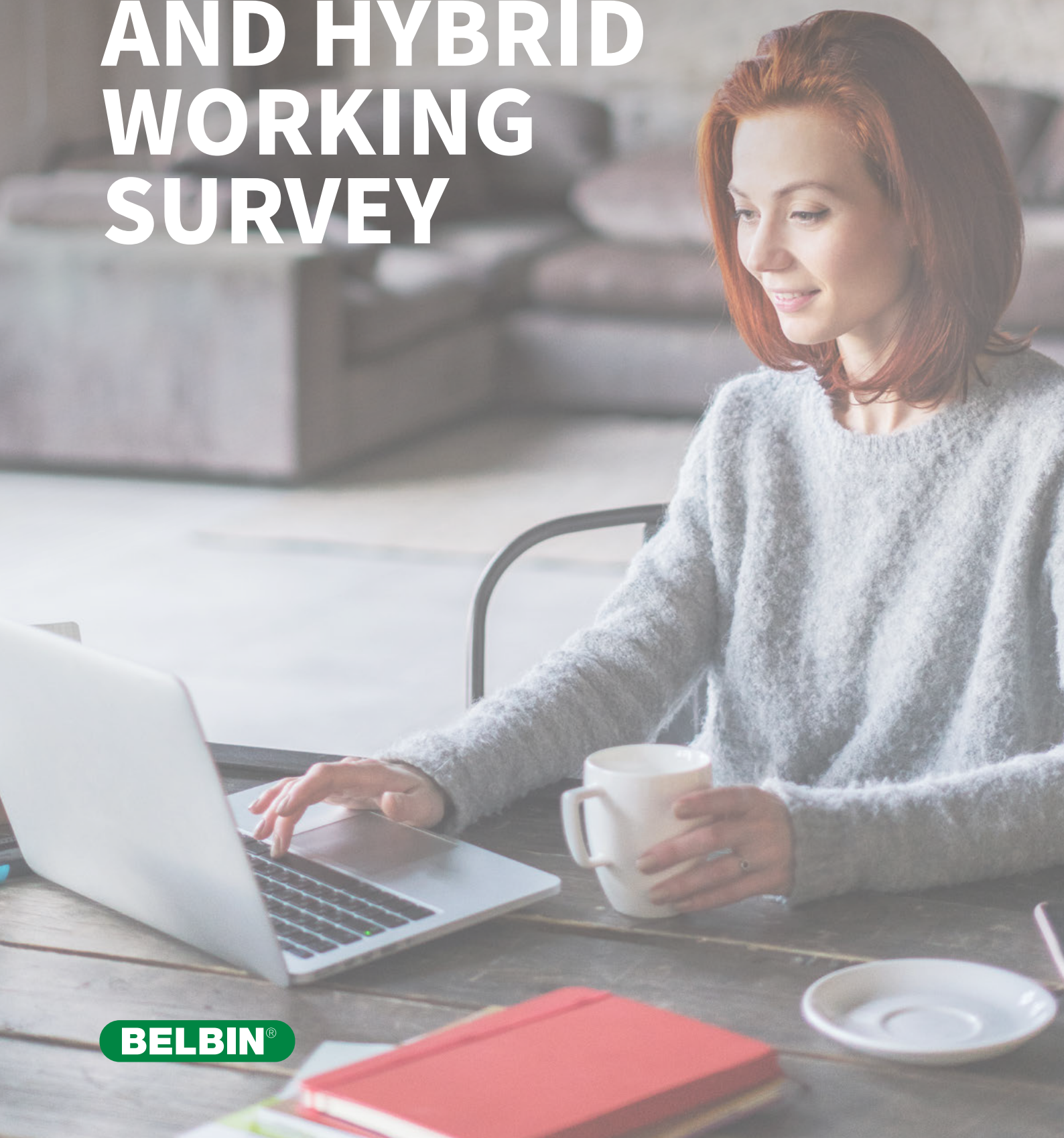




BELBIN REMOTE AND HYBRID WORKING SURVEY



Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic changed the face of remote working. Harvard Business Review reports a spike from 6% of full work days in the U.S. to more than 50% in the spring of 2020.

Since then, remote work has been steadily decreasing and, at the start of 2023, was around 28%.

Prior to the pandemic, remote and hybrid work was primarily the domain of international teams who were geographically-dispersed and worked separately out of necessity.

It has since come to be understood and accepted as a new way of working, complete with its own benefits and challenges.

In the autumn of 2020, during a UK lockdown, Belbin conducted a survey to assess the impact of remote work on individuals and teams in the UK. At this time, workers were being encouraged to work from home where possible and hybrid working was not prevalent.

A little over three years later, the landscape has changed significantly, highlighting a schism between employer and employee needs and objectives.

With the likes of Meta and Google mandating a certain number of days per week in the office (and, in the case of Google, linking office attendance to performance reviews), the return-to-office push has not gone altogether smoothly. And according to Harvard Business Review, executives fully expect remote and hybrid work to continue to grow.

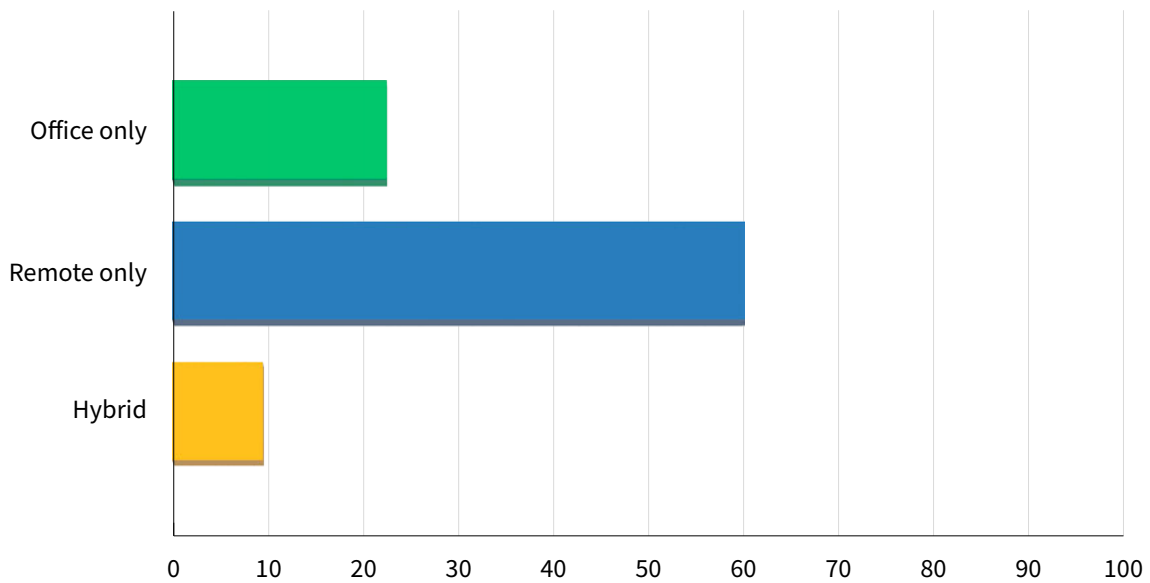
So, is hybrid working 'an aberration' (per David Solomon, CEO of Goldman Sachs) or the new normal? How does remote working affect our productivity and engagement? How effective can hybrid teams be? In what has been a rapidly-changing situation over the past three years, research is, of course, still in its infancy.

In this study, we build on our 2020 findings and discover how remote and hybrid working has affected not just individual effectiveness and productivity, but also team engagement and connection to organisational culture. This is the first study of this kind linking findings on remote and hybrid work to Belbin Team Roles.

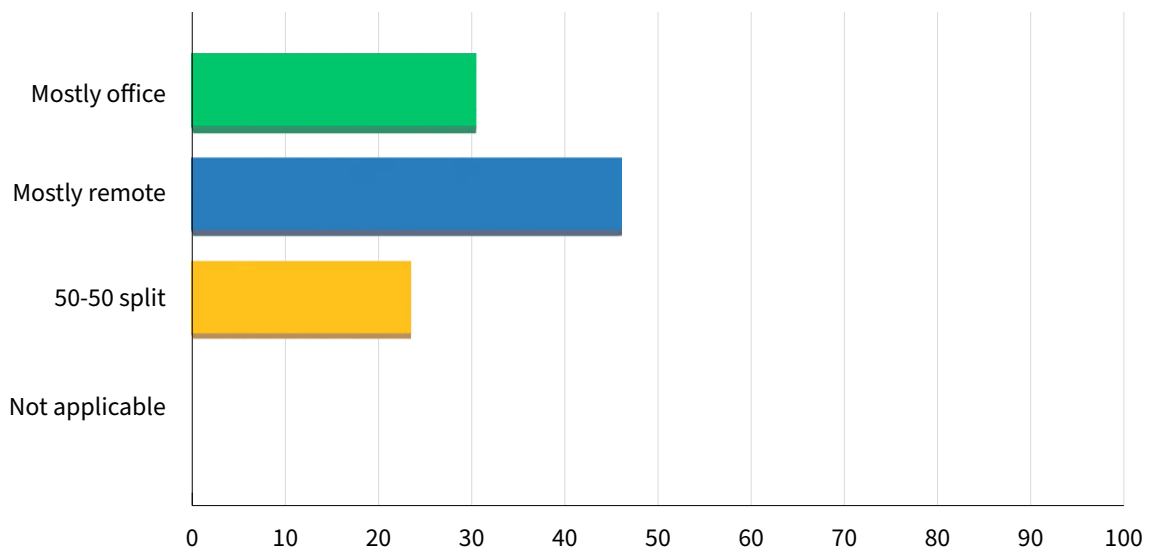
Preliminary findings

We received 136 responses to our survey. We asked about working patterns during the six months prior to the survey.

55% stated that they were hybrid workers, dividing time between remote working and an office or workplace. 15% were working in an office or workplace all the time and 28% were fully remote. (The remaining 2% did not respond to the question or answered that the question was not applicable to them.)



Of those who have been hybrid working, 45% spend more time working remotely than in the office. 31% spend more time in the office than working remotely and for 1 in 4, it's a 50-50 split.



How happy are hybrid workers with their working patterns?

- 60% of hybrid workers we surveyed are happy with the balance of remote and office-based working.
- Almost 1 in 4 would like to work remotely more often and 1 in 10 wanted more office-based working.

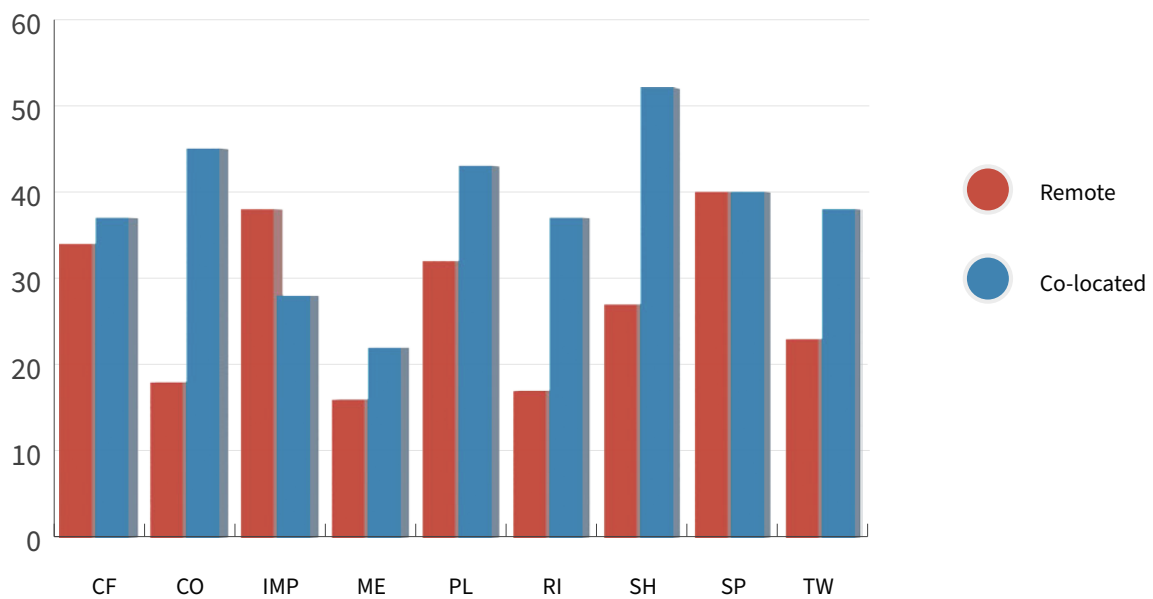
Experiences of remote and co-located working by Team Role

When we analysed the data according to top Team Role, we discovered some interesting patterns.

Hybrid working was the default for almost 80% of Implementers we surveyed and almost 70% of Monitor Evaluators.

Most hybrid workers, regardless of Team Role, were happy with their current balance of remote and office-based working.

Our survey asked a number of questions regarding experiences of remote and co-located work across a variety of topics including effectiveness, performance, engagement and communication. From this, we derived a score reflecting overall positivity or negativity of experience.



On the whole, Co-ordinators and Shapers show the strongest preference for co-located working.

These two roles are generally responsible for bringing people together, whether to build consensus and clarify objectives (Co-ordinator) or drive the team towards its goals (Shaper).

By their nature, remote and hybrid work can be more antithetical to achieving this kind of cohesion. In other words, it stands to reason that people with these top roles might prefer bringing people together in person, in order to achieve their aims.

By contrast, Implementers and Specialists rated their experience of remote and hybrid work higher than did any other Team Roles.

As we discovered in our 2020 research, Implementers value the increased efficiency and productivity that remote working affords.

Specialists might tend to find that solitary working allows them to explore a subject in depth without disruption.

These differences demonstrate that it is important to consider what remote work might mean to individuals with different Team Role strengths, as well as ramifications for them, and for the team as a whole.

Even before COVID-19, Resource Investigators were (and are) more likely than others to divide their time between workspace and other locations, since they are outgoing individuals who like to explore opportunities and build their network.

For them, hybrid work might be synonymous with isolation, which is likely to result in boredom and frustration. Implementers and Specialists, as mentioned above, might be more productive, but this productivity could come at a high cost, if the connection with the team is lost. In this situation, either might find themselves doing work which is obsolete or ultimately not of value to the team. We will explore this further later in this report.



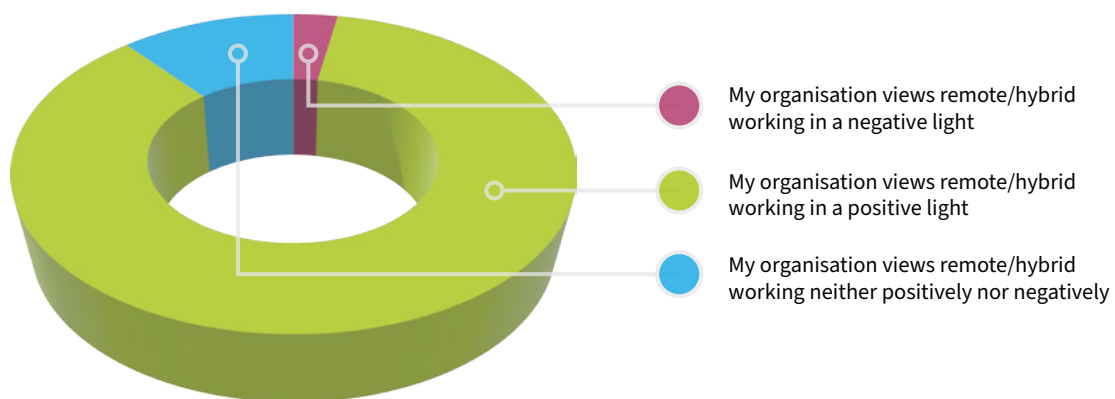
Organisational perceptions of remote working

We asked people about their organisation's perception of remote and hybrid work.

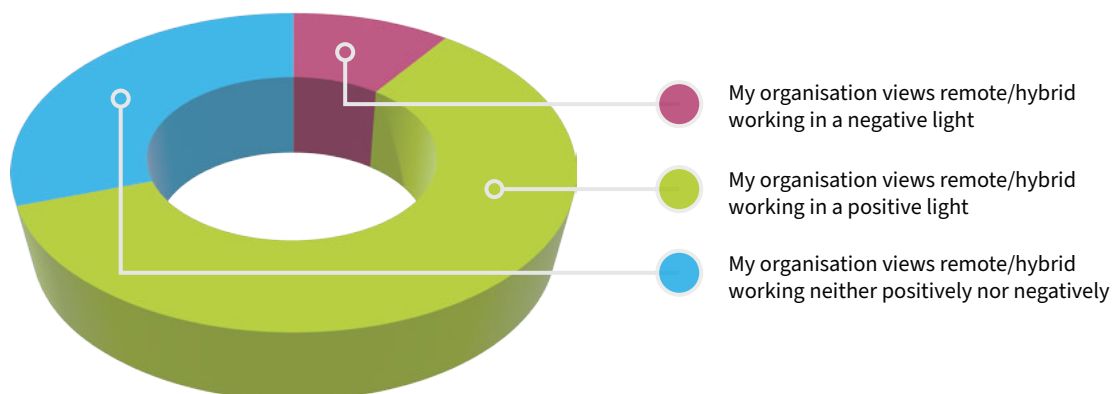
Perhaps unsurprisingly, an organisation's attitude to remote and hybrid working affected the numbers adopting hybrid working practices.

Those working entirely remotely reported the most support for remote and hybrid work from their employer, whilst those working in an office or other workspace indicated more negative perceptions of remote and hybrid work.

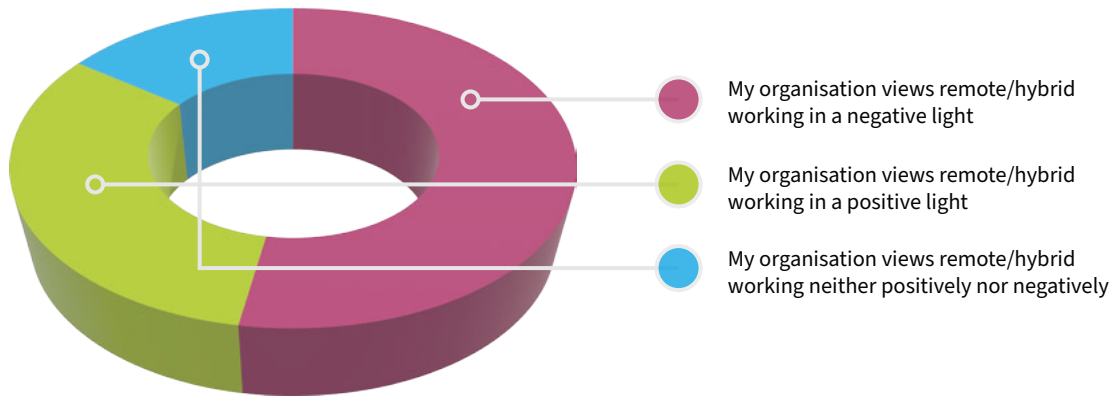
Organisation perception of remote/hybrid work for 100% remote workers



Organisation perception of remote/hybrid work for hybrid workers



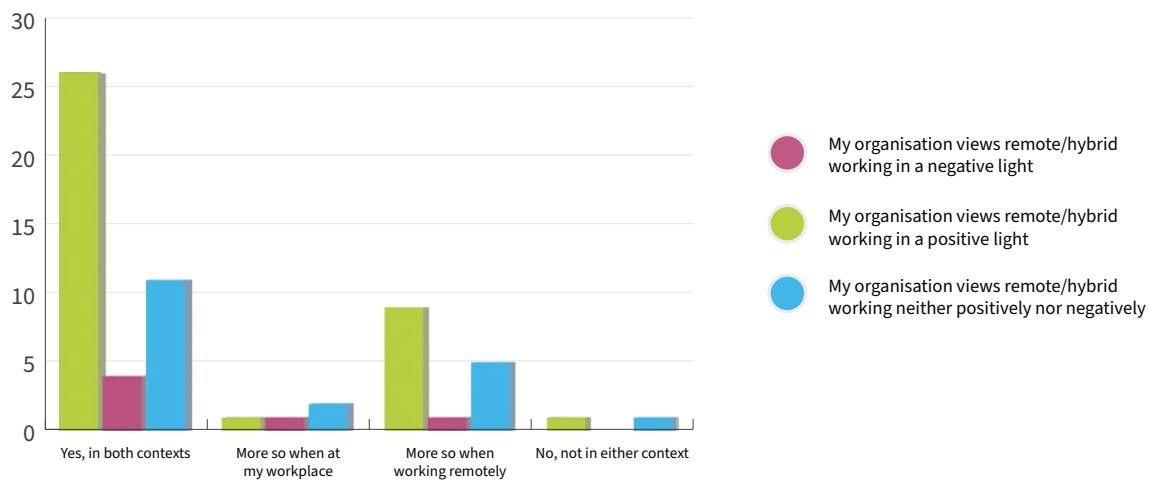
Organisation perception of remote/hybrid work for office workers



Productivity, engagement and organisational culture

Significantly, we also found that the organisation’s attitude to remote and hybrid working directly affected the individual’s engagement with, and effectiveness in, their role.

I am effective in my role

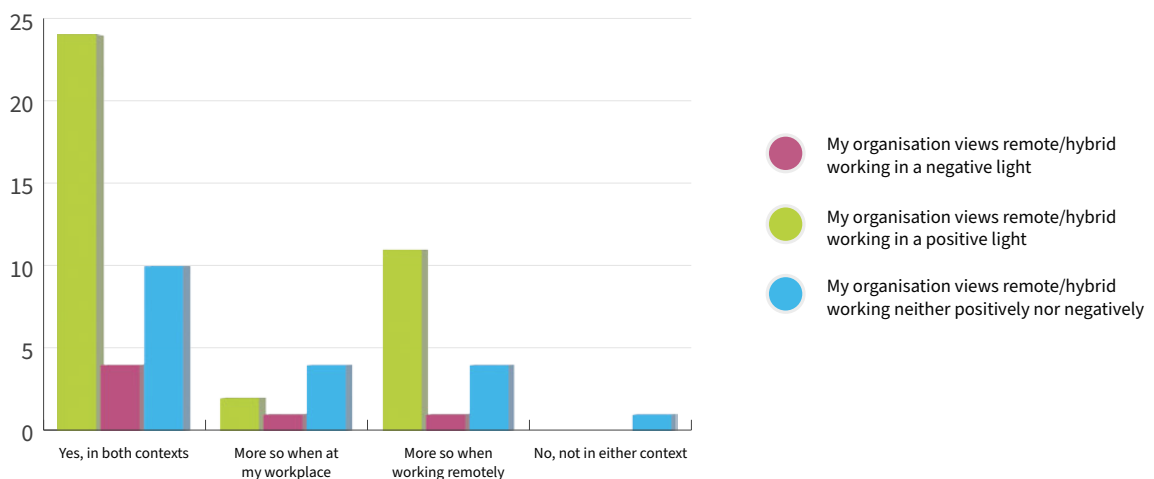


Those whose organisations viewed remote and hybrid work positively were not just more effective when working remotely – they were more effective in both contexts.

This suggests that an organisation’s approach to remote and hybrid work – and its employees’ perceptions of that approach – can directly impact performance.

The same was true of individual engagement.

I am engaged in my work



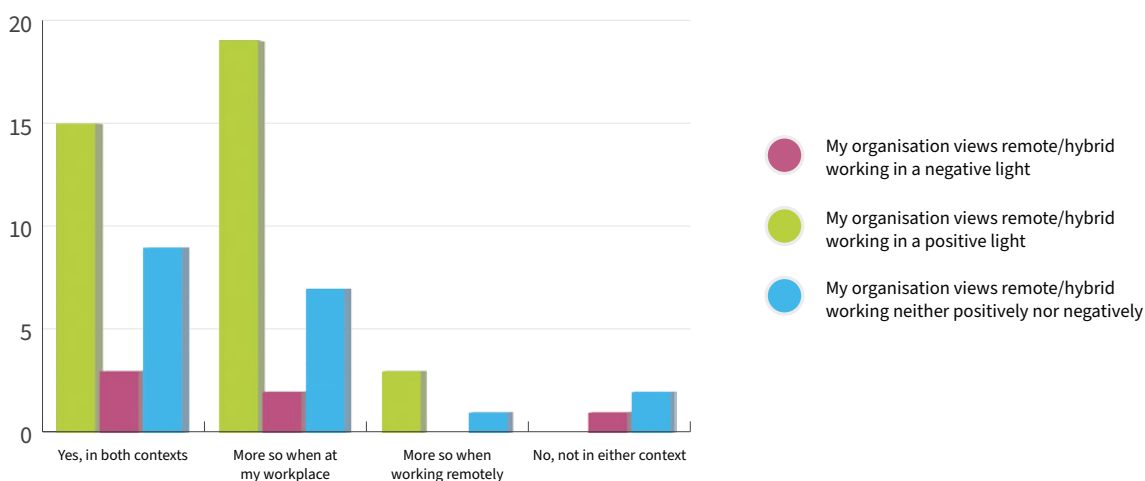
These findings suggest that there are more than logistical factors at play.

Organisations who take a positive approach to hybrid work demonstrate trust in employees and cultivate a culture of autonomy, where individuals are able to achieve a greater work-life balance. This, in turn, leads to higher effectiveness and engagement in role.

By contrast, it is possible that organisations who have a negative perception of remote and hybrid work are perhaps grappling with other cultural difficulties (such as micromanagement, lack of trust and lack of psychological safety) which inevitably damage performance and engagement.

However, there were two key areas in which hybrid workers felt that co-located working was preferable. These were team engagement (“I am engaged with my team”) and (“I feel connected to my organisation’s culture”).

I am engaged in my team



Even though positive approaches to hybrid working tend to result in higher levels of team engagement, co-located working is undoubtedly the preference for helping team members to engage with one another and collaborate more effectively.

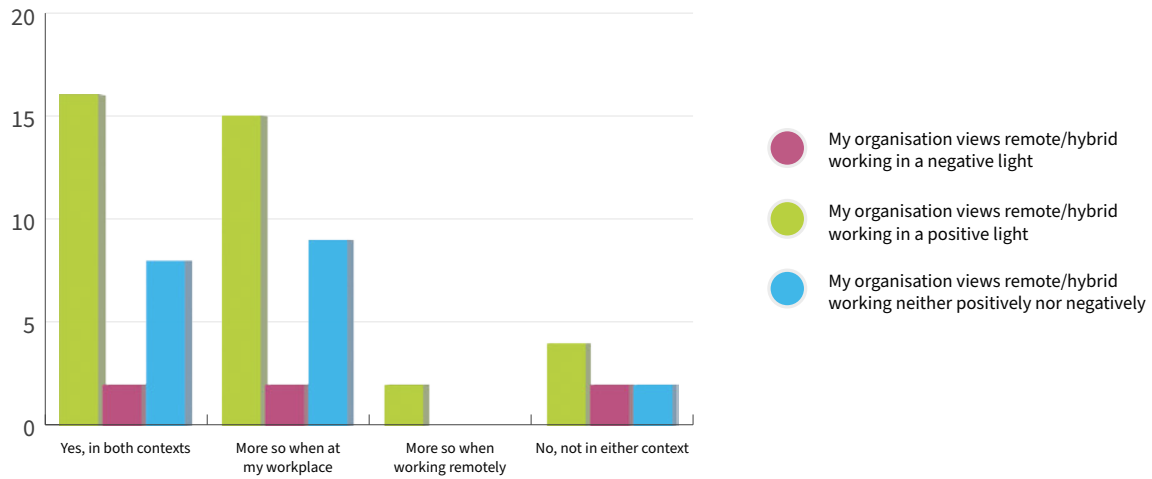
In our 2020 study, we suggested that the general trend for remote work was an increase in productivity and a decrease in individual engagement.

However, our more recent results reveal a distinction between individual and team engagement.

Whilst 61% are engaged with their work on an individual basis in both contexts, this drops to 43% for team engagement, with 45% reporting higher team engagement at their workplace.

The change for organisational culture was even more marked, with 43% reporting higher engagement at their workplace, compared to 39% who felt engaged in both contexts. Only 3% of respondents felt more connected to their organisation’s culture when working remotely.

I feel connected to my organisation's culture



Whilst a positive approach to hybrid work seemed indicative of a healthier, more connected culture in general terms, an individual's connection to that culture was significantly higher when they were working in person with others.

43% of those who felt supported in hybrid work were connected to company culture regardless of context, whilst 40% of supported hybrid workers felt more connected when working together with others in person.

This suggests that whilst a positive corporate attitude towards hybrid and remote work can improve individual effectiveness and engagement regardless of context, it cannot entirely mitigate the negative effects of hybrid working on team engagement and that many continue to seek connection through co-located working, even when their employer supports hybrid work.

It is notable that the statements which provoked a response preferring co-located working relate to a broader context, whether team or organisation.

By contrast, those which related to individual performance or efficacy generally garnered responses favouring hybrid working.

This key finding in our more recent results indicates that, whilst organisations may be addressing individual engagement in remote and hybrid work, team engagement is being missed.

Whilst hybrid work brings a number of benefits to individuals, some form of co-located working is essential for building cohesive and effective teams, and for cultivating a culture conducive to high performance.

This important finding has the potential to inform hybrid working strategy. People are seeking time and solitude to work independently, without distractions. They also want time to collaborate effectively with their teams.

Many of the comments we received in this area related to a failure to allocate the right work to the right people in the right context.

For example, some people spoke of ‘empty office syndrome’ – commuting only to find that no co-workers were in the office that day. Others spoke of long hours spent on video calls trying to do collaborative work that could have been done more efficiently in person. These situations don’t only waste time and resources, but also erode goodwill and engagement.

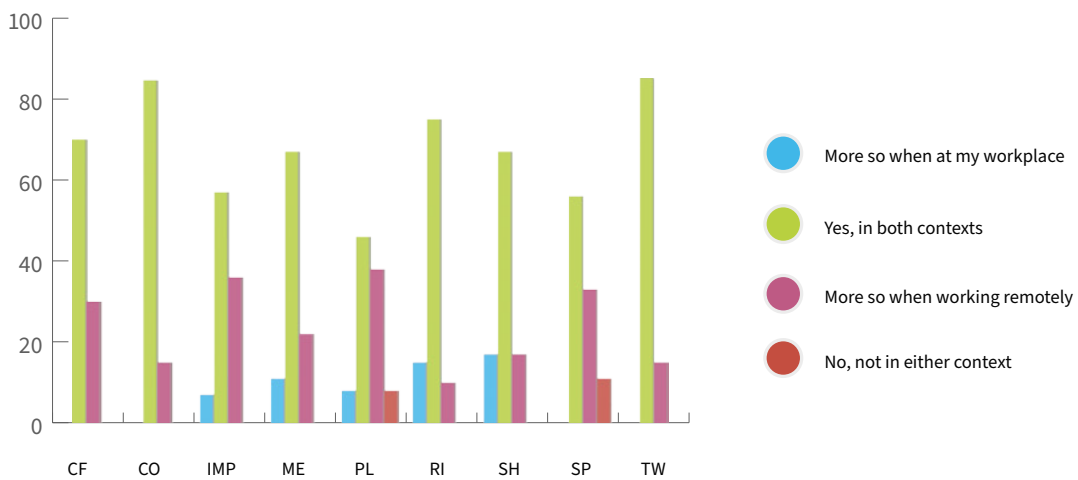
This indicates that a positive approach is not enough to make hybrid work... work. Organisations need a considered, strengths-based strategy which takes into account who is required at each stage of a project, the type of work being done, and the most suitable context for that work.



Effectiveness, engagement and culture by Team Role

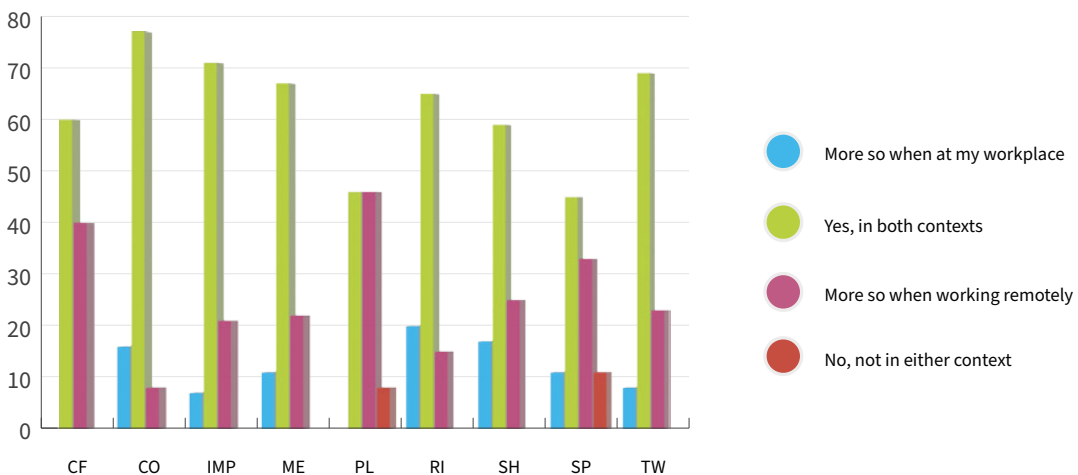
The majority of our respondents claimed they were effective in their role regardless of context. However, there were some differences between Team Roles.

I am effective in my role



As mentioned above, Plants and Specialists tend to work in isolation. Whilst their role inevitably involves communicating their ideas or research (respectively) to other team members, it is perhaps unsurprising that they deem themselves to be more effective at playing to their particular strengths when free from distraction.

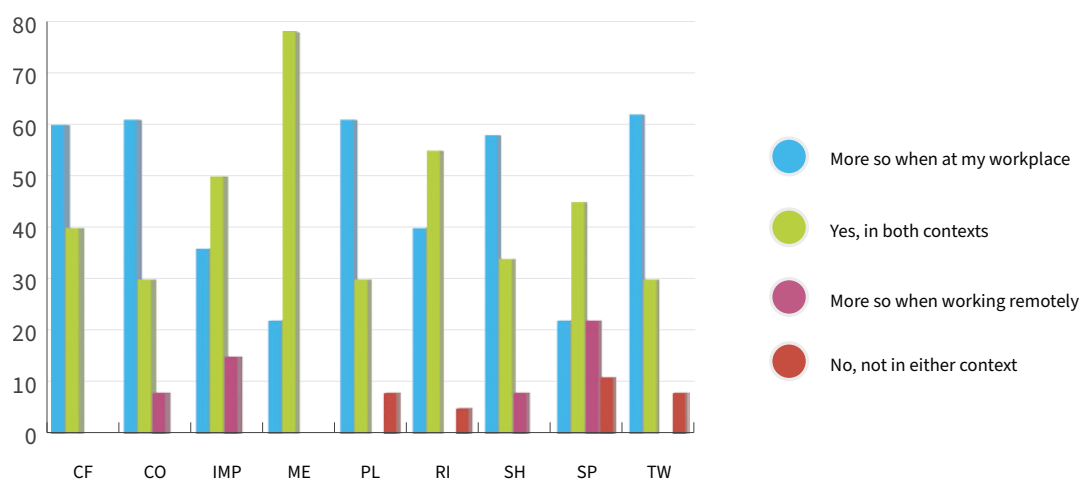
I am engaged in my work



Implementers and Completer Finishers also tended to rate their effectiveness most highly when working remotely, perhaps valuing higher productivity and an opportunity to focus on the details, respectively.

When it comes to individual engagement, Plants were the highest scorers, but even so, there was an even split between those who felt more engaged when working remotely and those who were engaged in both contexts.

I am engaged with my team



When it came to team engagement, there were some specific Team Role trends.

Shapers and Co-ordinators (those most likely to report a positive experience of co-located working in general) were the most likely to say that team engagement was better in the workplace.

Monitor Evaluators and Resource Investigators were most likely to say that they were engaged with the team in both contexts.

This is interesting because these two roles can both operate at a remove from the team for different reasons. Monitor Evaluators tend to keep a little distance from the team in order to maintain objectivity, whilst Resource Investigators naturally go outside the team to explore new opportunities and might feel restricted if forced to spend all their time at a desk.

It is possible that those who are naturally at more of a remove from the team might feel equally engaged regardless of location.

I feel connected to my organisation's culture



These results show that most people, regardless of Team Role strengths, feel more connected to their organisation's culture when working in a workplace.

When it comes to organisational culture, it is Plants and Specialists – the solo workers – who seek out the workplace in order to feel more connected.

It is interesting to note that Specialists were the most likely of any Team Role to say that they did not feel connected to organisational culture in either context.

It is important to bear in mind that the interplay between behavioural differences and work location can influence our affinity to organisational culture. Whilst people with certain Team Role strengths might seek out solitary work, they still place a value on connecting in a broader context, whether with the rest of the team or the organisation more broadly.



Communication

Responses regarding effective communication also elicited some different responses according to Team Role strengths. In general, communication was deemed to be considerably more effective for co-located working than for remote work.

Monitor Evaluators and Shapers were the most likely to say that communication within the team was effective regardless of context.

Implementers and Specialists (amongst the most positive regarding remote working in general) rated remote communication more highly than others did.

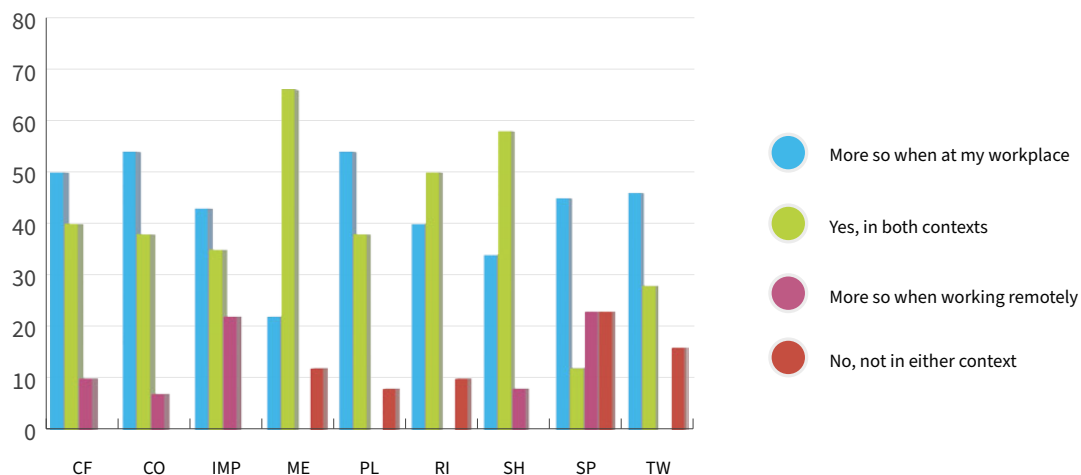
It is important to consider that there could be some differences in terms of perceptions of communication and what makes it effective. For example, online communication might lend itself to disseminating information (for example, in the form of webinars and presentations) in a way that appeals to Specialists

Likewise, Monitor Evaluators might rate communication as effective if discussion explores different options, whereas Shapers are more likely to view it as effective if the outcome includes action points, a tangible goal and deadlines.

In other words, the definition of effective communication (as defined by those with different Team Role approaches) might affect responses to this question.

When devising strategies to improve communication for hybrid teams, it is essential to consider behavioural diversity.

Communication within my team is effective



New and established teams

Our survey indicated some important and interesting differences between the way new and established teams experience hybrid work patterns.

We asked respondents whether they were members of a newly-formed team, a newcomer to an existing team or a member of an established team.

Again, we saw an increase in perceptions of productivity across the board when people work remotely.

Most respondents who felt they were effective in their role and were happy with their performance felt so regardless of where they were working.

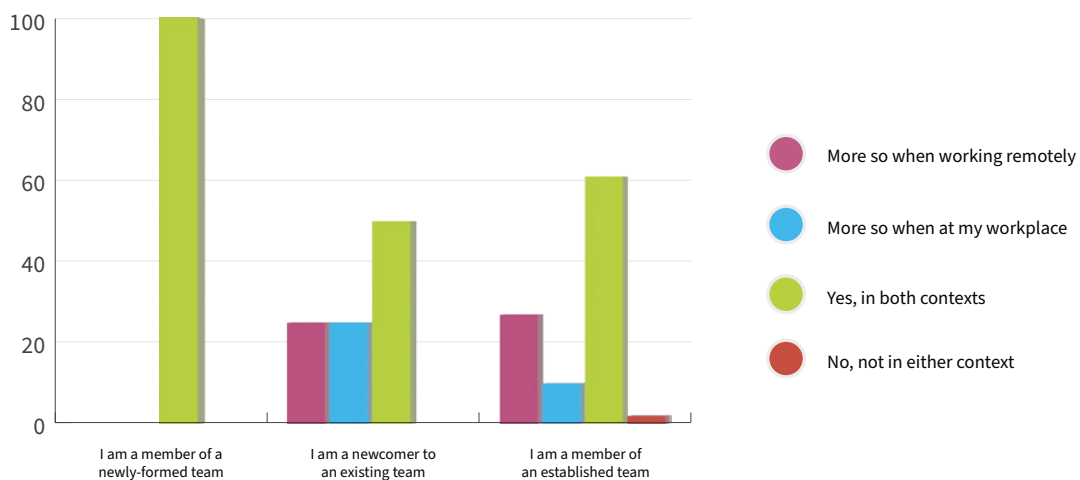
Engagement

Studying individual and team engagement yielded some interesting results.

All those we surveyed in newly-formed teams were engaged in their role wherever they worked.

Most newcomers to the team tended to be engaged in both contexts, with the rest split between remote and co-located. Those in established teams showed a slightly higher rate of individual engagement when working remotely than newcomers to existing teams did.

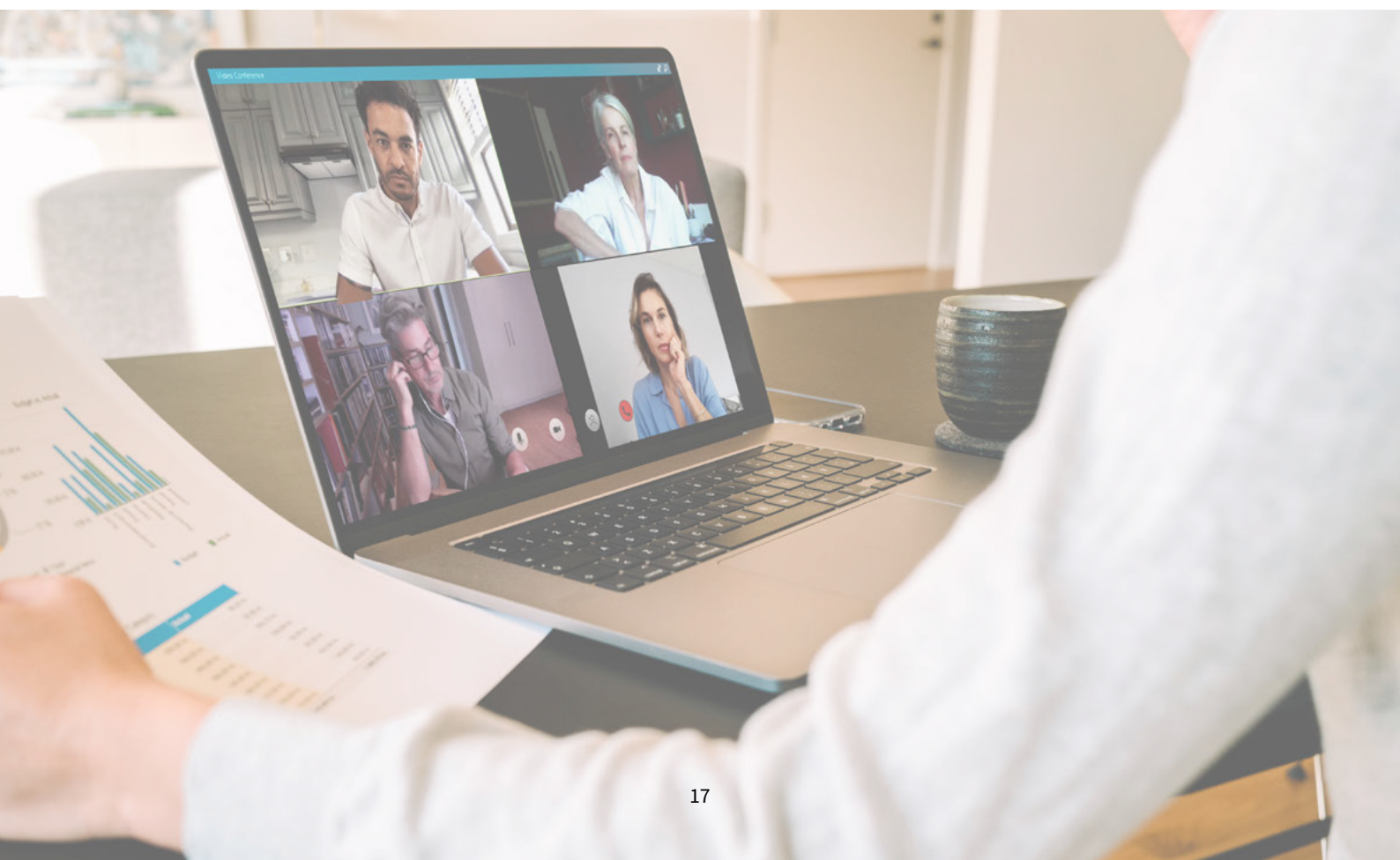
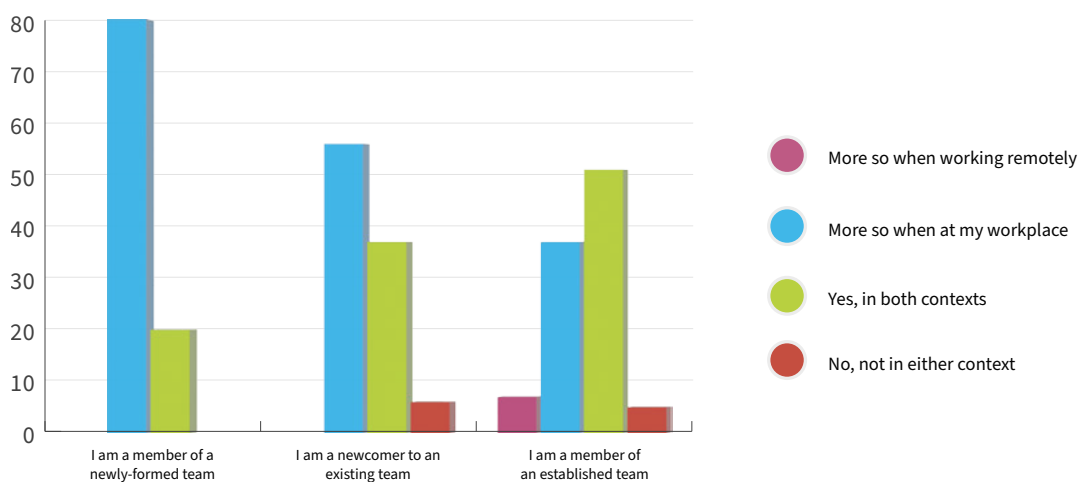
**Individual engagement for new and established hybrid teams:
“I am engaged in my work”**



However, team engagement was a different story.

Newly-formed teams and those joining existing teams seem to need more time in the workplace to foster team engagement. Once teams become more established, this need is not so pronounced.

**Team engagement for new and established hybrid teams:
“I am engaged with my team”**

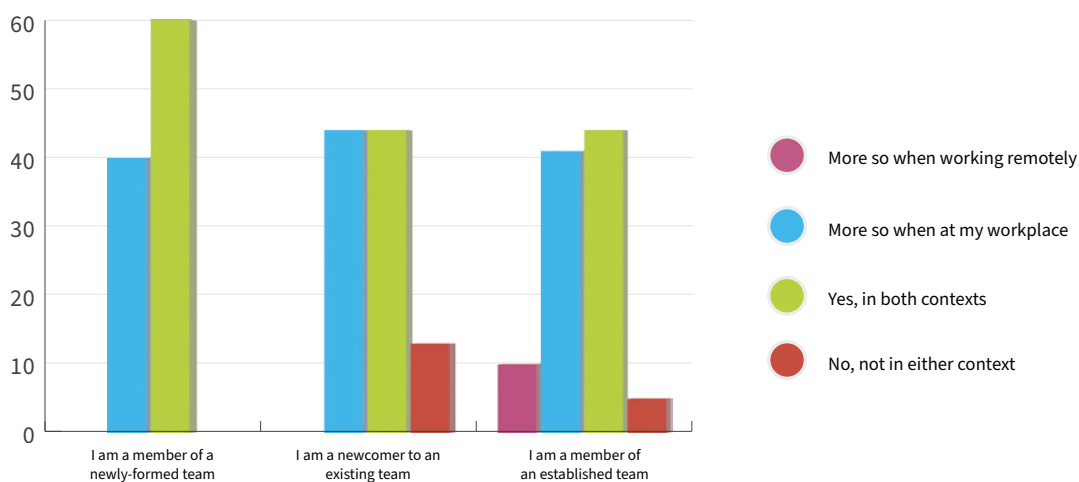


Communication

When it came to communicating effectively, newcomers to existing teams were the most likely group to claim communication benefits from co-located working.

In all three groups, a significant proportion felt that communication was effective in both contexts, but it is interesting to note that this number was lower for existing and established teams. This might indicate that communication difficulties in remote or hybrid work sometimes take time to be identified and addressed.

**Communication for new and established hybrid teams:
“Communication within my team is effective”**



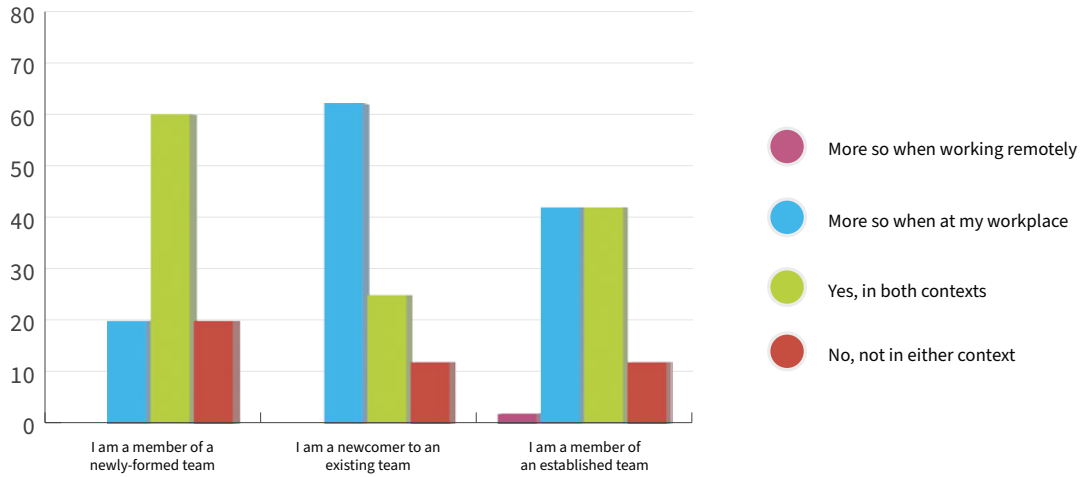
Organisational culture

In terms of connection to the organisation’s culture, newcomers to existing teams showed a marked preference for the workplace, compared to the other groups.

This suggests that, whilst newly-formed teams may be ‘learning the ropes’ together when it comes to organisational culture, onboarding a new member into an existing team requires an element of co-location in order to ground the newcomer effectively in the new culture.

These findings have significant implications for onboarding new employees. Whilst established teams may be able to work together effectively remotely, it appears that co-located working is important for integrating new members of existing teams, allowing them to communicate more effectively, and understand the team’s culture and social contract more readily.

Organisational culture in new and established hybrid teams: “I feel connected to my organisation’s culture”



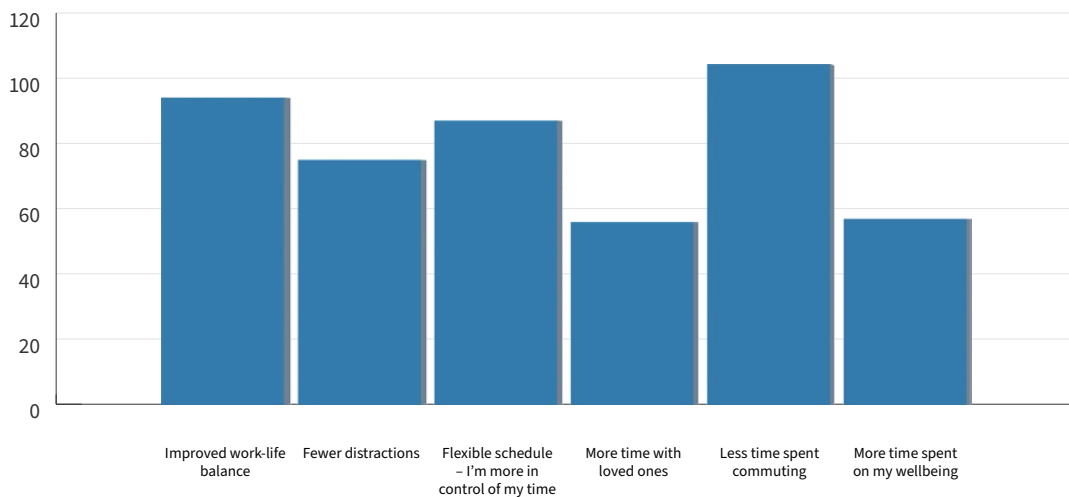
Advantages and disadvantages of remote and hybrid working

We asked respondents (whatever their own working patterns) about the benefits and drawbacks of hybrid and remote working.

Benefits of remote and hybrid working

As was the case with our 2020 survey, commuting time was the most reported advantage, and the majority of additional comments in this section centred around the reduced cost and environmental impact of not commuting.

Improved work-life balance and a flexible schedule were also important factors.



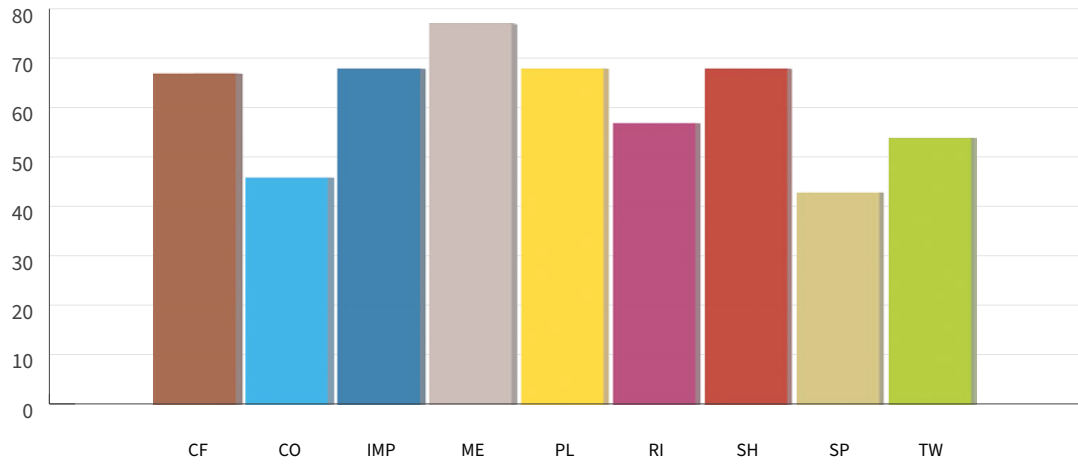
We analysed one factor – ‘Fewer distractions’ – in more detail, looking at responses according to Team Role.

Significantly, we discovered that task-focused roles (Completer Finisher, Implementer and Shaper) were proportionally more likely to state that ‘Fewer distractions’ was a benefit of remote or hybrid working.

Plants and Monitor Evaluators, who each require time to think, also scored highly.

Those with higher social roles (Co-ordinator, Resource Investigator and Teamworker) tended to allocate fewer marks to this answer, since they are perhaps less likely to regard interactions in the workplace as ‘distractions’ and more likely to see them as integral to communication at work.

Fewer distractions



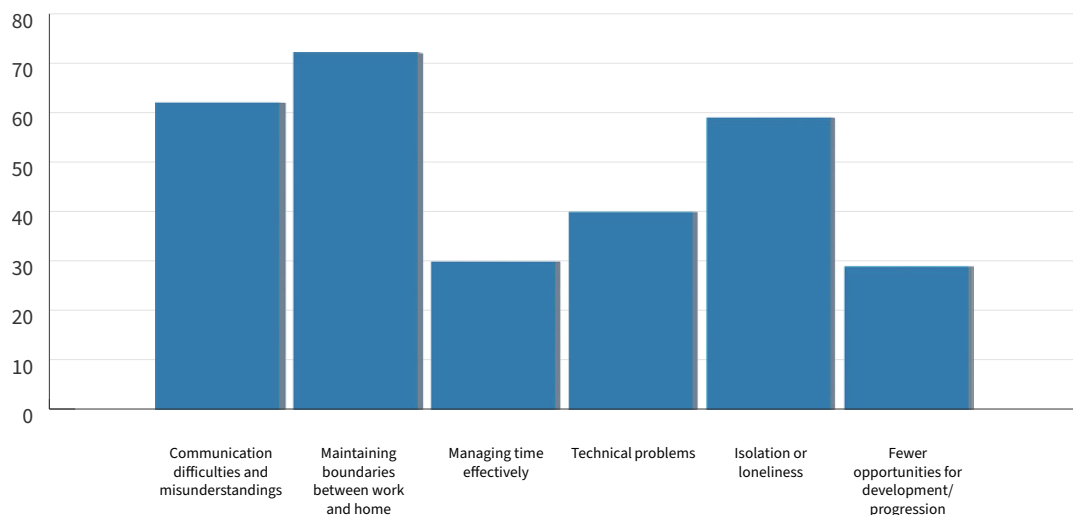
Drawbacks of remote working

Our respondents indicated that maintaining boundaries between work and home was the most challenging issue with remote working.

This is a contrast to our 2020 results, where this item scored among the lowest concerns.

This suggests an issue that is becoming of increasing concern to remote workers and might be a useful area for future training and development.

Drawbacks of remote and hybrid working

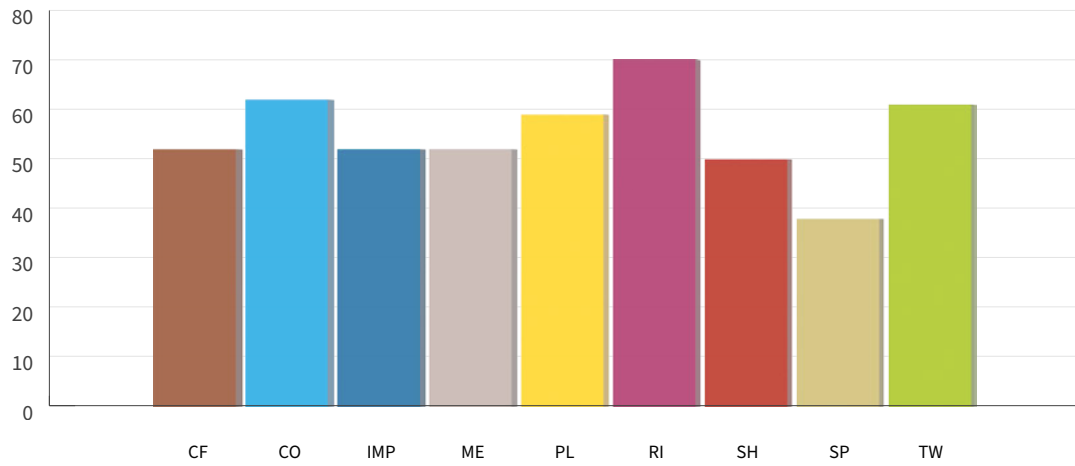


Communication difficulties and isolation or loneliness are also more prominent than they were in 2020.

When we analysed the response 'Communication difficulties and misunderstandings' according to Team Role, we found that those with high social roles (Co-ordinator, Resource Investigator and Teamworker) were more likely to identify this as a problem.

When it came to 'Managing time effectively', Implementers were among the least concerned, perhaps because they rate themselves amongst the most productive.

Communication difficulties and misunderstandings



Analysing trends

We asked respondents to share any additional comments regarding remote or hybrid working and noted prominent and recurring themes.

It is clear that hybrid working is an evolving and emotive discourse, which touches many areas of work: the positioning of employer and employee needs; performance; trust; engagement, and work-life balance, to name but a few.

The benefits of hybrid work

Many extolled the virtues of hybrid work in decreasing commuting time and environmental impact and ensuring a better quality of life.

Some pointed out that offering – and supporting – a hybrid model was essential for businesses who want to attract and retain talented people, who will otherwise look for those benefits elsewhere.

Those who have successfully adapted to hybrid work suggest a pattern of collaborating with others while in the office to test ideas and bring in different perspectives, whilst doing more focused work at home.

Others identified benefits of hybrid work for particular groups and demographics, including parents trying to balance work and family, and those close to retirement age who would simply have retired earlier without the option to work remotely.

Hybrid working: the cost to businesses

The engagement versus. productivity debate was prevalent in the comments, with particular concerns over loss of connection with colleagues and gradual disengagement over time.

As one response succinctly put it:

“The work itself can be done quite well, while the team relationships deteriorate.”

Several responses expressed concern at the loss of casual and spontaneous conversations which are key to knowledge sharing and building relationships and mentoring or developing less experienced staff.

The increase to management workload was also mentioned, with shared tasks, meetings and leave allocation all to be taken into consideration. One response mentioned that location-based shared tasks are defaulted to the employees who are present in the office.

Trust

The issue of trust was discussed in many comments.

On the one hand, many were distrustful of employees using work time for personal tasks and being more easily able to hide lack of preparation for meetings.

Others suggested that ‘old school’ managers were more likely to struggle with this trust and that managers needed further training to manage effectively and confidently in a hybrid setting.

Have we truly adapted?

A number of responses questioned the extent to which organisations have truly adapted to hybrid working.

“Hybrid working is not ‘plug-and-play,’” as one response pointed out.

Whilst management may have agreed to remote work, the systems, tools, supporting expectations and opportunities for collaboration have not been adapted to make remote work successful, with the result that people collaborate when co-located and work in isolation at home.

‘Empty office syndrome’

Some responses pointed out that working in the office doesn’t necessarily mean co-located working... if no one else is around.

For those looking for buzz or team cohesion, going into the office to sit on your own doesn’t cut it. Again, strategy and attention are required.

Finding what works

Those who were most positive about hybrid work in their comments indicated a degree of experimentation was required to find out what works for a particular team or culture.

“WFO or WFH or WFA... It’s all about setting, managing and exceeding expectations” was one response.

“Do the right work, in the right place at the right time, with the right people,” was another.



Conclusions

The issue of remote and hybrid work is complex and multi-faceted, and there is no 'one size fits all' solution.

It is clear that, along with other factors, our Team Role strengths can affect our attitude and approach to hybrid work, and managers could benefit from taking behavioural factors into account when developing hybrid working strategies and policies.

Previous studies have focused on the productivity vs. engagement debate. A comparison of our 2020 findings with this most recent study indicates that companies have been investing energy into promoting individual engagement within a hybrid model.

However, our research indicates that many organisations may be overlooking the impact of the hybrid model on team engagement and organisational culture. This is an important consideration which requires further attention in research and in practice.

Crucially, hybrid working does not deliver the same levels of team engagement as co-located working, and our findings demonstrate a disconnect with organisational culture among hybrid teams.

When hybrid teams are able to meet face-to-face, this time must be used as effectively as possible to promote cohesion, ensure alignment of objectives and therefore boost team performance.

Our research demonstrates that our diverse strengths influence our appetite for, and experience of, remote work, as well as the kind of work we do, and where we do it.

Our findings indicate that, in order to attract and retain talent, and to produce high-performing teams, a successful hybrid working strategy must have team engagement at its centre, along with individual performance and engagement.

In order to be effective for diverse individuals and teams, hybrid working strategies should be informed and underpinned by strengths-based practices.

This is where the Belbin Team Role model comes in.

Belbin is the gold standard team tool. It is unique in starting with the team, identifying and situating individual contributions within the holistic whole, to ensure individual strengths are aligned with team objectives.

This approach keeps team cohesion and engagement at the core of what we do, whilst promoting individual strengths in a way that benefits the individual and the team in unison.





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