

2020 LOCKDOWN EMPLOYMENT SURVEY REPORT

bfspeople

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Introduction

During June 2020 **bfpeople** received 1192 responses to an online survey – inviting people from its list of contacts and via social media networks to complete. More than 99% of responses were from people in the UK and we collected all data completely anonymously.

The survey consisted of a short questionnaire about the participants' employment situations, attitudes, and experiences during the ongoing lockdown. Our aim was to "take the temperature" of a UK working population: to understand the breadth of experiences and views in this unique situation for the UK workforce.

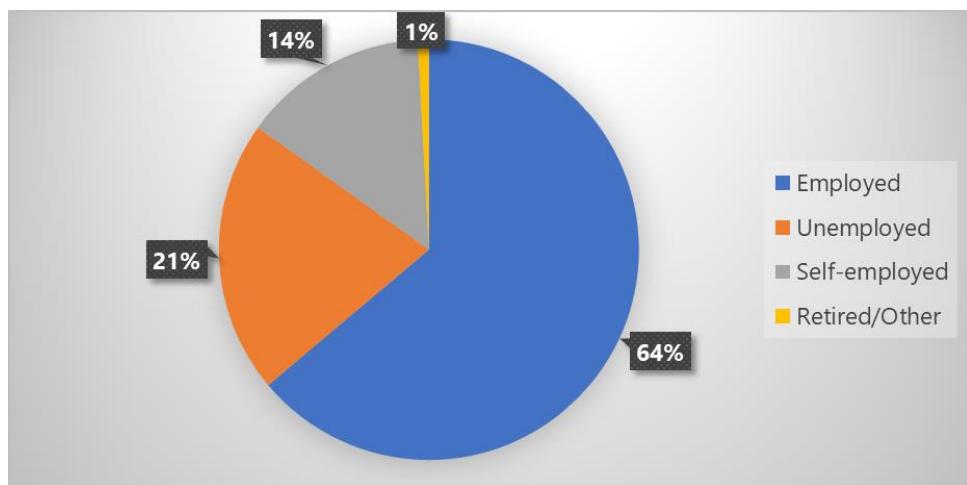
The survey was completed by employed – some furloughed, others still working - unemployed and self-employed people. Each category received different questions, based on their reported employment status and this summary report is structured based on those categories.

The summary results of this survey are contained in this report. All percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

bfpeople is a people consulting business, partnering with commercial, public sector and non-profit clients to design and deliver executive search, assessment, leadership coaching & development, and career transition & outplacement services. As the UK partner of Executive Resources International, the global network of independent executive search, human resources and leadership advisory firms, **bfpeople** has more than 350 colleagues in over 30 countries to support clients' international growth and development.

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Q: What is your current employment situation?



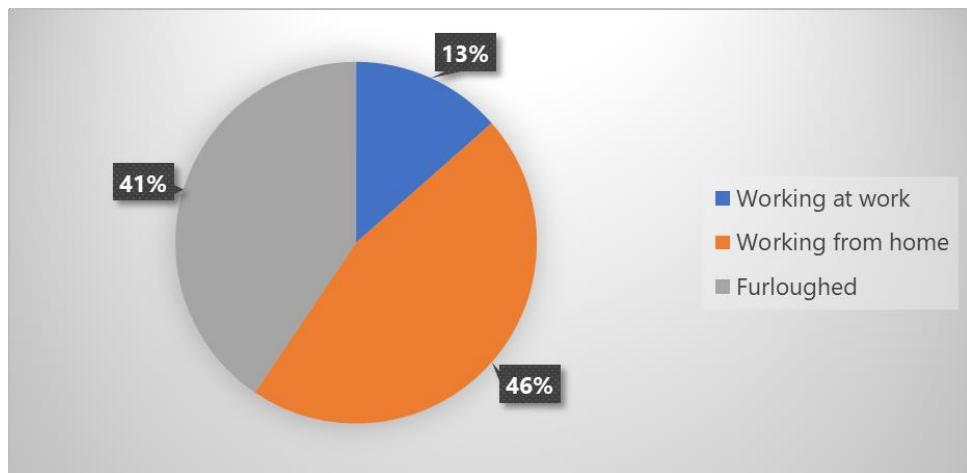
Most of the 1192 respondents were currently employed, 21% unemployed and 14% working for themselves. A very small percentage who identified as "retired" or "other" at the start of the questionnaire were thanked for their interest but received no further questions.

Responses came from one-person businesses (18%) to employees in firms with over 1000 staff (16%) and all sizes of business in between. Respondents came from a wide range of industry sectors and job functions. Job roles included finance, administration, consulting, education, engineering, IT, marketing, quality, supply chain and strategy. The largest populations responding were in sales (25%), project/programme management (14%), creative/design (13%), and general management (11%). The principal industry sectors of respondents consisted of manufacturing (18%), retail/hospitality (16%), and construction (14%) but also included people from government, education, healthcare, life sciences/pharma, design, aviation, automotive, energy, financial services and advertising.

Responses from participants currently in employment

Just over 40% of those employed were furloughed at the time of completing the survey. Only 13% were working at their usual place of work – in an office, plant etc), while 46% were working from home.

Q: What is your current working situation?



57% of the 13% working at their normal place of work had been doing so throughout the lockdown period, with others returning to work in stages during the lockdown period, some as recently as the week of completing the survey.

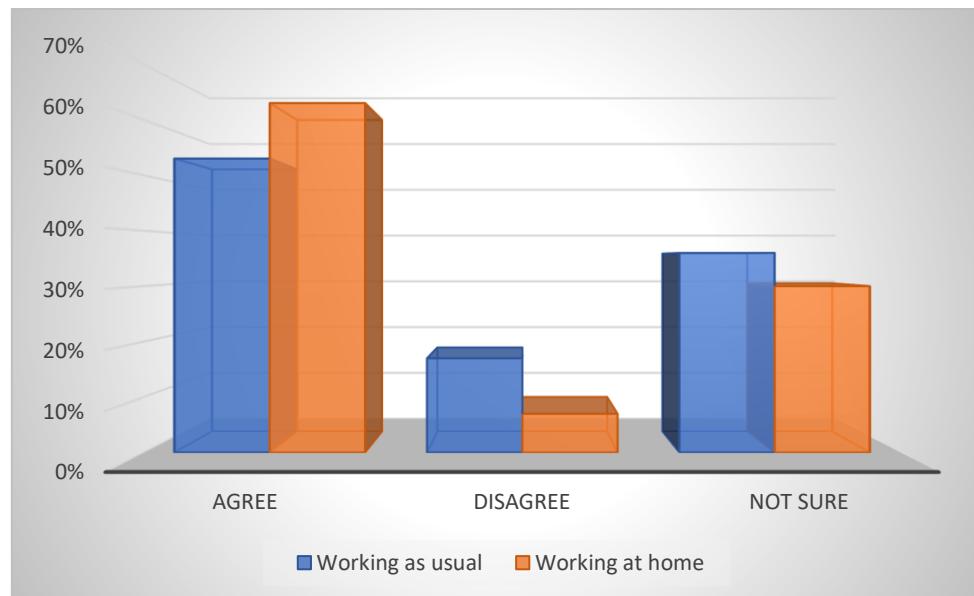
A little over two-thirds (68%) of those working had colleagues who had been furloughed during the lockdown. Of all the individuals working at their usual place, 60% said they preferred to be working, while 20% believed having furloughed colleagues paid for being at home was unfair on those working.

Responses about safety, welfare and engagement

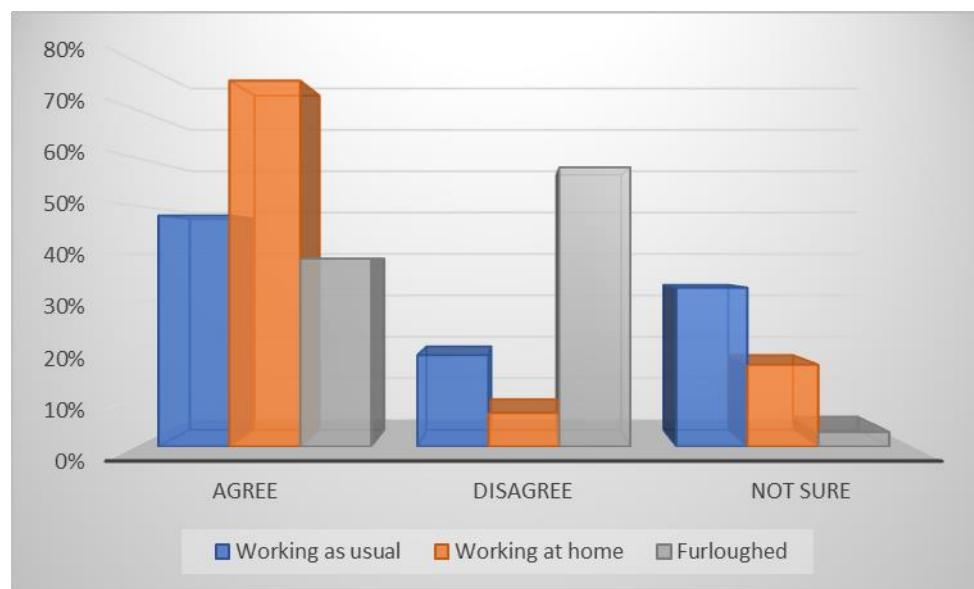
We wanted to understand how supported and engaged staff were in their different situations. We asked a series of questions of all respondents who were currently employed.

Of those working in offices/plants, 60% reported that their employer had made adequate provision to ensure their safety at work. The remaining 40% were unsure or did not answer.

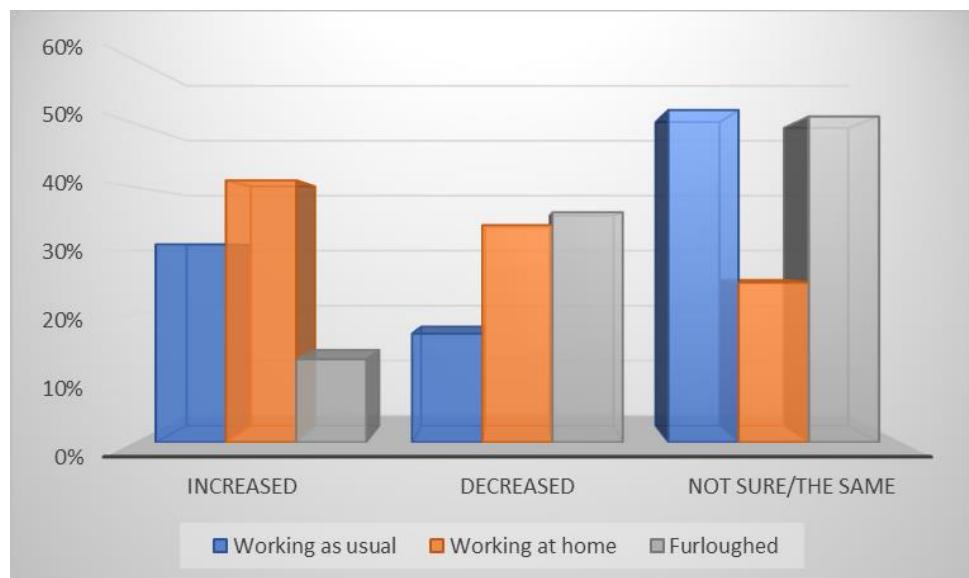
Q: My employer takes care of my well-being



Q: I have received good support from managers and the company



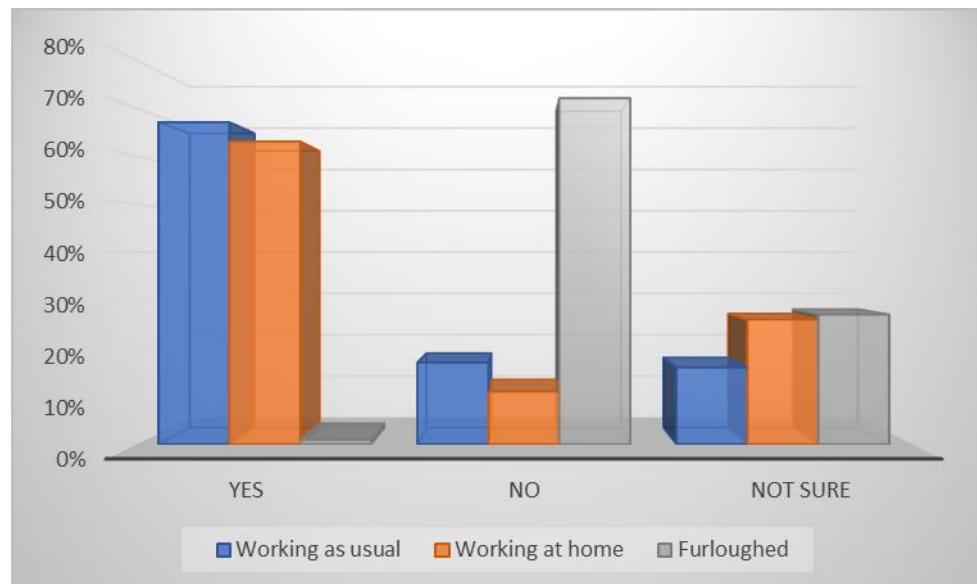
Q: Has your loyalty to your employer increased or decreased as a result of their actions during lockdown?



It is notable that those working from home reported an overall higher level of "satisfaction" with their employer than those working as usual. Those who were furloughed indicated the lowest level of satisfaction – this might be expected if there is limited contact and support from work during this period, although only 13% of furloughed employees report a higher level of loyalty to their company.

When looking at the level of confidence in the future of their role and employment in the company the responses show a clear difference in outlook. While more than two-thirds of all those working gave a positive response, 72% of furloughed respondents were pessimistic about their future employment.

Q: I feel confident that my current employment will continue for the foreseeable future

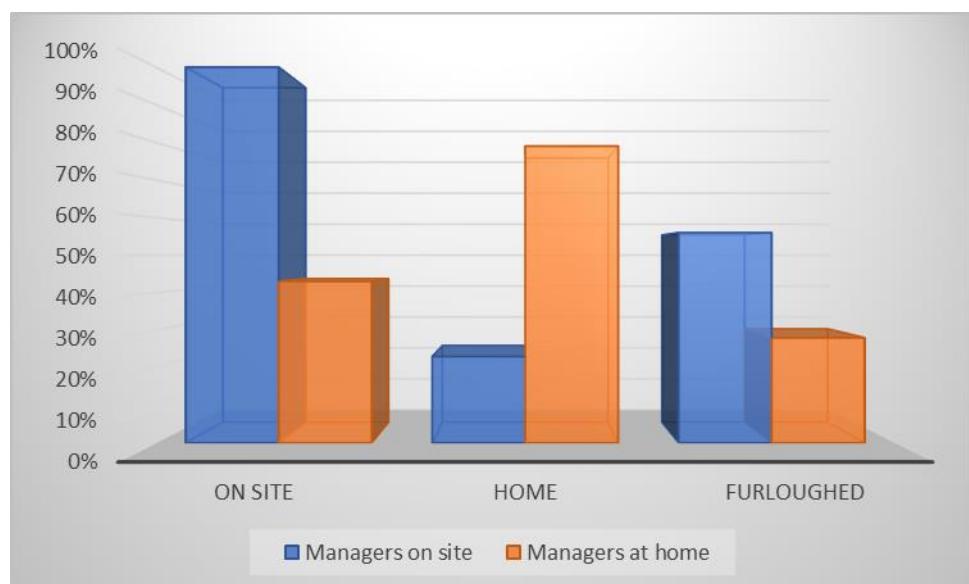


Leading in Lockdown

71% of those working as usual and 48% of those working from home were leaders/managers of people.

Those still working on site, were much less likely to be managing staff who were working at home than managers who were themselves working from home. Those on site were more likely to have team members who were furloughed than working from home.

Q: Are you currently managing staff who are:



While those managers who were working from home were most likely to have their team also at home, 43% of managers working from home were responsible for colleagues working on site as usual.

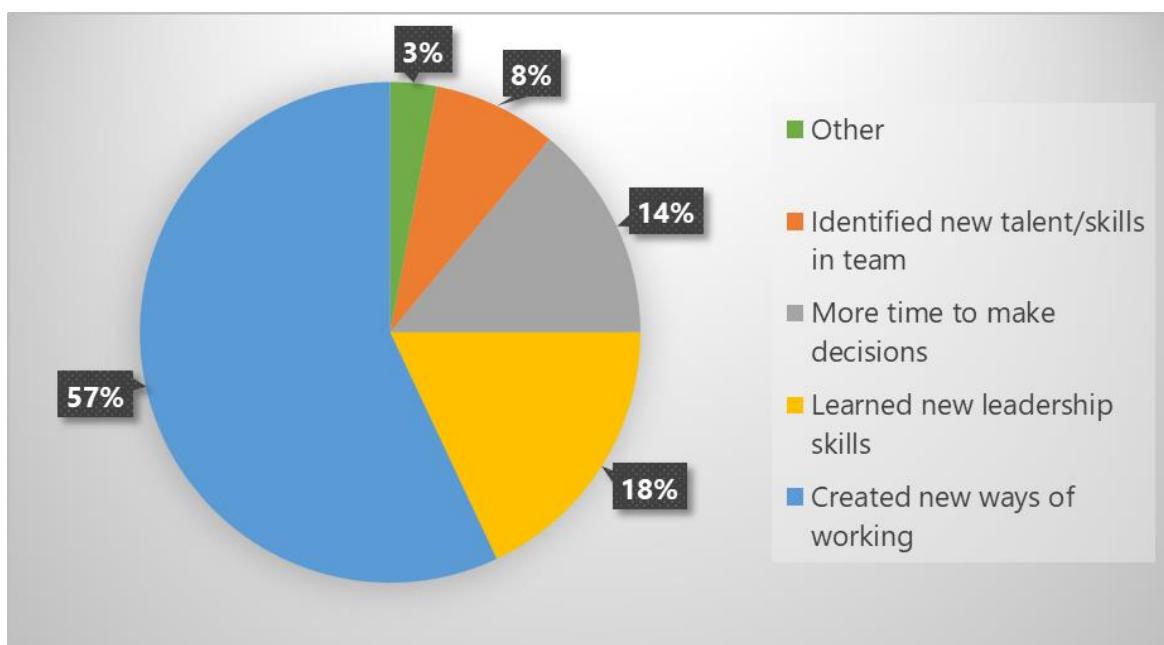
We asked about the biggest challenges that managers faced in their current situation. For those working on site the principal responses, in descending order, were:

- Maintaining the motivation of staff and colleagues
- Ensuring the well-being of colleagues
- Having limited time to think about decisions
- Increased volume of email from colleagues, suppliers and customers.

For managers working from home many of the challenges were similar but some other entries featured in the most common responses, again in descending order:

- Ensuring the well-being of colleagues
- Team communication/team building
- Finding time to spend with individuals
- Maintaining the motivation of staff and colleagues
- Maintaining productivity of colleagues
- Managing performance issues

Looking to what positives can be taken from this experience, we asked leaders: "[What has been the best thing that has come from the lockdown situation?](#)"



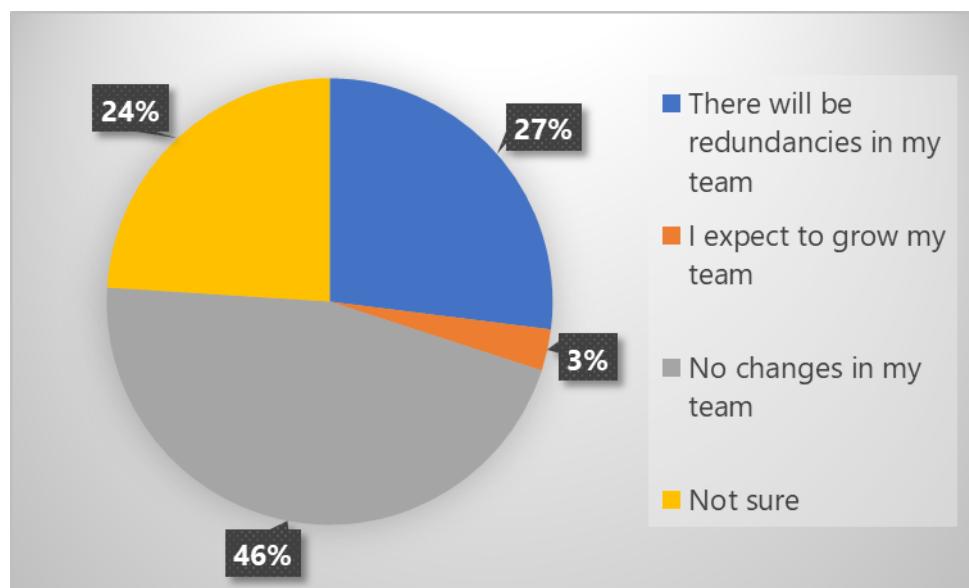
57% identified the benefits to be gained from new ways of working – specifically mentioning working remotely, using video and communications technology and having more work life balance.

Almost one-fifth of managers reported that they have learned new leadership skills through adapting to the new way of working – all of the positive responses in this came from managers who were working from home.

Other general comments here referred to having a greater appreciation of the contribution and efforts of members of their team, and also a much better understanding of their own role and priorities as a leader.

When looking at the future prospects for their team, more than two-thirds of managers felt there would be no change or were unsure about potential changes.

Q: What is most likely in the near future?



The responses were broadly similar from those managers working on site and at home. However, predictions of growth only came from leaders who were currently working from home while those managers working on site expressed more uncertainty about the future.

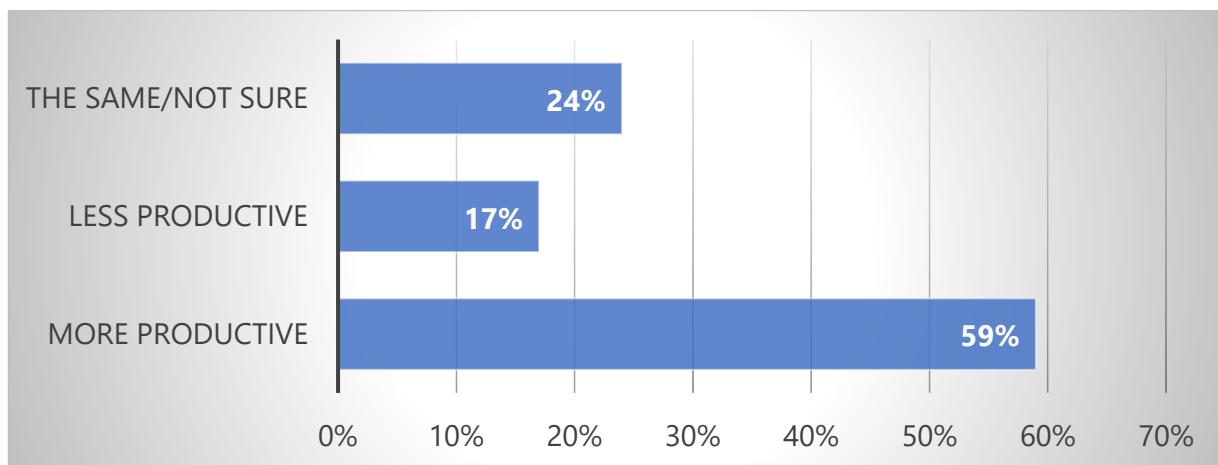
Working from home

Although most participants who were working from home had done so since the beginning of lockdown, a small number (7%) had more recently changed their working arrangements.

73% of those working from home had colleagues who had been furloughed by their employer and 35% reported that they had colleagues who had been laid off as a direct result of the pandemic and lockdown.

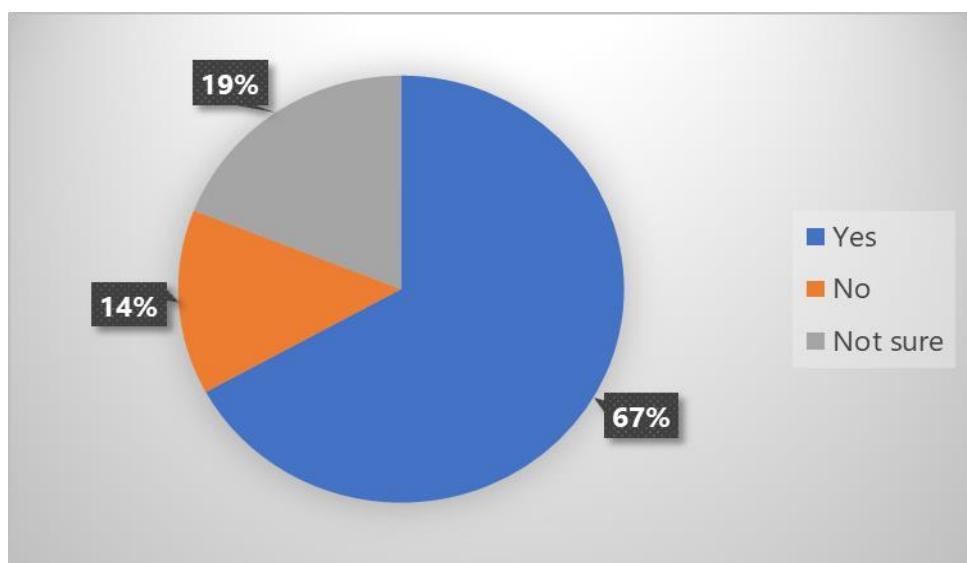
When thinking about their experience of working from home, the results are highly positive.

Q: Do you feel you have been more, or less, productive working from home?



This is amplified when looking at the responses to the next question:

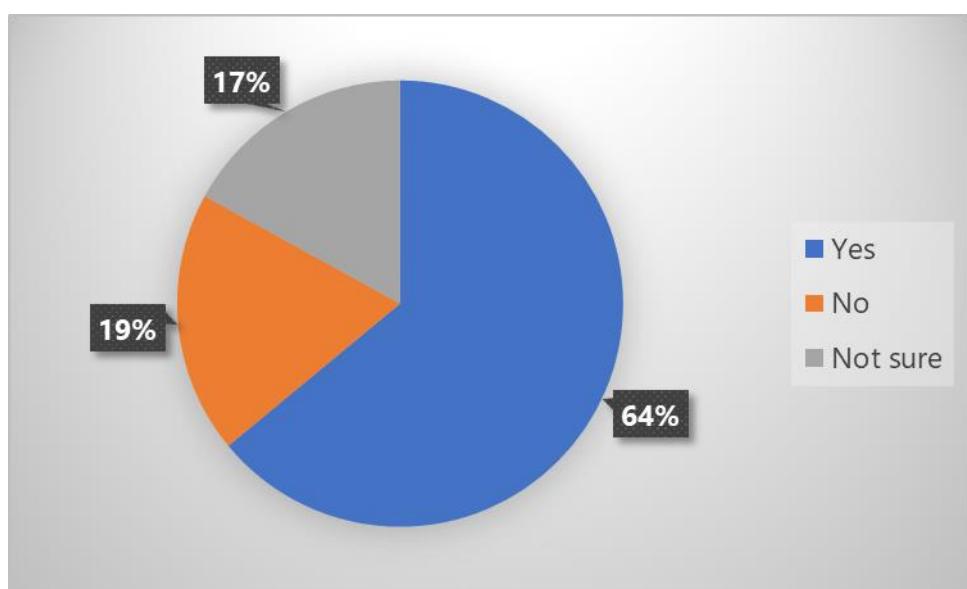
Q: Has this experience made you want to work from home more in future?



Curiously, perhaps, there were a small number of people who want to work from home more despite feeling no obvious lift in productivity. Looking into the narrative comments in the report it is clear that a small number of people take advantage of the freedom and lack of supervision that comes with working "out of sight" of the office. This has performance management implications for which links with other comments about the challenges managers have faced (see page 8).

There is also optimism about having the opportunity to spend more time working at home in the future.

Q: Is your company likely to support you working from home more in future?

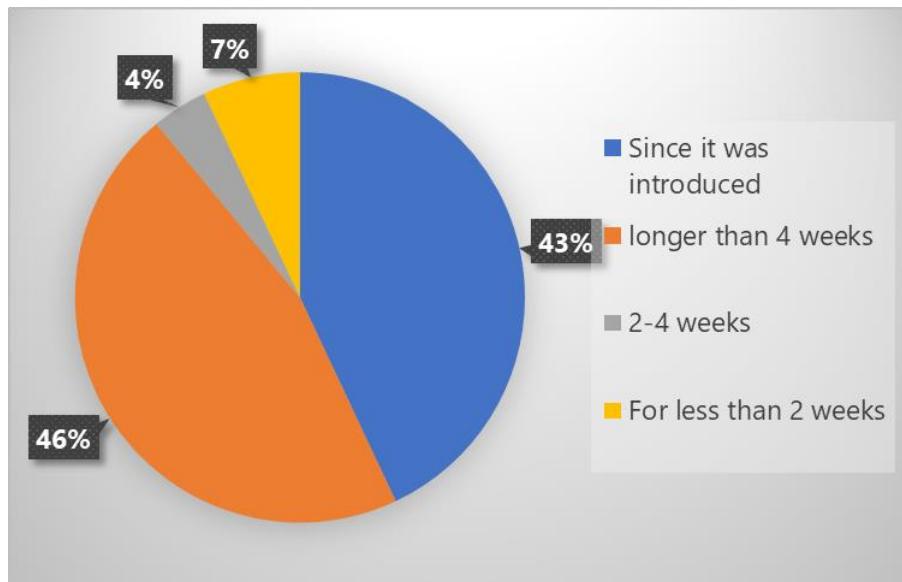


As seen above, individuals who were working from home were the least pessimistic about their future job security, felt more looked after by their company – and reported the largest increased loyalty to their employer of all of the respondents.

Currently furloughed

For most respondents in this category, the furlough scheme has been a long-term arrangement, with many being sent home from work as soon, or shortly after, the scheme came into operation.

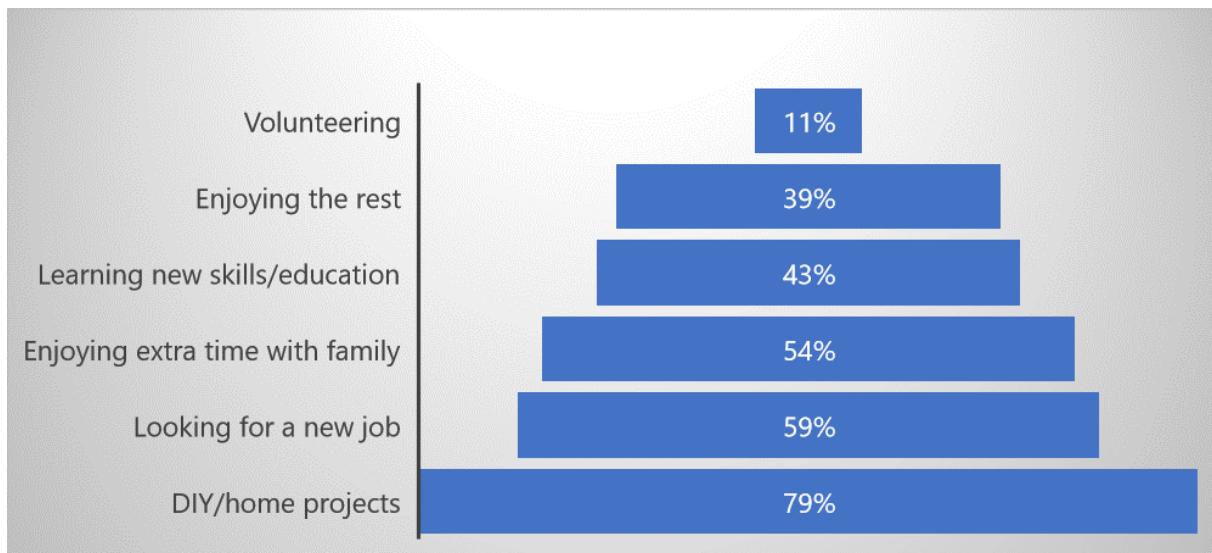
Q: How long have you been furloughed?



Even among those currently furloughed, 18% report having colleagues who have been made redundant during the lockdown period.

Most people surveyed feel they would rather be working than furloughed, and 43% believe the scheme is the best solution for their employer. 15% said they would rather be furloughed than have to work, while 4% of respondents believe the furlough scheme is unfair for those still working - this compares with 20% of people still working who felt that it was unfair that furloughed colleagues were getting paid for being not working.

We asked furloughed employees how they had been spending their time:



While most have turned to their tool kits, a large number of respondents have been learning new skills and even actively looking for a new job (58% of all furloughed employees).

15% of furloughed employees report that their employer has asked them to work during their period of furlough. And 77% of them have not received their full salary (over and above the 80%/£2500 government payment scheme).

Views are fairly equally split when looking at whether furloughed staff expect to return to work soon, but only 1% report that they feel they have certainty about their future in the organisation – with 73% answering that question with a “No”.

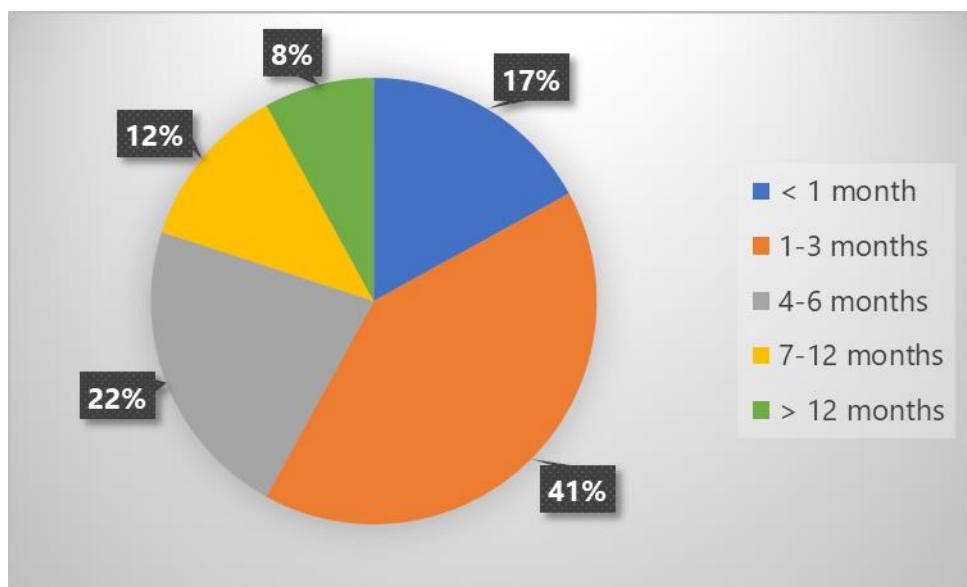


Combine this with the furloughed population indicating the lowest levels of "satisfaction" with their employer and also the lowest level of loyalty, this creates a strong need for companies to think hard about how to engage with furloughed staff before and after bringing them back into the workplace.

The unemployed

21% (250) of our respondents were unemployed.

We asked them how long they had been out of work:

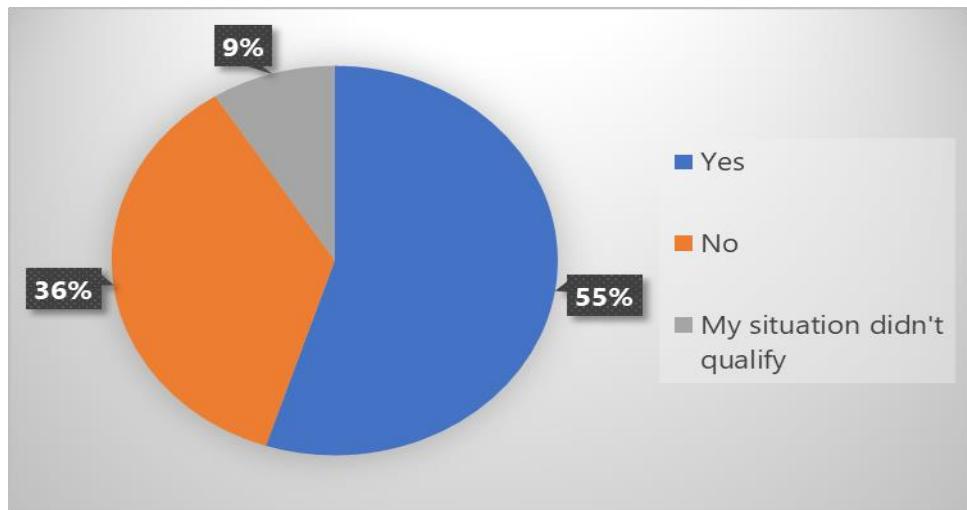


While there are a number of longer-term unemployed people in the response, there is a significant majority who lost their jobs in the 3 months immediately prior to completing this survey (i.e. since March 2020).

73% of those attribute their job loss to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

We also asked those made unemployed in the last 3 months:

Q: Did you ask your employer to rehire you in order to take advantage of the government job retention scheme?



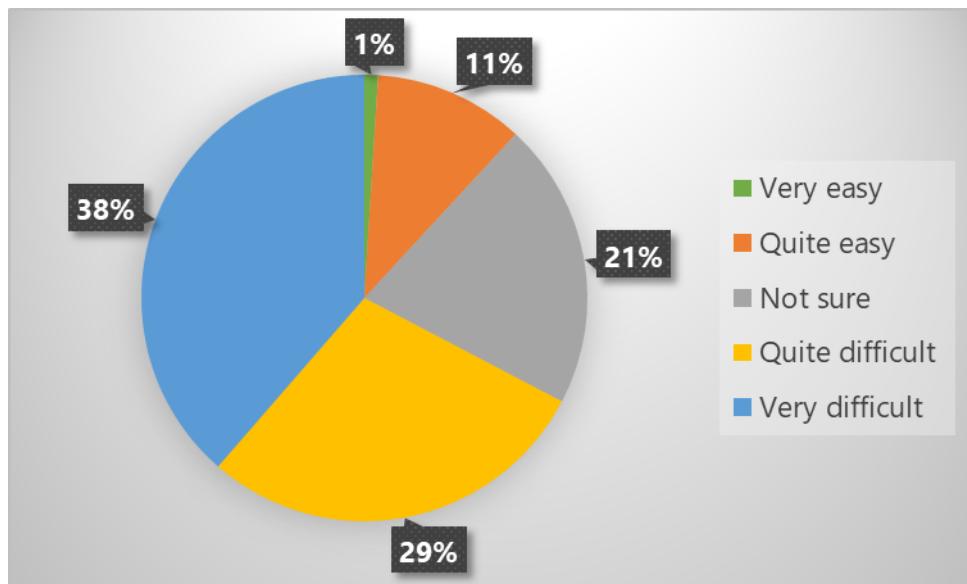
This indicates that more than half of employees were refused requests of support via a widely available option.

8% of all unemployed respondents had a new job offer at the time of completing the survey and were waiting to start their new role. All of them reported that it had been “quite difficult” or “very difficult” to secure a new job.

Interestingly, over 50% of those waiting to start their new job had changed their job role in order to secure employment, and almost one-third had changed industry sector. This suggests there is some mobility in skills and career options – but may reflect that people were taking advantage of the rise in available jobs in supermarkets, couriers, healthcare etc at this time. The survey did not specifically examine this.

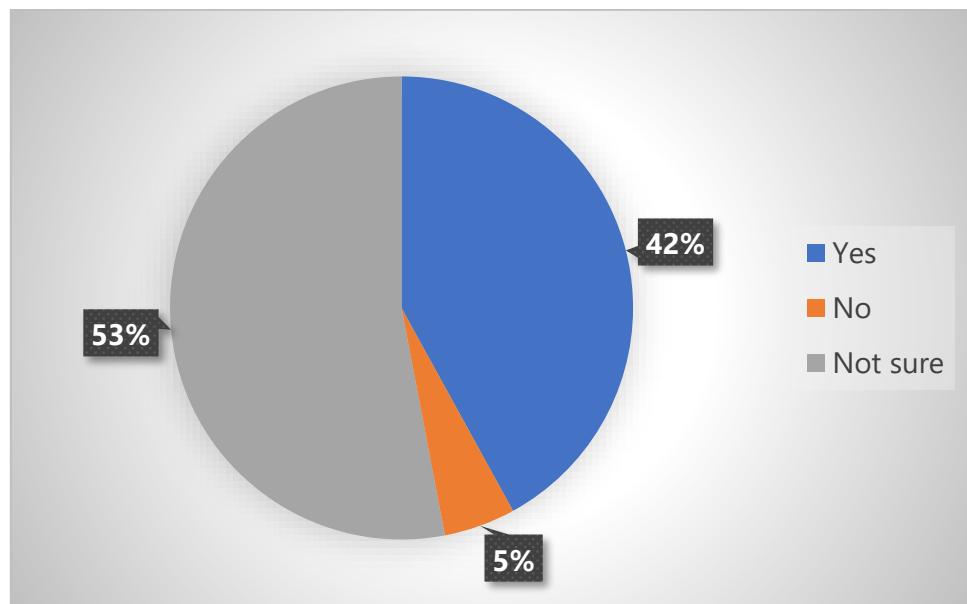
However, of those not working and with no current job offer, there is also an expectation of the need to be flexible.

Q: How easy do you feel it will be for you to find a new job in the next 6 months?

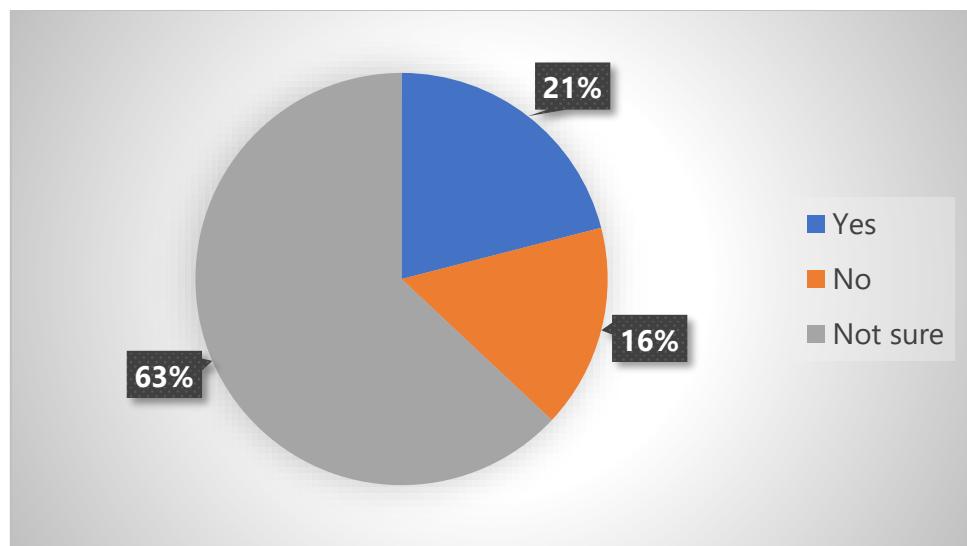


Optimism is low. Those reporting that it would be very difficult were predominantly in sales, construction and retail/hospitality sectors. There is a recognition that finding a job will be hard and that change may be required:

Q: Do you think it likely that you will need to change your job function in order to find employment?



Q: Do you think you will find a new job in the same industry/sector that you last worked in?

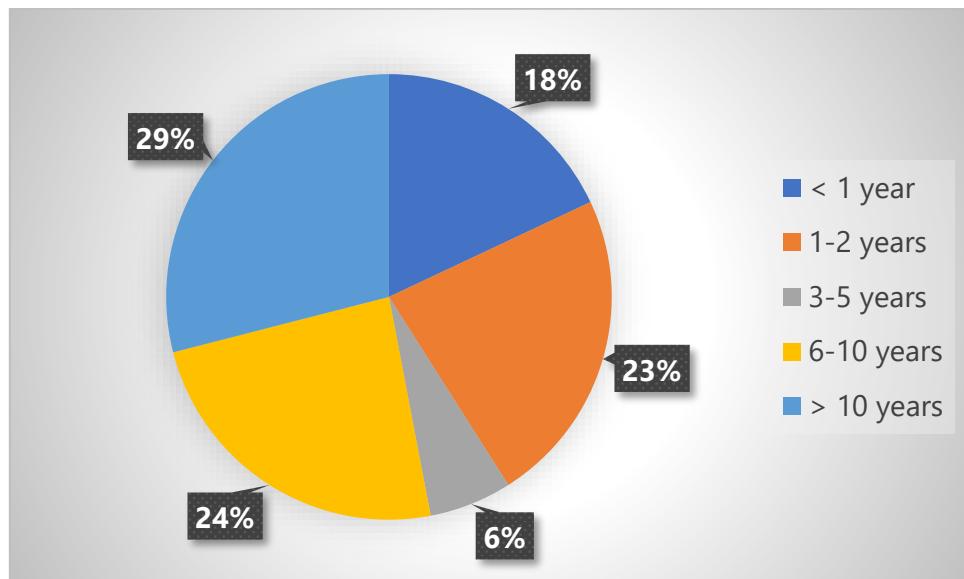


A recurring theme, perhaps, but those in manufacturing, sales, retail and hospitality were least likely to think that they would stay in the same job and industry. Overall, only 5% of unemployed respondents expect to stay in their most recent job function and 21% are confident of finding a role in the same industry or sector. People in these categories were largely in supply chain/logistics, strategy/planning and project management fields. Additionally, 48% of jobless respondents said they will consider self-employment, with a further 10% answering as being unsure about this.

The self-employed

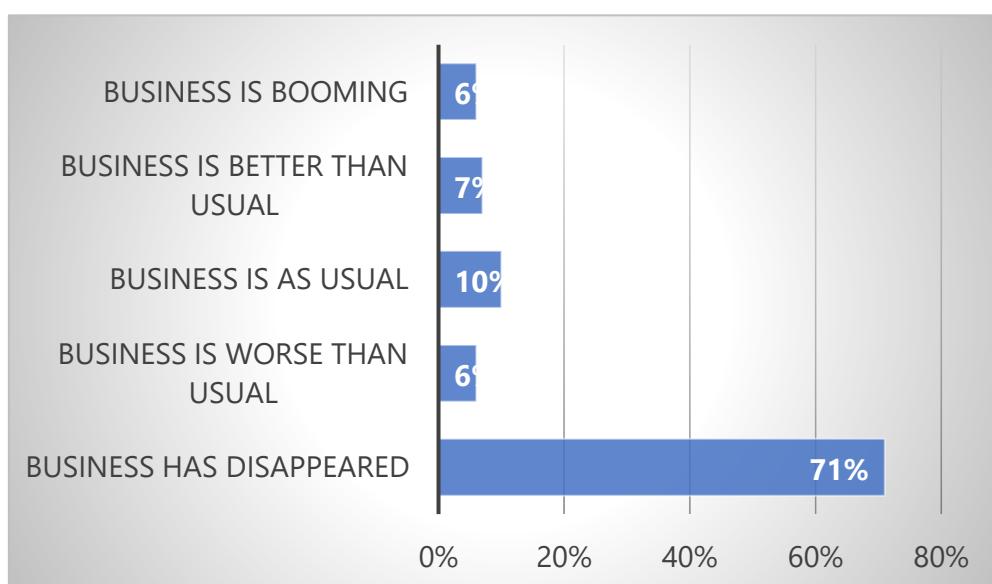
14% of respondents were self-employed at the time of completing the survey.

Our first question established for how long they had been self-employed:



Despite showing some well-established operators, 53% of respondents had been trading for more than 6 years, the pandemic and lockdown has had a negative effect on more than three-quarters of them:

Q: How has your level of business changed in the last 3 months?



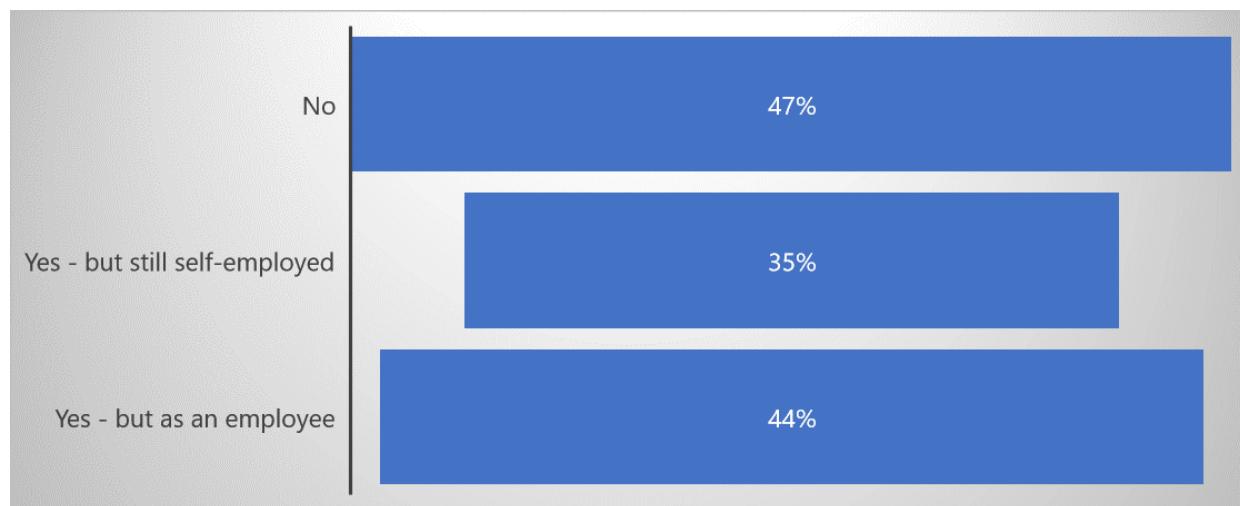
The impact on self-employed business owners has been hard and swift. Only 13% of self-employed business operators reported better than usual trading in the last quarter.

Every one of those respondents who described themselves as operating in consulting, creative, sales and marketing industries reported that "business has disappeared".

For those who reported lower levels of business than usual we asked if they had been able to secure any government financial support. 54% had done so and, of those, 41% were satisfied with the support they had received.

A little over one-half of self-employed respondents were planning to keep their options open for the future. 53% reported to that they were likely to look for alternative employment or work soon.

Q: Are you likely to look for alternative employment in the near future?

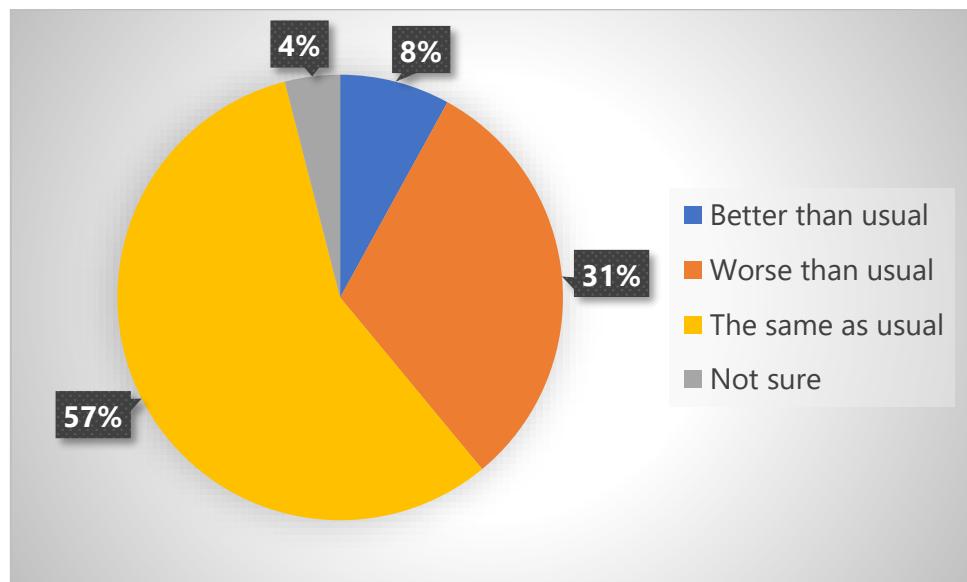


Other answers here indicated that many are keeping their options open, are interested in taking a part-time employed job, or waiting to see how events change over the coming months.

Mental health

We asked all respondents two questions about their mental health and asked for narrative comments too.

Q: How would you describe your mental health at the time of writing?

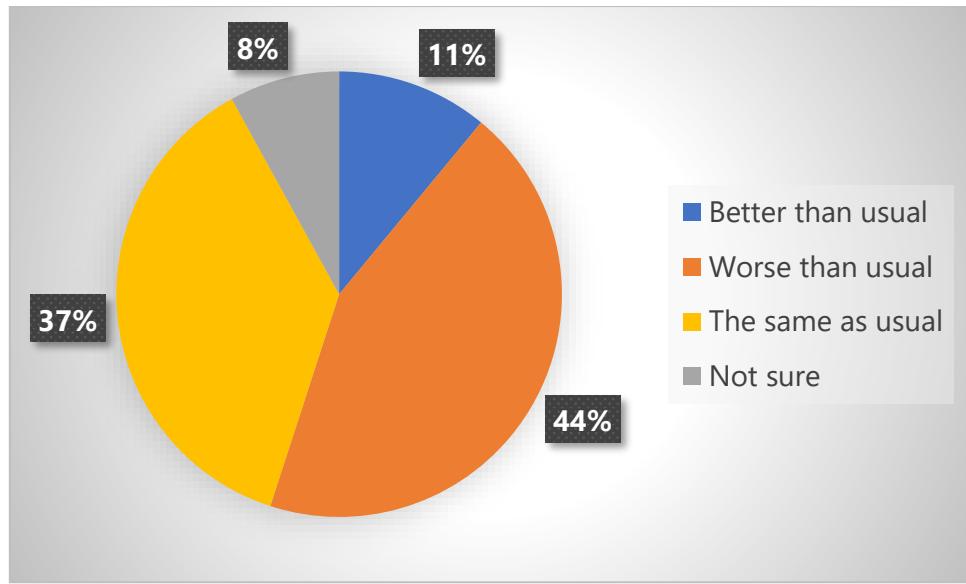


The reporting of mental health status was very similar across all groups of participants (employed, unemployed, self-employed). However, not one self-employed respondent said that they felt their mental health was better than usual.

The worst affected were in marketing and sales related roles, where almost 50% of respondents reported their mental health as being worse at this time.

Narrative comments in this question ranged from reports of "*severe stress, anxiety and very bad depression*" to "*having a few weeks off regular work was quite refreshing*." Many people comment on missing interaction with colleagues – in particular, the social aspect of work -and many more refer to the challenges of balancing working (whether at work or from home), home schooling, and having family at home all the time – "*one of the most stressful things I've had to do*", as one put it.

We also asked: **How would you describe your level of optimism/positivity right now?**



While slightly more people report better optimism (11%) than better mental health (8%), there is a bigger increase in those reporting that their positivity is worse than usual (44% against 31%).

There is less optimism among the self-employed than any other category, with 57% of self-employed people reporting that their optimism/positivity is worse than usual.

Overall, those working in sales, marketing and consulting functions are the most pessimistic about the short-term future.

Narrative comments here ranged from "*Gravely worried about future prospects*" and "*there is no light at the end of the tunnel*" to "*Always looking to remain positive and look at the many things in my life to be grateful for*" and "*I'm feeling good about life...Working from home has given time to sort lots as well as work full time.*"

General comments

The narrative comments options for questions produced many interesting views and experiences.

The survey results indicate that there is work to be done by employers to re-engage people who have been furloughed. Many comments add context to that theme. People speak of lack of empathy and understanding from employers and senior leaders, as well as poor communication.

“..business have had to adapt at the drop of a hat. But they need to remember to check in with employees on a human level and not just about business.”

"I was furloughed and refused to give up my company car...so I was put on notice of risk of redundancy to save that monthly cost."

Although it was not all bad news:

"My company have been amazing right from the start of the COVID-19 outbreak. They have kept me, and my work colleagues, informed and I really feel like we have been looked after."

"I have been well supported by the firm. I know there is a future with them and have no reason to look elsewhere."

Lots of people raised questions here about the future of work:

"The world of face to face sales and business development has changed for ever. Is there a place for this now?"

"How to travel to work while avoiding tube/peak travel time is going to be a real issue."

"I'm hoping uncertainty will bring in work as companies may not want to increase overheads with permanent staff."

But there was also optimism and looking forward from many:

"We have to be positive and work to rebuild our businesses."

"I believe we will come out of this pandemic hungrier than ever to succeed and regain lost business."

And a final comment from one participant that summed up a sense of opportunity and change that this situation has created.

"Lockdown has gifted me the time and opportunity to assess what is important and of interest as I look to my last decade of work. There is nothing off limits at the moment."

Conclusions

At the time of writing this report (mid-July 2020) the UK is beginning to return to work in many sectors. It is too early to be sure how things will change in the longer term; when, or if offices will be fully staffed; what the financial implications of the lockdown, and its impact, will have on employers, the self-employed and the unemployed.

However, history shows that in any time of challenge and change there are winners and losers in business. While large cash reserves help, those that readily adapt, those that are innovative and brave, those that invest, those communicate and those that look after their people and their customers are more likely to survive and prosper.

Some key takeaways from this survey are as follows:

For many companies that have furloughed staff in recent months, there is considerable work needed to re-engage and win back the trust of those individuals. Only 1% of furloughed workers express that they are confident that their continued employment is secure. And 59% of furloughed workers have spent at least some of that time looking for new jobs.

Those working from home during lock down have higher levels of satisfaction with their employer than those continuing at work, or furloughed. They also feel that they have been more productive and want to work from home more. How can employers build on this and what are the challenges for them?

57% of leaders feel that finding new ways of working is the best thing to have come from the lockdown. Again, capturing that learning and experience and developing the good ideas creates a real opportunity for employers.

59% of people working from home believe they are more productive than when at their usual place of work. 67% report that they want to work from home more in the future. This creates both opportunity and challenge for employers. Managing performance was cited as one of the key challenges for managers – and the survey results suggest that a number of staff working from home say they want to do more, even though they may be less productive. Training (for managers and workers) as well as effective goal setting, performance management and review processes are all going to have increased importance.

Overall, those working in technology, software and supply chain have the most optimistic view of the future in terms of their careers and opportunities for themselves and their employers/companies.

The self-employed have been hit hard with almost three-quarters reporting that their business had disappeared overnight. Things will change for many, but there will inevitably be ramifications for individual and micro business owners. Some however, see opportunities for freelance and contract work as companies choose to subcontract rather than employ.

67% of those who are out of work believe it will be difficult, or very difficult, to find a job in the next 6 months. Perhaps as a result, job seekers are open-minded and keen to consider opportunities in new industries and job sectors. And, almost half of our self-employed group are interested in finding permanent or part time employed work. With the likelihood of increased redundancies ahead, this means the pool of candidates for those companies that are hiring will be large and broad.

Mental health, and particularly optimism, has been hit hard by the lockdown – especially among the self-employed. Among the employed, those working in sales, marketing and consulting jobs are the most badly affected. People miss the social interaction of going to work and this has had a negative effect on mental health.

Employers should be aware of their responsibilities concerning the mental health of employees and take steps to support those that require it as soon as practicable.

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If you, or your business, are affected by any of the issues raised in this report, ask if we can help.

Established in 1990, **bfpeople** finds leaders and develops talent - working with ambitious companies and individuals to support them at all stages of the employment lifecycle.

bfpeople - finding leaders, developing talent

Finding	Assessing	Developing	Coaching
Executive and non-executive search	Leadership assessments Assessing potential	Leadership development Team building	Leadership coaching First 90 days coaching
Fixed-fee recruitment	Assessment & Development centre design and delivery Psychometric testing	Interview training Assessor training	Coaching for performance, confidence & effectiveness
Volume recruitment campaigns	Assessment for recruitment/promotion	Sales training	Career coaching and career transition
Graduate recruitment			

The right people doing the right things in the right jobs

If you would like more information about this survey and report, or any of the services we offer contact:

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