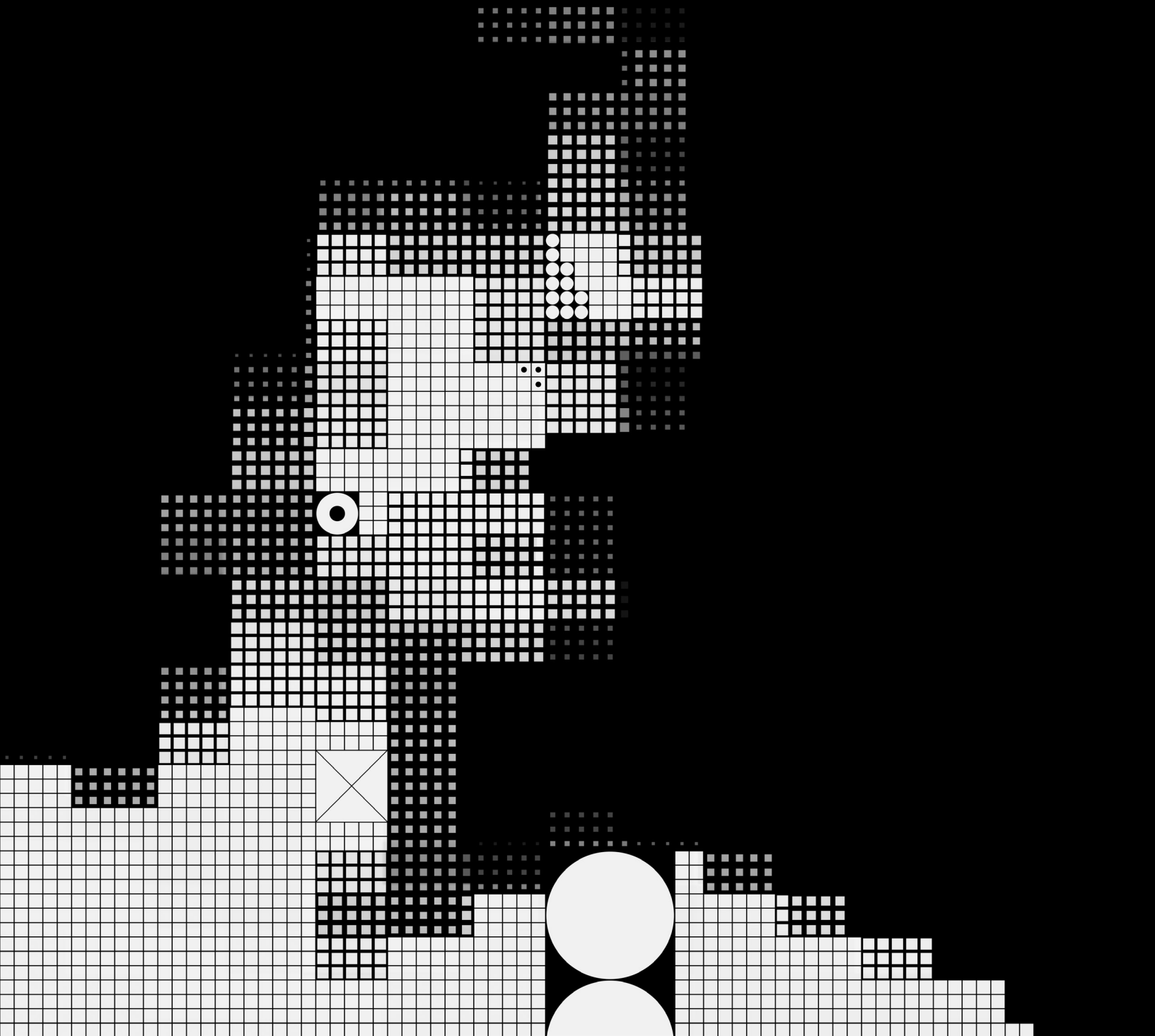
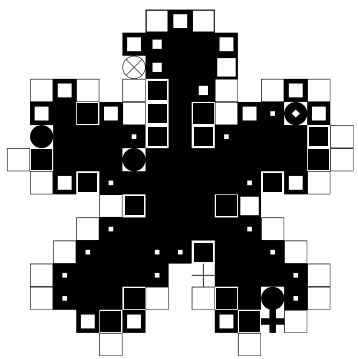


What it takes to hire (and keep)
the best in global talent.



02	The salary report
06	Background
08	Key factors
12	Global salary overview
16	Variables that matter
26	Variables that don't matter
28	Variables that matter but shouldn't
38	Transparency and happiness
44	Transparency starts with us
46	Conclusion
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50	Appendix
60	About the Design Leadership Forum
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Design Leader
Salary Report
2021

02 At the beginning of 2021, InVision conducted an online anonymous survey over a two-week period with the Design Leadership Forum community. Our goal was to identify trends and societal shifts in base salary and happiness amongst design leaders. This report is directional and inspirational, and should be read as a guide.

A mature design practice is the watershed that divides thriving product teams from failing ones.

Without strong design leadership, along with standout specialists in disciplines like UX research, operations, design systems, and UX strategy, the path to maturity is steep, and disruptions like the COVID19 pandemic can become disastrous.

Meanwhile, the competition for design talent has gone global. The rise of remote work means companies can recruit from anywhere, while talent migrates far from the usual urban hubs in startling numbers.

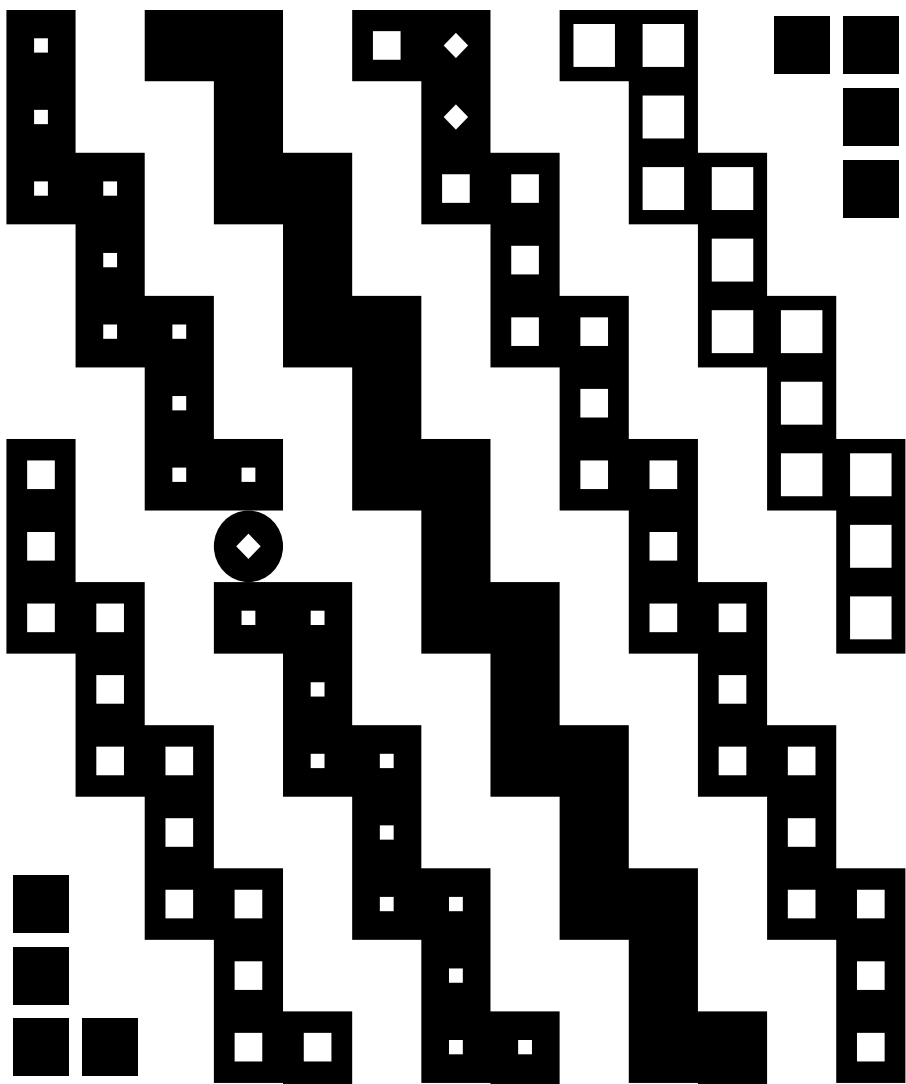
04 This shift in hiring norms
has led to two major questions:

Are we paying enough
to compete for talent
in the global market?

1

Are we paying
our best leaders
enough to stay?

2



This report
answers both.

Survey in numbers

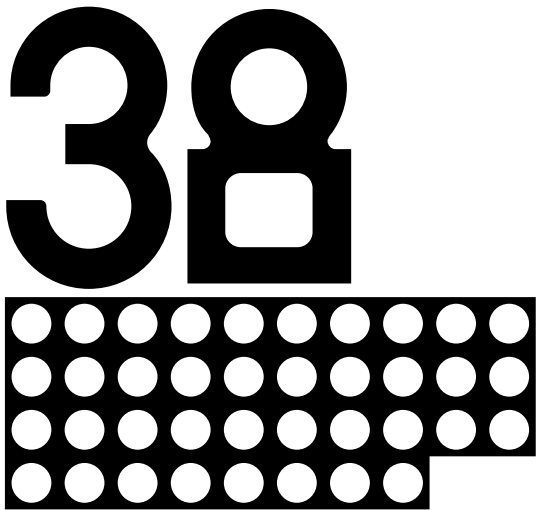
Design Leader
Salary Report
2021

06

Respondents

608

Industries



From every region
except Antarctica

%

6

Seniority
levels surveyed

7

Sr. Individual Contributor

16

Mid-level Manager

17

Head of Design

42

Director / Sr. Director

15

VP / SVP

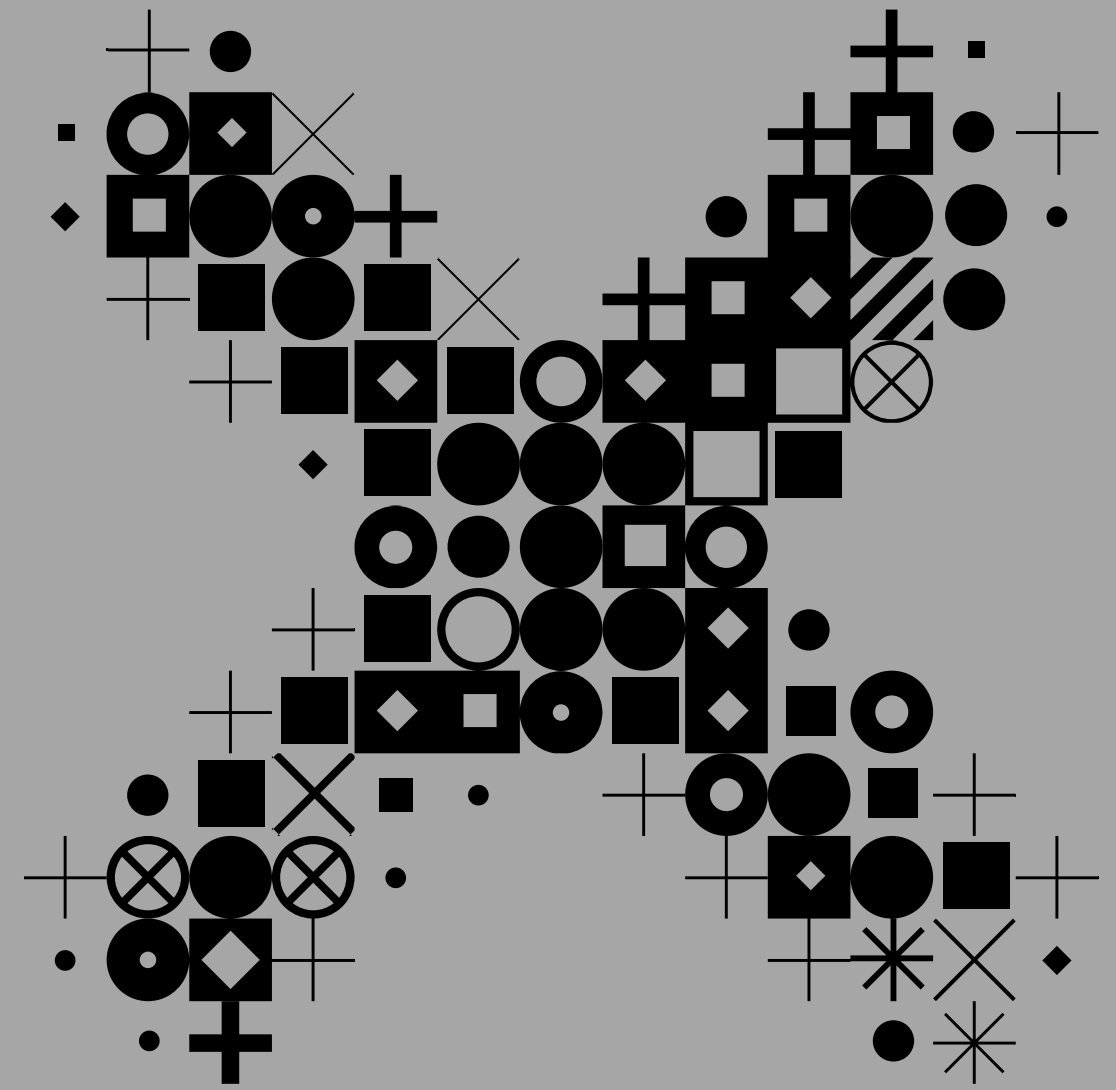
3

C-Suite*

To understand how this report defines these seniority levels, check the Seniority section in the appendix.

*Directional, not statistically significant

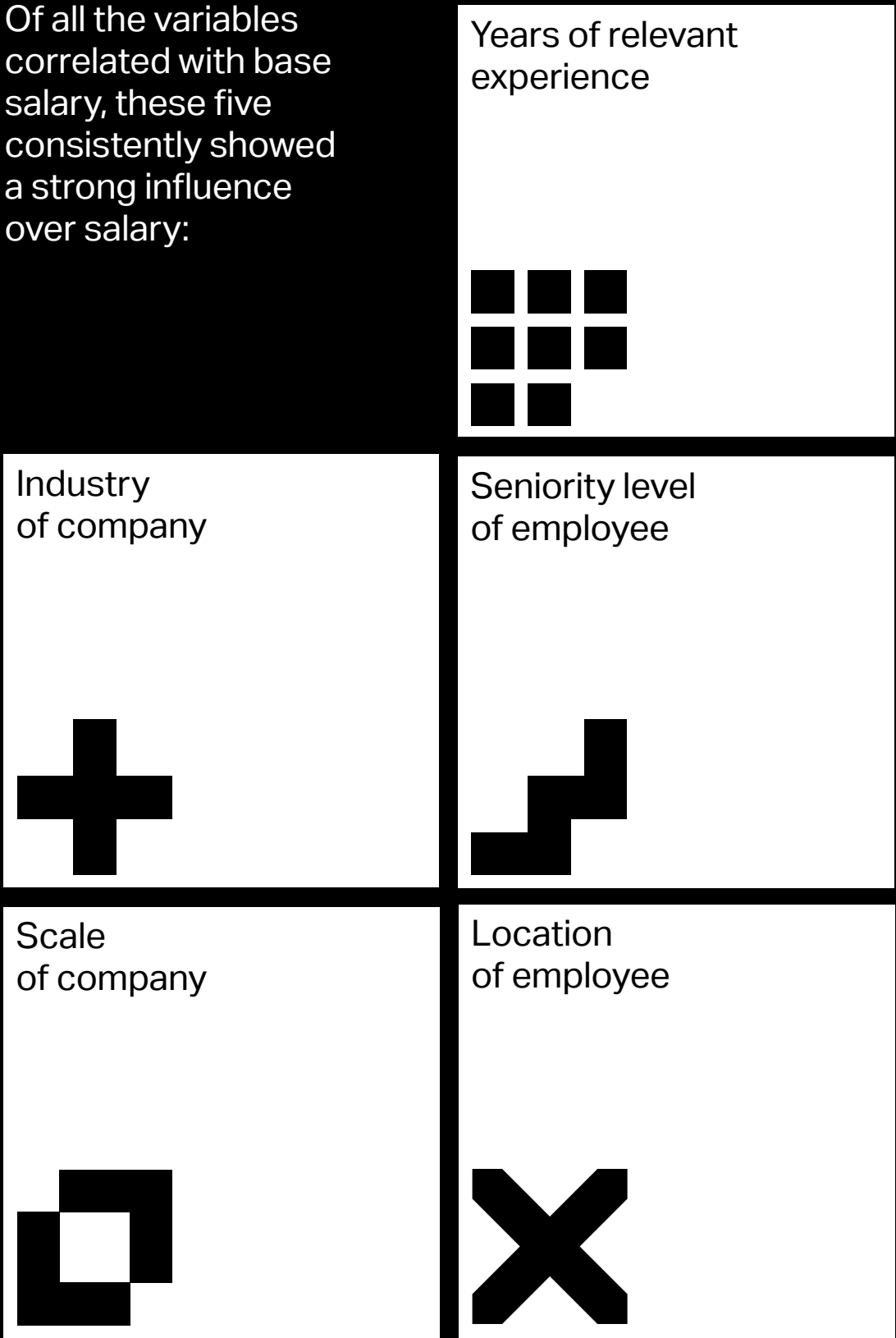
We asked this truly global group of design leaders about their age, race, gender, location, seniority, years of experience in the field, company size, industry, location and remote operating model.



What factors actually affect how design leaders get paid (and what does it take to make them happy)?

Recruiters, human resources, and people teams use a broad matrix of factors when putting together a competitive compensation package.

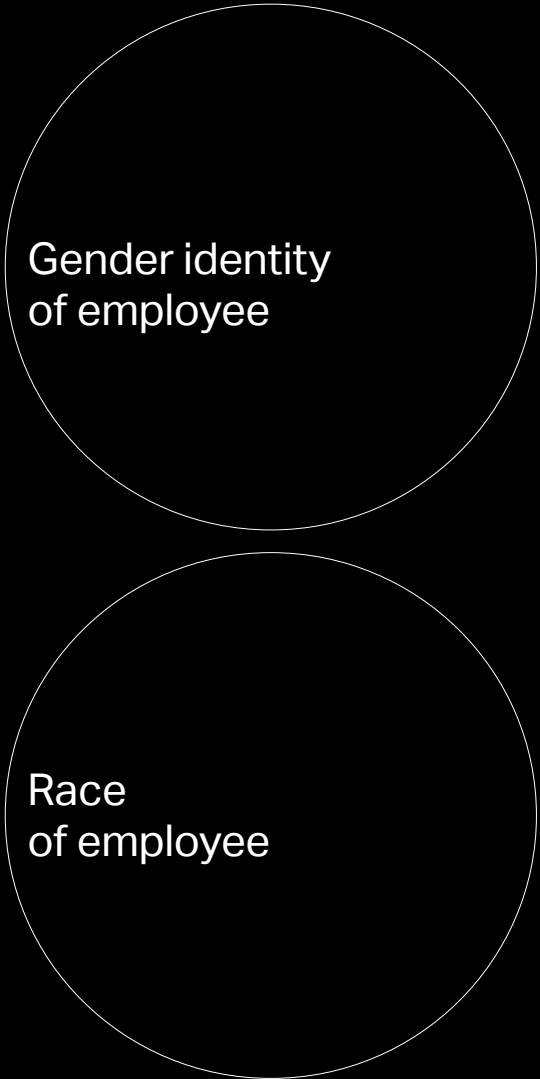
Design Leader
Salary Report
2021



One variable may have mattered in the past, but no longer does:



And a few variables that should never have mattered still show strong correlations:



What if salary were graded on a global curve?

Design Leader
Salary Report
2021

Let’s zoom out as far as we can to the global average salary – for all levels of seniority in every region and every industry.

Considering this study was mostly design leaders, you might think it’s skewing toward the high end. And you’d have a point. Here’s why the global average may be higher than you’d expect:

%

45

of responses come from Tech, the highest paying industry

%

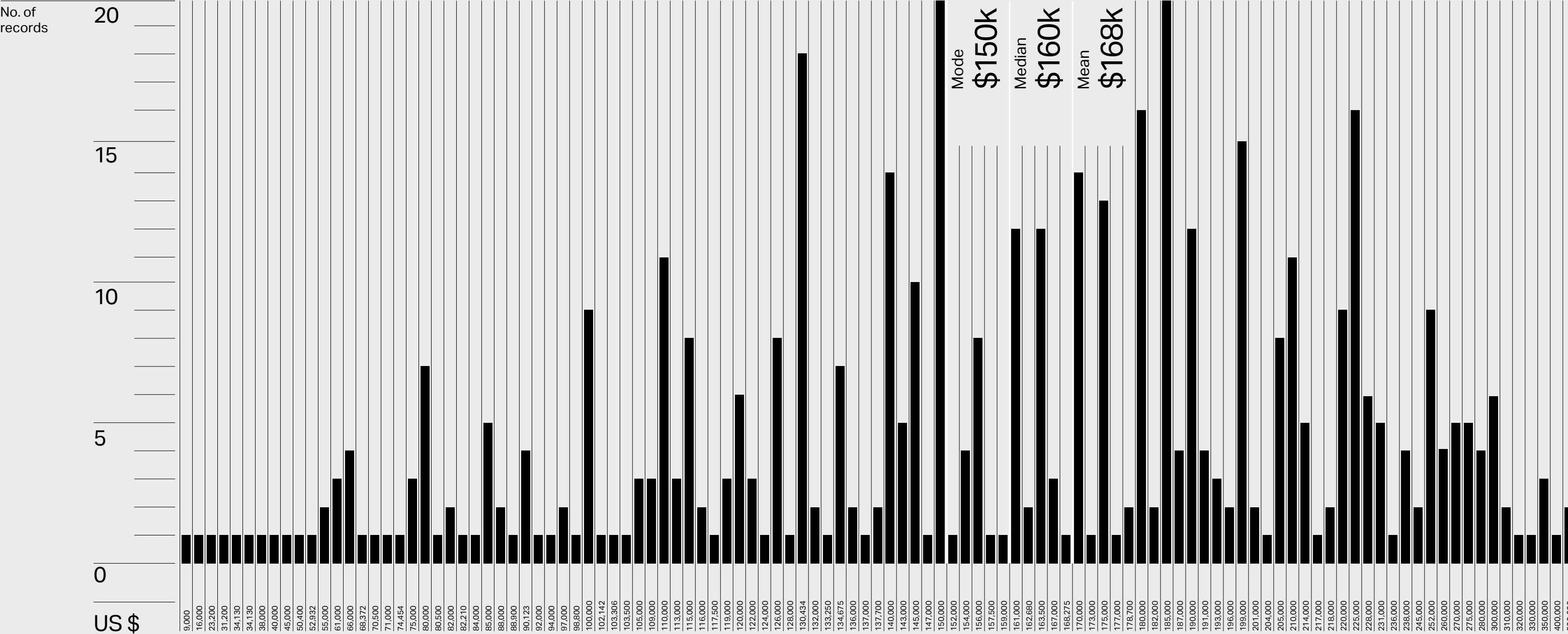
65

of responses come from the US, the highest paying region

%

76

of responses come from Heads or higher, the highest paid leadership positions



Why does the global curve matter?

Design Leader
Salary Report
2021

14 Should hiring managers in Berlin be concerned with the average pay in San Francisco? Should a 200-year-old bank try to compete on salary with a ten-year-old tech startup?

Mode	Median	Mean
\$150k	\$160k	\$168k

If we look at 2020 trends in the housing market, coupled with the rise of remote-first working styles, and the ongoing globalization of product teams, it becomes clear that for most organizations, global averages matter.

Not only can recruiters hire from almost anywhere in the world, talent can apply almost anywhere with internet. The job market is hot and tilts steeply in the designer's favor.

Teams that want to grow their practice with cutting-edge leadership and real world experience will have to pay to compete – at a globally attractive price.

So what does the
data show really matters when
it comes to salaries?

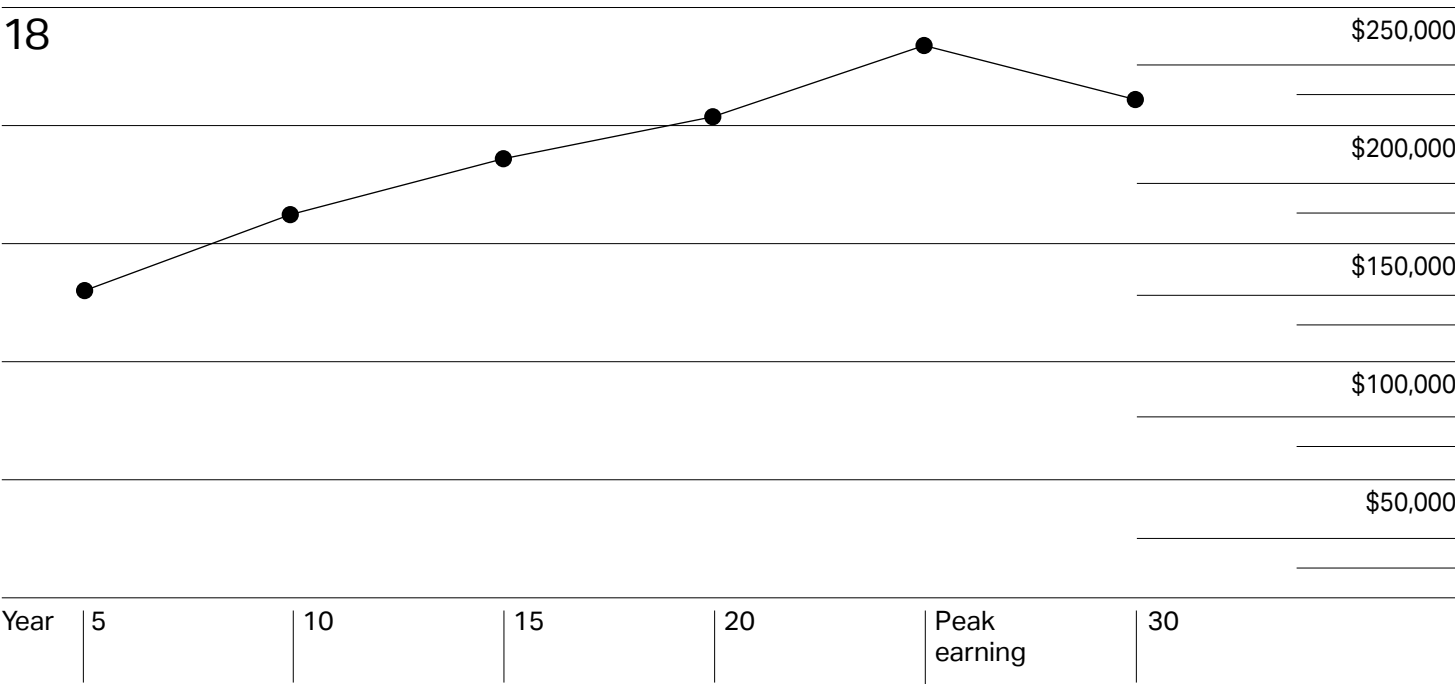
16	EXPERIENCE	17
	INDUSTRY	
	SENIORITY	
	COMPANY SCALE	
	LOCATION	

Experience

The single most important variable to a design leader's pay was their years of experience in the field.

There are certainly exceptions to the rule, but generally, there's a fairly gradual increase in salary the longer a design leader is in the field. That is, until the 25th year of experience. From there, we see a gradual decline.

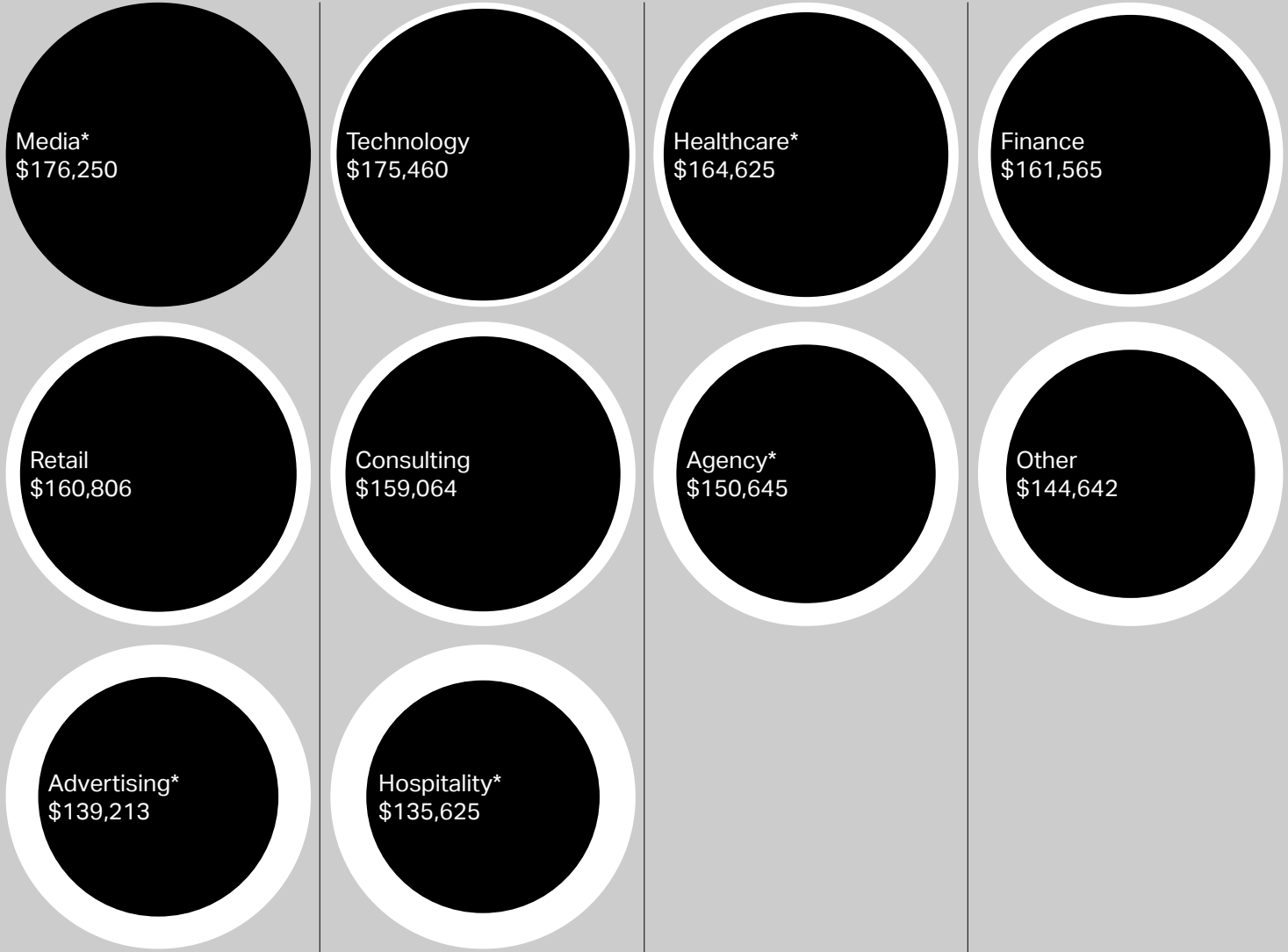
 Design Leader
Salary Report
2021



Industry

Regardless of experience and level of seniority, the industry where design leaders choose to serve has significant impact on their pay, with tech and media at the top of the curve.

Industries that are newer to digital transformation tend to pay less.



*directional, not statistically significant

Seniority

 Design Leader
Salary Report
2021

20	Levels vary from company to company. Some companies rank the head of design above the director, and others do the opposite.	These seniority levels signify areas of responsibility, as well as individual behaviors - what they spend their time doing. Here’s a high level overview of the levels of seniority
	For our aggregate, levels were ranked based on pay.	

These are the two factors we used to define seniority consistently:

A

Self-reported titles (free text response)

B

Self-reported seniority level (multiple choice response)

The six seniority levels are described here based on input from survey participants.

C-Suite*	A rare position typically paired with a title like Chief Design Officer or Chief Creative Officer. They may have influence over the entire end-to-end product or brand experience. They're sometimes tasked with transforming the entire company's employee experience, too. And of course they're still supporting and maturing the design organization. The CDO is in the best organizational position to make change happen for design.		\$223,833 (mean)
	VP	While there are a few enterprise companies with C-suite representation, most have none. Often you'll find the highest design authority resides in the VP, SVP, GVP, or EVP level.	\$213,006
Director	When these positions exist in an enterprise environment, design's value is generally known and established. The people in these roles are usually leading teams.	While sometimes this is the highest design position in the company, it's becoming increasingly common for them to report to a VP of design.	\$172,871
		Directors play a strategy-focused role, though they may still be called upon to lean into their tactical background. Directors shoulder the responsibility of aligning with the business on their department's strategic focus, then they lead teams on strategic execution.	
Head of Design	A widely varied title with a variety of responsibility types. Some heads of design are the actual design authority in an enterprise, with layers of reports. Others are very senior ICs who are about to grow and build a design function. These leaders often have strategic input on the broader business, and are tasked with executing on a tactical plan.	Manager	\$139,670
		Front-line managers oversee a team or teams, but not managers. Example titles might include Design Manager, Senior Creative Manager or Associate Director.	\$136,672
		Senior Individual Contributor	\$128,803
		These leaders often have strategic input into the broader business but no direct reports. This category of design leader is often associated with titles such as 'Lead', 'Principal' or 'Architect'. They are at the top of the class for their craft.	

*directional, not statistically significant

Company scale

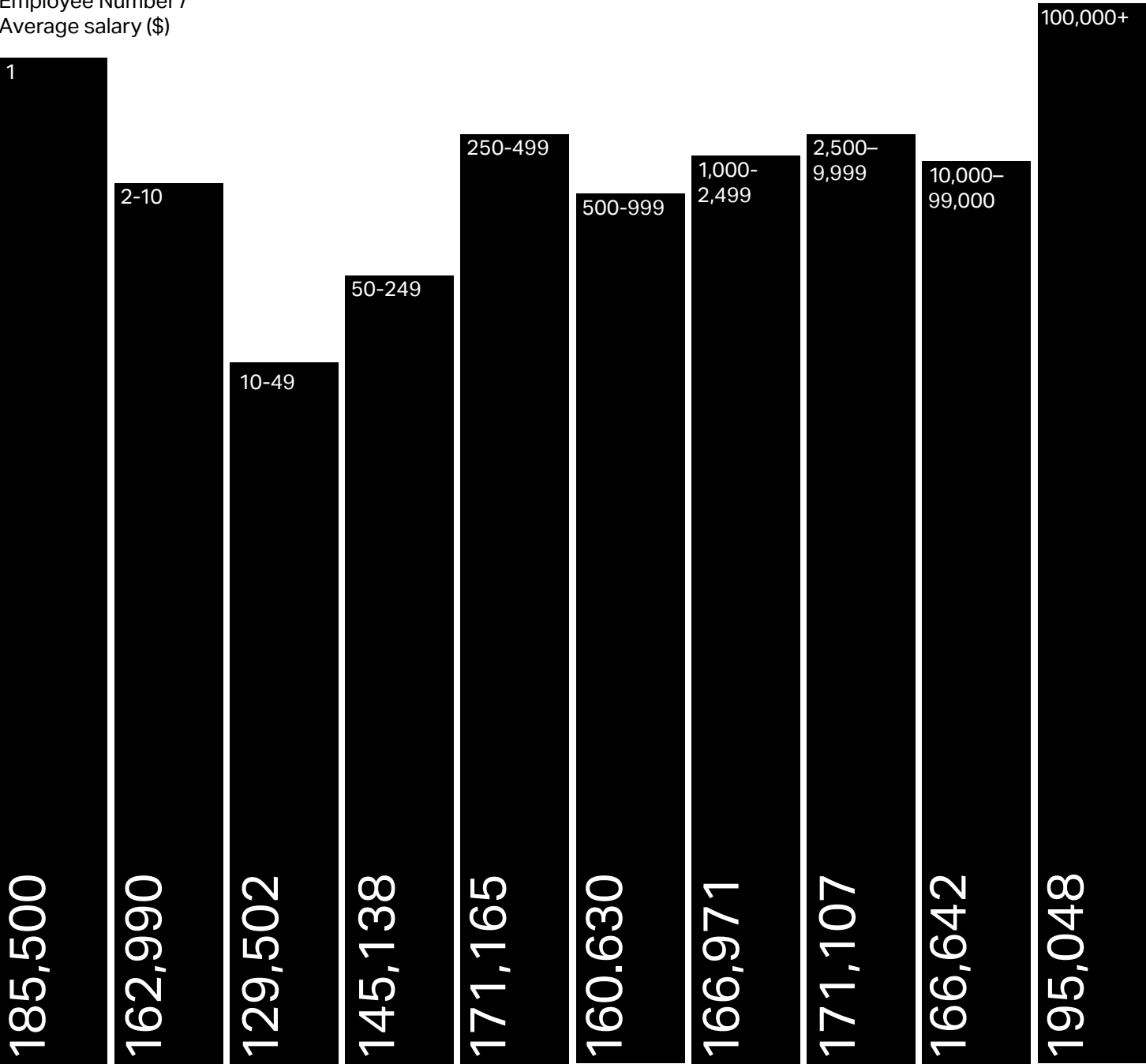
Unsurprisingly, the larger the company the higher the salary. The exception of course is the business of one, who values their work however they see fit (usually very highly).



Design Leader
Salary Report
2021

22

Employee Number /
Average salary (\$)



The difference in
average salary
(10-49 vs. 100,000+)

\$65,546

23

The highest paid
salaries are at
opposing ends of
the spectrum

One
100k+

Location

Where someone is based greatly affects their base salary.

The difference in average salary (US vs. EMEA)

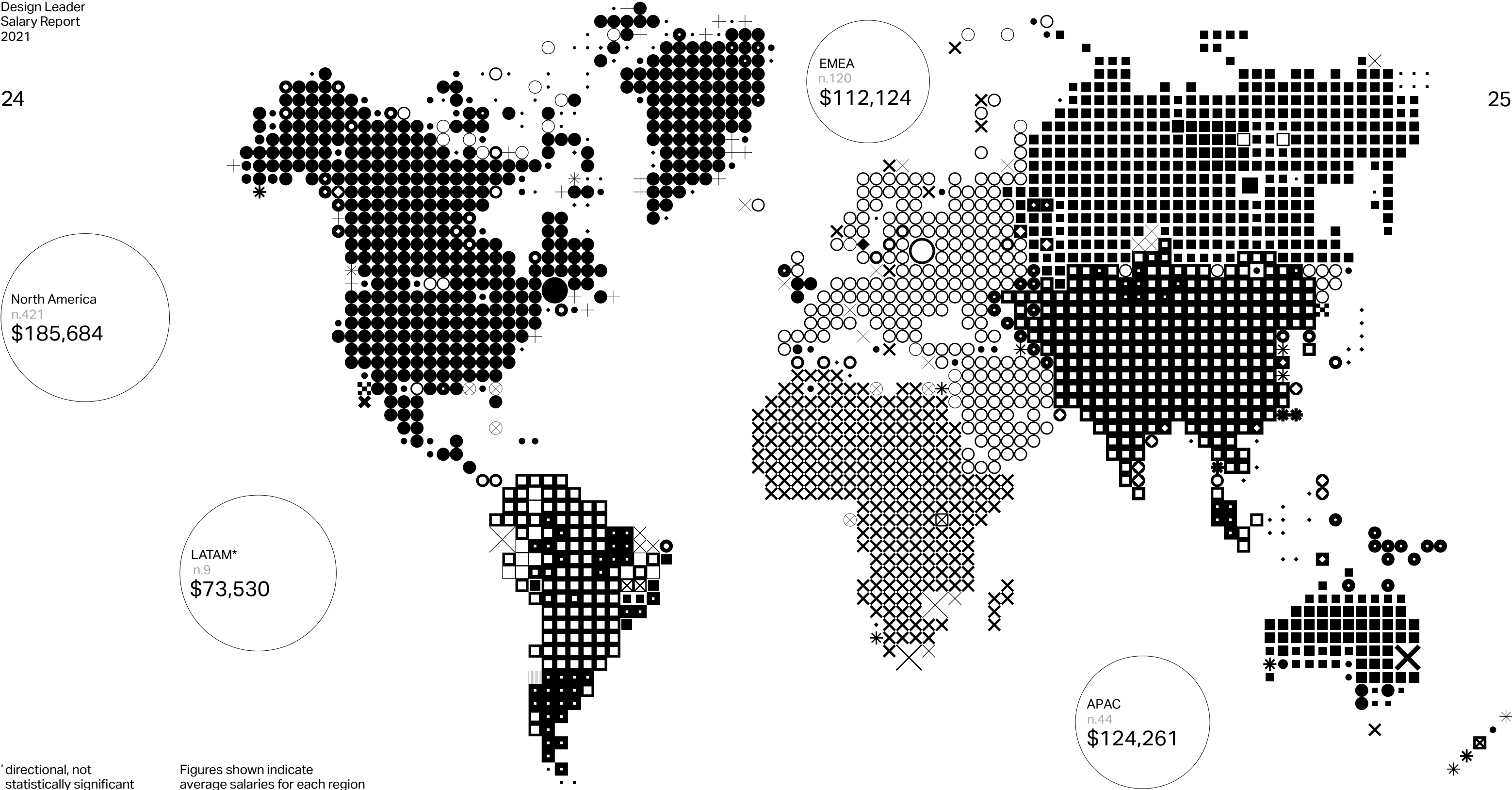
\$78,703



Design Leader
Salary Report
2021

24

25



*directional, not statistically significant

Figures shown indicate average salaries for each region

Remote operating model

26

Remote doesn't mean cheap when it comes to salary. As teams turn increasingly to remote work, some have conjectured that salary might decrease, while keeping talent happy with a more flexible work-life integration.

Our survey found that's not happening. Working remote doesn't correlate to happiness or pay. Years of experience, age, and location still count. Remote doesn't.

That means hiring managers are competing with everyone – remote, hybrid, and in-person jobs. Competing against their own region, and competing against other regions. The compensation aggregate becomes a very important number.

Figures shown indicate average salaries for each operating model

*Due to COVID19

Fully remote	Hybrid	Temporarily remote*
\$188,088	\$182,996	\$186,121
Unsure Unhappy with base salary Happy with base salary	Unsure Unhappy Happy	Unsure Unhappy Happy

Unfortunately, there are still some factors that have an impact, that clearly shouldn't.

RACE

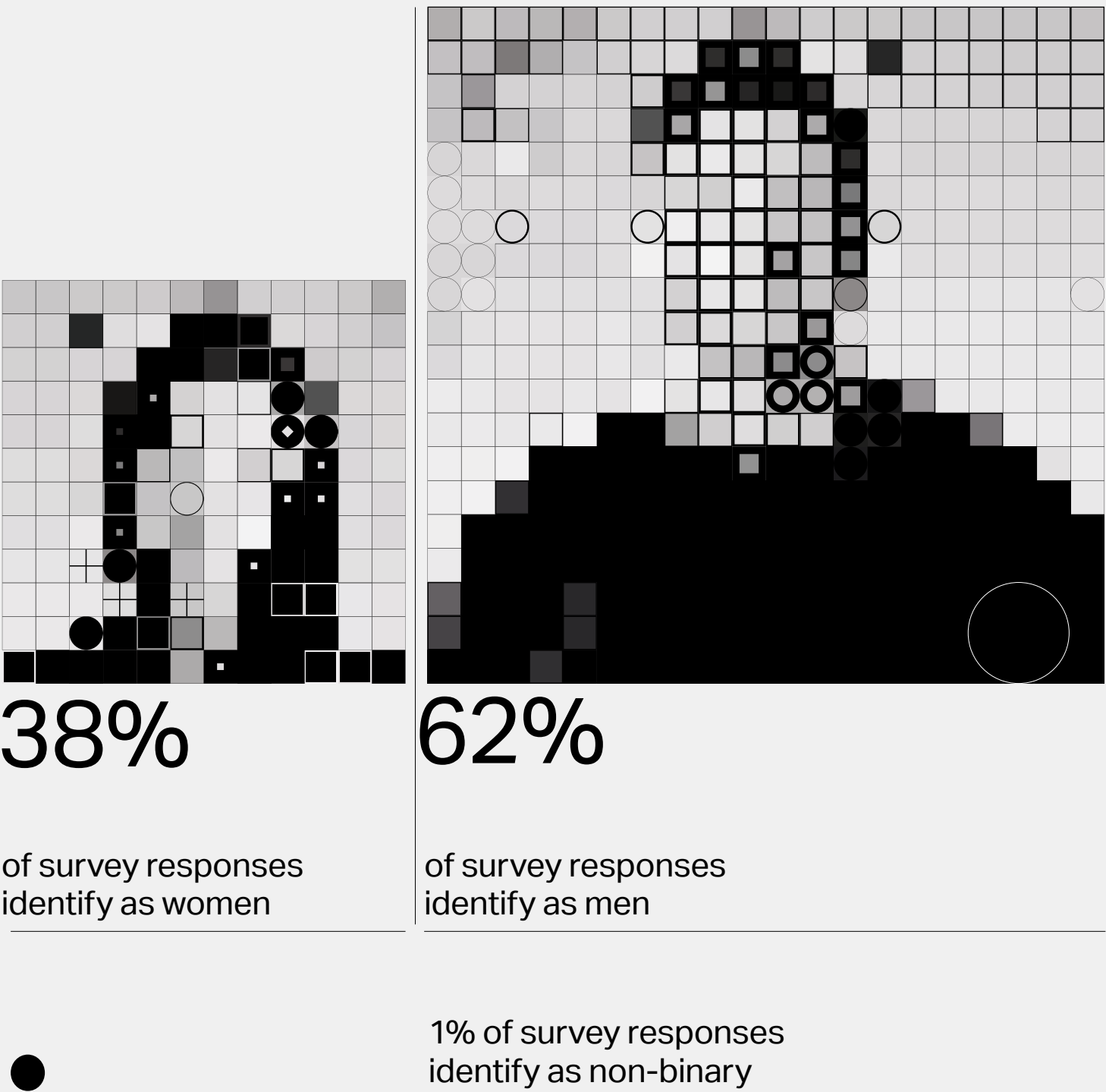
AND
GENDER

Gender

Design Leader
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2021

30 Gender still affects salary, in some spaces more than others. The men vs. women gap overall is closing. There's a \$3k difference between men and women in the study (with men being paid slightly more), but representation is also imbalanced.

Out of the 608 respondents



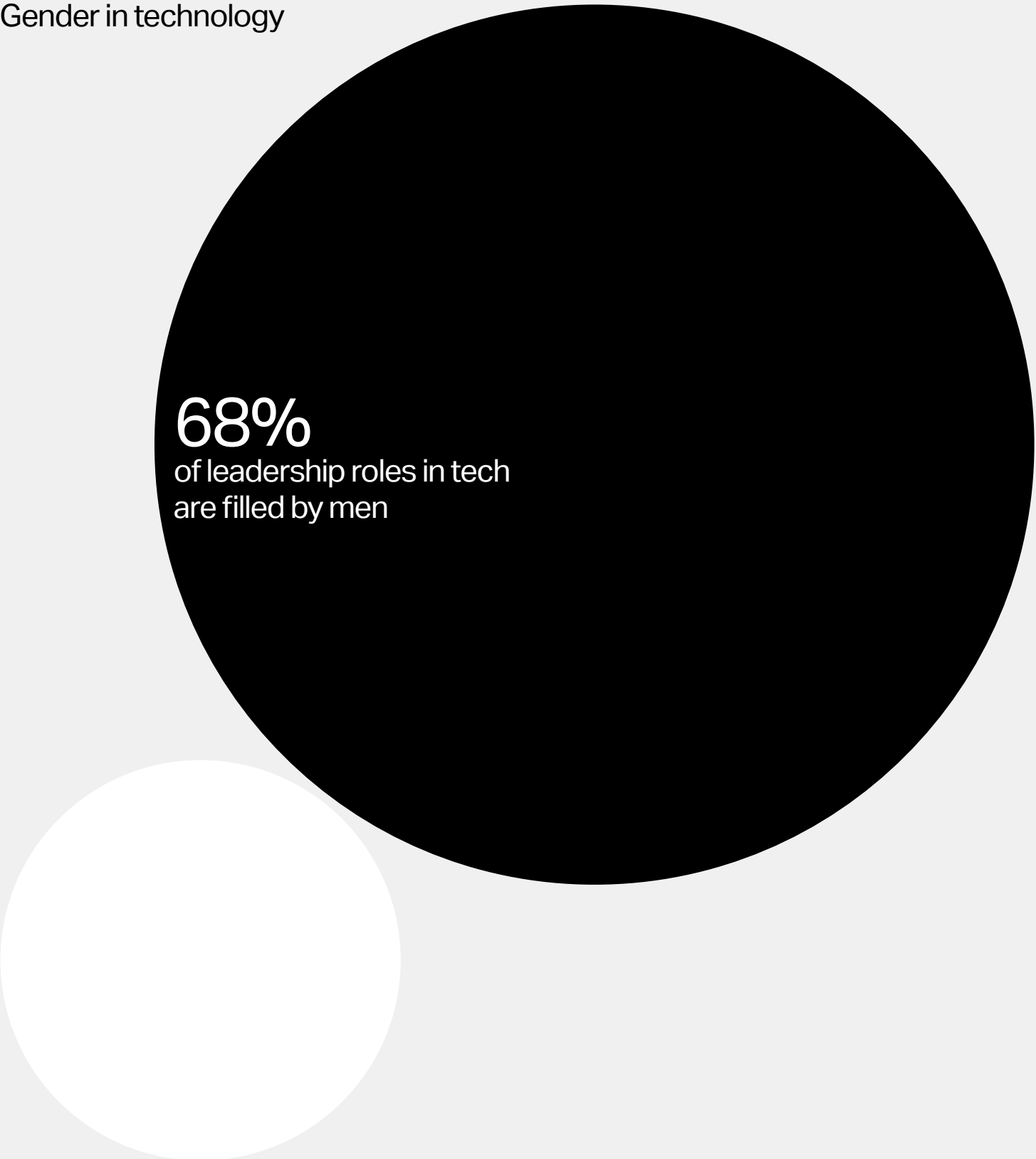
Lagging industry: Technology

Design Leader
Salary Report
2021

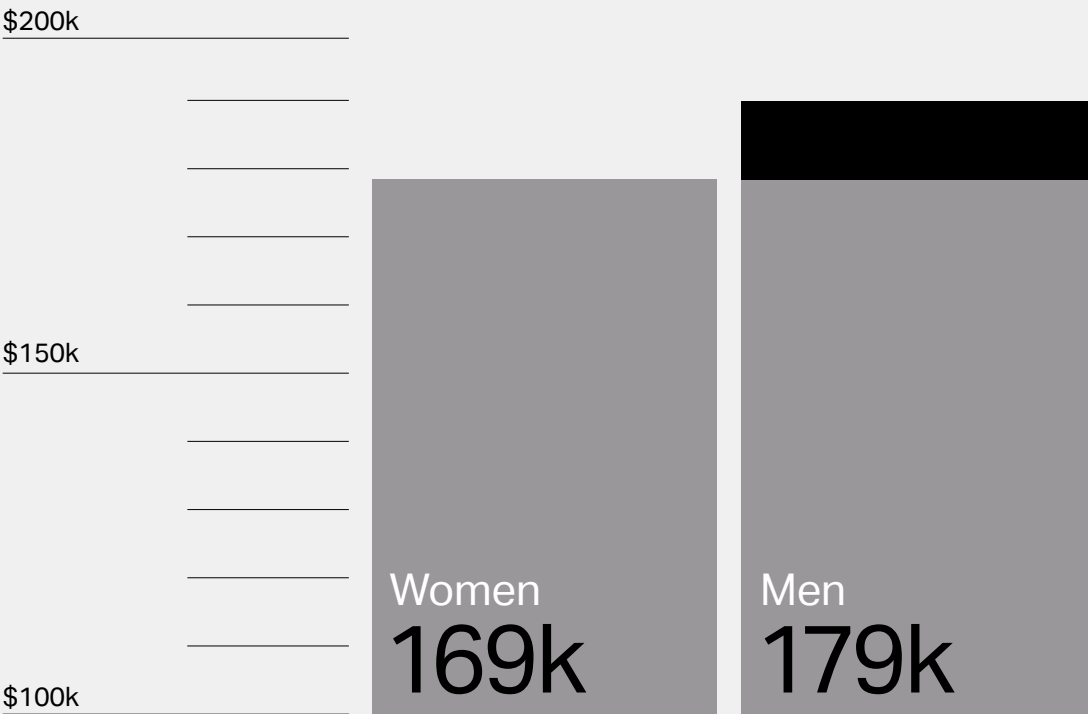
32 The tech industry
gender pay gap is three times
larger than the aggregate.



Gender in technology



Average
salary of
design
leaders
in Tech



Race

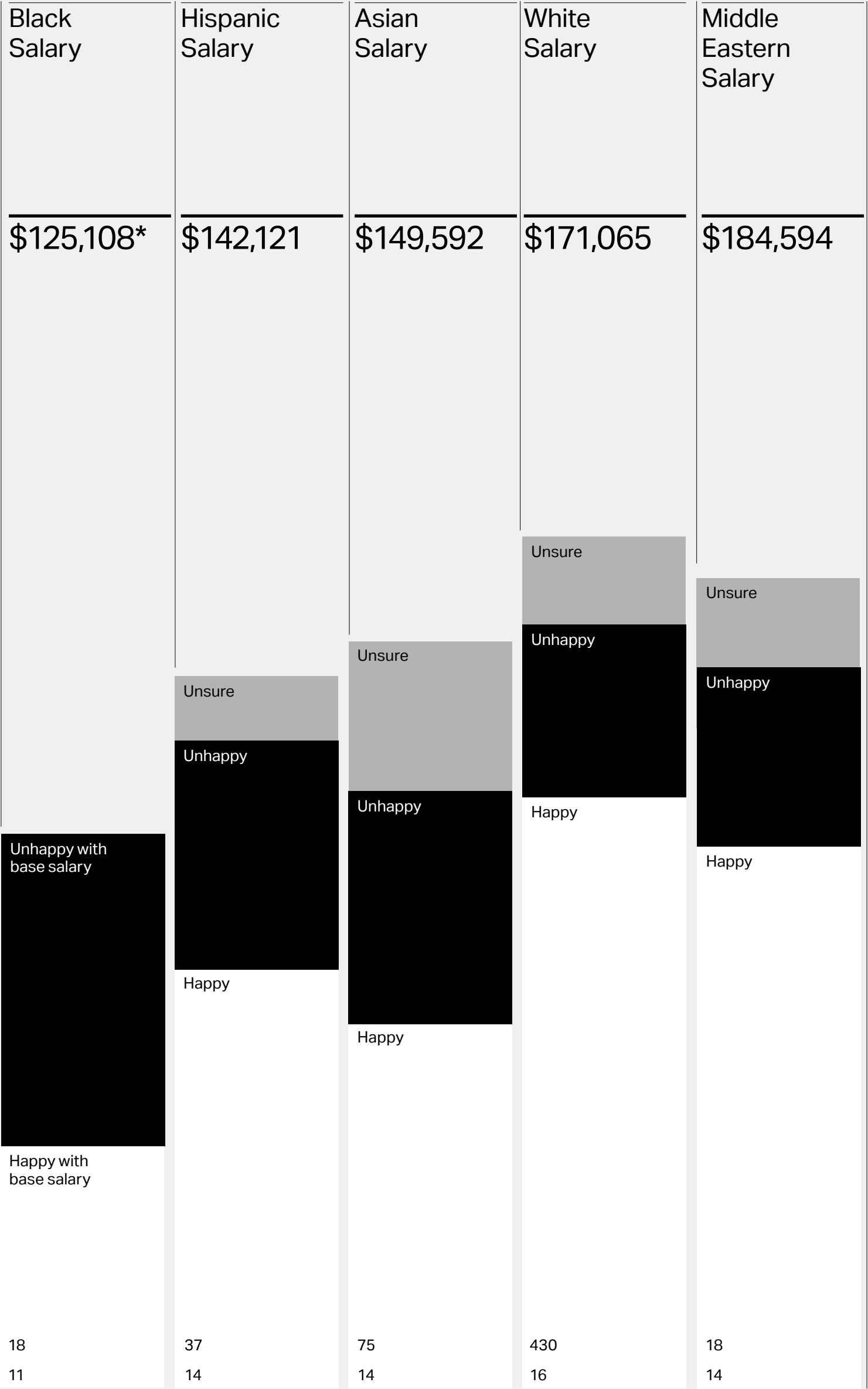
Design Leader
Salary Report
2021

34 Racial identity affects salary even more than gender. The pay gaps between some racial identities in design leadership are massive.

Keep in mind, the strongest variable in determining pay is "years of experience" as you look at the data.

To improve clarity about representation gaps, we've specified average years of experience along with number of responses below.

Number of responses	18	37	75	430	18
Average years of experience	11	14	14	16	14



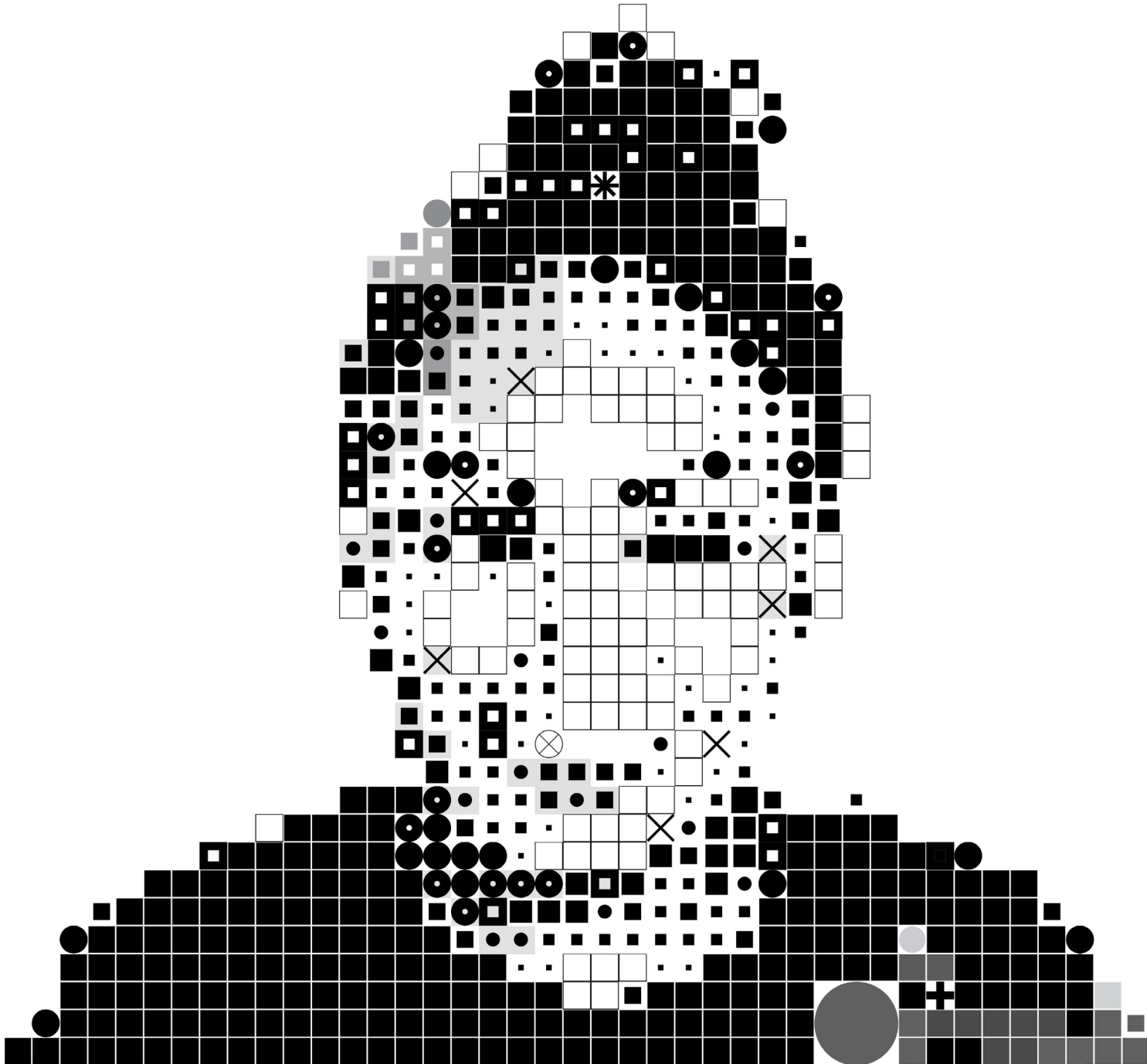
* Not statistically significant

We're going to keep seeing this disparity, and seeing it grow, if the people affected by it aren't in the room when decisions are made.

Design Leader
Salary Report
2021



Tiffany Vurek Lee
DEI Committee Leader, DLF



YOU
CAN'T
FIX
WHAT
YOU
CAN'T

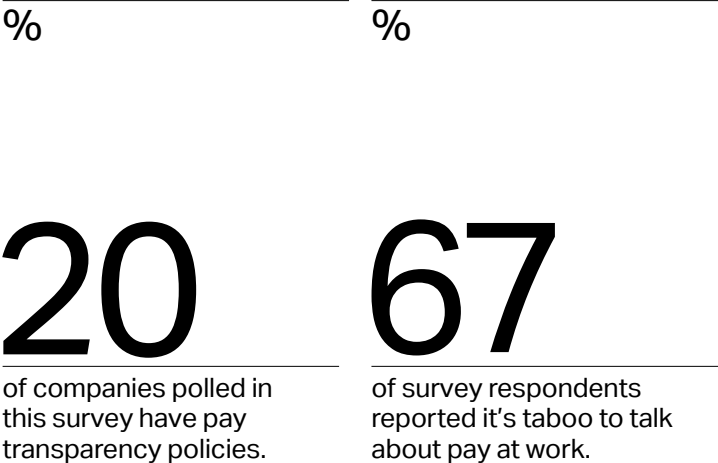
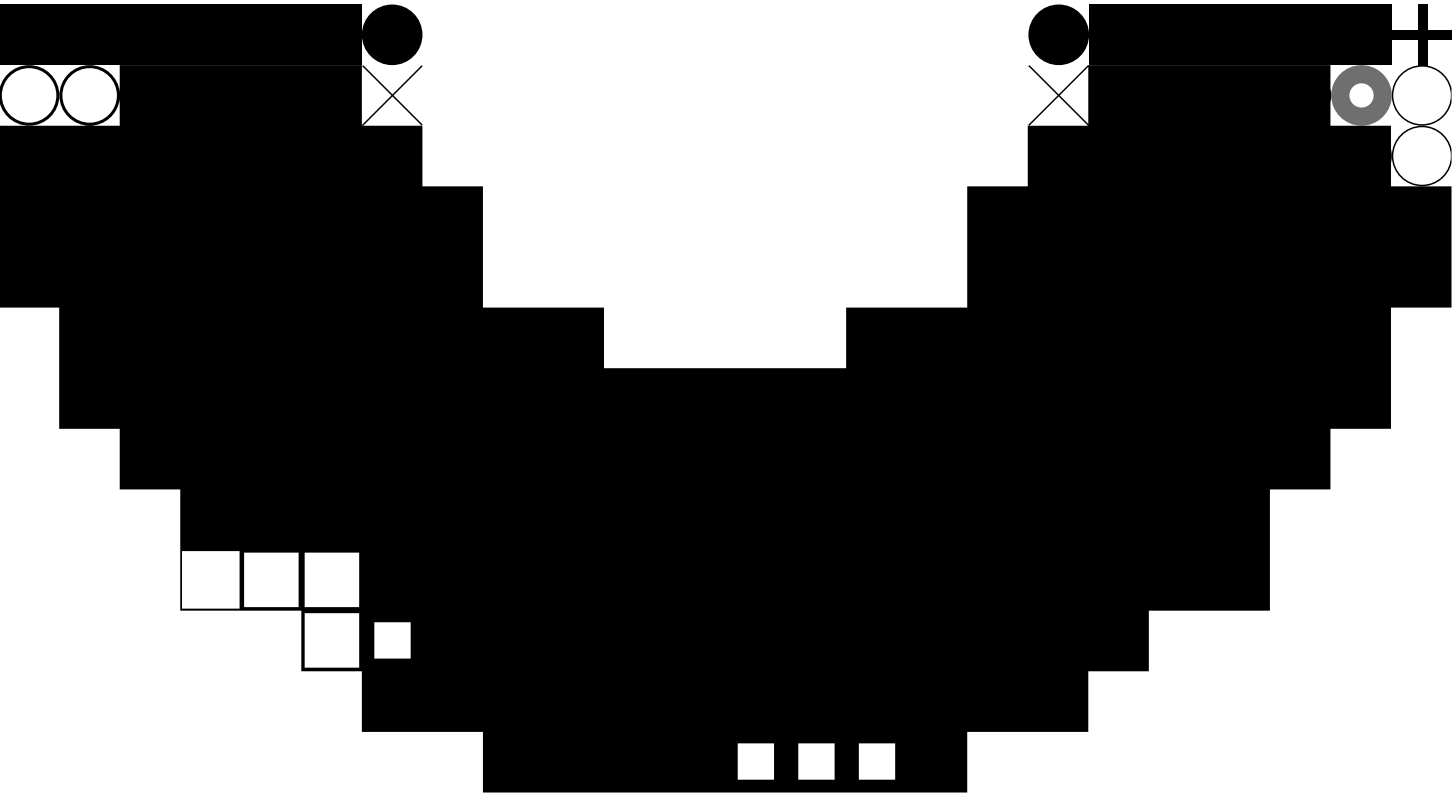
Beyond questions about salary, we also asked about salary happiness, plus whether it's taboo to discuss pay in their company, and whether there are pay transparency policies. What we found was interesting....

It makes sense that when employees are openly encouraged to talk about salary, there’s a good chance they’re also being paid well. Design leaders happy with their salaries are 50% more likely to be working at a company with transparency policies regarding pay.

Design Leader
Salary Report
2021

40

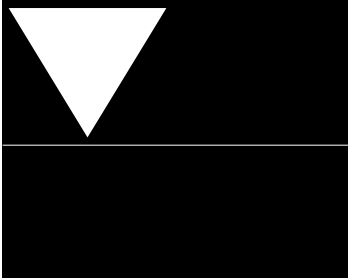
In short: Transparency around pay correlates with happy salary numbers.



Pay is not transparent, so it's weird to talk about it.



Companies in the consulting industry are the most likely to have transparency policies in place



Transparency and happiness

	VP	Directors	Head	Mid Manager	Senior IC Level
Average of happy employees	\$223,636	\$179,174	\$148,206	\$149,809	\$142,416
Average of unhappy employees	\$192,884	\$150,941	\$119,241	\$118,520	\$105,625
Difference between happy and unhappy	\$30,752	\$28,233	\$28,965	\$31,289	\$36,791

In relation to happy salary numbers, the difference between happy and unhappy is about \$30,000.

Strangely this held true globally across seniority levels – even when salary averages grew.

If you want to lure away talent, and keep it, offer the happy salary.



Transparency. It starts with us.



The data for this report came from within the Design Leadership Forum, which consists of 3,000 leaders. Theoretically that's big enough to represent the full gender and racial identity makeup of the broader population.

But we don't see that makeup represented here in the report. Sadly that's the reality of the diversity represented in the DLF and in most companies. In fact, even with our current gaps, if the DLF were a 3000-person company we'd be fairly average in terms of gender and racial representation. In the tech industry we'd be better than average.



A WORD FROM
Tiffany Vurek Lee and
Vincent Brathwaite
DEI Committee Leaders,
Design Leadership Forum

first intentional grouping was an open door referral policy – the same level of outreach and engagement as many companies put into their hiring efforts. The people who answered that open call tended to be white men.

Just like we've seen in every other industry, organic growth didn't deliver diversity. It's going to require work – pushing and asking and engaging far outside the easy, organic circles we know and love.

As members of the diversity and inclusion effort in the DLF, we're going to be pushing further and asking hard questions. We hope you will too.

Why are we hoping people from underrepresented communities come to us, instead of going to them?

Do people from diverse backgrounds feel they have to code switch or over-perform in order to be accepted as equals in our group?

How can we encourage everyone, perhaps especially people with privilege, to openly share knowledge about pay and hiring, so we can work towards equity for all?

Do we care enough about these disparities to do what it takes to fix them?

Are we going to be the ones to set the standard others follow in how this is done? Are we willing to put in the work and tell a more equitable story?

Most of all, we have to start talking – about pay, about hiring, about inclusion and diversity. People need data before they can make change. Transparency first and always. Let's make some changes.

In spite of our efforts to build more inclusive events, more engaging conversations, more localized experiences all over the globe, people in the minority just aren't here.

We have to ask why. Why are women missing, not just from full 50% representation in the DLF, but from representation at the highest levels of leadership? Why are Black and Hispanic design leaders represented in such minuscule numbers not just in the DLF, but also in the ranks of the most prominent design teams in the world?

This is the gap you get if you try to grow diversity organically. The DLF started on promising ground, founded in San Francisco by InVision with a relatively balanced mix of leaders, slightly more than 50% white, but zero black representation. What followed that

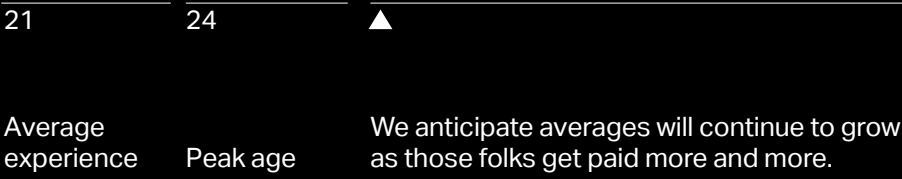
DESIGN,
AGILITY
AND
PARTNERSHIPS
MATTER.

The talent market is in flux, and salaries are rising. This study benchmarks a strange moment in history when work changed overnight, and it’s still transforming.

Design matters more than ever when the market shifts. Agility matters. Partnerships between disciplines matter. The talent make-up and maturity of every product organization are the difference between failing and thriving.

As leaders work to grow their teams they’ll need to keep an eye on the rapidly-shifting numbers – everywhere. And more importantly, they’ll need to listen hard to know what will keep their most talented people happy.

Early analysis indicates there will be an increase in pay for a long time. Maybe the rest of the 2020s. Every year, we’ll see bigger salaries. As design continues to provide more value to the business, people will get paid more. As these roles are valued and better paid, people will choose to stay and will not transition out, which feeds the cycle of increased value/pay.





This author didn't feel they could safely identify their name or company in a public conversation about pay. Identifying information is redacted.

How to use this to drive change for yourself

Don't use this report as a standalone artifact to understand if you are fairly paid. As a reminder, this report is directional and only covers base salary. Of course, base salary is just a part of the larger compensation packages people are receiving. 92% of leaders in this study were receiving additional compensation benefits, such as bonuses and equity. Instead, use as a grounding artefact to help you understand if you're being fairly compensated. The punchline: You can quickly compare base salaries but you need to take into account the complexities that are a total comp package including bonus, equity, benefits, perks and even non-monetary ones like feeling good from being part of supporting a mission. Use this report in conjunction with other industry salary benchmarking reports and information available on websites like LinkedIn and Glassdoor.

How to use this to drive change at your company

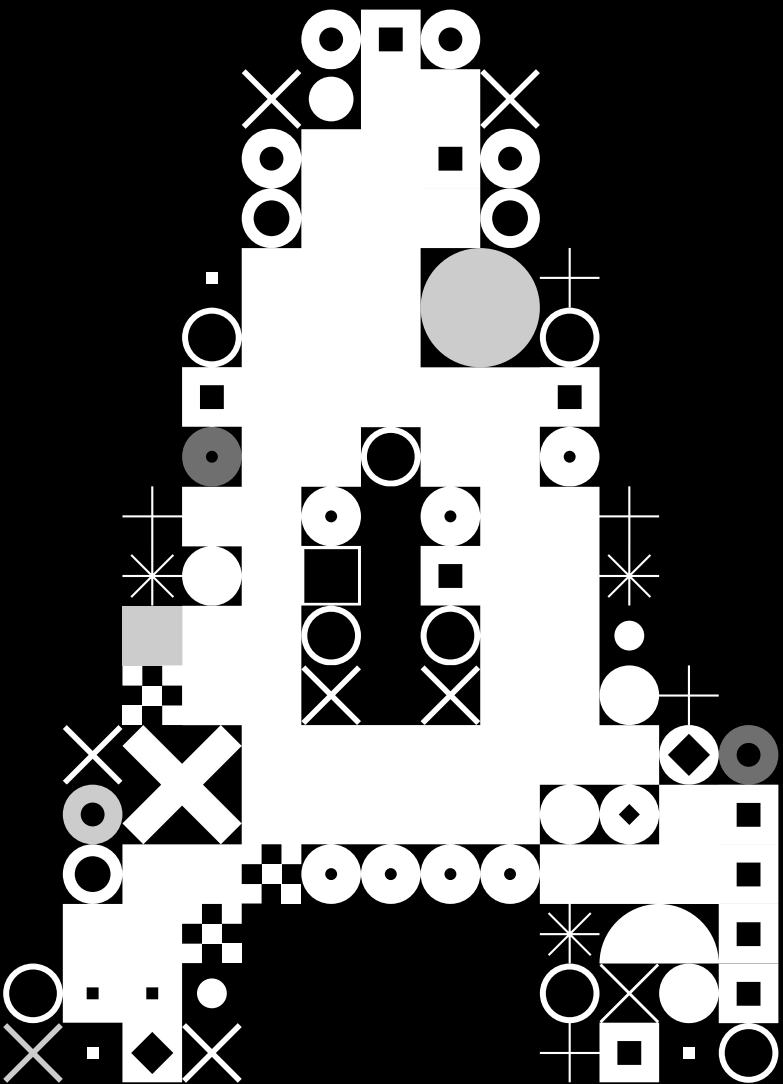
Don't send an email to your boss demanding more pay and linking to this report. It's not going to end well. Rather, use it to start a dialogue. This report provides a picture of what makes for leaders happy with base pay. And more happy employees are better for the organization. In early shareouts of the report, some design leaders are pairing with the HR partners to look at some of the info in this report such as base pay and region, and examining their own recruiting acceptance/attrition rates to see if there is a correlation. If pay is a particularly known issue at your company, you may want to consider a pay equity study for your organization. Consider if you have the right DEI targets. If there are disparity gaps, explore ways you can close these. At the end of the study, consider publishing your hiring goals and pay policies to your company (or even the public) to holding yourself accountable for driving change.



rk

enc

- Location
- Onsite / Hybrid / Remote Happiness
- Years of experience
- Seniority
- Industry
- Race



IX

Appendix

Location overview

574 respondents

	US	NA	APAC	EMEA	LATAM
Number	38965%	42171%	447%	12020%	92%
Average Salary	\$190,907	\$185,684	\$124,261	\$112,124	\$73,350
Years of Experience	16	16	13	14	13

2021 Design Leader Salary Report

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Happiness vs. Onsite / Remote Hybrid overview

592 respondents

	Happy	%	Not Happy	%	Unsure	%
Number	38665%		13823%		6811%	
Average Salary	\$175,902		\$135,772		\$159,558	
Full Remote	44	11%	12	9%	7	10%
Hybrid	180	47%	55	40%	29	43%
Temporarily Remote	161	42%	69	50%	32	47%
No Remote	1	1%	2	1%		0%

Years of Experience overview

592 respondents

Number of responses	Years of experience	Take home base salary
32	5	\$100,321
117	10	\$133,370
179	15	\$160,600
163	20	\$179,078
83	25	\$208,526
31	30	\$186,505

Salary / Exp.

5 years

10 years

15 years

20 years

25 years

30 years

○ Sample size too small to include

2021 Design Leader Salary Report

Seniority overview
595 respondents

	C-suite	%	VP	%	Directors	%	Head	%	Mid-level manager	%	Senior IC	%	Mid IC	%	Junior	%	Other	%
Number	15	3%	87	15%	249	42%	102	17%	94	16%	44	7%	○		○		○	
Salary	\$223,833		\$213,006		\$172,871		\$139,670		\$136,672		\$128,803							
Average Comp Adjust	\$290,982.90		\$295,207		\$224,372		\$180,700		\$177,673.60		\$167,443.90							
Years of experience	19		18		17		14		13		13							
Above / below average	35%		29%		5%		-15%		-17%		-22%							
Fairly compensated																		
Yes	13	87%	55	63%	141	57%	49	48%	47	50%	22	50%						
No	2	13%	18	21%	40	16%	24	24%	24	26%	12	27%						
I don't know		0%	14	16%	68	27%	30	29%	23	24%	10	23%						
Happy																		
Yes	13	87%	63	72%	165	66%	63	62%	55	59%	26	59%						
No	2	13%	13	15%	54	22%	27	26%	32	34%	12	27%						
I don't know		0%	11	13%	29	12%	13	13%	7	7%	6	14%						
Gender																		
Men	10	67%	58	67%	145	58%	71	70%	55	59%	24	55%						
Women	4	27%	28	32%	100	40%	31	30%	38	40%	19	43%						
Non binary		0%		0%		0%	1	1%	1	1%		0%						
Agender		0%		0%		0%		0%		0%		0%						
Not to answer	1	7%		0%	3	1%		0%		0%	1	2%						
None of the above		0%	1	1%	1	0%		0%		0%		0%						
Ethnicity																		
White	11	73%	62	71%	186	75%	76	75%	56	60%	24	55%						
Middle Eastern	1	7%	3	3%	4	2%	3	3%	5	5%	2	5%						
Hispanic	1	7%	4	5%	12	5%	5	5%	9	10%	5	11%						
Asian		0%	14	16%	30	12%	9	9%	15	16%	6	14%						
Black	1	7%	1	1%	6	2%	5	5%	5	5%	1	2%						
N/A	1	7%	1	1%	2	1%	2	2%	2	2%	3	7%						
Indigenous		0%	1	1%		0%	1	1%		0%		0%						
Prefer not to answer		0%	1	1%	9	4%	2	2%	2	2%	3	7%						
Company size																		
100,000+		0%	4	5%	25	10%	7	7%	16	17%	9	20%						
10,000-99,999	1	7%	13	15%	43	17%	13	13%	20	21%	9	20%						
2,500-9,999		0%	18	21%	34	14%	11	11%	13	14%	5	11%						
1000-2,499	1	7%	10	11%	28	11%	10	10%	15	16%	3	7%						
500-999		0%	10	11%	23	9%	8	8%	12	13%	5	11%						
250-499	2	13%	13	15%	37	15%	15	15%	9	10%	3	7%						
50-249	3	20%	11	13%	28	11%	17	17%	6	6%	8	18%						
10-49	6	40%	5	6%	20	8%	15	15%	3	3%	1	2%						
2-10	2	13%	3	3%	9	4%	6	6%		0%		0%						
1		0%		0%	2	1%	1	1%		0%	1	2%						
Education																		
Phd/Doctorate	1	7%	1	1%	3	1%		0%	1	1%		0%						
Masters	5	33%	27	31%	82	33%	24	24%	29	31%	18	41%						
Bachelors	6	40%	53	61%	138	55%	55	54%	55	59%	16	36%						
Associate	3	20%	2	2%	13	5%	5	5%	4	4%	5	11%						
High School or GED		0%	3	3%	8	3%	12	12%	2	2%	2	5%						
Technical or occupational Certificate		0%	3	1%	4	4%	3	3%	2	5%								
Professional Certification		0%	1	1%	2	1%	3	3%		0%	1	2%						
Age																		
18-24		0%		0%		0%				0%		0%						
25-34	2	13%	12	14%	41	16%	33	32%	34	36%	18	41%						
35-44	6	40%	43	49%	129	52%	58	57%	41	44%	20	45%						
45-54	7	47%	28	32%	74	30%	14	14%	18	19%	6	14%						
55-64		0%	4	5%	4	2%		0%	1	1%		0%						
65-74		0%		0%		0%		0%		0%		0%						
75+		40%		0%		0%		0%		0%		0%						
N/A	8	13%		0%	1	0%		0%		0%		0%						
Parent																		
Yes	14	93%	53	61%	150	60%	58	57%	39	41%	18	41%						
No	1	7%	34	39%	98	39%	45	44%	55	59%	26	59%						
N/A		0%			1	0%		0%		0%		0%						

60

The DLF is a private community of design leaders.

This report won't be a one time thing. We also asked leaders about their total compensation package and further subjects to get an understanding of the standard industry offerings.

Through this, and future reports, we aspire to change industry norms around how we discuss pay.

Number of design leader members

3200

+

Number of countries DLF members span

45

Let’s talk about it We hope you have a stronger understanding of what makes for happy pay for design leaders in this first edition of the Design Leadership Salary Report. There’s so much more to the study that goes beyond the report. Want to get more involved?

62	Design leaders, join the discussion We’d love for you to join the Design Leadership Forum, private community where design leaders are discussing these insights, and sharing notes about how to mature their team and careers. Apply to join the community at designleadership.com	Everyone else, stay tuned for more There’s more design leadership content coming out later this year. To stay up to date, subscribe to insidedesign.com
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Authors This report was conducted, analyzed and co-written by Adam Fry-Pierce Report narrative was led and co-written by Rebecca Kerr Supported and co-written by Diego Núñez	Contributors Aaron Stump Jessica Green Ryan Spanswick Richard Banfield Tiffany Vurek Lee Vincent Brathwaite
Design and art direction by ENSEMBLE weareensemble.co.uk	

