

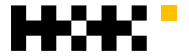


■ Covid-19

Changes across the PR industry
Research report, April 2020

Hill+Knowlton Strategies





Across the globe, the Covid-19 pandemic has caused substantial change for us all – including communications and PR professionals.

In most cases this includes substantial disruption to how professionals manage their teams, work across their organisation, and plan for the future.

There has been a lot of speculation about what those changes are – but not enough data.

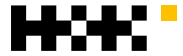
This survey, conducted in April 2020 by Hill+Knowlton Strategies, aims to gather that data.

The focus in particular is on changes within organisations and teams, so we can identify commonalities and trends across the profession

This report summarises responses over 220 PR professionals globally.

To our knowledge, this is the only such data-led insight into the working lives of PR professionals since the Covid-19 pandemic began.

Eight key findings



1. Most respondents are working longer hours; reporting a bigger increase in hours worked than in other instances where professionals move to home working
2. Most managers report less oversight of their team's performance, despite no reduction in frequency of team meetings and check-ins
3. Lots of us are finding working from home and the lockdown generally quite tough – impacting our work performance and general health and wellbeing. The biggest challenges are among working parents
4. Team morale is negatively impacted. But there are lots of efforts to keep-up morale.
5. Similarly for health and wellbeing; we're conscious of the risks to our mental and physical health but are making efforts to mitigate those
6. Line managers prioritise their team's wellbeing over their productivity. However, they do not see this from the organisation overall.
7. We're all communicating more than ever – and in different ways. This is time-consuming
8. Many of us see some silver linings and long term positive changes emerging from this experience, especially in flexible and home working

How we did the research



- A single survey offered to H+K's clients globally
- April 2020 – which in most countries was a couple of weeks into full lockdown
- 223 clients responded (not everyone answered every question)
- Circulated by client leads to clients in 20 markets. Highest responses in Canada, UK, and UAE
- Responses spread across all levels of seniority and working circumstances (e.g. people with family responsibilities while working from home)
- Survey developed by H+K's internal communications and client leads in UK, USA, Canada and METIA
- Survey designed by behavioural science unit in UK and run by data and analytics team in Canada



■ Working patterns

Proportion of PR professionals commonly working from home, before and after lockdown

Before
12.8%

After
88.6%

As we might expect, globally the trend to home working is enormous. In April 2020 this was commonly mandated by national governments.

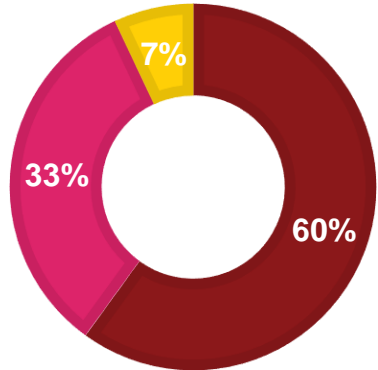
Will this trend persist beyond the Covid-19 pandemic? How can we encourage such habit changes that are good for individual staff and for the business?

We're working longer hours and sometimes to different patterns



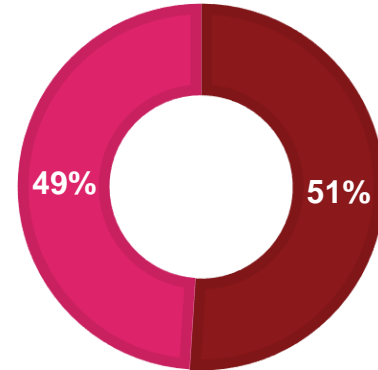
WORKING LONGER HOURS

■ Longer ■ No change ■ Shorter



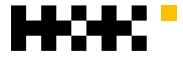
WORKING DIFFERENT PATTERN

■ quite different ■ not different



Studies show that people working from home tend to report longer working hours than those office based, Nonetheless, the scale of increased hours is substantial – and not sustainable.

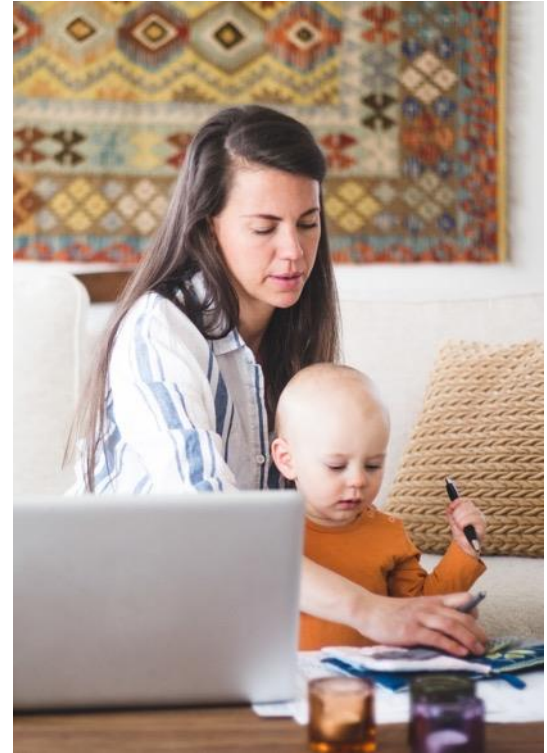
Also, while many of us work to a similar pattern of hours, around half have changed.



Overall, this research showed that the biggest barrier to working effectively from home is family distractions.

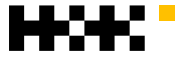
A third of parents say that juggling childcare is “very hard”. Only a quarter of parents say it’s not hard at all

- Around half of working parents have changed their pattern of hours worked.
- However, 40% said no help was provided by their employer at all – including flexibility in working patterns
- Only one respondent (of over 220) reported reduced hours for parents; and one help with keeping children occupied through the day
- Working parents were twice as likely to report a drop in team morale than were other staff.



■ Performance +
team support





Among managers, there's been a three-fold increase in not having a good oversight of team performance

Before
9%

After
27%

One of the drawbacks of remote working is the loss of the oversight that is more readily apparent when working among the team, perhaps especially for junior staff. If lockdown continues over many months, line managers will need to identify new ways to support their teams and regain that level of oversight.

Many of us cannot do all of our usual job from home



For some of us, at least with some of our work, it's not possible to do our usual work from home.

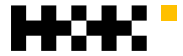
For example, colleagues for whom events management is part of their role.

- 40% of managers report that at least some of their team's work cannot be done from home
- For the staff affected, this is commonly only a proportion of their work.
- However, for many this cannot be replaced with other meaningful work

Meaningful work is a significant factor in mental wellbeing. Finding meaningful new work for colleagues whose usual work cannot be performed remotely may be among the best ways to support longer term wellbeing and performance

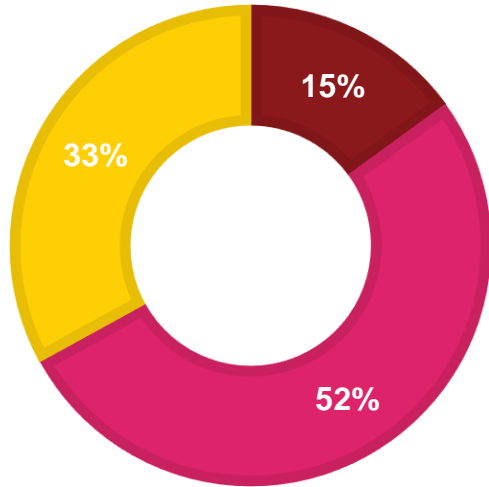


For most, team morale is worse compared to before lockdown



TEAM MORALE

■ A lot worse ■ A little worse ■ No impact



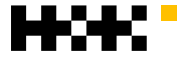
Team lunches 79% → 10%

Social events 57% → 27%

Baking & treats 63% → 10%

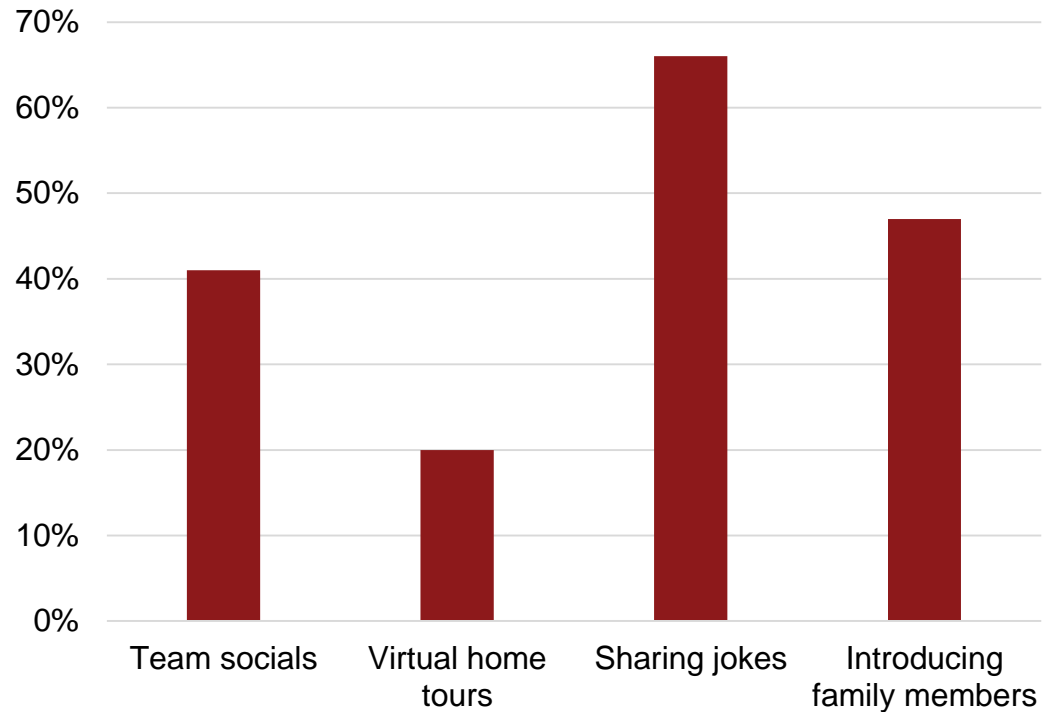
Usual team-building activities have reduced enormously. And 65% agreed that the impact of the lockdown will get worse in the coming weeks, so this is the time to do more than ever to boost morale. We are still at the early stages of this Covid-19 pandemic and the workplace disruption it entails.

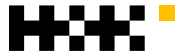
But we're making efforts to keep up team morale



Virtual activities are being used to keep-up morale within teams

It is unclear which of these has the most positive impact or their persistence over time.





There's a gap between the expectations of leaders to model positive changes in the workplace, and what is being observed by PR and communications teams

95%

agree or strongly agree that leaders should model positive working practices

69%

have observed this in their senior leadership

While Covid-19 is a crisis unprecedented in its scale and spread, numerous other crises demonstrate the importance of leading from the front, leaders modelling positive behaviours, and leaders communicating authentically. The speed at which Covid-19 hit many of our organisations may have caught some leaders off-guard.

Overall, this research showed more stresses and strains on junior staff when compared to senior staff

This includes a bigger negative impact on morale

- Junior staff report that working space is a problem while working remotely, perhaps because they are more likely to live in shared accommodation
- Junior staff are more likely to report not seeing senior leaders model new positive working behaviours
- And they are likely to self-identify as impacted more negatively than their senior colleagues
- However, correlated with age, junior staff are less likely to have to juggle childcare



■ Wellbeing



Almost all respondent want practical, informational, and emotional support from their employer

- Over a third worry that social isolation will impact their work performance
- 40% worry social isolation will impact their mental health
- 40% also worry it will impact their physical health



There is considerable concern among PR and communications professionals or all types of the impact social isolation will have on their physical health and mental health.

This is not an easy challenge to solve. Nonetheless, there are evidence-based approaches to help mitigate these harms.

There is a trade-off between wellbeing and productivity



Line managers prioritise their team members' wellbeing over their productivity during these difficult times.

But they do not believe their organisation does the same

10 to 1

Line managers prioritise wellbeing

1 to 1

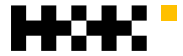
Belief the organisation prioritises wellbeing or productivity

There is a stark contrast. This may come to impact communications teams in the near future, if productivity becomes an issue and yet staff are struggling with the mental and physical health impacts of the lockdown.

■ Working practices



The volume of written communications has increased rapidly

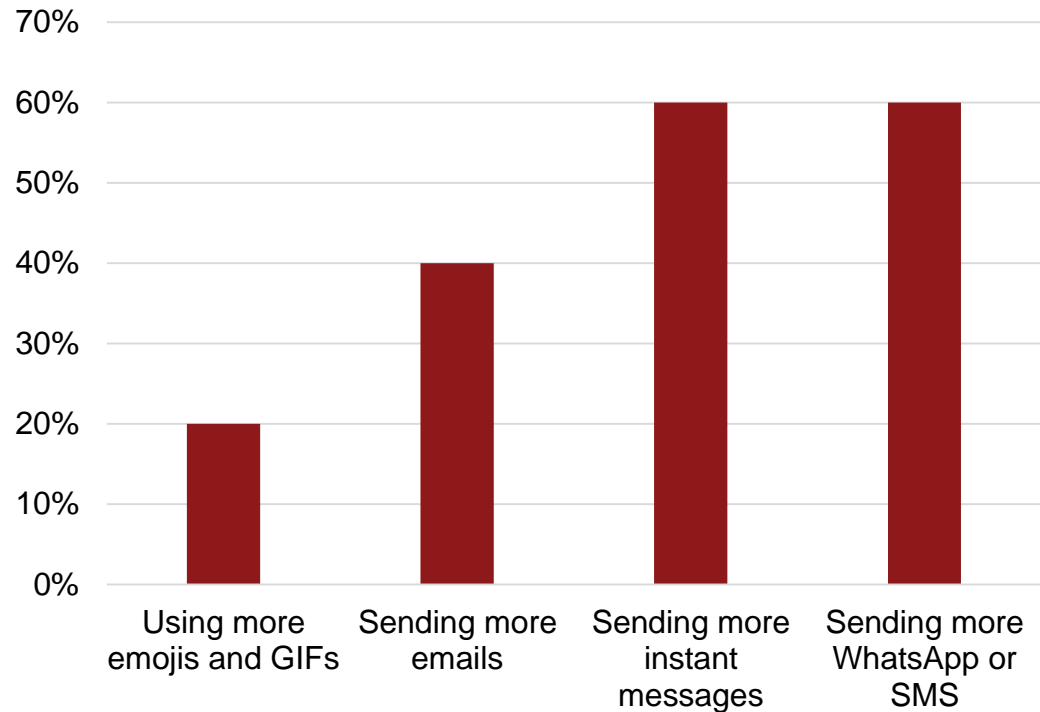


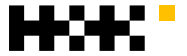
How we communicate is changing.

The volume of written communications greatly increasing – can we keep this up?

And the nature of those communications is evolving fast!

It is unclear how sustainable this is – or its impact on productivity and creativity.





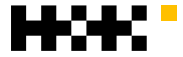
There's been a dramatic increase in people showing their face on videoconferencing

Before
11%

After
78%

The percentage of people mostly showing their camera when on a videoconference has increased seven-fold. This is positive, as studies show that showing your face on video can help build connection and, by showing attentiveness, be respectful to colleagues.

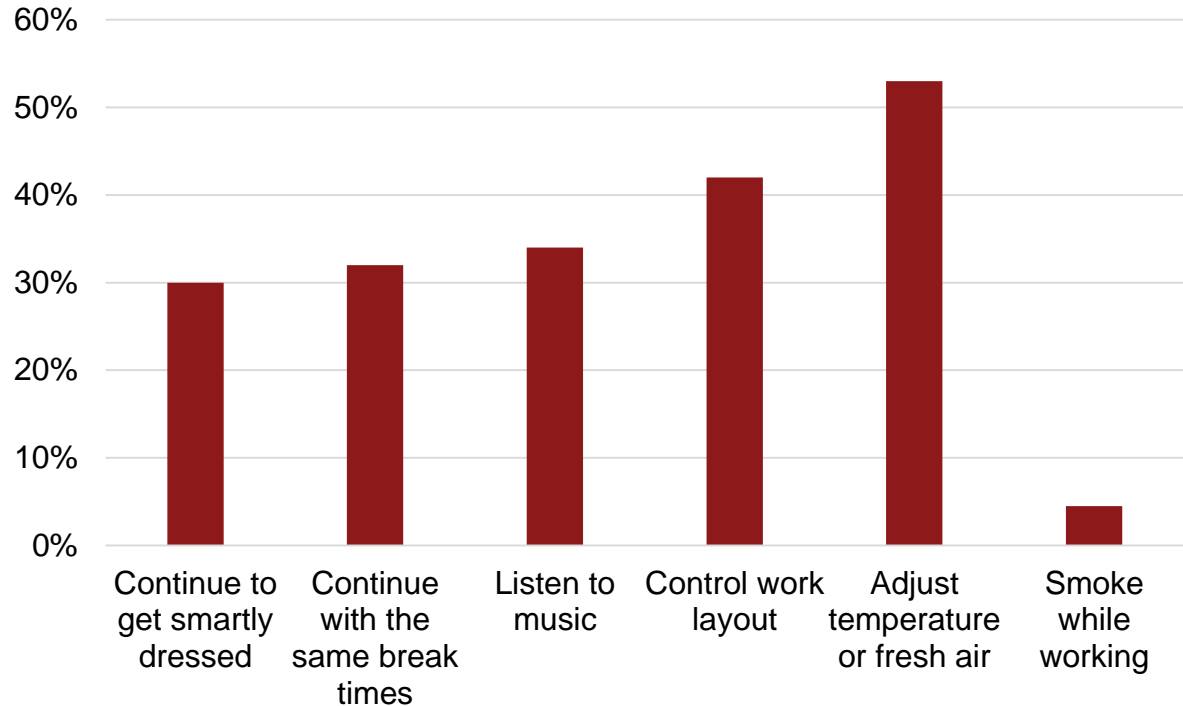
Many of us are taking advantage of working from home

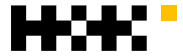


Many of us are taking advantage of the benefits of working from home.

For example, two thirds are not getting smartly dressed.

And most of us are enjoying the opportunity to set the temperature to our liking.





For more information
about this survey, contact

XXXXXXXXXX

If you are interested in running similar
research among your teams, contact
XXXXXXXXXX

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Home to over 2,000 strategists, content creators and master storytellers, H+K delivers deep sector knowledge and breadth of communications expertise which enables us to solve complex communications challenges for our clients.

Our 'breadth and depth' model allows us to bring together the best expertise and specialisms from across the industry to create agile teams for our clients.

We have specialist expertise in internal change programmes, crisis communications, leadership training, data and analytics, employee wellbeing, and behaviour change.



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