



# MANAGING ECOANXIETY MOBILIZING EMPLOYEES FOR ACTION

## WHO THE TOOL IS FOR:

Human resources professionals

## OBJECTIVES OF THIS DOCUMENT:

- Understand ecoanxiety, its context and its impacts
- Explore potential solutions to help employees deal with it

## BACKGROUND

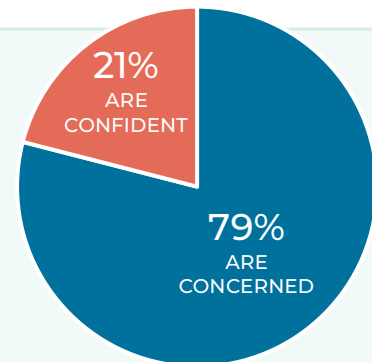
The effects of climate change on the planet are increasingly visible and concrete. This topic is ever present in discussions both on social media and in the news, to the point that for many people, these major changes can cause psychological distress that takes the form of ecoanxiety.

Ecoanxiety is defined as a **chronic fear related to the possibility of experiencing environmental catastrophes**. Although anxiety is the main symptom, it can be accompanied by a wide variety of emotions, such as fear, anger, exhaustion, helplessness, a sense of loss and even phobia and despair.

## THE IMPACTS OF ECOANXIETY ON PEOPLE

Ecoanxiety involves a broad range of possible impacts on people, from their psychological well-being to their life choices:

- Symptoms of depression
- Symptoms of anxiety
- Stress
- Insomnia
- Difficulty adjusting and functioning
- Changes in appetite
- Obsessive thoughts
- Fatalistic thoughts
- Existential angst
- Reluctance to have children
- Changing jobs/careers to respect one's values



### ECOANXIETY BY THE NUMBERS

- In 2021, 79% of adults in the United States said they were very (48%) or somewhat (31%) concerned about climate change.
- Youth (18–23 years) are the most concerned about the effects of climate change on their mental health.
- These figures are increasing and have already doubled since 2017. This is not surprising, as this is not a passing crisis, and more and more people are becoming aware of the issue.

## ECOANXIETY IN ORGANIZATIONS



In businesses, ecoanxiety and its effects on people are being felt more and more keenly. In 2023, the Conference Board conducted a survey in several countries that revealed that 60% of those polled want employers to do more to tackle the causes of ecoanxiety. One point that was raised was that employees expect employers to help them take collective action to protect the environment. For this reason, more and more studies show that by proactively managing environmental concerns, organizations can increase the attraction and retention of talent and create a positive corporate culture.

## CONCRETE ACTIONS TO TAKE

As a human resources professional, you may find that it can be difficult to know how to support employees who are going through challenges related to climate change or how to talk to them about it. It is recognized more and more that ecoanxiety can be overcome through action, whereas brooding and paralyzing anxiety negatively affect health. Although it's true that anxiety is an emotion that is often linked to negative impacts, we mustn't forget that it has a role to play: mobilizing people to adapt. Transforming fear into a driver for action should therefore be at the heart of your efforts.

### WARNING!

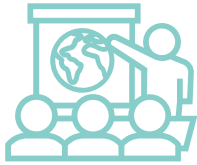
Although the potential actions proposed are recognized as good practices, whatever you put in place should be aligned with your organization's position on climate issues to avoid giving rise to cynicism among employees!



### Encourage volunteering

Give employees an opportunity to get involved in volunteer activities with a focus on environmental projects, whether through helping directly (offering paid time off to volunteer, making financial donations) or indirectly (helping to create networks, sharing information about ways to get involved in different causes, building partnerships with organizations that are looking for volunteers). Sometimes people want to get involved but don't know where to start.

Why not offer a forum with a spotlight on external or internal initiatives to expose employees to the various options that are available? For example, community cleanup days, tree planting, urban development activities, or political activism initiatives. Simply serving as a link between these initiatives and employees can make a big difference.



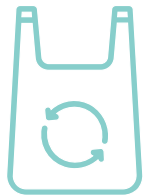
### Organize training activities

An essential starting point for reducing ecoanxiety is to provide access to quality information on climate issues. This allows you to both curb disinformation and send a signal to all employees that the organization is ready to start the conversation on these issues and is placing all staff on an equal footing. You can offer training or presentations (several environmental organizations offer these!), develop tools on the intranet or find reliable sources of information. Why not create an annual day of awareness on climate issues during which informational and engagement activities are planned? It would be useful to invite subject experts to come and speak to employees.



### Support internal initiatives

Encouraging employees to seek out potential ways to reduce the company's ecological footprint is another option. Whether it's the use of plastic packaging in the cafeteria or the unnecessary waste of paper, you can intervene at various levels in low-cost and efficient ways. And why not involve employees directly in researching the solutions? The aim is to manage expectations well and avoid making promises you can't keep. You will be surprised to find that people are naturally reasonable in their expectations!



### Identify individual solutions

Often, people who experience anxiety are paralyzed with fear, which leads them to imagine the worst and blocks their creativity. However, there are countless small actions that can be put in place and that have a bigger impact than we think on mental health because they promote consistency between our actions and our values. For example, you can suggest alternative transit options, highlighting forms of transportation such as cycling, subway, train or bus and identifying potential routes. You can also document the energy savings involved in these kinds of initiatives and share this information. Another idea is to ask for advice from nutritionists to find dietary options that are more environmentally friendly. The same goes for all kinds of everyday actions that people might not have thought of, such as recycling habits, buying groceries in bulk, reducing the use of packaging, etc. The sky's the limit! The key is to help employees discover ways to have a concrete impact.



### Promote contact with nature

It is increasingly clear that connecting with nature (walking in the woods, gardening, birdwatching) has a positive impact on both people's well-being and their fears around climate change. Immersing ourselves in nature allows us to feel less cut off from it. Encouraging outdoor breaks, incorporating plants into the office space or promoting initiatives such as developing exterior spaces can result in major benefits. (For more details, see the Global-Watch tool on [outdoor breaks](#).)

## A FEW ESSENTIALS FOR A SUCCESSFUL APPROACH

- Involve employees as often and as early as possible.
- Validate their feelings about climate issues but encourage them to take action.
- Be open to ideas, projects or initiatives in work teams.
- Identify positive leaders among employees and let them take the lead.
- Inform, inform, inform! And when you don't have the information you need, get support from experts!



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