

Understanding Working Experiences during COVID-19

May 2020

Report produced in partnership with:



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INTRODUCTION

Like us, we are sure you can remember Boris Johnson addressing the nation on the 23rd March 2020. We knew things were serious, we'd watched the daily news reports and seen the devastating impact across Europe and the wider world.

Yet that evening we are not sure any of us could have imagined the way that our world of work was about to change.

The impact of the Coronavirus has been far reaching. Many of us have faced massive change, uncertainty, and the introduction of words we'd never heard of before – furloughed...

Many business have had to temporarily close, others have had to adjust to the whole workforce working from home, whilst some have had to find a way to carry out their business in a new way, local pubs became pop-up shops, and our key workers have been put centre stage and we have spent weeks applauding their efforts.

Personally, we have seen many of our own clients challenged with the impact of a global pandemic and we have spoken with many leaders and managers who have expressed concerns about how to manage a remote workforce at a drop of a hat...

We set out in May 2020 to understand the impact COVID-19 was having on the workforce and the way we manage people during these very uncertain and unsettled times.

Our report has been constructed from the responses we received to a Survey Monkey survey shared across social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter.

We have focused upon three key areas, Communication, Health and Wellbeing and Working from home. For us as facilitators of leadership development, we wanted to understand how well people managers were doing and the perception of their employees. We think this report makes for some interesting reading and we hope engages you to ask the question 'how would my people have responded?'

At the heart of our efforts is to use our findings to help shape our development offer to future proof People Management capability in a world that has been turned on its head.

We hope to be of service to you in the near future, for now keep positive and focus on your people.

Emma

Founder ENGAGE, MOTIVATE, DEVELOP, INSPIRE

Bina

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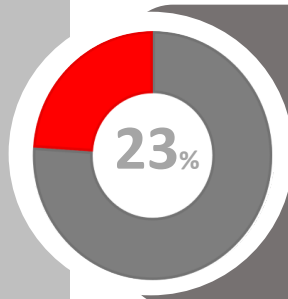
UNDERSTANDING YOUR WORKING EXPERIENCE DURING COVID19 COMMUNICATION

In any company, no matter the size, its employees are its number one asset. In these unprecedented times a company's internal communication has even more of an impact on its employees. Maintaining moral, productivity and engagement when the team are all located in one building has been a challenge for many companies, but now when many are working remotely how are companies fairing?

During May 2020 we asked people to participate in our survey entitled 'Understanding Your Working Experience During COVID-19' one of the sections explored people's opinions of company communication.

Overall the results indicated positively and many companies are doing really well.

However we also noticed a 20% trend... for each of the questions asked around 20% were disagreeing or staying neutral:

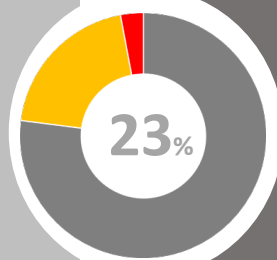


HAS YOUR COMPANY COMMUNICATED A CLEAR PLAN OF ACTION?

77% either strongly agreed or agreed

23% remained neutral or disagreed

QUESTION: Can you afford to have nearly a quarter of your workforce unclear about your plan of action?

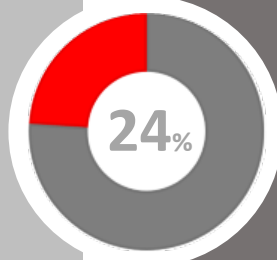


HAS YOUR COMPANY COMMUNICATED IN A TIMELY MANNER?

20% remained neutral or shared they disagreed

3% Strongly Disagreed

QUESTION: When was the last time you asked your people how often they would like to be communicated with? Even when there is nothing new to add the power in hearing from the company in times of crisis and change is significant to motivation and engagement



HAS YOUR COMPANY LEADERSHIP TEAM BEEN VISIBLE DURING THE CRISIS?

76% either strongly agreed or agreed

24% remained neutral or disagreed of this 3% strongly disagreed!

QUESTION: Have you considered the level of visibility you and your leadership team have with your remote workforce?

Can your company afford to have 20% of its workforce unclear about your plan of action, or feeling that communication isn't timely and not sensing leadership visibility?

COMMUNICATION

In March 2020 our government delivered the message to STAY HOME as the single most important action we could all take in fighting coronavirus and protect our NHS in order to save lives.

Many businesses will have had a Business Continuity Plan in place, outlining a range of disaster scenarios and the steps the business will take in any particular scenario to return to regular trade. How many of those plans would have considered the impact of a global pandemic?

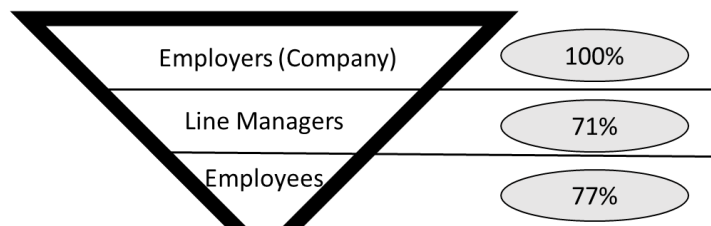
We wanted to understand people’s working experiences during COVID-19, in particular we were keen to understand employers and employee’s perception of the communication they had received during this time.

Employees look to the company’s leadership team for direction, never more so than during times of crisis. Employees need to believe that their company and leadership team have a clear plan of action.

The survey found that one hundred percent of Employers believed that they had communicated a clear plan of action. The reality showed that only 71% of Line Managers and 77% of Employees agreed.

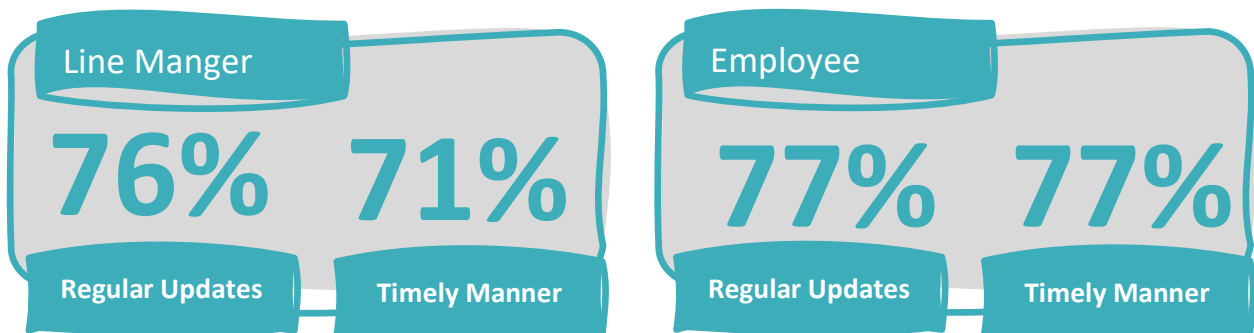
A key enabler of communicating a plan of action is to be clear and concise and our survey revealed that only 67% of Employers agreed that they had communicated in this way. From a Line Managers point of view, 76% of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement “The Company has communicated in a clear and concise way”, whilst our employees actually had a higher perception of clear and concise communication and scored 83% in agreement.

The Company communicated a clear plan of action:



? There is a gap in the perception of clarity in communication from the Employer (Company) through to the Line managers and the Employees...

Many of our respondents had found themselves working from home, whilst a number remained working out in a business location. For either situation, the need to hear regular and timely updates of the business plan is key to business success. Our survey found that one hundred percent of Employers (Company) believed that they had given regular and timely updates. Our Line Managers and Employees responses were:



COMMUNICATION AND LINE MANAGEMENT

As we worked through the survey data one area continued to stick out for us - the important role Line Managers hold. Where an Employer (Company) had given a 100% positive response to questions like having communicated a clear plan of action, providing comms in a timely and regular manner, our Line Managers responses were interestingly lower.

When we asked the question “I have regular communication with my line manager”, our employees responded with a 100% yes, whilst the line managers shared that 22% of them had not...

Take a look at the difference in responses to the same questions from our Employees and Line Managers:



Line Managers are the link between Company Leadership teams and employees. We need to question ‘why are there gaps between the leadership teams and line managers?’.

In times of rapid change, uncertainty and worry, line managers need clarity from their leaders to enable them to engage with and motivate their team members. Whilst our data indicates that Line Managers are seemingly able to keep their lines of communication to their employees open, the same is not to be said between Senior Manager and the Line Manager.

THE WAY WE ARE COMMUNICATING

We asked what the frequency of the Employers communication was giving the options of daily, weekly, fortnightly, monthly and a final option of “not heard from them”.

4% of Employees and 5% of Line Managers actually responded with “not heard from them”.

Weekly came in as the normal frequency with 53% of employees and 47% of Line Managers choosing this option.

Daily communication was limited to around 25% of both the Employee and Line Managers responses, with fortnightly being 13% for our employees and 21% for the Line Managers.

When it comes to the method of communication, it is probably no great surprise to find email being the top choice with just over 80% of both Employees and Line Managers agreeing.

The second most utilised method of communication is the Video Call with 59% of employees and 55% of Line Managers choosing this option.

Since the beginning of the lockdown within the UK; Zoom, FaceTime, Houseparty, Microsoft Teams and all manner of other video-calling apps have become the norm when it comes to meeting our social connection and communication needs. In fact, Zoom at the end of December 2019, reported a maximum of 10 million daily users; by March, 200 million people were on it each day!

Video calls have become a way of working that previously many avoided, preferring the opportunity to meet face to face. We have now been forced to embrace the technology and all its glitches.



As we slowly come out of our enforced “hibernation”, many employees are questioning the need to be bound to an office and are looking to embrace the work from anyway opportunity the lockdown has opened up. We asked the question “When you are able to return to working at your normal location, will you request to continue working from home?”. Of our Employees 12% said that they would like to work permanently from home and 27% occasionally; and of the line managers, 10% would like to work permanently from home with 31% occasionally.

Given the findings from our communication questions surely many organisations need to challenge themselves on how effectively they are communicating, not only with their Employees but their Line Managers.

If we are to enable Line Managers to remotely manage an agile workforce, we need to take stock of our ability to communicate in a clear and concise way that reaches a broad audience with a variety of communication / listening styles.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR WORKING EXPERIENCE DURING COVID19 ANXIETY & YOU

During May 2020 we asked people to participate in our survey entitled 'Understanding Your Working Experience During COVID-19' one of the sections explored peoples levels of anxiety during this time.

There were four key areas highlighted in the results: feelings of fear, annoyance or irritability, time spent worrying and trouble relaxing.

45%



HAVE EXPERIENCED FEELING AFRAID AS IF SOMETHING AWFUL MIGHT HAPPEN

It is OK to feel this way. We are all experiencing a situation we have never faced before; something that we weren't expecting and something that has brought with it an increased level of uncertainty. It's important to recognise that everyone reacts differently. Perhaps you are like the 45% from our survey who said they have experienced feeling afraid. *That's OK.*

Is there someone you can talk to about your feelings?

Sharing your concerns with others you trust, can ease some of your worry – and doing so may help them too!



59%

SPENT EITHER A FEW HOURS OR ALL DAY WORRYING TOO MUCH ABOUT DIFFERENT THINGS

Worrying is a natural human trait. In these uncertain times it's only human for you to be worrying about many different things. There has been much research into the positive benefits of worrying; for example, a recent study identified that "worriers" are more likely to be motivated to take action, e.g. wearing a face covering, when shopping. The very act of worrying may allow people to better prepare themselves for negative experiences in their lives and develop a greater appreciation for positive experiences they encounter. It's about balance, listen to your worries, write them down and then flip them!



59%

SAID THEY HAVE FOUND THEMSELVES BECOMING EASILY ANNOYED OR IRRITABLE A FEW HOURS EACH DAY

Feeling annoyed for what seems to be no apparent reason?

Finding yourself irritable more often?

Know this: you're not the only one. The "lockdown" has us stuck in small spaces; some alone and as a result feeling lonely, and some with housemates, partners or our children, all of whom just won't leave us be! Your feelings of annoyance and irritability are understandable, what you choose to do to overcome them, is down to you. Regular exercise is very effective at reducing stress. A simple walk around the block can help put the world back into perspective and reduce your irritability and annoyance.

64%



REPORTED HAVING TROUBLE RELAXING

Relaxation reduces stress and the symptoms of mental health conditions like depression and anxiety. Whilst we've been "locked down" you would have thought that having trouble relaxing wouldn't have been an issue – did you know there is over 2.2 million minutes of content on Netflix... but, being a couch potato isn't relaxing! Relaxation and the ability to relax actually takes a little effort, but the benefits are more than worth it. A quick 'google' and you'll find loads of ideas on how to relax, some of our favourites over the last few weeks have been, gardening, online Pilates, going out for walks, SUDOKU (*oh yes!*) and baking. **Go on take five and grab a cuppa tea a good book & relax....**



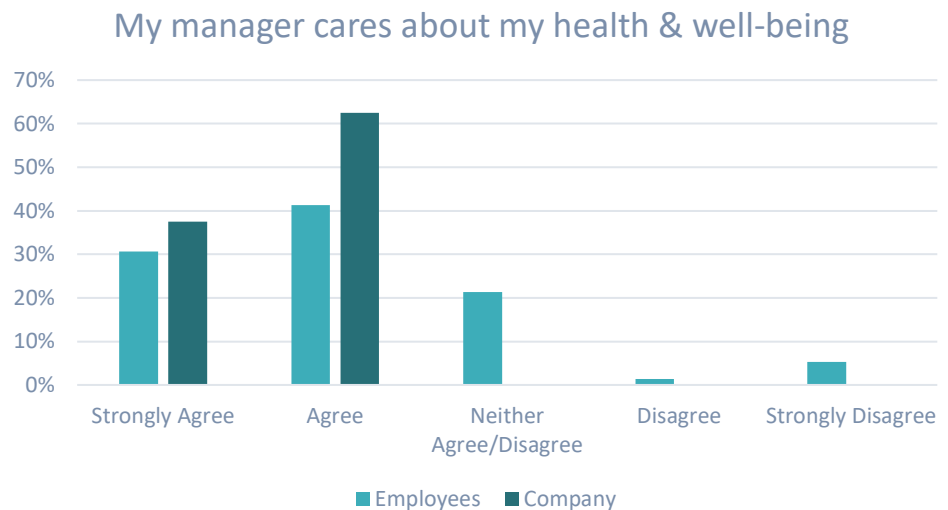
UNDERSTANDING YOUR WORKING EXPERIENCE DURING COVID-19 RESEARCH CONDUCTED FOR EMD INSPIRE & EQUILUX PD VIA SURVEYMONKEY BETWEEN 11TH – 29TH MAY 2020. 100 ADULTS 18-65+

DISCLAIMER: If you are concerned about your health and wellbeing we recommend you contact your GP. Our suggestions are based on personal experiences, they may not work for you therefore we recommend you seek advice from a medical professional should you have persistent symptoms of anxiety.

HEALTH & WELL-BEING

The role of companies in sustaining health and well-being is now more important than ever. Well-being at work goes beyond just health but considers social, financial and community. In this survey, we looked at employee's overall impression of health & well-being within the company.

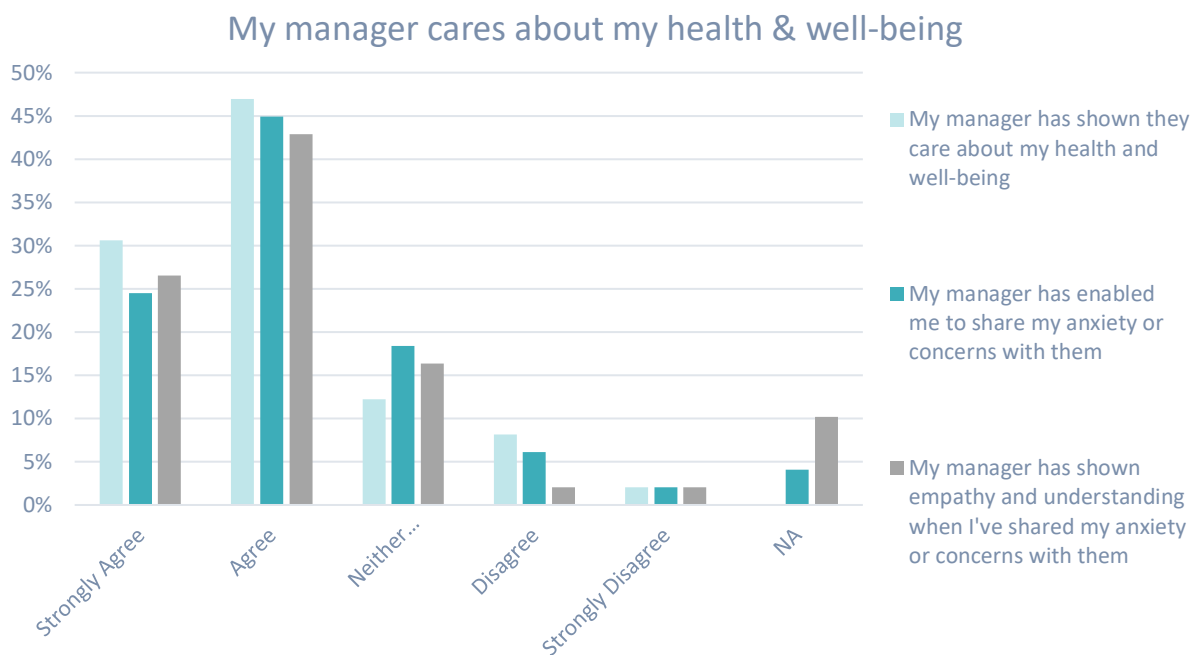
100% of employers indicate that they strongly agree or agree that they care about their employees' health and well-being and 72% of employees strongly agree or agree with this. This is a great result and shows many employers are doing the right things for their employees health & well-being but there is still room for improvement.



28% of employees are on the fence, disagree or strongly disagree, which tells us they don't believe they are being looked after by their employer.

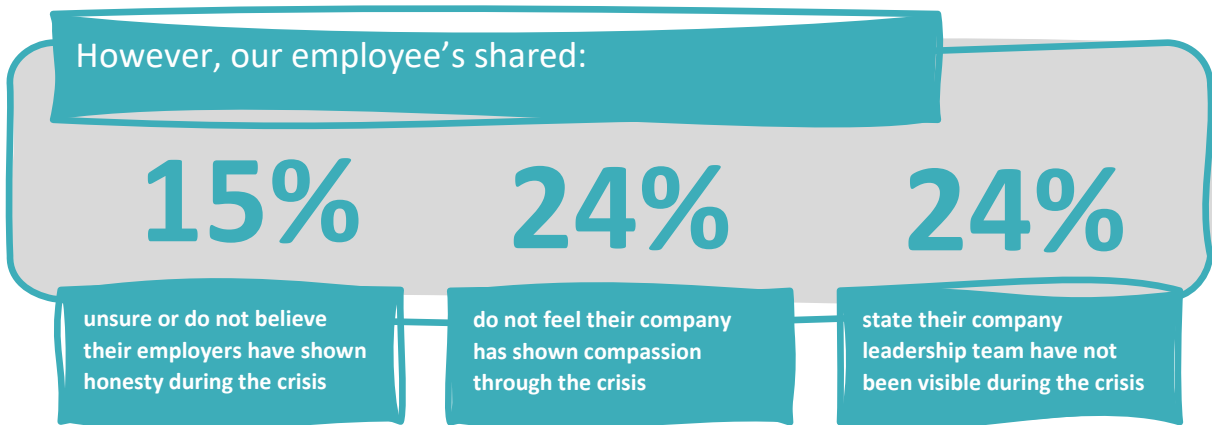
Allowing employees to air their concerns or anxieties can be helpful in managing their health and well-being. Of the surveyed employees:

- 27% did not feel enabled to share their anxiety or concerns with their line manager
- 20% felt their manager showed no empathy or understanding when they've shared their anxiety or concerns with them



How a company 'shows up' during a time of crisis, plays a large role in the impression employees will have of the company in the future. as well as having an impact on their health & well-being.

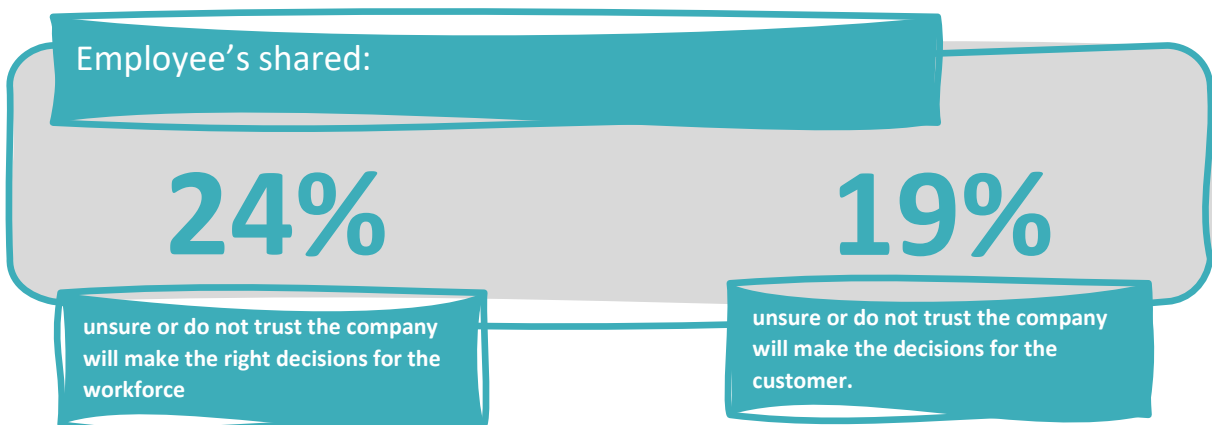
100% of employers surveyed, strongly agree or agree they have shown honesty, compassion and have been visible during the crisis.



Comparing this to line managers:

- 16% of employees are unsure or do not believe their line managers have shown honesty during the crisis
- 16% of employees do not feel their line managers have shown compassion through the crisis

Honesty and trust go hand in hand and is a key factor in company and leadership success. If an employee feels the employer has not been honest or compassionate, the knock-on impact on trust will be seen.



A lot of this relates back to communication, but at the heart of this is the question,

'Who do you want to be as a employers or line manager?'

The way company leadership manage the current situation with COVID-19 will resonate with employees for some time. Employee engagement and retention are becoming increasingly more important over the last 10 years and how a company manages itself during a national crisis has a bearing on the employees.

How well the company handling the COVID-19 situation



20% of employees were unsure or did not feel their employers handled the COVID-19 situation well. Line managers faired slightly worse with 24% of employees unsure or felt it was handled badly.

Employee's shared:

21%

unsure or unlikely to stay with the current employer based on their experience

It's not all doom and gloom and there is time and opportunity to make positive strides to improve employees working experience – now and in the future.

WORKING FROM HOME

With 70% of surveyed employees working from home, 66% of which began this when the measures were introduced; the management of employees has had to change and a new skill set needed for remote management.

Prior to COVID-19, 69% of employees were able to work from home regularly showing a good level of flexibility from employers.

Since COVID-19, 57% of employees would like to occasionally work from home and 22% would like to permanently work from home.

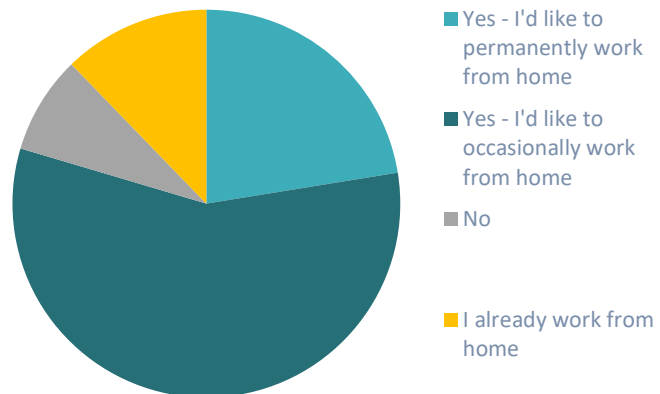
For some employers, it would be prudent to consider what this will look like for your company. If you have previously rejected requests to work from home, this crisis has shown that it is possible for many previously site based employees. How could you make this work, what tools and technology is needed for employees to be effective and how equipped are managers to manage their teams remotely?

Of surveyed employees 86% indicated the company had provided the tools and technology needed to effectively do their job from home, indicating a significant number of employers had been able to work quickly in setting up their remote teams. Not having the right tools to be able to do the job can increase stress levels; people try to find workarounds or even add in processes that take longer thus reducing productivity. With 14% of the remote workforce without the foundation of home working in place, what are the 'must haves' for the remote team? What is the company doing to provide this?

Working from home can be challenging especially if you've been used to working on site. With almost two thirds of the employees stating the workload has increased since working from home and over half indicating they have not been able to maintain a normal working routine; providing the right level of support and guidance for employees can make the difference in the home working experience.

The vast majority of employees have had a good experience since working from home and most of the focus has been on the task – getting the job done; but

Working location



There is opportunity for improvement:

10%

have not had regular communication from their line manager

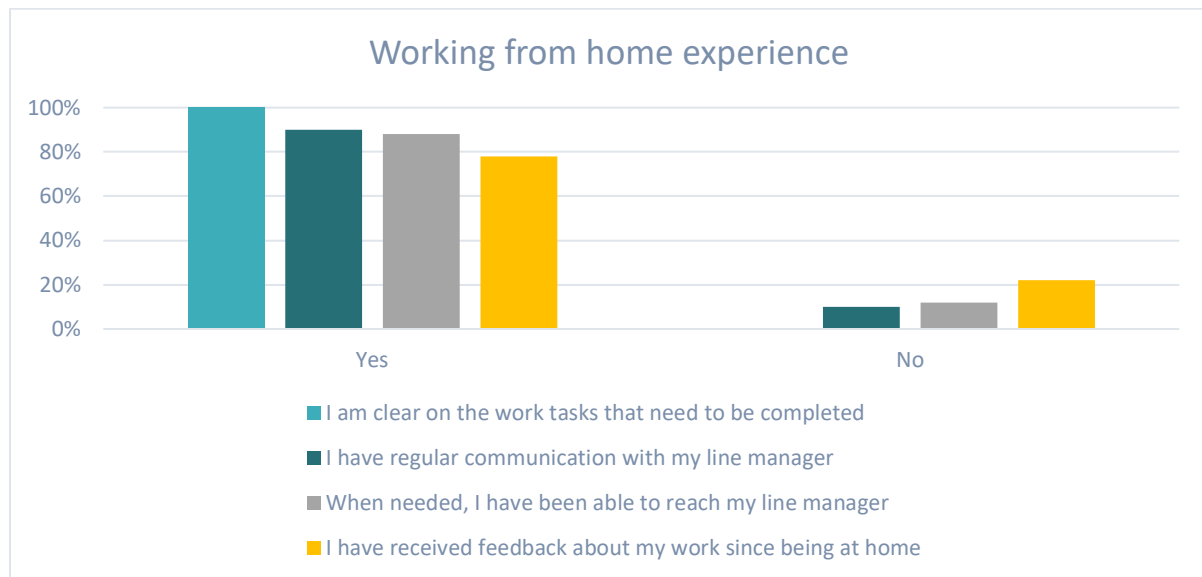
12%

have not been able to reach their line manager

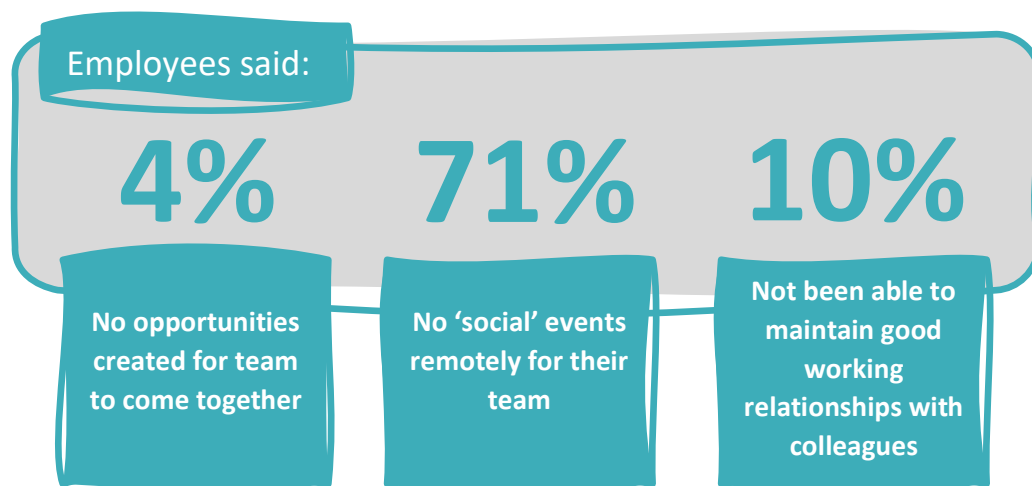
6%

unsure if their work is added value to the overall success of the company

Communication when managing remotely is key. It isn't enough just for someone to know what they need to do, keeping in touch and being accessible all play a part in motivation, engagement and productivity. If this is an area you or your line managers struggle with, we can help.



When managing it is easy to focus just on the task but great leaders also focus on the individual and team needs.



How do you promote team working, morale and team spirit whilst being remote? What changes have been made to enable effective team communication?

When it comes to the employee, the support and their needs will be individual to them. Adapting management styles and providing the right level of support and autonomy is not only important in remote management, but in all facets of management.

- 22% have not received feedback from their line manager since working from home
- 22% are unsure or disagree that they feel completely involved in work
- 4% neither agree or disagree that their line manager trusts them
- 48% were able to undertake job related training
- 31% have identified additional support or training they require

How well do you understand them – their personality, skills and strengths? How often do you acknowledge their work and effort? What are their development areas and what is happening to provide training and development?

And finally, ON THE FENCE

We've seen many reports, where in the rush to share the extremes, the positive (strongly agree) vs the negative (strongly disagree) leaves the report a little short in its insight.

So, we did a final review and found a few questions where our neutral respondents are giving us some real insight.

We've grouped these together and called it "on the fence".

The real beauty with people who are currently "on the fence" is that with a little thinking, a small change in working and a genuine desire to understand what will get them off the fence can provide organisations and managers with a real leap forward in terms of motivation, engagement and productivity.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR WORKING EXPERIENCE DURING COVID19

ON THE FENCE

During May 2020 we asked people to participate in our survey entitled 'Understanding Your Working Experience During COVID-19'. As we explored the results we noticed a number of what we've termed "on the fence" responses. Where respondents neither agreed nor disagreed...



Your team members who are "sitting on the fence" are your quick wins, they are the ones you should be spending time understanding what you could be doing better or more of.



ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Emma Davis is an experienced Learning & Development Consultant with over 20 years' service in the industry.

In 2017 she founded the leadership development company EMD INSPIRE.

Through her background in retail, telecommunications, M&D and health care alongside Operational Leadership and Management Emma has built an exceptional training company where on average 91% of delegates rate their training experience as Extremely Satisfactory.

Emma's passion in creating learning environments that inspires change and empowers people to develop from their experiences is key. Her ability to mobilise the team at 'emd inspire' to facilitate engaging events where people are able to absorb the content and become self-motivated to make a real change back in their organisation is why the team has worked with the likes of TUI, Allpay, Ralph Lauren, Iceland, Kingspan and Barrett Steel to name but a few.

Like to know more contact emma@emdinspire.co.uk or call her direct on 07775 684 804



Bina Tailor started her career as a dispensing optician before moving into the field of learning and development in the optical industry.

She has over 17 years of experience in learning and development and has been instrumental in setting up management and leadership development programmes, ILM qualifications and team development to support businesses.

Bina has extensive experience in facilitating programmes around management and leadership and is an accomplished TAP certified trainer. She is passionate about leadership within the workplace and has a proven track record in building sustainable people management and development capabilities in leaders.

Bina believes that everyone has the ability to grow and maximise their personal and professional potential which is embodied in her team's ability to create quality solutions to help drive business performance.

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