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## YOUNG PROFESSIONALS IN A CORPORATE ENVIRONMENT: HOW CONTROL AFFECTS THEIR CREATIVITY AND MOTIVATION\*

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**Abstract.** The present study investigates young professionals' perceptions of the balance between control and creativity in the workplace. The study focuses on the relationship between control and creativity for young professionals. At the same time, the study explores how different management approaches influence creativity, motivation and innovation potential in young employees. One of the leading concerns with deeper digitalisation is increased control over work processes. Therefore, the opinion of young professionals who start and develop their professional experience in a highly digital environment is critical, especially regarding creativity, as they are the natural carriers of innovative thinking. The survey (n=257) results reveal a deep tension between control and creativity in the modern workplace. Most young professionals feel that control dominates their organisations – bureaucracy, hierarchy, lack of trust and limited access to real implementation of ideas. Only a small proportion – around 15-25% – feel they have the freedom and support to create entirely. According to young professionals, the main obstacles to creativity are strict control and bureaucracy (in the first place), followed by insufficient trust from management, lack of implementation of ideas, expectations for performance, lack of initiative, exhaustion and lack of communication within the team. At the same time, factors that most strongly stimulate creativity are freedom of action and the opportunity to experiment; a supportive, open environment to ideas; challenging tasks and flexibility in work; participation in team and cross-functional collaboration.

**Keywords:** Creativity; Control; Digitalization; Human Resource Management

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### 1. Introduction

The modern business world is highly dynamic and rapidly changing according to customers' requirements and competitors' behaviour. At the same time, with the advancement of technology and the introduction of modern management tools based on artificial intelligence, the dynamics of business life are becoming even stronger. All this also predetermines the new challenges that employees have to deal with. The requirements that new employees have to meet are becoming increasingly greater, in line with the expectations of employers.

In this context, an organisation's creativity (and that of its employees) should not be considered as added value but a basic resource for innovation and adaptation to sustainable development.

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Control is usually associated with clear frameworks, measurable goals, and strict rules that lead to the completion of tasks. Creativity requires spaces for experimentation, risk-taking, and breaking established boundaries. This conceptual opposition creates a severe tension between the demands for efficiency and the need for freedom to generate new ideas. The question we need to answer is whether these two aspects – control and creativity – can coexist in the same work environment and under what conditions they complement each other rather than suppress each other.

Due to their unique expectations and attitudes, young professionals are particularly sensitive to management styles. They often resist hierarchical and authoritarian structures, preferring flexibility and participation in decision-making. These professionals seek opportunities to express their creativity and autonomy in the work process, which makes traditional management practices ineffective and unsuitable for their needs. Therefore, what are the effects of managerial control on their creativity and what strategies can be implemented to balance the need for control with the freedom to innovate is a question that requires further research.

This study aims to investigate how different forms of control affect the creativity of young professionals, focusing on the dynamics between formal and informal management mechanisms. Factors such as motivation, initiative, and opportunities for creativity and innovation will be analysed, and good practices that combine effective control with creative freedom will be identified. This study will contribute to expanding the knowledge on the effective management of young talents in the modern organisational environment.

## 2. Literature review

In a rapidly evolving and demands-driven workplace, the balance of control mechanisms to inspire creativity and motivation has become a matter of interest and concern, especially for young workers. One of the opportunities the workforce brings to an organisation is the balance between creativity and control needed to get results. The interplay between these two areas has resulted in much research highlighting the potential positive and negative influences of control systems on creative output and employee motivation.

Ásványi (2022) analyses the legislative accomplishments in Europe and Hungary related to mechanisms for controlling labour within organisations and the constraints these laws impose on managerial authority, particularly concerning employee privacy. Wnuczak and Osichuk (2020) examine the impact of management control systems and the educational qualifications of managers on the performance of public cultural institutions in economies that have undergone a transition. Coelho et al. (2021) simultaneously studied the influence of various control mechanisms and management strategies on service employees' creativity, employing symmetric and asymmetric modelling techniques. Phan, Baird, Bhuyan and Tung (2024) explore the connections among management control systems, organisational capabilities, and performance, emphasising the significance of job autonomy in influencing employee results. Tang et al. (2017) investigate the impact of high-performance work systems on employee creativity, highlighting the intermediary functions of perceived organisational support and decentralised management. Their research aligns with findings made by Cai et al. (2024), who explore the impact of employee creativity on leader-empowering behaviours, taking into account the moderating role of supervisor-subordinate relationships and their similarities. Volery and Tarabashkina (2021) study the influence of organisational support and employee creativity on innovative work behaviour, emphasising the impact of work centrality. Almost the same idea is shared by Alharbi, Jamil, Mahmood and Shaharoun (2019). They analyse the relationship between organisational culture and management control systems and their combined effect on promoting innovation within the organisation.

On the other hand, Biswas and Akroyd (2022) investigate the design and application of management control systems in the context of strategic change processes, specifically focusing on the shift from closed to open innovation. Kaveski and Beuren (2020) also studied managerial control systems, but their research reveals how these systems impact job performance, with individual creativity as a mediating factor. Barros and Ferreira (2023) contribute to this topic, further developing the relationship between MCS and innovation in enterprises.

A study developed by Klementová & Stoková (2020) explores the psychological influences and emotions experienced by employees when controlling practices are introduced in organisations. They pinpoint obstacles and suggest approaches to improve acceptance. Miao, Fayzullaev and Dedahanov (2020) examine the influence of management traits on employee creativity, emphasising the mediating effect of job satisfaction. Bollinger (2020) also analysed the managers and their control. Still, the scholar focuses on the impact of various managerial control methods and practices on creativity during innovation processes. Wang, Yang & Zhang (2021) also explore the relationship between control and innovation. They study the influence of diverse organisational control mechanisms on different types of innovation, highlighting the need for a balance between exploration and exploitation.

The findings of the study by Du, Li and Zhang (2018) indicate a positive association between job control and employee creativity, which, according to the authors, is mediated by creative self-efficacy. Furthermore, a promotion focus influences the indirect effect of job control on employee creativity through creative self-efficacy; specifically, the link between job control and creative self-efficacy is more pronounced for employees with a high promotion focus (ibid). Su, Baird and Tung (2022) focus on the relationship between creativity and collegiality. Their research investigates the impact of management control systems on employee creativity and collaboration and how these behaviours mediate the connection between control mechanisms and organisational performance. Almost in the same line comes the research of Fraihat et al. (2023), who pay attention to the moderating role of communication in employee individual creativity and organisational structure. Egwakhe, Omonijo, Akande and Umukoro (2022) highlight the role of organisational culture and its influences on the relationship between corporate entrepreneurship and organisational performance. They report a moderating effect of this impact.

Interesting research in a more recent context is proposed by Juan, Li, Zhang and Gong (2024), who analyse the circumstances that influence how electronic monitoring impacts employee creativity, emphasising the importance of autonomous and controlled motivation. Kivrak, Arslan and Yorno (2025) examine how job autonomy fosters creativity through perceived support from supervisors. They also investigate the moderating effect of job difficulty on the connection between job autonomy and employee creativity. After comprehensive research, Chan and Chu (2024) admit that high-performance work systems at the organisational level boost employee creative engagement by enhancing their overall well-being. Concurrently, scholars conclude that employee mindfulness contributes to heightened creative engagement by improving their work well-being. Marler (2024) describes the challenges and opportunities of using artificial intelligence and algorithms in management and decision-making processes in a more sustainable organisational manner. Aguinis, Beltran and Cope (2024) add to this discussion further development by exploring the idea of using generative AI as an HRM assistant.

Kostev and Anguelov (2024) present a thought-provoking study devoted to employees' perception of the level of digitalisation of Bulgarian conditions. Stoyanova and Stoyanov (2024) comprehensively explore the digitalisation of Higher Education Institutions to secure their competitiveness and increase the quality of the educational process through innovative and creative digital tools. Dimcheva and Stoyanov (2023) examine in depth the introduction of AI in the decision-making process of companies, including and for HRM purposes. Temelkova (2018) explores, analyses, and integrates the competencies required for effective digital leadership to manage collaborative network teams' interconnected, advanced technological landscape. Krumova, Dimitrov and Dimitrova (2023) focus on the relationship between recruitment strategies and employee performance as a specific aspect of the ICT sector. On the other hand, Anguelov (2023) considers the tools and applications provided by different digital tools as an entirely new level of human resource management development, with all accompanying challenges, opportunities and limits.

### 3. Methodology of the research

The present study investigates young professionals' perceptions of the balance between control and creativity in the workplace. The study focuses on the relationship between control and creativity for young professionals. At the same time, the study explores how different management approaches influence creativity, motivation and innovation potential in young employees. The study comes as a logical step in implementing the uni-

versity-funded project, devoted to developing new strategies for further digitalisation of Human Resource Management. One of the leading concerns with deeper digitalisation is increased control over work processes. Therefore, the opinion of young professionals who start and develop their professional experience in a highly digital environment is critical, especially regarding creativity, as they are the natural carriers of innovative thinking.

In pursuit of the main objective of this study, the following two hypotheses were defined:

**Hypothesis 1:** Excessive control negatively impacts the creativity of young employees despite their need for mentorship and intensive collaboration with their immediate supervisors.

**Hypothesis 2:** The creativity of young employees is positively influenced by the perceived support they receive from their managers.

The survey was developed through a cascade approach, combining a theoretical review of the existing literature on organisational behaviour, creativity and leadership and qualitative interviews with eight young professionals from different sectors (technology, marketing, education, finance). The interviews helped to identify key themes and common challenges, which were subsequently formulated as survey questions.

The final survey contained 20 questions, structured in three main sections:

- I section: Demographic and Professional Profile
- II section: Perceptions of control and creativity in the workplace;
- III section: Preferences regarding organisational climate and culture.

The questionnaire includes predominantly closed formats – with multiple-choice answers and Likert scales, allowing for both quantitative. The very last question is open and requires qualitative analysis.

The survey was conducted between June and September 2024 in electronic format via the Google Forms and Teams platform. Its distribution was carried out through university and youth communities, internal networks of organisations that voluntarily participated in the study, and individual efforts of the project team. The sample includes 257 respondents, 97% of which meet the criterion of "young professionals" – i.e. individuals between the ages of 18 and 35, with at least 1 year of work experience. 3% of responders are 36+ age. The sample is not strictly representative, but it offers good diversification by sectors, including IT, marketing, administration, education, finance, and design. Participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and the confidentiality of the information provided. The collected data were processed using Excel. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, averages) were used for the quantitative and open-ended questions – qualitative analysis through thematic coding.

#### 4. Analysis and discussion of the collected data

##### *Demographic and professional profiles of respondents*

The largest share of respondents work in the technology and software sector – 29%, followed by marketing and advertising – 21% and art and design – 14%. Combined, 64% of respondents are in fields that require a high degree of creativity and innovation. Finance (9%) and healthcare (7%), which are traditionally associated with stricter regulation and control, are less represented. The received questionnaires suggest that most participants work in industries where creativity is essential, but there is also pressure for structure and results. This makes the question of the balance between control and creativity particularly relevant. Basic data forming demographic and professional profiles of our responders are presented in Table 1.

The leading age group is 25–30 years old (47%), followed by 31–35 years old – 28%, with the age group of 18–24 years in third place – 22%. Only 3% of respondents are over 36 years old. Based on the data obtained, it can be concluded that the sample is indeed focused on young professionals in an active phase of career development. They probably have strong aspirations for expression, innovation, and personal value but are still adapting to organisational norms and control.

Regarding professional experience, 34% have between 1–3 years of experience, and 37% of respondents indicate experience between 4–6 years. Only 8% are new to the profession, and 21% have over 6 years of experi-

ence. Based on these data, it can be commented that most respondents are professionally mature but not for too long in high management roles. They have enough experience to compare different work models and feel control's effect on their productivity and personal creativity.

**Table 1.** Demographic and professional profile of respondents.

| Industry sector                     |     | Age                                |     | Professional experience |     |
|-------------------------------------|-----|------------------------------------|-----|-------------------------|-----|
| Technologies and software           | 29% | 18-24                              | 22% | Less than 1 year        | 8%  |
| Marketing and Advertising           | 21% | 25-30                              | 47% | 1-3 years               | 34% |
| Arts and Design                     | 14% | 31-35                              | 28% | 4-6 years               | 37% |
| Education                           | 11% | 36+                                | 3%  | Over 6 years            | 21% |
| Accounting and Finance              | 9%  |                                    |     |                         |     |
| Healthcare                          | 7%  |                                    |     |                         |     |
| Other                               | 9%  |                                    |     |                         |     |
| Work position/ Hierarchy level      |     | Work style                         |     |                         |     |
| Internship position\ Start position | 14% | Individually                       |     | 9%                      |     |
| Specialist                          | 52% | Mainly Individually                |     | 18%                     |     |
| Team leader/ manager                | 18% | Hybrid (Individually and in teams) |     | 42%                     |     |
| Middle-level manager                | 11% | Mainly in teams                    |     | 22%                     |     |
| Other                               | 5%  | Entirely in teams                  |     | 9%                      |     |

Source: own research; n=257, results in %

Regarding job positions, most respondents (52%) indicate they are in a "specialist" position – an executive profile with some self-management, while 18% state they are team leaders. 11% of respondents are in managerial positions, and only 14% are trainees or newly hired. Most respondents are not senior management but are often subject to management control. This makes them ideal for assessing how control affects their motivation and creative potential "from within".

Regarding individual and teamwork, the representatives of the largest group here, 42%, state that they work in a mixed model, while 22% – mainly in a team, and 18% – mainly independently. Only 9% work entirely in a team or entirely independently. These data allow us to conclude that a hybrid work style prevails, which requires a balance between personal autonomy and collective responsibility. This places additional demands on how control is exercised – it must be flexible and adaptable to the environment. A summary of key characteristics of the demographic and professional profile of respondents is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** The main profile of responders

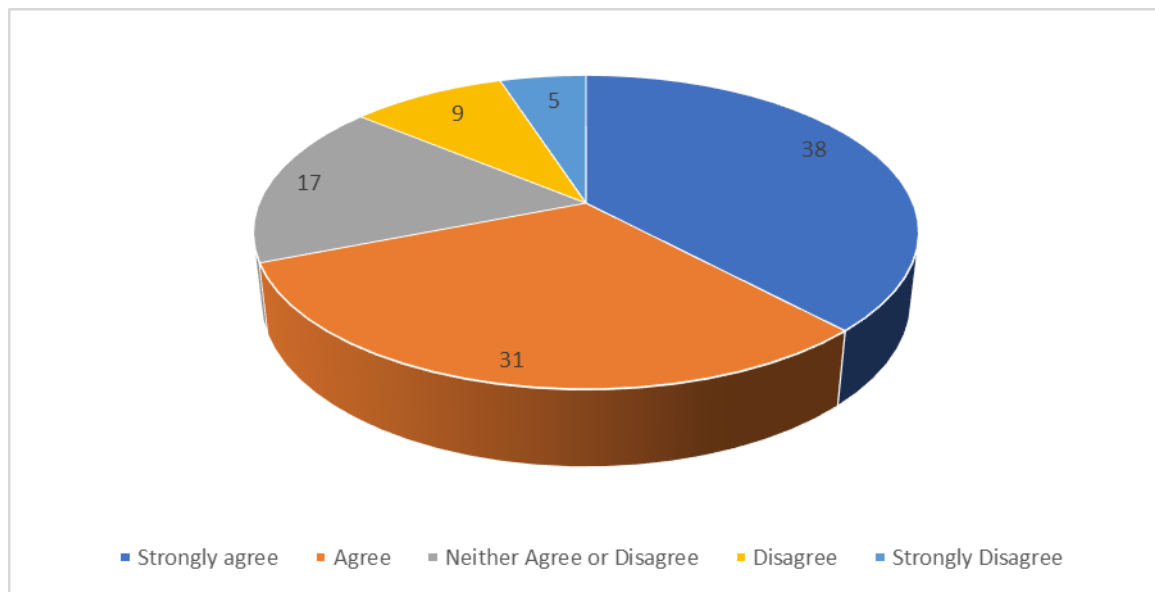
| Factor        | The main profile of respondents                                 |
|---------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Industry      | Creative and innovative sectors (Technologies, Marketing, Arts) |
| Age           | Young professionals (25-35 years old)                           |
| Experience    | 1-6 years, developing professionals                             |
| Job Position  | Mainly specialists and team leaders                             |
| Working style | Hybrid (Individual + teamwork)                                  |

Source: own research

### **Control and creativity for young professionals**

The next part of the questionnaire is dedicated to the relationship between control and creativity, according to the judgment and personal opinion of the young specialists. The first question in this part of the questionnaire is: Do you think a high level of control at work limits creativity? Respondents could choose from pre-set answers using a five-point Likert scale of agreement or disagreement. Results are presented in Figure 1.

The data clearly shows that a large part - 69% of the respondents agree that control limits creativity, and 17% are neutral. Only 14% disagree with this statement. In this sense, the feeling that control in the work environment does not support but instead blocks creative thinking prevails. At the same time, control may be perceived as a form of micromanagement or a lack of trust, suppressing initiative among young specialists. Neutral and disagreeing respondents probably work in better-structured environments, where control is perceived as a framework rather than a limitation. This should also not be underestimated, as it plays a significant role in forming work skills, especially in the first years of professional development.



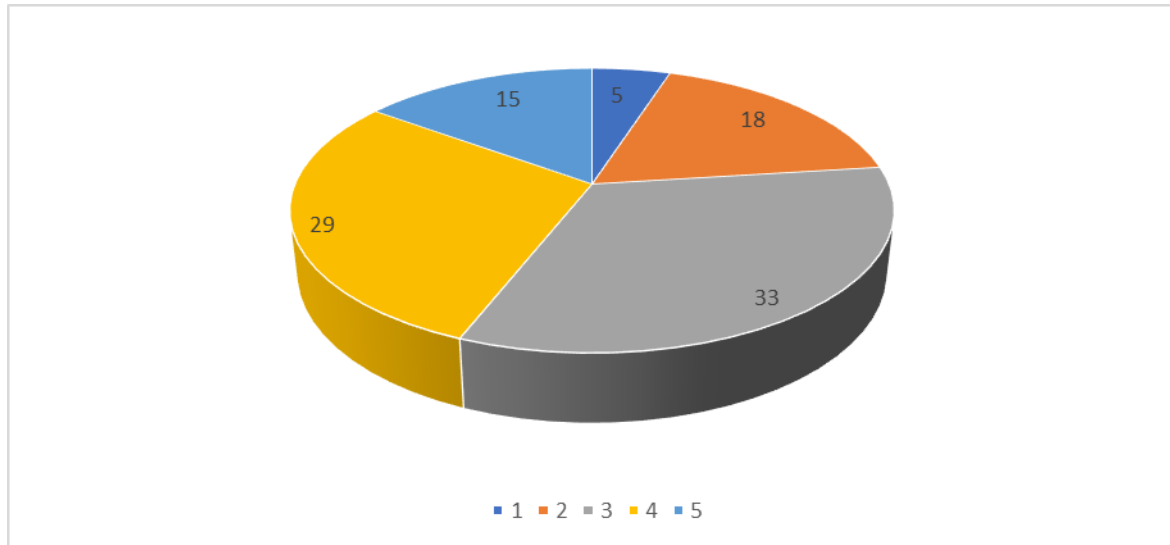
**Figure 1.** Responds collected to the question: Do you think a high level of control at work limits creativity? (in %, the total number of 257 answers)

The next question is, "How would you rate the level of control in your job?" And the responders are requested to assess from 1 to 5, where (1 = no control, 5 = extremely strict control). Results are visualised in Figure 2.

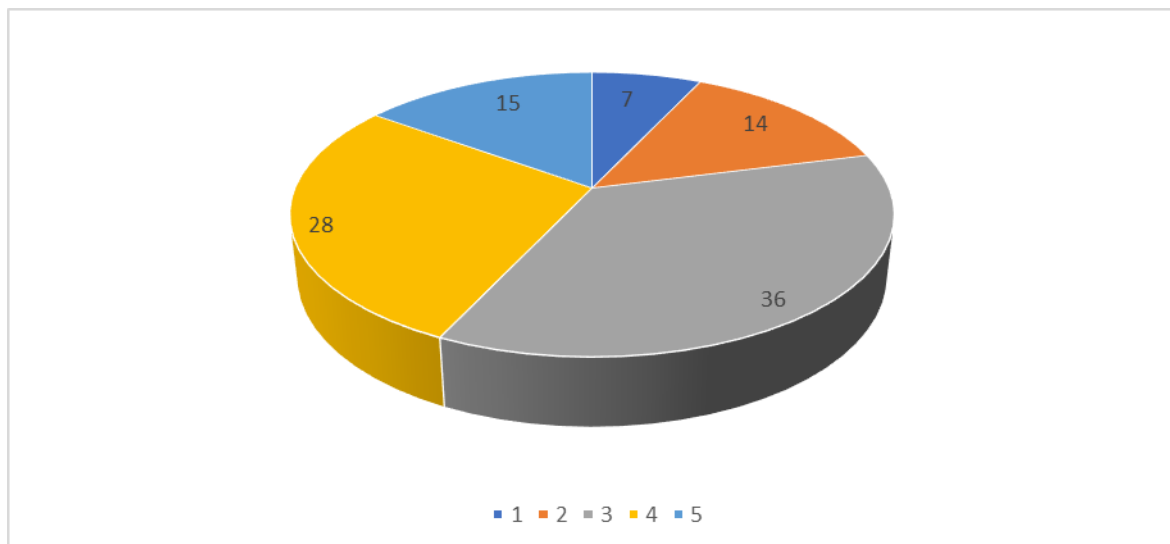
Most responses here are concentrated at scores 3 (33%) and 4 (29%), indicating a moderate to high level of control. A total of 44% are between 4 and 5 – claiming to feel a significant amount of control. Only 5% of respondents think almost complete freedom (score 1). Although most respondents are in creative industries, control is present and tangible, according to their assessment. High levels of control can be organisational (procedures, deadlines) and socio-psychological (expectations, reports, approvals). The results of this question support the data accumulated from the previous question: perceived control is considered a direct limiter of creativity.

The next question is, "How would you rate the opportunity to express creativity in your work?" respondents are again asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = no opportunity and 5 = complete freedom (Figure 3).

Like the previous question, the most frequently given ratings are 3 (36%) and 4 (28%). At the same time, 43% claim they have high or complete freedom (rating 4 and 5), while 21% answer with 1 or 2 – they feel limited creative freedom. Although there is no drastic shortage of creative freedom, it is lower than expected for industries with high innovation. At the same time, it should be noted that our respondents are young professionals, and these data can be interpreted in several directions – first, the level of sensitivity and assessment of young professionals may be excessively high, leading to a discrepancy between personal and real organisational freedom in creativity. On the other hand, it is also possible that, given their less life and professional experience, young professionals are sometimes subjected to higher levels of control, which is not necessarily always perceived negatively. A significant proportion of respondents stated that they felt medium or limited freedom, corresponding with the previous answers about strong control. These results show that the balance between control and freedom is not optimal for a significant proportion of respondents.



**Figure 2.** Responds collected to the question: How would you rate the level of control in your job?  
(in %, the total number of 257 answers)



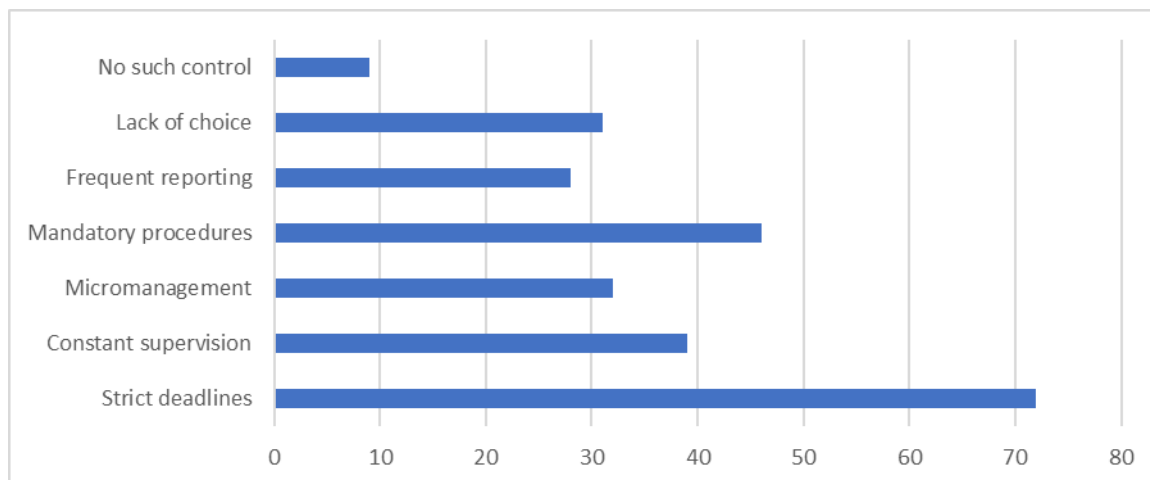
**Figure 3.** Responds collected: How would you rate the opportunity to express creativity in your work?  
(in %, the total number of 257 answers)

"Which forms of control do you feel most strongly in your daily work?" is the question in the questionnaire, with respondents being asked to select the top three answers according to their impressions of their work (Figure 4).

Strict deadlines are among the most common forms of control – they are mentioned by 72%. In second place are mandatory procedures but with a significantly smaller share – 46%. Next in importance are micromanagement – 39%; Constant supervision – 32% and lack of choice – 31%.

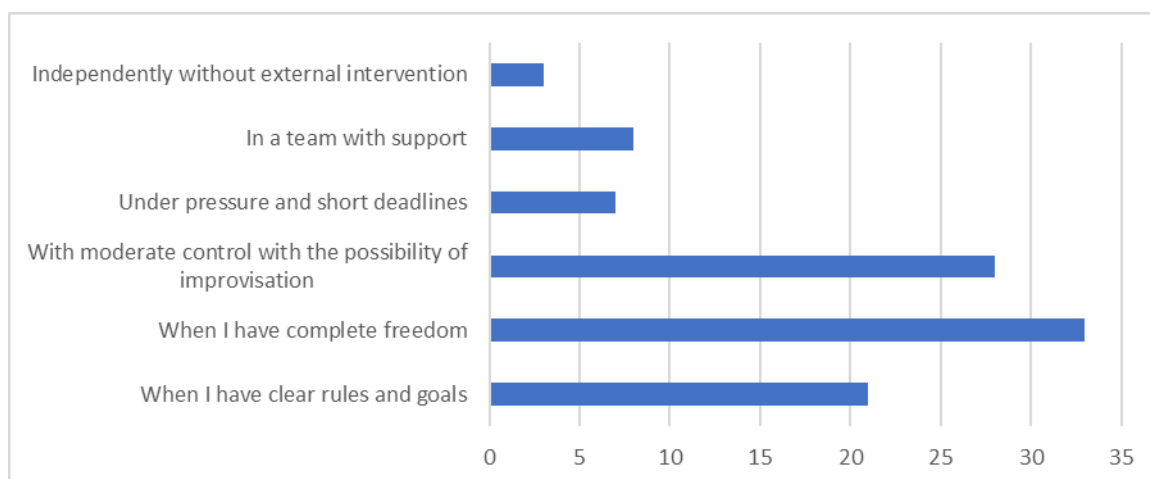
One of the direct conclusions that emerges from the answers to this question is that control is not only formal but multifaceted and complex. Its formality is cut through deadlines and procedures. At the same time, however, control is also personal – it is expressed through micromanagement and lack of choice. The least frequently mentioned answer is "No such control" – only 9% of respondents. This means that almost everyone

feels some form of pressure or supervision. The feeling of lack of choice and freedom is particularly worrying, as this is a direct barrier to creative behaviour and creative expression.



**Figure 4.** Responds collected to the question: Which forms of control do you feel most strongly in your daily work? (in %, the total number of 257 answers)

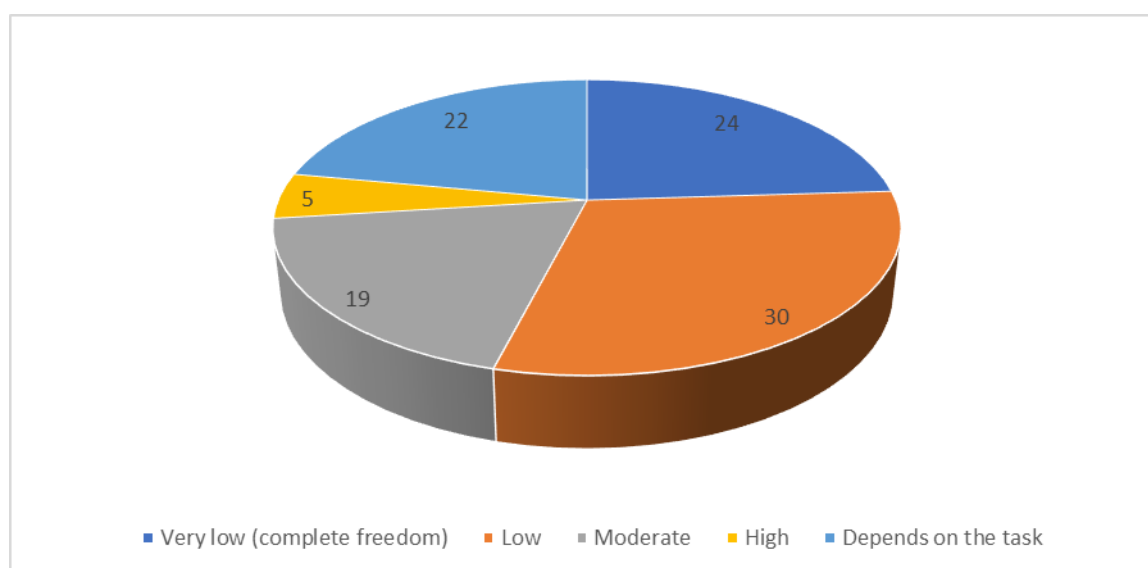
The purpose of the next question is to understand the environment that is most conducive to creativity. It reads as follows: In what environment are you most creative? (Figure 5). The results of this question are not surprising (at least about the first choice), although their proportionality could have been more expressive. The leading choice is Complete Freedom, which is indicated by 33% of respondents, followed by Moderate Control – 28% and Clear Rules and Goals – 21%. Only 7% of respondents state that they are most creative "under pressure". Interesting results were obtained regarding team creativity - only 8% of respondents say they are most creative in a team, and another 3% – state that they are most creative independently. Based on these results, we can make several interesting observations. Most participants feel most creative with complete freedom, but nearly 50% indicate options with clear but not intrusive frameworks. This suggests that young professionals do not entirely reject structure but prefer it to be flexible and inspiring, not restrictive. Creative potential depends on autonomy, even when goals and expectations exist. At the same time, the levels of team and individual creativity are surprisingly low, especially considering the professional and demographic profiles of the respondents. The other answers were preferred due to their greater clarity and specificity.



**Figure 5.** Responds collected to the question: In what environment are you most creative? (in %, the total number of 257 answers)

The following question is, "What level of control is best for your creativity?" (Figure 6). The overall percentage of responses in favour of low and very low levels of control reaches 54%, clearly showing a preference for a more autonomous environment, especially for tasks requiring creativity. Only 5% of respondents find high control favourable – an indicator that the directive style does not support the creative process in young professionals. The share of those who answered "It depends on the task" (22%) is interesting, which speaks of contextual thinking. Some participants realise the need for different levels of structure depending on the nature of the task (e.g., creative vs. executive).

The conclusion that can be drawn based on the results of this question is that freedom – but in limitations – turns out to be a key element for creativity, while firm control is rather demotivating. In this line of consideration, management should adapt to the situation and the nature of the team rather than being based on a universal approach.

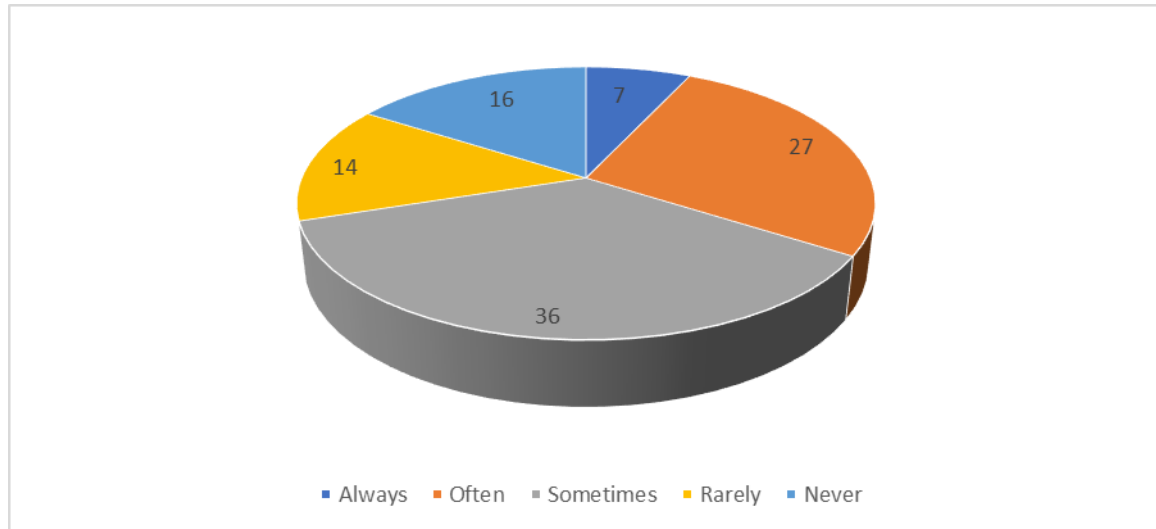


**Figure 6.** Responds collected to the question: What level of control is best for your creativity?  
(in %, the total number of 257 answers)

"Do you feel that your ideas are taken seriously by management?" is the following question (Figure 7). Only 34% of respondents (those who chose answers always + often) feel that their ideas are a priority for management. This is a worryingly low share, given that creativity depends on the perception of one's value within the organisation.

The "sometimes" group (which accumulates the most significant percentage of preferences on this question) shows uncertainty and hesitation – that is, ideas are heard but not always considered. This creates a feeling of inconsistent support and can result in distrust of one's abilities, especially when you are a young specialist still seeking your development.

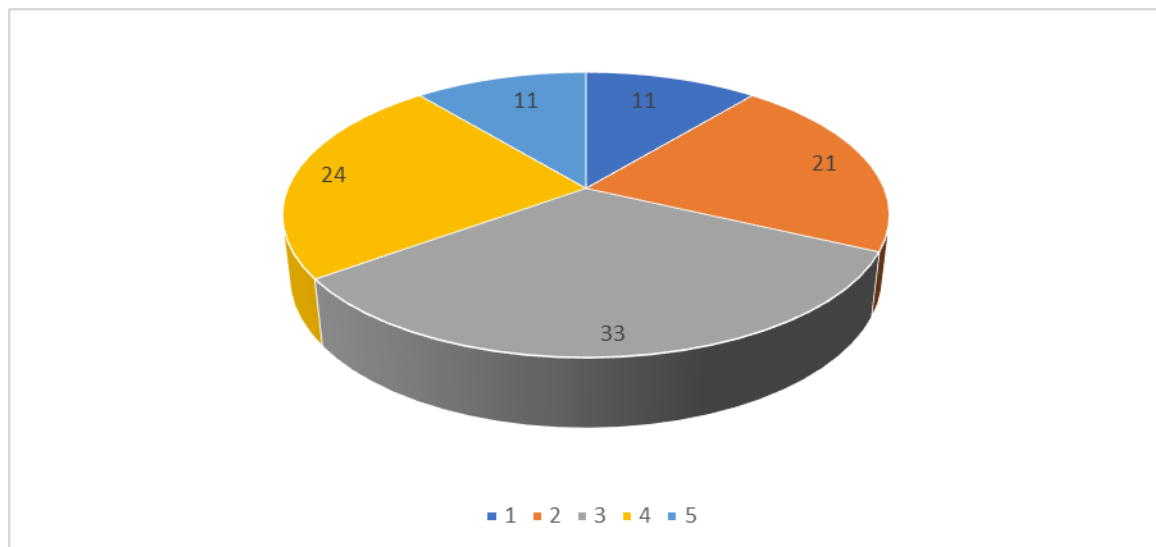
In total, 30% feel ignored or undervalued – this can lead to discreet withdrawal from participation in innovation processes. This high percentage can directly lead to the overall dissatisfaction of young people with their current job and their looking for another, more favourable job. Here, we can conclude that when young people do not see a real effect from their suggestions, their motivation to share and think creatively drops sharply. In this sense, leaders must not only listen but also validate the contribution, either through feedback or visible implementation.



**Figure 7.** Responds collected to the question: Do you feel that management takes your ideas seriously?  
(in %, the total number of 257 answers)

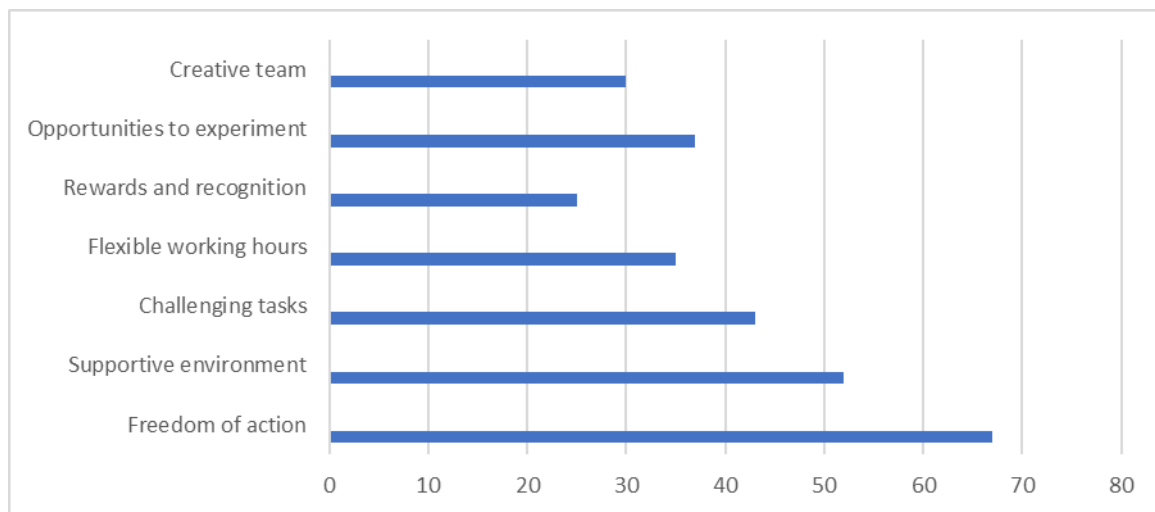
To what extent do managers in your organisation encourage creativity? is the following question (Figure 8). Here we have again a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not at all, 5 = completely). The average score here is around 3.1, which indicates moderate support but with significant deviations. Almost 32% (the share of people who chose scores 1 and 2) believe that there is no or little encouragement – this is a serious signal that some managers do not understand or do not value creativity as a priority. Only 11% gave the maximum score – with a young professional staff, this is below the norm since this group is more sensitive to opportunities for expression and development.

The fact that 33% give a "3" indicates a neutral perception – there is no inspiring leadership example and probably a systematic strategy for stimulating ideas. Here, the conclusion that almost automatically follows is that management's lack of consistency and purposefulness in encouraging creativity is reflected in the low commitment of their young employees. This limits the cultural development of organisations and establishes creative indifference.



**Figure 8.** Responds collected to the question: To what extent do managers in your organisation encourage creativity?  
(in %, the total number of 257 answers)

The next question was "What most stimulates your creativity?" and the responders were requested to choose up to 3 predefined options of answers (Figure 9).

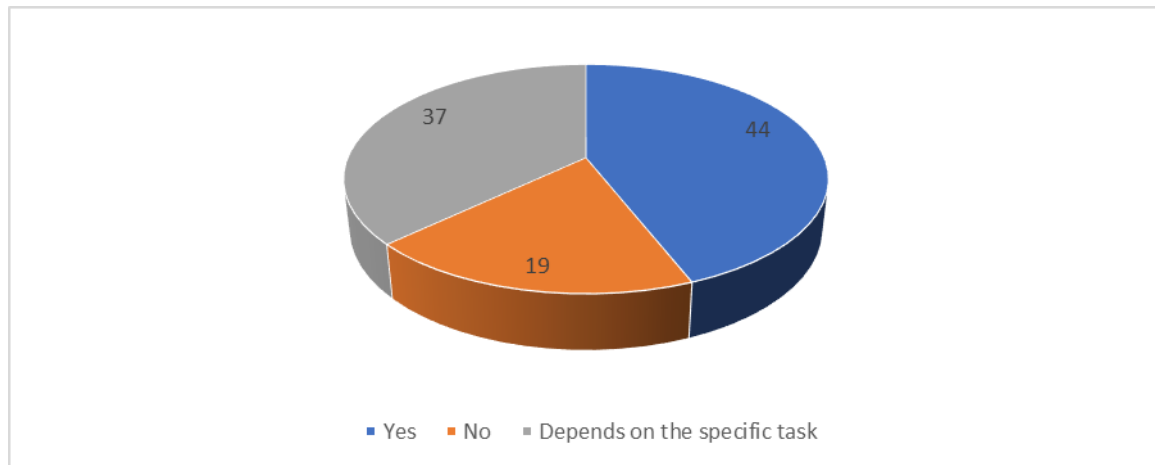


**Figure 9.** Responds collected to the question: What most stimulates your creativity?  
(in %, the total number of 257 answers)

As can be seen from the figure above, freedom is the leading motivator (67%), which corresponds to the answer to question 11. Young people associate independence with the opportunity to express themselves. A supportive environment is also highly rated (52%) – it includes an emotional climate, acceptance of differences, and openness to ideas. High levels are also found in challenging tasks and experimentation – proof that dynamism and innovation attract and inspire. Awards and recognition are not among the leading ones – an interesting fact, as it shows that for young professionals, internal motivation and freedom are more important than external incentives. All the data obtained here suggest that support and freedom are more important for young professionals than formal incentives. They are motivated by the opportunity to contribute, not just to receive.

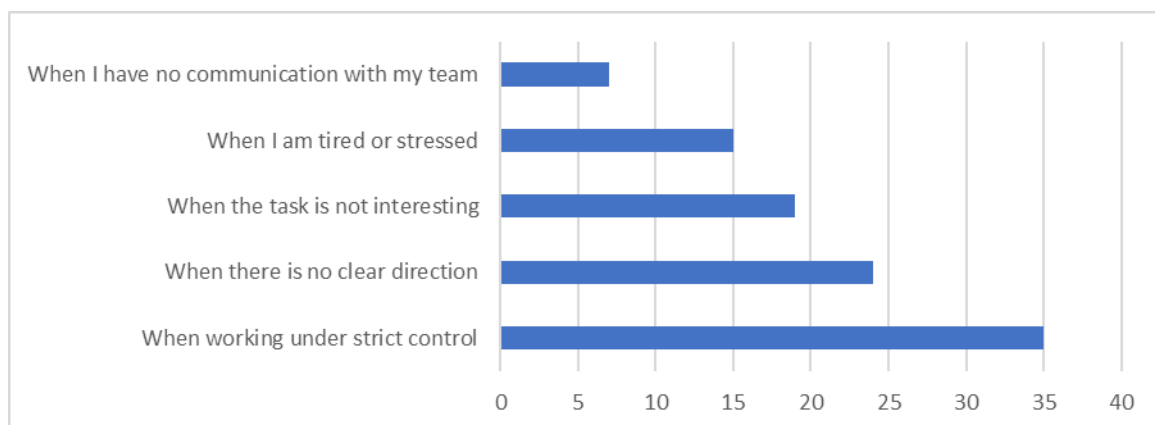
The next question is, "Do you think structured work can be compatible with creativity?" (Figure 10). More than half of respondents here (44% answering "yes" + 37% answering "depends") believe that structure and creativity are not mutually exclusive as long as they are adapted to the type of work. At the same time, the rejection of structure (19%) aligns with the earlier expressed desire for freedom, but most participants do not deny the benefits of framing and organisation.

The answer "Depends on the specific task" (37%) is also essential – it speaks to reflexivity and the ability to distinguish between types of creative activity (e.g., design vs. concept writing). Here, it can be summarised that participants generally demonstrate maturity in understanding the balance between freedom and structure. The best creative process often requires clear goals and context but, at the same time, flexibility in approach.



**Figure 10.** Responds collected: Do you think structured work can be compatible with creativity?  
(in %, the total number of 257 answers)

The next question is too direct and is the following: When do you feel least creative? (Figure 11). According to our responders, the biggest blocker to creativity is strict control (35%), which reinforces the results of questions 11 and 12 – control has a demotivating effect. Lack of clear guidelines also limits creativity (24%) – an interesting paradox since too much structure also suppresses it. This reflects the need for clarity but without pressure. Personal interest in the task and state of mind (stress, fatigue) are also factors – a reminder that creativity is not only an organisational, but also a psycho-emotional process. The observation here is that excessive control and a lack of context are equally suppressive. Creative effectiveness is highest in an environment of clarity, inspiration and psychological stability.



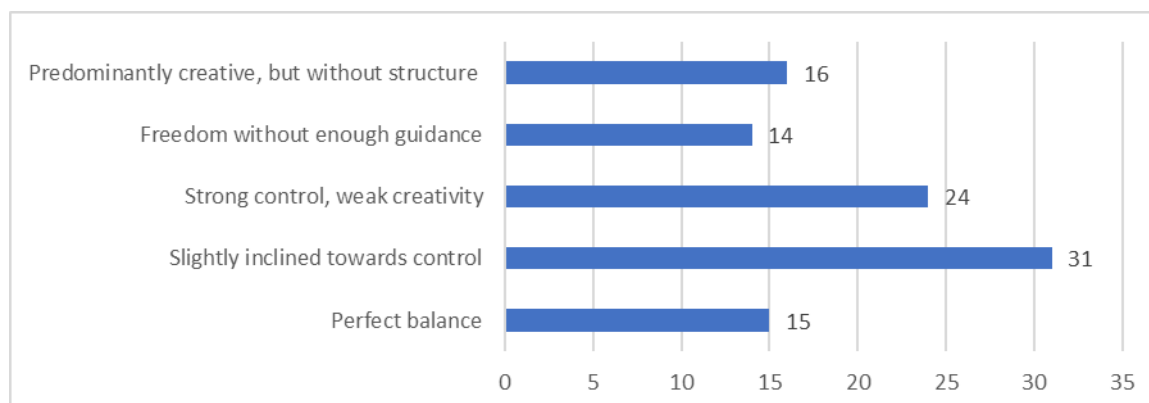
**Figure 11.** Responds collected to the question: When do you feel least creative?  
(in %, the total number of 257 answers)

According to our responders, the biggest blocker to creativity is strict control (35%), which reinforces the results of questions 11 and 12 – control has a demotivating effect. Lack of clear guidelines also limits creativity (24%) – an interesting paradox since too much structure also suppresses it. This reflects the need for clarity but without pressure. Personal interest in the task and state of mind (stress, fatigue) are also factors – a reminder that creativity is not only an organisational, but also a psycho-emotional process. The observation here is that excessive control and a lack of context are equally suppressive. Creative effectiveness is highest in an environment of clarity, inspiration and psychological stability.

The next question is devoted to the balance between control and creativity. How would you describe your work's current balance between control and creativity? The responders were asked to choose from predefined answers (Figure 12).

Only about 15% of respondents believe there is a perfect balance between control and creativity. This relatively low percentage clearly shows that most young professionals feel some imbalance. Almost 55% are in the zone of increased control (mildly or strongly expressed), which suggests a tendency towards excessive regulation in the organisational environment.

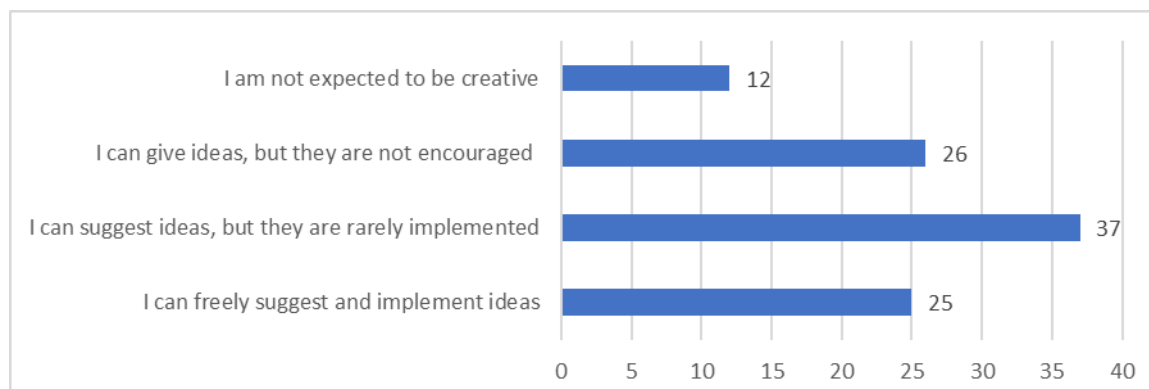
Interestingly, about 30% indicate the opposite imbalance – too much freedom without structure or guidance. This shows that while control is the main "culprit" for limiting creativity, the lack of a clear framework hinders it. These data show that current work environments often do not achieve the desired balance between structure and freedom. This necessitates the expressed need for more flexible leadership and clearly defined frameworks that allow creativity without chaos.



**Figure 12.** Responds collected to the question: How would you describe the current balance between control and creativity in your work?  
(in %, the total number of 257 answers)

"Which of the following phrases best describes your creative freedom?" is the next question, and again, the responders were asked to choose from predefined answers (Figure 13).

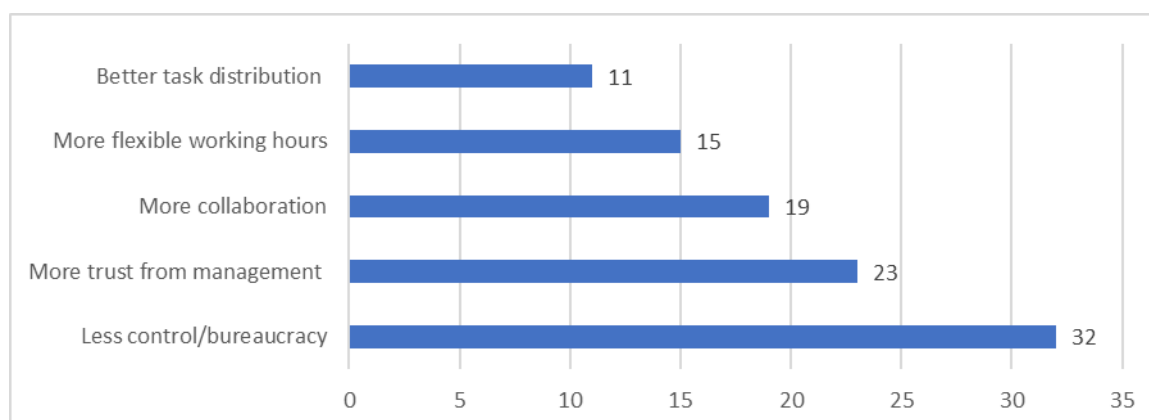
Only a quarter of respondents (25%) feel completely free to implement ideas, while the remaining 75% encounter barriers – either in implementation or at the level of acceptance. This speaks of a lack of real mechanisms for introducing new ideas and possibly a culture in which proposals are formally accepted but not implemented. It is particularly worrying that over 12% responded that they are not even expected to be creative – this indicates a traditional management model that suppresses initiative. These results suggest a gap between the ability to give ideas and the ability to accept and implement them, especially among young professionals. Organisations must develop more effective processes for managing innovation and strengthening internal communication and employee trust.



**Figure 13.** Responds collected to the question: Which of the following phrases best describes your creative freedom?  
(in %, the total number of 257 answers)

The next question of this research is connected to changes. We ask the responders the following: If you could change something in your work environment to be more creative, what would it be? (Figure 14). The most frequently mentioned change is reducing control and bureaucracy (32%) – this confirms the data from the previous questions and clearly shows that too strict procedures stifle creativity. Also, the second most substantial incentive – trust from management (23%) – emphasises the need for internal legitimization of creative efforts and recognition from leaders.

Interestingly, almost 19% of respondents want more collaborative work – which shows that social dynamics and exchanging ideas are also key to the creative process. In this regard comes the observation that young professionals see creativity not simply as a personal ability but as a function of work structure, interpersonal dynamics and leadership. The strongest recommendations include reducing bureaucracy, building trust and encouraging teamwork.



**Figure 14.** Responds collected to the question: If you could change something in your work environment to be more creative, what would it be?  
(in %, the total number of 257 answers)

The last question was open: the respondents were asked, "Describe a situation in which you felt particularly creative or inhibited in expressing ideas at work. What contributed to this?"

After comprehensively analysing the received answers, several main topics were identified in the two opposite cases.

Situations with increased creativity - about 61% of respondents describe positive experiences:

- Freedom of action and trust from management: "When my manager said, 'You have complete freedom to approach it however you see fit', – that unleashed an incredible flood of ideas in me."
- Team support and collaboration: Many respondents noted that their creativity was stimulated by "brainstorming", spontaneous discussions and open communication within the team.
- Short deadlines + challenging tasks: Paradoxically, about 15% shared that constraints (time, resources) mobilise them and "squeeze" their creativity positively.

Situations of suppressed creativity - about 39% of participants described situations in which they felt suppressed in expressing ideas. Main reasons:

- Authoritarian management style: "My idea was rejected without discussion because it 'didn't fit the established protocol.'"
- Lack of feedback or reaction from management: Some participants shared that their ideas "sink", which demotivates them to engage actively in the future.
- Fear of mistakes and accusations: "When every mistake leads to a reprimand, you don't dare to try something new."
- Excessive hierarchy and formal structures that limit access to decision-making.

Young professionals feel most creative when there is a high degree of autonomy and risk-taking and when a trusting team climate is built. Intentionally challenging tasks also stimulate innovative thinking. At the same time, suppression of creativity most often stems not from a lack of ideas but from an unfavourable culture – a lack of acceptance, dialogue and security when taking risks.

### Correlation analysis and data interpretation

Three questions in the questionnaire, explicitly addressing the level of control, the level of creativity, and the support from management, were designed with predefined numerical response options. This structure facilitated further investigation through correlation analysis.

**Table 3.** Correlation matrix

|                          | Level of control | Expressing creativity | Management encouragement |
|--------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| Level of control         | 1                | -0.65                 | -0.30                    |
| Expressing creativity    | -0.65            | 1                     | +0.72                    |
| Management encouragement | -0.30            | +0.72                 | 1                        |

Source: own calculations

#### Level of Control and Expressing Creativity (-0.65):

There is a strong negative correlation between the Level of Control and Expressing creativity. This suggests that as the level of control goes up, the worse their employees' ability to advertise originality. In a closely staffed environment, a level of control equals stifling innovation among employees. This finding indicates that a culture of extreme control out of management and mentors damages the creativity young employees need. This correlation confirms the first hypothesis: Excessive control negatively impacts the creativity of young employees despite their need for mentorship and intensive collaboration with their immediate supervisors.

#### Level of Control and Management Encouragement (-0.30):

The correlation between the Level of Control and Management Encouragement is moderate and negative. This implies that higher levels of control are associated with less encouragement from management. It may suggest that a controlling management style diminishes the support and encouragement employees receive, potentially leading to declining motivation and levels of commitment.

#### Expressing Creativity and Management Encouragement (+0.72):

There is a strong positive correlation between Expressing Creativity and Management Encouragement. This indicates that as young employees feel more encouraged by management, their abilities to express creativity improve. This finding confirms the notion that employees can work freely when managers are warm and open in style. Management also plays a vital role in helping to enlarge and sustain creativity. This also confirms our second hypothesis: The creativity of young employees is positively influenced by the perceived support they receive from their managers.

### Conclusions and recommendations

The study results reveal a deep tension between control and creativity in the modern workplace. Most young professionals feel that control dominates their organisations – bureaucracy, hierarchy, lack of trust and limited access to real implementation of ideas. Only a small proportion – around 15-25% – feel they have the necessary freedom and support to create entirely.

At the same time, however, there is an equally important problem: where there is a lack of sufficient structure, creativity also suffers – especially in the absence of clear guidelines, roles and processes. This highlights that creativity requires not only freedom but a consciously constructed framework that nurtures it, not suppresses it.

According to young professionals, the main obstacles to creativity are strict control and bureaucracy (in the first place), followed by insufficient trust from management, lack of implementation of ideas, expectations for performance, lack of initiative, exhaustion and lack of communication within the team. At the same time, the factors that most strongly stimulate creativity are freedom of action and the opportunity to experiment; a supportive, open environment to ideas; challenging tasks and flexibility in work; and participation in team and cross-functional collaboration.

Young professionals seek an environment with clear goals but minimal interference in the way they work – their creativity thrives best in autonomy with trust, not control with suspicion. Control is not a problem for young professionals, but it undermines motivation, initiative and creative potential when it is too strict and overly fixed. Young professionals seek an intelligently structured environment where the framework is clear but not dogmatic, and trust is the litmus test of management. With an approach that combines autonomy, respect for individual style and shared responsibility, creativity has the potential to unfold to its full extent.

The survey highlights that young employees do not look for anarchy or rigid discipline – they prefer a balanced, meaningful work environment that values their contributions, allows for mistakes, encourages experimentation and provides clear goals. All data from the study indicate that they want to be heard, included and recognised to be motivated and creative.

The study results are in line with the recent study of Lechler, & Huemann (2024), claiming that young professionals need autonomy in their work.

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