



The Consumer Brands Future of Work Sentiment Report

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introduction

The pandemic has no doubt disrupted the way we work—and both employers and employees alike have had to adapt quickly in order to sustain any momentum for their business. Remote work during the pandemic was supported by rapid deployment of new digital solutions, such as videoconferencing, document-sharing tools, and expansion of cloud-based computing capacity. Despite the existence of global or regionally dispersed teams for many years, the shift to having the entire workforce operating in this fashion impacted people in a variety of ways, with much of this research still emerging.

As we move to a post-pandemic reality, it is clear that the future of the way we work will never be the same. Many people report that the increased flexibility afforded from remote work is something they do not want to give up, at least not entirely. Time saved from commuting, proximity to family, and the flexibility to address the needs of both work and home seamlessly stand out for sure. Still, difficulties assimilating new hires into the culture, endless Zoom meetings (leading to fatigue), and rising mental health challenges are among the many challenges to arise as a result.



Clearly, proximity to others matters. Social cohesion, where employees build trust with one another over the mid to longer-term, suffers dramatically without it. Collaboration and creativity suffer as well, given the loss of those serendipitous collisions that lead to some of the best ideas. And even with the technology we have today, the quality of communication drops dramatically. Addressing this need for proximity while adapting to the need for increased flexibility has businesses reimagining where and how work is done.

So, what will the future “workplace” look like? It’s a hybrid environment for sure—and getting that right requires leaders to learn quickly and adapt accordingly. What can we learn from (successful) dispersed teams prior to the pandemic? How will we mitigate against the inherent bias that leaders will have for those operating in the same location as themselves? How can we ensure that those working remotely, at least part of the time, are at the table and being heard when decisions are made? Time will tell. We shared our initial thoughts on the subject here:

<https://beperpetual.com/insights/blog/talent-development-blog/the-dysfunction-within>

Here is what many of you had to say on the subject:

executive summary

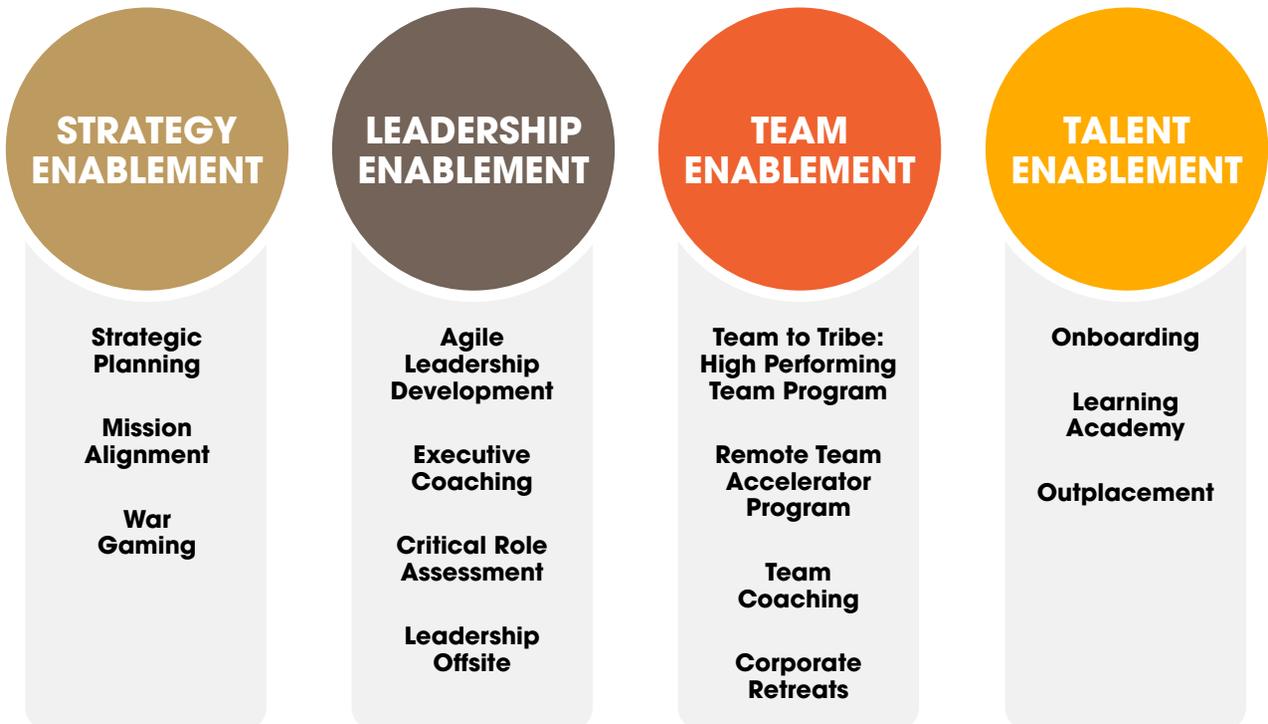
Now is the time, as you reimagine the post pandemic organization, to pay careful attention to the effect of your choices on organizational norms and culture. Focus on the ties that bind your people together. Pay heed to core aspects of your own leadership and that of your broader group of leaders and managers. Your opportunity is to fashion the hybrid virtual model that best fits your company, and let it give birth to a new shared culture for all your employees that provides stability, social cohesion, identity, and belonging, whether your employees are working remotely, on premises, or in some combination of both.

As people return to work, it will also be vital for leaders to re-engage their teams in person through meaningful experiences. The classical “off-site” — or even “on-site” — executed in unique and impactful

ways, will make a massive difference in regaining lost trust, will repair cracks in social cohesion, and will accelerate assimilation of new hires that much faster.

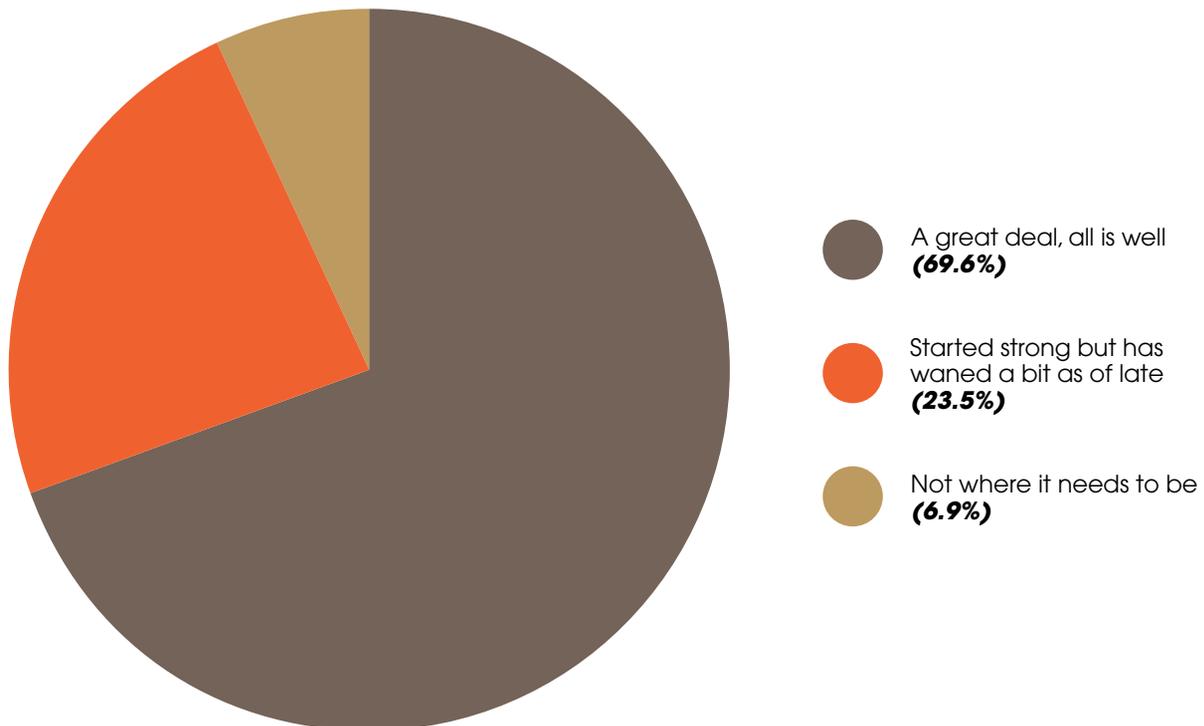
Further, these off-sites allow for an opportunity for leaders to ensure any pivots in strategy brought about by the pandemic are clearly understood and aligned throughout the team and/or organization. For teams that have gone through a number of changes, a 2-3 day high performing teams program will effectively allow the team to recapture its identity, align on the future, and accelerate business results. Think of it as “slowing down in order to speed up.” Your people need it. Your business requires it. And, at Perpetual, we are here to help.

Perpetual: has a full suite of programs designed to help you navigate a post-pandemic world:



To what extent have your people been able to sustain productivity working remotely?

Response: 69.6% - a great deal all is well



Perpetual Takeaway: This percentage is higher than we would have thought, though it is consistent with early research during the first 3-5 months of the pandemic. Productivity gains here were largely around routine or “non-creative” work, however, which proved to suffer as time went on. Still, the efficiencies cannot be ignored. Many teams implemented inclusive rituals—formal and informal—to ensure the team stayed connected and focused throughout their remote experience, which proved to add real value at a critical time.

But while productivity may have risen, many employees report feeling anxious or overwhelmed, leading to challenges with mental health. Hence, these gains will prove unsustainable and must be addressed in the post-pandemic work environment. Enter the need for a hybrid approach. And while many organizations have already committed to some form of a hybrid work environment, very few have been explicit on the details of yet. Our sense is that this new way of operating will be an iterative experience and one that must involve consistent input from employees to get it right.

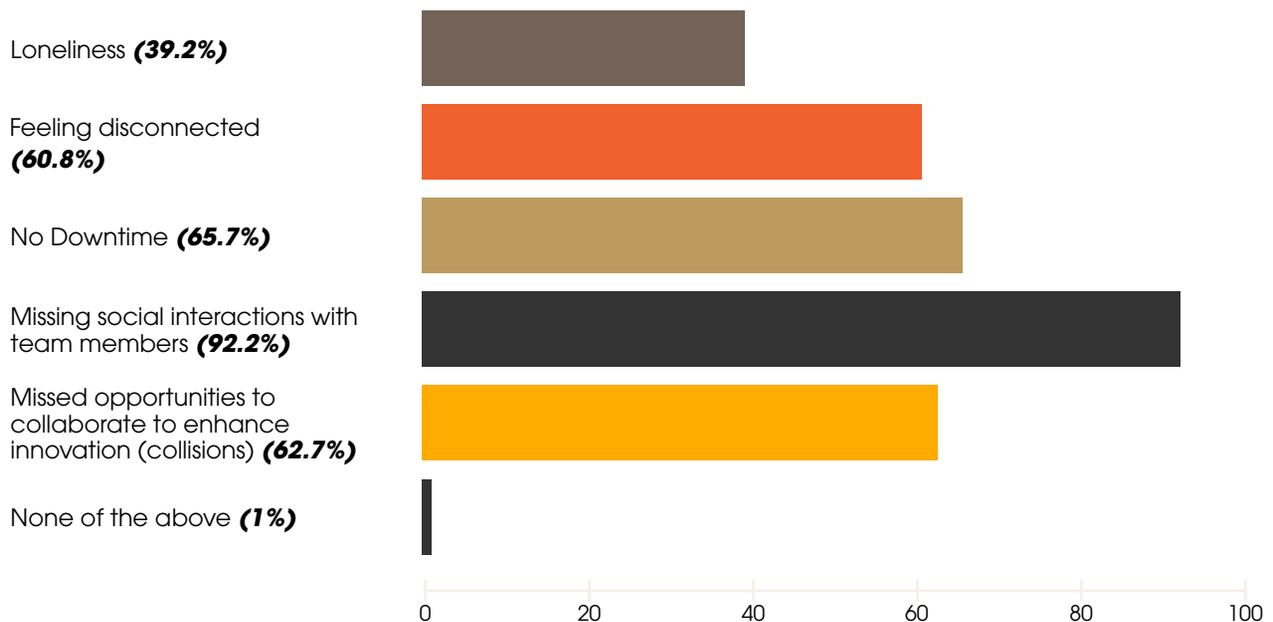
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I'm so tired.
I do have
Zoom fatigue!
I do not book
any back-to-back
meetings anymore

Eric Yuan, Zoom CEO

What issues are affecting your employees (personally) at present, as they work remotely?

Response: 92.2% - missing social interaction with team members

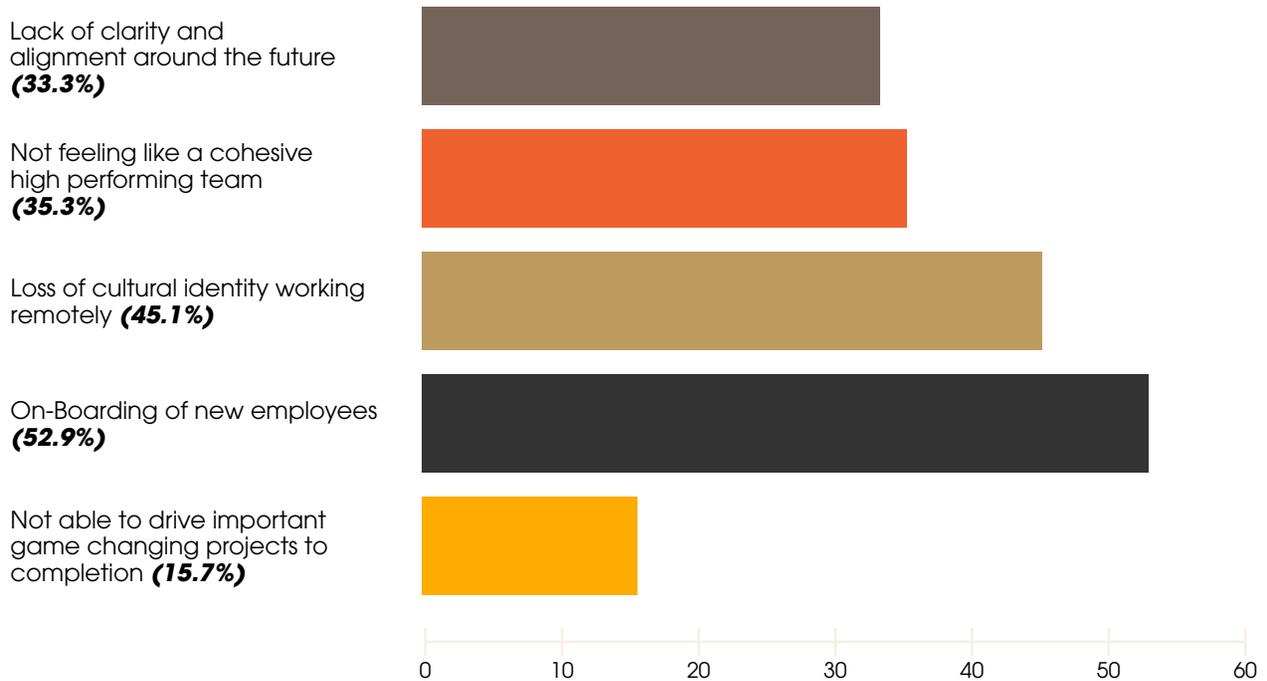


Perpetual Takeaway: Humans are inherently social animals, and the lack of social interaction is a real downside to remote work. It forces many to deny an essential human need to engage socially, create shared experiences and generate a common culture that drives people. The downside to not having a central geographic location that encourages these activities via proximity is that you run the risk of weakening organizational norms that underpin culture and performance. These organizational norms help create a common culture, generate social cohesion, and build shared trust. The irony is that the short term gains that helps remote working and virtual collaboration are in many ways made possible by the trust, cohesion, and shared culture that was built by groups pre-pandemic.

Separating into in-person and remote workers also risks letting two organizational cultures emerge. Where in-person workers and managers benefit from the positive elements of co-location and in-person collaboration, culture and social cohesion for the virtual workforce is negatively impacted. This could lead to remote workers feeling isolated, disenfranchised, and unhappy, unintentionally left behind by organizations that failed to build a coherent model for virtual and in-person work to effectively co-exist. The sense of belonging, common purpose, and shared identity that inspires all of us to do our best work gets lost. Organizational performance could be at risk in this bifurcated environment.

What is the key TALENT challenge affecting your organizational performance currently?

Response: 52.9% on-boarding new employees



Perpetual Takeaway: Just as repeated immersion into a functional office environment allows a culture to emerge, cultivate and thrive, the opposite (lack of proximity) will attenuate the positive contributions of culture. Hiring new people into an organization is a promise—one that so often is broken due to poor on-boarding practices even during pre-pandemic times. Companies did not stop hiring during the pandemic, at least not for long, so new hires now have gone an entire year, in some cases, without meeting their team in person. This will not lead to sustainable high performance, nor contribute to engaged and happy employees for long.

Best practices include: investing in technology to create immersive experiences, including gamification, to bring your culture to life; sending people to outdoor “happy places” where the description of the view represents a company value and a guided tour is offered by a leader via the phone; meeting in small numbers (masks on and socially distant) in outdoor parks to get acclimated to your co-workers; and the like. Despite at least a partial return to the office, many of these ideas will stick—and should, because they are unique and creative. Our hybrid model suggests that leaders expect their teams to be in the office on the same day at least 1-2 times weekly. This balance should allow for more effective on-boarding to re-emerge, provided leaders (and organizations on the whole) take it seriously.

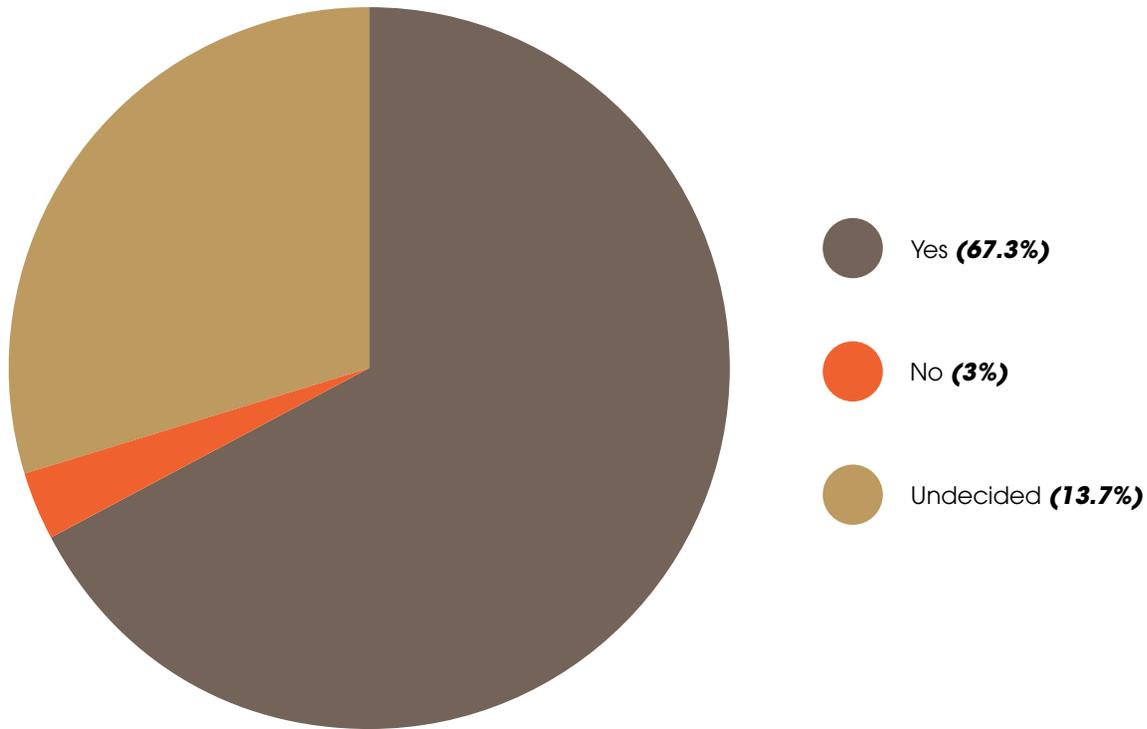


I think that the world is probably permanently shifted, It will certainly be likely, going forward, to be less than five days a week in the office. Even post-pandemic, where we land on that will vary by office, geography and team

Hugh Johnston, CFO Pepsi

Are you planning to return employees back to the office this year?

Response: 67.3% - Yes



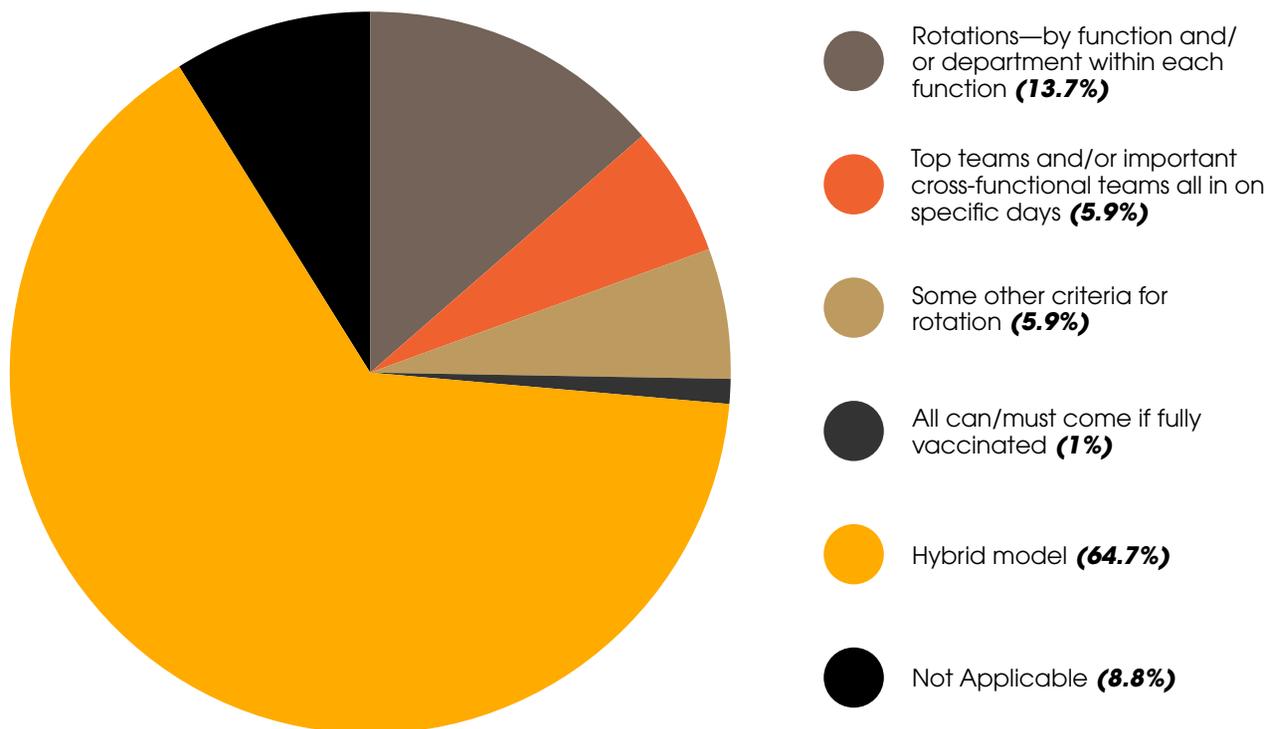
Perpetual Takeaway: Great news, some sense of normalcy. Of course, the above response comes with the caveat that it can be done safely. Many of our global clients have simultaneously re-opened 100% in some countries and shut down extensively in others, following the local infection trends and advice of authorities. Understandable.

Satellite offices or hubs offer an alternative to the giant corporate office, most of which are representing opportunities for colocation spaces (like Regus and WeWork) as they capitalize on the opportunity. These informal, down-to-earth settings represent a fun and interesting way to collaborate with colleagues, and once those leases expire on the larger central offices, will represent a real savings in real estate costs. At Perpetual, we already see many clients headed in this direction and expect more will follow.

Alas, the office is not dead. People need a place to connect for both personal and professional reasons, and businesses benefit as a result. If anything, we expected that more companies would be returning by the end of this year. Still, there appears to be some tension brewing between employees who have become acclimated to remote work, and organizations who feel that hybrid models, at a minimum, are vital aspects of how they operate.

If you are bringing people back to the office, please select any of the strategies below you are considering now.

Response: 64.7% hybrid model, 13.7% rotations, by function or department



Perpetual Takeaway: Organizations are developing hybrid working strategies for the long term to expand access to talent, increase employee satisfaction, and reduce real estate costs. Executing the hybrid proposition must be an intentional effort that will be iterative in nature, and likely no organization will get it right from the start. Hence, it is important to be clear about intent of the hybrid design and invite feedback so adjustments can be made throughout.

For example, one principle may be to “balance the need for collaboration and foster cohesiveness while respecting personal preferences of our people.” In this case, having people who fill critical roles or members of important cross-functional teams in the office on the same 2-3 days may be vital. Certainly, moving meetings where big decisions are made and absolute commitment to execute against them is critical and should involve on-site debate as much as possible.

Leaders will also need to be mindful of the bias for colocated direct reports—something that can manifest at unconscious levels. Choice assignments for key projects, promotions, 1:1 time with the leader and their peers, and inputs for big decisions often get left for those that have the capacity to make it to the office. Training will be needed for these leaders to help them navigate some of these challenges.

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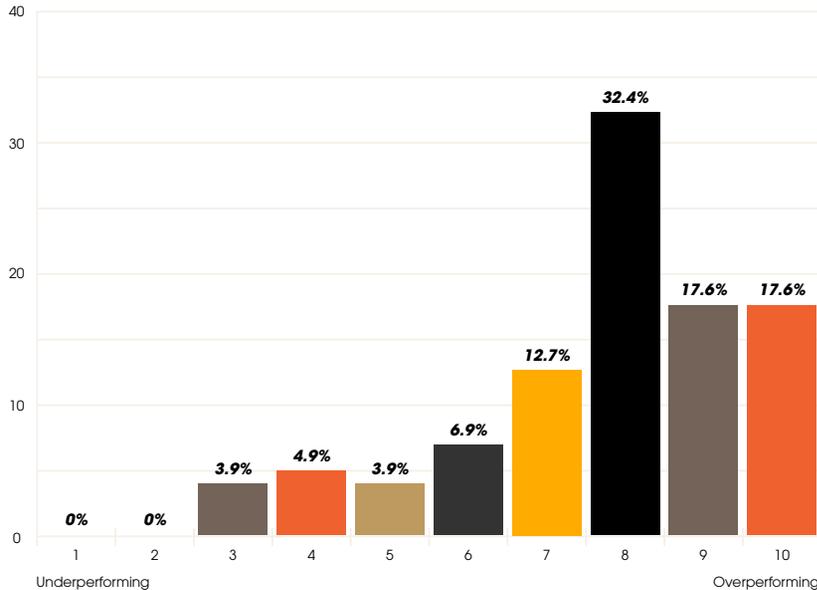
People are more productive working at home than people would have expected.

Some people thought that everything was just going to fall apart, and it hasn't. And a lot of people are actually saying that they're more productive now

Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Facebook

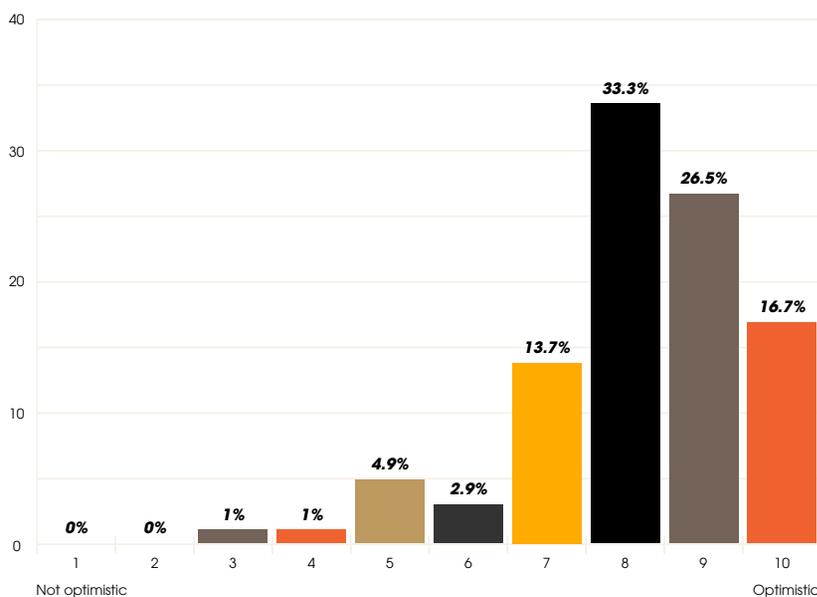
On a scale of 1-10 how is your business performing to plan in 2021?

Response: 68% scored 8-10



On a scale of 1-10 how optimistic are you for the remainder of 2021?

Response: 75% scored 8-10



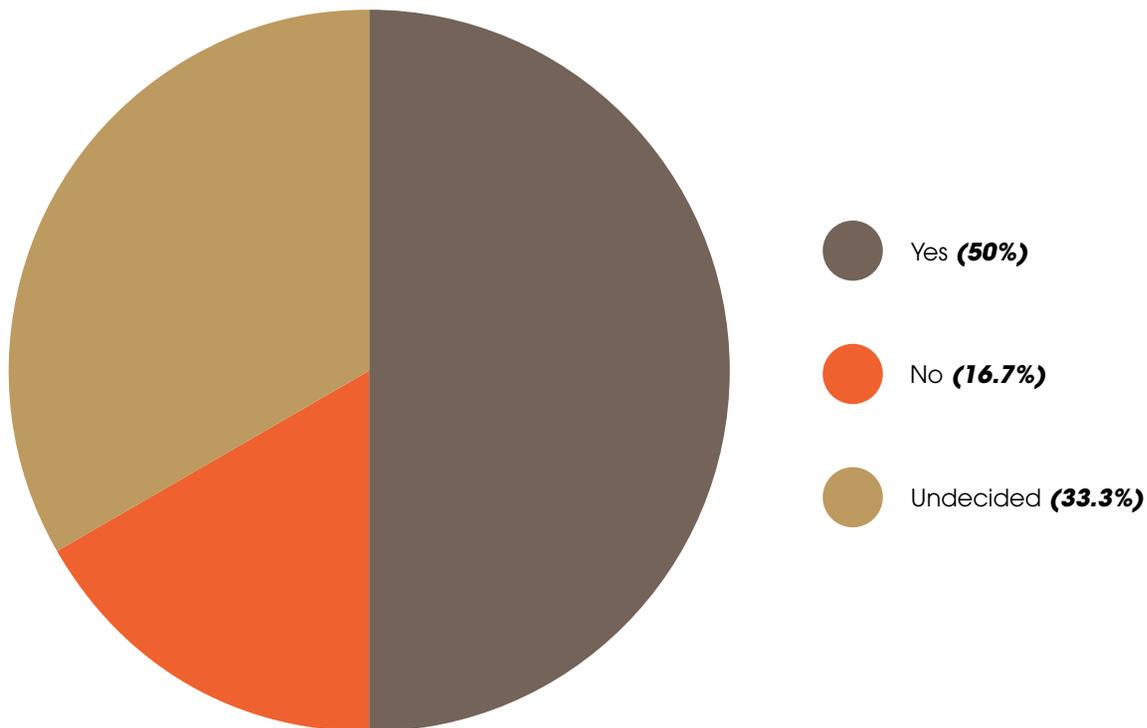
Perpetual Takeaway:

Business is roaring back to life as restrictions ease and full activity returns. The pent-up demand is driving opportunity and causing business to post results that are meeting, or exceeding, expectations set for 2021. We have seen a marked uptick in hiring over the first part of 2021 and the eagerness for business to “return to normal” and hire for the future is palpable.

The renewed optimism as leaders look forward is both welcome and understandable given the depths of the psychological distress many of us went through over the last year. We are witnessing a natural upswing in reaction to this on the heels of the year we have just experienced. The trick here will be to maintain this level of activity and harness this exuberance through strategic planning, considered investment, and exceptional leadership as firms navigate the next 6-12 months. The role of leadership teams over the next year will be crucial in creating company-wide strategic alignment and pointing the boat in the right direction to achieve continued and sustained success.

Do you plan on bringing teams together in person for an off-site or on-site planning session/corporate retreat/leadership meeting in Q3 or Q4?

Response: 50% yes, 33% undecided



Perpetual Takeaway: We believe bringing your team together will be important and will be a seminal moment that will signify the end of the pandemic for your business, even if the fight against the virus may continue in other parts of the world. The closing of one chapter and the start of a new one. There is a unique opportunity for leaders to bring their teams together in order to reconnect, share stories, and realign for the future while reigniting the cultural identity that has taken a beating during the pandemic. Whatever model will be adopted in the future of work, human-human interactions will always remain a powerful enabler and will likely remain at the heart of team ways-of-working. These may be in the form of the traditional offsite meetings, or "on-site" with teams coming into the office for well facilitated sessions that will enable the desired strategic alignment before resuming the hybrid working model as the teams move to execution.

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