

# Bayside Personnel Market Impact Survey



RCSA MEMBER | AHRI MEMBER



# Introduction

## Why a survey?

Bayside Personnel conducted a Market Impact Survey over a four-week period during September and October 2020.

The intention was to understand the impact of COVID-19 on engineering employers and jobs. Two surveys were conducted, one targeting employers and the other employees.

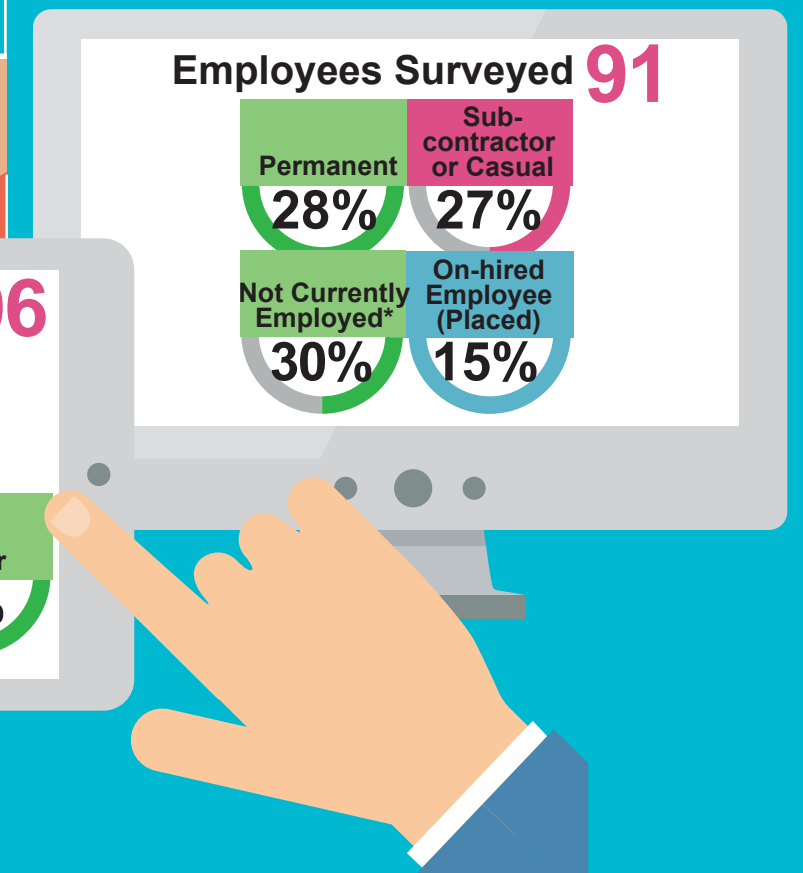
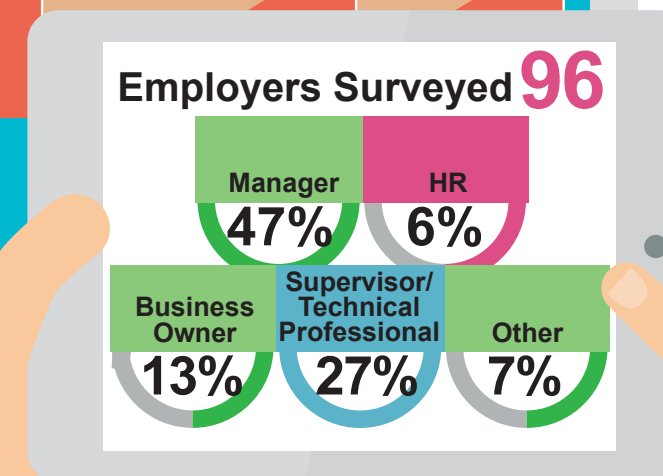
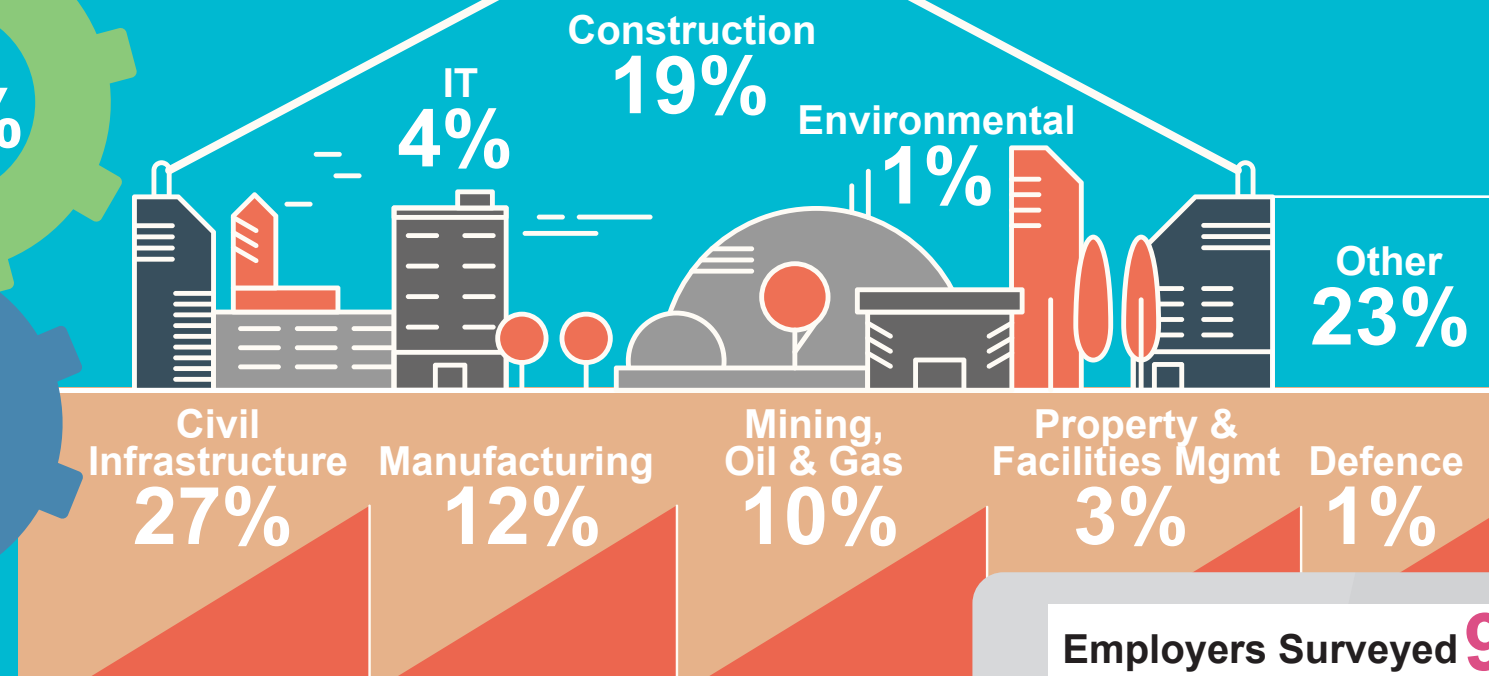
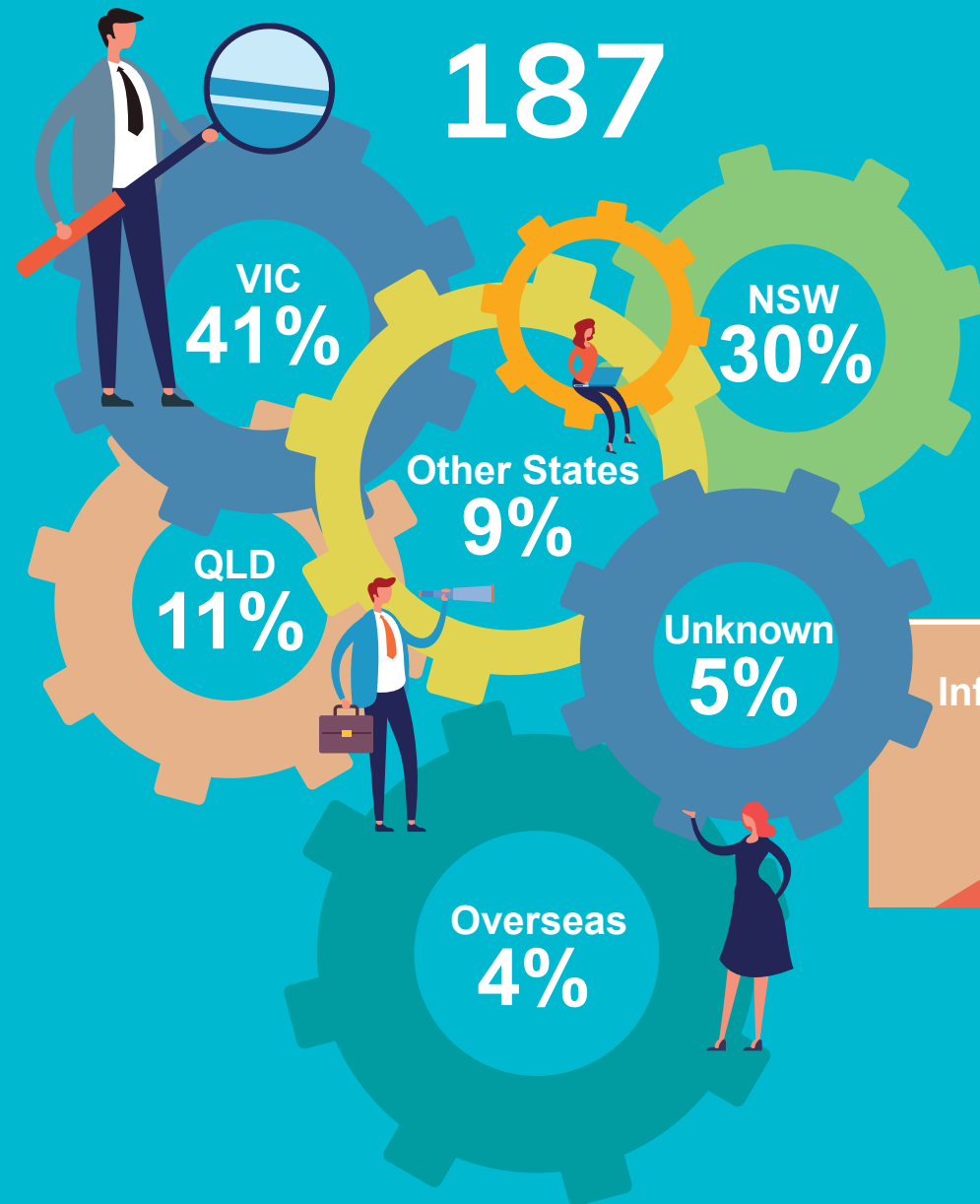
Given the constantly changing nature of the pandemic, it's important to provide context for this survey. Victoria was still experiencing more than 50 coronavirus cases per day when the survey started, although cases were clearly trending in the right direction. While the rest of Australia maintained low numbers throughout, there was concern about a potential outbreak in Sydney.

## Survey findings

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# Who we surveyed

## 187



\* Please note due to the nature of the questions, many of those not employed only partially completed the survey.



# ✓ How have employers responded to the pandemic?

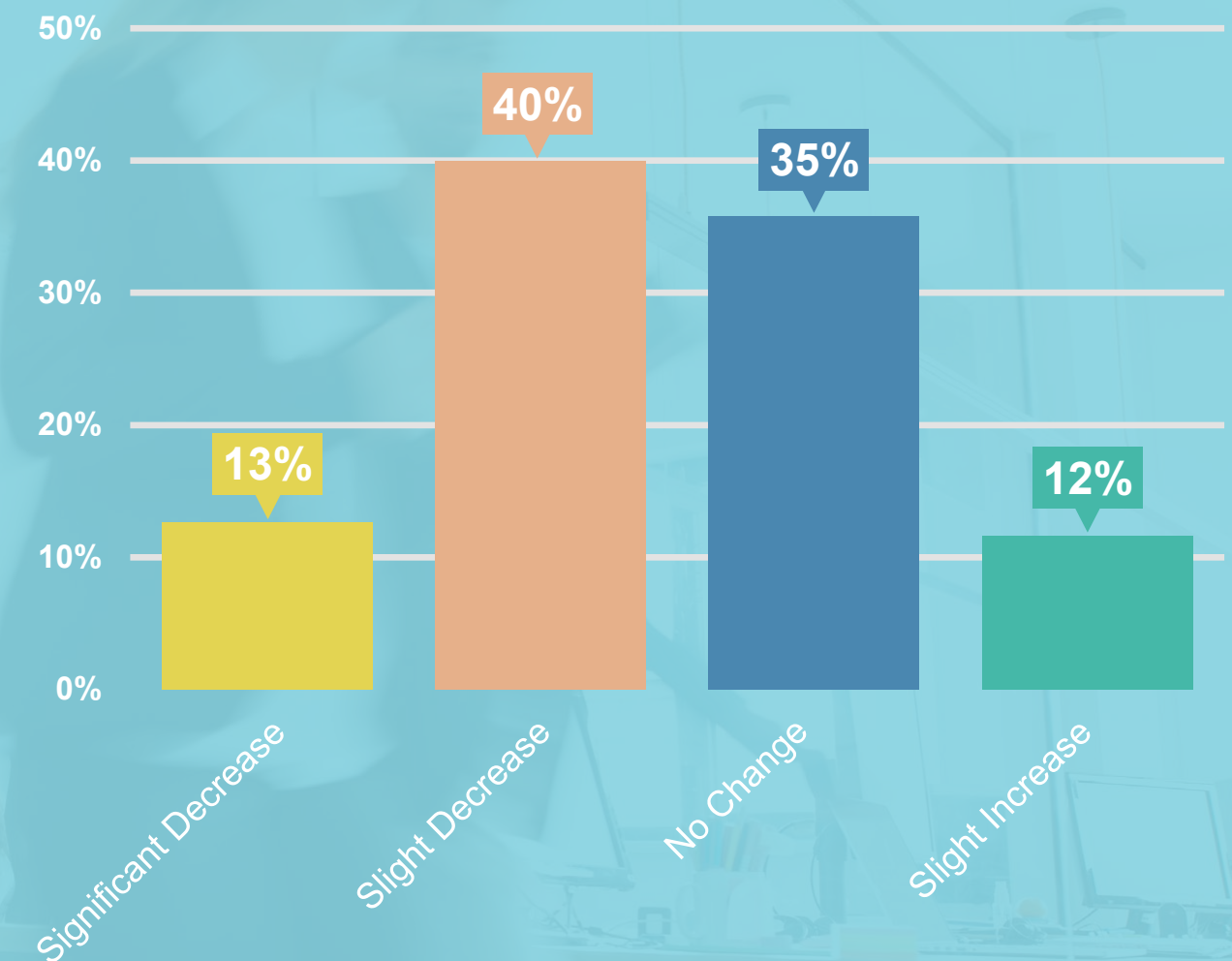
## Changes to staffing levels

Half of all employers surveyed decreased staff numbers as a result of the pandemic, with 13% downsizing significantly. In addition, half of those companies who made no changes to permanent staffing levels reduced their casual workforce.

Many decreases occurred in March and April, prior to JobKeeper, so unsurprisingly 75% of significant decreases were made in NSW, the state with the most cases at the time.

Only eleven companies made a slight increase in staffing numbers, with four of those in the construction sector.

Companies who didn't make changes or saw an increase were working on government infrastructure projects, or delivering essential or niche services.



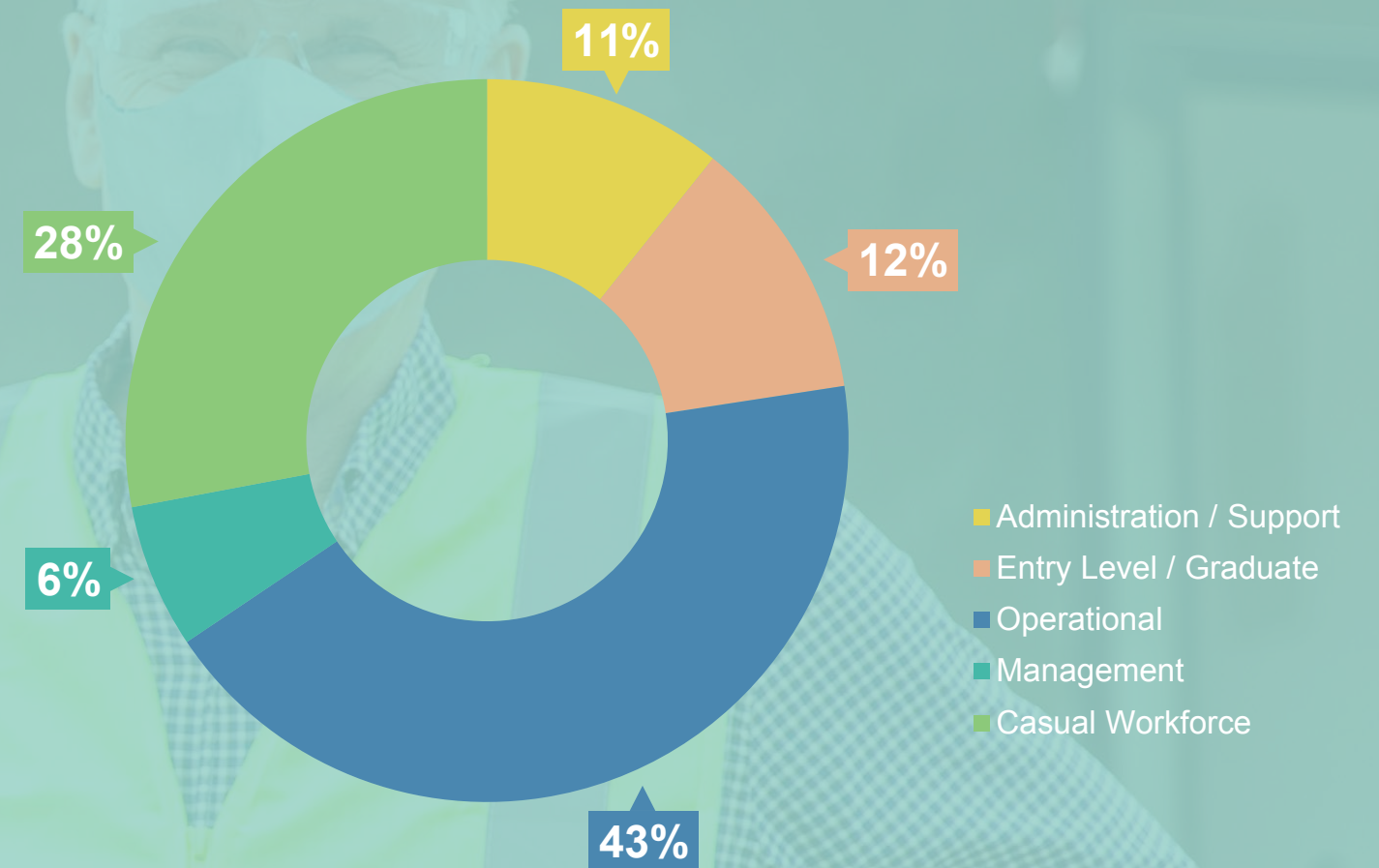
# ✓ How have employers responded to the pandemic?

## Which jobs were most affected?

Technical or operational and casual jobs were most affected, followed by entry level/graduate and administration jobs. This differs from many other sectors, where administrative roles were more impacted compared with other job types.

### Key insights

- Management reductions were in QLD and NSW only, mostly in civil infrastructure
- 50% of operational reductions came from NSW employers
- 60% of those who said there were significant or slight decreases in staffing primarily reduced their operational workforce



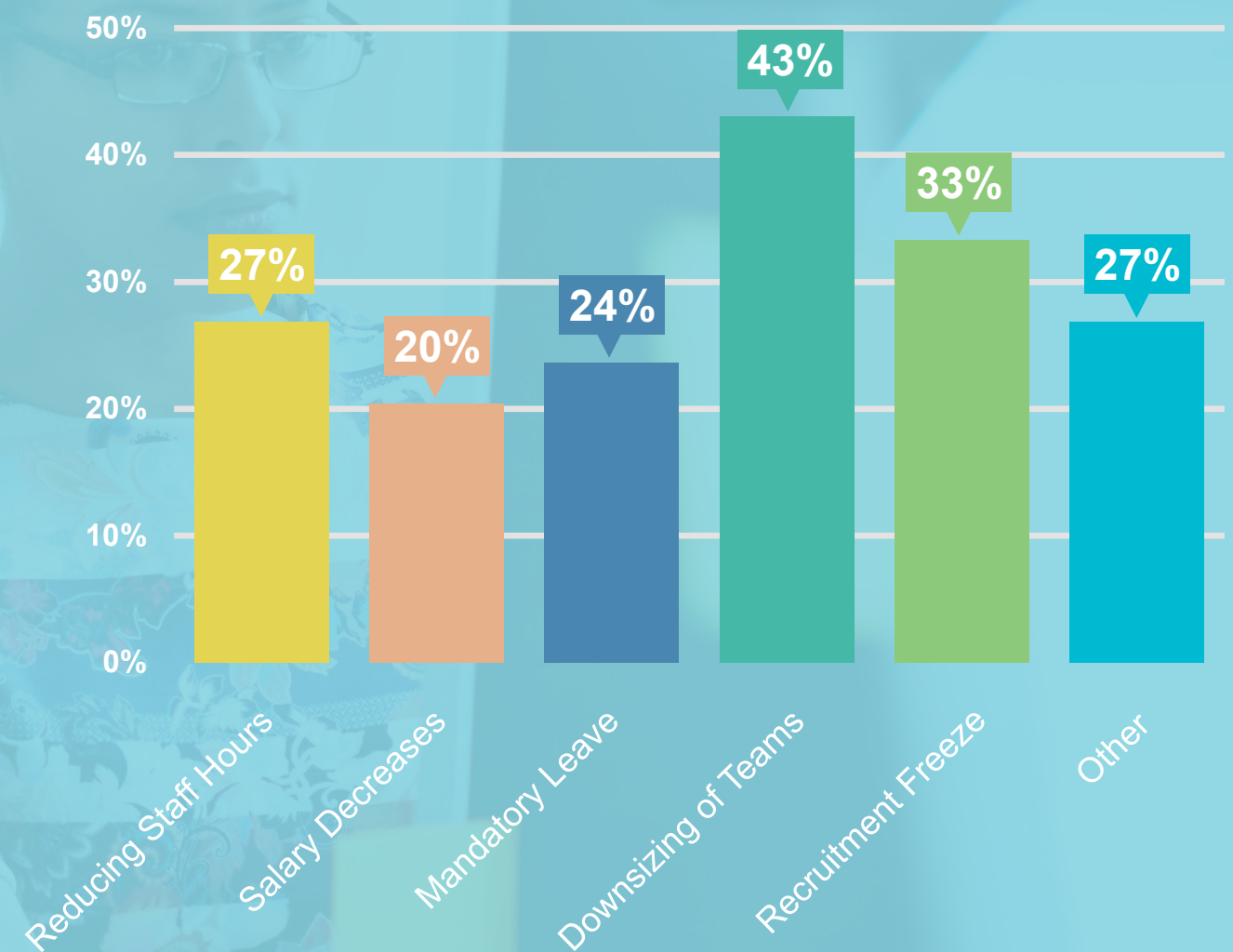
# ✓ How have employers responded to the pandemic?

## Cost reduction measures

Every respondent to this survey listed at least one cost reduction measure in the context of staffing levels.

### Key insights

- NSW respondents made up half of cost reduction measures
- Queensland employers preferred mandatory leave, making up one third of respondents
- Roughly 40% of reduced hours, decreased salaries and mandatory leave were in civil infrastructure
- Cancellation of new hires impacted more on casuals and administrative staff
- Over 90% of respondents who reduced hours or decreased salaries also took other measures
- 17% of Victorians surveyed used 'other' cost reduction controls





# ✓ How have employers responded to the pandemic?

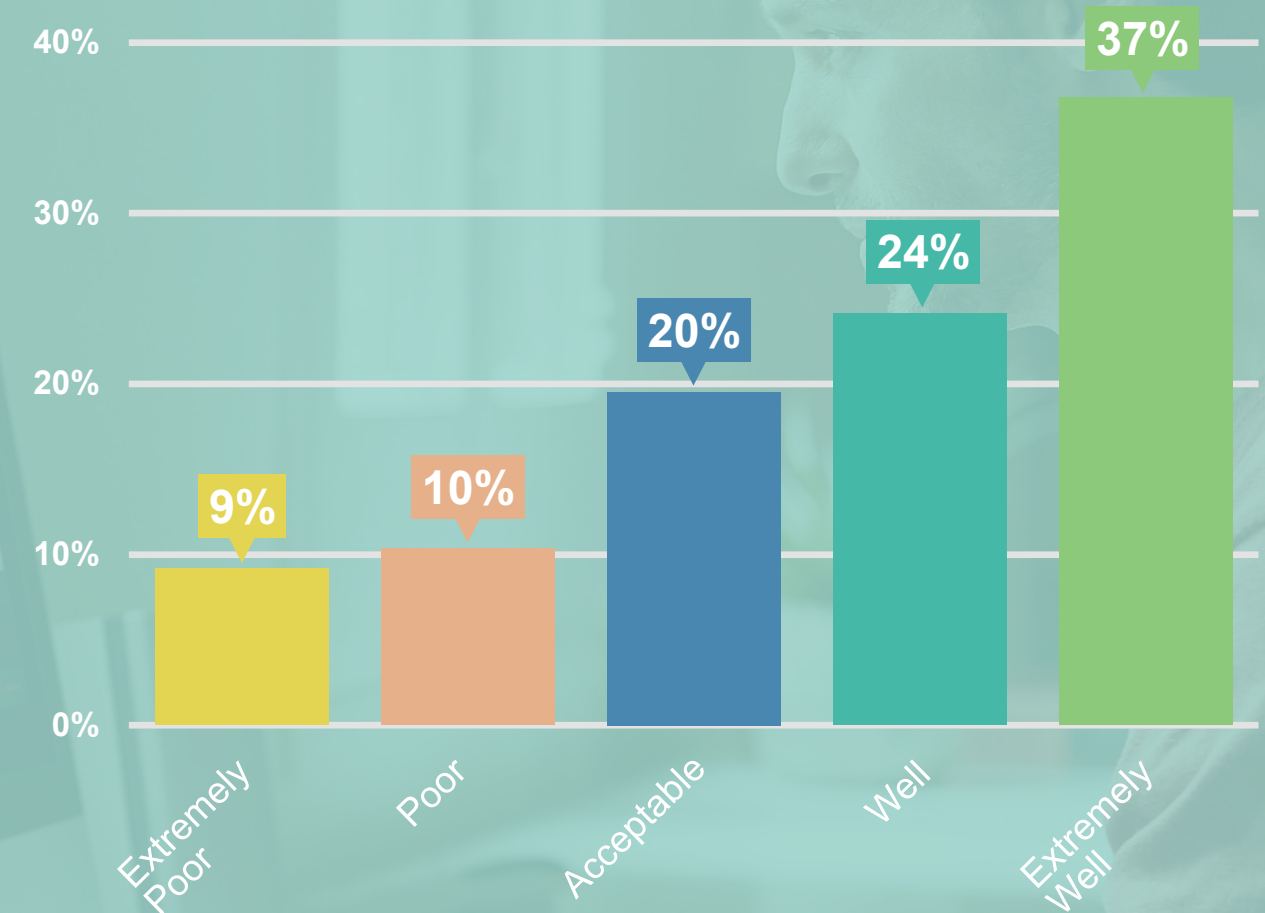
## Employee perceptions of their company's response

Roughly two thirds of respondents were satisfied with their company's response to the pandemic, with 37% praising their employer for managing COVID-19 extremely well. It should be noted that 73% of these respondents were working from home.

Almost half of respondents who gave negative feedback had lost their jobs. 45% of negative respondents worked in construction.

Two thirds of employers believe working remotely has been the most significant impact on their business activities due to COVID-19. This comes as no surprise, as many businesses were required to shift their operations to remote working.

16% of clients also stated that the pandemic expanded their use of technology, with new technology implemented to help those working from home. While just 12% of employers believe COVID-19 has had no impact on their business operations at all.



“We’ve been able to work from home and use Zoom meetings effectively”

# ✓ How have employers responded to the pandemic?

## What changes were made that employees would like to see continued?

Flexibility in work locations, or simply working from home has been an overwhelmingly popular change.

It seems that responses to the pandemic have inadvertently corrected some long-term and common complaints of employees, which is one positive outcome.

“Frequent notifications and updates to remote staff... as well as continuing to conduct remote audits

## Other initiatives in order of popularity included:

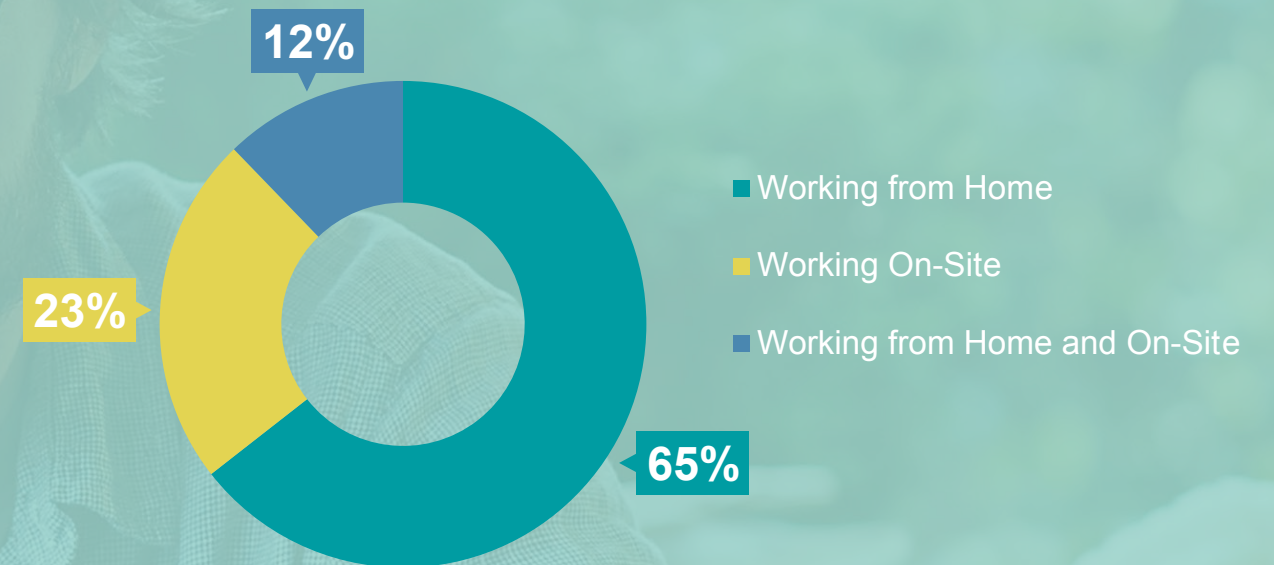
- Improved cleaning/personal sanitisation
- Improved technology, especially communications related technology
- Better communications from management
- Improved social support
- Isolation and social distancing
- Reduced hours or enforced time off
- Daily health checking
- Better adherence to procedures/regulations
- Better risk assessment processes



# ✔ Working from home

## Working from home vs working on-site

Almost two thirds of respondents were working from home at the time this survey was conducted. Only one quarter were working on-site, with the remaining a combination of both.



“ Working from home has been a great time saver so would like to be able to do it regularly once restrictions are lifted

vs

“ I spend more time on my computer working, so less opportunity for exercise



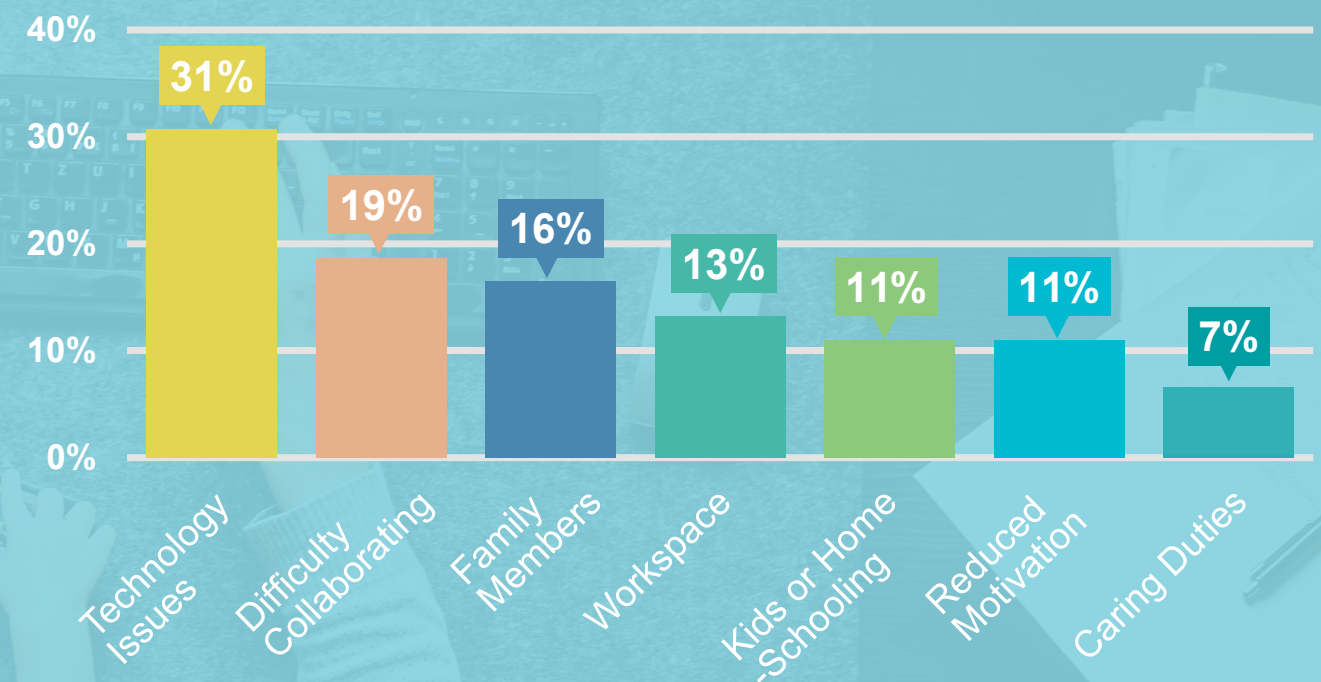
# ✓ Working from home

## Barriers to effectively working from home

Technology issues have been the biggest barrier to getting work done, with almost one third of employees citing this as a problem. Of those who had found themselves less motivated, two thirds were based in Victoria; this may be exacerbated by the lengthy lockdown.

### Key insights

- Difficulty collaborating with colleagues (19%)
- Distractions from family members at home (16%)
- Workspace set up (13%)
- Reduced motivation (11%)



“Challenges with internet speed, as well as having a dedicated work area

# ✔ Working from home

## What changes have been implemented that worked well?

Nearly 50% of employers felt their ability to transition their employees to working from home was a change their business implemented well due to COVID-19.

21% of employers stated that no changes were made as a result of COVID-19, outside of safety protocols. This number could reflect those businesses who haven't been as impacted as hard with their projects or staffing levels.

## Other changes listed included:

- Communication software - with Microsoft Teams often stated (21%)
- Flexibility around working hours (8%)
- Daily team meetings (5%)

“Project meetings and site visits which previously may have taken hours or a day out of the office have been replaced by web-based meetings



# ✓ Job security and business confidence

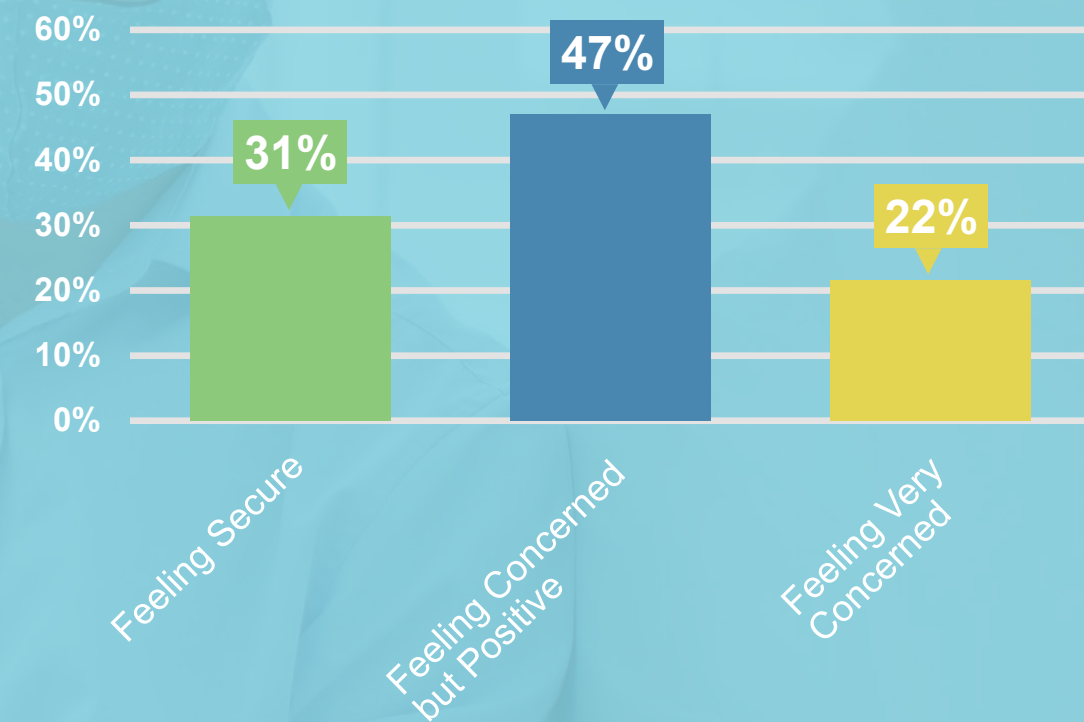
## Job security due to COVID-19

Overall employees were quite positive about their job security, with almost one third feeling very secure, and half feeling somewhat concerned but still positive. Only 22% of employees were very concerned about where their job stands.

The extension of JobKeeper to March 2021, even in a reduced form, may have influenced this response, potentially creating an inflated sense of optimism.

### Key insights

- Over half of those working on site felt very secure
- Only 19% of those working from home felt very secure



“Will be seeking permanent full-time roles rather than short-term contract roles”

# ✔ Job security and business confidence

## Factors causing delays or cancellation of projects

One third of employers said there weren't any factors causing delays or cancellations of projects. This is a great outcome given the current situation.

Those who responded with major projects being delayed/cancelled, stated it was due to either a decrease in government funding, delay in approvals or less staffing levels to complete the projects.

## Other changes listed included:

- Major project delayed, on hold or cancelled (24%)
- General economic uncertainty (14%)
- Reduced site access, travel or border access (13%)
- Difficulty sourcing materials (9%)

“ I interviewed for a job last August and I'm still waiting for a start date

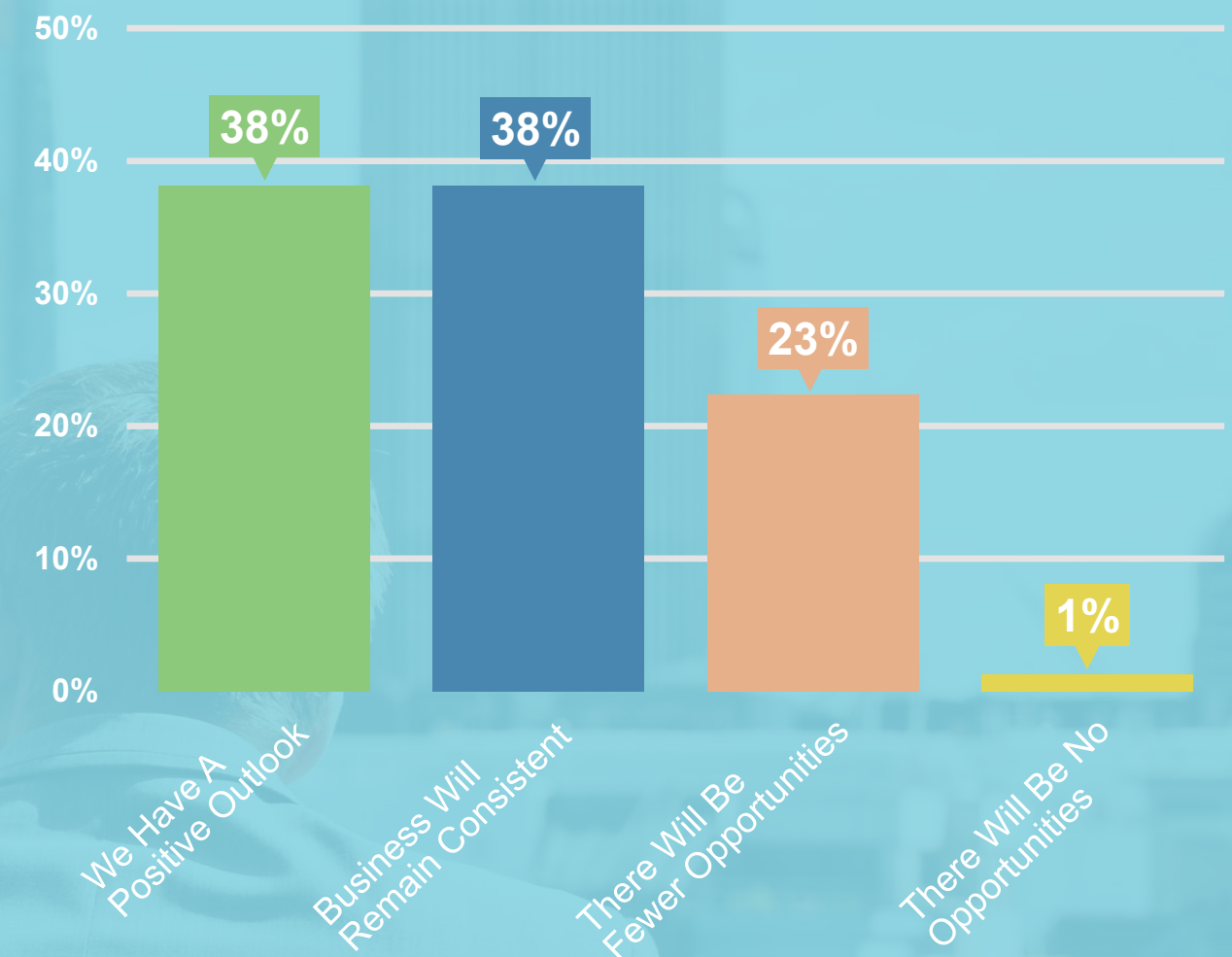


# ✓ The outlook for the future

## What does the future look like?

The majority of employers felt there would be no change or had a positive outlook for the future. Almost all of this group had seen primary staff reductions in administration or with casuals, rather than operational cuts.

Half of those with a negative outlook were based in NSW, and almost 80% of people who responded this way had seen staff decreases in their organisation.





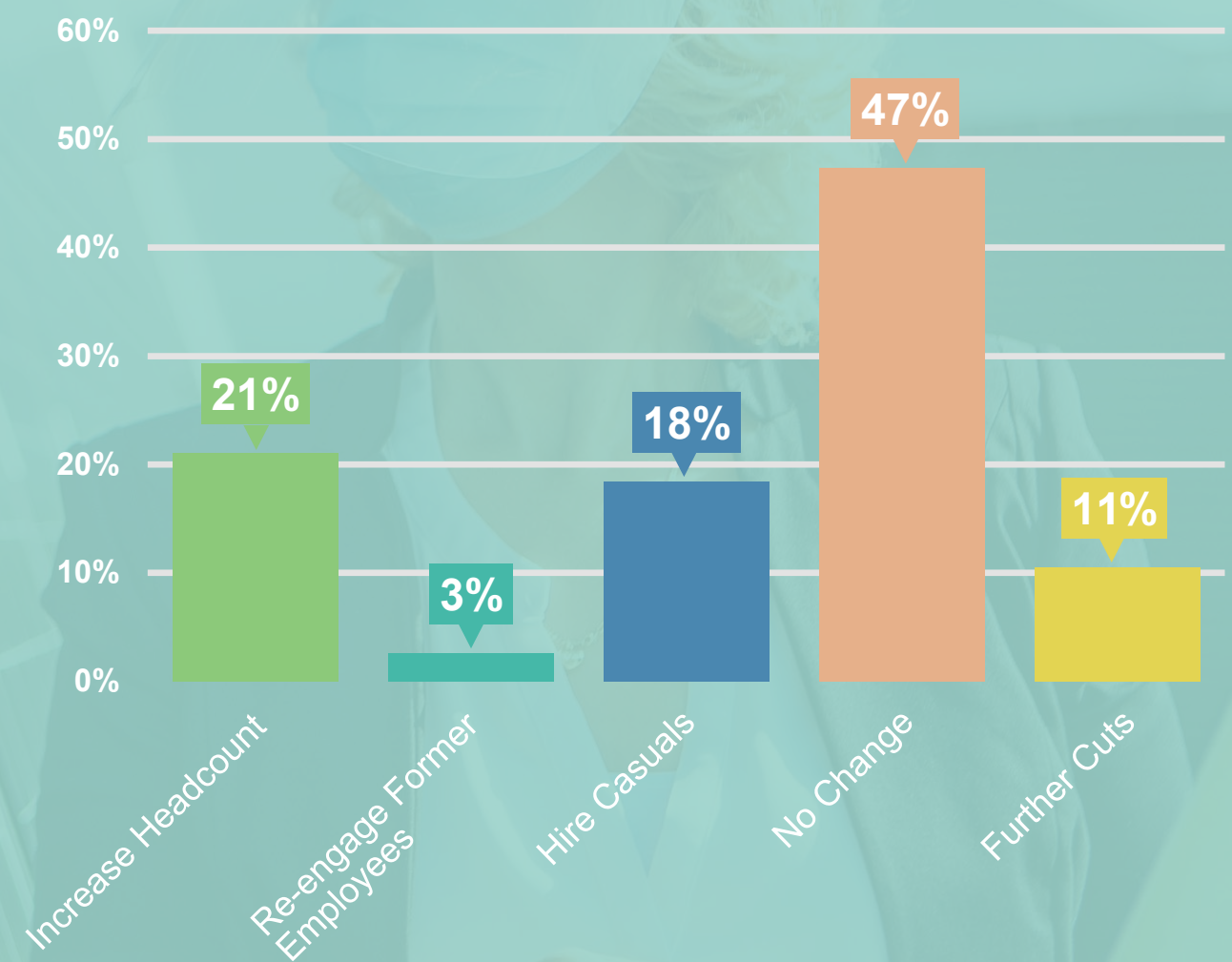
# ✓ The outlook for the future

## Changes to staffing levels moving forward

The staffing outlook for engineering companies was fairly positive, with 20% looking to increase levels in the coming months and half saying they will retain their existing staff. Those expecting additional cuts make up just 11% of responses.

### Key insights

- Many of the employers surveyed held middle to senior management roles rather than executive positions, and may not yet be privy to post-JobKeeper contingency plans
- Half of those expecting additional cuts work in mining, oil and gas
- Almost two thirds of those who will use casuals to resource requirements are in NSW
- Very few will look to engage former employees, suggesting that poor performers were targeted in initial cuts



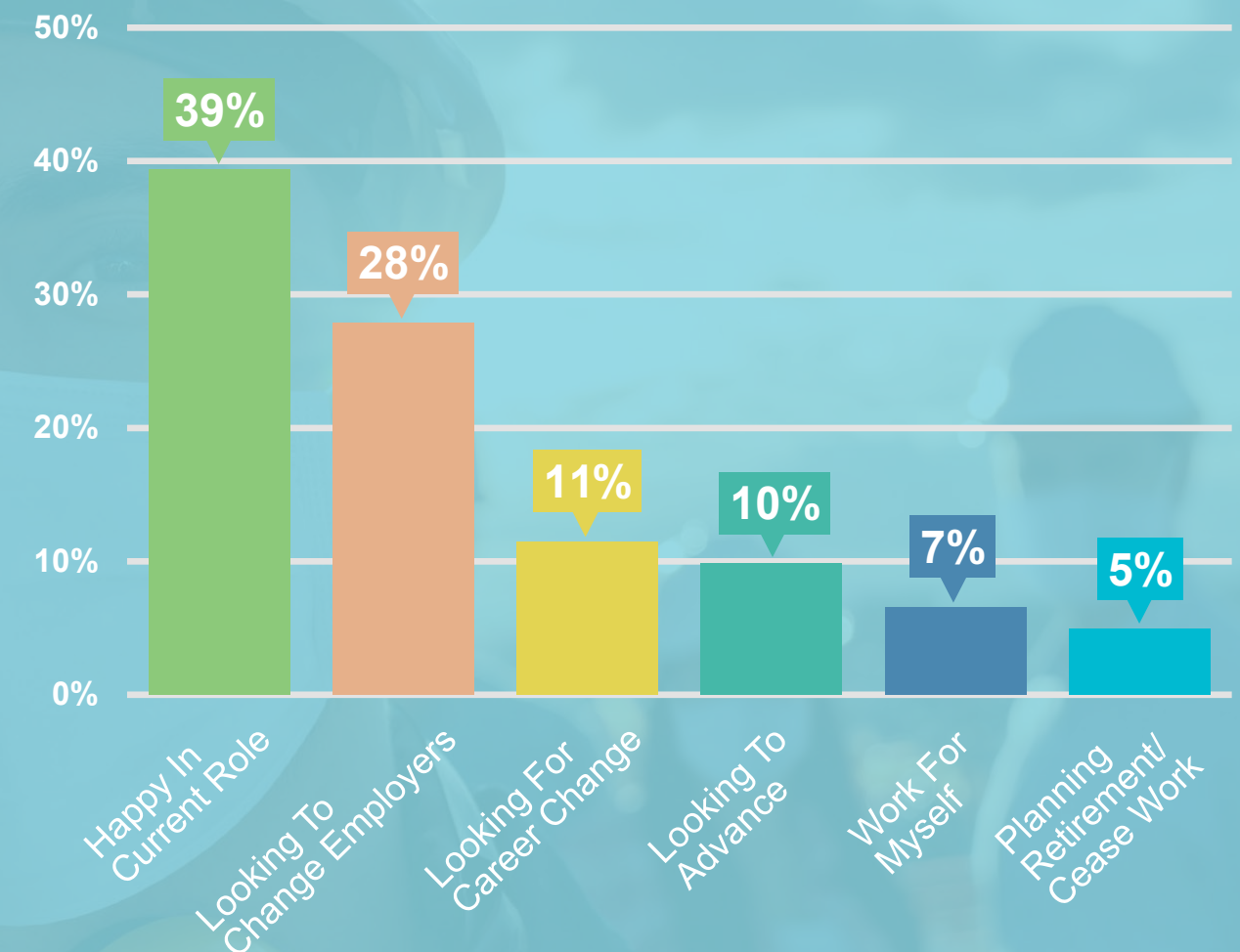
# ✓ The outlook for the future

## Are employee priorities changing?

The short answer is not as much as you might expect. Just over 60% of employees said that COVID-19 hadn't changed their priorities in relation to work/life balance; a large portion of these respondents felt secure in their jobs and worked in construction and manufacturing. Interestingly, almost two thirds of people who said that their priorities had changed worked in the civil sector.

### Key insights

- The almost 40% of people happy in their current role were satisfied with their employer's response to the pandemic and felt secure in their job
- Of the 28% looking to change employers, more than two thirds were Victorian
- Those looking for 'career advancement' were lower than pre-pandemic trends, suggesting employees have adjusted their expectations



“I've been missing out on heaps of family time and would like to have a better balance going forward”



# Conclusions

## What we've learnt

We will be working in an uncertain environment for some time to come, so making predictions is not really viable. The fact that 20% of companies have said they will need to increase staff based on current projects is positive in this environment. However, it is clear that key job losses occurred prior to JobKeeper, with post-JobKeeper jobs dependent on increasing market demand.

It is important to highlight the 30% of employees surveyed not currently employed, many of whom had been employed pre-pandemic. As this survey focused on experiences within companies, many only partially completed the survey. However, it was clear that finding employment wasn't easy.

Employers surveyed have been successful in communicating with their employees and effectively giving them some level of security and hope for the future where they can.

Overall, those working from home are happier with their employers than those on-site. However, it is unclear as to whether this is related to the employer's actions, the restrictions and risks resulting from the pandemic, or both. The majority of those who gave positive feedback cited communications as a reason, whether systems, management, team or collaboration, while those who gave negative feedback discussed difficulty in collaborating.

Every employer who responded had taken at least one measure to remain sustainable, yet three quarters of employees had a positive outlook for the near future. Even though many businesses are taking hits, feedback from employees demonstrates it is still possible to foster a positive work environment.





# Conclusions

## Key recommendations

- Approaches to any further redundancies should be carefully considered, with additional support provided – this is not a normal job market people are entering
- Be consultative in developing return to work strategies, and don't rush this process
- Consider on-site safety and work measures already in place and consult with employees as to how these can be improved
- Understand what changes employees are happy with and consult as to how these may be continued or further evolved
- Maintaining better cleaning standards in the office and offering more personal hygiene supplies is considered critical by employees
- Consider how you may continue relevant pandemic level communications as work restrictions ease

