Has COVID-19 Redefined the Role Of HR?

While HR professionals report new challenges during the pandemic, many Canadians remain unaware of HR's role

TORONTO, Sept. 23, 2020 /CNW/ - Hiring and recruiting, handing out paycheques - these are some of the tasks that often come to mind when we think about HR, but human resources teams handle so much more. If you're like most Canadians, you may not be aware of the increasing complexities and challenges today's HR professionals face. A new study from ADP Canada and Maru/Blue found that over one-third of working Canadians surveyed have no idea what HR does all day long. While over half of respondents recognize the role of their HR team has become more difficult during the pandemic, there remains a lack of understanding of the complexity and importance of HR's role.

The survey, which compared insights from both working Canadians and Canadian HR professionals, also found, not surprisingly, that 61 percent of HR professionals believe their role has become more difficult during the pandemic. According to HR professionals, new challenges caused by COVID-19 include protecting the health and wellbeing of employees, ensuring business continuity and staying on top of rapid policy changes. Over half of HR professionals surveyed also cite supporting the transition to remote work and supporting employee mental health as significant challenges. Given these new challenges, 43 percent of HR professionals feel the role of HR has changed because of COVID-19.

Although most Canadians believe the primary functions of HR include recruitment and hiring, overseeing payroll and benefits and planning for long-term staffing, less than half recognize responsibilities like conducting performance evaluations and creating workplace policies, training new and current employees, providing recognition for performance or scheduling fall under HR's authority. Bearing this in mind, it's not surprising that 48 percent of Canadians do not know how their workplace would be impacted if HR were to leave suddenly.

"HR's role has become increasingly challenging over the last several months, yet a lack of understanding and awareness of the important role of HR persists in Canada. The role of HR professionals is so much more than just recruitment and payroll – HR is critical to building a positive workplace culture, maintaining employee engagement, and to the success of every organization," says Heather Haslam, Vice President, Marketing at ADP Canada. "The role of HR professionals is multifaceted and demands thoughtful, hardworking, and perceptive people who can solve both short and long-term challenges through strategic solutions. At ADP, we recognize that HR's role is constantly evolving, and we strive to design a better world of work for HR teams and employees to ensure their hard work and efforts are recognized."

To celebrate and recognize hardworking HR professionals across the country, ADP Canada is launching the HR Appreciation Contest for the second year in a row. Between now and November 13, ADP encourages Canadians to visit HRAppreciation.com to nominate a member of their HR team as an "HR Superstar". Each HR Superstar will receive a small token of gratitude and will be entered in a draw to win a grand prize to put towards a weekend of well-deserved relaxation in a local hotel and spa.

Other key findings from the survey include:

- **Appreciation of HR in Canada remains relatively unchanged:**
  - Half (53%) of Canadians feel that HR is appreciated in the workplace
  - 16% feel that HR is underappreciated
  - Millennials (25%) are most likely to believe their HR team is very appreciated compared to the overall working population (18%)
- **HR challenges related to remote work:**
  - 66 per cent of HR professionals said that ensuring staff have functioning technology at home is a challenge during the pandemic, along with ensuring staff are appropriately engaged remotely (61%), or managing productivity and performance at home (58%)
  - Challenges of remote work were more prevalent among older HR professionals (55+)
- **When HR calls, some Canadians still brace for bad news:**
  - 15 per cent think they will be told about changes in the workplace
  - 9 per cent think they will be asked to fill out forms
  - 8 per cent think they are in trouble
  - 6 per cent think they will be asked to do something new/above their role
  - Only one per cent believe they will receive recognition for good work

About the Study

The Maru/Blue poll was conducted between August 10 and 20, 2020, on behalf of ADP Canada. For this survey, a sample of 1,538 Canadian employees (full time or part time), aged 18+, who work for a company with an HR professional / HR department was completed online using Maru/Blue's online panel, including 301 self-defined HR professionals.. The margin of error for this study was ±2.4 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

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