



FOCUS ARTICLE

Gauging the Success of Return to Work Strategies

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Understanding your employees' needs and perceptions—and responding appropriately—is of particular importance in times of crisis. The coronavirus pandemic and the resulting changes we experienced internally prompted us to listen carefully to what our employees had to say and to design a method that other organizations can use to both assess and respond to workers' needs as we all continue to adapt.

Assessing and Responding to Employee Perceptions

2020 has been a year defined by changes to the world we thought we knew. The coronavirus has turned life on earth upside down, and everyone has been affected to a greater or lesser degree. It has also been an interesting time for business psychologists as we watch the world of work adjust and adapt on many levels. We have seen furloughs, reduced working hours, redundancies and many more organizational decisions which have affected employees in countless ways. At DEKRA, we wanted to understand to what extent people have felt supported by their organizations when major decisions and adaptations occurred.

Our Approach to Employee Well-being in a Crisis

We started with an internal survey in March-April 2020 in the UK, just as lockdown began. The aim was to explore our own employees' feelings and to enable our leadership to be proactive in ensuring people continued to feel supported throughout the pandemic. Initially, we discovered many unhappy employees, with most of the workforce rating their feelings as “rainy or stormy” and only a third as “sunny/positive”. After reviewing individual comments and feedback, our leadership team put in place a series of well-being workshops, enhanced manager communications with their teams, and held individual conversations with those most affected by the changes we needed to implement to keep our team safe early in the pandemic.

Through these conversations, further changes were made to ensure individuals were as supported as they could be. We repeated the survey four times early in the pandemic -during the UK lockdown phase and sent each set of results to the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), who were pleased to see an increase in positive and happy employees. As commitments were made and honored, employees felt listened to and supported, and continued feedback suggests satisfaction with how our business is handling the pandemic internally.

A Focus on Resilience and Mental Fitness

Following the success of our well-being survey and the increased employee positivity that came as a result of the measures implemented, we were ready to run the survey externally. We wanted to explore how employees at other organizations have felt during the pandemic and whether other companies have been as successful as we have at DEKRA. In a matter of weeks, we had many responses to the first phase of our “Building a Resilient and Mentally Fit Organization” program, collected from surveys administered around the world and across multiple industries.

Survey participants - in the main industries:

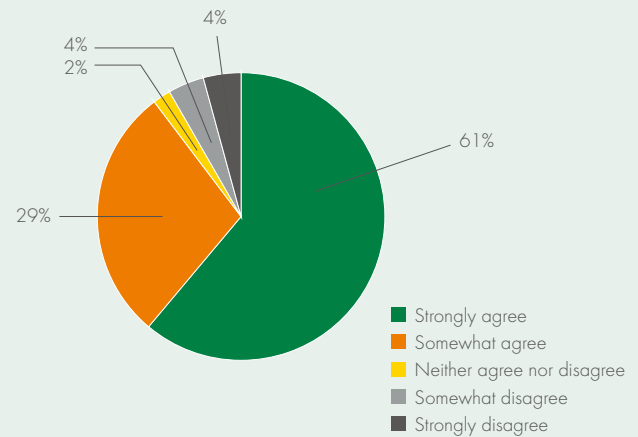
Automotive	9
Construction	3
Consultancy/Multiple Industries	19
Education	1
Oil & Gas	1
Pharmaceuticals	5
Other	17

Table 1 Survey participants

The results were illuminating, providing SLTs with a snapshot of employee perceptions and well-being and pointing out a practical path to improvement. To summarize:

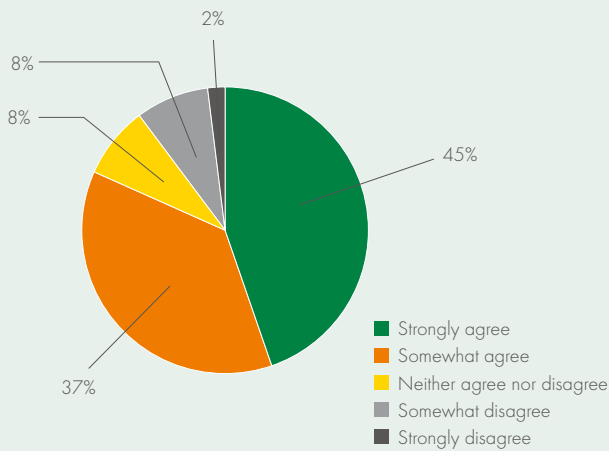
- > People reported beginning to feel more positive, although they were still managing stressors such as juggling work and care-giver responsibilities, fears around future job security, and isolation from family and friends. Our solution provides employers with tools to help reduce and manage stress in these areas.

My company has made efforts to maintain a safe environment for its employees

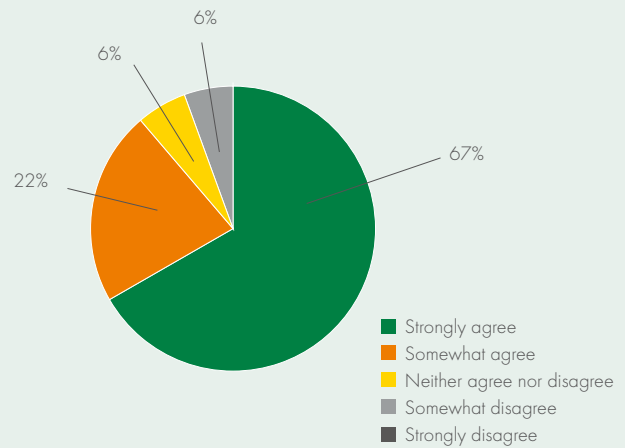


- > Although people felt generally satisfied with their organizations, specifically regarding the flow of information and a safe work environment, the area “caring for care-givers” needed attention. Our experts’ analysis suggests this could be a result of both caregivers and organizations having to “learn as they go” and resort to “trial and error.” This is an important area of improvement, and support through our program, which offers tried and tested tips and strategies, could help companies avoid mistakes and respond more quickly to care-giver needs.
- > Senior Leadership Teams received positive feedback from the survey. Most people felt their leaders were making the right decisions and taking into account employee well-being and safety. This insight is a fundamental benefit for SLTs, since being able to understand and act upon employee needs serves to create a **culture of care** and ensures that organizations emerge stronger following a period of crisis.
- > People responded very positively to questions about support from their managers/supervisors. However, an area which needs exploring and possible development is around managers/supervisors treating physical and psychological well-being as a top priority. The value of our survey once again is that it communicates these perceptions to those in leadership roles so that they, in turn, can take action.
- > Although teams appear to have supported each other well during the pandemic, there may be a need to enhance informal communications among people.

Senior leadership has been considerate of employee well-being and safety when making key decisions that affect the workforce.



I am satisfied with my company's efforts to create and maintain a safe work environment for employees.



- > Interestingly, most people who responded to the survey reported working above their capacity when asked about their workload. It would be beneficial to organizations to explore the reasons behind this.
- > Asked to identify topics they'd like to hear more about from their organization, respondents noted managing workload along with keeping track of changing priorities and taking advantage of professional development opportunities.
- > On an encouraging note, people who were working remotely felt they were able to do so comfortably, without many barriers preventing them from maintaining a normal workload.
- > Even more encouraging was that those working on site or in the office felt they had been provided with a safe environment to work in.

reflected in these results, but also those who see in them an opportunity to initiate a dialogue about returning to work strategies. The program consists of a survey and workshop to identify specific stressors and areas of concern and to provide tools for organizations to enhance the well-being of their employees. Ultimately, the program can lead to increased employee productivity and engagement and overall organizational productivity by strengthening the non-technical skills of supervisor/managers and the SLT.

The survey is in no way representative of all organizations. We know there are organizations, leaders, managers and employees who are struggling to "make it through the day" right now, and the team at DEKRA is here to support and guide them through times like this. By creating a suite of well-being, leadership, workforce and COVID-19 related offerings, we are ready to assist organizations in enhancing their culture in a time of crisis. If you want to know more, get in touch with us.

Our Support through the Crisis and Beyond

The initial results of the survey have provided us with valuable information as well as hope that organizations can make it through the pandemic and potentially come out with a stronger culture. Our "Building a Resilient and Mentally Fit Organization Program" may be beneficial not only to organizations who see themselves

CARLENE SMITH

Carlene Smith has worked at DEKRA Organizational Reliability since 2012. In her role as Assessments Manager, she supports clients in developing a positive culture, conducts and manages all cultural assessments and writes and gives feedback on culture diagnostic reports. Furthermore, she has developed new solutions such as workshops and coaching programs for all organizational levels, including leadership.



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