



TRA

FIRST  
FIVE ©  
RUNGS

 Commercial  
Communications  
Council

# GIVING NEWCOMERS THE BEST POSSIBLE START

*A First Five Rungs X TRA research project delving into the needs and  
experiences of those new to the communications industry*



# WE EXIST TO HELP GIVE INDUSTRY NEWCOMERS THE BEST POSSIBLE START

As a committee, we represent the perspectives of young people from all kinds of agencies and roles within the communications industry. We know that starting out in a job isn't easy, so want to share as much advice, support and connection as needed to help industry newcomers climb up the ladder with ease.

We have committee members across Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland) and Te Whanganui-a-Tara (Wellington) - and are always available for a coffee or a chat!

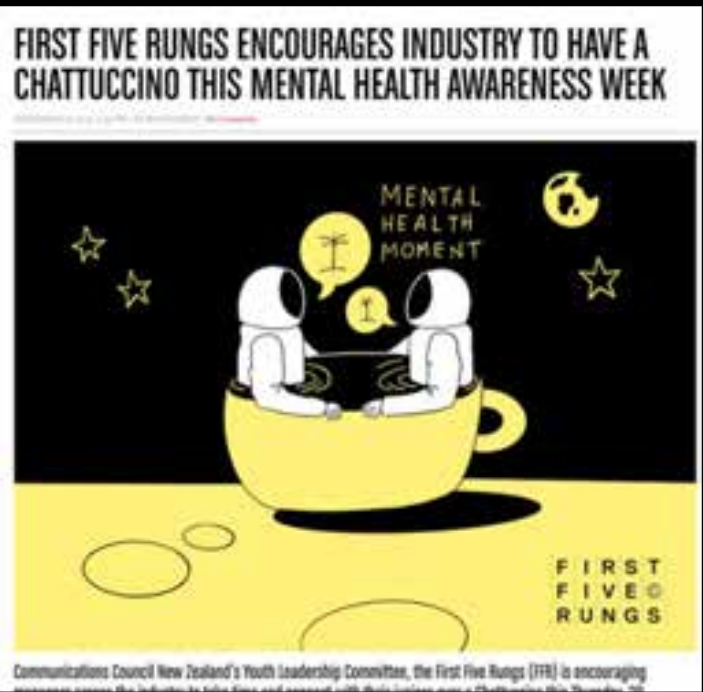
If there's anything you wish you know more about us and what we do, check us out on social or drop us a line at [team@firstfiverungs.co.nz](mailto:team@firstfiverungs.co.nz)



EVENTS



NEWBIE GUIDES & PACKS



CONTENT & RESOURCES



## WHY THE FIRST FIVE YEARS?

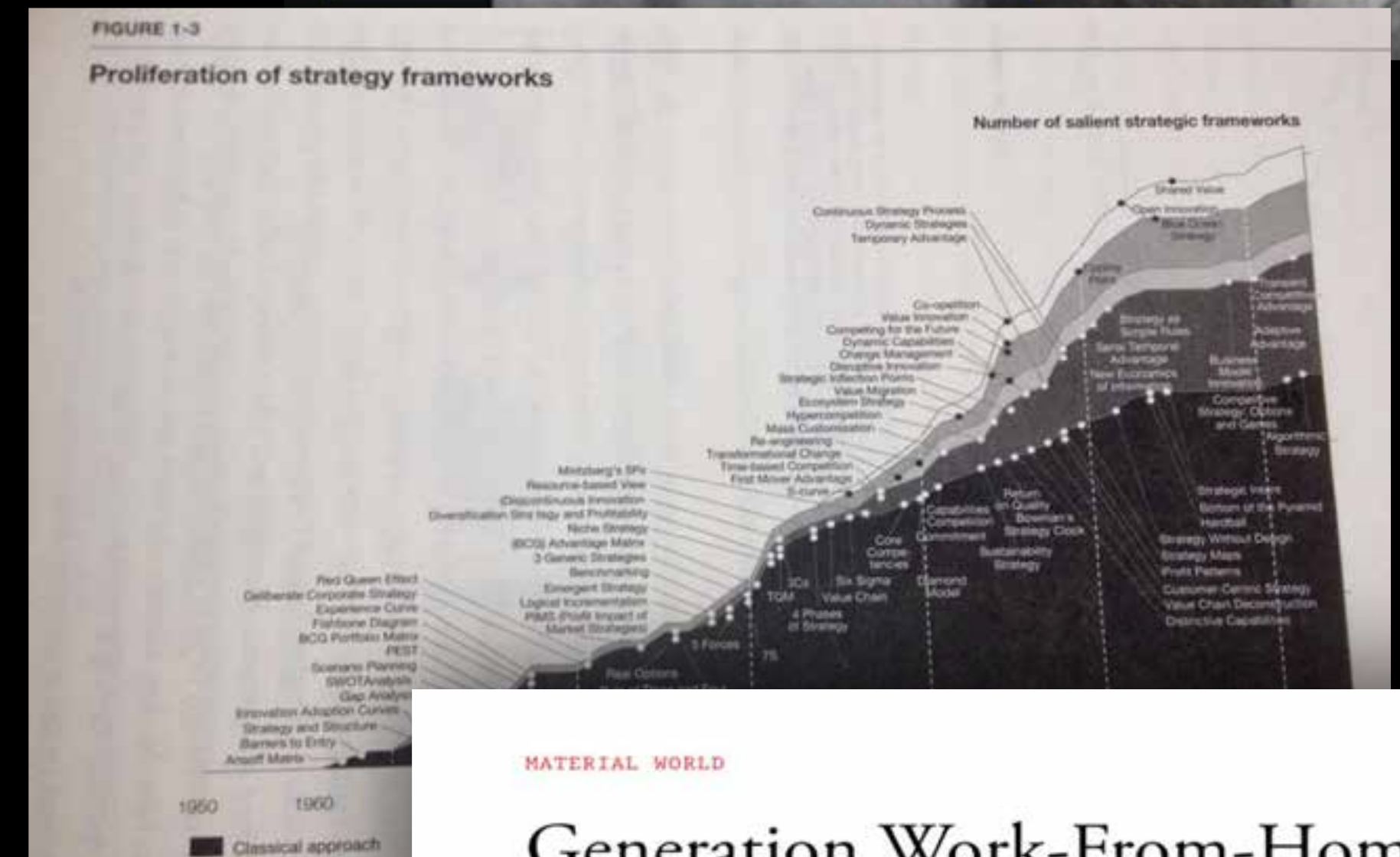
# IT'S HARD TO FIND YOUR FEET IN THE INDUSTRY

Every day, it feels like there's a new framework, model, channel or acronym or department for us to all learn. This makes it incredibly tough for newcomers to get a handle on the industry when first joining.

Add to that mounting debt, a three-year pandemic, changing work/life priorities, and a cost-of-living crisis – our worlds have never been more challenging.

Such turbulence simply exacerbates an already difficult time where newcomers are desperately trying to find their feet.

# How we racked up \$16 billion in student debt in NZ



## Generation Work-From-Home May Never Recover

The social and economic costs borne by young people without offices

By Amanda Mull

## Marketing job vacancies more than triple since height of pandemic

Recruiters have unanimously seen the marketing jobs market experience major growth as the economy has reopened, although some warn it may be somewhat of a “red herring”.

## PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

To help shape the industry for better, and ensure we were supporting newcomers in the best possible way we set out to...

**GAIN A FRESH UNDERSTANDING  
OF THE NEEDS AND EXPERIENCES  
OF TODAY'S NEWCOMERS**



# HOW WE DID IT

Working with The Research Agency (TRA), we conducted qualitative and quantitative research that was a representative mix of regions, agencies, departments and experience level.

3

qualitative  
focus groups

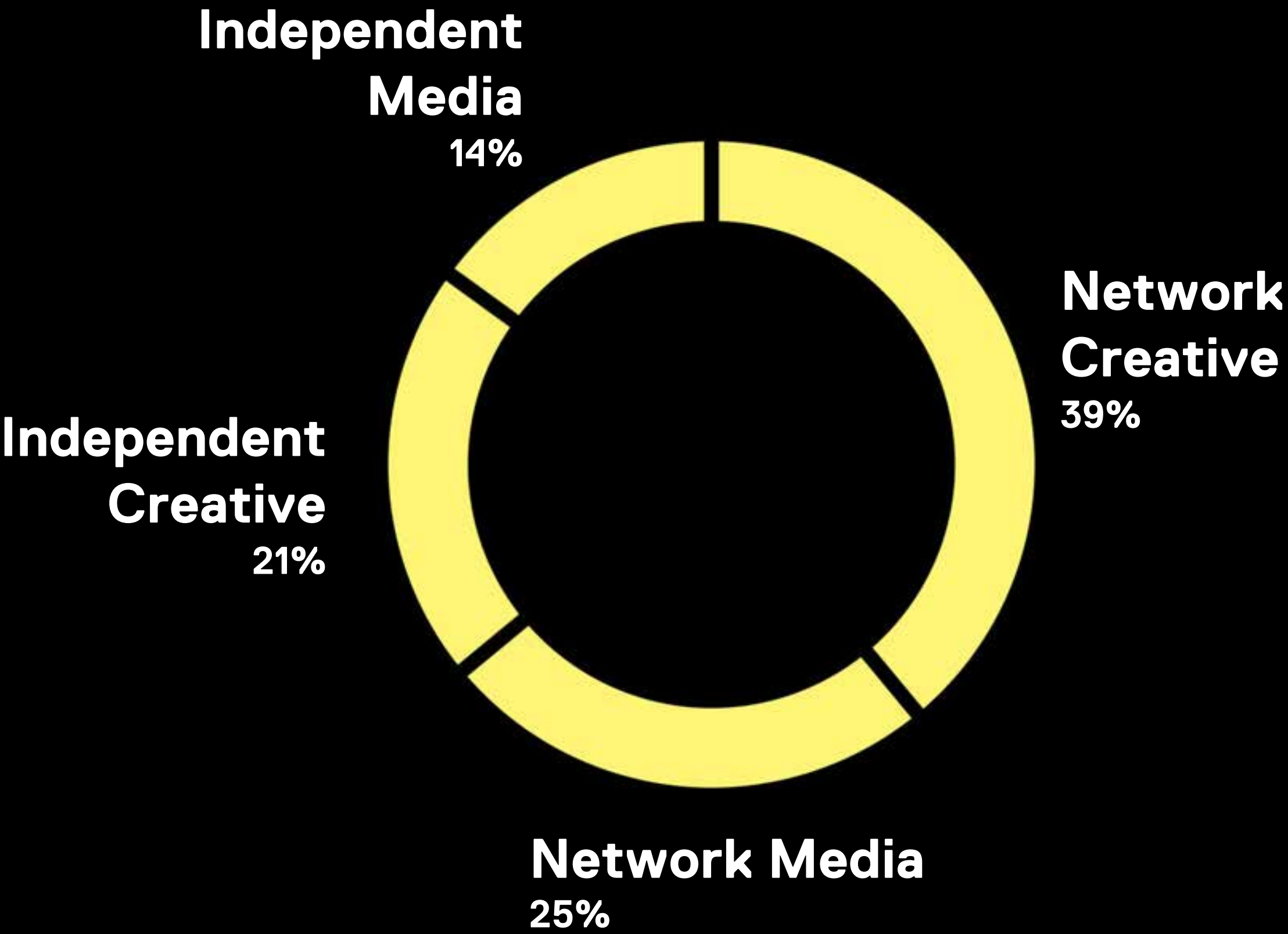
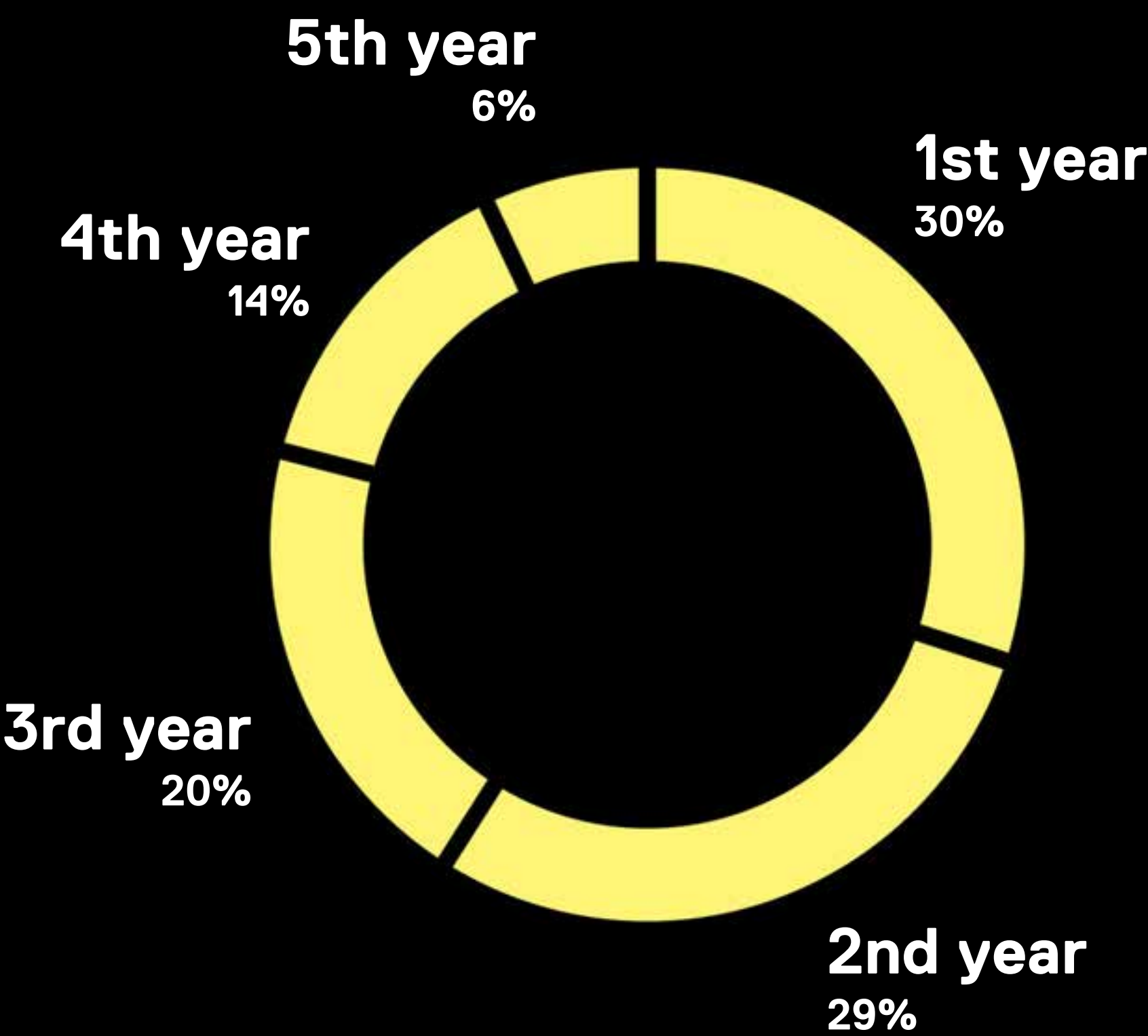
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1

responses to our  
quantitative survey



# SURVEY SUMMARY

Participants had a range of experience in their first five years, in a variety of workplace environments.





# NEWCOMERS ARE DRAWN TO OUR INDUSTRY FOR THREE REASONS

1

## COMRADES

“The people. Everyone is here because they love what they do”

2

## CREATIVITY

“All the freaking cool, creative things we get to do and how ever-changing our jobs are!”

3

## CULTURE

“The free flowing nature and the lack of conforming to typical corporate areas. I feel I can be more myself in this industry.”



# HERE'S WHAT WE FOUND





# Therapies

## Four Key

1

Prepare Me

2

Manage  
Expectations

3

Catch Up  
Regularly

4

Keep Me  
Mentally Well

**PREPARE ME**



# THE JUMP FROM UNIVERSITY INTO THE INDUSTRY IS STILL TOO STEEP

Many feel underprepared for and overwhelmed by the reality of industry life

“

*I studied advertising at uni and... ‘**you’re either a suit or a creative**’. And then you get into it and it’s nothing like it.”*

“

*“It’s just **real sink or swim, especially from the get go.***

78%

felt underprepared for  
industry life

# WHEN YOU START, YOU JUST WANT TO UNDERSTAND WHERE YOU FIT

There are a lot of questions around  
industry roles, structure and process

“

*It'd be interesting if  
you could shadow  
people in different  
roles so you can figure  
it out? What suits do is  
still like a mystery to  
me...*

“

*...what roles there are  
in an industry ...you  
spend a long time  
working out because  
no one really tells you  
what those are.*

“

*I often look at work  
and am like, so where  
do I fit in the puzzle?”*

45%

**are not sure about  
the best way to  
contribute to make  
the best work**

65%

**wish they had more  
understanding of  
how different roles in  
the industry work**



# THERE IS **LITTLE** **SUPPORT** FOR NEWCOMERS AS THEY NAVIGATE THIS

It's very much 'sink or swim'  
from the get-go

“

*Everyone was really busy. It left me feeling really out of my depth, I didn't feel confident about what I was doing.*

“

*It would have been nice to have someone explain processes to me more and guide me more than I was given.*

“

*I think they're all very sincere when they're saying just ask us anything, but everyone else was also really busy.*

# MANAGE EXPECTATIONS



# ROLE & PAY PROGRESSION FEELS LIKE A BLACK HOLE

Today's newcomers are frustrated by the lack of transparency and 'taboo' nature of these conversations

“

*it'd be great if we could just open up those conversations and (be) more comfortable talking to the managers about that.*

“

*it's all very secretive. And you're not allowed to tell anybody if you get a pay rise or promotion.*

“

*It would be good if we had clearer KPIs and an understanding of performance reviews and what's expected of them*

91%

**wish there was more  
transparency around  
pay progression**

# PAY IS A REASON WHY PEOPLE ARE TEMPTED TO LEAVE THE INDUSTRY

With better pay in other industries and overseas, some juniors are thinking about moving

“

*There are a lot of smart, talented and dedicated juniors in the industry that deserve more than minimum wage.*

“

*Entry salaries are way too low...it's hard to watch for your younger teammates and not a great selling point for encouraging more newbies in the door.*

“

*More young creatives are moving overseas to the likes of Australia, as the pay is better over there. I feel like us Kiwis are missing out on some amazing talent because of underpaid work.*

# 52%

**can imagine working  
in another industry**



# WE ALL LEARNED TO WORK FROM HOME AND IT BROUGHT MANY BENEFITS FOR NEWCOMERS

Flexibility, more mental space, and the chance to learn without fear of judgment

“

*I really liked the flexibility it afforded us.*

“

*Working from home has helped a lot in meetings. I would always have Google open and if it was an acronym I didn't understand, I'd just look it up.*

70%

said working from home occasionally is good for their mental wellbeing

# BUT IT ALSO CAME WITH **DOWNSIDES**

## MISSING CULTURE

*"I liked being around people, it's more motivating"*

## HARDER TO SWITCH OFF

*"I started work at home, and at my desk in my room. So it kind of felt like it was quite hard to not attach work to my bedroom. It just made me tense, my brain would still be on alert."*

## HARDER TO ACCESS SUPPORT

*"you couldn't just like tap your boss on the shoulder"*

## SLOWER PROGRESSION

*"your manager can't see what you're doing all the time. they've got no reason to think you're doing well if you're just on the other side of an email."*

# 61%

said working from home during the pandemic hindered their skill development

## INCREASED WORKLOAD

*"the workload escalated."*



# AND NOW IT FEELS LIKE AGENCIES ARE STRUGGLING TO FIND THE RIGHT BALANCE

It feels like there isn't fair access to remote work, with juniors looked down upon for it

There is **little clarity** ...

*"Now when you do actually work from home, you do get the underlying sense that it's not acceptable. And I feel like it's only with the more junior roles in the agency."*

*"... a little bit more clarity on whether or not that's okay would be good"*

... **making juniors** **more anxious**

*"sometimes I get worried that people don't think I'm working. So I don't want to leave my laptop in case they message me. It makes us feel anxious about doing it"*

# WORKING FROM HOME PREFERENCES

There's mixed feelings over what people want from WFH - but the need for structure is clear.

We asked juniors what their  
**ideal WFH situation**  
was...

**44%**

1 day WFH, 4  
days in office

**39%**

2 day WFH, 3  
days in office

**12%**

Fully in the  
office

**0%**

Fully WFH

**CATCH UP REGULARLY**



# LOCKDOWN **UPPED** OUR GAME

Managers became more consistent and considerate in their catch ups with juniors

“

*(My manager) gave me room to tell her if I was feeling overwhelmed or if working for home wasn't for me*

“

*my manager made a huge effort to structure my day while we were working from home.*

“

*I felt like my manager was always there...but I felt it even more during lockdown.*

# BUT A LOT OF THESE GOOD HABITS HAVE SINCE DROPPED OFF

Managers and juniors are 'physically present'  
but catch ups have dropped off massively

“

*'I definitely spend  
more days alone than  
with her in the office'*

“

*"my manager would always make time for you  
when we were working from home. I felt like we  
had more of a personal relationship. Whereas in  
the office, he's never really, right there, he's just  
everywhere."*

**AND IT'S NOT JUST MANAGER  
CATCH UPS NEWCOMERS NEED...**





# LOCKDOWNS HAVE LEFT MANY NEWCOMERS WITHOUT A SENSE OF CONNECTION TO THEIR BROADER AGENCY

Working from our bedrooms has come at the cost of getting to know people socially and form closer relationships

# 74%

feel they've lost out  
on the social parts of  
agency life

“

*“I think we end up in our own little silos. And so much of my day is my own stuff and what I've got to do. I don't know what our strategist does all day, or I don't know what our Machop does all day.”*

*Despite us all having very different roles. I think there is a lot of commonalities. We're all on the same team. And I think when you can have a mentor or a buddy or someone like that, that kind of crosses those boundaries at helps break down those kinds of barriers”*

# NEWCOMERS ARE FEELING THE LOSS OF WHAT MAKES INDUSTRY LIFE GREAT

People are finding the industry all work, no play

“

*There is not as many work events so it doesn't feel like work hard/play hard it's just work hard and go home exhausted only to log back in online.*

“

*It's important to celebrate the wins and allow people time to 'play' and enjoy things like team lunches or activities after weeks of hard work to get a campaign out - it shouldn't always be on to the next big job.*

“

*There's less perks than I thought there would be. The external image advertising has is VERY different to its reality.*

**KEEP ME  
MENTALLY WELL**



**ALMOST HALF (49%) OF  
NEWCOMERS WE  
SPOKE TO ARE  
WORRIED ABOUT THEIR  
MENTAL HEALTH  
WORKING IN THIS  
INDUSTRY.**

**THIS NEEDS TO  
CHANGE.**

*"I feel like I was definitely warned that the industry isn't for the faint hearted so knew what i was getting into with that respect, but I do find it very hard sometimes, mentally.."*

*"I have noticed that a lot of global agencies speak about what they're doing to address mental health...but this does not translate at the bottom. Senior & mid management are unwilling to acknowledge that times are changing and people are prioritising their health/wellbeing/life over working 10+ hours a day."*

*"It's important agencies don't encourage burn out culture and provide people with a workload that they can manage in the time they have at work...knew the industry would be high pressure but some places are hard on the mental health."*

# SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1

Prepare Me

2

Manage Expectations

3

Catch Up Regularly

4

Keep Me Mentally Well





**Imagine you are the CEO of an agency, if you could change one thing to **make the industry better for newcomers,** what would it be?**



# CHANGING THE INDUSTRY FOR THE BETTER

The following suggestions have been analysed  
and ranked in order of preference

# 1

## PAY

Increase starting salaries,  
open up conversations  
around pay transparency &  
progression.

# 2

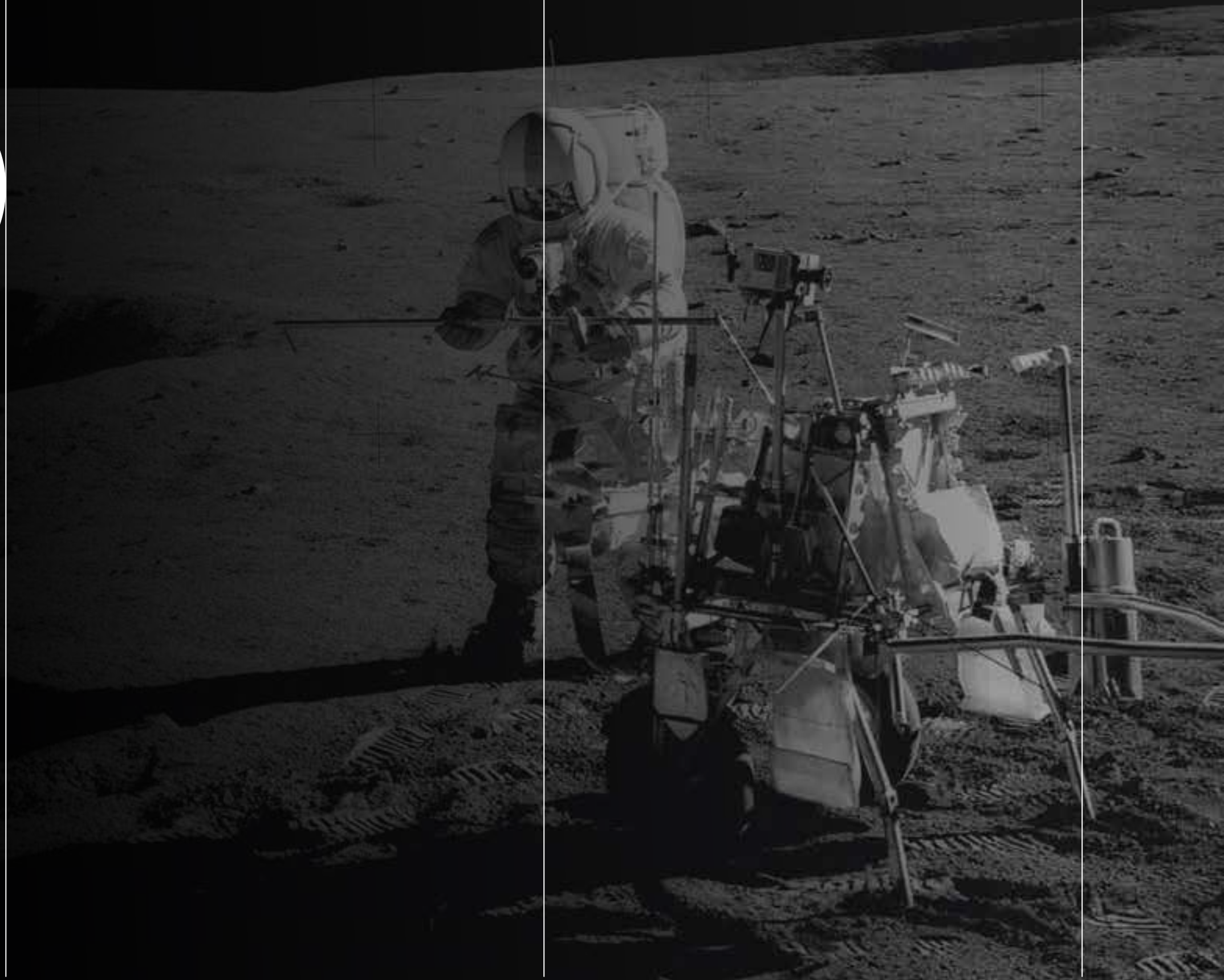
## ONBOARDING

Structured inductions into the  
entire business. Help with  
understanding the finance  
side. Full explanations of job  
descriptions and more  
facetime with suppliers.

# 3

## MENTORS

Senior agency mentors from  
different departments to help  
juniors. Buddy system  
whereby juniors are  
connected with intermediates  
to ensure support is robust.



A black and white photograph of a space shuttle launching, with a large plume of smoke and fire. The shuttle is angled upwards, and the launch pad structure is visible at the bottom left.

# 4

## MIX OFFICE

Creating more inter-departmental conversations to help people understand agency structure. More mingling between departments, and the potential for people to spend time in each department to get a hold of the way the agency is run. There's a desire for juniors to understand different roles.

# 5

## DIVERSITY

More representation in the industry at all levels, but particularly executive level. There's a need for industry support groups for Māori and Pasifika, and these groups need to be lead by someone who's also of a minority group. There needs to be more pathways for diverse groups to get into the industry.

# 6

## SUPPORT

Increased support from managers and HR. Implement open door policies so juniors feel like they can always ask questions. Have less of a hierarchy within the office space so there's no distance between juniors and seniors and everyone is supported.



# 7

## **SOCIALS**

Agency wide social events to encourage more conversations between departments, and so people have the chance to get to know colleagues in a more relaxed setting. Encouraging people to spend time at the office together so people can develop better relationships.

# 8

## **CREATIVITY**

Let juniors see the process behind big campaigns and offer chances for more collaboration. Host open studios for graduates and support junior creatives entering global ad competitions.

# 9

## **TRAINING**

Upskilling courses for all levels so the entire industry continuously improves. More in person training, and specific training for junior managers.





**WHAT CAN WE DO  
ABOUT IT?**



# WHAT FIRST FIVE RUNGS ARE DOING



## RESOURCES

We'll help newbies understand where they fit in by providing more resource around the basics of industry structure, roles and process and get these on newbies desks from day one



## CONTENT

We'll create more content that educates newcomers on career progression and industry knowledge



## EVENTS

We're using our events as a way to bring more social connection back for newcomers who have lost out on it



# WHERE YOU CAN HELP



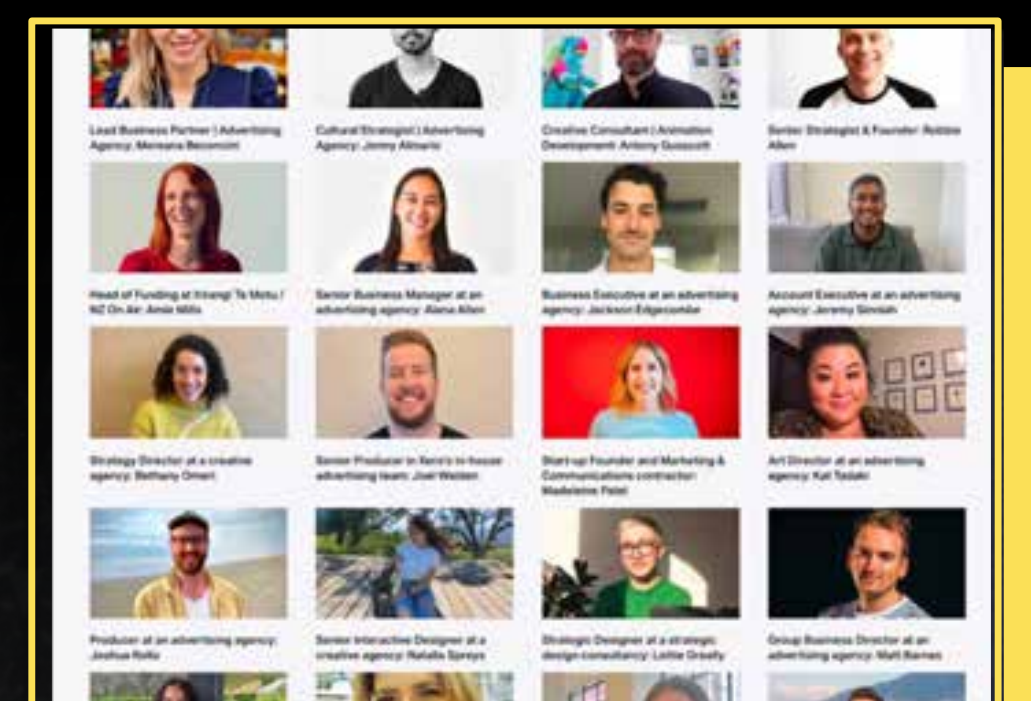
Encourage agencies to adopt **clearer remote work policies**



Provide more **progression resources** within your agencies, particularly for junior managers



Encourage agencies to reinstate **good habits** with **regular catch ups**



Work towards building a **mentor network** for newcomers within your agencies



# WHERE YOU CAN HELP

Let your  
newcomers  
know about  
First Five  
Rungs.

Hand out our  
newbie  
booklets.

Point them in  
our direction.

We're here to  
help, but we can  
only do that if  
people know we  
exist.

FOLLOW US



First Five Rungs





**ANY QUESTIONS OR  
SUGGESTIONS?**

Let us know at  
**team@firstfiverungs.co.nz**





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# NGĀ MIHI NUI

