



Deskless Not Voiceless 2020

Frontline Research Report: Global Summary



When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, many frontline employees - including shop assistants, store managers and fleet managers - were hailed as 'heroes'. **But how valued do they really feel at work?** And how well do their office-based colleagues actually understand them?

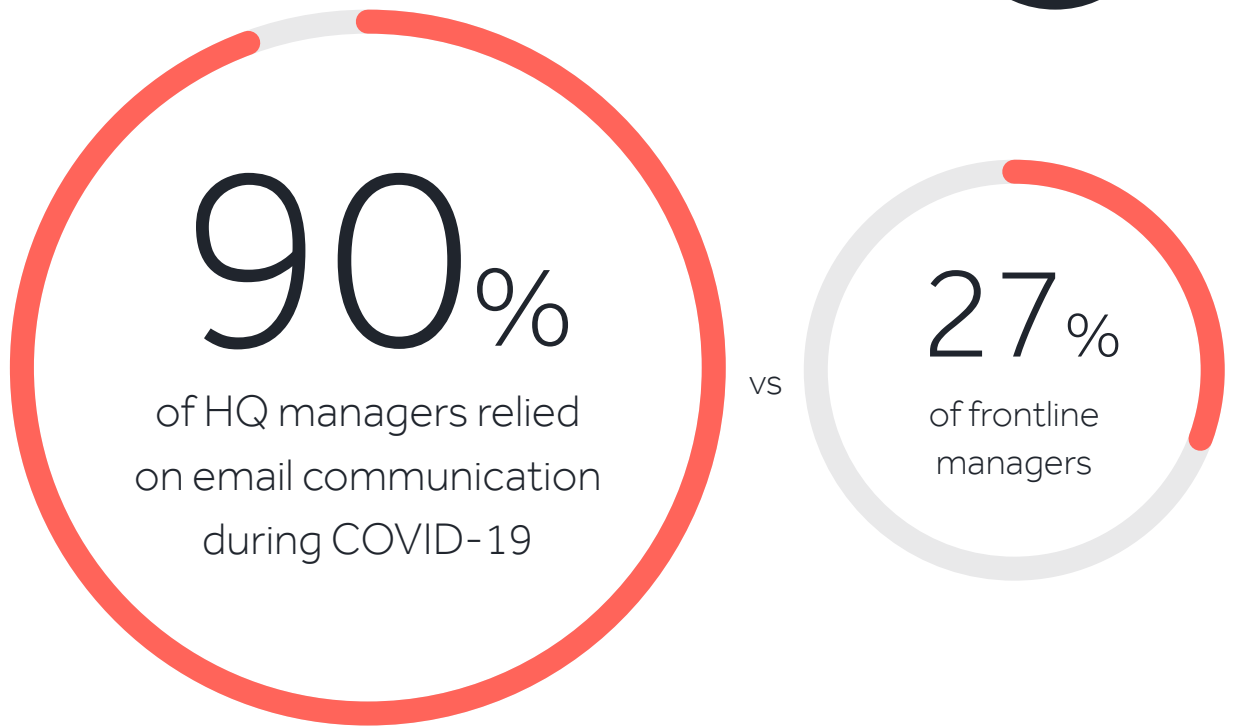


To find out, we commissioned a new research study based on conversations with 9,000 managers in eight countries, split equally between frontline and head office roles. Why frontline managers? Not only are they the crucial link between what's happening in HQ and on the ground, they can directly oversee up to 80% of the workforce¹. This research uncovered three major barriers preventing them from fulfilling their potential. As a result, **51% of frontline managers don't feel valued by their business.**



Why does this matter? Because frontline employees are the face of your business to customers. When they're more informed, engaged and motivated they deliver better experiences for those customers which, in turn, leads to tangible outcomes like increased loyalty and higher revenue. So it's more important than ever to connect the dots across your company.





The connection gap

COVID-19 has forced companies to double down on internal communication. That's been good for employees - the number of frontline managers who think there's a communication gap in their organization has dropped from 60% to 25% since the pandemic.

But the picture isn't entirely rosy. In fact, there is a critical gap in communication platforms. While **90% of HQ managers relied on email to communicate during lockdown, barely a quarter of their frontline counterparts did the same**. Instead, over half of frontline managers turned to messaging apps on their personal devices. So even as the communication gap shrinks, the connection gap persists.



The empowerment gap

The research shows that companies are trying to do more to give frontline managers a voice. Before COVID-19, only 37% said they were regularly consulted on business decisions that affect customers, despite dealing with those customers every day². That number is now up to 43%. But elsewhere, things look bleaker.

Tellingly, the percentage of frontline managers who say that strategic decision making happens mostly or only on the frontline has dropped from 46% to 41%. While **the number who feel empowered to actually make decisions has dropped even more sharply - from 64% to 50%**. In contrast, the number of HQ leaders who say they're empowered to make decisions has grown from 71% to 78%. Frontline managers might have a voice, but they aren't being given the opportunity to use it.



The culture gap

Many office-based workers had their own taste of being disconnected during lockdown - and they didn't like it at all. The research shows they feel less valued, less consulted and less recognized for their efforts. And yet **only 25% say their empathy for frontline colleagues has increased.** This will come as a surprise to the 59% of frontline managers who think their colleagues in HQ now better understand the issues they're facing. Clearly, there's still a culture gap to be bridged.





Closing the gaps

The good news is that there are positive trends emerging from lockdown. When asked what they think are the most important ingredients in a high-performance culture, leaders in HQ put **'empowerment'** and **'communication'** in the first two spots.

But there's work to be done. That includes bringing frontline and HQ together on a single, shared platform to ensure they're truly connected. It means empowering frontline managers to make decisions to drive greater agility and innovation. And it means investing in a culture that creates mutual recognition and alignment. Only then can you tap into the hidden potential of your frontline to deliver the kind of exceptional customer experiences that drive real business value.



Workplace is a communications tool that connects everyone in your organization including frontline employees - even if they don't have an email address. Check out our new guide, [7 Must-Do's to Connect and Empower Frontline Workers](#), to discover how you can bridge the gap between frontline and HQ.



Sources

Unless otherwise stated, all data is based on research conducted by Coleman Parkes and commissioned by Workplace from Facebook among 4,500 frontline managers and 4,500 HQ leaders in eight countries (UK, US, France, Norway, Brazil, Mexico, Australia and Japan). The research was carried out in two parts. The first part in February 2020, and again in August 2020 to better understand the reality for business leaders in organizations with frontline employees today.

- 1: Harvard Business Review, 2011
- 2: Censuswide, 'Deskless Not Voiceless' (study commissioned by Workplace), 2019