

EXECUTIVE BURNOUT REPORT

2023



evelyn
PARTNERS

Introduction

The past two years have seen unprecedented challenges and hardships for individuals and organisations alike. To gain deeper insight into how those in leadership positions are coping with these challenges, we conducted research to gain a deeper understanding. Our team of experts collaborated to develop a set of questions that would best capture executive attitudes, and we built a comprehensive questionnaire framework.

Recipients were given the option to complete the survey anonymously at their own convenience, either over the phone or through an online link.

Conducted in the final quarter of 2022, our research comprised in-depth interviews with executives from a range of industries and organisations. We aimed to gain an understanding of their current biggest challenges, the impact of the last two years on their operations, and their plans and attitudes for the future.

Our research was designed to provide a comprehensive picture of the executive landscape in the wake of the pandemic. By hearing directly from those in leadership roles, we were able to gain insights into the unique challenges they faced and the strategies they employed to navigate the turbulent environment.

The pandemic, combined with the current economic circumstances, have been massive disrupters to work and personal lives. Leaders have been required to make rapid decisions and support their workforce through worrying periods. We were keen to know how executives are coping and what they are doing to navigate these difficult times.

Our research is anonymised, so no answers are attributed to individuals.

We hope that our findings will prove useful to organisations looking to support their executives in the face of ongoing uncertainty and change.

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PART ONE:
Tell us about your
company



Your role

Our study engaged with senior decision makers who hold critical positions within their respective organisations. They are individuals with very demanding schedules and reaching them often entailed multiple attempts, which was a time-consuming process. Nevertheless, we gained a holistic understanding of their perspectives, opinions, and how they perceive the current work landscape.

Our participant pool was diverse, comprising organisations of varying sizes and industry sectors, and most held senior positions with small teams reporting to them. Additionally, an overwhelming 76% of participants had more than five years of experience in their roles. The research we have conducted is exclusive, as we rarely speak to exactly the same panel again, and their views and sentiments may not be replicated at any other point.

We express our gratitude to each participant for their valuable time and willingness to candidly discuss their personal views.

	Number of respondents
I work in HR	141
I work in people and talent/benefits and rewards/other HR	86
I work in finance	37
I work in operations/customer service	12
I am executive level	9
I am a business owner or partner	11
I work in another area	4
Total	300

At what level?

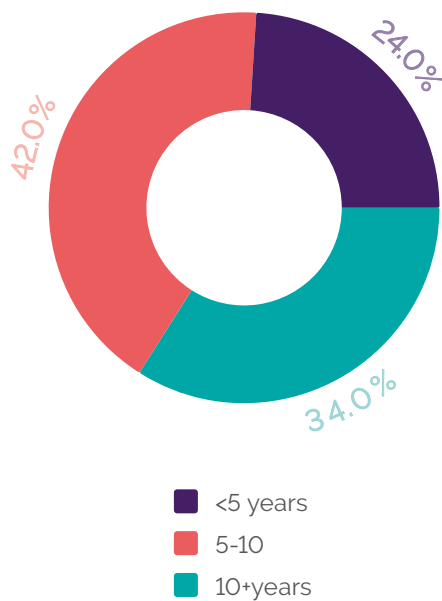
	Number of respondents
Manager	26
Senior management	78
HR admin	21
Director	98
Department head	77
Total	300

Size of firm (based on the number of employees)

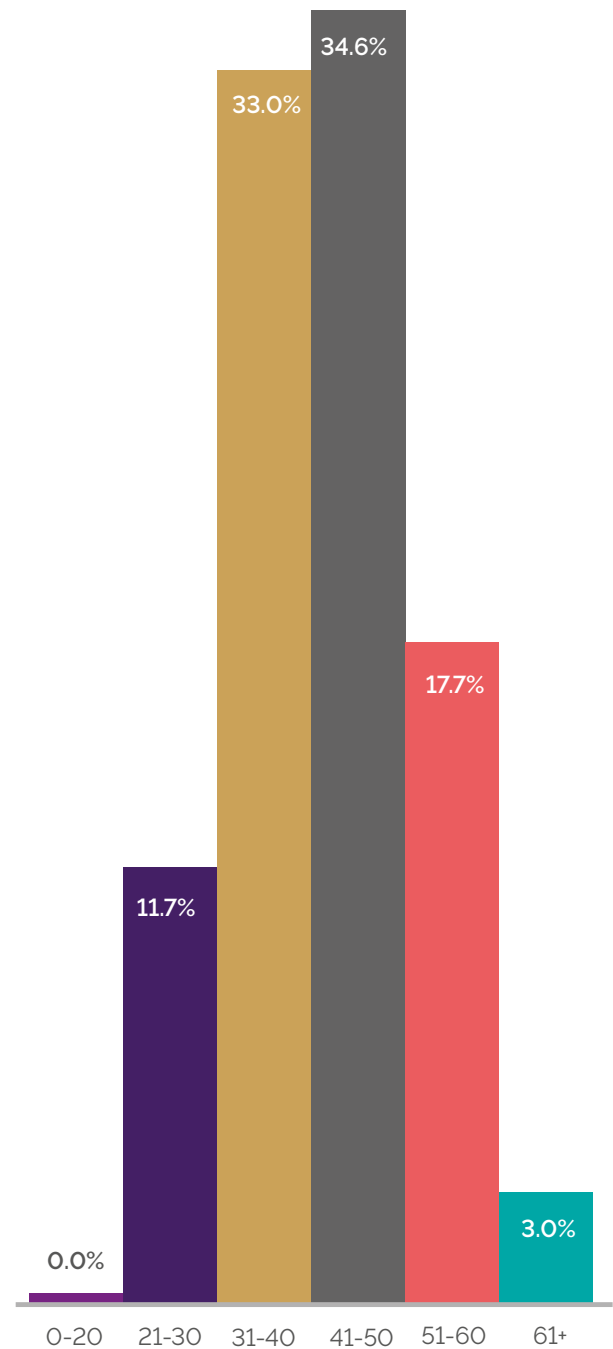
	Number of respondents
0-15	17
16-50	29
51 – 150	67
151 – 250	81
25 – 1,000	56
1,001 – 3,000	31
3,000+	19
Total	300

Total 300

How long have you been in your role?



How old are you?



How many people directly report to you?

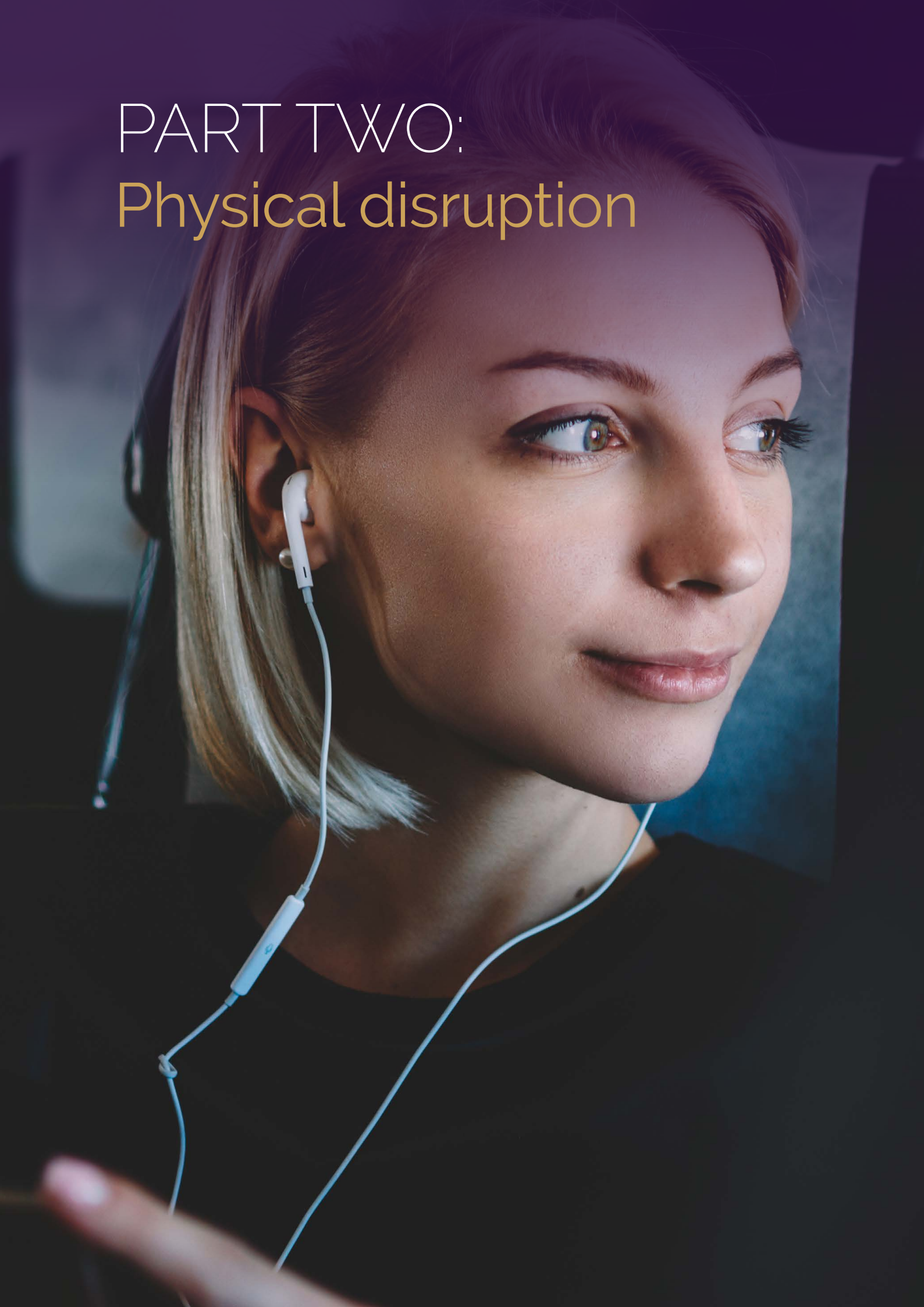
Number of respondents	
5 or less	109
6 – 10	127
11 – 20	53
21 – 50	11
51 – 100	0
101 – 200	0
200+	0
Total	300

Industry sectors



PART TWO:

Physical disruption



Place of work

We aimed to gain insights into how the workplace has transformed over the past 20 months. We asked our participants to select the statement that best represents their working situation, both before and after the lockdowns. The most popular response was that they adhered to government guidelines and worked from home when necessary (35%). Only 10% of companies faced little or no disruption due to their industry remaining open, while 8% belonged to sectors, such as hospitality, that were hit hard by closures and are still experiencing problems post pandemic.

We also examined how working life had changed for our participants personally, and as the statistics reveal, very few remained unaffected during this period. Only 12% continued to go to their workplace, while the majority (53%) worked from home, and 35% had a hybrid work arrangement.

Impact on work

Then, we asked participants to rate the issues that had the most significant impact on their work. Several factors emerged as having a notable impact, and many faced serious disruptions within a short period. The majority had to contend with the challenges of closing premises, sought both government and external support, and experienced disruptions in their supply chain. Concerns around employee engagement, recruitment, and mental health were also prevalent.

Customer impact

The pandemic and subsequent financial crisis has resulted in various experiences in terms of customer base and product diversification, and our research explored only some significant change drivers in business. While our study had a bounded scope, timeframe, and aimed to provide an initial glimpse into how leaders currently feel, the two areas of impact on customers and the need for diversification alone could generate further analysis and a deeper exploration.

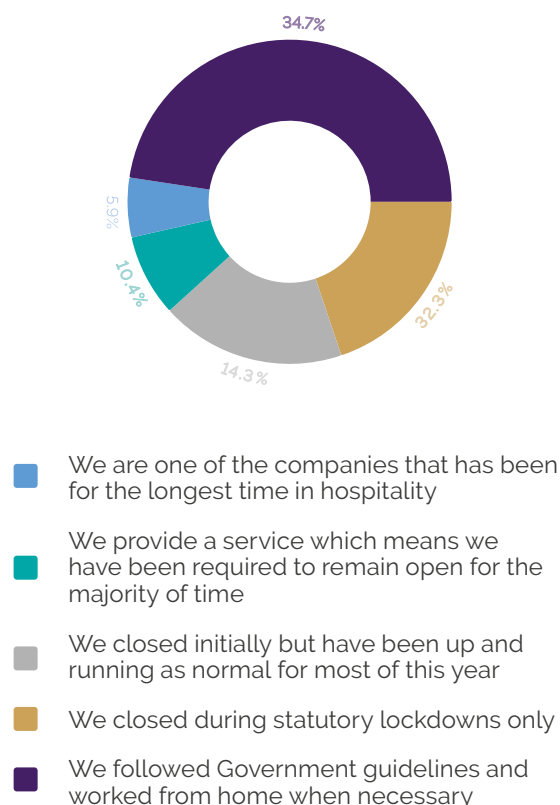
Areas of low impact

Despite the numerous challenges and issues that companies faced, few said that it significantly impacted their charitable support or employee benefit funding.

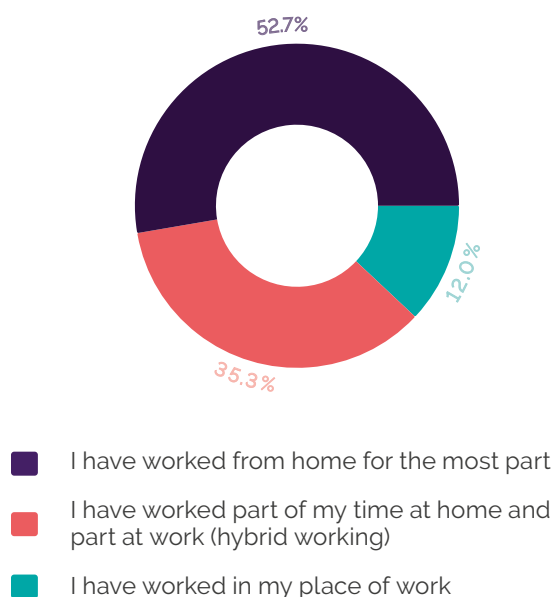
Current challenges

As our survey was conducted, inflation hit a forty-year high of 11%, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine commenced. Inflation is still at record highs, there is no sign of a de-escalation in the war and we have yet to see a drop in business energy costs. So, may we start to see a drop in focus on areas such as charity support, climate investment aspirations, or improving benefits packages as these areas become less of a pressing business priority?. With a Bank of England governor suggesting a turbulent forecast into 2024, it's clear that managing business during a period of significant challenge is far from over.

How has your business functioned over the last 20 months?



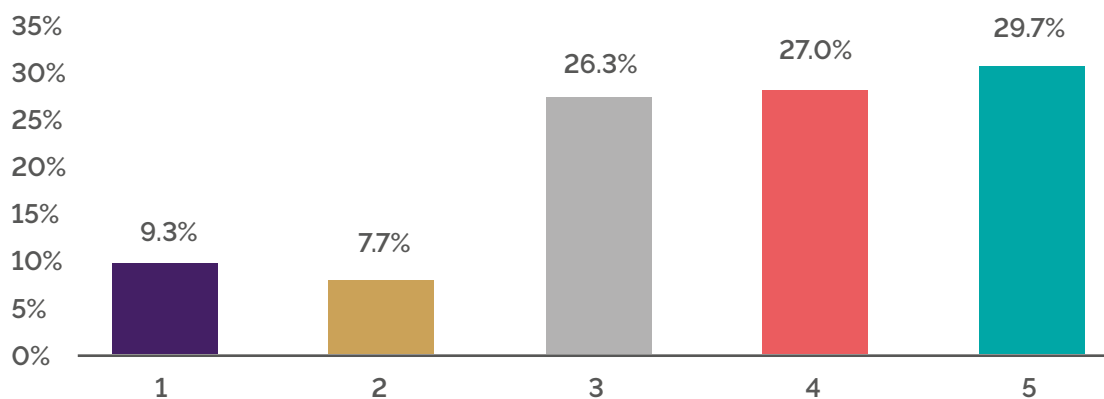
How have you personally worked over the last 20 months?



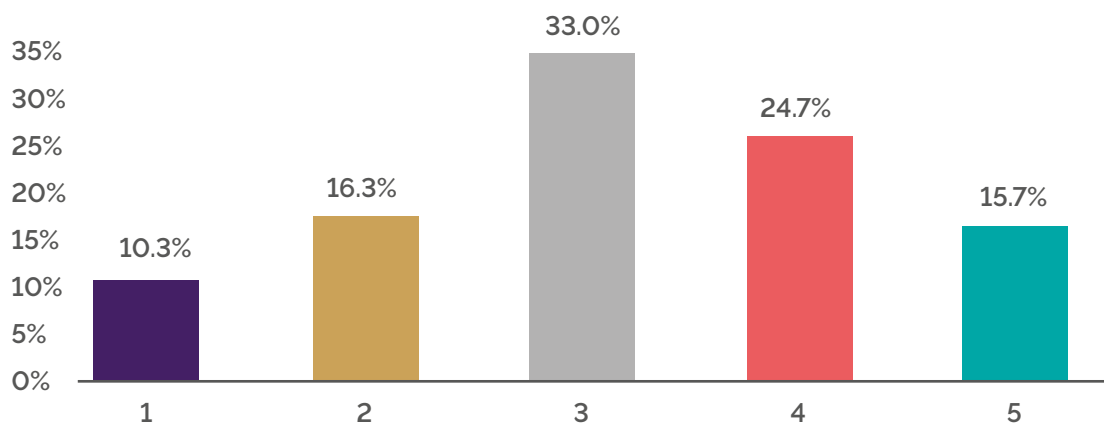
What have the implications of the pandemic and the current financial crisis been on your workplace?

(participants rated each statement from one to five with one being the lowest impact and five the highest)

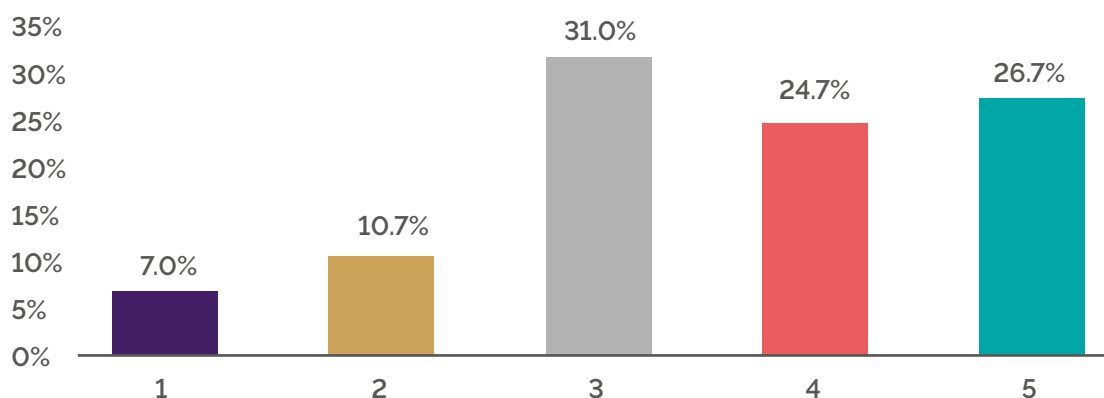
We have closed premises



Our business model has completely changed – we have diversified



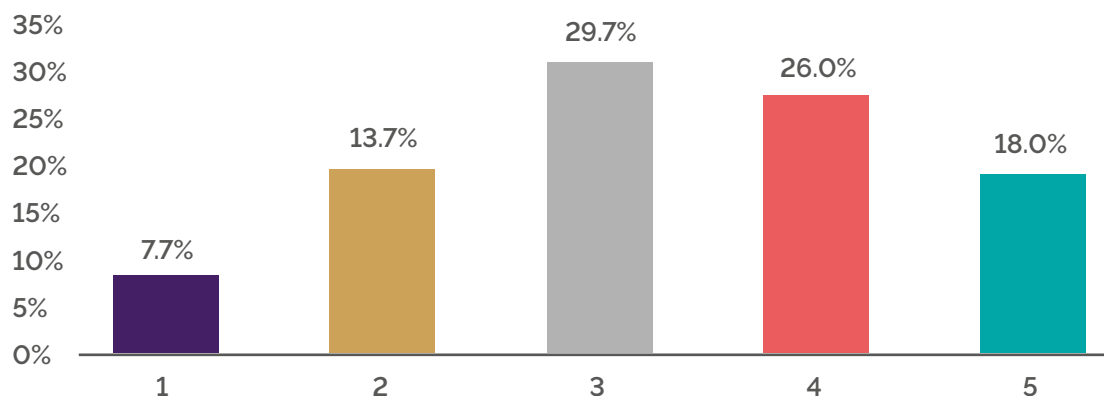
We have relied heavily on government support (furlough and business loans)



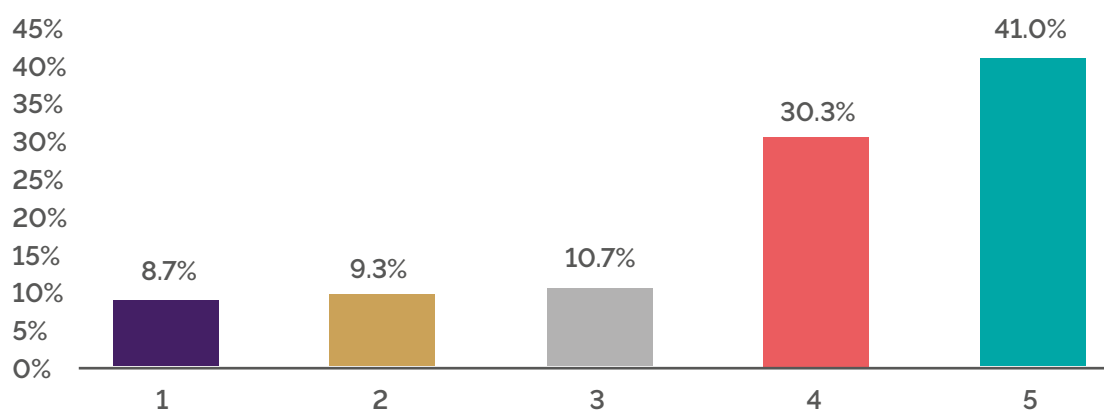




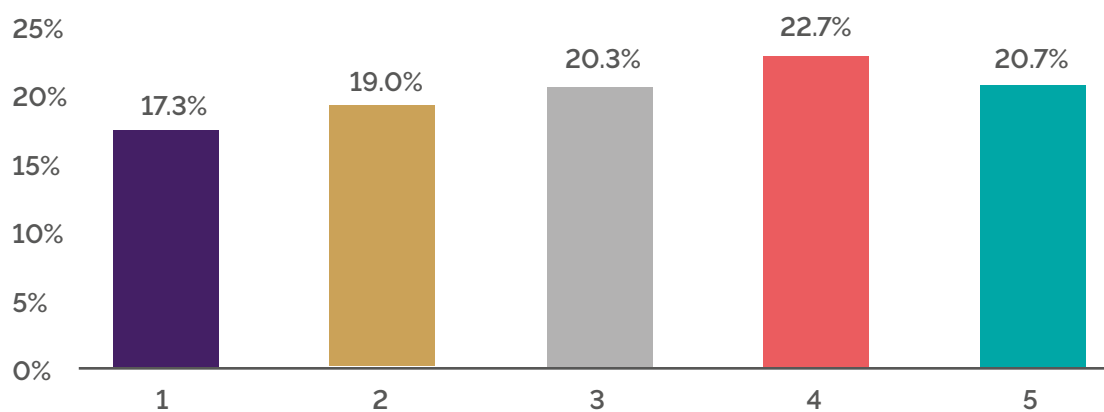
We have had to lay off staff



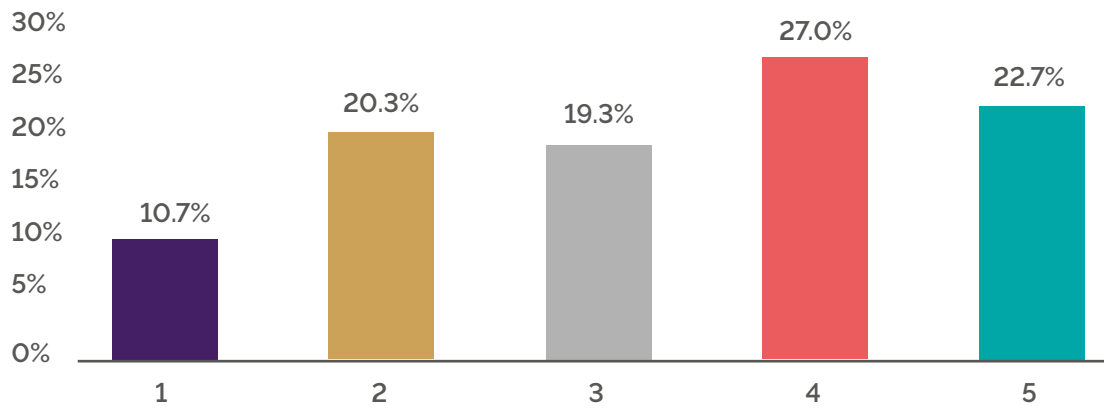
Our workforce has had to work remotely



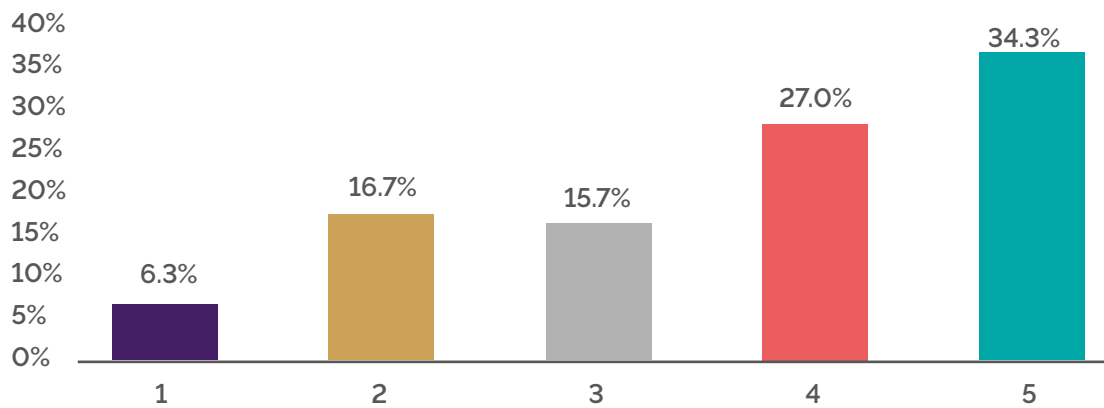
We have lost a large part of our customer base



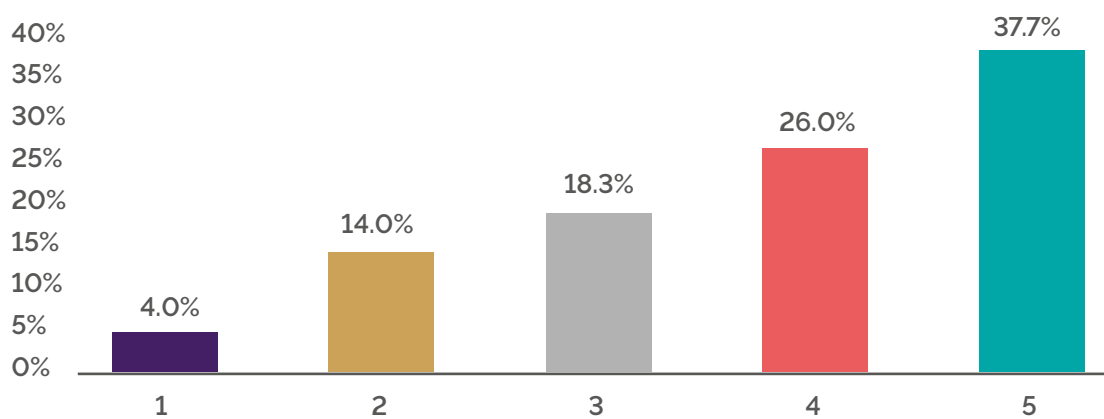
We have taken a large financial hit



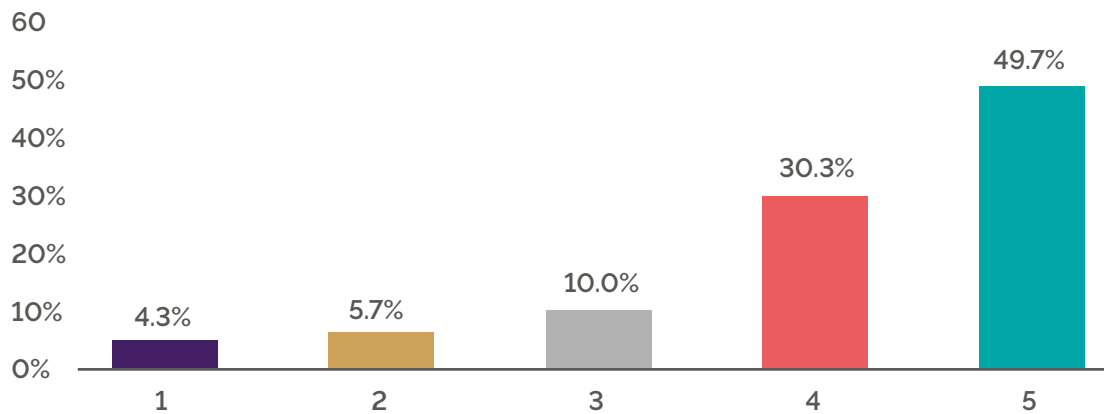
Employee engagement has been challenging



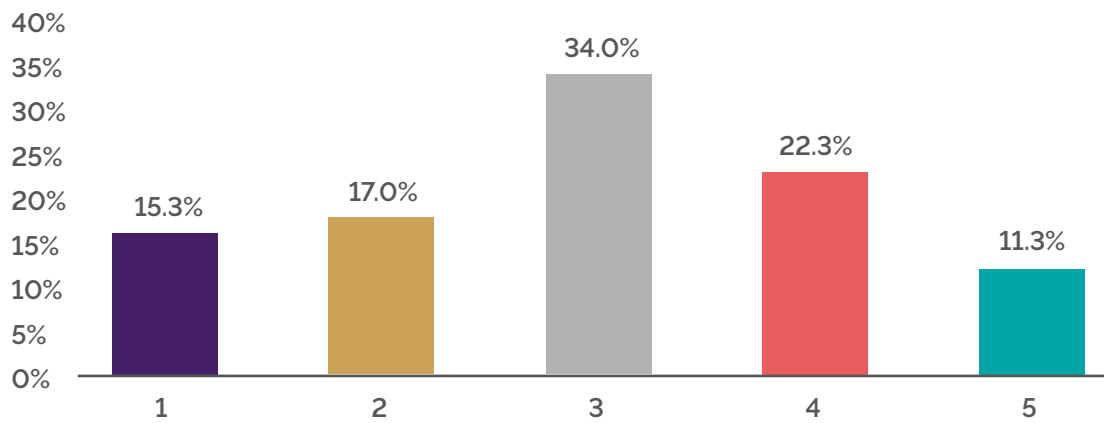
Employee mental health is a concern



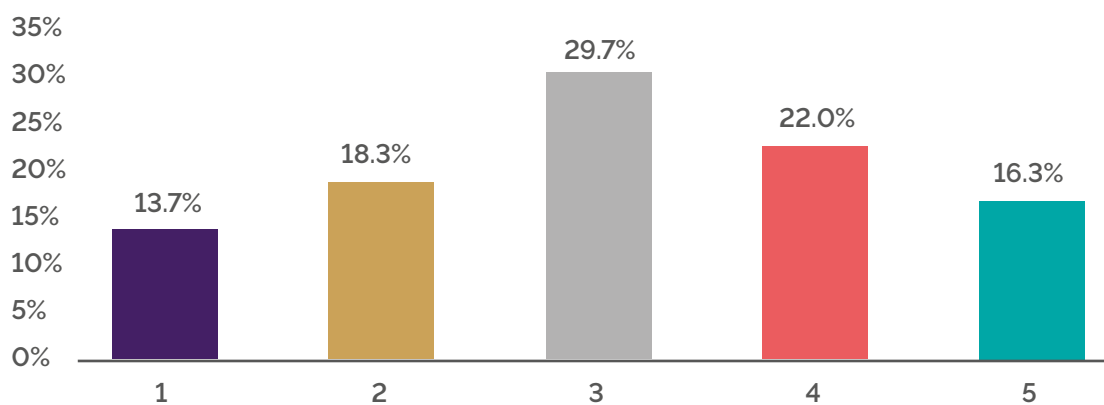
We have had difficulty sourcing goods from suppliers



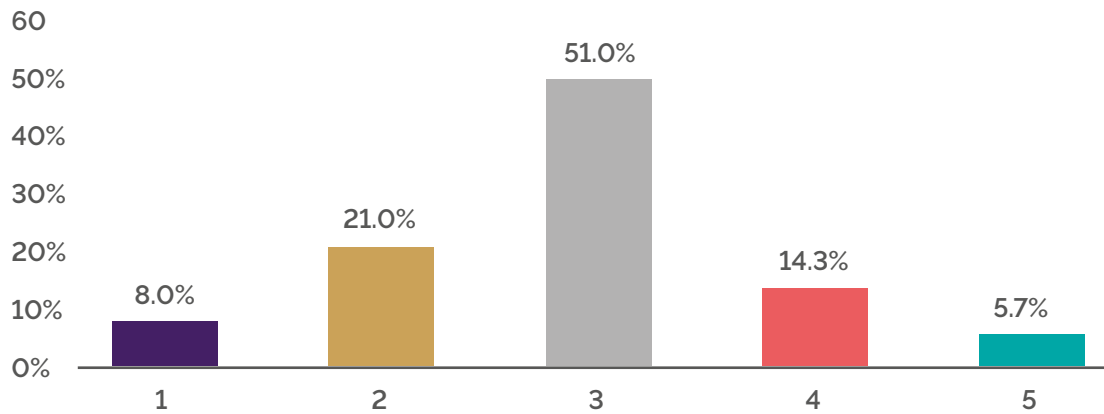
We have had difficulty importing



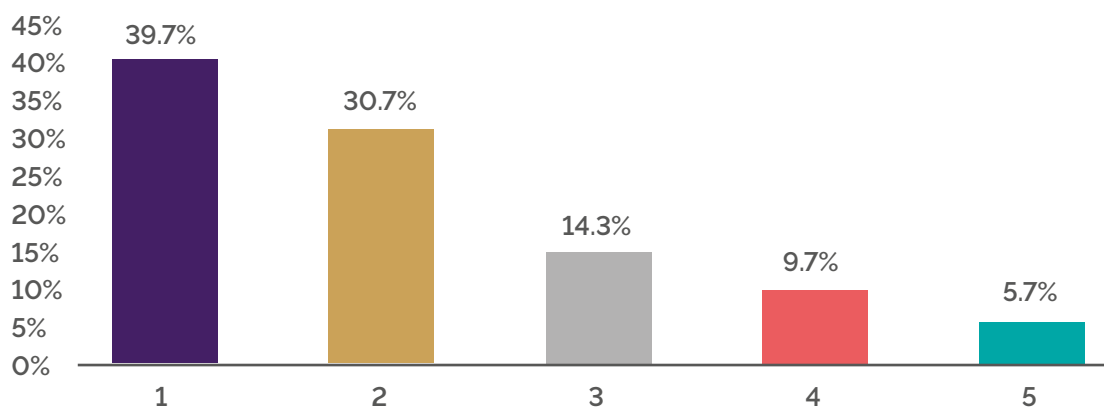
We have had difficulty exporting



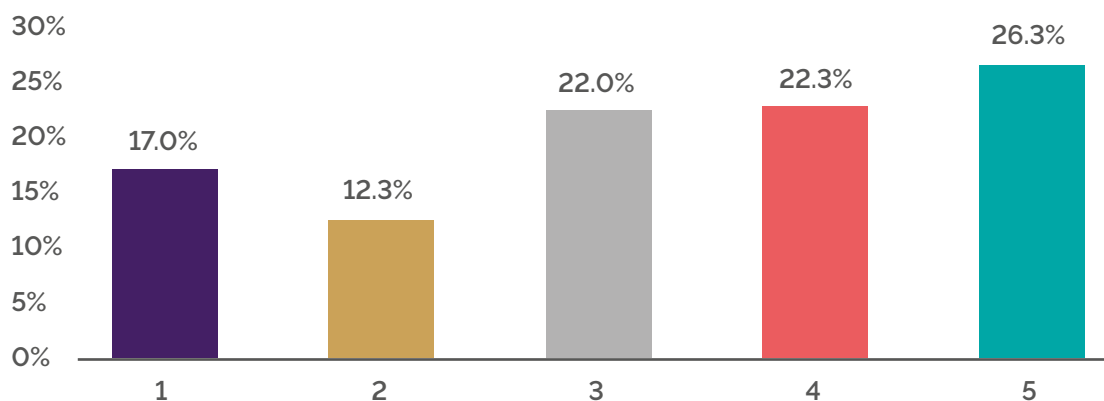
We will need to cut costs (for example, employee benefits)



We have had to stop supporting/funding any charitable, community or social activities



We have had difficulty recruiting





PART THREE:

Emotional disruption



Positive aspects

We asked participants to tell us which of the following statements best described what has been positive about the experience for them. Interestingly, the three most popular answers were fairly evenly split, with roughly a third of participants choosing one of the following options:

- I've developed as a person – 12.9%
- The way we pulled together as a team – 12.2%
- Navigating the financial challenges – 12.2%

Homelife challenges

Then, we asked what has been the most challenging aspect for them at home. Similarly, just over one third chose one of the top three responses from a number of options available. The results here echo what most people felt – worry, isolation and for a long time, no sense of knowing when the crisis would end. The results show the most challenging aspects at home were:

- Worrying about my family – 14.6%
- The uncertainty over the length of time with no normality – 13.3%
- Not seeing friends and colleagues – 13.1%

Difficulties at work

Our focus moved back to work, asking what was the hardest part about it during the pandemic. It may not be a surprise to see that the challenge of managing people remotely is in the top three:

- Managing people remotely – 15.2%
- Managing workload – 13.3%
- Employee mental health – 12.2%

Government-imposed remote working was a learning curve at the start. Given that it has continued, it may also be unsurprising to see that managing workloads (given the new way of working and the challenges that came with that) is also at the top of the list.

Mental health

Leaders are aware of the impact of the last two years on their employee's mental health and it has become a leveller across various workforces. Previously, there may have been disparities between leaders and staff in terms of pay, bonuses, and benefits. Through the pandemic and now in these uncertain, financial times, mental health has indiscriminately impacted families, jobs, schooling and liberty. Board expectations and performance are no longer the sole key drivers. Instead, survival is of paramount importance.

We then wanted to measure how leaders feel at this moment in time, so we asked them how do you feel at the moment?'

Just over 50% chose a positive indicator, showing they are optimistic and upbeat about the future. One in four leaders feel slightly burnt out. Worryingly, 20% (one in five) indicate they are totally burnt out or suffering with severe levels of stress and anxiety.

Companies expect a lot from those with responsibility for people. This group are expected to:

- Lead others
- Deal with employee issues (such as absence and recruitment)
- Turn negative situations around
- Maintain performance
- Keep customers happy
- Reach financial targets
- Communicate positively
- Grow the business in the current climate

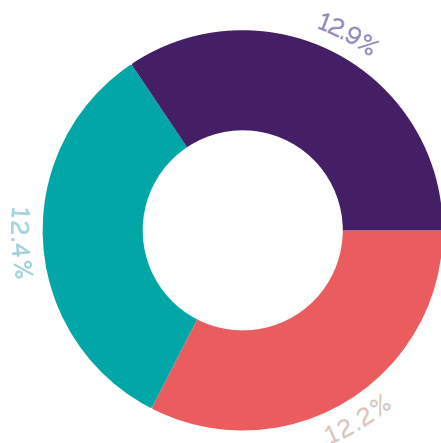
It's a big ask.

The next natural question to look at is the kind of support leaders are able to utilise at work. They could pick more than one from the selection provided below (but no one did). The most popular type of support leaders selected was private medical insurance (42%). We gave the option of selecting 'other' so they could tell us about things they have in their company that they value that we hadn't thought of, but no one chose this. The next most popular type of support was occupational health with 22% choosing this.

What has been positive for you?

We asked participants to consider what had been most positive, emotionally. They were provided with 12 possible options and could select three. The most popular are shown here with the other options listed below.

- High earning employee support – 10.9%
- Have learnt a lot from managing in times of crisis – 10.6%
- To be able to maintain our business under these circumstances – 10.2%
- I am stronger/better from the experience – 8.2%
- Rising to the challenge – 7.4%
- It's been more about people in the workplace than work itself – 7.4%
- Bringing people closer together – 4.6%
- What we do/what we provide really helps people – 2.3%
- Other (specify) – 0.9%

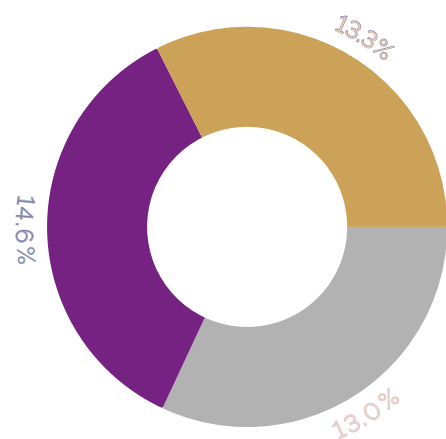


- I've developed as a person
- The way we pulled together as a team
- Navigating the financial challenges

What has been the hardest part for you at home?

We asked participants to consider what have been the hardest things to deal with at home. They were provided with 10 possible options and could select three. The most popular are shown here with the other options listed below.

- Financial worry – 12.1%
- Not looking after myself physically or mentally – 10.3%
- Worry/fear about catching Covid – 10.2%
- Working too long/too hard with no balance – 9.5%
- Anxiety/stress – 9.0%
- Seeing people close to me become ill – 8.1%
- Other (specify) – 0.0%

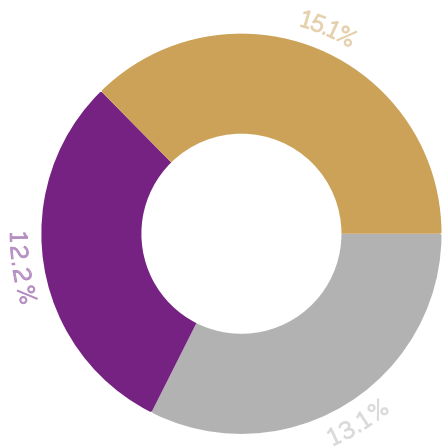


- Worry about uncertainty and the length of time with no normality
- Not seeing friends and colleagues
- Worrying about my family

What has been the hardest part for you at work?

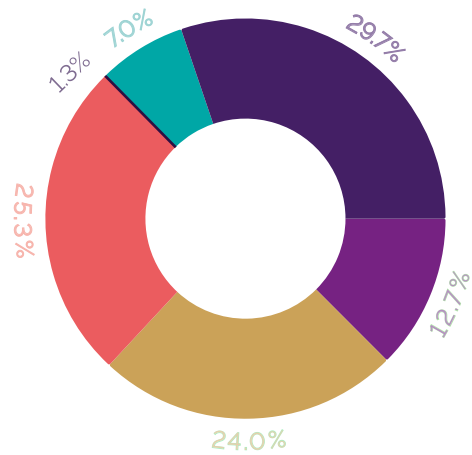
We asked participants to consider what had been the hardest things to deal with at work. They were provided with 10 possible options and could select three. The most popular are shown here with the other options listed below.

- Maintaining morale – 11.9%
- Performance and targets – 10.4%
- Lack of employee engagement – 10.4%
- Board expectations – 10.0%
- Managing hybrid working – 9.8%
- Adapting to significant workplace changes – 7.1%
- Other (specify) – 0.0%



- Managing people remotely
- Employee mental health
- Managing workload

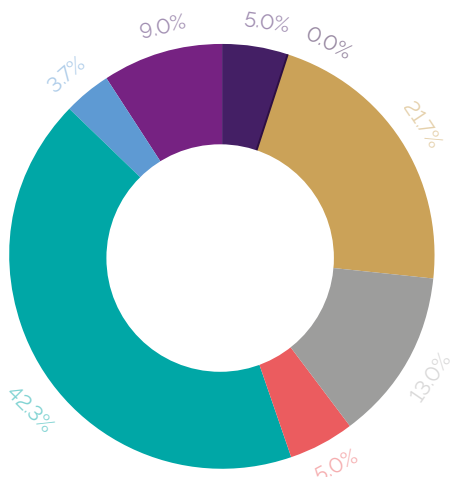
How do you feel at the moment?



- I am pleased how I have handled everything and enthusiastic about the future
- I feel anxiety and I am concerned about the future
- I feel a bit burnt out but not too bad
- I feel positive and optimistic
- I feel totally burnt out
- Other

What support do you personally have at work?

Participants could select more than one option.



- I have a work coach or mentor I can talk to
- I have occupational health support
- I have access to medical experts or mental health experts at work
- I have executive/senior management specific support
- I have private medical insurance
- I have employee assistance provision with counselling support if I need it
- I have App technology that provides medical services
- Other (specify)

PART FOUR:

The here and now



Positive aspects

This next short section looks at what is happening right now. We wanted to gauge how many leaders are back in the workplace fully, how they feel and what plans they have for the future.

Where they are working

We asked, 'where are you working presently?' Slightly more than half (53%) said they were back working completely in the workplace, 16% said they were still working at home and the remaining 31% were working both at home and work (commonly known as hybrid working).

Location of staff

We questioned 'where are your staff working presently?'. The answer here shows a slight difference with 31% of staff still working from home, 21% are hybrid working and 48% are fully back at the workplace.

Current issues for leaders

We wanted to gather a snapshot of what issues are worrying leaders at this present time. The most popular concern (31%) was a poor work/life balance, with 22% having concerns about their mental health. In order to get through a crisis, generally people don't mind rolling up their sleeves and getting stuck in, but working at crisis capacity level is not sustainable in the long term.

What conclusions can be drawn?

Looking at the answers here in conjunction with the answers given above on burnout and stress, it can be concluded that companies should have some serious concerns about their leaders and be doing everything they can to provide support. This report shows the need to help executives with burnout now, or at least in the very near future.

We're often told to put your own oxygen mask on before helping others. If we expect executives to lead, inspire, motivate and steer companies then employers need to provide the resources to help. Looking at the list above detailing the support leaders have available to utilise, there is a distinct lack of innovation and effectiveness.

Can we really expect private medical insurance and occupational health to be the solution for everything leaders need? Or is there a lot more that could be done? Would access to specific benefits that were independent from the workplace have more take up and impact?

In whatever capacity you are reading this report, you may want to consider whether there are any aspects in your own business where you could take action.

If you are a leader in an organisation, you are not alone.

In all sectors and company sizes, leaders have found it challenging to lead under the circumstances we have faced. Mental health is everyone's concern regardless of the level you operate at. If you are a company benefit decision maker, what insight can you take away? Does your offering hit the mark?

What can be done?

There are lots of crisis responses happening at the moment to help employees with the cost of living crisis. The fall out of inflation reaching a 40 year high, unemployment at the lowest for 50 years, soaring costs and low wages is impacting everyone. Companies are finding themselves helping in ways they haven't done so before, so that they can retain the staff they value.

For example, The Guardian reported that Janet Leighton, director of happiness at Timpson, now provides budget counselling to help people restructure commitments, crisis loans or in some instances, gifts of white goods to support employees in need¹. Sam Ward, MD of restaurant group Umbel, told Dine Out that he is a strong advocate of caring for colleagues by paying a fair wage in the hospitality sector. His company have also bought properties in Hong Kong, London and the Lake District to provide subsidised homes for staff². They recognise the benefits of career paths in their sector, and that helping people to get on the ladder, earn promotions and staying is beneficial for both parties. Even in small businesses, we see initiatives like the owner of a flooring wholesaler supplier in Preston, Lancashire now providing a weekly shop of everything his staff need to make lunches all week.

Maybe we need to apply the same level of care and think about innovative ideas to support leaders in their roles.

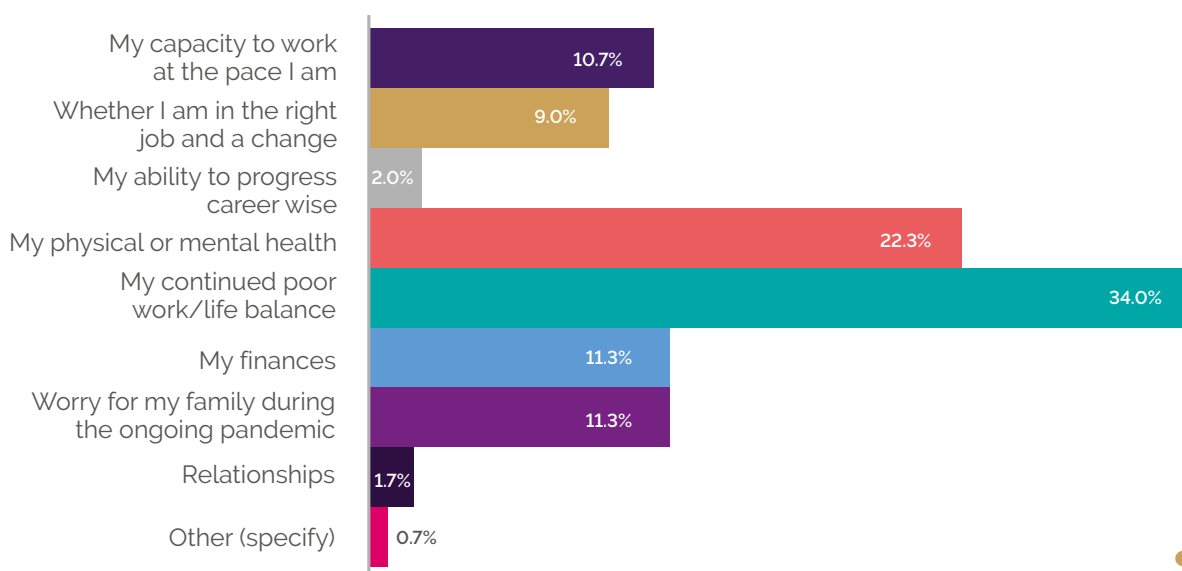
Testing general optimism for the future

Although director and CEO salaries have well outpaced average wage rates in the UK and globally over a number of years, there have not been the same increases in middle management and many households, particularly those with caring responsibilities, are being pushed to the brink.

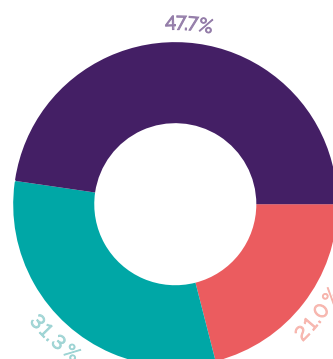
The last couple of questions we presented aimed to test the general optimism going forwards. We asked, 'what is worrying you most in the workplace?'. Lack of employee engagement appears to be the highest concern (14.6%), company finances are a strong second (13.3%), and interestingly, employee mental health (11.5%) is also a common concern. This signals an awareness of the importance of mental health and similarity with leaders' own situations. Lastly, we asked 'what are your plans going forward?' and were surprised and humbled by the response. The top priority of more than half (52%) of leaders is to 'support their people through this period'. Given everything, including the strain and their own mental health, loyalty and concern for others is at the top of the list. We wonder how much this is understood and valued by shareholders and Boards.

Another positive indicator was selected by 28% of leaders – 'if I can manage under recent circumstances, I can do anything, this has made me hungry for new challenges.' This type of resilience is fantastic to see. And lastly, 17% said it made them realise that they work for a company that fits with who they are and they want to stay. We, perhaps naively, expected more people to be unsettled and wanting to move or retire but in the sample, very few selected any of the pessimistic options. This stoic group of individuals clearly have more to give and more they want to do for their companies.

What is worrying you the most personally?

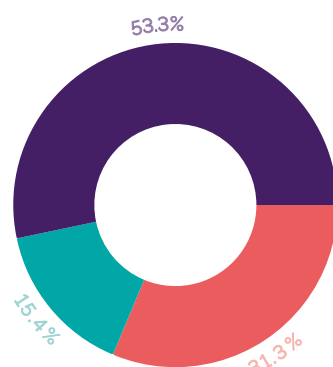


Where are your staff working presently?



- In the workplace
- Mixture of home and at work (hybrid working)
- Majority are still working from home

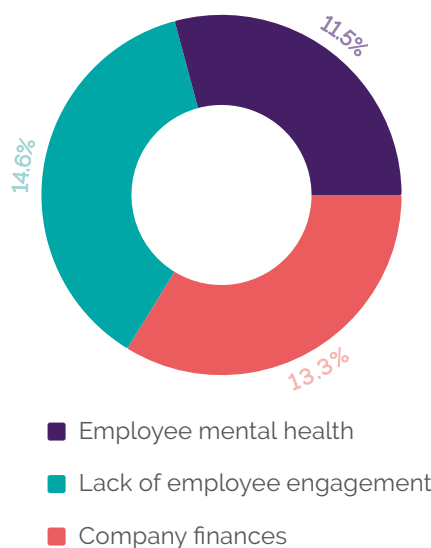
Where are you working presently?



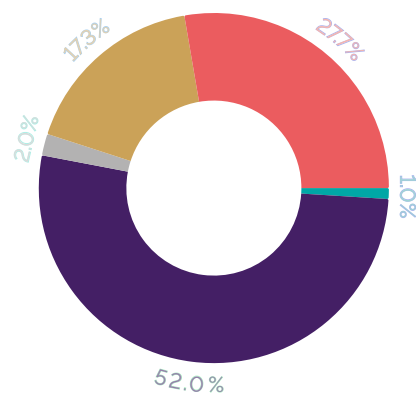
- In the workplace
- Mixture of home and at work (hybrid working)
- Majority are still working from home

What is worrying you most about work?

- Managing hybrid working – 9.4%
- Capability to motivate and inspire people under these continuing circumstances – 9.4%
- Ability to re-establish our customer base – 9.0%
- Risk of future pandemics and lockdowns – 8.0%
- Managing workload – 7.4%
- Future redundancies if things don't pick up – 7.1%
- Rise in Covid infection rates – 5.2%
- Ability to recruit – 5.2%
- Other (specify) – 0.0%



What are your plans?



- If I can manage under recent circumstances, I can do anything, this has made me hungry for more challenge
- I realise I work for a company that fits with who I am and I want to stay
- I want to leave this company/industry and go somewhere else
- To support my people through this period
- I am looking to retire as soon as I can
- Other (specify)

Contact us

To discuss your organisation's specific needs and find out more about how we can help you, please book an initial no-obligation consultation.



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