

# The Future of Work Arrives Early: How HR leaders are leveraging the lessons of disruption

Canada

## RESEARCH OVERVIEW

Oxford Economics and the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) partnered with SAP SuccessFactors to understand the realities of a post-pandemic workplace for both employers and employees in 10 countries.<sup>1</sup> Our research offers a glimpse of the various workforce strategies adopted by organizations in response to COVID-19, including insight into hiring and layoffs, expectations for future employment changes, readiness for remote work, and investment plans around digital technologies.

This brief report highlights research results for **Canada** and suggests next steps for HR leaders as they plan for the years ahead. The findings show that Canadian employers expect to make major operational and strategic changes in the coming year—but may be overlooking critical long-term planning around talent acquisition and retention and employee reskilling.

## CANADA'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Experiences with COVID-19 vary from country to country, based in some part on the scale of the virus spread, national responses to controlling the pandemic, and local economic realities. While many parts of Canada suffered considerable outbreaks, the country was largely able to control the spread of the virus—in part due to strict and consistent lockdowns and regulations, with high compliance from the population.

Canadian executives in our survey anticipate many changes to the workplace due to the pandemic, such as greater flexibility around remote working and increased safety protocols for in-office workers. But workers' needs extend beyond just remote work accommodations: Canadian leaders must consider other key investments to retain talent, such as reskilling programs, compensation, technology, and childcare.

Understanding regional and local differences will be critical for HR leaders in Canada and across the world as they make plans for their global workforces.

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<sup>1</sup> Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Germany, India, Mexico, Spain, United Kingdom, United States. To learn more about the research, including a detailed overview of each country, visit: <http://www.sap.com/human-experience-shrm-oe>

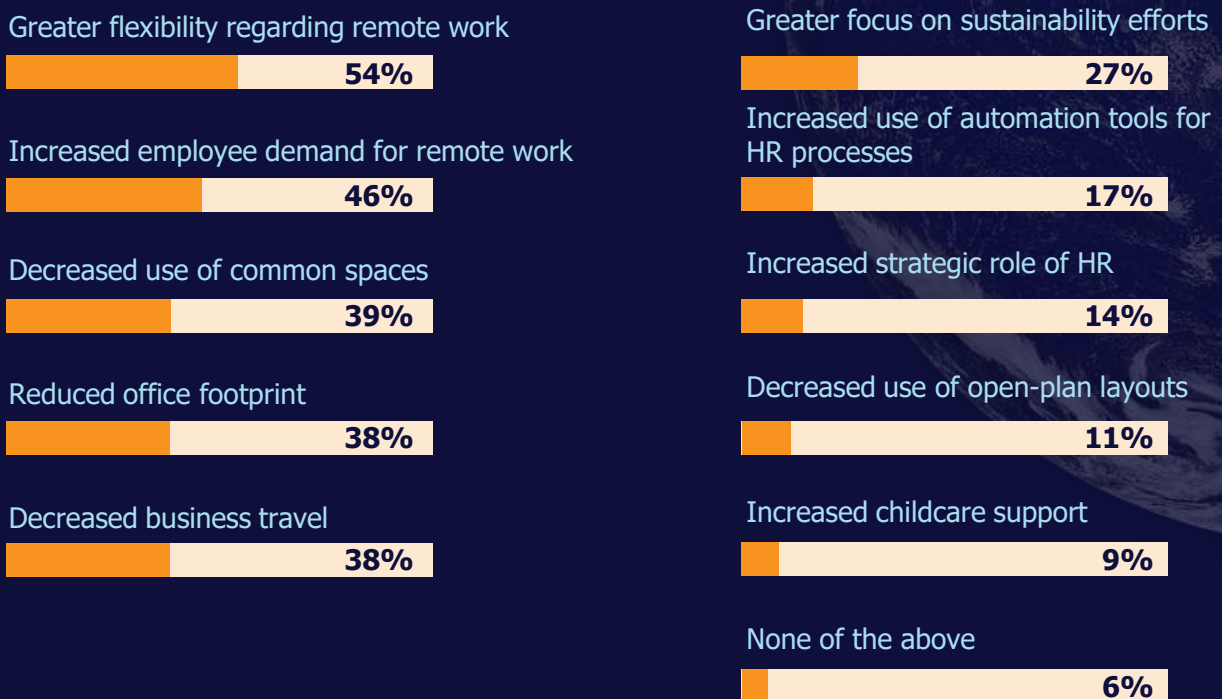
## REDEFINING THE WAY WE WORK

The pandemic has redefined work and altered workspaces for workers across Canada and the rest of the world, forcing leaders to adapt to unexpected disruptions, anticipate future challenges, and plan for strategic changes.

- While most Canadian executives are confident in their response to the pandemic—86% say their organization has effectively handled new ways of working and 78% say they are well prepared to address the changing work environment—more than half still expect challenges in their future, such as maintaining productivity given new ways of working (57%).
- Flexibility regarding remote work, and an increase in employee demand for it, rank among the highest in terms of expected changes to the workplace—and Canadian leaders are cautious of the challenges that might arise as a result. For example, 37% believe establishing a culture that supports more remote work employees will be a challenge for businesses.
- Similar to their peers in the US, most Canadian leaders are focusing on in-office changes such as increasing sanitation and cleaning (67%), implementing social distancing guidelines and precautions (54%), and training on new workplace safety protocols (52%) to keep employees safe and engaged at work. However, far fewer are staggering the number of employees in the workplace at once (37%) or conducting regular pulse surveys to gather employee feedback (20%).

**FIG. 1: Canadian leaders expect greater flexibility for remote work**

**Q: Which of the following long-term changes (12+ months) do you expect COVID-19 to have on the workplace? *Top-three ranked***



## THE POST-PANDEMIC TALENT CRISIS

While handling unexpected disruptions takes precedence in a pandemic, strategizing for long-term talent acquisition and retention must be top of mind for organizations to stay ahead of the competition post-pandemic.

- Canadian respondents may be underestimating the talent crisis, as just 17% believe competing for talent will be a major challenge for businesses after COVID-19. This possible oversight could explain why few expect to invest in learning programs for reskilling and upskilling (27%) and recruiting and onboarding programs (18%).
- Leaders must go beyond flexible work policies to sufficiently meet workers' evolving needs due to the pandemic—yet just 39% expect compensation to become more important to attracting or retaining talent given COVID-19, and 9% expect an increase in childcare support.

### FIG. 2: Flexible work will not be the only talent differentiator

**Q: To what extent do you expect the following to become less or more important in an organization's ability to attract or retain talent, given the effect of COVID-19?**

*"Somewhat more important" and "Much more important" responses*



## MIXED MESSAGES ON TECHNOLOGY

Most Canadian organizations are satisfied with the technology they have for new ways of working—but are they accommodating all workers?

- Nearly three-quarters (74%) say their company has the technology it needs to navigate the changing work environment. This could explain why just 37% expect to invest in remote collaboration tools.
- Yet just 22% say most of their workers can work remotely *and* have the necessary technology and environment to do so effectively, and most acknowledge that their hourly and salaried workers (58%) and office workers and facilities/field workers (75%) have very different experiences during lockdown.

**Q: Which technologies do you plan to invest in the most over the next 12 months? Top three technologies**

**37%** Remote collaboration tools

**27%** Listening tools/employee surveys

**27%** Learning programs for reskilling and upskilling, as well as new procedures