

Working during a pandemic: your thoughts and ideas

1. What were the biggest challenges?

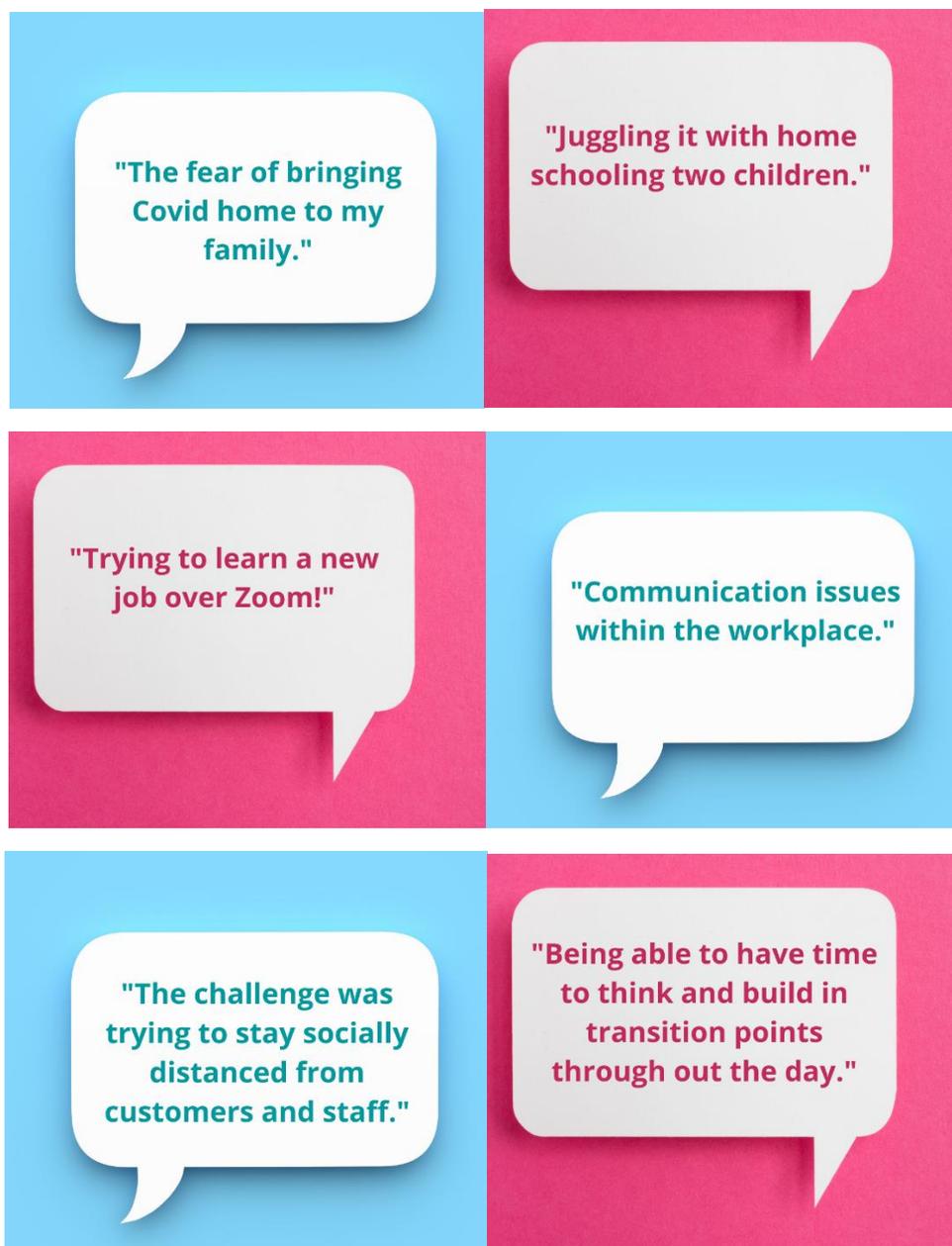
The main challenges were connected to managing **childcare** and **communication** – and lack of it in particular.

Other issues were around the **IT challenges** of working remotely, **lack of face-to-face contact**, and concerns and fears about adhering to Covid guidance – and **social distancing** in particular.

A couple of respondents spoke of feeling **isolated**, and there were also responses about **time management**.



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What can employers do?

Communicate, communicate, communicate. Look for opportunities to stay connected – and make it a priority. And not just on task. The informal stuff too, that's what matters. From Zoom coffee breaks to walking catchups, from beach picnics to Skype calls. Ask people what works for them and keep connected.

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Check in how people are feeling. Ask what they need. And respond accordingly. Recognise that people may struggle in different ways and for different causes: this has been and continues to be a wholly unsettling time. **Be kind, always.**

Provide true flexibility that allows parents to adapt around childcare: **trust people** by focusing on the outputs not the inputs. And make sure the 'basics' are in place, that people have the right kit and kaboodle they need to do their job: **make it easy for people to do their work.**

2. What were the biggest benefits?

The biggest benefit that the last year has brought has been the **gift of time**: to spend with family, to spend with partners, doing things that people enjoy. This is swiftly followed by **flexibility** – to do stuff such as housework around the work tasks, for example – and **balance**: life and work having greater equilibrium.

Other benefits have been **feeling safe** as the risk of catching Covid was reduced by being at home, **less travel** – goodbye traffic jams! – which was also coupled for some people with another benefit – **less expenditure**, savings on diesel but also on those Boots meal deals.

Other themes included being able to **be more effective** by getting more done, learning **new skills**, and **bringing people together**: living in a time of uncertainty creating a sense of 'we're in this together.'



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"Being able to work with more clients per day as I didn't have to travel, but having a much more balanced work life balance."

"Felt safer at home."

"Flexibility. Quick chores - putting the washing on, popping dinner on. No commute time."

"No travel, no searching for a car park space, no trying to find a desk."

"Less travel and more time to spend with the family."

"Flexibility and positive impact on work/life balance."

"Not having to travel, more time in the day and less expenditure."

"The biggest benefit was the gift of time."

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What can employers do?

Capitalise on these benefits. Ask your people what has worked well for them and what they want to take forward from this time. Take actions accordingly.

Consider how you offer **flexibility** – remembering that flexibility for one person might not be the same for another. **Empower people to make their own choices within the parameters of trust.** Focus on the outputs not the inputs.

Think about how people might be feeling and give them space to feel whatever they feel – that sense of safety might be threatened as they return. Think about how you **welcome them back** in the same way you might a new recruit. Make **wellbeing a priority.**

Maximise togetherness. Seek opportunities for informal engagement that brings people together and **show appreciation:** thank your employees for what they've achieved and continue to do so in a time like no other. And keep on showing gratitude.

3. Examples of employee engagement during the last year

There were some fantastic examples of employee engagement during the last year from respondents. And the main theme of these ideas was around **communications:** employers looked for different ways to keep their people informed and connected, using the technology available.

Other ideas came under themes such as **appreciation** – so vital to make people feel valued. Gifts, but also saying 'thank you' – something so simple but so often forgotten. Some employers homed in on **wellbeing support**, and it was great to read about **social engagement activities**, keeping people involved well beyond the task. Zoom quiz anyone?

And technology. One respondent shared that their employer had helped to fund the technical kit they needed and it's easier for them to work from home.

There were too a couple of respondents who said **nothing.** Which is a real shame. Because in normal times (whatever they were) employers need to engage their people – never mind during the biggest health crisis any of us have ever experienced, and all the uncertainty and anxiety that brings.

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"Quizzes, online socials, wellbeing activity, lots to engage and connect teams."

"I was buying a laptop for my personal use and my employer invested 50% so I could buy a better machine."

"They introduced a weekly webinar from our senior management which helped us feel included at a very isolating time."

"Autonomy to deliver on outcomes in whatever way works best."

"Weekly business updates."

"I engaged employees in virtual coffee mornings, walk and talk sessions and craft projects/virtual Hiit classes."

"Constant communication, video meetings and unexpected incentives like a free takeaway."

"We had Zoom team meetings, groups WhatsApp messages, thanking me for working hard and helping others."

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What can employers do

This. And more of it.

Look for ways to keep people **connected**. Focus on the person and value them. **Show appreciation**. Not least in word.

Be **innovative and creative** in your engagement. But **meaningful** too. Make any engagement activities in line with your organisation.

And **personal**. Adding that personal touch to your engagement – even just an individually written note from the boss – lets people know that they matter.

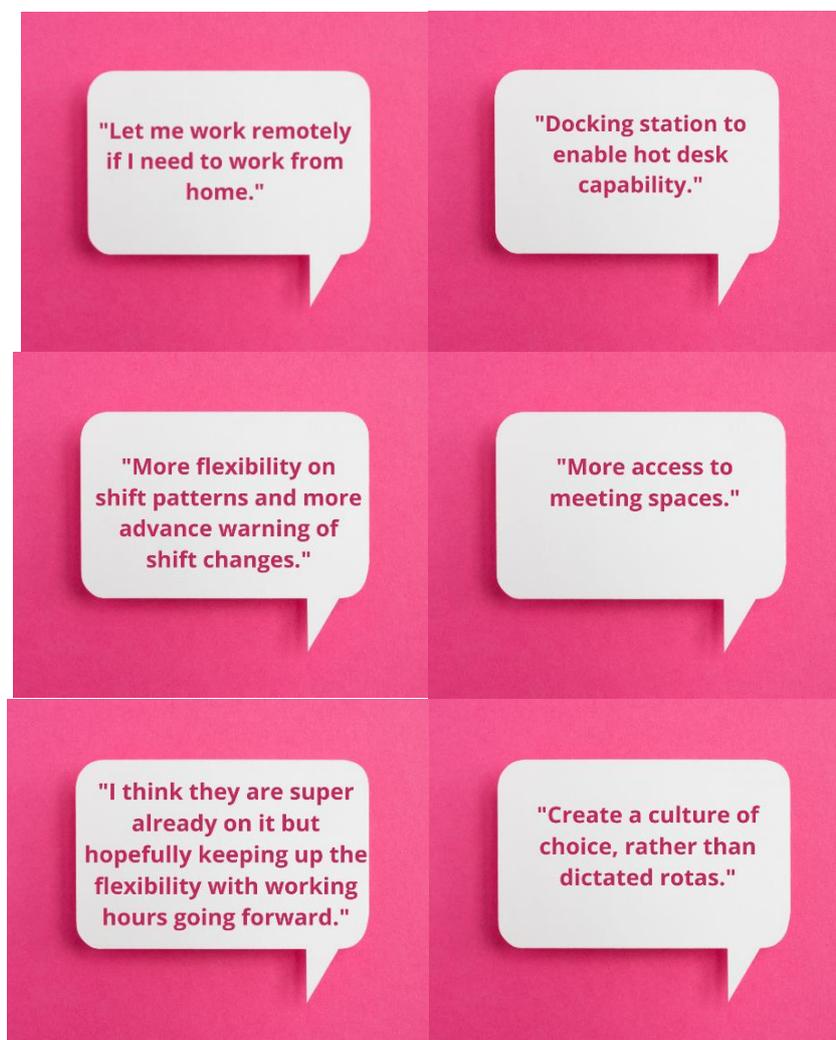
But do do it.

4. What one change could your organisation make to benefit you and how you work in future?

The single most common theme to this answer was **flexibility**: people want flexible working. The pandemic has provided an insight into a more flexible world that permits better balance and people don't want to go back. As one respondent said: 'don't be rigid' in the working arrangements and expectations.

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Other comments came under the themes of **technical tools** and **engagement and communications** – a sense of feeling isolated from the team.



What can employers do?

Firstly, recognise that when employees are satisfied, they will be more **productive and effective**. And so, think seriously about what is possible when it comes to **flexibility**: after all, the pandemic has shown us that there is way more scope for flexible working than we ever thought possible.

Coupled with this flexibility is a need for the right **technical kit and support** – people can't work remotely without it. And **enhanced engagement** – out of sight is most definitely not out of mind and when we're not seeing people regularly, we need to work even harder and communicating with them and making them feel involved. **Be proactive, be consistent.**

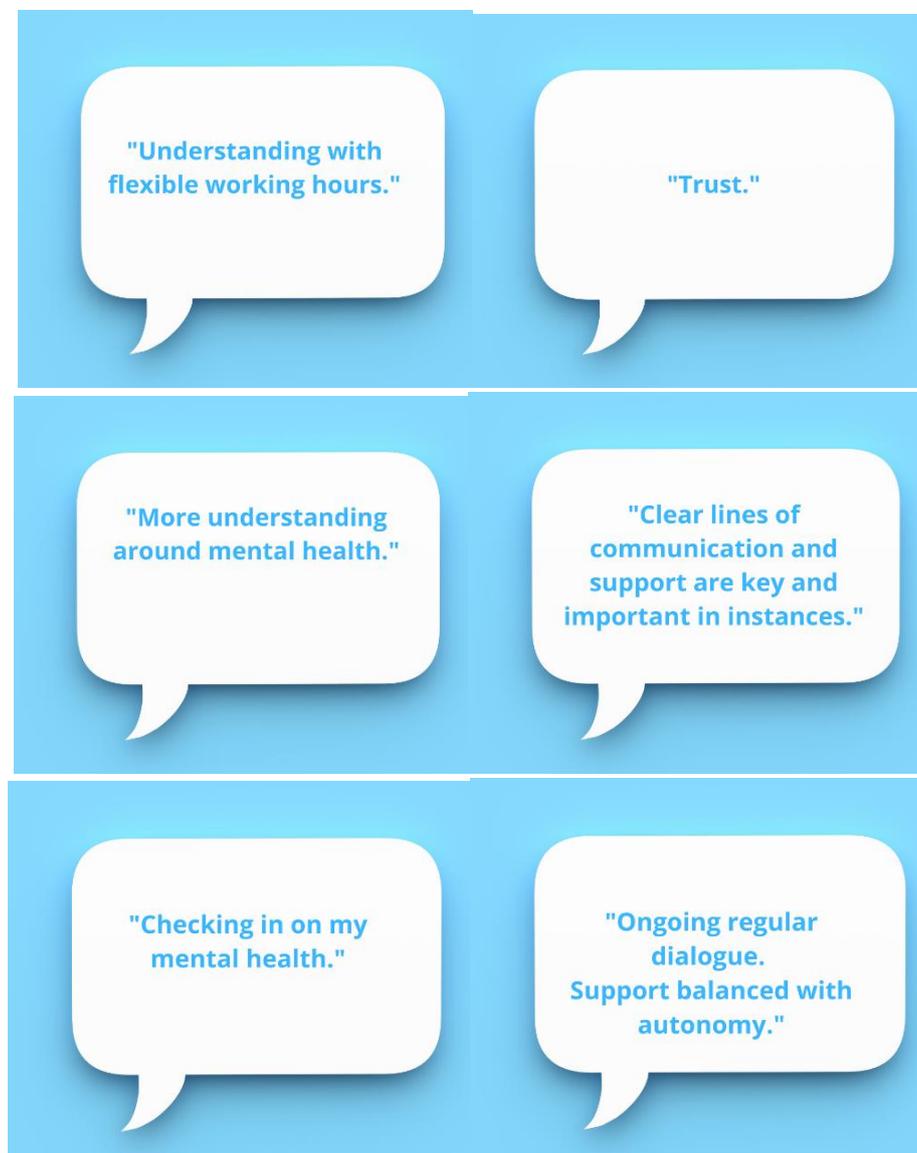
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5. What one thing do you need from your manager to support you in future?

Some of the comments were about **mental health** – understanding, support, and checking in. There were also comments around **communications** and maintaining an ongoing dialogue.

Reflecting the theme of **flexibility**, people wanted their managers to ensure flexible working was offered.

Also, there were comments around clear direction and being empowered – as someone said it quite simply: **'trust.'**



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What can employers do?

Managers need three things: **clarity** about what the role of a manager is – it isn't just a super-employee, it is a standalone role on its own with specific requirements; the **tools and resources** to help them to do their job, and finally, training.

Managers need to be **engaged and empowered** to be able to do their jobs and support their teams well. If they are not, then it may be very difficult for them to do the same for the people who report into them.

6. Has the pandemic encouraged to change your career aspirations?

For some people, the answer is yes. Reflective time has caused people to change their paths for different reasons – for **less stress, more time with family**, for something with a different **purpose**, or to pursue ambitions elsewhere, afforded by virtual opportunities.

To anyone who has decided to make the change – **all the very best wishes**. Life, as has been shown over the last year, is too precious to not do that which make us happy.



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So....now what?

Thanks to everyone who shared their views. This is just a toe dip into the world of working in 2021, a brief glimpse of some of the things that matter to people now.

What matters is that organisations **ask their people questions**. Find out what they need, what they want, how they feel. Listen. **And respond accordingly**. Because employers that do this will have more engaged, satisfied workforces. Which is great for everyone.

And keep asking. Because people's views change – especially as society starts opening up more. Keep listening. Keep responding. Employee engagement, it's not a one-off thing. It's an ongoing journey.

Rather like the last year.

Find out more

Want to find out more? Please give us a shout: michelle@engaging-people.co.uk