

The New Essentials: Canada

Working Lessons From a Year in the Pandemic

An Unprecedented Year in Review

The Canadian workplace has been undergoing dramatic changes for years. Evolving employee values and enabling technologies continue to transform traditional views on how and why we work.

But 2020 was another story. The unfolding COVID-19 pandemic would shut down businesses and entire industries, demand a definition of essential workers, and send millions of Canadians home to unfamiliar roles and uncertain futures.

It also created a valuable opportunity. The ongoing shift from “nice-to-have” to necessary is defining new essentials

for employees that might not have been on the table before. Some will have a profound and positive effect on Canadian work life. The challenge for employers is to determine which of these changes are permanent and how to deliver on them.

In this study of employed Canadians (people living in Canada employed full- or part-time), Ketchum has compiled extensive insights from both frontline and white-collar workers that reflect the perceptions, priorities, and attitudes emerging from a year in the pandemic. Employers who understand and address these values will be better positioned for the future.





Six Key Truths for Working Forward

The pandemic isn't over and Canada isn't "returning" to work — many people never stopped working, and many are working harder than ever. The big change is the evolving concept of the workplace itself, and how employees experience the company wherever they may be working from.

The New Essentials: Working Lessons from a Year in the Pandemic study shows that more than two-thirds (73%) of employed Canadians say they are more likely to stay at their current jobs than they were before the pandemic. Yet the study also reveals dramatic shifts in what people want from their workplaces. While many employees may "shelter in job" for reasons of safety and security, the burden of working through a pandemic has added an element of stress.

Nearly 4-in-5 employed Canadians (77%) feel more burned out in their job now than at the beginning of the pandemic.

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While many observers are looking for a New Normal to emerge from the pandemic, the better strategy is to concentrate on Working Forward. With flexibility cited as a workplace priority across the employment spectrum, the concept of "normal" remains a moving target. Employers who can engage a variety of workers in a more adaptive employee environment have a distinct advantage.

The New Essentials study identified **six key truths that employers need to know** to navigate the shifting landscape.



Embrace the Ongoing Change



Welcome to The Living Workplace



Vaccination Navigation



Elevate the Essential



Employees Are Influencers



Transparency Plus Empathy



Embrace the Ongoing Change

More than a year into the pandemic, employees have shifted their habits and attitudes. The goal isn't getting back to normal but understanding how these new priorities can strengthen employer communication, engagement and recruitment.

It's important to note that the pandemic wasn't the only challenge to the status quo; dramatic scenes of social and racial injustice across the world, coupled with oil sands and pipeline protests, climate change manifestations and major job loss across the country have added to the growing desire for companies to reflect the values of their employees.

When it comes to factors that are most important to Canadians when considering employment, the top 4 revealed by our study are:

1. Salary increase **(68%)**
2. Flexible hours **(58%)**
3. Health & Safety **(40%)**
4. Employer supporting values, causes and doing the right thing **(33%)**

Implications for Employers

By embracing the ongoing change, companies remind existing and potential employees that they are listening, reacting and committing to an improved employee experience.

(Numbers represent percentage of respondents)



25
of respondents prefer to work from home exclusively even after it's safe to return to the workplace



16
prefer to return to the office



24
would love a hybrid of both working from home and working at the office



Welcome to The Living Workplace

The post-pandemic office is a work-in-process, but every indication points to increased flexibility and less-traditional priorities. Whether virtual or physical, people will seek more meaning from work, and a company culture that reflects their values.

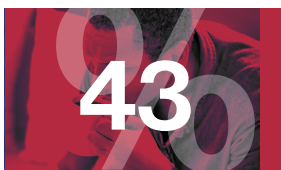
For employers, this means looking at a company through the lens of the employee experience; the interactions with coworkers, supervisors, customers, physical workspaces, and the brand itself that create the larger workplace culture. Not surprisingly, companies that create a more engaging employee experience enjoy better employee retention.

Our survey suggests that professional careers and personal lives have become more interconnected in the course of the pandemic year, and the quality of the employee experience needs to reflect that. **In addition to the 58% of workers who would like to see flexible hours added to their job benefits (second behind salary increase, 67%), 36% of Canadians would love compensation for their commute (car, gas, transit), while 1-out-of-4 (25%) would be motivated by a reduced commute. Thirty per cent of all workers would like a four-day work week.**

When it comes to specific industries, health and safety are more important to Restaurant (51%) and Retail Trade respondents (45%), than Information Technology (34%), Finance and Insurance (23%) respondents.

Priorities can vary for individuals:

(Numbers represent percentage of respondents)



Respondents from the restaurant industry put greater importance on employers supporting their values/causes (43%) than IT, retail and finance and insurance industries



Women place greater importance on a four-day work week (33% vs 27%) and mental health programs (18% vs 10%) than men.

3

Vaccination Navigation

The pandemic isn't over, and neither are difficult decisions. How many employees intend to get vaccinated? When would they feel safe returning to work? Corporate policies, incentives and outreach will need to respond accordingly.

At the time this study was conducted, better than four-in-five Canadian workers intended to get vaccinated (84%).

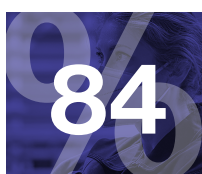
Despite 43% of employed Canadians saying that mandatory vaccinations of all employees would make them feel safe going into work, 16% of them say they don't intend on getting vaccinated — they would only get vaccinated if their employer requires (27%) or incentivizes it (11%).

Implications for Employers

The health and safety of employees is a priority in the best of times, and in the wake of a pandemic it will be crucial for businesses moving forward. Employers need to be fluent and up to date on ongoing safety protocols, provide knowledgeable information on local vaccination sites and policies, and consider the role of company incentives, health plans, and even mandates for securing workplace safety.

Given not all employed Canadians in our survey are inclined to get vaccinated, it's important that employers understand employee viewpoints on vaccination, and tailor policies and communications to reflect company concern for all its workers.

(Numbers represent percentage of respondents)



of employed Canadians plan on getting vaccinated



would vaccinate if their employer requires it



are awaiting more people to be vaccinated



would not vaccinate under any circumstance



Elevate the Essential

C OVID brought essential and frontline workers to prominence, elevating the importance and appreciation of their jobs. Similar assessments are taking place throughout the workforce as employees consider their own roles and value to a company. For their part, employers must now consider the new essentials emerging from their experience this past year.

The most pressing essentials involve workplace safety and employee burnout. Nearly 4-in-5 (77%) Canadians feel more burnt out now as compared to pre-COVID 19 and amongst our respondents, nearly three quarters (72%) rate their work-day stress as moderate to completely stressed.

One quarter (26%) of people working from home say they'd like to keep doing so after it's safe to go back to the workplace, and another quarter (24%) would love a hybrid of working in the office and remotely.

When it comes to the impact of their connections on coworkers, 35% of working Canadians believe the pandemic has made these connections more important. The level of appreciation from their employer has remained steady since the pandemic, but almost a quarter (23%) feel more appreciated than prior.

Implications for Employers

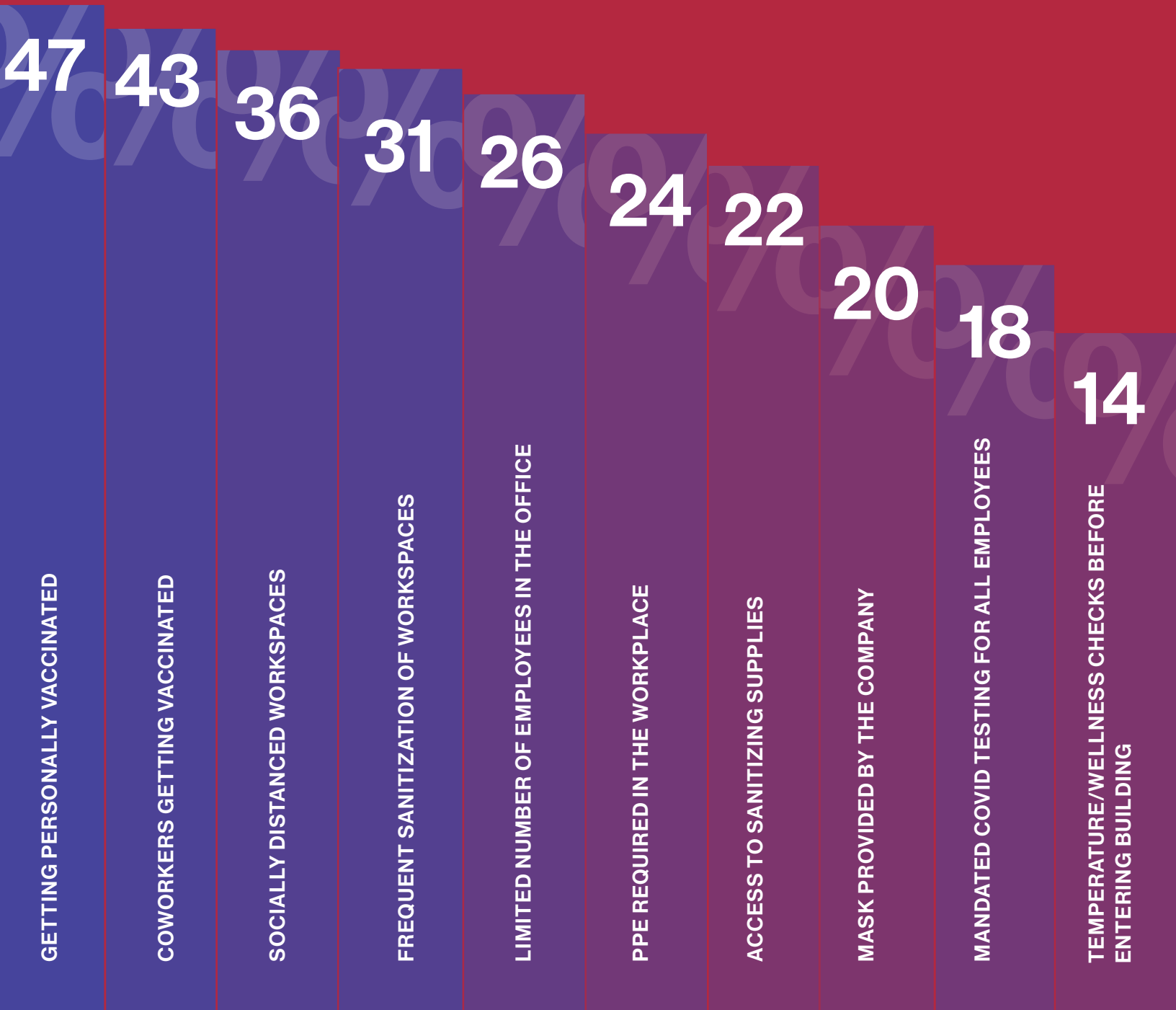
What benefits align with the new definition of essential? The financial, mental and physical strains of pandemic conditions have helped create a new list. Employers will need to decide which of these have been shaped by temporary events, and which should be part of a more permanent benefits package.

What Workers Want



(Numbers represent percentage of respondents)

What will it take for employees to **feel safe** at work again?



5

Employees Are Influencers

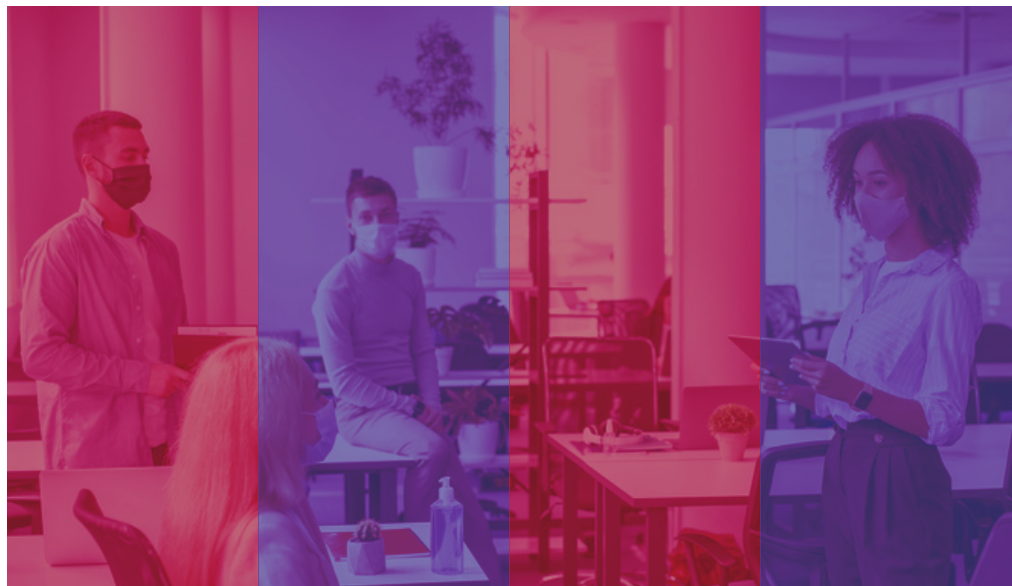
As COVID-related uncertainty eases, people will begin to feel more comfortable switching jobs, and the war for talent will soon be coming back. The pandemic has shown the importance of loyalty and how companies either earn or lose it. Knowing what matters most to employees will guide successful recruitment and retention.

As companies continue to define their purpose, mission, vision and values, employees become key influencers in living those behaviors and amplifying the message. Given the setbacks, sacrifices and economic uncertainty of the pandemic, employers could still enhance their reputation through positive, proactive and direct communication with their workforce.

While most Canadian respondents (73%) are likely to stay with their current job given job security compared to before the pandemic, a reopening of the economy is likely to lessen the number of people “sheltering in job” and increase the competitiveness of the job market.

Implications for Employers

It's critical for employers to maintain open channels of communication throughout the organization, to amplify recognition efforts, obtain ongoing feedback from all employee groups and take action swiftly to address it. Companies that can define their difference, react to change, and inspire their employees will enjoy a deeper dive in the talent pool.





Transparency Plus Empathy

The pandemic has tested the lines of communication, amplifying the need for clarity, consistency and digital channels. Employees' expectations will mean new standards for engagement and connectivity, increasing the need for managers to be effective communicators.

The good news is that most companies got it right. The majority (75%) of employed Canadians say their company provided “just the right amount” of important updates and health and safety-related communications during the pandemic, while only 14% cite not enough information.

Email blasts are currently the most common form of communication (55%) followed by direct manager conversations (28%), company town halls (8%), and leadership videos (4%).

The results also indicate the need to maintain many open channels of communication across the organization. People planning to leave their job often cite poor communication as a primary reason.

The survey suggests managers play the most critical role, providing direct conversations on topics important to employees.

Implications for Employers

During this pandemic year, successful companies got creative with new ways to connect with employees. Leaders, guided by their internal communications teams, reset the bar on engaging employees this year. And as we move to what will likely be a hybrid model, employers will need to continue to raise the bar to maintain culture and cultivate community.

Next generation leaders must be human, transparent and empathetic for their messages to resonate. As a result, employers can encourage their inspired, engaged and influential employees to leverage their social networks and shine a light on their companies as great places to work, as doing good in the communities where they operate and as thought leaders in their category.

The takeaway: **It was a big year for lessons learned.**

Major change can happen fast, as the last 14 months have demonstrated. The unprecedented year will continue to influence who we are, how we work, and what we expect. By reviewing the New Essentials, companies can create a blueprint on Working Forward and engaging their most valuable stakeholders – their employees.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forever altered the relationship between employer and employee.

Priorities of the workforce have shifted significantly and permanently, shining a brighter spotlight on the need for companies to be more transparent in additional ways, drive culture, instill confidence, align on purpose and motivate employees.

Employers need to ask: **What are the new essential elements of a strong employee experience?** Now is the time to reimagine those.

It's not all bad news – the Canadian employee has proven to be remarkably resilient and empathetic. Many feel more appreciated by their own employers – giving companies a powerful base to build on.

As the saying goes, if you can't measure it you can't manage it. Tools and wide-ranging metrics exist today to better understand the employee's mindset, how to better reach them, their impact on the business and the effectiveness of internal communications.

Employees have been changed by the year's events. While they currently seek security, they also reject the status quo, leaving them open to new and improved employee experiences.

Communicate regularly, transparently and empathetically, and use internal influencers to help share key information and keep employees engaged.

This is internal comms' moment. Take advantage of this opportunity to help employees, innovate processes, demonstrate value and advance the company's strategic goals in a return to consistent business performance.

About the New Essentials Study

Methodology:

From March 27th to April 1st 2021 an online survey of 1,127 randomly selected Canadian employed individuals who are Maru Voice Canada panelists was executed by Maru/Blue. For comparison purposes, a probability sample of this size has an estimated margin of error (which measures sampling variability) of +/- 2.9%, 19 times out of 20. The results provide representation across the Canadian provinces. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding.

About Ketchum Employee Engagement & Communications

Employees are your most important stakeholder. We work closely with our clients to help them understand, transform, grow and communicate with their workforce.

Services include:

- INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS
- EMPLOYEE AMBASSADOR PROGRAMS
- FRONTLINE COMMUNICATIONS
- COMPANY CULTURE THROUGH COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAMMING
- EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE (EX)
- RETURN TO OFFICE / NEW WAYS OF WORKING

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