

# NOW NORMAL SURVEY REPORT



# Introduction

“Any company that can enable their people to be fully effective in a distributed fashion can and should do it far beyond after this current crisis has passed. It’s a moral imperative. But that doesn’t mean it’s going to be easy, or that the chaotic and stressful first taste some workplaces are getting right now is one that inspires them to keep trying,” says Mullenweg (2020).

As Dans (2020) elaborates, and with reference to *Distributed Work’s Five Levels of Autonomy* by Matt Mullenweg, most people who started working from home in the first half of 2020 did so for one reason alone – lockdown.

Those not at level zero (0) in Matt’s model, continued to work without a dedicated workspace and with a temporary mindset.

However, the majority of workers started this journey from level one (1), where their respective organisations had made no deliberate effort to encourage distributed work or to create a remote-friendly environment. In many cases, working from home was generally discouraged.

Then by order of the authorities, – level two (2) of the model was introduced, where most employees were still required to stay home, yet many needed to remain productive. The attempt to replicate the office, for the most part, only lead to a synchronous loop of videoconferences and interruptions – and likely burnout as well. The need for presenteeism and micromanagement dropped away as trust, empowerment, and self-management has become a necessity.



Distributed work’s five levels of autonomy (Mellenweg, 2020).

A complete culture shift occurred.

Many organisations have assured employees that remote work will continue until further notice. Others have decided to allow many employees to continue to work remotely indefinitely, only going into the office when required.

### **This is the Now Normal.**

The way in which individuals interact with customers and clients (internal and external) – an element that is so crucial to the operation of many enterprises – has demanded a shift. The introduction of these changes has had an impact on individual workers, teams, and organisations at large, and – by default – leaders as well. Do these leaders truly understand the unique needs of employees that are working remotely? Are teams still able to practice effective conversations and keep projects and BAU initiatives alive and on track? Are organisations preparing and gearing up to leverage digital ways of working?

These are important questions and issues that invite a deeper understanding during these unprecedented times – and it's this lack of precedent that is adding a unique layer of stress to enforced remote, and possibly isolated, working. It is for this reason that IQbusiness has reached out to employees from various sectors to obtain a rich, textured, and objective perspective on the matter.

### **The survey explores the following:**

- To what extent are people working remotely now, compared to before the pandemic?
- How well have companies performed in enabling remote working?
- What challenges are employees encountering during these times?
- Has productivity been impacted? If so, how?
- Has decision-making been impacted?
- Are teams able to collaborate effectively?
- Do organisations need assistance in adapting to the current situation? What does this look like?
- Going forward, what sort of working arrangements do employees desire?

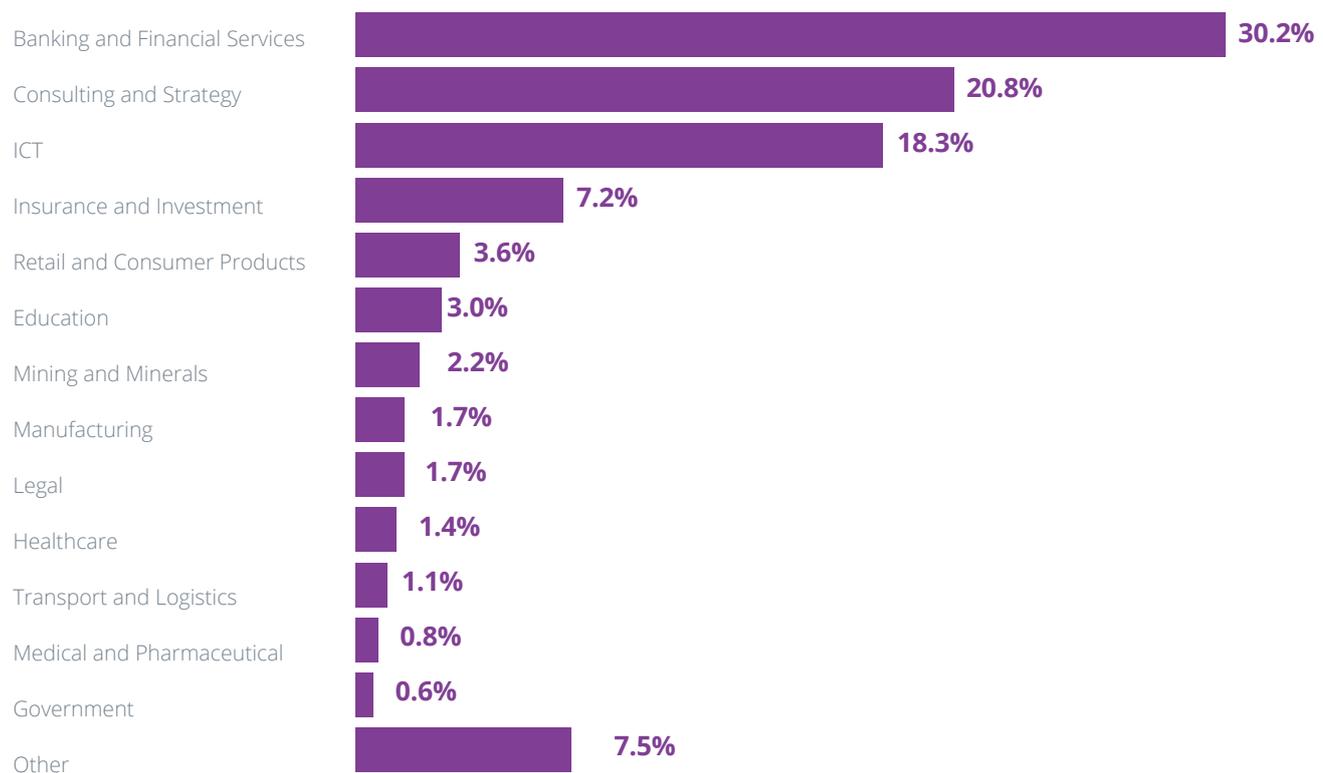
# Methodology and Sample

## How the research was conducted and participation

IQbusiness obtained responses to the Now Normal online survey from 387 individuals who represent various sectors. This was done through numerous channels, leveraging social media strongly<sup>1</sup>. Responses were received between 19 May 2020 to 17 June 2020.

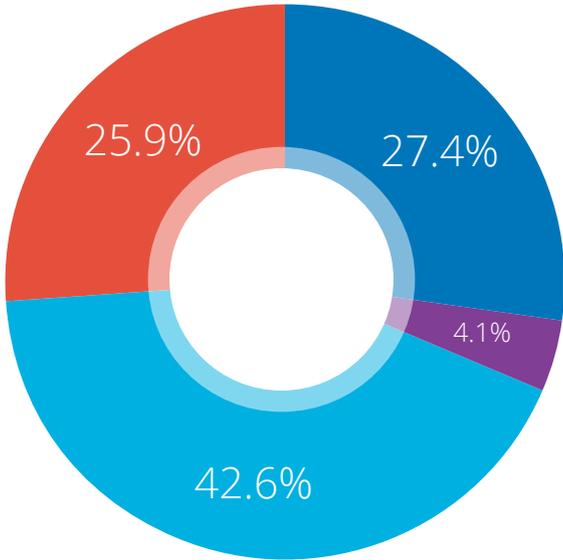
As can be seen in the figures below, most respondents represented Banking and Financial Services (30.2%), Consulting and Strategy (20.8%), and Information Communication Technology – ICT (18.3%), alongside a mix of various other industries. Moreover, there is a healthy blend of respondents that consider themselves as ‘general staff’ as well as those in managerial and executive positions, making for a relatively balanced sample.

## Industry representation (n=361)



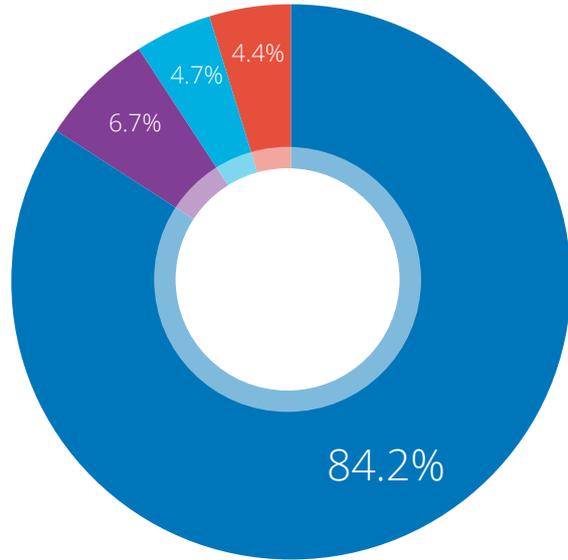
<sup>1</sup>The survey link was sent to: the IQbusiness existing client base, the Agile community and it was shared on LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter

**Designation of respondents** (n=317)

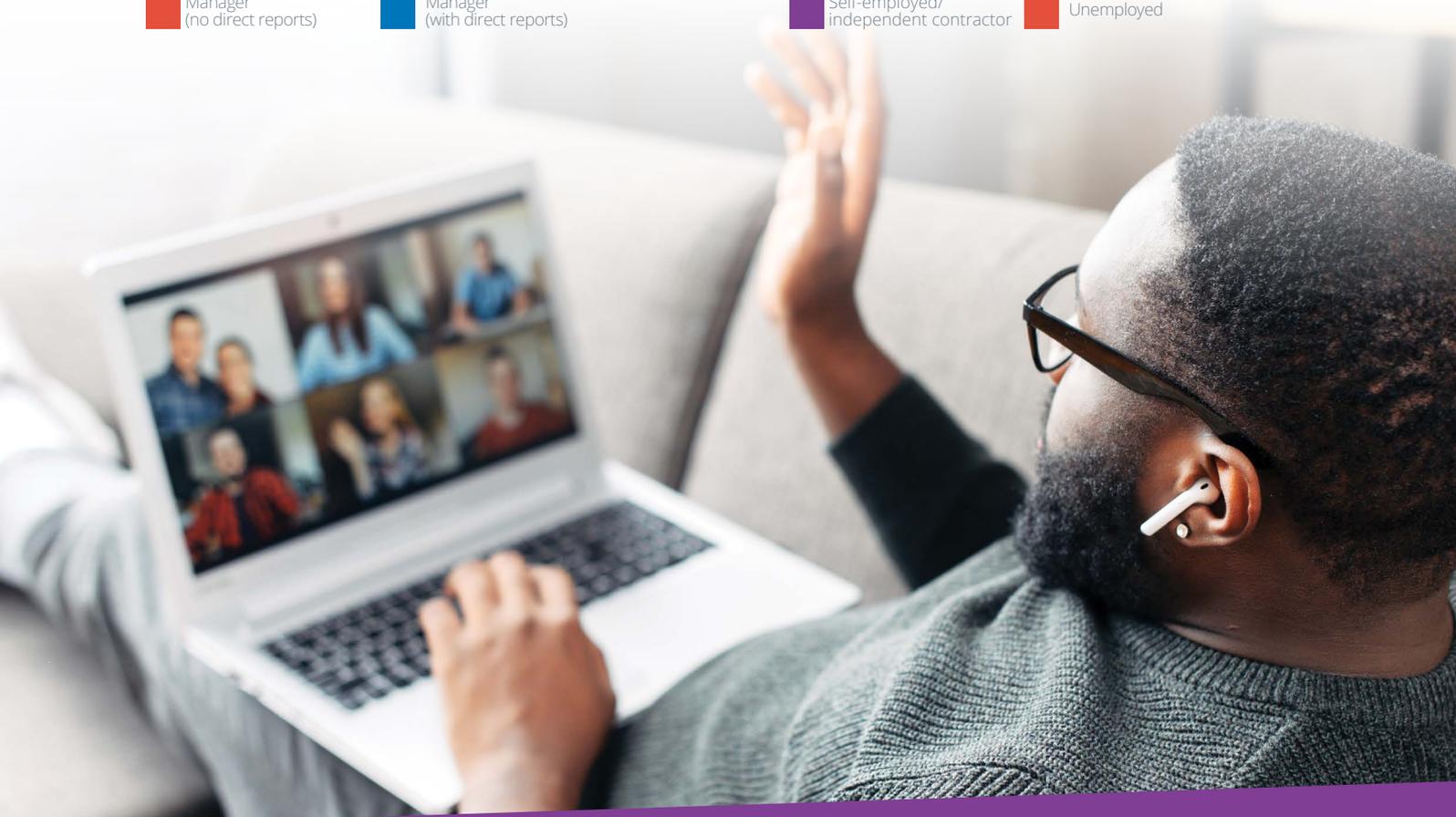


- Executive
- General staff
- Manager (no direct reports)
- Manager (with direct reports)

**Employment status of respondents** (n=387)



- Employee of organisation
- Business owner
- Self-employed/independent contractor
- Unemployed



# Results and Analysis

## Many people are working remotely for the first time

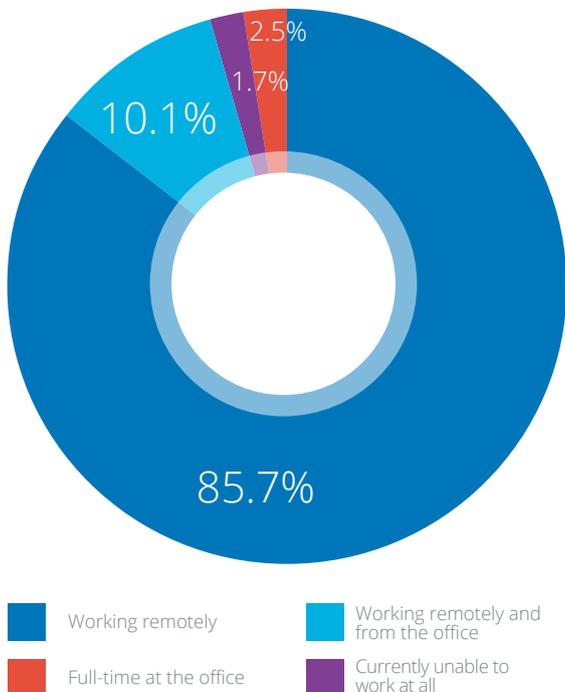
As revealed in the graph *Current working arrangements*, and at the time of taking the survey, 85.7% of respondents were working remotely only, with a further 10.1% working remotely on some days. This means that almost 96% of the respondents were experiencing the highlights and challenges of remote working at the time of taking the survey during South Africa's level four (4) lockdown. Interestingly, almost half of these people (47.1%) never typically worked remotely before the onset of the pandemic, thus stressing the extent of the adjustment that many individuals are facing.

These drastic changes likely call for new or adjusted approaches and policies that support different ways of working. This could

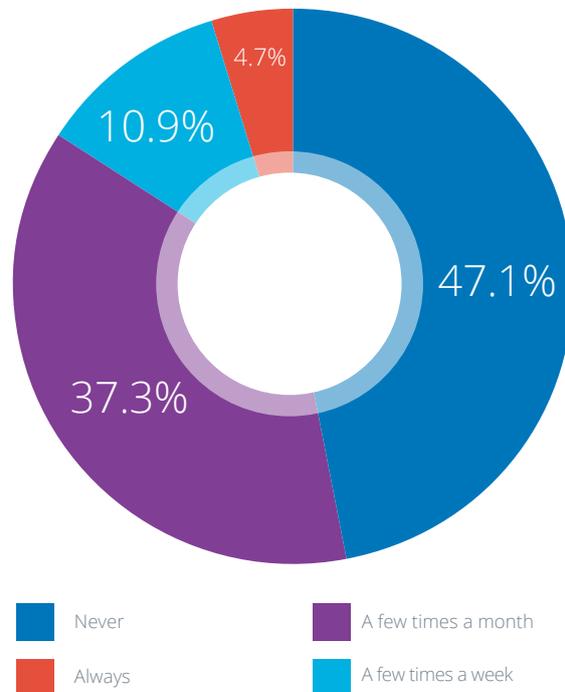
be an Employee Value Proposition (EVP) that gets individuals out of bed every morning and a supporting remote value chain that optimises an employee's experience, resulting in highly engaged individuals and high-performing teams. Organisational decision-makers must keep human beings at the very centre of their decisions while applying principles that foster trust and connection.

Many remote workers lack a dedicated workspace, have children who need to be educated and cared for, are surrounded by chores that need attention, and occupy an environment not conducive to operating at their full potential. However, remote working has become standard, so supporting these individuals, helping them to adapt and embrace the now normal, should be a key focus.

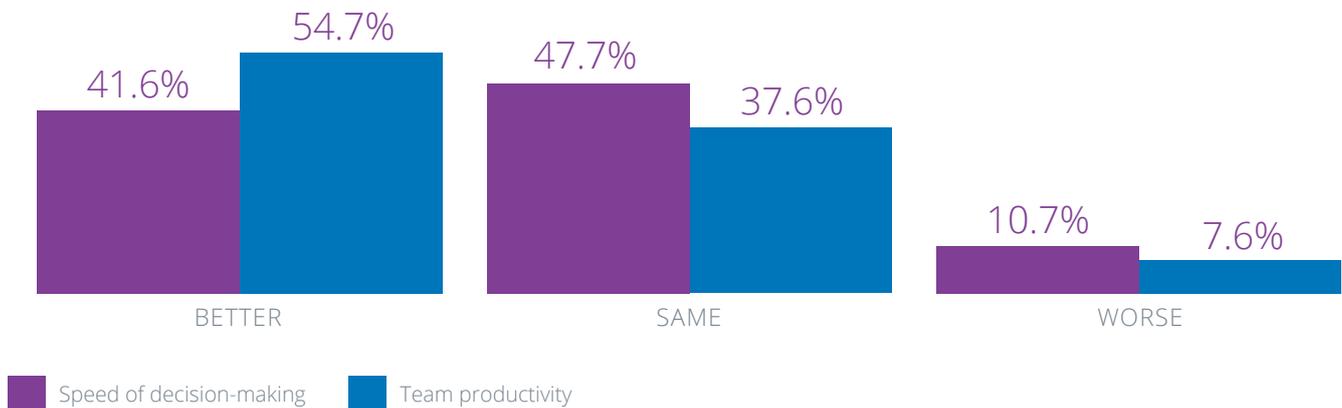
**Current working arrangement** (n=357)



**Remote working prior to COVID-19** (n=359)



## Speed of decision-making and productivity in the Now Normal (n=327)



### Productivity and decision-making are generally the same or better

As far as team productivity and the perceived speed of decision-making is concerned, it is encouraging to see that only a relatively small percentage of respondents feel that these have worsened. Most have expressed the view that these have been the same and, in many cases, gotten better. This raises a few questions: (1) What has contributed to the improvements in productivity and efficient decision-making, and (2) How can these positive elements be retained in the long-term when the crisis has passed?

### There is room for employers to drive better emotional responses

While there is undoubtedly room for employers to be more empathetic and therefore improve the extent to which positive emotions, such as trust, are experienced, it is encouraging to see that many people do feel trusted, informed, engaged, and empowered. This suggests that organisations intent on actively fostering these positive emotions already have a platform from which to work.

At the same time, it is evident that many people do not feel recognised during these times, and that there is a certain lack of connectedness. It remains questionable as to whether adapting the traditional rewards programmes designed to reward employee performance and encourage engagement is more challenging now, or if organisations should acknowledge that these programmes were not effective in the first place. Additionally, social isolation was identified as the biggest challenge for many of the respondents.

Moreover, 28.3% of respondents reported feeling overwhelmed often. While 46.6% mentioned that they often feel motivated during this time, it's questionable that long-term motivation can be sustained without deliberate, well-informed action from employers.

Through the correct organisational support and guidance, individuals can establish a new sense of personal well-being, focus, and meaningful connection. This can be achieved by adopting new behaviours and habits, reducing disruption, improving work-life balance, and ultimately enhancing productivity.

Furthermore, leaders and managers who want to foster

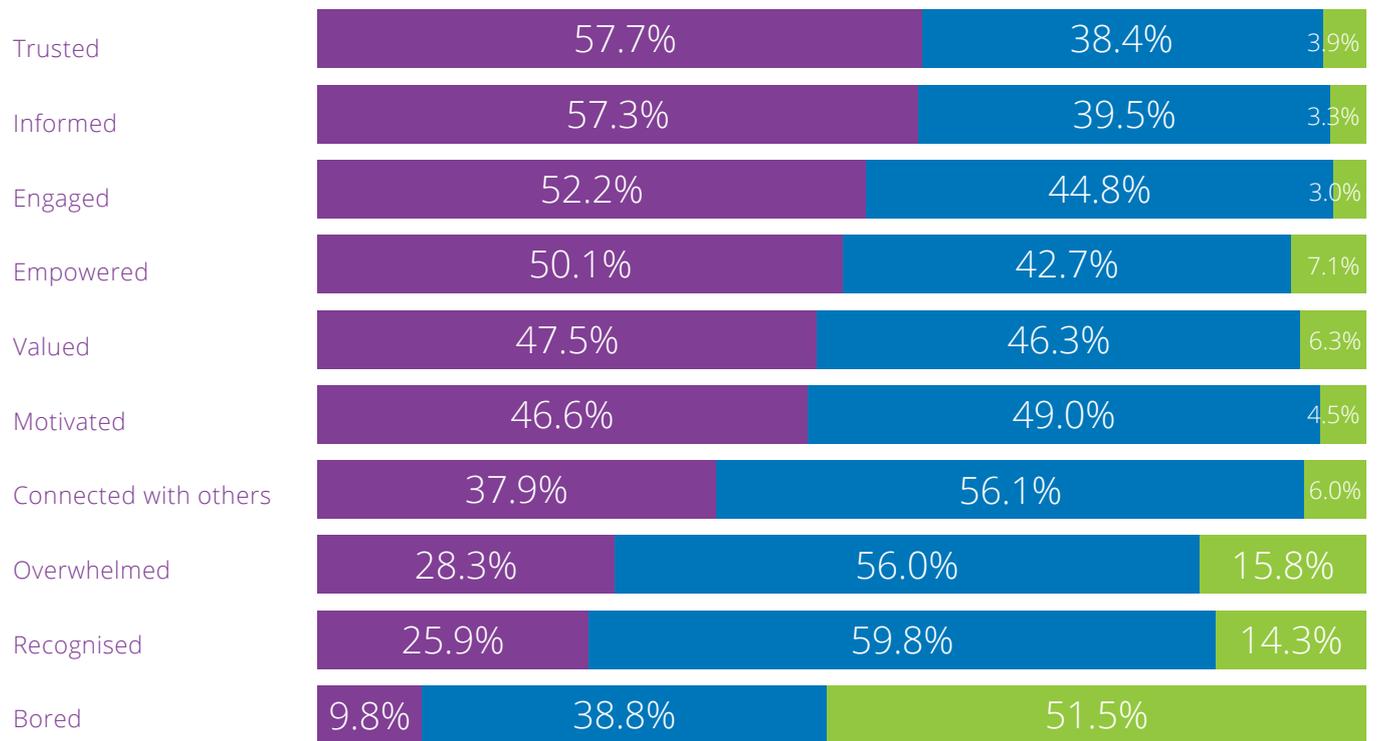
better team cohesion, enhance performance, and support team member culture and goals must recognise these individual needs. They should also provide alternative ways to gauge employee well-being, engagement, and contribution to the team and offer necessary recognition.

Leaders in organisations are urged to cultivate space and time for collaboration and innovation, where employees feel safe to suggest and consider original ideas. The American Management Association (2019) describes this as an 'intellectual safe harbour' where novel viewpoints and ideas are actively encouraged when facing exceptional circumstances.

It is equally essential for managers and leaders to embrace the notion that they are first and foremost individuals themselves. In the absence of understanding their own needs and supporting behaviours, nurturing an environment where team members feel accepted and respected, and where interpersonal risk-taking is welcomed, will present a challenge.

With such a strong focus on collaboration and effective ways of working together, especially for knowledge workers, the concepts of psychological safety, employee experience, and workplace culture are integral to the Now Normal.

### Emotions felt during these times (n=335)



Often Sometimes Never

## Remote working appears to be here to stay

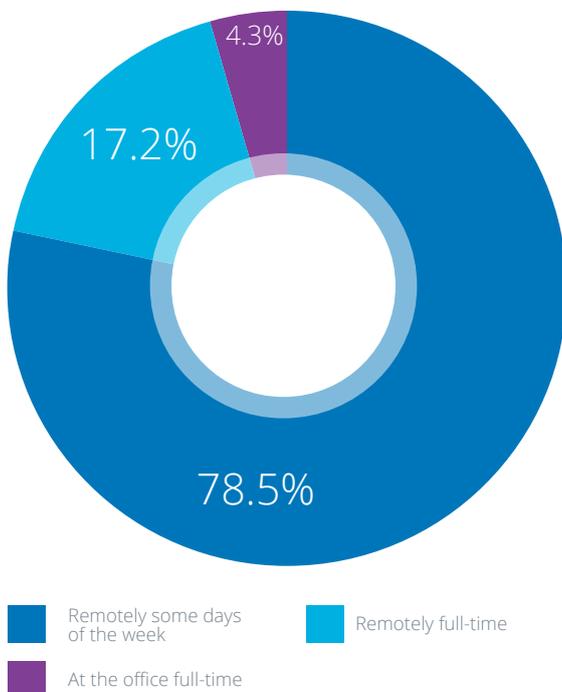
Post the crisis, 78.5% of respondents are in favour of a 'work from home' arrangement that allows them to work remotely for some days of the week and some days at the office, while 17.2% are in favour of a full-time remote working arrangement. Only 4.3% would prefer to return full time to the office. This poses a potential challenge to organisations who, in the future, will need to cater for and support both types of workers – each requiring a set of processes, structures, policies, and culture of their own. Employers need to consider whether they are ready or willing to meet this demand. If they are not, then they risk adverse potential

impact on employee motivation and retention.

Leaders undoubtedly want to offer their support in ensuring that remote teams and their members are enabled to deliver value from anywhere, to collaborate seamlessly, and to feel connected by reducing collaboration friction, repairing disrupted team routines and habits, and removing tool frustrations.

When team members gain clarity about how their work fits into and benefits the organisation, as well as adopting team norms, values, and accompanying behaviours that support remote work, it enables them to reach higher levels of performance faster.

### Preferred working arrangement going forward (n=326)



## Social isolation, a significant challenge during these times

Respondents were asked to identify the top 3 challenges that they are facing while working remotely and practising social isolation (28.4%), general anxiety about COVID-19 (27.9%) and keeping a regular schedule (26.1%) emerged on top. Other key challenges are shown in the figure below, with internet connectivity and childcare foremost amongst them.

The long-term effects of social isolation within an organisational setting – stripping away the informal discussions and interactions between colleagues in a traditional office environment – could result in employees feeling disconnected from the organisation and culture. This is especially true if there are no open and available methods with which to connect to others, potentially leading to a decline in employees’ engagement and possibly job performance as well (Larson 2020).

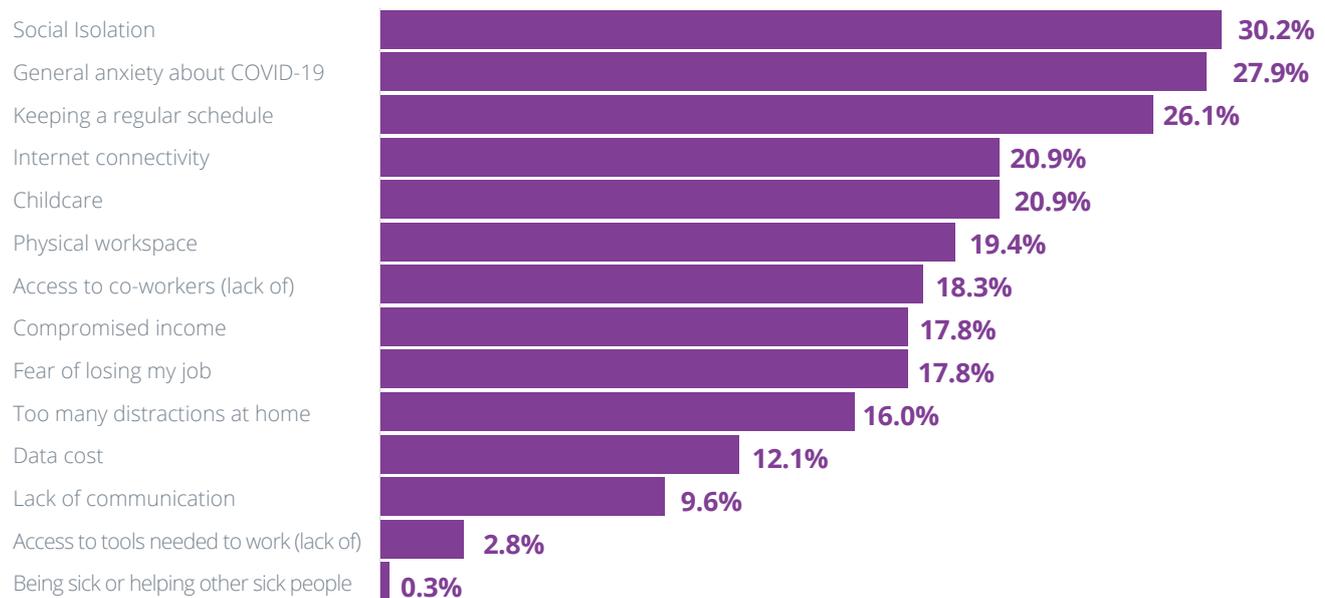
**Respondents were also asked to indicate the one thing that would make remote working easier, and responses tended to centre around the following themes:**

- A proper workstation (chair, desk, etc.).

- Internet access (for those that were without access).
- Optimised internet connectivity – some desired optimisation regarding speed/bandwidth, connection stability, or uncapped internet.
- The absence of home-schooling – many are finding it difficult to manage work commitments and home-schooling at the same time.
- The absence of childcare responsibilities.
- A more clearly defined work schedule.
- Assurance around job security.
- Hardware/software constraints, such as access to a second monitor.

Although organisations do not typically address these points, a level of support has been required to tackle the current conditions. It has, however, raised the challenge for organisations to rethink the benefits they provide to employees to support remote working. Emerging ideas include establishing satellite offices where a high employee density is evident, providing access to fit-for-purpose tools, offering assistance in setting up an ideal workspace, or offering training to support new skills, processes, or digital literacy, to name a few.

### Key challenges (n=387)



## Employers can do more to drive better remote working outcomes

Encouragingly, 84.5% of respondents rated their organisation either 4 or 5 on a 5-point rating scale, where 5 represented "completely enabled" and 1 represented "Not at all enabled" in the context of remote working. Despite this, employees have identified areas where their organisation needs assistance to better enable remote working. This is linked, in part, to a key challenge of keeping a regular work schedule, which more than a quarter of respondents cited.

There are also challenges around optimising performance management, coaching and mentoring, as well as employee engagement, which is something that companies cannot neglect for too long.

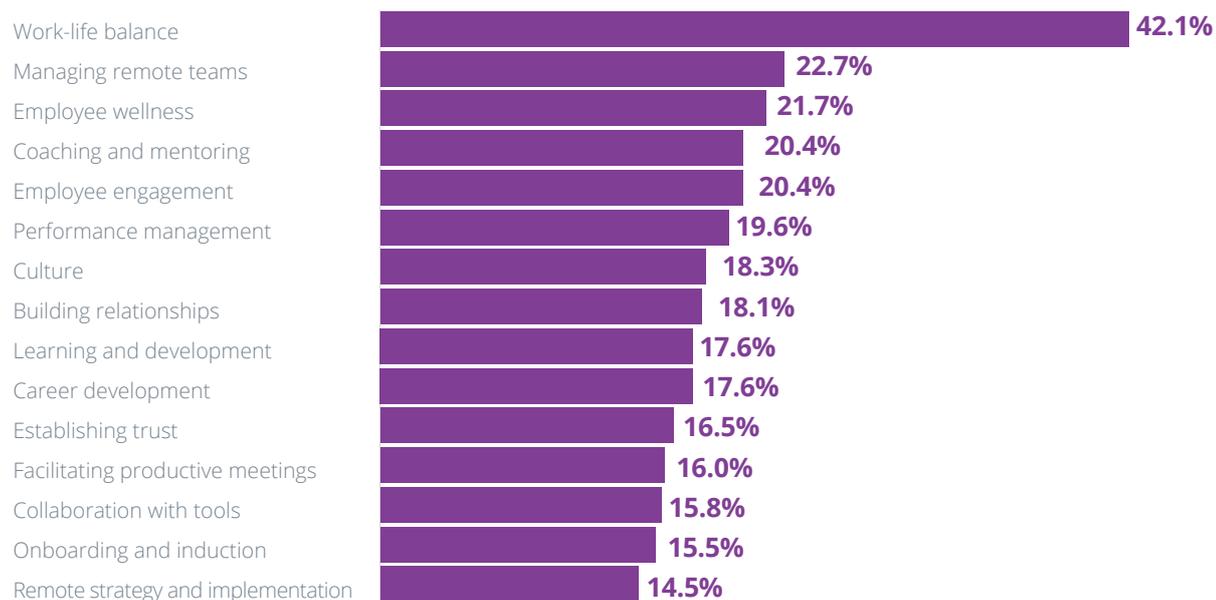
Be it getting an early start, deciding where to set-up for the day, prioritising tasks, or scheduling uninterrupted deep work, remote working is often associated with an increase in productivity and a decrease in commuting (win). To achieve this, consistent habits need to be formed, boundaries need to be established, and employees need the opportunity to establish a routine that works (Aboulhosn 2020).

Work-life balance has been replaced by the emerging concept of work-life integration, which is becoming an onboarding perk. Rather than trying to balance 'work' and 'life' separately, employees are now looking to integrate the two. Flexibility is the differentiator (Shepherd 2019).

Where there was once a blurry line, we now find ourselves lineless and we can thank technology and the ability for full-time connectivity for that. For all the benefit bells to be ringing, it is up to organisations to encourage engagement in a healthy way and up to employees to set equally healthy boundaries to avoid burnout. Human beings need time away from work to recover, which not only benefits them but the organisation as well (Shepherd 2019).

Rather than assuming the need to work harder and longer for the same rate, work-life integration should be considered as an opportunity for employees to shed pre-defined roles and assume a blend of work and life that is effective for them. When executed effectively, it can create engaged employees and reduce unnecessary stress. Their daily lives can become more fulfilling, and their personal identities can strengthen as well (Shepherd 2019).

### Areas that organisations may need assistance in (top 15) (n=387)



## Organisations aligned to Agile evidence better outcomes

A framework provides the guardrails and constraints that teams can operate within. In their book *Extreme Ownership*, Willink and Babin (2015) call the principle '*Discipline equals freedom*'. Essentially, following a best practice framework in a disciplined manner will allow individuals the freedom to respond to change.

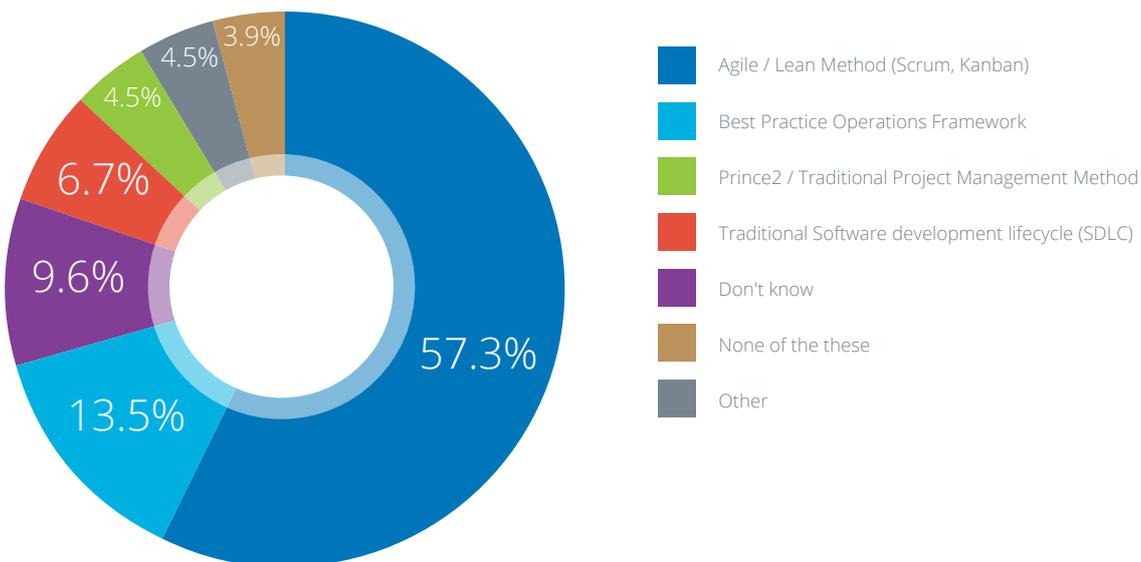
Regarding the survey sample, 57.3% of respondents indicated that Agile methods are used most within their organisations. Analysis demonstrates that organisations that mostly use Agile methodologies are linked to significantly better outcomes versus organisations that adopt mostly other methodologies. This is illustrated in the table that follows, which shows that organisations linked to Agile were more likely, before COVID-19, to practice remote working, versus organisations linked to other methodologies. At the time of

the survey, 93% of the former cohort were solely working remotely versus only 73% of the latter cohort.

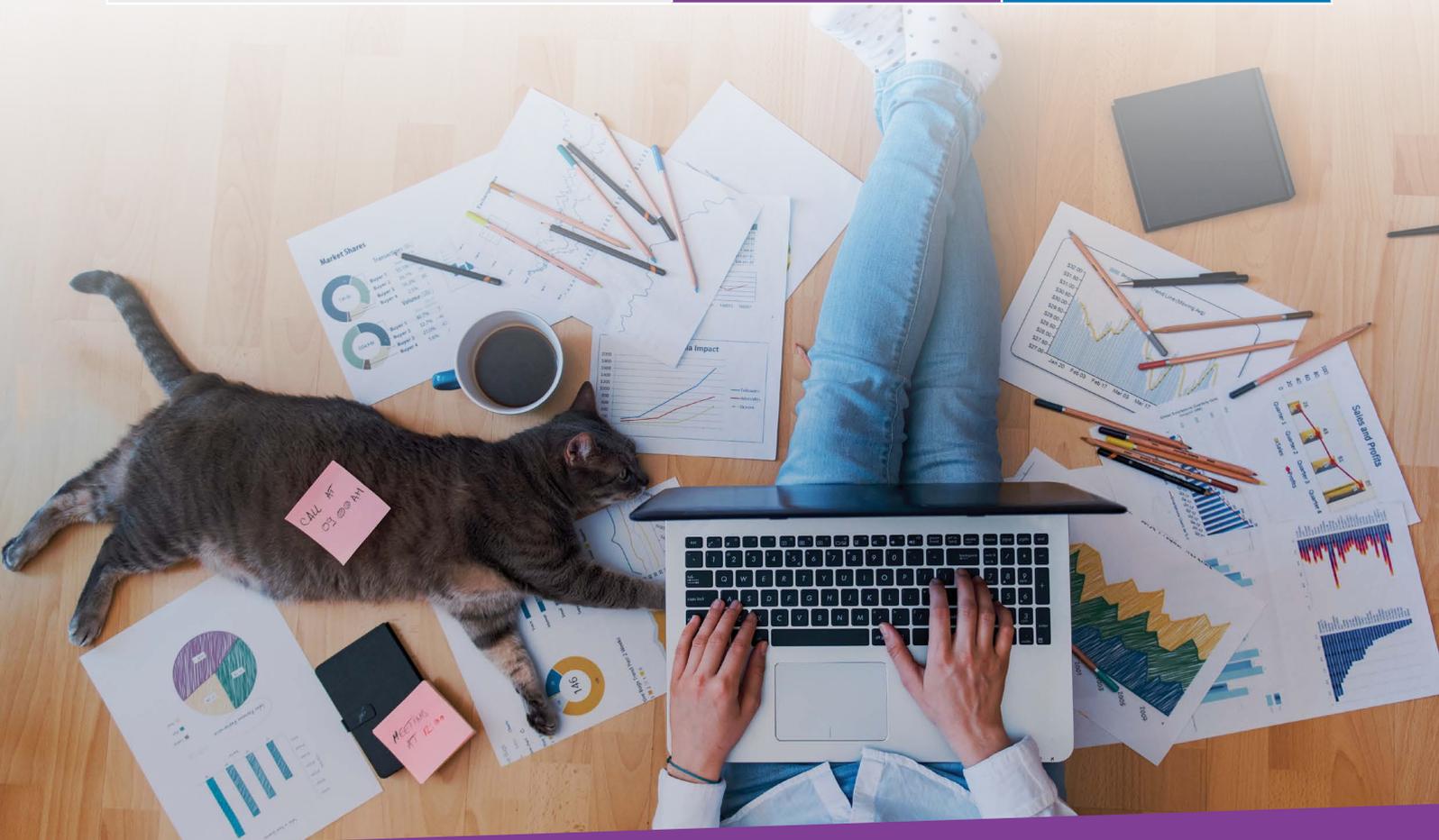
When comparing the two groups, the agile-linked respondents were also more likely to report better team productivity and speed of decision-making during the lockdown, compared to prior to the pandemic. Moreover, in what is perhaps the most interesting aspect of this comparison, agile-linked respondents were also associated with significantly better emotional outcomes.

For instance, 63% of agile-linked respondents felt motivated 'often' during these times, versus only 39% of respondents linked to other methodologies. Similarly, outcomes on various other positive emotions, such as trust, empowerment, engagement, and feeling valued, come out in favour of agile-linked respondents. All of this makes for a strong case for organisations to consider adopting agile methodologies.

## Methodologies/Frameworks applied most in organisations (n=178)



	Respondents whose organisation uses mostly Agile methodologies (n=102)	Respondents whose organisation uses mostly 'non-Agile' methodologies (n=51)
Working remotely only at the time of the survey	93%	73%
Never worked remotely prior to COVID-19	35%	46%
Perception that organisation has completely empowered employee to work remotely	69%	61%
Speed of decision-making better at the time of the survey versus pre-COVID	48%	39%
Team productivity better at the time of the survey versus pre-COVID	61%	48%
Feels empowered 'often' during these times	63%	49%
Feels engaged 'often' during these times	59%	51%
Feels motivated 'often' during these times	63%	39%
Feels trusted 'often' during these times	67%	57%
Feels valued 'often' during these times	58%	38%



## Guidelines around personal wellbeing and team working agreements are vital

Finally, regarding sets of guidelines that respondents feel would better enable remote working, it is not surprising, given the current global health crisis, that personal wellness guidelines feature at the top of the list. At the same time, team working agreements or social contracts feature almost as strongly, highlighting the need for some form of structured direction.

Lastly, almost a third of respondents (31.8%) highlighted the need for remote working guidelines. Again, the need for guidance around managing work-life integration surfaced, supported by effective time management, workspace setup, supporting technology, and associated processes; and the ins and outs to maintain both professional and casual relationships with clients, colleagues, and peers.

Anxiety is at an all-time high, and well-being (for employees and their loved ones) should be a focal point. Knowing that your organisation cares about you and your safety offers a level of comfort that cannot be bought (Hogg 2020).

This care relies on regular and consistent communication

and transparency, as well as a platform that allows for two-way communication flow to provide ongoing clarity. A holistic view of well-being should be considered at an individual level, including emotional and mental health, to ensure that employees feel cared for, regardless of where they work. Leaders must remain aware of any additional factors that may contribute to remote workers feeling overwhelmed, stressed, or burnt-out (Hogg 2020).

Employee well-being, in fact, is not limited to health alone. Job satisfaction and overall happiness are equally important (Short 2018). Autonomy is crucial because individuals need some control over their job roles to find value in the work they are doing. Employees who are happiest report that at least some responsibilities are left for them to manage themselves (Lupton 2019).

Employers can further engage individuals by providing supportive supervision and a combination of positive and critical feedback on a regular basis with an aim to develop employees within the organisation. This can have a significantly positive impact on employees, improving their self-confidence by making them feel as though their skills and abilities are valued and that their contribution to the workplace is appreciated (Lupton 2019).

## Set of guidelines that respondents feel will better enable remote working (n=387)





# Way Forward

## Using these insights to add tangible value

So, where are we headed? Levels four (4) and five (5) of the pyramid presented earlier, are characterised by the optimisation of working practices. Virtual communication tools and working on shared documents will become essential to daily work. Asynchronous work allows for more creativity and attracts better talent, especially when geographic restrictions are eliminated. Furthermore, remote work is consistently more efficient than any organisation with just a face-to-face culture (Dans 2020).

Leading remote organisations calls for leaders and decision-makers, who want to proactively service employees and customers and engage and communicate effectively, to enable remote readiness and resilience through focused leadership interventions, while bringing empathy, trust, and empowerment to their leadership styles. These interventions should seek to enable both employees and customers to embrace the right tools and processes, partnered with adopting the right behaviours for remote working. This would, in turn, be supported by leveraging off available and emerging tools, technologies, and insights, that could potentially promote data-driven decision making and enhance ways of working.

The future most certainly continues to support cross-collaboration with organisational leadership, employees, customers, and partners as personal and digital identities

are established and fostered. It is essential to continue learning from the challenges and opportunities that are being faced in the remote-first environment currently underway while respecting the various perspectives that are likely coupled with practical, behavioural, and technical stress.

An introduction of “moments that matter” within organisations may emerge, with an established or mature remote working capability. This could also apply to cases where remote workers have been more adaptive, allowing for a scaled-up approach and embracing remote versions of employee onboarding, performance management, townhalls, team building, and more, with other emerging practices surfacing to pave the way.

Rapidly changing competitive environments and continuous technological disruption means workers and organisations must cultivate the essential organisational capability for the future of work – adaptivity.

*“The companies that understand how this works, that are able to learn from what they have experienced during the greatest experiment in distributed work that humanity has ever lived, will be able to evolve into much more efficient structures and, above all, with more meaning for those who are part of them. Those that don’t... well, I’ve said it before: the future doesn’t belong to the biggest or the fastest, but instead to those that can adapt best to the new environment” (Dans, 2020).*

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## About IQbusiness

IQbusiness is the leading independent management consulting firm in South Africa, helping clients overcome their business challenges and achieve better results. Since 1998, we have been enabling banks, insurance companies, retailers and others to take their products to market faster, improve customer satisfaction, upskill teams, eliminate waste and strengthen governance and compliance.

Drawing on our core strengths - consulting, research and contracting - we solve clients' problems by providing innovative, faster and more cost-effective services and solutions, backed by teams with real expertise and experience.

Although proudly South African, our perspective is international through the experience of our people, our clients and our business partners. IQbusiness is privately owned and fully empowered with a level 3 B-BBEE certification.

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