



# The new normal

**Facing the challenges of returning to work**

# Employee care report

## Report overview

The Limeade Institute conducted a global study to understand the current state of the employee experience and how companies are moving into 2021.

The survey was administered on an online global surveying platform for approximately two weeks, launching January 20th, 2021 and concluding February 5th, 2021. Data was collected from 7,846 participants from various countries. After data cleaning, the final sample consisted of 4,553 full-time employees, over the age of 18, representing France, Germany, United Kingdom, Australia and the United States.

To ensure we collected a representative sample, we collected data from at least 500 individual contributors per country and 200 people managers or above, from each country. The overall sample consisted of 3,006 individual-level contributors and 1,547 people managers or above. Participants represented over 17 different industries, from companies with 500 employees or more. Most participants fell between ages 25 and 45 (68%), with 31% over the age of 45. It was a relative equal split between gender identification – with 52% identifying as woman, and 48% identifying as man. More than half of the participants (57%) identified as a parent or caretaker, and the majority identified as White\* (82%), with 7.4% identifying as Asian and 6% identifying as Black or African American.

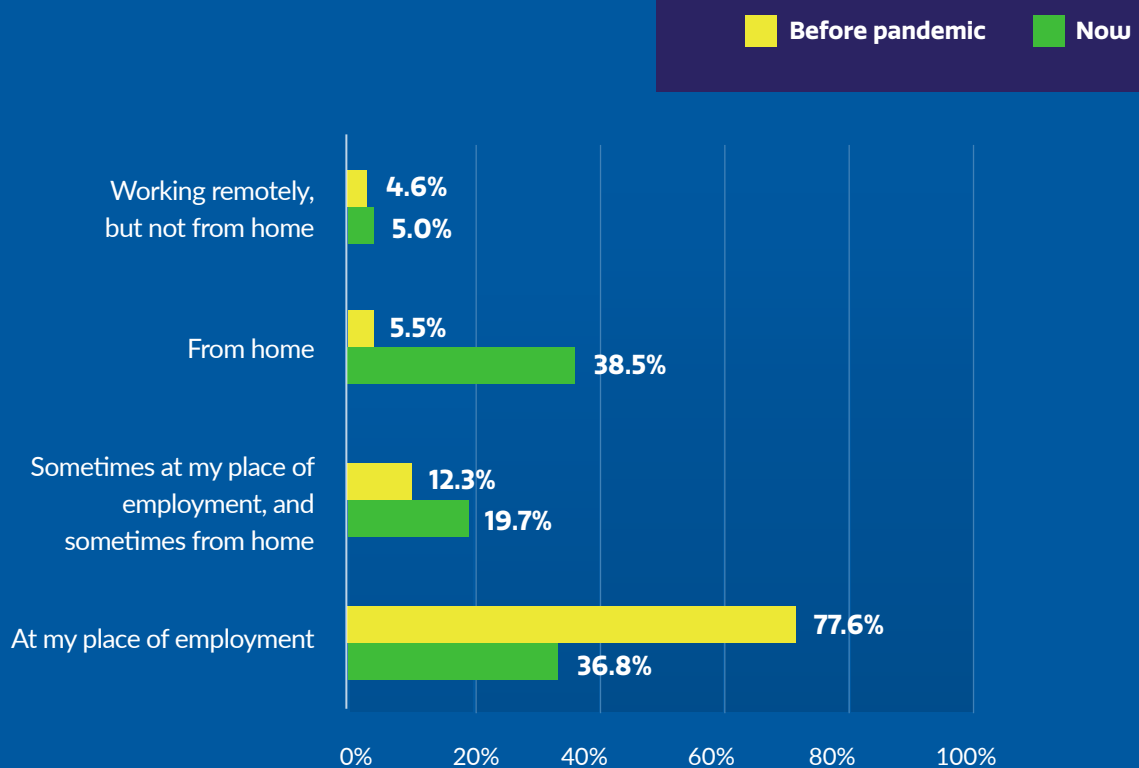
\*Note: due to cultural and legal context and recommendation against it, we did not ask for race from German employees.



# Changes in employee work-life

When asked where participants worked before the pandemic, the majority of participants (**78%**) had worked onsite at their place of employment, while only **6%** had worked from home.

And now, unsurprisingly, only **37%** are still working onsite at their place of employment, while **39%** are now working from home.



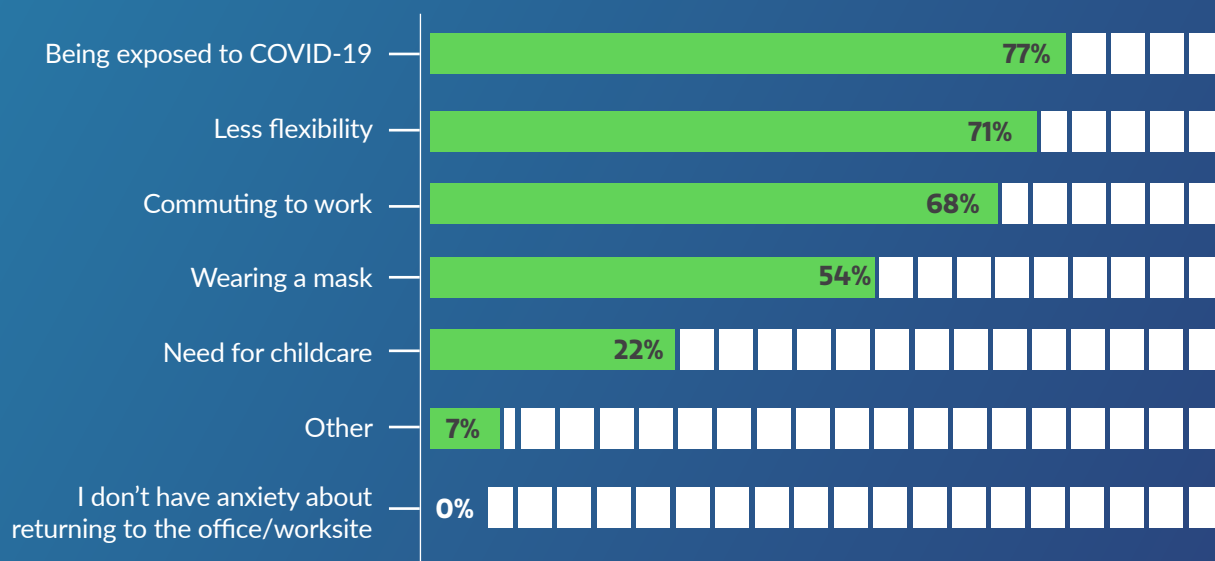


## Anxiety about return to a physical work environment

To understand how employees are feeling about returning to work, we asked those that were *previously* working onsite at their place of employment but are *now* working remotely, about their top sources of anxiety about returning to their previous office/worksite (n = 1628). Here is what they reported:



### Top sources of anxiety about returning to the workplace



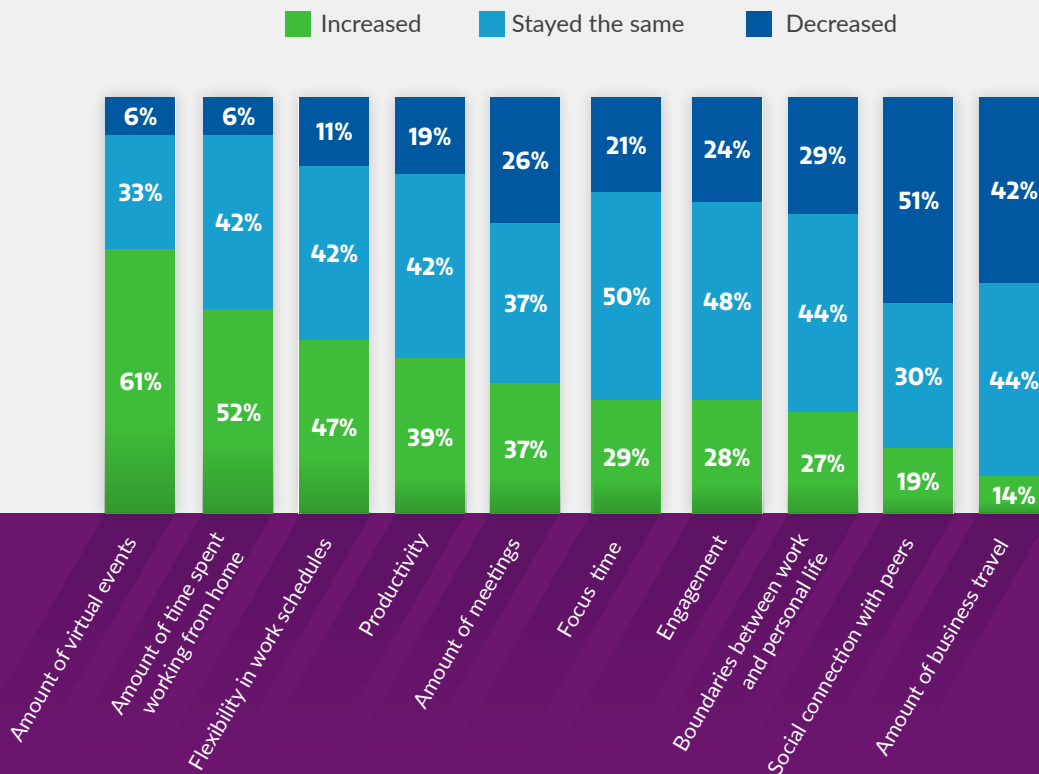
As seen in the chart above, **there was not a single employee that did not have any anxiety about returning to the office/worksite**. The top selected source of anxiety was being exposed to COVID-19 (77%); though, this was followed closely by the idea of less flexibility (71%) and having to commute to work again (68.5%). These results indicate that among fear of health and safety of a continued pandemic, **employees fear losing the flexibility that work-from-home practices have established, including the decreased commute**. There is a hesitancy to let go of this new reality of work that these individuals have experienced from this past year.

# Reflecting on 2020, moving into 2021 and beyond

Reflecting on 2020, employees indeed reported increases in time spent working from home and flexibility in work schedules — as well as the amount of virtual events, productivity and a slight increase in the amount of meetings. Focus time, engagement levels, and boundaries between work and personal life seemed to predominately stay the same with a relatively equal amount of those that either increased or decreased in these areas. 42% of employees reported a decrease in amount of business travel and 51% of employees experienced a decrease in social connection with peers.



## Changes in work in 2020



Interestingly, when we asked employees to reflect on what they would like to change or keep moving into 2021, 48% of individuals said they are happy with the amount of social connection they are experiencing with peers and would like it to remain the same, while only 20% wanted the current amount of social connection to change. Additionally, 70% of employees said they did still feel a sense of connection to the people they work with. These results suggest that although the changes to work have brought on declines in social interactions and connection with peers, employees are doing relatively okay with these changes.

	Increased* or stayed the same in 2020	Decreased in 2020	Want to keep in 2021	Do not want to keep in 2021
Amount of time spent working from home	94.09% (52%)	5.91%	53.64%	14.85%
Amount of virtual events	93.57% (60.8%)	6.44%	39.65%	20.80%
Flexibility in work schedules	88.53% (47%)	11.47%	68.43%	8.10%
Productivity	81.35% (39%)	18.65%	57.80%	10.23%
Focus time	79.35% (29%)	20.64%	51.64%	11.11%
Engagement	75.93% (28%)	24.08%	50.47%	12.14%
Amount of meetings	73.75% (37%)	26.25%	38.31%	22.31%
Boundaries between work and personal life	70.96% (27%)	29.04%	50.61%	16.10%
Amount of business travel	58.36% (14%)	41.64%	39.40%	21.91%
Social connection with peers	49.07% (19%)	50.94%	47.64%	20.38%

\* Increased in parentheses

When asked what other aspect of their work life employees wanted to keep moving forward, flexibility and working from home again emerged as particularly desirable (flexibility in work schedules, 68% and amount of time spent working from home, 54%). Interestingly, productivity also emerged as a top choice (58%), with 81% of employees reporting that their productivity either stayed the same or increased (increased for 39%). When asked if the physical space where they currently work helps them thrive, however, only 54% of employees felt as though that was the case (with similar scores across those that worked from home and onsite), indicating that although employees may like a lot of things about working remotely, their homes may not be optimized for work — and the same goes for working onsite. Given how quickly the world transitioned into alternative work arrangements, these results are not surprising. These findings suggest that there is an opportunity for organizations to rethink return to, as well as current state of, work through the lens that would most support employee well-being. There is also an opportunity to maintain any gains that are beneficial and desirable for employees, such as increased flexibility — all without the fear of sacrificing productivity. At the core of this will be two-way trust and communication between organizations and their employees — working together toward the best employee experience.



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## Overall sources of stress

We then asked all participants surveyed (n = 4553), regardless of where they were currently working, what their top sources of stress were when generally looking toward this next year. **Health and safety of themselves and their family (82.4%) was the top selected source of stress, followed closely by economic uncertainty (82%).** About 55% of employees indicated some stress about job security, and 49% sourced political polarization.

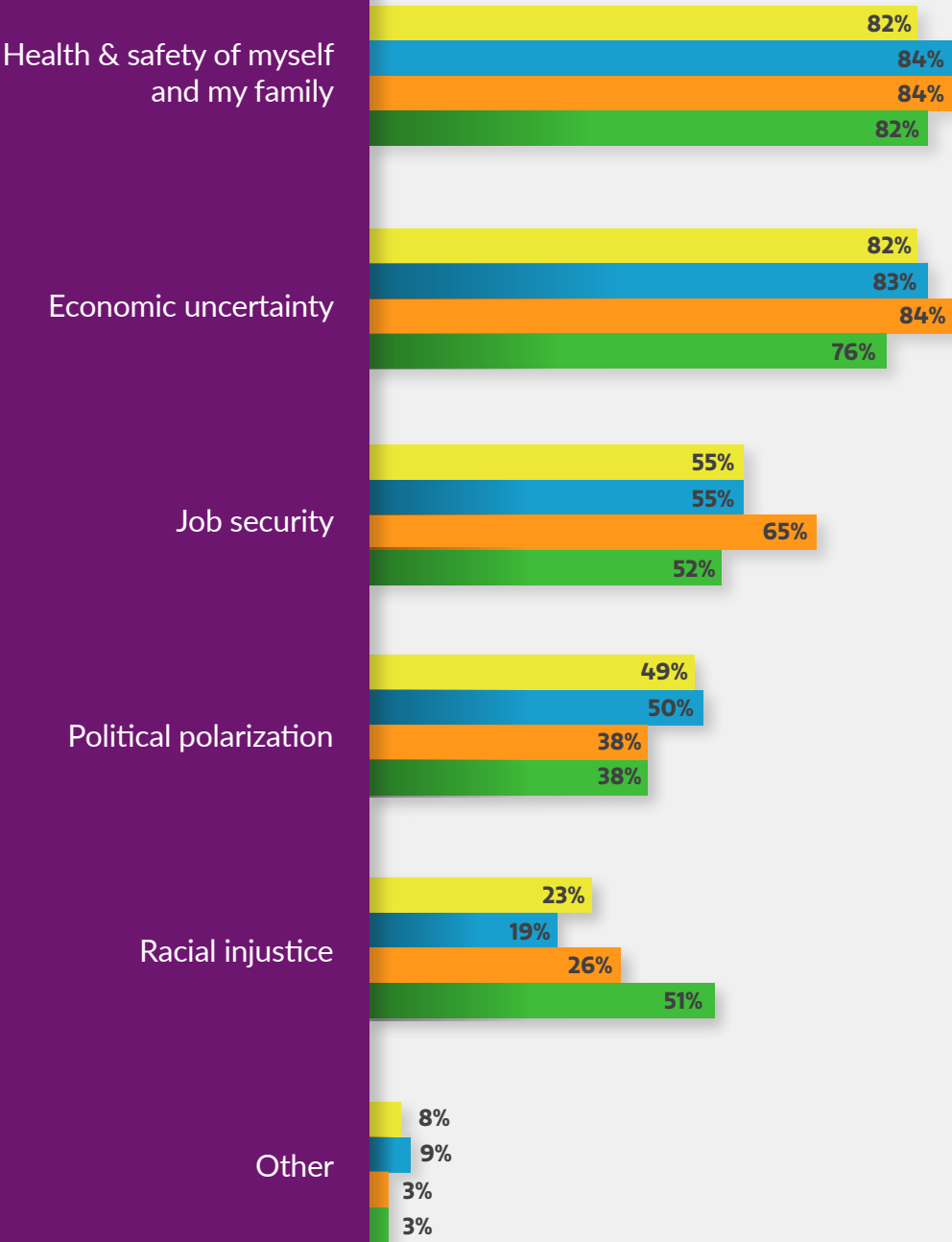
**While only 23% of the total response sample selected racial injustice as a top source of stress moving into 2021; this number jumped to 51% for those that identified as Black or African American.** The figure below shows top sources of stress by the top three racial groups. This data supports the notion that individual identities cannot be ignored, and this will remain a core part of caring for employees and what they are uniquely experiencing.

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## 2021 sources of stress

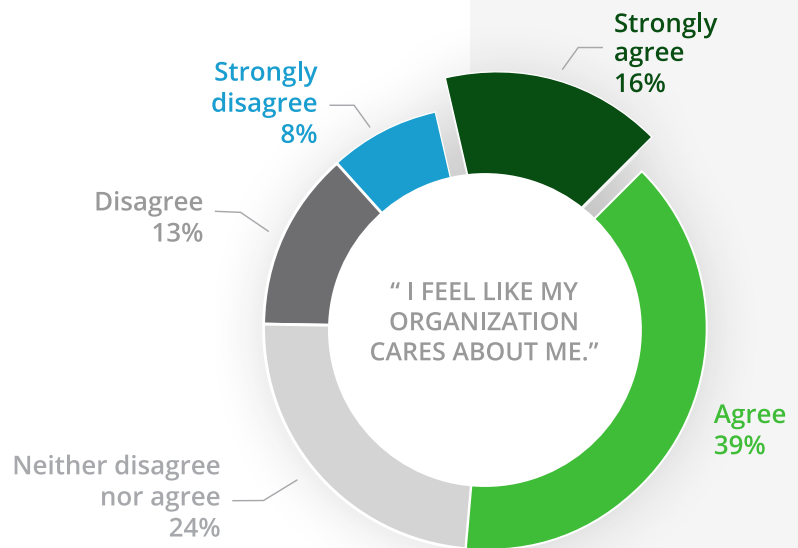


# Current state of organizational care

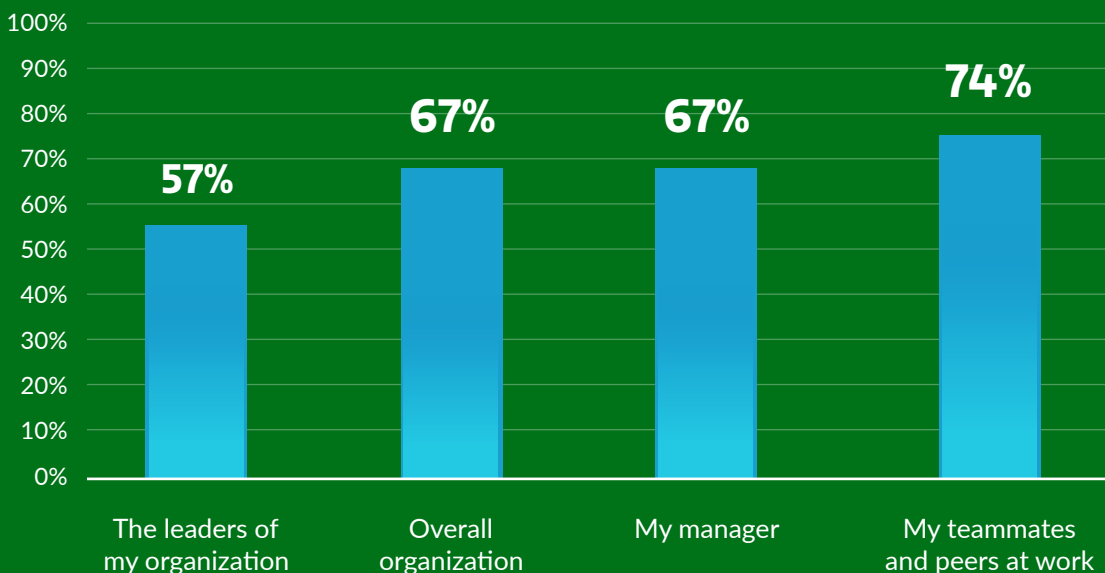
To get a pulse on the current levels of organization care, we asked participants if they felt like their organization cared about them as individuals.

Only 55% of employees felt like their organization cares about them. **Of this, only 16% strongly agreed, a drop from the 31% that strongly agreed in our March 2020 Employee Care Report.**

When asked about the extent to which employees felt supported by various levels of the organization (overall, leaders, managers, peers), **we saw that in addition to the overall organization, managers and leaders specifically continue to show room for improvement in supporting all employees, a trend we have seen from our previous care report (October 2020).**

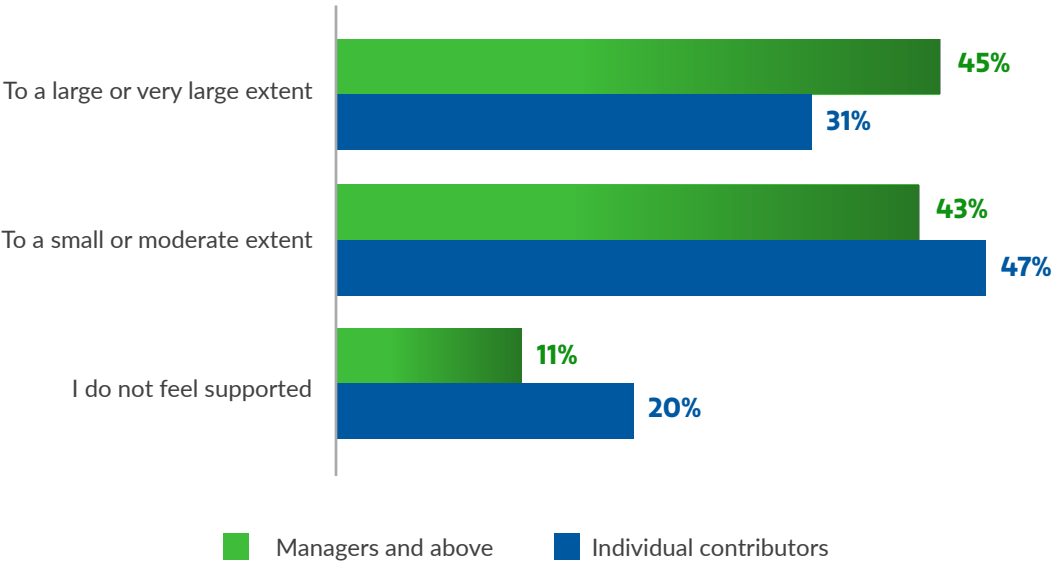


## I feel supported by...



And when explicitly asked about the extent to which they felt supported by managers and leaders in *improving their well-being*, we continue to see individual contributors slipping through the cracks compared to managers and above. This mirrors the results we saw in our October 2020 Employee Care Report, illustrating the gap between how supported managers feel compared to their employees.

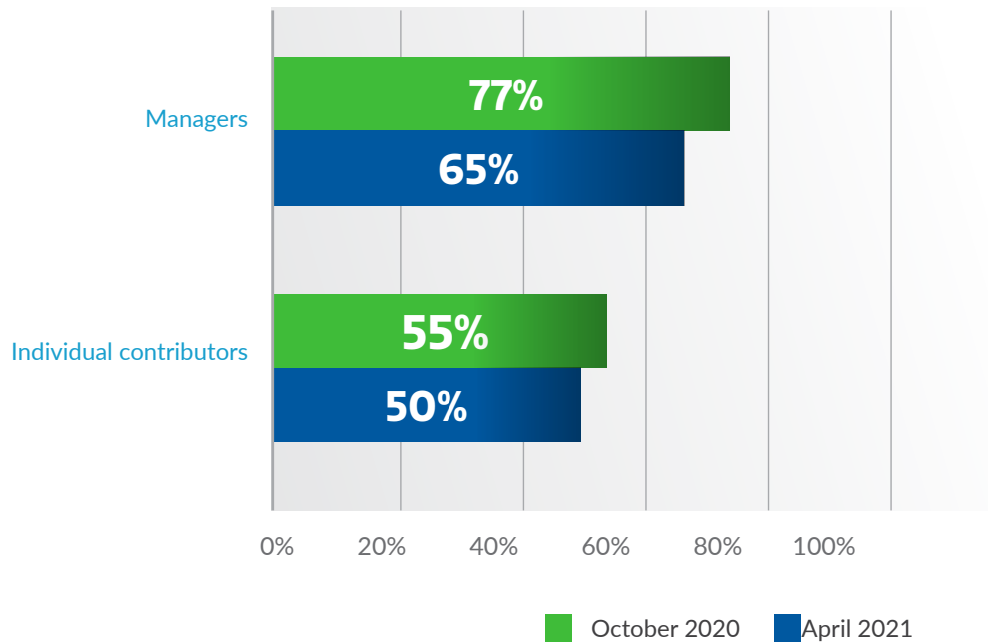
**Do you feel supported by your managers and leaders in improving your well-being?**






We then took a step back and looked at the extent to which individuals felt like their overall organization cared about their whole-person well-being. Here, we again saw a similar gap between individual contributors and managers; however, we see that **both groups are declining in perceived organizational care for well-being, indicating that organizations need to step up for all employees.**

## Organizational care for whole person well-being



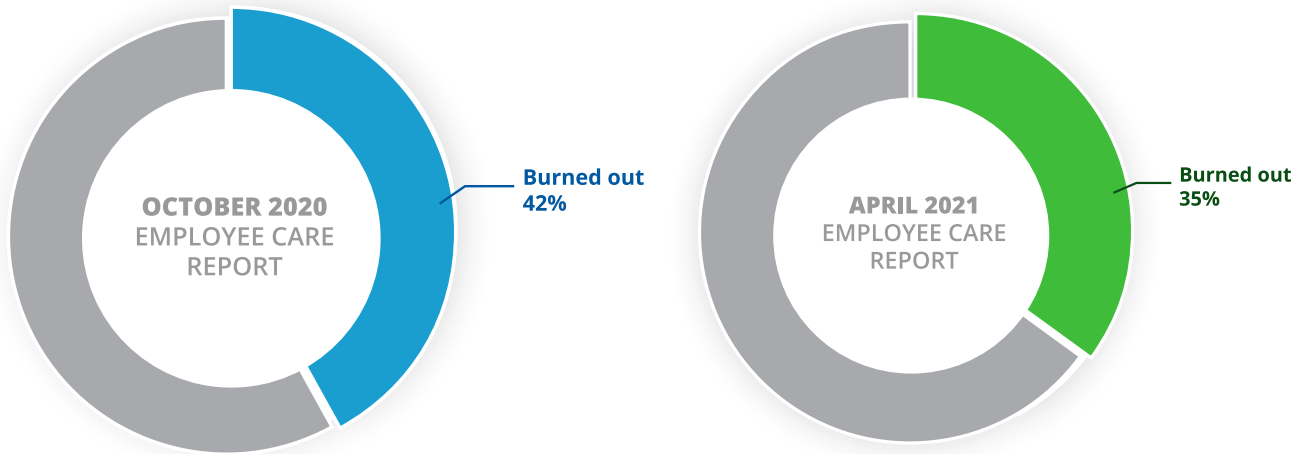
**When looking at current levels of employee well-being, engagement, and inclusion, we saw moderate numbers, with room for improvement:**

  
**72%**  
**Well-being**

  
**72%**  
**Engagement**

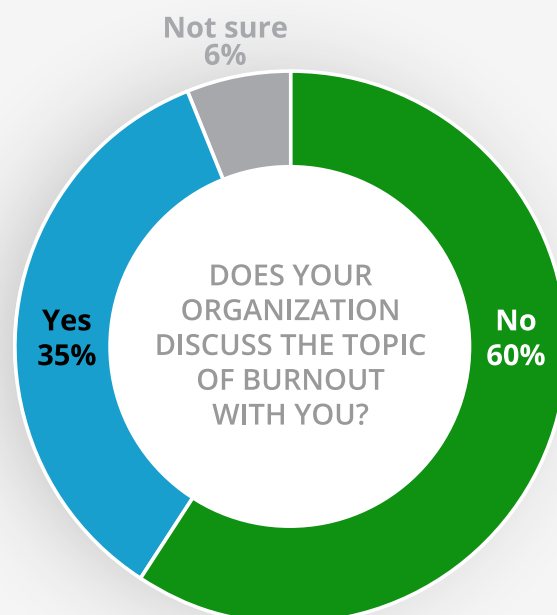
  
**65%**  
**Inclusion**

Additionally, though there was a decrease in burnout levels from our October 2020 Employee Care Report, dropping from 42% to 35% of participants reporting feeling burned out — this number remains high.



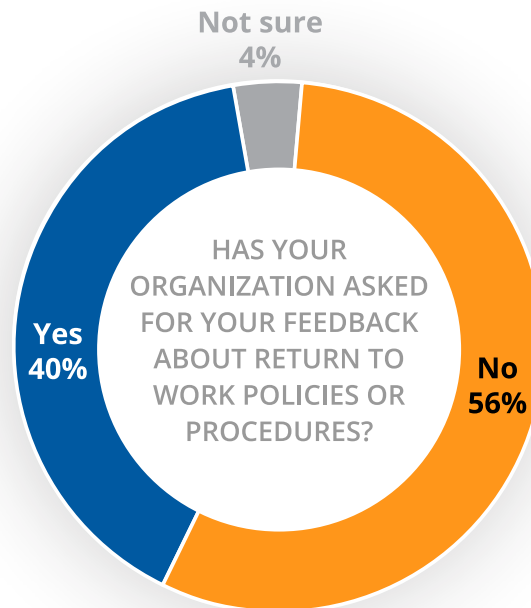
## Are organizations discussing the topic of burnout? 60% of employees said no.

In part, this may be due to the gap in support received — when asked if their company discusses the topic of burnout them, 35% said yes, **but 60% said no** with 6% unsure.



# The road to return to work

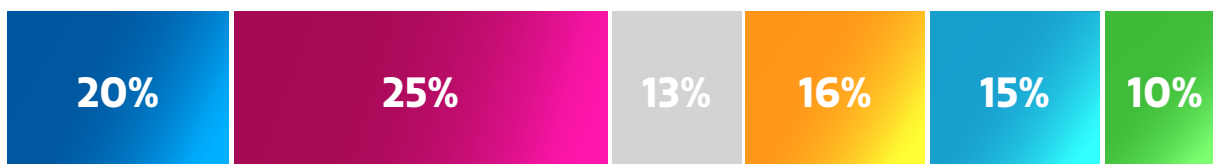
To understand the extent to which organizations are currently asking their employees how they are doing, or the best way to support them, we asked about the extent to which organizations are soliciting and acting on employee feedback. Surprisingly, more people said that their company had **not** asked for their feedback about return to work policies or procedures (55.7%) than those whose companies actually had (40.5%). 3.8% of participants were unsure if their company had asked for their feedback.



And when asked how often their company *communicates* about return to work planning, there was inconsistency in how often organizations are communicating with their employees, with **some even reporting never (15%)**.

## How often does your organization communicate about return to work planning?

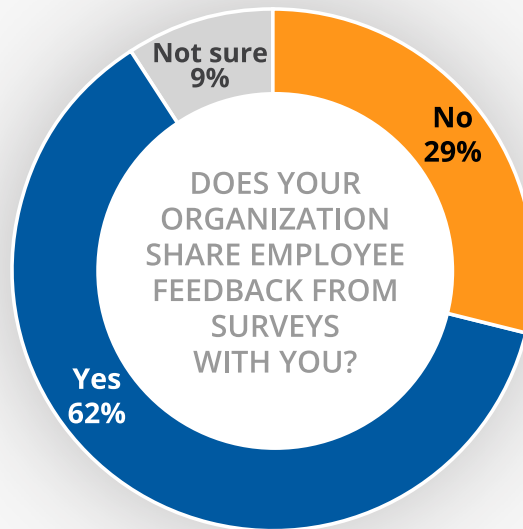
Weekly Monthly Quarterly Irregularly Never Not Sure





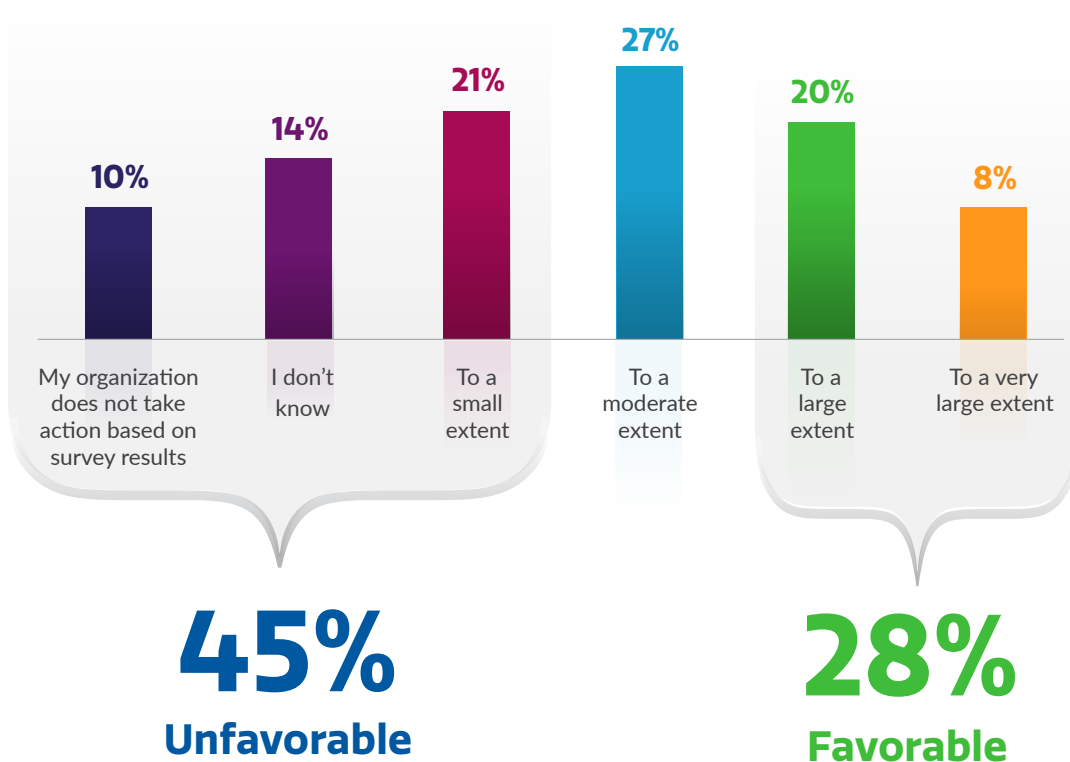
When asked about employee surveys in general, **a whopping 15% of employees said that their organization does not administer employee surveys to gather their feedback at all.**

Of those that worked at organizations that *did* administer surveys, 62% said they do receive feedback from surveys they've submitted, while the rest (38%) either did not receive feedback (29%) or were unsure (9%).



When asked about the extent to which their organization takes **action** based on the results of employee surveys, only 28% responded favorably ("Organization takes action to a large or very large extent"), whereas 45% responded unfavorably — 10% of which said their organization does not take any action based on survey results.

### To what extent does your organization take action based on survey results?





These results indicate that organizations need to do a better job of administering surveys, sharing what was heard, and taking action based on results. To achieve a new employee experience that fosters well-being and is rooted in employee care, organizations must utilize surveys and gather feedback — they will serve a critical role in building the necessary two-way communication and trust required between organizations and their employees. In the end, employees are maintaining their productivity and focus time, and would like to keep the added flexibility that has come as a result of the pandemic. However, there continues to be a need for organizations to solicit feedback from their employees and work *together* towards a new, more caring tomorrow. Employees continue showing up for their organizations and the work required from them — it's time for organizations to do the same.

# Are you facing any challenges as employees return to work?

**Get feedback from your workforce to boost retention and lower burnout.**

Learn more about how you can transform work with Limeade and build a positive employee experience at your company. Get in touch today, or visit us online.



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