

# State of design 2023

Design denmark

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# State of Design – Introduction:

In December 2022, Design denmark ran an online survey asking designers about everything from where they find inspiration and what they love to what they are paid and which type of clients they work for.

We call it the State of Design.

With almost 300 participants, State of Design is the largest survey of its kind in recent memory, providing valuable insights into the state of our industry and highlighting the opportunities and obstacles ahead.

We have released the survey findings in separate chapters through the first months of 2023. However, here we present the full report, which will serve as a resource for designers, businesses, and policymakers alike - highlighting both the upsides and downsides of the design industry.

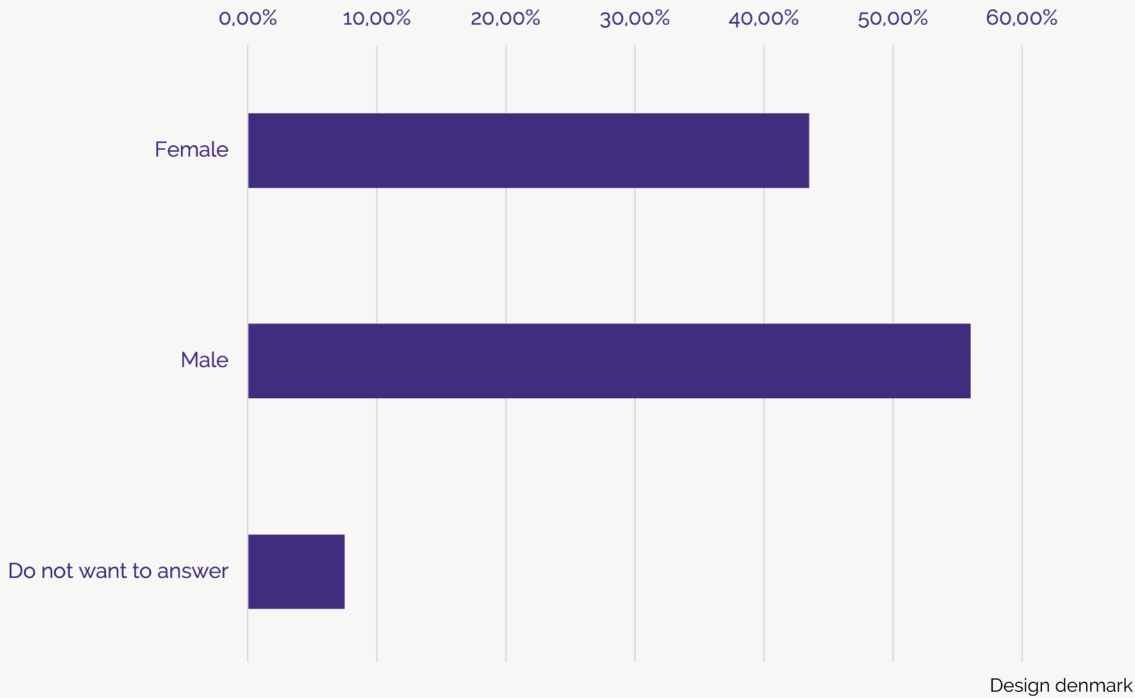
Enjoy!

Henrik Lübker  
CEO - Design denmark

# State of design

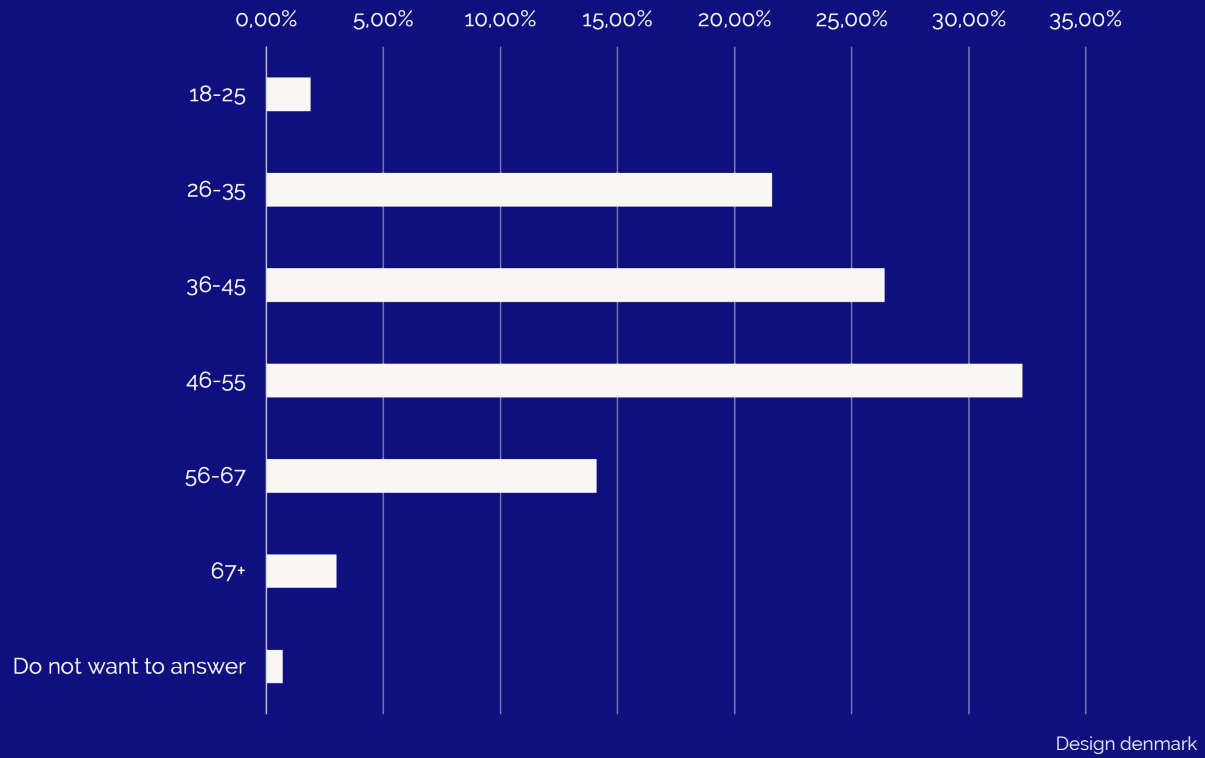
## The Basics

# Gender



Design often figures as a male-dominated discipline in many surveys - mainly because there are quite few women in engineering, tech and software development - and these disciplines are often regarded as part of the design field in the surveys. Our survey is more balanced, but we also have don't have many identifying as engineers, tech- or software developers answering the survey.

## Age



The age distribution is as expected - perhaps leaning ever so slightly to the older side.

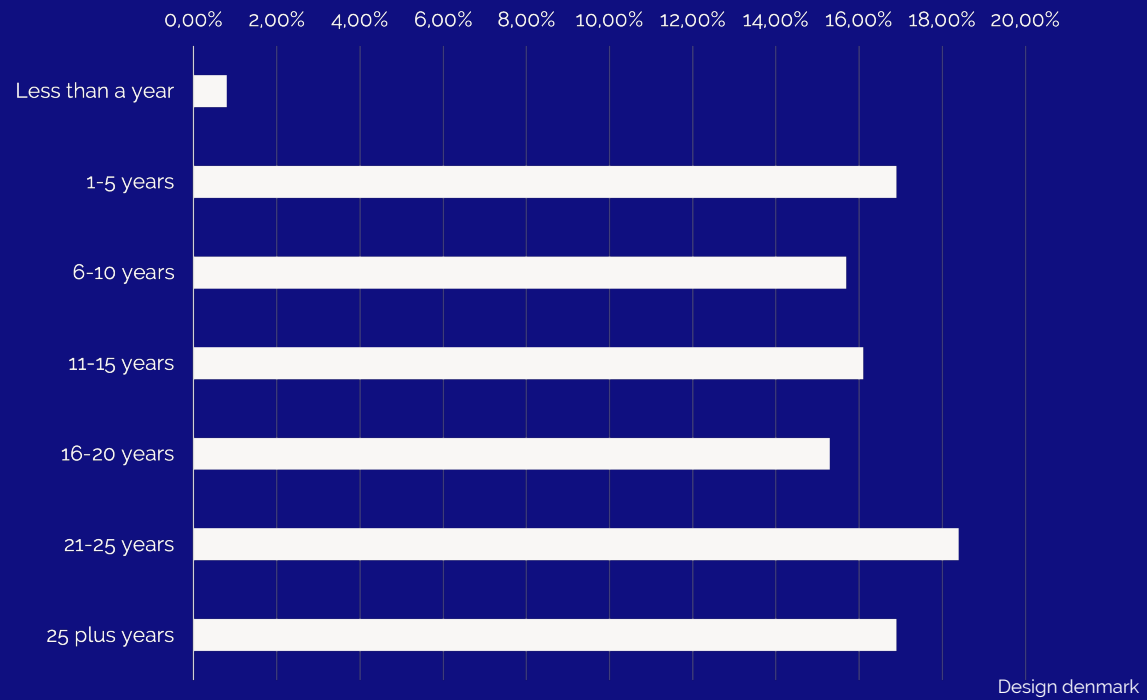
## Educational origin



Looking at the educational design landscape, it is no wonder that the design industry is fragmented. There might be many roads to Rome - but there are even more to design.

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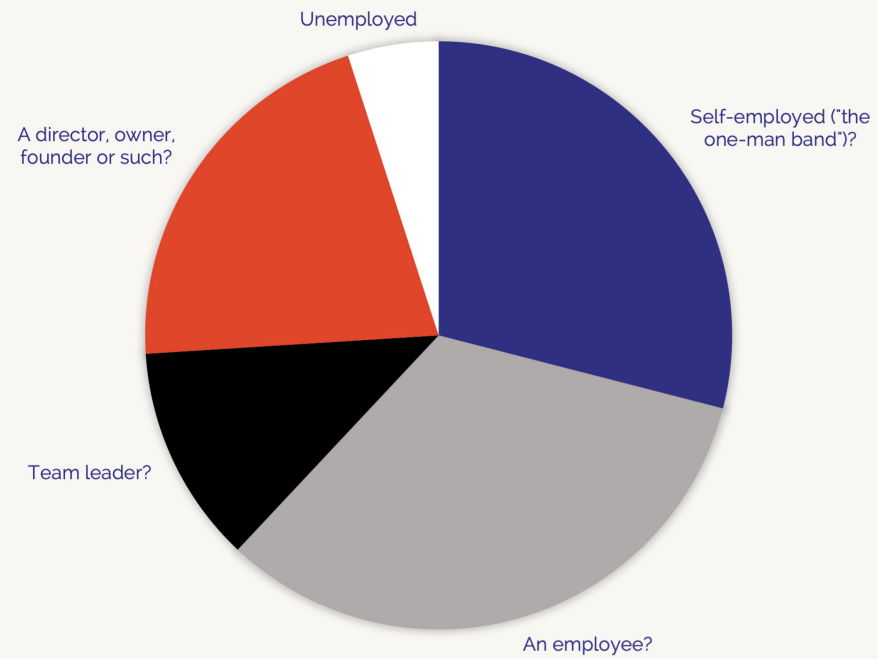
## Design Experience



The survey has a very nice spread of design experience among the participants.



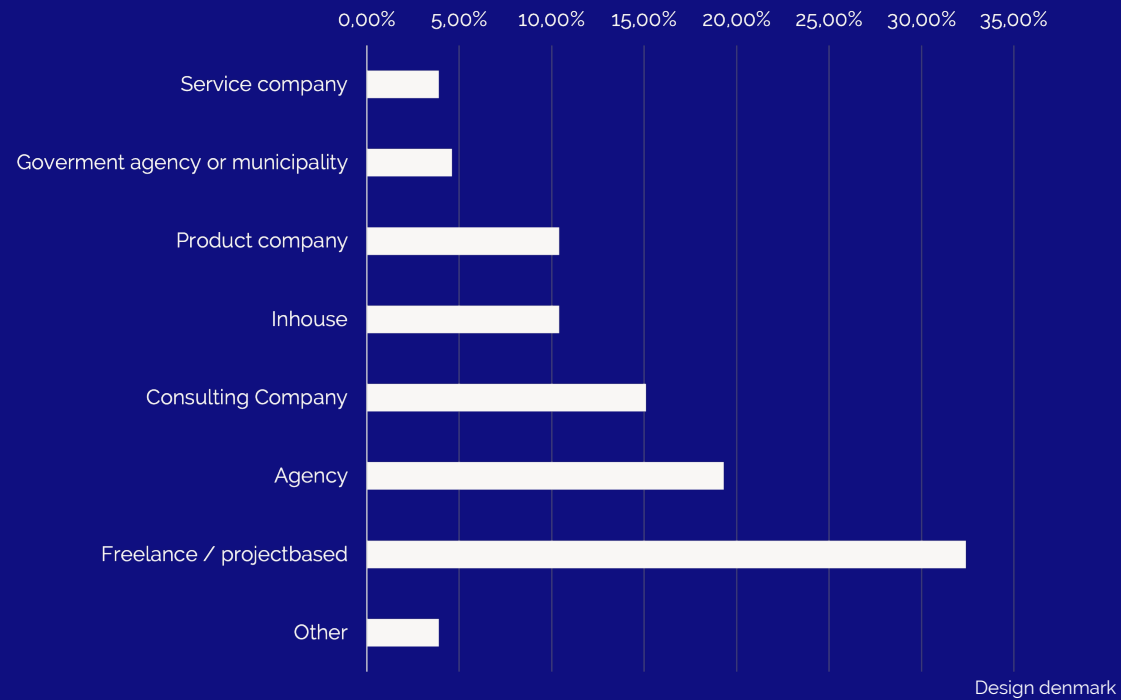
## Job type



Almost evenly divided into thirds between designers with employee responsibility, employees, and one-man bands, the survey has a very nice distribution of the various roles of designers.

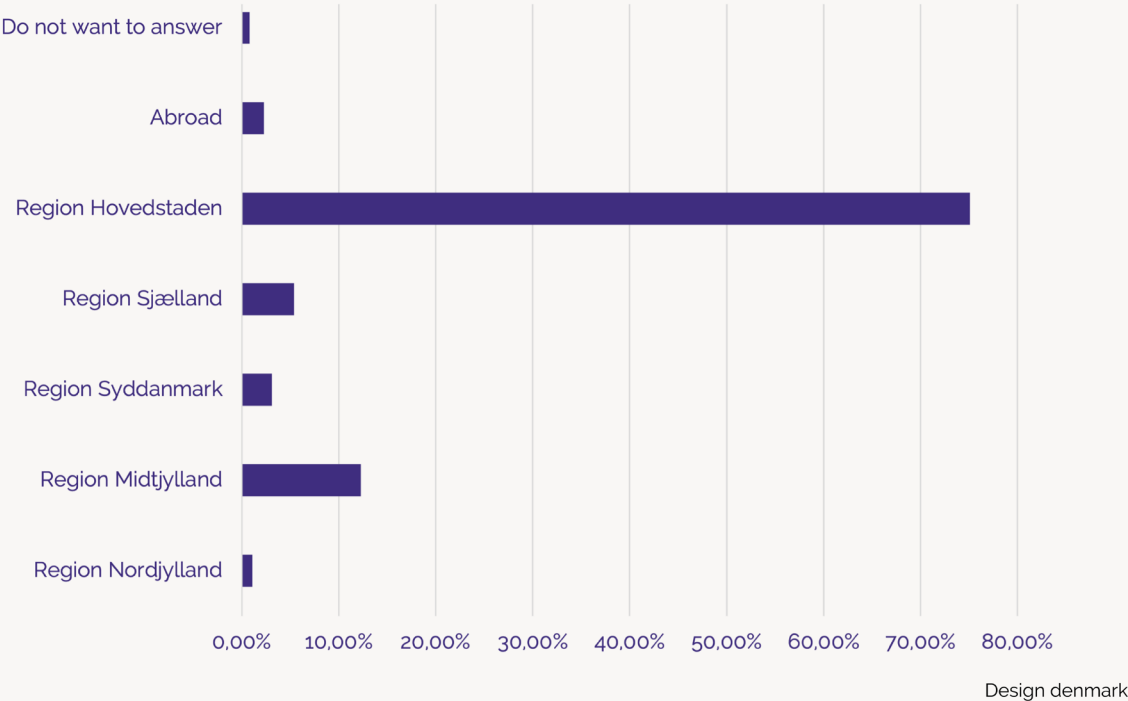
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## What type of company?



Again we see that the survey consists of a pretty diverse collective of different types of organisations.

# Location



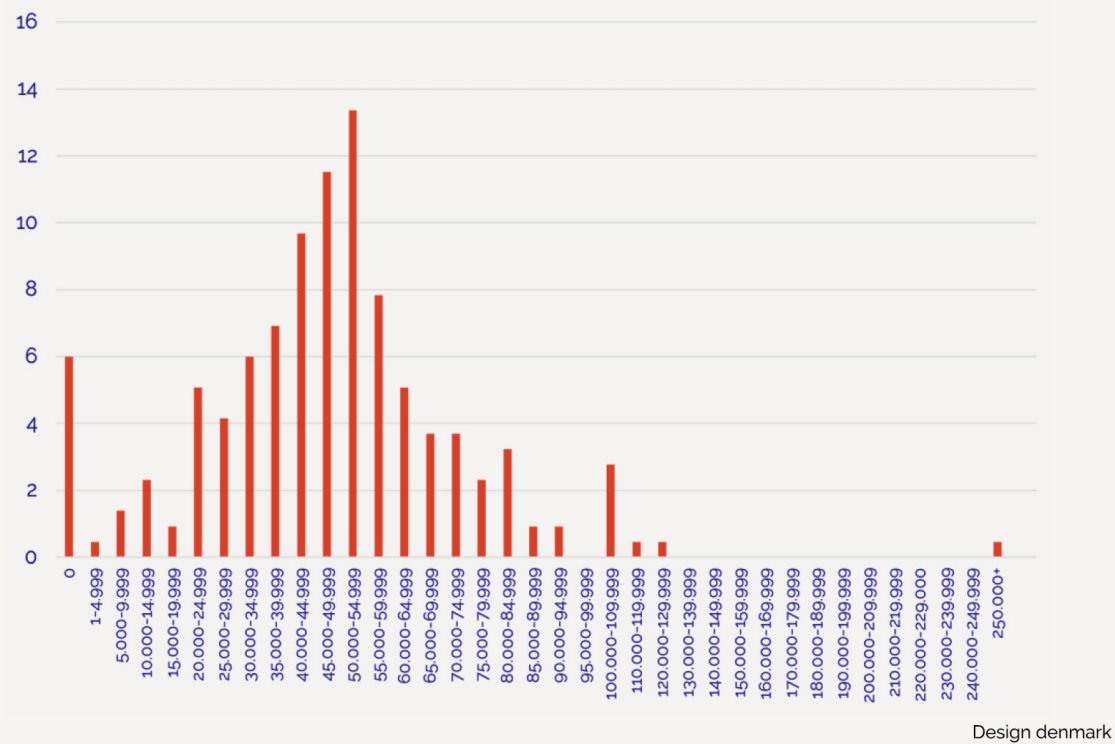
We also asked about the location of the designers - and although we expected a majority to come from Copenhagen, the 75% seems extremely high. Is this just a representation of the design landscape?

# State of design

## Results 1: Income

## Average Monthly Salary in DKK (excluding pension and benefits)

**47.305**



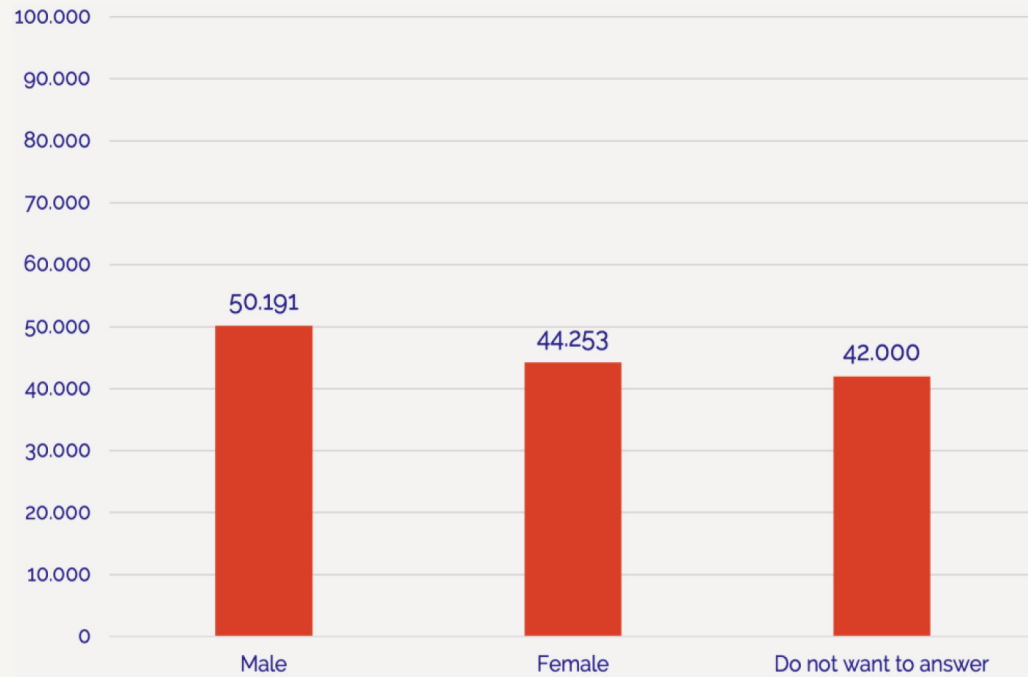
Hidden behind this number is quite a hefty spread, which is not surprising given that we include everything from startups to directors and owners of very successful businesses. More than 25 % earn less than 35,000, while just shy of 10 % are averaging more than 80,000 DKK a month.

Spread: Average Income in %

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# Gender & Income

## Average Income Gender: Across Categories

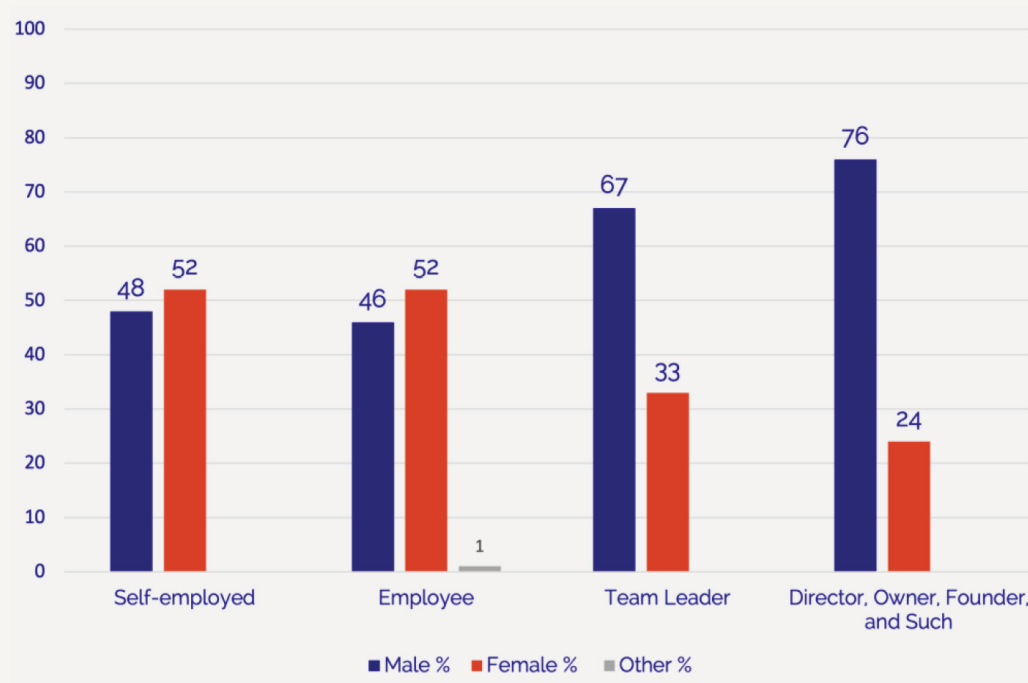


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One of the most anticipated results was whether there was an income gap between men and women.

Looking at the average income per gender, We see quite a large difference where men are paid 13 % more. But this is not telling the full story. Take a look at the gender % in the different work-type categories on the next page.

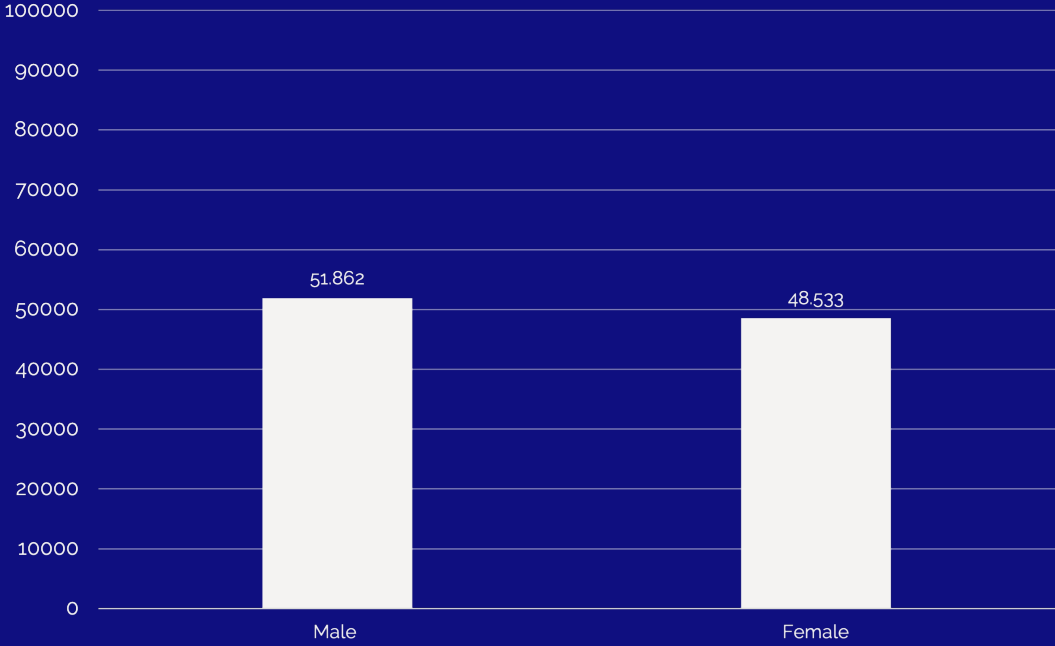
## Gender per Category %



The numbers are striking. Data reveals that about half of the income gap comes from a disproportionate rate of men at the top paid positions. If we adjust for this the average income per gender would look like the graph on the next page.

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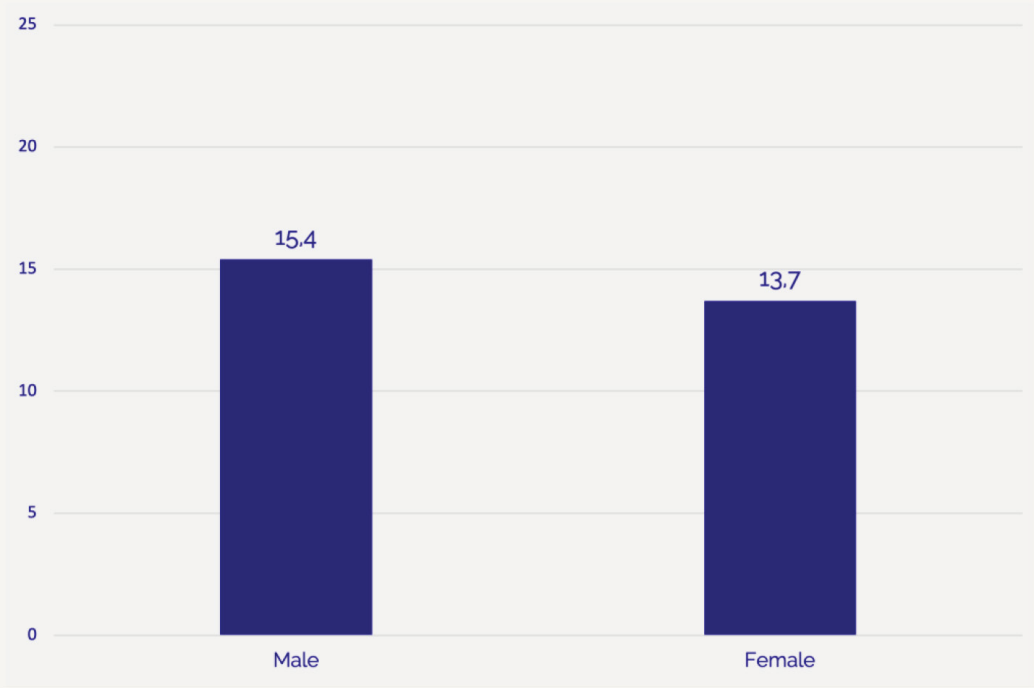
# Adjusted Average Income: Across Categories



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# Average Years of Experience

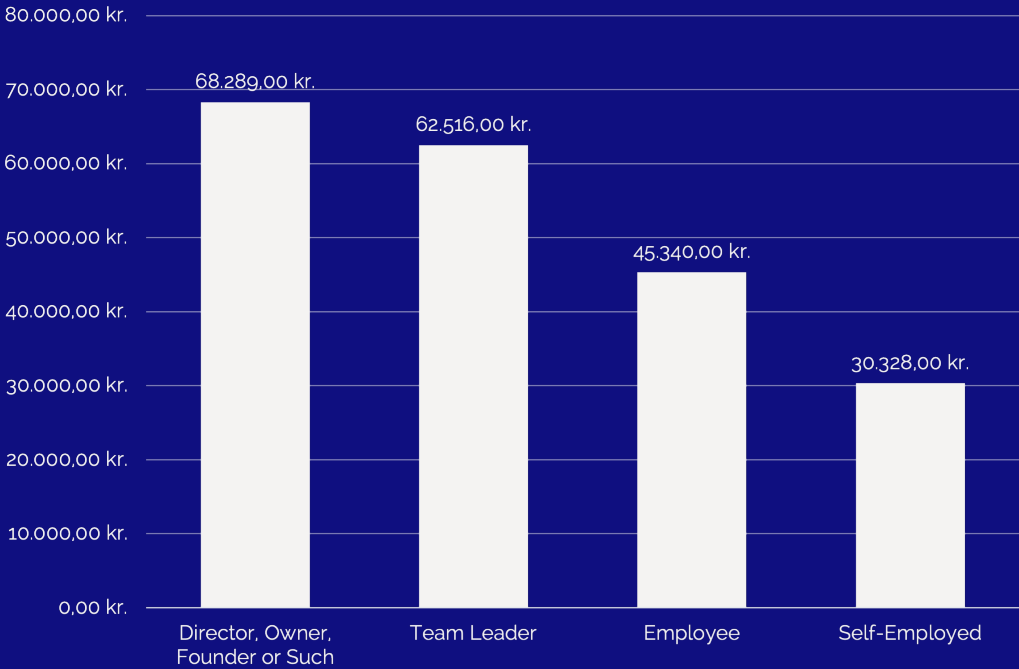


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Another influencing factor is that men in our survey had slightly longer work experience. It is difficult from our data sets to quantify the effect of this, but it is unlikely that it accounts for the remaining difference.

The conclusion is, therefore, that there is a significant gender income gap. It predominantly stems from a skewed distribution of the type of jobs women and men have – and to a smaller, albeit noticeable, extent, a result of bias or other factors not accounted for in this survey.

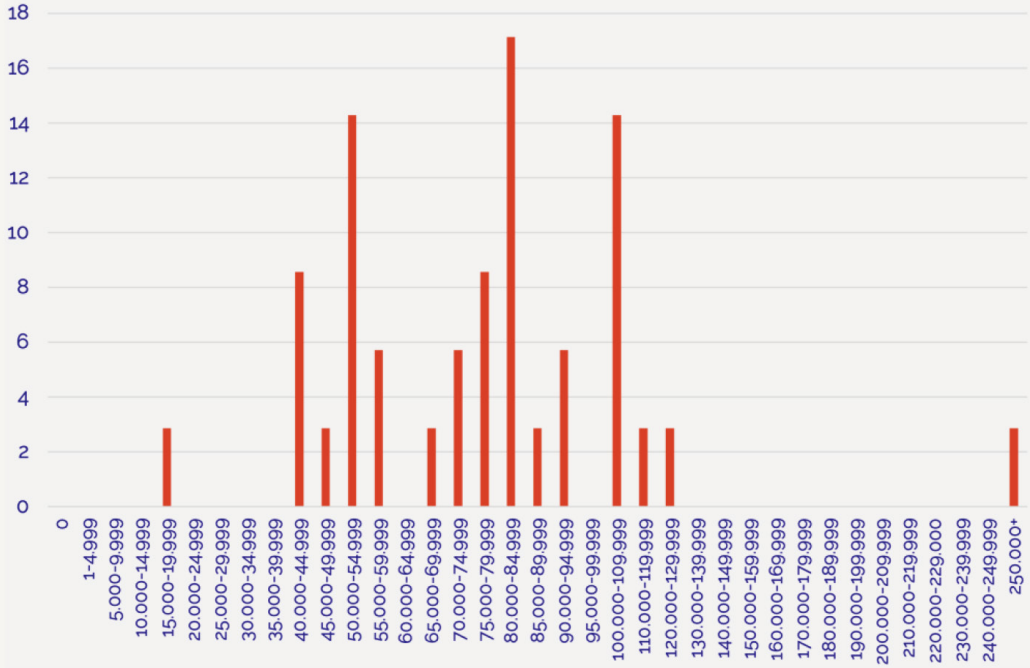
# Average Income Across the Various Categories



We also examined how the average income was distributed across the categories of being "Self-employed", "Employee", "Team Leaders", and "Directors, Owners, Founders and Such" - see more on the next page.

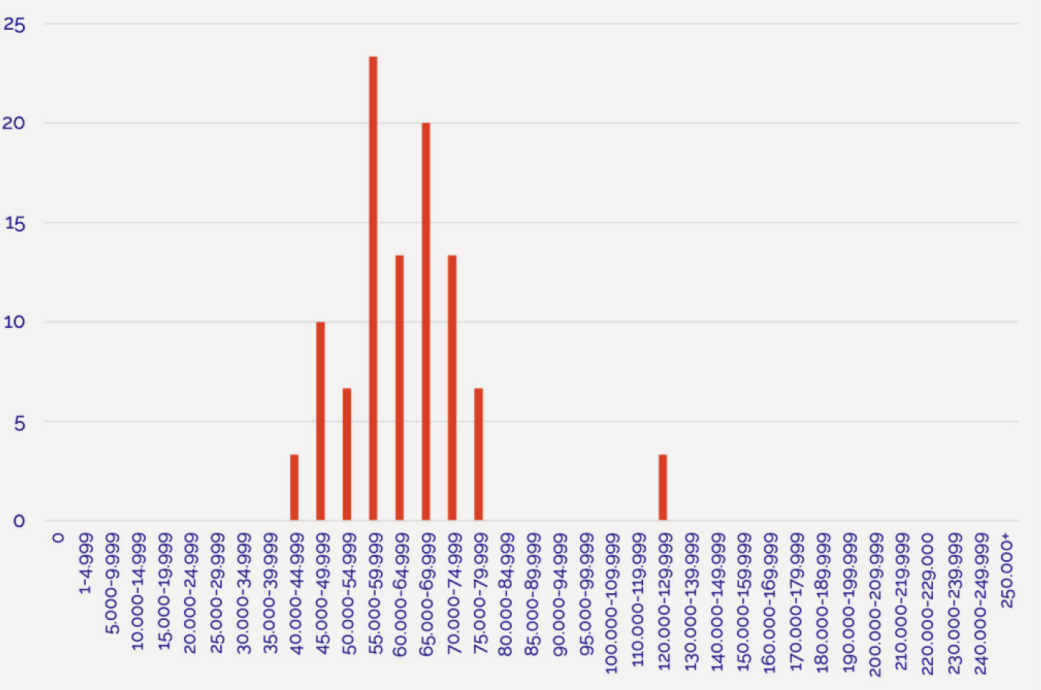
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# Spread Director, Owner, Founder, and Such %



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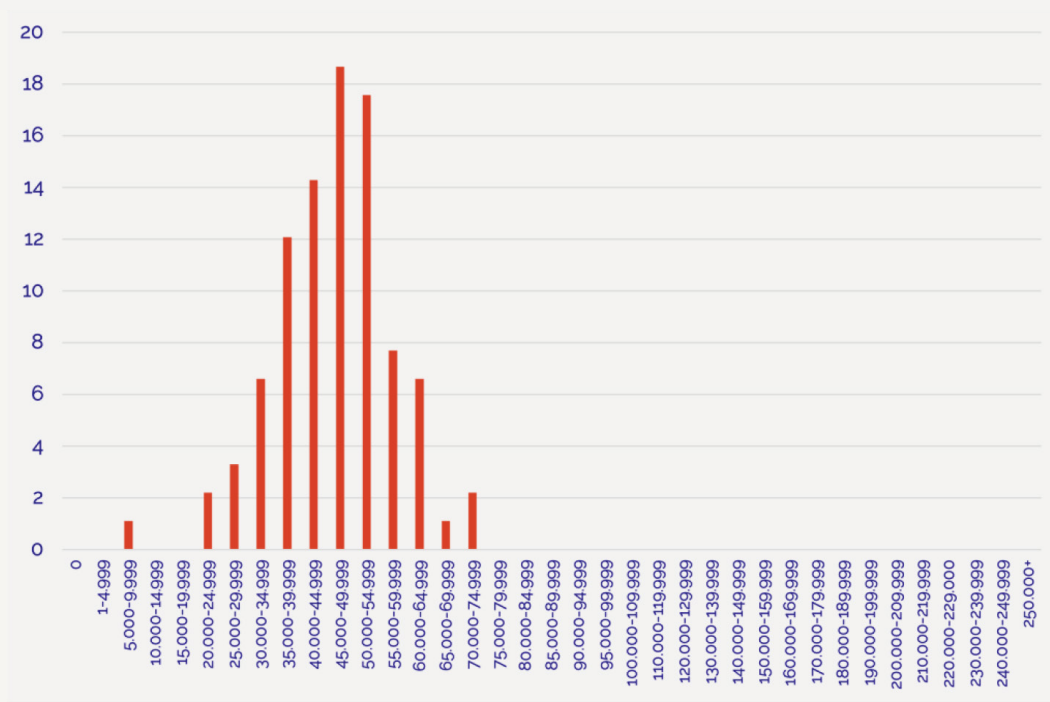
# Spread Team Leaders %



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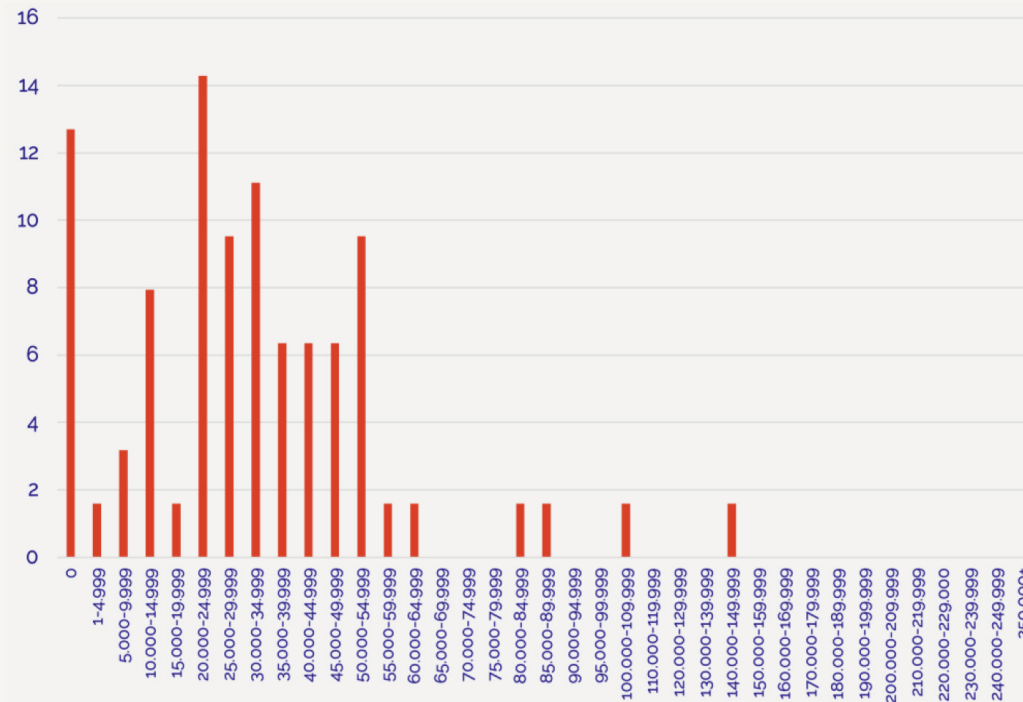
The "Director, Owner, Founder, and Such" category is a bit spotty, which we attribute to a somewhat limited data set and a quite high variance category. But grouped together with "Team Leaders", personnel responsibility forms a normal distribution curve averaging just around 65,000 DKK in income per month.

## Spread Employee %



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## Spread Self-Employed %



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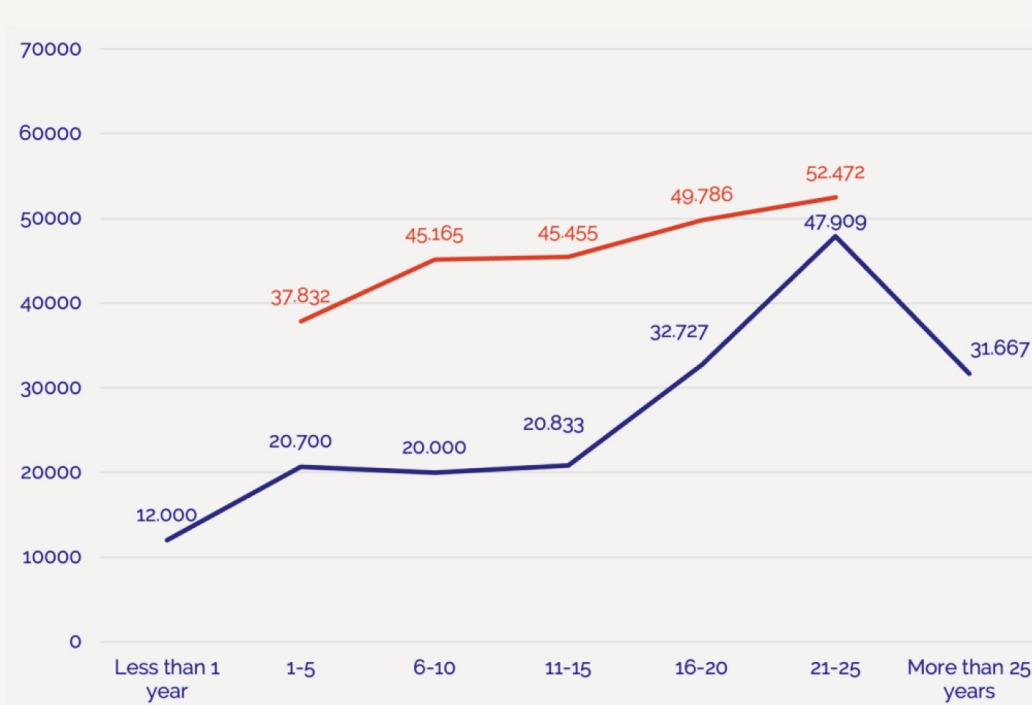
"Self-employed" is another high variance category, but with a clear tendency towards the bottom part of the income spectrum. Freedom comes with a price, as the average reported payout is only two-thirds of that of the "Employee" category!

A note of caution here:

The data shows how much the self-employed pay themselves, so, in principle, they could have accumulated a lot of money in their companies not reported in the data of this survey.

But looking at the data from self-employed spanning whole careers, nothing indicates that this is the case.

## Income - Years of Experience: Employee vs. Self-Employed

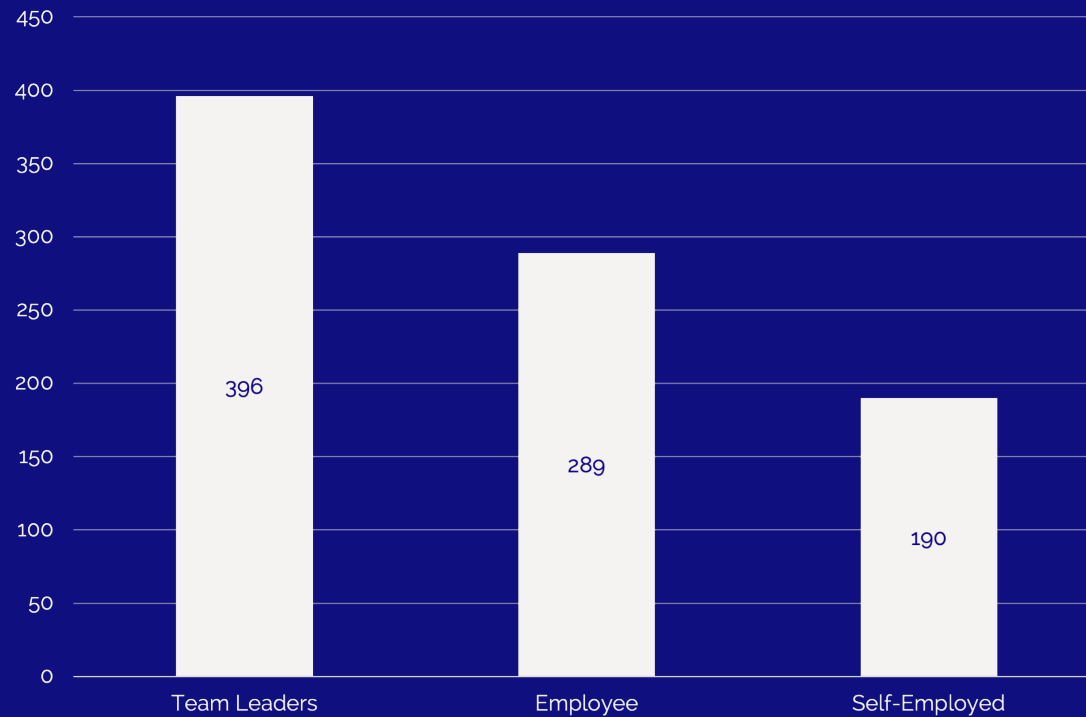


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Red: "Employees", Blue: "Self-Employed"

We also income-mapped "Employees" and "Self-Employed" based on years of experience. And this is again a woeful tale for the self-employed.

## Hourly Income DKK



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Finally for this chapter we took a look at the numbers adjusted per work hours, but again the story remains the same.



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Results 2:

Income x Desiplines x

Education x Perks

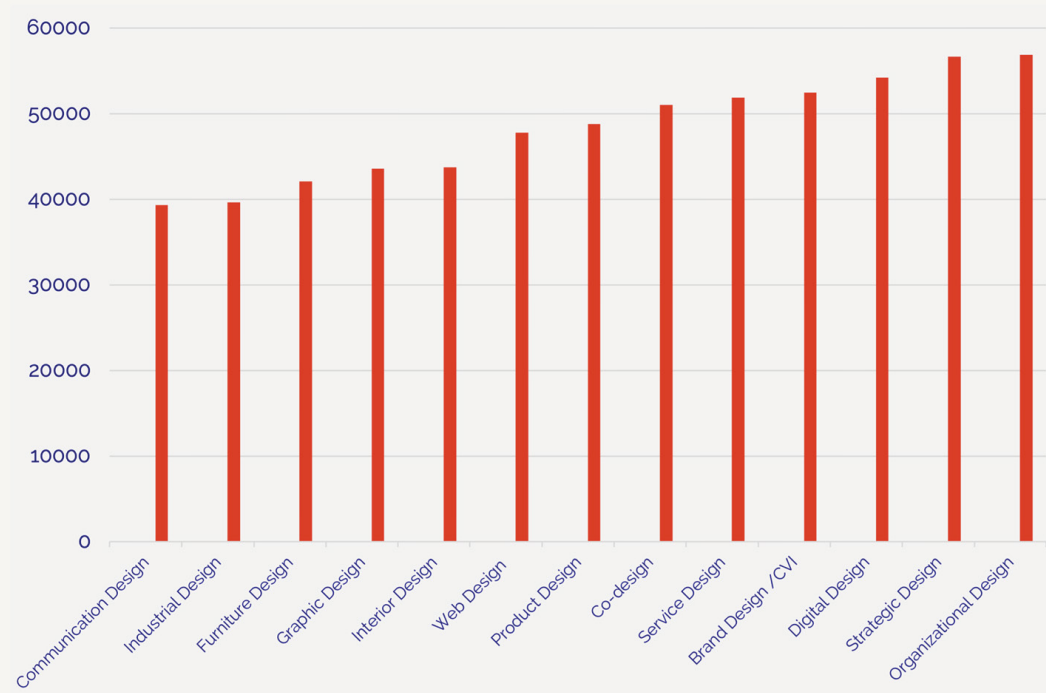
# State of Design – Results 2: Income x Disciplines x Education x Perks

In part 1, we covered all the basics regarding income. In this part, we look at how income relates to disciplines and education and what additional perks might come with the job.

A word of warning: although we have had 287 respondents and therefore have the perhaps biggest dataset of any Danish design survey in recent times, deep diving into specifics may influence how generalizable the results are. They are clearly indicative, and various patterns emerge across the different graphs, but we would probably need a much larger sample size to draw any absolute conclusions.

# Income x Design Disciplines

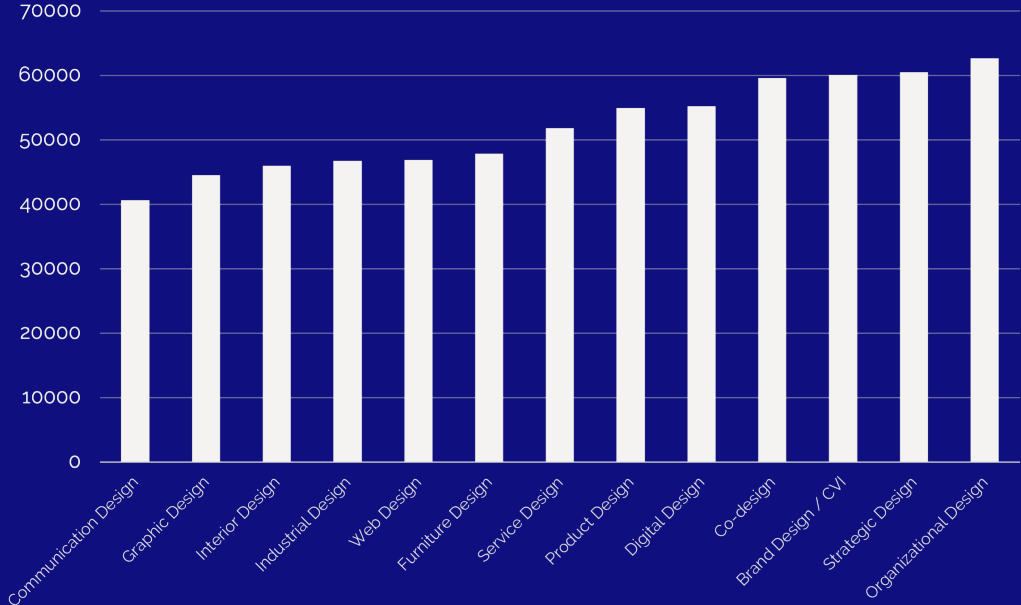
## Income x Design Disciplines: Everyone in DKK



We start off by having a look at how income relates to the various design disciplines.

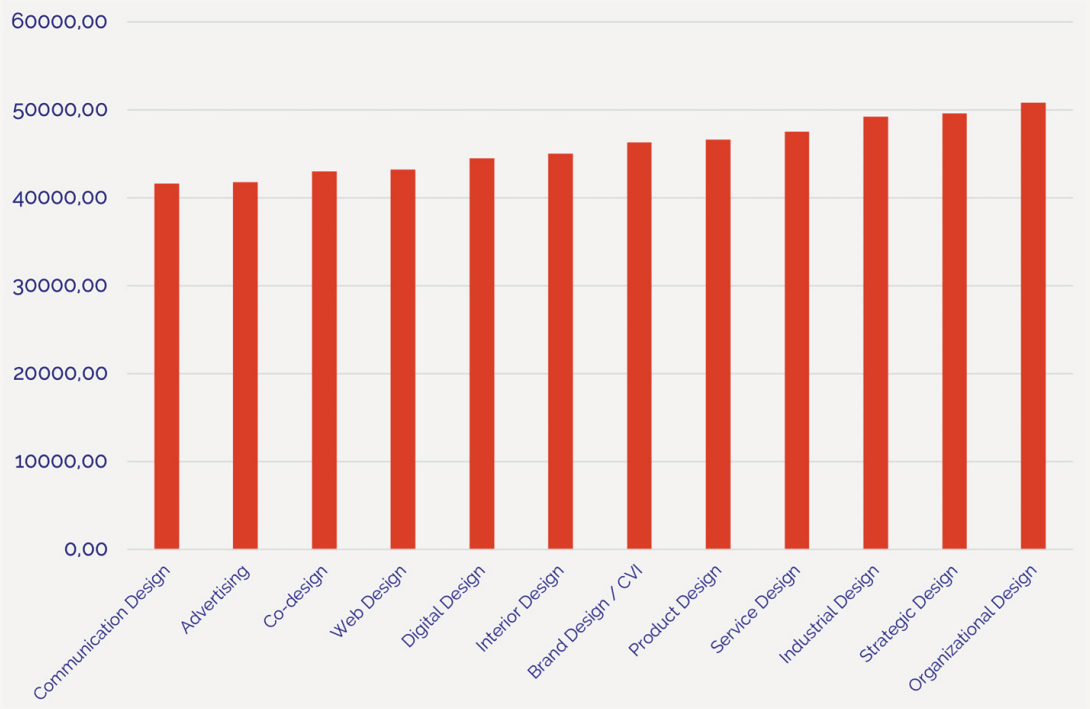
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**Income x Design Discipline: Employee, Team leader and Director, Owner, Founder in DKK (excluding Self-employed).**



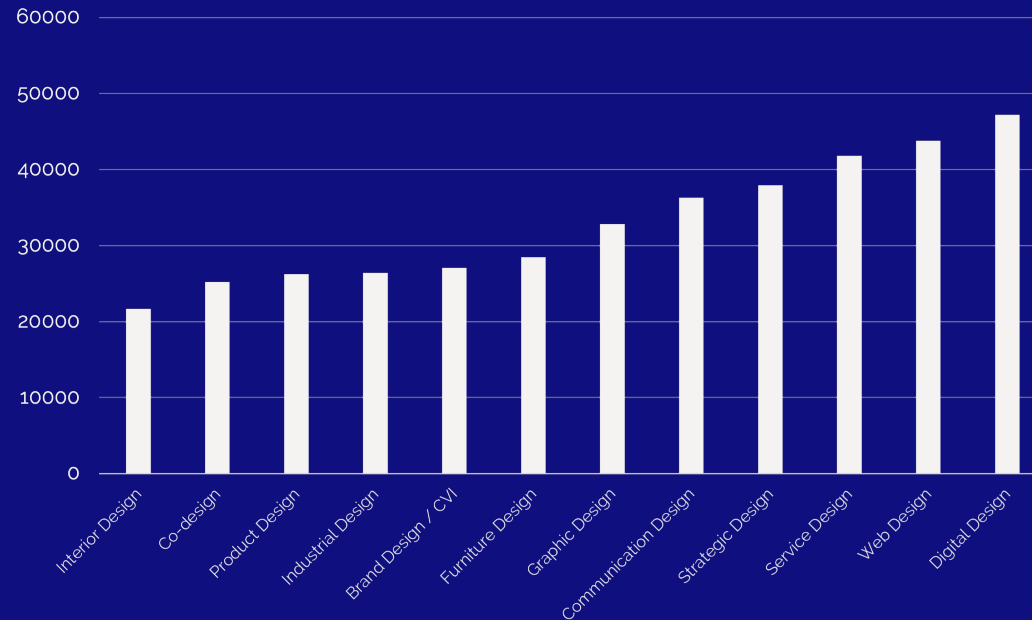
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# Income x Design Discipline: Employee in DKK



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## Income x Design Disciplines: Self-employed in DKK



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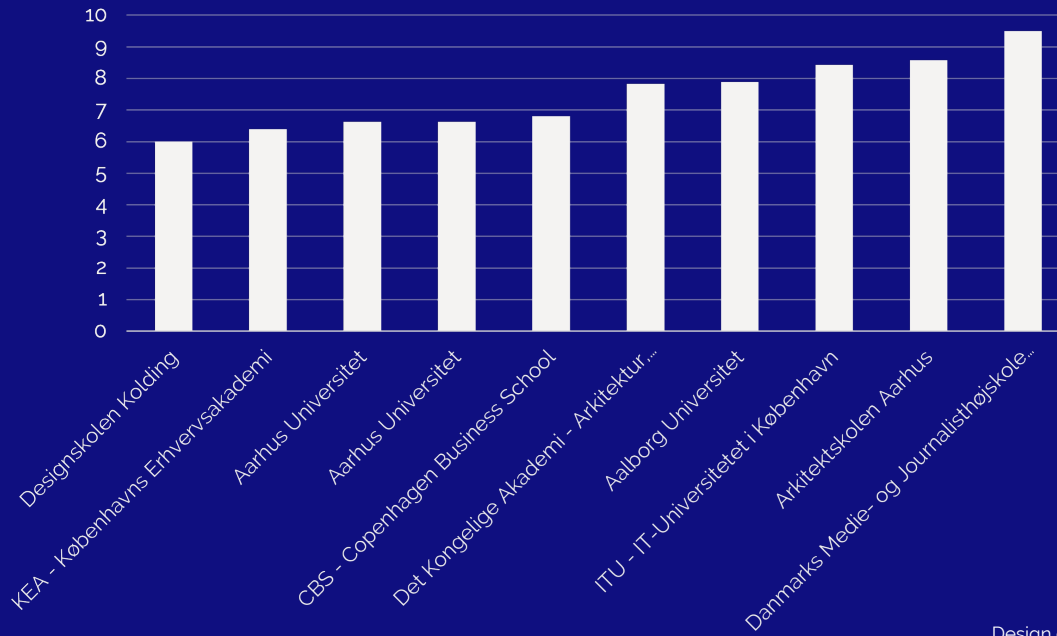
In all the categories above except for this last "Self-employed" graph, it seems like there is a slight trend that it is the newer and more ephemeral design disciplines that brings in most income. Part of the reason might be that most directors and owners (who are paid the most) also emphasize for example strategic design work.

We first found it strange that Communication Design seemed to be a major exclusion to this trend coming in last overall. But looking closer at the numbers reveals that this might be because it is a term mostly used by the Self-employed in our study, and therefore it reflects their substantially lower income (as seen in part 1) more than it reflects anything else.

The design discipline question these graphs are based on was a multiple choice allowing the respondents to choose more than one discipline, which leads to a more valid data set.

# Income x Education

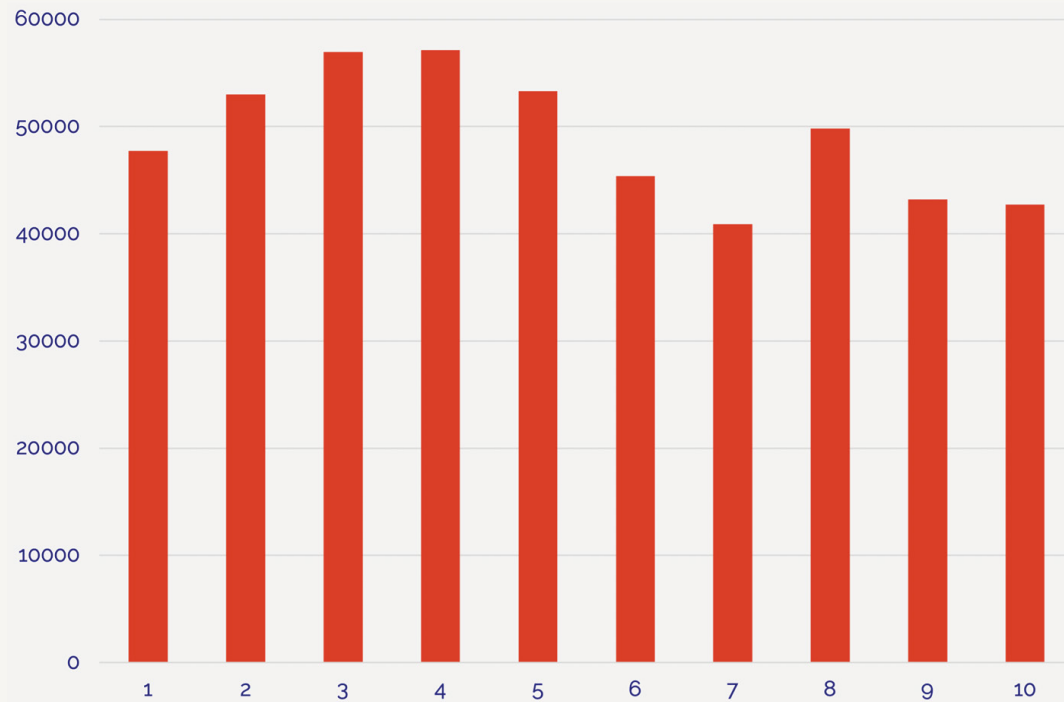
Average Rating x School - 1 = worst, 10 = best



We also asked the respondents how they would rate the usefulness of their educational background and then mapped it up against their income.

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## Income x Rating of Education 1 = worst, 10 = best



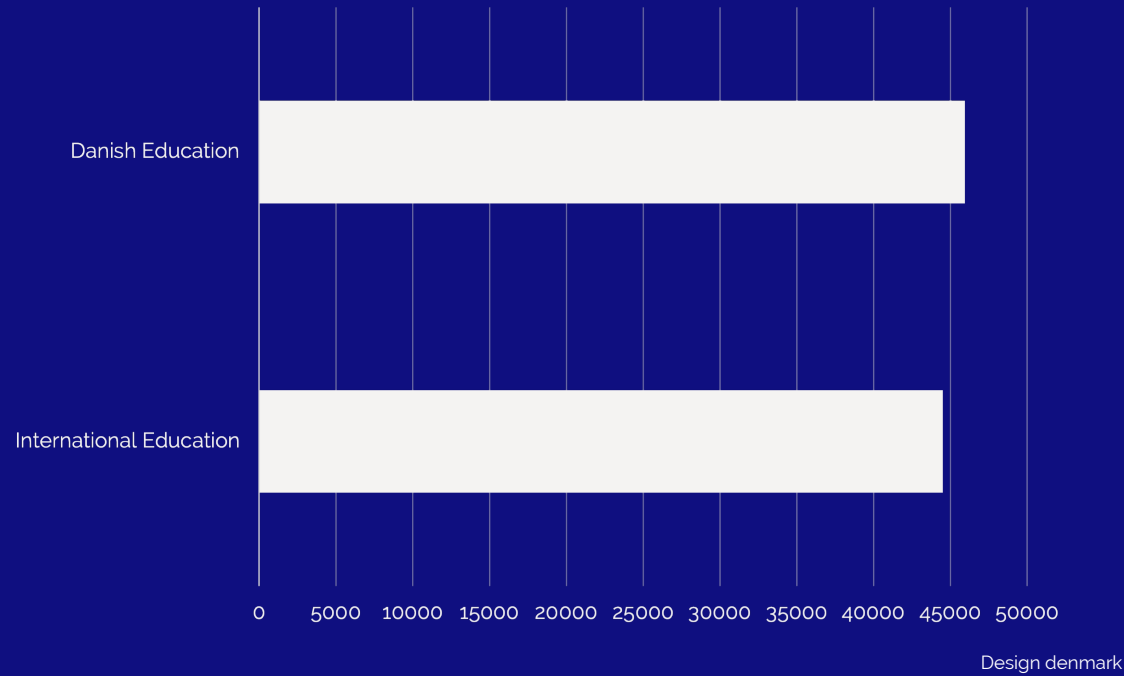
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This is probably more speculative than valid, but it curiously shows that income is actually a bit higher among those who rate their education's usefulness in the bottom half.

However, there can be many reasons for this. For example, it could be that you are more critical of your education the more senior you get – and since people tend to go up in income over time, this could explain the difference. Or it could be random fluctuations that happen when you spread a data set like this over ten different options.

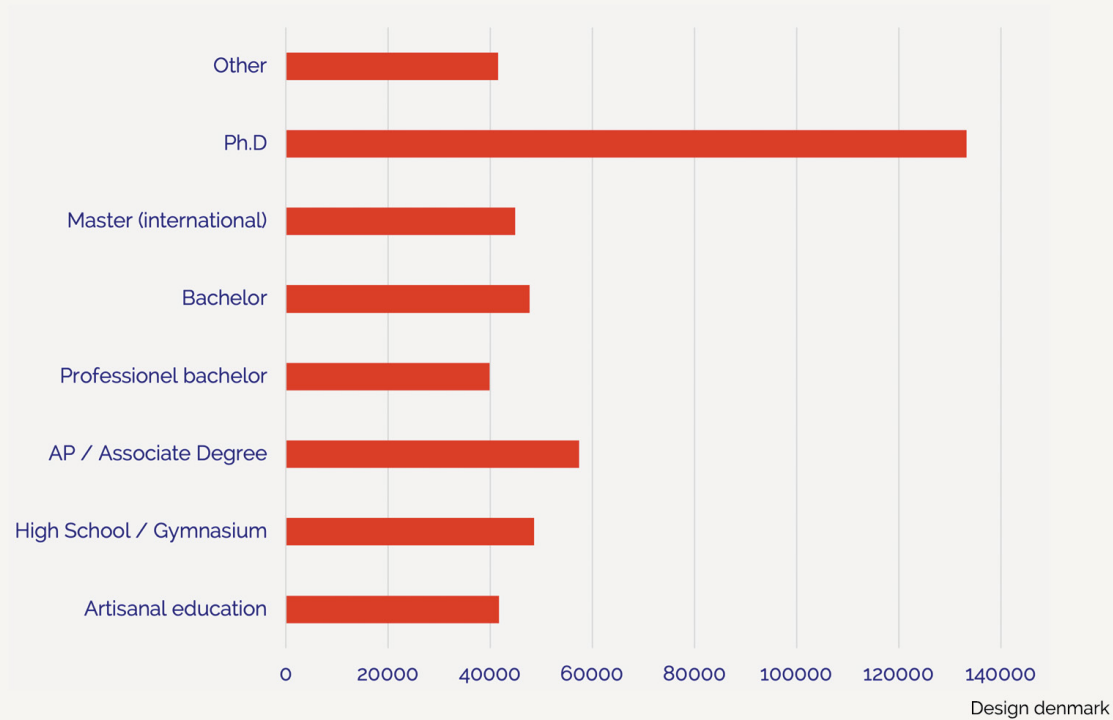


## International or Danish Education x Income



A bit more solid is our mapping of how income relates to whether you have studied internationally or in Denmark. However the numbers are fairly close, so not much to report here.

## Educational Level x Income



We also mapped the type/length of the education against income, and it turned out fairly even across the board.

Whether this means that education is a waste of time or that the ones who make it in the industry without education have had the extraordinary talent to be able to do without is anybody's guess.

The PhD category should actually be excluded since the data set was too limited for it to be valid. We included it merely to show that there are some huge differences in income in the field of design.

# Basic Perks

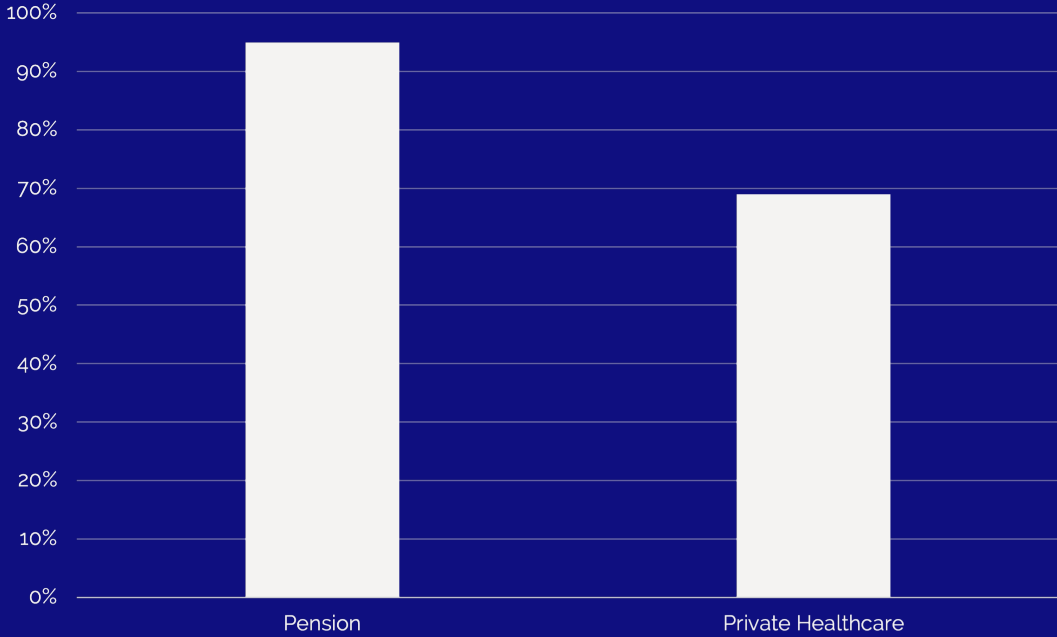
## Pension, Private Healthcare: Everyone



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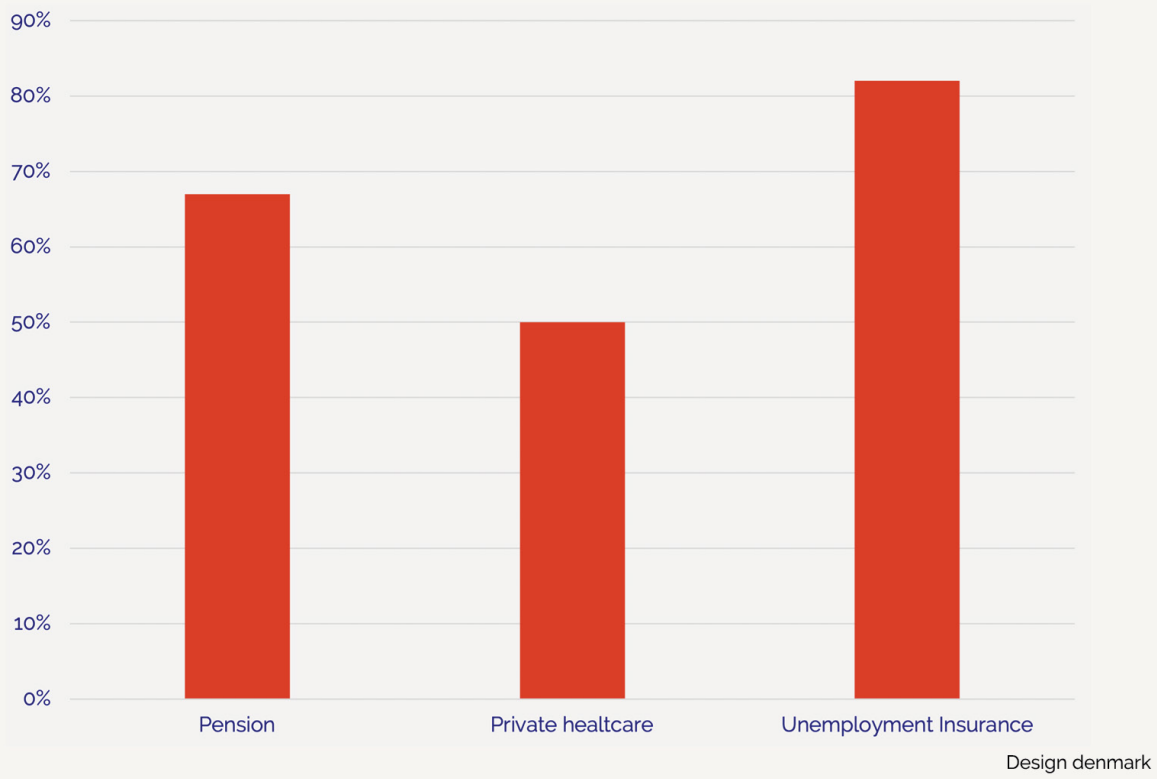
Enough talk about income. Let's talk about perks! We started with the basics – the most important questions.

# Pension, Private Healthcare: Employees & Team Leaders



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# Pension, Private Healthcare: Unemployment Insurance: Self-employed

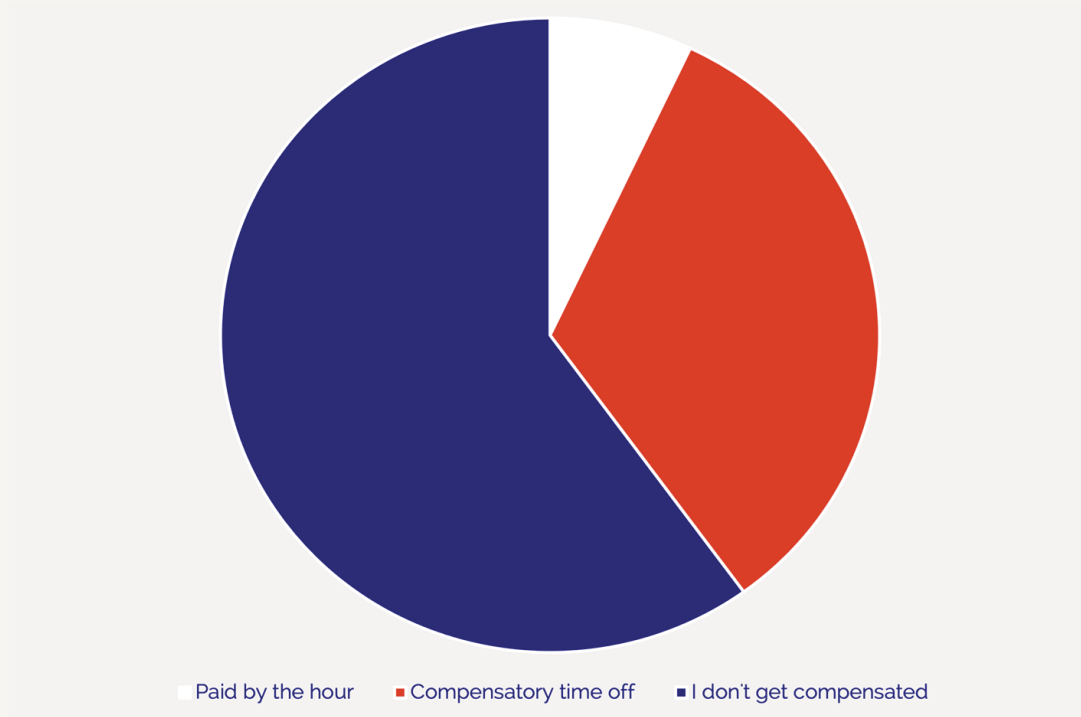


If you are an employee, basically everyone (95%) has a pension, and there is a wide-spread use of private healthcare.

As expected, the numbers are a bit lower in the Self-employed category. We also asked the Self-employed whether they had unemployment insurance, and about 82% answered yes to this.

# Extra Employee Perks

## Overtime Compensation

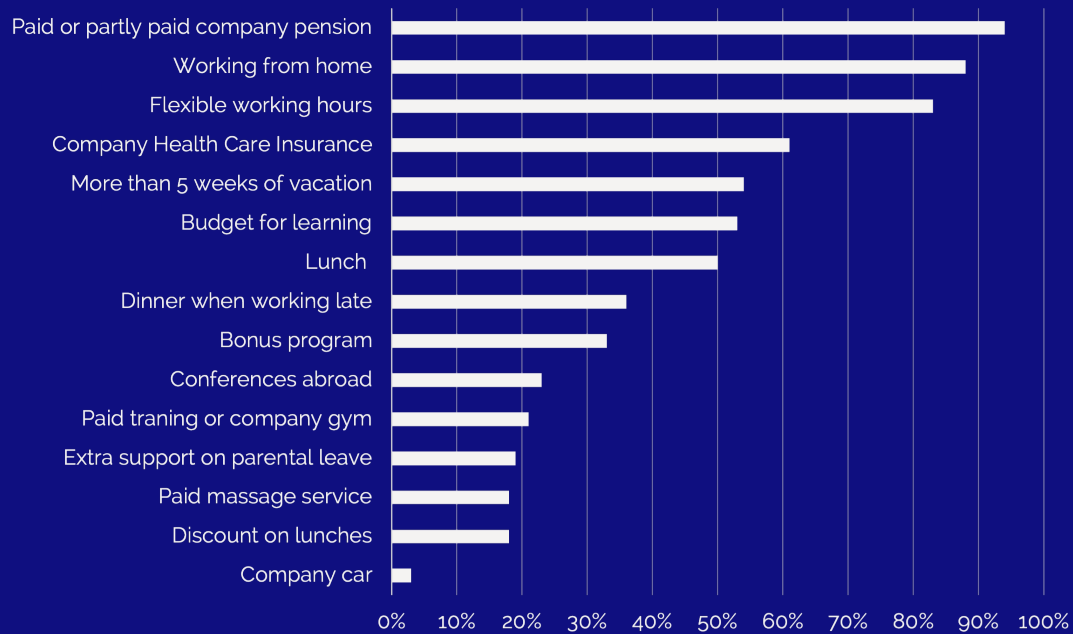


So we figured that employees probably had a lot of extra perks on top of their income to sweeten the deal of having a boss. But first, we asked how they were compensated for overtime.

Surprisingly, almost 60% said that they don't get compensated, whereas the majority of the rest get compensatory time off.

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## But then there are all the other perks...

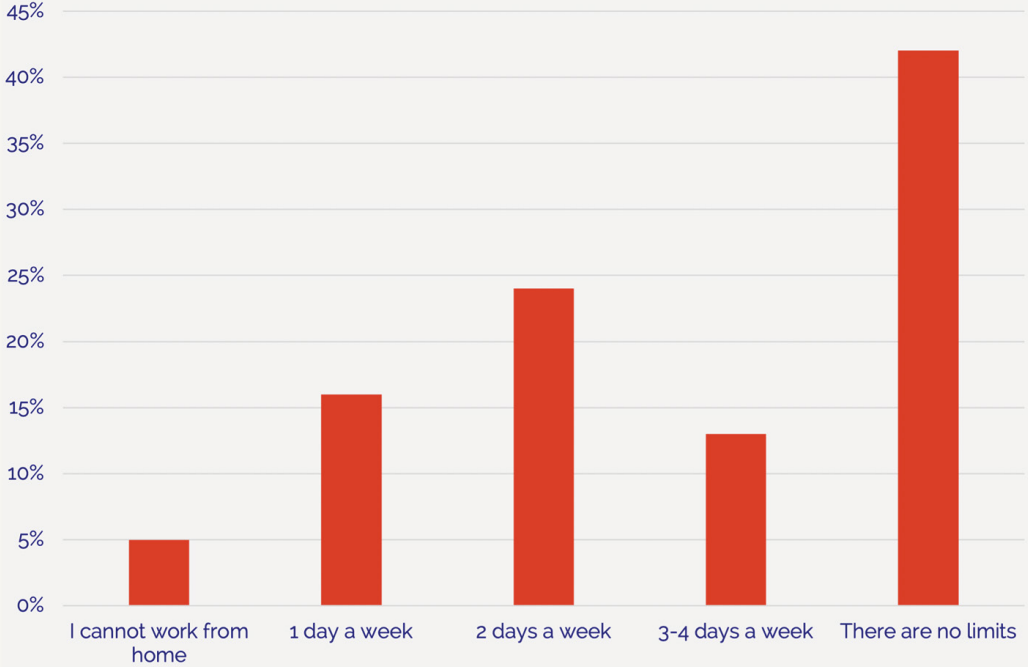


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Many of the respondents expressed satisfaction with their current perks, but there were 3 major trends amongst their requests:

- 1) greater flexibility in terms of more vacation, better work-from-home opportunities, paid maternity leave and more of that sort.
- 2) Skills upgrade in the form of conferences, study trips etc. And finally a recurring request for
- 3) higher wage.

# How often can you work from home?

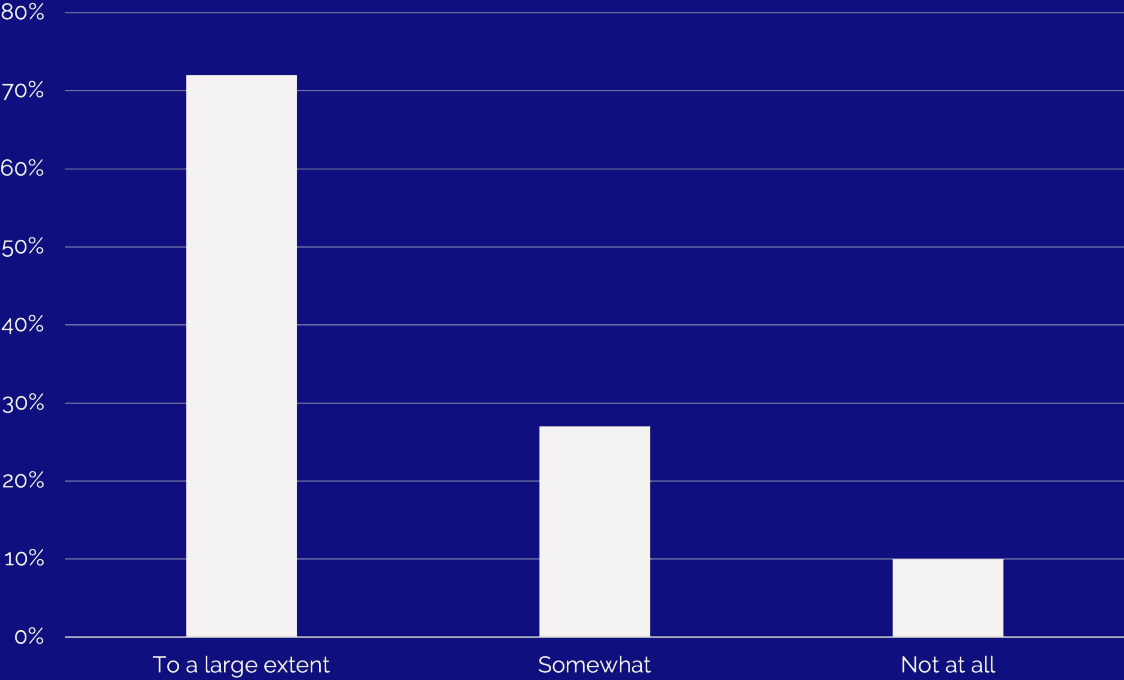


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It is impressive how flexible work is for most respondents. Almost 80% can work from home 2 days or more a week, and to a large degree, most can plan quite freely when.

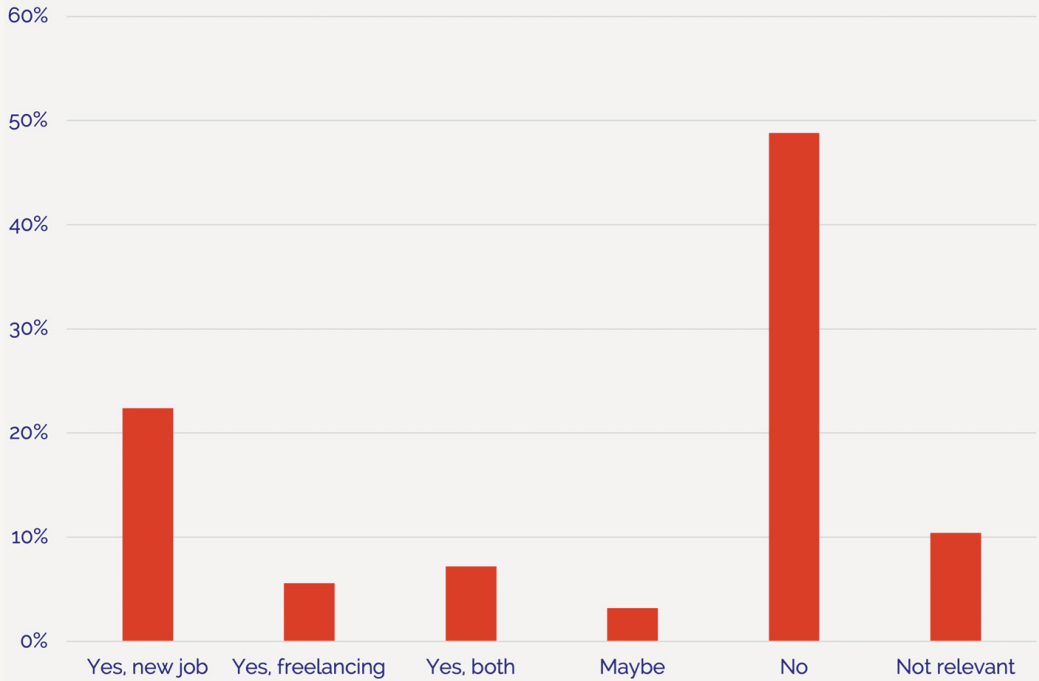


# And to what extend can you personally choose when?



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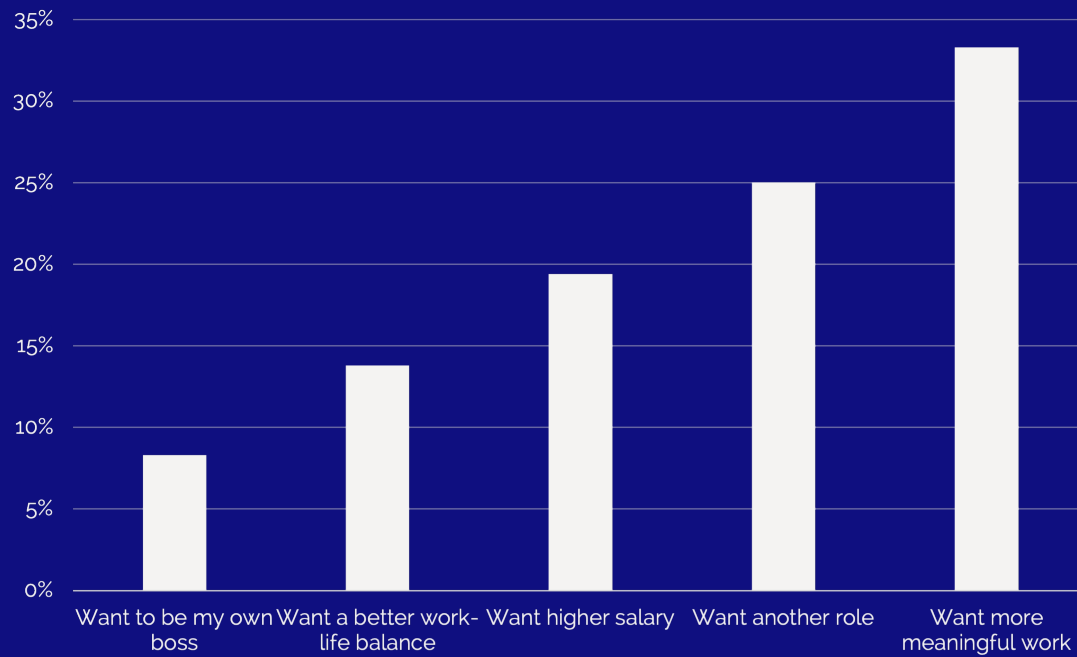
# Are you considering a new job or freelancing?



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Everything from the last few pages has lead us to asking how many out there was looking for a new job or freelancing.

## If you are looking for a new job: Why?

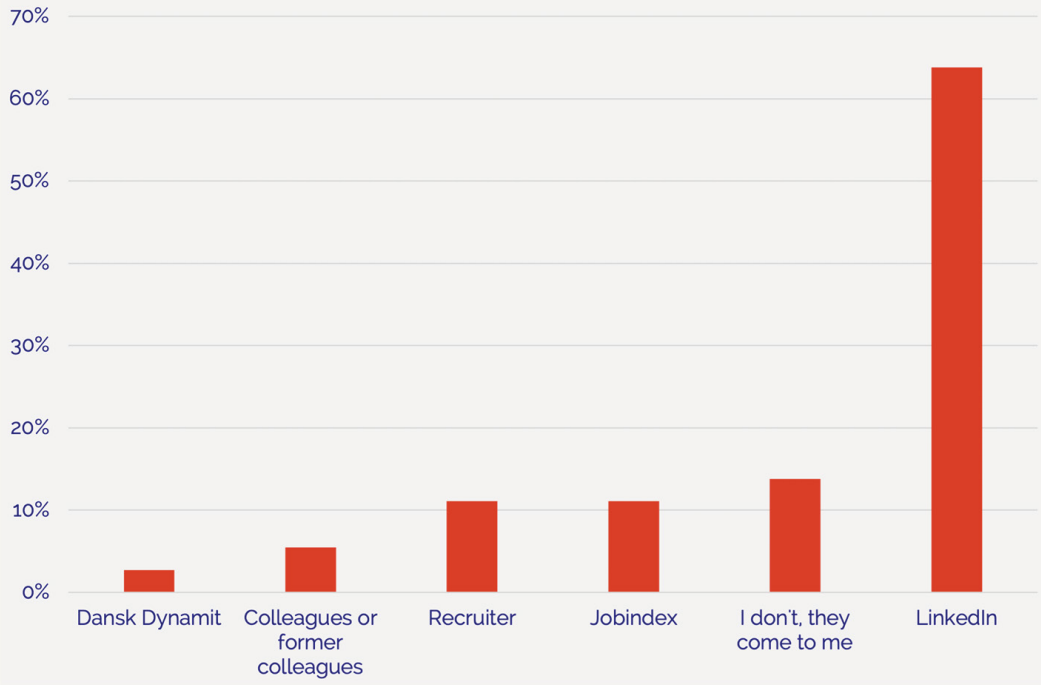


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Wanting more meaningful work is a clear winner, and it is something to be mindful of if you are hiring designers or trying to keep the talent you already have. Otherwise, you will find them looking for a new job..

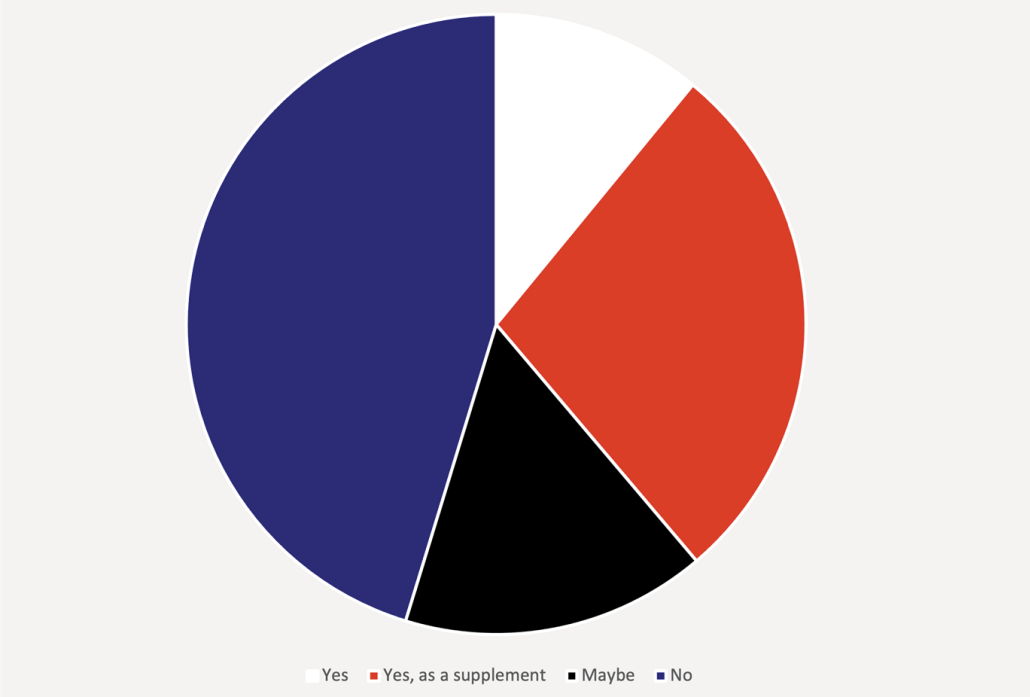
- presumably on LinkedIn.

# Where do you look for a new job?



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### Self-employed: Are you considering employment?



As the final graph in this part of the survey, we turned the table and asked the Self-employed whether they are considering employment rather than freelance.

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# State of design

Results 3: Inspiration, loves,  
and the not-so-fun

## State of Design – Results 3: Inspiration, loves, and the not-so-fun!

For many, design is like a calling – an innate ability honed by years of training and craftsmanship. But in every field, there is both good and bad. We asked you about the upsides and downsides – and, not least, about all the places where you find inspiration.

## What do you love about your job?



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Not surprisingly, manifesting something new by creating, working creatively, and solving problems is why designers love what they do. It is, however, interesting that the "loves" are so anchored in the individual and are so dominant in a field cherishing user perspectives and utopian ideals.

Community-oriented words like "collaboration", "helping", and "people" are mentioned but not to a huge extent.



## What is less fun?



Less fun is the exact opposite image of the freedom and exploration of creativity. It is about boxes and columns, bottom lines and making things fit. Not something a designer wants to be bothered with.

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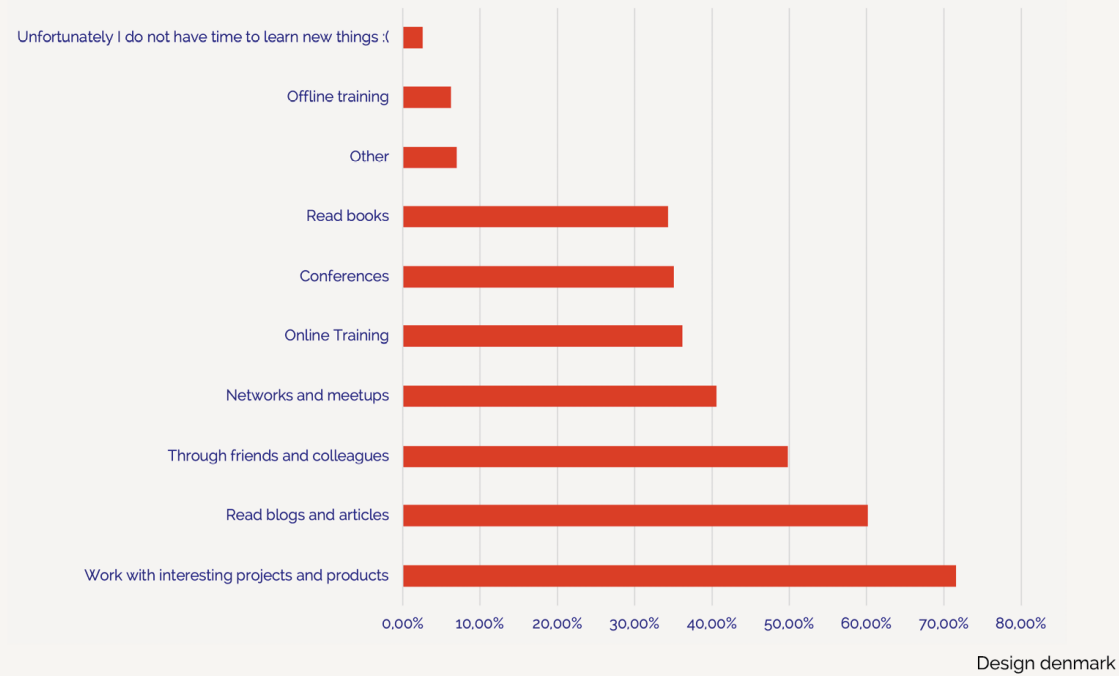
## What makes a good designer?



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We also asked what it takes to be a good designer, and interestingly enough, here we find a lot of values that are not connected to the ego. The designer's love is expressing individuality, but it seems the foundation for that expression is in something other than oneself.

## How do you learn new things?



Learning through doing is the name of the game for most designers. It is a sad testament to the state of "continued education" in the design field that most learning is through projects or blogs. Only 6 % do old-school off-line training!

### Top 8:

Which book, blog, podcast or the like do you find interesting?

1. Medium
2. Design kan, podcast af Kristina May
3. LinkedIn (groups like \_by design etc.)
4. Adfærd, podcast af Morten Münster
5. DAC
6. Dezeen
7. The Futur / Chris Do
8. Design details

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## Top 10: Design conferences

1. Design Matters
2. SXSW
3. OFFF
4. Salone del Mobile
5. Awwwards
6. We Love Graphic Design
7. The Conference
8. UX Cph
9. Forward
10. Tech BBQ

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Turning to conferences, Design Matters has a considerable place in the heart of many designers, with SXSW as a close second. Many voiced that they liked international conferences, with a mixture of talks and hands-on events.

Then again, some wanted conferences from other fields of design because designers are often "narcissistic", "full of themselves", and with "big egos." We'll let that stand without comments.

## Important trends



Finally, we looked at the significant trends in the design community. AI to rule it all.

Putting everything related to sustainability together, it comes in as a not-too-distant second. But other than these two trends, the rest appeared as almost indiscernible things far away in the distance.

We are not done talking about AI anytime soon. Could we use it to talk about the climate crisis, please?

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# State of design

## Results 4:

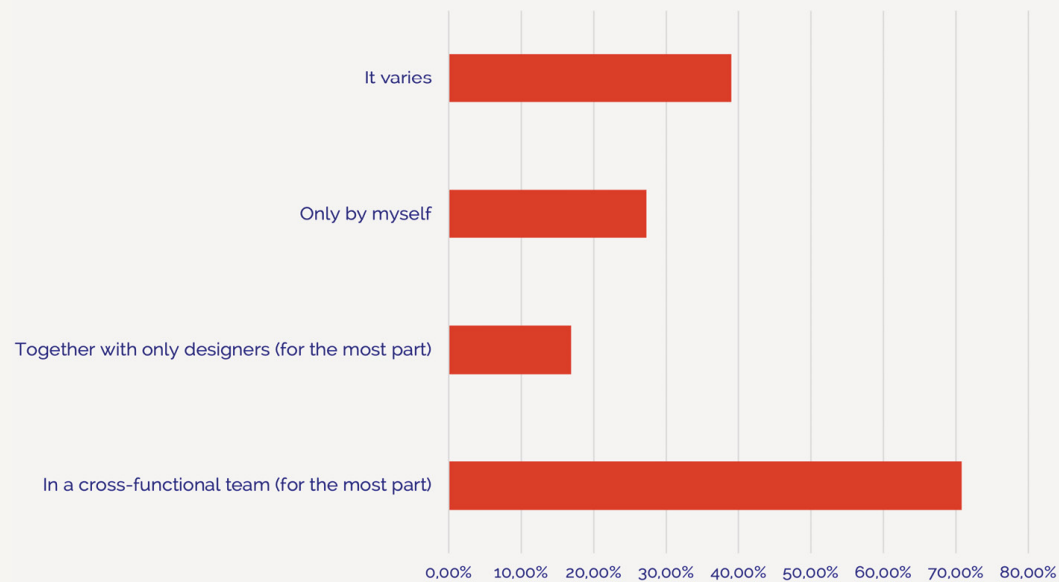
### What kind of work?

# State of Design – Results 4: What kind of work?

In chapter 4 of the State of Design survey, we dive into the kind of work you do as a designer. How do you work, with whom and where, what tools and methods you use as a designer, and much more.



## How do you often work?



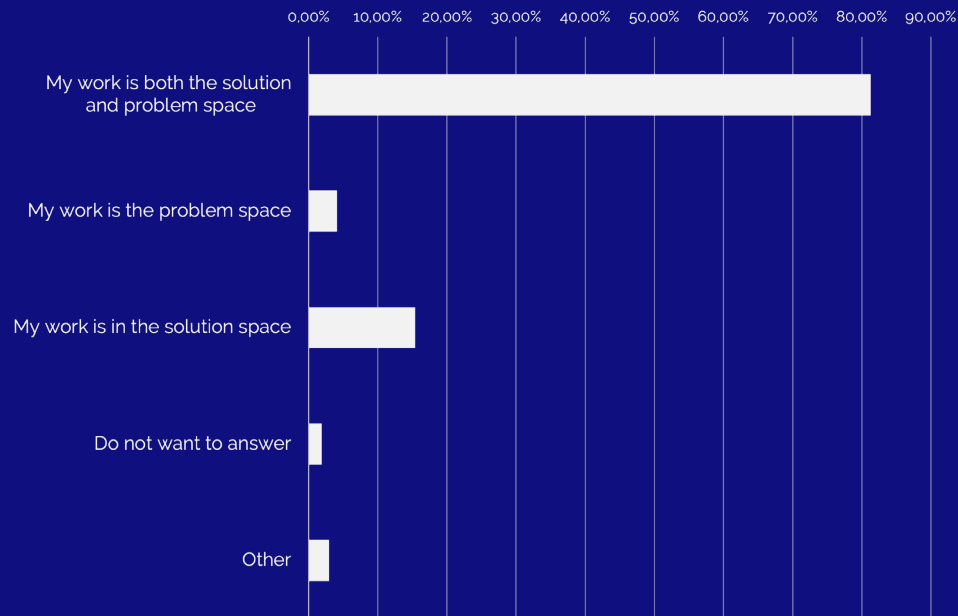
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Around one-third of the respondents were one-man bands, so it is unsurprising that almost 30% work alone.

That, however, doesn't hide the fact that design is a collaborative, cross-disciplinary field.

(The combined numbers allot to more than 100 % since some respondents ticked off multiple boxes – a little bit strange given the type of questions).

## How do you experience your role as a designer?



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We were also interested to see whether there were beginning to form specializations within the design processes themselves, but to a large extent, it seems that it is still, in large, a holistic discipline, where the individual designer is a part of the project in its various inceptions.

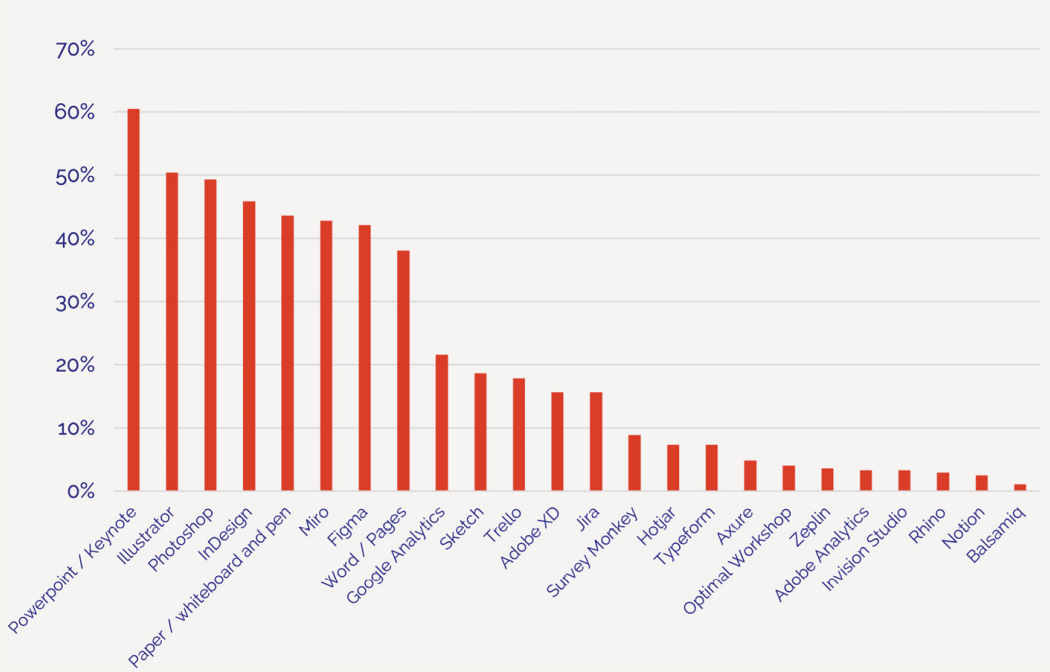
## What activities do you typically work with?



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Wherever there is collaboration, there are also meetings! Being a designer is about much more than just designing.

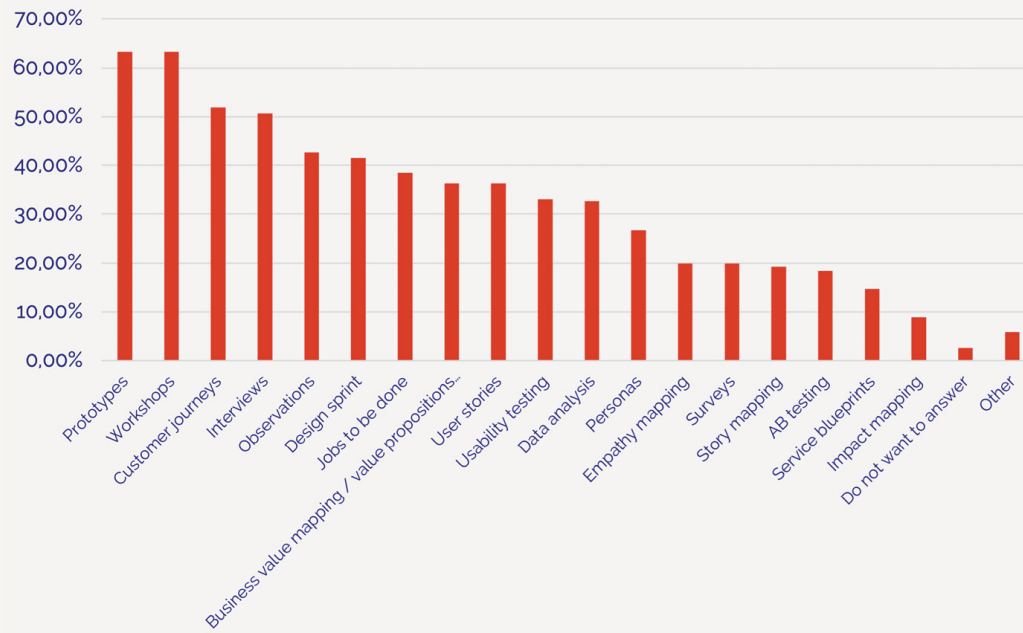
# What are your tools?



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Since there are no avoiding meetings, there is no avoiding the presentation tool either. But next after these, we have the usual Adobe suspects. Miro and Figma have also made a name for themselves in the last few years, and in our comments for this question, we had a lot of people praising Figma.

## What methods do you use?



The classical formats and methods are dominating, it seems. But it is also interesting to see the actual recommendations by fellow designers.

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## What method, tool or mindset would you recommend to other designers and why?

"Always try new tools, processes and methods.  
You both grow and get inspired by it"

"Remember, your job is to serve others, not to fulfil your ambition as a designer. Too many do things because they like it, not because it's necessary to solve our clients' problems. More pragmatism, more critical thinking"

"I would recommend a theory fuelled mindset, that can help highlighting the marvellous hiding in the mundane"

"Be like water! Never still, always evolving,  
flowing between the rocks, always adapting"

**What method, tool or mindset would you recommend to other designers and why?**

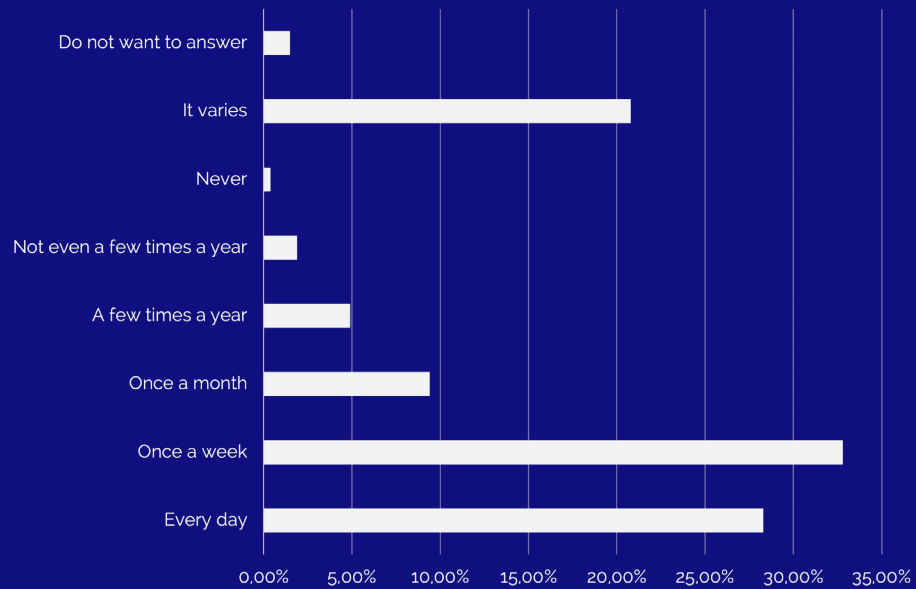
"Curious, humble, and express your opinion."

"Your clients are your partners in crime. Embrace them, be curious and open minded, tap into their knowledge."

"Engage with complexity, take a natural world view of systems and their inter-relationships, be humble!"

"You can change anything you want"

## How often are you in contact with your users or customers?



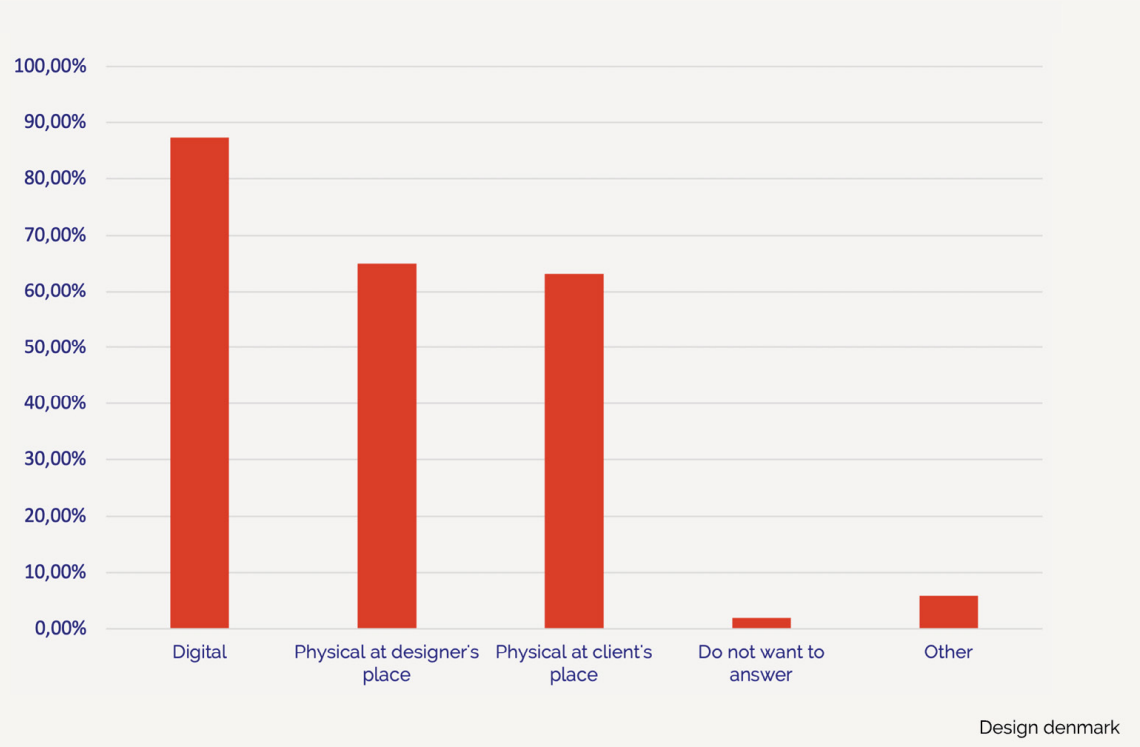
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No business without clients. State of Design also dove into the client-designer relationship, and we are happy to be able to conclude it is going well.

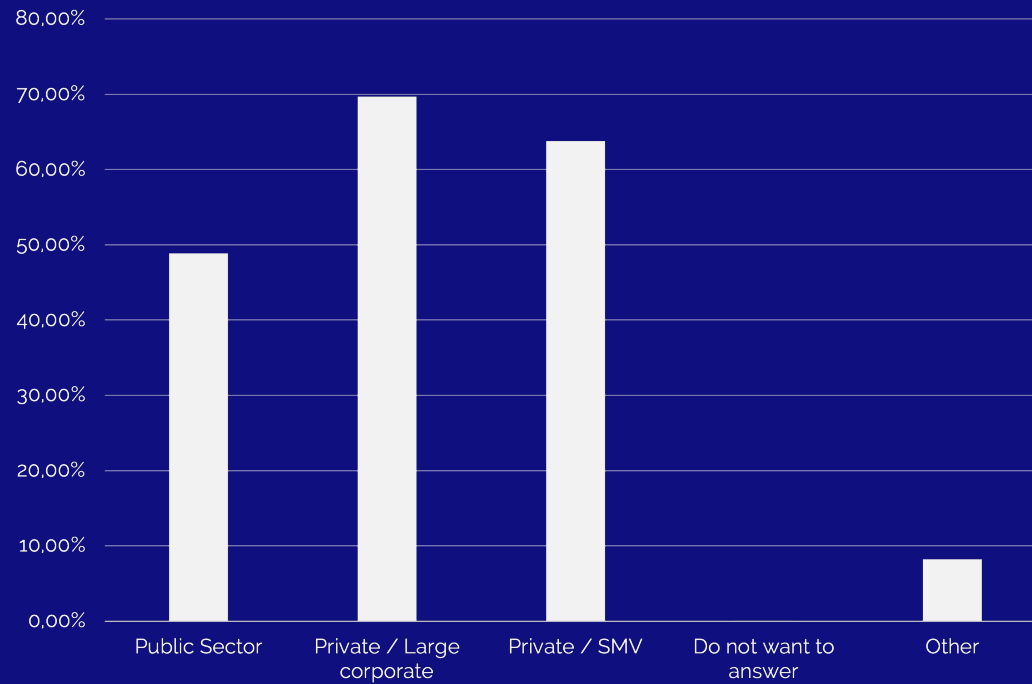
Over 60 % of the respondents had contact with their users or customers at least once a week – meeting them online, or at their place, or bringing them into the designer's home turf.



# How do you collaborate?



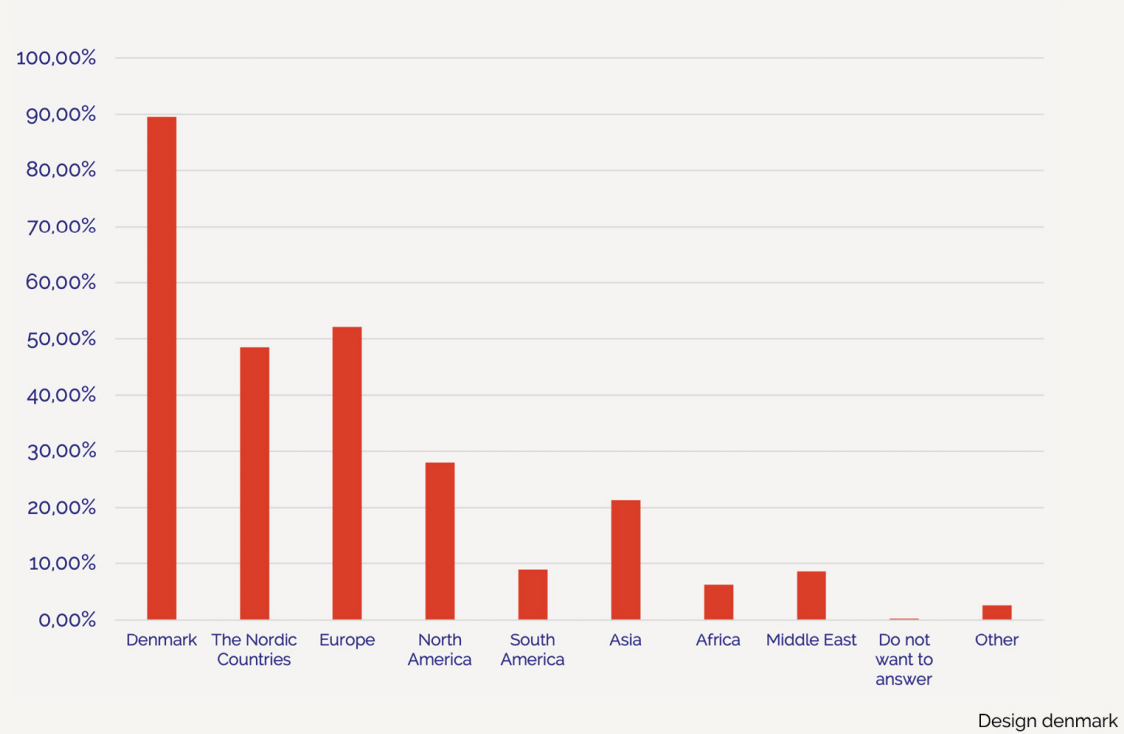
## Which type of clients do you or the company you work for have?



Most of your clients are private companies, but almost half also do business with the public sector.

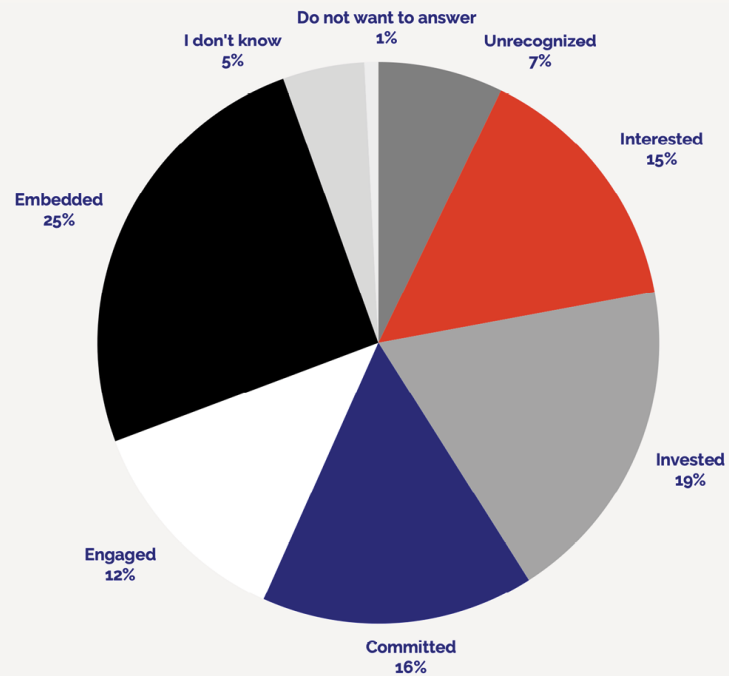
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## Where are your clients located?



Distance and culture seem to matter when it comes to clients.

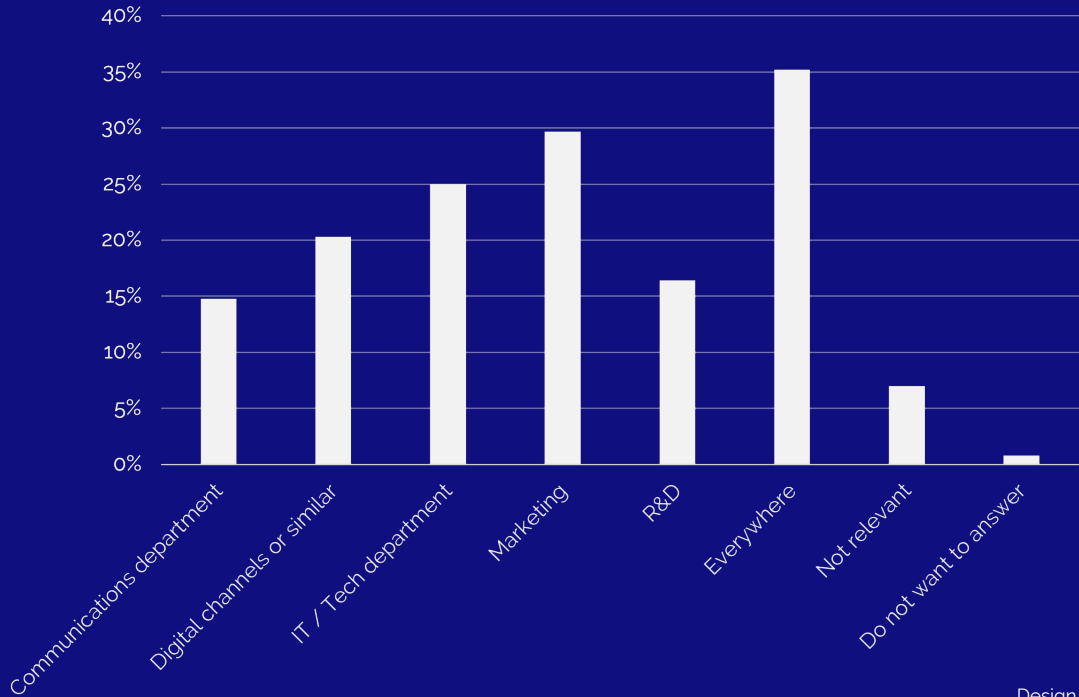
## Maturity of Design in your Organization



We were interested in seeing how design-mature designers rate their organizations – going from unrecognized to embedded. A note: quite a few of the respondents came from design agencies, which clearly brings the level of "embedded" up.

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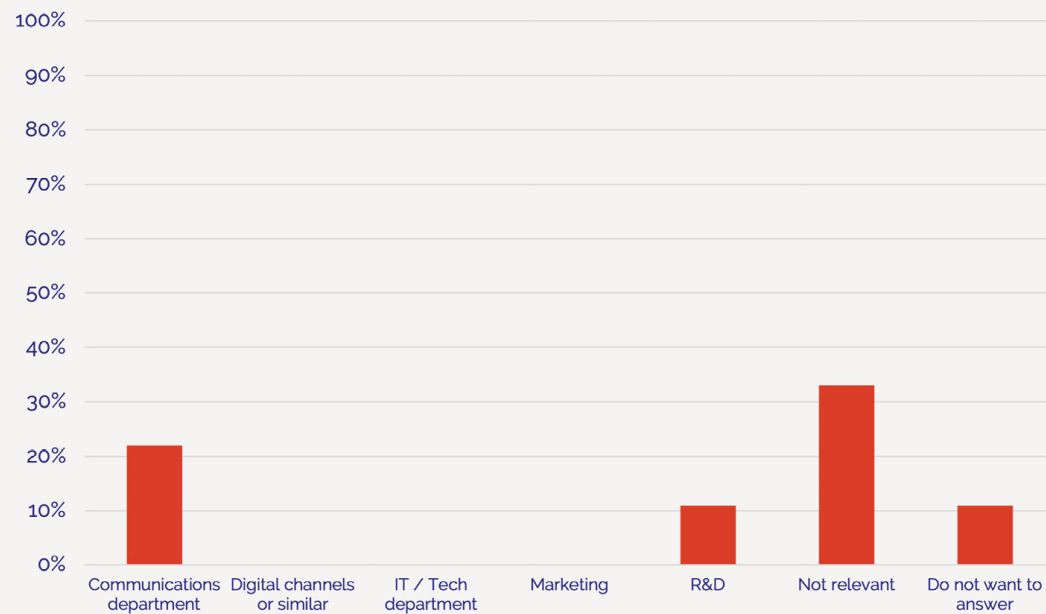
# Where is design located in your organisation?



After that, we mapped where the design was located in the organizations.

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## Design's maturity level is: Unrecognized

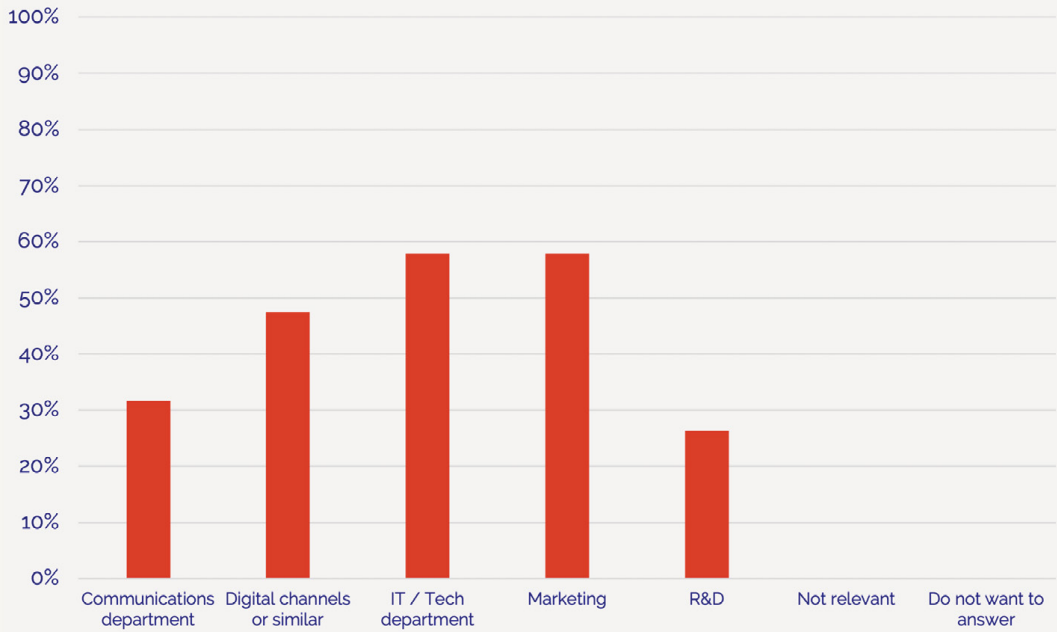


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Then we thought it could be interesting to see the extent of design and how design spreads throughout the organizations moving from organizations where design is unrecognized to those where it is embedded.

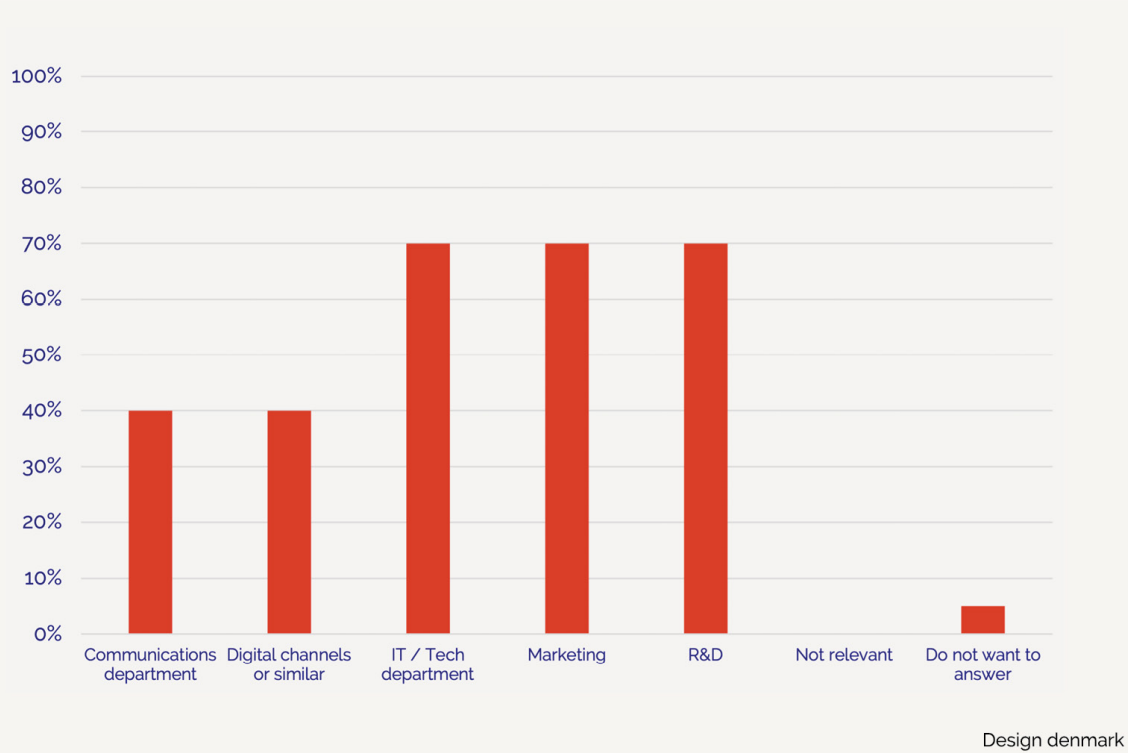
Although a bit speculative, the data suggests that it often starts in communications or R&D, but as the organization matures, it quickly spreads through IT, digital channels, and Marketing.

# Design's maturity level is: Interested



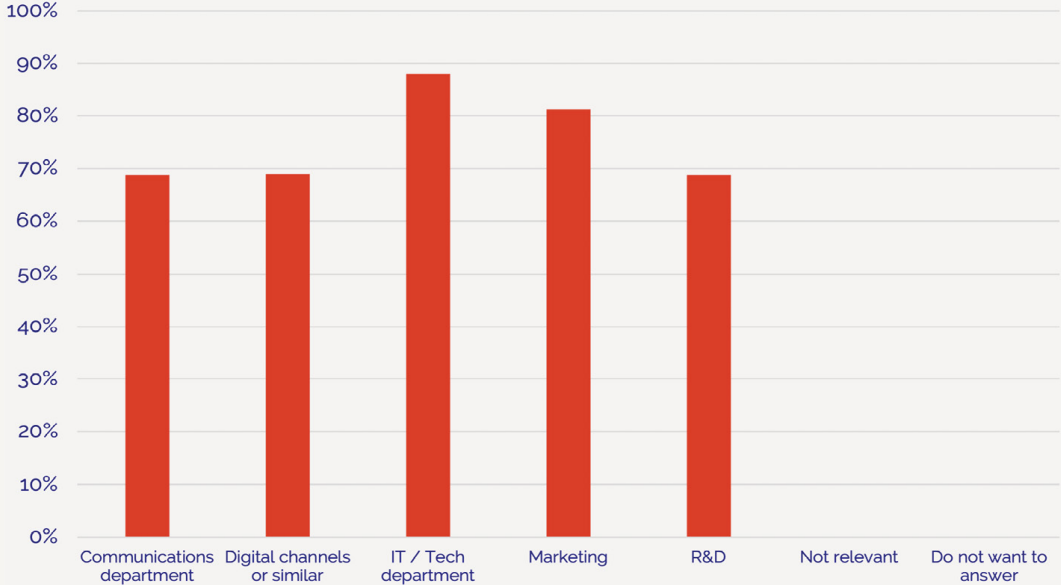
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# Design's maturity level is: Committed



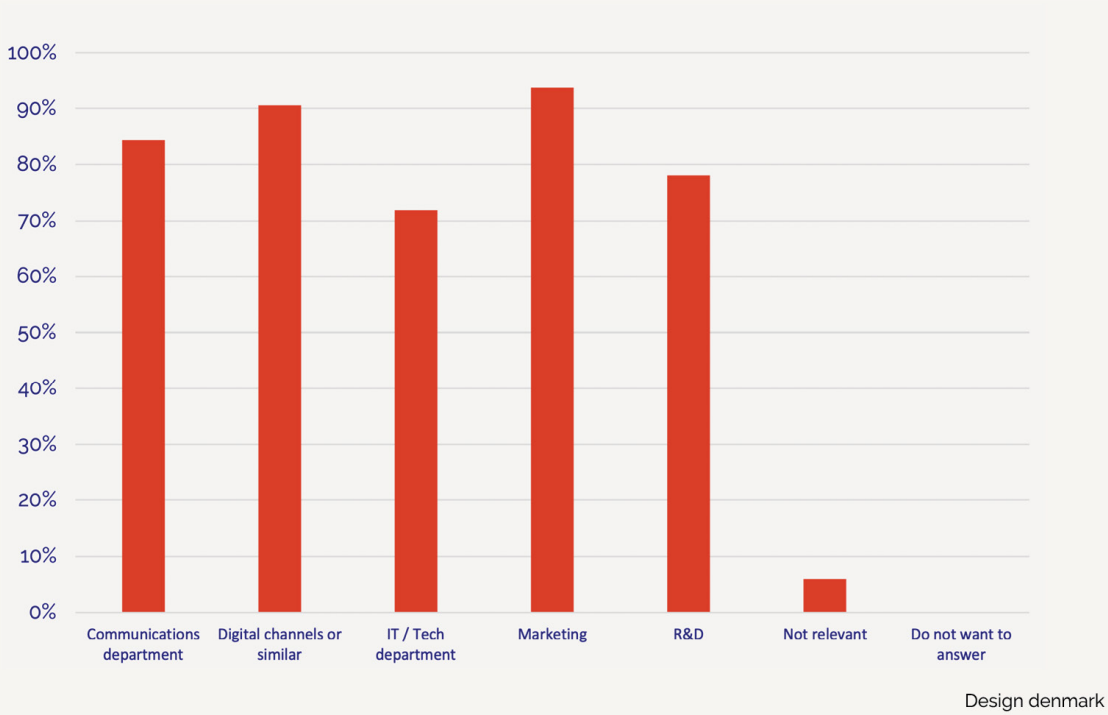


# Design's maturity level is: Engaged

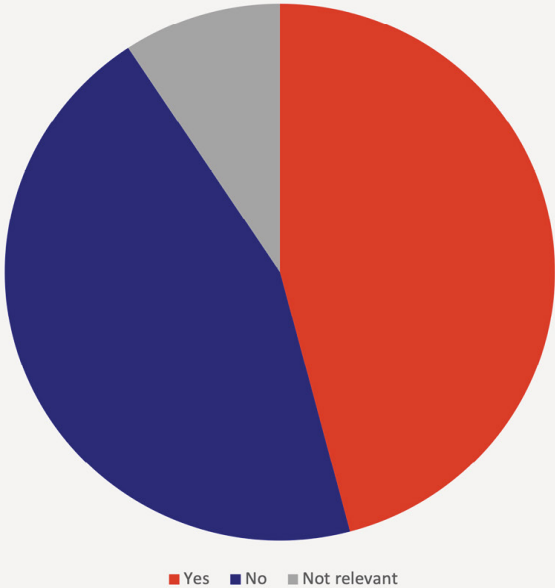


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# Design's maturity level is: Embedded

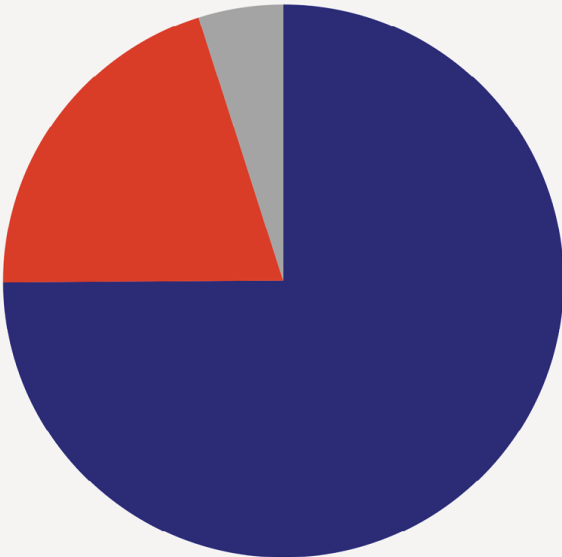


# Is there a clear design process in your organization?



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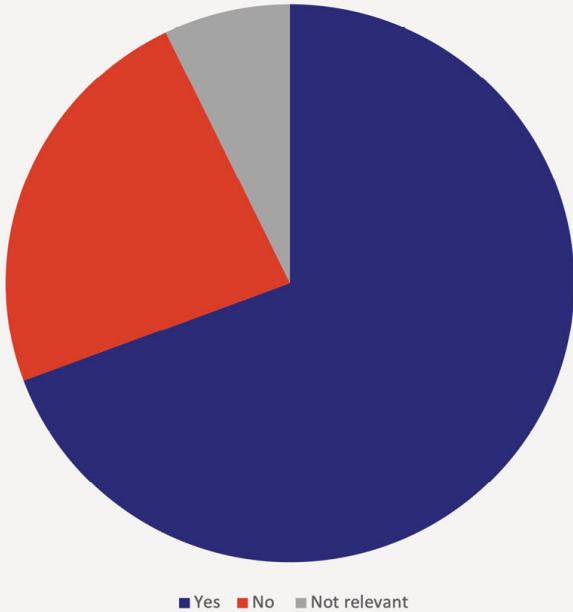
Is it clear in your organization who is responsible for design?



■ Yes ■ No ■ Not relevant

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# Do you have ownership over the design questions in your organization?



Finally, we asked about ownership and responsibility for design in the organization.

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# State of design

## Results 5 & 6:

### Your Workforce + The Big Picture

## State of design Results 5 & 6: Your Workforce + The Big Picture

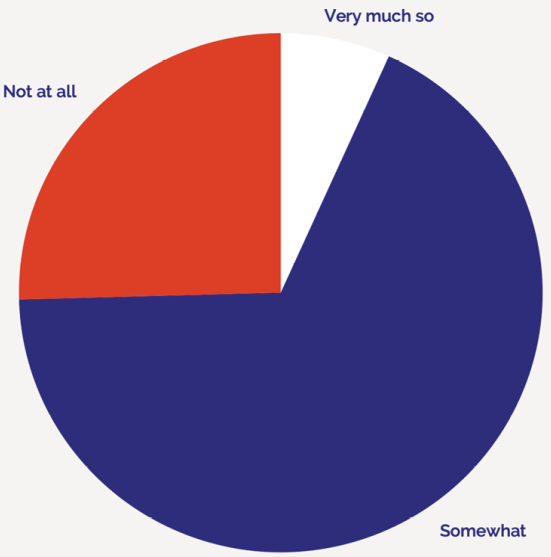
In the two final chapters of our State of Design Survey, we ask for a point of view from designers with employee responsibility – how they see the state of design and the role they play in it – before we, in the final part, turn towards the questions and challenges much bigger than the individual.

When asking the team leaders about the upsides and downsides of the position as a middle manager in the design industry, it told the tale of a gratifying, yet at the same time very taxing and challenging job. On the plus side, words like "rewarding", "inspiring others", "helping", and doing "strategic work" was mentioned repeatedly. On the downside were all the admin work, the lack of time, the difficulty of managing people, and the absence of deep design work.

On average, the team leaders/owners/Creative Directors etc., are leading 21 people. The number is, however, hiding a considerable difference – spanning from just a few to several hundred.

We also asked the designers with employee responsibility whether there are enough qualified designers on the market, expecting a resounding "no!" since the discrepancy between a somewhat high level of unemployed combined with a high demand for designers has been the main storyline from several design agencies as well as organizations like the Danish Chambers of Commerce. However, looking at the numbers, they don't really support such a tale.

# Are there enough qualified designers?



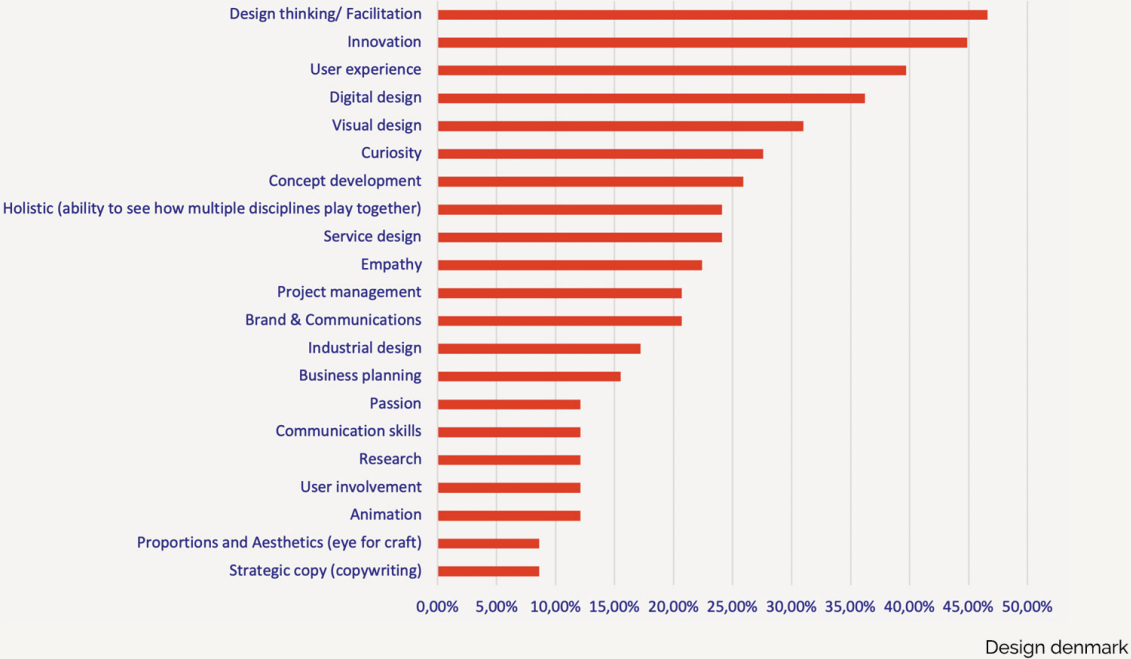
When we asked about what skills the employers were looking for in employees, Design Thinking & Facilitation, Innovation and UX ranked highest among a list of predominantly broad and soft skills.

We see little difference in what agencies and self-employed look for – only a slight increase in qualities like understanding "business planning" and "project management" from design agencies. In contrast, self-employed leaned a bit towards the soft categories like "curiosity" and "empathy".

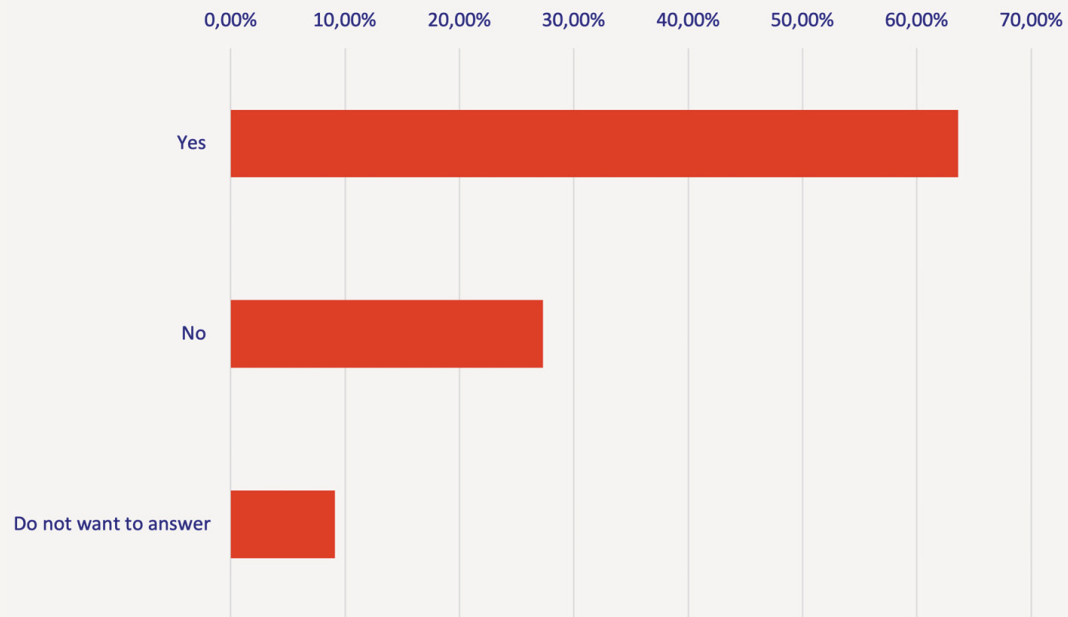
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# What skills are you looking for in a designer?



## Do you offer further training for your employees?



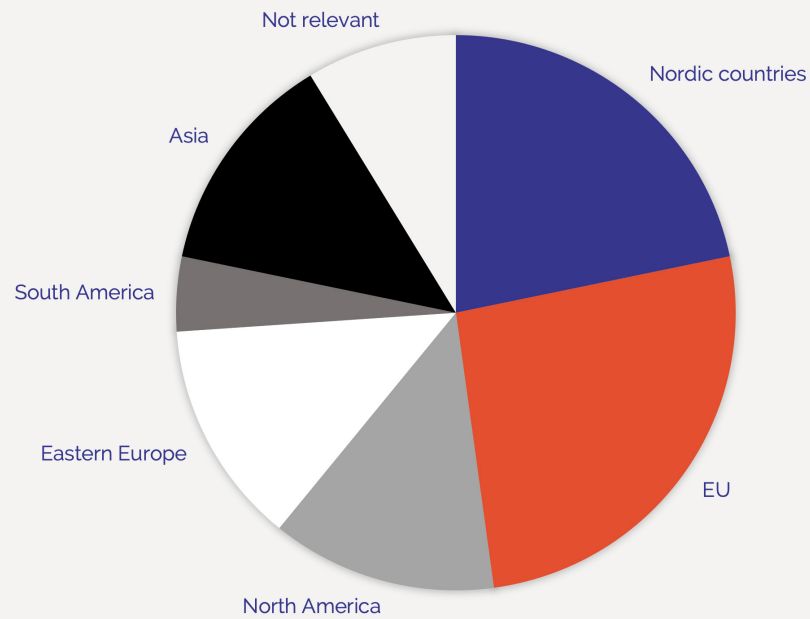
Around 2/3 said they offer further training for their employees. But when we – in Chapter 3 – asked the designers where they learned new things, the numbers seemed somewhat lower, indicating that further training might not be for all of the workforce.

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How many internationals are you employing?

**29,8%**

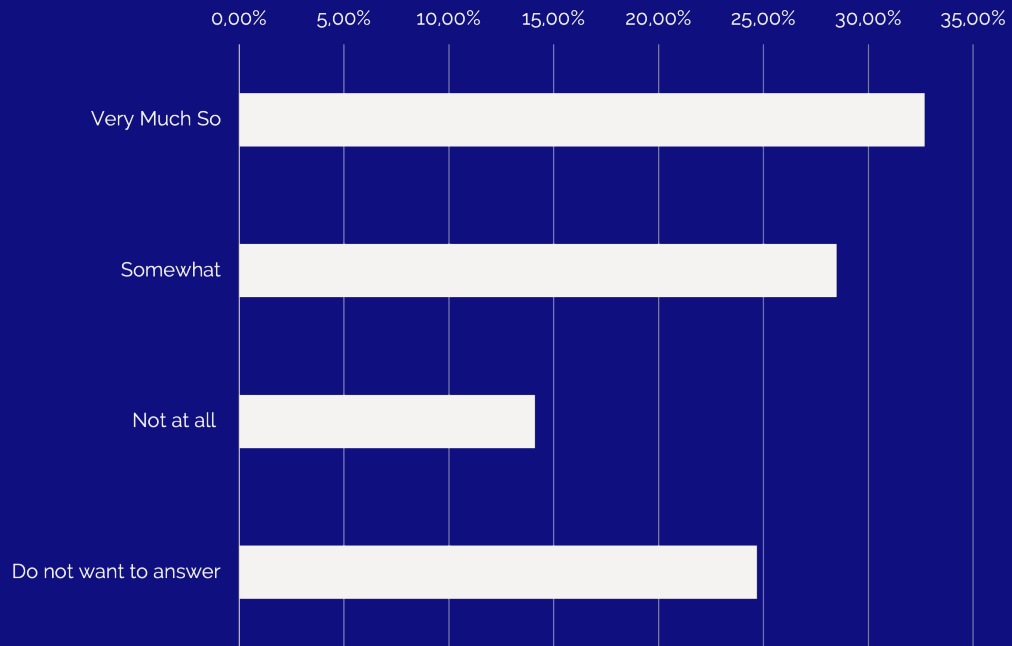
## Where does your internationals come from?



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Many internationals come from our neighbouring countries, but the overall picture is clear: Danish design is genuinely shaped by people coming from all parts of the world.

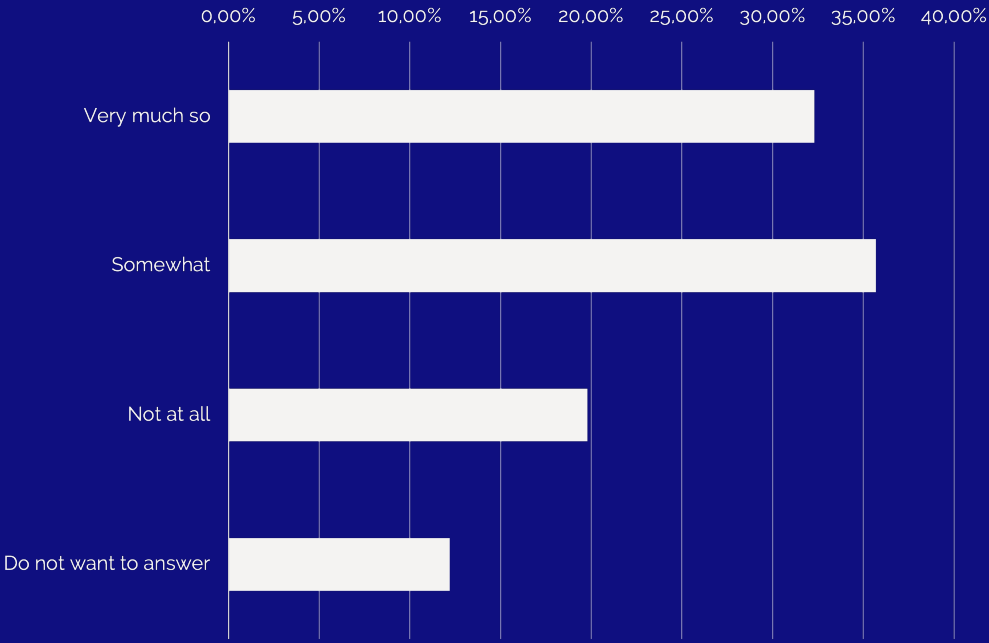
## Is free pitching a problem?



Free pitching seems to be a huge problem - not the least reflected in the huge "do not want to answer" number.

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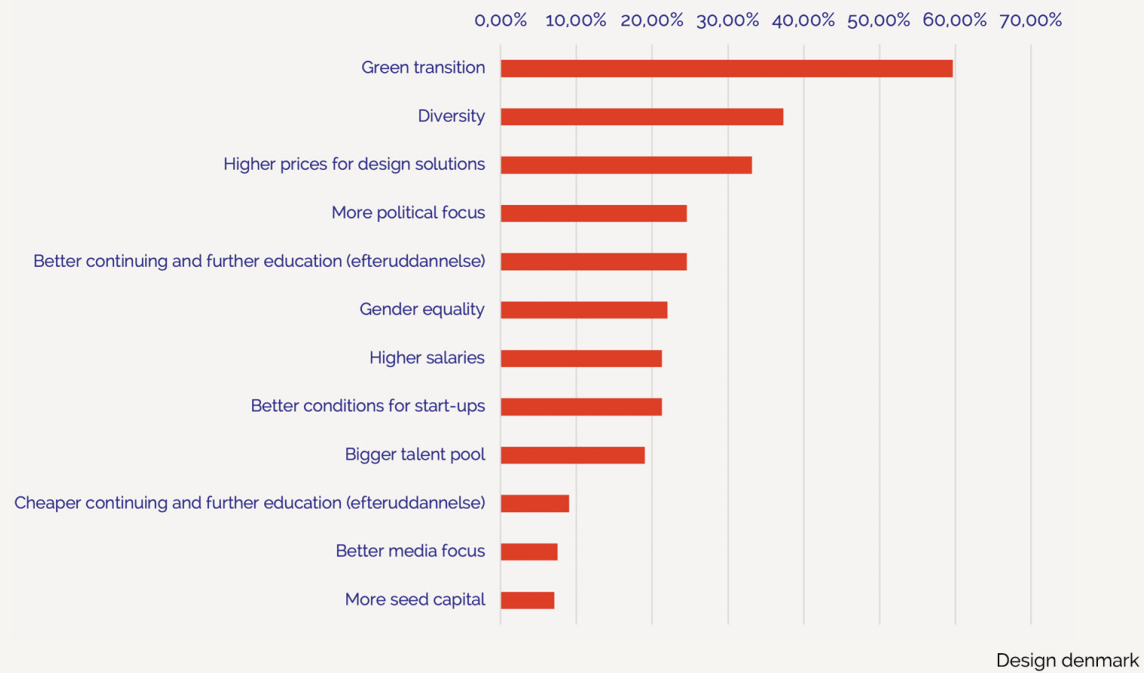
# Are unpaid internships a problem?



Also, when it comes to unpaid internships, there is consensus that this poses a problem in the industry – this time with fewer respondents refusing to answer the question.

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## What is the most important agenda?



As the final graph in our State of Design Survey, we asked about the most important agendas for designers.

We think the numbers and topics speak for themselves.

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