# Materials Handling Industry COVID-19 Remote-Work Insights

March 30, 2021

# Methodology and Survey Topics

## Objectives/Topics

The purpose of this survey was to understand materials-handling industry employees' reactions to and abilities to navigate the work environment during the COVID19 pandemic.

Survey topics included:

- Management's trust of employees working remotely
- Effect of WFH on company culture
- Productivity in remote vs. in-office settings
- Preference for WFH/remote vs. office in 2021
- Influence of WFH on employee retention
- Likelihood to seek new employment as a result of WFH policies
- Desired employer-supports for WFH/remote workers

## Survey Methodology

- The MHI team co-developed and approved the survey content. The data-collection period ran from February 24th to March 24th, 2021.
- The MHI team shared the e-vite content and survey link with their membership counterparts at MHEDA, WiM, and WERC.
- The data collection for non-MHI associations began on/about March 3rd and ended March 24th, 2021.
- The evite included an opt-in for respondents who completed the survey, to enter a drawing for a $500 American Express Gift Card®.

## Results

- The team closed the data-collection period with 670 completed online interviews from members of MHI, MHEDA, WiM and WERC. The total results include responses from each association's members versus highlights from each individual one.

# Insights

MHI

# 2021 Remote-Work Survey

## Insights

### Members' Profile

o Most respondents represent WiM (67%), followed by MHI (24%), MHEDA (17%) and WERC (2%).

o Engineering (38%) is the leading job function, with C-suite (14%), marketing (12%) and operations (11%) forming a second tier. Most employees (71%) have over five years of experience and 79 percent are female.

o Almost eight-in-10 respondents (78%) represent companies with more than 100 employees. Over half (58%) are from companies with 500+ workers in total.

o Respondents may be pro-WFH/remote-work given their seniority, company size and job functions that can be done offsite.

# 2021 Remote-Work Survey

## Insights, cont'd
### Members' Profile

o The wide distribution of respondents' company type may account for the relative enthusiasm and acceptance for the WFH/remote model.

o **(54%) A leadership-focused organization** with an emphasis on employee growth, internal promotions and advancement through job rotation, mentoring and coaching programs (e.g., F500, packaged-goods, Rx firm)

o **(26%) A traditional organization** with a well-defined hierarchy, procedures and 9-to-5 work schedule and dress code (e.g., government agency, financial institution)

o **(20%) An innovative organization** that focuses on development and creativity with less hierarchy and more fluid communication and flexible work schedules (e.g., tech and startup firms).

# 2021 Remote-Work Survey

## Insights, cont'd
### Workplace Culture

o 63% of members are primarily working from home/remotely or in combination with time at their employer's office/warehouse. Over one-third (34%) are working entirely on site, and three percent indicate "other" setup.

o Since Q4 2020, 92 percent of respondents' companies have had on-site (essential) and remote/WFH (non-essential) employees.

The WFH model has had a relatively positive impact on employees' company culture engagement.

o Nearly two thirds (64%) indicate more engagement or no change vs. 36 percent who are less engaged in their culture by comparison to before Q4 2020.

o Members seem generally positive to the WFH/remote model as demonstrated by the lack of change and more engagement in their company culture. They've learned how to adapt over the last five-six months.

# 2021 Remote-Work Survey

## Insights, cont'd
### Work/Life Balance

○ 94% of the respondents believe management trusts their abilities to get the work done in a remote context.

○ 80% of employees cite equal or greater productivity from a remote/WFH environment than from working in their employer's office.

○ 85% prefer a WFH/remote-working environment or in combination with office time vs. only office time that involves commuting (15%).

○ 51% of the employees feel their work/life balance favors work; 43% indicate a 50/50 work/life balance; and six percent indicate a life focus.

○ The fact of 94% of member employees feeling management's trust, coupled with respondents are more productive in a remote/WFH context, is a plus for building remote-work, employee engagement, and loyalty shaping policies.

# 2021 Remote-Work Survey

## Insights, cont'd
### Remote Work/Employee Retention

- 85% indicate company culture is extremely/very/somewhat influential when deciding to stay with an employer.

- 79% indicate extremely likely/likely to stay with an employer as *the result of the WFH* model.

- 71% are extremely likely/likely to stay with an employer if the *company* were to *return to a work-from-the-office model.*

- The downward trend indicates more affinity for the WFH/remote vs. the at-the-office model and may signal which model is best for employee retention.

- 65% of employee respondents indicate a positive or see no impact of companies having remote and on-site employees during the pandemic. Thirty-five percent have a negative/other view.

# 2021 Remote-Work Survey

## Insights, cont'd
### Maintaining Company Culture

o 70% of employee respondents indicate either their company culture is more/somewhat more cohesive or there's been no change since Q4 2020.

o Employees' top ways for maintaining company culture include daily communication with peers (87%), participating in online events (62%) and daily interactions with immediate bosses (51%).

o Employees have primarily learned how to adapt to the pandemic work environment and found ways to maintain their company culture.

# 2021 Remote-Work Survey

## Insights, cont'd
### Company Culture Success Attributes

o For 2021, majorities of employee respondents want their company culture to include flexibility in work locations (74%), work schedules (73%) and management's trust and transparency (68%).

o Respondents rank these same attributes as the *most important* for their workplace. However, management's trust/transparency is #1 with work-schedule and work-location flexibility to follow.

o Employees indicate their top WFH/remote *needs from employers as:* work-schedule flexibility, management's communication, and computer hardware/software.

# 2021 Remote-Work Survey

## Insights, cont'd
### Employee Challenges/Strengths of WFH/Remote Work

o Key challenges of working from home/remotely include communicating with peers; isolation; distractions of home responsibilities/kids; and maintaining work/life balance. Surprisingly, there were few mentions of tech-support challenges, implying the IT support is good and vital to success.

Employees' personal top strengths from the WFH/remote experience:

o Most responses relate to becoming more productive and efficient through greater personal focus on work projects and priorities.

o The WFH/remote context offers flexibility to enable employees to be more productive, allowing people to shift their work hours since there's no commute, and they can shift hours to accommodate home/parenting responsibilities.

# 2021 Remote-Work Survey

## Insights, cont'd
### Ideal Culture

o Employee respondents cite their ideal company cultures as those offering flexibility to work from home/remotely along with the elements to succeed, including transparency and trust; open communication; inclusivity; and team collaboration.

# 2021 Remote-Work Survey

## Recommendations

Next steps can include:

o To help ensure employee loyalty, leadership needs to communicate, offer autonomy, transparency, and the flexibility for employees to work in locations and with schedules that offer work/life balance.

o The remote-work genie bottle has opened. Employees will be hesitant to return to the full-scale, back-to-the-office model from pre-COVID-19 years.

o Leadership can help employees to succeed by offering the employer-sponsored elements they require for efficient work operations and execution (e.g., IT support)

o Employees find they're equally or more productive by working remotely than from working in their employers' offices. Companies can foster productivity and innovation by offering work-place flexibility.

# 2021 Remote-Work Survey
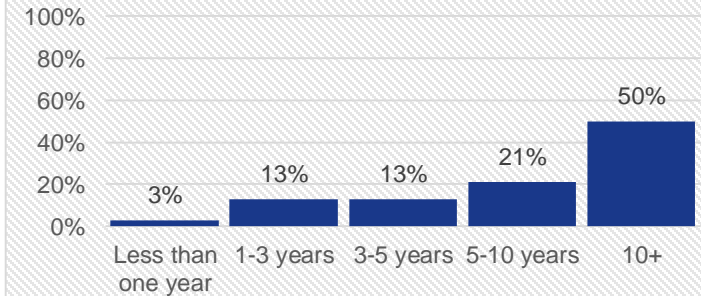
## Recommendations, cont'd

Next steps can include:

o For the employees who cannot work remotely (on-site/essentials), company leadership/management may need to equalize work schedules and flexibility to reduce opportunities for alienating essential, on-site employees.

o In the context of company culture being a driver of employee retention, there may be opportunities for companies to foster more communication between on-site and off-site employees, further strengthening company bonds. Keep in mind there are likely differences in how/where different genders prefer to communicate.
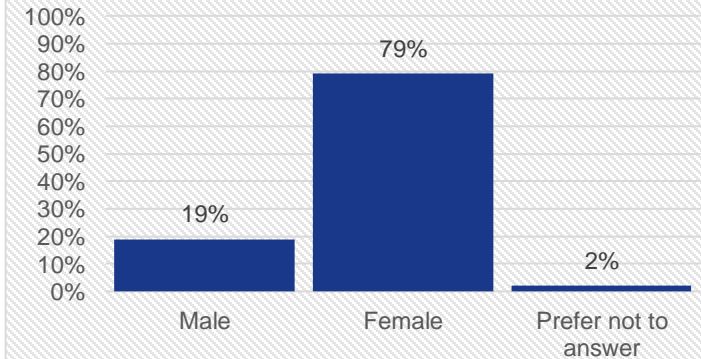
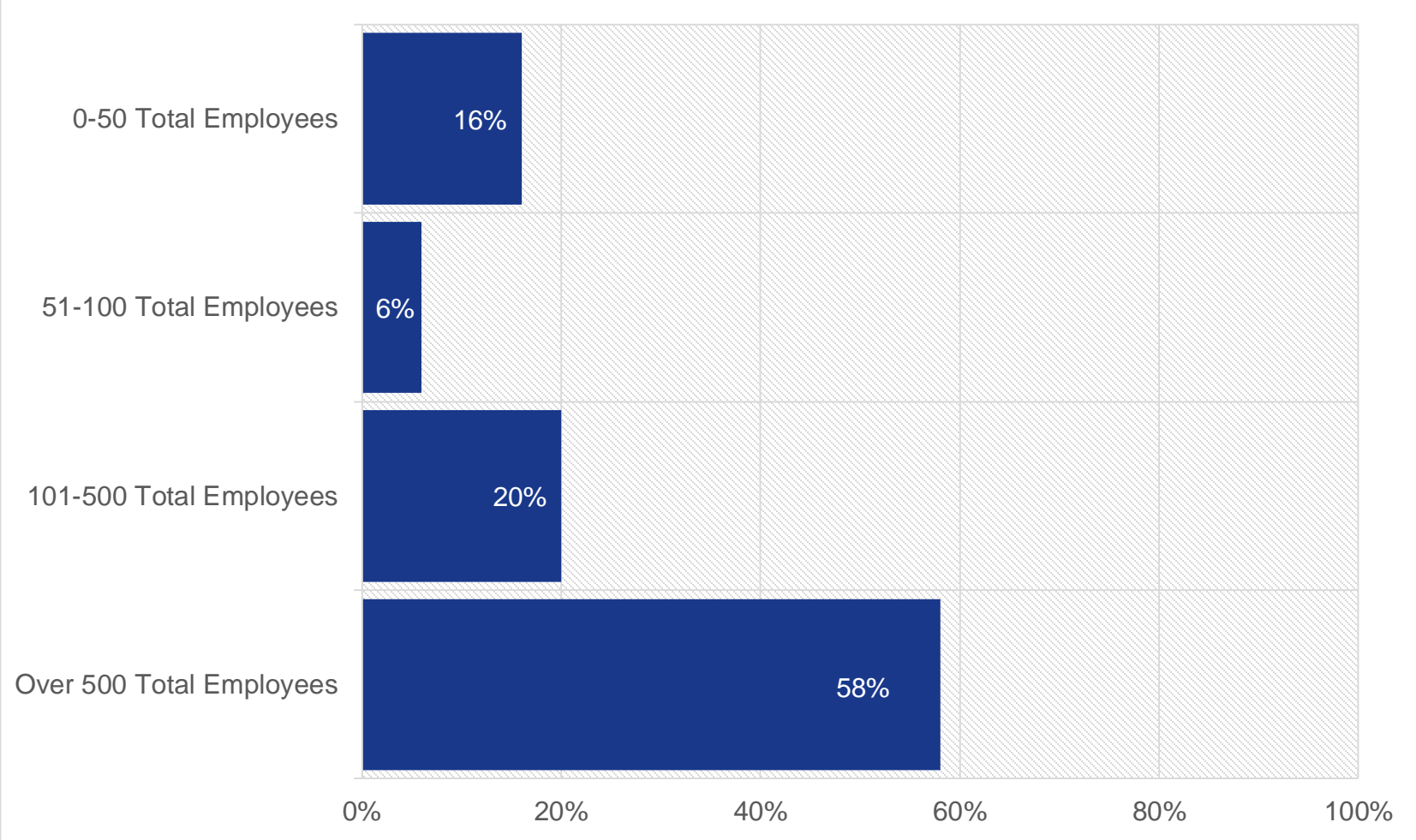# Members' Profiles

## By Job Function



- C-suite/Executive Leadership 14%
- Engineering 38%
- HR 7%
- Marketing 12%
- Operations 11%
- Product Mgmt 6%
- Sales 13%
- Warehouse Mgmt 2%
- Other 19%
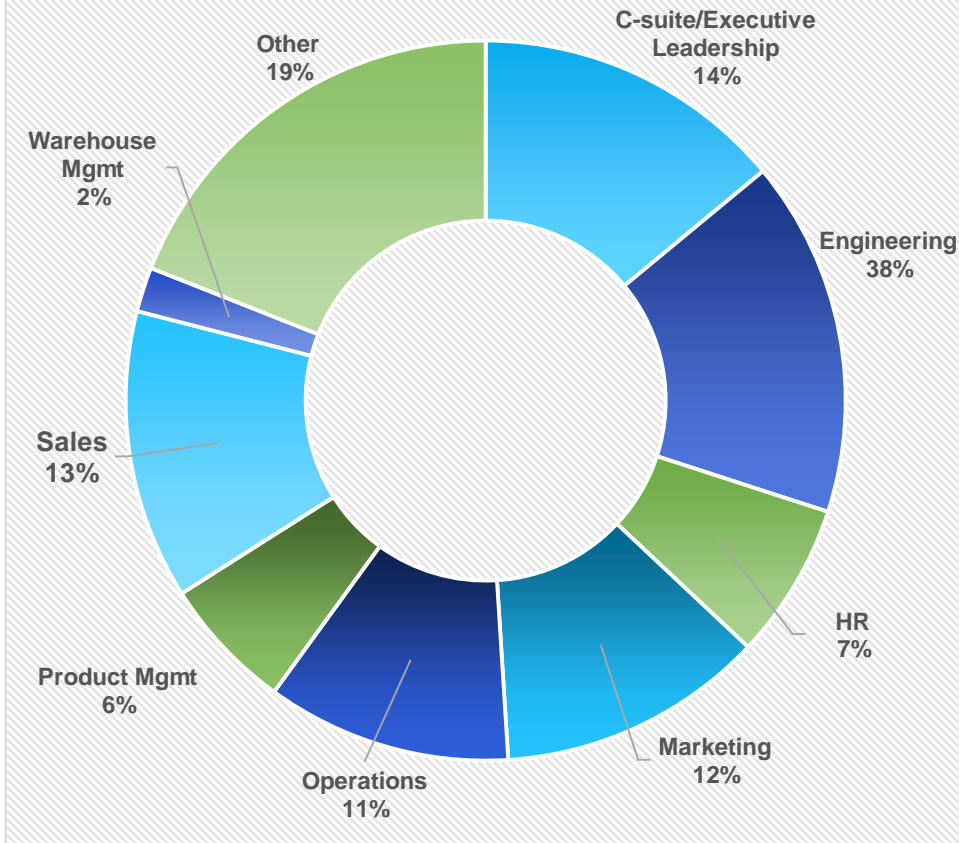
## Years of Sector Experience



| Less than one year | 1-3 years | 3-5 years | 5-10 years | 10+ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3% | 13% | 13% | 21% | 50% |

## By Gender



| Male | Female | Prefer not to answer |
|---|---|---|
| 19% | 79% | 2% |

# Total Numbers of Employees



Chart: horizontal bar chart showing distribution of total number of employees

- 0-50 Total Employees: 16%
- 51-100 Total Employees: 6%
- 101-500 Total Employees: 20%
- Over 500 Total Employees: 58%

(x-axis: 0% to 100%)

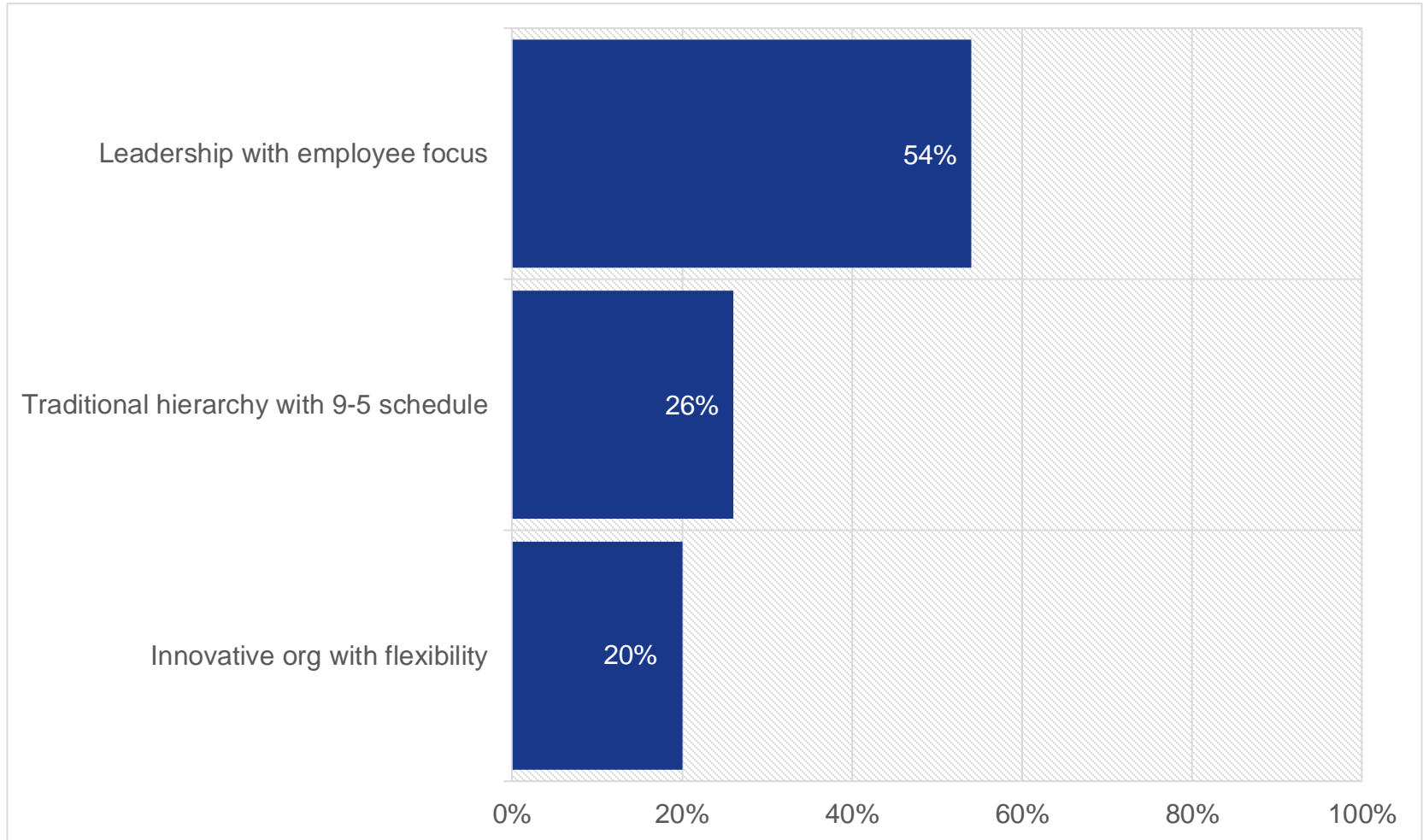How many employees work for your company (including all locations)?

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# Respondents' Membership Status
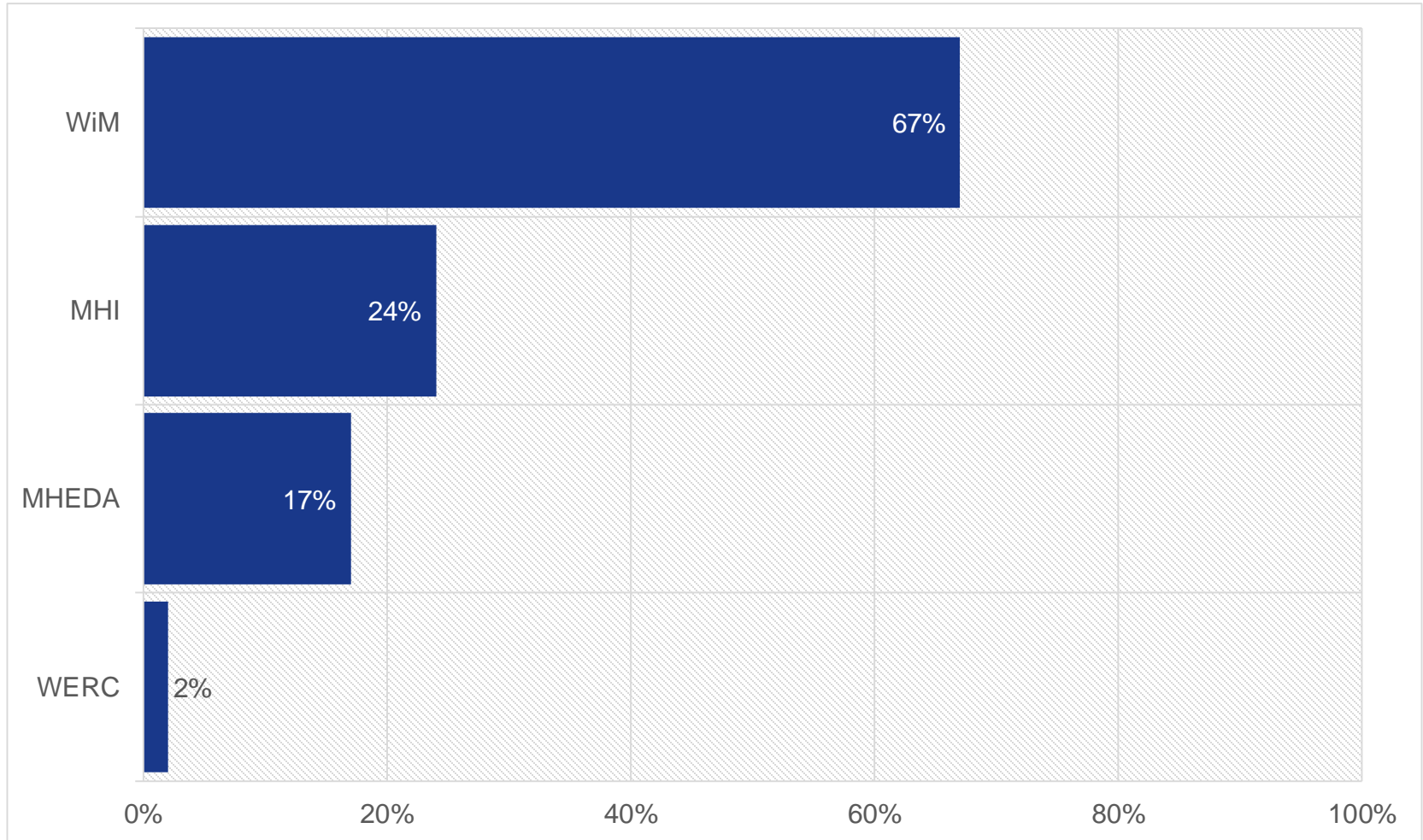


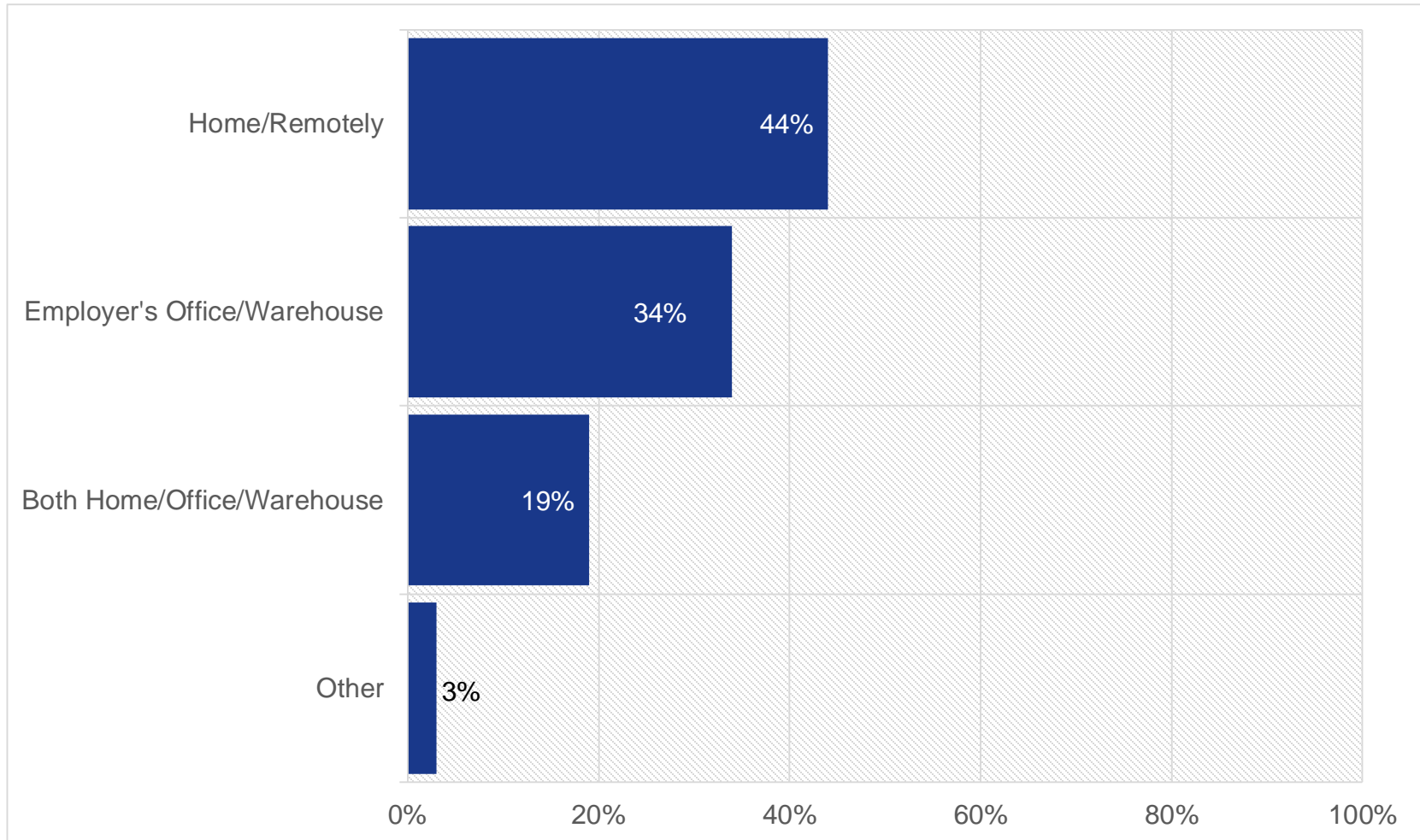Of which membership-based association are you/your company currently a member?
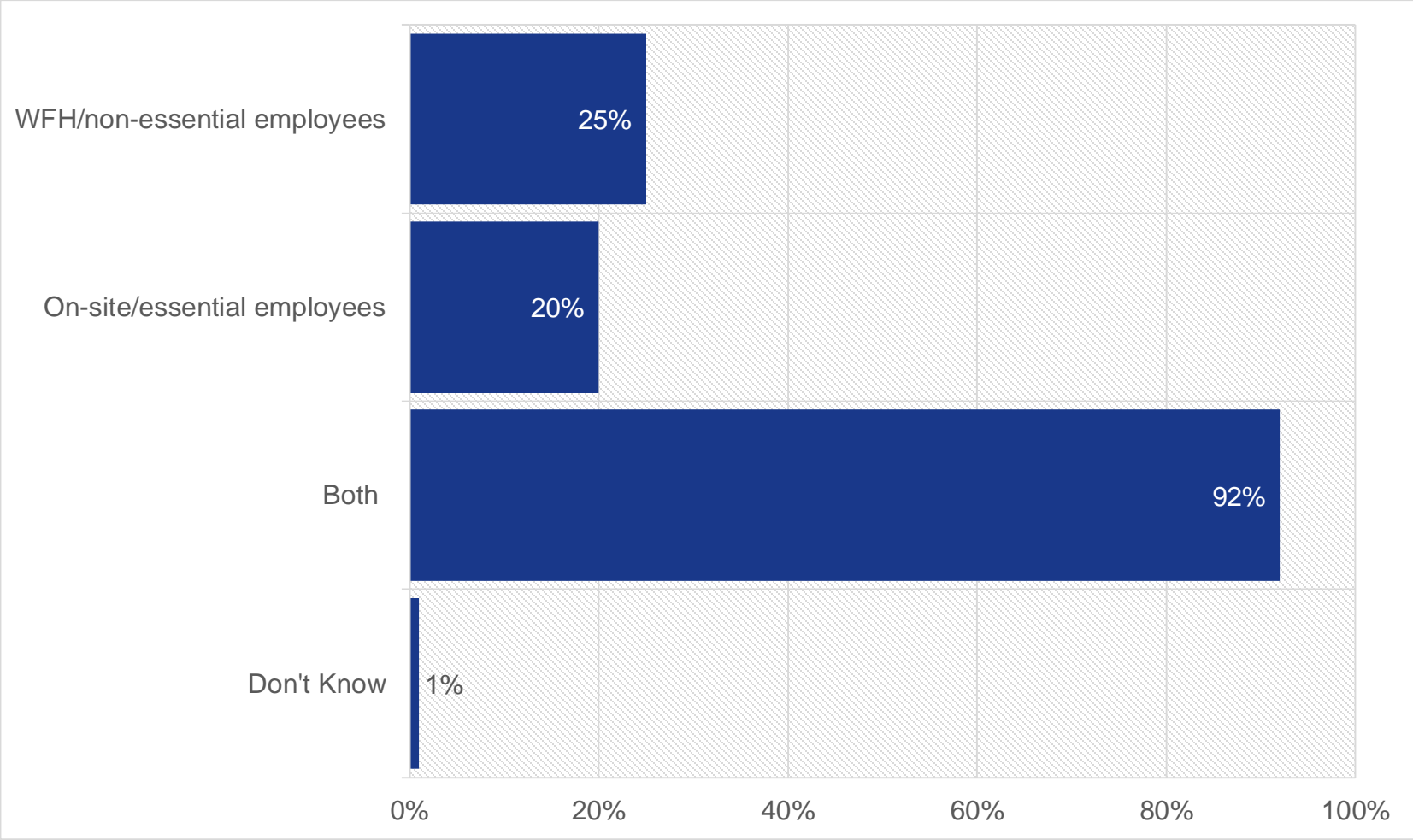
# Baseline Company Types



Which of the following best describes your employer's culture? (Check ONE)

# Where Employees Primarily Work



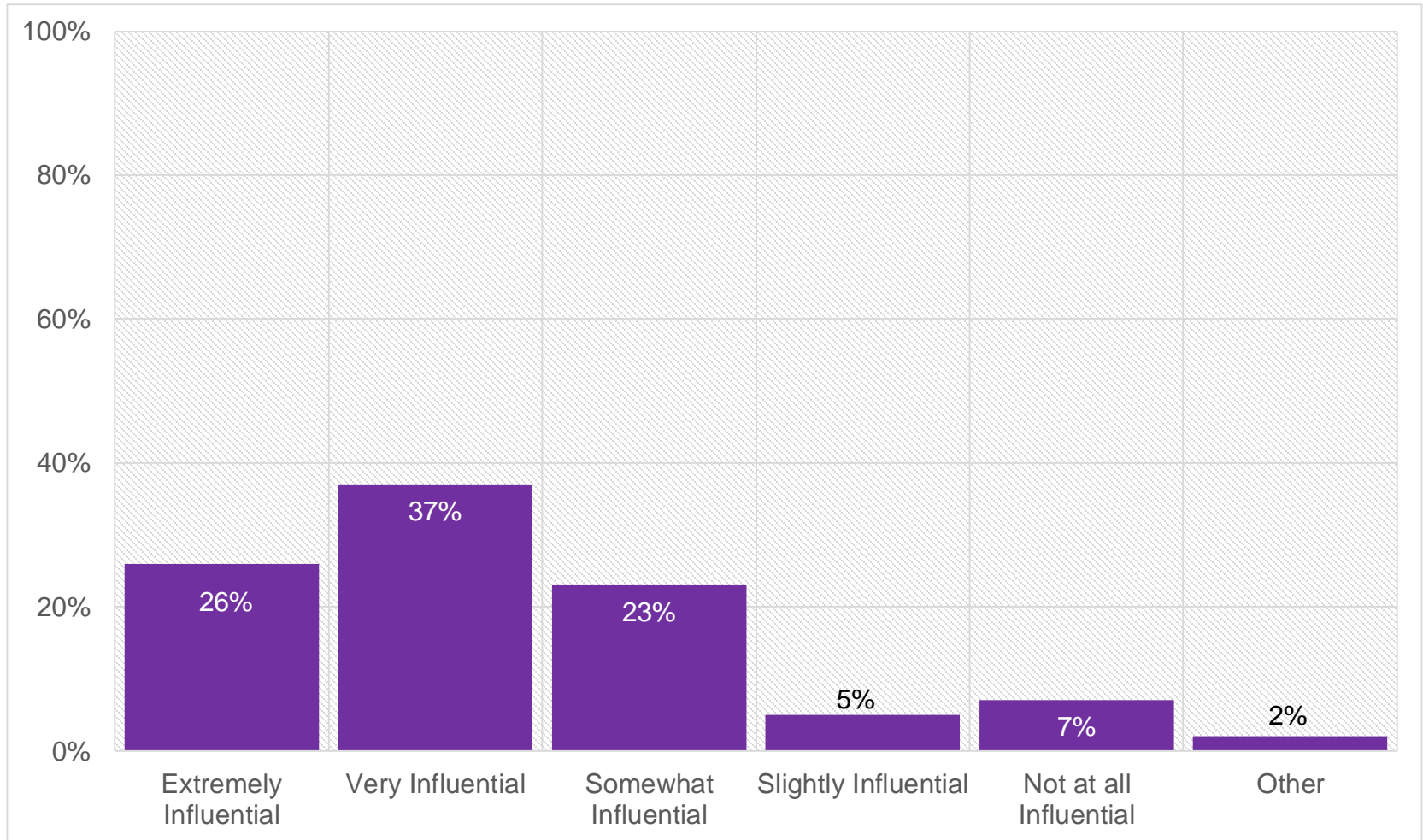From where are you working during the majority of your work week?

# Since Q4 2020, Companies Have Had..
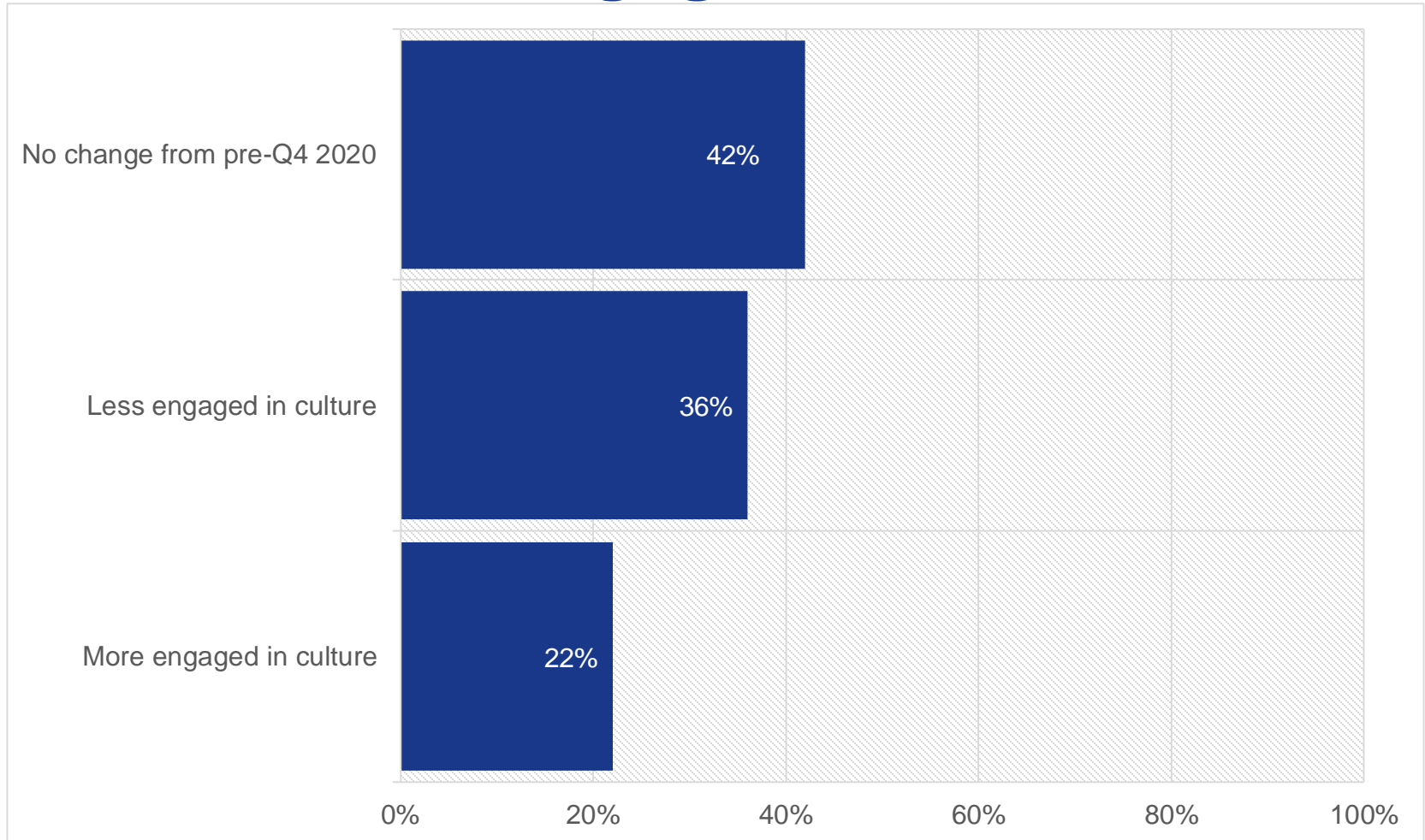


Since Q4 2020, has your company had:

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# Influence of Employer's Culture on Retention



After a year of the COVID19 pandemic, to what degree does your employer's culture influence your decision to stay with your employer?
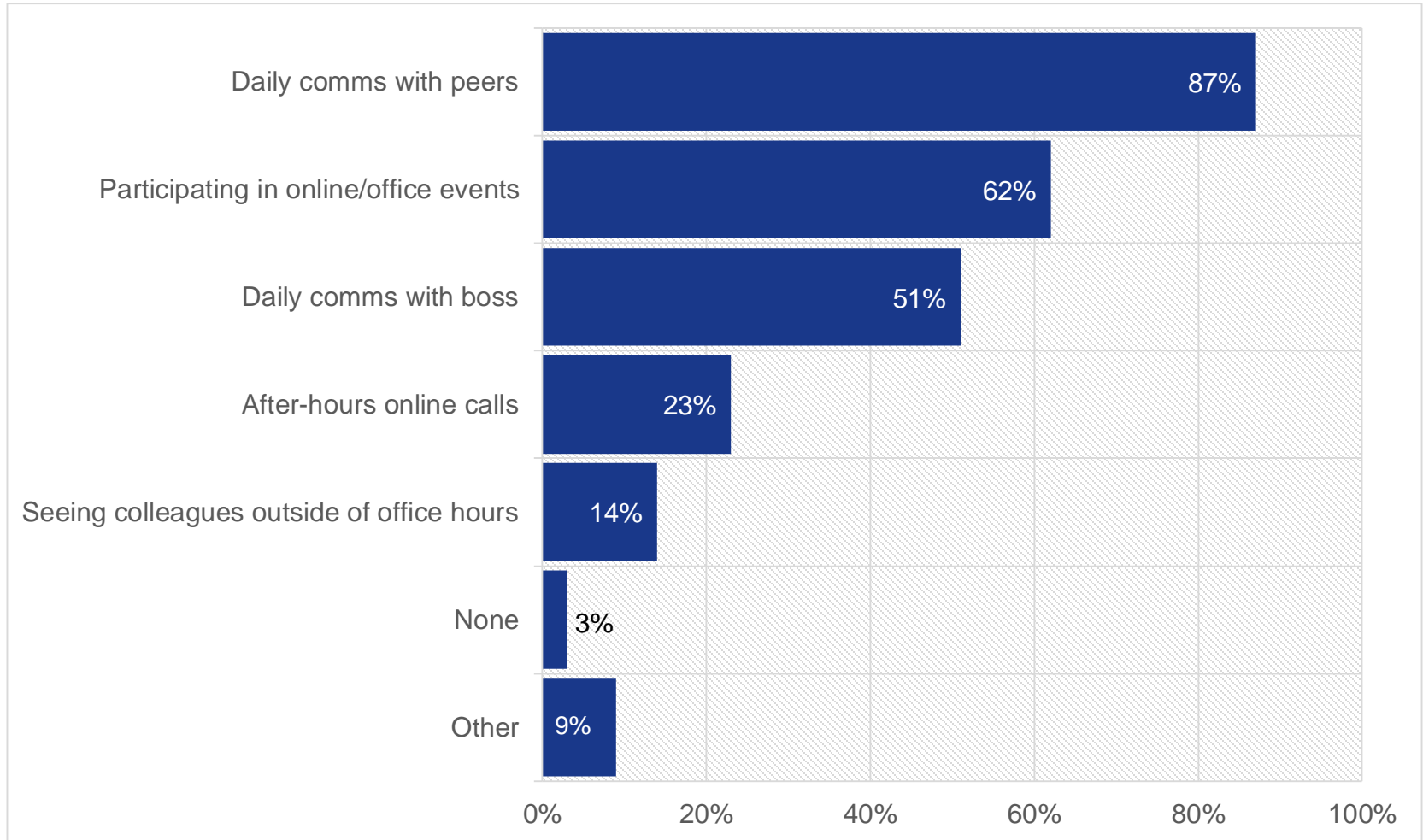
# How WFH Impacted Cultural Engagement



Chart: How WFH Impacted Cultural Engagement
- No change from pre-Q4 2020: 42%
- Less engaged in culture: 36%
- More engaged in culture: 22%

How has working from home/remotely (full- or part-time) affected your engagement in your company's culture?
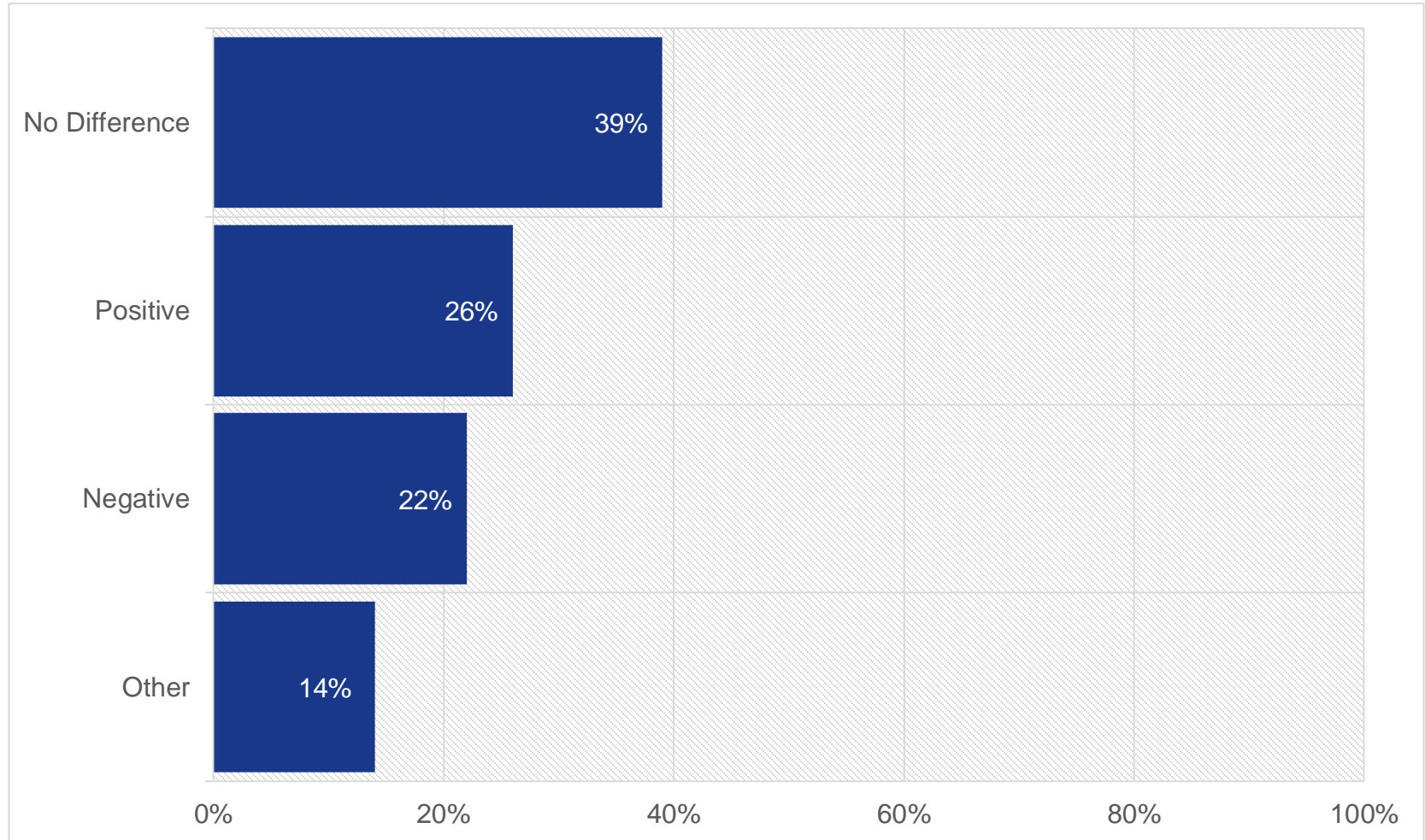
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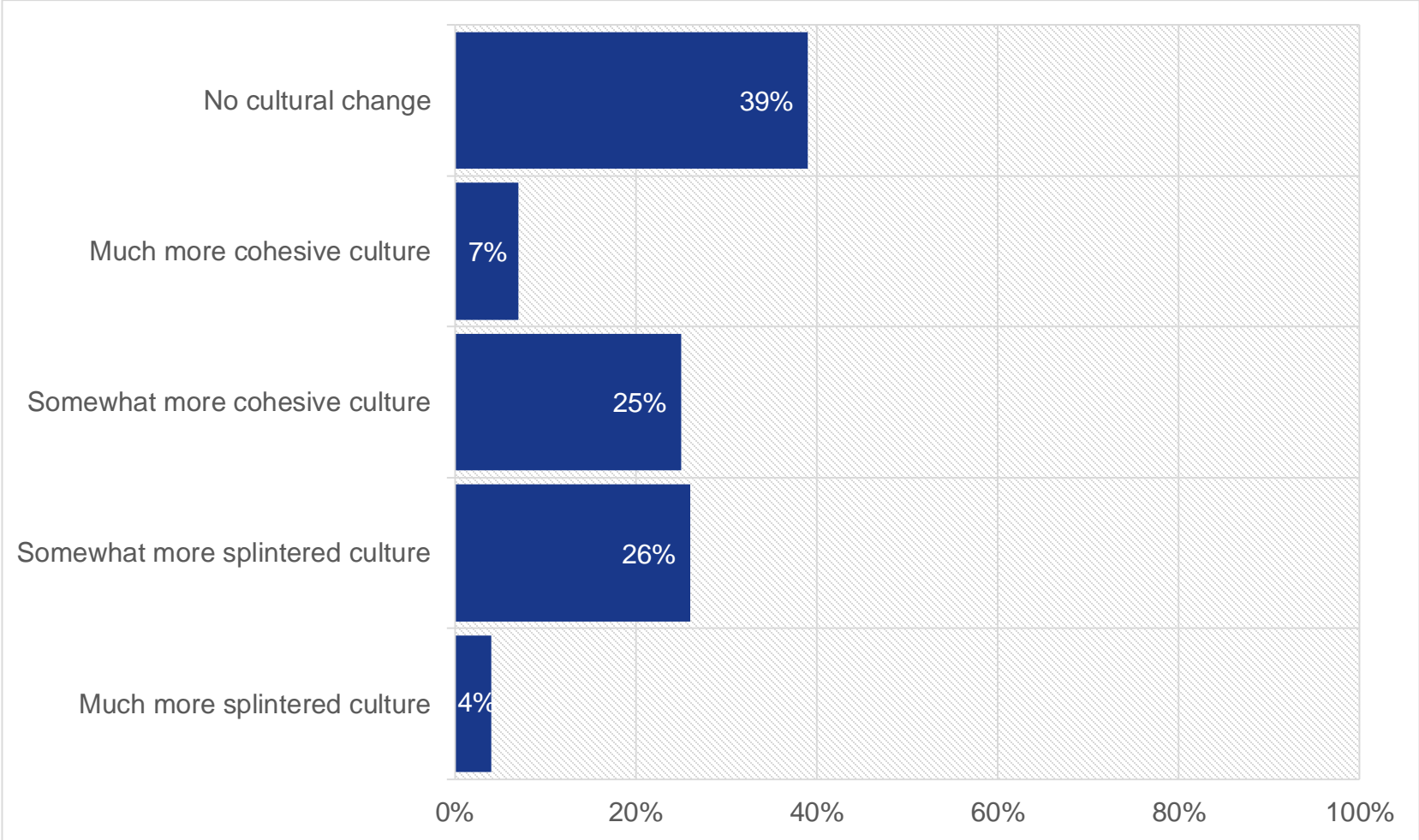# Employees Help Maintain Culture by..



How are you personally helping to maintain your company's culture?

# Effect of On-Site and Remote Employees on Company Culture



Does having remote and on-site employees during the pandemic have a positive or negative impact on your company's culture?
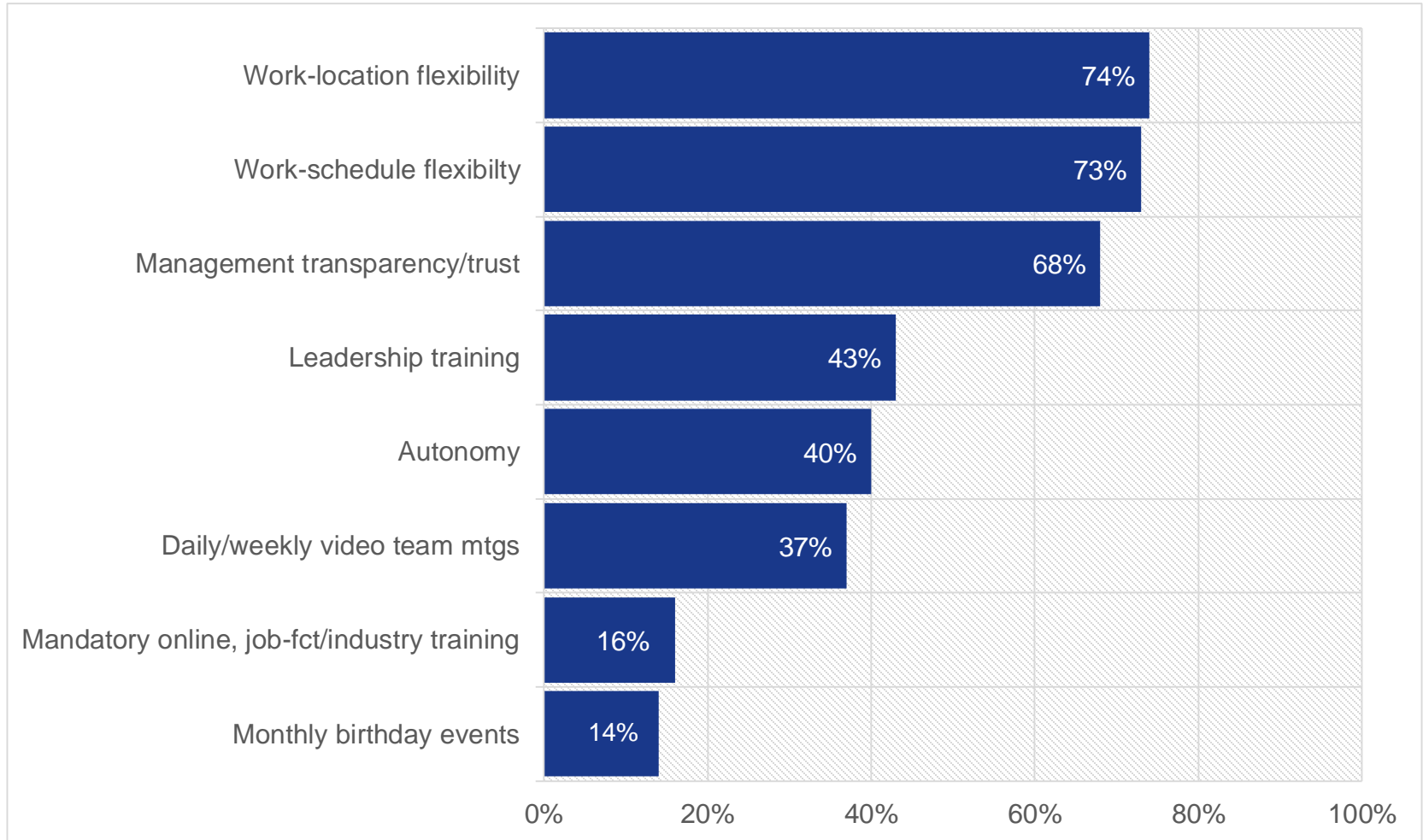
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# Change in Company Culture since Q4 2020



Please indicate any change in your company's culture since Q4 2020:

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# Desired Company Culture Elements for 2021

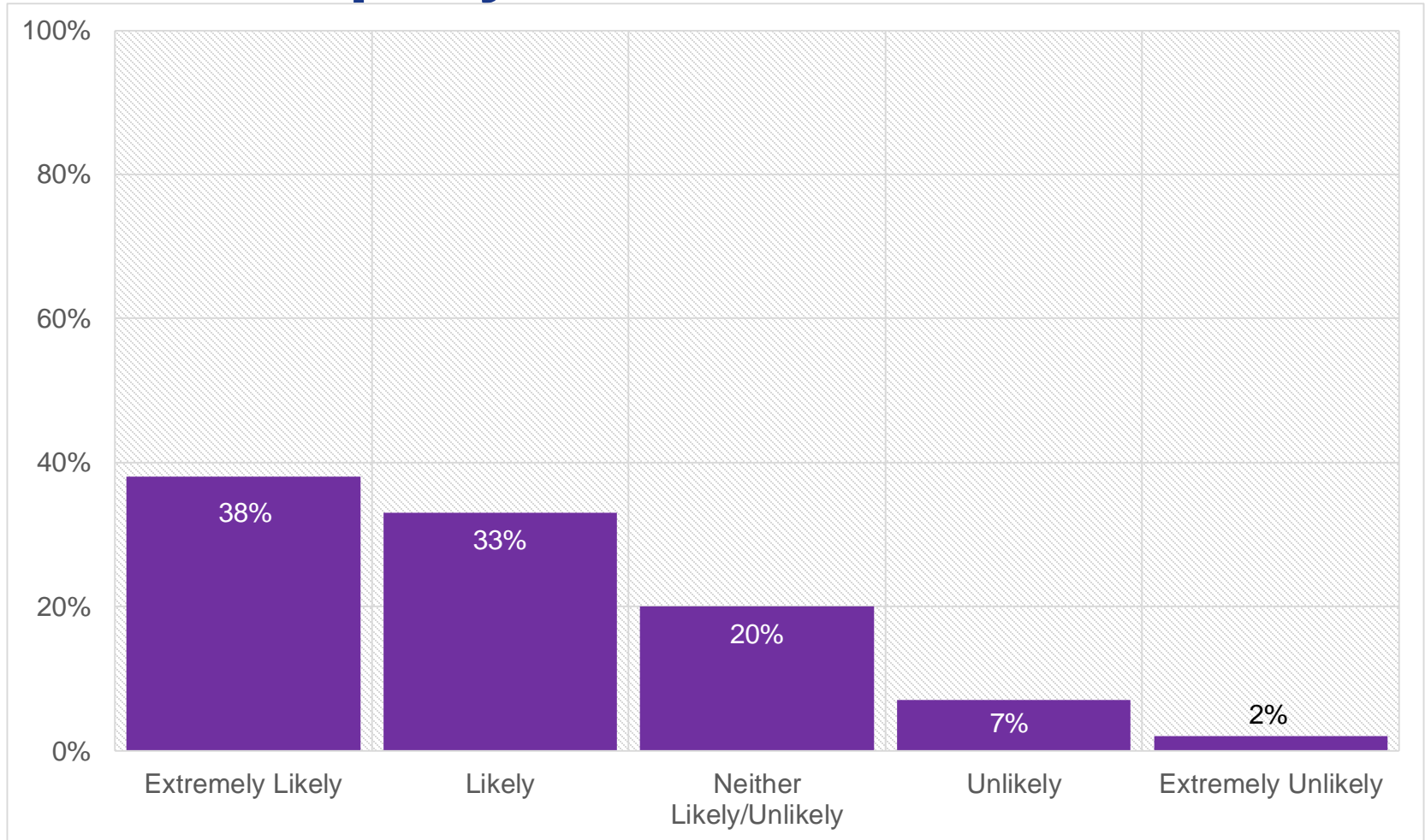| Element | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Work-location flexibility | 74% |
| Work-schedule flexibilty | 73% |
| Management transparency/trust | 68% |
| Leadership training | 43% |
| Autonomy | 40% |
| Daily/weekly video team mtgs | 37% |
| Mandatory online, job-fct/industry training | 16% |
| Monthly birthday events | 14% |

After a year of COVID19 and a work-from-home/remote model, which
elements of your company's culture do you want in 2021?

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# Likelihood to Stay with Employer as a Result of WFH/Remote
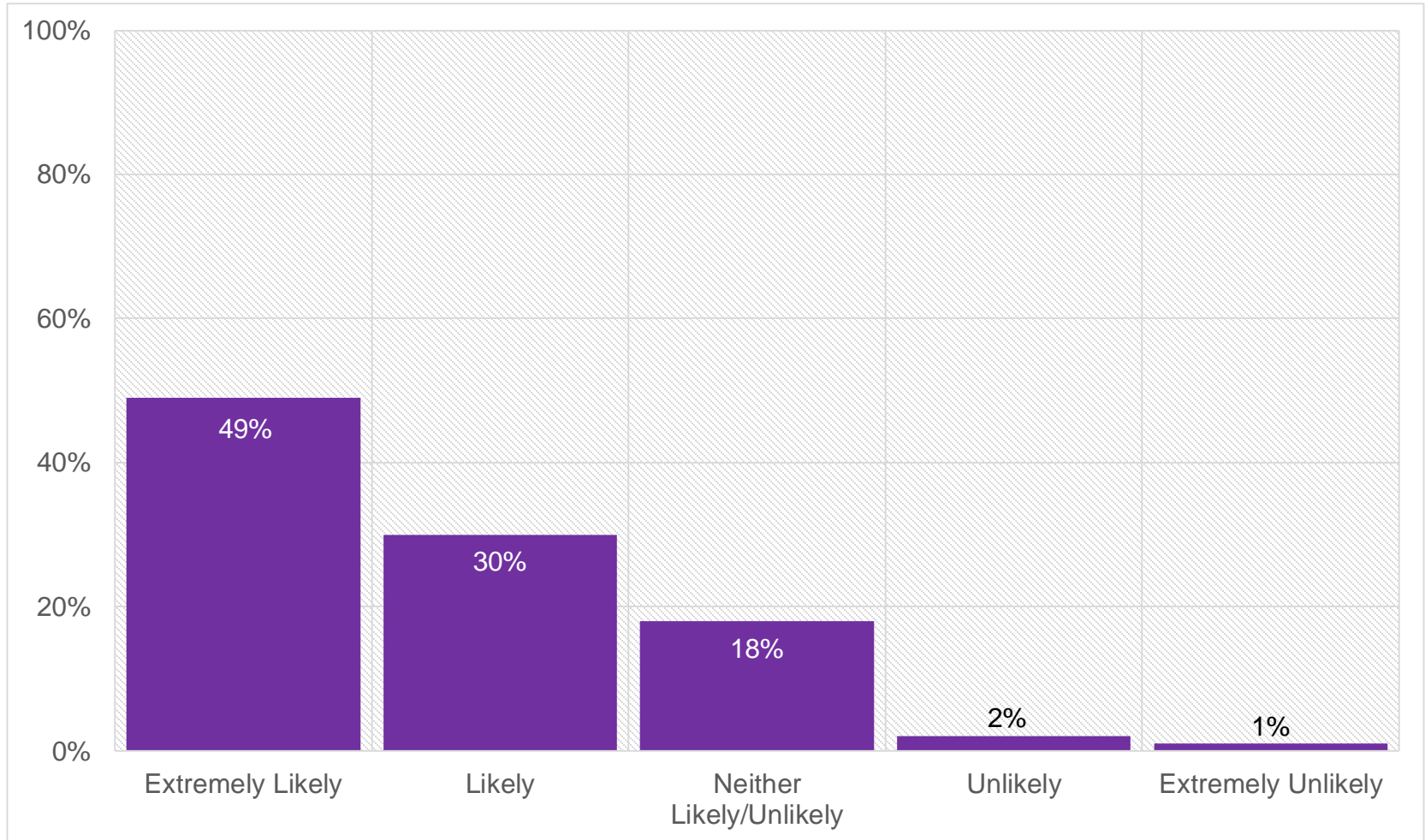


As a result of the work-from-home/remote-work environment, what is the likelihood that you will stay with your current employer?

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# Likelihood to Stay with Employer If Company Returns to WFOffice



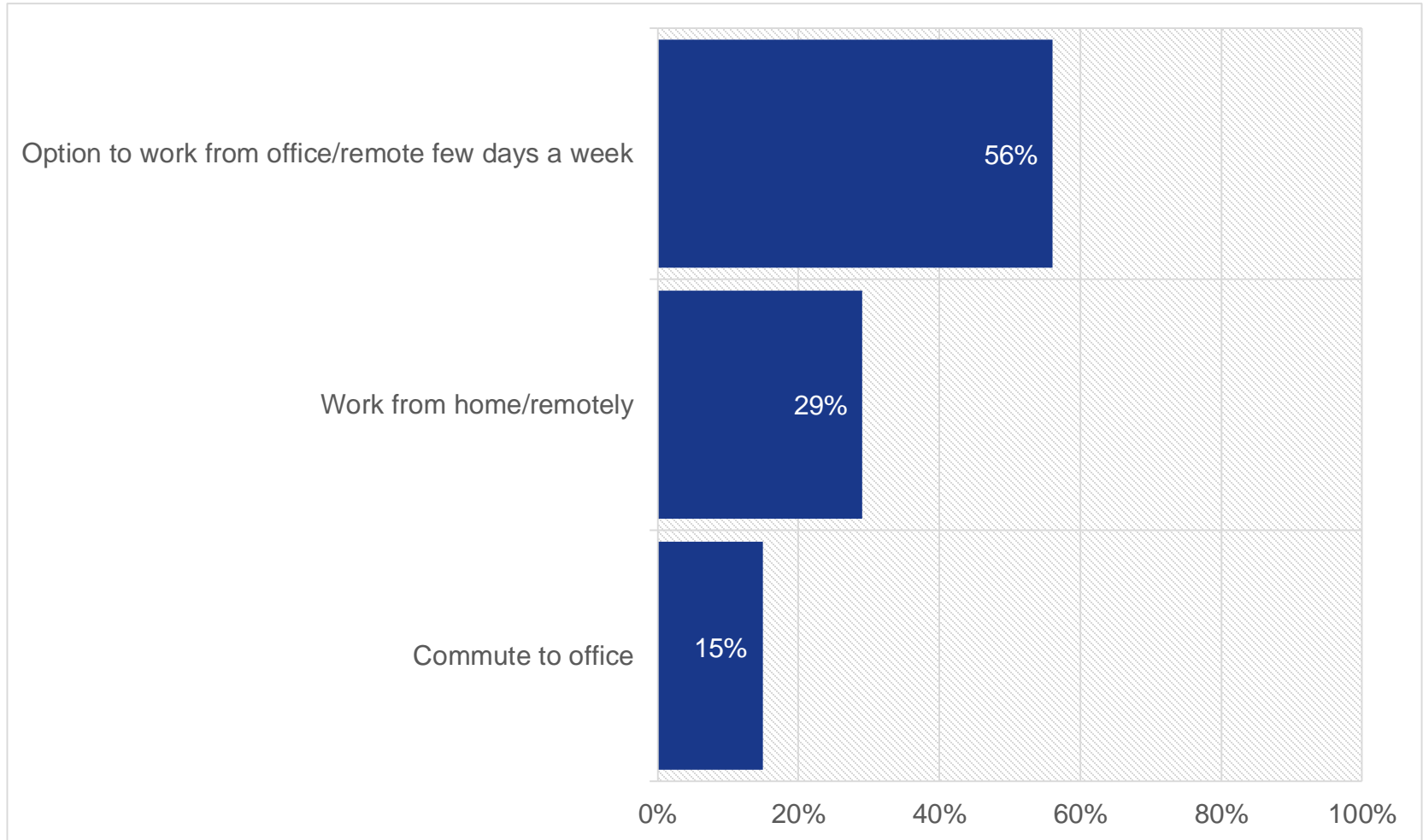| Category | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Extremely Likely | 38% |
| Likely | 33% |
| Neither Likely/Unlikely | 20% |
| Unlikely | 7% |
| Extremely Unlikely | 2% |

If your company were to return to a working-from-the-office model, what's the likelihood you will stay with your current employer?

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# Importance of Company Culture Attributes in 2021

| Rank Order of Attributes |
| --- |
| 1. Management Transparency/Trust |
| 2. Work-*schedule* Flexibility |
| 3. Work-LOCATION Flexibility |
| 4. Autonomy |
| 5. Leadership Training |
| 6. Daily/weekly Video Team Meetings |
| 7. Mandatory Online Job-Function/Industry Trainings |
| 8. Monthly Birthday Events |

Please rank the 2021 company culture attributes from 1-8 where
1 = most important.

# Winter 2021 Preferred Work Environment

Option to work from office/remote few days a week — 56%

Work from home/remotely — 29%

Commute to office — 15%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

In the winter of 2021, what is your preferred work environment?

# Ideal Company Culture for 2021

| Top Qualitative Themes (Alpha Order) |
|:---:|
| Collaboration |
| Communication |
| Flexibility |
| Inclusivity |
| Remote/Home |
| Transparency |
| Trust |

Please describe your ideal company culture for 2021:

# Ideal Culture Quotes

A collaborative environment that allows for schedule/location flexibility and encourages diversity and leadership opportunities

My ideal company culture is one where I'm able to have autonomy, trust, development opportunities and work-life balance.

Autonomous and flexible decision making in managing schedules and staff

Understanding the self-discipline to work from home; staying connected

Continue to engage our employees on a personal level regardless of location

Everyone gets back to work in the office every day and supports the work of all those working in the factory who never had the option to work from home.

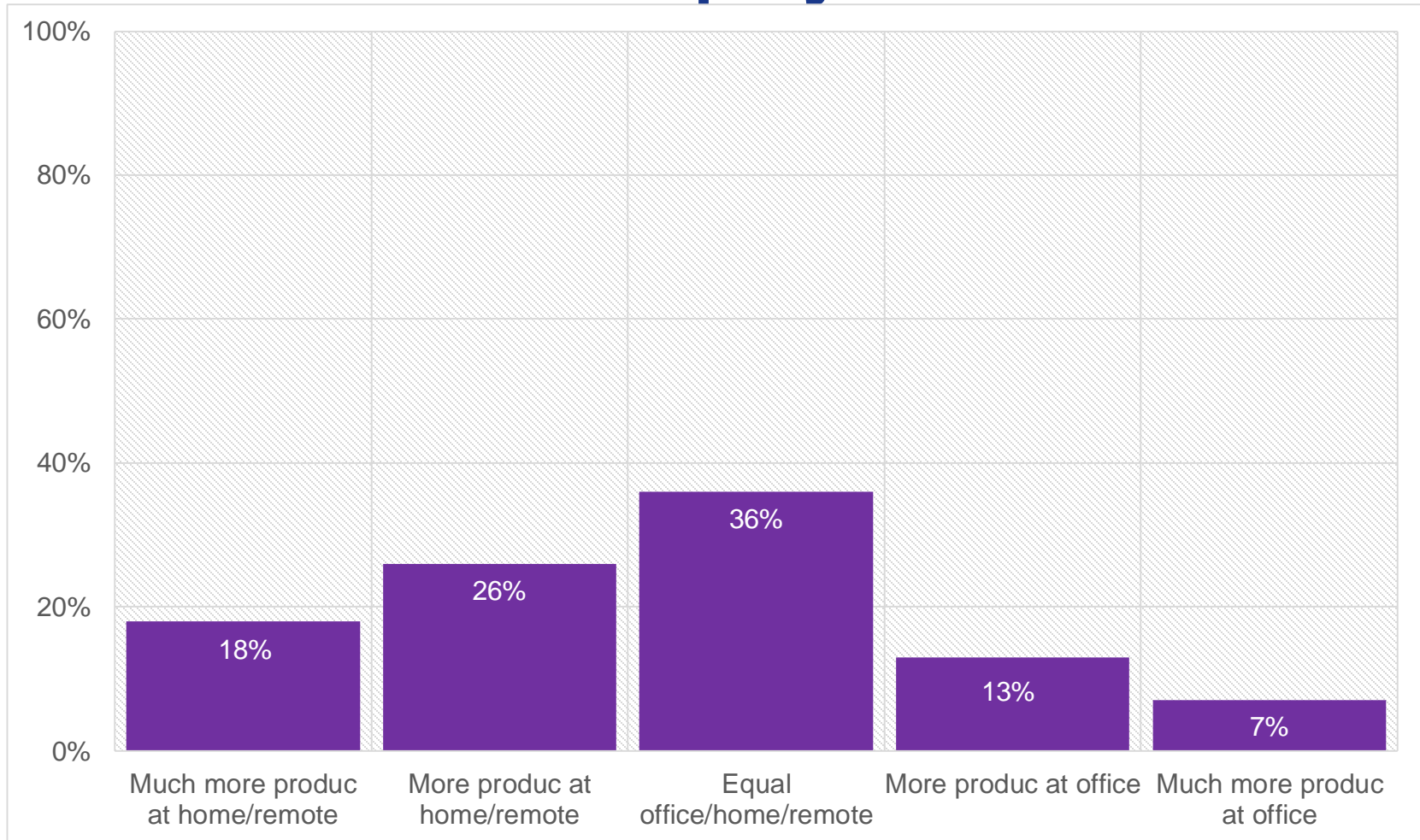[Fewer] factions between those forced into the office and those who work from home

Work where you want; office or home; as long as your job is getting done it should not matter where or when you get it done; trust.
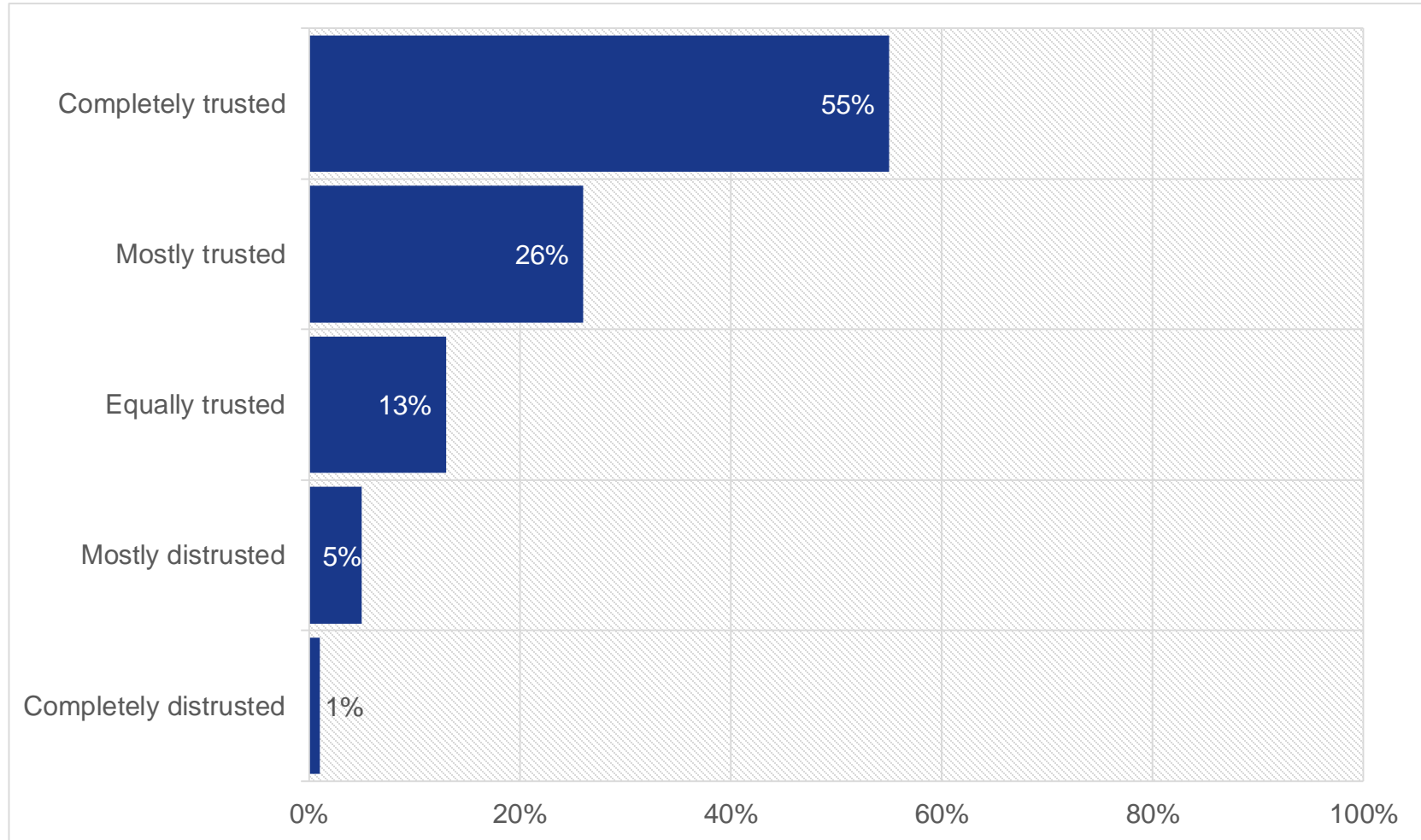
# Work-Life Balance Rating
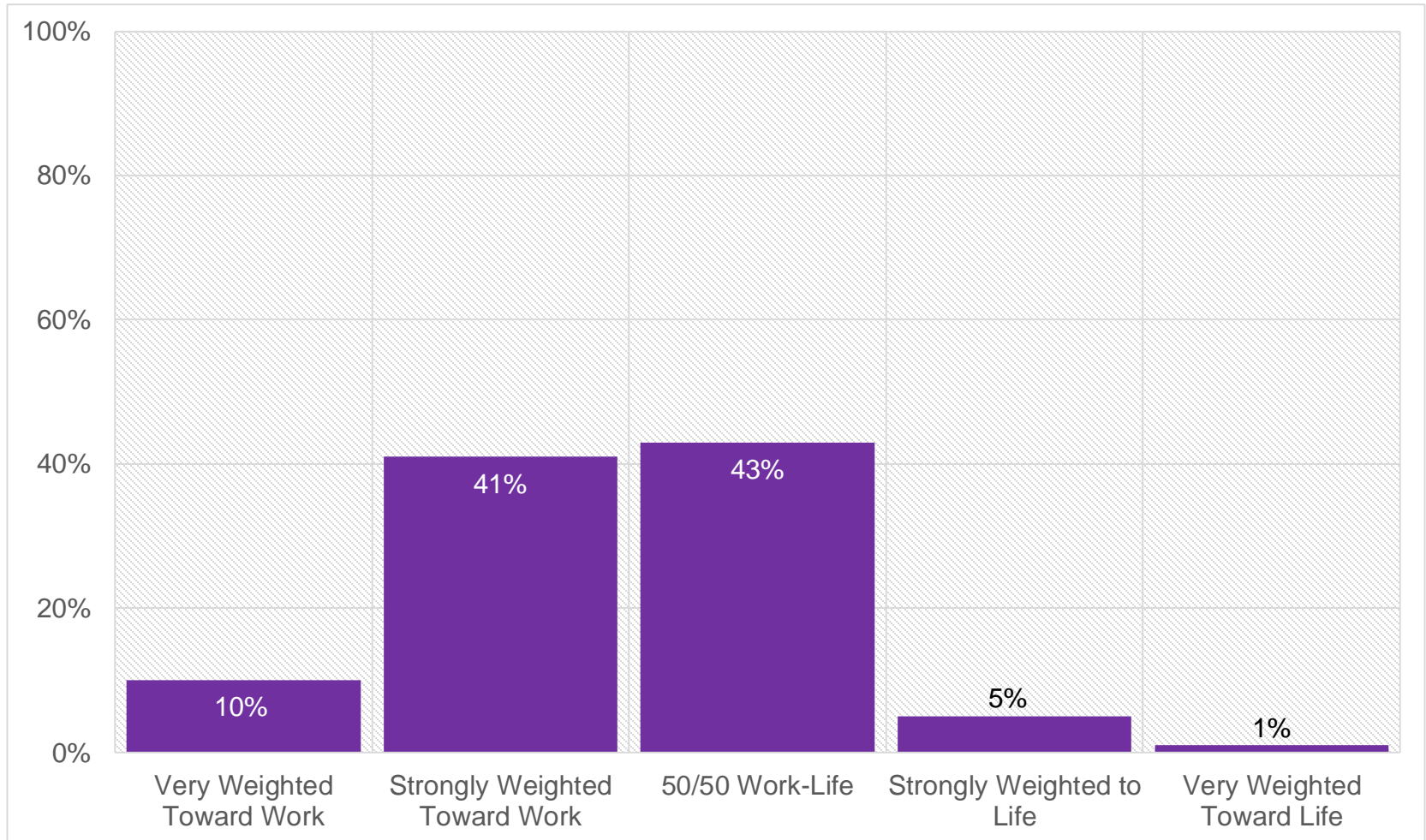


How would you rate your current work-life balance?

# Home/Remote Productivity vs. From Employer's Office



Please indicate your level of productivity from your home/remote location vs.
at your employer's office location:

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# Employees' Perceptions of Management's Trust for Completing Work Remotely



When working from home/remote (full-part-time), to what degree do you feel management trusts your abilities to complete the work?

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# Importance of Employer-Sponsored Supports for WFH/Remote

| Ranking of Needed Supports |
|---|
| 1. Work-*schedule* Flexibility |
| 2. Communication from Management |
| 3. Computer Hardware/Software |
| 4. Work-team Outreach |
| 5. Tech Support |
| 6. WFH Policy Updates/2021 Plans |
| 7. Local Childcare/Teaching-Support Options |
| 8. Other |

Please rank your needs for employer-sponsored support for working from home/remotely from 1-8 where 1 = most important.

MHI.

# Greatest Challenges of Working Remotely

| Top Qualitative Themes  (Alpha Order) |
|---|
| Access to ideas/office supplies |
| Balancing work/life boundaries |
| Collaboration/communication/connecting with others |
| Distractions (kids, home details) |
| Isolation from team |
| Work/life balance |

What is your greatest challenge of working from home/remotely?

# Challenges of Remote-Work Quotes

Access to tools available in the office

Connecting with customers. Zoom is a great tool but struggle to build relationships and meeting consistency.

Extended hours, sometimes I can't get away from the office.

Realistic meeting hours/schedule and turning off the computer to experience life remotely.

Children home from school

Feeling isolated – my work is very siloed so I do not have peers that I can even work with remotely.

Missing the face-to-face collaboration and socialization at the office

MHI

# Greatest Employee Strengths from Working Remotely

| Top Qualitative Themes  (Alpha Order) |
|:---:|
| Communication |
| Discipline |
| Efficiency |
| Flexibility |
| Focus |
| Multitasking |
| Productivity |

What has become your greatest employee strength as a result of working from home/remotely?

# Greatest Employee Strengths Quotes

Ability to better balance work with family time and health goals

Being hyper-focused on the days when I'm working in the office.

Communication, it has always been important to me, so I have just continued to find ways to connect with coworkers.

I am much more productive, and I have more time to connect with my team.

Autonomy

Empathy and the ability to work independently, but still stay connected to team

Flexible, able to connect with people, don't waste time in hallway conversations because I'm talking just to be nice.

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