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The Post-Pandemic Workplace

The Supply Chain Profession's Perspective

Survey Results 2021

Foreword

Events of 2020 and 2021 have put pressure on global supply chains to an extent that no-one could have fully anticipated. Although the COVID-19 pandemic clearly tops the list of disruptions, it was by no means the only one. Adding in other challenges such as Brexit, the Suez Canal blockage, rising supply costs, commodity shortages, exorbitant shipping cost hikes, distribution capacity challenges, and truck driver shortages (to name but a few), the last 20 months have been far more than just another day in the office for the supply chain profession.

Indeed, for many there was definitely no typical "day in the office". Instead, many switched almost overnight to working from home or working in environments with new rules and constraints regarding hygiene and social distancing, often with drastically reduced workforces. All of a sudden, parents were not only fighting urgent fires at work, but were also homeschooling their children. Others were caring for wider families and loved ones impacted by the virus or even contracted the virus themselves.

In this report we share the results of a global survey that reveals current sentiment about the impact of the pandemic on the professional and personal lives of supply chain professionals. What the results clearly show is that while the current situation is still far from ideal, with an alarming number of people still experiencing worrying levels of stress and burnout, it has also presented us with an unprecedented opportunity to think differently about what the future "workplace" might look and how to create working environments and cultures that drive optimum performance in balance with physical and mental well-being.

Each of the topic areas highlighted in this report clearly deserve more exploration. We look forward to further conversation on them but hope the insights we share here will help inform and shape your own strategies as we move forward through this very fluid period of ongoing uncertainty, challenge, change, and opportunity.

My thanks to everyone who took part in the survey and to those who shared their personal experiences. Their thoughts are highlighed in quotes throughout this report. My thanks also to my industry colleagues Caroline Crotty at Talent Pod and Jason Breault at LifeWork Search who both kindly gave of their time and insights in a webinar which accompanies this report – the replay is available at https://www.boomglobalnetwork.com/survey2021-replay.html

Beth Morgan
Founder
boom! | The Global Community for Women in Supply Chain

Introduction

This report presents the results of a global survey of supply chain professionals. We invited men and women across the sector to give us their personal perspectives across these areas, including:

- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on working practices, employee performance and well-being
- Future workplace location preferences, concerns and benefits
- The impact of remote working on career progression equity and opportunity

We have organised this report into five key topic areas. Throughout the rest of this report we dive into each of these areas and present the data-based insights generated from this our second annual global survey. We also share a selection of anecdotal comments in highlighted quotes. Where relevant we highlight key differences in opinion and experience between male and female respondents.

In this section we present a high-level snapshot of the key headlines from each area.

The headlines

The Great Resignation

- 29% of respondents changed their job during the pandemic. Although this is slightly higher than average, this probably comes as no complete surprise to supply chain leaders who have long been operating against the backdrop of an already escalating war on supply chain talent.

- Perhaps more concerning is the 34% of respondents who said they considered a move but as yet have not. This points to an overall far bigger potential workforce turnover over the coming months.

- Within this overall group of those who already have moved or have considered moving, 38% are motivated primarily by career development goals. However, 25% are seeking a better work-life balance.

The Great Work-Life Imbalance

- For 39% of people now working from home there was a positive impact on productivity. However, this was outweighed for 51% by much higher workloads, all together resulting in more working hours for 75% and 55% flexing hours outside typical working times.

- Perhaps as a result of higher workloads and extended working hours, an alarming 47% of respondents reported a negative impact on their mental health during the pandemic. The risk of burnout continues for 40% of respondents who are still experiencing ongoing symptoms of emotional and physical exhaustion, with 8% nearing the edge of their ability to cope without making changes or seeking some form of help.

- This situation does not look set to resolve anytime soon, with the majority of respondents forecasting that their stress levels will at best remain the same over the next 6-12 months, if not get worse.

The Great Migration

- In line with many other sectors, the supply chain workforce is currently in transition between a predominantly home-based scenario to one which will be based on a hybrid mix of home office and official workplace location. In the future, only 29% of respondents expect to be working full time in an office or other location (such as plant or distribution centre) compared to 81% pre-COVID.

- Although only 8% of respondents do not know what future plans may look like, expectations for exactly when any kind of transition may fully bed in are still uncertain as the pandemic continues.

- 2% of respondents reported losing their job as a result of the pandemic.

The Great Reset

- Digital technologies have made it possible for most types of work to be undertaken successfully within virtual environments. However, the human need for interaction in person is becoming increasingly important as a way to recharge relationships and in the case of new joiners, establish them more effectively.

- The need to be able to draw clearer boundaries between home and work life is recognised by 79% of respondents who would prefer a hybrid scenario going forward, with a 3:2 day home to office ratio the most popular option. More women than men would prefer a hybrid scenario and 56% of all respondents would like to flex their time as necessary rather than have mandated office hours.

- Health risks top the list of concerns about returning to official workplace locations for 79% of respondents. But longer-term concerns around wasted commute time and costs, impact on the environment and on personal physical and mental well-being reflect a potentially bigger shift in preferences and expectations.

- Travel to locations beyond primary places of work is also expected to drop, including 32% of resondents planning to travel less to see customers in the future.

The Great Leveller (and Divide)

- The changes caused by the pandemic have had both positive and negative impact on supply chain professionals in almost equal measure. Roughly a quarter of repondents have been able to take advantage of the situation in relation to both equity in the workplace as well as career progression opportunity. About the same number again have found themselves disadvantaged on both scores.

- Visibility into specific career opportunities is the initiative rated most by survey respondents as the best way to support equitable career development opportunity for those not always physically present or visible in workplace environments. This is closely followed by virtual training and virtual networking with senior leaders.

- The quality of relationship and level of interaction with managers during the pandemic has played a significant part in the overall employee experience. For 16% of respondents their experience improved, but for 21% it was not as good as before, with supplemental comments highlighting issues relating to poor rapport, communication and lack of trust.

The Great Resignation

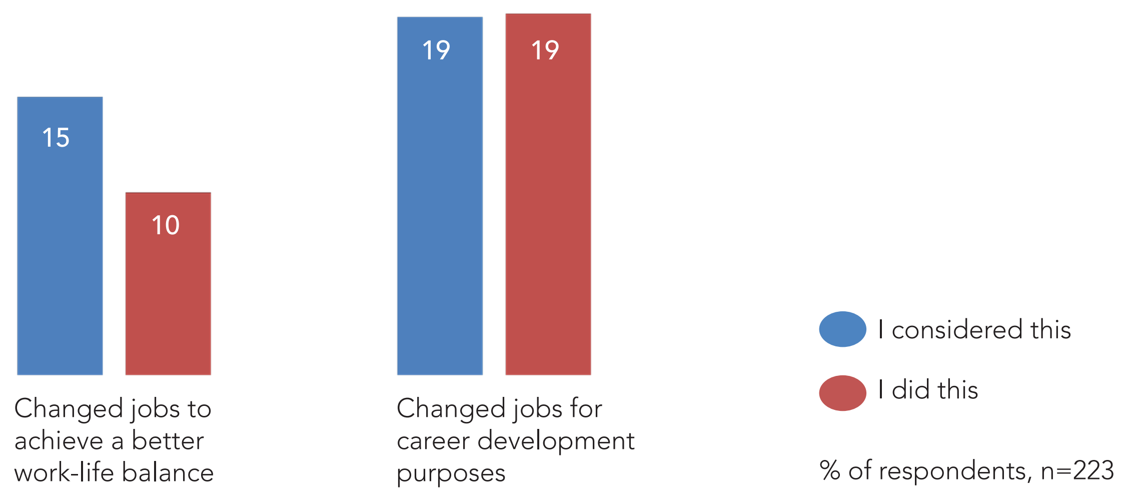
A term first coined in 2019, the idea of "The Great Resignation" has hit the headlines yet again, with a reported 11.5 million people in the United States alone quitting their jobs during April to June 2021. It's natural to expect a certain percentage of workforce turnover each year. But just how big a percentage is enough to cause serious concern about a mass exodus in the supply chain profession specifically? More importantly, just how real is the risk?

According to our survey, 29% of respondents changed their jobs during the COVID pandemic. This number is higher than usual, with turnover of around 20-25% a typical average for supply chain, says Caroline Crotty, Partner and Head of International at supply chain recruitment firm Pod Talent. Bearing in mind that some of these job moves might have been with the same employer, the survey number starts to look slightly more reasonable.

However, perhaps more indicative of current trends are the reasons why people changed jobs during this period. Although 19% moved for career development reasons, 10% of respondents were seeking to achieve a better work-life balance. What better time than during a pandemic to reflect on life's priorities?

What is of more concern is the 34% of people who have considered moving, but who have not yet done so. Of these, 19% considered moving for career development purposes, while 15% were motivated to find a better work-life balance. Add those numbers together and that's a potential of up to 63% of the entire workforce contributing to the Great Resignation statistics. That's a big number.

Did you consider or undertake a job move during the pandemic?



In total, 25% of respondents are currently motivated to achieve a better work-life balance, with no signficant difference between men and women. That’s a 17% increase since our last survey fielded in September 2020, which may point to a longer-term trend.

When might The Great Resignation take place?

Although the media headlines may suggest a more sudden and dramatic walkout, more likely is a gradual shift over the next 6-18 months as new “back to the office” parameters are established and as employees continue to evaluate how their preference for more flexible working patterns match what their employers are offering.

Employers must also reckon with the longer-term decreasing average tenure of supply chain professionals, which has dropped from an average five years to 3.75 years, says LifeWork Search managing director Jason Breault. In parallel, the war on talent in the supply chain will continue to increase as supply chain organisations expand their workforces to meet demand for the increasing challenges and opportunities ahead. As a prime example, just one of the companies to benefit from the changes in consumer buying behaviour since the start of the pandemic, Amazon has already hired more than 450,000 workers in the United States alone and is seeking another 55,000 globally. Given the current level overall of open positions, there’s probably never been a better time to be a supply chain professional.

Note to readers

Throughout this report you will see quotes like the one you see to the right here.

These quotes are drawn from the free comments made by respondents of the survey to supplement specific data points. We thank everyone who took the extra time to share their thoughts and experiences which certainly add more colour to the overall picture.

“The biggest change I noticed working remotely is the importance of strong trusted relationships. Where that was not in place pre-COVID, it only exacerbated feelings of distance. Said differently, trust helped maintain productivity. But now even these relationships need to be recharged in person.”

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The Great Work-Life Imbalance

The impact of the COVID pandemic has touched everyone's lives on both a personal and professional level. Those on the healthcare front line very clearly bore the brunt of the pressure, with hospital and care systems around the world straining for many months under the weight of the sheer numbers of patients requiring urgent critical care and end of life support.

However, although empty shelves in the supermarkets were one of the other clear indicators to the general consumer of systems under pressure, arguably less visible other than for those directly involved was the tremendous work going on behind the scenes to keep supply chains of all sorts up and running – from keeping essential goods and services as available as possible, to sating the demand for other types of products suddenly in demand from millions of now almost exclusively home-based consumers.

One of the biggest changes, of course, was that suddenly people were no longer actually "in the office". Many left their offices behind and instead were in home offices or sitting at kitchen tables, getting to grips with the realities of full-time remote working. Others continued to work in operational locations such as manufacturing, distribution and retail, but now with the added pressure of fewer available staff, social distancing and other hygiene measures. For both groups, the need to home-school children and juggle other personal challenges added to the complexity of the challenge.

Productivity up, workload up

With commuting and other travel now off the schedule for many, there was a not surprising positive uplift in productivity for 39% of respondents. However, this was matched by a significant increase in workload, which was viewed as a negative by 51% of respondents.

As a coping mechanism, 72% of respondents reported working more hours than usual throughout the pandemic. There is a notable difference here between the genders, with 88% of women saying they worked more hours versus 58% of men. Similarly, 55% of respondents (51% of men and 59% of women) said they flexed hours outside of typical working times.

A not insignificant 9.5% of respondents chose to formally reduce their working hours and just over 5% took long-term leave. The data reflects no notable differences between genders here.

"My work week increased from an average of 50 hours to more than 60 hours. Working from home was more intensely focused and therefore productive, but also exhausting over a long period of time."

Impact on working hours

72%

worked more hours than usual

55%

flexed hours outside typical working times

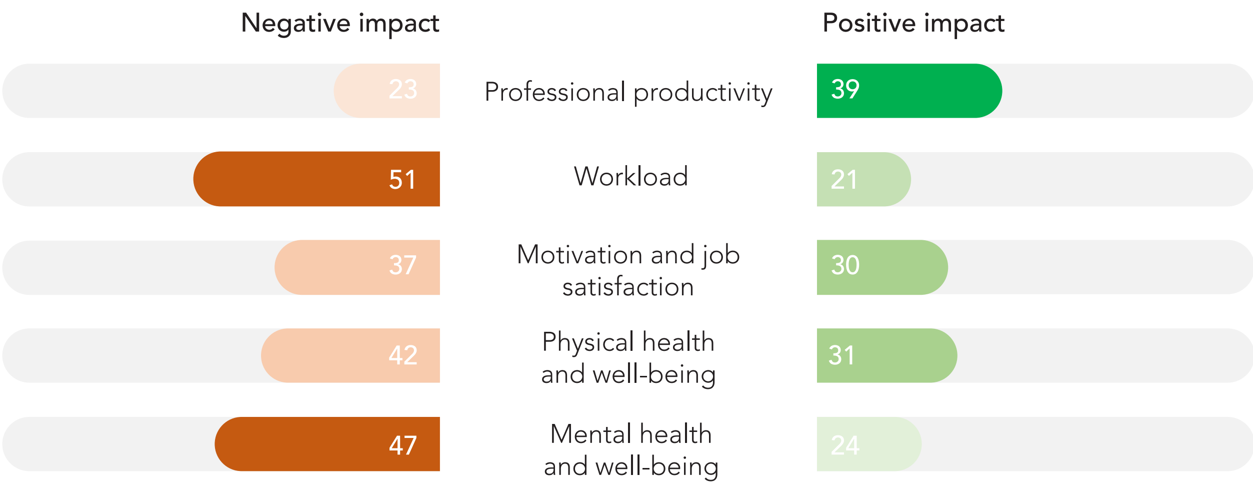
% of respondents, n=223

The impact on mental health

When we surveyed the profession back in 2020, only 21% of respondents said that the pandemic had had a negative impact on a healthy work-life balance. But fast-forward less than a year to July/August 2021 and the situation has deteriorated significantly with 46% of respondents indicating a negative impact.

Although the impact on physical health and well-being, motivation and job satisfaction has been a positive for around of a third of respondents (31% and 30% respectively), a marginally higher number report a negative impact (42% and 37%). Where there is a much bigger and more concerning disparity is on the topic of mental health and well-being where the impact has been positive for 24%, but negative for a much bigger 47% of respondents.

Compared to your circumstances before COVID, what was the impact on your...



% of respondents, n=224

Burnout is a real risk

And it’s not going away anytime soon...

We explored this more deeply by asking exactly what this negative impact looked like in terms of stress levels and potential burnout. The answer should raise an alarm bell for all supply chain leaders and their HR partners.

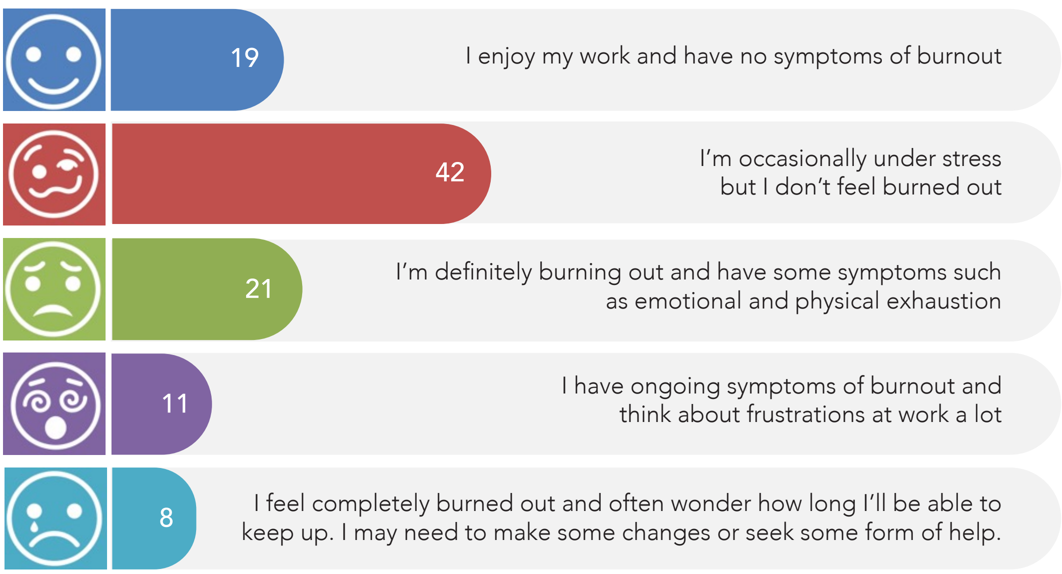
Based on a standard five-level model for measuring stress levels in a workplace scenario, we asked the survey respondents to indicate their current feelings towards stress and burnout. We then asked whether they thought this would improve, stay the same or get worse over the next 6-12 months.

Occasional feelings of stress are experienced by 42% of respondents, with no indication of more concerning levels of burnout. However, the outlook is more worrying for almost the same number again, with 40% of respondents rating their stress levels at various points along the burnout continuum.

“The intense pandemic period was very traumatic.”

“Increased workload... no travel or socialising... non-stop virtual meetings with no switch off and an expectation we’d work 24/7...”

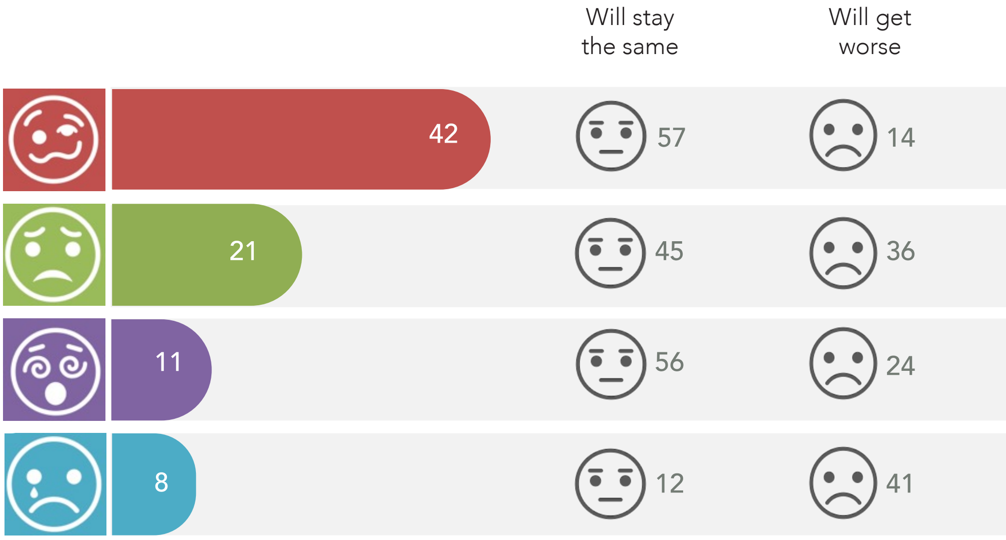
Which of the following statements best describes your current feelings towards stress and burnout?



% of respondents, n=224

In terms of the longer-term outlook, for most the situation is not expected to improve overnight. At best, current stress levels or burnout levels will stay the same, but for those towards the top end of the burnout continuum, the future looks far less optimistic.

How do you think your current levels of stress or burnout will change over the next 6-12 months?



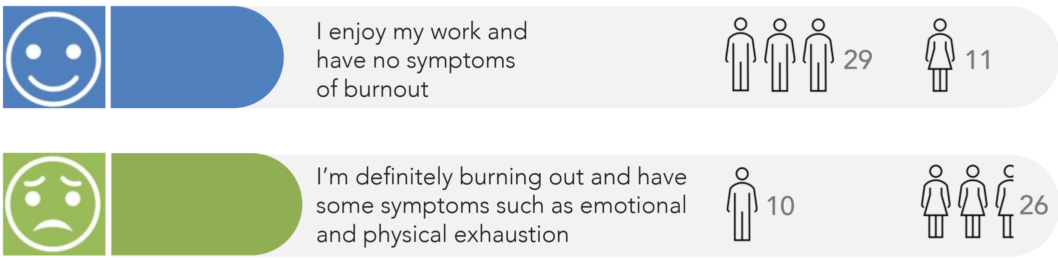
% of respondents, n=224

There are notable differences between men and women regarding stress

For the most part there are currenty no major overall differences in stress levels between men and women, except at two specific points in the five-level stress model shown above.

Men are far more able to report that they enjoy their work and have no symptoms of burnout (29%), compared to just 11% of women. On the other side of the coin, however, far more women (26%) say they're definitely burning out and are experiencing some symptoms of burnout such as emotional and physical exhaustion. This compares to just 10% of men.

Although we cannot dig deeper into the reasons behind these data points and risk drawing false conclusions, there is an arguable link here with a previous finding, namely that women appear to be working much longer hours than men. If nothing else, this is a red flag to be aware of when it comes to understanding potential differences between team members, expectations and levels of support needed.



% of respondents, n=224

The Great Migration

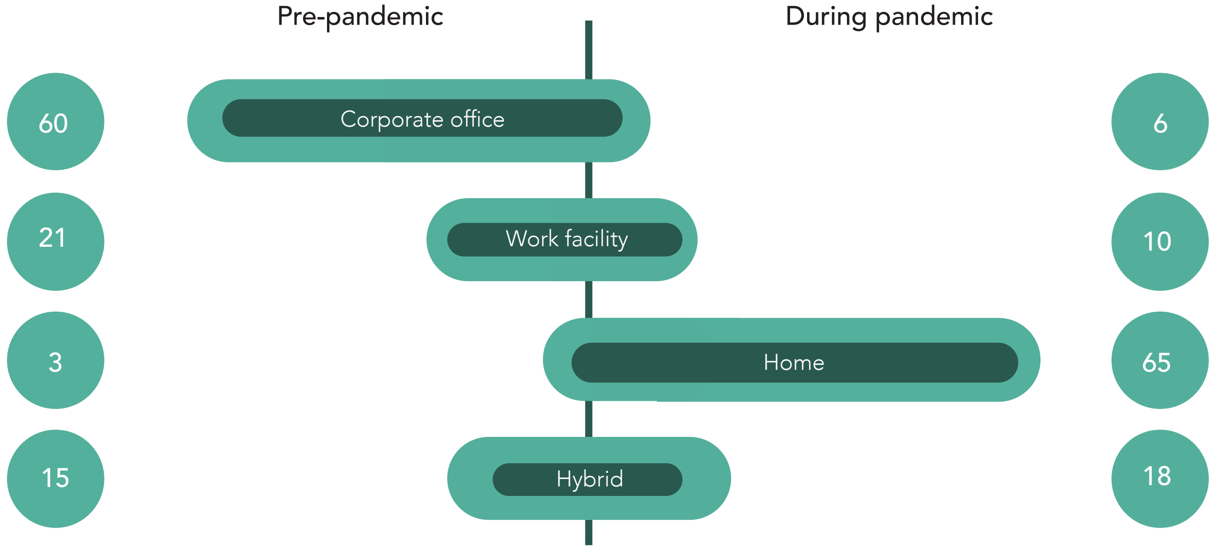
One of the biggest consequences of the pandemic were the extensive government-mandated "lockdown" or "shelter-in-place" orders put in place across many countries and regions.

Although a significant number of key workers needed to remain in their usual places of work, for the majority this suddenly meant either a switch to working from home or in some cases, a furlough period or even job loss. The supply chain profession was in no way immune to these changes.

The level of pressure on manufacturers, distributors and retailers to keep supply chains up and running was immense. Companies worked hard to keep employees safe, establishing social distancing and other hygiene measures, often with a much smaller workforce in place. Indeed, our survey shows that while 21% of respondents were located in work facilities such as plants, manufacturing facilities and distribution centres and the like before the pandemic, this number dropped to just 10% during the pandemic.

By far the biggest shift, however, was the number of people previously located in corporate offices, dropping from 60% prior to COVID to just 6% during the pandemic. While companies had previously catered for 15% of employees working in hybrid (work location, on the road, home office) scenario and just 3% working from home full time, now 65% of employees were working exclusively from home for the first time – and in many cases, in a sudden overnight switch.

Which of the following best describes your primary work location before and during the COVID pandemic?



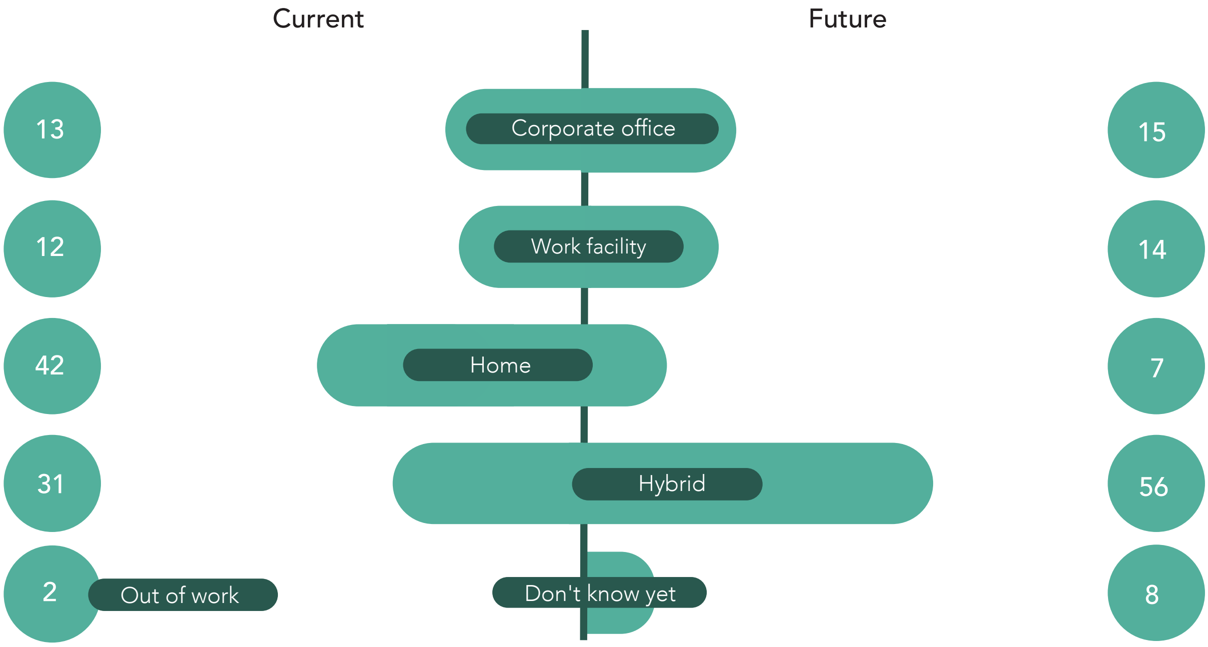
% of respondents, n=224

A workforce in transition

Although some parts of the world are still coping with the extremes of the pandemic, others have been able to resume a good if not almost complete degree of pre-COVID normality. For the majority of the world's population, however, the current situation is probably best described as "in transition", as protective measures are gradually eased, supported in many locations by a mass-scale vaccination programme.

This transition is clearly evident from our survey data (see figure below) which shows that the number of people currently working from home has already dropped from 65% to 42%. However, that displaced number is not shifting back to pre-COVID workplace scenarios. Instead, many workers are shifting to a hybrid model with employees starting to return to the office or other formal workplace locations on a part-time basis.

Which of the following best describes your primary work location currently and in the future?



% of respondents, n=224

The above figure is a snapshot that reflects what is very much still a fluid situation. Plans earlier in 2021 for a watershed "back to the office" shift to take place in September (as this report is published) have in many cases been delayed, forced largely by the increasing number of cases of the more transmissable Delta variant in some locations. We are very much in a "monitor and respond" situation at present.

Despite this uncertainty, the experiences of the last year or more have already created an opportunity to evaluate – and potentially reset – what the future of work could look like longer term.

The Great Reset

Despite pockets of persistent traditional thinking, if the pandemic has done nothing else it has blasted the myth that remote work isn't possible for "some roles" or for "certain people" completely out of the water. What was deemed impossible, or at best unworkable, became a necessity – and the impossible suddenly became possible. Not only that, many supply chain professionals did this at the same time as taking on some of the biggest challenges of their careers so far. It wasn't always easy and in many cases still isn't. But one way or another the job got done.

Although we're far from back to complete pre-COVID normality, there has been some degree of recalibration and normalisation over more recent months as the peak of the crisis has receded. Now as companies begin to roll out plans for a return to the workplace, we have a unique opportunity to rethink and potentially reset what the future workplace could look like.

Clearly there are some roles that can only be fulfilled in specific locations – take manufacturing, as a very obvious example. For others, the exact where and how can be considered more flexibly, certainly when reevaluated through the fresh lens of recent experience.

What supply chain employees want

Many employers are understandably taking the lead on creating a model for what the future workplace looks like. But what do employees themselves really think about what could work?

In the following sections we share what our survey respondents think about what type of work is best done where, the concerns they have about returning to workplace locations, their ideal workplace scenarios, and their thoughts about future travel expectations.

What's easier to do virtually and what's not

As shown in the figure on the following page, the general concensus is that it's easier to focus and be productive when working remotely, i.e. from home. Likewise, and perhaps somewhat counterintuitively, the majority of respondents feel that it's easier to work creatively and even transformationally with colleagues in a virtual environment than in an office. Working collaboratively in a planned way is also as easy to do virtually.

Although some respondents have found it easier or more difficult to access key people or resources in a virtual environment, the majority have found it to be more or less the same as when in a physical location.

The same applies to spontaneous collaboration. Although those informal chats along the office hallways or at the coffee machine haven't been possible, many teams have embraced collaboration technologies that enable virtual chat and video calls. Jumping onto a quick Teams or Zoom call with your colleague rather than walking over to their desk is apparently not so different after all, and in many cases has made connecting even easier.

"Our digital connectivity improved. We fully embraced Teams chat."

"We are spread out over a large area. Using virtual meetings we actually talked more."

But what is more difficult to achieve in fully virtual scenarios is the ability to fulfil the human need for social interaction. Particularly in the early days, Zoom quizzes, virtual coffee sessions and after hours cocktails on a Friday all provided a novelty substitute for the real thing, but were never likely to provide an effective long-term solution.

As we've already seen earlier in this report, although living and working in the same physical space has provided multiple benefits for some, for others it has made drawing clear boundaries between work and home life increasingly challenging. This hasn't just been about the willpower to close the virtual office door at the end of the day or stop responding to emails late into the evening on the ever-present smartphone; for many it's been the sheer volume of work, the calls from morning 'til night, just to get the job done during this challenging period.

The majority of survey respondents say the following activities or behaviours are easier, the same or more difficult to do in a virtual / remote scenario

It's easier to...

- Focus and be productive
- Work creatively and/or transformationally with colleagues
- Collaborate with colleagues in a planned way

It's the same to...

- Access key people and resources
- Collaborate with colleagues spontaneously

It's more difficult to...

- Interact socially
- Draw clear boundaries between work and home life
- Be visible for career progression purposes

Finally, the last thing that resondents said was more difficult to do in a virtual set up is to be visible for career progression purposes. We look at this aspect in more detail later in this report.

Supply chain is no stranger to virtual environments

What makes supply chain quite different to other sectors is that its global nature means that many teams are distributed geographically and therefore already at least semi-virtual in nature. This is a stark contrast to other sectors such as finance where remote working was previously less common. Even as this report is being written, there are strong calls from city-based financial bosses to bring everyone back into the office as soon as possible and discourage future requests for flexible working, adding to the already well-publicised views of Goldman Sachs' CEO David Solomon earlier this year. "People abuse it and are less productive, at least in financial services," said VSA Capital CEO Andrew Monk in a BBC interview (https://www.bbc.com/news/business-58662455). Yet even in this sector, not everyone agrees, with other financial giants such as PwC and Deloitte embracing flexible working. Change is afoot and employers must respond or risk losing valued people to more attractive alternatives.

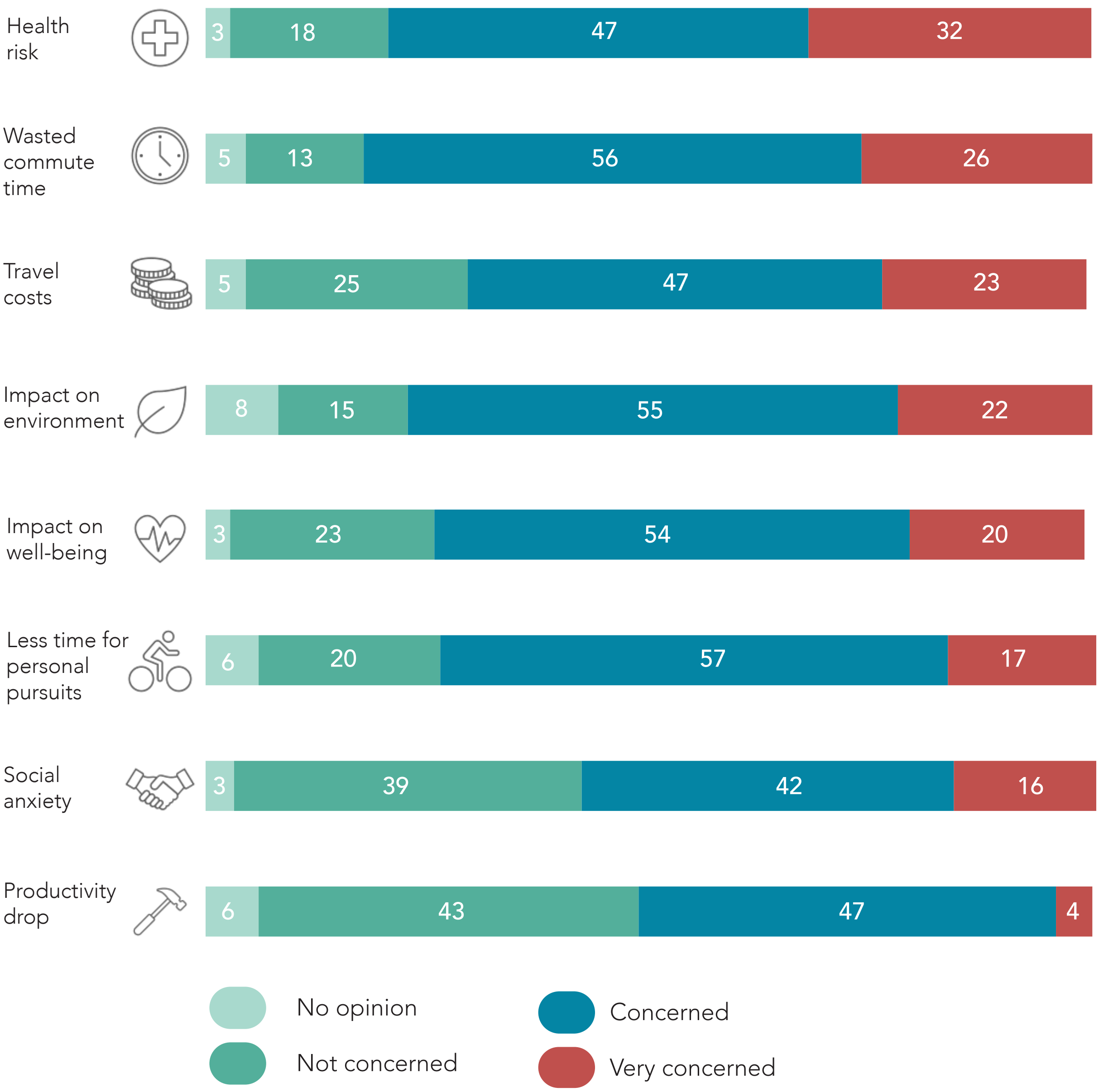
"I'm based in India and my boss is in the United States.

We work as we did before."

Concerns about the workplace

For those who are already or who will be required to return to an official workplace enviroment, the survey data indicates a number of clear areas for concern from employees. As shown in the chart below, it is not surprising that health risks (specifically relating to the COVID virus) currently top the list of concerns. As measures to safeguard against the virus increase and the level of risk decreases, hopefully this level of concern will steadily drop over time. However, what will not change are the other more permanent concerns, most notably wasted commute time, travel costs, impact on the environment and impact on well-being.

What concerns do you have about returning to official workplace environments in a post-pandemic world?



% of respondents, n=224

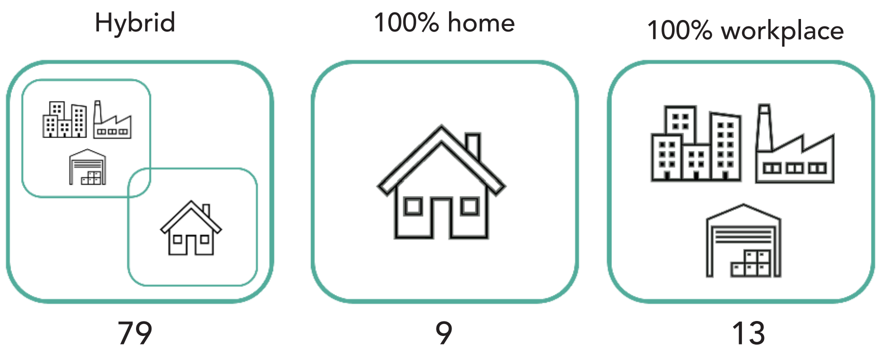
Against the backdrop presented earlier of what type of work activities employees find easier to do where, balanced with the various concerns about returning to a workplace environment, we asked the survey respondents to describe their ideal workplace scenario.

The bottom line? The overwhelming majority of respondents (79%) would prefer a hybrid scenario. Compare this to the just 15% who reported working in this way prior to the pandemic.

There is a slight but notable gender difference here, with 85% of women expressing a preferences for a hybrid scenario, compared to 71% of men.

"I wasn't as stressed during my hybrid schedule. I didn't have to worry about my child. My work-life balance was great."

In a post-COVID world, which of the following best describes your ideal workplace scenario?



% of respondents, n=223

For those indicating a preference for a hybrid scenario, we dug deeper into exactly what that might look like.

- 56% of the total workforce would prefer to have a fully flexible hybrid scenario, moving between home office and official workplace locations as necessary.
- 23% of the workforce would prefer to have set days at home each week. Of this 23%, 19% would prefer to choose these days themselves, compared to just 4% who are happy for their employer to mandate which days.
- 22% would prefer to work from home four days per week and 9% would prefer to work from home one day per week. The biggest group, 46%, would prefer to work three days at home and two days in an official workplace.
- Changes to travel preferences also extends to other locations as follows:
    - 45% of respondents are planning to travel less to industry events and gatherings
    - 43% are planning to travel less to other company locations
    - 42% are planning to travel less to suppliers and partners
    - 32% are planning to travel less to customers

The Great Leveller

Or is it The Great Divide?

In this final section we share perspectives from the profession relating to impact on equity and career development opportunity.

As we've seen in previous sections, there have been those who, relatively speaking, have thrived in terms of work-life balance and stress levels during the pandemic, those who have not, and then everyone in between. This reflects a relatively normal distribution or bell curve that can be applied to many situations – and it turns out it applies equally when it comes to views and experiences relating to equity and career progression. Let's start with equity.

Impact on equity

For the purposes of this survey we defined equity as "the fair and impartial treatment and experiences of all employees, regardless of gender, ethnicity, physical/mental ability, sexual preference, age, etc.".

Just under half, or 45%, of our survey respondents expressed a neutral view about potential impact on equity. The remainder were split in almost equal number between those who experienced or perceived a positive impact (27%) and those who reported a negative perspective (28%).

Below we share some of the comments from the respondents which reflect the diverse range of perspectives in relation to equity. They also point to some of the devisive and polarising factors underlying inequity, particularly in terms of the impact on groups within society such as women and those who are more economically disadvantaged.

What impact do you think the COVID pandemic has had on equity in the workplace?

Positive impact (27%)

- Being in the same boat has created more understanding
- There's more openness to discussing mental health and well-being impact
- Thanks to video calls, I met way more people than usual so got more visibility
- Our company takes pride in diversity and that's showed especially during the crisis
- Father have become more aware and more emphathic to working mothers

Negative impact (28%)

- The usual suspects still get all the focus; it's even more difficult to self-promote
- The additional burden on women has been disproportionate
- Diversity and inclusion has dropped down the company's priority list
- Social differences mean not everyone has a great home office or technology
- Lots of women in front line, non-salaried roles lost their jobs

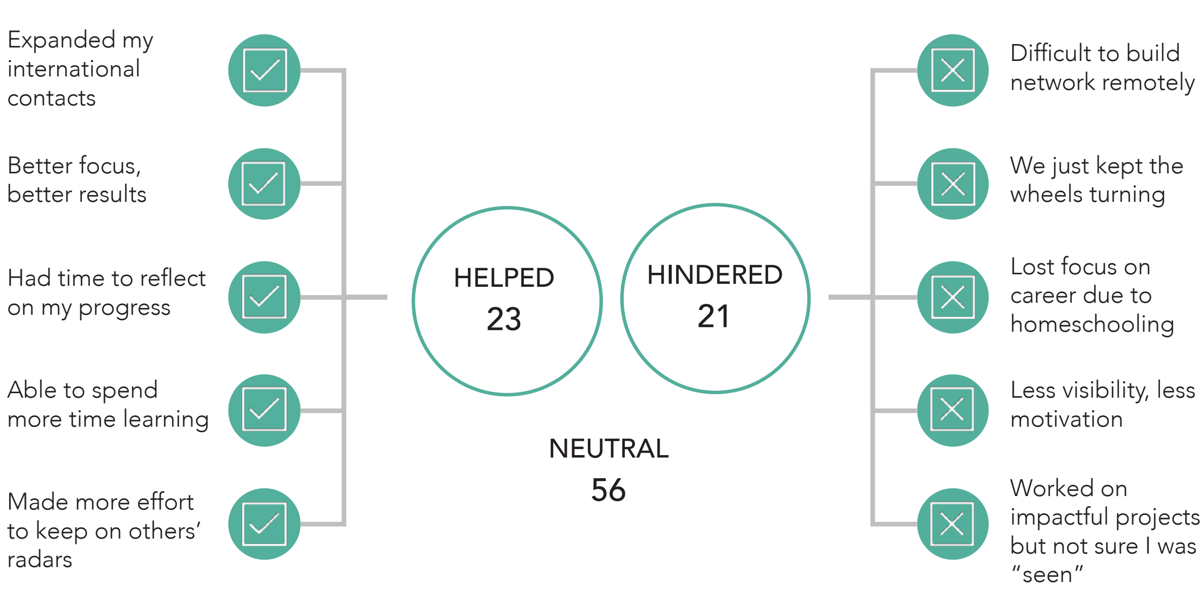
% of respondents, n=218

Impact on career progression

In line with perspectives on workplace equity during the pandemic, the survey reflects a very similar typical distribution of responses relating to career progression. 56% of respondents were neutral on this topic, i.e. they felt their career was neither helped or hindered. But again, an almost equal number were split on the issue – 23% feel that it helped, while 21% felt it hindered their career.

The chart below shares a selection of representative comments made by the survey respondents whose experiences and opinions fell either side of neutral. These comments highlight expected variances in personal circumstances, including working environment, family situation, confidence levels, experience, skills, and even mindset.

If you worked remotely during the pandemic do you think this helped or hindered your career?



% of respondents, n=213

Thinking about the impact of remote working on career progression going forward, the picture looks very similar, with 51% of respondents remaining neutral, along with a fairly even split between postive (25%) and negative (24%).

Initiatives to support equitable career development for remote workers

In our 2020 survey we asked more generally – not just through the lens of remote working – about the types of initiatives that would be helpful to career development in supply chain. This time we echoed the same question but with that lens added – and yet perhaps not suprisingly received very similar reponses. The chart on the following page outlines the results, with visibility into specific career development oppotunities topping the list for 55% of respondents as the number one initiative to make a difference.

Other initiatives rated by respondents to be most supportive for remote workers are likewise nothing new, i.e. training, networking, mentoring and so on. However, these types of initiatives must now be translated into formats accessible to all, providing an equitable experience for those not available to participate in person as well as for those who are.

Which of the following initiatives do you believe would best support equitable career development and progression opportunities for those not always visible in official workplace environments?

- 55 Visibility into specific career development opportunities
- 44 Virtual training and development
- 42 Virtual networking with senior leaders
- 41 Dedicated champion or sponsor
- 35 Formal career development reviews
- 33 Visibility into career progression paths
- 24 Virtual mentoring programmes

% of respondents, n=215

We highlight one notable gender difference here, namely that a slightly higher percentage of women than men indicated they would value a dedicated champion or sponsor (44% vs. 30%).

The important role of managers and leaders

As a segue to the final section on perceptions on the quality of relationships with managers, we share the following powerful comment from one of our survey respondents.

> *"I have worked in places where all of these initiatives were in place. Yet many supply chain professionals were hindered in their career simply because the leadership did not uphold rules or processes when it came to evaluations. The integrity of leadership teams is the #1 key aspect when it comes to career progression."*

This sentiment is entirely aligned with the findings from our 2020 survey which indicated that the most impactful working environment related initaitive for career progression would be a change in cultural values and leadership, indicated by 56% of respondents to that survey (see page 11 of the boom! report, *Career Progression in Supply Chain: The Employee Experience*, available at https://www.boomglobalnetwork.com/research.html).

Manager scorecard: could do better

Finally, we share the collective experience of the survey respondents relating to the quality and level of interaction they had with their managers throughout the pandemic. We asked: if you worked remotely during the pandemic, what was the impact on the quality of relationship / level of interaction with your direct line manager compared to before? The possible responses: not as good; about the same; better.

Again, a relatively normal natural distribution curve of responses prevails. For the vast majority – 63% – the experience was much the same (which of course may have been good, bad or somewhere in between). For 16% of respondents, the experience was happily better. However, for a not insignficant 21% of respondents, the experience was not as good as prior to the pandemic.

Interestingly, when offered the opportunity to add a comment as part of the survey, this question elicited the most responses, with some passionately cheerleading for their manager experience and others far less so positive, due either to practical considerations or for more human-based issues relating to trust, communication and rapport (or lack thereof). Again, we share a representative selection of comments from the survey respondents, grouped into two categories of "not as good" and those for whom their experience was "about the same" or "better."

Not as good - 21%

- No more informal chats in the canteen or during coffee breaks – interactions only via scheduled 1:1 with specific topics to discuss
- Contact was marginal, I was left alone and my manager only reached out if there was a big issue
- We have a good relationship but I wasted time chasing him for a video call when in the past we just talked in the office
- Bad communication
- Personal interaction was very much curtailed
- Less contact resulted in less motivation
- Workflow was awkward – trust decreased but workload increased
- Contact has been limited to transactional conversations about work, and I am only contacted in case of a crisis so not receiving the same level of coaching as before
- There are times when you need a face to face and this is not always possible as people are able to avoid you when working remotely
- I had a new boss and did not get to know him as well as I would have in the office

About the same (63%) or better (16%)

- With the increased working hours and the dedication put in, my manager started recognising and praising which was not the case before
- We interacted more than usual and got to a better understanding with regards to expectations from both sides
- My boss is very kind and he trusts I can manage myself well and my work result shows that as well
- My manager was able to focus more on my results and output than on my routine
- The level of feedback increased and became more concrete, pragmatic and focused
- My boss was a servant leader and always managed to remain in touch
- We made a more conscious investment in connection and as a result increased bonds
- My boss took greater measures to check in with his team
- Increased touchpoints and talked more openly when I felt overwhelmed – I felt more supported
- Our locations haven't determined the impact, it's how we used our time

The Bottom Line

Although this report does not aim to provide a prescriptive guide for business operations and HR leaders in relation to what the ideal workplace scenario could or should look like for supply chain professionals going forward – after all, the needs and requirements of different companies are highly individual – we offer the following conclusions and observations for consideration.

- The pandemic has underlined the importance and reliance on people as a most precious asset in the supply chain ecosystem. Current levels of employee stress and potential burnout should remain a significant red flag as we navigate this next phase of the pandemic and the transition to some semblance of normalcy and should be addressed as a key concern as soon as possible.

- The expectations of employees when it comes to workplace preferences and the type of cultural environments they prefer to work in have changed. Employers that do not embrace these new expectations born out of the very real experience of the last almost two years do so at their own risk. In parallel, leaders must work harder than ever before to maintain levels of engagement and provide clear career paths for the future or otherwise risk losing valuable people to other employers offering a more attractive alternative.

- This survey has highlighted few major differences between the experiences and expectations of men and women. However, what has surfaced has been a potential imbalance between number of hours worked and consequent levels of stress. When thinking about workplace scenarios and how to create equitable opportunity for all employees given their individual needs and circumstances, note that the survey has revealed a relatively higher preference for more flexible, hybrid options from female respondents compared to male.

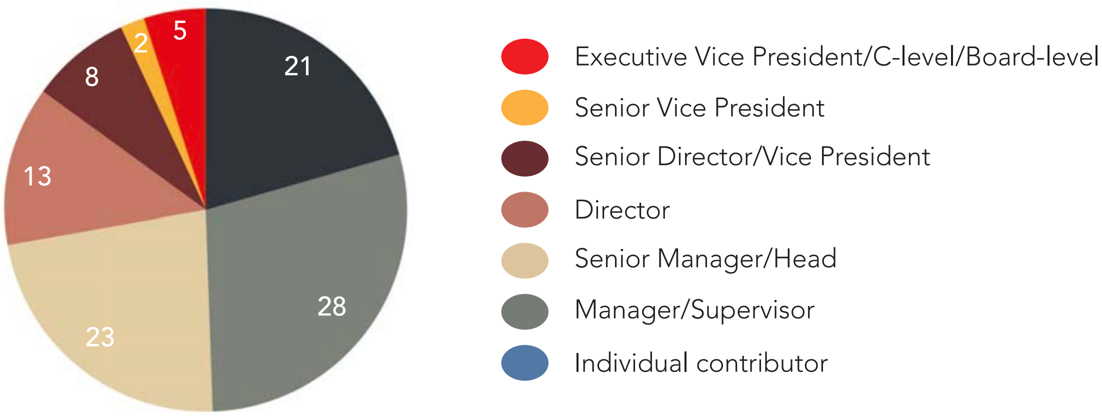
- Although it was the norm for many managers pre-COVID to lead distributed teams, for others it has been a relatively new experience to manage in a virtual environment, particularly during a time of intense pressure. Some have fared well; others less so. Now is the time to ensure that all managers are trained to be equipped to manage well in new hybrid scenarios.

- As individuals, we must also learn how to navigate new ways of working, whether that means improving time management skills, establishing effective approaches for achieving optimum work-life balance, building great networks to support ongoing career development, or creating good habits for learning and wider professional skills development. Although employers may provide many of the resources needed to do this, those who are able to nurture an increasingly self-led and self-sufficient growth mindset are those who will continue to thrive in the future. For those to whom this may come less naturally, consider seeking out additional support from your employer or from an external coach or supportive network of peers.

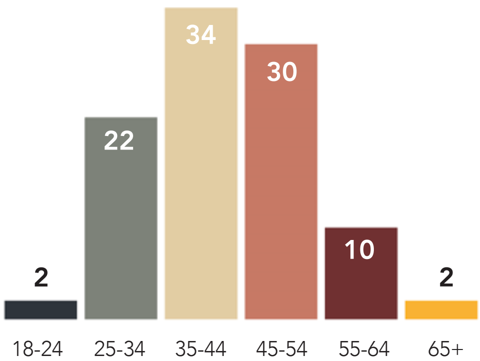
About the survey

At the beginning of July 2021, an invitation to complete an online survey was sent out to members of the boom! community and to the wider supply chain profession via LinkedIn and selected supply chain media titles. The survey was closed in mid-August 2021. In total 224 completed responses were received. The following graphics highlight the key demographics from survey respondents. Figures represent percentage of respondents.

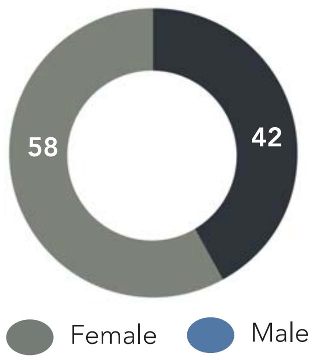
Job level



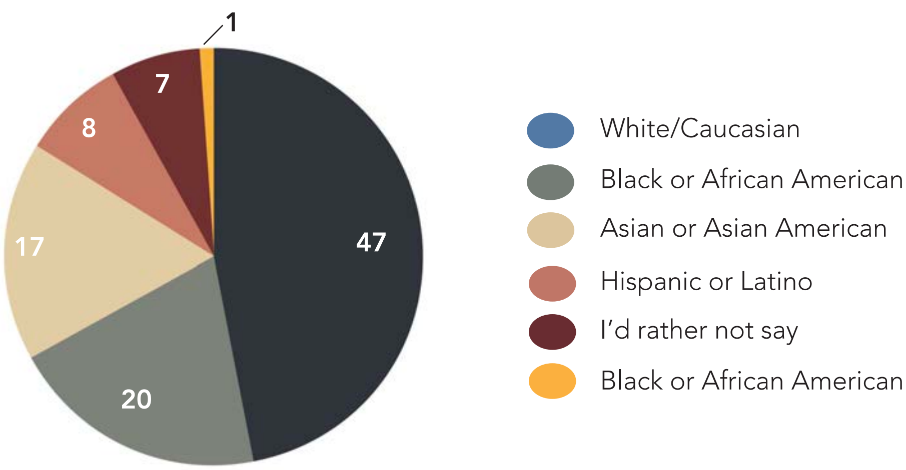
Age



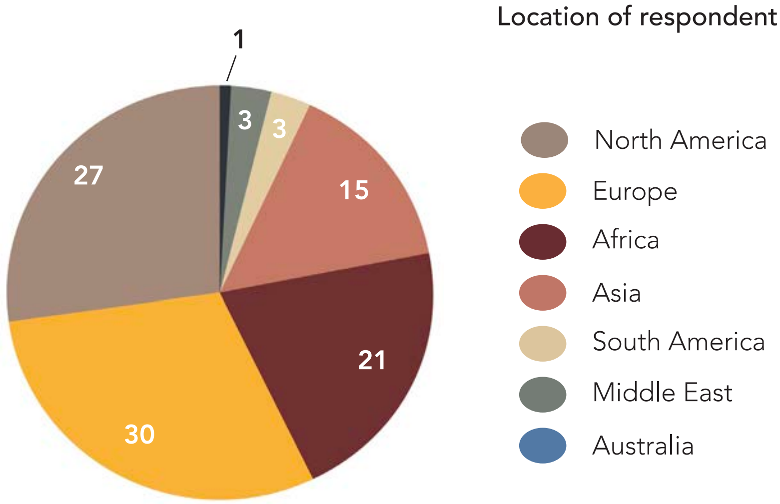
Gender



Ethnicity



Location of respondent



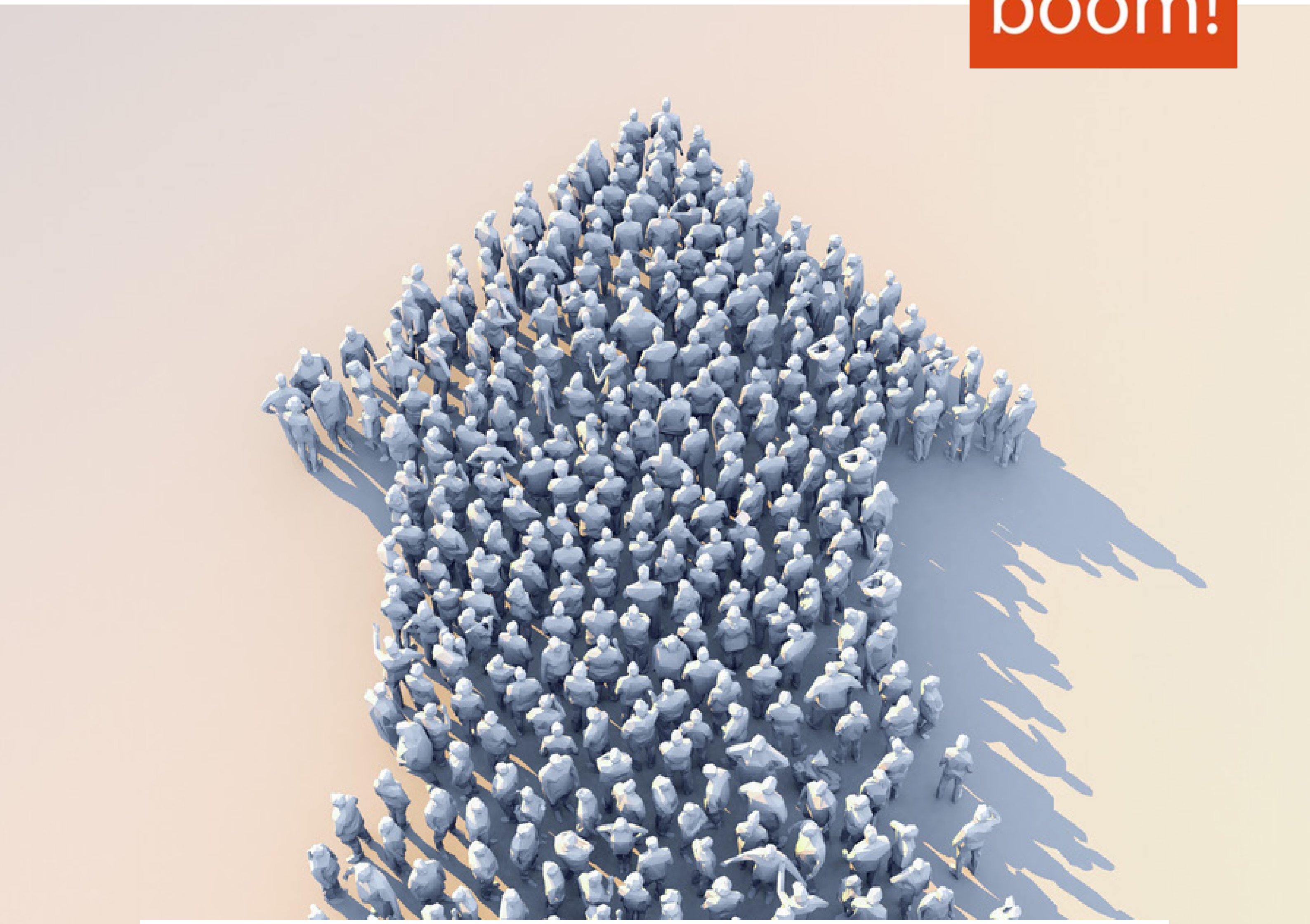
Industry sector

- 1 Aerospace & defence
- 5 Agriculture & mining
- 4 Automotive
- 3 Chemicals
- 3 Construction & engineering
- 18 Consumer packaged goods
- 2 Fabric & apparel
- 9 Food & beverage
- 10 Healthcare & pharma
- 7 Hi-tech
- 8 Industrial
- 11 Logistics & distribution
- 2 Medical equipment & devices
- 1 Paper & packaging
- 6 Professional services
- 6 Retail
- 4 Utilities & Energy

Company size by annual revenue (USD)

- 17 Less than $10 million
- 6 $10 million to less than $50 million
- 9 $50 million to less than $100 million
- 6 $100 million to less than $250 million
- 4 $250 million to less than $500 million
- 7 $500 million to less than $1 billion
- 16 $1 billion to less than $5 billion
- 8 $5 billion to less than $10 billion
- 9 $10 billion to $25 billion
- 18 $25 billion USD or above

boom!



About boom!

The boom! community was launched in 2019 with a vision to empower women in supply chain for the benefit of all. Our members represent all supply chain and procurement functions and span multiple industries across 42 countries, bringing a rich diversity of experience, thinking and ambition.

Our ultimate goal is an equitable world where there is a level playing field for all those with a desire to flourish in their careers in balance with their personal lives. In that world there will be no need for boom! to exist. Until then it is our mission to help enable women grasp with both arms the opportunities available to them and to provide guidance to supply chain leaders and their teams as they work to nurture female talent and create equity of opportunity for all.

The boom! community is supported by supply chain leaders from companies such as Burberry, Coca-Cola Europacific Partners, The Estée Lauder Companies, GE Appliances (a Haier company), Henkel, The Hershey Company, Microsoft, MSD, Mondelēz International, New Balance, Schneider Electric and Unilever.

For more information visit www.boomglobalnetwork.com or contact us at hello@boomglobalnetwork.com

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