

**Athabasca University 2023 Omnibus Poll:**  
***The Great Evolution: Mapping New Workplace Dynamics and Desires***  
**Executive summary of findings**

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*This is a cross-Canada survey that explored Canadians' attitudes and expectations for what the future of work will look like in tomorrow's post-pandemic era. The global pandemic sent unforgettable shockwaves through Canadian workplaces, arguably changing what it looks like forever. This research was designed to study what that change looks like. It dove into how the Canadian workplace is changing right now, what its next iteration will be, and how Canadians' lifelong learning goals are evolving in this process.*

*One portion of this survey was focused exclusively on collecting Canadians' perspectives on micro-credentials as a continuous learning option. This section of the study gauged what Canadians are looking for in their continuous learning endeavours.*

*The following statistics and insights comprise this study's executive summary of findings.*

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**On learning and re-skilling:**

- **We are a country of passionate learners:** An incredible nine in 10 Canadian workers (89 per cent) say they want to continue learning to build new skills, specifically for their own personal benefit and growth. Interestingly, 93 per cent of managers and 88 per cent of non-managers report this.
- **Augmented ambition:** Almost half of all Canadian workers say they have become more ambitious in their career aspirations (48 per cent). This figure increases significantly among respondents who manage people at work. Sixty per cent of this group report that they've become more ambitious career-wise.
- **Seeking brand new careers:** One-third of all employed Canadians (34 per cent) say they want to find a new and different career altogether. This figure jumps to 41 per cent among young Canadians aged 18 to 34.
- **Re-skilling is in high demand:** Three –in four employed Canadians (77 per cent) want to re-skill (e.g., learn new skills) just to keep up with their job's changing needs. Managers are statistically more likely to want to re-skill than non-managers (82 per cent vs 75 per cent, respectively).
- **Desire to deepen expertise:** 7 in 10 Canadian employees (72 per cent) want to increase the depth of their expertise at work to advance their careers. These wishes to grow are, again, stronger in managers than non-managers (80 per cent versus 68 per cent, respectively).
- **Canadian employees want to increase their value at work via micro-credentials:** 76 per cent of all managers across the country want to increase their value at work through courses that don't demand too much of their time (e.g., micro-credentials). For non-managerial staff, that figure drops to 63 per cent. The national average is 67 per cent. Moreover, 58 per cent of respondents also said they want to take micro-credentials to increase their employability.

- **What may be holding Canadian workers back from learning?** Among Canadian workers who are not already pursuing post-secondary education, one in five (21 per cent) can't fit continuous learning into their schedule due to full-time work; another 28 per cent say they can't afford to pay tuition fees right now.
- **Desire to go digital is top-of-mind:** Seven in 10 Canadian employees identify digital knowledge as an area where they want to up-skill and grow their expertise. Statistically, managers were significantly more likely to say this than those who don't manage direct reports (78 per cent versus 66 per cent, respectively).

#### **On leading, making more meaningful connections, and increasing soft skills:**

- **Managers, even more than their direct reports, want to increase their soft skills for work:** While wanting to gain digital knowledge is one key goal among Canadian workers, another priority appears to be focused on soft skills. Almost three-quarters of all Canadian workers (74 per cent) report wanting to increase their interpersonal skills (e.g., communication style, conflict resolution, relatability, team-building, etc.) for their work. This desire is even greater in managers than non-managers (83 per cent versus 70 per cent, respectively). A significant portion of Canadian managers (36 per cent) also feel that employees today don't have the depth of soft skills needed to excel in their jobs.
- **Seeking camaraderie and deep connections at work:** It may not come as a surprise that post-pandemic, more than three in five Canadian workers (63 per cent) are seeking deeper connections with their colleagues. Managers have an even greater thirst for this at 71 per cent versus non-managers at 59 per cent.
- **Managers really want to be better leaders:** Of those who have people reporting to them at work (managers), 87 per cent indicate they want to increase their leadership skills. This figure falls to 60 per cent when speaking to non-managers across the Canadian workplace.

#### **On work-life balance:**

- **The pandemic has made Canadian workers protective of their work-life balance:** Despite having aggressive career aspirations, seven in 10 Canadian employees also say they have become much more protective of their work-life balance since the start of the pandemic.
- **Canadian workers say "beware of burnout":** Nearly two-thirds (64 per cent) of workers acknowledge having experienced some prior workplace exhaustion, saying they are now guarding the pace of their work to make sure they don't burn out like they did before.
- **Back to "busy":** Three in five Canadian employees (59 per cent) report that they are busier than they ever were before. Among managers, seven in 10 report this, while just a little over half of non-managerial workers report feeling the same (54 per cent).

- **Searching for more purpose:** Interestingly, two-thirds of Canadian workers say they want a more purpose-driven culture at work. It may suggest they want to go beyond chasing profits, and want to make a difference through their work, for the greater good of society. This demand is higher among managers at 74 per cent, compared to non-managers at 62 per cent.

#### The most significant challenges in the workforce right now, according to Canadian workers:

- **Canadian employees are feeling the market's current labour shortage:** seven in 10 Canadian workers (70 per cent) believe being over-extended and under-staffed is the most critical challenge in the workforce today. Interestingly, non-managerial staff seem to be feeling this more than managerial staff at 73 per cent and 64 per cent, respectively.
- **Canadians' struggles with mental health is a significant workplace challenge:** More than half of Canadian workers (53 per cent) believe employees are struggling with their mental health, and it is a critical Canadian workplace challenge, coming in at No. 2 on the list overall. The good news is 68 per cent of respondents also said they feel comfortable talking about subjects related to mental health at work—a sign of progress in Canadian workplaces
- **Engagement challenges remain:** Third on the list of top workplace challenges is employee engagement. Close to half of Canadian workers (47 per cent) say that employees aren't fully engaged at work today.

#### The Canadian Managers Performance Report Card:

- **Canadian employees (non-managerial staff) have spoken, and here is their take on the performance of Canadian managers:**
  - 53 per cent are dissatisfied with how managers motivate their employees; 41 per cent are also dissatisfied with the level of team spirit and collaboration at their work
  - 48 per cent aren't happy with how managers foster workplace engagement for employees
  - Almost half of respondents (47 per cent) are dissatisfied with how managers foster innovation at work
  - 43 per cent don't think managers live and foster company culture as they should

#### On predicting emerging future priorities:

- **Purpose is moving to the front lines:** Close to four in five Canadian workers (78 per cent) say companies need to bring *purpose* to the forefront of their corporate culture in the future. It may suggest that Canadian workers want to work for employers with a meaningful vision beyond profits—a company that stands for something contributing to the greater good of society.

- **Desired digital confidence among management:** Three in four Canadian workers (74 per cent) say when looking through a future-focused lens, that managers will need to deepen their digital knowledge to keep up with changing job requirements. Surprisingly, managers may be putting more pressure on themselves in this arena, given that they were more likely than non-managers (81 per cent versus 71 per cent, respectively) to say so.
- **Digital isn't everything—soft skills in the workforce is a topic also competing for the spotlight:** More than seven in 10 Canadian workers think those working in the digital arena today will need to deepen their people skills (e.g., interpersonal or soft skills) in the future. Canadian managers feel more strongly about this than workers without direct reports (77 per cent versus 68 per cent).
- **Training is becoming the future *underdog*:** Seven in 10 Canadian workers also believe that when looking at the workforce with a futuristic lens, ongoing training at work will be undervalued.
- **Running back to pre-pandemic practices:** Sixty-two per cent of Canadian workers say that companies are not advanced enough in their thinking; in fact, they are going backwards and reverting to practices that should now be considered antiquated (e.g., removing work from home privileges).
- **Missing camaraderie:** Looking at the workplace of the future, a little more than half of all Canadian workers (53 per cent) believe the hybrid work environment is making it hard to build camaraderie among staff, and that in the future, more focus will need to be placed in this area. Managers were statistically more likely to say so than those without direct reports at 62 per cent versus 49 per cent, respectively.

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#### Research stats on perceptions of micro-credentials:

- **Describing the term “micro-credentials”:** Overall, 76 per cent relate the term to courses and training and 23 per cent relate it to completion time. Specifically:
  - 19 per cent define it as a short-term course/training/learning that takes a few months to complete
  - 22 per cent see it as skills/knowledge improvement, or as advanced skills courses
  - 18 per cent say it is specialty skills training
  - 13 per cent see it as job-specific or job-related training
  - Another 13 per cent say it is a certificate program (e.g., a certificate of completion from a course)
  - 11 per cent describe it as “add-on” or small credentials
- **How many Canadians have taken or are taking micro-credential courses?**
  - 44 per cent report having taken such courses in the past, and 15 per cent are currently enrolled in micro-credential courses; but 42 per cent have never done this before.

- Interestingly, those in managerial positions are twice as likely as non-managers to be enrolled in micro-credential courses (23 per cent versus 11 per cent, respectively) and young workers (18-34 years-old) are also twice as likely as those 35 and older to be taking them (22 per cent versus 10 per cent, respectively)
- **Sharing micro-credentials with others:**
  - 82 per cent of respondents say they would share their micro-credentials on their resume
  - 44 per cent would proudly share it on social media (e.g., LinkedIn)
- **Who should cover the cost of micro-credentials?** 82 per cent believe employers should cover the tuition costs for such courses, but 54 per cent say they'd be willing to pay for their own courses to earn micro-credentials if it meant they could advance their career.
- **Advancing careers with micro-credentials:**
  - 71 per cent think earning micro-credentials will help them become better equipped to handle the needs of new jobs in the future (as the jobs of tomorrow demand new skills)
  - 64 per cent think their managers would value them taking micro-credentials for advancements in their job
  - 57 per cent say that earning micro-credentials can help them grow faster in their career
  - 55 per cent believe micro-credentials can help them future-proof the job they currently have
  - 53 per cent believe micro-credentials can help them earn more money in their career
  - 52 per cent of Canadian workers say they believe their employer provides many training and professional development opportunities for its staff
- **A key barrier to taking workplace-sanctioned micro-credentials courses:** 46 per cent of Canadian workers say they are not sure how they would pitch to their manager that they should be taking some micro-credentials courses—and that their employer should pay for it. A further 40 per cent don't think their employer would understand the value of earning micro-credentials.
- **What is the ideal amount of time to spend on earning micro-credentials (for personal or professional learning)?** 26 per cent think it should be one week; 23 per cent think one month is the ideal length of time; while 22 per cent believe it should be done over a weekend.

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**About the Study: The Great Evolution: Mapping New Workplace Dynamics & Desires**

*These are the results of a survey conducted by Athabasca University, from January 6-10, 2023, among a nationally representative sample of n=1,507 Canadians who are members of the online Angus Reid Forum, balanced and weighted on age, gender, region and education. This included a sub-sample of n=831 full-time and part-time employed Canadians. For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of the total sample size would yield a margin of error of +/- 2.5 percentage points at a 95% confidence level, while a probability sample of the employed Canadians sample would yield a margin of error of +/- 3.4 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. The survey was offered in both English and French.*