

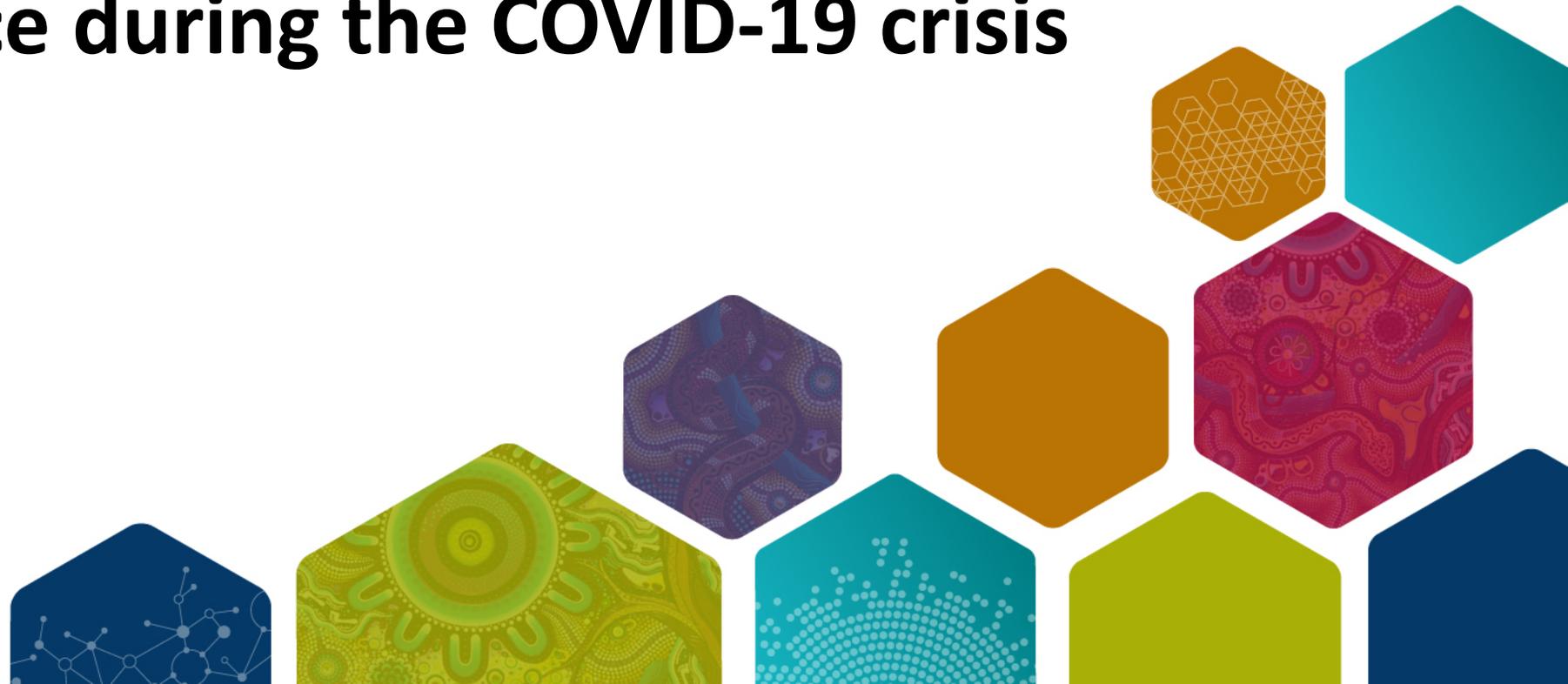


Australian Government
Australian Public Service Commission

Employee perceptions of organisational performance during the COVID-19 crisis

July 2021

Research Note 13-21



2020 APS Employee Census results offer insights into employee perceptions of organisational performance during the COVID-19 crisis

COVID-19 has impacted both the work and the employees of the APS.

During this period, there have been significant shifts in the way the APS works, including greater mobility within and between agencies, increased remote working arrangements and more frequent use of digital platforms.

Comparison of the 2019 and 2020 APS Employee Census responses allows insights into the changes in employee perceptions of organisational performance and productivity during the COVID-19 period.

Administered across October to November 2020, the 2020 APS Employee Census sought employees' experiences and perspectives during the COVID-19 period.

For the purposes of the Census, the COVID-19 period was defined as commencing on 27 February 2020.¹

Some Census questions were posed with direct reference to the COVID period, whilst others were general in nature, and covered the entire 12 months preceding the Census.

¹ On 27 February 2020, the Prime Minister of Australia announced the activation of the Australian Health Sector Emergency Response Plan for Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19).

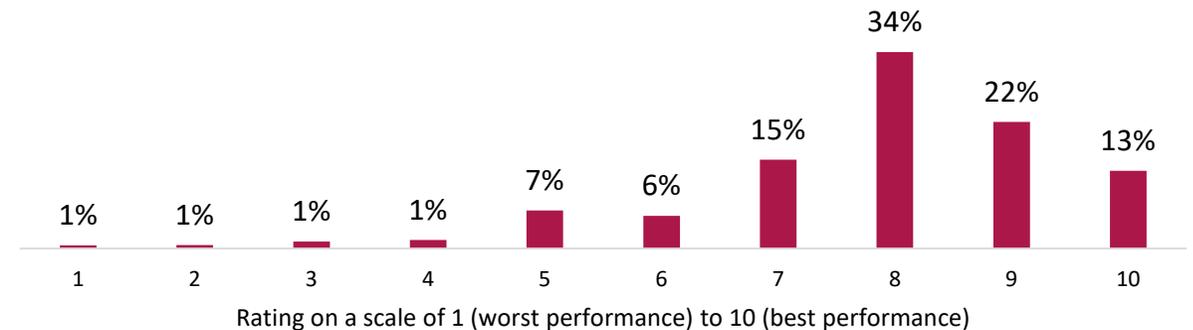
The majority of employees indicated that their workgroups and agencies had high levels of performance over the COVID-19 period

When asked to rate their workgroup's overall performance over the COVID-19 period, 69% of respondents rated it as an "8" or higher*.

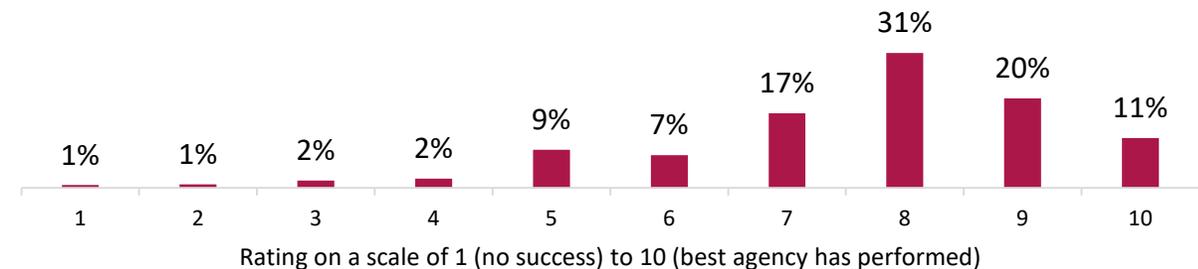
A similar proportion of respondents (62%) rated their agency's success in meeting its goals and objectives as an "8" or higher*.

*On a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is 'worst performance/no success' and 10 is 'best performance'

Ratings of workgroup's overall performance since 27 February 2020



Ratings of agency's success in meeting its goals and objectives since 27 February 2020



Employees with a clarified sense of purpose in working for the APS were more likely to rate agency and workgroup performance highly

Sixty two per cent of respondents agreed that crises such as the 2019-20 bushfires and COVID-19 clarified their sense of purpose in working for the APS.

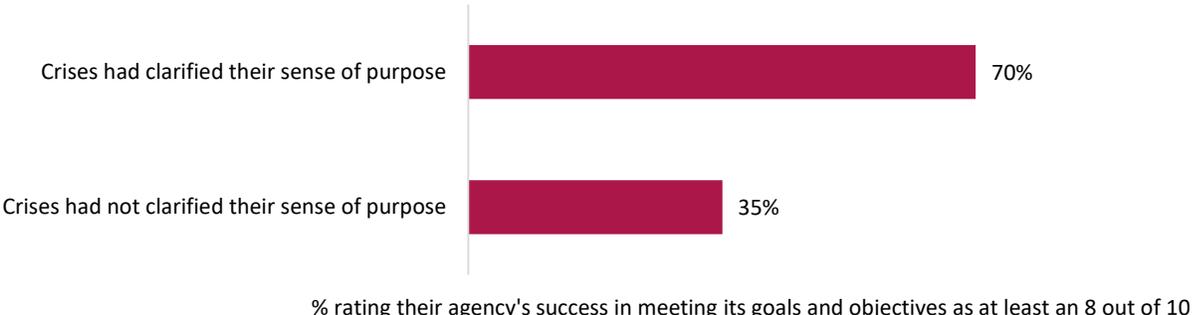
These respondents were more likely to rate both their workgroup's and agency's performance at an "8" or above.

Conversely, those who disagreed were more likely to allocate a lower rating for both workgroup and agency performance.

Employee ratings of workgroup performance by clarified sense of purpose



Employee ratings of agency success by clarified sense of purpose



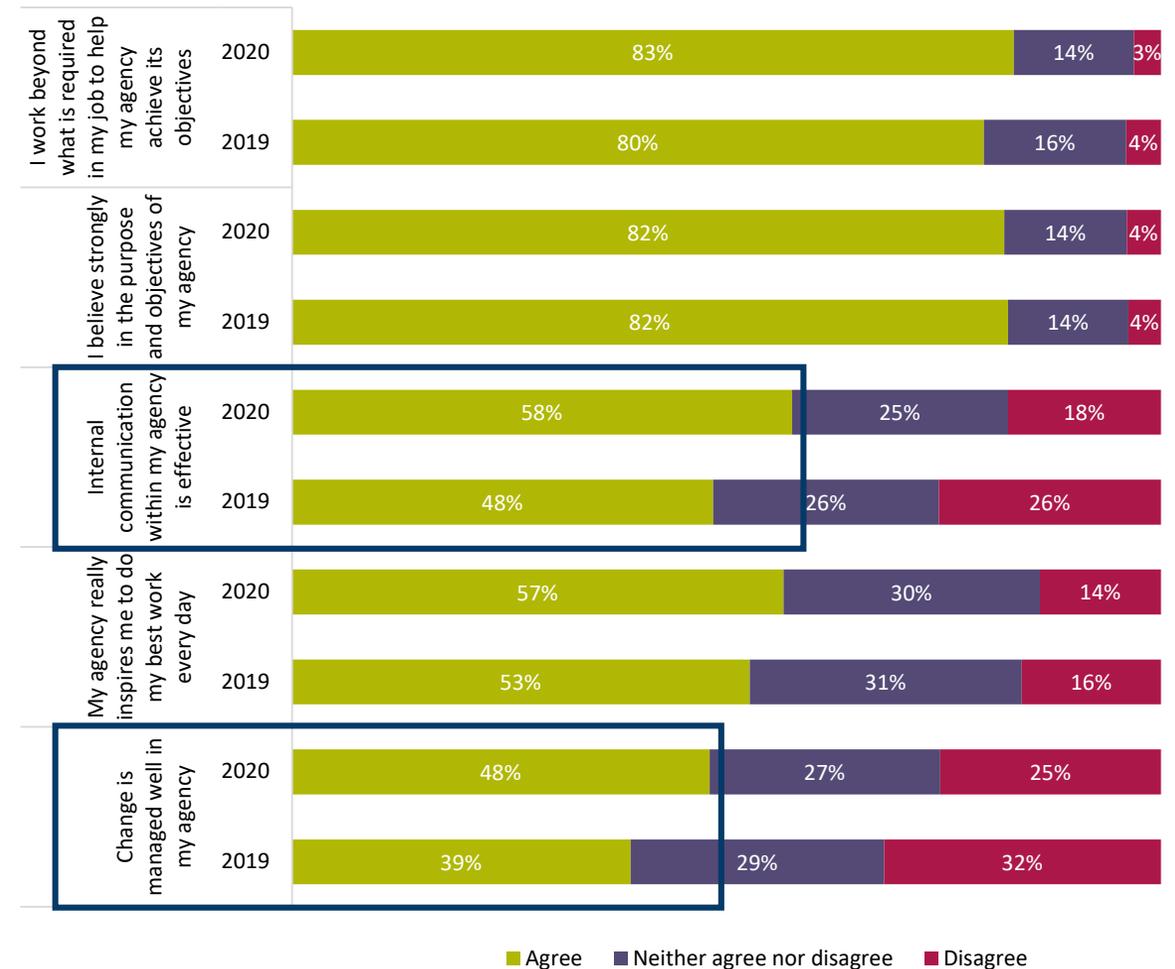
Employees' general impressions of their agency and the APS were mixed, with some indicators improving whilst others remained stable

Respondents' attitudes towards change management and effective internal communication improved in 2020 when compared to 2019. Those who agreed that:

- Change was managed well in their agency increased from 39% to 48%
- Internal communication within their agency was effective increased from 49% to 58%

There was little change in the proportion of respondents agreeing that:

- Their agency inspired them to do their best work every day
- They worked beyond what is required of them to help their agency achieve its objectives
- They felt a strong personal attachment to their agency
- They believed strongly in the purpose and objectives of their agency.



The majority of employees felt that since COVID-19 there was either an improvement or no change in their productivity

Almost half of all 2020 APS Employee Census respondents (49%) reported that their productivity had improved since COVID-19.

A further 42% reported no change in their productivity.

Only nine per cent of respondents felt that their productivity had decreased since COVID-19.

How has your productivity changed since COVID-19?

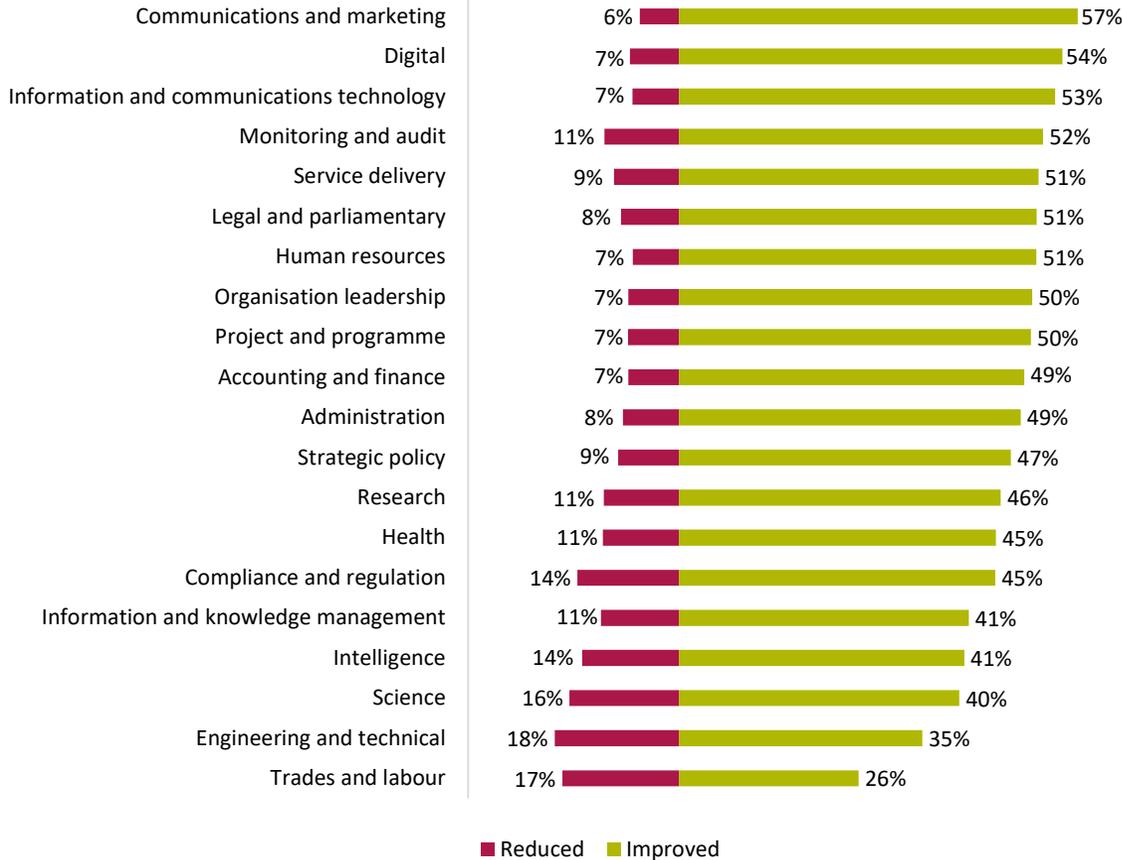


Reported changes in productivity, however, varied by the type of work employees did

Larger proportions of respondents who identified as working in communications and marketing, and digital roles reported increases in productivity.

Conversely, larger proportions of respondents working in engineering and technical, trades and labour, and science roles reported decreases in productivity.

How has your productivity changed since COVID-19?

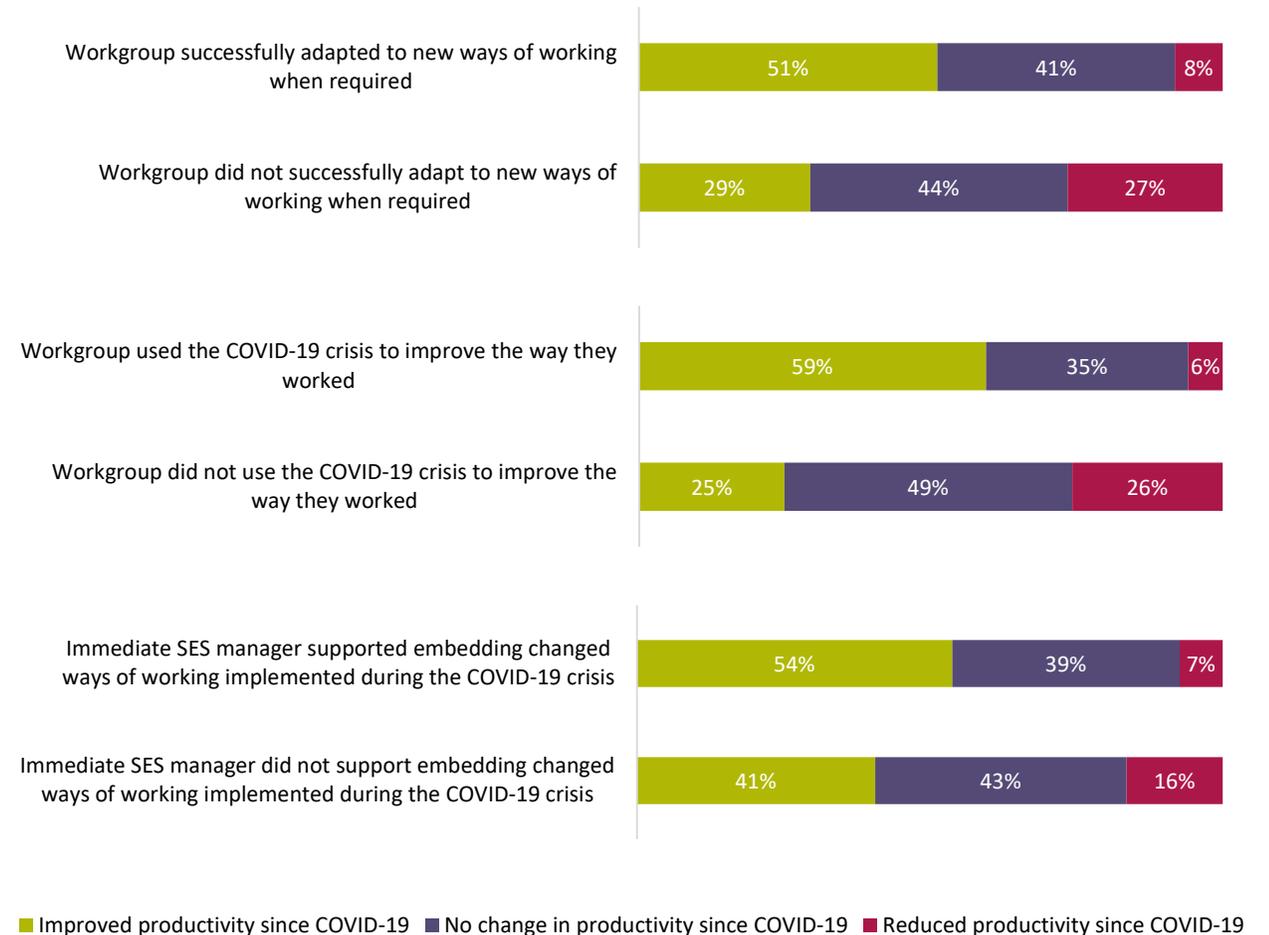


Larger proportions of those who reported improved ways of working also reported improved productivity since COVID-19

Respondents who reported that their workgroup had changed the way they worked tended to report increased levels of productivity.

This was found for those who agreed that:

- their workgroup had adapted to news of working
- their workgroup had used COVID-19 to improve the way they worked
- their SES manager supported embedding changed ways of working implemented during the COVID-19 crisis.

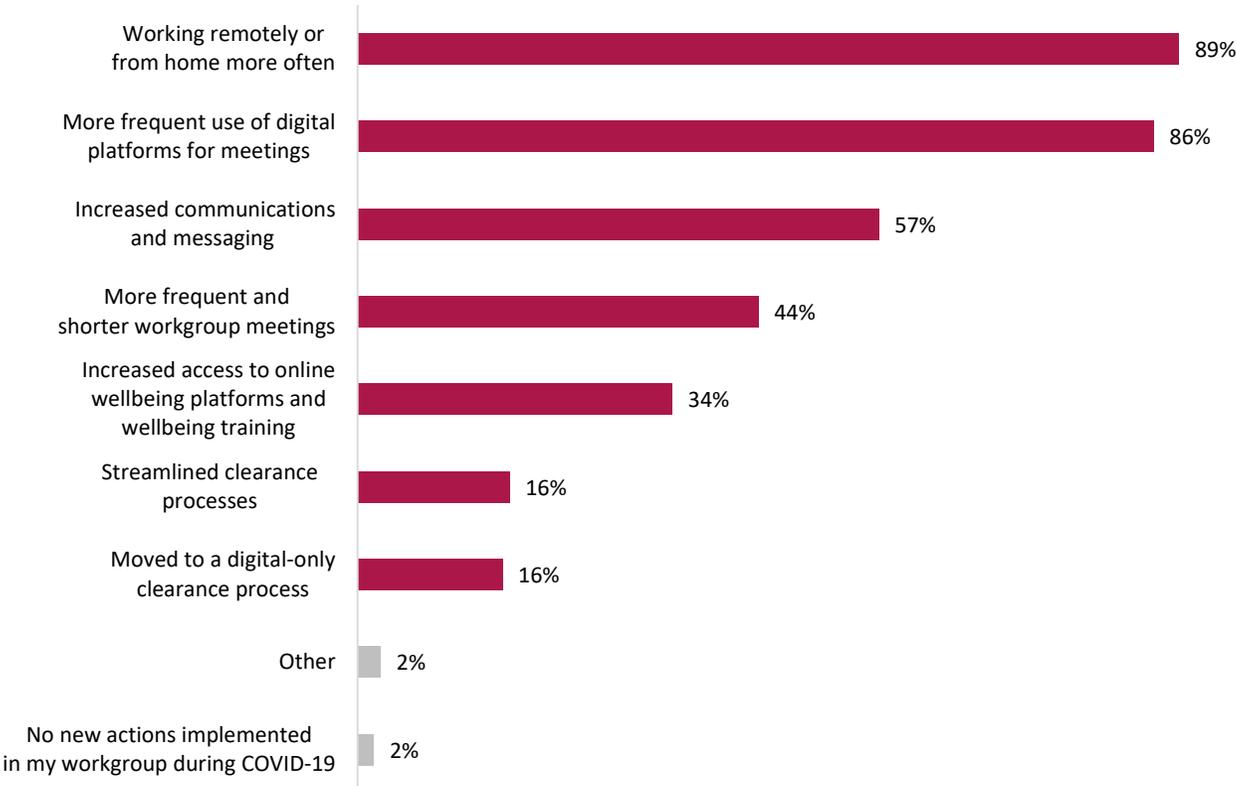


Employees reported a range of actions implemented by their workgroup during the COVID-19 crisis

Respondents identified remote working arrangements and more frequent use of digital platforms for meetings as the most frequently implemented actions in their workgroup during the COVID-19 crisis.

Less frequently reported actions included streamlined or digital-only clearance processes.

What actions did your workgroup implement during COVID-19?



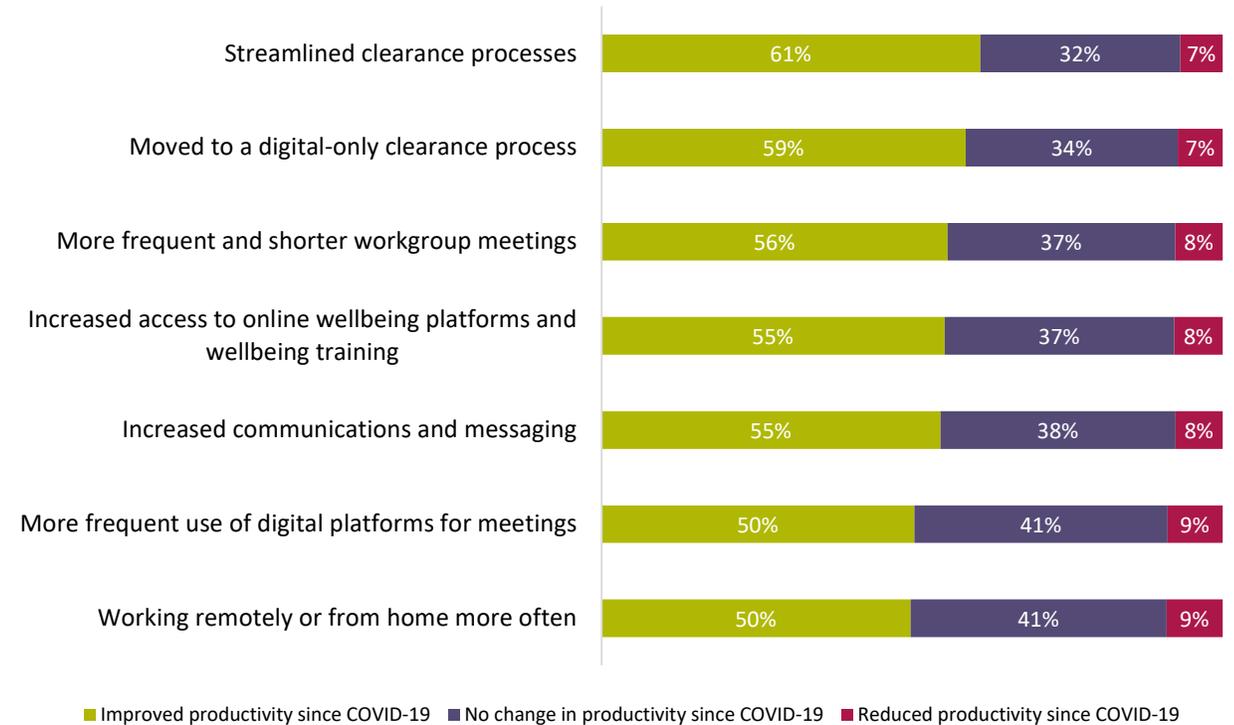
Note: Respondents could select multiple options so percentages may not sum to 100%.

Actions implemented by employees' workgroups during the COVID-19 crisis were associated with changes in productivity

Although less commonly implemented than other actions, larger proportions of those who said their workgroups had streamlined or digitalised clearance processes reported improved productivity.

Only half of those who worked remotely or from home more often reported improved productivity.

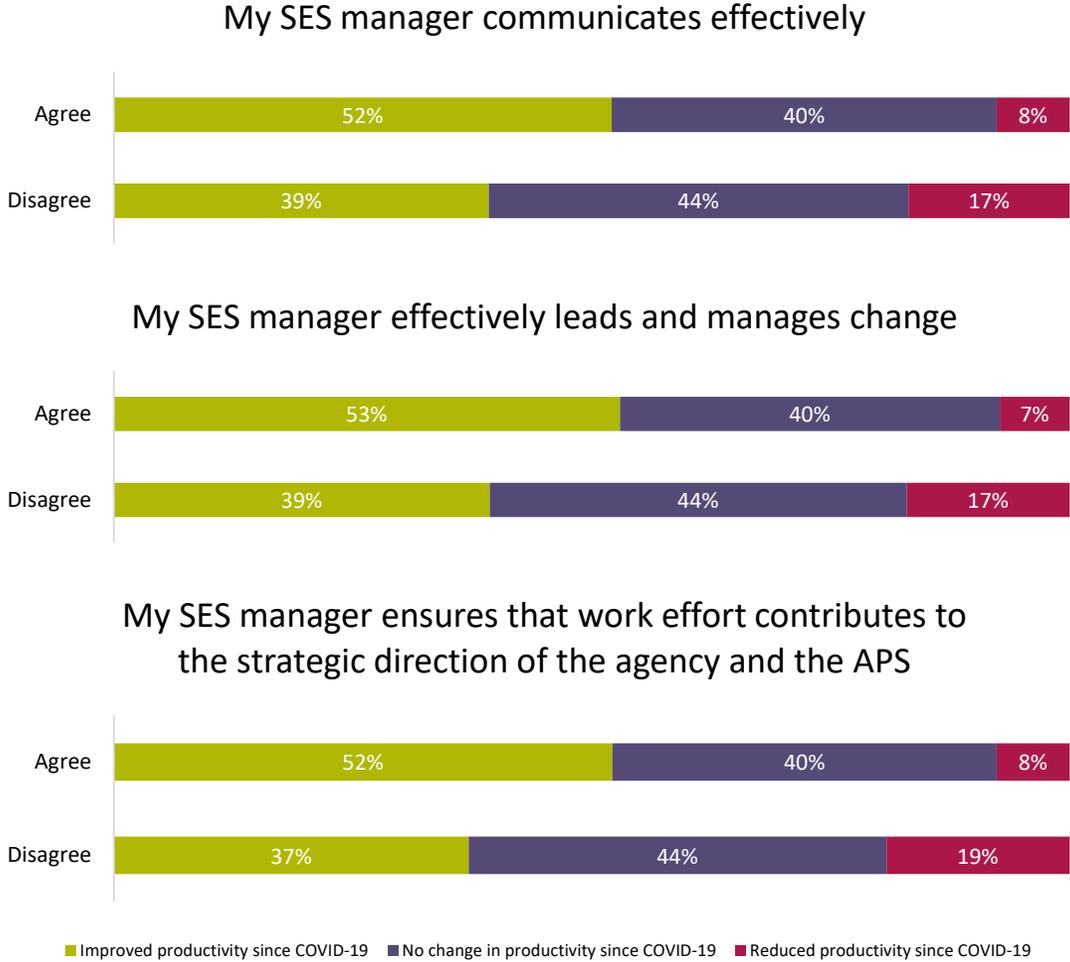
Which of the following actions did your workgroup implement during COVID-19?



Larger proportions of those who held positive impressions of their senior executive managers also reported improved productivity since COVID-19

Respondents who held positive views of their Senior Executive Service (SES) managers were more likely to report increased productivity over the COVID-19 period.

These results were consistent when asked about both respondents' direct SES manager, and the SES cohort across the respondents' agency.



The greatest barriers to performance reported by employees were competing priorities, administrative processes and technology

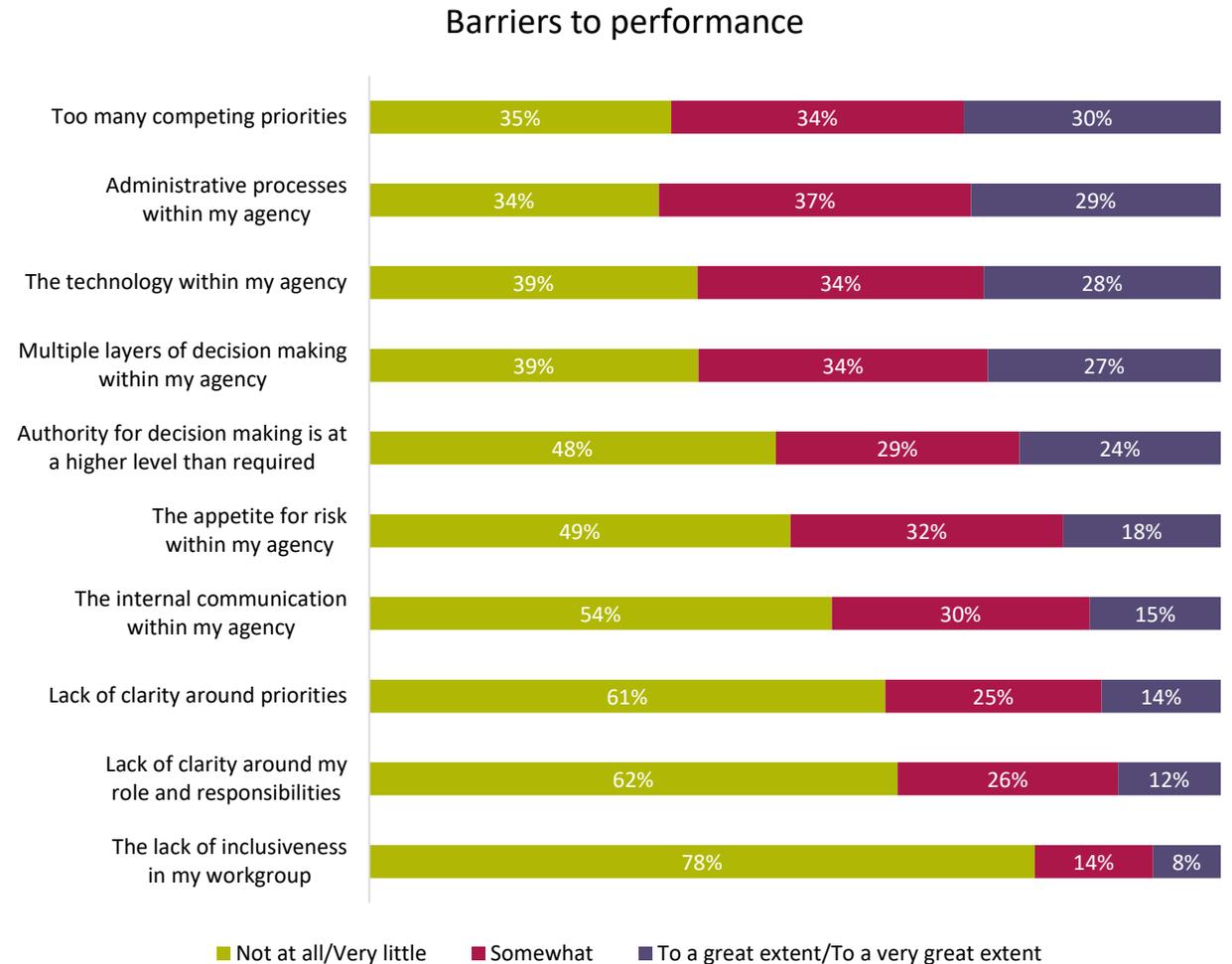
Respondents were asked to identify a range of barriers to performance.

The greatest barriers to performance in 2020 were:

- too many competing priorities (30% to a great/very great extent)
- administrative processes within an agency (29%)
- the technology within a respondent's agency (28%)

The factors least likely to be a barrier to performance were found to be:

- lack of inclusiveness in their workgroup (78% not at all/very little)
- lack of clarity around respondents' roles and responsibilities (62%)
- lack of clarity around priorities (61%)



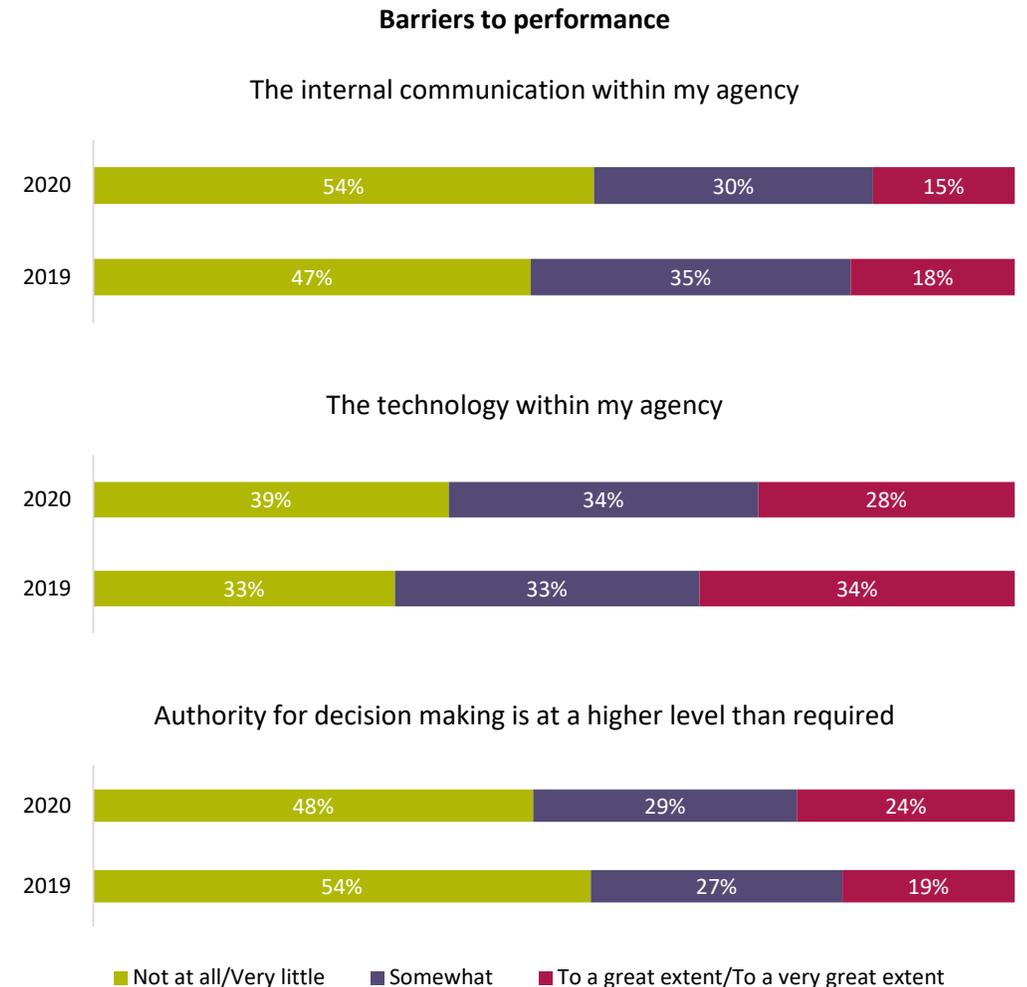
There were some differences in the barriers to performance perceived by employees in 2020 and 2019

While respondents' views on the barriers to their performance remained largely unchanged between 2019 and 2020, there were some changes of note.

Internal communication within the agency became less of a perceived barrier to performance in 2020 (54% vs 47% in 2019 reported that this was not a barrier, or only a very little barrier, to performance).

Although respondents identified the technology within their agency as one of the greatest barriers to performance, the proportion indicating that technology impeded their performance to a great or very great extent declined from 34% in 2019 to 28% in 2020.

Almost one-quarter (24%) of respondents in 2020 identified that the authority for decision making being at a higher level than required acted as a barrier to performance to a great or very great extent. This is an increase from 19% in 2019.



Overall, employee perceptions of organisational performance during the COVID-19 crisis were high

Respondents to the 2020 APS Employee Census reported high levels of workgroup and agency performance during the COVID-19 crisis.

This was particularly evident for those employees who indicated that recent crises had clarified their sense of purpose in working for the APS.

Almost half of all respondents felt their productivity had improved since COVID-19, however responses varied by job family.

Both improved ways of working in response to the COVID-19 crisis and senior executive leadership were associated with improved employee productivity.

Internal communication and technology was viewed by some employees as a less significant barrier to performance in 2020 than in 2019.

For further information please contact:

Workforce Research and Analysis
Strategic Policy and Research Group

research@apsc.gov.au

02 6202 3828