



OPENING THE CONVERSATION:

Mental Wellbeing in Marcoms Agencies

Key findings

June 2021



What people think,
feel and do

PREPARED BY CROUD, JUNE 2021



Forewords

Since launching our workplace mental wellbeing audit back in 2019 we've supported numerous sector bodies to help them understand the mental wellbeing of employees in various industries and ultimately uncover how senior leaders can better support employee wellbeing.

We were delighted when the Alliance of Independent Agencies agreed to partner up with us this year to help audit the mental wellbeing of marcoms agencies.

We all have mental wellbeing, just as we do physical wellbeing. And it is becoming more normalised to talk about our struggles, and how we can maintain good mental health, especially over this past year of living through the pandemic. However, there is still a way to go, especially regarding mental wellbeing in a workplace setting. We hope that this report will help senior leaders in agencies accelerate change in their organisations. As you'll see throughout the report, we've distilled the vast amount of data we collected into 4 key recommendations, which we hope will arm senior leaders with the insights and knowledge to help better support employee wellbeing in their agencies.

Supporting mental wellbeing in the workplace is a journey, and we are all at different stages in that journey. But it is vital that we listen to employees as we take action to support workplace wellbeing to ensure we create lasting and impactful organisational change.

We hope you are able to take the learnings from this report back into your organisations; helping accelerate the country-wide change needed in this area.



James Endersby
CEO, Opinium

Forewords

As a leader, or an individual with responsibilities for people within your agency, creating a culture and implementing policies and practises that support and nurture mental health can often seem complex and challenging.

That's why we've commissioned this research to firstly shine a light on where we should be focussing our efforts to support our people and teams, and secondly and more importantly, what positive steps will make a real impact on individual businesses to improve our industry's collective mental health for the better.

While the results sadly show real areas of concern, I'm reassured that we are beginning to have frank and open conversations about mental health that simply wouldn't have been aired five or ten years ago.

We all have a responsibility to ensure that our industry supports, nurtures and develops its workforce, whether as a client or agency. Together we can lift the standards of mental health support across the entire industry, and then thrive as a result.



Ruth Kieran

Co-Chair, Alliance of Independent Agencies
CEO, Cirkle

Over the past few years, discussions surrounding mental wellbeing, and the wellbeing of those in the marcoms sector, have become increasingly prominent. This has been especially true over the past year, as conversations have been focussed around working from home and how best to support employees as they navigate the changing world. We have all seen a rise in the number of surveys being sent around and events being hosted, and whilst these are very positive steps, there is still plenty that we can do to support employees and normalise the conversations around mental wellbeing.

It is important for us to remember that wellbeing strategies are not fixed; they should be constantly reviewed, pulled apart and questioned, especially with global and societal changes impacting the way we work. Long-term actions can often be left in the wake of short-term discussion, and it is important to use insights such as these, to inform, develop and strengthen our own strategies.



Alexandra Stamp

Wellbeing Group Chair, Alliance of Independent Agencies
Senior Marketing Manager, Croud

Background to the research

Talking about mental health and wellbeing has become more commonplace over the last several years, and this past year in particular has caused us to turn inward and pay more attention to our wellbeing than ever before.

Many employers have also recognised the important role they have to play in helping support mental wellbeing across their workforce.

We designed our Workplace Mental Wellbeing Audit to help organisations understand the mental wellbeing of their employees by listening to them, in turn allowing them to take steps to help support employee wellbeing. This year we are running our audit amongst marcoms agencies specifically. We partnered with the Alliance of Independent Agencies to survey UK marcoms professionals working in agencies, to understand the mental wellbeing of those working in marcoms agencies, and the impact of the coronavirus on this audience.

Throughout the report, we also compare to our normative database of national UK workers, to understand how marcoms agencies fare in comparison to UK workers at large.

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

The research provided us with a wealth of data to analyse and deciding which findings to focus on was no easy task but in summary we found four important recommendations for senior leaders of marcoms agencies:

1. Focus on workload management and tackle the issue of burnout head on

Professionals in the marcoms sector rate their job more stressful than the UK workforce and are more likely to experience stressful situations such as heavy workloads and impending deadlines. Not only do heavy workloads directly contribute to stress, but they are also one of the key reasons employees do not take time off work for poor mental health. Helping to reduce and prevent heavy workloads for employees should be a key priority for senior leaders, which in turn will alleviate stress, reduce the likelihood of burnout and allow those who are struggling feel able to take time off.

2. Provide a safe space for sharing and follow up with support

The vast majority of marcoms professionals feel that they would be

supported at work if they were struggling with their mental wellbeing and that they can talk openly with their manager. However, feelings don't always translate into action, with two fifths of those who struggled with their mental wellbeing failing to speak to anyone at work about it. The reasons behind this focused around feeling it wasn't necessary and also fearing it would jeopardise their career. Agencies therefore need to do more to provide a safe space for the sharing of struggles, but also implement sources of support for those who have felt able to open up.

3. Introduce initiatives and facilitate open conversations about mental health

Marcoms agencies do well in having wellbeing initiatives available to staff and are more likely to do so than the average UK employer. There are some initiatives, such as flexible working hours and break spaces which have beneficial impacts on mental wellbeing. Senior leaders should explore the possibility of introducing these initiatives if they haven't already. Employees also want to be supported by their agency in other ways which aren't initiative focused. Many want to see their agency do more to tackle workload and de-normalise burnout culture, as well as encouraging more open conversations around mental health overall.

4. Re-evaluate working practices post-pandemic

The impacts of coronavirus of the last year have invaded all aspects of our lives; changing the landscape of traditional work routines and forcing many of us to work from our homes. And whilst working from home has come with some benefits, it has been challenging for many, especially with regards to work-home boundaries. Though despite these challenges, many would like to continue working from home to some degree post-Covid, and as such agency leaders should consider whether it is possible to implement a hybrid working model to reap the benefits of home working, whilst also benefitting from the collaborative and social nature of working in the office.

Key findings



96% of marcoms professionals have experienced poor mental health in the last 12 months



Half (**52%**) have experienced burnout in the last 12 months



Just **13%** of those who experienced poor mental health took time off work for this



41% of those who didn't take time off for their mental health said this was because they had too much work to do



59% say their workload and having too much to do is a key source of stress



42% of those who experienced poor mental health didn't speak to anyone at work



25% would like to see flexible working hours introduced in their company



96% want to continue working from home to some degree post-Covid



63% are concerned that returning to the office will result in them losing the free time they gained working from home



60% feel optimistic about going back to the office



35% feel anxious about going back to the office

SETTING THE SCENE:

Mental wellbeing in marcoms agencies

The general mental wellbeing of those working in marcoms sector is comparatively low relative to UK workers at large.

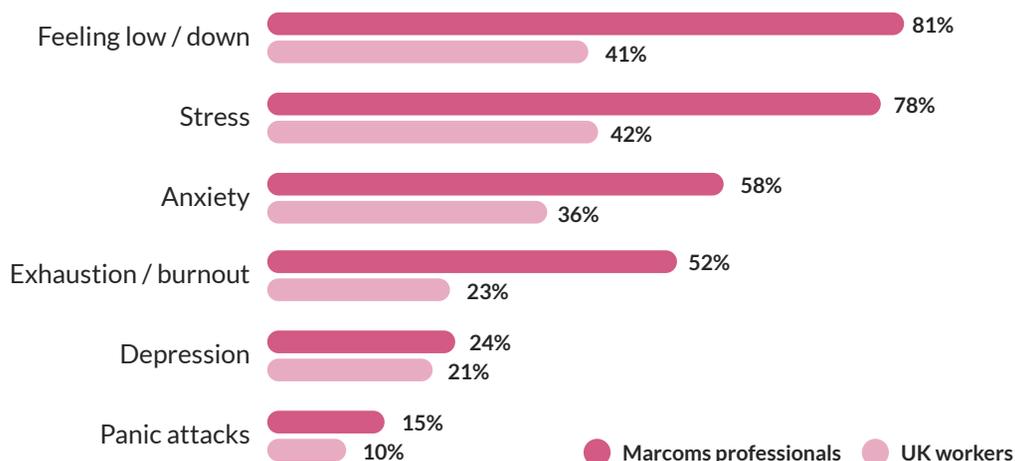
In the last twelve months 96% of professionals have experienced poor mental health, compared to two thirds of all UK workers (65%). Those who work in the marcoms industry were also more reluctant to take time off work for poor mental health compared to the UK workforce (13% vs 32%).

Marcoms professionals more susceptible to poor mental health than the general UK workforce

Mental wellbeing scores from the WEMWBS for marcoms agencies (46.4) are similar to that of UK workers at large

(46.5). However, more professionals in the marcoms sector have experienced poor mental health in the last 12 months (96%) than the general UK workforce (65%). Four fifths have experienced feeling low/down (81%) compared to two in five of all UK workers (41%). Following this trend, stress (78%), anxiety (58%) and burnout (52%) have been experienced by a much higher proportion of professionals in the marcoms sector than the general UK workforce (42%; 36%; 23% respectively). The negative impact of these experiences on their work is also disproportionate when comparing the marcoms professionals and the average UK employee. Almost a third (31%) say their experiences of poor mental health last year had a significant negative impact on their work compared to 24% of the UK workforce.

Mental health problems experiences in the past 12 months



Those in marcoms agencies are less likely to take time off work for their mental health

Although it's common practice to take some time off when we're physically ill, the same care is rarely taken for our mental health. Just one in ten (13%) of those in the marcoms sector who experienced poor mental health have taken time off work for this; this is far fewer than the UK workforce (32%). It is also worth noting that professionals in the marcoms sector are less likely to take time off for physical health reasons too (28% compared to 40% of all UK workers).

So why aren't marcoms professionals taking time off for their mental health? For the majority who did not take time off for their mental health, the main reason for not doing so was because they thought it

wasn't bad enough (53%). Two fifths (41%) felt they had too much to do at work to take some time off and a further third (33%) wanted to keep it to themselves.

As the chart below demonstrates, not thinking it's bad enough and having too much to do are higher than the UK workforce at large, highlighting a key issue to address here.

So, where do we go from here?

Throughout the rest of the report, we dive deeper into the role of the workplace in supporting the wellbeing of employees and provide key recommendations emerging from our data, which we hope will empower senior leaders to make demonstrable changes in their agencies to better the mental health of the marcoms industry.

Top 3 reasons why those who experienced mental health problems didn't take time off work



Focus on workload management and tackle the issue of burnout head on

Professionals in the marcoms sector rate their job more stressful than the UK workforce.

Those in the marcoms sector are also more likely to experience the following sources of stress such as heavy workloads (59%) and impending deadlines (47%) than the rest of the UK workforce (at 25% and 15% respectively). Not only do heavy workloads directly contribute to poor mental health and wellbeing, but they are also one of the key reasons employees do not take time to recover. Helping to reduce heavy workloads for employees should be a top priority for employers, which in turn will alleviate stress, reduce the likelihood of burnout and allow those who are struggling feel able to take time off.

Marcoms professionals find their jobs more stressful compared to the UK workforce

On a scale of zero to ten (0 being not at all stressful and 10 being extremely stressful), marcoms professionals gave

their job an average score of 6. This is a tier higher than UK workers at large, who gave their jobs an average stress score of 5 out of 10. One in five (17%) marcoms professionals also find their job highly stressful (giving it a rating of 8-10) compared to 16% of UK workers.

This is perhaps unsurprising when we look at how often marcoms professionals experience stressful situations at work compared to the UK workforce. Three fifths (58%) of those surveyed experience impending deadlines/ targets often or all of the time, more than double the UK workers (26%). Likewise, 55% experience demands from clients often or all of the time, 52% tight deadlines and 51% a heavy workload. These are all significantly higher than general UK workers (25%; 24%; 30% respectively). This highlights the need for agencies to step in and help their employees manage their workloads especially as having too much to do and impending deadlines are rated the top causes of stress at work in the industry.

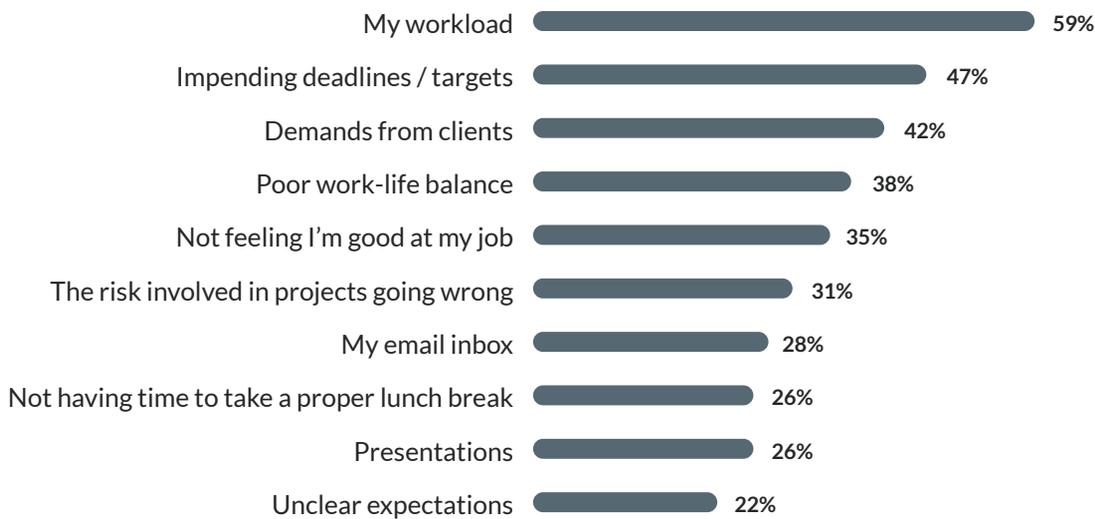
More than half (59%) of workers in the marcoms industry rated their workload/ having too much to do as the top cause of stress at work. This is followed by

impending deadlines (47%), demands from clients (42%) and a poor work life balance (38%). It is therefore critical to find ways to assist people with work volume and implement processes to help employees manage and share their workload. This will prevent more employees from experiencing burnout and stress and allow them to produce higher quality work, beneficial to both employees and employers.

“...OFTEN THE DEMANDS OF THE BUSINESS / NATURE OF THE JOB ARE SUCH THAT THERE WILL BE STRESS INVOLVED - IT'S NOT ABOUT TAKING ALL STRESSORS AWAY, IT'S ABOUT HOW YOU HANDLE THEM OFTEN, AND THEY ARE TRYING HARD TO PROVIDE TRAINING FOR HOW WE CAN BE MORE RESILIENT.”

The quote below sums up how beneficial employer assistance would be for those struggling with work stresses.

Top 10 causes of stress at work for marcoms professionals



Provide a safe space for sharing and follow up with support

Marcoms agencies are ahead of the wider UK workforce in creating a supportive environment for those experiencing poor mental health to open up.

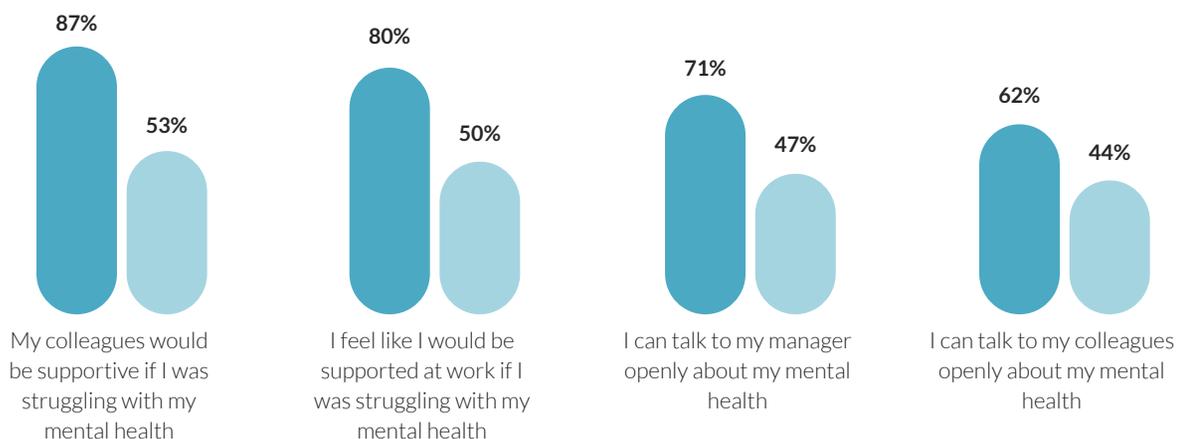
Eight in ten (80%) of professionals in marcoms agencies feel they would be supported at work if they were struggling and many (71%) feel they can speak to their manager openly about their mental health, both far higher than the UK workforce (50% and 47% respectively). Looking deeper however we can see that the reality is different. Two fifths (42%) of those who struggled with their mental wellbeing didn't speak

to anyone at work about it, with not thinking it's necessary emerging as a key reason. Agencies therefore need to do more to provide a safe space for the sharing of struggles, but also implement sources of support for those who have felt able to open up.

Majority of marcoms professionals feel they would be supported at work if they struggle with their mental wellbeing

The majority of marcom professionals feel they would be supported at work if they were struggling with their mental wellbeing (80%), higher than the UK

% of those who agree with the following statements





workforce (50%). Not only this, but many feel they can speak out about their mental health struggles. Seven in ten (71%) feel they can speak to their manager openly about their mental health/ wellbeing and 62% can speak to their colleagues. These are both higher than the UK workforce (47% and 44% respectively).

For those who did speak up about their mental health struggles (54%), the majority (84%) said that the person they spoke to was understanding and supportive, higher than the general UK workforce (57%). Others were also given the opportunity to offload some of their tasks to help reduce their workload which is further demonstrated in the following quote:

“MY LINE MANAGER WAS EXTREMELY HELPFUL AND TALKED TO ME ABOUT HOW I COULD MANAGE THIS. WHETHER THAT BE TAKING TIME FROM WORK FOR A FEW DAYS OR OFFLOADING SOME TASKS. A LOT OF MY ANXIETY AND PANIC ATTACKS CAME FROM BEING ON CLIENT CALLS WITH MY CAMERA ON. MY LINE MANAGER SPOKE TO SENIOR MEMBERS OF THE TEAM AND I WAS ALLOWED TO TURN MY CAMERA OFF.”

The benefits are clear, opening up creates a mutual understanding between employer and employee and additional steps can be put in place to help support those struggling.

However, two fifths didn't open up about their struggles, feeling it unnecessary or fearful this would jeopardise their career

Unfortunately, feeling like you can open up doesn't necessarily convert into action. Two fifths (42%) of those who experienced poor mental health

in the past year didn't tell someone at their current workplace about this. Interestingly, this is higher for under 35 year olds (44%) than over 35s (38%).

The top reason for not opening up was not thinking it was necessary to tell someone at work (69%) followed by thinking it could jeopardise their career, not knowing how to talk about it and feeling embarrassed (all three at 18%), these feelings are echoed in the following quotes from the research:

“BECAUSE SO MANY PEOPLE HAVE FELT LIKE THIS IN THE PAST YEAR. IT'S SOMETHING I'VE HAD TO LEARN TO LIVE AND WORK WITH.”
“IF I TOLD THEM I WAS STRESSED AND ANXIOUS IT WOULD HAVE BEEN CONSIDERED AS WEAKNESS AND AN INABILITY TO PERFORM MY JOB.”

Knowing how beneficial it is when people speak out about their struggles, it is therefore imperative that agencies make sure their employees feel heard despite the current climate. Agencies should encourage open conversations and create an environment where employees can speak up about their mental health struggles and not feel as though they have to go it alone.

However, even for those who did speak up about experiencing poor mental health, 12% felt that the person they spoke to didn't know how best to support them, despite being sympathetic.



We can see this explored deeper in the following quotes:

“A SYMPATHETIC EAR BUT WITH BAD COMPANY CULTURE SURROUNDING THIS AND NO HR / WELLBEING PROGRAMME IN PLACE - ULTIMATELY POINTLESS”

“FEELING DEMOTIVATED AT WORK DUE TO PEER PRESSURE AND I SPOKE TO A COLLEAGUE ABOUT THIS. THEY SYMPATHISED WITH ME BUT WERE UNABLE TO HELP FURTHER. I’VE NOW RECENTLY SENT A RESIGNATION IN AS A WAY TO LOOK AFTER MYSELF.”

Being a listening ear only solves half the problem. Many feel that discussing their struggles at work would not get them the adequate help or support they need. To help improve the mental wellbeing of staff, agencies need to build on having open discussions, by implementing useful strategies and schemes to help those experiencing poor mental health gain the relevant support they need.

Taking action

While encouraging open discussions about mental wellbeing is important, it must be followed up with tangible action. Agencies must also focus on implementing helpful schemes such as wellbeing support programmes and mental health first aiders to ensure those struggling receive relevant support. Furthermore, offering training throughout the agency, accompanied by key strategies to look after mental wellbeing will not only help raise awareness, but act as a preventative measure against poor mental health in future.

Introduce initiatives and facilitate open conversations about mental health

Marcoms agencies do well in having wellbeing initiatives available to staff and are more likely to do so than the average UK employer.

There are some initiatives, such as flexible working hours and break spaces which have a beneficial impact on mental wellbeing, though currently only 60% of marcoms professionals report being offered flexible working hours and 46% have access to break spaces. Senior leaders in agencies should explore the possibility of introducing these initiatives in particular if they haven't already. Employees also want to be supported by their agency in other ways which aren't focused on initiatives; many want to see their agency do more to tackle workload and de-normalise burnout culture, as well as encouraging more open conversations around mental health generally.

Marcoms professionals have greater access to wellbeing initiatives through their employer than the average UK employee

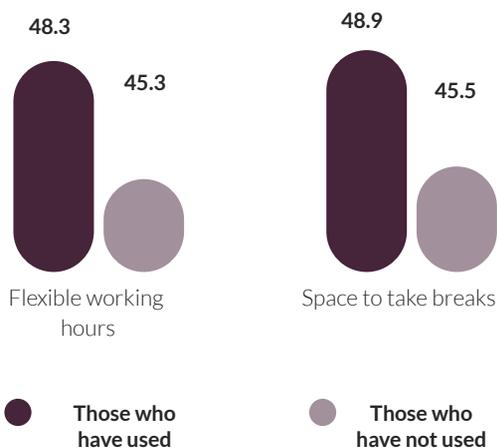
More than nine in ten (96%) marcoms professionals say that their employer offers them initiatives to support their mental wellbeing, compared to 75% of the UK working population. The most commonly offered initiatives are:

- **Remote working / working from home** (76%)
- **Flexible working hours** (60%)
- **Have a mental health first aider** (48%)
- **Provide information about mental health and techniques to improve wellbeing** (48%)
- **Provides a space for people to take breaks at lunch** (46%)
- **Exercise/ recreational classes at lunch or after work** (36%)
- **Monitoring of mental wellbeing to understand their employees (e.g. via a survey)** (34%)

- Access to a counsellor (27%)
- Visits from external speakers/ companies to increase awareness of mental wellbeing (27%)

Looking at accessing these initiatives, we see that remote working is the most accessed (68%), followed by flexible working hours (39%) and then spaces to take breaks (30%). Furthermore, making use of flexible working hours and break spaces does appear to have a beneficial effect on mental wellbeing, with those who have accessed these initiatives having higher mental wellbeing scores on the WEMWBS scale than those who have not, as shown by the chart below. We were unable to analyse any other initiatives due to limited base size.

WEMWBS wellbeing scores for those who have used / not used wellbeing initiatives



However, there are some less accessed initiatives, namely mental health first aiders (7%) and accessing a counsellor (3%). Potentially highlighting a need for

greater communication around these initiatives to encourage usage.

Demand for further initiatives

Marcoms professionals have an appetite for their employers to offer further initiatives to help support employee mental wellbeing, the most wanted initiative is duvet/ mental health days (55%), which are allocated days that can be taken off if not feeling 100% to look after your mental wellbeing. Further initiatives marcoms employees would like to see introduced are shown below:

Initiatives marcoms employees would like to see introduced



Focusing on de-normalising burnout and having open conversations is key

We asked marcoms professionals what they think their organisation should do to help support employee wellbeing and there were several key themes that emerged. One of the most dominant themes was around workload and work-life balance, many



feel overworked and that currently there is a culture of working long hours, causing stress, anxiety and burnout. As a result, many would like to see more action taken by senior leaders to help employees manage workload and ensuring that employees have a good work life balance.

“I THINK STRESS/ ANXIETY/ BURNOUT IS SOMEWHAT ACCEPTED AS NORMAL IN THE INDUSTRY.”

“TAKE MUCH EARLIER ACTION TO COMBAT EARLY SIGNS OF STRESS AND BURNOUT. DON'T JUST ACKNOWLEDGE THAT PEOPLE MAY BE STRUGGLING BUT CONTINUE TO APPLY PRESSURE.”

“DOING MORE TO RECOGNISE WORKLOAD, ANTICIPATE WORKLOAD COMING IN AND LISTEN TO EMPLOYEES WHEN THEY FLAG THE UPCOMING PROJECTS AND LACK OF CAPACITY THAT THEY WILL HAVE. THE EXPECTATION IS FOR US TO PLAN AND FLAG, BUT THEY DO NOTHING ABOUT IT UNTIL WE ARE DROWNING.”

Employees in marcoms agencies would also like to see more openness around talking about mental health, especially from senior leaders; some mention the idea of regular check ins as a way to facilitate this.

“SENIOR TEAM SHOULD BE MORE OPEN ABOUT TALKING ABOUT THE STRESS OF WORK - SOMETIMES IT FEELS LIKE THEY WANT TO BLAME EXTERNAL FACTORS AND CAN'T JUST ADMIT THAT STRESS AND ANXIETY LEAVE IS WORK RELATED - OPENLY DISCUSSING IT WITH US AS A

TEAM.”

“ENCOURAGING AN OPEN AND ACCEPTING ATMOSPHERE AT WORK, CREATING MORE OPPORTUNITIES TO HAVE DISCUSSIONS FOCUSED ON MENTAL HEALTH IN SMALLER GROUPS”

Many also mentioned having a point of contact or support to reach out to when they need it. Encouraging openness is important, but it is vital that there are support systems in place for people when they do open up about experiencing poor mental health.

“I THINK HAVING A MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AIDER AND CLEAR POINT OF CONTACT FOR MENTAL WELLBEING CONCERNS TO BE FLAGGED WOULD BE GREAT. ALSO, HAVING A CLEAR PLAN IF SOMEONE FLAGS MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES OF HOW TO GIVE THEM SUPPORT FROM THE WIDER TEAM OR WHAT THE PLAN WOULD BE IF THEY WENT ON COMPASSIONATE LEAVE IF THEY NEED IT.”

Re-evaluate working practices post-pandemic

The impacts of coronavirus of the last year have invaded all aspects of our lives; changing the landscape of traditional work routines and forcing many of us to work from our homes.

The majority (85%) of marcoms professionals feel that their agency has handed the pandemic well. And whilst working from home has come with some benefits, it has been challenging for many, especially with regards to work-home boundaries. Though despite these challenges, many would like to continue working from home to some degree post-Covid, and as such agency leaders should consider whether it is possible to implement a hybrid working model to reap the benefits of home working, whilst also benefitting from the collaborative and social nature of working in the office.

Majority have felt well supported by their employers throughout the coronavirus outbreak

Majority of those working in the marcoms sector feel their organisations have handled the pandemic well. Almost nine in ten (85%) said their companies handling of the pandemic

was 'good' with half feeling it has been 'very good' (51%). This is considerably higher than the UK workforce with 64% rating their organisations handling the pandemic as 'good' and just a quarter rating it as 'very good' (26%). Not only this, those in the marcoms sector feel more supported by their employers than the rest of UK workers. Almost all (94%) said their employer has been supportive towards them throughout the coronavirus outbreak compared to 76% of UK workers.

This past year, coronavirus changed the landscape of traditional work routines forcing many of us to work from home. Nearly all (99%) said that they've been working from home due to the pandemic, including 88% who have been working from home full time. This is a major shift for professionals working in marcoms agencies as prior to the pandemic, just 28% said they worked from home at least some of the time, with just 3% working from home full time.

Working from home has had a varied and individual impact on mental wellbeing

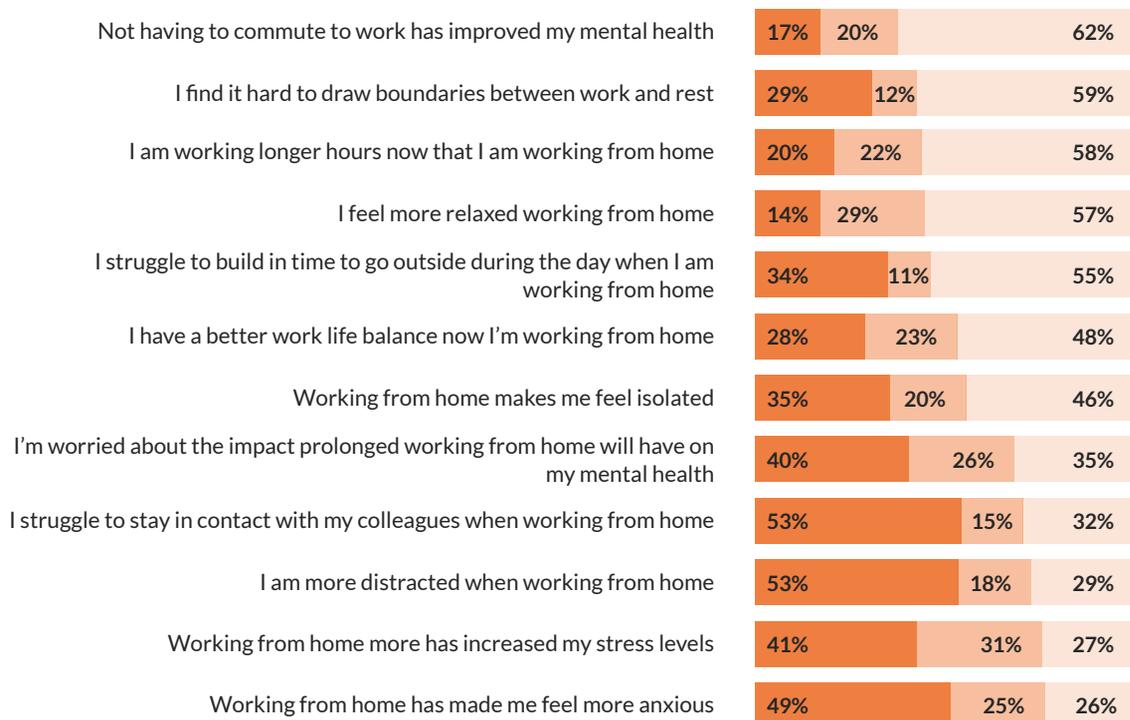
Many marcoms professionals have enjoyed some of the benefits working from home brings. Five in ten (62%) say not having to commute to work has improved their mental health, 57% feel more relaxed working from home and half (48%) feel they have a better work life balance now they're working from home.

While some have adapted well to working from home, for others working from home has brought about a negative disruption to their work-life balance. Six in ten (59%) find it hard to draw the boundaries between work and rest and 58% are working more hours now that they are working from home, both higher than the rest of the UK

workers (36% and 34% respectively). These are causes for concern especially as a heavy workload and poor work-life balances were rated as some of the top cause of stress by those in the industry. Given the mix of challenges and benefits relating to mental health, it's unsurprising that whilst 35% feel that working from home has improved their mental wellbeing, a further 43% feel it has had a negative effect on their mental wellbeing; this is considerably higher than the UK workforce (29%). Women working in marcoms are more likely to say that working from home has negatively impacted their mental wellbeing than men (46%, vs. 37%). We asked those who felt it had negatively impacted their mental health why that was and the main reasons were around having less boundaries between work and home, more distractions and missing the social aspects of the office.

Feelings about working from home

(based on those who have worked from home during the pandemic)



“HOME HAS BECOME WORK AND IT’S HARD TO ESCAPE THINKING ABOUT WORK SOMETIMES AS IT’S JUST INVADING ALL CORNERS OF LIFE.”

“THERE’S NO LONGER A DIVIDE BETWEEN WORK AND HOME. I’M EXTREMELY DISTRACTED AND I FEEL DISCONNECTED FROM MY CO-WORKERS / WORK.”

“I LIVE ALONE, SO HAVE MASSIVELY LOST OUT ON THE ABILITY TO SOCIALISE AT WORK AND OFTEN FEEL ISOLATED AS A RESULT OF HAVING WORKED FROM HOME FOR 12 MONTHS NOW.”

Despite this split in the impact of working from home on mental wellbeing, 96% would like to continue working from home to some degree once the pandemic is over. With the majority (65%) wanting to work from home a few days per week. With this in mind, marcoms employers should consider whether a hybrid approach to working is possible in their organisation. This will enable organisations to capitalise on the benefits of working from home, such as less stress from commuting and an environment more conducive to focused work, whilst also benefiting from the positives of office working, such as collaboration and socialisation.

Looking ahead - return to the office

Thinking about returning to office life after the pandemic is over, marcoms professionals feel mostly positive. Three in five (60%) feel optimistic, half feel excited (50%) and 46% feel eager to return. However, there is also understandably some anxiety surrounding this return, with 35% saying they feel anxious about

returning to the office, whilst 38% feel relaxed.

The main cause of this anxiety comes from concern around losing the free time gained when working from home (63%) and spending less time with family (35%). Commuting is also a concern for many, over half are concerned about busy commutes (55%) and 37% are concerned about having to use public transport.

Employers must take these concerns into consideration as they plan returns to the office. As the findings show, individuals have different feelings and concerns regarding office returns, and as such a phased return to the office might be something to consider in order to ease employees back into the day-to-day routine.

Looking ahead

As we have seen, the last twelve months have been a challenge for marcoms agencies, especially in the light of Covid-19.

Though the industry as a whole is becoming more open about mental health, employees in the marcoms industry who have opened up about their mental health at work have mainly seen beneficial results. However, whilst things are moving in the right direction there is still lots of work to do, especially with regards to addressing the issues surrounding workload and burnout.

The pandemic has had a deep impact on the lives of marcoms professionals, both at work and home. It is vital that senior leaders are mindful of the individual and varied impacts the pandemic has had on their team members so that they can best support them. Despite the challenges faced this year, we have seen some benefits of working from home, and the majority would like to keep working from home at least a few days a week post-Covid. Senior leaders of agencies should consider a hybrid working model which allows their employees the flexibility of home working.

The next step for many agencies will be returning to the office. Whilst most marcoms professionals are excited

for this next step, there are high levels of anxiety around this too, fuelled by concerns about losing the free time gained from working from home and commuting. A phased approach to returning to the office will help employees readjust to office working and help ease some of these concerns. An open dialogue from leadership regarding office returns is key. The pandemic has forced us to be isolated from our family, friends and colleagues, and uprooted many areas of our lives. However, with life now returning to a more normal state, we have the opportunity to take this experience to re-examine our working culture and make it better for all, placing wellbeing at the heart of it.

“WELLBEING NEEDS TO BE AT THE FOREFRONT OF OUR PEOPLE CULTURE. COMPANIES ARE ONLY AS GOOD AS THE PEOPLE WHO WORK FOR THEM. WHEN PEOPLE ARE HAPPY AND HEALTHY, THEY DO BETTER WORK.”

About the authors



Sophie Holland

Sophie is passionate about mental health and holds a BA Hons in Experimental Psychology from the University of Oxford. She developed Opinium's workplace mental wellbeing audit and heads up Opinium's mental health research team. Sophie also leads the internal wellbeing team at Opinium, introducing workplace initiatives to support employee mental wellbeing. Sophie works on a variety of different projects from design to delivery, ranging from largescale quantitative research and international studies, to in-depth qualitative research. She is heavily involved in the brand and comms space, with a particular focus on health, wellness and social research.

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Raven Ddungu

Raven works on a variety of projects utilising both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to help clients better understand consumer attitudes and behaviours. Raven is heavily involved in the brand and comms and thought leadership spaces and more recently, she has been involved in social research, geared towards helping addicts who are in recovery.

Opinium

Opinium is an award winning strategic insight agency built on the belief that in a world of uncertainty and complexity, success depends on the ability to stay on pulse of what people think, feel and do. Creative and inquisitive, we are passionate about empowering our clients to make the decisions that matter. We work with organisations to define and overcome strategic challenges – helping them to get to grips with the world in which their brands operate. We use the right approach and methodology to deliver robust insights, strategic counsel and targeted recommendations that generate change and positive outcomes.

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The Alliance of Independent Agencies

The Alliance of Independent Agencies, develops skills and represents the interests of independent marketing agencies. The Alliance brings the best and most forward-thinking independent agencies together to access the tools, resources, community, training and guidance to keep their offering as brilliant as their ideas and to maximise the return on their own energy, persistence, commitment and hard work.

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