight

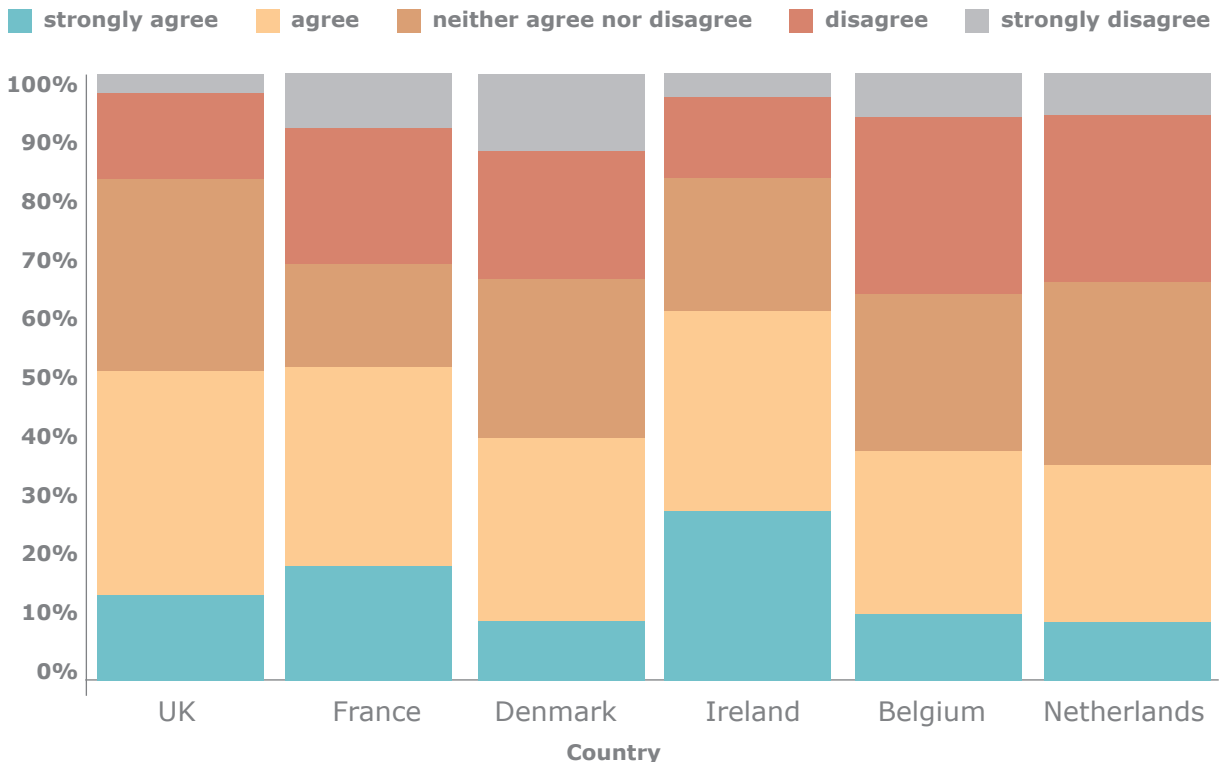
Avoiding career mistakes is possible with the proper assessments. They can increase our chances of getting it right first – or second – time.

*"After many unhappy months in other jobs, I now feel very content... I am working in my field of degree study, and I am attempting further qualifications in this career path, which keeps me motivated and challenged, not bored as with previous jobs."* – Irish respondent

Reflecting the lack of career guidance highlighted by so many, there is a recognition of the value of personality and aptitude assessment at early stages of the employee lifecycle:

- Around half the respondents believe that assessments to identify their abilities, strengths and potential before they began their careers would have led them to make better choices.
- The French, British and Irish were the most fervent in this belief, with up to 62% of respondents agreeing on this point.

### I would have made better career decisions if I'd had formal testing



# The misguided search for global talent

## What support are employers providing?

Much has been said about the global war for talent, and how employers are supposedly prioritising recruitment and retention of the best people. This survey, however, suggests that European businesses are missing a trick closer to home. A wealth of potential remains untapped among their existing workforce:

- Four out of ten respondents (39%) said their employers are not helping them to realise their potential.
- Meanwhile, one in five (19%) believes they are not making the most of their abilities in their current role and the same number claim their employer is ignorant of their strengths.
- Nearly three in ten (27%) are unclear about how to progress in their organisation.

*"I'm disappointed in my role. I am not using my talents."*

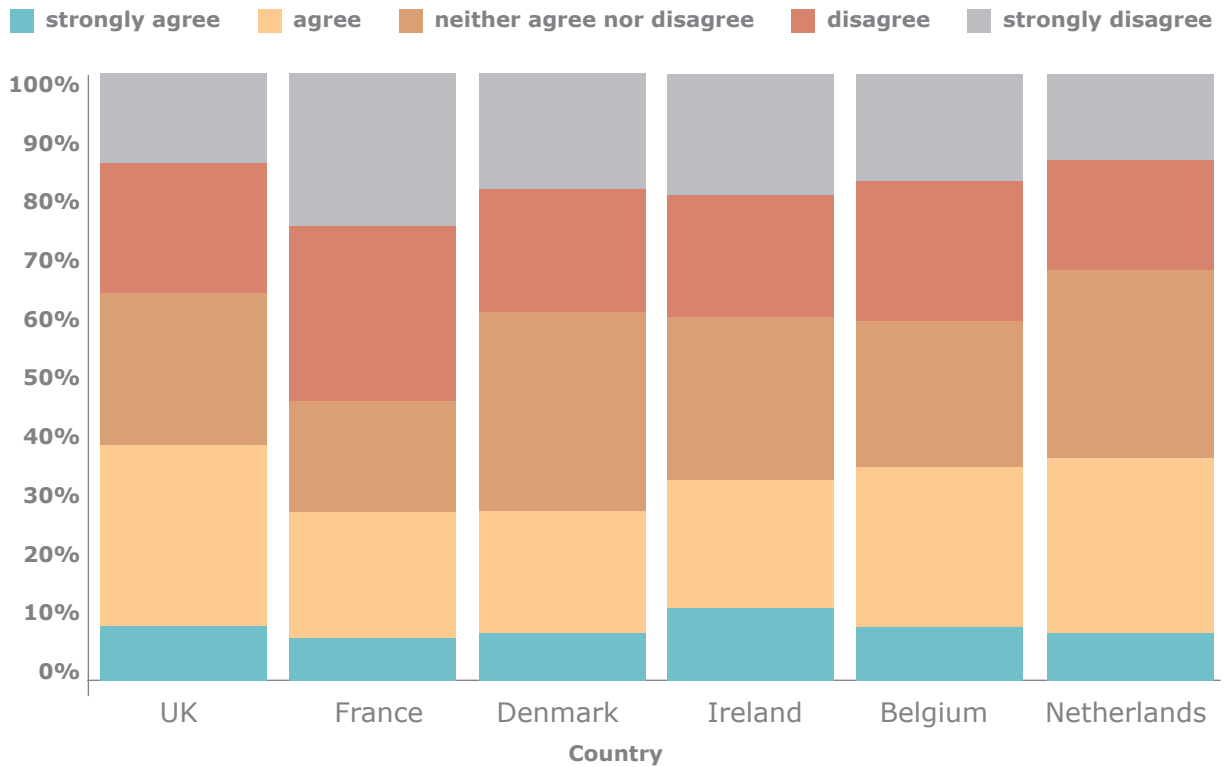
– Dutch respondent

*"The job I am in now gives no recognition for hard work or for doing the job properly. In order to advance you have to play the game, be in the right clique."* – Irish respondent

Tests and assessments help to identify strengths and potential, but six out of ten (58%) workers say that their employer has not used them. Worryingly, at the basic level of structured feedback and personal development, four in ten (41%) claim their organisation doesn't even have a formal appraisal and development process.



## My employer provides structured evaluation and feedback



*"I think I can do better but I don't get enough feedback"* –  
Belgian respondent

*"I enjoy my job but don't feel I am using my full potential"*  
– UK respondent

## In at the deep end...

Employers have a key role to play in ensuring their people fulfil their potential – for obvious, mutual benefit – but the research suggests too few are stepping up to meet the challenge:

- Over a third (36%) of respondents feel their employer has not shaped their role to make the most of their individual skills and abilities, rising to 42% in the UK.
- Further, two in five employees (41%) believe that they have not been given support at transition points in their career. This is particularly prevalent amongst workers in their 50s and 40s, of whom nearly half feel they have been left by employers to 'figure it out for themselves' as they rise through the ranks.

*"I am satisfied in my job, even though I think I don't get enough support from the management team – and my colleagues agree" – Dutch respondent*

Given that these transition points are likely to be the times when employees can have most impact for the better (or worse) in an organisation – for example, when they become a manager for the first time or have their first strategic responsibility – this lack of support represents substantial potential risk for employers.

## Does it matter?

A notable correlation between career satisfaction and employee engagement emerges, leaving little room for managers to doubt the value of investing time in identifying and developing the talents of individual members of staff.

Of those who are most satisfied in their current role:

- 83% believe their employer knows where their strengths lie. Less than half of those who plan to change career say the same.
- Nearly six in ten (59%) believe their employer is helping them realise their potential, but less than one in five (18%) of the least satisfied agree.
- Nearly half benefit from a structured evaluation process at work. Conversely, a majority (60%) of those who are least satisfied in their current role and committed to a career change say their employer does not provide structured feedback.
- At a country level, workers in Denmark and the Netherlands rate their employers most highly in terms of helping them to realise their potential and are also the most likely to feel their career matches their aspirations.

*"I am thriving ... I have found a profession where I give the best of myself and get satisfaction." – French respondent*



# Belgium *The Belgians: the psychologists of Europe?*

Working life may not be perfect for the Belgians, but their future is certainly looking more stable than for some of their European colleagues:

- Belgian employees are least likely to change direction in future, with over 70% saying that their current career matches their aspirations.
- However, the route to their above average career contentment has not been without its false starts – 60% of Belgians have changed career and over half have switched two or three times.
- Although they are most likely among their European colleagues to have chased their dreams, those who went after their ideal job still number less than one in ten (8%).

Rank	Dream career when young	Dream career now
1	Teacher	My current job with more status/ money
2	Vet	In charge: CEO/manager/ entrepreneur with own business/ self employed
3	Nurse	Shareholder/financially independent
4	Police officer	Teacher
5	Firefighter	IT
6	Legal profession	Nurse
7	Pilot	Psychiatrist/psychologist
8	Doctor	Travel industry
9	Hairdresser/hair stylist	Legal profession
10	Chef/baker	Working in medicine/social care

A lack of drive and confidence were deciding factors, but comparatively less so than for other European nations:

- After the Dutch, the Belgians were least likely to have let a lack of motivation or self confidence get in the way of pursuing their dream job.

Interestingly, the Belgians are not immune from career envy, despite their commitment to their current roles:

- After the Irish, they are the nation second most likely to covet someone else's job (nearly 40%).

*"I'm very lucky in this job (limited stress, nice colleagues and boss). But the flip side is that I wouldn't be able to do this forever – it lacks challenge."*

– Belgian respondent

*"As always, one thinks the grass is greener somewhere else"* – Belgian respondent

# Denmark *The Danes: the administrators of Europe?*

When it comes to realising your workplace aspirations and making the most of your potential, it pays to be Danish.

The Danes stood out in the research as overwhelmingly contented with their lot. Most respondents clearly felt they have found their niche:

- Nearly 90% feel their current career matches their aspirations.
- Two in three Danes believe their previous roles have suited them too – more than any other country.
- Nearly three in four believe they are making the most of their strengths in their current role.

*"I really enjoy my job – it's the profession I've always wanted" – Danish respondent*

Rank	Dream career when young	Dream career now
1	Teacher	My current job with more status/ money
2	Vet	In charge: CEO/manager/ entrepreneur with own business/ self employed
3	Nurse	IT
4	Firefighter	Teacher
5	Police officer	Pilot
6	Pilot	Working with animals
7	Lawyer/solicitor/ barrister	PA/admin
8	Doctor	Lawyer/solicitor/barrister
9	Hairdresser/hair stylist	Work with children/people
10	Finance/banking	Police officer

The Danes express satisfaction in spite of the fact that just a small number have pursued their dream career – less than one in ten. Nearly half would take a different path a second time around.

Clearly, more effective development of their employees by Danish organisations has some bearing on their levels of job satisfaction:

- Nearly three quarters of Danes believe their employers know their strengths.
- The Danes were most likely to confirm that employers are helping them realise their potential.

*"I think it's fantastic that skills from my former career can be made useful in an exciting and challenging job in a business where I am useful" – Danish respondent*

# France *The French: the artists of Europe?*

The research showed the French to be among the more disappointed employees in Europe:

- 45% of respondents feel their current career falls short of their aspirations.
- Even more – nearly 60% – would take a different route if they could start again.

This thirst for a second chance is hardly surprising, given that nearly one in five French employees believe they have never had a role that has suited them and one in three feel their strengths are going untapped in their current position.

*"I like my job but I would like to leave to do what I wanted when I was younger."* – French respondent

Factors behind early career decisions show the French, never traditionally perceived as the shrinking violets of Europe, in a different light:

- After the Brits, the French appeared most likely to have allowed a lack of drive or confidence to stand in the way of pursuing their dream career.
- Equally, they ranked most likely to have been pressured or influenced into a career other than that of their dreams – one in four claimed external pressures or persuasion from family shaped their decision to take a different route.

Rank	Dream career when young	Dream career now
1	Teacher	My current job with more status/ money
2	Vet	In charge: CEO/manager/ entrepreneur with own business/ self employed
3	Doctor	Teacher
4	Hairdresser/hair stylist	Shareholder/financially independent
5	Firefighter	Work with children/people
6	Pilot	IT
7	Police officer	Doctor
8	Nurse	Artist/illustrator
9	Journalist	Pilot
10	Air Force	Journalist

Worryingly, employees seem to have particularly limited scope to identify and develop any opportunity in their current role, which might enhance career satisfaction or open new doors:

- French employers ranked lowest for structured evaluation and personal development processes, with less than half providing them. Just 15% undertake formal assessments to identify employees' potential or strengths.

The knock-on effects are apparent, with potentially significant consequences for employers and national competitiveness:

- The French are the least clear among the nationalities surveyed about how to progress in their organisation or current role.
- They are among the most likely to have moved in search of greater fulfilment – over half have changed career two or three times.

*"I followed this path by default. I am not unhappy but I don't go to work with pleasure."* – French respondent

# Netherlands *The Dutch: the creative sparks of Europe?*

The Dutch are attracted to the idea of wealth early on – ‘millionaire’ ranked among the top ten jobs that respondents dreamt of when they were young.

Few actually pursued their dreams – just 6% – but the Dutch appear to have achieved career satisfaction all the same:

- Behind the Danes, they are the second most career-content nation – nearly 80% feel their current path matches their aspirations.
- Nearly 70% are committed to staying in their current career – perhaps having found something to which they feel suited after trying different roles early on (they are the most likely to have changed career in the past).
- They are the least likely to experience job envy – nearly 25% do not know anyone whose job they would like to have.

*"I'm like a fish in water"*  
– Dutch respondent

Rank	Dream career when young	Dream career now
1	Teacher	My current job with more status/ money
2	Police officer	In charge: CEO/manager/ entrepreneur with own business/ self employed
3	Nurse	Working with animals
4	Vet	Travel industry
5	Pilot	Teacher
6	Hairdresser/hair stylist	Pilot
7	Millionaire	Shareholder/financially independent
8	Firefighter	<i>A challenging job/a role in which I can show my talents/ creativity</i>
9	Chef/baker	IT
10	Flight attendant	Researcher/scientist

Although the nation least likely to have been held back from pursuing their ambitions by lacking drive or confidence, many Dutch appear to have succumbed to outside influences in their choice of career:

- One in five was pressured or advised to turn their back on their preferred career path.

Dutch employers rank among the best in terms of providing employees with structured appraisal and development – but this is still offered by less than 40%.

*"Despite the fact that I didn't plan my career I am very happy with its course"*  
– Dutch respondent

# Republic of Ireland *The Irish: the writers of Europe?*

For the Irish, the grass certainly looks greener on the other side:

- Over half (53%) are disappointed by their current career and 60% would choose a different route if they could start again.
- They are the nation most likely to envy someone else's job – overwhelmingly for the salary (70%).

There is a strong desire for change. The Irish are the most likely to change career in the future – nearly 55% intend to pursue a new path, encouraged by longing looks over their neighbour's shoulder, perhaps.

Rank	Dream career when young	Dream career now
1	Teacher	In charge: CEO/manager/ entrepreneur with own business/ self employed
2	Pilot	My current job with more status/ money
3	Nurse	Teacher
4	Doctor	Pilot
5	Firefighter	IT
6	Vet	Travel industry
7	Footballer	Author/writer (novel/song/screen)
8	Flight attendant	Sport instructor/industry
9	Astronaut	Nurse
10	Accountant	Legal profession

Lack of guidance, information and personal insight have played a particular role in shaping poor choices and missed career opportunities:

- Nearly one in four did not pursue the career of their dreams due to a lack of information and guidance.
- The Irish rank highest for wanting to embark on a different route, prompted by having greater self-awareness and understanding of the factors influencing personal happiness or success.
- Not surprisingly, the Irish emerge as the strongest supporters of the idea that assessment of individual strengths and abilities at the outset of their career would have shaped better choices (over 60%).

Again, employers get the thumbs down, fuelling a lack of fulfilment:

- Less than one in three Irish believe their employer is helping them realise their potential – ranking among the lowest in the research.
- Just one in three benefits from a structured appraisal process.

*"I'm bored. I'm changing soon - selling my house and moving to Australia to train as a pilot."*

– Irish respondent

*"It's not a job I want to do forever but until I find out what my 'perfect' job is, it will do"*

– Irish respondent

## UK *The Brits: the footballer-wannabes of Europe?*

A sorry picture of the UK working population emerges from the research. Are we a nation of misfits or do we just expect too much?

- UK employees are the most disappointed with their current careers among those surveyed.
- Not surprisingly, they are the most likely (70%) to say they would choose a different career if they could start again.

Looking at the potential root causes of this malaise, the stereotype of perceived British reserve is evident. However, support or opportunities for insight in the early stages of career-influencing decisions also appear to be lacking:

- The Brits are most likely to give up on their dreams – just 2% have pursued the role they aspired to when young.
- More than any other nation, this was due to a lack of confidence or drive.
- UK workers are wasting their qualifications to a greater extent than any other nation – 40% are using neither higher education or vocational qualifications in their current career.

*"I wish I'd had more support when I was younger"*  
– UK respondent

Rank	Dream career when young	Dream career now
1	Nurse	Running the show! (CEO/manager/entrepreneur/self employed)
2	Teacher	What I'm doing now, but for more status and money!
3	Police officer	Carer/charitable work
4	Vet	Footballer
5	Doctor	Travel industry
6	Footballer	IT
7	Flight attendant	Working with animals
8	Pilot	Writer – novel/song/screen
9	Train/engine driver	Teacher
10	Actor/actress/film star	Involved in film/TV/radio

When it comes to UK employers, the picture is a mixed one. It's a vote of no confidence from employees, despite more evidence of a formal structure for feedback and development existing in the workplace. It would seem that even when those processes exist, they are not being used correctly:

- UK employers rank highest for providing a structured appraisal process;
- And yet Brits are also most likely to feel their abilities are not understood by their employers and to give their employer the thumbs down for their efforts to help them realise their potential.

Is there a sea change on the horizon? The Brits appear to be gearing themselves up to make up for lost time:

- They are second most likely, after the Irish, to change career in the future.
- However, one in ten is unable to identify what their dream job would be if they could choose now – so maybe a lottery win is the answer!

*"I enjoy my job but don't feel I am using my full potential"*

– UK respondent

## Tips for employees: are you making the most of your potential?

- 1 The best jobs allow you to bring the 'whole person' to work. But how well do you know yourself? Self-awareness is the best first step to greater career satisfaction. Try to identify where your preferences lie, what activities and environment best suit your personality, and how you respond to pressure.
- 2 Distinguish between being in the wrong career and simply feeling stalled, as both can be the cause of deep dissatisfaction. Do the irritants lie in the content of your role or in its lack of new challenge? You may need a revitalising change, but you may also need to take a long, hard look at what you need to change about yourself. Otherwise you may find yourself in the same dissatisfied position in another company 12 months later, after the honeymoon wears off.
- 3 Do you know what you're good at? And does your job require you to apply these strengths each day? If the answer to the first question is no, it's time to find out. Seek feedback from colleagues and your manager. Think about where you've had success and what skills and attributes this required of you.
- 4 Whilst the saying about old dogs and new tricks may be an overstatement, a complete career switch can become a more challenging – and costly – option as the years go by. Consider whether substantial development in your current field of operation is achievable, and who can help you. Age is no longer a barrier to a complete change of approach, but progress in your current role can bring great satisfaction without the disruption of a life change.
- 5 Many people have a sense of 'square peg, round hole' in their working life. If this is you, stop to reflect on what aspect of your job makes you feel this way. Often, the root cause is the culture of the organisation. Are you in touch with your own values and preferences? Do these fit with those you see being rewarded and reinforced? For example, if you are an introvert, it can be tough working in a highly extroverted culture where everyone prizes social skills above all. If there's a mismatch here, perhaps it's time to look for pastures new.
- 6 If the feeling that you're spinning your wheels has been so strong for so long, take time to step back and think about what you really enjoy doing, and why. Is there a way that you can engineer progress toward that career field in your current organisation? Can you use personal time to gain the requisite skills and qualifications? Enlist HR's support to find a mentor who can help you assess the feasibility of this and perhaps put you on the right track.
- 7 If a complete switch is really for you, get under the skin of the role. Find out what skills and preferences are at a premium, as they may differ from your preconceptions, and be honest with yourself about whether they play to your strengths. If you know anyone in that role already, ask them to describe 'a day in the life' or offer to shadow them for a day. It's also worth contacting professional associations or companies in that field. Ask them if novices have a realistic shot at success and which, if any, of your skills are transferable and confirm salary expectations. Good luck!

## Tips for employers: the Magnificent Seven for organisations

- 1 Self-development starts with self-awareness. If you want your people to take responsibility for their own development then they need self-insight. You need to help individuals recognise both strengths and personal challenges. Only once these have been acknowledged can they begin to understand their impact on others and exert control over any bad habits.
- 2 Many organisations struggle with identifying potential, often confusing it with performance. Aptitude for more senior leadership roles can be deduced from the outputs of a psychometric test, which can reveal hard-to-detect qualities like resilience, emotional stability, ability to learn and adaptability, as well as interpersonal and influencing skills.
- 3 The tools you use to gather data on candidates as part of the selection process bring value to the next stage of the employee lifecycle. Outputs should be passed to the successful candidate's line manager for an early development planning discussion – not in the context of obtaining a sneak preview of what that person 'is really like', but in the spirit of how best to set that individual up for success.
- 4 Time spent helping people understand how they differ, and why they should respect others' differences, pays dividends in building strong, collaborative teams. A number of psychometric instruments provide a basis for this.
- 5 Don't assume that today's bright starter knows who they are and what they want longer-term. Equally, don't assume that those in mid-career are necessarily more certain, because values and expectations change as a career progresses. Ensure that individual aspirations and opportunities are matched to those of the wider organisation so that engagement remains high and talent is retained.
- 6 Make sure that development planning is always tailored to the individual and always based on robust data, looking at the underlying causes of behaviours. When any personal challenges are sympathetically handled in feedback and later, coaching, individuals can be helped to truly 'own' them and institute lasting behaviour change.
- 7 Many employers find that they are short of the skills they anticipate needing for the future. The typical response is to look outside for job-ready talent. Instead, organisations can create a rich databank of psychometric data as a source of intelligence for planned career development, whether within or beyond the individual's current field.



unlocking potential

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