

The State of

REMOTE WORK FOR ENGINEERS

Codility_

DEAR READERS,

In today's world, every company needs to become both a tech-first and remote-first company, and the key to long term survival is a strong engineering team.

In our [2019 Engaging Developers at Work](#) report, we surveyed thousands of engineers to find out how they like to work and discovered that most of them prefer remote work.

This year, engineers have spoken again and remote work is here to stay.

We surveyed over 800 engineers to understand how they've adapted to working remotely during COVID and found that they thrive on flexibility. They don't want to go back to normal.

Any company that insists on a return to a rigid corporate lifestyle post-COVID will bleed top talent.

This creates a real opportunity to reshape how engineering teams work.

An opportunity that could see engineers become even more effective, engaged and – with the ability to recruit and work remotely – more diverse.

An opportunity to make more time and talent, available to solve problems that matter.

We hope that our insights will be useful to you.



Natalia Panowicz
CEO

OUR MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS

The key takeaways from our survey results are that remote work:

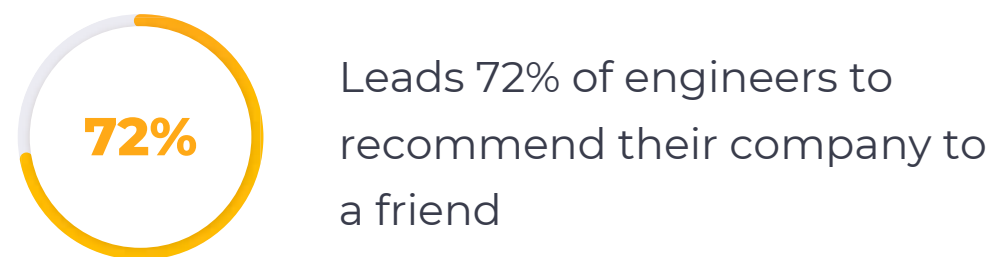
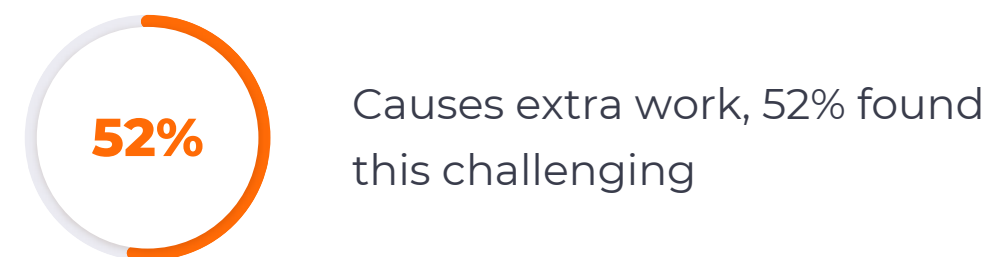


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THE POST-COVID REMOTE REVOLUTION

Teleworking is not a new concept in tech companies. Our industry has always had higher levels of remote working, but the 2020 pandemic saw this rise to an unprecedented level.



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HOW COVID IMPACTED ENGINEERS

Our [2019 Engaging Developers at Work](#) survey showed that 61% of engineers could work remotely. A further 40% wanted the flexibility to do so.

With COVID's stay home mandates, their desire became a reality. Millions of workers across the globe moved out of their offices to begin working from home practically overnight.

Our survey reveals the effect of the pandemic on engineers, with 93% of respondents now having the option to work remotely - a third more than in 2019.

Two thirds (67%) of engineers now say they work remotely regularly, the vast majority of which (60%) do so full time. Only 7% never work remotely at all.

Many of those we surveyed were at pains to state remote work wasn't the norm previously, with one confirming; "There was no remote working culture before COVID".

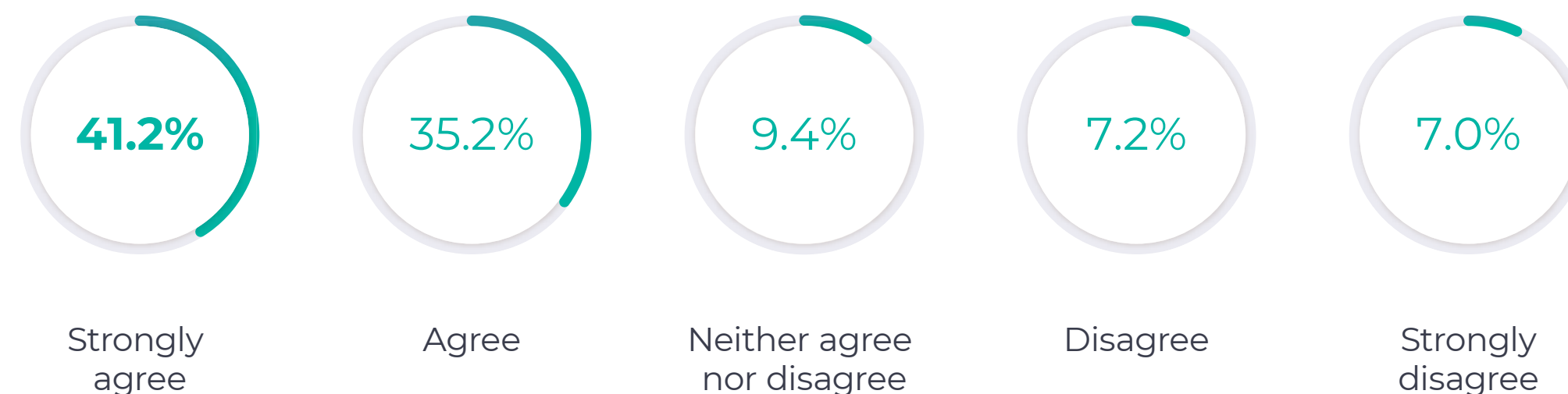
But it's a shift that many predict will become permanent.

Remote work is here to stay

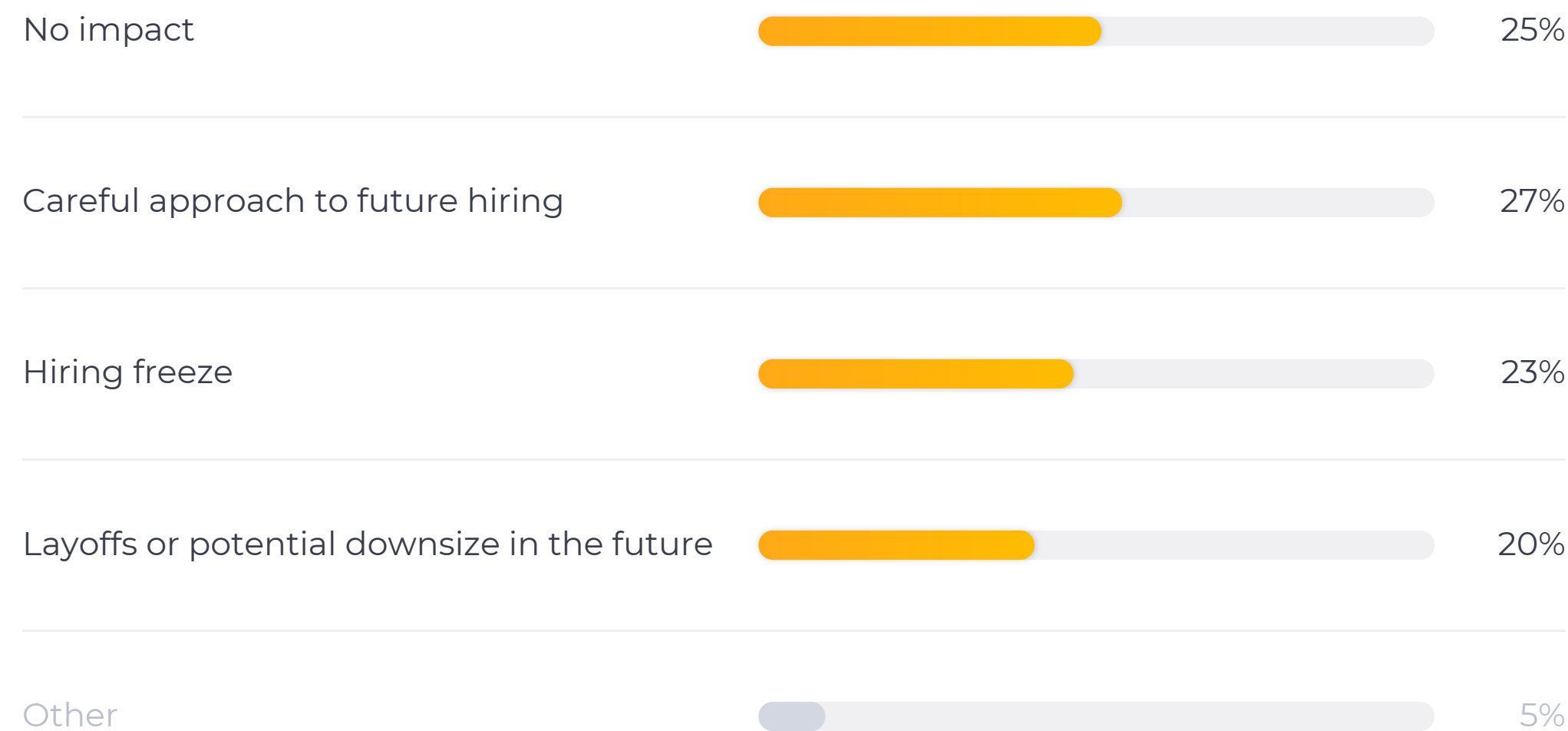
With tech companies such as Slack, Twitter and Facebook going on record to say they'll allow many employees to remain working remotely once the pandemic ends, this trend is widely predicted to stay in the software development industry.

The big question now is, how will engineers' cope with the change? Will it be better for morale, productivity and work-life balance, or worse?

Do you agree with the statement that COVID-19 impacted your job and working environment?



How does COVID-19 impact workforce planning in your organization?



FLEXIBILITY MATTERS MOST

Remote working is here to stay but is this a good thing for engineers?
Won't they suffer without teammates around them and the buzz of the office?
Not according to our research.



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BALANCE IS BETTER FOR MOST, BUT NOT ALL

The majority of engineers we surveyed (68%) agreed that working remotely helped them better manage work-life conflict.

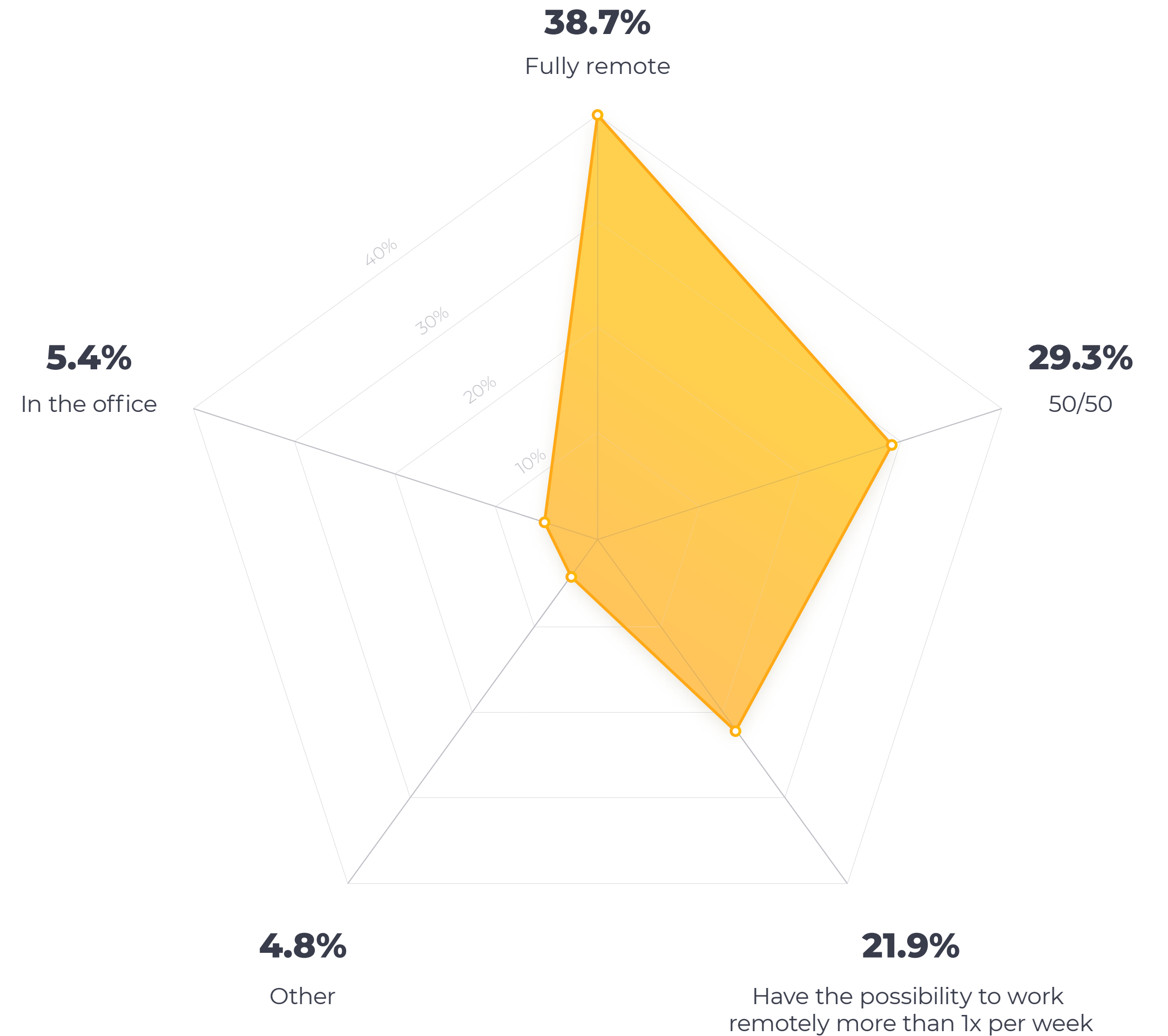
Many people will gain back time by avoiding rush hour commutes. This, along with more control over how they spend their day, can make more time available for family, friends, and hobbies.

Still, nearly a third (32%) of engineers felt work-life balance is a challenge.

This emphasizes the need for flexibility so that each individual can thrive in the right working environment for them.



Would you prefer working:



REMOTE REDUCES WORK-LIFE CONFLICT

We were curious to know whether working remotely enabled engineers to balance work with their life commitments. Was more time at home helping with work-life conflict?



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REMOTE WORK IS HAPPIER WORK

Over three-quarters of the engineers we surveyed (76%) said that the ability to work remotely makes them happier.

This backs up our [2019 survey](#), which showed developers working remotely reported having higher levels of job satisfaction than those working in an office. It also showed that the highest job satisfaction ratings come from developers who work remotely full-time.

However, while many engineers can thrive without the office environment, it's never a case of one-size-fits-all.

Engineers want free choice

Flexibility is something that those we surveyed value above all else.

A unanimous 95% of those we surveyed want the flexibility to choose between working remotely and working at the office, with only 5% wanting to work in the office full time.

As one put it, they wanted a “completely free choice between office and remote”. Some also wanted to choose to work from local coworking or office space.

So rather than remote work itself being the best option, it's more likely that it's workplace flexibility that creates the rewarding, agile environment that engineers thrive in.

As one person put it, “I strongly believe working 50-50 will really impact work-life for good”.

Remote work reduces work-life conflict



The ability to work remotely makes engineers happier



REMOTE IS GOOD FOR PRODUCTIVITY

Study after study into remote work has shown that remote workers tend to be more productive than their office-based colleagues. But is this the reality for engineers?



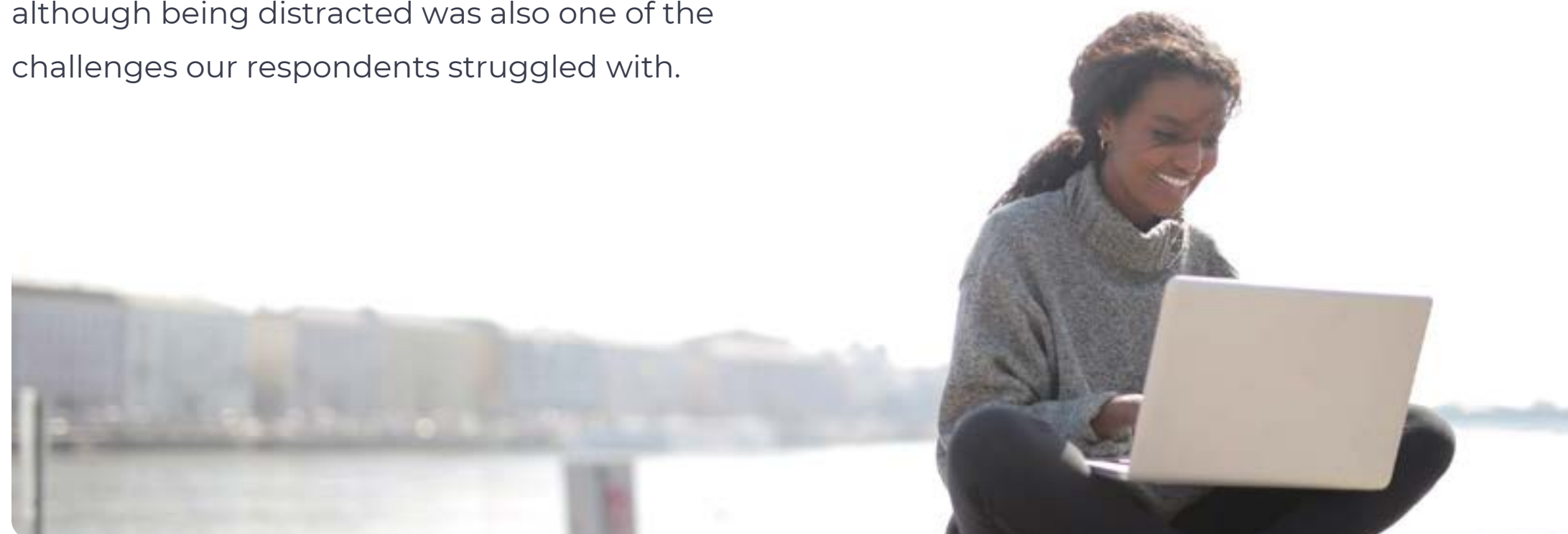
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WHY IS REMOTE WORKING OFTEN MORE PRODUCTIVE?

Our survey found that 84% of engineers say their productivity hasn't suffered from working remotely. Over half (52%) stating that they're working more productively.

It's not clear why this is the case. There may be fewer distractions when working at home, although being distracted was also one of the challenges our respondents struggled with.

The uplift in productivity might also be because engineers are working more hours than before. Over half of our respondents said "too many working hours" was the main challenge of remote work.



Efficiency and Productivity

1.7%

Other

14.0%

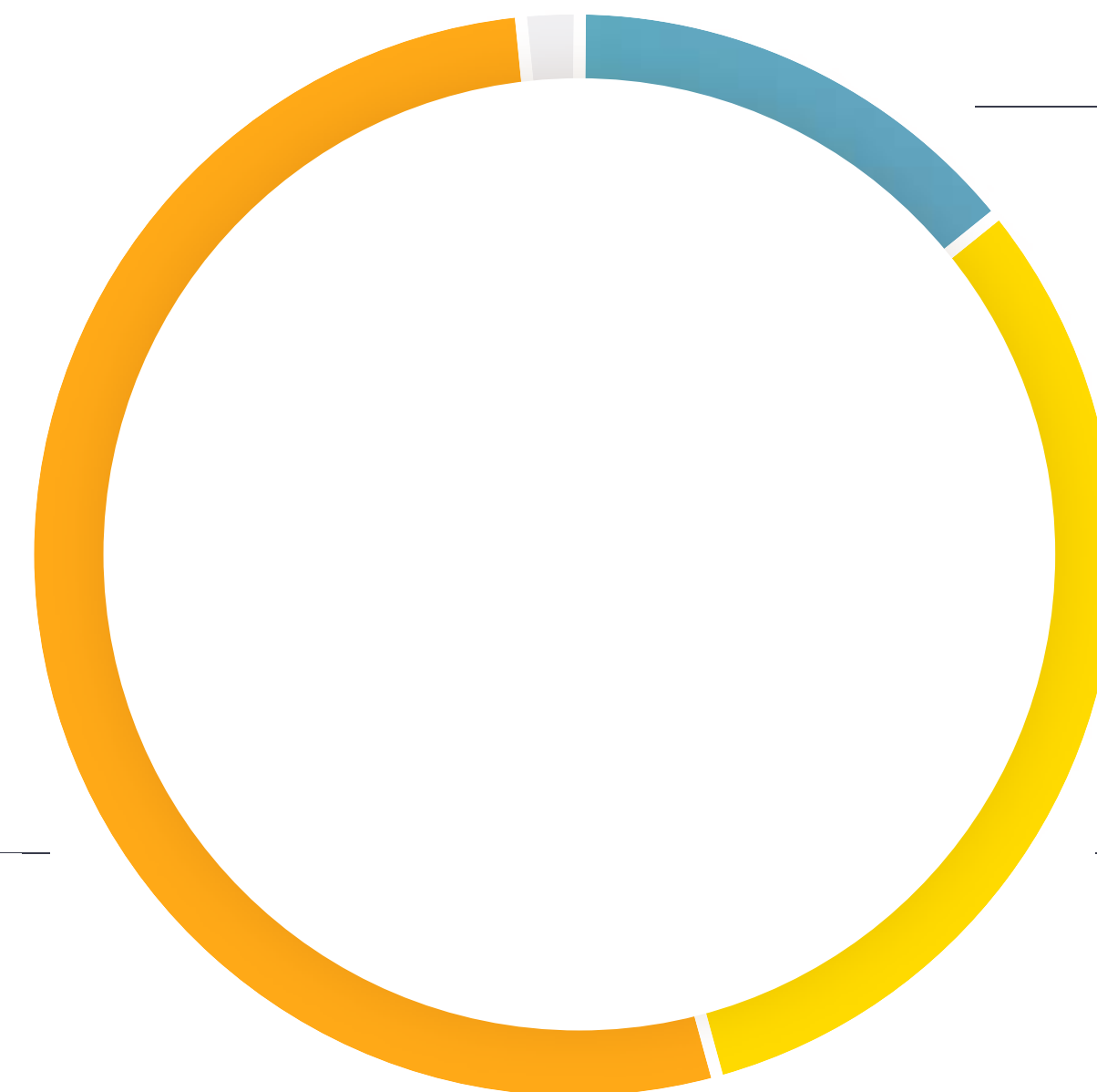
Less efficient & productive

52.7%

More efficient & productive

31.6%

Same



REMOTE IMPROVES RETENTION

In our [2019 “Developers Report”](#) survey, we said that the flexibility to work remotely could influence whether or not an engineer stays with their current employer. In this survey, we dug deeper into this.



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REMOTE WORK INCREASES SATISFACTION

64% of the engineers we surveyed said the option to work remotely does make them less likely to leave their employer.

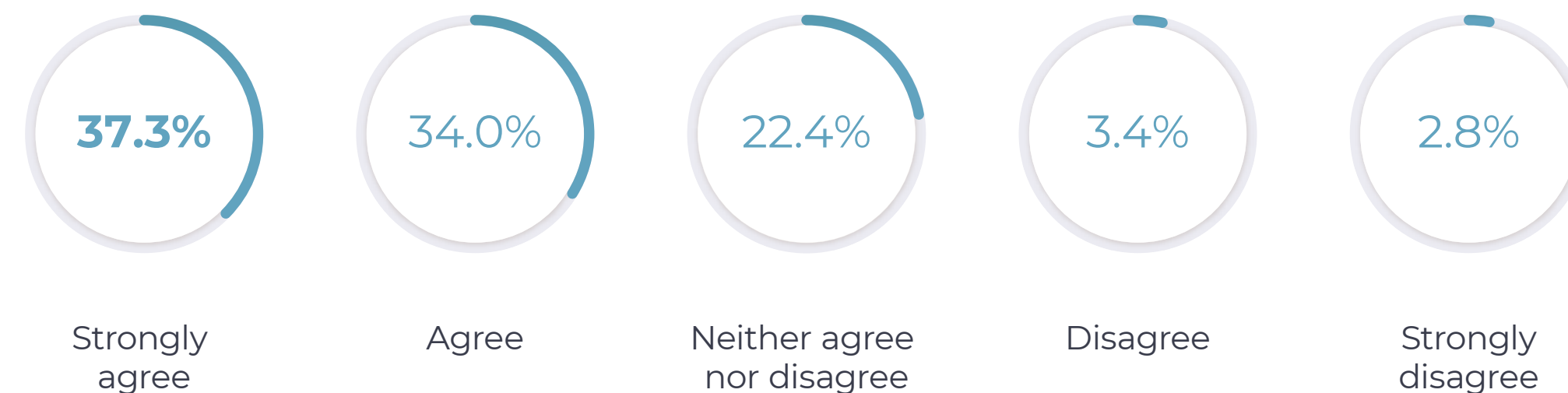
It also makes them far more likely to recommend their company to a friend, 72% of engineers said remote work directly encourages referrals. It also makes over half (54%) of respondents feel more trusted at work.

It looks like, by boosting overall satisfaction, remote working has more of an effect on recruitment and retention than employers may have previously realized.

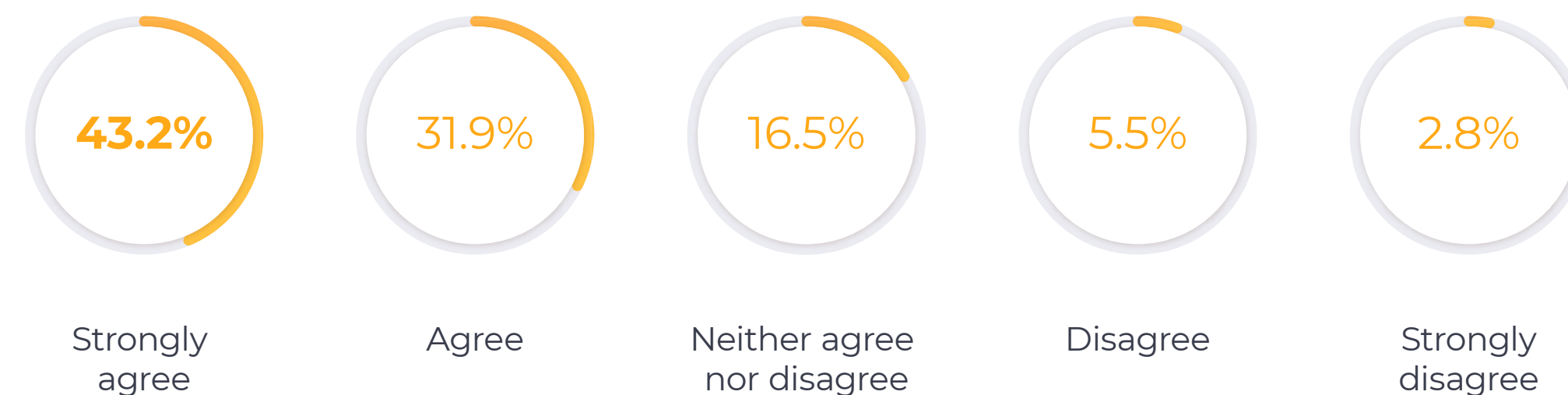
Once the pandemic has passed, employers will need to offer flexible working if they want to retain their top engineering talent.



The ability to work remotely makes engineers more likely to recommend their company to a friend



The ability to work remotely makes engineers happier



THE GEN X VS MILLENNIAL EXPERIENCE

Along with understanding how engineers feel about remote work, we wanted to understand the differences across the generations.



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GEN-X PREFERS REMOTE WORK

The older the engineer, the more likely they are to work remotely full-time and the more likely they are to want flexible working arrangements.

Among the 45-54 age group, 66% always work remotely.

Older developers also expressed a preference for scheduled meetings and a better work-life balance. This may be because Gen X engineers have more family commitments that make home working and time blocking more essential to their life.

Millennials prefer a 50/50 split

Among the younger engineers, only 50% work remotely full-time. They seem to prefer this, opting for a blended approach to remote work where possible, with more time in the office than their older colleagues.

They also expressed a preference for routine and a more office-like environment.

One possible reason is that junior developers may need more direction, which is easier face-to-face. They're also more likely to be renting with others and less likely to have a dedicated home office space.

Younger engineers were also more concerned about privacy and security. This was important to them when it came to choosing the right software for remote working.

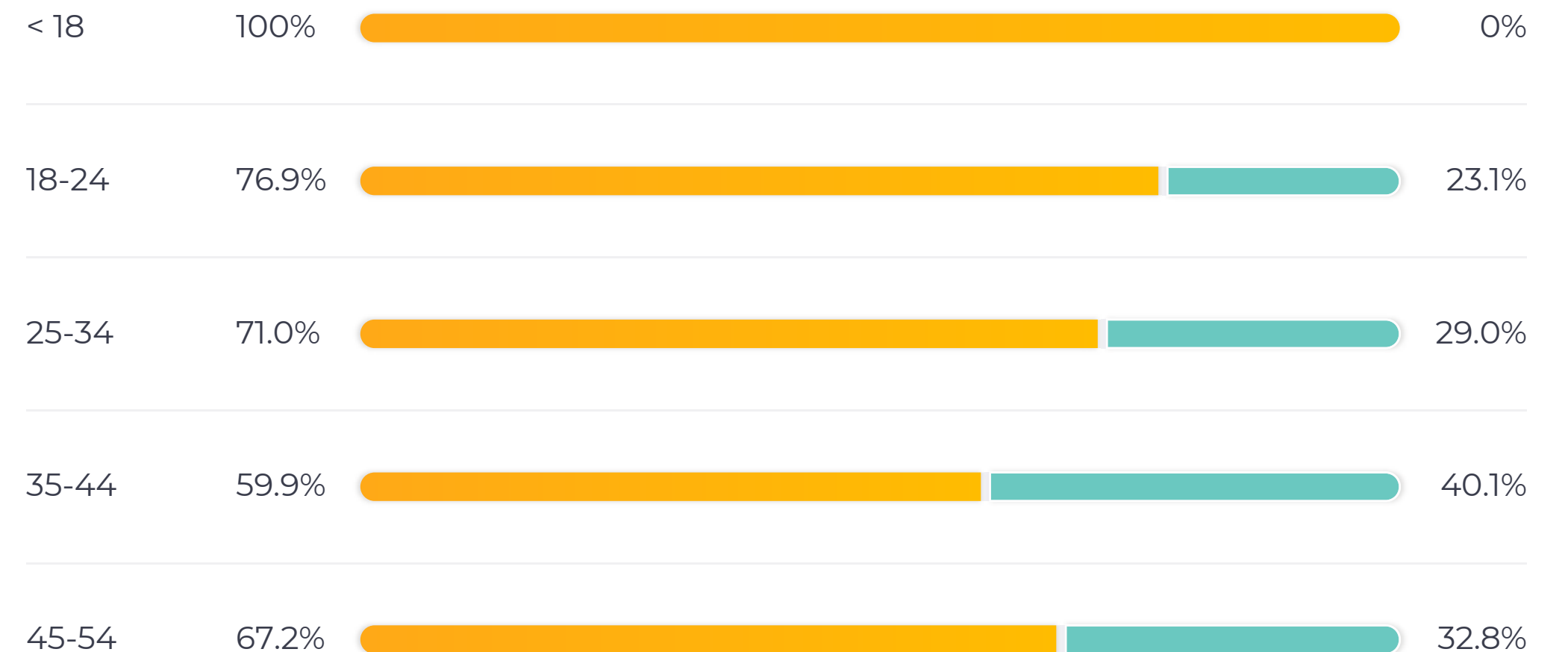
When it came to the direct impact of COVID, the youngest engineers (aged 18-24) experienced the highest impact on their salaries.

Do you feel that privacy and security is a concern when using external tools?

33.4%
No



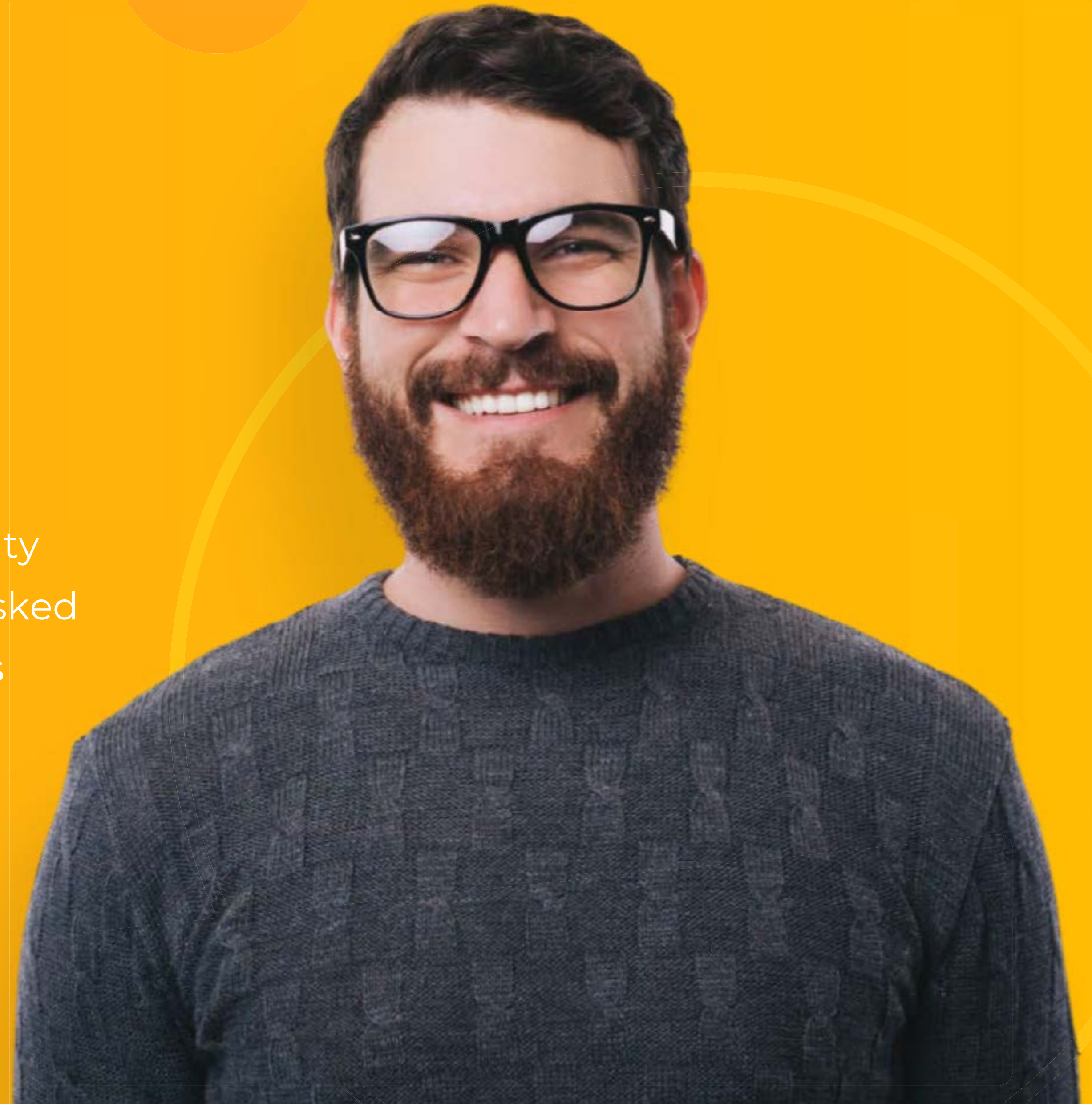
66.6%
Yes



Yes No

THE BIG THREE CHALLENGES OF REMOTE WORK

Although it's clear most engineers want the flexibility to work remotely, it can be difficult for many. We asked people what their main challenges were, and this is what they said they struggled with most.



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REMOTE WORK COMES WITH CHALLENGES

01 Working extra time

Over half of the engineers (52%) said they're working longer hours than they did when they were on corporate premises.

This might also be the reason a third of them found the work-life balance harder. As one person said, "it's very easy to work all the time when remote".

When there isn't as clear a divide between work and home, work can easily take over.

While this is acceptable and even normal during times of high pressure, it's not sustainable long-term and could potentially lead to burnout.

02 Interruptions and distractions

Working at home may aid productivity, but 38% said their main challenge was experiencing interruptions and distractions.

There could be many reasons for this. Those who live in small shared houses or apartments may not have a dedicated workspace.

Whereas engineers with children at home – particularly during COVID when many childcare settings were closed – will particularly struggle with interruption-free work time.

This is another reason why it's important to have flexibility around remote-working.

What challenges do you have when working remotely?



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03 Team communication

36% of engineers said that team communication is a challenge. Worryingly, a similar number (35%) expressed experiencing loneliness and lack of human interaction.

Interestingly, [Buffer's 2020 State of Remote Work](#) report found the same challenges but theorized that loneliness is a larger-scale societal struggle, no matter how people work. Likewise, even non-remote teams struggle with communication.

That said, at Codility we know that good communication is vital to engineering teams. Our previous research even showed that engineers experience more work satisfaction when they work collaboratively.

We also found that the more meetings respondents have per week, the more they agree that COVID-19 impacted their work. This may be because the disruption of the pandemic has made communication particularly challenging.

In summary

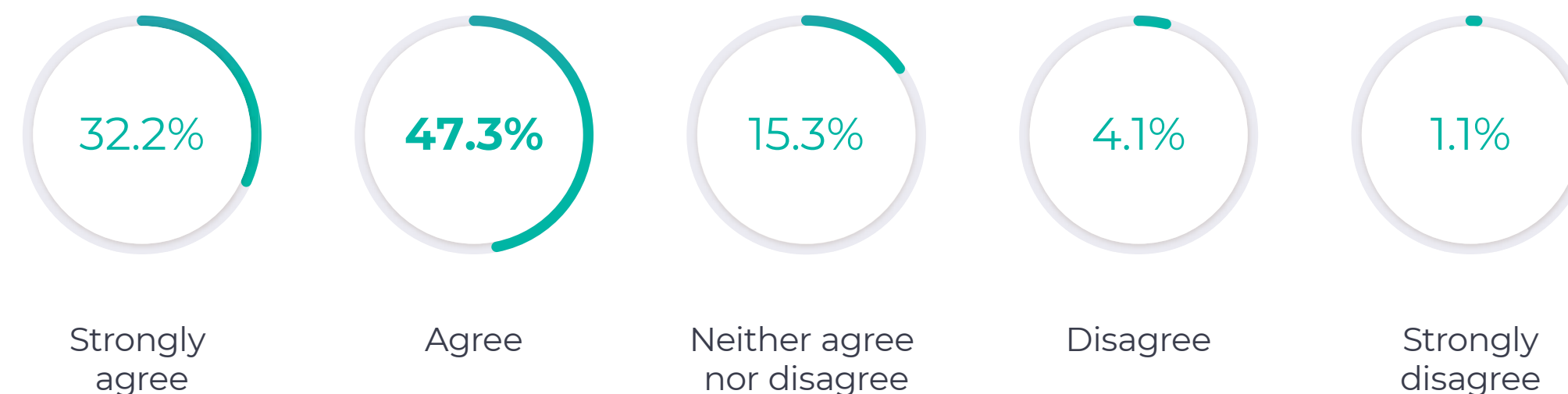
During the COVID period, the switch to full remote working happened suddenly, leaving many employers unprepared.

Shockingly, 29% of those we surveyed hadn't been provided with any tools or expenses for remote working. Only half (52%) had been given any hardware at all.

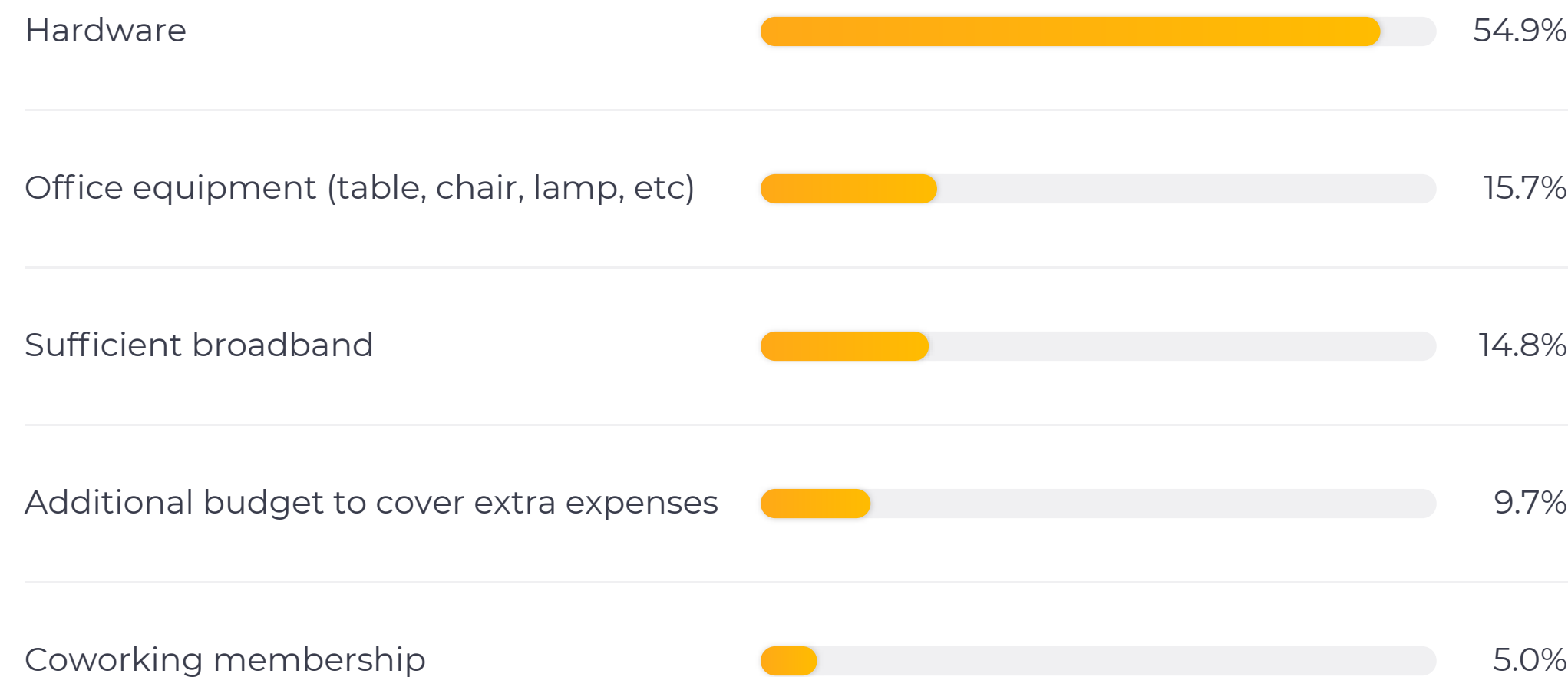
If the switch is going to be permanent, employers will have to do more to support remote workers, especially when it comes to facilitating boundaries, workplace flexibility, collaboration and good communication.

Left unchecked, this will be damaging not only to work output but also to engineers' morale and even their health.

Working remotely makes you better able to manage work-life conflict



What does your company cover for remote work expenses?



REMOTE WORKING TIPS AND TRICKS

We took the top challenges– time, distractions and communication – and we looked at the tips and tricks engineers use to overcome them. Here are a few of the best, in their own words.



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HOW ENGINEERS OVERCOME CHALLENGES

How to PREVENT OVERWORK

“At one time, I was working way too many hours, so I bought a chess clock to keep track of my working time. If I've had a day where I worked a few hours over, I'm relaxed about taking time off the next day to do something fun, even if it's in the middle of the day.”

“Maintain a flexible working schedule but make sure that your manager is understanding and flexible before modifying your working schedule. I've been so happy because I've been working in the evening where I am most productive.”

“You need to have a cue for when work starts and where it ends. Have "rituals" for starting work and also rituals for when work is over for the day. Also, dedicate a special place at home where you work so you don't "pollute" home activities with work activities and vice versa.”

How to REDUCE DISTRACTIONS

“Use a box to put your phone, tablet and kindle etc. in, then put it in another room. Only look during planned breaks.”

“Use time trackers that block distracting websites during work time.”

“An established workspace is essential. If I have to reset my workspace every time I start my day, then I've just wasted a chunk of my most productive time and energy.”

“If you work on something challenging, change your setting if you can. Just going into the backyard, kitchen or (post-COVID) a coffee shop can help you avoid the death by 1000 cuts distractions at home and lets you focus on your tasks.”

“Use Pomodoro timers so that you can track your productivity.”

How to IMPROVE COMMUNICATION

“Video-call your workmates to shoot the breeze - more communication will happen than you think.”

“Lower your threshold to ask questions, and focus on communication with your colleagues.”

“Communicate 3x times more than you think you should. Call instead of chat if you see conflict or misunderstanding. Take time to have the non-work conversations you had before.”

“If a slack message seems rude - it's probably a misunderstanding - hop on a call!”

“Over-communicate and document your thoughts for async work
* Be mindful of people's calendars before you Slack them * Put time slots – even 10 minutes – into people's calendars to set the expectation that you need their time.”

CONCLUSION

2020 has seen the engineering community get the flexibility they have long been seeking.



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CONCLUSION

Most have embraced the freedom to work remotely and feel it's made them happier. They unanimously want it to remain a regular feature of their lives.

But work-life balance, the potential for burnout and poor communication are downsides that need to be addressed.

During the pandemic and beyond, it's important that engineers create healthy work-life boundaries and ask for what they need to make remote working, work for them.

LESSONS FOR EMPLOYERS



Now that engineering teams have had a taste of remote working, they don't want to go back to the office full-time. Employers that impose this, will lose them.



Engineers need the flexibility to work in a way that suits them best. For some, especially Millennials, this will be a 50-50 remote and office split.



Every team needs remote practices that facilitate good communication without being overwhelmed, and productivity without overwork.



Get this right and you'll have happier teams that are more effective, more engaged and – with the ability to recruit remotely – more diverse.



A new remote-first future is on its way and it looks bright.



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