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# These Organizations Show How Best To Support Female Employees Post-Pandemic

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The COVID-19 pandemic is having a disproportionate impact on women's personal and professional lives. According to the World Economic Forum (WEF), the yearlong pandemic has already set gender parity efforts globally back [by more than a generation](#).



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Deloitte Global's new report, [Women @ Work: A global outlook](#), which surveyed 5,000 women across 10 countries, shows that women's

responsibilities at work and at home have increased since the pandemic began.

These lifestyle changes and responsibilities are causing job dissatisfaction among women. Moreover, employers are not adequately providing their female employees with the policies and company culture needed to address women's needs: Only 22% of those surveyed believe that their employers have enabled them to create clear boundaries between work and personal life; most feel they have to be “always on” at work; and 63% feel their employers evaluate them based on their time spent online rather than the quality of their output. As a result, only 39% believe their organization's commitment to supporting them during this time has been sufficient.

“Women—especially women of color, LGBT+ women, sole parents and those with caregiving responsibilities—underwent significant additional work and home stresses during COVID-19, which most employers didn't or couldn't address,” says Michele Parmelee, Deloitte Global Deputy CEO and Chief People and Purpose Officer. “Many women unhappy with their current work situations are considering leaving their current employer for a more positive and supportive environment. More than half of our respondents either expect to leave their current employer within two years, or are already actively looking for work with another organization.”

However, some organizations are getting it right because they have built inclusive, high-trust cultures that offer greater programmatic support to the women in their workforce. The women who work at these organizations, identified by the survey as “gender equality leaders,” feel confident about reporting noninclusive behaviors and supported to balance work and other commitments, and they also feel that their careers are progressing as fast as they would like.

Unfortunately, these “gender equality leaders” make up a minority of organizations, representing just 4% of the total global sample surveyed in Deloitte's report. Yet, organizations can realize myriad benefits from

following the gender equality leaders' example and building inclusive, high-trust cultures where women feel supported.

## Reaping The Benefits Of Gender Equity

The benefits of prioritizing gender equality are clear for organizations and their workforces, including higher job satisfaction, higher rates of productivity and greater employer loyalty. The 4% of the companies identified as gender equality leaders by Deloitte's report have realized significant business benefits in supporting women (see chart below).



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As Parmelee notes, these benefits aren't happenstance: "Gender equality leaders take marked and deliberate steps to enable their whole workforce to thrive," she says. "And doing so isn't just good for the employees—it has positive ripple effects across their entire organization."

Women who work for gender equality leaders say their organizations have responded to employees' needs during the pandemic by establishing clear boundaries around working hours, offering paid time off and resetting work objectives so that they're more realistic in the current environment.

The survey also found that gender equality leaders are more than twice as likely as lagging organizations—31% of the global sample that have not demonstrated an inclusive culture—to offer formal mentoring programs for women (40% vs. 16%), to provide development opportunities for women (38% vs. 15%) and to offer support with childcare, including emergency childcare support (22% vs. 8%).

## Steps To Mitigate The Pandemic's Impact

While gender equality leaders may be in the minority today, organizations can take several actions to reverse the pandemic's impact on working women—and reap the benefits of supporting gender equity.

“Our survey respondents are clear about what needs to be done to reverse the pandemic's disproportionate effects on working women,” Parmelee says. Here are four recommendations to help organizations become gender equality leaders:

1. **Prioritize** work-life balance and offer flexible working options that are entrenched in the company culture, so that all employees feel they can take advantage of them.
2. **Empower** women to succeed outside of work, in order to enable success at work.
3. **Build** women's skills and experience by offering fulfilling development opportunities.
4. **Demonstrate** a visible commitment to gender equity from leaders.

“As organizations look to reopen their workplaces, those that prioritize diversity, equity and inclusion in their policies and culture, and provide tangible support for the women in their workforces, will be more resilient against future disruptions,” says Parmelee. “Additionally, they will lay the groundwork needed to propel women and gender equality forward in the workplace.”

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# Hybridized

If the future of work is hybrid, why do so many  
companies lack a vision for hybrid work?



# It's definitely hybrid

Top executives confirm that their organizations are shifting to hybrid work for all roles that aren't essential to perform on-site.

# It's also fuzzy

But two-thirds of companies lack a detailed plan for handling hybrid work.





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# The great exhaustion

One thing that burned-out employees have in  
common—leaders who have yet to get specific  
about the future of hybrid work.



# Drained

Nearly half of all employees report symptoms of burnout, but the real number is surely higher since the most burned-out people have likely left the workforce already.

# Anxiety's role

People who feel anxious about hybrid work are often the ones who are the most

Lack of

Base

work are often the ones who are the most  
burned out.

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causi

## Ambiguity's role

Especially if they have yet to hear a clear  
plan for postpandemic hybrid work.

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comm

# Sounds of silence

Yet nearly two-thirds of organizations  
have spoken vaguely, if at all, about  
postpandemic hybrid work.



# What employees are saying about the future of remote work

April 1, 2021 | Article

By Andrea Alexander, Aaron De Smet, Meredith Langstaff, and Dan Ravid

Employees want more certainty about postpandemic working arrangements—even if you don’t yet know what to tell them.

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**A**s organizations look to the postpandemic future, many are planning a hybrid virtual model that combines remote work with time in the office. This sensible decision follows solid productivity increases during the pandemic.

But while productivity may have gone up, many employees report feeling anxious and

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Our survey results make the source of anxiety clear: employees feel they've yet to hear enough about their employers' plans for post-COVID-19 working arrangements.

Organizations may have announced a general intent to embrace hybrid virtual work going forward, but too few of them, employees say, have shared detailed guidelines, policies, expectations, and approaches. And the lack of remote-relevant specifics is leaving employees anxious.

As organizational leaders chart the path toward the postpandemic world, they need to communicate more frequently with their employees—even if their plans have yet to solidify fully. Organizations that *have* articulated more specific policies and approaches for the future workplace have seen employee well-being and productivity rise.

The following charts examine our survey findings and shed light on what employees want from the future of work.

***Feeling included.*** Even high-level communication about post-COVID-19 working arrangements boosts employee well-being and productivity. But organizations that convey more detailed, remote-relevant policies and approaches see greater increases. Employees who feel included in more detailed communication are nearly five times more likely to report increased productivity. Because communicating about the future can drive performance outcomes today, leaders should consider increasing the frequency of their employee updates—both to share what's already decided and to communicate what is still uncertain.

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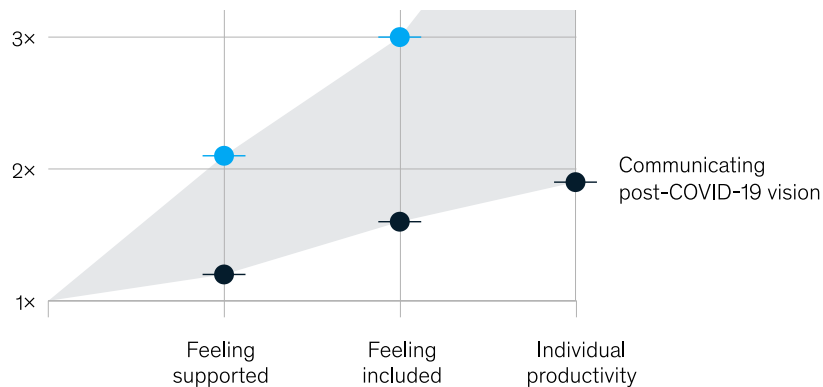
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Note: All analyses conducted while controlling for all other predictors, region, industry, company size, job level, age, gender, and parental status (n = 4,854–5,043).  
 Source: Reimagine Work: Employee Survey (Dec 2020–Jan 2021, n = 5,043 full-time employees who work in corporate or government settings)

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**Communication breakdown.** Valuable as a detailed vision for postpandemic work might be to employees, 40 percent of them say they've yet to hear about *any* vision from their organizations, and another 28 percent say that what they've heard remains vague.

**Most organizations have not clearly communicated a vision for postpandemic work.**

Employees that report  
their organization has



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**40** Not communicated

Source: Reimagine Work: Employee Survey (Dec 2020–Jan 2021, n = 5,043 full-time employees who work in corporate or government settings)

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**Anxiety at work.** At organizations that are communicating vaguely, or not at all, about the future of postpandemic work, nearly half of employees say it's causing them concern or anxiety. Anxiety is known to decrease work performance, reduce job satisfaction, and negatively affect interpersonal relationships with colleagues, among other ills. For the global economy, the loss of productivity because of poor mental health—including anxiety—might be as high as \$1 trillion per year.

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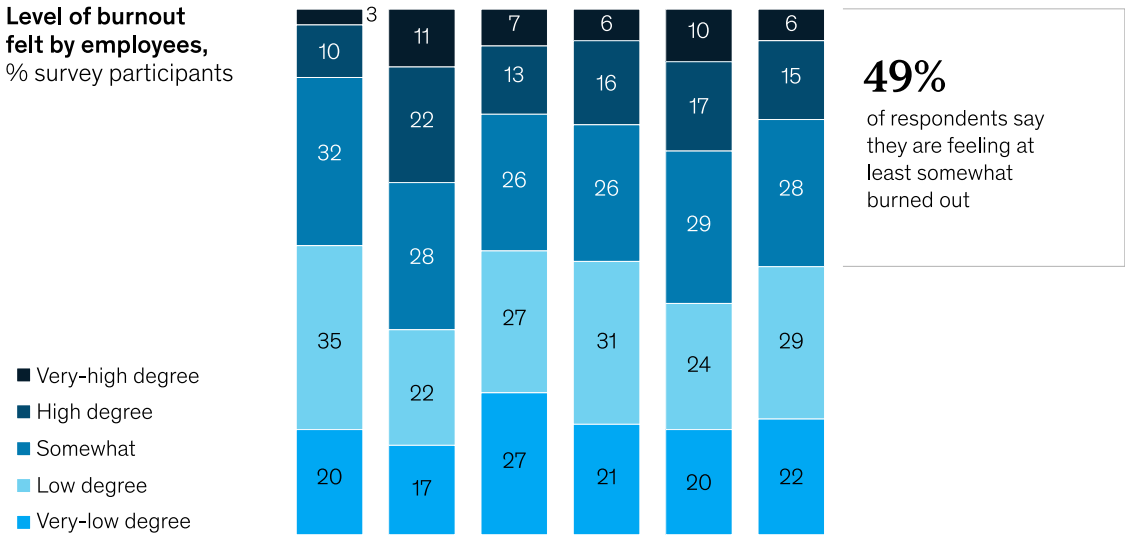
41% feel a lack of clear vision about the post-pandemic world is a cause for concern

Source: Reimagine Work: Employee Survey (Dec 2020–Jan 2021, n = 5,043 full-time employees who work in corporate or government settings)



**Burning out.** The lack of clear communication about the future of postpandemic work also contributes to employee burnout. Nearly half of employees surveyed say they’re feeling some symptoms of being burned out at work. That may be an underestimate, since employees experiencing burnout are less likely to respond to survey requests, and the most burned-out individuals may have already left the workforce—as have many women, who’ve been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 crisis.

Almost half of all employees report being at least somewhat burned out—and that’s likely an underrepresentation of the real number.



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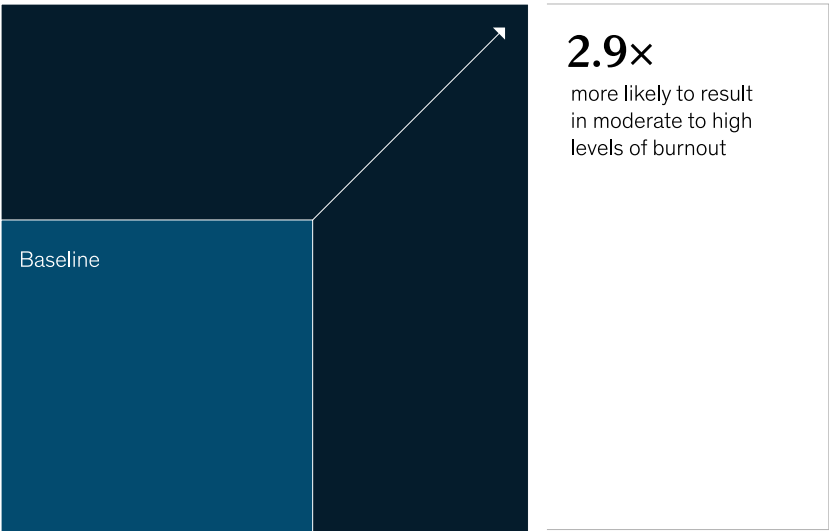
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**Share more.** Burnout is especially pronounced for people feeling anxious due to a lack of organizational communication. These employees were almost three times more likely to report feeling burned out. The obvious recommendation for organizational leaders: share more with employees, even if you're uncertain about the future, to help improve employee well-being now.

**Individuals who are feeling anxious due to a lack of organizational communication about the future are more likely to feel burned out.**

Lack of clear vision as a factor in causing anxiety, multiples



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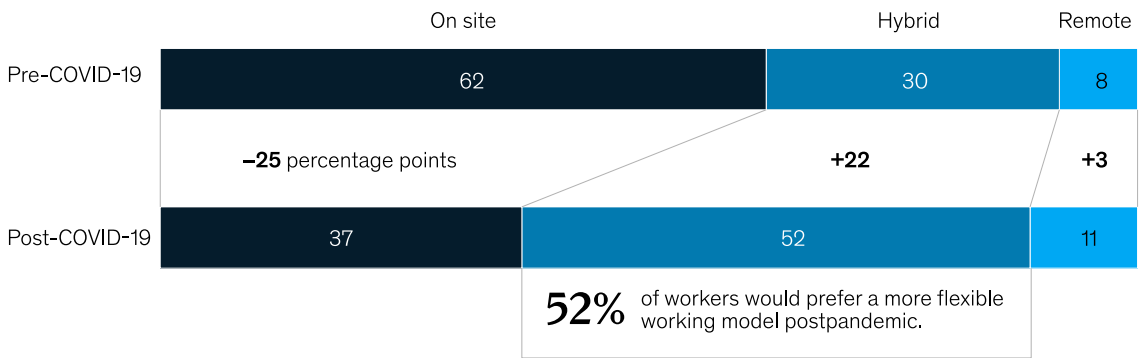
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**Employees want flexibility.** So how do organizations help their anxious and burned-out employees? One way is to find out what employees want for the future. More than half of employees told us they would like their organizations to adopt more flexible hybrid virtual-working models, in which employees are sometimes on-premises and sometimes working remotely. A hybrid model can help organizations make the most of talent wherever it resides, lower costs, and strengthen organizational performance.

**Most employees would prefer a more flexible working model after the pandemic is over.**

Working models pre-COVID-19 and desired working models post-COVID-19, % survey participants



Source: Reimagine Work: Employee Survey (Dec 2020–Jan 2021, n = 5,043 full-time employees who work in corporate or government settings)

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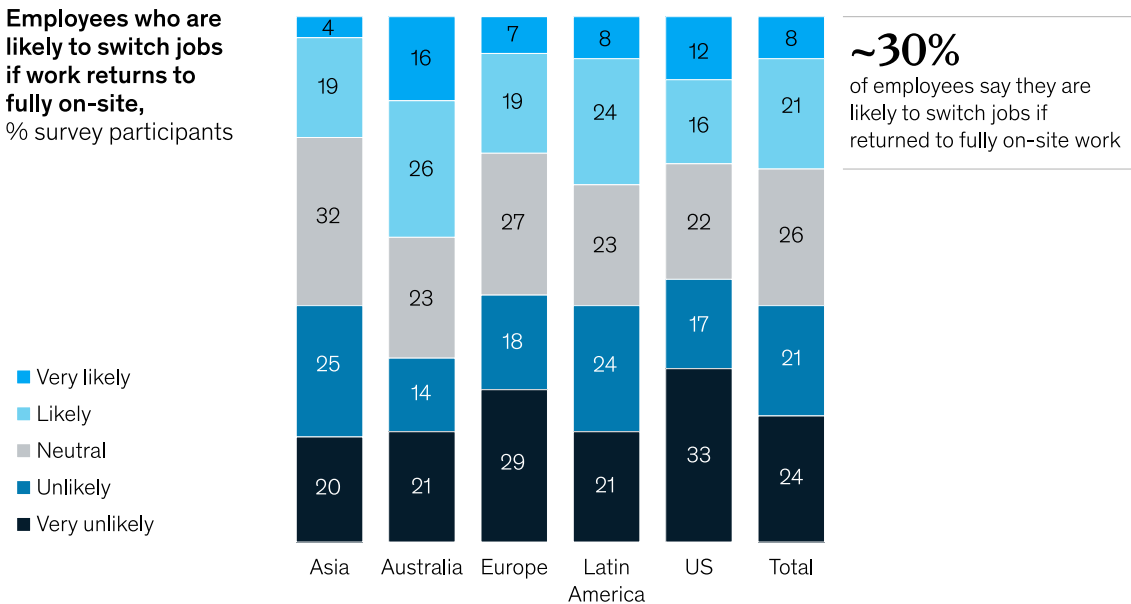
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**Talent at risk.** In fact, more than a quarter of those surveyed reported that they would consider switching employers if their organization returned to fully on-site work. Of course, even employees who say they might depart could ultimately decide to remain, depending on the policies companies end up adopting, the availability of jobs at the same or better rates of pay, and the role of automation in shifting the tasks people do.

Going back to a fully on-site model might have significant talent implications.



Source: Reimagine Work: Employee Survey (Dec 2020–Jan 2021, n = 5,043 full-time employees who work in corporate or government settings)

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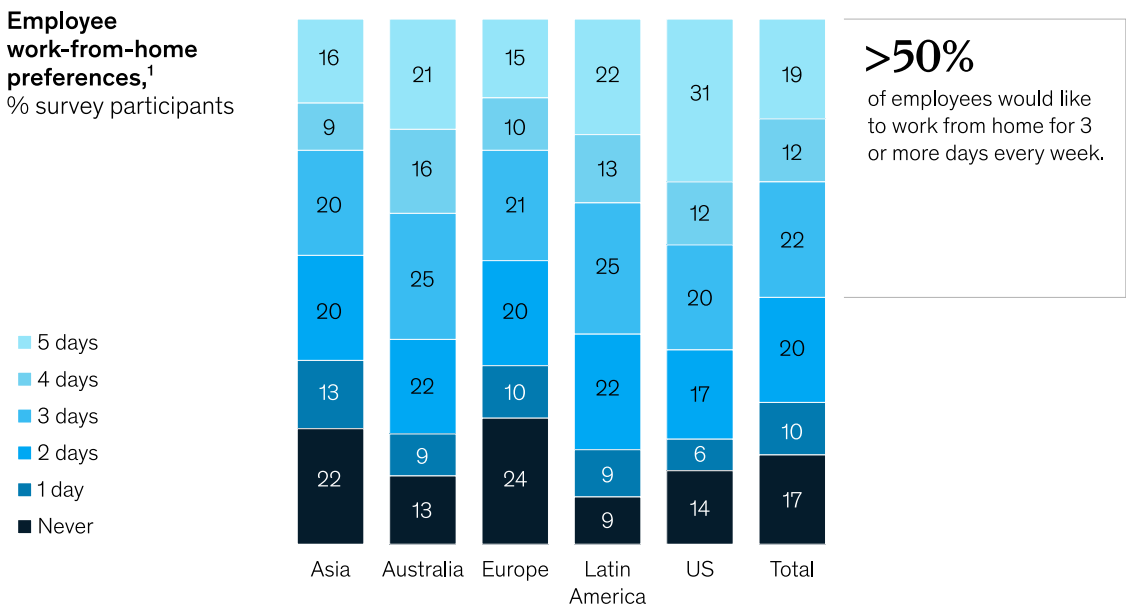
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**Staying home.** In describing the hybrid model of the future, more than half of government and corporate workers report that they would like to work from home at least three days a week once the pandemic is over. Across geographies, US employees are the most interested in having access to remote work, with nearly a third saying they would like to work remotely full time.

The majority of employees would like to work from home at least three days per week in the future.



<sup>1</sup>Question: How often would you prefer to work from home in the future?  
Source: Reimagine Work: Employee Survey (Dec 2020–Jan 2021, n = 5,043 full-time employees who work in corporate or government settings)

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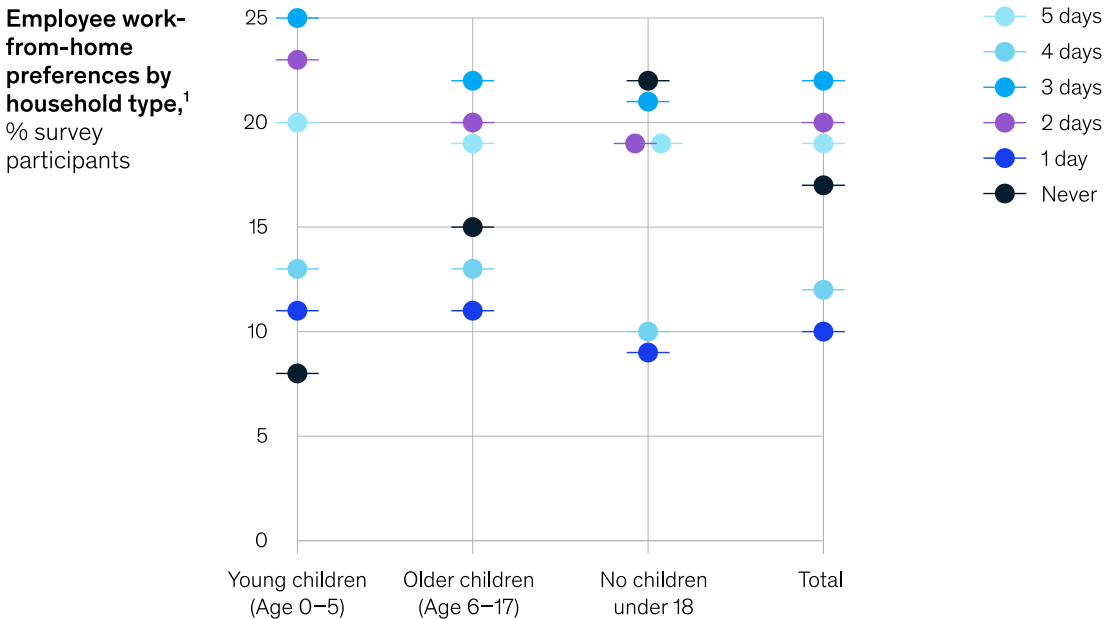
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**What parents say.** Employees with young children are the most likely to prefer flexible work locations, with only 8 percent suggesting they would like to see a fully on-site model in the future. Employees without children under 18 are nearly three times as likely to prefer on-site work, but the majority still prefer more flexible models.

Employees with young children are more likely to prefer primarily remote working models.



<sup>1</sup>Question: How often would you prefer to work from home in the future?  
Source: Reimagine Work: Employee Survey (Dec 2020–Jan 2021, n = 5,043 full-time employees who work in corporate or government settings)



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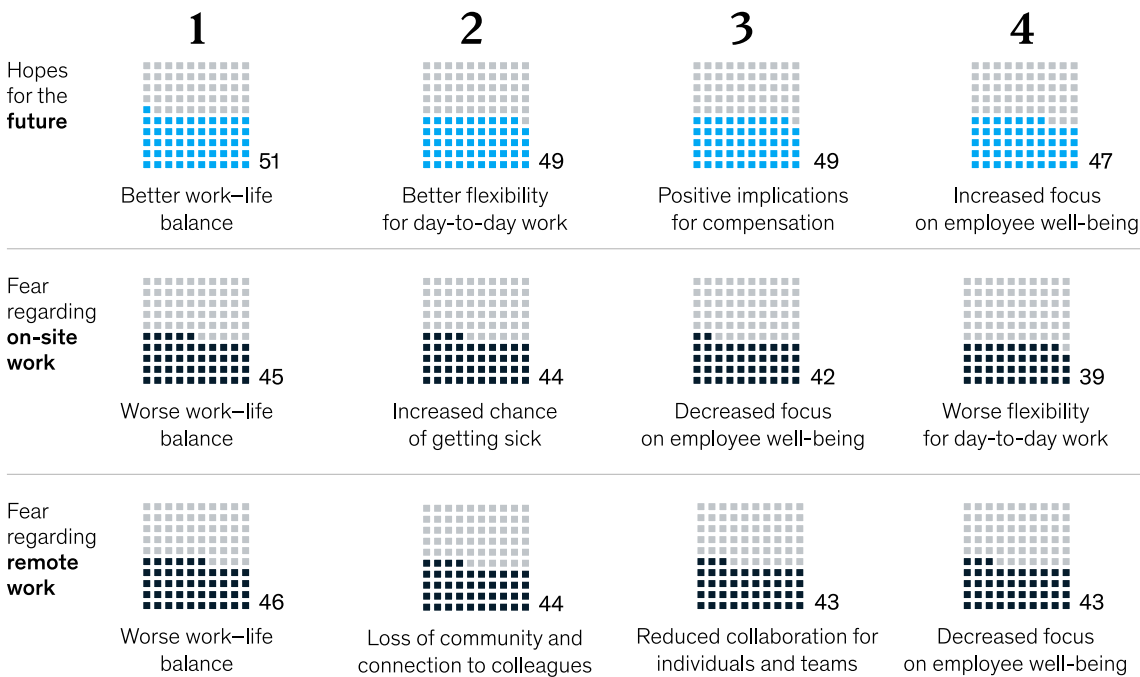
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**Hopes and fears.** Across the board, employees are eager to see organizations put a greater emphasis on flexibility, competitive compensation, and well-being once the pandemic is over—and conversely, they’re concerned that future work, regardless of whether it is on-site or remote, will negatively affect these needs. Employees also fear that on-site work will lead to a greater chance of getting sick and that remote work will reduce community and collaboration between colleagues.

Employee hopes and fears for the future reflect a focus on flexibility, well-being, and compensation

Employees’ top 4 hopes and fears, % survey participants



Source: Reimagine Work: Employee Survey (Dec 2020–Jan 2021, n = 5,043 full-time employees who work in corporate or government settings)



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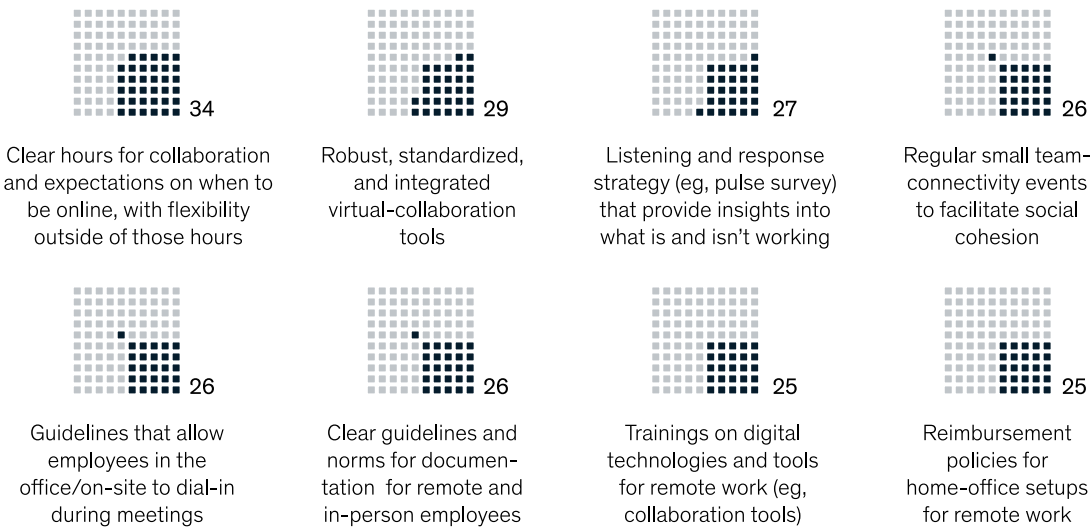
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**Policy matters.** Which working arrangements and related policies do employees say will lead to the highest levels of well-being, social cohesion, and productivity? More than a third of respondents ranked clear hours and expectations for collaboration in their top five policies; several other collaboration policies, including technologies that enable on-site employees to dial-in to remote meetings and guidelines for documentation, also received significant support. Collaboration tools, and training for those tools, also rate highly for employees, as does reimbursement for remote-work office setups. Microconnectivity policies, meanwhile—from small team events to a listening and response strategy—were top policies for more than a quarter of all respondents.

**Employees are most interested in collaboration, connectivity, training, and technology policies.**

**Support for company policy,** % of respondents who ranked the policy in their top 5<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup>Percent of respondents who ranked the policy in their top 5, when considering which policies they were most excited about and which policies would have the greatest impact across productivity, well-being, and social cohesion.  
Source: Reimagine Work: Employee Survey (Dec 2020–Jan 2021, n = 5,043 full-time employees who work in corporate or government settings)

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1. Besides anxiety and burnout, longer-term productivity in a hybrid virtual model will also require addressing the organizational norms that help create a common culture, generate social cohesion, and build shared trust. See Andrea Alexander, Aaron De Smet, and Mihir Mysore, “[Reimagining the postpandemic workforce](#),” *McKinsey Quarterly*, July 7, 2020.

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# What executives are saying about the future of hybrid work

May 17, 2021 | Article

Organizations are clear that postpandemic working will be hybrid. After that, the details get hazy.

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**In the postpandemic future of work**, nine out of ten organizations will be combining remote and on-site working, according to a new McKinsey survey of 100 executives across industries and geographies.<sup>[1]</sup> The survey confirms that productivity and customer satisfaction have increased during the pandemic.

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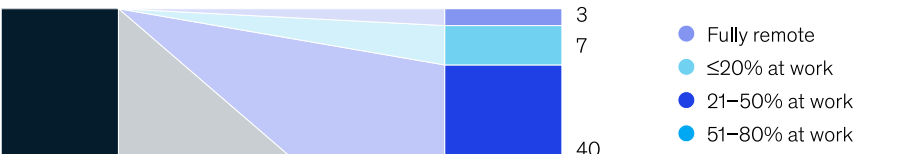
productivity gains might well depend on how organizational leaders address the anxiety their employees feel—and the associated levels of burnout.

The following charts, drawn from our survey, offer insights for executives who are sorting out the particulars of the hybrid approach. A notable finding is that organizations with the biggest productivity increases during the pandemic have supported and encouraged “small moments of engagement” among their employees, moments in which coaching, mentorship, idea sharing, and coworking take place. These organizations are preparing for hybrid working by training managers for remote leadership, by reimagining processes, and by rethinking how to help employees thrive in their roles.

**The future will be more hybrid.** Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, the majority of organizations required employees to spend most of their time on-site. But as the pandemic eases, executives say that the hybrid model—in which employees work both remotely and in the office—will become far more common. The majority of executives expect that (for all roles that aren’t essential to perform on-site) employees will be on-site between 21 and 80 percent of the time, or one to four days per week.

**In the post-COVID-19 future, C-suite executives expect an increase in hybrid work.**

Past and future expectations of time spent at work location,<sup>1</sup> % respondents



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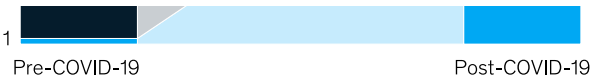


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<sup>1</sup>Question: What level of remote working (for roles typically associated with being office-based) does your organization have?

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**Future vision.** Although nine out of ten executives envision a hybrid model going forward, most have at best a high-level plan for how to carry it out—and nearly a third of them say that their organizations lack alignment on a high-level vision among the top team. Although another third of organizations have a more detailed vision in place, only one in ten organizations have begun communicating and piloting that vision.

**Most organizations don’t yet have a detailed vision in place for hybrid work.**

State of post-COVID-19 return-to-office planning,<sup>1</sup> % respondents



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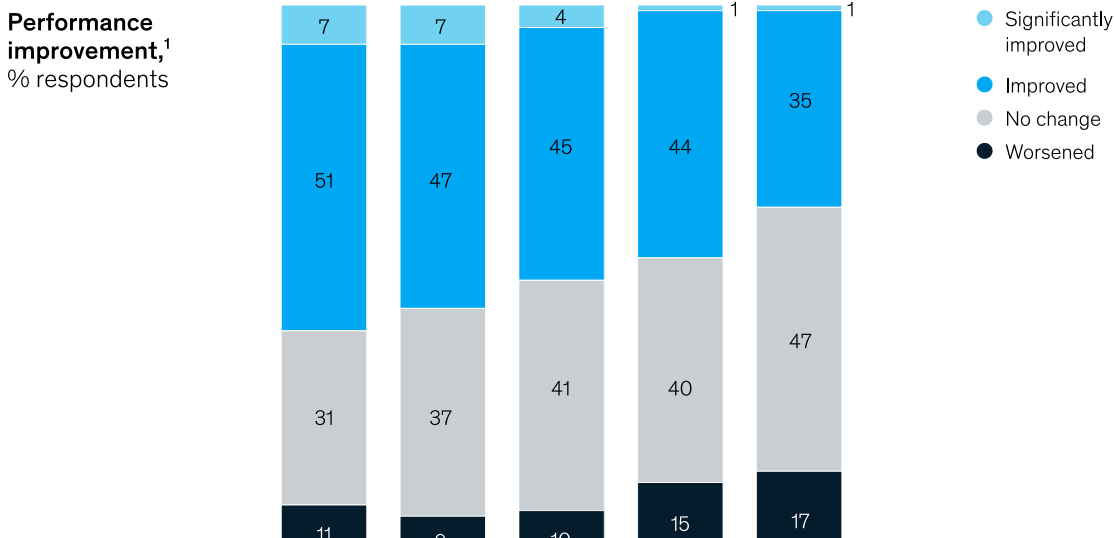
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**Productive nonetheless.** The survey also confirms that during the pandemic most organizations have seen rises in individual and team productivity and employee engagement, and, perhaps as a result of this increased focus and energy, a rise in the satisfaction of their customers as well.

But not every organization has experienced the same improvement. Take individual productivity. Some 58 percent of executives report improvements in individual productivity, but an additional third say that productivity has not changed. Lagging companies, which make up 10 percent of respondents, relate that individual productivity has declined during the pandemic. It’s important to note the high correlation between individual and team productivity: C-suite executives who say that individual productivity has improved are five times more likely to report that team productivity has risen too.

**Most C-suite executives report improvement in their organizations’ productivity, customer satisfaction, employee engagement, and diversity and inclusion.**



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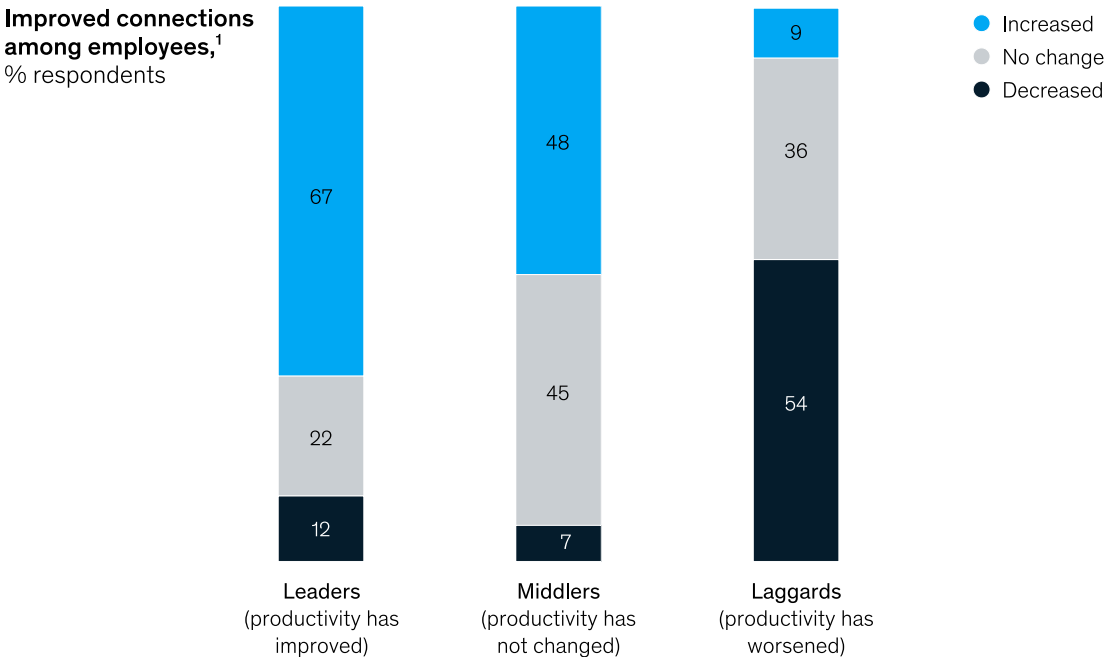
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**Making the small connections count.** Why have some companies enjoyed higher productivity during the pandemic? According to our survey, they’re the ones supporting small connections between colleagues—opportunities to discuss projects, share ideas, network, mentor, and coach, for example. Two-thirds of productivity leaders report that these kinds of “microtransactions” have increased, compared with just 9 percent of productivity laggards. As executives look to sustain pandemic-style productivity gains with a hybrid model, they will need to design and develop the right spaces for these small interactions to take place.

**Organizations that have kept employees connected have also tended to see their productivity increase.**



Note: Figures may not sum to 100%, because of rounding.  
<sup>1</sup>Question: How have the number of microtransactions changed in the remote workplace (for example, connecting with colleagues to discuss projects, share ideas, network, mentor, and coach)? For leaders, n = 58; for middlers, n = 31; for laggards, n = 11.

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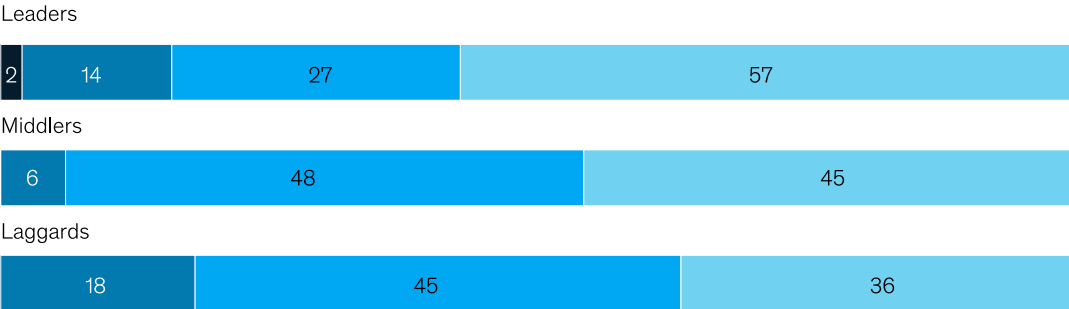
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**Managing differently.** Supporting small moments of connection requires subtle shifts in how managers work. Nearly all executives surveyed recognize that managing remotely differs from when all employees are on-site, but other subtleties may not be as apparent. Nuances can be seen in the more than half of productivity leaders that have trained their managers on how to lead teams more effectively. Only a third of productivity laggards have done the same. The emphasis on small connections suggests that organizations could better support managers by, among other things, educating them about the positive and negative impact they have on the people who report to them, and by training managers on soft skills, such as providing and receiving feedback. Organizations can also explore novel ways to address the loss of empathy that often accompanies gains in authority.

**Leading organizations are most likely to have helped managers lead differently.**

Managing differently while working remotely,<sup>1</sup> % respondents

- We do not expect people to manage their teams differently
- No formal definition; managers or team leads determine what they need to do
- Established a clear point of view on how managers or team leads should lead their teams differently but have yet to train people
- Established a point of view on how managers or team leads should lead their teams differently and have fully trained people



Note: Figures may not sum to 100%, because of rounding.  
<sup>1</sup>Question: How has productivity changed in the remote workplace compared with pre-COVID-19? Please compare the workplace today with pre-COVID-19. Respondents answered on a 5-point scale (5 = significantly increased; 4 = somewhat increased; 3 = no change; 2 = somewhat decreased; 1 = significantly decreased). Those answering 1 or 2 are leaders, n = 58; those answering 3 are middlers, n = 31; and those answering 4 or 5 are laggards, n = 11.

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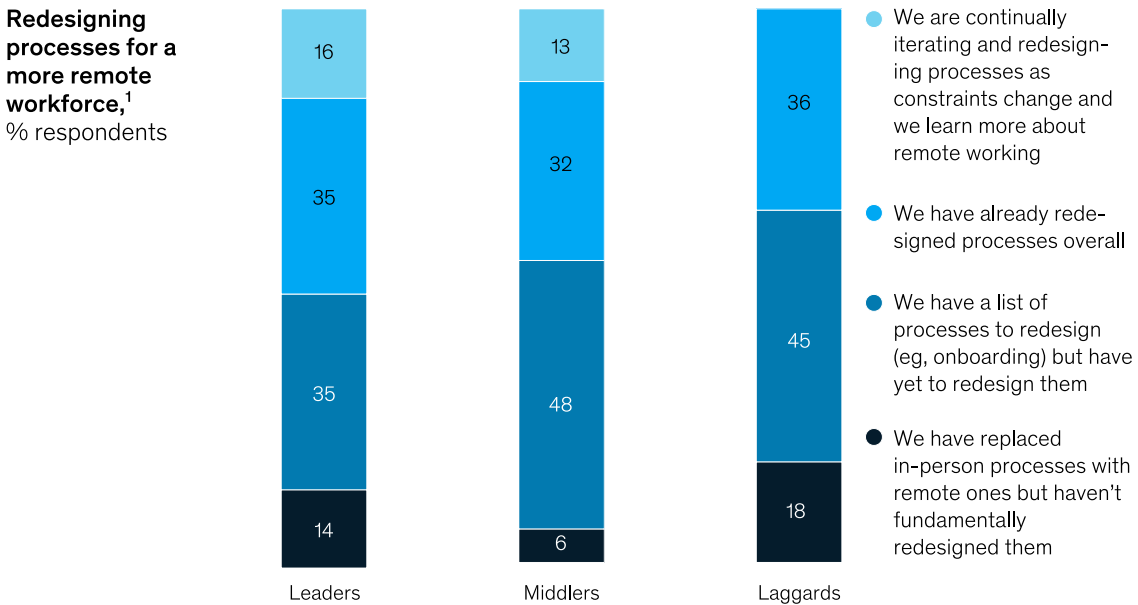
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**Experiment and iterate.** Across organizations, executives already recognize the need to redesign processes to better support a remote workforce—with the majority having at least identified the processes that will require rethinking. But productivity leaders are more likely to continually iterate and tweak their processes as the context shifts. As organizations look to codify the hybrid model, there is evidence that the test-and-learn approach to process redesign will be an important enabler.

**Lagging companies are least likely to experiment and iterate processes.**



Note: Figures may not sum to 100%, because of rounding.  
<sup>1</sup>Question: To what extent have you redesigned processes for a more remote workforce? Respondents answered on a 5-point scale (5 = significantly increased; 4 = somewhat increased; 3 = no change; 2 = somewhat decreased; 1 = significantly decreased). Those answering 1 or 2 are leaders, n = 58; those answering 3 are middlers, n = 31; and those answering 4 or 5 are laggards, n = 11.



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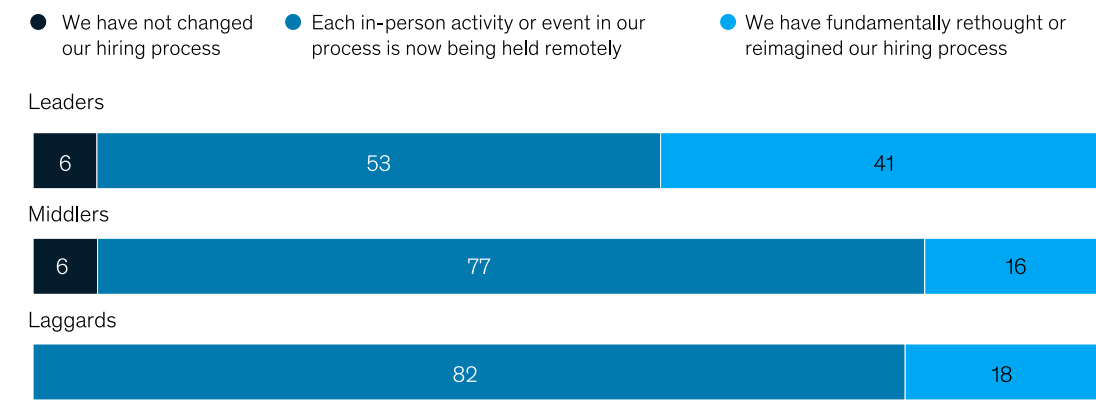
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**Reimagine hiring.** Hiring is among the most crucial processes to reconsider in the hybrid world. Should organizations continue to hire within specific geographies, or should they open up their talent aperture beyond traditional recruiting locations, for instance? Should they conduct more remote interviews? During the pandemic, nearly two-thirds of organizations have moved in-person recruiting events and activities to remote settings, but only one in three have reimagined hiring from the ground up. Forty percent of productivity leaders, by contrast, have holistically redesigned their entire hiring process.

**Most organizations have changed their hiring processes, but leading companies have reimagined them entirely.**

Modifications to hiring process,<sup>1</sup> % respondents



Note: Figures may not sum to 100%, because of rounding.  
<sup>1</sup>Question: To what extent have you modified your hiring process? Respondents answered on a 5-point scale (5 = significantly increased; 4 = somewhat increased; 3 = no change; 2 = somewhat decreased; 1 = significantly decreased). Those answering 1 or 2 are leaders, n = 58; those answering 3 are middlers, n = 31; and those answering 4 or 5 are laggards, n = 11.



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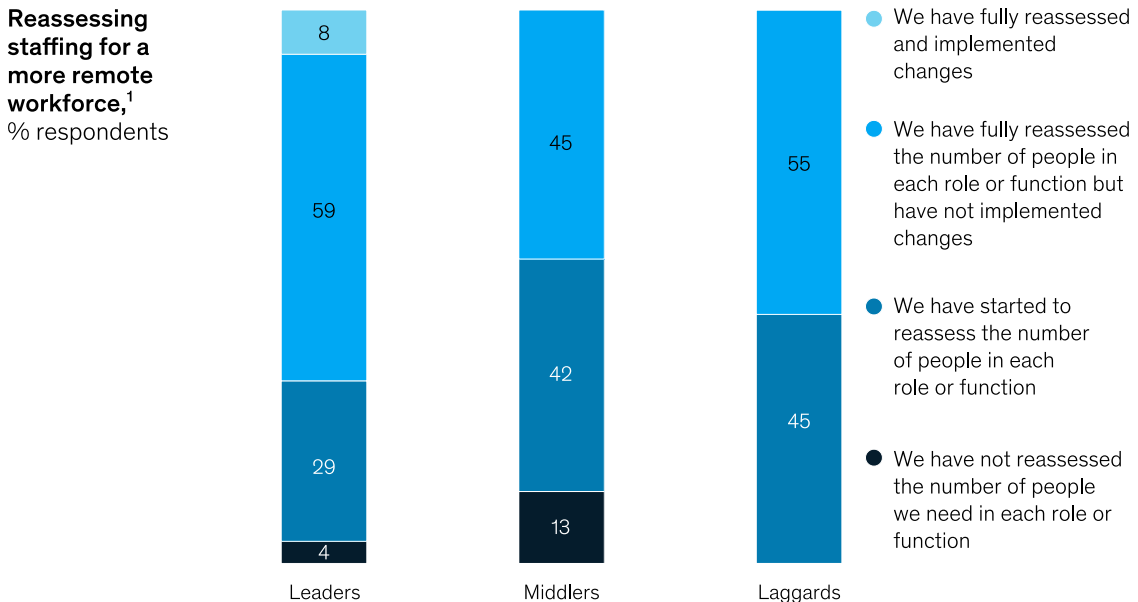
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**Rethink talent allocation.** During the pandemic, nearly two-thirds of organizations have reassessed the number of people in each role and in each function in the company. But productivity leaders are more likely than middle performers and laggards to fall into this category. A select few leading companies have taken it even further and have gone beyond reassessing to actually implementing changes. As organizations redesign their hybrid future, matching the workforce with the right priorities could help spur productivity improvements.

**Many organizations have started to reassess the number of people in each role or function, but only a few have rematched employees with priority roles.**



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1. From December 2020 through January 2021, McKinsey surveyed and analyzed responses from 100 respondents at the C-suite, vice-president, and director level, evenly split among organizations based in Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the United States, and among a variety of industries. Company revenues ranged, on average, from \$5.1 billion to \$11.0 billion per year.

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