



## White Paper

Collective reasoning - how are current events influencing the future of workplace management?

March 2022

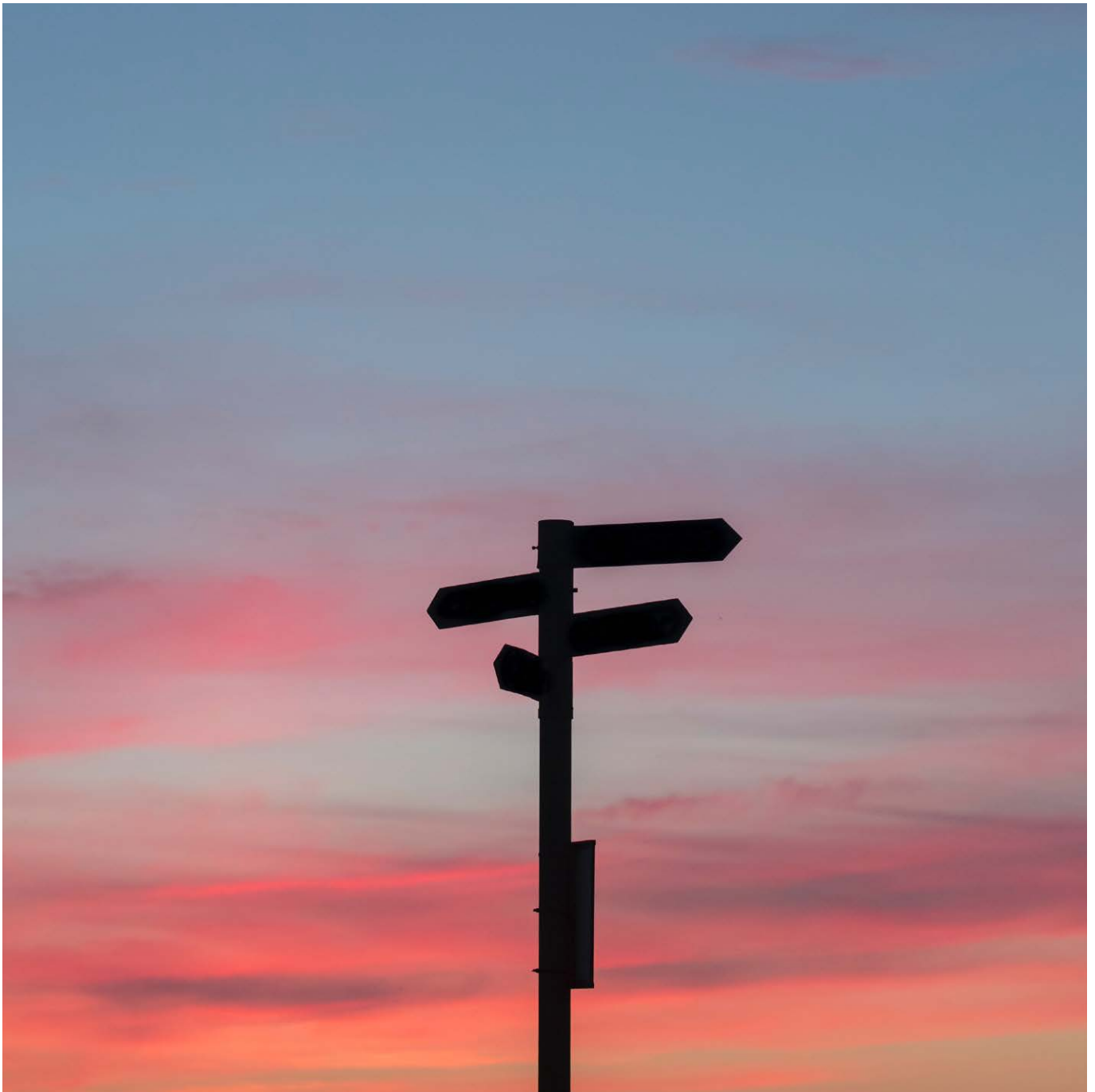


## Collective reasoning - how are current events influencing the future of workplace management?

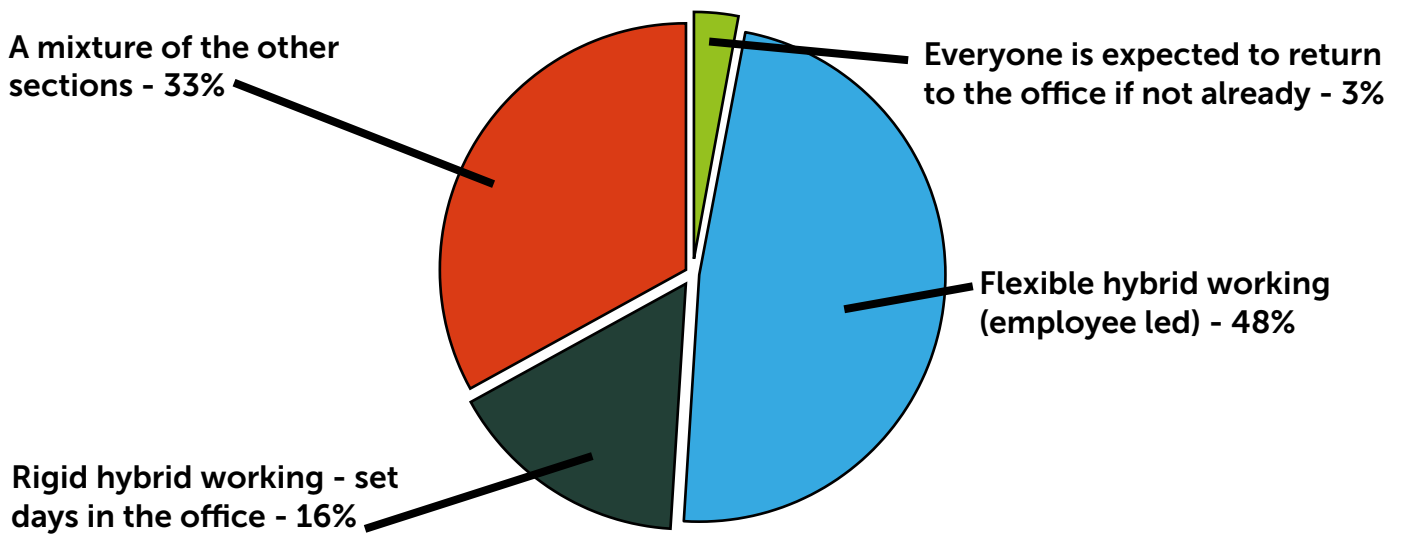
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Some people see the events of the last two years as transformational for the future of our work environments, others as just an interruption before a return to the more established and traditional norms. The truth is possibly somewhere in the middle!

Looking at some of the issues affecting the workplace today, during our February webinar we polled our audience of workplace professionals on their approach/reaction to various topics, and we debated the answers. In this month's whitepaper we are reporting on the results of some of the points raised, and the influence they are/may have on the workplace.



## 1. How are you seeing the return to work occurring in your organisation?



A lot of column inches and comment has been directed towards our return to work, although what is very clear from our poll responses is that everyone going back to the office or staying at home are not likely outcomes. 97% of those polled had adopted some form of hybrid work style, however.

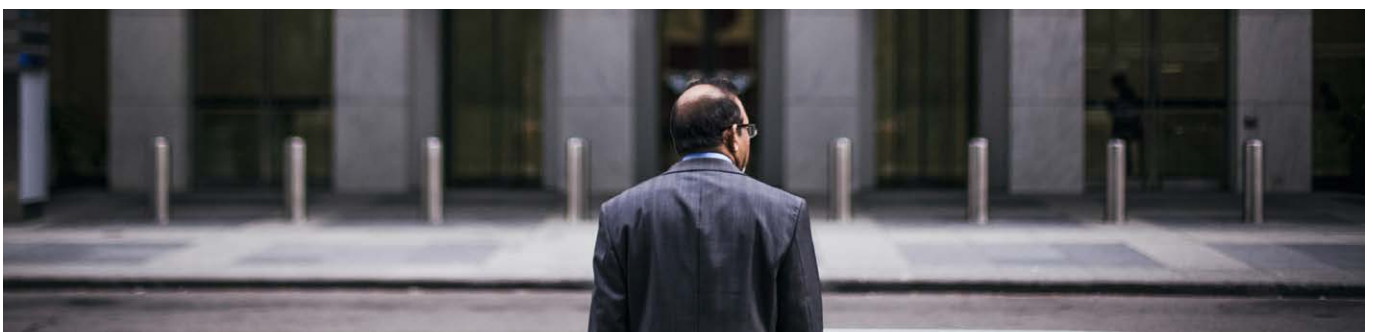
The degrees of flexibility for hybrid working are though still being worked out. For some a more prescriptive regime for office attendance is in place, for others it is very fluid. Different departments also seem to be faring very differently, with some, through function, needing to be in the office exclusively and others almost not at all.

From our webinar and wider reading, occupancy rates continue to be variable with averages anywhere between 15% and upwards of 50% being reported.

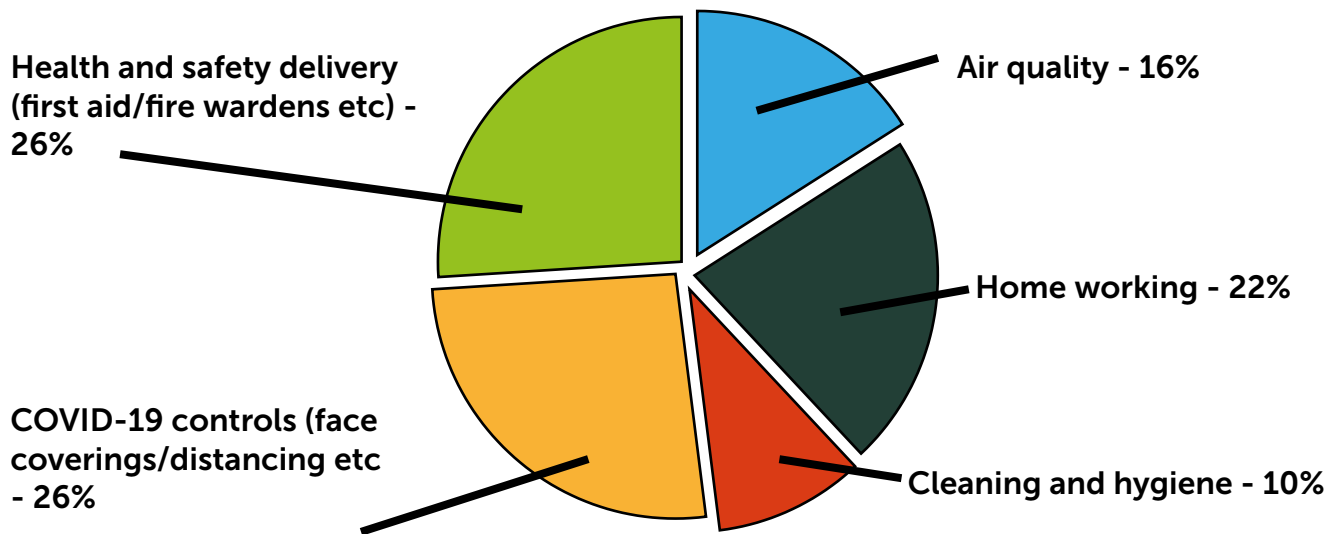
Tuesday to Thursday is being targeted by many as office days, brings its own challenge too. Anecdotally, employee numbers in some offices are outweighing the available space (particularly where social distancing is still in place), although the same offices are almost empty on Monday and Friday.

A focus on collaborative space and team building is seeing some blending of time, space and skills, with organisations developing their own strategies to facilitate creativity and purpose/belonging amongst their employees.

How and where broader initiatives, such as reduced working weeks, more flexible working hours, etc., will further impact these practices remains to be seen. Currently the balance between work/life, productivity, return to work and "new normal" seems to be working, if not in the same way for every organisation.



## 2. Which areas of your health and safety management are seeing greatest activity/ interest currently?



The fact that there is clear evidence of ongoing activity in all areas, regardless of topic, tells its own story. While some of the answers reflect the variable nature of an organisation's return to work strategy, others are potentially reflecting more of an ongoing change in expectation.

The pandemic has seen fundamental change to how workplaces are being managed, although it appears for some, cleaning and hygiene at 10% for example, with what was new, now being accepted process. It is possible that these types of controls, together with the individual's attitudes to hand washing and hygiene, could well endure beyond COVID-19.

Much of the focus relates to two specific aspects, both of which topped the poll with 26%:

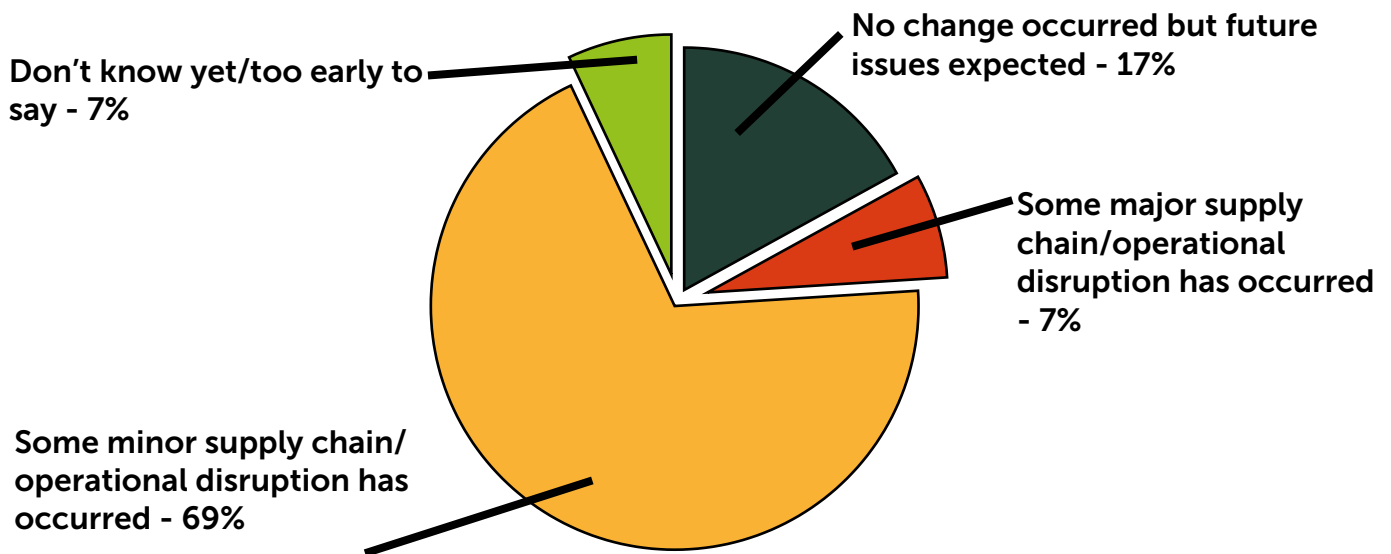
- With COVID-19 controls now largely the responsibility of the employer, risk appetite and sentiment now govern what is expected and delivered.
- Aspects of historic health and safety delivery are causing more of an issue, however. The pre-pandemic process for particularly first aid and fire management have been affected by the changes in levels of occupancy. This is requiring organisations to re-think their strategy (and is one of the most common questions we are now being asked). There are a number of solutions that could suit, depending on your circumstances of course. These include potentially targeting those staff and contractors who are in more regularly to pick up some of the controls and support (facilities, security, cleaning etc.), or having designated days when specific, trained employees are in the workplace.

Home working continues to cause some organisations issues, although as much now from a contract, HR and logistics perspective, as that of health and safety. Air quality and ventilation is also an ongoing issue – this is discussed in a later question.

Currently with health and safety/COVID-19 being linked, interacting themes, one of the main takeaways for the webinar discussion was the need to clearly communicate expectation, particularly with a more spread workforce. This, along with reviewing and updating your policies, procedures and for example signage (especially where your controls change) will be key to success.



### 3. How has your supply chain – or operations as a result of supply chain changes - been affected over the last two years?



From the results of this poll, it was clear the vast majority of those responding to the questions have either suffered (69%) or are expecting (17%) some supply chain issues as a result of the pandemic.

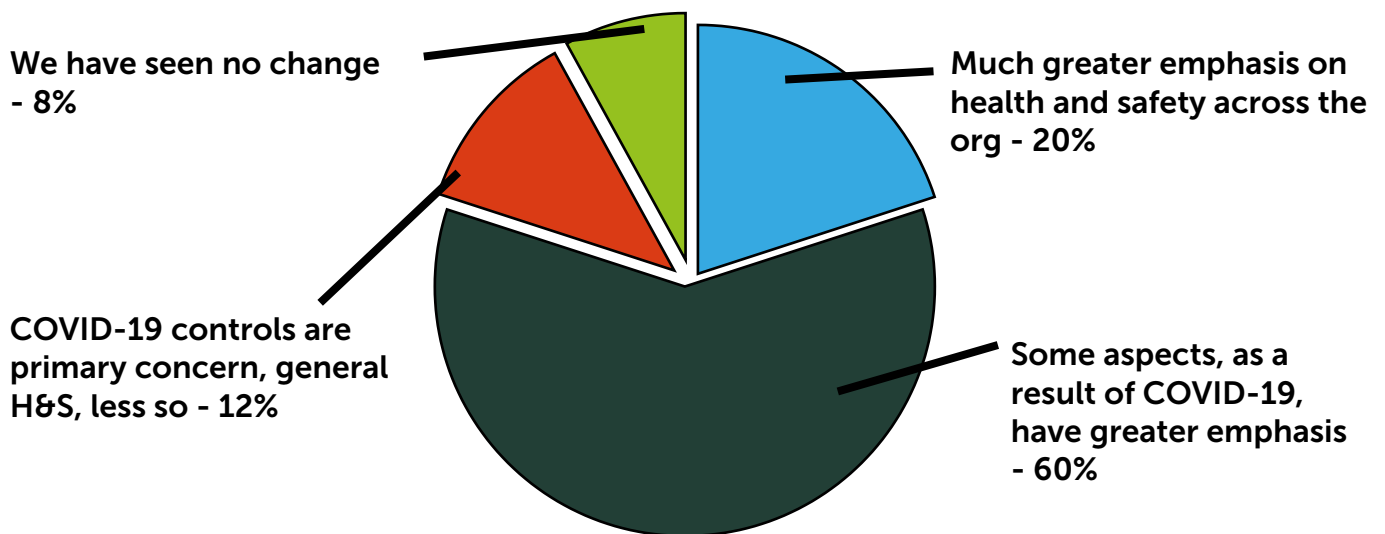
Interestingly, feedback from the webinar panel indicated that there was little or no disruption where supply chain relationships were strong or in relation to most routine planned works. Problems can occur with for example, engineering and fit out works and technical equipment, with supply having gone from “days and weeks to weeks and months” and cost continually rising.

Return to work has also seen, anecdotally, issues arising with staffing and resourcing work, with competent engineers, cleaning, catering and security staff, not coming back in the numbers needed to satisfy demand. Pay rates, lifestyle changes and labour market stresses on new recruitment were all cited as possible causes.

Planning will be critical for future work, while also recognising, at least in the short term, the timescales will need to be fluid.



#### 4. How has your organisational perception of health, safety and wellbeing changed over the last two years?



80% of responses to this question indicated there to be more emphasis now on health, safety and wellbeing than pre-pandemic. Even aspects such as mental health, depression, anxiety and stress, which were gaining traction prior to 2020, have seen dramatic increases in the activities around them over the last 18 months/2 years.

This has also coincided with the need for a multi disciplined response to the management of the pandemic (FM, HR, IT, etc.) enduring and so a more people focussed, holistic, view to health and safety being taken in the workplace.

Articulated at the webinar and experienced in the work we are doing, another factor facilitating the visibility of health and safety is that senior management now have a better understanding of concepts, such as risk assessment and schemes of control. This is seeing greater C-suite engagement and so numbers of the previous barriers to investing in and developing health and safety being removed.

We are also seeing:

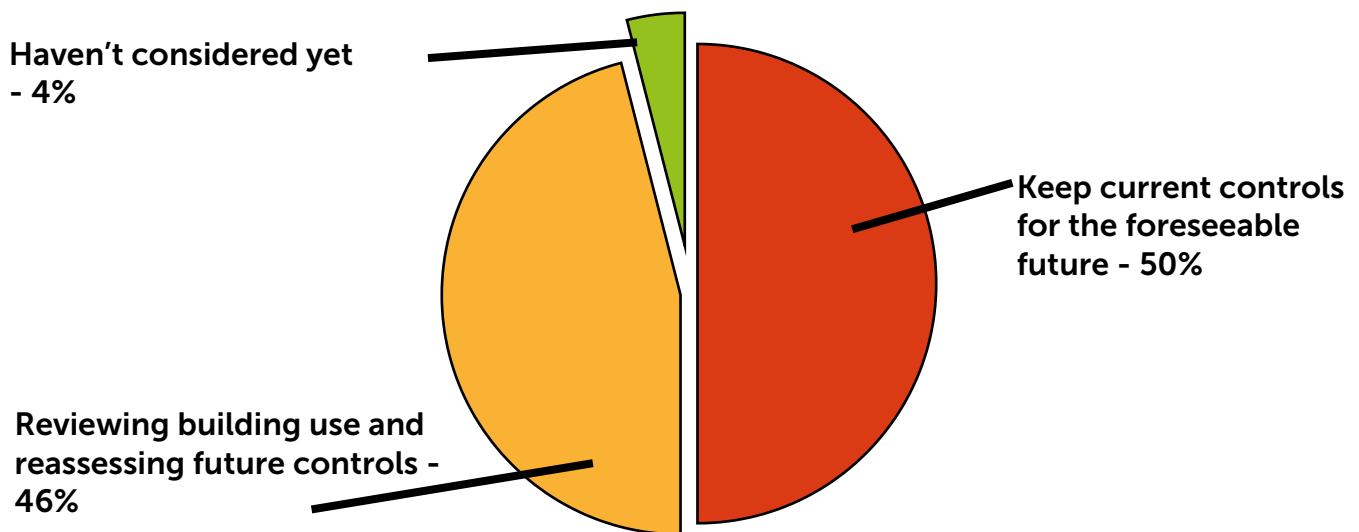
- Reviews of organisational risk registers prompting questions and wider consideration around specific activities and processes (such as events and accident management);
- Spend on health and safety training has increased over the last year with senior management roles and responsibilities training proving very popular; and
- Less of a need to explain to people what PPE is and what it is for!

In reality, it is likely that many of your new areas of activity, where occurring, will be in addition to, rather than instead of the existing ones. As we move to "new normal", success for your health and safety compliance will be about establishing what's changed, how it affects the organisation, agreeing your management aims and blending them with your existing policies, procedures and processes to best effect.

Much of what has been carried out over the last two years has been driven by short term necessity against a rapidly changing set of "rules" and guidance. Whether this will be robust enough or workable for future demand is another question you need to answer.

A formal review of your current health and safety provision could be a very wise investment in identifying what went well, as well as what you might want to do differently – or now needs to be done differently – in the future. You can then use this to help set the agenda and keep your compliance management compliant.

## 5. What are your plans for ventilation management over the next twelve months?



Air quality and ventilation have been major themes of our workplace pandemic management, and having been so visible, it is not surprising to see 50% of poll responses indicating they are looking to maintain their current control strategy, with a further 46% of responders reassessing them in line with future building use.

As we have pointed out in numbers of our webinars and articles over the last two years, air quality in the vast majority of well managed, well maintained, well balanced, mechanically ventilated buildings, was shown to be very good or excellent before the pandemic (even if it was kept a secret!). This fact must not be lost as we look to reassure and reoccupy the workplace. Providing accurate, verifiable information on your indoor air quality (IAQ) is going to be an important factor for end users returning to work and wanting to know their environment is safe.

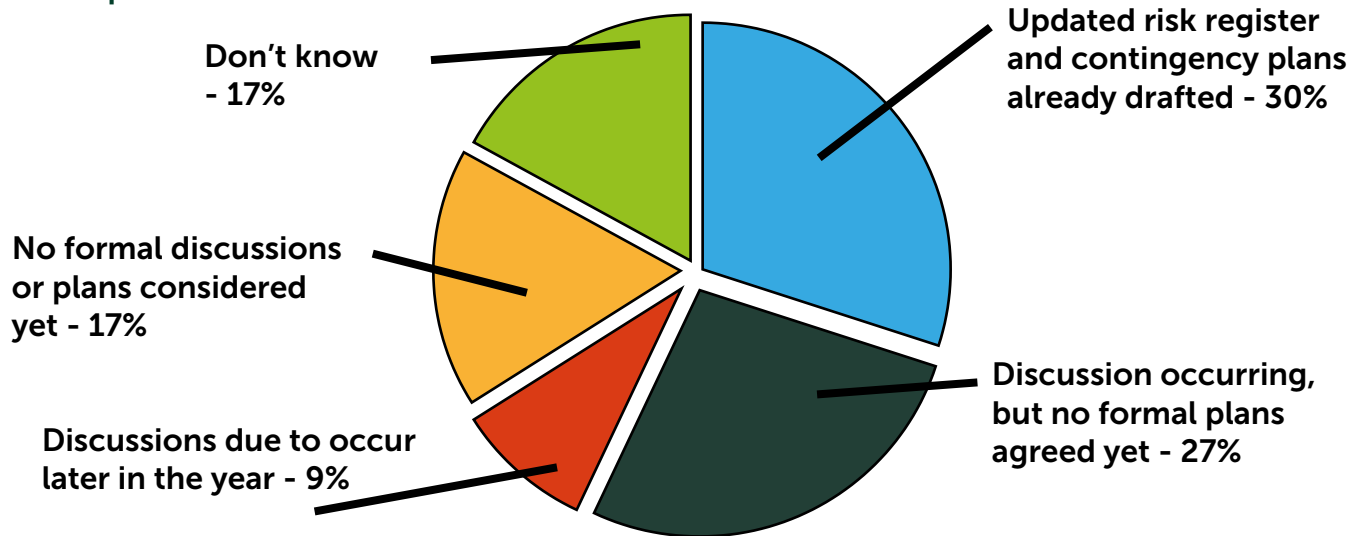
Your ventilation strategy also needs some careful thought as the current 100% FA, 24/7 approach is at odds with many net zero and carbon management pledges. Similarly, as we saw last winter, thermal balance can be difficult to achieve and numbers of buildings struggled or had to adapt systems "to get some heat into the building".

Having carried out 1,000s of independent, accredited, IAQ and occupancy comfort audits in buildings over the last 35 years, if not already, we'd be happy to help you accurately assess yours and provide you with the information you will want and need.





## 6. Future strategy – what preparations are you making to manage another epidemic/pandemic?



Our final poll of the webinar challenged future epidemic/pandemic contingency planning and pleasingly over 55% of responses indicated these had already been drafted or were in discussion (30% and 27% respectively). 34% of responders however indicated that no formal discussions/plans had been considered yet (17%) or that they didn't know (17%) if they had or not.

The departmental collaboration seen over the last two years (as previously mentioned especially that between FM, HR and IT) will fully continue to the benefit of all. A significant share of the planning and any future execution of such plans will undoubtedly fall to the workplace and FM teams though. Being involved and prepared is therefore vital if our industry is to deliver again.

With the technology now largely understood and deployed, considerations around the type of epidemic/pandemic need to be recognised, as flu for example could lead to a loss of workers, rather than a loss of traditional workplace.





More organisational based contingencies (as well as national) also need to be covered and the 2021 BCI Horizonscan report identified the following areas (as well as non-occupational diseases) to watch in the short term (12 months):

- Cyber attack/data breach;
- IT/telecoms outage;
- Regulatory change; and
- Adverse weather.

Interestingly, while health and safety incidents are not mentioned they have been one of the major reported disruptions over recent years in Horizonscan reports. Issues raised regarding supply chain management are another that need to be kept under close watch.

Therefore, while being flexible in your planning and response is essential for some areas, for health and safety it is about investing in the process that will pay most dividends, getting your risk assessment right, having relevant and suitable and sufficient schemes of control in place and an overarching management system that is designed and built to support you in today's world for today's needs.



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