



# White Collar Mental Health Investigation Project

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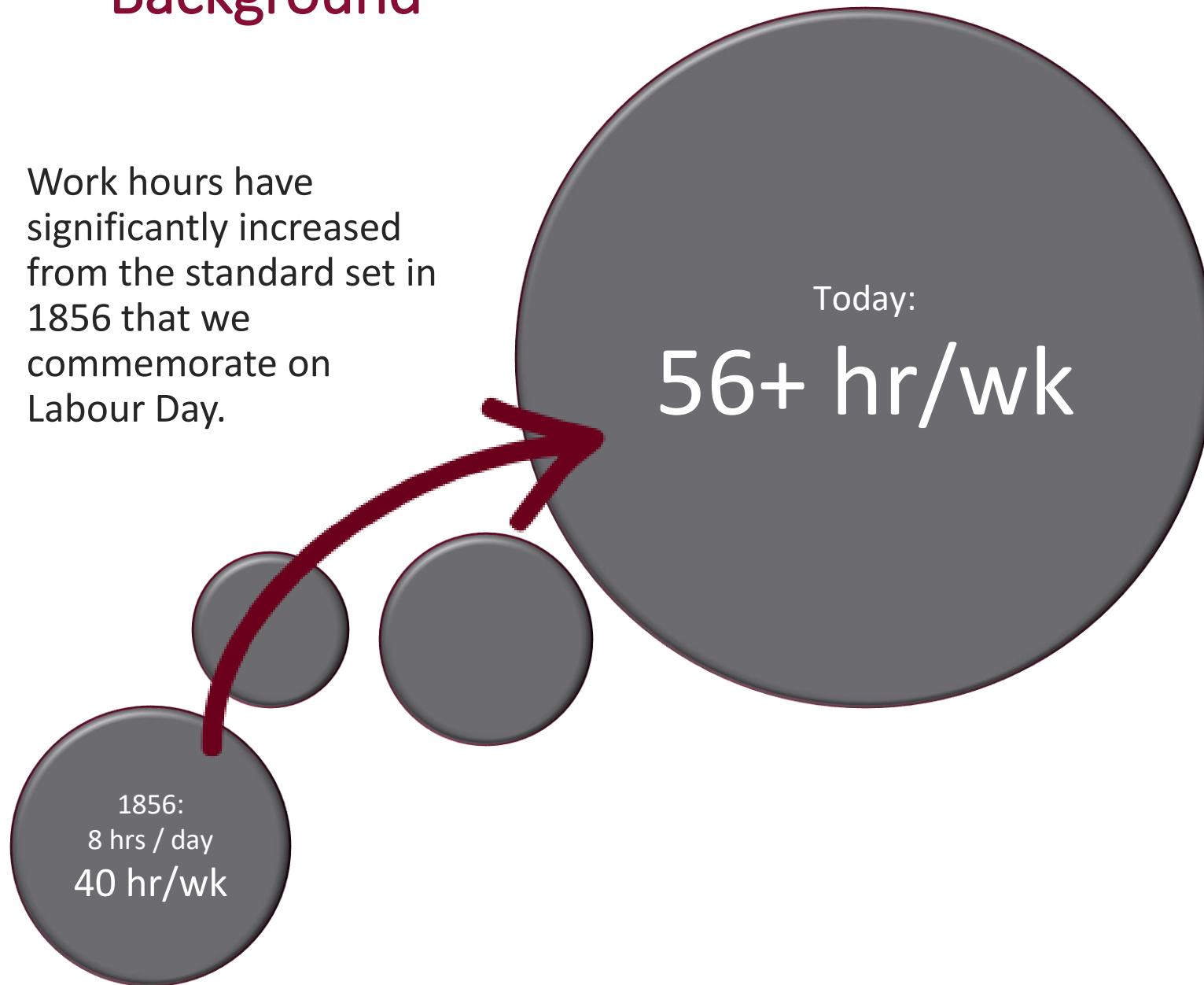
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# Background

Work hours have significantly increased from the standard set in 1856 that we commemorate on Labour Day.



Physically safe work environment.



Mentally safe work environment?

Working in the construction industry correlates with a higher risk of suicide compared to non-construction work<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup>MIC-Annual-suicide-report-MIC-and-Deakin-University

# What contributes to this?

Complex relationships between government, design and contracting parties.

Spiral effect of cost and milestone pressure over time have normalised a culture of long work hours.

The nature of these relationships also acts as a barrier to addressing it



## What Re-Designs could we explore to improve this?

### Reduce workload? ✘

This was seen to be infeasible as it would require changes to common competitive procurement models which individual organisations cannot affect

### Culture of presenteeism? ✔

Simple changes to behaviours stemming from a culture of presenteeism may improve the mental health of the white-collar workforce.

# Hypothesis

Challenging **behaviours** stemming from a **culture** of long work hours, may **reduce the impact** on mental health.

## Workplace Re-Design



Targeted behaviour: not taking lunch breaks

### Intervention #1: Taking Lunch Breaks Away from Desks

*What impact does a 30 minute break and the natural environment have?*

Targeted behaviour: remaining connected after business hours



### Intervention #2: Remove Emails from Phones

*Would this better enable staff to switch off and recharge mentally after hours?*

# Re-Design Roll Out

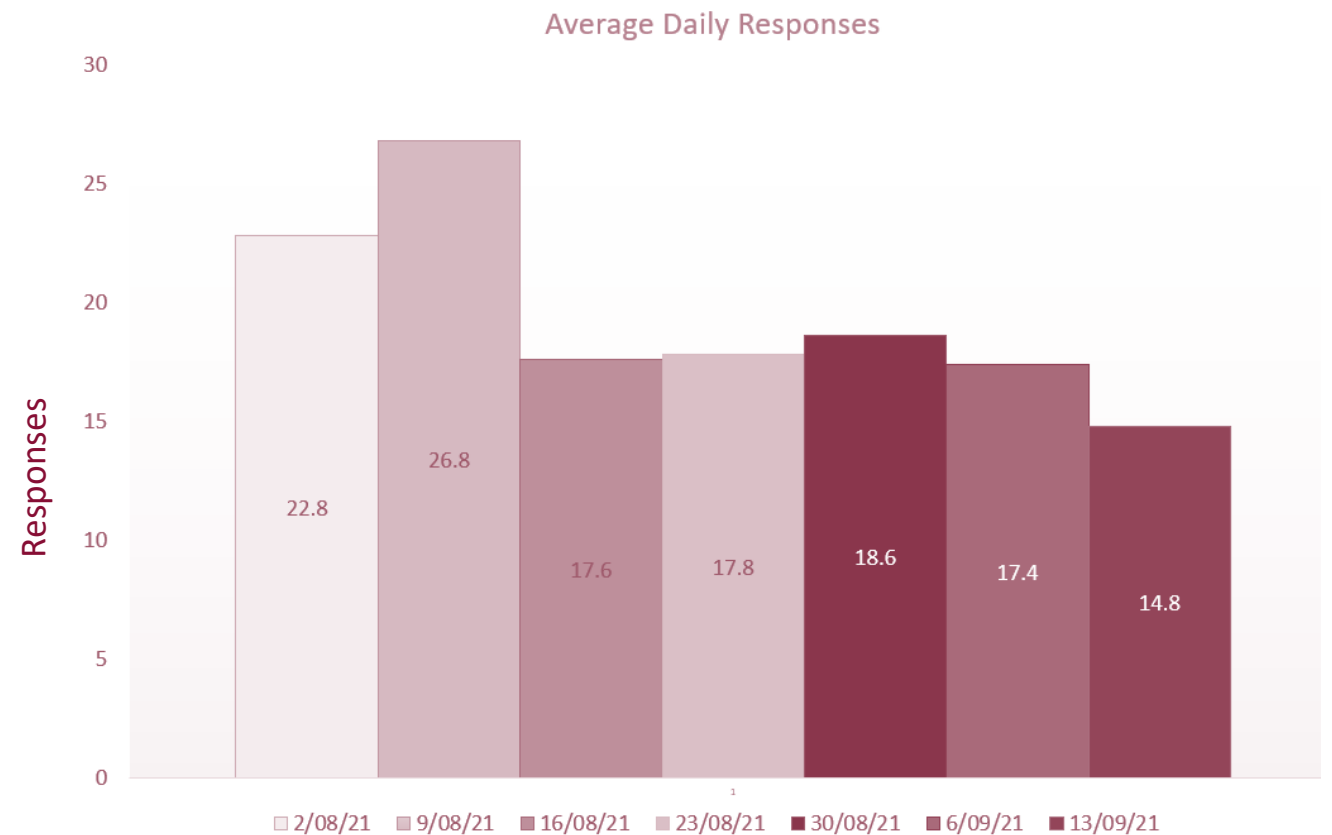
**Participants:** White collar Contractor/Delivery phase operating in Victoria

**Weeks 1 – 4:** No change to work practices  
Daily quantitative work demand survey  
1<sup>st</sup> qualitative survey completed during week 4

**Weeks 5 – 7:** Implementation of Workplace Re-Designs  
Daily quantitative work demand survey  
2<sup>nd</sup> qualitative survey completed upon week 7 end

# Re-Design Engagement

- 53 participants
- 697 responses in total
- Average of 20 responses per day



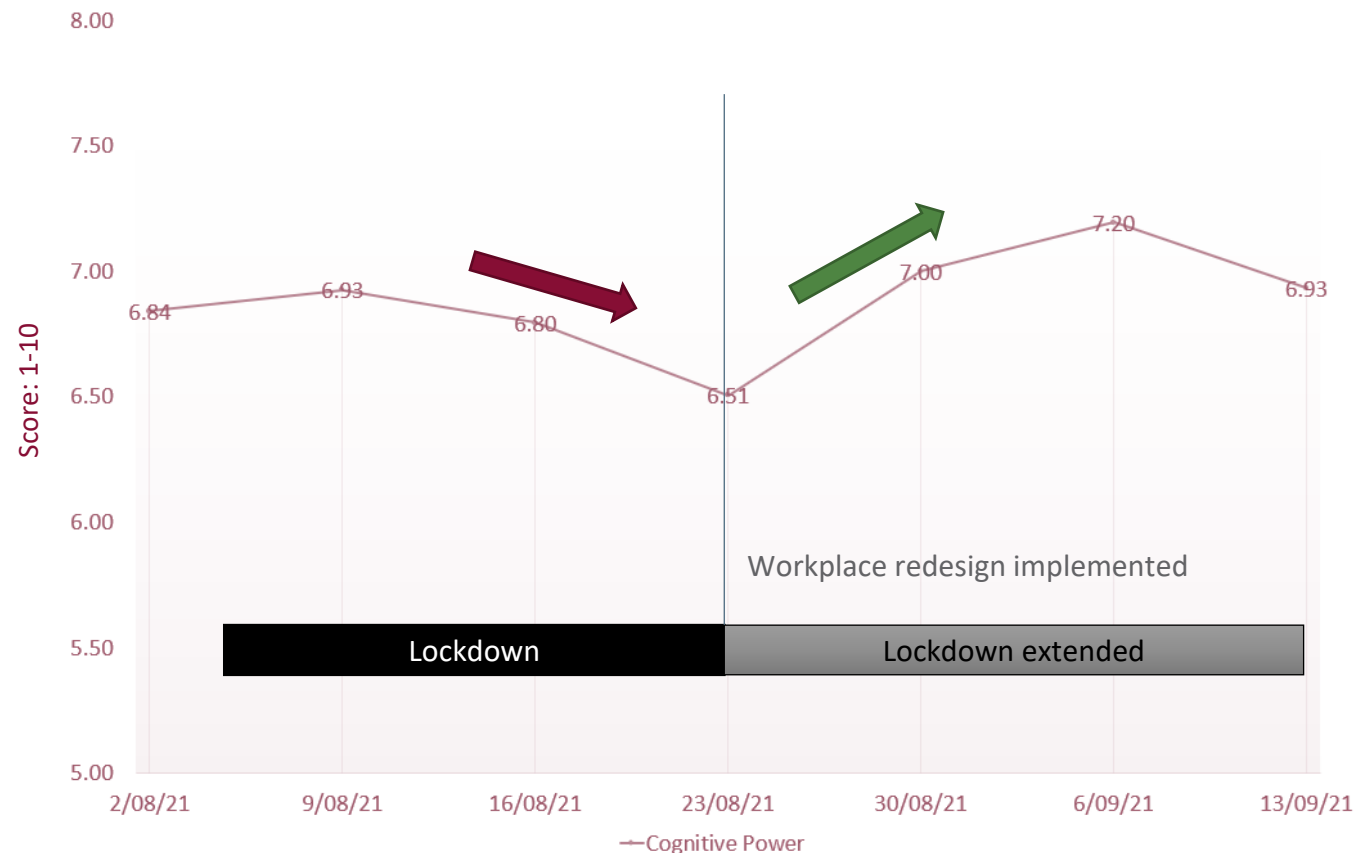
# Results: Impact on Cognitive Power and Anxiety

Did the interventions improve Cognitive Power?

Did the interventions decrease Anxiety?

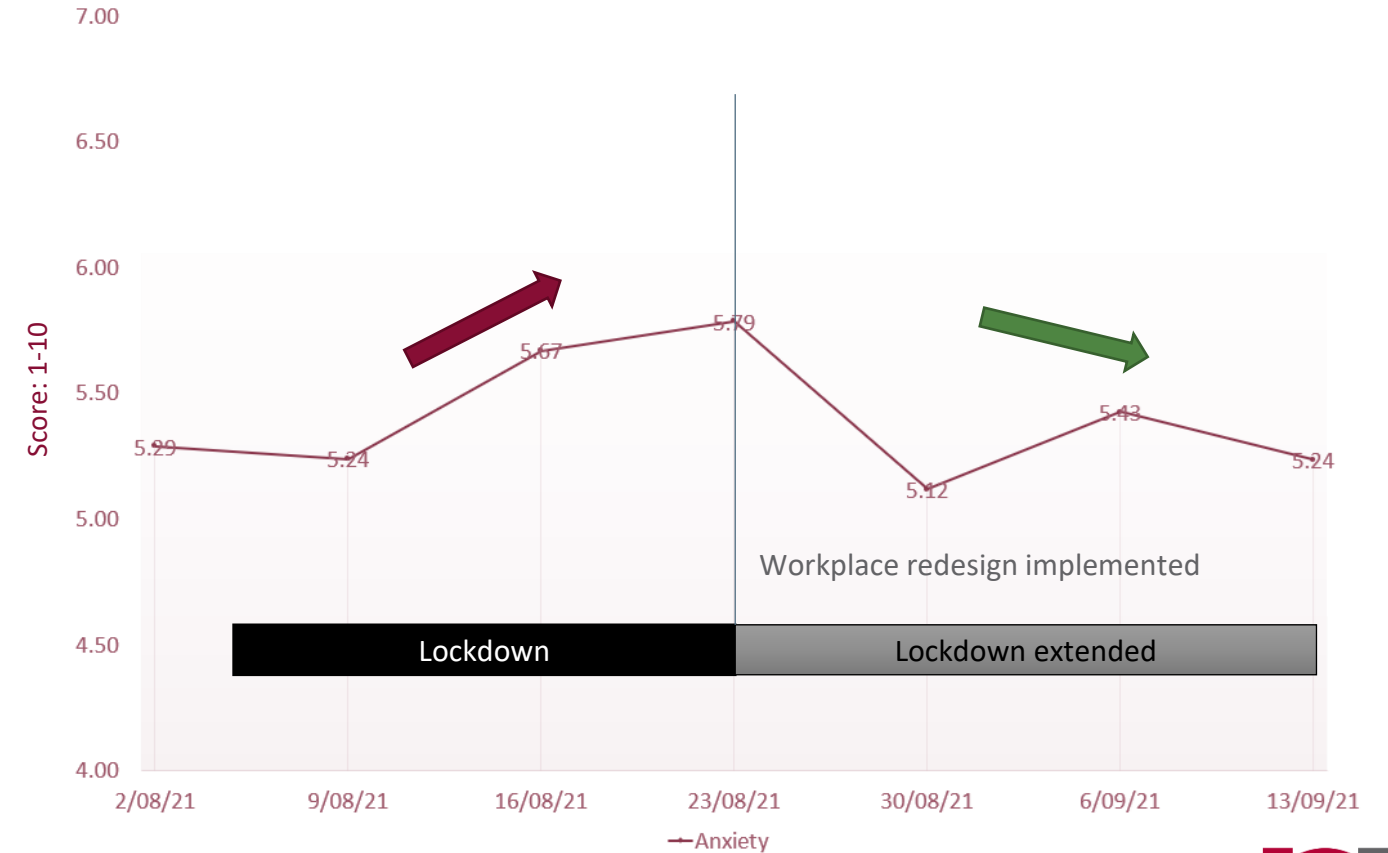
## Findings

- Decline in Cognitive Power during Lockdown
- Increase in Cognitive Power after implementing workplace redesign



## Findings

- Increase in Anxiety during Lockdown
- Decrease in Anxiety after implementing workplace redesign



**Note:** there will be a link between lockdown related activities and anxiety which we didn't design the survey around

2021 Fellowship Group Four – VIC (Contractor/Delivery Phase)



# Results: Types of Lunch breaks

What impact does the type of lunch break have?

## Findings

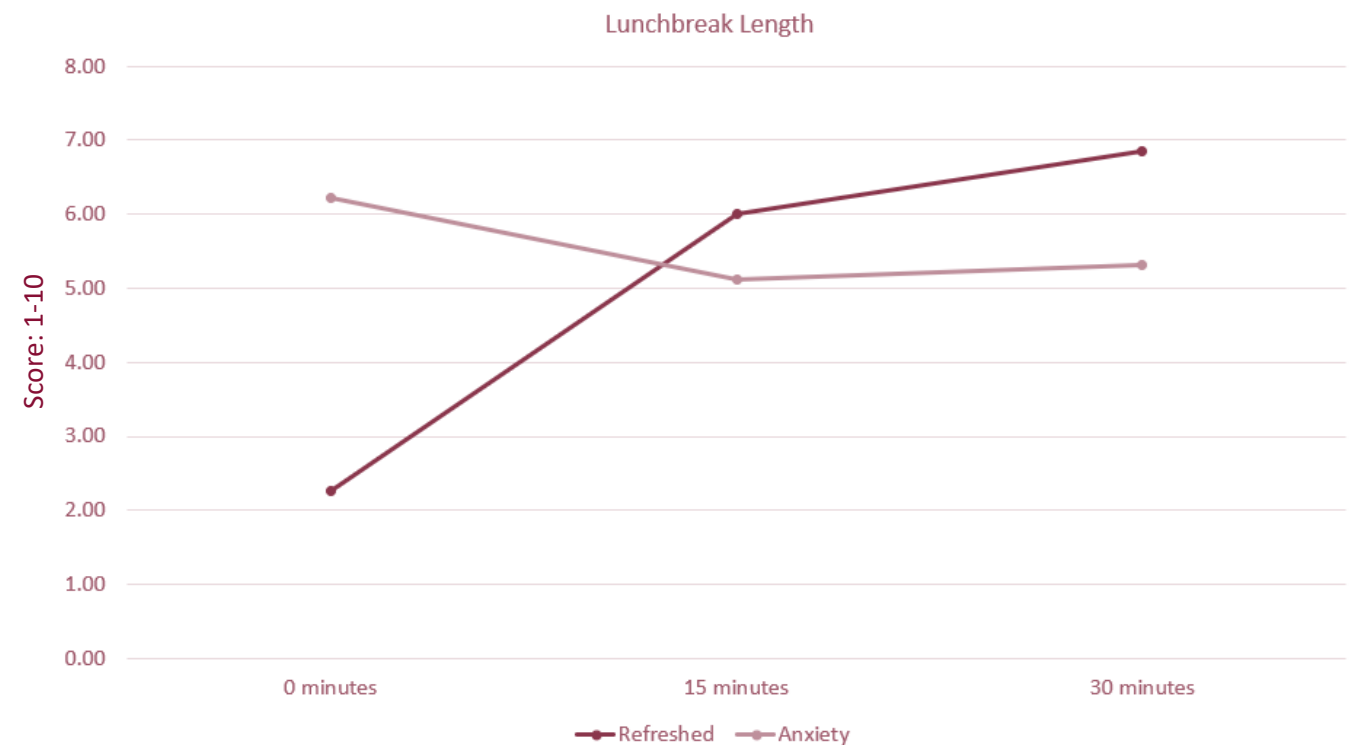
- A lunch taken outside was more refreshing and reduced anxiety over a lunch break inside / at desks
- The number of people taking lunch break increased through the Re-Design



What impact does the length of lunch break have?

## Findings

- Taking even a 15 minute lunch break significantly participant increased Readiness
- Taking a lunch break reduces Anxiety



# Results: Impact on feeling overwhelmed and ability to switch off

How often do you feel overwhelmed by work duties?

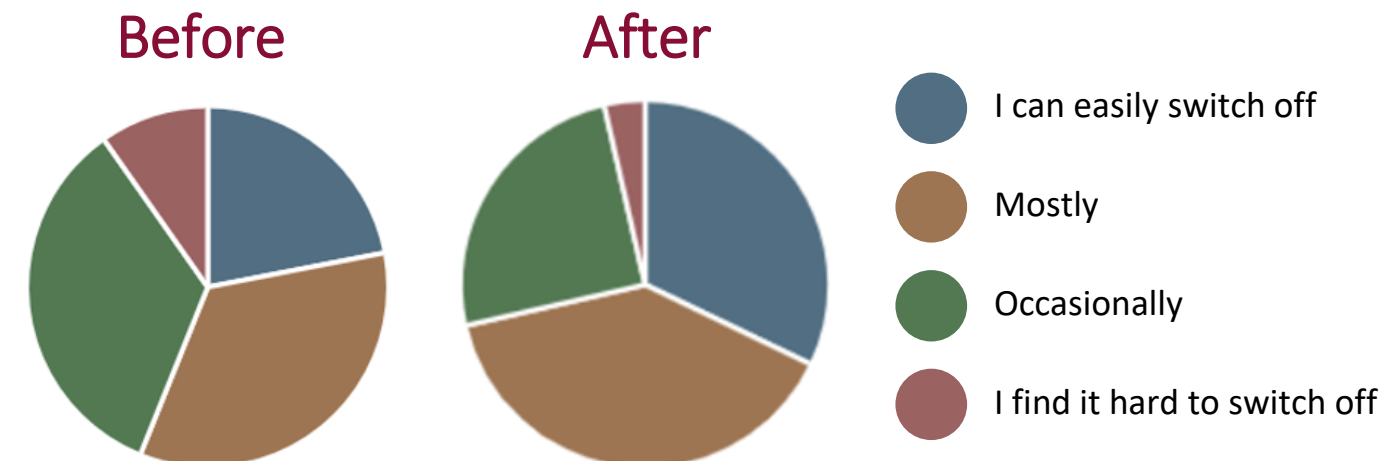
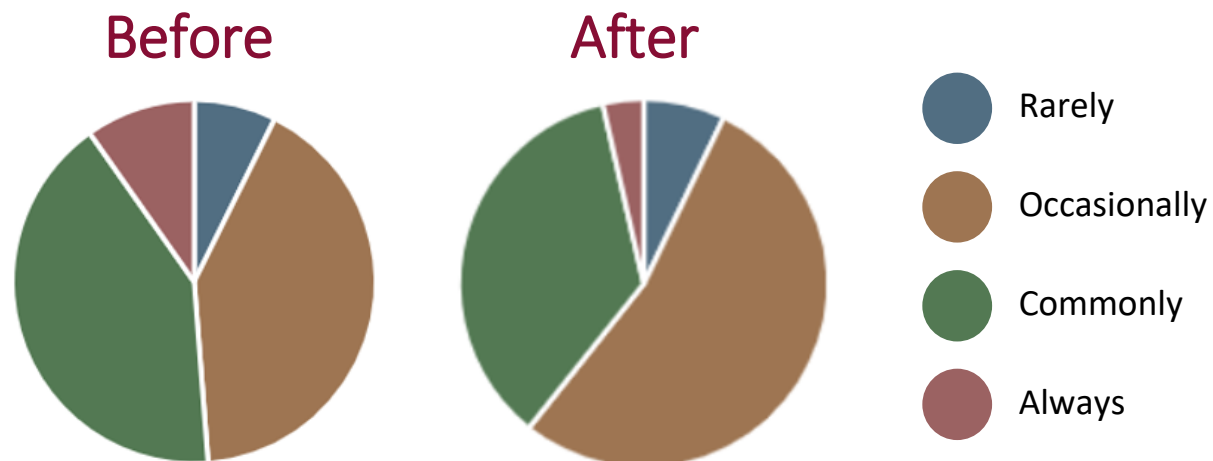
How capable are you of turning off from work?

## Findings

- There was a reduction in rate of employees feeling overwhelmed post the work interventions, consistent with the quantitative data.
- The main drivers for feeling overwhelmed were:
  - Excessive Workload - 22%
  - Balancing personal / family - 21%
  - Dispute / Interpersonal issues - 17%

## Findings

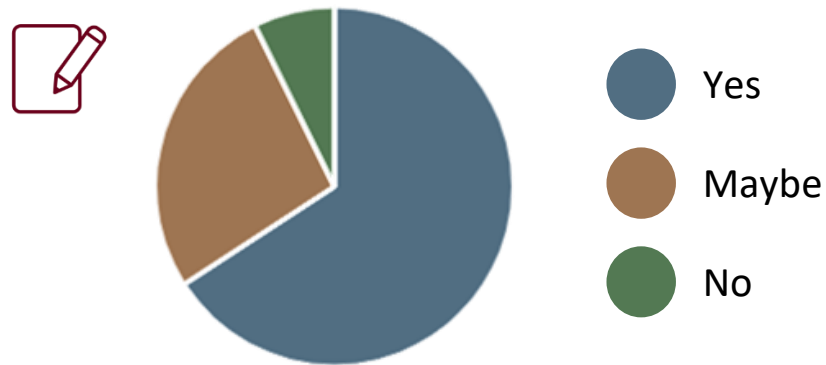
- There was a reduction in the rate of participants who felt incapable of turning off out of business hours, and an increase in the number of participants who felt they could easily switch off, or mostly.
- The work intervention most likely to impact this result is removing emails from mobile phones, however may be indirectly linked to reduced anxiety from a lunch break.



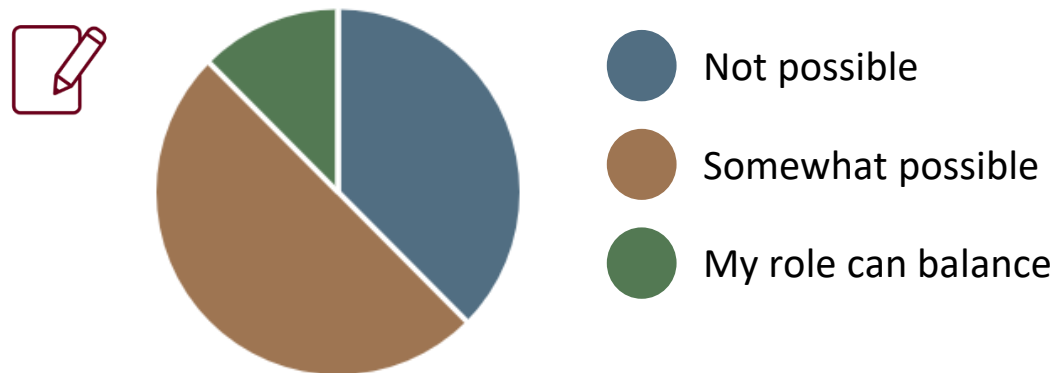


# Results: Other insights

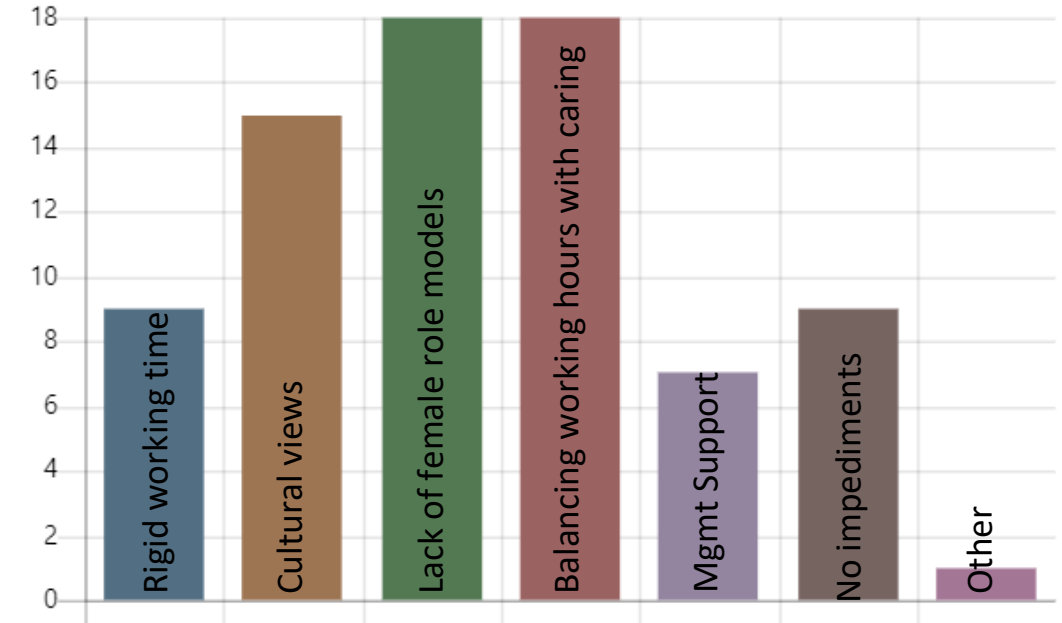
Is construction a long term career option?



Is it harder to balance for parents or others with primary caring responsibilities?



What might be deterring women from the industry?

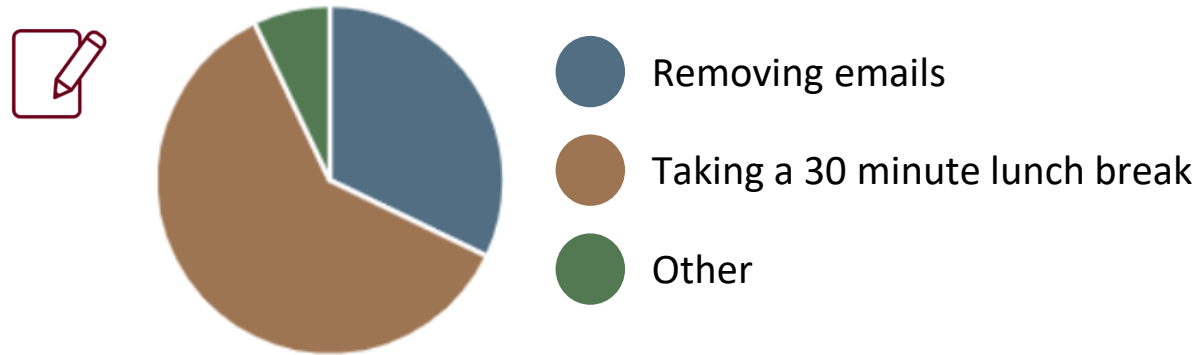


## Findings

- The majority of participants see a career in construction as a sustainable long term career
- Work hours, mental health and workload were listed as potential reasons listed as why the participants might leave the industry
- Around a third of employees believed primary caring responsibilities wouldn't be possible for their role.

# How did the participants feel about the interventions?

What work interventions would you like to take forward?



How confident do you feel to sustain this?  
(1 = not confident, 10 = very confident)

6.21  
Average Number

## Findings

- Overall a positive response to the interventions, with many participants intending to take them forward, in particular around lunch breaks.



# Conclusion

The results **echo research** around working long hours in the construction industry and the **link to mental health**.

Both disconnecting from work after hours and taking lunch breaks show **promising signs** of improvements to mental health.

- We observed a **link between rest and recovery and anxiety levels** the next day believed to be linked to removing emails off mobile phones. Many comments expressed feeling disconnected when removing emails from phones however, so not “one size fits all”.
- The most popular intervention was lunch breaks, and the main benefit appears to be **less about the duration, but the location**. Getting outside, even for a short break, may be an effective of reducing anxiety levels.
- We didn't observe participants working less as a result of the intervention, but did see better outcomes in terms of readiness for the day and decreased anxiety

*Note: a major factor impacting mental health that was not controlled for through this was COVID related lockdowns*



**Even just for a few minutes, disconnect and head outside**



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**Thank you for your time**

