

TALENT

On the Move in France

A report by INSEAD for Choose France 2020

Summary of findings

**Choose
France**™



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Key findings

How competitive is France in terms of talent? And what are its talent challenges of tomorrow? In November 2019, INSEAD set out to answer these questions by surveying nearly 2,000 students and graduates of top higher-education institutions and interviewing 94 managers at 20 companies in France. Using additional data from our own annual index of talent competitiveness in 125 countries, we were able to build up a three-dimensional picture of the national talent landscape, in terms of established perceptions, current realities and future opportunities.

Dimension 1: Individual skills and attitudes

- **Perception.** France is a country rich in technical and analytical skills - producing some of the best engineers in the world, but poorer in soft skills.
- **Reality.** There is a growing awareness of the remaining soft-skills gap – and a hunger to plug this gap through learning – among young talent. There is a corresponding demand for soft skills from companies in France. Meaningful work and social impact are also increasingly important to the young talent pool.
- **Future.** With a powerful base of technical skills and an emerging focus on soft skills, France is well placed to compete in the rapidly digitalising global economy. Employers who can provide opportunities for learning and social impact will win the war for talent in France and gain the competitive advantage in business.

Dimension 2: Organisations and corporate cultures

- **Perception.** France has a strong sense of hierarchy and tends to foster antagonistic employer-employee relations. Employees need to build trust in management and confidence in change.
- **Reality.** There is no significant difference between France and other countries in terms of employer-employee relationships. Young French talent is highly flexible and no longer seeks or expects employment for life. Instead, high-potential students and alumni want to move around companies, roles and geographical locations as their careers progress. In return for this flexibility, they expect employers to provide learning opportunities, early responsibility, interesting work and above all work-life balance. Young French talent is also extremely hardworking if well managed.
- **Future.** There is an opportunity to combine the strong French social culture with greater organisational flexibility and emphasis on talent potential. Companies that supply young professionals with missing soft skills will create a virtuous circle of individual and organisational change – leading to better leadership and greater productivity.

Dimension 3: National environment

- **Perception.** France's quality of life is high but taxes are also high. Society could be more welcoming to diversity.
- **Reality.** French mindsets are shifting, with much greater international openness and excellent English spoken among the younger generation. At the same time, there is high appreciation for the value of public amenities and social benefits such as the healthcare system. However, meeting inclusion and diversity objectives remains a challenge.
- **Future.** Employers have an opportunity to highlight the value of the French context in terms of both heritage and progress: excellent quality of life, strong social model, growing openness and the development of dual (soft plus analytical) skillsets. Companies that leverage the French quality of life and embrace a spirit of international openness and meritocracy can create a virtuous spiral of ever-higher performance.

Our study reveals a country with a great technical, commercial and cultural heritage, where skillsets and mindsets are undergoing rapid change. In France, it seems, **talent is on the move – creating unprecedented opportunities for individuals, organisations and the nation as a whole.**

Recommendations

We believe that this rapidly changing environment is a magnet for high-potential individuals and organisations, both homegrown and international.

The extent to which the country is transforming itself was underlined by one of our interviewees, a manager from an international company that has “chosen France”:

“This new muscle that France has been capable of building in such a short timeframe is really remarkable. Seven years ago, the venture capital in France was three or four hundred million. This year it’s going to be five billion. It’s huge and a big, big difference. It’s a sign that something is changing.”

The “something” that is changing is, first and foremost, talent. In the course of our research, we saw a country with the skills base, the institutions, the infrastructure and the people to transform organisations and to lead the world. As for the negative stereotypes, we found most of them to be myths or, at worst, out-of-date realities.

Of course, there is still work to do.

We therefore have recommendations for all components of the national talent ecosystem.

- **International companies:** Choose France and you will have a competitive advantage, provided that you present yourselves as dynamic, meritocratic and ready to supply the country’s hardworking, eager-to-learn and mobile workforce with the development opportunities it seeks. If your mission is one of social impact, you will be even more attractive to the younger generation of French-educated talent.
- **Companies of French origin:** Reward high performance and flatten your corporate structures. Look beyond the *grandes écoles* for high-potential employees in all parts of French society and the wider world. Prize soft skills, as well as technical skills, and demonstrate your commitment to business as a force for good and work-life balance in order to attract the best.

- **Government:** Continue to focus your reforms on soft skills, agility and inclusion. Promote your wonderful country to the rest of the world, be patient with learners of your beautiful language and banish those lingering negative stereotypes once and for all.
- **Higher education:** Help companies to plug the remaining skills gaps, by providing long and short programmes in soft skills for all career levels. Ensure that students gain vocational and international experience through internships, global exchanges and learning that mirrors real life.
- **Future researchers:** Survey a wider group of talent and a wider range of companies to get a better sense of the generational change that we have found so fascinating. Consider doing similar deep-dive studies to our own in other countries to compare and contrast with France.
- **Individual talent:** Continue updating your skills and broadening your outlook. Focus on soft skills as well as technical and analytical skills. For native French talent, learn languages, travel the world and bring your newfound knowhow back to France. For foreign talent, update your perceptions to the new realities of opportunities for your professional development in France. Keep moving.

France has a rich heritage of talent on which to build. It has a remarkable history of skills across the entire spectrum: more Nobel prizes for literature than any other country; second only to the US in mathematicians with Fields Medals; and, just last year, the youngest ever Nobel prizewinner in economics – a woman. France also has a remarkable business history, with leading global brands in every business sector from automotive to luxury goods. It is no coincidence that Paris is one of the world’s most talent-competitive cities and one of Europe’s top tech hubs. After all, it was France that gave the rest of the world the term “entrepreneur”.

France, your talent is on the move – this is your moment.

Talent on the move in France

	Perception	Reality	Future
	<p>What are the established perceptions of talent in France?</p>	<p>What did talent and companies tell us about their current reality?</p>	<p>What are the future directions and opportunities for the development of talent in France?</p>
Individual skills and Attitudes	<p>Excellent engineering and analytical skills.</p> <p>Poorer in “soft” skills such as creativity and negotiations.</p>	<p>Growing awareness of the soft skill gap and hunger for learning among talent, increased demand for soft skills from companies.</p> <p>Increasing emphasis on organisational mission and social impact.</p>	<p>France can win the war for talent through a dual focus on building soft and analytical skills.</p> <p>Employers who can position themselves as genuinely caring about social impact will attract more talent.</p>
Organisations and Corporate Cultures	<p>A strong sense of hierarchy and fostering antagonistic employer-employee relations.</p> <p>Employees need to build trust in management and confidence in change.</p>	<p>Similar quality of employer-employee relations to other countries.</p> <p>Talent no longer seeking or expecting employment for life, preferring instead flexibility and better work-life balance.</p>	<p>Opportunity to combine strong French social culture with greater organisational flexibility and emphasis on talent potential.</p> <p>Organisations can create positive feedback loops where enhanced leadership skills improve the training and attraction of dual-skillset talents.</p>
National Environment	<p>Outstanding quality of life but prohibitively high taxes.</p> <p>Society could be more welcoming to diversity.</p>	<p>Strongly shifting mindsets with much greater international openness.</p> <p>Meeting inclusion and diversity objectives remains a challenge.</p> <p>High appreciation for the value of public amenities and social benefits e.g. healthcare system.</p>	<p>Opportunity for employers to highlight the value of the French context in terms of both heritage and future (excellent quality of life, social model, analytical and soft skills, greater openness).</p> <p>Opportunity (and still some need) to promote greater inclusion and diversity.</p>