

Covid 19 and employment upheavals: worried employees

Abstract

The Covid 19 pandemic and the measures taken to limit its spread (containment, social distancing) have led to a recession and a major economic crisis. The economic data show significant job losses. The Insee Emploi-Chômage note published on September 8th notes 715,000 salaried jobs lost in France in the first half of this year. Against this backdrop, employees are deeply concerned about their professional future and the risk of job loss. Memorandum 5 : overview of the studies and projects registered on WPRN database

Covid 19 and employment upheavals: worried employees

The Covid 19 pandemic and the measures taken to limit its spread (containment, social distancing) have led to a recession and a major economic crisis. The economic data show significant job losses. The [Insee Emploi-Chômage](#) note published on September 8th notes 715,000 salaried jobs lost in France in the first half of this year. Against this backdrop, employees are deeply concerned about their professional future and the risk of job loss.

Several studies reviewed on WPRN have attempted to capture employees' concerns about employment and work in such a troubled context. The objective of this note is to shed light on how the economic upheavals linked to this crisis are experienced by employees.

The studies highlight a significant concern among employees regarding the risk of job loss. The impacts on work may also have led employees to feel a loss of meaning with regard to work and to revise their professional priorities.

Employees express strong concerns about the risk of job loss, job stagnation and wage regression, a fear that is all the more strongly felt when employees belong to a «vulnerable» group

A [study](#) by the University of Ghent, available on WPRN conducted at the end of March and based on a representative panel of Belgian employees, highlights the worries related to employment that affect employees. More than one out of five respondents indicate that they are afraid of losing their job as a result of the crisis. And one in seven think they will lose their job by the end of the year. These data are consistent with those expressed by other surveys. In France, in a [survey](#) of 1,000 people conducted in April by Censuswide for the Glassdoor recruitment platform, 39% of respondents feared losing their jobs or experiencing a drop in salary. Fear of missing out on career opportunities is also significant.

In the Ghent University study, more than one in four respondents expressed concern about missing out on a promotion they would have received had the crisis not occurred. One person in two expresses fear of a pay cut and one in three believes that the pandemic will have a significant impact on their career. The fear of not finding a job is also significant, with one person in two expressing concern that Covid 19 will have a significant impact on job vacancies. A University of Florida [study](#) listed on WPRN highlights this concern in another way. The study assessed unemployment or fear of unemployment in the United States from the Google searches of Internet users. It shows that an increase in the search on the Covid in a state directly leads to an increase in the search for unemployment on the search engine.

The fear of losing one's job appears to be stronger among the more «vulnerable» groups. The authors of the Ghent University study note concerns about greater job loss among migrant workers and older workers. Unemployed people also see things more negatively. Likewise, the fear of missing a promotion increases significantly among the temporarily unemployed, while it is low among civil servants. People with temporary contracts in the private sector are much more worried about losing income than others. Young people express more fear of feeling less motivated to work.

The differences are also marked in terms of gender. A [study](#) from the University of Exeter in the United Kingdom surveyed on WPRN on the gender impacts of the Covid 19 pandemic found among those surveyed that women were twice as likely as men to have been affected by job loss. Women also express more anxiety than men about the impacts of the coronavirus. These stronger effects on women have been confirmed by several studies. Finally, the effects are marked according to occupational sector. Indeed, it is logically in the sectors most affected by the pandemic, such as tourism, that employees express the most anxiety about their future careers. While the coronavirus kills more men than women, its impact on society has served to highlight and even accentuate inequalities that disadvantage women.

A loss of professional meaning is experienced by many employees and prompts them to change their relationship to work

Changes in work arrangements have been significant in the aftermath of the pandemic. Teleworking has emerged as a central phenomenon (see the WPRN memorandum on this subject). A [Dutch study](#) available on WPRN, which is currently in the pre-print stage, shows that other work changes have affected employees. Based on a survey of 545 respondents, it finds that employees who have been unable to work or who have had to reduce their working hours sharply because of lockdown express a perception of their work as contributing less to the common good, identify less with their organization and feel more insecure about their jobs. The University of Ghent study points to the important link between job satisfaction, connection with the employer and concern about the future. The more employees appreciate their work, the less concern they perceive about the impacts of the pandemic on employment.

This feeling of distancing, of estrangement from work felt during lockdown may have implications in terms of the relationship to work. The Ghent University study notes that 51% of employees want to attach more importance to working conditions and their work-life balance following the Covid pandemic 19. Conversely, only 20% explain that they will attach more importance to income following the crisis. These results seem to be in line with previous studies and the role of telework could be central in these value changes.

Further research should be carried out to study particularly affected segments of the population and also to analyze the concerns and strategies from the employers' point of view.

The various studies therefore point to strong concerns about the professional future among employees. These concerns differ according to the level of vulnerability of employees. Further research should be conducted on this aspect and focus in particular on the more heavily affected population categories such as young people and older people, or study the differences between people with low and high levels of education. Studies should focus in particular on the integration of young graduates into the labor market. The [Association pour l'emploi des cadres](#) reports a 69% drop between April 2020 and April 2019 in job offers for young graduates.

Similarly, the [International Labor Organization](#) noted in its note of May 27th that 1 in 6 young people in the world had lost their jobs due to the pandemic, expressing the risk of «a confined generation, whose working lives would be marked forever». Finally, since all the studies address the employees' point of view, it would be interesting to also provide research showing employers' perceptions of the crisis. A forthcoming [study](#) by the University of Vienna, listed on WPRN, could provide information on companies' strategies to adapt to the crisis and ultimately limit job losses.