

Stats from across 9 different industries & 5 expert contributors



# Mental Health in the Workplace Report

A study on the impact of modern working on employee mental health & how to improve it.



# Contents

Welcome	3 - 4
A Message from If U Care Share	5 - 6
Our Purpose	7 - 9
Expert Opinion with Matt Heller of Performance Optimist	10 - 11
Burnout	12 - 13
Expert Opinion with Joe Robinson of Work to Live	14 - 15
Moral Injury	16 - 19
Expert Opinion with Cara De Lange of Softer Success	20 - 21
Remote Working & Mental Health	21 - 23
A view from the Experts on Remote Working	24 - 25
Improving Mental Health in the Workplace	26 - 31



---

## Welcome

### **Welcome to Oak Engage's Mental Health in the Workplace Report.**

Following on from the Future of Working Report published in April 2022, in this report we delve deeper into the state of mental health in physical and remote workplaces.

Employees have battled against the tide of isolation and uncertainty during the pandemic and now we face more challenges in the form of a cost of living crisis. The past three years have brought very little respite.

It's very little surprise that 58% of our survey respondents have suffered mental or physical stress as a result of work in the past two years.

As the research is presented you'll see some clear trends in the drivers of mental anguish at work, many with different implications across different industries. Some you will resonate with...some you may find surprising.

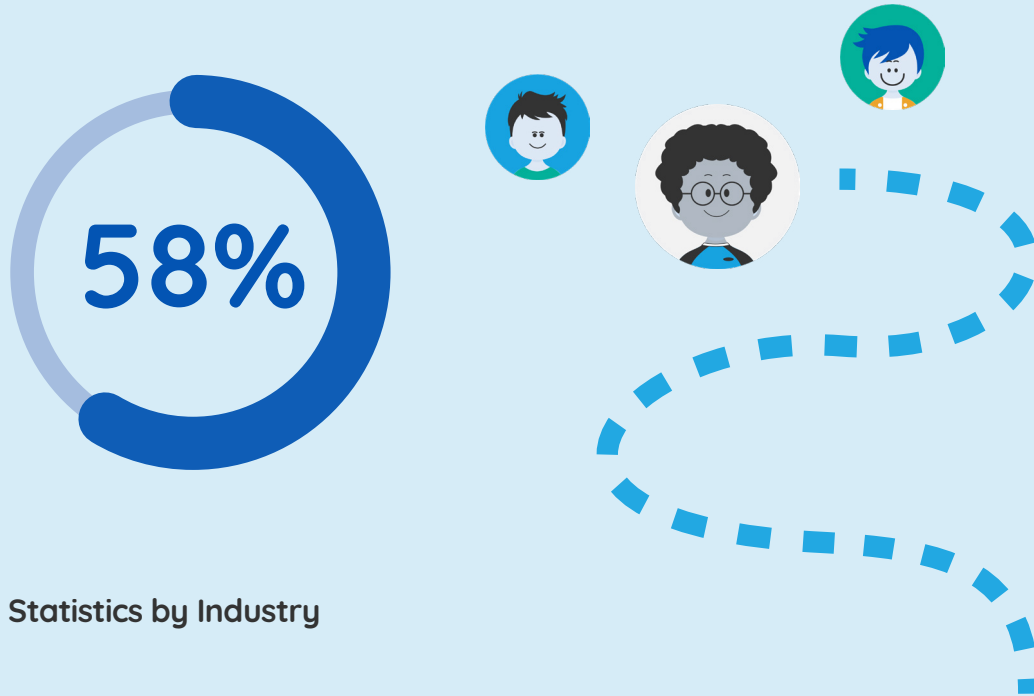
The data we have collected through employee surveys, across 9 industries paired with knowledge from industry experts, will help you to gain a better understanding of burnout, moral injury, purpose, remote working and their link to mental wellbeing.

We are delighted to have partnered with If U Care Share for this report. They provide essential intervention and prevention services, as well as educating organisations on mental health issues.

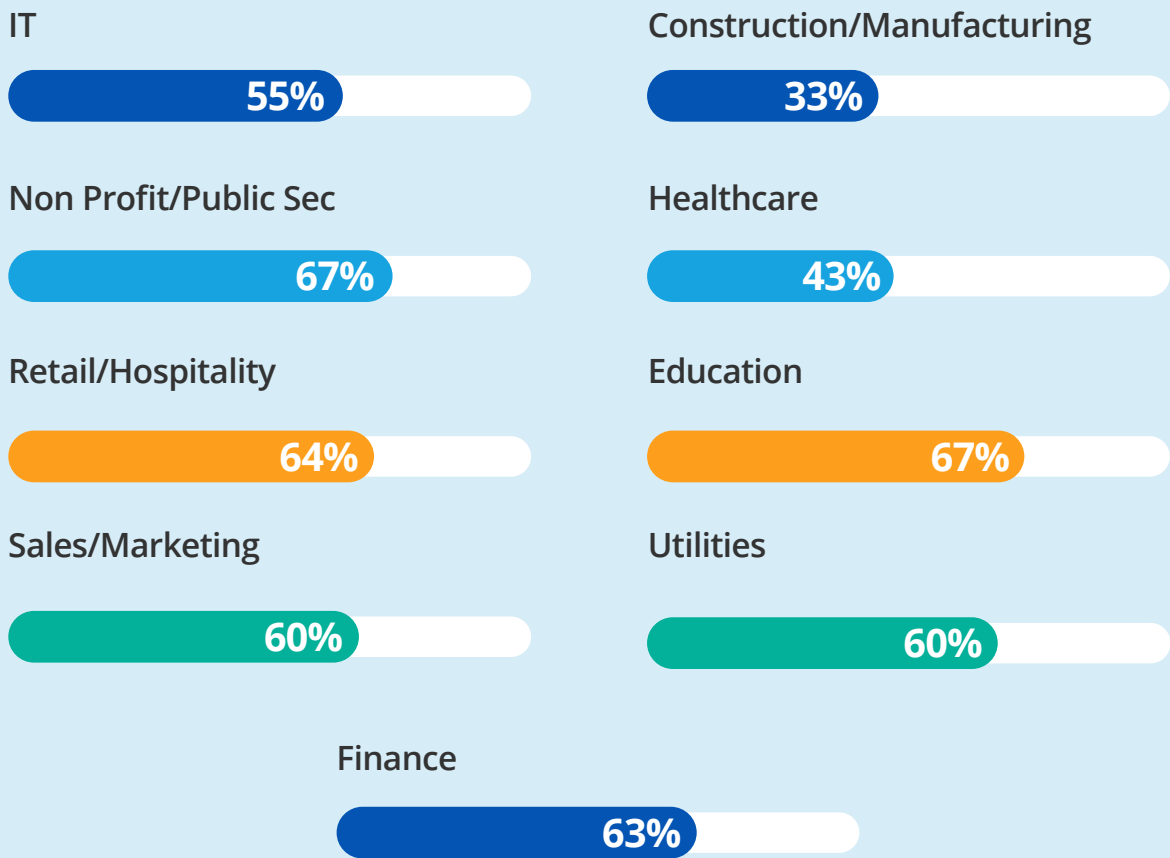
We thank them for the fantastic contribution and insight they have given us.

Hopefully, you will find value in this report and help to change the landscape of mental health in the workplace.

Percentage of workers who have suffered mental or physical stress as a result of work in the last 2 years.



Statistics by Industry



---

## A Message from If U Care Share

Firstly we would like to acknowledge the contribution of every participant, sharing their perspectives, experiences and emotions, through a collective voice we can identify key areas for improvement and where further support may be required.

Some of this report may surprise you and we would invite you to reflect on why that may come as a surprise? Is it an industry you are unfamiliar with or are there unconscious assumptions we make based on particular responsibilities?

The report highlights there are very specific disparities within particular industries and that ultimately the feelings we are left with can be the same. Our experiences can vary greatly and yet the emotional impact can still be significant.

The survey also highlights to employers where there are opportunities to do more, or work differently, to promote honesty and authenticity. To create a space and a culture where people can reach out when needed.

To those of us who see ourselves as the employee, the survey participant, we can see our experiences in comparison to others. In doing so we might be consoled that it isn't just me or we may be challenged that our experience is vastly different to others in the same industry. That second perspective may enable us to empathise, to be more open, to offer support, or seek to understand some of those differences. The first perspective, that it isn't just me, allows us to understand ourselves, our wider industry and perhaps also help us to identify different ways of working.

The important thing for all of us to remember, is that there is always a way, there is support available. There are all kinds of things we can do to look after our mental health, and although work can be a major factor it is not the sole contributor.

We need to take time to look at our own experiences, our own challenges, our own emotions, and how we may want to deal with them differently. There are some great resources, tips and insights shared by industry experts and some of their insights will be particularly helpful.

It's also important to recognise sometimes we are our own experts, we can understand ourselves better than anyone else and know what we need to do. Getting to that place takes a lot of time, reflection and support from others. Hopefully this report will promote that conversation in your own experience and within your wider industry.

We were delighted to be involved in this work with Oak Engage and have no doubt this report will continue to elevate the conversation and hopefully lead to meaningful change where necessary.

**David Brown**



Training & Development Manager, If U Care Share

“We need to take time to look at our own experiences, our own challenges, our own emotions, and how we may want to deal with them differently.”

“There are some great resources, tips and insights shared by industry experts and some of their insights will be particularly helpful.”

---

## Our Purpose

Everyone likes to feel needed and wanted, agreed? But what our individual purpose is completely depends on our goals and motivations. In order for employees to feel like they have a purpose, the purpose of the employee and employer either must be aligned or help to achieve one another.

With a lack of purpose at or because of work, employees can automatically disengage from their jobs. Given that we spend so much of our waking life at work, this can impact our mental health. Often employees don't feel like they play an important part in their roles and it's often because they don't feel appreciated or recognised.

Let's take a look at some of the findings of our survey around purpose and belonging at work.

We asked employees:

**Do you feel like your role has a significant purpose?**

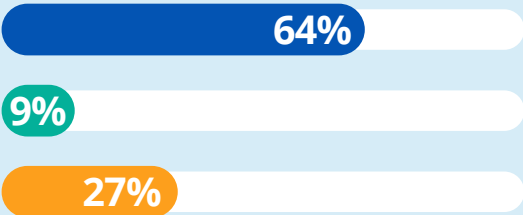


### Statistics by Industry

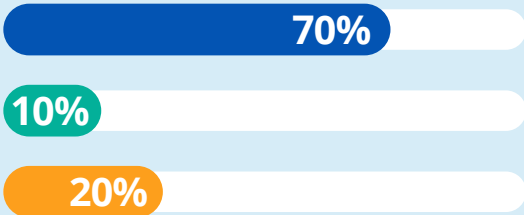
Do you feel like your role has a significant purpose?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

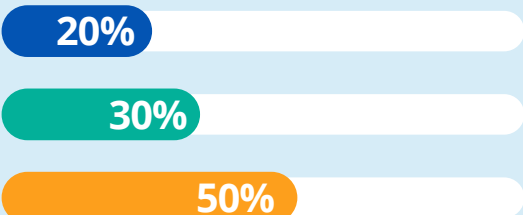
#### IT



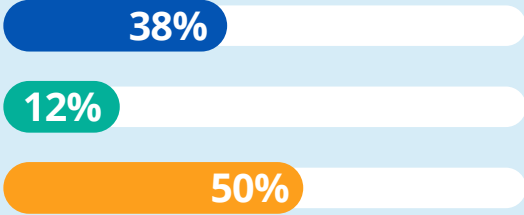
#### Sales/Marketing



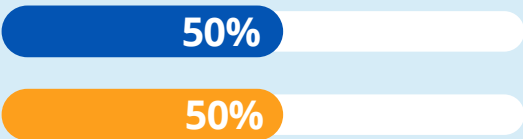
#### Retail/Hospitality



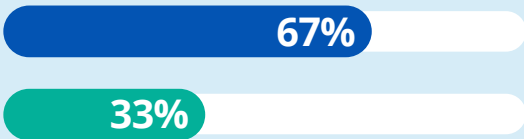
#### Finance



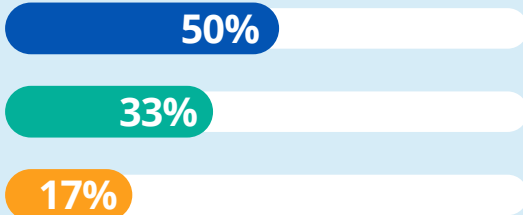
#### Construction/Manufacturing



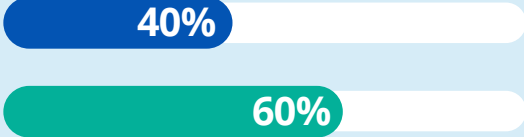
#### Healthcare



#### Education



#### Utilities

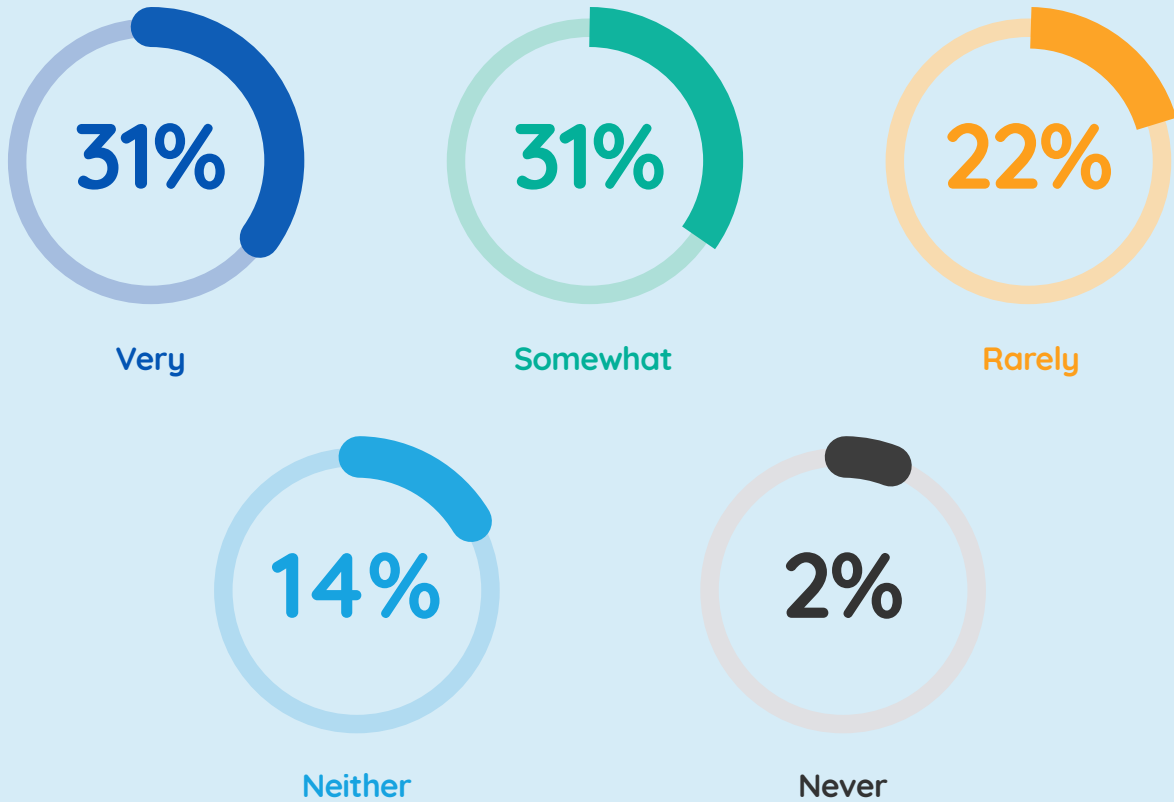




---

## How connected do you feel to the organisation you work for?

Over a third of employees don't feel connected to the organisation they work for...



### Statistics by Industry:

**84% of utilities** workers DO NOT feel connected to their organisation

**75% of finance** workers DO NOT feel connected to their organisation

**72% of healthcare** workers feel VERY connected to their organisation

**72% of IT** workers feel at least some connection with their organisation

**67% of education** workers feel at least some connection with their organisation

## Expert Opinion with Matt Heller

**Matt founded Performance Optimist in 2011, coaching business leaders to create more purposeful and team oriented work environments. He does this through training workshops, coaching programs and on-going development initiatives. Matt has worked with a host of organisations of all sizes and has published books on employee burnout and supportive leadership.**

One of our big drivers is about purpose and people understanding what their purpose is. They ask themselves this question 'is it worth it?'

'Is it worth working in this way to spend time away from my family or to disregard my mental and physical health?' Then we start to wonder whether we should be doing this and start to disengage. This is a natural human process.

Purposes can be different or a combination of things. For example, someone may go to work in order to fulfil their purpose of having a family and doing what's best for them. It is a means to an end. Is their purpose aligned with the organisation? Maybe not, but if this allows them to fulfil other purposes like look after their family the way they want to or get involved in the community, they don't have to 100% align with what the organisation is doing.

But, I think if the organisation can figure out what that purpose is for people they can work together regardless of their beliefs etc. If your purpose does really align to the ethics of a company you will naturally be much more engaged.

Where we run into issues is where an organisation doesn't make the decision you expect it to make and there's no communication. Comms in an organisation is the all-important thing.

If the reason behind that decision isn't transparent and the bigger picture of how it will impact the business down the line, we start thinking about whether this fits with my purpose? The answer to this will be different for every person. Managers have to speak to every employee to understand this.

---

It's also important to talk to your manager, they have to know! It is tough sometimes you don't know how to approach certain issues. But, you don't want them to be invisible in your solutions just like you don't want to be invisible to the organisation; it's a two way street.

**Matt Heller**



Consultant & Author on Purpose, Culture & Burnout

“I think if the organisation can figure out what that purpose is for people they can work together regardless of their beliefs...”

...If your purpose does really align to the ethics of a company you will naturally be much more engaged.”

# Burnout

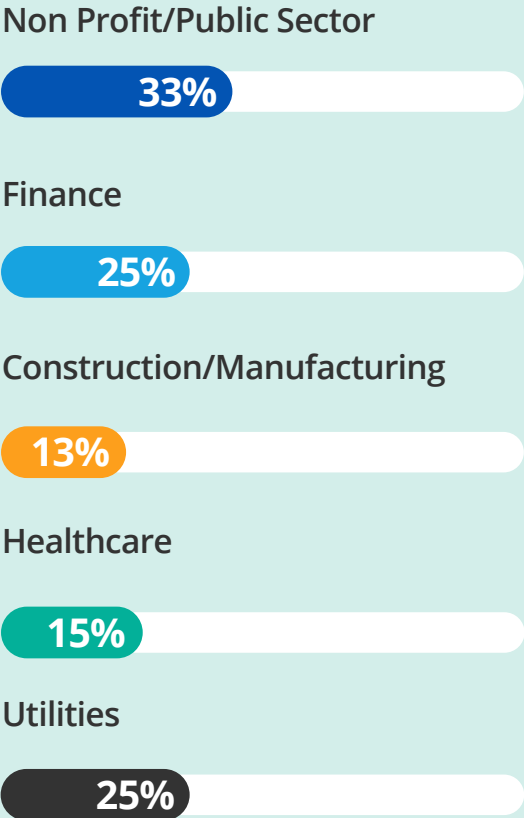
One of the key consequences of modern working is burnout. Employees can now be contacted any hour of the day.

Employees can be overworked by the organisation or have trouble switching off from work (this has become a bigger issue when working from home). Either way, it isn't healthy.

Burnout contributes to stress, anxiety, disengagement and overall happiness. It reiterates the need for work-life balance and setting boundaries.

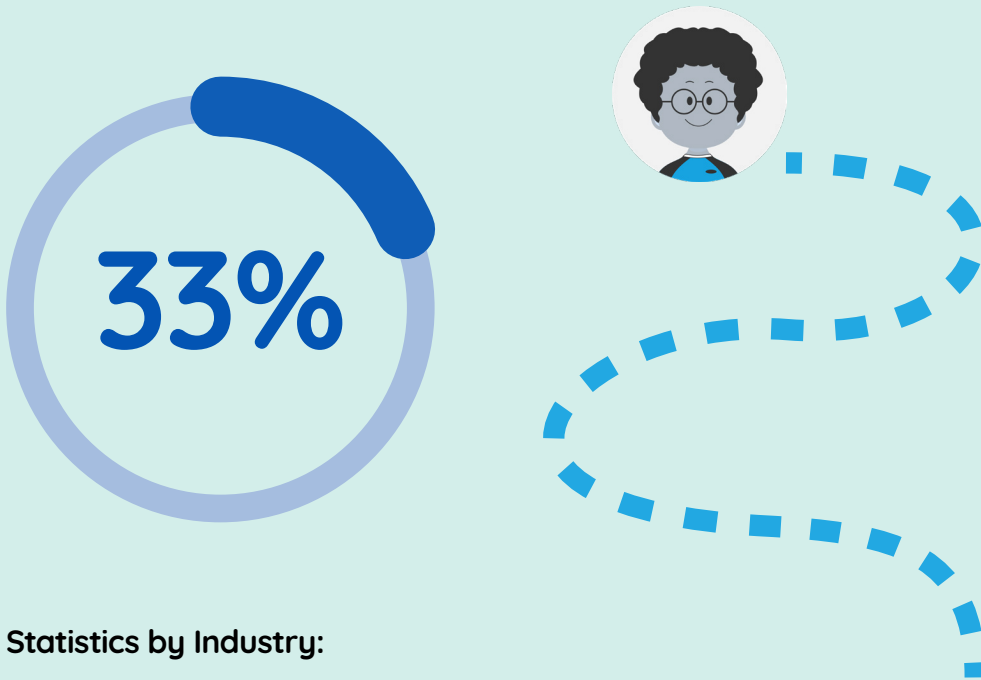
We surveyed employees on being overworked and burnt out...

## Percentage of workers who said overworking/long hours had contributed to their stress:



---

Percentage of workers who said expectation/pressure had contributed to their stress:



Statistics by Industry:

IT



Education



Retail/Hospitality



Sales/Marketing



## Expert Opinion with Joe Robinson

Joe Robinson is an author, speaker and trainer on work-life balance and stress management. He has helped several businesses find a balance between productivity and employee engagement. Featuring on CNN, NBC and Wall Street Journal to name a few, Joe has become a respected voice in the field, helping to shape cultures and perception to accommodate work-life balance. His new book *Work Smarter, Live Better: The Science-Based Work-Life Balance and Stress Management Toolkit*, is available on [Amazon](#).

Based on working individually with burned-out clients and training with teams and organisations, the main triggering events are excessive hours, no boundaries, not enough support, and no recovery strategies. The stress continues to orbit brains in a pattern called rumination. This gives the hare-brained false beliefs and catastrophic thoughts triggered by stress credence the more we think about them- but they're bogus.

Employers need to know that excessive hours and lack of boundaries are relentless demotivating tools. We are in the knowledge economy, where productivity is a function of an energised, focused brain. Burnout gives you the opposite.

### **If you want to prevent employees from burning out:**

- Rein in overwork and chronic 50-hour-plus work weeks.
- Set boundaries on an unbounded world- check email at designated times, shut off notification sounds and alerts and no work email or calls after business hours.
- Get people the support they need- when someone leaves, and they are not replaced, the remaining folks may be able to cope for a little while, but after that comes burnout.
- Encourage recharging and refuelling throughout the day with frequent breaks

---

The pandemic has underscored the importance of work-life balance and what that does for wellbeing and stress reduction. We are not hard drives with hair. I see more companies taking work-life seriously now. We now know what happens when all fun, social life, travel, and recreational activities are shut down. It affects mental health and that affects output.

Every company should have a stress management strategy and regular employee training if they want to prevent employees from burning out.

**Joe Robinson**



Business Culture & Work-Life Balance Expert

“We are in the knowledge economy, where productivity is a function of an energised, focused brain...”

...Burnout gives you the opposite. Employees are mentally and emotionally checked-out if they are burned-out.”

## Moral Injury

Our own belief systems can often correlate with how engaged we are at work. Sometimes people can switch off and be focused purely on their outcomes, but many will be impacted by what their employer stands for and how they behave.

Ethics and morals make us the people we are and when we perceive ourselves as working against them, it can lead to us disconnecting and shutting down.

The term 'moral injury' is very fitting, as it can cause damage to our mental health. As well as anxiety, we may question and start to change a perception of ourselves in a negative way.

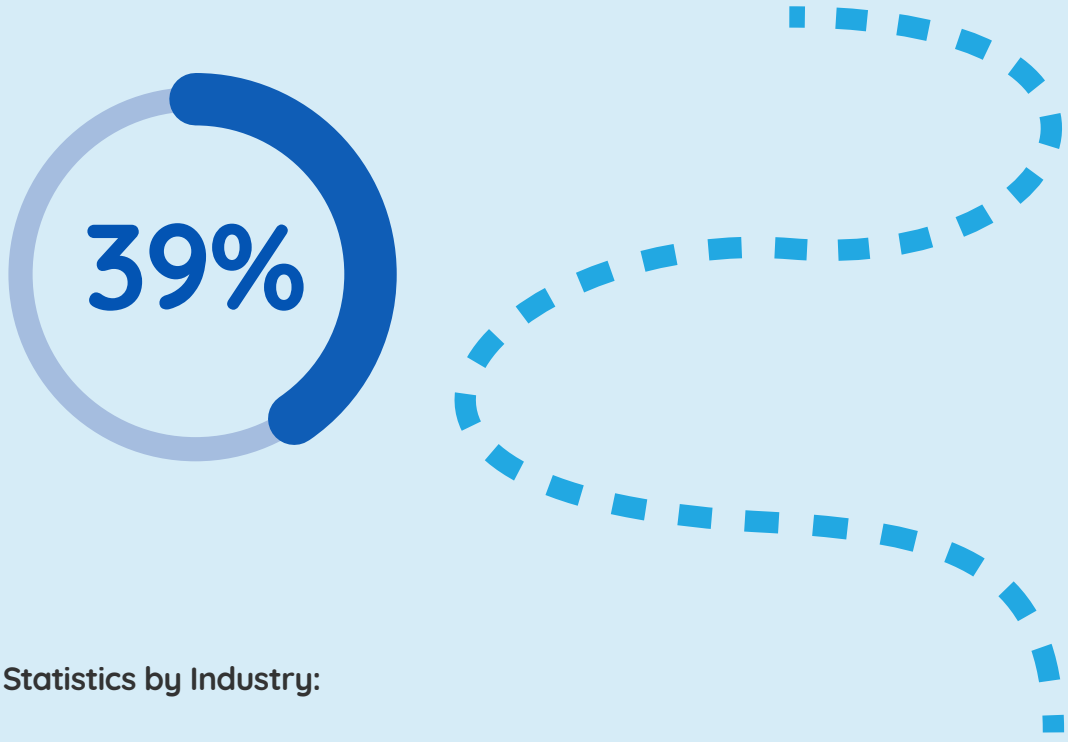
**We surveyed employees on how they really feel on this subject...**





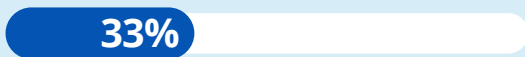
---

**% of employees who have suffered anxiety, stress or depression as a result of your employer contradicting your morals or beliefs:**



Statistics by Industry:

Construction/Manufacturing



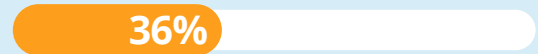
Sales/Marketing



Healthcare



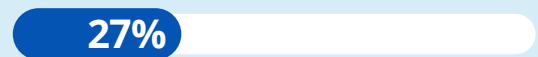
Retail/Hospitality



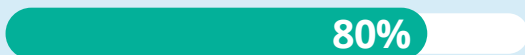
Education



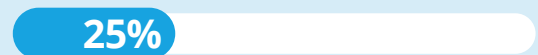
IT



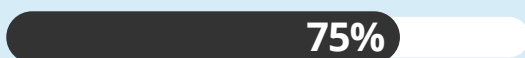
Utilities



Non Profit/Public Sector



Finance



## The reasons...

We asked:

**‘If there was a specific event that caused this, please give a short description’...**

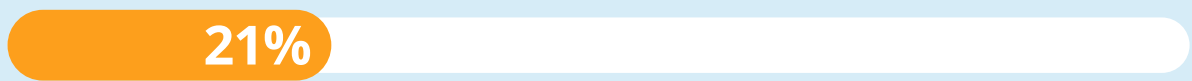


---

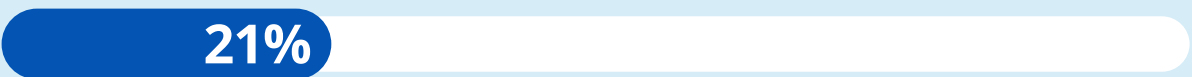
We asked:

**How do you feel the values of the organisation you work for match your own?**

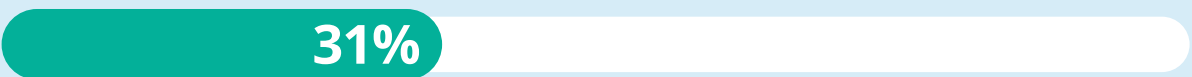
Completely aligned



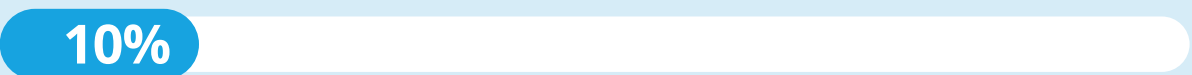
Not really aligned



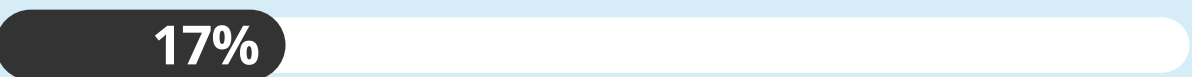
Somewhat aligned



Completely contradict



Unsure



## Expert Opinion with Cara De Lange

Cara de Lange is a specialist in the science of burnout. A visionary author, wellbeing consultant and corporate futurist, she founded Softer Success® to provide evidence-backed burnout solutions for businesses. Working with the world's top universities, researchers and psychologists, she created the ground-breaking, anonymous wellbeing assessment '[A Walk Through the Forest](#)', which can diagnose the risk of workplace burnout and toxicity in 90 seconds.

Moral injury can be the result of a toxic workplace culture with procedures that are not looking after the wellbeing of their employees sufficiently. Through our own research we have found that when someone sits in emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and moral injury for too long, this can contribute to burnout.

Some recommendations for organisations to avoid moral stress and injury:

- As an organisation, be prepared to acknowledge and learn from mistakes. Align external and internal narrative and openly take action to prevent future transgressions occurring.
- Embed ethical standards throughout your organisational practices, processes, policies, and communications.
- Clearly articulate standards of behaviour around ethical conduct and be prepared to take visible and consistent action against transgressions.
- Identify and acknowledge moral stressors in the organisation.
- Ensure that where internal investigations do need to take place, that they are conducted according to due process and where the employee experiencing the moral stress is protected and supported throughout.

- 
- Enable a culture of psychological safety where employees are free to speak up without fear of **recrimination** (leaders openly encouraging feedback and clear evidence to all that feedback is acted upon), **processes** ( having a range of anonymous forums through which employees can give feedback for instance a staff survey and through feedback hubs) and **policies** ( a clearly articulated whistleblowing policy that is well communicated and adhered to).
  - Provide tertiary support to those employees that may be suffering from the outcomes.

**Cara De Lange**



Workplace Wellbeing, Toxicity & Burnout Expert

“As an organisation, be prepared to acknowledge and learn from mistakes...”

...Align external and internal narrative and openly take action to prevent future transgressions occurring.”

## Remote Working & Our Mental Health

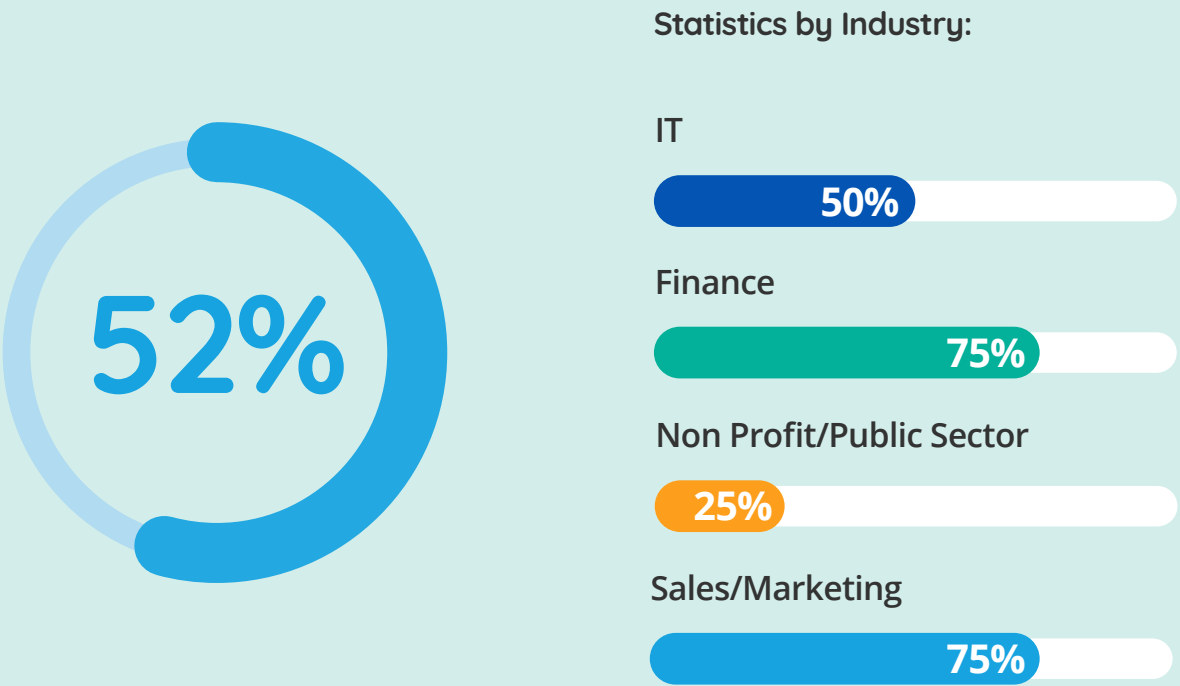
Many of us have gotten used to remote working since early 2020 and it is likely that it will be a permanent fixture in a lot of businesses, at least to some degree. Working from home (WFH) has brought many benefits. In many cases businesses enjoy higher productivity, whilst employees enjoy a better work-life balance.

However, in the same vein many have felt isolated during remote working periods. Not to mention the increasing possibility of higher costs of WFH due to soaring energy costs.

There are a lot of different opinions on remote working, with many CEOs who have urged workers back to the office met with backlash to similar ferocity.

In this section, we take a look at how employees feel about working from home...

### % of workers who said they had not suffered mental health or stress issues and benefited/benefit from remote/hybrid working





of remote workers feel more isolated and lonely working from home

## Top Challenges of Remote Working for Employees



Work-Life Balance



Increase in Virtual Meetings



Lack of Communication

## What the Experts Say on Remote Working...

Prior to the pandemic, we had clear boundary lines which helped us to psychologically separate work from home, including a commute and work gear for example. But, whilst the concept of spending a day in our slippers and dressing gown at the desk in our front room might have sounded quite cushy prior to 2020, actually it's been harder for people to say, 'ok, it's 18:00, time to turn off the PC, turn off my phone ... it's family time'.

As a result, many people are working when they should have switched off to rest, or they're working/faffing and work-life balance is a confusing mess. They're not getting the benefits of being productive and feeling productive, nor are they getting the benefits from completely switching off.

**Andrew Pain**



TedX Speaker & Coach on Leadership & Wellbeing





---

Some people want to go back to the office, not just because of social interaction but also to get out of the house and maybe there is a good part of that, perhaps being able to concentrate more- that contributes to stress too with external factors. Working from home is not easy! This is why an individual approach is needed.

Managers say they want everyone back in the office but that may not be the best thing if the work can be done in a hybrid manner (2 or 3 days from home). If you sent people home in the pandemic and the work was still getting done, then why would they have to come back to the office? Having said that, social interaction and in-person meetings can be important.

It has to be fit for the individual. Conduct regular check-ins. If people are working in a new way, they and you won't truly know the pitfalls that are in their way or causing them stress. 'Is this hybrid/fully remote arrangement working for you?'. If not, you re-evaluate to see how you can make it better.

**Matt Heller**



Consultant & Author on Purpose, Culture & Burnout

One of the things that remote workers tell me is that the pandemic opened up the gates for employers to contact them at all hours. They're working at home, so they must always be available for work matters.

Businesses can help with this problem by refraining from contact with employees outside of business hours. To keep talent from burning out, let them know you support them getting out of the house and engaging in recreational activities, which create the positive mood and brain refuelling that offset the strain and tension of the day.

**Joe Robinson**



Business Culture & Work-Life Balance Expert

## Improving Mental Health in the Workplace

**So we've given you the figures and the opinions of our experts, now what?**

If you can resonate with the findings of the Oak Engage Mental Health in the Workplace or are pretty surprised by them, we are going to take you through the things that you can apply to your business in order to improve the wellbeing of your employees.

### Creating a sense of purpose

The report found that over a third of employees don't feel connected to their organisation.

As long as the work gets done that's fine right? Wrong. A lack of connection or purpose leads to disengagement that will result in a poor opinion of their employer and poor productivity.

**Here are ways you can help build a sense of purpose within the workforce...**

### Feedback Loops

The straightforward way to find out the reasons behind a lack of purpose and disengagement in employees is to ask them. As simplistic as this may seem, the bigger an organisation is the more difficult it is to apply feedback to improving the employee experience.

Here is where Pulse Surveys come in. More focused than traditional surveys, they can help you make sense of a particular topic. Oak Engage's [Pulse Survey](#) feature allows you to target surveys to specific people or departments and through the [analytics dashboard](#) helps to visualise the data and make well informed changes.

---

## Targeted, engaging content

An antidote to a lack of commonality and purpose can be targeted, individualised comms. Oak Engage's curated content system creates an immersive experience for ALL.

Through Smart Delivery, individual users will see content in their intranet based on what is relevant to them, using algorithms and behaviours and receive bespoke curated newsletters.

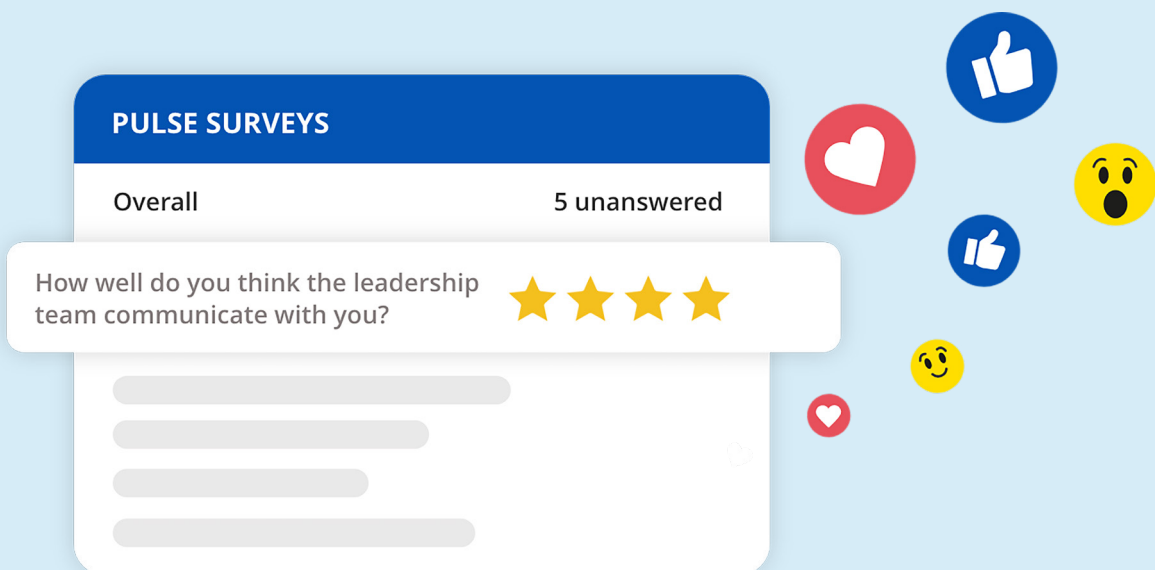
With individualised comms you can connect or reconnect with employees by helping them cut through the noise and give them engaging content.

Internal communication is only as effective as its delivery.

## Recognise Achievements

Employees are likely to feel more of a purpose if they feel recognised and appreciated for their efforts. This doesn't have to come at a significant cost.

Oak Engage's [employee recognition tool](#) helps you to show appreciation for employees and peers, bringing this to the forefront of your business culture.



## Avoiding Burnout

Nearly 1 in 5 of us have endured work related stress through overworking and a third of us through expectation and pressure at work.

Our expert, Joe Robinson, told us that a lack of set boundaries are 'demotivation tools' and a lack of 'recovery strategies' are some of the main drivers of burnout.

To tackle burnout you need to create boundaries and encourage employees to switch off from their work from time to time, no matter how counterintuitive that may be in hectic times for business. You also need to have the proper process and policy in change that helps employees recharge their batteries.

**Here is how you can do it...**

### Create Social Spaces

One way to achieve the former is to create spaces for employees to socialise. [Community hubs](#) and [social features](#) like instant messaging, can replicate social aspects of the workplace that many have been lacking during remote working periods.

The report also found that isolation is a common implication of remote working so this can kill two birds with one stone. The fact that they are as intuitive as everyday social media platforms will help to increase usage across the board.

### Easy access to wellbeing policy & programmes

As for recovery strategies, HR can utilise their Oak Engage intranet as a one-stop-shop for wellness policy through [content management](#) and [integrate](#) third party systems that support wellbeing programmes and education. For busy people to want to access information that can help them to avoid burnout, you have to make them easy to find!

With Oak Engage's [mobile app](#), users can access all the features of the desktop site, so deskless employees can also access the same information and content.

---

## Treating & Avoiding Moral Injury

39% of employees said that they had suffered anxiety, stress or mental health issues as a result of their employer contradicting their morals or beliefs. We spend a large proportion of our lives at work, so there is no surprise that we want our working life and our beliefs to be, at the very least, non-contradictory.

Fighting these fires is perhaps the most difficult role of an internal comms professional, often a projection of a businesses external conduct or someone within the business away from the internal comms function.

**Here are some ways you can help to avoid moral injury in the workplace...**

### Make sure your brand vision & values are present

If employees feel like brand values contradict their own beliefs, then there's a good chance they may not be aware of or fully understand your internal comms messaging.

This has been even more difficult to replicate during remote working. With Oak Engage, your intranet is [designed to your specifications](#) to re-enforce your branding. Through intuitive [content feeds](#) and targeted content with [Smart Delivery](#), vision & values can be communicated virtually in an effective way.

With their branded [mobile app](#), deskless workers and those on the go also get the authentic experience. Push notifications also keep employees up-to-date with the news and updates they need to know, on an urgent basis.

## Create a culture of transparency with leadership at the forefront

Every business will make mistakes. It's how you react that counts.

Organisations need to be transparent and upfront with employees, which can help to quash issues before they snowball. Through the [company newsfeed](#) and [targeted messaging](#), your intranet can be the central source of all news and the first place people go to for updates. This means you can shape the narrative before someone else does.

Multimedia posts on your content feed can help leadership to become a face of the business and not the 'big brother' type figure they can be perceived as. In turn, leadership comms will be more relatable and employees are more likely to give them the benefit of the doubt.

With communication that connects leadership to the workforce you help to build more of a community spirit within the organisation. An open door policy with a direct link to everyone in the business is one way to achieve this. A [People Directory](#) gives everyone access to contact details of the entire business.

### How to Maintain Wellbeing & Connectivity Remotely

Half of remote workers feel more isolated and lonely working from home. The drivers of this are a lack of social interaction and detachment from colleagues. Despite all the benefits of WFH, replicating the social aspect of office work has been difficult.

There is also an element of reduced collaboration that has perhaps caused stress through uncertainty of employees' own convictions without the proverbial sounding board to bounce ideas off.

**Here are ways to alleviate isolation and improve collaboration remotely...**

---

## Allow time for interests outside of work

One thing employees bond over and a significant aspect of workplace socialising is talking about mutual interests. Especially if you were onboarded remotely, the chance of you reaching out to someone to talk about your favourite Netflix show is pretty slim.

Through Oak Engage's [Community Hubs](#) you can create these spaces for employees to chat about their interests and even organise events around (which they can also create on their site). From fantasy football to pets, you can create a hub on anything you want.

## Create virtual collaboration spaces

There's no denying that collaboration and the innovation that comes with it, has been a barrier for many businesses during remote working periods. There are debates over whether or not this is a factor in many businesses urging employees back into the office.

Collaboration can be recreated on your Oak Engage intranet. Through [department hubs](#) and pages, project teams can gather to participate in discussions. With an intuitive instant messaging feature employees can connect as individuals or in groups to share ideas.





[www.oak.com](http://www.oak.com)