The Future of Work is Flexible: ADP Canada Study

The post-pandemic office may be different, as many Canadians prefer remote work, flex hours

TORONTO, Sept. 2, 2020 /CNW/ - As many Canadians head back to their place of work, a new survey by ADP Canada and Maru/Blue indicates a shift in attitude towards the traditional workplace. The survey found that 45 percent of working Canadians surveyed say they would prefer to work remotely at least three days a week and more than one quarter would prefer to work flex hours. Respondents, including managers and front-line employees, also said that remote work did not have a significant impact on productivity, quality of work and hours of work. While over half of employees surveyed (55%) say their employer has continued to allow remote and flexible work throughout COVID-19, it's clear that employers have an opportunity to embrace flexible work options beyond the pandemic.

Although the findings show strong support for flexible and remote work options, 69 percent of respondents are not willing to accept reduced compensation for the changes, which, prior to the pandemic, were sometimes seen as a perk. In addition, only four percent of workers said they would consider accepting reduced compensation to work reduced hours, for example, a four-day work week. Most Canadians surveyed (45%) also feel that remote workers have equal opportunity for job promotion and career advancement.

"It's clear that employees want to choose how and when they work. Employers that embrace flexibility within their culture may improve employee engagement, retention and performance," says Heather Haslam, Vice President of Marketing at ADP Canada. "However, flexible work requires the appropriate tools to support collaboration, productivity, workplace culture and engagement in a remote environment."

The younger generation of workers appear particularly drawn to remote work, with 61 percent of workers aged 18 to 34 saying they prefer to work remotely at least three days a week, compared to 43 percent of workers over 35. Additionally, only 13 percent of workers aged 18 to 34 said their job does not allow remote work, compared to one quarter of workers aged over 35.

So, what will the workplace look like in five years? While just under half (44%) of Canadians surveyed do not think the workplace will change drastically, more than one quarter believe their employer will offer more flexible work options. Additionally, nearly one quarter believe most employees will work remotely in the future and six percent believe the workplace will be entirely virtual.

Those aged 18 to 34 are more likely to believe the workplace will change, compared to other age groups: 44 per cent believe their employer will offer more flexible work options in the next five years, compared to only a quarter of workers over 35.

Canadians Have Mixed Feelings About Returning to the Workplace

While over half of Canadians surveyed have already returned to the workplace (53%) most have mixed feelings about going back to their workplace - with some looking forward to returning (13%), others feeling anxious (12%), and some not wanting to return at all (15%). Of those who were feeling anxious about returning to the workplace or who did not want to return, the majority (73%) said it's because they would prefer to work remotely. Over half were also concerned about catching the virus (56%) and worried their employer may not take the necessary steps to protect them (30%) from COVID-19.

Although anxious, results also show most employees (84%) believe their employer has taken the necessary precautions to protect workers from COVID-19. Over two-thirds of respondents say their employer has increased sanitization and cleaning of workspaces (66%), implemented social distancing measures (64%) or has provided protective barriers and equipment (51%).

"While it appears most employees feel their employer has taken the necessary precautions to protect them, ongoing communication and education can help ease additional anxiety Canadians may be experiencing," says Heather Haslam, Vice President of Marketing at ADP Canada. "By sharing a clear re-opening plan and setting expectations, employers can mitigate health and safety concerns and ensure employees are aware of new policies and what to expect when they come back to work."

Regional Findings:

Atlantic Canada

- Most likely to have returned to workplace (67%)
- Most likely to report that their workplace has put social distancing measures in place (73% vs. 64% national average) or has reduced the number of employees coming to work (25% vs. 44% national average)

Quebec

- Most likely to strongly agree their workplace has taken all necessary precautions to protect their employees (66% vs.

national average of 59%)
- Most likely to believe that employees working from home have equal opportunities for promotion and job advancement (64% vs. national average of 45%)

Ontario

- Least likely to have returned to workplace (46% vs. 53% national average)
- Most likely to prefer flexible hours (31% vs. national average of 28%)

Prairies

- Least likely to claim they don't want to return to workplace (7% vs. 15% national average)

British Columbia and Alberta

- Most likely to believe there will be no drastic changes to how Canadians work in the future (50% compared to 44% average)

Survey Methodology

An online survey of 1,538 working Canadians (including those working full and part time) was completed between August 10 and 20, 2020, using Maru/Blue's online panel. The margin of error for this study was +/-2.4%, 19 times out of 20.

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