

HR Insights

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HR Challenges and Trends in 2021

Throughout 2020, HR departments were challenged with adapting to frequent change as company structure shifted, business models were adjusted, employees transitioned to remote work and more. With 2021 underway, the trends that emerged from the disruptions brought forth by the COVID-19 pandemic are likely to continue.

1. Employee Well-being and Mental Health

Employees are reporting stress, depression and anxiety at increasing rates, and studies have found that 26 per cent of Canadians have shown signs of post-traumatic stress disorder due to the pandemic. Team members are fatigued and burnt out. With some experts saying Canada is on the cusp of a mental health crisis, HR departments should prioritize employee well-being and mental health moving forward.

Promoting flexibility in the workplace can build a resilient workforce. Maintaining social connection and communication as a team can work as a protective mechanism against feelings of isolation, depression and anxiety. It can also work toward building emotional and psychological safety among employees. HR professionals should be educated on the mental health resources their organization provides and encourage employees to utilize them, especially since happy and healthy employees tend to be more productive.

2. Remote Work and Learning

According to Statistics Canada, 25 per cent of Canadian businesses are “likely” or “very likely” to remain remote even after the pandemic is over. Several organizations are also leaning into a hybrid

working structure, giving employees the ability to work from home or at the office.

As remote working continues to be the norm, HR professionals can embrace the benefits of technology by implementing communications and project management tools that promote collaboration from anywhere. In addition, peer-to-peer learning allows employees to work in cohorts on common topics with the support of coaches. This type of learning will promote camaraderie and help to build deeper relationships.

3. Diversity and Inclusion

The call for greater diversity and inclusion in organizations isn't new, but it is likely to continue into 2021 and beyond. Organizations are actively adopting new behaviours that promote diverse and inclusive practices.

Inclusive and diverse organizations can benefit in many ways, such as improving the company's ability to compete globally, bettering the company's financial performance, broadening knowledge of markets and more. Diversity in the workplace creates productive teams and also lends itself to solving problems by utilizing unique and varied perspectives.

4. A Shift in Skills

Prior to the pandemic, the most coveted leadership skills included creativity and persuasion. These days, emotional intelligence and adaptability are at the top of the list. It's important for leaders and HR professionals to have the skills to properly connect and engage with their teams. By creating an environment that is sensitive to the needs of its workers,

organizations will be able to retain and develop high-performing employees.

In the coming years, it's likely that there will be a rise in the democratization of leadership. Shared leadership and working in tandem will create accountable leadership and foster a more emotionally intelligent working environment.

5. The Employee Experience

It's been reported that one-third of Canadian employers are planning on suspending or freezing raises in 2021. As a way to counteract those monetary cuts, HR departments should focus on the employee experience as a whole. In fact, 31 per cent of chief human resources officers are reporting that the employee experience is a priority for their organization.

Moving forward, individual needs, skills and capabilities of workers will be at the forefront of employee development. As the employee experience becomes a priority, companies will no longer be able to get by with a standardized, one-size-fits-all approach. Focusing on the employee experience can help propel a culture that emphasizes value and employee contribution.