

2020 SURVEY TOPIC BRIEF

BY THE STRUCTURAL ENGINEERING ENGAGEMENT AND EQUITY COMMITTEE
OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF STRUCTURAL ENGINEERS ASSOCIATIONS

WORK FLEXIBILITY

The 2020 SE3 Work Flexibility Brief explores the state of flexibility in the structural engineering profession based on the responses to a nation-wide survey. In developing the 2020 SE3 survey questions for this topic, the Committee sought to understand the desirability and acceptability of several flexibility benefits such as remote work, schedule flexibility, options to take a leave of absence, and how these vary amongst demographic groups.

The development timeline of the 2020 SE3 Survey uniquely aligned with corporate response in the United States to the COVID-19

pandemic. This topic brief explores the adjustments in location and hours participants made to continue working during the effects of COVID-19 and how they compare to flexible work arrangements pre-COVID. At the time of publication, the COVID-19 pandemic is ongoing in the United States and many people are still working in altered work situations. Results in this section indicated as “pre-COVID” refer to a respondent’s “typical” work experiences prior to early March 2020 and results presented as “during COVID” refer to a respondent’s opinions and experiences collected from April through June of 2020.

BRIEF HIGHLIGHTS

1. The majority of survey respondents (59%) were satisfied or very satisfied with work-life balance.
2. Respondents with school aged children were more likely to be satisfied than those with no dependents.
3. Pre-COVID, the majority of respondents reported rarely or never working from home.
4. During COVID, 46% of respondents opinion of working remotely improved.

SATISFACTION WITH WORK-LIFE BALANCE

The 2020 SE3 Survey asked respondents to rate their satisfaction of work-life balance based on a five point scale--very dissatisfied, dissatisfied, neutral, satisfied, or very satisfied. Of all the respondents, 59% reported satisfied or very satisfied, 23% were neutral and 18% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

Satisfaction with work-life balance correlates with other job satisfaction levels; respondents who reported satisfaction with work-life balance tended to be satisfied with other job satisfaction metrics. For example, 75% of respondents who reported dissatisfaction with work-life balance also reported dissatisfaction with their overall career while 67% of respondents who reported satisfaction with work-life balance also reported satisfaction with their overall career. The SE3 Committee observed similar relationships between satisfaction with work-life balance and satisfaction with flexibility, gross income, advancement, professional development opportunities, among others.

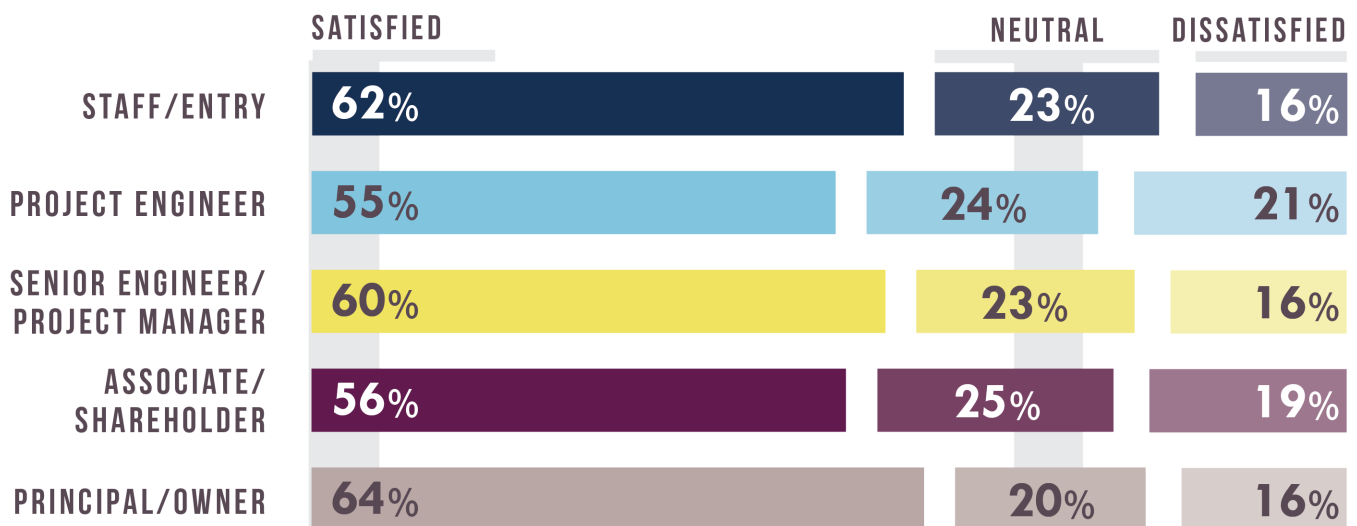
WHAT CHANGED?

Respondents of the 2020 SE3 Survey reported similar levels of satisfaction with work-life balance as respondents to the 2018 SE3 Survey. Of all 2018 respondents, 56% reported satisfaction with their work-life balance, 23% were neutral and 21% were dissatisfied. The survey responses in 2018 were not broken down by race, gender or position title. Additionally, satisfaction with work-life balance was the lowest scoring category out of the survey's primary satisfaction metrics in the 2018 cycle. Other higher scoring satisfaction metrics included satisfaction with pay/compensation and with overall career.

PREDICTORS OF SATISFACTION WITH WORK-LIFE BALANCE

The Committee found that satisfaction with work-life balance varies with position and having dependents. For example, the majority of respondents at each position level are satisfied or very satisfied with their work-life balance. However, Entry Level Staff and Principals are most likely to be satisfied, and Project Engineers or Associates are least likely to be satisfied with work-life balance. 62% of Entry Level Staff and 64% of Principals reported satisfaction with work-life balance compared to 55% of Project Engineers and 56% of Associates, respectively. Conversely, 21% of Project Engineers and 19% of associates reported dissatisfaction with work-life balance compared to 16% of Entry Level Staff, Senior Engineers, and Principals.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE SATISFACTION BY POSITION TITLE



4,815
Total
Respondents

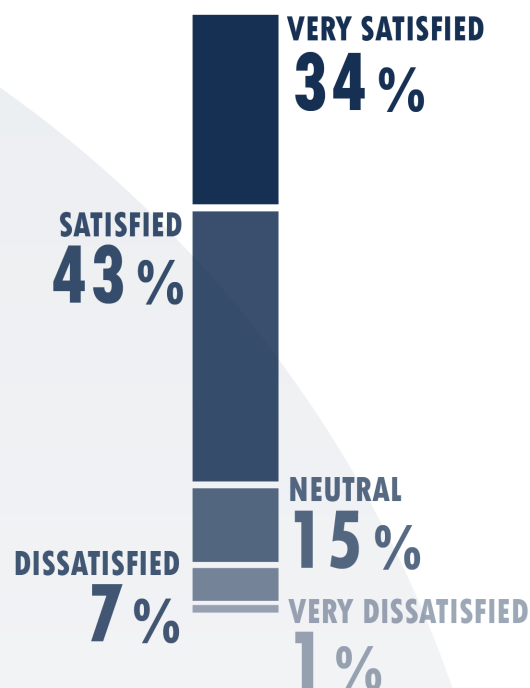
When controlling for other variables, the strongest predictors of satisfaction with work-life balance are if working reduced hours pre-COVID was acceptable, position, experiencing discrimination or harassment, having dependents, and frequency of feedback. As an example, someone who reported reduced hours being acceptable pre-COVID was almost twice as likely to be satisfied with work-life balance than a respondent who reported reduced hours were not acceptable pre-COVID. Regarding dependents, a respondent with school-aged children was approximately 1.25 times more likely to report satisfaction while a respondent with adult children was 1.5 times more likely to report satisfaction as compared to a respondent with no dependents.

SATISFACTION WITH WORK FLEXIBILITY

Satisfaction with work flexibility was the highest ranked category of the 2020 survey primary satisfaction metrics. Using the same five point scale as satisfaction with work-life balance, 77% of all respondents indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied with work flexibility, 15% were neutral, and 8% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

The 2020 survey investigated the desirability of different flexibility benefits, including daily schedule flexibility, weekly schedule flexibility, option to work remotely, option to work a reduced schedule and option to take a leave of absence or sabbatical. Daily schedule flexibility (which hours and how many hours in a given day) was the most desirable, with 93% of respondents describing it as desirable. Weekly schedule flexibility (which days and how many in a week) and the option to work remotely were the other two most desirable benefits, with more than 85% of respondents indicating these as desirable.

The results vary significantly by gender for benefits like reduced schedule and leaves of absence. 73% of women indicated the option to work reduced schedules as desirable compared to 54% of men, and 77% of women indicated the option to take a leave of absence as desirable compared to 60% of men. The survey also asked more specific questions about reduced schedules. The majority of survey respondents (85%) have never requested a reduced work schedule. But of those who have, the majority of requests were accepted. Only 17% of those who asked were denied a request to work reduced schedules. Men were more likely than women to be denied a request; 20% of men compared to 15% of women.



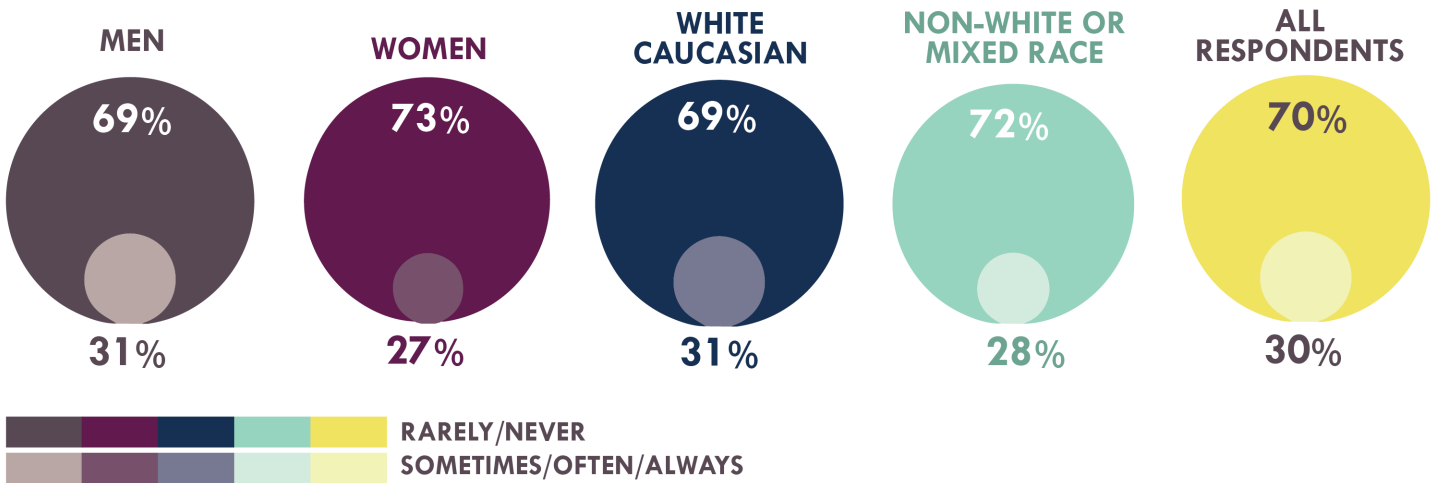
WORKING REMOTELY PRE-COVID

Responses to previous SE3 surveys have indicated that working remotely is a consistently desired flexibility benefit. As such, the 2020 SE3 survey asked several questions on this topic. In addition, the 2020 SE3 survey was undergoing final development in March 2020, when many states and local jurisdictions began imposing stay-at-home orders. Prior to release, the SE3 Committee modified the survey questions to capture a respondents opinion and experience of remote work both pre-COVID and during COVID.

Pre-COVID, the majority of total respondents (70%) reported rarely or never working from home and 30% of respondents reported working from home sometimes, often or always. "Rarely" was defined as less than once per month, "sometimes" as 1-4 times per month, and "often" as 1-4 times per week.

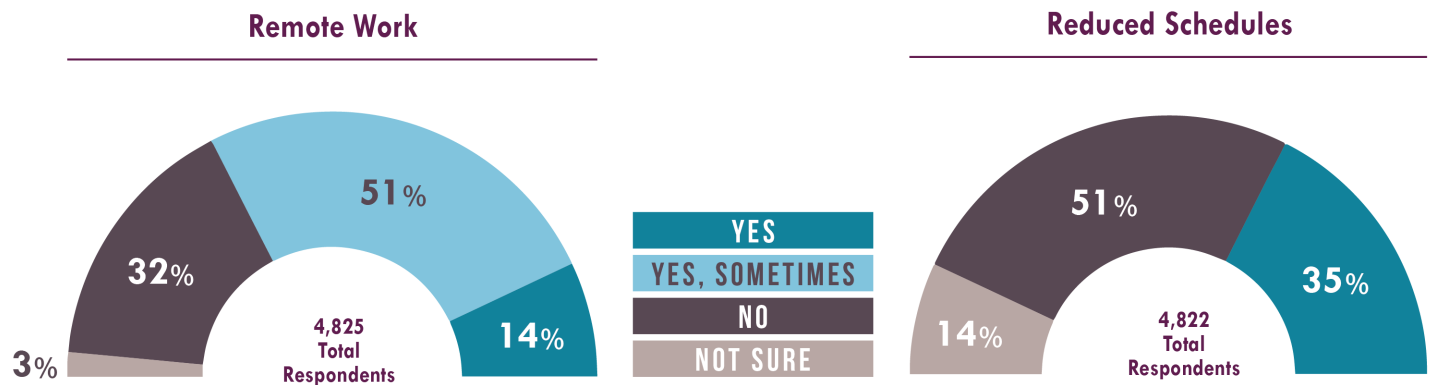
The responses varied slightly by race and gender. Women and non-white respondents were less likely than men and white respondents to work from home pre-COVID. 73% of women reported working from home rarely or never compared to 69% of men. 72% of non-white respondents reported working from home rarely or never compared to 69% of white respondents.

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS THAT WORKED FROM HOME PRE-COVID



The Committee studied the relationship of position level and having dependents on working from home pre-COVID. Survey respondents with no children were the least likely to work remotely pre-COVID. 80% of respondents with no children reported working from home never or rarely as compared to 60% of all other respondents. Increasing position level was associated with increased frequency of working from home. 14% of respondents at the lowest two position levels (Staff and Project Engineer) reported sometimes, often or always working from home compared to 40% of respondents at the highest three position levels (Senior Engineer, Associate/Shareholder and Principal/Owner). 16% of Principal/Owner respondents reported always working from home, a percentage significantly higher than all other positions.

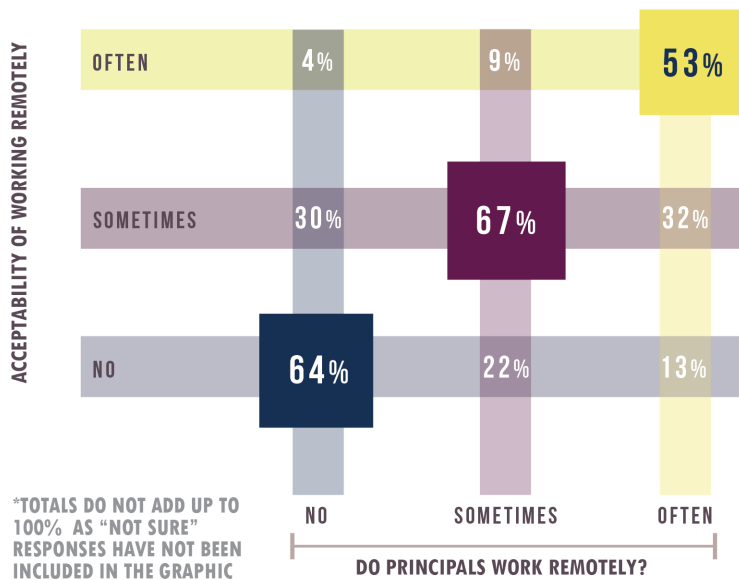
ACCEPTABILITY OF REMOTE WORK & REDUCED SCHEDULES PRE-COVID



The 2020 Survey investigated further the acceptability of remote work and reduced schedules before COVID. For remote work, 65% of respondents indicated they felt it was acceptable (14% often and 51% sometimes), 32% of respondents felt it was not acceptable, and 3% were not sure. For reduced schedules, 35% of respondents felt it was acceptable, 51% felt it was not acceptable, and 14% were not sure.

Additionally, a higher position level and increased age were both associated with an increased perception that remote work was acceptable pre-COVID. Respondents who worked at smaller firms were less likely than those who worked at larger firms to perceive remote work as acceptable pre-COVID.

ACCEPTABILITY OF REMOTE WORK VS. PRINCIPALS REMOTE WORK PRE-COVID



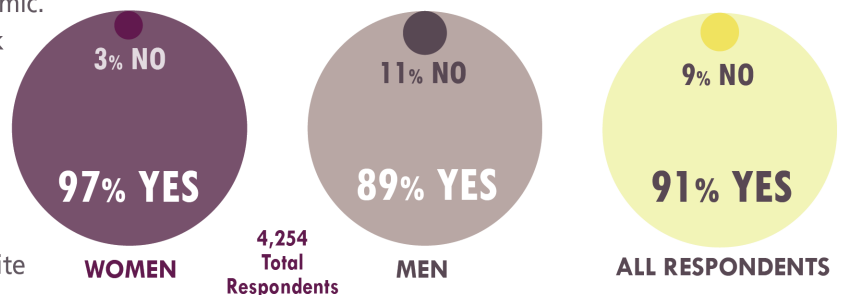
Interestingly, the respondents' opinion of acceptability correlated strongly with whether principals at their firm worked remotely or worked reduced schedules.

Respondents who worked at firms where principals took advantage of these flexibility benefits were more likely to feel it was acceptable, and the inverse is also true.

WORKING REMOTELY DURING COVID

Open participation of the survey occurred in April, May and June of 2020 which coincided with the first wave of COVID-19 pandemic infections throughout the United States. As evidenced by survey responses before and during COVID, the pandemic significantly impacted the daily work circumstances of the survey respondents. 91% of the total respondents reported working from home during COVID. As compared to working remotely pre-COVID, there was a significant increase in respondents working from home during the pandemic.

Of all groups, principals were the least likely to work from home (77%) during the pandemic. This is in contrast to pre-COVID times when principals/CEOs were the most likely to work remotely. When broken down by gender, 97% of women reported working from home during COVID compared to 89% of men. No significant differences between white and non-white respondents were reported.



OPINION OF REMOTE WORK POST-COVID

The 2020 SE3 Survey asked respondents to indicate if their opinion of remote work had changed as a result of COVID as compared to their pre-COVID opinion. The majority of respondents (80%) reported having a better or similar opinion of remote work as compared to pre-COVID times. 16% of respondents reported a worse opinion and the remaining respondents (4%) were unsure.

When looking at the data by position level, SE3 found that Staff/entry level respondents were the more likely to report a worse opinion (21%) compared to 15% of other respondents. When responses were examined based on having dependents, SE3 found that respondents with no children, young children or school-age children were more likely to report a better opinion (47%) compared to respondents with adult children or other dependents (38%).



WHAT CHANGED?

As a result of COVID, the majority of respondents (80%) indicated their opinion of remote work was better than or similar to their previous opinion.

SE3



NCSEA
National Council of Structural Engineers Associations

The information contained in this report was gathered from an NCSEA sponsored survey administered online by the SE3 Committee in early 2020. The survey is an on-going effort to identify trends, to understand the underlying factors, and to initiate conversations on engagement and equity within the profession. The 2020 SE3 Survey was developed with a focus on key study topics; including career development, compensation, work flexibility, and overall retention, among others. While we believe the information presented in this document is an accurate, unbiased representation of the data received in the survey, the matters discussed are sometimes subject to differences in opinion or approach. As such, neither NCSEA nor its Board, committees, writers, editors, firms, or individuals who have contributed to this report make any warranty, expressed or implied, or assume any legal liability or responsibility for the use or reference to findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed herein.

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