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## **The impact of the 2020 covid-19 pandemic on the Northwest Arkansas workforce as reported by HR professionals and business leaders**

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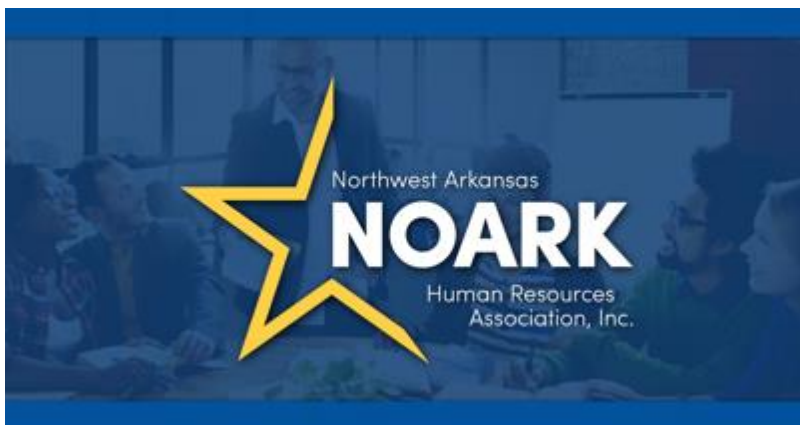
**Judith Tavano, MA, SHRM-SCP, SPHR**

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## General overview

### About NOARK

The Northwest Arkansas Human Resources Association (NOARK) has been providing service to the Human Resources community of Northwest Arkansas since 1971. NOARK is a not-for-profit organization with a membership of more than 300+ Human Resource professionals, with over 225 companies represented. As the local SHRM (Society for Human Resource Management) affiliate Chapter 0148, NOARK has been awarded numerous awards including most recently the "2018 SHRM Excel Award: Platinum Chapter", the "2017 SHRM Foundation Chapter Champion" and the 2018 Pinnacle Award.



The mission of NOARK is to provide an avenue for the advancement of human resource management in Northwest Arkansas by ***advancing the Profession and serving the Professional***. To that end, NOARK is dedicated to offering the members opportunities and resources to improve their ability to perform in the human resource industry, the community, and through the affiliation with the Society for Human Resource Management, the nation.

### THE IMPACT OF THE 2020 COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE NORTHWEST ARKANSAS WORKFORCE



As the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact people and businesses throughout the world, the northwest Arkansas chapter of the Society for Human Resource Management (NOARK) set out to learn how local businesses have been impacted by the pandemic and what measures they are taking to assist workers, maintain stability, and conduct business during these unprecedented times.

According to a McKinsey report "In the United States, normalcy is not likely until the second quarter of 2021, and herd immunity is not likely until the third quarter. In other words, the pandemic will not be vanquished soon, and businesses will continue to be challenged."

(Covid19: Implications for business, McKinsey Executive Briefing – November 25, 2020)

### Methodology

During the period of October 8 – November 8, 2020, NOARK conducted a survey of its members and affiliates in northwest Arkansas to determine workplace trends during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. Participants were invited by email to participate in the survey. The survey consists of 25 questions designed to reveal participants' attitudes toward, and responses to, changes in the workplace due to the pandemic. Fifty invitees participated. All responses were collected anonymously by way of a third party survey instrument. Additionally, participants were asked to self-disclose their job responsibilities, industry, and age-group so that survey results could be sorted by these categories for a more in-depth interpretation of results.

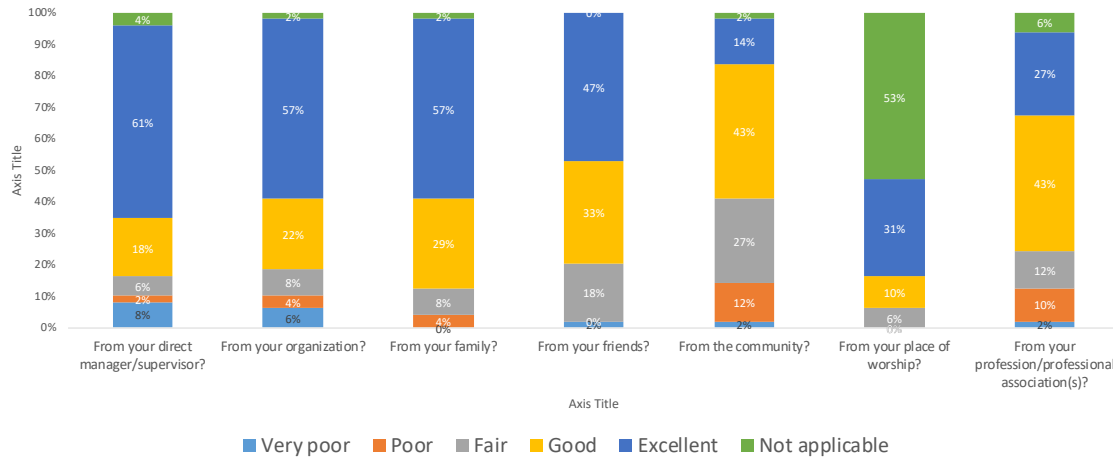
Age groups were identified as 23 – 39 (Millennials), 40 – 57 (Generation X), and 58 – 74 (Baby Boomers). Of respondents, 27% are Millennials, 53% are Generation X, and 20% are Baby Boomers. There are no responses from individuals older than 74 years old. There was only one response for the age group below 22 years of age. Since one response cannot be considered representative of an entire age group, the age group below 22 is not represented in the final report. Within the age groups represented, the overwhelming majority of respondents report their roles include HR or people management. The largest percentage of respondents who report no HR or people management responsibilities is found among the Millennial responses.

### Summary

Survey respondents, consisting of HR Professionals (85%) and other business leaders (15%) report unprecedented workplace challenges and adaptations during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. Their insights into what organizations, their workforces, and they, themselves, need paint a picture of professional competency and courage.

## Survey Results

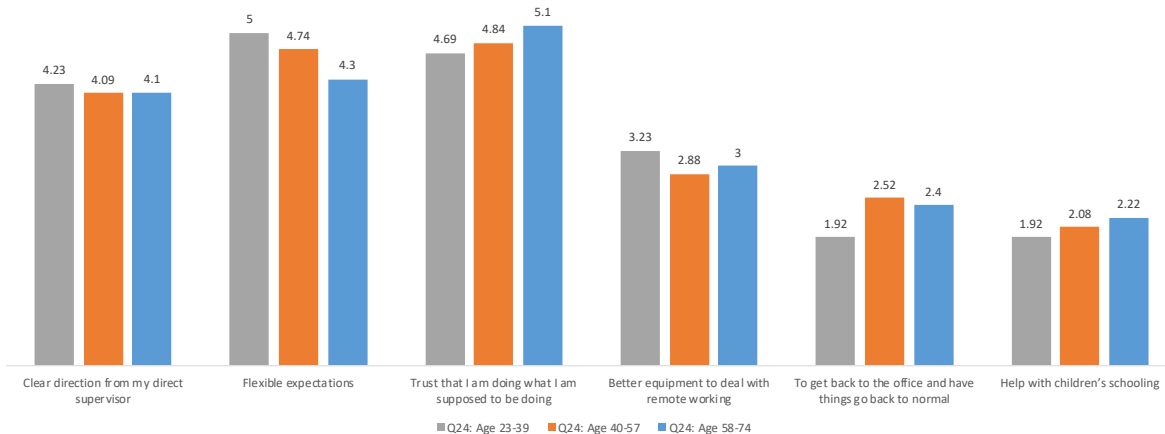
### Q1. How would you describe the quality of support you are experiencing during this pandemic?



### Survey Respondents Are Experiencing the Strongest Support from Family During the COVID 19 Pandemic

In the graph of responses above, combining Good (29%) and Excellent (57%), family emerges as the strongest supporter of HR professionals and business leaders during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, followed by support from direct manager/supervisor and the organization. The highest rating for poor support (8%) is assigned to direct manager/supervisor, followed by the organization at 6%.

### Q2. What do you need most during this pandemic time?

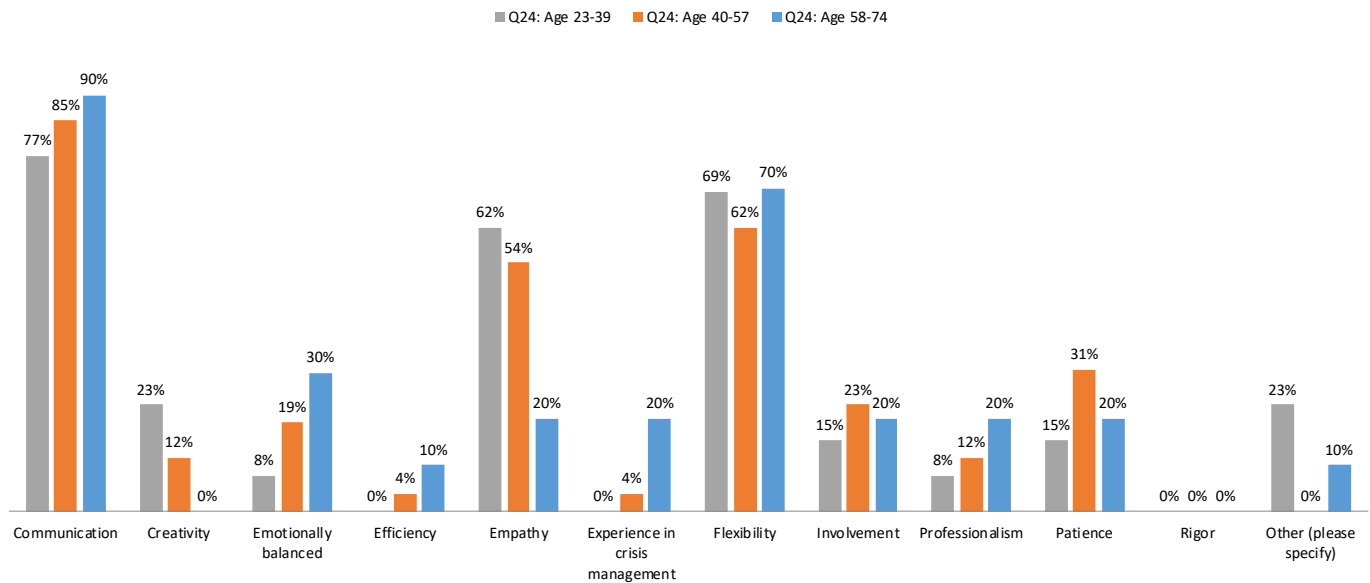


### Trust and Flexible Expectations Rank Highest as Most Needed by HR Professionals and Business Leaders During the COVID-19 Pandemic

This graph is the first graph showing responses of survey respondents by age group. Across all age groups, trust and flexible expectations rank highest as needs for HR Professionals and business leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, there are statistical differences between age groups within each category of answer. Trust, for example, appears to be more important for the 58-74 age group than for the younger

age ranges, while flexible expectations rank highest for those 23 – 39. The third greatest need for all age groups is clear direction from their manager, with responses from all age groups relatively even.

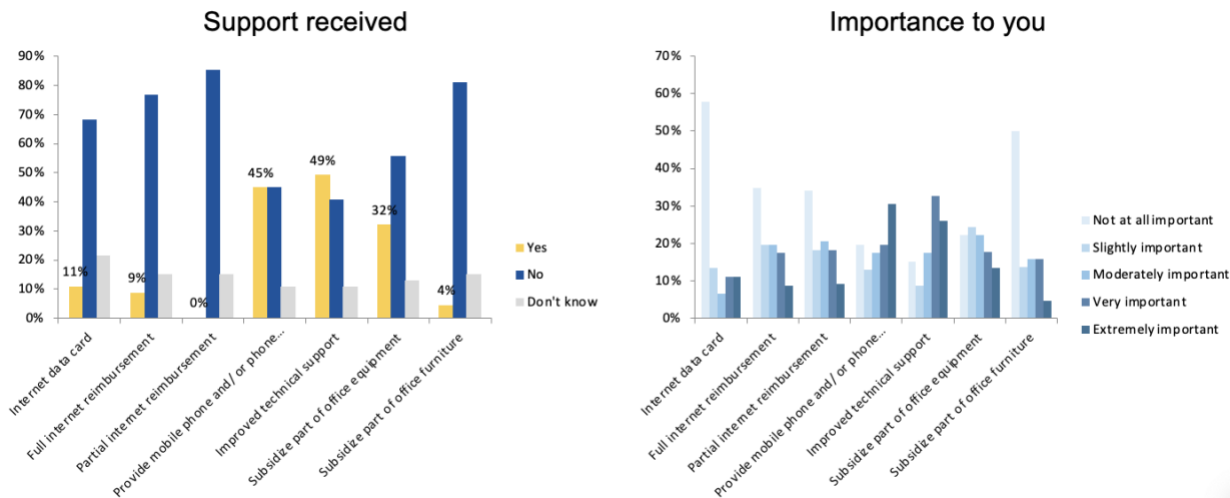
### Q3. Which are the 3 most important qualities a leader should have during crisis times?



#### Communication Ranks as the Most Important Leadership Quality During Crisis Times

Across all age groups, survey respondents rank communication as the most important quality for a leader during crisis times. Flexibility follows. The third most important quality for leaders in crisis times appears to be empathy for respondents 40 – 74, while respondents 23 – 39 indicate emotionally balanced as their third most important quality for leaders in crisis times. Experience in crisis management, efficiency, and rigor all show low rankings as qualities for leaders in crisis times.

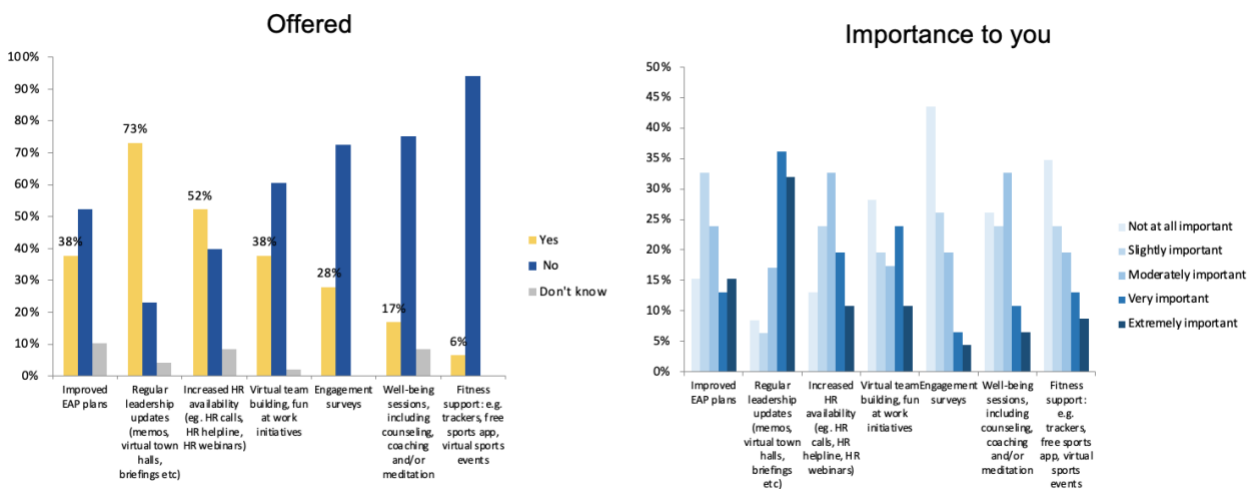
## Q4. What kind of technological support does your company offer if you are working from home?



### Improved Technical Support Ranks as Very Important for those Working From Home

Comparing the two graphs above, 49% of respondents indicate that their organizations offer improved technical support for those working from home during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, while at the same time, improved technical support is indicated as very and extremely important. Forty five percent of employers appear to offer mobile phones and respondents rank the provision of mobile phones as second in importance.

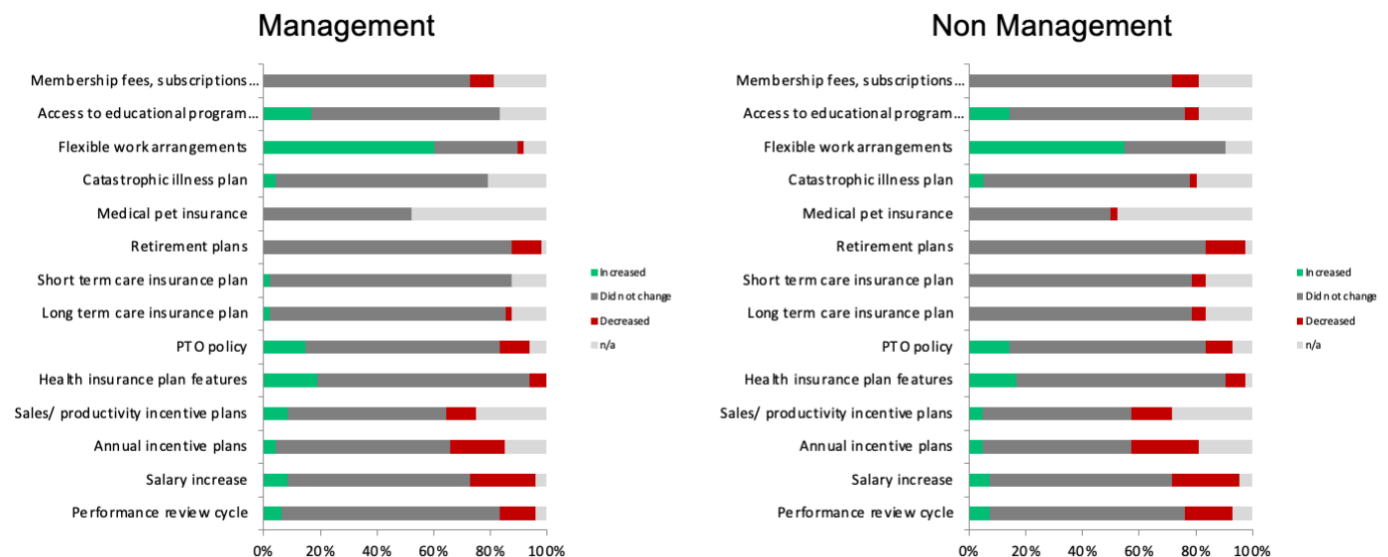
## Q5. What "well-being" measures is your organization offering during this difficult time?



### Regular Leadership Updates Are Most Important to HR Professionals and Business Leaders During the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic

Seventy-three percent of organizations represented by survey respondents offer regular leadership updates while respondents rank regular leadership updates as very important and extremely important by a wide margin over other well-being measures. The category of virtual team-building/ fun at work initiatives comes in second as very important, while only 38% of organizations represented by respondents offer such activities.

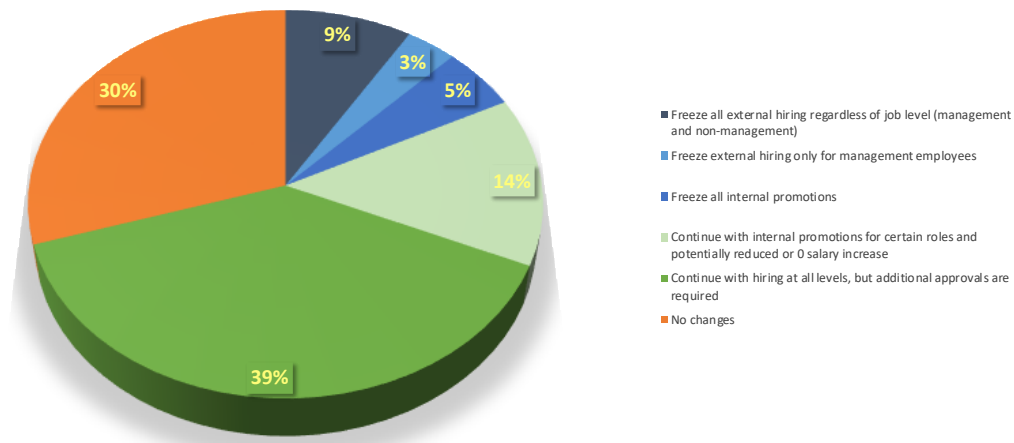
## Q6. Has your organization made changes to any of the following as a result of the pandemic?



### Flexible Work Arrangements Top the List of Changes Made by Organizations as a Result of the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic

Changes in policies and practices are consistent between management and non-management, with flexible work arrangements showing significant increase for both management and non-management. The areas that are most affected by decrease include: salary increases, incentives plans (sales or annual), retirement plans and performance review cycles.

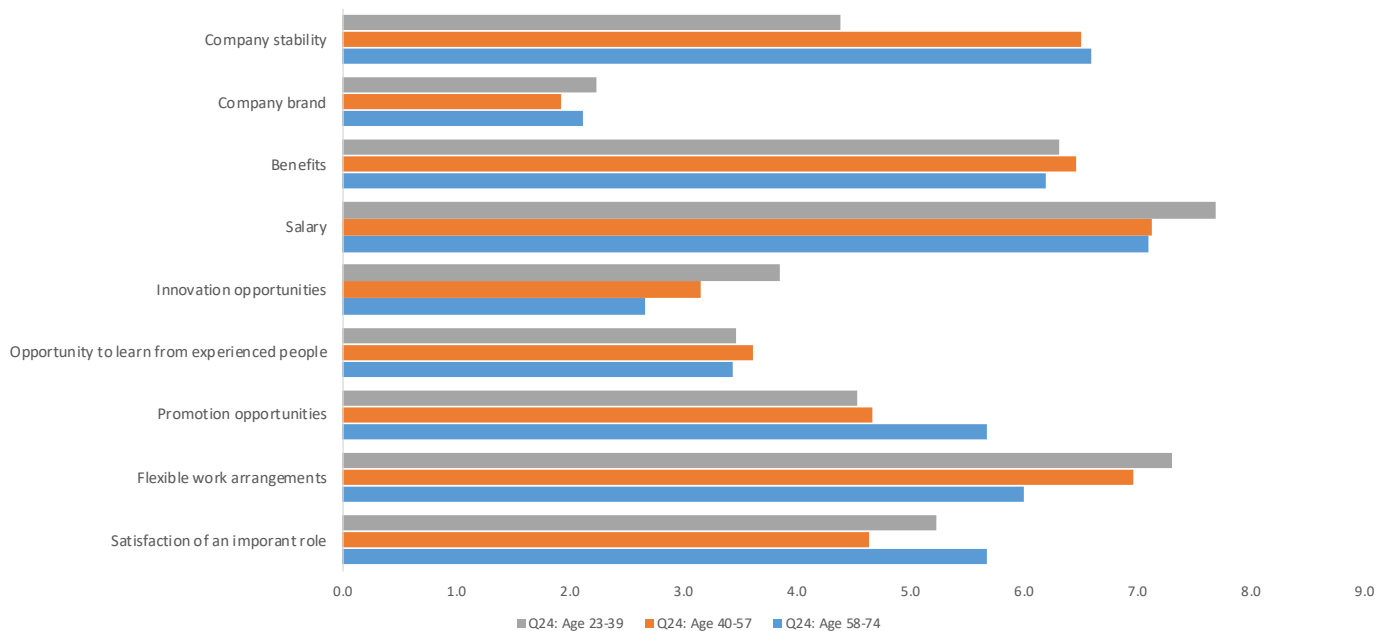
## Q7. What is your company's current position on hiring? Choose all that apply



### A Majority of Companies Represented by Survey Respondents Indicate Minor or No Changes in Hiring During the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic

Though 83% of companies represented by survey respondents indicate little or no disruption in hiring during the months of the pandemic, 9% indicate a freeze of all hiring and 5% indicate a freeze in promotions.

## Q8. What do you think the job seekers appreciate most in current times? (ranking)

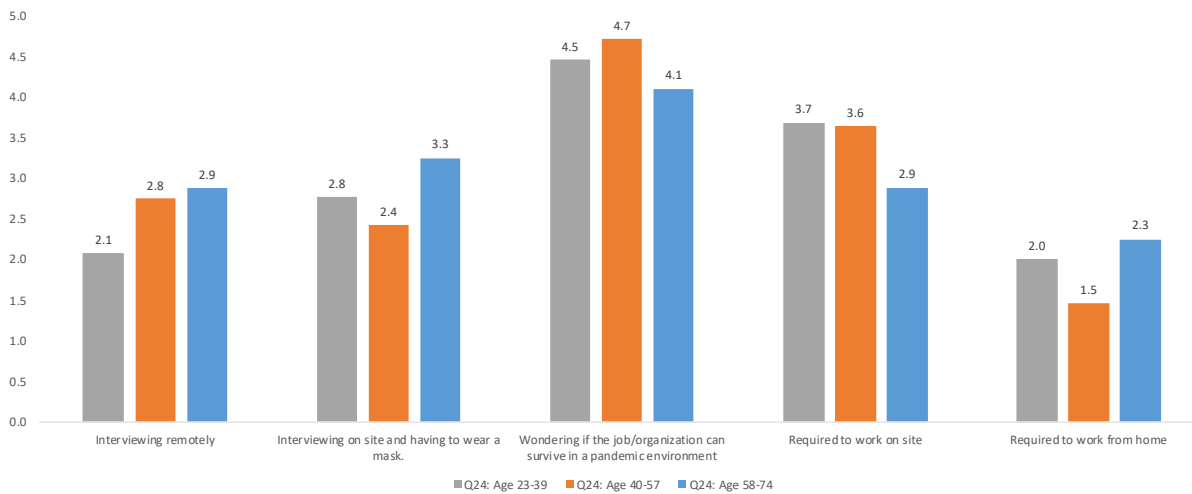


### Salary, Benefits, Flexible Work Arrangements, and Company Stability Rank High for Job Seekers in all Age Ranges During the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic

While salary and benefits appear to matter most (when combined), the pandemic has triggered two “new” areas of appreciation for job seekers - company stability and flexible arrangements. Additionally, satisfaction of an important role is more important than company stability for ages 23 – 39; younger respondents appear to need flexible work arrangements more than older respondents; and younger responders are more interested in the innovation opportunities.



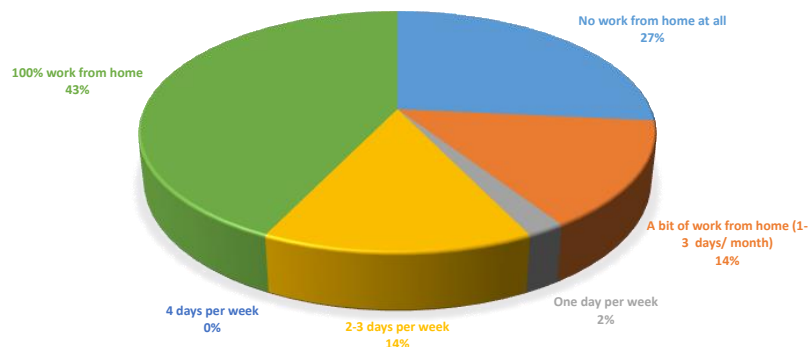
## Q9. If you were looking for a job right now, what would concern you most?



### Concern for Company Stability is Top of Mind for Job Seekers Across All Age Groups During the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic

Though Figure 8 demonstrates survey respondents' belief that company stability is a concern primarily for older job seekers during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, respondents, across all age groups, rank company stability as their top concern when looking for a job, themselves. Further, this graph shows a heightened concern for having to work onsite during the pandemic among respondents ages 23 – 57 and mask wearing during an interview appears as a considerable concern for older respondents.

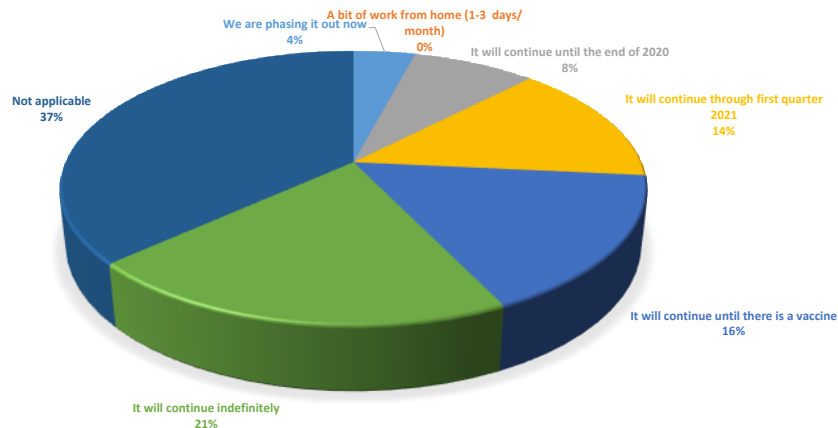
## Q10. How much work from home does your company provide for office employees?



### Work-from-Home is a Prevailing Option for Office Workers in northwest Arkansas During the 2020 COVID 19 Pandemic

Among survey respondents 43% report 100% work-from-home for office workers. The balance, either report no work from home for office workers, or hybrid schedules.

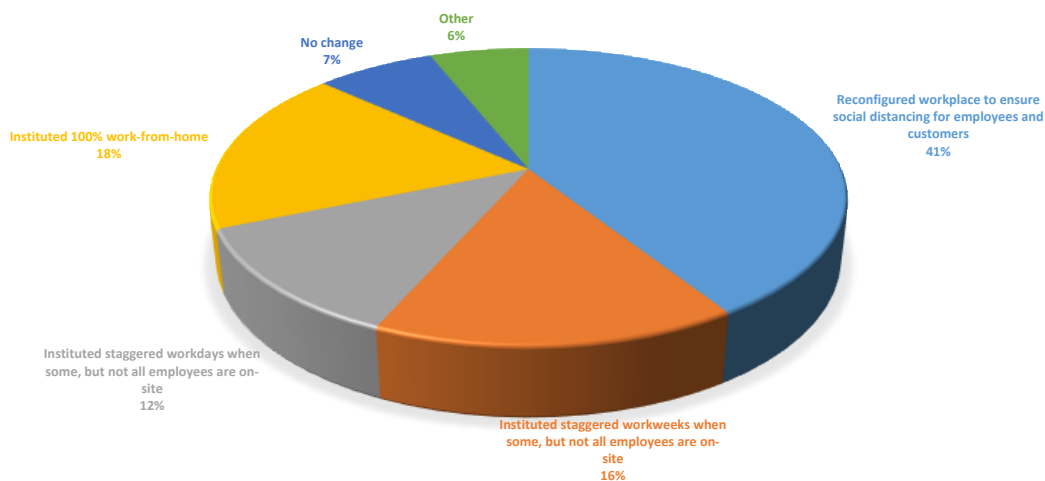
**Q11. If your organization is operating on a work-from-home basis now, how long do you anticipate work-from-home to continue?**



**Nearly 60% of Survey Respondents Foresee a Continuation of Work-from-Home in Some Form in Northwest Arkansas**

Of the nearly 60% predicting some continuation of work-from-home, 21% predict an indefinite continuation of work-from-home and 14% expect work-from-home to last through the first quarter of 2021. For 37% of respondents, the issue of work-from-home is not applicable.

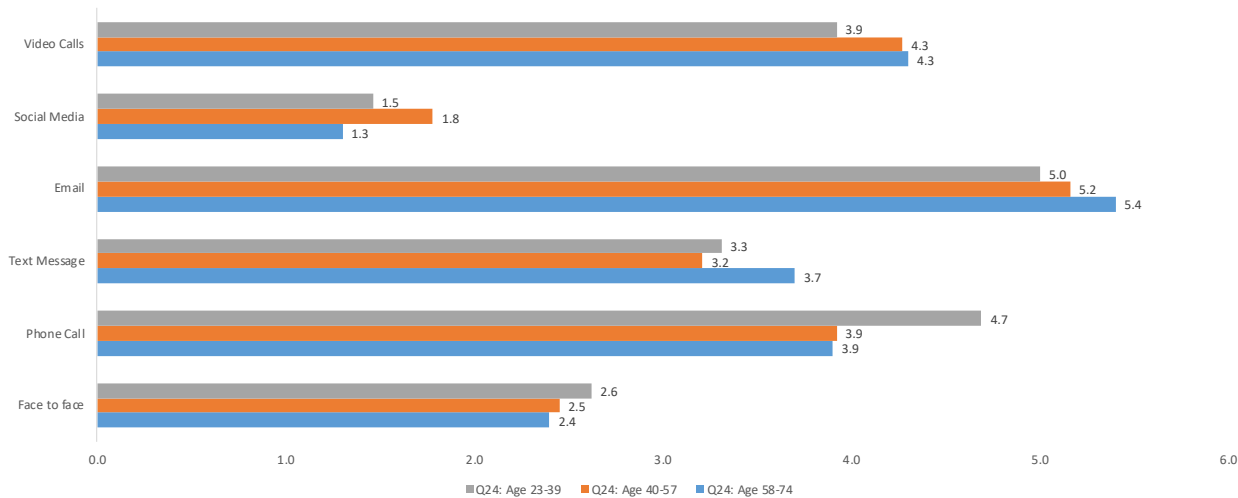
**Q12. What has your organization done to help prevent the spread of contagions in your workplace as a result of concerns raised by the communicability of COVID-19?**



**Nearly 100% of Survey Respondents Report Action to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19 in the Workplace**

Of respondents, 93% have taken some measures, with 18% instituting total work-from-home and 41% reconfiguring the workplace to ensure social distancing for employees and customers.

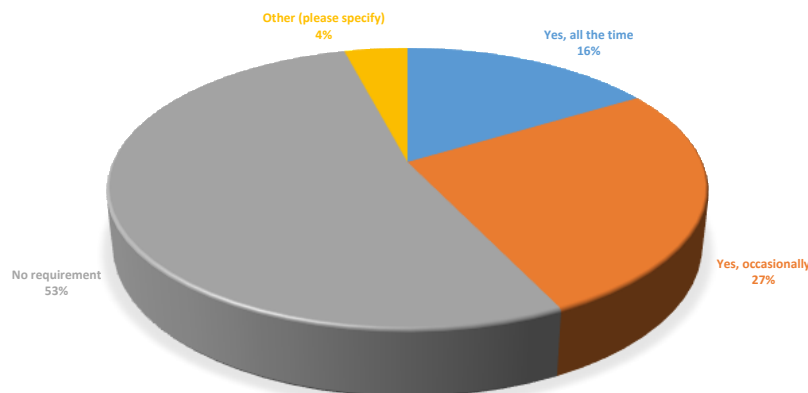
## Q13. Which communication channel are you using most to communicate professionally during this pandemic?



### Email is the Primary Communication Channel Used by Survey Respondents During the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic

Email ranks highest as a communication tool across all age groups, while younger respondents indicate a high usage of phone calls. Video calls rank next and social media appears as the least used communication tool during the pandemic. Surprisingly, those 58 and older report using text messages at a higher rate than younger age groups.

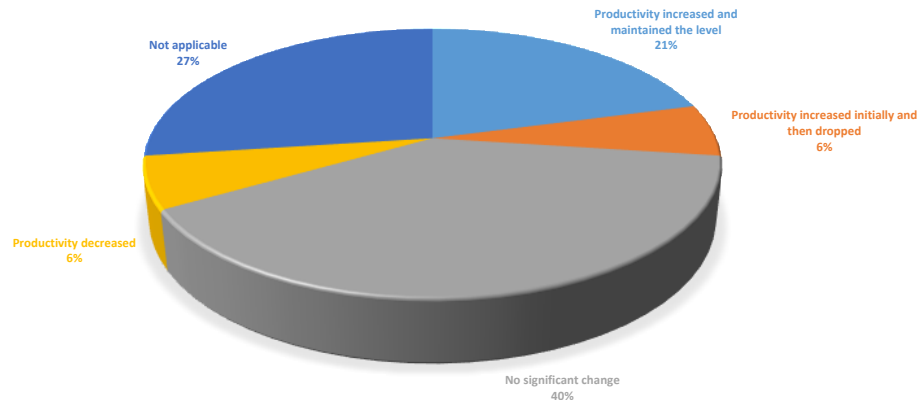
## Q14. Does your company require video calls with camera on?



### More than Half of Organizations Represented by Survey Respondents Have No Requirement for Camera On During Video Calls

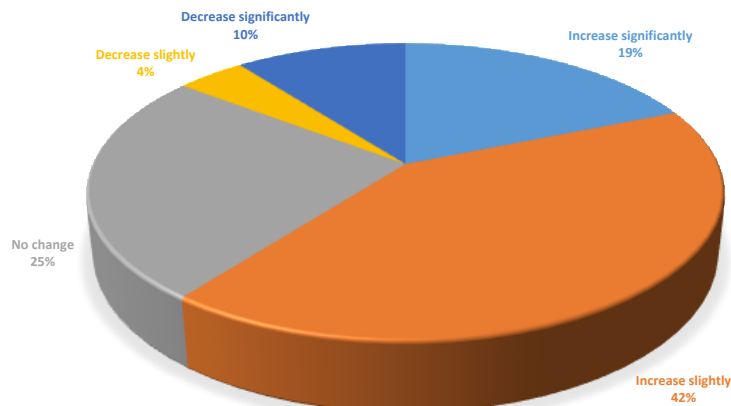
While 53% of companies do not require camera on, 16% require the camera on all the time and 27%, occasionally. In open-ended comments to this survey question, 4% of respondents cite companies that have requirements, but do not enforce them.

### Q15. If you have employees working from home, how would you describe the impact on productivity?



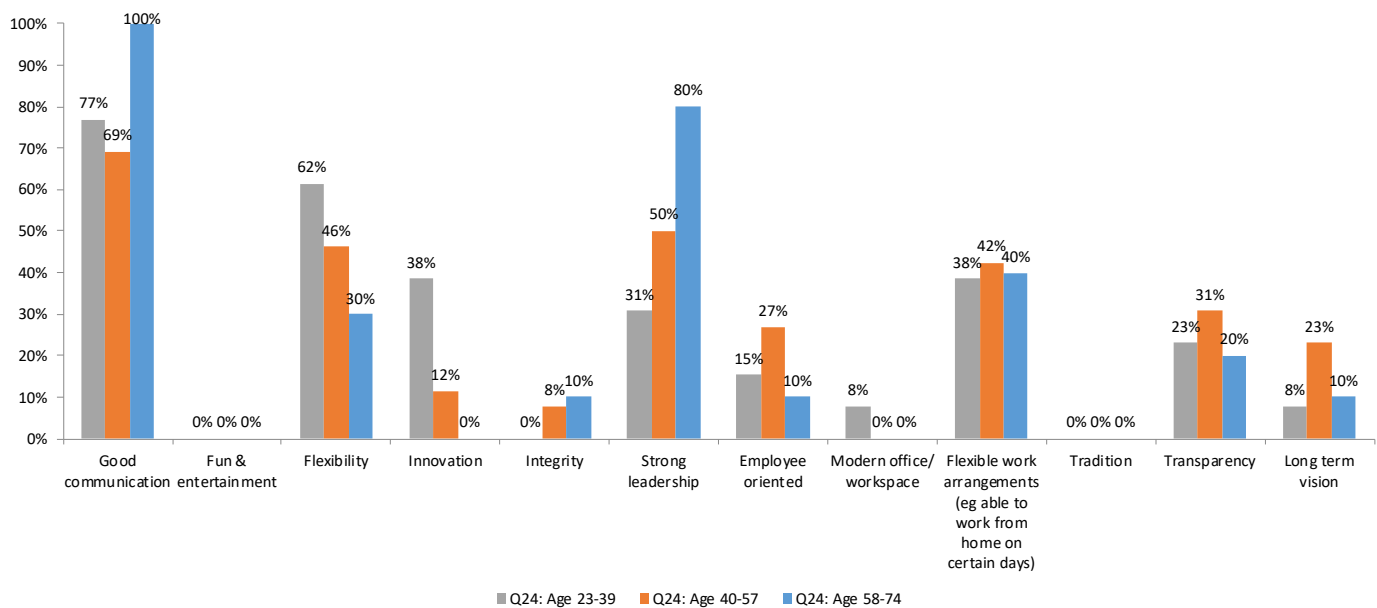
**Productivity While Working from Home is Unchanged or Increased for a Majority of Organizations Represented by Survey Respondents**  
 Forty percent of respondents report no significant change in productivity, while 21% of respondents report productivity increased and remained at that level. Six percent of survey respondents indicate a decrease in productivity and another 6% report productivity increased initially and then dropped.

### Q16. How do you expect hiring to evolve in the following 6-12 months?



**Over 60% of Survey Respondents Predict an Increase in Hiring Activity in Northwest Arkansas in the Next 6 – 12 Months**  
 Sixty-one percent of respondents say hiring will increase, either significantly (19%) or slightly (42%). The negative perspective (decrease of hiring) is shared by only 14% of respondents.

## Q17. Please select the top 3 most important qualities an employer should have during these hard times

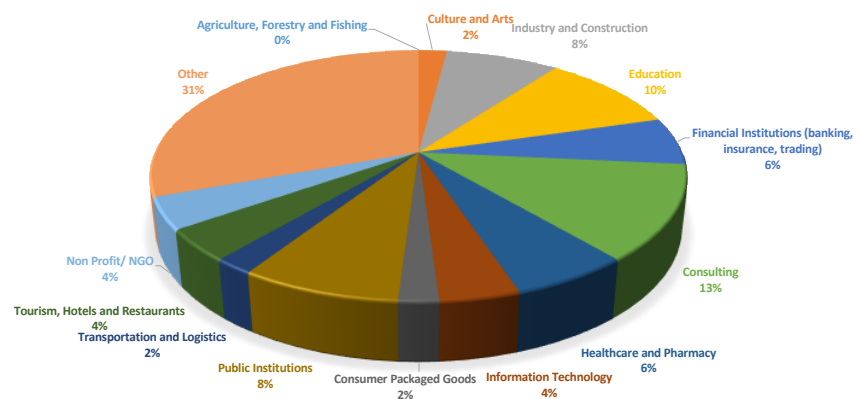


### Good Communication is Cited Across All Age Groups as the Top Quality an Employer Should Have During Hard Times

Respondents in all age groups agree that good communication is the most important quality for an organization in difficult times. Strong leadership ranks second for those in the 40 – 57 age group, followed by flexibility. For those 23 -39, flexibility is second, and innovation and flexible work arrangements, rank as distant third.

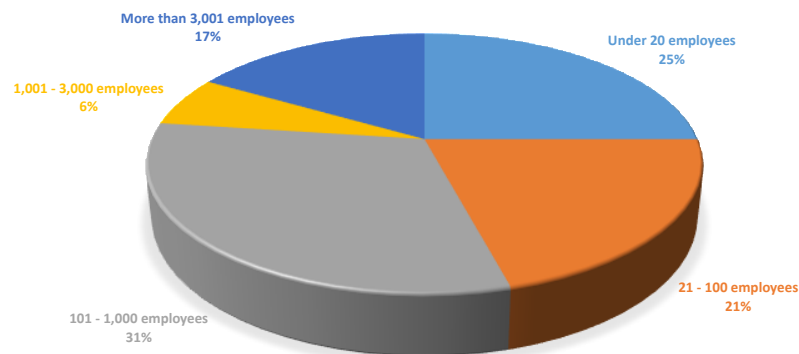
## Respondents sample profile

### Q18. Please indicate your current industry



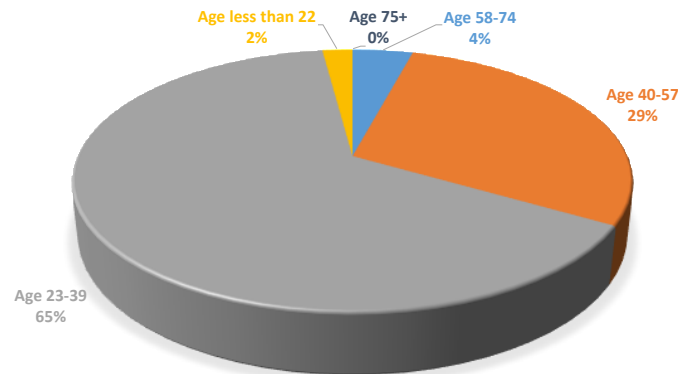
### Survey Respondents Come from a Variety of Industries in Northwest Arkansas

### Q19. What is the size of your company's workforce in Arkansas?



### Twenty-five Percent of Survey Respondents Come from Small Businesses While the Remainder are from Mid to Large Organizations

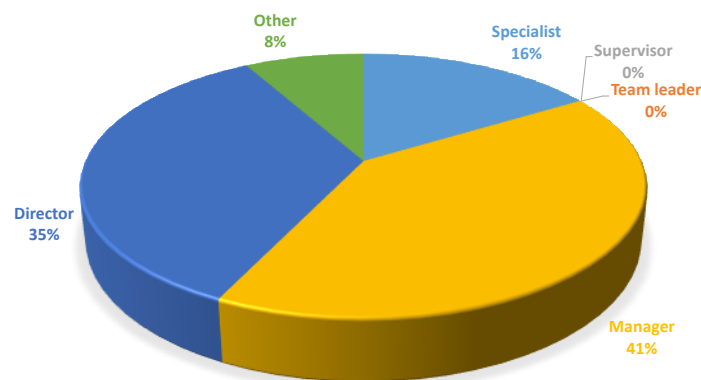
## Q20. What is the largest population by age range in your organization?



### Millennials Comprise the Largest Age Group within Survey Responders' Organizations

Sixty-five percent of survey respondents identify as Millennials (age 23- 39), followed by 29%, Generation X (age 40 – 57), 4%, Baby Boomers (age 58 – 74), and 2%, Generation Z (age 22 and younger).

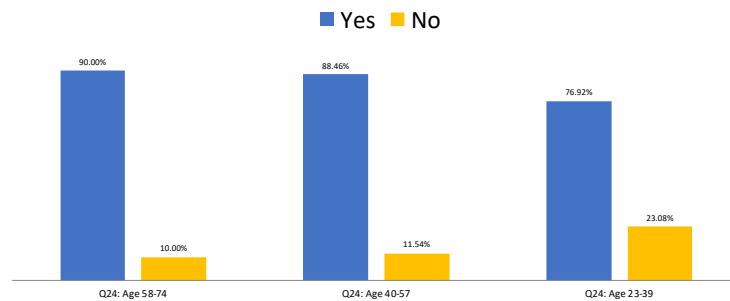
## Q21. Please indicate your current role in the organization



### Over 75% of Survey Respondents Hold the Position of Manager or Higher

Forty-one percent of respondents indicate manager as their current role, while 35% identify as director. The remaining 24% note their roles as specialist or other. There are no responses from those whose job titles are supervisor or team leader.

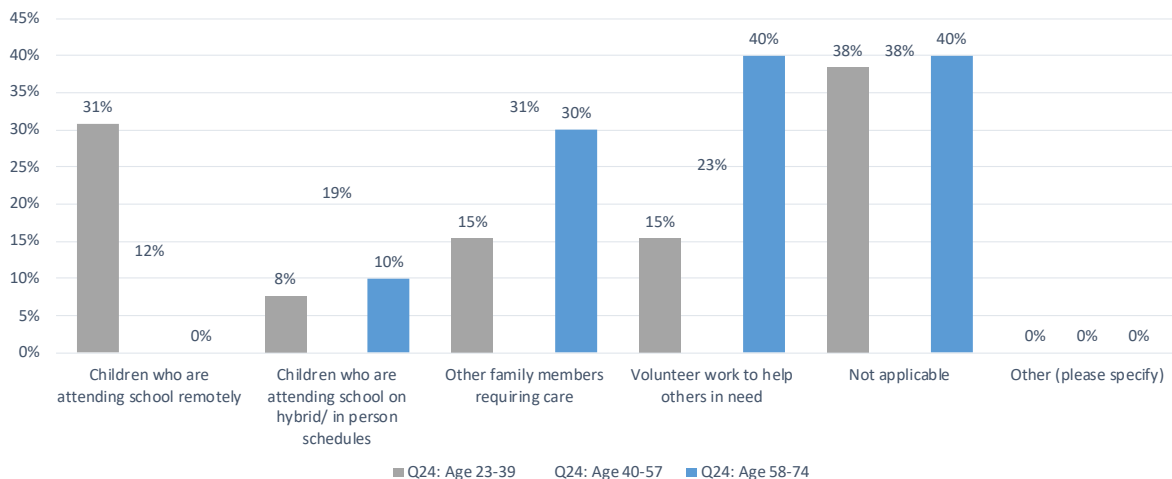
## Q22. Does your current role include HR or people management responsibilities?



### Survey Respondents are Primarily HR Professionals or People Managers

Across all age groups, respondents who identify as HR Professionals and People Managers outnumber non HR Professionals and People Managers by wide margins.

## Q23. In addition to keeping up with work responsibilities during this pandemic, I am also responsible for:

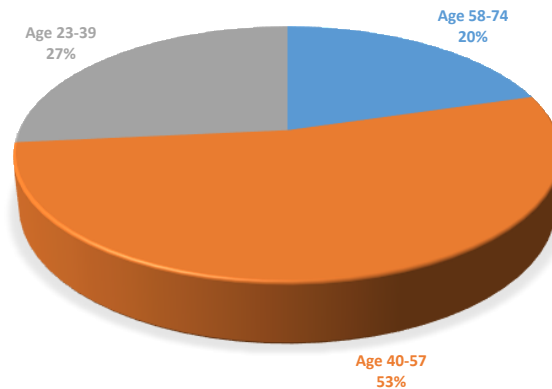


### Survey Respondents are Engaged in a Variety of Outside-of-Work Responsibilities During the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic

Though this graph shows survey respondents dealing a variety of demands outside-of-work, their participation in these activities differs by age. While all age groups rank Not Applicable as the highest response category, young people (age 23 – 39) rank activity associated with children who are attending school remotely as their greatest out-side-of-work activity, while older workers (age 58 – 74) indicate high participation in volunteer work to help others. The next highest activity indicated is care for other family members, noted as such by respondents age 40 – 74.



## Q24. In what age range do you fall?



### Generation X Comprise the Largest Age Group of Survey Responders

Of survey respondents, 53% identify as age 40 – 57 (Generation X), 27%, age 23 -39 (Millennial), and 20%, age 58 – 74 (Baby Boomers). There are no responses from older or younger generations.