

## **Many Workplace Changes Caused by COVID-19 Expected to be Permanent**

### ***Canadian Companies Adjusting to New Normal as Operations Return to Pre-Pandemic Levels***

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**TORONTO, Dec. 22, 2021**—Canadian companies have been impacted differently in the nearly two years since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, but most have one thing in common; permanent changes to their workplace.

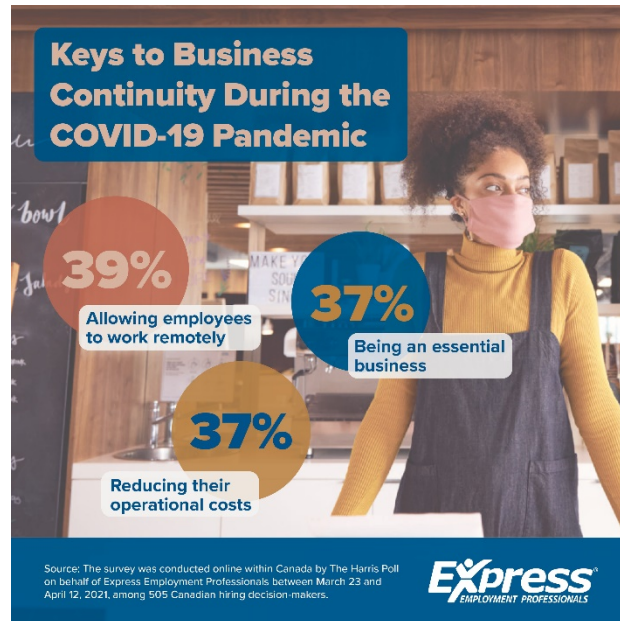
According to a survey from The Harris Poll commissioned by Express Employment Professionals, 1 in 3 Canadian hiring decision-makers (32%) say their company struggled a great deal or quite a bit and another 33% say they struggled some. An additional (35%) say they struggled a little bit or not at all. Small businesses (2-9 employees) were the most likely to say they struggled a great deal or quite a bit during the COVID-19 pandemic (42% vs. 10-99 employees: 26%; 100+ employees: 29%).

As businesses return to pre-pandemic operations, a new normal has emerged with a large majority of Canadian hiring decision-makers (83%) expecting lasting changes to human resource management.

For instance, around 3 in 10 hiring decision-makers foresee fewer employee interactions in physical workplace(s) (e.g., less time in common areas, fewer staff lunches) (34%), leadership being more flexible in accommodating employees' schedules and needs (32%) and/or a greater focus on training for current employees to be reskilled or upskilled (29%). Related to training, nearly 1 in 4 (23%) say there will be a need to continually train employees on new technology updates.

Hiring managers indicated that the keys to keeping their business operating during the pandemic include allowing employees to work remotely (39%), being an essential business (37%) and/or reducing their operational costs (e.g., reduced capacity, streamlined processes) (37%).

Although Canadian hiring decision-makers are split on when exactly they think business in Canada will return completely to pre-pandemic operations (i.e., not limited by restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic), most believe it has already happened or will be in the coming months—either by the end of this year (43%) or during 2022 (42%).



In Halifax, Nova Scotia, most companies' operations returned to pre-pandemic operations a year ago, according to local Express franchise owner Shane DeCoste.

"Businesses have been making up for lost time and are pushing hard to capitalize on opportunities. The landscape has changed, and they have found new ways to be more productive," DeCoste said. "Halifax regained its pre-pandemic operations back in September of 2020 and the growth trend has continued with investment in the future resuming."

In Sarnia, Ontario, things aren't quite back to normal, according to local Express franchise owner Bruce Hein, as companies are still restricting any non-essential visitors and must continue to follow government restrictions.

He ranks being an essential business and reducing operating costs as the top factors that helped his client companies survive the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by having a plan for crises.

DeCoste says constantly seeking out opportunities is what helped companies continue to operate during the pandemic.

"Business leaders knew that even though there was no end in sight, they needed to get to work on how they uncover opportunities caused by such a significant disruption," he said. "Those that were strategic and drove the panic out of their organization are thriving now."

Employers may have a difficult time predicting how long COVID-19 will continue to impact their companies in some form, but DeCoste and Hein agree that the pandemic has resulted in several changes to the workplace that will likely be permanent.

“Employee flexibility will remain a hot topic,” according to DeCoste. “Organizations are adapting, and increased flexibility is here to stay. Now that we all lived through a forced trial, it turns out that in many cases it leads to improved productivity.”

Hein agrees that flexibility is a lasting impact of the pandemic.

“Flexibility to work remotely, improved company benefits and lots and lots of cheerleading the team are all changes that have come about as a result of the pandemic that we expect to last,” he said.

While businesses never hope for another disruption like the COVID-19 pandemic, they should be prepared with contingency plans, according to Express CEO Bill Stoller.

“Heading into 2022, I think we are all hoping for more stability on every level,” Stoller added. “The next few years should tell us a lot about how the pandemic changed business operations forever whether it’s for better or for worse.”

### **Survey Methodology**

The survey was conducted online within Canada by The Harris Poll on behalf of Express Employment Professionals between March 23 and April 12, 2021, among 505 Canadian hiring decision-makers (defined as adults ages 18+ in Canada who are employed full-time or self-employed, work at companies with more than 1 employee, and have full/significant involvement in hiring decisions at their company). Data were weighted where necessary by company size to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population.

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If you would like to arrange for an interview to discuss this topic, please contact Ana Curic at (613) 858-2622 or email [Ana@MapleLeafStrategies.com](mailto:Ana@MapleLeafStrategies.com).

### **About Bill Stoller**

William H. "Bill" Stoller is chairman and chief executive officer of Express Employment Professionals. Headquartered in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, the international staffing company has more than 830 franchises in the U.S., Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. Since inception, Express has put more than 9 million people to work worldwide.

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