



Workplace Mental Wellbeing Audit 2022

FOREWORDS

At the end of every year, PR and communications teams' performance is measured by numbers. The bottom line tells a story about what was accomplished. But it's the numbers that are not preceded by pound signs that should motivate us most.

91% of PR professionals have experienced poor mental health at some point in the past year. A quarter are currently diagnosed with a mental health condition. Under a quarter of PR professionals who experienced poor mental health took time off work to rest and recover. The national average is 41% across all professional industries.

These numbers represent people – colleagues and friends – and highlight the necessity of this report.

While there is ongoing uncertainty, there is also hope. More than half of PR professionals have told someone at work that they have struggled with their mental wellbeing. Remote, flexible working has proved to be game changing for many.

PR and communications professionals have shown incredible resilience throughout the biggest global upheaval since WWII. Our industry's innovative and adaptive spirit holds us in good stead to emerge from the challenges ahead stronger once more. We must adopt a business head and a community heart. To that end, mental health must be at the core of every organisation's operation. We must work together – within our organisation, with industry peers and with people we serve. Collaboration fosters teamwork and generates compelling ideas to better support our colleagues who experience depression, anxiety and stress.

I am proud of PRCA's part – alongside CIPR – in keeping the mental health and wellbeing conversation at the fore. However, there is much more to do to build a system of support that looks beyond a short-term fix to addressing the lifelong needs of individuals.

What does the office look like in the future? The findings suggest employees are generally satisfied with their offices, but interestingly, they point to a desire for organisations to re-imagine the workplace setup, such as introducing more areas to work away from desks, better eating areas and indoor décor.

Looking ahead, we need bold and urgent action to continue promoting a culture of support. I hope the expert insights offered in this report will help PR leaders build on the positive progress made over the last few years.



Francis Ingham MPRCA
Director General, PRCA

Firstly, I'd like to thank the PRCA and CIPR for working with us on this and making such a valuable endeavour possible.

I'm really pleased to see some encouraging signs after what has been a difficult couple of years for us all. As you'll see when you read on there are reasons to be hopeful; wellbeing scores have returned to pre-pandemic levels and employees are reaping the benefits of flexible working.

However, whilst positive these changes are modest. It is important that all of us continue to work hard to make a difference and I hope that next year we continue to see small positive progression in the wellbeing space. Workloads remain the biggest cause of work-related stress and this is something that the sector needs to address, and address collectively. We also continue to see high levels of poor mental health and more professionals who are finding their job stressful this year.

This year is the fourth year of the project, and I hope that it continues to help us understand the wellbeing of those in the sector and make changes for the better.



James Endersby
CEO, Opinium



FOREWORDS

As 2022 comes to its close, this survey highlights some of the questions we need to think about if 2023 is to be a better, more rewarding and positive year for us all. How suitable is our current working model? Are we doing enough to tackle workload stress?

The profession has spoken loud and clear; the hybrid model works and is here to stay.

But we need to think more about the impact a physical work environment has - in-person or at home - on an individual's mental health and wellbeing.

When it comes to creating open and positive cultures across the profession, we have barely scratched the surface. Embedding an inclusive and open culture requires a long-term investment, and as a profession, we must focus on nurturing company culture as opposed to thinking of it as something we can sort out with a quick fix.

It's easy to get pulled down into just managing the daily demands of clients and co-workers, but we have to think about how we want public relations to work in 5 or 10 years' time. Will working in PR still feel the same for so many people? Is a sector that places such a high mental health burden on those who work in it even sustainable for that long?

At the root of this issue is workload stress.

58% stated that an overwhelming workload is a key source of workplace stress. Improvements have been made but this figure remains too high. We cannot talk of addressing the stigma of mental health if we do not open the conversation on workload and the expectations PR professionals face.

Although findings in the 2022 audit highlight positive changes, they also shine a light on the scale of challenge that remains. Take some time to reflect on the data in this report and share them with your senior leaders.

The power to improve the mental health of our employees and colleagues is in our hands. Now is the time to make a difference.



Alastair McCapra,
CIPR CEO

INTRODUCTION

Much progress has been made in the area of mental health in the last several years; talking about it openly and honestly has become more commonplace, and governments and businesses have recognised that they have a major role to play in helping people look after their mental wellbeing.

We designed our Workplace Mental Wellbeing Audit to help businesses and other organisations understand the mental health of their employees and in turn take steps to help them. We have once again partnered with the PRCA, ICCO and CIPR to survey 175 PR professionals through their networks, with the aim to understand specifically the mental wellbeing of those working in the PR and Communications industry.

This year we also decided to pay closer attention to the physical environments in which we work, both at home and in the office and the impact this can have on our wellbeing and productivity.

Throughout the report, we also compare to last year's survey of PR and Communications professionals, and to the normative database of national UK workers, to understand how the industry fares in comparison to other sectors and track changes within the industry over time.



This year, it is worth calling out upfront the smaller sample size this year in comparison with 559 PR professionals last year. Whilst the two will be compared directly throughout the report, we do need to take the difference in sample size into consideration when considering some of the differences.

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The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS)

A key element of our audit is the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale; a rigorous and scientific method designed by the University of Warwick with funding from NHS Scotland. Not only does the scale give our research a robust method for measuring mental wellbeing, it also distinguishes our approach from the myriad of other mental health surveys by giving us a benchmark to work with that is underpinned by academic research.

Looking at the scores of the scale, the mental wellbeing of an individual can be determined in terms of whether it falls above or below the national average. The scale enables us to quantify mental wellbeing, thus promoting wider understanding of mental wellbeing as a whole. Furthermore, scores can be tracked over time, allowing organisations and society at large to understand factors that impact mental wellbeing.



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Recommendations

We found 4 key findings for senior leaders in PR. Many of them build on the findings from the last couple years which we have seen as the industry adapts to and recovers from a major global pandemic

1

There have been small improvements in mental health, but the industry still has work to do

This year we've again seen a small but consistent improvement in mental wellbeing scores, back to 2019 levels before the pandemic, when we first started tracking. However, we are still seeing high levels of poor mental health within the PR industry, with many also not very likely to take time off when dealing with mental health issues. This needs to be addressed with clear communications around available support resources.

2

Workloads continue to be the biggest cause of stress

PR professionals find their job slightly more stressful compared to last year, with workloads being the top cause of stress. The number of PR professionals saying that their employer takes mental wellbeing seriously has fallen. Employers should look at ways to help better manage workloads and communicate procedures and working practices clearly with their workforce.

3

Flexible working is popular with workers and beneficial to their mental health

The data is clear that flexible working is good for professional's mental health. Flexible working provides a better work life balance, freedom from commutes and a more relaxing work environment. Still, many workers benefit from certain aspects of the office, such as the social stimulation and liveliness. Allowing them access to both home and office working with flexibility between the two is key.

4

Offices would be better to work in if they had more areas to work away from your desk, better eating areas, and indoor decor

This year we also explored working environments, diving into satisfaction and potential improvements that may assist with higher wellbeing. Generally, employees are satisfied with their offices, but improvements could be made by providing more areas to work away from desks, better eating areas and indoor decor. Therefore wellbeing programmes should focus on intentional office design, to ensure employees can make the most out of their offices and help to improve mental wellbeing within the workplace.



KEY FINDINGS



45.5

average wellbeing score

(up slightly from 45.1 last year)



30%

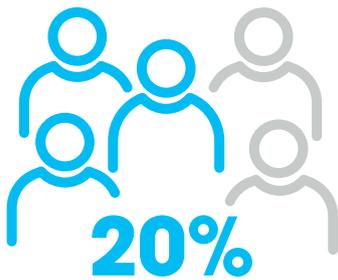
Three in ten have found their job stressful, slightly up from 26% last year

91% of those in PR have experienced poor mental health at some point in the past year, compared to 90% in 2021.



58% said an overwhelming workload was a key source of workplace stress, down from 67% last year

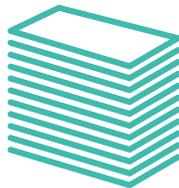
51% have told someone at work that they have struggled with their mental wellbeing



20%

One-in-five market researchers say they find their job stressful (scoring 8 or more out of 10 for stress). This is down from 24% in 2021 and 21% in 2020.

50%



Having too much work to do remains the biggest barrier for taking time off to deal with mental health. Half of those who experienced poor mental health cited this as a reason for not taking time off.

63%

Almost two thirds say that working from home has improved their mental wellbeing.



81%

Eight in ten support a mixed approach of office and home working



71%

vs.

53%

People were more likely to say that their home environment was appealing compared to their office



On the other hand, the office was more likely to be described as lively (47% v. 25%)



1

CONTINUED SMALL IMPROVEMENTS IN MENTAL HEALTH HAVE BEEN MADE BUT THE INDUSTRY STILL HAS WORK TO DO

This year we've seen a small but consistent improvement in mental wellbeing scores. We've seen mental wellbeing scores at 45.5 (up from 45.1 in 2021, and back to the level it was at in 2019 when we first started tracking). For the first time, the industry is above UK workers in general, whose wellbeing score sits at 45.3.

We also still see that 91% have experienced poor mental health in the last twelve months (90% in 2020). For the first time this year, we recorded that a quarter (25%) of PR professionals are currently diagnosed with a mental health condition.

It's quite possible that these small improvements in wellbeing scores are connected to the end of the pandemic and the return to 'normal'. **However, we continue to see such high levels of poor mental health within the PR industry that needs to be addressed.**

Year on year we see the same proportion of PR professionals who have experienced poor mental health in the last year

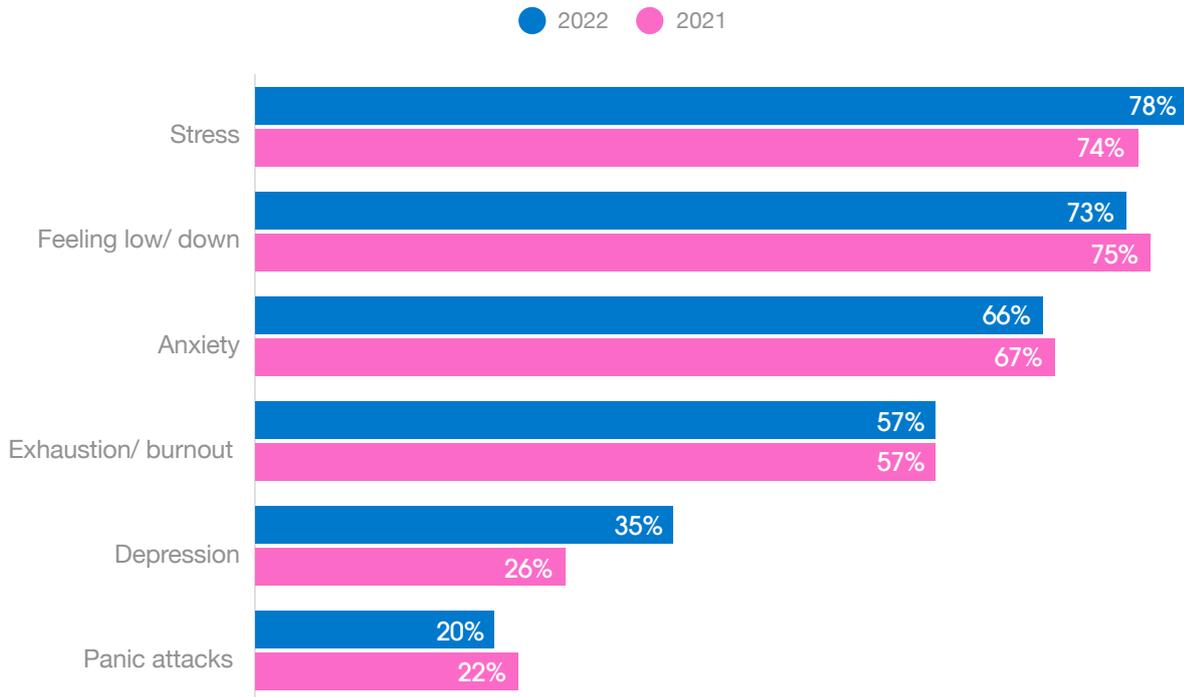
When we look at the proportion of PR professionals who have experienced poor mental health in the last twelve months (including levels of stress) the figure does not vary year on year, this year we see 91% compared to 90% in 2021 and stable ever since we started tracking this back in 2019.

PR professionals are more likely to experience poor mental health than the rest of the UK workforce; a fact that has been the case in previous years too. 69% of UK workers indicate that they have experienced poor mental health in the past year.

Looking at what in particular PR professionals have experienced this past year, around three quarters (78%) experienced stress, 73% experienced feeling low and 66% experienced anxiety. The proportion experiencing depression has increased the most since last year, up to 35% from 26%.



Top mental health problems experienced in the past 12 months compared to 2021



PR professionals continue to be more reluctant to take time off work for their mental wellbeing compared to UK workers at large

Last year we found that just 26% of PR professionals who experienced poor mental health took time off work to rest and recover. This year that figure has lowered slightly to 22% and remains lower than the national average (41%).

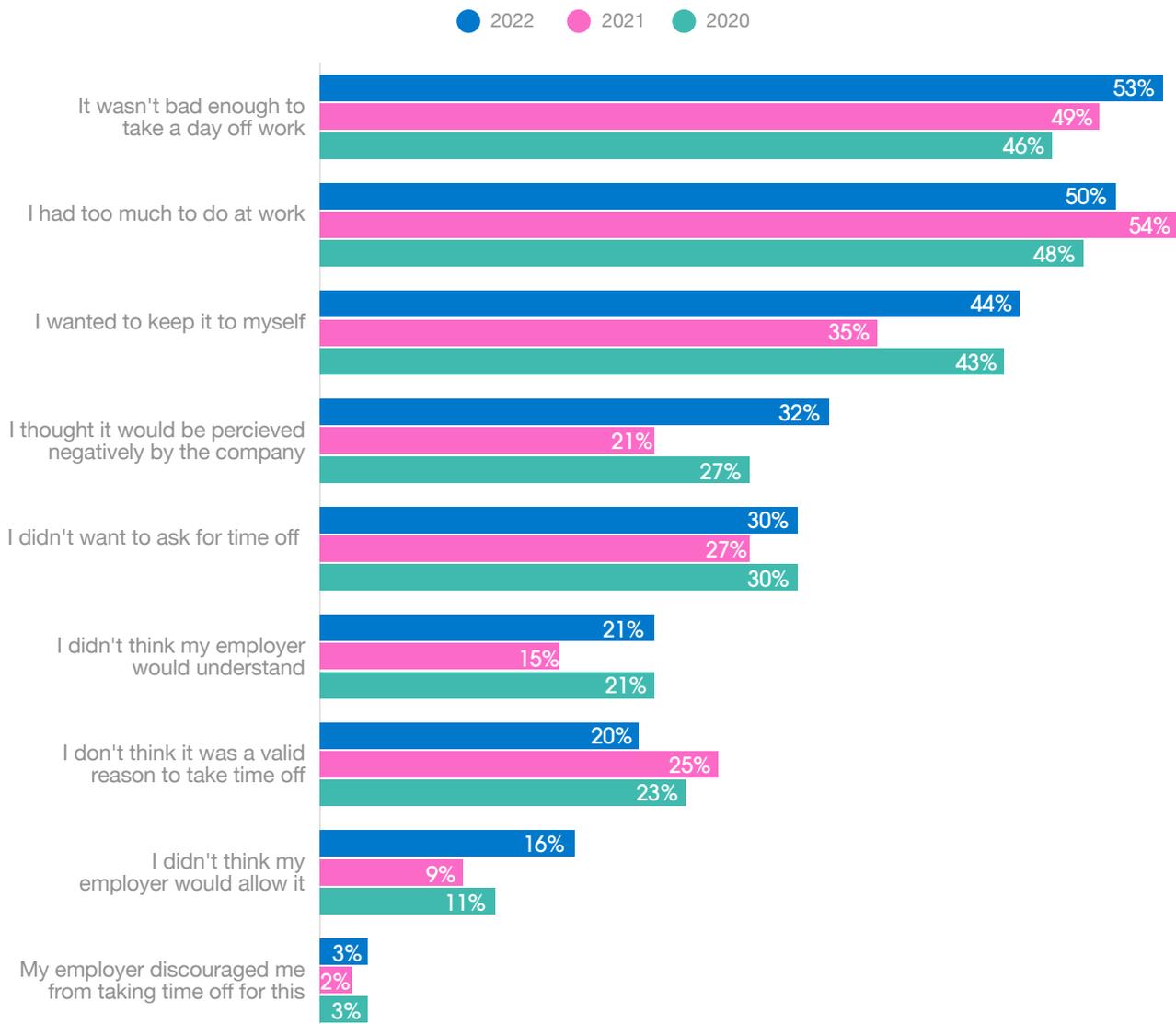
When looking at the reasons why PR professionals are hesitant to take time off for their mental health, workloads remain a barrier to taking time off. Half (50%) of those experiencing poor mental health say they didn't take time off to rest because they had too much to do. Yet, for the first time this has slipped to the second reason for not taking time off, behind only it not being bad enough to need to take a day off work (53%, up from 49% in 2021).

Two fifths (44%) just wanted to keep it to themselves, which is valid, but what is worrying is that 32% thought it would be negatively perceived by the company (up from 21% in 2021), 30% didn't want to ask for time off (up from 27% in 2021) and 21% didn't think their employer would understand (up from 15% in 2021).

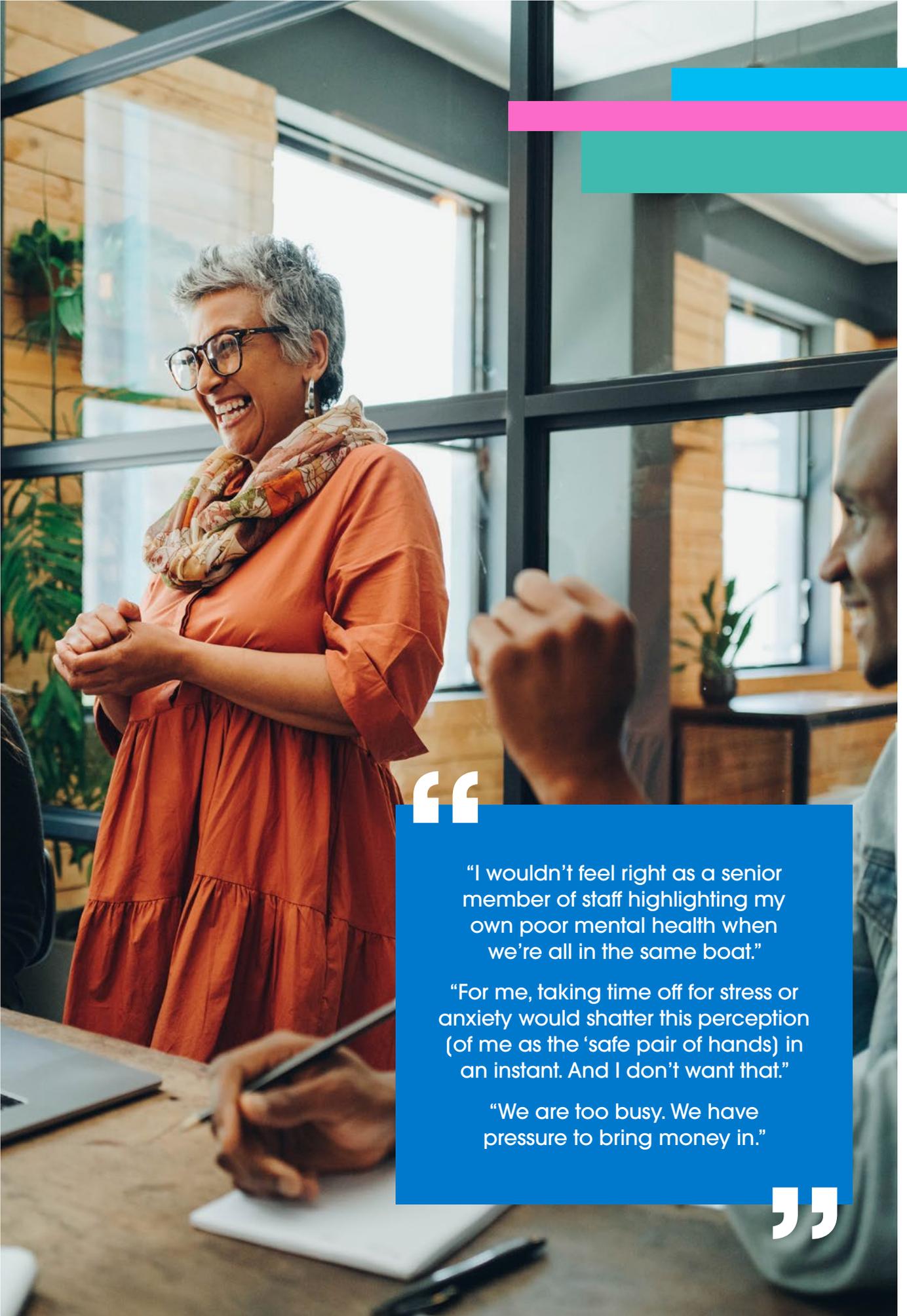
Last year we were keen to point out that workload is the main barrier to taking time off work for mental wellbeing, and whilst it is good to report that it has decreased from last year, it still remains a key barrier.

When we look at the other areas in the chart below, we also see that many of the figures are broadly consistent with previous years suggesting that although we have seen progress when it comes to the mental health of those working in the industry, the barriers stopping people from taking time off remain in place.

Reasons for not wanting to take time off work for mental health problems



Clear communication around the processes and support available for those who take time off need to be established to better support those struggling with their mental wellbeing. Despite some signs of improvement, the industry still has plenty of work to do.



“

“I wouldn't feel right as a senior member of staff highlighting my own poor mental health when we're all in the same boat.”

“For me, taking time off for stress or anxiety would shatter this perception (of me as the 'safe pair of hands') in an instant. And I don't want that.”

“We are too busy. We have pressure to bring money in.”

”

2

STRESS LEVELS HAVE SEEN A MARGINAL INCREASE AND WORKLOADS CONTINUE TO BE THE BIGGEST CAUSE OF STRESS

PR professionals find their job slightly more stressful compared to last year; 30% gave a score of 8-10 for stress compared to 26% last year. However similar to last year, the top cause of stress is having too much to do (58%) followed by impending deadlines/ targets (47%).

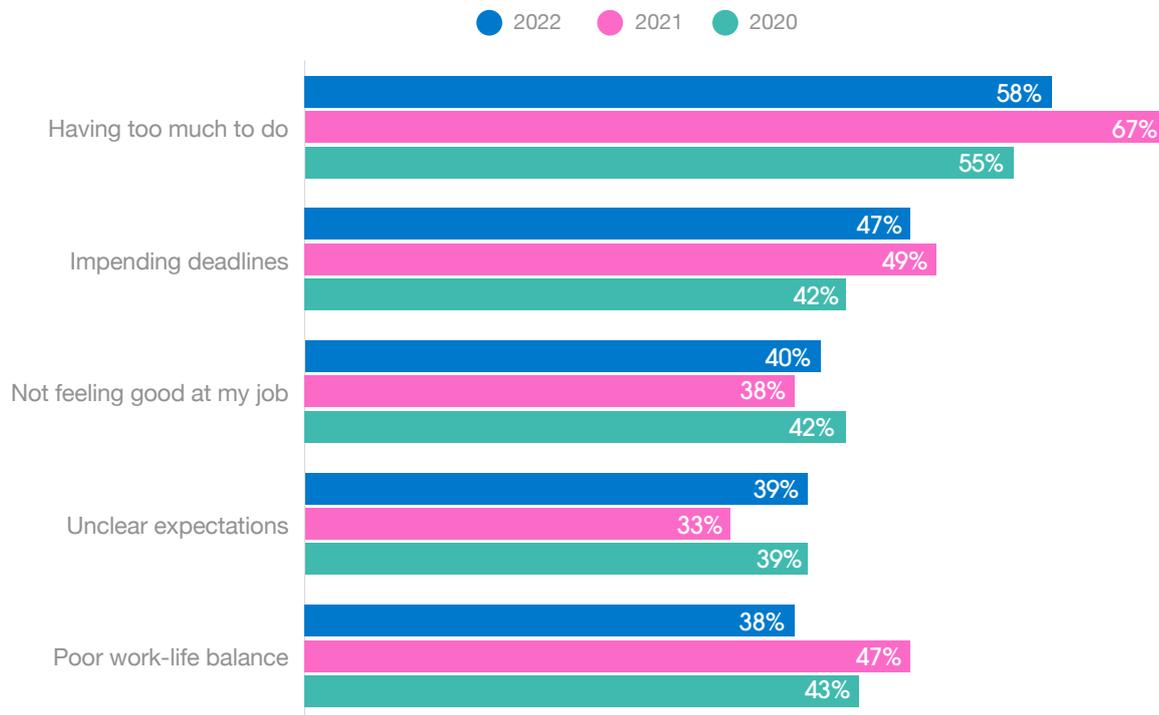
Almost three fifths say having too much to do causes them stress

The proportion of PR professionals who find their job stressful has slightly increased. Three in ten (30%) of PR professionals say they find their job stressful (giving it a score of 8-10, 10 being extremely stressful), compared to 26% in 2021.

Having too much to do came out as the top cause of stress again this year (58%), down from 67% in 2021, followed by impending deadlines/ targets (47%), not feeling good at their job (40%), and unclear expectations (39%). Having too much to do and having a poor work-life balance have both fallen slightly from last year as show in the chart below.



Top 5 causes of stress at work compared to 2021 and 2020



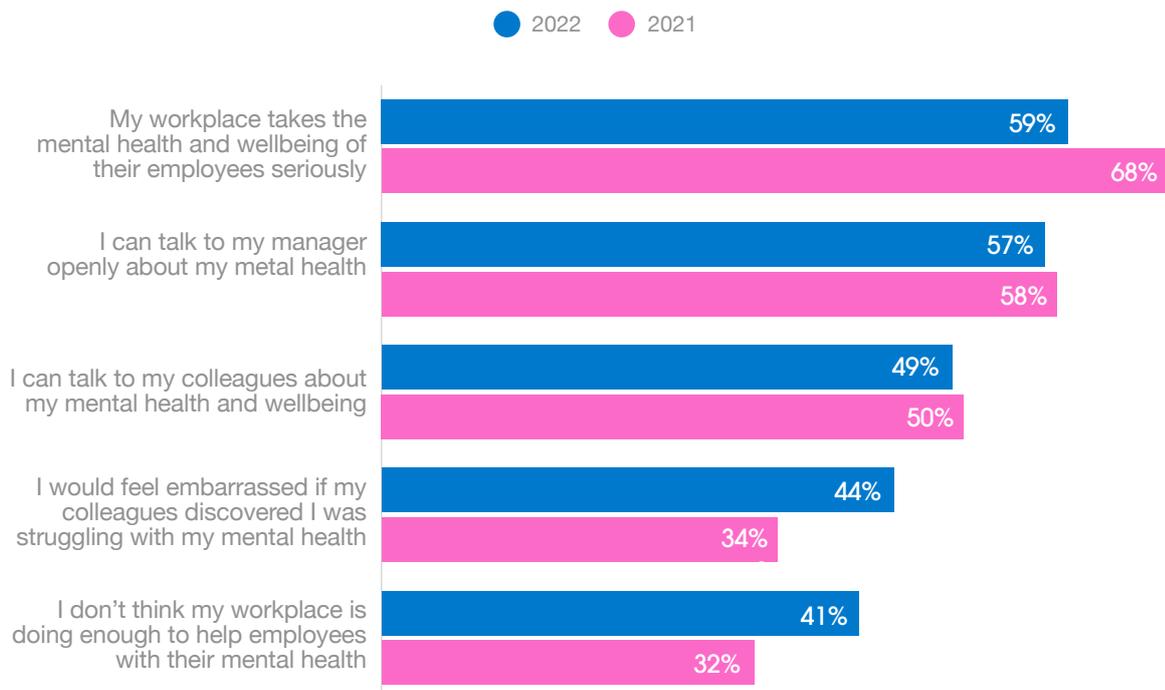
Having too much to do has historically also been the top reason why PR professionals have not taken time off for their mental health, and for the first time this has dropped to the second reason, behind it not being bad enough to need to take a day off (53%). Although it has dropped, it still remains a key barrier so is still important to focus on helping employees manage their high workloads or reducing them all together would break the cycle of employees feeling overwhelmed to the point it harms their mental health but being unable to take time off work because of their workloads.

Attitudes towards mental health in the workplace are similar to last year

On the whole, attitudes towards mental health are similar to last year. However there has been a fall in the proportion of PR professionals who believe their workplace takes the mental health and wellbeing of their employees seriously. Last year two thirds (68%) felt this was case but this year the figure has fallen to a quarter (59%). The proportion who would feel embarrassed if their colleagues discovered they were struggling with their mental health has also increased from 34% last year to 44% this year.

These suggest that we still have far to go in the journey of communicating and ensuring that all workplaces are taking the mental health of colleagues seriously, and making employees feel comfortable to open up about any struggles they may be facing, in a secure environment.

% of non-sole traders who agree with the following



Ensuring that all workplaces are taking the mental health of colleagues seriously should be a key focus area for PR workplaces



3

FLEXIBLE WORKING IS POPULAR WITH WORKERS AND BENEFICIAL TO THEIR MENTAL HEALTH

Broadly speaking flexible working is hugely beneficial to the mental health of workers. Nearly all (87%) have experienced changes to their working patterns since the start of the pandemic. Before the pandemic around 70% of those PR professionals worked from an office all of the time. This number has now fallen to 3%. Working from home has huge benefits for workers, giving more control over how and where we work.

Almost two thirds (63%) of those who have experienced changes to their working pattern report that the changes in their working patterns have increased their wellbeing, whilst 12% said it made no difference and 14% said it has decreased their wellbeing.

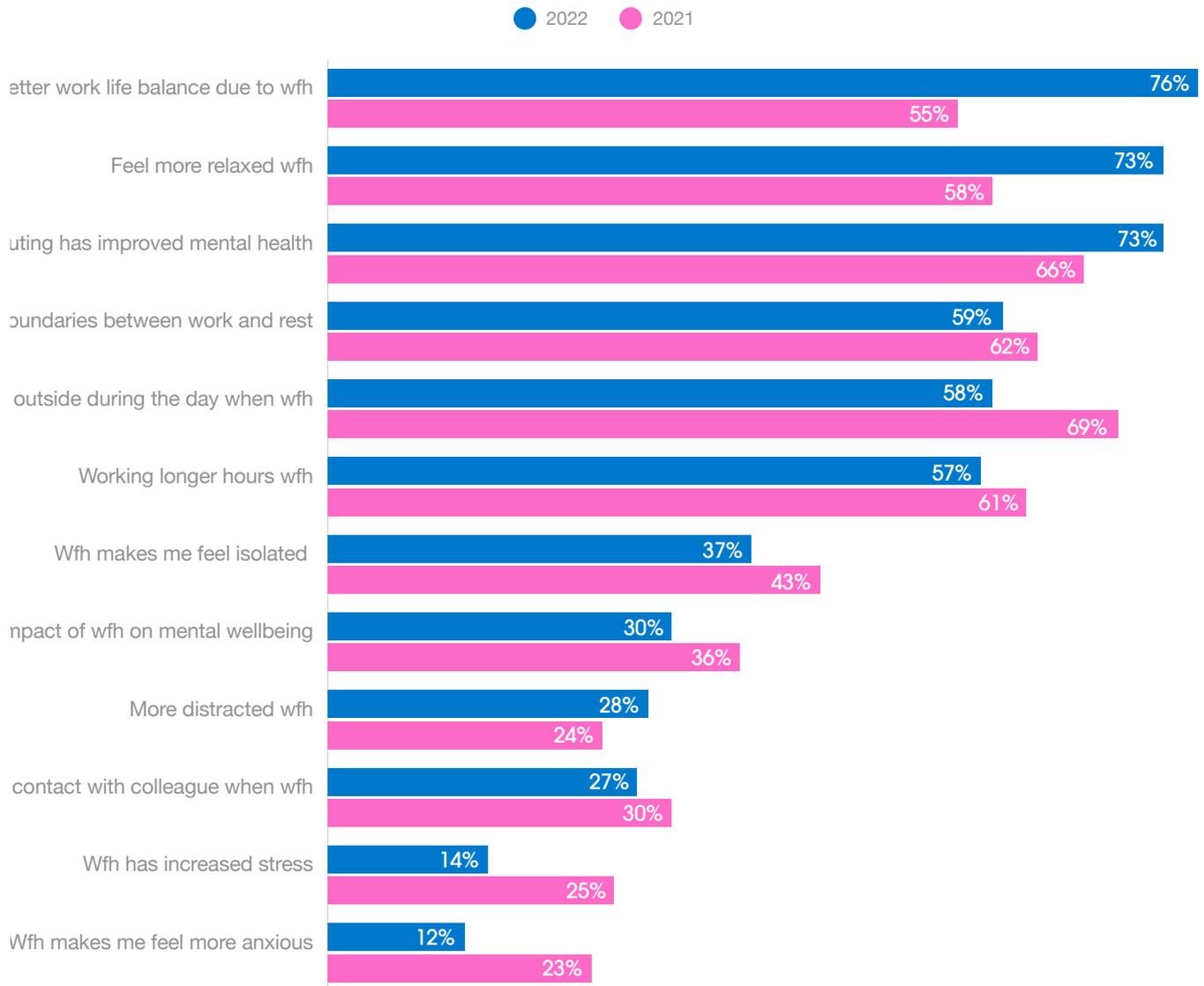
Three quarters feel they have a better work life balance now they are working from home

This year there is evidence that many are adjusting to new patterns of working and settling into working from home. More people than last year are saying that they have a better work life balance now they are working from home (76% v 55%) and that they feel more relaxed working from home (73% v 58%). Almost three quarters (73%) say not commuting has improved their mental health, up from 66% last year.

Whilst in other industries we see more of a downside towards working from home, the only downside that has increased in the last year amongst PR professionals is feeling more distracted when at home (28% v 24%), although this is still in the minority. Bar this, all the positive statements towards working from home have increased in agreement and all the negative statements have decreased since last year, including that while last year 25% were finding that working from home was increasing their stress levels, this is now down to 14%.

Clearly, we can see that as workers become more accustomed to working from home the more, they appreciate the benefits and adapt to its drawbacks. The message from workers to employers is clear; employees want the ability to work where they want. Eight in ten (81%) say they support a mixed approach of office and home working, compared to 27% who support permanent home working and only 8% who support working from an office full-time.

Pros and Cons of working from home on mental wellbeing



The positive effects of working from home and the flexibility it gives workers in the industry is borne out by the fact that 81% say they support a mixed approach of office and home working. The advice for employers is clear: allow your workers the flexibility to work wherever suits them each day – either at the office or at home



4

Home and office environments provide different benefits, but offices could do better in terms of being appealing and inviting working spaces

With so many of us now working from home at least some of the time, we wanted to understand what the quality of the working environment is like both in the office and at home.

This is especially important as we know that the physical design of working environments can have a real and significant impact upon employees' wellbeing, satisfaction and productivity.

For example, previous research has highlighted that colour has been shown to influence task performance and satisfaction, whilst views or representations of nature help restore mental capacity and natural lighting can help reduce stress levels (Nieuwenhuijsen K, 2010; Ochiai H, 2015).

It is therefore increasingly important to make sure employees have supportive environments both at home and in the office. Wellbeing programmes should focus on improving mental health through good office design and home working environment.

What's clear from these findings is that the home is more likely to be seen as appealing, inviting and colourful. However, workers are more likely to say that the office is lively, roomy and stimulating.

Whilst a home working environment is more likely to be considered appealing, the office is more likely to be seen as stimulating

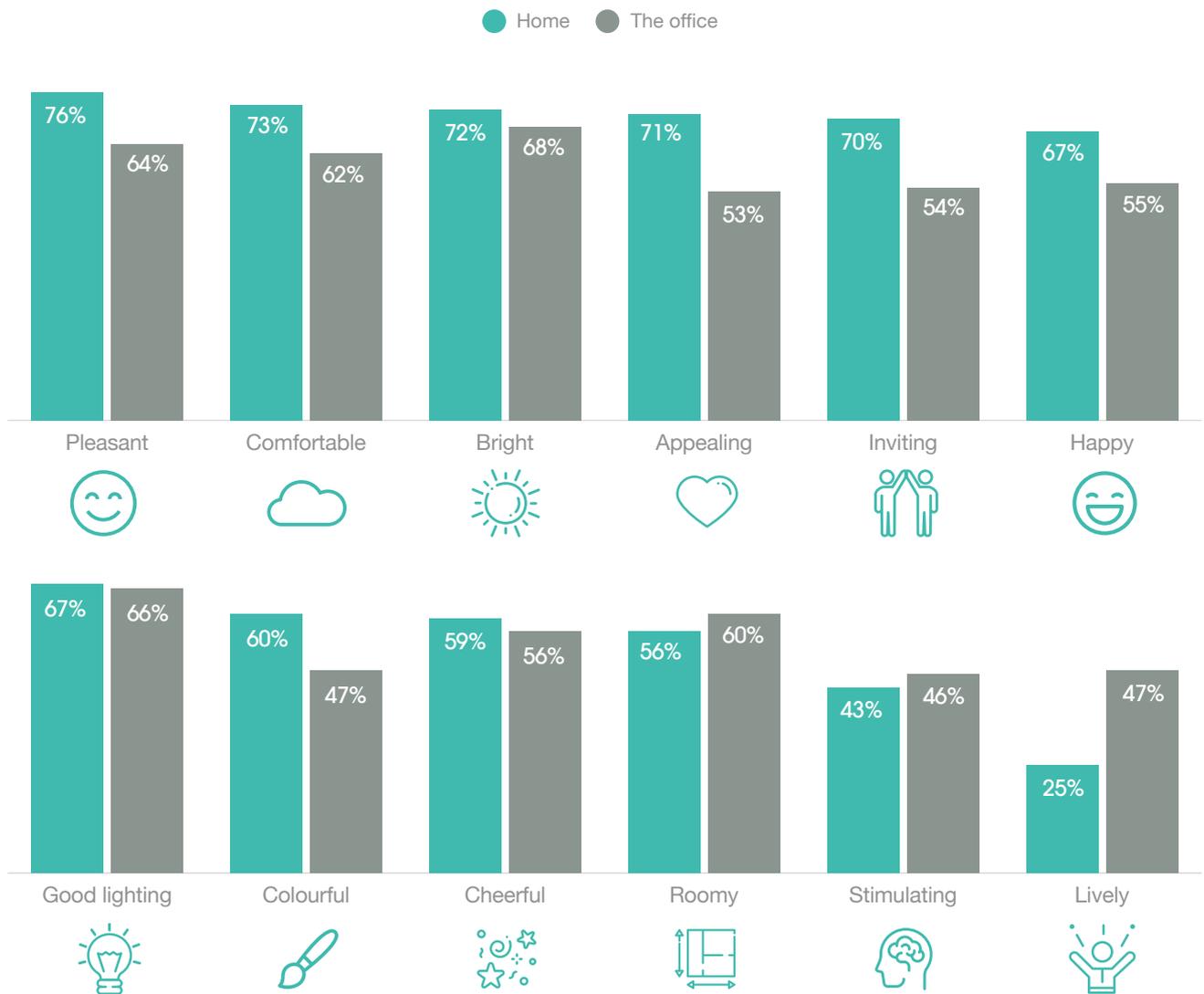
The environment is an important part of our working lives and certainly plays at least some role in our mental wellbeing. We asked respondents to consider a series of opposing words and select which they felt most applied to their working environments.

We ask these questions about both the office and the home working environment. Interestingly in most cases for the PR industry, the home environment scored slightly higher than the office environment, bar a few exceptions.

People were more likely to say that their home environment was appealing compared to their office (71% vs. 53%). This was also the case for inviting (70% v. 54%), and colourful (60% v. 47%).

On the other hand, the office was more likely to be described as being lively (47% v. 25%). This was also the case for roomy (60% v. 56%) and stimulating (46% v. 43%).

Words associated with working environments



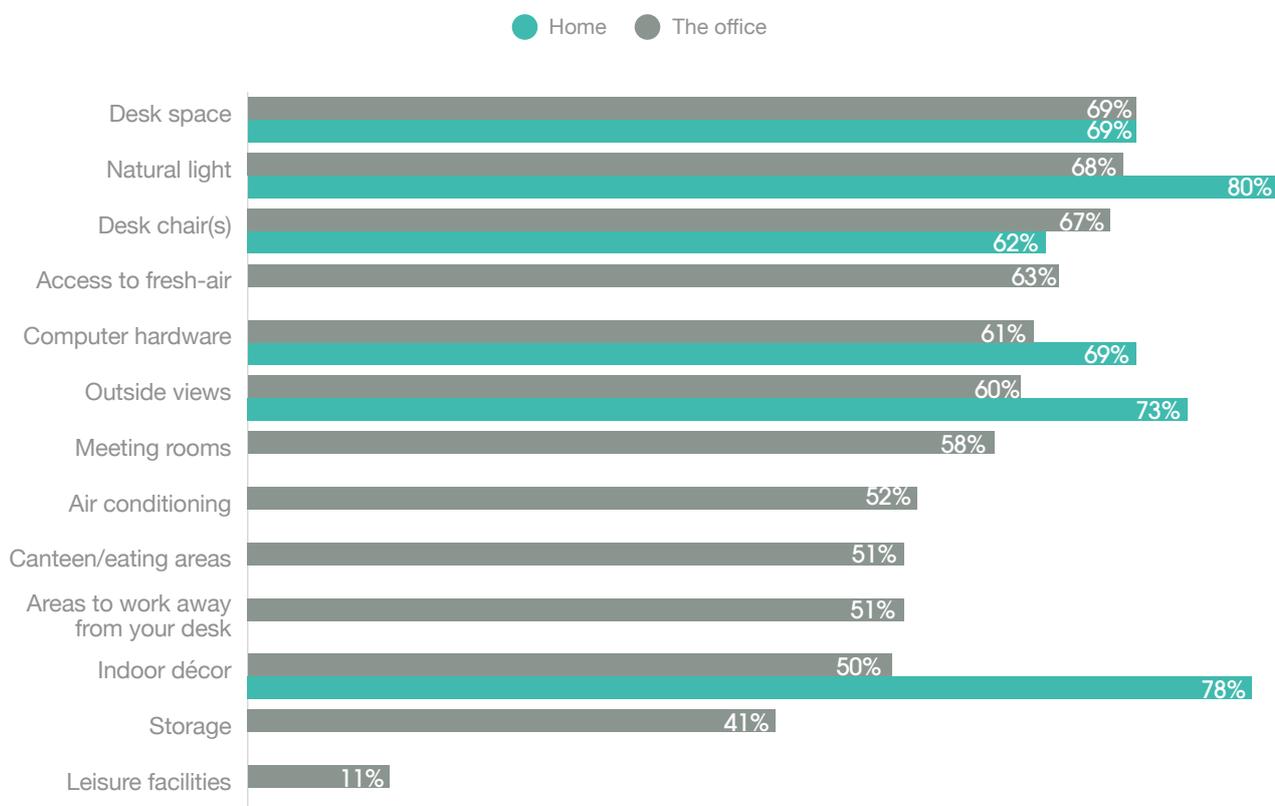
It's clear to see that both the home and office environments provide different benefits, but that offices could do better in terms of being appealing, inviting and colourful working spaces. Knowing the impact that working environments can have not only on mental wellbeing but on productivity, satisfaction and performance this provides wellbeing programmes key information in terms of having a good office design that not only supports employees but invites them in.

Natural light, indoor decor, and outside views are all better at home than in the office

Interesting differences emerge when we look at satisfaction levels with various features of working from home and in the office.

Looking at the office first, satisfaction levels are highest when it comes to desk space (69%) and natural light (68%). Lower down the scale satisfaction levels are lower when it comes to areas to eat away from your desk (51%), indoor decor (50%), and storage (41%).

% satisfied with various office features



CONCLUSION

It's great to see that as we move away from the turbulence of the pandemic, small improvements in mental wellbeing are beginning to show. We've seen this in the wellbeing scores returning to pre-pandemic levels.

Yet, we also still see high levels of PR professionals who are experiencing poor mental health, and high levels of stress at work. We also see the same barriers to workers taking time off to protect their mental health, mostly because of workloads. PR is often associated with involving long hours and intense workload. It's up to employers to try and help their staff manage these workloads and put in processes and procedures which reduce the burden.

What is abundantly clear is that working from home has been hugely beneficial to the mental wellbeing of those in the industry. It's improved work-life balance, reduced the need for stressful commutes, and handed workers greater autonomy.

That said, employees still appreciate the office particularly when it comes to it being lively and stimulating. Moving forwards, we need to think about the role of the physical design of employees working environment whether at home or in the office to help support wellbeing and satisfaction.



AUTHOR



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Isobel is passionate about mental wellbeing and has an academic background in Psychology. At Opinium Isobel is involved in the wellbeing team and is also a trained Mental Health First Aider. Isobel works within Opinium's PR practice area, running research across a range of sectors to deliver compelling insights. Isobel is also closely involved in employee research and has worked on our wellbeing surveys with the PR industry since 2019.

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What people think,
feel and do

About Opinium

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About The PRCA

The Public Relations and Communications Association (PRCA) is the world's largest professional PR body.

We represent more than 35,000 PR professionals in 70 countries worldwide. With offices in London, Singapore, Dubai, and Buenos Aires, we are a global advocate for excellence in public relations.

Our mission is to create a more professional, ethical, and prosperous PR industry. We champion - and enforce - professional standards in the UK and overseas through our Professional Charter and Code of Conduct. The Code compels members to adhere to the highest standards of ethical practice.

We deliver exceptional training, authoritative industry data, and global networking and development opportunities. We also manage the International Communications Consultancy Organisation (ICCO), the umbrella body for 41 PR associations and 3,000 agencies across the world, and LG Comms – the UK's national body for authorities raising standards of local government communication.

www.prca.org.uk



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Founded in 1948, the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) is the world's only Royal Chartered professional body for public relations practitioners with over 10,000 members.

The CIPR advances professionalism in public relations by making its members accountable to their employers and the public through a code of conduct and searchable public register, setting standards through training, qualifications, awards and the production of best practice and skills guidance, facilitating Continuing Professional Development (CPD), and awarding Chartered Public Relations Practitioner status (Chart.PR).

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