



THE ADECCO GROUP

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# Resetting Normal

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Defining the new era  
of work

# Introduction

As many parts of the world gradually emerge from the acute phase of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is becoming clear that the world of work and employment markets have been profoundly altered. Within this shifting environment, many opportunities have been revealed or accelerated for employers and senior managers. As organisations plan for their future beyond Covid-19, assessing altered working patterns, brought about by enforced lockdowns in countries around the world, can inform their approach to workplace optimisation. Those who embrace the transformation opportunity will position themselves ahead of the curve. To do so, organisations must now navigate this uncharted territory and the new set of employee expectations that have arisen, defining the new working parameters for a new era of work.

To fully understand the rising expectations of both employees and managers in this new era, the Adecco Group carried out a study, assessing the attitudes to work of 8,000 people across eight countries: Australia, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Spain, the UK and the USA. We spoke to office-based workers (aged 18 to 60 years old who were working a minimum of 20 hours per week during the pandemic) about how the pandemic had altered their perceptions of how and where they work, the skills needed for the future, and relationship dynamics between themselves and their leaders. The results reveal a stark emerging shift in many of the entrenched working patterns that have held for generations – and a clear gap between the expectancy of workers and the capabilities of organisations in rising to meet them.



## The challenge to change

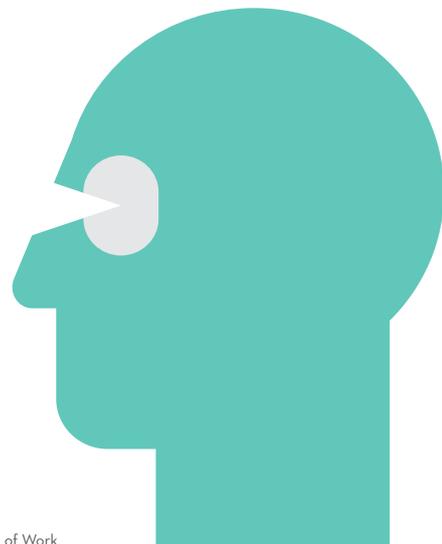
Whilst many businesses across the globe have proven themselves to be responsive, resilient, and resourceful under such unique circumstances, the bigger challenge they now face is establishing new working norms, informed by their learnings from the pandemic experience. The focus thus far has been on keeping their own business operations afloat; the next obstacle to overcome is enabling their own workforce, and wider society, to thrive in the new era of work.

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Employers have earned employee trust during the pandemic. Companies are now the most trusted to “reset normal” – more than any other institution.

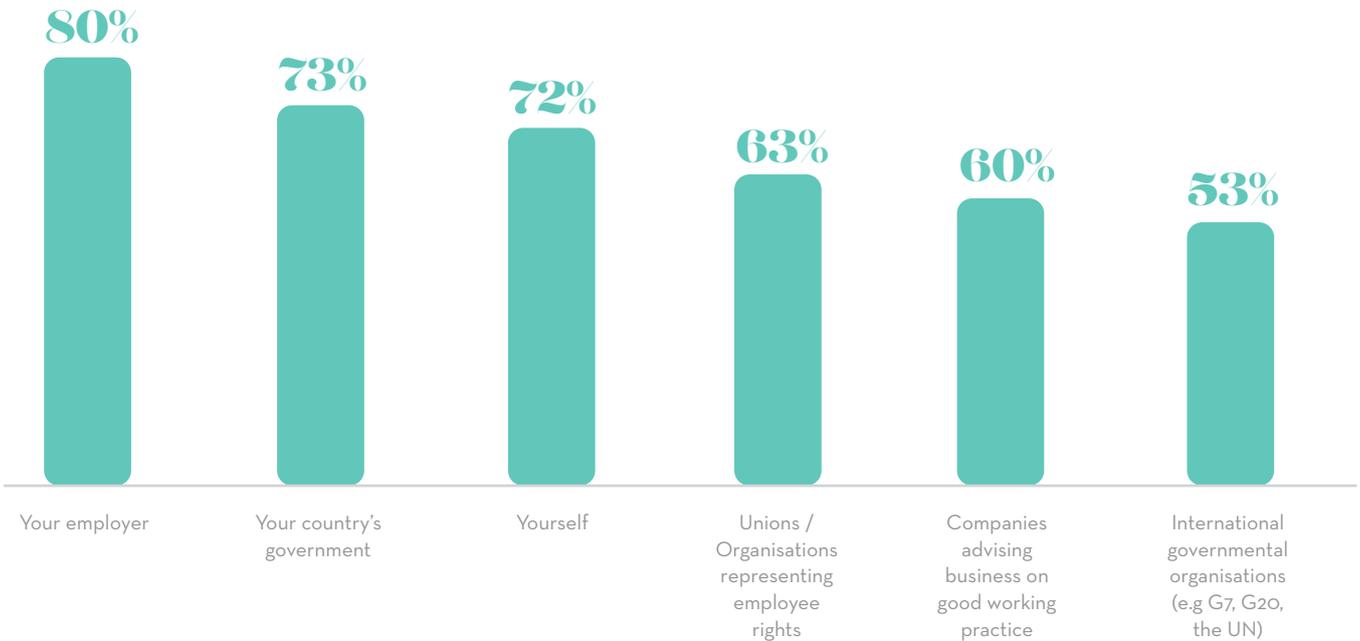
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Some 80% of respondents said their employer is ‘responsible’ for ensuring a better working world after the pandemic. Meanwhile, 73% said the government is responsible, and 72% of the employees said that they themselves were responsible. As such, the gauntlet is being laid down to all parties who have the power to deliver change, but the overwhelming consensus is that employers are the most trusted to drive this forward.



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**% Who say the following parties are responsible for ensuring a better working world after the pandemic**



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In the case of companies, to meet the expectations placed on them to deliver, it will require a new breed of leader and approach that can and will prioritise the emerging trends that have been accelerated by the pandemic - specifically around flexibility, workplace policies and addressing skills gaps.

This is a key moment in time that we have never seen before. Business leaders have been given an unprecedented opportunity to hit reset on pre-pandemic working norms and shape the future of work in a way that allows the workforce and businesses to thrive. Those who do not embrace these challenges risk being left behind. This presents a rare and unique opportunity for businesses to re-think their operating models and pivot toward working styles that will benefit both management and employees long-term.



# The future is flexible

## The world is ready for ‘hybrid working’

While flexible working was already on the rise, the pandemic lockdown propelled this once ‘emerging trend’ forward, and one of the biggest verifications from the research is that flexible working is here to stay. This is not just a measure of necessity in times of forced lockdown – but a desired practice to be embraced sustainably for the future. Both business leaders and workers at large agree that greater flexibility enhances not only employee work-life balance, but overall business performance.

So, what does this new model of flexibility look like? In an ideal paradigm, employees want a balance of office and remote work, and to have their work environments and hours accommodate their personal circumstances. They appreciate the value of working remotely where they can concentrate on “deep thought” work and avoid lost time commuting, and they still see the benefit of spending time in a shared office environment where teams can collaborate face to face, inspire each other, and foster a shared workplace culture.

That’s why three quarters (74%) of workers say that a mix of office-based and remote working is the best way forward. And although employees expect their employers to force them to spend more than two thirds (69%) of their time in the office in future, they would ideally prefer to only spend half (51%) of their time there, with the balance spent working remotely (49%).

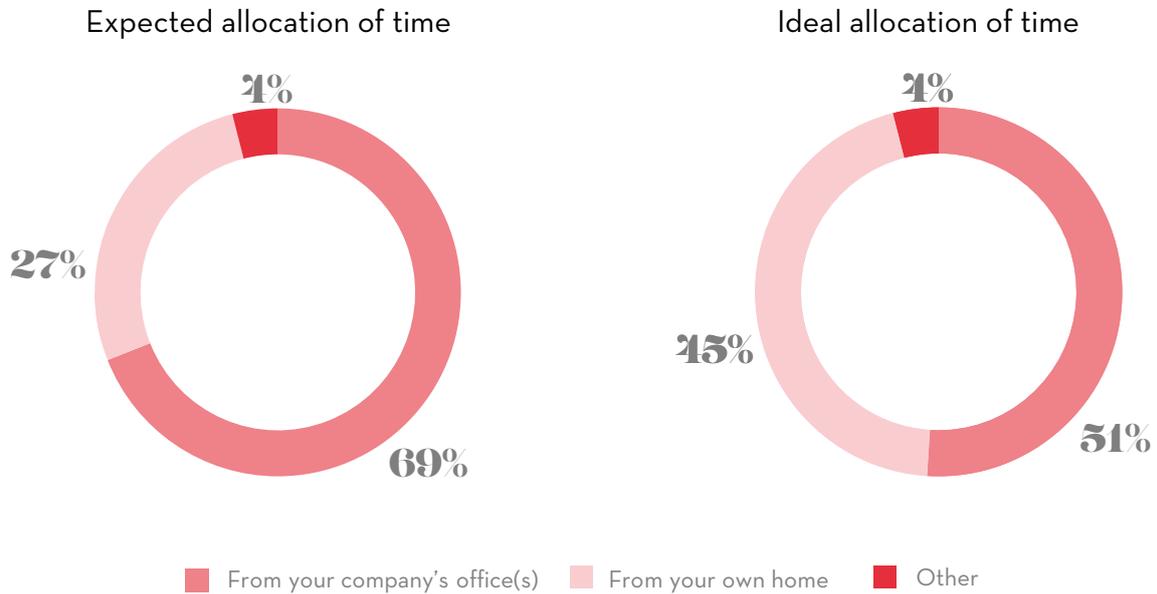
# 49%

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On average, employees want to spend around half their working week remotely

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## % of working week expected vs. wanted to spend in the following environments after the Covid-19 pandemic



And it's not only employees who see the benefits. Almost eight in 10 (77%) C-level/executive managers believe that business will generally benefit from allowing increased flexibility around office and remote working. Also, 79% of C-level/executive management see that employees will personally benefit from having increased flexibility around office and remote working.

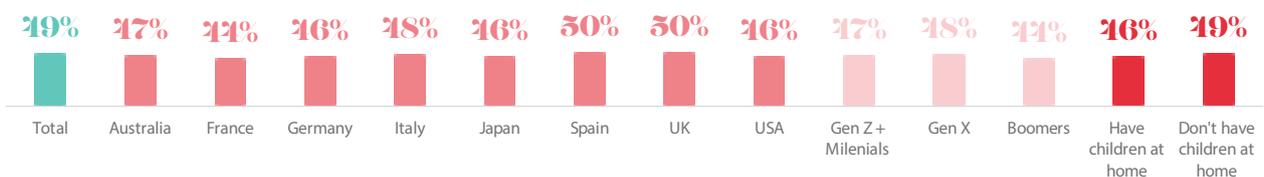
Additionally, eight in 10 workers (80%) said it is important to be able to maintain a good work/life balance after the pandemic, and half of workers (50%) said that their work/life balance has improved during the lockdown.

There is universal approval of flexible working, across business structures and geographies, across generations and parental status. It is a clear affirmation that the world is ready for 'hybrid working'.

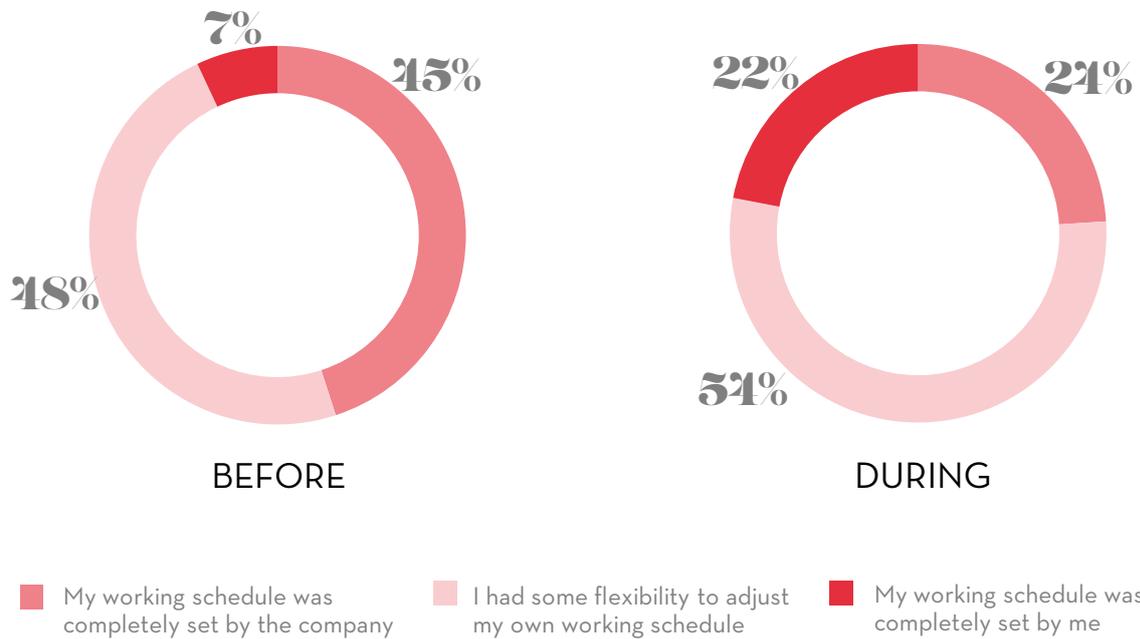
### Is this the end of the 9-5?

The work that we do is changing, the working environments we inhabit are changing, and there is also a rising call to rethink how roles are commissioned, and how productivity is assessed.

## % of working week workers want to spend working remotely after the Covid-19 pandemic



## Level of flexibility regarding working schedule before vs. during the Covid-19 pandemic



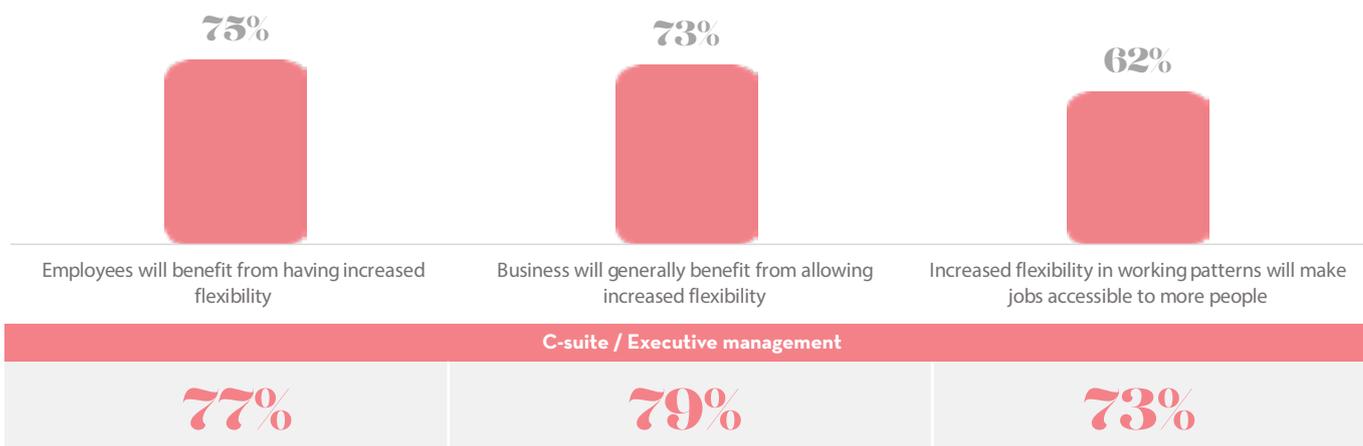
During the pandemic, individual autonomy over work schedules tripled from only 7% completely setting their own schedule before the pandemic, rising to 22% during. The value of this autonomy is also something that workers are keen to retain in future with three quarters (75%) saying it is important to maintain flexibility over their working schedules.

# 50%

Say their work-life balance has improved as the result of the pandemic

## The future is flexible: Increased flexibility deemed to have universal benefits with strong buy-in from C-suite / Executive management

### % Who agree with the following statements about flexibility after the pandemic

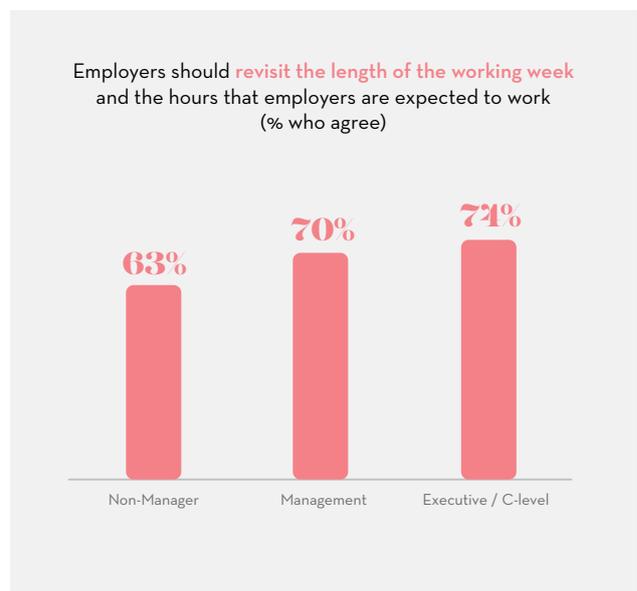
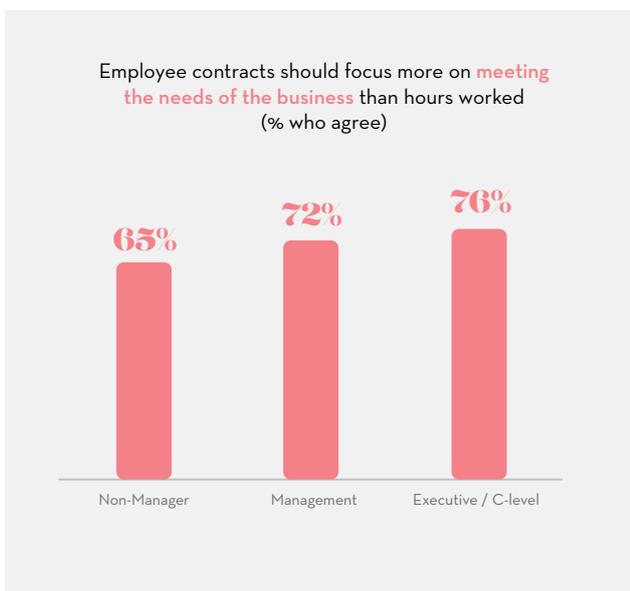


# 3 in 4

Closely linked to this, we see an emerging view that employee contracts should evolve to focus more on meeting the needs of the business than on set hours. This view is currently shared by over two thirds (69%) of workers and is likely to remain and potentially grow in influence. A similar majority (67%) also feel that employers should revisit the length of the working week and the hours that employees are expected to work.

Think it is important that they retain flexibility over working hours / schedule (75%)

And to implement more flexibility in how and where staff can work (77%)



Within this scenario, key performance indicators related to output and impact would be the main metric by which a knowledge-economy employee is measured, as opposed to how long they have worked. Employees would have flexibility in framing their hours and working style, so long as they complete the tasks they are contracted to do and deliver the results expected of them. This would be a significant departure from what was once the norm for many businesses, where “time at desk” was considered important in assessing whether an individual employee was a productive and contributing team member.

For the model to be a success, the high levels of trust that have been established between employees and employers during the pandemic must continue. In fact, over three quarters (78%) of employees say that feeling trusted to get the job done will be important after the pandemic.

These perspectives illustrate that there will not be a return to the ‘normal’ that we experienced in times past. The workplace is a fluid concept and for the first time en masse, we are no longer seeing it as a physical space. To not be left behind, organisations will need to alter the lens through which they view their workers, the jobs they do, and the conditions in which they do them.

## Key takeaways

- It is clear that there will be more flexibility in our future, but the question of how this is sustained in the longer term beyond the pandemic remains a key challenge for businesses.
- With all workplace parties calling for greater flexibility, it is imperative that everyone is involved in aligning on the optimal model. Listening to employees to identify which elements of flexible working have worked well and where there remains room for improvement, is the first step to establishing the new norm.
- To ensure success, leaders must consider the shifts that need to be made in working styles, communication rhythm and team organisation when adopting a hybrid working model, and avoid simply applying the structures of the past.
- With the preference being an even split between office and remote working, leaders will need to consider the functionality and purpose of the office and how the shared work space can bring the most value to a workforce that can and will work anywhere in the world.
- As flexibility increases and employees gain greater control over working schedules, they will also look to gain greater autonomy over how to manage working time.
- As the importance of knowledge-based work increases, the practice of compensating an employee based on a fixed set of hours during a certain time of the day, rather than results delivered, will no longer stand as reference for a working relationship.
- Historically, for many jobs, wages have been calculated on the basis of attendance rather than impact. Going forward, the concept of correlating output with hours will be outdated. Many individuals work at a different pace to each other, and work volumes are often not linear.
- Redefining the measurement of productivity is complex and goes to the heart of Industrial Relations and Labour Legislation. An individualised approach must be considered going forward. In an era of work vastly different from the one based on an industrial 9-5 scheme, it is inevitable that the hours based model of productivity measurement will be revisited.

# Reinventing leadership

## Leading the workforce forward

It is clear that expectations for leaders have risen over the past few months. This applies to the way they lead and the emphasis they place on various aspects of management. While it is clear that employees want greater flexibility, it will be more complex than simply implementing a new work-from-home policy. The prior model of management is insufficient in a remote world. This was laid bare during the pandemic where a clear gap emerged between what employees wanted and needed from their managers, and the level of preparedness of leaders to effectively motivate, engage and support employees virtually.

Leaders, just like the employees they are managing, must also commit to learning new skills and evolving. In the new era of work, it is likely that those who will rise to the top will be agile, embrace constructive disruption, and exhibit interpersonal skills that can transcend office walls and geographical boundaries.

Six in 10 people surveyed (63%) said that training and resources based on soft skills such as teamwork, people skills and problem-solving will be important after the pandemic. 75% of C-suite / exec management and 69% of managers believe that training on managing staff in remote working environments is important as we reach the other side of the pandemic.

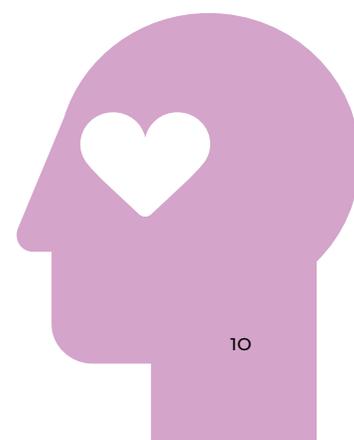
The traits of the new type of leader are clearly different to those that were deemed 'successful' in the past. The new breed of leader must be empathetic, a clear communicator, considerate of the holistic wellbeing needs of their employees, and able to foster a working relationship based on mutual trust rather than top-down hierarchical management. The shift to digital teams requires more than just new technology, it calls for new mindsets.

## Emotional intelligence is the new gold standard

Emotional intelligence matters more now than ever before. Employees have raised their expectations and want to see managers do more to ensure the workforce remains motivated, collaborative and positive. As a result, three quarters of employees (74%) say that it is important for managers to exhibit a leadership style focussed on collaboration, problem solving and adaptability, and one characterised by empathy and a supportive attitude.

# 70%

Employees who say that support for their mental wellbeing will be important to them after the pandemic.



Being in tune with employee needs is an essential part of achieving this gold standard. Three quarters (74%) of workers said effective organisation and coordination of team members across different locations from managers is important. As working patterns shift, managers must ensure that workers have the support and resources they need - wherever they are working.

# 74%

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Employees who say it is important for managers to have a leadership style focused on empathy and a supportive attitude.

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There is a danger that historical bias creeps in, and a perception emerges that if the manager cannot “see” the employee, they are not productive. Rather than applying old models and then blaming the shift to remote work when teams fail, companies and leaders must be deliberate in how they set up the new working structures, communication cadence, and team dynamics, and take accountability for actively framing the new model of work. Taking time to invest in building a stronger set of soft skills will be paramount.

## Mental wellbeing should remain front of mind

Holistic wellbeing and workforce vitality are rising areas of focus for individuals and organisations but many companies lack the blueprint to embrace these trends, and the resulting deficiencies were clearly felt during the lockdown period. During the pandemic, where employees were isolated from their teams, more than one in four (28%) said their mental wellbeing deteriorated.

At the same time, only 2 in 5 people (40%) said that their managers had exceeded their expectations on checking on their mental wellbeing during the lockdown. And more than half of managers (54%) said it was not easy to provide effective advice on mental wellbeing to their people. This highlights an apparent lack of adequate soft skills training in the past and an important improvement area for the future.

# 28%

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Of employees say their mental health got worse during the pandemic

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As we look beyond the pandemic, the increased expectations on mental health support are here to stay. 70% say having the right support available in the post-pandemic world is important to them. Already a growing concern before Covid-19, workers now expect employers to put the right measures in place for their wellbeing going forward. It is a consensus too significant to be ignored.

## 54%

say it was not easy to **provide effective advice to staff on their mental wellbeing** during the Covid-19 outbreak

## Only 2 in 5

say their managers have exceeded expectations on checking in on their mental wellbeing (40%)

## Key takeaways

- Managers, leaders and C-suite executives all face a steep learning curve as we begin to reset norms and standards in the workplace. Employees have high expectations of their leaders and want reassurance that their wellbeing and safety remains the utmost priority as we exit the pandemic.
- What leaders do now will be remembered. Those that can prove to be agile, resilient, and supportive in the most challenging of times will be most effective in leading their workforces into the new working world. This will play a huge part not only in talent retention in the immediate future, but talent attraction for years to come.
- Maintaining relationships and collaboration within a primarily virtual working environment will prove challenging for leaders. While employees could be anywhere, it's important that they are given the support and resources to help them feel like they belong somewhere when they 'show up' to work every day.
- It is clear that a "soft skills gap" exists across the management and C-suite layers. Leadership development, coaching and up-skilling is one way to solve this challenge. A second is to recruit a different profile of leader, better suited to the workforce of tomorrow. This is an area of opportunity as organisations evolve to become more resilient and future-ready.

# New skills for a new era – accelerated digitisation and the re-skilling imperative

## The ongoing nature of digital up-skilling

The pandemic has accelerated many of the trends related to digitisation that have been underway for some time. As a result, the post-pandemic climate will call not just for new types of work but also a new type of worker. This new and evolved workforce will be confident collaborating digitally and embrace online productivity tools. As a result of the pandemic and working remotely, six in 10 (59%) said their digital or remote working skills have improved. Meanwhile, more than two thirds (69%) said that support and training related to digital and remote working skills will continue to be important beyond the pandemic. Employees recognise that whilst progress has been made, there is a need to constantly upskill themselves as the world they work in continues to evolve, while the currency of their skills is finite.

59%

of employees say their digital skills improved during the pandemic

69%

of people want more digital up-skilling post-pandemic

Lifelong learning is therefore the bedrock on which companies must build their future skills policies. Workers now see the immediate need for digital skills enhancement, and that need will only deepen. As our work, consumption, and lifestyle habits change, accessibility will increasingly be dictated by an ability to interact with artificial intelligence and other rising technologies. Additionally, the skills needed by companies to successfully embrace technologies such as machine learning and automation will become more complex. Enhanced technical and soft skills will be required.



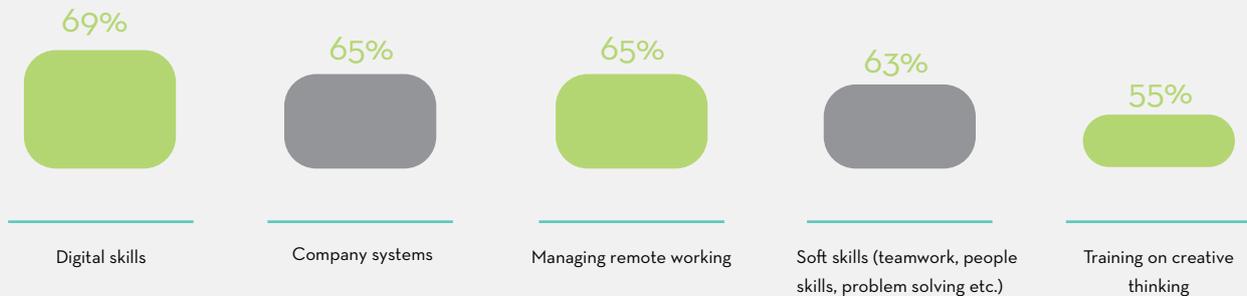
## Universal appetite for mass up-skilling

Employers have an opportunity to audit the skills they currently have within the business, identify what they need for future growth, and address these gaps, rather than simply supplementing staff with talent from outside the business. Making such a commitment to skills investment is less costly to the organisation in the long-term, addresses skills gaps before they worsen, and boosts employee engagement and loyalty. This is an opportune time for businesses and employees to prepare for the digital future while building on the base of talent they already have.

Right now, employees are extremely receptive to re and up-skilling. Skills development is also a key reason why workers seek new roles (43% cited skills as their main reason for being attracted to a job in the same sector). Whilst digital and softer skills specifically are called out as most important beyond the pandemic across all markets (with 69% of workers rating this as important), a wide range of areas for re and up-skilling are identified as important areas for further training, resources and support. These include training on company systems (important to 65% of workers), managing remote teams (65%), soft skills (63%) and creative thinking (55%). As such, businesses and workers alike should be capitalising on this desire to learn and the opportunity to build their talent base for the future.

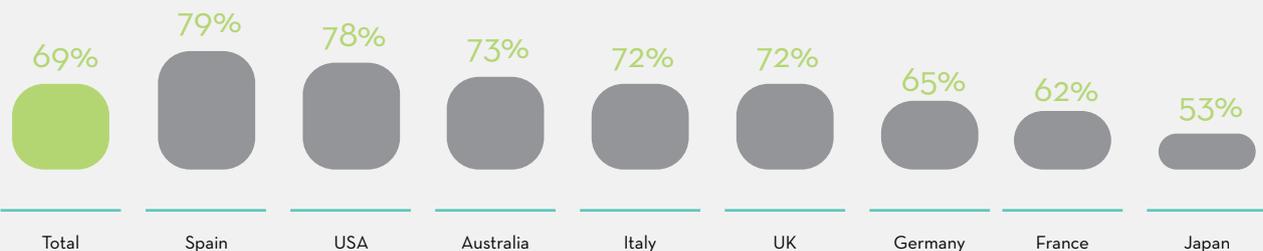
Strong need and appetite for a wide range of re / up-skilling is evident, particularly in areas relating to digital and soft skills

% Who rate the following types of training resources and support as important after the pandemic



Digital skills seen as the top priority across all countries in terms of training needs after the pandemic

% Who rate digital / remote working skills as important after the pandemic



## Key takeaways

- Businesses have rightly taken a ‘rapid response’ approach to ensuring workers have the digital infrastructure and knowledge required to work remotely and upskill themselves under lockdown restrictions. But to facilitate hybrid working long term, employees must be equipped not only to survive, but to thrive.
- There is a broad appetite by employees to improve themselves as individuals through re-skilling and now is the time to seize the opportunity. Those organisations that embrace lifelong learning on a constant continuum, rather than hiring employees and hoping their skills remain current, will emerge as the most competitive in the future marketplace.
- The fast-paced nature of technology evolution means that digital skills quickly lose their currency, if not continually updated. As digitisation accelerates into the future, there is a clear business case for ongoing re-skilling and up-skilling. It is time to view this as an investment in human capital that delivers clear ROI, rather than as simply a cost to organisations.

# The trust equation – a double edged sword

Employers have earned employee trust during the pandemic and are therefore deemed the most trusted institution to lead us into a new working world.

On the whole, employers have done a good job managing through the crisis and putting their people first, according to workers. In fact, 88% say that their employer met or exceeded their expectations in adapting to the challenges of the pandemic. The link between communication and trust is proven, and 86% say that their employer met or exceeded their expectations for communicating about business performance during the pandemic

## 88%

say that their employer met or exceeded their expectations in adapting to the challenges of the pandemic.

## 80%

say their employer is responsible for ensuring a better working world after Covid-19

As a result, six in 10 (61%) also trust their employer to support them during any future crises. Having gained trust, employers now have a responsibility to fulfil that trust, not just in extreme conditions, but in all conditions. That means listening to the needs of the workforce, being attuned to changing perspectives and expectations, and being constantly mindful to actively lead their people through this period of change.

This rise in reputation equity leads to higher expectations. Employers are the most trusted to usher in the so-called “better normal”, with 80% saying their employer is responsible for ensuring a better working world after Covid-19 and resetting norms. While employers scored higher than any other institution, governments are also expected to play a leading role according to most (73%), employees also see themselves (72%) and unions (63%) as accountable in shaping their future world of work.

**% Who say the following parties are responsible for ensuring a better working world after the pandemic**

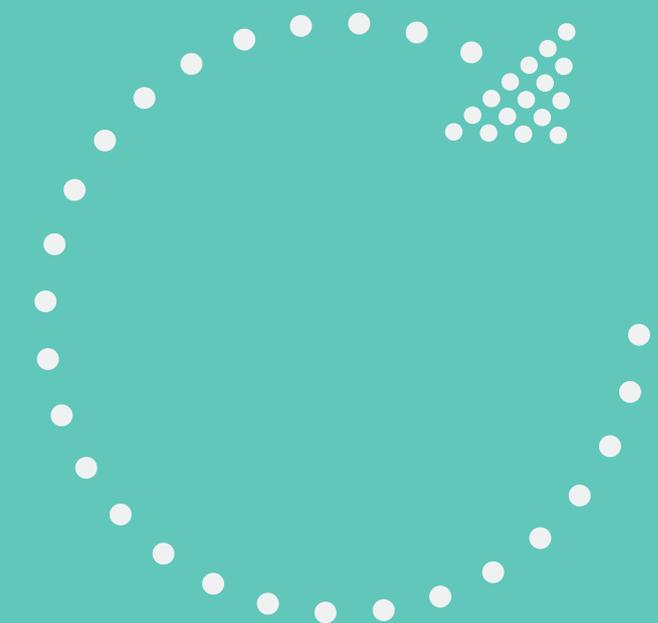
	Total	Australia	France	Germany	Italy	Japan	Spain	UK	USA
Your employer	80%	85%	69%	82%	78%	74%	81%	86%	84%
Your country's government	73%	80%	57%	69%	77%	73%	79%	78%	71%
Yourself	72%	80%	69%	72%	74%	53%	71%	76%	83%
Unions / Organisations representing employee rights	63%	62%	55%	64%	64%	56%	72%	69%	64%
Companies advising business on good working practice	60%	67%	50%	55%	58%	48%	70%	67%	69%
International governmental organisations (e.g. G7, G20, the UN)	53%	54%	41%	41%	53%	56%	64%	59%	53%

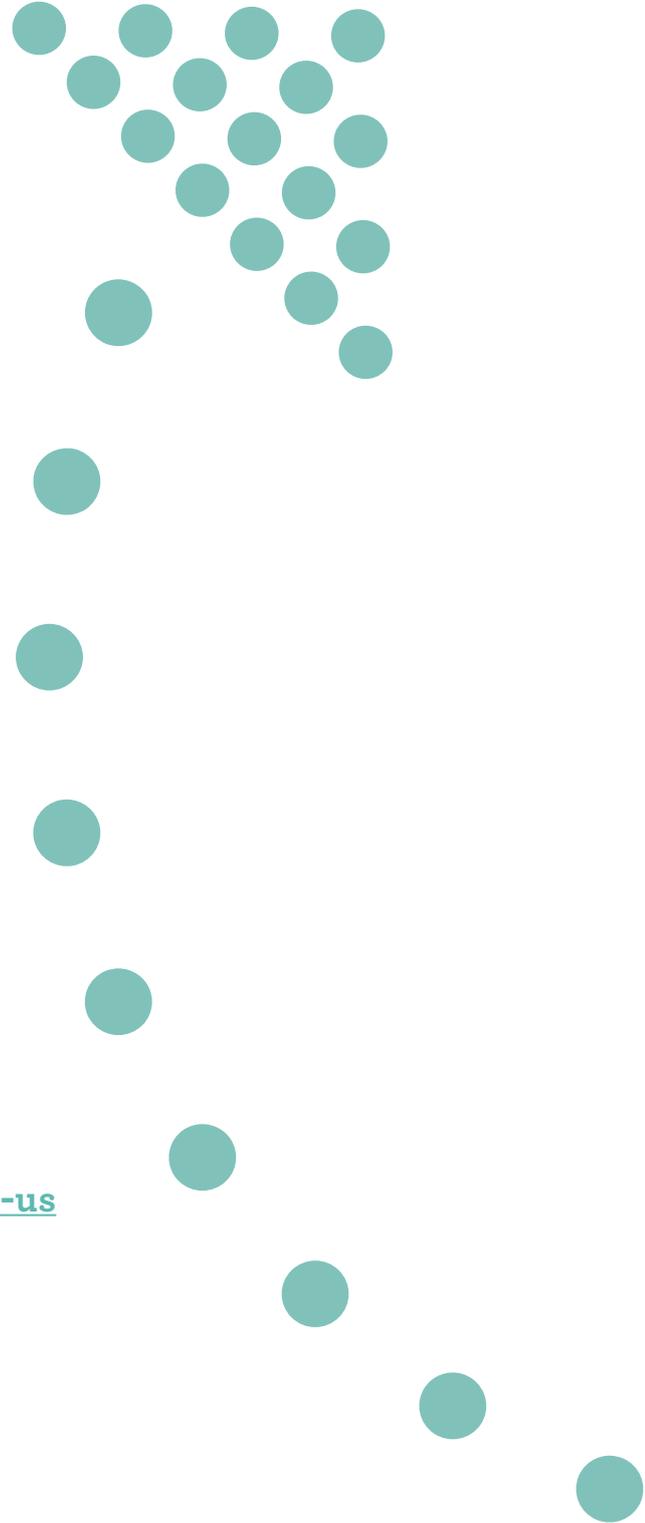
# Preparing for tomorrow

The world of work will never return to the 'normal' that we were familiar with before the pandemic struck, and it is clear that the prior version of 'normal' did not work well for a lot of labour market participants. The respondents in this study have painted a clear picture of what a "better normal" looks like for individuals and for organisations.

However, the shift towards flexibility, lifelong learning and multi-dimensional leadership will never be fully realised unless enabling structural changes are made. The current system is failing to meet the demands for specialist skilled workers in growing sectors, mental health issues at work are on the rise, and an increasing number of workers are struggling to juggle the competing demands of a busy personal life and a satisfying and successful career. It is therefore vital that employees, employers, and policymakers share the responsibility of shaping a new working model. And we have a rare window to do so.

Arguably, the Covid-19 pandemic has changed the world of work more radically than any other single event in our working lifetime. Defining how we use this opportunity to reset and transform our workplaces is now in the hands of all labour market participants. The decisions made by employers today will influence their status as an employer of choice for many years to come. The war for talent will be won and lost on the battlegrounds of flexibility, skills investment, leadership and trust. The organisations that are able to "reset normal" on these four dimensions will not only secure the best talent, but will also be the most effective in managing their human capital to create sustainable success for their organisations, for the individuals they employ, and for society at large.





# Contact Info

For all enquiries:

<https://engage.adeccogroup.co.uk/contact-us>



THE ADECCO GROUP

Adecco

Ajilon

BADENOCH  
+ CLARK

GA GENERAL  
ASSEMBLY

LHH

modis

officeangels  
RECRUITMENT CONSULTANTS

Penna

pontoon

Spring