



REALIZE STRATEGIES
People Driving Purpose.

APRIL 2020 SURVEY RESULTS:

Trends and Best Practices for Supporting Remote Workers During COVID-19 and Beyond

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Introduction

- Key takeaways for leaders
- Key survey statistics



How can leaders best support employees now working from home?

- Best practices for supporting remote workers
- What do leaders need to mitigate?
- Best practices for remote communication, flexibility, and social connection

How can you engage employees when you aren't able to connect with them in person?

- Job resources and personal resources related to remote work
- How to strengthen focus, organizational support, co-worker connection, and overall enjoyment of remote work
- Adapting to a new workplace



We surveyed 65 people working remotely because of COVID-19 to uncover best practices of what organizations can do to support employees.

Key Takeaways for Leaders



- 1 Practice compassionate and collaborative leadership**
 - Actively and empathically listen to your employees to understand their needs and concerns through this time, and ensure they know it's okay to be less productive.
 - Communicate clearly, transparently, and consistently.
 - Involve your team in hard discussions, keep them up to date on COVID-19's impact on your organization to reduce feelings of uncertainty, and engage them in brainstorming ideas and solutions to the challenges your organization is facing.
- 2 Be available to employees and provide clarity on expectations and deliverables.**
 - Employees don't need to be micromanaged right now. But without regular face to face interactions, many will need their supervisor to be even more clear on expectations and deadlines for deliverables, and particularly clear that expectations are not the same as before, given the current situation.

Key Takeaways for Leaders



3 Incorporate tools and resources to support employees.

- Talk to your employees about what they need, what would help them be more productive, and what would help them feel more connected with each other. This may include more video calls, instant messaging, bringing home pieces from their workstation, or providing a budget for ordering equipment.
- Ensure people have information on mental health related benefits.



Of the 65 remote workers who participated:

- **80%** had not regularly worked remotely before.
- **50%** do not have access to a Work From Home Policy.
- **50%** have flexible schedules vs. set start and end times.
- **45%** do not regularly take breaks and get outside.
- **40%** work with one or more children at home.
- **55%** are worried about COVID-19 impacting their job security.



How can leaders best support employees now working from home?

Best Practices for Supporting Remote Workers



There is no “one best way” to support remote workers.

Leaders need to be flexible, understanding, supportive, and provide a variety of communication options to employees in order to support the individual needs of each person.

Support them as **people first**, and **employees second**.





What Do Leaders Need To Mitigate?

Uncertainty is a key stressor impacting people's mental health and productivity, both personally and professionally.

Without clear, consistent, and regular communication from leadership, employees may be feeling stress from:

- A lack of support and direction
- A lack of clear expectations
- Fear of layoffs or the stress of being one of the remaining employees

These stressors are in addition to general stress about how long the pandemic will last, the effect on the economy, the effect on their family and friends, and the isolation felt from social distancing.

Compassionate leadership is key.



Best Practices for Remote Communication

When asked what has helped improve their remote work experience, **communication** was the most important factor mentioned.

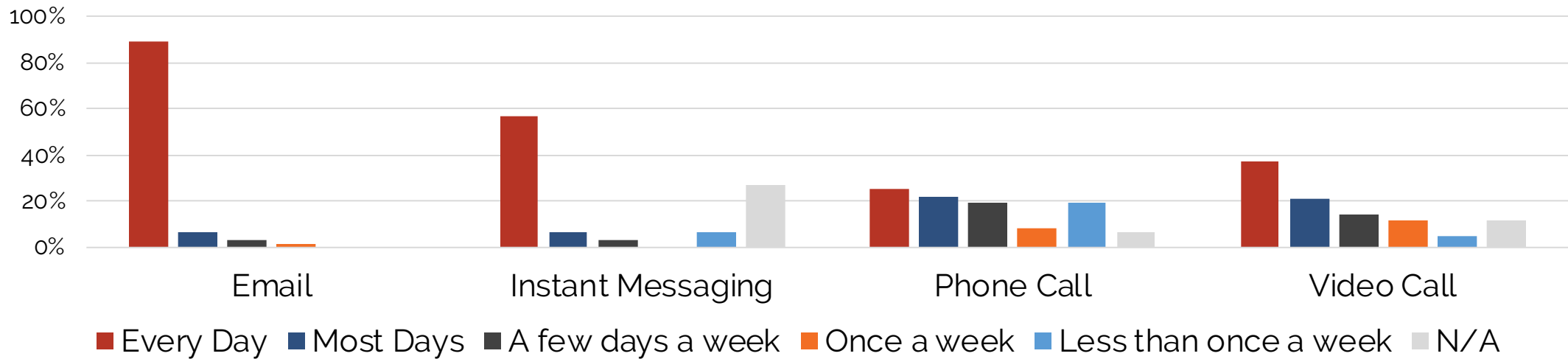
People appreciate having:

- Regular check-ins (daily or weekly) and team meetings (phone or video)
- Lunchtime drop-in video calls
- Regular updates from leadership on the state of the organization and expressing support for employees
- Communications outlining mental health benefits and other resources
- Training sessions on using new tools and software

Tools for Remote Communication



How often do you communicate using the following methods?



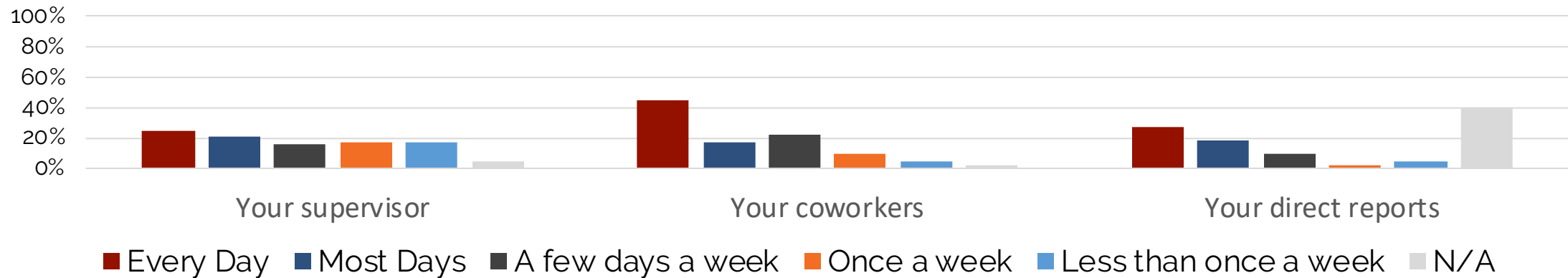
Email remains the most common form of communication, but almost **60%** of people use instant messaging every day and almost **60%** use video calls every day or most days. Most of the communication-related responses regarding what has worked well for people included the use of video calls and instant messaging.

It is important for leaders to ensure lines of communication are open, transparent, and supportive, and to **listen and respect what works best for the team.**



How Often Should You Be Communicating?

How often do you check in with your supervisor, coworkers, and direct reports?



How often to communicate depends on the individual and organizational culture. People may need less communication as they adjust to remote working. **For example** here at Realize, once we started working remotely, we added daily drop-ins for more face-to-face interaction. However, after a few weeks people were feeling overwhelmed with meetings and since we had established a routine, we felt comfortable reducing the number of drop-ins.

Ask your employees what is best for them and make the needed adjustments.



Best Practices for Flexibility

When asked what has helped **improve their remote work experience**, participants greatly appreciated having more **flexibility** and **understanding** from leaders.

Participants recommended:

- Allowing for flexible schedules and encouraging employees to take breaks when needed to support families and their own health and wellness
- Supporting people with children at home
- Clear communication that expectations and protocols have changed (e.g., time to complete projects, providing extra support, extending sick leave, etc.)

Create a safe environment and culture for people to discuss what may be newly impacting their work (e.g., childcare, anxiety) and what reasonable solutions can be reached to support employees while still properly serving the clients and community.

Flexibility is about accepting that **productivity is different now, **mental health** is more important than ever, and that **compassion** is needed from everyone.**



Best Practices for Social Connection

When asked what has helped **improve their remote work experience**, participants also greatly appreciated the below **fun/social initiatives**.

- Weekly video socials and virtual happy hours
- Informal team chats and daily optional video drop-ins
- Instant messaging social group channels that make room for the humour and camaraderie that make work enjoyable. This is especially encouraged if your organization is transitioning to virtual work for the first time. (E.g., Slack)

For example, here at Realize Strategies, we do bi-weekly Thirsty Thursdays, which we have continued through Zoom while working remotely. Sometimes we play virtual Pictionary or do pub quizzes. We use Slack regularly for both work and non-work conversations, which has helped maintain the normalcy of casual conversations.



How can you engage employees when you aren't able to connect with them in person?



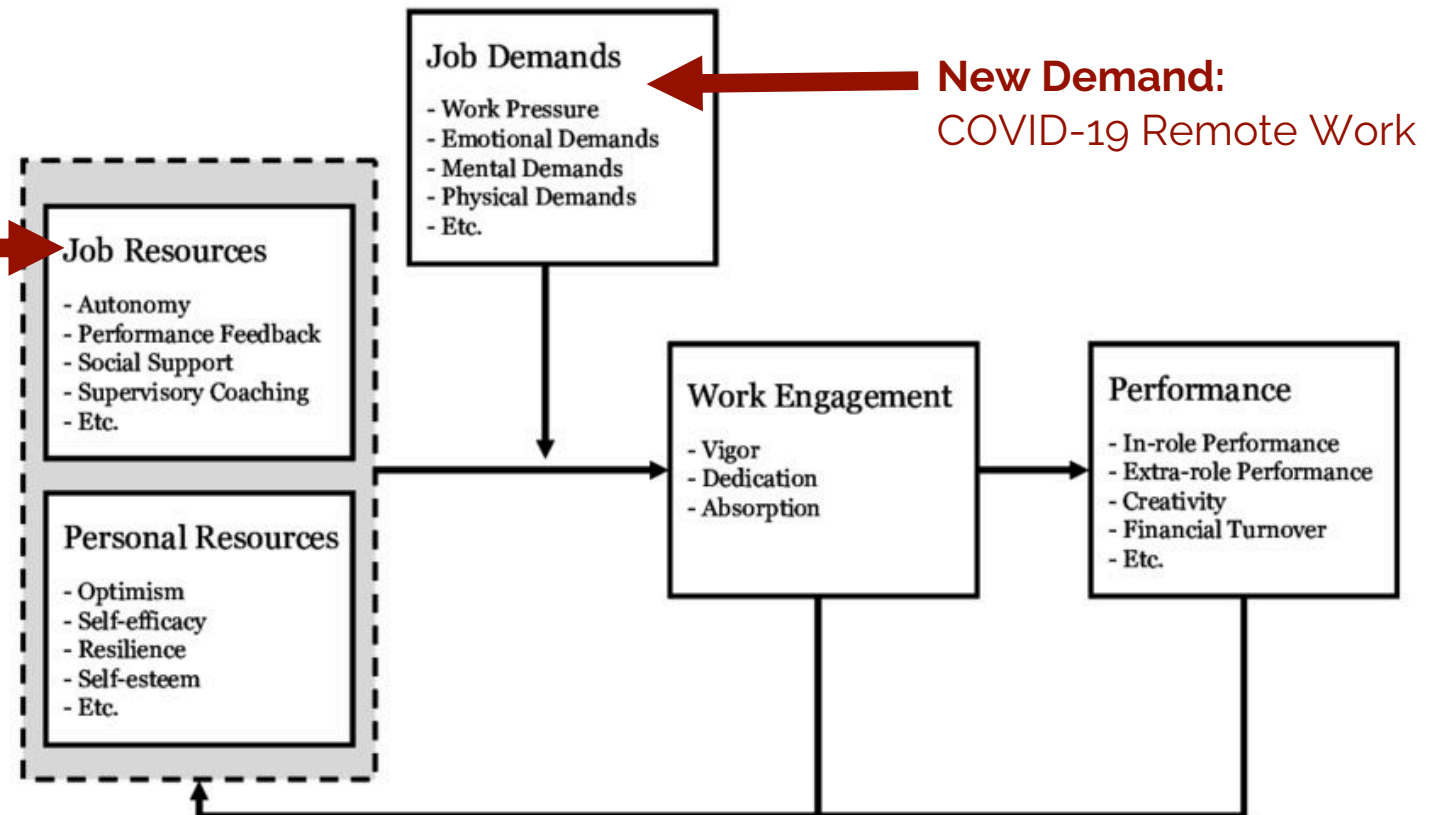
Understanding the Big Picture



Having more job and personal resources helps **offset the impact of job demands** on engagement and performance. Leaders can **increase job resources** to support employees through this new demand of COVID-19 Remote Work.

Important Job Resources to improve for remote workers:

- Supervisor Clarity
- Supervisor Availability
- Communication Frequency
- Communication Tools
- Policies and Resources



Bakker, A.B. (2009). Building engagement in the workplace. In R. J. Burke & C.L. Cooper (Eds.), The peak performing organization (pp. 50-72). Oxon, UK: Routledge.



Job Resources Related to Remote Work

Leaders can strengthen these resources in order to improve the remote work experience for employees:

- **Supervisor Clarity and Availability:** Communicate clear expectations and deliverables for projects and tasks. Be reasonably available to offer direction when employees get “stuck” in a project or task. This ensure employees feel supported and know what to focus on.
- **Communication Frequency and Methods:** Provide multiple options for communication to allow for formal and informal meetings, face-to-face interactions, and work with employees to understand how frequently they need different types of communication.
- **Remote Work Schedule and Breaks:** Allow for schedule flexibility and encourage breaks. Many people may feel guilty for taking breaks but it is vital for their mental and physical health, especially now.



Job Resources Related to Remote Work

Leaders can also strengthen these resources in order to improve the remote work experience for employees:

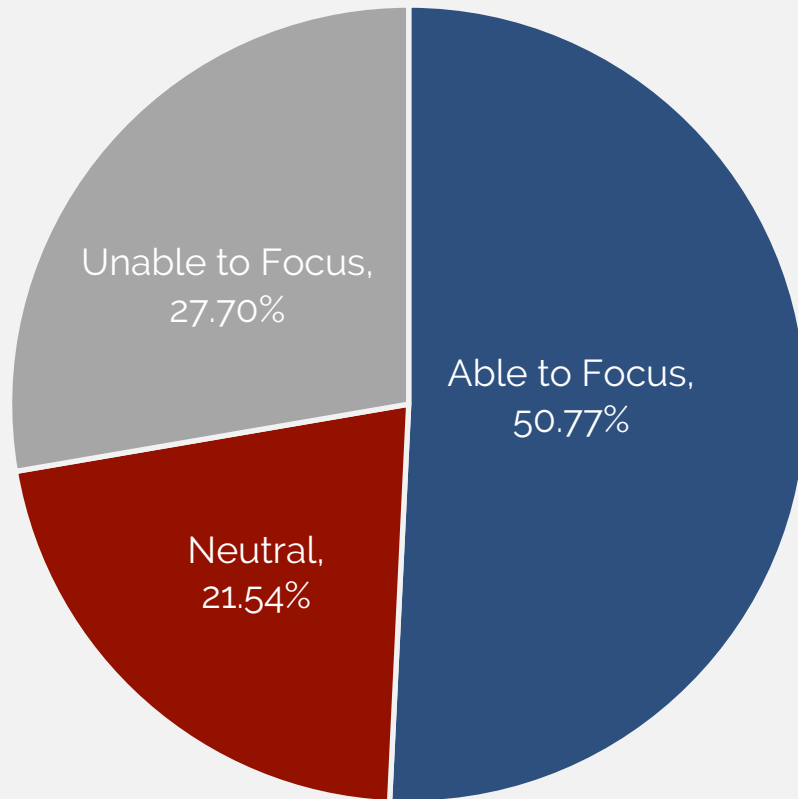
- **Work From Home Policy:** Create or review your Work From Home policy to ensure employees have clear expectations and are connected with needed resources.
- **Project Management Tools:** Where appropriate, implement project management tools (Smartsheet, Asana, Excel) to help align teams and increase collaboration when they are not physically working with others on their team in order to reduce miscommunication.
- **Workspace and Equipment:** Ask what support employees need in terms of equipment and their new workspace and provide a budget or allow for people to bring equipment home.

Personal Resources Related to Remote Work



The personal resources above are all individual feelings and behaviours that are strongly related to employee engagement but cannot be directly influenced by leaders. However, there are several job resources leaders can strengthen that are **highly correlated** with each of these personal resources.

I am focused while working remotely



Shifting to working remotely has been challenging for many people, and only **50%** of survey participants indicated they were able to focus while working.

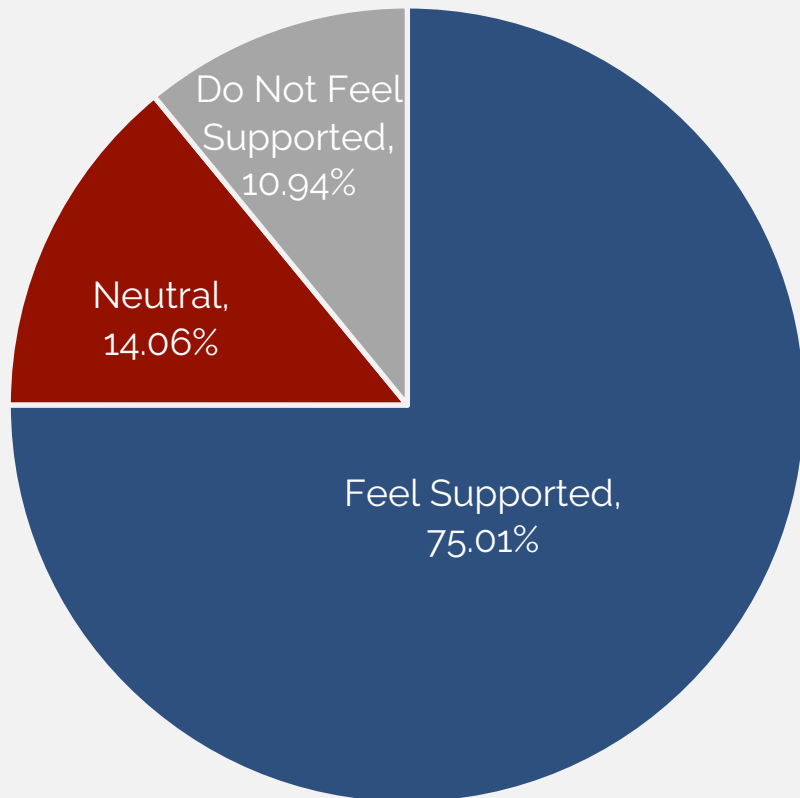
Related job resources to strengthen:

- Ensure **supervisors are available** to employees and that employees feel comfortable reaching out to them.
- Consider incorporating **video calls every day or most days** to bring in more face to face time with your team.

Feeling Supported by the Organization



I feel supported by my organization



75% of participants felt supported by their organization, which is very positive.

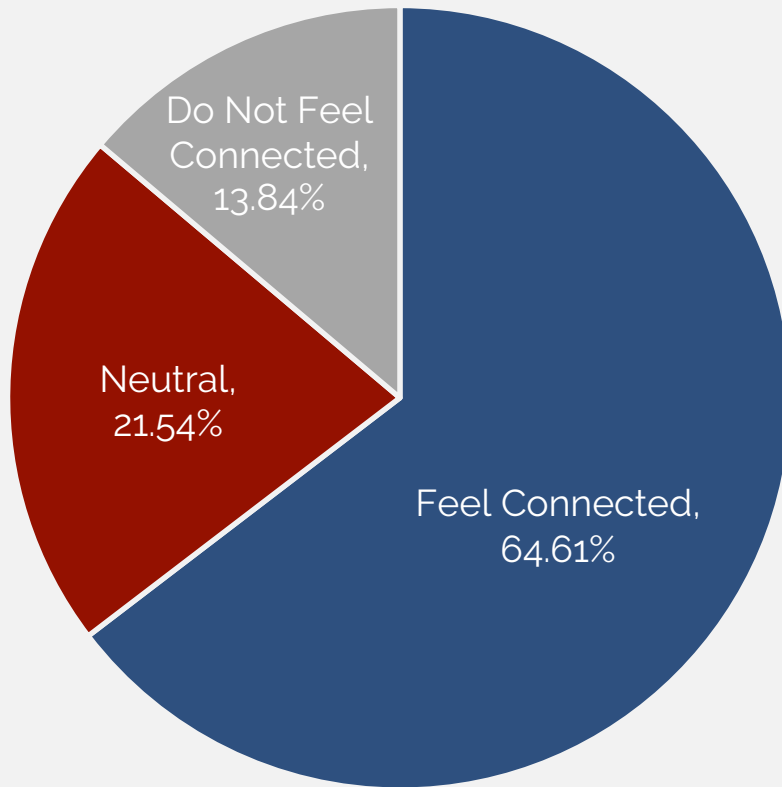
Related job resources to strengthen:

- Ensure supervisors are available, communicate fairly often, and are **clear about expectations and deliverables**. Check-in with employees to understand the support they need.
- Provide employees with a **Work From Home or similar policy** to provide additional expectations and resources.
- Add **instant messaging** as a communication tool.
- Consider a **project management** tool for increased clarity and accountability.

Feeling Connected to Coworkers



I feel connected to my coworkers



65% of participants felt connected to their coworkers, which is also important during COVID-19 and the shift to working remotely.

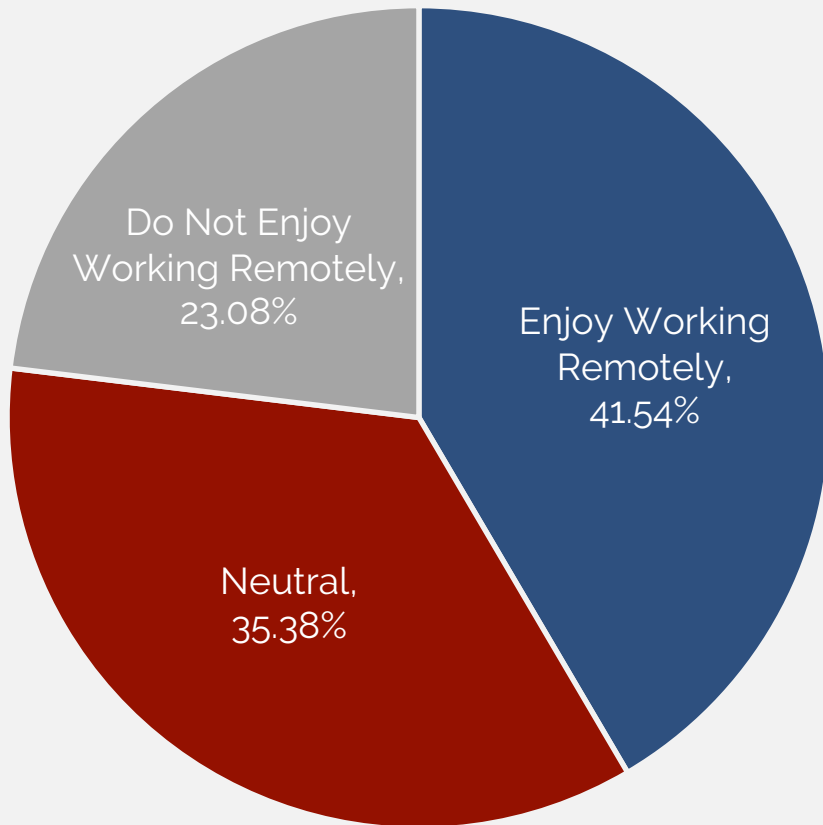
Related job resources to strengthen:

- Create opportunities for employees to **communicate regularly** with each other, including **video calls** and **instant messaging**.
- Consider organizing weekly or bi-weekly **social video calls** to maintain a social connection.
- Leaders should communicate **consistent information** to ensure all employees have the same understanding and expectations.

Enjoy Working Remotely



I enjoy working remotely



Only **42%** of participants enjoy working remotely, which will be greatly influenced by personality, preferences, and the type of job they have. Some people will never enjoy working remotely, but getting them to neutral will help their resilience.

Related job resources to strengthen:

- Incorporate **video calls** to allow for more face to face interactions.
- Ensure **supervisors are available** to employees and that employees feel comfortable reaching out to them.
- Consider a **project management** tool for increased clarity and accountability.



Adjusting to a New Workspace

Having the **right equipment and workspace** is also very important during this change. Participants appreciate being able to:

- Bring their equipment home or having a budget for a home office set up
- Connecting to the office network easily

For others, **improving their workspace** would help improve their experience:

- Many don't have space for a dedicated home office and may have children at home or other factors that impact their ability to focus
- Many don't have a comfortable and ergonomic workspace (e.g., working from a dining table rather than a desk)
- Their internet connection may cause problems or be too slow for their work

Leaders should support employees where possible and be understanding about aspects that can't be controlled.



“It is not the strongest or the most intelligent who will survive but those who can best manage change.”

-Charles Darwin



Visit the [COVID-19 Resources](#) page on our website for:

- Pro Bono Consultation
- Insight Exchange Webinars
- Realize Resilience Slack Channel
- Our curated list of COVID-19 related resources



Start a Conversation

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