



SILICON REEF  
*work happy.*



RESEARCH REPORT - 2022

# **LONELINESS:** **COMBATTING THE HIDDEN** **IMPACT OF HYBRID WORKING** **WITH TECHNOLOGY**

**HOW TO ENABLE A HAPPIER WORKFORCE**



ALEX GRAVES

## A WORD FROM SILICON REEF

We work with organisations to shape and improve their collaboration, productivity, employee engagement and wellbeing through technology. This helps them create a culture that enables employees to work happy.

Because happiness in the workplace is better for everyone: employees, customers and leaders. And it's better for organisations in general because happy workers are 13 per cent more productive, according to Oxford University research. That's why we're keen to understand what's making people unhappy. Since if we understand the problem, we're halfway to solving it.

In this report, we've uncovered some of the negative emotions office and flexible workers are experiencing as they get used to hybrid models. The headline is that many people feel lonely when not in the office and the vast majority think action needs to be taken.

We're keen to do our bit to address this, offering technology to better connect people. Read on to find out what you can do to tackle the loneliness epidemic.

Alex Graves, CEO, Silicon Reef

## A QUICK SUMMARY

We asked office and flexible employees about their experience of working somewhere other than the office, the impact it had and what they'd like to see change for the better. The results were decisive. Here are some of the key findings.



What have you experienced when working somewhere other than the office?

49% Lack of motivation

What impact did this experience have on you?

51% Harder to concentrate

46% Harder to communicate with colleagues

42% Productivity was lower

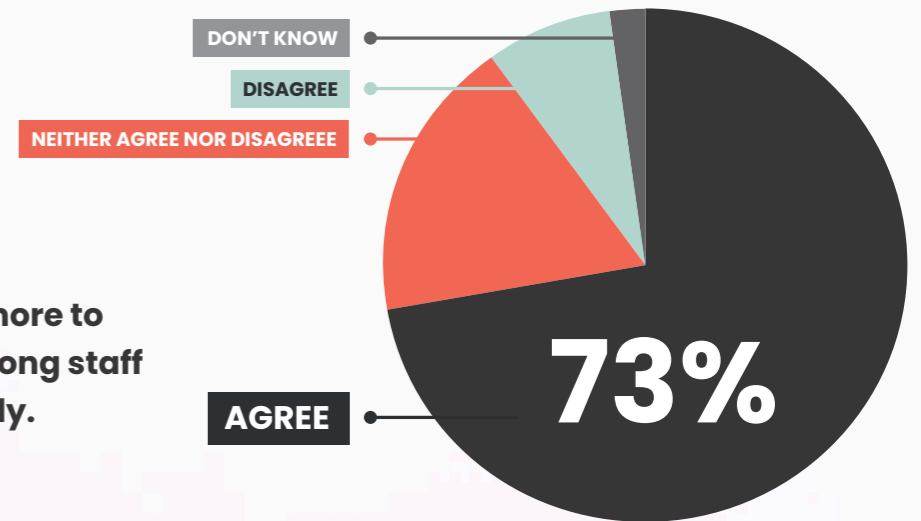
48% Disconnection from colleagues

36%  Loneliness

17% A sense of being hemmed in or constricted



Employers should do more to address loneliness among staff who are working flexibly.



What are your favourite places to work that are not the home or the office?



40%  
A café



26%  
A garden



25%  
A co-working space



14%  
A pub



11%  
In the car



7%  
A tent or caravan

“What’s different about this research is that people now recognise loneliness as a problem and want employers to do more.”

What would most help to improve the remote and hybrid working experience?

44% Opportunities for mental breaks and support

41% More interaction with employees online socially

32% More opportunities for ad hoc communications with colleagues

32% Better ways to share work and get feedback

Why did you choose to work outside of home or the office?

40% To get away from distractions

38% To separate home and work life

28% To stave off loneliness or a feeling of being hemmed in and constricted

26% To feel connected to a community





## THE RISE OF THE "THIRD WORKPLACE" TO STAVE OFF LONELINESS

In this context, two fifths (40%) of employees have taken to working in a location other than the office or at home at least once a month – with most (29%) opting to do so at least once a week. Over a quarter (28%) say they opt for a "third workplace" to stave off loneliness or a feeling of being hemmed in and constricted.

Interestingly, cafes and gardens are more popular than co-working spaces. Many people chose unusual places. This included pubs (14%) cars (11%) and even in a tent or caravan (7%).

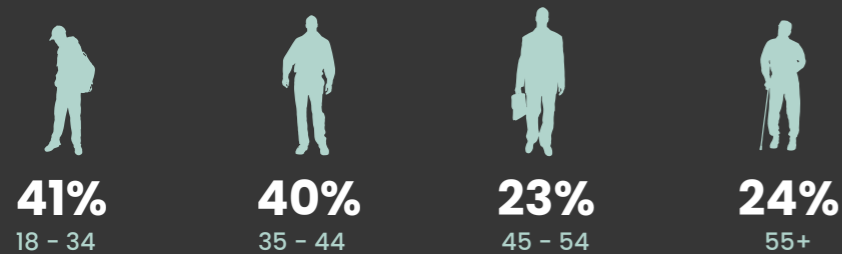
"Two fifths of employees have taken to working in a location other than the office or at home at least once a month. Over a quarter do so to **stave off loneliness** or a feeling of being hemmed in and constricted."

## OFFICE WORKERS CALL FOR ACTION ON THE LONELINESS EPIDEMIC

What stands out of this research is that nearly three quarters (73%) of office workers are calling on employers to do more to address loneliness among staff who are working flexibly. They see it as the responsibility of leaders to take action, and believe this should include introducing opportunities for mental breaks and support (44%) and more social online interaction with employees (41%).

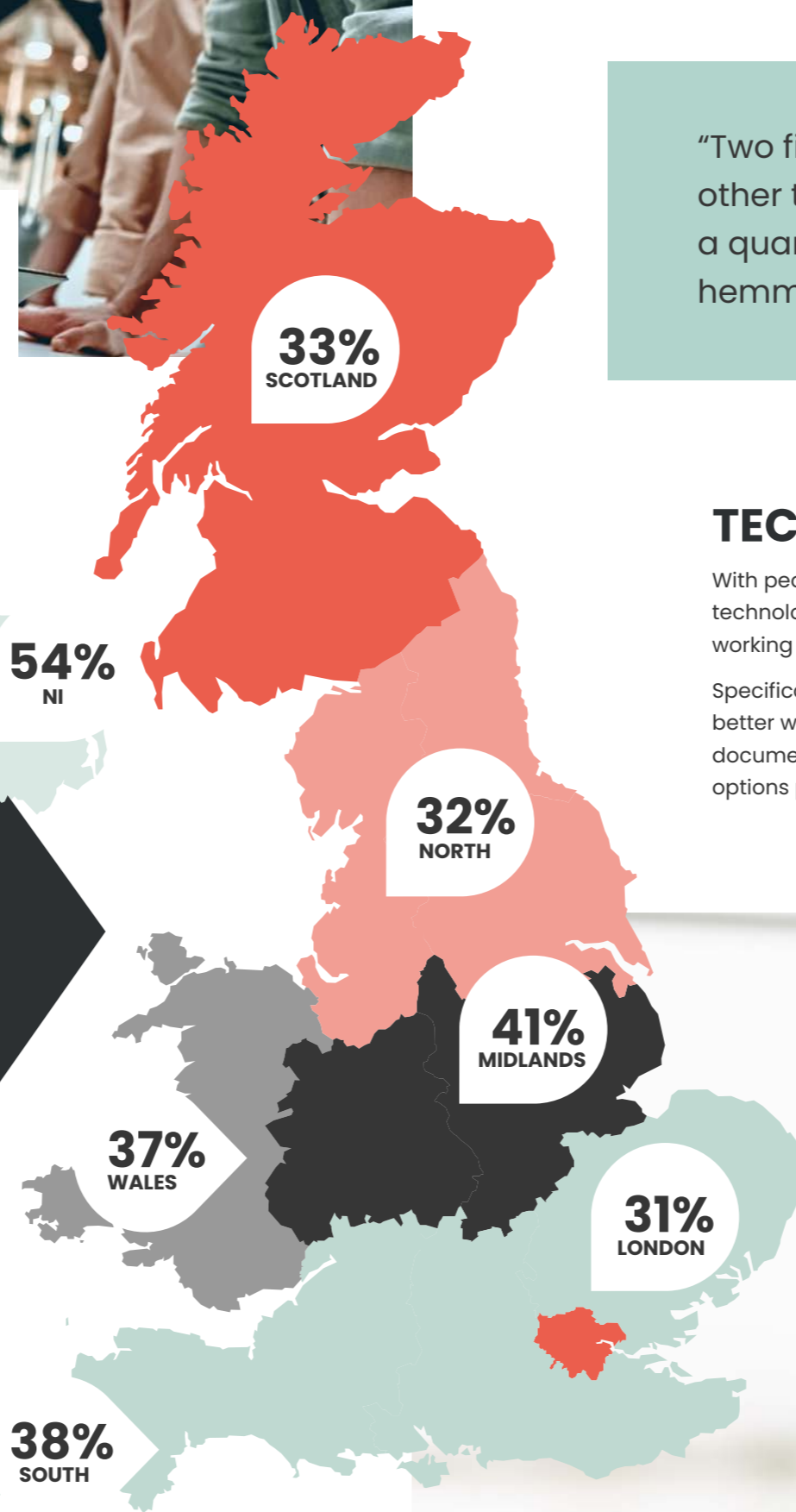
Over a third (36%) of office workers have themselves experienced loneliness when working flexibly. Putting this in context, just 27% of the UK population has contracted COVID at some point. While we can never compare the two, this illustrates that loneliness is at epidemic levels.

### Have you experienced loneliness when working somewhere other than the office?



The issue gets even worse for younger age groups. Nearly twice the number of 18-34 year olds (41%) experienced loneliness compared those aged over 55 (24%).

But loneliness isn't the only issue. Half of all workers felt either a lack of motivation (49%) or disconnection from colleagues (48%). Just a quarter (25%) had felt none of the negative impacts they were questioned about. This has made it harder for them to concentrate (51%), communicate with colleagues (46%) and reduced their sense of productivity (42%).



## TECHNOLOGY NEEDS TO IMPROVE

With people taking matters into their own hands to address their loneliness, many also feel technology is still lagging behind. Half (50%) believe some aspects of remote and hybrid working were introduced hastily and need to change.

Specifically, workers want better ways to message and feel engaged with their team (29%), better ways to join meetings remotely without interruptions (19%) and better ways to share documents quickly and securely (17%). Just 10% of respondents felt none of the technology options put to them would help.



# HOW CAN WE ADDRESS THE LONELINESS EPIDEMIC?

Clearly, we can't solve this intractable and difficult problem overnight. And loneliness can be caused by a complex range of factors. This is why employers need to look for many different solutions that address cultural and management issues.

There is information available on the Government's website and charities can provide advice too. **The Campaign To End Loneliness, Mind** and many other organisations are available to help. But as the Government points out, infrastructure and workplace design play a large role. Technology increasingly forms a part of this.



## We recommend the following in response to actions cited by respondents as likely to improve the remote and hybrid working experience:



Gathering data about employee working practices to understand how they spend their days. This allows leaders to make recommendations about the efficient use of time to boost productivity and wellbeing. This will help address the need for more mental breaks and support, cited by **44%** of respondents.



Using separate and distinct communications platforms throughout a workforce, with one where social interaction is encouraged, such as **Yammer**. This can complement work-based channels such as **Teams**. This will help to boost interaction with employees socially online, cited by **41%** of respondents.



Introducing initiatives such as "coffee roulette" or daily drop-in sessions where colleagues are randomly (or not so randomly) prompted to engage with each other. This helps to create more opportunities for ad hoc communications with colleagues, cited by **32%** of respondents.



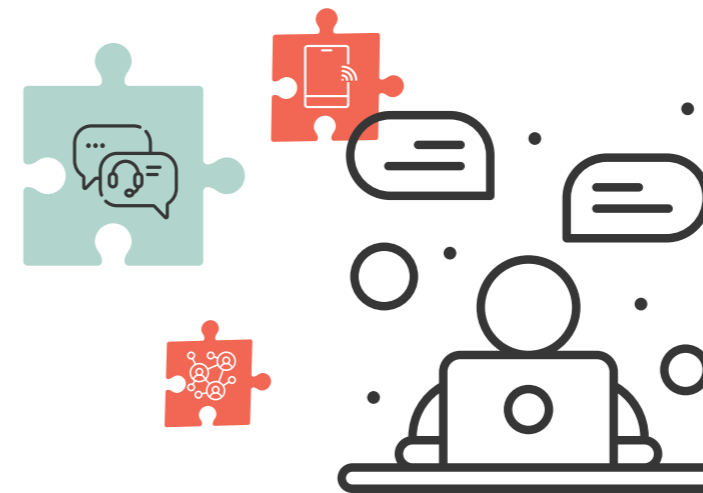
Creating work buddy systems and encouraging people to team up on tasks with virtual or face-to-face meetings. This helps improve ways of sharing work and getting feedback, cited by **32%** of respondents.



Producing training videos and company charters to support employee development. Also consider techniques such as reverse mentoring to ensure more senior staff continue to learn through coaching from juniors. This helps offer better ways to learn and train online, cited by **28%** of respondents.

## NOW'S THE TIME TO TAKE ACTION

Our research has clearly shown that loneliness has become a huge workplace issue in the wake of hybrid and flexible working. And people want action. Leaders should take note, because if left to get worse, we'll have an unhappy workforce and that's no good for anyone – workers, leaders, customers and wider society.



By getting the right technology in place, along with other important steps, we can combat the loneliness epidemic and help people to work happy. Software won't solve everything on its own, but it's a vital piece of the puzzle – and a good place for employers to start. It offers practical and very tangible help.

## METHODOLOGY

The research comprised an online survey of 1,009 people in the UK between 7th and 8th February 2022. They all worked in an office prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was conducted by independent research agency Survation.

To find out more about how we can help you improve your workplace technology visit [www.siliconreef.co.uk](http://www.siliconreef.co.uk), email [info@siliconreef.co.uk](mailto:info@siliconreef.co.uk) or call **0333 939 7976**.