



Quality Consultants Limited

WORKING FROM HOME DURING A PANDEMIC

The Employee Experience

MAY 2020

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THE HIGHLIGHTS

91%

Almost all respondents to the survey said they have a clear understanding of what is expected of them while working from home (WFH).

82%

4 out of 5 respondents believe they are as or more productive WFH as working at the office.

53%

Over half of the respondents believe they are getting more work done at home than at the office. Female respondents were more inclined to believe so than male respondents.

60%

If given the option, 3 out of 5 respondents would work from home 2 or 3 days per week. Only 5% of the respondents would not want to work from home at all.

60%

3 out of 5 respondents say WFH has given them a better work/life balance.

62%

A little over 3 out of 5 respondents say they feel less stress WFH than at the office.

53%

Over half of the respondents say they have no fear of losing their job while WFH. Male respondents are less fearful of losing their job than female respondents.

46%

Less than half of the respondents say they are getting the psychological and emotional support they need from their company while WFH.

13%

Just over 1 in 10 respondents say their company is doing a good job of implementing WFH at this time.

- **Not having to commute to and from work is what respondents like most about WFH, while the disconnection from their co-workers is what they like least.**
- **Respondents' main suggestion for their company to support them while WFH is to provide them with the resources they need to be successful, and/or to upgrade the resources they have.**

THE SURVEY

COVID-19, the novel coronavirus global pandemic, has impacted the world in unprecedented ways, including how we work. In order to contain the spread of the virus, many organizations have implemented work-from-home (WFH) practices for their office staff. This is uncharted territory for many employees who are not accustomed to this work arrangement, and organizations and their employees have been grappling with how to make it work, especially as this may be the “new normal” for some time to come.

We at Quality Consultants Limited are acutely aware of the challenges that both organizations and employees are facing at this time, and, as a company whose core business is employee research, we embarked on a study to measure the impact of WFH on employees, with a view to helping organizations better manage and support their staff while ensuring business continuity.

Our objectives for this survey were:

1. To find out how employees are adapting to and coping with working from home,
2. To assess their self-reported productivity levels and wellbeing while working from home,
3. To identify what employees think they need to be effective in their jobs while working from home, and
4. To make recommendations to organizations to better manage and support their remote workers.

The survey was conducted online during the period April 27 to May 15, 2020. It comprised six demographic questions, 24 closed questions and three open-ended questions.

A total of 220 usable questionnaires were received from several local, regional and international respondents. However, over 80% were from Trinidad & Tobago. Over 75% of the respondents were working from home for the first time, while just under one in five normally worked both from home and the office. The other 5% worked in the office only.

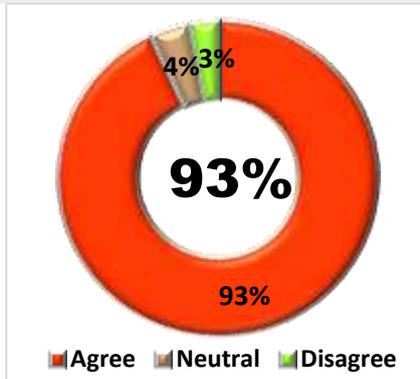
Thirty-one percent of the respondents were management personnel, while 28% were professionals. The rest of the sample comprised supervisory, administrative and technical staff. Operations and Human Resource departments accounted for over 60% of the sample, with other respondents coming from Marketing and Sales, Finance, IT and a range of other areas. Two-thirds of the respondents were between 30 and 49 years old, while females outnumbered males by more than two to one.

This report presents the findings of the survey and suggests a way forward for organizations in the continuing scenario.

THE RESULTS

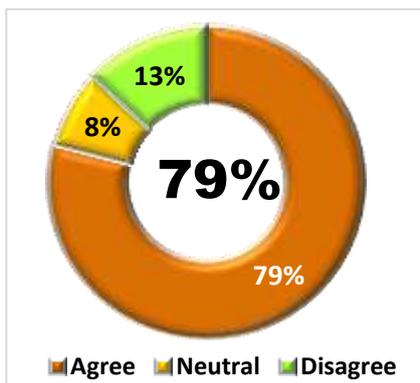
READINESS FOR WFH

“I have the technology (Wi-Fi, connectivity) I need to work effectively from home.”



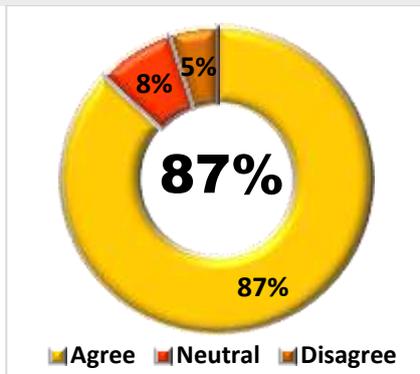
Almost all respondents say they have the technology they need to work effectively from home. Only 3% said they didn't.

“I have the resources (material and equipment) I need to work effectively from home.”



Over 75% of the respondents indicated having the resources they need to work effectively from home. 13% say they don't, while 8% aren't sure. Although almost 4 out of 5 respondents said they have the resources they need, providing or improving resources was respondents' main suggestion for companies to make their WFH experience better.

“I have access to the information I need to do my job.”



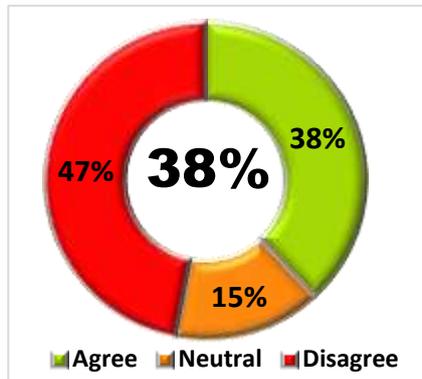
Almost 90% of respondents say they have access to the information they need to do their job. Only 5% don't think they do, while 8% aren't sure.

Although employee readiness for WFH was found to be high overall, interestingly, it was significantly higher among older respondents than among millennials (respondents below 30). No other demographic differences were found.

THE RESULTS

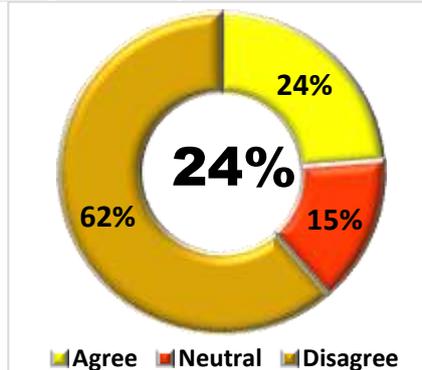
COPING WITH WFH

“Adjusting to working from home has been a challenge for me.”



Close to 40% of the respondents admit that WFH has been a challenge for them. But almost half say it hasn't, while 15% are non-committal. Male respondents were more inclined to say that WFH was *not* a challenge for them than female respondents. Adjusting to WFH seems to be easier the older respondents get, with ease of adjustment increasing with age. This could be a function of the fact that the older respondents tended to be managers with pre-existing WFH privileges not enjoyed by their younger staff.

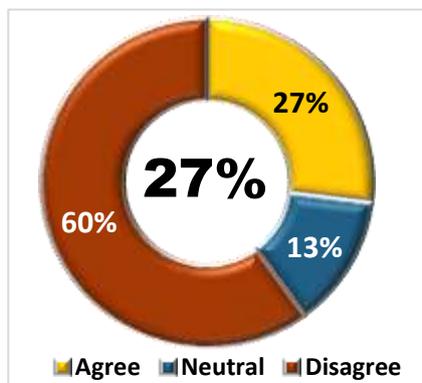
“I get easily distracted while WFH.”



Just about a quarter of the respondents say they get easily distracted while WFH. However, over 3 out of 5 say they don't.

Although more respondents say they're not easily distracted while WFH, several cited the distractions and disruptions when asked what they like least about WFH.

“I feel less connected to the company while WFH.”



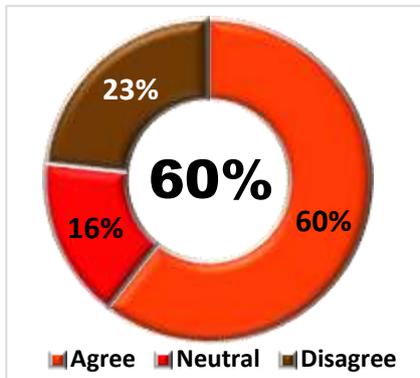
Over a quarter of the respondents say they feel less connected to their company while WFH. This is consistent with respondents' open-ended comments where an equivalent number cited disconnection from the office and their co-workers as the thing they like least about WFH.

On the other hand, the majority of respondents (3 out of 5) don't feel less connected to their company while WFH.

THE RESULTS

COPING WITH WFH (cont'd)

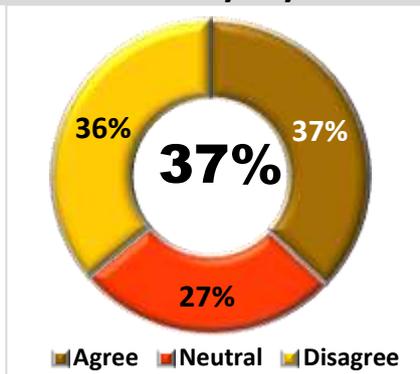
“WFH has given me a better work/life balance.”



Three out of five respondents say that WFH has given them better work/life balance. This is consistent with respondents' open-ended responses to what they like most about WFH, many of which included better work/life balance, more family time, personal freedom and flexibility.

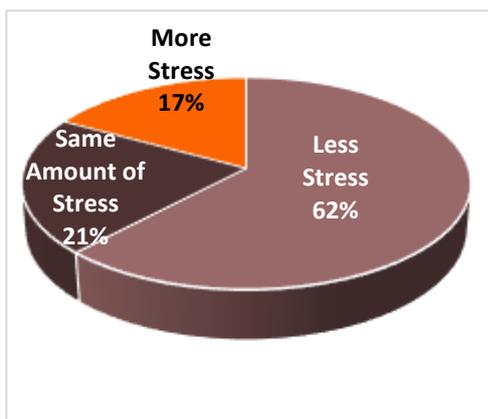
Respondents in the 30-39 age group were much more inclined to agree with this statement than those in other age groups.

“I can honestly say that I miss working in the office.”



Respondents were divided on whether or not they miss working in the office. Almost the same number of respondents agreed and disagreed with the statement, while over a quarter weren't sure. This may be a function of the fact that, although respondents are happy with WFH, they also miss interacting with their co-workers.

WFH and Stress



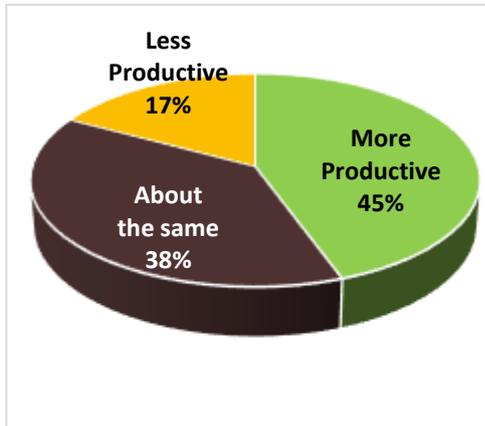
Over 60% of the respondents say they experience less stress while WFH. One in five say they experience about the same amount of stress as working in the office, while 17% say they experience more stress at home than at the office.

Respondents in the 30-39 age group indicated experiencing the least amount of stress, while those in the 40-49 age group experienced the most stress.

THE RESULTS

PRODUCTIVITY & WFH

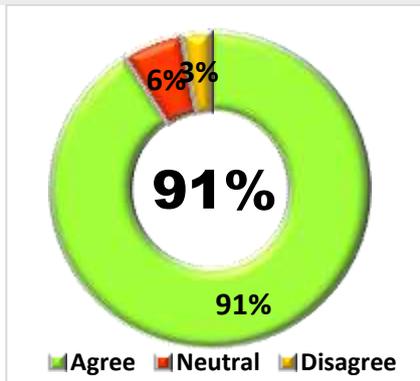
Productivity & WFH



Close to half of the respondents say that they are more productive WFH than working in the office. Almost 40% say they are at least as productive WFH, while 17% say they are less productive.

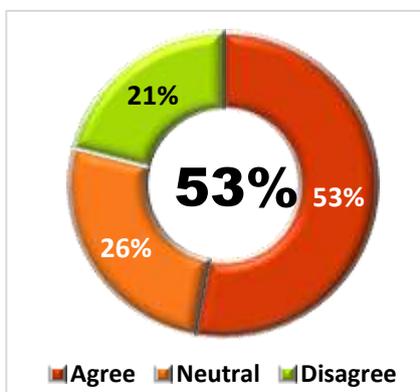
Respondents in the 30-39 age group were most inclined to say they are more productive WFH, while those in the 40-49 age group were the least inclined to say so.

“I have a clear understanding of what is expected of me while I work from home.”



Almost all respondents say they have a clear understanding of what is expected of them while WFH. Only 3% say they don't, while 6% did not give an opinion.

“I believe I am getting more work done at home than at my office.”



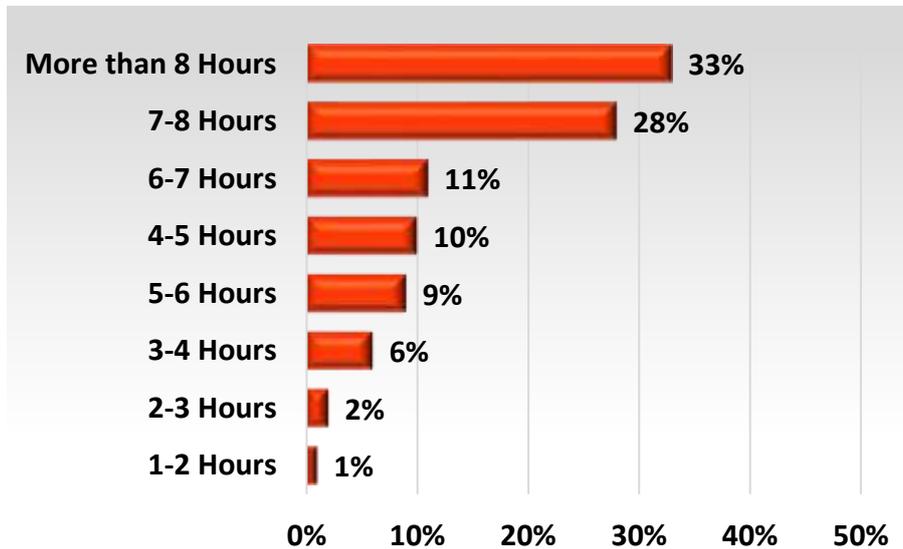
Over half of the respondents think they are getting more work done WFH than at the office. Female respondents were more inclined to think so than their male counterparts. However, younger and older respondents were less inclined to think so than those in the middle age groups.

A quarter of the respondents were neutral on this statement, suggesting some ambivalence on the statement.

THE RESULTS

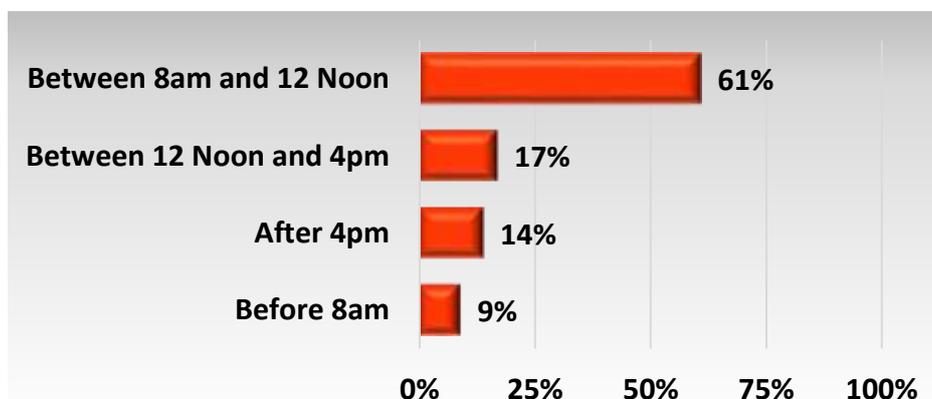
PRODUCTIVITY & WFH (cont'd)

Average Number of Hours Worked Per Day While WFH



The majority of respondents (61%) say they work for at least 7-8 hours per day while WFH. Over half that number say they work for more than 8 hours per day. Management personnel were more inclined to say they worked for more than 8 hours per day, while administrative support staff were less inclined to say so. Similarly, respondents in the 40-49 age group were more inclined to say they worked more than 8 hours, while millennials were less inclined to say so.

Most Productive Hours WFH

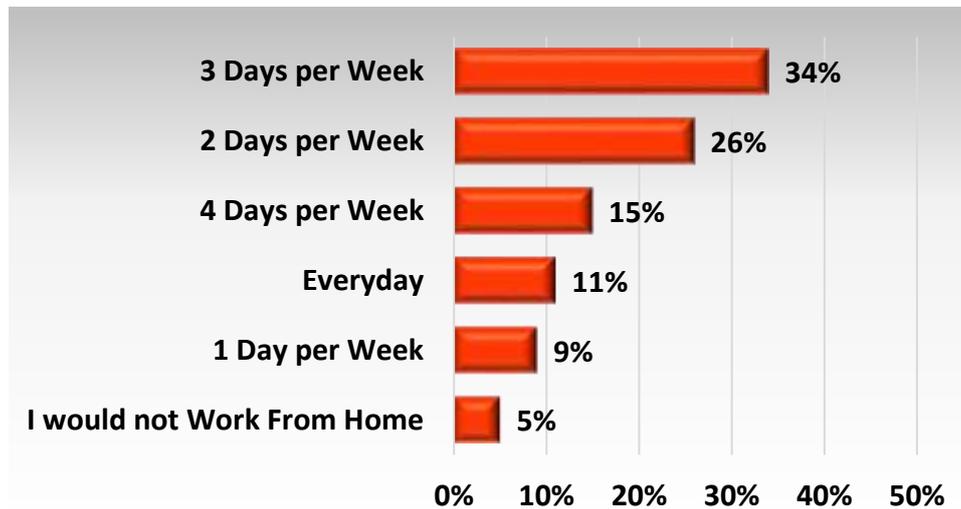


The majority of respondents also say they are most productive during the morning hours. This is especially the case with the millennials.

THE RESULTS

PRODUCTIVITY & WFH (cont'd)

Choice of Number of Days Per Week to WFH

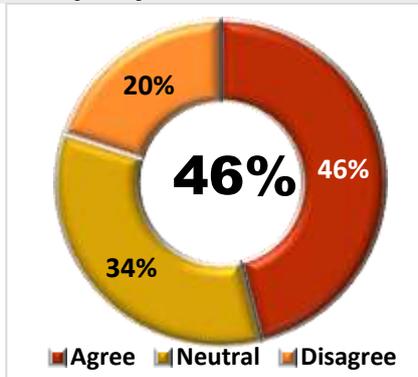


If given the choice, most respondents would work 2-3 days from home, and over half of them would opt to work from home 3 days per week. Only 5% of the respondents would choose not to work from home. Female respondents were more inclined to want to work from home for 2-3 days, while the desire to work 3 days per week from home was strongest among millennials.

THE RESULTS

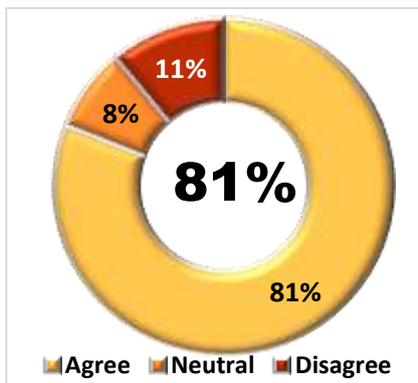
COMPANY SUPPORT FOR WFH

“I am receiving the psychological and emotional support I need from my company at this time.”



Less than half of the respondents say they are receiving psychological and emotional support from their company at this time. Twenty percent say they aren't, and a third gave no opinion, perhaps not sure how to respond. This was the largest neutral score recorded, and suggests that, perhaps, respondents don't expect to receive psychological and emotional support from their company.

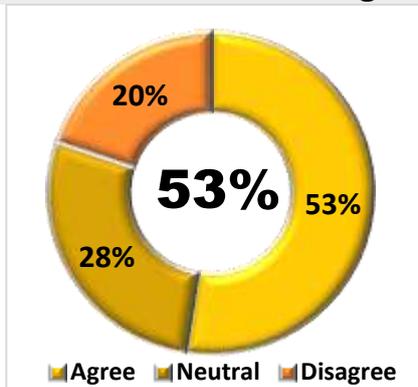
“I receive adequate and timely information from my company while WFH.”



In contrast to receiving psychological and emotional support, respondents overwhelmingly indicated that they receive adequate and timely information from their company. Only 11% said otherwise.

However, although 4 out of 5 respondents say they get adequate information from their company, some respondents listed limited access to company information as one of the things they like least about WFH, suggesting that this is an area for improvement.

“I have no fear of losing my job while WFH.”

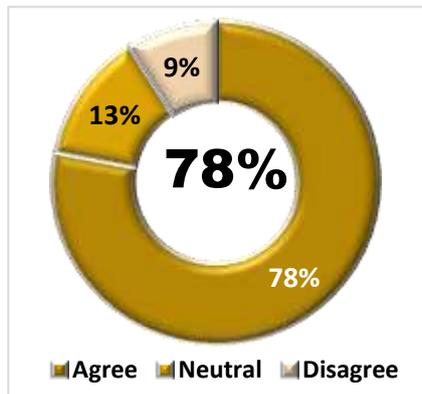


Over half of the respondents say they are not afraid of losing their job while WFH. Male respondents were less fearful of losing their job than their female counterparts.

THE RESULTS

COMPANY SUPPORT FOR WFH cont'd

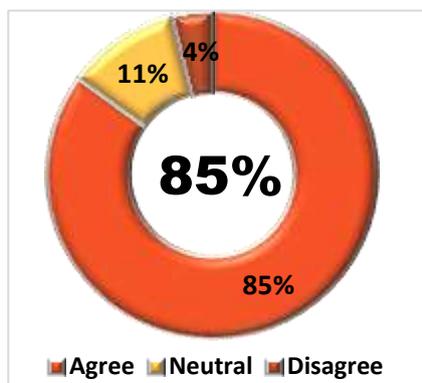
“My immediate supervisor/manager provides adequate support and feedback for me to do my job effectively while WFH.”



Over 75% of the respondents say they get adequate support and feedback from their immediate supervisor or manager. Only 9% say they don't.

Notwithstanding the fact that over 75% of the respondents are happy with their supervisor's/manager's support, several of them suggested needed improvements in their management of WFH.

“I receive the support I need from my co-workers for me to do my job effectively while WFH.”



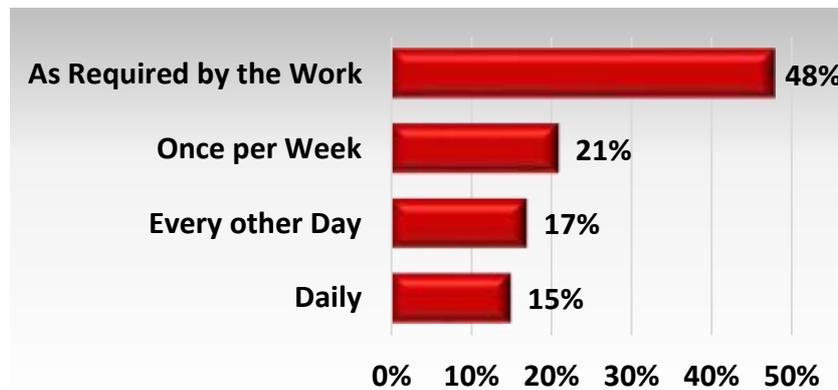
Respondents were more generous with their assessment of the support they get from their co-workers, with only 4% indicating that they don't get the support they need to do their job effectively.

Notwithstanding the support respondents said they get from their co-workers, many of them still feel disconnected from their co-workers while WFH.

THE RESULTS

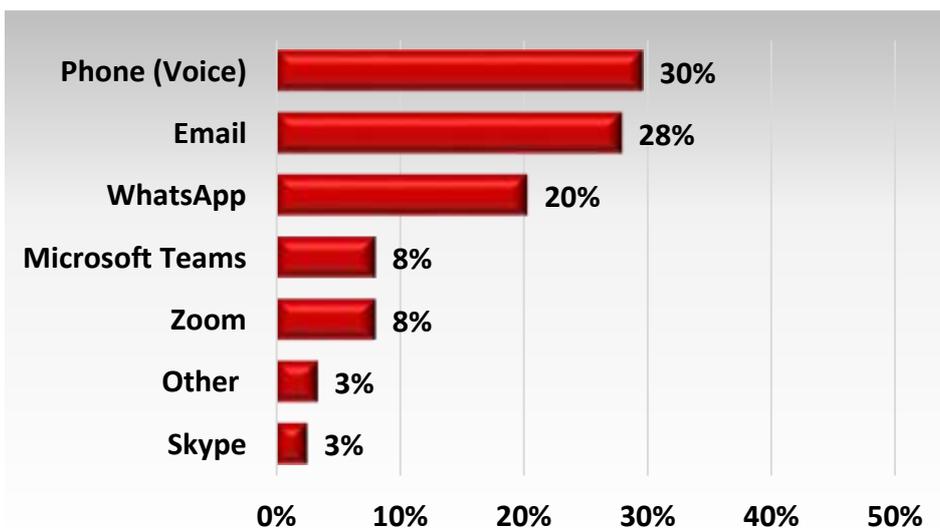
COMMUNICATION & WFH

Manager/Supervisor Check-ins



When asked how often they would like their manager or supervisor to check in with them while WFH, almost half of the respondents said as required by the work. Only 15% said they would like their manager or supervisor to check in with them on a daily basis. This is an interesting finding, as several respondents complained about micromanagement and constant communication and disruptions from their manager/supervisor.

Preferred Manager/Employee Communication Medium

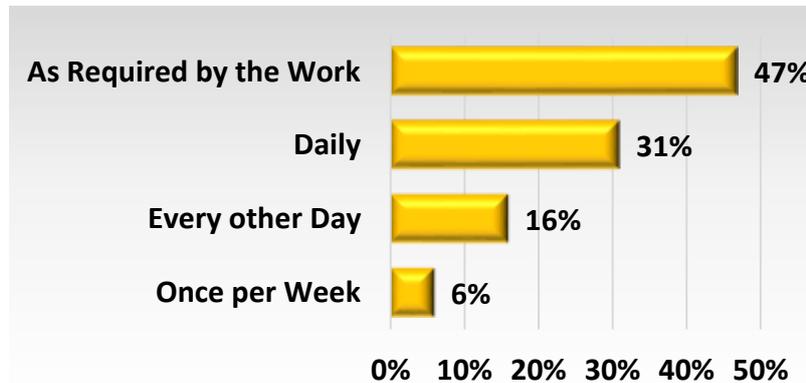


Respondents' preferred medium for communicating with their manager or supervisor is voice calls by phone, followed by email and WhatsApp.

THE RESULTS

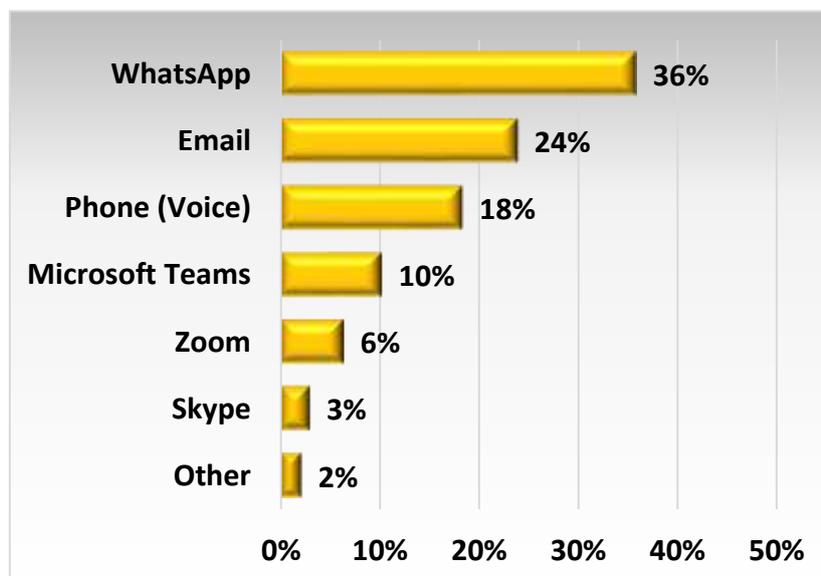
COMMUNICATION & WFH (cont'd)

Co-Worker/Team Member Check-ins



When asked how often they would like their co-workers/team members to check in with them, most respondents also said as required by the work. However, in contrast to their response to the same question about their manager or supervisor, almost a third of the respondents would like their co-workers/team members to check in with them on a daily basis.

Preferred Co-Worker Communication Medium

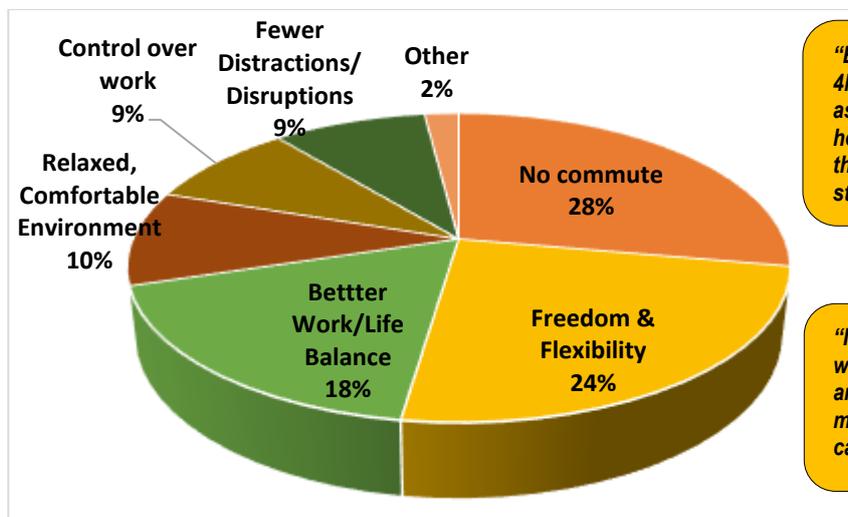


Respondents' preferred medium for communicating with their co-workers/team members is WhatsApp, followed by email and voice calls.

THE RESULTS

RESPONDENTS' COMMENTS ABOUT WFH

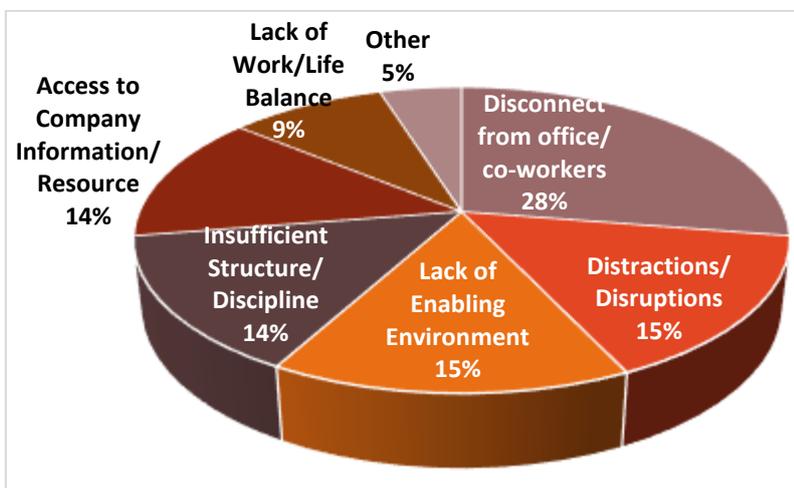
The top three things that respondents like about WFH are not having to commute to and from work, the freedom and flexibility that it affords them, and the better work/life balance they experience, especially quality time with their families.



"Being able to manage my time better. I spend on average 4hrs in traffic everyday pre-covid-19. I can get more rest as I don't have to leave home at 5:30 am and get back home at 7 pm. I can spend more time with my family and they get better waking hours with me because I am less stressed."

"I believe I have a more balanced and better quality of life with WFH... WFH has been better for my mental, emotional and physical health. I finally have time to spend time with my family. My mood has increased for the better significantly."

In contrast, the top three things respondents dislike about WFH are the social disconnection from their co-workers and office, the distractions and disruptions that come with WFH, and the lack of an enabling physical and technological environment, including dedicated office space, technology infrastructure and connectivity.



"I miss chatting with my colleagues informally over lunch, in the corridor, etc."

"Since school is at home, that is why I am not as productive. I have to manage work, school and personal life all in the same space."

"I do not have a home office so my physical surroundings are not optimal. Noisy neighbours... I need to invest in proper office equipment and a sound proof air conditioned environment."

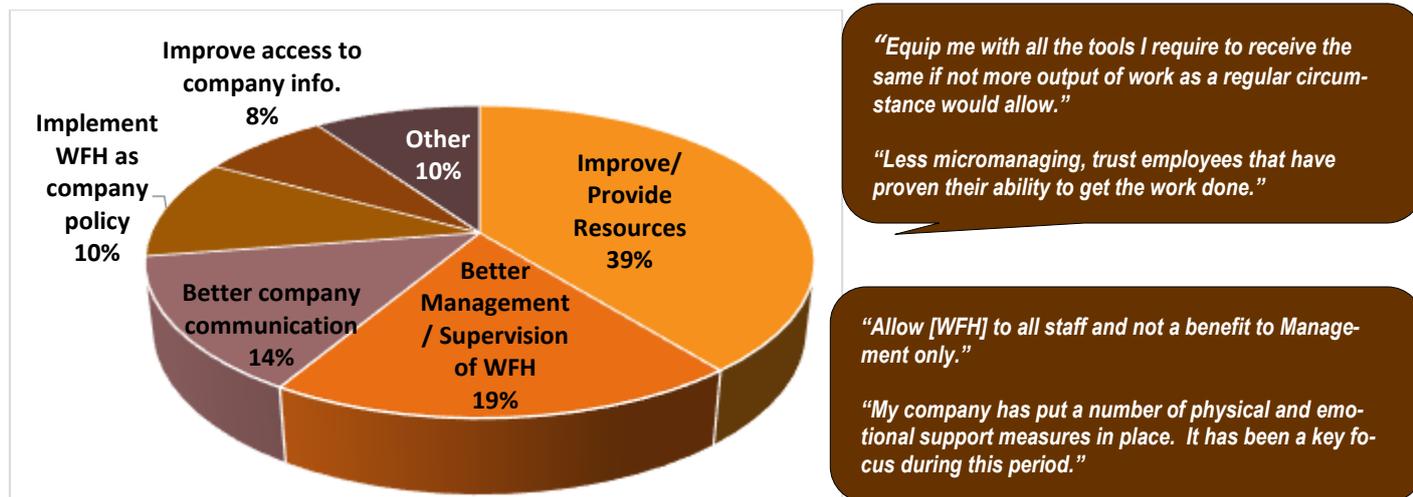
"I am still figuring out the work/life balance - right now the work side is winning."

THE RESULTS

RESPONDENTS' COMMENTS ABOUT WFH (cont'd)

Finally, respondents' top three suggestions for making their WFH experience better are improving/providing the technical and material resources needed for WFH; better management and supervision of WFH, including setting expectations, objectives and structure, trusting employees and respecting their off-work time; and better communication from their company. A positive finding is that several respondents indicated that their company had done a good job of managing WFH during the pandemic. However, they were in the minority.

Several respondents also suggested that WFH should be made a company policy going forward, rather than just for the pandemic.



THE WAY FORWARD

The Coronavirus pandemic has presented organizations and their employees with challenges that most weren't prepared for. But it also presents an opportunity for organizations to review and reset work and work culture. Although a pandemic, when everyone is forced to stay home to stay safe, is not the ideal setting for working from home, it has shown that WFH can work with the requisite tools, technology, materials and management. Organizations should ask themselves if it is absolutely necessary for all employees to come to the workplace every day to get their work done, especially when social distancing is taken into consideration. Is it necessary for all employees to have to face the daily morning and evening commute to be able to do their jobs effectively, especially when the very commute may be affecting them both physically and mentally, and in turn, impacting their productivity levels? Can organizations actually increase productivity and engagement by allowing some employees to work from home, based on their role and responsibilities?

These are questions that organizations will need to address going forward. In the meanwhile, based on the results of the survey, we make the following suggestions to improve the employee experience while WFH:

- Demonstrate empathy and understanding with employees working from home during the pandemic through regular "social," non-work-related management check-ins. Get the employee assistance programme or other similar facility involved with supporting employees' mental and physical wellbeing.
- Engage employees to find out what works best for them and then agree on a structure for WFH, including rules of engagement; schedules; expectations; communication protocols for when, how often and how to communicate with them; etc., and then trust them to do their job.
- Ensure that employees have the requisite hardware and software technology and equipment to work from home successfully. Compensate them for the use of their personal equipment, electricity, Wi-Fi and physical space for doing the company's work.
- Make required company information and documentation easily accessible digitally, ensuring the necessary security and authorizations are in place. Digitize hardcopy material to make it accessible electronically.

Finally, we suggest organizations consider implementing WFH policies and protocols with clear guidelines about who's eligible, how it will work and how it will be managed. The future of work for many will be working from home.

ABOUT QUALITY CONSULTANTS LIMITED

Quality Consultants Limited is a Caribbean Management Consulting firm specializing in workforce research, specifically employee surveys. Established in 1992, and incorporated as a limited liability company in 1998, Quality Consultants Limited provides management consulting services to clients throughout the Caribbean. To date, the Company has worked with over 100 local and regional organizations across the English- and Dutch-speaking Caribbean, and has surveyed over 100,000 employees. The Company has also conducted consultancy assignments for regional and international agencies such as the Caribbean Development Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the Organization of American States, the International Labour Organization, and the European Union.

We provide our consulting services by assembling a team of specialists in the areas of our clients' needs. Our international team of consultants possesses a combined total of over 500 years of consulting experience in their areas of expertise garnered from assignments in North and South America, Europe and the Caribbean.

We believe that we are shaped by our organizations and, in turn, help to shape them. Hence, our mantra is "Improving Organizations, Improving Lives."

For further information about us, visit our website at www.quality-consultants.com.

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