

Restoring Stability – Employee Experience and Wellbeing through COVID-19

Virtual Focus Group Findings

May 2020



Virtual Focus Groups

Introduction

On 12 May 2020, Willis Towers Watson invited clients to participate in a Virtual Focus Group discussing the impact of COVID-19 on the Employee Experience and wellbeing.

As the UK government set out initial plans to return people to work and school, we asked clients to share their plans for restoring stability within their organisations. Digging into findings from our survey data, the discussion covered employee wellbeing, building manager resilience, leading the Employee Experience and renewed priorities for the future.

Executive summary

Every organisation's roadmap out of the crisis will look different depending on their sector and the make-up of the workforce. However, it's clear that for most of us the experience and expectations of 'work', and the consequences for wellbeing, will face significant disruption in the months ahead. From the focus group, three key priorities stood out:

- 1. Managing costs is a priority and benefits are in focus.** Employers need to deliver benefits that will support employees through this crisis, whilst simultaneously maintaining or even reducing their existing benefit spend. To do so, employers must understand what their employees value.
- 2. Managers are the key enablers of your Employee Experience and they need to feel confident, capable and empowered.** Employers need to equip managers with the information, tools and training to support people through the crisis, and to be resilient and flexible and drive those behaviours through the organisation.
- 3. The rules around the experience of work are being re-written.** Employers have a unique opportunity to refine and communicate the organisation's vision and values to drive high performance. Flexibility and trust are key components of the 'new normal' and embedding an agile mindset will build resilience.

While organisations have some difficult decisions to make in the weeks and months ahead, now is not the time to lose momentum on the Employee Experience and wellbeing. Maintaining trust and communication, embedding an agile mindset and effectively supporting employee wellbeing will be the key to accelerating out of the crisis. This report contains a summary of findings, along with our recommendations on how you can support new, emerging priorities.

Managing costs is a priority and benefits are in focus.

Employers need to deliver benefits that will support employees through this crisis, whilst simultaneously maintaining or even reducing their existing benefit spend. To do so, employers must understand what their employees value.

Managers are key enablers of your Employee Experience.

Employers need to equip managers with the information, tools and training to support people through the crisis, and to be resilient and flexible and drive those behaviours through the organisation.

The rules around the experience of work are being re-written.

Employers have a unique opportunity to refine and communicate the organisation's vision and values to drive high performance. Flexibility and trust are key components of the 'new normal' and embedding an agile mindset will build resilience.

How we can help

Willis Towers Watson's [Total Reward Optimisation](#) is a quick, cost-efficient way to model more efficient ways of using your overall reward spend, and gathering insights from employees about what they truly value.

We've developed a single dedicated communications hub to house your crisis content and build out support in the areas of wellbeing, which our research is telling us really matter to organisations and their employees.

We also specialise in **driving appreciation and value in employee benefits** programmes. To talk through your wellbeing and benefits strategy or see a demo of the COVID Hub, contact us.

Our [Leadership Impact](#) report delivers development guidance to your leaders during this period of uncertainty. This can be supplemented by tailored 1-2-1 support.

Our **manager capability building** solutions support managers to understand the key skills related to people management, communicate in a crisis, manage difficult conversations and encourage resilience during adversity.

Our [employee listening technologies](#) provide the ideal platforms to give your employees a Voice and involve them in your transformation journey.

Our [HPEX scorecards](#) help you identify the pain points in your Employee Experience and focus action on areas that will drive high performance.

Our [Future of Work consulting services, data and software](#) help your organisation meet the challenges of a new work ecosystem.

Audience Demographics

75+

Participants throughout the session

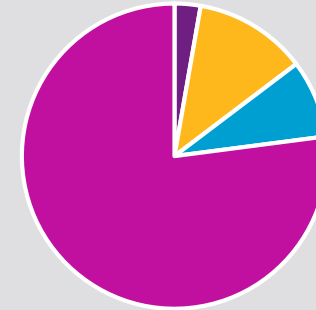
25

Questions covering physical, financial, social and emotional wellbeing and the Employee Experience

22

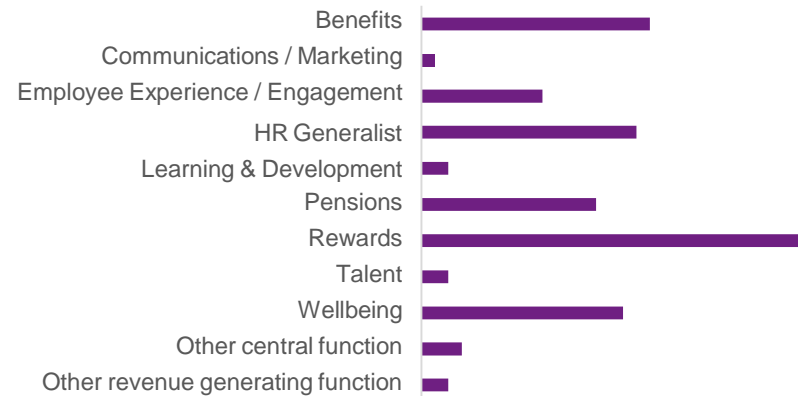
Questions asked by participants, with the top 3 most popular questions raised to the group

Participants represented large UK employers...

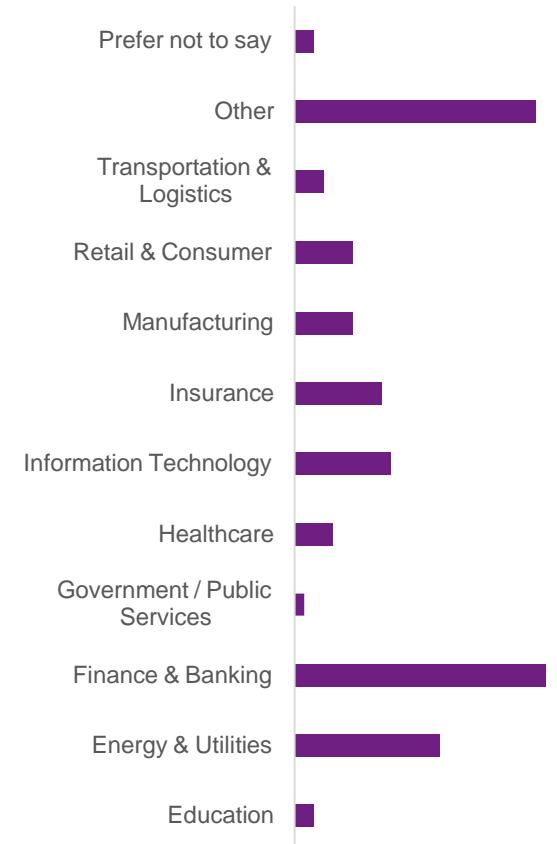


■ 20 - 100 ■ 100 - 500 ■ 500 - 1000 ■ 1000+

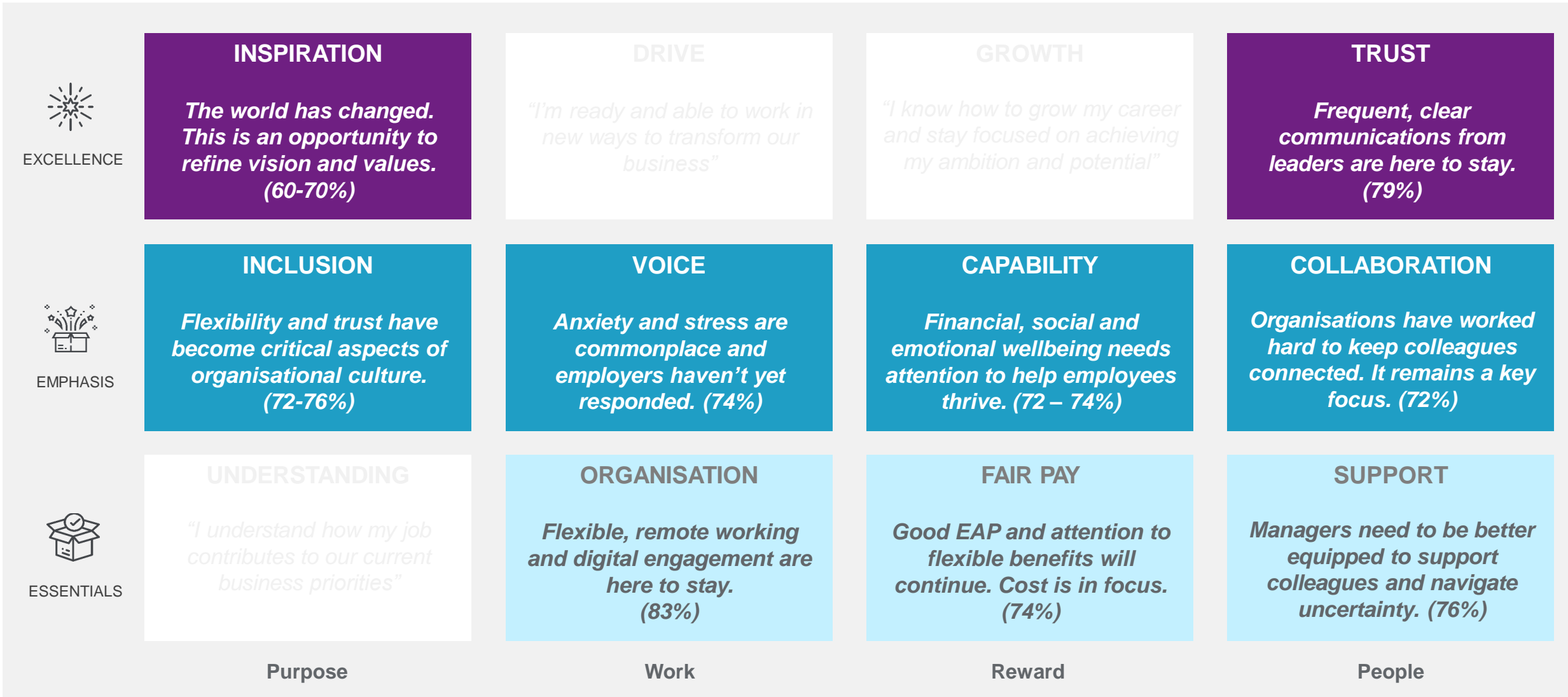
...and came from a diverse range of roles:



Insights were gathered from a broad range of industries:



Key Findings: Emerging priorities for the Employee Experience

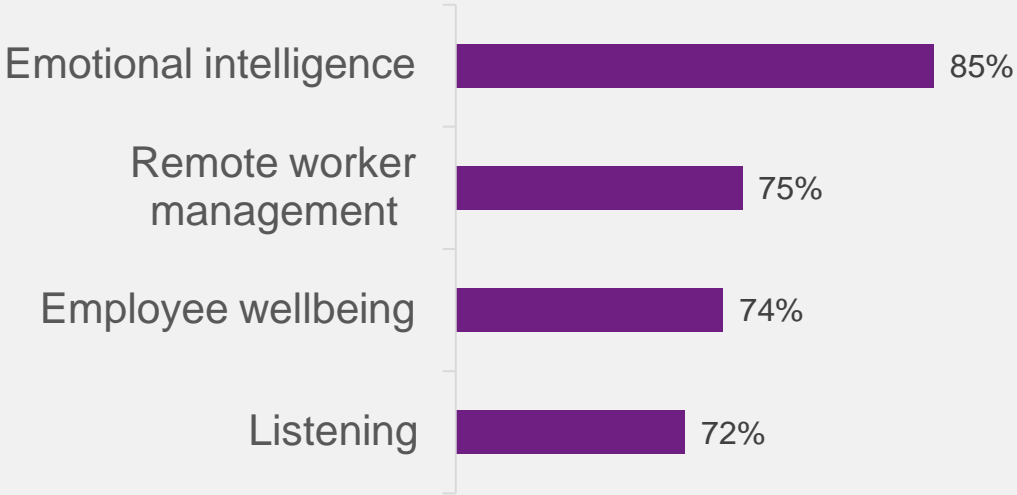


Key Findings: Manager capability

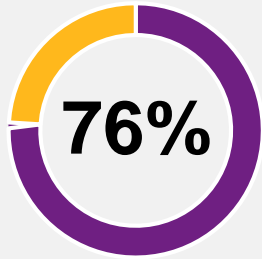
Managers are critical to employee engagement, wellbeing and development. However, few are equipped with the management skills needed to be effective in the current environment.



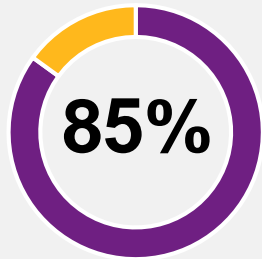
The most critical skills which managers need to be equipped with include:



Key Findings: Physical wellbeing



Agree employees are worried about returning to work.



Had roles that couldn't be done remotely.

Something has to give. Employers are clear that they won't rush employees to return to work, but measures to alleviate anxiety and work safely are critical to restoring normality. Other issues such as sedentary lifestyles are also an emerging concern.

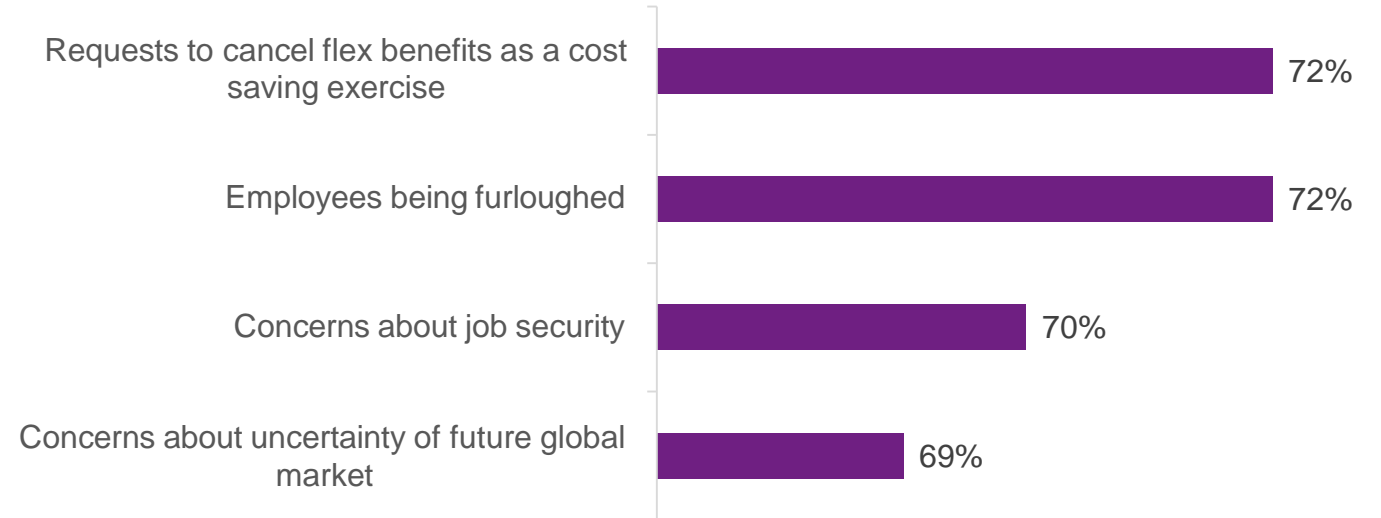
Innovative ways to improve employees' physical health

The obvious concern for employers is maintaining social distancing and keeping employees safe in the workplace. But some employers are looking at other innovative ways to support physical wellbeing, including:

- Telemedicine / virtual GP;
- Enhanced cycle scheme;
- Holiday roll over;
- Resources to keep employees moving at home;
- Introducing virtual fitness apps.

Key Findings: Financial wellbeing

Employees need help making informed decisions about pension and benefits. Some want to maximise their take-home pay in context of job uncertainty and possible insecurity.



Innovative ways employers are looking to improve employees' financial wellbeing right now:



Introduction of saving and debt consolidation product



Enhanced EAP



Education



Loans via Payroll

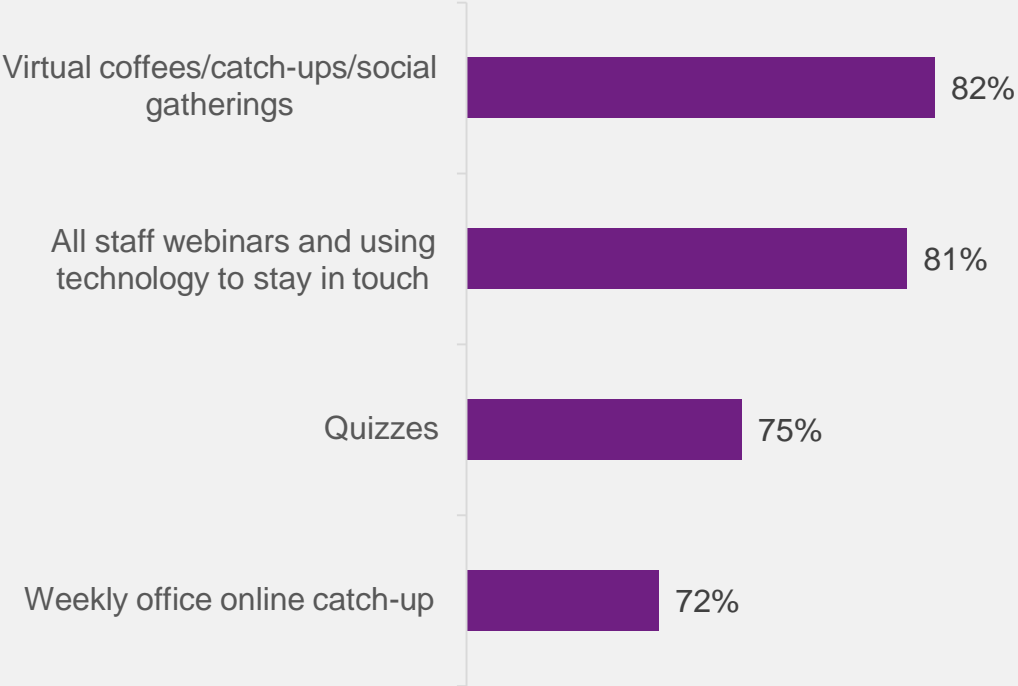
Key Findings: Social wellbeing

Remote working has been successful as organisations have widely adopted a culture of flexibility and trust. However, employers need to ensure that their people have the tools and opportunities to collaborate and engage with one another frequently. Managers are also critical to this process.



82%

of employers were running informal virtual gatherings with employees. The rules around organisational culture and the social experience of work are being rewritten.



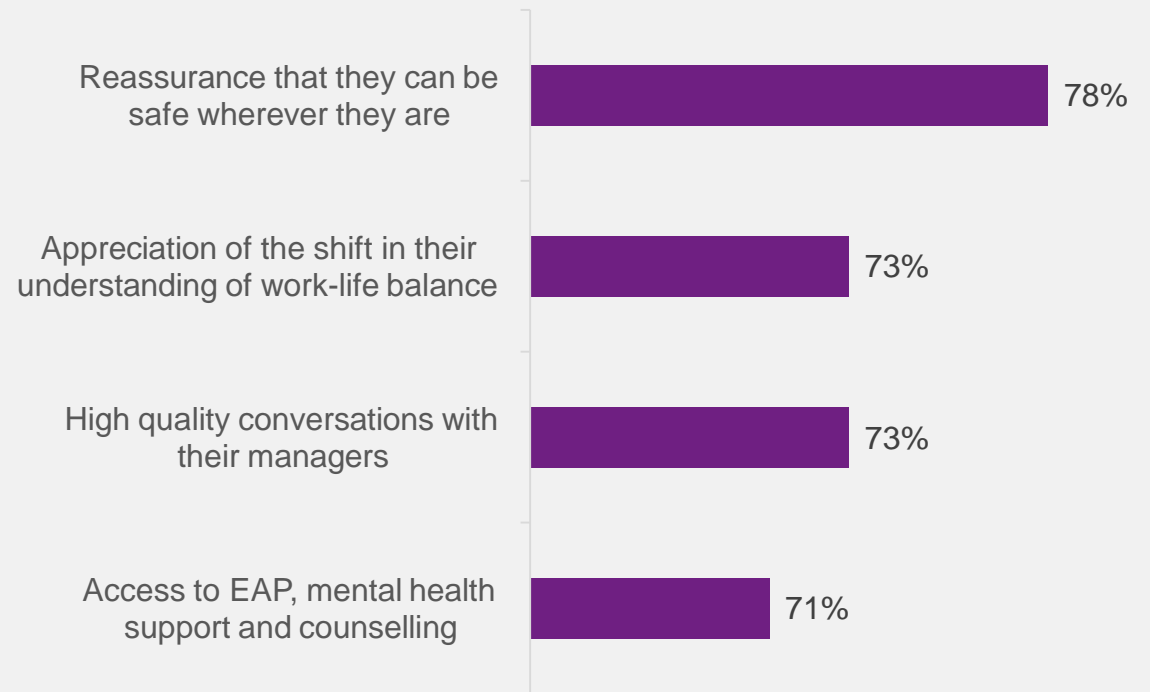
Key Findings: Emotional wellbeing



of employers had seen an increase in issues related to emotional wellbeing through Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs), HR cases or other channels.

The wellbeing of all groups, but particularly vulnerable, younger and/or lower paid employees, are of concern.

which employees will need as they return to work include:



About the technology

- Virtual Focus Groups are built and run through Artificial Intelligence (AI) software – the machine is continually learning through participant responses.
- The platform provides a safe space for people to share thoughts, ideas and learning anonymously within a peer group. Everyone's voice is heard, not only the loudest people in a group.
- Participants provide their own unique responses to open-ended questions and voted on other's responses as well. The platform works to understand each individual participant's sentiment. Depending on the initial answer a participant gives, the platform will display pairings of ideas to understand where a respondent 'sits' on a spectrum of opinion.
- The more a participant clicks, the better the AI understands their sentiment as an individual. Since there isn't a tally of responses (as you would have in a survey), the number of times a participant votes won't impact other participants' choices or the popularity and consensus of opinion in the group.
- Finally, an algorithm calculates the top response – this is identified by estimating every person's opinion of every answer based on how they voted on similar answers, or based on whether they voted similarly to someone who did vote on that specific answer.

Thank you



Tom Wooldridge
**Associate Director – Communications
and Change Management**

51 Lime Street | London | EC3M 7DQ | United
Kingdom

M + 44 7768 138 067

Thomas.Wooldridge@willistowerswatson.com



Shazre Quamber-Hill
Talent Experience Consultant

51 Lime Street | London | EC3M 7DQ | United
Kingdom

T+ 44 20 7170 3826

Shazre.Quamber-Hill@willistowerswatson.com