



BACK TO WORK SURVEY REPORT



SURVEY RESULTS: **HOW DID BUSINESSES COPE WITH THE FIRST LOCKDOWN?**

The first national lockdown forced businesses to adapt almost overnight – but what did they do and how did they cope? And what lessons can they use to guide them through the second lockdown and beyond? To find out, we went and asked them.

The first national lockdown, announced towards the end of March 2020, was a body blow to businesses of all sizes. Many had to shut up shop, send workers home or transform their working practices. And as the weeks dragged on, many were forced to watch as output slowed, turnover reduced and sales plummeted.

But how well did businesses adapt to this situation and what did they do to make their workplaces safe when they were able to return to work? To find out, and to discover what lessons can be learnt to smooth the path through the second lockdown and beyond, we invited them to take part in our survey.

Here is a summary of what we discovered.



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SWITCHING TO SURVIVAL MODE

When lockdown was first announced, what did your organization do? Please tick all that apply.

After the lockdown announcement, the vast majority of businesses in our survey had to change their practices, with only 17.4% being able to continue working as normal.

Some businesses had to temporarily close (15.2%), while the same percentage had to drastically adapt their way of working by introducing PPE, alcohol or even new products.

Remote working was the most popular alternative, however. A total of 42.4% of respondents sent their workers home to set up offices in spare rooms, kitchen tables or living rooms. This suggests that modern working life has had the potential to be more flexible for some time, but it is only now that this flexibility has been exploited.



- Switched to remote working
- Continued working as normal
- Closed the business temporarily
- Changed business practices (such as creating new products, PPE, alcohol gel, etc.)
- Other
- Does not apply

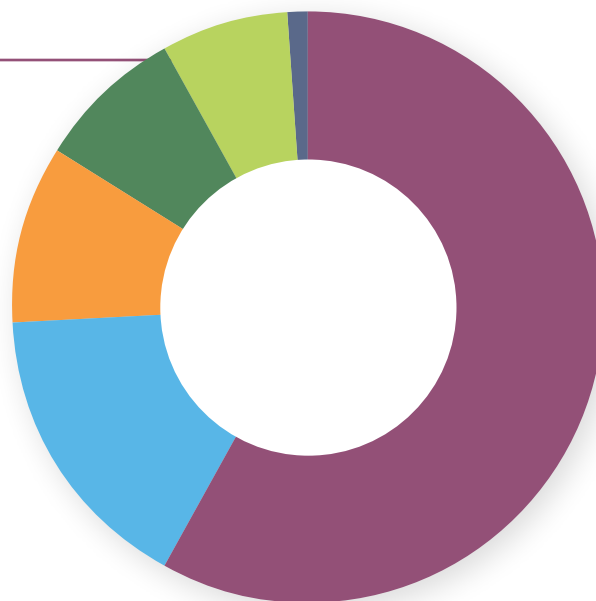
QUESTION OPTIONS	PERCENT
Switched to remote working	42.4%
Continued working as normal	17.4%
Closed the business temporarily	15.2%
Changed business practices (such as creating new products, PPE, alcohol gel, etc.)	15.2%
Other	9.8%
Does not apply	0%

What, if any, staff measures did you have to take? Please select all that apply.

Reliance on the furlough scheme was by far the most common reaction, with 58% of respondents who did not continue to work as normal calling upon the pay-outs. Some businesses furloughed only a few members of staff, but others were heavily reliant upon it. One respondent, for example, furloughed all staff, with the joint directors then taking responsibility for keeping the business ticking over and fulfilling internet orders.

However, the presence of the scheme probably led to a much smaller percentage of respondents needing to make more drastic or permanent changes, such as cuts to the number of employees. Of our respondents, only 8% were forced to make redundancies while 0.9% temporarily laid off staff.

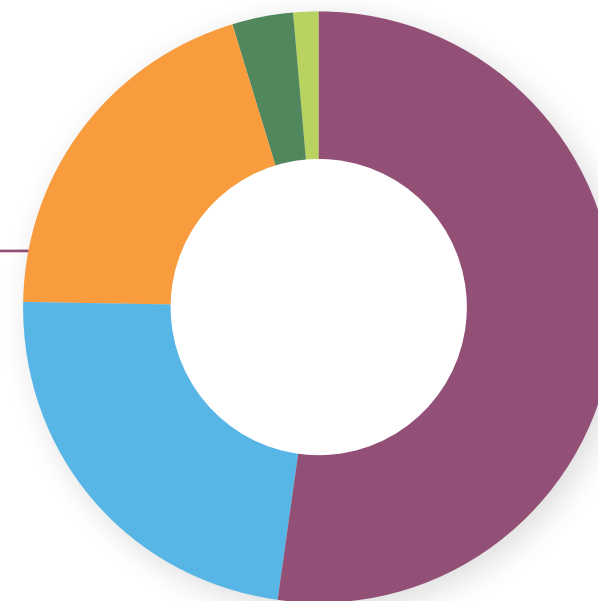
A large number of businesses were also able to keep some key functions going by switching to remote working. Of our respondents, 42.4% sent their staff home to continue working away from the workplace. Although this required unprecedented effort, the majority were able to create a smooth transition with 52.3% and 19.8% respectively saying that it was not difficult at all or only slightly difficult to equip their staff for this.



- Furlough workers
- Does not apply
- Introduce reduced pay
- Make redundancies
- Other
- Temporarily lay off staff

QUESTION OPTIONS	PERCENT
Furlough workers	58%
Does not apply	16.1%
Introduce reduced pay	9.8%
Make redundancies	8%
Other	7.2%
Temporarily lay off staff	0.9%

If you introduced remote working, how difficult did you find it to equip your staff?



- Not difficult at all
- Does not apply
- Slightly difficult
- Quite difficult
- Very difficult

QUESTION OPTIONS	PERCENT
Not difficult at all	52.3%
Does not apply	23.3%
Slightly difficult	19.8%
Quite difficult	3.5%
Very difficult	1.1%

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CREATING A HOME OFFICE

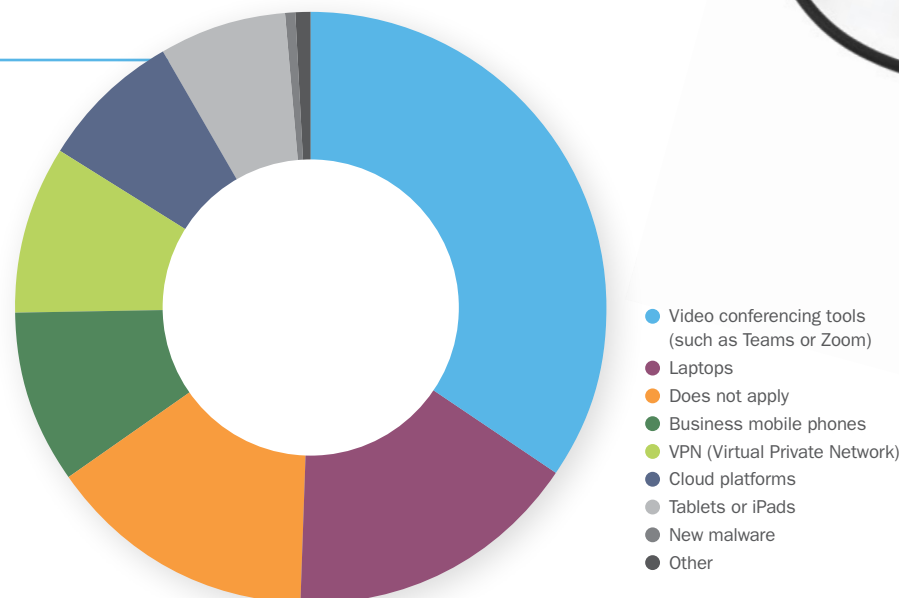
Switching to remote working en masse meant that businesses had to rely upon a whole different way of working, which increased the reliance on technology.

Many businesses had to invest in new software, of which video conferencing tools proved to be the most in-demand with 34.6% of respondents getting the relevant software in order to keep communication channels open. Other virtual solutions were also drafted in, with 9% getting Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) and 7.7% investing in cloud platforms.

Physical pieces of kit were also necessary for a significant proportion of respondents. Sixteen per cent had to invest in laptops for their new home-working team while another 9.6% bought business mobiles and another 7% gave their team members tablets or iPads.



What new tools/
software have you
adopted since
lockdown and going
back to work? Please
select all that apply.



QUESTION OPTIONS	PERCENT
Video conferencing tools (such as Teams or Zoom)	34.6%
Laptops	16%
Does not apply	14.7%
Business mobile phones	9.6%
VPN (Virtual Private Network)	9%
Cloud platforms	7.7%
Tablets or iPads	7.2%
New malware	0.6%
Other	0.6%

“We did not have a specific plan for a pandemic situation but we did have one for homeworking, which we developed more when put into practice.”

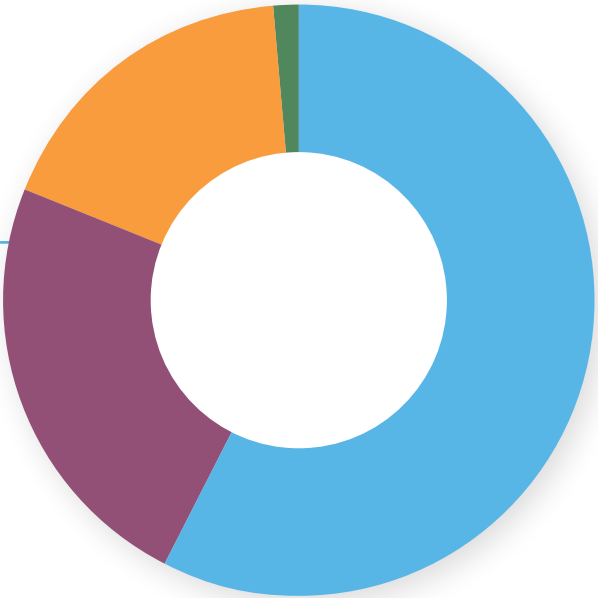


“On the day of lockdown, all my team were working from home using our telephone system and all computers were connected to our cloud-based IT platform.”

If you introduced remote working, how difficult did you find it to set up new communication channels?

Despite the introduction of new software and technology, it is encouraging that the majority of our respondents still reported that they coped well with the difficulties. Indeed, 57.6% said it was not difficult at all to set up new communication channels.

This suggests that many businesses may have already been on the path to digital transformation and were therefore more resilient when the time came to rely more exclusively upon digital solutions. This was certainly the case with one respondent, who reported that the lockdown had given them a boost with their digital business plans: “We are an internet telephony services provider, so we already used cloud storage and remote communication tools. The move to (mostly) remote working just accelerated the development of our own video conferencing product.”



- Not difficult at all
- Does not apply
- Slightly difficult
- Very difficult
- Quite difficult

QUESTION OPTIONS	PERCENT
Not difficult at all	57.6%
Does not apply	23.5%
Slightly difficult	17.6%
Very difficult	1.3%
Quite difficult	0%



3

STAYING CYBER SECURE

A greater reliance on technology and new software can easily open up a business to greater cyber security risks. But during a global pandemic, this risk is even greater.

As the pandemic spread and more workers were sent to work from home, increasing numbers of cyber criminals began to target home workers. Data supplied by cybersecurity company Darktrace to *The Guardian*, for example, revealed that the proportion of attacks targeting home workers rose from 12% of malicious email traffic before lockdown in March to more than 60% six weeks after.

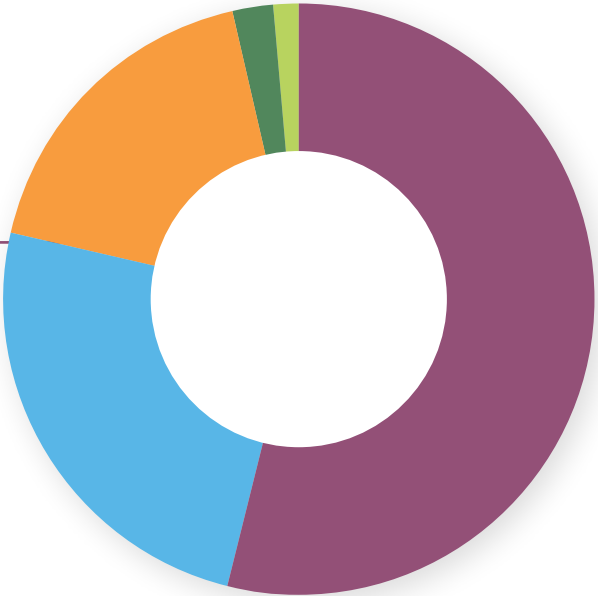
Cyber criminals were also keen to target new VPNs, weaker home Wi-Fi connections and new software, such as video conferencing tools. Headlines were soon reporting that popular tool Zoom was easily compromised and had allowed cyber criminals to hack into supposedly private calls.



If you introduced remote working, how difficult did you find it to ensure a high standard of information security?

Our respondents seem to have been largely untroubled by cyber concerns. Indeed, 54.1% reported that maintaining cyber security in the new normal was not difficult at all. Another 19.8% said that it was only slightly difficult. Interestingly, very few reported that they had made any additional investment into their cyber security – fewer than one per cent of respondents said that they had brought in new malware to protect their business against cyber-attack.

This is unusual when set against the background of other news stories during the first lockdown, which suggested that business' cyber policies were not up to scratch, and could suggest that some businesses have been over-estimating their security and underestimating the likelihood of an attack in the future.



- Not difficult at all
- Does not apply
- Slightly difficult
- Quite difficult
- Very difficult

QUESTION OPTIONS	PERCENT
Not difficult at all	54.1%
Does not apply	24.7%
Slightly difficult	17.6%
Quite difficult	2.4%
Very difficult	1.2%

“We were lucky enough to have an in-depth business continuity plan, which came in useful as we all knew what was needed to ensure the business continued. I would recommend any company to spend the time to create one.”



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BACK TO WORK

If a business did have to suspend operations, they did so for a significant length of time.

In our survey, 93% of businesses forced to close their doors did so for at least one month. The largest proportion (38%) shut up shop for two months, but significant percentages were closed for longer. A total of 12% closed for three months while 16% were shut for a lengthy, and damaging four months.

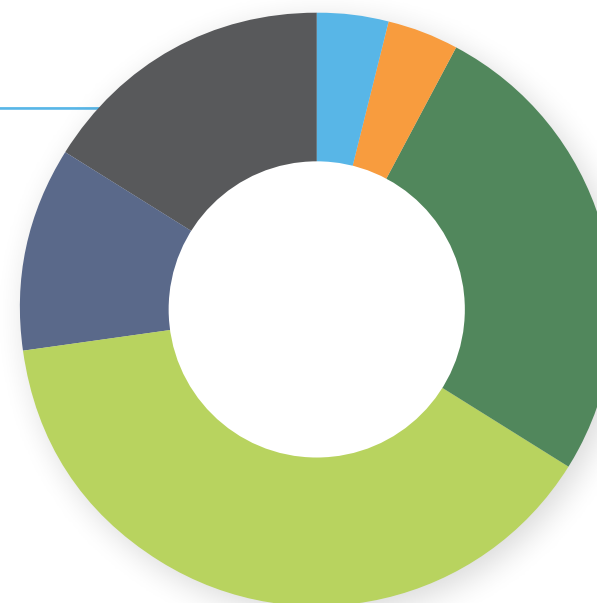
But whether businesses stayed open or waited until re-opening their doors, going back to work required extensive changes.



If you suspended business, how long did it take until your business went back to work?

Our survey revealed that businesses implemented a wide range of measures to make their workplaces COVID-secure, although some were not as universal as expected. For instance, 16.8% of respondents introduced two-metre distancing in their workplace, the same percentage as those who put hygiene stations equipped with hand gel. As two relatively easy measures to implement, it is surprising that these percentages were not higher and suggests that some businesses may have room for improvement when it comes to protecting their workforce from infection.

Similarly low percentages provided PPE (13%) and implemented new cleaning rotas (12%). Perhaps more worryingly, there was also a small percentage of just 10.6% who provided their staff with additional training on handwashing, social distancing and symptoms of COVID, an inexpensive yet effective way of reducing the likelihood of infection in the workplace.



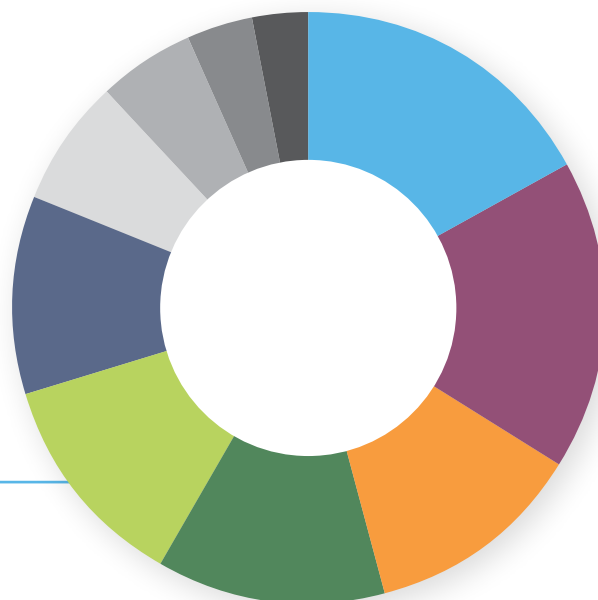
- 1 week
- 2 weeks
- 3 weeks
- 1 month
- 2 months
- 3 months
- 4 months or more

QUESTION OPTIONS	PERCENT
1 week	4%
2 weeks	0%
3 weeks	4%
1 month	26%
2 months	39%
3 months	11%
4 months or more	16%

- Introduced 2m distancing
- Created hygiene stations with alcohol gel
- Provided PPE (face masks, gloves and/or aprons)
- Rearranged indoor workspaces
- Introduced a new cleaning rota
- Provided additional training on hand washing, social distancing and the symptoms of COVID-19
- Created a rota system or shifts to reduce the number of people in the workplace
- Created a one-way system in the workplace
- Other
- Does not apply

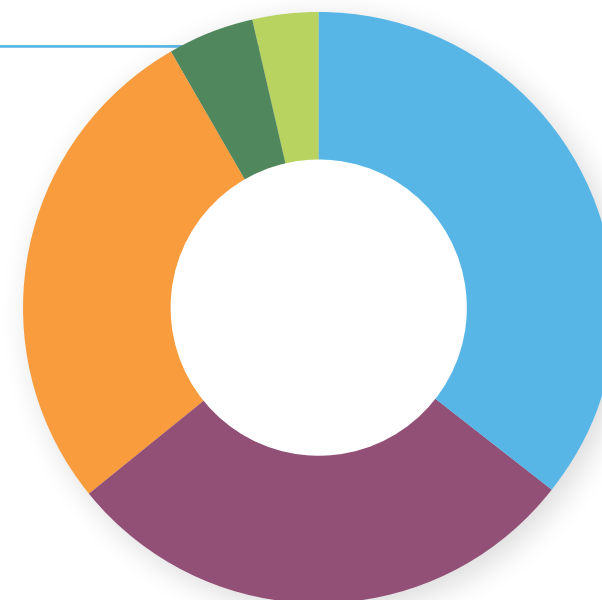
If you continued working, or have since returned to work, what measures have you put in place to protect your staff? Please select all that apply.

No matter what measures were introduced, it appears that most businesses took the changes in their stride with 35.7% stating that it was not at all difficult to go back to work and another 28.6% reporting that it was only slightly difficult.



QUESTION OPTIONS	PERCENT
Introduced 2m distancing	16.8%
Created hygiene stations with alcohol gel	16.8%
Provided PPE (face masks, gloves and/or aprons)	13%
Rearranged indoor workspaces	12.2%
Introduced a new cleaning rota	12%
Provided additional training on hand washing, social distancing and the symptoms of COVID-19	10.6%
Created a rota system or shifts to reduce the number of people in the workplace	6.9%
Created a one-way system in the workplace	5.3%
Other	3.5%
Does not apply	2.9%

If you have returned to work, how difficult have you found the process?



- Not difficult at all
- Slightly difficult
- Does not apply
- Quite difficult
- Very difficult

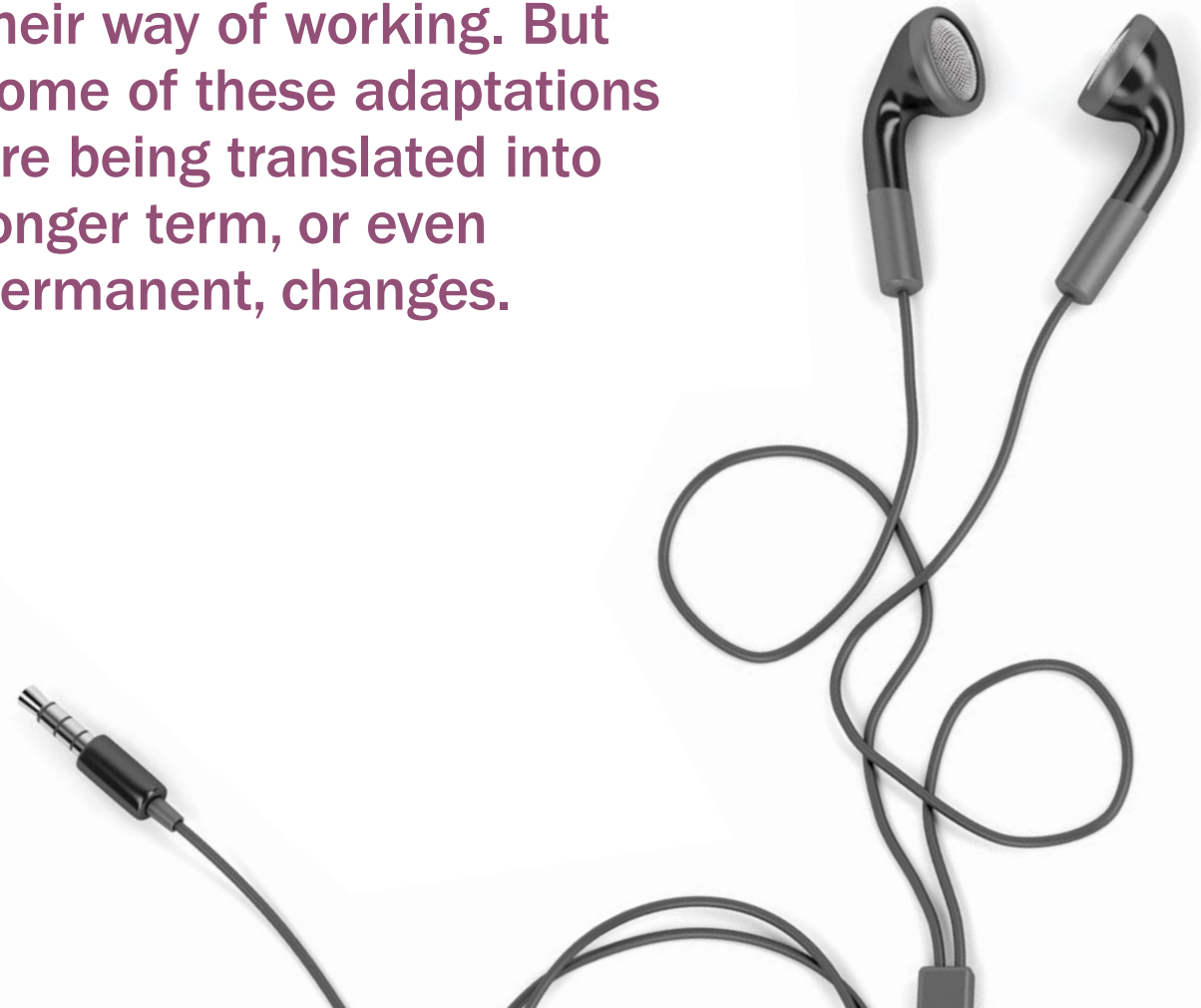
QUESTION OPTIONS	PERCENT
Not difficult at all	35.7%
Slightly difficult	28.6%
Does not apply	27.4%
Quite difficult	4.8%
Very difficult	3.5%



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LONGER TERM IMPACTS

The spread of COVID-19 undoubtedly had a huge impact on many businesses and caused them to adapt their way of working. But some of these adaptations are being translated into longer term, or even permanent, changes.



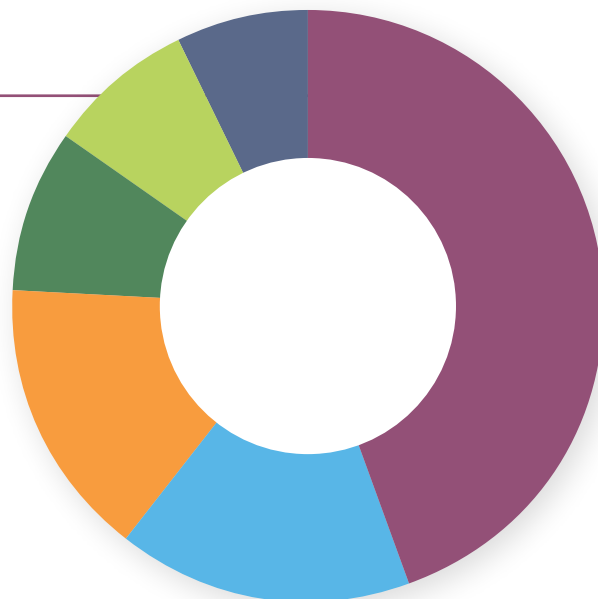
What, if any impact has lockdown had on your business practices? Tick all that apply.

For instance, the shift to homeworking and the introduction of staggered shifts has caused many businesses to re-evaluate their office space and attitudes to more flexible working.

This was reflected in our survey results, with 44.6% of respondents saying that they had now introduced more flexible working patterns. Another 8.9% have recognised the benefits of homeworking and have switched to this on a permanent basis. “We have, and will continue, to work from home,” reported one respondent. “We have cancelled the rent on our office space and have kept the smallest for use as an address. Homeworking works well for us.”

Businesses have also taken the opportunity to review their plans to make their business stronger going forward. For example, 15.2% have created a new business continuity plan, with many now putting plans in place for a pandemic: “Our business continuity plan did not mention ‘pandemic’,” said one respondent. “It does now!”

Another positive long-term consequence of the pandemic is that 60.2% of our respondents came out of the first



lockdown feeling that their businesses were stronger and more resilient as a result. Another 30.7% felt that their business had recovered very well after the first lockdown, with 42% believing that their recovery had gone quite well.

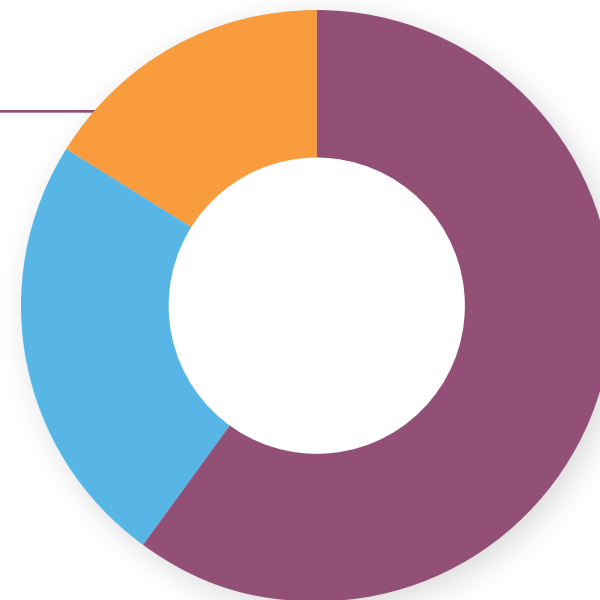
Staff were also considered to have adapted well to the changing situation, with 46% of respondents reporting that they had adapted to the ‘new normal’ very well. The same percentage judged that their staff had adapted quite well.

Taken all together, these results create a positive message that offers reassurance for the second lockdown and beyond.

- More flexible working
- No impact
- A business continuity plan
- Permanent home working
- Shifts/rotas
- Other

QUESTION OPTIONS	PERCENT
More flexible working	44.6%
No impact	16.1%
A business continuity plan	15.2%
Permanent home working	8.9%
Shifts/rotas	8%
Other	7.2%

Would you say that your business is more resilient now?



- Yes
- Not sure
- No

QUESTION OPTIONS	PERCENT
Yes	60.2%
Not sure	23.9%
No	15.9%

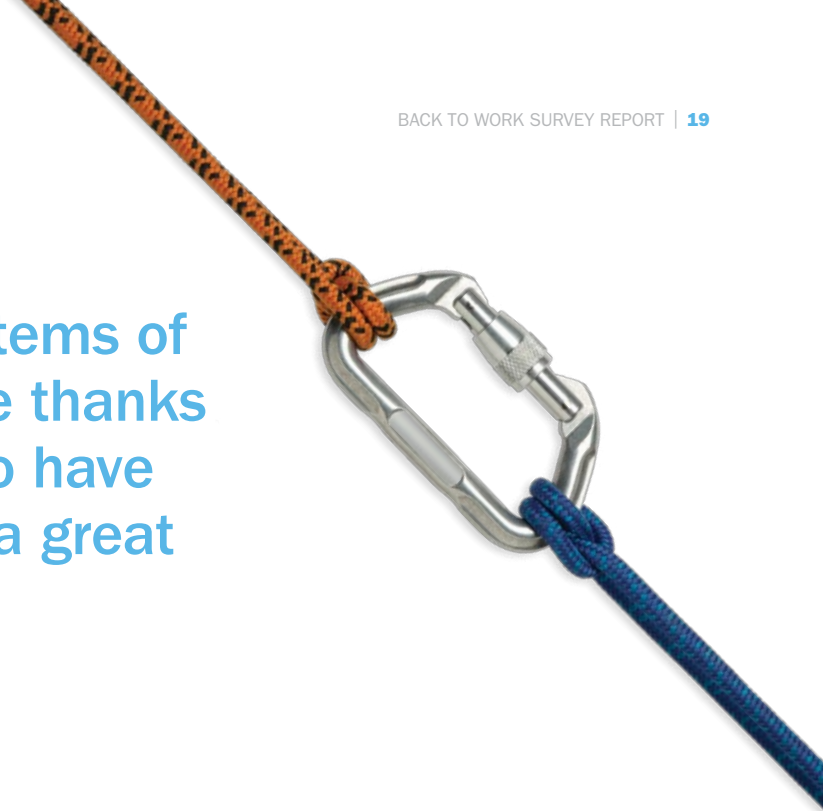
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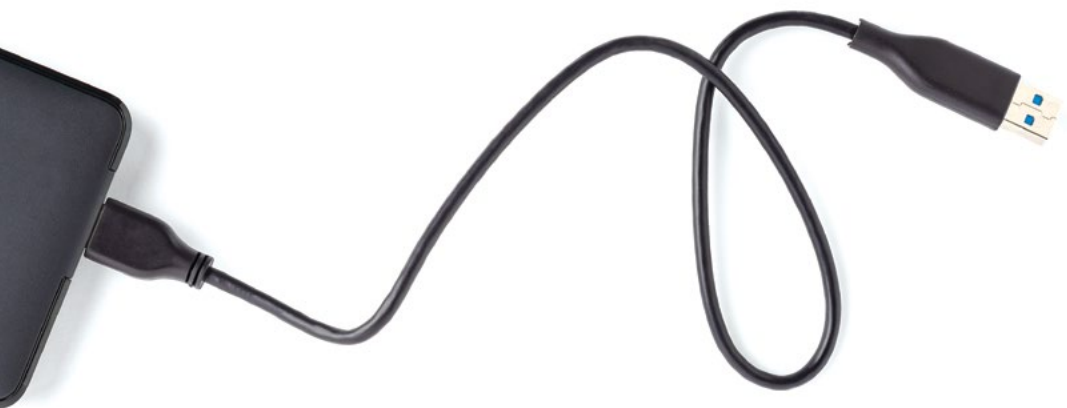
USING ISOS THROUGHOUT LOCKDOWN

Having robust systems of processes in place thanks to ISOs appears to have given businesses a great deal of support.

ISOs create a robust set of best practice processes that businesses can rely upon to keep key functions working as they should. Some ISOs also have a requirement for business continuity planning, which can help a business to react confidently and quickly in the event of a disruption. Of our respondents, 63.1% found their ISO useful in navigating lockdown, with ISO 9001 proving to be particularly popular for providing support during the pandemic. “Because we had these systems in place, we have been able to manage the pandemic without too much disruption to the business,” commented one respondent.

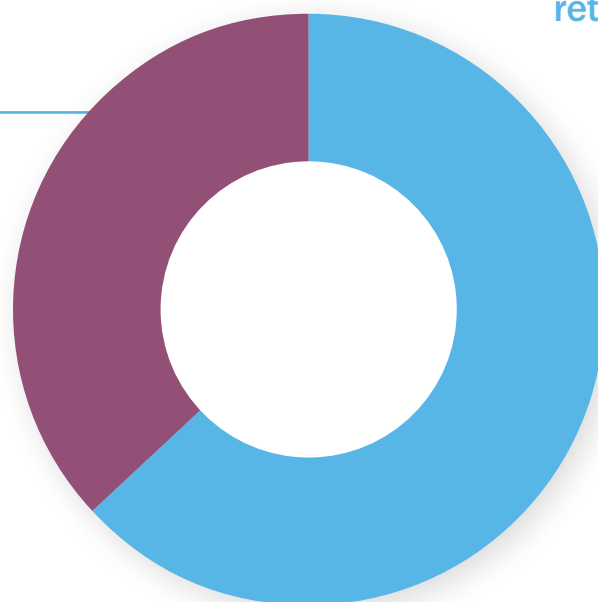
“We found that having a business continuity plan and an ISO in place has helped with planning to maintain the business in these difficult times.”





If you have an operational management system in place, has it proven valuable in assisting you with lockdown management?

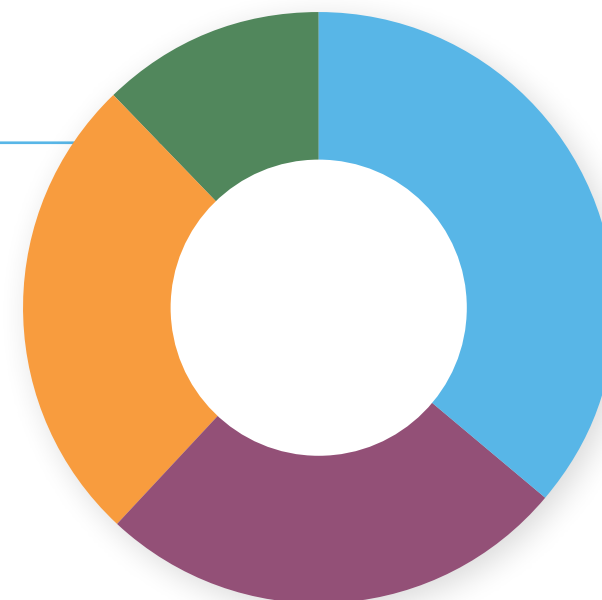
Business continuity plans were also singled out as something that gave businesses support, with 36.2% of those with a plan saying that it helped them adapt during lockdown: “We found that having a business continuity plan and an ISO in place has helped with planning to maintain the business in these difficult times,” said another respondent.



● Yes
● No

QUESTION OPTIONS	PERCENT
Yes	63.1%
No	36.9%

How helpful was your Business Continuity Plan during lockdown and when returning to site?



● Very helpful
● Quite helpful
● Slightly helpful
● Not helpful

QUESTION OPTIONS	PERCENT
Very helpful	36.2%
Quite helpful	25.9%
Slightly helpful	25.8%
Not helpful	12.1%



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LESSONS FOR THE SECOND LOCKDOWN AND BEYOND

Overall, our survey demonstrated that many businesses have been able to showcase their resilience and adaptability when it comes to handling a crisis.

Our respondents showed that they and their workforces were able to adapt well when switching to remote working and when transferring back to the workplace once the lockdown was lifted, and that new software and new ways of working were embraced.

But the survey has also highlighted the importance of support, whether from the government's furlough scheme or from the structure and process provided by ISO management systems and business continuity plans.

It has also highlighted some areas for improvement. There seems to have been a low uptake of essential training, which offers a quick and easy way to help reduce the transmission of infection in the workplace, and the survey responses suggest that some businesses may need to re-evaluate their cyber security and invest in up-to-date malware.

Going forward, it is clear that businesses need to continue to adapt their processes to ensure that they continue to be resilient, and that changes they have introduced to cope with the first lockdown should be incorporated into permanent business plans so that they be relied upon for this and future pandemics.



Get in touch

To learn more about our service, ISO 14001 or any other ISO certification, just contact us by phone or email. You can also visit our website to get a quote online or chat live with one of our friendly team.



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