

# Chili Chat

sponsored by



Cornell University  
Employee Assembly

Report and Recommendations

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## **Executive Summary**

The intent of the Chili Chat forums was to discover the reasons why many staff had difficulty using their vacation time. Each forum was an hour long, including lunch, held at one of the following locations: Geneva Experimental Center, East Hill Plaza (EHP), Statler, Veterinary Medical Center (VMC), Robert Purcell Community Center (RPCC), and Willard Straight Hall (WSH).

The following questions were asked:

1. Other than wages and benefits, what keeps you motivated at work?
2. What is the biggest obstacle to taking your vacation (or using your vacation time)?
3. How do you leave work 'at work' while on vacation?

There were 400 participants with 1145 responses to the questions asked. The results indicate that a positive interaction between coworkers creates the most effective motivating environment for employees. The biggest obstacles expressed towards taking vacation time were guilt and work overload. In order to have a relaxed vacation from work, all communication devices should be left behind.

Three objectives will be pursued using this data. First, the results will be presented to Cornell staff via this document on the Employee Assembly website. Second, recommendations will be made to administrators and trustees. The third objective will be to pursue solutions based on the findings and recommendations.

## **Analysis of the results**

(See Appendix I for Reference Charts)

**Question 1:** Other than wages and benefits, what keeps you motivated at work?

- 30% - enjoy where they work and the people they work with
- 30% - take pride in what they do or have a sense of respect or accomplishment
- 12% - find their job challenging
- 14% - recognize the opportunity for self-improvement
- 2% - see students and customers as motivation.
- 12% - other

**Question 2:** What is the biggest obstacle to taking your vacation (or using your vacation time)?

- 42% - workload/ lack of coverage/ seasonal workload
- 18% - personal or family
- 17% - supervisor won't let them, or guilt from coworkers or supervisor
- 9% - money
- 1% - none
- 13% - other

**Question 3:** How do you leave work "at work" while on vacation?

- 24% - no technology
- 20% - plan ahead
- 9% - hobbies/ fun/ friends
- 9% - coworkers/ supervisor/ backup support
- 8% - leave the area
- 7% - just do
- 6% - don't/ can't
- 6% - don't think about it
- 10% - other

## **Recommendations**

- **Recognize staff with a thank-you for a job well done.** Also, encourage a yearly thank-you celebration. Staff are more motivated when they receive recognition for doing their jobs well.

- **Forums and special events.** Encourage and support staff to attend educational, informational, and networking events.
- **A small group meeting (informal) to discuss concerns or items that need attention.** Surrounding vacation, this would improve communication between coworkers and make planning for vacations easier for all involved.
- **Improve cross training and back up plans by supervisors.** Cross training will improve the feeling of comfort while on vacation, knowing someone is taking on one’s responsibilities. Coworkers will be better prepared to handle added workloads and it will improve communication.
- **Departmental Pool.** This was suggested by a number of staff, and would help with the lack of coverage. When returning from vacation the workload would not be overwhelming. This option would be the most realistic for positions that do not require specialized training. Temporary employees need to be hired before the vacation period starts so they can be oriented to tasks.
- **Vacation calendars for departments and better planning for vacation time in general.** This will improve communication between staff about their vacation plans and make it easier to prepare. Workload, lack of coverage, guilt, timing, and burden on coworkers accounted for a vast majority of the obstacles to taking vacations or using vacation time. Planning ahead for this by improving communication between coworkers, for example by using a vacation calendar, would help alleviate some of the obstacles.
- **Midwinter day off** – “Ezra Cornell Day”, the first day of Spring Break. There is a five-month period between the winter break and Memorial Day. Having a day off in that period would give staff a much-needed mini vacation.

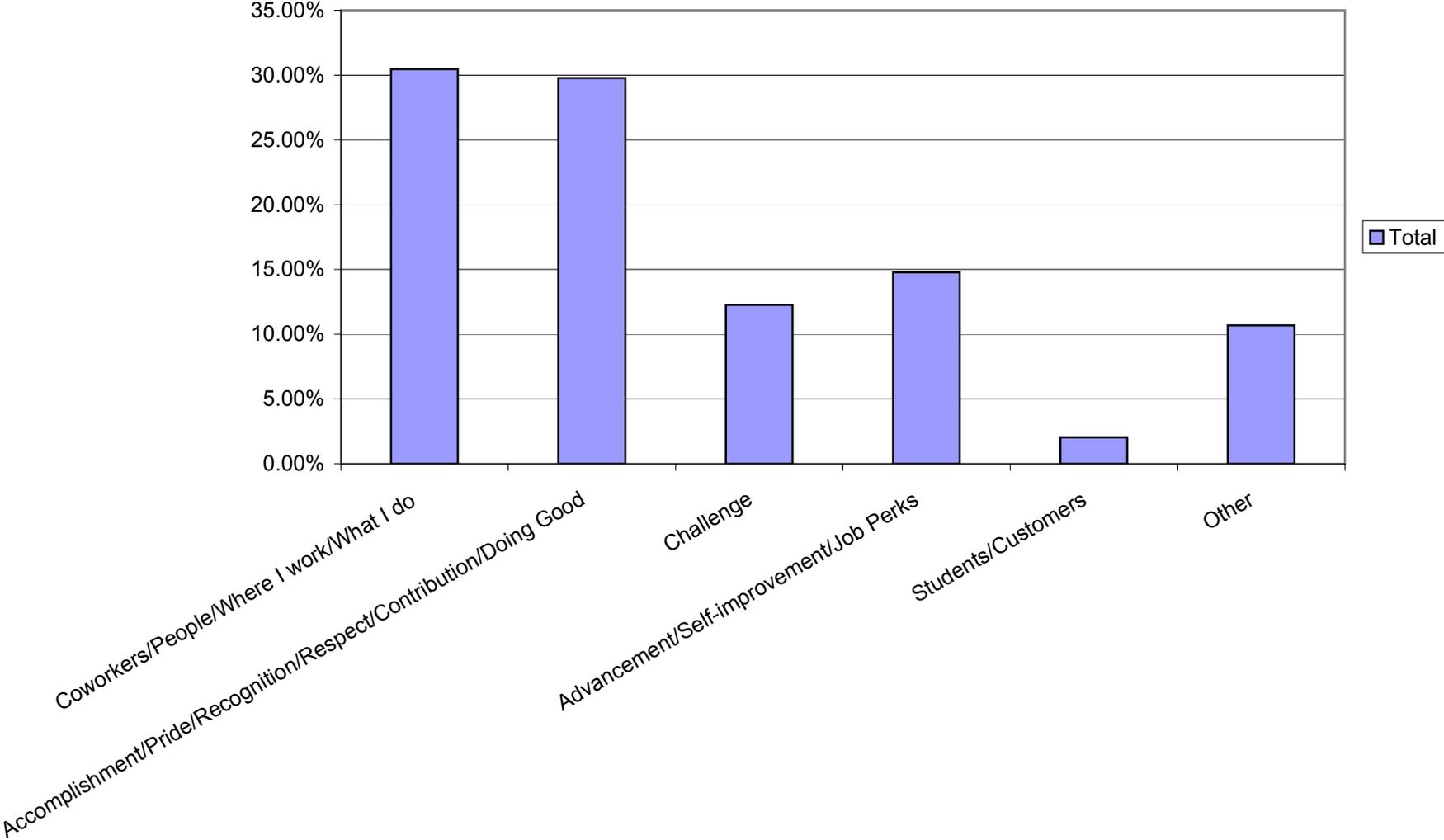
## Timeline

Summary and Recommendations .....	November, 2006
Tip of the Month pamphlet for supervisors and staff (to be distributed through email, pawprint, and other mediums). Implementation of other recommendations.	November through January, 2006
Forums for Supervisors .....	February through April, 2007

## **Appendix I: Reading the charts**

The charts are divided into three sections, one for each question. The first page has a chart with the results for that question with a combined average for all six locations. Each bar on the chart indicates the percent of responses corresponding with a particular response (i.e. 9% of people said that Lack of Money was their main obstacle to taking vacations). The second page shows the average results in a table with the percentage of responses per location. Additionally, it averages all six locations combined, matching the chart on the first page. Pages three through eight show the charts for each of the six locations. The blue bar shows the percentage of responses for each location. The red bar shows the overall responses from all six locations for comparison purposes.

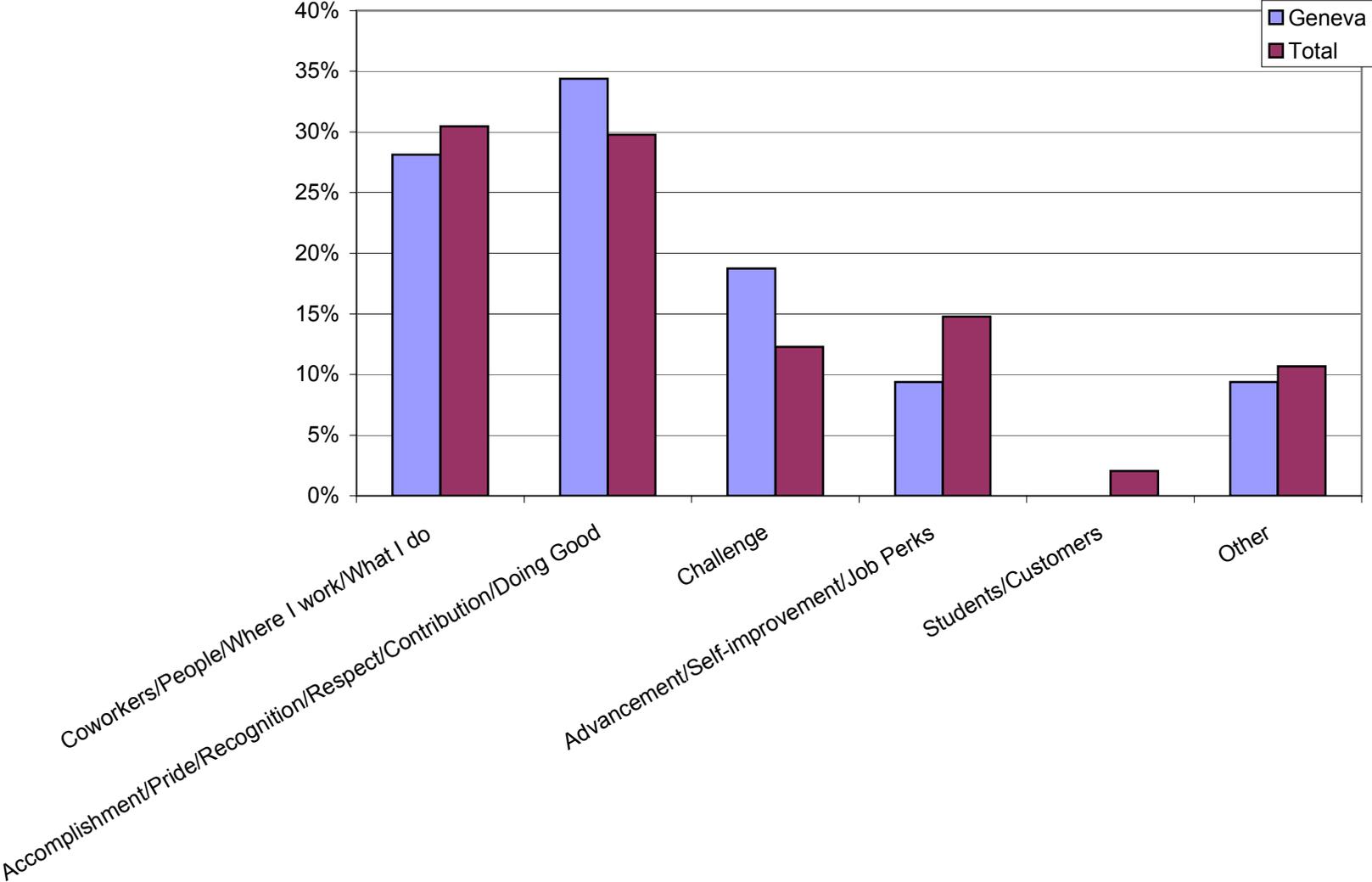
**Question 1 Average Results**  
**Other than Wages and Benefits, what keeps you motivated at work?**



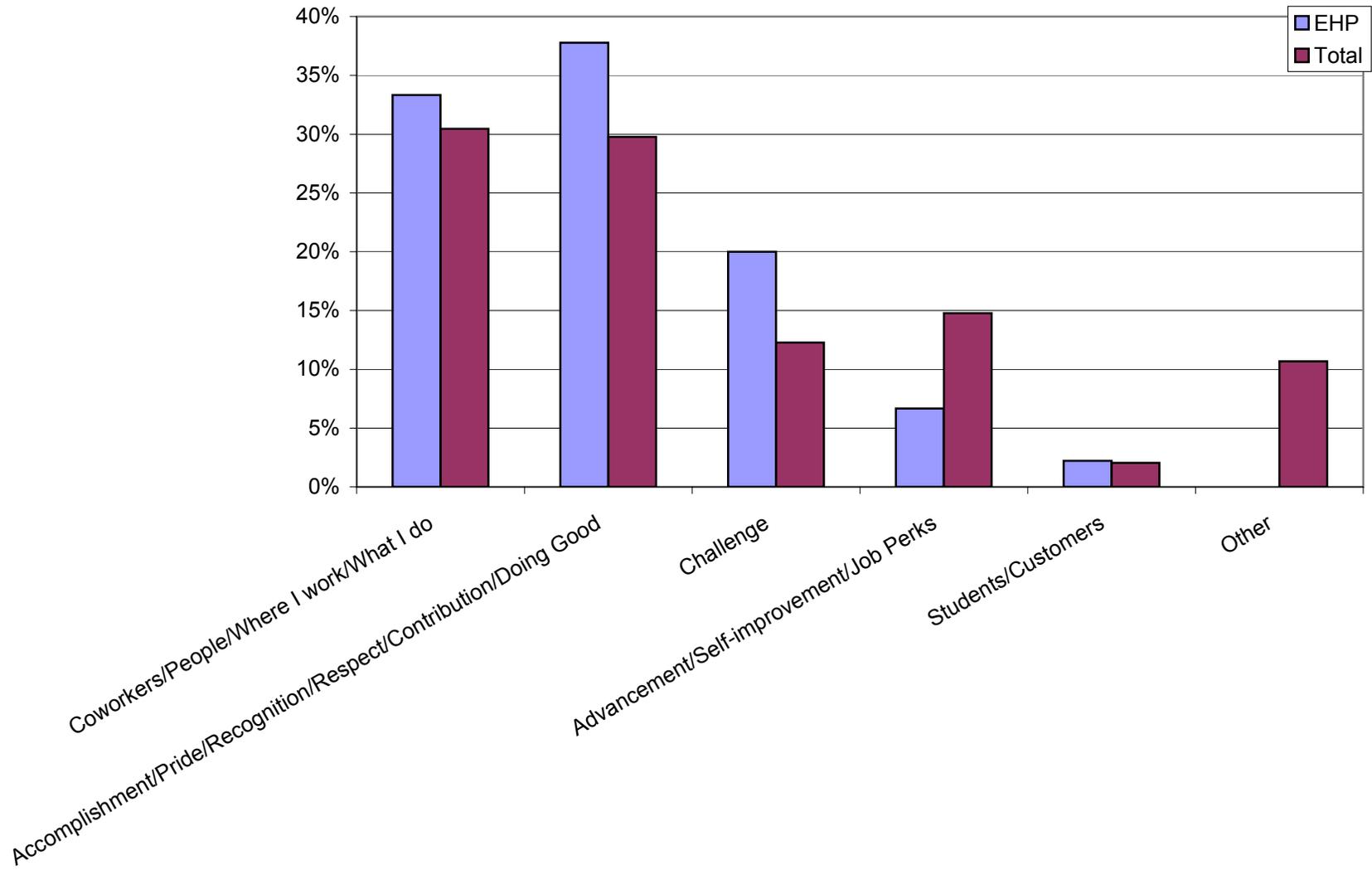
# Question 1 - Other than wages and benefits, what keeps you motivated at work?

	Geneva	EHP	Statler	VMC	RPCC	WSH	Total
Coworkers/People/Where I work/What I do	28.13%	33.33%	34.95%	30.60%	25.00%	26.36%	30.45%
Accomplishment/Pride/Recognition/Respect/Contribution	34.38%	37.78%	33.01%	26.12%	31.25%	26.36%	29.77%
Challenge	18.75%	20.00%	12.62%	8.21%	6.25%	12.73%	12.27%
Advancement/Self-improvement/Job Perks	9.38%	6.67%	11.65%	21.64%	12.50%	14.55%	14.77%
Students/Customers	0.00%	2.22%	1.94%	0.75%	6.25%	3.64%	2.05%
Other	9.38%	0.00%	5.83%	12.69%	18.75%	16.36%	10.68%

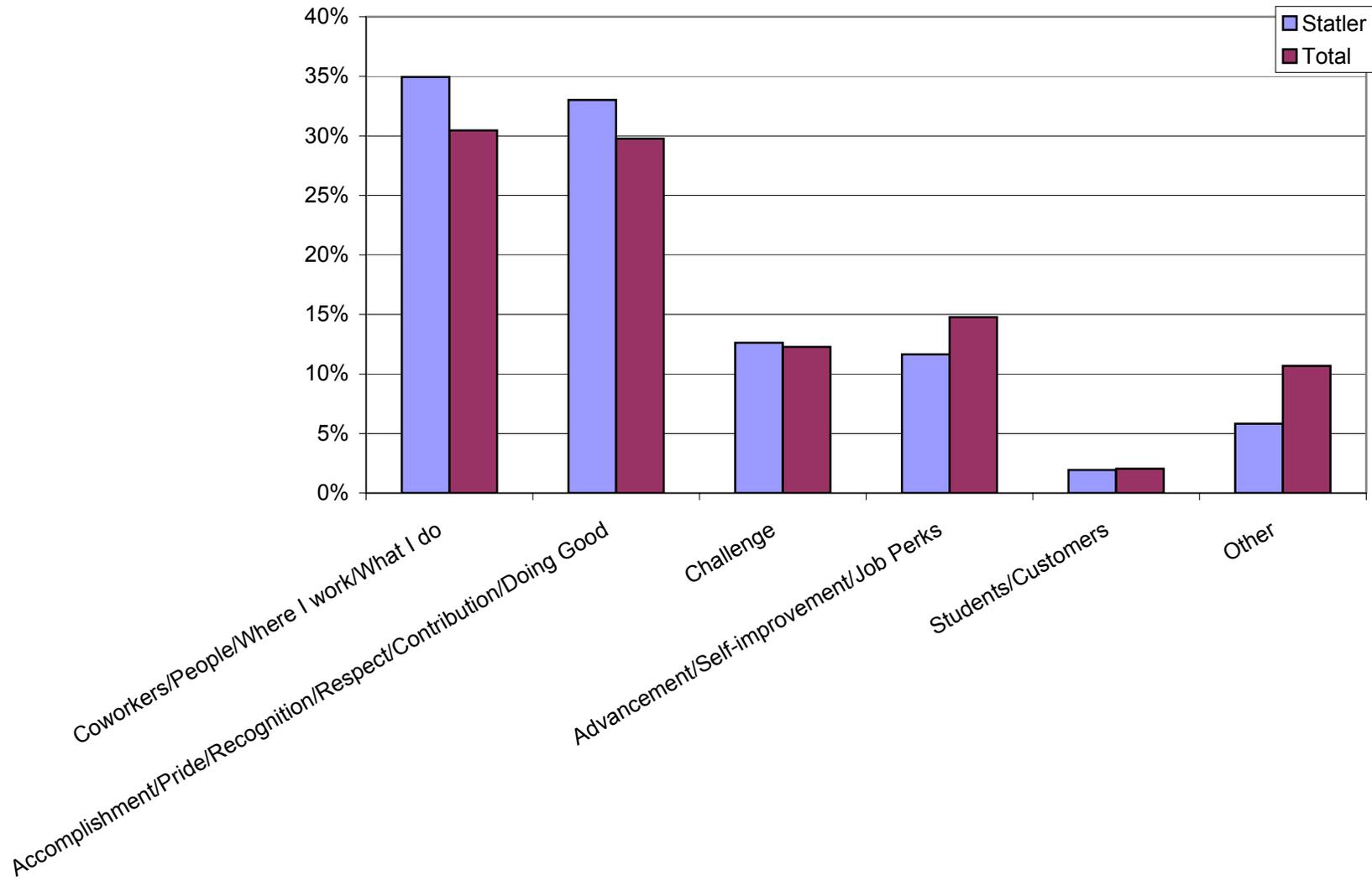
# Geneva



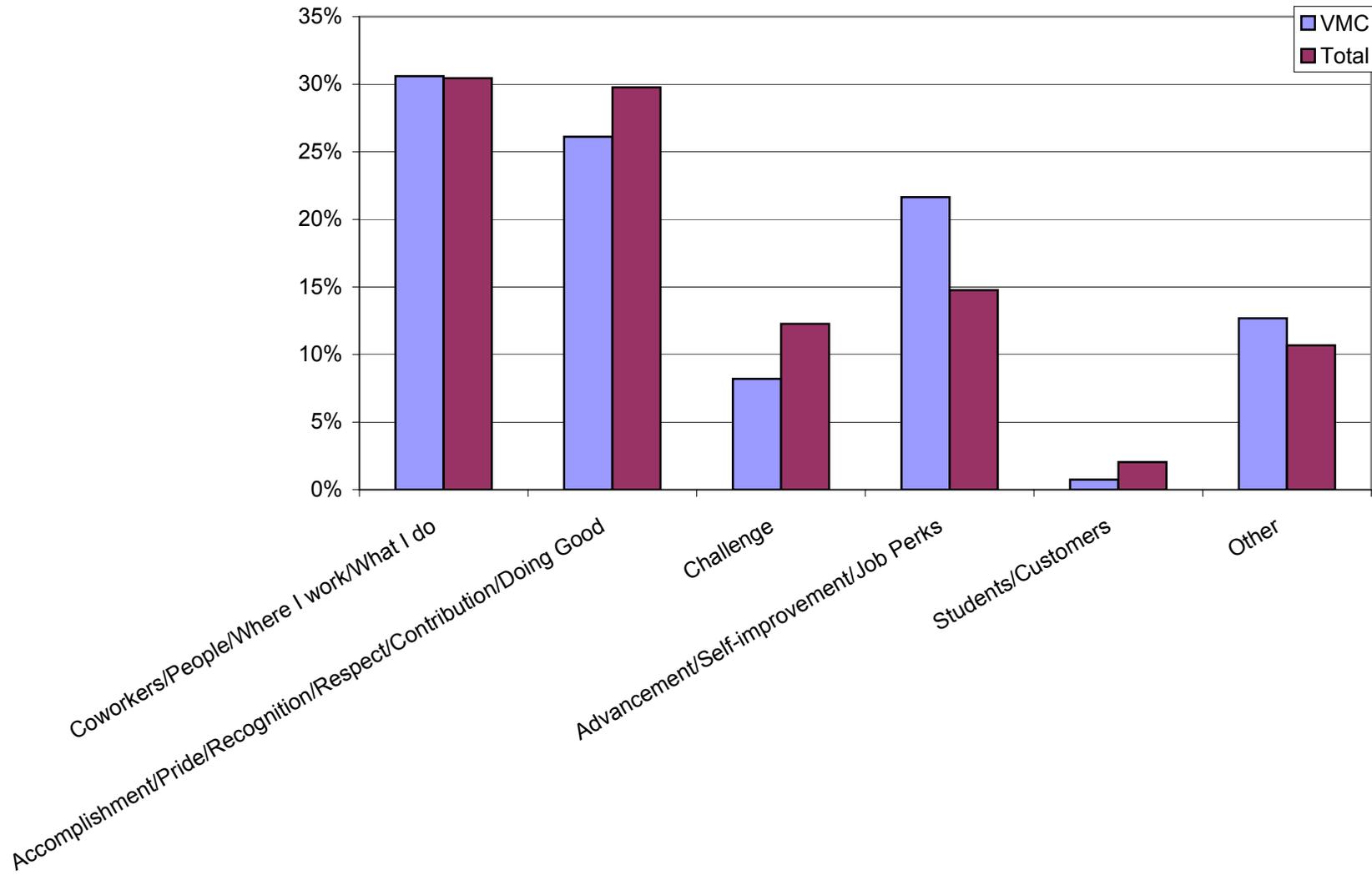
# EHP



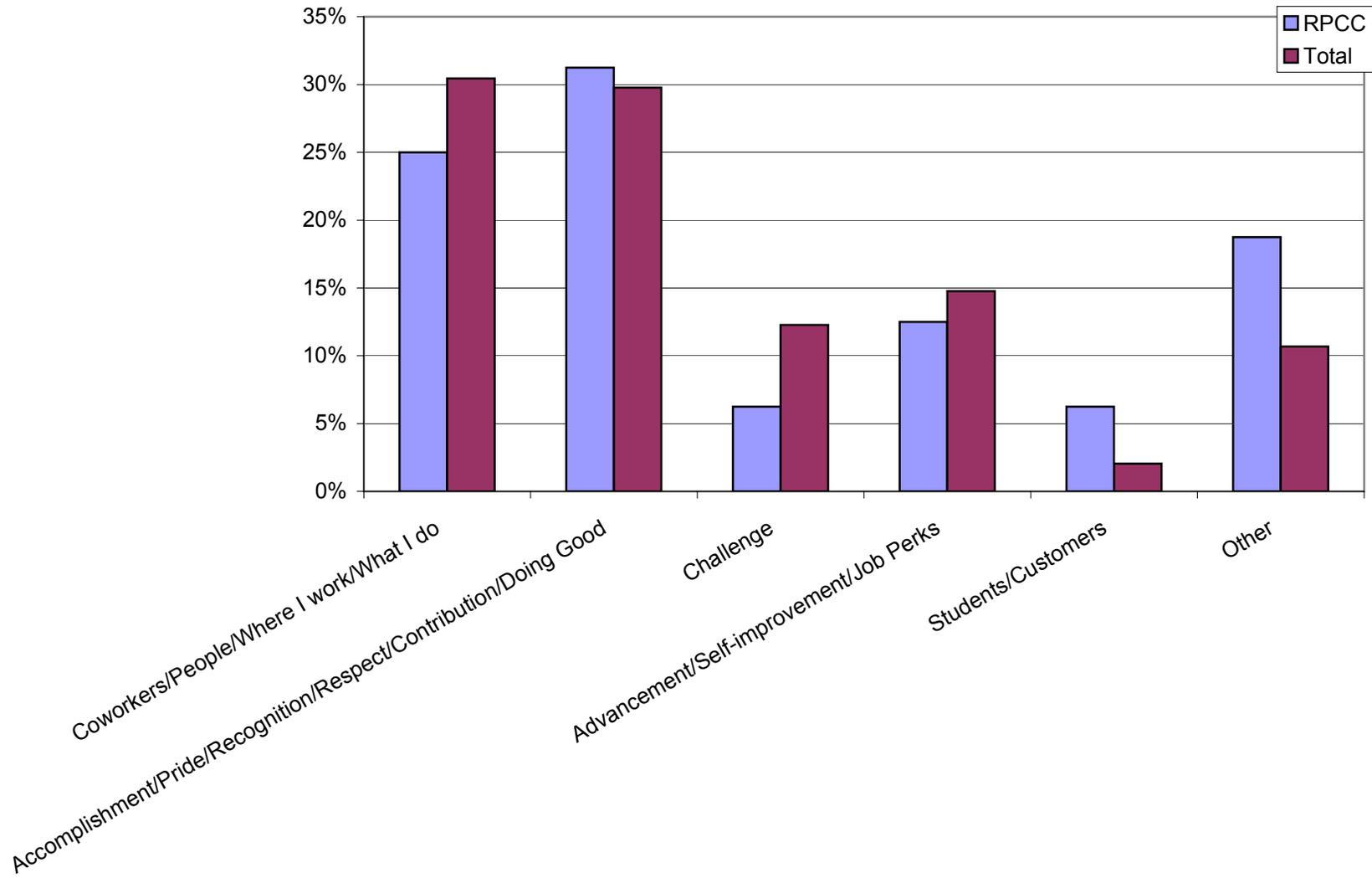
# Statler



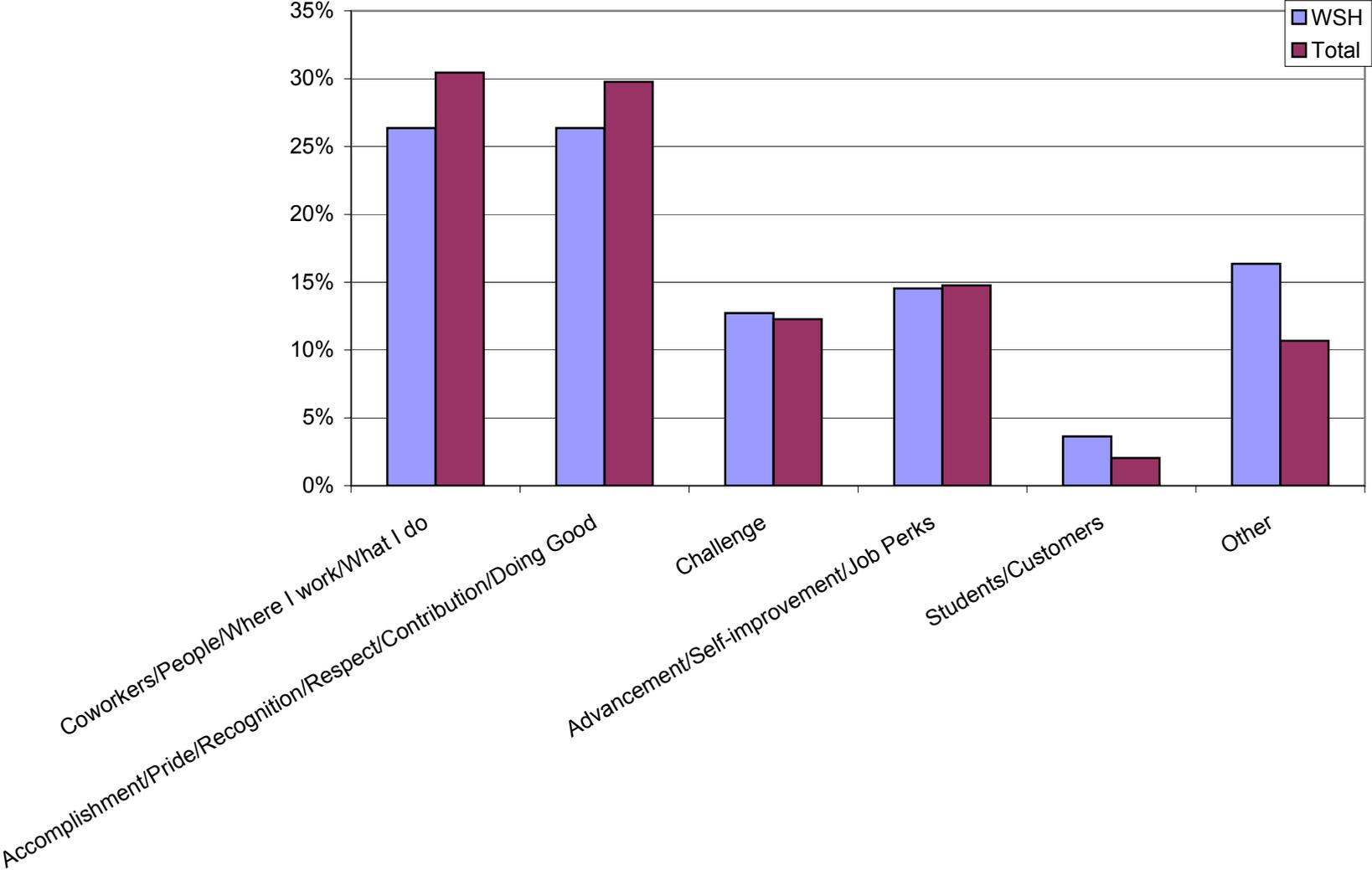
# VMC



# RPCC

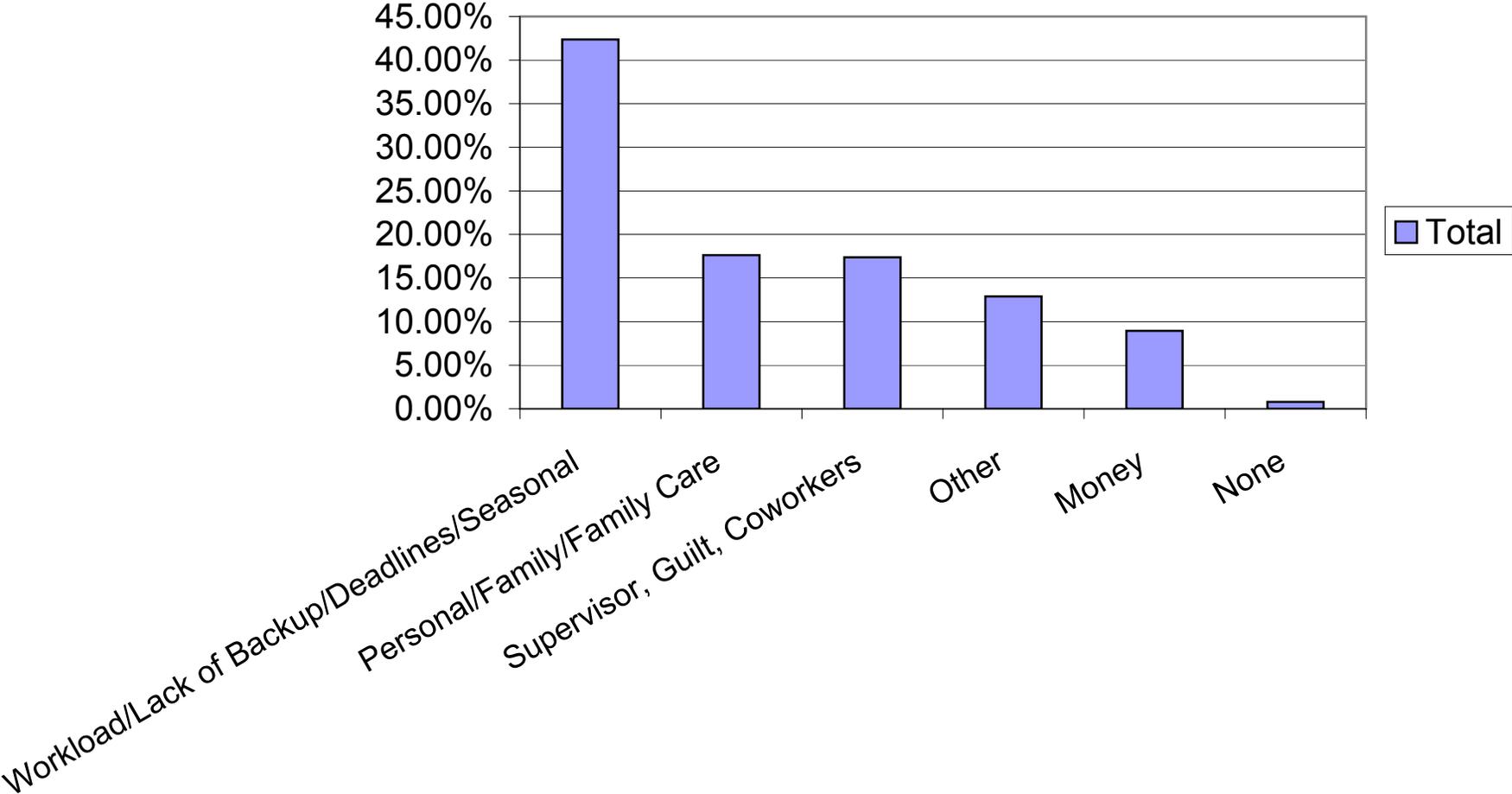


# WSH



# Question 2 Average Results

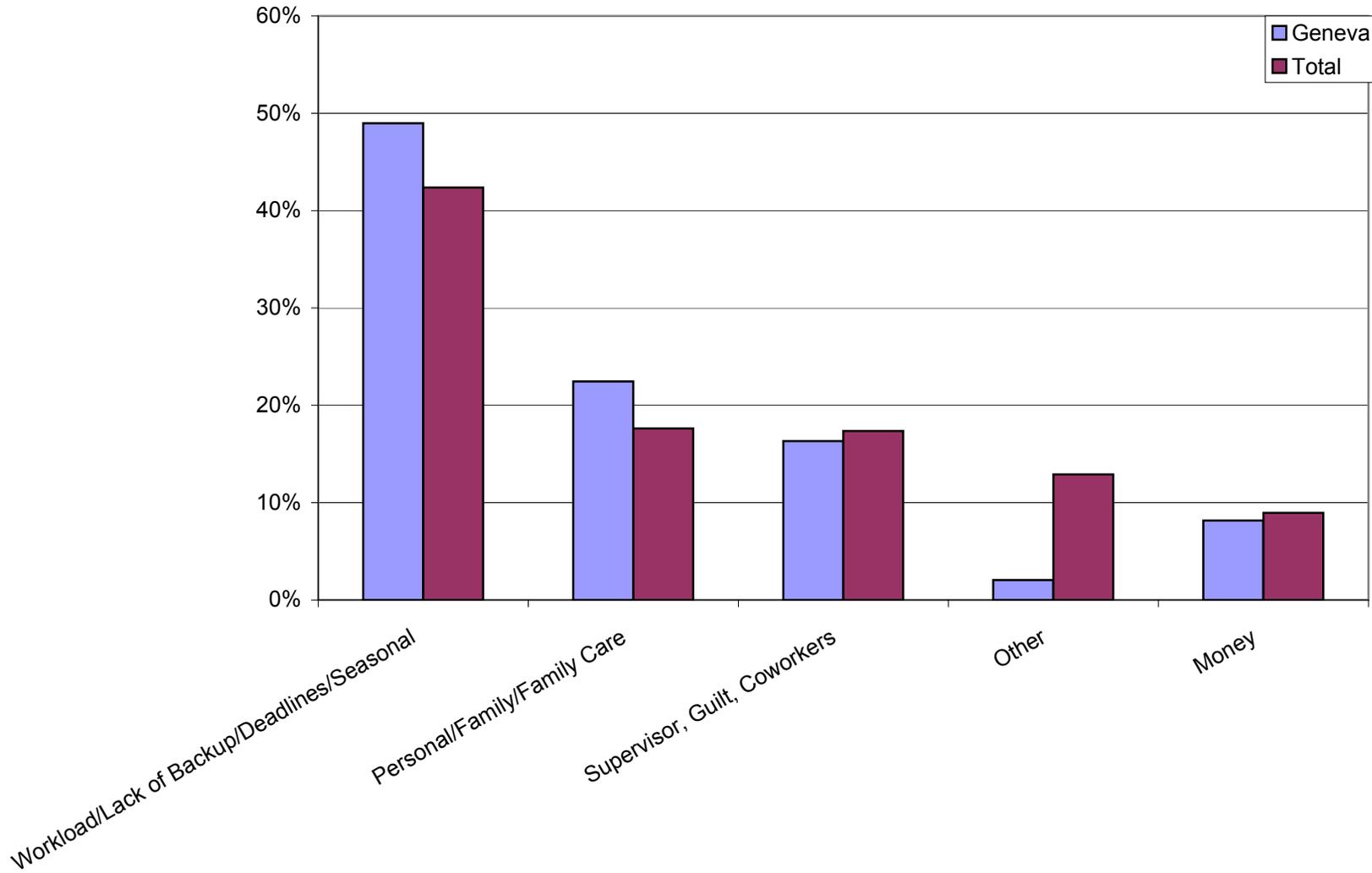
## What is the biggest obstacle to taking your vacation (or using your vacation time)?



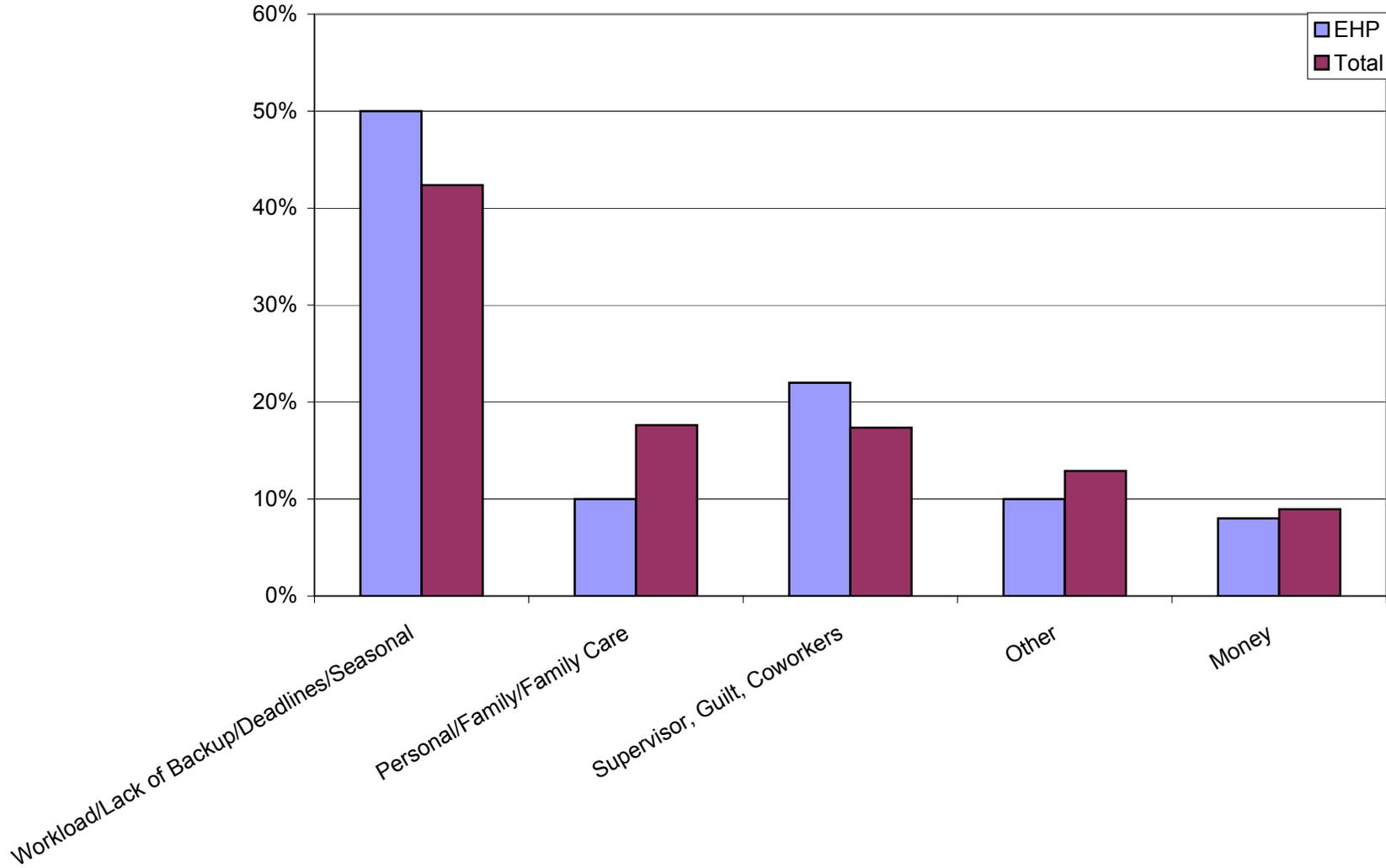
## Question 2 - What is the biggest obstacle to taking your vacation (or using your vacation time)?

	Geneva	EHP	Statler	VMC	RPCC	WSH	Total
Workload/ Lack of Backup/ Deadlines/ Seasonal	48.98%	50.00%	42.17%	39.58%	42.86%	37.23%	42.37%
Personal/Family/Family Care	22.45%	10.00%	16.87%	17.71%	14.29%	20.21%	17.63%
Supervisor, Guilt, Coworkers	16.33%	22.00%	15.66%	16.67%	28.57%	17.02%	17.37%
Other	2.04%	10.00%	16.87%	17.71%	0.00%	12.77%	12.89%
Lack of Money	8.16%	8.00%	7.23%	7.29%	14.29%	12.77%	8.95%
None	2.04%	0.00%	1.20%	1.04%	0.00%	0.00%	0.79%

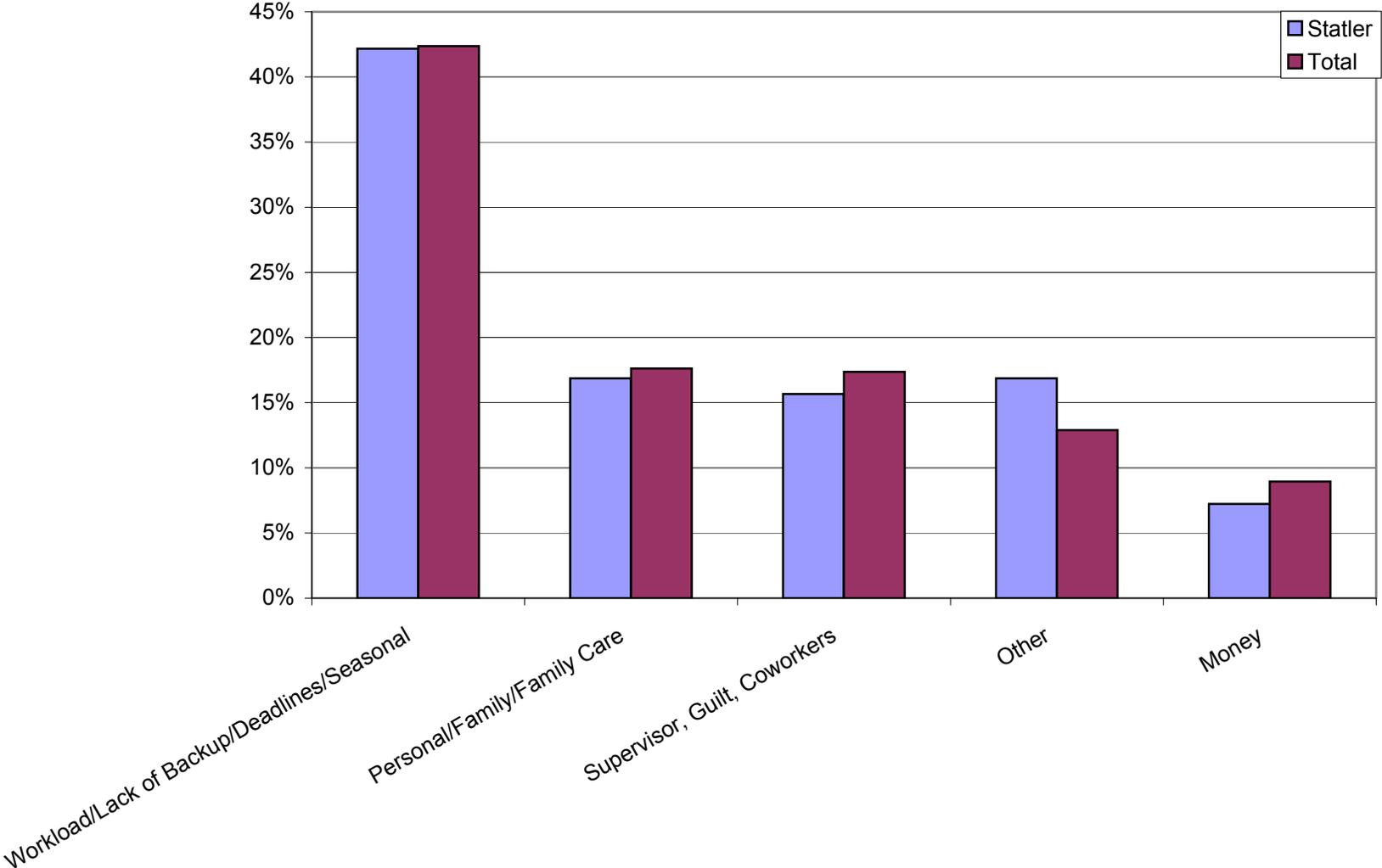
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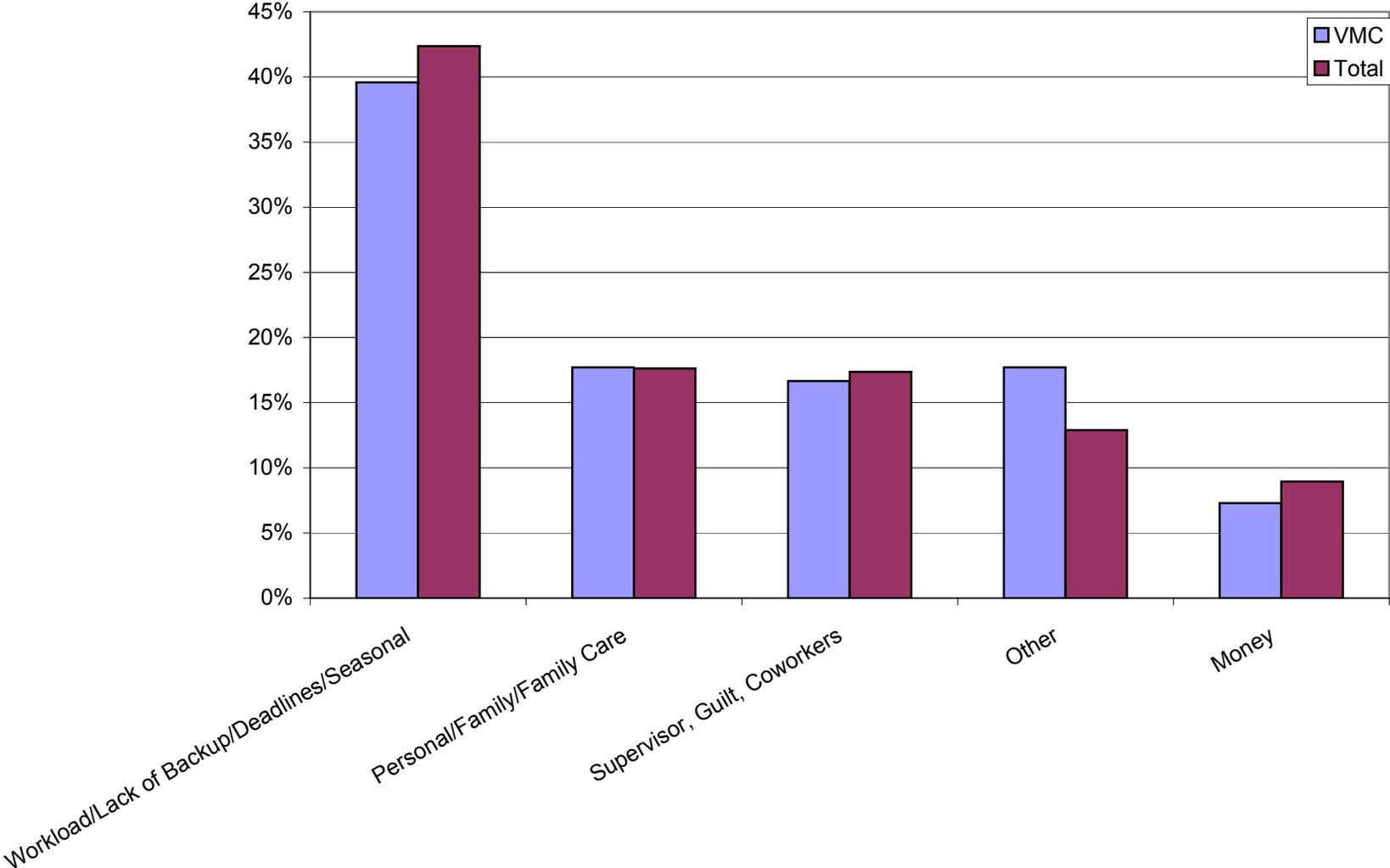
# EHP



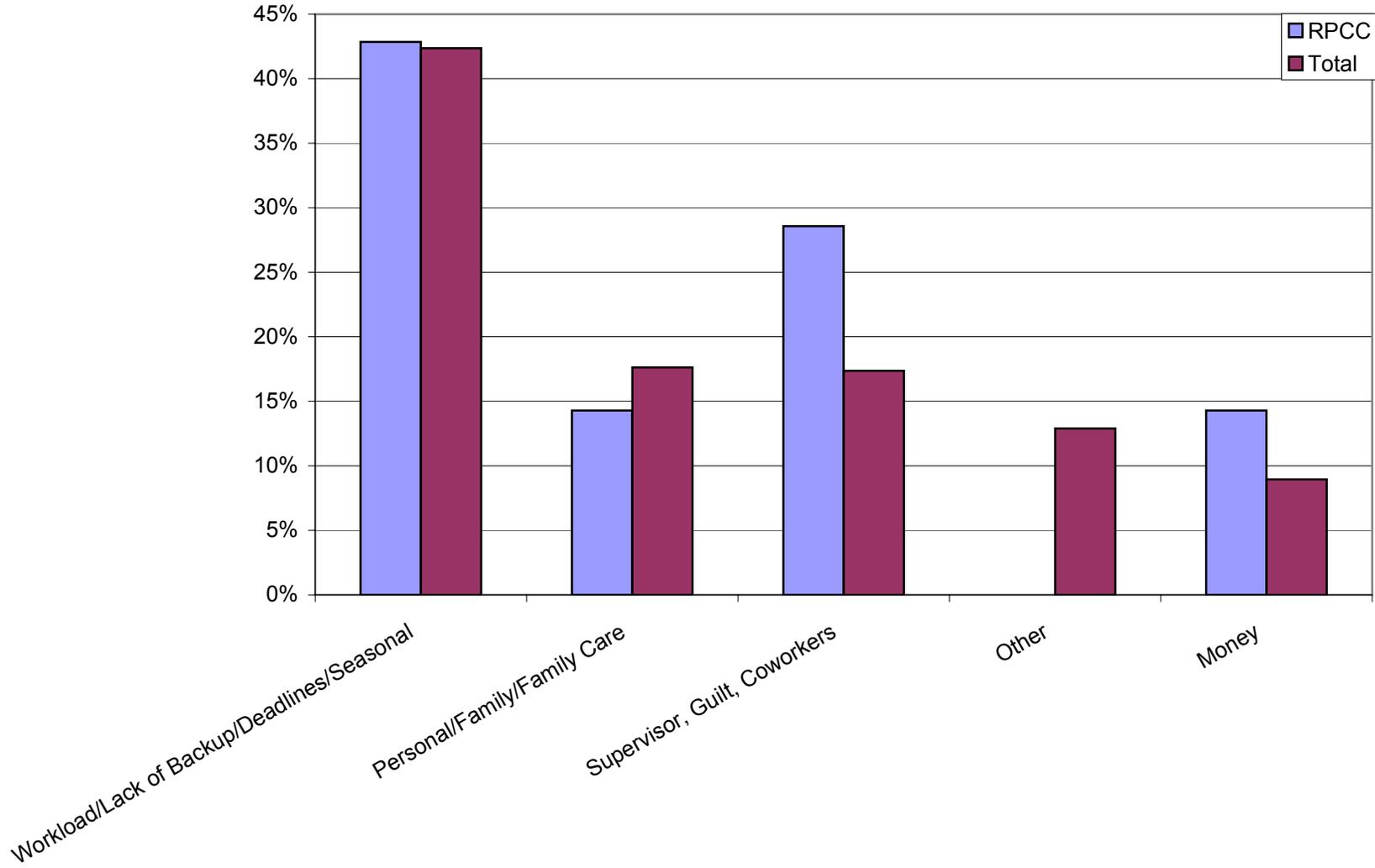
# Statler



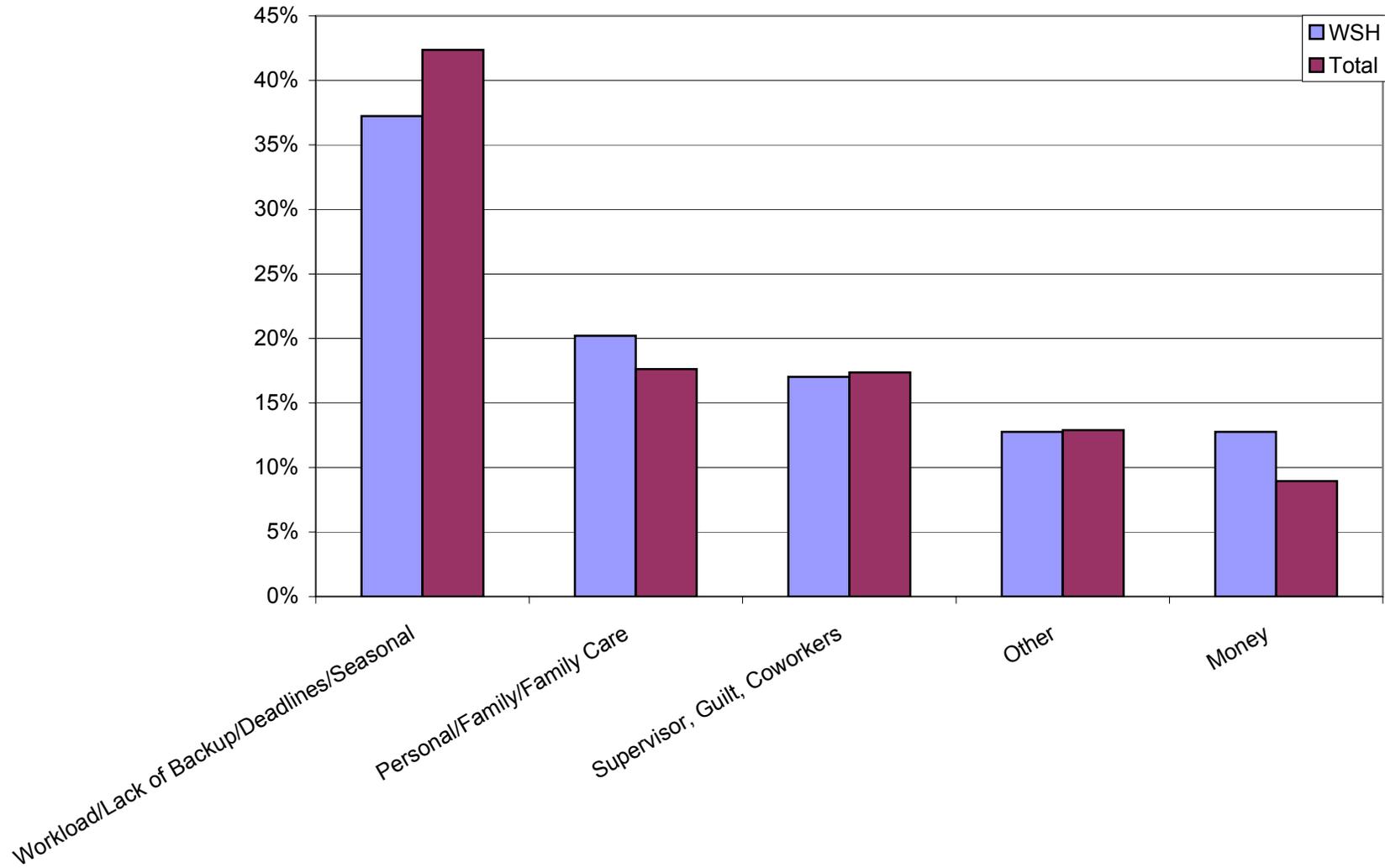
# VMC



# RPCC

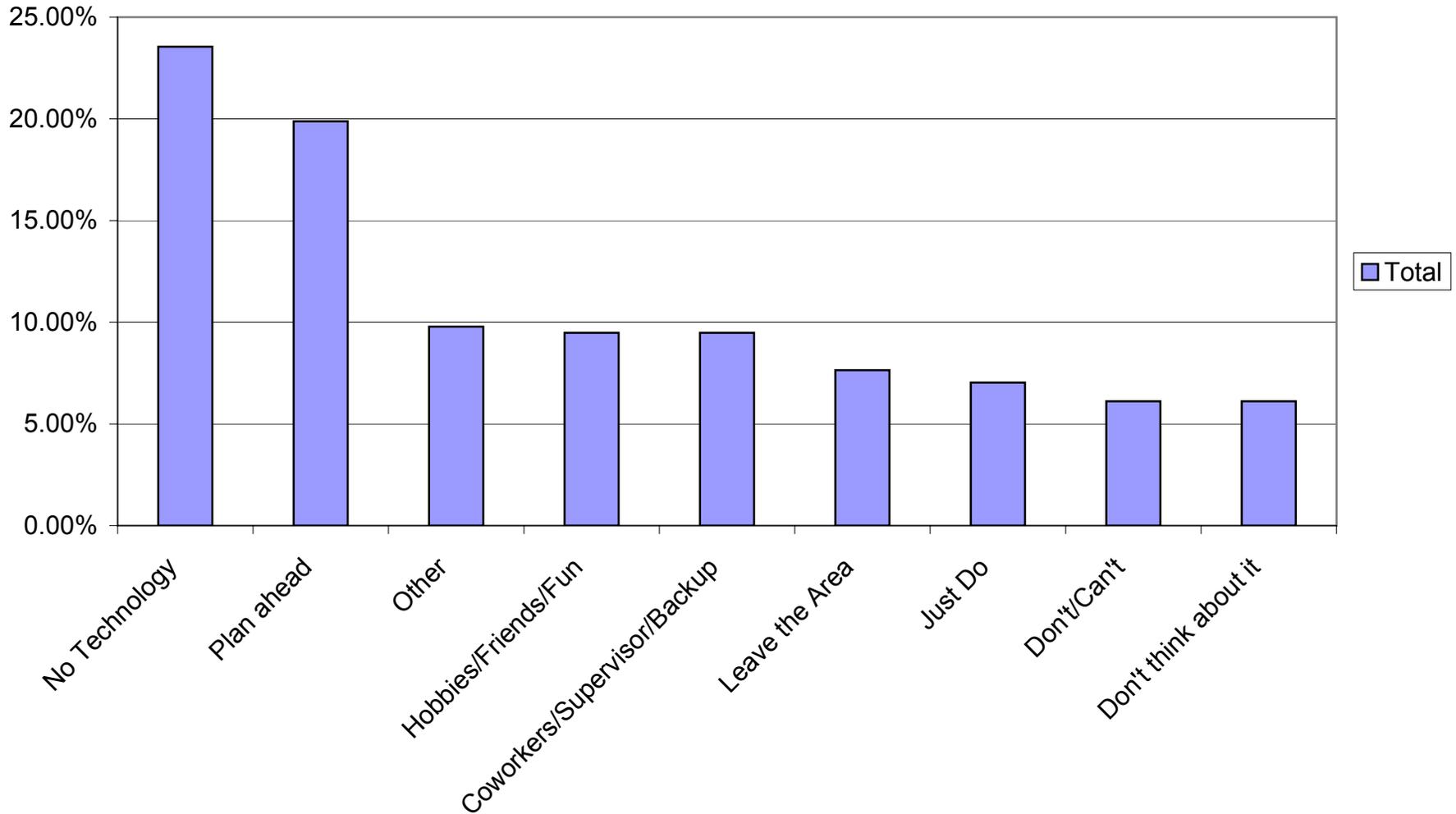


# WSH



### Question 3 Average Results

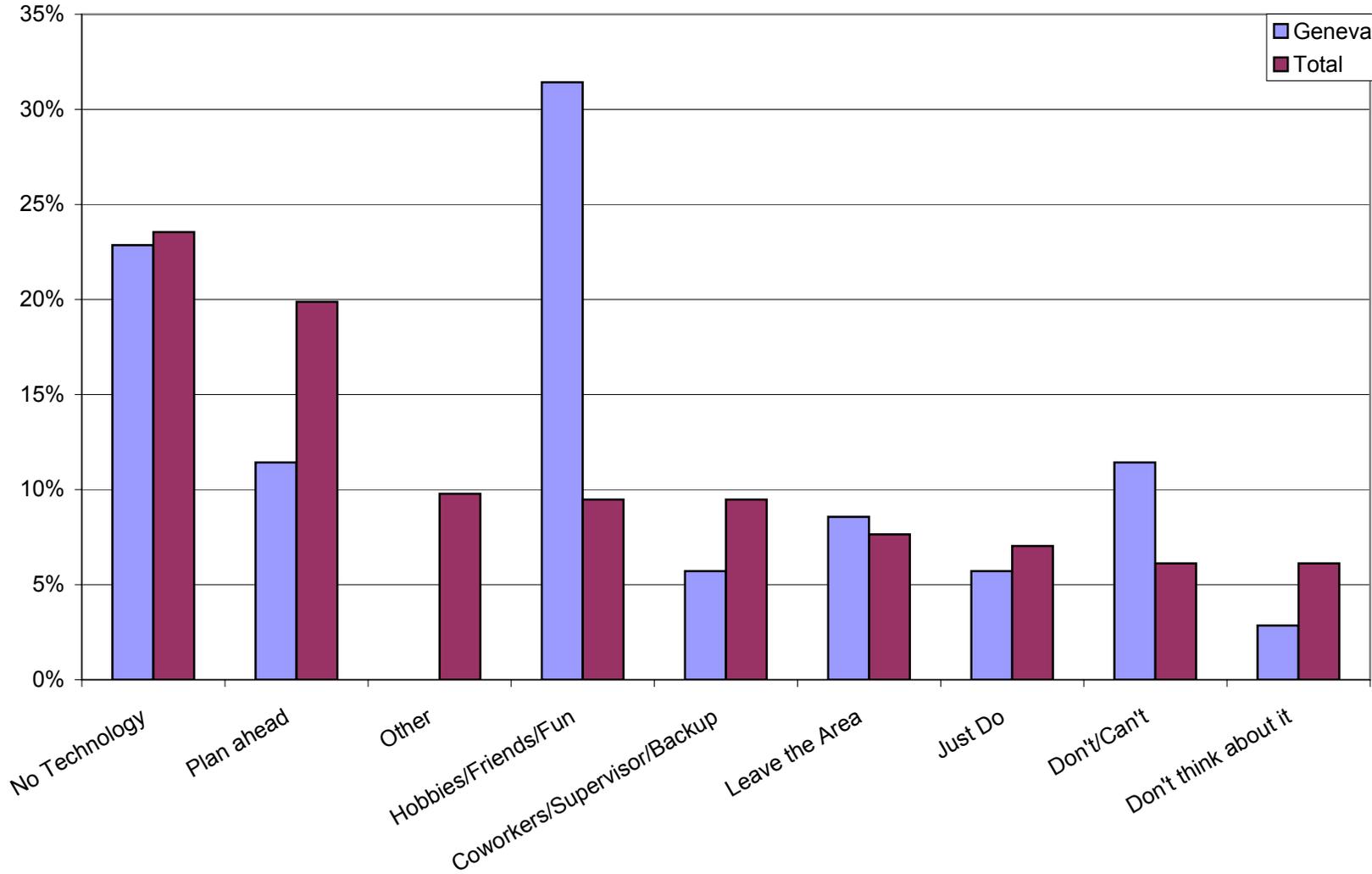
#### How do you leave work 'at work' while on vacation?



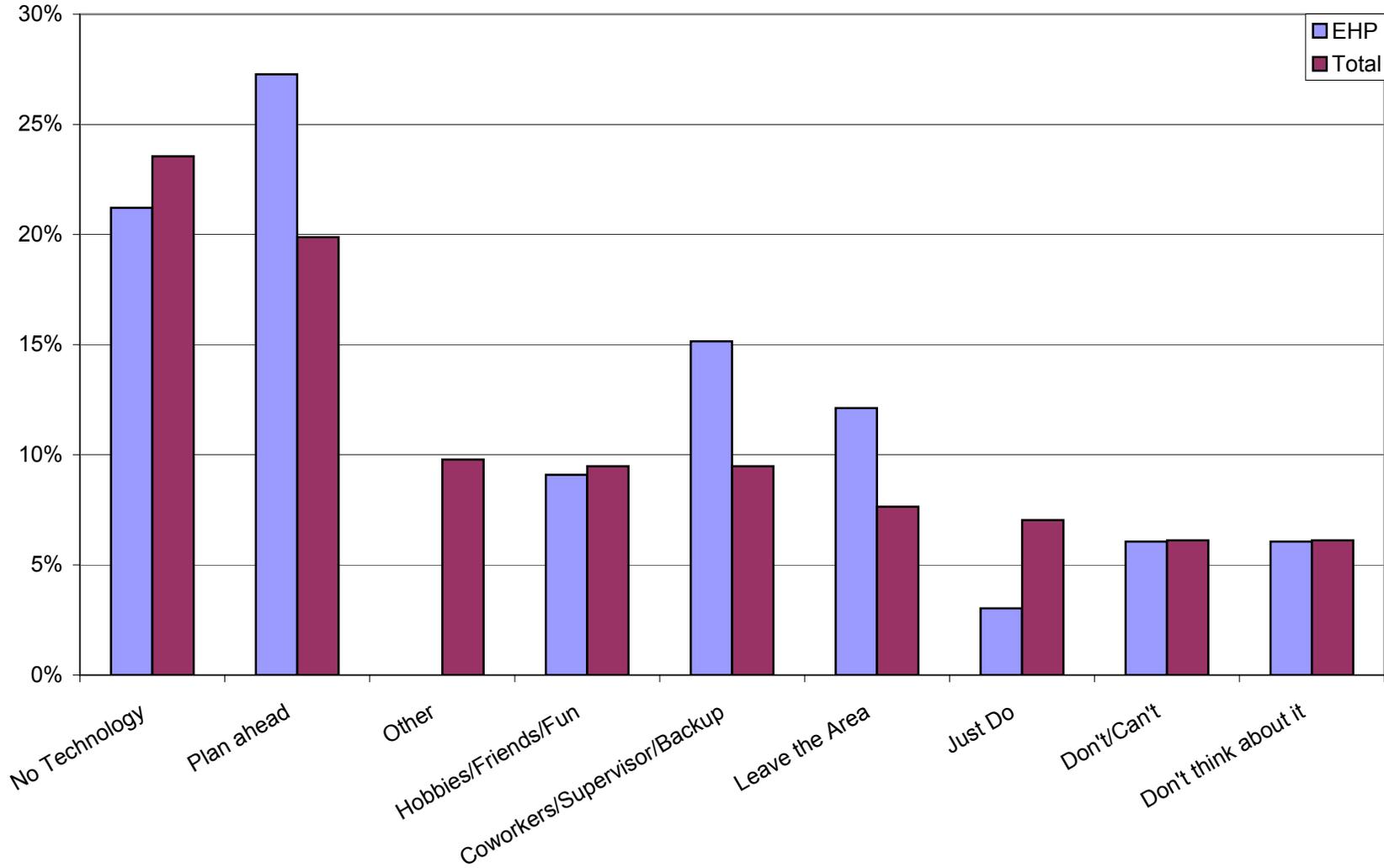
### Question 3 - How do you leave work 'at work' while on vacation?

	Geneva	EHP	Statler	VMC	RPCC	WSH	Total
No Technology	22.86%	21.21%	24.42%	20.78%	0.00%	28.74%	23.55%
Plan ahead	11.43%	27.27%	25.58%	14.29%	16.67%	20.69%	19.88%
Other	0.00%	0.00%	13.95%	14.29%	0.00%	10.34%	9.79%
Hobbies/Friends/Fun	31.43%	9.09%	3.49%	9.09%	16.67%	6.90%	9.48%
Coworkers/Supervisor/Backup	5.71%	15.15%	16.28%	7.79%	0.00%	4.60%	9.48%
Leave the Area	8.57%	12.12%	3.49%	5.19%	16.67%	11.49%	7.65%
Just Do	5.71%	3.03%	2.33%	11.69%	16.67%	9.20%	7.03%
Don't/Can't	11.43%	6.06%	5.81%	9.09%	16.67%	1.15%	6.12%
Don't think about it	2.86%	6.06%	4.65%	7.79%	16.67%	6.90%	6.12%

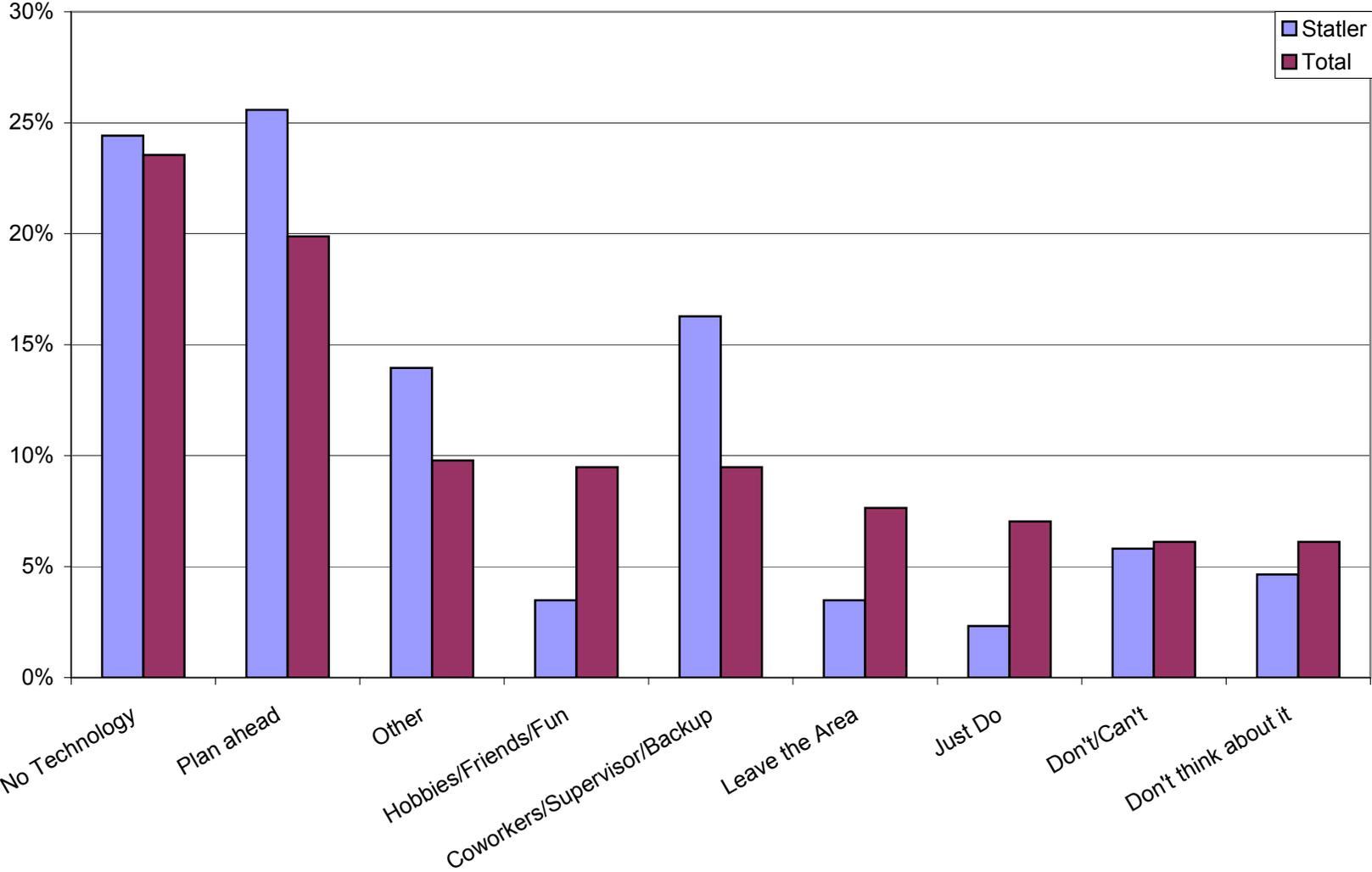
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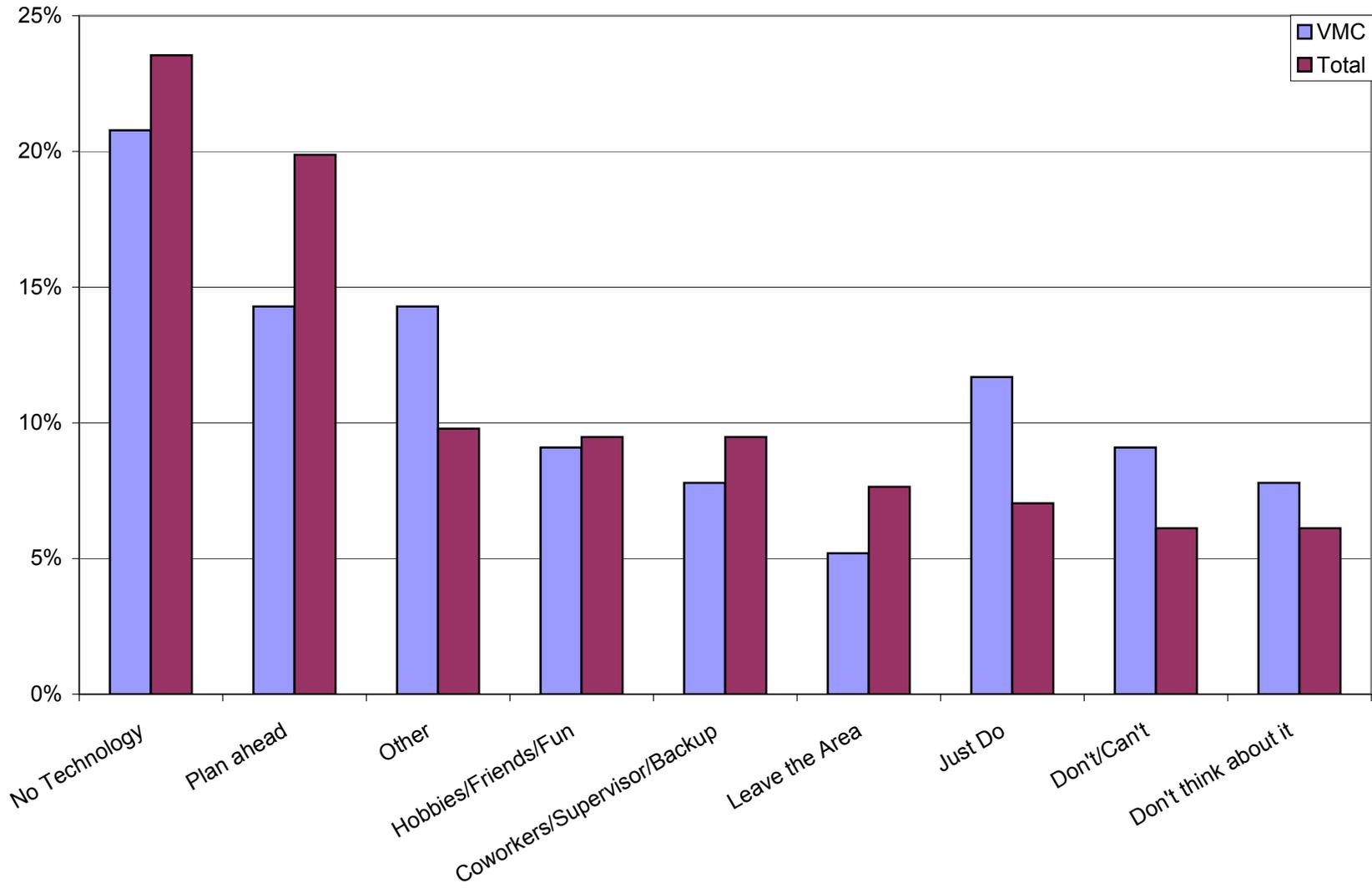
# EHP



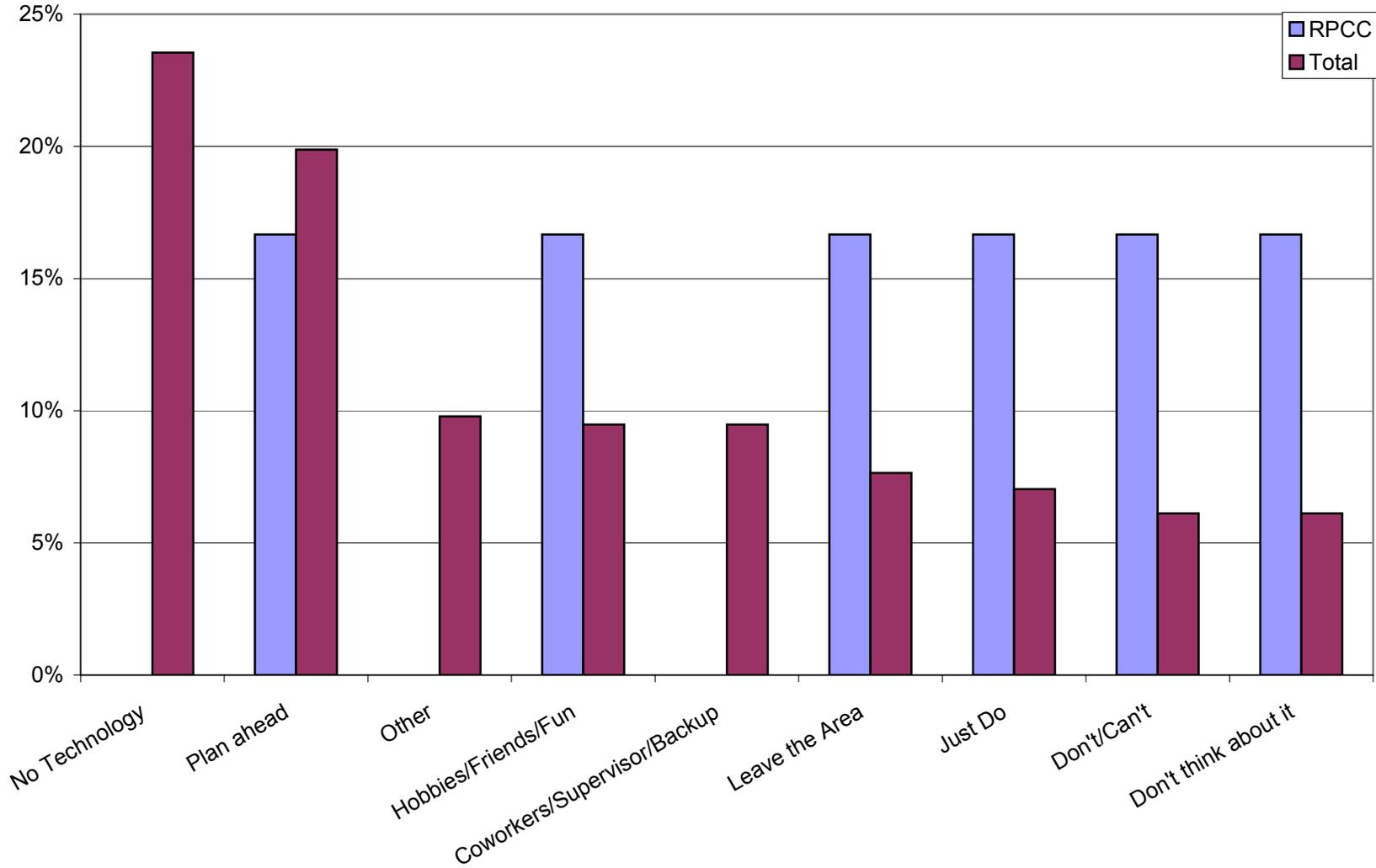
# Statler



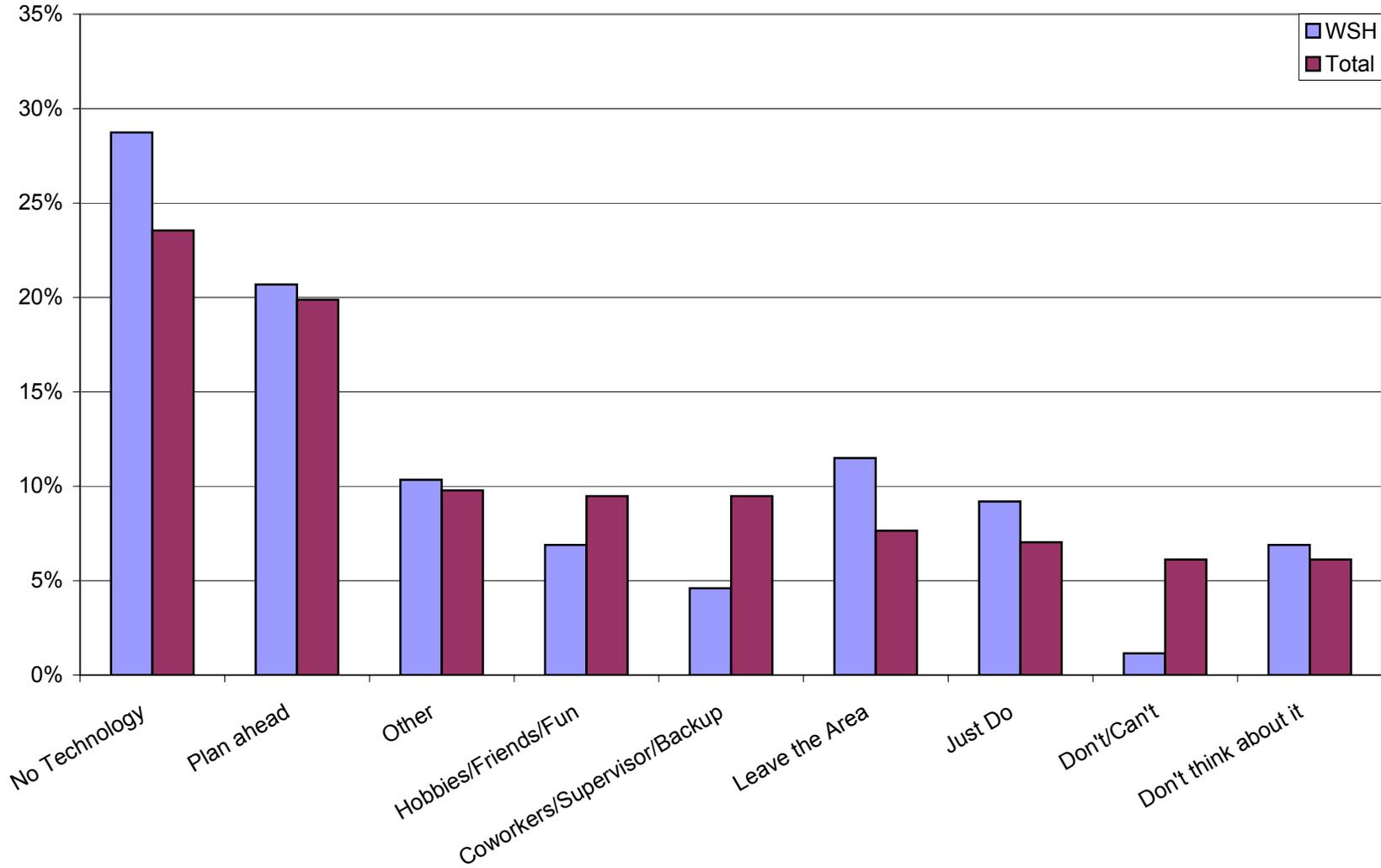
# VMC



# RPCC



# WSH



Report prepared by,

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On behalf of the Employee Assembly Communication Committee:

- Hazel Hall
- Donna Goss
- Andre Goncarovs
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And the Employee Assembly.